

Switching Schools? A Closer Look at Parents' Initial Interest in and Knowledge About the Choice Provisions of No Child Left Behind

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Whether public and private school choice initiatives usher in widespread enrollment changes or whether they cater to a small niche of students critically depends on the decisions that parents make on behalf of their children. Thus far, participation rates in most programs have proved disappointing. This article focuses on parents' knowledge of and interest in the choice provisions under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), for which a miniscule percentage of qualifying students nationwide have enlisted. Drawing from a survey of Massachusetts public school parents completed in the summer of 2003, 18 months after NCLB's enactment, two basic findings emerge. First, although parents claimed to be familiar with NCLB, the vast majority of those who in fact qualified for the act's choice provisions did not know that their child's school was on the state's list of underperforming schools. Second, parents

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with children in underperforming schools were especially interested in pursuing alternative schooling options. This interest, however, did not derive from pointed dissatisfaction with their current schools, and it was regularly directed toward options that NCLB does not afford—specifically, private schools. An essential point underscores these findings: If advocates of NCLB are to boost participation rates, and if scholars are to accurately predict the likely scope of other kinds of school choice programs, parents require considerably greater attention than they have received up until now.

Not since the original Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 has the federal government enacted a more comprehensive education law than the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). With this 2002 act, the federal government entered the accountability business, mandating that standardized tests be administered to every child in Grades 3 to 8 and that states develop academic proficiency standards to determine whether public schools are making “adequate yearly progress” (AYP) toward achieving them. Students attending schools that fail to make AYP for 2 consecutive years have the option of switching to another higher performing public school within the district. Students attending schools that fail to make AYP for 3 years gain access to supplemental tutoring services. Thereafter, harsher penalties apply.

NCLB undoubtedly raises the profile and stakes of standardized testing, just as it interjects the federal government into public education like never before. Thus far, however, the act has failed to mobilize many families around its school transfer provisions—the one area where, as of this juncture, policymakers can reasonably expect the material lives of children to have changed. Consider the case of Massachusetts. During the 2003–04 school year, 983,313 students enrolled in Massachusetts public schools, of whom 95,458 qualified for NCLB’s public school choice provisions. To date, just 298 students, or 0.3% of the eligible population, seized on the opportunity to switch to a higher performing public school. And in this regard, Massachusetts does not appear exceptional. Among 46 urban school districts that are members of the Council of the Great City Schools,¹ 1,162,695 students qualified for NCLB’s choice provisions during the 2003–04 school year, of whom only 44,372 students (or 3.8% of the eligible population) requested a transfer, and only 7,878 students (or 0.1% of the eligible population) actually received one (Casserly, 2004). Although participation rates were up from the 2002–03 school year, the practice of school choice still does not appear to be meeting its promise.

¹The Council of the Great City Schools covers 60 districts, 47 of which responded to this particular survey.

As others have pointed out, low take-up rates are partially due to the efforts of state and local bureaucrats, superintendents, and school board members to minimize NCLB's impact on their districts by keeping children in their current public schools (Hess & Finn, 2004). Transportation issues and space limitations, meanwhile, prevent still other students from switching public schools (Krueger & Ziebarth, 2004). But even if policy-makers are able to rework the accountability system so that political actors throughout our system of separated and federated powers freely and enthusiastically promote the law's choice and supplemental services provisions, and even if all logistical problems are solved, widespread enrollment changes are hardly a foregone conclusion. As with all choice initiatives, NCLB does not mandate change—it merely presents some public school parents with new educational options. Whether these parents will take advantage of these options, and whether they can adequately assess the best needs of their children when doing so, remain open questions.

Several years after the law's enactment, we still do not know whether the choice provisions of NCLB effectively meet parents' wants and wishes. To be sure, some excellent research examined parents' educational priorities within the existing public school system (Schneider, 1998; Schneider & Buckley, 2002; Schneider, Teske, & Marschall, 2000; Schneider, Teske, Roch, & Marschall, 1997). Other scholars, meanwhile, surveyed parents' professed interest in school vouchers and charter schools (Moe, 2001; Public Agenda, 1999). Unfortunately, none of these surveys dealt specifically with the options NCLB avails to families with children in underperforming public schools. And there is good reason to believe that parents' interest in policies such as school vouchers (or charter schools or magnet schools) does not illuminate the likely choices they will make in a highly restricted, intradistrict, public school choice program. If scholars across the political spectrum have settled on one truth about school choice, it is this: The fate of a program ultimately rides on the particular ways it is structured, the population it targets, and the resources it brings to bear. All of the action is in the details, and analysts who generalize from yesterday's policy initiative to today's do so at some risk.

The 35th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll (Rose & Gallup, 2003) contained measures of public attitudes toward NCLB. Much of the survey revealed public attitudes toward the law itself. It asked whether citizens think testing is a good way of assessing school performance; whether the federal, state, or local government should retain primary responsibility over the governance of schools; whether subjects other than math and English ought to be included in determinations of student and school progress; and whether standards should differ for special education students. Interesting as these policy items are, they tell us little about how NCLB actually

functions in local communities. Although it sheds light on parents' views about NCLB, this battery of survey items did not directly illuminate the practical choices that parents make within a given educational context.²

Drawing from a telephone survey of 1,000 public school parents in the state of Massachusetts, this article critically examines public school parents' knowledge of and interest in alternative schooling options. The first section introduces the survey. The second section assesses parents' knowledge of NCLB choice provisions and features of their children's education. The third section addresses parents' satisfaction with their children's current public schools and their interest in exploring new public and private schooling alternatives. The fourth section concludes by offering some modest policy recommendations.

Section 1: The Survey

During the summer of 2003, 1,000 public school parents in Massachusetts's 10 largest school districts were surveyed over the telephone via random-digit dial. One fourth of the stratified sample consisted of parents living in Boston, another one fourth of parents in Springfield, and another one fourth in Worcester. The final one fourth was drawn randomly from parents in Brockton, Lynn, Lowell, New Bedford, Lawrence, Fall River, and Newton.³ The reason for focusing on these larger districts is straightforward: The vast majority of Massachusetts's 489 school districts have just a handful of elementary schools, and just one or two middle and high schools. Given that NCLB mandates choice options within, but not across, school districts, few parents in underperforming rural schools can be expected to move. The survey, as such, focuses on the larger districts simply because it is there that NCLB stands the greatest chance of effecting change.

Surveys were conducted in either English or Spanish and generally required 15 to 20 min to complete. To qualify, households had to have at least one child in a public school, and questions were directed only to parents or guardians of this child.⁴ In 72% of the cases, the respondent was the child's

²Although the Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll (Rose & Gallup, 2003) contained some measures of parental satisfaction, the results basically confirmed conventional wisdom—namely, that most parents are happy with their child's current public school. And unfortunately, as the analyses conducted on the poll are rudimentary at best, the findings offered little insight into how various populations with children attending various types of schools systematically differ in their knowledge of and interest in new forms of school choice.

³So that they reflect a random draw of parents in the sampled locales, findings presented in this article rely on weights that account for the sizes of the district populations.

⁴In a handful of cases, questions were directed toward parents of children who attend private schools. The results do not change when these cases are excluded from the sample.

mother, 22% the father, 3% a grandparent, and the rest were other relatives. (Hereafter, respondents are referred to simply as *parents*.) When families had more than one child, respondents were asked about the youngest attending a public school.⁵ As such, elementary school children were the subject of a disproportionate share of the interviews.⁶ Before abandoning it, each telephone number was called 15 times, usually spread out over several weeks. The adjusted response rate was 31%, which is roughly on par with most telephone surveys using random-digit dial.⁷ To the extent that this survey oversampled socioeconomically more advantaged families, it likely overstates the level of knowledge that parents have about NCLB; if such families were more successful at placing their child in a preferred public school, the survey also underestimates the level of interest in NCLB's choice provisions.⁸

From the outset, some additional caveats are in order. This article takes a distinctly behavioral orientation. The survey does not provide much basis on which to levy blame—on parents, teachers, or district administrators—for perceived lapses in knowledge, much less on failings in school performance. The survey's strengths lie in specifying what parents know and less in why they know it. Moreover, this article, and the survey on which it is based, does not intend to scrutinize NCLB's language or design. So as to provide an early assessment of parental knowledge of and interest in new edu-

⁵As previously mentioned, policymakers want to focus on those students who are in the best position to exercise choice under NCLB. Because elementary schools greatly outnumber middle and high schools in most communities, it makes perfect sense for the youngest child, rather than, say, the child with the next birthday, to be the subject of inquiry.

⁶Students in Grades K to 12 constituted 13.6%, 10.7%, 9.7%, 8.6%, 8.2%, 6.0%, 6.7%, 8.7%, 5.7%, 6.7%, 6.2%, 6.1%, and 1.6% of the sample, respectively. In 1.5% of the cases, the respondent did not know the student's grade.

⁷This estimated response rate assumes that the incident rate among those of unknown eligibility (usually because they did not stay on the telephone long enough so that we could determine whether they had a child attending a public school) is the same as the incident rate among those of known eligibility. If the incident rate among noncompliers is lower, which is likely given the subject of the survey and the population we targeted, then the true response rate is higher than 31%.

⁸Available demographic data from the Massachusetts Department of Education suggest that the survey contains the right approximate proportion of African Americans, an under-sample of Hispanics, and an oversample of Whites. (Given the varying methods of collecting demographic data, race/ethnicity provides the cleanest of comparisons.) In the survey, 17% of parents are non-Hispanic African American, 7% are Hispanic, and 73% are non-Hispanic White. According to Massachusetts Department of Education records, 17% of parents living in the 10 largest school districts are non-Hispanic African American, 23% are Hispanic, and 46% are non-Hispanic White. The magnitude of the observed discrepancies for Hispanics is sufficiently large to warrant some concern. Those Hispanic parents who are included in the survey, it is fair to assume, probably speak better English, have higher education, and are more likely to own their own home than the larger population of Hispanics targeted. To the extent that this is true, the survey probably will overestimate their knowledge of NCLB.

cational opportunities and the challenges faced by advocates of choice and accountability who aim to boost parental control over and involvement in children's education, this takes as given state determinations of school performance and remedies for failure. By design, the survey identifies what parents know about and want for their child's education within a given context and at a given time. The findings presented herein are best understood as a snapshot of Massachusetts parents roughly 18 months after NCLB's enactment, where lessons drawn may apply only imperfectly to other states and times.

