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Private Choice, Public Impact: How the Choices of San Francisco Private School Families Impact the Public School System

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**Private Choice, Public Impact: How the Choices of San Francisco Private School Families
Impact the Public School System**

A Capstone Thesis Presented to the College of Arts & Sciences
University of San Francisco

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS IN URBAN & PUBLIC AFFAIRS

by

Julia Roehl

May 2022

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June 2022

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this thesis has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

Approved:

Sarah Burgess _____

Date _____

David Donahue _____

Date _____

Author Release Form

The University of San Francisco and the College of Arts and Sciences have permission to use my M.A. Capstone Paper project as an example of acceptable work. This permission includes the right to duplicate the manuscript and allows the project to be checked out from the College Library.

Print Name: Julia Roehl

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Date: May 3rd, 2022

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	
Abstract	
Introduction.....	1
Literature Review.....	10
<i>Elements of the Decision-Making Process</i>	11
<i>Whiteness in Schooling</i>	14
<i>Concluding Remarks</i>	21
Methods.....	21
Data Analysis.....	25
<i>Deciding Factors in Choosing Private School</i>	27
<i>Parental Experience</i>	27
<i>Specialized Teaching</i>	34
<i>Curriculum</i>	38
<i>Community</i>	40
<i>Public School Enrollment Process</i>	44
<i>COVID-19 Resource Accommodations</i>	45
<i>Relationship between the Individual and the Public System</i>	47
<i>Expanding the DEI Curriculum</i>	48
<i>Impact on Public School System</i>	51
Conclusions.....	57

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This Capstone is dedicated to San Francisco public school students.

Abstract

The San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) has worked toward increasing diversity in San Francisco schools, but predominately white families are still leaving public schools. Due to the significant number of families opting out of the public school system, the public education resource is depleting as funding relies on a per-pupil model. The issue of modern-day segregation exists because of the disproportionate access white middle to upper-middle-class families have to private education in contrast to those who rely on the public resource. To address this issue, my Capstone Project asks, what are the factors that lead San Francisco families to decide on private education instead of public? In this thesis, I show that the elements influencing the decision of families to opt for private schools include parental experience, specialized teaching, curriculum, community, the public-school enrollment process, and COVID-19 resource accommodations. Drawing on Pauline Lipman's definition of the "right to the city", the Capstone Project shows that the needs of private school families are disproportionately available to them in private schools because of being both white and middle to upper-middle class. As public-school funding relies on attendance numbers, it is critical to utilize the factors to draw more families from private to public schools. I suggest that the incorporation of the characteristics outlined by the private school families provides resources to those who rely on public schooling and could diversify the classroom.

Introduction

Between private and public academic institutions, San Francisco's education system has become increasingly divided by race and class resulting in a lack of diversity across San Francisco schools. The issue I investigate is how the individual choices of families choosing private schools affect diversity in the public school system. While the SFUSD has attempted to diversify the classroom by re-working the enrollment process, the goal of inclusive and diverse classrooms has not been achieved in all schools. The mission statement of the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) states, "Every day we provide each and every student the quality instruction and equitable support required to thrive in the 21st century" ("Our Mission"). While re-working the enrollment processes, San Francisco public schools attempted to increase the diversity of their student body at each public school.

As public schools began to de-segregate in 1971, a significant number of students left the public education system ("Facing"). In the mid-1960s, during the beginning of legal school desegregation and following *Brown v. Board of Education*, 94,000 children were in San Francisco schools, but in 2006 there were 40% fewer (Asimov 2006). As students left the public system, it is essential to examine which racial/ethnic demographic was exiting the public schools to evaluate how diversity changed within the San Francisco public schools.

Following *Brown v. Board of Education*, predominately white students were leaving the public school system. In the late 1960s, 41 percent of San Francisco public schools were white, but that percentage then dropped to 18% at the end of the 1980s (Asimov 2006). In the 1970s, San Francisco public school enrollment had dropped by 39% in 1980 and public schools became

less white (Asimov 2006). Enrollment of white students in San Francisco public schools has been decreasing since the point of desegregation (“Decline”). Consequently, the question now is where did the white students leaving public schools go? The answer, for some, is private schools and other families fled to the suburbs (“Decline”). For this Capstone Project, I will be focusing on those who leave the public system for private education. San Francisco private elementary, middle, and high schools represent many white students.

Race/Ethnicity	Percentage at K-8 San Francisco Private School #1
White	46.6%
Multiracial	35.8%
Asian	11%
Hispanic	3.5%
African American	3.2%
Race/Ethnicity	Percentage at K-8 San Francisco Private School #2
White	67.9%
Asian	17.9%
Multiracial	6.4%
Hispanic	3.9%
African American	3.2%
Native American	0.7%
Race/Ethnicity	Percentage at K-8 San Francisco Private School #3
White	47.5%
Multiracial	20.2%
Asian	14.3%
Hispanic	9.9%
International	3.1%
Unknown	2.7%
African American	2.2%
Race/Ethnicity	Percentage at San Francisco Private High School #1
White	53.2%
Multiracial	18.5%
Asian	10.4%
Pacific Islander	7.2%
Hispanic	5.4%
African American	3.3%
Unknown	1.6%
Native American	0.3%
Race/Ethnicity	Percentage at San Francisco Private High School #2
White	50.2%
Asian	19.3%
Multiracial	14.1%
Hispanic	6.3%
African American	5.1%
Unknown	3.7%
Pacific Islander	1%
Native American	0.2%

Figure 1: Chart of the race/ethnicity make up of San Francisco K-8 private schools and private high schools (Niche).

As seen in Figure 1, the white student population of the selected private schools ranged from 46 to 67 percent of the school’s racial/ethnic makeup. The trend of white students leaving the public

school system gradually increases throughout education levels. Census data shows that more white children are in public elementary schools, but as they get older, they leave these schools (Ehrenfreund 2015). For public elementary schools, the student body is 16.4% white (“Where” 2015). Then, as white children progress toward middle school, this number decreases. For public middle schools, the white student body population goes down to 10.9% (“Where” 2015). Public high schools then make the drop to 8.9% white students (“Where” 2015). With consideration to San Francisco’s white population, it would be expected that 28.7% of San Francisco’s public schools are white (“Where” 2015). Due to the navigation of the lottery enrollment system, white students are concentrated in some of San Francisco’s best public elementary schools (Ehrenfreund 2015). However, the declining number of white students in the San Francisco public school system suggests students exit for other alternatives, one being private schools.

When families opt out of public for private, there is an increase in educational disparities for public schooling due to less funding, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Private schools, due to tuition and fundraising, had been better supported throughout COVID-19 than public schools. During the Trump Administration, Education Secretary Betsy DeVos issued a rule for more COVID-19 funding to be directed to private schools which had been dropped as it violated the intent of Congress (Reilly 2020). The tuition for private schools allows the students to prosper even throughout a pandemic. Educational inequities deepened during the COVID-19 pandemic, and private school enrollment increased.

The white student body in San Francisco public schools significantly decreased throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Enrollment for white students declined by nearly 12% (Tucker 2021). Families noticed the consequences of COVID-19 on their children, especially mental health-wise, so they then searched for education options that were in-person (Reilly

2020). Not only were health implications recognized, but also the impact on the academic pursuits of their respective children. Issues with online schooling resulted in students significantly falling behind in their academic studies (Reilly 2020). This led to a shift of families who first went public to then go private. Due to the significant difference in resources between public and private schools, private schools were able to open their doors to students before San Francisco public schools could.

The resource disparity between public and private schools was magnified through school re-openings. Before San Francisco public schools returned to in-person learning, 113 private and parochial schools already reopened (Rodriguez and Brooks 2021). During the pandemic, predominately middle to upper middle class white students were able to excel due to open private schools while predominately Black, Latinx, and other students of color in public schools fell behind (Rodriguez and Brooks 2021). While San Francisco public schools have now reopened, there was the expectation that public school enrollment numbers would increase. However, that has not been the case (Tucker 2021). COVID-19 has created a “new normal” within public schools meaning that decreasing enrollment leads to shifts in staffing needs and student seats (Tucker 2021). COVID-19, on top of a foundation of education inequities, furthered the divide between public and private education.

The consequence of when families choose private education over public leads to an impact on the amount of funding public schools receive. The issue was only exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic which made the financial outlook for SFUSD dramatically worse (“Funding”). The unanticipated costs of the pandemic impacted the balance of budgets for SFUSD as public schools needed more support and resources (“Funding”). COVID-19 enrollment drops in public education displayed how reliant funding is on the number of public-

school students. In the past two years, San Francisco public schools lost 3,499 students which could mean a 35 million hit in state funding (Tucker 2021). Due to these enrollment declines, the district faced a \$116 million budget deficit (Tucker 2021). The district expects the base grant from the state, which is based on attendance numbers to fall from \$535 million to \$500 million (Gaus 2021). While private schools receive their funding from tuition and family donors, public schools heavily rely on the number of students.

The per-pupil budget for San Francisco public schools decreases when less families attend these schools. Public schools are meant to be accessible to all San Francisco community members, therefore it is free. According to the U.S. Department of Education, San Francisco public school per-pupil spending was around \$20,872 for the 2020-21 academic school year (“Search”). The per-pupil spending, unlike private education, does not greatly change from K to 12. The per-pupil funding model is important to public school funding as Proposition 13 greatly changed the resources within public schools.

Since public school funding was cut by Proposition 13, the per-pupil funding model is significant to public school fundraising. California’s Prop 13, passed in 1978, drastically changed how the state funds education (Rancaño 2018). Before Prop 13, local property taxes were the main source of K-12 funding making up 60% of school funding (Rancaño 2018). Therefore, Prop 13 led to a significant decrease in public education spending which in return harmed the greater public-school community (Rancaño 2018). To put this in perspective, in the late 70s, California paid \$1,000 above the national average per pupil but in the early 80s, per-pupil spending fell below the national average by about \$700 when adjusted for inflation (Rancaño 2018). Therefore, public school funding is incredibly reliant on the number of students.

Looking at the numbers, there is a clear resource disparity between public school students and private school students.

The private school tuition costs alone make private schooling an inaccessible alternative for all San Francisco families. The average tuition for San Francisco private schools is about \$24,965 (“Private School Review”). Private school tuition, however, ranges depending on the level of education. When looking at the cost of San Francisco private high schools, one school reported their tuition to be almost \$54,000 a year (Justice 2022). The financial resources of private schools are significantly higher than those in public education, and the expensive costs create a barrier for all families to have this option. While there are different factors as to why families choose private education, the ability to opt for private education exists on a foundation of both privilege and resources (Adam 2015). While San Francisco’s education system is divided between the haves and the have-nots, the lack of governance in San Francisco's private schools allows for the private academic institutions to operate differently than the public.

