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Money or Diversity? An Implementation Analysis of the Voluntary Transfer Program in St. Louis, 1999-2009

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Abstract: A dual transfer program was created in 1983 in the St. Louis metropolitan area following a 1972 lawsuit brought upon the city, charging it with withholding an equal educational opportunity for Black students. Through this program, Black students from St. Louis City are provided with free transportation to one of 15 suburban school districts, and White students from the surrounding suburbs are eligible to attend city magnet schools. At its peak in 1999, enrollment reached approximately 15,000 students, of which over 13,500 were from St. Louis City. Following the lifting of the court order in 1999, suburban participation became voluntary and tuition reimbursements to the participating suburban districts were reduced. By 2009, program enrollment had fallen to approximately 7,000 students, of which 6,800 were from St. Louis City. Using critical policy analysis and a media framing analysis on almost 100 newspaper articles collected from four media outlets, this study found that, between 1999 and 2009, suburban implementation of the voluntary transfer program was largely affected by economic factors. Though the program is still in operation, and will continue through at least the 2018-2019 school year, this research raises important questions about the various factors that contribute to or hinder

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implementation of this long-running voluntary desegregation program.

Keywords: desegregation, policy analysis, busing

Dinero o diversidad? Un análisis de la implementación del Programa de Transferencia Voluntaria en St. Louis, 1999-2009

Resumen: Un programa de transferencia dual fue creado en 1983 en el área metropolitana de St. Louis luego de una demanda judicial contra la ciudad en 1972, que acusó por prevenir igualdad de oportunidades educativas para los estudiantes negros. A través de este programa, los estudiantes negros de la ciudad de St. Louis contaban con transporte gratis a uno de los 15 distritos escolares suburbanos, y los estudiantes blancos de los suburbios circundantes son elegibles para asistir a las escuelas “magnet” (imán) de la ciudad. En 1999 la matrícula alcanzó aproximadamente 15.000 estudiantes (punto más alto), de los cuales más de 13.500 eran de la ciudad de San Luis. Tras el levantamiento de la orden judicial en 1999 la participación se convirtió en voluntaria y los reembolsos de matrícula a los distritos suburbanos participantes se redujeron. Para el año 2009, la matrícula se redujo a aproximadamente 7.000 estudiantes, de los cuales 6.800 eran de la ciudad de San Luis. Utilizando el modelo de análisis crítico de políticas y de los “encuadramientos mediáticos” de casi 100 artículos periodísticos de cuatro medios de comunicación, este estudio encontró que, entre 1999 y 2009 la aplicación del programa de transferencia voluntaria se vio afectada en gran medida por factores económicos. Aunque el programa todavía está en funcionamiento, y continuara por lo menos hasta el año escolar 2018-2019, esta investigación plantea preguntas importantes sobre los diversos factores que contribuirían o impedirían la aplicación de este programa voluntario de desagregación de larga duración.

Palabras clave: eliminación de la segregación; análisis de políticas; transporte escolar

Dinheiro ou, diversidade? Uma análise da implementação do Programa de Transferência Voluntária em St. Louis, 1999-2009

Resumo: Um programa de transferência dupla foi criado em 1983 na área metropolitana de St. Louis após uma ação judicial contra a cidade em 1972, que acusou a cidade de prevenir a igualdade de oportunidades educacionais para estudantes negros. Através deste programa, os alunos negros da cidade St. Louis tinham transporte livre para 15 distritos escolares, suburbanos e os alunos brancos dos subúrbios eram elegíveis para participar de escolas *magnet* (imã) da cidade. Em 1999 matrículas atingiu cerca de 15.000 estudantes (ponto mais alto), dos quais mais de 13.500 eram da cidade de St. Louis. Na sequência do levantamento da liminar, em 1999 a participação, tornou-se voluntária e a taxa de reembolso da matrícula aos bairros suburbanos envolvidos foram reduzidos. Até 2009, as matrículas foi reduzida cerca de 7.000 estudantes, dos quais 6.800 eram da cidade de St. Louis. Usando o modelo de análise crítica das políticas e dos "enquadramentos da mídia" de cerca de 100 artigos de jornais de quatro meios de comunicação, este estudo encontrou que entre 1999 e 2009, a implementação do programa de transferência voluntária foi afetada em grande parte por fatores econômicos. Embora o programa ainda está em operação, e vai continuar pelo menos até o ano escolar 2018-2019, a pesquisa levanta questões importantes sobre os vários fatores que contribuem ou impedem a implementação deste programa voluntário de desagregação de longo prazo.

Palavras-chave: desagregação; análise de políticas; transporte escolar

Money or Diversity? An Implementation Analysis of the Voluntary Transfer Program in St. Louis, 1999-2009

In 1972, a group of parents filed a class action lawsuit against the St. Louis City Board of Education, arguing that Black students were not receiving equal educational opportunities in the St. Louis Public Schools. In 1983, a settlement agreement was reached in which the district court created a dual-transfer interdistrict program requiring school districts in St. Louis County to desegregate. This program provided Black children from St. Louis City with free transportation to attend higher-performing suburban public schools in St. Louis County, while simultaneously offering White suburban students the opportunity to enroll in the city's magnet schools. The Court determined the number of spaces available in the suburban public and city magnet schools, and both Black and White students submitted applications in order to participate and enroll in out-of-district schools. Students are selected with no regard to academic performance.

In the first year of the program (1983-84), approximately 2,500 Black students from St. Louis City attended public schools in 16 participating suburban districts, while 350 White students from St. Louis County enrolled in the city's magnet schools. Enrollment steadily increased, and by the 1998-1999 school year, the program reached its peak of approximately 15,000 total participating students—13,500 Black students from St. Louis City (90% of total enrollment) and 1,500 White students from St. Louis County. This program, still in operation, offers another school choice option for city and suburban families alike, in addition to private and charter schools.

In 1999, a second settlement agreement was reached, which removed the Court's oversight, and district participation in the dual-transfer program became voluntary. This meant that although students were still required to apply to enroll in the program, each participating suburban district was allowed to determine the number of Black students from St. Louis they would accept into their schools. Data provided by the Voluntary Interdistrict Choice Corporation (VICC) (personal communication, 2013) finds that overall enrollment in the program has declined substantially since 1999; however, Black students still constitute the significant majority of participation. By 2009, fewer than 7,000 total students participated in the program—almost 6,800 Black students from St. Louis City (45% of 1999's total enrollment) and 170 White students from St. Louis County (1% of 1999's total enrollment). Despite declining enrollment—or more specifically, despite fewer spaces open for Black students in suburban schools—the suburban districts continually extend their participation in the program, most recently voting in 2012 to enroll new students through the 2018-2019 school year.

