ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation:	THERE GOES THE NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOL: TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF GENTRIFICATION'S EFFECTS ON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
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The growing presence of middle-class families in urban neighborhoods and schools has catalyzed interdisciplinary investigations designed to investigate the transformative promises and challenges of gentrification for public education. This three-article dissertation expands our understanding of school gentrification through complementary, qualitative investigations designed to understand the meanings and implications of demographic and cultural changes for urban schools.

Study 1, "Responding to Gentrification: Navigating School-Family Partnerships Amid Demographic Change," draws on data collected through a multisite case study of three elementary schools in Washington, DC to investigate how school staff respond to gentrification. This study foregrounds the perspectives of 21 school staff members (i.e., teachers, administrators, support staff, and external partners) and finds that staff members recognized the potential of gentrification to

alter their school's existing cultures and implemented several strategies to promote inclusive school-family partnerships. This study's findings suggest that when school staff are intentional about equity, they can minimize the marginalization and exclusion of longtime resident parents in gentrifying school communities.

Study 2, "School Gentrification and the Ecologies of Parent Engagement," adds to the growing conversation about middle-class parents' engagement in gentrifying schools. This study foregrounds the perspectives of 17 middle-class parents and finds that their experiences in and perceptions of gentrification influenced their motivations for and practices to engage in their children's schools. This study's findings reveal the potential of collectively-oriented middle-class engagement to improve the experiences of all students and families in gentrifying schools.

Study 3, "What's Best for my Child, What's Best for the City: Values and Tensions in Parent Gentrifiers' Middle and High School Selection Processes," draws on retrospective interviews with a sample of 20 parent gentrifiers to understand how families select secondary schools for their children. Although interviewed parents espoused many civically-oriented values that might suggest an automatic preference for neighborhood schools, just two of the interviewed parents had children enrolled in these schools during the study's focal year. This study's findings reveal critical differences between elementary and secondary schooling decisions and reveal the limits of civic values in informing parent gentrifiers' schooling decisions.

THERE GOES THE NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOL:

TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF GENTRIFICATION'S EFFECTS ON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

by

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Introduction

I met Jeff[1] at a coffee shop in downtown Washington, DC on a rainy morning in summer 2019. For almost an hour, Jeff walked me through his family's decision to move to an "up-and-coming" neighborhood in the northeastern section of the city and his process for choosing schools for his two daughters. That fall, his oldest daughter would start fifth grade at a public charter middle school more than six miles from the family's home. While home prices in Jeff's neighborhood surpassed the half-million-dollar mark and the neighborhood elementary school showed signs of improvement, the neighborhood middle school still received the lowest rating on the Office of the State Superintendent's (OSSE) school rating system. Like many parents that I interviewed, Jeff's firm belief in the importance of investing in neighborhood schools exists in tension with his desire to do what he thinks is best for his children. Reflecting on his family's decision, he observed: "I'm being hypocritical here. I could choose to send my daughter to the local school and put all of my resources and energy into making the school the best that it can be. But it takes more than one. It takes a community."

Jeff's comments and the tensions he navigates underscore gentrification's promises and challenges for urban neighborhoods and schools. For some education leaders and policymakers, the growth of middle-class families in gentrifying neighborhoods represents an opportunity for school improvement (Byrne, 2003;

[1] A pseudonym.

Stillman, 2012). Researchers have found that middle-class families frequently work to improve schools in gentrifying communities, often to make these schools suitable options for their children (Posey-Maddox et al., 2014b). Yet, gentrification processes may exacerbate inequities across schools as middle-class families coalesce around and invest in schools with a critical mass of families "like them" (Anderson, 2012). Once middle-class parents have selected schools, their very presence can shift the politics of schools as administrators, teachers, and parents, both gentrifying and longtime resident parents, negotiate their respective interests.

Scholars studying the intersection of gentrification and public education have generated valuable insights about macro-level processes that facilitate the transformation of urban schools (e.g., Cucchiara, 2013; Makris & Brown, 2017; Smith & Stovall, 2008), how middle-class parents select schools (e.g., Nelson, 2018; Roda, 2018), and the promises and challenges of middle-class parent engagement (e.g., Billingham & Kimelberg, 2013; Cucchiara & Horvat, 2009; Posey-Maddox, 2014). Although this work has been vital for understanding how gentrification manifests in schools and its impact on incumbent populations, usually economically disadvantaged families of color, questions remain about the process. Indeed, much of what we know about gentrification and schools draws from studies that center on the perspectives of gentrifiers and, more specifically, White parent gentrifiers (Quarles & Butler, 2018). Similarly, few studies have investigated how school-level staff members respond to changing demographics within the context of gentrification. Finally, much of the school gentrification literature centers on this process at the elementary level, when parents are most willing to try their neighborhood schools

(Kimelberg, 2014b; Posey-Maddox et al., 2014b). Addressing these methodological gaps is critical for developing a complete understanding of the promises and challenges of gentrification for public education.

This dissertation builds on the insights generated by prior studies of school gentrification, a process characterized by growing numbers of middle-class families in urban schools, improvements to school's infrastructure and educational programming, changes to school climates, and the marginalization and exclusion of economically disadvantaged students and families (Posey-Maddox et al., 2014a). I leverage data collected through three complementary qualitative investigations designed to understand the meanings and implications of demographic and cultural changes for urban schools. Individually, the chapters generate critical insights about the politics of school-family partnerships (Chapter 2), the promises and challenges of middle-class parent engagement (Chapter 3), and how parent gentrifiers choose secondary schools for their children (Chapter 4). Collectively, this dissertation brings to the fore the perspectives of actors who are currently underrepresented in the existing research on school gentrification, including school-level staff (i.e., teachers, administrators, and support staff), minoritized gentrifiers and middle-class longtime residents, and parent gentrifiers with middle- and high school-aged children. At its core, this dissertation seeks to understand the transformative processes and challenges of gentrification for urban schools to inform strategies to build inclusive communities for students and their families.

Why Washington, DC?

The empirical chapters that comprise this dissertation investigate the transformative promises and challenges of gentrification for public schools in Washington, DC, a city that has experienced multiple cycles of disinvestment, redefinition, and revitalization (Asch & Musgrove, 2015). Washington, DC is a favorable location to study school gentrification processes. The availability of jobs in both the private and public sectors has long made the city appealing to young professionals (Asch & Musgrove, 2015). The city was left relatively unscathed by the 2008 recession, which further cemented the city's status as a destination for college graduates (Brown-Robertson et al., 2013). Although revitalization of the city's downtown had been underway for decades, government officials and private developers seized on an opportunity to accelerate the redevelopment of the city's central business districts and, gradually, neighborhoods across the city (Brown-Robertson et al., 2013; Hyra, 2017).

Public education has been a key lever in the city's revitalization (Wilson, 2015). The city has long been a site of market-based education reforms, including expanded school choice (Jenkins, 2020). Intra-district choice within the District of Columbia Public Schools System (DCPS) and a large public charter sector offer residents an array of schooling options. Although evidence of a causal relationship is mixed, researchers hypothesize that expanded school choice may facilitate gentrification by decoupling the relationship between housing and schooling decisions (Jordan & Gallagher, 2015; Pearman & Swain, 2017). Education officials in the city have leveraged choice to attract and retain families by funding new charter

schools in “strategic neighborhoods” (Office of the State Superintendent of Education, 2006). At the same time, education officials have also altered neighborhood school attendance boundaries and feeder patterns, in part, to keep families, including affluent families, from exiting the public school system (Brown, 2014; DC Advisory Committee on Student Assignment, 2014).

Studies of enrollment patterns in Washington, DC have documented steady demographic shifts in schools located in gentrifying neighborhoods. Mordechay and Ayscue (2020), for example, found increases in the share of White students enrolled in public schools located in gentrifying neighborhoods across the city. This promising trend suggests that gentrification may be a lever to reduce racial segregation in the city’s public schools. Yet, as many scholars have cautioned (Cucchiara, 2019; Posey-Maddox, 2014), the growing presence of White and middle-class families in city schools poses a challenge to educational equity within and between schools across the city (Syeed, 2018, 2019). With Washington, DC as the backdrop, this dissertation adds to and extends the school gentrification literature through related investigations designed to understand how this process shapes the culture and context of urban schools.

Overview of Studies

This dissertation draws on qualitative data collected between 2019 and 2021 for related studies designed to understand the meanings and implications of demographic change for urban schools. Study 1, “Responding to Gentrification: Navigating School-Family Partnerships Amid Demographic Change,” leverages a multisite case study design to investigate how staff at three Washington, DC

elementary schools respond to gentrification. Two questions guided the analysis: *1) How, if at all, does parent gentrifiers' presence influence the politics of school-family relations,* and *2) How do school staff members' responses to parent gentrifiers ameliorate or exacerbate inequity in urban schools?* Data sources included interviews with 21 school staff members (i.e., teachers, administrators, support staff, and external partners), observations of parent engagement activities, and a review of documents describing family engagement policies. This study reveals the promises and tension of middle-class parents' presence in urban schools. Gentrification brought what some respondents called a "new class of parent" to each of the three schools. Parent gentrifiers frequently made material and financial contributions to their schools but used these contributions to seek influence or privileges for their children. Staff members, however, attempted to "hold the line" (Roda, 2020) on school gentrification and used a range of strategies to manage parent gentrifiers' influence and cultivate equitable school-family relations. The findings from this suggest that when school staff are intentional about equity, they can minimize the marginalization and exclusion of longtime resident parents in gentrifying school communities.

Study 2, "School Gentrification and the Ecologies of Parent Engagement," adds to the growing conversation about middle-class parents' engagement in gentrifying schools. Building on research that foregrounds what these parents do to transform urban public schools, this study investigates why and how these parents engage in gentrifying schools. This study asks, *1) How do middle-class parents perceive the impact of gentrification on their schools and neighborhoods,* and *2) How do middle-class parents' orientations and beliefs shape how and why they engage in*

gentrifying schools? Drawing on interviews with 17 parent gentrifiers and longtime resident parents, observations, and documents collected from three elementary schools, I found that middle-class parents' experiences in and perceptions of gentrification influenced their motivations for and practices to engage in their children's schools. This study's findings suggest the potential of collectively oriented middle-class engagement to improve the experiences of all students and families in gentrifying schools.

Whereas the first two chapters focus on school gentrification at the elementary level, Study 3, "What's Best for my Child, What's Best for the City: Values and Tensions in Parent Gentrifiers' Middle and High School Selection Processes," turns its attention to secondary school to understand parent gentrifiers' school selection processes. This study draws on retrospective interviews with a sample of 20 parent gentrifiers to answer the following questions: *1) What values inform parent gentrifiers' middle and high school selection processes*, and *2) How do parent gentrifiers construct their choice sets for and select middle and high schools?* This study conceptualizes values as both ideological and instrumental (Freidus, 2016; Reay et al., 2007); that is, values comprise not only what parents believe but also what parents – and their children – can derive value from. Parents' values inform the construction of their choice sets (Bell, 2009). Although interviewed parents espoused many civically-oriented values that might suggest an automatic preference for neighborhood schools, just two of the interviewed parents had children enrolled in these schools during 2019-2020, the study's focal school year. This study's findings reveal critical differences between elementary and secondary schooling decisions and

suggest the limits of civic values in informing parent gentrifiers' schooling decisions. This dissertation concludes with a discussion of the three studies' collective contributions and directions for future research.

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Study 1. Responding to Gentrification: Navigating School-Family Partnerships Amid Demographic Change

After decades of flight, middle-class families are becoming a growing presence in urban centers. Parent gentrifiers, or middle-class families who move to formerly disinvested urban neighborhoods, are not only choosing to raise their children in these areas but also enrolling their children in their neighborhood public schools (Cucchiara, 2019; T. L. Green et al., 2020; Pearman & Swain, 2017). For some school leaders and education advocates, parent gentrifiers' presence represents an opportunity for school improvement. Indeed, a growing body of research has documented parent gentrifiers' collective efforts to make schools "safe" – academically and socially – options for their children (Freidus, 2016; Posey-Maddox et al., 2014b; Siegel-Hawley et al., 2016). Although parent gentrifiers' investments have brought new educational programs, improvements to schools' facilities, and new sources of funding, research suggests that there is a "dark side" (Lareau, 2000, p.149) to parent gentrifiers' collective action. For example, when parent gentrifiers narrowly target their investments toward their children, they may pursue school policies and practices that benefit their children at the expense of others (Aggarwal, 2014; Cucchiara & Horvat, 2009; Siegel-Hawley et al., 2016). Parent gentrifiers' engagement styles can also shift expectations for parent involvement, which can exacerbate longtime resident parents'[2] marginalization and exclusion (Posey-Maddox, 2014; Syeed, 2018).

[2] In this article, I use the phase "longtime resident families" to describe schools' incumbent population, which includes families from economically disadvantaged and/or racially minoritized backgrounds.

School-level staff members (i.e., teachers, administrators, and other support staff) may play key roles in facilitating or constraining parent gentrifiers' impact on urban school inequities. School staff who privilege parent gentrifiers' perspectives and status in their communities can facilitate what Posey-Maddox, Kimelberg, and Cucchiara (2014a) call *school gentrification*, a process characterized by changes in school populations (i.e., increased numbers of middle-class families), upgrades to schools (e.g., new programs, facilities improvements), changes to school climates (e.g., expectations and social relations), and the exclusion of longtime resident families. Fortunately, longtime resident families' exclusion may not be an inevitable outcome of parent gentrifiers' presence in urban schools. Studies underscore how school administrators can mediate middle-class parents' engagement by collaborating with middle-class parents, resisting middle-class parents' dominance, or cultivating shared leadership among all families (Cucchiara, 2013b; Lareau & Muñoz, 2012; Mansaray, 2018). In this article, I argue that school staff members' orientations toward parent gentrifiers and their use of intentional strategies to promote equity are key to ameliorating school gentrification's exclusionary effects (Cordova-Cobo, 2019; Cucchiara, 2019; Mansaray, 2018). School staff who value all parents' contributions and who explicitly seek to protect longtime resident families' position in urban schools may be able to "hold the line" (Roda, 2020) on school gentrification.

This study leverages data collected from a larger multisite case study of school gentrification in Washington, DC to investigate the following: *1) How, if at all, does parent gentrifiers' presence influence the politics of school-family relations*, and *2) How do school staff members' responses to parent gentrifiers ameliorate or*

exacerbate inequity in urban schools? I use the term "politics of school-family relations" to refer to the quotidian interactions and contests over power (i.e., the ability to influence others to achieve one's goals) that occur between parents and school staff as each group works to achieve their individual or collective goals. These interactions may occur within formalized structures that support family engagement, such as parent advisory councils or parent-teacher organizations (PTOs), or in informal settings, such as an individual parent requesting accommodations from teachers or other school staff members.

This article begins with a review of the literature on school gentrification and foregrounds research on the relationships between parent gentrifiers and school staff. Next, I present the theoretical perspectives, including conceptualizations of culture and power (Bourdieu, 1973, 1986) and micropolitical theories of education (Blase, 1991; Malen & Cochran, 2008), that guide the study's empirical analysis. I find that staff members across all three schools were acutely aware of how parent gentrifiers' engagement could shift the balance of power, both between parents and staff and among parents, and widen inequities among students. Staff members used diverse strategies to respond to gentrification in their communities and cultivate equitable school-family partnership climates where all families' engagement and contributions were welcome. Ultimately, this study's findings suggest that when school staff members are intentional about equity, they can minimize longtime resident families' marginalization and exclusion in gentrifying schools.

Literature Review

This study is situated in the literature on school gentrification and school-family partnerships. Although the school gentrification literature has centered on parent gentrifiers' experiences and perspectives, researchers have generated valuable insights into the relationships between parent gentrifiers and school staff (Siegel-Hawley et al., 2016; Stillman, 2012), how educators understand gentrification (Mansaray, 2018, 2020; Winsett, 2019), and school leaders' roles in city-wide gentrification processes (Cucchiara, 2013b; Smith & Stovall, 2008). These studies, when paired with the broader literature on school-family partnerships, offer insights into school staff members' potential roles in exacerbating or ameliorating inequities in gentrifying schools.

Gentrification has accelerated concurrently with the marketization of public education, which positions parents as both consumers of education and producers of school improvement (Billingham & Kimelberg, 2013; McGhee & Anderson, 2019; Posey-Maddox, 2016). Amid shrinking public education budgets, schools have come to rely on the families that they serve for material and financial contributions as well as their status and reputation (Calarco, 2020; Posey-Maddox, 2016). Thus, school staff members in gentrifying communities may be incentivized to recruit parent gentrifiers to capitalize on their contributions to schools (Cucchiara, 2008). When parent gentrifiers fill schools' resource gaps, they can become, as Cucchiara (2013b) described, "valued customers." Staff, in turn, become customer service agents who are responsible for parents' satisfaction with their school. When parent gentrifiers make demands or seek accommodations for their children, school staff

may feel pressure to negotiate or acquiesce to parents' demands to avoid conflict (Mordechay, 2021). At the same time, school staff may be less responsive to longtime resident families whose contributions may be seen as less valuable and visible than those of parent gentrifiers (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2009; Posey-Maddox, 2013; Smith & Stovall, 2008).

School staff members' orientations toward parents may influence their responses to parent gentrifiers. An expansive body of research has established that school staff members often view minoritized and working-class parents' engagement practices through deficit-based lenses. Parents whose engagement styles do not match schools' expectations may find themselves excluded from forming meaningful partnerships with their children's schools (Cooper, 2009a; Montoya Ávila et al., 2018). Minoritized and economically disadvantaged parents' exclusion may be exacerbated in schools where staff members see parent gentrifiers' arrival as an opportunity to partner with parents whom they perceive as having the capacity to support schools (Cucchiara, 2013b; Mansaray, 2018). School staff members may use deficit-based narratives to justify parent gentrifiers' leadership in and control of parent organizations or school-based committees (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002; Brantlinger, 2003; Posey-Maddox, 2013). As school staff members elevate parent gentrifiers' engagement and leadership, they may leave few opportunities for minoritized and economically disadvantaged parents to participate in partnership activities. In turn, longtime resident parents have fewer avenues to share their concerns or participate in school governance (Posey-Maddox, 2013; Posey-Maddox et al., 2014b; Sieber, 1982).

The marginalization and exclusion associated with school gentrification may not be inevitable. Two recent studies suggest how school leaders might use their power and authority to promote and protect longtime resident families' interests in gentrifying schools. Cordova-Cobo (2019) observed school leaders' orientations towards longtime resident families and their adoption of intentional structures to diversify parent-teacher organizations (PTOs) ensured that these families continued to have a voice in their schools. Roda (2020), similarly, found that a sample of New York City principals used their discretionary authority in city-wide school choice programs to promote racial and socioeconomic diversity in their schools and protect longtime resident families from being displaced from their school communities. Specifically, these principals prioritized economically disadvantaged and racially minoritized families when enrolling students and marketed their schools to White families who shared their schools' commitments to justice-oriented education.

Although staff can attempt to limit parent gentrifiers' influence, research suggests that parent gentrifiers are well positioned to achieve their goals and agendas over the objections of school staff (e.g., Cucchiara, 2008). The pressure to recruit and retain parent gentrifiers, for example, makes the "threat of exit" a powerful tool that these parents can leverage to achieve their goals (e.g., Brantlinger, 2003; Wells & Serna, 1996). Parent gentrifiers can also use their collective power and resources to override school staff members' authority in schools (Lareau & Muñoz, 2012). As Cucchiara (2013b) and Mansaray (2020) observed, parent gentrifiers can work collectively to remove principals, sometimes with the support of district leaders, who do not acquiesce to their demands.

This study expands on the extant literature and generates important insights into school staff members' responses to parent gentrifiers. Specifically, this study foregrounds the perspectives of school administrators, classroom teachers, support staff, and school partners to explore how these staff members set the tone for school-family relations and how they managed parent gentrifiers' engagement. In doing so, this study reveals the critical role that school staff members can play in ameliorating longtime resident families' exclusion and building productive partnerships with all families.

Theoretical Framework

This study integrates sociological conceptualizations of culture and power (Bourdieu, 1973, 1986) with micropolitical theories of education (Blase, 1991; Malen & Cochran, 2008). For this study, pairing Bourdieusian theories of culture and power with micropolitical perspectives offers a lens to view how schools' shifting fields (Schirato & Roberts, 2018), including who has power and the resources that parents and school staff wield to achieve their goals, influence school-family relations.

Researchers studying schools have applied Bourdieusian perspectives (1973, 1986) on culture and power to understand how schools (re)produce and validate elite culture (Lareau, 2000; Warikoo & Carter, 2009). Within the school gentrification literature, researchers have primarily leveraged this framework to investigate parent gentrifiers' experiences and practices in urban schools (e.g., Butler & Robson, 2003; Kimelberg, 2014; Mansaray, 2020; Posey-Maddox, 2014). In this context, the framework hypothesizes that the alignment between parent gentrifiers' culture and schools' institutional culture leads to a "mutual understanding" about the norms of

interaction and the types of resources that school staff members value (Bæck, 2010, p. 324). Parent gentrifiers' cultural and monetary resources provide an advantage to customize their children's educations and reproduce advantage (Lareau, 2000).

As gentrification brings affluent and White families to urban schools, Bourdieusian perspectives provide an analytic framework to investigate how school staff members secure power and maintain status. Within schools' fields, which define the rules and expectations for stakeholder interactions, administrators, teachers, and other education professionals have considerable power by virtue of their professional roles and expertise (Lightfoot, 1978). Thus, school staff members can create what Lareau and Horvat (1999) called "moments of inclusion and exclusion" to facilitate or constrain parents' engagement. Generally, middle-class parents are well positioned to respond to schools' expectations for parental engagement (Lareau, 2000). However, middle-class parents' views on the connections between home and school may make them more willing to challenge educators' professional authority, which can increase conflicts between parents and school staff (Bæck, 2010; Brantlinger, 2003). Parent gentrifiers' social connections, political know-how, and material resources can facilitate their ability to override school staff members' authority and to pursue agendas that may not be aligned with schools' priorities.

