

Fwd:

Arresting Insights in Education

Subject:

Where Do Public School Teachers Send *Their* Kids to School?

By: Denis P. Doyle, Brian Diepold, and David A. DeSchryver

Does it matter where public-school teachers send their own children to school? If so, how and why? What can we learn from them?

Urban public school teachers are more likely than either urban households or the general public to send their children to private schools.

What we are grappling with here is the question of *connoisseurship*. Stock analysts, for example, watch carefully when corporate directors buy or sell the stock of companies on whose boards they serve.

Similarly, we can assume that no one

knows the condition and quality of public schools better than teachers who work in them every day. Teachers, it is reasonable to assume, care about education, are reasonably expert about it, and possess quite a lot of information about the schools in which they teach. If these teachers are more likely than the general public (which may not have nearly as much information or expertise in these matters) to

send their own daughters and sons to the public schools in which they teach, it is a strong vote of confidence in those schools. If they do not, then we might reasonably conclude that those in the best position to know are signaling a strong “sell” about public education in their communities.

Joel Klein, the New York City schools chancellor, exemplifies the point when he asks, “To how many schools (in New York City or elsewhere) would you send your own children?” The shorter the list of responses, the more devastating the indictment: that public education in many of our large cities is “broken.” The fix? Choice, in part. To be sure, Chancellor Klein is not talking about education vouchers, but he is talking about meaningful choice, a reform strategy that represents strong medicine to a culture that is notoriously bureaucratic and cautious.

A Naturally Occurring Experiment

Because of the availability of fine-grained census data and the power of modern computing, the question of where teachers send their children



to school is one that has had at least a tentative answer for two decades.

The story begins in 1983 with a *Detroit Free Press* survey that revealed that Michigan public-school teachers were twice as likely as the public at large to send their children to private school. Fascinated by this information, a colleague at Northwestern University shared a copy of the *Chicago Reporter*, which followed civil rights activities in its home town.

The Chicago numbers were startling: 46 percent of that city's public school teachers (compared to 22 percent of Chicagoans in general) sent their children to private schools. Even more interesting was the human-interest part of the story. The *Reporter* found a bustling private Montessori school on the South Side that enrolled so many children of public school teachers that parent/teacher conferences were held on public school holidays!

That was news.

With the example of the *Chicago Reporter*, we turned to the 1980 Census data and produced a monograph, *Where Public School Teachers Send Their Children to School: A Preliminary Analysis* (Denis P. Doyle and Terry W. Hartle, American Enterprise Institute, 1986). By the time the 1990 data became available in 1993, the 5 percent sample code books reported that similar information would be available—this time for all states and the hundred largest cities in the U.S. As it happened, the code books were wrong; the numbers only showed up in the 2 percent sample, too small for our purposes. So we engaged the Census to do a special run of the 5 percent sample. Those data arrived mid-Fall 1994 on three discs and 400 pages of printout. Not until April 1995 was the hand posting completed and we were able to issue *Where Connoisseurs Send Their Children to School* (The Center for Education Reform, 1995).

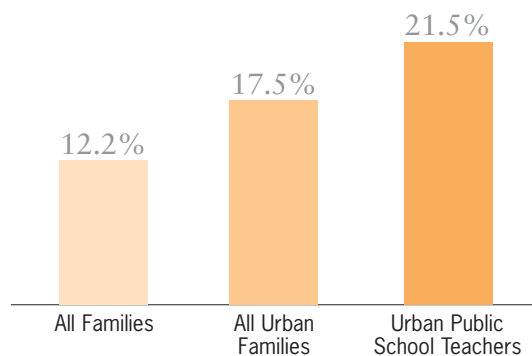
The 2000 Census numbers are more accessible,

though difficulties continue. As discussed in the methodological notes below, comparing Census tracts with city boundaries is not a perfect science and there is no straightforward way to deal with the school district as the unit of analysis. Still, much of interest can be learned from this analysis.

What Do the Numbers Show?

