

Commentary

Reflections on School Privatization, Marketization, Segregation, and Inequality: Timely for Current Legal and Policy Debates in the United States and the World

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Introduction

At a time of rising inequality, school marketization and privatization persist, often segregating students of differing backgrounds. As centralized oversight of education by governments gives way to privatized schooling options and educational actors responding to market forces appeal to families to choose their schools, accommodating the interests of *some* parents and the success of *some* schools may come at the cost of meaningful school quality for *all* students, as well as achieving other societal goals of schooling. For instance, the expansion of privatization in the United States, aided by a decades-long political and legal effort (MacLean, 2017), occurs at a time of rapid demographic transition—particularly among school-aged population—and rising inequality.

Market-based policies have gained acceptance in urban settings over the last 50 years after courts halted many efforts to address racial and economic inequality in metropolitan area schools (Anyon, 1997; Frankenberg, Farrington, DeBray, Siegel-Hawley, Leibovitz, McCollum et al., 2025); such policies have also spread to some suburban communities. Rather than investing in urban schools and neighborhoods or adjusting district boundary lines to avoid isolating urban communities, providing a market-based solution has the appearance of addressing the effects of racial and economic inequality, but does not disturb the *status quo* in nearby advantaged communities. In other words, it is an individualistic solution for a limited number of in-

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dividuals who can take advantage of privatization policies while not requiring a systemic investment to address the effects of racism or concentrated poverty. At the same time, choice-based policies can be appealing to those seeking to decouple school composition patterns from segregated residential patterns, noting that this linkage allows those who are more affluent or who do not experience racial discrimination in the housing market to exercise a form of school choice by where they buy homes (Holme, 2002; Lareau & Goyette, 2014). The studies in this special issue of the *International Journal of Education Policy & Leadership (IJEPL)*, “The Rise of Education Marketization and the Enduring Enigma of School Segregation,” help to illuminate the tensions and costs by exploring why and how inequality persists amid school marketization and privatization. What is the responsibility of private and public providers of education in responding to parents but also in considering societal goals such as inclusion and equality as well?

The articles in this special issue make clear that though the specifics of choice, privatization, and marketization, along with their histories and demography, may vary internationally, many of the causes and consequences are shared regardless of country context. In this issue, though privatization and choice are constant across all four articles, one tension—hinting at the recent simmering debate in the United States—is the extent to which various school sectors are truly “private” or “public.” A second theme across three of the articles is how schools shape their enrollments. Three articles, set in Montréal, Canada; Victoria, Australia; and in France, focus on the overlay of choice policies that are silent regarding the inequality of schools and families that exists, which ultimately incentivizes school leaders in this competitive schooling market to choose students from families that may improve outcomes rather than be truly open to allow any students to choose them. A third theme is a broader reframing of the consequences of school choice and privatization, particularly for society. I explore each of these themes in a bit more depth, as well as the potential implications for society, and for subsequent research considering these articles together.

Though this special issue is international in scope, especially in the contexts of Australia, Canada, France, and the other 69 countries participating in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), my expertise in school segregation and how it is shaped by privatization and marketization policies is U.S.-centric. As such, in the remainder of this article, this commentary will largely focus on these dynamics in the U.S. There are several reasons that a comparative U.S. approach may be informative for this issue. Historically, the United States has had relatively strict separation of church and state, including in public schools, although less so more recently (e.g., *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*, 2002; *Carson v. Makin*, 2022). U.S. policy trends also influence those in other countries, including school marketization. Yet, there are important distinctions when comparing the United States to international trends, but a comparative lens on this set of studies and the field more broadly can be illustrative. Since the early 1990s, both major U.S. political parties have supported expansions of school marketization, believing competition in the school marketplace will improve school performance (Hoxby, 2002). Although there is variation, the parties traditionally differed in the extent to which they supported privatized providers of schooling and public money flowing to such providers (Welner, Orfield, & Huerta, 2023).

How “public” is a private school? Is a public school “private”?

