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School Selection Patterns Choice and Traditional Public Schoolsthrough the Lenses of Rational Choice Theory and Behavioral Economics Theory

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SCHOOL SELECTION PATTERNS THROUGH THE LENSES OF RATIONAL
CHOICE THEORY AND BEHAVIORAL ECONOMICS THEORY

by

Steven Krull

A Dissertation Submitted in
Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
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ABSTRACT

SCHOOL SELECTION PATTERNS THROUGH THE LENSES OF RATIONAL CHOICE THEORY AND BEHAVIORAL ECONOMICS THEORY

by

Steven Krull

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2016
Under the Supervision of Professor William Vélez

This study uses rational choice theory and behavioral economics theory to examine parent considerations when selecting an enrollment rich traditional public school (one that grew or sustained enrollment) for their child. Traditional public schools provide children general academic instruction at a school determined by the geographic boundary of their home. For many years, traditional public schools were the dominant publically funded institution for educating children. However, in the current era of school choice, parents now can select from a variety of educational options. In Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS), traditional public schools compete for students with private voucher schools, inter-district open enrollment schools, magnet/specialty schools, and both non-MPS and MPS charter schools. As a result, traditional public schools struggle to sustain student enrollment. Using the lenses of both rational choice theory and behavioral economics theory, this study investigates the characteristics of schools parents considered when selecting an enrollment rich traditional public school. Results suggest that participants considered schools with high academics, regardless of income or education level. Additionally, the vast majority of participants considered three or fewer schools. This study contributes to the literature by using both rational choice theory and

behavioral economics theory to understand the selection behaviors of parents who choose an enrollment rich traditional public school.

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DEDICATION

Thank you to my family, friends, and committee for supporting me through this process. I am grateful to my children Imogen and Keith for their love and giving up their time and possible memories. Thank you to my parents Robert & Sharon and my wife Amanda for their love and encouragement. Thank you to my sister Sioux and my friends Bob, Dave, Joe, JJ, Matt, Sarandi, & Stephen for their support and motivation. Finally, my sincere thanks to my committee chair, Professor Vélez, and the other committee members Professor Britton, Professor Shah, & Professor Joseph for their guidance and support.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Policy makers, education experts, and researchers have discussed a variety of initiatives with the ultimate goal of improving schools in the United States. What prompted these debates was the Presidential Education Commission's 1983 release of the "Nation at Risk" report. This publication suggested that public schools in the United States were failing. The report created a public outcry because it indicated that American students, especially those in urban school districts, were academically deficient compared to students from other industrialized countries. Many feared the US would lose its economic and military dominance in the world. To maintain American influence, policy makers introduced a variety of initiatives including school choice.

School choice initiatives directly impact Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS). Milwaukee once maintained an abundant number of traditional public schools. These schools offer a general academic curriculum and assign students based on the geographical boundary of their home. Because of school choice, traditional public schools now compete for students with magnet schools, charter schools, voucher schools, inter-district open enrollment schools and/or suburban schools. The result is many traditional public schools in MPS suffer from a loss of student enrollment. This study focuses specifically on the selection behaviors of parents who choose an enrollment rich traditional public school (one that grew or sustained enrollment). This investigation seeks to contribute to the literature by analyzing and discussing these patterns through the lenses of both rational choice theory and behavioral economics theory. There are other studies, discussed later, that sought to explain some aspects of school choice through each of these lenses independently, but none

compared specific selection patterns of enrollment rich schools in the context of both theories.

This study contributes to both our theoretical understanding of school choice and our knowledge of school selection practices. First, academic researchers may gain a better grasp of how selection patterns function through the lenses of rational choice theory and behavioral economics theory. Second, districts could use the information on parent selection patterns to make decisions on how to attract student enrollment to traditional public schools. Finally, policy makers could also use the information on selection patterns to inform future discussions and legislation on school choice.

Problem

Milwaukee Public School (MPS), like other large districts, experienced an almost two-decade decrease in student enrollment. MPS served 106,337 students at its peak in the 1997-98 school year (MPS, 2005a). Enrollment dropped to 77,391 students in 2014-15 (MPS, 2015a). The 27% reduction in student enrollment was due to a decrease in the number of school aged children in the City of Milwaukee and increased competition from publicly funded non-MPS schools.

The number of school aged Milwaukee children has wavered in recent decades. Milwaukee boasted 144,474 school aged children between five and nineteen in 2000 (U.S. Census, 2015a). By 2014, there were an estimated 134,057 possible students (U.S. Census, 2016). The number of potential students decreased more than seven percent from 2000 to 2014. However, the majority of the enrollment decline in MPS was due to the expansion of the educational marketplace.

These options gave Milwaukee parents of public school children the ability opt-out of MPS. In the 2014-15 school year, 42,742 Milwaukee children attended publicly funded schools outside the jurisdiction of MPS (DPI, 2014; DPI, 2015d; MPS, 2014a; DPI 2015b; DPI, 2016c). Table 1 displays the distribution of publically funded school organizations available to Milwaukee children.

Table 1.
Types of Publically Funded Schools for Milwaukee Children

School Type (2014-2015)	Enrollment	Percent
MPS Traditional, Charter, Magnet, Contracted, or At-Risk schools	77,391	64.4%
Chapter 220 (In Suburbs)	1,457	1.2%
Open Enrollment (In Suburbs)	5,578	4.6%
Non-MPS Independent Charter	8,839	7.4%
Publically Funded Private School (Voucher)	26,868	22.3%
Total Publically Funded Milwaukee Students	120,133	100%

Notes: (DPI, 2014; DPI, 2015d; MPS, 2014a; DPI, 2015b; DPI, 2016c)

Traditional MPS schools and MPS unionized charter schools bore the brunt of the enrollment reductions (MPS, 2014a). In the 2006-07 school year, traditional public schools made-up 58.2 percent of MPS schools, by the 2015-16 school year these schools accounted for 32.5 percent (MPS, 2005b; MPS, 2015c). Of the remaining traditional public schools, only 14 of 50 maintained or grew their enrollment from the 2012-13 to the 2013-14/2014-15 school years (MPS, 2013a; DPI, 2016d; MPS, 2014c; MPS, 2015b). Within those three years, 72 percent of traditional MPS schools lost their market share of students. Table 2 displays the number and percent of students in each type of school structure within MPS.

Table 2.
Types of MPS Funded Schools

Type of Schools in MPS (2014-15)	Enrollment	Percent
MPS-Elementary/K8/Middle School/High School (Traditional)	22,297	28.8%
MPS-Elementary/K8/Middle School/High School (Magnet or Instrumentality Charter)	46,538	60.1%
MPS-Contracted Programs & Schools for At-Risk Students	1,657	2.1%
MPS Charter (Non-Instrumentality)	6,899	8.9%
Total Milwaukee Public School	77,391	100%

Notes: (MPS, 2015b; MPS, 2015c; MPS, 2015f)

A MPS administration report acknowledges the enrollment challenges and created strategies to reduce and/or prevent reductions (MPS, 2014b). Betts (2009) argues that to remain competitive, districts will have to create schools that offer similar programs to those in the education market place. MPS leaders agree and attempted to gain student market share by expanding magnet and charter schools (Johnson, 2015; Richards, 2014a; Richards, 2014b; Borsuk, 2012). Unfortunately, magnet and charter schools lack certain benefits that traditional public schools offer. Those benefits will be discussed later.

Rationale

Traditional public schools struggle to maintain enrollment in a competitive educational market. As discussed above, non-MPS charter schools, inter-district open enrollment, schools in the Chapter 220 Program, and voucher schools offer additional options to parents in Milwaukee. To remain viable, MPS expanded the use of non-traditional schools. From the 2006-07 to the 2015-16 school years, non-traditional schools grew from 41.8 to 67.5 percent of the total types of schools in MPS (MPS, 2005b; MPS, 2015c). Additionally, enrollment reductions plague traditional public schools. From the 2012-13 to the 2013-14/2014-15 school years alone, close to three quarters of traditional public schools in MPS lost student enrollment (MPS, 2013a; DPI, 2016d; MPS, 2014c; MPS, 2015b). The expansion of non-traditional public schools and the enrollment challenges in traditional public schools demonstrate the true nature of competition within the realm of school choice in Milwaukee. Though non-traditional public schools may provide some relief to the enrollment woes experienced by MPS, traditional public schools offer several advantages.

The increased use of traditional public schools in MPS could benefit both the district and student community. First, traditional public schools have the potential to maintain financial solvency. They do not require specialty equipment or staff. They also have lower administrative costs and lower transportation costs than magnet and/or charter schools (MPS, 2015b; MPS, 2015f; MPS, 2015e). Further, traditional public schools have a distinct advantage over non-instrumentally charter schools by employing staff who contribute to the long-term legacy costs of the district (MPS, 2015f).

Second, they have the potential to reduce segregation in schools. School choice increases segregation because parents generally select schools that enroll students similar to the race, ethnic, and economic status of their own children (Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Wang, 2011; Rapp & Eckes, 2007; Garcia, 2008; Ball, 1993; Goyette, 2008). Traditional public schools have the opportunity to reduce segregation by assigning student to a school determined by the geographic location of their home. Because of the deep racial segregation in Milwaukee (Logan & Stults, 2011), this method may only be successful if the geographic barriers of traditional public school were extended across known racial/ethnic lines.

Third, traditional public schools could increase student achievement. High mobility rates in urban educational settings put students who move from one school to another academically behind their peers (Grigg, 2012). Teachers must then waste time reviewing materials with new students, which creates instructional redundancies for the current students (Kerbow, 1996). This issue could be eliminated by ensuring all students receive similarly paced curriculum offered by traditional public schools. Additionally, there is evidence that magnet and private schools have systems in place to limit the number of low achieving students (Nelson, 2015). This increases the likelihood of academic segregation between

schools. Traditional public schools draw students from a geographic boundary determined by the location of their home, without consideration of the students' academic background. This could reduce the academic segregation caused by the selective practices of magnet and private schools.

The increased competition of school choice negatively effects the enrollment at traditional public schools. The loss of student enrollment in these schools is the motivation for this investigation. To study school choice patterns, this dissertation uses rational choice theory and behavioral economics theory to gain a better understanding of how parents select enrollment rich traditional public schools in a competitive educational marketplace.

Chubb & Moe's (1990) ground breaking book opened the conversation that led to the current state of school choice. They present two guiding principles. First, parents want the best school for their child, which the author suggests is academic quality. Second, parents consider a vast number of schools before making a selection.

There are an extensive number of studies that focus on how parents select schools for their child. These studies, discussed in the literature review, look at how parents choose specific types of school. These include public schools, private schools, voucher schools, charter schools, and students moving from public to private schools. These studies provide insight into the characteristics of schools parent considered. But none parcel out schools with sustained or growing enrollment trends from those with declining enrollment.

Focusing specifically on the reasons parent selected an enrollment rich traditional public school could provide two distinct advantages. First, these organizations demonstrated that they are the type of schools parents want by showing that they can maintain or grow student enrollment. Knowing the reasons why parents choose to enroll their child into one of

these schools could allow us to test one of the main arguments laid out by Chubb & Moe (1990); namely that parents desire schools with high academic quality. Additionally, this information could be used by districts to modify school organizations to make them conducive for attracting student enrollment.

Second, we could determine the number of school's parents considered during the selection process. We can use this information to test if all parents do in fact consider multiple schools before making a decision as suggested by Chubb & Moe (1990). To accomplish this feat, this study queries parents on why they selected an enrollment rich traditional public school for their child.

Research Questions

Research Question #1: What was the most frequently identified consideration of some parents of newly enrolled four-year-old kindergarten children when they selected an enrollment rich traditional public school for their child?

Research Question #2: How many schools did some parents of newly enrolled four-year-old kindergarten children consider before selecting an enrollment rich traditional public school for their child?

Theoretical Framework

This investigation uses rational choice theory and behavioral economics theory to answer the two research questions posed above. Though talked about more at length during the literature review, these two theories will help guide our understanding of the characteristics of schools parents considered.

Rational Choice Theory. Rational choice theory is the most widely used by researchers to understand the school choice process (Wilson, 2016). Based on behavioral psychology and extended to other fields, it suggests that individuals premeditate their actions to their greatest advantage. They do this by comparing the cost and benefit of every decision. Herrnstein (1990) describes rational choice theory in the context of school choice. Rational choice theory requires parents to be an active participant in the school choice process. Supporters of rational choice theory believe parents seek out the best school for their child, which they argue is based on academic quality (Chubb & Moe, 1990). With that goal in mind, parents then consider a wide range of schools and filter through information in order to find and select the school with the highest academic quality (Kelly, 2007).

Behavioral Economics Theory. The second theory used to analyze how parents selected an enrollment rich traditional public school is the behavioral economics theory. In 1956, Simon challenged the ideas laid out by rational choice theory. He argued for bounded rationality, the concept that there are limitations that prevent an individual from making a rational choice. This forces people to “satisfice”; that is consider only enough alternatives to make an adequate selection. This could lead to individuals not selecting the optimal alternative.

Behavioral economics can be applied to the school selection patterns. Parents “satisfice”; that is pick the first reasonable school based on their expectations. Unlike rational choice theory, these expectations may or may not be academic quality because they are shaped by the parent’s experiences and environment (Samson, 2014). Additionally,

because parents do not consider all school options they may not select the “best” school, even if their primary consideration was academic quality.

Purpose of Study

Milwaukee Public Schools face increased competition from private voucher schools, non-MPS charter schools, inter-district open enrollment schools, and schools in the chapter 220 suburban integration program. As a result, 42,742 Milwaukee children attended publicly funded schools outside the jurisdiction of MPS in the 2014-15 school year (DPI, 2014; DPI, 2015d; MPS, 2014a; DPI 2015b; DPI, 2016c). The current MPS strategy is to use magnet and charter schools to increase student market share (Johnson, 2015; Richards, 2014a; Richards, 2014b; Borsuk, 2012). Though magnet and charter school have helped maintain student enrollment, they have the potential to reduce the financial stability, increase segregation, and negatively affect academics within MPS. Therefore, MPS could benefit from an increase use of traditional public schools. Unfortunately, only 14 of 50 traditional MPS schools saw a stable or increased enrollment from the 2012-13 to the 2013-14 & 2014-15 school years (MPS, 2013a; DPI, 2016d; MPS, 2014c; MPS, 2015b).

The purpose of this study is to understand the process parents used to select an enrollment rich traditional public school for their child. It views the selection process through the lenses of both the rational choice theory and the behavioral economics theory. Surveys were issued to parents in 12 of the 14 enrollment rich traditional public schools. Parents rated the importance of 22 questions which fit into six school choice indices. They also indicated the number of schools they considered during the selection process and parents were asked to identify their age, race/ethnicity, household income, and education level.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Milwaukee and many areas in the nation have switched from relying on traditional public schools to expanding school choice options in education. Since their inception, traditional public schools have been the backbone of the educational system in America. Students receive a common academic curriculum at an assigned school, based on the geographic location of their home. The policy changes over the last century have impacted the structures of schools and districts in the US. This is especially true of urban districts, where policy leaders continue to discuss the role, effectiveness, and makeup of the public school system. The current reality in cities like Milwaukee is an arrangement where traditional public schools compete for students with both private voucher schools and other public schools.

