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School Choice and Urban Residency: The Impact of Expanded Choice on Camden Housing Decisions

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Abstract: This qualitative study investigates if, and how, both current and middle-class prospective Camden (NJ) residents' housing decisions are impacted by increased school choice through Camden's newly state-imposed Renaissance schools. Recent research suggests greater school choice options can attract and anchor middle-class families within larger, more cosmopolitan cities like New York, San Francisco, Atlanta, and Philadelphia. Here, with Camden's smaller, post-industrial urban identity, study findings suggest participants' decision to live in Camden is largely unaffected by the offering of more choice school options. Current residents reported choosing to remain in Camden due to the city's affordability and emotional connections to the city. Middle-income prospective residents indicated their decision to move to Camden is impacted by broader quality of life considerations including safety and poverty, and communicated negative perceptions of Camden's newer choice schools. This study highlights the complexity and nuance in the common understanding of urban residential decisions and school choice, particularly within smaller, non-cosmopolitan urban localities.

Introduction

Since the decades following Camden's (NJ) decline in ship-building, manufacturing, and population that initiated in the 1950's, state and local government, for decades, made attempts to revitalize the city back to its pre-World War II glory days. As late as the 1970's, manufacturing jobs at RCA/Victor and Campbell's Soup factories were still readily available for residents and Camden's population was above 100,000 (Gillette, 2005). But following familiar patterns of post-industrial urban decline, discriminatory housing practices, and middle-class white flight, both jobs and people left Camden en masse, leaving behind a city with much less of both. After decades of that unfortunate reality, Camden, with a current population of 77,400, with a poverty rate of 40%, eventually developed the identity of being the poorest, and the most crime-ridden city in America (Comer, 2009; NBC News, 2013).

Like other municipal public services that fell into disrepair over the Camden's depression years, the city's public-school system was not immune to the effects of poverty (Epstein, 2015). Today, the Camden City School District (CCSD) is under state takeover resulting from 20 of 23 of its schools being classified as "failing" by the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) in 2013 due to persistently low graduation rates, poor school performance on state standardized tests, and low scores on the NJDOE Quality Single Accountability Continuum (QSAC) evaluation of public-school district governance.

A growing body of contemporary urban planning and education research correlates citizens' housing choices with local school quality, the willingness to relocate and purchase homes in urban communities near charter schools, and the impact charter schools have in raising nearby home values, particularly in large cosmopolitan cities (Bennett, 2000; Burdick-Will, Keels, & Schuble, 2013). In Camden, like other urban communities, the perception of chronically underperforming public schools has long been cited as an obstruction to city-wide progress by frustrating the return of middle-class professionals as residents and homeowners. South Jersey political powerbroker George Norcross remarked in an interview, "We've got to make it safer here and improve the quality of education, or no one will move here. And anyone who achieves any measure of success won't stay" (Volk, 2013, pg. 3). The popular local narrative, like other urban areas, held that underperforming Camden schools kept potential middle-class residents away, and at the same time caused Camden residents who earned middle-class incomes, to eventually move to the suburbs if they had school-aged children. This rationale articulated by Norcross became law before long in the form of New Jersey's Urban Hope Act of 2012. That new Renaissance schools provide greater "high quality" options to current and prospective Camden families (Camden City School District, 2014, pg. 1) through offering a

“new network of charter schools” (Mooney, 2012, pg. 1) would serve as alternatives to Camden’s “failing” public schools, presumably, was an attempt to rebrand the delivery of public education and attract new Camden residents, similar to what has been exhibited in other urban areas such as Atlanta, Chicago, and Philadelphia (Davis & Oakley, 2012).

Whether the offering of expanded school choice in Camden in the form of imposed Renaissance schools, is sufficient to alter prospective Camden residents and current Camden residents’ residential decisions, is much less clear. The purpose of this study is to better understand if expanded school choice options in Camden, a post-industrial Northeastern city with a population of roughly 77,000 people through Renaissance schools, impacts current residents and middle-class prospective residents’ decision to remain in, or move to, Camden.

Camden Context

The American public often views today’s urban public schools pejoratively. Images of aging buildings, crumbling facilities, apathetic teachers, and troubled minority youth who are wholly disinterested in their education, primarily informed by popular media, seem to categorize how modern American society views these public institutions (Heyman & Virgil, 2008; Noguera, 2003; Bascia & Osmond, 2012). Such conceptions concerning urban education suggest inner-city public schools are failing to adequately educate children (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2009), presenting a clear and present danger to America’s future prosperity, and a violation of urban students’ state civil right to a high-quality education (Perry, Moses, Wynne, Cortes & Delpit, 2010). Collective assumptions and biases concerning urban public education have been shaped by politicians and education reformers, as well as through popular media in films such as *Lean on Me* (1989), and *Dangerous Minds* (1995), to *Waiting for Superman* (2010) and a host of others (Kupchik & Bracy, 2009; Nasir, McLaughlin & Jones, 2009; Mackler & Wilson, 2011). The widely accepted

idea that America's urban public education system is, "failing", has motivated policymakers, business leaders, and educational reform activists to use the "failure mantra" to alter the landscape of urban public education through legislation and neoliberal education reforms such as district-takeover, public school closure, and charter-ization (Antrop-Gonzalez, 2003; Weiner, 2012; Taylor, McGlynn & Luter, 2013; Epstein, 2015).

Camden, NJ, a city long plagued by chronic poverty and unemployment, has over the past few decades, implemented various district and state interventions in hopes of improving educational outcomes in its public schools that yielded little statistical progress in assessment scores, graduation rates, and other traditional school performance metrics (Epstein, 2015). Camden's public schools, despite diversifying teaching practices and regularly changing school and district leadership, were still considered the worst schools in New Jersey in 2015 (Epstein, 2015). Like other American inner-cities (Geller, Sjoquist, & Walker, 2006), where charter schools are presented as the solution to historically under-performing districts, the newest urban school reform tactic in the CCSD is the establishing of state-mandated, privately-run, charter management organization (CMO) operated Renaissance charter schools (Stratos, Wolford, & Reitano, 2015)), as outlined in the Urban Hope Act of 2012. Seldom mentioned, however, is that Camden's Renaissance schools will divert a significant population of district students and dollars away from district public schools (Cho, 2013; Buddin, 2012; Forman, 2007), thereby, putting the survival of traditional public education in Camden, in peril (Ni, 2007; Benson, 2016).