Bourdieusian theories provide a framework to understand schools' cultural arrangements. However, we must also consider the day-to-day interactions and conflicts over power that shape the politics of schools. To that end, I leverage micropolitical theories of education to frame the school politics and to investigate the specific strategies that school staff members use to constrain or facilitate parent

gentrifiers' influence (Blase, 1991; Blase & Anderson, 1995; Malen, 1994). Broadly, this framework offers a lens to understand conflicts within schools as stakeholders wield and leverage their power – that is, the ability to influence others – to advance their goals. Within the context of schools, micropolitical conflicts often center on who has the legitimate right to make decisions about schools (Malen & Cochran, 2008). Such conflicts occur among and between stakeholder groups, such as conflicts between professionals and patrons, (e.g., teachers and parents), superiors and subordinates (e.g., principals and teachers), or among professionals (e.g., conflicts among parents) (Blase, 1991; Malen & Cochran, 2008). Stakeholder groups are not monolithic and may represent diverse interests. This study centers on interactions between parents and school staff members, including teachers and administrators, but also considers how interactions among professionals shape school-family relations (Corbett, 1991). These interactions may occur in formal arenas, such as during PTO meetings, or informally during one-on-one interactions between parents and school staff. Ultimately, this framework reveals which stakeholders possess power to influence others, whose interests are heard within schools, and whose interests are neglected.

Within the context of school gentrification, where an influx of middle-class parents may bring new demands to and expectations for schools, staff members may leverage their power to protect their professional legitimacy and their schools' stability (Malen & Cochran, 2008). Thus, school staff members may seek to suppress or contain potential conflicts with middle-class parents by giving parent gentrifiers symbolic authority over issues (e.g., Malen & Ogawa, 1988), or granting special

accommodations to parent gentrifiers and their children (e.g., Calarco, 2018; Mordechay, 2021). Research on the micropolitics of education has also explored the potential for school staff members to acknowledge the diverse interests within their schools and adopt structures to share power among staff and between staff and parents. A school's institutional culture, for example, may support open, deliberative negotiations about resource distribution and educational programs (Blase & Anderson, 1995; Horsford et al., 2019; Malen & Cochran, 2008). Horsford et al. (2019), for example, have pointed to the potential of transformative leaders who are attentive to potential inequities within their school communities and who collaborate with staff and parents. This culture of shared power may stem from school leaders' orientations toward their communities, their willingness and capacity to address racial and socioeconomic inequities directly, and their capacity to manage diverse stakeholder perspectives within schools (Cooper, 2009b; Evans, 2007a, 2007b).

Methods

The findings presented in this paper draw on data collected from a larger, multisite case study designed to investigate the transformative promises and pitfalls of school gentrification for urban elementary schools. The benefits of the multisite case study design are two-fold: first, the design allows for an examination of a contemporary phenomenon – that is, school gentrification – in its "real-world context" (Yin, 2014, p. 16). Second, incorporating data from multiple sites fosters an opportunity to explore phenomena in multiple settings, which can increase the potential for cross-site comparisons and generalizations (Herriott & Firestone, 1983). School gentrification is a context-dependent process that is influenced by the

intersecting ecologies of schools, school districts, and broader municipalities. Thus, this study aims to generalize not to other contexts but to a broader theory of school gentrification and school staff members' roles in the process.

In this paper, I foreground interview data collected from a purposive sample of school-level staff members' (i.e., principals, teachers, support staff, and external partners) to understand how parent gentrifiers' presence influences the politics of school-family relations and how staff members' responses to parent gentrifiers might minimize or exacerbate patterns of inequity in urban schools. I focus on school gentrification at the elementary level (i.e., PreK-5) to capture staff members' perspectives and experiences when parent gentrifiers are most likely to enroll their children in neighborhood schools and participate in school improvement efforts (Kimelberg, 2014b).

Setting and Participants

This study's findings are drawn from three elementary schools located in Washington, DC. The rapid transformation of neighborhoods across the city (e.g., Hyra, 2017; Summers, 2019), the use of public education as a lever to attract and retain middle-class families (Wilson, 2015), and increasing White and middle-class enrollment in neighborhood public schools (Mordechay & Ayscue, 2020) make the city a favorable location to investigate how school-level staff respond to gentrification.

From the population of District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) and public charter schools, I used intensity sampling (Patton, 1990), a sampling strategy that seeks to identify case sites where the features of a phenomenon are present but

would not be considered extreme cases, to identify schools undergoing gentrification processes as defined by Posey-Maddox et al. (2014a). As a first step, I considered schools where there was an increase in the proportion of middle-class students enrolled. Although there are not agreed-upon thresholds to measure school gentrification, researchers have developed various frameworks to characterize demographic change in gentrifying schools (e.g., Green et al., 2020; Stillman, 2011). For this study, I identified public elementary schools where there was at least a 5% increase in the proportion of middle-class families[3] between 2000 and 2019, according to data from the National Center for Education Statistics[4]. According to Green et al.'s (2020) typology, a 5% increase in the proportion of middle-class families would put a school in the earliest stages of gentrification. This sampling approach produced a pool of 28 neighborhood and public charter schools. In addition to data on demographic change, I searched for publicly available information about potential schools to gain insights about available academic programs, financial or material support from parent-teacher organizations or "Friends Of" organizations, and information about school facilities upgrades. From this information, I narrowed the pool to six potential sites, including three DCPS schools and three charter schools.

[3] The District of Columbia Office of the State Superintendent's measure "at-risk" students served as a proxy measure for students' economic status; the "at-risk" measure accounts for the number of students enrolled in a school who are homeless, in the District of Columbia's foster care system, qualify for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). When this indicator was not available, free and reduced-price lunch status served as the economic indicator.

[4] I focus on the period between 2000 and 2019 to capture changes in demographics following explicit policy initiatives that promoted housing, economic, and education initiatives designed to attract middle-class residents and businesses to the city (e.g., Asch & Musgrove, 2015; Wilson, 2015).

After securing research approval from DCPS, I sent introductory emails to the six school principals to schedule exploratory conversations about conducting research in their schools. At one school, my prior connections with one of its external partners facilitated access to the school's principal. When I did not receive a response from other schools, I returned to the original pool and selected additional schools for outreach. During site selection, a professional contact introduced me to two parents at two schools in the sample pool, who helped facilitate introductions to their schools' administrators. I scheduled introductory conversations with administrators at the three schools to learn more about school-level dynamics to inform final site selection. Ultimately, I gained access to three elementary schools, all managed by DCPS, located in gentrifying neighborhoods across the city. Table 1 displays the characteristics of each of the participating schools.

Table 1

Participating School Characteristics, 2000 and 2019[5]

	Juniper Elementary[6]		**Pine Elementary**		**Sycamore Elementary**	
	2000	2019	2000	2019	2000	2019
Student characteristics						
Total enrollment	470	450	140	230	470	440
Racial/ethnic composition (%)						
African American/Black	70	15	80	15	80	60
Hispanic/Latinx	30	70	5	10	5	5
White	0	10	10	60	10	25
Asian	0	0	5	5	5	5
Multiracial	N/A	5	N/A	10	N/A	5
American Indian/Native Hawaiian	0	0	0	0	0	0
Economically disadvantaged (%) (FRPL/at-risk)	70	30	60	10	30	20
In-boundary attendance (%), 2019	-	40	-	90	-	40
School Characteristics, 2019						
STAR[7] Score	-	70	-	N/A	-	70
STAR Rating	-	4	-	N/A	-	4
Dual Language Program	-	Yes	-	No	-	No
Parent Organization	-	Yes	-	Yes	-	Yes

[5] All data points rounded to protect confidentiality.
[6] All school and participant names are pseudonyms.
[7] The School Transparency and Reporting (STAR) Framework evaluates school performance, including academic achievement and growth, school environment, English language proficiency, and graduation rate. Schools receive a rating from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest) based on their STAR score (100 points)

Site Contexts.[8] Juniper Elementary School (Juniper), located on a quiet street off a major gentrifying corridor, has experienced multiple demographic shifts throughout the school's history. Once a majority Black school, Juniper saw a steady increase of Latinx students, many of whom were the children of newcomers from Central America, since the late 2000s. Increasingly, affluent families – both White and Latinx – have become interested in the school, which offers a Spanish immersion program. As of 2019, approximately 70% of students identified as Hispanic/Latinx, 15 % of students identified as African American/Black, and 10% of students identified as White. Five percent of students identified as multiracial. According to interviewed school staff and partners, Juniper has a long history of parent activism and engagement. The school offers multiple pathways for family engagement, including a parent-teacher organization, parent advisory team, monthly principal coffees, back-to-school nights, and parent social events. The school's general ethos is guided by the Mayan poem *in lek'ech* (You are my other me). Staff members described efforts to cultivate a community where parents and staff work together to support all families. To be sure, staff recognized the challenges of creating what they called "a Juniper for all." Notably, staff members observed that the neighborhood and the school were losing Black families. Staff attributed this demographic change not only to gentrification but also to the school's academic program and instructional

[8] To protect each school's confidentiality, site descriptions do not include information about the neighborhoods in which schools are located.

practices. For staff, understanding how to recruit and retain Black families amid gentrification has been a key focus.

At Pine Elementary School (Pine), staff members observed that rising home costs have made the neighborhood largely inaccessible, even to those families who might be considered middle class. Staff accounts revealed the impact that gentrification has had on the school's demographic composition. In 2000, for example, 80% of students were Black. In 2019, the proportion of Black students was 15%, while 60%of students identified as White. The school has smaller populations of Hispanic/Latinx students (10%), multiracial students (10%), and Asian students (5%). Approximately 10% of students come from economically disadvantaged households. Staff members' descriptions of the school suggest a positive, nurturing climate. As one staff member observed, the school "feels like the land of all things lovely." For many staff at the school, however, recent years have been punctuated by a series of conflicts between the school's staff and affluent parents who are seeking a "private school-like" environment for their children. These conflicts have centered on resource allocation within the school as well as control of the PTO's agenda and activities.

Sycamore Elementary School (Sycamore) has seen a steady increase of White and affluent families since 2000, when White students comprised 10% of the student body. In 2019, approximately one-quarter of students identified as White. That same year, 60% of students identified as Black and 5% of the population, each, identified as Hispanic/Latinx, Asian, and multiracial. Approximately 20% of students were identified as economically disadvantaged. Staff members observed that many White

families exit the school before fifth grade, sometimes for the city's selective enrollment middle schools or public charter schools. Retaining in-boundary families has been a priority among some families, and staff members' accounts suggest conflicting visions among parents and between parents and staff about the school's identity. School staff members described the parent community as very engaged. Affluent families' contributions have brought resources to the school. However, staff expressed concerns that these parents' contributions and influence could widen equity gaps in the school community.

Participants. For each school, I aimed to recruit a purposive sample of administrators, teachers, and other staff members who could describe their school's approach to family engagement and who regularly interacted with parents, either through their professional roles or through participation in family engagement activities (e.g., staff representatives on PTOs). When recruiting teachers, I sought at least one teacher from each grade level. At Juniper, I sent e-mail invitations to participate in the study to 11 of the school's 37 teachers and 3 of the 5 administrators, including the school's principal. At Pine, I sent recruitment emails to 13 of the school's 23 teachers.[9] Finally, at Sycamore, I sent recruitment e-mails to 12 of the school's 30 teachers. During interviews, administrators and teachers also offered the names of colleagues who could share their approach to responding to parent gentrifiers and insights into school dynamics. In addition to staff interviews, I conducted interviews with external partners at each school that supported family

[9] Across all three schools, five teachers declined invitations to participate in the study. Twenty-two staff did not respond to the invitation.

engagement activities, including four staff from an external organization that has supported Juniper's family engagement activities for nearly a decade and an external consultant who has worked with both Pine and Sycamore since the 2020-21 school year. The final sample included 21 respondents across all three schools (Table 2).

Table 2

Participant Characteristics

	Juniper Elementary (*N*=11)	Pine Elementary (*N*=4)	Sycamore Elementary (*N*=6)
Participant's Role			
Principal/administrator	3	1	1
Classroom teacher	3	3	3
Other staff (e.g., instructional coach)	1	0	1
School partner	4	0	1*
Participants' Race/Ethnicity			
Black	3	4	3
White	5	0	3
Latinx	3	0	0
Participants' Gender			
Male	3	0	2
Female	8	5	4

* Sycamore's partner also worked with Pine Elementary School.

Data Collection

This study's findings draw on multiple data sources, including interviews, observations, and documents. Documents include parent-teacher organization bylaws, documents describing family engagement policies, and articles describing key events in schools' histories and current context. Data collection activities spanned January 2020 to June 2021 with two separate stages: pre-Covid-19 and during Covid-19. Between January and March 2020, I spent time at each of the schools and observed interactions between parents and school staff at arrival and dismissal as well as during

scheduled family engagement activities, such as parent-teacher organization meetings, principal coffees, and other activities. Observations at Juniper totaled 4.75 hours of informal observations, including four 15-minute sessions during arrival or dismissal and three principal coffees, lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. I observed two joint meetings of staff and families at Pine and Sycamore, totaling 3.5 hours of observation across the two schools. During informal observations, I recorded field notes focusing on social interactions among parents and between parents and staff members. During family engagement meetings, I took extensive notes to capture the meeting content as well as meeting participants' roles and apparent demographics. I paid close attention to which parents and staff led and contributed to conversations during meetings. I used quotation marks to indicate verbatim comments from meeting participants. On March 16, 2020, all in-person data collection activities ended when DCPS closed all school buildings in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Amid the crisis, family engagement activities paused for the remainder of the school year as staff and parents transitioned to online instruction. School building closures limited opportunities to observe interactions between parents and school staff and to, perhaps, observe the strategies that staff used to respond to parent gentrifiers in action. My findings, thus, are limited to what staff members were willing to share about their responses to school gentrification and parent gentrifiers' requests.

Except for interviews with Juniper's partners, which were conducted in-person in February 2020, all interviews were conducted virtually using Zoom web conferencing. Interviews lasted between 30 and 75 minutes; the average duration was 50 minutes. Interview protocols asked school staff to describe the demographic and

cultural changes occurring in their schools and in the surrounding neighborhoods, their perceptions of how these changes affected their professional practice, and the strategies that they used to respond to parents' requests. School partners also described their perceptions of the changes occurring in the school communities and how their work supported schools' efforts to cultivate school-family relations. I designed interview protocols to collect information about the current context of school gentrification (i.e., the 2019-2020 and 2020-21 school years). Many longstanding staff members naturally reflected on their schools' early responses to gentrification, which provided a necessary historical context of the process in all three communities. Further, school staff reflected on the impact of the global pandemic and the 2020 protests under the banner of the Movement for Black Lives on their professional practice and their schools' equity-centered work.

I considered myself to be an outsider to the school communities. However, my professional relationships and prior professional experience in the city facilitated access to schools and interview participants. At Juniper, I had established relationships with the school's partners, for whom I conducted a formative evaluation of their family engagement model. This evaluation provided insights into school gentrification in the community and provided an entry point when recruiting staff for interviews. My introduction to Pine and Sycamore came via a professional contact who introduced me to parents who were affiliated with the schools. The parents later invited me to attend a parent-led discussion group centered on issues of equity and inclusion and introduced me to the schools' administrators. Over the course of the study, my professional relationships with a small group of staff at Pine and Sycamore

deepened as I worked with this group as they planned equity audits for the 2021-22 school year. In the pre-Covid phase of the study, school staff members and parents appeared to welcome my presence at the schools. During school building closures, I found that I was able to establish an easy rapport with school staff members during participant recruitment and while conducting virtual interviews. As a middle-class Black woman, I was cognizant of the ways that my identity could shape what school staff members were willing to share in interviews. Although I cannot be completely certain, my status as a researcher studying education may have allowed school staff members to see me as a professional ally.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was iterative and began during the data collection phase. I audio recorded and used transcription services to produce a verbatim transcript of each interview. To ensure accuracy, I reviewed transcripts with the audio files. I typed all field notes in a narrative form for analysis. I uploaded all interview transcripts, field notes, and documents to NVivo, a qualitative analysis package. I coded all interviews twice: first using inductive methods and then using deductive strategies. Inductive codes captured staff members' perceptions of how gentrification influenced their school communities (e.g., changes to school demographics and parent engagement culture) as well as specific strategies they used to respond to parent gentrifiers (e.g., pre-empting external influence, setting communication boundaries). I derived deductive codes from relevant literature related to school gentrification and family engagement as well as from the conceptual frameworks that guide this analysis. Deductive codes included codes to capture staff members' descriptions of their

schools' cultural fields (e.g., visions for family engagement, engagement norms) micropolitical strategies identified in the literature (e.g., expanding the scope of conflict, controlling agendas). Where appropriate, I consolidated codes that emerged during the inductive coding phase with deductive codes when these codes captured similar concepts (e.g., merging codes that captured similar strategies for responding to gentrification). A full list of codes can be found in Appendix B. After coding each transcript, I drafted an analytic memo designed to debrief the coding process and to identify key themes from each conversation. These memos allowed me to identify themes within and across sites and consider rival explanations for findings.

Observations and documents provided background and additional context to understand family engagement structures and relationships at each school. I annotated observation notes to capture information about meeting participants and perceptions of relationships among parents and between parents and staff members. When reviewing documents, I focused on information to understand the specific histories of each school as well as existing structures and policies that guide each school's approach to family engagement. I triangulated impressions from observations and documents with interview data to form a full understanding of each school's family engagement culture and to understand the context of staff members' responses to gentrification.

Findings

The section presents findings across school sites. Across the three schools, parent gentrifiers' arrival shifted the politics of school-family relations by bringing a "new class of parent" to each school. Consistent with the school gentrification

literature, these parents invested material and financial resources into schools but sometimes used these contributions to seek influence or accommodations. School staff used several strategies to manage parent gentrifiers' influence and cultivate equitable school-family relations.

Shifting Politics of School-Family Relations

Staff member accounts and observations suggest that all parents were welcomed and had multiple pathways to contribute to their children's schools, such as through formal organizations (e.g., PTOs, school advisory teams) and volunteer opportunities in classrooms. In interviews, staff members' definition of partnerships suggested clear delineations between educators' roles and parents' roles. Some staff, for example, viewed parents as supporters of education who were experts on their children. As Ms. Summers, a teacher at Sycamore, explained: "I think teachers are the experts on learning, and parents are the experts on their kid. We have to bring both of those things together and respect each other's expertise." According to Ms. Francis, a teacher at Pine, the ideal role for parents is to provide resources that support the learning process: "If you've got a new idea, use your networking to give us a really awesome visitor that we wouldn't have access to."

For many staff members, gentrification brought a "new class" of "highly-involved" middle-class parents who happily contributed resources to their schools but who also sought to control the curriculum, governance, and resource distribution. Ms. Francis observed that, with the help of parents, teachers could easily secure resources for their classrooms: "If I don't have something, I ask, and parents are happy to provide." Likewise, Ms. Lockhart, at Pine, described middle-class parents as willing

to "throw money at anything and everything." At the same time, staff members perceived that parent gentrifiers' contributions came with "strings attached." That is, parent gentrifiers expected special accommodations or influence over the school. At Pine, Ms. Cloud observed, "The same parents who will give more money to the PTA to support activities…also feel, like, this sense of entitlement to offer unsolicited input." At both Pine and Sycamore, administrators and teachers described middle-class parents' attempts to influence the allocation of recess time, instructional strategies and content, student discipline, and extracurricular activities. Mr. Vega, at Juniper, saw a fine line between parents donating time and resources and trying to assert control over the school. He stated, "It's a public school. We don't depend on [parents'] money. … That's something new with, like, the White families. They're the ones trying to have their hands in everything."

This "new class" of parents shifted the politics of school-family relationships in several ways. First, parent gentrifiers used collective engagement strategies such as organizing their own events and coordinating requests (e.g., increasing recess time) to school staff. These strategies allowed parent gentrifiers to pursue their goals as a unit and, sometimes, override the objections of school staff members. For example, parents at Pine and Sycamore wanted to reorganize an annual family literacy event as an offsite fundraiser open to the broader community; staff members argued that such an event would exclude families who lived outside of the schools' neighborhoods. At Juniper, parent gentrifiers and longtime resident parents held separate fundraising events. Principal Gordon explained:

> [Middle-class parents] came in and said, "We want to raise money and have a bake sale." And, so they had a bake sale with traditional things like cupcakes and brownies. Then, the Spanish-speaking parents said, "We want to raise money." And, so that next week, they had a pupusa [tortillas filled with cheese, meat, and other fillings] sale. It was this funny thing that they had to work through where they weren't in competition with each other.

Parent gentrifiers engaged in surveillance practices and challenged teachers' professional authority. At all three schools, teachers opened their classrooms to parents and other volunteers. However, teachers at Pine and Sycamore recalled instances when visiting parents recorded activities or verbally criticized teachers' practice. Parents who lived in the neighborhood would sometimes walk around the schools to observe teachers. Ms. Cloud, for example, described one instance where parents complained about instructional practices: "We use an app on our phones to record what students are doing. Parents would be walking around, see teachers on their phones, and assume that we're socializing. … They don't understand what's happening, and yet they want to control." For some teachers, parents did not have to be in the room for them to feel as though they are being watched. Mr. Vega, for example, felt that he needed to be "more aware" of what he said around middle-class children because their parents were "super involved."

When parent gentrifiers were unable to get what they wanted from individual school staff, they escalated conflicts to school administrators or, in some cases, to school district staff or city councilmembers. One of Principal Thomas' first lessons at

Pine was that email was a key mode of communication. Email allowed parents to copy other families on messages and, according to Principal Thomas, give individual requests the appearance of being collective concerns. She explained:

> If there's a concern, the principal is on the email, and [the parent] is on the email. And Johnny's mom is on it, and Susie's mom is on it. So now there are ten moms on an email, and I'm like, "Well, whose issue is it?"

