School Choice Strategies at the Intersections of Disability, Race, Class, and Geography

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Abstract: While parents of students with disabilities (SWD) select schools according to various factors, schools also choose students through different sorting mechanisms. Thus, parents of SWD may need to employ different strategies to enroll their child in their preferred school. We employed an intersectional approach for studying school choice, integrating ethnographic interviews and descriptive GIS to answer the following questions: (a) What strategies do parents of SWD utilize to secure placement in the school of their choice? and (b) How is the engagement with such strategies shaped by their social and geographical locations? We found that parents engaged in five strategies: Accepting an IEP Team's school recommendations, securing placement through a sibling, testing into selective enrollments, changing IEP provisions, and engaging in due process. Moreover, these strategies were afforded and constrained by their intersecting social positions (i.e., race, class, and disability), their geographical locations, and the developmental school stage of their child (i.e., transitioning to kindergarten or high school).
Keywords: school choice; students with disabilities; urban special education

Estrategias para la elección de escuela: Un análisis situado en la interseccion de discapacidad, raza, clase y localidad geográfica
Resumen: Si bien los padres de estudiantes con discapacidades (EcD) seleccionan las escuelas evaluando varios factores, las escuelas también eligen a los estudiantes a través de diferentes mecanismos selectivos. Por lo tanto, padres de EcD necesitan emplear diferentes estrategias para inscribir a sus hijos en su escuela preferida. Empleamos un enfoque interseccional para estudiar la elección de escuela de padres de EcD, integrando entrevistas etnográficas y análisis geográficos descriptivos para responder las siguientes preguntas: (a) ¿Qué estrategias utilizan los padres de EcD para asegurar la matrícula en la escuela que prefieren? y (b) ¿Cómo influye la ubicación social y geográfica de los padres en la utilización de las estrategias para asegurar la matrícula en la escuela deseada? Descubrimos que los padres utilizaron cinco estrategias: aceptar las recomendaciones escolares del equipo psicopedagógico, asegurar la matrícula a través de un hermano, realizar evaluaciones en escuelas con inscripciones académicamente selectivas, cambiar el plan educacional del estudiante e iniciar un proceso jurídico con un arbito parcial. Además, estas estrategias estaban influenciadas y limitadas por las posiciones sociales de los padres (es decir, raza, clase y discapacidad), sus ubicaciones geográficas en al ciudad y la etapa escolar de desarrollo de su hijo (es decir, la transición al jardín de infantes o la escuela secundaria).
Palabras-clave: elección de escuelas; estudiantes con discapacidades; educación de necesidades especiales en zonas urbanas

Estratégias para escolha escolar: Uma análise situada na interseção de deficiência, raça, classe e localização geográfica
Resumo: Embora os pais de alunos com deficiência (EcD) selecionem as escolas avaliando vários fatores, as escolas também escolhem os alunos através de diferentes mecanismos de seleção. Portanto, os pais de DPI precisam de empregar estratégias diferentes para matricular os seus filhos na escola preferida. Empregamos uma abordagem interseccional para estudar a escolha escolar dos pais de DPI, integrando entrevistas etnográficas e análises geográficas descritivas para responder às seguintes questões: (a) Que estratégias os pais de DPI usam para garantir a matrícula na escola preferida? e (b) Como a localização social e geográfica dos pais influencia o uso de estratégias para garantir a matrícula na escola desejada? Descobrimos que os pais utilizaram cinco estratégias: aceitar recomendações escolares da equipe psicopedagógica, garantir a matrícula por meio de um irmão, realizar avaliações em escolas com matrículas academicamente seletivas, alterar o plano educacional do aluno e iniciar um processo legal com um árbitro parcial. Além disso, estas estratégias foram influenciadas e limitadas pelas posições sociais dos pais (ou seja, raça, classe e deficiência), pela sua localização geográfica na cidade e pelo estágio de desenvolvimento dos seus filhos na escola (ou seja, transição para o jardim de infância ou o ensino secundário).
Palavras-chave: escolha de escola; alunos com deficiência; educação especial em áreas urbanas

School Choice Strategies at the Intersections of Disability, Race, Class, and Geography

Advocates of school choice claim that such programs promise quality educational options to underserved families that they would not otherwise have (e.g., Chubb & Moe, 1990). According to this logic, neighborhood-based school assignments frequently consign disadvantaged and marginalized communities to under-performing districts and schools based on residential location.

Wealthier families can choose better schools by residing in higher-performing districts or enrolling their children in private schools. Such choices shape a market dynamic that enables consumer-style behavior while advancing opportunity. Extending choice options to more disadvantaged communities—whether through private, public, or charter (hybrid) schools—should provide those families a "civil right" to choose better schools for their children while also subjecting lower-performing schools to some much-needed competition (Lubienski & Lee, 2016). As a result, underserved families should have equitable access to quality schools.

The logic of a market-style school model (Lubienski, 2007) would suggest that families are incentivized to gather information on school quality and other characteristics to choose the "best" school for their children. While a more technocratic model of schooling (Lubienski, 2005) would see district administrators or other experts (such as court-mandated consent decrees) try to socially engineer or balance the demographics of school intakes, in a market model, parents are left to make those decisions in their own (self-)interest.

However, much research on broader populations questions this information acquisition and school selection model. More affluent families often have access to better information on schools. In that regard, they may be more likely to benefit from school choice programs, while less advantaged families are often more likely to focus on transportation and other costs (Ball, 2003; OECD, 2019). Further, researchers have demonstrated that not all school choices are equally accessible (Mommandi & Welner, 2021). For instance, while it is known that affluent families may be able to select schools by buying a home in a desired area, many often do not need to consider school quality, just taking it as a given (Lareau, 2014). On the other hand, Rhodes and DeLuca (2014) demonstrate how poor and minoritized families often have to weigh other considerations instead when deciding where to live and where their children will attend school, while Phillippo (2019) shows how students make choices within an inequitable system in ways that draw from and re-shape their own identities.

In addition, rather than choosing the most effective schools for their children, parents may choose schools where the student body more closely resembles their children's racial and class characteristics (Bifulco & Ladd, 2006a, 2006b). Likewise, rather than choosing "better" schools, parents may choose schools with "better" students; that is, they may choose schools not on the value-added potential of the program but on the academic inclinations of potential peers who attend the school (Rowe & Lubienski, 2017). Thus, in that market model, families are differentially positioned according to their race and class to access school options and information and adopt strategies to secure access to a desired school.

