Understanding How Parents Chose Schools: An Analysis of Denver’s SchoolChoice Form Questions

Prepared for Donnell-Kay Foundation and Piton Foundation

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## Contents

Background .......................................................................................................................... 5

What Factors Did Parents Consider when Making Their School Choices? .......................... 7

Did this Differ by Subgroup? ............................................................................................... 8

Grade .................................................................................................................................... 8

Race/Ethnicity ...................................................................................................................... 12

Region of the City ............................................................................................................... 14

Free/Reduced Lunch Status .............................................................................................. 16

School Performance Rating of Current School ................................................................. 18

Summary ............................................................................................................................. 20

Did parents’ reports about important factors align with the actual choices made? .............. 20

School Performance Rating ............................................................................................... 21

Location ............................................................................................................................... 21

What resources did parents find useful when making their choices? ............................... 22

Did This Differ By Subgroup? .......................................................................................... 23

Grade .................................................................................................................................... 23

Race/Ethnicity ...................................................................................................................... 25

Region of the City ............................................................................................................... 28

Free/Reduced Lunch Status .............................................................................................. 30

School Performance Rating of Current School ................................................................. 33

Summary ............................................................................................................................. 35

How can we improve the quality of information we provide to parents and families? .......... 37

Did This Differ By Subgroup? .......................................................................................... 38

Grade .................................................................................................................................... 38
Race/Ethnicity ........................................................................................................................................ 40
Region of the City ................................................................................................................................ 43
Free/Reduced Lunch Status ..................................................................................................................... 45
School Performance Rating of Current School ......................................................................................... 47
Summary .................................................................................................................................................. 48

Can parents’ answers to these questions shed light on why there is variability in the demand for high quality schools across various subgroups? ................................................................. 49

Students who Qualify for Free/Reduced Lunch ...................................................................................... 49
Hispanic Students .................................................................................................................................... 51
Southwest Region ..................................................................................................................................... 52
Northwest Region ..................................................................................................................................... 53
Conclusions .............................................................................................................................................. 53
Background

In the spring and summer of 2012, Denver Public Schools (DPS) completed its first round of school choice using a new unified approach called SchoolChoice. Prior to this year, charter schools, magnet schools and neighborhood schools used different processes to enroll students. One analysis of the prior system estimated that there were over 60 different procedures for school choice in place. \(^1\) In an attempt to create a more streamlined and equitable approach to school choice, a unified school choice process was put into place. In Spring 2012, for the first time, charter, magnet and neighborhood schools all participated in the same process. Families completed one form to rank their top five choices for schools. A new formula was used to match students with their requested schools in an equitable manner.

In addition to providing information about their student’s background and preferences, parents had the opportunity to answer three optional questions designed to gather information about how they made their choices. In October 2012, the Buechner Institute for Governance arranged for the data entry of the answers to these three questions. This report provides descriptive information about the answers as well as analyses of the three parent response questions in conjunction with the information about students’ demographic characteristics and the choices they made.

The three optional questions on the SchoolChoice form were as follows:

1) What was your most important single reason to select the top school on your list?
   - School rating on the School Performance Framework (SPF)
   - Special program or focus of the school
   - Location close to home, work, or family
   - Good reputation, from word of mouth
   - Other (specify):

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2) What resource provided you with the most useful information in making your choice?
   - SchoolChoice Enrollment Guide
   - Teachers or administrators at the school
   - School marketing materials
   - Information from other parents
   - Parent websites
   - School fairs or events
   - Other (specify): ______________________

3) What piece of information did you not have that would have helped you decide on your school choices?
   - Student academic performance information
   - Measures of school safety
   - Information about the school culture
   - Information about the schools’ programs or approaches
   - Information about transportation availability and options
   - Other (specify): ______________________

This report describes analyses of the parent responses on the SchoolChoice form to address three research questions:

1. **What factors did parents consider when making their school choices?** Did this differ by subgroup? Did parents’ reports about important factors align with the actual choices made?
2. **What resources did parents find useful when making their choices?** Did this differ by subgroup?
3. **How can we improve the quality of information we provide to parents and families?** Do reported ways to improve the information provided differ by subgroup?
4. Can parents’ answers to these questions shed light on why there is variability in the demand for high quality schools across various subgroups?

The Buechner Institute obtained access to 23,154 SchoolChoice forms from Denver Public Schools. 13,499 (58%) of these forms contained answers to at least one of the questions. This sample of 13,499 was the sample used for analysis in the report.

What Factors Did Parents Consider when Making Their School Choices?

Parents’ answers to Question 1 were examined to address this research question. 12,637 forms (55% of forms) included a response to Question 1. Although it was worded such that it requested a single response (i.e., “What was your most important single reason to select the top school on your list?” emphasis added), many respondents selected more than one response (see Figure 1). About three-quarters of respondents provided just one answer, as requested. Nearly a fifth of respondents provided two answers. Nearly a tenth of respondents provided more than two answers.

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2 The sample of students is rather large creating a situation where statistical power is high enough to detect very small effects that are likely to be of little practical significance. To adjust for this, an alpha level of .0001 is used in this report for determining statistical significance in all analyses.
Figure 2 presents the frequency of each of the response options. Readers should note that the percentages do not sum to 100% because a substantial proportion of the respondents provided more than one answer. The most popular reason cited was ‘location close to home, work, or family.’ This reason was endorsed by nearly half of the respondents. Nearly a third of respondents reported that the ‘special program or focus of the school’ was their reason for selecting it as their top choice. Finally, about a quarter of respondents indicated that the school’s rating on the School Performance Framework (SPF) or its reputation was a reason for selecting it.

![Figure 2: Percent of Respondents Endorsing Each Reason for Selecting the Top School on their List](image)

The extent to which responses to this question differed for different subgroups of students was examined. Specifically, responses were analyzed by the following subgroups: grade, race/ethnicity, region of the city, free and reduced lunch status, and SPF rating of the student’s current school.

**Did this Differ by Subgroup?**

**Grade**

The vast majority of students who participated in the SchoolChoice process were entering grades when students typically transition to a new school (i.e., ECE, kindergarten, sixth

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3 Free and Reduced Lunch Status was only available for students who had been previously enrolled in Denver Public Schools.

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Because fewer students from non-transition grades participated, results for elementary non-transition grades (i.e., grades 1-5), middle school non-transition grades (i.e., grades 7-8), and high school non-transition grades (i.e., grades 10-12) are grouped in these analyses. There were significant associations between grade in school that the student was entering and each of the responses to Question 1.  

