

Catholic Schools and Immigrant Students: A New Generation

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Background/Context: *This article considers the role of Catholic schools, an institution born of the adaptation of previous immigrant waves, in the education of new immigrants and their native-born counterparts. The new immigrants enter a landscape in which education plays a much bigger role than it did for their predecessors and yet faces many challenges. Public schools, particularly in urban centers, struggle with financial difficulties and new standards of accountability. Although scholars and the media have praised Catholic schools for performing better than public schools in promoting academic achievement among urban low-income minority students, the Catholic system also faces fiscal difficulties, declining enrollments, and school closings.*

Purpose/Objective/Research Questions/Focus of Study: *We examine the use of Catholic school by families of different ethnic backgrounds and how attendance relates both to religious affiliation and to socioeconomic class. We also analyze whether attending or graduating from Catholic high school has a positive effect on educational attainment and on the incidence of arrest and incarceration for men, and early childbearing for women. Finally, we seek to understand why immigrant families choose Catholic schools and how their children experience them.*

Research Design: *We draw on data collected for the Immigrant Second Generation in Metropolitan New York Study (ISGMNY). The study includes survey data on 3,415 young adults aged 18–32 who were interviewed between 1998 and 2001. Respondents include second-generation immigrants and native-born individuals. The study also includes qualitative data from in-depth interviews. For this article, we use interviews conducted with 74 respondents from immigrant and native-born groups who attended Catholic high schools,*

and those who referenced Catholic schools in their educational history even if they did not attend.

Conclusions/Recommendations: *For immigrant families who have arrived recently, religion seems to be more or less irrelevant to the decision to send their children to Catholic school. Instead, like many native Blacks and Latinos, these families choose Catholic schools to avoid what they see as a seriously deficient public school system. To some extent, this represents a rational choice, but for many immigrant families, it also reflects a lack of knowledge about the public education system. Although many low-income families would like to send their children to Catholic school, cost is an insurmountable barrier for many. With the exception of native-born Whites, socioeconomic factors are very important in shaping who can go to Catholic school and whether students can stay until graduation. In many cases, families were forced to withdraw their children by high school, when costs rise sharply. Nonetheless, overall, the data show a benefit in terms of educational attainment for nearly all groups, and also a positive impact in terms of avoiding of certain problems, such as early pregnancy for girls and trouble with police for boys.*

The long history of Catholic schools in the United States is closely bound up with immigration. The rise and maturation of Catholic schools took place during the mid-19th to early 20th centuries with the arrival of immigrants from South, Central, and Eastern Europe, who quickly found themselves stigmatized along the lines of race, ethnicity, language, and religion. Immigrants of the Catholic faith responded to their perception of underlying Protestant and assimilationist tendencies in the public schools by organizing their own schools and, eventually, parallel school systems. The goal was to acculturate and assimilate children under the supervision of coethnics, although the schools were typically modeled after public school norms (Ravitch, 2000; Weisz, 1976). After immigration was virtually stopped in 1924, Catholic schools¹ continued to serve important functions for many descendants of the European immigrants, as a domain for expressing religious and ethnic identity and as a route to social mobility (Lazerson, 1977).

The 1960s marked a confluence of demographic trends that would reshape Catholic schooling in the United States. The year 1964 signaled the height of the Catholic school system, with 12% of the nation's K–12 students enrolled in more than 14,000 institutions² (McGreevey, 1996). But as the decade progressed, the departure of the descendants of European immigrants for the suburbs that had begun in the 1950s continued, shrinking White ethnic enrollment in urban Catholic schools (York, 1996; Youniss, 1998). However, the 1960s brought the resumption of large-scale immigration, mainly from Latin America, the Caribbean, and Asia, and many of the newcomers settled in the urban areas vacated by previous generations of immigrants.

This article considers the role of Catholic schools in the education of these new immigrants and their native-born counterparts. The post-1960s immigrants are both similar to and different from their predecessors. Coming predominantly from Asia, South America, and the Caribbean rather than Europe, they are different—and also very diverse—in terms of language, race, ethnicity, religion, and social class (Portes & Rumbaut, 1990, 2001; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). But they share the drive and willingness to uproot themselves in search of a better life, and access to greater educational opportunity for their children is often a part of what motivates them.

The new immigrants enter a landscape in which education plays a much bigger role than it did for their predecessors. Whereas earlier immigrants could quite easily find work with a high school degree or lower, increasingly, a college degree is essential for stable employment with benefits and any possibility of advancement. This means that immigrant parents, many of whom have low levels of education themselves, face the daunting task of moving their children several rungs up the class ladder in one generation (Perlmann, 2005). And they must do this at a time of retrenchment in both the public and parochial school systems. Public schools, particularly in urban centers, struggle with financial difficulties and new standards of accountability (Louie, 2005). Although scholars and the media have praised Catholic schools for performing better than public schools in promoting academic achievement among urban low-income minority students (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993; Coleman, 1981; Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore 1982; Greeley, 1982), the Catholic system also faces some serious challenges, including fiscal difficulties, declining enrollments³ (although school choice policies might lead to a resurgence), and school closings (Cattaro, 2002; Shokraii, 1997). Furthermore, because many students are now minorities, teachers are often no longer of the same ethnic or racial group or even religion as their students⁴ (Bryk et al.; Foster, 1996; National Catholic Educational Association, 1986; Youniss, 1998).

DATA AND METHODS

In this changed educational and social terrain, what role do Catholic schools play in the education of immigrant students? Do new immigrant and native-born communities use the Catholic system in different ways, and what benefits do they derive from it? In this article, we consider these questions using data collected for the Immigrant Second Generation in Metropolitan New York Study (ISGMNY). The study aimed to provide a better understanding of children of immigrants growing up in New York

City. It included a broad range of questions on neighborhoods, education, employment, marriage and family, and civic participation. The study includes survey data on 3,415 young adults aged 18–32 who were interviewed between 1998 and 2001. Respondents include second-generation immigrants from the Dominican Republic, South America, the English-speaking Caribbean, China (including Hong Kong and Taiwan) and the former Soviet Union, as well as native-born Whites, Blacks, and Puerto Ricans.⁵

Although the ISGMNY study was not designed specifically to examine the role of Catholic schools, respondents were asked a number of questions about their educational history that shed light on the questions explored in this article, including the highest level of education they had attained, the type of high school they graduated from (whether public, private, or parochial), and the type of diploma earned. They were also asked if they had ever attended Catholic school for at least 1 year and whether they graduated from a parochial school or were still attending one at the time of interview.⁶

We use survey data from the ISGMNY study to examine use of Catholic school by families of different ethnic backgrounds and how attendance relates both to religious affiliation and to socioeconomic class. We also analyze whether attending or graduating from Catholic high school has a positive effect on educational attainment. Because parents often choose the Catholic schools in the hope that strict discipline will keep their children out of trouble, we also look at data from the ISGMNY survey on the incidence of arrest and incarceration for men, and early childbearing for women.⁷

To understand why immigrant families choose Catholic schools and how they experience them, we draw on qualitative data from the in-depth interviews conducted as part of the ISGMNY study. A total of 333 interviews were conducted with a representative sample of the survey respondents to understand the processes at work behind the outcomes of the survey. For example, respondents were asked how they chose the high school they went to, whether they were aware of the presence of selective magnet schools for which they might have taken an entrance test, and about their experiences in the schools they did attend. For this discussion, we use interviews conducted with 74 respondents from immigrant and native-born groups who attended Catholic high schools and those who referenced Catholic schools in their educational history even if they did not attend. These data fill an important gap in the literature, which has tended to rely on an institutional approach and has consequently paid relatively little attention to the voices of students and their families

