School Choice and Ethnic Segregation

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Since the 1980s, ethnic segregation has become a feature of the educational landscape in many European countries. The article explores how school choice has influenced this stratification in Dutch primary schools. In contrast to earlier research, the authors found that the ethnic composition of schools plays an important role in the school choice of parents. The study shows that native Dutch parents are significantly more interested in a match between their social and cultural background and the pupil composition of schools than ethnic minority parents. Minority parents prefer schools with a good reputation and that focus on their educational problems (e.g., learning proper Dutch). Both groups of parents generally reject predominately "non-White" schools. The authors also found other factors influencing the segregation patterns of schools (e.g., competition between schools and admission policies).

Keywords: *school choice; ethnic segregation; parents' preferences*

THE CONCENTRATION OF SOCIAL and ethnic groups and their segregation relative to other groups in schools are phenomena as old as education itself. Just like residential segregation (in the form of ghettos, working-class and middle-class districts, "forbidden cities," Chinatown, and Little Italy), various forms of segregated education have existed since way back in time: elite schools (e.g., Eton), ragged schools, prep schools, and ethnically segregated schools in the British and Dutch colonies. There is also a long history of ideas and efforts to encourage school integration: the idea of the *common*

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school in the United States, the socialist movement's efforts to bring about a *unified school,* and the postwar policy of comprehensive education in Western Europe.

The history of empirical research into school segregation, on the other hand, is not so long. In contrast with the United States, where research into racial segregation was started following the Supreme Court's 1954 decision, the first European studies date from the late 1980s (Adler, Pech, & Tweedie, 1989; Alba, Handl, & Müller, 1994; Commission for Racial Equality [CRE], 1989; Everts et al., 1986; Teunissen, 1988; Van Breenen & Dijkstra, 1989). In this period, the consequences of the influx of mainly non-Western migrants were becoming evident throughout Western Europe (Fase, 1994).

Of particular concern was the fact that the outcomes of the process of integration through education and work remained below expectations. The level of achievement of different ethnic minority groups remained behind that of other children. Too few of them completed their training, and a large proportion dropped out. Furthermore, society's need for well-trained people was rapidly increasing while demand for unskilled labor continued to fall. Partly due to this, the labor market failed to improve, and the participation of ethnic minorities fell below that of the total population (WRR, 1989). That is why in the Netherlands and elsewhere in Europe, people began to ask for the first time what effect segregated education had on the performance and integration of migrants and what policies might be implemented to counteract possible negative consequences (Dors, Karsten, Ledoux, & Steen, 1991).

When in the 1990s school choice became a prominent issue on the policy agenda in many Western countries (Hirsch, 1994), international researchers began to study the influence of parental choice on the stratification of education along socioeconomic and ethnic lines (Vincent, 1992; Waslander & Thrupp, 1995; Wells, 1993; Wells & Crain, 1992; Willms & Echols, 1992). Critics of increased freedom of choice, especially in countries where traditionally public education had a monopolistic position (United States, United Kingdom, France), expressed concern about the "creaming off" of high-performing pupils, as a result of which some (i.e., mainly public) schools would become a "repository" for pupils at risk (Broccolichi & Van Zanten, 2000; Cobb & Glass, 1999; Gibson & Asthana, 2000; Lee, 1995). Proponents, on the other hand, saw the introduction of greater freedom of choice for parents and pupils (for instance, through "magnet schools") as precisely the means of achieving integration, as compulsory forms of desegregation (such as "bussing") had failed in practice (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Raywid, 1990).[1]

The Netherlands is an excellent country in which to study the relationship between parental choice and different patterns of segregation because of its long history of free choice of schools, the variety of its schools, and the social

and cultural diversity of its population. Given the large number of schools, the population density, the good transport facilities, and the minimal differences between schools in terms of funding arrangements by the government and parents, the Dutch situation offers ideal opportunities for empirically testing several assumptions in the international debate (Dijkstra, Dronkers, & Karsten, 2001). This article reports on a study into two questions of this debate:

1. To what extent does the exercise of choice by parents play a role in the creation and persistence of segregated elementary schools?
2. What factors other than choice contribute to the creation and persistence of segregated elementary schools?

ETHNIC PREFERENCES OF PARENTS UNDER CHOICE

In Dutch and other studies into the motives informing parental choice, until now it has been difficult to determine whether ethnic composition plays an important role in choosing a school. The dynamics of school choice are complex and hard to study. We will briefly discuss some of the most important institutional and methodological problems. First, the degree of freedom of choice varies over time. Until recently, in many countries there was no freedom of choice in this matter (for example, the United States, England, France, and New Zealand). Meanwhile, freedom of school choice has increased in some countries and greater segregation appears to result from this (Willms & Echols, 1992, on Scotland; Gibson & Asthana, 2000, on England; Waslander & Thrupp, 1995, on New Zealand; Broccolichi & Van Zanten, 1997, on France). Some (Gorard, 1997), however, argue that it will take time before the education market demonstrates a certain maturity and finds a new balance. In view of the fact that there has been freedom of school choice in the Netherlands since 1917, it could be assumed that the time factor there would be less significant.

Second, the outcomes of parents exercising choice can vary with the location of the schools and the interaction between parents, schools, and governing bodies (Gewirtz, Ball, & Bowe, 1995). This is an important reason for considering local circumstances in research on the subject (Taylor, 2001). After all, parents are not the only players in the local market. The profile of schools (market niche) and the actual admission practices can be influenced to some extent by governing bodies and school leaders. Some (Herbert, 2000) even speak in this context of "head teachers as gate keepers on an uneven playing field."

