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ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITY: SCHOOL CHOICE AND THE EXPERIENCES OF  
NON-ENGLISH-SPEAKING LATINO FAMILIES IN NEW YORK CITY

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

to the faculty of the

DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE AND INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

of

THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

at

ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

New York

by

Christian Toala

Date Submitted 12/8/2020

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Catherine DiMartino, PhD

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITY: SCHOOL CHOICE AND THE EXPERIENCES OF NON-ENGLISH-SPEAKING LATINO FAMILIES IN NEW YORK CITY**

Christian Toala

Districts across the United States have embraced school choice as a means to improve educational outcomes. Independent schools and those backed by charter management organizations have entered the public educational market in an attempt to provide parents with more educational options. The marketing and branding of public schools, both traditional and charter, has also increased as schools and districts compete to attract more students. Furthermore, in addition to the public school system, the Catholic school system of New York City continues to strive to compete in enrollment. In New York City, there has been an increase in charter school applications and in the English language learner population. This instrumental case study examines how non-English-speaking Latino families, who have children in Catholic schools, navigate the high school choice process. Through observations, interviews, and document analysis, this study captures the different factors that influence this group of non-English-speaking parents' educational choices for their children who are enrolled in Catholic schools. Through navigational and resistance lenses, I examine school choice reform with a focus on marketing, branding, and advertisement practices and their effects on equity. Findings from this study will inform educational leaders, at all levels, as to the access and information given to non-English-speaking parents, including those in a different school system, with regard to school choice.

## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation and all of its work is dedicated to my family, past and present. For me, family includes those not related by blood. My family is big, and, just know, I will always keep you in my heart. Thank you for all the support and encouragement. Without you, this would not have been possible.

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The journey of a doctoral student is not only defined by work but rather by the struggle, because there is value in that struggle. My dissertation committee not only provided me with guidance but also with a challenge. That challenge was to be better and keep working harder. They also let me know that I was not and would never be alone on my journey. Dr. Clemens began guiding me since the day I attended the open house. His words and work motivated me to apply and begin my work at St. John's University. His sincerity was always followed by a word of encouragement. Dr. Kotok not only provided me with valuable feedback during my dissertation process but also gave me great advice in my career. Always responsive if I encountered a problem, his input went beyond what I asked for, which was always appreciated.

Not every student encounters their teacher; luckily, I had that opportunity. To simply call this person a mentor is a disservice to her temperance and dedication. I, at times, like many other students, thought of giving up but this person gave me words of encouragement and pushed me to continue fighting to achieve my goal. Countless revisions to my work, meetings to cover goals and revisions, letters of recommendations, teaching, and actual mentoring are the reasons why I would like to thank Dr. Catherine DiMartino. I am proud to say I have studied under one of the great minds of the educational field.

I am grateful to these three individuals who not only sacrificed time to help and mentor me but for reminding me that there is value in the struggle as long as you are not alone. With them on my journey, I was not and will never be alone. I would also like to thank the entire DAIL faculty and staff for their help and guidance. DAIL stands out

because we are a family. Special thanks to Dr. Miller and Dr. Parmer, who led this social studies teacher to love, understand, and carry out quantitative research. To Dr. Ornstein, for bringing that educational philosophy back into view and guiding me to enter the higher education world. Last but not least, to Mrs. Cimino, Mrs. Berardi, Mrs. Rubino, and Mrs. Impelli. I will always be thankful and in debt for your support, guidance, and teaching.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION .....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iii
LIST OF TABLES .....	viii
CHAPTER 1 .....	1
Introduction .....	1
Purpose of the Study.....	3
Significance .....	4
Theoretical Framework .....	4
Overview .....	4
Freirean Influence.....	5
Critical Race Theory and Freire .....	6
Social Equity Framework .....	7
Navigation and Resistance Within Social Equity.....	8
Resistance and Social Equity.....	9
Definition of Key Terms .....	11
CHAPTER 2 .....	13
Review of Literature.....	13
The Process and Actors within School Choice.....	13
The Rise of School Choice .....	13
Charter Schools and Charter Management Organizations .....	14
Independent Charter Schools.....	15
Charter Schools Under a Charter Management Organization .....	16
Funding Differences .....	18
Promises and Challenges.....	19
Influences on the Choice of Schools .....	22
Branding and Edvertising.....	23
Marketing and Recruitment.....	26
Types of Marketing .....	27
Open House Events .....	28
Word of Mouth .....	29
Printed Materials .....	30
Digital Media.....	31
Social Media .....	32
Parental Response to School Choice .....	32
Latino Families, ELLs, and School Choice.....	34
Involvement of Latino Parents .....	36
Conclusions and Implications.....	39
CHAPTER 3 .....	41
Methodology.....	41



Research Questions .....	41
Research Design .....	42
School Sample Selection .....	43
Sample Schools .....	44
Data Collection .....	46
Identifying and Recruiting Participants .....	47
Data Sources .....	50
Interviews .....	50
Observations .....	52
Analysis of Documents .....	52
Data Analysis Overview .....	53
Trustworthiness of the Design .....	53
Triangulation .....	53
Member Validation .....	54
Peer Review .....	54
Role of the Researcher .....	55
CHAPTER 4 .....	57
Findings .....	57
Theme 1: Catholic Schools Keep Their Parents Informed .....	58
The Involvement of Staff Members in Parent Meetings .....	59
The Cross School Meeting Experience .....	59
Key Staff at the Cross School .....	63
The Epiphany School Meeting Experience .....	67
Key Staff at the Epiphany School .....	69
School Members as Influences .....	71
Theme 2: Experiences at Organized Events .....	75
The Perception and Influence of Catholic and Public School Fairs .....	76
Accessibility to Translation Services .....	83
Theme 3: Barriers to Discussing Selection .....	88
Discouragement Due to Technological Challenges .....	89
The Trouble of Getting Help .....	95
Theme 4: Informed Parents Knowing What They Want .....	98
Finding Guidance to Navigate the Maze .....	99
School Reputation, Safety, and Resources .....	101
Word of Mouth .....	105
Conclusion .....	110
CHAPTER 5 .....	113
Conclusion .....	113
Interpretation of the Findings .....	114

Research Question One .....	114
Connection Between Research Question One and Prior Research.....	119
Research Question Two.....	122
Connection Between Research Question Two and Prior Literature.....	123
Connection to the Social Equity Framework.....	125
Limitations of the Study .....	128
Implications for Policy .....	129
Implications for Future Research .....	134
Conclusion .....	136
APPENDIX A: PARENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL .....	138
APPENDIX B: PARENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL (SPANISH VERSION).....	142
APPENDIX C: SCHOOL OFFICIAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL .....	146
APPENDIX D: OBSERVATION PROTOCOL .....	148
APPENDIX E: DOCUMENT REVIEW PROTOCOL .....	149
APPENDIX F: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY .....	150
APPENDIX G: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY (IN SPANISH) .....	151
REFERENCES .....	152

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Description of Case Study Schools (2018-2019) .....	45
Table 2 Description of Participants .....	48
Table 3 Themes .....	58
Table 4 Recommendations for Stakeholders .....	131

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **Introduction**

Market-based educational reform is grounded in the theory that choice and competition will improve schools (Chubb & Moe, 1998; Friedman & Friedman, 1982). This type of reform is not new but has gained strength locally and internationally. Within the United States, major market areas, such as Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, New Orleans, and Boston, have strengthened the market-based school choice model with the growth of their public charter school system (DiMartino & Jessen, 2016; Jabbar, 2015; Phillips, 2016). This concept has taken hold internationally in countries such as Chile, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, giving parents choices and at times creating subsidy policies that strengthen parental school choice (Drew, 2013; Jabbar, 2016; Lubienski, 2005; Marsh & Fawcett, 2011; Oplatka, 2007; Wilkins, 2012; Whitty & Power, 2000). Consumers (parents) will make a choice of school based on their appreciation of cost and benefit as well as their preference; this process of school choice stems from rational choice theory (Ballantine & Spade, 2003; Friedman, 1962). Research has shown that within these highly competitive environments, schools have ratcheted up their marketing and branding practices to compete for and ultimately enroll students (DiMartino & Jessen, 2016, 2018; Jabbar, 2015; Lubienski, 2005, 2007). Key research in the field examines how marketing and branding target particular students, the role of educators in marketing and advertising, and the use of social media to convey a brand (Drew 2013; Hernández, 2016; Jabbar & Li, 2016; Jennings, 2010; Jessen & DiMartino, 2016).

Research has indicated that the Latino population is often at a disadvantage in the ever-growing high choice environment (Sattin-Bajaj, 2011). If non-English-speaking Latino families are not being offered information in their native language, this practice is not only exclusionary but also oppressive (Freire, 1968). The New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE) does provide families with the NYC High School Directory that is available in different languages, and it is distributed to the parents of eighth grade students, yet a fair process calls for much more than just a translated book (New York City Department of Education, 2017, 2020). Translation services, advisement, school visits, and open houses, among other services, are needed to make an informed decision. The barriers present for many Latino families at times prevent them from participating in school-related events, including the school choice process (Mavrogordato & Harris, 2017). Recent research has suggested that these barriers are not because of lack of desire for involvement but rather because of lack of access to information (Gil & Johnson, 2017; Yosso, 2005). For this underrepresented group of parents, who are part of the Catholic schools of New York City, the option of enrolling their children in the NYC DOE public schools is a reality. Yet, as they are part of a different school system looking to enter the public school system, they are on the outside looking in.

In the 2016-2017 academic year, the NYC DOE reported having 76,283 students enrolled in eighth grade (New York City Department of Education, 2016), most of whom would be involved in the high school selection process. According to the NYC Charter School Center, there was a 7% increase in applications in 2016 alone (Chapman, 2017). Not new to marketing strategies, the Catholic schools of New York reported an increase in enrollment based on their marketing efforts during the 2015-2016 academic period,

with noted efforts made toward attracting the bilingual population (Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese of New York, 2016). In New York City, there is a large and growing population of English language learners (ELLs) in schools (New York City Department of Education, 2016). With both of these increases, one must ask, how are non-English-speaking families, who are part of another school system, experiencing school choice? Are they being given an equal opportunity to make an informed decision about their children's educational future? Has market-based school reform led to institutions targeting specific populations while excluding others?

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study investigated the school choice processes and experiences of the non-English-speaking Latino families of New York City (NYC), whose children are enrolled in a Catholic school, with a focus on high school choice. The analysis of influences affecting non-English-speaking parents in their school choice process will open a window to probe the success of equity within school choice reforms, focusing on the public school system. Furthermore, the analysis of influences will contribute to the discussion of parental involvement among non-English-speaking minority groups and their quest to have their children achieve goals and fulfill hopes and dreams. The following questions guided my study:

1. What influences shaped the school choice decisions of non-English-speaking Latino parents of eighth grade students enrolled in a Catholic school?

2. To what extent are public schools advertising and marketing themselves to non-English-speaking Latino families whose children are enrolled in a Catholic school?

## **Significance**

The historically underserved Latino population is at times perceived, by others as uninformed and uneducated (Mavrogordato & Harris, 2017; Yosso, 2005). Marginalized by different demographic factors or legal status, many Latinos face obstacles that affect their daily lives and interactions with others. Their cultural backgrounds are diverse and rich with knowledge and willingness to rise, yet the different adversities they face might ultimately make it difficult (Mavrogordato & Harris, 2017; Sattin-Bajaj, 2014; Yosso, 2005). Being denied access to interact as stakeholders in schools because of their limited English comprehension, with no access to translation services, no access to informational meetings they could understand, unreasonable timeslots to attend meetings, and lack of a welcoming environment are among the barriers these parents might face as they enter the school choice process (Carreon et al., 2005; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2010; Jasis & Ordoñez-Jasis, 2012; Mavrogordato & Harris, 2017; Sattin-Bajaj, 2011 ). This study will seek to learn more about the experiences of the Latino families whose children are enrolled in Catholic schools as they navigate school choice.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### ***Overview***

The emergence of school choice within the United States and the growth of charter schools raise many questions about access to choice options and the equitable distribution of schools. These questions not only raise discussions about equity but also about racism, discrimination, and power. The right for parents to choose a school for their children is empowering and important, which signals a need to better understand certain groups' experiences of the school choice process. Critical race theory, which serves as a

foundation of this dissertation, is a useful lens for exploring these controversial but real topics within education.

### ***Freirean Influence***

Holding that there is a hierarchy within society is not a new concept. This notion, among others, is rooted in the works of Paulo Freire (1968) and has since been addressed by different scholars (Chávez, 2012; Solórzano & Yosso, 2005). Society is governed by those in power, those who make the rules, and who will aim to maintain the status quo in which a specific group of individuals is beneath the ruling class (Freire, 1968). In a Freirean view, the schooling system is not viewed as a system of liberation but rather as a system of oppression, where those beneath the ruling class will be urged to be complacent and stay in their place (Freire, 1968). Through what Freire (1968) described as a banking system, administrators and teachers keep students oppressed, and they subsequently remain oppressed throughout their lives. Such a theory, although debatable, takes on validity in countries where there is a clear division of classes, races, and/or ethnicities (Ornstein, 2016). This study took place in New York City, a diverse city on many levels and one that has different social levels. The examination of the school choice experience of non-English-speaking Latino parents allows and calls for a Freirean perspective, as equity will be in the spotlight. Is there a sense of oppression through this school choice process? Although this study is limited to considering the experiences of one marginalized group, the discussion and implications surround aspects of race and class more broadly. Freire sets the stage for such examination and allows for the use of critical race and Latino critical race theories as the backbone of this social equity framework.



### *Critical Race Theory and Freire*

Segregation and discrimination are still present within society, and many theoretical lenses hold that racism is embedded within the social and political structures of U.S. society (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1998). When exploring the educational system, landmark cases that sought to equalize the playing field for marginalized groups stand out; some cases went further and sought to provide students with equal opportunity to attend any school (Black, 2017; Tate, 1997). Yet, scholars have also argued that desegregation simply benefitted the socially powerful, while the “others” remained at a disadvantage (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Today, many speak of the re-segregation of the school system based on different factors, which include community demographics, financial status, and traditions (Chang, 2018; Gans, 1995). It is essential that the state of equity be examined by researchers and policy makers among distinct demographic groups in order to better serve and understand parents. Storytelling and the use of “voices” as a way to understand a reality are needed, not only to comprehend the situation of parents but also to probe a problem with school choice (Ladson-Billings, 1998). At times, research brings forth only evidence from those voices that make the rules, those who sit in a privileged position (Freire, 1968; Solórzano & Yosso, 2005). The counter story of those oppressed voices is necessary and critical to reveal possible barriers or systems of oppression (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Freire, 1968; Solórzano & Yosso, 2005;). Within critical race theory, it is not only necessary to unearth the problem but also to rectify it (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005).

The social equity framework used in this dissertation draws from the extensive literature of critical race and Latino critical race theories, herein referred to as Crit and

LatCrit. A meeting place for both legal and educational research, critical race theory proposes that racism is harbored deep within United States society and its institutions (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Freeman, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Such a notion would suggest that minorities are and will be at a disadvantage within United States society, including schooling and its processes. Critical race and, more specifically, LatCrit provide a strong and necessary foundation to this social equity framework as a way to examine the state of equity within school choice, specifically in this present political climate.

### ***Social Equity Framework***

The working definition of equity for this study is having fair access to the same materials as other groups (Sattin-Bajaj, 2014). By using such a definition, I will avoid the common misrepresentation of the term. For the purpose of this dissertation, I use and examine the term equity within the context of school choice. This process not only involves parents but also school staff and officials, family members, the community, and the children. The ultimate results of the school choice process or the experiences throughout the process can have an effect on future processes or choices (Berends, 2015). It is crucial to understand that school choice is much more than an educational policy; it affects communities and individuals beyond schooling. There is also a social connotation that this policy carries. Thus, throughout my examination, I will employ a social equity framework stemming from the critical race and Latino critical race theories literature. Although appropriate and extensive, Crit and LatCrit literature is broad and can lead to misinterpreted information as it navigates both legal and educational issues. This dissertation is limited to the consideration of non-English-speaking Latino parents’

experiences in the school choice process. As such, the dissertation and its social equity framework will adopt two lenses: a navigational lens and a resistance lens.

### ***Navigation and Resistance Within Social Equity***

This study presupposes that navigating and resisting are an important part of the social equity framework. As such, I utilize these two concepts in my analysis of the access to information that non-English-speaking parents have during the school choice process (Freire, 1968; Yosso, 2005). As market-based educational reform sought to create an efficient manner of school selection among those receiving an education, school autonomy also meant that those in power could create obstacles to entry based on the values used to develop admission criteria, population targeting, and/or school procedures. Equity was not within the goals of this reform, as efficiency and empowerment of consumers were the focus. As such, studies have suggested that public schools can shape their student bodies by targeting certain populations and excluding others (Jabbar, 2015; Sattin-Bajaj, 2014). This argument further supports the social theory that education is an oppressive system that creates a social divide based on class status and power (Freire, 1968; Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Underrepresented groups have grown and reshaped the population makeup of the United States. They are now considered a rising majority in the United States, and, among these groups, some do not speak English. Parents have hopes and dreams for their children and seek to be involved in their education, regardless of their fluency and comprehension level of English (Gil & Johnson, 2017; Yosso, 2005). Communities that are composed of underrepresented groups hold and showcase strengths that allow them to navigate through social problems, such as racism and discrimination (Smith-Maddox &

Solórzano, 2002). Such social obstacles are indisputably oppressive, yet Crit, LatCrit, and Freirean views can help illuminate how these communities fight, resist, and navigate such barriers (Freire, 1968; Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002).

Although obstacles are present for these parents, they are still part of a process that was founded on the idea of competition in the educational market and efficiently enrolling children into schools of their choice (Chubb & Moe, 1988; Mavrogordato & Harris, 2017; Yosso, 2005). Empowerment of parents can be questioned by different stakeholders or policy makers, as certain groups will be at odds if they do not have the tools to be empowered. The state of equity is at odds with the school choice reform. Lastly, although parents seek to resist, navigate, and fight the obstacles they encounter, they should not be responsible for fixing a system that might seek to oppress them through racist and discriminatory policies.

### ***Resistance and Social Equity***

Equity in education has proven to be an elusive goal. As we continue to speak of school choice reform, we must also analyze the status of equity within the educational field (Mavrogordato & Harris, 2017; Mavrogordato & Stein, 2016; Sattin-Bajaj, 2014). LatCrit calls for the analysis of situations to reveal possible problems and to rectify those problems (Fernandez, 2002). The concept of resistance is appropriate for this study, as the population under focus is non-English-speaking Latino parents, this same population that is targeted by many public educational institutions for diverse positive and negative reasons. Navigation and resistance are two actions taken by parents to achieve personal goals or the goals they have set for their children (Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002; Yosso, 2005). Parents will access both dominant and non-dominant cultural capital to

attain their goals (Carter, 2003). The ultimate goal of parents, through the use of these forms of capital, is to secure equity for their children (Carter, 2003; Yosso, 2005). The obstacles that parents might encounter throughout their school choice experience are not enough to keep them from rising or obtaining the information they seek to make an educated choice, as set forth by these forms of capital (Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002; Yosso, 2005).

The limitations in accessing materials to guide the parents' decisions further support the theory of an oppressive system within education (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Freire, 1968). Advertisements set up by schools in the English language might attract some students but also exclude others, giving them few tools to make decisions. Conversely, advertisements targeting Spanish-speaking families may also impact the school choice process for those who do not speak Spanish. These families are at times left with the option of relying on "word of mouth" as their only resource for making a decision about their children's future (Carreon et al., 2005; Jabbar, 2015; Mavrogordato & Stein, 2016). Ultimately, families need multiple types of readily understandable information on which to base their decision-making process.

Part of Freire's (1968) theory considers that those in power who set the rules seek to maintain the status quo because it favors the balance of power that already exists. If such a system remains, then those who seek equity cannot achieve it. The solution is for all stakeholders to work to break the cycle of oppression (Freire, 1968). By utilizing critical race theory, the "voices" of those who are the victims of oppression, discrimination, and/or racism will counter the dominant voices of those who are in power (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Fernandez, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Smith-Maddox &

Solórzano, 2002). Freire's (1968) social equity theory, through the lens of navigational and resistance capital, helps us to understand the experiences of non-English-speaking Latino parents. This leads to the following key questions: Are all stakeholders working to bring forth equity? To what extent are influences (advertisements, fairs, and open houses) made available to all possible parents? And lastly, how, if at all, do discriminatory and racist practices influence the school choice process (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Fernandez, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1998)?

### **Definition of Key Terms**

**Advertising:** Defined by DiMartino and Jessen (2018) as “the combined practice of marketing, branding, and advertisement in education” (p. 4).

**Influences:** Factors that can affect parental behavior or choices in an indirect manner (Jessen, 2011).

**Resistance:** The will and actions of parents to access information or opportunity to secure a positive educational outcome for their children (Yosso, 2005).

**Equity:** A state of being fair within education and having access to the same materials as others within the school choices process (Chubb & Moe, 1988; Sattin-Bajaj, 2014).

**Branding:** A specific and unique attribute that identifies a company, which in this study is a school or a school managing organization (Drew, 2016; Olson Beal & Beal, 2016).

**Marketing:** The strategies utilized by companies/schools to promote and inform the public about their services (Jabbar, 2016).

Printed Media: Materials used to market a company/school that are tangible and contain information about the company or school. Some of these materials include, but are not limited to, brochures, pamphlets, newspaper ads, flyers, and billboards (DiMartino & Jessen, 2018).

Digital Media: Television, video recordings, and radio are among the devices used to promote a company's/school's offerings to the public (DiMartino & Jessen, 2018; Meyers, 2014).

Social Media: Specific web-based applications, such as Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, and Twitter, used to promote a company/school to the public and provide information that might attract customers/students (DiMartino & Jessen, 2018).

Open House: Event held at a school to invite parents to visit the location and inspect its offerings (Oplatka, 2007).

Word of Mouth: Strategy that occurs by influence of schools or other stakeholders and allows individuals to create the schools' image throughout the community using conversation as a medium (Herold et al., 2016).

## CHAPTER 2

### Review of Literature

The review of the literature is divided into five broad themes: 1) the process and actors within school choice, 2) influences on the choice process, 3) branding and advertising, 4) marketing and recruitment, and 5) parental response to school choice. This literature review aims at not only establishing the findings around school choice, the influences on that process, and issues around access but also the need for further research on relevant areas within school choice. Lastly, I examine the literature on equity as a way to question or validate the research on school choice.

#### **The Process and Actors within School Choice**

This section focuses specifically on the growth of the school choice movement, the rise of charter management organizations (CMO), and their role within the process. It also focuses on access and equity among specific groups participating in school choice processes in different markets. Studies have found that low-income minority families are at a disadvantage when facing the school choice process (Archbald, 2004; Crosnoe, 2009; Sattin-Bajaj, 2011). Examination of the research raises several questions about the equity status of specific groups within the school choice process, the specific practices that shape a school's population, and how Latino parents participate in the process.

#### ***The Rise of School Choice***

School choice reform, as outlined in Chapter 1, grew out of a need to effectively improve schools in the United States. Within a free market economy, such as that of the United States, it has been suggested that competition should guide many areas, including the educational field (Freidman & Friedman, 1982). The option to choose empowers the



consumer and pushes businesses to offer more to attract consumers (Freidman, 1962). Although existent and applied in many other fields, the idea of parents having school choice within education did not gain strength until the late 1980s (Kolderie, 2005).

