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ABSTRACT

Benefits accrue to individuals from their social relationships, and these benefits may serve as resources. A study focused on the structure and implications of voluntary association, both between and within U.S. secondary schools. It studied both the qualities of social relationships in high schools and the schools' organizational characteristics. The study explored the advantages and disadvantages of internal and external choice, drawing on data from two projects that examined social capital in 10 high schools, using qualitative methods. An example of external choice would be choice between schools. An example of internal choice would be choice among small learning communities in high schools organized into schools-within-schools. A major benefit of choice is the commitment that students, parents, and teachers bring to the schools or subunits whose themes, values, and norms are aligned with their own. Such commitment typically leads to productive relationships among school members. That is, the prevalence of social capital in such settings is a direct result of voluntary associations that underlie their formation. The disadvantage of allowing such voluntary associations is that social stratification may, and often does, develop. Choice, social capital, and social equity are discussed within a framework that contrasts individualism and the common good. (Contains 59 references.) (RKJ)

Volition and Social Capital: The Dilemma of Choice and Inequality Surrounding Human Relationships in Secondary Schools

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Volition and Social Capital: The Dilemma of Choice and Inequality Surrounding Human Relationships in Secondary Schools

Abstract

This study focuses on the structure and implications of voluntary association, both between and within U.S. secondary schools. Drawing on data from two projects that examine social capital in ten high schools using qualitative methods, the study explores the advantages and disadvantages of choice. Two types of choice are highlighted: external choice (i.e., choice between schools) and internal choice (especially choice among small learning communities in high schools organized into schools-within-schools [SWS]. A major benefit of choice is the commitment that students, parents, and teachers bring to the schools or sub-units whose themes, values, and norms are alligned with their own. Such commitment typically leads to producive relationships among school members. That is, the prevalence of social capital in such settings is a direct result of voluntary associations that underlie their formation. The disadvantage of allowing such voluntary associations is that social stratification may (and usually does) develop. Choice, social capital, and social equity are discussed within a framework that contrasts individualism and the common good.

Volition and Social Capital: The Dilemma of Choice and Inequality Surrounding Human Relationships in Secondary Schools

Introduction

Social capital is an important element in helping children to develop into successful adults. My colleagues and I, who have been studying social capital through the lens of secondary schools, contend that adolescents' collective life in school represents a substantial portion of the social capital on which they may draw. Our research focuses on both the qualities of social relationships in high schools and the schools' social organizations. We are interested in understanding the process through which school-based social capital either helps or hinders adolescents' academic development, particularly students who are at risk of educational failure.

Although policymakers and researchers have made increasingly frequent references to the importance of social capital in the educational context, the construct is neither well understood nor well conceptualized. With the aim of making this appealing theoretical construct a more accessible and useful means for understanding how the human dimensions of schooling influence adolescents' well-being, a conceptual framework through which to study this construct has recently been offered (Lee and Croninger 1998). This framework divides social capital into six elements. Three elements describe its inherent *qualities* (use, location, and intentionality); three other elements focus on the *mechanisms* through which students gain access to social capital (volition, impetus, and norms). This paper expands upon one of these mechanisms: *volition*.

Data for the study described here comes from two related field-based research projects which aim to help us understand how social capital is generated and sustained in U.S. secondary schools. For both projects, data were drawn from in-depth case studies in several high schools. In Project 1, entitled, "Social Capital and Its Effects on the Academic Development of Adolescents at Risk of Educational Failure," my colleagues and I studied six public and private secondary schools. Project 2, "A Study of Social Capital in Schools-Within-Schools," extends the qualitative study of social capital in five public high schools that are divided into smaller learning communities. According to administrators in secondary schools with the schools-within-schools (SWS) design, creating more personal relationships

among members of the smaller sub-units was a major motivation for selecting this organizational form. All Project 2 schools are public; most serve students from designated catchment areas.[1] As one school in Project 1 offered the SWS structure, it was also included in Project 2. Thus, data for this study come from a total ten U.S. high schools. As field work in the schools in Project 2 is ongoing, conclusions drawn from it are more speculative than from Project 1.

A wide lattitude of choices is available to students and teachers in all sampled schools, despite the fact that most are public high schools. Choices are available both between and within schools. Within schools there is considerable choice of the sub-units to which school members affiliate themselves. Three of six schools in Project 1 are schools of choice: an alternative public school and two Catholic schools.

The paper locates the study of educational choice within the context of two major tensions that surround the issue: stratification vs. commitment. On the one hand, I consider whether choice may be a vehicle to increase students' commitment to the educational goals of the schools. On the other hand, I consider how, in these settings, choice may act to increase social stratification in educational outcomes. Issues of stratification and commitment are especially salient in these settings, because the schools enroll high proportions of students at risk of educational failure.

Background

Research on the Social Dimensions of Schooling

Two ideologies for reform. Two separate literatures are relavent to this study. The paper first considers research about the social dimensions of schooling, focusing on school-based social capital, recent reforms and policy statements directed to improve human interactions in schools, and research about schools organized as communities. Second, the paper reviews research and writings about school choice.

Two important (but quite different) ideologies underlie reforms designed to improve students' academic development. One ideology focuses on social support, highlighting the role of schools in providing affective connections among their members and with the broader adult community (Anson et al. 1991; Noddings 1988). A second ideology centers on academic press, emphasizing strict adherence to codes and values of academic performance,

typically in a more competitive than cooperative environment (Phillips 1997). Although these two ideologies are typically seen as competing, some recent empirical work has demonstrated that the two constructs actually work in tandem (Lee and Smith 1998; Shouse 1996).

As this paper is located within the first rather than the second ideology, the review focuses on the social and affective dimensions of schooling. Empirical examination of the affective dimensions of schooling also draws from three research strands: (1) school-based social capital; (2) writing and research about recent reforms that target the social dimension of schooling; and (3) the organization of schools as communities. Although these strands share considerable theoretical overlap, but work in one is seldom cited in another.

School-based social capital. Social capital, particularly as it relates to children's academic development, is consistent with the social support approach to improving children's academic development. There is, unfortunately, much ambiguity about the meaning of social capital in the educational context (Epstein 1996), despite the intuitive appeal of this construct. It identifies a crucial observation about collective life: that the qualities of social relationships themselves either enhance or hinder our capacity to attain desirable social goods (Coleman 1990; Fukuyama 1995). The idea is that benefits accrue to individuals from the social relationships in which they engage, and these benefits may serve as resources for them. Moreover, social relationships encompass broader patterns of interaction between individuals can also serve as resources for neighborhoods, communities, and other social groups. Such exchanges of resources make not only individual but collective actions more effective.

Coleman (1988) pointed out the special significance of social capital for children. The responsibility for young children's early skill development rests with parents, but as they mature their spheres of social relationships expand to include peers, other adults, and of course the school. The focus of developmental activities shifts from home to school, as young people begin to spend more time engaged in formal education (Broffenbrenner 1979). Although the family and other social institutions continue to assist young people as they move into adulthood, the school has the primary responsibility for teaching the social and cognitive skills needed for successfully filling adult roles (Coleman 1987). Social relationships in school become increasingly important as children mature.

Social capital represents the potential for more effective action embedded in social relationships; thus, it is seen as both an individual asset and a communal good (Coleman 1990; Fukuyama 1995; Lee and Croninger 1998). Conceptualizations of social capital may thus create a useful link betwen micro- and macro-theories of human behavior. At the micro level, social capital functions as a social-psychological resource on which individuals may draw to pursue their interests. At the macro level, it includes norms, traditions, and behavior patterns that shape both the goals people pursue and their opportuntities for doing so. Conceptualizing social capital requires theoretical and analytic considerations at both levels.

Reforms focused on social relations. A major theme underlying the aims of the Annenberg Foundation, which recently committed $500 million to reform urban schools, is to improve personal relationships between children and adults in schools. An early document laying out the Annenberg Challenge addressed this theme directly. Among four guiding principles, "[f]irst the schools will arrange their resources so that each child shall be known well. The schools should wisely use that knowledge of each child to shape his or her schooling" (Annenberg Institute for School Reform 1994:2). Generous Annenberg Challenge grants to several cities (e.g., Chicago, New York, Detroit, Philadelphia) stress this theme. Clearly, this current national school reform effort identifies a key need in urban schools: to develop more positive social relations among school members.

A similar theme supports the Carnegie Foundation's efforts to reform schools during the last decade. A major recommendation in its influential report on middle schools, Turning Points, was "to create small communities for learning" (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development 1989:9). The first of six themes of Carnegie's report about high schools, Breaking Ranks, is that "schools must break into units of no more than 600 students so that teachers and students can get to know one another" (NASSP 1996:5). A major high-school reform effort, the Coalition of Essential Schools, has been committed to changing secondary schools for almost two decades. The fourth of the nine principles that guide all Coalition schools states: "Teaching and learning should be personalized to the maximum feasible extent" (MacMullen 1996:116). Founder Theodore Sizer described "personalization of learning and instruction" as the goal underlying one of five imperatives for improving schools: keeping the structure simple and flexible (Sizer 1984:216).