Third, there are methodological problems in demonstrating the extent to which parents consider the social and ethnic composition of a school when making their choice. Dutch studies (Van Breenen et al., 1991; Van der Wouw, 1994) indicated that a substantial group of parents has a preference for particular educational methods (e.g., Montessori, Steiner) or religious denominations (e.g., Catholic, Muslim, or Protestant) and is prepared to travel great distances to reach such schools. As White families and ethnic minorities have different preferences in this regard, the net effect is a degree of segregation. Consequently, the ethnic preferences of these White families are never made manifest. On the other hand, parents without such specific preferences who choose from among their local schools often select the one that also matches their own ethnic background: something they deny, however, when asked directly.

A small-scale study of school choice in a major Dutch city (Ledoux, Koopman, & Schaap, 1999) found that the composition of the school population did not emerge as a motive when people were asked about their positive preferences but did emerge as a "negative" motive (reason *not* to choose a particular school). Other researchers (Bagley, Woods, & Glatter, 2001) have also pointed out that most studies into the exercise of choice focus on positive motives, so the chance is great that only responses that are considered socially desirable will be found. This is an important reason for adopting a research approach, as we did in our study, that also investigates reasons for rejecting certain schools.

To avoid the problem of socially desirable answers, one also can study actual behavior. Glazerman's (1998) study of the actual choices made by parents in Minneapolis after the expansion of parental choice in that city is interesting in this context. His analyses showed that parents do not choose the schools with the best average results. He found that traditional measures of quality such as exam results and indicators of "added value" are hardly, if at all, predictors of school choice behavior. Ethnicity, distance, and environment, on the other hand, were strong predictors. His analyses suggested that expanding choice could ultimately lead to severe but not total segregation by race and ethnicity. Similar research has also been conducted in the Netherlands (Dijkstra, Jungbluth, & Ruiter, 2002). These researchers demonstrated that parents ultimately choose a school with a similar clientele, a phenomenon that occurs to almost the same degree in both private and public Dutch schools. The problem with these studies of actual behavior, however, is that they only show the results of choice, without affording any insight into how those choices were made and what local circumstances played a role.

Schneider and Buckley (2001) demonstrated an original approach to investigating parents' actual choice behavior. They studied the search

behavior of about 1,200 parents on an Internet site giving extensive information on all public schools in Washington, D.C. The site contains information on various aspects of the schools, including location, pupil composition, test scores, mission statements, and curricula. Each visitor to the site was asked to enter certain background information, allowing the researchers to establish the educational background of the sample of parents as well as their search patterns (what data they searched for). Their study revealed a strong behavioral bias toward accessing the demographic characteristics of the student population, which is in marked contrast to verbal reports of the importance of race. They also found that the composition of the pupil population played a greater role among well-educated parents than among less well-educated parents. However, this type of research approach is not often possible for reasons of privacy.

Our study is based on the assumption that the choice of a school is a complex decision-making process in which a number of factors play a role and that this choice is made in a local market with schools where various actors (especially school principals) are trying to influence the choice behavior of parents. In that decision-making process, we distinguish not only factors such as information, influence of others, and positive motives for choice, but also the reasons parents give for rejecting particular schools. Not only can these (negative) reasons provide greater insight into the choice process as such, they can also offer us clues to the extent to which those choice patterns can be influenced.

THE DUTCH SETTING

Traditionally, the principle that parents should be given the opportunity to organize and choose the kind of education they want has been central to the Dutch education system. A long struggle conducted under the slogan "schools to the parents" resulted in a historic compromise in 1917. That compromise led to equal funding for public and private schools (Karsten & Teelken, 1996). As a result of this, about 65% of all pupils attend private schools. However, as Ritzen, Van Dommelen, and De Vijlder (1997) remarked, in the first decades following the compromise, parents rarely saw the freedom to choose in its contemporary sense of "consumer choice." Until the 1960s, every child simply attended the school that matched their parents' religious or other beliefs. Education was therefore segregated along denominational lines.

The equal funding of public and private schools was accompanied by legislation demanding that schools meet certain requirements for the curriculum and qualification of teachers. Because both private and public schools had to

fulfill the same quality requirements and were funded to the same level, the differences in quality were not made manifest. Only recently, researchers (Dronkers, 1995) showed that schools differ in their effectiveness, which parents directly or indirectly take into account. Research into the motivations behind parental choice of schools in the Netherlands (Witziers & De Groot, 1993) has demonstrated that since the 1970s, the importance of religious motivations has declined while the importance of "quality" aspects has increased. Many observers (Dijkstra et al., 2001; Dronkers, 1995; Louis & Van Velzen, 1991) have concluded, therefore, that the traditional divisions along religious dividing lines have been gradually replaced by a new dividing mechanism, namely that of the (quasi-) market in which competition is based on the success of the schools.

Since the 1970s and 1980s, a strong desecularization of Dutch society and the influx of large numbers of immigrants, especially in the largest cities of the country, have increased the social and ethnic segregation in Dutch schools (Karsten, 1994; Karsten & Teelken, 1996). Not all schools in the whole country exhibit the same degree of concentration or segregation. There is an uneven distribution of children from ethnic minorities in the different parts of the country, in different districts within the larger cities, and also among schools of different denominations. By far the majority of schools with over half of their pupils deriving from ethnic minorities are found in the four major cities in the west of the country: Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, and Utrecht. Within these cities the distribution between different districts is uneven. However, remarkably, not all of the schools within the same district have the same concentration of ethnic minorities.