Each of the four articles in this issue focus not only on the private school sector and choice, but also on how privatization and marketization have more broadly affected the schooling sector, raising questions about the role of the government in providing equitable education regardless of the socioeconomic, racial, or educational background of a student’s family. “Private schooling” is still subject to varying amounts of governmental regulation. While providing some autonomy to educational providers, governments have some stipulations and, in some cases, provide funding. Student testing or curriculum may be similar to that in public schools. And, beyond the private sector, there are ways in which an increasingly competitive schooling market also affects public schools. In Australia, a select number of government schools have similar patterns to private schools and are typically academically selective (i.e., not serving all students). Windle (2025) describes one state school situated near private schools that adopted similar characteristics such as requiring a uniform and implementing curricular foci that attract advantaged students. Likewise, in France, some public high schools offering curricular differentiation had a higher concentration of students from high socioeconomic status backgrounds. In Montréal, the requirements for consideration for admission to public selective schools can be lengthy and are submitted almost a year in advance; schools set their criteria for student selection (Yoon & Barrett DeWiele, 2025). The blurring of the public-private distinction may have ramifications for equity, along with creating a competitive environment focused on the success of individual schools, not the entire system of schools serving an array of student interests and needs.

The questions raised in this special issue are not merely academic questions but are also legal and policy debates. Though the articles in this special issue are situated in international contexts, these questions are also at the heart of U.S. education policy and law. In a much-watched case in the United States argued on April 30, 2025, proponents and opponents of a religious charter school that had applied to enroll 400 students and receive nearly U.S.\$3 million in state funding argued about 1) whether a state could exclude religious organizations in the charter school grant program and 2) whether a charter school is a “state actor.” These related questions would specifically affect the potential establishment of a Catholic-run charter school in Oklahoma, but more broadly affected the nearly 8,000 charter schools in 46 states that enroll more than 3.7 million students in the United States. While each state decides whether to permit charter schools and crafts its own charter school guidelines, to be eligible for funding under the 1994 Charter School Program federal funding program, charter schools must, among other things, be a public school that is “non-sectarian” and does not charge tuition. The determination of whether this potential Oklahoma charter school was a state actor or whether it was a private entity mattered for how bound the school would be by the U.S. Constitution. Legal decisions over the years have had different determinations about whether charter schools were state actors, which had ramifications for due process and equal protection rights of the schools’ students and teachers (Green & Eckes, 2025).

Since their origins, charter schools have occupied a middle ground in American reform policy, a model that has expanded beyond the U.S. context. Originating in the early 1990s, charter schools are authorized by individual U.S. states and vary in design and rationale. Federal charter school legislation was first passed in 1994. Relatedly, charter supporters also had many reasons for championing this policy reform (Bulkley, 2005). To some extent they acted as a compromise between those who wanted more choice beyond what has typically been districts' residential assignment of students to public schools, and those who opposed efforts to expand and/or send public funding to private schools, as President George H.W. Bush's administration had proposed (Junge, 2012; Shira, 1991; Orfield, 2013). Charter schools were introduced as publicly funded schools, with flexibility from certain bureaucratic requirements that traditional public schools must follow, and in return promised greater accountability for student outcomes. This sector has expanded rapidly in the last three decades, encompassing a wide range of schools and operators with a wide range of student experiences and outcomes.

However, this charter school compromise did not end the efforts of those seeking to expand private schools, and to provide public funding for them. In 2002, the Supreme Court upheld Cleveland's voucher system, which gave money to parents to use in private schools, provided that there were both religious and non-sectarian options to choose from (*Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*, 2002).¹ After subsequent conservative victories in a number of states beginning in 2010, voucher programs that provide public funding for students to enroll in private schools began to expand in number and size. Yet even though many voucher programs begin as programs for low-income students, over time many have loosened eligibility requirements beyond low-income students. And, even with the low-income requirement, eligible students faced a host of barriers that may have made a voucher choice unrealistic (Welner et al., 2023). And, unlike many international voucher programs, U.S. versions often do not fully cover the cost of enrollment in many private schools, which limits who can use them and which schools they affect (Abrams, 2025). Voucher programs remain unpopular with U.S. voters—routinely defeated when put to a referendum—but remain politically appealing to legislators (All4Ed, 2024; Hager & Schwartz, 2024).