Private schools do not have to follow the same regulations as public institutions do therefore creating an education marketplace. As public schools are meant to be utilized as a city-wide resource, private institutions represent a sense of exclusivity (Knight 2006). San Francisco private and parochial schools, in contrast to public education, are not governed by the state and neither do they receive public funding (Knight 2006). Even though K-12 education is a public resource in San Francisco, education has become a market as private schools receive expensive tuition and donations. In turn, families see schooling as a comparative marketplace in which they navigate using financial resources (Adam 2015). The ability to choose education comes from a great place of privilege. When one does not have the resources, they don’t get to make this

choice (Adam 2015). Due to the privatization of a public resource, there is a stark separation between the haves and the have-nots.

Not only does tuition contribute to private school funding, but significant donations contribute to the school's resources as well. For the 2022 school year, San Francisco has 114 private schools that serve 26,825 students ("Private School Review"). Some families would argue that the "worst private school is better than the best public school" since private school families pour money and resources into a school as a way to "elevate" it (Knight 2006). Within San Francisco, private school attendance rates soar as public-school attendance decreases.

Leaving public schools, and/or never enrolling in them, has a greater impact on the public resource itself by depleting public school funding. San Francisco families choose private and religious schools at a higher rate than in any other major city in the United States (Knight 2006). 30 percent of San Francisco children attend private school, so California ranks third highest state for private school attendance (Lorgerie and Smith 2021). The numbers examining white demographics in San Francisco do not reflect an equal distribution of white students in public schools. The white population makes up 42 percent of the city's overall population with 33 percent being children yet only 12 percent are public school students (Adam 2015). Even some students within San Francisco private schools have acknowledged that some of the private schools reflect a majority of white and wealthy students (Knight 2006). While the decision to go private appears individual, there are greater systematic impacts of this choice.

The issue of San Francisco white families opting for private education leads to a segregating cycle that works beyond changing the enrollment process. The enrollment process, some families have stated, does not guarantee the desired placement for their family. Due to high tuition costs, some San Francisco private schools exist as spaces of systematic oppression. The

average white San Franciscan makes three times more money than the average Black resident (Adam 2015). As predominately white families make more money in San Francisco, some private schools are more accessible to predominately white families rather than Black and Latinx families. In turn, the San Francisco education system grows on a foundation for modern-day segregation because there is a private inaccessible option.

A cycle is perpetuated as some families decide to enroll in private schools. The public resource not only depletes but there is a significant consequence of existing in spaces that lack diversity. A UC Berkley study found that students who attended segregated schools were most likely to eventually live in segregated neighborhoods and send their children to segregated schools which continues the cycle of racial isolation (Adam 2015). The damaging cycle creates a deeply concerning outlook for a diverse public school system. Since predominately San Francisco private schools have a white student majority, it is important to examine the justifications families utilize to defend this choice.

The examination of families opting out of public education for private invites an analysis of the factors that families apply to argue for these decisions. By exploring a balance of both choice and diversity, the topic of my capstone will specifically examine the issues of modern-day segregation through the consequences of white middle to upper-middle-class San Francisco families opting for private education. Within this Capstone, I ask San Francisco families why they chose private education for their children, and how they believe that impacts San Francisco's public education system. From these interviews, I develop a conclusion that argues the reasoning presented by San Francisco families complicates the choice to go public. The decision-making processes of these families exist in a systematically racist system that gives education options for some, but not all.

Within this Capstone Project, I seek to better understand how families argue for their choice¹ to go private instead of public, and how they see this decision being the right one. I observe choice patterns of families who have children currently enrolled in a San Francisco K-12 private or are currently in the enrollment stages for private education. In this Capstone Project, I ask what are the factors that lead San Francisco families to decide on private education instead of public?

In this thesis, I show that the elements influencing the decision of some families to opt for private schools include parental experience, specialized teaching, curriculum, community, the public-school enrollment process, and COVID-19 resource accommodations. I argue that the factors private school families utilize when opting out of public school complicate the decision-making process and challenge the relationship between the individual and the public system. The relationship between the individual and the public system is complex as some families are expected to choose between their want to contribute to the public school system and the needs of their child. The private education option exists in a neoliberal system where education is privatized resulting in unequal resource distribution across public and private school systems. Pauline Lipman's definition of the "right to the city" shows that the needs of some private school families are disproportionately available to them in private schools because of being both white and middle to upper-middle class. As public-school funding relies on attendance numbers, it is critical to utilize the factors to draw more families from private to public schools. I suggest that the incorporation and expansion of the characteristics outlined by the private school families provides resources to those who rely on public schooling and could diversify the classroom.

¹ Throughout this Capstone Project, the reference to "choice patterns" are defined as the decisions of families to preference private school for their children but will not argue for voucher programs or other methods in which government spending is used toward private education.

My Capstone Project answers my research question in an outline of the following sections. At the beginning of the body of my Capstone, the literature review explores two different bodies of literature: the elements of the decision-making process and whiteness in schooling. The literature review demonstrates further scholarship in school choice and how whiteness is represented throughout. Following the literature review, I will discuss the semi-structured interview methodology I use to answer my research question. Semi-structured interviews provide personal testimonies that allowed me to understand what factors families use to choose a private school. Following this, I provide my data analysis which is divided into two sections. The first sections list the factors that led San Francisco families to choose private education over the public option. In the second section, I present the necessary expansion of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) curriculum, and the impact of choosing private. The last section will focus on conclusions that show not only the significance of the data but also how these decisions represent who has the “right to the city” regarding education in Urban and Public Affairs. To better understand the issue at hand, it is critical to examine the existing literature that outlines the significance of the relationship between school choice and many white families.

Literature Review

As segregation exists between many public and private schools, it is important to understand how scholars have addressed the significance of choice in education. The relationship between the individual and a public system holds noteworthy power in San Francisco’s education structure. The choices made by some white San Francisco families to opt out of the public system for private schools are significant as it impacts the greater SFUSD. When the

decisions of families have an impact like this, it is critical to examine how literature has framed the background of the issue at hand to see how it contributes to some white students receiving more resource accommodations. San Francisco exemplifies issues of education inequity that are intensified by the neoliberal approaches to privatized education. A neoliberal approach to education means that since private education is exempt from governance, there is a sense of unfairness and inequality between private and public education resources.

Class division in San Francisco leads many white families with the financial resources to choose expensive private schools for their children. To better understand how this issue has developed, the literature review is divided into two main bodies. The literature review begins by examining the elements of the decision-making process. By outlining decision-making patterns, this body is imperative to address the reasoning of family's scholars have identified. The second body of the literature review develops on the impact of whiteness in schooling. This body of literature explores how decisions made by white families lead to segregating effects, and disproportionately benefit the educational wants of many white families. The goal of the literature review is to examine points where public education shifts to better understand the complex relationship between the individual and a public system. As the root of the families' decision-making process begins with the right to choose, it is critical to understand how families leverage the privilege to choose by outlining the factors.

Elements of the Decision-Making Process

Understanding the factors in the decision-making process is essential to critically examine the reasoning behind choice patterns. Gemello and Osman argue that the following are factors that influence the school choices of families; race/ethnic composition, socioeconomic

status, characteristics of local school districts, and religious preferences of the residents (1984, 277). These characteristics will outline the scholarly discussion around the elements of school choice.

Race/ethnic composition determines school choice through testing. Baker points out that high-stakes testing used for admittance leads to segregating effects (2001, 340). Race/ethnicity choice patterns segregate schools between public and private. Testing, as an assessment, shows that black access is limited from some academic institutions (Baker 2001, 340). Essentially, Baker argues that testing has a racially/ethnically segregating effect when utilized for school choice. The use of test scores strongly correlates with race-neutral choice patterns. In agreement with this, Gemello and Osman point to specifically reading scores being used to determine school choice (1984, 278). While not said outwardly, the influencing factor of race/ethnicity choice patterns is elements like testing.

The role of socioeconomic status influences families deciding between public and private. The findings had shown that higher income was associated with private school attendance rates (Gemello and Osman 1984, 277). The scholarly literature shows that class plays a part in decision making and consequently segregating effects. Private education has add-ons that include different courses paid by the individual families and donors whereas public school programs are paid for by the taxpayer (Gemello and Osman 1984, 264). Ryan and Heise agree with Gemello and Osman as school districts or neighborhood schools are quite segregated by race and income (2002, 2085). Additionally, Ryan and Heise point out that a student's socioeconomic status greatly influences their academic achievement (2103). When families evaluate schools based on testing, they evaluate schools on race/ethnicity and socioeconomic

status. Residential segregation is another aspect that trickles down impacting the demographic of public schools.

Segregated neighborhoods display the haves and have nots in education by limiting the access to well-sourced schools for some demographics. High-poverty urban schools, Ryan and Heise argue, have lower levels of academic achievement contrasting to low-poverty schools (2002, 2103). On a poverty scale, Ryan and Heise highlight that as schools get poorer so does academic achievement. Neighborhood access is a key component when assessing who ends up in low/high-poverty schools. Charles supports Ryan and Heise's argument by stating that a consequence of racially segregated neighborhoods is a lack of mobility for opportunities (2003, 167). In turn, one's residence influences the quality of education one will receive (167). Charles points to a history of residential segregation of black, Latinx, and Asian communities (168). Racially segregated neighborhoods result from individual- and institutional-level actions (181). Charles argues that segregated neighborhoods are consequences of government, real estate, lending, and construction industries maintaining a segregated housing market (182). Characteristics of local school districts are reflective of neighborhood trends. Charles points out that research in the 1970s had shown white families were growing comfortable with integrated neighborhoods if they were not the minority (184). Translating this research to the components of a school district, school districts have historically been set up to have segregating effects.

Religion impacts the decision to go private, and predominately serves affluent religious families. Schneider et al. point out that scholars have determined the communal nature of Catholic schools' forwards' academic success in students (2000, 239). Schneider et al. argue that since private schools charge tuition, it is more likely that the families are affluent and Catholic or Jewish (239). With, there is a connection between socioeconomic status and religion when

differentiating between private and public education. The reasoning for families' religious preferences in private schools' stems from concerns like values, academic quality, and discipline (239). Schneider et al. also point to a study that found Catholic schools outperformed public school students regarding graduation rates and college attendance (240). The religious component of schooling is essential to understand when examining the elements of the decision-making process.

Elements of the decision-making process shape the distinction between public and private education. The crucial factors outlined by Gemello and Osman provide a roadmap for scholars to understand influencing choice patterns in the education system. The academic literature shows how interlinked the elements of the decision-making process are. Regarding the dynamic of deciding factors, it is critical to assess the role of whiteness in education and how that impacts the public school system.