(Bempechat, Drago-Severson, & Boulay, 2002; Sanders, 1981; Weisz, 1976; York, 1996). Although the information gathered is partial and retrospective, it sheds light on the meaning of Catholic school for respondents and their families, the contexts in which they made the choice of whether to attend, and the advantages and disadvantages of doing so. Because our analysis highlights many issues that warrant more detailed exploration, we conclude with some directions for future research.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

INDUSTRIALIZATION, IMMIGRATION, AND THE COMMON SCHOOL

Between 1880 and 1915, 23 million immigrants arrived in the United States, mostly from Central, Eastern, and Southern Europe, in response to a wave of rapid industrialization in the United States (Lieberson, 1980; Pedraza, 1995). The presence of so many immigrants, who tended to cluster in urban neighborhoods with their own forms of associational life, provoked cultural and social anxieties that they would not be incorporated into the mainstream (Alba & Nee, 2003; Lazerson, 1977; McGreevy, 1996; Waters, 1990). It was widely acknowledged that immigrants and, in particular, their children, had to be absorbed into American life, and education was seen as playing a pivotal role in this process (Hartmann, 1948; Graham, 2005).

Prior to large-scale immigration, there were already ongoing educational reform movements grounded in the recognition that industrialization would require a workforce skilled beyond reading, writing, and arithmetic. The key supporters of the common school movement also viewed it as a way to tackle the class strife, labor tensions, and crime emerging from industrialization (Bryk et al., 1993; Cremin, 1951; Reisner, 1930). By the end of the 19th century, the common school, or free public education at the grade-school level available for all children that emphasized reasoning and observation, replaced what had been highly localized educational systems available mainly to the wealthy (Lazerson, 1977). As immigration increased, the common schools also aimed to teach American cultural practices to children from foreign cultures, bringing them into the mainstream Anglo Saxon fold (Bryk et al.; Olsen, 1990; Weisz, 1976). By the time the doors to large-scale immigration closed in 1924, the public school was expected to serve both as a channel of social mobility and as an agent for social inclusion through the development of citizenship.

THE BEGINNINGS AND RISE OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

The rise of Catholic schools has to be understood within this context of immigration, cultural incorporation, and the development of the common school. Between 1870 and 1910, the Catholic school system came of age. Catholics criticized what they viewed as state-sponsored religious practices in public schools, such as the expectation that students read the King James Version of the Bible and recite the Protestant version of the Lord's Prayer. In some cases, the tensions between Catholics and Protestants escalated into violence and contributed to the rise of nativist movements like the Know Nothing Party (Leahy, 1991). It was because of the combination of intense social pressure to conform to the American mainstream and the lack of institutional mechanisms available to manage these tensions, argued York (1996), that "the creation of Catholic schools seemed a cultural, if not an academic, necessity." Catholics proved to be anxious not only about public schooling but also about an education "that did not bear the unique print of their cultural identity." The result, according to York, was the emergence of a "tradition of respecting other cultures and giving them voice, visibility, and power in their schools" (pp. 19–20). In sum, Catholic schools were integral to the adjustment and response to the United States of many South, Central, and Eastern European immigrant groups. As scholars have noted, however, differences in premigration characteristics and experiences of incorporation also generated important intra-European differences in views toward, and engagement with, Catholic schools, and differences in who actually attended and graduated from them⁸ (Perlmann, 1988).

Despite the often contested relations between public and Catholic schools in this period, the founders of Catholic schools actually took careful note of public school governance and pedagogical strategies and engaged in similar initiatives in response to like pressures around ideology, power, and the market. Centralization of authority, including school boards and superintendents, and standardization of curriculum and textbooks were the fruits of this modeling (Lazerson, 1977; Weisz, 1976). Meanwhile, although the impetus to establish Catholic schools came at least partly from the desire to preserve nationality and ethnic language, and some schools did teach at least partly in Italian or in French until midcentury, English eventually became the language of instruction in many Catholic schools (Gerstle, 1989).

By the 1950s, the transformation was complete: Catholic schools were similar to public schools in their organization, policies, and teacher characteristics (York, 1996). It was also during the 1950s that Catholic parents, like non-Catholics, started the slow exodus from the nation's urban

centers to the suburbs. Once there, third- and later generation Italians, Irish, and Poles no longer viewed Catholic schools as the sole possibility for their children; in fact, one marker of their assimilation was that they began to see a wider educational canvas for their children (Cattaro, 2002).

CHALLENGES AND THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL ADVANTAGE FOR MINORITY CHILDREN

Beyond the decline of their core student constituency, the mid-1960s brought new challenges to urban Catholic schools with higher labor, building, and maintenance costs (Egan, 2000). Catholic school officials typically responded by choosing to stay in the cities and serve the native and immigrant minorities (Youniss, 1998), and over time, they began to gain recognition for promoting the academic achievement of these minority children. Notably, Coleman and his collaborators have argued that Catholic K–12 schooling provides a positive effect on academic achievement, particularly for minority students in low-income brackets (Coleman, 1981; Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Coleman et al., 1982; Hoffer, Greeley, & Coleman, 1985).

However, there has been considerable debate about the role that family characteristics, school characteristics, and school climate play in generating this effect. A central question has been that of selectivity bias: It is unclear whether the minority families who enroll their children in Catholic school are more economically advantaged and have higher educational aspirations for their children. If that is the case, the academic achievement of minority youth in Catholic schools would be an artifact of self-selectivity⁹ (McEwan, 2000). Other commentators have placed more emphasis on school characteristics, such as the mean socioeconomic status of students, mean academic ability, and racial and ethnic composition (Hallinan, 2001; Keith & Page, 1985).

A third line of inquiry has focused on school climate, namely how curriculum, teacher expectations and pedagogy, and disciplinary standards within Catholic schools affect achievement for minority students. Some researchers have argued that Catholic schools maintain higher teacher expectations of students, a stronger academic curriculum with more opportunities for advanced coursework, smaller class sizes, and a cohesive community, and that these are the school characteristics that should be adopted by public schools (Bryk et al., 1993; Coleman, 1981; Keith & Page, 1985). Net of family background and “other extrascholastic influences” (Hoffer et al., 1985, p. 91), students attending Catholic schools devote more time to homework, take more mathematics and foreign

language courses, and are less likely than their public school counterparts to be absent and to cut class. Yet this generally depicted structured environment of Catholic schools does leave space for flexibility, as is evident from the system of tracking. Although evidence suggests that a system of tracking exists in Catholic schools, there is more flexibility for students to move from one academic track to another. Altogether, the climate in Catholic schools seems to result in less replication of inequality than in public schools.

Other researchers have pointed to the fact that the main tenet of secondary Catholic schooling is “a core curriculum for all students” (Bryk et al., 1993, p. 297), one grounded in a social justice mission to aid the disadvantaged, and in an ethos of caring. They argue that this ethos of caring extends to the teacher–student relationship, with the teacher fully embedded in the school context beyond the classroom and in the neighborhood, and strong school–family partnerships. According to Bempechat et al. (2002), Latino and African American Catholic school fifth and sixth graders differed from their public school peers in their views toward how academic success could be achieved. Latinos enrolled in Catholic schools “were more likely to attribute success to ability” (p. 1) rather than inherent intelligence, and further, to experience a positive effect on their mathematics achievement.