Section 2: Knowledge

If parents are to enlist their children in new schooling opportunities, they must know about the relevant programs. Should families remain unaware of state and federal programs, or should families lack the most basic information required to determine whether their children, in fact, qualify for them, then participation rates assuredly will dwindle. In turn, this section assesses each dimension of knowledge and its implications for NCLB.

Knowledge of NCLB's Existence

When asked, Massachusetts parents claim to know a fair amount about NCLB. Consider the findings presented in the "All Parents" column of Table 1. Among those surveyed, 70% profess to have heard of the act, 52% to know about the option of switching from an underperforming school to one that made AYP, and 44% to have heard about the availability of supplemental services.⁹ As conventional wisdom suggests that average citizens pay little attention to politics and lack basic information about the contents of public policy (Carpini & Keeter, 1989; Converse, 1964), these figures reflect well on parents.¹⁰

⁹Of those who say they have heard about NCLB, 59% received their information from the media, 24% from the school district, 7% from other parents, 3% from friends and family, and the rest from assorted sources.

¹⁰We also asked parents whether their districts offered intradistrict choice programs, interdistrict choice, and charter schools. Because we know which district parents lived in, we again were able to verify their responses. When asked about the availability of intradistrict choice options, 68% of parents answered correctly, 26% incorrectly, and 6% said they did not know (6 of the 10 districts offered some kind of intradistrict choice program). When asked about interdistrict choice options, 45% answered correctly, 38% incorrectly, and 17% said they did not know (all districts in Massachusetts allow students to attend public schools in schools outside of their boundaries, provided that they can find transportation to another district that will accept them; students in all of the top 10 districts took advantage of this option.) Finally, when asked about the presence of charter schools in their area, 81% answered correctly, 13% incorrectly, and 6% said they did not know (8 of the 10 largest districts have charter schools; because of interdistrict choice options, students in every district attend charter schools).

Table 1
Parental Knowledge of the No Child Left Behind Act

<i>Parental Knowledge</i>	<i>All Parents (%)</i>	<i>Parents With Child Attending an Underperforming School (%)</i>	<i>Parents With Child Attending a Higher Performing School (%)</i>
Heard of act			
Yes	69.6	66.0	70.8
No	30.4	34.0	29.2
Total	100.0 (935)	100.0 (232)	100.0 (703)
Heard of act's choice provisions			
Yes	52.2	56.8	50.7
No	47.8	43.2	49.4
Total	100.0 (935)	100.0 (232)	100.0 (703)
Heard of act's supplemental services			
Yes	44.1	52.4	43.0
No	55.9	57.6	57.1
Total	100.0 (935)	100.0 (232)	100.0 (703)

Note. Underperforming schools failed to make adequate yearly progress for 1 or more years; higher performing schools, meanwhile, made adequate yearly progress every year. Number of observations is in parentheses.

It is less important, though, that all parents know about NCLB than that the right parents—namely, those whose children are attending underperforming schools and hence qualify for new schooling opportunities—know about the act and its various provisions. The middle and far right columns of Table 1, as such, compare the levels of knowledge registered by parents whose children qualify for choice (because they attend an underperforming public school) and those who do not (who attend higher performing schools).¹¹ For the most part, there is continued reason for optimism. Although parents of eligible children are slightly less likely to claim to have heard of NCLB, they are 6 and 9 percentage points more likely to know about the act's choice and supplemental service provisions, respectively.¹²

¹¹All students who attended schools that failed to make AYP during the 2003 academic year, when this survey was conducted, qualified for the choice provisions of NCLB.

¹²Because attendance at an underperforming school has no bearing on a student's eligibility for intra- or interdistrict choice programs or charter schools, one would not expect their parents to have higher levels of awareness of these schooling options. The data confirm as much. Neither simple comparisons of means nor multivariate analyses reveal differential levels of knowledge about these schooling options by school status. See Appendix Table A2 for multivariate results.

Assuredly, children enrolled in underperforming public schools come from different kinds of families and have different educational needs and capacities than those in higher performing public schools. In this survey, parents of children in underperforming schools are less likely to be White, born in the United States, or own a home, just as they are less educated, have lower incomes, and are less involved in their child's education. To the extent that these characteristics independently influence knowledge about NCLB and covary with school attendance patterns, the differences observed in Table 1 may derive less from the ways in which information is disseminated to families within school districts and more from the kinds of families attending underperforming schools. Table 2, therefore, presents results from a series of weighted logistic regressions that predict the probability that parents claim to know about the existence of NCLB (columns 1a–1b), the act's public school choice provisions (columns 2a–2b), and the availability of supplemental services (columns 3a–3b).¹³ Each model controls for numerous family and child background characteristics; in addition, models intermittently include district fixed effects.¹⁴ Descriptive statistics of all variables are included in Appendix Table A1.

Even after controlling for a wide range of background characteristics, we still find ample evidence that parents with children in underperforming schools know more about NCLB and its various choice provisions than do parents with children in higher performing schools. In all models, the estimated coefficients are positive; and in four of the six models, the point estimates are statistically significant. Holding all other variables at their means, the fixed-effects models predict that parents of children in underperforming schools are 7 percentage points more likely to have heard of NCLB, 16 points more likely to know of the act's public school choice options, and 8 points more likely to know of the availability of supplemental service provisions.

For the most part, the estimated coefficients associated with background controls make intuitive sense. Born in United States, mother's education, home ownership, and married are factors that are almost always positively associated with parental knowledge of NCLB; in many instances, the impacts are statistically significant. Among parental background characteristics, the two largest impacts concern place of birth and mother's education.¹⁵

¹³In most models, estimates are virtually identical when employing multiple imputation to deal with missing data (King, 2001).

¹⁴By including a vector of dummy variables, the models simply allow for baseline propensities to vary across districts.

¹⁵As shown in Appendix Table A2, models that estimate parental awareness of intra- and interdistrict choice options and charter schools do not perform anywhere near as well as those presented in Table 3. For instance, significant effects are occasionally observed for place of birth but never for education. Most other family background characteristics also generate null effects.

Table 2
Parental Knowledge of the No Child Left Behind Act, Multivariate Analyses

	<i>Heard of Act</i>		<i>Heard of Act's Choice Options</i>		<i>Heard of Act's Supplemental Services</i>	
	<i>1a</i>	<i>1b</i>	<i>2a</i>	<i>2b</i>	<i>3a</i>	<i>3b</i>
Attends underperforming school	0.41 (0.26)	0.39 (0.26)	0.73*** (0.23)	0.66*** (0.24)	0.60*** (0.23)	0.46** (0.23)
Parent characteristics						
African American	0.08 (0.34)	-0.14 (0.36)	0.02 (0.30)	-0.04 (0.32)	-0.28 (0.33)	0.00 (0.34)
Hispanic	-0.52 (0.48)	-0.52 (0.52)	0.18 (0.44)	0.15 (0.46)	-0.68 (0.43)	-0.65 (0.46)
Born in United States	1.16*** (0.29)	1.19*** (0.30)	0.70** (0.28)	0.74*** (0.28)	0.35 (0.28)	0.27 (0.29)
Education	1.89*** (0.54)	1.76*** (0.56)	1.50*** (0.50)	1.57*** (0.52)	0.69 (0.51)	1.01* (0.53)
Work full time	-0.08 (0.23)	-0.04 (0.23)	0.22 (0.21)	0.21 (0.20)	0.26 (0.21)	0.27 (0.21)
Own home	0.59** (0.28)	0.51* (0.30)	0.35 (0.26)	0.31 (0.27)	-0.00 (0.28)	-0.01 (0.29)
Married	0.58** (0.26)	0.70*** (0.27)	0.15 (0.25)	0.19 (0.25)	-0.03 (0.26)	-0.13 (0.26)
Female	-0.20 (0.25)	-0.10 (0.26)	-0.17 (0.22)	-0.13 (0.22)	0.06 (0.23)	0.04 (0.23)
Frequently attend religious services	0.38 (0.34)	0.30 (0.38)	0.54 (0.35)	0.61* (0.33)	0.70** (0.34)	0.65** (0.33)
Catholic	-0.30 (0.29)	-0.14 (0.31)	-0.13 (0.27)	-0.07 (0.27)	-0.20 (0.28)	-0.21 (0.27)
Protestant	0.13 (0.34)	0.19 (0.36)	0.20 (0.29)	-0.20 (0.29)	-0.04 (0.30)	0.09 (0.30)

Child characteristics												
Special needs	0.13	(0.21)	0.16	(0.21)	0.05	(0.19)	0.02	(0.20)	0.01	(0.19)	0.00	(0.19)
Elementary school	0.15	(0.23)	0.21	(0.24)	-0.11	(0.21)	-0.10	(0.21)	-0.30	(0.21)	-0.32	(0.21)
Boy	0.44**	(0.21)	0.49**	(0.22)	0.16	(0.19)	0.18	(0.19)	-0.02	(0.19)	-0.03	(0.19)
Parental involvement												
Volunteer at school	0.53**	(0.22)	0.58***	(0.22)	0.38*	(0.21)	0.33*	(0.20)	0.40*	(0.21)	0.49**	(0.21)
Parent Teacher Association member	0.63**	(0.26)	0.65**	(0.27)	0.64***	(0.22)	0.66***	(0.22)	0.57***	(0.21)	0.47**	(0.22)
Work public school district	0.97***	(0.28)	0.94***	(0.31)	0.86***	(0.23)	0.87***	(0.25)	0.94***	(0.23)	0.89***	(0.23)
Constant	-2.74***	(0.60)	-2.77***	(0.79)	-2.54***	(0.55)	-2.60***	(0.64)	-1.79***	(0.53)	-1.26*	(0.66)
Pseudo- R^2	.19		.21		.12		.13		.09		.12	
Log-likelihood	-391.40		-376.44		-474.58		-468.33		-488.81		-470.31	
No. of observations	781		781		781		781		781		781	
District fixed effects included	No		Yes		No		Yes		No		Yes	

Note. Weighted logit models estimated with robust standard errors reported in parentheses.

