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LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

Understanding Catholic School Attrition:
Catholic Elementary School Students' and Parents' Perceptions and Matriculation Decisions

by

Thomas Gasper

A dissertation presented to the Faculty of the School of Education,
Loyola Marymount University,
in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Education

2021

Understanding Catholic School Attrition:
Catholic Elementary School Students' and Parents' Perceptions and Matriculation Decisions

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By

Thomas Gasper

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School of Education
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This dissertation written by Thomas Gasper, under the direction of the Dissertation Committee, is approved and accepted by all committee members, in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this to my family: to my parents whose commitment and leadership in education first inspired me to serve; to my wife Diane whose faith in God and me has inspired my continued leadership and scholarship in Catholic education; to my children Grace and Tommy who I pray will continue to be inspired in their pursuit of knowledge, most especially of God's love for them.

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ABSTRACT

Understanding Catholic School Attrition:
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This mixed methods study shed light on the issue of attrition within Catholic education and points to opportunities for leaders to improve the effectiveness of elementary and secondary schools as well as identify barriers impacting access to poor and vulnerable populations. The purpose was to: describe factors eighth-grade Catholic school students and their parents consider in choosing a high school; determine correlations between degree of satisfaction with Catholic elementary schools and perceptions of programs in Catholic high schools; and understand the extent students' and parents' identified attributes corresponded to their high school selection.

Quantitative data was generated from surveys of a proportionally stratified sample of 610 eighth-grade students and parents from 25 Catholic elementary schools in Los Angeles County. Qualitative data was yielded from follow up interviews of nine parents whose graduating children were not matriculating to a Catholic high school.

Statistically significant differences in the importance of factors were found between parent and student, among participant ethnicity, and among family income level. While expense was the primary reason for not attending a Catholic high school, it was most often in combination with at least one of several other reasons. Strong correlation between satisfaction of elementary school and perceptions of high school was prevalent among participants, particularly

parents and those matriculating to private and public high schools. With attrition found to be highest among students of color, lower middle-income families, and girls, recommendations for school improvement practices and collaboration with diocesan, higher education, and foundation leaders are presented.

CHAPTER 1

Background

Enrollment in Catholic schools across the nation has dropped continually for the past five decades. In 1960, 5.25 million students attended Catholic elementary and secondary schools in the United States. Other than from 1990 to 2000, there has been a steady drop in enrollment for the past 60 years. In that same time period, overall student enrollment has dropped by 69%. In the past ten years, from 2010 to 2020, the U.S. Catholic school system decreased by almost half a million students representing a 23.3% decrease (National Catholic Educational Association [NCEA], 2021a).

A problematic cause and effect associated with this enrollment drop is the increased costs associated with running effective Catholic schools. While many factors contribute to the rising cost of education, for Catholic schools, which historically relied on a strong workforce of religious sisters, brothers, and priests to both teach and serve as administrators, the costs associated with paying lay faculty and staff salary and benefits have impacted the sustainability of schools unable to charge substantially higher tuition (Garnett, 2013; Ospino & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2016; Zehr, 2005).

The proposition of having to pay significantly more to attend Catholic schools has coincided with a decline in religious affiliation among Catholics in the United States. While there are more than enough Catholic families to fully enroll Catholic schools (Ospino & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2016), the societal pattern of secularization also encourages many of those families to not prioritize faith formation to the same extent that families did at the height of Catholic school enrollment. Finally, for many young people and families there are other issues related to the

Church's traditional values and structures in addition to contemporary scandals that contribute to their disaffiliation with the Catholic faith (McCarty & Vitek, 2017).

A significant impediment to Catholic school enrollment has been the introduction of public school choice. Research shows that public charter schools have drawn a large number of students not only from other public schools, but also from Catholic schools by promoting themselves as creating similar communities steeped in value, structure, and high achievement (Lackman, 2013; Song, 2012; Toma et al., 2006). For many families who do not have the resources to spend on Catholic schools or who see the need for faith formation to a lesser degree, charter schools seem like an attractive alternative.

As a result of these significant drops in enrollment and increased costs associated with running Catholic schools, many schools reached a tipping point in which they could no longer operate and were closed by parishes or dioceses. With just under 6,000 Catholic elementary and secondary schools in 2020, more than half have closed since 1960 when nearly 13,000 schools were in operation (NCEA, 2021a). In many cases, the majority of the schools that closed primarily served students of color from lower-income families (Zehr, 2005).

Catholic schools have consistently shown great success in educating at-risk students from minoritized populations (Bryk et al., 1993; Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Coleman et al., 1982; Greeley, 1982). Catholic social teaching calls people and institutions to go to the margins to meet and serve God's people. When Catholic schools close in underserved neighborhoods, in addition to the lost opportunities to create access for those students, there is often negative impact to the local community, so the adverse impact on the vulnerable spirals exponentially (Brinig & Garnett, 2012). A significant number of the remaining Catholic schools tend to primarily serve

relatively wealthier populations which conflicts with Catholic social teaching as well as the priorities of the Catholic Church's contemporary leader, Pope Francis (Esteves, 2015).

Statement of the Problem

With so many Catholic schools at risk of closure and the edging out of underserved populations, much attention is given to families who have never enrolled in Catholic education. Schools have gone to great lengths to create and market value propositions to a broad consumer base including many non-Catholic families of means. However, what lies underneath the surface of most schools' efforts in admission of new families is the relatively unexplored phenomenon of attrition that exists within the Catholic school system. While national statistics of Catholic attrition are unavailable, the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, the largest Catholic school system in the United States, has been the subject of research studying the continuation of its students from financially at-risk families. Studies of three cohorts of students receiving financial assistance from the Catholic Education Foundation found that 30 to 36% of eighth-grade Catholic school students did not matriculate to a Catholic high school (Higareda et al., 2011; Huchting et al., 2014; Litton et al., 2010). While these studies did not include data showing reasons for attrition in the Catholic system, it may be presumed that the relatively higher cost of tuition was the primary factor, particularly since these families face greater financial challenges than most. There was a gap in the research literature offering concrete data from financially disadvantaged families as well as other economic, ethnic, geographic, and religious backgrounds with regard to leaving Catholic schools after elementary school. Exit data on school satisfaction have not been available; therefore the relationship between satisfaction and attrition is unclear. Finally, there was also a gap in understanding the views of students in school selection as most research

included only parents and assumed they are the sole or primary decision makers. Research was needed to understand the key factors in Catholic elementary school graduates and their parents making the decision whether or not to continue studies in Catholic high schools. In addition, there was a need to explore possible relationships between satisfaction with Catholic elementary school and perceptions of and matriculation to Catholic high school. This study shed light on the issue of attrition within the system and pointed to opportunities for leaders to improve the effectiveness of elementary and secondary schools, as well as identified the barriers making them inaccessible to poor or vulnerable populations.

Research Questions

This study focused on three research questions:

1. What are the primary factors for Catholic elementary school graduates and their parents in choosing a high school?
2. What is the relationship between Catholic elementary school satisfaction and Catholic high school perception?
3. To what extent do Catholic elementary school graduates' and their parents' identified attributes correspond with their high school matriculation selection?

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to describe the primary factors Los Angeles area Catholic elementary school eighth-grade students and their parents consider in selecting a high school. Additionally, the purpose was to determine if there were relationships between degree of satisfaction with key elements of Catholic elementary schools and parent and student perceptions of corresponding programs in Catholic high schools. Finally, an aim of this

study was to see if there were associations between Catholic elementary school student and parent attributes and the type of high school to which they matriculated.

Significance

There exists a gap in literature exploring attrition rates from eighth to ninth grade in Catholic education. This study can inform leaders locally and nationally to better understand the problem of declining matriculation from elementary to secondary Catholic schools. Unlike much of the research that focuses on elementary or secondary schooling, findings from this research will aid site and diocesan leaders in their work in both elementary and secondary Catholic education. This research revealed perceptions of current Catholic elementary schools from diverse constituents so that leaders in Catholic elementary education can improve their schools and better serve families. The research also informed the extent to which vulnerable populations were being served in their current elementary schools. Research revealing why populations did not matriculate can be utilized by leaders in Catholic secondary education to remove barriers, with particular interest in hindrances that exist for vulnerable populations. Results can be shared with educational leaders, institutions, and foundations to build the case for better support of poor or vulnerable students.

Conceptual Frames

Two conceptual frameworks guided this research: Catholic social teaching (CST) and the National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools (NSBECS) (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). CST is a body of work, articulated through Church doctrine, papal encyclicals, and pastoral letters which calls for a social justice response in seven specific areas (McKenna, 2013). The two tenets of CST that guided this study were the

preferential option of the poor and vulnerable and solidarity. While the preferential option for the poor can be tied to early scriptural references such as the Beatitudes and Christ's parables, many attribute the term and a renewed increased commitment to this imperative to Jesuit priest Pedro Arrupe and the Conference of Latin American Bishops (CELAM) in the 1970s (Arrupe, 1973; Massaro, 2016). Focusing on this tenet encourages a critical posture toward many of the economic, political, social, and educational policies and practices which continue to marginalize others. The CST tenet of solidarity makes the common good each person's responsibility. It calls on everyone to make sacrifices that will bring greater benefits to others in society regardless of their connection or stake in the matter (Massaro, 2016). Focusing on the common good drives the work of Catholic educators to reveal ways in which they reject the status quo that is too often associated with both the Catholic Church and the field of education as a whole. Some practical applications of the CST framework in this research included: selection and prioritization of sample schools and family demographics; development of survey questions; scope of follow-up interviews; and direction for data analysis and discussion.

The National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools (NSBECS) were created by a task force of higher education and K-12 leaders beginning in 2010 and after feedback from practitioners, pastors, and bishops were published in 2012 (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). In just a few years, both scholars and practitioner leaders quickly adapted them to their work in ensuring effective Catholic schools (Ozar et al., 2019). There are 13 standards organized in four domains with 70 benchmarks to assist in measuring the effectiveness of the standards. Rubrics, surveys, and other tools are available to assist easy adaptation to different schools as well as research such as this (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012).

Seven standards representative of the four domains and defining characteristics guided the development of survey questions with regard to satisfaction of current elementary schools as well as perception of available Catholic high schools.

Method

In order to best understand the research problem, this study utilized a mixed methods sequential design. In the preliminary phase, a cross sectional survey was distributed to eighth-grade students and parents of 25 Catholic schools purposively selected in order to generate a pool amplifying poor and vulnerable populations while inclusive of the socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, and geographic diversity of Los Angeles County. The quantitative data collected in surveys included demographic information, perceived satisfaction with elementary school, perceived quality of Catholic high schools, and various factors related to the choice of high school and the decision-making process. Access to a large sample was gained through support of elementary school principals and nominal gift cards made available to participating schools and parents. Measures to protect anonymity of respondents were put in place. Once the survey data were collected, they were analyzed and presented utilizing descriptive and inferential statistics.

In the secondary qualitative phase, preliminary analysis from the quantitative phase identified the type of data needed (Mills & Gay, 2019). Data were acquired through the practice of individual semi-structured interviews of eighth-grade parents whose students were not matriculating to a Catholic high school. A preliminary interview protocol was adapted based on findings of the quantitative phase and included questions about factors pushing the family away from Catholic schools and pull factors of the intended (non-Catholic) high school. Since this research was framed in CST's preferential for the poor and vulnerable and research indicated

financial challenges to be a primary reason for non-continuance, survey questions explored the degree to which perceived costs were barriers and how the plausibility of more financial assistance impacted the parent decision.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations

A threat to internal validity of the study was the differential selection of participants. Even though great care was taken to achieve proper proportional sampling of the target population, there were greater numbers of participants with some backgrounds than others. The unforeseeable impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and racial injustice of May 2020 created challenges for parents to receive and complete the parent survey or parent consent materials. Even when parents gave consent, due to the shift to online instruction, many eighth-grade classes were no longer having synchronous class instruction. Links were emailed to student accounts with limited results compared to the plan of having dedicated time in class to complete the student survey.

While parent survey participation was relatively diverse, participants of lower and middle incomes were less responsive to participate in the follow up interview. Given the researcher's experience as a leader of both elementary and secondary Catholic schools, there was potential for bias. Finally, the positionality of the researcher as assistant superintendent of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles may have impacted the way in which school leaders, parents, or students responded.

Delimitations

Because of the design of this research, there were many factors which limited its scope. By preselecting the participating schools, there were many schools in the archdiocese which did

not have the ability to participate. Furthermore, while the Archdiocese of Los Angeles serves families in counties of Los Angeles, Ventura, and Santa Barbara, for the purpose of this study only those in Los Angeles County were invited to be participants. Finally, because this research was focused exclusively on this Archdiocese, the generalizability to other locations and dioceses is limited.

Definition of Terms

- a. ***Archdiocese of Los Angeles (ADLA)***: The Archdiocese of Los Angeles is the governing organization of churches, schools, and other ministries within the counties of Los Angeles, Ventura, and Santa Barbara. The ADLA oversees the largest system of private schools in the United States encompassing 264 schools and over 66,000 students (Campa, 2021).
- b. ***Archdiocesan school***: An archdiocesan school is one which is owned and governed by the archdiocese. Principals are selected by archdiocesan leadership and supervised by Assistant Superintendents working in the ADLA's Department of Catholic Schools. There are 11 archdiocesan elementary and 20 archdiocesan high schools within the ADLA (Archdiocese of Los Angeles, 2020).
- c. ***Merit scholarship***: This represents scholarship money awarded toward a student's tuition which is not based on financial need, but rather desired attributes such as demonstrated leadership or high test scores.
- d. ***Need-based financial aid***: This represents scholarship money awarded toward a student's tuition based on relative financial need as established by tax returns or other financial documents.

- e. ***Parent***: While a traditional definition of this term may refer to one’s mother or father, for the purposes of this research, the term will be interpreted more inclusively to also involve guardians who have responsibility for the children involved in the study.
- f. ***Parish school***: A parish school is one which is governed by the parish to which it is a subsidiary. While parish and parish school leadership are expected to cooperate and participate with expectations given by ADLA and the Code of Canon Law, principals are hired by and primarily report to the pastor who has canonical authority to administer ministries of his parish. Parish pastors report to local auxiliary bishops who report to the archbishop.
- g. ***Private Catholic school***: A private Catholic school is one which is typically sponsored by a religious order or a private corporation. In order to be recognized as a Catholic school, private Catholic high schools must meet certain guidelines and policies. While most private Catholic high schools cooperate with diocesan personnel, they do not report to them, but rather to the religious order or board of trustees.
- h. ***Vulnerable student population***: For the purposes of this research, vulnerable student population refers to students who are at risk of not receiving a quality education such as students of color, English language learners, and children from socioeconomically disadvantaged families.

Organization of Dissertation

Chapter 1 provided a brief overview of the background of this study, the statement of the problem, research questions, purpose statement, significance of the study, conceptual frames utilized, limitations of the study, and definition of key terms. Chapter 2 provides a review of

literature related to this study presented in four sections: the role of Catholic schools in the U.S. and challenges to continued enrollment; separate organization of elementary and secondary schools in Catholic education and matriculation; factors in school choice; conceptual frameworks. Chapter 3 details the research design and methodology of this study. Chapter 4 presents the quantitative and qualitative data. Chapter 5 contains a discussion of the findings and offers recommendations for Catholic school leaders, supporters, and future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to better understand matriculation and attrition from eighth to ninth grade within the Catholic educational system in the greater Los Angeles area. The research enumerated the factors that parents and students consider in their discernment of schools. Additionally, the research reported student and parent degree of satisfaction with key aspects of current Catholic elementary schools, perception of Catholic high schools, and the association of those two variables. Finally, understanding how participant attributes may impact matriculation or non-matriculation to Catholic high school was investigated.

The literature review is comprised of four sections. The first section introduces the role of Catholic schools in the United States and the challenges to continued enrollment. The second section establishes the separate nature of elementary and secondary schools and matriculation from one to the other. The third section considers research on the factors in school choice generally and with regard to Catholic schools in particular. Finally, the fourth section examines the conceptual frameworks of Catholic social teaching (CST) and the National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools (NSBECS).

The Role of Catholic Schools in the U.S. and Challenges to Continued Enrollment

Many Catholic schools in the United States were initially established in the late 1800s in reaction to the perceived anti-Catholic, pro-Protestant agenda of public schools (Sander & Cohen-Zada, 2010). Within two decades, 5,000 Catholic schools primarily sponsored by parishes had been established. The rise of so many schools was in great part because of the simultaneous

boom in Catholic immigrants, doubling from 7 million in 1890 to 14 million in 1906 (Finke & Stark, 2005). U.S. Catholic schools strived to not only pass on the faith, but also to provide rigorous academic formation so that these marginalized immigrant students could succeed in society and remain connected to the Church. As the Catholic population increased and anti-Catholic sentiment lessened, Catholic schools increasingly attracted students from non-Catholic families. Today, the national average percentage of non-Catholic enrollment in Catholic elementary and high schools has increased to 16.8% and 23% respectively (McDonald & Schultz, 2019). While some families choose a Catholic education because they value faith formation, a great number of families choose it because of its perceived academic and other advantages (Beauregard, 2016).

Secular Individual and Societal Benefits of Catholic Schools

Catholic schools have long been associated with superior outcomes on academic performance and other positive outcomes for both the individuals attending as well as communities and society that benefit as a cumulative result (Bryk et al., 1993; Coleman et al., 1982; Greeley, 1982). In this section, these outcomes are referred to as the Catholic school advantage. While Catholic schools have been shown to be effective in many areas related to values identification (Guerra, 1990; Village & Francis, 2016), faith formation (Notre Dame Task Force on Catholic Education, 2008), and increased post-secondary religious participation (Wadsworth & Walker, 2017), this discussion is limited to achievements and outcomes that pertain to non-religiously affiliated benefits. The secular benefits associated with Catholic school enrollment have created significant advantages for both students and society.

Among the most foundational studies on the Catholic school advantage was that pioneered by Coleman et al. (1982). In their book, *High School Achievement: Public, Catholic, and Private Schools Compared*, they provided an in-depth analysis of the 1980 federally supported “High School and Beyond” data gleaned from a comprehensive survey of 10th and 12th grade students. The examination looked at a variety of factors including course of study, participation in extra-curricular activities, discipline, as well as perceptions of school spirit and teacher interest in students. They compared results in each category by Catholic, other private school, and public schools. Results in almost all categories were more favorable for private schools than public schools. Catholic school results were generally stronger than private non-Catholic schools, but by smaller margins (Coleman et al., 1982).

Coleman et al. (1982), along with their contemporary Greeley in his own seminal work *Catholic High Schools and Minority Students* (1982), concluded that many of these gains were due to differences in school culture, organization, and teaching that lead toward “the Catholic school effect.” While some critics offered other rationales to explain this effect, such as bias due to selectivity, there has been conclusive data that point to Catholic schools’ greater gains in achievement and reduction of social class effects on the poorest, most disadvantaged, students (Coleman et al, 1982; Greeley, 1982).

Over the past 35 years since these foundational studies, many others have continued to test and show positive correlations on a variety of the factors that Greeley (1982) and Coleman et al. (1982) asserted. In 1992, Convey contributed a comprehensive review of twenty-five years of studies which articulate the innumerable qualities of Catholic schools (Convey, 1992). Then, in 2002 Hunt et al. updated Convey’s (1992) work to detail the research from the 1990s in *Catholic*

Schools Still Make a Difference. Using longitudinal data among eighth- and 10th grade students, Gamoran (1996) found students in urban Catholic schools exhibited higher achievement in math as compared to their counterparts in comprehensive public schools. Also utilizing national longitudinal data sets, Dee (2005) found that 10th-grade Catholic school students were more likely to vote and demonstrate civic engagement as adults. Kim (2010) found differences in quality values such as teacher quality and quantity of math teachers among Catholic and public schools in Wisconsin. Finally, Gottfried and Kirksey (2018) studied data from National Education Longitudinal Study and concluded that students in Catholic elementary schools exhibit more self-discipline than peers in both other private schools and public schools. These updates and additions to early research have been critical since so many changes are evident in Catholic schools such as the increase of ethnic and socio-economic diversity of those enrolled in Catholic schools; shifts from religious sisters, brothers, and priests to lay people in teaching and leading; and curricular movements reflecting society's greater discourse on college-preparatory content and skills (Hunt et al., 2002).

To gauge the Catholic school advantage in terms of its relevance today, one can reference the recent research published by Fleming et al. (2018). Their study of data from over 45,000 students in nine cohorts at one of the United States' largest universities moved research forward in that not only did it include a larger data set, but it also focused on refined outcomes such as college cumulative GPA, as opposed to first-year GPA (Monto & Dahmen, 2009; Pike & Saupe, 2002), college graduation, and graduating with a degree in a STEM field (Fleming et al., 2018).

The results showed Catholic high school graduates completing college at a higher rate, completing in four years at a higher rate, possessing higher cumulative college GPAs, and more

frequently graduating with a STEM degree (as coded by the College Board) than graduates from public, other religious private, or non-sectarian private schools. Furthermore, results continued to show that this achievement associated with Catholic schools occurred not just overall, but that the “Catholic school advantage was particularly noteworthy for students from minority or low-income families, students from urban areas, and students with low ACT scores” (Fleming et al., 2018, p. 20).

Significant research on the Catholic school advantage in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles was conducted by the Loyola Marymount University (LMU) School of Education. The results published in three phases (Higareda et al., 2011; Huchting et al., 2014; Litton et al., 2010), detailed the achievement of hundreds of students receiving need-based financial assistance from the Catholic Education Foundation (CEF). High school graduation rates for these at-risk students whose family incomes fell within the guidelines for free or reduced lunch ranged from 98% to 100% in Los Angeles Catholic schools compared with 66% to 79% in public schools. While the local public school sitting rate for the SAT or ACT ranged from 40% to 48%, for CEF students in Catholic high schools the average was 73% to 83%. Those numbers were particularly noteworthy considering that 100% of the population came from low income families and about 90% of them identify as ethnic minorities. These students had higher test scores than the public schools and college acceptance rates from 96% to 97.6%, with many becoming first generation college students (Higareda et al., 2011; Huchting et al., 2014; Litton et al., 2010).

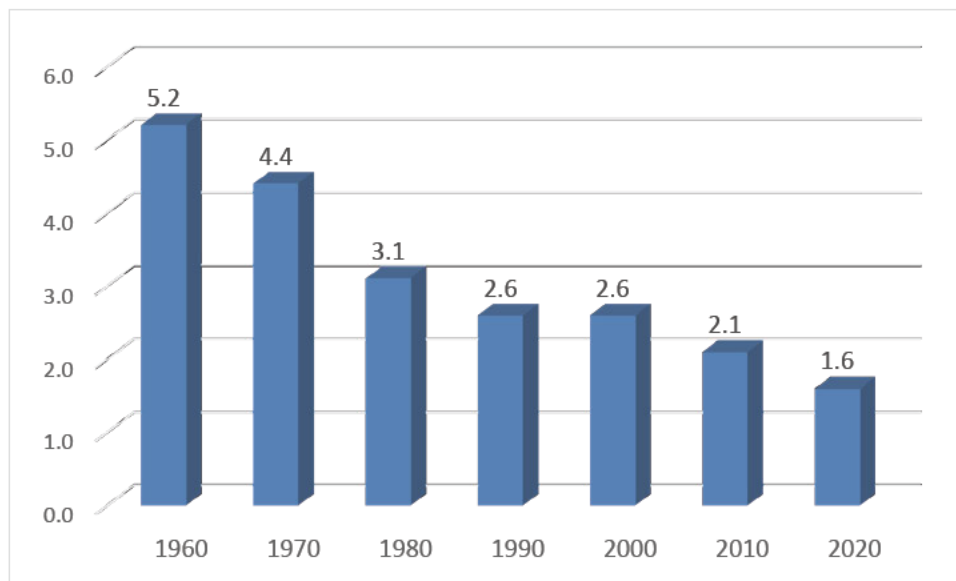
Decline of Catholic School Enrollment

In spite of these academic advantages benefitting students in general and most significantly minoritized populations, U.S. Catholic education has experienced a significant

decline over the past five decades. As can be seen in the enrollment figures published annually by the National Catholic Educational Association, in 1960, 5.25 million students attended Catholic elementary and secondary schools in the United States (NCEA, 2021a). As shown in Figure 1, other than from 1990 to 2000, there has been a steady drop in enrollment for the past 60 years.

Figure 1

U.S. Catholic Elementary and Secondary School Enrollment in Millions



Note. Adapted from *Catholic School Data Highlights* [Data set], National Catholic Educational Association, 2021a, https://www.ncea.org/NCEA/Proclaim/Catholic_School_Data/Highlights/NCEA/Proclaim/Catholic_School_Data/Highlights.aspx?hkey=e0456a55-420d-475d-8480-c07f7f090431. Copyright 2021 National Catholic Educational Association.

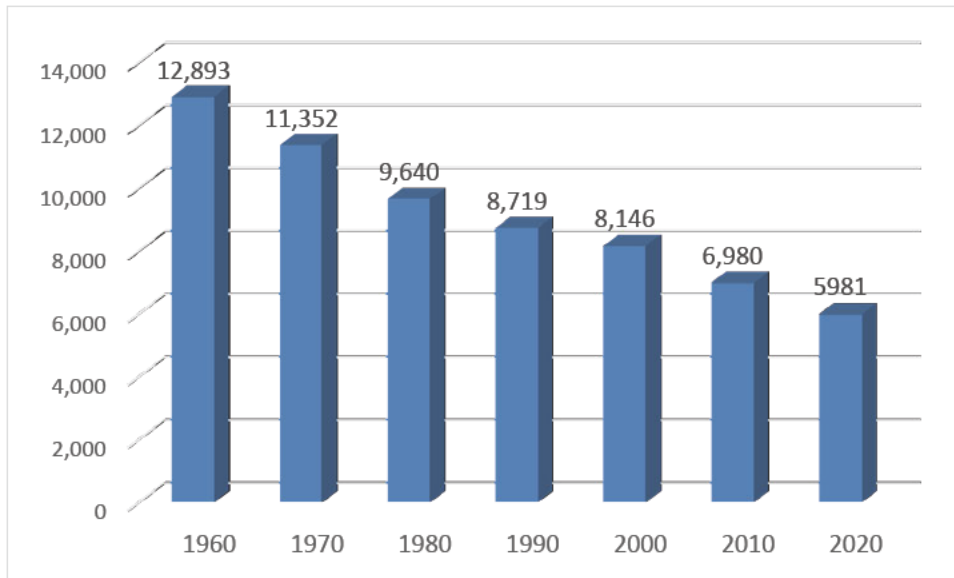
In that same time period, overall student enrollment has dropped by 69%. In the past decade, the U.S. Catholic system decreased by 493,050 students, representing a 23.3% decrease. As a result of this pervasive decline in enrollment, thousands of Catholic elementary and secondary schools have struggled to meet the increased costs of running effective schools. Some

Catholic schools, particularly those who serve primarily upper middle class and wealthy families, continue to flourish due to significant increased tuition and fundraising endowments. However, as Baker and Riordan (1998) pointed out, many of these schools have in doing so transformed their student populations into those largely from high income families in order to maintain operational vitality.

Many of the Catholic schools suffering declines in enrollment have relied on tuition as the sole or main source of revenue. Additionally, as tuition has increased dramatically, the ability for many families to pay has decreased. Thus, many Catholic schools reached a turning point at which they could no longer operate and were closed by parishes or dioceses. Figure 2 shows a steady decline in the number of schools from nearly 13,000 in 1960 to less than half of that in 2020 (NCEA, 2021a).

Figure 2

Historical Number of U.S. Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools



Note. Adapted from *Catholic School Data Highlights* [Data set], National Catholic Educational Association, 2021a,

[https://www.ncea.org/NCEA/Proclaim/Catholic_School_Data/Highlights/NCEA/Proclaim/Catholic_School_Data/](https://www.ncea.org/NCEA/Proclaim/Catholic_School_Data/Highlights/NCEA/Proclaim/Catholic_School_Data/Highlights.aspx?hkey=e0456a55-420d-475d-8480-c07f7f090431)

[Highlights.aspx?hkey=e0456a55-420d-475d-8480-c07f7f090431](https://www.ncea.org/NCEA/Proclaim/Catholic_School_Data/Highlights/NCEA/Proclaim/Catholic_School_Data/Highlights.aspx?hkey=e0456a55-420d-475d-8480-c07f7f090431). Copyright 2021 National Catholic Educational Association.

In the last ten years alone, nationally almost 1000 schools have closed, accounting for a drop of 14.3% (NCEA, 2021a). What is especially troubling about this trend is that a majority of the schools that have closed had been primarily serving minority students from lower-income families (Baker & Riordan, 1998; O’Keefe, 1994). As stated above, Catholic schools have consistently shown great success in educating at risk students from poor and vulnerable populations. When the Archdiocese of Chicago announced its highest number of school closures in 2005, 18 of the 23 impacted schools served a majority of Black or Hispanic students, many of whom were eligible for free or reduced lunch (Zehr, 2005). At the end of the 2019-20 school year amidst extra financial duress as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, 209 Catholic schools

closed across the United States. The closures disproportionately impacted Black families, Title I students, and urban communities (NCEA, 2021b). In cases such as these, many families are left without affordable options and so they lose their ability to choose an educational community that will best serve their children. In addition to lost opportunities to create access for those students, there is often negative impact to the local community. Studies have shown that Catholic schools are important generators of neighborhood social capital, so when a Catholic school closes, there are implications such as higher initial levels of crime and a decline of social cohesion (Brinig & Garnett, 2009, 2012).

Rising Costs of Catholic Education

Undoubtedly one of the greatest causes in the decrease of Catholic school enrollment has been related to increased costs for Catholic education. In the 1950s and 1960s when enrollment was high, not only were costs lower because of the efficiencies afforded by more students, but the primary difference can be attributed to the dedication and service of religious sisters and brothers who led and staffed schools. Catholic schools could charge far less tuition than what public schools spent per pupil because their costs were controlled by offering little more than room and board as compensation for its work force (Garnett, 2013; Ospino & Weitzel O'Neill, 2016). As vocations for religious sisters decreased, Catholic schools became more reliant on lay faculty, who will eventually become leaders. In order to attract and maintain educational professionals, Catholic schools have had to change significantly how they compensate staff. Even though many are still underpaid compared to others within the field, salaries have increased as well as the costs associated with providing health benefits. At the time of the study, the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) data revealed that 97.2% of Catholic

schools' staff are lay women and men (McDonald & Schultz, 2019). Since compensation to faculty and staff for most Catholic schools ranges from about 60% to 80% of its annual expenditures, these increased costs have forced Catholic schools to increase tuition significantly.

In a 2006 survey conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University, the primary factor dissuading parents from Catholic schools was the cost. The second highest factor was the lack of tuition assistance available (Gray, 2014). These factors leave many parents of lower socioeconomic backgrounds feeling as if Catholic schools are not accessible to them. Two decades ago, Baker and Riordan (1998) discussed these concerns and cautioned that the Catholic school system, which formerly served a working-class population, was becoming more elitist, increasingly serving the wealthy and non-religious.

Cost of Education and Tuition Charged

Even though cost has been a prime contributor to the reasons why families do not choose Catholic schools, it is unreasonable to imagine that the cost of tuition could decrease significantly. In addition to the staffing costs discussed above, the organizational, infrastructure, and programming costs of running schools is extraordinary. In fact, the published public school per pupil cost ranges from \$7,006 to over \$22,000 nationally and is projected at an average of \$11,841. Catholic school tuition, averaging under \$5,000 for elementary and just under \$11,000 for secondary, already reflects a significant reduction of costs and underwriting by parishes, dioceses, donors, and foundations (McDonald & Schultz, 2019).

The difference in tuition between elementary and secondary Catholic education can be seen in the results of Huber (2004, 2007), who surveyed 326 parents of eighth-grade students in parochial schools in twelve (arch)dioceses across the United States. When asked to estimate the

difference between tuition currently being paid and that of the Catholic high school(s) available to them, the mean difference of perceived additional cost for high school was \$4,605. The same parents were asked to rank on a Likert scale the extent to which paying their child's eighth-grade tuition is a real sacrifice for their family. With one being "not much sacrifice" and five being "great sacrifice," only 30.1% of families indicated a four or five for high sacrifice, while 46.2% chose a one or two. However, when asked to what extent paying Catholic high school tuition would be a real sacrifice, 68.1% indicated high sacrifice with a four or five while only 15.5% indicated low sacrifice with a one or a two. Thus, families of eighth-grade students in Catholic high schools perceive the financial struggles of affording a Catholic high school to be much greater.

While principals are often charged with establishing and managing tuition costs within schools, it is frequently the pastor who is responsible for the governance of most Catholic elementary and some Catholic secondary schools. While some might think pastors' main concerns regarding their schools may be issues related to their vocation of faith formation, in fact, their primary concerns were largely the financial viability of their schools. In 2008, Nuzzi et al. surveyed over 1,000 pastors from across the United States on their attitudes related to Catholic schools and Catholic education. Three interrelated areas of need were prioritized by these pastors: enrollment management, financial management, and the need to maintain affordability (Nuzzi et al., 2008).

Funding from Other Sources

Some literature detailed the previous and ongoing efforts to support schools and especially parents by providing funds or assistance. Donations by individuals and foundations

assist individual schools and systems with providing financial aid to keep Catholic schools more affordable to many families. In 2008, the Fordham Institute for Advancing Education sponsored research exploring how philanthropy was approaching the issue of trying to save United States urban Catholic schools. While many schools benefitted from individual donors, the most transformative solutions often targeted entire diocesan endowments, corporate partnerships such as the Cristo Rey Network, and university collaborations beginning with the University of Notre Dame's Alliance for Catholic Education and its subsequent expansion into other schools in the University Consortium for Catholic Education (Hamilton, 2008).

In some cities and states, some relief to parents has been made possible by the introduction of vouchers or tax credits (Garnett, 2013). There are 29 states that offer some kind of "school choice" incentives (McDonald & Schultz, 2019; Ospino & Weitzel O'Neill, 2016). It was estimated that Catholic schools save the United States over \$21 billion by providing education to students that would otherwise use tax dollars (McDonald & Schultz, 2019). Some proponents have called for more solutions to the high cost of tuition to parents by more reform in government financial incentives (Garnett, 2013; Notre Dame Task Force on the Participation of Latino Children and Families in Catholic Schools [NDF], 2009).

Competition from Charter Schools

One of the greatest challenges for Catholic schools has been the advent of charter schools. In the first two decades since the first charter law was created in Minnesota in 1991, enrollment grew to almost one million students (Toma et al., 2006). While many proponents of charter laws espoused public choice as a response to dissatisfaction with public school options, a

body of research has pointed toward its impact on private schools, and Catholic schools in particular.

Toma et al. (2006) studied enrollment changes in Michigan from 1994-1999. They found that one out of every five students enrolling in charter schools had previously been enrolled in a private school. While 20% coming from the private school population is noteworthy, it is an even more significant hit to private schools since only 8% of Michigan students attended private schools (Toma et al., 2006). While the findings were linked to private schools generally as opposed to Catholic schools, a majority of the private schools in Michigan are Catholic and thus the findings may be attributed to them to some degree.

In 2013, Lackman examined charter school impact specifically on the Catholic school system in New York. His findings included an overall conclusion that one out of every three students entering a charter school was matriculating from a Catholic school. Furthermore, at the time of the study only 10% of New York's charter schools were geared toward secondary schools. He predicted that as students move through the system, more charter schools would open at the secondary level, which would greatly encroach on the Catholic school system's market share (Lackman, 2013).

In a 2012 dissertation, Song shared results of a quantitative study of charter school impact on private schools in California from 2004-2008. He found that during this time in which charter school enrollment grew steadily, private school enrollment dropped by 17%. This study attempted to draw data from all 58 counties in California. However, while reliable data were utilized from a major public database to track statewide enrollment in charter and public schools, the data chosen to reflect the variables may have had validity concerns. For example, he defined

minority population as identifying as Black and religious identification was projected from a less established organization of interreligious affiliation. Song (2012) concluded there was a correlation between private school enrollment decrease to charter school growth. Yet, he included the caveat that causation could include a number of other factors.

As seen in the above studies, the increase of charter school enrollment has impacted the decline in enrollment in Catholic schools. However, more than just the number of students leaving, the greatest consequence has been the closure of Catholic schools. In cities such as Albany, NY, which have the highest number of charter schools per pupil, the impact to Catholic schools has been especially dramatic. In the twelve years following the first charter school opening in Albany, four of its eight Catholic schools closed and enrollment dropped by 68% (Lackman, 2013).

For some Church leaders facing declining enrollment and imminent Catholic school closure, a tempting solution has been the leasing of property to elementary charter schools. (McShane & Kelly, 2014). While new non-sectarian charter schools have provided rental income for those individual parishes, they have created exponentially negative impact on Catholic school enrollment. The support of property and infrastructure to free charter schools has created additional competition for nearby Catholic schools as well as taken away Catholic partner schools' population from matriculating to area Catholic high schools.

For Catholic leaders concerned about losing the asset of faith formation on their campus, conversion to "wrap around" charter schools has been pursued. In these cases, while religion is not taught during the school day, there has been the inclusion of optional religious education before or after school. In most cases, the schools have been operated by non-sectarian

institutions, but in a few states a religious organization may run the school provided the school is non-sectarian. While in some cases, these arrangements have helped to encourage the values-oriented character formation of Catholic schools, many Catholic leaders have been concerned about diluting the faith and contributing to the demise of other area Catholic schools as discussed above (Garnett, 2013).

United States Latino Population in Catholic Church and Schools

While many trends such as the decrease in school-aged population and the secularization of American society work against the continued healthy enrollment of United States Catholic schools, there is one major demographic shift that has great promise for the viability of Catholic schools: the population growth of Latino families. According to research by the Pew Research Center, the Latino population in the United States reached 57.5 million in 2016, which is an increase of over 21 million since 2000 and accounts for half of the total U.S. population growth (Flores, 2017). Yet, even with this boom in population that included many Catholic families, more than 1,400 Catholic elementary and secondary schools closed in the early 2000s (NDTF, 2009).

How is it that the United States Catholic population continues to grow but Catholic schools continue to be under-enrolled and are closing at high rates? According to the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University (Gray, 2014), only 4% of the Latino Catholic population attends Catholic schools versus 12% attendance of all ethnicities/races combined.

A national market research study conducted by Foundations and Donors Interested in Catholic Activities (FADICA) and the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) found

that Hispanic Catholic parents were more likely to be critical of Catholic schools than White Catholic parents. Hispanic Catholic parents of children in K-12 schools of various types agreed with statements about Catholic schools lacking diversity and not creating a welcoming environment for minorities or those with differing beliefs or lifestyles at higher rates than White Catholic parents. Hispanic Catholic parents also were more likely to agree with perceptions that Catholic schools place too much emphasis on religious teachings and not enough on academics, particularly math, science, and technology essential for today's job market (Foundations and Donors Interested in Catholic Activities [FADICA] & NCEA, 2018).

The University of Notre Dame published the findings of a task force in 2009 that studied many aspects related to Catholic Latino families, including why the Latino population has remained stagnant in Catholic schools despite its continued growth in the Catholic Church. Focus groups in seven cities found four primary reasons: affordability, difficulty for parents to find information about Catholic schools, issues vital to working families such as daycare and transportation, and language barriers (NDTF, 2009). While the challenge of finances is an important one that aligns with research on most sub-populations of Catholic schools, the other three are unique and significant to the Latino population and require additional understanding by school leaders.

Another way to approach understanding in this area has been to study Latino parents whose children attend Catholic schools. In a 2017 study, a team led by Vera surveyed parents of English Learners (ELs) in Catholic schools to determine best ways to involve them in home- and school-based participation. They found that parents generally have a high regard for teachers, but communication could be limited due to language or cultural barriers. Furthermore, many parents

were overwhelmed by work obligations which conflicted with the times that interaction with parents or school leaders could take place. The authors went on to suggest many strategies for Catholic leaders to make schools more inviting including: creating learning environments more welcoming to parents, providing childcare when school meetings take place in the evening, or incorporating report card pick up or conferences after Sunday Mass when parents are in attendance and not working (Vera et al., 2017).

Other research has pointed to embracing the opportunities that exist within bilingual education. In *Changing the Ending*, Baxter (2011) drew attention to the need to establish schools that complement a child's specific learning style and interests. One such suggestion was dual-language immersion (DLI) schools. These schools, which begin at the primary level, encourage the simultaneous development in proficiency of two languages to learn other subject content and skills. While not specifically addressing Catholic families, Heineke and colleagues from Loyola University Chicago studied ways to encourage more success among learners by encouraging teachers and school leaders to "collaborate with colleagues, parents, and partners to conceptualize and utilize linguistic diversity as an opportunity, rather than a challenge" (Heineke et al., 2012, para. 3).

The United States Census projected that by the year 2060 the Hispanic population will increase to 119 million people, accounting for 29% of the U.S. population (Colby & Ortman, 2015). With only 17.8% of Catholic school enrollment identifying as Hispanic (McDonald & Schultz, 2019), Catholic schools have a tremendous opportunity to adapt their culture and programs to better attract and serve this population. Most importantly, this is a population which

research has continually shown to benefit from the Catholic school advantage. Thus, to disregard the opportunity to better serve Latinx students would be a great disservice.

Separate Organization of Elementary and Secondary Schools in Catholic Education and Matriculation

The majority of elementary and secondary students in the United States attend public schools. Many of these schools are organized as K-12 unified school districts in which a majority of the students matriculate from elementary to a designated secondary school. In sharp contrast is the highly separate and autonomous nature of most Catholic elementary and secondary schools in the United States. Since the Code of Canon Law of the Roman Catholic Church supports the local pastor of parish schools to govern each school with great autonomy, the central office often has little control over its schools (Sabatino et al., 2013). Thus, even though schools within a diocese share a superintendent, it is more of a loose system than a unified school district. In recent years, in response to the question of viability, many Catholic schools have turned to new governance models including greater influence of boards and networks (FADICA, 2015). However, Catholic elementary schools in the United States continue to operate separately from Catholic high schools. Matriculation from one to the other is a distinct process with most families engaging in a substantive process of discernment. Thus, toward the end of elementary school, students and their families consider a variety of options including Catholic, public, charter, and non-sectarian private schools.

Matriculation from Catholic Elementary to Secondary Schools

While some issues with Catholic school enrollment relate to inhibitors to students entering its schools, of particular interest is the case of those who have experienced Catholic

education and chosen not to continue. Although the National Catholic Educational Association has provided valuable reporting of many variables among all U.S. Catholic elementary and high schools annually, there has been no mention of attrition or matriculation in any of its statistical reports. Private schools rarely publish attrition numbers, so literature detailing this dynamic nationally has been unavailable.

However, Loyola Marymount University produced three research reports that detailed the continuance or attrition of Los Angeles Catholic school students receiving financial aid. While 100% of students in all three cohorts graduated from eighth grade, only 69%, 64%, and 70% continued to a Catholic high school in 2001, 2004, and 2008 respectively (Higareda et al., 2011; Huchting et al., 2014; Litton et al., 2010). It was clear that a significant number of students were leaving the Archdiocese of Los Angeles school system between eighth and ninth grade. Given the positive student outcomes shared earlier, it is noteworthy that approximately one third of students did not stay in Los Angeles Catholic schools. Higareda et al. (2011) cited the Catholic Education Foundation attributing the increase in attrition percentage among phase II participants compared to prior phase I participants exclusively to costs, but no data were offered to qualify that statement. Given the foundation's sponsorship of the studies and its own positionality to this field, this summative statement in the report without offering supporting data limited the credibility of the assertion.

Huber (2004) conducted a study of 326 parents of eighth-grade students in Catholic parochial schools. In response to the question of whether or not they were considering a Catholic high school for the following year, 261 or 80.1% of them responded positively. Conversely, 65 or 19.8% indicated they were not. When given the ability to rank among six reasons for not

considering a Catholic high school, results overwhelmingly showed the greatest number of parents selecting “Catholic high school tuition is too prohibitive.” The second and third most commonly ranked reasons among parents not considering a Catholic high school were “public school has more to offer” and “Catholic high school location is too far,” respectively. The other two remaining options of “Catholic high school academics may be too difficult” and “we prefer a non-Catholic private school” did not resonate within the top three reasons for very many respondents.

Vega-Mavec (2016) conducted a qualitative study of eleven parents of underrepresented children to determine reasons surrounding whether or not to matriculate to Catholic high schools in Kansas. All of the parents articulated high regard for academic programing within Catholic high schools, but only six ultimately chose to continue in Catholic schools. Costs were factors of consideration for most of the interviewees, but many felt that the preparation for college and other success was worth it. There appeared to be some evidence among some families that not continuing in Catholic school was due to multiple children and a feeling that it would not be fair to send one and not the other. Another interesting finding was an untested presumption from a family that they would not qualify for any amount of financial aid at a Catholic high school since they were better off than some. Given the previous discussion of Catholic Latino families, the Vega-Mavec’s finding that Latina mothers received their information primarily from family or friends and not school-prepared materials is worth consideration. While interesting, since this study was limited to few respondents in only one area in Kansas, the findings were not generalizable.

