Cardus Religious Schools Initiative

Be True to Your School, Parents in North America Say: Intergenerational Continuity in School Sector Enrollment

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In this paper we assess the schooling choices of North American parents in the early years of their children's lives. In what ways are schooling choices influenced by the schooling experiences of graduates of private schooling? Do parents in the US or Canada enroll their children in schools that are similar in nature to the schools they attended?

In other words, is the type of school a student attends ultimately influenced by the enrollment decisions that their grandparents made on their parent's behalf? For instance, we would expect that experiences and networks built within private schools make a private schooling option more viable for the next generation. Likewise, Catholic schools are marked by close-knit communities in which parents are highly involved (Bryk, Lee, and Holland 1993), which could extend into adult life. Further, experiencing homeschooling as a child may provide the knowledge of what homeschooling entails, connections to other homeschooling families, and a level of comfort with and confidence in taking on the homeschooling task. For these and other reasons, we can expect later generations to follow in the footsteps of their parents when it comes to schooling choices.

We call this process intergenerational continuity in school sector enrollment. To test the consistency of schooling choices across generations we fit multinomial logistic regression models predicting school sector enrollment for children using data from the Cardus Educational Survey (CES)—a unique, multi-national study that over-samples graduates of private and religious high schools in the United States and Canada.

Our findings provide new insights for a variety of audiences. For scholars who study sector effects, we provide insight into the little-known process of school sector discernment. For educational practitioners we provide context for understanding enrollment patterns in a shifting educational marketplace.

Parents choose the schools that their children attend in two key ways: through residency, by moving to a different district, or school catchment area, or through voluntary enrollment in private schooling (Clotfelter 2004). Further, a small percentage of families take advantage of public school choice plans. A recent wave of research has shown that educational considerations play an important role in residential segregation in the United States (see Lareau and Goyette 2014). Relatively little is known, though, about the more active process of choosing schools—choosing whether and where to enroll one's children in private schools.

From the early 1980s through the late 1990s, research consistently demonstrated sector effects on various educational outcomes, particularly for Catholic graduates (see Coleman, Hoffer, and Kilgore 1982; Carbonaro and Covey 2010).

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Research then shifted to unlocking the "black box" of the Catholic school advantage. Catholic schools were found to have a more communal orientation (Bryk, Lee, and Holland 1993), and perhaps greater intergenerational closure between parents and students (Carbonaro 1998).

The process of "selection" often problematizes academic research on school sector effects. Estimates of the impact of school sector on learning or life outcomes are often burdened by questions of why parents chose to enroll their children in a given sector or concerns of unobserved differences that are related to these enrollment decisions (see Altonji, Elder, and Taber 2005). Given the persistence of these questions, it is somewhat puzzling that the process of sector discernment has received little attention and researchers know surprisingly little about factors that influence sector choice.

Educators can also strategically utilize knowledge about how parents chose where to enroll their children in a changing educational landscape. Evangelical Protestant schools are increasingly independent of churches and denominations (Wagner 1997). Catholic schools are increasingly attracting families interested in a strong college preparatory curriculum and are more distant from individual parishes (Baker and Riordan 1998). In the competitive marketplace of private school enrollment, parents are increasingly serious school shoppers and hoppers, seeking the ideal fit for their family and each child's idiosyncrasies.

Data and Methods

This research draws on four phases of the CES, each of which constitutes a nationally representative sample of high school graduates between the ages of 24 and 39 in the US or Canada. Households were randomly selected to participate in Internet panels administered by Knowledge Networks/GfK (in the United States) and Vision Critical/Maus (in Canada). The CES strategically

Table 1: Analytic Sample

Variable/Value	Percentage/Mean(sd)
Child School Sector	
Private Religious	10.77
Private, Non-Religious	2.52
Public	65.64
Home Schooled	6.39
Public Catholic (CA)	14.68
Parent School Sector	
Private Religious	22.58
Private, Non-Religious	5.93
Public	53.36
Home Schooled	3.78
Public Catholic (CA)	14.34
Parent Education	
High School	14.10
Some College	37.83
Bachelor's Degree	32.74
Graduate Degree	15.32
Household Income	
Low	9.78
Middle-Low	22.83
Middle Income	22.17
Middle-High	32.01
High	13.21
Family Characteristics	
Number of Children	2.51 (1.39)
Married	71.82
Parent Age	34.49 (3.66)
Eldest Child Age	10.57 (5.24)
Times attend Church/Year	24.30 (28.09)
Collection	
US 1	19.83
Canada 1	24.24
US 2	18.99
Canada 2	36.94
Total	1,906

over-sampled graduates of private and religious high schools to provide a large enough sample to allow for analysis of differences among private school sectors and religious traditions.

