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Self-interest versus social-interest policy framing : the case of school choice

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Self-Interest versus Social-Interest Policy Framing:
The Case of School Choice

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Abstract

Self-Interest versus Social-Interest Policy Framing: The Case of School Choice

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Committee members: *Dr. Allison Archer, Dr. Tom Shields, Dr. Thad Williamson*

This study examines the role of self-interest and social-interest framing in determining support for school choice policies. I make a new contribution to the field of political psychology and policy framing by comparing the effects of social-interest and social-interest. My research focuses on the domain of education policy and school choice in an original experimental study and a case study of newspaper editorials. I find evidence that the self-interest frame garners significantly more support for school choice policies among certain population, but policy advocates most commonly use social-interest framing when arguing for school choice policies.

Signature Page for Leadership Studies Honors Thesis

Self-Interest Versus Social-Interest Policy Framing:
The Case of Inter-District School Choice

Thesis presented

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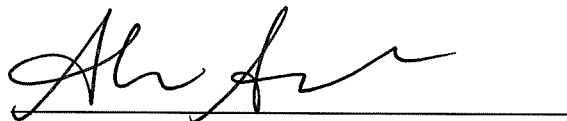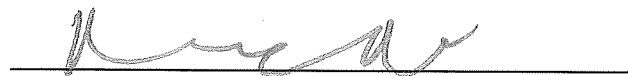*Benedict Roemer*

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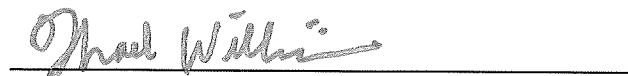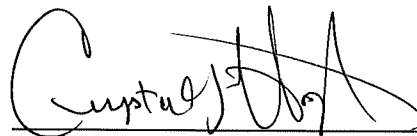
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Chapter 1: Theory and Background

Introduction

Political scientists in the field of political psychology have for years attempted to determine what drives public opinion and support or opposition for a particular policy or political candidate. Public opinion lies in the background of all voting decision, and it is this vote which can provide the foundation of a successful democratic society as selected leaders are placed in a position to construct important policy decisions that will affect individual lives and society as a whole. Or public opinion can even more directly affect policy formation through ballot referendums. Issues such as education, taxes, environmental protections, and many others, which affect entire communities and the individual within, are taken up by policy makers selected by voters when they cast their ballot. Given the far-reaching consequences of public opinion, understanding the psychological processes that drive the formation of the opinion on a particular policy or candidate is critical to understanding the forces behind the construction of our democracy.

While prior research suggests self-interest and party identification or ideology serve as powerful antecedents to policy opinion (Gerber et al. 2010; Abramowitz and Saunders 2006; Green and Gerken 1989), I propose a different approach to understanding policy attititude formation through self- and social-interest. Rather than looking at material or purely ideological determinants of opinion formation and voter behavior, I will examine how frames emphasizing social good and personal well-being influence opinion formation. That is, I study how changes in the context of the policy environment—in this case, varying rhetorical strategies—alter public opinion as well as the conditions under which these frames are more or less effective. Social-interest messages will emphasize community well-being by focusing on the group instead of the

individual in the context of my research. Whereas, self-interest messages will emphasize the individual and their autonomy of choice.

My first thesis question then, is whether voters are more likely to support school choice policies after reading appeals with a self-interest frame or a social-interest frame. I will use an original experimental study to test this research question. I will also investigate the empirical question of whether policy influencers have employed self-interest or social-interest appeals in pursuit of support for their policy proposals. To do so, I will draw on another original dataset consisting of local newspaper editorials in Michigan from 1993 - 2018. I will investigate both of these questions within the context of school choice policy because the issue is controversial and often fosters unique coalitions of support and opposition across party lines so the results will not be driven by the demonstrably powerful opinion influencer of party identification (Ryan and Heise 2002). That is, individuals may be particularly vulnerable to framing effects given the ambivalence they might feel toward the subject (Druckman et al. 2013). Additionally, school choice policy and education more generally are an issue that can speak to both self- and social-interests. On one hand, parents have a strong self-interest in providing their child with an education that will make them competitive and successful. But public education is guaranteed for every child because it can serve as a great equalizer within society. If every child receives equal education opportunities, they (at least in theory) will have an equal chance at success.

As a preview of my findings, my results suggest that demographics and personality type are the strongest indicators of how an individual will be affected by the self- or social-interest framing. Parents, blacks, and low-egalitarian individuals are significantly more supportive of certain school choice policies after reading the self-interest frame. In practice, however, school choice policy advocates and detractors more commonly employ social-interest arguments to

address their readers. The incongruence between the findings of the experimental and case study portions of this thesis holds important implications for political elites and policy influencers and strategic communications.

Theory

The subject of this thesis, whether self-interest or social-interest framing more successfully drives public opinion to support school choice policies, rests on a strong foundation of prior research on both framing practices and effects as well as public opinion/voter choice theory. The research question under investigation here centers on two opposing argument frames, self-interest and social-interest. These two frames have been chosen out of the recognition that a closer look at their comparative influence will add to a rich discussion on drivers of public opinion and voter choice, such as self-interest, political party affiliation, and other factors.

Framing

Framing has been used extensively by politicians and other public figures. Take, for example, the ways in which members of President Trump's camp and their opposition are framing the findings of Special Council Mueller's investigation. On one side, pundits go so far as to say that the lack of charges essentially exonerate President Trump from all wrongdoing, while the other side chooses to frame the findings as firm evidence of President Trump's unethical and legally dubious behavior. The two opposing frames are selected to push a narrative that will either build a stronger coalition of support around Trump or one that will pull more supporters away from him moving into the 2020 election. Whether these attempts to frame the Mueller report, or other narrative or policy framing attempts, are successful has been studied almost exhaustively by social scientists due to the recognition of their ability to influence the public's opinion formation process. Druckman et al. define framing as "alternative conceptualizations of

an issue or event" (Druckman et al. 2013, 58), and Druckman states in another article that the effect of framing is seen in practice when "in the course of describing an issue or event, a speaker's emphasis on a subset of potentially relevant considerations causes individuals to focus on these considerations when constructing their opinions" (Druckman 2004, 672). Daniel Beland provides an additional definition of framing as "a strategic and deliberate activity aimed at generating public support for specific policy ideas" (Beland 2005, 11).

Another view of policy framing, taken by John L. Campbell, emphasizes how framing employs ideas to influence policy formation rather than rational choice theory (Campbell 2002). According to Campbell, frames are one way in which policy influencers communicate the larger normative or cognitive ideas behind their policies in order to make them politically acceptable (Campbell 2002). Thus, rather than appeal to an individual's rationality, framing policy proposals to align with their cognitive or normative ideas can more successfully influence an individual to adopt or support certain policies. Daniel Beland similarly views frames as "weapons of mass persuasion" through their relation "to existing social and institutional forces" (Beland 2005, 12). In the context of a conflictual political arena, policy actors use normatively acceptable terms, often communicated through widely understood symbols and concepts, to frame solutions to policy problems (Beland 2005).

One common framing technique involves casting the same information in either a positive or a negative light (Druckman et al. 2003). However, effective framing can simply consist of emphasizing different perspectives or angles of the same issue in different ways. For instance, Druckman et al. found that, out of two equally strong arguments for drilling, political partisans were more likely to support the argument endorsed by their preferred party (2013). In the two frames used for my experimental study described in more detail below, I take two

different angles in support of school choice. Specifically, I encourage study participants to focus on the self-interest frame, or to focus on the broader community in the social-interest frame.

Campbell also provides an example of framing's influence in driving support or opposition to certain policies. Throughout the 1970s and 80s, during the debate over social welfare programs, Campbell writes that ideas about race and poverty were included in the framing of these policies to build opposition (2002). Rather than appeal to any strictly rational view of the costs and benefits of these programs to individuals or the country as a whole, politicians and policy influencers would appeal to ideas about race and dependency on government assistance that then led to an unfavorable perception of these policy programs. This strategy succeeded because individuals already held cognitive biases about race or normative judgements regarding moral desert which these frames picked up on and turned into opposition to the welfare programs (Campbell 2002).

Policy framing has a demonstrated effect on public opinion by emphasizing a particular perspective—and sometimes simultaneously activating partisan, racial, and other biases—that then drive support or opposition to certain policies. This thesis seeks to understand how frames emphasizing self-interest versus social-interest affect opinion about education policy. Self-interest and social-interest are powerful determinants of public opinion. The following section, therefore, reviews evidence of their effectiveness and distinguishes my conception of social-interest from previous literature.

The Role of Self-Interest and Social-Interest in Public Opinion

Since its inception after World War II, the field of political psychology has produced numerous theories concerning the factors that influence public opinion formation and the decision-making process of a voter (Stone et al 2014). Some argue that opinion and voting is

simply a matter of self-interest, suggesting that individuals will always prefer the candidate or policy that best advances their personal ends. Others, however, find that factors such as political party identification, symbolic politics, and sociotropic interests are more influential in determining the individual's opinion on the policy or candidate.

Many scholars argue that party identification provides the best explanation for public opinion formation and voting behavior. The strength of party identification can be explained by human psychology and group dynamics. Much like an allegiance to a religion or sports team, individuals develop deep psychological attachments to political parties, and partisanship functions as an important social identity for many (Campbell et al. 1960). Further, humans feel pressured to conform to group actions (Gerber et al. 2010), so when an individual identifies as either a Democrat or Republican, they will feel pressure to form their opinion in accordance with this group. Therefore, when either party announces their position on a policy, or throws their support behind one candidate over another, individuals who identify with the party will likely follow the direction of the party. Party identification is necessary for this effect to be visible (Gerber et al. 2010), so Independents may fall outside the reach of this theory. This effect of party identification was demonstrated in a study by Alan S. Gerber et. al, who found that when they primed party identification within primary voters in Connecticut, those primed to align with one party or another were also more likely to then vote with that party in the election (2010).

Alan I. Abramowitz and Kyle L. Saunders also find that party identity provides a strong explanation for opinion formation and voting behavior (Abramowitz and Saunders 2006). They first determine that party identity is connected most closely with ideology. In the case of Republicans, for example, they acknowledge that many Republicans belong to certain groups - they are often white, Catholic men - but more important to their party identification is their

conservative ideology (Abramowitz and Saunders 2006). Then, with their party identification intact, Abramowitz and Saunders find that identification with one party or another will cause voters to cast their ballot in support of the candidate from that party (Abramowitz and Saunders 2006).

Though the importance of party identification is backed by much empirical evidence, many human behaviorists and theorists, such as English philosopher Thomas Hobbes, have long concluded that humans are constantly driven by a self-interested desire for survival (Hobbes 1997). So, one might imagine that this human behavior would carry over into opinion formation and political decision making. As it relates to political decision making, self-interest is defined by David O. Sears et al. as a mindset focused on maximizing gains and minimizing losses to the individual's well-being, including economic and other tangible benefits, such as safety and one's children's well-being as well (Sears et al. 1979). The view of self-interested voter decision making often seems highly intuitive and can even be construed as rational. Indeed, early work in political science argued that voters maximized their interests in a similar vein as consumers in a supermarket (Downs 1957), and political psychologists have found evidence to support this view.

A study regarding self-interest in policy opinion formation used the case of a law in San Francisco against smoking to make their argument. The authors of this study found that non-smokers were largely in favor of policies that limited smoking or placed taxes on tobacco products, while smokers, and especially heavy smokers, were strongly opposed to any limitations or taxes (Green and Gerken, 1989). This finding would suggest strong support for the self-interested theory of public opinion formation. Important to note, however, is the case chosen for the study. The authors acknowledge that two characteristics of the case are very important to

their findings. The first is the salience of the issue. In the study, participants were asked whether they smoke before being asked for their opinion on the policy against smoking (Green and Gerken 1989). Therefore, their status as a smoker or nonsmoker was highly salient as they considered the policy propositions. This caused them to form the opinion more favorable to their identity as a smoker or nonsmoker. The second characteristic important to the finding of this study is this issue's separation from larger ideological considerations such as party identity (Green and Gerken 1989). With issues such as welfare or tax policy, party identity or political ideology can play a bigger role than self-interest. In this case, however, smoking is completely separated from any such ideology, and only self-interest remains to dictate an opinion on the policy.

In a second study which considered the strength of voter's self-interest, Larry M. Bartels examined how voters responded to the massive tax cuts of 2001 and 2003. Bartels finds that voters who saw themselves as beneficiaries of the cuts voted in favor of the policy makers, President Bush included, who supported the tax cut (Bartels 2005). The popularity of the tax cuts was evident despite the voters' professed belief in diminishing economic inequality, something which these cuts actually exacerbated (Bartels 2005). Therefore, it would appear that self-interest won out over concern for public well-being. However, Bartels also finds that many who thought they were benefiting from the tax cuts were not correctly informed. Indeed, these voters who appeared to be concerned entirely with their self-interest actually were not going to be the greatest beneficiaries of the tax cut. Many were also largely unaware of the impact that these tax cuts had on wealth inequality or their concern for the public good. When controlling for voter issue knowledge, Bartels found that voters knew more about the full effect of the tax cuts were less likely to support them (Bartels 2005). This finding suggests that self-interest has limited

power to drive voter decision making when other factors are taken into consideration. Thus, the primary conclusion of Bartels's study is that self-interest may drive voter behavior, but this self-interest may be misguided. Voters can incorrectly perceive a policy as benefiting them when it does not, and they may also not understand the broader implications of the policy itself due to lack of political knowledge. His analysis suggests that when individuals are aware that a policy opposes another interest they might hold, such as limiting inequality, then self-interest does not necessarily win out.

The cases of tax cuts and smoking attempt to show that public opinion formation is connected to self-interest, but both cases must include caveats to this conclusion. In the case of smoking policy, the issue is too isolated from politics to speak about policy opinion formation in more partisan contexts, and with tax policy the lack of information distorted the findings. Therefore, another theory might be more powerful, such as symbolic politics, which appears to be a greater force than self-interest in two separate studies conducted by David O. Sears and his colleagues. In the first, the authors investigate the comparative influence of self-interest and symbolic politics in policy attitudes and presidential voting (Sears et al. 1980). Symbolic politics could be seen as stemming from a similar idea like social-interest, but the authors' definition of symbolic politics as "liberal or conservative ideology, party identification, and racial prejudice" (Sears et al. 1980), suggests symbolic politics differs greatly from my conception of social-interest. Where symbolic politics derives from strong ideological beliefs, social-interest simply is defined as an interest in the wellbeing of each member of one's community.

Though the authors find that symbolic politics were more powerful in voter decision making than self-interest, their definition of symbolic politics closely aligns this finding with the findings of party identification theorists. Therefore, this study shows that self-interest actually

loses out to ideology that falls along party lines and party identification itself. The second study conducted by David O. Sears and his colleagues investigated whether self-interest or symbolic politics more strongly determined white voters' opposition to busing policies (Sears et al. 1979). This study also finds that symbolic politics outweighs self-interest in voter decision making, but once again this study finds that party identification cannot be ruled out as a significant contributor as well.