School Decision-Making: Parent Versus Student

The decision of which school a student will attend was traditionally made by parents of students. While it has been the researcher's experience that students increasingly play a major role in choosing which high school they will attend, there was very little empirical data to support this. Bott (2017) asked 466 parents of students in public and Catholic high schools "Who had the greatest influence on the decision to send the child to this school?" The 424 responses showed parents overwhelmingly influenced the decision of school of attendance. Approximately 87.2% attributed the most influence to one or both parents while 7.5% said the parents and student influenced equally and only 1.9% said the student had the greatest influence on the decision. Furthermore, as will be seen in all of the literature referenced in the following section on school choice, research participants have been exclusively parents, which may not capture fully the student voice in the decision-making process.

Factors in School Choice

A study of ten years of published research on Catholic education showed school choice to be a topic of high frequency (Frabutt, Nuzzi, et al., 2008). Over the years school choice research has revealed different factors of importance for parents in selecting schools for their children. Since the term "school choice" can often be connected to the discussion of access or financial incentives to support parent choice of alternatives to the traditional public school, substitution of the word "choice" with another such as "selection" was made in some cases. However, since much of this section's cited research utilized "school choice" in this context of selection among Catholic and other schools, the original term was retained when referenced as such by that author.

Studies revealing factors of importance in school selection have differed greatly in both the survey population as well as the format and language of questions. Therefore, it is important to see the context of many of these studies to better understand the key factors that various populations identified as fundamental to their school selection.

Factors in Choosing Elementary Schools

Bosetti and Pyryt (2008) conducted mixed methods research on school choice among 1,871 elementary school parents in Alberta, Canada. They found that for public school parents the primary factor was proximity to home (30%) followed by academic reputation (16%) and the principal (9%). For alternative schools, academic reputation was first (18%), followed by special programs offered (15%) and the school's shared values and beliefs about education. For parents choosing religious private schools, the school sharing values and beliefs about education was of greatest importance (and significantly higher at 43%). The second highest percentage (at 20%) for that subset of parents was identified as religious content in the curriculum. Thus, while parents in public and alternative schools have a variety of reasons for their selection of schools, this study showed that over two-thirds of parents of private religious schools identify reasons related to values about education and religious curriculum.

Factors in Choosing Catholic K-12 Education

Beauregard (2016) conducted mixed methods research that provided relative ranking of factors of enrollment choice to 267 parents of children attending elementary and secondary Catholic schools in the Diocese of Tulsa. With regard to academics, he found that given four options, academic curriculum received the highest overall combined ranking of first or second-most important factor among both non-Catholic parents and Catholic parents. However, when

isolating the most important academic factor among Catholic parents, they rated religious instruction even higher than academic curriculum (second) and academic standards (third). While only 3.1% of non-Catholic parents ranked religious instruction first, the combined percentage choosing within their top two academic factors was high at 29.1%. In contrast, academic standards was most important to non-Catholic parents of children attending Catholic schools. The academic factor garnering the least amount of parent support as a first or second-most important factor was the quality of teachers.

Beauregard (2016) also asked parents to rank five environmental factors in relation to their selection of a Catholic school. When considering the factors ranked most important or second most important, for both populations, student safety garnered the highest response. Continuing with the most important and second most important factors, student discipline was second for non-Catholic parents and third for Catholic parents. High quality administration received the second highest combined ranking among Catholic parents and third highest among non-Catholic parents. The least important environmental factors were school facilities and parental involvement for Catholic and non-Catholic parents, respectively.

Finally, Beauregard (2016) reported parents' evaluation of the importance of six factors in choosing their Catholic school. For each of these, respondents selected from Likert scale options from *Not important at all* to *highly important*. When considering combined responses of important and highly important, overall reputation was the highest with 95.5% of the respondents in agreement. Extracurricular activities and sports programs were next with 72.6% and 68.6% of respondents rating them important or highly important. Comparative affordability was fourth with 65% of parents rating it important or highly important. Driving distance was still of

importance to a majority of Catholic families (52.8%), but only rated as important by 33% of non-Catholic families. Finally, a family member being an alumnus/alumna garnered importance from a minority of Catholic families but was not selected by any non-Catholic families.

In 2018, the Archdiocese of Los Angeles published online the results of a survey of 7,256 parents of elementary and secondary school aged children regarding their perceptions of schools. When Catholic parents were asked to rate how important certain factors were in deciding which school to send their children to, the highest rated factors receiving over 90% were consistent between parents of children in Catholic schools as well as other schools: building good character or virtue; academic curriculum; staff and teachers; safety; school community or environment; individual attention for your child. However, some statistically significant differences between the ratings among these two populations were prevalent in the second highest tier of rankings. Catholic parents whose children were enrolled in Catholic schools placed greater priority on graduation and college acceptance rates, religious curriculum, classroom technology, tuition cost, and athletic or arts programs than Catholic parents of children enrolled in other schools. Among the almost 600 parents of school-aged children not attending Catholic schools, 55% cited tuition as a barrier to attending Catholic schools (Archdiocese of Los Angeles, 2018).

Factors Among Parents of Eighth- and Ninth-Grade Students in Catholic Schools

Huber (2007) studied the primary motivations of 678 parents of eighth- and ninth-grade Catholic school students among 12 (arch)dioceses nationally to send their children to Catholic elementary or high schools. Of the 15 options offered, the same five highest motivations for sending a child to their Catholic school were consistent among eighth- and ninth-grade families. Catholic tradition and philosophy was ranked first among eighth-grade elementary school

families and second among Catholic high school families. Strong academics received the second highest percentage for eighth-grade parents but was first for ninth-grade parents. Christian values was the third highest choice for parents of ninth but fifth for those of eighth. Discipline showed the fourth highest percentage for ninth, but third for eighth. Safe environment received fifth highest percentage for ninth and fourth highest for eighth. While not highly ranked by either population, three factors among the remaining six options garnered significantly different responses from the two populations. The quality of teachers was noted by 4.3% of the ninth-grade respondents, but by only .9% of the eighth-grade parents. Location was a motivation for 4.8% of elementary families but not indicated by any of the high school families. Finally, the reputation of the school was a factor for 5.7% of ninth-grade families, but only 2.9% of eighth-grade families.

Factors Among Catholic Families Selecting Public or Catholic High Schools

One of the few U.S. studies looking exclusively at Catholic families' school choice decisions for high school was conducted by Bott (2017). Bott's survey data from 466 Catholic parents in Albany, New York, whose children were in 10th through 12th grade showed some similarities and differences among those attending Catholic high schools and public schools.

Among combined totals of all parents, quality of academic program (87.1%), reputation of the school (70.1%), and financial considerations (50.4%) were among the top factors that shaped their decisions. None of the other nine factors were highly ranked among a majority of the total group but may have some significance when isolating the data among the public-attending versus Catholic school-attending populations Bott (2017).

Given that parents of Catholic school children only made up approximately 13% of the respondents, the above results found in the author's findings may be misleading as they were overly weighted toward the significant majority who were parents of children in parish formation programs whose children attend public schools. Among the 12 factors that parents rated degree of influence in choosing their school, four showed a significant statistical difference in mean scores among parents who chose Catholic versus non-Catholic schools: religion, moral/character education, disciplined environment, and single sex. Among Catholic parents of students attending Catholic high schools, moral/character education had the highest mean, above quality of academic program, which was second highest. Disciplined environment and religion were the third and fourth highest, both surpassing good reputation, which was fifth for Catholic school parents (Bott, 2017).

Conceptual Frameworks

To advance the research on Catholic school selection and attrition, this research was guided by two conceptual frameworks: Catholic social teaching (CST) and The National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools (NSBECS). The integration of these two grounded this research philosophically and operationally. This section will begin by establishing CST as foundational doctrine and expanding on the tenets of the preferential option for the poor and vulnerable and solidarity. The section then introduces the NSBECS as a recent instrument to holistically operationalize and evaluate Catholic school effectiveness.

Catholic Social Teaching (CST)

Catholic social teaching is the body of work that details the Catholic Church's call for just responses to various social issues (McKenna, 2013). Pope Leo XIII (1891) issued the first papal social encyclical, *Rerum Novarum: The Condition of Labor*, which boldly called for the rights of all workers, including a living wage and the right to organize. It also argued the role of the Church to speak out on social issues and since that time, fourteen major documents have been issued. Mich (1998) pointed out that there are often many other leaders and agents involved in the movements that bring these social issues to the attention of Church hierarchy. While the call for social justice from the Catholic Church has many authors and subjects, the official doctrine, papal encyclicals, and documents known as CST identify seven areas of emphasis (McKenna, 2013: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops [USCCB], 2005). While most of these pillars are interconnected, drawing upon some of the same scriptural or theological sources, for this research on Catholic education, this research focused on two pillars: the preferential option for the poor and vulnerable and the imperative for solidarity or common good.

God's Preferential Option for the Poor and Vulnerable. A pillar of CST is God's preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, an idea tracing its historical roots to both Hebrew and Christian Scripture. Isaiah 25:4 (New International Version) stated, "For you have been a refuge to the poor, a refuge to the needy in their distress." Throughout each of the Gospels, Jesus called for a greater care for the poor such as in the Beatitudes when He proclaimed, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" (Luke 6:20, New International Version). The presence of this priority for the poor in CST can be traced to the original social encyclical *Rerum Novarum* in which Leo XIII stated, "When there is question of defending the rights of

individuals, the poor and badly off have a claim to especial consideration” (1891, section 37). Pope John XXIII’s encyclical, *Mater et Magistra: On Christianity and Social Progress* (1961), introduced the “need for global justice between rich and poor nations” (Massaro, 2016, p. 39). This CST document stated, “The divine Master frequently extends to the rich the insistent invitation to convert their material goods into spiritual ones by conferring them on the poor” (John XXIII, 1961, section 121). Then, following the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI’s *Populorum Progressio: The Development of Peoples* (1967) continued with a stronger call of action needed to lift up less developed nations and their people (McKenna, 2013).

The popularization of “preferential option for the poor” along with a renewed and increased commitment to this imperative are sometimes attributed to Jesuit priest Pedro Arrupe (1973) with the formal use of the phrase by the Conference of Latin American Bishops (CELAM) during their meetings in Medellin, Colombia and Puebla, Mexico (Massaro, 2016). While Pope John Paul II, who began his papacy in 1978, did not always endorse some aspects accompanying the liberation theology movement, he used his platform to emphasize the social priority for the poor in three social encyclicals between 1981 and 1991. Meanwhile in the United States, Bishops underscored the preferential option for the poor in their pastoral letter, *Economic Justice for All*, which was critical of popular American political policies and the economic growth of laissez-faire capitalism (USCCB, 1986).

Writings of popes and Church leaders on CST tenets such as the preferential option for the poor have voiced a critical call to transform economic, social, and political structures that marginalize. Yet, Frabutt, Holter, et al. (2008) suggested that “education is not afforded the same attention as other social concerns; a comprehensive examination of education as a context or

issue of justice is largely absent from these formative encyclicals” (p. 33). Since his election in 2013, Pope Francis has modeled this CST tenet in words and actions in his attempts to realize “a Church which is poor and for the poor” (Francis, 2013, para. 198). Pope Francis has included education generally and Catholic education specifically in practical applications of social justice. Speaking of Catholic schools, Pope Francis has challenged them to “educate the poor and the marginalized even if that meant cutting the staff at some of their schools in wealthier neighborhoods” (Esteves, 2015, para. 12).

While recognizing Catholic schools’ historical commitment to students in poverty and immigrant communities, Scanlan (2008) warned that Catholic schools have for several decades have become increasingly selective. He argued that structures and practices that work against support for the poor and vulnerable have become so common that they are unquestioned. Scanlan said, “This grammar masks the discrepancies between CST on the one hand and structures of selectivity on the other” (p. 30). A practice for a Catholic administrator to prioritize students based on a family’s ability to pay is in conflict with CST. Scanlan indicated, “Practices of exclusion and elitism in the recruitment and retention at Catholic schools are antithetical to the Church’s teachings” (p. 33).

This CST pillar is often extended to include not just the poor, but also the vulnerable. This interpretation calls forth a greater response other than to those lacking financial resources, but also those who face marginalization from a variety of circumstances. In addition to the poor, among the most vulnerable in contemporary Catholic education are those who may not have access because of language, culture, or immigration status. Pope Francis urged those responsible for Catholic education to reach out “to meet the different souls existing in a multicultural

society” by reminding them of Jesus’ own ministry in the “Galilee of the Gentiles, a crossroads for people of different races, cultures and religions” (Francis, 2014, para. 4). The U.S. Bishops’ pastoral reflection, *A Place at the Table* affirmed the work of Catholic schools to fight poverty through strong education and formation and welcoming of refugees (USCCB, 2002).

Another challenge to CST’s preferential option for the vulnerable can be seen in Catholic education’s lack of support for students of diverse abilities. Leaders in Catholic education have often cited the lack of financial resources to be able to serve students with special needs (Boyle & Hernandez, 2016). Aware of the need to overcome this, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a framework for inclusion which stated, “Costs must never be the controlling consideration limiting the welcome offered to those among us with disabilities, since provision of access to religious functions is a pastoral duty” (1998, p. 2). However, leadership within the Catholic Church has not prioritized systematic funding resources or directives to support this vulnerable population in Catholic schools. Scanlan (2008) argued:

The inclusion of students with disabilities is clearly aligned with CST, yet the fact that Catholic schools consistently do not serve these students is rarely acknowledged as a significant failure to practice CST. (p. 35)

Catholic educational leaders are obligated by this tenet of Catholic social teaching to overcome challenges to more inclusively educate students marginalized due to different abilities.

Solidarity and the Common Good. Another pillar of Catholic social teaching that resonates with this work in Catholic education is that of solidarity and the common good. This is an important construct that challenges or complements the CST’s initial encyclical, which emphasized value on each person as an individual. In *Mater et Magistra*, Pope John XXIII wrote,

“The sum total of living conditions whereby persons are enabled more fully and readily to achieve their own perfection” (1961, para. 65). This teaching makes the common good each person’s responsibility. However, as McKenna (2013) cautioned, this is not referring to a popular notion of the greatest good for the greatest number. Rather, in this Christian framing, no one may be excluded from the common good. It calls on everyone to make sacrifices that will bring greater benefits to others in society regardless of their connection or stake in the matter (Massaro, 2016). Pope John Paul II repeatedly called for solidarity in all three of his above-named social encyclicals (Gaspar, 2013) and even designated solidarity as a Christian virtue (Klackner, 2006).

The need to practice this virtue of common good can be seen when looking at the great disparities and needs of all in education. The U.S. Bishops wrote, “Whereas individualism is a value promoted by U.S. society, Catholic tradition teaches that human beings grow and achieve fulfillment through their participation in cooperative communities” (Valadez & Mirci, 2015, p. 164). The striving to build intentional communities has long been a goal of Catholic schools. CST’s understanding of the common good would expect these communities to be inclusive and oriented toward the betterment of all. Also, since the education and formation of young people is essential, it becomes everyone’s responsibility to ensure it has proper resources. All citizens, regardless of whether or not they have any members receiving benefit, are obliged to make sacrifices for the greater good of the community (Massaro, 2016). Yet, many Catholic schools are not inclusive, nor do they realize their goals of building supportive communities. Pope Francis said “Catholic educators must overcome a tendency of being selective and must work to restore the broken educational alliance among families, schools and society, which tends to place

profit over people . . . it distances one culture from another” (Esteves, 2015, para. 8). All Catholic schools need to be committed to the common good over their own self-interests.

National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools

Since their launch in March 2012, the National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic and Elementary and Secondary Schools, known as NSBECS have quickly become a valuable framework guiding Catholic education. Their primary authors, Ozar and Weitzel-O’Neill (2012) explained that the standards aim to “describe how the most mission-driven, program effective, well-managed and responsibly governed Catholic schools operate” (p. vi). They were developed over a two-year period with input from Catholic K-12 site and diocesan leaders, higher education faculty, Church leadership, and community partners under the leadership of faculty from Loyola University Chicago and Boston College. With Catholic schools lacking an established comprehensive framework for Catholic education in the United States, this work filled a void, establishing a paradigm to better gauge effectiveness of schools whether urban or rural, large or small, and regardless of region.

Organization and Content of NSBECS. The NSBECS are organized into four domains (see Table 1): Mission and Catholic Identity, Governance and Leadership, Academic Excellence, and Operational Vitality. Whereas some national standards such as the Common Core State Standards are widely adopted to address one general domain of academics (LaVenia et al., 2014), the NSBECS is a comprehensive set of standards for all areas critical to Catholic school effectiveness (Ozar et al., 2019). Each of these four domains has two to four standards which articulate related characteristics of most effective Catholic schools. For example, within the

domain of mission and Catholic identity, Standard 3 states, “An excellent Catholic school adhering to mission provides opportunities outside the classroom for student faith formation, participation in liturgical and communal prayer, and action in service of social justice” (Ozar & Weitzel-O’Neill, 2012, p. 6). While many Catholic educational leaders have previously engaged with national or state academic standards or the equivalent from the USCCB related to Catholic identity, the NSBECs call all leaders to focus on the unique areas of governance, leadership and operational vitality. Without addressing all these critical areas, Catholic schools are increasingly at risk of closing.

Table 1*National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools*

<u>Domain</u>	<u>Standard</u>	
Mission and Catholic Identity	1	An excellent Catholic school is guided and driven by a clearly communicated mission that embraces a Catholic Identity rooted in Gospel values, centered on the Eucharist, and committed to faith formation, academic excellence and service.
Mission and Catholic Identity	2	An excellent Catholic school adhering to mission provides a rigorous academic program for religious studies and catechesis in the Catholic faith, set within a total academic curriculum that integrates faith, culture, and life.
Mission and Catholic Identity	3	An excellent Catholic school adhering to mission provides opportunities outside the classroom for student faith formation, participation in liturgical and communal prayer, and action in service of social justice.
Mission and Catholic Identity	4	An excellent Catholic school adhering to mission provides opportunities for adult faith formation and action in service of social justice.
Governance and Leadership	5	An excellent Catholic school has a governing body (person or persons) which recognizes and respects the role(s) of the appropriate and legitimate authorities, and exercises responsible decision-making (authoritative, consultative, advisory) in collaboration with the leadership team for development and oversight of the school's fidelity to mission, academic excellence, and operational vitality.
Governance and Leadership	6	An excellent Catholic school has a qualified leader/leadership team empowered by the governing body to realize and implement the school's mission and vision.
Academic Excellence	7	An excellent Catholic school has a clearly articulated, rigorous curriculum aligned with relevant standards, 21st-century skills, and Gospel values, implemented through effective instruction.
Academic Excellence	8	An excellent Catholic school uses school-wide assessment methods and practices to document student learning and program effectiveness, to make student performances transparent, and to inform the continuous review of curriculum and the improvement of instructional practices.
Academic Excellence	9	An excellent Catholic school provides programs and services aligned with the mission to enrich the academic program and support the development of student and family life.
Operational Vitality	10	An excellent Catholic school provides a feasible three- to five-year financial plan that includes both current and projected budgets and is the result of a collaborative process, emphasizing faithful stewardship.
Operational Vitality	11	An excellent Catholic school operates in accord with published human resource/personnel policies developed in compliance with (arch)diocesan policies and/or religious congregation sponsorship policies, which affect all staff (clergy, religious women and men, laity, and volunteers) and provide clarity for responsibilities, expectations, and accountability.
Operational Vitality	12	An excellent Catholic school develops and maintains a facilities, equipment, and technology management plan designed to continuously support the implementation of the educational mission of the school.
Operational Vitality	13	An excellent Catholic school enacts a comprehensive plan, based on a compelling mission, for institutional advancement through communications, marketing, enrollment management, and development.

Note. Adapted from "National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools" by L. A. Ozar and P. Weitzel-O'Neill (2012), p. 18, Loyola University Chicago. Copyright 2012 by Loyola University Chicago.

The desired attainment of these standards is clarified by 70 measurable benchmarks. Each of these benchmarks provides clear expectations or practices that support meeting the associated standard. For example, within Standard 13, which calls for strong institutional advancement planning, there are three separate benchmarks related to enrollment management, marketing/communications, and development. Standard 10, which articulates proper financial planning, is supported by eight different tangible benchmarks (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). A key to its quick rise in universal adoption is the widely available tools such as surveys and rubrics on its accompanying website for immediate application of the 70 benchmarks. For example, program effectiveness surveys can be easily downloaded with different versions for students, faculty, and parents in English and Spanish languages (Faber, 2019).

Application of NSBECS by Schools. A review of recent literature shows that the NSBECS have been adopted or integrated by many schools and dioceses throughout the country. In reviewing the responses of 908 K-12 Catholic educational leaders surveyed last year, 79% of them knew about the NSBECS and 78% of them said they use them. The greatest impact can be seen in the many dioceses and accreditation agencies that have incorporated them into accreditation protocols (Erich & Salas, 2019). Among those who knew and used the standards, over 62% said they did so in relation to accreditation (Ozar et al., 2019).

In addition to accreditation, many dioceses utilize NSBECS as part of the school improvement processes. For example, in a state like South Carolina in which so many different schools are of great distance from each other, the NSBECS have provided an opportunity to use shared language and tools to learn and collaborate with each other (Leatherwood, 2019). Other dioceses such as Milwaukee have used the NSBECS to provide objective criteria for school

recognition programs as well as its teacher effectiveness framework (Cepelka, 2019). Some university principal preparation programs have also examined this framework to improve their curricula (Boyle et al., 2016). In other dioceses such as Orlando, the NSBECS have given important structure to a new 360 administrator appraisal process (Fortier, 2019). As more schools see the need for strategic planning, having access to standards-based data related to all areas of a Catholic school mission and programming is valuable.

Application of NSBECS to This Study. For the purposes of this study the NSBECS were used as a conceptual framework to guide the focus of the research. While the NSBECS are too extensive to include all, one or two standards from each of the four domains was utilized so as to ensure this study of Los Angeles Catholic schools was tied to the national standards for effective Catholic schools. While all 13 standards are important, this study focused on seven that more closely related to areas of effectiveness that aligned with parent and student factors in school selection.

Within the domain of Mission and Catholic Identity, Standard Two, which focuses on religious studies and Standard Three, which considers faith formation outside of the classroom, were utilized. From the Governance and Leadership domain, Standard Six, which focuses on the leadership of the school was incorporated into this research. In the domain of academic excellence, Standard Seven and Standard Nine, which encapsulate curriculum and student life respectively, were found to be essential in understanding perceptions of schools. Finally, within the Operational Vitality domain, Standard 12 relating to facilities, equipment, and technology was incorporated into understanding parents' perceptions of the effectiveness of schools.

Conclusion

The literature and research in Catholic education posited the value of Catholic schools, particularly for low income, underrepresented students. The literature also indicated that enrollment in Catholic schools is on the decline. While limited literature on Catholic school choice existed, it exclusively focused on parents as participants. Furthermore, there was a gap in understanding why parents and students already in Catholic schools choose to leave the system. This study attempted to add to the literature in an effort to inform Catholic school leaders of student and parent perceptions related to the decision of continuance in the Catholic school system. Particular attention was paid to poor and vulnerable populations. These factors and the conceptual framework outlined in Chapter 2 guided the purpose and structure of this mixed methods study design to better understand matriculation and attrition from Catholic elementary to Catholic high school by capturing student voice. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology of this study. Chapter 4 presents the data, and Chapter 5 contains a discussion of the findings and recommendations for Catholic schools as they seek to understand the factors that contribute to matriculation and attrition.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Introduction

Catholic schools have shown significant positive impact on students, particularly poor and vulnerable populations (Bryk et al., 1993; Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Coleman et al., 1982; Greeley, 1982). Yet, enrollment in U.S. Catholic schools has been in steady decline since the 1960s (McDonald & Schultz, 2019). Rising costs and declining enrollment have resulted in the closure of many Catholic schools serving minority and lower-income families (Baker & Riordan, 1998; O’Keefe, 1994). With many schools at risk of closure and the edging out of underserved populations, much attention has been given to families who have not enrolled their children in Catholic education. Schools have gone to great lengths to create and market value propositions to a broad consumer base including many non-Catholic families. However, what lies underneath the surface of most schools’ efforts in admission of new families is the relatively unexplored phenomenon of attrition that exists within the Catholic school system.

While national statistics of Catholic school attrition have been unavailable, the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, the largest Catholic school system in the United States, has been the subject of research studying the continuation of its students from financially at-risk families. Studies of three cohorts of students receiving financial assistance from the Catholic Education Foundation found that 64 to 70% matriculated from a Catholic elementary school to a Catholic high school (Higareda et al., 2011; Huchting et al., 2014; Litton et al., 2010). While these studies did not include data showing reasons for attrition in the Catholic system, it is presumed that the relatively higher cost of tuition is the primary factor, particularly since these families face greater

financial challenges than most. There was a gap in the research literature reporting data from financially disadvantaged families as well as other economic, ethnic, geographic, and religious backgrounds with regard to why families leave Catholic schools after elementary school. Exit data on school satisfaction has not been systematically available, so it was unclear if there was any relationship between levels of school satisfaction and attrition. Finally, there has also been a gap in understanding the views of students in school selection, as most research includes only parent perceptions and assumes they are the sole or primary decision makers.

Purpose

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to describe the primary factors Los Angeles Catholic elementary school eighth-grade students and their parents consider in the high school decision making process. Additionally, an aim was to determine if there are connections between participants' degree of satisfaction with key elements of Catholic elementary schools and their perceptions of comparable elements in Catholic high schools. Finally, another aim of this study was to see if there were associations between Catholic elementary school student and parent attributes and the type of high school to which they matriculate.

Research Questions

This study focused on three research questions:

1. What are the primary factors for Catholic elementary school graduates and their parents in choosing a high school?
2. What is the relationship between Catholic elementary school satisfaction and Catholic high school perception?

3. To what extent do Catholic elementary school graduates' and their parents' identified attributes correspond with their high school matriculation selection?

Method

Context

This mixed methods study took place within the Archdiocese of Los Angeles (ADLA), the most populated Catholic diocese in the United States. As a school system, the ADLA is comprised by 214 elementary schools and 50 secondary schools. With a total enrollment of over 66,000 students, the ADLA has the highest enrollment of any nonpublic school system in the United States and is the fifth largest school system serving students in California behind the Los Angeles Unified School District, San Diego Unified School District, Long Beach Unified School District, and Fresno Unified School District. While the ADLA includes five regions covering 8,636 square miles across Los Angeles, Ventura, and Santa Barbara counties (United States Census Bureau, 2020), research was limited to the four pastoral regions that encompass Los Angeles County only. The Our Lady of Angels Pastoral Region (OLAPR) includes 48 elementary and 12 high schools in central Los Angeles communities from the beach areas of Malibu and Santa Monica to downtown Los Angeles. The San Fernando Pastoral Region (SFPR) includes 43 elementary and 12 high schools in the San Fernando, Santa Clarita, and Antelope Valleys. The San Gabriel Pastoral Region (SGPR) extends from East Los Angeles to the San Gabriel and Pomona Valleys and includes 50 elementary and 13 high schools. Finally, the San Pedro Pastoral Region (SPPR) includes 53 elementary and eight high schools located in Long Beach and throughout Southern Los Angeles County (Archdiocese of Los Angeles, 2020). The majority of schools (195 elementary and five secondary) are parish schools, which are governed

by the pastor or one of the ADLA parishes. Archdiocesan schools, which are supervised directly by the Department of Catholic schools, account for 11 elementary and 21 secondary schools. Private Catholic schools are typically governed by a religious or lay board and account for eight elementary and 25 secondary schools in the ADLA. All Catholic elementary and secondary schools referred to in this study have been given pseudonyms.

Participants

This study included participants from three stakeholder groups: schools, parents, and students.

Schools

All participants were affiliated with one of 25 Catholic elementary schools in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles within the geographic boundaries of Los Angeles County. Proportional stratified sampling for school selection was employed in an effort to generate a participant pool that amplified poor and vulnerable populations while inclusive of the socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, and geographic diversity of Los Angeles County. Mills and Gay (2019) described proportional stratified sampling as “the process of selecting a sample so that identified subgroups in the population are represented in the sample in the same proportion in which they exist in the population” (p. 151). A spreadsheet of all 214 archdiocesan, parish, and private Catholic elementary schools in the ADLA was created to organize data including pastoral region, deanery (location), enrollment size, designated financial level, and ethnicity of students. While a proportional sample may not be realized across all facets, the sampling plan prioritized diversity in ethnicity, income level, and geographic location. The schools were sorted by these variables repeatedly in an effort to ultimately reduce the school list to a distributive sample.

While the goal was to have approximately 25 schools as participants, it was decided to initially invite 32 schools to account for leaders who would opt not to participate. In fact, after several school leaders declined participation, two additional schools were invited to participate. The reduction of elementary schools from 214 to 34 was a lengthy process of resorting by variables and eliminating a portion of schools within each variable to keep percentages of the emerging subtotals strata in line with those of all Catholic elementary schools in Los Angeles County. Sorting by and reduction within a particular stratum occurred multiple times non-consecutively following similar reduction of schools based on other strata. Thus, while each of the key variables have been presented isolated in forthcoming discussion, it should not be understood that each occurred in a standalone or sequential order similar to its presentation.

In order to ensure broad geographical representation, the dataset of potential elementary schools was sorted by pastoral region. All schools in the Santa Barbara Pastoral Region which includes all schools in Ventura and Santa Barbara counties were eliminated. Remaining schools were identified by a subset of geographic region called, “deanery.” Ultimately, all 16 deaneries were represented in the 34 invited elementary schools. However, after some principals elected not to participate, 14 of the 16 deaneries were represented in the final participating sample. The geographic distribution of elementary schools by pastoral region is displayed in Table 2.

Table 2*Geographic Distribution of Catholic Elementary Schools*

Characteristic	LA County Catholic Schools		Invited Schools		Participating Schools	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Pastoral Region						
Our Lady of the Angels Region	48	25.4	9	26.5	6	24.0
San Fernando Region	42	22.2	9	26.5	8	32.0
San Gabriel Region	46	24.3	8	23.5	5	20.0
San Pedro Region	53	28.0	8	23.5	6	24.0

Note. Percentages do not sum to 100% due to rounding error

The sample of participating elementary schools represented a good degree of geographic distribution generally in line with that of the archdiocesan total. An exception to this was a degree of overrepresentation of San Fernando schools at 32% of the sample versus only 22.2% in the archdiocesan total.

Utilizing Catholic social teaching as a framework for this study, it was imperative in the design to ensure that the sample of elementary schools would appropriately reflect the impact of school decision making and attrition among poor and vulnerable populations. While the Archdiocese does not have socioeconomic information for all of its families, in 2016 its Department of Catholic Schools conducted a study to determine financial levels of its elementary schools based on the median income of all households within a two-mile radius of each school. Each of the schools was assigned one of five income level designations: Financial Level 5: \$20,000 - \$34,999; Financial Level 4: \$35,000 - \$49,999; Financial Level 3: \$50,000 - \$64,999; Financial Level 2: \$65,000 - \$79,999; Financial Level 1: \$80,000+. Stratified sampling methods described previously were utilized with this financial level data to encourage proportional representation of the various socioeconomic levels of schools in the invited and final sample.

Table 3 displays the percentages of schools falling into each of these designated levels.

Table 3

Socioeconomic Classification of Catholic Elementary Schools

Characteristic	LA County Catholic Schools		Invited Schools		Participating Schools	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Designated Socioeconomic Level						
Level 1	17	9.2	2	5.9	2	8.0
Level 2	30	16.3	9	26.5	6	24.0
Level 3	53	28.8	10	29.4	7	28.0
Level 4	52	28.3	6	17.6	5	20.0
Level 5	32	17.4	7	20.6	5	20.0

The income level distribution of the sample of participating elementary schools was aligned with the distribution of Catholic elementary schools in Los Angeles County. The percentage of schools falling into Levels 2, 3, 4, and 5 ranged from 20-28% in the sample versus 16.3-28.3% among all Catholic schools in Los Angeles County. The most affluent designation, Level 1, which accounts for only 9.2 % of the Los Angeles County total, was similarly smaller in the sample with 8.0% of the total. The intentional underrepresentation of this level in the sample allowed for increased potential to hear from families residing in lower socioeconomic areas.

In addition to ensuring schools serving families of various income levels were appropriately represented, a high priority in selection was to include students and families of all ethnic backgrounds. To assist with this, eighth-grade student ethnicity counts from fall 2019 census data were analyzed. The totals and percentages of eighth-grade students in LA County, among invited schools and within the final sample of participating schools, can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4*Ethnic Distribution of Eighth-grade Students in Catholic Schools*

Characteristic	LA County Catholic Schools		Invited Schools		Participating Schools	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Eighth-Grade Student Ethnic Distribution						
American Indian or Alaska Native	13	0.3	3	0.3	3	0.4
Asian or Pacific Islander	205	4.3	50	5.1	42	5.6
Black or African American	209	4.4	63	6.4	22	2.9
Filipino	375	7.9	89	9.0	75	10.0
Hispanic or Latino	2463	51.9	433	44.0	332	44.4
White or Other	1043	22.0	229	23.2	187	25.0
Multiracial	435	9.2	118	12.0	87	11.6

Note. Percentages do not sum to 100% due to rounding error.

A degree of diversity can be seen in the final sample of participating elementary schools. While less than the equivalent percent within Los Angeles County, students identifying as Hispanic or Latino comprised the highest percentage of students among participating schools at 44%. The second largest grouping was students identified as White or Other with 25% among participating schools. Of note, three smaller marginalized ethnic populations which were strategically oversampled in an effort to ensure better representation, achieved slightly higher percentages of the sample as compared to Los Angeles County actuals. The participating elementary schools within the sample included higher representation of Asian Pacific Islander, Filipino, and multiracial student populations at 5.6%, 10%, and 11.4% respectively. However, in spite of the intentional invitation of schools with a higher percentage (6.4%) of Black or African American students than the Los Angeles County total, several of those school leaders declined participation, resulting in that strata accounting for 2.9% of the sample versus 4.4% across the system. As noted in the limitations section that follows, response rates of school leaders as well

as parents and student participants were impacted by several issues at the time of study including the COVID-19 pandemic, economic crisis for many families, and social unrest following the killing of George Floyd.

Parents

Parents or guardians (hereon referred to as parents) of eighth-grade students from the 25 selected Catholic elementary schools in Los Angeles County served as survey and interview participants.

Survey. Survey links were made available to parents of 748 eighth-grade students from participating Catholic elementary schools. In total 383 parents gave consent and initiated the survey, but 15 were invalid because they answered no questions. Additionally, data from nine other respondents were excluded from the sample because the surveys did not contain information beyond initial demographic items. Table 5 displays the demographic characteristics of the 359 parents included as participants.

Table 5*Demographic Characteristics of Parent Survey Participants*

Characteristic	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Male	61	17.0
Female	298	83.0
Ethnicity		
American Indian or Alaska Native	4	1.1
Asian or Pacific Islander	21	5.8
Black or African American	10	2.8
Filipino	49	13.6
Hispanic or Latino	168	46.8
White or Other	92	25.6
Multiracial	15	4.2
Religious Affiliation		
Roman Catholic	318	88.8
Orthodox	6	1.7
Protestant	14	3.9
Jewish	1	0.3
Buddhist	1	0.3
Other religious affiliation	9	2.5
No religious affiliation	9	2.5

Note. Percentages do not sum to 100% due to rounding error.

A significant majority of the parent survey participants were female with 83% versus 17% male participants. At 46.8% of respondents, almost half of the participants identified as Hispanic or Latino. About a quarter, 25.6% of participants identified as White or other. The remaining quarter of parent participants self-identified with the following percentages of the total sample: Filipino, 13.6%; Asian or Pacific Islander, 5.8%, multiracial, 4.2%; Black or African American, 2.8%; American Indian or Alaska Native, 1.1%. With regard to religious affiliation, a substantial majority (88.8%) of the parent participants identified as Roman Catholic. Percentages of other Christian religious affiliations noted by participants included Protestant at 3.9% and Orthodox at 1.7%. One parent identified as Jewish and one as Buddhist. Nine parents (2.5%)

identified as other and another nine parents (2.5%) reported no religious affiliation. Because the Archdiocese of Los Angeles does not collect or report demographic data of parents of students in its schools, comparison of the sample to actual population of parents was not possible.

While not asked of the student participants, the parent survey also included an additional demographic question asking them to share the range of their estimated annual income. All but six parent participants selected from seven ranges in \$30,000 increments the one which contained their family’s estimated household income. The number of respondents and percentage of total for each of the income ranges can be seen in Table 6.

Table 6

Estimated Family Income of Parent Participants

	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Under \$30,000	41	11.6
\$30,001-\$60,000	52	14.7
\$60,001-\$90,000	52	14.7
\$90,001-\$120,000	37	10.5
\$120,001-\$150,000	40	11.3
\$150,001-\$180,000	42	11.9
Over \$180,000	89	25.2

Note. Percentages do not sum to 100% due to rounding error.

A quarter of the parents (25.2%) indicated the highest category of over \$180,000 for their estimated household income. The distribution of the other three quarters of parent participants was relatively evenly dispersed among the other six categories ranging from 10.5% to 14.7% each. While the sample is well distributed among the seven income levels, since parent income is not collected or reported by the ADLA, it is unknown if this sample accurately reflected the actual parent population.

Parents were able to receive the survey overview, consent information, and the survey itself in English or Spanish. Table 7 shows the distribution of parent participants by the language they chose to access and complete their survey.

Table 7

Language Selected by Parent Participants

	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
English	327	91.1
Spanish	32	8.9

A large majority of parents (91.1%) accessed the survey in English. However, 8.9% of parent participants chose to complete the survey in Spanish.

In order to gauge school enrollment longevity, parents were asked to indicate how many years their eighth-grade daughter or son attended her or his elementary school. Similarly, to account for parents whose experience in Catholic elementary schools may have preceded their time at that school or their eighth-grade child, they were also asked how long their child/children attended Catholic elementary school(s). The frequency of parent responses for 359 participants are shown in Table 8.

Table 8

Years of Attendance Indicated by Parent Participants

	Years eighth-grade student attended elementary school		Years child(ren) attended Catholic elementary schools	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Less than two years	20	5.6	17	4.7
Two to four years	58	16.2	43	12.0
Four to six years	39	10.9	28	7.8
Six to eight years	60	16.7	61	17.0
More than eight years	182	50.7	209	58.4

Note. Percentages do not sum to 100% due to rounding error.

Over half of participating parents indicated attendance more than eight years at both their current elementary school (50.7%) and in Catholic schools (58.4%). Of the remaining parents, the next most frequent range of years of attendance was six to eight years at their current Catholic elementary school (16.7%) as well as Catholic elementary schools overall (17%). A small percentage of participants had children less than two years in current elementary school (5.6%) and Catholic schools generally (4.7%). With the majority of parents falling into the maximum length category of more than eight years, there was not much distinction between the length in their current Catholic elementary school and Catholic elementary schools.

Interview. Nine parents who had indicated on their survey that their child would not be attending a Catholic high school participated in a follow up semi-structured interview. Each were given pseudonyms to protect their identity. Table 9 displays descriptive characteristics for each of the interview participants.

Table 9

Interview Participant Description

Pseudonym	Gender	Geographic Location	Ethnicity	Primary Language Spoken	Estimated Family Income Before Taxes	# Years in Catholic ES
Carrie	Female	Glendale	White or Other	English	> \$180,000	> 8 years
Gabriel	Male	Torrance	Filipino	English	\$120,001~\$150,000	6 to 8 years
Jenny	Female	Los Angeles	White or Other	English	> \$180,000	> 8 years
Johnny	Male	Upland	Hispanic or Latino	English	\$150,001~\$180,000	> 8 years
Julia	Female	North Hills	Hispanic or Latino	Spanish	< \$30,000	4 to 6 years
Maria	Female	South Los Angeles	Hispanic or Latino	Spanish	\$30,001~ \$60,000	> 8 years
Miguel	Male	Lawndale	Hispanic or Latino	English	>\$180,000	> 8 years
Rob	Male	Lakewood	Hispanic or Latino	English	> \$180,000	> 8 years
Veronica	Female	Monterey Park	Hispanic or Latino	English	\$90,001~\$120,000	2 to 4 years

Note. All participants identified as Roman Catholic

While survey respondents skewed heavily to female participants, proportional stratified sampling techniques resulted in the parent interview participants being fairly even with five women and four men. The sample came from a variety of urban and suburban settings inclusive of all four Pastoral Regions in Los Angeles County. Two-thirds of interview participants identified as Hispanic or Latino. Given the importance of understanding the voices of vulnerable populations, four of the five Spanish speaking parents who self-identified on the survey with some interest were invited as interview participants. This resulted in two parents whose primary language is Spanish completing interviews. While there were participants representing six of the seven income levels established, four of them all fell into the highest income level. While this income level garnered a significantly higher frequency of 22.3% of all self-identified willing participants from the survey, those in that income level also responded positively to the interview invitation at 40% versus other income level invitees ranging from 0 to 25%. Two-thirds of interview participants had children in Catholic elementary schools for over eight years. The remaining interviewees were distributed evenly among elementary attendance ranges of two to eight years.

Students

Eighth-grade students from the 25 selected Catholic elementary schools in Los Angeles County served as survey participants. While 748 eighth-grade students from these schools were to be recruited through a link sent to their parents, only those with previously obtained parental consent and personal assent were able to participate in the research. A total of 276 students (36.9% response rate) received parent permission, gave their own assent, and started the survey. Twenty-five of those students' responses were discarded from the sample. Fourteen of those

students did not complete any questions. Eleven students completed one or more demographic or elementary satisfaction questions but did not respond to any high school decision-related questions which were critical to this study. Demographic characteristics for the 251 student participants can be seen in Table 10.

Table 10

Demographic Characteristics of Student Survey Participants

Characteristic	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Male	114	45.4
Female	137	54.6
Ethnicity		
American Indian or Alaska Native	2	0.8
Asian or Pacific Islander	17	6.8
Black or African American	4	1.6
Filipino	29	11.6
Hispanic or Latino	109	43.4
White or Other	51	20.3
Multiracial	39	15.5
Religious Affiliation		
Roman Catholic	228	90.8
Orthodox	3	1.2
Protestant	5	2.0
Jewish	1	0.4
Buddhist	2	0.8
Other religious affiliation	7	2.8
No religious affiliation	5	2.0

Gender distribution of student participants was fairly even with 54.6% identifying as female and 45.4% identifying as male. Students identifying as Hispanic or Latino comprised the largest ethnic grouping with/at 43.4%. About one-fifth (20.3%) of students identified as White or other. Self identification of ethnicity among student participants also included: multiracial, 15.5%; Filipino, 11.6%; Asian or Pacific Islander, 6.8%; Black or African American, 1.6%;

American Indian or Alaska Native, 0.8%. When comparing the final student sample to the whole population of Catholic elementary school students in Los Angeles County, there were some discrepancies. The greatest of these was the underrepresentation of Black or African American students at 1.6% compared to 4.4%. Relatively higher proportional representation in the sample occurred among multiracial and Filipino students at 15.5% and 11.6% as compared to Los Angeles County Catholic elementary schools at 9.2% and 7.9% respectively.

With regard to religious affiliation, a large majority (90.8%) of the students identified as Roman Catholic. Other stated Christian affiliation among students included 2.0% Protestant and 1.2% Orthodox. Two students (0.8%) and one student (.4%) identified as Jewish and Buddhist respectively. No students identified as Islamic or Hindu. Seven students (2.8%) selected “other religious affiliation” while five (2.0%) selected “no religious affiliation.”

Students were also able to indicate the number of years in which they had been attending their current Catholic elementary school as well as the total number of years among any Catholic schools. The distribution of student responses to these two questions can be seen in Table 11.

Table 11

Years of Attendance Indicated by Student Participants

	Years attended current elementary school		Years attended Catholic elementary schools	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Less than two years	23	9.2	15	6
Two to four years	41	16.3	26	10.4
Four to six years	23	9.2	17	6.8
Six to eight years	42	16.7	40	15.9
More than eight years	122	48.6	153	61

Note. Percentages do not sum to 100% due to rounding error.

A little less than half (48.6%) of student participants attended their Catholic elementary school more than eight years. When taking into account their attendance at all Catholic elementary

schools, an additional 31 students indicated a total of more than eight years for a total of 61.0%. The percentage of students attending their current elementary school less than two years was 9.2% while those with less than two years' experience in Catholic elementary schools was only 6.0% of the participants.

Procedures

This section outlines the study's procedures for participant recruitment, student survey, parent survey, and interviews.

Recruitment

In early May 2020, having already received permission from the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and approval from the Institutional Review Board of LMU, an email was sent to the principals of 32 Catholic elementary schools explaining this research project and inviting their schools to participate (see Appendix A). Principals were free to decline to participate based on their own interest and priorities. Recruitment of schools was enabled by the inclusion of a nominal gift card to be utilized by the participating sites for student resources as well as an additional thank you gift card for any school appropriately achieving a student survey response rate of 80% of their eighth-grade class. However, principals were assured their school's participation was voluntary and they may decline or opt out at any time.

