

# Parent's Choice or School's Choice? Discrimination Against Students in Admission to Private, Charter, and Traditional Public Schools

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# School Choice Programs are Expanding Rapidly

- Universal voucher programs are being implemented in many states, specially red states
  - **Private schools can legally discriminate against students except race**
  - **Even racial discrimination is hard to prove**
- Charter schools are also expanding
  - **Charter schools tend to be small and accountability could create incentives to discriminate**
- To what extent do these programs discriminate against students is an open question

# We will conduct an audit experiment of all schools in the US

- We will send emails to receive admission information
- We will randomize several characteristics of the students to test for discrimination
  - Race/Ethnicity: Black, Hispanic, White, Arab
  - LGBTQ+ Status: gay/lesbian vs. presumed straight and transgender vs. presumed cis
  - Disability Status: ADHD, autism, no disability disclosed
  - GPA: High vs low
  - Discipline: Disciplinary record vs. no disciplinary record
  - Socioeconomic Status (SES)/Income: High, middle, low paying jobs

# We contribute to the literature in several ways

- We will be the first audit study to test for discrimination in access to education in public, charter, and private schools
  - **No previous audit studies included private schools**
- First study to test for a wide range of characteristics
  - **LGBTQ+ and Arab**

# Data



# National Longitudinal School Database (NLSD)

- NLSD is a census of all schools in the US
  - **Includes all private, charter, and traditional public schools from 1990-2019**
- We will supplement the NLSD with data about voucher participation, discrimination law (e.g., don't say gay), and political leaning of the state
- We will also supplement NLSD with MDR Education's contact data

# Study Design



# We will consider many dimensions

- At least 7 types of schools
  - **Private: Catholic, Protestant, secular, and single-sex**
  - **Charter: No-excuses/other, district/other authorizer**
  - **Traditional public schools**
- 6 dimensions of potential discrimination
  - **Race/ethnicity (Black, Hispanic, White, Arab)**
  - **LGBTQ+ status (sexual orientation or transgender status)**
  - **Disability status (ADHD, autism, no disability disclosed)**



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# Communication with the Schools

- There is an extensive literature on how to write the emails to the schools (Patrick is the expert)
- We will send two emails to school administrators (available in the MDR Education data)
- We will randomize the characteristics of the students in the emails to signal our dimensions of interest
- The emails will be realistic and will ask for information about the admissions process
  - We will use some of Doug's extensive contacts with educators to ensure the emails are realistic

# Emailing Strategy

- We will send two emails to each school
  - **One email will be "treatment" (e.g. parent mention their child is transgender) and the other will be "control" (no mention)**
  - We will randomize the order of the emails
  - **Send at least one month apart**
- Sending two emails substantially increases statistical power
- This is the place where we need suggestions