While this review of party identification, self-interest, and symbolic politics reaches conflicting conclusions, Donald R. Kinder and D. Roderick Kiewiet find evidence of yet another determinant of public opinion (Kinder and Kiewiet 1979). In light of significant prior research which has suggested that economic grievances are the largest determinant of opinion and vote choice, Kinder and Kiewiet take another look at these findings from the individual-level perspective. Prior research on this topic has largely been conducted in the aggregate and, therefore, is insufficient to explain individual behavior (Kinder and Kiewiet 1979). In their individual-level view of the data, Kinder and Kiewiet find that personal economic grievances actually say nothing at all about how people will form their opinions about a candidate. Rather, perceptions of collective economic well-being are much more likely to predict this behavior (Kinder and Kiewiet 1979). This finding complements the study from Bartels on the tax cuts of 2001 and 2003. In the aggregate, it may appear that individuals form their opinion of the tax reform based on how it serves their self-interest, but at the individual level, it will become clear that the primary factor in the opinion formation process is something quite different. Bartels's own study suggests that it might have something to do with concerns of economic inequality, while Kinder and Kiewiet would argue that it has to do with perceptions of general economic well-being (Kinder and Kiewiet 1979). Both of these results support the notion that citizens

might be persuaded by appeals that look beyond just themselves and instead focus on how policy will impact the collective community. That is, these studies provide some evidence that social-interest appeals might be effective rhetorical strategies.

Importantly, the content of my social-interest frame serves as a novel contribution because it differs conceptually from previous work, specifically symbolic politics and sociotropic concerns. While the definition of symbolic politics provided by David O. Sears et al. uses terms such as "liberal and conservative ideology" and even "party identification," social-interest in this thesis specifically excludes such considerations. Furthermore, my conception of social-interest remains separate from Kinder and Kiewiet's use of sociotropic concerns because of the economic nature of those concerns (1979). As I define it, however, social-interest emphasizes the wellbeing of the community through a moral conception. For example, a social-interest frame might emphasize protecting equal opportunities for everyone due to a belief in the inherent value of all lives. This can best be understood in opposition to self-interest, which has the individual wellbeing as its singular concern and would only be interested in maximizing one's own opportunities. Additionally, unlike before, the social-interest frame which I use here is entirely disconnected from any liberal or conservative ideology or one political party. Thus, while political party identification, symbolic politics, or sociotropic economic concerns may outweigh self-interest, there is also evidence that self-interest can outweigh social interest, particularly in apolitical contexts (Green and Gerken 1989). I seek to better understand the effectiveness of frames evoking these two concepts and the conditions under which each might be more influential than the other.

While I would be interested to know how self- and social-interest stack up as strategies for appealing to voters on the issues above (e.g., taxes, economic wellbeing), their association

with one political party or another make it difficult to separate the effect of self- or social-interest in evaluating these propositions from the very strong effect of party identification. Therefore, I determined that identifying an issue which is debated largely outside the boundaries of party identification would be necessary for a successful study. As the literature review above suggests, so long as an issue can be associated with one party or the other, a new study would not find anything, no matter the approach, other than the already established fact that party identification will be the overriding determinant in voting behavior (e.g., Sears et al. 1979). However, if the setting in which the voting decision is made can avoid drawing on party identification, it would be possible to study the strength of self-interest versus social-interest in voter decision making. In a setting removed from appeals to party identification, the strength of one interest over the other can be isolated and measured. In today's fiercely politically partisan climate, there are limited issues remaining that do not immediately split along party lines. However, I argue that education policy is a fruitful area for study because different elements of school policies have garnered bipartisan support in the past.

Understanding Support for Education Policy

Education policy distinguishes itself from many other policy areas because of the way in which it can break from strict adherence to party divisions (Ryan and Heise 2002). In some cases, education reforms have received bipartisan support, or different factions within parties will move across party lines in one direction or the other to form coalitions with factions within the other party (Ryan and Heise 2002). This issue has also drawn a conflict between self- and social-interest. Jennifer Hochschild, in a discussion of public education and the American Dream, highlights how support or opposition for certain public school policies actually conflicts with upholding the American Dream for public school students (Hochschild 2001). More

specifically, suburban, middle- to upper-class, white parents will oppose certain school choice

policies that seem to threaten the quality of their child's high performing public school despite

their expressed interest in upholding the American Dream for everyone. Thus, we see a conflict

between self-interest - the parent's desire for a high-quality education for their own child - and

social-interest – the possibility for all students to realize their potential through quality

educational opportunities. These competing values produce an ambivalence for people regarding

their opinion on education policies. Therefore, understanding if frames that focus on one value or

another, such as self-interest or social-interest, will be effective is an important endeavor.

While some education policies could lead to fiercely partisan debates, other policy

debates can bridge partisan lines and create unique cross-party alliances. Regarding the former,

certain topics within education policy prime party identification. For example, school resources

officers, or SROs[1] quickly raise the prospect of guns in schools, which then precipitates a

partisan debate over gun laws. Therefore, attempting to frame SRO's as a self- or social-interest

issue would be a futile endeavor as those consideration would be overridden by the partisan

ideologies acting upon the individual considering the policy at hand.

School choice policy has proven to be a particularly bipartisan issue (Ryan and Heise

2002), as it is one example of an education policy issue that has led to the creation of

unexpected, cross-party alliances. Policies under the expansive school choice umbrella include

intra- and inter-district school choice, voucher programs, charter schools, magnet schools, and

bussing. An important aspect of all these programs (except for bussing) is how they alter the

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[1] One policy under consideration for this study was school resource officers (SROs). However, necessary to any discussion of SROs is the consideration of firearms. Guns, through the fierce protection of Second Amendments by the Republican Party and its affiliation with the National Rifle Association, have become a strong Republican issue. Therefore, discussion of SROs will begin to draw on party identification and fall prey to the power of party identification in a study of voter decision making on this issue.

funding structure of public education. Traditionally, local property taxes and state funding are simply distributed among the schools in a given district. When students take advantage of school choice opportunities, the per-pupil funding travels with this student to whichever school the elect to attend and may therefore move to another public school outside of the student's district or even to private institutions in the case of voucher programs. To provide some more detail on the policies listed above, intra-district school choice allows students to enroll in another public school within their district of residency, and with inter-district school choice the student may enroll in public schools even outside of their home district. Voucher programs give families a set amount of money for each child to fund their education at a public or private school of their choice.[2] Charter schools are publicly funded but privately-operated schools which often have a specialized curriculum in the arts or STEM fields, for example. Magnet schools are publicly funded and operated public schools which, similar to charter schools, will often have a specialized curriculum to attract top performing students from the district and potentially from out of district as well. Finally, bussing has been used to move students from their neighborhood school to other public schools within and outside of their district to promote racial and/or socio-economic integration. However, this policy has mostly been removed from state education policy because of an unsuccessful track-record and severe parental dissatisfaction from both white families and people of color due to the forced integration which it played a hand in creating.

While the numerous school choice policies establish a system of school choice in different ways, two distinct groups of voters tend to view these policies more favorably. In support of greater school choice opportunities are ideological free market conservatives and urban black voters (Ryan and Heise 2002). So, we have the ideological base of the Republican

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[2] Private school options may be limited by restrictions on religious schools.

Party and a core constituency of the Democratic Party coming together in support of greater school choice. Of course, their reasons for supporting school choice are quite different. Free market conservatives support the policies because they see them as encouraging greater competition between schools, which will lead to improved quality across public schools (Iacono 2018). Black urban voters favor school choice because it is generally their children's schools that are underfunded and underperforming. Therefore, they want their children to be free to enroll in schools other than the failing neighborhood school, whether these are charter or magnet schools, or the regular public school elsewhere in their district or a neighboring district (Ryan and Heise 2002).

Standing in opposition to school choice are the middle- and upper-class suburban conservatives, and liberal education advocacy groups and teacher unions, groups which in most cases stand firmly divided across party lines. But, while united in their opposition to school choice, these groups again have vastly different rationales behind their opposition. The liberal education advocates and teacher unions worry that school choice will draw funding out of traditional public schools and into charter and private schools. This, they argue, will leave some children stuck in even more depleted public schools, and teachers will find themselves in charter and private schools where they have fewer protections and less job security (EdChoice 2017). Meanwhile, the wealthy suburbanites oppose school choice because they fear that low income and less successful students will infiltrate their successful suburban public schools, thereby threatening their own child's education (Ryan and Heise 2002).

The opposition of wealthy suburbanites to school choice policy has been highly influential in the success (or lack thereof) of attempts to pass school choice policies because this electorate has significant political clout (Ryan and Heise 2002). Therefore, while school choice

policy is heavily debated, it remains quite limited in practice. In the various iterations of school choice, such as open enrollment, magnet schools or charter schools, and school vouchers, there have been some stories of success. Almost all states have some form of open enrollment, either within or between districts. Most states, however, allow districts to choose exactly how they will work with this policy, so individual districts may ban out-of-district enrollment and even limit the extent to which students can move between schools within the district (Ryan and Heise 2002). Charter schools and magnet schools are also gaining popularity, but here again there is great variation between and within states. While some are more open to charter schools and have seen great success with programs such as The Knowledge is Power Program (commonly known as KIPP) (Knechtel et al. 2017), others remain highly restrictive and access to charter education remains limited. Finally, school vouchers continue to face the greatest opposition and there are very limited examples of these programs in use (Ryan and Heise 2002).

All of the above is not to say that school choice policy has been without its successes. James Ryan, most extensively in his book *Five Miles Away, A World Apart*, argues that the key to academic success for all students through school choice policy would come through greater socio-economic integration (Ryan 2010). If school choice policy was designed in such a way that it brought together students of varied socio-economic backgrounds into one school, Ryan argues that this would lead to the greatest upward movement in school performance. Most education reform thus far, including school choice policies, has been geared towards bringing more money into poor inner cities through various programs, including charter and magnet schools. However, if all the children attending these schools still come from low-income backgrounds, Ryan believes that the possible gains in outcomes are substantially limited. Therefore, school choice

must address exactly what suburban parents so vehemently oppose: the integration of poor inner-city children into wealthy suburban schools.

Because suburban parents are so strongly opposed to any reform in this direction and have the political power to thwart such reforms, few examples can be used to demonstrate their success. However, there are two cases in which socio-economic integration has occurred and been successful. The first takes place in Montgomery County, Maryland. The success here, however, comes from housing policy rather than any school choice policy (McCrummen and Birnbaum 2010). Through the use of housing policy to encourage socioeconomically diverse communities, neighborhood schools naturally become more diverse as a result of housing diversity. As socio-economic diversity has increased, the performance of low-income students has been on the rise, and most importantly, the presence of low-income students in traditionally wealthy public schools has not hurt the performance of the middle- and upper-class students at all. This evidence serves as a strong refutation of the argument used by suburban middle- and upper-class voters to oppose school choice policies that would increase socio-economic integration of their schools.

The second successful case of socio-economic integration, this time as a result of education policy, can be found in the Wake County school district in North Carolina (Grant 2009). The city of Raleigh and the surrounding Wake County originally had two separate school districts, but they were brought together during the period of school desegregation to form one integrated district. While a unified district could have still resulted in socio-economic divisions between neighborhood schools, the Wake County district, which now includes the city of Raleigh, also has a system of intra-district school choice and a collection of magnet schools so that students from around the district are encouraged to attend schools across neighborhoods.

Furthermore, the district actively works to ensure that no single school has a student body consisting of more than 40% of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch, an indicator of poverty. With these policies of school choice and intentional distribution of poverty across schools, the Wake County district has successfully achieved a high level of socio-economic diversity in its schools and has been rewarded with high academic outcomes (Grant 2009). Wake County achieved success at least in part because of the "political courage" of the suburbanites to "tear down the wall that separated Raleigh's urban schoolchildren from those in the suburbs" (Grant 2009, 94). The political will to take this radical action that would vastly improve educational outcomes throughout the wider Wake County area could possibly be attributed to a social-interest of the Wake County electorate.

Due to the potential of school choice policy to improve educational outcomes for students across the United States, as demonstrated by the Montgomery and Wake County examples, studying how to build stronger coalitions of support for the policy is an important task. Furthermore, the policy is ripe for examining how framing effects can drive support because political ideology is not a clear predictor of support or opposition to the policy. Finally, polling has demonstrated ambivalence among most voters in regard to their support or opposition to the policy, and the lack of crystalized opinions on the issue also makes it a prime candidate for a study of framing effects on public opinion (Druckman et al. 2013).

Hypotheses

Considering the literature on framing, self- and social-interest, and school choice, I propose several hypotheses concerning the first research question: will self-interest or social-interest framing more successfully drive support for school choice policies? This research question, and the hypotheses and study which stem from it, are especially important in light of

three problems that Campbell find with prior research on framing (Campbell 2002). One of these issues is a lack of a counterfactual in the research, or the ability to compare different positions in a single policy debate (Campbell 2002). However, the following studies take precisely that approach by examining how self-interest and social-interest framed arguments drive support for school choice policies in an experimental study. Through randomization of treatments and control, I am able to directly study the counterfactual setting Campbell (2002) desired.

The literature review of public opinion formation and voting behavior uncovers evidence that both self-interest and sociotropic/symbolic political concerns can be powerful influences on opinion and support for a policy or candidate under certain conditions. On the one hand, when looking at a highly salient and apolitical issue such as smoking, researchers found strong evidence of self-interested voting (Green and Gerken 1989). But, when studying how economic concerns affected voting behavior, researchers found that it was a concern for general economic well-being rather than individual economic concerns that drove voter behavior (Kinder and Kiewiet 1979). My definition of social-interest for this study does differ from the sociotropic interest found in the study by Kinder and Kiewiet, so the findings of that study may not be directly applicable to my hypothesis here. However, I still am presented with two opposing findings regarding the power of self-interest in public opinion when positioned against other considerations which are similar to my use of social-interest.

The smoking study most closely aligns with my own examination of self- and social-interest, even though the two frames were not explicitly addressed in that study. However, the power of self-interest to drive opposition for smoking restrictions among smokers due to their direct connection to the issue suggests the possibility of a similar relationship between school choice policy and anyone who feels directly connected to public education, such as parents. In

fact, I predict that parents will be especially influenced by the self-interest frame because of their very salient interest in providing their child with the best education. Considering the available literature on self and social-interest in voter decision making and the greater similarities between my own study and the study on smoking policy and voting, I hypothesize that the self-interest frame will be the more powerful argument for both proponents and detractors of school choice policy.

While I believe that appeals to self-interest will be stronger overall, I also predict that the relative strength of self- and social-interest will vary greatly across demographics. For example, I already addressed how parents will likely be more supportive of school choice when considering their self-interest, and I will also examine how support various across egalitarianism and race. Carl Knight and Andreas Albertsen claim that the defining feature of egalitarianism is its interpretation of equal status among individuals as requiring substantive equality, i.e., that each individual be placed in the same social or economic conditions (2018). Egalitarianism, therefore, "is an inherently normative view, and more specifically, a view about distributive justice—that is, about the appropriate distribution of benefits and burdens" (Knight and Albertsen 2018). An individual's level of egalitarianism in this study was determined by a set of question established by Paul R. Brewer (2003) which determine how strongly someone supports a statement such as "it is not really that big a problem if some people have more of a chance in life than others" (Brewer, 2003). If someone agrees with this statement, they are less egalitarian, while if someone disagrees and instead expresses support for the idea that people receive equal opportunities in life, they are more egalitarian. I predict that high-egalitarian individuals will differentiate themselves from the whole sample by demonstrating stronger support for school choice policies

with the social-interest frame, which low-egalitarian individuals will find the self-interest frame far more convincing.

To test these hypotheses, I ran an original experimental study that randomized participants to read a message that had a self-interest frame or a social-interest frame. There was also a control group, which received no message. In the following chapters, I will describe the design of this study as well as the key analyses and results. I also report the results of my case study of the debate surrounding school choice policy in Michigan. Here, I examine the degree to which self- or social-interest frames are actually used by political elites in the real world. Taken together, my results will speak to the relative effectiveness and prevalence of self- and social-interest frames in relation to school choice policy.