From the initial 32 schools invited, 23 principals responded favorably and followed up with requests to disseminate information as well as corresponding links to consent and the surveys. Given that the end of the school year was nearing, and principals were engaged with extra challenges associated with adapting to distance learning many leaders did not respond to the invitation or follow through. Four principals never replied to the invitation for their school to

participate. Three principals initially indicated interest in response to the invitation but did not communicate subsequently. Two principals agreed to participate and initially promoted the survey information and links to parents but did not follow up with subsequent requests to disseminate the student survey. As it became clear that the desired sample of 25 schools would not be achieved from the initial invitation, two alternate schools from deaneries lacking any representation in the sample were invited to participate. The principals of those two schools agreed to participate and followed up with subsequent requests resulting in a sample of 25 elementary schools.

Parent Survey

Principals communicated to parents of eighth-grade students an overview of the parent and student surveys with active links for further participation. A letter (see Appendix B) was provided in both English and Spanish, but it was up to each principal's discretion how the information was conveyed. Some principals emailed this directly to the parents while others included the letter as an attachment to a newsletter or other communication. One parent from each household was encouraged to consider taking the survey. Parents who chose to follow the link given to them were taken to a Qualtrics landing page with welcome and descriptive language in both English and Spanish. Parents were then provided consent information in English or Spanish. Parents indicating consent were then able to complete the parent survey (see Appendix C) in that same language. Parent participation was incentivized through the awarding of \$10 gift cards for participants, as well as the opportunity to be included in a drawing of one gift card valued at \$100.

Student Survey

As indicated above, principals emailed eighth-grade parents information about parent and student surveys. Parents were encouraged to read more about and consider providing permission for their child to participate in the student survey by clicking a different link. Parents who chose to access that link were directed to a Qualtrics landing page which had options to read a description in English or Spanish. After reading the overview and consent information, parents could provide permission for their son or daughter to take the survey by signing or typing their name as well as the providing the name of their child.

Based on time and communication preferences, approximately a week or two after the parent links were provided to parents, principals or designees were emailed a list of student names whose parents completed the necessary consent. Principals were given a new Qualtrics link enabling access to the student assent form and subsequent eighth-grade student survey (see Appendix D). The principal or homeroom teacher was asked to distribute the link only to the stated eligible students whose parent consent had been verified. While it was hoped that some teachers would distribute the survey link at a particular point of class time chosen by the teacher, due to the limited nature of synchronous learning for most eighth-grade students, most students received the request through a school assigned student email account. Students could access the link independently and then had the option to give assent and complete the student survey or decline without any pressure or penalty. Principals were sent follow up emails notifying them of the number of students completing surveys as well as thank you gift cards.

Interviews

Parents of students not matriculating to a Catholic high school who successfully

completed the survey had the option of indicating interest in a follow up, semi-structured interview. From the 108 parents of eighth-grade graduates who were not going to attend Catholic high school, 51 parents indicated potential willingness to be interviewed. After the results of these surveys were tallied and analyzed, ethnicity, zip code, income range, elementary school code, and email addresses given by parents indicating interest in a follow up interview were transferred to a separate Excel spreadsheet. Similar to the prior process to identify a proportional stratified sample of elementary schools, the data of the 51 potential interview candidates were resorted multiple times according to different variables. The data were initially sorted by elementary school code, deanery code, and zip codes so as to ensure that the potential sample would reflect a variety of geographic areas and school types. Then, they were further narrowed within those groups by eliminating candidates whose ethnicity or income levels were already represented. While this yielded an initial distributive sample of 12 invited parents, after offering multiple interview times over a couple of weeks only two responded favorably. Those parents were interviewed and the process of resorting data to identify other parents as potential substitutes resumed. In these, priority was given to candidates whose ethnicity, language, or income level attributes were not reflected in the current sample. Ultimately, 38 of the 51 eligible parents were invited to participate in a follow up interview.

Parents were emailed an invitation to participate in a 40-minute one-on-one interview to better understand their experiences. The email included an attached consent form for review and assured them they were under no pressure to participate. Each candidate was given 6 to 10 days and times from which to choose. Parents completing the survey in Spanish were emailed in Spanish and were given the option of having a translator present for the interview if desired.

Parents who replied with interest were sent instructions on how to access the interview as well as a link to access at their selected time. Parents who had not returned their interview consent forms received follow up emails so that each was received prior to commencing the interview.

Ultimately, interviews were completed with nine parents in July and August 2020 so as to capture the period after the student had graduated elementary school, but prior to her or his start of high school. Interviews were conducted and recorded utilizing Zoom videoconferencing platform (2020, www.zoom.us). Prior to the interview, participants were reminded that the interview was being recorded and as referenced in their returned consent forms, they could decline any questions and end the interview at any time without any penalty. Recordings and transcriptions of interviews were downloaded from Zoom. To ensure the confidentiality of research participants, both digital recordings and interview transcriptions were password protected and stored securely on a private hard drive. Each participant was given a pseudonym to protect identity. All parents received a follow up email thanking them with a digital gift card.

Measures

This mixed methods research incorporated surveys for the first phase of quantitative data and interviews for the second phase of qualitative data collection.

Surveys

In order to answer the research questions, a cross-sectional survey was developed in Qualtrics to collect quantitative data from parents and students. This method can be effective in providing a current picture of attitudes from a given population (Mills & Gay, 2019). Separate versions were administered to parents (see Appendix A) and eighth-grade students (see Appendix B) of 25 Catholic elementary schools in Los Angeles County. The survey was

developed by the researcher incorporating both original questions created based on findings from existing literature as well as adapting some questions from prior quantitative research. In order to provide comparison between the two populations, the parent and student versions of the survey were similar in content but worded differently to reflect their roles. The survey contained four sections. The first contained questions relevant to demographic information to be utilized in data analysis. The second section asked parents/students to reflect on their satisfaction with seven aspects of their elementary school. The third section asked parents/students to gauge the quality of Catholic high schools. The fourth section contained questions about the decision-making process for high school. The survey concluded with the opportunity for participants to respond to an open-ended question with any comments related to choosing a high school as well as for parents to identify themselves as a possible willing interviewee.

Demographic Information. The survey began with common demographic questions such as gender, racial/ethnic background, and religious affiliation. In order to align with existing Catholic school data, parents and students selected from ethnicity options based on those in use for annual reporting by ADLA and NCEA. Parents and students were asked to select from options indicating a range of years of attendance in their current school as well as Catholic schools in totality. Parents were also asked to select from ranges of annual household income so as to be able to later analyze data by socioeconomic levels.

Satisfaction with Current Catholic Elementary School. Parents and students were asked to rate their degree of satisfaction on seven elements of their Catholic elementary school from extremely satisfied (5) to extremely dissatisfied (1). This information was intended to provide data to answer Research Question #2. In order to reflect the most essential areas for

effective schools in the Catholic context, the survey was representative of each of the four domains of the National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). Six of the seven areas assessed reflects one of six standards: “religious studies” is reflective of Standard Two from the Mission and Catholic Identity domain; “faith formation experiences” is reflective of Standard Three from the Mission and Catholic Identity domain; “school leadership” is representative of Standard Six in the Governance and Leadership domain; “academic instruction” was taken from Standard 7 from the Academic Excellence domain; “co-curricular and extra-curricular programs” correlates with Standard Nine from the Academic Excellence domain; “facilities, equipment, and technology” is reflective of Standard Twelve in the Operational Vitality domain. Additionally, the item “sense of school as a community” was taken from “Shaped by Communion and Community” one of the NSBECS’ defining characteristics, which serve as a platform on which the standards rest (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012).

Perception of Catholic High Schools. Parents and students were asked their perceptions of the quality of Catholic high schools in the same seven areas assessed in the previous section. These seven items were representative of the NSBECS and respondents’ answers were intended to provide data for Research Question #2. Similar to the previous survey question, respondents selected from five Likert options, but in this case to indicate a perception from far above average to far below average.

Decision-Making Process. Several questions were asked in order to understand Catholic elementary school parents’ and students’ decision-making with regard to high school choice. The first question asked respondents to rate how important different factors were in deciding which

high school to attend. The question was presented on a matrix with Likert scale options from extremely important (5) to not at all important (1). The ten factors of importance included on the survey were based on the following school choice research: academic program (Archdiocese of Los Angeles [ADLA], 2018; Bosetti & Pyryt, 2008; Bott, 2017; Huber, 2004); co-curricular arts program (Beauregard, 2016); co-curricular athletics program (Beauregard, 2016); college acceptance (ADLA, 2018; Huber, 2004); faith values and beliefs (ADLA, 2018; Bosetti & Pyryt, 2008; Bott, 2017; Huber, 2004); financial considerations (Beauregard, 2016; Bott, 2017); location (ADLA, 2018; Beauregard, 2016; Bosetti & Pyryt, 2008; Bott, 2017; Huber, 2004); safety (ADLA, 2018; Beauregard, 2016; Bott, 2017; Huber, 2004); school reputation (Beauregard, 2016; Bosetti & Pyryt, 2008; Bott, 2017; Huber, 2004); single gender (Bott, 2017).

Parents/students were asked to identify the type of high school that the student will be attending next year. Initial choices included: Catholic high school, Private (non-Catholic) high school, Public high school, Other high school, or undecided. Additionally, skip logic facilitated a follow up question to further identify the sub-type of public (e.g., charter public) or private (e.g., non-religious) high school to be attended. For parents/students indicating that they would be attending any option other than a Catholic high school, display logic presented an additional question asking respondents to rank up to three from the pre-populated reasons. This question was adapted from Huber (2004), but options were expanded and updated to incorporate findings from other literature.

One of the final questions seeking to understand the decision-making process was “Who had the greatest amount of influence on the decision of which high school to send your child to next year?” This question adapted the structure of this question from Bott (2017) but reduced the

number of options and changed the language to be more inclusive of parent family structures.

In order to ensure clarity and proper flow, the parent and student surveys were field tested in the Qualtrics platform by students and parents associated with the researcher who were not included in the subsequent research. Their feedback was considered so that minor modifications could be made prior to activating the survey links to the study participants.

Interviews

After the quantitative data were collected and analyzed, additional qualitative data were collected from individual follow up interviews of parents of students not matriculating to a Catholic high school. This explanatory sequential design can be especially effective by utilizing the findings of the quantitative data to inform the type of data collected in the qualitative interviews (Mills & Gay, 2019).

Before the results of quantitative data were known, a preliminary interview protocol (see Appendix E) was developed. The interview protocol anticipated themes and suggested questions to further explore respondents' answers from the survey. Initial open-ended questions asked parents to describe their positive or negative experiences in the Catholic elementary school from which their daughter or son had just graduated. Since all parents interviewed intended to have their child go to a non-Catholic school in the fall, the protocol included questions about factors pushing the family away from Catholic schools and pull factors of the intended (non-Catholic) high school. Since this research was framed in CST's preferential option for the poor and vulnerable and research indicated financial challenges to be a primary reason for non-continuance, questions also explored the degree to which perceived costs are barriers and how the plausibility of more financial assistance might have impacted their decision.

Prior to each interview, the participant's survey answers were reviewed, and notes were added to applicable sections of the protocol to inform that interview. When conducting the interviews several techniques were employed to encourage more authentic participation from the participants. As encouraged in Leavy (2017), the researcher utilized open-ended questions and encouraged respondents to use their own language. In keeping with funnel organization suggested by Roller and Lavrakas (2015), a theme was first introduced with broader, more general questions prior to specific questions as necessary and particularly when respondents did not offer detailed explanations. Active listening techniques were employed to build rapport with the subjects and assist in generating follow up questions.

Data Analysis

In this explanatory sequential mixed methods design, quantitative data were weighted heavily and were collected and analyzed first before collecting secondary qualitative data (Mills & Gay, 2019). Quantitative data from surveys and qualitative data from interviews were analyzed in order to answer the research questions. However, analysis of each method was not conducted in isolation but rather integrated in order to “produce a whole . . . that is greater than the sum of individual qualitative and quantitative parts” (Guetterman et al, 2015). Findings from quantitative and qualitative data were integrated to both confirm and expand understanding (Fetters et al., 2103).

Survey Data

Data from parent and student surveys were analyzed using the Statistical Package in the Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 27.0 (IBM Corporation, 2020). An initial step of analysis entailed the calculation of descriptive statistics, facilitating the description of several disparate

pieces of data with a relatively small number of indices (Mills & Gay, 2019). For nominal data such as type of high school chosen or who had the greatest influence on decision-making, the frequency of each variable was calculated. For interval data such as satisfaction with elementary school, perception of Catholic high schools, and importance of factors in high school selection, several measures of central tendency were computed for each variable such as mean, median, and standard deviation. The data were disaggregated by important subgroups including parent/student, matriculating school type, family income level (parent responses only), and ethnicity.

An important component of data analysis was the calculation of inferential statistics in order to understand if there were significant differences among groups pertaining to variables. Parent and student survey designs included most of the same questions so that the means of those two groups could be compared to determine whether statistical differences exist. In order to compare school matriculation, analysis was performed among the three most common high school matriculation types. Given the CST framework, understanding differences between vulnerable groups was a priority so ethnicity and family income were analyzed where possible. For three items with interval data (Catholic high school perception, and importance of factors), tests of significance at the standard probability level of $< .05$ were utilized to determine if differences among groups were significant and not simply due to chance (Mills & Gay, 2019). For comparisons among two groups (e.g., parents and students), a *t*-test for independent samples was used. For groupings of more than two (matriculation type, income, ethnicity), a series of one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were utilized. While these ANOVAs compared variance between groups and variance within groups to determine if group differences were

significant, they do not identify how specific groups differ. Tukey HSD and Games-Howell post hoc tests were used to identify between which groups the difference was statistically significant. In cases in which Levene's test for equality of variances was satisfied, Tukey HSD post hoc test was utilized. When the ANOVA results were significant, but the assumption of variances was violated, Games-Howell post hoc test was used to compare all possible combinations of group differences (Howell, 2013). With categorical data, chi-square analysis was conducted to see if a significant association existed between two variables.

Finally, correlational analysis was utilized to determine if there were relationships between level of satisfaction of Catholic elementary school variables and perception of comparable Catholic high school variables. Mills and Gay (2019) referred to the Pearson r as the most appropriate and precise coefficient in educational research when interval data is available. Since Likert scale responses to both elementary satisfaction and Catholic high school perception were recorded as interval data, the Pearson r coefficients were calculated for each of the seven areas representing effective school standards from the NSBECS. Additionally, one composite variable was created based on the seven items measuring elementary school effectiveness as well as one based on the seven elements of Catholic high school effectiveness. In both cases, the Cronbach alpha was calculated to ensure that there was a high enough internal reliability.

Interview Data

Data from interviews were initially transcribed using Zoom software. Once the transcripts were reviewed and cleaned for errors, they were uploaded into Dedoose (Version 8.3.43 www.dedoose.com), a web application for qualitative data analysis. Each of the documents were assigned descriptors and the coding process began. Mills and Gay (2019) described coding as

assigning words to segments of data in order to reduce and classify it. The data were initially categorized utilizing a priori codes based on the research questions and conceptual frameworks (Saldaña, 2016). However, as the process of re-reviewing and recoding continued, other codes emerged. In some cases, these were related to an existing a priori code such as when two child codes “too conservative” and “too liberal” were created under the existing parent code of religion. In other cases, there were new, unrelated ideas such as bullying/classmate socialization which emerged inductively from subsequent review. Utilizing Dedoose’s code application and co-occurrence charts, frequencies and relationships between codes could easily be identified. Throughout this process, the creation and review of analytic memos assisted in the identification of illustrative qualitative data to more fully answer the research questions. Recognizing trends, themes emerged. Finally, the themes were examined in the context of the quantitative findings. In keeping with Fetters et al.’s (2013) coherence of quantitative and qualitative findings was explored. In some cases confirmation occurred in which the qualitative data confirmed the findings of the quantitative data. In other cases, expansion was found to have occurred in which interview data expanded the findings from the survey data. These were further integrated through the narrative utilizing the weaving approach (Fetters et al., 2013) in which the qualitative and quantitative findings are presented together on a theme-by theme basis in Chapter 4.

Limitations

This study had both limitations and delimitations. A threat to internal validity was the differential selection of participants. Even though great care was taken to achieve proper proportional sampling of the target population, principals from some of the schools did not respond to the invitation to participate. In particular, two invited elementary schools with high

concentrations of Black or African American students did not participate. Thus, this marginalized population, which historically represents a low percentage of students in Los Angeles Catholic elementary schools, was not represented adequately nor amplified as desired.

Even among the schools that participated, the unforeseeable impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and racial injustice of May 2020 created challenges for parents to receive or attend to the parent survey or parent consent materials. Amidst these challenges, by the time parents gave consent, principals and teachers were busy with end-of-year activities, which were exceptionally challenging given the flux of health restriction guidelines. While it was initially envisioned that eligible students would be given an allocated time during class to complete the survey announced by the classroom teacher, by the time parents gave consent, due to the shift to online instruction, many eighth-grade classes were no longer having synchronous class instruction. Participating principals or teachers forwarded the link to eligible students via student email with varied results. The lack of a dedicated time and context for all eligible students to complete the survey led to a lower than expected percentage of participation from students.

While the number of parents completing the survey was good and generally diverse, participants of lower and middle incomes were less responsive to participate in the follow up interview. Parents from incomes other than the highest level made up 82.8% of those who declined or did not respond to an interview invitation. However, only 55.5% of those who completed the interview reported incomes lower than the highest level category.

Another limitation was that parents planning to leave the Catholic system may have been less likely to return signed consent forms for students as well as complete parent surveys. Thus, the group that responded to the survey may not have reflected the whole population of the

schools. While efforts were made to encourage honest feedback, it is likely that many students and particularly parents may not have been comfortable responding with critical feedback about the Catholic schools with which they had been associated. As the researcher, given my experience as a leader of both elementary and secondary Catholic schools, there was potential for bias in this subject area. Furthermore, my positionality as an assistant superintendent of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles may have impacted the way in which parents responded, particularly in the interviews.

Delimitations

Because of the design of this research, there were many factors that limit its scope. By preselecting the participating schools, there were many schools in the archdiocese that did not have the ability to participate. Furthermore, while the Archdiocese of Los Angeles serves families in Los Angeles, Ventura, and Santa Barbara counties, for the purpose of this study only those in Los Angeles County were invited to be participants. The geographic limitations of the area included also make the findings less generalizable to other parts of the country. Finally, the short time period and narrow focus of this research was exclusively pointed at eighth-grade families as they were completing elementary school. Thus, findings about matriculation and attrition were not supported by longitudinal data nor were they necessarily applicable to satisfaction or decision-making at other grade levels.

Conclusion

This chapter detailed the methodology designed to gather and analyze quantitative and qualitative data. The data collected are presented as findings in Chapter 4 and discussed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Study Background

The purpose of this explanatory sequential mixed methods research was to investigate the primary reasons and elements Los Angeles Catholic elementary school eighth-grade students and their parents consider in choosing a high school. In addition to push and pull factors of making the decision, it was important to understand the degree to which students or parents are the primary influencer in the ultimate decision. Furthermore, the study sought to ascertain if there is a relationship between degree of satisfaction with Catholic elementary schools and perceptions of related programs in Catholic high schools. Finally, it was important to consider if there are associations between attributes of parents and students and the type of school to which they matriculate. Informed by a Catholic Social Teaching (CST) conceptual framework, embedded in each of the objectives was the desire to understand how vulnerable populations are impacted similarly or differently from others.

Research Questions

This study focused on three research questions:

1. What are the primary factors for Catholic elementary school graduates and their parents in choosing a high school?
2. What is the relationship between Catholic elementary school satisfaction and Catholic high school perception?
3. To what extent do Catholic elementary school graduates' and their parents' identified attributes correspond with their high school matriculation selection?

The findings presented in this chapter are organized by themes within each of those research questions. In keeping with the sequential mixed methods design, quantitative survey data were collected and analyzed preliminarily so as to better inform the qualitative interview data collection process. However, in this chapter, quantitative and qualitative findings are both presented within each theme so results of the data can complement each other.

Summary of Findings

Research Question 1: What Are the Primary Factors for Catholic Elementary School Graduates and Their Parents in Choosing a High School?

Who is Choosing a High School—Parents or Students?

Before discussing participant responses to preferred factors in decision-making, it was important to understand the landscape of who was making this decision. While the majority of research discussed in the literature pointed toward the parents as the primary decision-makers, the quantitative and qualitative data collected in this study revealed a different picture in this sample of Los Angeles County Catholic eighth-grade students and their parents.

Quantitative Data Results. Students and parents were asked in the survey: Who had the greatest amount of influence on the decision of which high school your child or you will attend next year? Table 12 displays the frequency of responses to this question among parents and students.

Table 12*Greatest Influence on HS Decision Frequency of Parent and Student Responses*

Response	Parents		Students		Total	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Parent/guardian(s) primarily	107	30.6	58	23.4	165	27.6
Student primarily	48	13.7	49	19.8	97	16.20
Parent/guardian(s) and student equally	192	54.9	123	49.6	315	52.70
Other	3	0.9	18	7.3	21	3.50

Note. Percentages do not sum to 100% due to rounding error.

Overall, more than half of respondents, 52.7% answered that the decision was made by parent(s) and student equally. Among all respondents, 27.6% attributed the decision primarily to parents while 16.2% assigned it to students. When comparing parent and student responses to this question, there appeared to be differences in how these two groups answered. In order to see if statistically significant differences existed between students and parents, chi-square analysis was conducted. Results show that the null hypothesis was rejected and that there was a difference in the dependent variable between parents and students ($X^2 = 23.68, p < .001$). More parents, 30.6% reported themselves as the primary influencer as opposed to students among whom only 23.4% attributed the primary influencer to be parent(s). Similarly, more students, 19.8% viewed themselves to have the greatest influence on the decision as compared to 13.7% of the parents who attributed that role to students. With a Cramer's *V* of .19 ($df = 3$), the effect size of this association between role and response to influence was medium.

Since this research was designed to identify and understand the decision-making process, particularly among those leaving the Catholic school system, it was important to know who was making those decisions within those families. Table 13 shows a comparison of the frequency of responses of greatest influence on high school decision among intended matriculation school type.

Table 13*Comparison of Greatest Influence on HS Decision Based on Intended Matriculation*

Response	Catholic HS		Private (NC) HS		Public HS		Total	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
	Parent/guardian(s) primarily	100	24.7	4	20.0	52	39.4	156
Student primarily	75	18.5	4	20.0	16	12.1	95	17.1
Parent/guardian(s) and student equally	230	56.8	12	60.0	64	48.5	306	54.9

Participants designating the parent as having the greatest influence accounted for 28% among those who indicated one of the three high school matriculation choices. However, within the public high school-matriculating subgroup, the frequency of parent as the primary influence was considerably higher at 39.4% while lower among private, non-Catholic and Catholic high school subgroups at 20.0% and 24.7% respectively. Conversely, frequency of participants indicating student primarily having the greatest influence was highest among private and Catholic high school matriculants at 20.0% and 18.5% respectively as compared to public school matriculants at 12.1%. Parent and student equally was the most frequent response in all three matriculation groups. However, this shared influence response represented a higher percentage of the totals for private and Catholic high school subgroups at 60.0% and 56.8% compared to the public high school subgroup at 48.5%. The influence of student input on the decision was even more evident when combining the responses of both “student primarily” and “student equally with parents.” In those cases, families matriculating to private non-Catholic and Catholic high schools accounted for 80.0% and 73.5% as compared to only 60.6 among those matriculating to non-Catholic high schools.

A chi-square test was conducted to see if matriculation school type and greatest influence response variables are different. Results revealed that there was a statistically significant

difference between participants matriculating to these three types of schools with regard to their indication of primary influence ($X^2 = 12.00, p < .05$). The Cramer V value of .10 with df of 4 indicated the effect size to be small.

Qualitative Data Results. In an effort to further understand the quantitative data and the implications for parent and student roles in high school matriculation choices, interviews with parents whose children were not planning to continue Catholic education in high school were conducted. While responses to open-ended prompts to describe who made the decision to continue to a non-Catholic high school revealed great variability in the degree to which a parent or child makes the decision on which high school to attend, the findings from interview data are presented according to the three identified categories from the survey.

Parent(s) Primarily. Among the interview participants, data revealed in majority of cases that parent(s) were the primary influencer in the high school decision making process. In the interviews with both Rob and Jenny, the parents were clear that they were the ones making the decision to have their child not continue in Catholic school due to the financial costs in spite of their children's wishes to do so. When asked who the decision makers were, Rob responded:

Probably my wife and I, and then, you know, we would get input from him (his son). But I mean, ultimately, kind of us.

Rob further shared that his wife had some leaning toward the son matriculating to an all-boys Catholic high school.

I mean she is probably more inclined. You know she's kind of she's the one last minute trying to get him back into Augustine. I'm more or less, you know, I take care of more of the finance and stuff like that so you know, I don't know. That's a lot of money.

While Rob made it clear that they did not apply to any Catholic high schools, when questioned further about what his son's choice would have been, Rob shared his son would have chosen the all-boys Catholic high school:

I think he would have gone. Yeah. I mean, because he did have a couple friends that were going and I think he would have gone there. I feel like he would have wanted to go to Augustine.

Another interviewee, Johnny, made it clear that his ex-wife made the decision for their daughter not to attend a Catholic high school. He shared that she lost faith in Catholic schools despite the fact that they sent two daughters to Catholic elementary school. Johnny spoke of his desire to have his daughter continue in Catholic education and that the daughter would have made that choice as well.

Since fifth grade she's been saying, St. Joan's, so when the letter came from St. Joan's, it was the way I probably reacted when I got my Xavier letter. I mean, she was just full of, you know, joy!

However, he further explained that his ex-wife will not allow it, so they have agreed to give the public school a one-year trial.

Another parent, Jenny, shared that the cost of quality Catholic high schools for her daughter (and son two years later) led them as parents to make the decision for their daughter to attend a public high school. When questioned if her daughter wanted to go to a high school other than the one the parents had selected, Jenny responded:

Yes, she did. It was Ave Regina because she did the summer school there and it was fantastic. The summer school is just a really great program. That's a really great school.

Jenny's expressions were more upbeat and convincing in talking about her daughter's appreciation for Ave Regina than when she reticently talked about the public school on which she settled.

Julia ultimately made the decision for her daughter to attend a public charter high school because of finances but talked with her daughter in the process.

I talk to her and she says she wants to continue in Catholic school, but she sees the difficulties that I have in paying tuition for both kids in two different schools – I don't really have another option.

Julia talks about her daughter being heartbroken about the decision but is a more willing participant if her younger brother can remain in Catholic school.

And she says to send her to charter school so that I can afford sending her brother to Holy Cross. But she gets sad because she wants to continue in Catholic school but knows it's tough for me. . . . She's not putting her feet, you know, digging their heels and saying, I have to go. She says that she will forego that experience so that the younger brother to continue at St. Michael's.

While the mother's description indicates the daughter would make another choice, she appears to have a great sense of understanding of her mother's predicament and seems to willingly sacrifice her own choice for the betterment of her mother and brother.

Student Primarily. While none of the parents interviewed indicated in their survey that the student was the primary influencer, in the context of the interview, one parent discussing the shared roles ended up attributing more of the final decision of which high school to attend to his son. Miguel described:

We actually let him choose. We had it . . . he narrowed it down to two different schools. Miguel went on to discuss the importance of technology to his son allowed them to narrow it down to a Catholic high school and a local public high school which, in their estimation, both had stronger programs in technology. Miguel continued:

And then we asked him to narrow it down based on preference, what he liked, what he appreciates. And we told him, we actually told him whatever he chose is what we would allow, even if we had to pay. So, I told him, we told him, let's forget about what you have to pay. If this is a place you really want to go, then we're willing to pay. Right? But I'll be honest. So, all things considering what made probably the biggest difference for him is that his best friend who he went to school with, who he's been to school with, who he lives very close to us is going to the public high school. So, I think that was the initial nudge into that direction. As you know, you know, that is a huge transition, right? Between eighth grade and high school, especially from a private to a public is huge. Right? So, so if you have somebody that you trust and rely on everything, it's going to be a huge pool. Right? And his best friend, that's where he was going. His parents had made the decision that's where he was going to go. So, so we allowed him to make choice and that's where he chose.

This outward freedom for the child to not have to factor the cost is in great contrast to many of the situations other parents cited. Furthermore, this influence of the friend's decision to attend a public school is contrary to the parent's initial survey data. Miguel did not choose the option "My daughter's/son's friends are not attending a Catholic high school" as one of the three reasons he cited for not choosing a Catholic high school. Yet, in a deeper follow up conversation

two months later, the parent acknowledges the son's friend's prior decision to attend the public school as the "biggest difference" in the son's decision between the final two schools.

Since this parent had previously mentioned two younger sons also attending Catholic elementary school, Miguel was asked further how he thought that decision might go.

It depends on how well my son does as well and his experience right? Would be a big pull. The other thing too is my two sons are very different than my oldest. So they have various different needs. So I'm well aware of that. So I will actually get them involved with that decision making early on. So that way they could make a better informed decision based on what their needs are as well. My two other sons are not science people necessarily my middle son is much more into the arts and, and he's much more involved with that. He does all the plays at the school and things like that. So if there's a school that fits well for him and is a good fit for him based on what his needs are and his interests, then we will lead in that direction.

While Miguel acknowledged the active roles he and his wife play in taking their sons to open house or information sessions for both Catholic and public schools, of those interviewed, he ultimately believes he is trying to facilitate his children being primary decision makers based on some of their own interests.

Parent(s) and Student Equally. While six of the nine parents indicated on their initial survey that parent and child influenced the decision equally, after analyzing their follow up responses it appeared that this was the case with only three of them. In all of these situations, parents were concerned about the financial investment needed to have their child attend a Catholic high school. When their child showed signs of interest in not continuing in Catholic

education, parents were very open to that consideration within certain parameters. Carrie, the mother of a son, expressed:

He was 100% adamant that he did not want to go to a Catholic school for high school . . . but I do feel like he's romanticizing public school, a little bit.

Carrie spoke of her active support in trying to attain a waiver for a school outside of their area which had a strong theatrical arts program. Not wanting her son to go to the local public high school, she acknowledged that they had somewhat considered a private Catholic high school in the area should the son not receive the waiver. However, when her son resisted, she was relieved.

Honestly, it's a huge relief to not be paying \$20,000 a year for school and my plan is to get my kids through college with no student loans and I couldn't ever do that if I was paying 20 grand a year to send them to high school. I just, it wouldn't be possible. But now it's possible potentially. So that was a big deal. So I probably would push them maybe a little bit towards public school if we're in a good area, which had a good public school, which we are. But because he has some issues with anxiety and being if he if he really like felt like, "no this is my safety and I need to stay within this system," we would have made it happen financially. If he was on the fence and said, "I don't care either way," then we'd be like, "Maybe we should give the public school a try?" But if he felt like "I really, I'm so nervous about the public school. I don't want to go there," he would have gone to private school.

Like Carrie, Maria also seemed relieved that her child was interested in pursuing a tuition-free high school option. When asked to quantify the role of parent or student influencing the ultimate decision, Maria explained:

I would say we were 60% and she was 40%, it definitely wasn't 50/50.

While Maria had previously sent two older children to Catholic high school, she lamented:

We have four children. It is a greater expense. We have already reached our limit, we cannot continue with Catholic school.

As detailed above Maria also shared that each of her children are different and referred to developments in recent years that led to her daughter wanting a change socially from her elementary classmates.

She said there's too much drama. But I told her that at a bigger school, there's sometimes bigger drama. I also think she also included us saying it would be too difficult to afford four tuitions.

In spite of Maria's expressed value/satisfaction of/with the Catholic high school experiences of her older children, the combination of her daughter expressing some desire to try a new school with the realization of the challenge of tuition for four children to attend Catholic high school enabled her to come to a shared decision to support a trial year at a public high school.

It's a trial year during ninth grade. If we see that it does not meet the academic expectations we have for her education, then we'll have to make the sacrifice to send her to Catholic school. But we've said and she's said that we're going to give it a try, we're not saying she's going to stay there. Since they were little we've always been invested in

their education. So will continue to watch and monitor to see what they're offering us there. If we do feel comfortable then we'll stay but if it doesn't, even it'll make things a bit difficult for us economically, we'll move her to a Catholic school.

Even though Maria and her husband are open to giving the charter school a try, if their daughter or the school does not reach her parents' expectations, then they will find a way to make Catholic high school work for their third child.

In his interview, Gabriel commented that he and his daughter shared in the decision for her to attend a local public high school.

For me was a purely financial aspect because when I looked into private institutions, it's quite costly and I felt I would rather save the money and put it into her college fund.

He continued that his daughter was also open to a change. Since his daughter was in his presence during the interview, he asked her to add to his response,

Gabriel: Susie herself felt that she wanted to also try public school right?

Susie: Yes. One of the previous eighth graders that graduated before us, he goes to [X Public HS] and I asked him how it was. He said it's challenging. But yeah, it's a really good school, he said, and the curriculum is challenging enough. Also, some of my friends are going there so I won't be alone.

There was clear dialogue between most parents and children about the preferences they each had for choosing a high school. Quantitative survey results from the entire sample show a fairly balanced degree of parent and student influence. When looking at the differences among matriculating school types, quantitative data revealed that students were more likely to have equal or greater influence among those continuing to a Catholic high school. The qualitative data

from follow up interviews supported this, showing that parents retain more influence in their decision of their children not matriculating to a Catholic high school.

Importance of Factors in Deciding High School

Quantitative Data Results. Eighth-grade students and their parents were asked to rate the importance of ten different factors in deciding which high school the student was going to attend. For each of these factors, respondents chose from following Likert scaled options: Extremely important, very important, moderately important, slightly important, not important at all. In order to calculate and compare means of importance of each factor, coding was assigned to each option from 1 (not important at all) to 5 (extremely important). The descriptive statistics for parent and student responses to the importance of each of the ten factors are detailed in Table 14.

Table 14*Importance of Factors Among Parents and Students*

Factor	Parent			Student			Total		
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Academic Program	355	4.75	0.48	248	4.64	0.61	603	4.70	0.54
Co-Curricular Arts Program	353	3.95	1.05	248	3.67	1.16	601	3.84	1.11
Co-Curricular Athletics Program	353	3.91	1.12	248	3.92	1.15	601	3.91	1.13
College Acceptance	352	4.74	0.54	248	4.63	0.66	600	4.69	0.59
Faith Values and Beliefs	353	4.39	0.89	248	3.75	1.21	601	4.13	1.08
Financial Considerations	352	4.42	0.93	248	4.17	1.12	600	4.32	1.02
Location	351	4.21	0.95	248	3.88	1.05	59	4.07	1.00
Safety	352	4.78	0.52	248	4.52	0.80	600	4.67	0.66
School Reputation	352	4.60	0.64	248	4.21	0.97	600	4.44	0.82
Single Gender	350	2.48	1.58	248	2.00	1.40	598	2.28	1.52

Note. Likert scale from 1 (Not at all important) to 5 (Extremely important)

The factors yielding the highest means among all participants were academic program, college acceptance, and safety. Given the range of those means from 4.67 to 4.70, the majority of respondents found those three factors to be extremely important in the high school decision. With a mean of 4.44 another factor of high importance was the school reputation. Participants found financial considerations, faith values and beliefs, and location to be very important as evidenced by means of 4.32, 4.13, and 4.07 respectively. With means of 3.84 and 3.91

respectively, co-curricular arts and athletic programs were moderately important to very important to most participants.

The only factor rated considerably low was single gender. With a combined mean of 2.28 among all participants, this factor was only slightly important overall in most parents and students high school decision. One parent respondent chose to end her survey commenting:

Based on my experience, a single gender school is a bad choice. It does not reflect the real world. I don't care what the administration of the school says about it being conducive to learning. It is not realistic, is unnecessary in the United States and in the Modern World and it leads to stereotypes of its graduates when going to College and later in life. Unfortunately for us, the nearest co-ed Catholic High School would have required us to drive a minimum of 1 hour each way every day.

Similarly, a student chose to end with an explanation of her decision about matriculating to an all-girls school:

I have a comment about the question that is about the importance of the gender of the students that attend the school. For me it was important in the sense that I really wanted to go to a co-ed school but I couldn't because I wasn't provided with enough financial aid. I didn't really hate the idea of an all-girls school, but I wasn't a big fan of it mainly due to the fact that I was worried I wouldn't get enough exposure people of the other gender.

Even among this student who was matriculating to a single gender school, that factor did not weigh positively in her decision.

Comparison of Importance of Factors Among Parents and Students. It was important to understand if there were differences between how parents and students rated the importance of particular factors in choosing a high school. When comparing the mean results, other than athletics, parents rated factors higher than students. Parents and students essentially ranked athletics the same with means of 3.91 and 3.92 respectively. A series of *t*-tests revealed that the differences between parents and students on the other nine factors were significant.

While nine of the ten factors showed significant difference, with a Cohen's *d* value of .60 the largest effect was associated with the importance of Faith Values and Beliefs. $T(427.98) = 7.20, p < .001$). While still factoring in the high school decision to some degree, the importance of this among students ($M = 3.75, SD = 1.21$) was significantly lower than that of parents ($M = 4.39, SD = .89$). Parents ($M = 4.60, SD = .64$) were significantly more concerned with factoring in the high school's reputation than students ($M = 4.21, SD = .97$), $t(396.40) = 5.55, p < .001$. With a Cohen's *d* of .49, the effect of this was medium, The difference between parents' weight of safety ($M = 4.78, SD = .52$) compared to students ($M = 4.52, SD = .80$) was also significant $t(395.13) = 7.20, p < .001$ (Cohen's *d* = .41). Finally, parent- student differences were also statistically significant regarding the remaining factors: location, $t(597.00) = 4.04, p < .001$; single-gender, $t(567.07) = 3.96, p < .001$; co-curricular arts program, $t(499.84) = 2.98, p < .01$; financial considerations, $t(472.76) = 2.90, p < .01$; academic programs, $t(449.14) = 2.28, p < .05$; college acceptance, $t(460.22) = 2.29, p < .05$. However, their effect was relatively small as evidenced by Cohen's *d* values ranging from .20 to .34.

Comparison of Importance of Factors by Matriculating School Type. It was also valuable to understand how factors of importance in choosing a high school may have varied by

high school matriculation decision. Table 15 shows descriptive statistics for each of the ten factors among students and parents who chose Catholic, private, or public high schools.

Table 15

Importance of Factors in Deciding High School by Matriculating High School

Variable	Catholic HS			Private (NC) HS			Public HS		
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Academic Program	421	4.71	0.53	22	4.82	0.40	137	4.68	0.57
Co-Curricular Arts Program	420	3.83	1.10	22	3.95	0.95	136	3.88	1.16
Co-Curricular Athletics Program	420	4.03	4.05	22	4.00	1.16	136	3.56	1.26
College Acceptance	420	4.70	0.60	22	4.59	0.59	135	4.70	0.59
Faith Values and Beliefs	421	4.34	0.88	22	3.95	1.29	135	3.50	1.32
Financial Considerations	420	4.33	0.95	22	4.41	1.30	135	4.33	1.11
Location	420	4.07	1.00	22	3.32	1.29	134	4.17	0.96
Safety	420	4.67	0.66	22	4.45	0.80	135	4.67	0.66
School Reputation	420	4.45	0.80	22	4.23	0.75	135	4.46	0.86
Single Gender	418	2.51	1.56	22	2.00	1.31	135	1.55	1.15

Note. Likert scale from 1 (Not at all important) to 5 (Extremely important)

Table 15 identifies the top three factors receiving the highest means among all three independent groups were academic program, college acceptance, and safety. With means ranging from 4.45 to 4.70, an overwhelming majority of respondents found all of these factors to be extremely important in choosing a high school. Conversely, all three subsets rated single gender

as the least important factor among all ten with a mean of 2.51 among families matriculating to a Catholic high school, 2.00 among families matriculating to private, non-Catholic high school, and 1.55 among families matriculating to a public high school. While some similarities among subgroups existed in the ranking of the highest and lowest-rated factors, several differences were also apparent.

A series of one-way ANOVA tests were run for the ten factors to see if significant differences in means existed among the subgroups of those choosing to attend a Catholic, private non-Catholic, or public school. In each of these, an F ratio was calculated by dividing the variance between groups by the variance within groups. The larger the resulting F -ratio was, the more likely that there were differences among the groups. Because group sizes were unequal and homogeneity of variance was violated, Games-Howell post hoc tests were run to compare all pairs of groups, while controlling the simultaneous confidence level. Results of the one-way ANOVA tests revealed that statistically significant differences existed in four of the ten factors in high school decision making among participants matriculating to the three subgroups. ANOVA results of these factors of significance are detailed in descending order by F -ratio: faith values and beliefs; single gender school; co-curricular athletics program; location.

The factor with the largest difference among matriculating school subgroups was faith and values. Table 16 displays the significant results of the one-way ANOVA test for the importance of the factor of faith values and beliefs among the three high school matriculation groupings, $F(2, 575) = 34.67, p < .001$. A Games-Howell post hoc comparison test was run to compare the means of school subgroups two at a time. Results show participants matriculating to a Catholic high school ($M = 4.34$) rate the importance of faith values and beliefs significantly

higher than participants matriculating to public schools ($M = 3.50, p < .001$). With an eta-squared value of 0.11, the effect of this was medium. While the mean for those matriculating to private high schools was higher than those matriculating to public schools and lower than those matriculating to Catholic high school, it was not significantly different from either subgroup.

Table 16

ANOVA Results Comparing Importance of Faith Values and Beliefs as a Factor Among Matriculation School Type (N = 578)

Perspective Comparison Type	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	71.72	2	35.86	34.67	.000***
Within Groups	594.81	575	1.03		
Total	666.53	577			

*** $p < .001$.

Another factor with a large difference between two of the matriculating school subgroups was single gender school. Table 17 shows the one-way ANOVA results showing the statistical significance of the factor of single gender school among matriculating school subgroups, $F(2,572) = 22.54, p < .001$. Games-Howell post hoc comparison test results indicate that students and parents choosing public high schools ($M = 1.55$) rated this factor significantly lower than those choosing Catholic high schools ($M = 2.51, p < .001$). The effect of this was medium as indicated by an eta-squared value of 0.07.

Table 17

ANOVA Results Comparing Importance Single Gender School as a Factor Among Matriculation School Type (N = 575)

Perspective Comparison Type	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	96.90	2	48.45	22.54	.000***
Within Groups	1229.85	572	2.15		
Total	1326.76	574			

*** $p < .001$.

Table 18 displays the results of one-way ANOVA testing indicating a significant difference in the importance of co-curricular athletics program in high school decision-making among matriculating school subgroups, $F(2,575) = 9.20, p < .001$. Games-Howell post hoc tests again showed participants matriculating to Catholic high school ($M = 4.03$) valued the importance this factor more than those matriculating to public high school ($M = 3.56, p < .001$). However, with an eta-squared value of 0.03, the effect of this is small.

Table 18

ANOVA Results Comparing Importance Co-Curricular Athletics Program as a Factor Among Matriculation School Type (N = 578)

Perspective Comparison Type	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	22.61	2	11.30	9.20	.000***
Within Groups	706.24	575	1.23		
Total	728.85	577			

*** $p < .001$.

The final factor in high school decision-making in which a statistically significant difference was found among matriculating school subgroups was location. Table 19 displays the statistically significant results of the one-way ANOVA, $F(2,573) = 6.90, p < .01$. Whereas Games-Howell post hoc tests among other factors showed the significance only between Catholic and public school subgroups, post hoc tests pertaining to location showed significant differences among all three groups. Parents and students matriculating to private non-Catholic high schools ($M = 3.32$) rated the importance of location to be significantly lower than participants matriculating to Catholic high school ($M = 4.07, p < .001$) and public high school ($M = 4.17, p < .001$). However, the effect size is small as indicated by an eta-squared value of 0.02.

Table 19

ANOVA Results Comparing Importance Location as a Factor Among Matriculation School Type (N = 576)

Perspective Comparison Type	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Between Groups	13.81	2	6.91	6.90	.001**
Within Groups	573.68	573	1.00		
Total	587.49	575			

Note. ** $p < .01$.

One-way ANOVA test results for the other six factors participants considered in high school decision-making were insignificant. Despite some differences in means, participants matriculating to Catholic, private, and public high schools were not more or less likely to rate the factor of academic program, co-curricular arts program, college acceptance, financial considerations, safety, or school reputation.

Comparison of Importance of Factors Among Participant Ethnicity. Given the importance of understanding the priorities of vulnerable populations, Table 20 displays the average means of ethnicity subgroup for each of the ten factors of high school selection. While sizes of some ethnic groups are too small for statistical comparison, the frequencies for all are displayed.