Figures for 2000 from the Ministry of Education, Science and Cultural Affairs, show that in the period 1991-1999, the number of schools with a "high concentration" of ethnic minority pupils (70% or more) increased further. The growth is slow and very limited outside the major cities. In the four major cities, 35% of schools currently have more than 70% ethnic minority pupils, but the greatest growth stems from the preceding five years (1985-1990), when the percentage of concentration in schools in the four major cities rose from 15 to 30%. Comparing the pupil populations of these schools with those of the districts in which they are located, it turns out that in the Netherlands 6.2% of elementary schools have populations that differ from the neighborhood population (more than a 20 percentage point difference). Over half of these are in the major cities, and almost half are public schools.

With data from a representative sample survey of 500 Dutch elementary schools, Dijkstra et al. (2002) also investigated the interaction between socioeconomic and ethnic segregation. Their analysis showed that segregation does not occur only along ethnic lines. Only 30% of the schools have a mixed

school population in which no single group dominates. The remaining schools count predominantly pupils with highly educated parents (17%), pupils whose parents have a middle level vocational training (36%), pupils with White parents with a lower level vocational training (14%), and, finally, pupils with non-White parents with a low level of vocational training (predominantly Turkish-Moroccan schools).

METHOD

This section briefly describes the sampling procedure, the techniques of data collection, and the instrument used in our study.

As our research was aimed primarily at proving ethnic-specific choices of schools and not at giving representative insight into choice behavior in all situations, we opted for a design in which choice was possible in the most direct local situations, and in which, therefore, the chances were great that ethnic-specific choices could be made. What this meant is that, in relation to the composition of the population in the direct environment, both a "too-White" and a "not-too-White" school are present.[2] We used as a starting point a database compiled by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Science and Cultural Affairs, on the pupil composition of all Dutch elementary schools and the ethnic composition of the population in the postcode districts where the schools are located.[3]

The database enabled us to compare the following two kinds of data:

- the percentage ethnic minority pupils per school and
- the percentage of ethnic minority children (in the age group 4-12 years) in the postcode district of the school.

When the first percentage is significantly (±23% or more) different from the second, the school can be called segregated: these schools are referred to as "White" or "non-White" schools from now on. Schools that do not differ significantly from the percentage ethnic minority population in the postcode district are called "representative schools." In this way we identified 445 schools out of 7,202 schools in the database as being segregated: 296 schools are too non-White and 149 schools are too White. [4] For some of these schools, this was to be expected. These are the Muslim (24), Hindu (1), orthodox Reformed (13), Reformed (7), and Steiner schools (16).

For our sample, we started with districts that have both White and non-White schools. These are the districts in which we would have a reasonable chance of tracking down segregation processes. There were 40 postcode

districts like this with a total of 163 schools (103 of which are segregated). As one of the four major cities was entirely unrepresented in this, we included a number of adjacent postcode districts in the city concerned in the sample. Finally, we sought out a number of districts with Muslim schools so that we could investigate their possible effects on the local market of schools. Taking all these factors together, this produced a target sample of 190 schools in 49 postcode districts.

Final Sample

A written request to take part in the study was sent to all schools in the 49 selected postcode districts. Based on the response, 11 postcode districts with a total of 52 schools were selected for the study, of which a relatively large number of schools reasonably well-spread over the country (including urban and rural districts) were willing to take part. The schools finally recruited for the study were in these 11 postcode districts. Eventually, 43 schools agreed to take part, including 13 non-White and 13 White schools. Of the 9 schools unwilling to take part, there were 2 non-White, 3 White, and 4 representative schools.

Survey and Telephone Interviews

At the participating schools, all the parents who had chosen the school in question during the past 2 years were surveyed. The school distributed written questionnaires among the parents. The questionnaires were entirely anonymous; however parents were asked to give their postcode so that distance to the school and to possible alternative schools could be determined. We also interviewed all the school principals of the participating schools by telephone.

The survey instrument included questions about the families and their characteristics, how they went about choosing a school, and what their motives were in doing so. To make the questions about motives as concrete as possible, schools in the same postcode district as the chosen school were mentioned by name in the questionnaire. Parents were asked whether they saw these schools as an option when making their decision and on what grounds particular schools were not considered as a real option for their children. We also asked them about the sources of information they used when choosing a school. We included a couple of questions about distance to the school and about switching to other schools. Finally, we asked parents for their opinions on a number of matters related to the ethnic composition of schools. We based our questionnaire on several national and international

studies (Bagley et al., 2001; Breenen & Dijkstra, 1989; Gorard, 1999; Ledoux et al., 1999; Teunissen, 1988; Van der Wouw, 1994).

Using written questionnaires has one major disadvantage: the response from ethnic minority parents is generally low. Previous Dutch research (Driessen, Van Langen, & Vierke, 2000) demonstrated the existence of a clear relationship between education level and social background, on the one hand, and response to the parent questionnaire, on the other hand: generally, more highly educated parents responded better than less highly educated parents. With regard to specific minority groups (specifically Turks and Moroccans), the response is generally even lower. This undoubtedly is related to the low degree of fluency in Dutch among these groups of parents. On the other hand, in general, in selecting a school there is a distinction between "active" and "passive" choosers (Willms & Echols, 1992). In all probability, the active choosers among both the White Dutch parents and the minority parents reacted in this research.

The interview schedule included questions about the local market and specific local factors that might cause segregation. We asked the school principals about the historical development of White and non-White flight in the district concerned and at the school in question, as well as the current policy of the school and the governing body with respect to these issues. The school principals were also asked for their opinions about parents' motives for choosing or not choosing their school and were asked about possible explanations for the existence of segregated schools in the district.