In addition, parent gentrifiers often used their resources and connections to lobby local elected officials or central office staff on behalf of the school. At times, parents' efforts were in the service of the broader school community. Lauren, an external partner at Juniper, described parent gentrifiers as "email warriors" who frequently secured additional resources from their neighborhood and council representatives. Similarly, Ms. Willow, a teacher at Sycamore, recalled the efforts of one very engaged father: "He was PTA president, but he would go to the chancellor's office and fight for the school. They were so sick of him, but he was very involved." However, there was also a "dark side" (Lareau, 2000) to parent gentrifiers' engagement with elected officials: parents would use communication with external parties to undermine or challenge school staff members' authority. When making requests, parents would sometimes include central office staff or elected officials on emails. At times, parents would reach out to these parties before bringing concerns to school staff. At Juniper, Assistant Principal King observed, "When they bring an issue, they have already spoken to [central office staff] and, they say, 'I've spoken to these people. I've copied them on this email.' It feels like a power play to me."

For some staff, the combination of parent gentrifiers' presence in schools and ability to escalate conflicts led them to be careful about their interactions with parents. Assistant Principal King, for example, felt that she needed to "entertain" parent gentrifiers' requests. With written communication, she noted that she spent considerable time "reading [emails], then an hour-and-a-half writing my response and having 30 people look at it, my boss included, to make sure it's not going to get me on Urban Moms."[10] Several staff members reported that they reflected constantly on how they responded to active and well-connected parents. Principal Thomas, for example, explained, "I'm like, 'Let me check myself because I responded to this parent because I know they will email the chancellor. But why didn't I respond to this parent who will never come into the building?'"

For some teachers, staying out of conflicts with parent gentrifiers was an important strategy to protect their positions in the school. Ms. Lockhart, for example, noted that she tried to "keep her head down" when conflicts arose between parent gentrifiers and school staff. Other staff members hoped to encourage involvement while also managing parent gentrifiers' expectations. For example, Mr. Bordeaux described himself as "well-equipped" to listen to parents' concerns. When parent gentrifiers request special privileges or accommodations, he walks through his instructional approaches and evidence of impact: "I always start by making sure that I've understood. … I just show them evidence, not in a confrontational way."

[10] "Urban Moms" refers to the popular online forum DC Urban Moms and Dads. The forum originally started as a mailing list in 2002 and has since evolved to a full website where posters anonymously start and respond to discussions on a broad range of topics, including DC Public and Public Charter Schools.

School Staff Responses to Parent Gentrifiers

Staff members leveraged multiple strategies to respond to parent gentrifiers. For staff members across the three sites, cultivating equitable and inclusive school-family partnerships was a chief concern. As such, school staff members implemented intentional strategies to promote shared leadership of parent-teacher organizations, incorporate a broad range of perspectives when making decisions that would affect their schools, and attempted to preempt parent gentrifiers' escalation of conflicts. Additionally, school staff members worked with influential parents who were ideologically aligned to their equity goals to mediate the influence of other parent gentrifiers.

Centering equity. On balance, equity was a key operating principle at all three schools and guided staff members' responses to parent gentrifiers. Administrators and teachers implemented intentional strategies to foster inclusive school climates where all families were welcome. At Juniper, administrators, teachers, and other staff consistently described the school's central goal to maintain a "Juniper for all." For many staff, the Covid-19 crisis and 2020 uprisings for racial justice reaffirmed this goal. For example, when asked how gentrification affects his work, Mr. Hall, a Juniper administrator, explained, "It makes us look through a clear lens of equity and not just as a fad. … We're not going to talk about the Black struggle this week or talk about Black Lives Matter just because it's painted on one of the blocks of DC. This is going to be engrained in our culture." Notably, at Juniper, staff members described a specific goal to prevent longtime resident families', especially its Spanish-dominant population, displacement from the school. Staff

members have been able to leverage the district's dual language policy to reserve a portion of their school's enrollment seats for Spanish-dominant families, which, to some degree, has allowed the school to protect its incumbent population. Ms. Frederick explained, "The neighborhood is changing, but I think we can at least use [district policies] to protect the community that we need to serve."

Equity was also a central focus at Pine and Sycamore. Interviewed teachers and administrators described an explicit focus on equitable academic and disciplinary outcomes for students. Before the start of her tenure, Principal Thomas set a personal goal of closing opportunity gaps between Black and White students. Part of this work also included building positive relationships among parents, whom she saw as racially divided. Both Pine's and Sycamore's equity work is deeply informed by the district's Capital Commitment, which establishes a shared vision for equity and excellence for all schools. Principal Lewis, for example, described his equity-focused work using the district's language of ensuring that all students are "loved, challenged, and prepared." Both schools have implemented several initiatives to cultivate a positive climate for students and their families, including intentional strategies to promote positive relationships among racially and socioeconomically diverse families. Like Juniper, the pandemic and racial justice protests have given Pine's and Sycamore's equity commitments a new sense of urgency. As Ms. Lockhart, a teacher at Pine, explained, "We're going to come to everything with an equity lens. So, we hear a lot of that from our administration because they're hearing it from their boss and their boss' boss."

Building equity within the PTO. As part of their responses to gentrification, staff members were acutely aware of how PTOs could be key sites of longtime resident parents' exclusion. At Juniper, staff members recalled parent gentrifiers entering the school community with an assumption that the school needed to be "fixed." Principal Gordon, who first worked as a teacher at the school, recalled that parent gentrifiers' first action was to start a new parent organization – even though the school had an existing parent organization led by Black and Latinx families. She recalled: "[The prior principal] said to this group of parent gentrifiers, 'You know, we already have a parent organization. You're welcome to come and be a part of our parent organization." Juniper's staff members understood that if the PTO did not have equity built into its organizational structure, parent gentrifiers could gain control of the group and exclude longtime resident families.

At Juniper, much of the work to build equity with the PTO began nearly a decade ago. School staff worked with an external organization to strengthen parent relationships and the schools' partnership climate. Additionally, before the study period, parents and staff at Juniper engaged this organization to help develop a set of bylaws to guide the school's PTO and ensure that all parents would be represented. The bylaws stated that the PTO's leadership includes co-presidents, at least one of whom must be from the school's Latinx community. During this period, the partners were critical for managing parent gentrifiers. Lauren, one of the partners, recalled, "I remember I had to bat a few teachers back, and Cassidy [another partner] had some frank conversations with the White parents." For school staff, this early work was critical for building what they described as "a unified" parent organization. Juniper

maintained its relationship with this external organization, which continued to support family engagement activities through the 2020 school year.

At Pine and Sycamore, PTO parents are a significant presence. Although all parents are ostensibly welcome to attend meetings, PTO leaders are often White and affluent mothers. According to Principal Thomas, the composition of the PTO has been a source of parent conflict. She recalled, "Black families began to talk about how they felt like they didn't belong in the community. … And they started to call out the PTO, too, saying, 'You all have a responsibility in this, right?" PTO diversity is a central issue for leaders at Pine and Sycamore. As a Black woman working with a majority White PTO, Principal Thomas perceived that she would have a limited effect raising the issue of diversity. However, she believed that other parents – specifically other White parents – could move the needle. Thus, she relied on families whom she saw as ideologically aligned with her vision to spark the conversation about inclusivity. She reflected,

> It's like putting nuggets out there. If you have a parent group, we need diversity on this team to have an idea of the full concerns that people care about. I would open up those conversations. I can't force the PTO to become more diverse, but other parents can.

Seeking diverse perspectives. In addition to diversifying PTOs, whenever possible, staff members at all three schools worked to incorporate diverse perspectives when making decisions that affected classroom or school communities. Ms. Summers, for example, perceived that some parent gentrifiers tried to speak for the entire community when they made suggestions or requests. She noted that she

rarely made in-the-moment decisions; instead, she delayed her response to consult with staff or other families: “I feel like that’s the best way. Sometimes even just passing the idea on and saying, ‘That’s really great. I’ll talk to my team and see what other teachers think’ or ‘I’ll talk to my administrator about it.’ Basically, avoid in-the-moment honoring or dishonoring whatever request they’re making to buy more time.” At Juniper, school staff reported collecting data through surveys of the entire community to inform decisions. These data have been a useful source when responding to parent gentrifiers who attempted to speak on behalf of other families. Assistant Principal King recalled:

> [Parent gentrifiers will] make requests on behalf of other people, so they might say, “8:30 is really hard [for a meeting]. A lot of families are working. Our families are in food service. … It’s really hard for them too. So, maybe we could change it?” And, I’m like, “Actually, no, we did speak to those families, and they told us they would prefer this.”

For many staff members, seeking or having additional perspectives was a key strategy for equitable decision-making.

Collaborating with influential parents. At times, staff members saw opportunities to collaborate with parent gentrifiers to achieve their equity goals. Administrators and staff were attuned to which parents had influence in the communities and often looked to these parents for support when implementing new initiatives. Like Principal Thomas, who called on ideologically aligned White parents to raise issues about PTO diversity, Assistant Principal King also sought input from

parents whom she believed had power and credibility in the community. She explained:

> [Those parents] aren't always the families or people with leadership positions. … I'm like, "Oh, this is someone who has the ear of the people. People respect her; they're coming to her. She knows a lot of people." So that's someone I'm going to say, "Hey, I'm thinking about this thing. What do you think?"

Notably, both administrators were Black women. For both women, collaborating with influential or ideologically aligned parents was an important step to getting their message across when interacting with White parent gentrifiers.

Although some staff leveraged parents in the service of equity, other staff called on parents to advance personal goals. At Pine and Sycamore, staff members observed that teachers with political "know-how" sometimes used parents to "get what they want." Ms. Francis, for example, observed a feeling among some staff of "I scratch your back, you scratch mine." Sometimes, teachers used parents to undermine principal authority and directives. Ms. Fine, at Sycamore, observed that some staff members would sometimes organize parents to push back on the principal's agenda: "Every time teachers had an issue, instead of trying to see if they could figure it out or talk it through, there was a call of the parents. [The teachers] will find a way to make it so parents became a little bit enraged and started applying pressure."

Preempting escalation. Finally, school staff members attempted to preempt parent gentrifiers' attempts to escalate conflicts beyond the school. Assistant Principal King believed that the school's staff could lose credibility if central office

staff or other external parties overrode school-level decisions. Thus, staff members often reached out to central office staff before they rolled out new initiatives. Assistant Principal King explained, "We've done a better job of anticipating and trying to talk to our superintendent in advance. We've done a much better job with planning for the pushback." Staff members, however, were not always successful when parents escalated conflicts beyond the school. At both Pine and Sycamore, parent gentrifiers frequently used their external connections and personal funds to get what they wanted, even when their goals conflicted with the schools' broader equity aims. Principal Thomas, for example, reflected,

> This community is going to ask for what they want. They'll email the mayor. They'll email the president. They'll email whoever to get what's best for their kids. When we think about what that means for the trajectory of all students, that's where the conversation starts.

Discussion and Conclusion

Research on school gentrification has established that the process can be a double-edged sword for local communities and their schools. On the one hand, parent gentrifiers often bring financial and programmatic resources that can contribute to school improvement (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2009; Posey-Maddox, 2016; Siegel-Hawley et al., 2016). On the other, parent gentrifiers' collective engagement can worsen existing inequities and further marginalize longtime resident families and students (Aggarwal, 2014; Makris, 2015; Posey-Maddox, 2014). This study builds on extant literature on school gentrification and adds to the field's understanding of not

only how parent gentrifiers' presence alters school-family relations but also how staff members can ameliorate the exclusionary effects of school gentrification.

The three schools comprising this multisite case study underscore the tensions that can emerge in gentrifying schools. Across all three schools, gentrification altered the politics of school-family relations in similar ways. Parent gentrifiers brought resources to schools and sought to use their status and power to gain accommodations for their children or influence school operations. Parent gentrifiers' resources and collective approaches often provided leverage to make decisions without the input of the full school community, including longtime resident parents and school staff. Further, parent gentrifiers' social connections and political know-how helped them expand conflicts within and outside of the school community. Finally, parent gentrifiers' connections and surveillance influenced how several school staff approached interactions with parent gentrifiers.

From a Bourdieusian lens, we might expect staff members at each of the three schools to create the necessary moments of inclusion that would allow parent gentrifiers to leverage their resources to secure power and advantages for their children. After all, these parents possessed the skills, knowledge, and resources that schools typically value. On the contrary, equity principles defined schools' cultural fields and guided school staff members' interactions with parents. Thus, staff members sought to build strong relationships with all parents and tried to avoid treating parent gentrifiers as "valued customers." Interviewed school staff members leveraged their professional authority to protect their status position, manage middle-class parents' engagement, and promote equitable school-family relationships. Staff

members' responses to gentrification were reinforced within schools' broader culture. Staff members, sometimes in collaboration with ideologically aligned parents and external partners, pursued strategies to promote equitable school-family relationships. The PTO was a key site for this work. Staff members promoted diversity on PTO boards and encouraged shared leadership among parent gentrifiers and longtime resident parents. School staff also developed strategies to solicit input from the broader school community to counter parent gentrifiers' attempts to speak on behalf of all families.

Staff members also used strategies to manage the day-to-day politics of partnerships. School staff members indicated that they wanted all parents to feel heard when they brought concerns but also managed requests so that accommodations did not create new patterns of inequity within schools. Staff members, for example, often delayed their responses to families or consulted colleagues before granting an accommodation or request. Staff members also reported taking a hard line when parents' requests were not aligned with schools' guiding principles and policies. School staff members also adapted to parent gentrifiers' new engagement techniques. Administrators, in particular, played key roles as "buffers" to external influence (Malen, 1994). Just as parents escalated conflicts by engaging external stakeholders, including district staff or elected officials, principals and other administrators also sought the support of these external partners, in part, to minimize parent gentrifiers' ability to use external influence to their advantage.

The study's findings are, perhaps, a source of optimism and illustrate how staff members' orientations toward families can minimize longtime resident families'

exclusion in gentrifying schools. This work starts with school administrators. In the three school communities, principals and other administrators led with many elements of culturally relevant leadership, a paradigm that blends culturally relevant and antiracist pedagogies (Horsford et al., 2011). Administrators across schools displayed an acute awareness of how gentrification could transform their schools' political contexts. For administrators, equity was central to their professional responsibilities and their schools' missions. Further, they took asset-based approaches to school-family partnerships. As such, they made explicit attempts to engage all families in their communities and diversify the perspectives represented on school-based committees (e.g., Cordova-Cobo, 2019). In addition to equity-oriented leadership, administrators, teachers, and other staff were attuned to the broader social and political contexts of their communities and seemed to understand the gentrification's potential to exacerbate inequities within their schools. The global pandemic and 2020 racial justice protests heightened staff members' awareness of how the broader contexts influenced their work in schools.

Indeed, this study's findings are about the people who lead and work in gentrifying schools. Thus, it is important to acknowledge how this study's sample shaped its findings. Interviewed staff members may be distinguished from other staff by how they understand and respond to gentrification, their perspectives on school-family relations, and their general commitments to equity. In the absence of these staff members, it is possible that school gentrification may have unfolded differently in each school community. Further, although I interviewed a range of school staff, the perspectives presented here cannot be viewed as representative. Interviewed teachers

at Pine and Sycamore described other staff members' attempts to resist principal directives covertly, sometimes using parents to advance their positions. This finding suggests that not all staff members shared the visions for school-family relations or equity that interview respondents articulated. Additionally, this finding reveals the importance of micropolitical dynamics between principals and teachers for promoting equitable school-family partnerships. Although principals play critical roles in setting the vision for their schools, teachers' willingness to align with the principal and support their goals can facilitate – or undermine – the success of this vision.

This study's setting may have also shaped the findings. Studies suggest that the marketization of public education may incentivize school leaders and teachers to actively recruit parent gentrifiers and cater to their needs and interests (Horsford et al., 2019; McGhee & Anderson, 2019). School district and city leadership may reinforce these pressures, as in the cases of Philadelphia (e.g., Cucchiara, 2013b) and Chicago (e.g., Lipman, 2013; Smith & Stovall, 2008). Interviewed school staff, to the contrary, did not report feeling external pressure to recruit and retain parent gentrifiers. This lack of pressure may have facilitated staff members' responses to gentrification. Even so, some staff members felt a need to respond to parent gentrifiers in certain ways to protect their status position and professional authority. Thus, while there may not be explicit pressure, school staff members may feel subtle pressures to accommodate parent gentrifiers' requests. Studies of school gentrification, including this one, have centered on dynamics within one or a small sample of schools. Developing a complete understanding of school gentrification, thus, requires additional research on the macrolevel policies and practices, including

the coordination between public and private interests (e.g., Makris & Brown, 2017), that influence how this process manifests in schools and shape school staff members' responses.

The movement of middle-class families into urban school communities, as this study suggests, does not have to result in longtime resident families' marginalization and exclusion. When school staff are committed to equity and protecting incumbent families, they may be able to "hold the line" on school gentrification (Roda, 2020). Lessons from the three case study sites, however, underscore the need to understand the connection between schools and their broader contexts to ameliorate gentrification's exclusionary effects. Staff members across all three schools recognized that rising housing costs had displaced families from neighborhoods and, barring intervention, would change the demographic characteristics of their schools' attendance boundaries. Of the three schools, Juniper was, perhaps, uniquely positioned to protect a portion of its incumbent population because its programmatic model requires a certain proportion of native Spanish speakers. Similar protections, however, do not exist for other groups of longtime resident families. Minimizing longtime resident families' marginalization and exclusion in schools in gentrifying communities, thus, requires a broad vision for equity within and outside of the schoolhouse doors.

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Study 2. School Gentrification and the Ecologies of Middle-Class Parent Engagement in Urban Public Schools

Middle-class parents have become a powerful force in urban school improvement (Billingham & Kimelberg, 2013; Cucchiara, 2008; Posey-Maddox, 2016). Beginning in the early 2000s, a new wave of gentrification has transformed the demographic profile of cities across the United States, bringing an influx of young, educated professionals to neighborhoods this population had once avoided (Cucchiara, 2019; Wilson, 2015). Increasingly, public education has become a key lever to attract and retain middle-class residents. Developers, city agency staff, and education leaders have advanced coordinated efforts to remake public schools to reflect middle-class parents' schooling preferences (Cucchiara, 2013b; Makris & Brown, 2017; Smith & Stovall, 2008). At the same time, middle-class parents have also positioned themselves as critical change agents and have worked collectively – usually with other parents "like them" – to make schools academically and socially safe options for their children (Freidus, 2016; Posey-Maddox et al., 2014b; Syeed, 2019).

The transformation of urban public schools, by and for middle-class families, can produce what Posey-Maddox et al. (2014a) called *school gentrification*, a process characterized by increased middle-class enrollment as well as improvements to schools' infrastructure and educational programming. While these changes may be beneficial, a growing body of research has revealed how this process can widen opportunity gaps among students and alter the culture and politics of school-family relations (Cucchiara, 2019; Posey-Maddox, 2013; Syeed, 2018). Much of the school

gentrification literature has centered on what middle-class parents – or parent gentrifiers – do and how their actions impact schools' incumbent communities, usually economically disadvantaged longtime residents (Billingham & Kimelberg, 2013; Siegel-Hawley et al., 2016). Although understanding what parent gentrifiers do is an important first step for understanding how school gentrification manifests and its impact on schools, much less is know about how middle-class parents' orientations and beliefs influence *how and why* they engage in gentrifying schools. Further, existing research draws considerably on White parent gentrifiers' perspectives and experiences (Quarles & Butler, 2018). This focus has obscured how race *and* class jointly influence parents' interactions in gentrifying schools, including when both parent gentrifiers and longtime resident parents are middle class.

This study contributes to conversation on middle-class parent engagement in gentrifying schools by investigating how these parents' orientations and experiences shape their engagement practices. Drawing on data collected through a multisite case study of school gentrification in three elementary schools in Washington, DC, this study asks: *1) How do middle-class parents perceive the impact of gentrification on their schools and neighborhoods?* and *2) How do middle-class parents' orientations and beliefs shape how and why they engage in gentrifying schools?* This investigation makes two key contributions of the literature. First, this study's findings reveal the potential for collectively oriented middle-class parent engagement to interrupt opportunity hoarding behaviors in gentrifying schools. Second, this study reveals the racialized complexities of middle-class parent involvement through its examination of power *within* parent groups (i.e., middle-class parents). The school gentrification

literature has emphasized how White parent gentrifiers marginalize and exclude economically disadvantaged families of color. By holding parents' social class constant, this study nuances discussions of school gentrification by revealing patterns of exclusion when both parent gentrifiers and longtime residents are middle class.

This article begins with a review of the literature on school gentrification and middle-class parent involvement in education. Next, I present the Ecologies of Parent Engagement (EPE) framework (Barton et al., 2004), which guides this study's empirical analysis. Leveraging ecological perspectives, this study finds that middle-class parents', both gentrifiers and longtime residents, experiences and perceptions of gentrification influenced how and why they engaged with their children's schools. Specifically, interviewed parents were oriented toward the collective and used engagement strategies that they believed would benefit improve all families' experiences in their schools.