Table 20*Importance of Factors in Deciding High School by Participant Ethnicity*

Variable	American Indian or Alaska Native		Asian or Pacific Islander		Black or African American		Filipino		Hispanic or Latino		White or Other		Multiracial	
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>
Academic Program	6	4.83	38	4.84	14	4.71	76	4.72	275	4.71	141	4.61	53	4.77
Co-Curricular Arts Program	6	4.00	38	4.05	14	3.86	76	4.00	273	3.91	141	3.61	53	3.64
Co-Curricular Athletics Program	6	4.33	38	3.84	14	3.79	76	3.87	273	4.01	141	3.65	53	4.21
College Acceptance	6	4.67	38	4.76	14	4.57	76	4.71	272	4.76	141	4.59	53	4.58
Faith Values and Beliefs	6	4.50	38	3.84	14	3.64	76	4.26	273	4.26	141	4.00	53	3.85
Financial Considerations	6	4.00	38	4.26	14	3.79	76	4.75	272	4.50	141	3.91	53	4.06
Location	6	4.17	38	4.13	14	4.29	76	4.49	271	4.20	141	3.74	53	3.62
Safety	6	4.83	38	4.58	14	4.43	76	4.76	272	4.77	141	4.52	53	4.57
School Reputation	6	4.17	38	4.55	14	4.64	76	4.64	272	4.49	141	4.28	53	4.13
Single Gender	6	3.17	38	2.32	13	2.15	75	2.12	272	2.40	141	2.25	53	1.87

Note. Likert scale from 1 (Not at all important) to 5 (Extremely important)

One-way ANOVAs were also calculated to determine if the differences among participants of different ethnic backgrounds were statistically significant. While the data show differences in all ten factors, results of one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) testing showed

these differences to be significant between at least two subgroups among five factors: financial considerations, location, reputation, safety, and co-curricular athletics.

The factor resulting in the largest F ratio when comparing one ethnic subgroup to another was financial considerations, $F(6,593) = 9.57, p < .001$. Table 21 displays the significant results of the one-way ANOVA test. Games-Howell post hoc tests showed Filipino ($M = 4.75$) respondents rating the importance of this factor significantly higher than Hispanic or Latino ($M = 4.50, p < .05$), White ($M = 3.91, p < .001$), and multiracial ($M = 4.06, p < .01$) respondents. Similarly, Hispanic participants ($M = 4.50$) rated the importance of financial considerations significantly higher than White ($M = 3.91, p < .001$) participants. This factor also resulted in the largest effect size of 0.09 eta-squared value.

Table 21

ANOVA Results Comparing Importance of Financial Considerations as a Factor Among Ethnicity (N = 600)

Perspective Comparison Type	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	55.23	6	9.20	9.57	.000***
Within Groups	570.61	593	0.96		
Total	625.83	599			

*** $p < .001$.

Another factor of importance with a relatively large F ratio was location. The significant results of the one-way ANOVA are shown on Table 22, $F(6,592) = 7.94, p < .001$. Games-Howell post hoc tests showed that statistically significant differences existed among four ethnic subgroups. Hispanic or Latino parents and students ($M = 4.20$) rated location to be significantly more important than White or other ($M = 3.74, p < .001$) and multiracial ($M = 3.62, p < .001$) parents and students. Similarly, Filipino participants ($M = 4.49$) also rated location to be more important as a factor in high school decision than White or Other ($M = 3.74, p < .001$) and

multiracial ($M = 3.62, p < .001$) participants. With an eta-squared value of 0.08, the effect size of this was medium.

Table 22

ANOVA Results Comparing Importance of Location as a Factor Among Ethnicity (N = 599)

Perspective Comparison Type	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	44.77	6	7.46	7.94	.000***
Within Groups	556.00	592	0.94		
Total	600.77	598			

*** $p < .001$.

Table 23 shows the results of a one-way ANOVA of the dependent variable school reputation with the independent variable of ethnicity, $F(6,593) = 3.56, p < .01$. Games-Howell post hoc tests revealed that significance differences exist among four subgroups. Filipino parents and students ($M = 4.64$) rated reputation to be of more importance in the high school decision than White or Other ($M = 4.28, p < .05$) and multiracial ($M = 4.13, p < .01$) parents and students. The effect size of this was small as evidenced by an eta-squared value of 0.03.

Table 23

ANOVA Results Comparing Importance of School Reputation as a Factor Among Ethnicity (N = 600)

Perspective Comparison Type	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	13.90	6	2.32	3.56	.002**
Within Groups	385.56	593	0.65		
Total	399.47	599			

** $p < .01$.

The one-way ANOVA results for safety as a factor in the high school decision among ethnic subgroups are displayed in Table 24, $F(6,593) = 3.28, p < .01$. Games-Howell post hoc test results show a significance among only one pair of ethnic groupings. Parents and students identifying as Hispanic or Latino ($M = 4.77$) rated safety to be of more importance as a factor

than parents and students identifying as White or Other ($M = 4.52, p < .05$). With an eta-squared value of .03, the effect size of this is small.

Table 24

ANOVA Results Comparing Importance of Safety as a Factor Among Ethnicity (N = 600)

Perspective Comparison Type	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	8.42	6	1.40	3.28	.004**
Within Groups	253.90	593	0.43		
Total	262.32	599			

** $p < .01$.

The final factor resulting in a significant one-way ANOVA result was co-curricular athletics program, $F(6,594) = 2.40, p < .05$. The results are displayed on Table 25. Games-Howell post hoc tests clarify the only significant difference was that multiracial participants ($M = 4.21$) rated athletics program to be more important than White or other participants ($M = 3.65, p < .05$). However, the effect size was small as evidenced by an eta-squared value of 0.02.

Table 25

ANOVA Results Comparing Importance of Co-Curricular Athletics Program as a Factor Among Ethnicity (N = 601)

Perspective Comparison Type	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	18.23	6	3.04	2.40	.027*
Within Groups	752.10	594	1.27		
Total	770.33	600			

* $p < .05$.

One-way ANOVA results of the other five factors did not show significant differences between any of the ethnic groups.

Comparison of Importance of Factors Among Family Income. Given the research on financial considerations impacting school selection and the framework's emphasis on removing barriers for lower-income populations, it was important to study if differences in family income

impact the importance of particular factors. Table 26 displays the average means of family income level subgroups for each of the ten factors of high school selection .

Table 26

Importance of Factors in Deciding High School by Family Income

Variable	Under \$30,000		\$30,001-\$60,000		\$60,001-\$90,000		\$90,001-\$120,000		\$120,001-\$150,000		\$150,001-\$180,000		Over \$180,000	
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>
Academic Program	40	4.78	51	4.82	52	4.75	36	4.86	40	4.75	42	4.71	88	4.65
Co-Curricular Arts Program	38	4.26	51	4.16	52	3.90	36	3.92	40	3.93	42	3.76	88	3.83
Co-Curricular Athletics Program	38	4.13	51	4.06	52	3.96	36	3.94	40	3.53	42	4.02	88	3.88
College Acceptance	37	4.73	51	4.88	52	4.77	36	4.86	40	4.68	42	4.74	88	4.64
Faith Values and Beliefs	38	4.66	51	4.59	52	4.44	36	4.14	40	4.43	42	4.40	88	4.23
Financial Considerations	37	4.62	51	4.66	52	4.69	36	4.72	40	4.58	42	4.36	88	3.89
Location	37	4.32	51	4.39	51	4.43	36	4.36	40	4.20	42	4.14	88	3.90
Safety	37	4.89	51	4.84	52	4.90	36	4.86	40	4.75	42	4.79	88	4.61
School Reputation	37	4.65	51	4.65	52	4.67	36	4.69	40	4.33	42	4.67	88	4.55
Single Gender	37	3.51	51	2.39	52	2.15	36	2.19	39	2.33	42	2.24	87	2.61

Note. Likert scale from 1 (Not at all important) to 5 (Extremely important)

The data revealed many differences among income levels in response to each of the ten factors. However, ANOVA test results revealed that these differences were significant among two or more subgroups in only four factors: financial considerations, single gender, location, and safety.

The factor with the lowest p value among income level was financial considerations. The significant results of the one-way ANOVA are shown on Table 27, $F(6,339) = 7.87, p < .001$. With the assumption of homogeneity of variance violated, Games-Howell post hoc test results revealed that statistically significant differences existed between the highest income level all six other income levels. Parents making over \$180,000 rated the importance of financial considerations ($M = 3.89$) lower than the other six income levels (range of $M = 4.36$ to 4.72). In addition to having the largest F value among all significant ANOVA results, the effect size of this was medium as evidenced by an eta-squared value of .12.

Table 27

ANOVA Results Comparing Importance of Financial Considerations as a Factor Among Family Income ($N = 346$)

Perspective Comparison Type	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Between Groups	37.46	6	6.24	7.87	.000***
Within Groups	268.93	339	0.79		
Total	306.39	345			

*** $p < .001$.

Another factor of importance with a significant difference among income levels was single gender. The results of the one-way ANOVA are shown on Table 28, $F(6,337) = 3.72, p < .01$. Tukey HSD post hoc results revealed. Parents with household incomes less than \$30,000 rated the importance of single gender ($M = 3.51$) higher than those in the other six income levels (range of $M = 2.15$ to $2.61, p < .05$). The eta-squared value of .06 indicates a medium effect.

Table 28

ANOVA Results Comparing Importance of Single Gender as a Factor Among Family Income (N = 344)

Perspective Comparison Type	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Between Groups	53.12	6	8.85	3.72	.001**
Within Groups	802.81	337	2.38		
Total	855.93	343			

** $p < .01$.

The importance of location in high school decision proved to be significantly different among at least two income levels as demonstrated in Table 29, $F(6,338) = 2.77, p < .05$. Tukey post hoc results revealed that location was significantly less important to parents with incomes over \$180,000 ($M = 3.90$) than those with incomes from \$30,001 to \$60,000 ($M = 4.39, p < .05$) and \$60,001 to \$90,000 ($M = 4.43, p < .05$). With an eta-squared value of .05, the effect was small.

Table 29

ANOVA Results Comparing Importance of Location as a Factor Among Family Income (N = 345)

Perspective Comparison Type	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Between Groups	14.27	6	2.38	2.77	.012*
Within Groups	290.70	338	0.86		
Total	304.97	344			

* $p < .05$.

As seen in Table 30, the final factor in high school decision with an ANOVA result indicating a significant difference among income groupings was safety, $F(6,339) = 2.66, p < .05$. Tukey post hoc results showed safety to be significantly less important to parents with household incomes over \$180,000 ($M = 4.61$) than parents with incomes from \$60,001 to \$90,000 ($M = 3.90, p < .05$). The effect was small, as evidenced by its eta-squared value of .04.

Table 30

ANOVA Results Comparing Importance of Safety as a Factor Among Family Income (N = 346)

Perspective Comparison Type	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Between Groups	4.17	6	0.70	2.66	.016*
Within Groups	88.57	339	0.26		
Total	92.74	345			

* $p < .05$.

ANOVA results did not show significance in the differences in income groupings among the importance of the other six factors in high school decision-making.

Qualitative Data Results. Whereas in the survey participants were asked to rate the importance of ten specific factors in their choice of high school, the broad, open-ended questions in the context of a forty-minute interview allowed each interview participant to share layered stories of multiple aspects of consideration to them. In most of these interviews the issue of expensive cost of Catholic high school was the most significant factor in their high school decision. However, this finding will be discussed in detail in the following section regarding the reasons for not attending Catholic high schools. Thus, focus here will be given exclusively to pull factors named by parents for non-Catholic high school selection. The knowledge of and degree of excitement for the public high schools their children would be matriculating to varied greatly. Two themes encapsulated the majority of these parents' pull factors toward the non-Catholic high school of their choice: special programs and accessibility to a good traditional public or charter high school.

Special Programs. A few parents interviewed described a special academic program or focus that matched their daughter or son's interests, drawing them to ultimately choose that public high school.

Among all of the parents interviewed, Miguel stood out as the one most aware of and sold with program offerings of the public high school, regardless of the Catholic high school affordability. Because his son was exceptionally interested and capable in math, science, and engineering, his son put that as a high value in choosing a school. Miguel and his wife aided in research and supported their son's decision to attend one of the closest public high schools with strong academic programming. Miguel explained:

They have an engineering program which he got into. So I think by junior year, they're interning like JPL, things like that. They have a very advanced robotics program. They have these other programs you know, AVID and all this other stuff he was able to kind of take advantage of, and at the same time we would not have to pay. So that's kind of like a big, a big plus, right?

Miguel and his wife have both worked in education and prioritized ensuring their son had a challenging math and science curriculum. He recognized that this might not have been the case in other neighborhoods and districts saying:

If we lived in another city, then we might have leaned more towards the, to the you know, the Catholic high school.

Even though Miguel and his wife were graduates of Catholic high schools and valued the opportunity for community and faith formation that they provide, he would not prioritize that over ensuring that his son be challenged in a rigorous and innovative program. He was grateful to find that at a local public high school.

Another parent looking forward to a special program in a non-Catholic high school for her son was Carrie. Carrie explained that her son suffers great anxiety but finds great delight in acting and improvisation activities. She described:

There's some of that at the Catholic schools, but this is a huge school that's super renowned for that and they have a very well renowned comedy sports team, which is competitive improv which he's really into. We've been going to performances of comedy sports at the high school that he'll be attending for the last two years, because he's so interested in it.

Carrie went on to describe that this public high school was in their school district, it was not the one closest to them and so they were not certain if he would be able to get a permit to attend. While she was awaiting the results, she considered a Catholic high school which had a decent theatrical arts program. While she was concerned about the potential tuition, she considered it as a backup since she did not want him going to the public school assigned to them. While Miguel and Carrie placed greatest importance on one particular special program and sought out a high school accordingly, other parents weighed a variety of factors among high schools outside of their local public district.

Accessibility to a Good Public High School. Many interviewees with financial concerns related to Catholic school continuance spoke of the value of gaining access to a different local public or public charter school. Rob is the father of a high achieving son who would have been happy attending a Catholic high school, but Rob deemed it to be too expensive. However, Rob did not feel comfortable with the public high schools in his district. So, he applied for his son to

be part of a pathway program for higher achieving students in a different city school district. He explained:

He was only going to go there If he was going to be able to get into those honors college prep programs. They take only the top, you know, a couple amount of kids from outside of the district and he was able to get into it so we thought that was a good opportunity for him.

Similarly, the cost of tuition prompted Maria to look outside Catholic education for high school. However, Maria was intent on trying to find a free public or charter school that more closely aligned with the characteristics of Catholic schools that her four children attended. After researching several schools, she set her sights on a charter school which her nephews had attended. She described the school:

It is smaller, similar in size to Catholic school. Smaller groups. The level of academics, we researched it and it is good.

While she was sad her daughter would not continue in Catholic school, she had heard from family members that the school had a relationship with a local college that provided some early credit options for students.

They monitor during ninth grade to see how they perform, not all students qualify for the program. Only those who qualify. In 10th grade, they can get credits.

Maria seemed cautious since this would be her first child not attending a Catholic high school but was grateful to have this charter school as an option for her daughter.

The single greatest factor in choosing a high school found in interviews of parents of eighth-grade students was financial considerations. Among those parents impacted by these costs

who then choose to go to a non-tuition-based school, the data revealed they are likely to consider a school beyond what may be their closest public school. In many cases, parents selected a traditional public or public charter school outside of their immediate neighborhood which either boasted a special program in alignment with their child's gifts or providing something of value to the student or parent.

Reasons Students and Parents Do Not Choose Catholic High Schools

Quantitative Data Results.

All Reasons for Not Attending a Catholic High School Compared. Students and their parents who indicated that they were matriculating to Catholic high school were asked to identify and rank up to three reasons why they would not be attending (or sending their child to) a Catholic high school. The frequency of participant responses for each of the 13 options can be seen in Table 31.

Table 31*Frequency of Reasons Not Attending Catholic High School*

Variable	Reason #1		Reason #2		Reason #3		Total identified	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Location it too far	12	6.6%	19	10.5%	6	3.3%	37	20.4%
Academics may be too challenging	6	3.3%	4	2.2%	3	1.7%	13	7.2%
Academics may not be challenging enough	5	2.8%	7	3.9%	3	1.7%	15	8.3%
Tuition is too expensive	97	53.6%	28	15.5%	10	5.5%	135	74.6%
Friends are not attending	2	1.1%	4	2.2%	8	4.4%	14	7.7%
Athletics program stronger at another	6	3.3%	17	9.4%	14	7.7%	37	20.4%
Visual or performing arts program stronger at another school	3	1.7%	18	9.9%	11	6.1%	32	17.7%
Specialized academic program stronger at another school	11	6.1%	24	13.3%	16	8.8%	51	28.2%
Catholic religious instruction and/or values is not of value	2	1.1%	2	1.1%	3	1.7%	7	3.9%
Not admitted to Catholic HS of choice	2	1.1%	3	1.7%	1	0.6%	6	3.3%
Student does not want to attend	17	9.4%	12	6.6%	19	10.5%	48	26.5%
Other	18	9.9%	8	4.4%	11	6.1%	37	20.4%
None selected (when selecting at least one reason)	0	0.0%	35	19.3%	76	42.0%	na	na
Total	181	100.0%	181	100.0%	181	100.0%	432	na

Note. Participants could choose up to three reasons, but since some only chose one or two, the additional data of “none selected” was added to this table so as to account for all 181 responses per reason.

Overwhelmingly, the most frequent reason for not attending a Catholic high school indicated by participants was “tuition is too expensive.” In fact, 135 (74.6%) of 181 participants

completing this question chose tuition expense for one of their three reasons. Over half of respondents (97%) indicated it was the number one reason, while an additional 38 (21%) identified it as a secondary to one or two other reasons.

The second most common reason selected by 51 (28.2%) of respondents was “Specialized academic program (e.g., Robotics, STEM, Advanced Placement) is stronger at another school stronger at another school.” Of those, 11 participants ranked this reason number one while another 40 indicated this reason was secondary to one or two other reasons. Among other reasons associated with academics, “too challenging” and “may not be challenging enough” were less common with only 13 (7.2%) and 15 (8.3%) respectively. It was interesting to note that these two opposite reactions to the perceived rigor of Catholic school academics garnered a similar amount of response.

Among students and parents, the third most common reason for not matriculating to a Catholic high school was that the student does not want to attend a Catholic school. Over a quarter of parent and student respondents named this as one of the top three reasons. This was noted as a primary reason by 17 participants, while an additional 12 and 19 ranked it as the second or third reason respectively.

Location, athletics, and “other” categories were each selected by over one-fifth of all respondents as one of up to three reasons why they would not be attending a Catholic high school. While each of these were identified by 37 respondents, most ranked it as a secondary reason. “Catholic high school location is too far” was ranked first by 12 respondents with 25 others ranking it second or third.” Co-curricular athletic program of importance is stronger at another school” was selected as the primary reason by only six participants as the primary

reason. However, an additional 31 participants noted it as secondary reason in their decision to not attend a Catholic high school. The 37 respondents choosing “other” recorded a variety of responses, none of which singularly would account for great significance. However, in reducing this text to common themes, seven reasons with multiple responses emerged: wanted change or bigger environment (5); student choice (3); distance learning due to COVID-19 (2); grades are poor (2); homeschool (2); moving (2); only single gender schools nearby (2); private school aid better (2).

There were two reasons identified by less than 5% of the respondents as contributing to their decision not to attend a Catholic high school. “Catholic religious instruction and/or values is not of value” was selected by seven participants among their top three reasons. An additional six participants named (their child or self) not being selected to the Catholic school of choice as one of their top three reasons. Among each of these two reasons, only two respondents named them as their primary reason for not attending a Catholic high school.

The majority of parents and students responding to the question of reasons for not attending a Catholic high school indicated two or three reasons for not attending. However, 37 (20.4%) of respondents only chose one reason. Again, the expense of tuition was most prominent with 29 (16.0%) while the other eight (4.4%) were spread across a variety of areas.

Huber (2004) assigned points to parents’ ranked responses among six options for not considering a Catholic high school for their child. The same scale of three points for each number one reason, two points for each number two reason, and one point for each number three reason was applied to this study’s participant rankings of reasons for not attending a Catholic high school. Following Huber’s line of reasoning, the higher resulting point value, the more

important that reason influenced the participant decision to not attend. Table 32 displays the total frequency and weighted point totals of all twelve variables in descending order of points.

Table 32

Frequency and Weighted Points Total of Participant Reasons Not Attending Catholic High School

Reason	Respondents identifying 1st, 2nd, or 3rd		Points	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Tuition is too expensive	135	74.6	357	38.0
Specialized academic program stronger at another school	51	28.2	97	10.3
Student does not want to attend	48	26.5	94	10.0
Other	37	20.4	81	8.6
Location it too far	37	20.4	80	8.5
Athletics program stronger at another	37	20.4	66	7.0
Visual or performing arts program stronger at another school	32	17.7	56	6.0
Academics may not be challenging enough	15	8.3	32	3.4
Academics may be too challenging	13	7.2	29	3.1
Friends are not attending	14	7.7	22	2.3
Catholic religious instruction and/or values is not of value	7	3.9	13	1.4
Not admitted to Catholic HS of choice	6	3.3	13	1.4

Note. Using weighting similar to Huber (2004), #1 reason = 3 points, #2 reason = 2 points, #3 reason = 1 point. Adapted from *The Accessibility of American Catholic Secondary Schools to the Various Socioeconomic Classes of Catholic families*. (Publication No. 3122956), by J. B. Huber, 2004, [Doctoral dissertation, University of San Francisco], ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. Copyright 2004 by J.B. Huber.

A considerable percentage (38%) of the total points were distributed to “tuition is too expensive.” After that, there was a large drop to the next most important reasons of “specialized

academic program” and “student does not want to attend” at 10.3% and 10.0% of the points respectively. The resulting order of points in this weighting system in general mirrored the total frequency rates when combining first second and third responses equally. The only exception was the weight of “academics may be too challenging” was greater than “friends are not attending” which received one more response, but most of them ranked second or third. There were six respondents who named the challenge of academics as the primary reason for not attending while there were only two respondents indicating their friends attending elsewhere as the primary reason for not attending a Catholic high school.

Analysis of Tuition Expense as a Reason for Not Attending. Since tuition expense was clearly the most frequent and heavily weighted reasons respondents offered for not attending a Catholic high school, further analysis was conducted based on data available. Of the 181 parent participants who indicated at least one reason for not attending a Catholic high school, 106 also self-reported their family income level. Table 33 displays a comparison of the inclusion of tuition expense within the top three reasons by family income level.

Table 33*Comparison of Tuition Expense as a Reason for Not Attending Catholic HS by Income*

Variable	Included in Top Three Reasons		Not Included in Top Three Reasons	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Under \$30,000	11	78.6	3	21.4
\$30,001-\$60,000	11	68.8	5	31.3
\$60,001-\$90,000	18	94.7	1	5.3
\$90,001-\$120,000	10	71.4	4	28.6
\$120,001-\$150,000	8	88.9	1	11.1
\$150,001-\$180,000	12	85.7	2	14.3
Over \$180,000	11	55.0	9	45.0
Total	81	76.4	25	23.6

Note. “Not include” indicates participant chose one to three reasons but did not include tuition expense as one of them.

Among of parents across all income levels, 76.4% included “Catholic high school tuition is too expensive” as one of their top three reasons for their child not attending a Catholic high school. With all but one respondent including this reason in their top three, parents in the \$60,001 to \$90,000 income level had the highest percentage at 94.7%. Also, considerably higher percentage of inclusion of this reason than the overall average were parents within income levels of \$120,001 to \$150,000 and \$150,001 to 180,000 with 88.9% and 85.7% respectively. Parents in the lowest income levels of under \$30,000 and \$30,001 to \$60,000 included this reason slightly above and below the average at 78.6% and 68.8% respectively. Only a little over half (55%) of parents in the highest income level of over \$180,000 included this reason within their top three for not attending a Catholic high school. While differences are visible among some income

levels, with relatively few responses spread over seven income categories, a chi-square analysis was not significant.

Financial Assistance Offered to Offset Tuition Expense. Tuition assistance is offered by all Catholic high schools and several foundations to offset tuition expense. It was important to understand the degree to which participants received offers of tuition assistance. Parents and students were asked to indicate any financial assistance awards they were offered to attend a Catholic high school. Four options referred to need-based financial assistance from the high school, the Catholic Education Foundation, the Specialty Family Foundation, and community-based organizations. A fifth option of non-need-based option was titled “Merit scholarships (e.g. based on academics, leadership, test scores, etc.)”. Finally, a sixth option indicated “no financial assistance or scholarships were offered.” For the purposes of this analysis, participants selecting any one or more of the five types of financial assistance were regarded as receiving financial assistance. Participants who selected “no financial assistance or scholarships offered” were regarded as not receiving financial aid. Table 34 shows the results of a comparison of receipt of any type of financial assistance offer by family income level.

Table 34*Comparison of Any Financial Assistance by Income*

Variable	Received Aid		Did Not Receive Aid	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Under \$30,000	35	89.7	4	10.3
\$30,001-\$60,000	38	76.0	12	24.0
\$60,001-\$90,000	27	54.0	23	46.0
\$90,001-\$120,000	18	50.0	18	50.0
\$120,001-\$150,000	19	50.0	19	50.0
\$150,001-\$180,000	22	53.7	19	46.3
Over \$180,000	38	43.7	49	56.3
Total	197	57.8	144	42.2

Note. Financial assistance includes any form of need-based or merit-based financial assistance offered from HS or other sources

When considering all types of financial assistance, 57.8% of all parent respondents indicating income level received at least one offer of aid. Chi-square analysis was conducted to determine if there were statistically significant differences between receipt of assistance across the seven family income levels. Results revealed that rate of financial assistance offered and income level were different, $\chi^2 = 32.64$, $p < .001$. The effect size of this difference is large, with a Cramer's *V* value of .31 ($df=6$). Parents in the lowest income levels of under \$30,000 and \$30,001 to \$60,000 showed the highest percentages of receiving some kind of assistance offer at 89.7% and 76.0% respectively. Parents whose income fell between \$60,001 to \$180,000 all reported assistance offers at a much lower rate ranging from 50.0% to 54.0%. The frequency of

financial assistance received was lowest among those parents in the highest income level above \$180,000 at 43.7%.

Table 35 displays the results of a comparison of need-based financial assistance by family income levels as reported by parent respondents.

Table 35

Comparison of Need-Based Financial Assistance by Income

Variable	Received Aid		Did Not Receive Aid	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Under \$30,000	35	89.7	4	10.3
\$30,001-\$60,000	34	68.0	16	32.0
\$60,001-\$90,000	23	46.0	27	54.0
\$90,001-\$120,000	17	47.2	19	52.8
\$120,001-\$150,000	10	26.3	28	73.7
\$150,001-\$180,000	13	31.7	28	68.3
Over \$180,000	15	17.2	72	82.8
Total	147	43.1	194	56.9

Note. Need-based financial assistance includes selection of any of the following: HS-offered need-based, CEF, and Specialty Family Foundation.

The overall percentage of parents receiving need-based assistance was lower at 43.1%. Chi-square analysis revealed a similar pattern as with “any assistance” reported previously, that need-based financial assistance award frequency is related to family income level, $X^2 = 77.91, p < .001$. Given the Cramer’s *V* value of .48 ($df=6$), the effect size of this association is large. Without the inclusion of merit-based awards, the descending rate of frequency of parents receiving assistance was even more pronounced as income levels increased. The rate among

parents falling in income levels under \$30,000 continued to be highest at 89.7% followed by a sharp drop to 68.7% among parents within the \$30,001 to \$60,000 income level. While another drop in frequency to 46.0% was reported among the third income level of \$60,001 to \$90,000, the fourth income level group of \$90,001 to \$120,000 reported a receipt rate just slightly above that at 47.2%. From there, another marked decrease could be found for the \$120,001 to \$150,00 and \$150,001 to 180,000 levels at 26.3% and 31.7% respectively. Finally, 17.2% of those reporting the highest income level of over \$180,000 received a need-based offer of financial assistance from at least one source.

Impact of Financial Assistance on Matriculation Choice. As concerns of the expense of tuition were rated as the number one reason for not attending Catholic high school, it was important to understand how the awarding of financial assistance may or may not impact this. Table 36 shows the rates of parents reporting receipt of an offer of any financial assistance to a Catholic high school compared by high school matriculation choice.

Table 36

Comparison of Any Financial Assistance and HS Matriculation Choice

Variable	Received Aid		Did Not Receive Aid	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Catholic HS	298	72.3	114	27.7
Private (NC) HS	11	50.0	11	50.0
Public HS	32	25.2	95	74.8
Total	341	60.8	220	39.2

Note. Financial assistance includes any form of need-based or merit-based financial assistance offered from HS or other sources

Among 561 parents and students providing answers to both questions, 60.8% reported receiving some kind of need- and/or merit-based financial assistance. It was visibly evident that the pattern of receipt of assistance was not distributed similarly among high school matriculation types. Chi square analysis revealed that a significant pattern between these two variables exists, $\chi^2 = 91.59$, $p < .001$. Furthermore, with a Cramer's V of .40 ($df=2$), the effect size of this association is large. The highest rates of received aid were among participants matriculating to Catholic high schools at 72.3%. Half of those matriculating to private, non-Catholic high schools reported receiving an offer of financial assistance to attend a Catholic high school. Finally, the rate of receiving an offer of financial assistance was only 25.2% among those matriculating to a public high school.

The results of a comparison of need-only-based assistance offered to parents and students from Catholic high schools by matriculation school type can be seen in Table 37.

Table 37

Comparison of Need-Based Financial Assistance and HS Matriculation Choice

Variable	Received Aid		Did Not Receive Aid	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Catholic HS	216	52.4	196	47.6
Private (NC) HS	9	40.9	13	59.1
Public HS	27	21.3	100	78.7
Total	252	44.9	309	55.1

Note. Need-based financial assistance includes selection of any of the following: HS-offered need-based, CEF, and Specialty Family Foundation.

The percentage of participants receiving need-based financial assistance was lower at 44.9% than when previously combined with merit-based assistance. However, a similar pattern

in which receipt rates are disproportionate based on matriculation school type seemed evident. This was tested through chi-square analysis which revealed that the null hypothesis could be rejected. There was a significant association between receipt of need-based financial assistance and matriculation to different types of school, $X^2 = 38.26, p < .001$. The effect size of this was medium as evidenced by a Cramer's V of .26 ($df=2$). Those matriculating to a Catholic high school reported the highest need-based financial assistance offered rates at 52.4%. Participants matriculating to a private, non-Catholic high school reported receiving need-based offers of assistance at a rate slightly lower than the overall average at 44.9%. Parents and students matriculating to public high schools reported receipt of assistance offers at a significantly lower rate of 21.3%.

Qualitative Data Results. In response to the survey data, the interviews revealed a greater understanding of the reasons families were deciding not to matriculate to a Catholic high school. Just as the quantitative data for all participants revealed financial considerations to be the primary reason for most respondents, all but one of the parents participating in the qualitative interviews overwhelmingly pointed to the expense of Catholic high school as a primary reason for not attending. While financial challenges were articulated as the primary reason among participants of all economic levels, findings are presented in two categories representing the lower and upper ends of the income levels surveyed.

Finances as a Reason Lower Family Incomes. Even though Maria's two older children are attending Catholic high schools, she made it clear that her daughter who just graduated eighth grade from a Catholic elementary school would be attending a charter school.

The decision was, more than anything, economical. Given the questions that come out right now, the question of the pandemic. If she were to go to Catholic school, would be paying for four schools. Right now, the way finances are could not afford four schools. In response to my inquiry about Catholic Education Foundation based financial assistance, she replied:

We've applied year after year. For example, with (older son) we applied this year and didn't qualify. That is one area—we are always involved at church, in church groups, in parent groups. And we've always said that there are people who are not involved, who do not participate, and they always qualify. I know it is based on income, but we are in the middle. We are a large family, so we need to be in the middle to make ends meet. We have (older daughter) in college. If we made less money, we couldn't pay our bills. CEF doesn't take that into account.

This rejection of financial assistance from the Catholic Education Foundation was a surprise since she had indicated their family income to be less than \$60,000. Even if her income is slightly more, she still articulates the challenge of being in the middle with four children and not qualifying for this assistance.

In the case of Julia, the only reason that her daughter was not set to attend a Catholic high school was finances. As shared earlier, her daughter wanted to attend but as a single mom of two children in Catholic schools she decided she could not make it happen and enrolled in a public charter school. However, by the time I conducted Julia's follow up interview in late July things had changed to the extent that she described that she felt like now she felt that she was in a telenovela caught between two loves due to new information.

Today I got a call from the director of admissions from St. Garcia letting me know that they had cut the price in half for me and that the packet was ready for pickup.

For me to decide, and I'm hopeful that I might be able to send her there. . . . And so now I am more undecided now because I would LOVE TO HAVE THE St. Garcia experience come to fruition.

The excitement in Julia's face and voice as she articulated the last sentence was palpable.

However, she also transitioned back into a cautious, sober parent not wanting to have her hopes up too much in case the school cannot provide enough aid for her. When asked about other forms of financial assistance other than the receiving high school, she indicated that she had received a CEF award of \$2000 she would be able to use at St. Garcia. Additionally, since I knew the Specialty Family Foundation awards were given to Julia's elementary school principal to assist families matriculating to Catholic high schools, I inquired if she had also received one of those awards.

The principal at St. Michael commented to me that there was a scholarship from St. Michael, but I spoke with him, precisely today and he told me that perhaps they could no longer give it to her. It's a separate foundation that if I kept one of my students at St. Michael, I would get support for the student going to Catholic high school. But they said that perhaps it might not be available any longer because it's a bit late.

The combination of enough tuition assistance from St. Garcia, CEF, and Specialty Family Foundation by way of the Catholic elementary school just might be enough to change her plans to let her daughter attend the Catholic high school of her choice. However, Julia also worries about the sustainability of this and ensuring she still supports her younger son.

But if she goes to Catholic high school, I will need to figure something out to also send him to high school to be fair.

For this single mother whose annual income is under \$30,000, to keep her children in Catholic schools seemed challenging, but she maintained some cautious hope.

A comment from a survey respondent echoed some of Julia's hope for Catholic high school and uncertainty in the amount of financial assistance, "Even though I will be living paycheck to paycheck. I just hope I will get financial aid. If I don't then I will be counting pennies but it's all worth it for my daughter." While it is great to see this parent with family income less than \$60,000 was committed to sending her child to a Catholic high school, it was surprising that in late May she also did not have a clear sense of the financial assistance yet.

Finances as a Reason Higher Family Incomes. Jenny has a household income of over \$180,000 and yet stated her primary concern with the cost of quality Catholic high school to be too prohibitive for her two children to continue beyond elementary school.

If I can continue paying the same amount of tuition, maybe paid like even \$2,000 more a year than what I paid at [current Catholic elementary school], they would be in the Catholic school.

While we discussed that there may be a few high schools that could get fairly close to that, she saw a great distinction between the lower priced and higher priced Catholic high schools. She had previously enrolled her children in summer programs at different Catholic high schools and came out a fan of the higher priced school and very critical of the lower priced one. As a result, she thought well of several schools charging over \$20,000, but could not fathom paying that much.

Yeah, and by that time you're looking at like \$40,000 a year. And then, you know, we were also trying to like buy a house, and there's no way to do all those things. The solution is buy a house in a nice area that has good public schools.

In fact, Jenny was in the process of moving her family to another state to put her children in what she perceived to be better public schools in the fall. I asked her about consideration of Catholic high schools there. She replied,

There is one Catholic high school, Bishop Dowd. The tuition there is \$14,000 a year. So that's like more affordable, but then again, if you multiply it by two that's \$28,000 a year. On my salary, which, if I don't work overtime, my base pay is like \$78,000, drastically cutting into things.

While Jenny's income is higher than many families sacrificing to place their children in Catholic schools, with other obligations of a home mortgage and other future costs, she did not think it was practical.

Rob is another parent whose annual income was greater than \$180,000 but felt that the cost of high school tuition would be too great to continue to the all-boys school his son's friends were heading to:

We kind of, you know, thought about going to Catholic school and going to St. Augustine, but just the price range was just, you know, just out, way too much, you know, to kind of really look into that further even really consider that.

Since Rob referenced previously in the interview that his son was at the top of his class and had qualified for a selective honors program at the public school, he was asked if they had received any merit awards in addition to need-based financial assistance.

No, we didn't go through the actual application process. We talked to them about the aid and what you know we could get, which was, you know, a substantial amount to what the tuition is. But the price, even still, after that was still a lot, you know. Even if it was like half the tuition it was still, you know, kind of too much.

He also seemed to be a little concerned that the amount would not be guaranteed for all four years.

We kind of almost considered it at the end, but you know we just, you know, decided not you know kind of decided not to. Yeah, because I know it would be one year. Then I don't know what the second year, the third year, the fourth year, how long that would last for. I think we're just kind of worried just about, you know, if we ended up getting stuck for some reason with the tuition . . . because it was just a lot and if something, I don't know, you know, it would be harder to go there and then turn him away from that school if he didn't want to leave anymore.

While it appeared that Rob's family may not qualify for traditional need-based assistance, given that his son was at the top of his class and open to attending with his friends, if he had been courted with a guarantee of a merit award over all four years, there may have been potential to have kept this student in a Catholic high school.

Other Reasons for not Sending Children to Catholic High School. While the cost of tuition was the primary push away from Catholic high schools, in a few cases, there were additional reasons that supported their decisions. The two most clear cases were the previously shared examples of Miguel and Carrie who prioritized the special engineering and improvisation programs they found to be stronger at a non-Catholic high school. Additionally, as shared

previously in the findings of parents and students sharing equally in the decision, in the cases of Gabriel and Maria, in addition to financial concerns, they cited that their child was open to or interested in trying out a larger/different school. Finally, with the case of Veronica, the lack of an appropriate special education program or services in Catholic school was a primary driver in her decision. This will be further detailed later in the findings regarding Catholic high school perceptions.

Research Question #1 Conclusion

Data collected in this mixed methods research revealed that there are many key factors that Catholic elementary school parents and students consider in determining which high school the student attends. First, in over half of the survey participants, that decision was shared somewhat equally by both parents and students. When not shared equally, parents were more likely to have the greatest influence on the decision in about 27.6 % as opposed to students having the greatest influence in 16.2 % of the cases. When looking at matriculation school type within decision-maker subgroups, it was found that, when made primarily by the student or shared by both parents and students, participants were more likely to choose to continue to a Catholic high school. However, when the primary influencer was solely the parent, participants were more likely to matriculate to a non-Catholic high school. Qualitative data revealed similar tendency among those matriculating to public high school, the parent was primary decision-maker a majority of the time. Finally, compared to previous research cited, cases of students having the greatest influence were higher, particularly among the subset of students who reported higher cases than parents.

Both students and parents considered a variety of factors to be important in making the decision for a particular high school. The only factor from the literature which was found to be of little importance to both parents and students was single gender education. Except for co-curricular athletic programs, parents rated each factor to be more important than the students did. Statistically significant differences in school matriculation type included the rating of faith and values, single-gender, and athletics to be less important factors among public high school matriculants compared to those matriculating to Catholic high school. ANOVA results showed significant differences in five of the ten factors when comparing participant ethnicity. The largest significant difference was with regard to financial considerations, which Filipino and Hispanic and Latino parents and students rated more important than White or other participants.

Survey and interview participants not matriculating to public and private schools identified the expense of tuition as the number one reason for not attending a Catholic high school. While parents in all income groups cited this answer most frequently among their top three reasons, those with incomes between \$60,001 to \$90,000 had the highest percentage with 94.7% citing it compared to only 68.8% of those with incomes of \$30,001 to \$60,000. The percentage of families being offered financial assistance also drops considerably beginning with income levels between \$60,001 to \$90,000.

Even though expense was the primary reason for not attending a Catholic high school, in all but 15% of the cases participants articulated one or two other reasons that added to their decision. The second most common reason selected in surveys was the quality of a special program at another high school. This was validated by interviewees who made selections to

attend public high schools in part because of a strong program of interest including engineering, improvisational theater, early college credit, and honors pathway.

Research Question 2: What is the Relationship Between Satisfaction with Catholic Elementary School and Catholic High School Perception?

Elementary School Satisfaction

Quantitative Data Results. Participants independently rated seven variables representing key elements of effective Catholic schools as identified by the National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools (NSBECS). In response to the survey prompt, “Reflecting on the Catholic elementary school you attend, please indicate the degree you are satisfied with each of the following,” to which parents and students selected from five options on a Likert scale from “extremely dissatisfied” (1) to “extremely satisfied” (5). Additionally, the seven items measuring satisfaction of essential components of Catholic elementary schools were tested for internal reliability. A Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of .85 was calculated indicating strong internal reliability, so a mean composite variable, “Catholic elementary school (CES) effectiveness” was created. Table 38 displays descriptive statistics for all participants as well as parent and student subgroups for each of the 7 elementary school satisfaction variables and the composite.

Table 38*Elementary School Satisfaction Among Parents and Students*

Variable	Parent			Student			Total		
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Religious studies	359	4.57	0.72	251	4.36	0.72	610	4.48	0.73
Faith formation (prayer, Mass, service)	355	4.70	0.62	249	4.51	0.62	604	4.62	0.66
School leadership	357	4.43	0.82	251	4.29	0.82	608	4.38	0.84
Academic instruction	357	4.34	0.87	250	4.37	0.87	607	4.35	0.83
Co-curricular and extra-curricular programs	356	4.10	0.97	250	4.16	0.97	606	4.12	0.95
Facilities, equipment, and technology	355	4.13	0.94	251	4.06	0.94	606	4.10	0.97
Sense of school as a community	355	4.59	0.73	251	4.41	0.73	606	4.51	0.79
CES effectiveness composite	359	4.41	0.62	251	4.31	0.62	610	4.37	0.61

Note. Likert scale from 1 (Extremely dissatisfied) to 5 (Extremely satisfied)

With an overall effectiveness composite mean of 4.37 among all parents and students, the majority of participants responded to elementary school satisfaction questions positively with “satisfied” (4) or “highly satisfied” (5). Among all participants, faith formation (prayer, Mass, service) received the highest mean at 4.62 with sense of school as community second with a mean of 4.51. Facilities, equipment, and technology and co-curricular/extra-curricular programs received the lowest overall means of 4.10 and 4.12, respectively.

Comparison of Parent and Student Survey Data. In five of the seven questions, the mean for parents was slightly higher. However, regarding academic instruction and co-curricular and extra-curricular student mean scores were slightly higher for students as compared to

parents. For both parents and students, the highest means were in response to satisfaction of faith formation with 4.70 and 4.51 respectively. While overall both groups were satisfied, among the seven categories, the relatively lowest means among parents and students were in response to co-curricular and extra-curricular (4.10 and 4.16 respectively) as well as facilities, equipment, and technology (4.13 and 4.06 respectively).

Independent samples *t*-tests were run on each of the seven variables as well as the composite variable. Significant differences were found between parents and students among results of five of the eight dependent variables. The means of parents ($M = 4.57, SD = .72$) were significantly higher than those of students ($M = 4.36, SD = .73$) in the area of satisfaction of their elementary school religious instruction $t(608) = 3.46, p < .01$. Similarly, with regard to satisfaction with faith formation, there was a significant difference $t(491.91) = 3.36, p < .01$, between students ($M = 4.51, SD = .62$) and parents ($M = 4.70, SD = .62$) with the latter rating their elementary schools higher. Leadership in their Catholic elementary school was also rated significantly higher among parents ($M = 4.43, SD = .82$) than students ($M = 4.29, SD = .82$) $t(606) = 2.01, p < .05$. Parents ($M = 4.59, SD = .73$) were more satisfied with the sense of community in their Catholic elementary school than students ($M = 4.41, SD = .73$) $t(481.02) = 2.62, p < .01$. Finally the difference in means of parents ($M = 4.41, SD = .62$) and students ($M = 4.31, SD = .62$) for the composite of Catholic elementary school effectiveness was also found to be statistically significant $t(608) = 2.02, p < .01$. However, with Cohen's *d* values ranging from .17 to .28, all five significant differences were shown to have a small effect.

Comparison of Groups by Matriculating High School Type. In order to answer research question 2, it is important to further understand Catholic elementary school satisfaction

responses by disaggregating this data by high school matriculation decision. Table 39 shows descriptive statistics for each of the seven variables and composite among students and parents who chose Catholic, private, or public high schools. It can be noted that six (0.98%) respondents selected “other” were not included in analysis and discussion as this small number would not facilitate a valid statistical test.

Table 39

Elementary School Satisfaction by Matriculation School Type

Variable	Catholic HS			Private (NC) HS			Public HS		
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Religious studies	424	4.51	0.71	23	4.30	0.93	140	4.48	0.73
Faith formation (prayer, Mass, service)	421	4.64	0.65	23	4.39	0.78	137	4.66	0.62
School leadership	423	4.44	0.79	23	3.78	1.17	139	4.4	0.81
Academic instruction	422	4.34	0.84	23	4.04	0.82	139	4.55	0.68
Co-curricular and extra-curricular	422	4.15	0.93	23	3.87	0.97	138	4.12	0.97
Facilities, equipment, and technology	422	4.17	0.88	23	3.61	1.16	138	4.05	1.13
Sense of school as a community	421	4.55	0.79	23	4.39	0.99	139	4.52	0.74
CES effectiveness composite	424	4.40	0.58	23	4.06	0.76	140	4.4	0.6

Note. Likert scale from 1 (Extremely dissatisfied) to 5 (Extremely satisfied)

There are some differences in reporting level of satisfaction of elementary school among subgroups of high school matriculation type. Separate one-way ANOVA tests were run for each of the elementary school variables as well as the composite in order to determine if differences in means for those choosing to attend a Catholic, private, or public school were significantly different. In each of these, an *F*-ratio was calculated by dividing the variance between groups by

the variance within groups. The larger the resulting F -ratio was, the more likely that there were differences among the groups. Output revealed that statistically significant differences existed in four of the eight elementary school satisfaction variables.