Whiteness in Schooling

Whiteness in schooling goes beyond the aspect of demographic reporting. Within this section, I refer to whiteness in schooling by recognizing the impact of white presence in schools. Scholarly literature has argued the construction of whiteness in schooling suggests a white demographic as the norm. In turn, this has a segregating effect in which individuals who are not white are othered. The scholars also argue that whiteness is a part of the neoliberal construction of education in ways that harm desegregating efforts. The presence of white families in schools is examined to analyze how white families "gentrify" public school systems to better their interests. This body of literature will observe how scholarly work presents whiteness in education today.

The concept of whiteness as the norm, scholars argue, is problematic in education policy research and the classroom. Whiteness as the norm means research that does not address the impact of white presence establishes the desires of white families as the norm. For example, it is critical to address how the race/ethnicity of white people is not also noted in prior research. Bryne argues the harm of not examining the race/ethnicity of those being interviewed when discussing school choice which suggests whiteness to be the norm as other participants were identified by their race/ethnicity (2009, 429). In prior research for school choice, Bryne points out how the ethnicity/race of black or Asian interview subjects will be stated but not white participants (2009, 430). Scholars point to the contrast in which white research participants are seen as the norm, and the ways white as the norm is extended into education. Bryne argues research is needed regarding the influence of being white on school choice (2009, 431). To add to this argument, Posey-Maddox outlines the impact of white flight existing in both urban and suburban public education.

The dynamic between suburban and urban schools creates a system of modern-day segregation as white flight is prevalent when families leave public urban schools for suburban ones. Posey-Maddox points out that suburban schools have been conflated with middle-class white families and treated as the norm against urban schools (2016, 225). Posey-Maddox suggests that examining the systematic issue of white flight is significant to the conversation on neoliberal education systems. A neoliberal education system exists when there is a private option to compete with the public-school option. As education is seen as a market, it results in competition between private and public schools. Private education is then not regulated by the government as a promotion of free-market policies making it a neoliberal representation of education.

As private academic institutions do not need to follow the same policies as public ones, families opting for private exist in a neoliberal model of education. In conversation with Posey-Maddox's discussion of white flight, Taylor examines how the concepts of neoliberal education are magnified. Taylor argues that private education functions as neoliberal institutions to perpetuate the recreation of whiteness (2021). Systematic racism provides white families an inequitable opportunity to access private education and to therefore exist in education that is exempt from governance. Private education provides families with the option to enroll their children in places that don't need to follow policies as public schools do.

Scholars' agree that a private option for schooling, as the private schools are predominately white, thrives on a foundation of systematic racism. Taylor defines neoliberalism as the "rigid adherence" to the principles of a free market and the privatization of previously public efforts (2021). Taylor points out that it has been argued neoliberalism itself is a formulation of racial formation and racism (2021). The "myth of white ignorance", Taylor argues, is an area that serves as a place of self-reflection within independent schools (2021). It points out that white ignorance must be problematized, and not as a method to expose people as racist, but rather to increase knowledge about participation in race relations (Taylor 2021). The presence of white families in urban public schools invites a scholarly conversation regarding the influence of whiteness. Taylor and Posey-Maddox exemplify ways in which white families have inequitable access to education that is not shared with public school systems. The impact of whiteness on desegregation efforts is critical to examine within public education.

The scholarly conversations about whiteness in public schools addresses how white presence impacts desegregation. Bankston and Caldas argue that there is a significant percentage of white students in nonpublic schools and a concentration of public-school students of color

(2000, 548). The implication of the racial/ethnic makeup of public and independent schools found by Bankston and Caldas led them to conclude whether white students are in public or not (2000, 548). Test performance is arguably the leading reasoning as to why white students are not within the public school system (Bankston and Caldas 2000, 548). Bankston and Caldas propose an argument in which white students don't feel academically pushed in public school settings. The scholarly conversation about white students not attending public schools leads to an impact on the racial/ethnic makeup of public schools, and how white families impact public schools.

Scholars examine how white students in public schools affect the diversity within the school. Bankston and Caldas argue that the "white-black gap" is deeper in districts where many white students attend non-public schools (2000, 548). When analyzing this, it is critical to examine the research done regarding the impact of white families on education systems in public school, where the neoliberal approach exists but not as blatantly. Posey-Maddox makes an argument critiquing white presence in public education. The relationship between white families and their respective schools shows how race appears through "improving" public education systems and forwarding the recreation of whiteness. Scholars argued that the influence of white presence in public schools leads to public schools serving white families above communities of color.

The scholarly conversation on the representation of whiteness in diverse schools' results in a complex relationship between white families and public schools where public schools do not incorporate the needs of students of color. Scholars have examined how representation of whiteness forwards a majority approach in which white families want to be seen as the norm. The idea of white families being seen as the norm presents that white families want to be the majority in public schools. Largely white middle-class parents express their interest in the

diverse environments of public school but are hesitant when they believe their child will be one of the few white children and/or won't be academically challenged (Posey-Maddox 2016, 226). The idea of school gentrification is argued by Posey-Maddox when schools are gentrified by white families to make them "better" (2016, 226). Freidus states how the gentrifying impacts influence the culture and climate of the school itself (2019,1141). The gentrifying effects on school systems are essential to the scholarly conversation on whiteness in education.

Posey-Maddox and Freidus show that strains exist in public school systems where one racial/ethnic group has more of a say on aspects of the public school than families from other backgrounds. Middle-class involvement in public schools showed how "dedicated parents" had more of a say within greater decisions made at the school (Freidus 2019,1141). As an example, tensions between families from different racial/ethnic backgrounds appeared when choosing a new principal for the school (Freidus 2019,1141). Freidus points out that more advantaged families have more of a say in public schools which creates an unfair environment among all families (2019,1141). Additionally, Freidus examines the relationship between the "old-timers and new-comers" that leads to a conflict regarding the future of the school (2019,1141). Therefore, scholars argue how the interests of white families can be prioritized in public schools.

The concept of white families gentrifying schools prioritizes the needs and wants of white families before families of color. Significant white presence in schools reshapes how the respective school functions. Therefore, scholars argue that whiteness in schooling, when white families are the majority, has the power to alter the school itself. Freidus states how the action of families gentrifying schools' results in the school seeing them as "valued customers" and the families seeing themselves as "investors" (2019,1141). Largely white parents who had chosen for their children to attend non-elite urban public schools have done extensive fundraising and

volunteerism with parents like them to build up the school (Posey-Maddox 2016, 226). Posey-Maddox argues the concept of “school gentrification” regarding this relationship white families have with the schools. School gentrification brings about new patterns of segregation within the school and district contexts through not only their choices but also their engagement styles (Posey-Maddox 2016, 226). The idea of making schools “better” is strongly related to Taylor’s argument regarding the recreation of whiteness. Taylor points out that independent schools, specifically the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), function to reproduce the construction of whiteness in America through a privatized approach to education (2021). The link between race, class, and schooling determines how structural racism is established within education settings.

Scholars argue that white families, due to privilege, hold more power in education spaces than families of color. As an example, white families gentrifying schools shows how, with financial resources, competition develops throughout schools regarding donations and holding board positions. Freidus argues the harm of this gentrification contributes to structural racism and disregards important conversations throughout schools (2019, 1142). Whiteness as the norm perpetuates the recreation of white spaces in urban public settings, and schools point out the harms of white ignorance regarding privilege in schools.

The establishment of whiteness in education presents an issue of ignorance regarding white privilege and the neoliberal model of education that gives white families more power in academic spaces. Bryne discusses whiteness in schooling by pointing out the curiosity of whether white people know they are white as their power has been unmarked or unnoticed (2009, 429). However, Bryne argues that regarding education and school choice, white people are often aware of the racialized nature of their choices (2009, 429). Taylor argues that the issue of the

racialized nature of choice leads to white families benefiting off the capitalization of education where private schools are disproportionately available to white students. The capitalization of education refers to how education, whether it be public or private, can be influenced by the interests of white families. Neoliberal approaches to education develop a market-based approach to educational choice in actions and language that elevate resources in private schools (Taylor 2021). Taylor points out that independent schools, specifically NAIS, function to reproduce the construction of whiteness in America through a privatized approach to education (2021). Bryne agrees with the points on education as a market that can be racially divided. Not being aware of whiteness in the education sphere is dangerous as parents are seen as consumers (Bryne 2009, 429). The notion of consumerism within education is critical to examine how scholars argue after examining the decisions of white families.

White presence in education is a concept scholars have determined to be highly circumstantial depending on the actions of the individual. The acknowledgement of white privilege is crucial when holding space in education. To this point, scholars point out how the relationship between white families and public schools should not be one of promoting white families. It is crucial to understand how the literature shows how white families are put on a pedestal and have increased access to private schools. Recognizing the place of whiteness in education is crucial to understanding the influence of choices within the education system. By recognizing these impacts through literature, the scholars point to places where white families can maneuver through larger public systems by independent choice-making.

Closing Remarks

The scholarly literature shows how inequitable educational opportunity is in San Francisco. The bodies of literature represent how the ability to choose schools leads to

segregating consequences. The elements of these decisions are interlinked reasonings why segregation continues between private and public education. The literature points to the role of whiteness in education but does not address the ways this demographic argues for their choices. An analysis of how individual choices have a greater impact on a public education system is missing from the literature. The key missing piece from the literature is how some white families see the impact of their choices to enroll their children in a private school on the greater public school system. Within my Capstone, I outline the reasonings as to why some families choose private education, and how benefitting from the private option exists through the “right to the city”.

Methods

Since the literature does not describe the complexities of the choice between private and public schools, the method of this Capstone Project seeks to understand the reasonings families offer when opting out of public education. Therefore, the methods section will overview the use of semi-structured interviews to better understand the decision-making process of San Francisco private school families. The interviews are significant to this research as they show the relationship between the individual and the system through the testimonies of the interviewees. To understand the significance of this method, it is critical to outline how semi-structured interviews work to answer my research question.

The methods for my Capstone Project address how choice patterns influence the greater public education system in San Francisco. Therefore, my research question is what are the factors that lead San Francisco families to decide on private education instead of public? Semi-structured interviews are the most applicable method to support my research question. The

interviews provide individual testimonies that contribute to the research on how individual choices impact a greater system. By learning from the experiences of the interviewees, the Capstone Project can present the complexities of the choice between public and private education. As defined by Luker, interviews are, "...accurate accounts of the kinds of mental maps that people carry around inside their heads, and that it is this, rather than some videotape of 'reality,' which is of interest to us" (2010, 167). By synthesizing interview themes, my data analysis outlines the deciding factors families use to choose private education and then how these factors give some the "right to the city" while others do not have the same opportunity.