Figure 3 presents the proportion of respondents reporting that ‘School Rating on the School Performance Framework (SPF)’ was an important reason they selected their first choice school, by grade. Generally speaking, parents of younger students were less likely to report that the SPF was an important reason for requesting a school. Parents of students entering ECE were the least likely to report choosing based on the SPF; fewer than a fifth of them reported this was an important reason for selecting the top school on their list. In contrast, parents of students in first through ninth grade were more likely to report this was an important reason for selecting their top school. Over a quarter of parents of students in these age groups reported that the school’s rating on the SPF was an important reason for requesting their top school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>SPF Rating, %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ECE</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinder</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-8</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-12</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4 presents the proportion of respondents reporting that a ‘Special Program or Focus of the School’ was an important reason they selected their first choice school, by grade.

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5 SPF: $\chi^2_{6}=110.24, p<.0001$; Special Program: $\chi^2_{6}=495.72, p<.0001$; Location: $\chi^2_{6}=771.72, p<.0001$; Reputation: $\chi^2_{6}=53.59, p<.0001$
Generally speaking, parents of younger students were less likely to report that a special program or focus of the school was an important reason for requesting their top choice school. Parents of students entering ECE and kindergarten were the least likely to report choosing based on this factor; fewer than a quarter of them reported this was an important reason for selecting the top school on their list. In contrast, over a third of parents of students entering later grades reported this was an important reason for selecting their top school. Parents of students entering 7th and 8th grade were the most likely to report this as an important reason. Half of parents in this group reported that a special focus or program was an important reason for selecting their first choice school.

![Figure 4: Proportion of Respondents Reporting that the School's Special Program or Focus was an Important Reason for Requesting their First Choice School, by Student Grade](image-url)
Figure 5 presents the proportion of respondents reporting that ‘Location close to home, work, or family’ was an important reason they selected their first choice school, by grade. Location was cited more often as an important factor by parents of students in younger grades. Over half of parents of students entering ECE and kindergarten cited this as an important reason for selecting their top choice school. Parents of older students were much less likely to report this as an important factor; slightly less than a quarter to slightly more than a third of parents with older students reported that this was an important reason for selecting their top school.

![Figure 5: Proportion of Respondents Reporting that the School’s Location was an Important Reason for Requesting their First Choice School, by Student Grade](image)

Figure 6 presents the proportion of respondents reporting that ‘good reputation, from word of mouth’ was an important reason they selected their first choice school, by grade. Reputation was cited more often as an important factor by parents of students entering high school grades. About a third of parents in these groups cited reputation as an important reason for selecting their top choice school. In contrast, only about a quarter of parents of students entering lower grades cited reputation as an important reason.
Race/Ethnicity

There were significant associations between student’s race/ethncity and three of the responses to Question 1: SPF, Special Program or Focus, and Location.\textsuperscript{6}

Figure 7 presents the proportion of respondents reporting that ‘School Rating on the School Performance Framework’ was an important reason they selected their first choice school, by race/ethnicity. Parents of black students were the most likely to report that the SPF was an important reason for requesting their top choice school; over a third of these parents reported this was an important reason. Parents of white students were the least likely to cite the SPF as an important reason for choosing their top choice school, fewer than a sixth of them reported that this was an important reason.

\textsuperscript{6} SPF: $\chi^2 = 322.26$, p < .0001; Special Program: $\chi^2 = 175.60$, p < .0001; Location: $\chi^2 = 712.77$, p < .0001; Reputation: $\chi^2 = 18.75$, n.s.
Figure 8 presents the proportion of respondents reporting that a ‘Special Program or Focus of the School’ was an important reason they selected their first choice school, by race/ethnicity. Parents of Hispanic students were least likely to report that a special program or focus of the school was an important reason for requesting a school; only about a quarter of them cited this reason. Parents of students identified as white or belonging to another race/ethnicity were most likely to indicate that this was an important reason. Over a third of parents in these groups indicated that a special program of focus was an important reason for requesting their top school.

![Figure 8: Proportion of Respondents Reporting that the School's Special Program or Focus was an Important Reason for Requesting their First Choice School, by Race/Ethnicity](image)

Figure 9 presents the proportion of respondents reporting that ‘Location close to home, work, or family’ was an important reason they selected their first choice school, by race/ethnicity. Location was cited most often as an important factor by parents of Hispanic students. Over half of parents in this group cited this as an important reason for selecting their top choice school. Parents of white students were the least likely to indicate that this was an important reason. Only about a third of these parents indicated that location was an important reason for requesting their top school.
Region of the City

There were significant associations between region of the city where the student resided and three of the responses to Question 1: SPF, Special Program or Focus, and Location.\textsuperscript{7}

Figure 10 presents the proportion of respondents reporting that ‘School Rating on the School Performance Framework’ was an important reason they selected their first choice school, by region of the city. Parents of students residing in the Southwest region of the city were most likely to indicate that the SPF was an important reason that they selected their first choice school; nearly a third of these parents indicated this was an important reason. Parents of students residing in the Near Northeast region were the least likely; only about a fifth of parents of students residing in this region indicated that this was an important reason.

\textsuperscript{7} SPF: $\chi^2 = 95.11$, $p < .0001$; Special Program: $\chi^2 = 80.29$, $p < .0001$; Location: $\chi^2 = 272.95$, $p < .0001$; Reputation: $\chi^2 = 22.01$, n.s.
Figure 11 presents the proportion of respondents reporting that ‘Special Program or Focus of the School’ was an important reason they selected their first choice school, by region of the city. Parents of students residing in the Far Northeast were least likely to respond that a special program or focus was an important reason for requesting their top choice school. Only a fifth of these parents indicated that this was an important reason. In contrast, nearly a third of parents in the Near Northeast, Northwest and Southeast indicated that a special program or focus was an important reason for requesting their top school.

![Figure 11: Proportion of Respondents Reporting that the School’s Special Program or Focus was an Important Reason for Requesting their First Choice School, by Region of the City](image)

Figure 12 presents the proportion of respondents reporting that ‘Location close to home, work, or family’ was an important reason they selected their first choice school, by region of the city. Location was cited most often as an important factor by parents of students residing in the Far Northeast and Southwest regions of the city. Nearly two-thirds of parents of students residing in the Far Northeast indicated that this was an important reason for selecting their top choice school. Over half of parents of students residing in the Southwest region of the city reported that location was an important reason. In contrast, only 41-45% of parents of students residing in other areas of the city reported that location was important reason for selecting their top choice.
Free/Reduced Lunch Status

There were significant associations between free or reduced lunch status and three of the responses to Question 1: SPF, Special Program or Focus, and Location.  
Figure 13 presents the proportion of respondents reporting that ‘School Rating on the School Performance Framework’ was an important reason they selected their first choice school, by free/reduced lunch status. Parents of students who qualified for free or reduced lunch were twice as likely to indicate that the SPF was an important reason that they selected their first choice school; nearly a third of these parents indicated this was an important reason.