Chubb and Moe (1988) provided the blueprint for a school choice system. The focus of their proposal was to rid public schools of bureaucratic control. With power to make changes and promote their schools, educational leaders could effectively serve their communities without bureaucratic constraints. The intent was to foster competition and empower parents to be the decision-makers (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012). In theory, this competition, premised in market-based education ideology, would push schools to compete for students and, in turn, to be more responsive to parents (Ballantine & Spade, 2003; Friedman, 1962).

### ***Charter Schools and Charter Management Organizations***

The charter school movement gained strength after reports indicated that traditional public schools were failing (Lubienski & Weizel, 2010). The idea for charter schools grew out of the work of Ray Budde, a former teacher, school administrator, and education professor, who sought to restructure the organization of districts to allow groups of teachers to receive charters from the school board (Kolderie, 2005). Teacher empowerment was the foundation of Budde's charter idea, as teachers would receive funding from the school board for instruction, and their teaching, in turn, would be evaluated by an "inside/outside committee" (Budde, 1989, p. 520). In 1983, the national report on education called *A Nation at Risk* created a sense of urgency, as the United States was not performing at a level to compete with the rest of the world; the message was that as a country we were falling behind (National Commission on Excellence in

Education, 1983). Al Shanker, the President of the American Federation of Teachers, proposed schools in which teachers could experiment and hold much more power (Rotberg & Glazer, 2018). The first of these schools opened in Minnesota. Among the promises made by this school were “greater freedom for teachers, independence from excessive regulation, improved student performance, decreased educational cost, and more equal distribution of quality of education” (Rotberg & Glazer, 2018, p. 164). Expansion soon was in sight, as the ideas proposed by Shanker and the reorganization once proposed by Budde were now in the national spotlight.

Utilizing arguments that gave rise to the No Child Left Behind Act, charter schools became part of the solution to what was called a failing education system (United States Department of Education, 2006). Located mostly in communities where there are a high number of minorities, charter schools aim to provide an alternative to traditional public school (Burdick-Will et al., 2013). Although publicly funded, they are not administered by local education authorities and are managed by independent organizations (DiMartino & Jessen, 2018). Curricula, pedagogy, and professional development are among some of the elements these schools can independently design. Yet, there are many differences among charter schools; a big difference lies in the internal organization of the schools.

### ***Independent Charter Schools***

Many charter schools operate independently from overarching school districts, with charter school leaders (principals, heads of schools, boards of directors) being able to shape the schools’ overall effectiveness, along with other stakeholders. These schools still hold the mission of providing an alternative to traditional public institutions but

usually operate in single communities because of philosophical ideals, monetary constraints, and human capital constraints. Some charter schools are centered on themes, such as science, humanities, and technology, that guide their mission, vision, partnerships, and curriculum development (Duger, 2012). Teachers or community members founded these schools in an attempt to offer a solution to the particular problems affecting the community.

Although network-operated schools are another type of charter school, their operational systems are different; these networks are known as charter management organizations. In terms of accountability, independent charter schools do not have to answer to a large number of stakeholders in the way that network-operated charter schools do (Prothero, 2017). However, because independent charter schools tend to have less funding and widespread representation, they are often at a disadvantage when compared to network-operated schools. The pressure to fundraise and maintain student enrollment places stress on these schools, which must compete with the bigger, network schools.

### ***Charter Schools Under a Charter Management Organization***

Charter schools were born of the ideology to empower teachers and lessen bureaucratic control in order to produce positive change in a more efficient manner. Yet have charter schools maintained these ideals? Both Budde's and Shanker's reformist ideas sought to empower teachers and have educational boards oversee but give autonomy to these schools as a way to improve them (Scott & DiMartino, 2010). Unfortunately, the ideas of Budde and Shanker were not the only ones to which the charter school movement adhered; as the movement gained strength, so did the visibility

of other ideologies introduced by policy makers, social activists, and market-oriented reformers (Scott & DiMartino, 2010). As a way to reach more children and provide a quality education, these new stakeholders held that management organizations were perhaps the best way to manage a charter school (Scott & DiMartino, 2010). Educational management organizations (EMOs) were the fruit of these discussions, and, from 1992 to 1998, they grew in prominence. Baltimore, Hartford, Massachusetts, Michigan, Texas, and Kansas were some of the places where EMOs began to manage schools. Yet, soon after, for-profit organizations also entered the field of school management. These new type for-profit EMOs now began to manage schools across state lines, which allowed them to reach more families (Scott & DiMartino, 2010). Assessments of the success of EMO-managed charter schools had mixed results, as some did not outperform traditional district schools. The issue of for-profit schools was also questioned, as prioritizing profits could compromise the quality of teachers or resources (Scott & DiMartino, 2010). Soon these EMOs lost contracts, went out of business, or reduced their operation size. Advocates of charter schools still maintained that, in order to make an impact in the educational field, there was a need for more charter schools. As a result, new types of management organizations were created, charter management organizations (Scott & DiMartino, 2010).

Charter management organizations (CMOs) are entities that manage a group of charter schools, specifically overseeing curricula, the identity of the schools, allocation of resources, and management of school leaders, among other responsibilities and depending on the management model (corporate style or franchise model). How involved a CMO is within a school's operation varies depending on these two models (Scott &

DiMartino, 2010). As previously mentioned, the idea that management organizations were needed to organize and help reach more students and communities was prevalent. Yet, in order to grow and deal with issues, such as a lack of resources, teacher attrition, and limited space, school funding was needed. Philanthropic support became the backbone of CMOs, allowing them to open more charter schools in a growing school choice market (Scott & DiMartino, 2010). Some of the biggest CMOs within the United States are BASIS Schools Inc., Harmony Schools, Imagine Schools, and K12 Inc. (Woodworth et al., 2017). Within New York City, some of the biggest CMOs are Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP), Success Academy, and Uncommon Schools. These organizations ultimately dictate many of the elements needed to successfully run a school; curricula, professional development, recruitment practices, hiring practices, management, branding, and advertisement are only a few of the aspects that these organizations closely monitor (Center for Research on Education Outcomes, 2017; DiMartino & Jessen, 2018; DiMartino & Scott, 2013; National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2013). Schools directed by these organizations benefit from the organizations' recruitment strategy and also enjoy the organizations' power of advocacy, as powerful CMOs will direct funding and efforts towards this goal.

### ***Funding Differences***

The difference in funding and working economic capital between independent charter schools and CMO-managed schools is quite defining. DiMartino and Jessen (2018) looked closely at the expenses of these two types of charter organizations' marketing efforts. The Washington D.C. case study showcased the difference between independent charter schools and CMO-managed charter schools, both small and large.

KIPP, a major player in the charter school field, held 48.2% of overall marketing capital among charter schools in the 2015-2016 academic year. This amount dwarfed the capital of other charter schools (DiMartino & Jessen, 2018). Massachusetts supplied supporting evidence of the marketing spending disparities between non-CMO and CMO charter schools. In 2015, non-CMO schools located in Boston and the surrounding suburban areas spent \$45,767.29, while CMO-affiliated schools located in the same area spent \$122,347.23 (DiMartino & Jessen, 2018). Lastly, in New York, Success Academies hold a substantial advantage among other charter schools, both CMO and independent, in regard to marketing expenditures. In the 2012-2013 academic year, Success Academies spent \$3,526,345, which when compared to National Heritage Academies (\$284,579), Public Prep (\$47,235), and Democracy Prep (\$22,308) a considerable difference is noticeable (DiMartino & Jessen, 2018, p. 67). These expenditures, although focused on general marketing/recruitment, staff recruiting, and student recruiting/marketing, speak of the difference in economic power between these two types of charter schools in a market-based educational field.

### ***Promises and Challenges***

Charter schools, in theory, are supposed to provide parents with the option of enrolling their children in a public school that offers more support and rigor than traditional public schools. Charter schools look to serve students from marginalized populations, which include minority students from low-income families. The locations of many charter schools furnish evidence of this purpose and promise, as research has shown that they open in low-income areas with high numbers of minorities (Gulosino & D'Entremont, 2011; Henig & MacDonald, 2002; Jacobs, 2013; Koller & Welsch, 2017).

Although the research has indicated that the purpose of the charter schools aligns with the schools' locations, there have been some research findings that suggest that charter schools select which communities they wish to target.

Jabbar (2015) analyzed the charter school situation in post-Katrina New Orleans. Charter schools played an important role in the rebuilding of the educational make-up of the city, as the previous school infrastructure was devastated by the hurricane. CMOs were not only competing to recruit students but also high-quality teachers as a way to advertise top academic instruction and expectations. Jabbar (2015) exposed the fact that charter schools fail to provide for ELL students and their needs. Furthermore, there is a selective admissions process that seems to target a specific population. As such, the marginalization and/or exclusion of "others" occurs within this competitive educational marketplace. Are charter schools selecting to not recruit a specific population? How is this occurring? These are some of the questions that rise out of this study and find space in previous research as well (Gumus-Dawes et al., 2013; Lubienski, 2007; Sattin-Bajaj, 2011).

A study conducted by Jennings (2010) examined the role that schools play in the school choice process. Although schools open in different locations, their leaders understand the need to advertise and market toward the population present in the community. As such, these schools must distinguish themselves from other organizations and seek to protect their brands. The approach of certain school leaders extends to cutting deals with politicians as a way to shape a population of desired individuals within their schools. Jennings (2010) points to the need for school principals to find the right child that "fits" the school. Findings have suggested that school leaders, through networking,

find ways to shape their desired population and deal with students that have not been part of the initial selection criteria but rather seek to enter the school through the “over the counter” process. School leaders work to avoid taking these students or students who have special needs by tapping into stakeholders that can help steer this population away from the school. School choice is still in effect, but the question of who is choosing arises. Jennings (2010) stated, “My findings suggest that when schools simultaneously face strong accountability pressures, schools may respond strategically to weakly regulated choice systems” (p. 245). Jennings’s study indicated that school choice reform has weak points that counter the efforts to provide equity and accessibility to students and parents. The question of who chooses becomes important: is it the parents (as the reformers sought), or is it the schools?

Whitty and Power (2000) analyzed how over marketing of a school can lead to the opportunity to “cream” the pool of applicants, which means they can be selective and take into consideration the applicants that meet their desired requirements. The study was cautious on the effects of marketization of public schools, as it can lead to schools shaping their institution in a particular way. Whitty and Power (2000) averred that “by encouraging an increasingly selective admissions policy in [over-subscribed] school’s open enrolment may have the effect of bringing about increased opportunities for cream-skimming and hence inequality” (p. 100). The study argued that, although decentralization of the education system is at the core of school choice and a market-based educational system, there has to be a certain level of government control in order to oversee equity (Chubb & Moe, 1988; Whitty & Power, 2000). We must ask if equity is being guaranteed at any level in the school choice process.



Koller and Welsch (2017) examined which factors influenced the location decisions of charter schools in Michigan. Although their findings focus on academic and social factors, it should be noted that they found no indication of new charter schools opening in neighborhoods where there is a large percentage of Latino families. In contrast, the study found that charter schools opened new facilities in communities that had a high population of Black families. There would seem to be a selective notion about which populations to serve that runs counter to charter schools' putative mission. Yet, the study mentioned that the Latino community seemed interested in the charter schools that have been already established (Koller & Welsch, 2017). These findings support previous research about charter schools shaping their populations in a particular manner through admissions procedures, limited services for ELL students, and discipline protocols (Jabbar, 2015; Lubienski, 2007; Mavrogordato & Torres, 2018; Natale & Doran, 2012). Although Henig and MacDonald (2002) found that charter schools aim to serve minorities, Koller and Welsch (2017) and Gulosino and D'Entremont (2011) clearly highlighted the differences among the minority communities served, stressing that Latinos are enrolled in fewer numbers when compared to Black students. These findings raise several questions about the awareness and motives behind these decisions.

### **Influences on the Choice of Schools**

The influences present within school choice have evolved with the passing of time. As such, this review extracts three select practices that allow institutions to influence choice: marketing, branding, and advertisement. This last practice, advertisement, comes to the education field from the business world. DiMartino and Jessen (2018) have named the use of advertisement in education "edvertising;" it is

mostly used by and associated with charter schools. Findings from research on both traditional and charter schools guide the examination of these three practices. Location; sports programs; programs focused on areas such as art, music, and technology; and quality of staff are influences that can sway the decisions of parents. Yet, for all these influences, it is the marketing, branding, and advertising of schools that allow parents to glimpse what a school has to offer. Both traditional public schools and charter schools (independent and CMO-managed) utilize these practices to grow as institutions, compete for enrollment, and attract advocates to their particular ideologies. The level of investment varies as well as the purpose of these practices. Marketing also brings about competition among schools. Lubienski (2005) suggested that schools in this new market-based environment chose to identify themselves through images directed at the parents, the same images that we might find in marketing and advertising campaigns. Strategies like this one aim at recruiting parents by showcasing something with which they can identify. Many charter schools, in comparison to traditional public schools, promoted a more traditional pedagogical philosophy and curricula as a way to establish themselves in a competitive market. Lubienski's (2007) research showed that schools choose to present different aspects of their institutions, such as facilities, academics, and safety. These aspects appeal to different consumers in an attempt to gain their business.

### **Branding and Edvertising**

Branding and advertising, or as DiMartino and Jessen (2018) have called it "edvertising," stem from marketing practices. The use of advertisement in education as a means to recruit students and promote schools resembles business practices used by non-educational companies. The identity of schools is at times the selling point for these

institutions. Names, colors, and even slogans like “transforming lives” become synonymous with the schools or the organizations (Lubienski, 2007). These strategies are closely guarded by institutions and are distributed to the school leaders as a way to micromanage branding of each institution (Bennet, 2008; DiMartino & Jessen, 2018). The traditional methods of advertisement, such as newspaper ads, flyers, and radio airtime, have been updated. Schools and districts now use a wide range of digital tools to convey their message and brands to the public. Social media sites, such as Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat, among others, are used to advertise schools, programs, or entire educational organizations, such as CMOs (DiMartino & Jessen, 2018). In a digital age, school leaders have understood that social media is a powerful tool that is able to reach a larger audience. This type of advertisement combined with other marketing strategies, such as word of mouth or open house events, allow educational institutions to recruit much more than before. Research has also suggested that the monetary investments of certain institutions, mostly those managed by CMOs, on advertisement surpass that which is allocated to salaries and school resources. As institutions born out of the educational market reform, charter schools, especially CMO-managed schools, have truly revolutionized the way schools market, brand, and advertise themselves to the public. These same institutions, at times, utilize their human capital as a way to promote among the neighborhood and recruit students (DiMartino & Jessen, 2018; DiMartino & Jessen, 2016; Jabbar, 2016).

There is another aspect to the branding of a school, as parents also contribute to this effort through word-of-mouth marketing. As parents’ contentment with a school increases, word of mouth also increases; this creates a ripple effect among parents, as

they have now contributed to the advertisement of a school (Olsen Beal & Beal, 2016). All these elements are part of the advertisement strategies of schools, which they ultimately use to fulfill their enrollment goals.

Amid this increase in advertisement, traditional public schools have also sought to increase their advertisement in an attempt to compete (Phillips, 2016). Headed by marketing directors, individual schools and districts advertise their schools to the community. Printed material, billboards, and even radio advertisements are used in an attempt to increase student enrollment; such is the case in Los Angeles (Phillips, 2016). These heightened levels of marketing, branding, and advertisement have not only cemented educational market-based reform but also increased competition among public schools. Marketing, branding, and edvertising are guiding the efforts of schools to attract more parents (DiMartino & Jessen, 2018).

With the high level of marketing and edvertising, a high level of competition among all public schools has erupted in high choice markets, such as New Orleans, New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Washington D.C. Chubb and Moe (1988) suggested that this form of competition would lead to the development of better schools for consumers. As schools aim to recruit more students, they also aim to distinguish themselves from their competitors by changing their names or brands (Drew, 2016). The educational market now holds many schools carrying the title of academy, preparatory school, or thematic names. In theory, this attempt to distinguish themselves would allow parents to distinguish schools from each other (Lubienski & Lee, 2016).

Noguera (2003) argued that changes made by educational institutions are valid if they seek to better serve the population; this argument would support the use marketing

and advertisement. Some traditional public schools do not see themselves as competing with charter schools but rather consider their marketing and advertisement as a way to make themselves visible to the community (DiMartino & Jessen, 2018). Regardless, competition for student enrolment still takes place and ultimately may influence parents' decisions in ways that affect their children's access to educational opportunities (Crosnoe, 2009; Cuero et al., 2009; Davis & Oakley, 2013; Drew, 2013; Hernández, 2016; Jabbar & Li, 2016). This hints that equity is not a guarantee.

### **Marketing and Recruitment**

As market-based educational reform has taken place, schools are using more marketing techniques in their hopes to recruit more students. Some charter schools heavily use marketing strategies to recruit students. Third party companies are hired to handle the marketing of the CMO or individual charter schools (DiMartino & Jessen, 2018). Although traditional public schools or districts also use marketing, the increase of the use is aligned with the rise of the charter school movement. Charter schools not only recruit students but also teachers and form alliances with organizations like Teach for America (Jabbar, 2016). This partnership allows schools or organizations to promote the quality of teachers serving their students, thus speaking to the quality of education at their schools (Jabbar, 2015). Yet, a problem emerges within this strategy, as new teachers are expected to contribute to the marketing machines that are charter schools (DiMartino & Jessen, 2018). The schools replace professional development with time allocated to recruit students, set quotas for student recruitment, and encourage teachers to manage and promote events (DiMartino & Jessen, 2018). The time spent by these new teachers recruiting students has also become synonymous with the name of the school.

Marketing and recruitment practices vary by school and/or organization, as many have adopted business-like practices in an effort to attract more students. DiMartino and Jessen (2016) explored these practices by conducting two case studies of three New York City schools and their partner organization that were using different strategies to attract consumers (parents and students), among them each school's name and colors (2016). Although these aspects of marketing are more aligned to branding, they still contribute to the overall goal of recruiting students. The school's name and logo serve as mechanisms to attract parents; the logo is showcased on all written materials the school produces to assure maximum representation and impress parents, perhaps influencing their final choice of school. Although not the only way to advertise to parents, such branding does establish a practice by public schools to recruit students. However, DiMartino and Jessen's (2016) study identified parents who were dissatisfied with promises made by school officials through their recruiting efforts. As schools market themselves, they must also deliver on the goods promised to the consumers. The DiMartino and Jessen (2016) study established the linkage between marketing and branding and school budget, as well as funding made available by outside organizations for marketing and branding efforts (Lubienski, 2005).

### ***Types of Marketing***

As the educational system now operates in a market-based environment, schools marketing strategies have evolved from the traditional methods. Several types of marketing strategies used to attract potential families are open house events, word of mouth, printed materials, digital media, and social media. As already discussed, charter school funding varies depending on the type of charter school, independent or CMO-

managed. Facilities, staff, faculty, location, and other factors are emphasized through the different forms of marketing. These factors help schools, in theory, distinguish themselves from their competition. The enrollment or attendance numbers helps school leaders calculate the success of these strategies. It should be mentioned that, although each marketing strategy is unique, the overall question that arises is, which strategy is more influential for parents?

### ***Open House Events***

Parents seek to gain understanding about particular schools by visiting, which presents an opportunity to examine the facilities, the staff, and the culture. Schools occasionally organize events in an effort to provide all the information parents seek. Oplatka (2007) examined the effectiveness of open house events in the recruitment of students and sought to determine the effect these school events had on school choice. This study encountered contradictory perceptions between teachers and families regarding the effectiveness of the open house. While most teachers held that the open house was influential on school choice because it gave the families an opportunity to examine the uniqueness of the school and their offerings, parents held that it was not influential because the message and marketing tactics were the same as other schools. There was no uniqueness in the brand of the schools, which is an important part of marketing and recruitment (Jennings, 2010). Some parents did mention that the facilities and resources exposed during the open house might influence their choice. This last point could be taken as part of the marketing and branding of a school, as facilities are at times advertised as part of the marketing campaign.

### ***Word of Mouth***

As the influence of an open house seems to have little effect on parents' school choice, there are other forces that have a greater effect in the decision-making process. One of these influences is word of mouth. A school can serve its own marketing strategy by solidifying its reputation within the community that it serves. Kimelberg and Billingham (2012) examined parents' decisions and motivations based on findings from interviews with middle-class parents of Boston public school students and demographic data from the city's public elementary schools. They analyzed enrollment trends across the entire district and within individual schools, such as changes in the racial and socioeconomic composition of each school's student body. These trends revealed that certain influences had a greater effect on recruitment than others, one of them being word of mouth. Parents are a major marketing force, as they are able to promote the school through their own social circles. Parents discuss schools in online discussion boards and at open houses (Kimelberg & Billingham, 2012). Word of mouth and the use of social media are not exclusive to English-speaking families, as research has shown that families of different cultures and English-speaking levels also rely on social media platforms as a way to access information and opportunities with regard to education (Gil & Johnson, 2017; Mavrogordato & Harris, 2017; Yosso, 2005).

Yet, word of mouth can be a negative at times, as parents can become gatekeepers of specific educational institutions. Parents can establish a school's brand and choose how they wish to shape the school's population (Olsen Beal & Beal, 2016). According to Kimelberg and Billingham (2012), "As a few select schools gain a positive reputation among the middle class, they become even more attractive to this population, likely



prompting intensified efforts on the part of parents to secure placement for their children in these schools” (p. 225). A positive reputation among middle-class parents can lead to the most popular schools largely being attended by this specific population. As such, a question arises about low-income parents and their place within these schools. The study suggested that the high number of middle-class children attending certain schools has resulted in the displacement of low-income students (Kimelberg & Billingham, 2013).

### ***Printed Materials***

As schools make efforts to attract more students, they also rely on traditional methods of marketing, such as the use of printed materials. Educational organizations or specific schools use brochures, banners, public-advertising boards, and dioramas, among other materials, to convey their distinction, showcase their accomplishments, and represent the uniqueness of the school (Wilkins, 2012). As these materials transmit these messages, studies demonstrate that they offer an opportunity to shape the school population by targeting some families and discouraging others (Wilkins, 2012). These materials allow schools to signal information about social economic status and other aspects that not only contribute to the targeting efforts but also toward the branding of the school (Symes, 1998).

In order to reach communities that live farther away or speak languages other than English, some schools or organizations utilize newspapers as a form of marketing (DiMartino & Jessen, 2018). Yet, not all organizations can afford to do so, as is the case of New York City Department of Education. The cost of running newspaper ads in New York City amounted to “60 grand a month,” according to the NYC DOE’s director of marketing (DiMartino & Jessen, 2018, p. 77). Moreover, not all managing organizations

employ newspapers as a marketing source, as they are not a “huge driver” (DiMartino & Jessen, 2018). Cost definitely affects the use of newspapers, but outdoor advertising is used more, regardless of cost. Billboards, street furniture, bus, and train advertisements, among others, saturate the market with messages (DiMartino & Jessen, 2018).

### ***Digital Media***

With more internet access, schools and charter management organizations have turned to digital advertising as a way to promote their schools. In major markets, schools and, if applicable, their managing organizations have a webpage through which they can highlight their accomplishments, provide important information, and give a description of their facilities, among other aspects. These websites are part of the school’s identity and everything that comes with it, like symbols, brands, logos, etc. (Drew, 2013). At times, the driving message behind these websites is to have families envision their children attending the school. A problem that can come with websites is promoting or not the schools to a particular group, which some studies call “selling elitism” (Drew, 2013).