Wells, Holme, Revilla, and Atanda (2004) state that there is a gap in the school desegregation literature that should focus on how desegregation policy is shaped by local and political contexts. Past school desegregation policies focused extensively on race, while recent desegregation policies have moved away from using race as a proxy and now instead use socioeconomic status as a determining factor (Diem, 2012). In the *Parents Involved in Community Schools v Seattle Public Schools* (2007) case, the United States Supreme Court ruled that it is unconstitutional to use race in student assignment. Despite recent national political and judicial efforts, race remains at the core of the unique voluntary transfer program in St. Louis. The St. Louis Public School system has never been considered a unitary system (meaning that it had never been desegregated and still operated as a dual system); therefore, the voluntary transfer program is not considered unconstitutional and is able to operate outside of the parameters of the *PICS* ruling.

In focusing on the urban-to-suburban aspect of this dual-transfer program (as that is where the vast majority of participation occurs), this paper uses critical policy analysis, as well as a backward-mapping approach to policy implementation, to examine the implementation of the

voluntary interdistrict transfer program in St. Louis between 1999 and 2009. Diem, Young, Welton, Mansfield, and Lee (2014) suggest that critical policy analysis is focused on the distribution of power and social stratification. Given the sharp, and consistent, decline in enrollment following the second settlement agreement, this program offers an ideal setting to examine desegregation, the future of resegregation in metropolitan area public schools, and the power issues at play.

Context: The Voluntary Transfer Program in St. Louis

The program in St. Louis is the largest of eight interdistrict desegregation programs currently in operation across the country. The other programs are hosted in Boston, MA; East Palo Alto, CA; Hartford, CT; Milwaukee, WI; Minneapolis, MN; Omaha, NE; and Rochester, NY. The oldest programs—in Rochester, Boston, and Hartford—began in the mid-1960s, a full 10 years after the monumental 1954 *Brown* decision, yet almost 20 years before the creation of the program in St. Louis.

In order to grasp the current implementation of the voluntary transfer program¹ in St. Louis, it is necessary to understand its inception. The secretary of the St. Louis Board of Education publicized the city's plan to integrate the public school system immediately following the *Brown* decision. However, attendance zones were redrawn to promote neighborhood schools, thus enabling White students who had been assigned to attend predominately Black schools to remain in their original schools through graduation (Freivogel, 2002; Gotham, 2002; Heaney & Uchitelle, 2004).

In 1972, frustrated with the lack of progress toward integration, a group of Black parents called the Concerned Parents of North St. Louis filed a class-action lawsuit in the district court against the St. Louis Public School system, individual board members, the superintendent, and district superintendents. The parents, led by Mrs. Minnie Liddell, had grown exasperated with the rezoning and with the opening and closing of Black schools across the city (Heaney & Uchitelle, 2004; Wells & Crain, 1997). In *Liddell v. Board of Education of the City of St. Louis* (1972), the defendants denied that they had operated the schools in a discriminatory manner and argued that they had not deprived Black students of equal educational opportunities.

In 1982, St. Louis Public Schools (SLPS) totaled over 59,000 students, of which 49,610 (79%) were Black. Of those, over 30,000 Black students attended majority-Black schools in the Northern part of the city. St. Louis County, on the other hand, was comprised of 23 school districts and totaled almost 131,000 students. Approximately 27,500 suburban students (21%) were Black—the majority of whom (74%) were concentrated in six districts closest to the Northern side of St. Louis city. Two of those suburban districts had Black student enrollments of at least 40% while the remaining four had student populations over 55% Black. Of the 17 remaining suburban districts, ten had Black student enrollments under 4%, and six had Black student enrollments between 10 and 30% (La Pierre, 1987). Table 1 presents the racial composition of public schools in the 23 school districts in St. Louis County 10 years after the *Liddell* lawsuit was filed.

A settlement was finally reached in 1983. The 16 suburban school districts with Black student enrollments under 25% were required to increase the percentage of Black students by at least 15% of their current enrollment, though not to exceed 25% of total enrollment. Voluntary participation would avoid interdistrict litigation against those districts for five years because

¹ The terms “voluntary transfer program” and “voluntary interdistrict transfer program” will be used interchangeably.

Table 1.
1982 Enrollment in the 23 St. Louis County School Districts

District	Total Students	Black Students	Black as a % of Total
Affton	2,067	3	0.2%
Bayless	1,336	2	0.2%
Brentwood	834	182	21.8%
Clayton	1,573	20	1.3%
Ferguson-Florissant	12,669	5,137	40.6%
Hancock Place	1,447	5	0.3%
Hazelwood	17,129	2,981	17.4%
Jennings	2,332	1,285	55.1%
Kirkwood	4,496	764	17.2%
Ladue	3,060	391	12.8%
Lindbergh	5,546	44	0.8%
Maplewood	1,436	416	29.0%
Mehlville	9,675	31	0.3%
Normandy	7,127	6,195	86.9%
Parkway	20,693	410	2.0%
Pattonville	6,535	243	3.7%
Ritenour	6,456	839	13.0%
Riverview Gardens	5,060	2,156	42.6%
Rockwood	10,354	98	1.0%
Valley Park	629	3	0.5%
Webster Groves	3,640	723	19.9%
University City	5,627	4,341	77.2%
Wellston	1,261	1,254	99.5%

Source: La Pierre, 1987.

participation, or enrolling students from St. Louis, meant that the suburban districts were not actively supporting segregation. This stemmed from the fact that, initially, only five of the 23 suburban districts agreed to participate in the interdistrict program following the original 1981 proposal. The seven remaining county districts with Black enrollments over 25% were not obligated to host transfer students from SLPS. The program was capped at 15,000 students, possibly in an effort to limit state costs (La Pierre, 1987). The settlement agreement was implemented at the start of the 1983 school year.

The participating suburban districts received the equal per-pupil expenditure amount for each student transferring in, while SLPS was able to keep one-half of the per-pupil expenditure amount for each student transferring out. The city magnet schools that accepted the suburban students received the full per-pupil funding for each transfer student, as well as additional funding for school improvement (Wells et al., 2009). During the first year of implementation, program costs for the dual transfers amounted to \$2.1 million (Glaser, 2012), including transportation for city-to-county transfer students. County students attending city magnet schools were responsible for their own transportation.

By the end of the first year of implementation (1983-1984), almost 3,000 students participated in the program: 2,496 Black students transferring to suburban schools, and 351 White students transferring into city magnet schools. Enrollment in the dual transfer program steadily

increased over the next decade and a half, reaching peak enrollment of 14,626 students in 1999—13,263 city and 1,363 county students.

1999 Settlement Agreement and Program Extension

In the fall of 1997, the Missouri legislature appointed a committee to review how to end the school desegregation case in St. Louis. By 1999, following a lengthy process, a second settlement agreement was reached. The court-ordered desegregation of the city's public schools ended, but the dual-transfer program and city magnet schools remained. Additionally, a sales tax increase for city residents was proposed to maintain the transfer program (Freivogel, 2002). The State also agreed to pay the City Board of Education \$180 million to construct new schools (Liddell v Board, 1999). This agreement gave the responsibility of the voluntary transfer program to the Voluntary Interdistrict Choice Corporation (VICC). VICC was originally the state-funded organization, the Voluntary Interdistrict Coordinating Council, which oversaw the transfer program, but following the settlement agreement, it changed its name and became an independent 501-c-3 organization.