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8 SPF: χ² = 227.26, p < .0001; Special Program: χ² = 128.90, p < .0001; Location: χ² = 254.13, p < .0001; Reputation: χ² = 10.02, n.s.
Figure 14 presents the proportion of respondents reporting that ‘Special Program or Focus of the School’ was an important reason they selected their first choice school, by free/reduced lunch status. Parents of students who did not qualify for free or reduced lunch were about 1.5 times more likely than parents of students who did qualify for free or reduced lunch to indicate that a special program or focus of the school was an important reason for selecting their top choice school. About two-fifths of parents whose students did not qualify cited this as an important reason for requesting their top choice school.

![Figure 14: Proportion of Respondents Reporting that the School’s Special Program or Focus was an Important Reason for Requesting their First Choice School, by Free and Reduced Lunch Status](image)

Figure 15 presents the proportion of respondents reporting that ‘Location close to home, work, or family’ was an important reason they selected their first choice school, by free/reduced lunch status. Parents of students who qualified for free or reduced lunch were over 1.5 times more likely than parents of students who did not qualify to report that location was an important reason for selecting their top choice school. Over half of parents whose students qualified for free or reduced lunch indicated that location was an important reason.

![Figure 15: Proportion of Respondents Reporting that the School’s Location was an Important Reason for Requesting their First Choice School, by Free/Reduced Lunch Status](image)
School Performance Rating of Current School

There were significant associations between free or reduced lunch status and three of the responses to Question 1: SPF, Special Program or Focus, and Location.⁹

Figure 16 presents the proportion of respondents reporting that ‘School Rating on the School Performance Framework’ was an important reason they selected their first choice school, by the school performance rating of the student’s current school. In general, parents of students who were currently enrolled in the lowest performing schools tended to cite the SPF as an important reason for selecting their first choice more often than other parents. Over a third of parents with students enrolled in schools that were On Probation indicated that the SPF was an important reason for selecting their first choice school. In contrast, parents whose students were not currently enrolled in a DPS school and those whose students were enrolled in a school that was not rated were less likely to report that the SPF was an important reason for requesting their first choice school. Only about a fifth of these parents indicated that this was an important reason.

Figure 16: Proportion of Respondents Reporting that the School’s Rating on the SPF was an Important Reason for Requesting their First Choice School, by the School Performance Rating of the Student’s Current School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Proportion (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Distinguished</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meets Expectations</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Watch</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Priority Watch</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Probation</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Rated</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Currently Enrolled in a DPS School</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 17 presents the proportion of respondents reporting that a ‘Special Program or Focus of the School’ was an important reason they selected their first choice school, by the SPF Rating of the student’s current school. Parents of students in higher-rated schools tended to report that this was an important reason more often than parents of students enrolled in lower

⁹ SPF: $\chi^2=72.93$, $p<.0001$; Special Program: $\chi^2=116.40$, $p<.0001$; Location: $\chi^2=146.11$, $p<.0001$; Reputation: $\chi^2=9.15$, n.s.
rated schools. Over a third of parents whose students were enrolled in schools rated as Distinguished or Meets Expectations indicated that this was an important reason. In contrast, only about a quarter of parents whose students were enrolled in schools rated as On Watch, On Priority Watch, or On Probation indicated that this was a reason.

Figure 17 presents the proportion of respondents reporting that ‘Location close to home, work, or family’ was an important reason they selected their first choice school, by free/reduced lunch status. Parents of students who were currently enrolled in schools rated as Distinguished were less likely than all other groups to cite location as a reason for requesting their first choice school. Only 29% of parents in this group indicated that location was an important reason compared with 44-55% of parents in the other groups.

Figure 18 presents the proportion of respondents reporting that ‘Location close to home, work, or family’ was an important reason they selected their first choice school, by school performance rating of the student’s current school.
Summary

When parents were asked to indicate which factors were most important in selecting their first choice schools, answers varied according to the subgroups examined.

- The SPF rating of the selected school was most often cited as an important reason by parents of students who:
  - are black,
  - reside in the Southwest region of the city,
  - qualify for free or reduced lunch, and
  - were currently enrolled in a lower performing school.

- A special program or focus of the school was most often cited as an important reason by parents of students who:
  - were entering a middle school grade;
  - were white or identified in the “other” race/ethnicity category;
  - resided in the Near Northeast, Northwest, or Southeast regions of the city;
  - did not qualify for free or reduced lunch; and
  - were currently enrolled in a higher-rated school.

- Location of the school was most often cited as an important reason by parents of students who:
  - were entering ECE or kindergarten,
  - were Hispanic,
  - resided in the Far Northeast or Southwest regions of the city,
  - qualified for free or reduced lunch, and
  - did not attend a Distinguished school.

Did parents’ reports about important factors align with the actual choices made?

This question is addressed by examining two of the response options to Question 1 in association with actual choices made: SPF rating and location. Analyses addressed two specific questions: 1) Do parents who report that SPF was an important reason for selecting their top school select first choice schools with higher SPF ratings? and 2) Do parents who indicate that location was an important reason for selecting their top school choose first choice schools...
within the same region as their homes? The analysis for the second question has some drawbacks. The actual wording of the location item is “location close to home, work, or family” but the data only permit the examination of whether the chosen school is close to home. It is important to keep this drawback in mind when interpreting the results.

**School Performance Rating**

A t-test was conducted to compare the percent of points on the school performance framework earned by first choice schools selected by two groups of families: those who indicated that the SPF was an important reason for selecting a school and those who did not indicate that SPF was important reason. The results of this analysis are presented in Figure 19. The t-test was significant; those parents who indicated that SPF was an important reason for selecting their first choice school did indeed tend to request schools as their first choices that scored significantly higher, on average, on the SPF.  

![Figure 19: Average Percent of Points on the School Performance Framework Earned by First Choice Schools for Parents Who Did and Did Not Indicate that SPF was an Important Reason for Selecting a School](image)

**Location**

Next, an analysis was conducted to compare the proportion of parents who chose a first choice school for their student that was in the same region of the city as the student’s residence for two groups of families: those who indicated that location was an important

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10 $t=17.46$, df=3709, $p<.0001$
reason for selecting their first choice school and those who did not. The analysis was non-
significant, indicating that parents in the two groups chose schools within their home region at
similar rates. In both groups, about 71% of parents chose schools within their home region.\textsuperscript{11}
As mentioned above, this analysis has drawbacks because the survey question mentions
location close to home, work or family and these data only provide information about whether
the school was close to home.

