

Education, Land, and Location

For the past eight years, each of our annual land policy conferences has addressed a different theme; last year's explored the changing links between education, land, and location in light of the growing importance of school choice. The volume resulting from our 2013 conference—*Education, Land, and Location*, co-edited by Lincoln Institute Fellow Daphne A. Kenyon and me—includes contributions from eminent scholars in a range of social science disciplines from across the U.S., Chile, and England.

When children attend schools near their homes, a strong link arises between residential location and quality of education. That link is strengthened when schools rely heavily on funding from the local property tax, as in the United States. Indeed, part of a house price can be thought of as paying for a ticket into a particular school system. But what if school choice is unlinked from choice of residence?

In the 1960s, approximately one in ten schoolchildren in the United States attended a private school. Now, there are new forms of school choice such as magnet schools, inter-district and intra-district choice, charter schools, vouchers, and homeschooling. The best available data indicate that today between one-quarter and one-third of schoolchildren exercise some form of school choice.

This volume focuses on three policy issues. The first is racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic segregation. Within the decentralized system of U.S. local government, a great deal of such stratification is evident. As John R. Logan notes, the “average white child attends a school that is over 78 percent white.” The second is academic achievement gaps. Eric A. Hanushek concludes that the “gaps in achievement are stunning,” even though differences in high school attainment rates and scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress among whites, blacks, and Hispanics have converged somewhat. The third is a lack of equal opportunity flowing from residential segregation and academic achievement gaps. As Elizabeth J. Mueller and Shannon S. Van Zandt state, “Opportunities, in the form of good schools and other public services . . . are neither evenly distributed across regions nor accessible to all.”

The book is divided into four sections. The first reviews the literature, including Ellen B. Goldring and Walker Swain's



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loosely chronological account of residential location–schooling linkages in the United States. The second examines questions of school district organization and finance, including William A. Fischel's economic history of the structure of school districts, Andrew Reschovsky's assessment of the property tax as the key funding source for K–12 education, and Henry A. Coleman's examination of non-traditional sources of school funding. The

third considers the effects of charter school location, with contributions from Robert Bilfulco and John R. Logan; Julia Burdick-Will and Elisabeta Minca; and Stephen Machin and Anne West, who analyze academy schools—the equivalent of charter schools in England. The fourth section examines cases where education and location are unlinked, such as homeschooling in Virginia, analyzed by Luke C. Miller.

This volume presents some evidence, highlighted in Eric J. Brunner's chapter, that introduction of school choice reduces both the housing price premium associated with location in a high-quality school district and residential segregation. So far, however, these effects are less dramatic than one might suppose. One reason is that parents strongly prefer to send their children to neighborhood schools. Another reason is that the expense and availability of transportation limit the effective range of school choice. (Transportation costs are analyzed in the chapter by Kevin J. Krizek, Elizabeth J. Wilson, Ryan Wilson, and Julian D. Marshall.) One fascinating chapter on Chile, which implemented universal school vouchers in the 1980s, is instructive. One might have thought that school choice would reduce the school segregation inherent in residential segregation, but Carolina Flores found that socioeconomic segregation in schools is even greater than in residential neighborhoods. There are a number of reasons for this, including some schools' ability to select students or to charge fees.

It is possible, however, that a decade from now school choice may have a more profound impact on housing markets and residential choice. Technological changes have begun to upend college education. Perhaps elementary and secondary education will soon face changes just as fundamental, some of which have been foreshadowed by the analysis in this volume. **L**