Chapter 2: Experimental Study – Framing Effects

Experimental Study Research Design

In order to investigate the success of my hypotheses, I ran a survey experiment using Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). I recruited approximately 600 subjects age 18 and older who are citizens of the United States to participate in the study. The data include 589 unique participants. Most of these participants were between 20 and 40 years old, just over 70 percent are white, nearly 60 percent associate themselves most closely with the Democratic Party, and 268 out of the 589 are parents. Subjects received $1.40 for their participation, a financial reward in line with the minimum wage of Virginia for their time completing the survey. The subject first read an introduction to the study and gave their consent (the full study instrument can be found in Appendix A). Subjects were then randomly assigned to one of two op-eds written by a local city council candidate discussing their views on school choice or a control group. Both op-eds were in support of school choice policy but varied in their use of a social- or self-interest frame in their argument. A third group did not read anything and serves as the control group. All participants then answered questions regarding their level of support or opposition to school choice and a host of other dependent variables that I will explain in more detail below. Finally, subjects were debriefed if they read the fabricated op-ed.

If the potential study participant met all the requirements for participation and gave their consent, they read one of the three treatments - the two arguments or the control. The two arguments, seen in figure 1, are written as short editorials by a candidate for city council. The arguments presented in the treatments—the first as self-interest pro-school choice, the second as social-interest pro-school choice—were formulated based on arguments gleaned from both academic literature as well as opinion pieces found in newspapers and online (e.g. Iacono 2018

and EdChoice 2017). The choice of presenting these editorials as written by a local candidate was an additional attempt to remove consideration of party identification. Prior research in framing has demonstrated that references to political party quickly magnify partisan divisions (Druckman et al. 2013) and would therefore severely limit the ability of this study to produce

Table 1: Self-Interest and Social-Interest Frames

Self-Interest	**Social-Interest**
Headline: I will work to provide the best education for YOUR child.	Headline: I will work to provide the best education for OUR children.
My name is Taylor Simmons and I am running for City Council because I want to ensure that you are empowered to provide your child with the best education possible. I am writing this editorial to express my support for a system of inter-district school choice because this system will give you the freedom to send your child, regardless of where you live, to the school with the funding and other resources that they need to succeed.	My name is Taylor Simmons and I am running for City Council because I want to ensure that our children are provided with the best education possible. I am writing this editorial to express my support for a system of inter-district school choice because this system will create greater educational equity by allowing all children of this city, regardless of their race, wealth, or zip code, to attend the school with the funding and other resources they need to succeed.
Imagine your child, or a child important to you, stuck in an under-performing school with no escape or opportunity to pursue their full potential. A system of inter-district school choice could save this child by giving you, or anyone close to you with a child, the opportunity to select any traditional public, magnet, or charter school for that child within or outside of the city's school system. Open enrollment at all these schools will allow your child to compete for the best school, or the school that best meets their interests. This system will also encourage schools to perform better as they will be competing for the best students. The bottom line is that with inter-district school choice, your child can access a much better education than they might currently receive at their local neighborhood school.	Imagine any child stuck in an underperforming school with no escape or opportunity to pursue their full potential. A system of inter-district school choice will save these children because every child will be able to select any traditional public, magnet, or charter school they like within or outside of the city's school system. Open enrollment at all these schools will allow every child to compete for the best school, or the school that best meets their interests. This system will also encourage schools to perform better as they will be competing for the best students. The bottom line is that with inter-district school choice, schools will become more diverse and equitable and every child will end up with a much better education than they might currently receive at their local neighborhood school.
I promise that, as a member of the City Council, I will ensure that your tax dollars are at work in an educational system that empowers you to send your child to a school with the resources needed for their success.	I promise that, as a member of the City Council, I will ensure that this city's tax dollars are at work in an educational system that gives all children equal access to the resources needed for success.
I humbly ask for your vote this election so that I can fulfill my promise to you and your child.	I humbly ask for your vote this election so that I can fulfill my promise to our city's children.

meaningful results. However, party politics are far less prevalent in local elections as many are nonpartisan (Northup 1987), and participants will therefore be less likely to refer to their party affiliation when determining their support for the treatment which they receive in the survey. Finally, the name of the fictional candidate for city council who wrote the editorial, Taylor Simmons, was intentionally chosen as a gender and racially ambiguous name so as to avoid any biases that may affect opinion of the candidate outside of the participant's view of school choice policy.

After reading whichever treatment is presented to them, the subject was asked their level of support for inter-district school choice as the primary dependent variable, and then why they view school choice policy favorably, unfavorably, or neither favorably nor unfavorably (using an open-ended question). They were also asked about their support for vouchers, charter schools, magnets, raising taxes for more education funding, and bussing to move students to further-away schools. These additional school choice policies were included to determine whether support, and the nature of that support, is equal across various iterations of school choice policy. Additionally, including the question about taxes would demonstrate how far participants would be willing to go to back up any support they express for improving public education through increased funding. Finally, they were asked to state how likely they would be to vote for Taylor Simmons and their reasons for being likely or unlikely to vote for Simmons (again in an open-ended question). Participants were also asked how familiar they were with school choice policy, how effective and interesting they found the op-ed which they read, and if they had the sense that Taylor Simmons belongs to one political party or another.

As a check on the random assignment of the treatments, I ran statistical analyses examining the degree of balance across conditions. Participants found the two treatments equally

interesting (my manipulation check question), were equally familiar with school choice policy across conditions, and were equally distributed by political party, race, and parental status across conditions. The balance achieved in terms of my manipulation check and across various demographic characteristics provides the conditions necessary to conduct simple difference-in-means tests to analyze how the treatments affect support for the dependent variables (Druckman et al. 2011).

Finally, the study measured demographic characteristics of participants that might make them more or less likely to support school choice policies after reading one frame or the other. First, the subject answered seven questions in the egalitarianism battery taken from Brewer.[3] This will be used to determine whether individuals predisposed to express concern about equality also are more drawn to appeals to their social-interest through policy framing. The survey ends with a demographic battery that asks about party identification, race, income level and area of residency, as well as age and whether or not the participant has children under 18. Each of these independent variables are important points of analysis due to the context in which this study is conducted, and the hypotheses laid out above. First, considering the literature on voter decision making, I must look for the way in which party identification interacts with public opinion on school choice policy even after taking numerous precautions to guard against the influence of this factor in my study. Knowing the race, income level, and area of residency is very important in light of Ryan and Heinse's discussion of school choice policy and the different groups who support or oppose it (Ryan and Heinse 2002). For example, if the subject is a person of color, an urban resident, and/or with a low socio-economic status, I would expect them to support school choice when reading the self-interest frame because of their strong individual desire for greater

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[3] The full battery of question is included in the appendix for reference.

choice beyond the poor urban public schools which they most likely have available in their district.

Finally, I include a question about parental status because anyone who has children will more likely be drawn to self-interested arguments because they have the wellbeing of their child to consider. On the other hand, the way in which the self-interest arguments are presented means that they would be less convincing to someone without children. Thus, the inclusion of the demographics battery will provide the information required to make fully analyze the relative success of the self- and social-interest frames in building support for school choice policies.

Results

First and foremost, I uncover no significant *main* treatment effects. That is, across all the dependent variables, the difference in support between 589 readers of the self-interest and social-interest treatments failed to reach significance.[4] The only exception to the lack of significance is the dependent variable for the bussing policy (Table 2). While the difference in mean support for inter-district choice, vouchers, and charters never reaches anything greater than -.13, the difference between the self-interest and social-interest mean support for bussing stands at -.25. The greater difference cannot be attributed to greater support among readers of the self-interest treatment. Rather, it is the considerably lower level of support among social-interest readers that leads to the significant result in bussing. In fact, any mean score below 3 translates to an average response below "Neither Support nor Oppose", which indicates more opposition than support for the policy.

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[4] The difference-in-means between the treatments and the control group were also insignificant.

Table 2: Framing effects for all participants.

	Inter-district	Vouchers	Charters	Magnets	Taxes	Bussing	Vote
Social Interest	2.84	2.62	2.55	3.19	2.52	2.33	2.25
Self Interest	2.88	2.75	2.61	3.17	2.64	2.58	2.24
Difference Soc-Self	-.04	-.13	-.05	.022	-.13	-.25	.02
p value of difference	0.72	0.28	0.66	0.81	0.31	0.04**	0.89

Note: *p<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01, two-tailed.

I suspect that the reference to racial equality in the social-interest treatment primed readers to think about race, which has a particularly strong effect on views about bussing policy due to its controversial racial history. In particular, many whites opposed bussing in the past due to their fear of non-white children joining their schools. Additionally, students of color who were bussed to other schools have frequently noted the isolating effects of this process: not only were they plucked from their own communities, but they also had to exist as one of only a handful of non-white students in their new schools. Thus, as readers of the social-interest treatment marked their support for bussing, the racial implications of the policy led them to express significantly less support for bussing than those who read the self-interest treatment and were never primed to think about race.

This interpretation is backed up by a difference-in-means test of bussing across racial groups. Black participants reported an even greater difference in support between the social-interest and self-interest treatment groups (difference = -0.87, p=0.02, as seen in Table 3) than what we see in Table 2. Here, support for bussing in the social interest group is similarly low to the full sample's support for bussing in Table 2. However, there is elevated support for bussing among black participants who received the self-interest frame in Table 3 (3.23 versus 2.58 for all study participants in Table 2). The mean support for bussing found among black participants in the control group is 2.68, which suggests that the self-interest frame certainly boosts black

individuals' support for bussing, but the social-interest frame—which briefly, but explicitly,

references race— also diminishes that support.

Table 3: Framing effects for black participants versus white participants.

	Bussing (Black Participants)	Bussing (White Participants)
Social-Interest	2.36	2.26
Self-Interest	3.23	2.46
Difference Soc-Self	-.87	-.2
p-value of difference	0.02**	0.17

Note: *p<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01, two-tailed.

Meanwhile, among white participants the significance for bussing disappears altogether

as the difference diminished to only -.2, p=0.17 (Table 3). The increased significance among

black participants and the disappearance of significance among white participants follows from

the possibility that the social-interest treatment primed race. The priming of race in the social-

interest treatment would be very salient for black participants and they therefore are significantly

more supportive of bussing in their self-interest, absent the priming of race. But, due to the

salience of race are far less supportive of bussing after reading the social-interest treatment,

which does prime race. I should also note that white participants reading the social-interest frame

expressed even lower levels of support for bussing than the black participants in this treatment,

which may suggest that the priming of race also raised the salience of the perceived threat of

nonwhite children coming into their predominantly white suburban schools, which Ryan and

Heise (2002) discusses as a source of their opposition to school choice. However, white

participants reading the self-interest frame were not significantly more supportive of bussing, so

I cannot conclusively determine that the mention of race in the social-interest frame was taken

into consideration by white participants. Therefore, while the stronger difference in support for

bussing among black participants than white participants could be explained by the salience of

race for black individuals and the racially charged history of bussing, the stronger support for the policy among black participants, absent any mention of race, requires further explanation.

The link between race and poverty in the United States may rest at the foundation of this explanation. While black participants are almost significantly more supportive of certain school choice policies, as will be demonstrated below, they may be aware that black children often are without the transportation needed to provide access to the greater selection of education options. In fact, many parents do list transportation as a barrier to exercising choice in education (Degrow 2017). Therefore, these participants, without thinking about the racial history of bussing, are highly favorable of the policy and its ability to give black children access to more educational opportunities.

As I mentioned above, testing for differences in support across race did return nearly significant results for certain choice policies, such as vouchers. While the difference in support across all racial groups combined failed to reach significance (p-value = 0.28), among black participants the p-value of the difference fell all the way to 0.08 as both treatment groups expressed higher levels of support for vouchers but support from the self-interest group climbed especially high (Table 4).[5] Also interesting to note is the higher mean support among black participants. Overall, the mean support for vouchers was 2.62 and 2.75 for social-interest and self-interest, respectively (Table 2). For black participants, those numbers climbed to 2.71 and 3.32 (Table 3).

The higher mean support levels for vouchers and the nearly significant difference in effects for the self-interest and social-interest treatments among black participants raise two important questions. First, why are black individuals more supportive of voucher policies? And

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[5] Testing for differences among other racial groups did not similarly provide any significant results.

why are framing effects more powerful and lead to more distinct results among black participants in support for vouchers as compared to all participants combined?

Table 4: Framing effects on vouchers for black participants versus white participants.

	Vouchers (Black Participants)	Vouchers (All Participants)
Social-Interest	2.71	2.62
Self-Interest	3.32	2.75
Difference Soc-Self	-.6	-.13
p-value	0.08*	0.28

Note: *p<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01, two-tailed.

An answer to the first question will become more apparent in the case study below, but for now, a reflection on the comparative educational opportunities of black and white children provides some insight into why black individuals might favor increased choice in their education. A higher percentage of black children are stuck in failing urban public schools and vouchers can provide an escape to private schools with more resources and support (Urban Institute 2017). The second question poses more of a challenge, but I hypothesize that the flip side of voucher policies, the removal of public funding from neighborhood public schools, becomes a more salient concern for black readers of the social-interest treatment. The social-interest treatment speaks to the value of ensuring that every child receives a quality education, an ideal that may run counter to the view of vouchers as draining resources from public schools and leaving some student behind with even fewer opportunities. This concern may be especially relevant for black individuals as poor urban public schools serving primarily black children are often the schools stripped of funds by voucher programs when any slightly wealthier students at those schools can take advantage of the voucher (Oxender 2011). Thus, while a black participant primed to think about their self-interest may view vouchers as an escape from the failing public school system, the social-interest reader might be more inclined to see the black child left behind by the voucher

policy in an even more poorly-funded public school. However, even though the difference in

support for self-interest and social-interest frames is greater for black participants and even

significant, even those reading the social-interest frame are more supportive of vouchers than all

readers of this argument. The higher mean support shows that, among this population, vouchers

are more popular than throughout the general population, but I still would attribute the smaller

increase in support for readers of the social-interest frame to the negative perspective on

vouchers which this frame may conjure for its readers.

Egalitarianism

This next section will explore the relationship between egalitarianism and the relative

impact of the self-interest and social-interest treatments on support for the various dependent

variables. Drawing on the questions developed by Brewer to measure high and low

egalitarianism,[6] high-egalitarian individuals are those who believe that all people are equal and

therefore, deserve equal opportunities. Low-egalitarian individuals, on the other hand, are those

who believe that differences in life-opportunities are not important and each person can and

should have to work to get the same opportunities in life. A participant's level of egalitarianism

is of interest to this study because of the amplifying affect that could be observed through the

combination of this predisposition (e.g., whether a participant is high or low in egalitarianism)

and the rhetorical context under which they hear about school choice policy (e.g., the self- or

social-interest frame). For example, if a low-egalitarian individual also reads the self-interest

frame, they might respond far more strongly to the argument for school choice policy than a

high-egalitarian would. Likewise, a high egalitarian individual reading the social-interest frame

would should find that argument more convincing than a self-interest argument that stands very

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[6] A full copy of the questions is included in the appendix.

misaligned with their world-view. It is worth noting that egalitarianism and partisanship are correlated at 0.61. This is a correlation of only medium strength, and certainly leaves room for this predisposition to matter outside of party identification.

Table 5: Framing effects for high-egalitarian participants.

