



# FINAL REPORT: ENROLLMENT AND PERCEPTIONS RESEARCH STUDY

Kansas City Public Schools

*April 2020*

# INTRODUCTION

During the 2019-2020 school year, Hanover Research (Hanover) completed a series of research projects to assist Kansas City Public Schools (KCPS) in developing a system-wide plan to ensure that all students have access to a range of high-quality educational opportunities and improve student recruitment and retention across the district. Hanover’s work provides insights to administrators at KCPS regarding:

- The factors that drive local families’ decisions around school enrollment;
- What changes are needed to retain and attract students;
- The competitive landscape, including what differentiates KCPS from other school options; and
- The perception of KCPS schools to inform branding, marketing, and communications efforts.

Hanover completed a series of three research studies to gather information from stakeholders on their opinions, experiences, and preferences related to family enrollment decisions and strategies for improving student recruitment and retention.

This document presents comprehensive findings from each study and overall recommendations based on a synthesis of study results.

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# METHODOLOGY

Hanover completed the following three research studies on behalf of KCPS to gain insight into perceptions of the district and families’ enrollment decision making. The **Family Survey** and **Focus Groups** included parents from a range of KCPS signature and traditional schools, as well as non-KCPS parents. The Focus Groups also included KCPS staff and key community members. The **Staff Survey** included site-level staff from across KCPS schools.

## Key Stakeholders

## Participants

### Family Survey

October 2019 –  
February 2020

- KCPS Current Parents
- Local Parents of Non-KCPS Students
- Local Parents of Future School-Aged Children

2,331

Total Respondents



### Staff Survey

January –  
February  
2020

- KCPS Teachers
- KCPS Administrators
- Other KCPS site-level staff

506

Total Respondents

### Focus Groups

February  
2020

- KCPS Current Parents
- Local Parents of Non-KCPS Students
- KCPS Teachers/Librarians
- KCPS Partner Organization Representatives
- School-Choice Knowledgeable Organization Representatives

11

Focus Group  
Sessions

2

In-Depth  
Interviews

# ENROLLMENT DECISION PRIORITIES

- Families place the highest value and emphasis on the **quality of education** - especially the quality of academic programs and curricula and teachers - when selecting a school for their child.

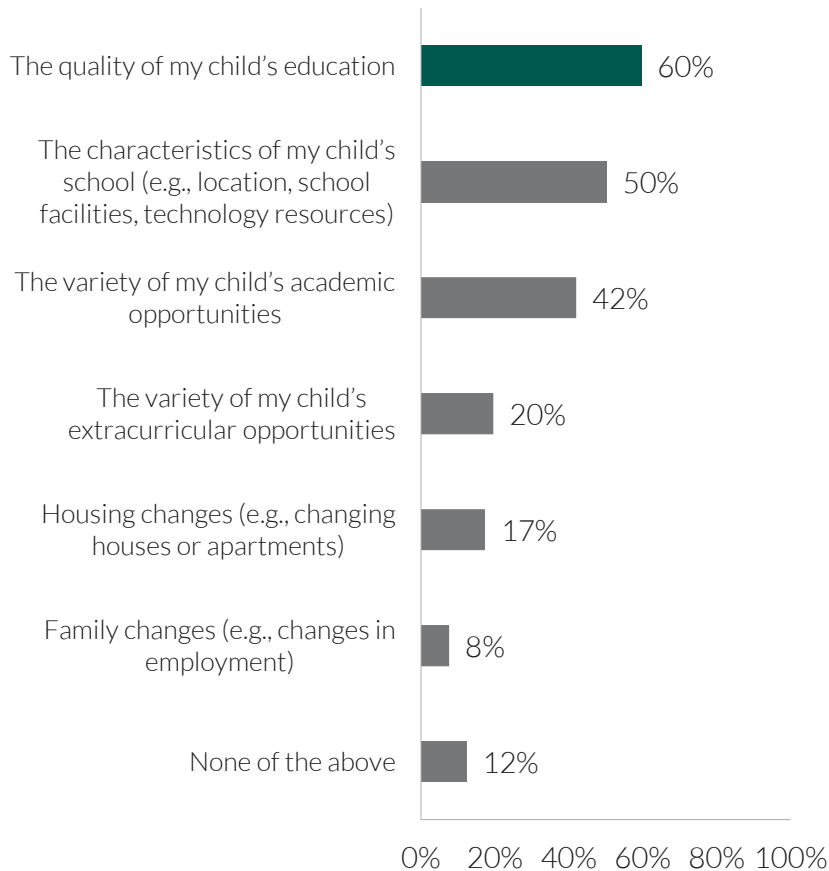


# RECOMMENDATIONS

- Emphasize maintaining and expanding high-quality academic programs and curricula in the district. The quality of academic programs and curricula is the most commonly cited academic-related factor that influences enrollment decisions among families (65%) and second most common according to staff (52%).
  - The enrollment decisions of parents of a child who transferred out of KCPS were *more affected by overall educational quality* than those of parents of a child who transferred into KCPS.
  - Staff – particularly neighborhood school staff – recommend prioritizing the improvement of *academic rigor* and the expansion of *programs for students who struggle academically* to attract and retain families.
  - Similarly, focus group participants recommend programs that increase the level of *personalization and rigor* – again, particularly at neighborhood schools – and resources to *identify students in need of additional support*.
- Continue to invest in the recruitment and retention of high-quality teachers and staff. Staff members perceive teacher quality as the most important academic-related factor affecting families' enrollment decisions (75%), as well as a top strength for KCPS. Families also commonly cite the quality of teachers (63%) as influential in making enrollment decisions.
  - Focus group participants recommend that KCPS focus their efforts on staff retention by *studying why teachers are leaving* and adjusting policies so that *first-year teachers* are not placed in high-needs schools and classrooms.

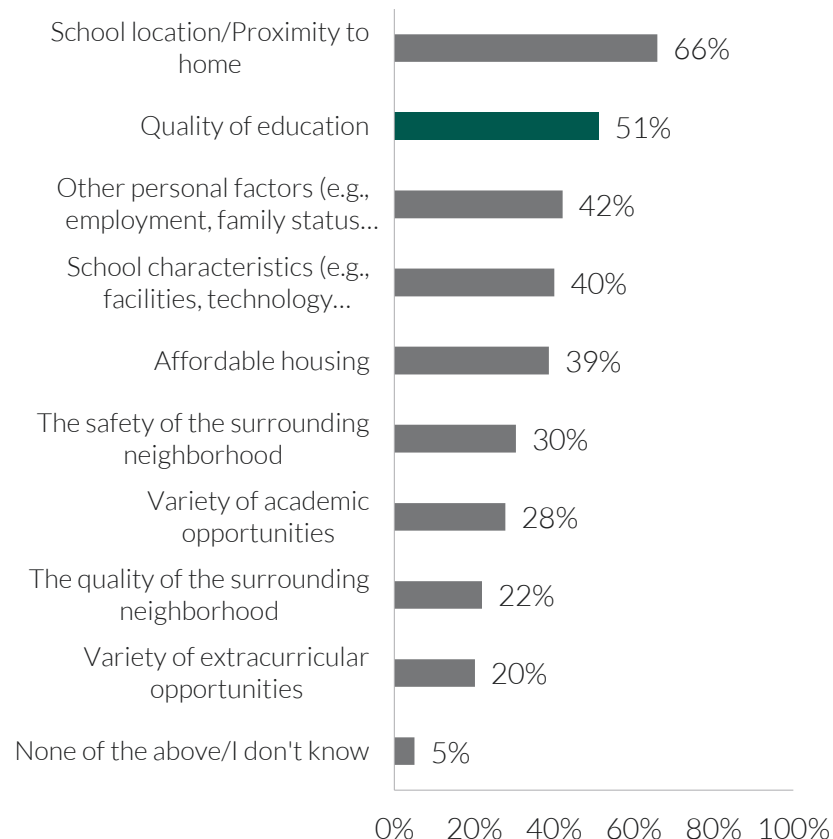
# FAMILY SURVEY RESULTS

Which of the following factors influenced your and your child's decision to enroll your child at their current/graduated school?  
Please select all that apply. (n=1,994)



# STAFF SURVEY RESULTS

In your experience with families and students at your school, which of the following factors most influence families' school enrollment decisions for their children? Please select all that apply. (n=496)





# IMPROVEMENT AREAS

- **Behavior and classroom management** is viewed as an area in need of improvement across the district and one that is linked to the perception of school safety.

“From middle school into high school, the internal violence level is pretty high, and surprisingly high, I think, of major fights, and fist fights, and aggression that scares teachers and kids.

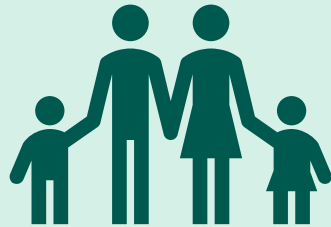
– KCPS Partner (Focus Group)

# RECOMMENDATIONS

- Seek opportunities to provide additional behavioral support for students as part of a larger effort to improve school safety. While families are less likely to list behavioral supports (27%) and classroom management (42%) as influential factors in their enrollment decisions, nearly half (48%) do cite school safety as a consideration. Over half of staff members also note that school safety is influential in families’ school enrollment decisions (64%).
  - Staff report *classroom management and effective behavioral supports* as weaknesses of KCPS in comparison to local charter options.
  - Neighborhood school staff are more than twice as likely than signature school staff to believe that their school would most benefit from prioritizing *behavioral programming and supports* in order to attract and retain families. This is the most commonly selected priority area for staff overall.
  - Parents of a child who transferred out of KCPS placed more *emphasis on school safety* when making their child’s most recent enrollment decision than current KCPS parents.
  - Focus group participants suggest improvements to *classroom management and discipline practices* to improve perceptions of school safety and violence.
  - Focus group participants also suggest the establishment of multi-faceted strategies to reduce negative student behavior, such as increasing *trauma-informed practices*, implementing a *district-wide social-emotional learning* curriculum, and hiring additional *school-based social workers*.

# IMPROVEMENT AREAS

- **Parent engagement** and **class size** are both viewed as weaknesses of KCPS and important factors in school choice for some families.

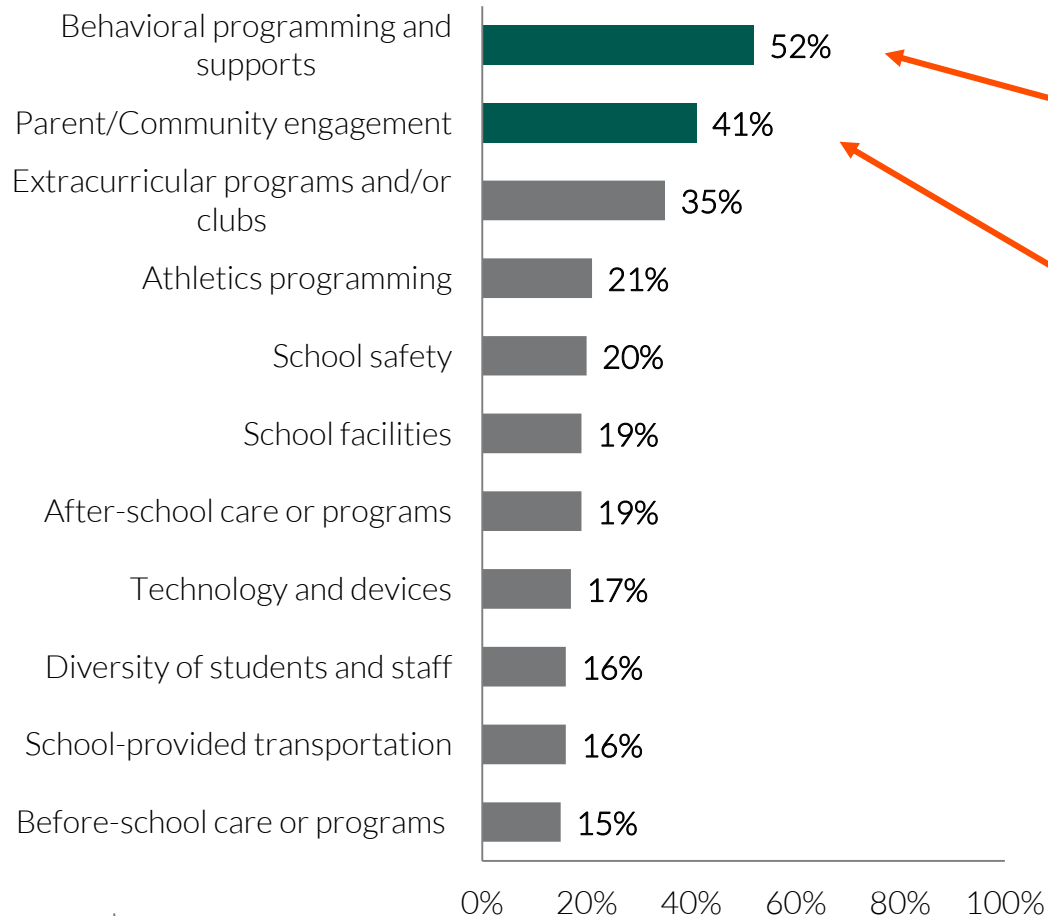


# RECOMMENDATIONS

- Encourage schools to increase opportunities for parent and community engagement, especially at secondary schools. Nearly half of families identify the level of parent involvement and outreach as a factor in their decision to enroll in their current school (48%). Focus group participants also perceive private and charter schools as having higher levels of parent involvement, better communication, and more personal relationships with families. Parent involvement is viewed as higher at KCPS elementary schools compared to secondary schools.
  - Focus group participants recommend that KCPS focus on strategies for *engaging parents who work during the day*, establish *parent-teacher organizations* at all schools, and *showcase parent involvement* when parents tour schools.
- Consider the feasibility of lowering class size at KCPS schools, especially those that struggle with recruitment and retention of students. Smaller than average class size may be a marketable factor for prospective parents. About a third of families list small class size as a factor in their decision to enroll in their current school (33%). Focus group participants also perceive private and charter schools as having smaller class sizes and recommend reducing class size to improve overall student enrollment and retention.
  - Non-KCPS parents – particularly parents of a future school-aged child and parents of a child who left KCPS – place *more emphasis on class sizes* when making enrollment decisions than current KCPS parents.

# STAFF SURVEY RESULTS

Do you feel that your school would benefit from prioritizing any of the following areas to attract and/or retain families? Please select all that apply from the list below. (n=451)



Top Three Weaknesses of KCPS v. local charter schools.

**36%** <sup>#3</sup>

Effective Behavioral Supports

**42%** <sup>#2</sup>

Level of Parent Involvement/  
Outreach

**43%** <sup>#1</sup>

Class Size

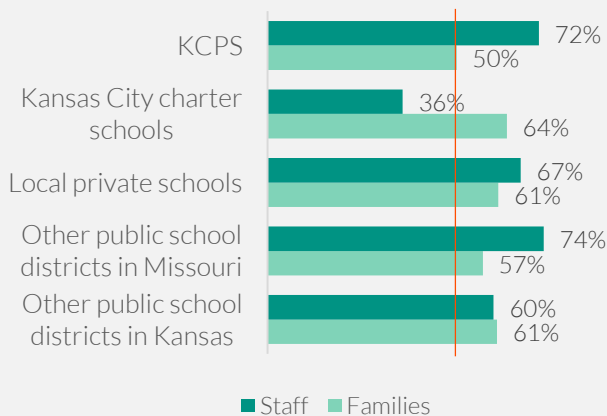


# PERCEPTION OF KCPS SCHOOLS

- Perceptions of KCPS are mostly positive overall, though families generally have a **more positive opinion of other school options**. Moreover, non-current KCPS parents have significantly less positive perceptions of the district.

## Overall Perception

% Somewhat Positive + % Very Positive



# RECOMMENDATIONS

- Focus resources to support marketing and recruitment efforts at traditional neighborhood schools. Focus group participants report a perception that signature schools at KCPS are viewed as having a stronger and improving reputation in comparison to traditional schools. Some stakeholders perceive signature schools as receiving more resources and support and as having more rigorous academic standards. Further, some parents of signature school students report that they would have chosen a charter school over their neighborhood school if their child had not enrolled in a signature school.
- Develop marketing and recruitment strategies that highlight the value of KCPS to future parents and those considering charter school options in particular. Future parents and parents of young children have the least positive perceptions of KCPS overall. In comparison, nearly twice as many parents of future school-aged children have positive perceptions of Kansas City charter schools, suggesting that charter schools will continue to be a major competitor to KCPS for future students in the city.
  - Focus group participants highlight KCPS' greater *diversity, variety of extracurricular options, before- and after-school care, and services for students with special needs* as benefits over other school options, including charter and private schools.
  - Minority parents* are more likely to have *positive perceptions of KCPS* than white, non-Hispanic parents.

# FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

## KCPS Perceived Challenges & Negative Aspects



Teacher turnover

Negative student behavior  
and lack of classroom  
management

Attendance Challenges

Accreditation challenges

Lack of academic support  
and rigor

Segregation and redlining  
effects

Inconsistencies and  
variation within and across  
schools

Constant Change

## KCPS Perceived Benefits & Positive Aspects



Variety of extracurricular  
options

Supportive teachers

Efforts to improve

Diversity

Before- and after-school  
care

Supports and services for  
students with special needs

# PERCEPTION OF KCPS SCHOOLS

- Stakeholders recognize that the district is working to **overcome challenges and negative coverage in the local press.**

“In the news it comes out when they do something wrong, but when they do something right you never know”

– KCPS Parent (Focus Group)

“I think the media loves sensationalizing failure. So I think a lot of the bright, shining stars are not reported as well as they could be.”

– School Choice Knowledgeable (Focus Group)

# RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop a marketing and public relations campaign that showcases positive initiatives and aspects throughout KCPS signature and neighborhood schools to balance negative media and improve public perceptions. Stakeholders are aware of the district’s challenges with accreditation, staff retention, student behavior and violence, academic rigor, segregation, attendance, and variation between schools. Further, they emphasize that KCPS is represented negatively by the media, which biases public opinion and perception of its schools.
  - Parents of a child currently enrolled in KCPS have more positive perceptions of KCPS than other parents and community members, suggesting that these stakeholders may be *more aware of the system’s successes and benefits*. Parents of a child who left KCPS, however, have the most positive perceptions of local charter schools.
  - Focus group participants recommend *recruiting student and alumni volunteers to act as advocates* for their schools to the public.

# FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

The following themes arose across focus groups and represent both barriers that inhibit parents from enrolling or keeping their child in KCPS, as well as areas that KCPS can address to improve student recruitment and retention in district schools:



**School Climate, Safety, and Violence**



**Communication and Relationship-Building**



**Meeting Students' Academic Needs**



**Parent Engagement and Involvement in School**



**Staff Retention**

# RECRUITMENT OF FAMILIES

- The **enrollment process** is viewed as a potential barrier to overcoming negative perceptions of KCPS schools and improving recruitment and retention.

"I just still had a good feeling that I hadn't always had when I walked in to other schools. And so that helped me decide to send my kids there."

– Non-KCPS Parent (Focus Group)

"Enrollment...was a nightmare. ... The system wasn't working right"

– KCPS Parent (Focus Group)

# RECOMMENDATIONS

- Improve the enrollment and application experience for parents of prospective students, with a particular focus on transitions between schools. Focus group participants report that parents find the enrollment process challenging and often lack sufficient information on the steps required. Recommended improvements related to the enrollment process include:
  - Providing more information about school choice options and deadlines to all parents early in the school year;
  - Conducting quality and accuracy tests on enrollment materials in other languages; and
  - Improving KCPS' online enrollment system.
- Ensure that schools offer welcoming and informative tours for prospective families. While parents primarily rely on word of mouth and recommendations from friends, neighbors, and social media, they also place significant importance on their school visit experience in their enrollment decisions. Focus group participants, especially those who send their children to non-KCPS schools, report that school visits are very impactful and that they often choose a school based on its "feel" during the tour.

# FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

Families find school information to inform enrollment decisions from:



Word of mouth and conversations with family, friends, neighbors, and social media



School visits, shadows, and classroom visits



Organized tours that bring parents to visit multiple schools



Online: school websites, comparison websites, and reviews

Parents describe having trouble finding information about enrollment in KCPS schools and describe a lack of communication from the district and individual schools regarding enrollment, especially around the middle and high school transition and related deadlines.