FINDINGS

Survey

In this section, we report most of the findings relevant to how parents engage in choice and to how much the ethnic composition plays a role in the choice process. The findings are based on data from 931 parents of pupils at 37 schools in 11 districts with both non-White and White schools. The response rate per postcode district hovered around 37% for all districts but varied—as expected—by type of school. The average response rate at the White schools was higher than at the non-White schools, where the average was between 23% and 27%.[5] A classification of ethnic background based on the country of birth of both parents was produced for the various analyses. A classification of the educational level of the family was also constructed based on the education followed and qualifications achieved by the parents. Finally, the parents were asked what church, faith community, or religious or ideological group they considered themselves as belonging to.

Distance. As previous research has shown that parents prefer to choose an elementary school from among the schools in their locality, we first used a Geographical Information System (GIS)[6] to calculate the distance between the home address and the address of the school. This analysis revealed that parents at the representative schools lived closest to those schools: three quarters lived less than 1 km from the school. Many parents at non-White schools also lived less than 1 km away, but there were also more parents who lived slightly further away (1½ km or more). The White schools, however, had more parents living at a greater distance from the school. Another trend that emerged was that both the small group of native Dutch parents at the non-White schools and the small group of ethnic minority parents at the White schools often lived closer to the school than the "dominant" group at those schools; however, the numbers were too small to be statistically significant.

Second, we asked whether the parents had considered other schools from other postcode districts for their child as a good option. The analysis of the replies revealed that about 70% of the parents had "not considered any" schools outside their local area (postcode district). A clear link, however, was found between the ethnic and educational background of the parents and the fact of considering schools outside the district as an option: native Dutch parents took schools that are further away more often in consideration, and the higher their level of education the more likely they were to consider the schools outside the district. There was also a correlation with the type of school that was chosen. Parents of pupils at White schools had considered schools outside the district most often and parents at non-White schools least often.

Positive motives. We presented the parents a series of 24 motives and asked them to indicate how important these were in their choice of a school for their child. These motives could be grouped together into five dimensions, which played an important role in the choice process (the construction of this scale is outlined in greater detail in the appendix). These dimensions were:

- *distance* and location (in the local neighborhood, safe route to school)
- *academic standard* (reputation of the school, assessment of the Inspectorate, number of transfers to higher forms of secondary education)
- *match* between home and school (with respect to culture, religious convictions, social milieu, etc.)
- degree of *differentiation* at the school (attention for both slow learners and fast learners, and attention for pupils who are non-native speakers)
- *curriculum and facilities* (time for creative subjects, out-of-school activities, pleasant building, well-maintained appearance, etc.)

A score for each of these dimensions was calculated ranging from 1 (*not at all important in our choice of this school*) to 5 (*very important in our choice of this school*).

Using regression analysis, we investigated differences between parents characterized by ethnic background (Turkish or Moroccan, Surinamese or Antillean, other ethnic minority background, with Dutch/Western as the reference category) and type of school (non-White or White, with representative as the reference). We used the parents' educational level as a control variable and added interaction effects of ethnic background and type of school. Table 1 shows the average scores for the five motives and the parameter estimates from the regression analyses.

With the exception of the curriculum/facilities motive, on average, most motives score high. Except for a match with home, all motives are less important for higher educated parents. Checking this effect of education, the distance motive is more important for Surinamese and Antillean than for Dutch parents. Moreover, this motive is clearly less important for parents of children at White schools. Although standard and reputation seem to be most important for Turkish and Moroccan parents, significant interactions are found here. Ethnic parents at White schools tend to have higher scores, whereas Dutch parents at non-White schools score lower on this motive.

Compared to the other motives, a match with home is equally important for both higher and lower educated parents. This motive seems to weigh less for ethnic parents, especially those with a Turkish or Moroccan background.

For the last two motives, the pattern of differences found in the regression analysis is more or less the same. After checking for the educational level, parents with children at White schools score significantly lower, whereas Surinamese and Antillean parents scored higher. Again, significant interaction effects are found: the small group of Turkish and Moroccan parents at White schools has considerably higher averages for both motives.

We also examined separately the religious or ideological beliefs of the parents and the weight given to the item "this school has the same philosophy of life as we do." This item only played a significantly stronger role for the Protestant parents (average 4.2). There were no differences between the parents of other faiths or philosophies of life; they scored 3.5 on average on this item.

The process of choosing. We also asked parents a number of questions about the process of choosing a school and the information they used. In the first place, we found that most parents did not find choosing an elementary school very difficult. On a scale of 1 (*very easy*) to 5 (*very difficult*), the average response was 2.5: right between *easy* and the neutral category *not easy/*

Table 1
Role of Positive Motives in Choice of Present School: Grand Mean (on Scale 1-5) and Coefficients of Linear Regression on Education, Ethnic Background, and Type of School (n *from 853 to 876)*