	Inter-district	Vouchers	Charters	Magnets	Taxes	Bussing	Vote
Social - High Egalitarianism	2.92	2.559	2.455	3.241	2.697	2.414	2.372
Self - High Egalitarianism	2.90	2.664	2.545	3.21	2.846	2.615	2.182
Difference Soc-Self	.022	-.1057	-.0903	.0316	-.1496	-.2016	.1906
p – value of difference	0.8743	0.4788	0.5352	0.7603	0.261	0.1587	0.1523

The first condition I investigate is the interaction between high egalitarianism and my two frames. Here, the social-interest frame garners greater mean support than the self-interest frame for the first time in relation to inter-district choice policy, and we generally see an increase in the mean support for all the variables, except vouchers and charters (Table 5). The difference in support for inter-district choice remains far from significant under the condition of high-egalitarianism. However, the change in support from the test of self-interest versus social-interest among the full sample is notable. While the mean popularity of inter-district choice with readers of the self-interest treatment increases only 0.02 points from Table 2, the mean popularity for the social-interest treatment rose 0.8 points. So, while high-egalitarian readers of the social-interest treatment are not significantly more likely to support inter-district school choice than similar readers of the self-interest treatment, they are much more supportive than the average reader of the social-interest treatment. However, a comparison of high-egalitarian readers in the control

group and readers of the social-interest treatment reveals that high-egalitarian individuals are just more likely to support inter-district school choice regardless of the argument they read.[7]

The second result of interest from the high-egalitarian test of the two treatments is the finding that the mean popularity of each dependent variable rose except for vouchers and charters. This divide can likely be attributed to the common argument against these two policies which argues that they drain funds from poor public schools and damage the educational opportunities of mostly low-income students of color (Craig 2007). A high-egalitarian individual concerned with the wellbeing of the least among us and ensuring equal opportunities for everyone would therefore view vouchers and charters less favorably. Meanwhile, the other choice policies, inter-district choice and magnet schools, do not carry that same reputation and, as both treatments were written in support of choice, high-egalitarian readers of the social-interest treatment were highly swayed by the appeal to their strong social-interest.

Table 6: Framing effects for low-egalitarian participants.

	Inter-district	Vouchers	Charters	Magnets	Taxes	Bussing	Vote
Social - Low Egalitarianism	2.58	2.78	2.84	3.06	2	2.08	1.9
Self - Low Egalitarianism	2.81	3	2.79	3.06	2.04	2.48	2.4
Difference Soc-Self	-.23	-.22	.05	-.003	-.04	-.4	-.5
p – value of difference	0.17	0.15	.83	0.99	0.87	0.06**	0.05**

Note: *p<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01. The p-values for inter-district, vouchers, and bussing are one-tail with the hypothesis that low-egalitarian individuals will be more drawn to the self-interest frame.

Under the opposite conditions of low egalitarianism, inter-district choice, vouchers, and bussing become almost significantly more popular for readers of the self-interest treatment as compared to the social-interest frame. Low-egalitarian individuals also are significantly more

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[7] High-egalitarian participants in the control group returned a mean support of inter-district school choice of 2.93, very similar to the mean support of 2.92 among high-egalitarian readers of the social-interest treatment.

likely to vote for the Taylor Simmons, the candidate for City Council who supposedly authored the editorial (Table 6).

Inter-district choice and vouchers reach marginal levels of significance among those low in egalitarianism in a one-tailed test under the prediction that low-egalitarian individuals will be more receptive to and persuaded by self-interest given their predispositions. For inter-district choice, support for self-interest readers actually hardly increases, but low-egalitarian readers of the social-interest frame became far less supportive of the policy than all participants combined, so the marginal significance I uncover can be attributed to the social-interest frame's failure to appeal to the low-egalitarian population. In fact, this message seems to repel low-egalitarians. Vouchers, on the other hand, tell a very different story with both treatments returning stronger support for low-egalitarian readers, but the support increases even more for readers of the self-interest frame. This suggests that vouchers generally are more popular among low-egalitarian individuals than the average participant. Also, when combining low egalitarianism with conservative political party identification, these results became more significant because of the moderately strong correlation between low egalitarianism and Republican Party identification (corr= -0.61).[8]

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[8] While testing inter-district choice and vouchers while accounting for party did not return any significant results, rural voters were nearly significantly more supportive of inter-district choice after reading the self-interest treatment ($p = 0.09$ for inter-district choice, $p = 0.07$ for vouchers). One might assume that this result can also be attributed to the high popularity of the Republican Party in rural areas, but a correlation test for rural residency and Republican Party membership produced a very low correlation between the two (corr $= 0.06$). Furthermore, being a rural voter also did not correlate with low egalitarianism (corr $= 0.02$). Therefore, the higher level of support among rural participants for school choice policies must be attributed to another factor. Though further research would be required to confirm the following hypothesis, I find that this support may stem from the low quality of many poor rural schools and the significant lack of choice in these areas. Most charter school are located in urban centers and one district may even have multiple schools at each grade level that students could choose to attend through open enrollment. Rural areas, however, are less likely to have charter school options and most districts have only one high school and the next one might be a long drive away. Therefore, families in these areas may feel that their children are trapped in low-achievement schools and would be attracted to school choice policies because of the escape they would provide from these circumstances.

Returning to low-egalitarian participants, we see that vote choice actually returns a significant result when comparing the two frames (0.05). The change in vote is due to a decrease in support from low-egalitarian individuals who read the social-interest treatment, not any increase in support for readers of the self-interest treatment. In fact, in the case of vote, these participants were significantly less likely to support the candidate because their mean support is only 1.9, the lowest result for support of the candidate in the entire dataset. This result shows a strong rejection from low-egalitarian individuals of the candidate's appeal to their social-interest, which would be the expected outcome because these individuals expressed through the egalitarianism battery that they have very little interest in equality.

Vouchers, however, tell a different story because here we see the highest level of support for vouchers, particularly among the low-egalitarian readers of the self-interest treatment. While mean support for inter-district and vote declines significantly, across both treatment but particularly for readers of the social-interest frame, support for vouchers among low-egalitarians rises far above every other policy proposal except for magnets, which have been popular throughout the dataset. The movement of support for vouchers and charters (though charters remain far from significant), runs inverse to support for the other policies: support for inter-district choice and magnets rose for high-egalitarian individuals and fell for low-egalitarians while vouchers and charters are far more popular among low-egalitarian individuals than their high-egalitarian counterparts. This differing behavior leads me to wonder, for future research, what the different nature of vouchers and charters is compared to other policies that drives high support among individuals who are less concerned with equality.

While I only examine framing for arguments expressing support for school choice policies in this research, I suspect that the answer to my question can be found in the negative

rhetoric around these policies. As I found in the case study of public rhetoric around school choice policies presented below, voucher programs and charter schools are attacked because of how they strip funding from neighborhood schools and leave certain students, particularly low-income students or those with disabilities, behind in failing public schools (e.g. Frownfelder 2011 and Robinson 2018). Low-egalitarian individuals who are less concerned with ensuring equal opportunities for all will most likely disregard these arguments against vouchers and charter schools, especially when they encounter an argument for these policies that is framed to address their self-interest. On the other hand, high-egalitarian individuals who are more likely to consider the wellbeing of all members of their community will have these arguments against vouchers and charter schools in mind regardless of the frame with which an argument supporting these programs is presented to them. This is one possible explanation for the opposing movement of the school choice policies across various demographics and the two frames, but further research could examine more closely what the important differences are between vouchers and charter schools and other policies such as inter-district choice and magnets that contribute to this feature of support.

To summarize, difference-in-means tests of examining attitudes about inter-district choice, vouchers, and the other dependent variables, except for bussing, did not reveal significantly different levels of support between the self-interest and social-interest frame treatment. However, when race and egalitarianism are included in the analysis, we see significantly higher levels of support for vouchers and charter schools among low-egalitarian and black readers of the self-interest frame. One point of analysis that must still be considered is how parental status will influence support for school choice policies across the two frames.

Chapter Three: Parents

School choice policies are expected to be far more salient for parents than the general

population due to the direct effect that the policies will have on the interests of the parent

through their child's interaction with educational opportunities. Therefore, the following section

investigates how the 268 parents who participated in this study support or oppose school choice

policies and contrasts those opinions against those of non-parents. I will first examine how

parental status interacts with the effectiveness of my treatments but will then follow that analysis

by looking simply at the difference in support between parents and non-parents. In doing so, I

use parental status as an alternative operationalization (albeit a rough approximation that yields

only correlational results) of self- and social-interest.

First and foremost, all parents expressed far stronger support for all the school choice

policies and the candidate, though not for taxes. That is, the mean values in the cells of Table 7

are all greater than those of Table 2. However, only with vouchers and charters did significant

treatment effects between the two frames emerge.

Table 7: Framing effect for parents.

	Inter-district	Vouchers	Charters	Magnets	Taxes	Bussing	Vote
Social - with children	2.99	2.75	2.67	3.2	2.41	2.3	2.42
Self - with children	3.06	3	2.96	3.27	2.57	2.89	2.6
Difference Soc-Self	-.07	-.25	-.29	-.06	-.16	-.58	-.17
p – value of difference	0.67	0.08*	0.05**	0.66	0.41	0.001***	0.34

Note: *p<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01. The p-values for vouchers and charters are from a one-tailed analysis with the hypothesis that parents will be more persuaded by self-interested frames due to their desire to provide their children with a good education.

Under the expectation that parents would be more persuaded by self-interest out of

concern for their children, the framing effects for vouchers and charters reach significance (p =

0.08 and p = 0.05, respectively). That individuals with children are far more likely to support

these policies when given the self-interest treatment confirms the expectation that parents would

be more drawn to how the treatment was written – it speaks directly to parents about providing the best educational opportunities for their child. The implication here is that parents are more supportive of school choice policies when they, and their self-interest, is directly addressed in messaging for the policies. As politicians and other advocacy groups seek to build support for these policies, they should take note of this result and craft their messaging accordingly.

While the strong self-interested support of policies which could provide a better education for their child is expected from parents, the curious aspect of these findings is that vouchers and charters are still so unpopular among parents reading the social-interest treatment as to provide a significant difference between the two treatments. Parents reading the social-interest frame are more supportive of these policies than the average reader among all participants, but one might still expect that parents would strongly support these policies regardless of how they are framed, and we would therefore see more equal support across the two treatments.

Meanwhile, inter-district choice and magnets remain more popular than vouchers and charters for readers of both treatments. Here, as with egalitarianism and race, the familiar arguments against vouchers and charters which claim that they harm traditional neighborhood schools may be suppressing the popularity of the policies among parents who, after reading the social-interest treatment, have a greater concern for the wellbeing of all children. While reviewing articles for my case study, I never read a negative argument against magnet schools, and inter-district choice also was targeted far less than charters or vouchers. Therefore, even if these programs also have negative impacts on the education opportunities of some children, they are less widely known, and readers of the social-interest treatment did not take them into consideration when ranking their support for magnet schools and inter-district school choice.

Focusing on participants without children did not produce any significant treatment effects (Table 8). Perhaps unsurprisingly, mean support for all school choice policies among non-parents is lower than the entire sample combined, and the self-interest treatment is particularly unsuccessful in garnering support because the direct focus on parents within this frame fails to address any self-interest of individuals without children. Therefore, under the condition of not having children, support for school choice is low and there is no significant difference in support between the two frames.

Table 8: Framing effect for participants without children.

	Inter-district	Vouchers	Charters	Magnets	Taxes	Bussing	Vote
Social - without children	2.7	2.5	2.45	3.18	2.61	2.35	2.1
Self - without children	2.75	2.57	2.36	3.1	2.7	2.37	1.98
Difference Soc-Self	-.05	-.08	.09	.08	-.08	-.02	.11
p – value of difference	0.76	0.65	0.6	0.53	0.61	0.92	0.46

Note: *p<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01, two-tailed.

Thus far, difference-in-means analyses of the treatment groups' responses to my dependent variables produce mostly null main effects, and some interesting interaction effects when considering additional independent variables, such as egalitarianism, race, and parental status. These significant results suggest that one must consider who a message is directed towards when choosing the framing of the message. In fact, the stark difference in mean support for the school choice policies between participants with and without children warrants further investigation into whether a statistically significant difference in support between these two groups is present. The following analysis examines the relative support of parents and non-parents—regardless of treatment group—for all the dependent variables. I also test for a difference in support between low and high egalitarian parents and non-parents to determine if the personality type of a parent might still affect their opinion on school choice policies. Importantly, these tests are completely correlational since parental status is not randomly assigned. Despite this, an initial look into how being a parent affects support for school choice

policies provides interesting insights for my project because, similar to the study of smoking regulations in San Francisco (Green and Gerken 1989) it reveals how issue salience causes self-interest to inform policy opinions.

Table 9: Support for school choice by parental status.

	Inter-district	Vouchers	Charters	Magnets	Taxes	Bussing	Vote
Without Children	2.75	2.44	2.34	3.16	2.64	2.39	2.04
With Children	3	2.75	2.79	3.24	2.54	2.47	2.5
Difference without-with	-.25	-.3	-.46	-.08	.1	-.08	-.47
p - value of difference	0.01**	0.004***	0.00***	0.28	0.33	0.44	0.0001***

Note: *p<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01, two-tailed.

Parents are significantly more supportive of inter-district choice, vouchers, charter schools, and vote, though there is no significant support for the other dependent variables (Table 9) However, it should be noted that the results do not express particularly strong support for either policy. The mean score of 2.75 for parents' support of vouchers falls just below "Neither support nor oppose" on the survey. Inter-district choice, with a mean score of 3, just barely earns a neutral rating from parents. So, even though these policies are significantly less popular among non-parents, they still are not quite popular with parents either.

However, if we look back at the results for the relative influence of self-interest versus social-interest messaging on parents (Table 8), we see that the self-interest message increased support for both vouchers and inter-district choice (mean of 3 and 3.06, respectively). The increase in the mean of vouchers in particular demonstrates the power that self-interest messaging has for establishing greater support for the policy among parents.

If we modify which parents and non-parents we examine and only include the high-egalitarian individuals in the analysis, every policy became more popular for parents and non-parents, except for vouchers (Table 10). This finding reflects the effect of high-egalitarianism

from the prior analysis of high-egalitarianism and the self-interest and social-interest treatments.

Now we see a similar effect comparing parents with non-parents.[9]

Table 10: Support for school choice by parental status for high-egalitarian participants.

	Inter-district	Vouchers	Charters	Magnets	Taxes	Bussing	Vote
Without Children - High Egalitarianism	2.82	2.43	2.27	3.22	2.82	2.44	2.08
With Children - High Egalitarianism	3.07	2.65	2.65	3.28	2.8	2.56	2.58
Difference without-with	-.25	-.22	-.38	-.06	.02	-.12	-.5
p – value of difference	**0.03****	0.08*	0.003***	0.45	0.86	0.32	0.002***

Note: *$p<0.1$, **$p<0.05$, ***$p<0.01$, two-tailed.

Before, we only knew that the average person concerned with equality who quite possibly has no personal stake in securing education vouchers strongly disapproved of the policy, possibly because of its impact on low income neighborhood schools where some children were stuck with dismal educational opportunities, even with vouchers. While parents do have a stake in securing educational opportunities for their child, the high-egalitarian parents still are more disapproving of vouchers than other policies because they likely cannot help acknowledging the negative impact that vouchers can have on creating even larger education disparities based on race and socio-economic status.