The dependent variable is coded 1 if respondent claimed to have heard of NCLB (models 1a and 1b), opportunities under the Act to transfer out of under-performing public schools (2a and 2b), or the Act's supplemental services (3a and 3b), and 0 otherwise. All explanatory variables rescaled 0-1. Given high number of missing values, income not included in models; most estimates, however, appear unchanged when it is added.

* $p < .10$, two-tailed test. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$.

Fixing all other variables at their means, the models predict that native-born parents are between 4 and 26 percentage points more likely to know about different aspects of NCLB as are foreign-born parents. And moving from 1 standard deviation below the mean of mother's education to 1 standard deviation above translates into somewhere between an 11 and 15 percentage-point increase in the probability that a parent will indicate awareness of different aspects of NCLB.

Churches and synagogues can be important conduits for information about community affairs. At Saturday and Sunday services, soup kitchens, and clothing drives, congregants have ample opportunities to discuss goings-on in their communities and to exchange insights about educational programs and opportunities. What is more, numerous scholars have observed high levels of social capital and connectedness within religious communities (Campbell, *in press*; Putnam, 2000). Elsewhere, in the context of a targeted, urban voucher program, I observed that parents who attend religious services are more likely to have the necessary knowledge, interest, and wherewithal to apply for vouchers, to find access to a private school, and to remain there over time (Howell, 2004). Here, too, I find evidence that parents who regularly attend religious services are more likely to profess awareness of NCLB. Holding all other variables at their means, a shift of 1 standard deviation below the mean of religious attendance to 1 standard deviation above corresponds with somewhere between a 3 and 9 percentage-point increase in the probability that a parents knows about some aspect of NCLB.¹⁶

One might expect parents with special needs children to pay especially high amounts of attention to their child's education and hence to the quality of their schools. Although average children may easily adapt to a wide variety of educational settings, students at the high and low ends of the distribution may suffer both personally and academically when they lack adequate accommodations, inducing parents to carefully monitor the information available about their child's school. With regard to NCLB, however, the evidence on this score is mixed. Although all of the coefficients are positive, none even approach standard thresholds of statistical significance.¹⁷

Consistently, the largest impacts are associated with measures of parental involvement. Parents who volunteer in their child's school, who are

¹⁶These findings, however, do not appear to carry over to other state educational programs and initiatives. As shown in Appendix Table A2, neither religious identity nor practices appear to have any relationship with parental knowledge of intra- or interdistrict choice plans or charter schools.

¹⁷Virtually identical results are observed in models that predict the probability that parents are aware of intra- and interdistrict choice plans and charter schools. As shown in Appendix Table A2, five of six coefficients are positive, but none are statistically significant.

members of a Parent Teacher Association (PTA), and who themselves work in the public school system (or have a family member who does) are much more likely to claim to have heard of NCLB as well as its choice and supplemental service provisions. Depending on the model estimated, involvement in one of the three associations corresponds with somewhere between a 9 and 22 percentage-point increase in the probability that parents know about NCLB. Those, it seems, who work and volunteer in public schools are most aware of state and federal policies designed to hold them accountable and to expand educational options for qualifying parents.¹⁸

Knowledge of Eligibility Under NCLB

Parents overall, as well as the subset of parents with children in underperforming schools, reveal markedly high levels of awareness about NCLB. But knowledge about the mere existence of educational opportunities does not automatically translate into high participation rates. In addition, parents must know whether their child actually qualifies for the act's benefits. And here, informational networks begin to break down.

The centerpiece of the federal government's accountability system consists of assessments of public schools' AYP toward state-mandated proficiency standards. From these determinations, penalties are directed to schools and districts, just as benefits flow to parents and students. To navigate the educational landscape, and to seize on new schooling opportunities, it is vital that parents know the status of their child's school. Without knowing whether their child in fact qualifies for the act's choice and supplemental service provisions, parents can hardly be expected to take advantage of them.

Overall, 25% of the Massachusetts parents surveyed had children who attended underperforming schools. But when asked whether their child's school was on the list of underperforming schools, only 12% of parents responded affirmatively. Something, plainly, is amiss.¹⁹

Using self-reports to assess knowledge about policy matters is always a tricky business. Indeed, in many ways the history of survey research constitutes a long cautionary tale about the problems of taking people at their word (Price & Zaller, 1993). For a wide variety of reasons, what people say in the context of telephone surveys does not reliably match what they believe, know, or do. In this instance, parents have ample incentives to feign knowl-

¹⁸When estimating the probability that parents know about intra- and interdistrict choice plans and the presence of charter schools, these effects attenuate somewhat. Significant effects are only observed for parents who work in public schools in models that predict awareness of charter schools and interdistrict choice plans. Again, see Appendix Table A2.

¹⁹Asked where they learned about the status of their child's school, 36% of parents indicated the district or school, 25% a newspaper or television news story, 4% other parents, 3% the Internet, 2% a friend, and the rest did not know the source of the information.

Table 3

Parental Knowledge of Child's School

<i>Parental Knowledge</i>	<i>All Parents (%)</i>	<i>Parents With Child Attending an Underperforming School (%)</i>	<i>Parents With Child Attending a Higher Performing School (%)</i>
<i>Status of child's school under the No Child Left Behind Act</i>			
Identify correctly	48.8	29.3	57.3
Identify incorrectly	11.3	28.8	5.8
"Don't know"	39.9	42.0	36.9
Total	100.0 (964)	100.0 (232)	100.0 (703)
<i>Principal's name at child's school</i>			
Identify correctly	49.5	49.5	58.1
Identify incorrectly	12.1	12.1	16.3
"Don't know"	38.4	38.4	25.6
Total	100.0 (935)	100.0 (232)	100.0 (703)
<i>Size of child's school</i>			
Identify correctly	40.0	22.7	46.0
Identify incorrectly	38.7	50.5	34.6
"Don't know"	21.3	26.8	19.5
Total	100.0 (927)	100.0 (232)	100.0 (695)

Note. The number of observations is in parentheses.

edge of matters about which they have very little information and to overestimate their ability to place their child in a successful public school—both of which effectively distort assessments of parental awareness of NCLB and the characteristics of children that the act intends to reach.

Fortunately, I do not need to rely exclusively on what parents tell us. Because the survey asked for the name of the school that each child attended, I can use administrative records to verify their responses. Doing so, a more sobering view of parental awareness begins to emerge. For starters, only 49% of surveyed parents in Massachusetts could correctly identify whether their child's school made AYP. This assuredly represents an upper bound on knowledge, as an unknown percentage of parents guessed correctly the status of their child's school. A total of 40% of parents admitted not knowing whether their child's school made AYP, whereas the remaining 11% incorrectly identified the status of their school.²⁰

²⁰Curiously, parents who received their information directly from the school or school district were 4 percentage points less likely to identify the status of their school correctly than were parents who received their information from other outlets. With these data alone, however, it is impossible to know whether poor school communications or characteristics of families who rely exclusively on districts for information is to blame.

As the results in Table 3 demonstrate, parents have markedly different levels of knowledge about the status of their children's schools. Unfortunately, the observed disparities point in a direction exactly opposite of what one would hope. Although parents with children who attend higher performing public schools generally know that their child's school is not on the list of underperforming public schools, parents with children in underperforming schools generally do not know that their school is. Hence, they lack the most basic information required to pursue NCLB benefits for which they are eligible. Fully 57% of parents with a child attending a higher performing public school know the school's status, as compared to just 29% of families with a child in an underperforming school. This is true even though the state has mandated that districts send letters home only to those parents whose children attend underperforming schools advising them of their school's status. Parents with a child in an underperforming public school are 5 percentage points more likely to claim that they do not know the school's status and fully 5 times more likely to get it wrong when they claim that they do know.

When parents lack facts to the contrary, they may assume that their child's school meets the grade. After all, who wants to admit, especially to a stranger on the telephone, that they send their child to a public school that is deemed underperforming? This predisposition would explain the kind of imbalances observed in Table 3: When guessing, parents in higher performing public schools are more likely to answer correctly than parents with students in underperforming public schools. It would be a mistake, however, to dismiss this empirical phenomenon as an artifact of survey research. Indeed, immediate policy consequences are apparent. In addition to overcoming districts' reluctance to promote the act's choice and supplemental service provisions, NCLB advocates also must find ways to break through parents' independent evaluations of their child's school. More to the point, spreading the word about NCLB's choice and supplemental services entails convincing many parents that their children's public schools are not as good—at least, according to state standards—as they think they are.

Cognitive dissonance, however, does not constitute the only barrier to knowledge, for parents at higher performing and underperforming school also retain different levels of information about other aspects of their children's schools. Again, using administrative records to verify parental responses, I was able to identify which parents knew the name of their child's school principal and the size of their child's school. The results break down along much the same lines as those observed previously. Whereas 58% of parents at public schools that made AYP were able to correctly name their child's principal, 49% of parents with children at under-

performing schools could do so. Similarly, when asked about the size of their child's school, 46% of parents of children at higher performing schools picked the right population range, as compared to 23% of parents of children in underperforming schools. Either because underperforming schools are doing a poor job of communicating with parents or because parents are insufficiently involved in their child's education (or both), parents of children in underperforming schools know less about a wide variety of aspects of their child's education than parents of children at schools that made AYP.

All of these findings hold up in multivariate models. Table 4 presents the results from a series of weighted logistic regressions that predict the probability that parents correctly identify the AYP status of their child's school (columns 1a–1b), the name of their child's principal (columns 2a–2b), and the size of their child's school (columns 3a–3b). Across the board, parents whose children attend underperforming school know less than parents whose children attend higher performing public schools. Holding all other variables at their means, the models predict that parents in underperforming schools are 25 percentage points less likely to identify the status of their school, 8 percentage points less likely to know the name of their school principal, and 22 percentage points less likely to know their school's size.