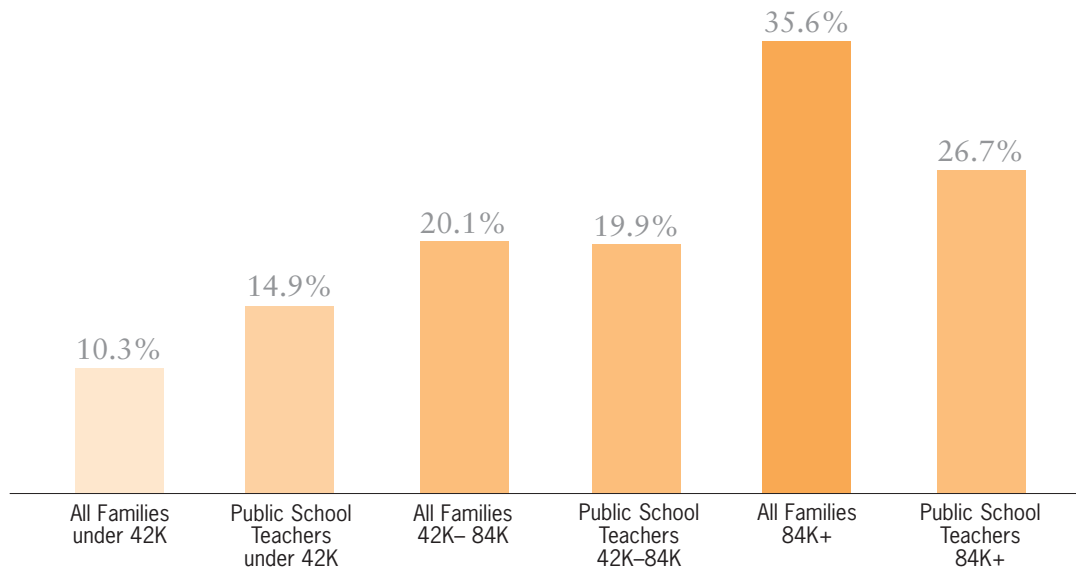
The data again show that urban public school teachers are more likely than either urban households or the general public to send their children to private schools. Across the states, 12.2 percent of all families (urban, rural, and suburban) send their children to private schools—a figure that roughly corresponds to perennial and well-known data on the proportion of U.S. children enrolled in private schools. But urban public school teachers send their children to private schools at a rate of 21.5 percent, nearly double the national rate of private-school attendance. Urban public school teachers are also more likely to send their children to private school than are urban families in general (21.5 vs. 17.5 percent).

Private School Enrollment, nationwide



Strikingly, urban public school teacher households earning less than \$42,000 a year (approximately the median national income) send their children to private school at a rate of 14.9 percent, a rate 4.6 percentage points

Private School Enrollment, by household income



higher than the private-school enrollment rate of all families at similar income levels (10.3 percent). Simply put, as income decreases, a greater percentage of urban public school teachers choose private schools. Perhaps that's not surprising: especially among relatively low-income families, urban teachers are unusually well educated and especially apt to value education. Still, it's noteworthy that, even when the financial sacrifice required for private education is greater, urban public school teachers still choose private schools for their children at higher rates than urban families with similar incomes.

When comparing all teachers and all families in Table 1 (see page 4), another notable trend appears: the average differential in the biggest cities where public school teachers choose private school at a rate greater than all urban families is greater than the average differential in cities where the opposite is true. That is, the average spread between the "Public School Teachers" and "All Families" rates of private schooling is 9.1 points in the 29 cities where public school teachers' use of private schooling outpaces the rate among all urban families. In

the 21 cities where public school teachers lag behind all urban families in private school usage, the average spread is only -3.6 points. (The average sample size is similar for both city groupings.) This is interesting because it is reasonable to assume that teachers are in a better position to assess the condition of their district's public schools. When they do act, it's more decisively than the "all family" average, which suggests that they may be acting from information not readily available to the average family. Put another way: it is evidence of connoisseurship in action.

To many analysts, pundits, and politicians, these findings are surprising, and of course they are apt to be embarrassing for teacher unions, considering those organizations' political animus toward assisting families to select among schools. But these results do not surprise most practicing teachers to whom we speak; they know from personal experience that many of their colleagues make such a choice, and do so for good and sufficient reasons.

