

Q&A on Amity Student Enrollment and School Switching

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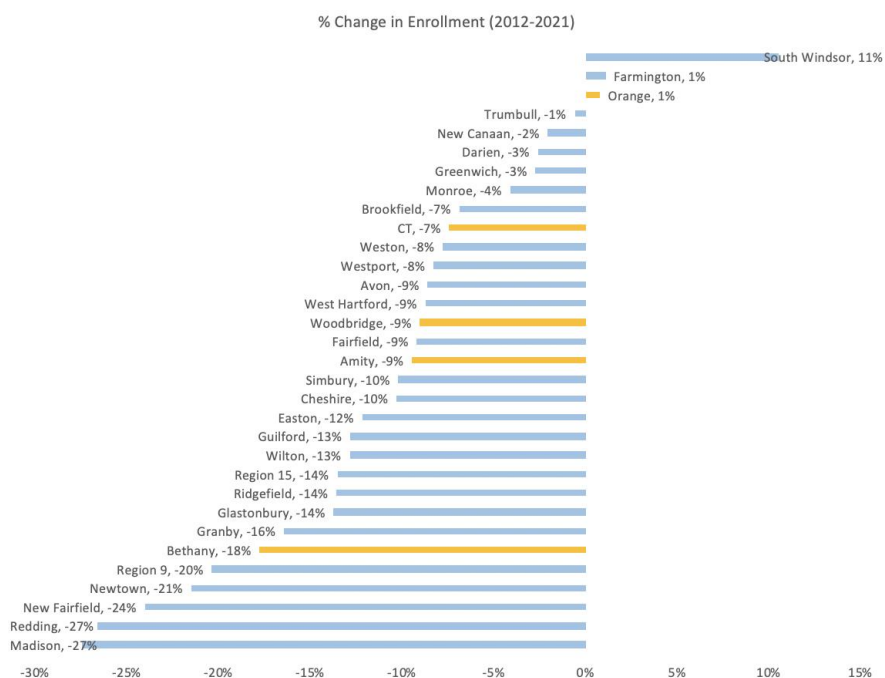
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(The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of Yale and BOE)

1. I hear Amity's enrollment is going down. Is something wrong with the school?

Across Connecticut, enrollment in public schools has dropped due to falling population in the last decade.

Amity's enrollment dropped 9% from 2012-2021, and 3% from 2017-2021. Amity ranks in the middle of BOWA districts, and in the middle of districts both like us AND wealthier than us. Highly ranked schools across the state saw drops, many much bigger than Amity's. The decline is not a reflection of educational quality at Amity.



Data Source: EdSight

2. What about parents pulling kids out of Amity? Is this different from the past or from peer schools?

I looked at the EdSight data on drop-off in students from 8th to 9th grade. During 2012-2021, Amity had an average drop of 3%. During 2019-2021, the average drop was 2%.

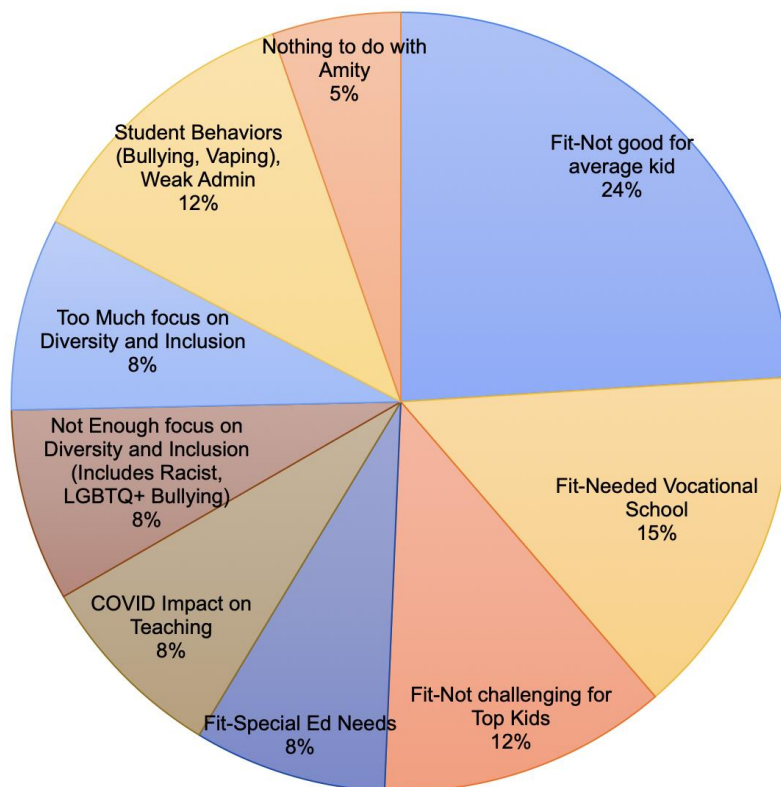
This 2-3% drop places Amity in the middle of some highly ranked and wealthy districts, many of which also face strong competition from private schools.

3. I read an op-ed that said kids are leaving Amity because the academics, administration and culture have gone bad. Is this true?

Ms. Meghan Rabuse surveyed people on Facebook hoping to learn reasons for why kids are leaving Amity. I thank her for sharing the raw data with me.

This survey can't tell us how Amity parents overall feel about the school district. Those who switch schools are only 2-3% of Amity families. And not every switching family took the survey. But these responses may still help us understand Amity.

From the text of the survey response, I coded each respondent's primary reason for switching school. The graph below shows the share of various reasons.



Primary Reasons for Leaving Amity (N=75)

A. 67% of switching was because of student fit or Covid disruptions

Fit with student needs drives 59% of the switching. Some kids need vocational school, some have specialized educational needs. Some want a curriculum focused on high-achieving students, while some others want an environment focused on the “students in the middle.” While Amity should strive to fit all students, it is not surprising that some parents prefer specialized schools that cater to their kids’ specific needs. Parents frustrated by poor fit for their child often blame the curriculum and administration.

COVID disruptions drove 8% of switching. This is an issue that has passed.

B. 16% had concerns with Amity's diversity climate, but in opposite ways

Not Enough Attention to diversity and inclusion: 8% of parents felt Amity is not diverse and inclusive. These included parents concerned about racist, LGBTQ+ bullying.

Too much attention to diversity and inclusion: 8% of parents felt Amity focused too much on diversity and inclusion. These included parents concerned about their kids being bullied for

conservative views.

Overall, 28 out of 75 respondents (37%) mentioned diversity-related issues, even if this was not their primary reason. Of these respondents, 57% cited too much attention to diversity, while 43% mentioned not enough attention to diversity. By calling opposite feelings around diversity as “toxic culture,” the op-ed presents a misleading picture of the school environment. The respondents on both sides blame the administration for the diversity climate. But I interpret the opposing sentiments to mean that the administration takes a balanced approach.

C. 12% left because of student behavior concerns - vaping, drug use, bullying

Some parents reported on their kids’ experiences, while many said they heard about problem behaviors and switched. Parents often also blame a “weak” administration for problem student behaviors.

All middle and high schools have some level of problem student behaviors. We all want the Amity administration to reduce/eliminate problem behaviors. But for a comparative perspective, it is useful to remember that the State classifies Amity as a Tier 1 district (best tier out of four) for discipline issues.

D. 5% of school switches were unrelated to Amity.

These include moving out of district or a family always sending their kids to private school.