While the CES includes four cross-sectional surveys with nearly 7,300 total participants, the analytic sample for this project is restricted to those with at least one school-age child, which limits the sample to just over 1,900 respondents across the four waves of data. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for many of the characteristics (variables) used in the final model.

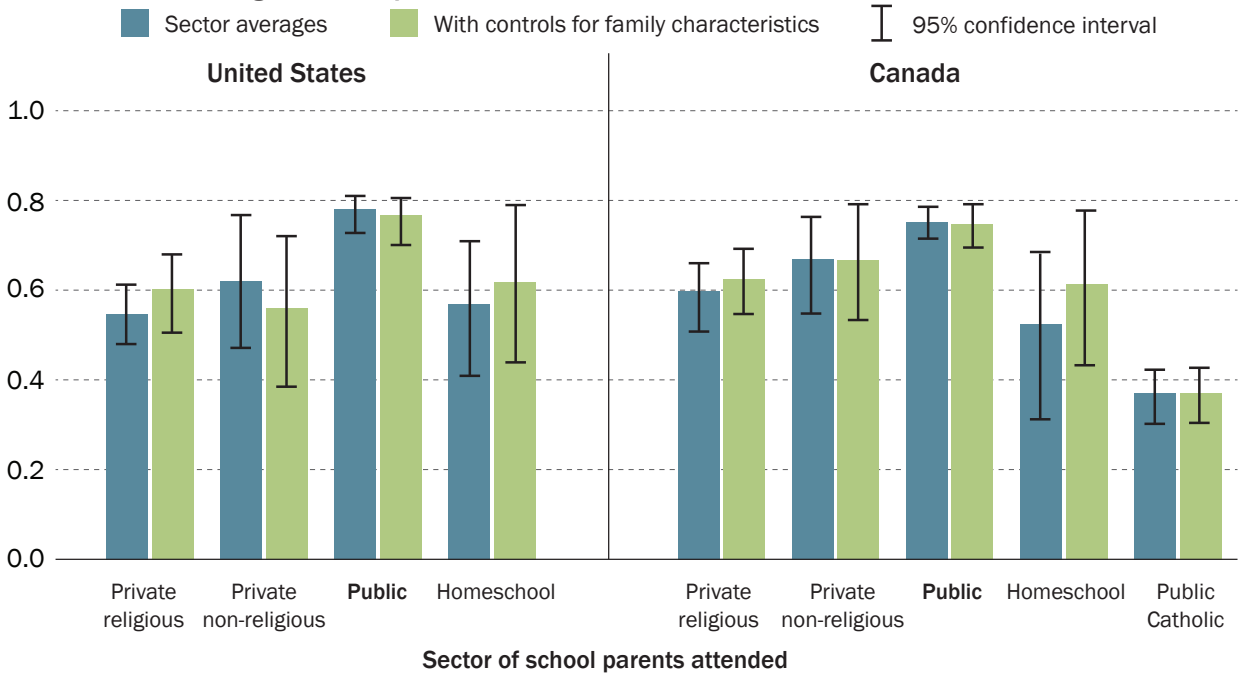
The outcome of interest (dependent variable) is the type of school that the respondent's child(ren) attends. Our key predictor is the school sector from which the respondent graduated. Using multinomial logistic regression, we fit two models. The first model looks at the unadjusted relationship between parent's and children's school sectors. Our second model accounts (controls) for the effect of parents' education, income, age, marital status, age and number of children, and frequency of religious service attendance, as well as an indicator of which wave of the CES a respondent participated in. By adjusting the estimates to account for these background characteristics, we are able to compare sector of enrollment for children of respondents who are observably similar in terms of family characteristics and resources to more accurately isolate the impact of parent sector on the types of schools their children attend than in the unadjusted model.