Unitary status in St. Louis Public Schools had not been reached by 1999, meaning that the school system had not been declared fully desegregated and still operated as a dual system. A declaration of unitary status, and resulting removal of court oversight, could have led to a loss of the funds necessary to support the transfer program (Armor, 2003). The 1999 Settlement Agreement allowed for the gradual decrease in the number of transfer students served. The 16 predominately White suburban districts agreed to keep transfer enrollment at 85 percent of the 1998-99 transfer enrollment for the first three years of the second settlement, with a reduction to 70% of the 1998-99 transfer enrollment in years four through six. Beginning in the seventh year following the settlement, there would be no minimum transfer enrollment required for the participating districts (VICC, 2015). One of the 16 districts had reached its goal of 25% minority enrollment, and chose to discontinue participation in the program altogether. Table 2 displays the racial composition of the 15 participating suburban school districts in 1999.

Table 2.
1999 Enrollment in the 15 Participating Suburban School Districts

District	Total Student Enrollment	Total Black Enrollment	Transfer Enrollment (% of Total Black Enrollment)	Total Black Enrollment as a % of Total Enrollment	% change from 1982
Affton	2,650	381	331 (86.9%)	14.4%	14.3%
Bayless	1,458	214	180 (84.1%)	14.7%	14.6%
Brentwood	914	249	180 (83.5%)	27.2%	5.4%
Clayton	2,461	531	479 (90.2%)	21.6%	20.3%
Hancock Place	1,721	356	317 (89.0%)	20.7%	20.4%
Kirkwood	5,001	1,250	662 (53.0%)	25.0%	7.8%
Ladue	3,321	780	359 (46.0%)	23.5%	10.7%
Lindbergh	5,226	1,014	935 (92.2%)	19.4%	18.6%
Mehlville	12,000	1,548	1,338 (86.4%)	12.9%	12.6%
Parkway	20,547	3,575	2,846 (79.6%)	17.4%	15.4%
Pattonville	6,688	1,722	882 (51.2%)	25.7%	22.0%
Ritenour	6,450	1,936	98 (5.0%)	30.0%	17.0%

Rockwood	21,175	3,096	3,095 (100%)	14.6%	13.7%
Valley Park	1,024	298	244 (81.9%)	29.1%	28.6%
Webster Groves	4,028	1,101	464 (42.1%)	26.1%	6.2%

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, 2015a; Voluntary Interdistrict Choice Corporation, personal communication, 2013.

The voluntary transfer program has experienced two 5-year extensions since 1999. Despite declining enrollments and reduced reimbursements, VICC's Board of Directors unanimously approved the first extension in 2007, extending both the program and new student enrollment through the 2013-2014 school year. As part of the extension, the suburban districts were able to individually determine whether to accept new students, with the understanding that all currently enrolled students would continue in the program. In 2007, at the time of the first extension, two more districts declined to admit any additional students. The second extension was approved in November 2012, extending the program through the 2018-2019 school year (VICC, 2015). There are now a total of four (out of 15) suburban districts no longer accepting new transfer students into their schools, but those districts allow transfer students currently enrolled to graduate.

Reimbursement policies were also amended as a result of the 1999 Settlement Agreement: suburban school districts received a reimbursement maximum of \$9,100 per transfer student, or the actual per-pupil cost of the district, whichever was less (VICC, 2015). Based on the amended reimbursement procedures, some districts were fully reimbursed for each transfer student while others lost between \$300 to \$9,000 in funding per transfer student (on average per district). Table 3 outlines the losses per district based on the second settlement agreement's reimbursement policy.

Table 3.

Average per Pupil Expenditures and Losses, 1999-2009

District	Average Per Pupil Expenditure (Inflation-Adjusted Dollars)	Average Per Pupil Expenditure Lost Per Transfer Student (reimbursement capped at \$9,100)
Affton	\$10,356	-\$1,256
Bayless	\$7,134	\$0
Brentwood	\$16,193	-\$7,093
Clayton	\$17,956	-\$8,855
Hancock Place	\$8,781	\$0
Kirkwood	\$10,014	-\$914
Ladue*	\$17,158	-\$8,058
Lindbergh**	\$10,882	-\$1,782
Mehville	\$7,882	\$0
Parkway	\$11,295	-\$2,195
Pattonville**	\$14,229	-\$5,129
Ritenour*	\$9,458	-\$358
Rockwood	\$10,161	-\$1,061
Valley Park	\$10,583	-\$1,483
Webster Groves	\$12,034	-\$2,934

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, 2015b.

*no longer accepting new transfer students as of 1999.

**no longer accepting new transfer students as of 2007.

By 2009, over 25 years after the program's creation and 10 years after the second Settlement Agreement, total program enrollment had fallen to 6,945 students: 6,774 Black students were transferring to suburban schools, and 171 White students were attending city magnet schools. Figure 1 displays total enrollment between 1999 and 2009 (VICC, personal communication). Black students have and continue to comprise the vast majority of program participation. During the first year of implementation in 1983, the 351 White participating students totaled 12% of total program enrollment. White student enrollment was 9% of participation immediately following the 1999 Settlement Agreement, and by 2009, had fallen to 3% of total enrollment.

