

Beyond Test Scores: Does Public Information about School Satisfaction and Violence Levels Affect Parental School Choice?

Abstract:

Amid the proliferation of school choice policies, substantial disparities persist in the quality of schools selected by high and low socioeconomic-status (SES) families. Can we decrease this gap by providing parents with better information, and if so, what information is effective at inducing parents to select better schools? To address these questions, I leverage a unique natural experiment in Israel, where a Supreme Court ruling mandated the public release of comprehensive school-level information. Employing a discrete choice model, an event study design, and a difference-in-difference approach, I examine the impact of this information disclosure on student school choice. I find that in regions with multiple school options, following the information disclosure, parents increasingly favor schools with better attributes. Notably, this shift is primarily attributed to factors such as violence levels and students' school satisfaction ratings, rather than test score information. Importantly, I find that the effect is driven by the increased response of lower SES households to the non-score related attributes, narrowing the preexisting selection gap from their high SES counterparts. Crucially, I establish a robust association between school violence levels and school value added measures, and find that lower SES households were more likely to select schools with higher value added following the information disclosure. Furthermore, I identify information sharing networks, based on shared ethnic and cultural ties, influencing school choices. My findings demonstrate the importance of providing a diverse set of school attribute information to enhance equity, academic outcomes and social mobility.