Further, schools may choose parents as much as parents choose schools. Schools in choice systems leverage different mechanisms to select or filter students (Lubienski et al., 2022; Mommandi & Welner, 2021). This includes strategies that charter schools or low-fee schools use to select their geographic location, engage in selective marketing strategies, and dissuade students who do not fit the profile and goals of the school (LaFleur, 2016; Mommandi & Welner, 2021). For instance, schools in many different contexts that compete for students create covert practices that exclude certain students, target more "desirable" families through marketing messages, or gerrymander attendance zone boundaries that give preference to some families over others, as when more "desirable" schools in Auckland use their ability to adjust preferential attendance boundaries to exclude poorer and minority students (Lubienski et al., 2013). Some schools have overt sorting practices for student enrollment, such as selective enrollment schools, where students compete with other students for access through their test scores, or magnet schools, where students must enter a lottery to be accepted.

Thus, parents may not always be able to enroll their children in their preferred schools. Consequentially, it is essential to understand the strategies parents employ to secure placement in their schools of choice while competing with other families for places at desirable schools, as well as schools that may be incentivized to limit options for some students. To address this, we focus on families of SWD as they present a unique challenge to some of the rationales for implementing school choice and have received limited attention in prior research (Waitoller & Lubienski, 2019).

Students Receiving Special Education Services and School Choice

Parents of SWD do not engage with school choice in the same ways that parents of students without disabilities often do (Waitoller, 2020). Their experiences choosing a school are shaped by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which requires that such students have an individualized education program (IEP). Written by an interdisciplinary team composed of school professionals and the parent(s) of the child (i.e., the IEP Team), the IEP establishes the services that the student will receive and the amount of time they will spend in the least restrictive environment (LRE; e.g., general education classroom, separate classroom). The IEP Team also recommends a school that will be appropriate for the services the student will receive, which is particularly important when students are transitioning to kindergarten, middle, or high school, as many typically need to change schools. For instance, if the IEP indicates that the student needs a specialized classroom for students with sensory disabilities, the IEP needs to recommend a school that can provide those services. Thus, parents' school options can be constrained or expanded according to the availability of schools in the district to provide the services established in the IEP.

Such decision-making instances can be particularly difficult for families of SWD from minoritized racial backgrounds (Waitoller, 2020). When making placement decisions, professionals tend to weigh their expertise over parents' experiences and preferences, particularly when parents do not have the cultural capital of schools or are not as familiar with parental rights under IDEA (Harry & Klingner, 2014). Further, school professionals in the IEP team can have deficit views of racially minoritized families from low-income backgrounds, which affects the extent to which they take into consideration parental preferences (Cioe-Peña, 2021). Racially minoritized families of SWD are also more likely to be in urban school districts with fewer financial resources and, therefore, fewer options for school options that include their children in the general education classroom (Brock & Schaefer, 2015).

In addition, if parents of SWD prefer a different school or LRE placement than the one recommended by the IEP Team, they can also apply independently for a selective enrollment school, a charter school, and, in some states, a private school using a school voucher. However, accessing such school options often requires obtaining a cut score on a test, 'winning' the lottery, or qualifying under the state requirements to obtain a school voucher. This latter often means families must renounce their rights under IDEA (Eckes et al., 2016). Further, under IDEA, parents of SWD can use legal means to force the district to provide another school placement because their children are not receiving a "Free and Appropriate Public Education" (see *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District RE-1*, 2015). Thus, the experiences of these parents with school choice programs provide a unique window to understand if school choice can be leveraged to expand quality educational opportunities for vulnerable populations such as students eligible for special education services.

Although there is a growing body of research on the disproportionate proportions of SWD in traditional neighborhood schools when compared to charter schools (Barnard-Brack et al., 2018; Waitoller et al., 2017; Winters, 2015), on how parents of SWD consider and evaluate schools (e.g., Mawene & Bal, 2018; McNerney et al., 2015; Waitoller & Super, 2017), we have little information about how parents of SWD seek to secure placement in schools of their choice. For instance, are

there strategies to secure placement in a school unique to parents of SWD? Do families' social circumstances, such as race/ethnicity and class, shape their opportunities to secure placement? How do real-world factors such as proximity and location shape parents' strategies to secure placement? In this paper, we present a study that aims to understand how parents of SWD transitioning to kindergarten and high school secure placement in one of the schools in their "choice sets," that is, the menu of school options that parents construct in selecting schools (Bell, 2009). Because we are interested in how disability intersects with other social categories and geographical locations, we utilized an intersectional approach to school choice.

Theoretical Framework: An Intersectional Approach to School Choice Research

The study draws from an intersectional and spatial approach to school choice research to understand how SWD and their families experience school choice programs (Waitoller & Lubienski, 2019). Such a lens is informed by intersectionality theory (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991) and insights from critical geography (e.g., Soja, 1989). Kimberly Crenshaw (1991) uses the term structural intersectionality to refer to interacting social structures that organize the experiences of social groups (e.g., race, disability, class, gender), producing unintended outcomes. The intersections of social categories become the source for empirical questions (Hancock, 2007). Thus, an intersectional lens to examine school choice foregrounds the interactions of social categories such as disability, race, class, and gender and their roles in shaping the experiences of families of SWD as they learn about, consider, and select schools, as well as their experiences during and after their attendance at schools of "their choice" (Cahill, 2021; Waitoller, Nguyen et al., 2019). Such interactions may afford and constrain access to different school choice opportunities, which can exacerbate existing educational inequities (Waitoller, 2020).

Further, urban geographies are essential in parents' engagement with school choice (Waitoller, 2020). For instance, Black and Latinx parents of SWD experience school choice programs in ways that not only differ from those of White families but also vary according to the geographical location within a city shaped by uneven economic developments (Waitoller, 2020). Parents can have different school choice experiences if they live in areas impacted by poverty, gentrification, or middle-class areas (Waitoller & Super, 2017). Drawing from our intersectional framework, our research questions are as follows: (a) What strategies do parents of SWD utilize to secure placement in the school of their choice? (b) How is the engagement with such strategies shaped by their social and geographical location?

Methods

This study uses a longitudinal, mixed methods approach that merges in-depth interviews across time and geospatial analyses. The study is situated in the Chicago Public School District (CPS), the third largest school district in the United States, serving over 361,000 students. The district is racially and economically diverse (CPS, 2021), but the community is relatively segregated by residence and school enrollment patterns compared to other districts (Karp & Vevea, 2016; Serrato, 2022). In the 2018-19 school year, when data were collected for this study, White students accounted for 10% of the school enrollment, Black students 37%, Native American students 0.3 %, Hispanic students 47%, Asian students 4%, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students 0.2%, and multi-racial students 1% (CPS, 2021). Fourteen percent of students in the district received special education services. Students whose first language is not English accounted for 19%, while 77% received free or reduced lunch (CPS, 2021).