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first provides a brief history of the institutional changes in education that led from traditional public schools to the current era of school choice. Section two focuses specifically on the criteria parents use to select a school for their child in the context of both rational choice theory and behavioral economics theory. The third section revisits the research questions of the study and presents the hypotheses. The final section assembles the 22 surveyed school selection items into six indices for test and analysis.

Historical Perspective – Traditional Public Schools through School Choice

The Growth of Traditional Public Schools

Education in America operated differently before the mass expansion of traditional public schools in the 1830s. Many children did not attend school in the newly founded United States. The agricultural nature of rural areas did not require formal education and children were often taught by their families and community. This changed in north-eastern cities when urbanization created a market for schools. Private schools were the main formal institutions that provided education in cities. Private school tuition was adjusted to afford a healthy enrollment of students from a variety of socioeconomic classes (Kaestle, 1983). In the 1820s, several large cities saw a mass increase in childhood crime and poverty, which resulted in the formation of privately funded charity schools. Charity schools served the urban poor and worked to eliminate issues of poverty, crime, discipline, and morality (Spring, 2008). These educational institutions created the basic structure of traditional public schools.

Traditional public school supporters of the early 19th century modified and expanded educational institutions in north-eastern America. They educated citizens and immigrants with a similar language, knowledge, and values to become active members of the new republic and to equalize their chance for social and economic success (Bailyn, 1960; Kaestle, 1983). Parents had the opportunity to send their child to a tuition-free school that was geographically based in relation to their home and which provided high-quality and standardized instruction. Teachers relied on discipline and rote instructional methods to maintain order and educate children. In the end, the government gained responsibility for the education of many American children (Ravitch, 2000).

Not everyone supported the traditional public school movement. The reforms consolidated school decision making from local groups to large ward based school boards who had taxing authority. Rural residents and democrats opposed the increased taxes and loss of local control. They believed the economy and members of society could effectively function without government run schools (Spring, 2008). Some religious groups also disagreed with the expansion of traditional public schools. As Tyack (1974) explains, Protestants were the dominant religion in the early 19th century. They claimed non-sectarianism in schools, but Protestant teachers and textbooks criticized the values and beliefs of Catholics and immigrants. Catholics saw common schools as a Protestant assault on their religion. They wanted to remove religion and anti-Catholic sentiment from schools. They also sought public funds to support their own Catholic schools (Bailyn, 1960). After political pressure and isolated riots, the bible and anti-Catholic textbooks were removed from public schools. Further, Catholic leadership mandated that each parish establish their own school to teach Catholic education and values to its members (Spring, 2008). In the end, there were two large institutional education systems in America. One supported by religious organizations & tuition and the other that provided a separate and free education system funded by taxes.

Public education had a strong backing in early Milwaukee. Jorgenson (1936) discusses how mid-western pioneers believed in a representative government and the separation of powers afforded to them through the federal constitution. They feared that an uneducated population would result in the creation of an elite aristocracy. As a result, the Michigan Territory government created a common school law to ensure every child had the same basic skills and knowledge to become citizens in a unified, self-governed America.

The result was the basis for a rapid expansion of traditional public schools in Milwaukee, where enrollment boomed from 753 in 1847 to 4,625 in 1861.

The main opponent of public schools were supporters of religious private schools. By 1861, private schools in Milwaukee enrolled 24% of children between four and twenty (Gomez, 1996). These mostly Catholic institutions served Milwaukee's large German population and had little to fear from the initial expansion of the public school system. Unlike the north-east, Milwaukee Protestants showed little disdain for Catholics and public schools did not reinforce an anti-Catholic sentiment. For many years, traditional public schools and private schools operated simultaneously without much hostility. This changed in the early 1870s when Catholic leaders saw the enrollment threat of public schools and launched a minor campaign to attract students. They tried to persuade parents to send their children to Catholic schools because public schools did not instill Catholic values (Walch, 1975). After legislative and legal battles, traditional public schools solidified their status as the primary means of educating children while Catholics maintained their separate unregulated education system in Milwaukee.

Institutional Changes

As the nineteenth century came to a close, urbanization and industrialization created discussions around the structure and purpose of education in America. People began to question the operational efficiency of large ward based school boards. Further, as industry grew, job specialization encouraged progressive reformers to challenge the effectiveness of the academic curriculum in traditional public schools. These issues eventually led to a

corporate model of school management and individualized instructional paths and curriculum.

As early as 1870, political and business elites and “administrative progressives” discussed their perceived issues with the ward based system of school governance (Tyack, 1973). They felt large school boards were inefficient and their members lacked knowledge and were potentially corrupt. Reformers were concerned that politically appointed board members instilled bias in their hiring and policy decisions. Elites wanted to consolidate their influence, so they used their political pressure to restructure the organization of school governance (Katz, 1971). Elected non-partisan school boards replace large ward based school boards and these members appointed a superintendent. The superintendent was a knowledgeable educational leader who controlled school operations and hired trained education professionals to teach children. Most city dwellers were happy with the new corporate model and it spread quickly across American (Kaestle, 1983). By 1913, most ward based systems were eradicated (Tyack, 1974). Changes to the structure of the school governance overlapped the expansion of progressive education.

Many felt common school policies did not meet the needs of an urban, industrial, and specialized economy. Districts across the nation began to implement progressive education reforms to ensure the skills and social needs of every student (Kean, 1983). Reformers felt traditional methods of classroom instruction were not always an effective approach for a diverse urban student population (Ravitch, 2000). Reformers moved to eradicate the school structures that focused on an academic curriculum; which was believed to benefit the elite (Karier, Violas, & Spring, 1973). The new progressive education system individualized education and placed students into courses that were relevant to their future vocation

(Cremin, 1961). Further, school courses would also reflect the broader needs of the industrial economy (Kliebard, 1999). The result was a transformation from a traditional academic curriculum to differentiated tracks based on vocational desires which encourage engagement and active learning (Tyack, 1974).

Milwaukee rapidly became more industrial and urban in the late nineteenth century. The large amount of foreign born residents, especially Germans, created a unique political landscape compared to most other cities in the US (Still, 1948). By 1910, MPS fell under the corporate model and socialists controlled one-third of the school board (Reese, 2002). Traditional educational practices were expanded to include relevant courses, such as home economics, arts, and manual training (Reese, 2002). Further, education leaders wanted schools to keep up with the rapid industrial and technological changes. By 1917, Milwaukee Public Schools were a national leader because it provided traditional academic courses for the college bound and a comprehensive vocational education programs. With the help from the state, Milwaukee operated a trade school for girls and boys, provided additional mechanical training in a traditional environment, and opened what is now Milwaukee Area Technical College for those students who left school after eighth grade (Kliebard, 1999). These programs allowed schools to meet the needs of both the student and the economy.

Milwaukee like the nation began to turn their back on progressive education in the 1950s. The launching of Sputnik by the USSR, the threat of communism, and a scathing review of the educational system by researchers caused concern for many in America. To ensure the US maintained its status as a global powerhouse, school leaders revisited traditional academic curriculums in public schools (Spring, 2008).

By the 1950s, segregation was common in American schools. Jim Crow laws segregated southern schools while race restrictive residential patterns racially isolated northern traditional public schools. These were part of a systematic effort to maintain a division of labor between Black and White citizens (Anderson, 1988). Most Americans believed a quality education was the key for future economic success (Katznelson & Weir, 1985). But disparities existed between segregated minority and White schools. These concerns led parents and national organizations to build coalitions and challenge race restrictive school laws (Henig et al., 1999). It also led to the unanimous Supreme Court decision of *Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka* opinion, which made laws that separated schools based on race illegal. Besides excessive use of military force (Spring, 2008), the unified decision came at the cost limited enforcement (Patterson, 2002). Federal district courts were responsible for the implementation of school desegregation, but many federal judges were sympathetic to segregation and approved plans that contained loopholes. By 1964, only two percent of Black students were in integrated schools (Orfield, 1969).

Though the Brown opinion was originally intended for legislated laws that segregated public schools in the south, northern educational institutions were also sorted by race. Housing laws and discriminatory lending practices created racially separated neighborhoods in the north. Since schools were assigned based on geographical borders, segregated neighborhoods equated to segregated schools (Anyon, 1997). Further, school policies in many cities forced minorities into segregated schools (Jacobs, 1998). Minority schools generally had inexperienced teachers, less rigorous courses, and low level instruction that encouraged low academic performance and discipline problems (Neckerman, 2007; Collins, 2011). By the late 1960s and early 1970s, litigation against segregation emerged in the

north. Residents were able to prove intentional racial segregation by school officials and many districts were ordered to follow an integration plan.

School districts forced to integrate did so in a variety of ways. In the south, it was common for courts to order modified attendance zones. Racially isolated neighborhoods required the use of busing to integrate schools. Many northern cities implemented one of the following; magnet schools - which offered specialty programs used to attract a pool of students who could be racially integrated; Open enrollment - allowed parents to choose whichever school they desired in the district; clustering – where two racially isolated schools would mix students; and forced integration - where the district placed students at specific schools to ensure a racial balance (Reber, 2003).

Milwaukee schools also experienced segregation. The district followed the traditional practice of residential boundary based school assignments. Since Milwaukee neighborhoods were segregated by race and ethnicity, so were the schools. Additionally, Dougherty (2004) describes how district leaders intentionally perpetuated segregated schools through administrative policies. School officials adjusted neighborhood boundary lines to restrict Black student enrollment into White schools. If minority schools did increase enrollment, the district would modify the building to accommodate additional students or used intact busing. Intact busing transported whole classes of minority students from their assigned building to White schools for instruction in separate classrooms and returned those students to their assigned school at lunch and at the end of the school day (Barnes, 2005). Supporters of integration mobilized boycotts and protests, but were unable to persuade the Milwaukee Public School leadership to change its policies (Stolee, 1993). Schools in Milwaukee only implemented an integration plan after a federal court order in 1976.

Milwaukee Public Schools relied on busing to integrate schools. Miner (2013) describes how magnet schools became the main solution for school desegregation. These schools attract students with specialty programs in college preparatory, technology, the arts, language immersion, or Montessori. They hoped to attract multicultural clientele with the variety of specialty programs. Magnet schools were very successful in Milwaukee, but they were only part of the integration process. School administrators also relied on forced busing, where students from Black neighborhoods were sent to predominantly White neighborhoods. Leaders also hoped to include suburban districts into the desegregation program through chapter 220. Chapter 220 was one of the only multi-district solutions to segregation, it allowed any minority students from Milwaukee to attend a suburban school and any White student could attend a Milwaukee school (Nelson, 2012).

School Choice

The Nation at Risk report published by the National Commission in 1983 brought upon many discussions and policy changes that impacted education in America. The report suggested the state of education in the US was stagnant and our students were achieving academically lower than other nations. The authors recommended sweeping changes to content, standards, programming, teachers, leadership, and finances. Though the Nation at Risk report spurred many pioneering changes to our education system, one of the biggest was the expansion of school choice.

In 1990, Chubb & Moe (1990) published their infamous book *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools*, which sought to transform much of the education system in America. They argued that the educational institutions that were supposed to support learning actually

create administrative barriers that stifle innovation and student achievement. To remedy the plight of bureaucracy, they argued that schools should be self-governed with the autonomy to meet the needs of all children. They believe greater autonomy in schools could lead to innovation, school improvement, and ultimately academic success (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Walberg & Bast, 2003). Additionally, these independent schools would become subject to competition. Parents would select the schools with the highest academic quality. This would force low performing schools to improve or close due to lack of student market share (Hess & Manno, 2011). Choice, they believed, would “all by itself” bring positive transformations to education (Chubb & Moe, 1990).

The ideas put forth by Chubb and Moe resulted in sweeping changes to the structure of educational organizations in America. First was the expansion of publically funded private schools. Milwaukee became the epicenter for structural reform in 1990 when they created the first voucher system in America. Under the plan, a limited number of low income students from the city of Milwaukee were removed from the bureaucratic confines of MPS and were allowed to attend a private, including religious, school using governmental financing. Since then, thirteen states and the District of Columbia allow some form of voucher program, with the most extensive expansion in Wisconsin (NCSL, 2015). Recently, the Wisconsin legislature expanded vouchers statewide and removed enrollment caps and lowered income restrictions in Milwaukee and Racine (Marley & Stein, 2011; DPI, 2016a). In the 2014-15 school year, the Milwaukee voucher program drew 26,868 students (DPI, 2015d).

The second recent change to the structure of educational institutions is the expansion of charter schools. These schools limit district bureaucracy and allow autonomy around

management, academics, and innovation. From 2000 to 2012, charter enrollment grew from under 500,000 to over 2,000,000 students (NCES, 2013). In 2010, the federal government encouraged the growth of charters with \$136,181,206 worth of grants (Dept. of Ed., 2013a). Education leaders and politicians see charter schools as a means to compete in the education market through autonomous and specialty programming. Charter schools have also shown some positive academic achievement over traditional public schools (Angrist, Dynarski, Kane, Pathak, & Walters, 2010; Hoxby, Murarka, Kang, 2009).

MPS also expanded their use of charter schools (MPS, 2014a). MPS sponsored charter schools offer a unique opportunity to compete with other choice programs (Public Policy Forum, 2012). MPS contracts both instrumentality and non-instrumentality charters (those staffed by union employees or not) and has nearly tripled the number of students who attend non-instrumentality charters from 2010 to 2014 (MPS, 2014a). Besides the autonomy vested under the contract, charter schools have a unique benefit. If successful, a district can claim credit. If the school fails, the district could opt not to renew their contract and the school closes. Though charter school students do not show the same success in Milwaukee as some do in other cities (Betts, 2009), they do offer an exceptional chance to maintain enrollment through competitive programming.

Magnet schools are the third type of structural change to the educational market place. These public schools increase parental choice within the district through unique or specialty programming. Over 2.2 million students attended magnet schools in the US (NCES, 2013). Magnet schools generally have higher parent satisfaction (Poppel & Hague, 2001) and show greater academic results compared to non-magnet schools (Gamoran, 1996; Bifulco, Cobb, & Bell, 2009). Though part of their academic success is due to their selective enrollment

practices. This is where school administrators seek out the best and brightest students to enroll, creating academic segregation across schools (Nelson, 2015). Even with these potential biases, federal officials provided grants to support the growth of magnet programs. Most recently the Department of Education gave \$89.8 million to 27 school districts to increase specialty programs for parents and students (Dept. of Ed., 2013b)

MPS also relies on magnet schools for competition against other school choice options. Born out of desegregation policies, these popular schools lure students with Arts, Montessori, language immersion, or International Baccalaureate programming. Within the past several years, MPS worked to gain student market share through the expansion of these programs (Richards, 2014a; Richards, 2014b; Borsuk, 2012).