Attention to the so-called Catholic school advantage has tended to concentrate on the experience of native-born minorities, with little research on the experiences of immigrant students in Catholic schools since the 1960s (Youniss, 1998). The goal of this article is to help fill this gap by focusing on the views and experiences of some immigrants and their native counterparts in New York City.

PATTERNS OF CATHOLIC SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

Catholic schools continue to play an important role in the educational landscape of New York City. The Archdiocese of New York operates 182 schools in New York City, 116 of them located in areas where the average income is at or below the poverty level. More than twice as many children attend Catholic elementary schools as do high schools, with over 55,000 enrolled in elementary schools in 2006 according to the Archdiocese, compared with only just over 21,000 at the secondary level. In 2006, 23% of students in the New York City schools were not Catholic, and 66% were minority.

Nearly 30% of the young adults in the ISGMNY study attended Catholic school for at least 1 year, and 12.3% had graduated or were attending Catholic school at the time that they were interviewed. As Table 1

indicates, native-born Whites were both the most likely to have attended Catholic school (over half had done so) and to have graduated (36.3%). The proportions were much lower in the other groups. Around a third of South Americans and Dominicans attended Catholic school for at least a year, but only 17.9% and 12.3%, respectively, had graduated or were still attending Catholic schools at the time of the interview. This rough measurement of retention rates shows that 44.7% of Puerto Ricans completed Catholic school, but only 32.4% of Dominicans did so, and only 28.1% of native Blacks, with the rest leaving the Catholic system.

Table 1. Catholic School Attendance and Completion

	Attended Catholic school for at least 1 year	Graduated from or attending private or Catholic school	Completion rate
South American	34.4%	17.9%	50.0%
Dominican	33.7%	12.3%	32.4%
Puerto Rican	28.6%	12.8%	44.7%
West Indian	28.9%	10.3%	34.3%
Native Black	23.5%	6.8%	28.1%
Chinese	18.1%	5.2%	26.7%
Native White	51.9%	36.3%	69.2%
Total	29.6%	12.3%	
N	2820	2980	2770

As Table 2 shows, the religious “fit” with Catholic schools is strongest for Latino immigrants. Overall, 79% of South Americans, 71.6% of Dominicans, and 66.8% of Puerto Ricans said that they were Catholic, compared with 58.8% of native-born Whites, 21.4% of West Indians, and only 9.1% of native-born Blacks and 5.4% of Chinese. Nonetheless, the growing presence of non-Catholics in Catholic schools is evident across

Table 2. Religious Affiliation and School Attendance

	% Catholic	% who attended Catholic school for at least 1 year who are not Catholic	% who graduated from Catholic school who are not Catholic
South American	79.0%	18.7%	14.0%
Dominican	71.6%	21.4%	14.0%
Puerto Rican	66.8%	21.9%	23.5%
West Indian	21.4%	70.6%	59.0%
Native Black	9.1%	81.8%	76.0%
Chinese	5.4%	85.1%	67.0%
Native white	58.8%	33.0%	28.9%
Total	39.1%		
N	2950	2738	2997

the spectrum: 18.7% of South Americans and about 22% of Dominicans and Puerto Ricans who attended Catholic school for a year or more said that they were not Catholic, as did 70.6% of West Indians and 81.8% of native Blacks.

Multivariate analysis of patterns of attendance and graduation from Catholic schools enables us to unpack the relationship between ethnicity, religion, and socioeconomic status. Taking religion into consideration shows that South American, Dominican, and Puerto Rican respondents who were Catholic were less likely than Whites to attend and complete Catholic school but that being Catholic reduced the gap with Whites for native Blacks, West Indians, and Chinese (see Tables 3 and 4). But the family's economic status clearly plays a much bigger role than religion in determining who attends Catholic school. Being eligible for free school lunch and growing up with only one parent significantly reduced the likelihood of having attended Catholic school, and having more siblings was also a negative factor, probably because families could not afford to pay fees for several children. Women were more likely to attend than men, but the difference becomes insignificant once religion is taken into account.

Controlling for these factors cuts the difference with Whites in Catholic school attendance by about half for South Americans and Chinese and by about a third for Puerto Ricans. It reduces the difference to insignificance for Dominicans, West Indians, and native-born Blacks. The gap in

Table 3. Binary Logistic Regression—Attended Catholic School for at Least 1 Year

Constant	-.073***	-.440***	-1.225***
South American	-.704***	-.880***	-.326*
Dominican	-.765***	-.883***	-.060
Puerto Rican	-.966***	-1.086***	-.371*
West Indian	-.977***	-.733***	-.244
Native Black	-1.284***	-.945***	-.151
Chinese	-1.571***	-1.212***	-.894***
Age	.001	.000	.011
Female	.213**	.192	.245**
Catholic		.723***	.615***
Parents' education			.044*
Free school lunch			-.775***
Grew up with both parents			.719**
Siblings			-.156**
Nagelkerke R square	.058	.081	.164

Note: The dependent variable, educational status, is measured on a 15-point scale where 1 is less than high school and 15 is completion of doctoral or professional degree. Parents' education is the highest level of education attained by either parent on the same scale.

*sig < .10. ** sig < .05. *** sig < .001.

Table 4. Binary Logistic Regression—Graduated Catholic School or Attending at Age 18

Constant	-.643***	-1.176***	-1.799***
South American	-.952***	-1.163***	-.403*
Dominican	-1.386***	-1.535***	-.543**
Puerto Rican	-1.355***	-1.465***	-.630***
West Indian	-1.591***	-1.269***	-.550**
Native Black	-2.035***	-1.573***	-.595**
Chinese	-2.335***	-1.873***	-1.335***
Age	.002	.001	.015
Female	.049	.017	.052
Catholic		.943***	.893***
Parents' education			.039*
Free school lunch			-1.173***
Grew up with two parents			.564**
Siblings			-.264***
Nagelkerke R square	.148	.125	.220

Note: The dependent variable, educational status, is measured on a 15-point scale where 1 is less than high school and 15 is completion of doctoral or professional degree. Parents' education is the highest level of education attained by either parent on the same scale.

*sig < .10. ** sig < .05. *** sig < .001.

completion rates, which is much bigger to begin with, also shrinks dramatically for all groups once socioeconomic status is controlled for. However, the difference with Whites remains sizeable for all groups nonetheless. This may be because these variables do not fully capture socioeconomic status, especially for immigrant groups, or because different educational options are available to families as a result of the neighborhoods they live in and their knowledge of the school system, as discussed next.

WHY CATHOLIC SCHOOL?

RELIGION

In keeping with the findings from the survey data, the in-depth interviews show that religion and ethnic culture are less of a factor for today's generation of Catholic school students, in contrast to the strong religiosity among earlier South and Central European immigrants. We found a clear link between a family's faith and the decision to attend Catholic school most often among white respondents, who said that their parents wanted them to have "that Catholic upbringing" or to follow in the family tradition of attending a particular institution. Religiosity was less frequently mentioned among other groups but did play a key role for a few

individuals. One 21-year-old Dominican man said that religion was “very important” to his entire family as he was growing up. Attending parochial school was the backdrop to the typical Catholic milestones of youth—serving as an altar boy, being confirmed, and attending church and taking communion every week.