Urban economists and urban geographers alike have long asserted that local public-school quality influences residential demand, housing prices, and increasing property value (Horn, 2014; Mickelson, 2014; Jud & Watts, 1981). As such, situated within a broader Camden redevelopment perspective, to state and local elites, the establishment of Renaissance schools in

Camden is considered a positive for the city to improve education (Fenwick, 2013) and, likely, facilitate residential demographic change (Choido, Hernandez-Murillo, & Owayang, 2010; Horn, 2014). A growing body of research suggests the presence of charter schools in poor minority urban areas has the potential to attract middle-class millennials to move to the area (DeArmond, Joachim, Gross & Lake, 2014), as well as raise property values in areas where charter schools are situated (Fenwick, 2013; Horowitz, Keil, & Spector, 2009; Hankins, 2007). Increasing attention among researchers linking urban redevelopment, gentrification, and the increasing presence of charter schools in large, cosmopolitan cities across the country such as Philadelphia (Cucchiara, 2013), Boston (Kimmelberg & Billingham, 2012), New York City (Stillman, 2013), Chicago (Lipman, 2008; 2011), and Atlanta (Haskins 2013; Davis & Oakley, 2012) may represent broader opportunities for municipal revitalization, and governmental efforts to reverse of middle-class flight from urban America by stabilizing these potential urban residents' education concerns.

Among many politicians and vast swaths of the public, urban redevelopment is generally seen positively as it typically denotes a reversal of white and middle-class flight into the city (Cahill, 2006; Powell & Spencer, 2002), the generating of a new tax base, and development of blighted neighborhoods (Cahill, 2006; Sheppard, 2012). But, for current low-income residents in urban neighborhoods, such urban “progress” initiated and enjoyed by those with political and social capital, can also yield displacement (Zuk, et al., 2012), disruption of community social networks, and marginalization of low SES residents from community participation (Hyra, 2012; Jennings & Lynn, 2005;). And, while many Americans believe in the transformative power of education and the societal benefit of public education systems (Goldthorpe, 2014; Hertel & Pfeffer, 2014), many urban residents, like those in Camden, are routinely marginalized and

disenfranchised from democratic participation in decision-making on matters affecting their communities (Muggah, 2012; Lipman, 2009); specifically, within public education (Bettez & Hytten, 2011). As such, the purpose of this study is to understand further how Camden's current residents, who are routinely excluded from meaningful decision-making processes, as well as prospective Camden residents, factor expanded school choice into their own residency decisions.

Choice in Camden

The creation and proliferation of charter schools nationwide is an often-remedied school choice alternative for low-income students of color. While public school vouchers are available to low-income residents in Camden, state public policy steers those residents towards charters as an alternative in their communities. Because low-income parents must consider their real-time life constraints when deciding on education options for their children i.e. work, travel and availability, local alternatives to public schools are more convenient and accessible in comparison public schools away from their communities (Jorgan & Gallagher, 2015). Charter schools can be placed in any area, however cities with the highest Black and Latino population and highest poverty rate are where the majority of charter schools are placed. In New Jersey, 55% of all charter school are located in municipalities where 75% of the population is Black and Latino, and that are in the 80th percentile for the rate of poverty (Index Mundi, 2018; NJ Department of Education, 2018). To compare nationally, Black and Latino students make up 57% of the charter school population; low-income students make up 54% of the charter school population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018).

Charter schools were signed into law by then-Governor Whitman with the Charter School Program Act of 1995. This law allowed for charter schools to exist "in competition" with traditional public schools. The Urban Hope Act (UHA), signed into law by then Governor Chris

Christie, provided a proverbial victory to charters in select municipalities. UHA legislation allows for charter schools to apply to “take over” total control of underperforming schools in the school districts of Camden, Newark and Trenton. In the original legislation, renaissance schools had to build new facilities; in 2014, the law was amended allowing renaissance schools to use existing facilities with the promise to renovate them (Miller, 2018). Prior to the UHA, Camden was home to charter schools independent of any regional or national network. Since the UHA, regional and national networks have come into the city and co-exist among traditional public schools and independently administered charter schools.

While previous research was cited linking urban redevelopment, gentrification and the increasing presence of charter schools with opportunities for urban stability and revitalization, there are trends that put such a link into question. For example, gentrifiers who have children tend to pay for private school or exercise school choice when available in urban districts (Keels, Burdick-Will, and Keene, 2013). As Stillman (2013), Kimelberg & Billingham (2013) and Cucchiara (2008) show, gentrifier parents were only willing to send their children to urban schools if other gentrifier parents did the same. However, in Camden City, the optics show that the only thing being gentrified is charter school employment. Both Camden City Public Schools and charter schools that operate in Camden City serve low-income Black and Latino students predominately. However, when compared with Camden City Public Schools, charter schools, both independent and network associated, have more White certified staff (teachers, administrators and support staff) and fewer Black and Latino certified staff; see figure 1. The same is true when you isolate for teachers (Miller, 2017).

Figure 1 – Staff & Enrollment Comparison: Camden City and Charter Schools In Camden City

ENROLLMENT CERTIFIED STAFF

	%Black	%Latino	%White	%FPRL	%Black	%Latino	%White
Camden City	46%	51%	1%	64%	46%	11%	41%
Camden Charters	41%	57%	.006%	75%	19%	9%	69%

* <http://www.state.nj.us/education/data/>

Significance of the Study

In an era where cities are experiencing a mass “return-to-the-city” movement by gentrifying white and black middle classes (Hyra, 2012; Wilson E., 2015; Powell & Spencer, 2003;) seeking to return to low-income minority neighborhoods lured by shorter commutes, urban amenities and culture, and attractive home prices, poor minority residents are increasingly excluded from the decision-making processes that influence the future of their communities and education systems. And while efforts to attract a wealthier, more educated, and often whiter urban public appears to be urban planners’ method of choice to revitalize cities, residents have seen an erosion of their democratic rights, loss of political influence as actions are taken by the powerful, and politically-connected supposedly and expressed publicly, to benefit Camden residents.

The emergence of Camden’s Renaissance schools is an example of such a phenomenon. Camden’s public schools had long been demeaned and labeled “failing” by local and state politicians, and in January 2012, the Urban Hope Act was passed into law establishing state-mandated charter schools in Camden to run by CMOs. Camden residents had no opportunity to participate in the process that will yield fifteen new charter schools with no public accountability, and at the same, significantly impact Camden’s public-school budget, and future sustainability.