Results

We find strong support for intergenerational continuity in school sector enrollment. The figures that follow present the predicted probability that a respondent's child will be enrolled in a given sector based on the sector from which a parent (the respondent) graduated (sector average, in blue) as well as the relationship between parental and child sector after accounting for the influence of family characteristics and resources (with controls, in green). A statistician looking at these figures would focus on instances in which the 95% confidence intervals for the like-colored bars representing enrollment for each sector (the vertical line that extends below and above the top of each bar) do not overlap, indicating a significant difference in the likelihood of enrollment in a particular sector by parents own sector. If the confidence intervals for two (or more) parent sectors do overlap, the difference in the enrollment figures for a given child's sector could be an artifact of the CES sample (due to random sampling fluctuations), so might not represent true differences in the population.

For instance, in Figure 1, for both the blue and green bars, the bottom of the confidence interval for public sector graduates is higher than the top of the confidence interval for private religious school graduates, indicating that public school graduates are significantly more likely to choose public schools for their children than are graduates of private religious schools, even after accounting for family characteristics. In comparison, the confidence intervals on the blue bars for public and homeschool graduates do not overlap, indicating that homeschool graduates are less likely to send their children to public schools than are public school graduates. The fact that the confidence intervals for the green bars do not overlap, however, indicates that this sector difference between homeschool and public school graduates is not a true sector effect (an effect of having attended a school in a particular sector), but can be explained by some factor(s) that led families to choose those sectors in the first place (such as religious participation, income, or education, perhaps).

Figure 1: Proportion with Children Enrolled in Public Schools



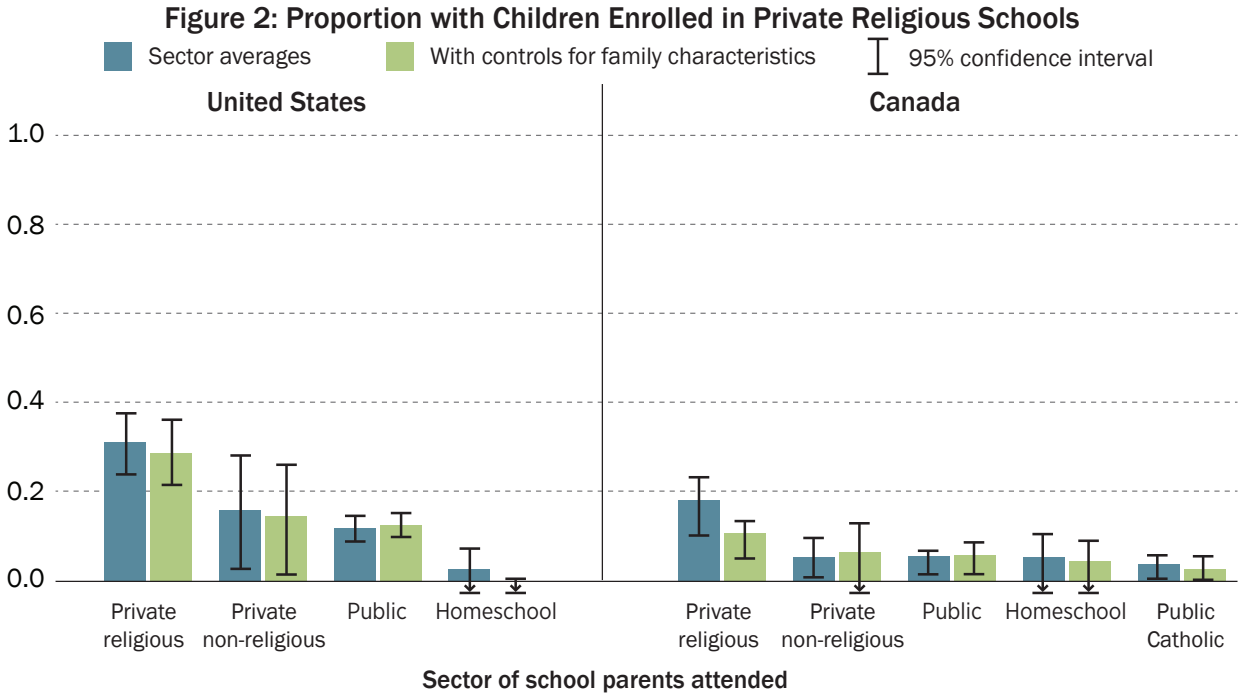
Non-Religious Public School Enrollment

Non-religious public schools are the most common choice for parents (with the exception of public Catholic schools for parents who graduated from public Catholic schools, as will be discussed toward the end of the report), which is not surprising given the cost and availability factors that favor public schools. While the majority of graduates of nearly all sectors send their children to non-religious public schools, there are still considerable differences in the strength of this preference.