In early July 2025, the U.S. Congress passed legislation instituting a federal tax credit to provide scholarships for families to use for private schooling, with generous eligibility requirements for students and covered educational expenses. Because the eligibility extends to children in households with an income up to 300% of the county median, estimates suggest that most families would be eligible to participate (Young, 2025). Thus, although the U.S. Supreme Court did not allow the religious charter school at issue in this case to open, this issue is far from settled and related concerns about constitutional protections for students in schools operated by private entities, even those receiving public funding, will continue. Moreover, as school privatization expands rapidly, research continues to emerge on the resulting segregation and inequitable access but is largely ignored in the policy debate. In addition, the expansion of privatization raises concerns about funding for public schools, and the possibility of public-school closures. In both the United States and global contexts in this issue, the contradictory policy aims of private providers of a public good are clear.

Schools shaping their enrollment

To the second theme about the actual ability of families to choose, I am reminded of the origins of school choice in the U.S. context in the middle of the twentieth century. (Choice, of course, can be exercised by residential moves, but this has additional constraints and may be unappealing due to perceived costs.) In two different court cases in Virginia during the 1960s, the Supreme Court held that localities' efforts to use ostensibly neutral school choice policies in the aftermath of the pivotal *Brown v. Board of Education* decision were unconstitutional. In the first, *Griffin v. School Board of Prince Edward County* (1964), rather than be forced to desegregate public schools, the school board voted in 1959 to close the public schools, which was an option permitted by Virginia's repeal of its compulsory attendance law, leaving the power up to individual school boards. White private school academies arose, and received financial support from the state and district, but there were not similar efforts for Black students (for more, see Siegel-Hawley, Taylor-Beierl, Frankenberg, Hewko, & Castro, 2024; *Griffin v. School Board of Prince Edward County*, 1964). In the Court's 1964 decision, they invalidated the state tuition assistance to these private schools. Without a public system, a private academy system—supported with public dollars—excluded some Black children of education for five years, only permitting some students to participate in the privatized system.

In a different case, four years later, the Court considered choice within a public system, this time in New Kent County, Virginia. Then, more than a decade after *Brown v. Board of Education*, the district adopted an assignment plan that permitted students to choose where to attend school.² Evidence from the district show that no White students had chosen to attend segregated Black schools and only a few Black students had attended formerly all-White schools, leaving the schools far from desegregated. Again, the choice plan theoretically gave every student the same opportunity to select a school to attend, but this laissez-faire mechanism was unequal to the task of overcoming decades of racial segregation and inequality. In *Green v. County School Board of New Kent County* (1968), the Court ordered that choice plans, if not effectuating desegregation, were unconstitutional.

This history provides helpful contrast to today's mechanisms of school choice and segregation. Though less overt, incentives still result in similar behaviours but do so in ways that are less likely to be found unconstitutional as was the case in the 1960s. For example, today, with the passage of time from *de jure* segregation, courts are less likely to find school choice policies unconstitutional despite evidence that not all students are able to choose some publicly funded schools of choice (e.g., because schools of choice cannot or will not accommodate them; see Mommandi & Welner, 2021). However, as legal scholar Elise Boddie (2016) has argued in the U.S. context, practices can adapt to perpetuate discrimination even when prior discriminatory efforts are legally restricted. Because of the way schools' practices have adapted—driven by incentives within a marketized system—it is difficult to show the many ways students do not have equitable access to some, particularly highly desirable schools of choice. Despite the frequent framing of expanding the educational marketplace to allow for “empowerment” or as a “civil rights” issue, because of the discrete interests of individual providers to sustain or grow their share of en-

rollment and revenue, this may work at cross-purposes to equitably serving all students (Scott, 2013). And this affects those who do not do the choosing as well: non-choosing students, who may not be as advantaged, are concentrated in public schools and are at greater risk of school closures, as seen in the United States (Jabbar, Tracy, Germain, Lenhoff, Alonso, & Haderlein, 2025) and in the countries that are the focus of analyses in this special issue.

