



# **Black and Latinx Parents of Students with Dis/abilities Selecting Charter Schools in Chicago**

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**Equity by Design  
Research Brief**

# Black and Latinx Parents of Students with Dis/abilities Selecting Charter Schools in Chicago

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## Executive Summary

### Purpose

In this research brief, we summarize a study published by Waitoller and Super (2017). The purpose of this study was to learn how Black and Latinx parents of students with dis/abilities living in the city of Chicago decided to avoid or leave neighborhood schools and instead chose charter schools for their children. The study also aimed to contextualize parents' school decisions within the geographies of uneven economic changes occurring in the city of Chicago from 1970 to 2010.

### Research Questions

The research questions were:

- 1) What were the factors that shaped the decisions of Black and Latinx parents of students with dis/abilities when choosing to enroll their child in a charter school?
- 2) How did these factors relate to the economic changes occurring in the city of Chicago?

### Findings

Through the analysis of in-depth qualitative interviews with 24 Black and Latinx parents and guardians, we found that:

- Parents of students with dis/abilities struggled throughout their children's school trajectories to find schools that adequately served their children.
- The factors that influenced parents' decisions to leave or avoid neighborhood schools were the following: (1) Safety, (2) Perceptions of poor academics, and (3) Negative experiences with special education.
- Parents living in areas of the city that experienced economic decline or that have remained in extreme poverty since 1970, and parents living in areas of gentrification were most concerned with safety, while parents in middle class areas primarily focused on avoiding segregated school settings.
- Parents chose charter schools, as they perceived them to be safer due to the strict disciplinary measures, more academically rich due to their college-readiness culture, and more attentive to the individual needs of their children due to their small class sizes.

## Introduction

### School Choice and Charter Schools

School choice has been paramount in U.S educational policymaking since the 1990s, particularly for urban areas. Guided by a market rationale, districts offer a range of school options for students, including magnet, charter, selective enrollment, and specialty schools like military academies in addition to traditional neighborhood schools. In this framework, parents are viewed as consumers who will make the best decisions about their children's schooling within this competitive marketplace of school options as long as they have the "right information" (e.g. standardized test scores, college admission rates, school mission statements). School choice advocates argue that choice both provides families with alternatives to underperforming neighborhood schools and raises the quality of all schools over time by pressuring schools to either improve their performance or close due to low enrollment or continued failure (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Manno, Finn, & Vanourek, 1999).


Though originally charter schools were created to serve as small incubators of educational practices, they have become a key component of school choice reform as they promise to expand competition and access without being attached to attendance boundaries. Charters have grown rapidly in the last decades. From 1999 to 2012, charter school enrollment grew from .3 to 2.5 million (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools [NAPCS], 2016). Of those students enrolled in charter schools in the 2011-2012 school year, 10.5% received special education services (Rhim, Gumz & Henderson, 2015).

Some research has challenged assumptions about school choice and questioned the idea that parents make school choices based solely on academic quality (Lubienski & Weitzel, 2010). Proximity to home, perceptions of the school's neighborhood, and racial composition of the school are also factors

in parent's school selection (Ball, 2006; Garcia, 2008; Rowe & Lubienski, 2016). While some parents avoid schools in what they consider "bad" neighborhoods despite the school's proximity to their homes, research suggests that others may stay in their neighborhoods out of a sense of belonging and commitment to their community (Bell, 2007). Another study found that White parents tended to choose schools that are majority White, even when they did not consider the school's test scores, out of a sense that the school's demographics signaled higher achievement (Goyette, Farrie, & Freely, 2012). It is clear that parents look beyond school performance, often interpreting school quality based on the social and racial makeup of the school or neighborhood (Bell, 2009; Schneider and Buckley, 2002).

Further, educational choice is unevenly distributed across urban areas (Lipman, 2011). While some charter schools tend to be located in Black and Latinx low-income neighborhoods, magnet and selective enrollment schools are located in areas that have been gentrified in recent decades or that are prime for a new wave of gentrification. Thus, scholars argue that education has become a tool for economic development and makes the city more attractive to middle class parents (Lipman, 2011).

The educational placement of students with dis/abilities further challenges market-based strategies to improve school districts. Students with dis/abilities are typically assigned to a school by their individual education plan team. The balance of power in this placement decision tends to heavily lean on school professionals, particularly when parents are people of color and have less social and cultural capital (Harry & Klingner, 2013). While parents can move their children to a school of their choice if they do not agree with their child's placement, their options are extremely limited in most settings not characterized by vibrant choice plans.