As seen in Table 40, the one-way ANOVA revealed a significant difference in the satisfaction of elementary school leadership among respondents choosing Catholic, private non-Catholic, and public high schools: $F(2,582) = 7.20, p < .01$. In order to further understand which of the groups differed significantly, a Tukey HSD post hoc comparison test was run. Results indicated that students and parents choosing private high schools ($M = 3.78$) rated their Catholic elementary school leadership significantly lower than those choosing Catholic ($M = 4.44, p < .001$) or public high schools ($M = 4.40, p < .01$). With an eta squared value of .02 the effect size of this was somewhat small.

Table 40

ANOVA Results Comparing Perspectives from Different HS Matriculation Type Toward ES Leadership (N = 585)

Perspective Comparison Type	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	9.43	2	4.71	7.20	0.001**
Within Groups	381.36	582	0.66		
Total	390.79	584			

** $p < .01$

A one-way ANOVA test also revealed significant differences among high school matriculation choice subgroups regarding satisfaction of academic instruction in their Catholic elementary school $F(2,582) = 7.20, p < .01$. The results are reported in Table 41. The Tukey HSD post hoc test revealed that respondents choosing public high schools ($M = 4.55$) were more satisfied with the academic instruction in their Catholic elementary school than respondents

matriculating to private ($M = 4.04, p < .05$) and Catholic ($M = 4.34, p < .05$) high schools.

However, the resulting eta squared value of .02 indicated that the effect size is small.

Table 41

ANOVA Results Comparing Perspectives from Different HS Matriculation Type Toward ES Academic Instruction (N = 584)

Perspective Comparison Type	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	7.25	2	3.63	5.55	0.004**
Within Groups	379.62	581	0.65		
Total	386.88	583			

** $p < .01$

Table 42 displays the results of the ANOVA test comparing different HS matriculation subgroups' mean satisfaction ratings for Catholic elementary school facilities, equipment, and technology. Results showed a statistically significant difference in the group means $F(2,581) = 5.55, p < .01$. In order to understand which groups differed, a post hoc test was run. The Tukey HSD results demonstrated that, while public ($M = 4.05$) and private ($M = 3.61$) school matriculating respondents both rated this category of their current Catholic elementary school lower than their Catholic high school ($M = 4.17$) matriculating counterparts, only the difference between private and Catholic high school groups was statistically significant ($p < .05$). The eta squared value of .01 demonstrates that there is a small effect.

Table 42

ANOVA Results Comparing Perspectives from Different HS Matriculation Type Toward ES Facilities, Equipment, and Technology (N = 583)

Perspective Comparison Type	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	7.56	2	3.78	4.15	0.016**
Within Groups	528.51	580	0.91		
Total	536.07	582			

** $p < .01$

As displayed in Table 43, a one-way ANOVA comparing the Catholic elementary school effectiveness composite (comprised of the means of all seven variables of elementary school satisfaction) means of high school matriculating subgroups showed significant differences $F(2,584) = 3.73, p < .05$. Tukey HSD post hoc tests confirmed that parents and students matriculating to private high schools ($M = 4.06$) rated the effectiveness of their Catholic elementary school significantly lower than respondents matriculating to Catholic ($M = 4.40, p < .05$) and public high schools ($M = 4.40, p < .05$). However, with an eta-squared value of 0.01, the effect is small.

Table 43

ANOVA Results Comparing Perspectives from Different HS Matriculation Type Toward CES Effectiveness Composite (N = 587)

Perspective Comparison Type	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2.62	2	1.31	3.73	0.025*
Within Groups	205.09	584	0.35		
Total	207.71	586			

* $p < .05$

While differences among matriculation school type were significant in the above detailed four Catholic elementary school effectiveness variables and composite, the null hypothesis could not be rejected among the other four variables. Differences in school type were not statistically

significant with regard to religious studies, faith formation, co-curricular and extra-curricular programs, and sense of community.

The data collected as survey results set a base level understanding of how satisfied parents and students matriculating from Catholic elementary school were with the effectiveness of variety of components articulated in the NSBECS. Follow up interviews with parents choosing not to continue in Catholic education at the secondary level allowed collection of more clear understanding of specific areas of greatest satisfaction and dissatisfaction. These qualitative findings are presented in the next section.

Qualitative Data Results. As opposed to survey participants who responded to seven specific areas of elementary school effectiveness, interview participants were given broad open-ended prompts to describe any positive or negative experiences with their Catholic elementary school. While this unrestricted approach yielded detailed examples in many different areas, after coding and analysis of responses, three major themes emerged. Each of these will be described through sharing of the participants' own words.

Community. One of the most dominant themes brought up by most interviewees was the sense of community in the Catholic elementary school. Some parents like Miguel spoke more about the community from the point of view that those working at the school know the children and parents well:

Whoever is in the front, who's the secretary and how welcoming, inviting are they to and how they interact with the children. Those things combined, I think is what makes it makes you feel part of the community family. Because everybody knows, they know

your kids. And if there's a problem, I know that the front secretary actually will just text me.

For other parents like Rob, the feeling of community was felt in both school personnel as well as other families at the school:

Being able to get pretty close with all the other families of like his classmates. We kind of knew them all pretty well. And just the close knit of the school and you know all the families that go to that school and you know the administration and faculty as well. The easy access to talk to them if you need something.

Jenny valued the sense of a Catholic community that served as a unifying element:

When you go to a Catholic school, it's like a community. I think it feels more personal. Since it's a Catholic school you kind of feel like okay, you know, sure, we might have differences, but the same thing that's supposed to bring us all together is our religious beliefs. So at least there's commonalities there. Like when we came to Basil Moreau, it was interesting because a large portion of the student body is Filipino and my kids are not. They kind of stuck out a little bit, but I did throw myself into volunteering very heavily with the sport committee, and I also was classroom parent for two years, too. So just being at a Catholic school there's a lot of personal contact that you end up having with, you know, the administration and with the teachers and stuff like that. And it was always a good place for them to be.

In addition to positive experiences, many participants also revealed ways in which, by the end of their experience in Catholic elementary school, the sense of community eroded or did not

live up to some expectations. Having moved into a new area, Carrie and her family found the Catholic elementary school environment to be valuable.

We really did love that community atmosphere where everybody knew the kids and everybody really, you know, felt like there was a lot of eyes on your kids all the time and that the teachers really, really cared. And that was great. We had a lot of friends there and we, you know, we really really liked it, but it's just when you have a lot of friends when your kids all get along, and then when your kids get older and they start kind of choosing their own friends, it becomes a bit different. . . . I think maybe as a family. We kind of outgrew it.

Carrie went on to open up about her son's challenges:

But then for our older child it wasn't so good in the later years. I would say, starting in grade seven there were a lot of issues there. He has some issues with anxiety and he's very creative and he's very, very quirky and he didn't fit in that well there, even though he had gone to school with these kids all the way through preschool. There were a lot of issues with bullying. . . . We just felt like there wasn't a lot of diversity in the school, economic diversity or diversity of thought . . . and I was always having to talk to the school about bullying.

When asked about the school's response in handling the issues, Carrie responded:

I mean, I feel like they tried. You know they were concerned and they acknowledged it definitely, and they did talk to the kids and they did try to get involved. But the fact was that there's not a lot of diversity in that school. A significant portion of the kids in his class, their parents had gone to the same school and in some cases their grandparents had

gone to the same school so they were very, like, kind of like linear thinkers. If you are not in athletics or you're not in then you're in, you're not in the clique. You know, and so the school did try and stand up for him when the bullying got overt. But it's very cliquey. So it's just like the kids were warned not to be so jerky, but they just didn't. He was just always the odd one out because he wasn't on that path. He wasn't part of that clique. And we just, we were over it after a while. Even though the teachers, some of the teachers were really disappointed, like he should be going to a, you know, Catholic high school, and he's going to get eaten alive in a public school, and it was like he's been bullied every day for two years in *this* school. . . . We'll take our chances, you know, at least it's a big enough school that he can escape and find his own clique, which he could never do in that school because there was only one clique and that was the kids that were on that path.

The small and fixed nature of the Catholic elementary school that was attractive to some families did not result in Carrie's son feeling as if he were in a community:

You have like 30 kids basically a grade all the way through. So these are the kids he'd gone to school with him. He would say to me like I was the weird kid in kindergarten and I never outgrew it. You know, he never got a chance to kind of reinvent himself and he was right.

Two other parents interviewed referenced concerns about bullying or drama that emerged in the latter years at their Catholic elementary school. As shared previously in the section regarding students and parents making the high school selection together, Maria's eighth-grade daughter Susana felt there was a lot of drama among peers in her Catholic elementary school.

She wanted a change socially, to be around a different group of students to help with the drama.

While this was significant enough for Susana to want to try public education, Maria also acknowledged that her two older children who matriculated to Catholic high schools also had enough of their Catholic elementary school classmates.

Neither went to the Catholic schools that other students from their middle school attended. Pedro was the only one from St. Andre to go to St. Stanislaus. For example, Melissa was the only one from her class to go to Mercy. New people, new teachers. Everything was different. It was a different experience.

Although Maria talked about each of her children matriculating to different schools, they all agreed on wanting a break from the students with whom they had attended Catholic elementary school.

This feeling was validated by one of the students' comments at the end of her survey:

I have been at this elementary school all my life (since preschool) and I've known all of my classmates for so long that I guess life got a bit boring. So, one of the main reasons I picked this school was that I just wanted to really get away from most of my classmates and have a new adventure in my life.

While Maria understood that some of things that eroded community for her children around middle school were part of adolescence, she felt that the Catholic elementary school did not do enough to try to guide students socially through this transition. When asked how the school could be more supportive, Maria replied:

[What] I really would like a little bit more in Catholic school is more guidance/ counseling for students. Because you know, teenagers, in eighth grade start you know, like changes. There I have seen a lot of, that they need more guidance, so they can be more centered on what they want. Susana used to tell me it was more difficult this year because there is a lot of drama, she'd say. I understand those are normal changes, but if there was more guidance, would be positive for them. They might take things a different way.

I think that a class, that would help students become with their identity, become more mentally strong. Maybe the Archdiocese could develop a class to help identify and discuss how to navigate adolescent changes? [There] should be a separate class that deals with topics such as drugs, how to navigate relationships/liking each other, social media. I know that it is a parent's responsibility to educate their children about these topics, but sometimes they hear it better from someone other than their parents.

Having three of her children graduate from Catholic elementary school Maria understood some change and challenge was inevitable. However, she felt that bringing issues up to the surface proactively and professionally may contribute to a more positive experience for the students.

Leadership and Communication. A frequent topic of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with Catholic elementary schools referenced in interviews had to do with the leadership of the school and perceived effectiveness of communication.

Miguel spoke about the importance of leadership in elementary school:

The administration and faculty staff are the big components of whether a person feels welcomed or part of something. I think especially in the school that we're in, the

principal is very hands on. I think that's been a huge- so she's always involved. She shows up. She goes to the games. She goes to she goes to the events. She really makes an effort to know the kids, know their names, you know, a huge thing. So because I've been to a lot of schools and I've worked in a lot of schools in the past, and sometimes that's not always the case.

Miguel went on to describe the importance of access to communication with leadership:

We had previously had them in another parochial school not too far away. But there were some problems that occurred. And as a result, we started looking around. We noticed that the administration, the faculty very open to conversations and whenever things were we felt were either addressed or they were always really open to have those conversations and try to make adjustments when needed. So that was a big, I think, a big pull for us.

Miguel recognized that those in leadership at times lack insight to new ideas or programs:

I don't think necessarily the technology always aligns in the way and they're not, they might not always be up to date with what's being used. And you know, my wife, especially my wife. And it's been a lot of time, you know, telling like the administration, Hey, have you heard it from this? Have you, have you considered that?

While Miguel did not depict his elementary school to be advanced in academic or technological matters, he appreciated that the principal seemed open to he and his wife's input.

Similarly, Jenny had experienced two different Catholic elementary schools as a parent and cited the principal's leadership as a key factor.

Having a strong principal is a really important aspect of the school. I mean it is probably the most important aspect of the school. If you don't have a strong leader, you know, just

your whole infrastructure is going to fall asleep and I didn't like the principal at all at St. Helena, sadly. They were kind of stuck in the past and not very forward thinking. And then, [principal at the more recent Catholic elementary school], I really loved her. And I love the way she had meetings with the other teachers and the way that the whole school was set up.

Like Miguel, Jenny articulated the value of the principal being open to parent ideas:

She's been very receptive. You know, there I had wanted to start like a track team at the school. That was one of my visions and there is another parent that was really gung ho about sports. So we formed the athletic committee together and we were able to have a track team for the kids. So there's that community that I was talking about. You know, you're able to come together and put that together for the kids and see it through and Mrs. Rojas was very supportive of that.

However, other parents described situations in which they felt that more consistent communication from principal or teachers would have greatly improved their experience. When asked if anything about her experience in Catholic elementary school could be improved, Julia replied:

Sometimes the communication with the teachers, um. . . I wish there was more information on the part of the Archdiocese when the principal sometimes receives a concern from my experience and sometimes I haven't felt heard. I've tried to communicate in my simple ways. I'm a simple woman from a ranch and I didn't study but yes, more ability to convey information so that there is an openness with parents.

When asked for more clarification about the lack of communication, Julia replied:

I'm referring to the openness concretely. Sometimes when there was a problem, I wanted to have someone else to hear my concern, someone that was higher than the principal because he, in certain situations with other parents, but I can speak only concretely about my experience in a certain incident, not terribly significant, but I felt like he ignored me, and I felt the school needed to hear every concern, especially those related to bullying and I felt he wasn't interested. I feel Catholic schools must, more than academics, have a Christian and humanistic emphasis to them. . . . I would've liked more information on where to go when a person like that, in a position like that doesn't pay attention to the concern, where does one go to seek further assistance, especially in a situation such as bullying.

While Julia was greatly concerned about what happened to her son and she was able to support him with counseling, she remained disappointed that when the principal didn't address it, she felt that she had no recourse.

The schools need to have more openness and truly take advantage of the community they have there and be better type of Catholic school in their vigilance as an administration to give a professional and human attention. The majority of the time I have felt I am a part of the community because I help with fundraisers and go to meetings. But, I engage with other parents, um but sometimes we feel shut out.

Even though Julia is involved, she feels that she and other parents in her community are not taken seriously by the school's leaders.

Kids need the extra support from parents, from principals, from teachers for people to be more involved, like the principals, for us to expect that teachers will communicate

because parents are paying, many are helping with scholarships, people with their own jobs supporting us, it a lot of sacrifice for many people for our kind to be there. And that the school take advantage to the maximum the opportunity in front of them to listen carefully to the concerns from parents, when they say that their kid has been hurt, or they pushed my kid, we need to come up with a solution – that’s the openness I have not seen, sadly, in the incident with my son, and I’ve heard other parents sadly I have seen other mothers cry, and I think, it’s due to the administration, more than anything.

Julia articulated another example in which a simple notification from the teacher or principal to the parent would have avoided much consternation. She made efforts to help and support the school and be physically present, but still felt alienated by a teacher or principal’s lack of collaboration.

Religious Instruction and Faith Formation. The importance of religion and being in a values-centered elementary school was an evident theme of the parent interviews. At some point all parents interviewed brought up their perceptions about the Catholic elementary school’s focus or lack thereof on religious instruction and faith formation. For many of the families, a school community infused with religious values was one of the reasons they chose to enter a Catholic elementary school. As Miguel described:

I grew up, my wife and I both went to parochial schools up through high school. So we wanted to replicate that as well. We wanted our children to actually have that experience. And we understand the importance of small class sizes and things like that. Also, I have a theology background, so that matters in theology as well. So the religious aspect of it was it was also important and important to us, especially the initial part of their education.

Julia described herself as conservative and valued greatly the ability for her children to be in a religiously focused Catholic school.

Adolescence is very difficult. Especially for a girl that had not had a father figure, in this case my daughter. I'm worried more about other kids more than math; I'm worried more about the culture of the kids.

Julia appreciated that Catholic schools gave her children a values-infused point of view to offset a more materialistic and liberal focus of the public square.

Johnny, who was very active in his Catholic church as a leader of service outreach activities, spoke of the importance of religion in the school.

So I would say from kindergarten through sixth grade we were really happy but then we felt like the religious education started to drop in seventh, eighth grade.

Johnny explained that the religion teacher who taught multiple subjects did not actually focus on religion, but rather allocate that time to other academic subjects. From his conversations with his daughters, it seemed as though they often did not really even have instructional time in religion.

Over dinner we would ask the girls what was religion class like today? That we maybe we maybe got 10 minutes in, we maybe got 15 minutes in. So we had always had the belief that if it's considered a class, and there are seven classes well each class is getting four full hours a week, let's say. And in comparison to what we were hearing from other parents, it was pretty obvious to most that they weren't getting that full hour.

Even when the teacher did allocate the dedicated period of time to religion, Johnny was critical that there was not really quality preparation or thought to the approach of the subject.

An hour of just reading a religious book or anything like that. Um, we, we were kind of banking on this sixth-grade teacher to kind of take it to the next level at that age group where they could do, you know, more videos, more movies, interaction. Let's play out Moses. Let's play out, you know, anything out of the Bible. Let's do some social justice things. And again, I just kind of felt like it was we had all these other classes and religion just kind of didn't have the priority.

Gabriel echoed disappointment in the Catholic elementary school meeting his expectations of religious instruction and faith formation.

Our choice was specifically to raise her in a Catholic school because I feared public school. American public school values are, to put it bluntly, scary, not good with the way started early in the last century of the removal of prayer in school and then the cultural value, cultural decay has set in ever since. So I wanted to give her Catholic Christian values while young. It certainly was good enough, but I don't feel that it was very strong. It seems to me the religion, I think what was it 40 minutes? Or one hour? . . . 40 minutes of instruction. It seems like it was more of the historical aspect of religion than the values of it. That's at least how I saw it. Faith formation, I think, needs more focus. The instructional value, historical value is all good. But the purpose I sent her to Catholic school was for the faith formation. I think that's where it lacked.

Gabriel's daughter, Annie was in proximity so she offered more detail about her religion teachers from the last couple of years:

Our old religion teacher, she was also a Spanish teacher so we only sometimes did religion. It was mostly Spanish. But then when the new religion teacher came, he taught

us from the book and he made us do activities. But it never really taught us any . . . well, we learned values, but we never really put it into action. And he was a laid back teacher, but he taught religion from the book. He just said what the book was teaching and sometimes he made one of our classmates explain like a word that the class didn't know.

Gabriel and Annie's descriptions of religion instruction being shorted for other subjects and lacking engagement beyond the text matched Johnny's in a different Catholic elementary school. Gabriel continued to clarify an additional comment Annie made about the missed opportunity of application of values.

There's one thing that they had them do which is community service. But it became more an exercise of okay just have your paper signed and show you did one hour here, one hour there and there was no monitoring. I don't believe there was any discussion about what you did, right, girl, on your volunteering community service?

Annie replied:

No, not really. . . . They made us write a paragraph on how it helped us in our faith at the end, but

Gabriel:

Okay, so I think, to me, it felt like it just became a reporting system. Make sure you check the box and then that was it. It's done. I think it lacks in that aspect of the interaction and developing that real desire to help others rather than just tick the box and yeah I completed 20 hours for this semester and I'm good. I think that's not a good approach at all.

Gabriel speculated that the elementary school's poor approach to faith formation was not limited to particular religion teacher or class assignment, but rather the school's intentional watering down to appeal to others.

I think the Christian values ought to be more front and center and without regard to political correctness. I think because St. Joan of Arc and I believe other Catholic schools, admit non-Catholics, that there's an inclination to be inclusive and therefore put the Catholic values aside for convenience. I think it should be unapologetically Catholic in its approach and those who are not Catholic would just have to learn it as, from their aspect, instructional or historical. But for Catholics attending the school, I think it should be pretty much straightforward and as I said, non-apologetically.

Gabriel offered specific examples in English or social studies classes in which teachers did not lead students toward Catholic teaching such as its stance against abortion. Annie clarified that she felt that several of her teachers were Catholic and might even be pro-life, but more often let students speak freely:

The teachers give us a platform to share our opinions. They don't force anything on us. And also our social studies teacher, she, when we would talk, when we're on the topic of the government, she let us have a conversation about our views and she wouldn't interject herself into any of it. She would just say, that's your opinion. I won't enforce anything on you.

Gabriel added:

They were neutral. They should be able to instruct positively affirmatively why abortion is bad. They did not. And that's where I say I think their political correctness or the fear

of being too overt has overcome the institution. And I think it's ironic. It's a Catholic school. They should be able to push that kind of learning and I feel that that's where the school has failed.

While Gabriel longed for his daughter to experience more unapologetic and definitive stances advocating Catholic values from teachers at St. Joan of Arc School, Carrie found the promotion of pro-life values present at Ave Crux School to be undesirable.

Ave Crux is quite a conservative school and that was evident. And there were a few times where they push the pro-life stuff a fair bit with the older students and I had a friend who is who pulled his daughter basically out of the school because when they went to Mass, they were asked to pray for, like, a bunch of pro-life protesters that stopped in and were on their way. So there was that where I didn't really agree with him because I thought, well you are sending your kids to Catholic school. You know what you're getting.

Carrie shared other personal examples in which she finds herself in opposition of Catholic Church teaching. Because her son was older, she felt comfortable sharing her own views with him:

And I had to sit down and say, I don't care what they say. . . . And I thought, why am I having to undo something that I paid to have taught?

She described trying to reconcile that with other parents:

I couldn't believe they were still [teaching that]. And I said to some of the other parents, do you know they're still teaching that? They were shocked. They thought, oh, okay, in the textbook and that's what they're studying. They're like, Oh, I'm sure they don't really

mean it. I'm like, no, it doesn't matter. Like, that's what they're being taught and I don't agree with that and he knew it was ridiculous.

One of the more frequent themes of Catholic elementary school dissatisfaction in interviews related to issues related to religious instruction and faith formation. In most cases, the concern voiced was the lack of growth and depth in how students experienced and processed religious instruction in the school as they got older. However, in some cases, parents viewed themselves at odds with the dominant political-religious culture of that parish school which they perceived to be too conservative or too liberal.

Catholic High School Perception

Quantitative Data Results. Parents and students independently rated on a Likert scale the perceived quality of Catholic high schools available to them by responding to the same seven variables considered for elementary schools taken from the NSBECS. Furthermore, these seven items measuring perceptions of the effectiveness of essential components of Catholic high schools were tested for internal reliability. The result yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .88 indicating strong internal reliability, so a mean composite variable, "Catholic high school (CHS) effectiveness" was created. By coding participant responses with values of 1 (far below average) to 5 (far above average), means can be calculated and compared for different subgroups. Table 44 displays the resulting descriptive statistics for parents and students in response to the perceptions of Catholic high schools available to them.

Table 44*Catholic High School Perception Among Parents and Students*

Variable	Parent			Student			Total		
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Religious studies	351	4.20	0.79	250	4.02	0.81	601	4.13	0.80
Faith formation (prayer, Mass, service)	347	4.28	0.79	250	4.15	0.84	597	4.22	0.81
School leadership	346	4.38	0.78	250	4.39	0.81	596	4.38	0.79
Academic instruction	345	4.37	0.74	250	4.40	0.77	595	4.38	0.75
Co-curricular and extra-curricular programs	347	4.22	0.90	250	4.24	0.90	597	4.23	0.90
Facilities, equipment, and technology	346	4.12	0.92	250	4.20	0.94	596	4.15	0.93
Sense of school as a community	346	4.49	0.74	250	4.45	0.81	596	4.47	0.77
CHS effectiveness composite	351	4.29	0.64	250	4.26	0.61	601	4.28	0.63

Note. Likert scale from 1 (Extremely dissatisfied) to 5 (Extremely satisfied)

Overall, perceptions of Catholic high schools were favorable as evidenced by the CHS effectiveness composite mean of 4.28 among all parents and students. Sense of school as a community received the highest mean at 4.47 followed by academic instruction and school leadership which both had combined means of 4.38. Perceptions of Catholic high school religious studies and facilities, equipment, and technology received the lowest relative means at 4.13 and 4.15, respectively.

Comparison of Parent and Students. Among the seven variables comprising the composite, sense of community had the highest means for both parent and student populations. Close behind with the next highest relative means were school leadership and academic

instruction. With regard to the lowest rated perceived areas among respondents, there were some differences. Within the parent sub-group, facilities, equipment, and technology was rated lower than the other six variables. However, among the students, that variable was 5th, with both religious studies and faith formation garnering lower means within that subgroup.

While there were other differences in terms of how parents and student subgroups perceived variables of Catholic high schools, *t*-tests were run in order to determine if the means and standard deviations of those groups were statistically significant. Independent samples *t*-test performed found that the only statistically significant difference between parent and student populations was in response to their perceptions of high school religious studies $t(599) = 2.75, p < .01$. Parents ($M = 4.20, SD = .79$) perceived high Catholic high school religious instruction higher than students ($M = 4.02, SD = .81$). However, with a Cohen's *d* value of .23, the effect was rather small.

Comparison of Groups by Matriculating High School Type. It was important to determine if there were differences in perceptions of Catholic high schools among students and parents matriculating to Catholic or other types of high schools. Table 45 shows descriptive statistics for each of the seven variables and composite among students and parents who chose Catholic, private, or public high schools. Respondents who selected "other" (0.98%) or were undecided (2.79%) were not included in this analysis and discussion.

Table 45*Catholic High School Perception by Matriculation School Type*

Variable	Catholic HS			Private (N-C) HS			Public HS		
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Religious studies	422	4.20	0.77	23	4.22	0.74	135	3.93	0.87
Faith formation (prayer, Mass, service)	420	4.29	0.77	23	4.17	0.83	133	4.09	0.84
School leadership	420	4.48	0.73	23	4.04	1.07	133	4.18	0.82
Academic instruction	420	4.44	0.74	23	4.17	0.72	132	4.28	0.74
Co-curricular and extra-curricular	420	4.31	0.86	23	4.39	0.78	133	4.02	0.96
Facilities, equipment, and technology	419	4.24	0.88	23	3.96	0.93	133	3.97	1.04
Sense of school as a community	419	4.54	0.73	23	4.35	1.19	134	4.33	0.76
CHS Effectiveness Composite	422	4.36	0.60	23	4.19	0.69	135	4.11	0.65

Note. Likert scale from 1 (Far below average) to 5 (Far above average)

A report of the CHS effectiveness composite data revealed the participants perceived Catholic high schools favorably overall with mean scores ranging from 4.11 to 4.36 on a scale of one to five. Furthermore, respondents matriculating to Catholic high schools perceived Catholic high schools more favorably than those matriculating to private and public schools. Additionally, within specific variables there were other differences within those subgroups. In order to determine if those differences were significant and not due to chance, independent one-way ANOVA tests were run for each of the seven variables and the composite. The resulting output of those tests showed that seven of eight variables had significant differences among participants matriculating to Catholic, private, and public high schools.

Table 46 shows the results of the one-way ANOVA of perceptions of Catholic high school religious studies that determined whether significant differences exist among participants matriculating to Catholic, private and public high schools $F(2, 577) = 6.00, p < .01$. Tukey HSD post hoc tests further revealed that respondents matriculating to Catholic high schools ($M = 4.20$) perceived religious studies significantly higher than those matriculating to public school ($M = 3.93, p < .01$). The eta squared value of 0.20 indicates the effect is small. While respondents matriculating to private high schools ($M = 4.22$) also rated Catholic high schools higher than public school matriculating counterparts, the difference was not statistically significant in the post hoc test.

Table 46

ANOVA Results Comparing Perspectives from Different HS Matriculation Type Toward Catholic HS Religious Studies (N = 580)

Perspective Comparison Type	SS	df	MS	F	sig.
Between groups	7.50	2	3.75	6.00	0.003**
Within groups	360.19	577	0.62		
Total	367.69	579			

** $p < .01$

Differences also existed among subgroups in response to their perceptions of Catholic high school faith formation. Table 47 displays the results of the ANOVA which show these differences to be significant and not due to chance $F(2, 573) = 3.41, p < .05$. Similar to the previously reported data regarding religious studies, post hoc Tukey HSD revealed that participants matriculating to public schools ($M = 4.09$) have a lower perception of Catholic high school faith formation than those matriculating to Catholic high schools ($M = 4.29, p < .05$). The eta-squared value of 0.01 indicates a small effect.

Table 47

ANOVA Results Comparing Perspectives from Different HS Matriculation Type Toward Catholic HS Faith Formation (N = 576)

Perspective Comparison Type	SS	df	MS	F	sig.
Between groups	4.26	2	2.13	3.41	0.034*
Within groups	357.20	573	0.62		
Total	361.46	575			

* $p < .05$

Table 48 displays the outcome of the ANOVA test comparing different HS matriculation subgroups' mean ratings for their perceptions of leadership of available Catholic high schools. Results demonstrate there was a significant difference among these groups $F(2, 573) = 10.24, p < .001$. Tukey HSD post hoc tests showed that the public high school-matriculating ($M = 4.18$) group rated Catholic high school leadership significantly lower than the Catholic high school-matriculating group ($M = 4.48, p < .05$). Additionally, private school-matriculating respondents perceived Catholic high school leadership even lower ($M = 4.04$) resulting in a more significant p value in its comparison to Catholic high school matriculating respondents ($p < .001$). This produced an eta-squared value of 0.04 indicating a small effect.

Table 48

ANOVA Results Comparing Perspectives from Different HS Matriculation Type Toward Catholic HS Leadership (N = 576)

Perspective Comparison Type	SS	df	MS	F	sig.
Between groups	12.07	2	6.03	10.24	0.000***
Within groups	337.47	573	0.59		
Total	349.54	575			

*** $p < .001$

As seen in Table 49, a one-way ANOVA test also revealed significant differences among high school matriculation choice subgroups regarding their perceptions of co-curricular and extra-curricular programs at Catholic high schools available to them $F(2, 573) = 6.07, p < .01$.

In order to gain greater insight into the differences between these subgroups a Tukey HSD post hoc test was run. It revealed that students and parents matriculating to public high schools ($M = 4.02$) perceived these programs at Catholic high schools lower than those that were matriculating to Catholic high schools ($M = 4.31, p < .01$). With an eta-squared value of 0.02, the effect is small.

Table 49

ANOVA Results Comparing Perspectives from Different HS Matriculation Type Toward Catholic HS Co-Curricular and Extra-curricular Programs (N = 576)

Perspective Comparison Type	SS	df	MS	F	sig.
Between groups	9.40	2	4.70	6.07	0.002**
Within groups	443.59	573	0.77		
Total	452.99	575			

** $p < .01$

As displayed in Table 50 the one-way ANOVA revealed a significant difference in the participants matriculating to different types of high schools' perceptions of Catholic high school facilities, equipment and technology $F(2, 572) = 5.02, p < .01$. Post hoc tests showed a significant difference in the way that public high school-matriculating respondents rate this variable ($M = 3.97$) lower than those continuing on to Catholic high school ($M = 4.24, p < .01$) the eta-squared value of 0.02 indicates a small effect size.

Table 50

ANOVA Results Comparing Perspectives from Different HS Matriculation Type Toward Catholic HS Facilities, Equipment and Technology (N = 575)

Perspective Comparison Type	SS	df	MS	F	sig.
Between groups	8.48	2	4.24	5.02	0.007**
Within groups	483.49	572	0.85		
Total	491.97	574			

** $p < .01$

As seen in Table 51 a one-way ANOVA comparing perceptions of the sense of community at available Catholic high school among matriculating high school subgroups showed a significant difference $F(2, 573) = 4.22, p < .05$. Tukey post hoc tests revealed that students and parents matriculating to public schools ($M = 4.33$) perceived the sense of community lower than those matriculating to Catholic high schools ($M = 4.54, p < .05$). The value of 0.02 eta-squared indicates a small effect size.

Table 51

ANOVA Results Comparing Perspectives from Different HS Matriculation Type Toward Catholic HS Sense of Community (N = 576)

Perspective Comparison Type	SS	df	MS	F	sig.
Between groups	4.84	2	2.42	4.22	0.015*
Within groups	328.95	573	0.57		
Total	333.79	575			

* $p < .05$

Finally, one-way ANOVA test of the Catholic high school effectiveness composite also revealed significant differences among high school matriculation choice subgroups $F(2, 577) = 8.45, p < .001$. These results can be seen in Table 52. Tukey HSD post hoc test clarified the significance in respondents matriculating to public high schools rating Catholic high schools lower ($M = 4.11$) than respondents continuing on to Catholic high schools ($M = 4.36, p < .001$). With an eta-squared value of 0.03, the effect size was small. Participants matriculating to private high schools also showed lower means in the overall Catholic high school effectiveness than those continuing Catholic education, but those differences were not significant.

Table 52

ANOVA Results Comparing Perspectives from Different HS Matriculation Type Toward Catholic HS Effectiveness Composite (N = 580)

Perspective Comparison Type	SS	df	MS	F	sig.
Between groups	6.33	2	3.16	8.45	0.000***
Within groups	216.02	577	0.37		
Total	222.35	579			

*** $p < .001$

Thus, with statistically significant differences in seven of eight variables, it was clear that there was an association between matriculating high school type and the perception of Catholic high schools. Parents and students matriculating to public schools continually perceived Catholic high schools lower than their equivalents who were actually matriculating to Catholic high schools. Furthermore, in several areas, participants matriculating to private non-Catholic high schools rated variables lower than those continuing in Catholic education, but only the difference in perceived leadership was statistically significant.

Qualitative Results. Perceptions of Catholic high schools varied greatly among the nine interviewees, all of whom planned to enter public schools. While participants' perceptions of some specific areas of Catholic high schools have already been detailed in previous sections, three additional general findings will be discussed.

Awareness of Catholic High Schools Varies Greatly. Among the interviewees who were all not matriculating to a Catholic high school, there was a great range of experience and knowledge to inform perceptions of high school. A majority of interview participants did not go through the application process at any Catholic high school. Some participants like Gabriel, Rob, and Veronica seemed to have relatively little specific information or direct experience with Catholic high schools. In the case of Gabriel, because he had determined early on the cost would

be too prohibitive, he had not engaged in open houses or other typical Catholic high school outreach activities.

We looked into it, but we did not really pursue it.

Rob said that they went to a general information night at his elementary school, but they fell short of actually going to any Catholic high school open houses or applying due to the perceived costs:

We kind of, you know, thought about going to Catholic school and going to St.

Augustine, but just the price range was just, you know, just out way too much, you know, to kind of really look into that further, even really consider that.

Both Gabriel and Rob had some general assumptions about Catholic high schools, but because of perceived costs had never actually visited a campus for open house or to meet with school personnel.

Veronica was another Catholic elementary school parent who did not visit a campus, but for different reasons. Veronica admitted that she valued the prospect of Catholic high school for both her eighth-grade son and sixth- grade daughter. However, since Veronica had very specific concerns about her son's academic needs, she did not partake in much of the traditional open house or information night presentations. Rather, she called two of the Catholic high schools in her area and asked them a few questions directly.

I talked to the office person. I was very shut off by John Carroll. The office person I called a couple of times and I didn't like the way I was spoken to. Not because they were rude, but it was because they were very cold. And I'm sure that they have a lot of work to do, but I feel like in the sense coming from someone who's been an office manager,

there's a certain level of customer service, you have to offer when you answer the phone. There's a greeting. There's a, you know, don't hang up on people and I felt like it was very cold. In St. Frances, I did speak to the admissions director and I felt like she had more information, but she did sound busy. I guess like the familial feeling that I got at St. Rufus (her Catholic elementary school), I didn't get that from the high schools. So, had I felt that maybe my decision might be different, but, yeah, that's not what I got.

In the context of the interview, there was a disconnect in Veronica's experience of significant dialogue with the principal in her Catholic elementary school and a short, business-like approach from the two Catholic high schools she somewhat considered. Veronica never continued her research of either school and made her assumptions based on limited information.

Unlike the other five interviewees, Miguel Jenny, Johnny, and Julia articulated a high level of awareness about potential Catholic high schools in their area. Even though they eventually made a different choice for their children to attend public high schools, each of these parents was able to discuss Catholic high schools with greater familiarity.

Miguel and his wife were both graduates of St. Phillip High School and seemed to have a lot of knowledge and opinions of several other Catholic high schools in the area. He shared that his son's Catholic elementary school did not host an information night for parents.

Most of them were done during the school time. So, some of those we did try but that was. . . . So we would do school visits. We'd go to a lot of the open houses, ask a lot of questions.

However, as mentioned in a previous section, Miguel's son excelled in math and science and they targeted public and private schools with that emphasis.

We went to the schools, he started the application and then as we were discussing and he went to, then we took them to the public high schools. And then as we were narrowing things down, we asked them, are you going to be, do you want to take the exam, the entrance examine, et cetera. And after a while he just said, you know what, it's, it's really kind of out of the of my prime periphery of what I want, really want.

Before Jenny and her husband decided to move, they had been considering Catholic high schools for a number of years and had some clear conclusions about certain ones.

Because my husband actually went to Catholic school, you know, all the way from elementary school through high school and he graduated from Our Lady Preparatory. And so, you know, I would say like, "Oh, you know, what do you know about this school, and he's like, oh, you know, we used to make fun of the people that went to that school because they had this kind of reputation about them. And then my kids have both done summer school.

Jenny seemed to consider reputation based on her husband's past perceptions but also gathered several new observations about three different Catholic high schools where her children attended summer programs. However, she did not attend any Catholic high school open house presentations.

I didn't go on campus to their open house, but we did talk to them at high school night at the school and, you know, I certainly looked online.

Jenny did not complete the application process because she was fairly certain they would not qualify to receive financial assistance from her preferred choice of Catholic high schools which

were out of their price range. However, she seemed confident in being able to name a local Catholic high school that would have been ideal for each of her two children.

Johnny and Julia were the only parents of the nine parents interviewed who explicitly spoke of completing the full application process for a Catholic high school. In both cases, the interviewee knew enough of a Catholic high school that they would like their child to attend, were it not for a major impediment. For Johnny, even though his daughter was accepted to an all-girls private Catholic high school and would love to have attended, his ex-wife would not support it. For Julia, after doing some research of Catholic high schools, she and her daughter narrowed it down and applied to a coeducational parish high school. She was accepted and both mom and daughter would love for her to go. However, the single mother of two did not receive enough assistance and registered to attend a charter school.

Catholic High Schools Need to Be Innovative. While some participants perceived great differences among Catholic high schools, Miguel was critical that Catholic schools have not differentiated themselves. Rather, he articulated that often Catholic high schools missed the mark with too broad or general of an approach:

Catholic high schools have an opportunity in some ways to be very creative. And sometimes I think the creativity is lacking in terms of what they can offer. I would say if I were to talk to an administrator, one of the things I'd like to push, is what makes your school unique? You know? Yes. It's Catholic. Yes. It has these things. Okay. But other than that, what if, you know, what, what would I gain from this experience? What programs would things you have to offer that makes you different than other schools in that area? And sometimes I think maybe, at least for me, I haven't always fully

received that information. You know, the uniqueness of it, other than just the Catholic education. Sometimes that's what it's push is you get a Catholic education, but that's a very broad statement. Right. And that can mean a lot of things to a lot of different people. Right. So what does that mean and what does that look like? What would you, what do you bring, what do you have to offer in your school that is different, that's going to help me propel me into, into a leader . . . or whatever.

While Miguel was calling for differentiation, it did not necessarily mean straying away from Catholic identity or mission. For him, social justice embodies Catholic education, but challenged what he perceived to be a status quo approach.

When you say Catholic education for me, the, what I hear is, okay, I hear social justice. You know, I hear that. So, in what ways are you, are you kind of just embedding social justice in the activities that you do, the experience that you have to try to make this world a better place, right. Versus just soup kitchens or something like that, but what are you really doing? How are you being innovative in education? So actually that's the word I'm looking for? The innovation portion of it. In which ways are you being innovative using new, innovative tools that are coming out? In which ways are we using these innovative tools to propel leaders in the world, right. And not just leaders, but leaders that will not, that are not just trying to lead to be successful. But leaders in a way that trying to make this world a better place. And for me, that would be huge. It's sometimes I don't always get that if there is, if it's out there, I don't, I don't hear that. So, so maybe it's, it's how it's promoted. I don't know.

Miguel felt that Catholic schools needed to innovate, with an awareness of what tools are now available to impact its work in forming leaders who go beyond attaining success for self, but rather focus on solidarity- making the world better for all.

All Catholic High Schools are Not the Same. While Miguel was critical of Catholic high schools in general for not innovating, he and Jenny both voiced that Catholic high schools are not generally the same but could be differentiated into two distinct groupings. Jenny reflected on her daughter's summer program school experience:

Charlotte did summer school at Ave Regina and it was a fantastic experience. You just walk on the grounds of Ave Regina and immediately you can tell that that school has a lot more resources than say, St. Isadore. You know, just even going on the grounds it's a different experience. And she really loved it there.

While both of the schools mentioned are all-girls Catholic high schools, the former is a private school charging almost \$20,000 in tuition while the latter is a parish school with a tuition rate about 40% less. Jenny also discussed her son's previous summer school experiences.

I tried to put him in a summer school at St. Michael's and St. Michael's is one of your lower priced all-boys high schools. So my experience at St. John's was insane because he hadn't been there for longer than a week and during lunchtime the kids, I don't know why, they were like unsupervised or something and two of the kids got in a fight during lunchtime at the school and my son because they were allowing the kids to have their phones recorded it on his phone. So I pulled him out. You know, this is fine. I can just give him a workbook at home where he's not going to be, you know, exposed to fighting and stuff like that. . . . He also did a summer at St. John. And again, you know, when you

go on their campus, even just the campus itself is much nicer and dealing with the administration there was different from dealing with the administration at St. Michael. St. John and St. Michael are both all-boys private Catholic high schools with very different price points. Similar to the previous comparisons Jenny made among the all-girls Catholic high schools, the tuition rate of the high school Jenny holds in high esteem is almost \$20,000 while the one she speaks poorly of charges 40% less for full-paying families. Jenny said throughout her interview that she would prefer to have her kids stay in Catholic schools, but just could not afford the high cost of tuition.

We just couldn't afford it and you know it really made me bitter because these are our kids, and they've been raised in this insulated environment at Catholic elementary school. You've paid the money for them to go all those years for them to have that religious education and stuff. Now that they get to high school. It's just unattainable, unaffordable unless you want to choose one of the high schools that's not so well off.

When posed that there are many Catholic high schools charging less than \$20,000 a year, Jenny responded:

Yeah, but then again, I liken the cheaper Catholic high schools to my time at St. Helena [former Catholic elementary school] where you're just worried that like they're not going to have the resources. And so why would you send your kids to like a cheaper Catholic high school that doesn't have as many resources when you could just move into a good public school district and send them there? . . . But then again, we're at the point where it's like, Okay, if we were to pay for Catholic schools, for Catholic High School, then we're definitely going to be broke. Especially with having two because you know what's

going to happen when my son goes to high school? He's going to have to go, I want him to go to St. John. I don't want him to go to, like, you know, some cheap lower level school that might be the same as like, might be the equivalent of a *Saint Helena High School*.

There is no such Saint Helena High School. Rather, Jenny was making a hypothetical allusion to a very small, lower financial level archdiocesan Catholic elementary school serving 87.5% BIPOC students. At one point she referred to herself somewhat as victimized that the Catholic system failed her because she does not have any affordable Catholic school options. In fact, she only will consider the ones that are far outside of her price range. She would rather move to a better neighborhood and have her kids go to public school.

While Miguel does not mention differences in resources or socioeconomic considerations like Jenny, he does several times throughout the interview show a bias toward private Catholic high schools over archdiocesan ones. While he and his wife attended an archdiocesan high school, it was not in the mix among the two or three private Catholic high schools he considered alongside the public school options. Speaking about his alma mater, Miguel said:

My wife went to school, actually, we have, I think like 17 different family members went to that school and I actually know the administration well and actually know quite a few of the teachers because I went to school with a lot of them. I have not been convinced in my discussions with them and seeing the school and I'm still involved with school, because they have, they have some good things. . . . But I was like, this is not where I would want my child to go. You know, I don't think he's gonna benefit from it. I don't

think this is going to improve upon, upon his, his academic. . . . If anything, he'd probably be stymied a little.

Miguel continued with some specifics about limitations of academic programming at some Catholic high schools.

I've seen it with students that I have known to excel really well, and then go to a school, not just St. Phillip, but other schools, and then they kind of fall back because there's no way for them, the school doesn't even know what to do with them at some point. Right. So they start trying to create something that is "kind of make things up." And I don't want that. I want to see a plan. What I see if my child excels, you know, what plans do you have? So you have calculus. Okay. But do you you have Calculus AB and on? Do you have statistics yet? Those types of things, what plans do you have for the children that are, maybe this might be too easy for them, you know? So those types of things, and yeah, I did, I just, wasn't fully committed. I've seen other schools and some of them are known to be good schools, but when talking to them, I just, I didn't hear the breaking out of the, I didn't hear the creativity, the ingenuity in the same way that I heard from, let's say some of the public schools.