Around the same time, between 2012 and 2014, other significant revitalization and redevelopment efforts in Camden took place. After nearly 140 years of service, Governor Christie, along with Mayor Dana Redd, dismantled the Camden Police Department (CPD) and started the Camden County Metro Department (CCMD). This action, too, was executed without the input of residents, despite vocal resident pushback criticizing the move. The stated rationale was that this move was to keep residents safer by putting more officers on the streets (Benson, 2016).

Following the passage of the New Jersey Redevelopment Act 2013 which authorized billions of dollars in tax credits, tax abatements, and grants for corporations and medical and educational institutions, “meds and eds”, willing to relocate or expand in Camden, large amounts of Camden real estate along the Waterfront and Downtown areas have been purchased organizations like Holtec International, Subaru America, Connor, Strong & Buckelew, despite there being no mandate that these companies hire Camden residents or any community benefit agreement (Benson, 2016). Since 2013, the narrative has been, such drastic spending is worthwhile to Camden’s future revitalization “because jobs are coming to Camden (Basara, 2015).” Additionally, there has been precipitous increase in home prices in the Downtown area, coinciding with rising tax and rental rates, along with the lessened availability of low-income and affordable housing despite the reality that most residents cannot afford to purchase new market-rate homes, afford rising rental rates, and some have begun to be displaced (Steele, 2015).

Since the enacting of the previously mentioned changes in Camden public education, public safety, and economic development, a consistent narrative of a Camden renaissance and “Camden Rising” has permeated local media. And while local powerbrokers and politicians hail

these steps as evidence of a Camden comeback, it is the voices of Camden's low-income minority residents and those of middle-income prospective residents that have not been included and thereby, not fully understood.

Unlike prior research that examines urban school reform as a mechanism to influence urban residency in larger more middle-class friendly cities, this study seeks to examine how current residents, and targeted prospective Camden residents perceive the expanded school choice options in their decision to remain or move into Camden – a small to mid-size postindustrial city.

This qualitative study seeks to put residents' and prospective residents' perspectives at the center of this research pertaining to both expanded school choice through Renaissance schools and housing decisions. And while Camden, the most populous city in New Jersey south of Trenton is the single city of focus within this study, this research could provide a context by which policymakers in similarly situated localities make policy decisions relating to urban public education and urban residency.

Methodology

The marginalized, overwhelmingly low-income urban residents in Camden and prospective Camden residents often have decisions made on their behalf that may or may not reflect their wishes or desires. This study is designed to investigate and highlight Camden residents and prospective residents' interpretations of newly-arrived, state-imposed Renaissance schools, along with their future residency decisions in Camden.

Working Definitions

Prospective resident – a person expressing a true consideration of moving to Camden permanently within the next five years

Current resident – any person residing in Camden presently as their primary residence

Renaissance school – CMO-operated schools in Camden established through the Urban Hope Act of 2012

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to highlight the perspectives of Camden’s current residents, as well as prospective residents, who are rarely given the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes that impact them. The central question driving this study is:

1. How does the establishment of Renaissance schools influence current and prospective residents’ decision to move into, stay in, or leave Camden?

Research Design

As I am interested in how current Camden residents and prospective Camden residents factor expanded school choice in Camden offered through the establishment of state-mandated Renaissance schools into their future residency decisions, I seek to understand how these recent occurrences influence participants’ decision to reside in Camden. And in that this study’s purpose is predicated on understanding participants’ shared experiences, and their individual perceptions, a phenomenological qualitative study was most appropriate (Creswell, 2008).

Participants

Participants were drawn from both current Camden residents and prospective Camden residents. Following William A. Sampon’s methods for recruiting participants in his study of home environments of academically successful Black and Hispanic students (2002; 2003), I used local civic organizations and community establishments as the starting point for my participant recruitment efforts. During community meetings in each of the respective neighborhoods, I introduced myself and informed attendees about my study. I then asked that anyone who was

interested in participating to complete a brief questionnaire eliciting demographic and biographical information, and any redevelopment and education changes potential participants observed. Questionnaires were then collected. Initial data collection entailed attending civic group meetings in Camden's mostly Hispanic North Camden neighborhood; the mostly-Black Lanning Square, Downtown and Whitman Park neighborhoods; and the gentrifying Victor Building/Cooper's Grant neighborhoods.

I attended civic group meetings and community locations in the Lanning Square, North Camden, Whitman Park, and Downtown neighborhoods in that these are the neighborhoods where the first Renaissance schools were established, and I wanted to get a sense of how residents in those areas make sense of the new Renaissance schools operating in their respective communities, possibly even serving their children. I also selected the Victor Building/Cooper Grant neighborhood for research because that neighborhood is showing active signs of gentrification. It is a developing neighborhood with primarily middle-class renters and homeowners, and many upperclassmen and graduate students of a nearby public university live there in "off-campus" housing.

Camden County Council on Economic Opportunity, Inc. (Camden County OEO).
The Camden County OEO is a non-profit agency aimed at providing social supports for families living in Camden County. The agency itself provides help for low-income families in securing job training, child care, energy assistance, and employment. Because of the variety of services provided by the Camden County OEO, and its Broadway location in the Lanning Square section of Camden, the OEO building is a neighborhood hub for residents to discuss community concerns and issues. Through this agency, I was able to attract participants residing in Lanning Square for my study.

United Neighbors of Whitman Park (UNWP).

Located in the Whitman Park section of Camden, UNWP sits at the corner of Norris and Chase Streets and was established by former Camden Councilman Ali Sloan-El and Bill Nickens (Vargas, 2012). Offering free haircuts and summer lunches for local children, job training and employment opportunities for adults, UNWP embodies the true meaning of a community center. In 2009, out of the UNWP office Whitman Park resident Anthony Ways established Camden African Neighborhood Development Organization (CANDO) to forward the initial mission of UNWP by dedicating its energies to community development through community fellowship, personal health, and personal responsibility. CANDO sponsors adult night-time basketball leagues and softball leagues for men, as well as a kickball league for women. Additionally, CANDO offers seminars on HIV/AIDS, swimming, and job training to anyone willing to avail themselves to the organization and its services. Through this organization, I have been able to connect with, and find study participants from the Whitman Park neighborhood.

Respond, Inc.

Respond Inc., much like the Camden County OEO in Lanning Square, seeks to provide additional support to low-income residents in North Camden. Through providing childcare, affordable daycare programs for seniors, services for the homeless, and job training for youth and adults, Respond, Inc. is a non-profits agency that has been closely tied to its North Camden community for over 41 years. As an organization that has developed a lasting relationship with North Camden residents, and because of the variety of services Responds, Inc. avails to the community, many North Camden residents use Respond, Inc. facilities as a community meeting place to fellowship and receive aid. Here, introduced myself and my study to the North Camden

community and found participants from the neighborhood. Additionally, because many audience members were Spanish-speakers, I was accompanied by a Spanish-speaking translator.