When parents of students with dis/abilities (PSWD) engage with school choice, they base their decisions on class size, on their perceptions of teacher quality and academic programming, discipline and safety, as well as perceived quality of special education services available at the charter school (Lange & Lehr, 2000). However, research on how parents of students with dis/abilities engage in school choice is very limited.

Due to the complexity of the school context described above and the lack of research on school choice among PSWD, we aim to answer the following research questions.

1. What are the factors that shape the decisions of Black and Latinx parents of students with dis/abilities when choosing to enroll their child in a charter school?
2. How are these factors related to the economic changes occurring in the city of Chicago?

## Methods

This study represents a section of the findings from a larger research study that examines the experiences of Black and Latinx parents of students with dis/abilities who experienced conflicts with a charter school. The study was conducted in partnership with Disability Legal Advocates (DLA), a non-profit civil rights agency that provides advice and legal representation for people with dis/abilities. The recruitment process was initiated by representatives from DLA who contacted parents who had received legal advice or representation through their Charter School Clinic regarding conflicts with charter schools. Researchers then arranged for interviews with parents who agreed to be contacted. We were able to arrange interviews with 24 of the 33 potential participants. Participants were mostly female (mothers, grandmothers, guardians) and African-American (83%, with 17% Latinx), while their children were mostly male (75%) (Waitoller & Super, 2017).

We conducted 24 semi-structured in-depth interviews with the adult participants, generated 24 sets of field notes describing our observations during the interviews, and gathered photographs and artifacts about the charter schools (handbooks, applications, mission statements, and other information from school websites). We coded parent interviews using analytical tools from grounded theory (Charmaz, 2008). The first round of coding was broad and open to anything that emerged from the data. This generated an initial list of codes and gave some direction for our analysis. We then selected the codes that occurred most often and were the most relevant to our research, called focus codes. These codes were compared, refined, and restated as conceptual categories (Charmaz, 2008) like “unsafe neighborhoods” and “experiencing segregation.” Both authors coded most of the interviews (18 of 22) and we met biweekly to discuss and compare our coding. We frequently wrote memos about our emerging thoughts about the codes. With axial coding techniques (Charmaz, 2008), we clustered codes along different axes to see the relationships among codes.

To examine the role economic change may have had on parents’ experiences, we classified participants using a report that examined demographic and economic changes in Chicago from 1970-2010, *The Socioeconomic Change of Chicago’s Community Areas* (Nathalie P. Voorhees Center for Neighborhood and Community Improvement at the University of Illinois at Chicago [NVC], 2014). Our participants lived in four of these areas: (a) areas of extreme poverty, (b) areas of serious economic decline, (c) areas of gentrification, and (d) middle class areas.

### **Areas of Extreme Poverty**

Areas of extreme poverty experienced high rates of poverty (around 38%) between 1970 and 2010, with little change (NVC, 2014) and are predominately Black (95%) with household incomes from low to high \$20,000s per year. Many residents in these areas lived in public housing. School closings have disproportionately impacted these areas; 38% of all school closings from 2000-2013 occurred in areas of extreme poverty (Weber et al, 2016). Charter school concentration is also highest in these areas of the city (25% of the city's charters), with fewer students in magnet schools (13%).

### **Parents Living in Areas of Serious Economic Decline**

Chicago's West and far South sides experienced serious economic decline from 1970 to 2010. Largely Black and Latinx families live in these areas (66% and 28%, respectively), with poverty rates at 24% and incomes between \$30,000 and \$50,000. Nine percent of children attend private schools (NVC, 2014). These areas have also seen a proliferation of new charter schools (20% of the city total) and school closings (18% of all closings).

### **Parents Living in Areas of Gentrification**

Concentrated in the near North, South, and West sides of the city, areas of gentrification are easily accessible from downtown and the lakefront (see figures 1 and 2) and have experienced large economic gains, development, and construction booms since the 1970s. Residents are largely White (64%), with Black and Latinx residents making up only 14% of the population (NVC, 2014). The poverty rate is low at nine percent, while the average income is nearly \$116,000. Forty percent of children attend private schools (NVC, 2014). Working class families that are able to remain in gentrifying areas have greater access to magnet schools, as 40% of the city's magnet schools are located in these areas. These areas also had

significant numbers of school closings (22%) and a high concentration of charter schools (17%).