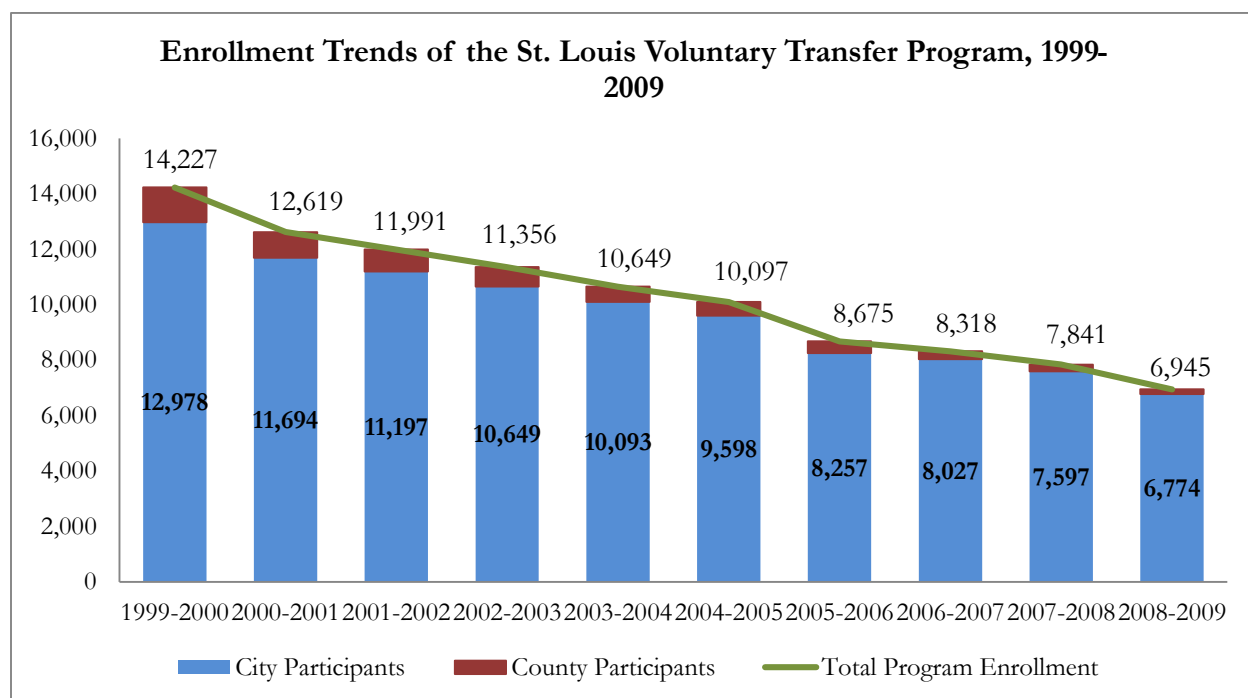


Figure 1. Enrollment Trends of the St. Louis Voluntary Transfer Program, 1999-2009
Source: Voluntary Interdistrict Choice Corporation, personal communication, 2013

Since the *Brown* decision, integration in schools has been an interest of parents, educators, and policymakers alike. Wells, Warner, and Grzesikowski (2013) suggest that policymakers must bring renewed attention to the choice policies that focus on equality of access to educational opportunities. This particular study aims to do so by using this unique dual-transfer program to examine both access to educational opportunity as well as the power to provide educational opportunity.

Policy Analysis Framework

As mentioned, this paper will use critical policy analysis to examine suburban implementation of the voluntary transfer program in St. Louis. Levinson, Sutton, and Winstead (2009) suggest that “the way to unpack policy is to see it as a kind of social practice, specifically, a practice of power” (p. 767). Rather than using the traditional method of policy analysis, some scholars have instead chosen to incorporate critical policy analysis into their work, building on Lasell’s idea of “exploring policy problems in all their complexity” (Diem et al., 2014, p. 1069). Diem et al. (2014) explain that one of the facets of the critical approach to policy analysis is “to uncover elements of social stratification, the distribution of power, resources, and knowledge in policy

creation and implementation, and the creation of winners and losers” (p. 1083). Levinson et al. (2009) state, “this critical approach has tended to emphasize the production of education policy as a contested political process in which dominant groups position themselves best to order an education system” (p. 774). The authors further assert that because critical policy analysis critiques the dominant social structure, it is then a useful tool in moving social justice forward.

The supplemental framework used in this study is the backward-mapping approach to policy implementation, which suggests that those at the lowest level of implementation should provide the necessary information to inform the creation of a particular policy, based on their particular needs and beliefs (Elmore, 1979; Sabatier, 1986). Elmore (1979) suggested that this approach assumes that “the closer one is to the source of the problem, the greater is one’s ability to influence it” (p. 605). This shifts the focus of analysis away from larger organizations and instead to individuals, coined by Lipsky as the “street-level bureaucrats” (McLaughlin, 1987). Hamann and Lane (2004) suggest that, “implementation is a process engaged in by context-embedded individuals that entails intertwined processes of interpretation, negotiation, sense making, bargaining, ambiguity management, and the exercise of discretion” (p. 427). Lin (2000) asserts that the earlier, linear models of policy implementation “oversimplify and mischaracterize the policy process” (p. 17). Implementing policy on the ground, rather, means that “the ideas that went into policymaking are reexamined and replaced, and the policy conflicts that first surfaced during enactment reappear” (Lin, 2000, p. 17).

The voluntary transfer program in St. Louis County is an excellent example of how policy ideas and problems can reappear over time, and how those in power positions can knowingly, or unknowingly, promote social stratification. Once the 1999 settlement agreement was reached in the St. Louis metropolitan area, suburban program implementation became voluntary and student enrollment was left to the discretion of the policy actors (namely, principals, school board members, and superintendents) in the individual suburban districts. These policy actors, or “street level bureaucrats” were the ones closest to the “problem” of program continuation, and therefore, had the greatest influence over its implementation, especially in deciding how many transfer students from St. Louis to enroll in their schools and at what cost (financial, social, or otherwise) to their districts. Using Lin’s (2000) reference to the reappearance of policy problems, this analysis will explore in greater detail how fiscal resources and human interests affected suburban implementation of the voluntary transfer program between 1999 and 2009.

Methods and Data

This study relies on a media framing analysis to critically examine suburban implementation of the desegregation policy in St. Louis County between 1999 and 2009. Pan and Kosicki (1993) define framing analysis as a method of news analysis which investigates how public policy discourse is constructed, contending that these analyses go beyond the agenda-setting literature to examine “the diversity and fluidity in how issues are conceptualized” (p. 70). Further, Pan and Kosicki (1993) suggest that to use a framing analysis is to “view news texts as a system of organized signifying elements that both indicate the advocacy of certain ideas and provide devices to encourage certain kinds of audience processing of the text” (p. 55). Kirby, Harris, Crane, and Rossell (1973) suggest that journalists constitute almost 10% of a city’s elite civic leaders. Given Diem et al.’s (2014) definition of critical policy analysis as an examination of power structures and social stratification, the use of this method further extends the critical examination of the voluntary transfer program.

Neuman, Just, and Crigler (1992) noticed that several conceptual themes, or “frames” emerged as they studied how the media presents information about certain topics, as well as in the public’s response to them. The five frames are: conflict (conflict between individuals, groups, or

institutions); human interest (presenting an emotional angle to a problem); economic (reports an event based on the economic consequences on a particular group); morality (outlines a problem in a religious or moral context); and responsibility (attributes the responsibility for the solution to a problem to the government or to a specific group) (Neuman et al., 1992; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000).

Research on media framing has been used to investigate the importance of certain frames in the news and the public's interpretation of these frames (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). In their seminal study investigating the prevalence of the five frames in European media, Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) applied a deductive approach to their framing analysis. The deductive approach uses predefined frames to understand how often particular frames appear within news outlets. Matthes and Kohring (2008) discuss limitations to the deductive approach—that the frames be known beforehand and that they suit the topic under review. Given that the five frames outlined by Neuman et al. (1992) align with many of the obstacles facing implementation of the voluntary interdistrict transfer program in St. Louis, the deductive approach was applied to this particular research, with a focus on three of the frames in particular: economic, human interest, and conflict. The final two frames, morality and responsibility, were not used in the analysis, as they did not reflect the major interests voiced, whether positive or negative.