In contrast to this archdiocesan Catholic school that was closest to his home, Miguel did talk more positively about the academic options at three private Catholic high schools even though they were quite a distance away. Miguel's critical differentiation of Catholic high schools was not limited to academics. Even in the religious identity, Miguel saw a stark difference between archdiocesan and private Catholic high schools. Miguel described himself as more aware of differences in Catholic point of view among schools because of some past experience in the

seminary. He described his own leanings to be more progressive than some of the more conservative teachings prevalent in parish or archdiocesan schools.

It's a lot more conservative in nature, right? So sometimes my disagreements would be in the theology of it in that it's a lot more Thomistic view. So, sometimes the emphasis would be pushing this kind of ideology, you know, which is for me in my upbringing or my theology, a lot more conservative. . . . I think we were talking about like a Jesuit school. Let's say if it was a Jesuit school, I think it would be different. Right? A diocesan school for the most part, I think has a very standardized way of teaching, especially religion, right. Have very similar, um, textbooks and things like that. So I think that's where they're gathering their information from, and that's been my experience in working actually even myself, working at, teaching religion at various different high schools.

While they prioritize and articulate different elements, Miguel and Jenny both draw a much more positive picture of certain private Catholic high schools. For Jenny, it is about the added resources, campus, and feeling of a few schools that happen to be higher tuition-charging private Catholic high schools. For Miguel, he sees more academic offerings and less standardized teaching of religion in private Catholic high schools.

Relationship between Elementary School Satisfaction and Catholic High School Perception

Quantitative Data Results. Correlational analysis was used to determine if there were relationships that exist between level of satisfaction of current Catholic elementary school variables and perception of comparable Catholic high school variables. Participants independently rated seven variables representing key elements of effective Catholic schools as identified by the NSBECS. In response to the prompt, "Reflecting on the Catholic elementary

school you attend, please indicate the degree you are satisfied with each of the following,” parents and students selected from five options on a Likert scale from “extremely dissatisfied” (1) to “extremely satisfied” (5). In a separate section, respondents replied to “Reflecting on the Catholic high schools you considered, please indicate your perceptions of the quality of each of the following” with an answer from “far below average” (1) to far above average” (5). Bivariate analysis was conducted for each of the seven elementary school satisfaction variables and composite with the corresponding variables and composite for high school perception. The results for each are shown in Table 53 which displays the applicable Pearson r coefficients for all participants as well as student and parent subgroups.

Table 53

Catholic Elementary and High School Correlation Coefficients for Parents and Students

Variable	Parents	Students	All Participants
Religious studies	.44***	.26***	.37***
Faith formation (prayer, Mass, service)	.47***	.35***	.42***
School leadership	.56***	.32***	.46***
Academic instruction	.38***	.30***	.35***
Co-curricular and extra curricular	.52***	.30***	.43***
Facilities, equipment, and technology	.47***	.47***	.47***
Sense of school as a community	.50***	.31***	.41***
Effectiveness composite	.61***	.45***	.54***

***Denotes $p < .001$

The results for the entire pool of participants showed significant positive relationships between each of the corresponding elementary and high school pairs as well as the composites. The resulting correlation coefficient for elementary effectiveness and high school effectiveness ($r = .54, p < .001$) demonstrated that there was a moderately strong positive relationship between participants' satisfaction in the effectiveness of their Catholic elementary school and their perception of the effectiveness of Catholic high schools available to them. There was a somewhat linear relationship between these two continuous variables. Thus, it can be generally said that participants who rate their Catholic elementary school favorably also tend to rate Catholic high schools available to them favorably. Similarly, participants who are more critical of their Catholic elementary school tend to be more critical in their perceptions of the Catholic high schools available to them. Among all of the participants, the individual variables showing the relative strongest association between elementary and high schools were school leadership ($r = .46, p < .001$) and facilities, technology, and equipment ($r = .47, p < .001$). While still positive and significant, academic instruction showed a relatively weaker association among all participants ($r = .35, p < .001$).

Comparison of Elementary-High School Correlations by Parent and Students. When examining the Pearson correlational coefficients generated for parent and student groupings, it can be seen that, while still significant and positive, the association between Catholic elementary and high school composites is stronger among parents ($r = .61, p < .001$) than among students ($r = .45, p < .001$). Considering specific variables, several parent correlational coefficients revealed moderately strong associations between Catholic elementary and high school: faith formation ($r = .47, p < .001$); school leadership ($r = .56, p < .001$); co-curricular and extra-curricular

programs ($r = .45, p < .001$); facilities, equipment, and technology ($r = .47, p < .001$); sense of community ($r = .52, p < .001$). However, other than facilities, technology, and equipment ($r = .47, p < .001$), students' correlational coefficients for specific variables ranged from .26 to .35, showing weaker strength in the positive correlations ($p < .001$) between Catholic elementary and high schools.

Comparison of Elementary-High School Correlations by Matriculating High School.

Bivariate analysis of the Catholic elementary school effectiveness composite and variables with the corresponding Catholic high school effectiveness composite and variables resulted in the correlational coefficients which are displayed for each HS matriculation subgroup in Table 54.

Table 54

Catholic Elementary and High School Correlation Coefficients by High School Matriculation

Variable	Catholic High School	Private High School	Public High School
Religious studies	.34***	.57**	0.39***
Faith formation (prayer, Mass, service)	.42***	.73***	.37***
School leadership	.43***	.78***	.37***
Academic instruction	.28***	.76***	.52***
Co-curricular and extra-curricular	.39***	.49*	.48***
Facilities, equipment, and technology	.45***	.32	.53***
Sense of school as a community	.42***	.54**	.33***
Effectiveness composite	.51***	.75***	.58***

*Denotes $p < .05$

**Denotes $p < .01$

***Denotes $p < .001$

The resulting output showed positive significant relationships between the Catholic elementary school effectiveness composite and the Catholic high school effectiveness composite regardless of which type of high school they were choosing to matriculate. However, the strength of the association between Catholic elementary satisfaction and Catholic high school perception was more pronounced among those who were leaving the Catholic system for private or public high schools. A strong relationship between the two composites existed for students and parents matriculating to private (non-Catholic) high schools ($r = .75, p < .001$). Parents and students matriculating to public schools ($r = .58, p < .001$) also revealed a positive significant correlation between the two levels of Catholic schools at a rate more pronounced than those matriculating to Catholic high schools ($r = .51, p < .001$).

This positive correlation between Catholic elementary school satisfaction and Catholic high school perception was indicated in each matriculating group's correlational coefficients for each of the seven variables individually. Additionally, all of those correlations were significant with p levels less than .05 with the exception of facilities, equipment, and technology among private school matriculants ($p = .13$). Among all other variables, the association between Catholic elementary satisfaction and Catholic high school perception was strongest among participants matriculating to private (non-Catholic) high schools, ranging from moderate (co-curricular and extra-curricular: $r = .49, p = .05$) to very strong (school leadership: $r = .78, p = .001$). Correlations of the seven effectiveness variables among students and parents matriculating to public schools generally showed moderate association with the strongest associations in academic instruction ($r = .52, p < .001$) and facilities, equipment, and technology ($r = .53, p < .001$). Correlations among the seven variables for participants matriculating to Catholic high

schools were not quite as strong overall, ranging from weak (academic instruction: $r = .28, p = .001$) to moderate (facilities, equipment, and technology: $r = .45, p = .001$).

Qualitative Results. Results from interview analysis revealed a tendency for alignment between participants' Catholic elementary school satisfaction and perceptions of similar elements or programs in Catholic high schools. There were no questions asked directly about this subject of Catholic elementary to Catholic high school correlation to participants. In fact, the interview protocol intentionally separated the conversations about elementary and high school into two segments so as to not lead participants to any potential conclusion. However, interviews, which were only conducted among parents not matriculating to Catholic high schools tended to reveal similar assumptions about areas of elementary school dissatisfaction to likely also be present in Catholic high schools.

For Carrie, her criticism of academics at her Catholic elementary school focused sharply on its culture of high stakes pressure.

It was such a high-pressure environment in terms of academics and a lot of parents like that. And we didn't like it, and he felt like, constantly felt like he wasn't smart because he wasn't catching up. And then we were constantly berating him over his grades.

They consider an A in that school, I think, to be 95 and above. I remember at one point we were giving him a hard time that he hadn't made honor roll. You know, and almost everything was in the 80s, but that was probably like the bottom quarter of a class, you know. Like there was so much pressure. And I just thought I don't want it to be an environment where he feels like he's not smart because he doesn't learn the same way that kids in Catholic schools are expected to learn, which is pretty linear, I think.

Later, Carrie described feeling like the academic pressure culture she did not value was not limited to her Catholic elementary school but projected it to be part of the Catholic high school experience as well.

I feel like the academic pressure would be the same or worse. And I just, I did not want him in that environment because I remember we went to a meeting in the spring of seventh grade for him and they started talking about eighth grade and a lot of the kids the summer between seventh and eighth grade went to summer school to do high school prep. And we got a whole meeting from the teachers about how eighth grade the first trimester was so important. And they were slamming like you know you have to like the pressure is on and this was like the last trimester of seventh and the first trimester of eighth and this is when the college scandal was breaking. You know what these parents who paid these thousands of dollars to get their kids into school. And I said, this is where it starts. It starts in these rooms in these classrooms or you're told, like you know your kid has got to do well because you know that they don't do well in the last trimester of seventh grade. They're not going to get into high school a year and a half later, the right high school year and a half later. . . . Then I said that's where it starts. We're looking at those people and thinking that they're crazy, but we're already being crazy like where are we going to be in five years, and I felt like that would be the same thing by the time he got in. I have a friend whose kid just graduated 10th grade. He's going into 11th grade and she's already been told, "That's the pressure year!" And I thought, he's not even going to get a respite. He's going to go into ninth grade, try to fit in, and 10th grade and then the

pressure is going to be on like now it's going to be not what high school do you have to be good enough for but what college you have to be good enough for? And I said ugh! While the pressures associated with getting into high school experienced in seventh and eighth grade were part of her dissatisfaction, Carrie extended this emphasis beyond a couple of years of transition.

When I would sometimes bring it up like why are fifth graders getting two and a half, three hours of homework every night? They were like, oh no, they may as well get used to it because that's what they, you know, that's what's ahead of them in high school. In response to a follow up question as to her sense if this academic pressured culture she found undesirable was more of a Catholic school, private school, or American cultural phenomenon, Carrie responded:

I think it's more of a Catholic school trademark. A little bit, yeah, or private school maybe trademark. I don't know, but me. I think a bit of a Catholic school trademark probably that you know you just grind it out. You get those marks.

While Carrie had not experienced Catholic high school herself, she inferred from the cues from teachers and some other parents that the high-pressured academics element she disliked in her current elementary school were part and parcel of the overall culture of elementary and secondary schools.

Veronica is another parent who presumed the key areas she named for satisfaction and dissatisfaction in her Catholic elementary school would continue at the Catholic high school. For Veronica, there was a direct correlation between her negative experiences in Catholic elementary school handling of special education and her perception of a comparable high school. Veronica

relayed that her son was not originally accepted into St. Rufus Catholic elementary school due to the principal's concerns related to him being autistic and sometimes prone to epileptic seizures.

When I applied, like I said, my daughter was accepted because she was gifted and she had a great report card and the principal who had been there for 25 years didn't accept my son . . . we can't offer these services. There's just nothing we can do for him.

However, Veronica described her son being bullied a lot at the public school and she really wanted him in a safer environment. So, two years ago when a new principal arrived at the Catholic elementary school, Veronica took a chance again.

Then the new principal came in and she did accept him because she wanted to make it all inclusive for students who were special needs as well. So he had been and, you know, and since I've had so much experience. I worked in education.

Veronica described herself working in public and charter schools for many years outside of the classroom. As such she had a lot of experience and knowledge about academic services that she shared with the newer principal who was open to this advice and support.

They really took it into consideration and I feel like they are trying really hard to make it inclusive with what they have available.

But Veronica felt this principal's knowledge and courage to do things differently was in sharp contrast to the culture of that Catholic elementary school.

I felt like sometimes they were their own worst enemy because here was this brand new principal, ready to, you know, let's do this and this and let's get it done and I'm thinking, progress. Great. Then she would have meetings with people who had been there for 25-30 years or the Monsignor and they would convince her out of it. That's not possible.

When asked about her high school decision process, Veronica shared:

I was a little bit nervous about him going to a Catholic high school because I was scared that they weren't going to work as much. I feel like the [new] principal at St. Rufus, since she has a lot of charter school district background, she knew what was expected and the principal at our local Catholic school wasn't as well versed in different districts and was more Catholic school based. So what you see is what you get. And I'm all about advocating for my son and pushing forward but at the high school level, you really expect at that point for my son to be, not mom to be there anymore. I can't be there advocating as much and I shouldn't, he should. The school should take on that role so he can develop on his own and advocate for himself. And so I did look into different Catholic schools.

As shared previously in the section about awareness, Veronica did not attend open house or information nights, so she did not talk with high school principals or academic specialists.

Rather, because of her specific concern about special education (SPED) services, she called the schools to inquire and received a less than favorable response from office personnel.

I wasn't completely impressed with the SPED program there. And that's why I mean if I would have been like, okay, great, then I would have chosen one because I love the discipline! That's really what draws me to the school is the discipline.

And the discipline is great, but I really need my son, at this point, I can't be that helicopter mom. I have to, he needs to go on campus and he needs to know where, you know, the SPED department office is and he needs to know his own way. So when he graduates from high school he knows that he has to go do that on his own. I can't be there doing that for now. And at the Catholic schools, I have to do it because they really don't

have a system in place for STEP. A lot of them are, it's a new process for them. The Pope had just said that they wanted to open it up and make sure that it's all inclusive and, you know, but there was no funding for it and so that's why I decided to go with a charter school.

In Veronica's mind, both the positive (discipline) and negative (lack of knowledge in SPED), aspects that were primary to her Catholic elementary school satisfaction were perceived to continue similarly in a Catholic high school.

But when it came to SPED, there wasn't, I felt like there wasn't enough support. And same thing with St. Frances. I had actually one of my best friends, her daughter has an IEP and she was at St. Frances, and she actually transferred her out and put her at Burton Charter. She said she wasn't getting enough support and so nothing against the school.

With the case of Gabriel, his previously described criticisms of the Catholic elementary school's teachers and leaders watering down the pronouncement of Catholic values is something he acknowledged might not be limited to that school. Gabriel did not have his daughter apply to any Catholic high schools primarily due to finances. However, when asked if money was not an object, was there a Catholic high school he would have considered, he spoke about a coeducational Catholic high school in his area.

It seemed like to me that my impression was it was a very strong school because it seemed to, I mean, it's physical facilities told me that it's got a good solid background financial background to do what it wants to do. One thing I couldn't tell was, would I be disappointed in the same thing as it was with St. Joan of Arc so far as teaching values amongst the subjects, not just the religion subject. You know, as I expected religion

would have been infused throughout the curriculum, not just here's the period for religion and that's what we teach it. I think that is a mistake.

Again, later Gabriel concluded:

I was just wondering if I had chosen them. I don't know what I would have, what could have been expected if, would it be the same experiences St. Catherine, but I did not pursue it. . . . It seemed like it to me. That's my impression.

Gabriel admitted that he had little personal knowledge about the local Catholic high school and he would have considered it if was not so expensive. However, he surmised that it may likely have the similar shortcomings in meeting his expectations of infusion of Catholic values throughout the academic subjects.

Finally, while Johnny did not speak directly of correlation of dissatisfaction in one area of Catholic elementary school leading to the same perception of Catholic high schools, he did attribute that poor experience as a primary reason they did not to consider a Catholic high school. Even before the interview, in response to an optional text box on the parent survey, Johnny explained:

We are a divorced family. As parents, we disagreed on the high school decision, as I was for Catholic High School, while my daughter's mother was not. Due to issues we had at the grammar school level and the cost of the education, her mother was unwilling to seek Catholic High School education, although my daughter preferred to go the Catholic route.

In the course of the interview, Johnny revealed that his ex-wife's disillusionment with the Catholic elementary school their girls attended centered around their perceived poor handling of a teacher who acted unprofessionally toward their daughter. After the principal and archdiocese

did not do something substantive to remove the teacher, Johnny and his ex-wife, who had both been very involved in the Church and school, detached from the school community. In the end, while frustrated with the school primarily over the handling of that teacher, Johnny saw the value of Catholic high school for his daughters. However, he shared that because of their joint custody, he could not make that decision. At one point, because his daughter wanted to attend a Catholic high school the ex-wife did engage with a Catholic high school principal but was not really open to it.

It was really the middle school experience at Our Lady of the Angels that made that looking at high schools, realistically, more challenging for my daughter's mother.

Johnny's situation is different than the previous parent examples in which there were more direct associations of a particular area of dissatisfaction in both Catholic elementary and high schools. Nevertheless, it is interesting to hear his attributing of his ex-wife's unwillingness to consider Catholic high school based primarily on her dissatisfaction of the elementary school's handling of personnel.

Research Question #2 Conclusion

Students and parents matriculating to Catholic high schools generally revealed higher levels of satisfaction with their current Catholic elementary school than those matriculating to other types of high schools. These differences are significant among participants matriculating to public high schools who rated the effectiveness of their Catholic elementary school lower generally (as measured in the composite) than those continuing to a Catholic high school. Participants matriculating to private (non-Catholic) high schools also rated overall effectiveness of Catholic elementary schools as well as specific areas such as leadership and facilities,

equipment, and technology lower than those matriculating to Catholic high schools. Experiences in Catholic elementary schools aligned with the way participants view the Catholic high schools available to them. A series of one-way ANOVA tests revealed there were statistically significant differences in how matriculation subgroups perceive Catholic high schools, with those matriculating to non-Catholic private schools being most critical. Finally, significant, positive, and moderately strong correlation existed between participants' satisfaction of Catholic elementary school and their perception of comparable Catholic high school variables. These associations are strongest among populations not matriculating to Catholic high schools.

Qualitative data revealed that many parents whose children are leaving Catholic elementary schools communicated relatively little specific knowledge of Catholic high schools in their area. In several cases, parents did not attend open houses or apply for admission since they felt that the cost to continue would be too great to pursue. Among many interviewees, critical areas of dissatisfaction at the Catholic elementary school were assumed to be perpetuated similarly at Catholic high schools.

Research Question 3: To What Extent Do Catholic Elementary School Graduates' and Their Parents' Identified Attributes Correspond With High School Matriculation Selection?

Quantitative Data Results

Participants' Intended High School Matriculation Type. A key aim of this study was to understand what types of high schools Catholic elementary school eighth-grade students and their parents chose to matriculate and determine if different demographic variables impact that matriculation. All participants were asked to identify the type of high school they or their child

would be attending in the fall. The utilization of skip logic allowed a follow up question for more specificity in the student or parent response. The survey results from 610 parents and students are shown in Table 55.

Table 55

Frequency of Intended HS Matriculation Type Among Parents and Students

Variable	Parent		Student		Total	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Catholic HS	249	69.4	175	69.7	424	69.5
Total Private (non-Catholic) HS	13	3.6	10	4.0	23	3.8
Private Christian HS	10	2.8	4	1.6	14	2.3
Private Secular HS	3	0.8	4	1.6	7	1.1
Private (unspecified) HS			2	0.8	2	0.3
Total Public HS	81	22.6	59	23.5	140	23.0
Public Charter HS	27	7.5	24	9.6	51	8.4
Public Magnet HS	16	4.5	4	1.6	20	3.3
Traditional Public HS	36	10.0	29	11.6	65	10.7
Public (unspecified) HS	2	0.6	2	0.8	4	0.7
Other High School	5	1.4	1	0.4	6	1.0
Undecided	11	3.1	6	2.4	17	2.8
Total	359	100.1	251	100.1	610	100.1

Note. Percentages do not sum to 100% due to rounding error.

A majority of participants (69.5%) indicated intention to continue Catholic education at the secondary level. The follow up question revealed that 350 of those 424 respondents intended to matriculate to one of 38 archdiocesan, parish, or private Catholic high schools in Los Angeles County. An additional 10 respondents intended to attend a Catholic high school outside of Los

Angeles County and 24 did not provide specificity of which Catholic high school they would attend. Public high schools were the second largest type of matriculating school and collectively accounted for 23% of identified destinations among students and their parents. Among the 140 collective public high school-identifying matriculants, traditional public schools had the most at 65, followed by public charter schools at 51, and magnet schools at 20. The third largest grouping of matriculating schools among eighth-grade students and their parents was private, non-Catholic (NC) high schools, accounting for 3.6% of respondents. Among these 23 participants, 14 further clarified their intention to matriculate to a private Christian-affiliated high school, seven to a private secular high school, while two did not specify. There were 17 students and parents (2.8%) who had not yet decided on what type of high school they would attend. Finally, six matriculants (1%) indicated they had chosen some other type of high school than was offered as an option.

Of the 593 students and parents who had made a decision at the time of the survey and indicated it, all but six (1%) fell into one of three main categories: Catholic high school, non-Catholic private high school, public high school. These three broader categories of high schools were utilized for further analysis under the variable of matriculating school type. In keeping with the CST conceptual framework's emphasis for the preferential option for poor and vulnerable populations, it was important to understand how various populations as reported by ethnicity and income compare in their decision of continuance in Catholic education to a Catholic high school or to another type of school.

Ethnicity. Table 56 compares statistics for matriculation numbers and percentages to Catholic, private (non-Catholic), and public high schools based on participant-identified ethnicity.

Table 56

Comparison of Matriculation Type by Ethnicity of Students and Parents

Variable	Catholic HS		Private (NC) HS		Public HS	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
American Indian or Alaska Native	4	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Asian or Pacific Islander	28	73.7	1	2.6	9	23.7
Black or African American	6	50.0	0	0.0	6	50.0
Filipino	56	72.7	0	0.0	21	27.3
Hispanic or Latino	191	71.8	6	2.3	69	25.9
White or Other	107	77.5	10	7.2	21	15.2
Multiracial	32	61.5	6	11.5	14	26.9
Total	424	72.2	23	3.9	140	23.9

A majority of participants overall and among every subgroup except Black or African American indicated that they would matriculate from their Catholic elementary school to a Catholic high school. The total among all respondents indicating their ethnicity was 72.2% continuing their Catholic education. Subgroups with higher percentages matriculating to Catholic school are Filipino (72.7%), Asian or Pacific Islander (73.7%), White or Other (77.5%), and American Indian or Alaska Native (100%). While the number of American Indian or Alaska Native participants was not large enough to provide statistically significant information

(expected count was <5 in all three categories), the response is worth noting. Significantly lower percentages of continuance in Catholic education can be seen among Black or African American (50%) and multiracial (61.5%) subgroups. Additionally, while not considerably lower, it should be noted that this percentage continuance among the largest group of respondents, Hispanic or Latino, was slightly lower than average at 71.8%.

The majority of students and parents choosing to matriculate to another school type were heading to a public high school, with 23.9% of the participants overall. This percentage was more than doubled among Black or African American (50%) students and parents. Percentages for Hispanic or Latino, multiracial, and Filipino participants matriculating to public high schools were slightly above average at 25.9%, 26.9%, and 27.3% respectively. White participants matriculating to public schools was significantly lower at only 15.2%.

Participants matriculating to private (non-Catholic) high schools comprised only 3.9% of the total. However, a higher-than-expected percentage of the participants indicated matriculation to private schools within both the multiracial and White or other subgroups at 11.5% and 7.2% respectively.

In order to determine if the above referenced differences are statistically significant, a chi-square test was run. American Indian or Alaska Native and Black or African American samples were exceptionally small, not yielding at least one response in each category and were therefore not included in the test. Chi-square analysis among the five ethnicity subgroups and the three high school types resulting in $X^2 = 23.00, p < .01$, demonstrates that the null hypothesis can be rejected. A significant association exists between matriculation type and ethnicity with a medium effect size, given the Cramer's V value of .14 ($df=8$).

In an effort to see how all ethnically diverse, non-White participants, referred to as Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) participants collectively compare to non-White students and parents, a composite group was created. Table 57 displays the comparative numbers and percentages between White and BIPOC participants.

Table 57

Comparison of BIPOC and White Participant HS Matriculation Type

Variable	Catholic HS		Private (NC) HS		Public HS	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
BIPOC	317	70.6	13	2.9	119	26.5
White or Other	107	77.5	10	7.2	21	15.2
Total	424	72.2	23	3.9	140	23.9

While continuance in the Catholic school system is lower among BIPOC participants than White or Other participants, a chi-square analysis was conducted to see if these differences were significant. Results demonstrate that the null hypothesis was rejected and that the matriculation school type and ethnicity were associated with each other ($\chi^2 = 11.44, p < .01$). A higher percentage of White or other participants (77.5%) continue to Catholic high school than BIPOC participants (70.6%) completing Catholic elementary schools. The percentage of BIPOC participants (26.5%) matriculating to public high schools was significantly higher than that of White or other participants (15.2%). Finally, the percentage of White or other participants (7.2%) matriculating to a private (non-Catholic) high school was more than twice of that of BIPOC participants (2.9%). However, with a Cramer's *V* coefficient of .14 ($df=2$), the effect size of this

difference was smaller in the BIPOC chi-square analysis as compared to when five individual ethnicities were considered.

Family Income. It was important to establish if there were differences in matriculating school rates among family income levels. While all respondents were asked to indicate the type of matriculating school, only parents were asked any questions about income or tuition. Parents were asked to select from ranges of estimated family income before taxes in \$30,000 increments. Matriculating school type frequency data is presented in Table 58 for each of the seven ranges of income.

Table 58

Comparison of Matriculation Type by Family Income Indicated by Parents

Variable	Catholic HS		Private (NC) HS		Public HS	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Under \$30,000	27	69.2	2	5.1	10	25.6
\$30,001-\$60,000	35	71.4	4	8.2	10	20.4
\$60,001-\$90,000	33	64.7	0	0.0	18	35.3
\$90,001-\$120,000	23	67.6	1	2.9	10	29.4
\$120,001-\$150,000	31	79.5	1	2.6	7	17.9
\$150,001-\$180,000	28	73.7	0	0.0	10	26.3
Over \$180,000	68	78.2	5	5.7	14	16.1
Total	245	72.2	13	3.9	79	23.4

Several differences can be seen when comparing school matriculation rates by income levels, though chi-square analysis did not reveal a statistically significant association, The

highest percentages of continuance to a Catholic high school were among parent respondents falling into the highest categories of income. Parents reporting annual income between \$120,001 and \$150,000 had the highest percentage of continuance at 79.5%. The other two groups with the highest percentage of matriculation to Catholic high school were those families with household income greater than \$180,000 at 78.2% and those ranging from \$150,001 to \$180,000 at 73.7%. The continuance rate in Catholic education was relatively lower among the lowest income levels with 69.2% for those making less than \$30,000 and 71.4% for those with a range from \$30,000 to \$60,000. However, the lowest rate of continuance in Catholic education was among families earning \$60,001 to \$90,000 at 64.7%. The next income range above, \$90,001 to 120,000 had the second lowest matriculation rate to Catholic high schools at 67.6%.

Middle-income families had the highest percentages of matriculation to public schools with 29.4% among those with household incomes of \$90,001 to 120,000 and 26.3% among those earning 150,001 to \$180,000. The third highest matriculation rates to public high schools were found among those earning less than \$30,000 at 25.3%. Parents with the highest level of income over \$180,000 showed a significantly low matriculation to public high schools at only 16.1%. Parents reporting annual incomes of \$120,001 to \$150,000 also had low matriculation rates to public high schools with only 17.9%.

The percentage of parents indicating matriculation to private (NC) high schools was relatively low overall at 3.9%. These 13 parent responses spread out over seven categories yielded too few responses to show a meaningful pattern. In fact, chi-square analysis of parent income and matriculation school type did not result in a statistically significant difference. However, it was interesting that the relatively higher frequency of respondents heading to private

NC schools can be found in both the highest (over \$180,000) and lowest (under \$30,000 and \$30,001 to 60,000) income ranges.

Parent Language. In an effort to include many of the Los Angeles County parents and guardians in Catholic elementary schools who speak Spanish, the directions and survey were administered in both English and Spanish. School matriculation decisions of parents were presented by language in Table 59.

Table 59

Comparison of English and Spanish Language Parent HS Matriculation Choice

Variable	Catholic HS		Private (NC) HS		Public HS	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
English Language	226	72.4	13	4.2	73	23.4
Spanish Language	23	74.2	0	0.0	8	25.8
Total	249	72.9	13	3.8	81	23.6

Parents who completed the survey in Spanish had a slightly higher continuance rate to Catholic high schools (74.2%) than those completing the survey in English (72.4%). None of the 31 parents taking the survey in Spanish intended to have their child matriculate to a private non-Catholic high school while 4.2% of those completing it in English indicated their child would do so. However, parents taking the survey administered in Spanish indicated a slightly higher matriculation rate (25.8%) to public high schools than parents taking the survey in English (23.4%). However, the number of participants completing survey in Spanish was relatively small and chi-square analysis did not indicate a statistically significant association.

Student Gender. All participants were asked to indicate their own gender within the survey. The matriculation choices of 244 students can be seen in Table 60.

Table 60

Comparison of Female and Male Student HS Matriculation Choice

Variable	Catholic HS		Private (NC) HS		Public HS	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Female	90	67.2	6	4.5	38	28.4
Male	85	77.3	4	3.6	21	19.1
Total	175	71.7	10	4.1	59	24.2

Girls indicated a lower continuance rate in Catholic education from elementary to secondary at 67.2% as compared to 77.3% among boys. This difference was also pronounced for public schools in which 28.4% of girls indicated that choice versus only 19.1% of boys. Private non-Catholic high schools showed a slightly higher percentage of girls matriculating (4.5%) than boys (3.6%). However, chi-square analysis results did not show statistically significant differences among these two groups and the three matriculating school types.

Religious Affiliation. While the majority of students and parents in Catholic schools identify as Roman Catholic, most Catholic schools in Los Angeles County welcome families from all religious backgrounds. It was important to this study to understand how students and parents of different religious affiliations continue their Catholic education or matriculate to other schools. Table 61 displays the frequency of school matriculation type for each religious affiliation.

Table 61*Comparison of Religious Affiliation and HS Matriculation Choice*

Variable	Catholic HS		Private (NC) HS		Public HS	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Roman Catholic	382	72.8	18	3.4	125	23.8
Orthodox	6	66.7	0	0.0	3	33.3
Protestant	14	73.7	0	0.0	5	26.3
Jewish	1	50.0	0	0.0	1	50.0
Buddhist	3	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Other religious affiliation	6	40.0	4	26.7	5	33.3
No religious affiliation	11	84.6	1	7.7	1	7.7
Total	423	72.2	23	3.9	140	23.9

As 90% of participants were Catholic, the six other categories resulted in several categories with expected counts too low to measure statistically. The group with the largest affiliation after Catholic was Protestant, which tended to matriculate to Catholic high school at a comparable rate of 73.7% and 72.8% respectively. Those selecting “Other religious affiliation” matriculated to Catholic high school at a lower rate of 40%. Finally, those indicating no religious affiliation matriculated to Catholic high school at a higher rate of 84.6%.

Qualitative Data Results

There is little qualitative data from the interviews to add to the data for Research Question #3. By design all interviewees were parents of children not matriculating to a Catholic high school. Attributes such as ethnicity, income, language, and religion were known of each

interviewee from reviewing the results of their surveys. However, in order to maintain a comfortable space during the interview, these attributes were not referenced directly to interviewees in the line of questioning. In some cases in which a parent initiated a comment related to one of her or his attributes, then a follow up question was asked in order to hear more about that characteristic if offered. None of the parents made reference to their ethnicity nor that of their children being a factor related to school selection. While limited, other attributes self-identified by participants in relation to Catholic school or school type follow.

Language. No significant data was revealed by interviewees regarding language related to high school matriculation. Two of the parents chose to take the survey and conduct the interview in Spanish with the assistance of a translator. While cognizant that language could be a potential issue, neither parents' narratives elicited any examples. The only instance in which any inference could be made was when Julia was describing difficulty in communication at her elementary school. However, a clarifying question resulted in her responding:

Oh, let me be more concrete. I'm referring to sometimes there's a concern at school regarding some incidents that I've experienced, or other parents have shared with me. That more than anything it's not about understanding each other since he speaks good Spanish. The majority of the teachers speak Spanish. Actually, I have better communication with the eighth-grade teacher that didn't speak Spanish!

While this was the only interview in which the topic of language surfaced, Julia dismissed it and never spoke of any language-related barriers or considerations in Catholic elementary or high school.

Religion. All of the interviewees identified as Catholic. Some of them shared the importance of faith and values as a motivation to send their children to a Catholic high school. However, none of the parents interviewed highlighted this value enough to overcome other factors to continue in Catholic education. While none of the parents attributed their choice of public school in any part due to their Catholic identification, many of them expressed varied criticisms about how religion is taught or embodied in Catholic schools. Disparate ideas including the call for schools to be more unapologetically Catholic, a more pronounced approach to social justice, and more or less conservative are detailed in the preceding sections.

Income. While most parents did not disclose their exact income level in their interview, many described this attribute of household income as directly impacting the type of high school to which their daughter or son would matriculate. Many of the parents interviewed did not choose to continue Catholic education in great part due to the prohibitive costs. In fact seven of the nine parents interviewed, described their inability to afford Catholic high school based on their circumstances. This issue of finances factored into the school decision for parents of lower (Juana and Maria), middle (Veronica and Gabriel) and higher incomes (Carrie, Jenny, and Rob). Their narratives supporting this primary reason for not choosing a Catholic high school can be seen in previous sections.

Research Question #3 Conclusion

Quantitative analysis revealed among several demographic attributes, there were differences in how groupings matriculated to Catholic, private non-Catholic, and public high schools. There was a significant association between ethnicity and high school matriculation choice. Students and parents identifying as White or Other matriculated to a Catholic high school

at disproportionately higher rates and to public high schools at disproportionately lower rates. Conversely, parents and students identifying as Black or African American as well as multiracial reported matriculating to a Catholic high school at a disproportionately lower rate while matriculating to a public high school at a disproportionately higher rate.

There appear to be patterns in family income which led toward greater matriculation of some school types more than others. Families with income levels of \$120,000 or more had the highest continuance in Catholic education to the secondary level. However, attrition from the Catholic system was greatest not among the lowest income levels, but rather among those in the middle with annual incomes of \$60,001 to \$120,000. The most vulnerable families earning under \$60,000 had a higher continuance rate to Catholic high school than families with incomes falling in the middle-income levels. Matriculation to private high school was highest among those making over \$180,000. While the lowest and highest income levels had multiple students matriculating to private non-Catholic high schools, not more than one participant in any of the income groupings between \$60,000 and \$150,000 reported private non-Catholic high school matriculation. Public school matriculation was highest among families earning \$60,001 to \$90,000 annually. Qualitative data revealed that seven of the nine interviewees with incomes representing low, middle, and high incomes were all matriculating to public high schools in some or all part due to financial issues.

Student survey data revealed that boys matriculated to a Catholic high school more frequently than girls. While some minor differences in high school matriculation type existed in other areas such as parent language and religious affiliation, participant size was limited in some groupings and not allowing for significance in testing.

Summary and Conclusion

This chapter presented the quantitative data from surveys and qualitative data from interviews organized by the research questions. Chapter 5 analyzes the findings, discusses implications, and offers recommendations for Catholic school consideration and future research consideration.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Introduction

In order to understand the issue of attrition within the Catholic school system, this explanatory sequential mixed methods research investigated the perceptions and high school decision making process for 610 Catholic elementary school eighth-grade students and parents. The purpose was to identify the primary reasons and issues Los Angeles County Catholic elementary students and their parents consider in selecting a high school. In addition to push and pull factors contributing to the decision, the study intended to understand the degree to which students or parents influence the ultimate decision. Furthermore, this research sought to ascertain if there is a relationship between degree of satisfaction with Catholic elementary schools and perceptions of related programs in Catholic high schools. Finally, it was important to consider if there are associations between attributes of parents and students and the type of school to which they matriculate. Informed by a Catholic Social Teaching (CST) conceptual framework, embedded in each of these objectives was the desire to understand how vulnerable populations are impacted similarly or differently from others.

This chapter begins with the discussion of findings that emerged from survey and interview data. Then, limitations and implications of the study are presented. Finally, recommendations for practice and future studies are articulated prior to concluding remarks.

Discussion of Findings

The discussion of findings is organized and presented by the three research questions. Within each research question, findings resulting from both quantitative and qualitative data are synthesized and discussed by topic.

RQ 1: What are the Primary Factors for Catholic Elementary School Graduates and Their Parents in Choosing a High School?

Who is Making the Decision?

Parents and Students Make the Decision Together. A majority (52.7%) of participants responding to the question of who had the greatest amount of influence on the decision of which high school selected the option, “Parent/guardian(s) and student equally.” This is in contrast to Bott (2017) who found among 466 Catholic parents of students in public and Catholic high schools in eastern New York State only 7.5% of respondents attributed the influence to student and parent equally. It is worth noting that a few differences in Bott’s population include that students of parents were already in 10th through 12th grade, only 12% reported to be attending a Catholic high school and only parents were surveyed. When considering this study’s parent-only responses, the percentage of those indicating an equal amount of influence drops slightly to 49.6%. However, this response of shared decision making was significantly more common within this sample of parents and students matriculating from Catholic elementary schools in Los Angeles County.

Student Influence may be Greater Than Previously Thought. In addition to students having more say as part of an equal decision described above, within this study, participants selecting “student primarily” accounted for 16.2% overall. While a lower percentage than other

options, this was much higher than among Bott's (2017) sample in which only 1.9% of parents attributed the student to have the greatest influence. When isolating parent-only responses in this study, 13.7% attributed the greatest influence to the student. Combining parents attributing equal or greatest influence of the student, it was clear that eighth-grade students matriculating from elementary schools in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles (ADLA) have a great amount of influence in the high school decision. This was also different from the findings of Vega-Mavec (2016) who concluded from interviews of Latina mothers, while children had opinions and input, parents were largely the ones making the final decision.

Among Cases of Students Matriculating to Public High Schools, Parent Influence is Greater. Another finding regarding influence is the statistically significant association between high school matriculation type and parent-student influence. Matriculation to public high schools is higher among families in which the parent is the greatest influencer on the decision at 39.4% as compared to private and Catholic high school matriculation groups in which parent-primarily influence is only 20.0% and 18.5% respectively. Similarly, frequency of participants indicating that the student primarily had the greatest influence was higher in private and Catholic high school matriculation than public school matriculation. Students sharing equally in the decision with parents is also lowest among public-school matriculating participants.

Qualitative data supported this finding in that a majority of the parents with children matriculating to public schools had primarily influenced that decision. One parent who indicated an equally shared decision qualified in her interview that it was 60% parent decision. Among parents interviewed with children matriculating to public schools, parents had greater influence in that decision overall.

The findings in this study seem to be congruent with Bott (2017) in which the parent influence percentages and non-Catholic high school matriculation were both considerably higher.

Important Factors in High School Decision

Parents and Students Rate Many Factors Important. Parents and students consider a number of factors important in the high school decision. In fact, nine of the ten factors, which were incorporated based on previous research, had an overall rating equivalent to at least moderately important. The highest rated factors were academic program, college acceptance, and safety which, with means from 4.67 to 4.70, neared an overall rating of “extremely important.” School reputation, financial considerations, faith values and beliefs, and location all had means above the 4.0 value corresponding with “very important.” These results resonate with previous research which, based on different participant pools and construction of questions, also highlighted those seven factors. The only factor rated considerably low was single gender, which with a combined mean of only 2.28, is the equivalent nearest to “slightly important” overall among eighth-grade parents and students. This is consonant with the findings of Bott (2017) in which single sex education was the lowest rated among 12 factors that shaped school decision in a survey of Catholic parents of 10th to 12th grade students in Catholic and public high schools.

Factors are Rated More Important by Parents. When comparing means, t-tests revealed significant differences between parent and student ratings of nine of the ten factors. While parents rated all factors higher in importance than students, the three with largest effects were, in descending order: faith values and beliefs; school reputation; and safety. Previous research of high school choice factors surveyed did not include students as participants, so no comparison is available.

Students and Parents Leaving to Public High Schools Rate Faith, Single-Gender, and Athletics Less Important Than Those Continuing in the Catholic System. ANOVA results showed significant differences in four factors by matriculating school groups. The largest effect was found in higher rating of importance of faith values and beliefs among Catholic elementary school students and parents matriculating to a Catholic high school as compared to those matriculating to a public high school. This is congruent with the finding of Bott (2017) which showed significantly higher ratings of in both religious education and moral/character education among Catholic parents of Catholic high school students compared to Catholic parents of public high school students. Interviews among parents of children matriculating to public and public charter schools revealed mixed results about the importance of faith values and beliefs. The majority of parents valued their Catholic faith and conveyed sentiment that their child would benefit from further exposure to a Catholic high school's values-centered faith community if barriers such as finances were removed.

Quantitative results showed participants matriculating to public high schools rated single-gender significantly lower than those matriculating to Catholic high schools. While some interviewees expressed consideration of high schools that happened to be all-girls or all-boys, none discussed the value of single gender education to be an important factor in their decision. These findings are similar to Bott (2017) which found the rating of single sex education to be significantly less important among Catholic parents in public high school than those in Catholic high schools. Thus, while single-gender may be a critical part of those Catholic high schools' identity, promotional efforts should focus on other strengths, recognizing that this factor did

resonate with high importance to the general population of Catholic eighth-grade students and parents who had gone through the recruitment cycle.

ANOVA results also showed a significant difference in school matriculation type and co-curricular athletics. Students and parents matriculating to public schools rated this a less important factor than those matriculating to Catholic high schools. While Bott (2017) also noted the mean for athletics as a factor to be lower among public high school parents compared to Catholic high school parents, the difference in that study was not significant. Furthermore, qualitative data in this study show none of the nine parent participants of eighth-grade students matriculating to a public high school mentioned athletics at any point in the interview. Thus, for the study participants, athletics appears to be less important to overall population matriculating to public high schools than those to Catholic high schools. Catholic high schools focused on sports programs may consider strengthening and promoting other programs in order to serve and retain more of this population of eighth-grade students and parents with less interest in athletics from leaving Catholic schools.

Finally, the importance of location was significantly less for private, non-Catholic high school matriculants as compared to both Catholic and public high school matriculants. While Bott's (2017) participant sample did not include parents of private, non-Catholic students, the null hypothesis reached showing no statistical differences between its parents of Catholic and public high schools regarding the influence of drive time in school selection may be somewhat related. In both studies, parents of current or matriculating Catholic and public high school students do not view factors related to drive time or location of the school differently. Thus, the

reason for families choosing public school over Catholic school may not be related to proximity or convenience of the public school.

Differences in Some Factors by Ethnicity. Results of ANOVA tests revealed significant differences between at least two ethnic subgroups among five of the ten factors participants rated regarding importance in school decision. While all five yielded statistically significant results, only financial considerations and location results showed a medium effect size.

Separate ANOVA results showed Filipino participants in this study rated the factors of financial considerations, location, and school reputation significantly higher than White or other and multiracial participants. Also significant was the fact that Filipino respondents rated the importance of financial considerations higher than Hispanic or Latino respondents.

Significant findings of ANOVA tests showed Hispanic or Latino parents and students rated three factors more important in school selection than at least one other ethnicity subgroup. Hispanic or Latino participants rated financial considerations, location, and safety significantly higher than White or other participants. Additionally, the increased importance of location among Hispanic or Latino participants was also statistically significant compared to multiracial participants.

Finally, multiracial parents and students rated co-curricular athletics more important in school selection than White or other parents and students. While this difference was statistically significant, the effect size was small.

Financial Considerations, Location, and Safety Are Less Important Factors Among Parents With Incomes Over \$180,000. While financial considerations were rated highly important as a factor in the high school decision by families in all income groups, this factor was

rated significantly less important among families with incomes in the highest group. Similarly, parents with the highest incomes also rated location and safety lower than parents with incomes between \$30,001 to \$90,000 and \$60,001 to \$90,000 respectively. Finally, while all parents rated single gender to be of lower importance than any other factor, those with household incomes less than \$30,000 rated this significantly higher than those in all other income groups. Thus, all-boys and all-girls schools may attract families more open to single gender education by offering more scholarships to families with the greatest demonstrated need for assistance.

Special Programs Attract Students Leaving Catholic Schools. A factor of high importance expressed by some parents interviewed whose children were matriculating to public high schools was the quality of a particular special program. Many of these were related to academic programs including engineering and robotics, honors pathway, and college credit. Another parent articulated her son's priority for a public school based on a developed improvisational theater program. While there were other considerations in the decision including finances, in several cases, a perceived high quality program that matched the interest of the child was a significant factor in their school selection.

Access to a Good Free Public High School Eases Decision to Leave Catholic Schools. Among many of the interviewees, all of whose children were matriculating to a traditional or public charter high school, an important factor in their selection was the availability for their child to attend what they differentiated as a good public or public charter school option. In a majority of cases, these parents' children would not be attending the closest public school, but rather one that would be accessible through a permit, lottery, or physical move. While the intended school proximity to home was unknown, over one-third of the parent and survey

respondents matriculating to a public school indicated it would be a public charter high school. The impact of charter schools on declining local Catholic school enrollment described by Toma et al. (2006), Song (2012), and Lackman (2013) was validated in the survey and interview results of this research showing families leaving the Catholic school system for charter high schools. Additionally, charter school competition may have impacted the degree to which other public choice options are more readily available given the prevalence of both inter- and intra-district permits referenced by interviewees.