Two other digital forms of advertising are word search ads and display ads, utilized by both CMOs and traditional public schools, like the NYC DOE (DiMartino & Jessen, 2018). Providing a cost-effective form of paid word search ads and display ads allows these educational organizations to reach a greater number of families. Search engines, such as Google, work with advertisers to have specific content pop up based on the words people look up (DiMartino & Jessen, 2018). Display ads, such as banners, appear on webpages, including social media. These banner ads can take up a considerable amount of the webpage and appear based on the person’s search history, demographics, or past visits to the advertising webpage (DiMartino & Jessen, 2018). Digital advertising

allows educational organizations to display their organizations through colorful and diverse messages, which in the end is cost effective and worth the investment.

### ***Social Media***

Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube are only a few of the social media websites used by traditional public schools and their managing organizations as well as CMOs. Through these social media platforms, educational organizations once again can highlight their institutions, facilities, and programs. Moreover, they can disseminate important information. Through Twitter and Facebook, they can link YouTube videos. These videos, which are used by major CMOs, can appeal to parents and students in a manner that words alone might not (DiMartino & Jessen, 2018). Testimonial from parents, students, teachers, staff, and administrators can be transmitted through these videos in an attempt to showcase their schools as the “right choice.” These videos are professionally made, and some major CMOs employ individuals who are in charge of creating and maintaining these sites as well as the corresponding videos (DiMartino & Jessen, 2018). Other social media apps, such as Snapchat and Instagram, allow organizations to create small clips that can cause a “buzz” among followers. Traditional public schools also sometimes use these social media platforms, but major CMOs do so more frequently.

### ***Parental Response to School Choice***

Parental response speaks to the power and desire of parents to participate in their children’s education through the school choice process. Parental response to school choice varies from market to market, as some parents are eager to enter the school choice process, while others simply feel frustrated because of the number of options or

confusing information (Cheng et al., 2015; Kimelberg & Billingham, 2012; Lubienski, 2007; Olsen Beal & Beal, 2016; Oplatka, 2007).

Research has shown how parents can create a community brand around schools, through which they decide what population best fits their school (Olsen Beal & Beal, 2016). This response by parents mirrors that of some schools that seek to shape their school populations by having certain admissions criteria (Drew, 2013; Jabbar, 2015; Whitty & Power, 2000). Although parental involvement is high in this situation, it can create an obstacle for other families that are participating in the school choice process (Mavrogordato & Harris, 2017; Sattin-Bajaj, 2011).

As parents continue to navigate the school choice process, they may also feel confused by the lack of information (Dougherty et al., 2013; Lubienski, 2007). The Hartford project sought to simplify the process for parents who felt frustrated by a school choice system for which the information was insufficient (Dougherty et al., 2013). School choice providers attempted to offer parents information about the schools in the areas where they lived. Unfortunately, the information provided was incomplete and did not satisfy parents, as what they looked for in a school was not highlighted or it was missing. The Smart Choice website was created by Trinity College, ConnCAN, and Achieve Hartford to facilitate the process for parents. The result was a much more enthusiastic population that was participating in the school choice process (Dougherty et al., 2013). Although schools make an effort to advertise and market to parents, the information may be incomplete or presented in a way that overemphasizes one aspect of the school. Lubienski (2007) suggested that some schools decide to showcase their superior facilities and not their academic offerings or rigor, which leaves parents with an incomplete picture

of the schools' effectiveness. This incomplete picture for parents does not allow them to make the best choice for their children. Lubienski (2007) discussed how this practice impacts equity; to improve their standing in the market, schools avoid serving disadvantaged students by targeting high performing students.

Parental response to school choice varies, partly due to the strategies and information provided by school. Parents look to enroll their children in what they envision as the best school based on what they hold as the priority in education, which ranges from security, facilities, academic rigor, or location, among others (Canales et al., 2014; Cheng et al., 2015). If schools are not providing parents with all the necessary information, then parents cannot make an educated choice, and the market reform model begins to show some flaws (Whitty & Power, 2000).

### ***Latino Families, ELLs, and School Choice***

The school choice process can be daunting and frustrating, as parents look to explore all the possibilities and examine all the information that is available to them. Research has suggested schools at times do not distribute complete information or simply target a specific population (Drew, 2016; Dougherty et al., 2013; Jabbar, 2015; Lubienski, 2007; Whitty & Power, 2000). Parents, regardless of the accessibility and availability of information provided by a school, still participate in the school choice process. Some parents work full time or even overtime and must find availability within their demanding schedules to attend informational sessions. Sattin-Bajaj (2011) conducted a study to examine the experiences of low-income Latin American families during the school choice process in New York City. The study also investigated whether low-income children of Latin American immigrants face obstacles navigating school

choice related to their cultural backgrounds. Among the findings, the author revealed that low-income children of Latin American immigrants faced more obstacles than their peers. Parent availability as well as well as access to comprehensible information stand in the way of an informed choice of school.

Mavrogordato and Harris (2017) researched current and former ELL students' participation in the school choice process and addressed their likelihood of attending a non-zoned school. The findings indicated that current ELL students participated in the district's school choice process but were less likely to enroll in non-zoned schools. Former ELL students actually showed a greater percentage of enrollment in non-zoned schools. These findings suggested that non-zoned schools were less attractive to ELL students and their parents. The district provided parents with materials translated into Spanish as well as translations for all informational events, which made the process of school choice more equitable for these minorities, as they had access to the information in a language they understood. Yet, the low enrollment of current ELL students in non-zoned schools raised certain questions. Parents of former and current ELL students readily engaged in the school choice process, but why were parents of current ELLs not seeking non-zoned schools? Was there a particular barrier affecting their choice? The study proposed increasing the opportunities of community wealth by which parents can interact and learn from one another, which could help parents navigate the school choice process and consider non-zoned schools (Mavrogordato & Harris, 2017). Although the district made every effort to help parents navigate school choice in a language they could understand, an important question is raised: were schools providing this information in

the same manner to attract these students? Previous research has suggested this may not be the case.

### ***Involvement of Latino Parents***

Parental presence in a child's education is important, but that presence can take many forms because of constraints parents face. Carreon et al.'s (2005) research revealed how parents face different fears and constraints when looking to engage in their children's education. Three parents presented different situations as they attempted to engage in their children's education. The first participant, Celia, described her ability to build up courage and engage stakeholders who did not speak Spanish. Although her activity was limited to parent-teacher interaction, it still showcased her willingness to learn the cultural context of schools. Celia stated her son's teacher never asked for her input (Carreon et al., 2005). Although Celia was engaged with her son's education, she chose not to question the school on anything. The study noted that she was able to work within the system to obtain access to her child's education.

Other participants in the study were not so successful in engaging in the educational system, as they were met with resistance and unproductive comments. They chose to question certain aspects of their children's education but were then ostracized and prevented from engaging in conversation with school actors, such as the teacher and the principal (Carreon et al., 2005). Latino parents generally demonstrate a desire to be involved in their children's education. If the overall goal for school educators is the growth and academic success of students, could parental involvement contribute to this goal?

Studies have shown the great advantage of parental contributions, in this case, Latino parental involvement, in promoting their children's education, which in turn positively contributes to the children's academic success (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2010; Jasis & Ordoñez-Jasis, 2012). Jasis and Ordoñez-Jasis (2012) explored Latino parent engagement in community schools by analyzing three Latino involvement programs to gain insight to the participation of Latino parents and the overall empowerment obtained through these programs. Latino parents had initiated two of these programs; both "La Familia" initiative and the creation of an urban charter school established that Latino parents sought to unite in order to access educational opportunities for their children. "La Familia" initiative's goal was to address the lackluster academic performance of their children in their schools. Started by a Latina mother, the initiative united parents, administrators, and teachers in order to address the issue.

Before the initiative began, parents felt silenced by other stakeholders in the school:

Based on past school-hosted meetings and having experienced the frustrating silencing of their individual and collective voices, parents' narratives revealed that they clearly recognized the power differential between themselves as immigrant families and the symbolic omnipresence of school personnel. (Jasis & Ordoñez-Jasis, 2012, p. 73)

These experiences influenced the actions of the Latino parents. They met outside of school, where they could speak their native language. Through the initiative, parents were able to highlight how the power of parental involvement could change a school's learning



environment (Jasis & Ordoñez-Jasis, 2012). In the end, different stakeholders united in working toward the same goal.

The other parent-led initiative occurred in Los Angeles, California, as Latino parents came together to propose the creation of an urban charter school. Representing a segment of low-income families, these Latino families met to organize and create a school that offered safety and education. The initiative itself was not perfect; according to one parent, “Here we learn together about the importance of each other’s ideas. It does not mean that we always agree on everything, but what unifies us is that we all want the best for our children” (Jasis & Ordoñez-Jasis, 2012, p. 76). The determination these parents showed was enough to allow them to disagree yet still work toward the common goal.

The last program examined aimed at preparing Latino migrant workers for the General Education Diploma (GED) exam. This program, "Project Avanzado," was organized by an outside non-profit organization and was highly successful. Although the primary goal was to prepare these workers for the GED exam, there were other goals, such as empowering them as individuals so they could engage in other aspects of life, including their children’s education. Many of these parents did not have a good experience interacting with school stakeholders. A parent stated, “Some of my children’s teachers thought that they didn't have to dedicate much time to these children because they will always work in the fields, I don't agree with that!” (Jasis & Ordoñez-Jasis, 2012, p. 77). The sense of alienation and helplessness experienced by these parents might have discouraged them from participating or furthermore from wanting more for their

children. Yet, through this outside program, they were empowered to engage in their children's education.

Although all three programs provided an avenue for parents to engage in their children's education, many described negative experiences with their children's educational institutions, regardless of their engagement levels. Parents seek to engage in their children's education; although they face certain constraints, they find a way to be involved, which speaks to the navigational and resistance capital lens of this study. School choice necessitates engaging parents in the process of selecting a school, but research has suggested that the constraints parents face are at times purposefully created by certain stakeholders. These same stakeholders, at times, hold deficit views of these families, raising questions about the guarantee of equity in the current school choice model.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

The power of certain influences, such as open house events, brochures, and commercials, among others, increases with the amount of investment by organizations or schools. As this literature review reveals, CMO-managed charter schools are able to invest much more capital into marketing and recruitment than standalone charter schools or smaller CMOs. The influence of marketing, branding, and advertisement is present and growing in the market-based educational plan, raising the question of who is choosing, as the amount of influences is great and varies from school to school. The review also reveals that parents, both Latino and non-Latino, want to be involved in their children's education and in the school choice process. Yet, although they seek to participate in the process, equitability still varies from market to market, as the literature has revealed that

inequities in charter schools and within the school choice process do occur. Studies have suggested that perhaps parents look beyond what is advertised by schools on paper and seek to receive information from the source. Open house events are perhaps not only designed to inform but also to survey possible applicants. Parents might not view them as an influence, as the schools perhaps do not stand out as distinct from one another.

Lastly, research has revealed that word of mouth is a powerful tool to promote schools and at times the strongest one in advertising and marketing it. This speaks directly to the study's social equity framework and how Latino parents use different forms of capital to succeed. The research questions that drive this study are, what influences shaped the choice of school of non-English-speaking parents? And how are schools advertising and marketing themselves to non-English-speaking Latino families? These questions seek to contribute to the discussion on the state of equity in this complex school choice environment. As the use of marketing and advertisement has grown in the educational field, ideally accessibility and availability of information would also increase to best serve all populations within the society. Equity must be a guarantee within the system itself so as to promote education and access to opportunities.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Methodology**

For this study, I employed an instrumental case study methodology (Berg & Lune, 2012). This chapter explains both research questions and how they fit the overall focus of the study. I explain district and school sample selection, as well as participant recruitment steps, with a focus on the specific characteristics of the participants and sample schools. I discuss data sources and data analysis with emphasis on the coding methods I employed. I also discuss the trustworthiness of the design as a way to ascertain reliability and credibility. Lastly, I examine the role of the researcher in discerning the challenges parents face when navigating the schooling system.

#### **Research Questions**

This case study focused on the experiences of 13 non-English-speaking Latino parents whose children were enrolled in a Catholic school and who went through the school choice process in the 2019-2020 academic year. Furthermore, two staff members and one school leader also shared their experiences and involvement in the school choice process. The experiences of the 13 parents from two Catholic schools within New York inform broader themes around equity. The nature of my two research questions was exploratory, so as to not only inquire about the parents' experiences throughout the school choice process but also to examine how those experiences were impacted by the influences of other stakeholders. The research questions guiding this case study were as follows:

1. What influences shaped the school choice decisions of non-English-speaking Latino parents of eighth grade students who are enrolled in a Catholic school?

2. To what extent are schools advertising and marketing themselves to non-English-speaking Latino families whose children are enrolled in a Catholic school?

A qualitative approach allowed me to focus on both the participants and the action and influences of other stakeholders to gain an understanding of the entire public school choice process for non-English-speaking Latino parents of children enrolled in Catholic schools.

### **Research Design**

The utilization of a case study was appropriate to examine the school choice experience of non-English-speaking Latino families. Using an instrumental case study, I focused on parents of eighth grade students at two Catholic schools who were entering the high school choice process. Research on marketing and branding within school choice has provided me with an understanding of how educational institutions utilize business strategies to attract and compete in the educational market (DiMartino & Jessen, 2016, 2018; Lubienski, 2005, 2007). A case study approach allowed me to investigate the “how” question of the study with an exploratory and discovery focus in order to understand where non-English-speaking Latino families of Catholic schools fit in the school choice process. In depth analysis of the two Catholic schools within the Archdiocese of New York not only allowed for an exploration and examination of non-English-speaking parents and their experiences within school choice but also of the environment in which their experiences occurred. The case study, although focused on a narrow population, addresses the broader issue of school choice and equity (Stake, 1995). Although the acceptance into particular schools is relative to the school choice process, it

is not part of the focus of influences affecting our participants during their school selection.

### **School Sample Selection**

New York City's educational marketplace has been growing exponentially with regard to school choice for parents. The increase in charter school applications seems to solidify the research indicating that parents need options that are alternatives to traditional public schools (Chapman, 2017). Also, the increased efforts to attract more students by the Catholic schools of New York speak to the level of competition among different school systems (Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese of New York, 2016, 2018). Other major metropolitan educational markets across the United States have also seen an increase in charter schools and, with this, an increase in options for parents (Jabbar, 2015; Jabbar & Li, 2016; Lubienski & Lee, 2016; Phillips, 2016). This fact stands in contrast to the difficulties facing Catholic schools, as they struggle to find new ways to increase enrollment (United States Department of Education, 2018, 2019). Research has also shown that charter schools will look to open new facilities in places where there is a concentration of families from underrepresented groups, a heavy concentration of traditional public schools, insufficient schools for the neighborhood population, and failing schools (Burdick-Will et al., 2013; Glomm et al., 2005; Gulosino & D'Entremont, 2011; Hernández, 2016; Koller & Welsch, 2017; Phillippo & Griffin, 2016; Stein, 2015). In New York City, charter schools provide more options for parents, which studies have described as an expansion of the families' educational choices (Cordes, 2017; Nathanson et al., 2013;).

With this body of research in mind, I sought to find two Catholic schools located in New York City serving a high number of Latino families. Based on the neighborhood population and examination of the demographic data across Catholic schools in New York City, I identified the two schools, both located in Manhattan. Although other schools had similar numbers of Latino families, I decided to focus on these two schools because of convenience and accessibility. Previous studies have focused on Bronx schools (Jessen, 2011; Sattin-Bajaj, 2011) as a way to examine school choice and the obstacles parents and students face when entering this process. The other voices within other boroughs deserved to be heard as they also navigate the school choice process. The two schools selected for this case study were 1) the “Cross School” and 2) the “Epiphany School.” I selected them because of their location, percentage of Latino population, and proximity to my location. This convenience sample allowed me to examine the experiences of non-English-speaking Latino parents whose children are enrolled in a Catholic school. I looked at this group of Latino families that do not speak or had low English-speaking abilities and who participated in the high school choice process. It was important to analyze the experiences of these parents as they entered the educational choice market that aimed at providing power to the consumer and efficiency in the process (Chubb & Moe, 1988).

### ***Sample Schools***

Both schools are elementary and middle schools that serve students up until eighth grade. They are both located in low-income areas of Manhattan and serve a student body comprised of a majority of Latino students (see Table 1 below). They are co-educational institutions that require their students to wear uniforms. The number of

students enrolled ranged from 100 to 300 students. The Cross School has been functioning for a long time and, although it was once a parish school, it is now a regionalized Manhattan school. The Epiphany School has also been around for many years and is also regionalized, with a long-standing tradition of providing students with resources and extracurricular activities, such as art and music.

**Table 1**

*Description of Case Study Schools (2018-2019)<sup>123</sup>*

	Cross School	Epiphany School
Grades Served	K - 8	K - 8
Student Demographics	Enrolled – 200	Enrolled – 300
	20 % African American	19 % African American
	0 % Pacific Islander	0% Pacific Islander
	0 % Multi Racial	14 % Multi Racial
	70 % Latino	65 % Latino
	5 % Asian	1 % Asian
	5 % White	1 % White
	0 % American	0 % American
	Indian/Native American	Indian/Native American
Community Social Economic Status	Low-Income Community	Low-Income Community

<sup>1</sup> Data was retrieved from the Niche.com.

<sup>2</sup> The idea for the format of this table came from DiMartino (2009).

<sup>3</sup> All names are pseudonyms.



## **Data Collection**

I visited both schools selected for this study in the beginning of September as a way 1) to connect with the school leaders and parent coordinators and 2) to get an overall understanding of the school. I began to recruit parents between the middle of December and mid-January. In the month of February, I conducted parental interviews. I scheduled the interviews based on the parents' availability and conducted them in person and over the phone. I offered no incentive to parents for their participation, but I did make accommodations to best fit their schedules. I visited the Cross School during an informational session and during Catholic high school fair day. During the month of February, I also interviewed the school officials.

The New York City high school selection process begins at the end of seventh grade. The NYC DOE holds workshops during the summer recess months (NYC Department of Education, n.d.). Furthermore, the NYC DOE hosts high school fairs during the fall semester of the students' eighth grade academic year (NYC Department of Education, n.d.). During these periods, high schools will give parents and students opportunities to visit their schools, attend special information sessions about the schools, and provide printed literature about the schools. The NYC DOE also provides all eighth-grade students and their families with a New York City high school directory book, which showcases, among many things, school data, special programs, and admissions criteria (NYC Department of Education, 2020). After attending all these workshops, fairs, and school information sessions and analyzing the various printed information, eighth grade students and their families create their school choice list and submit it for admissions during the month of December through the "MySchools" web-based

application. This parent portal allows parents to directly list all the schools at which they wish for their child to be considered for admission. Middle schools typically also have access to the “MySchools” portal as a way to help parents apply to high schools. In certain instances, the school may apply on the child’s behalf with the parent’s approval. Families are notified of high school enrollment in the month of April (NYC Department of Education, n.d). Catholic school families that are considering public schools as an option are also advised of all these deadlines at their respective middle schools. They must also apply to public schools through the “MySchools” application or through the NYC DOE-sponsored Welcome Center. Within the center, parents may find help and guidance on how to apply to public schools.

Throughout all my interactions with the parents and school officials who were part of the case study, I maintained ethical standards with regard to the participants, organization, and nature of the interviews (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2009). In accordance with ethical guidelines, I gave letters of consent to all the participating parents (see Appendix D). I collected these letters as a way to maintain a record of their consent. I also notified the participants of the confidentiality of their answers. I kept all answers anonymous and assigned pseudonyms to protect the identity of each participant. I reminded the participants of the confidentiality notification during all our interactions.

### **Identifying and Recruiting Participants**

Based on the purpose of this study, I identified Latino parents who had a child in eighth grade as potential candidates to be interviewed. Per this criterion, I interviewed 13 parents representing different Spanish-speaking families between both schools. All parents had children who were enrolled in one of the two Catholic schools (see Table 2

below). Although some families had more than one child enrolled at the time, they all had a child enrolled in eighth grade. Per conversations with school leaders, school staff, and parents, I established the participants' English levels.

Lastly, I interviewed the school leader at the Epiphany School and the parent coordinator and one teacher from the Cross School to examine their perspectives and involvement within the school choice process. The school leader had more than 10 years of experience in school administration, and the parent coordinator had been in her role for more than 8 years. The teacher I interviewed was new to the school but was in his overall second year as a teacher. The language criterion I utilized to identify parents did not apply to these stakeholders; rather, it was due to their influential positions in the schools that I identified them as participants.

**Table 2**

*Description of Participants*

Participant	School	Function
Vicente	Cross School	Parent
Teresa	Cross School	Parent
Kika	Cross School	Parent
Carla	Cross School	Grandmother
Marcos	Cross School	Parent
Yulissa	Cross School	Parent
Sara	Cross School	Grandmother
Ana	Cross School	Parent
Gloria	Epiphany School	Parent
Angel	Epiphany School	Parent
Wendy	Epiphany School	Parent
Mirna	Epiphany School	Parent
Yanina	Epiphany School	Parent
Angie	Cross School	Parent Coordinator
Rafael	Cross School	Teacher / Advisor
Christina	Epiphany School	School Leader

By engaging in a conversation with the parent coordinator at the Cross School and the school leader at the Epiphany School, I gained information on events and meetings at which parents of eighth grade students might be in attendance. They also informed me of the parental involvement in the school, which served as a way to better connect with possible participants. Although my presentation took place after the start of the school choice process, the parent coordinator and school leader were able to introduce me as a researcher possibly looking to interview the parents in attendance. I was able to briefly explain the purpose and importance of the study. These introductions occurred during parent teacher night and school events (see Appendix A). I spoke to parents utilizing respectful but familiar Spanish that lacked formality and perhaps resembled vernacular from the country they might originate or vernacular that is general among all Latin American countries. I explained how their participation in the study will help me fulfill my degree requirements and hopefully contribute to a larger discussion around equity. I emphasized to parents how their voices were necessary for this study, as it revolved around the school choice process in which they were currently involved.

Although it was my intention to acquire knowledge of community organizations that served these parents, this was not possible. It should be noted that community organizations at times help parents with the school choice process, tutoring, or any aspect of their children's educational journey (Jasis & Ordoñez-Jasis, 2012). I was able to observe an information session at the Cross School but not at the Epiphany School, as explained in the section of the dissertation titled limitations.

## **Data Sources**

### ***Interviews***

Non-English-speaking Latino parents of Catholic schools enter the school choice process with the ambition of finding a good school for their children. As public high schools and Catholic high schools compete for student enrollment, they seek to influence the parents' decisions with regard to school choice. This study aimed to identify and analyze the specific influences affecting the final school choice of this particular population. Using Kvale and Brinkmann's (2012) seven stages of interview inquiry, I interviewed all the participants about their experiences throughout the school choice process, with a focus on which influences shaped their decision-making process. The nature of this case study is instrumental, as I sought through these interviews to assess how much access they have to information in Spanish. This informed me on the state of equity in the public school choice process. The interviews were semi-structured and took place based on the convenience of the participant. I used Atlas.ti, a qualitative software program, to organize data and begin the process of open coding by which I conducted general analysis of the interview and observation data with a focus on the purpose of the study (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2012; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The interview protocols I used in this study stemmed from previous scholarship on school choice (DiMartino, 2009; Jessen, 2011) and college choice (Rowe, 2002). I made modifications to reflect the purpose and the themes of this study (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). During the interviews, I aimed to focus on the parents' backgrounds, school selection criteria, school choice information, charter school knowledge, and reflections on the choices they made. My semi-structured protocol consisted of three

sections, which contributed to my two guiding research questions. Section one related to the parents' backgrounds and was comprised of six starting questions. These questions probed the participants' family backgrounds, daily home interactions with family, and involvement in their children's schooling. Section two was guided by my first research question and contained a total of eight questions. The last section was guided by my second research question and had a total of 10 questions. The starting questions within this protocol aimed to begin the interviews in a consistent way, although I occasionally asked follow-up questions to probe for understanding, clarity, and content.