Centerville Simbas Youth Football.

Centerville Simbas Football, founded in 1969 by long-time city residents and pillars of the community, Patrick Freeman, Dhamiri Abayomi, and Arnold Byrd to “provide strong male role models for many fatherless children” (Saul, 2016, pg. 1). Under the current direction of President Rashaan Hornsby and Vice President Balawa Scott, the Centerville Simbas is a citywide youth football organization that aims to improve academic outcomes and life trajectories of young boys through football. Though historically the Simbas attracted young men living in the Centerville section of Camden, today, the team comprises boys from throughout the city and many father-volunteers. Despite the recent national acclaim, the Simbas have achieved in recent years through repeatedly qualifying to participate in the Pop Warner National Championships in Orlando, it remains a Camden-centric community organization that serves boys from all over the city, and an institution in the city. The organization performs community service, holds fundraisers for a variety of interests, and thus, doubles as a Camden civic organization in addition to a football club. By presenting my study to the leadership of this historic football club, I was able to target, primarily, black males from all over the city who were interested in participating.

The Supper Club.

The Supper Club is a group initiated and facilitated by a local professor, Stephen Danley, and a web developer, Joseph Russell. The Supper Club seeks to get people together to fellowship while eating in some of the many Camden sit-in eateries. The Supper Club, going into its second year of existence is made up of primarily white career-track Camden expatriates, as well as

young professionals and college students (Paolino, 2015). The Supper Club convenes monthly dining sessions, and here, I was able to recruit Camden residents from the Victor Building/Cooper's Grant neighborhoods, and prospective Camden residents to participate in this study.

The only prerequisite for participation in this study was that participants identified themselves as over eighteen years old and, either current residents or prospective residents. There was no compensation for participation in this study.

Data Collection

As I am interested in how Renaissance schools and the expanded school choice it offers influences current Camden residents and prospective residents' residency decisions in the four different neighborhoods, I employed numerous qualitative data collection procedures.

Questionnaires

First, I presented the purpose of this study and issued flyers at community meetings throughout the city. From there, among those who expressed interest, I issued paper questionnaires for potential participants to complete consisting primarily of background and demographic questions. Questionnaires elicited respondents' demographic information, residential status, employment information, academic history, perception of Camden public schools, perceptions of municipal/governmental functions, perceptions of Camden quality of life, opinions of change within their neighborhood and Camden overall, and finally, and initial impressions of new Renaissance schools that have been established in their neighborhoods. While typically questionnaires are quantitative tools utilized to yield numeric depictions of attitudes and trends for a population sample participating in experiments, in this instance, they

were utilized to identify potential study participants (Creswell, 2009). I administered the questionnaires in person and collected them upon completion.

Following the collection and analysis of returned questionnaires, participants' information was sorted by neighborhood, in order to develop a neighborhood demographic snapshot and to ensure equal geographic representation among participants. The information was analyzed and entered into Dedoose. Only data from respondents identifying themselves as "eighteen and older," "current Camden residents" or "prospective Camden residents" were analyzed and entered. All responses entered remained anonymous. Information from those identifying themselves as "non-residents" and "non-prospective residents" were omitted and destroyed.

Upon collection of the questionnaires from respondents in person, I conducted purposeful sampling "intentionally to learn or understand the central phenomenon" (Creswell, 2008: p. 214) consisting of six respondents who identified themselves as either a "current Camden resident" or "prospective Camden resident" from each of the five civic groups to participate in my study consisting of focus group interviews and individual follow-up interviews. Purposeful or purposive sampling in this study was appropriate in that is a method "widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest" (Palinkas, Horvitz, Green, Wisdom, Hoagwood & Duan, 2013, pg. 1). I chose six participants from each civic organization, for a total of thirty participants, because I wanted equal representation from across neighborhoods in order to capture participants' perspectives of Renaissance schools and recent Camden development projects which may vary depending on where participants lived or planned on living. In seeking to maintain a balance in neighborhood

participation, I selected respondents to participate in our neighborhood focus groups to represent the spectrum of neighborhoods, ethnicities, academic statuses, income, gender, and ages.

Focus Group Participant Breakdown

After selecting which thirty respondents would participate further in the focus group interviews, eleven black Camden residents or prospective residents participated; ten Hispanic residents or prospective Hispanic residents participated; nine white Camden residents or prospective residents participated. The age range across focus group participants was from 18 to 83. Seventeen out of thirty focus group participants had school-aged children in Camden public or charter schools, and thirteen participants had either no children or children who had aged out of K-12 schooling. Twenty-one of thirty focus group participants self-identified as current Camden residents, and nine identified themselves as prospective Camden residents. Eleven of the thirty focus group participants graduated college, with nineteen participants having less than a bachelor's degree. Twelve of the thirty participants identified themselves as middle class, with eighteen participants self-identifying as working class or low-income.

Focus groups

Following the collection and analysis of questionnaires, I used purposeful sampling of six respondents per neighborhood, of varying demographics, ethnic, economic, and residential backgrounds to conduct a two focus group sessions per neighborhood of residence (six residents per neighborhood group; three residents at most per focus group). I employed the use of focus groups to interview a larger group at once, retrieve more data, and with the supposition that a less rigid structure would create a more conversational atmosphere among participants and allow for the collection of a "shared understanding about a phenomena" (Creswell, 2009; p. 226) exploring participants' views about living in Camden, public education in Camden, and their

views of the new Renaissance schools along with recent Camden revitalization efforts. Focus groups are also an effective mechanism in creating an atmosphere of common-ness in sharing and struggle, particularly for frequently marginalized and silenced groups (Pompper, 2007). Focus groups for this study were held at Camden neighborhood eateries, Little Slice of New York Pizzeria near the Rutgers-Camden campus, Corrine's Place in Parkside, and San Juan's Comida in East Camden. For the focus groups, I secured a portion of the venue and provided food to help facilitate a comfortable and conversational environment (Drake, 2013). The duration of each focus group interview was 2-2.5 hours. During the interviews, I used a semi-structured interview protocol asking few pre-scripted questions of the group while taking field notes regarding participant responses and an audio recorder to capture the conversation accurately. Data in the form of note-taking and audio recording was collected and transcribed. As I am not a fluent speaker of Spanish, I had an interpreter accompany me and serve as a translator for the Cooper's Poynt and East Camden focus groups, though their services were unneeded. Comments captured during the interview were attributed to the speaker, then coded using Dedoose. With two focus groups conducted per neighborhood, there were eight focus group events in all.

