

School Choice, Equity, and Democracy

Educational Studies (EDUC) 304

Trinity College

Spring 2021 | Tue/Thu 2:00–3:15pm ET

Zoom link: <https://trincoll.zoom.us/j/91887527629>

Professor: Elise Castillo, Ph.D. (she/her)

Email: Elise.Castillo@trincoll.edu (I aim to return emails within 24 hours, except on Saturdays)

Office Hours

Tue 10:45-11:45am ET; Wed 2:00–3:00pm ET; And by appointment (Email me and suggest a few times)

Zoom link: <https://trincoll.zoom.us/j/7326873522>

My office hours are times that I reserve specifically for meeting with my students. You do not need to sign up in advance. During office hours, I am happy to answer your questions about class material or assignments, or offer academic advice or mentorship. Generally, I meet with each student for 15 minutes, so it's helpful if you come with a clear sense of what you'd like to discuss so that we can make the most of our time together.

Course Description

How do families choose schools for their children? How do school choice policies, such as those advancing charter schools, magnet schools, and vouchers, advance or constrain equitable access to education, particularly for poor families and families of color? What are the democratic aims of public education, and how do school choice policies advance or constrain these aims? Students will investigate these questions while developing their qualitative research skills through interview and observation experiences.

Learning Objectives

Over the course of the semester, you will be able to:

- Understand the theories of action undergirding school choice policies
- Employ the tools of critical race theory to explain how school choice impacts equitable access to public education and the democratic goals of public education
- Enhance your critical reading skills by evaluating the work of scholarly researchers, policymakers, advocates, and journalists writing about school choice
- Enhance your qualitative research skills through interview and observation experiences
- Employ credible evidence and analysis to craft persuasive oral and written arguments

Course Materials

Readings will be posted to our course Moodle site. Read and reflect on all the assigned readings **before** class on the date they are listed on the syllabus. Come to class prepared to engage with discussing the readings. Reading loads and difficulties will vary; it will be in your best interest to look ahead and budget your time accordingly. Readings may be subject to change.

Course Assignments and Evaluation

Assignment	Due Date	Points Possible
Class attendance and participation	Every class; Mid-semester	10
	Every class; End-of-semester	10
Shared reading notes + leading discussion	Variable (2 classes per student)	2 x 5 = 10
Analysis Paper #1	Thursday, March 11, 11:59pm ET	10
Analysis Paper #2	Thursday, April 1, 11:59pm ET	10
Interview recording	Tuesday, April 6, 11:59pm ET	5
Analysis Paper #3	Sunday April 11, 11:59pm ET	10
Final paper proposal	Thursday, April 15, 11:59pm ET	5
Final paper small-group presentation	Thursday, May 6, 2:00pm ET	5
Small-group presentation evaluation	Thursday, May 6, 3:15pm ET	5
Final paper	Thursday, May 13, 11:59pm ET	20
		Total possible: 100

Your final course grade will be calculated by dividing the total points earned by the total points possible.

The grading scale is as follows:

90 to 100% = A (outstanding work)

80 to 89% = B (good work)

70 to 79 % = C (adequate work)

Below 70% = D or F (unsatisfactory work)

Each letter grade is divided into equal thirds for minus (-), regular, and plus (+) letter grades (e.g. 80 to 83.33 is a B-, 83.34 to 86.67 is a B, and 86.68 to 89.99 is a B+).

Class Attendance and Participation (Evaluated at mid-semester and end-of-semester; 10 x 2 = 20 points)

"As a classroom community, our capacity to generate excitement is deeply affected by our interest in one another, in hearing one another's voices, in recognizing one another's presence." bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress* (1994), p. 8

In this remote seminar, excellent class participation includes the following:

- *Attending all classes from start to finish.* Exceptions will be made only for documented medical or family emergencies or religious observances. If you know that you will be absent or will need to arrive late or leave early, please contact me in advance to arrange to make up work missed.
- *Coming prepared to each class.* Come to each class having completed all required readings and assignments and with all necessary materials, such as readings and notes. Arrive on time and ready to engage.
- *Actively engaging in class discussions.* Make thoughtful and analytic contributions to class discussions based on completed readings and assignments.
- *Listening and respond to others with respect.* Make space for others to share their perspectives and opinions in class discussions. Listen attentively and respectfully. If you disagree with something someone has said, do so graciously, respectfully, and with evidence to support your counterargument. Be open to learning from others' experiences, perspectives, and interpretations.