	Distance	*Standard/ Reputation*	*Match With Home*	*Differentiation*	*Curriculum/ Facilities*
Grand mean	3.72	3.84	3.71	3.78	3.32
Standard deviation	0.83	0.70	0.59	0.75	0.56
Regression coefficients					
Intercept	4.02	3.92	3.75	4.31	3.70
Educational level	–0.09**	–0.04*	0.00	–0.15**	–0.10**
Ethnic background (Dutch/Western reference)					
Turkish/Moroccan	–0.09	0.26*	–0.42**	–0.04	–0.15
Surinamese/Antillean	0.28*	0.12	–0.11	0.34**	0.19*
Other	0.21	0.19	–0.15	0.27*	0.12
Type of school (representative reference)					
White school	–0.53*	–0.36	–0.15	–0.61**	–0.36*
Non-White school	0.09	0.29	0.19	0.06	0.03
Interactions ethnic background and type of school					
Dutch on White school	0.43	0.30	0.30	0.36	0.21
Dutch on non-White school	0.45	–0.68**	–0.34	–0.36	–0.31
Turkish/Moroccan on White school	0.33	0.70*	0.28	1.07**	0.76**
Turkish/Moroccan on non-White school	–0.15	–0.33	–0.12	0.19	0.00
Surinamese/Antillean on White school	0.09	0.61*	0.00	0.26	0.20
Surinamese/Antillean on non-White school	–0.39	–0.22	–0.36	–0.15	–0.28
R^2	.050	.073	.102	.160	.094

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

not difficult. Ethnic minority parents found the choice a little more difficult on average (2.7) than Dutch parents (2.4), especially Moroccan parents who had an average score of 3.1.

Parents often heard about the elementary schools in the district at their preschool playgroup or day nursery. Almost 90% of the children of the parents in the survey had attended some kind of preschool facility. This percentage was higher among native Dutch parents (94%) than among ethnic minority parents (78%), and the percentage increased as the parents' level of education increased. Of the parents whose child had attended a preschool playgroup or crèche, 61% had heard about the various local elementary schools there; this percentage did not vary between the native Dutch and ethnic minority parents. This information was especially important to ethnic minority parents in making their choice of elementary school: they scored an average of 3.5 on a scale of 1 (*not important at all*) to 5 (*very important*); the native Dutch parents scored 3.0, right in the middle of the scale.

Over three quarters of the parents visited the school they eventually selected before making their choice, and both ethnic minority and native Dutch parents reported that the information they received there was important (score 4.1). In addition, about 40% of the parents visited other schools. In general, native Dutch parents made more visits to schools than ethnic minority parents, and better educated parents made more visits to schools than less well-educated parents.

Finally, information from the Inspectorate (which is published on the Internet) and information about the results of the final tests were of little importance: only 10% of the parents had sought out this kind of information about the schools.

Nonchosen schools. First, we asked the parents to briefly assess all the schools in their (postcode) district. Then we asked them to consider a school that they felt was definitely unsuitable for their child and to indicate why they felt this way using the negative choice motives mentioned earlier. An initial analysis of the answers suggested that all the parents, virtually without exception, consider the school their child attends as suitable. The judgments of other schools in the same district vary greatly.

Table 2 shows the correlation between the views of the parents and the type of school being assessed. This table shows that the local non-White schools were most often judged *not at all suitable* (56.7%). The White schools received this assessment least often (20.8%). This assessment also varied with the ethnic origin of the parents. Of the native Dutch parents, 60.3% considered the non-White schools in their locality to be completely unsuitable; fewer ethnic minority parents were of this opinion (but still

45.3% of them did think this, considerably more than the number of ethnic minority parents who considered the representative and White schools to be completely unsuitable: about 25%).

The data on the various opinions of native Dutch and ethnic minority parents, which are expressed as percentages above, can also be expressed as an average score, where 1 = *suitable*, 2 = *less suitable*, and 3 = *not at all suitable*. The higher the average score, the less suitable the school is considered to be.

We used regression analysis to explore the combined effects on these parental evaluations of ethnic background, type of school their child attended, and educational level. In Table 3 are presented the averages and coefficients of the regression.

Again, the grand means clearly show that White schools are considered the most suitable. There are no significant effects in the opinions about White schools, indicating that all groups of parents more or less share this view of White schools. Non-White schools are judged as most unsuitable, though this opinion is held less strongly by ethnic parents, especially those with Turkish or Moroccan backgrounds. In other words, native Dutch parents judge the non-White schools in their localities as the least suitable. Furthermore, parents with children in a non-White school see the other non-White schools in the locality as more suitable than parents in representative schools.

Negative motives. In addition to a general overall opinion on all the schools in the (postcode) district, we also asked the parents to choose one local school that they considered completely unsuitable and to indicate which out of 24 reasons were relevant to their assessment of this school as unsuitable for their child (the "negative" choice motives). Once again, the majority of these reasons could be combined in the five dimensions mentioned earlier.

Over one third of the parents reported that there was no school in the district they considered as completely unsuitable for their child, so these parents did not answer this question. For the remaining parents, we again used regression analyses to investigate whether the importance of the five negative choice dimensions was correlated with ethnic origin, type of school, and the level of the parents' education (see Table 4).

The most important reason for judging a school as completely unsuitable was a *mismatch* between home and school. That was followed by a poor academic standard and a lack of differentiation. Distance and curriculum and facilities were less important reasons for judging a school as unsuitable.

As with the positive motives, the regression analyses show some differences in terms of ethnic origin, educational level, and type of school. Match was more important for the native Dutch parents than for Turkish and Moroccan ones. The latter considered a poor academic standard and a lack of

Table 2
Opinions on Other Schools in the Locality, Distinguished by Type of School, Further Subdivided by Ethnic Origin of the Parents Assessing the Schools (shown as percentage; sample: 2,170 opinions from 689 parents)

	Representative School	*Non-White School*	*White School*	*Total*
Suitable	19.8	5.8	31.3	18.8
Less suitable	48.2	37.6	47.9	45.1
Not at all suitable	32.0	56.7	20.8	36.1

	Dutch/ Western	*Ethnic Minority*	*Dutch/ Western*	*Ethnic Minority.*	*Dutch/ Western*	*Ethnic Minority*
Suitable	17.7	28.0	2.3	18.0	30.2	34.0
Less suitable	48.6	46.4	37.4	36.7	50.6	41.1
Not at all suitable	33.8	25.6	60.3	45.3	19.2	24.8

differentiation to be important, more so than the native Dutch parents. Differentiation and curriculum and facilities were factors that lower educated parents deemed as more important for finding a school unsuitable than did higher educated parents. The distance motive as a reason for finding a school unsuitable played a more significant role for parents with children in a non-White school.