Another type of school choice is inter-district open enrollment. Passed by the Wisconsin legislature in 1997, Act 27 allows parents to send their child to any public school in the state (DPI, 2015b). To qualify, there must be an open seat and parents must provide transportation for their child. 50,075 Wisconsin students transferred out of their home district in the 2013-14 school year, including 5,578 from Milwaukee (DPI, 2015b).

Theoretical Frameworks

Rational choice and behavioral economics were the two theoretical frameworks used by this investigation to understand how parents selected an enrollment rich traditional public school for their child. This section sets up the context in which this study formed and analyzed parent data. Both parts contain an explanation of each theory and how it interacts with school selection patterns.

Rational Choice Theory. Rational choice is a market-based theory that is used to explain how individuals make choices. There are two general principles. First, individuals are self-interested during the choice process (Herfeld, 2009). That is, they desire the best product or service. Second, people seek to maximize total utility (Herrnstein, 1990). Under this idea, individuals search out and consider all possible alternatives. The rational individual then selects the highest ranked alternative. In a simple example of both steps, an individual purchasing toothpaste would determine what qualifies as the best toothpaste. Then they will consider each brand/product with the information available, determine which matches their high prerequisites, and finally the individual makes a purchase at the lowest possible total cost.

Rational choice is the most widely used theory in education literature to understand school selection patterns (Wilson, 2016). Chubb & Moe (1990) were the first to gain traction in connecting rational choice theory to the ideas of school choice. Similar to the above description of rational choice theory, two concepts emerged. First, parents want the best school for their child, which many describe as academic quality (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Lubinski & Lubinski, 2014). Second, parents consider all possible alternatives and then make an informed choice. In the context of school choice, rational choice theory assumes parents and students are consumers in an educational market place (Kelly, 2007). Given many school options, parents will desire and then select the highest academic alternative for their child. The ideas laid out by Chubb & Moe (1990) provide the basis for which most researchers and policymakers understand school selection patterns.

Goode (2007) criticizes rational choice theory explaining that humans may not always “maximize only material goods or money.” In the case of school choice and the arguments presented by Chubb & Moe (1990), humans seek to maximize academic quality. As discussed later, individuals may not always follow a set process and may not consider all options before making a rational decision. This criticism will be addressed later in discussions around behavioral economics theory. The studies below use rational choice theory to gain a better understanding on how parents select a school for their child. Each provides a summary, concern(s), and how this investigation seeks to improve on their work.

Schneider et. al. (2000) attempt to build on the work of Chubb & Moe (1990) by describing a more detailed choice process. They proposed that parents: “1) Have a set of preferences about education and schooling; 2) gather information about the set of schools available to their children; 3) make trade-offs between the attributes of these schools; 4) choose the school that best fits their preference.” The authors used this process to study the choice patterns of parents and found there were differences in selection considerations based on race and education. But even with these differences, teacher quality was still the highest ranked consideration for parents as they selected a school. The authors used teacher quality as a proxy for academic quality. The connection between academic quality and school choice follows the principles laid out by rational choice theory. However, the authors only use teacher quality as a representation of academic quality. Though acknowledged that the teacher quality has an important and direct influence on academic quality, it is but a single measure. Therefore, I plan to use additional academic factors when studying school choice. Also, analyzing parent selection data based on income could provide insight into the role of

resources in the choice process. Therefore, this study will compare the selection beliefs of parents based on income, in addition to education.

Bosetti (2007) also attempts to use rational choice theory to understand how parents select schools. She had parents rank their most important school choice reasons and disaggregated them based on school type. Results indicated that parents desired smaller class sizes when selecting non-religious private schools, seek out shared values/beliefs when choosing religious schools, consider proximity from their home when selecting public schools, and desire a strong academic reputation/teaching style when choosing alternative schools. She suggests other theories, in addition to rational choice theory, may be needed to properly explore and explain why the differences in primary considerations between the different types of schools. However, she does not suggest any specific other theories. The work Bosetti (2007) completed was important because it allows for the analysis of multiple school types and suggests that other theories, besides rational choice theory, could be used to understand the parent selection process. My study will focus on a specific school type, namely enrollment rich traditional public schools. Additionally, it will also view the selection process through both rational choice theory and behavioral economics theory. Additionally, there were concerns associated with her school selection factors. Bosetti (2007) did not explain why she connected some factors to academic quality and not others. Specifically, her most important results connected teaching to academic quality but not class size. My study will explicitly explain how each factors connects to six distinct indices for analysis.

Thelin & Niedomysl (2015) challenged the use of rational choice theory to understand school selection patterns in Sweden. They asked parents to rate the influence of distance, knowledge/reputation, friends, localization, programs, and accessibility. The surveys reported 63% of parents selected knowledge/reputation or programs (academic quality) as their most influential factor during the selection process. The authors argue that rational choice theory is “flawed” because it does not explain the 37% of parents who did not rank academic quality as their primary consideration. I have two concerns with this study. First, the authors ask parents to identify the most important of six factors. There are other academic and non-academic factors that are not included in their study. Perhaps the lack of certain factors, such as safety or perceptions of student behavior, were excluded because they are not issues in Sweden. Nevertheless, there should be additional selection factors and my study will include them. Second, the authors completely dismiss the idea of using rational choice theory but provide no other alternative. My investigation will attempt to understand the selection process using both rational choice theory and behavioral economics.

The previous authors included rational choice theory in their investigations to gain a better understanding of school selection patterns. Despite the concerns raised about the above studies, rational choice theory is widely used and provides a basic framework for understanding how parents interact with the selection process. The framework of rational choice is the first theory used in my study to analyze parent school selection behaviors.

Behavioral Economics Theory. Behavioral economics theory is a slight alternative to rational choice theory. Chetty (2015) challenges some basic assumptions of rational choice theory by asking two questions: Are people rational? & Do people optimize in market

settings? Simon (1956) was at the forefront of behavioral economics theory. He proposed that individuals do not always act in a self-interested and rational way. Like rational choice, this study will consider behavioral economics in two ways. First, Samson (2014) explained that “Our minds must be understood in relative to the environment in which they evolved.” This idea suggests that our environment shapes our experiences and what we consider most important. In contrast to rational choice theory, behavioral economics suggest that there are differences in what people perceive as “best” based on their environment and experiences. Because of these differences, academics may not be the overall consideration for parents during the selection process.

Second, Simon (1956) argues that people have barriers that prevent them from maximizing utility when making a decision. He insists that people could not possibly know all their available options or information about a topic and therefore take shortcuts when making a decision. Instead of rational choice, he proposed the idea of bounded rationality, a process where people “satisfice.” That is individuals make the first acceptable choice without considering all the possible alternatives.

Bell (2009) incorporated some aspects of behavior economics theory in the understanding of school selection patterns. She suggests that parents create choice sets when selecting a school. Bell’s explains that choice sets are influenced by resources, social networks, and access. In her study, she interviewed 44 families and constructed five indices from 102 discrete questions. She then created a poor/working class category and a middle class category based on income, educational attainment, and autonomy in the workplace. Her results suggest that parents considered a Holistic index more than an Academic index, Social index, Logistics index, or Administrative index. Additionally, there were no statistical

difference between subgroups. These results were striking for two reasons. First, parents found the Holistic index the more important than other considerations. Though not mentioned by her, this challenges the ideas laid out by rational choice theory, namely that all parents consider academics most important during the selection process. Second, there were no differences between poor/working class and middle class parents. One of the main tenants of behavioral economics is that environment shapes our experiences and what we value. Therefore, we would expect to see differences and thus these results challenge the ideas laid out by behavioral economics theory. My study will differ in three ways when determine what considerations parents value most when selecting a school. First, it will use predetermined school selection factors and organize them into measurable indices. Second, it will analyze results using both rational choice theory and behavioral economics theory. Third, it will incorporate the perspectives of both rational choice theory and behavioral economics theory.

The second idea laid out by Bell (2009) was a three step process of school selection. She suggests parents participate in a predisposition step, a search step, and a choice step. The predisposition step determines if a parent participates in a school search or not. If parents are happy with their current school or the district has naturally occurring feeder schools, they may simply choose not to consider any alternatives. If parents do decide to enter the choice market, Bell proposes the second step involves open or closed searches. Though she does not explicitly connect open searches to rational choice theory, they are similar. Parents create a very large choice set, then they narrow the alternatives until they make a choice. Closed searches differ from open searches. She argues that parents consider three or fewer schools, gather information, and then make a selection.

Bell (2009) used interviews to test her theories around choice sets. She found the average parent who conducted an open search considered 7.5 schools and the average parent who conducted a closed search considered 3.4 schools. Additionally, she found 25% of parents did not participate in a search, 25% completed a closed search, and 50% completed an open search. Bell suggests that parents who participated in a closed search picked “two or maybe three schools”, though she included results that do not match her criteria for a closed search. The average mean she reported for closed searches was 3.4 schools. If the maximum of her proposed category was three, the mean of 3.4 could not be possible. Because of these results and discussions, this study will reevaluate the number of schools parents considered during the selection process.

Rational choice and behavioral economics could help us understand how parents select schools. Through these lenses, this study seeks to understand what considerations parents find most important when choosing a school and the number of schools they considered before making a selection. Though not expressed directly towards an educational setting, Thaler (2016) suggests that using both rational choice and behavioral economics may help us to “improve predictions about behavior.” Therefore, using both of these theories could provide us insight not seen in other educational literature on school choice.

Research Questions & Hypotheses

The following hypotheses relate to the two research questions of this study. Each research question contains a hypothesis from both rational choice theory and behavioral economics theory. Additionally, each hypothesis provides a rationale for its prediction. Rational choice theory and behavioral economics theory could help guide our understanding of how parents at enrollment rich traditional public schools make school selections.

Research Question #1: What was the most frequently identified consideration of some parents of newly enrolled four-year-old kindergarten children when they selected an enrollment rich traditional public school for their child?

Hypothesis #1 (H1): *Rational Choice Theory: Academics will be the primary selection consideration for parents who choose an enrollment rich traditional public school for their child, regardless of income or education level.*

This hypothesis is viewed through the lens of rational choice theory. This theory suggests that people will seek out the “best” product or service. In relation to the characteristics of schools, parents believe the “best” is synonymous to high levels of Academics. Rational choice theory also suggests all parents will consider academics supreme, regardless of other mitigating factors. Several studies support these findings that parents consider some aspect of Academics as most important when selecting a school for their child (Maddaus & Marion, 1995; Schneider et. al., 2000; Tedin & Weiher, 2004; Teske et. al., 2007; Stein et. al., 2011).

Hypothesis #2 (H2): *Behavioral Economics Theory: The primary selection consideration for parents who choose an enrollment rich traditional public school for their child will differ based on income and/or education level.*

Through the lens behavioral economics, environment and experiences shape what people consider valuable (Samson, 2014). This could affect what parents consider most important during the selection process. For example, lack of resources may cause some parents to consider aspects of convenience over other factors when selecting a school for their child (Wilson et al. 2010). Therefore, we would expect to see differences in a parents' primary selection consideration based on their income and/or education level.

Research Question #2: How many schools did some parents of newly enrolled four-year-old kindergarten children consider before selecting an enrollment rich traditional public school for their child?

Hypothesis # 3 (H3): *Rational Choice Theory: The majority of participants will consider four or more schools during the selection process.*

Bell (2009) proposed that parents use open or closed searches when considering a school for their child. Using open choice, parents consider many options, narrow their alternatives, and make a choice. This is similar to the ideas laid out by rational choice theory, which explains that parents consider all possible schools, rank each, and select the highest ranked alternative. There are issues associated with these two definitions. First, Bell uses the non-measurable word “many” in her description of open searches. Second, there are over 150 schools in MPS (DPI, 2016d) and potentially many more if you include voucher,

non-MPS charter, and suburban schools. The idea that parents consider all available options as suggested by rational choice theory may be impractically unreasonable. Therefore, a defined measure for open searches based on rational choice theory may be necessary to produce a measurable analysis. Bell (2009) defined three or fewer schools as a closed search. To gain a measurable comparison, this study proposes an open search is one where parents considered four or more school during the selection process.

Hypothesis #4 (H4): *Behavioral Economics Theory: A majority of participants will consider three or fewer schools during the selection process.*

As alluded to above, behavioral economics theory suggests that parents “satisfice” and consider only enough alternatives to meet their goal. This would allow us to predict that parents would not consider many schools before making a selection. Bell (2009) proposed that parents who operate in a closed search tend to consider three or fewer schools during the selection process. Therefore, this study uses her measure of three or fewer schools as a reference point for a behavioral economics prediction.

Organizing the Six School Selection Indices

To gain a better understanding of the characteristics parents consider when selecting a school, this study constructs six indices from 22 discrete parent questions. Since the work of Chubb and Moe (1990) there have been a plethora of studies that seek to determine how parents select schools. Some use interviews or focus groups to determine how parents choose schools (Howe et al., 2002; Bell, 2009; Beabout & Cambre, 2013; Lareau, 2014). Other studies relied on internet search patterns (Schenider & Buckley, 2002; Dougherty et

al., 2013). But most studies, discussed below, examine parent choice patterns by asking them to rate or select from among a battery of survey questions. Because of the multitude of possible reasons, several studies organize parent responses into indexes or categories for analysis (Goldring & Hausman, 1999; Moe 2001; Goldring & Phillips, 2008; Stein et al., 2011; Beabout & Cambre, 2013). This study builds on their work by organizing 22 possible school selection factors into the following indices: Academics, Convenience, School climate, School community, School information sources, and Social networks.

Academics

Previous school choice studies inform the academics index used in this study. In an investigation involving fifth grade parents who selected either a magnet or traditional school in St. Louis, Goldring & Hausman (1999) used items such as reputation, individualized help, class size, and special programs to measure academics. This differed from Stein et al. (2011) who studied charter school choice and created an index named Academics as a Top Priority for School Choice (ATP). The author used academic quality and academic focus to form the ATP index. Schneider et al. (2000) also discussed academic quality using teacher quality as a measure. Finally, Moe (2001) employed both test scores and parent perceptions of performance to measure academic quality. The factors extrapolated from these studies can be organized into two types: actual and perceived. Actual factors are those with an objective measure, such as test scores or class size, whereas, perceived factors are parent perceptions of school reputation like teacher quality and academic quality. This study merges these two types of factors to create the academics index. The new index includes class size, test scores, teacher quality, and academic quality.