The holistic approach to interviews provides my research with general themes of experiences while also introducing the individualized experiences of the San Francisco families. Through learning from individuals' narratives, I better understand the deciding process San Francisco families use when navigating their child's education journey. The data collected benefits from a clear understanding of how the choice to enroll their children in private schools varies for individual families. My research question directly focuses on the choice patterns of families. I offer a clear understanding of how certain families choose specific academic paths for their children. The point of the interview plays out more like a conversation hence why they will be semi-structured. Therefore, I compare personal testimonies, and analyze for general themes, in their most raw forms. The personal testimonies strengthen my conclusions on the reasonings families use to pick private education and allow for suggestions to draw families toward public education.

Semi-structured interviews are the appropriate way to address my research question as they build off personal testimonies to understand the complex relationship between one's values and a greater public system. The interview themes show how there is a separation between the

interviewee's personal beliefs, and what they believe to be best for their respective child/children. By using semi-structured interviews, I see how family experiences have a strong influence on public education in San Francisco. The ability to choose private education over public itself exemplifies how white middle to upper-middle-class families have more of a "right to the city" than families who cannot "exit" the public system. Pauline Lipman's "right to the city" theoretical framework assists my research when presenting the impact of individual choices on public resource funding. By examining the issue of families opting for the private option, I use the interview data to outline ways to draw families toward the public choice. By doing so, the Capstone Project offers ways to increase diversity in public schools while also suggesting significant resource investment within the public schools. I anticipated that families would critique the lottery system and how they preferred neighborhood schools. From my data analysis, I have a better understanding of the correlation between individual decisions and how the interviewees understand their respective impact.

My collection of data is from personal contact interviews and email outreach. For my Capstone Project, I interviewed 7 white middle to upper-middle-class San Francisco families who either currently have a child/children enrolled in a San Francisco private school or are currently within the private school process. Within my interviews, I also have data from families who initially had their children in public school but then decided to have them attend private school. For personal contacts, I continued outreach through text/call. I then would use the snowball method with personal contacts to find more interview subjects. Before the interview, parents were asked to fill out a pre-interview survey on Google Form which asked how they defined their race/ethnicity and socioeconomic background. The survey also asked whether they had multiple children in private and if they had another child in public school. Regarding

interview subjects, I established a clear interview protocol to set explicit boundaries during, before, and after the interviews. All interviews were conducted and consensually recorded, on Zoom. I then used Otter.ai, an online transcribing platform, to transcribe the interviews. The transcribed interviews were then coded to establish confidentiality.

The benefit of this methodology resulted in personal testimonies that allowed me to observe the complex relationship between the individual and the public system. The semi-structured interview prompted organic conversations in which families felt comfortable sharing the significance of their decision. The interviews also allowed me to ask questions to families regarding their reasonings, and how the factors had tied to other mentioned influences such as their respective education history. By using this method, I can offer not only the factors the interviewees used to make their choice, but I can also utilize the “right to the city” theoretical framework to analyze the relationship between those in private schools and the impact on the public-school community.

The obstacles to my methods process included some challenges with filling out the consent forms. Changing the format of the consent form allowed more interview subjects to fill out the form promptly. Additionally, working with the busy schedules of parents was challenging meaning that the interview timeframe would have to be readjusted from 45 minutes to 30 minutes. Another obstacle included finding participants that would be interested in being interviewed as building trust with the interview subjects was critical for the sensitive manner of the questions. Lastly, COVID-19 restricted the ability for in-person outreach as well as in-person interviews. Since the interviews were held over Zoom, a sense of personability was lost which could implicate the comfortability of the interview subjects. I addressed the obstacles through

continuous outreach, and consideration to my interview subjects by working around their wants and scheduling needs.

The semi-structured interview method is limited by outreach initiatives, the detection of potential bias, and IRB protocol restrictions. Outreach to potential interview subjects would sometimes result in no response or disinterest from that potential candidate. Therefore, I continued outreach to different potential interview subjects to establish a significant amount of data. Using snowball methodology for outreach, there is a chance of bias as the contact is associated with another subject I had interviewed. To navigate this limitation, I used different forms of outreach to diversify the data by working with members of my Capstone Project counsel to see if they knew parents outside of my immediate professional connections. Lastly, IRB interview requirements restricted my access to some perspectives, such as children. To address this, I asked questions to the parents regarding their child's feelings about their respective school decision.

Data Analysis

The methods for this Capstone Project detail that families were interviewed to understand the components of their decision-making process. The data analysis of this Capstone analyzes the choices some San Francisco families considered when deciding to go private, and the greater impact of this decision. When the interviewed families were asked their reasoning as to why they chose private school for their children, they provided a wide array of answers and reasoning as to why their choice was the right one. From the interview process, it is clear the ways parents wear

two different hats. The first being one as a parent, and the second being one as a San Francisco resident. None of the interviews showed a want to deepen an educational divide through their individual choices. Yet, the results of these decisions themselves to go private contribute to the greater systematic issue. The key trends of characteristics that incentivized the interviewed parents to go private show a clear divide of access between private and public education. My research question asks what are the factors that lead San Francisco families to decide on private education instead of public?

In this Data Analysis Section, I show that the elements influencing the decision of some families to opt for private schools include parental experience, specialized teaching, curriculum, community, the public-school enrollment process, and COVID-19 resource accommodations. I argue that the factors private school families utilize when opting out of public school complicate the decision-making process and challenge the relationship between the individual and the public system. The relationship between the individual and the public system is complex as some families are expected to choose between their want to contribute to the public school system and the needs of their child. The private education option exists in a neoliberal system where education is privatized resulting in unequal resource distribution across public and private school systems. Pauline Lipman's definition of the "right to the city" shows that the needs of some private school families are disproportionately available to them in private schools because of being both white and middle to upper-middle class. As public-school funding relies on attendance numbers, it is critical to utilize the factors to draw more families from private to public schools. I suggest that the incorporation and expansion of the characteristics outlined by the interviewed private school families provides resources to those who rely on public schooling and could diversify the classroom.

To answer my research question, the data analysis is divided into two different sections. The first section directly focuses on contributing factors as to why some parents chose private education for their children. Within the second section, I show the ways in which the individual navigates the public system. Then, I present the greater impact of the choice on the greater public system. The education background of the families interviewed was a key aspect contributing to why families decided private school suited their needs.

Part I: Deciding Factors in Choosing Private School

Parental Experience

The academic experience of some parents is one of the influential factors as to why they chose private education. In some cases, families attended solely a private school while others came from a public-school education. However, some of the parents interviewed came from a mix of both public and private education. Most of the families had only attended public school, and these respective parents provided a critique of their own public education. The instances in which parents themselves attended public education spoke highly of the benefit of that choice. One parent, reflecting on their public experience, noted, “it was a good education” (Interviewee C). Some parents also spoke highly of their own parents’ decisions regarding their education, whether that be private or public, saying, “my parents were very dedicated to education and making sure that I was learning what I was supposed to be learning at that age” (Interviewee A). The dialogue around going to private school was framed as, “I think for my parents was like, if I needed it, they would do it” (Interviewee B). Many of the interviewees framed private education as a gift given to their children to provide them with the necessary education to excel.

Additionally, the idea of “needing” private school contributed to their responses and factors as to why private was the answer for their family’s needs. During the parent's reflection on their education, some pointed to diversity as a significant component.

The idea of diversity in education appealed to many of the parents as they also reflected upon how diversity contributed to their respective education journey. The diverse environment of the public schools the parents attended was something that the majority found beneficial to their education journey. From the perspective of one parent, there was a lot of diversity throughout the school which she described by saying, “there were so many people from Cuba and South America, and first-generation, you know, to the United States, they are and looking back now, as an adult, that was probably the most educational part of the public school” (Interviewee A). Parents described that having representation from all different backgrounds served as a critical academic asset to their schooling. This analysis showed how some families when going through the private school enrollment for their children, recognized the complexity within the system and chose the less diverse option. While they saw the benefit of their diverse education, other components outweighed this aspect for some of the families. The diverse demographic of the schools allowed many of the parents to be surrounded by communities that exposed them to different cultures, and perspectives throughout their academic careers.

The diversity within the public schools some of the parents attended was not just exclusive to race/ethnicity. One parent noted the diversity within her public school to be reflected “racially” “ethnically”, and “linguistically” (Interviewee D). However, her public school was not diverse socioeconomically as most students came from working-class low-income backgrounds. From other interviewees' perspectives, the diversity represented communities from different backgrounds including class. To this point, parents felt “prepped” for

their future by being in diverse academic settings. One parent noted how she believed this had benefitted her throughout her life by stating, “I think, all in all, it really prepped me for the diversity and kind of, you know, the mix of socio-economic backgrounds, as well as different, you know, ethnic or religious backgrounds, for college and beyond. So, I think in that realm, I was glad not to, to have chosen to go to what was an all-girls [private] high school at the time” (Interviewee C). It was interesting to examine the contrast between families who had enjoyed their public-school experience but still went private. However, most of the families had not attended public school in San Francisco so their factors for opting out of public school for their children was exclusive to the San Francisco public school system. While diversity played an integral role in many of the parent’s public-school experiences, some families noted ways in which it had been mishandled within their schools.

Some of the parents had critiqued the ways public schools navigated diversity within their schools which had then contributed to their choice-making for their own children's educational path. One parent had reflected on the contrasting experience of two different public schools she had attended. For one of the public schools in the south during the 80s, she noted that “they flew Confederate flags” (Interviewee E). Reflecting on her public-school experience both in the south and beyond, she stated how, “neither place was there much conversation about how, like, for example, in that school, when the Confederacy was being upheld and perpetuated as literally the mascot? There was no critical examination of that, for example. Right, and how that connected to history and white supremacy” (Interviewee E). Families observed how there is a benefit to diverse classrooms that serve all communities. Yet, navigating these differences was something some families did not deem public schools to be doing within their curriculum and

beyond. Families also had reflected on places in which their public schooling had not prepared them enough for the future.

Some parents who attended public schools found themselves resentful of their education deeming it to not prepare them for life. In some cases, a parent found their physical well-being in jeopardy within their public-school experience. One parent reflected on their public-school experience stating, “The other thing about my schools is they were very violent, there was a lot of gang activity, there were a lot of fights. There was a lot of bullying. Yeah, a lot of violence. So that was part of like, what I witnessed day to day or week to week. And it was part of what I experienced, being bullied in junior high. Yeah, so things like that were just really hard experiences as a kid” (Interviewee D). Some parents showed that public schooling, for them, had been a dangerous experience, and the violence of their own background contributed to wanting private schools for their child. Regarding safety, this instance showed that a parent wanted their child to feel protected and their own public experience established a sense of fear around flourishing in public schools. While safety was a concern of one of the parents, many noted not feeling academically supported during their public-school education.