Non-religious public schools are particularly popular among traditional public high school graduates, who overwhelmingly elect to send their own children to non-religious public schools, as seen in Figure 1. Over 75% of non-religious public school graduates choose secular public education for their own children, in both the US and Canada. This percentage is consistent after accounting for the effect of family resources, characteristics, and religiosity, which seems to indicate that the public school population is not particularly distinctive in terms of SES and religiosity compared to families in other school sectors, on average.

Graduates of private religious high schools in both countries, on the other hand, are significantly less likely to send their children to non-religious public schools than are graduates of secular public schools. All else equal, graduates of religious private schools only send their children to non-religious public schools about 60% of the time. Of all school sector origins, the private religious schooling group is, with the exception of the public Catholic school parents in Canada, the most consistent in avoiding nonreligious public schools.

While the sector averages indicate that parents who were homeschooled are less likely to send their children to secular public schools than are those who graduated from non-religious public



schools, after we account for the effect of other factors, we find that the difference cannot be explained by a sector effect, but by one or more family characteristics.

Parents who attended Canadian public Catholic high schools are least likely to enroll their children in secular public schools. In fact, these parents are the least likely to choose non-religious public schools. Apparently, the social boundaries between Catholic and nonreligious public schools in Canada are quite high, which is somewhat surprising given that both sectors are publicly funded and the student outcome differences are not large (Green et al 2016).

Figure 2A: Private Religious School Parent Characteristics

Compared to parents of public school students, parents with children in **private religious** schools tend to...

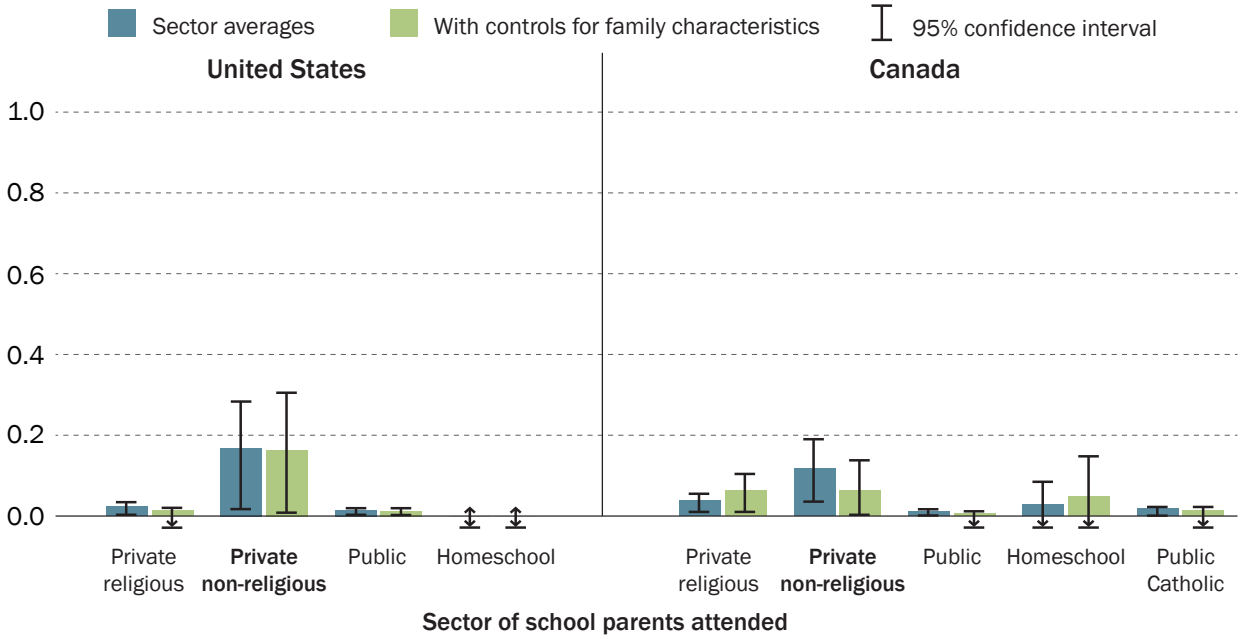
IN THE U.S.	IN CANADA
be older parents	more frequently attend religious services