CATHOLIC VERSUS PUBLIC SCHOOL

As we would expect from the literature, however, the quality of education and the discipline offered by Catholic schools were seen as their main advantage, particularly for non-White respondents. Immigrant and minority parents see Catholic schools primarily as offering an alternative to low-performing urban public schools, with many expressing concern about the violence and lack of discipline in those schools. A Puerto Rican woman who spent her “whole life” in parochial schools even though her parents were Pentecostal explained, “I think it’s seen as, you don’t put your kids in public school if you can afford Catholic school. They saw it as a better education, more discipline, keep the child in line as much as possible.”

A 20-year-old Puerto Rican man who had excelled in Catholic K–8 schools in the immigrant neighborhood of Jackson Heights, Queens, shared a similar view, highlighting academic preparation. Catholic schools, he noted, made the most sense to Latino parents living in urban centers like his own primarily because of the poor public school choices available to them. In his case, when his family moved to West Milford, a suburban, well-to-do, and, at the time, largely White town in Connecticut, his parents were content to send him to the high-achieving public school rather than explore Catholic schools. He noted, “In West Milford you get the same or better education than you get in a private school for free. So it wasn’t even a thought.”

This negative attitude toward the public schools reflects not only the reality of the educational choices that parents faced but also the information they had about the opportunities open to their children. The New York City public school system includes schools that range from excellent to extremely poor, with the percentage of elementary and middle school students performing at grade level in 2001 ranging from as low as a quarter in some neighborhoods to over three quarters in others (NYC Board of Education, 2001). There is an equal variation in middle school. For high school, students can take a test to enter the five extremely selective magnet high schools or seek admission to magnet and specialized programs available at some other high schools. However, few students who attend weak grade and middle schools pass these competitive tests. Local

zoned high schools are of extremely varied quality. In 2000, 68% of New York City high schools retained only 50% of freshman until senior year, and 81% retained only 60%. Nationwide, only 8% of schools had a retention rate as low as 50%, and 18% had a retention rate of 60% (Balfanz & Letgers, 2004).

Patterns of residential settlement are very important in determining the quality of local public schools, with low-performing schools concentrated in poor minority neighborhoods. The focus of this article is not on public education (for a fuller discussion of the pathways that children of immigrants take through the public system, see Kasinitz et al., 2008), but it is important to note that families of different ethnic groups have access to very different types of public schools. Reflecting the high levels of racial segregation in the New York City schools, immigrants also tend to go to schools with students of their own race (Gould Ellen, O'Regan, Schwarz, & Stiefel, 2001). For example, immigrants from the former Soviet Union generally attend schools where students are more likely to be White and of higher socioeconomic status and that have more experienced teachers and higher mean standardized test scores. Dominican immigrants attend schools where students are nearly all economically disadvantaged Blacks and Latinos. These schools have less experienced teaching staffs and considerably below average test scores (Gould Ellen et al.). The ISGMNY data reflect this. By high school, respondents of these different groups who were attending public schools were enrolled in institutions of very different quality (see Table 5, which shows the ranking of schools attended).¹⁰

Table 5. Ranking of Public High School

	1 (top)	2	3	4	5
CEP	15.4%	17.9%	27.9%	27.15	11.7%
Dominican	6.2%	14.9%	18.8%	27.9%	32.2%
Puerto Rican	10.3%	15.8%	17.1%	21.4%	35.5%
West Indian	14.4%	25.6%	18.8%	21.6%	19.6%
Native Black	11.8%	19.2%	18.0%	27.3%	23.7%
Chinese	44.5%	21.4%	17.9%	8.7%	7.5%
Russian	28.9%	49.3%	21.1%	.7%	——
Native white	25.0%	31.3%	23.8%	8.8%	11.3%
Total	20.8%	22/2%	19.8%	18.8%	18.3%
N	1901				

A few quotes from our respondents illustrate the environment in the worse schools in the public system, one of low academic standards and teachers who are often poorly trained, indifferent, or both (Lopez, 2003; Louie, 2006a). The comments of a 29-year-old Chinese man highlight the

theme of teacher accountability to the students' learning, one he sensed as quite a young child. The teacher at his public elementary school, he said, had taken a 2-week personal vacation followed by the winter break and, upon returning, showed slides of his trip to the class instead of focusing on content matter. The respondent said, "Basically I felt he wasn't responsible enough. Doesn't check on how we're doing or what happened with the sub." His vocal disapproval earned him a trip to the principal's office and the decision by his parents to enroll him elsewhere.

Other respondents, including many Dominicans and West Indians, witnessed violence in their schools and sometimes feared for their own safety (Louie, 2005; Waters, 1999). A 19-year-old Dominican man described the culture shock he experienced transitioning from the relatively safe environment of a Catholic high school to a "huge, huge school" with metal detectors, bag scanners, and "security guards just standing there like all mean and rough looking. Just checking you and asking you, 'You allowed to be here?'" In some cases, violent incidents were so traumatic that the respondents were literally driven away from school. An 18-year-old West Indian man left and went to night school after observing two friends fight at school over a girl. "They started fighting and he took out a razor and slit his face from ear to his lip and cut the lip through. His cheek was gone. His cheek was open. I remember I was, 'Wow.' And I started thinking that could have been me." Given this, it is not surprising that many minority and immigrant families sought to avoid the public schools. White respondents were much less likely to speak of their local public schools as underperforming or to give this as the main reason for their choice of Catholic school.

The Role of Information

Information about alternatives to local public schools was also an important factor behind parents' decision to send their children to Catholic school. Some seemed aware only of which public schools had a bad reputation and did not know that many public schools in the city are quite adequate and some extremely good. In fact, parents who were more familiar with the hierarchy within the public system often saw the magnet public schools as the best choice for their children because they provided a rigorous education without the steep price tag. A 28-year-old West Indian man explained that his mother first sent him to Catholic school to avoid the bad elementary school in his predominantly Black East New York neighborhood. But when he was accepted to a gifted program in a public school in the mostly White neighborhood of Canarsie, she sent him there because it offered as good an education for free.

Knowledge of the specialized public high schools was uneven across the groups. As previous studies have found, Chinese respondents had the most extensive knowledge, acquired through social capital, about the specialized public high schools (Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, Waters, Lopez, & Kim, 1997; Kasinitz et al., 2008; Louie, 2004, 2006b). They talked about their parents knowing about the schools from friends and colleagues and said that they hoped from a young age to go there. As one 24-year-old Chinese woman said, “Especially if you’re Asian, you had to take that test. You had to get into at least one of those schools.” A 27-year-old Chinese man who attended Catholic middle school framed the private school option this way: “I applied to a private high school in case I didn’t get any of those three [specialized high schools], but if I had made Stuyvesant, there’s no need to think about the others.” For Chinese families, private school was a safety net.

Of all the groups in our sample, Dominican families had the least knowledge of the specialized high schools and of the school system in general. Although they understood that certain public schools were bad, parents did not seem aware that there were better schools within the system and that their children might be able to attend them. For them, Catholic school was not a safety net but the only “exit” option available from poor neighborhood schools. A 20-year-old Dominican man who did not take the test because he felt that the specialized high schools were out of his reach underscored how the relevant decisions were solely his to make. Although his parents were always ready to provide the necessary supports for his education, like money for books or a desk, they often relied on him as a source of information about the school system. He noted, “You know when you grow up with Dominican parents, they don’t talk English—they try to be involved as much as they can, but they don’t know that much, you know. Usually it’s what you tell them.”

The experiences of a 20-year-old Dominican woman who did take the test nonetheless highlight the idea that she was essentially on her own in the process and in her education, generally speaking.

My parents left it totally up to me. I filled out the applications. I went to sign up for the test. I took classes studying for the test. I took the test.