Education policies in Chicago have promoted various forms of school choice over the last two decades, leading to a more comprehensive choice system (see Lipman, 2011, for the historical context of school choice policies in Chicago). Chicago presents a range of educational options (see Table 1). Parents can apply and rank to up to 20 schools and six selective enrollment programs through the district's website, GoCPS.

Table 1
School Options in Chicago According to Enrollment Conditions

Type of School	Example	Condition for Enrollment
Traditional Public Neighborhood School	Neighborhood school	Designated school according to one's home location, using attendance boundaries.
Semi Attendance Boundary School	Magnet cluster schools, open enrollment schools, and dual language schools	Students within the attendance boundary have a guaranteed place, and students outside the boundary must apply and enter if there are available seats or by lottery in case of high demand.
City Wide Schools	Magnet schools	Do not have attendance boundaries. Students must apply and enter if there are available seats or by lottery in the case of high demand.
Selective Enrollment Schools	Selective enrollment schools and gifted centers.	Testing is required to be accepted into the school.
Vocational school	Segregated school for high school students with disabilities	Students can qualify with a recommendation from their IEP team, and the district approves the placement.
Charter Schools	Charter elementary and high schools.	Students are selected via lottery, and applications are managed directly by each charter school.

Parents of students with IEPs can also select schools. In many cases, their IEP Teams advise and guide the decision of which school to enroll in according to the student's individual needs and assist the parent in securing a placement. Some selective enrollment schools may have different eligibility criteria for SWD, and some host self-contained specialized classrooms for students with specific needs. Parents have found it extremely difficult to obtain information about high school programs for students with IEPs as there are multiple criteria, which vary across schools, and many of them are not an option for their children with IEPs because they require a minimum score on the assessment of the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA; Waitoller, Pruitt et al., 2019).

Recruitment and Participants

We recruited participants from city areas through early childhood service providers and parental organizations. The parental organizations provide opportunities for parents to network and build a community, as well as advocacy and support for CPS parents. To qualify as a participant,

parents needed to have a child receiving services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and transitioning in the following school year (2019–2020) to either kindergarten or high school. We chose those transition times as they are critical entry grades for parents of students with IEPs to engage in school choice (Winters, 2015). First, we sent fliers and called these agencies, asking them to help us recruit. Some agencies allowed us to visit and talk to parents, while others informed parents directly and, with their consent, provided us with the parents' contact information.

The initial pool consisted of 35 parents who expressed interest in the study. Of those 35 parents, 20 continued communicating with the researchers. We used purposeful sampling (Payls, 2008) to select participants from the pool of 20 parents to ensure that different racial/ethnic, social, and geographic categories were represented to the maximum extent possible, allowing for a range of cases for comparison in the analysis. This final sample included only parents with children with a developmental disability and autism but included a range of racial and class categories and geographical locations. Reducing the numbers also allowed us to conduct more in-depth interviews across time. The final roster of participants consisted of 10 parents, five of whose children were transitioning to high school and five to kindergarten. See Table 2 for participant demographics.

Table 2
Participants Demographics

Name	Gender	Race	Disability	Transition to	Socio economic status
Lidia Gomez	Female	Latinx	Developmental Delay	Kindergarten	Working Class
Lorena Gutierrez	Female	Latinx	Developmental Delay	Kindergarten	Working Class
Talia Sanchez	Female	Latinx	Developmental Delay	Kindergarten	Working Class
Ashley Lowes	Female	Black	Developmental Delay	Kindergarten	Working Class
Rose Wong	Female	Asian	Speech	Kindergarten	Middle class
Ericka Lewis	Female	Black	Autism	High School	Working Class
Jennifer Rawson	Female	White	Autism	High School	Middle class
Sarah Glasgow	Female	White	Autism	High School	Middle class
Susan Guess	Female	White	Autism	High School	Middle class
Elaine Dulls	Female	White	Autism	High School	Middle class

Data Sources

We conducted two in-depth, open-ended interviews (Kvale, 1996) with each parent. The first round of interviews occurred between November and December of 2018 when parents were making their initial school selections. Between the first and second interviews, we collected data on schools constituting each parent's expressed choice set and all other unmentioned schools within a

given radius of the parent's home. School data included demographics, special education data, academic achievement, and the results of the 5 Essentials Survey (https://cps.5-essentials.org/2016/). We also accessed community data from the U.S. Census tracts around the homes and choice sets of families, including economic and housing variables. These data were used in geographical analyses of choice sets and to inform the questions in the second round of interviews. We also utilize these data to construct maps that serve as prompts for the second round of interviews.

The second round of interviews occurred in June 2019 after parents secured a final placement for the fall of 2019. The protocol of the second interview was constructed using the initial analysis of the first interview and the geospatial analyses. These interviews focused on checking initial findings from the first round of interviews and GIS analyses, asking the rationale for determining the final lists of schools and the schools finally selected. In addition, using maps constructed with the information from the first interview as prompts, we tapped into parents' rationale for choosing some schools over others. For instance, during the second interview, we pointed out in the maps schools that were not included in participants' choice sets but were similarly geographically situated and had similar academic standing than those included in their choice sets and asked participants why they did not consider such schools.

Data Analysis

Data analysis combined coding of qualitative interview data utilizing a constructive grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2014) and geospatial analyses. Through an inductive approach, our initial open coding strategies included line-by-line, incident-by-incident, and In-vivo codes (Charmaz, 2014). Through this open coding approach, we generated the first list of codes that included, for instance, "ranking academics of schools" or "changing IEP." Then, we focus-coded the interview transcripts (Charmaz, 2008), selecting the codes that appeared more often and were the most relevant to our research purpose, memoing, and transforming codes into conceptual categories (Charmaz, 2014).

We randomly selected 10 of the 20 interviews to discuss their coding, comparing codes until there was an agreement in the initial coding scheme. Then, we continued to code the interviews and construct summaries of each case, including information about schools that comprised their choice set, reasons for choosing schools, sources of information about schools, and how they made final decisions. Using axial coding techniques (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), we created conceptual categories, clustering specific codes along particular axes while deleting and renaming other codes as we compared them, finding relationships among them.

In addition, we coded the variations in how and when geographic factors mattered in parents' selection of schools. We mapped schools that parents said they were considering relative to their residences, noting the demographic and academic quality of the schools. We also mapped schools parents did not consider within the same radius as their choice set. Then, we compared coding and GIS analyses, finding relationships among them and developing a series of observations to answer our research questions. This involved going back and forward between interview data and the maps we created, allowing us to move from coding to an explanatory model relevant to the purpose of the study. Finally, we tested these assertions systematically against our data corpus and identified disconfirming cases (e.g., Rose's case) that can provide more nuanced answers.