I translated the interview protocol into Spanish and asked a third party, who is a native Spanish speaker with a bachelor's degree in communications and a minor in Spanish language from a U.S.-based four-year university, to revise and correct the translation. I developed aspects of the interview protocol based upon the State University of New York student opinion survey and the Suffolk County Community Colleges application to gather demographic information on applicants. I further established content validity by asking school stakeholders (administrators, counselors, and enrollment managers) to evaluate the questions for clarity and direction and compare them to the Taxonomy of College Choice Influence (Rowe, 2002). (See Appendix A for the interview protocols.)

I also used a semi-structured protocol to interview the school officials. Organized around three themes, these interviews aimed to understand the officials' roles within the choice process, the support their schools offered to parents through this process, and their reflections on the process itself.

I created digital records of some of the interviews, with the permission of the parties involved. Other interviews I recorded manually, as the participants did not grant permission for digital recordings. A third party conducted transcription of the digitally recorded interviews; per the company's policies, all raw data was destroyed after transcription to protect the participants' identities. Interviews lasted between 30 minutes to 45 minutes. (See appendix D.)

### ***Observations***

Utilizing Stake's (1995) vicarious experience and observations of the physical space and the language used together with written descriptions of events allowed for the development of rich notes on school informational events and both Catholic and public-school fairs. The interactions between Spanish-speaking parents and other school choice actors from both the Cross and Epiphany Schools provided context for how language can be an obstacle or a way to access opportunities. This observation data allowed me to triangulate the information obtained from the interviews and document analysis. I also analyzed observation data utilizing categorical aggregation as a way to group the data into categories (Stake, 1995).

### ***Analysis of Documents***

The last level examined within the case study was a diverse selection of documents, which included emails, school calendars, letters, pamphlets, and school directories. Through, content analysis I sought to understand and reveal any biases, meaning, intention, and themes. I collected and examined printed materials as a way to gather background information on the schools and perhaps their targeting mechanisms. It also strengthened my findings about how schools market themselves to parents. I

examined the effects of these documents on parents through the semi-structured interviews. The content analysis further strengthened the credibility and reliability of previous data gathered (Berg & Lune, 2012). See Appendix C for document analysis protocol.

### **Data Analysis Overview**

I analyzed all the data using Miles and Huberman's (1994) techniques for analysis. Lastly, all data analyzed were part of the categorical aggregation, per Stake's (1995) suggested method. I employed a coding matrix and in vivo coding to organize the interview data and to ensure the participants' voices resonate within the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I also created startup codes based on the literature review. These codes included family background, involvement in child's education, value of education, access to information, and constraints. After analysis of the data, I came up with 34 other codes, which included missing information, knowledge of charter school, age as a barrier, change in mindset, family help, and translation in need, among others (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I then merged several codes that bore a connection to one another. I extruded themes from the coded data that were aligned with the research questions guiding this study.

### **Trustworthiness of the Design**

#### ***Triangulation***

Triangulation is important to ascertain the strength and veracity of the data collected. Interviews, observations, and document analysis served as a method to reinforce or question my findings. By comparing the different data sources to one another, I was able to observe if they supported each other. I examined several data



sources in order to strengthen the perception of the case study. Within my instrumental case study methodology, I included interviews of parents and school personnel. During the interview process I was able to build a rapport with the interviewees to gain their respect and draw out truthful answers that best reflect their roles, feelings, or thoughts on the topic. Through observation of different meetings and events, I was able to triangulate the data analyzed in each interview and vice versa. The content analysis I conducted on different types of documents further strengthened the credibility and reliability of the previous data gathered.

### ***Member Validation***

I conducted each interview in a setting that best allowed the interviewee to feel comfortable. After the interviewee answered each question, I restated the answer to check that I had accurately understood the interviewee's meaning. If at any point I was unsure of the answer given, I asked for further clarification. This member validation technique strengthens the credibility and transferability of the answers given (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

### ***Peer Review***

As the study took place, my mentor oversaw not only the overall development of the study and the protocols but specifically the analysis of the data. She reviewed the coding process and the extraction of themes so they would fit the overall scope of the study and reflect the voice of the participants. Conversations also took place with my mentor around the contributions of this study to the field of equity within education.

## **Role of the Researcher**

Although the topic of school choice in this case study is centered on parents, I am not an outsider to the public educational system or the Catholic school system. As a former NYC DOE teacher and a former school leader of a Catholic school in New York, I was well aware of the operating model used by schools. Utilizing my knowledge of how schools operate and schedule events and the different roles and decision-making power different stakeholders wield, I was able to navigate through a complex system. Yet, these same experiences also can create a bias with regard to the different levels of bureaucracy within the NYC DOE. It might also bias me for or against the school system I was representing as a school leader. Furthermore, my years of teaching and personal experiences within Title 1 schools as well my interactions with young men and women of the ELL community also shape my perceptions as to what struggles they go through within the educational system. These perceptions create biases, which I was mindful of as I shaped my final narrative. As I made observations and conducted the interviews, I took notes on the reactions, questions, and thoughts that I had during these events. The review of these notes allowed me to understand how my biases, experiences, cultural values, and evidence intertwined to shape my interpretation of the data (Stake, 1995). Lastly, the strongest strategy for checking my own biases came from the conversations with my mentor, Dr. Catherine DiMartino, and her feedback on my writing. As an experienced educator and researcher, she is well aware of the biases I hold but also reminded me of the value of examining the ideas and conclusions that the research suggests. Although the present political climate is controversial, she and I worked to preserve the general idea as

to how my research contributes to the larger conversation around equity within public education.

Recruitment of parents was a daunting task within this case study, as parents have many responsibilities that are more important, such as participating in family dinner. Yet certain factors helped me appeal to prospective parents. First, my former title of school leader within a Catholic school allowed me to be recognizable to most parents. Furthermore, the language barrier that can create fear of participating, as parents might worry their opinions do not matter or are not welcomed, was not a major factor (Mavrogordato & Stein, 2016). As a native Spanish speaker who is Latino and was educated in South America but born in New York City, I was able to relate to parents on a different level and break the language barrier and possible fear. There was cultural reciprocity and a comfort level as parents dealt with someone who spoke their languages and was understanding of their constraints as individuals. As I approached parents and explained the purpose and significance of the study in Spanish, I was happily surprised with the number of parents willing to participate, even if they did not fit the criteria. Parents did not perceive me as an outsider but rather as a researcher who was part of the general cultural identity they hold: Latino. Some parents stated, “Sure, Mr. Toala, you know we have to help each other, as we are Latinos,” “Mr. Toala, anything you need, just as like we were back home,” and “always helping our people.”

## CHAPTER 4

### Findings

My analysis of the data I obtained from observations, interviews, and documents revealed the interactions between parents of both Catholic middle schools, the Catholic high schools of New York, and New York City public high schools (charter and traditional). Both the Cross School and Epiphany School presented a similar ethnic breakdown across Latino, Black, White, and Asian students. Parents from both Catholic middle schools reported difficulties navigating the public school system's high school selection process, as indicated by my interviews of parents and school employees involved in the school selection process, observations of events and school fairs, and analysis of several high school selection documents. Although the ethnic composition among parents was very similar, the parents' ages and economic, educational, and employment statuses differed. These differences, in certain instances, heightened their difficulty navigating the high school selection process. Four prevalent themes emerged from the analysis of data; they include 1) Catholic schools keep Catholic school parents informed, 2) experiences at organized events, 3) barriers to discussing selection, and 4) informed parents knowing what they want (see Table 3 below). These four themes interconnect and highlight the two research questions posed in this study. At the conclusion of this chapter, I will address how the findings relate to the study's research questions.

**Table 3***Themes*

Theme	Subtheme 1	Subtheme 2	Subtheme 3
Catholic schools keep their parents informed	The involvement of staff members in parent meetings	School members as influences	
Experiences at organized events	Perspective and influence of Catholic and public school fairs	Accessibility to translation services	
Barriers to discussing selection	Discouragement due to technological challenges	The trouble of getting help	
Informed parents knowing what they want	Finding guidance to navigate the maze	School reputation, safety, and resources	Word of mouth

**Theme 1: Catholic Schools Keep Their Parents Informed**

The first theme that emerged was that Catholic schools keep their parents informed. I interviewed parents, teachers, and staff members involved in the school selection process; they shared how their schools catered to their need for help in the process. My observations and analysis of documents revealed how the schools, through organized meetings, parent communication, and planned one-on-one interactions, helped parents receive help and access to the information they needed to make a choice. This action of keeping parents informed throughout the process and allowing them to access information, at times in both English and Spanish, revealed how schools help parents but also how they might be influences. Further analysis allowed the emergence of two subthemes within this theme: the involvement of staff members in parent meetings and school members as influences. Both subthemes speak to the notion that individualized

attention to parents is key in the school selection process. Furthermore, the two subthemes reveal how school staff can influence the school selection process.

### ***The Involvement of Staff Members in Parent Meetings***

Across both case study sites, informational meetings were offered with the intent to give parents the necessary information to navigate both the Catholic high school and public high school application process. Both schools offered meetings in the months of September and October on the same dates, yet they were carried out differently. The Cross School's meetings were directed by the principal, parent coordinator, and two teachers. The Epiphany School's meetings were directed by the principal and the secretary. Although the Epiphany School teachers did attend, they were not part of the process.

Informational meetings within both Catholic middle schools were key and a starting point to the overall process. I questioned parents from both schools about how their schools made it possible to be part of their children's education. All parents from both schools noted that their children's school was always ready to tend to their questions about academics, discipline, or activities.

### ***The Cross School Meeting Experience***

When asked specifically about how their school helped them during the high school selection process, the parents pointed to the two organizational meetings held by their school. The Cross School meetings were held in the months of September and October during afterschool hours, which spoke to the school's efforts to accommodate working parents and contributed to a higher participation rate. The Cross School's calendar showed that the September meeting was deemed mandatory. Furthermore, my

analysis of the Cross's School automated message transcript noted a reminder to parents to attend the September meeting. The Cross School September meeting had high attendance with 100% parent turnout. The reminders and notes from the school to the parents spoke to the attention given to parents and the efforts by the school to keep parents informed.

During the September meeting, there was a detailed PowerPoint presentation, which was both in English and Spanish. The presentation covered important dates, deadlines, school personnel involved in the process, and distribution of students among advising personnel. The meeting was guided by the principal and the parent coordinator, both of whom spoke in English and in Spanish. The principal, at the beginning of meeting, mentioned that the meeting would take place in English and in Spanish and asked the parents to please be patient, as making the presentations in both languages could take time. The delivery of the presentation in both English in Spanish not only attested to the attention given to parents but also to the accessibility to information in a language other than English. The school anticipated this effort would help parents choose the right high school and understand what steps to take.

An array of refreshments was laid out for parents to grab and enjoy while they took a seat in the school's library. Parents sat together and observed the PowerPoint presentation on a Smart Board. Several staff members were present during the event. According to the PowerPoint presentation, two teachers, the parent coordinator, and the principal were part of the high school selection committee. Each party was assigned to a different predetermined group of students to provide guidance. During the meeting, the parent coordinator specified that the school's guidance counselor was not involved in the

high school selection process. Several parents asked why the guidance counselor was not part of the process. There was a moment of silence, then the parent coordinator answered, “The counselor is not taking part of the process for various reasons, which we can discuss at a later time.” Towards the end of the meeting, two books were distributed to parents, and they were told to approach the staff member assigned to their child if they had any questions. Several parents lingered, while others approached the staff members to ask questions. The two books distributed were the high school directories for both Catholic schools and public schools; they were both only in English. This was unfortunate and spoke to the difficulty of accessing information in Spanish when the materials were not written by the school.

Parents from the Cross School seemed pleased by the information provided in the meeting. Sara, a grandmother representing her grandson at the Cross School whose dominant language is Spanish, attended the meeting and stated, “I did, there were two big meetings, and I went 3 other times to meet individually to the teacher we got assigned to help. They told us how to do it, when to do things, and also the difficulties.” When asked if she thought this was good, she said, “It was really good, I understood what was happening.” Sara’s perspective was not unique, as other parents saw the September event as a positive factor. Marcos, a Mexican parent who has one daughter who is enrolled in eighth grade at the Cross School, shared, “This was a good effort by the school.” His experience extended beyond the September meeting, as he pointed to the school always keeping parents informed. Another parent, Kika, who is an Ecuadorian mother at the Cross School whose dominant language is Spanish, also was happy about the September meeting, especially with the aspect of it being in Spanish. When asked about her



perspective on the meeting being in Spanish, she answered, “I felt as if I am back home, there is a sense of trust.” Parents from the Cross School appreciated the translation of the meeting, sharing that the meeting was good and that they appreciated the efforts of the Cross School.

The Cross School offered a second meeting in October that was once again set in the late afternoon with 100% attendance of parents of eighth graders. This meeting did not involve a PowerPoint presentation and was simply guided by the principal and the parent coordinator. Other staff members were not present. During the presentation, the principal was the primary speaker, and the parent coordinator stood by and only addressed parents with regard to the Catholic school deadlines. Parents had several questions about the Catholic school’s entrance exam. Others brought up questions about the approaching deadlines and the online process for public schools. The principal mentioned that the school had not received access to the “MySchools” application by the NYC DOE. He mentioned that the parents “would have to seek help from the Welcome Center.” Lastly, the principal told parents that the school would send more information by the end of the week.

At this point, parents started talking among themselves. Although several hands were raised, the principal mentioned that if parents had any questions, he and the parent coordinator “would answer them at the end of the meeting individually.” The meeting only lasted 40 minutes, and parents quickly began to exit in a visibly angry manner. Only a few parents stayed behind to ask questions. The “MySchools” application portal is meant for the use of parents and middle schools as a way to apply to public high schools. Although the application is designed to allow for direct parent interaction, middle schools

usually also have access to this application as a way to help parents and, in some cases, apply on behalf of the family.

When I asked parents of the Cross School about the October meeting, they explained their frustration. Vicente shared, “First they make it mandatory [applying to public schools], then they tell me they cannot help us because they don’t have access. My question is why make it mandatory? That is why I made the decision I made.” When asked if he blamed the school, he stated, “Not really but I was very frustrated.” Yulissa, another parent from the Cross School, had the same perspective, although with a different outcome. Yulissa stated, “The meeting left me with so many questions, that I felt helpless. I felt bad about everything. If it were not for the parent coordinator, I would have left it alone.” The October meeting left parents with a feeling of doubt about how to carry on with the application. Further analysis revealed another theme, barriers to discussing selection, addressed later in this chapter.

### ***Key Staff at the Cross School***

Data revealed that key staff members from the Cross School interacted with parents with the objective of acting as advisors and providing personal attention. Furthermore, the ability to speak Spanish allowed the school members to help Latino parents who did not speak English. The Cross School’s organizational strategy highlighted two teachers, the parent coordinator, and the principal as part of the high school selection process team. All four members speak Spanish and acted as advisors to the students and their parents throughout the process. As mentioned by the school, the school guidance counselor was not involved in the process for reasons that were not shared by any of the school members interviewed.

Among the two teachers that were part of the Cross School's team was Rafael. He was a teacher with two years of experience, who had previously taught at a New York City charter school but was in his first year as part of a Catholic school. Being raised in New York but coming from Mexico allowed him to interact in both English and Spanish. When approached and asked about his overall involvement in the high school selection process, he stated,

Well I have been to both [meetings] that we held in September and October. We give out information, the books, give them dates, and we also meet with the parents of the students assigned to us. I have also met with them by appointments. I do not get paid for it but it is a good thing.

Although Rafael was a new member at the school, he did not feel overwhelmed by his role in high school selection: "Not really, or maybe not yet, hahahaha, I hope I don't jinx it. The coordinator and the principal really do guide me and they help me if I have questions."

According to Rafael, he understood that his role was to try and explain the high school selection process and answer questions parents might have about the process or specific schools. His role was explained to him by the Principal at the beginning of the year. Rafael remarked,

The principal at the beginning of the year explained to me that he would need my help in high school admissions. I was very happy to help because I think it is very important but I had never done this at all. I go to the information sessions after school; I also have a group of four students that I guide and I maintain contact with the parents. Basically, I am their counselor with the help of the parent

coordinator and the principal [...] My job was to help them meet all the deadlines, translate, and help them apply to the public schools in New York.

Rafael was recruited for the role because of his ability to interact with parents in Spanish.

When asked about his interactions with parents in Spanish, he answered,

That is a tough one, I speak Spanish but it is not as good as the coordinator's or the principal. They actually have the parents who really speak very little English. I have a parent who speaks some English and we manage but if I run into problems, I go to them for help.

Although Rafael's confidence in his Spanish-speaking abilities seemed low, he did have one parent who had difficulties with the English language assigned to his group. His ability to interact with parents in Spanish made him a great asset to the school.

Furthermore, Rafael was an eighth grade teacher, which meant parents had access to him throughout the academic school year. Although Rafael's confidence in his Spanish speaking seemed low, he mentioned that he could rely on the principal and the parent coordinator.

Findings revealed that Angie, the parent coordinator, was not only a resource for Rafael but a strong stakeholder and source of support for the parents and the school. She has been with the school for over 8 years. Born and raised in South America, Angie has strong ties to the school community. In charge of many school activities, she also helps parents with different tasks apart from high school selections. When asked what parents come in for help with, she stated,

It depends, sometimes for translations, filling out paperwork, high school applications. In general, they come in for everything, since I have been here a

long time, they feel confident in asking me for help. Don't get me wrong I get very tired but it's almost like helping family.

She also spoke about the task of helping parents who do not speak English and how the school meets their needs: "Well, in this case we actually split the kids and parents between the principal and myself. We offer to share all the information in Spanish since we are both fluent speakers." Angie's role extends beyond her job description, as in the PowerPoint she was described as the second in command with regard to school selection. Always present and willing to help, Angie's presence was visible when the Catholic school's fair took place at the Cross School. I observed her offering translation services to families, explaining the enrollment process, and interacting with visiting high school staff.

As a visible school staff member, parents described Angie as a source of help and guidance. With the principal at times occupied, most parents saw her as their main point of contact when it came to help in Spanish. Angel, a father of two, has a child enrolled in the Cross School. Besides being a parent of two children in the school, he was also an employee of the parish. His perspective comes from a place of years of interaction with the school community and surrounding community. His interaction with Angie was daily, and his experience with Angie in regard to school selection verified what many parents stated and what I observed. Angel indicated, "The secretary was able to translate for parents and I had a few questions that I asked her after the meeting." Although Angel has the ability to speak some English, he stated, "I do [speak some English] but it is not at a good level, more like everyday things. I prefer to speak 'Christiano.'" Angel used the term "Christiano" to explain his preference for speaking in everyday Spanish. This term

is used by many members of the Latin American community. His preference to speak Spanish has always been well received by the school.

### ***The Epiphany School Meeting Experience***

The Epiphany School also held two meetings, one in the month of September and another one in the month of October, as noted in the school's calendar. The information session was led by the principal, the librarian, and the secretary. The principal of the Epiphany School, Christina, was a seasoned school leader with ample experience both in the public and Catholic school system. Her approach to the high school selection process was similar to that of the Cross School by having other members assist parents. The librarian and the secretary were also part of the process to assist parents of eighth graders through the process. Christina noted that both the librarian and the secretary spoke Spanish and acted as guides for parents through the application process. According to Christina, "Between all three of us, we offered parents help with the process." Christina admitted that her Spanish was not very good but stressed the importance of the other two members, as they speak fluent Spanish. Christina stated, "Parents know them and trust them. They see them every day so if they have a question in Spanish, they will approach them. It is the culture of the school."

The information given to the parents was similar to that given by the Cross School. Christina indicated that parents were given the public high school directory and the Catholic high school booklet. During the September meeting, the presenters spoke about deadlines, scholarships for Catholic schools, the Catholic high school admissions exam, test preparation programs, the process of applying to public schools, and specialized public high schools. Christina mentioned the meeting took place in the library

and some refreshments were offered, it should be noted that I was not present at this meeting. Although there was not 100% attendance of parents of eighth graders, there was a strong attendance rate, with the majority of parents attending.

The Epiphany School did not make it mandatory to apply to public schools but did stress the importance of looking at the public schools, as some of them had good programs. Christina stated, “What we wanted was for parents to be informed on all of their options both in the Catholic and public school system.” Parents from the Epiphany School appreciated the efforts of the school leader and secretary in the high school selection process. Yanina, a parent of an eighth grader, described the September meeting as “positive and good.” Her interaction with the school has always been positive, as she always gets information about events. Another parent, Wendy, described her experience at the September meeting as “informative” and confirmed the content of the September meeting by stating, “They told me about the process and the applications and scholarship.” Gloria added to the general approval from parents of the September meeting by opining, “The school did a good job and informed us of everything we needed to do.”

As the school continued through the selection process, Christina noted that the school leaders notified parents that they would try to access the “MySchools” application to help them with the public high school selection. Yet, by the month of October, the school still had no access and began to communicate with parents on where to obtain help with the public high school application. According to Christina, “We told parents to assist to the Welcome Center. Felt bad because the secretary, the librarian, and myself wanted to help parents with all the parts of the application process.”

### ***Key Staff at the Epiphany School***

Despite the setback with regard to not having access to the “MySchools” application, parents appreciated the efforts made by the school as staff tried to help them gain access, specifically the efforts made by the secretary of the school. Parents like Ana, a Dominican mother of two, held that the school secretary went beyond her role by translating and helping the school stay in communication with parents. When asked about how the school communicates with her about her children’s education, she mentioned the secretary:

The Epiphany School is good they send out information every day, about the work, about the events. They like to keep us informed of everything. If I don’t understand something, they are able to translate it or if not, the secretary is able to help us. She is really nice.

When asked more about the school secretary, she mentioned “She is amazing, she knows the whole school, knows everybody and is always ready to help us. Some teachers do not speak Spanish but she can translate.” Another mother, Mirna, also highlighted the help of the school secretary at the Epiphany School. Coming from a South American country and a former practicing dentist (she does not practice here in the United states), she attempts to be involved in her child’s education as best as she can, considering her complicated job schedule. When asked about her interaction with the school, Mirna stated, “Well, my daughter’s teacher does not speak Spanish but she tries. When we have gone to speak with her, the Secretary usually helps us with this. She translates or sometimes she will speak on our behalf.” When prompted about her trust in the school secretary, she said, “Yes, she is a very honest woman.”



Wendy, a parent from the Dominican Republic, mentioned how the secretary not only served as a liaison between the teachers and the Spanish-speaking parents but also between the principal and Spanish-speaking parents. When prompted about her interactions at school with staff members, she mentioned,

Some teachers do [speak Spanish] others don't but they are all nice. The principal does not speak Spanish but the secretary helps her. I remember the first day she was shaking kids' hands and welcoming parents. I went and said something in Spanish and she looked at me so lost. She laughed and called the secretary over. Very nice woman but not one pinch of Spanish.