Individual Interviews

Finally, I employed purposeful sampling, targeting four focus group participants per neighborhood to be interviewed individually, for a total of sixteen individual interviews. Each interview lasted 1 to 1.5 hours and took place in participants' environment of choice which included their homes, places of work, coffee shops, and in one instance, on the street outside of a barbershop in the rain. Individual interviewing was employed after all neighborhood focus groups interviews were completed to glean more in-depth, and thoughtful interpretations of participants' conceptions and perspectives on Renaissance schools and recent Camden

development (Creswell, 2009). During the interviews, I explored participants' histories and experiences living in Camden, what influences participants' decision regarding where to reside, what factors would facilitate living in Camden in the future, or leaving, and their opinions of Camden gentrification and redevelopment. I took and recorded notes manually, in addition to recording the interview electronically. The interviews were then be transcribed, and coded for analysis.

Confidentiality

Because of the sensitive nature of this topic, which potentially involves participants identifying family members, government officials, and employers negatively, all respondents were assured as to the confidentiality of their responses. Further, all participants were given pseudonyms to ensure participants' anonymity.

Data Analysis Procedures

Qualitative Analysis

To analyze the qualitative data of written responses to questionnaires, data retrieved from focus group interviews, and from individual interviews, I first entered responses from respondents and participants in Dedoose from only those who reported being "over eighteen" and a "Camden resident" or "prospective Camden resident." Next, after transcribing the focus group interviews and individual interviews, and where needed, I employed member checking by scheduling follow-up meetings or phone calls as a safeguard against misinterpretation and, in some instances, to gain clarity. Harper and Cole (2012) write, "member-checking continues to be an important quality control process in qualitative research assuring the course of a study, participants receive the opportunity to review their statements for accuracy" (p. 511). After the member-checking process, I entered transcriptions and notes I generated during both focus group

and individual interview sessions into Dedoose for more targeted analysis and to begin the coding process. Codes such as “prospective Camden resident,” “current Camden resident,” “Camden in the future,” “policy beneficiaries,” and “decision-makers” were established for organization and grouping purposes. The coding process in this study was critical as it allowed me to create a framework where I could organize and chunk entered data so that I could begin to form a larger narrative emerging across recurring themes that would speak to my initial research questions (Creswell, 2009).

Finally, after the coding process, I developed memos that explicitly connected common themes; then I used the collection of codes and emergent themes that addressed my initial research questions and developed conclusions based on the data set. The unit of analysis and data was the voices and perspectives of the oft-marginalized Camden community (Pompper, 2007; Hon, 1995; Harding 2009) and prospective Camden residents.

Researcher Positionality

As a black male Camden resident, and former secondary teacher in CCSD schools who is concerned about matters of social justice, democracy in public education, education reform and urban revitalization, I am motivated to investigate the perspectives and interpretations of both residents and prospective residents of Camden concerning Renaissance schools and their housing decisions. Further because of my frequent presence at Camden community events, both recreational and social justice-oriented, I was able to easily access Camden residents who ordinarily are marginalized from decision-making processes. Finally, as a black male in his mid-thirties, with visible tattoos, and physically looks much like other Camden residents, presenting myself and this study to civic groups and individuals, likely, was greeted with little detectable suspicion and an overwhelming welcome-ness to participate from groups and individuals.

To mitigate my biases and to ensure validity for my qualitative study, I triangulated coded information and participant review of data, compiling of thick, rich description. I also cross-checked data with participants to maintain the accuracy of data where confusion in meaning and intent arose (Creswell, 2009).

Findings

Suspicion from Current Residents

The central findings in this study were that of suspicion among current residents that new Renaissance schools and the expanded choice options they offered in Camden were not intended to improve education for Camden's current students. Most residents believed Renaissance schools were nothing more than a broader contemporary attempt to attract non-Camden residents, mainly middle-class white people.

Further, current residents were suspicious of the concept that expanded school choice in Camden was initiated to benefit themselves and other residents by anchoring current families in the city by offering these new "high-quality" choice options. Most current residents in this study communicated their living in Camden has little to do with school quality at all, but primarily based on the city's affordability and their emotional connection to Camden. No current Camden residents believed new Renaissance schools and the expanded school choice are a sufficient anchor for current residents.

Of the thirty people interviewed in focus group and individual interviews, twenty-nine expressed varying degrees of doubt concerning Renaissance schools' ability to attract prospective residents or retain current residents. Harry, a forty-something low-income, black high school graduate and current resident of the Parkside neighborhood in Camden:

Get this, they're bringing in KIPP, Mastery, and Uncommon. These people actually brag about being 'no-excuses'? My thing is how does 'no-excuses' improve education and

who would send their child to a school like that? Did you know they give demerits for not wearing the right color uniform, chewing gum, and talking in the hallway? They would never put a school like this in the suburbs. And what are they gonna do educationally besides focus on testing? I'm not sending my kid to those schools that's for sure.

Harry's remarks demonstrated a similar refrain among participants lamenting the educational change being forced on to Camden and its residents. Though Renaissance schools were rationalized as an educational need and improvement for Camden, the implementation of no-excuse charter schools as the embodiment of educational change was commonly scrutinized, and at times, outright rejected by both current and prospective residents.

Ted, Ms. Pat, and Mr. Fussell, during a focus group for the Lanning Square neighborhood, contributed their views. Ted is a black, current resident in his late thirties, and a business owner in the construction field. Ms. Pat is an elderly black woman in her sixties and a counselor at the Camden County OEO facility for women. Mr. Fussell is an elderly black man in his eighties who owns a barbershop in the Lanning Square neighborhood. While Ted is childless, Ms. Pat and Mr. Fussell, also current residents, both have adult children who have aged out of the public-school system long ago. On residential decisions and the establishment of Renaissance schools, Fred replied:

These Renaissance schools make no difference to me at all. I don't have kids... All this means nothing to me. I plan on leaving Camden within the next five years anyway because the business climate here for black [owned] businesses is toxic... I'm a resident, lived here all my life, graduated from here, started a business here, hire residents that live here and all that. You would think that the city would want to promote what I'm doing and have me involved in all this redevelopment. But nope. It only goes to those firms with political connections so I'm out of here... probably to Charlotte or Raliegh or something.