We also examined the role the item "the school has a different philosophy of life from us" played for parents with different religions of other ideological beliefs. As with the positive motives, this item turned out to play a stronger role for Protestant parents (average 3.8) than for all other groups of parents (average 3.4).

Finally, it is striking that almost half of the ethnic minority parents indicated that they would be willing to move to a different district where the education suited them better. Native Dutch parents state this significantly less. This could indicate that residential segregation is experienced as an impediment by ethnic minority parents.

Interviews With School Principals

In this section, we report on the main findings of the interviews with 43 school principals in 11 districts with both non-White and White schools. From the results of the interviews, we can conclude that it is a combination of mutually reinforcing factors that lead to a school attracting more and more ethnic minority pupils and fewer native Dutch pupils, or vice versa. An increasing proportion of ethnic minority pupils was found to be caused by (a)

Table 3
Opinions on Other Schools in the Locality: Grand Mean (on the scale 1 = suitable *to 3 =* not at all suitable*) and Coefficients of Linear Regression on Education, Ethnic Background, and Type of School (total of 2,148 opinions from 682 parents)*

	Opinion On		
	Representative Schools	*Non-White Schools*	*White Schools*
Number of opinions	970	617	561
Grand mean	2.12	2.51	1.89
Standard deviation	0.71	0.61	0.71
Regression coefficients			
Intercept	2.27	2.67	2.05
Educational level	–0.02	–0.03	–0.04
Ethnic background (Dutch/Western reference)			
Turkish/Moroccan	–0.19	–0.29**	–0.06
Surinamese/Antillean	–0.45**	–0.21	–0.09
Other	–0.05	–0.22	0.02
Type of school (representative reference)			
White school	0.11	0.12	–0.07
Non-White school	–0.34	–0.64*	–0.18
Interactions ethnic background and type of school			
Dutch on White school	–0.20	–0.08	–0.03
Dutch on non-White school	0.52	1.00	0.70
Turkish/Moroccan on White school	0.06	0.08	0.10
Turkish/Moroccan on non-White school	0.14	0.20	0.25
Surinamese/Antillean on White school	0.12	–0.05	0.22
Surinamese/Antillean on non-White school	0.32	—[a]	–0.17
R^2	.030	.078	.020

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$;
a. No opinions on other non-White schools in this group.

a growth in the number of ethnic minority families in the neighborhood, (b) the attractiveness of the school to ethnic minority parents, (c) native Dutch parents no longer choosing the school, and (d) a decrease in the number of native Dutch parents in the neighborhood. It seems, therefore, to be a combination of demographic trends in the district (influx and outflow of particular groups) and the choices made by parents (native Dutch parents begin avoiding a certain school, ethnic minority parents find that school of all schools attractive).

These push and pull factors were found especially in non-White schools. Once a school had a certain number of ethnic minority pupils, it became more attractive to new ethnic minority parents (the school attracted those parents) and then less attractive to native Dutch parents (the school put those parents

Table 4
*Role of Negative Motives in Finding a School Unsuitable: Grand Mean (on scale 1-5) and Coefficients of Linear Regression on Education, Ethnic Background, and Type of School (*n *from 502 to 538)*

	Distance	*Standard/ Reputation*	*Match With Home*	*Differentiation*	*Curriculum/ Facilities*
Grand mean	3.10	3.45	3.67	3.29	2.87
Standard deviation	0.95	0.91	0.75	0.92	0.70
Regression coefficients					
Intercept	2.92	3.55	3.86	3.50	3.17
Educational level	0.02	–0.04	–0.04	–0.09*	–0.11**
Ethnic background (Dutch/Western reference)					
Turkish/Moroccan	0.25	0.38*	–0.41**	0.71**	0.14
Surinamese/Antillean	0.26	0.14	–0.06	0.50*	0.25
Other –0.19	0.12	–0.08	0.26	0.31	
Type of school (representative reference)					
White school	0.36	–0.48	0.14	–0.31	–0.28
Non-White school	0.75*	0.18	–0.23	0.16	0.02
Interactions ethnic background and type of school					
Dutch on White school	–0.20	0.40	–0.07	0.16	0.27
Dutch on non-White school	–0.54	–0.06	0.10	–0.02	–0.47
Turkish/Moroccan on White school	–0.69	0.45	–0.02	0.10	0.55
Turkish/Moroccan on non-White school	–0.73	–0.35	0.25	–0.30	–0.09
Surinamese/Antillean on White school	–1.12*	0.78	–0.58	–0.06	0.39
Surinamese/Antillean on non-White school	–0.32	0.56	0.13	0.55	–0.32
R^2	.027	.044	.044	.137	.071

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

off). The result was Dutch parents no longer choosing the school, as well as native Dutch pupils leaving the school. Almost all non-White schools in our sample reported this exit behavior of native Dutch parents.

The White schools in our study seemed to be less sensitive to demographic trends. These were less often neighborhood schools and more often schools that served a specific group of parents and children because of their denomination (for instance, the only Protestant school in a largely Catholic area) or because of their attractiveness to parents from a particular social milieu (for instance, the well-educated who are keen to have their children make friends with children from their own social circle). The location of those schools did not seem to matter, and the more affluent parents were prepared to travel far.