What are those reasons? They are many, some elevated, some ordinary, some quixotic, some

Table 1:
Private School Enrollment for All Families and Public School Teachers, by top 50 cities

Rank	City	All Families	Public School Teachers	Public School Teacher/ All Families Differential
49	Rochester, NY	14.6	37.5	22.9
38	Nashville, TN	7.2	28.6	21.4
44	Hartford-Bristol-Middleton- New Britain, CT	7.0	25.0	18.0
24	Cincinnati-Hamilton, OH/KY/IN	24.4	41.2	16.8
3	Chicago, IL	22.6	38.7	16.1
32	Providence-Fall River-Pawtucket, MA/RI	16.5	31.3	14.7
19	Baltimore, MD	20.9	35.1	14.3
4	Philadelphia, PA/NJ	30.9	43.8	12.8
22	Denver-Boulder, CO	12.6	23.3	10.7
13	Riverside-San Bernadino, CA	9.1	19.3	10.2
1	New York-Northeastern NJ	22.7	32.5	9.8
43	Jacksonville, FL	18.6	28.0	9.4
12	San Francisco-Oakland-Vallejo, CA	25.2	34.3	9.1
6	Miami-Hialeah, FL	16.3	25.3	9.0
2	Los Angeles-Long Beach, CA	15.7	24.5	8.9
45	Buffalo-Niagara Falls, NY	20.0	27.6	7.6
25	Portland, OR-WA	12.7	20.0	7.3
7	Washington, DC	19.8	26.8	7.0
11	Boston, MA-NH	21.7	28.2	6.4
36	Milwaukee, WI	23.4	29.4	6.0
10	Detroit, MI	12.8	18.5	5.7
26	Sacramento, CA	10.0	15.2	5.2
40	New Orleans, LA	24.5	29.1	4.7
	United States Total (for Cities)	17.5	21.5	4.0
41	Memphis, TN/AR/MS	12.4	15.7	3.3
31	Columbus, OH	14.0	17.0	3.0
21	Pittsburgh, PA	13.4	14.9	1.5
14	Phoenix, AZ	8.2	9.2	1.0
33	Norfolk-VA Beach-Newport News, VA	12.6	13.6	1.0
35	Las Vegas, NV	6.7	7.2	0.6
27	Kansas City, MO-KS	17.3	17.1	-0.2
46	Richmond-Petersburg, VA	17.5	16.7	-0.8
8	Houston-Brazoria, TX	9.9	9.0	-0.9
17	San Diego, CA	10.4	9.3	-1.1
16	Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN	17.5	16.3	-1.2
20	Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater, FL	15.1	13.4	-1.8
50	Salt Lake City-Ogden, UT	7.2	5.2	-2.0
30	San Jose, CA	16.6	14.1	-2.5
28	San Antonio, TX	11.6	8.6	-2.9
5	Dallas-Fort Worth, TX	10.7	7.6	-3.1
34	Indianapolis, IN	14.5	11.1	-3.4
15	Seattle-Everett, WA	22.0	18.6	-3.4
9	Atlanta, GA	11.6	7.8	-3.8
18	St. Louis, MO-IL	20.4	16.5	-3.9
23	Cleveland, OH	19.9	16.0	-3.9
39	Austin, TX	10.0	6.0	-4.0
48	Birmingham, AL	13.1	8.7	-4.4
29	Orlando, FL	14.2	9.6	-4.7
47	Oklahoma City, OK	10.5	1.7	-8.8
37	Charlotte-Gastonia-Rock Hill, NC-SC	16.2	7.1	-9.1
42	Louisville, KY/IN	24.7	15.2	-9.5

banal. But they all share this: A school of choice—whether it is a well-heeled suburban public school, an urban private school, a charter school, or a traditional private school—is self-evidently *better* to the family that selects it, in precisely the way that any other choice is better, be it political, social, cultural, religious, or commercial.

What is the Import?

Is where teachers send their own children to school of importance, in the worlds of either policy or practice? It helps to frame the data in time and place.

Milwaukee, Wisconsin provides an example. The Census numbers reveal that 29.4 percent of public school teachers in the “City of Festivals” sent their children to private school in 2000 (Table 1). That is more than Milwaukee’s “All Families” rate (23.4 percent) and the “All Cities” rates of private schooling for all families and all public school teachers (17.5 percent and 21.5 percent). But narrow the search to teachers making less than \$42,000 and the percentage enrolling their children in private schools drops to 10 percent, lower than Milwaukee’s All Families average for households of similar income (16.0 percent) and the multi-city averages for all families and all public school teachers at that income level. This decline bucks the general trend of public school teachers making less than \$42,000 being more likely to avail themselves of private options for their child’s schooling.