Communal school organization. Investigations of "schools as communities" not only have a long and rich history (from Weber 1922; Waller 1932; Dewey 1943; and Bidwell 1965), but the idea is well established in more recent writings (e.g., Bryk, Lee, and Holland 1993; Lee, Bryk, and Smith 1993; Shouse, 1996). A thread describing the need for schools to provide informal connections between members runs through progressive reforms of the 1940s, through calls for communalism in the 1960s and 1970s, and into present with the reminder that "it takes an entire village to raise a child" (Clinton 1996). Bryk and Driscoll, who provide conceptual development for these ideas, relate communal school organization to two types of outcomes: teacher-student engagement and student achievement (1988). Three core components of schools' social organization represent the mechanisms through which this connection occurs: the degree to which they share (1) values and understandings, (2) a common agenda of activities, and (3) an ethic of caring. This paper is associated with the third component.

Research and writing about schools as communities focuses on the social dimensions of schooling. However, there is an important distinction between this work and reseach that focuses on social support for student learning (reviewed by Lee and Smith 1998). Studies of schools as communities define the social dimension as an organizational property of *schools* (a macro-level construct), whereas research on social support typically focuses on social interactions among *individuals* (a micro-level construct). One empirical study (Battistich et al. 1995) considers the construct of community at both the micro and macro levels. Lee and Croninger (1998) point out that school-based social capital may accrue to students through both the micro- and macro-levels.

Choice and Equity in the School Context

External and internal dimensions of choice. For students, families, and teachers, membership in some schools, is voluntary. This is the external element to school choice. Within schools, students typically have considerable control over their courses of study or even the sub-unit with which they choose to affiliate (internal choice). Voluntary schools, public or private, can offer specific programs or structures that are attractive to some but not to others. It seems likely that such an alignment of normative values and interests facilities the types of social interactions that constitute productive social capital. In voluntary settings,

commitment doesn't need to be built; rather, it is assumed as a condition of membership. Moreover, membership may be terminated (not always voluntarily) if members do not comply with accepted norms and expectations.

Choice between schools. Consistently, the U.S. public has offered strong support for school choice. Support for this policy, which has alternatively come from liberals and conservatives, is bound together by a deep disillusionment with an unresponsive and bureaucratic public school monoply (Peterson 1990; Raywid 1985; Tyack 1974). Strong advocates argue that school choice is the only way to affect needed reform, since these bureaucracies -- especially big-city districts -- cannot reform themselves (e.g., Boyd and Kerchner 1987; Chubb and Moe 1990; Lieberman 1989). External plans include (a) choice among public schools in single districts, (b) cross-district choice among public schools in a single state, and (c) publicly funded choice of public or private schools (via vouchers or tuition tax credits). Of course, some parents dissatified with their local public schools for their children have options available to them, in that they may choose whether to send them to selective magnet schools in particular districts, whether to move to private schools, or perhaps to change residency in search of better schools (the *exit* option in Hirschman's [1970] seminal work, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*).

The issue of school choice is contentious and political, but "the policy debate has been long on advocacy and short on analysis" (Manski 1992:4). For example, an empirical analysis by Chubb and Moe (1990) was embedded in strongly pro-choice rhetoric. Their work has been offered as evidence to support the Republican Party's strong positive stand on school choice. Bryk and Lee (1992) analyzed Chubb and Moe's empirical evidence, finding serious flaws in the original work. An empirical study that examined achievement in urban schools compared students attending schools of choice (Catholic, private, and public magnet schools) to those in comprehensive high schools generally favored students in choice schools (especially magnets) (Gamoran 1996). One explanation for why Catholic high schools are more effective than their public counterparts is that membership is chosen rather than assigned (Bryk et al. 1993; Coleman and Hoffer 1987). A foundational element of Catholic schools is the fact that students, teachers, and families choose to be there.

Choice within schools. Even if parents and students do not choose the schools they attend, choices are often available to them within schools

(particularly secondary schools). The most obvious choice is the curriculum program (or track) students select, presumably based on their post-secondary plans. Even in high schools without formal tracking, in comprehensive public high schools students have considerable choice over the courses they take (Powell, Farrar, and Cohen 1985). Presumably, these choices rest on students' educational aspirations, willingness to engage in hard work, intellectual curiosity, and parental guidance. As not all these choices result in benefits for students, inequities may result in allowing students to make choices about their courses of study (Lee 1993; Lee et al. 1993).

One reason why some high schools divide themselves into smaller instructional units (i.e., schools-within-schools) is to provide choices. In such schools, both students and teachers typically choose the units with which they wish to affiliate themselves. Again, these basis for these choices are based on individuals' interests, needs, preparation, and willingness to engaged deeply in the work of school. The staff in these smaller learning communities often work hard to distinguish themselves from one another, so students' choices will be logical and meaningful.

Choice and social equity. Proponents of school choice, particularly advocates of vouchers or tuition tax credits, have argued that this type of choice allows poor families the same choices their more advantaged counterparts typically have (i.e., to exit poor public schools in favor of private schools at public expense) (Chubb and Moe 1990; Coons 1990; Coons and Sugarman 1978; Friedman and Friedman 1981). However, choices typically have consequences. Although it is theoretically possible that all consequences of choice would be beneficial, in practice this is difficult. Critics of school choice have typically focused on these consequences, particularly the potential for inequality that may result from either bad choices or selectivity that occurs when more able or motivated students act on choice. A comparative study of choice of schools and curriculum highlights three issues about choice and educational equity: (1) who actually exercises choice; (2) stratification as a result of choice; and (3) inequitable access to information about schools (Lee 1993).

There is evidence that it is relatively more advantaged families who actually take advantage of choice when it is available (e.g., Moore and Davenport 1990; Willms and Echols 1993). This is because information about available choices is seldom equally acccessible to all families (Elmore 1990). Moreover, when more ambitious inner-city parents choose to

send their more able children to different schools, this withdraws important human resources from the schools they leave.[2] In the conclusion to his empirical study of choice in city schools, Gamoran asks: "If magnet schools raise achievement of students who attend them, what happens to students in the same district who do not attend magnet schools?" (1996:14) Drawing conclusions about school choice based on empirical evidence collected in the context of one large city, Lee, Croninger, and Smith are "pessimistic about the ability of a choice policy to reduce social stratification, especially in the Detroit area... [w]e conclude that the overall effect of the implementation of a choice plan would be to increase, rather than decrease, social stratification in education" (1994:450).

To counter the strong advocacy of school choice by the U.S. government early in the 1990s, two conferences were convened and their proceedings subsequently published. Papers presented at a conference convened in Washington D.C. by the Economic Policy Institute were critical of the policy (Rasell and Rothstein 1993). Also critical of school choice were papers presented in a series of seminars at Harvard University that were published in a book by edited Fuller and Elmore (1996).[3]

Research on Schools-Within-Schools

Sparse research base. There is very little empirical research about high schools that are divided into schools-within-schools. One study explored this design option as a means to introduce school reform (in that case, the Coalition of Essential Schools) into a larger high school setting (Muncie and McQuillan 1991). The authors concluded that the creation of a single smaller unit within a larger school often fomented unproductive divisions and competition within the faculty. The authors did not investigate SWS schools that fit our criteria (see below), since none of the schools they studied had the entire student body or faculty divided into smaller sub-units. Another author has written about her efforts in aiding schools to create smaller learning communities. Although she discussed the difficulties and rewards involved in such reform, these writings take the form of experience-based advice rather than empircally-based research (Oxley 1989; 1994).

A recommended reform strategy. Other authors have mentioned the SWS option as a recommendation for reforming high schools. In their conclusions to two large-scale quantitative studies that focused on how high-school

organization and size influence academic outcomes, Lee and Smith (1995, 1997) suggested that one way to accomplish effectively smaller high schools without building new schools would be to break up larger schools into smaller units. In a study conducted more than three decades ago, that also had findings favoring smaller high schools, Barker and Gump (1964) made a similar suggestion. The authors of that seminal study also favored smaller schools (some very small), with outcomes defined more in terms of students' affiliative activities than academic performance. Concluding their book, Barker and Gump offered several suggestions for improving high schools. One suggestion, labelled by them "the campus school," is relevant:

> ...an arrangement by which students are grouped in semiautonous units for most of their studies, but are usually provided a school-wide extracurricular program. The campus school provides for repeated contacts between the same teachers and students; this continuity of associates probably leads to closer social bonds. A common-sense theory is that the campus school welds together the facility advantages of the large school and the social values of the small school (Barker and Gump 1964:201-202).