The background controls, again, correlate with knowledge in expected ways. The models predict that Hispanics are 30 percentage points less likely to know the status of their child's school, and African Americans are 24 percentage points less likely to identify the size of their child's school. Being born in the United States and owning a home positively contribute to parents' knowledge about their child's school, although effects are not always significant. Curiously, parents who work full time are slightly more likely to know the status of their child's school, although they are less likely to know its size. The estimated impacts associated with a parent's education, meanwhile, are consistently large and significant. Moving from 1 standard deviation below the mean of education to 1 standard deviation above, while holding all other variables at their means, translates into a 12 to 14 percentage point increase in the probability that a parent correctly identifies characteristics of their child's school.

Unlike the models that predicted policy awareness, here religion and religiosity do not systematically enhance parents' knowledge about their child's school's status under NCLB. Catholics, Protestants, and individuals who regularly attend religious services are generally no more likely to correctly identify characteristics of their child's school than are individuals who claimed not to have any religious affiliation or who refused to answer the question. The only child characteristic to register significant effects

Table 4

Parental Knowledge of Child's School, Multivariate Analyses

	<i>Correctly Identify School Status</i>		<i>Correctly Identify Principal's Name</i>		<i>Correctly Identify School Size</i>	
	<i>1a</i>	<i>1b</i>	<i>2a</i>	<i>2b</i>	<i>3a</i>	<i>3b</i>
Attends underperforming school	-1.06*** (0.24)	-1.01*** (0.24)	-0.56** (0.23)	-0.27 (0.24)	-1.07*** (0.25)	-1.01*** (0.27)
Parent characteristics						
African American	0.20 (0.33)	0.06 (0.34)	-0.20 (0.30)	-0.26 (0.32)	-1.22*** (0.36)	-1.17*** (0.37)
Hispanic	-1.19* (0.64)	-1.30** (0.67)	-0.07 (0.38)	-0.12 (0.44)	-0.45 (0.47)	-0.50 (0.47)
Born in United States	0.42 (0.30)	0.39 (0.30)	0.36 (0.27)	0.55* (0.31)	0.24 (0.30)	0.21 (0.31)
Education	1.29*** (0.50)	1.05** (0.51)	1.20** (0.49)	1.22** (0.53)	1.02** (0.50)	0.83 (0.51)
Work full time	0.35* (0.21)	0.38* (0.21)	-0.24 (0.21)	-0.30 (0.21)	-0.52*** (0.20)	-0.55*** (0.21)
Own home	0.32 (0.26)	0.30 (0.26)	0.18 (0.26)	0.21 (0.26)	0.16 (0.25)	0.20 (0.25)
Married	-0.02 (0.24)	-0.01 (0.25)	0.16 (0.25)	0.20 (0.23)	-0.14 (0.26)	-0.17 (0.26)
Female	0.13 (0.23)	0.15 (0.24)	0.33 (0.23)	0.38 (0.24)	-0.05 (0.23)	-0.06 (0.22)
Frequently attend religious services	0.05 (0.36)	-0.03 (0.36)	0.02 (0.32)	0.35 (0.33)	-0.24 (0.35)	-0.28 (0.35)
Catholic	0.19 (0.29)	0.39 (0.31)	-0.11 (0.25)	-0.26 (0.29)	0.13 (0.28)	0.17 (0.30)
Protestant	-0.05 (0.34)	0.06 (0.35)	-0.07 (0.28)	-0.29 (0.31)	0.23 (0.32)	0.27 (0.32)
Child characteristics						
Special needs	0.07 (0.20)	0.09 (0.20)	-0.15 (0.20)	-0.12 (0.19)	-0.08 (0.19)	-0.02 (0.19)
Elementary school	0.02 (0.20)	0.07 (0.21)	0.88*** (0.21)	0.98*** (0.21)	-0.04 (0.21)	-0.04 (0.21)
Boy	0.22 (0.20)	0.25 (0.20)	-0.08 (0.19)	-0.13 (0.19)	0.29 (0.19)	0.29 (0.19)

(continued)

Table 4 (Continued)

	<i>Correctly Identify School Status</i>		<i>Correctly Identify Principal's Name</i>		<i>Correctly Identify School Size</i>	
	<i>1a</i>	<i>1b</i>	<i>2a</i>	<i>2b</i>	<i>3a</i>	<i>3b</i>
Parental involvement						
Volunteer at school	0.37* (0.21)	0.41* (0.21)	0.66*** (0.20)	0.57*** (0.21)	0.38* (0.21)	0.45** (0.21)
Parent Teacher Association member	0.62*** (0.22)	0.58*** (0.22)	0.33 (0.23)	0.56** (0.23)	0.25 (0.22)	0.20 (0.23)
Work public school district	0.52** (0.27)	0.55** (0.26)	-0.18 (0.24)	-0.06 (0.23)	0.18 (0.24)	0.22 (0.24)
Constant	-2.00*** (0.55)	-1.72* (1.00)	-1.49*** (0.56)	-1.66** (0.66)	-0.66 (0.53)	0.12 (0.63)
Pseudo- R^2	.12	.14	.10	.16	.11	.13
Log-likelihood	-474.13	-467.62	-479.66	-447.06	-467.87	-458.04
No. of observations	781	781	781	781	775	775
District fixed effects included	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes

Note. Weighted logit models estimated with robust standard errors reported in parentheses. The dependent variable is coded 1 if respondent correctly identified status of school (Models 1a and 1b), the principal's name (2a and 2b), or the school size (3a and 3b), and 0 otherwise. All explanatory variables rescaled 0 to 1. Given high number of missing values, income not included in models; most estimates, however, appear unchanged when it is added.

* $p < .10$, two-tailed test. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$.

concerns grade level. Parents of children in elementary schools are 23 percentage points more likely to know the name of their principal than are parents with children in middle or high school. Elementary school parents, however, are no more likely to identify the status of their child's school or its size.

Just as they expressed higher levels of knowledge of NCLB, parents with direct access to the public school system also appear especially informed about school performances. The models predict that parents who volunteer at their child's school, who are members of a PTA, or who work in public school districts are 10 to 14 percentage points more likely to know whether their child's school is underperforming than those who do not. Comparable impacts are observed in models that predict parental knowledge of their child's principal and school size.

For the most part, the key variables identified from simple comparisons of proportions continue to impact levels of parental knowledge. Parents of children in underperforming schools know less about their child's school, just as parents who have higher educations, who volunteer at school, are members of a PTA, or who work for a district tend to know more. Religion and special needs children continue to register null effects, whereas the estimated impacts of ethnicity, marriage, employment status, and native born attenuate somewhat. Several variables, meanwhile, appear item specific. For instance, parents are significantly more likely to know the name of an elementary school principal than a middle or high school principal, even though grade level has no bearing on the probability that parents know the status of their child's school or its size. And whereas parents who work full time are more likely to know whether their child's school is underperforming, they are less likely to know its size.

Who, then, is most likely to know about the status of their child's school? Parents with children in higher performing schools (who do not qualify for NCLB's choice and supplemental service provisions); non-Hispanics, the highly educated, and the well-off (who, by virtue of residential choice, already have access to a wide array of schooling options); and families with strong personal and professional ties to the public schools (who are already involved in their child's educational life). Such findings underscore a sad irony: Those who thrive in the existing system have the information required to realize that NCLB will not help them any further, whereas those who struggle lack the information required to explore new schooling options that might improve their lot.

How do these findings help explain the low participation rates in NCLB's choice provisions? Two lessons are apparent. First, the survey data suggest that parents' general awareness of the act is not the problem. Overall, parents appear well informed about NCLB's existence; moreover, par-

ents whose children attend underperforming schools, and hence qualify for public school choice and supplemental services, consistently register higher levels of awareness than parents whose children attend higher performing schools. To identify a link between parental knowledge and low participation rates, one must press further and consider the program's eligibility criteria. Although parents with children in underperforming schools are more likely to know about NCLB, they are considerably less likely to know that they in fact attend a school that failed to make AYP. Hence, they are less likely to know that they in fact qualify for public school choice and supplemental services. And only dimly aware that they qualify for new schooling opportunities, it is little wonder that so few parents have taken advantage of them.

Section 3: Interest

If NCLB's choice provisions are to catch on, lawmakers must ensure that parents have more than just a base level of knowledge about which schools made AYP and which did not. Lawmakers must offer alternative schooling options that actually appeal to parents, and sufficiently so that parents are willing to disrupt their child's current education to obtain them. In three steps, this section assesses the demand side of the equation: first, by measuring parental satisfaction with their current schools; second, by examining parental interest in alternative schooling options; and third, by considering the qualities of public schools that matter most to parents. Throughout, the intended beneficiaries of choice under NCLB (parents with children in underperforming public schools) are juxtaposed against those whom the act excludes (parents with children in higher performing public schools).

Parental Satisfaction With Their Current Schools

The chance that parents will explore new education options surely depends on how satisfied they are with their child's current school. Parents who are basically pleased with their child's current school, no matter how the federal accountability system rates it, are not likely to request transfers to higher performing public schools within their district. NCLB's choice provisions ought to appeal most to those parents who anxiously await opportunities to abandon schools that they themselves perceive as failing.

If interest in alternative educational options only thrives in areas of widespread discontent, Massachusetts districts need not worry about children fleeing their public schools in droves. In the surveys, parents were asked to grade their child's school on a scale ranging from A to F. Their re-

Table 5
Parental Satisfaction

	All Parents (%)	Parents With Child Attending an Underperforming School (%)	Parents With Child Attending a Higher Performing School (%)
Grade given school child attends			
A	37.2	28.7	41.5
B	44.4	44.6	44.0
C	13.2	16.8	10.6
D	3.4	6.6	2.5
F	1.8	3.3	1.3
Total	100.0 (991)	100.0 (229)	100.0 (698)
Grade given schools in community			
A	15.8	11.5	16.9
B	45.4	42.8	47.6
C	25.6	31.7	22.9
D	7.9	6.7	8.9
F	5.3	7.4	4.0
Total	100.0 (932)	100.0 (216)	100.0 (657)

Note. The number of observations is in parentheses.

sponses, presented in Table 5, confirm those found in numerous other studies—namely, parents are basically satisfied with their children’s public schools.²¹ In this survey, fully 82% of parents gave their public school either an A or B, whereas just 5% gave their school a D or F. Whatever may be objectively wrong with Massachusetts public schools, parents give them strong votes of confidence.