Literature Review

Numerous studies have documented the value of parent involvement in education. Researchers have found associations between parent involvement and individual student outcomes, including academic achievement and social-emotional outcomes (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012; McWayne et al., 2004), as well as school-level effects, such as increased social capital (Galindo et al., 2017) and promoting positive school climates (Comer & Haynes, 1991). Although parent involvement is beneficial for both students and schools, there is also a "dark side" (Lareau, 2000, p. 149). Researchers studying middle-class parent involvement, in particular, have documented the negative effects of high levels of engagement. For example, as they

work to customize their children's schooling experiences, middle-class parents may engage in surveillance practices, which can leave teachers vulnerable to parents' scrutiny and influence in classroom activities (Mansaray, 2020; McGhee Hassrick & Schneider, 2009). Middle-class parents' attempts to control school operations or school-based parent committees can increase conflicts between parents and school staff (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002; Lareau & Muñoz, 2012; McGrath & Kuriloff, 1999). Finally, middle-class parents' engagement practices can exacerbate inequities among student groups (e.g., between White and minoritized students). When middle-class parents advocate for their children's placement in advanced courses, they often play a role in widening racial and class stratification within schools (Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Lyken-Segosebe & Hinz, 2015). Further, middle-class parents may organize against policy changes that they see as a potential threat to their children's educational advantage, such as efforts to end tracking policies or expand access to gifted education programs (Lareau et al., 2018; Wells & Serna, 1996).

The negative effects of middle-class parent involvement may be heightened in gentrifying communities, where these parents are positioned as both consumers and producers of school improvement (Billingham & Kimelberg, 2013; Posey-Maddox, 2016). A common theme in the school gentrification literature is that middle-class parents work collectively to make schools academically and socially "safe" options for their children (Posey-Maddox et al., 2014b; Roberts & Lakes, 2016; Siegel-Hawley et al., 2016). Parent gentrifiers' advocacy, fundraisers, and material contributions, thus, often elevate them to "valued-customer" status (Cucchiara, 2013b). This status garners parent gentrifiers explicit praise and recognition from

school staff (Aggarwal, 2014; Posey, 2012) as well as accommodations, such as placement in specialized programs, and flexible support for their children (Billingham & Kimelberg, 2013; Freidus, 2020; Mordechay, 2021).

Parent gentrifiers may bring a different set of expectations for how schools operate, including for the structure and function of school-based parent committees. PTOs, in particular, have become key sites of conflict and exclusion in gentrifying schools (Posey-Maddox, 2013; Sieber, 1982; Syeed, 2018). As parent gentrifiers and other middle-class parents assume leadership of these committees, they may surreptitiously restructure these organizations to maintain control of the agenda (Sieber, 1982). Middle-class parents may also create physical or symbolic barriers that limit other parents' participation, such as meeting outside of school or communicating over electronic listservs (Freidus, 2016; Posey-Maddox, 2014; Sieber, 1982). As Posey-Maddox (2013) observed, the professionalization of parent committees can create symbolic barriers to participation. Parents who perceive that they do not have the skills that these committees value, such as grant writing or experience organizing large-scale fundraisers, or the time needed to participate in these activities may feel that there is no longer a place for them.

Social reproduction theorists have long argued that schools reward students – and their parents – when their behavior matches the norms and expectations of the dominant class (Warikoo & Carter, 2009). Parent gentrifiers, in particular, may have a greater advantage when staff members view their arrival as an opportunity to work with parents who possess the necessary "capacity," including the time, dispositions, and resources, to support schools (Cucchiara, 2013b; Mansaray, 2018). Researchers

studying school gentrification have emphasized social class in their analyses of the process. These studies foreground schools' and middle-class parents' cultural alignment, which allows these parents to have outsized influence in gentrifying schools (Butler & Robson, 2003b; M. Hernández, 2019; Posey-Maddox, 2014). However, the emphasis on class leaves questions about how race influences gentrification processes and minoritized middle-class parents' experiences in gentrifying schools. White and minoritized middle-class parents' shared class and schooling preferences may suggest homogeneity in parents' goals for schools (Anderson, 2012). However, research on minority-led gentrification suggests that these residents may have distinct motivations for investing in urban schools and neighborhoods, such as leveraging their resources for racial and economic uplift (Huante, 2021; Hyra, 2006; Pattillo, 2007). Even so, minoritized middle-class parents' actions can also marginalize and exclude economically disadvantaged families of color (Gordon & Nocon, 2008; Pattillo, 2007).

Presently, few studies have systematically investigated how minoritized middle-class families participate in and experience school gentrification. However, the broader parent involvement literature suggests that minoritized middle-class parents often have complicated interactions with their children's schools. Although White and minoritized middle-class parents may use similar engagement strategies (Diamond & Gomez, 2004; M. Hernández, 2019; McGhee Hassrick & Schneider, 2009), researchers have identified differences in middle-class parents' orientations toward engagement. Black middle-class parents, in particular, often display a "managed trust" toward schools (Rollock et al., 2015). For these parents, being

involved in their children's schooling allows them to ensure that their children's teachers maintain high expectations, protect their children from exclusionary discipline, and otherwise manage their children's encounters with racism within schools (Posey-Maddox et al., 2021; Vincent et al., 2012).

Minoritized, middle-class parents' social class, moreover, does not always insulate them from exclusion when attempting to engage with their children's schools (Diamond & Gomez, 2004; Posey-Maddox & Haley-Lock, 2016). Studies of Black middle-class parent engagement find that even when these parents possess the skills, knowledge, and resources that schools value, school staff often ignore their contributions and advocacy (e.g., Posey-Maddox, 2017; Posey-Maddox & Haley-Lock, 2016). Black middle-class parents may also be excluded from predominantly White parent social networks and parent committees (Allen & White-Smith, 2018). Posey-Maddox (2017), for example, found Black parents across socioeconomic groups simultaneously experienced hypervisibility and invisibility in schools. That is, parents felt as though they were always being watched in educational spaces and that other parents ignored their contributions and perspectives.

Although middle-class parents' actions can exacerbate inequities in gentrifying schools, research suggests that marginalization and exclusion are not inevitable. Middle-class parents' orientations and beliefs are key for understanding the outcomes of their engagement. Middle-class parents who are more individualistically oriented may exacerbate or create new patterns of inequity in gentrifying schools by narrowly targeting their investments toward their children (Cucchiara, 2019; Cucchiara & Horvat, 2009). In contrast, middle-class parents who

are oriented toward the collective may leverage their engagement to positively impact all families' schooling experiences. Understanding the process of school gentrification and its outcomes requires an understanding both of what parents do and how their beliefs and orientations shape how and why they engage with gentrifying schools.

Conceptual Framework

Researchers studying parent involvement in education have employed conceptual frameworks designed to investigate what parents do to support their children's academic and social-emotional outcomes (e.g., Epstein, 1995) and how parents construct their roles vis-à-vis their children's schools (e.g., Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). To some extent, the focus on parents' actions and role construction obscures how parents' experiences, both in and outside of schools, influence how and why they engage in their children's schooling. For this study, the Ecologies of Parent Engagement (EPE) framework (Barton et al., 2004) offered an analytic lens to understand not only what middle-class parents do but also how multiple overlapping fields influence middle-class parents' engagement practices.

For Barton et al. (2004), parent involvement is a dynamic and interactive process that is shaped by parents' histories, resources, and the specific spaces where their engagement takes place. The EPE framework draws on Bourdieu's (1986) conceptualizations of capital (i.e., embodied traits, styles, and manners; status markers) and field (i.e., the context of social interactions). Importantly, fields establish the rules and expectations for stakeholder interactions, the resources that individuals can use in their interactions, and the value of those resources (Schirato &

Roberts, 2018). Barton et al. use the term "space" rather than field within their framework, but the two terms are conceptually similar. Space, like a field, is a site of competition with defined rules of engagement. Within a given space, actors use their resources – whose value is determined by the context – to obtain power and advantage. Barton et al. employed the term space to link specific engagement activities to the many different contexts where parents engage around their children's schooling. In school-structured spaces, such as classrooms, and non-academic spaces, such as cafeterias, school norms define the rules and behavioral expectations. In the context of parent engagement, these norms include establish expectations for parents' roles, what types of engagement are acceptable, and the resources that parents can activate to support their children's education (Fernández & López, 2017; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Posey-Maddox & Haley-Lock, 2016). School-structured spaces, however, are not the only sites of parent engagement. Parents may interact with their children and other adults about schooling concerns in their homes and in their communities.

The EPE framework integrates the tenets of Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) to investigate how racism and linguistic hierarchies manifest in schools and shape parents' engagement experiences. As such, researchers have applied the EPE framework to investigate the lived experiences – both in and outside of schools – that influence minoritized parents' engagement practices (e.g.,Alameda-Lawson & Lawson, 2016; Posey-Maddox, 2017). I argue, however, that the EPE framework's focus on race and racism may obscure how multiple aspects of parents' identities shape their engagement beliefs, practices, and experiences. That is, a

discussion of parents' engagement experiences and their motivations requires an examination of the overlapping systems of oppression (e.g., racism *and* classism) that manifest within schools. Intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1991; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016) offers a pathway to frame how parents' overlapping identities (e.g., their race and social class) jointly shape parents' orientations and experiences. Thus, the empirical analysis attends to the multiple systems of power that parents may simultaneously encounter as they interact with schools and that shape parents' engagement motivations and experiences.

Methods

The findings presented in this paper draw on data collected from a larger, multisite case study designed to understand school gentrification's transformative promises and challenges for urban elementary schools. The multisite case study design fostered an opportunity to examine school gentrification within its "real-world context" (Yin, 2014, p. 16). The inclusion of multiple sites allowed for an examination of school gentrification in multiple settings, which can increase the potential for cross-site comparisons and generalizations (Herriott & Firestone, 1983). School gentrification's processes and outcomes are dependent on both macrolevel processes at the municipal level as well as microlevel dynamics within schools. Thus, this study did not seek to generalize to other school contexts. Instead, I aimed to contribute to broader theories and conceptualizations of school gentrification. In this paper, I focus on the perspectives of a sample of middle-class parents across the three Washington, DC elementary schools to investigate how their beliefs and orientations shape their engagement in gentrifying elementary schools. I focus on the elementary

level to capture middle-class parents' involvement during the grades where they are most likely to engage directly with schools (C. L. Green et al., 2007; Kimelberg, 2014b).

Setting and Participants

Washington, DC's rapid transformation makes it a favorable location to study school gentrification (e.g., Hyra, 2017; Summers, 2019). Like cities across the country, public education has been a key lever to attract and retain middle-class families (Wilson, 2015). Increasingly, middle-class families have enrolled their children in neighborhood public schools (Mordechay & Ayscue, 2017) and are playing key roles in school improvement (Stein, 2019; Syeed, 2018, 2019).

To identify case study sites, I started with the population elementary-level District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) and public charter schools. Using intensity sampling (Patton, 1990), a strategy that seeks to identify case sites where the features of a phenomenon are present but would not be considered extreme cases, I identified a pool of schools where the features of school gentrification were likely present (Posey-Maddox et al., 2014a). These features included an increase in the proportion of middle-class students enrolled, an infusion of resources (e.g., programmatic, monetary) to schools, changes to school cultures, and longtime resident families' exclusion and marginalization. Although there are not agreed-upon thresholds to measure school gentrification, researchers have developed various frameworks to characterize demographic change in gentrifying schools (e.g., Green et al., 2020; Stillman, 2011). For this study, I identified public elementary schools

where there was at least a 5% increase in the proportion of middle-class families[11] between 2000 and 2019, according to data from the National Center for Education Statistics[12]. According to Green et al.'s (2020) typology, a 5% increase in the proportion of middle-class families would put a school in the earliest stages of gentrification. This sampling approach produced a pool of 28 neighborhood and public charter schools. In addition to data on demographic change, I searched for publicly available information about potential schools to gain insights about available academic programs, financial or material support from parent-teacher organizations or "Friends Of" organizations, and information about school facilities upgrades. From this information, I narrowed the pool to six potential sites, including three DCPS schools and three charter schools.

After securing research approval from DCPS, I sent introductory emails to the six school principals to schedule exploratory conversations about conducting research in their schools. At one school, my prior connections with one of its external partners facilitated access to the principal. When I did not receive a response, I returned to the original pool and selected additional schools for outreach. During site selection, a professional contact introduced me to parents at two schools in the original sample pool, who helped facilitate introductions to their schools' administrators. I scheduled introductory conversations with administrators at the three schools to learn more

[11] The District of Columbia Office of the State Superintendent's measure "at-risk" students served as a proxy measure for students' economic status; the "at-risk" measure accounts for the number of students enrolled in a school who are homeless, in the District of Columbia's foster care system, qualify for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). When this indicator was not available, free and reduced-price lunch status served as the economic indicator.

[12] I focus on the period between 2000 and 2019 to capture changes in demographics following explicit policy initiatives that promoted housing, economic, and education initiatives designed to attract middle-class residents and businesses to the city (e.g., Asch & Musgrove, 2015; Wilson, 2015).

about school-level dynamics to inform final site selection. Ultimately, I gained access to three elementary schools, all managed by DCPS, located in gentrifying neighborhoods across the city. Table 1 displays the characteristics of each of the participating schools.

Table 1

Participating School Characteristics, 2000 and 2019[13]

	Juniper Elementary[14]		Pine Elementary		Sycamore Elementary	
	2000	2019	2000	2019	2000	2019
Student characteristics						
Total enrollment	470	450	140	230	470	440
Racial/ethnic composition (%)						
African American/Black	70	15	80	15	80	60
Hispanic/Latinx	30	70	5	10	5	5
White	0	10	10	60	10	25
Asian	0	0	5	5	5	5
Multiracial	N/A	5	N/A	10	N/A	5
American Indian/Native Hawaiian	0	0	0	0	0	0
Economically disadvantaged (FRPL/at-risk)	70	30	60	10	30	20
In-boundary attendance, 2019	-	40	-	90	-	40
School Characteristics, 2019						
STAR[15] Score	-	70	-	N/A	-	70
STAR Rating	-	4	-	N/A	-	4
Dual Language Program	-	Yes	-	No	-	No
Parent Organization	-	Yes	-	Yes	-	Yes

Site Contexts[16]. Since its founding in the 1970s, Juniper Elementary School (Juniper) has experienced multiple demographic shifts that mirror the demographic

[13] All data points rounded to protect confidentiality.
[14] All school and participant names are pseudonyms.
[15] The School Transparency and Reporting (STAR) Framework evaluates school performance, including academic achievement and growth, school environment, English language proficiency, and graduation rate. Schools receive a rating from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest) based on their STAR score (100 points)
[16] To protect each school's confidentiality, site descriptions do not include information about the neighborhoods in which schools are located.

transitions of its surrounding neighborhoods. The once-majority Black school now serves a majority Latinx population, many of whom are the children of immigrants from Central America who have settled in the city. Over the last two decades, a growing number of affluent families – both White and Latinx – have enrolled their children in the school, often attracted by the school's Spanish immersion program. In 2019, approximately 70% of students identified as Hispanic/Latinx, 15% of students identified as African American/Black, and 10% of students identified as White. Five percent of students identified as multiracial. According to interview respondents, the school has a long history of parent activism and engagement. The school offers multiple pathways for parent engagement, such as a parent-teacher organization, monthly principal coffees, back-to-school nights, and social events for families. Interviewed parents and school partners described a historic – and current – awareness of gentrification's potential to transform the school's demographic and cultural character. To that end, parents, school staff, and partners jointly developed strategies to support inclusive school-family partnerships and shared leadership among racially and linguistically diverse families.

Of the three schools, Pine Elementary School (Pine) has experienced the most dramatic demographic change between 2000 and 2019. In 2000, approximately 80% of students identified as Black, and 60% were identified as economically disadvantaged. By 2019, White students and middle-class students comprised the largest proportion of the school's population. Black students comprised 15% of the school's population and 60% of students identified as White. The school has smaller populations of Hispanic/Latinx students (10%), multiracial students (10%), and Asian

students (5%). Ten percent of students were identified as economically disadvantaged. The school benefits from an active parent community, including a PTO that hosts multiple fundraisers each year. Although interviewed parents generally viewed the school's active parent community as an asset, they acknowledged how some middle-class parents' engagement shifted the school's culture and contributed to the exclusion of a cross-section of families in the school community.

Finally, at Sycamore Elementary School (Sycamore), middle-class families have become a growing presence in the community. In 2000, 80% of all students identified as Black, 10% of students as White, and 5% each, as Hispanic/Latinx and Asian. In 2019, Black students still comprised the largest share of the school's population (60%), but the proportion of White students increased to 25%. Five percent each of the student body identified as Hispanic/Latinx, Asian, or multiracial. Twenty percent of students were identified as economically disadvantaged. White students are clustered in the early elementary grades as, according to interview participants, White families who live in the surrounding neighborhoods leave the school as their children approach the fourth and fifth grade. For some members of the school community, retaining these families has been a priority. Yet, parents recognized that the focus on in-boundary families, many of whom are White and affluent, could lead to the displacement and exclusion of minoritized families who reside outside of the neighborhood.

Participants. This study's findings draw on interviews with a sample of 17 middle-class parents across the three participating elementary school sites. "Middle

class" is an elusive term used to describe one's economic position and occupation as well as a set of practices, attitudes, and dispositions (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). In the United States, the term "middle class" often connotes a set of virtues, such as a strong work ethic and social ability (Cucchiara, 2013b). Thus, the term has become a ubiquitous description of one's social class that encompasses a broad range of incomes (Posey-Maddox, 2014). This paper defines "middle class" both in terms of parents' occupations and education as well as through the material and symbolic resources that parents wield as they interact with schools. To categorize respondents, I collected information about their education levels and occupations and the education levels and occupations of their partners, when available. I also used parents' descriptions of the resources and strategies that parents use to advance their interests in schools as an indicator of parents' class status.

The original recruitment plan included multiple recruitment strategies, including in-person recruitment during schools' arrival and dismissal period and at family engagement activities, as well as electronic recruitment methods through school and neighborhood listservs. School building closures due to the Covid-19 pandemic required that all recruitment be conducted online. Between March 2020 and June 2021, I recruited parents through direct e-mail outreach to parents who held leadership positions at their schools (e.g., PTOs, school advisory teams), submitting posts to school-affiliated parent listservs or "Friends of" groups, and sending posts to neighborhood listservs. Snowball sampling identified additional participants through interviewees' social networks. This sampling approach yielded a convenience sample of 17 parents who were, in general, connected to their schools either through their

participation in school-based engagement activities (e.g., PTOs) or connected to other families in their neighborhoods.

Almost all parents (15 parents) moved to the Washington, DC metropolitan area within the last two decades. The remaining participants grew up in the city or in a nearby suburb. Parents were highly educated, with 16 parents holding at least a bachelor's degree. Eight parents identified as Black or African American; seven identified as White; two participants were multiracial (i.e., Black-White, Asian-White). Most parents lived within the attendance boundaries of their chosen school. Three parents had children who attended two of the focal schools.

In addition to interviews with parents, I draw on interviews with external partners who support family engagement activities at the selected schools. These interviews, conducted in February 2020 (Juniper's partners) and June 2021 (Pine and Sycamore's partner), provided additional context about schools' family engagement cultures and the promises and pitfalls of middle-class parents' actions. I triangulated parents' accounts with data gained from external partners to generate a complete understanding of the family engagement dynamics in each school. Table 2 displays participant characteristics; one partner worked across multiple schools.

Table 2

Respondent Characteristics (*N*=22)

	Juniper Elementary (*n*=7)	Pine Elementary (*n*=4)	Sycamore Elementary (*n*=11)
Number of partners interviewed	4	0	1
Number of parents interviewed	3	4	10
Parents' Race/Ethnicity			
African American/Black	0	1	7
White	2	2	3
Multiracial	1	1	0
Parents' Gender			
Female	3	3	8
Male	0	1	2
Parents' Highest Level of Education			
Graduate/professional degree	3	4	3
Bachelor's degree	0	0	7
Some college	0	0	1
Parents Live in Attendance Boundary			
Yes	2	3	6
No	1	1	4

Data Collection and Analysis

This study draws on multiple data sources, including interviews, observations, and documents. Documents include parent-teacher organization bylaws, materials collected from parent group meetings, and newspaper articles describing key events at each school. Data collection activities spanned January 2020 and June 2021 and proceeded in two phases: pre-Covid-19 and during Covid-19. In the pre-Covid-19 phase, I spent time at each school to observe interactions among parents and between parents and school staff. During this period, I conducted 4.75 hours of observation at Juniper, including four 15-minute sessions during arrival or dismissal and three principal coffees, lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. I observed two joint meetings

of staff and families at Pine and Sycamore, totaling 3.5 hours of observation across the two schools. My observations focused on social interactions among parents and between parents and school staff members. During family engagement activities, I took extensive notes to capture information about the content of the meeting, participants' demographics and roles, and levels of engagement during activities. When capturing direct quotes, I captured comments verbatim and used quotation marks to indicate information directly from meeting participants. On March 16, 2020, DCPS closed all school buildings in response to the pandemic. Family engagement activities paused for the remainder of the school year as schools transitioned to online instruction. For this study, school building closures halted opportunities to observe parents' engagement practices and relationships across the three schools. School building closures also limited opportunities to recruit a cross-section of parents from each school community. On-line recruitment and recruiting through participants' networks ultimately resulted in a sample of parents who were connected to and active in their school communities.

Except for interviews with Juniper's partners, I conducted all interviews virtually using Zoom web conferencing. Interviews with parents lasted between 30 and 75 minutes, with an average duration of 50 minutes. The parent interview protocol asked parents to reflect on their decisions to enroll their children in their chosen school, their perceptions of neighborhood change, their motivations for engaging with the school, and strategies used to engage. Interviews with school partners lasted between 30 and 75 minutes, for an average of 66 minutes. The school partner interview protocol asked respondents to reflect on their perception of the key

issues facing each school and how their work supports schools' efforts to promote equitable school-family relations.

I considered myself to be an outsider to the school communities. However, my prior professional relationships facilitated access to the schools. At Juniper, my professional connection to the school's partners provided insights into how gentrification influenced the school's culture and efforts to promote equitable family engagement. My relationship with the school's partners may have also lent me credibility as I recruited parents for interviews. For parents at all three schools, I suspect that multiple aspects of my identity – as a middle-class Black woman and researcher – facilitated conversations and helped established rapport during interviews. Several parents, for example, held doctoral degrees and understood the nature of the research process.