Availability of school choice information for the middle and high school transition differs by school



Trouble enrolling in KCPS schools



Enrollment information difficult to obtain for parents who work or do not feel comfortable in schools





# **STUDY 1:** FAMILY ENROLLMENT DECISIONS SURVEY RESULTS

# INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

- In this section, Hanover analyzes and summarizes the results from the **Family Enrollment Decisions Survey**. In total, 2,331 respondents completed at least part of the survey.
- The survey was fielded online using the Qualtrics software platform between October 2019 and February 2020.
- After data collection, Hanover identified and removed low-quality respondents.
- Sample sizes vary across questions as some questions only pertain to a subset of respondents.
- “Don’t Know or Not Applicable” responses, and equivalent, are often excluded from the figures and analysis in order to focus on respondents who did express an opinion.
- The survey was available in English, Spanish, Swahili, and Burmese.

## KEY FINDINGS

# OVERALL RESULTS

- **Overall perceptions of KCPS are less positive compared to other schools in the area.** Among all respondents, Kansas City charter schools account for the most positive perceptions (64% of respondents rate their perception as either somewhat or very positive) followed by local private schools (61%), other public districts in Kansas (61%), other public districts in Missouri (57%), and KCPS (50%).
- **Respondents most commonly factor in quality of their child's education when deciding where to enroll their child.** Approximately 60% of respondents report that education quality influences their enrollment decision, followed by 50% who factor in the characteristics of their child's school.
  - Specifically, quality of academic programs and curricula (65%) and quality of teachers (63%) are the most common academic-related factors that influence enrollment.
  - In terms of school characteristics, at least half of respondents influenced by these types of factors identify location/proximity to home (58%), diversity of students and staff (58%), and sense of community within schools (54%) as a characteristic that affected their enrollment decision.
  - The quality (27%) and safety (27%) of the respondent's neighborhood, as well as cost of housing (25%), are the most common non-education related factors to influence enrollment.
- **Respondents most commonly identify quality of academic programs and curricula as having the greatest effect on their enrollment decisions for their child across academic-related factors, school characteristics, and factors unrelated to education.** A large number of respondents who select these items as having an effect on their child's enrollment ranked them as the first or second most important influence on their enrollment decision.

## KEY FINDINGS

# PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL OPTIONS

- **Parents of students who have always attended a KCPS school or have attended at least two KCPS schools consecutively have the most positive rating of KCPS.** Approximately 72% rate the district somewhat or very positively. Notably, parents of young children and future parents tend to have the least positive perceptions, with only 34% rating the district somewhat or very positively. In contrast, parents of a future school-aged child have the most positive perceptions of other public school districts in Kansas (67%). Parents of a child who previously attended a KCPS school have the most positive perceptions of local charter schools. Notably, minority respondents are more likely to express positive perceptions of KCPS than non-minority respondents (60% v. 43%, respectively).
- **Similarly, parents of school-aged children and graduates appear to have stronger overall perceptions of KCPS than parents of young children.** Only 37% of parents whose children are too young for Pre-Kindergarten provide a somewhat or very positive rating of KCPS overall. In contrast, 55% of parents with children in Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 6, 50% in Grades 7-8, 51% in Grades 9-12, and 57% of parents whose children have graduated from high school provide a somewhat or very positive rating of KCPS.
- **Non-current KCPS parents provide lower ratings of public school districts in Missouri than of private or charter schools.** Only 37% of non-current KCPS parents provide a somewhat or very positive rating of KCPS and only 55% of non-current KCPS parents provide a similar rating of other school districts in Missouri. In comparison, 65% provide a somewhat or very positive rating of Kansas City charter schools and 63% provide a similar rating of local private schools. In contrast, 69% of KCPS parents provide somewhat or very positive ratings of KCPS and 61% provide somewhat or very positive ratings of other public school districts in Missouri. Current KCPS parents and non-current KCPS parents provide similarly positive ratings of public school districts in Kansas (59% and 62%, respectively).

## KEY FINDINGS

# FACTORS INFLUENCING ENROLLMENT DECISIONS

### *Academic-Focused Factors*

- **All respondent groups highly rank quality of academic programs and curricula and quality of teachers as important factors in determining where they enroll their child.** However, across parent enrollment groups, parents of future school-aged children have the highest percentage of respondents who rank these items as the single most important academic-related factor affecting their enrollment decisions: just over one-quarter of these respondents rank quality of academic programs and curricula (27%) first and nearly one-fifth rank quality of teachers first (19%). Current KCPS and prior KCPS parents less frequently rank quality of academic programs and curricula as their most important academic-related factor in comparison with other parents.
- **Notably, parents with a child who transferred to KCPS from a school outside of the district are least likely to report that this decision was influenced by the quality of their child's education,** with only 43% of these parents selecting this factor, for example, in comparison to 79% of parents with a child who left KCPS. Quality of college preparation was a more common factor influencing the enrollment decisions of parents with a child who transferred to KCPS from a school outside of the district in comparison with all other parent enrollment groups, apart from parents of future school-aged children.
- **Other than parents of young children and future parents, parents with a child who left a KCPS school are the most likely to indicate that the quality of their child's education influenced the decision to enroll their child in the school they attended after leaving KCPS.** These parents are also more likely to indicate that the variety of their child's academic opportunities affected their enrollment decision than current KCPS parents. Moreover, in comparison with current KCPS parents, parents of a former KCPS student who indicate that academic-related factors impacted their school enrollment decision place more emphasis on effective classroom management (55%), quality of student support services (43%), small class sizes (38%), and effective behavioral supports (38%) than do current KCPS parents.

## KEY FINDINGS

# FACTORS INFLUENCING ENROLLMENT DECISIONS (CONT.)

### *Academic-Focused Factors (cont.)*

- **Parents with a child currently attending a charter school or private school place greater importance on quality of academic programs and curricula than do public school district parents.** A quarter (26%) of current charter school and private school parents rank quality of academic programs and curricula as the most important factor affecting their most recent enrollment decision in comparison to 12% of public school district parents.
- **While parents with a child across grade levels commonly identify quality of academic programs and curricula as the most influential factor affecting their enrollment decisions, parents of a child who has not yet enrolled in Pre-K are most likely to rank this area as the most important factor.** Logically, parents of a child in Grades 7-8 and 9-12 are increasingly likely to factor in quality of college preparation in their enrollment decisions.

### *School Characteristics*

- **In comparison with current KCPS parents, regarding school characteristics, parents of a student who transferred out of KCPS place less emphasis on before- and after-school programming.** School safety (53%) and student and staff diversity (51%) are the most common school characteristics that affected these parents' most recent enrollment decisions.
- **Parents of a child who has not yet enrolled in Pre-K are more likely to expect that their sense of community within schools, school safety, and level of parent involvement/outreach will impact their future school enrollment decisions for their child than parents of an older child.** Extracurricular programs and clubs are uniquely among the three most common factors that impacted the enrollment decisions of parents with a child in Grades 9-12, although only 44% of these parents select this factor.



## KEY FINDINGS

# FACTORS INFLUENCING ENROLLMENT DECISIONS (CONT.)

### *Non-Educational Factors*

- **Non-current KCPS parents are more likely to identify non-educational factors as affecting their school enrollment decisions than current KCPS parents.** Approximately 36% of non-current KCPS parents identify neighborhood quality as a factor affecting their school choice, compared to 18% of current KCPS parents, and 33% of non-current KCPS parents identify neighborhood safety as a factor affecting their school choice compared to 20% of current KCPS parents. Likewise, 16% of non-current KCPS parents report that family status changes such as marriage or having a new child affected their school choice, compared to 9% of current KCPS parents.
- **Excluding parents of young children and future parents, parents of a child who transferred to KCPS from outside of the system are most likely to indicate that housing changes influenced their enrollment decision.** More than a quarter (26%) of these parents selected housing changes as a factor that influenced their and their child's last school enrollment decision as opposed to 14% of other current KCPS parents. In comparison with parents of an older child, parents of a child who has not yet enrolled in Pre-K are more likely to place weight on the quality and safety of their neighborhood when making enrollment decisions.

## KEY FINDINGS

# FACTORS INFLUENCING ENROLLMENT DECISIONS (CONT.)

### *Differences by Ethnicity, Race, and Income*

- In comparison with white, non-Hispanic respondents, smaller percentages of minority respondents indicate that quality of their child's education (53% v. 72%), characteristics of their child's school (43% v. 65%) and variety of their child's academic opportunities (37% v. 47%) are factors that influenced their most recent enrollment decision. Minority respondents were, however, slightly more likely to indicate that housing changes affected this decision (19% v. 12%). Of minority parents who indicate that academic-related factors affected their decision, the most prevalent factors are similar to those selected by respondents overall. In terms of school characteristics that affected their enrollment decision, non-minority respondents place more emphasis on sense of community within schools than minority respondents.
- Quality of their child's education is less likely to affect the enrollment decisions of lower-income respondents (i.e., respondents with a household income below \$50,000) than the decisions of more affluent respondents. While 46% of lower-income respondents indicate that the quality of their child's education influenced their most recent enrollment decision, 72% of higher-income respondents indicate similarly. However, the specific academic-related factors influencing parents' decisions are similar across income levels. School characteristics influencing parents' decisions are similar across income levels as well, although lower-income parents are more likely to identify school-provided transportation as an influential factor (33% v. 17%). Housing changes are more likely to affect the enrollment decisions of lower-income respondents, with a quarter (26%) of these respondents selecting housing changes as an influential factor in comparison with just 10% of more affluent respondents.

# OVERVIEW OF RESPONDENTS

# OVERVIEW OF RESPONDENTS

## All Respondents

Enrollment Status	#	%
Community Member	264	11%
Current KCPS Parent (Former School: KCPS School)	695	30%
Current KCPS Parent (Former School: Non-KCPS School)	320	14%
Future Parent	193	8%
Non-Current KCPS Parent (Former School: Non-KCPS School)	654	28%
Non-Current KCPS Parent (Former School: Unknown)	110	5%
Past KCPS Parent	95	4%
Total	2,331	100%

KCPS Status	#	%
Current KCPS Parents	1,015	44%
Non-Current KCPS Parents	1,316	61%
Total	2,331	100%

## Parent Respondents

Student Grade Band	#	%
Early Childhood Education (or Younger)	136	7%
PreK-6	1,236	61%
Grades 7-8	226	11%
Grades 9-12	387	19%
Graduated	25	1%
Total	2,010	100%

Student Grade Band	#	%
Public School (Non-Charter)	1,301	69%
Charter School	389	21%
Private School	119	6%
Other	41	2%
Homeschool	24	1%
Total	1874	100%

Note: Enrollment Status groups are defined on the following slide. The “Early Childhood Education (or Younger)” student grade band encompasses respondents who indicated that their child “is not yet enrolled in/too young for Pre-Kindergarten.”

# ENROLLMENT STATUS DEFINITIONS

Enrollment Status	Description
Community Member	Respondents who do not currently have and do not expect to have any children living with them in the next two years or respondents (in the first survey iteration) who have no children living with them and were not asked whether they expect to have any children living with them in the next two years.
Current KCPS Parent (Former School: KCPS School)	Respondents who have a child who currently attends (or graduated from) a KCPS school and who (a) attended another KCPS school prior to their current school (or the school from which they graduated) or (b) only ever attended the school at which they are currently enrolled (or from which they graduated).
Current KCPS Parent (Former School: Non-KCPS School)	Respondents who have a child who currently attends (or graduated from) a KCPS school and who previously attended a school outside of KCPS (e.g., a charter school, private school, school in another public school district).
Future Parent	Respondents (a) whose child is not yet enrolled in or too young for Pre-Kindergarten or (b) who do not currently have children but do expect to have children living with them in the next two years and indicate that they are at least somewhat likely to raise a child in Kansas City, MO.
Non-Current KCPS Parent (Former School: Non-KCPS School)	Respondents who have a child that currently attends (or graduated from) a non-KCPS school and who attended a non-KCPS school prior to enrolling at their current school (or the school from which they graduated).
Non-Current KCPS Parent (Former School: Unknown)	Respondents (in the first survey iteration) who have a child that currently attends (or graduated from) a non-KCPS school and who may or may not have attended a KCPS school prior to their current school (or the school from which they graduated).
Past KCPS Parent	Respondents who have a child that current attends (or graduated from) a non-KCPS school but attended a KCPS school prior to their current school (or the school from which they graduated).

# RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS BY ENROLLMENT STATUS

Enrollment Status	% Living Within KCPS Boundaries	% Hispanic/Latino Child	% Non-White Child	% Household Income Below \$50K	% Household Income \$150K+
Community Member	59%	N/A	N/A	26%	13%
Current KCPS Parent (Former School: KCPS School)	97%	19%	63%	49%	7%
Current KCPS Parent (Former School: Non-KCPS School)	96%	17%	61%	51%	6%
Future Parent	79%	11%	39%	29%	22%
Non-Current KCPS Parent (Former School: Non-KCPS School)	79%	12%	43%	26%	17%
Non-Current KCPS Parent (Former School: Unknown)	78%	17%	64%	48%	4%
Past KCPS Parent	81%	20%	45%	38%	13%

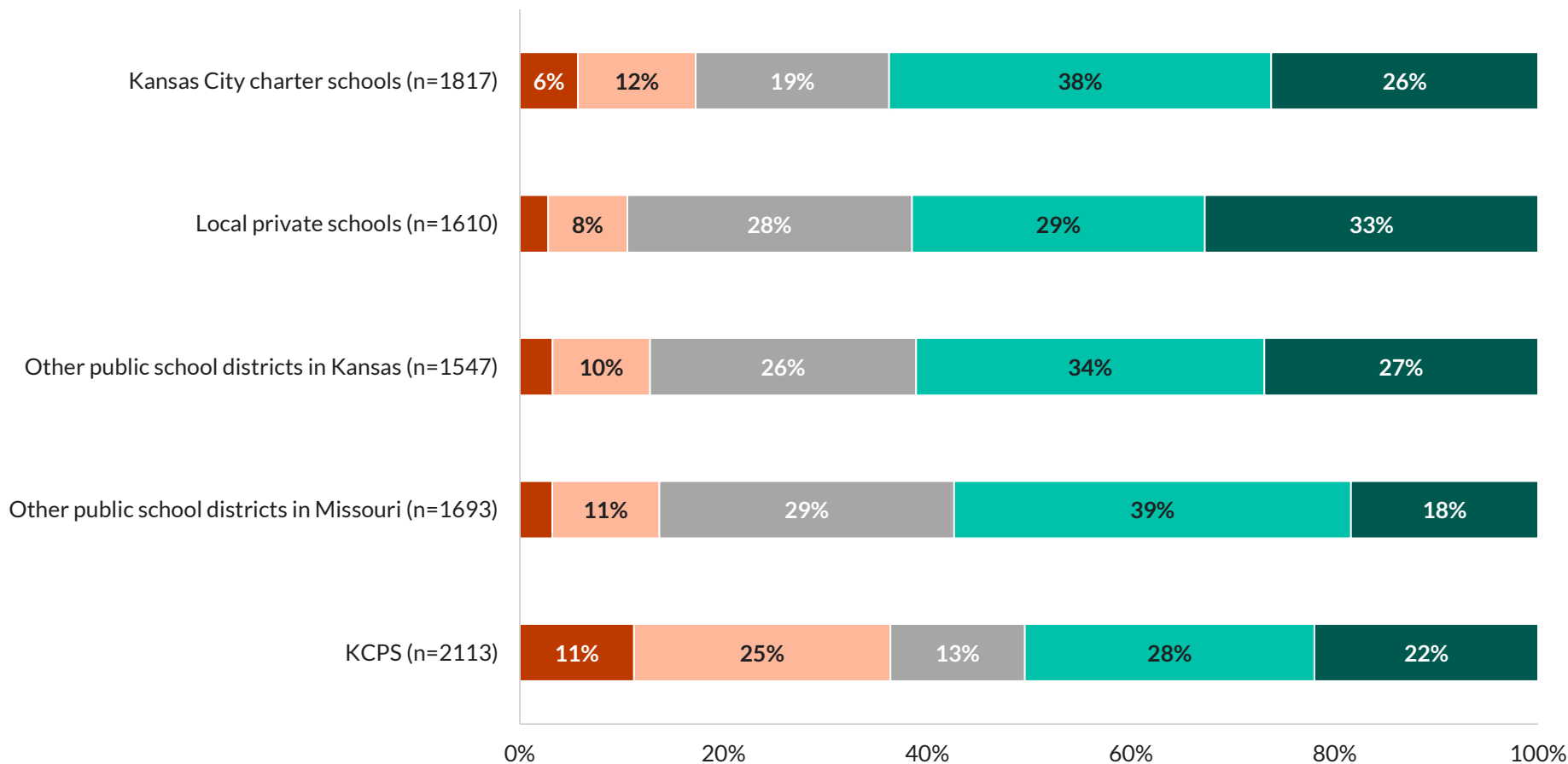


# SURVEY RESULTS VISUALIZATIONS

# OVERALL PERCEPTIONS

What are your overall perceptions of the following districts or schools?

Very Negative   Somewhat Negative   Neither Negative nor Positive   Somewhat Positive   Very Positive



# OVERALL PERCEPTIONS

## BY FAMILY/STUDENT ENROLLMENT STATUS

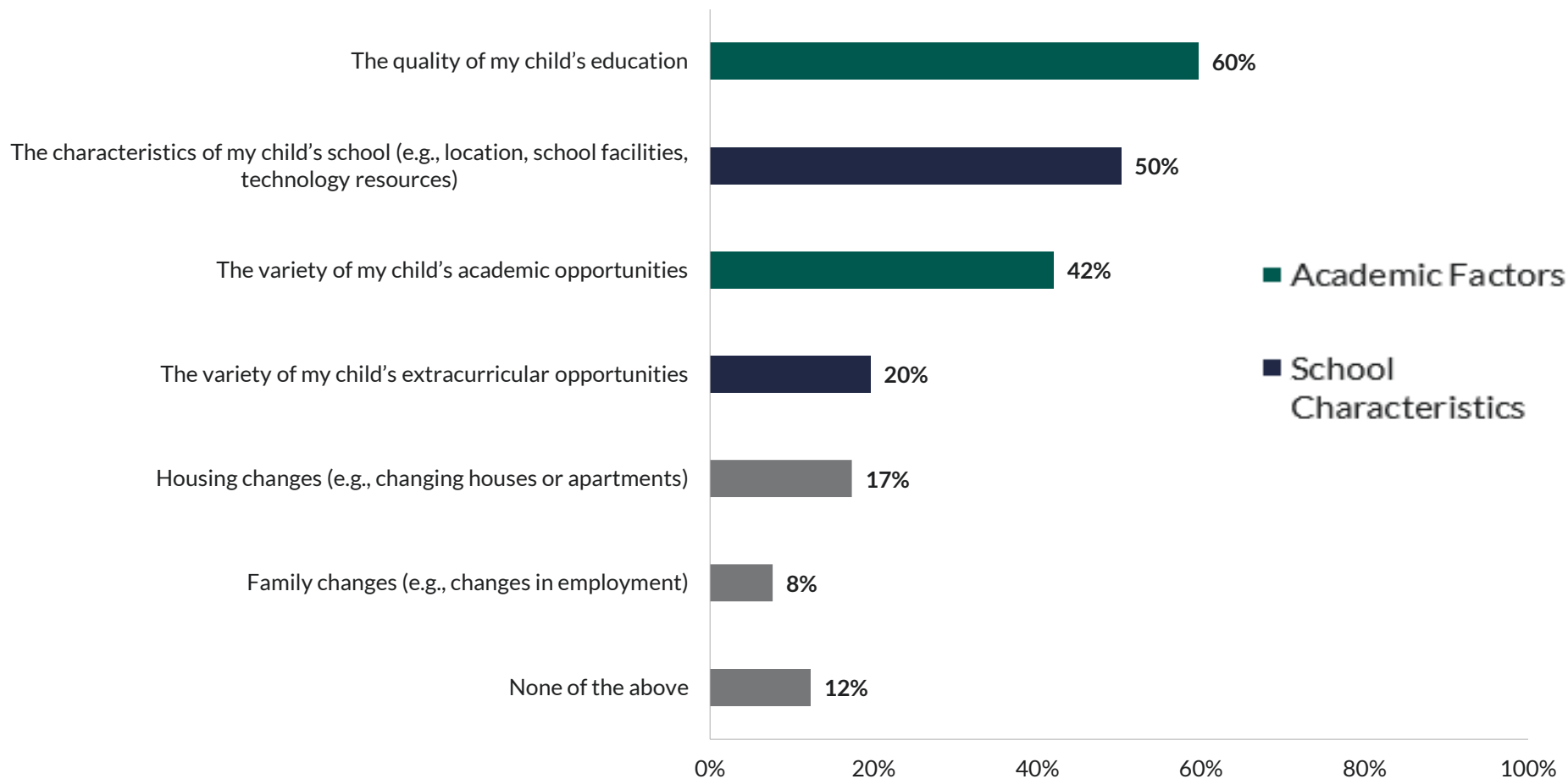
What are your overall perceptions of the following districts or schools?