### **Parents Living in Middle Class Areas**

Clustered on the far North and Southwest sides of Chicago, as well as surrounding the University of Chicago on the South side, middle class areas experienced economic stability in the period from 1970-2010. These communities tend to be 50% White, 24% Black, and 20% Hispanic (NVC, 2014). The poverty rate in these areas is around 9% and incomes range from \$50,000 to \$80,000 per year. These areas have the highest rate of home ownership in the city and 31% of the area children attend private schools. Only 3% of all Chicago school closings took place in middle class areas (Weber et al., 2016), and these communities host only 4% of the city's charter schools, but 14% of magnet schools.



The limitations of this study include: (a) our sample only includes parents who enrolled their child in a franchise charter school and had a conflict with the charter school after classes started, (b) we did not continue to collect data over time, and (c) our findings are limited to the city of Chicago, though many large urban centers have undergone similar economic changes and school choice reforms. Further research should be conducted to address these limitations.

## Findings

Black and Latinx parents of students with dis/abilities perceived they had few school options. For instance, Shanell was a Black mother of a student with autism. She was struggling for a school in which her child would not be segregated from his general education peers and was concerned about safety in the neighborhood school. During the interview she stated,

You know how people will make the comment the devil you know versus the devil you don't? People, they'll go with the devil you know versus the devil you don't? For me, I'd rather go with the devil that I don't because there's a possibility that it's not a devil. I was pretty much done with CPS. (August 28<sup>th</sup>)

Janae had also poor experiences in neighborhood schools before turning to the charter school. Her son had attended two turnaround schools in their neighborhood and the frequent turnover of school staff was affecting the services he received. She stated, "I don't have a lotta money—so a private school, Montessori school, that he should have—and I just was being failed by all of these schools out there. The charter was our last resort" (August 27<sup>th</sup>).

All parents we interviewed struggled throughout their children's educational trajectory to find a school that could serve their children's needs. Some parents of high school students had moved their children up to seven times since kindergarten. This constant search to find a school that could serve their children's needs placed an extra burden on parents, many of whom were struggling with unemployment and housing instability. For instance, Therese shared,

We kind of moved into that school. Just tryin' to find better—just like at first I was stayin' with my brother. Then I got on my feet and then I started workin' and

then I tried to move to a better place for us. I wanted to keep him at that school, but it was too far so I just took him out of that school.

In many instances, looking for a school took the back seat to searching for a job, looking for a ride to get to work, and looking for housing. So even when their child was underserved in their school, many of the parents interviewed, particular those living in areas of extreme poverty and economic decline, could not spend time researching schools.

When rationalizing their school decisions, parents first described the factors that led them to avoid or leave their neighborhood school and then the factors they considered when choosing the charter school. Though some of these factors were similar across parents, there were some differences among them depending on where parents lived.

### Factors Considered When Avoiding or Leaving a Neighborhood School

**Safety.** 19 parents out of the 20 parents living in areas of extreme poverty, serious economic decline, and gentrification mentioned safety as the main factor for avoiding or leaving a neighborhood school. Neighborhood safety was a major factor, as parents were concerned about gang-related violence in the neighborhood, especially in the passage to and from school. A Black parent, Dominique shared her concerns about safe passage to school: "The neighborhood school, I just didn't care for because that end of the area was rougher than the side I was on. Just like, the selling drugs, or things like that, and I didn't wanna walk through that" (September 8<sup>th</sup>). Dominique's neighborhood has been affected by poverty and disinvestment for over 40 years and searching for safety has become paramount to families' educational choices in this area.

Similarly, Wendi, a Latina mother, described changes in the composition of her

neighborhood that have made the neighborhood school a space where she felt her children would not be safe. Describing increased gang activity in her neighborhood as well as the residents moving in who were displaced due to the rising rents in areas of gentrification, she stated:

There's no winning. You've got the neighborhood school down the street. I live here. Before I put my kids there, they're gonna be at the charter eating whatever they're eating. Even though I'm not happy, I'd rather let them be at the charter. I do it for safety reasons. Educationally, they're not learning that much there either (August 26<sup>th</sup>).



Parents living in areas of extreme poverty searched for safety in charter schools because their children had experienced violence within the neighborhood school. Janae, a Black mother of a high school student with autism, had initially placed her son in the neighborhood school despite her fears about the neighborhood, but within a month felt that he was not safe there: “[H]e got into a situation where the kids were beating him up. He would come home scratched up and bit up, and I couldn't take it anymore. It was a month in, and I said—I spoke to the teacher, I spoke to the principal, and it just wasn't working out. I found out that the school had just did a turnaround, so all the staff were new” (August 27, 2015).