What resources did parents find useful when making their choices?

Parents’ answers to Question 2 on the SchoolChoice form were examined to address
this question. 11,582 forms (50%) included a response to Question 2. Like Question 1,
Question 2 was worded to request a single response (“What resource provided you with the
\textit{most} useful information in making your choice?” emphasis added). However, many
respondents provided more than one answer to this question (see Figure 20). About four-fifths
of respondents provided just one answer, as requested. About one-eighth of respondents
provided two answers and about a tenth provided more than two answers.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Figure20}
\caption{Number of Responses Provided to Question 2}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{11} \chi^2ices=0.21, n.s.
Figure 21 summarizes the responses to Question 2. As with Question 1, the percentages do not sum to 100% because many parents selected more than one response. Three sources of information stood out as the most useful: teachers or administrators at the school (33%), information from other parents (30%) and the SchoolChoice Enrollment Guide (28%). Other sources of information were much less frequently cited as the most useful.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information Resource</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SchoolChoice Enrollment Guide</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers or Administrators at the School</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Marketing Materials</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information from Other Parents</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Websites</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Fairs or Events</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Did This Differ By Subgroup?

Grade

There were significant associations between grade and three of the responses to Question 2: Teachers or Administrators at the School, School Marketing Materials, and School Fairs or Events. Figure 22 presents the proportion of parents indicating that teachers or administrators at the school were a resource that provided the most useful information to inform their choices, by grade. Parents of students entering kindergarten and grades 1-5 most often reported that teachers or administrators at the school provided the most useful

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12 SchoolChoice Enrollment Guide: $\chi^2 = 26.81$, n.s.; Teachers or Administrators at the School: $\chi^2 = 38.02$, $p < 0.0001$; School Marketing Materials: $\chi^2 = 51.78$, $p < 0.0001$; Information from Other Parents: $\chi^2 = 13.81$, n.s.; Parent Websites: $\chi^2 = 16.33$, n.s.; School Fairs or Events: $\chi^2 = 135.39$, $p < 0.0001$
information; about one-third of them indicated that this was the most useful resource. Parents of students in grades 7-8 were least likely to report that this resource provided the most useful information; less than a quarter of parents in this group indicated that this was the most useful resource.

Figure 22 presents the proportion of respondents reporting that teachers or administrators at the school provided the most useful information, by student grade. This response was not endorsed by a large proportion of parents overall (see Figure 21), but it was most often endorsed by parents of students entering middle or high school grades. The group most likely to indicate that this was the most useful resource was parents of students entering sixth grade; nearly a tenth of parents in this group reported that this was the most useful resource.

Figure 23 presents the proportion of parents reporting that school marketing materials provided the most useful information by grade. This response was not endorsed by a large proportion of parents overall (see Figure 21), but it was most often endorsed by parents of students entering middle or high school grades. The group most likely to indicate that this was the most useful resource was parents of students entering sixth grade; nearly a tenth of parents in this group reported that this was the most useful resource.
Figure 24 presents the proportion of parents indicating that school fairs or events were the resource that provided the most useful information, by grade. Parents of students entering sixth and ninth grades were the two groups that were most likely to report that these events provided the most useful information. About one-sixth of parents in these groups selected this response option. This resource was selected less often by parents of students entering the elementary grades and the later high school grades (i.e., grades 10-12). Only about a tenth of parents in these groups indicated that these events provided the most useful information to inform their choices.

![Figure 24: Proportion of Respondents Reporting that School Fairs or Events Provided the Most Useful Information, by Student Grade](image)

Race/Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity was significantly associated with five of the six possible responses to Question 2 on the SchoolChoice form: SchoolChoice Enrollment Guide, School Marketing Materials, Information from Other Parents, Parent Websites, and School Fairs or Events.13

Figure 25 presents the proportion of parents indicating that the SchoolChoice Enrollment Guide provided them with the most useful information, by race/ethnicity. Parents of black and Hispanic students were most likely to report that the SchoolChoice Enrollment Guide provided the most useful information. Over a third of parents in these groups indicated
that this resource provided useful information to inform their choices. In contrast, parents of white students were least likely to indicate that this resource provided the most useful information. About one-seventh of parents in this category indicated that this resource provided the most useful information.

Figure 26 presents the proportion of parents indicating that school marketing materials provided the most useful information, by race/ethnicity. Parents of Hispanic students were the group most likely to indicate that school marketing materials provided the most useful information. They were two times as likely as parents of white students to indicate that this resource provided the most useful information.
The proportion of parents indicating that other parents provided the most useful information, by race/ethnicity, is presented in Figure 27. Parents of white students were most likely to report that this was the resource providing the most useful information. Over a third of parents in this group selected this response option compared with only about a quarter of parents of students in the other racial/ethnic groups.

![Figure 27: Proportion of Respondents Reporting that Other Parents Provided the Most Useful Information, by Race/Ethnicity](image)

The likelihood of selecting “parent websites” as the resource providing the most useful information also differed by race/ethnicity (see Figure 28). Parents of black students were most likely to indicate that this was the resource with the most useful information. About a tenth of parents in this group indicated that parent websites provided the most useful information compared with 6-8% of parents in other racial/ethnic groups.

![Figure 28: Proportion of Respondents Reporting that Parent Websites Provided the Most Useful Information, by Race/Ethnicity](image)
Figure 29 presents the proportion of parents reporting that school fairs or events provided the most useful information to inform their choices, by race/ethnicity. Parents of students identified as white or from the “other race/ethnicity” categories were most likely to report that these events provided the most useful information. About 1 in 7 of these parents reported that this resource provided the most useful information compared with about 1 in 10 parents of black or Hispanic students.

![Figure 29: Proportion of Respondents Reporting that School Fairs or Events Provided the Most Useful Information, by Race/Ethnicity](image)

Region of the City

The likelihood of endorsing three of the six responses to Question 2 on the SchoolChoice form varied across regions of the city: SchoolChoice Enrollment Guide, school marketing materials, and school fairs or events. The proportion of parents indicating that the SchoolChoice Enrollment Guide provided the most useful information, by region of the city, is presented in Figure 30. Parents in the Far Northeast and Southwest were the most likely to report that the SchoolChoice Enrollment Guide provided the most useful information to inform their choices. Well over a third of parents in each of these groups indicated that this resource provided the most useful information. Parents in the Near Northeast and Southeast regions of the city were much less likely to indicate that the SchoolChoice Enrollment Guide provided the

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14 SchoolChoice Enrollment Guide: $\chi^2 = 292.61$, $p < .0001$; Teachers or Administrators at the School: $\chi^2 = 9.53$, n.s.; School Marketing Materials: $\chi^2 = 31.56$, $p < .0001$; Information from Other Parents: $\chi^2 = 20.53$, n.s.; Parent Websites: $\chi^2 = 5.55$, n.s.; School Fairs or Events: $\chi^2 = 72.18$, $p < .0001$
most useful information. Only about a fifth of parents in these areas selected this response option.