Research Focus

It is clear that, within the context of schooling, many decisions are left to families, students, and teachers. These choices, which involve decisions about *what* students would like to study and *with whom* they would like to associate, may occur externally (between schools) and internally (within schools). Allowing voluntary associations among individuals about their education is likely to increase their commitment to the educational enterprise. However, benefits resulting from voluntary association could be accompanied by costs, measured in terms of the potential for social inequity in and across educational settings.

This study explores the advantages and disadvantages that result from voluntary associations in schools. Although the advantages and disadvantages could influence a wide range of potential outcomes, take place at several levels, and occur in different types of schools, the focus of the study is narrowed in several ways. First, the study examines social capital within schools -- in particular, social relationships among school members. Second, although school choice and social capital have both been explored most often in schools serving young children, we focus on adolescents in

secondary schools. Third, because our focus is not on schools' core functions (teaching and learning), the study does not explore an important feature of educational choice: students' choices about the courses they take. Fourth, the study's sample and method are relatively narrow: we explore the issues in a modest number of U.S. high schools, using qualitative methods. An underlying research question guides the study: *Are inequalities that often result from allowing students and teachers to make major choices about their education and work balanced by the increased commitment that is likely to result from allowing choice?*

Method

Sample

Two projects. This study reports on data collected in two related and recent projects. Both are qualitative studies, more specifically each is a multi-site case study (Yin 1994), conducted in a modest number of secondary schools. The major focus of both projects is social capital: its character, how it is generated, how it is sustained, and how it related to each school's structural characteristics. The studies' staffs also overlap in large part, and both are directed by the same principal investigator. In several ways, Project 2 is a continuation and expansion of Project 1.

The aim of Project 1 was to study schools, especially those enrolling high proportions of at-risk students, where the probability of finding social capital was high. As we hypothesized that schools of choice would be especially likely to have social capital, three of the six Project 1 study sites were schools of choice. The other three were regular public high schools whose students come from designated catchment areas. Data were collected in Project 1 during the 1997-98 school year. Although the aim of Project 2 is similar, its sites share a common structure: all are public schools divided into schools-within-schools (SWS). All offer some sort of choice, most often through the sub-units in which students choose to enroll. In most Project 2 sites, students come from the school's designated catchment areas. In one school, students throughout the city apply directly to sub-units. Project 2 is ongoing; sample recruitment and selection occurred in Fall 1998; data collection is taking place in 1999.

Selection and recuitment of schools. As these projects are both qualitative, the aim in choosing possible study sites is less to select a

sample that is representative of some population than to choose sites that as a group comprise information-rich cases. Thus we followed a strategy of "maximum variation sampling" (Patton 1990:172). Schools in Project 1 were selected because (1) they enrolled substantial proportions of students at risk of educational failure; (2) they had qualitites that led us to believe that social capital might be prevalent there; and (3) their organizational structures and geographic settings were quite different from one another. Although the same selection criteria were used for both studies, we imposed additional criteria in the second study: (4) all students and teachers must be affiliated with only one sub-unit, and instructional activity in core subjects had to occur in sub-units; (5) SWS organizational structure should be quite different across schools; and (6) we aimed to maximize variation in the history and length of time the SWS structure has been in place.

As there was no population of schools from which to draw the sample in Project 1, sample selection was not systematic. Identifying the population from which to draw the sample for Project 2, however, required much time and many resources. We conducted hundreds of telephone screening interviews with schools that others suggested as SWS high schools.[4] The purpose of the first round was to determine if the nominated schools did, in fact, meet our criteria for SWS schools (most did not), and whether the SWS reform was currently in place (some had abandoned it). Only if all school members (students and teachers) were in sub-units did we conduct a second screening interview, to obtain more information about the SWS structure. From the list of schools with full SWS implementation, we chose schools to visit.[5]

For both projects, we made contact with schools we thought we might be interested in and requested more information. If the school sounded interesting (and interested), we conducted one-day exploratory visits. The principal investigator visited all schools; other staff members accompanied her on some visits. In conversation with the principal and other responsible parties, we explained the study, what participation would entail, listing the costs and benefits schools might expect from participation. For both projects, we distributed many copies of a brochure describing each study in more detail during these "scouting" visits.

Formal invitations to participate were issued to schools we decided would be good to study. In several schools, principals alone decided whether or not to participate. In others, that decision included faculty (in a few cases, by formal vote). In Project 1, all schools we invited to

join the project chose to participate. In Project 2, two invited schools declined (they had other ongoing research projects and felt the burden would interrupt their operations) and were replaced by other SWS schools.

Schools in Project 1. Table 1 provides summary data about the schools in Projects 1 and 2. Although the data are as accurate as possible, we have given the schools pseudonyms to protect their identities. Project 1 data describe the schools during 1997-98; Project 2 data are from 1998-99. Schools in Project 1 are of two types: regular public schools (Taylor, Coolidge, Wilson) and schools of choice (Jackson, St.Francis, McGuire). *Zachary Taylor* is a large "zoned" inner-city public high school that is the most racially diverse secondary school in a city whose school enrollment is overwhelmingly Black. The school is plagued by high dropout rates, high absenteeism, and low achievement. In 1994, the school was reconstituted. At present, it is involved in extensive reform, the major element of which is reorganization into several schools-within-schools described as career academies. Another regular public school is *Calvin Coolidge High*, a small all-White high school that is physically within the village's only K-12 school. Students are drawn from a large and isolated rural agricultural area with a stable (but sparce) population. The school plays a central role in its community. Virtually all students (close to half qualify for subsidized lunches) graduate, but even its highest performers attend non-selective colleges. The curriculum is traditional, and many Coolidge teachers have been at the school for decades.

Insert Table 1 about here

Woodrow Wilson High School, in a large Midwest city, draws its economically and racially diverse student population from a neighborhood with many non-English speaking and immigrant residents. Though large compared to other schools in our study, Wilson is relatively small among its city's high schools. Major curriculum and structural reform has driven the school for over a decade, including membership in the Coalition of Essential Schools. Sustaining these reforms is difficult within increasingly stringent top-down reforms coming from the district. Wilson shares many problems with Taylor, 1,000 miles away.

The popularity of *Andrew Jackson High*, a small alternative school of choice in a small city with two larger comprehensive high schools, has

increased in recent years. Admission is determined by lottery from among a much larger applicant pool of mostly White and middle-class applicants. Jackson's students score high on standardized tests. Casual social interactions occur within a democratic environment. Students take courses at other high schools, community colleges, or the nearby university. They may may also get credit for courses designed from community-based activities.

Two of the three schools of choice in Project 1 are private schools. However, both are Catholic schools, and both enroll high proportions of minority students. The population of *St.Francis of Asissi High School* a small and non-selective inner-city coeducational Catholic school, is all-Black. Very few students are Catholic (though most are religious). Half of its working- and middle-class students come from the city; the remainder travel in from the suburbs. The school's core curriculum, good college-placement rate, and strong sports programs attract students from a variety of academic backgrounds. The school displays many artifacts relating to students' African heritage. The structure and curriculum of *Cardinal McGuire High*, an academically oriented medium-sized coeduational Catholic high school sponsored by a religious order, are also quite traditional. In recent years applications have increased, after a history of enrollment problems, Currently, admission is somewhat selective. The majority of McGuire students are minority (mostly Black), reflecting a philosophy strongly directed to social justice; only half are Catholic. Almost all McGuire students graduate, and the vast majority go to good colleges (many with scholarships facilitated by the school).

Schools in Project 2. All schools in the Project 2 sample are public; most are large (see Table 1), and they are located across the nation. All contain from four to six sub-units (often called "houses" or "academies"). In general, students choose which sub-unit they wish to attend at the end of 8th or 9th grade, based on recruitment information and school visits. Although sub-unit sizes vary, 400 students is a common size. Students typically take courses in core subjects in their sub-units, but go outside for electives, art, music, and foreign language. The degree to which students share classes only with others in their sub-units varies considerably across these schools, but this is more common in the early high-school grades. "Career academies" are popular sub-unit themes.

John Quincy Adams High School, the only high school in a district in the Northeast known for its commitment to school choice, has offered the

SWS structure for over two decades. The school's ethnically and racially diverse population includes over 60 nationalities. One of its six sub-units is strongly academic, another is organized around cooperative learning, one is an alternative program similar to Jackson High (above), one is strongly vocational, and the other two have less distinct identities. Students take most courses in their "houses" in 9th and 10th grade. Across the country, *James Monroe High* serves a largely Hispanic population in a large Southwestern city. Half of its students qualify for subsidized lunches. This year-round school, architectually designed for the sub-unit structure, is in its third year of operation. It began by enrolling 7th-9th graders, who have "moved up" with the school. Madison's 1998-99 students are in Grades 9-11, and the school will expand next year with new 9th graders (the first *new* students since it started). Students' core academic subjects are studied in their sub-units, including science. Because other SWS schools were not designed with sub-units in mind, typically students all must travel across their schools for science. Electives (music, art, foreign language, computer work) are studied outside the sub-unit structure.