Over the course of the study, I built stronger connections with a small group of parents at Pine and Sycamore. These parents were members of Parents for Racial Equity (PRE), a parent-led initiative to support inclusive school climates. As a result of attending PRE meetings in early Spring 2020 and after conducting interviews, the organization's co-founders asked if I would be willing to advise the group on developing two surveys to gain information about parents' perspectives on equity and inclusion in their schools. To give back to the school community, I volunteered consultation and supported survey design and data analysis. Through follow-up conversations with this group of parents, I gained additional insight into the schools' cultures and parent engagement practices. This work also facilitated access to

additional participants, as they may have seen me as someone who was invested in their communities.

Data analysis was iterative and began during the data collection phase. I recorded and used transcription services to produce a verbatim transcript of each interview. To ensure accuracy, I reviewed transcript with their associated audio files. All field notes were typed in a narrative form for analysis. Following each interview, I audio-recorded short observations and impressions describing the interview. These impressions were later integrated into analytic memos drafted after coding interview transcripts. I coded all interviews using NVivo, a qualitative analysis program. Coding progressed in two stages. First, I coded interviews inductively to capture parents' perceptions of school change, parents' descriptions of their school communities (e.g., relationships among parents, the role of parent organizations), and engagement strategies (e.g., participation on school committees, community advocacy).

Next, I applied deductive codes that derived from the school gentrification literature as well as from the conceptual frameworks that guided this analysis. Deductive codes included codes derived from the EPE framework to capture information about parents' motivations for involvement as well as information about where parents' engagement took place (e.g., "academic spaces within schools," "non-academic spaces within schools," and "external involvement"). When appropriate, I consolidated codes that emerged during the inductive coding phase when they captured similar constructs derived from the literature and conceptual frameworks that guided this analysis. For example, I collapsed codes that captured parents'

descriptions of how the meeting accessibility influenced engagement with a corresponding deductive code capturing identified barriers to family engagement. Likewise, I merged parents' perceptions of the impact of the global pandemic and 2020 uprisings with a deductive code that captures the influence of the temporal context on parent engagement. A full list of codes can be found in Appendix B. During the analytic phase, I assigned attribute codes to each transcript, such as parents' racial background, gender, and whether they lived within or outside of their schools' attendance boundaries. To understand how parents' identities influenced their involvement, I ran crosstabs of select codes and attribute codes (e.g., "motivation for engagement" and "race") to explore differences among respondents.

Following each round of coding, I drafted an analytic memo designed to debrief the decoding process and to identify key themes from each conversation. These memos allowed me to identify themes within and across school sites and consider rival explanations for findings. Additionally, my relationships with parents at Pine and Sycamore provided informal opportunities for member checking for these two sites, which allowed me to refine emerging findings and themes. Observations and documents provided background and contextual information to form a more complete understanding of family engagement structures and dynamics at each site. I annotated observation notes to capture information about meeting participants, perceptions of relationships, and evidence of collaboration or conflict among parents and between parents and school staff. When reviewing documents, I focused on information to understand the specific histories and current contexts of each school as

well as information about the structures and policies that guide each school's approach to family engagement.

Findings

Interviews with parents revealed that their experiences in and perceptions of school gentrification shaped how and why they engaged with their children's schools. This section begins with a discussion of middle-class parents' perceptions of gentrification's impact on their schools. Next, I describe parents' engagement-related motivations and strategies.

Parents' Perceptions of Gentrification's Impact on Schools

When asked how gentrification influenced their communities, interviewed parents described observable changes to their neighborhoods and their perceptions of how those changes manifested in their schools. Parents universally associated gentrification with the construction of luxury apartment buildings, the renovation of historic homes, and new neighborhood amenities. For Yvette, a Sycamore parent and longtime resident, gentrification brought retail to neighborhoods where it had once been unavailable: "One thing that's changed is the amount of food resources. Growing up, I don't remember grocery stores in [my neighborhood]. We did our grocery shopping at corner stores." Parents universally perceived that gentrification had made neighborhoods across the city "Whiter and wealthier." Several parents shared stories about Black and Latinx neighbors who sold their family homes or who were displaced by rising housing costs. Turnover in home ownership meant changes to neighborhood demographics. As Tiffany, a longtime resident and parent at Pine, observed, "You know, who moves in is typically not Black families. You notice now

that it is such a concentration of non-Black families." Other parents questioned how gentrification altered perceptions about who was welcome in their neighborhoods. Mina, a biracial parent gentrifier at Pine, observed, "It feels very White, but I'm not sure that it is, or if we actually have just so deeply gentrified the neighborhood that we make people who are not White feel unwelcome in public spaces."

All parents connected neighborhood gentrification with school gentrification. In Yvette's words, "When we gentrify our neighborhoods, we gentrify our schools." The initial demographic change in gentrifying neighborhoods often results in a decline of school-age children (T. L. Green et al., 2020; Keels et al., 2013). For Olivia, a White parent gentrifier at Juniper, the turnover of homes meant the loss of Black and Latinx children in the school's catchment area: "Even on our block, a lot of families with kids that were Latino or Black have moved away. The Latino family behind us sold their house for a lot of money. They used to go to the school, but they left." The loss of racially minoritized school-aged children in neighborhoods often gave way to increased White, middle-class enrollment. Kelly, a biracial parent gentrifier at Juniper, described the demographic differences between the early elementary grades, where White students comprised a significant proportion of the population, and upper elementary grades as "very stark." This trend, in her view, would only continue: "Wealthier, White people will live here, and they will be more comfortable sending their kids to the public school because the kids of color are forced out." Similarly, Julia, a Black parent gentrifier at Pine, recalled that, before having children, she was excited by the promise of a racially diverse neighborhood school. However, the diversity she observed was gone by the time she enrolled her

children: "[My child] was one of two children of color in the class. … That was jarring for sure. It really gave me pause thinking about, you know, what is happening to the neighborhood."

An Infusion of Resources. Parents remarked that middle-class parents' presence brought several benefits to their schools, including the infusion of monetary and material resources. For parents across all three schools, PTOs were a significant source of these resources. Tiffany, at Pine, explained, "There are few other PTOs around the city that have the pockets that can raise the amount of money that ours does to support programs. That's phenomenal." In addition to direct contributions, middle-class families frequently contacted city and school district officials on behalf of their schools. Lauren, one of Juniper's educational partners, referred to middle-class parents at the school as "e-mail warriors." For interviewed parents, the ability to serve as advocates was part of the value they brought to their schools. As Derrick and Olivia explained:

> You have professionals – I'd like to think that I'm a professional – come in who are not from the area, and they add value to the school. … They start making noise with letters and influence. Then, you start to see the walls get painted and your school renovated. – Derrick, Black parent gentrifier, Sycamore

> I've got all this education. I've got the ability to communicate really well. I'm a good advocate as I do this for my job. I can come in and add value. I can take the work that's being done [in the school], contribute, and elevate it. – Olivia, White parent gentrifier, Juniper

Notably, how both parents constructed and understood their roles in their schools reflects prior studies of school gentrification. Researchers have found that parent gentrifiers' understanding of "value" refers not only to what parent gentrifiers, and their children, gain from choosing urban schools but also the perception of value that gentrifiers *add to* these institutions (Freidus, 2016; Reay et al., 2007).

Middle-Class Parent Influence in Schools. With middle-class parents' resources and advocacy came changes to which parents had power and influence. At all three schools, parents observed that White or middle-class parents held majorities on PTOs and other school-based committees. At Juniper, parents observed that despite efforts to share leadership across parent groups, Spanish-dominant Latinx parents were often underrepresented at PTO meetings. For Olivia, this decline was first noticeable when Spanish translation, available at all school events, became less of a necessity: "We had a meeting where we didn't need translation, and I was like, 'What's going on here?'" To be sure, Spanish-dominant Latinx parents engaged elsewhere in the school, including at observed principal coffees in early spring 2020 (Field note, 2020). As Cora, one of Juniper's partners observed, middle-class parents' efforts to professionalize PTO meetings may have alienated some families (e.g., Syeed, 2018). She observed, "[Latinx parents] don't want to just go and listen to a PowerPoint. They want to go and get to know each other. They want to go, drink coffee, and ask questions in an informal manner as opposed to having a very formal meeting."

As White and middle-class families gained control of parent organizations, they sought to influence school operations. Holly, a parent gentrifier at Juniper, observed that middle-class families – herself included – had an outsized voice in the school and have attempted to control how the school uses parent-raised funds to support programs: "It was sort of amazing to see once you got some vocal parents who had a little bit of money, they wanted to control what [the school] could do." Similarly, at Pine and Sycamore, middle-class parents' control over parent committees extended to attempts to control school operations. Julia, a parent gentrifier at Pine, observed, "You have the PTO mom types who were managing a lot of what's going on around the school. They have a lot of power and control." Vanessa, a Black parent gentrifier at Sycamore, perceived that some parents used PTO participation to have "sway" with the administration. Although some interviewed parents described this type of parent as well-meaning, others highlighted a prevailing sense of entitlement among middle-class parents to control what happens in schools. Zora, a Black parent gentrifier at Sycamore, explained, "[Some parents] feel like they can challenge the principal or the school on certain policies or think that they can do things better."

Social marginalization and exclusion. Across all three schools, parents described PTOs and other parent committees as socially insular organizations. Interviewees frequently used the term "clique" to describe whom they saw as the key players in the parent community. Autumn, a Black parent gentrifier at Sycamore, observed that the "historic make-up of the PTO" had turned off many parents in the community from participating in the organization: "They really do move like a Mean

Girls clique." Beyond membership in parent organizations, race and place shaped which parents were considered part of the "in-crowd" of parents. Black parents at Pine and Sycamore, in particular, described racialized microaggressions when interacting with White parents at their schools. Tiffany, for example, recounted an early experience at a school event: "I said, 'Okay, I'll go and meet other moms.' I'm being more involved. One parent – one of eight White mothers in that room – spoke to me." Derrick, the only Black father in the sample, also described being treated as invisible in his interactions with White parents: "I've had times when I've spoken to White parents, and they look at me like they didn't hear me. I know you heard me. There's only me and you right here."

Parents across all three schools perceived that living in the neighborhood was critical to being perceived as "of the community." For Kelly, a biracial parent gentrifier, living in the neighborhood meant access to relationships with other parents and access to information about the school. Tiana, a Black parent gentrifier at Sycamore, explained that living in the neighborhood influenced other parents' perceptions of her as "an insider:"

> It doesn't matter if you're White or Black, if you're not in the little circle community, if you're not part of the clique, you're not in. I've heard a White mom say, 'I'm not a part of the Mug Club' [referring to mothers who walk with their children to school].

To be sure, some parents who did not live in their school's immediate attendance boundaries still felt that they could gain access to the parent community. Still, their engagement strategies suggest the critical role of place in shaping parent

relationships. Vanessa, who lives outside of Sycamore's attendance boundaries, frequently visited the neighborhoods around the school: "Even though I may not live [in-bounds], I still frequented [the neighborhood]. You still may cross paths with someone."

Middle-Class Parents' Engagement Beliefs and Practices

From an ecological perspective, parents' experiences in and perceptions of gentrification's impact influenced why and how they engaged in their children's schools. For this group of parents, several external influences – including parents' engagement with popular and scholarly accounts of gentrification – influenced their engagement-related beliefs and motivations. Olivia, a parent gentrifier at Juniper, read news stories about school gentrification in New York City, which prompted her to reflect on her role and her reasons for engaging with her child's school: "[Parents] used the term 'tabula rasa.' Like, these parents were going to come in and fix the school and make it better by bringing their gentrification and whiteness. I find that so insensitive." Olivia had once been part of a group of parent gentrifiers who wanted to create a new parent organization to support Juniper. The school's principal at the time, Olivia recalled, gently declined the offer. Olivia reflected, "One of the lessons I learned from that is that you have to approach coming into a new school and be open to the fact that everything might actually be operating well." Erica, a parent gentrifier with children at Pine and Sycamore, similarly engaged with news accounts and research about school gentrification, which has led to many conversations with a colleague whose academic research centered on gentrification: "[My colleague's] always giving me things to read about cultural capital. So, I started, like, 'You won't

believe what's actually being sent out in parent groups right now and being discussed.'" For Erica, reading and engaging in conversations about gentrification's effects on schools prompted a desire to, in her words, "be on the right side of demographic change" and support parent- and staff led action to reduce inequities present in the school communities.

For parents interviewed in spring and summer 2020, broader calls for justice-oriented education, catalyzed by the pandemic and protests for racial justice, also influenced their motivations for engaging with schools. For some parents, the events of 2020 brought issues of racism and classism that had been simmering in their schools to the fore. Interviewed parents at Pine and Sycamore, for example, described persistent conflicts over the distribution of resources and the exclusion of families of color. Julia, a Black parent gentrifier at Pine, explained, "We're in a period now where a lot of parents are saying 'Hey, you know what was going on before? That wasn't right. That wasn't fair. We can't do that anymore." Similarly, Zora, a Black parent gentrifier at Sycamore, observed that the events of summer 2020 increased the urgency of action for racial equity at the school. For Zora, these events motivated her to become more involved with Parents for Racial Equity (PRE):

> [PRE] hasn't had the traction that it's had since George Floyd's death. And then, there was an uprising of parents that lashed out through the listservs. It's created some dialogues that I thought were helpful. That's what attracted me to [PRE] because I recognized that there was an issue at the school, and I wanted to be a part of the solution.

As Zora's comments illustrates, interviews with Black parents surfaced additional motivations to engage in gentrifying schools. As prior studies of Black middle-class engagement have revealed (e.g., Posey-Maddox et al., 2021; Rollock et al., 2015; Vincent et al., 2012), interviewed Black parents were motivated to engage, in part, to ensure that their children had positive experiences in racially diverse schools. For Black parents, this meant being "a presence" in the school community. Tiffany, a longtime resident parent at Pine, recalled microaggressions her family experienced at a private event attended by many families from her child's class: "[This interaction happened], and I said, 'Wait, I need to be more involved. They need to know who I am because there is something going on in this school community." Yvette, a longtime resident at Sycamore, was motivated to engage to have a pulse on the inner workings on the school and, in particular, the PTO: "I don't think that I was in the in-crowd of parents. So, I needed to go to these PTO meetings and other committees because I needed to know exactly what they were doing." Other Black parents saw their engagement as a way to challenge stereotypes that Black parents weren't involved in their children's education. Derrick, a parent gentrifier at Sycamore, was reluctant to engage with parent committees: "I didn't want to [join], but it is one of those things where it is truly a responsibility."

How Parents Engage. Interviewed parents were, in general, well connected to their schools and used a variety of strategies to support their children and the school. Parents engagement took place in both academic and non-academic spaces within schools as they volunteered in their children's classrooms, attended school-sponsored events, and worked directly with teachers and administrators when sharing

ideas or troubleshooting issues. Most parents reported that teachers and other staff welcomed their presence and engagement. Olivia, at Juniper, explained that she not only felt welcome in the school community, but that staff were willing to work with her family when problems arose. She perceived that staff operated from the position of "What can we do to help? What are the supports we can provide? How can we help [your child] do better in school?" It is possible that Olivia's position as a White middle-class parent contributed to her feeling welcomed and accommodated in the community.

Black parents, both parent gentrifiers and longtime residents, reported pushback when they attempted to intervene or engage with their children's schools. When asked about her reception at the school, Autumn, a parent gentrifier who was also an educator, perceived that one of her child's teachers would likely describe her as "pushy and aggressive" when she asked teachers for specific data about her child's progress. Although Autumn was careful not to generalize about other parents' experiences, her conversations with White parents suggested that they did not receive the same pushback. Derrick, a Black parent gentrifier, was met with resistance when he tried to visit his child's class. Sycamore changed its visiting policies, in part, to minimize parents' interference in classroom operations. Derrick was the only parent to mention that this policy change impacted his engagement: "I was looked at sideways, like 'Why are you here?' … It was kind of mouth-dropping. It was like, 'Wait, you're gonna turn a parent away? Why would you do that?'"

Parents' engagement also took place outside of schools. Parents frequently contacted elected officials or central office staff about issues in their schools. Olivia,

a parent gentrifier at Juniper, saw this as one of the roles that she should play as a parent in the community:

> I will find whoever's in charge of a problem and contact them. If it's the city, I'll contact the council member. … [The school has] repeatedly told me to cool my jets, but I see it like, you know, that's the value I add because I'm a constituent. I can say things that staff can't and turn the heat up a little bit.

Notably, school and neighborhood listservs were an important virtual space for parents' engagement. Listservs were spaces where parents could share and receive information about their schools. Listservs were also an important space where parents discussed – or debated – issues in the school community. At Pine and Sycamore, in particular, school listservs were sites of conflict among parents. Alex, a White parent gentrifier with children at both schools, recalled that parents voiced their frustrations on one of the community listservs following conversations between parents and school staff about opportunity gaps between Black and White students. Julia, a Black parent gentrifier, shared similar recollections: "There was a lot of drama, a lot of questions. … There was a lot of finger-pointing, a lot of vitriol, and parents feeling defensive and accusing each other." Some parents questioned the value and purpose of having conversations about the school on listservs, especially those that were not immediately connected to their schools. During the study, parents at Pine and Sycamore were embroiled in a conflict over resource distribution that that took place not only on school listservs but also on neighborhood listservs and other public

forums. Mina, at Pine, explained, "[The neighborhood list] is not a political body or a governing body even connected to the school. Why are we having this debate here?"

Parents also created new spaces to pursue specific engagement goals. For parents at Pine and Sycamore concerned about racial and class equity in their schools, PRE became an important, parent-led space for conversations and collective action. PRE members have shared and discussed emerging research about parenting and educational equity. According to Alex, a White parent gentrifier and PRE co-founder, readings have helped parents understand how gentrification impacted their schools. He described parents' reactions after reading Posey-Maddox's (2014) seminal study of middle-class parent engagement:

> The conversations went straight to our school because people were like, "Man, what's she's talking about at this school in California is exactly what's happening here." There was a lot of unhappiness with the PTO and how it didn't represent the school and how it marginalized people – all the stuff Posey-Maddox talked about.

Interviews with PRE members suggest that the group is an important space for middle-class parents to engage in collective-oriented work within their schools. Edward, a White parent gentrifier at Sycamore, described the group's focus as, "Let's learn about [inequities] together and talk about it…and build the type of community that would not just benefit our kids [referring to middle-class children] but also benefit all kids who are members of the community." In January 2020, PRE members, with staff from both schools, worked collaboratively to redefine the group's mission statement. Among the goals, parents expressed a commitment to

building an inclusive environment where parents "advocated for all children as if they were our own" (Field Note, 2020). The engagement of school staff was an important signal to many PRE participants. Erica, a parent gentrifier who had participated in other school committees, observed that PRE "felt like a very different thing." She commented, "I got the feeling that Principal Thomas was very involved, and this was something that she supported. It felt like a bridge between parents and the administration."

Although PRE is an important space for parents to discuss equity, parent interviews surfaced questions about how this space – and parents' work – connected to other family engagement spaces. Follow-up conversations with parents, for example, affirmed that PRE members are a small, but vocal, faction at Pine and Sycamore; however, other middle-class parents would prefer not to call attention to matters of race and class in the community. Mina, at Pine, recalled an interaction with another parent after she expressed satisfaction that the school's goal is to ensure that all children are academically successful: "I turned to the parent next to me and said, "Oh, that's so great." And [the parent] said something funny like, "Well, yeah, it's great until *your* kid's not getting what they need." Further, Black parents questioned whether the broader school community truly hears their concerns about equity. For example, Autumn, at Sycamore, explained, "I'm not sure if the parents on the board have actually heard me at all. … I question it. I don't know. I feel like they don't hear it, and it's often dismissed unless someone else brings it up."

Discussion and Conclusion

The school gentrification literature has revealed middle-class parents' transformative roles in urban schools. Although middle-class parents often bring resources and serve as advocates, the extant literature cautions that these parents' presence and engagement can widen inequities in urban public schools (Cucchiara, 2019; Posey-Maddox, 2014). Through the lens of the Ecologies of Parent Engagement Framework, this study reveals how middle-class parents' histories, resources, and experiences inform their engagement beliefs and practices within gentrifying schools. I found that parents' experiences in and perceptions of school gentrification shaped how and why they engaged in their children's schools. Notably, parents' engagement with scholarly and popular accounts of gentrification led parents to reflect on their roles as middle-class parents in gentrifying schools and channel their engagement toward activities that would benefit their collective school communities. For example, parents expressed a desire to "be on the right side of demographic change" or a "part of the solution" to address challenges within their schools. From an ecological perspective, this study's findings underscore how the broader macrosystem influences parents' engagement practices. For parents interviewed in spring and summer 2020, the pandemic and global racial justice protests brought conversations about racial and class inequities within their schools to the fore and, for some, added urgency to address these challenges.

This study underscores that parent engagement takes place in multiple spaces, both within and outside of school. In addition to traditional academic spaces, such as volunteering in classrooms and participating in PTO meetings, middle-class parents'

activism on behalf of their schools often took place in their wider communities. This study also revealed new spaces for parent engagement. Electronic listservs were also an important site of parents' engagement, which provided a space not only for parents to receive information but also to engage in conversations about what was happening in their schools. Although electronic listservs became important spaces to participate in conversations, some parents acknowledged that these spaces created engagement barriers for families who were unable to access these spaces. Further, parents questioned the expansion of school-centered conversations to neighborhood listservs that were unaffiliated with their schools. Parents comments underscore how new engagement spaces, such as listservs, can become sites of exclusion within gentrifying school communities (e.g., Posey-Maddox, 2014).