Figure 31 presents the proportion of parents reporting that school marketing materials presented the most useful information, by region of the city. Parents in the Southwest region of the city were most likely to indicate that school marketing materials presented the most useful information; about a tenth of parents in this region selected this response option. These parents were about 1.5 times more likely to indicate that this resource provided the most useful information than parents in other regions of the city.
The proportion of parents indicating that school fairs or events provided the most useful information also varied by region of the city (see Figure 32). Parents in the Near Northeast region of the city were most likely to indicate that these events provide the most useful information. About 1 in 7 of these parents selected this response option. Parents in this group were over two and a half times more likely to select this option than parents in the Far Northeast, the group with the lowest proportion of parents indicating that school fairs or events provided the most useful information.

Free/Reduced Lunch Status

Free/reduced lunch status was significantly associated with four of the six response options for Question 2 on the SchoolChoice form: SchoolChoice Enrollment Guide, school marketing materials, information from other parents, and school fairs or events. The proportion of parents indicating that the SchoolChoice Enrollment Guide provided the most useful information, by free/reduced lunch status, is presented in Figure 33. Parents of students who qualified for free or reduced lunch were over two times as likely as parents of students who did not qualify for free or reduced lunch to indicate that the SchoolChoice Enrollment Guide was the most useful source of information.

\[ \chi^2 = 372.59, p < .0001; \text{Teachers or Administrators at the School: } \chi^2 = 0.20, \text{ n.s.}; \text{School Marketing Materials: } \chi^2 = 29.36, p < .0001; \text{Information from Other Parents: } \chi^2 = 39.39, p < .0001; \text{Parent Websites: } \chi^2 = 4.94, \text{ n.s.}; \text{School Fairs or Events: } \chi^2 = 21.83, p < .0001 \]
students who did not qualify to report that the SchoolChoice Enrollment Guide provided the most useful information.

Figure 33 presents the proportion of respondents reporting that the SchoolChoice Enrollment Guide provided the most useful information, by free/reduced lunch status. Parents of students who qualified for free or reduced lunch were nearly two times as likely as parents of students who did not qualify to report that school marketing materials provided the most useful information.

Figure 34 presents the proportion of parents indicating that school marketing materials provided the most useful information, by free/reduced lunch status. Parents of students who qualified for free or reduced lunch were nearly two times as likely as parents of students who did not qualify to report that school marketing materials provided the most useful information.

The proportion of parents reporting that other parents provided the most useful information, by free/reduced lunch status is presented in Figure 35. About a third of parents whose students did not qualify for free or reduced lunch reported that other parents provided
the most useful information compared with just a quarter of parents of students who qualified for free or reduced lunch.

Free/reduced lunch status was also associated with the likelihood of reporting that school fairs or events provided the most useful information (see Figure 36). About 1 in 7 parents of students who did not qualify for free or reduced lunch indicated that this resource was most useful, compared with about 1 in 9 parents of students who qualified.
School Performance Rating of Current School

Three response options for Question 2 on the SchoolChoice form were significantly associated with the SPF rating of the student’s current school: SchoolChoice Enrollment Guide, teachers or administrators at the school, and information from other parents.\(^\text{16}\)

The proportion of parents reporting that the SchoolChoice Enrollment Guide provided the most useful information, by SPF rating of the student’s current school, is presented in Figure 37. Parents of students who were currently enrolled in lower-rated schools tended to report more often that the SchoolChoice Enrollment Guide provided the most useful information. Over a third of parents of students enrolled in schools rated as On Watch, On Priority Watch, or On Probation reported that this resource provided the most useful information. Parents of students currently enrolled in unrated or Distinguished schools and parents of students not currently enrolled in a DPS school were the least likely to report that this resource provided the most useful information. Only about a fifth to a quarter of parents in these groups reported that the SchoolChoice Enrollment Guide provided the most useful information.

Figure 38 presents the proportion of parents reporting that teachers or administrators at the school provided the most useful information, by the SPF rating of the student’s current school.

\(^{16}\) SchoolChoice Enrollment Guide: \(\chi^2=176.23, p<.0001\); Teachers or Administrators at the School: \(\chi^2=70.82, p<.0001\); School Marketing Materials: \(\chi^2=22.34, \text{n.s.}\); Information from Other Parents: \(\chi^2=63.48, p<.0001\); Parent Websites: \(\chi^2=10.47, \text{n.s.}\); School Fairs or Events: \(\chi^2=20.94, \text{n.s.}\).
school. Parents of students currently enrolled in schools rated as Distinguished and On Priority Watch were most likely to indicate that this resource provided the most useful information. About 2 out of 5 of parents in these groups selected this response option. Parents of students currently enrolled in schools rated as On Probation and students not currently enrolled in a DPS school were least likely to select this response option. Slightly over a quarter of parents in these groups indicated that teachers or administrators at the school provided the most useful information.

Figure 38: Proportion of Respondents Reporting that Teachers or Administrators at the School Provided the Most Useful Information, by the School Performance Rating of the Student’s Current School
The proportion of parents indicating that other parents provided the most useful information varied according to the school performance rating of the student’s current school (see Figure 39). Parents of students that were not currently enrolled in a DPS school were the most likely to indicate that other parents provided the most useful information. Over a third of parents in this group selected this option compared with 25%-29% in other groups.

![Figure 39: Proportion of Respondents Reporting that Other Parents Provided the Most Useful Information, by the School Performance Rating of the Student's Current School](image)

**Summary**

When parents were asked to indicate which resources provided the most useful information to inform their choice of schools, answers varied according to the subgroups examined.

- The SchoolChoice Enrollment Guide was most often described as the source of the most useful information by parents of students who:
  - were black or Hispanic,
  - reside in the Far Northeast or Southwest regions of the city,
  - qualify for free or reduced lunch, and
  - were currently enrolled in a lower performing school.
- Teachers or administrators at the school were most often described as the source of the most useful information by parents of students who:
  - were entering kindergarten or grades 1-5, and
  - were currently enrolled in a school rated as Distinguished or On Priority Watch.
• Overall, relatively few parents indicated that school marketing materials provided the most useful information. However, certain groups of parents were more likely to select this response option, specifically parents of students who:
  o were entering middle or high school grades,
  o were Hispanic,
  o resided in the Southwest region of the city, and
  o qualified for free or reduced lunch.
• Other parents were most often described as the source of the most useful information by parents of students who:
  o were white,
  o did not qualify for free or reduced lunch, and
  o were not currently enrolled in a DPS school.
• Overall, relatively few parents indicated that parent websites provided the most useful information. However, one group of parents was more likely to select this response option: parents of black students.
• Overall, relatively few parents indicated that school fairs or events provided the most useful information. However, certain groups of parents were more likely to select this response option, specifically parents of students who:
  o were entering sixth or ninth grades,
  o were white or identified in the “other” race/ethnicity category,
  o resided in the Near Northeast region of the city, and
  o did not qualify for free or reduced lunch.
How can we improve the quality of information we provide to parents and families?