The largest school in Project 2, inner-city *Ulysses S. Grant High*, has offered the SWS structure for 16 years. Over this period, the school's reputation has improved. The school's students, 93% of whom are Black, come from all across this large East Coast city. Rather than first deciding to attend Grant, students apply directly to one of five sub-units. Application/acceptance ratios vary considerably across sub-units, each of which enrolls 400-500 students. Although most sub-units have a career theme, their structure is unusual: two are academies, two are charter schools, and one is a magnet school. School staff are committed to keeping their students' educational experiences "pure" (i.e., entirely within the sub-units). In terms of demographics, inner-city location, and problems, Grant is very similar to Taylor (less than 200 miles away) and Wilson (half way across the country).

Of the four high schools in this mostly White working-class suburb of a Northwest city, *Benjamin Harrison High School* is the only one with the SWS structure. It is also the school with a slightly lower-SES (and lower-scoring) student body. The four "career academies" enroll between 200 and 400 students each. Students, who choose academies in junior high, enter Harrison as 10th graders. Students go outside their academies for advanced courses and electives. Harrison also offers a series of courses in math and

science for more advanced students outside the academy structure.

We retained *Zachary Taylor High* in our Project 2 sample (see above). Taylor's 9th graders are in a separate academy (a design that another Project 2 school considered and rejected). From the 9th grade academy, purposely separate from the rest of the school, most students "graduate" into the academy of their choice. Faculty report that Taylor's academy structure, in its fifth year, has improved the school's previously poor image throughout the city. Within the 9th-grade academy (at 900 students the school's largest), students are divided into interdisciplinary "teams" of about 150 students. Ninth-graders experience most of their education in these teams. Most academy students stay within sub-units for courses.

Procedures

Data. Procedures in Projects 1 and 2 are similar. Data come from several sources: extensive *documents* from each school, *observations* of classes, school events, lunches, hallway activity, and everyday happenings collected during two week-long visits to each school over a school year, and *interviews* conducted with the principal and other administrators (e.g., sub-unit heads), focus groups of teachers and students, and interviews with individual teachers. All interviews are transcribed verbatim.

Staff. Well before the visits, a research team was selected. The search for team members centered on several qualities: (a) knowledge of, and interest in, the theory of social capital; (b) training and knowledge of, experience with, and interest in, qualitative field methods; (c) knowledge of and experience in schools-within-schools (for Project 2); and (d) an interest and commitment to this type of research. The research teams for each projects contain about ten people. Team members each study one or two schools. Staff members fall into three categories: principal investigators, lead researchers, and research assistants. Principal investigators, who have designed and obtained funding for the research, direct and coordinate all activities. Lead researchers typically are faculty members or advanced doctoral students with experience in project work of this type. Most research assistants are doctoral students with strong interest in the project, some training in field methods, and a growing knowledge about social capital. The research team for Project 1 involved researchers from four different universities; the Project 2 team also includes researchers from four universities (not the same four). Four team members have been

part of both studies. All team members are affiliated with universities, in the fields of either Education or Sociology.

Training and preparation. After the teams were selected, we held a small number of full-team meetings, usually for two days each. In Project 1, we held three such meetings -- initial planning, before data collection began (to discuss design and protocol preparation), and after the first round of data collection. Project 2 has used the same preparation procedures. As this project added a staff member with much expertise in schools-within-schools, meetings between the principal investigator and this staff member have occurred frequently (in person or by phone). As team members come from many universities, some very far away, bringing the entire team together is costly and difficult.

The majority of the team is at one university (another team member within driving distance), however, so we have held several smaller meetings. In these meetings, we have discussed procedures, trained staff in qualitative data collection methods (entering the field, writing field notes, interviewing, observing), and worked together drawing up the general guidelines for interview protocols. These instruments have been constructed by two senior staff members, guided by suggestions from other senior staff.

Data collection. The two rounds of one-week field visits to the schools are conducted by two or three field staff (a lead researcher and one or two research assistants). Visits are scheduled to capture a school's "typical week." The visit is composed of observations, interviews, and attendance at events (many after school or in the evening). In conversations with our major contact person (usually the principal), we have asked him or her to appoint a teacher or staff member to serve as our site-based coordinator -- arranging interviews, obtaining signed consent forms for students to be interviewed, and generally making sure that our time in the schools was used well. We compensate the coordinators with an honorarium, and provide teachers with a nominal sum for participating in interviews. Our logic is that the time we take from teachers' busy days (or after school) they would otherwise use for professional activities.

Analysis. Data analysis is of two types. The first type involves each school-specific team organizing its data into a case study, structured around an outline common across sites and case studies. Each team drafts a case study after the first round of visits, revising and expanding it after final visits. Case studies are shared with the entire team after each

round. Analysis of the data for writing each case study is the responsibility of school-specific teams. The themes of the cases are general, and they are meant to describe the broader aims of each project.

Second-round analysis is more specific. Once general themes that have arisen from the cases are identified, smaller groups of team members decide on themes they would like to pursue for writing theoretical or empirical papers. At that point, these team members return to the actual data (transcripts, field notes, documents) to identify words and ideas related to these themes. We have entered all data into a computer database to facilitate the identification and management of theme-specific data. Although this process involves much contact with original data, we have found that there is no substitute for this level of effort.

Findings

The Nature of Voluntary Membership

A major factor determining the success with which schools generate and sustain social capital is the members' commitment to the school, its norms, its values, and its mission. Commitment is either *brought by members when they enter* (natural), or *it must be built* (intentional) after they arrive. The obvious matching between members' goals and schools' aims, which typically exists under choice, is a particularly productive form of natural social capital. Time and energy that schools might otherwise need for building commitment can be expended on activities that are more central to a school's central purpose: teaching and learning. Natural commitment also relieves school staff of the need to generate social capital; as a condition of membership, it is already there.

Choice is assumed to be accompanied by commitment. But what *forms* does choice take in the schools we studied? This section describes these forms, and how they relate to other characteristics of the ten schools in this study. We organize these descriptive findings are into two sections. The first section focuses on external choice, or choice among schools, as it relates to social capital. Results in this section focus on the three schools of choice in Project 1 (Jackson, St.Francis, Cardinal McGuire). The second section focuses on internal choice (i.e., choice options within schools). Although the main focus here is on choice among the schools-within-schools in Project 2, other types of choices that are available

within the ten schools are also described. The paper's final section spells out the implications of the findings about choice as they relate to educational equity. Potential tensions between equity and social capital are discussed.

External Choice

Application and selection. Why do students and families select high schools other than those that serve their residential area? Obviously, they feel that a school other than their local option may serve their needs better. Choice implies selection on the part of both the applicant and the school, but not all choice schools are *directly selective* (i.e., not all have either the ability or the desire to select the most qualified students from a large applicant pool). All schools of choice experience considerable *self-selection*, where applicants match their own desires against what the schools seem to offer. To exercise choice, students and families must take action -- i.e., they must apply to another school that accepts students outside their catchment area. To attract applicants, schools of choice must articulate their missions and rely on their reputations.

In the external choice schools we studied (Jackson, St.Francis, and Cardinal McGuire), two types of evidence indicate strong parental support for the schools' programs, policies, and activities. First, we observed both first-hand and were told by informants that parent turnout at meetings and events is high.[6] Second, parents told us about their commitment to the schools in focus groups. The parental support we heard of in these three schools far exceeded that in the other three schools in Project 1. Even though all three schools enroll students and families who have chosen their membership, among the three schools the choice *process* differs. Jackson High School chooses members randomly from an applicant pool. At St.Francis, virtually all qualified applicants are admitted. Cardinal McGuire's applicant pool is relatively large, however, and in general the school selects the most qualified among them for admission. Thus, this school also exercises direct selection. As each school's "choice" situation is somewhat different, they are discussed separately.

Admission by lottery. Application and selection to *Jackson High School* is based simply on the desire to attend; everyone who applies is eligible. This is not the case at all public choice schools, some of which are exam schools or require other academic qualifications. Jackson randomly

selects about 100 new 9th graders each year from the approximately 200 who apply. It has a well-defined mission statement as well as a 20-year reputation as an alternative school. Until two years ago, admission to Jackson was accomplished in one of two ways. Students and parents could line up at the school to apply, and at least half were selected on a first-come first-served basis from those in "the line." In 1995-96, the line was long; people began lining up two weeks before the deadline (and through a snowstorm). Because of publicity about this phenomenon, Jackson decided to move to a full lottery. Some applicants complained that admission by lineup was inequitable, as single parents, working parents, or parents of young children were unable to stay in line. However, some Jackson parents and teachers were nostalgic about line -- they felt that such families had demonstrated behaviorally their interest in Jackson member- ship. In focus groups, two parents who had gained admission to Jackson for their children via "the line" told us:

> I was willing to spend whatever amount of time in line that I had to because I felt pressured; if I didn't do that, I was letting my child down. But I was also aware of the fact that even thoguht I wasn't as capable as some of the people were to be able to do that [stand in line] and make that sacrifice, I was still more capable than a lot of other parents who could not have done that (Jackson parent).