Class Size. This measure is a widely discussed topic in the school community. Blatchford (2007) found class size had a large impact on student achievement. Specifically, there were significant gains in literacy when reducing the size of a class from 30 to 15. Further, these results may be especially true for younger children, where a lower number of students could lead to teachers focusing on prevention instead of remediation. Ravitch (2013) also describes the benefits of lower class sizes on student achievement. She argues that fewer students encourages social discourse and critical thinking skills. This is largely because teachers can better manage the classroom and facilitate an environment that leads to greater student collaboration, learning, and an increase in achievement on both classroom and standardized tests.

Class size is an important aspect of academics and several studies included it as a measure for analyzing how parents select schools. Goldring & Hausman (1999) used class size within their academics index, but did not discuss it as a separate factor. Similarly, Schneider et. al. (2000) included class size as one of eleven discrete factors for parent selection consideration, but also did not examine its relevance. This differed from Kleitz et. al. (2000), who asked parents to indicate the importance of class size when selecting a school. Explaining that class size “is a specific measure of educational quality”. Bosetti (2004) also incorporated class size into her study and discussed how it encourages more individualized help to meet the needs of students.

Class size is a vital component to the Academics index. The work of Blatchford (2007) and Ravitch (2013) explain the importance of class size on student achievement. Additionally, the use of this measure by Goldring & Hausman (1999), Schneider et. al. (2000), Kleitz et. al. (2000), and Bosetti (2004) demonstrate that other researchers value this

measure as an important factor for understanding academics. Because class size has a strong connection to academic quality, it is an essential and reliable measure and should be included in the academics index.

Standardized Test Scores / School Report Card. Test scores are an important factor when asking parents about their selection behavior. Schneider et. al. (2000) used the specific variable High Test Scores when they asked parents to rate their most important factor when selecting an urban or suburban school for their child. They discuss how test scores act as a measure of product for parents during the choice process. Tedin & Weiher (2004) also used test scores as a proxy for academic quality when they investigated how race/ethnic diversity affected choice selection in Texas charter schools. However, they did not give details into why they were important. These studies differed from Teske et. al. (2007), who explained that test scores are only a relevant factor when comparing multiple schools. Finally, as explained above, Moe (2001) describes how tests scores are a reliable variable for studying how parents choose schools. Test scores offer a comparable measure of school performance for parents during the selection process.

Standardized test scores/ school report card is a key factor to include in the academics index. Data gained from these sources are objective and reliable in how they correspond to the academic achievement of students. Parents could use test information to evaluate the academic success of a school. They can then compare the scores from one school to another and come to a conclusion. As such, standardized test scores/ school report card is a must for the academics index.

Academic Quality. Academic quality is a perceived factor that parents use to choose a school. Teske et. al. (2007) used Academic Quality as a variable when they asked low

income parents to rate their most important factors from a list when selecting a school in Milwaukee, Washington, D.C., and Denver. They discuss how parents “infer through their own observations”, meaning parents subjectively view the performance of schools and make decisions on those perceptions. Also, Stein et. al. (2011) included an Academic quality survey question to measure academics. They specifically asked parents to rate the top two reasons for selecting a charter school. The authors of both studies understood that the academic quality measure provides a general perception of its namesake and could have different meanings for different people. This study also uses the academic quality factor to capture how parents perceive the relative performance of a school during the choice process. This is because in addition to the objective factors of class size and test scores, parents could rely on a general sense of how students perform academically instead of using specific data to make their decisions. Though parents may vary in the way they view academic quality, this factor was included because it allows for other perceptions or inferences that parents could have about the academic quality of a school (Teske et. al., 2007). Since parents may use this informal method to rate the academic quality of a school, it was important to include it in the academics index.

Quality Teachers. This is the final question associated with the academics index. Armour & Peiser (1998) included the variable teachers when they surveyed Massachusetts parents on why they participated in school choice. Bosetti’s 2004 investigation also contained a factor involving teachers and how they care about parents and students. Schneider et. al. (2000) uses the specific variable teacher quality as a measure for academic quality in their study of urban and suburban school choice. Further, they were the only ones to discuss how teacher quality connects to academics and the role of parents in identifying

that connection. This idea was not supported by Teske et al. (2007), who did not include a measure of teacher quality because they felt it was too ambiguous a variable for parents. These authors had different perceptions on the importance of using teacher quality in evaluating the selection process. However, this investigation follows the work of Schneider et al. (2000) who values parent perceptions on teacher quality when determining the characteristics of schools parents considered. This is because, in addition to their own explanations, there is a strong backing of research since the 1960s, where researchers connected teacher quality to student learning (Coleman, 1966; Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002; Goe, 2007). Therefore, parent perceptions of teacher quality during the selection process is an essential component to the Academics index.

Convenience

Two studies informed the creation of the convenience index. Goldring & Hausman (1999) included survey questions which asked parents how the distance from their home/job, the availability of before and after school daycare, and whether the parents had another child at the same school affected their choice decision. This differed from Teske et al. (2007) who only used location as a measure of convenience. This study tweaks and expands the work of the two authors. First, it adopts Teske et al. (2007) term location as a factor instead of the distance from their home/job used by Goldring & Hausman (1999). Though Goldring & Hausman (1999) discuss location as a key component of understanding how convenience affects school choice, they decided to divide the factor into one that differentiates between home and job. This study merged the two factors into one because the perception of location could potentially be realized by parents without separate home/job factors. Second, this

study adds an available busing factor to the convenience index. Goldring & Hausman (1999) explains the importance of transportation in school choice, but they do not include it as factor of convenience. Instead they use a factor that excludes schools not considered due to transportation considerations. This study adds available busing as a factor of the convenience index because it could potentially give greater access to distant schools. Third, this study maintains the before and after school daycare factor created by Goldring & Hausman (1999). Finally, this study adds a sports or activity program factor to the convenience index. Sports offer children enjoyment, camaraderie, and skills which could lead to higher levels of self-esteem and social-emotional control (Atkins, Johnson, Force, & Petrie, 2014). Parents with few resources or homes that are distant from sport or activities may rely schools to offer these important programs. Therefore, the sports or activity program factor could be a relevant factor within the convenience index.

Available Busing. Busing is a vital aspect of schooling for many parents. Wilson et. al. (2010) used school bus service factor when studying how parents value transportation when selecting a school. The measure was included in their study because they hoped to find differences between transportation beliefs between school types and race. Goldring & Hausman (1999) also discussed the importance of transportation in the selection process. They asked parents which schools were not considered because they lacked transportation.

This study acknowledges the role of buses when parents consider schools. Parents who do not have access to a reliable source of transportation may have limited school choice options. As a result, this investigation supports the points raised by Wilson et. al. (2010) and Goldring & Hausman (1999). Additionally, this study recognizes that lack of transportation

can hinder a parents' ability to consider a school due to proximity. Therefore, this study incorporates available busing into the convenience index.

Before and After School Daycare. Daycare is a much needed resource for some parents. Those parents who work beyond the seven-hour school day rely on school daycare to watch their child until they have the opportunity to retrieve them (MPS, 2016u). Goldring & Hausman (1999) discuss how childcare could be a constraint for some parents and included the variable in their study. Patzlaff (2014) also believes this resource is vital for some parents and included a survey question related to childcare. This study recognizes that parents working an 8-hour day may need to rely on daycare for their child. Before and after school daycare may be a convenient way for parents to both meet the needs of work and child responsibilities. Using this rationale and those provided by Goldring & Hausman (1999) and Patzlaff (2014), this study includes the before and after school daycare factor within the convenience index.

Location of School. The location of a school may affect how a parent participates in school choice. Tedin & Weiher (2004) explain the significance of a schools' location during the selection process. They discuss how parent dissatisfaction with the location of a charter school would encourage them to opt for their neighborhood school. Goldring & Hausman (1999) used the factor related to the distance from the parents' home or work to measure how location relates to convenience. Teske, Fitzpatrick, & Kaplan (2007) directly links location to convenience and used a location/convenience question when asking parent to rate the most important factors during the selection process. Bell (2009) found location acted as a logistical concern for parents and that the distance from a school could become cumbersome or costly. The authors above explain how location is a logistical or convenience factor that

affects how parents choose a school. As with the arguments above, the location of a school could be a barrier for parents as they select a school. Parents may not consider a school because they do not have a means of transportation. Other parents may simply find distant schools to be logistically burdensome to have their child attend (i.e., traffic, out of the way to work). Therefore, a location of school factor falls comfortably into the convenience index.

Sports or Activity Program. These programs offer the opportunity for parents to involve their child in school programs that include students and parents from the school community. The benefit of these school based programs is students do not need to find additional outside organizations to participate in activities. Additionally, if the programs are directly after school, they have the added benefit of providing additional child care. Some authors used sports or activity programs in their study of school choice. Schneider & Buckley (2002) use the factor After School Programs in their internet search pattern study. Where, Ekanem (2013) discusses the importance of sports in the school choice process, but does not include other programs. Stein et al. (2011) uses the measure of extracurricular activities but does not give details. The use of this measure by previous authors and the benefit of having a convenient and accessible program for their child makes this factor a must for the convenience index.

School Climate

School climate is an industry term that measures the wellbeing of a school. Though many associate it with safety and how student behave in school, it also contains such factors related to the appearance or size of the school (Freiberg, 1999). Goldring & Hausman (1999) used a similar index to measure only the safety/discipline of the school and neighborhood.

This study seeks to narrow the focus to include only the climate of the school and factors other than safety to gain a holistic view of the term school climate. Additionally, this modified index is similar in structure to the academics index, where it contains both actual and perceived factors. This index consists of five factors: the outside of the building is inviting and clean, school size, safe and orderly school environment, other students in the school are well behaved, and quality principal.

The Outside of the Building is Inviting and Clean. This factor is borrowed from the service industry. This perceived measure allows parents to rate the importance of the outside aesthetics of the building in their selection considerations. Hyllegard and friends (2016), found that if patrons got “pleasure and liking” from the exterior of the building it would positively affect their purchasing intentions. Only Armour & Peiser (1998) asked parent about the Facilities, but they did not provide an explanation of its importance or why they included this variable in their study. This study includes this factor because parents may simply judge the school based on its appearance. For example, if the school has broken windows and graffiti, parents may believe the school to be unsafe or unruly for their child. This investigation uses this factor to gain insight into how parents value the appearance of the building within the context of the climate index.

School Size. This subject has also been a topic of conversation in recent years. Like class size, there are discussions around the effectiveness of a smaller school for children (Nelson, 2015). Only Beabout & Cambres’ (2013) uses a similar Small School Size variable to determine parent beliefs during the selection process. This study includes school size as an actual factor of school climate during the selection process for two reasons. First, smaller schools could provide a more community atmosphere. Because of the size, there would

potentially be fewer students. Lower enrollment could not only allow a deeper connection between students, but could facilitate the building of professional relationships between staff and students. This could lead to trust and a better school climate. Second, logistically a smaller school could facilitate a safer environment. The general student movement within the school due to smaller distances and fewer students could lead to a more manageable school building. Therefore, school size is a notable factor of the climate index.

Safe and Orderly School Environment. Safety is an important issue for parents and district staff. Since the 1980s, gangs, weapons, fighting, drugs, and bullying began to alter the culture of schools (Simon, 2007). Also, parents became more concerned about safety after the mass shooting at Columbine (Altheide, 2009). This actual factor, like test scores, is comparable and available to the public in the form of suspensions and expulsions (DPI, 2015c). Several studies use safety and/or discipline as selection measures in the school choice process. Goldring & Hausman (1999) used the variable safety when creating their discipline/safety index. They suggest safety is important to parents if they left a school that had those issues. Schneider, Teske, & Marschall's (2000) discussed the importance of safety and asked parents to rate its significance in the selection process. Ji & Boyatt (2007) also used safety as a measure and had participants rate its importance on a nine-point scale. Though surveyed differently, each author used safety as a measure for parents to rate during the choice process. This study agrees with the aforementioned authors. The relative safety of the students may be a paramount concern for parents who live in dangerous neighborhoods or had their child in an unsafe school. Therefore, this study uses a modified version of the safety factors presented by the previous literature.

Other Students in the School are Well Behaved. This measure asks parents to rate the importance of positive behavior during the selection process. Positive student behavior is associated with a more productive school climate and academic achievement (Ward, 2016). Additionally, parents may simply see behaved students as those who can be good role models for their own child. Though different from the actual metrics of safety/discipline, this perceived factor hopes to inform the school climate index by providing insight into parents' perceptions of student behavior. There are no previous studies to inform this factor. But the ability for parents to have a feeling about a place based on how other students behave could provide them with a perception of a safe environment. Thus, this perceived factor is included within the school climate index.

Quality Principal. Leadership is paramount to building and maintaining a positive school climate. Armour & Peiser (1998) included a factor related to administration, but did not provide an explanation. Bosetti (2004) also used a factor involving the principal to determine selection considerations of parents who choose a private, public, religious, and alternative school. Though both previous studies include a factor related to principal quality, none described its importance. Successful leadership can encourage safe and orderly schools through building trust and facilitating a focused and supportive environment for students, teachers, and parents (Astor, Benbenishty, & Estrada, 2009; Bosworth, Ford, & Hernandez, 2011). Additionally, principals are in charge of school budgets and can improve the appearance of the school through building projects and maintenance. Therefore, this study includes a factor around principal quality within the climate index.

School Community

This index is also an adaptation derived from the value community index used by Goldring & Hausman (1999). Their index included measures of teaching styles, parent involvement, values/beliefs and the race/ethnic makeup of the school. Factors around values/beliefs were removed because those are generally associated with religious or private schools (Ji & Boyatt, 2007; Bukhari & Randall, 2009; Beabout & Cambre, 2013). Instead this new index focuses on parent involvement, diversity, special services, and special programming at the school level.

Academic Support Programs (Special Education, English Language Services, etc.). These programs provide a wide range of both legally binding and intervention supports for students in schools. For example, MPS schools offer academic intervention and enrichment programming to 20% of their student body (MPS, 2016v). This is in addition to the 19.7% students receiving special education services or the 8.6% of student receiving English language services in the 2014-15 school year (DPI, 2015c). Even with their importance, only Stein et al. (2011) study contained a variable named services for special needs students. Though only one study includes a similar measure, academic support programs are important to the school community. These programs provide scaffolding and support for students with disabilities. Additionally, English Language Students will be able to access the language skills necessary to be a part of the school community. With that, academic support programs are an important part of the school community index.

Diverse Student Body. Orfield (2013) discusses how diverse schools help prepare students to interact in a diverse society. Other studies include diversity or a factor around the composition of the student body to measure parents selection beliefs (Schneider, Teske, &

Marschall, 2000; Schneider & Buckley, 2002). As with Orfield (2013), this study believes that a diverse student body is necessary to prepare children for a diverse adulthood.

Additionally, a diverse school could provide different perspectives to make a stronger school community. Thus the school community index should include a diverse student body factor.