This study also reveals complicated power dynamics within gentrifying schools. Multiple aspects of parents' identities shaped their engagement motivations and experiences. Black parents, notably, were motivated to engage in their children's schools both to protect their individual children's well-being in a racially diverse school and to promote a broader vision of equity and justice in their schools. Despite sharing class identities with White parents and teachers, Black parents encountered marginalization and exclusion. In line with prior studies of Black parents' engagement (Allen, 2013; Diamond & Gomez, 2004; Posey-Maddox, 2017), Black parents reported feeling overlooked and ignored by school staff and White parents. Racialized exclusion was also compounded by place. Some Black parents were able to overcome racialized exclusion because they were seen as "of the community" by virtue or their residence or their perceived proximity to the neighborhoods where

schools were located. Geography's role in shaping exclusion is particularly important in the context of gentrification as this process ultimately shapes who has access to neighborhoods and, by extension, neighborhood public schools (Freeman, 2005; Kennedy & Leonard, 2001; Pérez, 2004).

Interviewed parents were, perhaps, unusually engaged in discussion about gentrification's effects on education and educational equity. The high levels of awareness and engagement may be a function of this study's sample. Snowball sampling may have contributed to the ideological alignment among many interviewees. Further, given that many parents independently engaged in conversations about gentrification and racial equity, these parents may have been predisposed to avoid the kinds of opportunity hoard behaviors commonly associated with middle-class parents (Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Lyken-Segosebe & Hinz, 2015; Sattin-Bajaj & Roda, 2018). This study's findings, thus, speak to the engagement practices of a particular type of highly engaged, equity-oriented middle-class parent. Additional studies of middle-class parents' orientations toward engagement in gentrifying schools may reveal additional perspectives and approaches to parent engagement.

Although this study was not designed to assess the outcomes of middle-class parents' engagement, findings about parents' orientations and beliefs suggest that their efforts could lead to the community-wide benefits that Cucchiara and Horvat (2009) described. Although interviewed parents certainly advocated for their children, their community advocacy and school-level organizing centered on improving the school community for the benefit of all families. Further, PRE members at Pine and

Sycamore took the explicit stance of "advocating for all children as if they were our own," which underscores parents' collectivist orientations toward their schools. Perhaps, then, this study's findings suggest an opportunity to leverage middle-class parents' collectivist orientations to challenge the exclusionary effects of school gentrification. Given the importance of equitable school-family partnerships for ameliorating exclusion (e.g., Cucchiara, 2019), schools may be able to leverage parents' orientations to support shared leadership and build structures to promote inclusion within parent committees. However, as this study's findings reveal, parents' engagement orientations vary. Individualistically-oriented parents, thus, may resist efforts to center equity in gentrifying schools. Thus, schools cannot rely on parents' energy and orientations alone to interrupt inequities. Collective middle-class parent action, thus, must be paired with school-supported structures that ensure that all families are welcome and included.

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Study 3. What's Best for My Child, What's Best for the City: Values and Tensions in Parent Gentrifiers' Middle and High School Selection Processes[17]

> *For once, we really did choose what was best for [our daughter] over, maybe, our general philosophy and what we feel is best overall for the city. And, that was a really tough decision that put us in conflict with our own values and things we believe in.* – Serena

Gentrification, a process of neighborhood and municipal change driven by capital investments and the movement of middle- and upper-income residents into previously disinvested communities, is rapidly transforming the culture and context of public education. For some, gentrification presents an opportunity for school improvement (Byrne, 2003). In gentrifying communities across the United States, school and district leaders have sought to attract and retain middle-class families to increase racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity in schools (Diem et al., 2018), secure funding and material resources (Posey-Maddox, 2016; Posey-Maddox et al., 2014b), and increase social capital (Siegel-Hawley et al., 2016). Securing these benefits rests on the assumption that middle-class families will enroll their children in public schools and actively invest in these school communities.

Researchers studying gentrification's effects on urban schools have centered on parent gentrifiers' – that is, middle- and upper-income parents who live in gentrifying neighborhoods – schooling decisions. Prior research has found that some parent gentrifiers are willing to enroll their children in their neighborhood public

[17] This study was first published in *The Urban Review,* August 20, 2021. Advanced online publication https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-021-00614-1. Reproduced with permission from Springer Nature.

schools, even when doing so may be perceived as a "risk" to their children's future (Cucchiara, 2013a; Kimelberg, 2014b; Posey-Maddox et al., 2014a). Researchers have also investigated the particular values and motivations of this subset of parent gentrifiers who make Crozier et al. (2008) call "against the grain" schooling decisions. From the outside, these parents appear to act against their self-interest to position their children for future advantages by choosing "the best" school. Instead, this group of parents is often motivated to choose schools that other parents may perceive as "risky" based on their perceptions of student achievement and the demographic composition of schools. "Against the grain" choosers are often motivated by civically oriented values, such as commitments to diversity, public education, educational equity, and social justice (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2009; Freidus, 2016; Reay, 2007; Roberts & Lakes, 2016).

Much of the literature on school choice in gentrifying contexts centers on parent gentrifiers with elementary school-age children. Although researchers have asked gentrifiers to hypothesize what choices they will make for middle and high school (e.g., Billingham & Kimelberg, 2013), few studies have systematically investigated parent gentrifiers' motivations and considerations for these grade levels. Understanding parent gentrifiers' decisions about middle and high schools has important implications for understanding parent gentrifiers' decision-making processes across the K-12 continuum. Whereas parent gentrifiers are willing to try elementary schools and are confident that they can leverage their resources to supplement their children's learning, they may view middle and high school selection as more fraught because of the implications for their children's academic and career

trajectories (e.g., Sattin-Bajaj & Roda, 2018). Are parent gentrifiers just as likely to try their neighborhood middle and high schools despite the perceived "risks" of choosing these schools? What factors do parent gentrifiers weigh in the school selection process as their children enter middle and high school? This study aims to expand our understanding of the values and preferences that guide parent gentrifiers' decision-making processes by investigating how they select middle and high schools for their children. Drawing on retrospective interviews with a racially mixed sample of 20 parent gentrifiers in Washington, DC, this study asks *1) What values inform parent gentrifiers' middle and high school selection processes,* and *2) How do parent gentrifiers construct their choice sets for and select middle and high schools?*

I find that parents[18] espoused similar values as "against the grain" choosers, such as support for neighborhood schools and a commitment to educational equity. Although these values might suggest an automatic preference for neighborhood middle and high schools, secondary school selection introduced additional considerations. Parents also valued specific school attributes that they believed would benefit their children's academic and social development. When choosing schools, parents negotiated and weighed multiple value sets, which, perhaps surprisingly, led the overwhelming majority of parents to choose middle and high schools outside of their neighborhoods. For some parents, schooling decisions gave way to an internal conflict when they believed their decisions were at odds with their espoused civic values. This study's findings reveal the limits of civic values in school selection and underscore the tensions of school choice in gentrifying communities.

[18] I use the term "parents" to describe interview participants.

Literature Review

Researchers across disciplines have investigated the relationship between gentrification and school choice, including how school and district leaders may leverage choice to attract and retain middle-class families in urban school districts (e.g., Pearman & Swain, 2017) as well as parent gentrifiers' experiences choosing schools (e.g., Cucchiara & Horvat, 2014; Hankins, 2007; Makris, 2018). Although evidence of a causal relationship between gentrification and school choice has been mixed (Davis & Oakley, 2013; Pearman & Swain, 2017), the availability of school choice options may facilitate gentrification by decoupling the relationship between schooling and housing decisions (Jordan & Gallagher, 2015). As Pearman and Swain observed (2017), parent gentrifiers may be more likely to move into gentrifying neighborhoods when choice options exist. Further, parent gentrifiers may leverage schools of choice to opt-out of their neighborhood schools in favor of private, charter, or traditional public schools in other neighborhoods (DeSena, 2006; Ho et al., 2015; Makris, 2015).

Within the gentrification scholarship, a significant body of work has focused on the motivations, values, and decision-making processes of parent gentrifiers who actively choose their neighborhood schools. Researchers studying this group of parents have found that their commitments to diversity, their neighborhoods, and social justice were important factors in the decision to choose their neighborhood school (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2014; Freidus, 2016; Roberts & Lakes, 2016; Siegel-Hawley et al., 2016). For many parent gentrifiers, however, these commitments were

often in tension with their anxieties about choosing neighborhood schools (Cucchiara, 2013a; Roda & Wells, 2013). Although parent gentrifiers may espouse abstract support for educating their children in racially and economically diverse schools, they often seek schools with the "right" mix of diversity (Cucchiara, 2013a; Goossens et al., 2018; M. Hernández, 2019; Stillman, 2012). School demographics are a salient factor in parents' schooling decisions. Although parents across racial groups may see educating one's children in a diverse environment as a learning opportunity, prior research has found that White parents seek schools with a critical mass of children "like them," often as an indicator of a school's quality and to mitigate any risks associated with choosing their neighborhood school (Cucchiara, 2013a; Posey-Maddox et al., 2014b; Saporito & Lareau, 1999). Black middle-class families may also seek diverse schools as a form of social learning (Rollock et al., 2015) and, as Hernández (2019) observed, to shield their children from potentially negative schooling experiences.

In addition to school demographics, parent gentrifiers may also consider schools' pedagogical and disciplinary approaches. Studies of parent gentrifiers' elementary school decisions suggest that parents seek schools that use instructional and behavioral management styles that are aligned with their parenting philosophies. Stillman (2012) proposed that middle-class parents' preferences and urban schools' approaches to instruction and behavior management may become a source of tension in the school selection and evaluation process. Much like anxieties about the demographic composition of the schools, parents expressed anxiety about teacher-centered instructional approaches as a potential source of harm for their children

(Cucchiara, 2013a). Instead, parent gentrifiers seek schools with progressive, child-centered pedagogies (DeSena, 2006; Stillman, 2012).

School selection is a social process, and parent gentrifiers' social networks are often a valuable source of information about schools. Among middle-class families, information gleaned from social networks may carry more weight than "official" forms of information from schools and school districts (Ball & Vincent, 1998; Holme, 2002). Parents frequently gain information from parent and neighborhood-focused listservs (Freidus, 2016) and through close ties with other parent gentrifiers. For elementary school parents, these ties sometimes originate from playgroups (Roda & Wells, 2013) and may be sustained as children age and deepen as families become involved with neighborhood-based organizations that support local schools (Nelson, 2018; Posey, 2012).

Much of what we know about parent gentrifiers' school-related decisions comes from studies of parents with elementary school-age children. To be sure, researchers studying school selection have examined how racially and economically diverse parents in various contexts choose middle and high schools (e.g., Bell, 2007; Pattillo, 2015). However, less is known about how parent gentrifiers, whom I argue can be distinguished from other groups of advantaged parents by a particular set of progressive values that are linked to their desire to live in urban communities, identify and select middle and high schools for their children. Further, investigating parent gentrifiers' secondary schooling decisions can deepen our understanding of the intersection between school choice and gentrification. Marketized systems provide parent gentrifiers an exit option from schools that they believe will not meet their

children's academic and social-emotional needs. The resulting enrollment patterns can potentially increase inequities between schools in gentrifying communities.

Conceptual Framework

When choosing schools, parents negotiate multiple values, which are broadly defined as the set of beliefs that motivate decisions and actions. Values are both ideological and instrumental (Freidus, 2016; Reay et al., 2007). As Posey-Maddox, Kimelberg, and Cucchiara (2014a) argued, parent gentrifiers' schooling decisions are often linked to a set of ideological values that are tied to their identities as "urban people who value city living and all that it entails, identify as politically liberal or progressive, and profess a desire to have their children attend racially and socioeconomically diverse schools" (p. 448). Thus, the intentional selection of urban public schools – and, specifically, one's neighborhood school – is an extension of parent gentrifiers' preferences for city-living, as well as a commitment to a specific set of progressive values such as being pro-local schools, pro-public education, and pro-diversity (Cucchiara, 2019; Goossens et al., 2018; M. Hernández, 2019; Karsten, 2003; Nelson, 2018; Roda, 2018).

In addition to ideological values, Reay et al. (2007) argued that values are also instrumental (i.e., what parents and, by extension, their children can derive value from). Certain schooling decisions may allow parents to signal their ideological commitments (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2014; Nelson, 2018; Underhill, 2019). For White parents, in particular, choosing diverse schools may also allow them to distinguish themselves from prior generations and enact their understanding of what it means to be a "good" middle-class, White person (Underhill, 2019). Schooling decisions also

have instrumental value for one's children. For example, choosing diverse schools may reflect parents' beliefs that such environments will allow their children to learn to live and work in a multicultural society (M. Hernández, 2019; Ho et al., 2015; Underhill, 2019). Similarly, parents' preferences for schools that use progressive, student-centered instruction and behavioral management approaches (DeSena, 2006; Stillman, 2012) may reflect their beliefs about the types of environment that will prepare their children for future academic and career success (Kimelberg, 2014a; Roda & Wells, 2013).

Parents' values inform the construction of their choice sets, which are the sets of schools that parents are willing to consider for their children (Bell, 2009). As Bell observed, creating a choice set is a subjective process informed by parents' understanding of what is reasonable for their families. Creating a choice set involves three steps. First, parents decide whether they will search for a school or default to their neighborhood school. Next, parents develop criteria and draw on their resources (e.g., their social networks) to identify schools that would be reasonable for their children to attend based on their specific values and preferences. Finally, parents select a school. In the context of this study, the concept of choice sets provides a useful heuristic to frame parents' decision-making processes. This model accounts for the influence of individual factors that inform parents' construction of reasonable schooling options for their children. Following Bell (2009), I consider how parents' choices are bounded by the choice context and parents' specific values and preferences.

The choice set framework conceptualizes decisions as a three-stage process that ends with the selection of a school. However, for middle-class families, school selection can be an iterative process as parents' social, cultural, and economic resources give them some degree of flexibility in their schooling decisions. If they are not satisfied with their chosen school (i.e., if they or their children no longer derive value from the attributes offered), they may choose to restart the choice process and choose a new school within the same district or, if there are no viable options, leave the district entirely (Billingham & Kimelberg, 2013; Cucchiara, 2013a). For this study, I extend the choice set framework and consider the "futurity" of parents' decisions (Crozier et al., 2008) as a fourth step in the choice set framework. Once parents choose a school, they gather additional information to evaluate their choice and, if the chosen school does not meet their expectations (i.e., parents and their children do not derive value from the decision), decide whether to restart the school selection process and construct a new choice set. In this study, I consider the conditions under which parent gentrifiers may decide to leave their chosen school if the decision does not work for their children.

Methods and Analysis

This study draws on interviews conducted with parents in Washington, DC, a city that has long experienced cycles of disinvestment, redefinition, and revitalization (Asch & Musgrove, 2015). Washington, DC is a favorable location to understand parent gentrifiers' school choice decisions because it is a site of rapid economic, cultural, and demographic transformation (Hyra, 2017; Summers, 2019) and a key site of market-based education reform (Glazerman & Dotter, 2017; Jenkins, 2020).

The District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) system operates an intra-district open enrollment program that allows families to choose from a variety of schools. In addition to schools operated by DCPS, 66 charter management organizations operate more than 100 charter schools. Families are guaranteed a seat in their neighborhood school starting in kindergarten, or they can enter the My School DC Lottery, which allows families to apply to a K-12 school outside of their children's residential boundary, including charter schools, citywide DCPS schools, or selective high schools.

Coinciding with gentrification, city officials have implemented several programs and policies designed to attract and retain new residents, especially young families, in city schools (Wilson, 2015). In 2006, for example, the District of Columbia Office of the State Superintendent of Education initiated the City Incentive Grant Program (City Build), a joint education and neighborhood development initiative that provided one million dollars in funding to increase the number of charter schools in "strategic neighborhoods" to attract and retain new residents (Office of the State Superintendent of Education, 2006). In addition to expanding choice options, education officials have altered neighborhood boundary lines to retain young families in the city's public school system (Brown, 2014; DC Advisory Committee on Student Assignment, 2014). The city's gentrification-driven transformations and education marketplace make it an ideal case to understand parents' values and preferences in the school selection process in the context of a choice system that allows parents to act on those preferences.

Study Design and Data Analysis

This study's findings draw from interviews with a purposeful sample of 20 parent gentrifiers, who were recruited using in-person and virtual recruitment methods (e.g., postings on neighborhood listservs). Parents were eligible to participate in the study if they lived in a gentrifying or gentrified neighborhood, had a child in grades 5 through 12, and self-identified as middle class. At the time of interviews, all parents had decided where their children would attend school for the 2019-20 school year. All parents' accounts of their selection processes and priorities are retrospective. Table 1 displays respondent characteristics. Women comprised the majority of the interview sample. The majority of parents self-identified as White and middle- or upper-middle class. Respondents were highly educated, with 13 holding a graduate-level or professional degree and seven respondents holding a bachelor's degree. Additionally, the study's sample includes participants who were among the earliest waves of middle-class residents to move to their neighborhoods: seven participants moved to their current neighborhoods during the 1980s and 1990s. The remaining participants moved to their current neighborhoods in the 2000s. Notably, 13 participants were connected to education-related conversations, either professionally or through volunteer work. These parents, in particular, had a deep understanding of the city's educational context and the implications of a market-based system for educational equity.

Table 1

Respondent Characteristics (*N=20*)

Parents' race/ethnicity	
White	13
African American/Black	6
Latinx	1
Parents' Gender	
Female	19
Male	1
Families' social class	
Middle class	13
Upper-middle class	7
Respondent's highest level of education	
Graduate/Professional degree	13
Bachelor's	7
Focal child's grade (School Year 2019-20)	
High school grades (i.e., grades 9-12)	11
Middle grades (i.e., grades 5-8)	9

I conducted interviews between July and December 2019 using a semi-structured interview protocol. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. I analyzed data iteratively, beginning during the data collection phase. I coded each interview twice, first using an inductive coding approach to capture participants' voices (Saldaña, 2016). Inductive codes included descriptive categories (e.g., school attributes) as well as a set of process codes (Saldaña, 2016) to capture information about the specific processes that parents' used to construct their choice sets, such as weighing information from their networks and observing classes. After this initial round of coding, I used deductive codes derived from research on school gentrification and parents' school selection processes. I consolidated inductive codes with existing deductive codes when they surfaced categories generated from the

literature (e.g., parents' consideration of pedagogy when evaluating schools and the role of social networks). Inductive coding also surfaced new categories to understand secondary school choice, such as parents' perception of neighborhood safety and the role of information from education professionals. During the data collection and analysis phases, I wrote memos and recorded reflections to identify themes and consider rival explanations for my findings.

Findings

In the following sections, I describe the values and processes that informed middle and high school selection. I begin with a discussion of parents' civic values and commitments. Next, I describe specific features of schools that parents valued and the processes used to construct a choice set. Although parents' civic commitments may suggest preference for neighborhood schools, all parents "shopped" for schools, and just two parents had enrolled their children in neighborhood schools during the focal school year. This finding reveals the contradictions in parents' decision-making processes as they negotiate their ideological commitments with other value sets.

Civic Values and Commitments. Parents expressed many of the civic values found in prior studies of parent gentrifiers' who actively chose neighborhood elementary schools. Generally, participants valued public education, diverse learning environments, and, often, wanted to explicitly support their neighborhood schools. These values were not only relevant for elementary school selection but also were important considerations for middle and high school selection.

The majority of parents expressed broad support for public education. For many parents, the reverence for public schools was tied to their experiences in school. Maya, for example, reflected, "[My husband and I] are products of public schools. And, you know, thinking about schools as part of the community was a natural part of our lives." Notably, several parents considered private schools for their children but, as they explored options, maintained their support for public schools. Monica, for example, saw private schools as a "safety net": "It's never been a thought to me. I always imagined that I would use public schools."

Parents' support for public schools was tied to an explicit commitment to supporting one's neighborhood school. Danielle, whose children had attended a mix of public and private schools in the past, explained, "I am such an advocate of public schools, you know, and just in general, I think they're so important – neighborhood schools and all." For Serena's family, support for the neighborhood school was essential to her family's identity: "I think we were super invested. Our personal brand, like who we were as a family, was very invested and connected to the neighborhood schools." For some parents, the commitment to neighborhood schools was tied to a preference for an urban lifestyle. Lucy, for example, explained, "Being able to walk to school is huge. My husband walks to work. The kids walk to school. The walking lifestyle is something that we put a high value on."

Other parents saw the act of supporting their neighborhood schools as tied to a commitment to their place-based (i.e., neighborhood) community. According to Jeff, supporting one's neighborhood school "helps people come to the neighborhood, stay in the neighborhood, and have some sort of ownership in the neighborhood."

Similarly, Phyllis explained, “Communities are strong, I think, when they rally around the school. When you’re walking to school with neighbors, supporting parent volunteer days at school, and helping with fundraising, you’re doing all of the things to make your school stronger.” In describing their support for neighborhood schools, many parents were actively opposed to the city’s choice system, which they saw as disruptive to communities. In Lily’s words, “The only way we get equity is if all kids have access to strong neighborhood schools. Ultimately, the charters don’t have any long-term investment in a community.” Notably, these parents’ conception of community emphasized a geographic community around a school. As Cucchiara (2013b) and others have observed, the emphasis on geographic community in gentrifying contexts may act as a double-edged sword by strengthening the connection between schools and their place-based community but reproducing racial and economic segregation as longtime resident families are displaced from gentrifying neighborhoods.

Parents expressed a strong commitment to educational equity. Nearly two-thirds of parents had connections to the education field through their professions, advocacy, or volunteer work and, thus, were attuned to existing inequities across the city. Moreover, these parents were cognizant of how they and their children – as middle-class residents – benefited from the existing system and how their choices could contribute to inequities. Consistent with prior research (e.g., Freidus, 2016), parents positioned themselves – and other middle-class families – as playing an important role in school improvement across the city. India, for example, explained, “It’s very important for us to lift all boats. So, yeah, we can send [our daughter]

wherever, but what does that do for the other kids?" Likewise, Serena observed, "There are too many people not trying to make the system different. They're saying one thing and doing something totally different, and that's really, really frustrating to me, and it's really hurting a lot of kids in the city." Serena's frustration, in particular, exemplifies how parents understand their values and choices in relation to other parents. Notably, Serena distinguished herself from other parents across the city who espoused progressive ideals – such as support for public education and diverse schools – but nonetheless made choices that maintained their children's privilege.