> Going to a 100% lottery system [has meant that] people are able to get in without necessarily the parent support or without necessarily the level of commitment... There is such a determination amoung the kids that wait in line, we wonder if people... arent's more determined to keep their spaces by "doing the work (Jackson parent).

Despite a fully lottery-based admission policy now, all Jackson students are chosen from among those who actually apply. Its long history of alternative status means that there is considerable self-selection. The school seems to attract two types of students: (1) those who seek an alternative program, who work hard and do well, and who want the freedom to study what and how they want; and (2) students whose commitment to academics is low and feel that a school with very few rules and little pressure is best for them. Jackson students (especially the second group) are well aware that they had gained admission through a selection process, could be asked to leave, and that there are others waiting for their place at Jackson. At this alternative school, however, it is difficult to actually remove a student. Students who push the limits in this school are usuallly given second, third, even fourth chances to redeem themselves. Jackson students' commitment to the school is related to the knowledge that others

are waiting for their spot if they lose it.

A bit more selectivity. Besides a simple application process, entry to both Catholic schools includes the need to (a) take an achievement/aptitude test (administered by the archdiocese), (b) submit school records (academic and behavioral), and (c) pay tuition. These selection conditions typify virtually all Catholic high schools (Bryk et al. 1993). However, selectivity in choice schools (beyond self-selection) is constrained by the ratio of applicants to places. Waiting lists give a clear message: "If you don't want to be here, there are others who do." All three schools are able to offer the option of expelling students for non-compliance to behavioral and academic standards. Charging tuition coveys an equally obvious message: "What we do here has worth." Both St. Francis and Cardinal McGuire are coeducational urban Catholic schools enrolling high proportions of minority students, many of whom are not Catholic. Both make their missions public (including strong statements about social justice). By private secondary school standards, tuitions at both schools are relatively modest (although Cardinal McGuire's tuition is 40 percent higher than St. Francis').

Different conditions exist for students' entry and exit at the two Catholic schools, however. *St. Francis of Assisi High School* admits almost all applicants who meet minimum academic and behavioral standards. The majority of St.Francis' entering 9th graders are about one grade level below the national average in terms of standardized test scores. Thus, this is not an academically select school (although its students score better than their counterparts in the city's public high schools). Filling empty places is also a constant worry, and turnover is high. Relatively few St. Francis students were educated in Catholic elementary schools and very few are Catholic. Ms. Harper, St. Francis' principal, told us that a newly opened charter high school in the neighborhood had drained off almost 10 percent of St.Francis' students the previous year. Although the school has clearly stated academic and behavioral standards, removing a St.Francis student has obvious economic consequences. Teachers face a difficult task: to move St.Francis students successfully through its college-preparatory curriculum. For students who remain until graduation, however, most attend college (80 percent of the 1997 graduates were admitted to 4-year, 12 percent to 2-year colleges).

What difference does choice make in a non-selective school like St. Francis? One difference was summarized by a male mathematics teacher who was in his second year of teaching at St.Francis, after having retired from teaching in a nearby suburban public school district. He compared his experiences in the two schools:

> [Here] you have the unqualified support of the parents... [In the other school], there was a tendency on my part to say when a kid hits 16, it's about time he started being responsible for his own success and failures. You know, I've got 150-some kids and I don't have time to contact the parents and I needed to be one-on-one with the kids. In this place, you make contact with the parent and [snaps his fingers] the behavior is changed! Quickly!

Somewhat more selectivity. Compared to St.Francis, *Bishop McGuire High School*'s enrollment problems are in the past; the school may now be more selective than it once was. McGuire is located in an urban area where demand for Catholic schooling is high (and the quality of the city's public schools is seen as particularly poor). Although one of the archdiocese's less selective high schools, McGuire typically receives about 400 applications per year. It admits about 300 students, in order to be sure to fill its 220 openings at 9th grade. In general, admission is based on the archdiocesan admission test, grades in middle school, and teacher recommendations. Between 1997 and 1998, admissions jumped 20 percent (to 480 applicants). Although both Catholic schools describe themselves as college preparatory, McGuire enrolls students with better academic backgrounds than St. Francis (including high proportions of students from Catholic elementary schools). As part of its social justice mission, McGuire purposely admits 30 students per year who are considered "probationary," typically from inner-city public middle schools. These students are given special courses in their first two years.

The school has an outstanding record of college placement (98 percent go directly to 2- or 4-year colleges), and it works very hard to get generous financial aid for McGuire graduates. Its record as a successful college preparatory institution has contributed to its growing reputation. The increasing selectivity of its study body, reflecting higher demand for places at Cardinal McGuire, is a source of pride for the staff. Although only half the students are Catholic, and most are African-American, the school has a strongly Christian philosophy (as does St. Francis).

Faculty choice. In schools of choice (and perhaps at most schools), faculty have choices about where they want to work. However, since schools

of choice are likely to have distinct philosophies, faculty as well as students match their own values with those of the schools where they choose to work. Jackson has a core of teachers who have taught there since the 1970s, many of who strongly identify with the alternative status and democratic governance at the school. Virtually every decision is made democratically (including hiring new staff). Teaching slots at Jackson (even for student teachers) are coveted; and virtually all teachers are tenured in the city system. Faculty turnover is higher at the Catholic schools (especially St. Francis), in part because of low salaries. Teachers at both schools are on year-to-year contracts which may be terminated almost at will. Our observations match those of Bryk and his colleagues about Catholic high-school teachers, who stated: "[I]t seems clear that economic incentives are not the primary incentives prompting high levels of commitment among the adults in these schools" (1993:275). In fact, low economic incentives may actually increase commitment; teachers who are motivated by financial concerns do not remain on Catholic school faculties.

Internal Choice

What internal choices are available? Within the schools in this study, particularly schools for which there is no external choice, there are several types (and considerable variety) in internal choices available to students. In a few schools in this study, however *internal choice is quite limited*. In most U.S. high schools, course offerings are differentiated into *curricular programs or tracks*. Students have considerable freedom to select the track they wish to pursue, and such choices are typically made based on current interests and future educational and occupational plans. Although students in all U.S. secondary schools have choices among the courses they take, this study does not investigate this area of internal choice. Students have choices inside schools about whether to participate in *special programs* (that are not rigid curriculum tracks). Because of the special focus of the schools in Project 2, a major element of choice is among *sub-units* in the several SWS high schools we studied. Because the schools in this study were selected for special purposes, we recognize that representation of types and degrees of internal choice is unusual and not generalizable. We discuss several types of internal choice.

Low internal choice. In two Project 1 schools, *Coolidge and St.Francis*, few choices are available to students or faculty within the

schools. That is to say, most students take the same courses, experience the same teachers, and follow a reasonably similar academic program. These schools also share an important structural feature: they are the smallest high schools studied. Although in both schools resources are constrained, neither enrolls a homogeneous clientele. In the case of Coolidge, the small number of faculty keep curriculum differentiation to a minimum (something that troubles some school members). In the case of St.Francis, a Catholic school philosophy that students' academic experiences should be common (and should prepare all students to do college work) is a major norm driving the school's structure and students' experiences.

Special programs. Three schools in the Project 1 sample -- Wilson, Jackson, and McGuire -- have programs within the school that are available only to some students. Participation in these programs is typically voluntary. Its membership in the Coalition of Essential Schools implies that many organizational reforms at Wilson High School are targeted at all students. However, Wilson also operates under a curriculum and teaching philosophy driven by the Paideia curriculum (Adler 1982). Although all students experience teaching consistent with the Paideia principles, the school also offers a more intense Paideia curriculum option: Paideia Impact. This program is elite, in that it is an honors or college-prep program. Although admission to Paideia Impact is intended to be by choice rather than by selection, there is considerable self-selection. Only students interested in pursuing a demanding academic curriculum, motivated to work hard in school, and willing to commit to high academic standards select Paideia Impact. Similarly, teachers may choose to teach Paideia classes. Admission to the remaining programs (general education, bilingual, and special education) is by assignment. Half of Wilson's students are in general education, the default program, whereas a quarter are in the Paideia Impact program. The dropout rate for Impact students is much lower than from other programs. Within Wison, the opportunity to affiliate with students and teachers who share an interest in rigorous academic work is an important mechanism for voluntary membership (internal and external) and for sustaining social capital.

Although *Jackson* is also a very small school, its students have considerable internal choices. Three types of students are attracted to Jackson, even though all share an interest in democratic schooling and a generally rule-free structure: (1) students who want to work very hard and

to be allowed to pursue their intellectual interests fully; (2) students whose attachment to the academic demands of a regular public high school is low; and (3) students who want and need a solid special education program with substantial support. All three types of students are well served at Jackson. Courses vary greatly in the intellectual demands made on students, and students know well which faculty are demanding and which are not. The school also offers a "Community Resources" program, where students may design individual courses with professionals in the larger community. Students may also choose to take courses at the city's two regular public high schools, at a local community college, or even at the large state university a few blocks from the school. Therefore, Jackson students have perhaps the widest latitude of choices of coursework, activity that constitutes course credit, degree of academic effort expended, or even *where* to take courses of any school in this study. In fact, it is difficult to imagine a high school with more choices available to students than at Jackson.