What explanations can we posit? Because Milwaukee is a hotbed of school reform, it’s possible that teachers making less than \$42,000 are beginning to favor the public school system. (If so, it might be evidence that choice is having the intended effect of spurring improvements in public education there.) Or perhaps the emergence of charters has provided another free option to lower-income teachers who might otherwise choose

private schooling. We do know that the data are a snapshot of policies that were just gathering momentum in 1999. The city was then in its ninth year of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (aka vouchers) but only the second year of participation by religious schools. In fact, the 23.4 percent private schooling rate for all families in Milwaukee might be significantly lower were it not for that city’s 14-year-old private school choice program. The program is limited to low-income families, most of whom would not otherwise be able to afford private schools. In 1998-1999, 86 schools participated in the program serving 6,050 students, but most parents sent their children to one of 18 participating schools and private school enrollment was actually on the decrease, according to reports from the Public Policy Forum. The city’s first charter school, the Highland Community School, did not open until 1996, and in 1997 there were only two charter schools serving 55 students. At that time the Wisconsin Legislature passed a law allowing for additional authorizing agencies in Milwaukee, including the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee. The year 1999 saw the opening of a slew of new charter schools.

The value of the data, then, is in the context of the city’s growing school choice program and the impact of those debates and policies upon the choice of public school connoisseurs, or teachers.

Where Should the Research Go?

The data have shown the same basic pattern since we first happened upon them two decades ago: Urban public school teachers are more apt to send their own children to private schools than is the general public. One might say this shows how conservative teachers are. They continue doing what they’ve always done. Or it might indicate that they have long been discerning connoisseurs of education.

Even when the financial sacrifice is greater, urban public school teachers under the median national income still choose private schools at higher rates than similar urban families.

What may be the more interesting question for the future, then, is to uncover the number of teachers who live in suburban enclaves, capitalizing on geography as a way to find quality schools. This is an important issue because they, too, are part of the substantial, continuing exodus of the middle class—of all races and ethnicities—from central city to

suburb. It is not just the middle class that is leaving our cities, but *middle-class parents and their children*. Gentrification continues in many U.S. cities but it is largely restricted to childless couples, both young and old, and upper-income parents who are confident that they can find either an acceptable public school—including charter schools—or an affordable private school for their own

children. (In fact, many have argued that expanding school choice might actually reverse the demographic flow and bring more middle class families back into the central city, because they would no longer be required to enroll their children in decrepit urban public schools.)

The middle class will tolerate a lot—disorder, decay, and dismay, an unwholesome environment, petty crime, potholes, chicanery, and rudeness. One thing, however, that middle class parents will not tolerate is bad schools for their children. To escape them, they will pay out-of-pocket or vote with their feet. That is what discerning teachers do and the rest of the public, we believe, is simply modeling their behavior.

One would hope that teacher organizations would finally come to terms with the reality that many of their members have the intellectual energy and personal courage to act on their knowledge: some schools are better than others. It behooves all of us to know the difference and try to understand why and how that knowledge might be shared with others and translated into sound public policy for all.

Notes on Methodology

As commanded by the Constitution, every 10 years, the U.S. government undertakes a Census of the population. The 5 percent PUMS (Public Use Microdata Sample) data set is available in two media.

Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs) are the smallest unit within the PUMS. The PUMS data set provides access to answers from several hundred questions asked on the Census Long Form questionnaire. Because the Census Bureau must protect the privacy of individuals in the sample, one method is publishing the PUMS data in PUMAs, which are areas no smaller than 100,000 in population.

Standard Census data (summary files with information on the entire population) are published for many geographic levels, the smallest being the block group. The block groups are then combined to form Census tracts, which can be combined to form Census places, cities, counties, states, and other geographic distinctions. The Census cannot publish the information on small geographic levels such as block groups or tracts due to privacy laws.

Unlike the standard Census data, the PUMS data are not published with the same detail. As a result, combining PUMAs is not as perfect a science as combining block groups or tracts. Some PUMAs fall entirely within the political boundaries of a city, others lie partially within the city and partially outside. Therefore, some cities are better defined than others using the PUMS data.