Ted, a childless current resident expressed the expansion of school choice in Camden does not influence where he chooses to live in the future at all. Instead, Ted is primarily

concerned with the lack of business opportunities in Camden which is influencing him to consider moving elsewhere. Again, perceptions of school quality, or the presence of school options in Camden is not a factor to this current resident in determining to stay in or leave Camden.

Ms. Pat, agreeing the establishment of Renaissance schools does not impact her residential decisions, added:

All my kids graduated from Camden public schools. They weren't perfect or without issues, but overall, I didn't have problems with my children going to Camden schools. They all graduated and went to college and are doing pretty well. My daughter still lives here and her daughter goes to Sumner [Elementary School] here. I heard about these new schools [Renaissance schools] coming here and taking over, but this is not an issue that affects or impacts me at all...And this is not the change I'm interested in. I care about all these prostitutes walking up and down the street, and the cops just riding by like they don't know what's going on... I'm concerned about my taxes going up. I don't make a lot of money and I live around the corner here [in Lanning Square], and I can't afford it anymore. I really am planning on moving down to Virginia with my sister within the next year because my city taxes keep going up and I've been here all my life and haven't seen anything like this.

Mr. Fussell concurred speaking:

All this, this doesn't impact my decision on where to live in the slightest, and I doubt it will really impact anyone else's decision really. The bottom line is this: people live in the best place they can afford. Most of the people live in Camden for a two reasons, they either choose to because of some emotional or family attachment to this place, or they can't afford to live anywhere else. I see them trying get white people to move here, but these schools aren't gonna be enough to get them here.

For residents Ms. Pat and Mr. Fussell, presumably because they both have adult children, the presence of Renaissance schools does not impact their respective decisions on whether to stay in, or leave Camden at all. In the case of Ms. Pat, the establishment of Renaissance schools, along with other Camden redevelopment projects, are actually negatively impacting her ability to stay in Camden because of her rising taxes. Mr. Fussell offered a profound argument that is

rarely acknowledged when discussing people's residential decisions pertaining to Camden; that people live in Camden because of an emotional connection with the city, or because it is one of the few localities in New Jersey current residents can afford.

To Ted, Ms. Pat, and Mr. Fussell, the establishing of Renaissance schools and local Camden public school quality, have no bearing on their decision to reside in Camden in the future.

Ms. Nancy is a parent of a child who attends a Renaissance school currently. Ms. Nancy is a Latina in her late forties, currently unemployed, and a longtime resident of Camden in the Cramer Hill neighborhood. In our individual interview, she explained that she did not necessarily "choose" Mastery Charter [a new Renaissance school], but her son attends the school because the former public East Camden Middle School he attended was taken over by Mastery Charter while he was a student. When asked about whether Renaissance schools made her want to stay in Camden as a resident longer, she replied:

Not at all. Even though my son goes to Mastery, that's not the reason I'm staying here. I own this house – straight out. I only have to pay my taxes and my bills. I don't have to pay any mortgage, and I don't rent. I know its [her home] not much...It's not a mansion or anything like that, but it's mine and I can afford it. Why would I leave and to start all over again?

Ms. Nancy, though having a child currently attending a Renaissance school, offered flatly that the presence of the Renaissance school has no impact on her staying in Camden in the future. In communicating that her home is paid off, and as a result, has no plans of moving anywhere, Ms. Nancy conveys her decision to reside in Camden is primarily based on personal economics, not the state of Camden education.

Longtime Camden resident Tianna, a black female working as a clerk at a local public high school, is in her late thirties, graduated from Camden High School and attended Camden

public schools her entire schooling career. At present, she is working her way through a nursing program to earn more money, and has three children. Tianna's daughter is the oldest and recently graduated from Camden High School and both of her sons attend Camden High School.

Pertaining to school quality and her residential decisions, Tianna offered:

I'm still here because I love my city. I have hope for my city. And my both my sons did attend charter schools, D.U.E. Season which is now closed... And they keep advertising these Renaissance schools, but if they take over the district the way people are saying they are trying to do, to make sure these Renaissance schools are here, I would move out before I send my kids to one of them. My kids have all gone here [Camden High School] and all are on track to graduate and go to college so we're fine with or without these new charters [Renaissance schools].

Here, current Camden resident Tiana expressed that though she has sent her children to charter schools in the past, the emergence of Renaissance schools which, in her view, can threaten the future of Camden public schools would be a reason to move out of Camden. Expressing love for her city as the primary motivation for her staying in Camden, Tiana's perspective challenges the oft-repeated narrative that people move out of Camden because of the school system.

Shaheed, a fellow alum of a local high school, and son of a Camden public school teacher is in his mid-forties and works in healthcare as a social worker. A college graduate and Camden resident, Shaheed offered a different take regarding Camden schools and his residential decisions:

Man, I'm a tell you like this, I been planning on moving out of Camden... And the only reason I haven't so far is because I bleed purple and gold [school colors of Shaheed's alma mater] and I played football here and I want my son to finish his playing here too. If it wasn't for him going to Camden High, I woulda been out. Plus, he's doing well. He's on the honor roll and all that, but as soon as he graduates, I'm out of here.

Less attention in urban education and urban planning research is dedicated to the possibility that pride and devotion to residents' local school public system influences people to stay within city limits. Shaheed communicated that a sense of pride and tradition in Camden's schools is a reason to stay in the city rather than move out (Benson, 2017). A departure from the arching narrative concerning "failing" urban public schools and urban residency, from Shaheed's perspective, Camden's public schools are reason to stay.

Skepticism from Prospective Residents

The next finding was categorized as skepticism on the part of prospective Camden residents. Prospective Camden residents were not convinced that expanded school choice could lure or attract individuals similarly situated to themselves; middle-class, college-educated, and "professional". While most clearly recognized the changes in Camden concerning more businesses relocating to the city, and the increase of job opportunities through the expansion of "meds and eds" and a larger presence of anchor institutions, prospective residents did not believe expanded school choice could make up for other "quality of life" concerns they, and others like them, have. Prospective residents in this study believed more pressing issues confronting Camden including concentrated generational poverty, crime, and the lack of suburban amenities like retail stores, restaurants, bike paths, and grocery stores were even more primary issues preventing them from moving to the city long term.