The parents held in high regard the attention provided by the school, through the principal, the secretary, and the librarian. The secretary's role within the high school selection process was significant, as parents relied on her for advice and translations. This in turn spoke to parents finding a way through the maze of high school selection. Others unfortunately simply turned away from the process; this aspect will be discussed later on in this chapter.

My observations, analysis of the interviews, and document analysis showed that the school staff was involved in the high school selection process. Furthermore, parents viewed the parent coordinator at the Cross School and secretary at the Epiphany School as individuals who had a substantial amount of power when acting as a liaison, translator, and facilitator within the school selection process or between Spanish-speaking parents' and school stakeholders. With regard to the efforts made by the schools to help parents, both the Cross and Epiphany Schools had a plan in motion, although it was apparent that they experienced some setbacks, as signaled by the questions asked by the parents about

the public schools' online processes. The emotions displayed in the second meeting by parents of the Cross School also showcased their frustration at the inability of the Cross School to help them, as the school did not have access to the "MySchools" application. Yet, the involvement of staff members and school leaders within the school selection process showcased the personal attention parents received during this process. The parents of the Epiphany School were also disappointed with the school's lack of access to the "MySchools" application. Parents like Wendy expressed that at one point she was interested in public schools but "I needed help and I could not get it at the school."

The parents appreciated the personal attention given by both schools, yet it raised the subtheme of school leaders as influences on the parents' school choices. It should also be noted no outside members from the Archdiocese of New York or the NYC DOE assisted at the September and October meetings.

### ***School Members as Influences***

The second subtheme to emerge was school members as influences within the high school selection process. The previous subtheme revealed that the parent coordinator at the Cross School and the secretary at the Epiphany School were seen as important individuals who translated, advised, and guided parents throughout the process. My observations and the interviews revealed that these school members can also influence the parents' decisions. The data I analyzed showed that parents saw the ability to speak their language, Spanish, as a positive that allowed for direct interaction. Both school members and a few parents reported that the school members gave advice that allowed parents to lean toward making a particular choice, in most cases selecting Catholic schools as opposed to public. The Epiphany School leader placed emphasis on a

particular type of public school, specialized public high schools, such as LaGuardia High School.

Wendy, a parent of an eighth grade student at the Epiphany School, shared her experience and interaction with the school's secretary. According to Wendy, the secretary discouraged her from applying to public schools, although the school leader had encouraged parents to look at public schools. She stated, "No [public] were not an option, I had a conversation with the secretary and she told me not to listen to the principal about applying to public schools." Other parents from the Epiphany School also had the same experience.

Christina, the Epiphany School leader, echoed that parents should have all the information available to make a good choice but later on revealed her preference for Catholic schools or specialized public high schools:

See schools are different and as far I can see the parents want Catholic schools and although I don't tell them great, I still say that it was a good choice. Now, if we speak about public schools, specialized schools are different and ultimately, they are chosen by some of our parents. In that case I might say great but still I want them to go with what they want. That is why I did not make it mandatory to apply to public schools.

The Epiphany School did not mandate parents to apply to public schools, but the school leader does show preferences and a change in vocabulary when speaking about specialized public schools. Perhaps some parents did not feel the influence, but it was felt among the Spanish-speaking parents who received advice from the school secretary.

Unlike the Epiphany School, the Cross School mandated that parents to apply to public schools. Yulissa, a parent of two students enrolled at the Cross School, came from a Caribbean country. Her ability to interact with the school at times was difficult, as she was a full-time employee, but she was able to attend the informational meetings. She was assigned to work with the principal in the high school selection process, and their interactions shifted her perspective about public school and her final considerations. She stated, “In the beginning I was going to only consider Catholic schools but the principal spoke about the public schools in a good way. After that I started getting very interested and looked into it.” In the end, Yulissa selected public schools as her primary destination for her child. The parents that I interviewed from the Cross School revealed that the principal, the parent coordinator, and the teachers often spoke highly of the public schools.

The parent coordinator of the Cross School, Angie, affirmed her preference for certain schools as she spoke to parents. She admitted, “Hmm, yes, I am not going to lie I have several schools that I always try to get our kids to go to. I know the schools and I try to tell parents about them.” When asked if she promoted both Catholic and public schools, she stated, “No, only Catholic, although this year the principal is making a push also for public schools and I am also recommending some public schools.” I followed up on this statement with questions about her perception of public schools, as her supervisor was making a “push” for public schools. Angie’s perception of public schools did not allow her to fully recommend public schools. She remarked that she felt that way “not because the schools are bad only but because of the student’s interest or fears. I know in public schools there are some schools that are not too good.” When asked if she could

share the names of some Catholic high schools, she respectfully declined to share.

Although Angie did not share the names, she did mention the difference in help with regard to Catholic schools. She also allowed for a glimpse into the personal help Spanish-speaking parents received. She stated, “On certain occasions we will speak on their behalf to schools. This is mostly about Catholic schools and not public.”

Rafael, on the other hand, personally highlighted his support for public schools and the reasons behind it. He also gave the names of specific schools he promotes among his parents:

Oh, this is about public schools, I try to promote certain public schools but the questions that come up I sometimes do not know. For Catholic schools they mostly know what they want, at least my parents do, so it is easier[...] I really like to promote Beacon and Millennium high school; I think those schools have the right idea and I walk by them sometimes. Kids seem to be happy and are having fun. So why not try to see if the parents would like to consider them.

Rafael also gave parents his perspectives on charter schools. Although not willing to mention which charter school or organization he had worked for, he did give me reasons for why some charter schools might not benefit his students. He stated, “Well, if our kids go to a charter school, if it’s like the one I worked for, they will be fine, the worry I would have is the time they get to explore themselves as individuals.”

The perspectives shared by both Angie and Rafael confirmed my observations of the parent informational meetings. The Cross School had many slides detailing the importance and the specific steps to apply for public schools. Furthermore, the

PowerPoint presentation mentioned that it was mandatory for parents to apply to the public schools as a safety measure.

All the interviewed parents were non-English speakers or low-level English speakers. My analysis of the interviews, documents, and observations revealed that school staff and leaders acted as influences on the parents' perspectives, judgments, and decisions. Lastly, the findings also revealed that the influence from different staff members discouraged or encouraged the consideration of public schools. Although the notion of considering "what is best for the child" was present in these conversations, which parents considered the most important aspect of the conversations with school staff.

## **Theme 2: Experiences at Organized Events**

The second theme that emerged out of the analysis of the data collected was about the experiences of non-English-speaking parents at organized events. The parents and school staff interviewed shared their experiences with high school fairs in the public and Catholic school system. My observations and analysis of interviews showed the difference between Catholic high school fairs and public school fairs. Parents described varying experiences at the public school fairs, while they perceived the Catholic school fairs as catering to their interests. The first subtheme that emerged was the perception and influence of Catholic and public school fairs, and the second subtheme was accessibility to translation services. The two subthemes reveal the key differences between the Catholic school and public school fairs. Furthermore, my analysis of the data indicated how translation services are at the center of some experiences and can determine interest and follow through or result in discouragement.

### *The Perception and Influence of Catholic and Public School Fairs*

The first subtheme to emerge was the perception and influence of Catholic and public school fairs among non-English-speaking Latino parents. Furthermore, the ability for Catholic high schools to recruit from within the Catholic middle schools was also highlighted. Several Catholic high schools visited both the Cross and Epiphany Catholic middle schools. They set up tables with different reading materials for the parents to take with them. The event took place for three hours and in the afternoon during the school day. In addition, the Epiphany School leader revealed that several schools made additional visits to the school to speak to eighth graders about their high school choice. Students in eighth grade were allowed to meet their parents/guardians and enter the auditorium to chat with the high school representatives.

The parents of eighth grade students at the Cross School described positive experiences at the Catholic school fair held at the school. They pointed to the ease of having all the information in one place. Sara, a grandmother in her 70s, was in charge of her grandchild's education, along with the child's father. According to her, she was the one who was mostly involved in her grandchild's school activities, as her son worked. She liked the fact that there "was always someone there to help me." When asked about her experience at the Catholic high school fair at the Cross School, Sara stated,

It was very nice; many Catholic schools were there and the people there were able to answer questions. They gave us information and invited us to visit the schools.

It was not crowded, the [Cross] school made sure to give us good time slots.

Sara pointed out that she felt at ease because the parent coordinator was there to help if necessary, although she did not need her because "the Catholic high school people were

always willing to help.” Sara’s experience was not unique, as all the parents I interviewed from the Cross School shared that they had a positive experience at the Catholic school fair. Carla, another grandmother in charge of her grandchild’s education, shared, “For the Catholic schools, I did and I loved the one they did at the school. It was so easy and relaxed.” My observations confirmed the staff’s attendance and the interactions between parents and the Catholic high school representatives.

During the fair at the Cross School, the parent coordinator, the principal, and Rafael were in attendance to help the students, parents, and visiting high school representatives. The high school fair was organized in advance, as it appeared in the yearly school calendar. Angie, the parent coordinator, mentioned that the event was held yearly and that the Cross School “ask[s] the schools to present to the students and ask them about their interests.” When queried about public schools visiting the Cross School, Angie responded that the Cross School has “not held a fair for them at all in the school.” When asked why, she stated, “I actually do not know but none of the principals has ever tried.” I observed Angie collecting reading material from each of the school representatives and interacting with parents and students.

As the Catholic high schools’ representatives interacted with parents, students, and other members of the family, I had the opportunity to gaze at the reading material found on the tables. The information within the pamphlets, brochures, and pamphlets was divided into sections, and in some cases the amount of information was lengthy. Scholarships, deadlines, uniforms, extracurriculars activities, campus information, open house dates were among the information found in the brochures. One high school in particular highlighted its partnership with St. John’s University. Furthermore, the



brochures provided to parents were all printed on glossy material and had the school colors, logo, name, and a picture of the campus or student body on the front cover. Some schools had the information available in Spanish, and others did not, but they advertised that parents could call and request to receive the information in Spanish. During the fair, the Catholic high schools handed out trinkets, such as pens, card holders for phones, and keychains.

Conversation between the school representatives and the Spanish-speaking parents was visible with and without the help of Rafael or Angie. All the parents I interviewed expressed appreciation for the ability to attend the Catholic high school fair at their own school. They all seemed happy to be able to communicate in their language and feel comfortable interacting with support. Furthermore, the parents were informed by their school leaders of other Catholic school fairs occurring at other Catholic middle schools. This information was given to school leaders by the central office of Catholic school in the Archdiocese of New York. If parents missed the opportunity at their own school, they could go to a fair at another Catholic middle school to access the information.

The experiences shared by parents of the Cross School at the Catholic School fair were positive, but their reviews of the public school fairs were mixed. The NYC DOE organized public school fairs by borough. Teresa, whose eldest child was in eighth grade at the Cross School, did not have a good experience at the public school fairs. She stated,

I was unhappy with the public school process. I felt like one in a million parents.

It was just too complicated and in the Catholic schools it was just simple[...] The public-school fair was just something that I could not really understand. I had to

go with my husband and some schools had people who spoke Spanish, others did not. It was so different than the Catholic schools.

Ultimately, Teresa was discouraged by this interaction at the public school fair. Another Cross School parent of an eighth grader, Ana, had previous experience with the public school fairs. Her eldest child was in a public school and had to go through the process two years ago. She admitted there has been a change for the better in the fairs themselves, which had formerly been even bigger and more overwhelming. She remarked, “[I] went to the public schools’ fair, they were smaller than I remember but same thing. They give you papers, you are allowed to ask questions, see pictures. It was good, and my son made a choice based on the information.”

The size of the public school fairs was the main focus point for many parents, who saw this as a negative aspect. Vicente, a father of two children enrolled at the Cross School, came from a country in South America. His experience at the public school fair brought up memories of a market, but not in a positive way. He stated,

Yes, me and my wife attended the high school fair, it was a crazy place, although they tell me it used to be worse. I thought I was back in [my hometown] market.

We spoke to some people and some schools but it was difficult to get a sense of what the school was like.

Other parents echoed that the inability to interact in a manner that was intimate and personal was a reason for their negative experiences. Carla noted that her previous experience with public schools deterred her from even attending the public school fairs and ultimately from following through with the application process.

Parents of the Cross School were not alone in these experiences, as the parents of the Epiphany School expressed similar impressions. They also offered mixed reviews of the public school fairs but positive reviews of the Catholic School fairs. Yanina, a parent of the Epiphany School, described the Catholic School fair held at the Epiphany School as “much more organized and welcoming.” She continued, “It was like they had something for us.” Wendy also described her experience at the fair as a good one. She stated, “It was very nice and organized. I was able to ask all my questions and they gave me all the information.” Angel, another parent of an eighth grader, spoke about being able to communicate in Spanish with Catholic school representatives. He observed, “The Catholic schools gave us information in English and Spanish. A few spoke Spanish.” The overall interaction at the Catholic school fair at the Epiphany School was good. Christina confirmed this by expressing that the parents of the Epiphany School “had a great time at the fair.”

The fair at the Epiphany School took place on the same day as in the Cross School. The set up was the same, in the auditorium with banners, reading material, and small school memorabilia available for parents and students. According to Christina, the secretary and the librarian were available for parents if they required help with translation. Christina was also present during the high school fair, mostly interacting with school representatives and with parents.

The experience of the Epiphany School parents at the Catholic school fair was good, but, once again, their reviews of the public school fairs were ambivalent. Yanina was vocal about her mixed experience at the public school fair. Her experience was positive, but not in a way she would have expected:

Public schools varied. Some were amazing others were not so good and we just wanted to leave[...] It was like a market in Cuenca, so many schools, noisy at times. I didn't get a good feel but I knew who I was there to look at. We had a good experience. They gave us information in Spanish and for some of the schools we visited we spoke with someone in Spanish.

Angel shared the mixed experience at public schools, but the biggest difference were his interactions with specialized schools: "The specialized schools gave us information in both languages. When we went to the big fair it was different, some spoke Spanish others did not. They gave us pamphlets and propaganda; they all looked the same." Although his experience with specialized schools was positive, it did not generalize to all public schools at the fair.

The experiences shared by the parents from both the Cross and Epiphany Schools at the public school fairs were similar in the sense that they were mixed. My observations supported their expressed perspectives of public school fairs. The public school fair I attended was organized exclusively for the borough of Manhattan, with different schools from the borough setting up reading materials and signage and with school staff/officials and, in some cases, current students present. It occurred on both Saturday and Sunday one weekend, from 10 AM to 3 PM. For the fall for 2019, the NYC DOE scheduled two weekends for high school fairs in Manhattan, one in September and one in October. As parents entered the October fair on Saturday, they encountered guides and instructions on what to do and where to go. They then proceeded to walk up to schools' tables, some of which had smaller crowds than others. Schools highlighted different strengths, such as college admissions, sports programs, extracurricular activities, accelerated courses, and

important partnerships with various organizations. Parents navigated the displays and made several stops; on some occasions, they took the time to ask questions and hold conversation, but, on others, they simply took some literature and kept walking. Some schools had banners in their school colors. Some of the current students also wore the schools' colors. The height of the fair was between 11:30 AM and 1 PM, during which period I could see schools struggling to attend to each parent they received; several schools had large crowds of families, more than the schools could handle. At times, I saw and heard students translating for their parents and taking the lead in interacting with school members. Among the written materials accessible to parents, there were flyers and brochures with information about the schools' locations, offerings, schedules, partnerships, programs, and special courses. Several schools offered the information in different languages, including Spanish, but not all. The schools' mascots, insignias, or names were broadly visible within the flyers and brochures. Some schools offered trinkets to the parents who approached them and asked questions.

My analysis of the data collected from documents, observations, and interviews revealed a difference in the manner Catholic schools and public schools held fairs. Furthermore, the access Catholic high schools had to Catholic middle schools was not shared by public schools. Non-English-speaking Latino parents had a positive and personal experience at the Catholic high school fairs, while their experiences were mixed when visiting the public school fairs. Both Catholic and public schools had information available for parents, yet the quality of the physical material distributed by the Catholic schools was greater than that of the public schools. The trinkets offered to parents by both Catholic and public schools were mostly comparable, showcasing the

logos and names of the schools. Catholic schools advertised that help was available in other languages; some public schools did so too, but not all. The NYC DOE did advertise help in all languages.

### *Accessibility to Translation Services*

The second subtheme that emerged was accessibility to translation services for parents during the process of high school selection. My own observations and analysis of interviews revealed some of the experiences parents had in finding access to translation in Spanish. All parents interviewed from both the Cross and Epiphany Schools found translation services available in some way at the Catholic school fairs held at their respective Catholic middle schools. Marcos, a parent previously discussed, worked as a baker, and, although he has been in the country for several years, his English has developed slowly. He spoke about how the school caters to Spanish speakers at meetings: “The information is always in Spanish and when we have meetings the parent coordinator and the principal always speak in Spanish.” His experience with the school and how the staff interacted with him was positive. He valued even the effort shown by some of the staff members. He continued on to say, “The teachers are welcoming and the office is actually really nice so when I go for something, I am always able to speak Spanish. Some of the teachers do not speak Spanish but they still try or we get one of the helpers to translate.”

When speaking about his experience at the different high school fairs, he drew a distinct difference between the Catholic and public school fairs. He was accompanied by his daughter to the Catholic school fair, where he was able to interact in Spanish at different times. He shared, “When we went to the fair of Catholic schools at the [middle]

school, the materials were in English but the people there spoke Spanish so they were very helpful.” When he spoke of his experience at the public school fairs, he explained that the school representatives were helpful, but their ability to communicate in Spanish and provide Spanish materials varied. He stated,

When we went to the high school fair for public schools it was good but some schools had information in Spanish but no one spoke Spanish. There were schools with no information in Spanish, there were others that had Spanish information and were able to explain many things.

Marcos later shared that there were interactions between school representatives and him or his daughter that made him feel uncomfortable. He divulged, “When I went to the public school fair it was intimidating even with my daughter. Sometimes they would speak to her in English but as parents we want to know what is going on. When they spoke to us in Spanish it was fine.” Overall, the information Marcos received was useful, and he explained that it was enough to make a decision.

Unlike Marcos, Ana’s experience at the public school fairs was entirely positive. She indicated that they were smaller than they used to be, although still larger than the Catholic school fairs, and that “they give you papers, you are allowed to ask questions, see pictures. It was good, and my son made a choice based on the information.” Marcos’s and Ana’s experiences at the public school fairs gave them enough information in Spanish to make an informed decision.

However, other parents shared more of a negative experience. Teresa did not only attend the Catholic school fairs but also to their open house events. When comparing the two, there was a distinct difference in the availability of translation services. She shared,

From the Catholic schools, the schools provided me with a translator and I had my daughter. It was easy. I called some public schools and they were helpful in Spanish but in the fairs I felt lost. I started the process and it was so complicated, then the school fair was just something that I could not really understand. I had to go with my husband and some schools had people who spoke Spanish, others did not. It was so different than the Catholic schools. After all these things I gave up. Teresa's comparisons favor her experience with the Catholic schools, and, although some public schools did give her information in Spanish, it did not measure up to her experience with the Catholic schools.

Many parents shared the frustration expressed by Teresa and felt that the organization and translation services offered by the public schools did not match those offered by the Catholic schools. Although they mentioned that at several times they were reminded of information available in Spanish, that was just not the case for all public schools. The experiences shared by the Spanish-speaking parents of eighth graders at the Cross School are supported by the experiences of the Spanish-speaking parents of eighth graders at the Epiphany School. Yanina was not new to the public school system in the United States, as her daughter had previously been enrolled in the North Carolina public school system prior to moving to New York. Her experience was similar to Teresa's with regard to the public school fairs. Yet, she claimed that she knew what school she was visiting, and that helped her. Yanina did go on to mention that she was able to communicate in Spanish with some schools. She stated, "They gave us information in Spanish and for some of the schools we visited we spoke with someone in Spanish."



Interviews and observations revealed that some materials produced by schools and available for parents had a Spanish translation, but not by all. The NYC DOE high school directory was distributed to parents during the first informational session at both the Cross and Epiphany Schools. The book listed all the schools in the five boroughs of Manhattan. It gave the reader important information on the schools, including graduation rates, special programs offered, extracurricular activities, nearby transportation, and academic performance data, among other information. The booklet also included information on how to apply, eligibility, high school fairs, and a section on “meeting your needs,” which addressed language services, special education services, and testing accommodations, among other services. According to my observations, the parents did not have access to a physical copy of the high school directory in Spanish. In the directory, the NYC DOE indicated that “translations of this directory are available at middle schools, Family Welcome Centers, and online.”

When I asked Angie about whether the book was available in Spanish, she replied, “Sadly no, the Catholic schools and public schools’ books are not in Spanish, although I know you could go online and get the translated version but that is why we try to help our parents here at the school.” Rafael made a similar comment, and he proceeded to discuss the lack of other information that parents ask about. He stated,

I try to explain how the process works in public and Catholic schools and try to focus on what best fits their children. It’s tough because they have so many questions and some of the information they ask is not in the book. The book is ok but it doesn’t tell parents a lot of things that I don’t know if they can show. Stuff about the neighborhood, safety, fights, and other stuff. The parent that I

mentioned, has questions that she would like in Spanish but the book is not in Spanish.

The situation was the same at the Epiphany School, as Christina also shared that the parents of the Epiphany School did not receive a Spanish version of the NYC DOE public high school directory. All parents, from both schools, also mentioned the absence of a physical translation of the school directory. My observations of the September meeting at the Cross School, analysis of the PowerPoint presentation, and statements by the Cross School principal and by Christina of the Epiphany School showed that they told parents that the translation of the school directory was available online, as the schools had not received any of the promised physical copies from the NYC DOE. Parents like Teresa spoke to this fact as she stated, “The book we got from the school about public schools was in English and they said to go on the internet for the Spanish version. I called some public schools and they were helpful in Spanish.” Lastly, a brochure distributed by the NYC DOE and available at different schools, described that all the information was available to parents in different languages. It also provided clear guidance that translation services were available upon request.

This inconsistent availability of translated materials reflected some of the parents’ experiences at the fairs and open house events, as they encountered some school representatives who spoke Spanish and were able to translate. However, this was not the experience of all parents, as others reported not having someone with whom to communicate in Spanish. Yanina claimed, “When my daughter translated for someone, I felt bad because it should not be like this here in New York.” Teresa also described

problems with translations: “I had to go with my husband and some schools had people who spoke Spanish, others did not.”

The overall analysis of documents, observations, and interviews revealed differences between the Catholic high school fairs and public school fairs with regard to translation services. Parents had an overall positive experience with the translation services offered by the Catholic high schools. Although the materials were not always available in Spanish, there was a person who spoke Spanish or was able to translate. When speaking about public school fairs, the experiences were mixed, with some parents able to access translation services or encountering someone who spoke Spanish, while others did not have the same luck and had to rely on family members or simply move along. In regard to translated materials, both the Catholic school system and the public school system varied. The public high school directory was an item that was not physically available in Spanish, which contradicted the information found within the high school directory itself with regard to translations being available at middle schools. The offer of translation services by the NYC DOE was found by some but not all non-English-speaking Latino parents. It should be mentioned that this varied depending on what schools they visited. Ultimately, translated written material and accessibility to translation services were important factors for parents who were involved in the high school selection process.