Private Religious School Enrollment

The intergenerational continuity of school sector is comparatively less pronounced among religious private high school graduates, but there is a preference nonetheless. Before incorporating information on family background, religiosity, and finances, graduates of private religious schools are more likely to send their children to private religious schools than are graduates of any other sector in Canada, and nearly every sector in the US (see Figure 2). After taking other factors into consideration, most of the sector differences remain statistically significant.

In models with controls, graduates of private religious high schools in both countries are more than two times more likely to enroll their children in private religious schools than are graduates of public schools and five times more likely than parents who were homeschooled.

Figure 3: Proportion with Children Enrolled in Private Non-Religious Schools



The models we ran also allow us to look at the relationship between the other independent variables in the full model and the likelihood parents will enroll their children in a given sector relative to public schools. In the US, the likelihood of sending child(ren) to private religious schools increases with parents' age. This pattern is observed even as we account for the age of the parents' oldest child. This finding may reflect the greater economic security of parents more established in their careers, though we do not have direct evidence of this.

The patterns in Canada reflect family religious practice differences. Parents who send their children to private religious schools in Canada attend religious services more frequently than Canadian parents who send their children to secular public schools. Since religious schools, and especially evangelical Protestant schools, are often looked at skeptically in Canadian culture, it is perhaps not surprising that these schools are most frequently considered by the more active religious families.

Private Non-Religious School Enrollment

Graduates of non-religious private schools are more likely to send their children to private non-religious schools than are parents who graduated from any other sector, although family characteristics have more to do with this difference in enrollment patterns than do sector effects (see Figure 3).

In the US, parents who send their children to private nonreligious schools tend to have higher incomes than parents who send their children to public schools. To some extent, this is likely

Figure 3A: Private Non-Religious School Parent Characteristics

Compared to parents of public school students, parents with children in **private non-religious** schools tend to...

IN THE U.S.	IN CANADA
have higher income	have older kids
more frequently attend religious services	

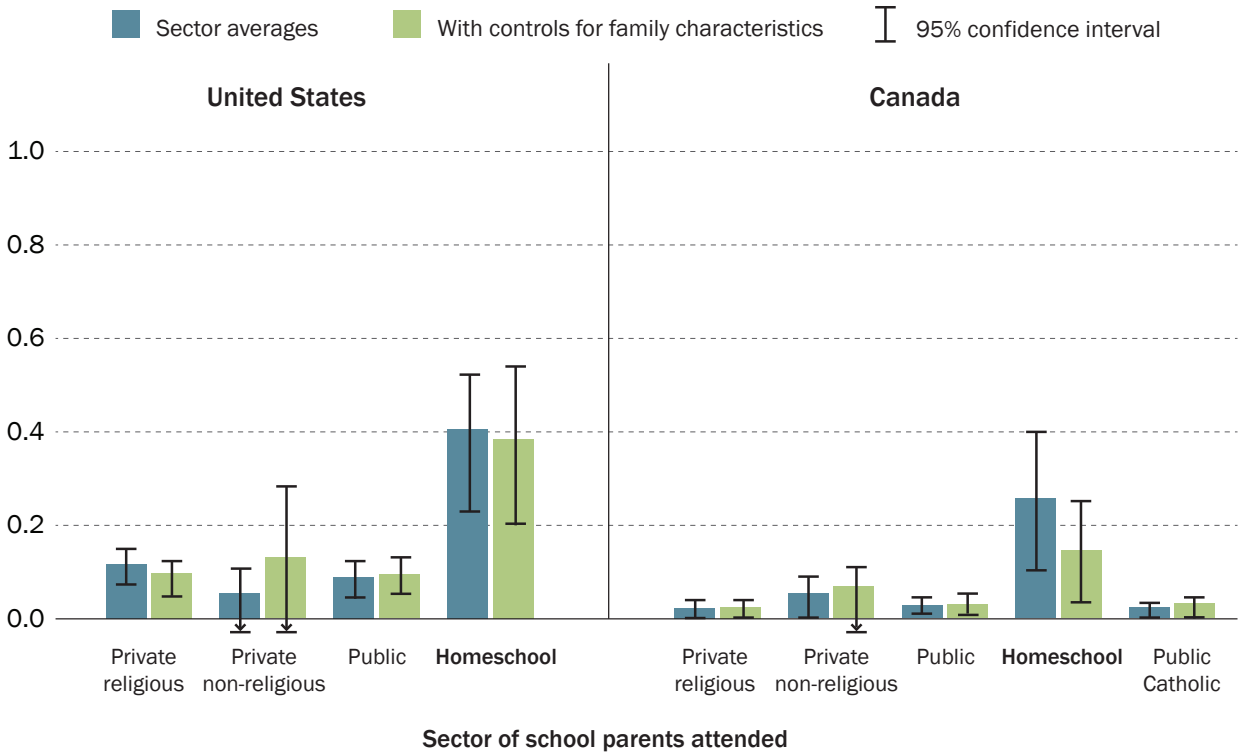
a function of the high cost of tuition since, according to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2013), the average tuition for a private nonreligious elementary school in the US is over $18,000 per year. It may also result from the role of nonreligious private schools in strategies for maintaining upper class positions, especially since the income difference is only significantly different among respondents with household incomes above $125,000 per year. Surprisingly, US parents who send their children to nonreligious private schools also attend church more frequently than parents who send their children to public schools. Since this finding is net of income and educational level, it may reflect a high level of civic engagement that includes religious attendance. Future studies are necessary to sort out why religious attendance is related to nonreligious private schooling.