In fact, current legal guidelines vary internationally around essential questions of legal protections for who can enroll in private schools that receive public funding. While there are general federal and state non-discrimination clauses in the United States, not all states have uniform protections for LGBTQ individuals (see Mead & Eckes, 2023). Comparatively, some countries prohibit discriminatory enrollment practices, even where operated by private providers (Abrams, 2025). These articles investigate the nuanced ways in which enrollment shaping occurs given existing regulations and indeed the incentives for schools to do so given the marketization of schooling.

In France, the private school sector is more regulated by the state than in other countries, including those researched in this special issue. Private schools in France are aligned with public schools in many ways, including curriculum, and a majority of funding comes from public sources; they are also not allowed to charge tuition but there can be other costs for families who enroll. Although the French government has taken some efforts to address school segregation, Maire and Molina (2025) note in their article that localities were allowed to implement their own approach and other policies such as weakening attendance zones. These policies likely furthered school choice, including to private schools. Segregation and percentage of students in private schools differs by municipality in France, emphasizing the importance of contextual analysis. While other research has found that public school segregation is a majority of the segregation nationally (Piquemal, 2024, as cited in Maire & Molina, this issue), the authors document the ways in which schools implicitly choose their students. This analysis found that this happens in different ways, however, depending on the age and socioeconomic status of students. In high schools, they found that program differentiation was an important reason that higher socioeconomic status (SES) students were underrepresented in comprehensive and vocational high schools while instead being more likely to choose academic-only schools. In middle school, higher SES students were less likely to enroll in priority education schools (those designated by the government as receiving more resources because they enroll students with greater disadvantage). Meanwhile, for low-SES students, school sector was a more important factor, as they were concentrated in higher rates in public schools and in vocational and comprehensive high schools. Thus, despite the increased regulation of the private school sector and variation among localities—somewhat akin to the U.S. charter school sector—in keyways, choices made by schools are mechanisms that relate to socioeconomic segregation of students.

In Montréal, Canada, the high school sector is fragmented, consisting of both French and English speaking schools as well as public and private schools. Similar to private school choice in France, school labels and curriculum offerings were related to their enrollment. But, unlike France, other countries' policies further enabled schools to help shape the composition of the student body. For example, no trans-

portation was provided by schools, which might disadvantage some students from choosing schools further from home. (There was also some preference for local catchments, though it is less clear how these are determined.) Moreover, academic enrichment schools could employ selective admissions, in a very direct way of shaping who enrolls. These policy choices are so consequential; however, schools with the more selective and enriched programs are in what Yoon and Barrett DeWiele (2025) call “spatially advantaged neighborhoods.” Not surprisingly, schools in more advantaged neighborhoods had students from wealthier neighborhoods enrolling in them (see also, Duncan & Murnane, 2011). However, parents in lower SES households may not have had the same ability to choose an “enrichment” school *and* schools may have had requirements that further restrict who can enroll based on a child’s academic performance. Taken together, this creates more homogeneity in school enrollment and deepens segregation.

In the Australian context, the marketization of schools has a technocratic sheen due to the “data journalism” published by a newspaper in Victoria. If the market-based theory of school choice is that parents will respond to data about school quality through their enrollment choices—and that those choices in turn will spur lower-performing schools to improve thereby raising the quality of all schools (Hoxby, 2002; but see Orfield & Frankenberg, 2013)—information about school quality is needed by parents (here, the “customer”). While Holme (2002) notes in the U.S. context that residential choice decisions were based more on social networks, in the decades since, information about schools has proliferated and is much more widely available. *The Age*, the Australian newspaper analyzed in Windle’s article (2025) sought to identify schools with improved performance. The newspaper then, according to the author, uncritically assessed why the changes had occurred, typically through interviews with principals, who in this system are responsible for their enrollment and therefore might view such stories as a means to recruit desired families. The author notes that the schools designated as top improving schools typically also changed in their socioeconomic composition, attracting more advantaged students—a fact that is likely related to increased performance on assessments but unremarked upon by principals or the journalists. However, by obscuring this link, it gives an inaccurate impression of what is happening within the schools, which may further influence families’ school choice and exacerbate stratification. If the cross-country trend is to put more decision-making about schools in the hands of parents, then a prerequisite of market-based school choice theory is that they should have full information in order to choose the best school for their child(ren).