### **Theme 3: Barriers to Discussing Selection**

The third theme that emerged out of the interviews, observations, and document analysis was barriers to engage in the selection conversation. Parent interviews and the documents I analyzed revealed several factors that presented difficulties to parents and

school officials in engaging and helping in the school selection process. Barriers included access to information, age of the participants, and trouble getting help outside the school. The first subtheme that emerged was discouragement due to technological challenges. The age of certain parents/guardians became an important factor when speaking about the role of technology in the public high school selection process. The second subtheme that emerged was the challenge of getting help. These two subthemes presented several factors within them, such as age of the guardian, lack of resources, and open hours of operation. The two subthemes also interconnected, due to the role of technology in the process.

### ***Discouragement Due to Technological Challenges***

The first subtheme that emerged spoke to the required use of technology by parents engaging in the NYC DOE high school selection process. Parents had to access a web-based application, “MySchools,” to begin their process and select the schools they would like their children to possibly attend the next year. To the parents of the Cross and Epiphany Schools, this came as a surprise, since they had not dealt with this situation before.

Some parents from the Cross School were considering public education for their children for various reasons. The “principal spoke good things about them,” “they are not all bad,” and “tuition is high” were among the reasons why some parents were exploring public schools. Yet, when they discovered that technology was part of the application process, they turned to the school for help. Unfortunately, the Cross School did not have access to this system, which meant the parents had to explore other ways to get help. Illustrating this challenge with technology, Vicente shared, “We did or try [at least], we

went to the fairs and even tried the process but then when it got difficult and they said stuff about codes, apps, websites, I said you know what let us just continue with Catholic schools.” Vicente was not alone as his experience. Others shared similar frustrations. Teresa was another parent who was discouraged by the process. Although receiving options from the principal and open to the possibilities of public schools, when having to deal with the technological aspect and receiving no help from the school, she said “let’s just go with what works.” The experiences of parents at the Cross School led to them to quit the public school application process.

Nevertheless, in some cases, parents found a way to access help. Yulissa’s experience began the same way but ultimately ended differently. She also found the technological aspect of the public school application difficult when compared to the Catholic schools’ application. She stated,

Ufff, the computer and the phone application for the public schools was a headache. I am glad the school helped me because if not I would have not continued. Catholic schools is easier but the public schools is so difficult. I don’t know.

Unlike the rest of the parents, Yulissa was able to find a way to continue with the application process to public schools. She sought out the help of the school, but she had to take a day off from work. She continued to say,

When this was going on, I was able to take one day off and take my phone to the school. I had to wait but the secretary was able to help me. At one point the principal came over and also helped. That is the only way I learned.

Some parents were able to access help, but not at the school. Marcos also found the process “tricky” but was able to go to the NYC DOE-sponsored Welcome Center to get help and finalize the process. Yet, when asked about other parents and their ability to look for help outside of the school, he stated, “Not all, some had a tough time and others are not going to public.”

The experiences the parents shared supported my observations at the Cross School and analysis of important electronic correspondences, namely those that showed exchanges between the school and the NYC DOE. Statements made by Angie also reflected the lack of access to the public school application online to help non-English-speaking Latino parents. During the September information meeting at the Cross School, parents were informed that the school was attempting to gain access to the web-based application to assist them during the process, since the school was making it mandatory to apply to the NYC DOE high schools. However, the school never gained access to this system. Angie indicated the school had previously had access to the system, but somehow the access was disrupted, and, for some reason, the school was not able to restore it. She disclosed,

Before we had access to the system and we were able to go and do the process with the parents here in our school. For our Spanish-speaking parents, it was comfortable and also a good way to ask questions. We now have no access to this, although I know we requested access and did not get it. The parents are in charge and we try to help but there is only so much we can do. In the Catholic school process, we can offer a lot more help.

Analysis of several documents revealed that the school made multiple attempts to request access to the system by contacting the NYC DOE via email. Each time, the officials received an automated response from the High School Enrollment Office of the NYC DOE. On several occasions, someone from the NYC DOE High School Enrollment office contacted the school on various topics, which included creating an account for “MySchools,” attempting to solve login issues, attempting to solve password confusion, and browser usage. The response from the school was almost immediate to each inquiry. Analyzing the exchanges, it is noticeable that each time a different person from the NYC DOE contacted the school on the same matter. Ultimately, the school was never able to access the “MySchools” system. Although the “MySchools” application is meant for parents, school staff also typically has access to this system as a way to assist parents with the process. The Cross School was attempting to gain access to the “MySchools” application to help all parents who were unfamiliar with this application. The last email from the NYC DOE enrollment office came a month after the last communication from the Cross School. By that time, the Cross School had already emailed out a letter to parents letting them know that staff would be unable to assist them beyond advisement, as they did not have access to the “MySchools” account. The letter also mentioned that parents could receive help in the process at the nearest NYC DOE Welcome Center. The letter noted the address and phone number for the nearest Welcome Center.

Angel, a parent at the Epiphany School, followed through with the application process but with a focus on NYC DOE specialized schools. He was able to employ the help of his eldest son in order to navigate the public school system’s application process. When asked if the school helped, he replied, “No, they said they couldn’t because we had

to do everything.” Christina, the Epiphany School leader, was able to guide some parents to the DOE-sponsored Welcome Center, as the school also did not have access to the “MySchools” application. Christina mentioned that she did not know of the web-based system until she arrived at the school, and, although she attempted to get access to the system, she could not. Ultimately, she simply directed parents to go to the Welcome Center for assistance. She stated, “We wanted to help them but found ourselves looking at a grim picture. No access to the application, no way of helping them. We could only translate. It was tough.” Christina’s statements detailed how the Epiphany School could translate if parents came to them with the application on their phone or knew how to get in.

The vast majority of parents interviewed experienced difficulties with the technology aspect of the public school system’s application process. Not being able to find help at their respective Catholic middle schools and running out of time, they were discouraged from continuing the process. Yet, two parents/guardians stand out when analyzing the interviews, both from the Cross School. The first is Carla, an Ecuadorian grandmother of two, one who was in college while her other grandchild was enrolled in eighth grade at the Cross School. In her early 70s, she was a working grandmother, as she sold “Ayacas” (a corn cake wrapped in a banana leaf) every weekday in front of a supermarket. She helped out in the house as best she could, as her daughter was a single parent who worked six days a week. Carla was the one who attended events at school and was on top of her grandchild’s education. When asked about the public school process, she mentioned that she lied about finalizing the process. When describing her experience in public school applications, she stated,



We had to begin to apply, because the school told us we had to just in case. I like the principal so I actually also did it for him but when I found out how we had to do things to apply, I stopped. I went to the school once to get help to start the application but the school could not help me. They told me they did not have access to some system. I told them it's ok that I would try on my own, but I did not. I knew what I wanted.

To follow up, I asked Carla what was difficult with the process. She replied, "Two things, the book with the school and we had to apply on the internet." When I inquired if she knew there was a center where she could get help, she continued, "Yeah, that's what the school told me but you know, when it's this difficult it's not meant to be. I am old but I still have push. The whole internet thing was not for me. If my school cannot help me then it is not worth it."

Carla was not alone in this situation as there was another grandmother, Sara, who served as guardian to her two grandchildren enrolled in fifth and eighth grade. Also, in her 70s, Sara helped out her son in the raising of his two kids. Because her son was a single father, Sara was happily tasked with representing her grandchildren at school. Her experience with public schools was mixed, as her own children had attended public schools. She was thankful for the education they received, although her interactions with the teachers had not always been positive. Her two grandchildren had also begun their education in public schools when they attended kindergarten. When speaking about the public school application process, she mentioned that she did not follow through with any fairs or open houses. She was not really interested in going back to public schools, and

the final discouragement came after finding out she had to “apply over the internet.”

When asked about the school helping, Sara replied,

Oh no, they actually were [willing to help] but they couldn’t. The principal said that the school was not given access to do it for us. So, I asked the parent coordinator to see if this was true. She said it was and that she could help me to translate or maybe do it together but at that point I said that’s too much.

Both Sara and Carla recognized that the Cross School was willing to help, but the school did not have access, and the two grandmothers were not willing to go through the process of going somewhere else for help. The web-based application process discouraged them from applying, as it did with other parents.

Analysis of documents and interviews revealed the discouragement felt by parents, as they saw the web-based application process as something “more” that they had to do. They sought help from their schools, but with the schools not having access, they felt even more discouraged. A few parents found a way to get help with the web-based application from family members or the Welcome Center.

### ***The Trouble of Getting Help***

The second subtheme, the trouble of getting help, emerged out of my observations and analysis of interviews and documents. Although the staff at the Cross and Epiphany Schools was not always able to help, there were other ways to obtain assistance. My analysis of the documents revealed the advertisement of the NYC DOE Welcome Center as the place to get help. The NYC DOE high school directory and website both advertised the Welcome Center as a place where parents can get assistance with enrollment. The NYC DOE website mentioned to contact the Welcome Center if they have questions or

need help. Based on all these Welcome Center mentions, it was logical to think that the Welcome Center could help parents with the application process.

The NYC DOE website also cited that students should “talk to [their] school counselor to decide which 12 programs to include on [their] application.” Furthermore, it stated that if they need language support, they can get access to many languages while using the “MySchools” application. The Cross School’s PowerPoint presentation, shown at the first parental meeting, stated that the school’s guidance counselor was not involved in the process of high school selection. The topic was not revisited, and, when I asked Angie about the matter, she said that she “did not know but that is what the principal had mentioned.” Parents did not have access to the guidance counselor but rather to the team of designated teachers.

The Welcome Center was the place that not only the NYC DOE pointed parents to but also the place the Cross School directed parents to visit to complete their enrollment process. According to the NYCDOE’s website, the Welcome Center was listed as open from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM on Monday through Thursday and on Fridays from 8:00 AM to 3:00 PM (New York City Department of Education, 2017). Almost all parents interviewed held jobs that ended at 5:00 PM or later. Parents like Vicente, of the Cross School, detailed other priorities, like dedicated family time, that also made it difficult to find time for visiting the center. He stated,

On weekdays we get home very late it is very important for us to all have dinner together. We talk about everyone’s day, discuss about my oldest son’s tournaments or soccer practice and about my youngest son’s rehearsal if he had

one at the moment, and plan our weekends. Three days out of the week my oldest son has soccer practice that I take him to.

As a plumber, Vicente, described his time as very family-oriented but running on a specific schedule:

On weekdays, I woke up at 5:20 am in order to leave the house by 6:00 am. My wife drops me off at work at 7:00 am, by 3:00 pm I am done with my work and head home to prepare dinner for my family. They are the last ones to arrive home.

Yulissa was a parent who worked past the hours of operation of the Welcome Center. According to Yulissa, she “does it all,” including caring for her children. Her work schedule starts at 9:00 AM and goes to 5:00 PM, and, although she has the help of her brother, he also works. Teresa described her normal weekday as “divided between work tasks and home tasks. I work from 8 AM to 6 PM and when I come home, I have to cook dinner and help my daughters tidy up.” Kika worked at a restaurant and indicated that her schedule officially ended at 5:30 but at times she stayed until 6:30 or 7 PM. When asked about why she stayed beyond 5:30, she replied, “After that I work but I get paid cash or keep the tips. It’s difficult so any extra money helps, I get very tired but it is worth it.” Kika relied on her mother for help with her daughter’s care.

Parents of the Epiphany School also shared some of the difficulties accessing the Welcome Center during their working hours. Such is the case of Mirna. She described her normal weekday as follows:

I work 6 days a week from 8 AM to 6 PM, my husband works almost the same hours. We share responsibilities with my husband, cooking, cleaning, grocery shopping. My daughter also helps out with the cooking and cleaning of the

apartment. We try to help each other out but that is my normal weekday. We leave weekends for family things.

Mirna chose a public school and employed the help of her sister to visit the Welcome Center to complete the process. As mentioned, most parents were working past the hours of operation. Those parents that chose to continue to apply to the public school system often looked to their families for help.

The perspectives and experiences of the parents interviewed revealed certain difficulties when attempting to interact with the public school enrollment system. Many parents viewed technology as a discouragement. Two older guardians saw it as something new that they could not manage. Both Catholic middle schools attempted to gain access to the web-based application by requesting help from the NYC DOE High School Enrollment Office. Although they received responses, ultimately both schools were not able to gain access. This in turn meant that both schools could not offer to help parents in the use of the technology. The existence and advertisement of the Welcome Center was promoted by both the NYC DOE and the school staff, but its hours conflicted with the parents' work obligations. Certain parents were discouraged, while others reached out to family members to help them finish the public school application process. Citing language and relationship, parents at times could not gain a positive interaction with the NYCDOE public school application process without the mediation of the principals, parent coordinator, or secretary.

#### **Theme 4: Informed Parents Knowing What They Want**

The fourth and final theme that emerged from my observations and analysis of documents and interviews was that of the informed parents knowing what they want. A

few parents shared their experiences and the resources they used to make the best decision. Parents also shared what they expected to find and what they were searching for in a school. The topic of how much parents knew about charter schools came up. Lastly, word of mouth as a positive and negative force also emerged from the interviews. The first subtheme that emerged was finding guidance to navigate the maze; the second subtheme was safety, reputation, and resources; the last subtheme was word of mouth. The parents' perspectives of charter schools emerged in the second and third subtheme, as I asked questions about their knowledge and exposure to advertisements for such schools. All three subthemes reflected that informed parents bring a wealth of formal and informal education. All parents interviewed were involved in their children's education, regardless of work obligations.

### ***Finding Guidance to Navigate the Maze***

The first subtheme that emerged was how parents found guidance to navigate the maze of high school selection. I asked the participants if anyone helped them through the high school admissions process. The Cross School parents I interviewed relied on their assigned staff members. Yet, some parents also sought help from other individuals, including family members and outside advisors. The same was the case of the parents I interviewed from the Epiphany School.

Kika, a parent at the Cross School, relied on the school secretary. Although part of a two-parent home, she also relied on her mom for help with the decision-making process. Kika stated,

My mom helped me with the school choice process. She trusted the research I did.

Once we choose the school, I made an appointment with the school secretary. She

helped me with the whole enrollment process which assured my mom and I that we made the right choice.

The involvement of Kika's mom in the process spoke to how some parents went outside the school to access advice and help. Other parents of the Cross School relied on their children to obtain information and be informed. Marcos relied on his daughter for translation services at the public high school fair, which allowed him to have the information necessary to make an informed decision. Other parents utilized resources that were available within public schools. Such was Ana's case. She utilized a resource that perhaps others did not think of: a guidance counselor working within a public high school. Ana's middle child was enrolled in a public high school. Although the child went to school alone, Ana's involvement allowed her to get acquainted with members of the school. Upon learning of the "MySchools" application and the Cross School's inability to help her with this aspect, she tapped the guidance counselor at her middle son's high school for help. Ana stated, "Ohh the new thing was the application on the internet. That is when I went to my son's [public] high school for help." When asked about who helped her make a decision, she mentioned "the high school counselor."

Just as the Cross School's parents looked to other sources to make these decisions, so did some parents of the Epiphany School. Mirna, a parent of the Epiphany School employed the help of her mother. She remarked, "The one thing we needed help was with the application to public schools because it was over the internet. My sister helped by going to the ministry of education and getting help." Another parent, Angel, relied on his oldest son, who was in college, to make a decision and access information. Other parents simply relied on the other parents of eighth grade students at their schools.

Wendy was one of these parents, as she had built a bond with the other parents. She spoke about receiving help from the entire group of parents as they are “a very united group.” Christina supported this claim, as she spoke of the school culture being a positive one, where parents helped each other out, regardless of language barriers.

In some cases, family played an important part in the other aspects of the school selection process. When attending the Catholic high school fair, many parents and representatives were also accompanied by other individuals who would interact with the parent coordinator and high school representatives. A finding that emerged from the interviews of parents of both schools was their involvement in their children’s education, regardless of their other obligations. If they missed a meeting, they would call the school and ask for information. Although some parents shared that they had a shortened education journey, as some did not graduate from elementary school, they knew what they were looking for in a school, they understood the process of choosing a high school, and, ultimately, they looked to their families or peers for advice, if needed.

### ***School Reputation, Safety, and Resources***

The second subtheme that arose was school reputation, safety, and resources. The parents revealed that what they were looking for in a school was school reputation and safety. Factors that parents identified as contributing to school reputation included academic excellence and quality of the facilities. Parents indicated that the factor of tuition was both a positive and a negative. Taken together, these considerations affected their decisions about whether to enter the public school system. Within the discussion of school reputation, charter schools emerged as a topic, with parents expressing both positive and negative perspectives.



School reputation and safety are what most parents were looking for in schools, whether public or Catholic. A common thread among parents was their confidence that they knew what they wanted. Some Cross School parents, like Vicente, clearly expressed what they were looking for in a school. Vicente stated,

My main concern or the most important factor when looking for a school was safety. Me and my wife have visited many schools and how the staff treats us and our children when we have questions or concern is always something I look out for. We have had many staff members in some school just to try to dismiss us. We look for an attentive staff who are willing to communicate with us in a respectful manner, because I think that will be the way they will treat our children when we are not around. The school my children currently attend has all of this and is a safe environment for them which gives me peace of mind. It is reflected on my kids, they are always happy with their teachers, have never had a problem with classmates.

Vicente cared about these interactions, which ultimately reflected on the school's reputation. Yulissa voiced the same sentiment with regard to staff interactions and caring for the children. Teresa, on the other hand, stressed the importance of safety, while setting Catholic schools as an example:

I was looking for a school where my daughters would receive a good education because I wanted their education to help them succeed in their futures and help them face any challenges that would arise head on. The most important factor was the school being a safe environment where my daughters would be safe for eight hours of the day without their parents because the school which they attended

before we switched was not. I was also looking for something that was accessible. Catholic schools are always easy because you get an answer or someone who knows the answer. The public schools is so difficult that I didn't know what to do. Ana and Kika also expressed that safety was an important factor in their school choices.

Parents of the Epiphany School also shared many of the views of the Cross School parents in regard to what they were looking for in a school. Mirna stated she was looking for good academics and that she was willing to make a sacrifice to get her child into the best possible school. Mario, on the other hand, referred to the size of the school. He said he was looking for a school with "good tradition, safe, small, not a lot of students." Wendy also looked for a small school for her child, which she thought was more likely to also be safe and good. Wendy said, "Something like they have now." The factor of safety was present within these preferences.

Angel allowed his child to have a lot of say in the final choice and what they were looking for. He stated,

To be honest, I was letting him choose but still keeping a close eye on what his choices were. I think school is what you make of it but his mother doesn't always agree with me. She thinks about the uniforms, about the programs, the language. I think more about the location and that's it.

When asked about why location was a factor, Angel related it to safety, as it was an important factor for them as a family. Also, when asked what else his son was looking for, he answered, "He wanted a school that had soccer but also had famous people who graduated from there." School reputation and safety were at the top of most parents' lists

of priorities. Some Catholic schools advertised tradition and safety in their brochures. Facilities were mentioned by several parents, but to a lesser extent.

Tuition and financial aid were also considerations parents mentioned. Most parents intended to continue with Catholic education, yet they were planning to see what type of aid they were going to be offered. Some parents viewed tuition as a form of power, in that the payment of tuition allows the parent to demand or expect certain services, just as in a business interaction. Gloria, who has two sons at the Epiphany School, one of whom is in eighth grader, stated, “You see to be in a Catholic school means that you will get something much more. If something goes wrong, you can speak up because you pay for it.” Other parents, such as Mirna, saw tuition as a sacrifice that was worth it. Yet, upon finding out the cost of Catholic high schools Mirna began to consider public schools. Yulissa, from the Cross School, worried about how she was going to deal with tuition in Catholic high schools. Her worry was more about getting financial aid for her child. She was going through a difficult time, which made her hesitant about keeping her child in Catholic education: “You know like money problems overall. For example, I am behind on tuition and I know if I don’t pay, they won’t give my son his diploma. But I do not tell him this because it can affect him. Stuff like that.”

According to my analysis of the tuition costs among the Catholics high schools present at the Catholic school fairs, rates began at \$9000 dollars and varied by school. Financial aid was available and, for most schools, it was based on the score the student achieved on the test for admissions into Catholic high school (TACHS). Several high schools had their own exam or a tuition subsidy, which helped out families and further attracted enrollment.

Overall, when dealing with high school selection, the parents focused on school reputation, including academics, quality of the facilities, and communication. Safety was also high on their list of preferences, which related to school location; these two categories applied to both Catholic and public schools. The factor of tuition was both a negative and a positive for parents as they still considered Catholic schools. Tuition caused some parents to switch and consider public schools. Document analysis also revealed that there was a considerable hike in tuition between the Catholic middle school tuition and the Catholic high school tuition.

### ***Word of Mouth***

The third and final subtheme that emerged after analysis of interviews was word of mouth. Parents shared how they found out about Catholic schools, public schools, and charter schools. Some parents had not heard of charter schools at all. Yet, when asked about their choices and how they came to head in that direction, a few mentioned specific school staff members that had guided them in that direction based on reviews. Some parents from the Epiphany School described word of mouth as a positive tool in their search for a school. It is worth mentioning that in the vicinity both schools there are three charter high schools and four traditional public schools.

Wendy was a parent who shared her experiences hearing about the Catholic school system as a whole. She said, “We didn’t know what to do until our neighbor told us about the Catholic school nearby [the Epiphany School].” This experience not only shaped her future choices but was also fortified what she heard about Catholic schools from school officials and other parents. Gloria, another Epiphany School parent, was influenced by the comments from fellow parents who were in the parental meetings.

Their interactions with one another allowed them to find out certain things about certain schools, such as reputation, quality of the facilities, and the generosity of financial aid.

Yanina relied on the opinion of her husband's family. She stated, "My husband's family has lived in this country a longer time, so they helped us to narrow it down." This advice, in the end, helped her make her final decision and the switch to public schools. Relying on family's advice and, in some cases, their experiences was not only limited to Yanina, as other parents, including Mirna, also deferred to family.

While word of mouth could be a positive aspect for certain schools, in some cases it was also negative. Vicente, from the Cross School, shared his views of public schools based on what he had seen on the media. He remarked, "All I need to do is turn on the news and something is always going on in public schools." Some parents also expressed that their decision not to enroll in public schools was based on a bad view of the schools.

When the conversation shifted to charter schools, most parents, from both schools, gave a solid "no" when asked if they had heard about charter schools. Others knew about charter schools from advertisements and school uniforms; they indicated that they had seen advertisements in Spanish. I asked the parents who had heard about charter schools if they gave consideration to enrolling their children in charter schools. All said no for different reasons.

Vicente said he had seen advertisements for charter schools in the street and that they were in Spanish. When asked if he considered them, he responded, "I saw some advertisements on the streets in Spanish, but they do not interest me. If I am going to do private it has to be Catholic." I noted that charter schools are public, but he replied that he thought they were private because of the advertisement. Sara also encountered

advertisements in the streets and on flyers. She mentioned that she remembers seeing the phrase “registrate ya,” meaning register now. Asked if she had been approached by anyone representing a charter school, she said no. She also did not consider charter schools for her grandchild. When asked why, she stated, “Hmm no, I was always suspicious. I always tell myself if they promote it that much, not everything that shines is gold. Besides I love Catholic education.” She also shared that her neighbors have a child in charter school but they have never sat down to talk about the charter school. She continued, “What I hear in passing is oh they are great, oh they give a lot of homework, they care. Same as all schools.” Carla also has knowledge of charter schools based on her interactions with her customers. When I asked if she has heard of charter schools, she answered,

Yes, I have, they have those nice uniforms. I was selling my Ayacas and I saw these kids walk by every day. Nice uniform and always well ironed. Parents sometimes buy my Ayacas, so one day I asked one of them about where their child went to school and I got told about the school.