When focusing on the assessments of NCLB’s target population, however, the story changes somewhat. Compare the results in columns 2 and 3. Although most parents with children in underperforming schools did not know their school’s status under NCLB’s accountability system, they nonetheless expressed less satisfaction with the quality of their child’s education. Parents with children in underperforming schools were 13 percentage points less likely to give their school an A than parents with children in higher performing schools, just as they were almost three times as likely to give their school a D or F.

Although parents express relatively high levels of satisfaction with their own child’s schools, the same cannot be said for the schools in their dis-

²¹See any of the annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup polls of public attitudes toward public schools, which are available online at <http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/kpollpdf.htm>

tricts as a whole. Although 37% of parents gave their child's school an A, only 16% gave the schools in their community the highest mark. Also, just 5% of parents gave their child's school a D or an F, and 13% gave their community's schools the lowest of grades. For the most part, differences between parents attending underperforming and higher performing public schools are more modest. Although 17% of parents with children at schools that made AYP gave their community's schools an A, only 12% from underperforming schools did so. At the bottom end of the grading spectrum, meanwhile, the responses of parents with children in higher performing and underperforming schools are indistinguishable.²²

Table 6 presents the results from multivariate analyses—this time, estimating the probability that a parent gives either their child's own school (columns 1a–1b) or the community's schools (2a–2b) an A. Even when controlling for a wide range of background controls, parents of children attending underperforming schools are significantly less likely to give their own school an A than are parents with a child in a school that made AYP. Impacts on parental satisfaction with the community's schools also appear negative, although they are not significant in models that include district fixed effects.²³ Most of the other variables in the models appear unrelated to parental satisfaction with their child's or their community's public schools. Of interest, though, parents of children in elementary schools give all public schools higher marks, and parents who work full time give lower grades. A few differences between Models 1a–1b and 2a–2b are observed. Specifically, although marital status and religion have no discernible bearing on parents' satisfaction with their child's school, married parents are more likely to give the community's schools an A, just as people who regularly attend religious services are less likely to do so.

Two lessons are apparent here. First, parents are especially critical of schools that their children do not attend. Just as average citizens express considerably higher levels of satisfaction with their own congressional representative than with Congress as a whole (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse,

²²Of those parents who were aware of intra- and interdistrict school choice options, we asked whether their child's school was their first choice. Overall, 85% of parents claimed that it was. And as one would expect, these parents expressed significantly higher satisfaction rates. A total of 41% of parents who placed their child in their most preferred school gave their school an A, as compared to 20% of parents who did not.

²³When estimating models that account for the full range of possible grades that parents could give schools, such as ordered probits, the effect of attending an underperforming school on parental satisfaction with their own school remains highly statistically significant. Its effect on parental satisfaction with community schools, however, is not statistically significant. For the most part, the decision to estimate logit or order probit models has little bearing on estimates for background covariates.

Table 6

Parental Satisfaction, Multivariate Analyses

	<i>Give Child's Current Public School an A</i>		<i>Give Public Schools in Community an A</i>	
	<i>1a</i>	<i>1b</i>	<i>2a</i>	<i>2b</i>
Attend underperforming school	-0.50** (0.24)	-0.55** (0.25)	-0.50* (0.30)	-0.42 (0.32)
Parent characteristics				
African American	0.17 (0.31)	0.09 (0.33)	-0.00 (0.36)	-0.01 (0.35)
Hispanic	-0.29 (0.45)	-0.40 (0.46)	-0.37 (0.56)	-0.38 (0.61)
Born in United States	-0.24 (0.29)	-0.23 (0.29)	-0.20 (0.36)	-0.22 (0.34)
Education	0.52 (0.48)	0.23 (0.48)	0.94 (0.65)	0.58 (0.67)
Work full time	-0.41** (0.20)	-0.43** (0.20)	-0.74*** (0.25)	-0.76*** (0.26)
Own home	0.31 (0.25)	0.39 (0.26)	-0.36 (0.34)	-0.35 (0.33)
Married	-0.32 (0.25)	-0.25 (0.26)	0.70** (0.34)	0.75** (0.35)
Female	-0.33 (0.22)	-0.32 (0.23)	0.11 (0.30)	0.17 (0.30)
Frequently attend religious services	0.44 (0.35)	0.36 (0.33)	-0.93** (0.39)	-1.00*** (0.38)
Catholic	-0.13 (0.26)	-0.09 (0.27)	0.29 (0.32)	0.32 (0.33)
Protestant	0.44 (0.31)	0.40 (0.31)	0.56* (0.32)	0.54 (0.33)
Child characteristics				
Special needs	-0.01 (0.19)	0.00 (0.19)	-0.11 (0.23)	-0.05 (0.25)
Elementary school	0.38* (0.21)	0.40* (0.21)	0.71** (0.28)	0.75** (0.29)
Boy	-0.30 (0.19)	-0.30 (0.19)	0.02 (0.24)	0.08 (0.24)
Parental involvement				
Volunteer at school	0.04 (0.20)	0.07 (0.21)	0.06 (0.26)	0.12 (0.26)
Parent Teacher Association member	0.35* (0.21)	0.23 (0.21)	0.17 (0.27)	0.17 (0.28)
Work public school	0.11 (0.23)	0.18 (0.24)	0.00 (0.29)	0.00 (0.28)
Constant	-0.16 (0.52)	0.15 (0.62)	-2.18*** (0.65)	-1.66** (0.75)
Pseudo-R ²	.04	.07	.07	.10
Log-likelihood	-500.25	-486.94	-306.27	-296.36
No. of observations	781	781	773	773
District fixed effects	No	Yes	No	Yes

Note. Weighted logit models estimated with robust standard errors reported in parentheses. The dependent variable is coded 1 if parent gave either the child school (Models 1a and 1b) or the public schools in the community (Models 2a and 2b) an A and zero otherwise. All explanatory variables rescaled 0 to 1. Given high number of missing values, income not included in models; most estimates, however, appear unchanged when it is added.

* $p < .10$, two-tailed test. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$.

1995), so do parents rally behind their children's schools while casting occasional aspersions at institutions their children do not attend. In addition, these findings provide an early hint that NCLB's target population might refuse the particular schooling options that the act avails. Although parents at schools that failed to make AYP are less satisfied with their own child's school, they are neither overwhelmingly dissatisfied with these schools nor especially keen on the schools in the district as whole. In fact, NCLB's intended beneficiaries think less of their district's public schools than do parents in higher performing schools. This does not bode especially well for political observers who hoped that the act, at last, would unleash pent-up demand for new public schooling options within districts.

Switching Schools

It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that general contentment with existing public schools translates into disinterest in alternative educational options. Although questions about parental satisfaction suggest mild curiosity, more direct questions reveal considerable interest in alternative public, charter, and private schools. And once again, differences are regularly observed between those parents with children who qualify for NCLB's choice provisions and those with children who do not.

Take a look at Table 7. Between 11% and 16% of parents claim that they would prefer their child attend a different public school in the same district, a different public school in a different district, or a charter school. And in all three instances, interest is higher among parents with children in schools that failed to make AYP. Although they express less satisfaction with their district's public schools than did parents with children in higher performing public schools, and although they are less likely to know that they qualified for NCLB's choice provisions, parents with children in underperforming schools are more than twice as likely to express interest in switching public schools. One in 4 parents in underperforming public schools claim that they would prefer to send their child to a different public school in the same district, compared to 1 in 10 parents with children in higher performing public schools. Much the same pattern of findings applies to public schools in different districts and charter schools.

Parents who preferred that their child attend a different school were asked to name an alternative—allowing us to distinguish parents with passing interests from those with stronger commitments to new schooling options. Demand, once again, appears highest among families with chil-

Table 7
Parental Interest in Alternative Schooling Options

	<i>All Parents (%)</i>	<i>Parents With Child Attending an Underperforming School (%)</i>	<i>Parents With Child Attending a Higher Performing School (%)</i>
Prefer that child attends ^a			
Different public school in same district	14.5 (995)	23.1 (230)	10.8 (700)
Different public school in different district	15.9 (992)	18.1 (231)	15.5 (696)
Charter school	10.9 (987)	18.3 (227)	7.6 (697)
Private school	39.4 (980)	45.0 (226)	38.1 (690)
Able to name a preferred school ^b			
Different public school in same district	11.3 (995)	18.8 (230)	8.8 (700)
Charter school	7.2 (987)	12.0 (227)	5.5 (697)
Private school	26.5 (980)	31.3 (226)	26.3 (690)
Among interested parents, type of school <i>most</i> like child to attend ^c (%)			
Public school in same district	23.4	18.1	26.0
Public school in different district	5.8	6.9	5.4
Charter school	8.2	11.9	6.0
Private school	58.5	61.6	57.0
Don't know	4.1	1.5	5.6
Total	100.0 (539)	100.0 (146)	100.0 (358)

Note. The number of observations is in parentheses.

^aParents could express interest in multiple kinds of alternative schools. ^bParents who preferred to send their child to a different public school in a different district were not asked to name the school they had in mind. ^cParents had to choose one type of school for their child. Only those parents who expressed interest in at least one alternative schooling option were included in sample.

dren in underperforming schools. Parents with children in underperforming public schools are more than twice as likely to name a preferred alternative public school in their district or a charter school than are parents with children in schools that made AYP.

One schooling option more than any other, though, appears to animate parents—namely, private schools. Fully 39% of parents generally, and 45% of parents in underperforming schools, claim that “if cost were not an obstacle,” they would rather send their child to a private school than to their current public school. And a surprisingly high percentage of these parents have a particular private school in mind. Roughly one in three parents with

children in underperforming schools both prefers that her child attend a private school and is able to name a specific school on the spot, many of which are elite boarding schools.²⁴

When reflecting on private schooling options, observed differences between parents with children in higher performing and underperforming schools attenuate somewhat. Whereas parents with children in underperforming schools were twice as likely to prefer different public or charter schools, they were only 5 to 7 percentage points more likely to express interest in sending their child to a private school. Attending a public school with low test scores, it seems, does not appear to be an especially important indicator of parental interest in a private education.