	Community Member (n=97)	Current KCPS Parent (Former School: KCPS School) (n=450)	Current KCPS Parent (Former School: Non-KCPS School) (n=176)	Future Parent (n=58)	Non-Current KCPS Parent (Former School: Non-KCPS School) (n=206)	Non-Current KCPS Parent (Former School: Unknown) (n=42)	Past KCPS Parent (n=36)
KCPS	42%	72%	62%	34%	34%	44%	40%
Kansas City Charter Schools	48%	60%	66%	62%	71%	59%	79%
Local Private Schools	60%	59%	59%	64%	66%	61%	58%
Other public school districts in Missouri	61%	64%	54%	53%	54%	52%	46%
Other public school districts in Kansas	58%	63%	51%	67%	64%	52%	60%

Note: For each respondent group, the two most favorably ranked districts/schools are colored in green and the two least favorably ranked are colored in red.

# TOP-LEVEL FACTORS INFLUENCING ENROLLMENT

Which of the following factors influenced your and your child's decision to enroll your child at their current/graduated school? Please select all that apply. (n=1,994)



# TOP-LEVEL FACTORS INFLUENCING ENROLLMENT BY PARENT/STUDENT ENROLLMENT STATUS

Which of the following factors influenced your and your child's decision to enroll your child at their current/graduated school? Please select all that apply.

	CURRENT KCPS PARENT (FORMER SCHOOL: KCPS SCHOOL) (N=666)	CURRENT KCPS PARENT (FORMER SCHOOL: NON-KCPS SCHOOL) (N=312)	FUTURE PARENT (N=182)	NON-CURRENT KCPS PARENT (FORMER SCHOOL: NON-KCPS SCHOOL) (N=635)	NON-CURRENT KCPS PARENT (FORMER SCHOOL: UNKNOWN) (N=107)	PAST KCPS PARENT (N=92)
The quality of my child's education	51%	43%	84%	67%	62%	79%
The characteristics of my child's school (e.g., location, school facilities, technology resources)	50%	41%	73%	52%	37%	47%
The variety of my child's academic opportunities	35%	35%	71%	45%	35%	46%
The variety of my child's extracurricular opportunities	17%	17%	45%	17%	21%	15%
Housing changes (e.g., changing houses or apartments)	14%	26%	26%	14%	21%	15%
Family changes (e.g., changes in employment)	5%	9%	13%	7%	9%	8%
None of the above	17%	14%	4%	11%	8%	0%

Note: For each respondent group, the three most selected factors are colored in green and the three least selected factors are colored in red.

# TOP-LEVEL FACTORS INFLUENCING ENROLLMENT BY PARENT/STUDENT GRADE LEVEL

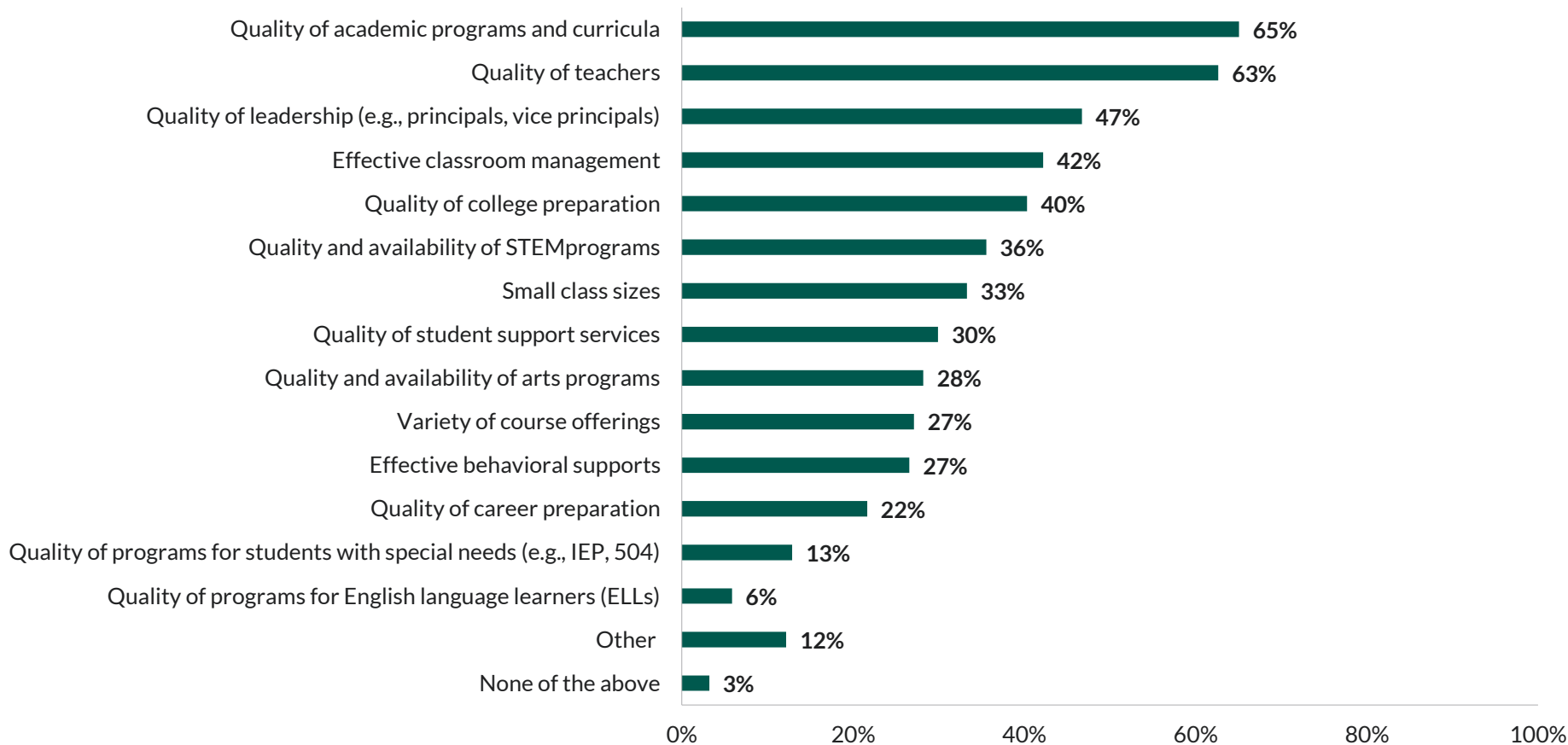
Which of the following factors influenced your and your child's decision to enroll your child at their current/graduated school? Please select all that apply.

	ECE PARENT (N=128)	GRADES PK-6 (N=1,200)	GRADES 7-8 (N=216)	GRADES 9-12 (N=372)	GRADUATED (N=24)
The quality of my child's education	84%	57%	58%	57%	67%
The characteristics of my child's school (e.g., location, school facilities, technology resources)	75%	52%	46%	38%	42%
The variety of my child's academic opportunities	69%	37%	45%	43%	46%
The variety of my child's extracurricular opportunities	42%	14%	22%	23%	38%
Housing changes (e.g., changing houses or apartments)	25%	16%	16%	18%	25%
Family changes (e.g., changes in employment)	12%	7%	10%	6%	4%
None of the above	5%	14%	8%	15%	4%



# ACADEMIC FACTORS

Which of the following academic-focused areas affected your and your child's decision to enroll your child at the school that they currently attend/graduated from? Please select all that apply. (n=1,280)



# ACADEMIC FACTORS

## BY PARENT/STUDENT ENROLLMENT STATUS

Which of the following academic-focused areas affected your and your child's decision to enroll your child at the school that they currently attend/graduated from? Please select all that apply.

	Current KCPS Parent (Former School: KCPS School) (n=374)	Current KCPS Parent (Former School: Non-KCPS School) (n=153)	Future Parent (n=158)	Non-Current KCPS Parent (Former School: Non-KCPS School) (n=447)	Non-Current KCPS Parent (Former School: Unknown) (n=71)	Past KCPS Parent (n=77)
Quality of academic programs and curricula	56%	69%	79%	68%	63%	57%
Quality of teachers	53%	46%	91%	68%	62%	53%
Quality of leadership (e.g., principals, vice principals)	39%	40%	69%	48%	45%	49%
Effective classroom management	31%	30%	68%	45%	41%	55%
Quality of college preparation	28%	52%	56%	40%	37%	48%
Quality and availability of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) programs	25%	25%	65%	39%	35%	31%
Small class sizes	20%	18%	51%	43%	30%	38%
Quality of student support services	27%	24%	50%	26%	27%	43%
Quality and availability of arts programs	25%	21%	54%	25%	21%	31%
Variety of course offerings	20%	32%	49%	25%	25%	19%
Effective behavioral supports	21%	16%	46%	26%	23%	38%
Quality of career preparation	18%	21%	36%	18%	25%	29%
Quality of programs for students with special needs (e.g., IEP, 504)	13%	11%	16%	11%	14%	18%
Quality of programs for English language learners (ELLs)	5%	5%	11%	5%	6%	6%
Other (please specify):	11%	12%	6%	14%	14%	16%
None of the above	6%	3%	1%	2%	3%	3%

Note: For each respondent group, the three most selected factors are colored in green and the three least selected factors are colored in red.

# ACADEMIC FACTORS BY PARENT/STUDENT GRADE LEVEL

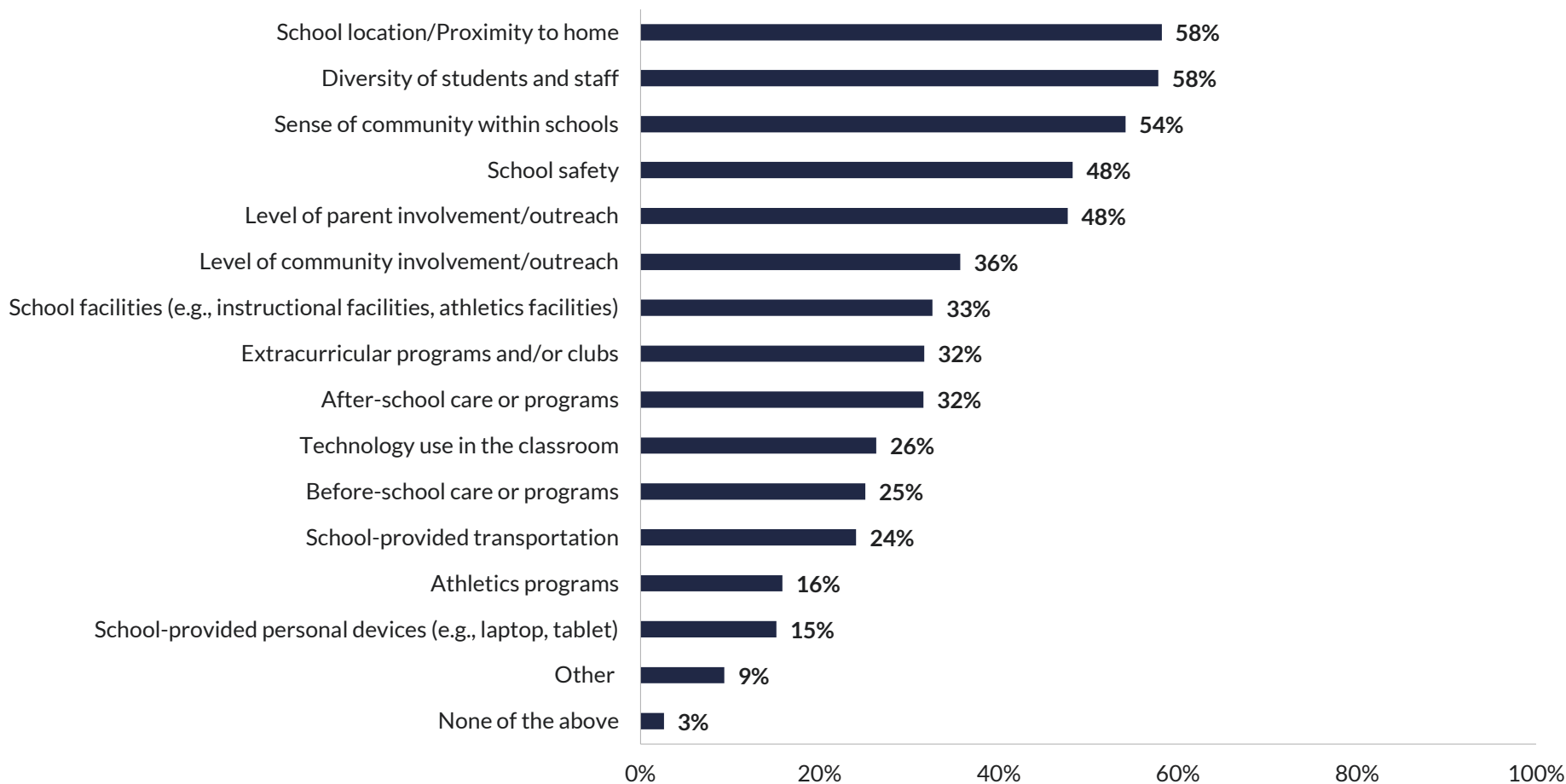
Which of the following academic-focused areas affected your and your child's decision to enroll your child at the school that they currently attend/graduated from? Please select all that apply.

	ECE PARENT (N=111)	GRADES PK-6 (N=732)	GRADES 7-8 (N=141)	GRADES 9-12 (N=232)	GRADUATED (N=17)
Quality of academic programs and curricula	81%	61%	66%	68%	82%
Quality of teachers	92%	64%	54%	46%	65%
Quality of leadership (e.g., principals, vice principals)	72%	46%	35%	38%	71%
Effective classroom management	76%	41%	35%	32%	59%
Quality of college preparation	52%	23%	52%	75%	82%
Quality and availability of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) programs	68%	30%	38%	31%	59%
Small class sizes	58%	35%	28%	20%	41%
Quality of student support services	50%	27%	26%	25%	53%
Quality and availability of arts programs	52%	24%	27%	24%	41%
Variety of course offerings	44%	17%	34%	36%	53%
Effective behavioral supports	45%	26%	18%	19%	47%
Quality of career preparation	32%	12%	26%	36%	53%
Quality of programs for students with special needs (e.g., IEP, 504)	14%	14%	13%	8%	24%
Quality of programs for English language learners (ELLs)	9%	5%	4%	3%	24%
Other (please specify):	5%	14%	13%	10%	6%
None of the above	1%	4%	4%	3%	0%

Note: For each respondent group, the three most selected factors are colored in green and the three least selected factors are colored in red.

# SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS

Which of the following school characteristics affected your and your child's decision to enroll your child at their current/graduated school? Please select all that apply. (n=1,067)



# SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS

## BY PARENT/STUDENT ENROLLMENT STATUS

Which of the following school characteristics affected your and your child's decision to enroll your child at their current/graduated school? Please select all that apply.

	Current KCPS Parent (Former School: KCPS School) (n=354)	Current KCPS Parent (Former School: Non-KCPS School) (n=142)	Future Parent (n=135)	Non-Current KCPS Parent (Former School: Non-KCPS School) (n=344)	Non-Current KCPS Parent (Former School: Unknown) (n=45)	Past KCPS Parent (n=47)
School location/Proximity to home	61%	56%	63%	59%	36%	49%
Diversity of students and staff	55%	53%	70%	60%	49%	51%
Sense of community within schools	47%	45%	76%	60%	36%	45%
School safety	38%	39%	81%	49%	47%	53%
Level of parent involvement/outreach	40%	40%	71%	52%	40%	38%
Level of community involvement/outreach	27%	33%	53%	41%	31%	30%
School facilities (e.g., instructional facilities, athletics facilities)	20%	24%	63%	37%	31%	38%
Extracurricular programs and/or clubs	28%	35%	52%	28%	29%	26%
After-school care or programs	37%	32%	49%	24%	13%	15%
Technology use in the classroom	20%	25%	44%	25%	36%	28%
Before-school care or programs	30%	26%	41%	17%	11%	17%
School-provided transportation	20%	29%	30%	22%	40%	23%
Athletics programs	10%	23%	32%	14%	16%	9%
School-provided personal devices (e.g., laptop, tablet)	14%	20%	20%	11%	31%	6%
Other (please specify):	11%	11%	4%	7%	20%	9%
None of the above	4%	4%	0%	1%	4%	6%

Note: For each respondent group, the three most selected factors are colored in green and the three least selected factors are colored in red.

# SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS

## BY PARENT/STUDENT GRADE LEVEL

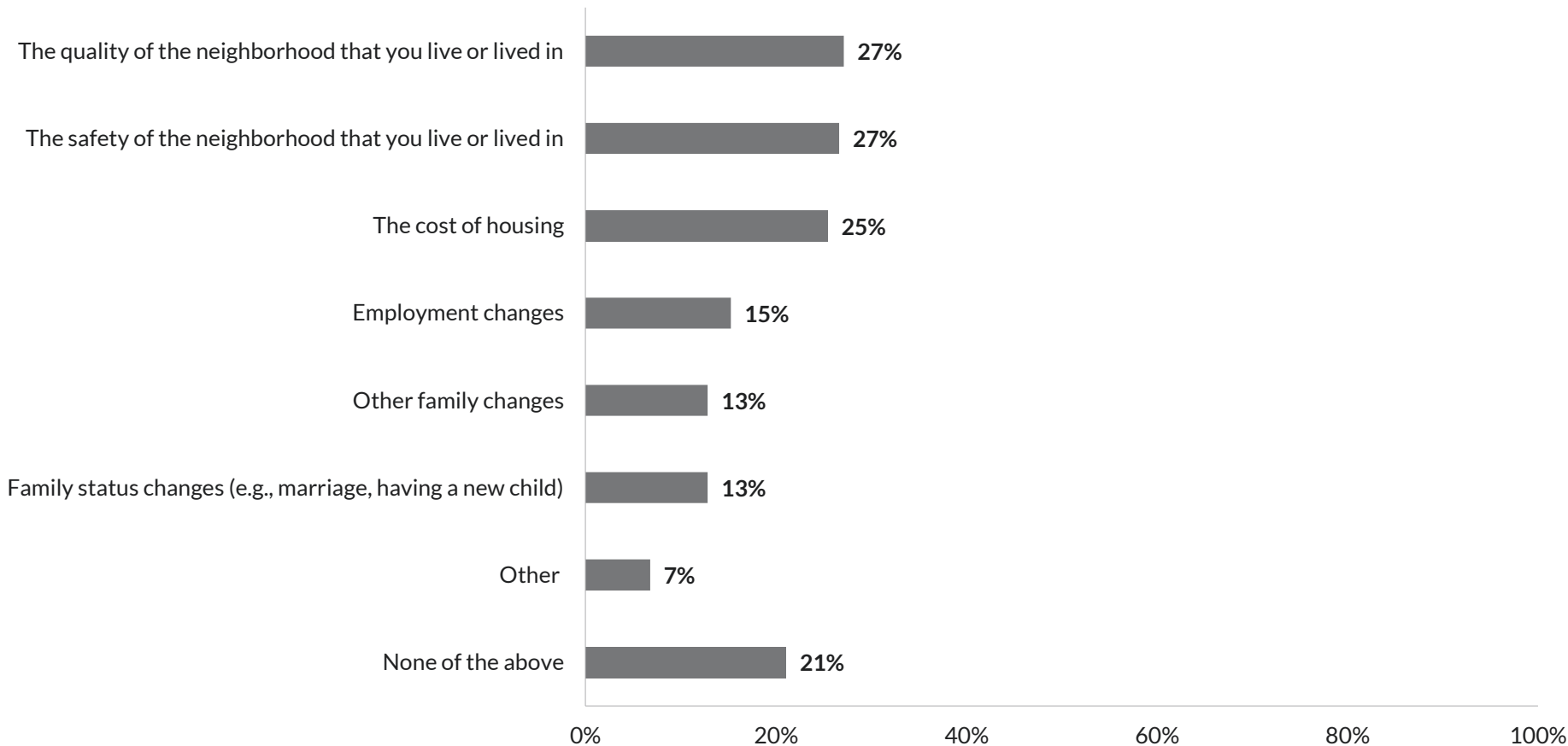
Which of the following school characteristics affected your and your child's decision to enroll your child at their current/graduated school? Please select all that apply.