Finally, access to racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse schools and neighborhoods emerged as a salient value. Parents perceived that diverse schools would offer their children several benefits, including a critical learning experience. Nora, for example, explained, "I didn't want her to be at a school where everybody's looks like her, given that both my husband and I are exactly like that regard. I wanted her to have a more diverse experience." Jeff, similarly, sought a diverse school because "that's what we're like out here":

> You're obviously going to have majorities, but I would like to see every race represented within that school. … If that's what kids see, on a daily basis, and what they grow up with and what's around them in their environment – not just within the school but outside of school – that becomes the norm for them.

In describing their support for diversity, some White parents distinguished themselves from other parents who opted out of public schools entirely or chose schools outside of their neighborhoods. This differentiation often occurred when

parents discussed schools with larger populations of Black and Latinx students. Sarah, for example, explained how parents in her circle reacted to the middle school where she enrolled her child: "It's funny because there's all this angst out there like, 'Oh my gosh, [middle school]. There're brown children. And, they all wear uniforms. And they're all coming from southeast [DC].' And, it's like 'Yeah, so what?'" Serena, similarly, expressed frustration with other White families who espoused progressive values while also sending their children to schools outside of their neighborhoods. To Serena, these families "are using choice as a way to say, 'I don't want my kids to go to school with the poor, Black kids."

In sum, parents' civic values included support for public education, support for one's neighborhood schools, a commitment to educational equity, and a preference for diverse learning environments. These values were just one set of values that informed the construction of a choice set. In the next section, I describe specific school attributes that parents valued and that they believed would be valuable for their children. Parents negotiated these values and preferences with their broader civic values as they entered the choice market and made decisions about their children's educations.

Valued School Attributes. Although parents' civic values and commitments might suggest an automatic preference for neighborhood schools, all parents "shopped" for middle and high schools. Parents offered a variety of reasons for their decisions to enter the city's choice market. Some parents questioned whether their neighborhood middle and high schools would be viable options for their children based on their perceptions of student achievement. Jen, for example, recalled looking

at available information about the family's zoned high school: "When I looked at the test scores, [the school] scored poorly on the DC CAS. … When I looked up the stats, it didn't have a good profile." Other parents questioned whether their children would fit in socially at their neighborhood schools. Ava, for example, looked into her neighborhood high school but ultimately ruled it out, stating, "[The school] is not just for us; they have not been able to get a cohort from the neighborhood."

Parents valued a broad range of school attributes, which were central to the construction of their choice sets. Consistent with prior studies of parent gentrifiers' elementary school decisions, parents considered school demographics. Reflecting their general commitments to diversity, parents found value in schools that were racially, ethnically, and economically mixed. Jen, for example, explained that she had been impressed by one prospective school's description of its student body: "When I went to [school], they talked about how their student body was equal percentages of the city from each ward, and ethnically diverse. I thought that was pretty impressive." Sarah, likewise, sought a school that she believed had "true socioeconomic diversity," which she believed benefits the entire school community. She observed, "I think when you just have too much of the same, then it's not as rich of an experience. … I really appreciate [a mix of people], and I was drawn to that."

Both Black and White parents considered school demographics in the school selection process. Black families found additional value in choosing diverse schools, such as helping students develop navigational capital (Yosso, 2005). Reflecting on her educational experiences, Patricia, for example, believed that attending racially diverse schools helped her "understand how to work and be in both [Black and

White] worlds." Further, Black parents also perceived that diverse schools could protect their children from negative schooling experiences that they might encounter in hypersegregated schools (*see also* Hernández, 2019):

> This is just the math of DC. You have White kids in a school, and they get certain things. And they're treated in certain ways. And I hate it more than anyone. … But, what am I going to do about that but just try to do the best that I can to get them in the best place for them? – Danielle

> I don't want [my child] wearing a uniform. I don't want them being spoken to in certain ways and not being able to get water. I mean, just all of the things that are put in place in certain environments to maintain control. … I have this conflict because where there are White kids, that's less likely to happen. – Yvonne

Notably, for Danielle and Yvonne, their assessment of school demographics considered the proportion of White students enrolled. Racially diverse schools would not only increase opportunities but also would allow their children to avoid practices that they considered oppressive. Further, for both mothers, the consideration of school demographics surfaced a key tension between what the mothers believed would give their individual children the best chances and their understandings of the broader implications of their choices.

Parents also valued middle and high schools that used more progressive pedagogical and behavioral management approaches. When evaluating potential schools, parents reported that they avoided schools that used what they described as

"authoritarian" or "militant" behavioral management strategies. Lucy described her decision not to enroll her child in a charter school popular among middle-class parents in her social group, stating, "The whole way the place is run seems very, very strict and authoritarian, discipline-oriented, and tons of homework." Similarly, Yvonne avoided schools that she believed implemented "oppressive practices:" "[There were] very unreasonable policies and practices that made were unconducive to learning and being successful." Parents were also wary of schools that they believed overemphasized homework and testing. Instead, parent gentrifiers sought environments that they believed would instill a love of learning among their children. Nora explained, "If you focus all your attention on test scores, then the test scores will go up, but I'm not sure that the learning does." Similarly, Jeff was impressed by the student-driven approach at his daughters' school and stated, "That's a big factor. The kind of student-driven learning I enjoy. It's not just regurgitated from a textbook." To be sure, parents were not totally critical of these approaches. Patricia and Danielle, both Black mothers, recognized how testing – and the results of tests – would impact their children's educational trajectories. Patricia explained, "[Students] have to be able to test well wherever they go. The school should help prepare her for the SATs and PSATs." Similarly, as Danielle described her daughter's school: "I'd say there's some 'drill and kill' [at my daughter's high school], which, pedagogically, I'm not crazy about. At the end of the day, they need to be ready for the SAT. … The testing part is only going to be more critical for what happens to her next."

Geographic location and accessibility were also important considerations, especially as children would have more responsibility and independence traveling to

school. Gloria, for example, explained that she was less sure of schools that were "off the beaten path" from the city's bus and metro lines; thus, her choice set included high schools that were close to public transportation. Several parents were drawn to schools that their families could walk to, which allowed parents to embrace living in an urban environment and strengthen relationships with their neighbors. Ava, for example, found the location of one school on her choice set "compelling" because her son would be able to walk to school with his friends. It is important to note, however, that although parents considered a school's geographic location, they did not include all of the schools closest to their homes in their choice set – including their neighborhood schools. Thus, while a school's location was an important consideration, it was not always the deciding factor in the school selection process.

Related to location, parents also valued safety. Parents' perception of safety was less focused on safety within the school building but on the safety of the neighborhoods in which schools were located or through which their children would travel. Parents' safety concerns emerged almost exclusively when discussing the choice sets for their daughters' schools. Patricia, for example, perceived that gentrification had created pockets of "haves and have-nots" in her neighborhood, which raised concerns about her daughter walking to school: "[The neighborhood] may not be the best thing for a young lady to be walking through by herself." Likewise, Amber, who lives in a neighborhood at the early stages of gentrification, ruled out her neighborhood schools because of safety concerns around the school building. Finally, when considering schools, Vivian walked around the neighborhoods where potential schools were located to observe "the level of violence

outside the door" and "how [students] interact a block from the school or out in the parking lot."

Parents were concerned about their children's academic and career trajectories and considered schools' academic environments. They valued special academic programs, such as Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate, which they believed would prepare their children for college. As part of the academic environment, parents also sought schools that they believed would put them in contact with other high-achieving students. They did not necessarily rule out schools that they considered "low performing" based on district-provided data – if they perceived that there were students enrolled who could provide a peer group for their children. Patricia, for example, explained that she considered schools that other families in her network had also considered. At the school that she ultimately selected, she perceived that there was "a good group of kids that [my daughter] can work with or be friends with to push her." Ava de-enrolled her child from one school and searched for new schools where she perceived that there would be a peer group for her son. She recalled:

> I was very disappointed…you know, nobody's pushing him. I really wanted him to be around some peers that would not only be athletic but also academically focused.

Researchers studying secondary school choice have underscored that these choices happen at a critical time when children are figuring out who they are and where they belong (e.g., Phillippo, 2019). Social fit, or the extent to which parents and students believe they fit in at school, is an important factor in middle and high

school selection. Patricia acknowledged that middle school introduced both academic and social challenges to students: "[Students] are trying to fit in. Students look at how you dress, how you talk, how you carry yourself. Are you cool or not?" Her choice set, thus, included schools not only where there would be a peer group but also where there were teachers and staff who could look out for her daughter. When describing the process of selecting schools, children's perceptions of fit were central to parents' decisions. Monica, for example, explained that she had tried to delay the decision to enroll her daughter in a popular charter school. Her daughter's comments after attending an open house prompted her to make a final decision: "[My daughter] was like, 'I want to go here." She never quite fit in at the neighborhood school. She's a little different. She got [to the new school] as was like, 'This is more eclectic. This is my speed. I'm going here.' So, I let her make the decision."

School attributes were an important factor in parents' choice set construction. Many parents sought additional information as they identified and evaluated potential schools. Consistent with prior studies of middle-class parents' school selection processes (e.g., Ball & Vincent, 1998; Holme, 2002), parents' professional and social networks were key sources of information when constructing a choice set. Parents gained information about prospective schools that had made their lists as well as schools that had not come up in their searches. Jen, for example, conferred with other parents to understand their experiences with the schools that she and her family considered: "Mainly, I wanted to know, 'This presents well; is that true? Do you feel [your child] is getting a good education? Is she socially happy?' They were able to confirm all of those things." Parents also sought feedback – and sometimes received

unsolicited advice – from educational professionals, including their children's teachers and school administrators. Educators' advice tended to steer middle-class families, across racial groups, away from their neighborhood schools. Instead, education professionals often encouraged parents to consider choosing charter schools, citywide schools, or DCPS schools located in the city's wealthiest neighborhoods. Claire, for example, recalled that her daughter's teacher recommended that the family look outside of the neighborhood when choosing a middle school:

> That teacher loves my daughter and wants the best for her, you know, in her opinion. … It's put you in a spot where you're like, 'Oh gosh, if even the teachers are like, 'No, this isn't the right place for your kid,' and they know the community better. Then, you know, it makes you kind of shy away.

Although this information was important, parents did not solely rely on the information they received from their social networks. Indeed, some parents were wary that their friends and even education professionals had an accurate picture of schools. India, for example, commented, "You have a lot of teachers who have been here for a long time and know the school's reputation from 15 to 20 years ago. … They don't know the schools from a community perspective." Parents frequently visited schools or encouraged their children to attend "shadow days" as they considered schools and before making enrollment decisions. Sarah, for example, recalled her visits to prospective schools. "We went to the open house, and I was like 'No, I want to go when school is in session.' I just need to feel it."

Reconciling Schooling Decisions with Civic Commitments. All parents shopped for schools, and, ultimately, almost all parents (18 of 20) did not have children enrolled in their neighborhood schools during the 2019-2020 school year. Although parents held civic values that might suggest a willingness to choose neighborhood middle and high schools, parents' decisions appeared to be driven more by the specific school attributes that they valued. The two parents who chose their neighborhood schools ultimately decided that these schools possessed the attributes that they valued and from which their children would benefit. Parents recognized the increased pressures for middle and high school choice. India, who enrolled her children in their neighborhood high school, nonetheless critiqued other White families whom she saw as avoiding the school:

> For middle school, who cares who goes where? But high school is definitely more weighted. [The school has] really amazing programs and, and I think a lot of people can't see past test scores. A lot of people can't see past free and reduced lunch numbers. And they can't see past all the faces that aren't White.

Several parents wrestled with the decision to opt out of their neighborhood school and recognized that their decisions were not aligned with their stated civic values. Jeff, who saw supporting one's neighborhood school as important for community cohesion but chose a charter school for his children, stated, "I'm kind of being hypocritical here. I could choose to send my daughter to the local school and put all of my resources and energy into making that school the best it can be. But it takes more than one, right? It takes a community." For parents whose identities were

strongly tied to their support for public education and their investment in their neighborhood schools and communities, choosing a school outside of their neighborhood was an especially fraught decision that left parents feeling conflicted about their schooling decisions. Maya and Serena, for example, considered the implications of their families' individual choices in the context of broader educational inequity in the city:

> It was very hard to take because I know what [schools are] like elsewhere. And it just bugs me. If we didn't have the inequity that we have throughout this city, I don't think I would have been influenced by it. … It's just a very difficult thing, you know, I wrestled with [the decision a lot]. And, I wonder if I've done the right thing. I'm not all that certain I have. – Maya

> People are making these decisions and justifying their choices and not feeling conflicted about it. And I think they should be. I think they should understand that the choices that they're making have consequences. …. We feel super conflicted about the choice that we made for [our daughter]. It was the right choice for her but not for the city. – Serena

Notably, both mothers were also active volunteers in their neighborhood schools and advocates for public education. Like similarly positioned parents, they had a deep understanding of the challenges that the school system faced. Parents' understanding of the conflict between their civic values and their actual decisions underscores how parents continuously weigh civically oriented values, such as the pursuit of

educational equity, with their desire to ensure that their children have the best chances for success in a competitive education system (*see also* Roda & Wells, 2013). As Yvonne observed, "People will hold firmly to those opinions and beliefs. And, you know, you can have those very strong opinions and beliefs. But when you've got to figure out what to do with your child, yeah, it's a very different story."

To be sure, not all parents felt torn between their stated civic values and their enrollment decisions. Parents in this group explained that they would have been happy to enroll their child in their neighborhood school if they perceived that these schools possessed the schooling attributes that they valued. As Patricia, for example, explained: "I don't struggle with [the decision] as much as I probably would have been having been through public and private schools myself. I wanted to support the public schools, but I just think that [charter school] is probably the right place for her." Similarly, Vivian indicated that she would have preferred to send her daughter to her neighborhood school but did not believe that the school did not "have as varied learning environments and approaches as what the charter schools have." Although both mothers did not feel the same level of conflict as other parents, both mothers seemed to want to support their neighborhood schools but were concerned with finding what they saw as the best schooling option for their children.

Considering the "Futurity" of Choice Decisions. Parents' satisfaction – or lack thereof – is a key condition for whether their family will remain invested in their chosen school. Generally, most parents reported that they were satisfied with their choices. Further, they were committed to staying in their chosen schools for as long as their children continued to derive value from their chosen school – that is, the

schools remained academically, physically, and emotionally safe places for their children. Although this study sought to explore the iterative nature of school selection, most parents saw constructing a new choice set as a last resort option. Parents had intervened – or described situations in which they would intervene – on behalf of their children when problems arose with their schools. Common intervention strategies included monitoring their children's academic progress and maintaining close communication with teachers. Parents also worked collectively with other families to support school improvement and became advocates for their children's schools. Lily, a middle school parent, captured the essence of parents who were determined to make their school decisions work for their families: "You don't go in and just go, 'I don't know. Maybe it'll work or not.' You make it work for your kids." When intervention did not work, parents did seek alternatives. During her interview, Amber described her satisfaction with her daughter's school as "50-50." Although she valued the curricular and extracurricular opportunities that the school offered, she was in the process of constructing a new choice set to inform schooling decisions.

For some middle school parents, the city's choice system created an environment that led parents to continuously create choice sets and "hedge their bets" to access "better options," even if they were satisfied with their chosen school. As Sarah observed, "Like all choices, there's a human tendency to be like, 'It's never good … it's always better on the other side.' People are always looking over like, 'Well, what else is there?'' Nora explained that she entered the city's choice lottery almost every year: "No matter where you get in, you always apply everywhere in case

you get into somewhere better." For Nora, better options included schools that were highly ranked according to the city's school rating system or, through school feeder policies, granted access to sought-after high schools. Likewise, Jeff hypothesized that he would consider changing schools if he could guarantee access to the school that had been first on his choice set. Still, he questioned how much more that decision would benefit his daughter: "[You're] always searching for that golden prize – that magical horizon that you're just never going to get to. We got our number two school. How much better can it get?"

Some middle school parents also looked ahead to high school and considered options within and outside of the city. Ava, for example, suggested moving as an option if her family could not access the high schools that matched their family's stated values: "If the preference doesn't work out, we probably would move for the year and rent our house." Ava's comments, in particular, surface how parents' decisions to remain in their district may be contingent on access to desirable high schools (*see also* Billingham & Kimelberg, 2013).

Discussion and Conclusion

This study underscores the value-laden nature of school selection and reveals the tensions and contradictions between parent gentrifiers' stated civic values and their actual enrollment decisions. Indeed, this study's findings surface how parents negotiate diverse value sets that inform schooling decisions. Moreover, the study's findings reveal the limits of civic values when choosing schools. Parents frequently espoused civically oriented values that might suggest their willingness to make an "against the grain" decision to enroll their children in neighborhood middle and high

schools (Crozier et al., 2008). They valued public education, connected supporting their neighborhood schools to cultivating a strong community, believed they had an important role to play in school improvement, and valued diverse learning environments. Parents frequently lived these values through their careers, volunteer work, and local advocacy on behalf of schools. Yet, despite these stated values and commitments, the majority of parents did not enroll their children in their neighborhood schools during the focal year of study.

This study's findings also reveal key differences in elementary and secondary school selection processes. Consistent with prior studies of parent gentrifiers' elementary school choices, parents valued racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse learning environments and environments that used student-centered or progressive behavioral management and pedagogical approaches. Middle and high school introduced additional considerations for parents, which reflect the perceived higher stakes of these grade levels for children's academic and career trajectories. Parents found value in schools that they believed were physically, emotionally, and academically safe for their children. As they searched for schools, parents considered safety, including the safety of the neighborhoods surrounding schools or through which students would travel. Parents also searched for schools that they believed would adequately prepare their children for college and that offered special academic programs, such as Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate. They also sought schools where they perceived that there was a peer group that would not only be a source of friendships but also would be a source of academic motivation.

Critically, given the context of middle-class parents' choices in urban neighborhoods, it is important to consider the racialized and classed nature of parents' preferences. Parents' references to the significance of race in the choice process were most explicit when discussing the value of diverse learning environments and considerations of school demographics. More subtly, color-evasive[19] language allowed parents to describe their preferences for desirable schools without mentioning the racial or ethnic composition of schools that they avoid (L. E. Hernández, 2016; Sattin-Bajaj & Roda, 2018). For example, parents' concerns about teacher-centered instructional approaches, "militant" or "authoritarian" behavioral management approaches, and "the level of violence" are often associated with the perceived dysfunction of schools that largely serve racially minoritized students. Similarly, some parents ruled out schools where they perceived that there was not "a cohort from the neighborhood," which may implicitly refer to other White or middle-class families – that is, families "like us" – who live in gentrifying neighborhoods (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2009; Posey-Maddox et al., 2014b; Stillman, 2012). Parents' concerns were not explicitly framed in terms of race or class; rather, they often framed their schooling preferences are framed by their perceptions of their children's academic and social needs (*see also* Holme, 2002). Nonetheless, parents' perceptions of schools and their ultimate selection underscore parents' perception of risk when choosing urban public schools (Cucchiara, 2013a).

[19] Following Annamma et al. (2017), I use the term "color-evasive" rather than "colorblind" to challenge the use of a dis/ability (here, blindness) as a metaphor for "lacking" or "undesired."

This study's findings extend current research on parent gentrifiers' schooling decisions by revealing the limits of certain values when choosing urban middle and high schools. As Roda and Wells (2013) observed, the concept of "fractured habitus" may help explain how parent gentrifiers' can espouse civically-oriented values – and, perhaps, choose neighborhood elementary schools – but make secondary school decisions designed to secure advantages for their children. Further, as Kimelberg and Billingham's studies of Boston (2013; 2012) suggest, acting on certain values, such as civically-oriented values or preferences for urban lifestyles, may be less tenable as children approach middle and high school. The physical and figurative closeness of neighborhood elementary schools may facilitate parent gentrifiers' ability to act on more civically oriented values because they believe that they will be successful in influencing these schools on behalf of their communities (Billingham & Kimelberg, 2013). Further, they may perceive that there are other like-minded families who can work collectively for school improvement (Cucchiara, 2008; Freidus, 2016; Roberts & Lakes, 2016). Neighborhood middle and high schools, in contrast, draw students from wider attendance boundaries and may be geographically farther from parents' immediate neighborhoods. For parent gentrifiers, mitigating the perceived risk of choosing these schools may depend on their perception that there are other families "like them" in these schools. In the absence of a "critical mass" (Posey-Maddox et al., 2014b) of families, they may seek other options.

This study's findings also raise important considerations for understanding school choice policies in gentrifying contexts. Although school choice policies have allowed urban school districts to attract and retain middle-class families, such policies

have the unintended consequence of limiting access to high-performing schools and increasing between-school segregation when parent gentrifiers' choice sets focus on a narrow set of schools that they believe will serve their families interests and needs (Aggarwal, 2014; Cucchiara, 2013b; Hankins, 2007; Pearman & Swain, 2017). Choice, then, may be a double-edged sword in the context of gentrification that creates the conditions that allow parent gentrifiers to remain in their neighborhoods but that do not require these families to engage with their neighborhood schools. This study's findings suggest an opportunity to capitalize on parent gentrifiers' values, such as parents' preferences for specialized academic programs, and make neighborhood middle and high schools attractive to these families. As the literature demonstrates, however, urban school districts have long made deliberate policy changes to make schools desirable for a subset of families, sometimes at the expense of families from minoritized and economically disadvantaged backgrounds (Cucchiara, 2013b; Lipman, 2009; Wells & Serna, 1996). Thus, attempts to attract middle-class families to neighborhood schools must not marginalize and exclude longtime resident families.