Which type of school would parents “most like their child to attend”? Among parents interested in an alternative to their child’s current public school, one option stands out: private schools. On the whole, 59% of parents hold a private school in highest regard, whereas 23% selected another public school in the same district, 8% a charter school, and just 6% a public school in another district. Ironically, parents in higher performing schools (who do not qualify for NCLB’s choice options) were 8 percentage points more likely to identify another public school in their district (the one option NCLB avails) than were parents with children in underperforming schools (who do qualify for NCLB’s choice options). Moreover, parents with children in underperforming schools were slightly more likely to prefer that their child attend a public school in another district, a charter school, or a private school (all choice options unavailable under NCLB) than parents with children in higher performing public schools.

Interest in alternative schooling options has less to do with the status of a child’s school per se and more to do with the kinds of families who attend them. Take a look at Table 8, which presents results from models that estimate the probability that parents would rather their child attend an alternative public or private school. After controlling for family background characteristics, attendance at an underperforming public school appears positively, but insignificantly, related to the probability that a parent expresses interest in an alternative public school (see columns 1a–1d) or private school (columns 2a–2d). Parents of children in elementary school who

²⁴Told that “costs were not an obstacle,” most of these interested parents appeared to relish the idea of sending their child to an expensive, elite private school. Four of the top five most popular private schools identified by parents were Milton Academy, Worcester Academy, Bancroft Academy, and McDuffie, all independent schools with tuitions that eclipse the monetary values of even the most generous school vouchers offered in public and private programs around the country and have admission standards that few students can meet. Roughly one third of interested parents identified Catholic and Protestant day schools that charge considerably more modest tuitions.

Table 8

Parental Interest in Alternative Public and Private Schools, Multivariate Analyses

	<i>Interested in Public School Alternative to Current Public School</i>				<i>Interested in Private School Alternative to Current Public School</i>			
	<i>1a</i>	<i>1b</i>	<i>1c</i>	<i>1d</i>	<i>2a</i>	<i>2b</i>	<i>2c</i>	<i>2d</i>
Attend underperf. school	0.36 (0.24)	0.27 (0.25)	0.26 (0.24)	0.14 (0.25)	0.36 (0.22)	0.30 (0.24)	0.26 (0.23)	0.17 (0.24)
Satis. with own school ^a			-1.36*** (0.26)	-1.41*** (0.26)			-1.38*** (0.25)	-1.45*** (0.25)
Relative satis. ^b			0.51** (0.22)	0.70*** (0.24)			0.65*** (0.21)	0.75*** (0.22)
Parent characteristics								
African American	0.11 (0.30)	-0.07 (0.34)	0.21 (0.31)	0.01 (0.35)	-0.01 (0.30)	-0.04 (0.32)	0.05 (0.32)	0.01 (0.34)
Hispanic	0.18 (0.40)	-0.02 (0.41)	0.03 (0.47)	-0.17 (0.47)	0.89** (0.41)	0.77* (0.41)	0.84** (0.39)	0.68* (0.39)
Born in United States	-0.30 (0.27)	-0.38 (0.27)	-0.45 (0.28)	-0.54* (0.28)	-0.42 (0.26)	-0.47* (0.26)	-0.59** (0.27)	-0.65** (0.28)
Education	-0.35 (0.47)	-0.21 (0.49)	-0.06 (0.49)	0.01 (0.51)	0.57 (0.46)	0.51 (0.48)	0.92** (0.47)	0.84* (0.49)
Work full time	0.03 (0.21)	0.00 (0.23)	-0.14 (0.22)	-0.15 (0.23)	0.38* (0.20)	0.42** (0.21)	0.25 (0.21)	0.28 (0.21)
Own home	-0.49* (0.28)	-0.57* (0.29)	-0.48* (0.28)	-0.54* (0.29)	0.18 (0.27)	0.20 (0.27)	0.23 (0.27)	0.28 (0.26)
Married	0.23 (0.25)	0.42 (0.29)	0.16 (0.25)	0.34 (0.28)	-0.11 (0.24)	-0.07 (0.25)	-0.22 (0.24)	-0.17 (0.25)
Female	0.07 (0.24)	0.09 (0.24)	-0.04 (0.25)	0.00 (0.26)	0.00 (0.21)	0.00 (0.22)	-0.11 (0.22)	-0.11 (0.22)
Frequently attend RS	0.22 (0.33)	0.12 (0.36)	0.29 (0.33)	0.22 (0.36)	0.38 (0.33)	0.28 (0.34)	0.47 (0.35)	0.36 (0.35)
Catholic	-0.08 (0.28)	0.08 (0.31)	-0.02 (0.29)	0.13 (0.31)	-0.06 (0.18)	-0.22 (0.28)	-0.27 (0.27)	-0.19 (0.28)
Protestant	0.11 (0.30)	0.22 (0.32)	0.05 (0.30)	0.17 (0.32)	-0.12 (0.20)	-0.26 (0.30)	-0.43 (0.30)	-0.32 (0.30)
Child characteristics								
Special needs	-0.12 (0.20)	-0.16 (0.21)	-0.17 (0.20)	-0.22 (0.21)	0.12 (0.19)	0.16 (0.19)	0.09 (0.19)	0.11 (0.19)
Elementary school	0.56** (0.23)	0.68** (0.24)	0.59** (0.23)	0.72*** (0.25)	0.30 (0.20)	0.29 (0.21)	0.32 (0.21)	0.32 (0.21)
Boy	0.36* (0.20)	0.39* (0.21)	0.29 (0.20)	0.32 (0.21)	-0.06 (0.18)	-0.09 (0.19)	-0.14 (0.19)	-0.18 (0.19)

(continued)

Table 8 (Continued)

	<i>Interested in Public School Alternative to Current Public School</i>				<i>Interested in Private School Alternative to Current Public School</i>			
	<i>1a</i>	<i>1b</i>	<i>1c</i>	<i>1d</i>	<i>2a</i>	<i>2b</i>	<i>2c</i>	<i>2d</i>
Parental involvement								
Volunteer at school	0.09 (0.22)	0.06 (0.23)	0.13 (0.22)	0.10 (0.24)	-0.12 (0.20)	-0.15 (0.20)	-0.09 (0.20)	-0.13 (0.20)
PTA member	-0.12 (0.24)	-0.15 (0.23)	-0.10 (0.25)	-0.09 (0.24)	0.03 (0.22)	-0.04 (0.22)	0.09 (0.23)	0.00 (0.22)
Work public school	-0.35 (0.25)	-0.36 (0.24)	-0.36 (0.26)	-0.35 (0.25)	-0.06 (0.23)	-0.06 (0.24)	-0.05 (0.24)	-0.03 (0.25)
Constant	-1.03* (0.55)	-1.48** (0.68)	0.12 (0.59)	-0.35 (0.69)	-0.90* (0.52)	-0.82 (0.60)	0.20 (0.57)	0.28 (0.64)
Pseudo- <i>R</i> ²	.06	.10	.10	.14	.04	.06	.08	.10
Log-likelihood	-449.79	-430.43	-429.67	-409.11	-503.22	-494.72	-479.60	-469.20
No. of observations	781	781	781	781	781	781	781	781
District fixed effects	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes

Note. Weighted logit models estimated with robust standard errors reported in parentheses. The dependent variable in Models 1a–1d is coded 1 if respondent expressed interest in alternative public school in district, alternative public school in another district, or in alternative charter school, and zero otherwise. The dependent variable in Models 2a–2d is coded 1 if respondent expressed interest in alternative private school, and zero otherwise. All explanatory variables rescaled 0 to 1. Given high number of missing values, income not included in models; most estimates, however, appear unchanged when it is added. underperf. = underperforming; satis. = satisfaction; RS = religious services; PTA = Parent Teacher Association.

^aGive child's school an A or B. ^bGive child's school a B or lower, but community schools an A or B.

* $p < .10$, two-tailed test. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$.

do not own their own home appear especially interested in an alternative public school. Hispanics, foreign-born residents, and parents who work full time appear especially interested in sending their child to a private school.

Obviously, when considering an alternative public or private school, parents reflect on the quality of their child's and their community's schools. Columns 1c, 1d, 2c, and 2d, as such, report results from models that include two additional variables, the first of which captures parental satisfaction with their own school, and the second of which identifies parents who give a district's schools high marks relative to their child's school. Effects of both variables are highly statistically significant and in the expected direction. Parents who give their child's school an A or B are significantly less likely to express interest in an alternative public or private school. Parents who give their child's school a B or lower while giving the community's schools an A or B not surprisingly appear positively disposed to exploring alternative public and private schooling options.

On the whole, the findings on parental satisfaction have mixed implications for NCLB. On the upside, although the parental satisfaction data reveal general contentment with public schools, these data suggest that many parents nonetheless remain interested in exploring alternative schooling options. Interest also appears somewhat greater among parents with children attending underperforming public schools—precisely the people whom NCLB targets. On the downside, however, parents appear most excited about schooling options that NCLB does not afford. Parents were three to four more times more likely to identify a preferred private school than an alternative public school within their district, a different public school outside their district, or a charter school. When looking at parents' "most preferred" options, the differences are even greater. When reflecting on their child's education, what these parents claim to want most is a private education.

Criteria for Choosing

By extending new schooling opportunities to families with children in underperforming public schools, NCLB gives qualifying parents greater influence over their child's education. But whether the act should enhance parental influence is another matter entirely. For starters, when selecting among a district's public schools, qualifying parents may not abide by their child's best interests. Rather than selecting a school because of its academic strengths, parents may pay special attention to such ancillary matters as its location, racial composition, or sports teams. Furthermore, parents may fail to choose a school that is any better than the

one their child currently attends. Given that many do not know whether their child’s school made AYP, parents whose children qualify for NCLB’s choice provisions may prove incapable of assessing the quality of other district schools.