	ECE PARENT (N=97)	GRADES PK-6 (N=638)	GRADES 7-8 (N=114)	GRADES 9-12 (N=168)	GRADUATED (N=12)
School location/Proximity to home	65%	62%	48%	48%	50%
Diversity of students and staff	68%	57%	56%	52%	50%
Sense of community within schools	79%	55%	44%	41%	58%
School safety	84%	43%	50%	40%	67%
Level of parent involvement/outreach	75%	48%	44%	32%	50%
Level of community involvement/outreach	56%	37%	25%	26%	33%
School facilities (e.g., instructional facilities, athletics facilities)	61%	26%	34%	33%	25%
Extracurricular programs and/or clubs	51%	23%	39%	44%	33%
After-school care or programs	56%	38%	16%	7%	17%
Technology use in the classroom	44%	21%	25%	32%	58%
Before-school care or programs	45%	30%	13%	4%	0%
School-provided transportation	30%	18%	37%	31%	50%
Athletics programs	25%	7%	21%	33%	17%
School-provided personal devices (e.g., laptop, tablet)	19%	9%	25%	23%	67%
Other (please specify):	5%	11%	6%	11%	17%
None of the above	0%	3%	4%	2%	0%

Note: For each respondent group, the three most selected factors are colored in green and the three least selected factors are colored in red.

# NON-EDUCATION FACTORS

Which of the following factors not related to education affected your and your child's decision to enroll your child at their current/graduated from school? Please select all that apply. (n=413)



# NON-EDUCATION FACTORS

## BY PARENT/STUDENT ENROLLMENT STATUS

Which of the following factors not related to education affected your and your child's decision to enroll your child at their current/graduated from school? Please select all that apply.

	Current KCPS Parent (Former School: KCPS School) (n=106)	Current KCPS Parent (Former School: Non-KCPS School) (n=95)	Future Parent (n=50)	Non-Current KCPS Parent (Former School: Non-KCPS School) (n=116)	Non-Current KCPS Parent (Former School: Unknown) (n=27)	Past KCPS Parent (n=19)
The quality of the neighborhood that you live or lived in	20%	16%	52%	29%	41%	26%
The safety of the neighborhood that you live or lived in	20%	20%	56%	25%	26%	32%
The cost of housing	25%	31%	30%	19%	30%	21%
Employment changes	11%	13%	30%	14%	15%	21%
Other family changes	13%	8%	10%	17%	15%	11%
Family status changes (e.g., marriage, having a new child)	14%	4%	24%	16%	7%	11%
Other (please specify):	8%	6%	2%	9%	0%	11%
None of the above	28%	29%	10%	16%	15%	11%

Note: For each respondent group, the three most selected factors are colored in green and the three least selected factors are colored in red.



# NON-EDUCATION FACTORS BY PARENT/STUDENT GRADE LEVEL

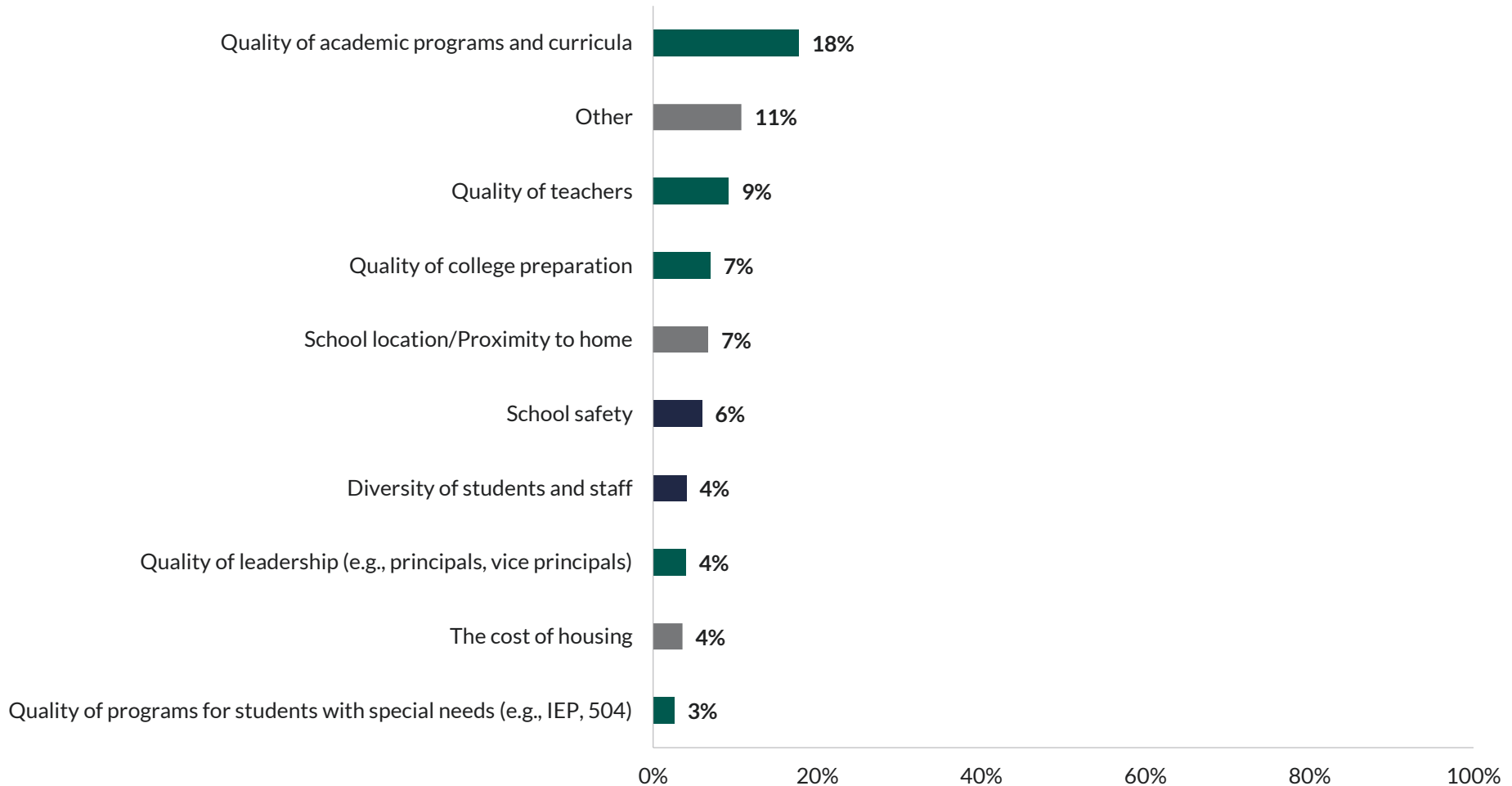
Which of the following factors not related to education affected your and your child's decision to enroll your child at their current/graduated from school? Please select all that apply.

	ECE PARENT (N=33)	GRADES PK-6 (N=240)	GRADES 7-8 (N=44)	GRADES 9-12 (N=72)	GRADUATED (N=7)
The quality of the neighborhood that you live or lived in	52%	22%	25%	26%	43%
The safety of the neighborhood that you live or lived in	61%	22%	20%	25%	29%
The cost of housing	27%	26%	32%	17%	14%
Employment changes	27%	15%	11%	11%	0%
Other family changes	6%	11%	25%	14%	0%
Family status changes (e.g., marriage, having a new child)	15%	12%	18%	6%	14%
Other (please specify):	3%	8%	7%	7%	0%
None of the above	12%	22%	20%	25%	43%

Note: For each respondent group, the three most selected factors are colored in green and the three least selected factors are colored in red.

# MOST INFLUENTIAL FACTORS

Top 10 items with a #1 ranking (n=1,433)



Note: This ranking visualization combines multiple questions to arrive at accurate counts for respondents' top-ranked factors. As respondents who only selected one item across academic factors, school characteristics, and non-education factors were not shown the ranking question, their single selections are treated as a #1 ranking and incorporated with the top-ranked factors selected by respondents who were asked to rank the multiple items they had selected.

# MOST INFLUENTIAL FACTORS BY PARENT/STUDENT ENROLLMENT STATUS

## Top Items with a #1 ranking

	Current KCPS Parent (Former School: KCPS School) (n=429)	Current KCPS Parent (Former School: Non-KCPS School) (n=205)	Future Parent (n=154)	Non-Current KCPS Parent (Former School: Non-KCPS School) (n=486)	Non-Current KCPS Parent (Former School: Unknown) (n=82)	Past KCPS Parent (n=77)
Quality of academic programs and curricula	13%	13%	27%	21%	23%	12%
Other	13%	12%	2%	10%	12%	16%
Quality of teachers	9%	5%	19%	8%	10%	10%
Quality of college preparation	7%	13%	4%	6%	5%	6%
School location/Proximity to home	10%	7%	3%	6%	0%	4%
School safety	6%	2%	18%	5%	4%	3%
Diversity of students and staff	4%	5%	1%	5%	1%	0%
Quality of leadership (e.g., principals, vice principals)	5%	2%	3%	4%	4%	8%
The cost of housing	3%	10%	1%	2%	6%	3%
Quality of programs for students with special needs (e.g., IEP, 504)	4%	2%	1%	2%	2%	3%
Sense of community within schools	3%	1%	1%	3%	1%	0%
The safety of the neighborhood that you live or lived in	2%	3%	1%	2%	2%	4%
Small class sizes	0%	0%	1%	4%	1%	5%
Effective classroom management	1%	0%	3%	3%	1%	4%
Employment changes	1%	4%	1%	1%	4%	3%
The quality of the neighborhood that you live or lived in	1%	2%	1%	2%	2%	1%
Quality and availability of arts programs	3%	0%	3%	1%	2%	0%
Quality and availability of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) programs	1%	0%	1%	2%	2%	1%
Other family changes	1%	2%	0%	2%	2%	1%
Family status changes (e.g., marriage, having a new child)	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%	3%
Effective behavioral supports	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%	5%

Note: For each respondent group, the three most selected factors are colored in green. This ranking visualization combines multiple questions to arrive at accurate counts for respondents' top-ranked factors. As respondents who only selected one item across academic factors, school characteristics, and non-education factors were not shown the ranking question, their single selections are treated as a #1 ranking and incorporated with the top-ranked factors selected by respondents who were asked to rank the multiple items they had selected.

# MOST INFLUENTIAL FACTORS BY PARENT/STUDENT GRADE LEVEL

## Top Items with a #1 ranking

	ECE PARENT (N=104)	GRADES PK-6 (N=846)	GRADES 7-8 (N=160)	GRADES 9-12 (N=258)	GRADUATED (N=15)
Quality of academic programs and curricula	26%	16%	18%	18%	0%
Other	3%	13%	8%	9%	7%
Quality of teachers	21%	10%	4%	3%	13%
Quality of college preparation	4%	2%	11%	22%	20%
School location/Proximity to home	4%	8%	7%	4%	0%
School safety	19%	3%	8%	6%	20%
Diversity of students and staff	2%	5%	3%	2%	0%
Quality of leadership (e.g., principals, vice principals)	3%	5%	2%	3%	20%
The cost of housing	1%	4%	3%	3%	0%
Quality of programs for students with special needs (e.g., IEP, 504)	2%	3%	2%	2%	0%
Sense of community within schools	1%	4%	1%	0%	0%
The safety of the neighborhood that you live or lived in	1%	2%	1%	4%	13%
Small class sizes	1%	2%	1%	1%	7%
Effective classroom management	2%	2%	3%	2%	0%
Employment changes	2%	2%	1%	2%	0%
The quality of the neighborhood that you live or lived in	0%	2%	3%	2%	0%
Quality and availability of arts programs	2%	1%	4%	2%	0%
Quality and availability of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) programs	0%	1%	3%	2%	0%
Other family changes	0%	1%	3%	2%	0%
Family status changes (e.g., marriage, having a new child)	1%	1%	2%	1%	0%
Effective behavioral supports	0%	2%	1%	1%	0%

Note: For each respondent group, the three most selected factors are colored in green. This ranking visualization combines multiple questions to arrive at accurate counts for respondents' top-ranked factors. As respondents who only selected one item across academic factors, school characteristics, and non-education factors were not shown the ranking question, their single selections are treated as a #1 ranking and incorporated with the top-ranked factors selected by respondents who were asked to rank the multiple items they had selected.

The background of the slide is a grayscale photograph of a school hallway. On the right side, there are rows of metal lockers. On the left side, a staircase with a metal railing is visible, leading downwards. The lighting is somewhat dim, creating a quiet, institutional atmosphere.

## **STUDY 2:** STAFF PERCEPTIONS SURVEY RESULTS

# INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

- In this report, Hanover analyzes and summarizes the results from the Staff Perceptions Survey. In total, 506 KCPS school-level staff members completed at least part of the survey.
- The survey was fielded online using the Qualtrics software platform in January and February 2020.
- After data collection, Hanover identified and removed low-quality respondents.
- Sample sizes vary across questions as some questions only pertain to a subset of respondents.
- In certain charts, † indicates response option was shortened to fit.
- “Don’t Know or Not Applicable” responses, and equivalent, are often excluded from the figures and analysis in order to focus on respondents who did express an opinion.

## KEY FINDINGS

# OVERALL PERCEPTIONS AND SCHOOL CHOICE

- **Nearly three-quarters of staff members surveyed have at least somewhat positive opinions of KCPS.**
  - They have a nearly equal positive overall perception when it comes to other public school districts in Missouri, but here they otherwise express neutral opinions while 16% of respondents report having a somewhat or very negative overall perception of KCPS.
  - Elementary teachers have more positive perceptions of KCPS (76% somewhat or very positive) than middle (61%) and high (56%) school teachers.
  - Signature and non-signature school staff have similarly positive perceptions of KCPS (69% and 73%, respectively).
- **Opinions of local charter schools are least positive overall** and evenly divided with one-third of perceptions positive, one-third negative, and one-third neutral.
  - Staff members with more familiarity with local charter schools have more positive perceptions of these schools than staff members with less familiarity.
- **Two-thirds of respondents perceive location to be the most influential factor in enrollment decisions overall**, and just over half identify quality of education as influential (51%).
  - Beyond that, the most influential overall factors perceived are personal factors such as employment and family status changes (42%), school characteristics (40%), and affordable housing (39%).
- **Staff respondents are divided when it comes to the factor they view as most influential across academic and school characteristics** with just 15% or less selecting any single item or going on to rank it as most influential of multiple items. The top-ranked factors are teacher quality (15%), school safety (14%), and quality of academic programs (11%), roughly aligning with parent responses overall.

## KEY FINDINGS

# ACADEMIC FACTORS IN SCHOOL CHOICE

- **Teacher quality is perceived as an influential academic-related factor in enrollment decisions by 75% of respondents** who select academic-related factors as influencing family enrollment decisions.
  - About half also report that quality of academic programs, classroom management, and leadership are influential (49-52%). Effective behavioral supports (43%) and small class sizes (41%) are on the third tier of most commonly selected academic-focused factors.
  - Elementary school teachers place more emphasis on effective classroom management and behavioral supports as academic-focused areas influencing families' school enrollment decisions than high school teachers, whereas high school teachers place more emphasis on quality of college preparation and variety of course offerings.
- **Teacher quality is also perceived as a top strength for KCPS compared to local charters (42%).** Quality of academic programs and leadership are viewed more as strengths (19%) than weaknesses (10% and 11%, respectively), although not overwhelmingly so.
  - Elementary school teachers are more likely to choose quality of teachers as a strength at their school compared to local charters (52%) in comparison with secondary teachers and KCPS staff overall.
- **Items that are rated high in importance but perceived more as weaknesses for KCPS compared to local charters include classroom management (16% weakness), behavioral supports (36%), and small class sizes (43%);** the latter two are the top weaknesses. Middle school teachers are more likely to identify effective behavioral supports as a weakness (61%) than elementary (38%) and high (28%) school teachers.



## KEY FINDINGS

# SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS IN SCHOOL CHOICE

- When asked to select specific school characteristics that influence family enrollment decisions, the top selections are school safety (64%), school provided transportation (60%), before- and after-school care (55-57%), and sense of community within schools (52%).
  - Most of these are perceived more as strengths than weaknesses for KCPS, although equal percentages (12%) identify school safety as a top-three strength and a weakness relative to local charters.
  - Administrators are significantly more likely to select school safety as the factor that most influences families' enrollment decisions than teachers (36% v. 13%).
- **The top strength for respondents' schools in comparison with local charters among listed school characteristics is diversity of students and staff (34%),** which staff rank sixth overall in influence on families' enrollment decisions among school characteristics (40%). Correspondingly, teachers across school levels are most (or second most) likely to identify diversity of students and staff as a school characteristic that is stronger at their school in comparison to at local charter schools.
- **Staff respondents identify level of parent involvement/outreach as the top weakness in comparison with local charter schools (42%),** with respondents across roles and teachers across grade levels identifying this areas as a weakness. However, just 27% of respondents perceive that this is an influential factor in enrollment decisions, placing it among the lowest of school characteristics.

## KEY FINDINGS

# PROGRAMMING PRIORITIES

- **Of the items listed to improve student recruitment and retention, a plurality of respondents (19%) would prioritize academic rigor related to course offerings, while 22% select none of the above or that they don't know.**
  - Among teachers, elementary school teachers most commonly select academic rigor as a priority area (19%). Middle school teachers are more likely to choose availability of career and technical education (CTE) courses in specific areas (22%), while high school teachers are more likely to choose variety of elective course offerings (15%).
  - A higher percentage of non-signature school staff (21%) selects academic rigor as a priority area in comparison with signature school staff (12%), although this area is the most common choice for both groups (tied with elective course offerings in specific areas of interest to students for signature school staff).
- **When asked about adding or expanding academic programs to attract and/or retain students, there is a clear prioritization of programs for students who struggle academically.** Nearly half (47%) of respondents select this as one of multiple programs to prioritize and 28% select this as their first choice. The next-highest first choice selections receive only 8% (performing arts and English Language Learners) of respondents.
  - Elementary school teachers are most likely to feel that their school would benefit from adding or expanding programs for struggling students (50%) in comparison with 46% of middle school and 30% of high school teachers.
  - Notably, non-signature school staff (32%) are twice as likely than signature school staff (16%) to select specialty programs for students who struggle academically as their top choice for adding or expanding programs to attract and/or retain families, the most commonly selected first choice for both groups. The next most common top choices for non-signature school staff are programs for English Language Learners (9%) and performing arts programs (8%) and for signature school staff are Montessori (11%) and dual language (10%) programs.

## KEY FINDINGS

# PROGRAMMING PRIORITIES (CONT.)

- When asked about general priority areas to attract and/or retain students, there is a clear preference for **behavioral programming and supports**, selected by 52% initially and 28% as the their top choice overall. The second most-selected is parent/community engagement (41% overall and 13% as their top choice), and third is extracurricular programs/clubs (35% and 10%).
  - Middle school teachers are more likely to prioritize behavioral programming and supports, with 46% selecting this as their first choice, in comparison to 29% and 14% of elementary and high school teachers, respectively.
  - A third of non-signature school staff select behavioral programming and supports as their top choice in terms of areas, if prioritized by their school, that they feel would benefit student recruitment and retention. In comparison, only 14% of signature school staff select this area as their top choice, similar to the percentage of signature school staff who select school facilities (15%) as the area that they recommend prioritizing to improve student recruitment and retention. School facilities is the most commonly selected top choice for prioritization among signature school staff.