To conduct the media framing analysis, four newspaper sources were used: the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, the major citywide daily newspaper; the *St. Louis Beacon*, an online media outlet established in 2007; and two suburban-only outlets, the *Suburban Journals of St. Louis*, published weekly in print and online, and the *South County Times*, published online only. The range in media outlets provided for a more comprehensive view of, first, the way in which information is distributed to the general public in St. Louis City and County, and, second, the manner in which the suburban residents perceive and describe the voluntary transfer program and their role in the provision of an equal educational opportunity for students from St. Louis.

The search of the four media outlets using the Lexis-Nexis database focused on the ten years between August 1, 1999 and July 31, 2009. This search yielded 82 articles that specifically referenced the voluntary transfer program based on the keywords “voluntary transfer,” “voluntary desegregation,” or “interdistrict” program. The St. Louis Public School system lost its accreditation in 2007, resulting in many news stories about city students (that did not participate in the voluntary transfer program) attempting to enroll in suburban schools. Those particular transfer efforts were based on Missouri's Outstanding Schools Act, of which Section 167.131 states that the Board of Education in an unaccredited district shall pay the tuition of and provide transportation to an accredited school in the same or a neighboring district (Missouri General Assembly, 2015). Any news articles referring to student enrollment as a result of the loss of SLPS accreditation were not included in this analysis².

The articles used in this research were analyzed manually three times, once for each of the three frames included: economic, human impact, and conflict. The *economic* frame addressed issues pertaining to human and fiscal resources, specifically as they related to the program's tuition reimbursement policy. The *human interest* frame brought attention to topics pertaining to diversity, fairness, and equality. Finally, the *conflict* frame outlined the “us” versus “them” perspective evident between city and suburban students and schools. Each frame was then analyzed for recurring themes. Multiple frames appeared in the majority of articles.

² SPLS was awarded provisional accreditation in 2012.

Findings

A total of 82 articles were analyzed to investigate the implementation of the St. Louis voluntary transfer program across the 15 participating suburban districts in the ten years following the second settlement agreement in 1999. The *economic* frame was the most prevalent, appearing in 51 articles (62%), followed by the *human impact* frame, appearing in 37 articles (46%). The *conflict* frame appeared in 25 articles (31%).

Economic Frame

Despite the program's popularity in St. Louis city, the future of the transfer program is entirely dependent on the investment of the participating suburban districts. The threat of losing funding directly impacts suburban involvement. Tuition reimbursements to the participating suburbs have gradually declined since the 1999 Settlement Agreement, from full reimbursement based on each district's per-pupil amount at the start of the program in 1983 to partial reimbursement maximized at \$9,100³. Article headlines about the funding of the transfer program included such phrases as: "budget problems," "future funding of busing troubles schools," "projected drop in money for schools adds urgency," "tax rate hinges on fate of desegregation program," "transfer program is in red," and "Parkway eliminates 43 full-time staff." While these headlines only represented a portion of the articles included in the economic frame analysis, they clearly portray the tone of the articles to the reader. Although conflict appears evident in these headlines, for the purposes of this study, the *conflict* frame corresponds to the divergence between residents, neighborhoods, and schools in St. Louis City and those in the surrounding county.

A St. Louis parent stated that, "children are more than dollar signs" (Bower, 2002, p. C1), and a suburban parent expressed a similar sentiment, saying, "these kids are more important than dollars and cents. Everybody benefits from the transfer program including kids in the district" (Bower, 2004a, p. C1). However, it becomes increasingly evident that, over time, the level of support for program continuation hinges on the amount of tuition reimbursed to the suburban district.

Based on these articles, the "value" of desegregation is questioned, suggesting that districts must choose between funding suburban or city students. Suburban parents believe that continuing to accept transfer students into their schools without full tuition reimbursement would mean that county districts would be paying to educate Black students from St. Louis, instead of being paid by the state (i.e. full tuition reimbursement) as the policy originally mandated in 1983. Bruce Ellerman, the then-Executive Director of VICC, stated, "many districts would be asked to subsidize the cost of educating children they enroll from the city. The unanswered question that loomed over the meeting was whether suburban school districts would tolerate that expense" (Franck, 2002, p. B2). Others state, "There is also the question of allocation of resources... Since there is an achievement gap between the resident students and the deseg students, will the district devote more resources to the deseg students than to the resident students?" (McClellan, 2004, p. C1), and wonder whether the cost of educating a transfer student is the same as educating a resident student (Bower, 2004d). In listening to their constituents, a Clayton school board member asks, "Do they want us to spend less money and discount education value, or do they want us to ask for more money? Do they want us to spend money on resident service or diversity service?" (Bower, 2004a, p. C1). Although the suburban parents have manufactured a conflict between their children and students from St. Louis, the impetus of this conflict lies with concern over the distribution of fiscal resources.

³ By 2012, maximum reimbursement had fallen to \$7,000 per transfer student.

An associate principal at a suburban high school stated, “I’m concerned if our communities will step up to the plate when asked to replace funds, or say integration is too expensive and not worth replacing,” (Bower, 2002, p. C1). Others, however, were clear in their lack of support for the transfer program. One suburban parent stated,

When objectives compete, money wins. The School Board must decide whether our children or the children of another community will pay a price. We deplore the inequities of life. It’s not my fault that some students have less educational opportunities. We’ve done them no wrong. We owe them nothing (Bower, 2004a, p. C1).

Concern about the program’s future began in 2002 once suburban districts realized that they would no longer receive full tuition reimbursement for each transfer student by the 2004-05 school year (Franck, 2002). Ellerman explained that the program cuts meant, “[districts] will need to come up with their own money to educate transfer students, reduce the number of students or pull out of the program” (Mueller, 2003, p. 2). Budget cuts forced the participating districts to more closely examine the terms and consequences of their current and future participation and implementation.

Suburban school districts reacted in different ways to the proposed budget cuts. One district’s chief financial officer outlined the effects of budget cuts: “the district stands to lose money—\$700,000 in the 2004-05 school year and \$1 million to \$2 million in each of following four years. And anywhere from 20 to 70 school employees, many of them teachers, could lose their jobs” (Bower, 2003b, p. C2). This was especially disconcerting for that district, as they have one of the highest per-pupil expenditures in the state—averaging \$17,956 in inflation-adjusted dollars between 1999 and 2009. The district’s School Board discussed proposing a tax increase over a three- or five-year period in order to supplement funding for the program lost from budget cuts (Trotto, 2002). The Superintendent stated that the district “doesn’t want to send back the kids we have. We will need to replace tuition money with local money. That could require a tax increase in the future” (Bower, 2003a, p. B1). Evidently, not all districts chose to abandon the program at the prospect of losing money and instead chose to find alternate funding streams.