Researchers Positionality

The first author is a non-U.S. white Latino cisgender male whose first language is Spanish and who does not identify himself as a person with a disability. He conducted the interviews with

both English and Spanish-speaking participants. The first author has been involved in different efforts in Chicago to improve SWD's school access. The second author is a white male U.S. citizen whose first language is English and who does not identify himself as a person with any significant disability. He led the geospatial aspects of this analysis due to his interest in equity and experience in various urban education systems.

Limitations

As we are focused on how more marginalized populations navigate school choices, it is essential to remember that this study examines only parents with children with a developmental disability and autism and is focused on those transitioning their children to kindergarten and high school. The study focused on Chicago, and therefore, the findings may not apply to other school districts with different histories and geographies shaping their school choice programs (e.g., a district that offers voucher programs). Although we have the largest demographic groups in CPS in our sample, White parents are over-represented in the sample.

Findings

Parents employed different strategies to secure their desired school placements. The interactions of parents' geographical and social location and the developmental stage of their children (i.e., transition to kindergarten or high school) afforded and constrained ways in which parents sought to secure placement for their children. We organized our findings according to the developmental stage of the children as it was a distinct feature of how parents' social and geographical location interacted to afford or constrain their strategies to secure placement.

Securing a Kindergarten Placement

Parents whose children were transitioning to kindergarten tended to have less information and were less savvy about choosing schools and securing placement for their children. Their strategies were less time-consuming and simpler than those employed by parents whose children were transitioning into high school. Two strategies were used by parents of students transitioning into a kindergarten classroom: Accepting the IEP team's school offer and securing placement through a sibling. There was one distinct instance that did not follow these patterns: Rose's case. As we discuss both strategies and then the case of Rose, we note how parents' social and geographical location shaped strategies.

Accepting the IEP Team's School Offer

The simplest strategy to secure placement was to follow the school recommendation of the IEP Team that served the child during early intervention services. These school recommendations often included the nearby school that was already providing their child with early intervention services during Pre-K. Ashley and Thalia,[1] both working-class parents, secured placement for their children transitioning into kindergarten by following the recommendation of their IEP Teams. Notably, parents who follow the recommendation of their IEP teams tended to have small choice sets and were also relatively less active school consumers than other parents in the sample. As they were relatively new to special education and school choice programs, they had limited knowledge about their school options and had not participated in the GoCPS system to choose and rank schools.

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[1] All individuals and schools are pseudonyms.

Ashley. Ashley is a Black single mother in her early 20s. She is the mother of Jordan, a 5-year-old boy identified with a developmental disability. Ashley and Jordan lived in a neighborhood on the city's northwest side with Ashley's grandmother. Ashley described Jordan as "really funny" and "very talkative." Ashley was only considering one school for Jordan. She stated, "Now that he's an actual kindergarten student, he will get all the services in his IEP as a kindergartener. That's why I was choosing Rawlson because I know all the speech therapists there".

Though Jordan was attending Pre-K in a community center a block from his house, he received early intervention services to improve his motor skills and speech in a neighborhood school around the block from Ashley's house. While finding a kindergarten, Ashley relied on Jordan's IEP Team's recommendation, which funneled him directly to that neighborhood school. Being nearby was essential to Ashley as she had no reliable car. She stated,

> Just because I know the convenience of it is really, really what makes me stay around here. I just know some days in Chicago, it might get 12 inches of snow, and we still gotta go to school. It's right there. It's not like I gotta go all the way across town to go drop 'em off.

Thus, her limited knowledge about other schools, her financial constraints and inability to afford a reliable car, the easy commute, and the comfort of having her son where he was already receiving services shaped Ashley's strategy to secure placement: follow her IEP team recommendation that ensured her a place in a nearby school.

Thalia. Thalia is a Latinx mother in a neighborhood composed mainly of Latinx families. Her son, Jose, was identified with a developmental delay. Thalia described Jose as "smart; he knows and understands a lot." Thalia's biggest concern was Jose's speech. "For his age, he does not speak the words he should speak because there are a lot of words that he is not clear about. He does not express himself sufficiently well," Thalia said. Jose was receiving speech therapy in a nearby neighborhood school while attending a preschool in a community center in the neighborhood.

Thalia had mentioned three schools she knew about but had little information about them, except for the one where Jose was already receiving services. In the first interview in November 2018, Thalia already knew she would follow Jose's school recommendation from his IEP team. She stated, "They are going to evaluate him again, and they [the IEP Team] will know where to send him, either Ordoñez or Hernandez Elementary." By June 2019, the IEP recommended Jose attend Ordoñez Elementary and continue receiving speech services.

Ordoñez was appealing to her due to two reasons. First, the staff in the school spoke Spanish, facilitating her communications with the school and Jose's bilingual education. Second, Ordoñez was conveniently located a few blocks from Thalia's house, an essential factor influencing her decision to follow the IEP team's school recommendation, as she did not have a car and relied on public transportation. That the school was bilingual and near her home was not a coincidence, as Thalia lived in a working-class Latinx neighborhood with various bilingual schools around her.

Thus, Ashley and Thalia's strategy to secure placement was unique to parents of SWD (i.e., IEP team recommendation) but was also shaped by their social and geographical locations and the developmental stage of their children. Being covered by a policy structure geared to SWD, such as IDEA, made it possible to secure a school placement and funnel them to neighborhood schools in their areas. They both engaged minimally in the educational marketplace. That is, they were not "active" consumers focusing only on the relative academic quality of schools as expected in the market model (Lubienski, 2007). Instead, they adopted a more "inert" stance given other costs that clouded their choices, a characteristic of how working-class parents often experience the school choice market by weighing costs over opportunities (OECD, 2019; Reay & Ball, 1997; Willms &

Echols, 1992). They were content with staying in a nearby school recommended by their IEP Team where their sons could continue receiving special education services. Further, in the case of Thalia, her ethnicity played a role in how she decided to secure placement, i.e., she was looking for a Spanish-speaking school and lived in a Latinx neighborhood with several bilingual school options.

Securing Placement Through a Sibling

Two families tried to secure placement through siblings already enrolled in their top school in their respective choice sets. One, Lidia, was successful, and the other, Lorena, was not. Both were Latinx working-class parents transitioning their children into kindergarten, and their choice sets were composed of two and three schools, respectively.

Lidia. Lidia lived in the city's northwest side, where Latinx working-class families comprised a little more than 70% of the population. Jonathan, her son, was identified with a developmental disability. Lidia described him as a loving and happy child who liked to play with toy cars and look at books, but he also presented some challenges for her. Lidia said, "No sibling had given me so much work." Jonathan was still occasionally using diapers and struggled to hold a pencil in school. He also received speech services because he did not talk until age 3. Lidia was anxious about her son moving to kindergarten in such a situation.