# OVERVIEW OF RESPONDENTS

# OVERVIEW OF RESPONDENTS

## All Respondents

Role	#	%
Teacher	391	77%
School Administrator	20	4%
Support Staff	57	11%
Other KCPS Staff Member	38	8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>506</b>	<b>100%</b>

Years Worked in KCPS	#	%
Less than 1 year	78	15%
1 to 3 years	136	27%
4 to 6 years	90	18%
7 to 10 years	40	8%
11 to 15 years	28	6%
16 to 20 years	55	11%
More than 20 years	79	16%
<b>Total</b>	<b>506</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Teacher Respondents

Grade Band	#	%
PreK-6	273	72%
Grades 7-8	28	7%
Grades 9-12	79	21%
<b>Total*</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>100%</b>

Role	#	%
Elementary school general education	143	37%
English language arts	86	22%
Math	70	18%
Science	62	16%
Social studies	53	14%
Special Education	39	10%
Other specific student populations (e.g., ELs, Gifted)	23	6%
Music	11	3%
Art	10	3%
World languages	9	2%
Health/P.E.	8	2%
Other	51	13%
<b>Total*</b>	<b>391</b>	<b>-</b>

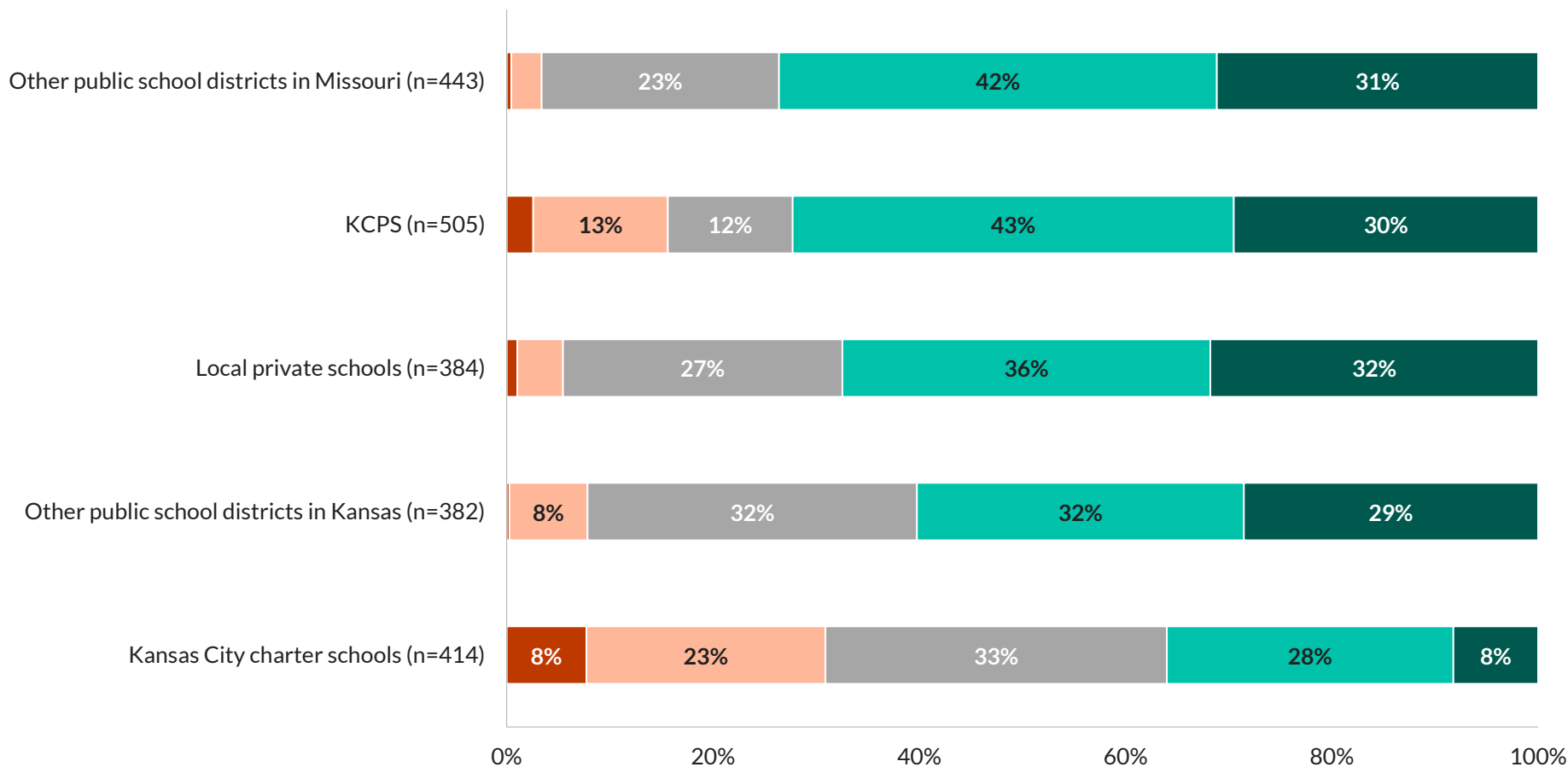
\*Respondents spanning multiple grade bands are excluded in the top-right segmentation due to low sample size. Teachers could select multiple subject areas; the total in the bottom-right figure reflects the number of teachers who responded to this question.

# SURVEY RESULTS VISUALIZATIONS

# OVERALL PERCEPTIONS

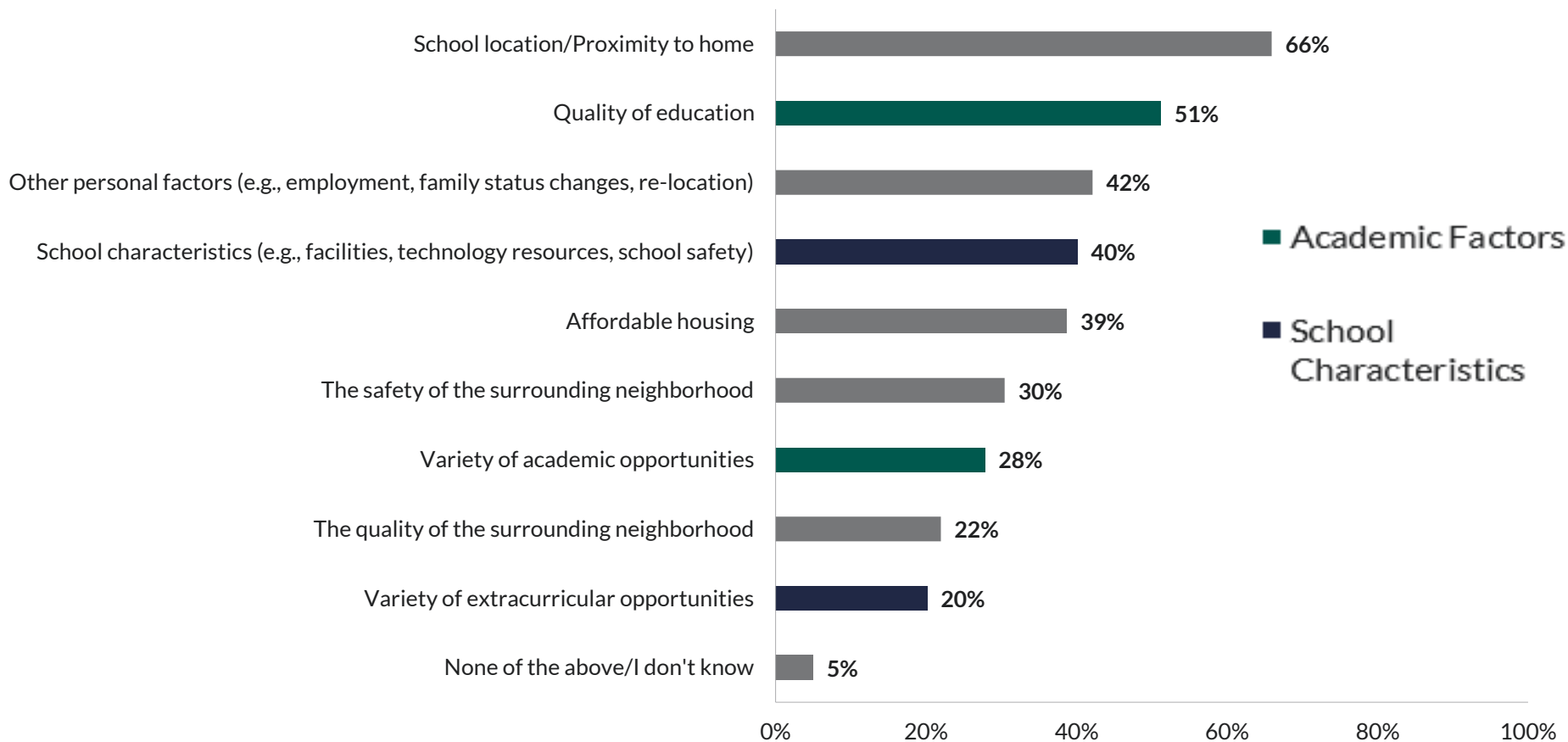
What are your overall perceptions of the following districts or schools?

Very Negative   Somewhat Negative   Neither Negative nor Positive   Somewhat Positive   Very Positive



# TOP-LEVEL FACTORS INFLUENCING ENROLLMENT

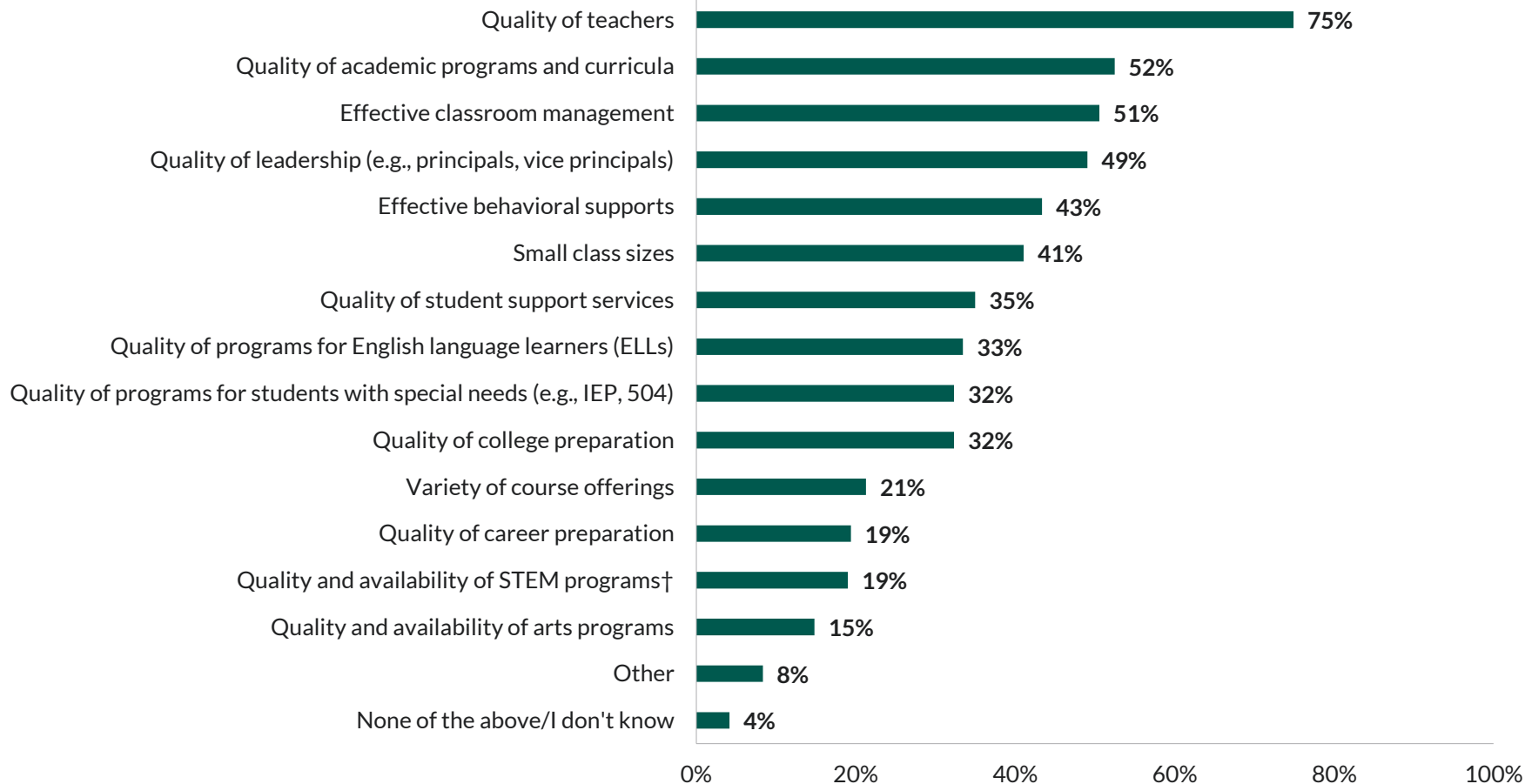
In your experience with families and students at your school, which of the following factors most influence families' school enrollment decisions for their children? Please select all that apply. (n=496)





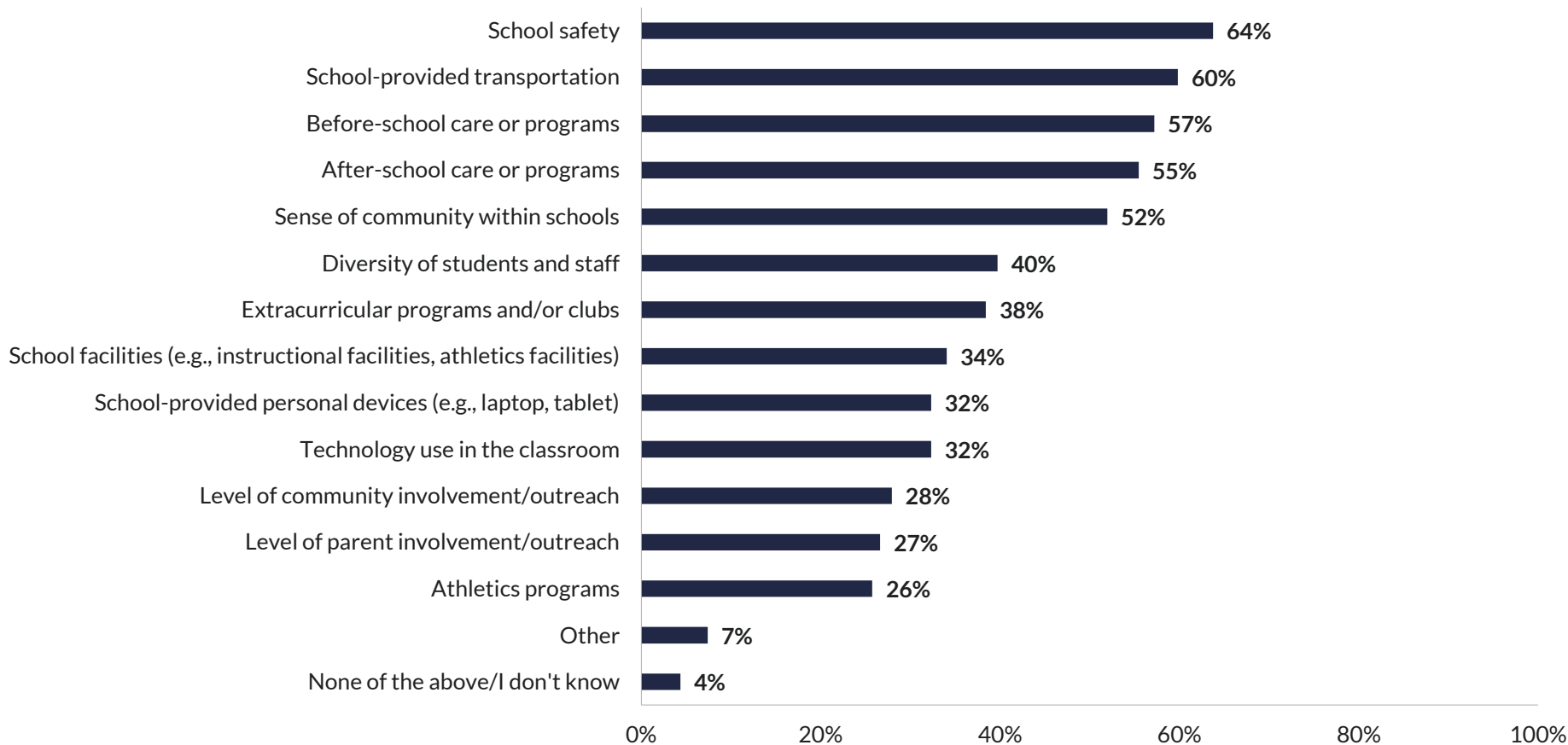
# ACADEMIC FACTORS

In your experience with families and students at your school, which of the following academic-focused areas most influence families' school enrollment decisions for their children? Please select all that apply. (n=263)



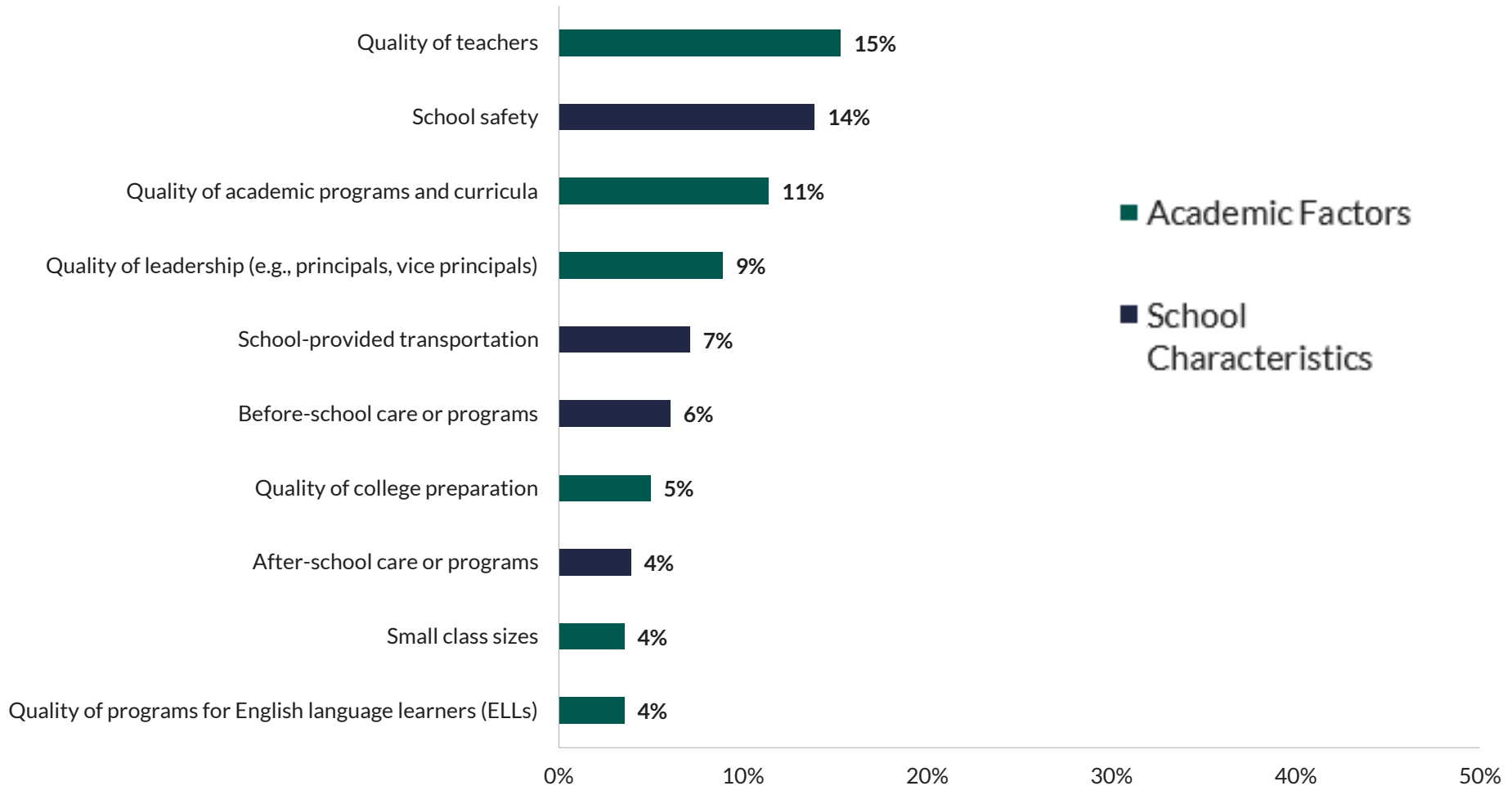
# SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS

In your experience with families and students at your school, which of the following school characteristics most influence families' school enrollment decisions for their children? Please select all that apply. (n=229)



# MOST INFLUENTIAL FACTORS

Top 10 items with a #1 ranking (n=281)



Note: Due to the display logic of the survey, this ranking combines multiple questions. Respondents who only selected one item across the initial "Please select all that apply." questions were not shown the ranking question. This graph accounts for that by assigning a ranking of 1 for respondents who selected one item as an important enrollment factor but did not make it to the ranking question.