Considering those low in egalitarianism by parental status, the differences for inter-district choice, vouchers, charter schools, and vote remain significant or very near that point (Table 11). The interesting point of analysis here is the movement of the means compared to their high-egalitarian counterparts. In the current condition, support for everything declines except for vouchers, where the mean rises relative to high-egalitarianism. In fact, the mean support for low-egalitarian parents comes very near to that of low-egalitarian readers of the self-

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[9] The only exception here is that the effect of high-egalitarianism even succeeds in making parents less supportive of vouchers, a policy which they generally support more than the average individual.

interest treatment and parents who received the self-interest treatment in the earlier sections of

the analysis. Only among these groups does support for vouchers reach or come close to a score

of three. Again, a score of three demonstrates entirely neutral feelings about the policy.

However, this level of support still comes in far above the average support from readers of the

self-interest treatment or the average parent.

Table 11: Support for school choice by parental status for low-egalitarian participants.

	Inter-district	Vouchers	Charters	Magnets	Taxes	Bussing	Vote
Without Children - Low Egalitarianism	2.51	2.5	2.58	2.94	2	2.2	1.85
With Children - Low Egalitarianism	2.87	2.94	3.07	3.16	2.04	2.29	2.34
Difference without-with	-.35	-.43	-.49	-.22	-.09	-.1	-.49
p – value of difference	0.04**	0.02**	0.007***	0.15	0.68	0.64	0.06*

Note: *p<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01. The p-value for inter-district is from a one-tailed analysis with the hypothesis that low-egalitarian parents will be more supportive of inter-district choice.

Conclusion

The primary hypothesis, that the self-interest frame for inter-district school choice would

drive more support than the social-interest frame, was not confirmed by analyses of the main

treatment effects, which produced mainly null results. However, the confirmation of subsequent

hypotheses, such as the stronger appeal of the self-interest frame among low-egalitarian

individuals and parents, or the dismissal of the candidate's appeal to social-interest by low-

egalitarian participants, demonstrates that the two frames do have disparate impacts on certain

groups of people. The implication for politicians and policy influencers looking for support in

the real world is that they must be aware of their audience when framing their arguments. If a

candidate for city council is speaking at a PTA meeting and wants the crowd to support a plan

for more charter schools, they need to address how each parent will benefit individually from the

policy. On the other hand, if the candidate is speaking at a social action conference full of high-

egalitarian individuals, they would be better off reflecting on how school choice policies will create equality in education for all children.

The preceding analysis also reveals that not all school choice policies are viewed on the same terms. While inter-district choice and magnet schools were most popular among high-egalitarian individuals, vouchers and charter schools were viewed less favorably by these groups and were most preferred by low-egalitarian participants and parents who read the self-interest frame. This split in populations who express more or less support for each school choice policy likely reflects a difference in how the policies are discussed in society. I suspect that vouchers and charter schools receive positive reviews for their ability to provide greater individual choices for parents and students, but these policies also come under fire for increasing education disparities between those who benefit from these programs and the children who are left behind in depleted public schools. Inter-district choice and magnet schools, on the other hand, are likely less controversial or widely discussed, which leaves high-egalitarian individuals and all parents more supportive of these policies. These hypotheses will be examined in the next chapter, the case study of political messaging on school choice policy reform in Michigan.

Chapter 4: Case Study

Introduction

While a controlled experiment allows for a discussion on causality in terms of how different message framing affect support for inter-district school choice, empirical studies can provide relevant descriptive info regarding the subject of the experimental study (Druckman et al. 2011). Therefore, in this chapter, I focus on a case study that provides real-world context and a snapshot of regular practice in policy framing. The following case examines newspaper articles and opinion pieces written about school choice policy in Michigan. Through these articles, I have been able to discern how politicians and other policy influencers have chosen to frame their support or opposition to school choice policy in order to influence others in their view of the policy.

This chapter will begin with some background on school choice policy in Michigan to set the scene for the policy framing. This will be followed by a full account of the method which I used for finding and categorizing the reviewed articles. I will then report my key findings, most notably that a majority of the 139 articles reviewed between the years 1993-2018 address social-interest concerns. The chapter will end with a discussion of how the messaging identified in the case study relates to the findings of the experimental portion of this research project and a discussion of my results' implications for real-world messaging strategies.

Background

Education policy, for the most part, falls under the jurisdiction of the states or even smaller localities. With this freedom to design and experiment with new policies, many states have revolutionized how their students access public or even private education. By 1996, intra-district open-enrollment plans were adopted by one in seven school districts nationwide and

magnet schools we open in almost every major urban district (Cullen and Loeb 2003). Charter

schools, which began in Minnesota in 1991, were opening across 34 states just five years later. In

fact, by 1996 their numbers totaled more than 2,300 (Cullen and Loeb 2003). Finally, privately

funded voucher programs were also becoming more popular by the mid-1990s and more than

thirty cities, including Milwaukee and Cleveland in the Midwest, were using public dollars to

send students to nonsectarian and religious private schools (Cullen and Loeb 2003). Within this

movement of revolutionary public education policy, Michigan embarked on their own journey of

school choice policy development.

Charter schools were the first iteration of school choice that Michigan gave to students

and parents when the state passed charter school legislation in 1994 (charterschools.org). In

Michigan, "charter schools are state-funded public schools that are governed by independent

boards and operate according to the terms of a performance contract overseen by an authorizing

body, often a public university" (DeGrow 2017). Though Michigan grants charters and funds to

privately operated schools, the legislation for the program originally placed a cap on the number

of charter schools authorized by the state. The cap was intended to limit the number of charter

schools operating while the success of the program was under review. Then, if the program

demonstrated success through higher achievement scores and student and parent satisfaction, the

cap could be raised through new legislation. The original cap of 150 charter schools was quickly

reached in 1999 but in 2011, after extensive debate over whether or not charter schools had

succeeded, Governor Snyder passed legislation to remove the cap (charterschools.org). Michigan

now has almost 300 operating charter schools that enroll more than 150,000 students, or ten

percent of all Michigan students (charterschools.org).

Charter schools were a step in creating more choice for families and students, but students were not guaranteed access to a charter school, or that one would even open anywhere near where they lived. Therefore, intra- and inter-district school choice took off in Michigan with the "Schools of Choice" program, initiated in 1996 (Degrow 2017). As Governor Engel wrote in 1993, school choice in this form would require all schools to compete with schools of choice and students would finally be released from "the monopoly of mediocrity" (Engler 1993). Originally, section 105 of this law allowed students to attend schools outside of their immediate district that were part of their intermediate school district (ISD). For example, a student in Grand Rapids could theoretically attend any school in the Kent County Intermediate School District because the schools might be in separate districts but fall within the same ISD. This program mirrors similar school choice policies in Wake County, North Carolina, where the Raleigh school district merged with the surrounding Wake County district to allow students to attend any school within the city or county (Grant 2009). Technically, individual schools could still opt in or out of the program, which had the potential to limit a student's actual options (Michigan Department of Education 2013). However, many school districts, particularly the smaller ones, viewed this program as an opportunity to attract more students and their accompanying funding (Brouillette 1999). Along with smaller districts looking to boost their enrollment and funding through this program, larger urban districts with declining enrollment also initially viewed the program as an opportunity to keep families in the city and attract students to specialized magnet schools within the city's district.

In 1999, the School of Choice program in Michigan added Section 105C, which expanded the program to allow for inter-district choice within neighboring districts which were not part of the same ISD as the student's resident district. To participate in inter-district choice, a

student must be released by their resident district and accepted by the district to which they want

to transfer (Michigan Department of Education 2013). So, even with the Schools of Choice

program, school districts maintained a significant degree of independence in deciding their level

of participation in the program. For example, Grand Rapids Public Schools and the larger Kent

Intermediate District which Grand Rapids is a part of, were slow to adopt the Schools of Choice

program. But, as a preview of my findings below, nearly 75 percent of the articles included in

this case study from the Grand Rapids Press spoke to this point and encouraged these school

districts to participate more fully in Schools of Choice to allow more options for students and

parents. However, the adoption of Schools of Choice program took several years for many

Michigan school districts.

In 1999, only 437 of 751, or 58 percent of districts were participating in the Schools of

Choice program (Brouillette, 1999). However, by 2017, 161 out of a sample of 168 Michigan

school districts surveyed by the Mackinac Center for Public Policy had "opened their doors to at

least some nonresidents" through either Section 105 or 105c choice (DeGrow 2017). Over the

course of eighteen years, the level of participation in School of Choice increased from 58 percent

to just over 95 percent of school districts. Student participation in the Schools of Choice

program has also been significant and rapidly increasing. Between the 2005-06 and 2012-13

school years, participation in the program climbed from 66,560 to 115,209, a 42 percent spike

(Cowen and Henion, 2015). Schools of Choice enrollment has also increased as a percentage of

the state's overall student population, "rising from just 3.7 percent of 1.8 million students in

2005-06, to 7.1 percent of 1.6 million students in 2012-13" (Cowen and Henion 2015).

While open-enrollment and charters have been greatly expanded in Michigan over the

past two decades, and both programs have slowly been more accepted by the state's schools and

families, vouchers have yet to enter the state. This is largely due to a 1970 amendment to the 1963 state constitution, called Proposal C, which expressly prohibits state dollars from going to private or religious schools, even indirectly (Prothero 2017; Citizens Research Council of Michigan 2010). An amendment to repeal this part of Michigan's constitution, Amendment 1, was put on the ballot in 2000 and received more than 13 million dollars in support from the family of Betsy Devos (Prothero, 2017). However, the ballot initiative amendment failed by a 2:1 margin, and another effort to change the constitution in 2014 also was unsuccessful (EdChoice.org). Governor Snyder and his supporters continue to eye adding vouchers to Michigan's school choice options but have so far been unsuccessful in garnering the support of Michigan voters.

Despite the lack of support for publicly funded vouchers, the existing school choice programs, charter schools and open-enrollment, have been popular among Michigan students and parents. By the fall of 2017, 25 percent of Michigan students were enrolled in a school outside of their home district – 123,000 in traditional public schools and 146,000 in charter schools (Mack 2018; Fournier 2017). However, participation in Schools of Choice has not been equal across races, income levels, and academic achievement. Black, low-income, and lower- achieving students have participated at higher rates than other students (Cowen and Henion 2015). Likely, parents who see their children struggling in their traditional neighborhood school are more eager to seek out opportunities to send their children to other schools. However, Cowen and Henion found that these students are also more likely to leave the program again (2015), so they must either find that changing schools is not beneficial to their child's education, or some other barrier to attending another school, such as transportation, limits their ability to remain in the program.

Transportation seems a likely barrier because Michigan school districts and charter schools are not required to provide transportation for students, regardless of whether or not they are residents of the district. Because of this law, about 30 percent of parents in Detroit in a 2014 survey said that "finding transportation to and from school represented a barrier to choice" (DeGrow 2017). Charter schools may be even harder to access than regular public schools because they spend 15 times less per student than conventional districts on student transportation services (DeGrow 2017). Therefore, student participation in school choice programs may be somewhat limited by the law itself, with the absence of vouchers and granting districts that ability to not admit out-of-district students. However, other barriers beyond the scope of school choice, such as a lack of access to transportation, may also limit the number of students taking advantage of the opportunities created by school choice policies.

While Michigan serves as a worthy example of a state where school choice policy has grown dramatically for over two decades, the policies have not been without controversy. This can be seen in the incremental adoption of various programs as families and law-makers approached the changes with caution. Before allowing inter-district choice, they tried out intra-district choice to see if the program worked in that limited capacity. And then, even with full inter-district choice, individual districts have sometimes waited several more years to release or admit students from or into their schools. Furthermore, rather than permit the unrestricted growth of charter school education, the state first implemented a cap to limit the number of schools while they observed their success or failure. And, two attempts later, supporters of publicly funded vouchers still cannot remove an amendment from the state constitution that explicitly prohibits them in Michigan. The trepidation with which school choice policy has been approached in Michigan, and the continued lack of acceptance of some policies, demonstrate

continued controversy over the policy and make the state an ideal subject of this policy framing case study. Furthermore, the lack of consensus will likely produce mixed findings of support and given arguments within the op-eds and provide this case study with a nice variation within the data.

Method

Against this backdrop, I seek to understand common themes in the arguments for and against school choice in Michigan. Specifically, I look to see if policy influencers use self- or social-interest framing in their arguments. To do so, I turn to newspapers, a medium that many politicians and political activists commonly use to advocate for their position on school choice, and I examine opinion pieces addressing issues of school choice for evidence of the two frames.

I collected all articles for this case study from the Access World News database. My search parameters focused only on opinion pieces published in Michigan newspapers (print or online), excluding blogs and magazines because I wanted to limit my search to regularly circulated and more widely read sources which served their local communities, or at most targeted the entire state of Michigan. While widespread messaging of school choice policies in nationally circulating news sources would tell us something about the national conversation on the issue, I was interested in learning how the actual policies under question in Michigan were being discussed.

With these larger parameters of the search set, I then used two terms to identify articles published within four possible sections of the paper. The terms were "school choice" or "Schools of Choice." "Schools of Choice" would locate articles which directly reference the education policy program in Michigan of that name. However, I also employed "school choice" to identify articles that did not explicitly address the Schools of Choice program but still divulged an

opinion on school choice policy in Michigan more generally. Using these terms, I then searched for opinion pieces in the Editorial, Op-Ed, Commentary, or Opinions sections of any newspaper in Michigan. I limited my search to these sections because I only wanted results which expressed an opinion for or against school choice policy in Michigan. I am interested in seeing how writers try to convince others to agree with their support or opposition to school choice policy, not in an objective description of the policy itself or the current state of Michigan schools under this policy. Pure news articles could certainly be helpful in understanding whether or not the policy works, and I did encounter a significant amount of that information in the arguments which I read. But for this purpose of this study, I am solely interested in opinion pieces.

The search criteria described above returned 476 results published from 1993 to 2018.[10] I only categorized 139 articles after removing duplicates that showed up under multiple searches, and articles which came up in the results but still did not fall into the scope of this case study. For example, several national Op-Ed pieces from writers at the Washington Post, New York Times, or Los Angeles Times were republished by Michigan newspapers and therefore, appeared in my search. However, these opinions were not directed at school choice policy in Michigan in particular and were not written for the Michigan audience, so I did not include them in my analysis. Other results were written as letters to the editor and were not written by public figures or policy influencers, so I also excluded those results as well. Finally, some articles were written as opinion pieces on candidates or budgetary matters which touched on school choice tangentially because the candidate supported or opposed the policy, or education policy came up in the budget debate. However, these pieces expressed no opinion on school choice policy itself, so they were also excluded from my analysis.

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[10] This time range encompasses all of the available results provided by the search, and conveniently aligns with the start of school choice policies in Michigan to the present.

After identifying all the articles that showed up in my searches and met the criteria of this study by expressing an opinion on school choice policy that was directed at the policies and people of Michigan specifically, I categorized these opinion pieces as speaking either in favor of or against school choice policy and with self-interest or social-interest framing. Whether or not the author supported school choice policy was for the most part very clear, though some expressed theoretical support for school choice while remaining critical of Michigan's particular approach to the reforms. I still categorized these articles as speaking positively about the policy because they believed in its ability to do good, even if the execution of the policy in Michigan schools at the moment was poorly done.