Jonathan's IEP Team from his early intervention services recommended that Lidia enroll in the neighborhood school where her son was already receiving special education services. Though Lidia was entertaining the recommendation of the IEP Team, she preferred the magnet school further from her home, where her older daughter was already attending. Like Ashley and Thalia, Lidia had not done much research about other schools. Her only two options were the school offered by the IEP Team and the magnet school. She noted her lack of time to shop for another school: "Well, the truth is that I haven't had much time. It's very complicated. It is difficult to keep the job and the three children. Be aware of everything; well, no, you can't."

In contrast to Thalia and Ashley, Lidia applied to the magnet school despite the recommendation of the IEP Team. She opted for this school for three reasons. First, even though the magnet school was further away from her home, Jonathan could take the school bus with her daughter, so geographical location was not an issue as it was convenient for her to have both children on the same bus.

Second, the magnet school was bilingual and had teachers and staff who spoke Spanish, while the neighborhood school suggested by the IEP Team did not. Lidia stated:

> I do not like it very much [school offered by the IEP Team] because it's almost pure English. The child mostly speaks almost pure English to me. At home, I must be teaching him Spanish. I speak little English, not much. It is difficult for me because sometimes I don't know what the teachers think; I don't have that communication with them.

Lidia felt different about the magnet school. "On the other hand, in the magnet school, they speak Spanish. It is a bilingual school; I already know the directors or nurses so much…they call me; they leave me a message." Third, she perceived magnet schools as offering higher-quality academics. Lidia expressed, "The magnet schools are more advanced. I check the computer, and then I see the scores from the school."

Lidia did not need to utilize the GoCPS system. She went directly to the magnet school to ask them about enrollment, bus service, and special education services. She secured placement because of the school's sibling priority policy. In addition, Lidia was also able to get bus services through her son's IEP services, so the distance and commute to school were not a problem. Once

she talked to the IEP Team at the magnet school and confirmed that they could serve her child's needs, it was an easy decision for her. Thus, in her case, though having an older child in the magnet school was the main leverage to secure placement, her decision was shaped by her language preference (ethnicity) and the possibility of securing a bus service (i.e., a convenient commute).

Lorena. Lorena is a working-class Latinx mother of Angel, who was identified as having a developmental disability. Her son attended an early childhood center a few blocks from her home in a neighborhood with a high concentration of Latinx families. In her first interview, she knew little about the schools surrounding her home and mentioned that family members and friends had recommended three neighborhood schools nearby. However, she had not investigated them. Like Lidia, her IEP Team recommended that she enroll Angel in a nearby neighborhood school to receive special education services. However, she was considering a charter school attended by her daughter. "I wanted to send him to the charter school because my daughter is there," said Lorena. The smaller school size also attracted her compared to the nearby schools. Indeed, the charter school had an enrollment of 249 students compared to her assigned neighborhood school, which served 450 students.

At the time of the first interview, Lorena was waiting for the charter school's response. By our second interview, Lorena's options were reduced, and she could not secure placement in the charter school. "They told me they do not have the services," said Lidia. Further, the charter school staff told her, "There were more schools I could look for options." Lidia also stated,

> Because they say that they won't give it to him if they had it, he would get it after a year; he would receive it after kindergarten, for example, after a year. I asked why. They said they wanted to observe the child to see if he needed assistance or not or to see if he was improving. I then told them, "He has an IEP; you have to assist him and help him with his problems." They responded, "No, we do things differently. We have to observe the child for almost a year." I said, "I don't agree with that." After that, I submitted my application to Ordoñez Elementary.

Lorena ended up enrolling Angel in the school where he was already receiving services, the school recommended by Angel's IEP Team. She stated, "Ordoñez School does have them, and since he's going to therapy there, they will continue giving it to him there. That way, I don't have to keep looking for a school."

In sum, both parents tried to secure placement in a school where they had another child and Spanish was spoken. Lidia successfully used this strategy as the magnet school accepted her son and offered the services. In contrast, Lorena's experience was shaped by the interaction of Angel's social location (i.e., disability) and market-driven forms of education service delivery: the charter school steered them away, which is a common strategy used by charter schools towards SWD (Mommandi & Welner, 2018).

Rose. Rose is the mother of Ethan, a child receiving speech services through early intervention services. Rose's family was middle class and lived in a neighborhood bordering downtown, with a population of over 49% Asian descent. In contrast to the other parents whose children were transitioning into kindergarten, Rose considered six elementary schools, four selective enrollment schools, and two magnet schools. Rose explained,

> We applied to Gabel Elementary because they are opening a new school and starting a gifted program there. We applied for that because it's close by. I don't think he's gonna get it, but we applied anyway. Then we have Karl Magnet Elementary, which is a block away, and then Chelsie Elementary, just because if

he gets to be with his brother, that'll be awesome. That's another selective
enrollment, and then I think we only did one more. I guess we applied to the four
other selective enrollments.

Rose's top choice was Chelsie, a selective enrollment school near her home where her older son was
already enrolled. Rose liked the school due to its holistic and socioemotional curriculum and the fact
that her younger son could be with his big brother. Also, there was the convenience of doing one
commute for both children.

However, unlike the magnet school from Lidia's story, the selective enrollment school did
not have a sibling preference policy. Thus, Rose's 4-year-old son's acceptance depended on his
capability to perform in a test. Rose was not very hopeful but decided to take her chances. She
stated,

We signed him up to do the selective enrollment testing and filled out the
applications to apply to the magnet schools. Those are lottery-based, so he did
not get into anyone. […] He did not get into any of the lottery schools. He was
like a number; I don't know, 80 on the waitlist. He took the test, and his scores
were so low that he didn't get into any selective schools. We have no choice.

Ethan did not obtain the minimum score and could not enroll in a selective enrollment school. He
was also unsuccessful in the lottery system and could not attend magnet schools. Following the
recommendation of her son's IEP Team, Rose settled for her neighborhood school, where Ethan
was already receiving speech services.

Thus, Rose's case demonstrates that the role of the child's developmental stage also interacts
with parents' class and ethnicity in shaping parents' strategies to secure school placement. Rose had
more knowledge of the school choice program in CPS and applied to various selective enrollment
schools. She was an "active" school consumer. However, due to his child's limited ability to perform
well in tests, she had to follow the IEP team's recommendation to enroll in their neighborhood
school, much like Ashley and Thalia.

Securing a High School Placement

Parents whose children were transitioning into high school had a more significant trajectory
in the district and, therefore, knew more about school offerings and how to leverage different
strategies. Further, some of their children participated to some extent in selecting schools. However,
their social and geographical location shaped their capability to engage in different strategies to
secure placement. We discuss three strategies in this section: Testing into schools, leveraging the
IEP, and engaging in due process.