While some parents had not felt safe within their public-school experience, others noted ways in which they did not feel academically prepared for higher education. One parent distinguished that she felt as though she had a “chip on [her] shoulder” because of the contrast between her public-school education to the experience of her friends within private schools (Interviewee B). From this conversation, this parent stated how she felt her friends who attended private school were, “set up better for life” and attested this to a “network effect” (Interviewee B). The parent argued that because of going to private school and being able to simply put the name of that school on their resume would set them up better in life (Interviewee B). Regarding

Pauline Lipman's observation of "right to the city", the network effect exemplifies how certain populations have more of a right to a financially advantageous future than those who do not have that kind of access. The "network effect" is defined as a way this parent believed private schools provide their students with connections her public-school education did not deliver on. The system, therefore, represents the haves and the have nots by displaying that private education leads to access to more resources than the public from the perspectives of some families. The academics within the parent's public-school education was a widely discussed factor in their decision-making process.

The academics within the families' respective schools contributed to their preference for private schools above public as the parents' recognized challenges through their college careers. From the parents' individual experiences in public education, they did not believe it was sufficient for their respective academic pursuits. One parent noted the impact of her public-school education had appeared later by stating, "When I went to college, I felt really ill-prepared. Like, I didn't know how to do research or study or write research papers, or you know, any of those things that are really important to be able to do before you get to college" (Interviewee D). Some parents noted missing pieces of their public education that they mentioned being included within their child's private education. One parent noted that her public-school education experience was missing "experiential education" and that she had, "no support or mentorship" (Interviewee E). Another parent noted that her public education was not, "customized for the kid", but instead more "general" and she had wished there had been more of a "customization" within her education plan (Interviewee B). One parent had reflected on her public-school experience, and why she values public school education, being integral to how her family impacts the system.

While some parents viewed their public-school education from a critical lens, one parent who grew up in the San Francisco public school system reflected on her education positively, and the way it made her initially choose public education for her children. She stated how, “I felt like, I really wanted to make it work. Or at least try it. Because I just thought it would be a good education for my children, and just a really good, like, win-win. For to feel like I was supporting the city that I'm from, and then I'm raising my kids in” (Interviewee H). This parent’s experience was interesting as she had attended public schools in San Francisco which draws the attention to the case study of urban education in San Francisco. Examining Lipman’s theoretical framework, urban public education must compete with private schools due to market competition. While this family had a positive public-school experience and wanted that for their children, COVID-19 led the schooling to be online. Therefore, the have’s and have not’s argument is presented again showing how some private schools have the resources to be in-person which influenced these shifts. This parent’s positive experience within public school invites the critique some parents also provided of the system.

Many parents who noted how their public schools did not sufficiently support them also mentioned ways in which the public-school systems had been neglected. One parent had noted the way her public-school experience had been impacted by the “link” between “rural areas and not having a lot of funding” (Interviewee D). The experiences of these families reflected how their academic journey within their public schools had led them to prioritize choice factors that San Francisco private schools provided. Some parents mentioned how they wanted their children to instead “have the highest quality education, because [they] wanted it when [they] were [younger]” (Interviewee D). Some parents, reflecting on their own academic experience, noted the importance of “being in a school that will hold you as you move through your education”

(Interviewee E). Some of the families who had attended only public school, or a mix seemed to take the characteristics that had been missing from their public-school education and use it as a way to find those missing pieces within San Francisco private schools. In contrast, families who had only attended private school or spoke more about their private school experience sought out those characteristics for their child's experience in San Francisco private schools.

Some of the interview subjects, who had either only attended private or had attended a mix of both, noted the shift they had experienced and how this supported their children to go private. One parent reflected on the way private education provided them with "personalized attention" (Interviewee A). How the community had been represented within their private school environment was how "the teachers really knew me; they knew my family. So, I feel like they just kind of knew what worked for me" (Interviewee A). Some parents noted this reflection of their private school experience as one of a "community" (Interviewee A). One parent spoke about how their private school experience was so positive that they, "revisited all of the same schools, for my children that I went to, and it's, I'm excited to give them similar education opportunities that I was given as a child" (Interviewee G). Whether parents came from a public-school background, a mix, or a private school background, their own experiences were reflected in how they chose their child's academic path. These characteristics were either missing from their public-school experience or were something they recalled fondly from their private school experience.

Specialized Teaching

Some parents expressed that one key thing that drew them into private education was the small classroom sizes. One parent noted that "maybe bigger classes, it seems more, more

anonymous there” (Interviewee A). There was a clear conversation regarding “resources” from the data collection. Some parents addressed the ways small classrooms accommodate the needs of their children. One parent noted how there are “a lot of resources designated to the classroom” and “attention given to each child” (Interviewee B). Other parents agreed with this as they saw how small classes allowed more access to the administration. One parent noted the ways small classes allowed for teachers to, “meet your child where their needs are” and the idea that they’re not “teaching one thing to the entire class”, but instead focusing on the individual kid to “exacerbate their strengths (Interviewee B). Parents observed the ways small classrooms gave more to their kids than a larger setting as students receive direct attention and support from their teachers.

Due to small class sizes, several parents praised the ways private schools address the specific needs of their child and how their child is better carried throughout their education. One parent stated that the school they chose “celebrates the individual” and how there is “no one way to be a student” at their respective school (Interviewee G). Other families had agreed with this concept and pointed to how individual growth thrives in a smaller setting. The data showed how many families wanted not only the small classrooms but also “learning support systems” (Interviewee E). To fit the individual needs of their child, a smaller environment was critical to some of the parents for their child to thrive in. One parent interviewed noted that, when learning about San Francisco public schools from friends with public school children, the public-school students were, “getting kind of lost in the system already” (Interviewee C). Through the conversations with other families and tours of public schools, the data showed how some families wanted an environment in which their child was prioritized by the administration.

While a majority of San Francisco private schools are religiously affiliated, some parents also discussed how values and religion played an important role in their choice to go private. Whether from the beginning off the application process or reaffirming the parents' decision, some parents mentioned how their family values and/or the religious affiliation of the school was an important characteristic. One family noted that the private school she looked at aligned with her values as they give back to the community by doing more "service", and how service shows that private schools are trying to get rid of their "elitism" reputation (Interviewee C). The idea of service and giving back stood out in the data as something that parents mentioned their respective schools doing. The service component of private education contributed to specialized education as it incorporates a teaching style that caters to the religious values of the respective schools. While service is a characteristic of some religions, it also aligns with value-based teaching. The private schools were seen to teach children "empathy, compassion, and service for others" (Interviewee C). By doing so, it established a mindset of, "we're all in this together" (Interviewee C). Many of the parents interviewed did not note that religion was a draw, but more so values. Values presented a huge draw to choosing private schools as one parent framed her choice by saying it was how she had been "raised" (Interviewee G). If anything, religion played a role when reaffirming their decision to see how it is structured in the curriculum.

The religious aspect did not play a role for most families looking at private, but values did. The data shows that some families liked the religion component of their schools while some did not. One family noted that she liked the religious aspect of the private schools her children attend as it provides "the foundation for like a moral compass" (Interviewee B). However, some families noted how most of the private schools in San Francisco are predominately Catholic. In that regard, one parent currently in the private school enrollment process said she wants her child

to be in an environment “open to all faiths” so they had narrowed the schools they applied to (Interviewee C). The religious aspect did not play a role for most families looking at private, but values did. As some families saw religion and values incorporated into their child’s education, they also noticed a specialized style that addressed different learning styles. Many families interviewed had a child with a learning difference which played a role in their deciding process as the child needed significant support for their academic success.

Many of the parents interviewed have a child with a learning difference which made specialized education in private schools stand out to them. When asked to reflect on the way learning differences are handled within private education, one family noted, “He is hyper and you know, they have a lot of things sort of built into their curriculum that helps address that” (Interviewee B). Like the small classroom set-up, some families saw ways their children would receive more support at a private school than they would in public. One family compared the support her child received at a small private high school in contrast to a large public high school stating how the school has “support for learning differences” (Interviewee E). However, one family noted how she had to outsource some of her child’s needs regarding his learning difference (Interviewee B). She stated how she had to outsource help for her child’s learning difference which would be on top of the private school tuition (Interviewee B). When discussing this, the parent noted that the school would not be able to provide the occupational therapy she needed for her child (Interviewee B). While many private schools, with resources and smaller environments, provided more support to students with learning differences they still are not able to provide everything that students need to succeed. The single-sex aspect of some private schools also drew select families to opt for private over public because private schools targeted issues like toxic masculinity and sexism.

Some parents spoke about how the single-sex component of some private schools was something that would benefit their child's academic career. One parent stated how she liked that the school was "fully embracing the boy" when discussing her child's all-boys private school (Interviewee B). Many other parents agreed with this testament, especially for boys. During a tour of an all-boys private school, one parent noted a huge draw was how the all-boys school spoke about teaching boys to be "good people" and this parent noted how she believed it was especially important with boys as they toured the school during the time of the Cavanaugh trial (Interviewee A). One parent noted the "social-emotional" side of education that private schools taught in a single-sex setting (Interviewee G). In that regard, the single-sex private school education model reflected the values of the family touring the private school.

For all-girls schools, parents spoke about how single-sex education addressed their needs as well. All-girls schools, similarly, to all-boys schools, provided something parents believed would strengthen the academic journey of their children. One parent noted how wanting an all-girls private school for her daughter would "bolster her confidence" and "eliminate distractions" and stated how an all-girls school would relieve "pressure or judgment" from boys (Interviewee G). Therefore, some parents saw how all-girls schools foster environments in which women are empowered in ways they have not historically been.

While some families spoke highly of single-sex education, not all believed it to be conducive to a thriving learning environment. One family currently going through the private school application process noted how she did not like the idea of single-sex education and had applied to some coed schools as well. She believed how single-sex education creates a "narrow world" where their child wouldn't be able to see other kids from the opposite sex in a learning environment (Interviewee C). She continued by noting how she believed this could have her

child place people into boxes thinking, “boys like this”, and “girls like that”, forming gender norms (Interviewee C). While specialized teaching played a role in the parent’s decision, the curriculum also stood out to many of the families when making their choice to go private.