The cities referenced in this paper are defined in two ways. This was necessary because the PUMAs do not seem to equal the political boundaries of cities, with a few exceptions such as Washington, D.C. The Census has defined each PUMA as belonging to a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). The Census has also defined each PUMA as located in the central city if the entire PUMA is within the central city boundaries; located outside the central city if the entire PUMA is outside the city boundaries; or “unknown” for PUMAs that include areas inside and outside city boundaries. Subsequently, each household within a PUMA is assigned the same MSA and the same central city status. From this information, we are able to define the cities based on the MSA and the central city status.

Approximately two-thirds of the cities are defined strictly by cross referencing the MSA with those households located in the central city. Unfortunately, this was an imperfect method for cities where all or most of the PUMAs that make up the city were unknown (or mixed). For the remaining cities that fall into this category, they are defined by cross referencing the MSA with those households that are both located in the central city or unknown (mixed). This is imperfect, too, because it includes a portion of households that are outside the city boundaries in the “city” for the purposes of reporting data. The danger is in the interpretation of these cities. We can expect the statistics to be skewed away from traditional city averages towards national averages based on the inclusion of a portion of suburban population in the “city” reporting. The alternative was either to not represent these cities at all or to have sample sizes too small to yield relevant results.

Several cities in the tables are “perfectly” defined. Those, such as Baltimore, that are independent of any county governance can be defined by the sum of the PUMAs that make up those cities. This can be seen on the PUMA

maps that the Census has posted on its web site at <http://www.Census.gov/geo/www/maps/puma5pct.htm>.

Unfortunately, most cities are not defined by their political boundaries on the Census PUMA maps. The maps delineate PUMAs, Super-PUMAs (minimum of 400,000 population), counties, and states. This leads to the suggestion that other data users better define cities. It is possible to use the Census PUMA maps and overlay the actual political boundaries of cities. Doing so would allow the analyst to determine which PUMAs make up a given city. There still would remain the problem of PUMAs that overlap political boundaries, but it would allow data users to pick PUMAs to include in the definition of the city based on their own perception of the best approximation of each city.

For those who are interested in exploring further the issue of PUMA and city definitions using the PUMS data, go to <http://www.Census.gov/geo/www/maps/puma5pct.htm>. For complete technical documentation of the PUMS data, visit <http://www.Census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/pums.pdf>.

A Note on Sample Size

We find it instructive to give an example of how quickly our questions reduce the population. Take, for example, the oft-used example of Rhode Island. The Ocean State has 408,424 “occupied housing units.” The 5 percent sample for Rhode Island represents approximately one-twentieth of all households, or 20,241. The national average of teachers with children as a percent of households is 2 percent. Therefore, approximately two percent of the 20,241 households in the Rhode Island sample are teachers with children, or 408.

This report produced over 40 city and state tables. For more information and for copies of the tables and sample sizes, please contact the authors. ■

About the Authors:

Denis Philip Doyle

(denis@schoolnet.com), analyst, writer, and speaker, is one of the nation's leading authorities on business and education and author or co-author of numerous books and articles. His many credits include three books about education with noted CEOs. He is the co-founder and chief academic officer of SchoolNet, Inc. a Web-enabled school improvement company.

Brian Diepold

(bdiepold@yahoo.com) is an economist who specializes in applied economic analysis and is a Ph.D. candidate in economics at American University. His primary areas of interest are industrial organization with an international

perspective, financial economics, and economic policy

David Alan DeSchryver

(ddeschryver@schoolnet.com) is an academic specialist with SchoolNet, where he works with district clients to implement data-driven-decision making and facilitate merging technology and education content. He is also managing editor of *The Doyle Report*, an online journal that covers the crossroads of education policy and technology.

The authors and the Fordham Institute wish to thank the American Education Reform Council for its generous support.

Fwd: is an occasional series of essays, short studies, and articles of interest on K-12 education reform, sent to you by the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation and the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. Want to know more about us? Surf to www.edexcellence.net and sign up for *The Education Gadfly*, our weekly email brief. You can also talk back to us at backtalk@edexcellence.net.

The Thomas B. Fordham Foundation and Thomas B. Fordham Institute are nonprofit organizations that conduct research, issue publications, and engage in action projects in elementary/secondary education reform nationally and in Dayton, Ohio. Neither is connected with or sponsored by Fordham University. The opinions expressed in Fwd: are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Foundation or Institute, their staff, trustees, or supporters.



1627 K Street, NW
Suite 600
Washington, D.C. 20006
tel 202 223-5452
fax 202 223-9226
www.edexcellence.net