The Superintendent of another school district describes the matter as “complex and controversial. Future decisions will affect the number of students and teachers attending and working in district schools” (McDonnell, 2003, p. 1). The district proposed to reduce transfer enrollment by 100 students, which would reduce revenue by \$450,000, possibly resulting in “smaller salary increases, a reduction in the number of employees and elimination of some programs unless additional revenue is found” (McDowell, 2003, p. 1). However, the very next paragraph of the article read,

In other matters, the board accepted a landscaping proposal, which include improvements to an area in front of the school building from the science wing to the south end of the building and an open quadrangle at the center of the building. The new landscaping will include several new benches, trees, a walking path, and recycling bins as well as a 10-foot fountain (McDowell, 2003, p. 1).

The district ultimately decided to reduce the number of students participating in the transfer program by 15 percent, beginning in 2005. A school principal said that he “regrets the decision but the district must be fiscally responsible” (Bower, 2004c, p. B1). Although many districts feared that the loss in funding from cuts to the desegregation program would result in a loss of staff, some

argue that accepting fewer students from St. Louis would not affect the budget as much as initially expected: “losing the students would not have saved the district money either because many of the district’s costs are fixed. For example, if two or three transfer students left a classroom, that class would still need a teacher” (Bower, 2004f, p. C1).

The majority of the participating suburban districts voted in June 2007 to continue participation in the transfer program for an additional five years, through the 2013-14 school year despite declining acceptances. Wagman (2004) writes, “[one district’s] percentage of black students has been gradually dropping, from about 14 percent black to 11 percent this year. That’s the effect of fewer city students participating in the busing program” (p. A1). This implies that families from St. Louis are not choosing to participate in the transfer program, rather than, as the analysis of the *economic* frame suggests, reflecting the fact that suburban districts were choosing to enroll fewer transfer students from St. Louis into their schools due to smaller per-pupil tuition reimbursements.

Human Impact Frame

Many tout the benefits that participation in the transfer program has brought to their respective communities. A suburban superintendent stated, “A program like this is necessary. I hope it gets us closer to integrating society. If not, it has been a good try” (Bower, 2002). One suburban principal explained that he was “proud to be a part of a community that values diversity in a metro area so segregated” (Bower, 2004d). Some school officials stated, “We have a responsibility to do the right thing. You can’t boil this down to economics. We value diversity. The world is global. We need to understand people of different cultures, people of different backgrounds” (Bower, 2004e, p. A1). Many suburban policy actors continue to advocate for the program because of the larger lessons that students, both suburban and urban, are able to learn.

Just as adults see the value in the transfer program, so do some of the participating students. Transfer students and families have reported that they participate in the program because of access to a quality education (Bower, 2004e; Giegerich, 2007a, 2007b; Wells & Crain, 1997), but some also report that participation reinforces the importance of diversity. One transfer student stated that, “diversity is key” because “everything is not white. Everything is not black. The voluntary student transfer program has let students be exposed to things they would not normally see, not just different ethnic groups but students from different economic levels” (Bower, 2004c, p. B1). Another explained,

I think that whites and blacks need to be together. I think it’s a must. If not, then we’re going to right back to the old days. We really are, because then it’s just segregated again. South County-whites. City-blacks. Then, we have that separation again. And eventually that separation will spread more, and then we’ll have a divided country again (Bower, 2004c, p. B1).

Historically, following the 1954 *Brown* decision when segregation in schools became illegal, Black students bore the bulk of the responsibility for integration. The transfer program in St. Louis is no different. One suburban teacher explained, “Being one or two students in a class and having to speak for your race is something that whites are privileged never to do” (Giegerich, 2007b, p. A1). However, suburban students are also very vocal in their support of the program, especially because of the diversity it brings to their communities. In 2004, 700 students at a suburban high school staged a walkout to support continuation of the program. A suburban student decided to organize the protest because she believed that the discussions about the program “were all about the budget

and not about the well-being of the student body” (Bower, 2004c, p. B1). Students carried signs reading, “Save diversity. Continue VST (voluntary student transfer)”, “Desegregate, don’t resegregate,” and “Homogenize milk, not students” (Bower, 2004b, p. B2). This demonstrates the investment in the voluntary transfer program and the active focus on diversity and integration by suburban students.

Several school officials questioned the program’s continuation and its focus on diversity. One district school board member explained, “The real question in Clayton is how to achieve diversity in the community. Some people feel the way to do it is through the desegregation program. Others think there are other ways to achieve diversity” (Bower, 2004a, p. C1). Although later apologizing for his comments due to public outcry, a district’s School Board President stated, “perhaps a more homogenous district would be easier to teach” (McClellan, 2004, p. C1). If suburban school district personnel have difficulty in seeing the benefits of a diverse student body, how can teachers, parents, and students be expected to view the program any differently?

Conversations about diversity extended beyond simply counting groups of students in schools. Questions were raised about the diversity of the teaching staff, as well as issues of student assignment, or tracking. Tracking is still seen as a form of segregation where there are little to no minority students in advanced classes while disproportionately represented in remedial and low-level classes. A suburban teacher was “troubled to find that the remedial classroom had a large number of black students, while there wasn’t a single one in the gifted classroom. That inspired her to start a support group to get black students into gifted education” (Hacker, 1999a, p. C1). The problem of tracking is echoed in LaMura’s (2008) study of the voluntary transfer program in Boston. Tracking is not a problem specific to voluntary transfer programs, but is, in fact, an issue that still plagues many schools across the country.

A suburban teacher also raised the issue of cultural sensitivity, explaining, “As principals and teachers, the scores distress and dismay us as well. Teachers must begin to look at whether they may unintentionally contribute to the achievement gap” (Tarlal, 2005, p. A1), while another district’s Director of Assessment explained that there were 14 Black teachers out of the district’s 117, noting, “I don’t think we have 100 percent culturally aware staff” (Tarlal, 2005, p. A1). A Black suburban parent believed that the district should be more proactive in ensuring that the diversity among students is reflected in the teaching staff without sacrificing the quality of teaching, stating, “Minority students do better when that takes place. But the primary focus has to be making sure you have the best qualified teacher” (Hacker, 2001, p. A1). A transfer student questioned “how [districts] can preach diversity if [they] don’t have a diverse staff?” (Tarlal, 2005, p. 1). There exists recognition among suburban teachers and administration that, first, suburban students are not the only ones that need to face their prejudices regarding diversity in their schools, and second, diversity should be reflected among the teaching staff and administration as well. However, more important than recognition of an issue is the proactive and sustained response to it.

The *human impact* frame also addresses equality and fairness. One suburban parent opposed isolated aspects of the transfer program, which she deemed unfair to suburban students. Students bused from the city to one particular suburb were able to earn coupons to McDonald’s as a reward for good behavior on the bus. The parent opposed the reward program because “by treating kids differently, you are creating a much larger separation between them, and resentment is going to occur” (Shapiro, 2008, para. 28). She further explained, “[Suburban] children view [the reward] program as a reward for the city kids, being given...for the same behavior that they are expected to uphold but, in turn, do not receive the same reward” (Shapiro, 2008, para. 31) and noted that city children have long bus rides because “it is a choice their parents have made” (Shapiro, 2008, para. 33). She argued for the reward program to be dropped “if it can’t be rewritten to give everyone the

same opportunity” because it “is being given for behavior that has nothing to do with education (and) it is limited to city children only” (Shapiro, 2008, para. 43). The principal responded, saying, “Fair doesn’t mean equal. And [the district] prides itself on meeting the diverse needs of all our students. Different students have different needs” (Shapiro, 2008, para. 30).