Finally, the study's findings offer several directions for future inquiries into parent gentrifiers' choices across the K-12 continuum. This study used a retrospective approach to understand parents' choices at a particular point in time. Although many parents naturally reflected on their choice processes before the decisions made for the 2019-20 school year, a longitudinal study of parent gentrifiers' schooling decisions has the potential to reveal how the weights that parents ascribe to their values and preferences change over time. Additionally, future studies of parent gentrifiers'

choices can further investigate the specific values, motivations, and experiences of parent gentrifiers from minoritized backgrounds. Although this study was not designed to compare White and minoritized gentrifiers, the findings suggest that these parents ascribe different meanings to their values and preferences and make positioned choices based on the intersections of multiple identities (*see also* Cooper, 2005; Ellison & Aloe, 2018). Finally, the study's findings suggest an opportunity to investigate the values and motivations of parent gentrifiers who have always opted out of their neighborhood schools, including those parents who have selected private schools for their children. These parents may hold different sets of values that guide them to make different choices about where their children attend school. A full examination of the broad range of choices that parent gentrifiers make can deepen our understanding of the tensions between school choice and gentrification.

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Conclusion

Middle-class parents' presence in urban centers has catalyzed a conversation about the transformative promises and challenges of gentrification for public education. For some advocates and policymakers, gentrification represents an opportunity for urban school improvement. Researchers, for example, have found that this process reduces racial and socioeconomic isolation in some schools (Mordechay & Ayscue, 2020; Stillman, 2012). Middle-class parents, or parent gentrifiers, have contributed significantly to school improvement, often bringing material and financial resources to make schools academically and socially "safe" for their children (Freidus, 2016; Posey-Maddox, 2013; Siegel-Hawley et al., 2016). Although schools can and do benefit from middle-class parents' investments, an ever-expanding body of research has revealed the pitfalls of gentrification (Cucchiara, 2019; Freidus, 2020; Posey-Maddox, 2014). Parent gentrifiers' schooling decisions, for example, can increase within and between-school segregation as they coalesce around schools with a critical mass of families "like them" (Anderson, 2012; DeSena, 2006; Posey-Maddox et al., 2014b). Within schools, parent gentrifiers' engagement styles can shift the culture of family engagement. For example, parent gentrifiers' highly visible advocacy and contributions can elevate them to a "valued customer" status, making schools much more likely to respond to their requests to the detriment of other families (Cucchiara, 2013b; Posey-Maddox, 2014). Parent gentrifiers' status can also complicate power dynamics within schools as they, along with school staff and longtime resident parents, pursue their interests and agendas (Freidus, 2016; Sieber, 1982; Syeed, 2018).

The three studies that comprise this dissertation enter the scholarly conversation about school gentrification through complementary investigations of the politics of school-family relations, middle-class parent engagement, and parent gentrifiers' secondary schooling decisions. This dissertation makes both methodological and conceptual contributions. Methodologically, the three studies foreground the perspectives of stakeholders who are understudied in the school gentrification literature. Whereas the literature has emphasized the perspectives of White parent gentrifiers and parent gentrifiers at the elementary level, this dissertation amplifies the perspectives of school-level staff, including teachers and administrators, minoritized middle-class parents, and parent gentrifiers with children in middle and high school. This expanded focus provides insights necessary to move the field toward a full accounting of how multiple stakeholders experience gentrification processes and the potential for school gentrification to impact secondary schools.

Conceptually, this dissertation provides empirical support for Posey-Maddox, Kimelberg, and Cucchiara's (2014a) conceptualization of school gentrification and suggests potential interventions to prevent the exclusion and marginalization of economically disadvantaged families of color. Each of the three schools included in the multisite case study has seen both demographic and cultural changes resulting from the influx of middle-class families. Interviewed school staff and parents, alike, observed that these demographic changes brought a "new class" of highly involved parents who contribute resources but bring new expectations and visions for how these schools operate. School staff members' accounts suggest that these parents were often more willing to challenge their professional authority and, when necessary,

escalate conflicts and requests beyond schools. Middle-class parents became the dominant voices on school-based parent committees, including PTOs and school advisory teams, which limited other parents' engagement opportunities. Notably, this dissertation revealed marginalization and exclusion was not just a function of social class – that is, middle-class parents contributing to the exclusion of economically disadvantaged longtime residents – but also a matter of race and place. Black middle-class parents – both gentrifiers and longtime residents – found themselves excluded from majority-white parent groups. However, some parents were able to overcome this marginalization if they were viewed as being a part of schools' place-based community.

As this dissertation suggests, however, school gentrification's exclusionary effects may not be inevitable. When school staff members are intentional about equity and are proactive in their response to changing demographics, they can cultivate environments where all parents' contributions are welcomed and valued. For each of the focal schools, equity was a core principle that guided school staff members' responses to gentrification. With support from external partners and, sometimes, ideologically aligned parents, school staff members created structures that supported shared leadership and ensured that all parents' perspectives were represented in decision-making processes. To be sure, parents' accounts and experiences reveal that schools continue to face challenges realizing their visions for equity. For example, at Juniper, despite multiple structures to support shared leadership among racially and linguistically diverse parents, the professionalized culture of the PTO has limited some parents' participation in this activity. This finding suggests opportunities for

schools to redefine and improve their strategies to cultivate equitable and unified parent communities. Parents can play a role in supporting schools' visions for equity. Amid changing cultural and political contexts, schools might be able to capitalize on the energy of collectively oriented families who want to be a "part of the solution" to gentrification-related educational inequities. Parents, however, cannot do this work in isolation from schools. However, as this dissertation suggests, productive partnerships between school staff and families can challenge structural inequities within gentrifying schools.

Whether and how gentrification manifests in secondary schools remain open questions. When selecting middle and high schools, parent gentrifiers interviewed for this dissertation's study of secondary school selection shared many of the values espoused by their elementary-level counterparts: they valued public education, believed in supporting neighborhood schools, and wanted their children to be educated in diverse environments (*see, e.g.,* Cucchiara & Horvat, 2014; Nelson, 2018). However, secondary school selection introduced additional considerations, which led most interviewed parents to choose schools outside of their neighborhoods. The final study reveals the limits of parent gentrifiers' civic values in the school selection process and suggests the potential for increased segregation between secondary schools as parent gentrifiers coalesce around a small number of schools that they view as the "best options" for their children.

This dissertation clarifies and reveals how diverse stakeholders experience school gentrification and offers insights into parent gentrifiers' secondary schooling decisions. Although this dissertation foregrounds perspectives that have been

understudied, we still have much to learn about how the full range of school stakeholders experience and respond to gentrification. An important direction for future school gentrification scholarship is to foreground the perspectives of economically disadvantaged longtime resident families. Future research should ask questions about the strategies that these stakeholders use to advance their interests in urban schools amid demographic change. This approach has the potential to challenge narratives of gentrification that portray longtime residents as passive recipients of the benefits of gentrification or displaced victims of the process. Similarly, as this dissertation suggests, the macrolevel policy context may have important implications for how school gentrification manifests and school staff members' responses to demographic change. Increasingly, researchers have posed questions about how district-level staff respond to demographic change (*e.g.,* Diem et al., 2018). In addition to this line of inquiry, I argue that interdisciplinary research should attend to the links across city agencies and school districts to understand whether and how coordination among these actors influences school-level responses to gentrification.

This dissertation's findings underscore that gentrification is a double-edged sword for school communities. Although schools may benefit from middle-class parents' energy and contributions, school gentrification poses challenges for schools' existing cultures and power dynamics among school-level actors. The presence of middle-class families, however, need not result in marginalization and exclusion. When school-level staff and parents are intentional, they can cultivate inclusive communities for all students and families.

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Appendix A. Interview Protocols

Responding to Gentrification:
Navigating School-Family Partnerships Amid Demographic Change

Principal Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about your professional background. *Probe/listen for:*
    a. Experience in the field of education
    b. Roles held
    c. Length of time at school

2. How would you describe the neighborhood in which this school is located? *Probe/listen for:*
    a. Neighborhood features (e.g., housing, amenities, schools)
    b. Neighborhood demographics

3. How, if at all, has the neighborhood has changed since you have been at this school?

4. How, if at all, does the neighborhood context influence your day-to-day work as principal?

5. How would you describe the community that this school serves? *Probe/listen for*:
    a. The neighborhood(s) the school's population draws from
    b. School demographics

6. How, if at all, has the school community changed since you have been at this school?

7. What is your vision for school-family relations? *Probe/listen for:*
    a. Expected roles of parents and staff at the school
    b. How this vision is communicated to staff and parents
    c. The types of activities offered to support school-family relations

8. Has your vision for school-family relations changed since you began your role? What factors influenced these changes?

9. What structures are in place to support your vision for school-family relations? *Probe/listen for:*
    a. Formal/informal policies for parent involvement in the school
    b. Supports for staff
    c. Supports for parents
    d. Types of parent engagement activities available

e. Partnerships with external organizations

10. How would you describe this school's parent community? *Probe/listen for:*
    a. Which parents engage with the school
    b. How parents engage
    c. Relationships between parents and staff
    d. Relationships among parents

11. From your perspective, are the parents who regularly engage with the school representative of the school's parent community as a whole? What factors do you think influence who engages with the school, and how parents engage?

12. What types of events or activities typically bring you into contact with parents?

13. How often do parents bring ideas, concerns, or specific requests to you? *Probe/listen for:* the types of requests parents bring, who brings these requests

14. How would you describe your approach to responding to parents' ideas, concerns, or requests? What factors influence your response? *Probe/listen for* specific examples of strategies to respond to requests and the outcome

Closing

15. Is there anything else about your school that you think I should know to help me understand your school's context or approach to school-family relations?

Teacher Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about your professional background. *Probe/listen for:*
    a. Experience in the field of education
    b. Roles held
    c. Length of time at school

2. How would you describe the neighborhood in which this school is located? *Probe/listen for:*
    a. Neighborhood features (e.g., housing, amenities, schools)
    b. Neighborhood demographics

3. How, if at all, has the neighborhood has changed since you have been at this school?

4. How, if at all, does the neighborhood context influence your day-to-day work as an educator?

5. How would you describe the community that this school serves? *Probe/listen for*:
    a. The neighborhood(s) the school's population draws from
    b. School demographics

6. How, if at all, has the school community changed since you have been at this school?

7. What are your core beliefs about school-family relations? *Probe/listen for:* expected roles of teachers and parents, what skills/knowledge parents need to engage with schools

8. How do you support school-family relations in your work? *Probe/listen for:* specific outreach strategies, structures used to engage families

9. How would you describe this school's parent community? *Probe/listen for:*
    a. Which parents engage with the school
    b. How parents engage
    c. Relationships between parents and staff
    d. Relationships among parents

10. From your perspective, are the parents who regularly engage with the school representative of the school's parent community as a whole? What factors do you think influence who engages with the school, and how parents engage?

11. What types of events or activities typically bring you into contact with parents?

12. How often do parents bring ideas, concerns, or specific requests to you? *Probe/listen for:* the types of requests parents bring, who brings these requests

13. How would you describe your approach to responding to parents' ideas, concerns, or requests? What factors influence your response? *Probe/listen for* specific examples of strategies to respond to requests and the outcome

Closing

14. Is there anything else about your school that you think I should know to help me understand your school's context or approach to school-family relations?

School Gentrification and the
Ecologies of Middle-Class Parent Engagement in Urban Public Schools

Parent Interview Protocol

1. Where did you grow up? *If the respondent grew up outside of DC*: When did you move to Washington, DC?

2. In which neighborhood do you live? How, if at all, has your neighborhood changed since you've lived there?

3. How would you describe the neighborhood where this school is located?
    a. What changes, if any, have you observed?
    b. How do you think those changes influence this school?

4. How long have you been a member of this school's community? *Probe for:* when the parent enrolled their child/ren, whether children attended other schools in the District

5. What attracted you to this school?

6. How often do you visit this school? For what reasons do you visit? *Probe/listen for:* pick-up and drop-off, visits to child's class, attendance at special events, participation in parent engagement activities

7. What do you think are the most important things that you can do to support your child's education?

8. In general, how would you describe this school's parent community?

9. Do you and/or your child spend time with other families outside of school? How did you get connected with these families?

10. How are you received by other parents/caregivers at this school?

11. What opportunities does this school offer to parents to be involved in the school?

12. Do the opportunities offered by the school meet your needs and interests? Why or why not?

13. How are you received by the staff at this school? *Probe/listen for:* reception by teachers, school administrators, and other staff members

14. At this school, which staff members do you interact with most frequently? For what reasons?

15. When you have an idea or concern, how, if at all, do you go about sharing that idea/concern?

16. Are staff members receptive to the ideas or concerns that you share? Why or why not?

17. What do you see as the strengths of this school? What do you see as areas for improvement or areas to be changed? *Probe/listen for:* strengths related to staff and the parent community

Closing

18. Is there anything else that you would like to share about parent engagement or your experiences at this school that we have not already talked about?

Optional Demographic Questions

19. What is your zip code? _____

20. What is your gender? (Respondent can choose not to answer.) _____

21. How do you describe your race/ethnicity? (Select all that apply)
__ African American/Black
__ Asian
__ Latinx/Hispanic
__ Native American/Alaska Native
__ White
__ Multi-racial, please specify:_____

22. What is the highest level of education that you have completed?
__ Less than high school
__ High school graduate
__ Some college/vocational/technical
__ Associate degree
__ Bachelor's degree
__ Post-graduate, please specify:_____

23. Besides housework, do you work? ___yes ___no

If yes: What is your occupation? _____
Is this position full-time or part-time: _____

24. What is the highest level of education that your child's second parent has received?
__ Less than high school
__ High school graduate

__ Some college/vocational/technical
__ Associate degree
__ Bachelor's degree
__ Post-graduate, please specify:_____

25. Besides housework, does the second work? ___yes ___no

If yes: What the second parent's occupation? _____
Is this position full-time or part-time? _____

What's Best for My Child, What's Best for the City: Values and Tensions in Parent Gentrifiers' Middle and High School Selection Processes

Pre-Screening questions to determine eligibility:

1. When did you move to Washington, DC? After 2000?

2. How would you describe your family's social class? (Lower, working, middle, upper)

3. In which neighborhood do you live?

4. Do you have a child who will be enrolled in a DCPS or public charter school in grades 6 through 12 in the fall of 2019?

Participant Information

What is your child's name? Name: _____

What is [name's] gender? Gender: ____

1. What school will [name] attend in fall 2019? Which grade will she/he will be entering?

School: _____
Grade: _____

2. Does [name] attend his/her neighborhood school?

Participant Background and Motivations for Choosing a Public School

3. How did you decide to live in [current neighborhood]?

Probe for: when the respondent moved to their current neighborhood, whether the respondent has lived in other DC neighborhoods

4. What factors influenced your decision to move to this neighborhood? *Probe for the importance of education/schools, proximity to work, other neighborhood amenities.*

5. What role, if any, did school quality play when you and your family decided to move to this neighborhood? What specific issues about schools did you and your family consider?

6. Do you feel a responsibility toward the public schools in the city? Why or why not?

Selecting a School

7. I want to spend some time talking about how you approached selecting [name's] current school.

Thinking back to when you decided that [name] would attend [school name], can you describe the process for making that decision?

Probe for: when respondent first started to think about schools, what respondent was looking for in a school for the child, who was involved in the decision-making process, and how, if at all, the respondent's child was involved.

8. What sources of information did you consult to help you make your decision? (*Probes: information from the school(s), information from the DCPS or public charter school board, information from friends, family members or coworkers, visits to schools.*)

    a. What sources of information were most important, and why?

9. What attributes of a school did you consider to be most important when selecting [name's] school?

10. How would you describe your child's current school in relation to those qualities?

11. In addition to your child's current school, did you consider any other options (e.g., other DCPS schools, charter schools, private schools)? Why?

Next Steps

12. How satisfied are you with your decision to enroll [name] in school? So far, how is the decision working for you and [name]?

13. What are the things that you like the best about [school name]? What are the things that you like the least about [school name]?

14. *For middle-school parents:* Have you thought about where [name] will attend high school? If yes, can you share your thinking?
    a. Can you describe to me your thinking about the decision for high school?

15. Is there anything else that you would like to add about your school selection process or thoughts about sending your child to a public school in DC?

Demographic Questions

16. What is your current zip code? _____

17. Do you have other children living in your home? Do they also attend public school in Washington, DC?

Child	Attend public school in DC? (Y/N)	Grade	Relation to Focal Child
Child 1			
Child 2			
Child 3			
Child 4			

18. Gender

__ Male
__ Female
__ Prefer not to answer

19. How do you describe your race/ethnicity?

__ African American/Black
__ Asian
__ Latinx/Hispanic
__ Native American/Alaska Native
__ White
__ Other, specify_____
__ Multi-racial, please specify: _____

20. What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

__ Less than high school
__ High school graduate
__ Some college/vocational/technical
__ Associate degree
__ Bachelor's degree
__ Graduate education, please specify: _____

21. Besides housework, do you work? ___yes ___no

If yes: What is your occupation? _____
Is this position full-time or part-time? _____

22. What is the highest level of education that your child's second parent has received?

__ Less than high school
__ High school graduate

__ Some college/vocational/technical
__ Associate degree
__ Bachelor's degree
__ Graduate education, please specify: _____

23. Besides housework, does the second parent work? ___yes ___no

If yes: What is the second parent occupation?
Is this position full-time or part-time? _____

Appendix B. Analytic Codes

Table B-1:

Analytic Codes for Responding to Gentrification: Navigating School-Family Partnerships Amid Demographic Change

Primary Codes	Secondary Codes
Challenges	
	Staff feeling surveilled
	Engagement barriers
	Parents: inter-class conflicts
	Parents: inter-racial conflicts
	Parent-staff: inter-racial conflicts
	Parent-staff: inter-class conflicts
Description of parent community	
	PTA parents
	Parent reputation
	Views of gentrifiers
	Views of longtime resident parents
Gentrification's impact on neighborhood	
	Amenities
	Demographic change
	Displacement
	Housing changes
Gentrification's impact on schools	
	Changes to teaching approach
	Changes to parent engagement culture
	Changes to school culture
	Population/demographic changes
	Loss of Title I funding
	Resources to schools
	Staff behaviors
Equity	
	Culturally relevant leadership
	Diversifying parent leadership
	Expanding engagement opportunities
	Leading for equity
	Messages about community values/culture
	Tensions/conflicts
Micropolitical strategies	
	Parents: changing scope of conflict
	Parents: organizing
	Staff: building social capital
	Staff: delaying response

Primary Codes	Secondary Codes
	Staff: filtering requests
	Staff: intentional equity conversations
	Staff: leveraging gentrification
	Staff: leveraging parent channels
	Staff: managing parents' expectations
	Staff: managing parents' involvement
	Staff: mediating conflicts
	Staff: pre-empting external influence
	Staff: providing supplemental information
	Staff: relying on policy
	Staff: setting communication boundaries
	Staff: using data
Parent engagement context	
	Expected parent roles
	Expected staff roles
	Parent groups: PTA
	Parent groups: Other
	Skills and capacities for involvement
School context	
	School history
	School climate
	Sense of community

Table B-2:

Analytic Codes for School Gentrification and the Ecologies of Middle-Class Parent Engagement in Urban Public Schools

Primary Codes	**Secondary Codes**
Barriers to engagement	
	Communication
	District policies
	Meeting accessibility
	Racial composition of parent groups
	Scheduling
	Structure of parent organizations
Ecologies of parent engagement	
	Motivation for involvement
	Spaces for involvement: academic (within school)
	Spaces for involvement: non-academic (within school)
	Spaces for involvement: outside of school
Involvement strategies	
	Advocacy outside of school
	Being "of value"
	Attending events
	Communicating with parent leaders
	Communicating with school staff
	Organizing/collaborating with other parents
	Pick-up/drop-off
	Parent organization (e.g., PTO)
	Volunteering at school
Parent organizations	
	Advisory team role
	Parent Listservs
	"Parents for Racial Equity"
	PTO role
Perception of school and neighborhood change	
	Changing demographics
	Catering to needs of advantaged families
	Displacement/exclusion
	School exit
Relationships	
	Connections to neighborhood parents
	Inter-racial relationships
	Relationship building activities
	Relationships with school staff

Primary Codes	Secondary Codes
	Perception of parent reception: other parents
	Perception of parent reception: school staff
School Context	
	Parents' perception of engagement culture
	Parents' perception of school climate
	Satisfaction with school
	School history
Other Context	
	Impact of pandemic
	Impact of 2020 uprisings

Table B-3:

What's Best for My Child, What's Best for the City: Values and Tensions in Parent Gentrifiers' Middle and High School Selection Processes

Primary Codes	**Secondary Codes**
Choosing neighborhoods	
	Role of schools
Choice set construction: Attributes	
	School attributes: behavioral management
	School attributes: building "well-rounded kids"
	School attributes: college preparation
	School attributes: community
	School attributes: demographics
	School attributes: extracurricular activities
	School attributes: facilities
	School attributes: feeder pattern
	School attributes: graduation rates
	School attributes: location
	School attributes: order/structure
	School attributes: pedagogy
	School attributes: peer groups
	School attributes: reputation
	School attributes: safety
	School attributes: school leadership
	School attributes: size
	School attributes: social environment/fit
	School attributes: student-staff relationships
	School attributes: test scores
Choice set construction: Sources of information	
	Listservs, social media
	Peer groups (child's)
	School district data
	School fairs
	Social networks
Choice set construction: Processes	
	Considering private schools
	Entering the choice market
	Observing classes
	Researching schools
	Visiting schools
	Weighing other parents' comments
	Weighing professionals' comments
Futurity	
	Advocacy

Primary Codes	Secondary Codes
	Intervening and monitoring
	Relocation
	Satisfaction with choice
	Supplementing learning at home
Values (Civically-oriented)	
	City living
	Commitment to neighborhood
	Commitment to public education
	Diversity
	Equity
	Support for neighborhood schools