Categorizing the opinion pieces as employing self-interest or social-interest framing was more complicated. However, using my own treatments from the experimental portion of this study as a guideline and to remain consistent in how these two frames are used across the study, I could, for the most part, clearly place each opinion piece on one side or the other of the self-versus-social interest spectrum. The self-interest frame for the experimental portion emphasizes the ability of the parent to choose where their child attends school and the use of their tax dollars for their child's education. That is, it focused on the individual. Any op-eds which similarly emphasized the importance of the parent's right to choose their child's school, or the movement of the parent's tax dollars with the child were therefore placed in the self-interest category. On the other hand, the social-interest frame focuses on the benefit that school choice provides to all children by allowing them to pursue the education choices they need for success. Also, this view stresses how school choice improves education overall by increasing competition among schools and improving the quality of education provided by all schools. Opinion pieces that focused on the poor quality of Michigan schools and then presented school choice as a remedy that would

equalize educational opportunities, or pieces that emphasized the value of providing all children with open educational opportunities were placed in the social-interest category of articles. I did encounter arguments which pulled on both framing methods but judged which one was used more earnestly or as the primary argument and categorized it accordingly. For example, if the concluding or introductory paragraph clearly addressed self-interest but both frames were used equally within the body of the article, I categorized the piece as self-interest because the author either intended to pull the reader in with a self-interest argument or leave the reader with that argument at the end. However, I still came across just less than 20 opinion pieces which could not be conclusively placed on one side or the other, and I marked these as "Self/Social" in the table of articles.

Results

Of the two frames, writers were more likely to frame their argument in the social-interest than the self-interest (Table 12). Seventy-one of the 139 articles addressed the reader's social-interest, which comes out to just above 50 percent of the opinion pieces. The most striking outcome of this case study, however, might be the overwhelming support for school choice expressed in Michigan newspapers. Out of the 139 opinion pieces analyzed, 116 supported school choice policies versus 29 that opposed them.

Table 12: Breakdown of opinion pieces by frame and support or opposition.

	Self-Interest	Social-Interest	Self/Social	Total
Support	49	54	13	116
Oppose	5	17	1	23
Total	54	71	14	139

The distribution of opinion pieces across the years was also uneven (Table 13). Over the course of some years, such as 2011, more than 30 pieces were published while other years, even more recent ones such as 2010 and 2015, did not return any results in the search. The significant

higher number of pieces from 2011 aligns with the debate over whether to increase the cap on

charter schools, one of the more contentious issues as the state engaged in a debate over the

value of charter schools. The lower number of articles from the earlier years (1993-2002) likely

has more to do with the limitations of the database than the actual number of pieces published.[11]

Nonetheless, we do see a slight increase in the number of articles moving into 2000, when

Amendment 1 was on the ballot to allow vouchers. The other years with spikes in the number of

articles written are election years because more opinion pieces were written in these years to

express support for the policies championed by the incumbent or challenging party.

Table 13: Breakdown of opinion pieces by year published and support or opposition.

Year	Total Number	Support	Oppose
1993	1	1	0
1995	1	1	0
2000	6	6	0
2001	5	5	0
2002	15	14	1
2003	2	2	0
2004	11	8	3
2005	9	7	2
2006	2	2	0
2007	6	5	1
2008	6	6	0
2009	2	2	0
2011	31	25	6
2012	13	11	2
2013	10	9	1
2014	5	4	0
2016	2	1	1
2017	5	0	5
2018	5	4	1

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[11] I could not find information on the NewsBank website about their data collection process or limitations, but there must be an explanation other than the possibility that fewer articles about school choice were being published before the year 2000, which I suspect is that the database has not compiled all local news articles published before 2000.

Taking a closer look at the pieces written in support or opposition to school choice policies, the results demonstrate that the usual conservative commentators and politicians spoke strongly in support for greater access to charter schools, public school choice, and even vouchers. More surprising was the strong support expressed by the editorial boards of Michigan's large city newspapers, the Detroit News and the Grand Rapids Press. Neither of these papers published a single article which I read that spoke negatively of expanding Michigan's school choice policy. This finding reflects the unique ability of school choice policy to bring what are usually political opponents together (e.g., conservative Republicans and urban black Democrats), as described by Ryan and Heinse (2002). The finding here, that Republican pundits and urban, likely Democratic, editorial boards in Michigan are unanimous in their support of school choice policy certainly reflects Ryan's analysis of school choice more generally.

On the other side of the issue, I found a mix of voices opposing the expansion of school choice in Michigan. The primary concern was that school choice, charter schools, vouchers, or even just allowing students to attend school out of district, would deplete enrollment and resources for traditional public schools. Many of these criticisms appeared in the newspapers of smaller cities such as Holland, Manistee, Cheboygan, or Galien. In Galien, enrollment became so low in 2004 that they had to seriously consider closing their last remaining high school (Herald-Palladium, 2004). For other schools, particularly in urban centers such as Detroit and Grand Rapids, the argument was that declining enrollment and funding meant poor educational opportunities for the students left behind, which were often those with special needs or that lacked access to transportation (Thiel 2017).

In the analysis below, I will more closely examine the opinion pieces written in support of school choice policies for several reasons. First, the overwhelming majority of pieces in my

original dataset (83%) advocated for school choice policies. Additionally, my primary interest in this thesis concerns which frames are most effective in building support for school choice. Indeed, both of the treatments used in my experimental study were written in support of school choice, just using different frames to do so.

While the representation of positive versus negative messaging on school choice policy is quite lopsided, I found a more even split between self-interest or social-interest messaging in the articles which supported school choice. By my analysis, of the 116 opinion pieces in favor of school choice, 54 used social-interest frames, 49 appeal to self-interest, and 13 equally addressed both self-interest and social-interest. As described in my method, social-interest articles would be those that spoke to the fundamental value of equality by providing opportunities for all children or improving education across the board through competition and more access to charter or private schools. That is, these arguments should focus on more than the individual. The oldest article which I read from 1993, two years before Michigan began to open charter schools and three before the Schools of Choice program began to allow inter-district school choice, was written by then Governor Engler. Governor Engler makes a clear appeal to a social-interested view of education in his opening paragraph with the statement, "The time has come to put a world-class education within the reach of every Michigan child" (Engler, 1993). Further on, Governor Engler continues to address the public value of education by writing:

> the humble schoolhouse is a great monument to a great idea – the American idea
> that education prepares us for a life of freedom. Without education, our children
> live lives of missed opportunity . . . It doesn't matter what your race, what your
> creed, what your gender, or what your ethnic background is. Without education,
> you are not free to reach your potential and to participate fully in our self-
> governing republic. (Engler 1993)

Finally, in a direct call for reform, Engler claims that, "Now we have the opportunity to reinvent our public schools and better prepare our children for the challenges of the 21st century" (Engler

1993). In the following paragraph, Engler names school choice and charters explicitly as the reforms he believes must be present in this reinvention of the public schools.

That the leader of the reform movement which brought Michigan Schools of Choice employs such a strong appeal to social-interest in anticipation of the fight to create these reforms carries significant weight. Other elected representatives in Michigan have similarly appealed to social-interest in their commentary on school choice reforms. State Representative Jerry Kooiman, in response to the decision of superintendents in the Kent Intermediate District to limit how many students could move out of district, wrote in 2002 that:

> We need to do what is best for the kids in our community and not just look at the students of any school district as representing $6,700 for the district. The focus needs to be on ensuring that children have an opportunity for a world-class education that meets their needs. As a community, we cannot afford to force those of economic means to leave the city of Grand Rapids if they are unhappy with education there. (Kooiman 2002)

Here, the naming of community and the explicit request to focus on the needs of the children clearly appeals to our sense of the social good or wellbeing of the community. Kooiman's closing closes his argument with this message: "Superintendents, tear down those walls for the sake of all of the children in Kent County" (Kooiman, 2002). Though this message is directed to the superintendents, the call to think of all the children in Kent County should be clear to all readers of this article.

Non-elected but also high-profile political figures also directed their arguments for school choice to our social-interest. Betsy Devos, who at the time of writing her opinion piece 2001 was chairman of Choices for Children, a statewide education reform group, speaks out in support of Amendment 1, which would remove the clause in the Michigan State Constitutions that prohibited the creation of a school voucher program. Devos laments that this amendment failed to pass in an article titled "Lots of talk, but no action on education," saying that "over 200,000

students are still stuck in schools that fail them" (Devos 2001). Devos's claim here appeals to the idea of the widespread injustice faced by these children who are barred from access to better schools. Her argument is that school choice would remedy this injustice, so here again the appeal is to a social-interest in eliminating injustice in our communities. Devos also directs our attention to the current failings of Michigan schools by stating that, "These are schools in which more than half of the students will drop out before graduating and where a third of those who do graduate, cannot read" (Devos 2001). She then proceeds to pitch more choice as the solution to these dismal statistics by claiming that, "Expanding school choice and eliminating the rationing of charter schools will provide an immediate stimulus for bad schools to become better" (Devos 2001). Regardless of what reasons Ms. Devos actually holds for supporting school choice policies, she clearly uses a social-interest frame in this article.

Other articles make similar appeals by arguing that school choice can "increase achievement for each child" (Weiler 2002), or that school choice reforms may be the way to help "struggling students in the state's largest school district" (The Detroit News 2001), or that increased competition between schools because of school choice policy "creates an incentive for improving the education of all students in the state" (The Detroit News 2004). Another article highlights this idea of schools competing for students, and thereby improving their educational quality, by describing how parents can now "shop around for schools" (The Detroit News, 2013). All of these authors are appealing to our belief in the idea that education can be the solution to poor education outcomes produced by the current public-school system and equalize the educational opportunities available to all students in Michigan. Through the expansion of school choice, students can find the program that will help them succeed and all schools will improve as they compete for students and funding. This messaging is employed in the belief that our social-

interest will be activated to support school choice policy because it provides for the societal outcomes that we desire in our communities or for the state of Michigan in this case.

On the other side of the spectrum, all the self-interest articles were directed to parents as they would be the subset of the newspaper audience with a stake in education. While politicians focused on the benefits of school choice to children and society, newspaper editorial boards, policy centers, and of course, parents felt more compelled to highlight how more choice would benefit parents. In fact, one author went so far to brand National School Choice Week as "a time to acknowledge a parent's right to choose" (Simon 2013). In another article titled "Give parents safety valve to fix schools", the Detroit News editorial board argues that "Families shouldn't feel helpless when stuck in a bad school district without the ability to send their child elsewhere", and school choice empowers the parents in these families to ensure that their child receives a quality education (The Detroit News 2012).[12]

The Michigan State Senate seems to have caught on the power of marketing school choice to parents' self-interest when, in 2011, they named their bill to expand school choice the Parent Empowerment Education Reform (Van Beek 2011). As Michael Van Beek, the director of education policy at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, writes in an article supporting the bill:

> The Parent Empowerment Educational Reform package recently introduced in the state Senate would, among other things, eliminate the cap on public charter schools, expand online learning and create a "parent trigger" mechanism to convert failing schools into charters. These reforms will help meet the diverse needs of Michigan's 1.5 million students and provide parents with more alternatives to the one-size-fits-all model created by the bureaucratized control of public schools. Parents clearly want more choices. (Van Beek 2011)

Van Beek asserts that parents want more choices, and 49 articles that I analyzed appealed passionately to this apparent desire for greater choice.

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[12] This article also cites the Heritage Foundation and agrees with the quote from its Education Policy Director, another testament to the ability of school choice policy to bridge partisan divides.

Most of the opinion pieces included in this case study successfully fit into one of the two framing categories described above: self-interest and social-interest. However, as mentioned previously, some of the arguments could not be placed on one side or the other and I ended up categorizing 14 pieces as "Self/Social." There were arguments that spoke with equal strength, or weakness, to both frames. For example, a piece by Ingrid Jacques of the Detroit News first expresses her support for an argument which states that school choice "is the best way to help all families - especially those in poverty." But later in the same article she argues that "given how well voucher and tax credit programs work in other urban districts, this could be a great option for Detroit parents" (Jacques 2004). The first argument vaguely addresses the social-interest by mentioning how the program would support "all families – especially those in poverty." This is a somewhat indirect expression of support for greater equality among families. The second statement, however, appeals to how more choice would be favorable for parents specifically, an appeal to their self-interest. This use of both frames, though without much force, requires that the piece is not placed in one category or the other.

The article above, and others included in the study, also suggest another limitation of this study. Some of the arguments found in the opinion pieces quite simply did not utilize self- or social-interest framing. Some of the pieces were only concerned with the poor state of Michigan schools and argued that school choice made them better, or worse depending on the view of the author. These pieces did not necessarily claim that school choice made the schools better because they gave parents more power and freedom in choosing a school for their child, or because the program would create more equality and better educational opportunities for all Michigan students. They may have simply argued that school choice would make the schools more efficient or cause schools to run out of money. With a bit of stretching, these arguments can be

identified as self-interest or social-interest, or may have been marked as both, but the author does not intend to appeal to any of those frames in the writing of their argument. Therefore, I acknowledge that other relevant frames are used for arguing for or against school choice policies. However, a majority of the arguments made by political elites in Michigan can be clearly placed within the self- or social-interest framing spectrum, which validates the focus of this case study on these framing strategies.

Discussion

An investigation into the framing practices of policy influencers discussing school choice policy in Michigan revealed two key points: A significant majority of the opinion pieces located in this study spoke positively about school choice policies, but a majority of pieces also employed social-interest frames rather than appealing to the reader's self-interest. Considering the results of the experimental portion of this study—that parents are far more supportive of school choice policy than others, particularly when thinking about their self-interest—pitching the policy directly to parents would likely be the most successful strategy. Furthermore, a study commissioned by the Mackanic Center found that voters in Michigan, especially those with children, largely support school choice policies (DeGrow 2017). Finally, parents likely are more attuned to the movement of education policy because of their stake in its outcome, so they would potentially engage more regularly with the arguments for or against school choice policy. Taking all of these points together, they suggest that anyone trying to build support for school choice policies would be most successful directing arguments with self-interest frames towards parents.

The findings of this case study, that a majority of the opinion pieces use social-interest frames, also suggest that most writers are not using the most effective argument. However, a closer look at who wrote which kind of argument shows that newspaper editorial boards, policy

centers, and even other parents who of course know best when it comes to what parents want to hear, are actually using self-interest arguments. In fact, politicians and other public figures are more likely to use social-interest arguments, and one might wonder why this might be the case considering the points made above. These are the individuals, after all, who are developing the school choice policies and trying to get them passed through the state house. The assumption could be that only the Democratic politicians are using social-interest arguments because they align with the ideology of the party. However, Betsy Devos, Governor Engler, and Representative Jerry Kooiman, the three most prominent public figures who wrote pieces included in this study, are all members of the Republican Party. My hypothesis, therefore, is that elected representatives of the state feel a need to address the wellbeing of the state which they have been elected to serve. Governor Engler, for example, was not elected to represent the interests of individual parents. Rather, his role as governor is to provide for the wellbeing of the state as a whole and pursue policies that will enrich its future, such as high-quality educational opportunities for Michigan's children.

Supporters of school choice have been largely successful in advancing their policies in Michigan, though they have also faced their disappointments, such as the failure to pass Amendment 1 in 2001. However, considering the intense interest of parents in school choice reforms, and their strong support for these programs, I wonder if proponents of choice in elected office might see even more success if they appealed more to the self-interest of parents and less to a general belief in the benefits of high-quality education for all children and society.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This thesis began by asking if self-interest or social-interest policy framing would more effectively drive public opinion to support school choice policies. Answering this question will increase important knowledge on framing effects in public opinion formation and develop a deeper understanding of the primary forces behind public opinion and subsequent voter decision making. Prior research on these topics has already demonstrated how partisan messaging and ideology, self-interest and sociotropic economic concerns can influence public opinion. However, the self-interest versus social-interest framing approach has not previously been explored.