Family characteristics that are associated with private non-religious school attendance in Canada indicate that financial resources possibly play a different role in Canada than in the US. The oldest child of Canadian parents who opt for nonreligious private schools is older, on average, than the first child of parents who enroll their children in public schools. This could reflect parents strategically investing in private non-religious education in later primary or secondary years—closer to the time that their child will earn a high school credential.

Homeschooling

Homeschooling is most popular among parents who were homeschooled. After taking into consideration background, resources, religiosity, and family characteristics, our model indicates that one out of every three parents who were home-

Figure 4: Proportion Schooling Children at Home



schooled during their high school years in the US elect to homeschool their own children (see Figure 4). In Canada, one in six homeschooled adults educates their children at home.

In both countries, homeschooling is the most likely choice for those who were homeschooled themselves, although the difference between homeschooled parents and those from private non-religious high school graduates is not statistically meaningful.

The intergenerational continuity of homeschooling is particularly interesting because homeschooled students are often educated independent of traditional educational institutions. This means the homeschooled children of homeschooled parents are learning from parents who might not have had exposure to formal primary or secondary schools. In fact, adults who were homeschooled are less likely to earn postsecondary credentials (Sikkink and Skiles 2015).

If these homeschooled parents have parents who were themselves homeschooled, or if their homeschooled children choose to homeschool their own children when they become adults, those third-generation homeschoolers will in many cases be two generations removed from more mainstream forms of public or private schooling."Hybrid" schooling options, including homeschooling co-ops, part-time enrollment in institutional schools, "dual-credit" college courses, and many online courses help to blur the line between home and traditional education. But the findings we have for the past two generations point to an intergenerational separation from traditional educational institutions among homeschooling families.

Regarding characteristics that predict homeschool environments in the US, we found that the age of the oldest child is negatively related to the likelihood of the child presently being schooled at home. In other words, parents chose homeschooling for children who are significantly younger, on average, relative to the enrollment decision of parents who send their children to public school. We posit three possible reasons for this pattern: (1) as children progress to upper secondary grades, parents enroll the children they have been teaching at home in a public or private high school in order to earn a credential (degree) from a formal institution; (2) the content material covered in secondary coursework exceeds the capacities (or perceived capacities) of parent-teachers; or (3) parents might "optimize" limited financial resources by waiting to strategically invest in private schooling later in the educational pipeline.

