

School Choice: What are the Trade-Offs?

Damon Clark
UC Irvine

Paco Martorell
UC Davis

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- Types of school choice
 - Intra-district choice (a.k.a. public school choice): currently used by SFUSD and OUSD
 - Charter schools: some in SF and Oakland
 - Vouchers for private school tuition: none in CA

Flavors of Intra-District Choice

- ① Default neighborhood schools and some citywide/magnet schools
- ② Default neighborhood school, transfers to other schools possible
 - Depends on availability of spots
 - Key detail: is it easy to transfer?
- ③ Open enrollment with no default school
 - Centralized application/assignments (e.g., SFUSD/OUSD)
 - Key detail: how to allocate seats at oversubscribed schools?
 - Proximity
 - Lotteries
 - Prioritize marginal groups (e.g., SFUSD CTIP)

Note: choice can operate districtwide or within zones

Tradeoffs: More vs. Less Choice

- Advantages of less choice:
 - Neighborhood schools convenient
 - Neighborhood schools can serve as community anchor
 - Less uncertainty about school assignments
 - Reduce exit from district (e.g., to private schools)?
- Advantages of more choice:
 - Allow parents to find good “fit” for their child?
 - Broaden access to popular schools?
 - Break link between neighborhood segregation and school segregation?
 - Provide incentives for school improvement (“market forces”)?

Outcomes Under Choice Depend on Contextual Factors

- Discourse around choice often centers on access to “good” schools
 - This can be a zero-sum discussion
- Outcomes under choice depend on three key factors:
 - How do parents determine what is a “good” school?
 - What does the “supply” of educational opportunities look like?
 - Do all parents have the resources to exercise choice?
- And districts can, to some extent, shape these factors:
 - Information provided about schools
 - Allocation of resources and special programs (e.g., language immersion)
 - Priorities (e.g., CTIP), outreach and information about choosing schools

Our work in SFUSD

- Ongoing research into what parents look for in schools
 - To shed more light on how parents determine what is a “good” school
 - To understand potential impacts of changing “supply”
- Beginning a study of SFUSD’s CTIP program
 - To understand if/how these priorities broaden access to high-demand schools