In our remote class, please know that there are multiple ways to show your engagement and participation, including: speaking aloud (in a breakout room or whole-class discussion), contributing in written form (e.g., chat or shared notes), or contributing in visual form (e.g., emoji reactions or body language, such as nodding or giving a thumbs-up when you agree with a point someone else makes).

We are all experiencing the uncertainty and anxiety caused by the global pandemic in different ways. Your own and your family's circumstances may impact your ability to participate and engage in class. I ask that you do your best to attend class on time, minimize distractions during class, actively engage, and **turn on your camera when possible (especially if you are attending our Zoom classes from your dorm room at Trinity)**. Please also do your best to communicate with me as soon as possible should you encounter any challenges to attending or participating actively in class.

Shared Reading Notes + Leading Discussion (2 x 5 = 10 points)

Two times during the semester, you will work with one or two classmates to prepare shared reading notes and discussion questions for class. You will sign up for these dates during the first week of class. On the days when you are responsible for preparing these notes and questions, I will expect you to serve as a "resident expert" on the day's readings and to take a leadership role in the discussion.

Three Analysis Papers (3 x 10 = 30 points)

Analysis Papers (3–4 double-spaced pages each) allow you to illustrate your understanding of course readings and themes, support claims with evidence and examples, and integrate theory and practice. Additional details regarding the expectations and guidelines for each Analysis Paper will be distributed in class. If you visit the Writing Center for support on an Analysis Paper, you will receive extra credit (0.5 points).

- 1) Unit 1 readings – due Thursday, March 11, 11:59pm ET
- 2) Unit 2 readings – due Thursday, April 1, 11:59pm ET
- 3) Interview analysis – due Sunday, April 11, 11:59pm ET

Interview Recording (5 points)

You will complete one interview with a parent of school-aged children to learn about how they navigate the school choice process. Additional details regarding this exercise will be distributed in class. Please submit the recording of the interview by **Tuesday, April 6, 11:59pm ET**. You will then prepare a written analysis of this interview in Analysis Paper 3 (due Sunday, April 11).

Final Paper

- Proposal (Due Thursday, April 15, 11:59pm ET, 5 points)
- Small-group presentation (Due Thursday, May 6, 11:59pm ET, 5 points)
- Small-group presentation evaluation (Due Thursday, May 6, 11:59pm ET, 5 points)
- Final draft (Due Thursday, May 13, 11:59pm ET, 20 points)

You have two options for your final paper:

- 1) Primary research paper (10–12 double-spaced pages)
This option builds from your interview and Analysis Paper 3. Conduct a minimum of three additional interviews with parents of school-aged children. Use the total collection of interviews (including the one you completed for Analysis Paper 3) to write a research paper. Your paper should include the following elements: research question, thesis statement, reflection on researcher positionality, brief literature review, methods, findings, discussion, and implications

for policy, practice, and/or future research. You may use part of Analysis Paper 3 within the paper, although you may find that you will need to edit or add to your earlier analysis.

2) Secondary research paper/literature review (8–10 double-spaced pages)

If you select this option, you will choose a topic related to school choice and conduct a literature review on the topic. The topic may be one that we discussed in class, but your paper should go beyond class readings and discussion.

Additional details regarding the final paper, proposal, and presentations will be distributed in class. If you visit the Writing Center for support on your final draft, you will receive extra credit (0.5 points).