In both countries, the likelihood of choosing homeschool rather than public school increases with family size. This likely reflects that parents are either consciously or unconsciously influenced by economies of scale associated with educating children at home. In other words, parents may view the opportunity cost of a parent opting out of the labor market to stay home to educate one child as much higher than if there are three children at home to teach. Perhaps also the higher number of children makes it difficult to consider private religious schools, which would otherwise be a viable option for many religious homeschool-

Figure 4A: Homeschooling Parent Characteristics

Compared to parents of public school students, parents with **homeschooled** children tend to...

IN THE U.S.	IN CANADA
have more kids	have more kids
have younger kids	have older kids
have lower income	more frequently attend religious services
be older parents	
more frequently attend religious services	

ing families.

Our models also indicate that religiosity plays a role in the decision to homeschool. In both the US and Canada, frequent religious service attendance is positively related to homeschool enrollment, relative to public school enrollment. Perceived conflict with public school culture may play a role in such enrollment decisions.

In addition, in both countries, there is a relationship between age and the decision to homeschool. In the US, parents who chose homeschooling are older than public school parents. In Canada, it is the kids who are older—children educated at home are older than students in public schools. This pattern is the opposite of what we observed in the United States. We speculate that this could have something to do with parents' desire to "protect" their children from environments that may be seen as troublesome for adolescents--such as peer pressure, or unhealthy social settings related to teen drug or alcohol use.

Finally, in the US we find that families who homeschool have lower household incomes than families who send their children to public schools. While there are a variety of arrangements for homeschooling, perhaps the most common is a parent who stays home to educate their own children. We posit that the difference in household income in the US reflects forgone income inherent in this model of homeschooling. With one parent at home teaching, the family income is based on one earner rather than two.

Figure 5: Proportion with Children Enrolled in Public Catholic Schools (CA)

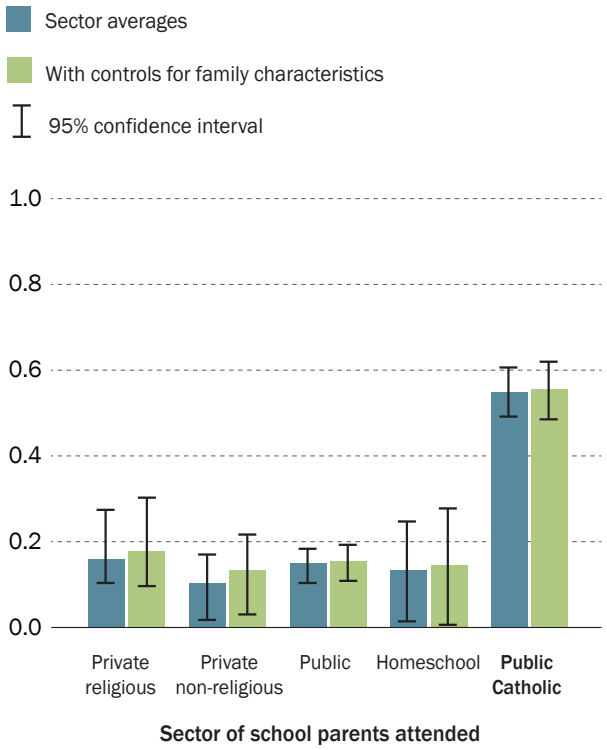


Figure 5A: Public Catholic School Parent Characteristics

Compared to parents of public non-religious school students, parents with children in **public Catholic** schools tend to...

IN CANADA
have higher income
have older kids
more frequently attend religious services

Public Catholic School Enrollment

Unlike the United States, Canada offers parents the option of publicly-funded Catholic schools. Religious institutions played an important role in the early development of education in both the US and Canada. Many areas of Canada developed parallel Protestant and Catholic public school systems.

The strongest argument for intergenerational consistency in school sector is observed among Canadian parents who attended public Catholic high schools. Despite the controversy surrounding the public funding of religious instruction, adults

who were educated in public Catholic schools are, generally speaking, committed to enrolling their children in similar schools. Nearly 57% of public Catholic school graduates elect to send their children to the same type of schools they attended, making them far more likely than parents who attended any other sector to select public Catholic schools for their children, as seen in Figure 5.

In some ways the parents who elect to send their children to public Catholic schools in Canada look similar to parents who send their children to secular private schools in the US, in that relative to parents who send their children to secular public schools, public Catholic school families have a higher household income and attend religious services more frequently.