Non-Academic Programs (Art, Gym, Music, Technology, etc.). In recent years MPS committed to increasing funding to these programs (MPS, 2016w). Schneider et al. (2000) and Schneider & Buckley (2002) discuss special programs, but do not provide a detailed description of the factor. These programs provide students a creative activities or simply brain break from academics. Additionally, these classes could facilitate teamwork through projects and activities. The results are a stronger school community.

Parent Involvement. Active parents desire schools with more parent involvement (Goldring & Phillips, 2008). This allows them to support academic and non-academic learning with other likeminded parents. Goldring & Phillips (2008) and Stein et al. (2011) used a parent involvement factor. Parents themselves are key components to the school community. They have the potential to provide resources and support to supplement the academic and non-academic activities at school. Parent involvement is an important factor to the school community index.

Social networks

Parents may value social networks as important reasons for selecting a school for their child. Schneider et. al. (2000) discusses how parent rely on friends and family to make school choice decisions. Goldring & Phillips (2008), uses the factor family/friend/neighbors to discover how significant these individuals are in the selection process. Armour & Peiser (1998) also asks parents to rate the importance friends/family when they select a new school

for their child. Simply said, the recommendation gained from family and friends could affect the school's parents consider. This is important because parents of low socio-economic class tend to have "cold" knowledge, or social groups that do not know much relevant knowledge about the schools considered. Whereas parents with higher socio-economic class tend to have networks in the know (Ball & Vincent, 1998). This study forms the social networks index by using the separate the factors of family recommendation and friend recommendation.

School Information Sources

School information sources is a new school selection index. Many studies discuss the importance of these types of sources of information during selection process (Schneider et. al., 2000; Schneider & Buckley, 2002; Hastings & Weinstein, 2007; Dougherty et al., 2013; Frankenberg, 2013). This study seeks to build on those works by creating the school information sources index, which includes the following information source factors: district "3 choice guide"; school rating organization; and school website.

District "3 Choice Guide". This document is available in print and on the district website. It contains every school within MPS and information about transportation, programming, and grades served (MPS, 2016u). Several authors discuss how districts use this type of document to inform parents about schools (Phillips & Hausman, 2011; Frankenberg, 2013). Schneider, Teske, & Marschall (2000) uses older references to district newsletters as an information variable. The district 3 choice guide could be an important resource for parents to provide key information about MPS schools during the selection process.

School Rating Organization (Great Schools, etc.). Available in print or online, these types of institutions provide general information and issue ratings to schools based on several characteristics, including test scores and parent feedback (Samuels, 2012). Dougherty and friends (2013) confirmed the wide use of site such as Greatschools.org as they studied parent usage of the school rating site <http://SmartChoices.trincoll.edu>. As people rely more on the internet for information, these sites could offer parents a third party view of schools in MPS.

School Website. School websites offer parents another digital source to gather information on a school. Though different from independent online rating organizations, school websites are managed by district personnel and thus could include only information that makes the school look good. This could inherently make them biased. Additionally, Lareau (2014, p 183) describes that not all individuals use this resource to find information. Even with these issues, the movement toward using the internet as a resource could potentially make school websites a valuable school information source for parents during the selection process.

III. METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This section is organized into the following components: research questions; hypothesizes; study location; sample population; survey design; data analysis; and summary.

Study Location

This investigation took place within the Milwaukee Public School (MPS) district. MPS is the largest school district in the state of Wisconsin, enrolling 77,391 students in 154 schools during the 2014-15 school year (MPS, 2015a). This mid-sized, mid-western school district also includes students between grades K3 through 12th grade. MPS also has a very diverse student population: Asian – 6%, Black – 54.6%; Latino – 24.7%; and White 13.4%. Further, special education students account for 19.7%; English Language Learners 8.6%; and 82.7% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch (DPI, 2016d).

This study focused specifically on parents who selected an enrollment rich traditional public schools. Not all kindergarten through twelfth grade parents provide the best sample for this study. MPS has about a 15 percent mobility rate (MPS, 2015a). This is where students transfer between schools either during or between school years. These parents may have selected a new school because they changed their place of residence, were disappointed with their previous school, or were expelled to another school. In their 2013 study, Beabout & Cambre discusses the push-pull factors that cause parents to move from one school to another. These factors are out of the scope of this study. Additionally, the logistical aspect of working with schools to find this small subset of parent throughout the year was

impractical. Therefore, studying parent selection beliefs during one of the major enrollment period could provide a reasonable and better sample to meet the needs of this study.

Some enrollment periods do not work within the guidelines of this investigation. If mobility accounts for about 15 percent of student enrollment, then the remaining MPS school enrollment takes place when children move into Four-Year-Old Kindergarten (K4), Middle School, or High School. Asking parents from the two latter periods could be problematic when investigating school choice patterns at enrollment rich traditional public schools. Middle and high schools in MPS currently do not qualify as traditional public school (see the definition section for selection criteria). Both are either classified as charter or specialty schools and/or have long distance transportation networks. For example, Vincent High School is listed as a neighborhood school by MPS, but its transportation zone extends to over 17 miles. Additionally, all eight of the other MPS identified neighborhood high schools are closer to a family at the furthest point of Vincent's transportation zone (MPS, 2016s; MPS, 2016t). Therefore, parents of newly enrolled K4 children may provide the best opportunity to gather information on the reasons why they selected an enrollment rich traditional public school for their child.

Focusing on parents from this specific enrollment period provides other benefits. First, parents of young children are the primary choice makers and are not as influenced by their child's desires. Four-year-old children may not provide much meaningful insight into the selection process. This differs from older children, who could sway parent to select a certain school, which could diminish the parents' role by inserting bias into their answers (Teske, Fitzpatrick, & Kaplan, 2007). Second, this study asks newly enrolled parents their reasons within the first months of school. By surveying parents early, we can have a better

picture of their actual school selection reasons instead of their current beliefs about the school.

Of the 154 schools in MPS, 50 were designated as traditional public schools in the 2014-15 school year. Of those schools only 14 maintained or grew their enrollment from the 2012-13 to the average of both the 2013-14 and 2014-15 school years (MPS, 2013a; DPI, 2016d; MPS, 2014c; MPS, 2015b). Table 3 displays demographic information of both traditional public schools with declining enrollment and those with sustained or growing enrollment.

Table 3.
2014-2015 Enrollment & Demographics of Traditional MPS Schools

	Total Enrolled	Students with Disability	Economically Disadvantaged	English Language Learners	Asian Students	Black Students	Latino Students	White Students	Categorized as Other Students
Enrollment Rich Traditional Public Schools (14 Schools)									
Number	5609	1072	4579	515	476	2760	1140	1165	68
Percent		19.0	83.1	9.0	8.5	49.2	20.3	20.8	1.2
Traditional Public Schools with Declining Enrollment (36 Schools)									
Number	16788	3725	14779	1716	664	8126	5632	2113	253
Percent		22.0	88.0	10.0	4.0	48.0	33.6	12.6	1.5

Notes: (DPI, 2016d); Milwaukee Public Schools includes those with Middle Eastern Descent as White.

Principals at the 14 MPS identified schools received an email requesting their participation in the study. Emails were sent August 17, 2015. A follow-up email was sent to principals who did not respond on August 31, 2015 and September 14, 2015. Of the 14 schools identified for this study, 12 principals consented to participation. Table 4 displays the demographics of the 12 schools that participated.

Table 4.
2014-2015 Enrollment & Demographics of 12 Traditional MPS Schools with Sustained or Growing Enrollment

	Total Enrolled	Students with Disability	Economically Disadvantaged	English Language Learners	Asian Students	Black Students	Latino Students	White Students	Categorized as Other Students
Number	4440	827	3603	296	449	2310	525	1097	59
Percent		18.6	81.1	6.7	10.1	52.0	11.8	24.7	1.3

Notes: (DPI, 2016d); Milwaukee Public Schools includes those with Middle Eastern Descent as White.

Sample Population

This investigation draws participants from enrollment rich traditional public schools. Surveys were only distributed to parents of newly enrolled four-year-old kindergarten students at the study schools. In late August 2015 and early September 2015, parents received the survey (Appendix A), a letter discussing the study, a waived consent form (Appendix B), and a pre-addressed, stamped envelope. Parents had the option to complete the full survey, part of the survey, or simply not return the survey. They implied consent if they returned a partial or completed survey to a PO Box printed on the pre-addressed, stamped envelope. The implied consent allowed anonymous responses so that no names were associated with the data. Participants returned 93 of a possible 422 surveys by November 1, 2015, accounting for a 22% response rate.

There are limitations to issuing survey to parents of students who just began school and a low response rate. First, asking parents after their child attends school could create bias in how parents respond to the questions. They may answer using their current view of the school instead of their perceptions during the enrollment process. Since the surveys were returned within the first two months, the hope is the surveys contain the most accurate information on parent selection reasons.

Second, the non-participation of the two schools and the 22% response rate could be problematic for drawing generalizations about the population. A couple of studies acknowledge a growing trend of non-response survey rates in several fields (Wagner & Kemmerling, 2010; Tourangeau & Plewes, 2013). Heggstad et al. (2015) explains that high rates of nonresponse cause concerns with credibility, statistical power, and could create a slanted picture of the population. Listyowardojo, Nap, & Johnson (2011) recommend that

one method to account for “under- or over-representation of some groups” due to non-response is weights. In a 2007 study, Jenkins and friends found “trivial” differences between weighted low-response rate data and non-weighted higher response rate data drawn from double-sampling, a method of following up with non-respondents. Though imperfect, this study will use weights to better understand the beliefs of some parents who selected an enrollment rich traditional public school for their child who entered four-year-old kindergarten.

Survey Design

This study relied on surveys as the primary means of gathering data. Wolter (2007) discusses the benefits of using survey data to accomplish quantitative data analysis. Surveys are beneficial by providing “accuracy, timeliness, cost, and simplicity” to data collection. Surveys are a key piece of research for many social scientists (Heeringa, West, & Berglund, 2010). This study used paper surveys to gather data from participants.

Many studies rely on survey data to gain information on how parents select schools for their child. Goldring & Hausman (1999) asked parents to respond yes or no while presenting sixteen possible reasons for selecting a school. This differed from Goldring & Phillips (2008) who prompted parents to rate each factors high, medium, or low. Other studies asked participants to rank their top reason(s) for selecting a school (Armour & Peiser, 1998; Schneider et al., 2000; Bosetti, 2004; Tedin & Weihr, 2004; Teske et al., 2007; Stein et al., 2011). While Ji & Boyatt (2007) and Moe, (2001) used a variety of scales from two to nine points. Two studies, which were the basis for this investigation sampling method, specifically asked parents to rate a battery of factors using four point Likert scale (Kleitzi et al., 2000; Bukhari & Randall, 2009).

The first part of the survey sought to gain a better understanding as to why respondents selected an enrollment rich traditional public school for their young child. It relied on a four point Likert type scale to measure single-item questions, similar to the work done by Kleitz et al. (2000) and Bukhari & Randall (2009). Parents could rate 22 school choice options as: (4) Very Important; (3) Important; (2) Unimportant; or (1) Very Unimportant. The 22 questions within the survey were developed to fit within the following six indices: Academics, Convenience, School climate, School community, School information sources, and Social networks.

The second part of the survey requests information about logistics and demographics. The following lists the survey question and provides an explanation of inclusion:

How many schools did you consider in the selection process?

This survey question revolves around the second research question, which seeks to determine how many schools a parent considered during the selection process. Teske et. al. (2007) asked the question “About how many schools did you consider when you were making a choice about where to send name to school” (this was an online test that filled in the name). This study simplified the question for a paper-pencil study. Additionally, this question was an open-ended measure (Appendix A). This allows participants the flexibility to answer an infinite number of potential answers. Though this could provide specific and rich answers, there are possible issues associated with open-ended questions. Such as the participant providing an unexpected answer that could be unrelated to the study or difficult to interpret (Babbie, 2005).

How many schools did you tour during the selection process?

This was a follow up question that wanted to determine to what extent were the parents engaged with the process. Teske et al. (2007) used the variable “Did you visit any of the schools you applied to?”.

Do you have any other children that attend school?

As discussed earlier, the purpose of this question was to determine a difference between those parents with one newly enrolled child compared to those with older school aged children. Goldring & Hausman (1999) asked this binary question as a portion of their Convenience index. Since this question was necessary to answer the second research question, it was removed from consideration as a factor to the similarly names convenience index.

Demographic Characteristics

The remainder of the survey includes standard questions on age, race/ethnicity, household income level, and the parent’s current education level used by many of the aforementioned authors in the survey design section.

Data Analysis

The data was cleaned before analysis. First, unit non-response resulting from unreturned surveys were not included. Unfortunately, the large number of non-response could lead to bias. Not having the complete population could result in an overestimation in the results. This is where the results may indicate parent beliefs differently than the actual population. Efforts will be made to deal with the possible bias resulting from unit non-response by using weights (Heeringa, West, & Berglund, 2010). Second, the item response portion of the survey was handled to ensure data is not lost due to item non-response. Handling of missing items follow the work of Moe (2001), Likert survey items will be recoded to a five-point scale as followed: 5 = “Very Important”; 4 = “Important”; 3 = “Missing”; 2 = “Unimportant”; and 1 = “Very Unimportant”. It is understood that moving the missing numbers to the middle of the distribution causes some measurement error. Next, these items were assembled into the six school selection indices (Academics, Convenience, School climate, School community, School information sources, and Social networks). The six indices were separately summed and standardized to the same scale. A Chronbach’s Alpha was used to test inter-item correlation between the parts of each index (Warner, 2008, p858). Weights were added based on the race/ethnicity of all fourteen traditional public schools that maintained or gained enrollment. As discussed above, this model imputes item non-response by moving from a four to five-point scale. Because this may introduce measurement error, results were compared to separately summed and standardized four-point indices. Data was handled differently using the four point factors. The index variables included only items with no missing data. This led to a diminished sample size.

RESEARCH QUESTION #1: What was the most frequently identified consideration of some parents of newly enrolled four-year-old kindergarten children when they selected an enrollment rich traditional public school for their child?

Hypothesis #1 (H1): *Rational Choice Theory: Academics will be the primary selection consideration for parents who choose an enrollment rich traditional public school for their child, regardless of income or education level.*

There are two steps to test this hypothesis. The first was to determine if the primary consideration for selecting a school was the academics index. Organization of the data follows the work of Bukhari & Randall (2009) who numerically ordered both the means of the Likert responses and the top parent ranking factors. This study numerically organized the means of the six indices. But since this study did not have rank order information, it instead numerically ordered the percent of participants in each index who rated all the corresponding components “Very Important” or “Important”. This method of viewing percentages is similar to the work of Kleitz et al. (2000). Analysis and hypothesis testing followed Bukhari & Randall (2009). The authors reference Borg & Gall, 1983, who used a Rank Difference Correlation Coefficient because “rank orders were being compared with continuous variables.” If the academics index does not rank as the primary consideration, the analysis stops and we accept the null hypothesis. If academics is the primary consideration, then we move to test the second step.