Curriculum

Many of the parents discussed ways in which the curriculum at their child’s respective private school would encompass different learning styles and challenge their child more while also providing their child more support. One parent noted a huge draw for private high school was “more hands-on learning” and “more experiential learning” (Interviewee D). Many other families agreed with the experiential learning component as it strengthened the private school curriculum. Some parents also noted the private school support that was given, such as “wraparound services” (Interviewee D). The “wraparound services” referred specifically to counseling and academic guidance to support students through mental health wellbeing and academic success. The idea of “wraparound services” and “experiential learning” tied into a contrast one of the families made against teaching in public schools. She stated, “My hope too, is that they're not just teaching for the test, you know, for the state tests, so that they can get, you know, X amount of kids, you know, passed, and they get more funding” (Interviewee C). The concept of not “teaching for the test” was discussed by other families when elaborating on the significance of hands-on learning. One parent noted how she wants her child to be able to “think critically” and not just, “regurgitate facts for a test so that the school can get funding” (Interviewee C). The academic expectation is tied to the comments families made about a network effect in private education.

Many of the parents were attracted to an environment that fostered a love for learning and one that prepared students to continue this passion in higher education. In that regard, many parents believed private schools focused on setting up their children for higher education, including more access to college counselors. The data showed that many parents saw the curriculum in private schools incorporates skills and tools for higher education and career success. Many of the parents argued that the educational experience they selected for their child would “prepare them better for life and higher education” (Interviewee D). The idea of support for success also tied to an argument for private school students being better-connected regarding both higher education and jobs, referred to as “network effect”. Some families had spoken about this network effect like a “track” (Interviewee C). However, while being set up for higher education, one parent critiqued the way this track works. In a sense, each school had set their students up to continue with the next step which meant that if you started with a private school, you continued with a private school. The “robotic track to some destination with learning” (Interviewee C) and the cycle of the pursuit of private education provided families with a feeling of relief since some parents believe that private school provided what would be best for their child. While network effect tied into the private school experience, families also noted the ways diversity had been taught in private schools.

While most parents noted the lack of diversity in private education, they discussed how private schools hold conversations regarding diversity through a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) curriculum. One parent had discussed her experience putting her child in private strongly related to how the school addressed gender exploration. She discussed the ways she felt that this private school would address the needs of her child as they explored their gender, “[The private school] was like attentive to that in a really proactive way in terms of their gender identity

curriculum, which started in kindergarten, and was built in throughout K through eight experience and had just come out with a gender inclusion statement” (Interviewee D). This parent felt like, with DEI curriculum, there was more “accountability” established within the school (Interviewee D). Most families mentioned ways they believed their private schools were teaching individualism, but not many discussed the extent of the DEI curriculum within their school. While the curriculum was a key component reflected in the data, many parents brought up conversations of community when looking for a private school for their child.

Community

The data showed that some parents prefer schools that were easily accessible to them. They noted the importance of a “neighborhood” school through prioritizing walkability and the community aspect of their child’s private school experience. One parent stated, “I want community. I want people that I go to school with to like live around me like because our lives walkable. So that sense of community tied to like where I live was really important” (Interviewee B). Many families agreed with this testament of being able to walk to school. One of the parents who had been able to walk to school before for their child’s public school noted how important it was for them to do so when choosing a private school (Interviewee H). The data showed that there was a want for the idea of the neighborhood school because it accommodated their schedule as a working parent.

When discussing walkability, a few parents had mentioned how this made their lives easier when both parents work full time. In that regard, one family spoke about how they were more comfortable reaching out to a neighbor for carpool, so she didn’t feel like she was asking someone to go out of their way (Interviewee B). The convenience of the school location also

benefitted this parent since all her children went to that school as well (Interviewee B). The community aspect of helping one another and being able to do that because of location proximity was expressed by other families as well. Being able to call on someone reflected having “family” through the school (Interviewee A). The idea of a school that was close in proximity to the families was something that drew parents to private schools.

In the neighborhood settings, some parents pointed out that their child could have more independence living in an area where their school community is. One family pointed out that this neighborhood community allowed their child to have more freedom and be in close location to his future friends (Interviewee C). One family described sending their children to local schools as something that holds a “lovely notion” (Interviewee H). The walkability to the school was expressed by one parent to develop “a more cohesive community” when seeing other families during this walk to the school (Interviewee B). Some parents noted that having a school reflective of the local neighborhoods strengthened the sense of community within the school (Interviewee H). One parent mentioned an experience in which a friend of hers who had transferred from public school had stated that the private school provided a more “tighter-knit community” (Interviewee B). As many families noted the way neighborhood schools worked well for them, there was also a reflection on how neighborhood schools exist differently in cities.

The want for a neighborhood school that was walkable was tied to a dislike of the public-school enrollment process. One parent reflected on not having public neighborhood schools as something that, “just seems harder in the city” (Interviewee C). The data showed how parents, who wanted a school close to where they lived, knew that the public-school process would not guarantee them that result (Interviewee A). Yet, walkability and neighborhood schools did not hold importance for all the parents interviewed. The data also pointed out that one family would

have to commute in “two different directions” for both their children’s schools so the neighborhood aspect was not as critical to all the family’s responses (Interviewee D). While walkability held significance to community for some families, the concept of consistency in their child’s education was also something vital to their decision-making process.

Some parents mentioned an aspect of their private school experience that allows them to remain within the same community since the private school is predominately K through 8. The consistency however went beyond K through 8 as families told stories of how their community began in preschool. One family found that many of the families from their preschool went to private school and how that was their “community” (Interviewee B). One parent pointed out how they also wanted to be a part of a community that they would stay within through the course of their child’s education (Interviewee G). The data showed that involvement within the school played an important role in the school’s community for some of the parents. Some families had noted the consistency also of their involvement with the school which had made them feel more connected to their child’s private school education. One parent noted her association with the school through going there and working there established a strong relationship between her and the school itself (Interviewee G). In that regard, not all families shared the testament of feeling connected with the school community through consistent involvement. Some families mentioned a feeling of being “indebted” to the school because of their working-class background leading them to volunteer more (Interviewee D). As consistency in involvement was an important community aspect to some, it did not hold the same significance to all the families. A community aspect that most of the parents spoke about included how the administration provides extensive support to the students.

When touring private schools or visiting their child's classroom, families noted ways in which the administration within private schools drew them to apply or reaffirmed their decision to go private. Some families stated how the funding difference was clear between private and public education since, they argued, better resources contribute to a stronger school administration (Interviewee C). The data showed that many families liked the "interpersonal dynamics" of the private schools since the administration knows each kid (Interviewee D). By having this, one family pointed out that the private schools provided "a culture of belonging" (Interviewee D). When using administration as a factor in choosing a private school, the data showed that the private school teachers stood out to some of the parents during school tours, but the public-school teachers had not (Interviewee B). When parents who had switched to private school reflected on this, they had argued that the private school teachers are more "consistently high-quality teachers" (Interviewee H). The experience of a family who had transferred from public to private noted how discouraging some of her interactions had been with the administration within the public school and how "disenchanted" she was with the leadership there (Interviewee D). The reasoning behind this was not always in comparison to private education. Many of the families recognized the resource disparities between public and private school teachers.

Many families pointed to ways private schools meet the needs of their children through their administration. The independent schools are "strategic" in leveraging the "funding" and "expertise" that families are bringing to the school (Interviewee D). In other words, the private school administration was more likely to "maximize" the experience of students (Interviewee D). The data showed that many parents understood how the commitment between public school administration and private could not be compared as it is based on the way private schools have

fewer kids so the students can receive more attention from the administration (Interviewee E). Many of the parents interviewed noted how important this “access” was to them as a resource for their children (Interviewee G). As many families were drawn to private because of the community, the public-school enrollment process discouraged many families from enrolling their children in San Francisco public schools.

Public School Enrollment Process

The lottery public school enrollment process was one that many families who had only looked at private schools noted to be a factor when opting for private school. The data showed that some families who opted for private schools found the enrollment process for a public school to be “discouraging” as they could not attend their local schools (Interviewee A). Some families who opted for private did not want to be at “the mercy of the public-school lottery” (Interviewee D). Some families interviewed had gone through the process while others had not. When families had not, they appeared to rely on what they heard about through word of mouth. Some families had also mentioned instances in which they knew people who had not been placed in one of their ranked choices (Interviewee C). One family noted how they knew families that had ended up with “no-options” after doing the public-school enrollment process (Interviewee D). The instance in which some families have no options show that the enrollment process does not accommodate the needs of many families, especially working families that struggle to commute far distances for school. The enrollment process also led some families to public schools that did not reflect characteristics private school families wanted.

Due to the complexities of San Francisco’s public-school enrollment, the data showed how families did not believe it to work for them. The lottery process appeared daunting for some

families as they stated they did not “roll up their sleeves” and dedicate time to looking at the public schools (Interviewee C). In the experience of some families, they had gone through the public enrollment process but got schools that “didn’t make practical sense” for their family (Interviewee B). Some families stated how they didn’t want to commute long distances for a school that wasn’t going to meet their standards (Interviewee C). When looking ahead, some families were also concerned to do public school enrollment for high school post-private K through 8 education. One parent noted that she didn’t want to, “dump them in a public high school that doesn’t provide like, what they need to be successful” (Interviewee D). The public-school enrollment process played a significant role in what deterred many families from public schools. Additionally, the accommodations provided to private school students throughout the COVID-19 pandemic played a role whether that be affirming the choice to go private or to transfer from public to private.

COVID-19 Resource Accommodations

The impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on public school re-openings led the interviewed families to leave public school, only look at private schools, or reaffirmed why going private made the most sense for them. The data showed that many families with children currently enrolled in private education felt “thankful” (Interviewee A) that their schools were able to continue in-person learning sooner than in public. One family described the private schools had gone “above and beyond” when it came to COVID-19 by hiring consultants and making sure that safety was established within the schools (Interviewee B). Those whose decision had been reaffirmed contrasted with those who had been looking at private schools for kindergarten.

From the perspectives of those looking at private schools, COVID-19 played a role by seeing what private schools were able to provide during the pandemic. One parent stated, “I was kind of observing how the public schools seem to have to close and open more readily. I don't know, it just seemed like, they had less control on the local level of whether the school would stay open, and how they would resume, like, teaching during that environment” (Interviewee C). In some experiences, families had recently enrolled their children in a private school which they believed to affirm their decision and one described it stating the timing had been “fortuitous” (Interviewee D). The perspectives of some of the parents with children in both private and public at the time noted the resource disparities between schools.

Many parents with children in public and private schools noticed how their children were supported throughout COVID-19. One parent described their experience in contrast to her other child, who is currently in public school, by expressing that the resources her private school child was able to receive such as socialization and food packages (Interviewee E). This parent explained how the private school would provide lunches for students to take-home including food packages. Course-wise, such as science classes, this parent's private school provided the equipment to be conducting experiments from home. From a different perspective, the data showed how COVID-19 also led one family to switch from public school to private because of the difference in resources.