The examination of these two frames presented in this thesis began with an experimental study in which participants were presented with one of two op-eds written by a fictional candidate for city council. These op-eds presented an argument for inter-district school choice in either a self-interest or social-interest frame by highlighting how the policy would benefit your own child, or how it would promote greater education opportunities and equality among all children. While testing the support that participants expressed for inter-district choice and other school choice and related policies, I found that the interaction of the self-interest frames with participant characteristics such as egalitarianism, race, and parental status, returned significantly higher support for these policies among low-egalitarian or black participants, and among individuals with children.

Considering the implications of these findings – that messaging for school choice policies should be framed to address the reader's self-interest especially when targeting particular social groups, I wondered how political elites were crafting their messaging in practice. Therefore, I conducted a case study of school choice policy messaging in Michigan, a state that continues to

move through a prolonged battle over the expansion of choice in their public-school system. This study found that a majority of all opinion pieces found in Michigan newspapers that addressed school choice policy, both in support and opposition, employed social-interest messaging. Even elected officials, including both governors of Michigan during the school choice fight, addressed social-interest concerns while promoting school choice policies. However, these officials might more successfully increase support for these policies, especially among parents who are actively pursuing the best educational opportunities for their children, if they spoke to these individuals' self-interest.

Further research could expand on both the findings of the experimental and case study portions of this thesis. While the data revealed that certain social groups such as low-egalitarians, people of color, and parents are more likely to support school choice policy framed in their self-interest, future research could take a closer look at why this is the case, particularly for people of color. The case study could be expanded by examining if the findings in Michigan are consistent with messaging across other states and national messaging found in more widely circulated newspapers such as the New York Times or Wall Street Journal. While the findings of this study begin to tell a story about which policy frame augments support for school choice policy and which frames are used in practice within one state, certain findings warrant more backstory and a wider narrative should be included to tell the full story.

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Appendix A: Experimental Study

The introduction to the survey:

Study Information

This study is being conducted by Benedict Roemer at the University of Richmond. The purpose of this study is strictly for research purposes. The researcher is not affiliated in any way with any organization other than the University of Richmond. The purpose of this study is to understand reactions to text, and it should take 10-12 minutes of your time. You will be compensated $1.40 for completing the study. I do not anticipate any risks to you participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life. You may discontinue the study at any time and may choose not to answer any questions without penalty. Your answers will be completely confidential and anonymous.

Contact Information: If you should have any questions about this research study, please contact me at benedict.roemer@richmond.edu. For additional information about your rights as a research participant in this study, please feel free to contact the University of Richmond Institutional Review Board Office at (804) 484-1565.[AA17]

The full instrument:

<div align="center">

MTurk Recruitment Materials
</div>

Subjects will be recruited through Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk (MTurk).

When individuals click on a HIT, there will be a description as follows:

Public Opinion Survey
We are looking for participants who are interested in completing a survey about public opinion.

Eligibility: • Age 18 or older   • Citizen of the United States

We greatly appreciate your cooperation in helping us to collect quality data for academic research.
Reward: 1.40

MTurk Study Information Sheet

Study Information
This study is being conducted by Benedict Roemer at the University of Richmond. The purpose of this study is strictly for research purposes. The researcher is not affiliated in any way with any organization other than the University of Richmond.

The purpose of this study is to understand reactions to text, and it should take 10-12 minutes of your time. You will be compensated $1.40 for completing the study. I do not anticipate any risks to you participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life.

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CONTACTS FOR QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS
Contact Information: If you should have any questions about this research study, please contact me at benedict.roemer@richmond.edu. For additional information about your rights as a research participant in this study, please feel free to contact the University of Richmond Institutional Review Board Office at (804) 484-1565.

[*consent*] In consideration of all of the above, I give my consent to participate in this research study. By selecting "I agree to participate in this study" you signify consent. If you select "I do NOT agree to participate in this study" you will be taken to the final screen.
1—I agree to participate in this study
2—I do NOT agree to participate in this study
If do not agree, then terminate survey.
Main Instrument

[*age*] What is your age in years?
          If <18, then terminate survey.

[*citizen*] Are you a citizen of the United States?
1—Yes
2—No
If select No, then terminate survey.

{new page}

Randomly assign to one of the four frames below or a control group (with no text).

Below is an editorial written by a candidate running for a seat in your town's upcoming City Council elections.

Self-Interest	Social-Interest
Headline: I will work to provide the best education for YOUR child.	Headline: I will work to provide the best education for OUR children.
My name is Taylor Simmons and I am running for City Council because I want to ensure that you are empowered to provide your child with the best education possible. I am writing this editorial to express my support for a system of inter-district school choice because this system will give you the freedom to send your child, regardless of where you live, to the school with the funding and other resources that they need to succeed.	My name is Taylor Simmons and I am running for City Council because I want to ensure that our children are provided with the best education possible. I am writing this editorial to express my support for a system of inter-district school choice because this system will create greater educational equity by allowing all children of this city, regardless of their race, wealth, or zip code, to attend the school with the funding and other resources they need to succeed.
Imagine your child, or a child important to you, stuck in an under-performing school with no escape or opportunity to pursue their full potential. A system of inter-district school choice could save this child by giving you, or anyone close to you with a child, the opportunity to select any traditional public, magnet, or charter school for that child within or outside of the city's school system. Open enrollment at all these schools will allow your child to compete for the best school, or the school that best meets their interests. This system will also encourage schools to perform better as they will be competing for the best students. The bottom line is that with inter-district school choice, your child can access a much better education than they might currently receive at their local neighborhood school.	Imagine any child stuck in an underperforming school with no escape or opportunity to pursue their full potential. A system of inter-district school choice will save these children because every child will be able to select any traditional public, magnet, or charter school they like within or outside of the city's school system. Open enrollment at all these schools will allow every child to compete for the best school, or the school that best meets their interests. This system will also encourage schools to perform better as they will be competing for the best students. The bottom line is that with inter-district school choice, schools will become more diverse and equitable and every child will end up with a much better education than they might currently receive at their local neighborhood school.
I promise that, as a member of the City Council, I will ensure that your tax dollars are at work in an educational system that empowers you to send your child to a school with the resources needed for their success.	I promise that, as a member of the City Council, I will ensure that this city's tax dollars are at work in an educational system that gives all children equal access to the resources needed for success.
I humbly ask for your vote this election so that I can fulfill my promise to you and your child.	I humbly ask for your vote this election so that I can fulfill my promise to our city's children.

{new page}

Main Instrument Dependent Variable Questions

[inter-district] Do you support or oppose inter-district open-enrollment school choice?
1. Strongly support
2. Somewhat support
3. Neither support nor oppose
4. Somewhat oppose
5. Strongly oppose

{new page}

[vouchers_intro] School vouchers are financial support of a certain amount per child to be used to pay for education at any school. In this system, education funding is attached to the child rather than the school.

[vouchers] Do you support or oppose the use of school vouchers?
1. Strongly support
2. Somewhat support
3. Neither support nor oppose

4. Somewhat oppose
5. Strongly oppose

[charters_intro] Charter schools are publicly funded but privately-operated schools opened under a charter with the state. These schools must still retain certain educational standards but have more freedom in the formation of their curriculum and the teaching styles they use.

[charters] Do you support or oppose the creation of charter schools?
1. Strongly support
2. Somewhat support
3. Neither support nor oppose
4. Somewhat oppose
5. Strongly oppose

{new page}

[policy_intro] The next few questions will ask what kind of policies you might be willing to support in order to make inter-district school choice possible and increase the education opportunities of students.

[taxes] Do you support or oppose raising taxes for more school funding?
1. Strongly support
2. Somewhat support
3. Neither support nor oppose
4. Somewhat oppose
5. Strongly oppose

[magnet] Magnet schools are public schools which specialize in certain subjects such as STEM, leadership development, or the arts. Do you support of oppose the opening of magnet schools?
1. Strongly support
2. Somewhat support
3. Neither support nor oppose
4. Somewhat oppose
5. Strongly oppose

[bussing] Do you support or oppose bussing students further distances so that they can attend out of district schools?
6. Strongly support
7. Somewhat support
8. Neither support nor oppose
9. Somewhat oppose
10. Strongly oppose

[why_choice] What are your reasons for [supporting/opposing/neither favoring nor opposing] any of the school choice policies mentioned above?
>   {open-end text box}

{new page}

[vote] If the City Council elections were held today, how likely would you be to vote for Taylor Simmons?
>   1. Extremely likely
>   2. Very likely
>   3. Somewhat likely
>   4. Not too likely
>   5. Not at all

[why_simmons] What are your reasons for being [likely/not likely] to vote for Simmons?
{open-end text box}

{new page}

[ft_intro] Next, we would like to get your opinion on Simmons using a scale of 0 to 100. The higher the number, the warmer or more favorable you feel toward Simmons; the lower the number, the colder or less favorable you feel. You can pick any number between 0 and 100.

[ft_simmons] How do you feel about Taylor Simmons?

{new page}

[guess_PID] If you had to guess, which political party do you think Simmons belongs to?
>   1. Republican Party
>   2. Democrat Party
>   3. Independent Party
>   4. Not sure

[familiar] How familiar are you generally with school choice policy?
>   1. Not at all familiar
>   2. Not too familiar
>   3. Somewhat familiar
>   4. Very familiar
>   5. Extremely familiar

[interesting] How interesting did you find the editorial you read?
>   1. Extremely interesting
>   2. Very interesting

3. Somewhat interesting
4. Not too interesting
5. Not at all interesting

[effective] How effective do you think the editorial's argument was in making its case? (circle one)

Definitely not effective						Definitely effective
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

{new page}

Egalitarian Battery:

[egal] Here is a set of statements that will help us understand how you feel about society. Please indicate whether you agree, disagree, or neither agree nor disagree with each statement.

{Statements order randomized}

[equalopp] Our society should do whatever is necessary to make sure that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed.

1. Strongly agree
2. Somewhat agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Somewhat disagree
5. Strongly disagree

[toofar] We have gone too far in pushing equal rights in this country.

1. Strongly agree
2. Somewhat agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Somewhat disagree
5. Strongly disagree

[betteroff] This country would be better off if we worried less about how equal people are.

1. Strongly agree
2. Somewhat agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Somewhat disagree
5. Strongly disagree

[chance] It is not really that big a problem if some people have more of a chance in life than others.

1. Strongly agree
2. Somewhat agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Somewhat disagree
5. Strongly disagree

[fewerprobs] If people were treated more equally in this country, we would have many fewer problems.

1. Strongly agree
2. Somewhat agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Somewhat disagree
5. Strongly disagree

[eqchance] One of the big problems in this country is that we don't give everyone an equal chance.

1. Strongly agree
2. Somewhat agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Somewhat disagree
5. Strongly disagree

Demographics battery:
{new page}

[*gender*] What is your gender?
    1—Female
    2—Male

[kids] Are you a parent?
1-Yes
2-No

{new page}

{if yes, branch to:}
[kids_home] Do you have any children aged from 0 to 17 living at home with you, or who you have regular responsibility for? [choose one only]
1. Yes
2. No

{new page}

[PID3]

Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a …?
1-Democrat
2-Republican
3-Independent
4-Other/Not sure

{single choice}
[PID7]
{if pid3=1: Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a strong Democrat or a not very strong Democrat?}
{if pid3=2: Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a strong Republican or a not very strong Republican?}
{if pid3=3 or 4: Do you think of yourself as closer to the Democratic or the Republican Party?}

{answer options if pid3=1}
1 – Strong Democrat
2 – Not very strong Democrat

{answer options if pid3=2}
7=Strong Republican
6=Not very strong Republican

{answer options if pid3=3 or 4}
3 – The Democratic Party
5 – The Republican Party
4 – Neither
8 – Not sure

[race] What racial or ethnic group best describes you?
African-American / Black
Asian
Hispanic / Latino
Native American
White
Other

[raceother] You indicated 'Other' for your race. What racial or ethnic group best describes you? (textbox)

[state]: What state do you live in? (drop down list including all 50 states, Washington DC, "Other US Territory" and "Non-US State or Territory")

[area] Which kind of area do you live in?

Urban
Suburban
Rural

[edu] What is the highest level of education that you have earned?
8th grade
Attended high school
High school degree or equivalent
Associate's degree
Some college
Bachelor's degree
Advanced degree

[employ] Which statement best describes your current employment status?
Working- full time
Working- part time
Temporarily unemployed
Homemaker
Student- undergraduate
Student – graduate/professional
Permanent disability
Retired
Other

[income] What is your total household income, including income from all members of your family, in 2013 before taxes? This figure should include salaries, wages, pensions, dividends, interest, and all other income.
Less than $10,000 (1)
$10,000 – $19,999 (2)
$20,000- $29,999 (3)
$30,000- $39,999 (4)
$40,000 – $49,999 (5)
$50,000 – $59,999 (6)
$60,000 - $69,999 (7)
$70,000 - $79,999 (8)
$80,000 - $89,999 (9)
$90,000 - $99,999 (10)
$100,000-$124,999 (11)
$125,000-$149,999 (12)
$150,000-$199,999 (13)
$200,000 and over (14)

[interest] In general, how interested are you in politics?
Extremely interested
Very interested
Somewhat interested
Not very interested
Not at all interested

[debrief] Debrief for treatments (not control)

During this study you read an article about a candidate running for City Council. This information was created for the purposes of this study and was not real. However, the content itself mirrors real-world debates about school choice.

If you choose to have your data withdrawn from this study, please note this in the open-ended comment box below. Please refrain from discussing the specifics of this study with others. We expect to have several more individuals participating in our study and our data could become meaningless if participants know ahead of time what they will be doing in the survey. We very much appreciate your cooperation.

If you have any additional questions about the content of the study, please direct them to Benedict Roemer (benedict.roemer@richmond.edu). Thanks again for participating!