This research question was addressed by examining parent responses to Question 3 on the SchoolChoice form. Question 3 asked parents about information they did not have that would have been helpful to them in making their decisions. 7,982 forms (34%) included a response to this question. Once again, a large proportion of respondents provided more than one answer to this question (see Figure 40). Of those that provided a response, four-fifths provided just one answer, slightly over a tenth provided two answers, and slightly less than a tenth provided more than two answers.

![Figure 40: Number of Responses Provided to Question 3](image-url)
Figure 41 summarizes the responses to Question 3. Nearly a third of respondents reported that they would have found more information about student academic performance or information about the school’s programs or approaches useful in making their decisions. About a quarter indicated that more information about transportation options or school safety would have been useful.

### Did This Differ By Subgroup?

#### Grade

Three of the five responses were significantly associated with grade: measures of school safety, information about the school’s programs or approaches, and information about transportation availability and options. Figure 42 presents the proportion of parents reporting that information about school safety would have been helpful, by grade. Parents of students entering sixth and ninth grade were most likely to select this response option. Over a quarter of parents in these groups indicated that more information about school safety would have been useful.

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17 Student academic performance information: $\chi^2 = 26.71$, n.s.; Measures of School Safety: $\chi^2 = 63.21$, $p < .0001$; Information about the School Culture: $\chi^2 = 4.14$, n.s.; Information about the School’s Programs or Approaches: $\chi^2 = 31.81$, $p < .0001$; Information about Transportation Availability and Options: $\chi^2 = 187.84$, $p < .0001$
have been helpful. In contrast, just 15% of parents of students entering first through fifth grade selected this option.

![Figure 42: Proportion of Respondents Reporting that Information About School Safety Would Have Been Helpful, by Student Grade](image)

The proportion of parents indicating that information about the school’s programs or approaches would have been helpful, by grade, is presented in Figure 43. This response was most common among parents of students entering ECE and 7-8 grade. One third of parents in these groups indicated that they would have found this type of information helpful. This response was selected least often by parents of students entering sixth grade. Only about a quarter of parents in this group indicated that they would have found information about the school’s programs or approaches helpful in making their selection.

![Figure 43: Proportion of Respondents Reporting that Information About the School’s Programs or Approaches Would Have Been Helpful, by Student Grade](image)
The proportion of parents indicating that they would have found information about transportation availability and options also differed by grade (see Figure 44). This response was most common among parents of students entering middle and high school grades. One-third of parents of students entering sixth grade indicated that they would have found this information useful. Parents of students entering ECE were least likely to indicate that they would have found information about transportation useful in making their school choices.

![Figure 44: Proportion of Respondents Reporting that Information About Transportation Availability and Options Would Have Been Helpful, by Student Grade](image)

**Race/Ethnicity**

Responses to four of the five response options to Question 3 on the SchoolChoice form varied significantly by race/ethnicity: student academic performance information, measures of school safety, information about the school culture, and information about transportation availability and options.\(^ {18}\)

Figure 45 presents the proportion of parents indicating that they would have found information about student academic performance useful in making their choices, by race/ethnicity. Parents of Hispanic students were most likely to select this response option. About a third of parents in this group indicated that they would have found information about

\(^ {18}\) Student academic performance information: \(\chi^2 = 88.00\), n.s.; Measures of School Safety: \(\chi^2 = 164.79\), \(p < .0001\); Information about the School Culture: \(\chi^2 = 72.12\), \(p < .0001\); Information about the School’s Programs or Approaches: \(\chi^2 = 8.85\), n.s.; Information about Transportation Availability and Options: \(\chi^2 = 112.29\), \(p < .0001\)
student academic performance useful in making their decision. In contrast, fewer than a quarter of parents of white students selected this response option.

The proportion of parents indicating that they would have found information about school safety helpful, by race/ethnicity, is presented in Figure 46. Parents of Hispanic students selected this response option most often. Over one-quarter of parents in this group indicated that they would have found this information useful. Parents of white students were least likely to select this response option. They did so at about half the rate of parents of Hispanic students.

The proportion of parents indicating that they would have found information about the school culture helpful also varied by race/ethnicity (see Figure 47). Parents of Hispanic
students were least likely to report that they would find this information useful. Parents of students belonging to all other racial/ethnic groups selected this option about 1.5 more often than did parents of Hispanic students.

The proportion of parents indicating that they would have found information about transportation helpful, by race/ethnicity, is presented in Figure 48. This response option was selected less frequently by parents of white students. Parents of students belonging to all other racial and ethnic groups selected this option more than 1.5 times more often than parents of white students.
Region of the City

Region of the city was significantly associated with four of the five response options to Question 3 on the SchoolChoice form: Student Academic Performance Information, Measures of School Safety, Information about the School Culture, and Information about Transportation Availability and Options. 19

Figure 49 presents the proportion of parents indicating that information about student academic performance would have been helpful, by region of the city. Parents of students residing in the Far Northeast and Southwest were most likely to select this response option. Over a third of parents in these two groups indicated that this information source would have been helpful compared with only about one-quarter of parents with students residing in other regions of the city.

The proportion of parents indicating that measures of school safety would have been helpful when making their choices also differed by region of the city (see Figure 50). Parents of students in the Southwest region of the city were most likely to indicate that school safety information would have been helpful. Nearly a third of parents in this group selected this

19 Student academic performance information: $\chi^2=44.71, p<.0001$; Measures of School Safety: $\chi^2=76.72, p<.0001$; Information about the School Culture: $\chi^2=37.43, p<.0001$; Information about the School’s Programs or Approaches: $\chi^2=16.26$, n.s.; Information about Transportation Availability and Options: $\chi^2=34.72, p<.0001$
response option. This response was provided least often by parents of students residing in the Near Northeast and Southeast regions of the city.