Janae's story illustrates the way that turnaround schools, in which the administration and all of the staff are replaced at once in an effort to improve school outcomes, can have a destabilizing effect on schools and student services.

Parents living in areas of serious economic decline and gentrification described the neighborhood schools through certain images they had of the local students and their families, including symbols of violence or poor discipline that signaled danger or poor quality of education. Sandra, a Black parent, recalled her impression of the local school; “[T]he sight that I seen right off the bat you know I wouldn't—cursing, sagging pants. They were cursing out the security guard. It was total chaos and I knew I was not going to leave [the children there] . . .” (September 10, 2015). Shanell had similar thoughts, and, like many parents, worried that her child with dis/abilities would be identified or singled out: “The kids [at the school] are smart, but they're bad as hell. Bullying is always a concern. Is he gonna be in an environment where he's gonna be able to be identified, things like that?” (August 28, 2015).

Other parents referred to metal detectors, empty bottles in the school vicinity, security guards, unkempt facilities, police presence, drug dealers hanging out on the school block, and drug searches in schools as symbols of unsafety. Simone described hearing about “metal detectors and bullying,” (September 4, 2015), while Rosanna learned through “little flyers [that] would end up at my doorstep: ‘Oh, yeah, so we conducted a drug search today or a gun search today.’” (September 11, 2015). Thus, the school district's efforts to keep students safe through metal detectors and increased security presence ultimately contributed to the pathologization of the students in the neighborhood schools, as those measures became signs of danger for Black and Latinx parents of students with a dis/ability.

**Academics.** Academics were the second most important factor in school decisions made by families in two areas: serious economic decline and gentrification. Jada, for instance, stated,

I believe that if you can find a better education somewhere else outta your neighborhood school, it's always we got to go for the best. Why have a mediocre education when you can get some of the best education?  
(September 9, 2015)

Most parents in areas of serious decline perceived the neighborhood school as a place of poor academics, either due to their own experiences or based on information gathered from friends and family.

Parents' shaped their perception of the neighborhood school's academic quality by how such schools were labeled by the district and by their publicly displayed test-scores. Roxana a Latinx parent living in area of serious decline, stated, "If I were to go online and look at it, you guys have really low test scores for the area, and I don't need you preparing my kid for a test that you guys—that she's more than likely gonna fall way below average" (September 11, 2015). Information about local schoolchildren's achievement served to pathologize schools and their students. Parents drew from this racialized narrative to make school decisions.

**Special education services.** After safety, the second most common factor that shaped the school decisions of parents living in areas of extreme poverty was their own poor experiences with special education services in the neighborhood school. Dominique experienced poor transition services from 0-3 Early Intervention to her child's preschool, explaining that her children did not receive the services that she expected:

No speech therapy, no occupational therapy, no physical therapy. They didn't offer any therapies at all ... I do remember attending a different meeting

where we I told them what my children receive [in Early Intervention], and they told me that they would receive those things, but they never received them (September 8, 2015).

Kendall, whose son was identified with ADHD and health issues related to prematurity, was critical of the way that her son was treated in preschool. At a time when he was having trouble using the washroom, his struggles were framed as intentional, when in fact he was later diagnosed with a bladder problem. She felt that the school's attitude was that "he's just lazy, he's too busy, he doesn't wanna go. . . . That was a strike against him. That was a problem with the school" (October 17, 2015). She later described her frustration with the lack of services, saying "He was more of a target—it was a negative type of targeting, versus 'you know what, this kid is really having a hard time. Let's see what we can do to help him'" (October 17, 2015). These early school experiences had an effect on her decision to move her child out of the neighborhood school in kindergarten.

**Avoiding segregation.** Black and Latinx parents living in middle class areas of the city were the only parents whose primary concern with neighborhood schools was not safety. They described struggles with segregation in CPS programs and sought more inclusive settings for their children. Rebecca, a Black parent, described her struggle to find an inclusive setting for her son labeled with autism, while the district representatives wanted to place him in an autism cluster program—a self-contained classroom that exclusively serves children with dis/abilities housed within a neighborhood school. When she pushed for him to attend a regular classroom, he was expected to do so without the support of an aide:

It was like he would have to be able to handle being in the regular class without any assistance. [The teacher] had no interest in him going to the class and . . . she had him with a security guard.



She wasn't very accepting (August 25, 2015).