INTERVIEWER: Did they know that Stuyvesant is a top school?

Not really. They just know it is a specialized school.

The woman's test score gained her admittance to Brooklyn Technical but fell short of the cutoff for Stuyvesant, her top choice. In the end, she declined both Brooklyn Technical and the option to attend summer school to get into Stuyvesant, in favor of another public school. Having gone through this experience once, she said, her parents were more knowledgeable about the public education system and encouraged her younger brother to aspire for Stuyvesant; at the same time, it is worth noting that their ideal choice for him was still Catholic school if they could afford the tuition.

Among other groups, knowledge about educational opportunities was mixed. In some cases, even if families knew about the specialized high schools, respondents felt that these institutions were "above" them and remembered a lack of encouragement from teachers to take the exam. Some Black and Latino youth also felt that they would not be comfortable in a predominantly White and Asian environment (Kasinitz et al., 2008). In other cases, parents were uncomfortable about their children traveling far from home, so they did not apply to better schools.

Those who did take the test often highlighted the encouragement that they received from teachers, counselors, and parents, or what we would call social capital. A 28-year-old West Indian man who went to the specialized high schools along with his siblings mentioned the crucial role that his mother played:

So I went because I got in and my mother was, "You're going to Stuyvesant."

INTERVIEWER: How did mom know?

Well, like I said, she was always investigating school stuff.

For a 23-year-old West Indian man, it was the influence of one of his teachers in the magnet public school program he attended: "One of my teachers thought that I could pass the tests, so I took it and I passed it."

AFFORDING CATHOLIC SCHOOL

For those who did attend Catholic school, cost was a key issue, particularly at the secondary level, where tuition increases sharply. Only Whites rarely mentioned the expense of Catholic school, which is not surprising given that the quantitative analysis demonstrates that cost was much less important for them. But for most respondents, paying fees of between \$2,000 and \$5,000 annually represented a sizable investment, and few

could afford to send all their children the whole way through. A 21-year-old Puerto Rican explained that his mother managed to send him and his two older sisters to Catholic schools, K–12, at one of the least costly Catholic high schools in the city. Despite the low costs relative to the Catholic system, the combined price tag was nonetheless a substantial portion of the household budget.

Both my sisters went to Cathedral High School and that was \$270 each month. So \$2,700 a year. So a year, my mother was already spending \$5,400 and adding on with me was going to be \$7,600. So that's pretty much my mother's entire salary because we were also getting some child support from my father. And there was rent and other things.

Many families were not able to sustain this expense, even with parents working two jobs. A common experience was for respondents to attend Catholic grade and/or middle school, for which the costs were most affordable, and to leave the system right before or in the first year of high school. A 25-year-old Dominican man described how unexpected costs could make Catholic school an unviable option. A graduate of K–8 Catholic schools because of what he described as his mother's "push," he was bound for La Salle Academy when his mother became pregnant. The addition of another child, combined with the respondent's lack of knowledge about scholarships, meant he had "to settle for a public high school." In some cases, families handled the cost issue by dedicating resources to only one child.

EFFECTS OF ATTENDING CATHOLIC SCHOOL

EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

We found that attending Catholic school for at least a year had a positive effect on overall educational attainment even after controlling for family socioeconomic status and individual effort (average hours of homework in high school). It was not surprising that completing Catholic school had a stronger effect than just attending. However, as the multivariate analysis in Table 6 shows, the bulk of the difference in overall educational attainment between Whites and other groups was explained by socioeconomic status, not by Catholic school attendance, suggesting that Catholic school did not necessarily serve as a great boost to attainment for low-income groups. It is interesting that although attending Catholic school did not eliminate the gap entirely, attendance reduced the gap with

Whites more for native-born Blacks and Puerto Ricans than for the immigrant second-generation groups, for whom it made no significant difference once socioeconomic status was controlled for. The Chinese case also indicates that Catholic school is not the only effective option for immigrant families: The attainment of second-generation Chinese is higher than Whites to begin with, and the gap only grows when socioeconomic class and type of school attended are taken into consideration.

Table 6. OLS Regression of Highest Level of Educational Status

	Beta	Beta	Beta	Beta
South American	-.097***	-.010	-.004	.002
Dominican	-.174***	-.048*	-.045	-.033
Puerto Rican	-.260***	-.141***	-.133***	-.125***
West Indian	-.115***	-.035	-.025	-.006
Native Black	-.246***	-.130***	-.121***	-.101***
Chinese	.111***	.194***	.221***	.243***
Age	.257***	.288	.286***	.271***
Female	.102***	.086***	.080***	.091***
Parents education		.131***	.125***	.130***
Free lunch		-.101***	-.080	-.065**
Two parents		.109***	.093	.101***
Siblings		-.077***	-.086	-.060**
Homework		.082***	.077	.067***
Attended Catholic school for at least 1 year			.117**	
Graduated Catholic school			.165***	
Adjusted R square	.170	.228	.240	.250

*sig < .10. ** sig < .05. *** sig < .001.

POSSIBLE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

One possible explanation for these differences in the impact of attending Catholic school is variation in quality among the schools within the Catholic system. Certainly, the existing research, mainly conducted with public schools, points to the relevance of students' race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status to the kinds of schools they are able to attend. In fact, increasing numbers of Black and Latino students have been attending segregated, or largely minority, schools since the 1980s (Frankenberg & Lee, 2002). As researchers have found, it is not the racial and ethnic composition per se that is at issue, but the troubling links between schools that predominantly comprise minorities, and high indices of concentrated poverty within the schools (both at the individual and institutional levels), marked teacher turnover, and fewer numbers of

credentialed and veteran teachers (Orfield & Lee, 2005; Rothstein, 2004). The result, they argue, is educational inequality for those minority students who already confront a number of disadvantages.

At the other end of the institutional spectrum, private schools have not proved successful in fostering student bodies that reflect relatively equivalent proportions by race and ethnicity. Further, as Orfield noted, despite the emphasis of voucher plans on religious schools, they in fact “have the highest levels of racial separation” among private schools (Reardon & Yun, 2002, p. 1). For example, Black–White segregation was found to be greater among private schools as compared with public schools, and among private schools, the most pronounced levels were located in the Catholic system. Whereas Latino–White segregation was lower among private schools as compared with their public counterparts, the levels were highest in both public and Catholic schools (Reardon & Yun). It is unclear, however, what links exist between such racial patterns in enrollment and the quality of education that the students are receiving.

In this article, although we were unable to obtain systematic information for all the Catholic schools attended by our respondents¹¹ on such indicators as the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds of students and academic variables such as test scores and graduation rates, we did find some interesting clusters by ethnicity. Some schools were attended only by White respondents, whereas others were much more mixed, and a few were attended only by particular groups. For example, Aquinas High School, which, according to descriptive data from the National Center of Educational Statistics (NCES), is 62% Hispanic, was attended by Dominican, Puerto Rican, and Black respondents. Similarly, the Nazareth School, which was attended by 5 West Indians and 1 of the White respondents, was 98.58% Black. At the same time, Mary Louis Academy, which was attended by South Americans, was 41.5% White and 14.26% Asian. Although the NCES data are from the school year 2003–2004 rather than from the years in which the respondents were enrolled, they are nevertheless informative and point to a possible sorting by race and ethnicity that is worth exploring in future studies.