Parents chose an elementary school in a specific, local setting in which there are several schools that can be seen as suppliers on a local market. The schools are also players in that process: They develop their own particular profiles, they do a lot of marketing, and they communicate with the parents seeking information. In our interviews with the school principals, we tried to gather data about what the schools themselves do to attract or even to deter parents (or particular groups of parents).

We found some, but not many, examples of schools that tried to "keep out" particular groups of parents and children (sometimes admitted by the principals of these schools themselves or reported by the principals of other local schools). Methods employed to do this included asking for a very high parental fee, using waiting lists for certain groups of pupils, limiting the number of children who do not speak fluent Dutch, only admitting pupils from a certain catchment area, advising parents to go to another school "because they will probably feel more at home there," or organizing the school in such a way that it is not attractive to a specific group. These forms of "gatekeeping" were often practiced by the White schools. Non-White schools adapted themselves, in their own words, "to the circumstances."

Sometimes schools made arrangements with other local schools about their admissions policies, for instance, by agreeing not to take children from parents "fleeing" another school or not to accept applications from another postcode district. However, these were often informal agreements, and it was not always possible to stick to them.

Non-White schools sometimes took specific measures to organize the education they were offering to be as good as possible for their target group by, for instance, using specific materials or methods, offering lessons for parents, offering (extra) professional development for teachers, or creating specific facilities such as a preschool group. The main aim of these measures was to develop the best and most suitable programs and not to make the school more attractive to ethnic minority parents and children. However, that can

often be the side effect of such measures: A school that develops in this way and also gets a certain reputation tends to attract that particular group of children and parents and put others off. It also gives other (White) schools arguments for referring ethnic minority parents on.

Another conspicuous fact is that there were schools that were not only White or non-White compared with the general population in the postcode district but that diverged from the average to an inordinate degree. The percentage ethnic minority pupils at the schools in the district sometimes varied in the extreme, even with schools of the same denomination (for example, a White and a non-White Protestant school in the same area). The principals interviewed often had an explanation for this. They pointed to the location of a school: It may be in the same postcode district but just in a neighborhood with private houses or just in an area with rented flats. Sometimes, however, the cause lay elsewhere. In particular, White schools with many children of well-educated parents sometimes seemed to withdraw completely from the patterns that affected other schools. They had their own clientele, a role that extended beyond neighborhood boundaries and frequently a specific mission. They also had less contact with other schools, adopting a kind of *insular position*. White schools with a strong religious identity ("strict" Protestant schools) were often in this position. On further consideration, however, this appeared to have less to do with the religious angle of the school and far more with the image that went with that in terms of standards and rules of behavior. Private schools were seen as less "free" or "stricter" than public schools, and that appealed to some groups of parents more than others. Furthermore, quite often private schools were less attractive to ethnic minority parents, who, being Muslim, preferred a school that is not of any Christian persuasion.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether parents make ethnically specific choices that lead to the development and persistence of segregated schools. We also looked at what other factors on the local schools market also play a role. It was the intention to study the mechanism of segregation and not the extent of ethnic segregation in Dutch elementary schools. This study clearly shows that the ethnic composition of the pupil population did play a role in the motives and mechanisms of school choice.

The first trend that emerged is that the parents in this study usually chose a nearby school in the local area. Rather more of the parents of pupils at White schools came from a bit further away, but a significant majority of them also lived in the same postcode district as the school. It also turned out that few schools outside the district were considered as an option. This may be

different in other parts of the Netherlands. For the purposes of this research, areas that had both non-White and White schools were deliberately chosen. If parents wanted, for instance, to choose a White school, there was one nearby in these districts. In general, native Dutch parents and better educated parents looked for alternative schools outside the area more often than did other parents.

Second, we found that ethnic minority and native Dutch parents gave different reasons for their choice. For native Dutch parents, the "match" between home and school was the most important factor; for ethnic minority parents the degree of differentiation and the academic standard of the school were more important. Degree of differentiation, academic standard of the school, and distance to the school were the most important motives for parents who had had little schooling, and these factors became less important as the level of education of the parents increased.

This study also asked parents explicitly to evaluate schools that they had not chosen. The responses to these questions clearly showed that the non-White schools in a locality were more often judged unsuitable, not only by native Dutch parents but also by ethnic minority parents. The White schools in a locality were most often judged to be suitable.

When asked why they considered a particular school unsuitable for their child, native Dutch parents gave a mismatch between home and school as the most important reason, followed by poor academic standards and the school having a bad reputation. Among ethnic minority parents, reputation/academic standard of the school and insufficient differentiation played a more important role than among native Dutch parents; the absence of a match between home and school played a less important role for the Turkish and Moroccan parents in particular.

The school principals reported that the variation in the ethnic composition of the schools was mainly due to general processes such as residential segregation but was also caused by schools (a) marketing certain profiles; (b) practicing all kinds of gatekeeping methods; and (c) competing among each other, leading to White and sometimes non-White flight. According to the principals, the White schools are often located in better parts of the district, cater for a larger area, and in some cases, pursue some kind of deterrent policy (waiting lists, admission criteria, "sending" ethnic minority parents to other schools, etc.). Agreements on proportional distribution generally appeared to be difficult to make and were vague and without commitment. Only the switching of pupils during the school year appeared generally not to be tolerated. Transfer (White flight) at the end of a school year occurred on a regular basis, however.