Step 2 was to determine if the primary consideration (academics) differed based on income and/or education level. The academics index acted as the dependent variable. The first test involved parent income levels. During the survey, parents were asked to select one of seven responses within an income category (see Appendix A). These responses were used

to form a three-bracket income category based on census percentiles. The following shows the income brackets used in this study in relation to US census household percentiles: \$0 to \$35,000 = 1 %ile to 31.8 %ile; \$35,001 to \$80,000 = 31.8 %ile to 64.6%ile; and \$80,001 and above = 64.6%ile to 99%ile (US Census, 2016a). A simple linear regression was then used to determine differences between the groups.

The second test for this part looked at differences based on education level. Teske et al. (2007) used a binary variable (High school education or less and college educated) to test a similar measure. This study separates parent education levels into three: High school education or less, Some college, and four-year degree or higher. The academics index acted again as the dependent variable. A simple linear regression was used to determine differences between the groups. Taken together, these test informed H1.

Hypothesis #2 (H2): *Behavioral Economics Theory: The primary selection consideration for parents who choose an enrollment rich traditional public school for their child will differ based on income and/or education level.*

H2 followed the same steps that informed H1 with one notable exception. This hypothesis does not specify a primary selection consideration and therefore whichever index ranked highest will act as the dependent variable. A simple linear regression was then used to test differences between income groups and education groups. Results from this analysis informed H2.

RESEARCH QUESTION #1: How many schools did some parents of newly enrolled four-year-old kindergarten children consider before selecting an enrollment rich traditional public school for their child?

Hypothesis # 3 (H3): *Rational Choice Theory: The majority of participants will consider four or more schools during the selection process.*

Weighted and unweighted descriptive statistics were used to test H3.

Hypothesis #4 (H4): *Behavioral Economics Theory: A majority of participants will consider three or fewer schools during the selection process.*

Weighted and unweighted descriptive statistics were used to test H4.

Summary

This methodology section focused on how this study would answer the two presented research questions. It revisited the hypothesis, discussed the study location and sample population, it explained the survey design, and provided a plan for data analysis.

IV: RESULTS

Introduction

Milwaukee Public Schools struggles to compete in the education market place. In the 2014-15 school year, a little over one third of Milwaukee children attend a publically funded voucher school, non-MPS charter school, inter-district open enrollment school, or chapter 220 suburban integration program school (DPI, 2014; DPI, 2015d; MPS, 2014a; DPI 2015b; DPI, 2016c). In an attempt to increase student market share, MPS expanded the use of charter and magnet schools. Though there was limited success in maintaining student enrollment, these schools could reduce the financial stability, increase segregation, and negatively affect the academic stability within MPS. As a result, MPS could benefit from increasing the use of traditional public schools. Unfortunately, 36 of the 50 traditional MPS schools lost student enrollment from the 2012-13 to the 2013-14 & 2014-15 school years (MPS, 2013a; DPI, 2016d; MPS, 2014c; MPS, 2015b). Only 14 traditional public schools defied the negative enrollment trend and have maintained or increased enrollment. Because these enrollment rich schools are successful in the highly competitive educational market, they became the focus of this investigation.

The purpose of this study was to identify why some parents of newly enrolled four-year-old kindergarten children select an enrollment rich traditional public school. Using the lenses of rational choice theory and behavioral economics theory, this study seeks to understand parents school selection behaviors. Surveys were issued to parents in 12 of the 14 enrollment rich traditional public schools. Parents rated the importance of 22 questions which fit into six school choice indicies. Participants also indicated the number of schools

they considered during the selection process. Additionally, parents were asked to identify their age, race/ethnicity, household income, and education level.

This section contains the results for this study. Data was prepared and analyzed through the lenses of rational choice theory and behavioral economics theory to answer the following two research questions: *What was the most frequently identified consideration of some parents of newly enrolled four-year-old kindergarten children when they selected an enrollment rich traditional public school for their child?*; and *How many schools did some parents of newly enrolled four-year-old kindergarten children consider before selecting an enrollment rich traditional public school for their child?* The remainder of this chapter was organized by research questions and their corresponding hypothesizes. Additionally, results were compared to the previous literature and initial links were used to introduce connections discussed in the subsequent chapter.

Research Question #1

What was the most frequently identified consideration of some parents of newly enrolled four-year-old kindergarten children when they selected an enrollment rich traditional public school for their child?

Preparation of Data

Survey data was organized and readied before analysis. Of the 422 surveys distributed to the twelve participating schools only 93 parents, or 22%, returned the surveys. The 329 non-respondents were removed from analysis. The 22 discrete questions from the 93 returned surveys were organized into the following indices: Academics, Convenience,

School climate, School community, School information sources, and Social networks. Table 5 shows each index and the corresponding survey questions.

Table 5.
Six Indices and Corresponding Survey Questions

Academics

Q1: Academic Quality
Q5: Class Size
Q13: Quality Teachers
Q22: Standardized Test Scores / School Report Card

Convenience

Q3: Available Busing
Q4: Before and After School Daycare
Q11: Location of School
Q21: Sports or Activity Program

School Climate

Q10: Quality Principal
Q12: Other Students in the School are Well Behaved
Q14: Safe and Orderly School Environment
Q17: The Outside of the Building is Inviting and Clean
Q19: School Size

School Community

Q2: Academic Support Programs...
Q7: Diverse Student Body
Q15: Non-Academic Programs...
Q18: Parent Involvement

Social Networks

Q8: Family Recommendation
Q9: Friend Recommendation

School Information Sources

Q6: District "3 Choice Guide"
Q16: School Rating Organization...
Q20: School Website

Notes: N = 93.

The 22 factors were analyzed and compared in two ways because of item-non-response. The first method isolated the questions for each index and list-wide deleted any participants' data with a non-response item. A Cronbach's Alpha was then used to determine the inter-correlation of each index. The second method transformed the four-point scale into a five-point scale and recoded non-response item as "3". The questions were then assembled

into the corresponding indices and a Cronbach's Alpha was used to measure inter-correlation. Table 6 displays all six indices using both methods and the corresponding Cronbach's Alpha. Additionally, all indices were weighted by race.

Table 6.
Six Indices and their corresponding Cronbach's Alpha based on exclusion and inclusion of item non-response participants.

Index	Cronbach Alpha 4pt (Number of Responses)	Cronbach Alpha 5pt (Number of Responses)
Academics	.64 (N=87)	.57 (N=93)
Convenience	.47 (N=85)	.47 (N=93)
School Climate	.78 (N=86)	.72 (N=93)
School Community	.52 (N=85)	.36 (N=93)
Social Networks	.93 (N=90)	.91 (N=93)
School Information Sources	.68 (N=85)	.62 (N=93)

Notes: 5pt expands the 4pt scale and includes item non-response recoded as "3"; Data is weighted by race/ethnicity

The Cronbach's Alpha measured the inter-correlation between the items within each index. Warner (2008) explains that most literature accept a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of .70 or higher as having acceptable reliability. In a study of other researchers use of Cronbach Alpha, Warmbrod's (2014) found that some experts required a minimum rating .60 while others required .90. Cronbach (1951) expressed that the original goal was to ensure the measure was as high as possible, but conceded that "Items with quite low inter-correlations can yield an interpretable scale." The four-point scale included the deleted participants based on missing items reports higher Alpha's and therefore were used for analysis. Though some indices did not conform to some of generally acceptable inter-correlation reliability used by most researchers, they were still used with the understanding that questions within some of the indices may not perfectly align. Therefore, specific limitations may occur in interpreting

the Convenience and School Community indices. To alleviate issues associated with the two categories with low reliability, a separate analysis (analysis not shown) was conducted that compared and ranked the remaining four reliable indices with the individual items of the Convenience and School Community indices. The results were noted within the affected hypothesis.

Hypothesis #1 (H1): *Rational Choice Theory: Academics will be the primary selection consideration for parents who choose an enrollment rich traditional public school for their child, regardless of income or education level.*

The four-point indices with the higher Cronbach Alpha scores were used and organized applying two ranking techniques. First, the mean of each index was determined based on the corresponding components. The means of the six indices were numerically ordered. Second, each index was ranked based on the percent of participants who rated every related component within the index either “Very Important” or “Important”. Table 7 reports the results from both ranking techniques. The rank and range of each index was included for convenience.

Table 7.
Parent Reasons for Selecting an Enrollment Rich Traditional Public School

Index	Index Mean (Number of Responses)	Index Range	Percent of Parents that Rated All Components VI/I (Rank)
Academics	3.73 (N=87)	2.75 – 4.0	88.35 (1)
School Climate	3.65 (N=86)	2.60 – 4.0	83.62 (2)
School Community	3.54 (N=85)	2.75 – 4.0	72.16 (4)
School Information Sources	3.24 (N=85)	1.33 – 4.0	62.08 (5)
Convenience	3.23 (N=85)	2.00 – 4.0	44.96 (6)
Social Networks	3.14 (N=90)	1.00 – 4.0	76.89 (3)

Notes: VI/I = Very Important and Important

A Spearman rank order measure was used to reveal how the mean of each index ranked against the percent of participants who selected both “Very Important” or “Important” within each index. The coefficient resulting from the test was .657, which indicates a “Strong” positive correlation between the rankings (Prion & Haerling, 2014).

Results suggest that participants did select academics as the most important index over other considerations. Because of concerns relating to low inter-correlation reliability in both Convenience and School Community indices, items from these two indices were separately analyzed with the four reliable indices. Results indicate that none of the means from the eight factors extrapolated from the Convenience or School Community indices were above the mean of the academics index (analysis not shown). Additionally, the academics index had both a higher overall mean and very important / important ranking. The connection between the high mean and rankings were solidified with the strong positive correlation of the Spearman rank order test. Therefore, we accept the first part of this hypothesis, that is academics is the primary consideration for parents.

The next part tested if there were differences based on income and/or education levels. Table 8 shows the mean of each subgroup. The first linear regression analysis tested differences in income levels. Income accounted for four percent of the variance ($R^2 = .04$) and there was no difference between parents with lower levels of income and those with higher levels of income and the importance of Academics ($p > .070$). Because the original income variable was condensed from seven to three categories, a full analysis was conducted to test for sensitivity issues. The survey used for this study shows the seven categories (Appendix A). Even with the full set of seven levels, income still only accounted for four

percent of the variance ($R^2 = .04$) and there was no difference between income groups ($p > .071$).

Table 8.
Parent Reasons for Selecting an Enrollment Rich Traditional Public School, With Income & Education Group Means

Index (Number of Responses)	Full Mean	\$0 – \$35,000 (67%)	\$35,001 – \$80,000 (19%)	\$80,001 & Above (14%)	High School or Below (40%)	Some College (19%)	4 - year Degree or More (14%)
Academics (N=87)	3.73	3.76	3.75	3.56	3.76	3.77	3.60
School Climate (N=86)	3.65	3.66	3.71	3.50	3.67	3.67	3.56
School Community (N=85)	3.54	3.58	3.60	3.25	3.66	3.48	3.42
School Information Sources (N=85)	3.24	3.36	3.04	3.00	3.42	3.27	2.87
Convenience (N=85)	3.23	3.41	2.77	3.12	3.41	3.20	2.99
Social Networks (N=90)	3.14	3.27	2.68	3.10	3.48	2.92	2.81

Notes:

A second simple linear regression was used to determine differences based on education level. Education accounted for three percent of the variance ($R^2 = .03$). However, there was no difference between parents with higher education levels and those with lower education levels and the importance of the academics index ($p > .099$)

The findings from this study were consistent with the predictions explained under rational choice theory. They also align with the theories presented by Chubb & Moe (1990) and the results of previous studies that suggest that parents select academic quality as their primary consideration when choosing a school (Maddaus & Marion, 1995; Schneider et. al., 2000; Tedin & Weiker, 2004; Teske et.al., 2007; Stein et.al., 2011). Further, these results also suggest that parents do seek out academics as their primary consideration when selecting an enrollment rich traditional public school for their child, regardless of income or education levels.

Hypothesis #2 (H2): Behavioral Economics Theory: *The primary selection consideration for parents who choose an enrollment rich traditional public school for their child will differ based on income and/or education level.*

Results are displayed under Hypothesis #1. Two linear regression analysis indicates no connection between the primary selection consideration (Academics) and their income and/or education levels. These results suggest that we fail to accept H2. These results were unexpected under the lens of behavioral economics. Samson (2014) explained that under behavioral economics “Our minds must be understood in relative to the environment in which they evolved.” Therefore, we would expect to see differences in the primary school selection consideration based on income/education.

RESEARCH QUESTION #2

How many schools did some parents of newly enrolled four-year-old kindergarten children consider before selecting an enrollment rich traditional public school for their child?

Hypothesis # 3 (H3): Rational Choice Theory: *The majority of participants will consider four or more schools during the selection process.*

Results suggest that roughly five percent of parents considered four or more schools. Therefore, we fail to accept H3. These findings are contrary to the principles laid out by rational choice theory and the concept of open searches choice sets presented by Bell (2009). Table 9 displays both the weighted and unweighted percentages of the number of schools considered by parents. Additionally, there may be ambiguity of a zero response. As such, results were presented including and excluding participants who reported considering zero

schools. There were modest differences between the inclusion or exclusion of the zero response level. There will be more discussion in the limitations section regarding the zero result.

Table 9.
Schools Considered by Respondents

# of Schools Considered	Full Results		Results Excluding	Zero Response
	Percent of Participants (Weighted)	Percent of Participants (Raw)	Percent of Participants (Weighted)	Percent of Participants (Raw)
Zero	8.32	8.89	-	-
One	29.70	27.78	32.40	30.49
Two	30.68	30.00	33.46	32.93
Three	26.22	28.89	28.60	31.71
Four or more	5.08	4.44	5.54	4.88

Note. Full Results N=90; Results Excluding Zero Responses N=82

Hypothesis #4 (H4): *Behavioral Economics Theory: A majority of participants will consider three or fewer schools during the selection process.*

Nearly all of the participants in this investigation considered three or fewer schools in the selection process. Therefore, we accept H4. The findings are presented in Table 9 and are consistent with the ideas laid out by behavioral economics theory. Parents did consider fewer schools before making a selection. Additionally, the results support the concept of closed searches presented by Bell (2009). Under closed searches, parents consider three or fewer schools.

Summary

Chapter IV contains the analysis and findings of this dissertation. The purpose of this study was to identity why some parents of newly enrolled four-year-old kindergarten children selected an enrollment rich traditional public school for their child and how many schools these parents considered before making a selection. Results suggest that

participants' primary concerns for selecting a school was academics. Additionally, these results were consistent across all income and education groups. These findings support the principles laid out by rational choice theory and Chubb & Moe (1990), specifically that all parents consider academics a primary concern when selecting a school.