The in-depth interview data, meanwhile, reinforce the impression that respondents were attending different types of Catholic schools, at least in terms of students’ race, ethnicity, social class, and even religion. White respondents tended to describe their schools as relatively homogeneous, for example, White ethnic (mainly Italian and Irish), Catholic, and middle class. Although some of the non-White respondents went to predominantly White schools, they generally reported more racial and ethnic diversity in their schools, particularly at the secondary level. This was true of religion as well, with scattered reports of Muslim, Jewish, and

otherwise non-Catholic classmates. The religious diversity was seen as normal. One 19-year-old African American man of Baptist faith said that in his Catholic elementary school, “most of the people had a different religion from Catholic, so we would just sit there and talk about ‘Well my religion we do this.’ It was just basically learning about different things.” Although there were not enough respondents in any given school to enable us to explore the impact of attending a particular institution, this evidence of sorting within the Catholic system raises the question of whether it has consequences for academic performance.

EXPLAINING THE EFFECT OF CATHOLIC SCHOOL

These caveats aside, attending Catholic school did have a positive impact on educational attainment for quite a lot of students. What produced these effects? We have already seen significant evidence of positive selection among students attending Catholic school, who, with the exception of native-born Whites, tend to come from advantaged families in terms of their socioeconomic status. Certainly, higher incomes and the presence of more adults to give guidance and support can be expected to boost student attainment regardless of the school they attend. But beyond this, many of the factors mentioned in the literature seem to have been helpful to students.

With the exception of native-born Whites, the very fact that their parents were paying was a powerful motivator for many respondents. The role of cost as an incentive for academic achievement has been underexamined in the literature on Catholic schools, although there have been anecdotal accounts suggesting that children respond to the parents’ outlays of scarce funds with “increased effort” in school (Irvine, 1996, p. 174). Our respondents were painfully aware of the sacrifice their parents were making to give them a better education. One 28-year-old Puerto Rican woman who later transferred to public school said that her grades declined as the pressure did: “Like I said, in the Catholic school, you couldn’t get lower than like a B or a C, it was just that my parents were paying so much money that I didn’t want to disappoint them by getting a low grade.” In some cases, students who did not rise to the occasion left Catholic school. One 19-year-old Dominican man recalled struggling academically his freshman year of Catholic high school mainly because he was “hanging out late at night” with the seniors. He decided not to return the next year because “it was just too expensive” for him to be barely passing. For that kind of underachievement, he could go to public school.

Discipline was another factor. In the words of a 21-year-old Puerto

Rican man, it was “impossible” to skip class because the doors of the Catholic school were “closed up.” The few who managed to get out, he explained, earned only the swift punishment of “a week’s detention.” Respondents who switched between Catholic and public schools were particularly vocal on this point. A 29-year-old woman of Puerto Rican and Dominican parentage attributed the decline in her grades—from 80s to 70s and below—to her parents’ financial inability to keep her in Catholic high school. In public school, she was no longer subject to the watchful eyes of teachers and administrators, who knew her family. She observed, “I could get away with everything. It was easy to cut class. It was easy for me to not go to school and write my own letter, saying it’s from my mother.” However, disciplinary measures in Catholic schools were sometimes seen as extreme. A 30-year-old South American woman described the nuns at her school as too strict: “I’ve seen nuns hit students that I was, ‘If that was my kid, I would be beating up the nuns.’ I don’t think that should be allowed.”

Young people also talked about many positive and highly valued relationships with school personnel that they felt contributed to their success in school. A common theme was the close-knit community in Catholic schools facilitated by smaller class sizes, an ethos of caring, and teachers who assumed multiple roles, of which the transmitter of knowledge was only one (Bryk et al., 1993; Coleman, 1981; Keith & Page, 1985). In the words of a 19-year-old Ecuadorian woman, “At Catholic school everybody knows your mother. Everybody, you know, it was like so close.” A 19-year-old Dominican man who went to Catholic school from fifth to ninth grades before transferring to public school found it helpful to have the same teacher for all subjects. He formed strong bonds with his teachers, who were of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, including White, Asian, and Puerto Rican. He explained, “They would visit you at home and all that. The priest also would visit on holy days. It was very, very personal.”

In contrast to the literature, however, the respondents did not mention a curricular emphasis on social justice and aid to the disadvantaged as key components of their Catholic school experiences. Rather, as other articles in this volume stress, it was the personal relationships, or social capital, that they saw as crucial in helping them to succeed in school.¹² According to a 19-year-old African American woman, instead of being left behind, struggling students found their needs met in the Catholic school climate. She noted, “The teachers would stay after school and help them or really somebody in the class would just go and help them.”

AVOIDING TROUBLE

Parents send their children to Catholic school not only because of their reputation for promoting better academic outcomes but also because they hope that the stricter discipline will help their children avoid some of the dangers of adolescence, particularly early pregnancy for girls and trouble with the police for boys. The survey data, presented in Table 7, show a mixed picture on this score, with some puzzlingly different outcomes for different ethnic groups. In terms of arrest rates, young men of South American and West Indian backgrounds who had attended Catholic school were much less likely to have been arrested than those who went to public school: Fewer than 7% compared with around 24% of those who attended public school. The gap was almost equally big, though not statistically significant, for native Blacks and Whites. But almost equal numbers of Dominican young men said that they had been arrested, regardless of where they went to school—about 22% in each case—and Puerto Rican men also seem not to have reaped much benefit from Catholic school in this respect. Chinese men had the lowest arrest rates, and there was not a significant difference between those attending public schools and those attending private schools. Whether these effects were due to the climate in the schools that young men of different ethnic backgrounds attended, the neighborhoods in which these schools were located, the neighborhoods in which they lived, or perhaps police practices in those areas, we cannot tell from our data, but it is certainly a phenomenon that invites further exploration.

Table 7. Nonacademic Outcomes

	Arrested (men)		Parent before age 18 (women)	
	Public	Catholic	Public	Catholic
CEP	21.5%**	6.3%	8.1%	2.7%
Dominican	21.0%	22.7%	13.4%*	3.4%
Puerto Rican	29.9%	23.8%	16.5%**	3.3%
West Indian	25.9%*	6.7%	7.9%	4.2%
Native Black	38.2%*	16.7%	18.9%	6.7%
Chinese	8.8%	5.3%	—	—
Native white	29.2%	18.9%	4.6%	3.6%

* sig < .10. ** sig < .05. *** sig < .001.

Turning to young women, we see that Catholic school had a stronger effect on the experiences of Puerto Rican and Dominican women than it did on men. Only just over 3.3% of women in both groups who were attending or had graduated from Catholic school at the time of the interview had a child before the age of 18, compared with closer to 15% of

those who did not. Native Black women in Catholic school were also less likely to become parents as teenagers; only 6.7% did, compared with over 18% of those in public schools. There were smaller decreases for South American, West Indian, and native White women, all of whom were less likely to become teenage parents regardless of where they went to school. Too few Chinese women had children as teenagers to assess the impact of the type of school they attended.

Of course, we cannot be sure from this simple bivariate analysis whether Catholic school attendance was the crucial factor shaping these outcomes. Teen pregnancy and being arrested are strongly associated with poverty and, as we have seen, respondents who went to Catholic school were from relatively well-off families.¹³ In fact, some of the in-depth interviews with women in Catholic school suggested that the environment does not always help reduce pregnancy because the lack of information about sex and contraception could leave girls ignorant about how to avoid it (see Kasinitz et al., 2008).

Although there is not space to explore these differences in detail here, multivariate analysis, as presented in Table 8, shows that the effect of Catholic school on early motherhood remains even when socioeconomic factors, family status, and religiosity are controlled for, but there is no significant impact on the incidence of arrest among young men.