To investigate these matters, the survey asked parents to rate on a scale ranging from 1 (*not important at all*) to 10 (*extremely important*) the relative importance of nine factors when selecting a school for their child. The results are presented in Table 9. Two features of the findings deserve attention—both of which suggest a rather salutary view of parents. The first concerns the rank ordering of school characteristics. Consistent with previous survey research, quality of teaching, discipline, safety and order, and class size are far and away the most important qualities of a school to parents, whereas location, racial–ethnic composition, and the prevalence of friends are the least important (Armor & Peiser, 1998; Howell & Peterson, 2002; Moe, 2001; Schneider et al., 2000). Moderately important items, by contrast, include programs such as physical education, a school’s reputation, and extracurricular programs and sports teams.

Second, when comparing the responses of parents at higher performing and underperforming public schools, both the rating and rank ordering of factors are virtually identical. Both groups give quality of teaching and discipline average values of 9.6 and 9.4, and both rank location, ra-

Table 9

Importance of Different Factors in Parental Assessments of Schooling Options

	<i>All Parents</i>	<i>Parents With Child Attending an Underperforming School</i>	<i>Parents With Child Attending a Higher Performing School</i>
Factors			
Quality of teaching	9.6 (997)	9.6 (232)	9.6 (702)
Discipline, safety, and order	9.4 (998)	9.4 (232)	9.4 (701)
Class size	8.7 (994)	9.2 (230)	8.6 (701)
Programs such as physical education	8.3 (997)	8.4 (231)	8.3 (701)
Reputation of school	8.1 (995)	8.5 (232)	7.9 (698)
Extracurricular programs and sports teams	7.8 (987)	7.9 (230)	7.8 (694)
Distance from house	6.8 (986)	7.3 (228)	6.6 (695)
Racial/ethnic composition of school	6.2 (978)	6.6 (229)	6.2 (687)
Friends at school	5.8 (983)	5.9 (225)	5.8 (695)

Note. The number of observations is in parentheses. Items are rated on a 10-point scale, from 1 (*not important at all*) to 10 (*extremely important*).

cial-ethnic composition of schools, and friends as the least important factors when evaluating a school. The only difference—which, statistically, may be due to chance alone—concerns the relative importance of programs such as physical education (which parents of children attending schools that made AYP ranked as slightly more important) and a school's reputation (which parents of children at underperforming school deem more important). Given scholars' general skepticism of the ability of less advantaged parents to advocate on behalf of their child's educational welfare (Ascher, Fruchter, & Berne, 1996; Carnegie Foundation, 1992; Fuller, Elmore, & Orfield, 1996; Henig, 1994; Hochschild & Scovronick, 2003; Wells, 1993), these findings are especially noteworthy. When selecting schools, parents with children at underperforming schools claim to care about the same things as parents with children at higher performing schools.

To be sure, the factors parents claim to care about most may not reflect the actual choices they would make for their child. As Schneider and Buckley (2002) argued, parents' "stated preferences are often not congruent with observed parental behavior, where researchers have found significant effects of race and class" (p. 135).²⁵ Unfortunately, we do not have any outside measures of parental attitudes that allow us to verify the existence or magnitude of response bias. We do, however, know the names of the schools that parents purport to prefer, establishing some grounds for advancing this line of inquiry. Specifically, by comparing the characteristics of those schools parents prefer to those their children currently attend, we may further evaluate the capacity of parents to identify schools with students who excel academically.

The first section of Table 10 compares average Massachusetts Comprehensive Achievement System test scores of the schools that parents prefer to the scores at schools their children currently attend. Positive values indicate that preferred schools have higher average scores than current schools; negative values indicate that preferred schools have lower scores. Because only a small number of parents prefer a different public school in their district and then can name a specific institution, the findings presented in this table are based on a rather limited number of observations. These results, therefore, should be considered more suggestive than definitive.

²⁵See also Tedin and Weiher (2004) and Weiher and Tedin (2002). It should be noted, though, that the findings in Table 9 do not show that race is unimportant—only that it is less important than the other factors listed. For other studies that examine the educational priorities of parents in nonsurvey settings, see Armor and Peiser (1998), Henig (1990), and Howell (2004).

Table 10
Characteristics of Preferred Public Schools in District

	<i>All Parents</i>	<i>Parents With Child Attending an Underperforming School</i>	<i>Parents With Child Attending a Higher Performing School</i>
Differences between test scores of preferred and current public school			
Third-grade English	0.12 (57)	0.41 (29)	-0.20 (28)
Fourth-grade English	0.32 (57)	0.56 (29)	0.06 (28)
Fourth-grade math	0.33 (57)	0.62 (29)	0.00 (28)
Sixth-grade math	0.46 (26)	0.50 (10)	0.44 (16)
Differences between student bodies of preferred and current public schools			
% African American students	-2.9 (96)	-9.9 (43)	2.6 (53)
% Hispanic students	-5.5 (96)	0.6 (43)	-10.4 (53)
% White students	7.5 (96)	11.9 (43)	3.9 (53)
% students qualify free/reduced lunch	2.1 (69)	-14.9 (20)	14.5 (40)
% limited English proficiency students	-9.8 (96)	-16.0 (43)	-4.8 (53)
Total no. of enrolled students	112.7 (96)	-43.4 (43)	237.3 (53)
% naming a public school that is underperforming	26.4 (106)	44.1 (44)	15.9 (56)
% naming a charter school that is underperforming	52.0 (87)	54.2 (29)	54.7 (53)

Note. Parents who expressed interest in an alternative public school and could name the public school are included in this table. Positive values in first set of questions indicate that the preferred public school within the district that parents identify has higher test scores (expressed in standard deviations) than the public school their child attends. Positive values in the second set of questions indicate that the preferred public school has a higher percentage of students with the identified characteristic than their child’s current school. The number of observations is in parentheses.

Parents, taken as a whole, consistently identify preferred public schools that score between one tenth and one half of a standard deviation higher than their current public schools. When isolating those parents with children in underperforming schools, the observed differences are even higher, ranging between two fifths and three fifths of a standard deviation.²⁶ Given the sizable literature on peer effects (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin,

²⁶Test scores for 7th, 8th, and 10th graders are omitted given the tiny number of observations available. All values for these grade levels remain positive for both parents as a whole and parents with children in underperforming schools.

2002; Hoxby, 2002), students at underperforming schools would likely benefit from gaining access to their parents' preferred schools.

Beyond test scores, how do preferred public schools compare to the schools that children currently attend? The answer very much depends on whether a child is enrolled in an underperforming public school. Interested parents of children who qualify for NCLB's choice provisions identify schools with lower proportions of African Americans, low-income students, and students with limited English proficiency, and higher proportions of White students. They also select schools that are slightly smaller, on average, than the schools their child currently attends. Among students with children in higher performing schools, minor differences are observed with respect to the percentage of Hispanic, White, African American, and students with limited English proficiency. Such parents, however, do choose schools with lower proportions of Hispanic students and higher proportions of low-income students. They also tend to express interest in larger schools than those their children currently attend.

But take a look at the last two rows of Table 10. When asked to name a specific public or charter school that they would prefer their child attend, a remarkably high percentage of interested parents actually selected other underperforming schools—an option that NCLB forbids. Fully one in four parents selected a public school that is deemed underperforming, and one in two selected a charter school that failed to make AYP. Although parents with children in higher performing and underperforming public school are equally likely to select a charter school that failed to make AYP, striking differences emerge when parents choose among a district's public schools. Parents with children in underperforming schools are almost three times as likely to select another underperforming school as are parents with children in higher performing public schools. Using NCLB's evaluative criteria, fully 44% of parents who qualify for choice want to send their child to another school that is no better—again, as measured by state standards—than the one their child currently attends.

Two basic findings stand out here, and both speak positively of parents whose children are enrolled in underperforming public schools. First, although parents who qualify for NCLB's choice provisions navigate their educational landscape with less information, they nonetheless purport to care about the same features of schools—foremost among them being academics—as parents whose children attend higher performing public schools. Second, when selecting an alternative public school for their child, interested parents in underperforming schools consistently identify schools with more advantaged and higher performing students. To be sure, many of the chosen schools themselves failed to make AYP. And without data on the quality of the teachers or the resources at these institu-

tions, it is difficult to assess whether the schools themselves are any better. But even if we accept the premise that preferred schools may not offer to their students a more impressive bundle of services, these schools nonetheless have managed to attract students with higher test scores—and parents, it seems, would like for these students to be peers to their child.

Section 4: Conclusions

There are ample reasons for criticizing NCLB and state determinations of AYP standards. Because NCLB does not account for student mobility patterns in AYP determinations, the act may hold schools accountable for students who attended them for brief periods of time. By tracking the performance of multiple subgroups, NCLB wisely draws attention to the performance of disadvantaged groups. However, by insisting that schools demonstrate AYP for different subpopulations and not just students overall, the act is predisposed to reward racially homogeneous schools and to punish heterogeneous ones. And by measuring student achievement strictly, and solely, on the basis of standardized tests, NCLB may disregard important aspects of student learning.

This article deliberately sets such complaints aside and instead attempts to discern how parents are navigating an expanding education marketplace. The survey results reveal considerable interest in new public and private schooling options, especially among parents whose children attend underperforming public schools. Although parents who qualify for NCLB's choice provisions give their schools high marks, they nonetheless appear less satisfied than parents with children in higher performing schools; they are more likely to prefer to send their child to an alternative public, charter, or private school; and most have in mind a specific school that they would prefer their child attend. Furthermore, when choosing among alternative schools, parents with children in underperforming schools consistently identify institutions whose students score higher on standardized tests.

Given such interest, why have so few parents transferred schools under NCLB? General awareness of NCLB does not appear to be a problem. Large margins of parents generally, and parents with children in underperforming schools specifically, claim to have heard of the act and its choice provisions. Instead, knowledge about how the law works and who qualifies for new educational opportunities may represent a contributing factor. Only one of every four parents with children in underperforming Massachusetts public schools successfully identified the school's status and hence grasped the most basic information required to take advantage

of NCLB's choice and supplemental services provisions. Whether the onus of blame lies with parents or schools, information—at least in 2003, when this study's survey was conducted—simply is not getting to those individuals who most need it.