Conflict Frame

There was a stark contrast in the descriptions of the city and suburban communities included in some of the articles. Franck (2007) writes, “the St. Louis Public Schools need at least \$194 million more a year to help struggling students overcome the ravages of poverty, youth violence, teen pregnancy, lead poisoning, and a host of other social ills” (p. B1). In explaining the differences between the city and suburbs to suburban peers: “once, after his classmates asked what life was like in his neighborhood, the city’s rough Academy section, he made a video. It showed abandoned buildings, alleys...prostitutes, and people sleeping in the streets” (Wagman, 2004, p. A1). The bus ride to attend school in the suburbs is described as “a trip to another world, one of upscale spas and salons, subdivisions baptized with names like ‘the Estates at Winding Trails’ and suburban lanes evoking canyons and ridges, farms and crests” (Giegerich, 2007b, p. A1). One high school principal decided to ride the bus from the city to the suburbs to gain some insight into the choices made by transfer students, and explained, “to get on that bus and see where a lot of our kids come from and what it takes them to get here is a very powerful experience” (Giegerich, 2007a, p. C4).

The description of city schools was equally alarming. The voluntary transfer program is depicted as operating “like an emergency visa for students leaving St. Louis public schools for districts in the county,” as “a lifeline for city students” (Hampel, 2007, p. B1), as “a beacon of hope” (Bower, 2004d, p. B1), and as a “safety valve” (McClellan, 2007, p. B1). Some of the negative descriptions of St. Louis schools also come from students and families that participate in the transfer program. One student stated, “You spend a day at one of those Belleville high schools and then a day at East Side and you would see. East St. Louis High is marked by fights in the hallways, large classes, and low expectations” (Wagman, 2004, p. A1). Parents of transfer students contend, “There are great teachers in the city but a lot of parents are not involved. In the city schools, they stay busy trying to discipline kids and stop fights. They don’t have time to teach anything” (Bower, 2004e, p. A1). Another transfer student explained that the bus rides are “all worth it if you want to get a good education” (Giegerich, 2007b, p. A1).

Not everyone views the desegregation program as the aforementioned “lifeline” for city students, but instead perceives it to be a contributing factor to the power struggle between city and suburban schools. Some leaders in the Black community in St. Louis describe the program as a “brain drain, claiming that county schools would skim the best and brightest city school children, further undermining the city school system” (Joiner, 2008, para. 4). The city’s first Black mayor, Freeman Bosley Jr., also opposed the busing program because “the money spent on desegregation, which has now cost more than \$1.5 billion, should have been spent to improve city schools, and by extension, shore up crumbling neighborhoods” (Joiner, 2008, para. 5). The “brain drain” and funding arguments suggest that promising students should stay in the city schools supported by appropriate levels of funding, rather than leaving the city school system altogether—a sentiment currently resonating with charter school opponents across the country.

In describing the transfer program as a program designed for only “the most promising students” that have “parents who care” enough to enroll them, one journalist managed to condemn city students, parents, and schools all at once, writing,

One problem with urban schools seems to be cultural. A lot of kids aren't trying. Maybe that's natural. Maybe if a kid doesn't have a parent pushing him or her, the child won't try. Some of these kids come from very difficult backgrounds—no father, a single mother too busy fighting her own demons to push her children to succeed in school. Teaching these kids is an uphill battle. The hope is that the negative home environment can be overcome with a positive school environment (McClellan, 2007, p. B1).

Lack of faith in St. Louis Public Schools has also affected suburban enrollment in the city's magnet schools. As part of the dual transfer program, suburban students can enroll in magnet schools throughout St. Louis, but "a lack of confidence in the St. Louis Public School system has sent county enrollment in city magnet schools plummeting to an all-time low" (Hampel, 2006, p. D1). The president of a magnet school's Parent Teacher Organization blamed the decline in suburban student enrollment "on the district's inability to attract suburban parents" (Hampel, 2006, p. D1). SLPS enrollment is simultaneously affected by high numbers of Black students leaving for suburban districts and a dearth of suburban families enrolling in city magnets, despite available spaces.

Despite opposition to the program, and perhaps in light of the lack of confidence in the city schools, many regard the academic achievement of transfer students as signs of the necessity of the program. Ellerman states,

The voluntary transfer program has led to significant improvement in black student achievement. In addition, the program has led to higher graduation and college enrollment rates among black kids and has resulted in more racial, cultural and economic diversity among students in participating school districts in the city" (Joiner, 2008, para. 8).

Access to suburban schools is viewed as the reason for increased achievement. Following the 1999 Settlement Agreement, a parent from St. Louis explained, "I'm not really certain about what's going on, but I just know that I'm not ready for my children to come back to city schools" (Hacker, 1999b, p. C5). One program graduate explained, "If it were not for the transfer program, I would not be where I am today. Lindbergh's caring teachers and small class sizes and the absence of discipline problems helped me succeed" (Bower, 2004e, p. A1). A participating student viewed the suburban district in which he attends school as "my intellectual horizon" (Tarlas, 2005, p. 1). One district's program supervisor acknowledges that the achievement gap between Black and White students is a problem at the school, as in other districts, "but we have significant programs in place and it's just a matter of time before the gap goes away" (Joiner, 2009, para. 18). Despite achievement gains, one suburban district's school board president uses a deficit perspective to describe an increase in Black student achievement: "More African-American students are testing one level below proficient, instead of two or three levels below" (Tarlas, 2005, p. A1). The voluntary transfer program has received resistance from both urban and suburban decision-makers alike (including policymakers, educators, and parents), yet academic achievement persists among the transfer students.

Conclusion

While previous research on this voluntary transfer program has focused on the students and parents from St. Louis who openly admitted to participating because of access to high-quality education (see Wells & Crain, 1997), this particular study attempts to examine the area's school

desegregation policy from a different perspective while using an alternate methodology. Bringing attention to the factors that have affected, and continue to affect suburban implementation of the program, and the simultaneous increase and decrease in value placed on diversity and integration, allows for further examination of an overlooked desegregation policy and its impact on students, families, and schools.

The media framing analysis found that the majority of articles, and thus, the majority of information presented to the general public about the transfer program, pertained to funding. More specifically, many of the articles specifically referenced budget cuts and the impact of the potential loss of education funding (due to partial reimbursement for some districts) on the White students in the suburban schools. It seems that the voluntary transfer program in St. Louis is not being threatened politically or legally (as evidenced by its continued extensions); rather, it appears that suburban residents feel as if their schools, and by extension, their children, are being threatened financially and academically. Suburban stakeholders have made clear their aversion to sharing human and fiscal resources with the Black students transferring in from St. Louis city, as it implies that White suburban students will somehow lose personally and academically.