Reasons for Not Attending Catholic High School

The Cost of Catholic High School Tuition is Too Expensive. When parents were given the opportunity to rank up to three reasons for not attending a Catholic high school, over half of student and parent respondents (53.4%) selected “tuition is too expensive” as their primary reason. Almost three-quarters (74.6%) of participants answering this question indicated the expense of tuition to be in their top three reasons for not attending a Catholic school. When considering the weighting of all participants’ top three reasons, tuition expense had by far the most points and factored to be the most important influence on participants’ decision to not attend a Catholic high school. This is consistent with previous research such as Huber (2004) who found “Catholic high school tuition is too prohibitive” to be the most important reason among parents of eighth-grade students in 12 U.S. parochial schools not considering a Catholic high school.

The interview data collected in this study also points to the cost of tuition as a primary factor in all but one parent matriculating to a public school. It was the most consistent reason discussed in some part by all parents in the context of the interview.

The Expense of Tuition is a Reason Among all Income Levels. When analyzing all parent surveys, those who reported a family income level and ranked at least one reason for not attending a Catholic high school, 76.4% listed “tuition is expensive” as one of their top three reasons for their child not attending a Catholic high school. In fact, a majority of respondents within all seven income levels stated tuition expense as one of the three most important reasons. The \$60,001 to \$90,000 income level accounted for the highest percentage of parents stating tuition expense was a reason. The second and third highest percentages of parents indicating expensive tuition as a primary reason were those with considerably higher income levels between \$120,001 and \$180,000. The most vulnerable families with incomes under \$30,000 yielded a percentage just slightly average. Other than those families with incomes over \$180,000, the income level with the lowest percentage of parents indicating “tuition is expensive” as a primary reason for not attending a Catholic school is comprised of families making \$30,000 to \$60,000. These findings are interesting in that parents with incomes over \$100,000 are more likely to list expensive tuition than parents with incomes of \$30,00-\$60,000. Since the majority of financial assistance at Catholic high schools is need-based, it might appear that some of those lower-income families are aware of the tuition assistance and therefore report it to be a barrier less often than those whose incomes do not qualify.

Financial Assistance Drops Considerably Among Families Earning Above \$60,000. Significant associations were found in both need-based and those receiving any financial assistance with regard to income level. Generally, parent percentage reporting receipt of financial assistance offers decreased as income level increased. While over two thirds (68%) of parents reporting incomes of \$30,001 to \$60,000 were offered need-based assistance, less than half

(46%) of those making \$60,001 to \$90,000. In fact, those making \$90,001 to \$120,000 received need-based assistance slightly more often at 47.2%. According to Cowan (2019), the Public Policy Institute of California estimates middle class income in Los Angeles County for a family of four to be between \$65,030 and \$227,605. Many of the families in this income level between \$60,001 to \$90,000 are under the threshold for middle class in Los Angeles and yet are not offered need-based financial assistance at Catholic high schools. It is understandable why without assistance, many of these lower-middle-income families feel they cannot afford Catholic high school tuition.

Three-Quarters of Families Leaving Catholic Elementary Schools for Public School did not Receive any Financial Assistance Offers from Catholic High Schools. Survey data revealed that there was a significant association between any merit and/or need-based financial assistance offered and school matriculation type. Parents heading to Catholic high school reported receiving financial assistance offers at a rate of 72.3% compared to those matriculating to private and public high schools at 50% and 25.2% respectively. While these rates probably reflect some of the parents leaving the Catholic system without an offer because they did not complete an application, this could be an opportunity for Catholic high schools to ensure that more families in Catholic elementary schools apply and receive financial assistance at greater rates. This finding was validated in the interviews in which only three of the nine parents matriculating to public high schools received some offer of financial assistance.

Parents Choosing Public High School Perceive They Will Not Qualify for Financial Assistance. Qualitative data revealed that a majority of parents matriculating to public high schools perceived that they would not qualify for financial assistance and did not complete the

application process. Additionally, a lower middle class parent with four children in Catholic school reported that her family had been turned down by the Catholic Education Foundation in the past. Because of this past experience she did not even want to try to apply for aid for her eighth-grade daughter.

Families That Applied for Assistance Report a Lack of Timely Clarity and Assurance.

Even families that were offered financial assistance did not have confidence in the offers received and made the decision to attend a public high school. One parent of a child who received a merit scholarship from a Catholic high school in which his son was interested expressed concern that the assistance was only guaranteed for the first year. He did not wish to take a risk having to take his son out of the school if the amount would be lessened in the second or third year.

Another parent described her surprise as a Catholic high school she and her daughter were very interested in suddenly reached out to them in the summer saying they could give more financial assistance than previously offered. An added challenge for this parent was the fact that a Specialty Family Foundation award previously mentioned by the principal of her elementary school was no longer available. This parent had also previously qualified for a Catholic Education Foundation scholarship which she hoped she might be able to still utilize. This parent who desperately wanted her daughter to continue in Catholic education, was trying to piece together different sources of support, but had already made a decision to attend a charter high school. However, she made it clear that if the total award reached a level that she was more comfortable with, she would jump at the chance to enroll her in the Catholic high school.

Tuition Expense is Rarely the Only Reason for Non-Matriculation. While tuition expense was the most frequent response among three options, it was the sole reason among only 15.5% of parents and students responding to the question. Even among the 97 participants who ranked it number one, 71.1% of them selected at least one additional reason contributing to their decision to not attend a Catholic high school. Among parents and students who indicated tuition expense as one of the three reasons for not attending, 28.2% ranked it as the second or third most important reason. Furthermore, there were 25.4% that listed other reasons altogether and did not include expense as one of their three. Thus, while it is the most significant factor for many, the overwhelming majority of students and parents indicate it being one element of the equation.

Qualitative interviews supported this finding. While finances were a concern for eight of the nine interviewees, there were only two parents that expressed it as the sole reason for their decision for their daughter or son not attending a Catholic high school. Three parents also factored in the strength of an academic, art, or special education program along with the challenges cost. Two parents attributed a combination of their concern of tuition expense combined with their daughters having some interest in a larger or different school than they had experienced.

Specialized Academic Programs May Be Perceived Stronger at Other Schools. The second most common top-ranked reason for Catholic eighth-grade students not attending a Catholic high school was “Specialized academic program (e.g., Robotics, STEM, Advanced Placement) is stronger at another school.” Additionally, this reason had the second highest frequency of top three reasons as well as the second highest weighted point total. While Huber’s (2004) selections did not include an option with this specificity, the second most common reason

he found among parents of eighth-grade students in parochial schools not considering sending their children to Catholic high school was “public school has more to offer.” While it is unknown which elements or programs appeared stronger to those parents, the previous study established that some parents were leaving the Catholic system because of their perception that a desired product may be better at the public high school. In this case, the surveys in this study revealed that the perception of a stronger special academic program may be available at other non-Catholic private and public high schools.

In addition to the quantitative results, qualitative data further illuminated this issue of the need for Catholic schools to develop stronger academic programs. As mentioned in the previous section, several parents talked about a specialized program in robotics and engineering, early college credit, or honors pathway being a pull toward a public high school. Given that 51 parents and students named this issue as one of the three reasons they are not attending a Catholic high school, this is a perception that merits addressing by Catholic school leaders. However, this conclusion should not be confused with an overall negative perception with regard to the rigor of Catholic high schools. Of 181 respondents, only 15 selected “academics may not be challenging enough” while 13 chose “academics may be too challenging.” Thus, the need to be more innovative with specialized programs should not be confused as an indictment of the college prep rigor often associated with Catholic high schools. Rather, data show the concern is with the lack of development of strong or appropriate specialized academic programs.

Some Catholic Eighth-grade Students Do Not Wish to Attend a Catholic High School.

The third most frequent reason students and parents named within their top three reasons for not attending a Catholic high school was “I/my daughter/son do/does not want to attend a Catholic

high school.” While 26.5% of respondents chose this as one of the reasons, only 9.4% named it as their primary reason. In fact, the highest frequency of this response was among those ranking it as their third most important reason in the decision. Yet, even if it is a secondary reason, it demonstrates this student opinion is one of the factors contributing to attrition in the Catholic school system. Another related piece of data to consider from this question is the most frequent “other” theme “wanted change or bigger environment” as interpreted from student and parent text box comments. Three of the applicable student quotes include:

I wanted to be in a bigger school environment with more people attending the school.

Change in environment, new people.

I want to try a public school for the first time.

Qualitative data added context to this finding with a few parents discussing their son or daughter’s interest in trying something new. With the majority of these cases, the student rationale had less to do with a Catholic high schools per se and more to do with wanting a change from negative social issues associated with the Catholic elementary students with whom they had attended for several years. In the only case in which a parent described the child being adamant about not attending a Catholic high school, the majority of the issues seemed to be about the bullying and social pecking order he was a victim of in his Catholic elementary school. While his mother thought some of those singular clique and social issues would be improved if he were to go to a Catholic high school, her son would not entertain it. Considering the cost of tuition, his mother was relieved, even though she said they would have found a way to afford it if the son wanted it. With regard to other families, the interviews in this study only captured the parent point of view, so it was hard to distinguish whether the student initiated a desire for a non-

Catholic school versus them being open to it since the parent had decided the financial costs were too prohibitive before pursuing Catholic high school options.

RQ 2: What is the Relationship Between Satisfaction with Catholic Elementary School and Catholic High School Perception?

Catholic Elementary School Satisfaction

Parents and Students Generally Have High Levels of Satisfaction. Mean scores for all seven variables and the effectiveness composite were all over 4.0 out of a 5-point scale showing a high degree of satisfaction with their current Catholic elementary school. Faith formation and sense of community were ranked the highest while co-curricular/extra-curricular and facilities, equipment, and technology were rated relatively lower among the variables.

Parent Satisfaction was Higher Than That of Students. Students rated most elements of their Catholic elementary schools lower than their parents. These differences were significant with regard to religious instruction, faith formation, leadership, sense of community, and the overall effectiveness composite.

Parents and Students Matriculating to Private Non-Catholic High Schools Rate the Effectiveness of Catholic Elementary Schools Lower. Participants going to private high schools rated every area of their Catholic elementary school lower than those heading to Catholic and public high schools. Additionally, this difference of school type was significant among the effectiveness composite as well as three variables: school leadership; academic instruction; facilities, equipment, and technology. This finding supports the previous research findings that it is not just finances that impact the decision. If there is a greater level of dissatisfaction with

Catholic elementary schools among those going to private schools, it helps to explain why those students and parents are making the decision to not continue in Catholic education.

Sense of Community is Highly Valued by Parents but Student Experience

Diminishes as Students Move into Upper Grades. Interviews revealed parents appreciated Catholic elementary school staff ability to know and interact more personally with students and parents. Some articulated the nature of a Catholic community being a unifying element among differences in students or families. However, in interviews several parents spoke critically of bullying, drama, and other social issues that became pronounced in middle school grades, impacting the student sense of community. While most recognized some of these things are part of adolescent growth, several felt school leaders did not do enough to address them. Furthermore, it was shared that the small and fixed nature of a singular class perpetuated cliques and stymied changes in peer perceptions.

Communication of Elementary School leadership is an Area of Dissatisfaction

Among Parents of Students Matriculating to Public High Schools. In interviews parents articulated issues that they felt could have been minimized if the principal practiced greater or more authentic two-way communication. One parent held on to angst because she had not been told by teachers or the principal that her son had been engaged in a disciplinary matter. The parent had no issue with any kind of consequence for the child, but rather that the principal continued to maintain that they had no obligation to inform her, taking away her role as a parent. This contradicts the common Catholic school philosophical tenet proclaiming that “parents are the primary educators.”

Some parents described principals to be fixed in their thinking and not open to parent opinions or ideas. Two parents described their Catholic elementary school principal as less forward thinking. One parent was grateful that the principal was somewhat open to the parent's ideas and offers to assist in an area of her expertise, such as technology. In another case, the principal let parents feel like their only place to be involved was relegated to fundraising activities. It seemed as if in some elementary schools the traditional hierarchical roles were being perpetuated by principals. Parent interviews indicate this did not sit well with contemporary parents who are paying tuition and have an expectation of being part of an authentic collaborative community.

Religious Instruction is Not of High Quality or a Priority for Elementary Schools.

Several of the parents interviewed initiated disappointment in the elementary school's handling of religious instruction, particularly in the upper grades. Two different parents described religion not being implemented as well as other academic subjects. In some cases, the teacher chose to allocate religion time to another discipline. Some parents described the teachers' instructional methods and activities to be basic and lacking depth or creativity. Whereas one parent felt the subject could be more engaging for adolescent learners with interactive activities or creation of original content such as videos or plays, rather than the more traditional bookwork. Even when it came to a formational activity like service, one parent described the school's approach to checking a box without any discussion, presentation, or real reflection. This criticism did not come out in any other academic areas, so it is unknown as to whether the quality of instruction was deficient because of multi-subject teachers' lack of content knowledge or less priority for meaningful instructional planning.

Catholic High School Perception

Parents and Students Generally Perceive Catholic High Schools Favorably. All seven variables of effective Catholic schools received a mean equivalent above “somewhat above average” among participants as a whole. Except for the parents’ higher perception of religious instruction higher than students’, there were no significant differences between parent and student ratings of Catholic high schools.

Public High School Matriculating Students and Parents Perceive all Areas of Catholic High Schools to be Less Effective Than Those Matriculating to Catholic High Schools. Parents and students matriculating to public schools perceived every variable of Catholic high schools lower than those matriculating to Catholic high schools. These differences were significant in the effectiveness composite and all variables except academic instruction. These findings are in alignment with Bott (2017), which found Catholic parents of public high school students rated the overall quality of Catholic schools in Albany lower than parents in Catholic schools.

Los Angeles survey participants matriculating to private non-Catholic high schools also rated most Catholic high school variables lower than those continuing to Catholic high school. However, only the difference in leadership was statistically significant. These lower ratings among families going to both public and private high schools posit that those leaving Catholic schools perceive Catholic education differently. This is further evidence that the decision to leave Catholic education may not be finances alone. In an interview supporting this evidence, one parent explained his evaluation of high school discernment:

Cost versus what the program is offering, right? If the program was super strong, but there was a cost, then we'd, we would still be leaning in that direction. If you're looking at variables, it would be cost distance, and programming. How strong is the school academically, etc.? We looked at those three variables and then we weighed them.

In the end, while that parent valued Catholic education, he did not see the Catholic high school academic programming to be substantially more effective than the local public school. To some degree, a lower perception of effectiveness of Catholic schools may factor in for parents whether consciously like this parent or subconsciously.

Catholic High Schools Need to Differentiate and be Innovative. One parent alumnus of a local archdiocesan Catholic high school articulated the need for Catholic schools, particularly archdiocesan schools, to be able to differentiate themselves more positively than local public high schools. Some of this had to do with a lack of innovation in academic offerings and limited programming. He also argued that many archdiocesan high schools do take advantage of opportunities to approach faith formation and service learning more creatively with a greater depth of social justice. While this father valued formation and justice and recognized his son would not receive that at the public high school, he did not see examples of Catholic high schools leveraging a real depth of this to a significant extent.

Most Eighth-Grade Parent Interviewees Sending Their Children to Public High School Did Not Complete a Catholic High School Application. While parents offered some positive perceptions of some Catholic high schools, most did not fully pursue their daughter or son's application. Several parents indicated they knew that the price would be too prohibitive to realistically consider.

Parents who did Complete the Application Process Wanted to Attend a Catholic High School Were it not for a Specific Barrier. Two parents of students matriculating to public high school who completed the high school application process preferred their child to attend that Catholic high school. In one case, the mother just could not afford it because of the tuition cost and not enough financial assistance offered in a timely manner. In the other case, the divorced father could not convince his ex-wife due to her previous concerns with a Catholic elementary school. While many families heading to public schools do not follow through with an application, those that do have at least one parent who is sold on the value of the Catholic high school. Thus, it may be beneficial for administrators to be in greater dialogue with parents both during and after the application process to understand those barriers and potentially offer additional assistance.

Few Interviewed Parents Heading to Public High School Attended a Catholic High School Open House or Similar On-Campus Experience. While Catholic high schools commit time and resources to these events which are typically well attended, many of the parents of Catholic elementary school eighth-grade students indicated in their interview they had not attended these events. Catholic high schools may need to come up with incentives or alternative events to get prospective families on their campuses before and during the application period.

Catholic High School Office Personnel and Practices Seem Less Familial. While most Catholic high schools are larger than elementary schools with more staff serving more constituents, one interviewee was put off by what she perceived to be a cold or perfunctory response when she called a Catholic high school. At another Catholic high school in which the office put the same parent through to an admissions director, she said she received more

information but still was left with the impression that the admissions director was busy. Several parents spoke of the accessible and personal nature of interactions with their Catholic elementary school office personnel. If parents have been in these small intentional communities in which they feel comfortable and well-known, some efficient business-like practices of Catholic high schools may conflict with these parents' customer service expectations or make them less likely to call for more information.

Parents Form Strong Impressions During Summer School or On- Campus

Programs. While finances precluded a particular parent from matriculating to Catholic high school, she had strong impressions about a few of them because of her children attending previous summer programs. In two of the cases, she spoke highly of the private Catholic high schools her daughter and son attended for summer programs. At a different Catholic high school in which a fight broke out during lunchtime among the elementary school students who were in a summer program, the parent made strong negative conclusions about lack of supervision and less positive administration.

A Parent's Distinction of Two Types of Schools Based on Tuition and Resources may Veil Classist or Racist Undercurrents. One parent made an interesting distinction among different Catholic high schools. She used terms like "fantastic," "grounds," "resources," and "campus" to describe her desirable high schools and "fighting," "cheap," and "lower level" for the undesirable high schools. One common trait among three Catholic high schools referenced positively is that their tuition was 40% higher than the negatively referenced Catholic high schools. Similarly, she spoke negatively about a Catholic elementary school her children briefly attended which charged 35% less than her current one. While the increased tuition may correlate

with better resources or facilities, it can also perpetuate a perception of a more exclusive community consisting of predominantly higher income or upper middle-income families. While all three of the positively referenced Catholic high schools offer financial aid to attract lower-income families, the percentage of lower-income or lower middle-class families they serve is a small percentage compared to the two disparaged Catholic high schools in which a majority of their population would fall in those financial demographics.

Additionally, the Catholic high schools this upper middle-class White parent referenced in disdain had low concentrations of White students. California Department of Education (2019) statistics show the student population of Los Angeles County schools to be 86% BIPOC. The two Catholic high schools she spoke poorly of accurately reflect the county norm with a range of 86% to 92% BIPOC student population. Similarly, the former Catholic elementary school she analogized as an inferior Catholic high school has a BIPOC student population of 87.5%. In contrast, the only three Catholic high schools that Jenny referenced in a positive light were all significantly less ethnically diverse with BIPOC students accounting for 42% to 54%. However, the parent did not discuss race with the exception of initiating that her kids “kind of stuck out” because a large portion of the student body was Filipino. While it was unclear that her comments had to do with race or finances, the parent also referenced her husband as having strong bias against some Catholic high schools. Quoting her husband, she said:

We used to make fun of the people that went to that school because they had this kind of reputation about them.

This family would only consider certain Catholic schools which they perceived were beyond their affordability. In the end, they decided to move to a new area, in which the public high school serves a population in which White students are a majority.

Relationship Between Catholic Elementary School Satisfaction and Catholic High School Perception

There is a Significant Positive Relationship Between Student and Parent Satisfaction of Catholic Elementary School and Perception of Catholic High Schools. The results of bivariate analysis showed significant positive relationships between each of the National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools (NSBECs)-inspired corresponding Catholic elementary and high school pairs as well as the composites. Additionally, combined parent and student samples resulted in correlation coefficients indicating at least a medium effect for all seven variables and the composite. There was a somewhat linear relationship between these two continuous variables. Participants who rate their Catholic elementary school favorably also tend to rate Catholic high schools available to them favorably. Similarly, participants who are more critical of their Catholic elementary school tend to be more critical in their perceptions of the Catholic high schools available to them.

Among all of the participants, the individual variables showing the relative strongest association between elementary and high schools were school leadership as well as facilities, technology, and equipment. This is particularly interesting since both of these areas may be viewed by many working in Catholic education to be considerably different at the secondary level. Whereas Catholic elementary school leadership is often primarily experienced by parents as the principal alone, Catholic high school leadership is distributed among many administrators

overseeing different programs and activities of the school. This association in leadership is perhaps problematic for Catholic high schools since several interviewed parents matriculating to public high schools revealed dissatisfaction with Catholic elementary school principals' communication. Catholic high school campuses typically have far more and developed facilities than elementary school counterparts. In many Catholic high schools, technology may be more highly integrated into general student learning as well as specialized programs not available to many smaller Catholic elementary schools. If these differences do indeed exist, they are not known or perceived as such by many Catholic elementary school eighth-grade students and their parents.

While This Association is Significant Among Both Parents and Students, Correlation is Higher Among Parents Than Students. The relationship between Catholic elementary school satisfaction and Catholic high school perception is strongest among parents. Most Catholic elementary school eighth-grade students are exposed to high school presentations during the instructional day. Many of them attend shadow days at multiple Catholic high schools during a school day so they also have first-hand experience that parents do not. Students also may receive more information second hand from friends who graduated from their elementary school a year or two prior and now attend Catholic high schools. The built-in opportunities for first and secondhand information are greater for an average eighth-grade Catholic elementary school student than her or his parent. Thus, it would appear students have a greater ability to think divergently about specific elements and programs offered in Catholic high schools compared to their own elementary school experience.

While parents are offered opportunities to attend open houses or information nights, these are optional activities that compete for interest and time on weekends or during the week after a long workday. Qualitative data revealed that most parents matriculating to public high school do not attend these information events on high school campuses. Thus, they may not understand the expanded differentiated program offerings and greater number of professional leaders in Catholic secondary high schools compared to Catholic elementary schools.

Correlation Between Elementary Satisfaction and High School Perception is Stronger Among Those Leaving Catholic Schools. Bivariate analysis resulted in positive significant relationships between the Catholic elementary school effectiveness composite and the Catholic high school effectiveness composite regardless of which type of high school they were choosing to matriculate. The effect of the association between Catholic elementary satisfaction and Catholic high school perception was more pronounced among those who were leaving the Catholic system for private or public high schools. The strongest correlation coefficients were among those leaving to private high schools in which the composite and all variables resulted in a large significant effect except facilities, equipment, and technology. Given this particularly strong correlation between Catholic elementary school and high school perception among private school participants, it is unfortunate that this population also had lowest means in Catholic elementary school satisfaction. In areas in which they are critical of their Catholic elementary experience, they are most likely to align that thinking toward Catholic high school options.

Parents Matriculating to Public Schools Named Criticisms of Their Catholic Elementary School They Assumed Would Persist in Catholic High Schools. One parent who was critical of the extra academic pressures experienced by her son in his Catholic elementary

school felt like it would be the same or worse in a Catholic high school, calling it a “Catholic school trademark.” Another parent who found Catholic elementary school leaders to not be open or well versed in special education services was understandably circumspect about Catholic high schools not being able to serve her son well. A parent critical of his elementary school’s lack of infusing Catholic values throughout the curriculum admitted that he did not look at Catholic high schools seriously, but he had an impression that it would probably be the case. Finally, a father who wanted his daughter to continue in Catholic education described his ex-wife’s unresolved issues with the Catholic elementary school to be a primary reason their daughter could not matriculate to a Catholic high school as she would have liked. While it may be understandable that parents having a negative experience in a Catholic elementary school may project that issue continuing at the secondary level, it is important for Catholic high schools to find ways to best inform and differentiate themselves with prospective parents.

RQ 3: To What Extent Do Catholic Elementary School Graduates’ and Their Parents’ Identified Attributes Correspond With High School Matriculation Selection?

Parent-Student Role

Parents and Students Reported Comparable Continuation Rates. The majority of parents and students reported matriculation to a Catholic high school at 69.4% and 69.7% respectively. While this shows some consistency within the two subsets of participants, it also aligns well to the overall population of Catholic eighth-grade students in Los Angeles County. In the previous year, the total matriculation reported by Catholic elementary school principals to a Catholic high school was similar at 68.9%.

Ethnicity

There is a Significant Relationship Between Ethnicity and School Matriculation

Type. Chi-square test of independence results revealed a significant association exists between matriculation school type and ethnicity when considering the five ethnic groups with appropriate sample sizes. White or other, Asian or Pacific Islander, and Filipino participants were most likely to continue in Catholic education at the secondary level at rates of 77.5%, 73.7%, and 72.7% respectively. Attrition was highest among multiracial participants at 38.5% compared to 27.8% overall. Filipino, multiracial, and Hispanic or Latino participants matriculated from Catholic elementary to public high school at 27.3%, 26.9% and 25.9% respectively while White or other participants matriculated at only 15.2%. While private high school matriculation was relatively low, the highest rates were among multiracial and White or other students and parents at 11.5% and 7.2% respectively.

Hispanic and Latino Students Matriculate to Catholic High School at Slightly

Lower Rates. While Hispanic and Latino participants comprised the largest group at 45.3% of the participant sample, their continuance rate was slightly less than average at 71.8% compared to 72.6% for other groups combined. Catholic schools have struggled to attract a proportional number of Latinx Catholic students (Gray, 2014; NDTF, 2009) and Church leaders cite Catholic social teaching as a mandate for preferential care and service to them (Francis, 2014; USCCB, 2002). Yet, with this finding, there is some indication that even Latinx students who enroll in Los Angeles Catholic elementary schools are not being retained comparable to or higher than levels of other populations.

Catholic School Attrition was Highest Among Black or African American and Multiracial Students. The lowest retention rates were among Black or African American and multiracial participants at 50% and 61.5% respectively. While the former subgroup did not yield a high enough sample for the data to be subject to significance testing, it is nevertheless concerning that half of those surveyed were not continuing. Black and African American students are already underrepresented in Catholic schools nationally and locally, so the potential that half of them could be leaving between eighth and ninth grade calls on Catholic school leaders to address this issue. Systemic racism plagues our society including Catholic schools. Pope Francis stated, “Our churches and our civic and social institutions are in need of ongoing reform. If racism is confronted by addressing its causes and the injustice it produces, then healing can occur” (USCCB, 2018, p. 5). This higher attrition data point provides a reminder to Catholic school leaders of their obligation to understand and act to end any practices that contribute to racism or do not elevate the marginalized.

Continuance Rate of BIPOC Participants in Catholic Education is Lower. Additional significant chi-square test of independence results showed that Catholic elementary school BIPOC students and parents are less likely to continue to Catholic high schools compared to White or other participants at rates of 70.6% and 77.5% respectively. BIPOC participants were more likely to matriculate to public high school at 26.5% compared to White or other participants at 15.2%. This increased attrition rate from eighth to ninth grade among BIPOC students conflicts with the call of Catholic social teaching to prioritize populations which have been marginalized.

Family Income

Families Making Over \$120,000 Reported the Highest Continuation Rates to Catholic High Schools. While differences were statistically insignificant among the seven income levels, frequency rates showed that Catholic school attrition was lowest among families with incomes in all three of the highest income levels. Within these levels of \$30,000 increments, those making \$120,001 to \$150,000 actually showed slightly higher rates of Catholic school continuance at 79.5% than the highest level over \$180,000 at 78.2%. Families with incomes of \$120,001 to \$150,000 also matriculated at a higher-than-average rate at 73.7%.

Families Within the Lowest Income Levels under \$60,000 Matriculate to Catholic High Schools at Rates Just Below Average. Parents with incomes under \$30,000 and \$30,001 to \$60,000 continued in Catholic school at the secondary level at rates a little below average. With the expense of tuition established as the primary reason for leaving Catholic schools, it would be logical for families with the lowest incomes to have the lowest rates but did not within this study. Since the majority of financial aid is need-based, it is possible that many families within these lower-income levels are being awarded scholarships at higher rates thus augmenting their attrition rates.

Families With Incomes Between \$60,001 and \$120,000 Reported the Lowest Continuation Rates to Catholic High Schools. Catholic school attrition was highest among families making between \$60,001 and \$90,000 with 35.7% of them leaving the system, exclusively to public high schools. Given the cost of living in Los Angeles, some of these families in this income level would not even be classified as middle class, so it is understandable that many of them would struggle to afford Catholic high school tuition without assistance.

While the Catholic Education Foundation provides the most significant support to Catholic schools in the ADLA, families with incomes in this level would not qualify under their typical thresholds (except in the rare case of a household size of 8). One parent who was denied several times for missing the assistance criteria said:

We've applied year after year. For example, with (older son) we applied this year and didn't qualify. I know it is based on income, but we are in the middle. We are a large family, so we need to be in the middle to make ends meet.

Some of these families may qualify for need-based assistance at some Catholic high schools, but with less frequency and lower award amounts.

Families making \$90,001 to \$120,000 might seem to be better off than some, but still showed the second highest level of attrition at 32.3% of participants. These families typically do not qualify for need-based assistance except at the highly resourced Catholic high schools which discount an amount off the higher published tuition. It appears that many families in the middle class are feeling particularly squeezed out of Catholic education. A frequent comment in interviews among parents matriculating to public high schools was that with two incomes they were better off than some but did not qualify for aid. Additionally, in keeping with the research of Vega-Mavec (2016), some parents presumed they would not qualify because of their income being better than some but did not actually apply.

Middle-income Level Families Leaving Catholic Education, Did Not Go to Private High Schools. Among all of the families leaving Catholic education within the four income levels between \$60,001 to \$150,000, 95.7% matriculated to public high schools. With merely 4.3% of those leaving matriculating to a private school, it is likely that families in these middle-

income groups face similar financial issues with private non-Catholic high schools with incomes too high for financial aid but too low for full-paying tuition. As a point of comparison, among families leaving Catholic education within the two lowest income groups, 23.1% matriculate to a private non-Catholic high school. Presumably, many of those families qualify for and receive financial assistance.

Student Gender

Girls Reported Matriculating to Catholic High Schools at a Lower Rate Than Boys.

While not statistically significant, girls continued in Catholic education at the secondary level at a rate of 67.2% compared to boys at 77.3%. These girls are not leaving Catholic schools for other private high schools since that only accounts for 4.5%. The majority of these girls leaving Catholic education matriculated to public high schools at a rate of 28.4% versus 19.1% among boys. While there is no current research data on trends in single-sex high schools, there is observational data in the ADLA that all-girls Catholic high schools have experienced the greater enrollment declines than coeducational and all-boys Catholic high schools.

Parent Language

Parents Completing the Survey in Spanish Matriculated to Catholic High School at a Comparable or Slightly Higher Rate.

There were only 31 parents completing the survey in Spanish so results as a subgroup were statistically insignificant. However, it is of interest to note the frequency of parents completing the survey in Spanish reported their children continuing to Catholic high school at a rate of 74.2% compared to those completing it in English at 72.4%.

While these results would be more convincing among a larger sample size, it would be a positive finding if indeed Spanish speaking families in Catholic elementary schools are continuing at a

similar rate to English speaking parents. While language and cultural barriers may prevent many Latinx families from entering Catholic schools (NDTF, 2009; Vera et al., 2017), perhaps, once in the Catholic system, the continuance of families at a similar rate to others could be an affirmation of the relative effectiveness of those Catholic schools serving them. In one of the interviews conducted in Spanish, a parent affirmed that while there were several Spanish speaking teachers and staff members at the Catholic elementary school with whom she could speak in her primary language, she communicated most effectively with one of the teachers who does not speak Spanish.

An additional result from the parents taking the survey in Spanish revealed that all of the parents leaving Catholic schools indicated their children would be matriculating to a public high school. This finding is similar to Vega-Mavec (2016) in which she interviewed Spanish-speaking Latina mothers from five Catholic elementary schools regarding the high school decision making process. Vega-Mavec found that of the 36% that were not continuing to a Catholic high school, all would matriculate to a public high school.

Religion

There Were No Significant Differences Between Religious Affiliation and School Matriculation Type. Since the participating sample reflected ADLA elementary student population accurately with 90% affiliating as Roman Catholic, the sample sizes of the remaining subgroups were too small for statistical analysis. However, it is interesting to note that the largest non-Catholic subgroup of Protestant Christian participants matriculated at a somewhat similar rate of 73.7% as Catholic participants at 72.8%. When combining the responses among all

respondents not affiliating as Catholic, the percentage of continuance in Catholic education was lower at 67.2%.

Limitations

A threat to internal validity was the differential selection of participants. Even though measures were taken to achieve proper proportional sampling of the target population, principals from some of the schools declined to participate. In particular, two invited elementary schools with high concentrations of Black or African American students did not participate. This population is already underrepresented in Los Angeles County Catholic elementary schools with only 4.4% of the student population. The timing of the killing of George Floyd coincided with student survey deployment, so many students, teachers, and families were impacted by this. The resulting percentage of participants identifying as African American or Black was exceptionally low at only 2.3%. This low participation prevented meaningful statistical analysis of this important historically marginalized population.

Among all participants, the unforeseeable impact of the COVID pandemic and racial injustice of May 2020 created challenges for parents to receive or complete the parent survey or parent consent materials. It took time from when principals deployed parent information and consent material to when consent was received for students by the researcher and communicated to principals. Thus, the timing of student survey administration was challenging to principals and teachers who were busy with end of year activities which were exceptionally challenging given the flux of health restriction guidelines. Pre-pandemic study design included teachers allocating a moment of time during class for eligible students to complete the survey. However, by the time parents gave consent, due to the shift to online instruction, many eighth-grade classes were no

longer having synchronous class instruction. Participating principals or teachers forwarded the link to eligible students via student email, often with limited results. The lack of a dedicated time and context for all eligible students to complete the survey led to lower than expected participation from students.

Although the total number of parents completing the survey was good and generally diverse, participants of lower and middle incomes were less responsive to participate in the follow up interview. Parents from incomes other than the highest level made up 82.8% of those who declined or did not respond to an interview invitation. However, only 55.5% of those who completed the interview reported incomes lower than the highest level category.

Parents planning to leave the Catholic system may have been less likely to follow links to provide parent consent for students as well as complete parent surveys. The group that responded to the survey may not have reflected the whole population of the schools. While the percentage of continuance to Catholic high school for the sample close to the previous year's rate for ADLA, given the pandemic and economic crisis impacting a decrease in overall enrollment, the actual fall 2020 matriculation may be less. While efforts were made to encourage honest feedback, it is likely that many students and particularly parents may not have been comfortable responding with critical feedback about the Catholic schools with which they had been associated. As the researcher, given my experience as a leader of both elementary and secondary Catholic schools, there was potential for bias in this subject area. My positionality as an assistant superintendent of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles may have impacted the way in which parents responded in the interviews or I interpreted the qualitative data.

Implications

Conceptual Framework Implications

While Catholic social teaching (CST) has a long, rich history which some would posit influenced much of the social justice movements of the past, this research highlights the need to study and expand its implications for Catholic schools today. With diminished enrollment and financial constraints, many Catholic schools do not give preferential treatment to poor and vulnerable populations. Furthermore, in a competitive marketplace, many Catholic school leaders' fixation on elitism or reputation comes at the cost of mission. Furthermore, the application of CST's tenet of solidarity to this this research may suggest that Catholic educational leaders too often focus on what is in a particular elementary or high school's singular interest as opposed to what is in the best interest of students within the whole system of Catholic education.

The use of the National Standard National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools (NSBECS) as a conceptual frame to guide research on student and parent satisfaction and perceptions was fruitful. Since the NSBECS have not been in wide use long or at all in some school, diocesan or higher education research, its use in this research may inspire others to critically evaluate pieces or the whole in order to determine its value for application in evaluating school effectiveness. The paring down of thirteen standards into a seven survey questions was deemed necessary in order to focus participants' limited attention. However, imperfect, the reduction seems to have been effective for encapsulating a whole, based on the results. The use of the same seven variables to form composites at the elementary and secondary level both resulted with high Cronbach alpha values at .85 and .88

respectively without removing any items. This strong score of internal reliability may imply that similar use, study, or adaptation by others may be useful in evaluating the effectiveness of Catholic schools from the points of view of parents and students.

The use of centuries old CST and relatively new NSBECS together in this research may be seen as incongruous or complementary. In some respects, these two did not naturally intersect as a synthesized conceptual framework. Rather, each of the two frames guided aspects of the research in different ways. The resulting product of this research was stronger because of the complementary contributions of each. Further intersection of these two conceptual frameworks may assist others in solving complex contemporary issues of Catholic education associated with mission and effectiveness. For example, while CST might point toward schools reaching out to serve marginalized populations more frequently, NSBECS provides some objective standards to measure how effectively those populations are being served in academic or other areas. While NSBECS include some emphasis on Catholic mission and identity, its focus does not adequately address whether each Catholic school lives up to the ideals and challenges that CST presents. On the other hand, a narrow focus of CST might lead one to reach out to serve vulnerable populations, but without the aid of appropriate standard, potentially unjustly serve those already at-risk ineffectively.

Recommendations

The data collected in this study provide information for Catholic education to consider while addressing the matriculation decisions of students and their parents from Catholic elementary schools to Catholic high schools. This section highlights recommendations for

Catholic educators to consider including: Catholic elementary schools, Catholic high schools, dioceses, higher education, foundations, and future research.

Catholic Elementary Schools

Create Opportunities for Improved Two-Way Communication With Parents

Leaders should consider engaging in authentic and frequent communication which supports parents as the primary educator. Examine hierarchical top-down leadership or one-way communication norms in light of opportunities for collaborative and community-based leadership.

Monitor School Effectiveness Regularly

Deploy surveys regularly for holistic data and receipt of timely feedback from students and parents. Analyze and utilize data to build a culture of ongoing school improvement.

Develop Strategies to Minimize Bullying and Social Drama in Upper Grades

Generate new initiatives and programs to create a supportive community to address the challenging period of adolescence. Teachers and leaders should collaborate with students regularly to proactively build up community. Provide clear consequences for bullying behaviors encompassed in restorative justice.

Strengthen Instructional Quality of Religious Studies in Upper Grades

Prioritize hiring or developing qualified teachers with expertise in religious studies. Evaluate quantity and quality of instructional time. Ensure students in upper grades are appropriately challenged and engaged in learning that leverages advanced exploration of content previously introduced.

Provide Access to and Actively Endorse Catholic High Schools

Recognizing parents and students may not be able to attend informational events at other sites, support the ability of Catholic high schools to educate students and parents at the elementary site. Pastors, teachers, and leaders should promote the value of continued growth in Catholic education and formation at the secondary level.

Partner with Catholic High Schools to Inform and Help Them Remove Barriers

Since Catholic elementary school teachers and principals know their students much better than potential receiving high school leaders, additional outreach on behalf of eighth-grade students not believed to be matriculating to a Catholic high school could be of value to support successful individual student matriculation as well as assist ongoing growth of high school.

Catholic High Schools

Build and Promote Specialized Academic Programs

Catholic high school leaders may wish to evaluate adoption of academic programs resonating with parents such as STEM/STEAM, engineering, robotics, arts, early college credit, and pathways. For schools with limited enrollment or resources, discern which program(s) can be supported appropriately to demonstrate excellence.

Differentiate School Based on Unique Offerings and Benefits to Students

While data show that parents continue to consider faith values and academic program as important factors in choosing a Catholic high school, it was also evident that individual Catholic high schools need to distinguish themselves in these and other areas from other high schools. This research showed that parents and students will often look for a high school with the strongest program matching a personal priority or interest as opposed to a school with a lot of

programs. Furthermore, prospective students and parents are sophisticated consumers with access to multiple sources of information. Thus, Catholic high schools need to ensure that, beyond its promotional vehicles, authentic satisfaction attesting to strength and depth of these differentiated programs exists among current students and parents.

Highlight Programs in Addition to Athletics, Particularly to Parents

Overall, parents rated all but one factor more important in choosing a high school than athletics. Additionally, participants matriculating to public high school rated it significantly lower than those continuing to Catholic high school. None of the parents interviewed leaving Catholic education talked about athletics being of interest in any way. In order to attract these students and parents, Catholic high schools would benefit from auditing their marketing efforts and making adjustments as necessary.

Augment Promotion of Single Gender With Other Differentiating Characteristics

While single gender education may be of value to some, it was rated the least important as a factor in the decision by parents and students overall, but especially those leaving the Catholic system. Single gender Catholic high schools with enrollment issues could look at ensuring their value proposition to ensure it is compelling, clear, and distinct from the single gender factor.

Enhance Offerings and Promotional Efforts to Attract Prospective Female Students

With female eighth-grade students leaving Catholic education at significantly higher rates than males, coeducational and all-girls Catholic high schools should focus greater attention to how to better serve this population. Additional scrutiny among coeducational schools of potential gender bias in their own marketing materials could be beneficial.

Communicate Full Availability of Financial Assistance With Subsequent Year Language at Time of Acceptance

Parents who do go through the application process need to know clearly, and in a timely fashion, the assistance that is available to them from the school, local foundations, and all other funds at the time of acceptance. Schools also could consider providing written assurance of financial assistance offers beyond the initial year of attendance. Renewal of merit-based awards could be promised given a minimum level of applicable student performance (e.g., GPA or participation in activities). While need-based assistance could vary due to a change in family income, promissory language could be included to assure renewability of award commensurate with family income.

Consider and Promote Need-Based Assistance for Middle-income Families

Without taking away resources from those in the lowest income levels who need assistance, develop a plan to offer and promote a wider range of financial assistance, particularly among those with income levels between \$60,000 and \$120,000.

Consider School Commitment to Prioritizing Service to and Success of Marginalized Populations

With this research's focus on higher Catholic school continuance from elementary to secondary, it is logical for Catholic high school leaders to look at practices in order to be more inviting and accessible to prospective students and parents of color. However, Catholic schools must also look critically at their own systems which perpetuate bias or racist practices. Conduct equity audits to assess and address opportunity gaps throughout the school for existing students, parents, and staff.

Address Inequities for the Underserved Population of Students With Special Needs

Inspired by the lens of Catholic social teaching, develop expanded opportunities and programs for inclusive education.

Promote Widespread Availability of Merit and Need-Based Assistance to Families Prior to Eighth Grade

Most Catholic elementary school families interviewed assumed they would not be able to afford Catholic high school tuition but did so without completing admissions or financial assistance applications. Schools need to proactively address the myth among middle class families that they would not qualify for any reduction of the published tuition which in most cases is significantly higher than what they pay at the elementary level.

Employ Target Marketing to Both Parents and Students

While in most cases parents and students are both highly involved in the high school decision, they prioritize factors differently. It is important to ensure that outreach and marketing are differentiated to reflect and reach both constituents. Use of customer relationship management (CRM) software or other tools to track and communicate based on interests may also facilitate more effective messaging.

Adjust Marketing Approach to Capture Many Catholic Elementary School Parents Who Never Set Foot on a Catholic High School for Open House or Other Vehicle to Receive Information

While high schools historically count on this format as a primary means of giving parents valuable information about their school, few parents interviewed attended an open house, even though they occurred long before COVID-19 restrictions were in place. Schools would benefit

from strategizing new targeted ways to engage parents in the manner and topics of most interest to them before they self-select out.

Retrain Office Staff and Personnel to Exceed Elementary School Parent Customer Service Expectations

Professional development can go beyond typical best practices to recognize that the majority of prospective parents are coming from a unique Catholic elementary school culture in which principals and other decision makers are readily accessible and know parents well. Many parents may not seek out information or submit applications without the inviting and friendly initiative coming from school personnel.

Market Differences of Catholic High School Programs and Experience From Catholic Elementary Schools

Given the strong positive correlation between Catholic elementary satisfaction and high school perception, many parents may be unaware of the significant differences in resources, programs, facilities, and management of larger comprehensive Catholic high schools. Since communication and leadership appear more often as an area of dissatisfaction among parents in Catholic elementary schools, without drawing any negative inference, market additional opportunities for parents in Catholic high school to have support of and access to a variety of leaders as well as be involved in several general and student affinity-related parent groups or organizations.

Dioceses

Explore Initiatives and Work to Amplify TK-12 Collaboration and Success

Reduce historical institutional practices which isolate elementary and secondary leadership at the diocesan level. Create opportunities for collaboration between elementary and secondary site leaders at both the diocesan and regional level. Consider diocesan or regionally sponsored collaboration of elementary and secondary teachers related to subject matter or staff in similar function areas.

Facilitate Partnerships Between Specific Elementary and Secondary Schools

Pair smaller or financially at-risk elementary schools with area Catholic high schools to provide additional human and financial resources in targeted areas such as development, marketing, financial reporting, and special programs.

Utilize Data to Analyze and Report Matriculation from Catholic Elementary to High Schools

Prioritize annual reporting and analysis of matriculation from eighth grade to ninth grade across the diocese. Utilize data for follow up work with Catholic elementary schools with lower matriculation to understand and remove barriers to continuance in Catholic education.

Consider Professional Development for Principals Related to School Attrition and Matriculation

Include findings from this and similar research on factors of importance for families in school decision making as well as ongoing assessment of school effectiveness for better retention.