# ACADEMIC STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES: KCPS IN COMPARISON WITH LOCAL CHARTER SCHOOLS

ACADEMIC	INFLUENTIAL	KCPS STRENGTHS	KCPS WEAKNESSES
Quality of teachers	75%	42%	7%
Quality of academic programs and curricula	52%	19%	10%
Effective classroom management	51%	12%	16%
Quality of leadership (e.g., principals, vice principals)	49%	19%	11%
Effective behavioral supports	43%	13%	36%
Small class sizes	41%	11%	43%
Quality of student support services	35%	23%	7%
Quality of programs for English language learners (ELLs)	33%	26%	5%
Quality of college preparation	32%	7%	14%
Quality of programs for students with special needs (e.g., IEP, 504)	32%	22%	7%
Variety of course offerings	21%	9%	14%
Quality of career preparation	19%	4%	7%
Quality and availability of STEM programs†	19%	3%	16%
Quality and availability of arts programs	15%	5%	13%
Other	8%	6%	7%
None/I don't know	4%	16%	15%

This chart combines results from three survey questions:

Q: In your experience with families and students at your school, which of the following academic-focused areas most influence families' school enrollment decisions for their children? Please select all that apply.

Q: With respect to which of the following academic-focused areas do you believe your school is stronger than local charter schools? Please select up to three areas of strength for your school compared to local charters.

Q: With respect to which of the following academic-focused areas do you believe your school is weaker than local charter schools? Please select up to three areas for improvement for your school compared to local charters.

Note: Only respondents who are at least "slightly familiar" with local charter schools in Kansas City, MO were asked to identify the strengths and weakness of KCPS related to local charter schools.

# SCHOOL STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES: KCPS IN COMPARISON WITH LOCAL CHARTER SCHOOLS

SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS	INFLUENTIAL	KCPS STRENGTHS	KCPS WEAKNESSES
School safety	64%	12%	12%
School-provided transportation	60%	24%	4%
Before-school care or programs	57%	17%	3%
After-school care or programs	55%	24%	5%
Sense of community within school	52%	25%	17%
Diversity of students and staff	40%	34%	9%
Extracurricular programs and/or clubs	38%	9%	25%
School facilities (e.g., instructional facilities, athletics facilities)	34%	9%	22%
School-provided personal devices (e.g., laptop, tablet)	32%	22%	4%
Technology use in the classroom	32%	16%	8%
Level of community involvement/outreach	28%	11%	18%
Level of parent involvement/outreach	27%	12%	42%
Athletics programs	26%	10%	12%
Other	7%	2%	5%
None/I don't know	4%	13%	22%

This chart combines results from three survey questions:

Q: In your experience with families and students at your school, which of the following school characteristics most influence families' school enrollment decisions for their children? Please select all that apply.

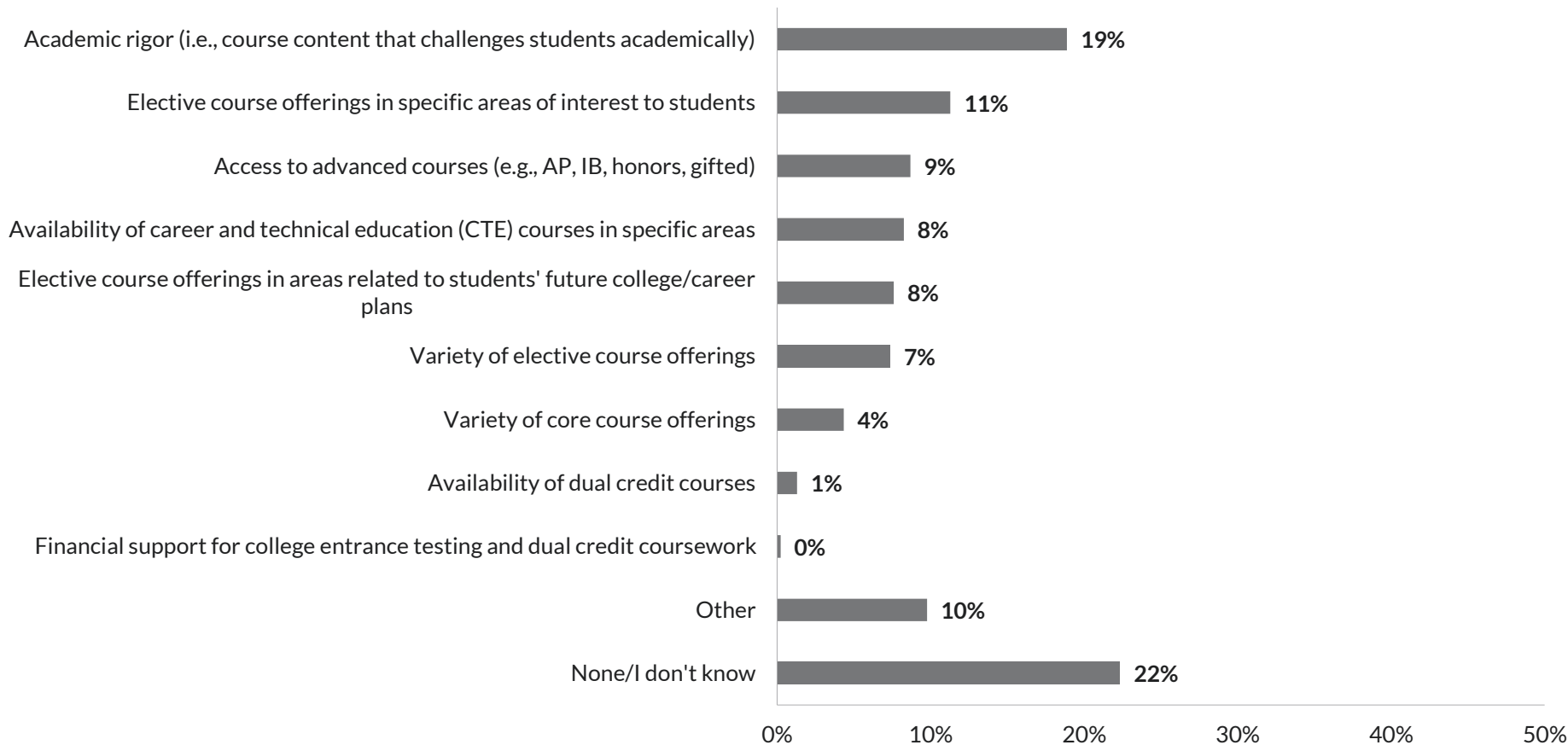
Q: With respect to which of the following school characteristics do you believe your school is stronger than local charter schools? Please select up to three areas of strength for your school compared to local charters.

Q: With respect to which of the following school characteristics do you believe your school is weaker than local charter schools? Please select up to three areas for improvement for your school compared to local charters.

Note: Only respondents who are at least "slightly familiar" with local charter schools in Kansas City, MO were asked to identify the strengths and weakness of KCPS related to local charter schools.

# PRIORITIES - COURSE OFFERINGS

If your school were to prioritize improving one of the areas listed below related to course offerings, which would you choose with the goal of better attracting and retaining families? (n=461)



# PRIORITIES - COURSE OFFERINGS

## *NON-SIGNATURE V. SIGNATURE SCHOOL STAFF*

If your school were to prioritize improving one of the areas listed below related to course offerings, which would you choose with the goal of better attracting and retaining families?

	Non-Signature School Staff (n=351)	Signature School Staff (n=110)
Academic rigor (i.e., course content that challenges students academically)	21%	12%
Elective course offerings in specific areas of interest to students	11%	12%
Access to advanced courses (e.g., AP, IB, honors, gifted)	9%	8%
Availability of career and technical education (CTE) courses in specific areas	9%	6%
Elective course offerings in areas related to students' future college/career plans	7%	9%
Variety of elective course offerings	7%	10%
Variety of core course offerings	4%	5%
Availability of dual credit courses	0%	5%
Financial support for college entrance testing and dual credit coursework	0%	1%
Other (please specify):	10%	10%
None/I don't know	23%	22%

Note: For each respondent group, the three most selected factors are colored in green.

# PRIORITIES - COURSE OFFERINGS

## BY GRADE BAND (TEACHERS ONLY)

If your school were to prioritize improving one of the areas listed below related to course offerings, which would you choose with the goal of better attracting and retaining families?

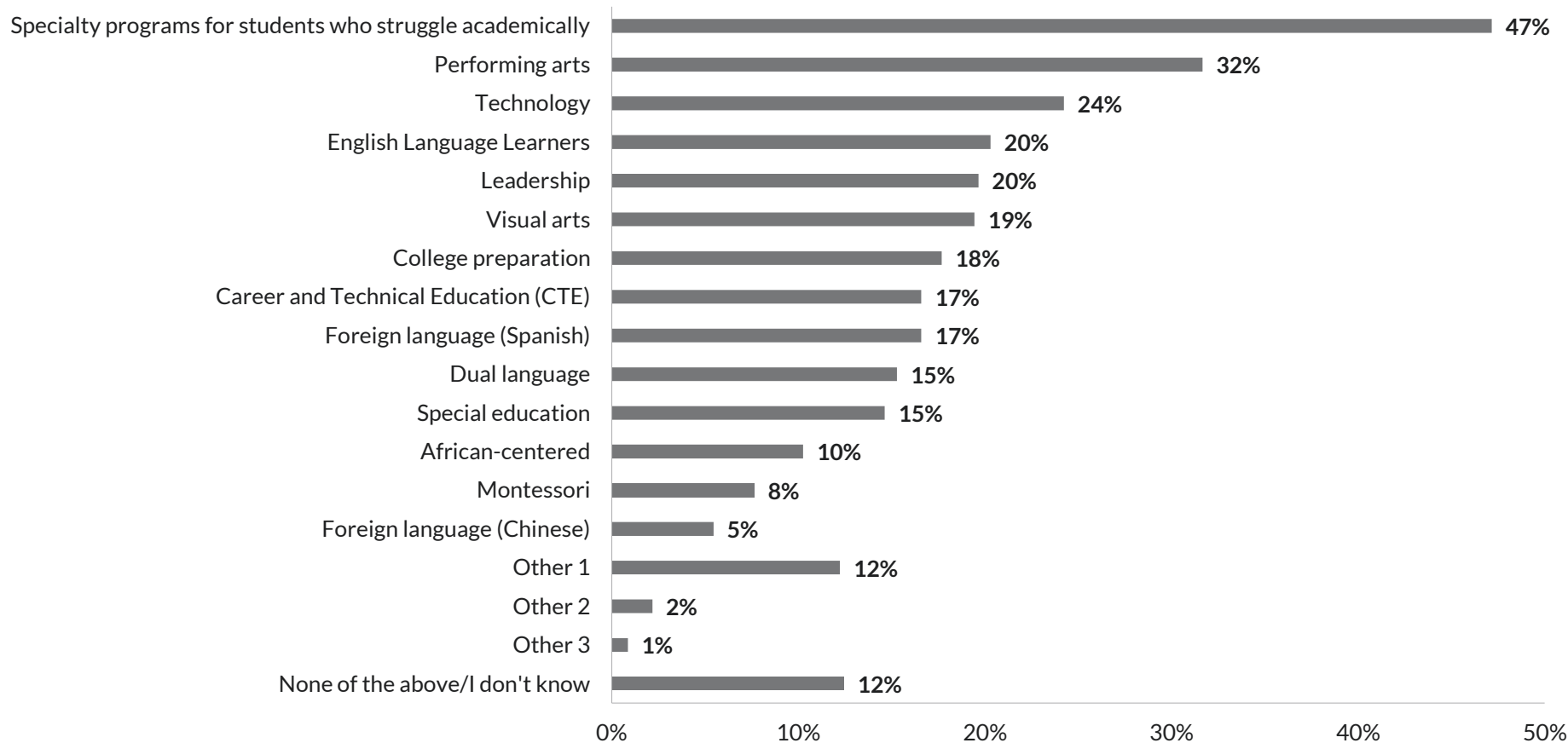
	Grades PK-6 (n=255)	Grades 7-8 (n=27)	Grades 9-12 (n=67)
Academic rigor (i.e., course content that challenges students academically)	19%	15%	7%
Elective course offerings in specific areas of interest to students	11%	11%	12%
Access to advanced courses (e.g., AP, IB, honors, gifted)	10%	7%	7%
Availability of career and technical education (CTE) courses in specific areas	7%	22%	9%
Elective course offerings in areas related to students' future college/career plans	7%	4%	12%
Variety of elective course offerings	3%	11%	15%
Variety of core course offerings	3%	7%	6%
Availability of dual credit courses	0%	0%	9%
Financial support for college entrance testing and dual credit coursework	0%	0%	1%
Other (please specify):	12%	15%	4%
None/I don't know	28%	7%	16%

Note: For each respondent group, the three most selected factors are colored in green.



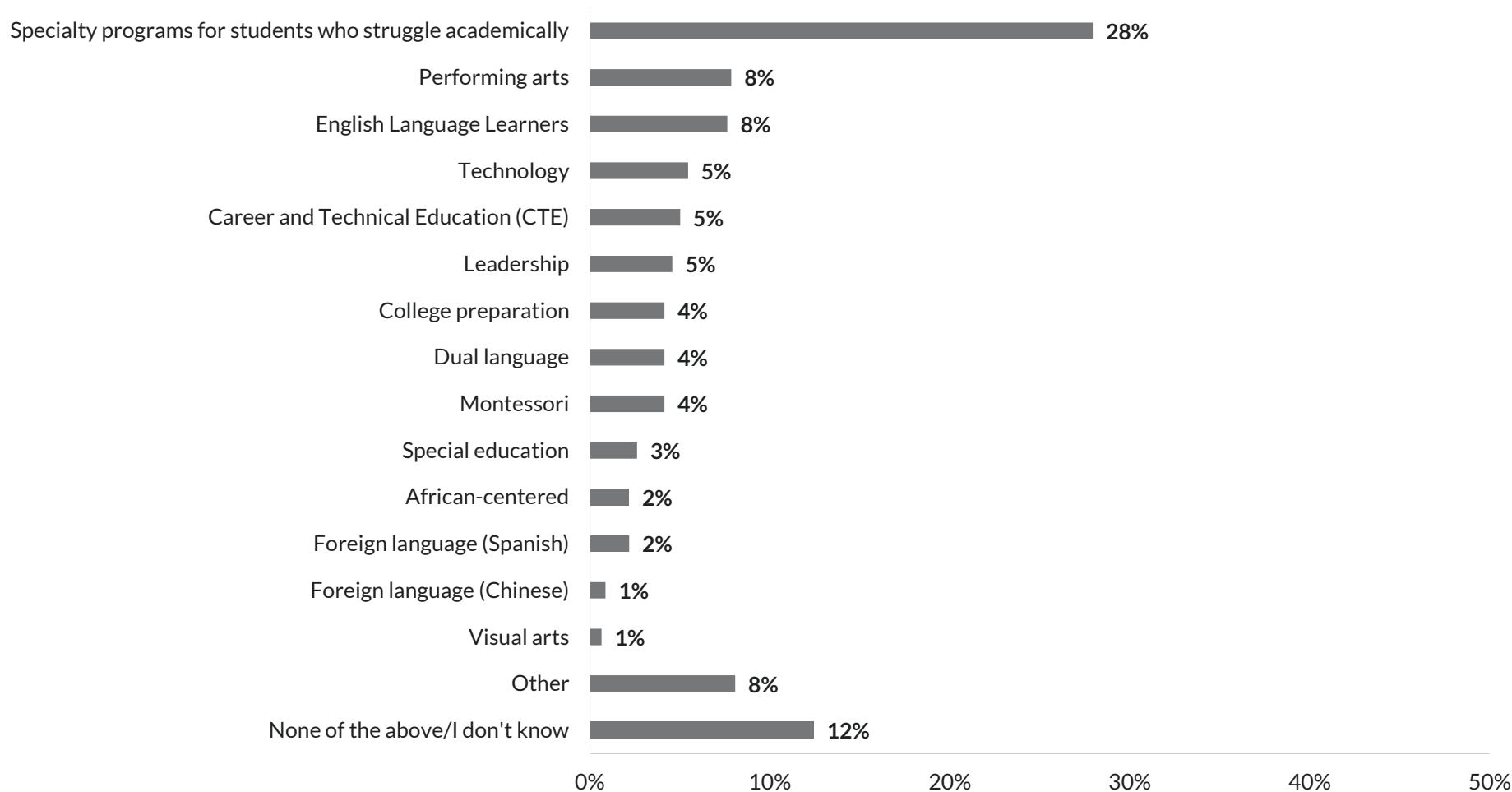
# SPECIAL ACADEMIC PROGRAMS TO EXPAND

Do you feel that your school would benefit from adding or expanding on any special academic programs to attract and/or retain families? Please select all that apply from the list below. (n=458)



# #1 SPECIAL ACADEMIC PROGRAMS TO EXPAND

#1 Special Academic Program Expansion (n=458)



Note: Due to the display logic of the survey, this ranking combines multiple questions. Respondents who only selected one question in the initial "Please select all that apply." question were not shown the follow-up question asking them to select their first choice program expansion. This graph accounts for that by assigning a ranking of 1 for respondents who selected one item initially.

# #1 SPECIAL ACADEMIC PROGRAMS TO EXPAND *NON-SIGNATURE V. SIGNATURE SCHOOL STAFF*

## #1 Special Academic Program Expansion

	Non-Signature School Staff (n=349)	Signature School Staff (n=109)
Specialty programs for students who struggle academically	32%	16%
Performing arts	8%	6%
English Language Learners	9%	2%
Technology	4%	9%
Career and Technical Education (CTE)	6%	2%
Leadership	5%	4%
College preparation	3%	9%
Dual language	2%	10%
Montessori	2%	11%
Special education	3%	2%
African-centered	2%	2%
Foreign language (Spanish)	3%	1%
Foreign language (Chinese)	0%	3%
Visual arts	1%	0%
Other	8%	8%
None of the above/I don't know	11%	16%

Note: For each respondent group, the three most selected factors are colored in green. Due to the display logic of the survey, this ranking combines multiple questions. Respondents who only selected one question in the initial "Please select all that apply." question were not shown the follow-up question asking them to select their first choice program expansion. This graph accounts for that by assigning a ranking of 1 for respondents who selected one item initially.