Academic Policies

Late Assignments

You are each entitled to two 36-hour extensions, no questions asked. You may use these extensions for any assignment, with two exceptions: 1) shared reading notes on the days you are scheduled to lead discussion; and 2) final paper small-group presentation (on the last day of class, May 6). When you submit the assignment on Moodle, please note in the comment box that you are using the extension. Other than the use of these extensions, late assignments will be penalized with a 10% deduction for every 1 to 24-hour period beyond the deadline. Exceptions will be granted only for documented family or medical emergencies.

Excused Absences and Making Up Work

Please notify me during the first week of the course if you require any scheduling accommodations for religious observances. If granted an excused absence from class for religious observances or documented family or medical emergencies, please watch the recording of the Zoom class (posted on Moodle) and communicate with me as soon as possible if you have any questions about what you missed. This is to ensure that you do not fall behind in the course material.

Accessibility

Trinity College is committed to creating an inclusive and accessible learning environment consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Like many things, the need for disability accommodations and the process for arranging them may be altered by the Covid-19 changes we are experiencing and the safety protocols currently in place. Students with disabilities who may need some accommodation in order to fully participate in this class are urged to contact the Student Accessibility Resource Center, as soon as possible, to explore what arrangements need to be made to assure access.

If you have approval for academic accommodations, please notify me by the end of week two of classes. For those students with accommodations approved after the start of the semester, a minimum of 10 days' notice is required. Please be sure to meet with me privately to discuss implementation. Student Accessibility Resources can be reached by emailing Lori.Clapis@trincoll.edu or SARC@trincoll.edu.

Intellectual Honesty

According to Trinity College policy, intellectual honesty "assumes that students do their own work and that they credit properly those upon whose work and thought they draw" (Trinity College Student Handbook, 2016). While we often draw upon the work of others, it is essential that any work presented as your own is indeed your own, no matter how big or small the assignment. Ideas and/or words that are not yours should always be appropriately cited.

You may use any citation style (e.g., APA, Chicago, MLA), as long as you do so consistently. If you have any questions about how to cite another author's work appropriately, or how to draw upon another author's work without plagiarizing, please ask me.

Intellectual dishonesty and plagiarism in any form will not be tolerated in this class. Instances of academic dishonesty or plagiarism may result in assignment failure, course failure, referral to the Honor Council, and/or other consequences.

Helpful Things to Know

Trinity College Writing Center. We are all developing as writers and thinkers (myself included), and we all improve through receiving feedback. For assistance and feedback on your writing, at any stage, consider scheduling an appointment with a Writing Associate at Trinity's [Writing Center](#). If you visit the Writing Center for support on an Analysis Paper or your final paper, you will receive extra credit (0.5 point).

Trinity College Library. Our librarians are amazing and eager to help you identify sources for research projects or other assignments. Although you can make a virtual appointment with any librarian, Rob Walsh, our social science librarian, has particular expertise in the library sources relevant to our class. You can email him at Robert.Walsh@trincoll.edu or [make an appointment on the library website](#).

Student Technology Assistants. The Student Technology Assistants (STA) work with Trinity's Research, Instruction, and Technology (RIT) staff to provide remote assistance and support regarding your technology needs, including using Zoom and Moodle. Contact the STAs at sta-help@trincoll.edu, drop by their virtual help desk (https://trincoll.zoom.us/my/sta_helpdesk), or read more on their [website](#).

SensusAccess File Converter. If you wish, you may convert course readings in PDF form into alternative formats, including audio files. In doing so, you can listen to the reading while following along with the written text. Trinity's RIT website includes additional details on the [SuccessAccess File Converter](#).

Title IX Resources and Mandated Reporting. As a faculty member, I am considered a "Responsible Employee." This means that if you disclose to me instances of sexual assault, sexual harassment, other sexual misconduct, dating violence, domestic violence, or stalking, I am required to share this information with Trinity's Title IX Coordinator or Deputy Coordinator. See Trinity's [Title IX website](#) for additional information.

