

Moms more likely than dads to favor both school diversity and neighborhood schools

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In the first empirical study on gender and school assignment, researchers find that mothers are more likely than fathers to favor both school diversity and so-called neighborhood schools. The study also finds that mothers are more likely to be concerned about challenges, dangers and uncertainty related to school assignments.

"Our threshold question was whether there were gender differences among parents toward their children's public school assignments - and we found clear differences," says Toby Parcel, a professor of sociology at North Carolina State University and lead author of a paper on the research.

"This is the first time researchers have measured, in an empirical way, how school assignment concerns break down along gender lines," Parcel says. "And it gives us a deeper, fundamental understanding of parental concerns about schooling."

For the study, researchers analyzed survey data from 547 parents of children in Wake County (N.C.) Public Schools. Survey participants were split about evenly between men and women.

"We found that mothers were more pro-diversity and more supportive of neighborhood schools than fathers, regardless of any other variables - such as race, education, income or political affiliation," Parcel says. "This highlights the policy challenges facing [school administrators](#), who often have to find a balance between promoting school diversity and

drawing a school population from its immediate neighborhood."

The researchers also found that mothers were more concerned than fathers about potential logistical challenges a school reassignment might pose, were more fearful that a reassignment may harm a child's learning or friendships, and were more uncertain about the likelihood of a child being reassigned to a different school.

"We do know that school boards do take these concerns into account," Parcel says. "For example, in Wake County, these concerns have slowed down the rate, and limited the number, of school reassignments."

Parcel notes that while this study focused on one North Carolina county, the underlying variables that the researchers examined are broadly applicable to other parts of the United States.

The study highlighted another area of potential interest for future research.

"We think the work of making school choices - such as choosing among public, private, charter, magnet and home-schooling options - is significant; it takes time, effort and emotional energy," Parcel says. "And it's an understudied area. We'd like to see questions about this incorporated into national surveys that focus on the division of household labor."

The paper, "'How Far is Too Far?' Gender, Emotional Capital and Children's Public School Assignments," is published in the journal *Socius*. The paper was co-authored by Andy Taylor of NC State and Joshua Hendrix, a former Ph.D. student at NC State, now at RTI International.

More information: T. L. Parcel et al, "How Far Is Too Far?": Gender,

Emotional Capital, and Childrens Public School Assignments, *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World* (2016). [DOI: 10.1177/2378023116669955](https://doi.org/10.1177/2378023116669955)

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