After homeschooling him for his kindergarten year, Rebecca again pushed back on the idea that her son needed a separate setting for first grade, saying "He didn't really do anything wrong except for being who he was, and they just felt they couldn't teach him there. My whole argument on it was the fact that they could" (August 25<sup>th</sup>). When her approach failed again, she said she was done dealing with the public school and moved him to a charter school.

Sarah, a Black mother of a student identified with ADHD and receiving speech services, described her son's IEP meeting as the pivotal moment in her decision-making. After an overwhelming meeting, she thought her son was slated for a regular classroom and was surprised to find out that the school principal recommended a self-contained setting:

"For me that didn't make sense. I was like, . . . 'How do you put a child with speech with other kids with multiple dis/abilities in kindergarten?' The most restricting thing, it was not part of what we had discussed inside of the IEP. That's when we decided like, 'I can't do that.' That's how we ended up in the charter school. . . . I'm so tormented about the neighborhood school that was going to put him in a self-contained special ed classroom. For me, that was—and we know it's like 'the warehousing of kids.'" (September 30, 2015).

The rigid assumption that students with dis/abilities need to be educated in separate settings reflects ableist ideas that dis/ability is something that must be controlled and contained and that separate classes offer teachers with the "right" expertise. These assumptions frame as normal and natural the exclusionary design of general education classrooms and leave those spaces unchallenged and unchanged, to the benefit only of those who can learn within such social

arrangements. What is more, Rebecca's and Sarah's experiences reflect the troubled history within CPS of segregating students of color with dis/abilities in separate classrooms (see the landmark special education case, *Corey H. v. The Board of Education of the City of Chicago*, 2008).



### The Allure of Charter Schools

In contrast to their experiences in and perceptions of neighborhood schools, charter schools presented an unknown but alluring option. Parents chose charter schools, as they perceived them safer due to the strict disciplinary measures, more academically rich due to their college culture, and more attentive to the individual needs of their children due to their small class sizes.

**Safety.** In contrast to their experiences with safety in the neighborhood schools, charter schools presented an alluring option to parents, especially due to the appearance of order and control due to their strict disciplinary codes. As Simone noted,

Not one sound. No kid was out of line, nobody was pushing or shoving.

I was like what did you do to these kids? I said wow, I like that type of discipline (September 4, 2015).

Dominique explained

[T]here has never been a discipline issue. I'm like okay, this is the best environment, and it's safe. I don't have to worry about anyone in the school arguing or fighting with you because there's zero tolerance (September 8, 2015).

Donna was impressed by the charter's dress code as a sign of control and safety:

I liked how they had their disciplinary setup. It wasn't a school with a bunch of fights. None of that. Dress code. They made sure the boys' shirts were tucked in. Shoes. Their clothes was all together (October 3, 2015).

Parents of children with dis/abilities were attracted to the charter schools' presentation of control and safety as they hoped their children would be less vulnerable to experiencing violence there. The charter also became a place where their children could get their own behavior under control. Angela, a Black mother, stated "After she was diagnosed, I felt that she needed to be somewhere a little bit more structured. . . . I guess where the school was more aggressive as far as discipline" (August 16, 2015). Ironically, once their children with dis/abilities attended a charter school, these rigorous zero-tolerance practices served to steer them away, a layer of our findings that we present in an upcoming report.

Parents perceived other Black and Latinx children in charter schools as less threatening than those in their neighborhood schools. Therese explained,

The reason why I put him in the charter school is [at the charter] they comin' from different neighborhoods and they got different opinions and different

upbringings and stuff like that. You're not with—you got people in the neighborhood. You might got three friends that always beat up on you. Because they close and you don't come outside. Every time you come outside you gotta duck and dodge. I remember that boy that used to beat him up. Now I'm at a charter school. We're not exactly in the area so if you want him you gotta get on that bus. You gotta come look for him or you gotta take your time to come look for him. (August 18, 2015)

Charter school enrollment based in a lottery system contributed to parents' perception of safety. That is, charter schools drew students from other neighborhoods and sometimes brought their child into a different neighborhood for school, which was perceived by parents as a sign of safety.



**Academics.** Charter schools had a reputation for academic achievement. Charter schools attracted parents by promoting themselves as pathways to college through their academic rigor and high expectations. Therese explained, "Then you see it on TV. They got 100 % college graduation" (August 18, 2015). Barbara used similar expressions explaining her interest in the charter: "Because I had heard that the charter school has the 100 % college rate."