The number of schools parents considered was also a focus of this investigation. About 95% of parents considered three or fewer schools. These findings align with ideas presented under behavioral economics theory. Namely that parents consider few schools before they "satisfice." The final chapter will revisit the problem and purpose of this study, discuss the results in the context of previous literature, provide recommendations for practice, include limitations, and finish with the concluding remarks.

V. DISCUSSION

Introduction

This is the final chapter of this investigation. It is broken into following five parts: problem/purpose/discussion/implications; recommendations; limitations; and conclusion.

Problem/Purpose/Discussion/Implications

Milwaukee Public Schools face extreme competition for enrollment from private voucher schools, non-MPS charter schools, inter-district open enrollment schools, and schools in the chapter 220 suburban integration program. As a result, 42,742 Milwaukee children attended publicly funded schools outside the jurisdiction of MPS in the 2013-14 school year (DPI, 2014; DPI, 2015d; MPS, 2014a; DPI 2015b; DPI, 2016c). Traditional public schools bore the brunt of the enrollment declines. Nearly three quarters of traditional Milwaukee Public Schools lost enrollment from the 2012-13 to the 2013-14/2014-15 school years (MPS, 2013a; DPI, 2016d; MPS, 2014c; MPS, 2015b). The current MPS strategy is to grow the number of non-traditional schools with the intent to become more competitive and reverse the negative enrollment trends (MPS, 2014b; Johnson, 2015; Richards, 2014a; Richards, 2014b; Borsuk, 2014). The use of non-traditional schools may help reduce the loss of student enrollment in MPS, but they do not enjoy the benefits of traditional public schools.

Traditional public schools have three distinct advantages over non-traditional schools. First, traditional public schools tend to have lower administrative/transportation costs and do not require specialty staff/equipment (MPS, 2015b; MPS, 2015f; MPS, 2015e). Additionally, traditional schools pay into long-term legacy costs which are not paid by non-instrumentally charter schools (MPS, 2015f). Second, school choice increases racial and economic segregation (Frankenberg et. al., 2011; Rapp & Eckes, 2007; Garcia, 2008; Ball,

1993; Goyette, 2008). Returning to traditional public schools could reverse these trends. This would only apply if the district created assigned school boundaries with the intent to lower racial segregation. Finally, traditional public schools have the potential to increase student achievement. High mobility rates in MPS plague instructional outcomes. Teachers at traditional public schools use similarly paced and standardized curriculum which may reduce the time needed to integrate new students, thus reducing in class review and redundancies (Kerbow, 1996). Also, traditional public schools could reduce academic segregation by eliminating selection practices that reduce the number of low achieving students in magnet and private schools. The loss of enrollment at these highly beneficial traditional public schools was the motivation for this study. Some traditional public schools defied the negative enrollment trend and have maintained or increased enrollment. Because these enrollment rich schools are successful in the highly competitive educational market, they became the focus of this investigation.

Most studies attempt to explain school selection patterns through the lens of rational choice theory. Chubb & Moe (1990) began the wide spread use of rational choice theory to describe how an education market operates. Their premise assumes two basic ideas. First, parents desire schools with high academic quality. Second, parents find and scrutinize a wide range of information from a large open *choice set* (Bell, 2009) of schools during the selection process to make an informed choice (Chubb & Moe, 1990). They predict that students will seek high academics and enroll in high achieving school, leaving failing schools and those unable to improve to close from enrollment woes.

To gain a better understanding of enrollment patterns, this study differs from other investigations by using both rational choice theory and behavioral economics theory to

understand the selection patterns of parents who choose an enrollment rich traditional public school. Results from this study informed two research questions. Each questions will be discussed using both theoretical frameworks.

Research Question #1

What was the most frequently identified consideration of some parents of newly enrolled four-year-old kindergarten children when they selected an enrollment rich traditional public school for their child?

Of the six indices created from the battery of school selection questions, academics ranked highest for participants who selected an enrollment rich traditional public school. Academics also remained the highest consideration for parents regardless of income or education level. These findings support the ideas laid out by rational choice theory, which suggests that parents are self-interested and seek out the best product or service as (Herfeld, 2009). Results from this study also supports the principles laid out by Chubb & Moe (1990) and Schneider et. al. (2000). They suggest parents pick academics as the primary consideration, regardless of other factors. Simply speaking using the lens of rational choice theory, parents have a desire for high academic quality and feel the schools in this study will meet the needs of their child by providing an education that will bring them future success.

The findings from this study are not supported by all previous literature. Bosetti (2007) focused on several school types and found that parents of public schools valued proximity most. My study focused specifically on enrollment rich traditional public schools and found parents desired academics. Though rational choice theory may explain the results from this study, perhaps behavioral economics could explain the differences between studies.

Though purely speculative, perhaps there are differences between the considerations of parent who selected an enrollment rich traditional public school versus a public school in general. Perhaps enrollment rich traditional public schools have an actual or perceived appearance of high academics. Therefore, parents who desire high academics may consider and flock to these schools regardless of environmental or economical restraints. Perhaps this is different for parents who select public schools in general, who may consider environmental and/or economical restrains before academics. This idea may be supported by the work of Thelin & Nedomysl (2015), who found that 63% of parents considered academics as their primary consideration when selecting a public school. Meaning many, but not all parents value academics in public schools in general during the selection process. These studies taken together may suggest that differences between parents and what they consider, dependent on the type of school they select. Future study is needed to test this possible difference.

The implications that arise from answering this research question is twofold. First, participants had an actual or perceived positive academic view about the enrollment rich traditional public schools used in this study regardless of income or education levels. This is important because it is contrary to the perception that low income parents are not always considered in the “know” about important school considerations (Ball & Vincent, 1998). In the era of school choice, traditional public schools compete with both public and private schools for student enrollment. The enrollment rich traditional public schools used in my study could potentially act as a model for district officials to mimic in order to remain competitive in the education market place.

Second, the results from this study support using rational choice theory when attempting to understand the characteristics of schools parents considered in isolation. Using rational choice theory may be appropriate when viewing school choice in isolation. Such as in this study of enrollment rich traditional public schools or school choice in general (Schneider et. al, 2000). However, Bosetti (2007) found different results when studying the selection behaviors of parents who choose alternative, religious, non-religious private, and public schools. Parents who selected an enrollment rich traditional public schools may differ from one that selects a public school in general. It may be better to use the lens of behavioral economics when analyzing across studies or school types. Future investigation may be warranted.

Research Question #2

How many schools did some parents of newly enrolled four-year-old kindergarten children consider before selecting an enrollment rich traditional public school for their child?

This study found that about 95% of parents consider three or fewer schools during the selection process. These results defy the ideas laid out by Chubb and Moe (1990) and rational choice theory. Specifically, that parents maximize utility and consider a multitude of schools before selecting the best alternative (Herrnstein, 1990; Chubb & Moe, 1990). This idea was also described by Bell (2009), who coined the term open searches to explain the market based selection process. Since this study found that only around five percent of participants used an open search pattern, perhaps a different theory is necessary to view this part of the selection process.

Behavioral economics theory may do a better job of explaining the results from this study. Following this theory, parents consider few schools until they “satisfice”, in which they select a school and end additional consideration. The idea of considering few schools was supported by Bell (2009) who designed the concept of a closed searches. Under her idea, parents create a choice set of three or fewer schools, gather information, and select the best alternative. Though this study does show that around 95% of parents did consider three or fewer schools, there is additional information that could help us understand the selection process. A review of Table 9 indicates that around a third of parents considered one or fewer schools and around two thirds considered two or fewer schools. Behavioral economics theory may provide some insight.

Instead of forming, considering, and selection from among a small choice set as described by Bell (2009), parents may actually create what I call a *limiting checklist of schools*. Under this idea, parents form their choice set one school at a time until they “satisfice.” This could explain how about a third of respondents considered one or fewer schools and about two-thirds considered two or fewer schools. Because parents may use this *limiting checklist of schools*, high achieving schools may not make the list of consideration and parents may inadvertently select a failing school. Though not talked about earlier, viewing the selection process this way may explain why there is a disconnect between the self-reported desire for high academics and the 20% of enrollment rich traditional public schools used in this study that were identified as failing (DPI, 2016f).

There are two implications that arise from the discussions of this research question. First, behavioral economics theory may provide us a better understanding into what considerations parents find most important when selecting a school for their child. About a

third of participants considered only one school, about two thirds considered only two schools, and 95% participants considered three or fewer schools. This suggests that parents do “satisfice” as suggested by behavioral economics. These patterns taken further may indicate that parents differ in how they form choice sets. Some may do as suggested by Bell (2009), where parents form choice sets that include three or fewer school, consider each, and make a selection. They may also do as I suggested, consider one school at a time until they “satisfice.” Regardless, it may be beneficial to use behavioral economics when studying the characteristics of schools parents consider most important.

Second, if participants do “satisfice” then districts have to be mindful of how parents find schools to consider. Results indicate that 95% of participants who selected an enrollment rich traditional public school for their child considered three or fewer schools until they “satisfice.” This puts a great importance on which school’s parents consider during the selection process. Parents are more likely to select a poor performing schools if they considered it in their choice set. This could lead to a situation where parents seek out academics, but “satisfice” and select a failing school.

Results from this study suggest that both rational choice theory and behavioral economics may be needed to understand the characteristics of schools parents find most important when selecting a school for their child. This builds on the work of Thaler (2016) who describes using both theories in other fields “improve predictions about behavior.” The findings from this investigation suggest that participants desire schools with high academics, regardless of income or education levels. Though there could be discussions around the differences between this study and others using the lens of behavioral economics, the results of the first part of my study fall directly line with rational choice theory. The second portion

of the study can be explained using behavioral economics. About 95% of parents participate in a closed search and consider three or fewer schools. To gain a better understanding of those results, I propose that parents construct a *limiting checklist of schools* which they add schools to a parents' choice set until they "satisfice" the selection process.

Recommendations

This study provides an alternative window into school selection patterns. First, academic researchers may gain a better grasp of how selection patterns function under both the rational choice theory and behavioral economics theory. The general sense is that people are different from one another and that using one theory limits our ability to understand human behavior. Rational choice theory allowed us analyze the selection behaviors of participants who choose an enrollment rich traditional public school. Whereas, behavioral economics gave us a deeper understanding of how parents consider schools during the selection process. Taken together, these two theories could provide great insight into the world of school choice. Therefore, I recommend future research on school choice include both theories.

Second, policy makers could also use the information on selection patterns to inform future discussions and legislation on school choice. MPS could attempt to control the schools included on a parents *limiting checklist of schools*. First, there needs to be transparency on private voucher schools. DPI continues to delay including voucher schools into the school report card system (DPI, 2016h). By adding these schools to the report card system, there can be real comparisons between the academic success of schools in the market. Second, MPS could benefit from targeted advertising of non-failing schools. Currently, the MPS administration is developing a “marketing/student recruitment-retention plan” for each school (MPS, 2016z). This is problematic, because many schools in MPS are failing (DPI, 2016d). Advertising and promoting the specific non-failing schools could encourage parents to add these schools to their *limiting checklist of schools*. These recommendations could ensure a fair competition with voucher schools and increase the

chances parents could match their desire for a school with high academics with the actual selection of a school with high academic quality. I recommend future research.

Finally, districts could use the information on parent selection patterns to make decisions on how to attract student enrollment to traditional public schools. Participants of this study valued academics the most important when selecting an enrollment rich traditional public school. Districts have the potential to improve academics at schools through discovering, hiring, and retaining effective teachers to improve test scores and gain student market share. Quality teachers have a direct link to positive student learning, which in turn could lead to high quality academics. The bureaucratic nature of hiring in large urban districts seek to ensures that staff are qualified to practice, but lacks a mechanism to ensure every newly hire is a quality educator. Further, the stressors associated with the current realities of an urban educator stifles retainment. These recommendations focus on *investing in people* as the method to attract and retain quality and qualified teachers.

Milwaukee Public Schools struggles to attract and retain highly qualified teachers. In the 2013-14 school year, 426 teachers left MPS with around 40% of those having three or fewer years' experience (Richards, 2014c). In the same year, MPS relied on 381 individuals that held an emergency license or no license to teach; a rate almost seven percentage points higher than the state average (DPI; 2015e). The administration does attempt to lure and retain teachers. Recently the district increased new teacher pay, expanded the New Teacher Center, held recruitment fairs, and continues to offer 403b retirement plans (MPS, 2013b; MPS, 2014d; MPS, 2014e). Further, Superintendent Dr. Darienne Driver set teacher recruitment as one of eight strategic objectives to improve student success (MPS, 2015g).

These efforts seek to attract highly qualified teachers, but they do not consider quality when hiring teachers.

Quality teacher are difficult to recruit. Levin & Quinn (2003) describes how this is especially true in large districts where multi-level hiring processes dissuades new teachers from applying. Further, they discuss how urban districts generally recruit teachers later than suburban districts. These structural systems impede hiring and reduce the potential candidate pool. Even with restrictive hiring practices, large districts do find some high quality teachers. But Morris & Morris (2012) found many quality teachers view under performing schools as a temporary stepping-stone to more attractive locations. The lack of qualified and quality teacher's forces districts to use alternatively licensed teachers, unlicensed teachers, and/or substitute teachers to fill their ranks. Unfortunately, these teachers generally prove ineffective, require more training/resources, and/or are more difficult to retain (Nougaret, Scruggs, & Mastropieri, 2005; Billingsley, 2005; Casey, Dunlap, Brister, Davidson, & Starrett, 2011; Ravitch, 2013).

Investing in people could be the most effective strategy to attract and retain quality educators. Two separate strategies could increase the number of highly successful educators. First, increase monetary incentives and the contract times of proven teachers. In the realm of data, MPS has a unique opportunity to determine which teachers are effective at improving student test achievement. The district could employ a team of talent scouts to discover educators who prove successful through practice and data. These scouts could have the power to offer five year contracts with attached bonuses to proven educators, contingent on normal background checks. Talent scouts could also court promising student teachers before they have the opportunity to seek positions with competing school districts across the nation.

The second strategy involves facilitating an environment that increases job satisfaction. Vittek (2012) describes how administrative work loads, support, and stress impacts job satisfaction. Reduced, focused, and planned instructional time could create the capacity for teachers to increase student achievement and reduce stress. Under corrective action, teachers must teach additional time in Math, Reading, Writing, and Interventions. Further, the student day was increased to seven hours and administrative time quadrupled (MPS, 2015h; & MPS, 2015i). MPS acknowledges research that suggests more instructional time is only beneficial if the time is used on quality instruction (MPS, 2013c). But greater student instructional time was not matched with increased planning time. Therefore, this dissertation recommends that MPS should return to a shorter student day.