Such problems, I suspect, do not uniquely apply to the parents included in this particular survey. NCLB participation rates in Massachusetts are not especially different from nationwide trends, and neither is the state's reliance on other choice programs, such as charter schools, intradistrict choice programs, and magnet schools. On the contrary, the long and rich history of public education in Massachusetts ought to buttress parents' commitment to and knowledge about public schools. These realities, combined with the fact that the survey itself included a disproportionately high percentage of well-educated parents, suggests that the main findings presented herein may actually overstate parental knowledge about NCLB.

To raise awareness of NCLB's accountability system and thereby augment the chances that more students will seize on its educational benefits, two simple policy changes should be implemented. First, state and federal governments should not rely on districts to disseminate information about which schools have made AYP and about which students hence qualify for transfers and supplemental services. To avoid the disruptions that accompany parental demands for new schooling options and to retain all of their Title I funding, districts have strong incentives to conceal or obfuscate their failures, discourage public discussions about NCLB choice options, and make it as difficult as possible for parents to actually seize on them.²⁷ Given as much, state and federal governments need to find ways to communicate directly with parents. Second, when disseminating information about NCLB, special accommodations must be made on behalf of non-English-speaking families. The poor knowledge revealed among parents of children attending underperforming schools was matched only by foreign-born parents and parents lacking proficiency in English. Only one in three parents born outside of the United States, and one in four parents of a limited-English-proficiency child, knew whether their school was underperforming.²⁸ If these families are to benefit from NCLB's choice opportunities, state and federal governments must find ways of effectively communicating with them.

Encouragingly, the federal government and state boards of education, both independently and in partnership with nonprofit organizations, have

²⁷For more on these problems, see Hess and Finn (2004).

²⁸Given the survey's undersampling of Hispanics, these findings probably overestimate the levels of knowledge of NCLB among foreign-born families and those whose English proficiency is limited.

begun to disseminate information about NCLB's choice provisions. Web sites that catalogue school test scores and explain the educational options available to parents now are commonplace. Organizations such as the Hispanic Council for Reform and Educational Options, Black Alliance for Educational Options, Public Education Network, Education Trust, and National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education have mounted community outreach campaigns to inform low-income and minority families about NCLB's choice and supplemental service provisions and to help them interpret the school achievement data that districts release. And the U.S. Department of Education has released a series of guides intended to inform parents about their rights and opportunities under NCLB.

The recent increase in students receiving tutoring services under NCLB would suggest that these efforts are paying dividends. Still, considerable work remains. Current efforts to advertise the choice provisions of NCLB are, for the most part, sporadic and poorly funded; for most parents, school districts remain the primary conduits of information about NCLB. In addition, some problems are not going to be solved simply through advertising alone. Although rising numbers of children are taking advantage of NCLB's supplemental services, few are seizing on the school choice provisions—and for reasons that extend beyond limitations in parental information to include the restricted array of choices available to students attending underperforming schools.²⁹ If choice is to catch fire, as many of NCLB advocates hope, parents must be granted a wider array of schooling options than the law currently affords.³⁰

If the choice and supplemental services provisions of NCLB are to introduce new competitive pressures to public education and to empower parents—especially minority and disadvantaged parents—in shaping the educational lives of their children, then policymakers must stay carefully attuned to families' knowledge of and interest in the opportunities they present. For choice to flourish, states must do more than introduce new schooling options to targeted populations. They must ensure that the options presented are the options that parents want and then that parents

²⁹If participation rates in intradistrict choice programs are to increase by any substantial margin, parents with children at underperforming public schools must be allowed to select any other public school in their district and not just those public schools that made AYP. Almost 50% of qualifying and interested parents claimed that they preferred another underperforming public school, and none of the findings presented in this article suggest that these parents were not misguided in doing so.

³⁰Still, another more practical concern supports this policy recommendation. As Massachusetts schools are held accountable for the test scores of subpopulations of students, the list of underperforming schools will undoubtedly rise. This further limits the number of schools that can accept student transfers.

learn about their existence and have the information needed to take advantage of them. Should parental choice become a defining feature of the educational landscape, extra efforts to advertise new educational opportunities may no longer be required. Until then, policymakers need to find innovative ways of reaching populations that, for the most part, are not especially accustomed to choosing among different schooling options for their children.

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Appendix

Table A1
Summary Statistics

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Indicator Variable</i>
Attend underperforming school	0.25	0.44	*
Correctly identify school status	0.49	0.50	*
Correctly identify principal	0.52	0.50	*
Correctly identify school size	0.40	0.49	*
Give own school A grade	0.36	0.48	*
Give districts schools A grade	0.15	0.35	*
Interested in public school alternative	0.31	0.46	*
Interested in private school alternative	0.39	0.49	*
African American	0.17	0.38	*
Hispanic	0.07	0.25	*
Born in United States	0.83	0.38	*
Education	0.46	0.23	—
Work full time	0.67	0.47	*
Own home	0.77	0.42	*
Married	0.77	0.42	*
Female	0.75	0.43	*
Frequently attend religious services	0.53	0.32	—
Catholic	0.47	0.50	*
Protestant	0.24	0.43	*
Special needs	0.42	0.49	*
Elementary school	0.63	0.48	*
Boy	0.57	0.49	*
Volunteer at school	0.48	0.50	*
Parent Teacher Association member	0.38	0.49	*
Work public school	0.20	0.40	*

Note. All variables scaled 0–1; hence, mean values for indicator variables reveal the proportion of $Y = 1$. * = indicator variable; — = continuous variable.

Table A2

Parental Knowledge of Availability of Other Choice Options in District

	<i>Intradistrict Choice Programs</i>		<i>Interdistrict Choice Programs</i>		<i>Charter School Options</i>	
	<i>1a</i>	<i>1b</i>	<i>2a</i>	<i>2b</i>	<i>3a</i>	<i>3b</i>
Attends underperforming school	-0.02 (0.23)	-0.03 (0.25)	0.03 (0.22)	0.06 (0.24)	0.92*** (0.34)	0.66 (0.42)
Parent characteristics						
African American	-0.44 (0.32)	-0.76** (0.36)	0.42 (0.31)	0.43 (0.34)	0.23 (0.38)	0.21 (0.39)
Hispanic	-0.23 (0.43)	-0.25 (0.44)	0.02 (0.41)	-0.07 (0.40)	-0.34 (0.54)	-0.49 (0.67)
Born in United States	-0.10 (0.30)	-0.23 (0.30)	-0.02 (0.27)	-0.16 (0.28)	1.20*** (0.33)	1.37*** (0.35)
Education	-0.68 (0.50)	-0.55 (0.55)	-0.01 (0.46)	-0.03 (0.49)	0.82 (0.60)	1.02 (0.65)
Work full time	0.10 (0.21)	0.13 (0.21)	0.44** (0.19)	0.49** (0.20)	0.15 (0.29)	0.27 (0.31)
Own home	0.52** (0.27)	0.45 (0.28)	-0.09 (0.24)	-0.13 (0.26)	0.28 (0.35)	0.12 (0.42)
Married	-0.34 (0.28)	-0.38 (0.29)	0.34 (0.23)	0.44* (0.25)	0.30 (0.30)	0.61 (0.39)
Female	0.29 (0.23)	0.33 (0.25)	0.03 (0.21)	0.02 (0.23)	-0.02 (0.32)	0.08 (0.31)
Frequently attend religious services	0.13 (0.33)	0.09 (0.34)	0.24 (0.33)	0.15 (0.33)	0.20 (0.45)	-0.12 (0.47)
Catholic	-0.32 (0.36)	-0.32 (0.28)	-0.08 (0.25)	0.05 (0.27)	0.69** (0.35)	0.72* (0.39)
Protestant	0.27 (0.31)	0.17 (0.32)	0.05 (0.29)	0.09 (0.30)	0.60* (0.34)	0.37 (0.37)

Child characteristics												
Special needs	-0.04	(0.20)	-0.12	(0.21)	0.31*	(0.18)	0.27	(0.19)	-0.19	(0.26)	-0.19	(0.27)
Elementary school	0.64***	(0.20)	0.77***	(0.22)	-0.35*	(0.19)	-0.30	(0.21)	-0.18	(0.29)	-0.41	(0.30)
Boy	-0.04	(0.20)	0.06	(0.21)	0.03	(0.18)	0.08	(0.19)	-0.41	(0.26)	-0.45	(0.28)
Parental involvement												
Volunteer at school	0.03	(0.21)	0.08	(0.21)	-0.08	(0.19)	0.05	(0.21)	0.22	(0.27)	0.40	(0.30)
Parent Teacher Association member	0.01	(0.22)	0.26	(0.24)	0.14	(0.21)	0.09	(0.23)	0.38	(0.28)	0.48	(0.33)
Work public school district	-0.21	(0.25)	-0.31	(0.25)	0.35	(0.23)	0.41*	(0.23)	0.68*	(0.37)	0.58	(0.41)
Constant	0.49	(0.51)	-0.82	(0.64)	-0.90*	(0.50)	-0.61	(0.58)	-1.11	(0.68)	-2.76***	(0.86)
Pseudo-R ²	.04		.14		.03		.09		.10		.22	
Log-likelihood	-475.71		-424.74		-521.21		-491.19		-290.93		-263.15	
No. of observations	781		781		781		781		695		667	
District fixed effects included	No		Yes		No		Yes		No		Yes	

Note. Weighted logit models estimated with robust standard errors reported in parentheses. The dependent variable is coded 1 if respondent correctly identified whether her district offered an intradistrict public school choice program (Models 1a and 1b), an interdistrict program (2a and 2b), or charter schools (3a and 3b), and 0 otherwise. All explanatory variables rescaled 0 to 1. Given high number of missing values, income not included in models; most estimates, however, appear unchanged when it is added.

* $p < .10$, two-tailed test. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$.

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