Further, many of the skeptical prospective residents who were willing to consider moving to Camden despite its dearth of middle-class niceties communicated being mostly turned off at the pedagogical approaches offered in each of Camden's Renaissance schools. Some expressed deep concerns over their "no-excuses" pedagogy centered on student compliance and test

preparation, while others overtly communicated that if living in Camden meant their children had to attend a Renaissance school, they'd prefer not living in the city at all. And finally, other prospective residents did not believe expanded school choice could make up for all the concerns prospective residents would have in taking up permanent residence among such apparent poverty; particularly of the prospective resident was white.

While affirmative assumptions concerning the efficacy of expanded school choice in Camden could anchor current residents and attract targeted non-residents has been posited by lawmakers and political operatives, but among study participants however, there was much less certainty.

Robin, a white working-class social worker in her fifties, lives in the Fairview section of the city. She acknowledged the concerns some families have regarding Camden's public schools, but at the same time questioned whether expanded school choice embodied in Renaissance schools could attract white, non-residents who have concerns about living in Camden with their children:

I know white people just like me who fully believed in wanting to live here and be part of the community, but as soon as they had kids, they bolted right out. But for them [policymakers] to believe that these schools are a solution for outsiders to move here, I just don't see it. I would say that's a lot of faith to put on any school... to think that people would move or feel comfortable moving to Camden in part because of new schools (pauses)... Schools were not really at the forefront of my mind when I thought about moving here. But then again, I don't have any kids. But I believe people are more concerned about safety, high poverty, and...kinda just being white and living here.

Robin, expressed the willingness of other white residents to reside in Camden conceptually, but were dissuaded from their original plans because of their expressed anxieties about the city's public school system. Still, she was skeptical that the establishing of Renaissance schools would be viewed as a solution that would allay white residents' educational concerns.

Further, Robin identified other issues plaguing Camden that may be more apparent in white residents's mind when deciding to move to, or stay in, Camden.

Prospective Camden residents, Rebecca, Ryan, and Josie of the gentrified Victor Building/Cooper Grant neighborhoods are all in their late 20's to early 30's, earn middle-class incomes, and are without children. Rebecca, who is white, is also a teacher at a progressive elementary school in a surrounding suburb. Ryan is a white male, who is finishing up graduate school and grew up in nearby Cherry Hill. Josie is a Latina who works in advising at a nearby university, and although she grew up in Camden, did public schools in Camden up until the 8th grade and has not permanently lived in the city since leaving for college nearly a decade ago. During focus groups, despite being neighbors and earning similar incomes, these participants voiced divergent opinions pertaining to Renaissance schools' and broader school choices' ability to keep them here permanently. Josie commented:

There are public schools in Camden I'd be interested in trying out once I have children that age, but if I'm dissatisfied, I like the fact that I have options here including Renaissance schools... I mean I like the idea of what I hear about Renaissance schools, and I think, if I'm not satisfied with any of the public schools, and I'm not able to establish my own school by then, I could see me sending my child to a Renaissance school, but as for the schools impacting where I live, I don't know about that. There are many factors that influence my decision on where I live. Primarily, proximity to where I work. I just happen to live really close to where I work. But if I find a better paying job somewhere else, we're all [future family] moving. Renaissance school or no Renaissance school.

Josie's comments communicate that though she may be interested in Renaissance schools in the future as an alternative to Camden's public schools, the establishment of such schools has little bearing on where she and her family will reside in the future. Instead, Josie's residential decisions are based more on the proximity of where she works. Again, Josie's views challenge the popular conception that people opt to live in neighborhoods where there are good school

systems as the determining factor in their residential decisions. Josie's perspective indicates that school systems, whether viewed negatively or positively by potential residents is not, universally, a deciding factor and that people make decisions on where they live for a variety of non-school related reasons.

Ryan added:

With the neighborhoods looking how they look I can't see how that would work. Honestly. That's pinning a lot of hope on a school because there's so many other factors. I can see if the school was put together really well, and offered a remarkable education, and experiences... Literally, I can't see people moving in [to Camden] for it [Renaissance schools].

He continued:

Look around here. Where are the places for people to sit and eat? After 5'o clock during the work week, this area [Camden's Downtown] is a ghost town. How's that gonna attract anyone like me or my friends? What's here for us. Sure, we have no problem coming here to work or go to school but living here is much different. I guess they figure that anyone like me that chooses to live here could just go to Philly if they wanted something to do, but...I just I couldn't see moving to Camden with my family, and the new Renaissance schools have little influence on that decision.

Ryan's comments echoed the skepticism that Renaissance schools would be viewed as an educational improvement sufficient enough to attract other white middle-class professionals like himself. Here, Ryan like Josie indicated that his decisions on where to live in the future is contingent on many other non-education related factors.

Rebecca interjected by challenging the pedagogy offered within Renaissance schools, arguing that alone would deter her from permanently moving to Camden because of the schools.

She commented:

Absolutely not!... When hell freezes over, that's when I'd send my child to a Renaissance school. If anything, with all the Renaissance schools propping up, it actually makes it more likely that I'd move out of Camden because there is no way I'd send my kids to a school whose primary concern is testing and discipline. That's not to say that I don't have concerns about Camden's public schools; I do. But I would rather send my kids there [a Camden public school] or to a

Catholic school, but certainly not a Renaissance school. And the idea that people like me [middle-class whites] would be attracted to charter schools like these enough to draw us here or keep us here is laughable.

Like other participants, Rebecca was critical of the brand of educational change being established in Camden through Renaissance schools, noting her dissatisfaction with their pedagogical approach. Further, she acknowledged having concerns about Camden's public schools, but at the same time saw Renaissance schools as type of school she would actively avoid enrolling her children in. In Rebecca's view, Renaissance schools are a deterrent to her becoming a permanent Camden resident.

Liev, a white middle-class college professor in his mid-thirties and prospective Camden resident, also of the Victor Building/Cooper Grant Neighborhood, echoed similar skepticism about whether Renaissance schools could change outsiders' perception of Camden education enough to attract people to move to Camden. Liev remarked:

I always talked to friends and family about buying a home in Camden and they think I'm crazy, sometimes, even my fiancé does too. We're debating about moving here [permanently] because we're getting married soon and thinking about having kids, but I think sometimes...what are my kids gonna be doing here? What's here for them amongst all this concentrated poverty? I do know for a fact that there are public schools I'd like to send my kids to here, and I know I'd be fine living here. But I'm an adult. I wonder about putting my child in the situation where he would be the only white kid in the entire school. I wonder that because I know I won't be sending my children to KCNA[KIPP Cooper Norcross Academy], but at the same time...I don't know if any of these Renaissance Charters are any way to attract outsiders to feel comfortable about education here. With the exception of KCNA, the others [Mastery and UnCommon] are 'no-excuse', 'drill and kill' schools that serve only poor black and Hispanic students. White parents would not send their kids to these schools, but I'm sure some medical students at the school [Rowan Medical School] would send their kids to KCNA, but I'm not sure many more non-Camden residents would be attracted to live here because of these schools at all. There's certain things that matter to me and my fiancé like having a place to walk our dog, a place to kinda go and just hang out. Yeah, Philadelphia is right over the bridge, but that gets old. We want greenspace...walkability, stuff Camden seems still a long way away from.