Parents whose children were in the early grades also expressed these perceptions. Shanell, whose child was in kindergarten, described the school:

The whole charter network, their entire charter surrounds pre-K to college. When you look at their history, they pretty much—their charter's surrounding intense academics, but getting everybody into college. Everybody. Within the last, I think, four or five years, they've had 100 % college enrollment for their kids (August 28, 2015).

These narratives of college access provided an alluring promise of social and economic inclusion for families of children with dis/abilities.

**Small Class Size.** Charter schools provided the possibility of more individualized attention through small class sizes. Janae reflected on learning that the charter school had two teachers in a classroom of 15 students, saying “I thought, ‘I hit the jackpot.’ . . . This is why I signed him up, because I felt like my child needs so much extra attention, and this would be awesome for him” (August 27, 2015). Donna stated,

I'd rather for them to be in a small setting than a large setting. Because if you're in a small setting, you can't fall into the cracks. If you're in a large setting, then you got it to where the teacher has to pay attention to everybody in the classroom. For a child in there that need—has some needs that need to be met, they not gonna get it. The charter school was a small setting. They didn't have no more than probably 10 to maybe 12. (October 3, 2015)

Interestingly, parents did not mention the special education services in charter schools as a factor, but they perceived the small student-teacher ratios as a sign that the individual needs of their children would be met.

## Summary and Recommendations

Our findings contribute to the emerging research examining the experiences of students with dis/abilities engaging with school choice. The parents we interviewed struggled to find a school that could serve their children in the urban education market. In this regard, a market approach to delivering educational service to students with dis/abilities has provided little alternative to the historical forms of exclusion experienced by students of color with dis/abilities and their families.

Another key finding is that factors that parents considered when engaging in school choice varied across the uneven economic development inscribed in the segregated geographies of the city. In areas of extreme poverty, serious economic decline, and gentrification safety was paramount. In middle class areas, parents' concerns about having their child in a segregated environment were more prominent. In any of these cases, the quality neither of academics nor of special education services were the main factors influencing parents' school decisions. These findings challenge the assumption that market approaches to education will improve educational options for parents of students with dis/abilities and contextualize parents' school selections within broader social factors beyond public schools.

**A market approach to delivering educational service to students with dis/abilities has provided little alternative to the historical forms of exclusion experienced by students of color with dis/abilities and their families.**

## Recommendations

According to these findings, we provide the following recommendations for policy:

- Build capacity to serve all students in all schools. Rather than place the burden on parents of students with dis/abilities to find a school that can serve the individual needs of their child, school districts should focus on improving the quality and quantity of services provided to students with disabilities, ensuring that each urban area has guaranteed access to a quality option. Depending on a lottery system or academic test-score to obtain access to a school does not provide “guaranteed access.” Parents of students with disabilities face many stressors, particularly those who experience poverty. Searching for a school in a market where there are few options adds another burden to their lives.
- Move from segregated special education placements to providing training and resources for expanding meaningful and supportive inclusive practices to all schools. Four of the interviewed parents were struggling to find an inclusive setting for their children. In these cases, district personnel insisted on a segregated setting for their child. Students with dis/abilities continue to have low rates of inclusion, particularly students with more extensive support needs. Rather than spending funds and resources to open new schools, school districts should gear resources toward building capacity for inclusive education. Searching for other schools can become obsolete when there is a guaranteed quality inclusive school option near one’s home.
- Invest in neighborhoods impacted by poverty and economic decline. The summarized study suggests that parents’ choices are shaped by factors beyond the scope of public schools. As Anyon (2005) pointed out, job, wage, housing, tax, and transportation policies should be part of educational policies. Focus on neighborhood safety

through reinvestment in neighborhoods for the existing population, job creation in areas of high unemployment, improving transportation systems, and more progressive taxing measures that can funnel funds to cash-strapped school districts should be part of a broader education agenda that can provide guaranteed access to a quality inclusive school.

**Students with dis/abilities continue to have low rates of inclusion, particularly students with more extensive support needs. Rather than spending funds and resources to open new schools, school districts should gear resources toward building capacity for inclusive education.**

**Dr. Federico Waitoller** is an associate professor at the department of special education at the University of Illinois at Chicago. His research focuses on urban inclusive education. In particular, his work examines and addresses policies and practices that generate or reproduce inequities for students of color with disabilities. Dr. Waitoller is also interested in examining how these inequities are affected by the production of space in urban economies and the role of teacher learning and school/university partnerships in developing capacity for inclusive education. You can follow Dr. Waitoller's work on [Twitter](#), [Academia.edu](#), and [ResearchGate](#).

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