Reframing the consequences of school choice and privatization

A central contribution of this special issue is presenting evidence that considers a broader range of the consequences of school choice and privatization, and should inform policymakers’ efforts in modifying school choice policy or its implementation. One theme across all four articles is segregation, and in three articles, the authors describe school policies and their implementation to illustrate the mechanisms that segregate students. While private schooling is related to higher segregation in each analysis, the authors detail the effects of choice mechanisms to understand why this

occurs, and illustrate how the magnitude of segregation varies based on a complex array of geography, school characteristics, and characteristics of students and the households they live in.

Across these articles, the authors identify various governmental goals for education, but their analyses show private schools and choice are undermining such goals through higher segregation. While there may be benefits to allowing parental choice, such as in Québec where school choice could align with linguistic rights, the wider differentiation of schools is also associated with inequality. In France, its laudable effort to identify schools as “priority” and to funnel more resources to these schools may indirectly harm its efforts to have schools enroll a broad, equitable share of students because more advantaged students avoid schools with the priority label. This inequality of choice is even more consequential given the analysis of PISA data, where authors argue there are societal costs of higher private school enrollment in terms of the development of global competencies in the 69 countries studied.

Indeed, as the article analyzing PISA (Molina & Gallo Cordoba, 2025) data notes that while there is a focus of how private school enrollment can benefit individual students who enroll (though evidence on this may be mixed), this is but one of many outcomes that societies should consider in the design of their schooling systems. In a choice-based system, a full analysis would also consider the students who don't make a choice, as well as the schools that are left. U.S. and international research find that parents of different race, socioeconomic status, and other forms of advantaged backgrounds have varied preferences with which they view school choice; they may also have constraints that limit the extent to which they can select a preferred school (OECD, 2014; Posey-Maddox, McKinney de Royston, Holman, Rall, & Johnson, 2021). Thus, analysis must also include understanding who benefits students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Higher private school enrollment may still have negative benefits more generally for society and more so if those who choose are systematically different from those who are non-choosers. A strength of Molina and Gallo Cordoba's article is their broader examination of the “effects” of private schools to consider other aspects such as social cohesion and prejudice formation. They find that countries with higher shares of private school enrollment have higher segregation, which in itself disadvantages societies. But, further, when analyzing students' self-reported global competencies, higher segregation is negatively related to several competencies, such as respect for other cultures, and has no positive relationship with any competencies. In particular, school segregation explains a substantial amount of variation between schools within countries. Molina and Gallo Cordoba argue that private schooling “negatively affects how well school systems are preparing globally competent young adults, and the extent to which they do so for all students,” (p. 19).

Taken together, these articles should provide evidence for countries to more carefully assess school choice policies, including those that concern marketization as well as the ways in which private actors are involved in schooling. Policymakers may find the idea of privatization very appealing due to have reduced bureaucracy, private funding for what would otherwise be governmental responsibility, or to respond to interest at least among families who desire school choice. With the rise of market accountability policies in education, increased competition and choice would theoretically lead to

school improvement given that schools must compete against a variety of other schools to attract students and associated funding, though these theories have not been borne out in many empirical studies (see chapters 1 and 2 in Orfield & Frankenberg, 2013; chapter 2 in Lubienski & Lubienski, 2014). However, the evidence in this special issue further contributes to understanding why families might make different choices, including to schools not considered to be providing quality educations to students, or that parents of students of different ages, socioeconomic status, racial or religious backgrounds, and/or neighborhood may have quite different preferences let alone constraints in exercising their ability to make a school choice (Jabbar et al., 2025).