A special program offered at *Cardinal McGuire* involves the 30 students per year who are granted provision admission but whose academic qualifications are weak. These students are provided with extra academic supports throughout their first two years. If, by the end of 10th grade, provisionally admitted students are unable to succeed in McGuire's regular academic curriculum, they are asked to leave the school. Most succeed. Although this program, strictly speaking, does not involve internal choices for students (except that the students actually apply), such students do choose to be part of the challenging academic program at McGuire. Moreover, even within a regular college-preparatory curriculum, honors and advanced placement sections of courses are available. This suggests an accepted degree of curriculum differentiation at this Catholic high school. However, all academic programs are meant to prepare students for college.

Schools-within-schools. Of the ten high schools in this study, membership in seven is determined by residence in particular catchment areas rather than by external choice. They are all public schools, all except one (Coolidge) enroll over 1,000 students, and all are in cities. Five are in the sample because of their schools-within-schools (SWS) structure. By and large, within the SWS schools membership in individual sub-units is voluntary; students apply for sub-unit membership. If more students apply than there are places available, typically students are

Grant's enrollment declined several years ago, as its catchment area was reduced. However, enrollment is now high, mainly because 8th graders throughout the city apply for admission directly to Grant's sub-units. Their enrollment size is similar, each educating about 400-500 students. Striking are rather extreme difference in application rates to different sub-units. For example, for the 1999 9th grade, one sub-unit received over 1,600 applicants, another received slightly more than 600 (about 150-200 students would be admitted). In general, the academies (seemingly due to the career focus) attract considerably more applications than either the charters or the magnet school. Because Grant tries to keep its sub-units approximately equal in size, sub-unit staff must make important decisions about *which* students to admit from among those who apply. All students from the catchment area must be admitted; however, the large majority of applicants come from other neighborhoods around the city. In general, applicants with poor academic or behavioral records are not accepted. We heard that among the remainder, students were selected randomly from among the applicants. However, the issue of self-selection has an influence on the composition of the different sub-units. As mentioned, the sub-units aim to keep students' academic and social activities "pure." Compared to other SWS schools we have studied, this appears to be quite successful.

Other city schools. Although two other SWS high schools, Adams and Monroe, are also city schools, neither is located in the inner city. Although both enroll many minority students, neither enrolls a mostly high-poverty clientele, as the inner-city schools do. Although both show some evidence of problems (in terms of attendance, graduation rates), these are not major difficulties in either school. One (Adams) may have the longest history of any SWS school in the country, whereas the other (Monroe) is relatively new. Monroe began as an SWS school (the only one in our sample) three years ago.

The middle-sized Northeast city in which *John Quincy Adams High School* is located is among the most racially and economically diverse cities imaginable. The city's two halves are rather sharply divided. At one end are several housing projects, a growing immigrant population, and substantial numbers of minority residents. At the other end of the city are beautiful old homes, tree-lined brick streets, fashionable shopping areas, and affluent and largely White residents. To stave off a mandatory desegregation order several decades ago, the city's two high schools (one

at each end) combined into one. Adams is "fed" by 15 elementary schools. Many students in this district attend private school (both Catholic and non-sectarian elite schools).

Adams' six houses vary in size, academic and demographic composition, but mostly strikingly in the variety of programs they offer. House themes vary from a distinctly alternative school (very similar to Jackson High School), a traditional college-prep program with internal tracking an integral part of the program, an old-style vocational program, a sub-unit founded on cooperative learning an a common core curriculum, and two houses with indistinct themes. Students apply to high-school houses in the 8th grade. The city-wide choice system has resulted, over time, in elementary schools with informal themes. Unsurprisingly, blocks of students from particular elementary schools apply to (or are steered to) Adams houses with similar themes. Even with a plan to create racial/ethnic and gender balance in the houses, the long-time history of choice and the substantial differences among the houses, has resulted in a degree of social stratification that school personnel recog- nize as both undesirable and difficult to change. Several informants were aware of, and interested in rectifying, issues of bias and equity related to the SWS design (and choice).

Beyond its SWS structure, *James Monroe High School* has two distinctive features. One is its architecture; the school was designed for the SWS structure. Another is its calendar: the school (indeed, the entire district) operates on a year-round schedule. Rather than rotating times when students are in school (a typical way for year-round schools to solve problems of overcrowding), Monroe High School operates a "60 days on, 20 days off" schedule. It is the only high school in a mostly Latino school district within a large Southwestern city. Although the school is, technically, within a large city, its actual location seems suburban. In fact, this relatively new school was constructed right on the edge of the desert, so that residential, commercial, and industrial areas surround the school on only one side.

Compared to Adams, the school is in its early years of SWS structure. Thus, its staff seems not to worry about stratification even though curriculum differentiation is an integral part of the school's structure (as we found at Adams). Among the four sub-units, two are magnet schools that seek applications from students outside the school's regular catchment area. One, a math-science magnet with strong selective entrance criteria

and a stringent academic program, draws students from well outside district (but not city) lines. The other magnet, with an inter-American business theme, is popular with Monroe students who are recent immigrants with weak English skills. Monroe students who do not select (or are not selected by) either magnet school are randomly assigned into two generic "blocks."

A suburban school. The student body of *Harrison High School* is mostly working class and mostly White. Seen as the weakest of the four high schools in this large suburb of a large city in the Northwest, school staff see the SWS structure as a means (potentially) for attracting better students to the school. Not only is Harrison the only SWS school in its district, it is the only one in the state. This relative isolation (at least in terms of this reform strategy) made school staff enthusiastic about participating in research on this topic. As 9th graders in middle schools, students headed for Harrison select themselves into one of four academies with career themes. Although the SWS structure has been in place for almost a decade, school staff were unaware of stratification that might result from allowing free choice. As the school puts no limits on the enrollments in the academies (and their sizes vary considerably), mmost students get their first choice of academy placement. As a way to build interest in the school and its academy structure, first-choice placement is assured for all 9th graders whose parents attend an evening program describing the school in the spring.

Coursework in each academy, which has a strongly career/vocational orientation, is organized into a core curriculum followed by most students. Two years ago, staff became aware that this type of curriculum structure was not challenging the schools' relatively few motivated and hard-working students. Thus, some students study some of their subjects (e.g., English, mathematics) outside of their academies. Cross-academy courses of a more demanding nature are offered to these students, again by choice.

Summary of internal choice options. Even in high schools that are not schools of choice, many internal choices are available. Several assumptions appear to underlie the rationale for offering these choices. In an inner-city high school with a commitment to the principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools and the Paideia curriculum (Wilson), some students are offered the ability to work harder, take more of the right courses, and be with other students like themselves. An increasingly selective Catholic high school catering to a minority clientele (McGuire) offers a special

program for students at the lower end of the ability/commitment distribution. Although students don't select this program directly, they must decide to work hard to increase their performance to the level of the rest of the school. If not, they're not invited to continue at McGuire. Even within a small alternative public high school of choice (Jackson), students have a wide variety of choices -- inside and outside the school -- and those choices are explicitly designed to cater to the level of commitment students wish to expend. Students may match their interests, values, and engagement with teachers who also vary widely on these dimensions.

Because of the nature of this sample of schools, by far the most elaborate choice sets are available in SWS high schools. Sub-units within the schools are expressly designed to be different from one another. This uniqueness is designed to engender commitment, by matching students' interests with sub-schools' themes. For the most part, students choose which sub-unit to attach themselves to -- sometimes (as in Grant High School) students apply to the sub-unit rather than the high school itself. It seems that the longer the SWS theme had been in place, the more different these units became from one another. Occasionally (as in Harrison and Monroe High Schools), the school has developed higher-end curriculum differentiation explicitly. At Harrison, the "special curriculum" is outside the SWS structure. At Monroe, by design it *is* one of the sub-units. At Adams High School, over time one of the sub-units has developed into a selective unit. The students know it, the parents know it, and the faculty know it. Within this one unit, courses are offered at more and less advanced levels. Only in this unit, advanced placement courses are available (students from other units can select them).

Implications of Findings

Choice and Social Equity in Secondary Schools

Philosophical basis for choice. Opinions of policymakers, scholars, and public educators about educational choice are sharply divided. Those who are critical of this policy cite two major reasons: (1) a general feeling that choice (particularly external choice) will undermine the public schools; and (2) the implications of choice for increasing social stratification in education. Because choice has become an increasingly common educational policy throughout the U.S. over the last decade, in part

with strong political support from the highest levels, several writers have tried to alert the public to these implications, particularly in terms of social equity (e.g., Fuller and Elmore 1996; Lee 1993; Rassel and Rothstein 1993). In general, arguments in favor of choice focus on benefits that accrue to individuals; such arguments are consistent with a basic tenet of American democratic thought. However, arguments about the societal implications of school choice sometimes appeal to the ideal of the "common good," historically important in American thought but currently on the wane (Bryk et al. 1993; Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching 1992; Lee, Croninger, and Smith 1994).