MPS could shorten the student day without violating DPI requirements and with minimal financial consequences. The student day could shrink from seven hours to six hours and the student year could be extended to 190 days. The 1,140 hours of school would fit into the teacher's 191 day school year while still meeting the minimum DPI requirement (DPI, 2016e). The shorter student day would allow teachers the opportunity to work in grade level professional learning communities to develop high quality, data driven lessons. Carey (2012) discusses how there should be "time within the school day for teacher leaders to practice the skills learned with their colleagues without sacrificing the time needed to teach students." Providing time for teachers to plan high quality instruction could reduce stress, reduce teacher turnover, and improve student achievement.

Another strategy to invest in people would be to attract and retain quality administrators. Leadership is also important to building a positive school climate. Successful leadership can encourage safe and orderly schools through building trust and

facilitating a focused and supportive environment for students, teachers, and parents (Astor, Benbenishty, & Estrada, 2009; Bosworth, Ford, & Hernandez, 2011). This is especially true of principals with four or more years at a single school. These leaders have a greater positive impact on climate than those with less than four years (Capshe, 2015). Principal stability is a challenge within MPS. A fifth of schools were assigned a new or different principal between 31 July 2014 and 30 July 2015 (MPS, 2015j; MPS, 2015k). To alleviate principal turnover, Cieminski (2015) suggests districts “act purposefully to retain principals by providing differentiated support and cultivating positive relationships among principals and with school district administrators.” Further, MPS should make every effort to increase the longevity of quality principals at specific school sites. Principals who create positive climate can inspire loyalty, buy in, and increased motivation.

MPS could attract and retain teacher by investing in people using monetary/contracting strategies and/or by increasing job satisfaction. Offering data proven, high quality teacher’s bonuses and multi-year contracts could attract and/or retain proven teachers. The district could also reduce the student day by extending the student year, and facilitate a positive environment through quality leadership. Though these ideas are not an exhaustive list, they do come from the lens of investing in people. Only through such investment will job satisfaction and loyalty increase, resulting in retention of high quality teachers.

Limitations

This study contains several limitations. First, the low 22 percent response rate makes drawing generalizations about the whole population of parents at enrollment rich public schools problematic. Along the same lines, the inclusion of only 12 of the 14 enrollment rich public schools also may make generalizations about the population difficult. Using the specific terminology “some parents” or “participants” attempts to guide the reader to the fact that this study may not be representative of the population. Additionally, weights were used to adjust the results based on race/ethnicity.

Second, surveys were distributed and collected after parents had already made their school selection. Because the surveys were distributed post decision, it is reasonable to believe that the passing of time or post positive beliefs about their school selection could cloud their actual intentions. In an attempt to limit that type of bias, surveys were distributed to parents on the first day in which their child attended school.

Third, the use of English only surveys could have created a barrier for some parents. Informal discussions with parents and teachers revealed that many schools not only have a variety of languages but also many dialects. Therefore, the decision was made to include only English surveys instead of creating and distributing surveys in nineteen languages that could have caused confusion and greatly reduced the response rate.

Fourth, Table 3 shows demographic differences between enrollment rich and declining enrollment traditional public schools. The largest measure being a 13.3 percentage point difference between Latino students; 20.3% versus 33.6% respectively. Though not known exactly, differences in language could explain the discrepancy. There are some traditional public schools that offer bilingual Spanish courses. The over representation of

White and Asian students at the expense of Latino students at enrollment rich traditional public schools may simply be a course offerings issue. Future studies may be able to better gain insight into this issue.

Fifth, the low level of inter-correlation of the Convenience (.47) and School Community (.52) indices may cause issues with interpretation. This may be especially true with the Convenience factor, which was used in a specific analysis. Therefore, caution may be needed when trying to understand the results brought by these two indices. Attempts were made to limit this concern. Each factor that formed the two indices with low inter-correlation were compared against the remaining four indices. Results suggest that the means of these individual factors did not surpass that of the Academics index (analysis not shown).

Sixth, there were parents who indicated they did not consider any school during the selection process. Because there were no explanations written next to these open ended questions, we can only speculate to their cause. Bell (2009) proposes that some parents do not consider any school because there may be a feeder system (such as a natural transition from an elementary to an assigned middle school). This idea does not apply to this study because parents of four-year-old kindergarten students are at the start of the schooling track. So perhaps the participants did not consider any schools because their child had a special need that could only be addressed by a particular schools programming. For example, if a student had a disability that prevented them from walking, they may have been assigned by the district to a school with one level and wheelchair friendly. Another explanation could simply be parents may have not cared about the needs of their child and selected the first one

they saw without consideration. Further investigation would be needed to determine why parents indicated they did not consider any schools in the selection process.

Last, the Academics (3.73), School Climate (3.65), and School Community (3.54) means were similar. Though there was similarity between these measures, an evaluation of the rankings based on the percent of parents who rated all components Very Important or Important show reinforce Academics as the most frequently identified characteristic. Even with the two measures, there may be issues in drawing generalizations about the whole population.

Conclusion

School choice continues to create challenges for Milwaukee Public Schools. The increased competition from voucher schools, open enrollment schools, chapter 220 schools, and independent charter schools tax student enrollment at MPS. This is especially true of traditional public schools. Offering specialty programs and independent governance through MPS charters had some success in attracting student enrollment. Unfortunately, those programs use additional resources to remain viable. Traditional public schools have the potential to draw students while using fewer resources, increasing academic performance, and potentially reducing segregation. Therefore, this study sought to determine what draws parents to enrollment rich traditional public schools.

Through the lens of both rational choice theory and behavioral economics theory, surveys were used to tease out the school selection patterns of parents of four-year-old kindergarten children. Participants revealed that academics ranked as the primary consideration, regardless of income or education levels. This aligns with the principles laid

out by rational choice theory. This study also found that 95% of participants considered three or fewer schools during the selection process. This result is supported by the ideas presented under behavioral economics. Where parents “satisfice”, that is consider one school at a time until they find one that is good-enough. This study recommends that future research pertaining to school choice should use of both rational choice theory and behavioral economics theory. Additionally, there are specific recommendations for districts and MPS to use to increase student market share.

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APPENDIX A

1) Please us an X to indicate why you chose to enroll you child into this school

	Very Important	Important	Unimportant	Very Unimportant
Academic Quality	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Academic Support Programs (Special Education, English Language Services, ect.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Available Busing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Before and After School Daycare	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Class Size	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
District "3 choice guide"	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Diverse Student Body	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Family Recommendation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Friend Recommendation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quality Principal	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Location of School	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Space Left Blank				
Other Students in the School are Well Behaved	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quality Teachers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Safe and Orderly School Environment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Non-Academic Programs (Art, Gym, Music, Technology, ect.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
School Rating Organization (Great Schools, ect.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Outside of the Building is inviting and Clean	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parent Involvement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
School Size	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
School Website	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sport or Activity Programs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Standardized Test Scores / School Report Card	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Almost Done...Please turn over to finish the survey.

2) How many schools did you consider in the selection process? _____

3) How many schools did you tour during the selection process? _____

4) Do you have any other children that attend school? _____

5) Circle the age that best describes you:

25 or under

26 to 35

36 to 45

46 or older

6) Circle one of the following that best describes your race/ethnicity:

American
Indian

Asian

Black or
African
American

Latino or
Hispanic

Multi-race or
Ethnicity

Other (Specify)

7) Circle one of the following that best describes your household income:

\$20,000 or
Below

\$20,001 to
\$35,000

\$35,001 to
\$50,000

\$50,001 to
\$65,000

\$65,001 to
\$80,000

\$80,001 to
\$95,000

\$95,001 or
Above

8) Circle one of the following that best describes your education:

- a. Never went to school
- b. 8th grade or less
- c. Some high school
- d. High school diploma
- e. Some college
- f. College degree (2 year)
- g. College degree (4 year)
- h. Graduate / Professional study
- i. Graduate / Professional degree

Thank you for finishing the survey.
Please return this yellow survey in the attached envelope.

Appendix B – Parent Consent Letter

Informed Consent
UW - Milwaukee

IRB Protocol Number: 16.345

IRB Approval date: 11 May 2015

University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Consent to Participate in Research

Study Title: Parent Motivations for Enrolling their Child into a Traditional Milwaukee Public School

Person Responsible for Research: Steven Krull (Student Principal Investigator) - UWM Staff Sponsor William Velez

Study Description: The purpose of this research study is to identify what draws parents to traditional public schools. It will also determine if there were statistical significant differences between considerations based on race/ethnicity or family income. The study will survey parents of four-year-old kindergarten students who attend traditional MPS schools that have recently maintain or gained student enrollment. Approximately 720 subjects will participate in this study. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete the following survey and return the following survey in the preaddressed, stamped envelope. This will take approximately five minutes of your time.

Risks / Benefits: Risks that you may experience from participating are considered minimal. There are no costs for participating. There are no benefits to you other than to future research.

Confidentiality: There will be no identifying information collected from you and all study results will be reported without identifying information so that no one viewing the results will ever be able to match you with your responses. Surveys from this study will be locked in a filing cabinet and data will be saved on an encrypted laptop computer until completion of my PhD program and graduation; where the surveys will be destroyed. Only the PI – Steven Krull will have access to the information. However, William Velez, the Institutional Review Board at UW-Milwaukee or appropriate federal agencies like the Office for Human Research Protections may review this study's records.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part in this study, or if you decide to take part, you can change your mind later and withdraw from the study. You are free to not answer any questions or withdraw at any time. Your decision will not change any present or future relationships with the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee. There are no known alternatives available to participating in this research study other than not taking part.

Who do I contact for questions about the study: For more information about the study or study procedures, contact Steven Krull at sskrull@uwm.edu or by phone at (414) 229-4751

Who do I contact for questions about my rights or complaints towards my treatment as a research subject? Contact the UWM IRB at 414-229-3173 or irbinfo@uwm.edu.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:

By completing this survey, you are indicating that you have read the consent form, you are age 18 or older, and that you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must be 18 years of age or older. By signing the consent form, you are giving your consent to voluntarily participate in this research project.

Appendix C – UWM IRB Approval Letter



Department of University Safety & Assurances

New Study - Notice of IRB Exempt Status

Melissa Spadanuda
IRB Manager
Institutional Review Board
Engelmann 270
P. O. Box 413
Milwaukee, WI 53201-0413
(414) 229-3173 phone
(414) 229-6729 fax

<http://www.irb.uwm.edu>
spadanud@uwm.edu

Date: May 11, 2015

To: William Velez, PhD
Dept: Urban Studies

Cc: Steven Krull

IRB#: 15.345

Title: Parent Motivations to Send Their Child to a Traditional Milwaukee Public School

After review of your research protocol by the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Institutional Review Board, your protocol has been granted Exempt Status under **Category 2** as governed by 45 CFR 46.101(b).

This protocol has been approved as exempt for three years and IRB approval will expire on **May 10, 2018**. If you plan to continue any research related activities (e.g., enrollment of subjects, study interventions, data analysis, etc.) past the date of IRB expiration, please respond to the IRB's status request that will be sent by email approximately two weeks before the expiration date. If the study is closed or completed before the IRB expiration date, you may notify the IRB by sending an email to irbinfo@uwm.edu with the study number and the status, so we can keep our study records accurate.

Any proposed changes to the protocol must be reviewed by the IRB before implementation, unless the change is specifically necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. The principal investigator is responsible for adhering to the policies and guidelines set forth by the UWM IRB, maintaining proper documentation of study records and promptly reporting to the IRB any adverse events which require reporting. The principal investigator is also responsible for ensuring that all study staff receive appropriate training in the ethical guidelines of conducting human subjects research.

As Principal Investigator, it is also your responsibility to adhere to UWM and UW System Policies, and any applicable state and federal laws governing activities which are independent of IRB review/approval (e.g., [FERPA](#), [Radiation Safety](#), [UWM Data Security](#), [UW System policy on Prizes, Awards and Gifts](#), state gambling laws, etc.). When conducting research at institutions outside of UWM, be sure to obtain permission and/or approval as required by their policies.

Contact the IRB office if you have any further questions. Thank you for your cooperation and best wishes for a successful project

Respectfully,

Melissa C. Spadanuda

Melissa C. Spadanuda
IRB Manager

Appendix D - Definitions

Chapter 220 Program. “Chapter 220 is the popular name for the Voluntary Student Transfer Program. This program is designed to racially integrate schools by giving minority students the opportunity to attend schools in suburban areas that are predominately non-minority (White.) Non-minority students from the suburbs are given the opportunity to attend racially diverse schools in Milwaukee Public Schools” (MPS, 2015d). In 2015, the Wisconsin Legislature began the process to phase out the Chapter 220 integration program (Richards, 2015a).

Instrumentality Charter School. “A school chartered with the Milwaukee Board of School Directors that employ MPS staff and is in a facility owned or leased by MPS” (MPS, 2015b).

Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP). “This program began in the 1990-91 school year and provides for City of Milwaukee students, under specific circumstances, to attend private sectarian and nonsectarian schools at no charge” (MPS, 2015b).

Magnet school. A school identified as a specialty school, charter school, commitment school, college & career ready, bilingual, Montessori, International Baccalaureate, Gifted & Talented, or a GE Foundation School. These schools use their programming to attract student enrollment.

Non-instrumentality Charter School. “A school chartered with the Milwaukee Board of School Directors that does not have MPS employees on staff” (MPS, 2015b).

Non-MPS Charter School. Considered Non-Instrumentality schools which are authorized by one of nine non-MPS chartering authorities (DPI, 2015a)

Traditional Public School. Sometimes referred to as neighborhood or common schools, these schools provide a standardized and general academic curriculum to students within a district. These schools are assigned by a geographic boundary close to the child's primary residence and generally provide transportation for students within a closely specified geographical area. This study identified traditional public schools as followed:

- 1) It used the school selection booklet (MPS, 2016u) to separate neighborhood schools from charter and specialty schools.
- 2) Schools supplied by the General Electric (GE) grant were excluded from the study because they do not use the standard general curriculum used by traditional public schools.
- 3) Schools with large transportation regions were excluded. MPS has three types of transportation regions. First are the nine regions that are set for generally elementary and K-8 schools (MPS, 2016x). Second are the two large high school transportation regions (MPS, 2016y). Third, are the city wide schools who can bus students from any location.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Steven Krull

Place of Birth: Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Education

B.S.O.E., Wayland Baptist University, May 2002
Major: Human Services

ASSOC., Community College of the Air Force, March 2004
Major: Criminal Justice

M.A.T., Cardinal Stritch University, June 2009
Major: Teaching

Dissertation Title: SCHOOL SELECTION PATTERNS THROUGH THE LENSES OF
RATIONAL CHOICE THEORY AND BEHAVIORAL ECONOMICS THEORY

Experiences

Instructor, United States Air Force, June 1999 – June 2002
Training Manager, United States Air Force, July 2002 – June 2005
Educator, Milwaukee Public Schools, July 2008 – June 2014
School Support Teacher, Milwaukee Public Schools, July 2014 – November 2016
Assistant Principal (UF), Milwaukee Public Schools, November 2016 - Current