DECOUPLING SCHOOLS AND NEIGHBORHOODS: LOCAL SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AND NEIGHBORHOOD PERCEPTION

Julia Burdick-Will
Johns Hopkins University

Urban Affairs Association
April 9, 2015
Assumed Neighborhood-School Link

• “For most children in the U.S., where you live determines where you go to school” (Schwartz 2013: 24)

• Such an implicit assumption that it is rarely stated this clearly

• School choice provides options

• Especially in urban, low-income neighborhoods
Research Questions

• Who attends a school near their home?

• Do parents who travel for their children’s school feel differently about their neighborhood?

• Do residents feel differently about a neighborhood when larger proportions of students attend non-local schools?
  • Is this relationship different for parents and non-parents?
Making Connections: Wave 1

- Verbatim school name for randomly selected child in the household

- All school locations regardless of type using NCES and Google
  - Fuzzy matching in Python to correct misspellings
  - 84.4 percentage of school names matched
  - Legible non-matches were confirmed outside of the area

- 680 households per city on average
- 280 households per city with school-age kids on average
Making Connections: Wave 1

• Defining “Local”:

• By geography
  • Within the official neighborhood boundaries

• By attendance patterns
  • The school with the largest proportion of children
    • Best guess at an attendance boundary school
Making Connections: Wave 1

• Neighborhood perception measures:
  • Collective efficacy
  • Social cohesion
  • Informal Social control
  • Safe neighborhood
  • Good neighborhood
School Attendance Patterns

Number of Schools

- Denver
- Des Moines
- Hartford
- Indianapolis
- Louisville
- Milwaukee
- Oakland
- Providence
- San Antonio
- Seattle
School Attendance Patterns

Percent in Local School

- Denver
- Des Moines
- Hartford
- Indianapolis
- Louisville
- Milwaukee
- Oakland
- Providence
- San Antonio
- Seattle
- All Cities

Graph showing the percentage of students in local schools across different cities.
Predicting Who Attends a Local School

• Insignificant Predictors:
  • Black, Asian, Income, Education, Respondent Age, Employment status, Welfare receipt, Public Housing, Home Ownership

• Significant Predictors:
  • Hispanic, Other race, Any foreign born adult, Number of years in the neighborhood
  • All substantively small

• **Nothing** significant after controlling for city

• Among parents, **no significant difference** in neighborhood perception
Exploring City-level differences

Max Percent in any One School

- Denver
- Des Moines
- Hartford
- Indianapolis
- Louisville
- Milwaukee
- Oakland
- Providence
- San Antonio
- Seattle

Max Percent in any One School
Effect of 10 percent more kids in one school

Collective Efficacy
Social Cohesion
Informal Social Control
Safe Neighborhood
Good Neighborhood

All Respondents
Without Kids
With Kids
Conclusion and Implications

- Assumed school-neighborhood link is clearly false
  - Need to focus on within neighborhood educational heterogeneity
  - Consequences for educational inequality?

- Preliminary city-level comparisons
  - Just one neighborhood in each city
  - Many other differences in these areas

- Initial findings suggest that in areas where students scatter, residents report lower levels of social capital

- Paradox of choice
THANK YOU

jburdickwill@jhu.edu