External choice. Two different contexts surround the equity issue for the schools of choice in this study: public school choice and choice of private or schools. These contexts represent major arenas for discussing this issue. The public school of choice we studied, Jackson High School, enrolls a slightly lower proportion of minority students than the two public high schools in its district. However, the proportion of special education students is a bit higher. As discussed, special education students are attracted to Jackson because of the strong support it offers for this type of student. Thus, this school of choice does not seem to attact a notably elite clientele.

Whatever inequity surrounds Jackson, compared to its counterpart high schools in the same district, springs from who chose to apply in the first place; Jackson students are selected by lottery from its applicants. The school has been in operation for over two decades, and its programs and mission are well defined. Thus, information about both the school and the procedures and deadlines for applying seems to be widely available. However, it is possible that inequalities surrounding unequal access to information might occur. Earlier research on school choice has suggested that parents from less advantaged backgrounds tend to want a structured school environment for their children -- something that Jackson surely is not. On balance, it seems that the potential inequalities that may result from differential self-selection into Jackson are slight.

Might inequalities occur as a result of students choosing to attend the two Catholic schools in this study? In an obvious sense, yes. When any motivated and ambitious African-American students (and their parents) leave the cities' public schools where they would otherwise enroll if they didn't attend St.Francis or Cardinal McGuire High Schools, potentially valuable

resources are removed from those schools. The question here is whether the benefit to these individual students in some sense undermines the "common good" elements of the larger public educational enterprise. Robert N. Bellah and his associates (1985) decry the radical individualism that has swept the U.S. in recent decades, and most arguments favoring school choice are justified by the benefits that accrue to individuals from allowing them the freedom to move away from bureaucratic and monopolistic public schools (Peterson 1990).

Families who choose to send their children to inner-city Catholic high schools, particularly those who are not themselves Catholic, are "acting with their feet." These families, who are likely to select Catholic schooling as a more desirable alternative to what they see as poor public schools, are demonstrating the "exit" option rather than leaving their children in those schools and trying to improve them (the "voice" option --Hirschman 1970). Two questions arise here: (1) are the numbers of students who choice the Catholic over the local public school option large enough to make a difference? and (2) Would those families really be able to make a change in the quality of the local public schools if they were to "stand and fight"? Both St.Francis and McGuire are small schools, and both draw students from outside the local areas where the schools are located. However, even if the numbers are modest and the likelihood of change small, it seems that removing motivated and able students from urban public schools introduces some degree of inequality, even if there are no public dollars that follow these students (i.e., in neither city where these schools are located is there a voucher plan in place).

Internal choice. Internal choice options in the schools we studied are of two major types: special programs and schools-within-schools. All of the special programs described earlier -- the Paideia Impact program at Wilson, the vast curriculum options at Jackson, and the provisional admission program at McGuire -- center on decisions about curriculum.

Curriculum programs. The availability of Paideia Impact, with its rigorous demands on students, surely introduces a degree of stratification at this inner-city high school. The most motivated students, those most likely to graduate and attend more selective colleges, choose to be part of this program. However, the remainder of Wilson students are not deprived of the Paideia curriculum, with its core curriculum and Socratic seminars. All students at this Coalition high school are also required to "graduate by

exhibition" (McDonald 1996), not just the Paideia Impact students. The stratifying effects of a program designed for curriculum differentiation must be seen, however, in the school context where commitment is generally low, absenteeism high, where students fail many classes, and where the proportion of 9th graders who remain until graduation is about 50 percent. We noticed that besides attracting the most able and engaged students (about 25 percent of Wilson students are in it), the Paideia Impact program also seemed to have very good teachers in those classes. Remember that, in theory at least, this is a program to which admission is by self-selection. The question here is whether allowing the special benefits of participation in Paideia Impact to some students in some way detracts from the experiences of other students? Our observation is that Wilson staff are committed to social equity and anxious that this not happen. However, it is almost impossible to avoid.

The provisional admission program at McGuire appears to be a school response to issues of stratification. Recognizing that McGuire is somewhat selective in admission, the school is committed to efforts to "save" a number of students every year who want to attend McGuire but don't have the academic credentials to do so. These students are somewhat separated from the rest of the student body for their courses in the first two years. This program, although separate from the rest of the school, has a compensatory purpose. If anything, this is a program aimed at ameliorating to some degree the stratification that results from a school like McGuire attracting "better" students away from the public schools. Administrators purposely keep the program small, as they feel it requires a considerable commitment of resources to make it successful.

Schools-within-schools. In general, this structure creates (or reflects) considerable stratification in the high schools we are studying. Within a common policy of allowing choice into sub-units (with academically based selection not very common), we noticed considerable social differences among the sub-units in these schools. A major example is Grant High School, which has widely varying application rates to its sub-units. One sub-unit at Adams High School has a strong academic reputation (some described it as similar to a private school). Within this sub-unit, more than others, the same courses are often offered at different levels (e.g., honors and regular). We noticed considerable differences in the racial composition of the sub-units, even in a school where there is an effort to

take race and gender into account in sub-unit placements. In the SWS schools, sub-unit placements are made from among those who apply (Adams students are asked to list three ranked choices). One sub-unit at Monroe High School is available only to students with strong academic credentials; staying in this sub-unit requires good grades and strong academic effort. Harrison High School offers some courses outside the sub-unit structure for its strongest students. In sum, the SWS structure allows for curriculum differentiation, even without a formal tracking structure in any of our Project 2 schools.

Although our knowledge of the SWS schools in Project 2 is incomplete at this point, it seems evident that stratification exists within the SWS high schools between the sub-units. Whether by means of self-selection or through explicit academic selection, allowing voluntary placement in sub-units within SWS high schools appears to lead to systemic inequalities. Many sub-units in our sample of schools were created, and still actively support, academic programs that are not *internally* differentiated (i.e., many aim to provide core academic experiences for all their students). However, the fact that students choose the sub-units with which they wish to associate themselves leads to an effort on the part of sub-units to make themselves different from one another (so that students know what they are choosing between).

Another trend is noteworthy. At least in this small sample, it seems that the longer the schools have offered the SWS structure (Adams and Grant have had it for decades), the more different the sub-units have become from one another. "Differentness" is not simply identified by themes; it also seems to grow over time through the reputations the sub-schools develop, the types of students and families who seek different sub-units, and the teachers who gravi- tate to one sub-unit or another. A natural competition among sub-units seems to be a consequence of this design, and this seems to be perceived (accurately or not) as a set of "winners and loosers." When the goal is to offer a series of programs, each of which should appeal to someone, the motivation is to make those programs quite different from one another.[7]

Choice and Social Capital in Secondary Schools

Rationale for the SWS reform. In the process of recruiting schools for Project 2, we asked SWS high schools that fit our selection criteria to

describe the rationale that drove their decision to move their high schools to this design. School personnel were more likely to cite non-academic than academic reasons. Even before we described the purpose of our study, administators and staff frequently offered rationales that are consistent with a social capital orientation. "The ability for students to be known well by a smaller number of faculty," "the advantages of students spending several years with the same peers in the same classes," "elimination of large and anonymous educational settings," "creating family-like settings for education" -- these are the sorts of reasons we heard over and over.

It is reasonable that we found the SWS reform more common in large high schools. Not coincidentally, many SWS high schools are located in large cities.[8] This reform is often considered by administrators whose high schools are experiencing such difficulties as high absenteeism, high dropout rates, serious discipline problems, and low achievement. If schools enroll many students who evidence these behaviors, students are likely to have to combat low levels of commitment to school (at least to its academic aims). The justifications that reflect the notion of social capital seem to suggest that disaffected students' commitment to school could be increased by means of the SWS structure. Theme-based sub-units, particu- larly those with a career orientation, are also throught of as vehicles for increasing commitment -- by allowing students to focus on activities that interest them and which they can see as useful to their future (especially if students go directly from high school to work). It should be noted, however, that our research in Project 2 is underway now. The explanations offered here are drawn from intitial and informal interviews in schools, during sample recruitment. It is important to emphasize the tentative nature of these conclusions.

Commitment and external choice. As mentioned earlier, commitment is assumed in schools of choice. The choice schools we studied have well-defined mission statements. Students and parents select these schools based on a matching between their own values and those of the schools. Parents and students share and support these schools' norms. Even without religious matching (in the case of so many non-Catholics in the two Catholic schools we studied), parents selected the schools because of academic press, tight discipline, and as a vehicle to get their children to good colleges. Parents and students also described themselves as religious, even if they weren't Catholic. Importantly, the choice schools have specific norms of

behavior and performance for both entry and exit; in theory and practice, students who do not meet these norms may be asked to (or wish to) leave. In the case of the Catholic schools, behavioral commitment is also evidenced by the fact that parents pay tuition (a substantial sacrifice for many parents).