While some articles included news stories about the benefits of diversity and integration, the negative perception of St. Louis schools, the city, and the Black students and families that live there lingers. This suburban viewpoint supports the common assumption that urban minorities, especially those from low-income backgrounds, “lack the social and cultural capital required for social mobility” (Yosso, 2005, p. 70). As a counter-narrative, Yosso (2005) defines *community cultural wealth* as “an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro- and micro- forms of oppression” (p. 77). Unfortunately, it is not only the suburban communities that paint St. Louis in a negative light. Parents of students in the transfer program explain that they enrolled their children “precisely because of the importance the community places on education” (Bower, 2002). An example of the community cultural wealth is Morris’s (2004) study of elementary schools in St. Louis and New Orleans. These sites were used as examples of successful all-Black schools that contradict the contemporary negative view of urban schools and students. Morris (2004) states that that the lack of research on effective minority schools is “irresponsible,” and it is important to believe that “Blacks have something of value” (p. 105), rather than appearing as broken families, hard-to-educate children, and drug- and crime-riddled communities, as some of these articles suggest.

In his study of the backward-mapping approach to policy implementation, Elmore (1979) notes that, “the closer one is to the problem, the greater one’s ability to influence it” (p. 605). Although the Black families from St. Louis who participated in the program may be the “street-level bureaucrats” in the truest sense of the term because they have the greatest personal (and numerical) investment in the program, they actually have the least amount of power in determining the program’s implementation and continuation. This circumstance renders them virtually powerless as the participating suburban districts hold all of the power in maintaining or terminating the voluntary transfer program despite the interests of Black families in St. Louis and the urban policymakers. Further, the journalists appearing throughout this research may actually be considered “street-level bureaucrats” as their stories could have influenced, either positively or negatively, Black and White families in the St. Louis metropolitan area.

The decrease over time in both the numbers of Black students enrolling in suburban schools and in White suburban students enrolling in city magnet schools indicates that variations in program implementation among the different suburbs and in overall investment by White suburban families is as much of a hurdle to educational access as inequality itself. Suburban decision-makers have made clear their priorities about the voluntary transfer program through the growing importance

placed on tuition reimbursement, their refusal to share resources with city students, and the declining significance placed on diversity as evidenced by fewer Black students being accepted into suburban schools.

Suburban stakeholders also have an impact on diversity in city schools. The opposite side of this dual transfer program (White, suburban students attending city magnet schools) has also experienced declining enrollment, but is based on individual choice rather than on district policy. Whereas Black families in St. Louis City have essentially no power in their roles as “street-level bureaucrats,” White families from St. Louis County have the freedom to choose with ease their level of involvement. Rational choice theory suggests that individuals act in their own best interest (McClendon, 1985). In this case, assuming that suburban stakeholders are acting rationally, and basing their decisions on information gleaned in part from the media, the declining enrollments of White students in city magnets by personal choice implies, first, the belief that city schools will not provide high-quality education; second, that Black students and families will continue to shoulder the burden of integration more often than White students and families; and third, diversity and integration is not as important as academic achievement.

This critical examination of the suburban implementation of the voluntary interdistrict transfer program in the St. Louis metropolitan area, combined with the backward-mapping implementation analysis, showcases distinct relationships of privilege, power, and inequality between Black and White families, and between urban and suburban communities—despite the original intent of the program. Finnegan and Stewart (2009) argue that a focus on metropolitan solutions for racial integration has “been met with concerns by community members about their loss of local control and the detriment to their own children’s educational opportunities” (p. 35). This sentiment is not a new phenomenon—following White Flight to the suburbs after the *Brown* decision became a reality, Schneider (1992) found that suburban residents began to exert influence over local government to control taxes and education spending. While this voluntary interdistrict desegregation program is not a formal metropolitan solution in that the school districts in St. Louis County have not been consolidated, the suburban fear of the loss of financial and academic control is palpable, rendering moot the original tenets (integration and academic achievement) of the voluntary transfer program.

Past and present policies have separated people based on race and class, and as suburban communities across the country become more racially and socioeconomically diverse, we should not, and cannot, isolate the public school system and require it to be the only place where equality of opportunity is achieved. The three frames used in this analysis correspond to broader concerns facing education and social policies across the country—equal educational opportunity (human impact and economic frames), resource allocation (economic and conflict frames), and social justice (human impact and conflict frames). This analysis also reinforces the fact that simply putting students together in a school (whether by force or by choice) does not adequately address issues of access and achievement, especially when power, control, and funding are not distributed equally among the participating groups. Further, educators and policymakers must recognize that a child should not have to be on a bus for several hours a day in order to receive the benefits that other children subconsciously expect.

In 1966, almost 20 years before the creation of this transfer program, the Coleman Report suggested that peer composition matters, and that Black students who attended integrated schools had higher achievement than those that did not. The intent of this research is not to promote integration as the only way for Black students to be academically and personally successful, nor to suggest that suburban schools are the only means of attaining an improved educational opportunity; there are many successful, and often overlooked, predominately Black schools in urban

neighborhoods. Rather, this research aims to use this popular, long-running voluntary transfer program in St. Louis as a lens through which to examine desegregation in schools and communities, resource allocation, and power structures. Additionally, this examination uncovers the complex and dynamic relationships between cities and suburban areas and the manner in which these relationships are conveyed to the general public through the use of written media. The media constitutes a small percentage of any metropolitan area's civic elite, and the use of the articles included in this research was deliberate and purposeful, given the bulk of political and financial power held by the suburban communities over the continuation of the voluntary transfer program. These articles represent a snapshot of information—no matter how biased—that suburban residents, educators, and policymakers relied upon between 1999 and 2009 when making decisions about the program. Future research should incorporate the perspective of urban families and stakeholders, with an eye toward more balanced and extensive media coverage. Additionally, as technology improves and has grown to reach wider audiences, a framing analysis which incorporates other news mediums (including television and social media) can be explored. Finally, this research can be used to continue the conversation about racial and socioeconomic integration, the means (human, fiscal, and political) necessary to achieve it in schools and in the larger society, and whether integration is, in fact, necessary and/or possible.

Bell's (1980) interest-convergence theory suggests that, "the interests of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated when it converges with the interests of whites" (p. 523). Prior to the 1999 Settlement Agreement, when the transfer program was fully funded by the state and suburban districts received full reimbursement for accepting Black students from St. Louis, participation reached almost 15,000 students. At that time, the financial interests of the suburban districts converged with the academic interests of the urban families. After 1999, once suburban districts were only partially reimbursed for accepting transfer students, the number of available seats declined by over 50%, falling to fewer than 7,000 seats by 2009. While the voluntary transfer program in St. Louis attempts to address social and educational disparities and aims to provide improved educational opportunities for Black students from St. Louis, it still remains that "when objectives compete, money wins."

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