As with families who homeschool, those with children enrolled in public Catholic schools also tend to have older children than families who send their kids to secular public schools.

Conclusion

Our evidence suggests that parents are true to their school when it comes to schooling choices for children. Still, in the US and Canada the non-religious public school choice is widely accepted. Regardless of which type of school a parent attended, the majority of parents send their children to non-religious public schools. The only exception is found among graduates of public Catholic schools in Canada, who tend to send their children to publicly-funded Catholic schools. However, the rate at which parents enroll their children in public schools varies by sector. Private religious school parents in particular are likely to opt out of the nonreligious public school options.

When looking at enrollment patterns across sectors, we find evidence suggesting an intergenerational continuity effect in school sector enrollment. For each sector discussed in this report, parents who graduated from a particular sector are the ones most likely to enroll their kids in that type of school, suggesting commitment to these schools' curricular or missional objectives as well as social networks that channel schooling information and experiences toward the familiar schooling choice.

Additionally, parents who were homeschooled are considerably more likely to homeschool their own children than are parents who were educated in more formal educational institutions. Whatever the long-term impact of homeschooling on graduates, continuity in this sector has the potential for compounding these outcomes across generations within families that are largely separated from formal educational institutions.

In addition, we find interesting differences in the factors that predict enrollment in each sector. Frequent religious service attendance predicts educating one's children at home in both the US and Canada. This makes sense given the fact that a common reason for selecting to homeschool children is to provide religious or moral instruction (Hoelzle 2013, Kunzman 2009, Vigilant et al 2013). Further, in Canada, religious service attendance predicts enrollment in religious schools, as might be expected. In the US, however, frequent religious service attendance is associated with enrolling one's children in non-religious private schools, *but not* religious private schools. We expect that we might have seen a religious service attendance effect for religious private school enrollment in the US, as we did in Canada, given a larger sample. The religious service attendance effect on private secular school enrollment is interesting, however, and might capture a measure

of social capital associated with religious service attendance for graduates of such schools (Putnam 2000).

Finally, we find that like religious service attendance, income is positively associated with choosing to enroll one's children in private non-religious schools in the US, and in public Catholic schools in Canada, suggesting similarity in these two subpopulations. Further research could examine the nature of and motivations for choosing US private non-religious schools and Canadian public Catholic schools to unpack this similarity. We do not find income differences between non-religious public and religious private school families. This may reflect the SES segregation within the public school system, in which many well-off families buy into school districts with strong academic programs. And it may reflect the importance of cultural factors in choosing a religious private school, such as a concern with moral or religious formation of students, which tends to draw interest from families across the SES spectrum. We also find that income is negatively associated with the choice to homeschool one's children in the US but not in Canada, suggesting interesting and likely meaningful differences in the homeschool populations in these two countries.

Implications

These findings help to unlock the mystery of selection that has plagued educational research on sector effects for decades. While many researchers have attempted to correct for selection statistically, we find evidence that parental educational sector, a variable not considered in other analyses that we are aware of, impacts where parents decide to send their children for school. Future research on the topic of school choice should take parents' own sector into consideration when possible. It should be noted that the CES survey only includes data for the respondent's sector of high school graduation, not the respondent's child's other parent's sector. Therefore, to the extent that respondents and their spouses or co-parents attended different sectors, there is some measurement error in our models that could be corrected in future studies by collecting data for both parents' sectors, when applicable.

For practitioners, our results suggest that schools seeking to increase applications or enrollment might consider the intergenerational consistency in their recruitment. Since parents send children to schools that are similar to schools from which they graduated, private religious schools might have success by targeting outreach to alumni, or by collaborating with other schools within the same sector on outreach to graduates. The private nonreligious efforts may succeed even potentially targeting parents from other private sectors, including homeschooling. Perhaps surprisingly, we don't find evidence that private religious schools may do well to target parents who experienced homeschooling. These strategies could help private schools capture an audience that is more likely to enroll their children in schools like theirs.

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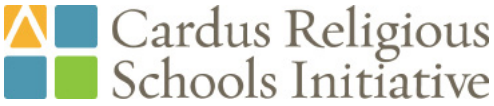

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