![Figure 50: Proportion of Respondents Reporting that School Safety Information Would Have Been Helpful, by Region of the City](image)

Figure 50 presents the proportion of parents reporting that they would have found information about the school culture useful, by region of the city. Parents in the Near Northeast region of the city most often reported that this information would have been useful. Nearly a quarter of parents in this group selected this response. Parents in the Southwest region were least likely to select this response option.

![Figure 51: Proportion of Respondents Reporting that School Culture Information Would Have Been Helpful, by Region of the City](image)

Figure 51 presents the proportion of parents reporting that they would have found information about the school culture useful, by region of the city. Parents in the Near Northeast region of the city most often reported that this information would have been useful. Nearly a quarter of parents in this group selected this response. Parents in the Southwest region were least likely to select this response option.

The proportion of parents indicating that they would have found information about transportation availability and options useful, by region of the city, is presented in Figure 52.
Parents in the Southwest region of the city were most likely to indicate that this type of information would have been useful. Over a quarter of parents in this group selected this response option. Parents in the Far Northeast were least likely to indicate that information about transportation would have been helpful.

![Figure 52: Proportion of Respondents Reporting that Transportation Information Would Have Been Helpful, by Region of the City](image)

Free/Reduced Lunch Status

Free/reduced lunch status was associated with three of the response options for Question 3 on the SchoolChoice form: Student Academic Performance Information, Measures of School Safety, and Information about Transportation Availability and Options.²⁰

²⁰ Student academic performance information: $\chi^2=16.29, p<.0001$; Measures of School Safety: $\chi^2=46.24, p<.0001$; Information about the School Culture: $\chi^2=13.72, \text{n.s.}$; Information about the School’s Programs or Approaches: $\chi^2=1.87, \text{n.s.}$; Information about Transportation Availability and Options: $\chi^2=54.46, p<.0001$
Figure 53 presents the proportion of parents indicating that they would have found information about student academic performance helpful, by free/reduced lunch status. Nearly a third of parents of students who qualified for free or reduced lunch indicated that more information about student academic performance would have been helpful compared with about a quarter of parents of students who did not qualify for free or reduced lunch.

The proportion of parents indicating that they would have found information about school safety useful also varied according to free/reduced lunch status (see Figure 54). About a quarter of parents of students who qualified for free or reduced lunch indicated that this type of information would have been helpful. Parents in this group selected this response option about 1.5 times more often than parents of students who did not qualify for free or reduced lunch.
Figure 55 presents the proportion of parents who reported that information about transportation would have been helpful, by free/reduced lunch status. Nearly a third of parents of students who qualified for free or reduced lunch reported that information about transportation would have been helpful. Parents in this group selected this response option about 1.5 times more often than parents of students who did not qualify for free or reduced lunch.

**School Performance Rating of Current School**

Only one of the five response options to Question 3 on the SchoolChoice form was related to the school performance rating of the current school: Information about Transportation Availability and Options. Figure 56 presents the results for this response option, by the SPF rating of the student’s current school. Parents of students currently enrolled in schools that were On Probation were most likely to select this response option. One-third of parents in this group indicated that they would have found information about transportation helpful. In contrast, parents of students who were not currently enrolled in a DPS school were about half as likely to select this response option.

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21 Student academic performance information: \( \chi^2 = 10.43, \) n.s.; Measures of School Safety: \( \chi^2 = 19.46, \) n.s.; Information about the School Culture: \( \chi^2 = 19.54, \) n.s.; Information about the School’s Programs or Approaches: \( \chi^2 = 17.08, \) n.s.; Information about Transportation Availability and Options: \( \chi^2 = 127.05, \) \( p < .0001 \)
Summary

When parents were asked to indicate which types of information they did not have that would have helped them decide on their school choices, answers varied across the subgroups examined.

- **Student academic performance information** was most often selected by parents of students who:
  - were Hispanic,
  - reside in the Far Northeast or Southwest regions of the city, and
  - qualify for free or reduced lunch.

- **Measures of school safety** was most often selected by parents of students who:
  - were entering sixth or ninth grade,
  - were Hispanic,
  - resided in the Southwest region of the city, and
  - qualify for free or reduced lunch.

- **Information about the school culture** was most often selected by parents of students who:
  - were white, black, or identified in the “other” race/ethnicity category, and
  - resided in the Near Northeast region of the city.

- **Information about the schools’ programs or approaches** was most often selected by parents of students who were entering ECE or 7-8 grades.

![Figure 56: Proportion of Respondents Reporting that Transportation Information Would Have Been Helpful, by the School Performance Rating of the Student’s Current School](image)
• Information about transportation availability and options was most often selected by parents of students who:
  o were entering middle or high school grades,
  o were Hispanic, black, or identified in the “other” race/ethnicity category,
  o resided in the Southwest region of the city, and
  o qualified for free or reduced lunch.

Can parents’ answers to these questions shed light on why there is variability in the demand for high quality schools across various subgroups?

A previous report on the SchoolChoice process found that students in particular subgroups tended to choose lower-rated schools as their first choices, on average. Specifically, students who qualified for free or reduced lunch, Hispanic students, and students who lived in the Northwest or Southwest regions of the city tended to choose lower-rated schools as their first choices. That report suggested that this difference may be due, at least in part, to the fact that Hispanic students and students who qualify for free and reduced lunch tended to live in areas of the city that had fewer available seats in higher rated schools and more seats in lower rated schools. This section provides a closer examination of the results for each of these groups in an effort to shed further light on their choices.

Students who Qualify for Free/Reduced Lunch

As described above, parents of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch were twice as likely as parents of students who did not qualify for free or reduced lunch to report that the SPF was an important reason for choosing their top school (see Figure 13). However, this group was even more likely to report that location was an important reason for choosing their top school (see Figure 15). Over half of parents of students who qualified for free or reduced lunch reported that location was the most important factor compared with about a third of parents who reported that SPF was the most important reason. As mentioned above, a

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previous SchoolChoice report found that students who qualify for free or reduced lunch tend to live in regions of the city where there are fewer available seats in higher-rated schools. This pattern of findings suggests that for this group of families living with fewer financial resources, the tendency to choose lower-rated schools may not be due to a lack of importance placed on the SPF as a measure of school quality. Instead, it seems that this group tends to choose lower-rated schools because of a lack of nearby higher-quality schools. Given this finding, it is noteworthy that parents of students who qualified for free or reduced lunch mentioned that they would have found information about transportation availability and options useful when making their school choices. Perhaps if parents in this group had more information about how they could transport their students to higher-quality schools outside of their region of the city, they would have made different choices.