The process of moving from public to private because of COVID-19 was not framed as an easy decision by one parent. She stated, “we wanted to send our kids to public school because I had a higher regard for public school, I think than a lot of other people, but because they were closed during the pandemic, we moved them to a private school” (Interviewee H). The experience of this parent stated her decision to switch to private was because remote learning had

become “too difficult emotionally” and that remote learning was “not a sufficient substitute for in-person learning” (Interviewee H). Many families with children currently enrolled in private education had their decision to go private reaffirmed by the pandemic. In contrast to public education, the data showed parents saying they “cannot complain” (Interviewee B). As the pandemic continues, the data is representing a part of the pandemic in which public schools had been shut down. As the factors the interviewed private school families wanted is outlined, it is critical to recognize the themes of the data and how this greatly impacts San Francisco public schools.

Part II: Relationship between the Individual and the Public System

The data synthesis leads to themes around the individual and the public system, and the complexity of navigating between public and private systems. The outline of the themes begins with the expansion of the DEI curriculum. From this analysis, I interpret how the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) curriculum advances in both public and private schools, but the focus on gender expression was something seen missing in the respective family’s public school. Through an ethnic studies curriculum in San Francisco public schools, both private and public incorporate DEI into their classrooms. Yet, some families pointed to the need to expand the incorporation of DEI. The “right to the city” exemplifies how some of the interviewed white families in private schools have increased access to DEI than what they saw in a public school’s DEI curriculum. When acknowledging the impact on the public school system, many parents expressed a responsibility they feel to not only their children but also to society. In doing so, many parents recognize both privilege and separation of personal values regarding the academic choices they make for their children. From this analysis, it is critical to see how individual

acknowledgement is significant, but the systematic issue complicates how many families navigate San Francisco's education system.

Expanding the DEI Curriculum

Some parents noted how Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) has been both taught and displayed in their child's respective public-school experience. Some families pointed out that what drew them away from public schools was a lack of DEI curriculum in their school, specifically a lack of gender expression curriculum. While the SFUSD has recently implemented an Ethnic Studies requirement, there are limits to the DEI curriculum, especially regarding gender expression. Many of the parents interviewed expressed the importance of education on social awareness and critical social justice issues. Some of the interviewed parents spoke about ways they saw teaching DEI in private schools to be incredibly important.

Teaching DEI in private schools addresses white privilege and the importance of awareness for forwarding social change. One parent explained how the DEI curriculum incorporates a critical awareness of race and power in society and teaches children how to be aware of their positionality. She stated how "independent schools have these really intentionally developed curricula around [learning about racism and oppression]" (Interviewee D). Essentially, she pointed out how the private schools are the "reverse" of public schools when it comes to both diversity and DEI curriculum (Interviewee D). The DEI curriculum, she argued, "Makes the children aware of the institutional and systematic nature of power and privilege and oppression in a way that can empower them and hold them accountable for their actions" (Interviewee D). In this instance, the interviewed parent noted her hesitancy with the curriculum around gender expression in San Francisco public schools. Many parents addressed how they saw strong

curriculums around DEI in their respective private schools but still did not see diversity within their schools.

Some parents believe that independent schools while trying to do so, are not able to sufficiently address increasing diversity within their schools because of costly barriers. One parent noted how there are, “realities to running private school that limit diversity” (Interviewee G). While private schools are making “tremendous strides and efforts toward increasing diversity”, that is the biggest thing the schools are missing (Interviewee G). Most parents agreed with this testament that while great efforts have been made for diversity in private schools, there is still, “more likeness than not among families” (Interviewee H). Many of the families noted how diversity is a missing aspect of private education, but the DEI curriculum is still significant to how some choose schools.

The SFUSD has taken great strides toward incorporating a DEI curriculum in the public-school classroom. In 2021, the SFUSD added Ethnic Studies as a graduation requirement beginning with the class of 2028 (“SFUSD” 2021). Therefore, the San Francisco public high school classes beginning their freshman year in 2024 will be expected to complete two semesters or 10 elective credits of Ethnic Studies (“SFUSD” 2021). There are many benefits to incorporating a DEI curriculum in the classroom. Not only does the SFUSD express that requiring Ethnic Studies serves to increase GPAs among students, but also provides a “sense of belonging” (“SFUSD” 2021). While the Ethnic Studies focus on race/ethnicity justice issues, there are limitations to the approach.

The limitations of the approach include that it is required for high school students and does not sufficiently address gender expression. While ethnic studies courses have been offered in many public schools, they have not been required or expanded on curriculum regarding gender

identity/expression. The Ethnic Studies requirement is expected for San Francisco public high schools as an “introduction to the experiences of ethnic communities that are rarely represented in textbooks and offers a compelling way to examine race, ethnicity, nationality, and culture in the United States” (“SFUSD” 2021). Therefore, the Ethnic Studies courses are not an SFUSD requirement for all K through 8 public schools. Some parents that left San Francisco public schools for private spoke on the limitations of the SFUSD’s work forwarding DEI. One parent framed this issue by noting how the students would be in a diverse setting but would not be able to understand the significance of “racial identity” and “gender identity” (Interviewee D). Therefore, it is critical to expanding upon the DEI developments the SFUSD has recently implemented to increasingly draw families to public schools. Within one family’s respective public school, she shares a story that displays the importance of DEI.

Some parents that spoke about the significance of a DEI curriculum also shared experiences in which existing systems of oppression played out in their child’s public school and required a conversation on issues of racial justice. One parent brought up a story in which, while at public school, the police were called on a student in the classroom. The parent then discussed the significance of not only this event, but of the conversation, she then had with her child following the incident. When parents with children in public school previously discussed issues of how systematic racism was lived within public schools she states,

So, an insight into conversations is prompted and required conversations about complex social issues that are connected to our family's values as far as understanding, trying to unpack and have some level of analysis around systemically Why is this happening? Right? Why is it wrong that the police came for your classmate? Why is that still something that that comes up when we talk about what's wrong systemically with inequity and how it shows up in schools? So, for better or worse, it's afforded us the opportunity to have those conversations because we weren't in a bubble. We weren't insulated or isolated from those things, which I think can happen probably some private schools more than others, frankly. (Interviewee E)

Many San Francisco public schools exist on a stage in which systematic issues are lived through the students, but not all are sufficiently providing the necessary DEI curriculum to make sense of these systematic issues. The city has become a concept in which struggles for social justice are amplified throughout (Lipman 2011, 1). While both private and public schools are not immune to systematic problems, it is critical to forward the DEI curriculum that especially addresses all age groups as the interviewed families who switched from public to private were in K through 8 schools.

Drawing on Pauline Lipman's "right to the city", certain demographics, specifically white middle to upper-middle-class families, have disproportionate access to some private schools that provide curriculum on gender expression and teach DEI concepts before high school. The data shows that many of the parents with children previously in public school noted how there is diversity within the public school but there was no DEI curriculum (Interviewee D). While the data is limited to the experiences of the respective families interviewed, it is important that the SFUSD continues working toward inclusive environments in public schools.

Impact on Public School System

Most parents recognize the impact on public school funding when they chose a private school. However, many families make these decisions within a flawed system. The factors missing from public education contribute to why some families opt for private schools, and funding that is reliant on attendance numbers does not address the necessary investment in public schools to achieve higher public-school attendance numbers. The data shows that many parents, while not wanting forward harmful systematic consequences, make the best-suited choice for their child even if it went against their want to support the public schools.

While the choice to go private seems individual, there is a greater impact on public schools because of the education system. Pauline Lipman's "right to the city" framework outlines how neoliberalism favors certain groups when education is privatized. Since there is a private option of schooling, the impact of not entering the public school system leads to decreased resources in public schools. Additionally, there are segregating effects as more white students are in private schools and predominately students of color are in public schools. A way to address this is by incorporating the factors families find missing in public schools which leads them to private schools.

The changing enrollment processes seek to forward diverse classrooms but do provide the sufficient investment in public schools to compete with a private option leaving predominately students of color in under-sourced schools. The resource disparities between public and private were recognized by many of the families, including the socioeconomic demographic of the school. One family who had children both in private and public noted how the difference between public and private is not that public school teachers are any less dedicated than private school ones, but instead, public schools are "under-resourced", and the teachers are "overextended" (Interviewee E). This parent stated how public-school teachers are the ones navigating a "broken system" (Interviewee E). Many public schools, in contrast to private, are not as heavily sourced exemplifying how public schools have to compete with private because of their existence in an education marketplace. Issues of modern-day segregation appear between public and private since white middle to upper middle class families have the "right to the city" in ways communities of color do not.

The public-school resource depletes because of how the funding system disadvantages those who rely on public schools and does not affect those who can choose private education.

For most of the parents with kids previously in public school, acknowledging the relationship with the public system meant explaining the inequities to their children. One parent stated, “Having these conversations like to the point of like, okay, let me tell you about Prop 13. And why schools are different than when I was going to school in California as a kid, like, the whole funding model is different. The resources are different.” (Interviewee E). Lipman argues that the neoliberal reconstruction of the city is driven by market ideologies, and the power of global finance (Lipman 2011, 3). Lipman’s framework allows us to make sense of the consequences of systematic issues such as the lack of San Francisco public education funding, and how unequal resource distribution has segregating effects between private and public schools.

San Francisco public school funding disserves the students currently enrolled, and the lack of resources in public schools deters families from wanting to enter the public system. Many of the parents are aware of how choosing a private school would impact San Francisco public schools because of the per-pupil funding model. One parent stated, “I want to believe in public schooling. Right. I want to like believe in it, I want to invest in it” (Interviewee D). The parent also shared the recognition of the harm of Prop 13 and being cognizant of how it has harmed the public school system (Interviewee D). Pauline Lipman’s definition of the “right to the city” exemplifies how the private option of schooling negatively impacts the success of public schools.

Incentivizing private school families to select public schooling increases the resources in public schools due to per-pupil spending and increases classroom diversity. The data shows that many families recognize funding changes when private school parents no longer had their children enrolled in San Francisco public schools. One parent noted how their former public school was “under-enrolled” and how they’re not, “donating to that school anymore. So, I think that’s an impact” (Interviewee H). Many parents identify with this impact in which resource

allocation had been changed because of their choice to go private. Parents, making an individual choice, recognized the systematic impact of such because of both public-school funding models and the impact of private schools in a neoliberal space. One parent noted how there is a “problem” where most San Francisco families who can afford to choose private school will (Interviewee A). The resource disparities between public and private were addressed when discussing the impact on the SFUSD. One parent continued by saying,

I think that there's so much money beyond tuition being raised for the private schools, and I think that families that are able to give are giving to their private schools, but that's leaving the public schools without as much funding or fundraising for additional services, and specialist classes and things like that. So, I do think that the public schools are missing out on that from families who are going to private school. (Interviewee A)

The reliance on individuals to improve the public resource greatly affects the resources public schools have. To serve the current per-pupil funding method, investment in public schools is necessary to compete with private schools. Many parents recognize their impact on not only the public school system but also the significance of them being in private schools.