# #1 SPECIAL ACADEMIC PROGRAMS TO EXPAND *BY GRADE BAND (TEACHERS ONLY)*

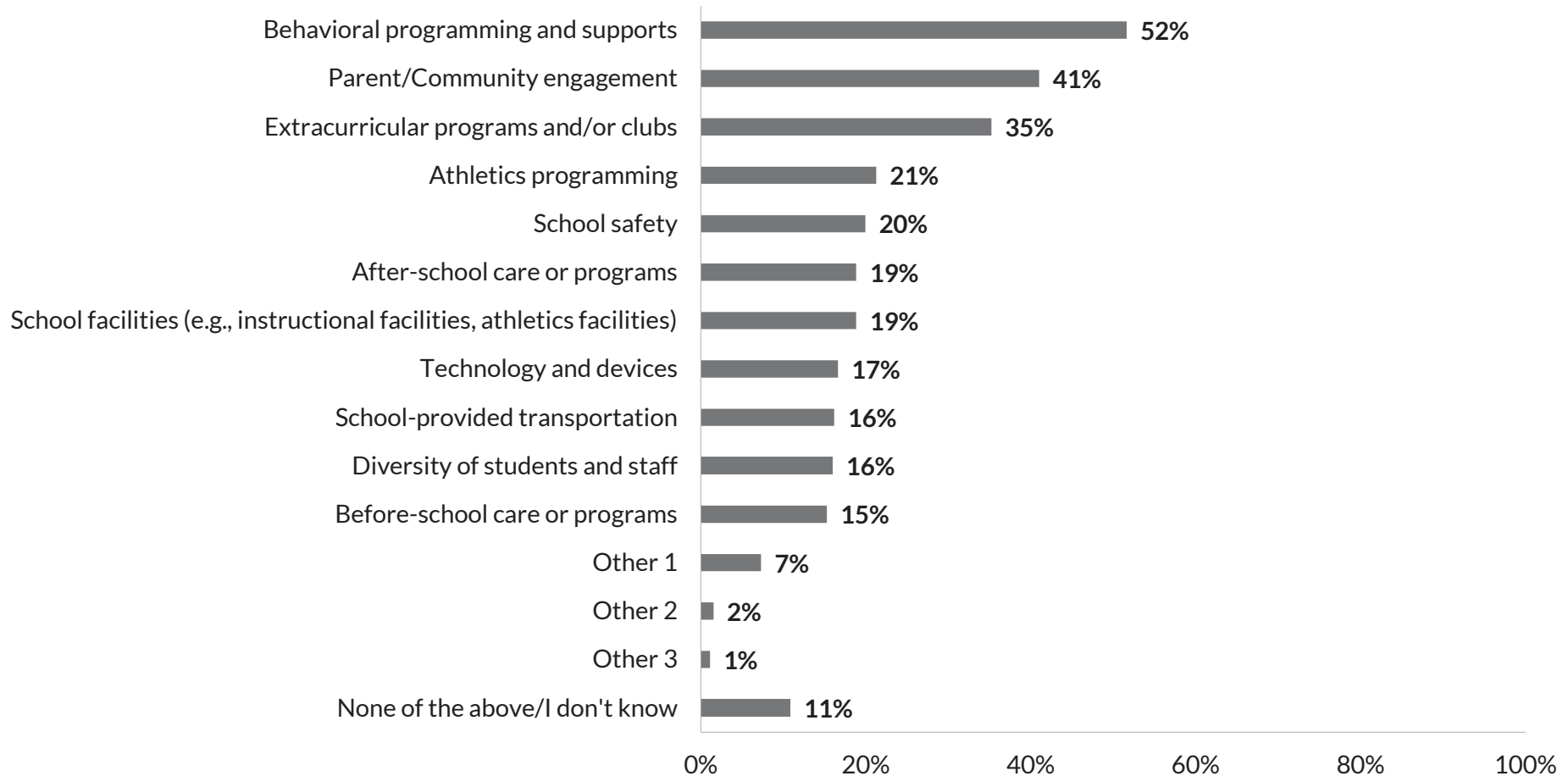
## #1 Special Academic Program Expansion

	Grades PK-6 (n=253)	Grades 7-8 (n=26)	Grades 9-12 (n=67)
Specialty programs for students who struggle academically	28%	27%	18%
Performing arts	7%	8%	10%
English Language Learners	10%	4%	7%
Technology	5%	8%	9%
Career and Technical Education (CTE)	3%	12%	9%
Leadership	4%	0%	3%
College preparation	3%	4%	10%
Dual language	6%	0%	1%
Montessori	6%	0%	0%
Special education	2%	8%	4%
African-centered	3%	4%	1%
Foreign language (Spanish)	3%	0%	0%
Foreign language (Chinese)	1%	0%	1%
Visual arts	1%	4%	0%
Other	8%	8%	7%
None of the above/I don't know	10%	15%	16%

Note: For each respondent group, the three most selected factors are colored in green. Due to the display logic of the survey, this ranking combines multiple questions. Respondents who only selected one question in the initial "Please select all that apply." question were not shown the follow-up question asking them to select their first choice program expansion. This graph accounts for that by assigning a ranking of 1 for respondents who selected one item initially.

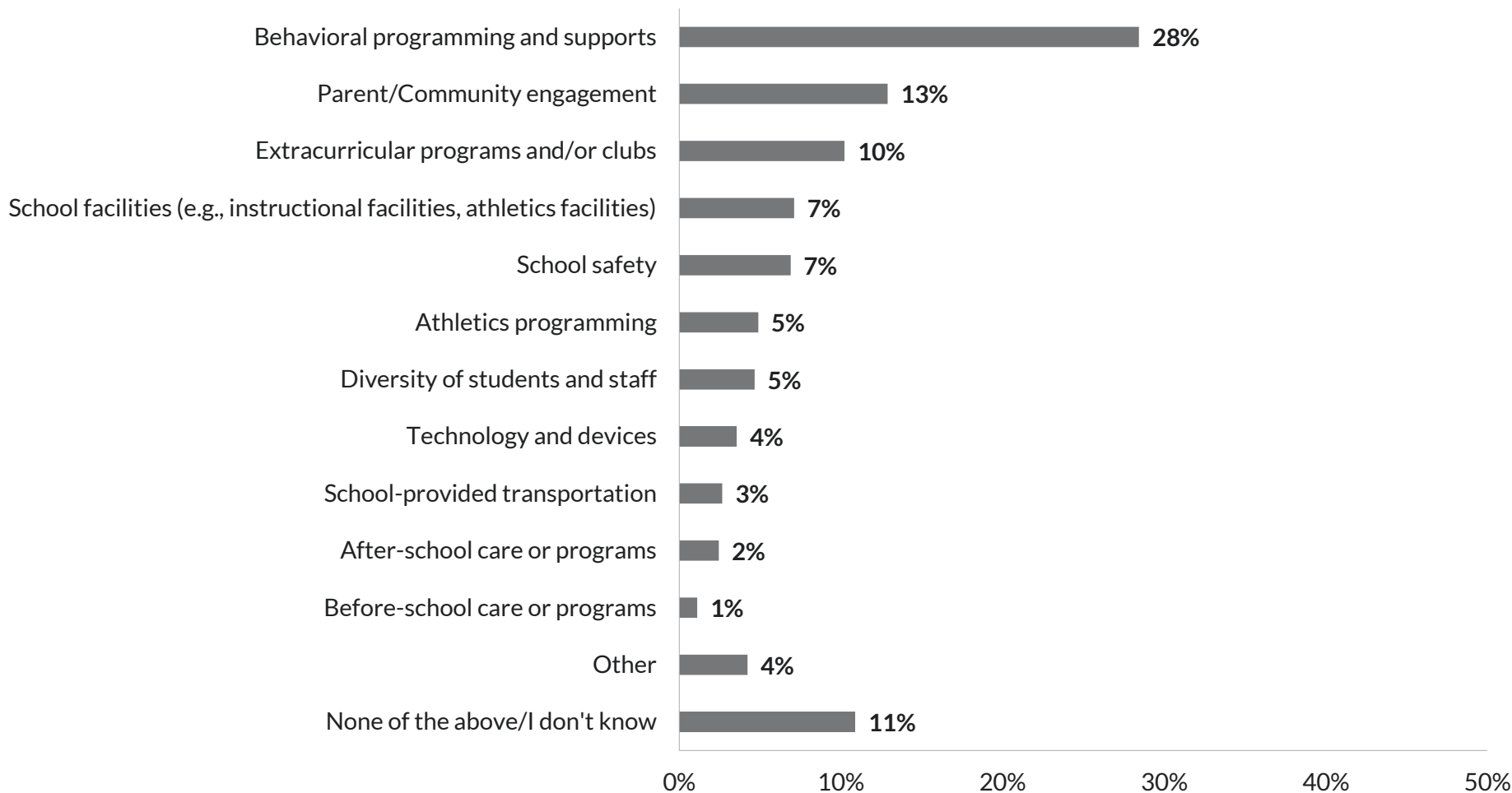
# PRIORITY AREAS

Do you feel that your school would benefit from prioritizing any of the following areas to attract and/or retain families? Please select all that apply from the list below. (n=451)



# #1 PRIORITY AREAS

#1 Priority Area (n=450)



Note: Due to the display logic of the survey, this ranking combines multiple questions. Respondents who only selected one question in the initial "Please select all that apply." question were not shown the follow-up question asking them to select their top priority. This graph accounts for that by assigning a ranking of 1 for respondents who selected one item initially.

# #1 PRIORITY AREAS

## *NON-SIGNATURE V. SIGNATURE SCHOOL STAFF*

### #1 Priority Area

	Non-Signature School Staff (n=342)	Signature School Staff (n=108)
Behavioral programming and supports	33%	14%
Parent/Community engagement	14%	10%
Extracurricular programs and/or clubs	11%	9%
School facilities (e.g., instructional facilities, athletics facilities)	5%	15%
School safety	8%	4%
Athletics programming	4%	7%
Diversity of students and staff	3%	10%
Technology and devices	3%	5%
School-provided transportation	3%	3%
After-school care or programs	2%	3%
Before-school care or programs	1%	1%
Other	3%	9%
None of the above/I don't know	11%	10%

Note: For each respondent group, the three most selected factors are colored in green. Due to the display logic of the survey, this ranking combines multiple questions. Respondents who only selected one question in the initial "Please select all that apply." question were not shown the follow-up question asking them to select their top priority. This graph accounts for that by assigning a ranking of 1 for respondents who selected one item initially.

# #1 PRIORITY AREAS

## BY GRADE BAND (TEACHERS ONLY)

### #1 Priority Area

	Grades PK-6 (n=248)	Grades 7-8 (n=26)	Grades 9-12 (n=66)
Behavioral programming and supports	29%	46%	14%
Parent/Community engagement	14%	12%	9%
Extracurricular programs and/or clubs	13%	0%	8%
School facilities (e.g., instructional facilities, athletics facilities)	7%	8%	9%
School safety	4%	23%	11%
Athletics programming	4%	0%	3%
Diversity of students and staff	5%	0%	11%
Technology and devices	2%	4%	11%
School-provided transportation	3%	0%	3%
After-school care or programs	4%	0%	0%
Before-school care or programs	0%	4%	2%
Other	4%	0%	9%
None of the above/I don't know	10%	4%	12%

Note: For each respondent group, the three most selected factors are colored in green. Due to the display logic of the survey, this ranking combines multiple questions. Respondents who only selected one question in the initial "Please select all that apply." question were not shown the follow-up question asking them to select their top priority. This graph accounts for that by assigning a ranking of 1 for respondents who selected one item initially.



The background of the slide is a grayscale photograph of a building's exterior, showing architectural details like windows and structural elements. A semi-transparent green rectangular box is positioned in the center, containing the title text.

## **STUDY 3:** STAKEHOLDER FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

# METHODOLOGY

Hanover conducted **eleven focus groups** and **two in-depth interviews** across three KCPS sites in February 2020 with the following stakeholder groups:

- KCPS Primary Parents (Grades PreK-2)
- KCPS Neighborhood School Parents
- KCPS Signature School Parents
- Spanish-Speaking Parents (*Referred to as “Hispanic parents” throughout report*)
- Non-KCPS Parents (Private, Charter, and Other Districts)
- Teachers/Librarians
- KCPS Partner Organization Leaders\*
- School Choice Knowledgeable Organization Leaders\*

\*See this report's [appendix](#) for list of partner organizations in attendance.

## Note:

Qualitative research is exploratory and designed to add insight and a depth of understanding to a particular question or topic. Qualitative findings provide commonalities and trends but are not intended to be statistically significant or to provide generalizable conclusions.

## KEY FINDINGS

# PERCEPTIONS OF KCPS



**While participants frequently describe KCPS in negative terms and point to the district's challenges, they also recognize that KCPS is working to improve.** Specifically, participants across groups first note the district's challenges with accreditation, staff retention, student behavior and violence, academic rigor, segregation, attendance, and lack of consistency between schools. However, some participants also highlight positive aspects of the district, including that KCPS offers a variety of extracurricular options and before- and after-school care, is diverse, has supportive teachers, and offers services for students with disabilities. Participants feel non-KCPS options (i.e., charter and private schools) frequently offer solutions to KCPS's perceived challenges. Participants also emphasize that KCPS is represented negatively by the media, which biases the public, and feel that KCPS should improve marketing to showcase the positive aspects of the district and its successes.



**Perceptions of KCPS are improving for signature schools but not for neighborhood schools.** Participants perceive signature schools as higher quality than neighborhood schools and feel they receive more resources, have higher levels of parent involvement, and better prepare students than neighborhood schools. Participants describe a hierarchy within KCPS where signature schools are above neighborhood schools, with Lincoln College Preparatory Academy at the top, and express a desire to level this hierarchy so that neighborhood schools have the same high academic expectations and resources as signature schools. Because signature schools have specific enrollment requirements and limited seats, participants note that parents whose children do not get into Lincoln or other signature high schools are likely to send them to non-KCPS schools. Indeed, multiple signature parents stated that if their child had not gotten into a signature school, they would have pulled their child from the district rather than send him or her to a neighborhood school.

## KEY FINDINGS

# ENROLLMENT FACTORS AND DECISIONS



When choosing a school for their child, parents prioritize rigorous academics, school climate and safety, availability of a variety of extracurricular options, a welcoming environment, parent involvement, diversity, services for students with special needs, and the school location and convenient transportation. Parents emphasize that school location and transportation considerations are secondary to academic concerns.



To gather information on school options, parents primarily rely on word of mouth and seek recommendations and experiences from friends, neighbors, and over social media; visit schools and classrooms to see the school in person; participate in organized tours that visit multiple schools; and consult online resources with school reviews, achievement data, and comparisons. Parents would like KCPS to offer more information on school enrollment options, improve the online enrollment system, and ensure that parents who work or do not speak English receive sufficient enrollment information.



Parents place great value on how they feel when they visit a school and are unlikely to enroll their child at a site where they do not feel welcome when they visit. Parents perceive charter schools as more welcoming to parents during visits and tours, which increases the likelihood that parents enroll their child in charter schools as opposed to KCPS schools.

## KEY FINDINGS

# BARRIERS TO RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION



Participants consistently described the following themes as both barriers to enrollment in KCPS schools and strategies for how the district can improve student recruitment and retention:



**School Climate, Safety, and Violence:** Participants would like KCPS to improve classroom management and discipline practices, offer a comprehensive social-emotional learning curriculum, and ensure parents feel safe and welcome when they visit schools.



**Communication, Relationship-Building, and Bilingual Communication:** Participants would like KCPS to establish consistent two-way parent communication at both the district and school levels and ensure communications and enrollment information translated into Spanish and other languages are accurately translated and accessible to parents who do not speak English.



**Meeting Students' Academic Needs:** Participants would like to see more personalization and higher academic expectations and rigor at all KCPS schools, as well as better diagnosis of students who would benefit from more advanced instruction and services.



**Family Engagement and Involvement in Schools:** Participants recommend that KCPS focus on strategies for engaging parents who work during the day, establish parent-teacher organizations at all schools, showcase parent involvement when parents tour schools, and increase parent engagement at secondary schools specifically.



**Staff Retention:** Participants suggest that KCPS focus their efforts on retaining and recruiting high-quality teachers, investigate why teachers are leaving, and discontinue placing first-year teachers in high-needs schools and classrooms.

# PERCEPTIONS OF KANSAS CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS



“There's also lots of really excellent people, teachers and administrators. And I feel hopeful with some new initiatives that they have coming up. And there are so many smart, smart kids in this district, who are amazing and wise.”

– KCPS Partner

# OVERALL NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS OF KCPS



Overall, when asked how they perceive KCPS, participants across groups first describe the district in negative terms and point to the district's challenges:

Accreditation  
challenges

Teacher  
turnover

Lack of academic  
support and rigor

Constant  
change

Inconsistencies  
and variation  
within and across  
schools

Negative student  
behavior and lack  
of classroom  
management

Segregation  
and redlining  
effects

Attendance  
challenges

*"Misunderstood...it's got a troubled history where bad decisions have been made and then there was a series of attempts that were not really well thought through. Now I feel like there are bright spots but there are also weak spots in it." – KCPS Signature Parent*

*"It's just kind of like, 'Oh, well. The kids are failing.' And the apathy of the community in particular." – School Choice Knowledgeable*

*"I'd have to say we're just average. In comparison to other schools, our budgets have gone down significantly in recent years, where I know other schools are getting increases, not decreases. Speaking from the angle that we're working in, I know I had a \$3,000 cut this year, which just about killed my budget. And that makes it kind of hard to provide all the quality things we want." – Teacher*

*"It was run like a jail to me. It was a horrible place. It was awful."  
– Former KCPS Parent, on why she pulled her child from KCPS school*



# OVERALL POSITIVE PERCEPTIONS OF KCPS



However, some participants also highlight positive aspects of KCPS and their perception that the district is trying to improve:

Variety of  
extracurricular  
options

Efforts to  
improve

Before- and after-  
school care

Supportive  
teachers

Diversity

Supports and  
services for students  
with special needs

*"My kids are happy. They're learning. So I can see that in what they're either bringing home, or their ability to read a harder book... And then we just had parent-teacher conferences, and so the teachers were able to provide us with actual documentation of, 'Here's where your kiddo was at.'" – KCPS Neighborhood Parent*

*"They're always kind of spinning their wheels. They're always trying to get better. If it's on the brink of accreditation, they're working hard to get it back. I just feel like they're always trying to get better is what I think of when I think of them." – Non-KCPS Parent*

*"For my high-schoolers, we have very supportive teachers." – KCPS Signature Parent*

*"My experience has been that the teachers are very dedicated."  
– Hispanic Parent*

*"The first thing that comes to mind when you say Kansas City Public Schools would be the dedication to excellence that the district actually puts into it .... the amount of effort that they put into to prepare their teachers to do what is necessary is amazing."  
– Teacher*



“We run and jump for Border Star. We run and jump for Lincoln. We run and jump for Holliday. These signature schools but all these other schools are just kind of like, ‘Fend for yourself. It’ll be what it is.’ So if Melcher and if Troost Elementary and if Southeast could get the same attention that Border Star was getting and Lincoln was getting-- I mean, Lincoln got a whole new field. People are running to go to the games out there, but you go see a football game at Southeast and nobody’s in the stands for these kids. So I think **the support is really-- it’s not even and it’s not spread fairly across the whole district so it does leave a bad taste in the mouth with a lot of parents.**”

– Non-KCPS Parent

“I feel like my school has been left in the dust, like we’re a foster child that nobody in the district really cares about anymore. The other middle schools, especially the signature schools, like Foreign Language Academy as an example, they have one-on-one computers.”

– Teacher (referring to a neighborhood school)

# PARTICIPANTS PERCEIVE SIGNATURE SCHOOLS MORE POSITIVELY THAN NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS

Participants perceive **signature schools as higher quality than neighborhood schools** and that they receive **more resources**, have higher rates of **parent involvement**, and better **prepare students** than neighborhood schools.

Participants across groups describe a **hierarchy** within KCPS where signature schools are above neighborhood schools, with Lincoln College Preparatory Academy at the top.

Multiple signature parents state **they would not send their child to a neighborhood school** and would have pulled them from the district if they had not gotten into a signature school. They feel **the district is losing students who do not get into signature high schools**.

*"The experience I've had with the signature schools have actually been fairly positive...People in Kansas City know the signature schools and want to support the signature schools. **But why can't neighborhood schools receive the same level of support and excitement? It almost feels like a secondary system**, ...Walking in to [signature] buildings felt very different than the few times I've walked in to neighborhood schools. Not even when I've walked in as a parent. When I've walked in to schools for work, **it's a different air there. You can tell the different level of support than a neighborhood school.**" – Non-KCPS Parent*

*So when I think of neighborhood schools, I tend to think that **they get almost a second-tier level of talent and resources.**" – KCPS Signature Parent*

*"There is a lot of buy-in, and there is a lot of trust into the signature schools. And more and more families are recognizing those as strong school options.... So I do think reputation is changing in a really positive way. It hasn't gotten to our traditional neighborhood schools yet, but I do think that there is a lot more parent buy-in and interest in signature schools and recognition that there's a lot of excellent things about the signature schools." – School Choice Knowledgeable*

*"It seems like these kids that are going to Lincoln, is almost like everybody expects them to be destined for something amazing because they got accepted into Lincoln. ...but if you go anywhere else, we don't know what's going to happen with you." - Teacher*

*"It feels like **there's a sharp funnel towards Lincoln Prep**, specifically, among schools. And that school has done so well, and because it has done so well, students who are doing well go there. And I interact with students from other, different schools, and **their experience at school is much different than students at Lincoln Prep.**" - KCPS Signature Parent*

# PERCEPTIONS OF KCPS COMPARED TO OTHER OPTIONS

Participants feel that KCPS and other school options (e.g., charter schools, private schools) each have benefits and drawbacks.