[EndComments] If you have any comments or questions, please note them below.
{open end text box}

[*code*] IMPORTANT: To receive credit for this HIT, please come up with a random 4-digit number from 1000-9999. Be sure to make it random! Enter the 4-digit number below, and copy and paste the exact same number into the HIT on Amazon Mechanical Turk. We will use this number to confirm that you have completed the survey and give you the credit. If your number below does not match the number you enter into the HIT, you will not receive the credit. When you are done, press the arrows below.
        {open-end text-box}

Appendix B: Case Study

Full List of Articles Reviewed:

OP Ed Piece on Education Reform	John Engler	1993	Afro-American Gazette	Positive	Social
LEGISLATURE MUST BE CLEAR ON WHAT SCHOOL 'CHOICE' IS	The Flint Journal	1995	The Flint Journal	Positive	Social
Westwood Schools, Face Change	The Detroit News	2000	The Detroit News	Positive	Self/Social
Charter Schools Add Diversity	The Detroit News	2000	The Detroit News	Positive	Self/Social
Voucher proposal deserved a more serious public debate - It's so easy to lose sight of urban reality from the suburban sanctuaries around the state	Joseph Crawford	2000	The Grand Rapids Press	Positive	Self/Social
The voucher debate -- whatever became of the children?	Joseph Crawford	2000	The Detroit News	Positive	Social
Solid evidence that vouchers work for black students	William Safire	2000	The New York Times News Service, in The Grand Rapids Press	Positive	Social
Michigan's school voucher plan: testing the will to reform	George Will	2000	The Washington Post, in Grand Rapids Press	Positive	Social
Lots of talk, but no action on education	Betsy Devos	2001	The Grand Rapids Press	Positive	Social
Serious about charter study?	The Grand Rapids Press	2001	The Grand Rapids Press	Positive	Social
Managing Education Change	The Detroit News	2001	The Detroit News	Positive	Self
Unlock doors to school choice - After four years of tight 'pilot plan,' time for Kent schools to open up	The Grand Rapids Press	2001	The Grand Rapids Press	Positive	Self
A successful school swap	The Grand Rapids Press	2001	The Grand Rapids Press	Positive	Self
Charter Schools Fill Public Education Niche	The Detroit News	2002	The Detroit News	Positive	Self

Title	Author/Source	Year	Publication	Sentiment	Type
Vote Yes on Millage for Royal Oak Schools	The Detroit News	2002	The Detroit News	Positive	Self
Give Detroit Vote on School Reform	The Detroit News	2002	The Detroit News	Positive	Self
Renew Efforts to Create More Charter Schools	The Detroit News	2002	The Detroit News	Positive	Self
School choice in the city - Grand Rapids should allow more transfers within district	The Grand Rapids Press	2002	The Grand Rapids Press	Positive	Self
Poor choice for schools - Countywide cut in school choice fences in parents, students	The Grand Rapids Press	2002	The Grand Rapids Press	Positive	Self
A wiser choice - Parents should have more say in where children attend school	The Grand Rapids Press	2002	The Grand Rapids Press	Positive	Self
Real changes will bring kids back to public school system - Teachers need incentives to perform; parents need reasons to return to public education.	Chris Myers	2002	The Grand Rapids Press	Positive	Self
Schools Can Cut Budgets without Harming Kids	The Detroit News	2002	The Detroit News	Positive	Social
For State Board of Ed: Vote Warren and Curtin	The Detroit News	2002	The Detroit News	Positive	Social
Judge Royal Oak Bond on Merits	The Detroit News	2002	The Detroit News	Positive	Social
Lack of parental guidance affects children's education, respect for others - Guest column	Harold Mercer	2002	The Grand Rapids Press	Negative	Social
Superintendents, tear down the walls	Jerry Kooiman	2002	The Grand Rapids Press	Positive	Social
State Board of Education	The Grand Rapids Press	2002	The Grand Rapids Press	Positive	Social
Schools of Choice program works well	Michael S. Weiler	2002	The Grand Rapids Press	Positive	Social
Michigan's Mentally Ill Need Better Care - Problems were decades in the making, but new commission is a step toward reform	The Detroit News	2003	The Detroit News	Positive	Self
School Choice Forcing Districts to Compete for Shrinking Funds - West Bloomfield proves creative districts can ride out fiscal crunch by offering better services	The Detroit News	2003	The Detroit News	Positive	Social
Undereducated today and outsourced tomorrow	Andrew J. Coulson	2004	The Oakland Press	Positive	Self

Title	Author/Source	Year	Publication	Tone	Category
No more protectionism - Kent County schools of choice works for students, districts	The Grand Rapids Press	2004	The Grand Rapids Press	Positive	Self
Parents Should Get Last Word in Canton School Dispute - Two subdivisions want to switch from Van Buren Schools to the Plymouth-Canton district	The Detroit News	2004	The Detroit News	Positive	Self
Ferndale Dances with Danger If It Rejects Outside Students - School board should explain what cuts it plans to make if it turns away nonresident kids and their state aid	The Detroit News	2004	The Detroit News	Positive	Self/Social
Keep School Choice as a Benefit for Education Employees - New Michigan law makes it easier for staffers to enroll their children in the district where they are employed	The Detroit News	2004	The Detroit News	Positive	Social
Farmington Should Keep School Choice Program - Extra students add money for Oakland County district and offer parents educational choices	The Detroit News	2004	The Detroit News	Positive	Social
Romeo Schools Should Accommodate Outside High School Students - School board can't expect nonresident students to bring in state education dollars and not give them seats	The Detroit News	2004	The Detroit News	Positive	Social
Expect more of students, schools - Governor needs to use study, lead to better education, economy	The Grand Rapids Press	2004	The Grand Rapids Press	Positive	Social
William F. Ast III	William F. Ast III	2004	The Herald-Palladium	Negative	Social
Galien schools: Odds are getting longer that high school will make it	The Herald-Palladium	2004	The Herald-Palladium	Negative	Social
Wake up Galien, it's not to late for school	Kim Wieczorek	2004	The Herald-Palladium	Negative	Social
Tax injustice hurts religious schools	Kevin Schmiesing	2005	The Detroit News	Positive	Self
The other side of school choice - Districts that lose students deserve some share of state funding	The Grand Rapids Press	2005	The Grand Rapids Press	Positive	Self
SJ's snobbish reputation is well deserved	Karen Johnson	2005	The Herald-Palladium	Positive	Self
A charter high school - Plan by National Heritage to serve grades 9-12 helps parents, school choice	The Grand Rapids Press	2005	The Grand Rapids Press	Positive	Self

[Charter schools: making the grade - At ten years old, a solid record for parents; governor, lawmakers should allow more](#)	The Grand Rapids Press	2005	The Grand Rapids Press	Positive	Self/Social
[A schools of choice success story](#)	Tammy Shembarger	2005	The Herald-Palladium	Positive	Self/Social
[Open door policy for learning - School choice program allows students and parents to pick school that best suits their needs](#)	The Grand Rapids Press	2005	The Grand Rapids Press	Positive	Social
[William F. Ast III](#)	William F. Ast III	2005	The Herald-Palladium	Negative	Social
[William F. Ast III](#)	William F. Ast III	2005	The Herald-Palladium	Negative	Social
[Economic crisis fuels Michigan campaign](#)	George Will	2006	The Detroit News	Positive	Social
[Demand more from Michigan students - Tough graduation mandates will produce better prepared work force](#)	Michael Warren	2006	The Detroit News	Positive	Social
[Schools are - responding to - Schools of Choice](#)	Midland Daily News	2007	Midland Daily News	Positive	Self
[Having a choice makes a difference - Charter school options help parents put educational needs of children first](#)	Amarrah Smith-Collins	2007	The Detroit News	Positive	Self
[Review choice policies - The KISD has sought a necessary audit of its schools](#)	The Grand Rapids Press	2007	The Grand Rapids Press	Positive	Self
[Real choices for children - School options should remain robust, even as loophole closes for charter students](#)	The Grand Rapids Press	2007	The Grand Rapids Press	Positive	Self
[Let's protect school revolution - Charter public schools deliver results; don't allow opening for restrictive rules](#)	Stephanie Van Koevering	2007	The Detroit News	Positive	Social
[Supporting GRPS, not abandoning it, will make schools better](#)	Vickie and Brian Craig	2007	The Grand Rapids Press	Negative	Social
[Complete notification of parents - Audit shows Michigan Department of Education has not ensured all possible options for kids in troubled schools are explained](#)	The Grand Rapids Press	2008	The Grand Rapids Press	Positive	Self/Social
[Seize chance to bring school choice to Detroit](#)	The Detroit News	2008	The Detroit News	Positive	Social

Title	Author	Year	Publication	Tone	Frame
Spellings' reforms needed for Michigan and Detroit	The Detroit News	2008	The Detroit News	Positive	Social
Ferndale's University High deserves praise, not attacks	The Detroit News	2008	The Detroit News	Positive	Social
Detroit schools' collapse -- and rebirth?	Amber Arellano	2008	The Detroit News	Positive	Social
Great expectations - Success of GRPS' University Preparatory Academy and other themed-schools critical to the district's reinvention	The Grand Rapids Press	2008	The Grand Rapids Press	Positive	Social
Cosby reinforces freedom of school choice	The Detroit News	2009	The Detroit News	Positive	Self
Column- What money can't buy	Cal Thomas	2009	The Holland Sentinel	Positive	Self
Michigan kids trapped in failing schools need a way out - Options other than traditional public schools must be available to parents, students	Peter Luke	2009	The Grand Rapids Press	Positive	Social
Detroit schools can't afford to lose ground gained by emergency manager	Peter Luke	2009	The Grand Rapids Press	Positive	Social
It is time to end schools of choice	David Frownfelder	2011	The Daily Telegram	Negative	Self
Expand school choice	The Detroit News	2011	The Detroit News	Positive	Self
Education options expand	The Detroit News	2011	The Detroit News	Positive	Self
Open the classroom doors	The Detroit News	2011	The Detroit News	Positive	Self
GOP should free school charter bill	The Detroit News	2011	The Detroit News	Positive	Self
Education reforms will make Michigan smarter	The Detroit News	2011	The Detroit News	Positive	Self
COMMENTARY - All parents deserve school choice	Dan Quisenberry	2011	The Holland Sentinel	Positive	Self
Lift the charter cap	Michael Van Beek	2011	The Holland Sentinel	Positive	Self
Expand education opportunities - It's time to take Michigan's school choice to the next level	Michael Van Beek	2011	The Pioneer	Positive	Self
Best education reform must include parents	Susan J. Demas	2011	The Detroit News	Positive	Self/Social

Lower roadblocks to education - Bills to expand choice, charters should be passed in state Legislature	The Grand Rapids Press	2011	The Grand Rapids Press	Positive	Self/Social
It's not about fixing schools	Eric Baerren	2011	The Morning Sun	Negative	Self/Social
GOP flunks all efforts at reform	Iris Salters	2011	The Detroit News	Negative	Social
School unions entrenched in the past	Joy Pullman	2011	The Detroit News	Positive	Social
Competition, choice key in improving education	The Detroit News	2011	The Detroit News	Positive	Social
Accelerate reform	The Detroit News	2011	The Detroit News	Positive	Social
Education test scores: Room for improvement	The Detroit News	2011	The Detroit News	Positive	Social
Positive education action best for Mich.	John Austin	2011	The Detroit News	Positive	Social
Choice will improve Mich. schools	Mike Reno	2011	The Detroit News	Positive	Social
A school reform recap	The Detroit News	2011	The Detroit News	Positive	Social
Saving Detroit's schools	The Detroit News	2011	The Detroit News	Positive	Social
Schools of Choice plan likely to fail	Times Herald	2011	Sentinal Standard	Negative	Social
Dropouts need more paths like Education ReConnection	Jack Kresnak	2011	Kalamazoo Gazette	Positive	Social
Anti-teacher union bills will hurt schools	Steven Cook	2011	The Detroit News	Negative	Social
Michigan reinvented: For better or worse?	Glenn Oxender	2011	The Grand Rapids Press	Negative	Social
Education reforms - Governor proposes better early childhood programs, more school choice, tenure reform, merit pay	The Grand Rapids Press	2011	The Grand Rapids Press	Positive	Social
Public education can learn from auto companies -- change or die	Tom Watkins	2011	The Grand Rapids Press	Positive	Social
Test scores and paychecks - Educators, policy makers should address link between poverty, classroom performance	The Grand Rapids Press	2011	The Grand Rapids Press	Positive	Social
Leaving behind No Child Left Behind	The Holland Sentinel	2011	The Holland Sentinel	Positive	Social
COLUMN - A winning choice for education	Cal Thomas	2011	The Holland Sentinel	Positive	Social

Is race beneath the school debate? - Gov. Snyder's plan to let students attend any school in the state opens an old can of worms	Tim Skubick	2011	The Pioneer	Positive	Social
Editorial: The value of school choice	The Detroit News	2012	The Detroit News	Positive	Self
House should choose school choice	The Detroit News	2012	The Detroit News	Positive	Self
Detroit calls for school choice	The Detroit News	2012	The Detroit News	Positive	Self
New charter schools provide choice	The Detroit News	2012	The Detroit News	Positive	Self
Give parents safety valve to fix schools	The Detroit News	2012	The Detroit News	Positive	Self
Editorial: Most parents don't think DPS is the best option for their children, seek alternatives	The Detroit News	2012	The Detroit News	Positive	Self
Create a market? More like a mess - New school choice bills are 'a recipe for an educational meltdown'	John Austin	2012	Jackson Citizen Patriot	Positive	Self/Social
Editorial: Michigan on right track with education - School choice, accountability and finances the focus in 2012; more to do next year	The Detroit News	2012	The Detroit News	Positive	Social
Bad schools threaten national security	The Detroit News	2012	The Detroit News	Positive	Social
Don't Rush To Expand Public Cyber Schools	The Daily Telegram	2012	The Daily Telegram	Positive	Social
School Aid rewrite on right track	The Detroit News	2012	The Detroit News	Positive	Social
Not really that much of a choice after all	Jim Crees	2012	Lake County Star	Negative	Social
A tale as old as time	Brian Davis	2012	The Holland Sentinel	Negative	Social
National School Choice Week: tip your hat for choice in public education	Victoria Simon	2013	Sentinal Standard	Positive	Self
In Pontiac, school choice in action	Ingrid Jacques	2013	The Detroit News	Positive	Self
Feds must let states offer education choice	Ingrid Jacques	2013	The Detroit News	Positive	Self
Editorial: In Detroit, grading schools helps parents choose	The Detroit News	2013	The Detroit News	Positive	Self
Working to learn, learning to work	Ingrid Jacques	2013	The Detroit News	Positive	Self

Meaningful school reform needed	Audrey Spalding	2013	The Manistee News Advocate	Positive	Self
Editorial: Focus on teaching our teachers - Giving teachers more support, better training is an effective way to improve education in Michigan	The Detroit News	2013	The Detroit News	Positive	Self/Social
Finding how education succeeds	Tim Skubick	2013	The Manistee News Advocate	Negative	Social
When choice does matter	Audrey Spalding	2013	The Manistee News Advocate	Positive	Social
With the students in mind	Audrey Spalding	2013	The Manistee News Advocate	Positive	Social
Ingrid Jacques: How to build better schools in Detroit	Ingrid Jacques	2014	The Detroit News	Positive	Self
Ingrid Jacques: Want better Michigan schools? Think vouchers	Ingrid Jacques	2014	The Detroit News	Positive	Self/Social
Jacques: NYC is school choice blueprint for Detroit	Ingrid Jacques	2014	The Detroit News	Positive	Social
Ingrid Jacques: In school choice debate, students speak best	Ingrid Jacques	2014	The Detroit News	Positive	Social
DECISION 2014 - Ingrid Jacques: Schauer's ed plan thin on substance	Ingrid Jacques	2014	The Detroit News	Positive	Social
When is $500M worth nothing?	Detriot Free Press	2016	Cheboygan Daily Tribune	Negative	Social
Sick of failure in Detroit's schools - Another View	The Washington Post	2016	The Washington Post, in The Daily Telegram	Positive	Social
Focus on teachers, kids, not politics	Frank Barefield	2017	The Holland Sentinel	Negative	Self
DeVos vs. students - MY TAKE	Elizabeth Dewaard	2017	The Holland Sentinel	Negative	Self
Op-Ed: Don't blame failing schools on parents	Sarah Lenhoff	2017	Traverse City Record-Eagle	Negative	Self

[Op-Ed: Special education funding is unequal](#)	Craig Thiel	2017	Traverse City Record-Eagle	Negative	Self
[Op-Ed: Michigan's future at stake in fixing public education](#)	John Austin	2017	Traverse City Record-Eagle	Negative	Social
[Charters key to school choice - GUEST EDITORIAL](#)	The Detroit News	2018	Cheboygan Daily Tribune	Positive	Self
[Opinion: School choice keeps parents satisfied](#)	Ben DeGrow	2018	The Detroit News	Positive	Self
[Charters key to school choice - GUEST EDITORIALS](#)	The Detroit News	2018	The Detroit News	Positive	Self
[School districts exaggerate the harm of losing students to choice](#)	Ben DeGrow	2018	Lake County Star	Positive	Self/Social
[Op-Ed: Charter schools have done more harm than good](#)	Mitchell Robinson	2018	Traverse City Record-Eagle	Negative	Social
Totals:				Oppose: 23	Social: 17, Self: 5 Self/Social: 1
				Support: 116	Social: 54, Self: 49, Self/Social: 13