Ethnic segregation in elementary schools has been a general phenomenon in the Netherlands for more than 15 years. It is caused mainly by a combination of residential segregation, and, as our study proves, of parental choice and the gate-keeping practices of school principals. What is more difficult is devising an appropriate response to this situation. Despite the growing attention in the media for the phenomenon of ethnic segregation in education, the various policy makers were extremely reserved in seeking solutions in the 1980s and 1990s (Karsten, 1994). The sensitivity of the subject, in which freedom of choice plays an essential role, was too great for this (Louis & Van Velzen, 1991; Vermeulen, 2001). In fact, one may speak of irreconcilable differences between civil liberties in making residential and educational choices and the desire to combat the erosion of the cohesion of Dutch society. The government policy of allotting more teachers per students to schools with many minority pupils cannot reverse the process of segregation but will only cut off the sharp edges of it.

Now that it has become clear in the past few years that this policy is fairly ineffective and that the "failed" integration of migrants has become one of the most important Dutch political issues, nationally and locally voices are being heard for the first time that "something" has to be "done" about the segregation problem. The question, however, is whether some form of distribution of pupils in the four big cities—where segregation is the highest—can afford any solace. Unfortunately, the percentages of minority children have become too high for this. In the smaller cities, however, there are still sufficient possibilities—in collaboration with all of the school boards and the parents—for choosing a more balanced distribution. However, both school principals and parents, when asked about it explicitly, are very reluctant to curb freedom of choice (Karsten, Roeleveld, Ledoux, Felix, & Elshof, 2002). As a result, most stakeholders prefer to maintain the status quo. This could be an important lesson for countries where the parental freedom of choice has not enjoyed such a long tradition. There, it may be easier to discuss traditional rights and deep-seated convictions and arrive at a system of freedom of choice in which undesirable effects can better be combated.

APPENDIX
Positive and Negative Choice Motives: Construction of the Scale

In designing the questionnaire for parents, a number of groups of motives were distinguished. The groups included both positively worded questions, such as "How important were the reasons given below to you in your choice of the elementary school your child is currently attending?" and negatively worded questions, such as "How important were the reasons given below to you in deciding that this school is not

suitable for your child?" Using factor and homogeneity analyses, we analyzed whether the expected groups of motives could also be traced in the data. Eventually, the following choice motive scales were distinguished:

Quality: Academic Standards, Performance

Positive	*Negative*
alpha = .66; 3 items like: This school has a good reputation for academic standards Many children from this school go on to the higher types of secondary education	alpha = .78; 3 items like: This school has a bad reputation for academic standards Only a few children from this school go on to the higher types of secondary education

Match With Home

Positive	*Negative*
alpha = .61; 5 items like: This school has the same approach to education and upbringing as we do The ambiance at this school appeals to us (rules, approach to handling children) There are a lot of children with the same cultural background as us at this school (e.g., Dutch, Turkish, Moroccan, or Surinamese)	alpha = .63; 5 items like: This school has a different approach to education and upbringing than we do The ambiance at this school does not appeal to us (rules, approach to handling children) There are only a few children with the same cultural background as us at this school (e.g., Dutch, Turkish, Moroccan, or Surinamese)

Distance/Location

Positive	*Negative*
alpha = .78; 4 items like: This school is nearby There is a safe route to this school as far as traffic is concerned	alpha = .66; 3 items like: This school is too far to be reached on foot The route to this school is busy and dangerous

Quality: Differentiation

Positive	*Negative*
alpha = .68; 3 items like: This school gives a lot of help to children who do not yet speak Dutch very well This school makes sure that pupils who learn more quickly than the rest are given attention	alpha = .79; 3 items like: This school has insufficient attention for children who are lagging behind This school does not help children who do not yet speak Dutch very well

(continued)

APPENDIX (continued)

Quality: Curriculum and Facilities

Positive	*Negative*
alpha = .69; 7 items like:	alpha = .82; 7 items like:
This school devotes a lot of attention to creative subjects like art, music, dance, and drama	This school gives no attention to creative subjects like art, music, dance, and drama
This school looks well maintained and safe	This school has no out-of-school activities (e.g., excursions, school camp, theater visits, school clubs)
This school is in a beautiful and spacious building	This school is not well-housed

NOTES

1. For a detailed treatment of the stratification critique of school choice, see Archbald (2000).

2. In the Netherlands, predominantly minority schools and minority parents are conventionally referred to as Black. From an American perspective, the mix of immigrants in the Netherlands hardly looks Black (e.g., of African descent). To prevent any misunderstanding on the part of American readers, we will use the term non-White to refer to all minority groups or schools.

3. Although we realize that postal code districts do not necessarily coincide with distinct neighborhoods or districts (this also proved true in the qualitative part of our research), we will nevertheless use postcode districts as the best proxy for neighborhood, given that no usable data at a neighborhood level exists. Moreover, the postcode districts in the Netherlands are relatively small, and research has proven that they are good indicators of catchment areas of schools. By using the four-digit postcode within the Geographical Information System (see Note 5), the distance can be determined up to tenths of kilometers.

4. Because we are mainly interested in the influence of choice processes on ethnic segregation, we used this segregation index and not an index of exposure. The number of schools with a minority population over 50% or 70% is, of course, much larger (see the section The Dutch Setting).

5. In general, these are low response percentages; however, given the sensitivity of the subject and the vulnerability of the migrant population, it is difficult to conceive of an easy solution to this problem. In all probability, our sample relates to the group of active choosers. Because the chief aim of our research was to investigate whether in the choice process, parents paid attention to the ethnic composition of the student population, this relatively low response is less serious.

6. See http://gis.frw.uva.nl/ and also Taylor (2001).

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