If you need to talk to someone who will maintain confidentiality, you can reach out to any of the following "Privileged Employees":

Spiritual and Religious Life, Trinity College Chapel, (860) 297-2013

The Reverend Trevor Beauford

Counseling Center: 135 Allen Street, (860) 297-2415

Randolph M. Lee, Ph.D., Director

Kristine Kennan, Psy.D., Associated Director

[After business hours, call to receive an available counselor's phone number]

In addition, the following “Confidential Employees” will not disclose names or other details that may reveal individuals’ identities, but they will report general details, such as the nature, date, time, and general location of the alleged incident.

The Health Center: Wheaton Hall, (860) 297-2018

Martha Burke O’Brien, Director

Health Center Staff, with the exception of front desk staff

Women & Gender Resource Action Center (WGRAC), Mather Hall, 2nd Floor, (860) 297-2408

Laura Lockwood, Director

Mental Health. Many of us face issues with our mental health over the course of our lives. Sometimes, being a student can create or exacerbate these issues. In addition, it is common to experience additional anxiety due to the global pandemic and other national political events. If you are struggling, your mental health is suffering, or you just need someone to talk to, I encourage you to make an appointment with the [Counseling and Wellness Center](#), or call (860) 297-2415. These services are free and confidential.

Learning Remotely/Online During the Pandemic. For many of us, learning remotely/online is still a new experience. There will likely be technical glitches and other unexpected challenges along the way. In addition, we’re all balancing academic commitments with other responsibilities related to health, work, caregiving, and more; and these commitments may be more challenging during the pandemic.

My goal is to support you in doing the best work you can in light of these challenges. I encourage you to prioritize your health and wellness, which are far more important than the grades you get in this class or any class. If you are finding it difficult to balance your health and wellness with your work in this class, please let me know. It’s okay to ask for help.

I ask that you be patient with me if the challenges to the semester force me to make last-minute changes. I will do my best to communicate any changes clearly and with as much notice as possible. Finally, please be patient with your peers as well as we all navigate this semester together.

Course Schedule

Unit 1: Theories and History of School Choice

What are the theories of action undergirding school choice policies? How do these theories reflect or resist racial equity, democracy, and/or market logic? How do past and ongoing experiments with school choice reflect these theories?

Tuesday, February 9: Course introduction

Hannah-Jones, N. (2016). [Choosing a school for my daughter in a segregated city](#). *The New York Times*.

Thursday, February 11: Framing our study of school choice: Critical race theory

Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. F. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teachers College Record*, 97(1), 47–68.

On the Media. (2020, October 8). [Trump’s war on critical race theory](#). WNYC Studios.

Tuesday, February 16: Market and equity theories of school choice

Orfield, G. (2013). Choice theories and the schools. In G. Orfield & E. Frankenberg (Eds.), *Educational delusions? Why choice can deepen inequality and how to make schools fair* (pp. 37–63). University of California Press.

Thursday, February 18: History of school choice: “Freedom of Choice” and “Segregation Academies”

Henig, J. (1994). Evolving practice: Problematic lessons from history. In *Rethinking school choice: Limits to the market metaphor* (pp. 101–113). Princeton University Press.

Optional: Read first-person alumni accounts from [The Academy Stories](#)

Tuesday, February 23: Voluntary desegregation: Opportunities and limitations, Part 1 – Metro Boston

Eaton, S. (2001). Ch. 1: The other Boston busing story; and Ch. 2: Why they went. In *The Other Boston Busing Story* (pp. 1–42). New Haven: Yale University Press.

Listen to *Hard Candy and Fruit Snacks*. (2020), [“Busing Between Two Different Worlds.”](#)

Thursday, February 25: Voluntary desegregation: Opportunities and limitations, Part 2 – Metro Hartford

Listen to *This American Life*. (2015), “The Problem We All Live With,” [Part Two](#). WBEZ Chicago.

de la Torre, Vanessa. (2017, March 12). Hartford schools: More separate, still unequal. *The Hartford Courant*.