Parents of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch were over twice as likely as other parents to report that the SchoolChoice Enrollment Guide was most useful in informing their choice of schools (see Figure 33). The SchoolChoice Enrollment Guide provided a variety of information about school, including each school’s SPF rating and special programs offered by the school. Considering that 40% of parents of students who qualified for free or reduced lunch reported finding the SchoolChoice Enrollment Guide useful, it was somewhat surprising that 30% of parents in this group reported that they would have found more information about student academic performance helpful. As can be seen in Figure 57, over a third of parents who found the SchoolChoice Enrollment Guide useful also reported it would have been useful to have more information about student academic performance. This suggests that it might be useful to try to add more detailed information about student academic performance or the interpretation of the SPF to the SchoolChoice Enrollment Guide.
Hispanic Students

The pattern of findings for Hispanic students is quite similar to the pattern of findings for students who qualify for free and reduced lunch. This is not surprising; 71% of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch are Hispanic. Parents of Hispanic students reported that the SPF was the most important reason for selecting their top school more often than some other racial and ethnic groups (i.e., white and other, see Figure 7), suggesting that school quality is a driving factor for this group. However, it was over two times more common for parents of Hispanic students to report that location was the most important reason for selecting their top school (59% of parents reported location was the top reason, see Figure 9, vs. 28% who reported that the SPF was the top reason). This group of students is more likely to live in regions of the city with fewer available seats in higher-rated schools. As with students who qualified for free or reduced lunch, a substantial portion of parents of Hispanic students indicated that information about transportation would have been useful for informing their choices (see Figure 48).

Over a third of parents of Hispanic students reported that the SchoolChoice Enrollment Guide provided the most useful information (see Figure 25), yet about a third reported that they did not have all the information that they would have liked about student performance (see Figure 45). Similar to the findings reported above for free/reduced lunch status, among parents of Hispanic students, over a third of those who reported finding the SchoolChoice...
Enrollment Guide useful also reported that they would have found more information about student academic performance useful (see Figure 58).

![Figure 58: Proportion of Parents of Hispanic Students Reporting Student Academic Information Would Have Been Helpful, by Reported Usefulness of the SchoolChoice Enrollment Guide](image)

Southwest Region

The pattern of findings for parents of students residing in the Southwest region is similar to the findings reported above for families of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch and families of Hispanic students. This is not surprising given the fact that 87% of students in the Southwest region qualify for free or reduced lunch and 85% are Hispanic. A large proportion of parents of students in the Southwest region indicate that the SPF rating is important (see Figure 10), but a much larger proportion of these parents indicate that location was their most important reason for selecting their top school (see Figure 12). Only about half of the elementary school seats in the Southwest Region were in schools rated as Meets Expectations. There were no elementary school seats in this region in schools rated as Distinguished. For the middle grades, only about 40% of seats offered were in these higher rated schools. Finally, this region has the lowest percentage of any region in the district of higher quality seats offered for the high school grades. Just 5% of high school seats offered in this region were in schools that were rated as Meets Expectations. The remainder of the high school seats offered were in schools that were On Probation or Not Yet Rated. Because of the low availability of high quality seats, parents in this region may be faced with the difficult choice of choosing between quality and location.
Similar to the results described above for free/reduced lunch status and Hispanic students, a large proportion of parents in the Southwest region reported that the SchoolChoice Enrollment Guide provided the most useful information, yet they also reported that more information on student academic performance, safety and transportation options would have been useful. This suggests that, although the SchoolChoice Enrollment Guide provides useful information, it could be supplemented with more detailed information.

**Northwest Region**

The answers to the parent questions on the SchoolChoice form shed surprisingly little light on why parents of students residing in the Northwest region tended to choose lower-rated schools. For the most part, answers provided for this group were similar to parents from regions of the city where families tended to select higher-rated schools for their first choices (see Figures 10-12, Figures 30-32, and Figures 49-52). Although other regions of the city reported much more often that location was an important reason for selecting a school, it is still true that nearly half of parents of students in Northwest reported that location was important to them (see Figure 12). Only about 50% of elementary seats, fewer than 40% of middle grade seats, and fewer than 20% of high school seats offered in this region were in schools that were rated as Meets Expectations or Distinguished. This may be setting up a situation where families need to make a choice between location and school quality.

**Conclusions**

Slightly more than half of participants in the SchoolChoice enrollment process elected to answer the optional questions on the SchoolChoice form. These respondents indicated that location was an important reason for selecting their top school, highlighting the importance of ensuring that high-quality schools are available throughout the city. Location was particularly important to parents of the youngest students, Hispanic students, and students who qualified for free or reduced lunch. This factor was also cited more often by parents of students residing in the Far Northeast and Southwest regions of the city, which are regions of the city with fewer than half of the available seats in higher-rated schools.
Overall a school’s rating on the SPF was cited as an important reason for selecting the top choice school by only about a quarter of parents. Location, a special program or focus of the school, and reputation were all cited more often as reasons for selecting first choice schools. This factor was cited more often by certain subgroups of parents. Specifically, it was most commonly cited by parents of black students, students residing in the Southwest region of the city, students who qualify for free or reduced lunch, and students who were currently enrolled in lower performing schools.

Three resources were most commonly cited as providing the most useful information to inform choices: teachers or administrators at the school, the SchoolChoice Enrollment Guide, and information from other parents. In spite of finding these resources useful, parents reported on information that they did not have that would have been helpful in making their choices. The most commonly indicated types of information were pertaining to student academic performance, the school’s programs or approaches, transportation availability and options, and school safety. In future years, it may be useful to try to include more information about each of these topics in the SchoolChoice Enrollment Guide or provide support to teachers and administrators to be more effective in conveying these types of information.

This report included a specific analysis of students who were found, in a previous report, to be less likely to select higher-quality schools. Answers to the parent questions provide some insight into for three overlapping subgroups of students: those who live in the Southwest region of the city, are Hispanic, and who qualify for free or reduced lunch. A substantial portion of these parents reported that a school’s SPF rating was an important factor in selecting their top choice school, significantly more than other groups of parents. However, location was cited more often than the SPF by these parents as their reason for choosing their top choice school. This suggests that while SPF is important, location is more important and parents in these groups are more likely to live in areas of the city where there are fewer high quality seats available.

Further, parents in these groups appear to be satisfied consumers of resources that are provided by DPS and individual schools, such as the SchoolChoice Enrollment Guide and school marketing materials. However, these parents were more likely to report than parents in other
groups that they would have found more information about student academic performance, safety and transportation helpful in making their choices. One recommendation is to include more information about these topics in these communication vehicles.

This report has provided valuable insight into parent’s choices. When interpreting the results, one should keep in mind that these results focus on responses from only about half of the SchoolChoice participants. Future research on this topic should utilize research methods that can promote a higher response rate to ensure that the perspectives of all parents are considered.
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