Testing into Schools

Elaine and Sarah were white middle-class parents who used the GoCPS website and had
their children tested to secure placement into a selective enrollment school. Their choice sets were
more extensive than the rest, including six schools.

Elaine and Sarah decided to test their children into selective enrollment schools partly due to
their proximity to these schools. As white middle-class parents, such proximity in Chicago is not a
coincidence. In Chicago, schools using selective enrollment or other exclusive admission processes
(such as gifted centers) are primarily located in gentrified or middle-class urban areas and have
received the largest share of special tax incentive funds dedicated to schools to attract middle-class
families (Farmer & Poulos, 2015).

However, being close to a selective enrollment school does not guarantee enrollment. Elaine and Sarah described their sons as children with high-functioning autism who can excel academically and in standardized testing. Elaine expressed her confidence in securing enrollment for Gus, her son, in a selective enrollment high-performing high school: "That's never really been a concern of mine because Gus always tests so high." Gus had his preferences, too: "He started looking at schools in seventh grade, based on their ranking within Chicago. All the schools he's choosing are high up in the ranks, and that's what he wanted to do." Dan, Sarah's son, had similar school preferences, "Well, the school rating. We know it's—I think it's the number-one school in the state. Harold Prep has been off and on the number one. That does motivate Dan to go to a good school."

Neither Elaine nor Sarah needed to rely on an IEP recommendation or a sibling policy to secure placement. "We don't really care what the counselors have to say. Like, this is where we want to go," said Elaine. In addition, their school had already advised students to enroll in the top high schools in the district. Elaine explained

> In seventh grade, after they did the MAP test and the NWEA, they already started conversing with them that you're eligible for these schools. He was already being fed information from school in seventh grade. They told him you can get into these schools.

Similarly, Sarah commented on the culture of Dan's school, "We looked at the fact that it was selective enrollment just because that's kind of where he's been the last eight years." Thus, attending a high-performing elementary school is a funnel to enroll in a high-performing high school.

There was another aspect associated with Elaine's son's social location as a student with a disability that increased his chances of being accepted into a top-performing high school. Elaine explained:

> The other thing is, for an advantage for us in the high school system for selective enrollment, I think they allow—or they account for 5% diverse learners. Because he tested so well, he was almost at the top of the diverse learners, so he'll probably get into his top choice.

Elaine's son did not need to perform better than all students. He only needed to perform in the top 5% of students with IEPs who had applied for that school. In her second interview, Elaine shared her news,

> There is lots of exciting news. We heard on March 29th that he got into his top choice, the top-performing high school in the district. […] He was able to get into three other top-performing schools on his own without any assistance from the IEP. Then, for his top school choice, he fell in the range with the IEP preference.

Elaine's son performed well enough on the enrollment test to get into several selective enrollment schools. He was accepted to his top school choice since his scores were good enough to outperform his peers with IEPs. Thus, Elaine's family was able to prioritize opportunities over costs when choosing a school. In fact, in proximity to her home, Elaine ultimately bypassed about 28 other schools, including two that she considered closer to her home than the one where they had enrolled Gus.

In sum, Elaine and Sarah had the social capital to learn about and apply to selective enrollment schools. They also lived in the city's white, middle-class areas strategically located within

a feasible commute to the top-ranked schools. However, ability/disability was a decisive factor in their case. Testing-in is based on the student's ability to perform on a specific standardized assessment, which, for many SWDs, is challenging. Unlike Rose's child, Elaine's and Sarah's children could perform well enough on the tests. In addition, as a student with a disability, Elaine's and Sarah's sons had a different route to being accepted as their top choice as they needed to outperform only students with IEPs who wanted to attend the same school. Dan's disability helped him gain an advantage.

Leveraging the IEP

Two parents, Jennifer and Susan, whose children were transitioning into high school, altered their children's IEPs to secure enrollment into the schools of their choice. They worked with their IEP Teams to change the description of their children's least restrictive environment into a more restrictive placement. They did not engage in this strategy because they thought a more segregated setting per se was more appropriate for their child. They changed their sons' IEPs to obtain entrance to the top schools in their choice sets. Due to their trajectory in CPS, they knew how to employ a disability-based specific strategy to secure placement.

Jennifer. Jennifer is a Black, middle-class mother of Jackson, a student identified with autism. Jennifer described Jackson in the following way,

> Jackson is on the autism spectrum, and he is in a classroom right now where he receives support in the general education classroom. His curriculum is slightly modified. He is a very good reader and decoder and things like that but not as good at expressing himself or, for example, regurgitating what he has read when it comes to reading comprehension and things like that. He has good grades because once he gets into something, he kind of zones in, but he is not the type of child that would have high NWEA scores, things that are required for the better schools in Chicago.

Jennifer and Jackson lived in an area predominantly inhabited by Black families, with a history of racial residential and school segregation and economic disinvestment (Ewing, 2018; Waitoller, 2020). However, in the last decades, the area has gone through a gentrification process, and White and Black middle-class families, like Jennifer's, began to arrive. As any parent whose son was transitioning into a CPS high school, Jennifer could enroll Jackson in her neighborhood school or try to apply for other schools through the GoCPS website.

She did not want to send her son to the neighborhood school, which has been in turn-around status due to poor performance and was operated by a private contractor, because she perceived it as unsafe. Jennifer stated, "I don't like the neighborhood; he's never going to be outside alone. You know what I mean? Woodward High School is down the street from me. I have every concern about what's inside Woodward." She desired to enroll her son in a selective enrollment school. She had five selective enrollment schools in her choice set, and though they were not nearby, they were either on her route or her husband's route to work.

However, she knew her son could not perform high enough on the test to qualify for a selective enrollment school. "He did not have the scores to be inside what I consider a safe place," she said. She also knew that those schools have cluster programs for SWD and that her son could enroll in one of those selective enrollment schools with a tailored recommendation from the IEP Team for a cluster program. She stated, "His IEP has been written, in the past, to be in a general education classroom. As it happens, his school has had full inclusion over the last couple of years, and the classes are co-taught."

She was willing to sacrifice Jackson's inclusion in the general education classroom to enroll him in what she perceived as a safe space: a selective enrollment school. She said,

> With this limited choice, I may have to change his IEP to put him in a self-contained program because I want a specific environment. I would have to get that cluster placement, which is a self-contained classroom […] I would have to change the way his IEP has been for the last 12 years.