Rabe Thomas, J. (2021, January 4). [Billions in school construction hasn’t made a dent in segregation—but this year, things could be different.](#) *The Connecticut Mirror*.

Tuesday, March 2: Tensions between market and equity framings of school choice, Part 1

Watch *Waiting for Superman* (2010).

Scott, J. (2013). A Rosa Parks moment? School choice and the marketization of civil rights. *Critical Studies in Education*, 54(1), 5–18.

Thursday, March 4: Tensions between market and equity framings of school choice, Part 2

Jabbar, H. (2015). “Every kid is money”: Market-like competition and school leader strategies in New Orleans. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 37(4), 638–659.

Unit 2: How Families Choose Schools

How do families choose schools for their children? How do racial, socioeconomic, political, and cultural contexts impact families’ choices, decision-making, and access to information?

Tuesday, March 9: “Shopping for schools”

Holme, J. J. (2002). Buying homes, buying schools: School choice and the social construction of school quality. *Harvard Educational Review*, 72(2), 177–205.

Thursday, March 11: “Stealing school”

Iorio, V., Lee, J., & Dougherty, J. (2020). [Jumping the school district line](#). In *On the Line: How Schooling, Housing, and Civil Rights Shaped Hartford and Its Suburbs*. Trinity College, book-in-progress.

Rooks, N. (2018). Stealing school. In *Cutting school: Privatization, segregation, and the end of public education* (pp. 161–183). The New Press. [Focus on pp. 161–175]

****Analysis Paper 1 due, 11:59pm ET (on Unit 1 readings)**

Tuesday, March 16: School choice for cultural preservation and affirmation

Goodyear-Ka'opua, N. (2013). Excerpt from Ch. 1: The Emergence of Indigenous Hawaiian Charter Schools (pp. 64–82). In *The Seeds We Planted: Portraits of a Native Hawaiian Charter School*. University of Minnesota Press.

Shapiro, E. (2019). “I Love My Skin!” Why Black Parents are Turning to Afrocentric Charter Schools. *The New York Times*.

Thursday, March 18: Immigrant families and school choice

Pérez, M. (2009). Low-income Latina parents, school choice, and Pierre Bourdieu. In *Theory and Educational Research: Toward Critical Social Explanation* (pp. 135–151). New York: Routledge.

Tuesday, March 23: The digital divide, the recruitment divide, and school choice

Dougherty, J., Zannoni, D., Chowhan, M., Coyne, C., Dawson, B., Guruge, T., & Nukic, B. (2013). School information, parental decisions, and the digital divide: The SmartChoices Project in Hartford, Connecticut. In G. Orfield & E. Frankenberg (Eds.), *Educational delusions? Why choice can deepen inequality and how to make schools fair* (pp. 219–237). University of California Press.

Listen to *The Promise*. (2020, October 12). Season 2, Episode 7: [The Recruitment Divide](#). WPLN Nashville Public Radio.

Thursday, March 25: Choosing schools during the Covid-19 pandemic

Green, C. T. (2020, July 22). [The latest in school segregation: Private pandemic “pods.”](#) *The New York Times*.

Schimke, A., & Aldrich, M. W. (2020, August 10). [Pods for all? Some districts and nonprofits are reimagining the remote learning trend](#). *Chalkbeat*.

Leon, B. (2020, September 16). [Hartford Survey Looks At The Reasons Parents Chose In-Person Learning](#). *WNPR News*.

Balingit, M., Natanson, H., & Chen, Y. (2021, March 3). [As schools reopen, Asian American students are missing from classrooms](#). *The Washington Post*.

Guest speaker: Robert Cotto, Director of HMTCA-Trinity College Partnership

Unit 3: Qualitative Interviewing

What do we learn from conducting interviews as a method of qualitative research? How do we conduct interviews in an ethical and responsible manner? What are the opportunities and challenges to conducting interviews remotely?