Specifically, participants associate charter and private schools with more **rigorous academics** and higher **student expectations**, better **student discipline and behavior**, a greater variety of **learning models**, smaller **class sizes**, higher levels of **parent involvement**, and better **communication** and more **personal relationships** with families. Participants also describe variation in quality among charter schools.

However, KCPS features greater **diversity**, offers a variety of **extracurricular options** and **before- and after-school care**, and better **serves students with special needs** in comparison to charter and private schools.

“

*“It depends on the school, all the schools are different. The one that I chose, I chose it because it was the number one school between the charter schools but there are schools that are similar that are charters that I wouldn’t choose for my daughter.”*

– Non-KCPS Parent

*“[Charter schools] challenge [students] way more.”*

– Non-KCPS Parent

*“Perhaps in [charter] programs...support, for example, children with special problems or abilities, support or follow-up for those children cannot be provided. They suggest you take them out, almost.”*

– Hispanic Parent

*“In the public [school], they are raised, shouting and moving... At the charter, I never saw a fight or my daughter never saw a fight, and when she went to the public, she did see a fight.”*

– Hispanic Parent

*“I think communication is stronger with the charter. I think the parent community is stronger in our experience with the charter versus the public school. I think that we’ve experienced comparable diversity between both of our school options, which is something we’re really looking for... But I think communication and parent involvement, or community and communication amongst each other is a big difference.”*

– KCPS and Charter School parent

# BIASED REPRESENTATION OF KCPS IN THE MEDIA

Participants across groups highlight how the media negatively portrays KCPS, creating a negative bias in the community against the district.

They feel the media only mentions negative incidents and does not portray positive aspects of KCPS and that other local districts or schools are more favorably covered by the media.

Participants feel that KCPS needs to improve their representation in the local media, improve their marketing, and share the “bright spots.”

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*“It's almost like a hidden jewel. I hear a lot of negative spoken about our school district but I feel like there's more positive that happens that isn't really communicated...I do feel frustrated because of how it's portrayed in the media.” – KCPS Signature Parent*

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*“Unfortunately most of the news we see or hear about the KCPS is bad but we never hear the good news. We know the KCPS has a great Superintendent that is a great person and he is doing a lot of good – but the community doesn't know about it. KCPS need to communicate all the good things they are doing; this would benefit them a lot.” – KCPS Parent*

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*“The district hits the newspaper, the district hits the nightly news, the district hits every social and news media outlet anytime there's a negative action that happens with the district. You don't hear about the negative actions in individual charter schools. You don't hear about the negative scores in charter schools. They're individual little places that don't garner that much attention, and I've always found that extremely detrimental to the school district because we are in a lot of schools, and we see a lot of success in the schools that we're in. We see a lot of good things happening every single day in schools, but that never makes the paper.” – KCPS Partner*

“

*“Because anything negative that happened in KC public schools is what leads the story.” – Primary Parent*

“

*“I think the media loves sensationalizing failure. So I think a lot of the bright, shining stars are not reported as well as they could be.” – School Choice Knowledgeable*

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*“In the news it comes out when they do something wrong, but when they do something right you never know.” – Hispanic Parent*

# ENROLLMENT DECISIONS AND FACTORS



“My daughter, they had already picked her school out. She was going to [the neighborhood middle school] regardless of whether or not I wanted that to happen. A month before or a couple of weeks before this school, they sent me this information about...she's going to [the neighborhood middle school]. **I didn't understand the transition period** from sixth grade to seventh grade, because she was still at [a neighborhood elementary school]. And so [this school] goes to the sixth grade. **So it was just an automatic transition, they didn't give you an option or say, 'Hey, here, this is what we have.'** Or, **'This is the deadlines,'** or any-- I haven't seen a **deadline ever**. I don't know what those deadline dates are because-- and I get emails from them constantly.”

- **KCPS Neighborhood Parent**

# HOW FAMILIES FIND INFORMATION ON SCHOOLS AND MAKE ENROLLMENT DECISIONS

Families find school information to inform enrollment decisions from:



Word of mouth and conversations with family, friends, neighbors, and social media



School visits, shadows, and classroom visits



Organized tours that bring parents to visit multiple schools



Online: school websites, comparison websites, and reviews

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*“In my research, in my conversation with people-- I know people who work at private schools, charter schools, public schools. I know I have good friends who have sent their kids to all three of those. So I feel like, in general, pretty well informed about educational options within Kansas City”*

*– KCPS Signature Parent*

Parents feel that, within KCPS, signature schools are better at recruiting parents but that charter schools do a better job of marketing to and attracting parents than KCPS.



# FACTORS FAMILIES LOOK FOR IN A SCHOOL

Parents of students who attend both KCPS and non-KCPS schools describe looking for the following features when deciding where to enroll their child:

## Academics and Curricula

Parents want, and look for, rigor, high expectations, the curriculum, and specific learning models (e.g., project-based learning, Montessori)

## Welcoming environment

Parents want to feel welcome when they visit a school and that the school wants them there.

## School Climate and Safety

Parents are very wary of sending their children to schools where they have seen or perceive high levels of fights, violence, and discipline challenges.

## Variety of opportunities and extracurriculars

Parents want their child to have access to a variety of options that meet their interests (e.g., sports, arts, ROTC).

## Diversity

Parents of all demographics want their students in schools with racial, socioeconomic, and gender diversity of student body and staff.

## Services and supports for students with special needs

Parents of students with special needs look for a school that offers the services that their student needs.

## Parent involvement in school

Parents look for schools where the parent community is involved in the school and in students' learning.

## School location/proximity to home and transportation

Parents look for convenient transportation and schools that are close to home so students can walk, are close to parents' jobs, or offer transportation. However, many parents noted that transportation is less important and that they are willing to have longer commutes for better schools.

# PARENTS CHOOSE A SCHOOL BASED ON HOW THEY FEEL WHEN THEY VISIT



School visits make a large impact on parents' enrollment decisions, as parents frequently describe choosing a school based on the **"feel"** of the school and whether it has a **welcoming environment**. This was especially apparent among parents who chose to send their children to non-KCPS schools.

*"I just still had a good feeling that I hadn't always had when I walked in to other schools. And so that helped me decide to send my kids there." – Non-KCPS Parent*

*"How I felt walking in and the office environment or whoever was going to give us tours of the schools. Kind of how I felt. It was just more of like the energy I had at the school, how everything felt, how everything was structured." – Primary School Parent*

*"So a lot of it was off from the gut feeling and how I felt in the environment" – Primary School Parent*

*"Sometimes your decision isn't just based upon scores, or isn't just based upon location. ...when I was putting my oldest into school, we went with a charter school that was within walking distance and when I went to visit I just had a good feeling about it." – Non-KCPS Parent*

*"A community atmosphere...familiar faces in the school."  
– KCPS Neighborhood Parent*

# PARENTS FIND THE ENROLLMENT PROCESS CHALLENGING AND LACKING SUFFICIENT INFORMATION

Parents describe having trouble finding information about enrollment in KCPS schools, as well as a lack of communication from the district and individual schools regarding enrollment, especially around the middle school or high school transition and related deadlines.



## Availability of school choice information for the middle and high school transition differs by school

*"The information is not forthcoming. They don't let you know anything. And they ask for your emails and your all your information, and you give it to them, and you get nothing. Absolutely nothing. I was on Dojo. They told me to download all these apps, all these programs. And it's nothing. You have to literally go out and find the information."* – KCPS neighborhood parent

*"More information. There needs to be more at parent meetings specifically for making the decision what school your child is going to go to."* – KCPS Neighborhood Parent



## Trouble enrolling in KCPS schools

*"Enrollment...was a nightmare. ... The system wasn't working right, .... It was just a big drama, just for something that I feel like could have been well planned out and could have gone smoothly."* – Primary Parent



## Enrollment information difficult for parents who work or do not feel comfortable in schools

*"The majority of opportunities [for receiving school information] are during a time when [parents] cannot get there because they're working and then the disconnect to get to the transportation and then even not feeling confident walking in the door to go do it."* – School Choice Knowledgeable



Recent immigrant parents are limited by their English language skills to find sufficient sources on school options. They also describe how poor translations on the KCPS website exacerbate the challenging enrollment process.

# **BARRIERS AND IMPROVEMENT AREAS FOR RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION**

# OVERVIEW

The following themes arose across focus groups and represent both barriers that inhibit parents from enrolling or keeping their child in KCPS, as well as areas that KCPS can address to improve student recruitment and retention in district schools:



**School Climate, Safety, and Violence**



**Communication and Relationship-Building**



**Meeting Students' Academic Needs**



**Parent Engagement and Involvement in School**



**Staff Retention**

# SCHOOL CLIMATE, SAFETY, AND VIOLENCE



Participants describe a school climate marked by violence and a lack of discipline that creates negative perceptions and influences parents' decisions to choose signature or non-KCPS schools for their children or to remove their children from the KCPS system.

Parents do not want to send their children to a school where there is bullying or fights between students.

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*“If it takes you two months to even get the entire student body in one room, because **there's too many fights**, what parent is going to choose to send their kids to that school if they have a choice?” – Primary Parent*

*“[My friend] was substitute teaching at [a neighborhood middle school]... she showed me a video of what was going on in her classroom when she was teaching.... **kids, literally screaming, running around the classroom-- during class...it was a free-for-all.**” – KCPS Signature Parent*

*“**We don't have the discipline in place.** We don't have a way to train the kids in place, so we get to have more and more discipline issues. We have inexperienced teachers who don't know how to get control of the classroom, which **increases the amount of violence and problems that we have in class.**” – Teacher*

*“**We've accepted a culture of violence in our schools that is unprecedented and unbelievable...**It's everybody in the culture that we've created and accepted in these schools. **Kids are scared. They're scared to go to school.**” – KCPS Partner*

*“From middle school into high school, **the internal violence level is pretty high, and surprisingly high, I think, of major fights, and fist fights, and aggression that scares teachers and kids.**” – KCPS Partner*

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# COMMUNICATION AND RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING



Parents would like the district and schools to provide more frequent and consistent communications and improve responsiveness to parent inquiries.

*"Every year they get a new principal. ... And it does frustrate me... because I called the principal, and I needed to ask the principal an important question. And I was told that, 'He's going to call you back before the end of the day.' I said, 'Great.' No phone call. Two days later. No phone call. So I was very frustrated."* – KCPS Neighborhood Parent

*"I just feel strongly that the district should be communicating with parents on helping them understand how to best navigate the system for the students."* – KCPS Neighborhood Parent

*"Consistency on all the outlets that their communication on-- if there's an announcement for one thing, then whatever outlet they use, it should be consistent the day they put it out, whether it's their social media or sending something home, because I've gotten different information from different-- from the school, from the district, and from maybe what comes through the email."* – Primary Parent

*"Communication from the school is lacking for us. I think when the school year started there was weekly communication from the principal or administration, or even a teacher. It has not been heard from since probably November...so just kind of that weekly, 'hey, school year is going...' ...on the flip side, communication about buses running late ...My phone blows up when the bus is running three minutes late."* – Primary Parent

*"There's a huge gap in communication between Kansas City Public Schools and it's relationship to the people that they serve. I just think that there's not enough going-- there's not a big-- the connection is not strong enough."* – Teacher

# BILINGUAL COMMUNICATION



*“KCPS needs to recognize that they have a decent number of Hispanics enrolled in their schools and many parents are not English proficient therefore we value and appreciate communication in Spanish. It looks that many times someone in the KCPS copies and pastes the English to Google to provide a translation and you know those Google translations leave a lot to be desired. I know we cannot make demands but with good translations we would really know what is going on.” - Hispanic Parent*

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*“[Communication] in Spanish is limited and also in other languages. And I'll tell you why [...] in the application, for example in Spanish, the application to enroll my son. It was open online by the computer so that parents who could not, or who had work or who could not attend to complete the application, this benefited them. **It was horrible in Spanish: it was not understandable, it had many mistakes, different things. I mean, they did nothing more than translating it in Google and putting it there.**” - Hispanic Parent*

**While parents appreciate that KCPS publishes a lot of bilingual communications, Hispanic parents emphasize that the Spanish translation can be well below average or even so bad that many times it cannot be understood.**



# MEETING STUDENTS' ACADEMIC NEEDS



Participants, especially former KCPS parents, explain that KCPS schools do not provide enough differentiation to meet students' unique learning needs.

Specially, they note that KCPS schools (especially secondary schools, with the exception of Lincoln) **do not offer students enough academic rigor, have high enough expectations, or properly diagnose or serve academically advanced students.** Former KCPS parents frequently mentioned switching to charter schools for increased rigor and academic expectations.

*Alternatively, parents with students at Lincoln describe it as “a very rigorous program.”*

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*“They did not challenge my students. My students were very bright and they failed to challenge them to try to help them get to the next level. And I would have many conversations [with the school], ‘What can we do?’ They didn't put them in a gifted program. They wouldn't do anything for my students. And I just felt like it was a disservice because they didn't know what to do with them. So I just don't think the curriculum is challenging enough. ...compared to other schools, I think they set the bar pretty low.” - Primary Parent (referring to her older students)*

*“You get kids into a classroom that are reading on a second-grade level that are in kindergarten. But the learning curve says they're supposed to be at this. Well, these kids that are above that are being kept where they are during the school year versus maximizing their learning potential. So they're being marginalized.” - Non-KCPS Parent*

*“They dismiss you when you act out. My son was acting out because he was bored, so when we transferred to a charter school they actually took the initiative to actually test him ...‘Does he have ADHD? What's going on?’ He was actually bored, so he did get to get into gifted classes because at the charter schools they offer that but [KCPS] will just write you off. ... So as the parent, I needed to find out what's going on because they try to dismiss you. And if he did have a learning disability, I do want to know.” - Former KCPS Parent*

*“The education [is] not being geared to a high enough level for some of the kids... I've got a kid right now... he's bored everywhere he goes... We need to hit all their needs....to push our kids.” - Teacher*

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“As a matter of retention, I think **KCPS** should try to intentionally find a way to have parents be more engaged in actually what's going on classroom. And the best way to do that is just to create opportunities for them to [do so] aside from a parent-teacher conference just once a semester. Get them more connected to have their teachers delivering the education on what that environment looks like, so they can start to feel more a part of the fabric of the school. And then when problems arise, they're more likely to go and talk to the teacher, talk to the principal, and really having built these relationships with these people instead of just bolting and leaving the school. And I think that's very, very important to retention. And if parents don't feel they can talk to you and I get pissed off about something because that's going to happen, then you're going to lose a student. I mean, you're more likely to lose a student [unless you make] a path and build that relationship. And I don't think that our schools are doing a good job with that.”

- **School Choice Knowledgeable**

# FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS



Participants feel that the level of parent engagement in KCPS schools is less than desirable and would like to see higher levels of parent involvement.

- “I have never seen most of my parents because they don't come here for parent-teacher conferences for one reason or another.”  
- Teacher
- “There's a lack-- I think across the board the school district has a challenge when it comes to parental involvement. And I think part of that is because of the demographic that predominantly makes up the district, not necessarily ethnic demographic, but income demographic in which is people are families who are working and don't have as much sort of time or expendable sort of income to get engaged in general.” - KCPS Signature Parent
- “I've heard parents several times say that they want their kids not to go to the school that I teach at anymore. And if they could, they would. They will pull all of them out, and they will send them someplace else. And it all boils down to parent-teacher relationships, administration-parent relationships. The lack of program and PTAs and stuff like that, they don't exist in the building I'm at.” - Teacher

Parents enroll their children in schools where they see higher levels of parent engagement.

- “The parent involvement at [one neighborhood elementary school] for us was big... My concern is finding that at the next step for us. And to be frank, with the research that we're doing, that doesn't exist right now that I know of.” - Primary Parent

Parents perceive more parent involvement at KCPS elementary schools than secondary schools.

- “A lot of parents do want to know what's going on, but it's like after- over time, you get distance...But engag[e] middle school and high school parents more.” - Charter Parent (former KCPS)
- “I have kids at Lincoln, and I have wondered if it's the parental support that's missing...At Border Star, the parents are very involved, right? So when an issue comes up, you're going to have a ton of people addressing it with the principal. You're also going to have people providing some solutions and sometimes financial support because there's money in our account. I don't see that same sort of commitment, I don't see here the same [support for secondary schools]...as I do at the elementary school.” - KCPS Signature Parent



# STAFF RETENTION



Participants express dissatisfaction with high levels of staff turnover within KCPS and charter schools, which negatively impacts perceptions of KCPS, enrollment, and student and parent experiences within the schools.

*"It would have to be a high teacher turnover rate or him coming home complaining about bullying [to make me pull him from KCPS]. Because I would like for him to stay at the school in the neighborhood and graduate from there. But [to pull him] it would have to be a high turnover. ... this year his AVID teacher left the high school, and went to the middle school, and that was so dramatic for him. I was devastated because he was so devastated about it. ...It was very dramatic for those students when that one teacher left."* – KCPS Neighborhood Parent



*"I felt terrible for the kids in the classroom. They were completely out of control. I talked to the teacher about it. She was their fourth teacher in that school year because nobody else could take it. I said, 'How do you do it?' She said, I cry a lot. I mean, oh my gosh, how horrible is that for the teachers and the kids."* – Non-KCPS Parent (speaking about experience volunteering in KCPS school)



*"Don't put your newest teachers, your first-year-out-of-college teachers, in the toughest schools. And I see that too often. And my school's one of those schools. ... six [teachers] that have actually walked out the door [this year] and never come back."*  
– Teacher

*"I just think stressful. It hasn't been a pleasant experience. It's been a battle and the main issue is teacher retention. And my daughter, during her elementary school year, she had six teachers. Her last year, she went through four teachers in one year. I just found out at [her neighborhood middle school] that she's had teacher turnover again. She's had four teachers in English and they've combined the classes. And I'm just frustrated. I talked to Dr. Bedell. I talked to everyone. The vice principals. And nothing's being done about it. And I am trying to remain loyal to KCPS, but I don't have too much more time for that because my daughter's education is way more important than loyalty."* – KCPS Neighborhood Parent



*"I can't remember how many superintendents we've had. Just a revolving door. And really frustrating. And I think from an image standpoint, to say, well, 'this isn't a place where people come to stay. This isn't a place where-- this isn't a destination job. This isn't a destination city. This is just a skipping stone on the way to something bigger.'" – KCPS Signature Parent*



*"Until you're in a school, sometimes you don't understand the magnitude of staff turnover."* – KCPS Neighborhood Parent (on choosing a secondary school)

# ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING STUDENT RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION



Participants further highlight the following recommendations for improving student enrollment and retention in KCPS:

- ➔ Actively and strategically market KCPS schools to parents. Recruit student and alumni advocates to act as spokespeople for the district and their school to build relationships with families and encourage enrollment.
- ➔ Increase options and awareness of CTE, vocational training, and career exposure.
- ➔ Implement a parent liaison in each elementary school to assist parents with navigating enrollment.
- ➔ Reduce class sizes.
- ➔ Provide more elective course offerings, especially in middle school.
- ➔ Improve building facilities (e.g., improve cleanliness and soundproofing).
- ➔ Offer more services for students experiencing trauma and a full-time social worker in every building.



# APPENDIX

# PARTICIPANTS

Group Composition	Number of Participants
Primary Parents (Grades Pre-K-2)	9
Teacher	1
KCPS Signature Parent	1
Non-KCPS Parents	8
KCPS Neighborhood Parents	7
KCPS Signature Parents	2
KCPS Partners Organization Leaders (Experience in Schools)	9
Non-KCPS Parents	9
Spanish-Speaking Parents	6
Charter School Parents	5
School-Choice Knowledgeable Organization Leaders	9
Teachers	2
KCPS Signature Parents	6

## KCPS Partner Organizations:

- LINC
- Score 1 for Health
- JBS (Refugee Resettlement Agency)
- Stand Up KC, the Children's Place, Operation Breakthrough, TIES, and Lead to Read KC
- Center for Conflict Resolution
- Communities In Schools
- Church of the Resurrection
- Samuel U. Rodgers Health Center

## School Choice Knowledgeable Organizations:

- Front Porch Alliance
- Show Me KC Schools
- UMKC's Institute for Human Development
- United Intercity Services
- Commerce Bank Charitable Trust and Foundations
- Kaufmann Foundation
- Hall Family Foundation
- Prep KC
- HR Block





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