Table 8. Binary Logistic Regression

	Mother 18 or Younger			Arrested		
Constant	-3.059***	-2.505	-2.364	-1.117***	-1.550	-1.555
South American	.439	-.068	-.129	-.329	-.785**	-.728**
Dominican	1.131**	.616	.616	-.168	-.807**	-.774**
Puerto Rican	1.295**	.876*	.866*	.258	-.212	-.185
West Indian	.573	.119	.079	-.034	-.428	-.394
Native Black	1.618***	1.233**	1.174**	.546**	.048	.082
Chinese	-18.144	-18.617	-18.684	-1.228***	-1.471***	-1.480***
Age		-.014	-.014		.025	.026
Parents' education		-.044	-.035		.010	.008
Free school lunch		.673**	.548**		.711***	.766***
Grew up with two parents		-.051	.024		-.529**	-.554**
At least 1 year in Catholic school			-.693**			.279
Attends church at least once a week			.197			-.467**
Nagelkerke R square	.120	.146	.160	.072	.109	.121

*sig < .10. ** sig < .05. *** sig < .001.

To the extent that Catholic schools were able to help young people avoid these risks, it seems to have been through a combination of the strict in-school discipline described previously and the fact that attending

Catholic schools often removed young people from neighborhoods where crime and drugs were a problem. Being separated from their peers at a time when they most wanted to be like everyone else was a painful experience at the time. A few Dominican men reported losing contact with their neighborhood friends after attending Catholic school and said they ended up staying indoors much of the time, watching TV and doing homework. But in neighborhoods troubled by crime and drugs, this isolation was a form of protection. One 21-year-old Dominican man explained, "I didn't have too much difficulties growing up around here 'cause I always kept to myself. My mother sent us to Catholic school. I didn't go out that much and if I did I only hang out with a couple of guys that I knew, [who] are okay."

In this respect, too, respondents referred to a hierarchy among urban Catholic schools, each of which had a reputation for strictness or looseness. According to a 25-year-old Dominican man who described his Catholic high school as one of the worst in the city, drugs were definitely a presence despite all the discipline: "I used to see some of my friends getting taken away in handcuffs. Either for something they did out of school or for something they were doing in school, like selling weed or tabs or whatever." This young man said he was a "lifer" of detention for making fun of teachers, cursing, and getting into fights. Nonetheless, he was sure his life would have turned out differently had he attended public schools, which lacked the structure he needed. He remarked, "Forget it. I definitely wouldn't have been in college if I went to public school." More likely, he thought, his options would have been jail or death at an early age.

CONCLUSION

Our analysis of the experience of native-born and second-generation students with Catholic schools in New York City has shown that parochial schools not only play a different role than in the past but also serve a variety of functions for diverse constituencies. For native-born Whites and Puerto Ricans, religion, or at least a cultural sense of being Catholic, continues to be an important reason for attending Catholic school, as it was for immigrants of an earlier era. For immigrant families that have arrived recently, however, religion seems to be more or less irrelevant to the decision to send their children to Catholic school. Instead, like many native Blacks and Latinos, these families choose Catholic schools to avoid what they see as a seriously deficient public school system.

To some extent, this represents a rational choice, but for many immigrant families, it also reflects a lack of knowledge about the public

education system. The Chinese, who are most likely, among the immigrant groups we studied, to live in neighborhoods with better public schools and who are also well informed about the system through social networks that cut across class boundaries, are the least likely to use Catholic schools. They regard them more as a safety net in case their children fail to gain entry to more academically rigorous institutions in the public school system. In contrast, many other immigrant families, particularly Dominicans, have more limited information about better schools within the public system and see Catholic schools as the only way to avoid bad neighborhood schools. Although they do offer an alternative for families who cannot gain access to the better schools in the public system, especially at the high school level, some poor families struggle to pay high fees even when their children are eligible for entry to specialized or magnet high schools. This finding points to the importance of social capital, especially information, in shaping educational opportunities for children of immigrants (Fuller & Hannum, 2002; Kasinitz et al., 2008; Louie, 2006b; Zhou, 2002).

Although many low-income families would like to send their children to Catholic school, cost is an insurmountable barrier for many. With the exception of native-born Whites, socioeconomic factors are very important in shaping who can go to Catholic school and whether students can stay until graduation. In many cases, families were forced to withdraw their children by high school, for which costs rise sharply. The consequence of this is that students who attend and remain in Catholic school are more advantaged than their peers who do not, a fact that at least partly explains their higher achievement.

Nonetheless, overall, the data show a benefit in terms of educational attainment for nearly all groups, and a positive impact in terms of avoiding of certain problems, such as early pregnancy for girls and trouble with police for boys. However, there were important differences across groups, with Dominican men in particular seeming to reap less benefit from attending Catholic school as compared with other groups. It is not clear whether this is due to shorter attendance, to differences in the quality of the Catholic schools attended, or to other factors, such as neighborhood quality or discrimination.

Because Catholic schools do offer an alternative to weak public schools and cost is the major barrier for poor families, some have argued that school vouchers should be provided to enable more children to attend (Bempechat, 1998; Shokraii, 1997). It is also clear that many families are not aware of opportunities for school choice within the public system, a problem that could be addressed by providing parents with better information. To some extent, this latter strategy is congruent with that of the

No Child Left Behind Act, which gives parents whose children are enrolled in schools that do not make adequate progress for 2 consecutive years the right to move their children to a better performing school at state expense.

However, for either of these approaches to succeed, there must be an adequate number of places available in “good” public or parochial schools; this is not currently the case, and it cannot be achieved without significant investment. For instance, factors that constrain the range of possible choices among voucher recipients from low-income minority families include “a highly segregated set of private schools within their local schooling market” (Reardon & Yun, 2002, p. 44) and for those seeking to avoid this situation, a lack of adequate transportation to more racially diverse schools. Finally, there appears to be a sorting by race and ethnicity in Catholic schools that results in Black and Latino students attending schools that are more isolated from Whites (Reardon & Yun). Whether these racial patterns of enrollment are linked to attendance at schools with fewer resources and lower educational quality (as is the case for Blacks and Latinos attending public schools) is an important question deserving of further attention. Nonetheless, given the present circumstances, it seems unlikely that expanding access to Catholic schools will solve the underlying question of how to provide quality education to all, or even most, students in the urban centers that are home to large numbers of poor families, immigrant and nonimmigrant (Noguera, 2003).

It is often said that the public system should learn from Catholic schools, which raises the question of which of the factors that seem to contribute to their success might be replicable outside them. Our analysis highlighted several factors, including a selected student population; the motivation inspired by cost; strict discipline; and a caring environment with strong student–teacher relationships. The first two factors are not relevant here. Suburban and elite urban public schools also have selected student populations and good results. And, although cost is a motivating factor for students who know that their families must sacrifice to pay tuition, it is irrelevant to discussions of the free public system. That leaves the somewhat contradictory variables of strict discipline and strong, caring relationships. Although the excessively strict discipline and corporal punishment of Catholic schools is not something that the public sector should seek to emulate, it does seem as if Catholic schools have been effective in enforcing other rules that have a positive effect on student attainment. For example, some Catholic schools seem to have rendered it more or less impossible to cut class, whereas at some public schools, students seemed able to do so with impunity. In those schools, security guards seem to serve more to keep students out of school than

to keep them in. A more detailed understanding of the effect of different approaches toward improving attendance and the extent to which they are already in place at some public schools might help to identify good practices (Murnane, 1984). However, because public schools do not have the freedom to expel disruptive students except in extreme cases, they have less leeway in enforcing discipline than Catholic schools.