Although Carla had a positive review of charter schools, she would still not consider them. When asked why, Carla replied, “The uniforms are nice, I never see those kids in fights or hanging around. but my [Catholic] school is amazing.”

Teresa had also encountered advertisements, not only in the street but also on television and the internet. Although not willing to consider them, she shared that charter schools look private because the uniforms were so nice. Yulissa had also heard about charter schools from a friend in a positive way, although in the end Yulissa was not considering them: “My friend tells me that it is good because it is good for the students.

The kids always have work, the teachers help them, and they have good results. But to me that is the same that I have now. So why would I want to change it?"

Some parents of the Epiphany School also shared their views and experiences with charter schools. Yanina heard about charter schools from the Epiphany School's presentation, from her family, and from seeing the kids with the uniforms in the street. When asked about what her family said about charter schools, she stated, "They told me unless you're crazy do not put them there. Those schools will burn out your kids." No one in her family had kids in charter schools, but a family member did work for a charter school. When I asked Wendy if she had heard about charter schools, she answered "Yes, they are everywhere. They are in the streets, train stations, busses. They are also in my restaurant." When asked to elaborate on this comment, Wendy replied, "Yes, some teachers stop by my restaurant to eat or to buy to take home. They always look so tired but they are nice. They tell me stories about the kids and how they love what they do but how they are tired." Asked if she was considering a charter school for her child, she said no because "why would I want my child to go to a place where their teachers look so tired?"

Angie did not have much information to share about charter schools, only stating that the school sometimes gets students coming over from charter schools. She added, "If it is a school that the parents want it's for a reason so I don't see a problem with it."

Rafael shared similar reasoning, but said he would recommend charter schools "depending on the charter school." When asked to elaborate, he stated,

Here we focus a lot on academics, like a lot. From what I understand the principal has made a shift to more of a social aspect to school, which I love and think it's

important. But in a charter school they might have or might not have an opportunity. Besides some of our kids are characters and I don't know if they will be able to find a place that fosters their creativity in a charter school.

The Cross School did mention charter schools to parents during the September informational meeting. Although there were no questions about them, they were included in the PowerPoint presentation and mentioned as an option. Christina at the Epiphany School shared that, during the September meeting, parents were given information in which charter schools were discussed. When asked about her perspective, she admitted, "Honestly I do not know much about them aside from the fact that they are an option and they are public." When asked if parents had questions about charter schools, she stated, "Actually no, and I don't think any of my eighth grade parents are considering them." My analysis of the area revealed three charter high schools located in relative proximity. Enrollment demographics showed that only one of the three charter schools had more than 25%, but still less than 50%, of Latino students.

My observations and analysis of interviews and documents indicated that parents and guardians look for help when dealing with the school admissions process. When they cannot easily find help, they might go outside of the school or feel discouraged from continuing the process. Furthermore, family members are an important resource, specifically when dealing with public schools. The parents did not mention the parish community as a resource, yet they might see school officials as part of the parish. School reputation and safety were the factors parents looked at when considering schools, both public and Catholic. Academics and locations factored within the categories of school reputation and safety, respectively. Some parents viewed tuition as a sacrifice worth



making for a good education, while others considered public school because of the tuition factor. Word of mouth was a positive and negative factor affecting the parents' perspectives of schools. Family members, clients, and other parents were primarily the ones disseminating the advice or information. Lastly, the Cross and Epiphany Schools did mention charter schools, but none of the parents were considering them. Lack of knowledge about charter schools was a factor, as was negative word of mouth from family members, clients, or past charter school employees. Although some were provided positive perspectives of charter schools, parents still did not consider them an option.

### **Conclusion**

The first research question I sought to explore was what influences shaped the school choice decisions of non-English-speaking Latino parents of eighth grade students who are enrolled in Catholic middle schools. Both the Catholic and public school system created advertisements, but on different levels, and parents were quick to notice. However, the data revealed that numerous factors, far beyond advertisements, affected the decision-making process of parents. School officials involved in the process were tasked with the responsibility of informing parents of the process and choices. Yet, the data revealed that they also encouraged or discouraged parents from applying to different schools. Parent coordinators, secretaries, teachers, and principals were involved in this process and interacting with parents. The informational meetings, aside from informing parents, also served as a mode of influence. The Cross School's mandate that students apply to NYC DOE schools was an example of the level of influence. Another influence affecting these parents was the schools' lack of access to the NYC DOE "MySchools" internet application. Parents sought help from their middle schools with this mode of

application, and many were so discouraged by their schools not being able to help beyond translation that they decided not to apply to public schools. The Cross School did contact the NYC DOE for assistance in getting access, but they were not successful, although there was email communication. The schools were thus unable to supply the personal attention, cited by parents as being important, to help families navigate the “MySchools” interface. For some parents, technological literacy became a major factor that discouraged them from applying to public schools. Availability was also a component in their decision processes, as the Welcome Center’s hours conflicted with working parents’ schedules.

Communication was another direct and indirect influence affecting the parents. They valued their interactions in Spanish with school representatives at both the Catholic and public school fairs. In some cases, securing translation services at the public school fairs was difficult, which parents considered a negative when determining where to apply. For the most part, Catholic high school representatives spoke Spanish or a middle school representative was able to serve as a translator. Among the public schools, the results varied, as some parents did not encounter a translator in their interactions.

School reputation and safety also influenced the final choice parents made with regard to their children’s future high school. The information high school representatives shared with parents was useful, and parents were especially interested in information on safety, strong academics, and the schools’ standing among other schools. They saw academics and the schools’ standing among schools as part of the schools’ reputations. Word of mouth was the last and perhaps most influential factor for parents. School officials, family members, other parents, friends, and clients provided parents with advice

and their perspectives on individual schools or school systems, including charter schools. Past experiences, current experiences, or stories from the workplace were shared with parents and ultimately exerted an influence in their choice.

The second research question explored was to what extent are public schools advertising and marketing themselves to non-English-speaking Latino families whose children are in Catholic schools. The data revealed that schools were advertising to non-English-speaking Latino families. Catholic high schools directly accessed the middle schools to hold fairs. They presented families with literature translated into Spanish or provided further details on how to access information in Spanish. The Catholic high schools also distributed trinkets, such as memorabilia, to families as a way to advertise themselves. My analysis also showed that public schools did not advertise for themselves but rather as part of the NYC DOE. Individual schools did advertise at the school fairs, where they offered parents information and answered questions. Access to translated materials from public schools varied, as not all had information in Spanish. The NYC DOE did provide a physical high school directory to parents, but not one in Spanish. A translated version could be accessed online in different languages. The high school directory itself did mention the availability of physical translations in different languages at middle schools, but this was not the case for both the Cross and Epiphany Schools. Charter schools, on the other hand, were advertising in Spanish, as several parents mentioned their observations of advertisements in Spanish in the streets, train stations, and on busses. Yet, this group of parents was small when compared to the overall number of parents who had not heard of charter schools.

## CHAPTER 5

### Conclusion

This case study examined the experiences of non-English-speaking Latino parents in the high school choice process. It focused specifically on the influences affecting their selection and the level of advertisement they were exposed to while on this journey. These parents had children enrolled in the Cross School or in the Epiphany School, both Catholic middle schools. There were two research questions guiding this study. The first research question asked about the influences shaping the decisions of the parents of eighth graders in their selection of a high school. The second research question inquired about the level of advertisement and marketing on the part of public schools toward non-English-speaking Latino parents. Upon the examination of influences, I saw patterns in the comparison between Catholic high schools and public high schools (traditional and charter) and the influences and level of marketing and advertisement toward these parents. Data revealed a story of two different systems and the difference in their strategies to attract parents to enroll their children. While public schools offered similar resources to parents as Catholic high schools, non-English-speaking Latino parents did not have the same experience when comparing them. These parents expressed that the attention given to parents in Catholic schools is key, as they received help from school staff members. Fairs for Catholic schools were held within Catholic middle schools, thus allowing not only Catholic high school representatives to help parents but importantly also the staff of the middle school. The help came in the form of translation services, interaction in Spanish, and assistance in applying. In contrast, the parents' experiences at public school fairs were mixed, with some parents receiving aid in Spanish or translation

services, but not always. This was crucial, as parents felt discouraged if they could not find help. The attention given to parents, as revealed in the interviews, also resulted in staff members acting as influences in the high school selection process. The factor of technology emerged from the findings as a barrier parents from both schools encountered, resulting in some parents determining not to apply to public schools, while others had to look for help in other places. The need to look for help elsewhere also created conflicts between parents' availability and access to resources at specific sites.

Data also revealed that parents were informed stakeholders in their search for a high school as they navigated through the school selection process. Their information came by the way of school staff and representatives, school events, and word of mouth. This last aspect was not only a positive but also a negative, in particular for charter schools. This aspect of the findings validates previous studies that pointed to word of mouth as a powerful factor influencing parents. This chapter will discuss the major findings, the interconnectivity between the data, and the data's relations to each of the research questions. I will also discuss the study's connection to existing literature and the theoretical framework. Lastly, along with the limitations of the study, I will consider the study's implications for policy development and for future research.

## **Interpretation of the Findings**

### ***Research Question One***

The first research question was, what influences shaped the school choice decisions of non-English-speaking parents of eighth grade students who are enrolled in a Catholic school? I addressed this question throughout the dissertation and explored interconnectivity between themes. My analysis of the data revealed that parents at both

the Cross and Epiphany Schools were influenced by different factors, spread across the four themes: Catholic schools keeping Catholic school parents informed, influence of events, technology, and informed parents. Furthermore, within the theme of keeping parents informed, there were distinct differences between the two schools and how they influenced parents.

As the theme of Catholic schools keeping Catholic school parents informed emerged, I determined that both the Cross School and the Epiphany School offered a vast amount of help to parents in the form of meetings, guidance, and translation services. Yet, this same exact theme revealed the differences between the two schools in their offers of help and level of influence. The Cross School held information sessions but made it mandatory to apply to public schools. The school leader created this policy as a safety net, yet it can be considered a level of influence from a school official, as parents were required to consider public schools without taking into account their initial inclination. Additionally, not only did the school leader exert this influence over the parents, his decision also influenced teachers and the parent coordinator as they were advising parents on certain public or Catholic schools. Unlike the Cross School, the Epiphany School did not make it mandatory to apply to public schools, but the principal did hold particular preference toward specialized public schools. The perspectives of parents from both schools reflected their appreciation for the personal attention they had received from the schools throughout their children's education. As these two Catholic schools offered personal attention on diverse matters, such as translations and guidance, parents believed that Catholic high schools would likely cater to their needs in the same way. This perspective was further supported by the parents' experiences at the events.

Both the Catholic and public schools offered events, such as high school fairs, although they were organized differently, which presents the first interconnection between the themes of personal attention and organized events. The access to translated materials varied for the group of parents interviewed, as well as the availability of translation services and accessibility to a Spanish-speaking school representative. Translation in Spanish was available at the Catholic school fairs, offered by Catholic high school representatives or by the Cross School or Epiphany School members present at the events. Catholic high schools held fairs at both the Cross and Epiphany Schools. This home school advantage made a difference for parents who needed translation services, had demanding work schedules, had questions that needed to be asked in Spanish, or required personal attention. Parents viewed this personal attention as a strong influence when making a final decision between public and Catholic schools. At the public school fairs, the ability of non-English-speaking Latino parents to interact in Spanish varied, which acted as a negative influence on some parents. They saw this lack as evidence that public schools would not be able to provide the personal attention and access to information that they required. Some parents did have access to family members who spoke English, others found translations at some public school stands, while others were at the mercy of the availability of these translation resources at the fairs. This aspect is also a point of interconnectivity between research questions one and two, which I will explore in more detail momentarily.

Beyond the fairs, parents experienced further challenges accessing translated materials about the public schools. Access to the high school directory in Spanish was only available online, despite the NYC DOE's statement that parents could find copies at

their middle schools. The advertised message did not match the reality of the availability of information. Again, the lack of readily available information in Spanish about the public schools weighed on parents as they considered their options.

Technology had the greatest impact on non-English-speaking Latino parents of Catholic schools. Not only did technology present a direct barrier for the Cross and Epiphany School parents and staff but also an indirect barrier for working parents. Both Catholic middle schools did not have access to the “MySchools” application, which parents needed to use to apply to the public schools. Although the application allowed for direct parent access, schools also wanted to have access so they could assist parents who were less comfortable with technology and apply for the children on the parents’ behalf. The Cross School even made repeated attempts to gain access but was ultimately unsuccessful. The schools’ inability to help caused some parents to abandon the process of applying to public schools. The required use of the “MySchools” application was a barrier to non-English-speaking Latino parents that not all could overcome. Although the “MySchools” application allowed for a translated version, some parents did not possess the necessary level of digital literacy required to navigate the website. In particular, older guardians, such as grandparents, were at an increased disadvantage. Interconnectivity with the theme of personal attention was present, as parents saw their schools not being able to provide them with help when it comes to public schools.

Parents were also informed of the NYC DOE-sponsored Welcome Center, where they could go for assistance with the public school application process. However, the operating hours of the Welcome Center conflicted with the working hours of parents. The lack of access to the “MySchools” application by both Catholic schools and the



inconvenient operating hours of the Welcome Center created barriers for non-English-speaking Latino parents considering public schools. As a result, many ultimately abandoned the process. This study contributes to the existing literature, as the parents interviewed were involved in the school choice process but certain barriers discouraged them from continuing with the public school application process.

The last theme about the influences on non-English-speaking Latino parents is that of the informed parent. The parents I interviewed shared their perspectives on what they were looking for in a school. Safety and school reputation stood out as their top priorities. As parents went on the journey of school selection, they held these two factors in mind as they read material in Spanish, visited school fairs, and interacted with members of both the Catholic and public school systems. Word of mouth also allowed parents to be informed about schools in both a positive and negative way. The amount of interaction between parents and with school staff members at both the Epiphany and Cross Schools was extensive throughout the whole academic year, as they met in the various school meetings and at school events. This allowed for the sharing of information about certain schools, both Catholic and public. Family members, friends, and clients also provided opinions about certain schools. Charter schools rely on word of mouth as a way to advertise their schools to the community, yet interviewing non-English-speaking Catholic school parents of the Cross School, I found they did not consider charter schools as an option based upon the negative comments they had heard. The negative effect of word of mouth is not always documented, but it can be as powerful as the rewards schools reap from it.

### ***Connection Between Research Question One and Prior Research***

The data analyzed revealed that there were numerous influences that affected non-English-speaking Latino parents' considerations throughout the school choice process and ultimately played a role in their decisions. The experiences the parents described attested to their willingness to share information in an attempt to be heard. The notion of being heard and being provided with information echoes prior studies with a LatCrit lens, which indicated that it is necessary that the voices of the "others" be heard (Chávez, 2010; Fernandez, 2002).

Although the NYC DOE made an effort to make parents aware that they could access information in different languages, parents reported a lack of translation services at certain public schools. While the system as a whole has made advancements in providing parents with translation services and information, difficulty still exists in ensuring these services are delivered (Mavrogordato & Harris, 2017). Districts across the United States have increased the access to information for non-English-speaking Latino parents, and this study reveals that the NYC DOE has done the same with regard to letting parents know there were translation services and sponsoring the Welcome Center as a resource, among others (Mavrogordato & Harris, 2017). Yet, a disconnect existed between the services marketed by the NYC DOE and what individual schools could actually offer. This speaks to lack of communication between the NYC DOE and the individual schools. Such a situation relates to the social equity theoretical framework used in this study (Fernandez, 2002; Freire, 1968; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Yosso, 2005). Although the NYC DOE is making attempts to achieve equity and engage non-English-speaking Latino parents in the school choice conversation, the disconnect between the

larger organization and individual schools works against that goal. The relationship to the study's social equity framework was in effect when non-English-speaking parents did not have access to physical versions of the school directories in Spanish at their schools (Fernandez, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002; Yosso, 2005). Their inability to access information in a language they could understand points to a lack of equity.

Technological advancements have improved efficiency and accessibility in some ways, yet they fail to take into account the level of digital literacy in the United States among certain groups. Black, Latino, and foreign-born people, among others, are still at a disadvantage, specifically those who are older (Mamedova et al., 2018). Along with research indicating that these groups are at a disadvantage, there is also an overall level of disadvantage and hesitation by Americans as a whole with regards to digital literacy (Feldman, 2019; Horrigan, 2016). Many Americans express hesitation into learning but another part also in "unaware of educational tech" (Horrigan, 2016). This became evident as the educational system throughout the United States entered remote learning through the current pandemic threat. Parents, either unprepared or overwhelmed by the need to access education digitally, have still attempted, along with their children, to learn through a computer (Harris, 2020). This connects back to the non-English-speaking Latino parents I interviewed for this study: is requiring them start their application process online equitable?

Previous studies have also concluded that Spanish-speaking parents face an uphill battle due to their responsibilities, yet at times this gets interpreted as a lack of involvement in their children's education, which is not entirely true (Carreon et al., 2005;

Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2010; Jasis & Ordoñez-Jasis, 2012; Sattin-Bajaj, 2011). Parents are generally willing to engage in their children's education and will engage with the community to increase their involvement in their children's academic journey, but it is teachers and leaders that, at times, might not welcome that engagement (Carreon et al., 2005). Ultimately, more opportunities to increase community wealth will help parents, as suggested by Mavrogordato and Harris (2017). Other studies have shown how different stakeholders, including parents, coming together can benefit parental involvement, which Freire (1968) also suggested as a way to break the cycle of oppression (Jasis & Ordoñez-Jasis, 2012).

Factors such as safety and school reputation also appeared in previous studies' findings as "what parents were looking" for in a school (Canales & Orellana, 2014; Cheng et al. 2015; Lubienski, 2007). Catholic schools advertise their academics as stronger compared to their competitors, both traditional public and charter schools (Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese of New York, 2016, 2018). This highlight would seem to encourage parents to continue looking for the same when their children look for a high school, which is to continue with high school backed by the Catholic faith.

Lastly, other studies have also documented the power of word of mouth as an influence. Although no parents implicitly attempted to shape their school community, parents did engage in conversations among themselves and with school staff (Kimelberg & Billingham, 2013; Olsen Beal & Beal, 2016). In this case study, charter schools fell short in word-of-mouth reports and suffered for it.

### ***Research Question Two***

This study's second research question was, to what extent are schools advertising and marketing themselves to non-English-speaking Latino families? Two themes contribute to the second research question and understanding the extent of advertisement: effectiveness of events and informed parents. This study did not find direct advertisement to parents of Catholic schools. The reasons behind such a finding are unclear, but there are clues based on the size of the public school system in New York City. Public schools did not advertise at the Cross or Epiphany Schools, unlike the Catholic high schools, which held fairs at each of these schools. Within public school fairs, there was advertisement to non-English-speaking Latino parents, although not exclusively to Catholic school parents. As previously mentioned, the availability of translated written materials varied across schools, as did translation services. The information highlighted in advertising materials included partnerships, extracurricular activities, and graduation rates, as schools aimed to give parents a glimpse of their reputations, academics, and standing against other schools. This information given to parents finds supports in previous research in the way schools advertise to parents in order to raise enrollment (Crosnoe, 2009; Cuero et al., 2009; Davis & Oakley, 2013; Drew, 2013; Hernández, 2016; Jabbar & Li, 2016). Although there was no direct advertisement to the study's group, there was advertisement to the Spanish-speaking community as a whole by the NYC DOE.

Data showed that charter schools also did not advertise to non-English-speaking Catholic school parents, or, at least, this group of parents did not notice any direct advertisement. Some parents did note that they encountered advertisements in Spanish.

For instance, they spoke about encountering key phrases such as “registrate ya” (register now) on charter school flyers. This was not the case for traditional public schools or Catholic schools, although my observations did reveal the existence of advertisement for non-English-speaking Latino parents by both traditional public and Catholic schools. The biggest asset, word of mouth, can work as an adverse form of advertisement. As previously discussed, certain parents did not consider charter schools, as they did not receive good reviews from family members, friends, or clients. When compared to their Catholic schools, they preferred not to consider them. Other parents reported not knowing about them, and some thought that charter schools were private because of the uniforms. Branding in terms of uniforms was positive and stood out, as parents noticed them, but ultimately word of mouth took precedence.

### ***Connection Between Research Question Two and Prior Literature***

This study supports findings of different studies around the topics of advertisement, marketing, influences on parental school choice, and barriers to accessing information. The overall findings fall within the social equity framework, which seeks to provide a stage for the voices of Latino individuals (Chávez, 2012; Fernandez, 2002). The use of advertising toward parents is well documented (DiMartino & Jessen, 2018; Drew, 2013; Kimelberg & Billingham, 2012; Oplatka, 2007; Wilkins, 2012). Interviewed parents did experience advertisement by public schools at fairs and by Catholic schools at the fairs and open house events. The printed materials given to parents by these schools reflected the marketing practices by other schools in order to recruit students (DiMartino & Jessen, 2018). Although there was no mention of specific names or colors for traditional public or Catholic schools, parents associated attention given, translated

documents, and overall care to Catholic schools. This association relates to research about parents associating certain aspects with schools (Lubienski, 2007). The marketing practices employed by Catholic schools speak to the brand they have constructed (Lubienski, 2007). It should be noted that certain traditional public schools did provide parents with translated materials and/or translation services, and some of their representatives spoke Spanish. The NYC DOE has tried to improve accessibility by letting the parents know where they can view translations. This increased advertisement effort connects to prior literature pointing to an increased effort by public schools to be more visible (Phillips, 2016). Overall, efforts to attract students and parents were apparent on behalf of both the Catholic and traditional public schools (DiMartino & Jessen, 2018).

The reviews parents shared with regard to certain charter schools indicated certain practices were alarming to them. Some parents cited tired teachers, overworked students, and academic pressure as associations with charter schools, which have also been documented by several studies that point to charter schools controlling aspects of teaching, “creaming” of student applicants, and prioritizing results over work-life balance (Jabbar, 2015). Such impressions among parents resulted from word of mouth, sparking questions about the supposed benefits of word of mouth. Used by different school systems, including charter schools, word of mouth has been regarded as a force in marketing (Kimmelberg & Billingham, 2013). Although studies have pointed to the harm of word of mouth in regard to parents shaping a school’s population, this study reveals something else (Olsen Beal & Beal, 2016). Word of mouth can act as a deterrent for

parents, not only because parents talk to each other, but also because parents talk and listen to employees and acknowledge their struggles.

### ***Connection to the Social Equity Framework***

The experiences shared by parents serve as a counter story that speaks to their reality within the school choice process (Chávez, 2010; Fernandez, 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2005). Although equity is at the forefront of the NYC DOE's policy, this story reveals the lack of equity experienced by a group of parents within New York City (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Fernandez, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002). At the same time as the NYC DOE touted an equity agenda (Siegel, 2019; Shapiro, 2019), data from this study showed that some parents faced obstacles trying to find translated materials or accessing help from the Welcome Center and thus did not have access to the same resources as others. Some parents considered public school for their children, but these obstacles deterred them from continuing with the process. This counter story gets lost in the grey educational realm of school choice, a process that perhaps was built for efficiency and not equity. The lack of access to the same information in a fair manner such as language in a language they can understand, can lead to an uninformed decision and also have a lasting effect of not achieving what might have been right. If looked at from this perspective, then it can be argued that oppression, as described by Freire (1968), is in effect within the school choice process. The rules and procedures are designed and implemented by the NYC DOE, which when analyzed, is an agency of power that creates and disseminates information. As such the NYC DOE acts as a gatekeeper, and although, the organization professes an agenda of expanding equity, it inadvertently has oppressed a particular group of individuals: the



non-English-speaking parents from the two Catholic schools who I interviewed for this study.