Tuesday, March 30: Qualitative interviewing, Part 1: Methods and techniques

Seidman, I. (2019). Chapters 1 and 6. In *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences* (5th ed.). Teachers College Press.

****Schedule and conduct one interview by Tuesday, April 6.**

Thursday, April 1: Qualitative interviewing Part 2: Navigating relationships and researcher positionality

Seidman, I. (2019). Chapter 7. In *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences* (5th ed.). Teachers College Press.

Guest speaker: Professor Madeline Pérez De Jesus, University of St. Joseph, West Hartford, CT

****Analysis Paper 2 due, 11:59pm ET (Unit 2 readings)**

Tuesday, April 6: Work day – Conduct your interview (Zoom class will not meet)

****Interview recording due by 11:59pm ET**

Thursday, April 8: Qualitative data analysis

Seidman, I. (2019). Chapter 8. In *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences* (5th ed.). Teachers College Press.

****Analysis Paper 3 due, Sunday, April 11, 11:59pm ET (Interview analysis)**

Unit 4: School Choice and the Democratic Aims of Public Education

What are the democratic aims of public education? How do school choice policies advance or constrain these aims? How do educational stakeholders' choices reflect, or counter, these aims?

Tuesday, April 13: Choosing community and the public good, Part 1

Knight Abowitz, K., & Stitzlein, S. M. (2018). Public schools, public goods, and public work. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 100(3), 33–37.

Ewing, E. (2019). [The fight for Dyett: How a community in Chicago saved its public school](#). *American Educator*.

Thursday, April 15: Choosing community and the public good, Part 2

Castillo, E., Makris, M. V., & Debs, M. (2021). "Fighting Against the Normal": NYC School Integration Activists During Covid-19. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association.

****Final paper proposal due, 11:59pm ET**

Tuesday, April 20: A more democratic choice? Examining "Parent Trigger" laws

Watch "Won't Back Down" (2012).

Lubienski, C., Scott, J., Rogers, J., & Welner, K. (2012). [Missing the Target? The Parent Trigger as a Strategy for Parental Engagement and School Reform](#). NEPC Policy Memo.

Thursday, April 22: A more democratic choice? Examining school vouchers

Pedroni, T. C. (2010). Acting neoliberal: Is Black support for vouchers a rejection of progressive educational values? *Educational Studies*, 40(3), 265–278.

Cheuk, T., & Quinn, R. (2018). Dismantling the wall between church and state. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 100(3), 24–28.

Unit 5: Perspectives on School Choice Amid Persistent Educational Inequity

What does it mean to remain critically hopeful amid persistent educational inequity? How can school choice reflect, or detract from, a hopeful vision for change? Why do educators choose to serve in alternative public schools of choice?

Tuesday, April 27: Critical hope amid ongoing inequity

Excerpt from Solnit, R. (2004, 2016). *Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.

Thursday, April 29: Educators and alternative schools of choice, Part 1

Skim the website of Roses in Concrete Community School and prepare at least one question for our guest speaker.

Guest speaker: Mr. Laurence Tan, Founding Teacher, Roses in Concrete Community School

Tuesday, May 4: Educators and alternative schools of choice, Part 2

Watch the video message from Ms. Brigit Rioual (Trinity 2014), Lower Elementary Teacher, CREC Montessori Magnet School

Skim the website of, and article about, Latitude Charter High School and prepare at least one question for our guest speaker.

Guest speaker: Ms. Lillian Hsu, Founding Principal, Latitude Charter High School

Thursday, May 6: Course wrap-up and small-group research paper presentations

****Final paper small-group presentations due (2–3 slides), by the beginning of class (2:00pm ET)**

Thursday, May 13, 11:59pm ET: Final paper due

Acknowledgements

Some of the statements on this syllabus were inspired by or adapted from statements on the syllabi of other scholars, including Professors Jessica Calarco, Mira Debs, Eve Ewing, and Stefanie Wong.