Because our Project 1 sample was equally divided between schools of choice and "zoned" schools (serving students from their catchment areas), comparisons were possible about the levels of commitment we saw among students, parents, and faculty in the choice and non-choice schools. Commitment was more consistent and more prevalent in the schools of choice. Although we saw some evidence of commitment in some non-choice schools (e.g., many parents were extremely interested and involved at Coolidge High School; some parents were quite commited to the program at Wilson, some students worked hard in those schools), the evidence was spotty and inconsistent. More often, we heard faculty in the non-choice schools (especially in Wilson and Taylor) speak of the need to *build* commitment, the difficulty of doing this with the types of students they serve, and a lack of interest on the part of parents in their children's education.

What Makes a Good High School?

Getting personal. We educational researchers try hard to pretend to be objective in our work and our writing, even if we are not. We also try to let each piece of writing stand on its own, as though our thinking in writing a particular piece was independent and not based on the body of research and writing that came before. However, here at the conclusion of this paper I wish to drop the cloak of objectivity and admit that, for me, this work has posed an increasingly serious personal dilemma. My "journey" into the issue of educational choice did not begin with the research described here. In this paper, I have cited articles and chapters my colleagues and I have written about school choice (in the third person, of course). In those papers, I expressed opinions (sometimes with colleageus Robert Croninger and Julia Smith) critical of choice in educational settings, and I based that criticism mainly on its implications for increasing stratification in education. Before undertaking this research on school-based social capital, my views were summarized as follows:

For strong believers in educational equity, any social policy whose result (intended or not) is

to increase social stratification in education is unwise and should be seriously questioned, whatever its positive results for some people...some of America's social policies actually exacerbate the social and economic distance among our citizens. We argue that parental choice of schools is one of these policies (Lee, Croninger, and Smith 1994:450).

My research career, and interest in studying secondary schools, began with work that is integrally related to the issue of school choice but not directly focused on it: comparisons of students in Catholic and public high schools. The timing of our book, Catholic Schools and the Common Good (Bryk, Lee, and Holland 1993), meant that it appeared within a policy milieu where the superior performance of students in private schools was used by Chubb and Moe (1993) as major evidence to support a government policy of school choice (including vouchers). In the final chapter, Bryk and I discussed the idea of the school as a voluntary community, with the idea of countering Chubb and Moe's "market" arguments. We stated:

Thus Catholic schools work better not because they attract better students (which is somewhat true) or because they have more qualified faculty (which does not appear to be the case). In general, these "inputs," or what economists call "human capital," are quite ordinary. Rather, Catholic schols benefit from a network of social relations, characterized by trust, that constitute a form of "social capital." In this regard, voluntary association functions as a facilitating condition. Trust accrues because school participants, both students and faculty, choose to be there. To be sure, voluntary association does not automatically create social capital, but is is hard to develop such capital in its absence (Bryk et al. 1993:314).

These two personal statements, published close to one another about five years ago, perhaps seem contradictory. The first statement suggests a critical stance toward school choice, because of the likelihood that it increases social stratification in education. On the other hand, the voluntary nature of Catholic school membership represents a major explanation for why they seem to work well. The two statements are very relevant to the ideas around which this paper is organized. Which is more important in a school or a system of schools: reducing social stratification or increasing personal commitment?

Individual vs. common concerns. After studying social capital in these ten secondary schools for the last two years, I find myself less doctrinaire in my opinion about educational choice than I was five years ago. I now see an advantage in allowing students and families some lattitude in decisions about *whom* they wish to be educated with, *how* that education is structured, and *what* they actually study. That advantage surrounds commitment. However, I suggest that the decisions that students and families make should be drawn from among a set of options that are all

beneficial. This is important; it means that educational professionals need to themselves engage in decisions about what is worth learning, what are useful ways to present these learnings, and how human beings should interact with one another. They need to worry about making sure that all students get good educational programs, not just those who choose the "right" ones.

To me, this suggests that individual lattitude (the essence of choice) needs to be tempered by making sure that no one can make bad choices (i.e., only beneficial choices are available). This suggests that there is a balance -- somewhere between individual self-aggrandizement and the common good. It also means that in most schools, much more attention to the common good is needed. It seems very beneficial for large schools to divide themselves into smaller learning communities. It also seems reasonable that these smaller sub-units can be different from one another. However, it does not seem reasonable to allow, over time, that the sub-units develop differentially, so that in some units students learn more than others. It also seems inappropriate to allow the most academi- cally committed students to group together, leaving the least committed into other sub-units.

In essence, this suggests that educational choice, either between schools, between programs in the same school, or between smaller learning communities within larger high schools, needs to be tempered by a much more conscious concern for the common good. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, in a well-balanced report about school choice, said this more eloquently than I can:

> [A] point of special concern to us is that school choice arguments are often framed almost exclusively in terms of the alleged benefits to individuals. This one-sided approach to educational policy, one that stresses only the private benefits of schooling, departs sharply from a vast body of work by well-regarded thinkers and writers underscoring the social imperative of education and recognizing that schools also promote the common good (Carnegie Foundation 1992:83-84).

Technical Notes

1. As the selection criteria for the second study were more stringent than the first, choosing schools was more difficult. The sample selection involved a large number of telephone interviews and a smaller number of school visits to sites that, ultimately, are not in the small sample. The sample selection process was extremely informative about the size and structure of the universe of public high schools offering the SWS option. When it is relevant, I have also drawn on data learned about schools through the selection process.

2. Within disadvantaged families who have exercised choice, it is not uncommon for such families to change their minds and return their children to their original schools (Wells 1993; Witte 1993). Sometimes the children (mostly minority) do not feel welcome in the mostly White schools to which they transferred (Wells 1993).

3. My own opinions on this subject are quite ambivalent. Work conducted with colleagues Anthony Bryk, Robert Croninger, and Julia Smith was included in both the Rasell and Rothstein (1993) and the Fuller and Elmore (1996). These studies focus on the issue of inequity that results from a full-blown policy of school choice.

4. Our sources of information for this study were several, including organizations (National Association of Secondary School Principals [NASSP], state departments of education, regional laboratories funded by the U.S. Department of Education), a team member with much experience setting up SWSs, the Internet, and several reform organizations. We also asked each school we contacted that did have the SWS structure we were looking if they knew of others.

5. When we began this study, we expected to find a large number of SWS high schools (according to our definition) across the U.S. In fact, we have been surprised at how few we have found. A secondary purpose of this study is to identify a full population list of SWS schools throughout the country.

6. In the two inner-city schools in Project 1 (Wilson, Taylor), very few parents came to meetings of any type or even came to school to pick up their students' report cards. However, Coolidge High School had good parental turnout, especially for sports events and school programs. Parents in the three regular public schools were not highly involved in activities that involved students' academic activities.

7. Our design calls for deeper study of two sub-units in each Project 2 school. We have asked the principal to guide us to two units that (a) are quite different from one another, and (b) that represent a better functioning unit and a unit that seems to be experiencing some difficulties of identify or recuitment. Although most schools have helped us select these units without difficulty, in one school the less strong sub-unit refused to be studied. They felt they would "look bad" compared to the other unit. This represents how competitive these units are with one another. We had to switch to another unit -- it is difficult to study a group of people who don't want to be studied.

8. Our intention in Project 2 is to identify the population of SWS public high schools in the U.S. (according to our definition). We have been surprised how few there are. We have also been surprised that the large majority of these high schools are located in large cities (often inner cities), and that the SWS reform has been seen as a means to improve educational settings that have been seen as beset with problems.

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Table 1: **Summary Information for High Schools in This Study**

Schools in Project 1

School	Enrollment	Sector	Minority Enrollment	Location
A. Regular Public Schools:				
Zachary Taylor	2,300	Public	69%	Inner-City
Calvin Coolidge	275	Public	0%	Rural
Woodrow Wilson	1,160	Public	92%	Inner-City
B. Schools of Choice:				
Andrew Jackson	402	Public	15%	Medium City
St.Francis of Asissi	365	Catholic Tuition: $3,500	100%	Inner-City
Cardinal McGuire	685	Catholic Tuition: $4,900	83%	Working-Class Suburban

Schools in Project 2

School	Enrollment	Number of Sub-Units	Minority Enrollment	Location
C. High Schools With Schools-Within-Schools				
John Quincy Adams	2,000	6	61%	Medium City, Working-Class
James Monroe	1,400 (Grades 9-11)	4	87%	Large City, Outskirts
Ulysses S. Grant	2,600	5	99%	Inner-City
Benjamin Harrison	1,300 (Grades 10-12)	4	30%	Working-Class Suburban

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