Implications of the themes of this special issue

It is unlikely that school privatization, marketization, and choice will be eliminated. But the articles in this issue demonstrate substantial costs of this policy choice without more careful policy guardrails, and it is worthwhile to consider what measures might make school choice fairer and more equitable. While imperfect, historically in the United States, those with expertise in assessing schools and students' needs—district leaders—were in charge of student assignment, making decisions that were supposed to maximize the relative benefits for most students even if not for every student. Choice models, by contrast, place expertise in the parent seeking to maximize the school assignment decision that is best for their child, even if at the expense of the overall system's maximization (e.g., because schools considered to be the best have finite seats). Some countries and districts in the United States have considered measures to manage choices in a more centralized fashion such as controlled choice or providing financial incentives for educating students from disadvantaged backgrounds (OECD, 2019; Frankenberg, 2017).

In addition to contributing to a broader understanding of school privatization, segregation and inequality across several countries, the authors also have useful suggestions and implications for furthering research in this area. They demonstrate the relative potential of different approaches that could enhance this line of research within and between countries moving forward. Some authors noted a barrier to answering many policy-relevant questions is the availability and limitations of data, which is particularly true in the U.S. context where there is much less data required from private schools.³ (It is likely to become even harder with the current efforts to eliminate the U.S. Department of Education and many of its data-gathering functions.) This is perhaps a consequence of privately-operated schooling compared with a government agency and associated bureaucratic structures, but limits analysis regarding inequality and more comprehensive analyses of the growth of privatization for society more broadly. A priority should be, as privatization persists and expands, the collection and analysis of data to offer more transparency for students' educations including where subsidized in any way by public funding.

More broadly, the articles also offer evidence about the implications of a reduced governmental role in education. While countries vary in the extent of centralization of education, the influx of additional providers fragments one system of schooling where decisions should consider how to maximize the educational best interests of all students into many systems where those in charge may only consider how deci-

sions affect their school, not an entire system. Such decision-making may benefit a small minority at the expense of the larger whole. And, in a system of fragmentation, any efforts to try to address inequality or segregation will require the cooperation, agreement, and compromise of many entities, which may be difficult to sustain. Likewise, fragmentation can impede complete and accurate information sharing about school choices, which is a fundamental assumption of market-based choice theory. As seen in Australia, the role of media sources may be additional intermediaries who frame how information about school “quality” is shared; studies have found similar effects of the media and school-rating web-based systems in the U.S. influencing residential decisions (Pride, 1999; Powers, 2023). This provides another rationale for transparent data analysis of all school options, regardless of operator.

An issue like this, with cross-national comparisons, is helpful in understand patterns that exist across contexts, and may also help to further analyses in specific national contexts. Taking the articles as a set, however, also suggests the complexity of the concepts studied. The authors have collectively begun to uncover whether, amid different types of school marketization, all families are actually able to make a school choice or whether, because of policy design, societal inequality, and/or the competitive pressures school operators are responding to, schools are shaping the choices that families make, with different sets of choices available to families based on their socioeconomic, racial, and/or linguistic background. As discussed earlier, the ability to differentiate what a private school is varies considerably among the countries here in terms of the extent of government control and funding. This is likely only one of many levels in which privatization is infusing schooling in these contexts—information that is beyond the scope of these articles but helps to understand the pressures on all operating within these systems. Likewise, as suggested above, there are a host of resources, constraints, and policies that shape which families will be able to take advantage of school choice, which in turn will likely exacerbate segregation (see generally Orfield & Frankenberg, 2013; Jabbar et al., 2025). To aid in better understanding outcomes, descriptions that fully describe this context would be useful to make comparisons of privatization and school segregation across countries. By contrast to this complexity and variation that is part of today’s school choice policies is the relative simplicity and narrow set of measures that are typically used to “market” schools, which reflects a narrowing vision of the goals of schools.