Our respondents echoed the importance of personal relationships highlighted in the literature on Catholic schools. Such relationships have also been found in successful urban public schools with minority student populations (Noguera, 2003). Valenzuela (1999), for example, has called attention to caring connections made with teachers, college counselors, and staff as being crucial for students, and so do other articles in this special issue (Gibson & Hidalgo, 2009; Suárez-Orozco, Pimentel, & Martin, 2009). Other studies have documented the importance of family/ethnic and nonfamily/nonethnic sources of social capital among peers and adults in fostering a sense of institutional belonging that promotes academic achievement (Gibson, Bejinez, Hidalgo, & Rolón, 2004; Goyette & Conchas, 2002; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). To the extent that Catholic schools generally seem to be more effective than low-achieving public schools in generating and maintaining such supportive relationships, it seems important to have a better understanding of how they do so. Quite possibly some of the conditions—for example, the strong commitment of some staff who are members of religious orders—are not replicable. Others, like more frequent contact with parents and home visits to families, may be hard to introduce in a public system where teacher unions enforce strict limits on hours and activities. However, given the growing volume of research that points to the importance of such relationships, more research is needed to understand how institutions can foster them.

At the same time, it is worth noting that the solution to the underperformance of struggling public schools likely rests not only with the schools themselves or the system of education writ large. As Noguera (2003) argued, such schools are located in social contexts influenced by macro-level disinvestment, which has resulted in a declining pool of jobs and a shortage of affordable housing options. These issues must be addressed in some measure as part of any educational solution (Hess, 1999; Wilson, 1987).

This article represents an initial attempt to understand the role that Catholic schools play in the education of children of immigrants today in the midst of the challenges facing both Catholic and public schools. Clearly, there is much more we need to know about patterns of attendance at different schools and how they relate to outcomes. Both the survey and in-depth interview data discussed here suggest that there are

between-school differences within the Catholic school system in terms of academic excellence and racial and ethnic composition that might warrant further investigation. More detailed data are needed to ascertain whether different native and immigrant groups are in fact attending Catholic schools varying in academic quality, and, if so, why this is happening and how it shapes educational trajectories.

Catholic schools were formed over a century ago on the initiative of immigrant communities who wished to educate their children in institutions that reflected their religious beliefs. Today they are attended by growing numbers of children from a new generation of immigrant families that are motivated by very different concerns. To understand the role of Catholic schools in urban education today, we need to explore further the ways in which the presence of so many children of immigrants, many of whom are not Catholic (or at least not religious), is changing the structure, mission, and practices of Catholic schools, as well as the relationship between schools, parents, and immigrant communities.

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Notes

1. We use the terms *Catholic* and *parochial* school interchangeably. In practice, there are distinctions between the two, and three broad categories of Catholic school, as Foster (1996) noted: "(1) the parish school financed by a particular parish to educate children from a particular church; (2) the diocesan school financed by a diocese to serve children from several parishes; and (3) the private Catholic school funded by tuition, any tier of the Church hierarchy, or by a religious order of priests, brothers, or nuns" (p. 2). It should be noted, however, that Catholic schools "never enroll[ed] more than 60 percent of all Catholic children" (McGreevey, 1996, p. 236).

3. In 1991, for example, it was estimated that only 20% of Catholic children attended Catholic grade schools.

4. It is estimated that students of color made up 22.2% of Catholic school students in 1990 (Foster, 1996).

5. In 1998 and 2000, a telephone survey was conducted of 3,415 young adults aged 18–32 living in the 10 counties within metropolitan New York, where the 1990 census

indicated that the target populations comprise at least 1.5% of all households. This area contained about 12 million of the region's 21 million people in 2000, and the study groups made up 81% of that total population. Eighteen was the lower age boundary in order to collect data on educational attainment and work. Thirty-two was the oldest a child born in the United States to a post-1965 immigrant parent could be in 1998. Respondents were identified through a combination of random digit dialing (which produced sufficient native-born respondents) and "targeted random digit dialing" in telephone exchanges that yielded at least 1 eligible respondent in the first wave. The response rate among eligible individuals was 69.7% for the first round and 58.7% for the second, for an overall response rate of 64.5%. The telephone interviews were 30–40 minutes. The second stage of the study involved open-ended face-to-face interviews with 333 of the telephone respondents between 1998 and 2001. Interviewers used a standard protocol but modified this when appropriate. Interviews lasted from 2 to 4 hours. In-depth interview respondents were broadly representative of the wider sample. (See Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, Waters, & Holdaway, 2008, for more information on the technical aspects of this survey.)

6. Further questions were asked relating to postsecondary education but are not relevant to this article.

7. We use data only for respondents who grew up primarily in New York City. Russian Jews were excluded from the analysis because none had attended Catholic schools, although a significant number did attend Yeshivas.

8. For a more in-depth discussion, please see Weisz (1976), Sanders (1981), Perlmann (1988), Leahy (1991), and Bryk et al. (1993).

9. Please see McEwan (2000) for further discussion of selection bias, possible ways to correct it, and the degree of effectiveness. He found, for example, that experimental results at the Catholic elementary school level revealed "modest mathematics gains for poor, minority students in grades 2-5" (p. 26). Nonexperimental research demonstrated inconsistent effects of Catholic secondary schools on student achievement.

10. The survey instrument asked each respondent for the name of the high school that he or she last attended. For all those who attended a public high school in New York City, a high school quality index was developed based on performance data collected by the Division of Assessment and Accountability of New York City Board of Education (now the Department of Education) for 1995. That was the earliest year for which comprehensive public school data were available. For more details of the ranking, see the methodological appendix of Kasinitz et al. (2008).

11. With the assistance of her research assistant, the first author spent several months trying to provide an institutional snapshot of each Catholic school attended by the Puerto Rican and Dominican respondents in the survey sample, with information on such variables as race/ethnicity of teachers, race/ethnicity of students, student-teacher ratio, mean entry score on the Test for Admission into Catholic High Schools (TACHS), percentage of college-bound seniors, mean SAT score, and graduation rates. The goal was to provide the kind of institutional profile that is typically available for public schools and then to sort the Catholic schools into various categories. Unfortunately, because the Catholic schools in New York City are decentralized, there was no one clearinghouse from which to obtain this information. Repeated attempts to contact the 54 schools individually by fax, phone, and letter did not yield enough information on the mentioned indicators for meaningful analysis.

12. Please see Attinasi (1989) and Rodriguez (2001) for a discussion of the role of cognitive mapping of the postsecondary institution among minority and/or low-income college students.

13. Analysis (not shown) indicates that attending Catholic school for at least 1 year did

not have a significant impact on teen pregnancy once socioeconomic status was controlled for. We cannot test the impact of longer periods of attendance with this data set because those who have graduated are by definition less likely to have become pregnant.

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Irish Catholics established Catholic schools in the parishes in which they came to reside. Many of these schools endured for long periods of time. Mann, Barnard, and others argued that schools were the ideal institutions within society to take up the important task of turning immigrants into Americans as well as providing the means for the poor to advance their prospects within society, working from the foundation of a solid education. It could no longer be left to chance that the varied, loosely organized system of informal learning would inculcate the skills and values that were necessary for the young and dramatically growing nation. New immigrants had to be rapidly assimilated into the American way of life and the values and mores of society.