Jennifer thought very strategically about how to change her son's IEP. She stated,

> It will have to specifically state that he needs a cluster program, and then I'll probably also have to think about it because just because it says cluster doesn't mean he will get into the school I want. I must think about the other things that almost—write it for that school. I would also have to consider the other factors that make it necessary for him. What other things would be necessary in the IEP to match a school like this? Manipulate, yeah, yeah, it's not going to be easy. He does not live in that community. There are enough children closer to that community that would probably get those spaces first. I've got to do what I have to do to try to get him there.

Jennifer had to figure out how to work around enrollment barriers such as test scores and attendance boundaries.

During her second interview, Jennifer shared that her strategy had worked. "I altered the IEP for the number of hours in the LRE so that the formula would fit in a safer place. They [the IEP Team] didn't push back," said Jennifer. Jennifer enrolled her son in a selective enrollment school with a large share of Black students, which was relatively convenient to commute to. Her son would be with similar peers in what she considered a safe environment. She leveraged the policy structures that arranged the educational experiences of her son with a disability to obtain one of the top schools in her choice set. In contrast to Rose, she knew how to leverage her son's IEP so that he could attend a selective enrollment school even if he could not perform high enough on the admission test.

Susan. Susan is a White parent who lives in a middle-class area of the city. Emma, Susan's daughter, was identified with autism. Susan described her as "moderate on the autism spectrum with some tendencies towards severity" and as "not really interested in reciprocal communication." Emma received services in a cluster program where she was removed from the general education classroom for most of the school day.

When she was transitioning into high school, the Office of Special Education Services at CPS offered to place Emma in a cluster program as in the prior years. Susan stated,

> The Office of Special Education in CPS says she can go to a cluster, and any school can meet her IEP goals. I'm sure that's true or may be true, but it's not the environment I feel is appropriate for her.

Susan did not think that the school options offered as a mix of self-contained classrooms and general education were adequate for her daughter because they did not have the expertise and resources to transition students into adulthood. Susan stated,

> My concern with the cluster programs is that the school still focuses primarily on the students in general education. That's fine if your kid's in gen ed. As she's going into adulthood, I want my daughter to attend a school focusing on kids with IEPs. I want somebody who does that for a living, who's trained in that,

who is gonna say, "All right. This is the level at which your daughter is functioning. I think that it would be wise to look into this option." I don't want my daughter, on her 22nd birthday, sitting around the home with no purpose.

Susan's top school choice was a specialized high school for SWD, focusing instruction on transitioning students into adult life. However, Emma's IEP was written to attend a cluster program in a regular school. To secure placement in her preferred school, Susan changed her daughter's IEP to qualify for a particular school focused on vocational training. Susan stated,

The IEP Team can't physically make the assignment. They can heavily recommend where Emma should go. Fortunately, my daughter's team had their act together. The teachers, along with the rest of the IEP Team and the district representative, geared the IEP, basically arguing for my daughter to go into a vocational school for SWD. They adapt the section on—the description where they have the part that paints a picture of the student and underscores the need for specific environments.

Susan's strategy successfully placed Emma in the vocational school she preferred.

Neither Susan nor Jennifer accepted the district's initial placement offer nor engaged with the GoCPS to choose a school. Both used a disability-specific strategy to secure their top choice. They leveraged the legal tools available through IDEA to access the school they thought would best fit their children. Interestingly, both gave up the option for their children to spend more time in general education classrooms. Structural factors related to race and geography shaped Jennifer's strategy for securing placement. Jennifer did not want to send her son to the schools near their home as she perceived them as unsafe, a perception related to the history of racial residential and school segregation in the area where she lived (Waitoller & Super, 2017).

Engaging in Due Process

Erika also utilized some of the affordances of IDEA to secure placement in the top school on her list, an opportunity that was much more time and energy-intensive. Erika is a working-class Black parent living in the same area of the city as Jennifer, an area shaped by a mix of racial residential segregation, disinvestment, and gentrification. Like Jennifer, Erika did not want to send her child to the nearby schools due to her perception of academics and safety at those schools and her knowledge of the neighborhood. She articulated,

Generally, don't send the children to the school in the area just because the schools still have not improved. They don't have the best option here […] A lot of gang activity there. That's a safety issue because my son still is not in an area where he can advocate for himself.

Erika said the area had improved, but the schools had not. Erika's experience is similar to the experiences of other parents living in gentrified areas where schools are still not perceived as safe, particularly for SWD (Waitoller & Super, 2017).

Erika had a conflict with the district for a couple of years due to her son not receiving a free and appropriate education. The IEP Team recommended schools that did not satisfy Erica. "Then they were offering schools. They offered two high schools, two of the top schools in CPS, but they were for a cluster program," said Erika. She continued,

Those schools are selective enrollment schools. Select enrollment schools only have two programs for kids with special needs. The select enrollment is where

they test in, have to take this four-hour ridiculous test and test in for a seat, and the other one is cluster. The problem with the cluster program is that it's cross-categorical. Most of the students are functioning somewhere between kindergarten and second grade. That does not help my son because what they do in those classrooms predominantly is life skills. Jackson can wash dishes, sweep the floor, and mop. He can do everything that most students at his age can do. His area is academics. My first response to CPS is that it's not for him. You know? His LRE grid shows he spends 65% of his day in a separate setting. His focus needs to be on academics so that we can reduce the 65% he is outside the general education classroom.

CPS offered various other schools to Erika, but they all involved placing her son in a separate classroom. In contrast to Jennifer, Erika did not think a separate classroom for students with more extensive needs was the appropriate setting for her son, who spent most of his school day in a separate setting through middle school. She wanted a more inclusive placement for his high school, where he could focus on his academics, communication, and speech rather than life skills.

Erika's top choice was a high school outside the district named Francis High School, which had a specific program for language and communication disorders where her son could receive the services he needed and be included in the general education classroom. The district denied her request for Francis High School, and mediation became due process. After engaging in intensive legal action and discussions, she secured placement in the school of her choice. In her second interview. Erika shared,

Finally, within the past few weeks—and that was about a week ago—they came up with another offer, and it was from now until 2021. They would pay for his tuition at Francis school for all of those years, plus transportation.

According to her geographical and social circumstances (i.e., race and disability), Erika perceived limited school options, and the district was not able to offer a fitting educational choice for her child. She engaged in a disability-specific strategy to secure placement in the school of her choice. Erika was a savvy parent who knew how to leverage legal means to secure a school with the services her son needed: a school where he could receive the services he needed while not being excluded from the general education classroom. Such a strategy to secure placement took time, effort, and economic resources. She obtained bus services and was willing to send her son on a long bus ride to another district.

Discussion

School choice policies promise to provide equitable educational options for underserved families. However, such policies are implemented in ways that may exacerbate inequitable circumstances, particularly for those students who experience intersecting forms of injustice (e.g., students of color, in poverty, and SWD) (Waitoller & Lubienski, 2019). We utilize the unique cases of parents of SWD to examine an aspect of school choice that has received limited attention: how parents secure school placement for their children at critical educational transitions.