Encourage all Schools to Utilize Effectiveness Surveys and Analyze Feedback for School Improvement Annually

Utilize existing or modify surveys appropriate for different constituents encompassing domains, standards, and benchmarks of the NSBECS. Foster culture of ongoing improvement in each school by soliciting and responding to yearly feedback from parents, students, and staff. Diocesan supervisors, pastors, boards, and principals can utilize data for greater understanding, support, and evaluation of elementary and high schools.

Evaluate Individual Schools on Their Effectiveness in Living out the Tenets of Catholic Social Teaching.

While Catholic schools are regularly assessed in terms of academic benchmarks or Catholic identity standards, the school's commitment to CST principles should also be specifically assessed. Even among the 70 benchmarks incorporated into the NSBECS to measure effectiveness of Catholic schools, CST is not referenced except for 2.7: "The theory and practice of the Church's social teachings are essential elements of the curriculum." This pertains only to students learning CST, but nowhere evaluates schools on their success of living out and serving those that are poor or marginalized or on their commitment of solidarity. While one might say the singular inference to making schools accessible in the defining characteristics is a nod, it does not have the same call to social action nor does it present a rubric as benchmarks do. Whether diocesan leadership pushes to add CST as an evaluative piece of its NSBECS applications or creates its own rubric as part of assessing Catholic identity, this evaluation of mission application is essential.

Increase Diocesan Fundraising and Resources for Schools Serving Poor and Vulnerable Populations.

While many dioceses allocate subsidies to schools serving lower income and marginalized communities, the amounts of awards are typically not enough to sustain the most mission-oriented schools. Additionally, while some dioceses are blessed to have a central foundation with endowed funds granting financial assistance awards to families, the amounts of those awards have not kept up proportionally with tuition increases. There is a great need for bishops and diocesan leaders to prioritize increased fundraising efforts and use of other Church assets in order to serve at-risk families in Catholic schools.

Develop Strategic Plans to Ensure Sustainability and Growth of Catholic Education by Region.

Given historical and predicted declines in Catholic school and school-aged enrollment, without a continued multi-year influx of significant funding, Catholic school closures are imminent. Strategic analysis and action are needed to ensure that schools are poised for effectively serving the needs of vulnerable populations in every region. If investment has been necessary to support the operations of a school serving an at-risk population, upon its closure, those resources ought to be deployed to serve that population somewhere else more effectively and efficiently. The responsibility to subsidize those impacted students should not become one of the new receiving school, but rather in keeping with the CST tenet of solidarity, a responsibility of all.

Ensure Special Education Services are Available in Catholic High Schools

While all Catholic high schools should strive to offer more inclusive education, some do not have the resources to fully respond to CST call to support students with disabilities fully. Diocesan support in human and financial resources should be allocated to provide extended special education services at select high school sites regionally.

Promote Governance Structures and Networks Which Honor Collaborative Leadership

The Canonical independence of sites may enable a survival of the fittest model that leads toward continued disproportionate closing of Catholic schools serving poor and marginalized populations. More collaboration among parish, regional, school, and community leaders is needed to shift much of the silo thinking that prevents an approach of solidarity in Catholic education. More than just sharing of resources and decision-making, this collaboration may generate creative thinking that will propel Catholic education forward.

Higher Education

Commit Human and Financial Resources to Form Effective Catholic Educators

Train leaders, teachers, and counselors steeped in the vision and values for Catholic education, rigorous curriculum, and culturally responsive pedagogy.

Incorporate the Tenets of Catholic Social Teaching in Catholic University Education

Curriculum

Exposure to the seven principles of CST can inspire and ground leaders with foundational social justice education.

Engage IHEs in Large Scale Research Projects to Advance the Mission of Catholic Education

Faculty at Catholic universities can collaborate in research to investigate opportunities for mission-centered, academically rigorous, value-added, and accessible Catholic education.

Collaborate with Other Organizations to Provide Diocesan or Regional Support

Leverage relationships with university faculty, funders, businesses, and educational leaders to increase strategic thinking and accomplish collective outcomes not attainable alone.

Foundations/Philanthropists

Prioritize Funding for Catholic Schools Committed to Serving Poor and Vulnerable

Populations

While all Catholic schools need support, allocate greater resources for schools whose mission aligns closely with CST's preferential option for the poor and vulnerable. Additional program, financial aid, and operational support are needed in order for these schools to remain operationally viable and effectively serve these at-risk communities.

Increase Funding for Need-Based Financial Assistance to Lower and Middle Class Families

Recognizing the considerable increases in tuition costs, foundations should consider increasing individual students' amount of scholarship allocated to families demonstrating highest need. Additionally, consideration of local cost of living may encourage foundations to expand the pool of awardees to include lower middle class families.

Increase Funding for Professional Development Opportunities to Enhance School Effectiveness

Support professional development initiatives to encourage school improvement. Consider linking funding eligibility to school's commitment to regular feedback on effectiveness from constituents as a means for continued growth.

Initiate or Respond to Invitations for Increased Collaborative Leadership in Catholic Education

Catholic schools do not just need financial resources, but would benefit greatly from questions, ideas, and leadership of funders and community members. This leadership is needed at the school level, whether formalized as part of a board or through the mentoring of site leaders. Within the community square, the advocacy of funders creates new opportunities for Catholic school leaders to be in conversation with public and local leaders. At the diocesan level, an involved and knowledgeable funder can garner the respect to address problems and move the needle on issues that hierarchical leadership might not hear from school leadership.

Future Studies

The findings in this study suggest the need for future research in several areas.

Expanding this Study of Catholic School Attrition, School Decision-Making and Effectiveness

Findings of this study could be tested and strengthened by expanding its design or sample to include other populations. Extending this research to other geographic areas could help understand these issues beyond Los Angeles County. Changing from fixed cross sectional to longitudinal data collection could facilitate better understanding of Catholic school student and parent changes in perception over years or particular grade levels. Purposive sampling in other

areas could improve understanding of underrepresented populations, particularly Black students and parents. Replication of this study outside of a health pandemic and period of social unrest may improve survey response rates, particularly among students, if delivered during in-person instruction. Expanding the invitation for follow up interview to students could yield greater firsthand knowledge and amplify student voice.

Investigating Retention and Attrition Data Best Practices Within Catholic Schools

While this research focused on attrition within the Catholic system, most Catholic schools would benefit from data-informed practices of monitoring, reporting, and analyzing their own retention and attrition information regularly. Studies could investigate or create tools and best practices for acquiring and reporting exit interview data to be analyzed for site or diocesan improvement. Extra attention to timely insight of underserved populations could make a difference in individual schools' efficacy of living out CST principles.

Deeper Dive Regarding Financial Assistance and Affordability of Catholic Schools

Findings of this research point to the need for more in-depth study of parent experiences regarding financial assistance and the affordability of Catholic schools. Research could include a greater understanding of the experiences of both lower-income and middle-income families. In addition to the perspective of parents and school leaders, it would be helpful to include other members of the community. In particular, the involvement of funders as participants or perhaps even co-researchers in community-based participatory research could be advantageous.

Impact of Adolescence to Sense of Community in Catholic Elementary Schools

While the rise of social issues and bullying is not unique to Catholic elementary school, these issues cited by parents in interviews showed greater frequency as a source of

dissatisfaction. While a strong sense of community is one of the defining characteristics of an effective Catholic school, several parents articulated that on the student level, that lessened in the upper grades in Catholic elementary school. Studies looking at best practices to reduce social drama and retain a sense of community with the unique context of a typical Catholic elementary school's small and somewhat fixed size and characteristics of mission may positively impact the experience of students during what can otherwise be a challenging time in their development.

Conclusion

While Catholic schools have historically demonstrated a commitment to and success in educating students from poor and vulnerable populations, many factors including increased costs, intensified competition, and religious disaffiliation have led to severe enrollment declines and the disproportionate closing of Catholic schools serving underrepresented students. This research sought to address the relatively unexplored phenomena of attrition from Catholic elementary to secondary school, ultimately to understand how to better serve students and remove barriers from continuance, particularly among poor and vulnerable populations.

The study yielded rich quantitative and qualitative data which together explain many aspects about high school decision making and Catholic school effectiveness. An important contribution to the field of study was elevating the voice of 251 students, many of whom report equal or greater influence than their parent in the discernment of high school matriculation. Follow up interviews with parents who had made the decision to leave the Catholic system provided clearer understanding of survey data, particularly regarding areas of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with Catholic elementary and secondary schools.

The high cost of high school tuition was a primary reason for a majority of students and parents. However, most respondents name other reasons that also contributed to their decision not to attend a Catholic high school. Although financial challenges are significant for families with the lowest incomes, their continuance in Catholic high schools is higher than middle class families, in part due to higher percentage of financial assistance offered. While families in all income levels attributed the primary reason for leaving to expensive tuition, attrition from Catholic elementary to secondary school was lowest among families in the highest income categories.

Overall satisfaction of Catholic elementary schools and perceptions of Catholic high schools are good and there is a positive correlation between these two. When students or parents are dissatisfied with aspects of Catholic elementary school, there is greater likelihood that they project similarly about those areas of Catholic high schools. Lowest levels of satisfaction of Catholic elementary schools and perception of Catholic high schools exist among parents and students matriculating to private non-Catholic high schools. Overall, Catholic elementary satisfaction and high school perception levels among families matriculating to public schools were not significantly different from those continuing in Catholic high schools. Consequently, the weight of finances seems to play a bigger role among those families than Catholic school dissatisfaction.

This study identified areas of improvement for both Catholic elementary and secondary school leaders. The incorporation of NSBECS in the design of this study to gauge effectiveness of schools yielded a wide range of data which can benefit those reading these findings as well as perhaps inform leaders of their own greater efficacy for surveying parents and students on

effectiveness to enhance site-based school improvement. For Catholic schools to remain viable, they will need to develop needed programs, find additional funding sources, create additional financial aid, strengthen pipeline and communication with elementary schools, create stronger recruiting programs for seventh- and eighth-grade students, and build relationships with families.

As this research concludes, it is worth noting that all elementary and secondary schools in Los Angeles County have been closed for on-campus schooling with some or all grade levels relegated to distance learning for almost a full year. The negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on physical, mental, social, and emotional health as well as learning loss has been experienced by all, but disproportionately impacted poor and marginalized families. Even though many Catholic school teachers and leaders have heroically dedicated themselves to increased efforts to support students, inequities in instruction, technology, devices, access, program, resources, and funding have been exacerbated. The systems perpetuating these inequities cannot be dismantled alone or simply.

While the findings of this research point to many recommendations that may reduce attrition and increase effectiveness in Catholic schools, to save and transform schools for all will require more than simple gestures or isolated initiatives. Those blessed with position, resources, and influence will have to sacrifice self-interest for solidarity. Speaking of this need for solidarity, Pope Francis (2020) said:

The current pandemic has highlighted our interdependence: we are all connected to each other, for better or for worse. Therefore, to emerge from this crisis better than before, we have to do so together; together, not alone . . . because it cannot be done. Either it is done together, or it is not done. We must do it together, all of us, in solidarity. (para. 1)

This is a pivotal time for Catholic education to either continue in its trajectory of school closures, allowing marginalized populations to be squeezed out from increasingly elitist Catholic schools that remain or reject the trappings of siloed self-interest for an educational system based on solidarity.

APPENDIX A

Elementary School Principal Invitation Email

Dear principal,

My name is Thom Gasper. I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership for Social Justice Doctoral Program at Loyola Marymount University. My research focus is looking at the decision-making process for Catholic elementary school 8th grade students and their families. You were recommended as the leader of one of the select sites I hope to include. I invite you to read more about my proposed study and consider your school's participation.

The first phase of this mixed methods study will survey 8th grade students and their parents from 25 Catholic elementary schools throughout the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. The anonymous survey will include questions about the high school decision making process and perceptions of Catholic elementary and high schools, as well as some demographic questions such as gender and ethnicity. The data from participating schools will be disaggregated to look for statistical significance among different sub-groups. The participating schools will not be mentioned in the subsequent dissertation nor any future publication. However, at the conclusion of the study, some findings about your school's overall response may be made available to you as the principal if desired.

After the survey data has been analyzed, the second phase of the study will involve one-on-one interviews with ten parents who have elected not to continue their daughter/son's education in a Catholic high school. Since a major focus of this study aims to understand more fully the issue of attrition in our Catholic school system, these parents will be asked to elaborate more fully about their perceptions of Catholic schools and barriers that hinder continuance. Parents will self-identify interest at the conclusion of the survey and their identity and elementary school association will not be shared with anyone including any personnel in the school or Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

Please note that while I serve as a leader at the Department of Catholic Schools and have the superintendent's support of this research, you are under no obligation to have your school participate. I recognize that there are tremendous pressures on your staff and families given the prolonged physical closures due to COVID-19. I have modified the procedures to accommodate the survey distribution and collection through Qualtrics to remote learners.

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to email a letter with a brief overview of the research to all parents of your eighth-grade class. The email will invite parents to consider taking the parent/guardian survey through one link and consider providing permission for their child to participate in the student survey through another link. Then, a few days later I will send you the list of names of students whose parents have provided a permission slip. You or the 8th grade homeroom teacher would then distribute a link to those students through the platform of your choice (learning management system, school email, etc). In thanks for their partnership, schools

with at least 50% of their 8th grade students participating in the survey will receive a \$50 gift card. Schools with 80% or more students participating will receive an additional gift card.

Other than the invitation email to parents, the school will not be involved with the parent/guardian surveys or interviews. All parents or guardians participating in a parent survey or interview will receive an electronic gift card to thank them for their participation.

Please let me know if you are willing to have your school participate by replying to this email as soon as possible. Be assured that you may opt out of this research process at any time without explanation or consequence. Feel free to call me at (213) XXX-XXXX or email me if you have any questions or concerns.

Thank you for your continued leadership and consideration of this study!

God bless,

Thom Gasper

APPENDIX B

Principal Email to Eighth-Grade Parents

Dear Parent/Guardian

While the past two months have been full of uncertainty, I remain committed to opportunities that inform how to best serve our students in Catholic education.

Our school was selected to be one of 25 schools participating in an LMU study to better understand 8th grade student and parent opinions about their elementary school experience and high school decision-making. Our students and parents will have the opportunity to provide anonymous feedback in a short survey. While individual answers will remain confidential, the results shared in summary can help Catholic schools and our school specifically to serve families better. I would be grateful if you would participate in two ways:

- 1. Student survey:** Please consider allowing your son/daughter to complete the student survey. You can read more about this (in English or Spanish) as well as complete the parent permission by clicking this link:
All students whose parents complete the form by May 19* will be able to take a 6-minute survey. You will also be helping our school since we will receive a gift card if a majority of our 8th grade students are able to complete the survey. Our school will also receive an additional bonus if 80% of our eighth-grade students complete the survey.
- 2. Parent/guardian survey:** Please consider having **one parent** take a 10-minute survey (in English or Spanish) by following this link:
In addition to helping inform the results of this study, one parent from each household completing this survey will receive a \$10 Target gift card and will be entered to win a \$100 gift card.

Thank you for being a great part of our school community! I look forward to celebrating the successes of our eighth-grade class with you!

God bless,

APPENDIX C

Parent Consent and Survey

8th Grade Parent/Guardian Survey

Welcome! Bienvenidos!

Thank you for considering taking this survey on the topic of choosing a high school for your daughter/son. This survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. One parent/guardian from each household will receive a \$10 gift card as a thank you for completing the survey. **Please click/tap here for English and then click/tap the arrow at the bottom of the screen.**

Gracias por considerar tomar esta encuesta sobre el tema de elegir una escuela secundaria para su hija / hijo. Esta encuesta tomará aproximadamente 10 minutos para completar. Un padre / guardián de cada hogar recibirá una tarjeta de regalo de \$10 como agradecimiento por completar la encuesta. **Por favor haga clic / toque aquí para español y entonces haga clic / toque la flecha en la parte inferior de la pantalla.**

Skip logic: If selected, skip to beginning of consent in Spanish

Please take a moment to read the participant consent form. If you agree to participate, please indicate below

TITLE: Understanding Catholic School Attrition

INVESTIGATOR: Thomas Gasper, Educational Leadership in Social Justice, School of Education, Loyola Marymount University, (310) xxx-xxxx

ADVISOR: Dr. Mary McCullough, Office of the Dean, School of Education, Loyola Marymount University, (310) 338-7301

PURPOSE: You are being asked to participate in a research project that seeks to investigate Catholic elementary school student and parent decision-making regarding high school. You will be asked to complete a survey indicating satisfaction of current school, perceptions of high schools, and factors related to high school choice for next year. You may choose to skip or not answer any question(s) you do not want to answer. The survey should take approximately ten minutes to complete online.

RISKS: There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study. You might not feel like answering a question. If this occurs, you may choose to skip or not answer any question(s).

BENEFITS: Your input combined with others may help to understand how to improve the effectiveness of Catholic elementary and high schools.

INCENTIVES: Participation in the project will require no monetary cost to you. One parent per household will receive a \$10 gift card for completing the survey.

CONFIDENTIALITY: This survey is anonymous. You will not be asked to disclose your name. You will be asked to share some demographic information, but this will not be shared with anyone. **Anonymous data will be provided in summary form to the principal of your school.** All research materials and consent forms will be stored via Qualtrics and be password protected. Some data will be downloaded to Excel, password protected and stored on the researcher's private desktop computer which is protected with two-factor authentication protocol. When the research

study ends, any identifying information will be removed from the data, or it will be destroyed. All of the information you provide will be kept confidential.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW: Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw your consent to participate at any time without penalty. Your withdrawal will not influence your relationship with any Catholic school or entity in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS: A summary of the results of this research can be supplied to you, at no cost, upon request. To request this summary, please email tgasper@lon.lmu.edu. It is anticipated that this information will be available in early 2021.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT: I have read the above statements and understand what is being asked of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason, without penalty. If the study design or use of the information is changed I will be informed and my consent reobtained. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project.

I understand that if I have any further questions, comments or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may contact Dr. David Moffet, Chair, Institutional Review Board, Loyola Marymount University, 1 LMU Drive, Los Angeles, CA 90045-2659 or by email at David.Moffet@lmu.edu.

- I agree
 I disagree

Skip Logic: If disagree is selected, end of survey

What is your gender?

- Male
 Female

What is your ethnicity?

- American Indian or Alaska Native
 Asian or Pacific Islander
 Black or African American
 Filipino
 Hispanic or Latino
 White or Other
 Multiracial

How many years has your 8th-grade daughter/son attended her/his elementary school?

- Less than two years
 Two to four years
 Four to six years
 Six to eight years

More than eight years

How long has/have your child/children attended Catholic elementary school(s)?

- Less than two years
- Two to four years
- Four to six years
- Six to eight years
- More than eight years

What is your religious affiliation?

- Roman Catholic
- Orthodox (e.g. Russian, Greek, Coptic)
- Protestant (e.g. Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran)
- Jewish
- Islamic
- Hindu
- Buddhist
- Other religious affiliation
- No religious affiliation

What is your ZIP code?

What is your estimated family income before taxes?

- Under \$30,000
- \$30,001-\$60,000
- \$60,001-\$90,000
- \$90,001-\$120,000
- \$120,001-\$150,000
- \$150,001-\$180,000
- Over \$180,000

Reflecting on the **Catholic elementary school** in which your son/daughter is enrolled, please indicate the degree you are satisfied with each of the following:

	Extremely satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Extremely dissatisfied
Religious studies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Faith formation (prayer, Mass, service)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
School leadership	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Extremely satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Extremely dissatisfied
Academic instruction	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Co-curricular and extra curricular programs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Facilities, equipment, and technology	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sense of school as a community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Reflecting on the **Catholic high schools** considered for your son/daughter, please indicate your perceptions of the quality of each of the following:

	Far above average	Somewhat above average	Average	Somewhat below average	Far below average
Religious studies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Faith formation (prayer, Mass, service)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
School leadership	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Academic program	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Co-curricular and extra curricular programs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Facilities, equipment, and technology	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sense of school as a community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Decision

Which describes the type of high school your 8th grade son/daughter will attend next year

- Catholic high school
- Private (non-Catholic) high school
- Public/Charter/Magnet high school
- Other high school
- Undecided

Display Q if Which describes the type of high school your 8th grade son/daughter will attend next year = Private (non-Catholic) high school

Which describes the type of private (non-Catholic) high school your 8th grade daughter/son will attend next year?

- Non-Catholic Christian-affiliated private high school (for example, a Protestant Christian high school)
- Religious, Non-Christian-affiliated private high school (for example, a Jewish high school)
- Secular private high school with no religious affiliation (for example, Harvard-Westlake School)

Display Q: If Which describes the type of high school your 8th grade son/daughter will attend next year = Public/Charter/Magnet high school

Which describes the type of public school your 8th grade daughter/son will attend next year?

- Traditional public high school
- Public charter high school
- Public magnet high school

Display Q: If Which describes the type of high school your 8th grade son/daughter will attend next year = Catholic high school

Which Catholic high school will your son/daughter attend next year?

Select from pre-populated Catholic high schools

Display Q: If Which describes the type of high school your 8th grade son/daughter will attend next year != Catholic high school (does not)

Please identify and rank up to three reason(s) you will not be sending your eighth-grade child to a Catholic high school. (Drag the most important reason to the box titled #1 Reason. If there is a second most important reason, drag that text to the box titled #2 Reason. If there is a third reason, drag that to the box titled #3 Reason)

Items	#1 Reason
Catholic high school location is too far	
Catholic high school academics may be too challenging for my child	
Catholic high school academics may not be challenging enough for my child	
Catholic high school tuition is too expensive	#2 Reason
My daughter's/son's friends are not attending a Catholic high school	
Co-curricular athletic program of importance is stronger at another school	
Co-curricular visual or performing arts program of importance is stronger at another school	
Specialized academic program (e.g. Robotics, STEM, Advanced Placement) is stronger at another school	#3 Reason
Catholic religious instruction and/or values is not of value	
My son/daughter was not admitted to the Catholic high school of his/her choice	
My daughter/son does not want to attend a Catholic high school	
Other (please specify) <input type="text"/>	

Please rate how **important** the following factors were in deciding which high school to send your child to

	Extremely important	Very important	Moderately important	Slightly important	Not at all important
Academic program	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Co-curricular arts program	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Co-curricular athletics program	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
College acceptance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Faith values and beliefs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Financial considerations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Location	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Safety	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
School reputation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Single gender (all boys or all girls) school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Who had the greatest amount of influence on the decision of which high school to send your child to next year?

- Parent/guardian(s) primarily
- Student primarily
- Parent/guardian(s) and student equally
- Other (please specify)

After all financial aid awards, how much does your family spend on your 8th grade child's tuition and fees per year?

- Less than \$2,000 per year
- \$2,000 to \$3,999 per year
- \$4,000-\$5,999 per year
- \$6,000-\$7,999 per year
- \$8,000-\$9,999 per year
- \$10,000 or more per year

Which of the following financial assistance awards were you offered to attend a Catholic high school next school year? (choose all that apply)

- Need-based financial assistance from the high school
- Merit scholarship (e.g based on academics, leadership, test scores, etc.) from high school
- Catholic Education Foundation award
- Specialty Family Foundation award
- Other community-based award
- No financial assistance or scholarships were offered

After all financial aid awards, how much do you think your family would have to spend on tuition and fees for your 8th grade child to attend a Catholic high school next year?

- Less than \$2,000 per year
- \$2,000 to \$3,999 per year
- \$4,000-\$5,999 per year
- \$6,000-\$7,999 per year
- \$8,000-\$9,999 per year
- \$10,000-\$11,999 per year
- \$12,000- \$13,999 per year
- \$14,000-15,999 per year
- \$16,000-\$17,999 per year
- \$18,000 or more per year

(Optional) Is there anything else you would like to share about choosing a high school for your daughter/son?

Display Q: If Which describes the type of high school your 8th grade son/daughter will attend next year != Catholic high school (does not)

(Optional) A few parents/guardians will be invited to be interviewed to understand more about high school choice. Those who complete interviews will receive a \$40 gift card. Would you be interested in participating?

- Yes
- No

Display Q: If (Optional) A few parents will be invited to be interviewed to understand more about high school c...

= Yes

(Optional) If you are selected to be invited for an interview, please provide an email address at which you would like to be contacted.

Thank you for completing this confidential survey! If you would like to receive a \$10 gift card AND be entered into a random drawing for a chance to win a \$100 gift card, please enter a valid email address to which an electronic gift card can be sent (maximum one per household).

[Begin consent in Spanish](#)

Por favor tóme un momento para leer el formulario de consentimiento del participante. Si acepta participar, indique a continuación

TÍTULO: Comprender la atrición de la escuela Católica

INVESTIGADOR: Thomas Gasper, Liderazgo Educativo en Justicia Social, Escuela de Educación, Universidad Loyola Marymount, (310) XXX-XXXX

ASESORA: Dra. Mary McCullough, Oficina del Decano, Escuela de Educación, Universidad Loyola Marymount, (310) 338-7301

PROPÓSITO: Se le está pidiendo que participe en un proyecto de investigación que busca investigar la toma de decisiones de los estudiantes y padres Católicos de la escuela primaria con respecto a la escuela secundaria. Se le pedirá que complete una encuesta que indique la satisfacción de la escuela actual, las percepciones de las escuelas secundarias y los factores relacionados con la elección de la escuela secundaria para el próximo año. Puedes optar omitir o no responder a cualquier pregunta que no desee responder. La encuesta debería tardar aproximadamente diez minutos en completarse en línea.

RIESGOS: No hay riesgos previsible involucrados en participar en este estudio. Es posible que no tengas ganas de responder a algunas preguntas. Si esto ocurre, puedes optar omitir o no responder a estas preguntas.

BENEFICIOS: Su aporte combinado con otros puede ayudar a comprender cómo mejorar la efectividad de las escuelas primarias y secundarias Católicas.

INCENTIVOS: La participación en el proyecto no requerirá ningún costo monetario para usted. Un padre por hogar recibirá una tarjeta de regalo de \$10 por completar la encuesta.

CONFIDENCIALIDAD: Esta encuesta es anónima. No se le pedirá que revele su nombre. Se le pedirá que comparta cierta información demográfica, pero no será compartida con nadie. **El dato anónimo se proporcionará en forma resumida al director de su escuela.** Todos los materiales de investigación y formularios de consentimiento se almacenarán a través de Qualtrics y estarán protegidos con contraseña. Algunos datos se descargarán a Excel, se protegerán con contraseña y se almacenarán en la computadora de escritorio privada del investigador que está protegida con un protocolo de autenticación de dos factores. Cuando finalice el estudio de investigación, cualquier información de identificación se eliminará de los datos o se destruirá. Toda la información que proporcione se mantendrá confidencial.

DERECHO A RETIRAR: Su participación en este estudio es voluntaria. Puede retirar su consentimiento para participar en cualquier momento sin penalización. Su retiro no influirá en su relación con ninguna escuela o entidad Católica en la Arquidiócesis de Los Ángeles.

RESUMEN DE RESULTADOS: Se le puede proporcionar un resumen de los resultados de esta investigación, sin costo, por solicitud. Para solicitar este resumen, envíe un correo electrónico a tgasper@lion.lmu.edu. Se anticipa que esta información estará disponible a principios de 2021.

CONSENTIMIENTO VOLUNTARIO: He leído las declaraciones anteriores y entiendo lo que se me pide. También entiendo que mi participación es voluntaria y que soy libre de retirar mi consentimiento en cualquier momento, por cualquier motivo, sin penalización. Si se modifica el diseño del estudio o el uso de la información, se me informará y se volverá a obtener mi consentimiento. En estos términos, certifico que estoy dispuesto a participar en este proyecto de investigación.

Entiendo que si tengo más preguntas, comentarios o inquietudes sobre el estudio o el proceso de consentimiento informado, puedo contactar al Dr. David Moffet, Presidente, Junta de Revisión Institucional, Universidad Loyola Marymount, 1 LMU Drive, Los Ángeles, CA 90045-2659 o por correo electrónico a David.Moffet@lmu.edu.

- Estoy de acuerdo
- No estoy de acuerdo

Skip Logic: If disagree is selected, end of survey

¿Cuál es su género?

- Hombre
- Mujer

¿Cuál es su etnicidad?

- Indio Americano o Nativo de Alaska
- Asiático o Isleño del Pacífico
- Negro o Afroamericano
- Filipino
- Hispano o Latino
- Caucásico o Otro
- Multirracial

¿Cuántos años ha asistido su hijo/a de octavo grado a su escuela primaria?

- Menos de dos años
- De dos a cuatro años
- De cuatro a seis años
- De seis a ocho años
- Más de ocho años

¿Cuánto tiempo ha asistido su hijo / hijos a la(s) escuela(s) primaria(s) Católica?

- Menos de dos años
- De dos a cuatro años
- De cuatro a seis años
- De seis a ocho años
- Más de ocho años

¿Cuál es su religión?

- Católico Romano
- Ortodoxo (por ejemplo, ruso, griego, copto)
- Protestante (p. Ej., Bautista, Metodista, Presbiteriano, Luterano)
- Judío
- Islámica
- Hindú
- Budista
- Otra afiliación religiosa

Sin afiliación religiosa

¿Cuál es su código postal?

¿Cuál es su ingreso familiar estimado antes de impuestos?

- Under \$30,000
 \$30,001-\$60,000
 \$60,001-\$90,000
 \$90,001-\$120,000
 \$120,001-\$150,000
 \$150,001-\$180,000
 Over \$180,000

Reflexionando sobre la escuela primaria católica en la que está inscrito su hijo/a, indique el grado en que está satisfecho con cada uno de los siguientes:

	Extremadamente satisfecho	De alguna manera satisfecho	Ni satisfecho ni insatisfecho	De alguna manera insatisfecho	Extremadamente insatisfecho
Estudios religiosos	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Formación en la fe (oración, misa, servicio)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Liderazgo escolar	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Instrucción académica	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Programas co-curriculares y extra curriculares	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Instalaciones, equipos y tecnología	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sentido de la escuela como comunidad	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Reflexionando sobre **las escuelas secundarias católicas** consideradas para su hijo/a, indique sus percepciones de cada uno de los siguientes:

	Muy por encima del promedio	Por encima del promedio	Promedio	Por bajo del promedio	Muy por bajo del promedio
Estudios religiosos	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Formación en la fe (oración, misa, servicio)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Liderazgo escolar	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Instrucción académica	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Muy por encima del promedio	Por encima del promedio	Promedio	Por bajo del promedio	Muy por bajo del promedio
Programas curriculares y extra curriculares	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Instalaciones, equipos y tecnología	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sentido de la escuela como comunidad	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Que describe el tipo de escuela secundaria a la que asistirá su hijo/a de octavo grado el próximo año

- Escuela secundaria Católica
- Secundaria privada (no Católica)
- Secundaria pública / charter / magnet
- Otra preparatoria
- Indeciso

Display Q: If Which describes the type of high school your 8th grade son/daughter will attend next year = Private (non-Catholic) high school

¿Qué describe el tipo de escuela secundaria privada (no Católica) a la que asistirá su hijo/a de octavo grado el próximo año?

- Escuela secundaria privada no Católica afiliada a Cristianos (por ejemplo, una escuela secundaria cristiana protestante)
- Escuela secundaria religiosa religiosa no afiliada a Cristianos (por ejemplo, una escuela secundaria Judía)
- Escuela secundaria privada secular sin afiliación religiosa (por ejemplo, Harvard-Westlake School)

Display Q: If Which describes the type of high school your 8th grade son/daughter will attend next year = Public/Charter/Magnet high school

¿Qué describe el tipo de escuela pública a la que asistirá su hijo/a de octavo grado el próximo año?

- Escuela secundaria pública tradicional
- Escuela secundaria charter pública
- Escuela secundaria pública magnet

Display Q: If Which describes the type of high school your 8th grade son/daughter will attend next year = Catholic high school

¿A qué escuela secundaria católica asistirá su hijo/a el próximo año?

Select from pre-populated Catholic high schools

Display Q: If Which describes the type of high school your 8th grade son/daughter will attend next year != Catholic high school (does not)

Por favor identifique y clasifique hasta tres razones por las que no enviará a su hijo de octavo grado a una escuela secundaria católica. (Arrastre la razón más importante al cuadro titulado Razón # 1. Si hay una segunda razón más importante, arrastre ese texto al cuadro titulado Razón # 2. Si hay una tercera razón, arrástrela al cuadro titulado Razón # 3)

Items	Razón # 1
La escuela secundaria Católica está demasiado lejos	

Las académicas de la escuela secundaria Católica pueden ser demasiado desafiantes para mi hijo

Académicas de la escuela secundaria Católica pueden no ser lo suficientemente desafiantes para mi hijo

Razón # 2

La matrícula de la escuela secundaria católica es demasiado cara

Los amigos de mi hijo/a no asisten a una escuela secundaria Católica

Razón # 3

El programa deportivo co-curricular de importancia es más fuerte en otra escuela

El programa co-curricular de artes visuales es más fuerte en otra escuela

El programa académico especializado (por ejemplo, Robótica, STEM) es más fuerte en otra escuela

La instrucción y / o los valores religiosos Católicos no tienen valor.

Mi hijo/a no fue admitido en la escuela secundaria Católica de su elección.

Mi hijo/a no quiere asistir a una escuela secundaria Católica

Otros (especificar)

Califique la **importancia** de los siguientes factores para decidir a qué escuela secundaria enviar a su hijo/a

	Extremadamente importante	Muy importante	Importante	Un poco importante	No tan importante
Programa académico	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Programa de artes co-curriculares	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Programa de atletismo co-curricular	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Aceptación universitaria	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Valores de fe y creencias	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Extremadamente importante	Muy importante	Importante	Un poco importante	No tan importante
Consideraciones financieras	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ubicación	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
La seguridad	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reputación escolar	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Escuela de un solo género (todos los niños o todas las niñas)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

¿Quién tuvo la mayor influencia en la decisión de a qué escuela secundaria enviar a su hijo/a el próximo año?

- Padre / guardián(es) principalmente
 Estudiante principalmente
 Padre / guardián(es) y estudiante por igual
 Otro (por favor especifique)

¿Después de todos los premios de ayuda financiera, cuánto gasta su familia en la matrícula y las cuotas de su hijo/a de octavo grado por año?

- Menos de \$ 2,000 por año
 \$ 2,000- \$ 3,999 por año
 \$ 4,000- \$ 5,999 por año
 \$ 6,000- \$ 7,999 por año
 \$ 8,000- \$ 9,999 por año
 \$ 10,000 o más por año

¿Cuál de los siguientes premios de asistencia financiera le ofrecieron para asistir a una escuela secundaria Católica el próximo año escolar? (elija todo lo que corresponda)

- Asistencia financiera basada en la necesidad de la escuela secundaria
 Beca de mérito (por ejemplo, basada en lo académico, liderazgo, puntajes de exámenes, etc.) de la escuela secundaria
 Premio de la Fundación de Educación Católica (CEF)
 Premio de la Fundación Familiar Especializada (Specialty Family Foundation)
 Otro premio basado en la comunidad
 No se ofreció asistencia financiera ni becas

¿Después de todos los premios de ayuda financiera, cuánto cree que su familia tendría que gastar en matrícula y cuotas para que su hijo/a de octavo grado asista a una escuela secundaria Católica el próximo año?

- Menos de \$ 2,000 por año
 \$ 2,000-\$3,999 por año

- \$4,000-\$5,999 por año
- \$6,000-\$7,999 por año
- \$8,000-\$9,999 por año
- \$10,000-\$11,999 por año
- \$12,000- \$13,999 por año
- \$14,000-15,999 por año
- \$16,000-\$17,999 por año
- \$18,000 o más por año

(Opcional) ¿Hay algo más que le gustaría compartir sobre la elección de una escuela secundaria para su hijo/a?

Display Q: If Which describes the type of high school your 8th grade son/daughter will attend next year != Catholic high school (does not)

(Opcional) Se invitará a algunos padre(s) / guardián(es) a ser entrevistados para comprender más sobre la elección de la escuela secundaria. Familias que completan la entrevista recibirán una tarjeta de regalo de \$40. ¿Estarías interesado en participar?

- Yes
- No

Display Q: If (Optional) A few parents will be invited to be interviewed to understand more about high school c... =

Yes
(Opcional) Si es seleccionado para ser invitado a una entrevista, proporcione una dirección de correo electrónico en con el que le gustaría ser contactado.

¡Gracias por completar esta encuesta confidencial! Si desea recibir una tarjeta de regalo de \$10 Y participar en un sorteo para tener la oportunidad de ganar una tarjeta de regalo de \$100, ingrese una dirección de correo electrónico válida a la que se pueda enviar una tarjeta de regalo electrónica (máximo uno por hogar).

APPENDIX D

Student Assent and Survey

8th Grade Student Survey

Thank you for considering taking this survey of 8th grade students on the topic of choosing a high school. This survey will take approximately 5 minutes to complete.

Your parent/guardian(s) have given you permission to participate. However, please take a moment to read the participant assent form. If you agree to participate, please indicate below.

My name is Thom Gasper, and I am a doctoral student at Loyola Marymount University. I am working on a research study called Understanding Catholic School Attrition because I want to know more about the factors Catholic elementary students and their parents consider in choosing a high school. Because you are an eighth-grade student going through the high school decision-making process, I would like your help, if you want to participate.

If you participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a survey indicating your satisfaction with your current school, your thoughts about high schools, and factors you considered related to high school chose for next year. The survey should take approximately ten minutes to complete.

There are no dangers involved in participating in this study. You might not feel like answering a question. If this occurs, you may choose to skip or not answer any question(s).

I will not give you any money or prizes to participate in this study, but what I learn will help me and other educators to understand how to improve the effectiveness of Catholic elementary and high schools. Your school will receive a gift card to be used toward a school resource.

Your individual answers including identifying information such as gender or race will not be shared with anyone. I will keep it safely in a computer with a password. If I write a paper about this information, your name or any other information directly related to you will not be in it. I will not tell anyone else about anything you say or do in this study, unless I learn that you plan to hurt yourself or someone else.

I have asked for your parent or guardian's permission for you to participate in this study, but you get to decide whether or not you want to be involved. If you decide to participate, you can stop at any time, and no one will be upset with you. You also won't get in trouble with your teachers or anyone at school if you decide to stop.

If you want to find out what I learn in this study, you or your parent can contact me at tgasper@lion.lmu.edu or (213) .xxx-xxxx

I understand that if I have any other questions, comments or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may contact Dr. David Moffet, Chair, Institutional Review Board, 1 LMU Drive, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, CA 90045-2659 (310) 338-4400 or David.Moffet@lmu.edu

By selecting "I agree," you are agreeing to the conditions listed above:

- I agree and wish to participate in the survey
- I do not agree and do not wish to participate in the survey **Skip logic Go to close if selected:**

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

What is your ethnicity?

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian or Pacific Islander
- Black or African American
- Filipino
- Hispanic or Latino
- White or Other
- Multiracial

How many years have you attended this elementary school?

- Less than two years
- Two to four years
- Four to six years
- Six to eight years
- More than eight years

How long have you attended Catholic elementary school(s)?

- Less than two years
- Two to four years
- Four to six years
- Six to eight years
- More than eight years

What is your religious affiliation?

- Roman Catholic
- Orthodox (e.g. Russian, Greek, Coptic)
- Protestant (e.g. Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran)
- Jewish
- Islamic
- Hindu
- Buddhist
- Other religious affiliation
- No religious affiliation

What is your ZIP code?

Reflecting on the Catholic elementary school you attend, please indicate the degree you are satisfied with each of the following:

	Extremely satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Extremely dissatisfied
religious studies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
faith formation (prayer, Mass, service)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
school leadership	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
academic instruction	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
co-curricular and extra curricular programs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
facilities, equipment, and technology	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
sense of school as a community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Reflecting on the Catholic high schools you considered, please indicate your perceptions (on average) of each of the following:

	Far above average	Somewhat above average	Average	Somewhat below average	Far below average
quality of religious studies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
quality of faith formation (prayer, Mass, service)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
quality of school leadership	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
quality of academic program	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
quality of co-curricular and extra curricular programs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
quality of facilities, equipment, and technology	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
quality of school as a community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Which describes the type of high school you will attend next year?

- Catholic high school
- Private (non-Catholic) high school
- Public/Charter/Magnet high school
- Other high school
- Undecided

Display Q: If Which describes the type of high school you will attend next year? = Private (non-Catholic) high school

Which describes the type of private (non-Catholic) high school you will attend next year?

- Non-Catholic Christian-affiliated private high school (for example, a Protestant Christian high school)
- Religious, Non-Christian-affiliated private high school (for example, a Jewish high school)
- Secular private high school with no religious affiliation (for example, Harvard-Westlake School)

Display Q: If Which describes the type of high school you will attend next year? = Public/Charter/Magnet high school

Which describes the type of public school you will attend next year?

- Traditional public high school
- Public charter high school
- Public magnet high school

Display Question: If Which describes the type of high school you will attend next year? = Catholic high school

Which Catholic high school will you attend next year?

Select from pre-populated Catholic high schools

Display Q: If Which describes the type of high school you will attend next year? != Catholic high school (does not)

Please identify and rank up to three reason(s) you will not be attending a Catholic high school. (Drag the most important reason to the box titled #1 Reason. If there is a second most important reason, drag that text to the box titled #2 Reason. If there is a third reason, drag that to the box titled #3 Reason)

Items	#1 Reason
Catholic high school location is too far	
Catholic high school academics may be too challenging	
Catholic high school academics may not be challenging enough	
Catholic high school tuition is too expensive	
My friends are not attending a Catholic high school	
Co-curricular athletic program of importance is stronger at another school	
Co-curricular visual or performing arts program of importance is stronger at another school	
Specialized academic program (e.g. Robotics, STEM, Advanced Placement) is stronger at another school	
Catholic religious instruction and/or values is not of value	

I was not admitted to the Catholic high school of my choice

I do not wish to attend a Catholic school

Other (please specify)

Please rate how **important** the following factors were in deciding which high school to attend next year.

	Extremely important	Very important	Moderately important	Slightly important	Not at all important
academic program	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
co-curricular arts program	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
co-curricular athletics program	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
college acceptance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
faith values and beliefs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
financial considerations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
location	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
safety	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
school reputation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
single gender (all boys or all girls) school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Who had the greatest amount of influence on the decision of which high school you will attend next year?

- Parent(s)/guardian(s) primarily
- Myself primarily
- Parent(s)/guardian(s) and myself equally
- Other (please specify)

Which of the following financial assistance awards were you offered to attend a Catholic high school next school year? (choose **all** that apply)

- Need-based financial assistance from the high school
- Merit scholarship (e.g based on academics, leadership, test scores, etc.) from high school
- Catholic Education Foundation award
- Specialty Family Foundation award
- Other community-based award
- No financial assistance or scholarships were offered

(Optional) Is there anything else you would like to share about choosing a high school?

Thank you for participating in this survey! Best wishes to you for a successful high school experience!

APPENDIX E

Preliminary Interview Protocol

Note: In keeping with mixed methods sequential design, the actual interview protocol will be modified after data has been collected and analyzed from student and parent surveys.

Introduction

Pre-interview reminder of previously signed consent: Thank you for joining me. As you know from your previous review and signing of the interview informed consent form, I am recording the interview so that I can transcribe it for analysis. I will remove your name and any identifying information at the time of transcription.

The interview should take about 40 minutes. However, please remember that you can end this interview at anytime of your choosing. None of the questions I am planning to ask you are intended to make you feel uncomfortable. If, however, I ask about something you do not want to discuss, you are free to decline to answer. Do you have any questions?

Thank you for meeting with me!

Elementary School

How long have you been at St. X Elementary School and what are some of the reasons you decided to send your child/ren to this school?

How has your experience been? What has been good (about your experience) and what has been not so good?

Now that you/your daughter/son is about to graduate, what has been good about your/his/her experience at this school?

Can you share some things about your experience at St. X that have not been great? How could your experience have been better?

In what ways have you felt welcome or unwelcome as a parent in this school?

If you have had any challenges, in what ways has the principal, teachers, or staff supported or not supported you?

Note: Add follow up question regarding post-survey emergent area of elementary school with relatively low satisfaction

Decision/Decision-Making

Have you decided which high school you/your daughter/son will be attending in the fall? If so, which one and why?

Can you share with me how you came to that decision?

Note: if not covered, follow up questions regarding roles/ and weight of parent/child in decision- making

Can you discuss some of the things about the (public, charter, private non-Catholic) high school you've chosen that you were drawn to or are most excited about?

Did you consider attending a Catholic high school? Why or why not?

Barriers from Remaining in Catholic Education

Note: Questions in this section will explore the most common "pushes" identified in surveys.

Potential areas include:

Quality of programs (academic/ co-curricular/ specialty)

Religious affiliation/ faith formation

Finances

How much (if any) was your decision to not attend a Catholic high school based on the costs of tuition and fees being too great?

What was your experience with any offers of financial aid or scholarships?

Note: Follow up if unclear regarding specifics from types of financial assistance (e.g., high school, CEF, Specialty Family Foundation, other)

If you had been offered more financial assistance would that have changed your decision?

Note: If yes, then pull out details of how much or what ways the Catholic high school would have needed to assist you?

Conclusion

As a final question, please share any other thoughts about your experience in Catholic schools.

This concludes our interview. Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts with me. I appreciate your participation in this research. If you have any further questions about this interview or would like to review the transcript, please do not hesitate to let me know. Good luck to you with your daughter's/son's transition to high school this fall!

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