Liev, while communicating his desire to live in Camden in future, and having demographic concerns about sending his children to Camden's public schools, would be open to the idea of enrolling his children in public schools. Further, he was skeptical that establishing Renaissance schools are a suitable approach to attract middle-class white professionals to Camden via education noting that "no-excuse" charter schools are often intended exclusively for black and Hispanic children. His views that white parents would not send their children to Renaissance schools except for KCNA challenges the idea that greater expansion of choice options, alone, is an attraction to other prospective Camden residents like him.

Of the thirty people interviewed for this study, only Rashawn, a middle-class, college educated, black male and current resident in his early thirties with two young sons responded that the emergence of Renaissance schools influenced his decision to stay in Camden in the future.

Rashawn offered:

Yes, Renaissance schools do impact my decision to stay in Camden because I have been looking for a good school for my sons. And when I mean a good school I mean a school where the bathrooms are clean, have soap in the bathrooms. Where they have a good curriculum, and teachers that care. My wife and me have been debating more and more about what we are going to do without living situation as our boys get older because we didn't want them going to Camden public schools. Now we have this alternative.

Rashawn's view that Renaissance schools did positively impact the likelihood of him residing in Camden was the outlier in the study. Consistent with other findings in an abundant body of research, middle class Rashawn was encouraged by the growing number of educational options in Camden in that, in his view, he can find a good school for his children in Camden where, before, he and his wife were considering relocating to avoid the city's public schools. With respect to the idea that current and prospective Camden residents view Renaissance schools, an alternative to Camden public schools, as a sufficient anchor to retain current Camden

residents and attract prospective residents, the majority of study participants viewed that concept as unlikely. Though common in academic literature and popular understanding holds that people move near “good schools”, and that increasing urban schooling options coincides with an increasing population of middle-class residents, among current Camden residents, it appears residency decisions are primarily determined by non-education related factors like household economics, affordability, and emotional ties to the city. Further, while there was near unanimous degrees of disinterest and skepticism concerning the ability of broader school choice through Renaissance schools to from the study’s prospective residents. Additionally, among some participants, the continued proliferation of Renaissance schools seemed to have an adverse impact on their decision to continue to reside, or permanently take up residence, in Camden by influencing them to leave the city with their families.

Discussion

In this study, participants discussed their views concerning whether Renaissance schools were a sufficient attraction to lure prospective Camden residents, or retain current Camden residents. For many participants, the overwhelming response was one of suspicion or skepticism, in that prospective residents viewed the Renaissance schools as an ineffective method to change Camden public education that would not alter their decision to move to Camden permanently with their future families and children. Further, for most current Camden residents, the establishing of Renaissance schools, is not a factor at all in influencing their decision to continue to live in Camden, except for one participant. Such consistent agreement among participants who either live in Camden currently, and middle-class prospective Camden residents who presumably Camden is trying to attract, presents a more complex narrative concerning the presence of school choice within as an attraction mechanism and in what context.

A rich body of research suggests a linkage in residential neighborhood choice and local school quality (Patterson & Silverman, 2013). Further, many assumptions have been made regarding the links between “good schools” and “good neighborhoods”, and “failing schools” and “bad neighborhoods”, with the presence of “poor schools” in Camden, like other urban areas, being blamed as a primary culprit sustaining resident flight from the city, and middle-class aversion from residing within cities today (Grooms & Williams, 2013). The offering of selective public schooling (magnet schools) and broader school choice options in urban areas across the country, has been a tactic employed by state and local governments seeking to offer the specter of improved urban education through exclusivity and school choice intended to draw middle class millennials, retain urban middle class residents, in order to increase city homeownership and municipal tax revenue (Cucchiara, Gold & Simon, 2011; Grooms & Williams, 2013; Roda, 2013).

While some larger, more cosmopolitan cities like Charlotte, Harlem, Brooklyn, Chicago, and Philadelphia have seen the implementation of school choice increase homeownership and local development in isolated areas (Danielson, Harrison & Zhao, 2014; Patrick, 2015), participants in this study offer a bleak picture with respect of similar results in Camden, a small post-industrial city that lacks the amenities of larger, more cosmopolitan cities. Current residents, mainly, expressed the desire to stay in Camden out of a sense of love and emotional connection to the city. Thus, many current residents, both with children and without, expressed the growing presence of Renaissance schools and school choice had no influence on their decision to stay in Camden in the future. Prospective residents expressed the imposition of “no-excuse” Renaissance charters does not necessarily improve education in their view, and therefore does not provide any incentive for them to move to Camden permanently.

Additionally, prospective residents, overall, reported being chiefly concerned with Camden quality of life issues including crime, poverty, and the lack of suburban amenities. Further, pertaining to expanded school choice in Camden intended to lure similar people to move to Camden permanently, many reported being turned-off by Renaissance schools' "no-excuses" pedagogical approach. Many expressed that the type of choice offered by Renaissance schools, is the kind of school choice they would actively avoid, and even deter them from moving to the city. Thus, it appears the imposition of Renaissance schools as a mechanism to attract people to Camden through offering "more high-quality options" (Rouhanifard, 2015), or to retain residents who are believed to move from the city to find better schools for their children, is insufficient.

This study illustrates how offering of more school choice in urban areas factors into individual's housing decisions is more complicated than current research suggests. It seems the size and characteristics of urban localities matter, and other non-education related are prominent in the minds of prospective residents when considering moving to an area permanently; and indeed, the kind of choice schools offered can, potentially repel targeted prospective residents from moving into urban areas – counter to policymakers' intentions. Further, while conventional wisdom holds that many urban residents, and families move from inner-cities in search of greener educational pastures for their children, it may be possible that urban schools that are often publicly demeaned as deficient and "failing", may influence urban residents to stay put. The complexity of school choice and urban residency is apparent and forces researchers and policymakers to question long-accepted notions and certainly warrants further study.

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