The acknowledgement of parents and students as a partner is essential to breaking the barriers of oppression (Freire, 1968), as are recognizing community wealth and cultural richness as levers that can be utilized to fight and access resources that are not necessarily always available. One might see the establishment of the Welcome Center by the NYC DOE as just such an effort at achieving equity. The Welcome Center is intended to serve as a place where parents can find help to make the informed decisions about their children's education. Yet, the center's hours of operation fall short of acknowledging the array of difficulties parents might face, such as working during business hours. The study revealed that many parents worked until 5 or 6 PM in the evening, yet the NYC DOE Welcome Center closed at 3 PM (Advocates for Children of New York, 2015; Google, n.d.). As an agency of power, the NYC DOE has inadvertently created a divide between working and non-working parents. In this particular study, several participants felt unsupported due to the unavailability of the Welcome Center (Freire, 1968; Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Previous studies also showed that certain groups of parents had difficulties that were not always taken into account by schools and school districts, such as demanding work schedules, language barriers, or low economic status (Dougherty et al., 2013; Jasis & Ordoñez-Jasis, 2012; Sattin-Bajaj, 2014, 2015). This does not mean that parents did not try to engage in the school choice process. Parents utilized resources that might not be part of those offered or available to all such as outside guidance counselors. Parents accessed friends, other guidance counselors from other schools, family friends as a way

to make the best choices for their children. Language, time, or economic status should not be perceived as a deficit by the public but rather as the opportunity to engage in other ways to attempt to access the information. This means letting go of a deficit mindset in order to access the richness of various communities, networks, and cultures (Gil & Johnson, 2017; Yosso, 2005). This cultural richness, such as family members that help parents navigate the educational field through their networking, sharing of procedural knowledge, and emotional support, is also a form of resistance that parents present as they deal with the NYC DOE and the school choice process (Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002; Yosso, 2005). The resistance presented by parents goes beyond identifying and solving a problem but rather presenting a solution to a problem that might extend beyond the participants of this study (Fernandez, 2002).

The overall use of resistance and navigational capital demonstrated by parents connects to the solutions presented by Freire as a way to break away from the oppression found within education (Freire, 1968). The idea to work collaboratively among stakeholders was present, as the study shows that participants, teachers, and administrators worked toward getting students into a school of their choice. Although this is positive work toward moving forward, the lack of access by schools to the “MySchools” application, translated materials, communication between the NYC DOE and individual schools, and convenient hours of operation at the Welcome Center suggests there is still work to be done to better the state of equity and break a possible cycle of oppression (Freire, 1968).

## **Limitations of the Study**

This study presents several limitations that are reflected within the findings. The sample of participants was small because of low enrollment among eighth graders in Catholic schools. Low enrollment was due to several factors, such as competition among schools and high tuition costs. The sample population cannot be used to generalize the experiences of all non-English-speaking Latino parents within Catholic schools and public schools in New York City.

Recruitment of participants presented a challenge, as some parents and employees did not want to be interviewed for fear of sharing the “wrong” information. Although I made them aware of their rights as participants, they were still hesitant and did not want to participate. Several key staff members did not participate out of respect for their roles within the schools. Timing also became an issue with recruitment, and my professional responsibilities and role as a researcher often clashed during school events. As a former head of school, I sought to first carry out my responsibilities as a school leader and then, if possible, recruit parents that met the requirements to be participants. This role also became a limitation, because parents and school staff saw me not only as a researcher but also as the school’s leader and supervisor.

The COVID-19 pandemic also presented a limitation, as I could not go back to participants to ask clarifying questions or continue interviewing new participants. Per instructions from the St. John’s University Institutional Review Board, I could not continue interviewing participants face to face. As parents were busy helping their children with remote learning in addition to managing their own professional responsibilities, it was not conceivable to ask for an interview virtually. Parents were

already doing so much to help their children that an online interview would have been a burden.

Furthermore, observations at the Epiphany School were not possible due to my other professional obligations. These limitations meant that triangulation of information about the Epiphany School was not always possible. The school leader's voice adds substance to the echoed experiences of parents interviewed, which speaks to the bounding of the study (Stake, 1995). Observation of other events at both schools was not possible due to the nature of the event, timing of the event, and conflict with other responsibilities. Observation of charter school events was not possible, as the I did not receive clearance and, in some cases, did not get replies to my requests.

The difficulty accessing the "MySchools" application among the schools and parents also prevented me from gaining access to analyze the application and the interface's level of ease/difficulty for parents and school staff. This information might have enriched the findings and perhaps added to the conversation encompassed within the social equity framework (Fernandez, 2002; Freire, 1968; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002; Yosso, 2005).

### **Implications for Policy**

School choice has been embraced to empower parents in their search for a school to best serve their children's diverse interests and education needs (Ballantine & Spade, 2003; Friedman, 1962). Yet, researchers and some policy makers are quick to point to the efficiency aspect of parental choice rather than true empowerment. The social equity framework utilized in this study helps to illuminate the current state of equity in the school choice system for non-English-speaking parents of Catholic schools. The findings

of this study suggest several recommendations for different stakeholders in both the Catholic and public school system. Table 4 below outlines the recommendations to these stakeholders in both educational systems.

**Table 4***Recommendations for Stakeholders*

Stakeholder	Recommendations
Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese of New York	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appeal to the NYC DOE to give both regional and parochial schools access to the “MySchools” application to best assist parents if they should consider public schools.</li> </ul>
NYC DOE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of New York access to the “MySchools” application.</li> <li>• Modify operating hours of the Welcome Center to best accommodate working parents who might not have children enrolled in a public school.</li> <li>• Assure the physical availability of the high school directory in different languages.</li> <li>• Confirm the availability of enough translators for parents at different school, district, and borough events.</li> <li>• Work with public schools to provide parents with all information, flyers, and brochures in a translated format.</li> </ul>
New York City Public Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work to have someone who speaks Spanish and English to translate for parents at events.</li> <li>• Have all information for parents in different languages, including Spanish.</li> </ul>
New York City Charter Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advertise to non-English-speaking Latino parents of Catholic schools in order to offer a choice and to dispel generalizations.</li> </ul>

As an important educational system in New York City, the Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of New York should appeal to the NYC DOE for access to the “MySchools” application system. Middle schools may help parents apply to public schools if they have access to this application. Catholic schools could apply on behalf of the families, with

parental permission. This would greatly help parents who have difficulty engaging with digital systems, parents who do not have the time to go to the Welcome Center, and parents who want someone from their school helping them. Findings in the study suggest that it is necessary for Catholic schools to have access to this application to help non-English-speaking Latino parents. It is best to guide parents through the process, should they consider public schools. Given the effects of the pandemic, the possibility of students choosing a public school rather than a private Catholic school might increase; parents might be looking for a break in tuition. This study's findings suggest that tuition is a reason some families consider public schools. My findings also suggest that Catholic schools strive to give personal attention to parents, and, by having access to the "MySchools" application, they could continue to provide this type of help.

The NYC DOE should give Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of New York access to the "MySchools" application, per the previously indicated reasons. Also, as equity is a focus of the current administration, access should be given to all parents, regardless of their affiliation with a particular educational system. For non-English-speaking Latino parents, it is not a question of willingness to engage, as several studies have supported that these parents desire to be involved; rather, it is a question of accessibility. The NYC DOE should consider modifying the Welcome Center hours and days of operation to increase access for working parents. If the "MySchools" application should crash or certain schools should not have access, then it is important for non-English-speaking Latino parents to have access to information and to the application process. Within the Welcome Center, parents can find help with enrollment, transferring, waitlists, and information on many other topics. The NYC DOE has advertised that

assistance is available in different languages. Parents can also access the high school directories in different languages. Although there is no mention of computer access for parents at the Welcome Center, this should be considered as an addition by the NYC DOE to further help parents and contribute to the growth in digital literacy. It would also be beneficial for middle schools to have both high school directories in English and Spanish, as mentioned in the directory itself. Depending on the population, other translated versions should also be available. Although findings suggest mixed experiences at the public school fairs, it is necessary for enough translators to be available for parents who do not speak English. Lastly, the NYC DOE should work with its schools to make sure all informational materials are translated in Spanish and other languages. As equity is the focus, the NYC DOE should not only prioritize efficiency. Furthermore, although there has been an increase in the use of web-based systems, there is still a lack of digital literacy, especially among specific groups of a certain age range (Mamedova et al., 2018). It is important to consider that these groups make up a large population base in the city, and the public school system is the default educational system. The public school system thus needs to work to serve these groups' needs.

Lastly, charter schools in New York City should make an effort to become more visible among non-English-speaking Latino parents whose children are currently enrolled in Catholic schools. It is important to give parents the opportunity to know about all the possible choices. This study showed that not all parents interviewed knew about charter schools. Besides informing parents, charter schools should seek to dispel some of the generalizations among this group of parents.



## **Implications for Future Research**

The purpose of this study was to bring to light the experiences of non-English-speaking Latino parents in the high school choice process in New York City. As explained in the limitations section, the number of participants for this study was low. Nevertheless, their experiences pointed to several important questions and issues within the school choice process for non-English-speaking parents and supported certain findings from previous studies. Future research around the topic of school choice could focus on the experiences of non-English-speaking-Latino parents within the New York City public school system. A study with a larger sample size would add to the contributions of the current study. The analysis of a larger sample would allow researchers to more fully examine the state of equity within the school choice process and also possibly identify if parents are facing the same difficulties or influences across districts in New York City. It can also provide an analysis of the overall success of school choice in high market areas among parents of all demographic background (Ravitch, 2011).

Furthermore, the charter schools' piece is an aspect that scholars could examine, as they are a growing part of the educational system. Along with the growth of charter schools in the educational market, there has also been growth among the ELL population and growth of the Latino population in New York City (New York City Department of Education, 2016). Analyzing the experiences of parents who are already within the public school system would also greatly contribute to understanding the state of equity in the public school system. Having access to the resources public schools offer could help shed light in what resources non-English-speaking parents currently have and still need in

order to make the best choices. Sattin-Bajaj's (2011) findings elucidated the adversities Latino parents encounter in an attempt to engage in the conversation around school choice. Further studies could help further illuminate how parents utilize their resources and perhaps continue to navigate and resist any obstacles they might encounter as they draw upon the cultural richness in their communities.

Charter schools continue to grow throughout high school choice markets, which include New York City. The findings of this study suggest that Catholic school Latino parents did not encounter marketing specifically targeting them, yet studies suggest that schools are marketing and advertising to parents in high competition areas (DiMartino & Jessen, 2018; Lubienski, 2005, 2007). Further studies around the experience of non-English-speaking Latino families within the school choice process could speak to how charter schools are marketing themselves to this group, particularly within the parameters of a health crisis. Lastly, previous research indicated the lack of effectiveness of open house events when compared to other methods of recruitment, marketing, and advertisement (Oplatka, 2007). Further research could support or possibly present a different perspective around the effectiveness of marketing events, including open house events. The research could focus on the population of non-English-speaking Latino parents.

This study's findings support findings of other studies in regard to the adversities non-English-speaking parents encounter in the school choice process and school engagement. Yet, as the world faces a pandemic, parents will now rely on access to the internet and will require digital literacy more than ever. Future research on the school choice process as the world deals with the pandemic might be necessary. In light of this

study's findings, it is crucial to understand the state of equity in the context of a health crisis. Findings can help point to the areas of strength and areas in need of improvement to best serve all parents of different groups.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of this study suggest that non-English-speaking Latino parents within the Catholic school system face adversities when attempting to engage in the process of applying to the public school system. Beyond the lack of translated materials or translation services in some settings, parents faced difficulties when dealing with a digital application system. The Epiphany and Cross Schools' inability to access the "MySchools" system limited their staffs' abilities to help parents. Many parents found this lack of assistance discouraging and, in some cases, decided not to consider public schools as a result.

Although this study adds to the research on equity and school choice, based on the limitations, it cannot offer an overall generalization. However, it does signal the need for further research on the public school system. As the NYC DOE continues to hold equity as the foremost policy goal, it will be necessary to examine the school choice process and its approach toward equity and empowerment, not merely efficiency. For the most part, the Catholic schools cater to parents and help them apply to the schools they wish their children to attend. Based on this case study, the willingness to help was there on the part of the Epiphany and Cross Schools. However, without access to certain resources, the schools were not always able to follow through on the will to help.

It should be noted that the will to help is evidence of Freire's (1968) theory of working together within education to break the cycle of oppression. It is also evidence of

the richness of the school culture and how different parties work together to benefit the number one stakeholder, the students. Yet, while this works takes place, parents and Catholic schools face constraints when engaging in the current high school choice process within New York City.

Parents will continue to be influenced by schools, staff, friend among others as it is part of the market-based school choice system. Competition, enrollment, and results are all part of the conversation, but equity is also part, if not the most important part, of this process. The question originally posed in the introduction of this study remains pressing: are school systems targeting and excluding certain groups? Findings with regard to this question are inconclusive, yet, circumstantially, my study shows that some non-English-speaking Latino parents whose children are enrolled in a Catholic school are facing adversities when attempting to engage in the school choice process.

## APPENDIX A: PARENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

### Parent Interview Protocol <sup>4</sup>

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Experiences / Background	Research Questions
<p>1. How was life where you grew up?</p>	<p>1. In what ways do you interact with the community? If not,</p>

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<sup>4</sup> Adapted from DiMartino C. (2009). *Public-private partnerships and the small schools movement: A new form of education management* (Order No. 3346262); and Jessen, S. B. (2011). *A year in the labyrinth: Examining the expansion of mandatory public high school choice in New York City* (Order No. 3454475).

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
|   | why don't you? Probe on the involvement in the community (both at school and at home).                                    | 1. Tell me about the experience of choosing a school.   |
| 2. Tell me about your normal weekday, what are your responsibilities? | 2. How often have you been able to interact in Spanish at school? If so please tell me about it, if not why have you not? | 2. Did you assist to any events (school fairs, open houses)? Tell me about the experience. If not why did you not go?       |
| 3. When at home, tell me about your interaction with the family.      | 3. What were you looking for in a school? Why? What was most important? Why?  | 3. Did these schools give you the information in Spanish or did you request them in Spanish? Tell me about the interaction. |
| 4. How often do you speak about school at home?                       |   | 4. Tell me about any difficulty you encountered through this process.   |

5. In what ways did the school make it easy for you to be part of your child's education?

6. How has your experience been at this school with regards to being informed of your child's education?

4. Did you receive any information with regards to the process of choosing a school?

From who? Explain.

5. Was the information made available in Spanish?

6. Who helped you with the school choice process?

7. What had most impact on your choice? Why?

5. Have you heard about charter schools?

6. Where did you hear about these schools?  
How?

7. Did they provide you with information in your language?

8. Does anyone in your family have a child in a charter school? What do you think of their schooling?

9. In the process did you encounter information about charter schools or traditional public

school on billboards,  
radio, newspapers,  
and magazines? Did  
you encounter them  
in Spanish?

8. Reflecting on when you  
began this process, do you think  
you changed your mind on  
“what you were looking for in a  
school”?

10. As a person who’s  
main language is not  
English, tell me about  
how you felt when  
attending events or  
interacting with  
individuals? Did you  
feel always  
comfortable? Explain.

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**APPENDIX B: PARENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL (SPANISH VERSION)**

Hora de la entrevista:

Fecha:

Lugar:

<b>Experiencias / Fondo</b>	<b>Preguntas de Investigación</b>	
1. Como era su vida en donde usted creció?	1. De que forma usted interactúa con la comunidad? Si no, por que no? Sondeo en el involucramiento en la comunidad (en la escuela y afuera).	1. Cuénteme acerca de su experiencia en elegir una escuela.
2. Cuénteme acerca de un día normal de semana.	2. Que tanto a podido interactuar hablando español en la escuela de su hijo? Dígame	2. Asistió a algún evento (feria de escuelas, casa

*Que influencias formaron la elección de escuelas entre los padres Hispanos de estudiantes del quinto grado que no hablan Ingles?*

*Hasta que punto las escuelas publicas se están haciendo publicidad y marketing hacia la comunidad hispana que no habla ingles?*

Cuales son sus responsabilidades?	acerca de aquello. Si no la ah podido hacer, cuénteme por que no.	abiertas)? Cuénteme acerca de la experiencia.
3. Cuando esta en casa, cuénteme acerca de su interacción con la familia.	3. Que buscaba usted en una escuela para su hijo? Que era lo mas importante que tenga? Por que?	3. Estas escuelas le proporcionaron información en español o tuvo que pedirles información en español?
4. Cuanto, mas o menos, se habla acerca de la escuela en su casa?		Cuénteme acerca de su experiencia.
		4. Cuénteme acerca de alguna dificultad que allá experimentado durante este proceso.
5. De que forma la escuela la ayuda a ser parte de la educación de su hijo?	4. Recibió alguna información con relación al proceso de escoger una escuela media? De quien? Explíqueme?	5. Ha escuchado hablar de las escuelas chárter?

6. Que tal ah sido su experiencia en esta escuela con relación a mantenerse informada acerca la educación de su hijo?

5. La información estaba disponible en español?

6. Quien la ayudo con el proceso de elijar una escuela?

7. Que impacto si decisión final? Por que?

6. Donde escucho acerca de estas escuelas? Como?

7. Las escuelas chárter le proporcionaron material en español?

8. Alguien en su familia tiene hijos en una escuela chárter? Que piensa usted acerca de esa escuela?

9. En el proceso encontró alguna vez información de las escuelas chárter o publicas en una cartelera, la radio, periódicos, o revistas

Encontró estos  
anuncios en español?

8. Reflexionando en cuando  
usted empezó este proceso, cree  
usted que cambio de opinar en  
relación a lo que buscaba en una  
escuela?

10. Siendo su primer  
idioma no Ingles,  
cuénteme acerca de  
como se sintió cuando  
interactuaba en algún  
evento escolar en  
relación a la elección  
de escuela. Se sentía  
cómoda?

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## APPENDIX C: SCHOOL OFFICIAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

### School Official Interview Protocol <sup>5</sup>

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Topic	Question	Probes
School choice process	1. Tell me about your role in choice process?	
Support for Parents	2. What type of support you have for parents in this process?	What type of support do you offer to parents who do not speak English?
		When do information sessions take place?

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<sup>5</sup> Adapted from DiMartino C. (2009). *Public-private partnerships and the small schools movement: A new form of education management* (Order No. 3346262); and Jessen, S. B. (2011). *A year in the labyrinth: Examining the expansion of mandatory public high school choice in New York City* (Order No. 3454475).

<p>Reflection on the Choices</p>	<p>3. Do you have any 'middle schools that recruit students?</p>	<p>Do you prefer your students to go to any particular school?</p> <p>Are there any schools you would prefer your students not apply to?</p>
	<p>4. Do you think parents take full advantage of the resources to make the best possible choice?</p>	<p>What stands in the way of parents accessing some of these resources?</p> <p>Do parents know best when it comes to their child education? Why?</p>

## APPENDIX D: OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

### Observation Protocol <sup>6</sup>

Name of Event:

Date:

Length:

Location:

1. What is the purpose of this event?
2. Who is supervising the event? What is their visual role?
3. Who is in attendance? How many are in attendance?
4. What language are those in attendance using?
5. What is the involvement of parents in this event?

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<sup>6</sup> Adapted from DiMartino C. (2009). *Public-private partnerships and the small schools movement: A new form of education management* (Order No. 3346262).

## APPENDIX E: DOCUMENT REVIEW PROTOCOL

### Document Review Protocol <sup>7</sup>

Title of Document:

Date acquired:

Place acquired:

1. What type of document?
2. Is the document provided in a language other than English?
3. What type of information does the document display?
4. Are there visuals within the document?

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<sup>7</sup> Adapted from DiMartino C. (2009). *Public-private partnerships and the small schools movement: A new form of education management* (Order No. 3346262).



## APPENDIX F: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY

You have been invited to participate in a study that examines the middle school choice process in New York City among the non-English speaking Latino community. This study is being conducted by Christian Toala, as part of his doctoral dissertation, who is a doctoral candidate at the DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE AND LEADERSHIP at St. John's University. His faculty sponsor is Dr. Catherine DiMartino who is part of the DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE AND LEADERSHIP at St. John's University.

If you agree to be part of this study, you will be asked to do the following:

1. Take part in an interview concerning the middle school choice experience.

Your interview will be recorded using a digital voice recorder or a recording app. The interview may occur in person or over the phone. You may review these recordings and request that all or any portion of the tapes be destroyed. Participation in this study will involve 45 minutes to 1 hour to conduct the interview.

There are no known risks associated with your participation in this research beyond those of everyday life. Although you will receive no direct benefits, this research may help the investigator understand the school choice process among the non-English speaking Latino community better. Confidentiality of your research records will be strictly maintained by keeping consent forms separate from data and making sure that your name does not appear on any descriptive or narrative.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty. You have the right to skip or not answer any questions you prefer not to answer. If there is anything about the study or your participation that is unclear or that you do not understand, if you have questions or wish to report a research-related problem, you may contact Christian Toala at [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] or the faculty sponsor, Dr. Catherine DiMartino, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] St. John's University [REDACTED]

For questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the university Human Subjects Review Board, St. John's University, [REDACTED]

Yes, I give the investigator permission to use my name when quoting material from our interview in his dissertation.

No, I would prefer that my name not be used.

You have received a copy of this consent document to keep.

### Agreement to Participate

\_\_\_\_\_  
Subject Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**APPENDIX G: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY (IN SPANISH)**

Consentimiento de Participar en el Estudio.

Usted a sido invitado a participar en un estudio para examinar el proceso de elección de escuelas medias del departamento de educación de la ciudad de Nueva York en la comunidad de habla hispana. Este estudio será realizado por Christian Toala quien pertenece al departamento de administración y liderazgo educativo de la Universidad de St. John's, como parte de su disertación/tesis. La patrocinadora y miembro de la facultad es la Dra. Catherine DiMartino quien pertenece también a la Universidad ya nombrada. Si usted decide participar en este estudio, se le pedirá:

1. Que participe en una entrevista.

Como parte de la entrevista, el uso de una grabadora de voz será utilizada. La entrevista podra ser en persona o por telefono. Usted puede revisar la grabación de la entrevista y pedir que se omita o destruya cualquier parte. Cada entrevista tomara entre 45 minutos a 1 hora. No hay ningún riesgo asociado con la participación de este estudio. Aunque usted no recibirá ningún beneficio directo, los resultados de este estudio podrán informar al encargado del estudio a comprender el proceso de selección de escuela.

Confidencialidad se mantendrá al solo mantener record de este consentimiento. Su nombre nunca será relacionado con este estudio o publicación.

Participación en este estudio es voluntaria. Usted puede reusarse a participar en cualquier momento sin ninguna penalidad. Si usted tiene alguna pregunta o duda acerca de este estudio podrá contactar a Christian Toala (████████████████████), o a la Dra. Catherine DiMartino (████████████████████). Si tiene preguntas acerca de sus derechos como participante puede comunicarse con el departamento apropiado en la Universidad de St. John's (████████████████████).

Para estas entrevistas:

\_\_\_ Le doy permiso al investigador de usar mi nombre cuando cite material de la entrevista.

\_\_\_ No, prefiero que no utilice mi nombre.

Acuerdo de Participación

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma del sujeto

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha

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