We found that parents of SWD employed multiple strategies to secure a school placement, sometimes successful or not. These strategies included following IEP Team recommendations, securing placement through a sibling, testing into selective enrollments, changing IEP provisions, and engaging in due process. Intersecting social structures (i.e., disability, class, and race),

geographical locations, and the developmental stage of their children (i.e., kindergarten and high school) constrained and afforded parents different opportunities to secure placement in their school of preference. Such interactions took unique forms according to each parent's circumstances, creating complex contexts of privilege and marginalization. In the context of SWDs, perhaps the families most in need of options, the over-arching influence of factors reflecting inequitable social structures undercuts equity claims for choice. Thus, our findings support using intersectional approaches to school choice (Waitoller & Lubienski, 2019) rather than approaches focusing on the role of social categories in a separate fashion.

　　Working-class parents whose children were transitioning into kindergarten (i.e., Lidia, Lorena, Ahsley, and Thalia) had less access to social resources and limited knowledge about schools, and thus were less likely to engage the local education market as active consumers and instead deferred to the expertise of their IEP team, in line with a technocratic instead of a market view of education (Lubienski, 2005)—except for Lidia who was able to secure placement through having a daughter in her preferred schools. Ashley, Thalia, Lorena, and Lidia noted their lack of time to look for another school. In contrast, Rose, a middle-class parent, had larger choice sets and was the only one of the kindergarten parents who was considering selective enrollment schools. Moreover, even though all the school options considered by these parents were "free," our findings align with prior research that indicates that less affluent parents tend to focus on the costs in evaluating their different choices. In contrast, more affluent parents tend to minimize the costs and capitalize on the opportunities (OECD, 2019).

　　Parent' geographic location interacted with their social locations. Working-class parents transitioning their children into kindergarten preferred staying in a nearby school to avoid commuting. In addition, living in a segregated Latinx neighborhood afforded parents like Thalia and Lorena the chance to have a nearby bilingual school where the teachers spoke Spanish. Lidia's IEP team prioritized providing special education services in the neighborhood school over attending a bilingual school, which was necessary for Lidia. In other words, the IEP team focused its recommendation on Jonathan's disability rather than ethnicity, whereas Lidia's preferences focus on the intersections of both social locations. Lidia enrolled Jonathan in her daughter's bilingual school, further from her home. This finding aligns with prior research indicating that IEP teams overlook Latinx mothers' placement preferences and prioritize disability services over bilingual education when making educational decisions for emergent bilingual SWD (Cioè-Peña, 2021). Thus, in the cases of Thalia, Lorena and Lidia, geography, as intersected with disability and ethnicity, is both a cost and an opportunity.

　　Four of the five parents transitioning their children into kindergarten followed their IEP teams' recommendations. They sent their children to a school in their neighborhoods, even when the schools recommended were not their first choice. Rose was hoping to enroll her child in a selective enrollment school and Lorena in a charter school. Rose and Lorena's final school choices were shaped by structural factors related to their children's disability. In the case of Rose, her son was not able to obtain a test score that would qualify him for enrollment in a selective school. For Lorena, the charter school steered her away due to her son's disability. Interestingly, both parents act as engaged consumers searching for other school options. However, structural factors related to their children's disability constrained their opportunities to secure placement in their top-ranked schools. This finding is in line with the finding from Winters et al. (2015) that the enrollment gap between SWD in charter schools and district-run schools begins in kindergarten when SWD are more likely to apply to district-run schools than a charter school. The cases of Ashley, Thalia, Lorena, and Rose indicate that parents' enrollment in a kindergarten in a district-run school is

shaped by their social class and disability, which can create inequitable contexts in which schools are "chosen."

Four parents whose children were transitioning to high school wanted their children to gain entry to a selective enrollment school. These parents had more options and larger choice sets. None of the high school parents secured placements for their children by following their IEP team's recommendations. This may have been because, except for Erika, those parents were middle-class and had broader access to social networks and information about school possibilities.

The interaction of social structures related to disability, class, and race and parents' geographic locations shaped their strategies to secure school placement. Being a White, middle-class parent, living in a geographic area with several selective enrollment options, and having a child who could perform high in the NWEA test provided significant advantages to build choice sets and, more importantly, to secure placement at their preferred school. Elaine and Sarah never considered schools that were not the top-ranked selective enrollment high schools. They lived in areas of the city that had received the most significant shares of school investments, primarily White, middle-class areas of the city (Farmer & Poulus, 2015). In addition to these racial and class advantages, they were able to benefit from their children's specific disability of high-functioning autism. Though their children received high scores on the standardized assessments required for admission, they only needed to perform better than other SWDs applying to the same school to qualify for a selective enrollment school.

Despite interacting structural barriers (e.g., access to social networks, extensive commute to selective enrollment schools due to Chicago's history of racial segregation and gentrification, and ability to perform in standardized assessments), Black parents were able to use disability-specific strategies in ingenious ways such as changing their children's IEPs and engaging in relentless due process. However, such strategies came at a cost. Jennifer had to give up having her son fully included in the general education classroom to secure placement in a selective enrollment school. Erika spent significant time and resources and had her son home-schooled for several months until the due process was resolved.

In sum, our study examines the unique interactions of social and geographic locations that shape parents' experiences with the school marketplace. The ways social and geographical locations interact in affording and constraining opportunities to choose schools and secure placement should not be over-generalized, just as the potential of school choice to ameliorate inequities should not be overstated given the primacy of social-contextual factors. They are contextualized within each parent's unique case and each local education market. Future research needs to study how interacting social and geographical locations shape parents' engagement with local education markets, such as how they gather information about schools and their experiences after enrolling in their school of choice. Our study also adds to prior work (e.g., Cahill, 2021; Waitoller, 2020), demonstrating the importance of attending to how disability interacts with families' other social circumstances in influencing how school choice is experienced by the people these policies are supposed to target.

These findings hold significant implications for policymaking on this issue. Choice is often considered an opportunity, even a "panacea" for families in underperforming schools (e.g., Chubb & Moe, 1990). Policymakers often apply choice as a blunt instrument that will liberate poorer families to choose better schools and foster competition between schools to increase productivity. Moreover, school choice has been cast as having a particular benefit for families of SWD. Indeed, in many states, such as Florida and Utah, choice policies are first offered to families of SWDs under the logic that they most need options before extending to broader populations. However, these results highlight the complexity of "choice" for families situated differently within unequal school

landscapes. They indicate that choice may not be the remedy some simplistically suggest but may further exacerbate the inequities and obstacles families face with significant challenges in educating their children.

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