These articles are an important contribution in pushing us to consider more varied outcomes of private school and choice. Can we go beyond this further to consider for whom these benefits accrue? And the costs? Increasingly, the concept of administrative burden is being applied to school choice contexts to elucidate the learning and psychological costs of understanding and accessing school choice options compared with other types of student assignment policies (Herd & Moynihan, 2019). These “compliance costs” contribute to inequality when policies treat all potential applicants the same. The articles speak more or less directly about how marketization pressures and privatization create incentives for school leaders to increasingly enroll students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, in part because of how that will further their marketing efforts. Given schools’ capacity limits, higher SES students mean fewer students from lower SES backgrounds who must be accommodated in

other schools. What happens to these students and the quality of schools they attend, which may have fewer resources and/or be further from home, is important to better understand. For example, in France, were lower SES students concentrated in vocational or comprehensive schools because they wanted that type of schooling or because it was the “default” choice available to them? Answering questions like this will take careful qualitative work cognizant of the many subtle ways schools and their environment, leaders, and policy can shape family decisions. It would also be interesting to see how changing demographics of neighborhoods intersect with privatization choices described here. While articles reference residential segregation and gentrification, understanding better how the perceptions of changing composition might have a reciprocal relationship with the take-up of school privatization options could be informative.

Finally, we might also think more broadly about—even if these gaps in outcomes for choosers and non-choosers, advantaged and non-advantaged are eliminated—other costs. In these articles, we see evidence of instituting policies or programs to try to cultivate an elite student enrollment.⁴ While some of these programs may have strong reputations (e.g., International Baccalaureate), are all of them needed? One area for future research not touched on in these articles is understanding which students access these selective opportunities *within* schools. Or, consider the imposition of uniforms as a means to limit who can select the school. There may be reasons to require school uniforms, but if there is not also a way to freely provide them for households who may lack resources to acquire them, this is another way schools may shape who enrolls; a lack of universal accessibility is, in some respects, limiting.

Although, given space constraints, the articles do not recount the historical context, it is worth remembering that many countries have histories of segregation and discrimination. In Canada, school segregation was permitted, alongside other policies similar to the United States such as a restrictive immigration policy limiting immigration on the basis of race. The Australian government commissioned a 2023 report to make suggestions about how to improve the diversity and outcomes of Australian schools (Nous Group, 2023). Indigenous students in Australia, Canada, and the United States have been particularly disadvantaged in schools.

Thus, the overlay of school privatization does not happen in a vacuum but must be understood in this context (along with residential segregation and inequality). And, as a result, creating niche schools of choice to market to different subsets of the population based on families’ interests—as do many of the privatization policies described here—is antithetical to the historical legacy and contemporary reality in these and other countries (Wilson, 2022). In the United States, the Supreme Court’s *Brown* decision declared that education is the foundation of good citizenship when it ruled that school segregation was inherently unconstitutional. Students cannot learn from and care about people who are different from them when students of different backgrounds are sorted into schools catering to their families’ interests and excluding others (whether intentional or not). Weighing this alongside any benefits of permitting family choice must be carefully considered.

At a time of global political shifts threatening efforts for building multiracial democracies and rising privatization, the work of this special issue is timely. It is an

important contribution to our understanding of segregation and the effects for society, and should inform policy conversations seeking to provide schooling options while also reducing segregation and inequality.

Notes

1. Approximately two decades after the ruling, there were 58 schools that participated in the program, and just over 8,000 students received a voucher, for approximately U.S.\$6,000 on average (EdChoice, n.d.). This voucher amount may limit which schools accept voucher students, but it does provide a savings to the state because it is much less than per-pupil costs are in the Cleveland school district (U.S. News, n.d.). In international contexts, increasing the voucher amount has been associated with improved student outcomes (e.g., Murnane, 2017).
2. Other southern states after *Brown* had similar variations in which they allowed students to apply to transfer and would evaluate their application. It allowed for a process to desegregate in theory, but in reality few Black students were approved and due to the stigma of Black schools, and their unequal resources, White students did not apply.
3. I have also made this argument in the U.S. public school context, which has comparatively much more data available though is still limited in being able to fully assess racial and economic inequality in education (Asson, Frankenberg, Maselli, Burfoot-Rochford, Fowler, & Buck, 2023; Scott et al., 2023).
4. In the US context, Jabbar and colleagues have found that in choice environments, increased resources go towards marketing, not improving school programs (Jabbar, 2016; Creed, Jabbar, & Scott, 2021).

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