Recognizing the differences in resources between public and private education, most families addressed how they want their children to see the “right to the city” they have because of their respective race and socioeconomic status. Many of the parents did not want their children to feel entitled when having the access to private school education. One parent stated, “My biggest concern is I don't want him to feel entitled on that he's in a bubble of elitism” and how she did not want her child to have, “some sort of silver spoon of entitlement that gives him a path” (Interviewee C). When recognizing the deciding factors for a private school, some of the families noted their places of privilege allowing them to pick and choose schools. One parent stated,

Safety I mean, I know. I feel like there's so much baggage in saying that, right. Because it's like, it comes with like, yeah, an acknowledgment of like rightness and privilege, right in the privilege of wanting to feel safe, but also, for me, is deeply rooted in my experience of not having safety in school. (Interviewee D)

Basic needs, such as safety, are something some of the parents did not see in San Francisco public schools. While the private school families want to utilize the public resource, the factors that draw them to private is not incorporated into public schooling. As many families navigate the education system, there is an extensive reflection that complicates the want to diversify the classroom and support public schools.

The system, where a private school is an exclusive option, places an expectation on families to choose public schools even if the respective schools are under-sourced. Due to this expectation, families make a choice where their personal values conflict with their decision to go private. Many parents who came from public schools recognized the way the system would not work for their respective family while also being able to acknowledge the systematic impact of this choice. One parent expressed how she had seen the school district “fail kids” because of a lack of resources (Interviewee E). In turn, there is a challenging relationship between the values of parents and the decisions they make for their children. The concept of value-based decision shifts was explained when one parent stated,

When I had my children, it really challenged my desire to kind of make values-based decisions on where I sent my kids, like, I want to believe in public schools, I think kids should have equitable access to high-quality education. And I don't think the public schools are providing the highest quality education. And I don't think a lot of them are keeping kids safe. And so, you know, when it came to my kids, it was like, okay, well, however, I feel about wanting public schools to be better, like the current state of them is that I would prefer that my kids don't go there. (Interviewee D)

Parents, in the position to decide between what is best for their child and improving a public system, are challenged when they don't have to rely on the public schools. Without changes

being made, the continuation of individual choices negatively impacting the public school system persist. Most of the families clearly established that they choose for their children, not the needs of the public schools. One parent stated,

I think San Francisco is a very complicated city to raise children in. But, you know, I think it's, you know, as a parent, you want what's best for your children. And I think that, in this particular instance, what I think is best for my children is not necessarily like what's the best for the city, and those things are just not going to, you know, align anytime soon until they make some, they're able to make some more changes, I think, unfortunately. (Interviewee H)

While the “right to the city” gives white middle to upper-middle-class families a choice, the ones who rely on the public system are not receiving an education comparable to the resources private schools provide. While not to suggest that either the public or private option is necessarily better, the interviewed families pointed to clear factors that either weren’t incorporated in public schools or weren’t advertised similarly to private schools. Families recognize the complexity that exists within the school admissions process and can rationalize their choices because of how San Francisco public schools do not meet the needs of the interviewed families.

Since parents are prioritizing their child’s needs, the data shows that families did not intend to contribute to segregating effects. To this testament, one parent stated how leaving the public school system and not working through education inequities is not reflective of who she is. This parent states,

I feel like this is a narrative like the white flight narrative is that people just check out. It's that's just not how I feel I'm handling this, you know, I'm not just like, peace out, forget it. It's broken. It doesn't, I'm going to move because my kids are okay, it's over. That's like not true at all. (Interviewee E)

When expressing values around public education, the data shows that many parents want to support and be a part of public education even if they have not been previously involved.

However, when asked to choose between the needs of their child and improving a public system, many parents prioritize the needs of their child. Parents, navigating both the needs and values of their children, are challenged when they make the seemingly individual choice. Therefore, the issue at hand needs to be addressed on a systematic level. A funding system that is based on the number of students should incorporate what families see missing from this option to draw them in, therefore increasing both funding and diversity. The “right to the city” shows how the individual families adjust to the public system because of white privilege and shows how access to education is unequally distributed in San Francisco.

Conclusions

“Most humans are not willing to risk their own children for their values and ideals” – Richard Buery

The significance of the data shows the complexities of the relationship between the individual and the public system. While the data represents people who want diversity in schools, the result of them choosing private education led to segregating consequences where white students are the majority in private schools but are not equally represented in public schools. The decision patterns of many private school families show the nature of who has the “right to the city” in an urban education system. This study is meaningful as it examines one of the foundational issues of modern-day segregation that is impacted by white families either opting out of public education entirely or transferring from a public school to a private one.

The Capstone Project invites us to look at the issue from a different lens by addressing solutions beyond a changed enrollment process. There is a desperate need for investment in desegregation. An enrollment process does not address the deep inequities that exist within San

Francisco schools. Resource distribution between private and public academic settings displays that white middle to upper-middle-class families have access to resources that those who rely on public schools do not have. While the changing enrollment process intends to diversify the classroom, the issue is more complex when the option to opt out entirely is present.

As the factors outline the answer to my research question, it is critical to examine how the factors can be utilized to better understand the complex relationship between the individual and the system. Factors such as parental experience, specialized teaching, curriculum, community, the public-school enrollment process, and COVID-19 resource accommodations are factors families saw missing from public schools. The characteristics that led the parents to choose private school suggests an analysis of how access to the factors exists on a systematically racist foundation. My research question sought to better understand why these choices are being made if they lead to racially/ethnically and socioeconomically segregating effects between private and public schools.

The crucial factors families listed to answer my question should be accessible to all students living in San Francisco, not just those who can afford private schooling. An expanded DEI curriculum in public schools that addresses gender expression could increase attendance numbers. Not only would expanding a DEI curriculum enhance curriculum, but also provide a space for students to learn about the significance of inclusivity. Observing that DEI curriculum is what draws families to private schools, it is critical to see how this offering could be packaged differently so parents see the incorporation of DEI in SFUSD schools. In addition to this, support for students with learning differences is another factor that could support those who struggle in public schools. Students with learning differences do not just exist in private spaces, and more resources need to be provided within the public option as well. The factors many families

detailed, when incorporated in public schools, level the playing field as a private option of schooling leads to education competition. The issue of the education marketplace favors white middle to upper-middle-class families in ways communities of color are not being fairly supported.

The issue of modern-day segregation is forwarded because of how inaccessible private school is to all communities, and how the factors families see are exclusive to private education. While examining the choices of families, the setting for the decision-making process is critical to acknowledge when analyzing the impact on public schools. The relationship between the individual and the public system, using Pauline Lipman's theoretical framework the "right to the city", shows how the decision-making process to enroll in private schools subsists in a foundationally racist system that serves the needs of predominately white middle to upper-middle-class families. The issue is not that many families don't support or want integrated schools, but since there will always be a level of choice with private education, those who can exit the public school system. Even if many families want diverse schools, the private option for schooling creates an unequal system in which predominately white middle to upper-middle-class families has increased access to well-resourced schools.

The data shows that many families choosing private education are put in a situation where their values conflict with their choices. While most interviewed families value the public system and want to support it, most of the data shows that many of the parents would not sacrifice the needs of their children for the greater public system. Since they had the choice to go private, they chose to go private. There is a deep understanding of the public impact this has. However, the systematic issue is heavily reliant on those who have more of a "right to the city" to make choices for the public resource over their own needs.

The communities that are disproportionately affected by this include those of lower socioeconomic status and people of color. As stated from the data, public schools in San Francisco are a “microcosm” of the systematic oppression that exists in San Francisco today. Therefore, those who rely on public school systems, even if the school does not suit the needs of the respective student, bear the consequences of an under sourced public school. Due to systematic issues caused by historic oppression, the “right to the city” white families have in contrast to families of color contribute to segregation effects between private and public schools. School integration should not be seen as a virtue within itself (Shapiro 2020). What my Capstone Project demonstrates is the need to fix the system rather than change the needs of the individual. Therefore, investment in public schools is necessary to draw families to choose public education to increase both diversity, and resources for those who rely on the public option.

As the factors private school families want are not incorporated in public schools, this proposes a challenge for raising attendance numbers in public schools. The “right to the city” theoretical framework shows the disproportionate access white middle to upper-middle-class families have to their child’s academics wants and needs than those who rely on public schools. To attempt diversifying schools, the SFUSD has predominately focused on the enrollment process. However, the data shows that the enrollment process itself is a key deterrent for families wanting to enter the public school system. This Capstone Project suggests the incorporation of the factors families saw in private schools but were missing from public schools, could contribute to a stronger diverse public school system.

The Capstone Project shows how, in the field of Urban and Public Affairs, school integration proposes complexities beyond the individual choice. Existing in a country where education is privatized leads to resource disparities between private and public education. The

“right to the city” shows who will benefit from the competition in education, and who is harmed. The answer is not “accidental integration” in which an enrollment process is changed and hopefully, equity follows that (Shapiro 2020). To diversify the public-school classroom, it is critical to address what leads private school families out of public schools. Since resources in San Francisco public schools rely on the number of students, it is essential to address how to intentionally desegregate schools.

The harms of modern-day segregation in schools have a greater impact on the choices of those existing in a segregated environment. The public-school resource is depleting because of the funding models that make it reliant on families choosing public education. While integration has been framed to benefit communities of color, there has been a lack of conversation around investing in public schools themselves (Shapiro 2020). The public schools, lacking the investment and resources, disproportionately harm communities of color. Many schools have been designed as “instruments of oppression” (Shapiro 2020). The “right to the city” shows how essential it is to provide resources to those who rely on the public-school option to address how white families have increased access to these resources from the start.

The case study is significant to the scholarly work because it presents how lack of investment has harmed attempts to diversify public schools and how resource allocation favors middle to upper-middle-class white families. The “right to the city” theoretical framework shows that urban education in San Francisco is separated by the haves and the have-nots. A segregated system produces harm above education and affects other policy issues such as residential segregation and other critical justice issues. As segregation is forwarded through a cycle, there is a trickle effect from education in which segregation is continued in other spaces. As the COVID-

19 pandemic deepened existing disparities, the need to address diversifying the classroom and expanding resources in public schools is critical to working toward ending this cycle.

The following step to this Capstone Project requires an evaluation of incorporating the factors into the public system. The process of intentionally desegregating schools requires oversight to not forward white gentrification in public schools. As this Capstone Project resulted in just the factors and in-depth research on modern-day segregation in San Francisco, it is essential to determine how the factors can be integrated into a public system to best serve the public-school community and forward diversity in public schools.

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