

Understanding School Choice Dynamics in St. Louis

Executive Summary

Background

Families in St. Louis navigate one of the most decentralized school choice landscapes in the United States, with options spanning district schools, charter schools, magnet programs, private and religious schools, and homeschooling. While this diversity of options expands potential opportunities for families, it also requires parents to independently navigate complex application processes, eligibility rules, transportation systems, and information sources across multiple sectors.

This study examines how parents experience school choice in practice — how they access information, what they prioritize, and which barriers shape the options that are realistically available to them.

Study Design

This mixed-methods study draws on multiple sources of data collected at two points in the 2025–26 school enrollment cycle:

- 189 St. Louis area parent survey responses (Spring 2025),
- 690 public poll responses from both St. Louis & Kansas City (Fall 2025),
- 17 in-depth parent interviews, and
- 5 administrator interviews.

The study documents how families access information, what they prioritize in schools, and the barriers they encounter during application and enrollment processes. Together, these data provide insight into both family decision-making and system-level enrollment dynamics.

Key Findings

Parents Define School Quality Broadly

Parents prioritize instructional approaches, belonging, safety, diversity, and social-emotional support over traditional academic metrics.

- 79.9% prioritized curriculum and teaching methods
- 59.2% prioritized student and staff diversity

- 58.0% prioritized safety
- 55.6% prioritized social-emotional supports
- 29.6% prioritized test scores

Parents consistently described quality in relational and experiential terms: whether their child feels safe, known, supported, and challenged.

Transportation is a Primary Structural Constraint

Parents are willing to travel to quality schools. Reliability – not distance – constrains access.

- 68% rely on personal vehicles
- 1 in 4 families report transportation barriers
- More than half are willing to travel 7+ miles

When transportation is unreliable or unavailable, schools become effectively inaccessible regardless of academic fit.

Information is Unevenly Distributed

Parents rely heavily on informal networks to learn about schooling options.

- 60% search school websites
- 59% rely on family and friends
- 43% use navigator websites

Access to accurate and timely information often reflects differences in social capital rather than family engagement.

Application Systems are Fragmented

Families navigate multiple application platforms, timelines, eligibility rules, and enrollment priorities across different schools.

Common sources of confusion include:

- Waitlists and lottery mechanics
- Sibling preference rules
- Transportation availability
- Misaligned deadlines across similar schools

Centralized enrollment improves coordination but does not completely eliminate information overload.

Parents Navigate Choice to Reduce Risk Rather than Optimize Opportunity

Parents framed school choice as protective rather than competitive. Decisions centered on avoiding:

- Unsafe environments
- Unmet special education needs

- Racial isolation
- Unsupportive school climates

The emotional weight of decision-making for parents was seen across interviews.

Trust in *People* Shapes Decisions More Than Trust in Systems

Relationships with teachers and principals impacted parents' decisions as much as school characteristics. Parents followed trusted leaders across schools and described responsiveness and advocacy as core indicators of quality.

Administrators View Enrollment as Stewardship, Not Competition

Administrators emphasized:

- Stability over growth
- Instructional coherence over expansion
- Capacity constraints in admissions support
- Transportation and calendar limitations

Centralized systems are necessary infrastructure, but more intentionality is needed to ensure equity across systems.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	1
Background.....	1
Study Design.....	1
Key Findings.....	1
Table of Contents.....	4
Introduction.....	6
Purpose of the Study.....	7
Study Design & Timing Context.....	8
The Choice Landscape.....	9
Study Timing.....	10
Spring 2025: Parent Survey.....	10
Fall 2025: Public Poll.....	11
Interview Participants.....	11
Data Collection Methods.....	12
Parent Survey.....	12
Focus Groups.....	12
Interviews.....	13
Study Population.....	13
Ethical Considerations and Data Protection.....	14
Parent Survey Results.....	15
Sample Characteristics.....	15
Geographic Distribution.....	15
Schools Attended.....	16
Transportation and Distance.....	17
What Parents Value When Choosing Schools.....	17
How Parents Seek Information.....	18
Knowledge of School Options.....	19
Applications to Other Schools.....	20
Open-Ended Survey Responses.....	20
Overall Implications.....	21
Public Poll Results.....	23
Perceptions of Local Public Schools.....	24
Satisfaction with School System Characteristics.....	26
Factors Influencing School Choice.....	28
Public Perceptions Within the Choice Landscape.....	29
Parent Experiences and Perspectives.....	30



How Parents Learn About School Options.....	30
What Parents Look for in Schools.....	31
Barriers to Navigating School Choice.....	33
Summary of Findings.....	34
School and System Perspectives.....	35
Key Findings.....	35
Summary.....	39
Cross-Cutting Themes.....	41
Families Define School Quality Holistically.....	41
Information Networks Play a Central Role in School Choice.....	41
Structural Constraints Shape Which Schools Are Accessible.....	42
School Choice Systems Function as Complex Ecosystems.....	42
School Choice Is Often Experienced as Risk Management.....	42
Implications and Opportunities.....	44
Improve Early and Transparent Information Access.....	44
Align Enrollment Processes Across Schools.....	44
Increase Transportation Clarity and Reliability.....	44
Strengthen Navigation Supports for Families.....	44
Invest in Data and Analytic Capacity.....	45
About the PRiME Center and Research Team.....	46
APPENDIX A.....	47
Full Survey Results.....	47
APPENDIX B.....	64
Full Poll Results.....	64

Introduction

Families in St. Louis navigate one of the most complex school choice environments in the United States. The region offers a wide range of schooling options, including traditional public schools, magnet programs, charter schools, private and religious schools, and homeschooling.

While this diversity expands educational opportunities, it also creates a decentralized system in which families must interpret multiple application processes, eligibility rules, transportation systems, and indicators of school quality.

Unlike systems with centralized school assignment processes, families in St. Louis frequently navigate multiple enrollment platforms and timelines simultaneously. As a result, access to information—and the ability to interpret that information—can significantly shape which schools families are realistically able to consider.

At the same time, school leaders must balance enrollment demand with instructional capacity, staffing constraints, and transportation logistics. These dynamics produce a school choice landscape that is both expansive and fragmented.

Understanding how families experience this landscape—and how schools manage enrollment within it—is essential for improving the accessibility and effectiveness of school choice systems. This report presents findings from a mixed-methods study examining how families and school leaders experience school choice in practice.

Purpose of the Study

Although school choice has been widely studied in education policy research, much of the existing literature focuses on system-level outcomes such as academic achievement, segregation patterns, and school competition. Less attention has been given to how families navigate school choice systems in practice.

This study was designed to address that gap by examining how families in St. Louis search for schools, evaluate options, and navigate enrollment processes.

Specifically, the study investigates three core questions:

1. **How do parents access information about school options?**
2. **What characteristics of schools do families prioritize when making enrollment decisions?**
3. **What barriers shape the options that are realistically available to families during the school search and application process?**

Understanding these dynamics is particularly important in St. Louis, where school choice has been a defining feature of the education landscape for decades. The city includes a large number of district schools, charter schools, and magnet programs, as well as private and religious schools. Many families interact with multiple sectors of this system during their children's educational journeys.

By examining both family experiences and school-level perspectives, this study aims to provide insight into how the school choice system functions in practice and where improvements may be possible.

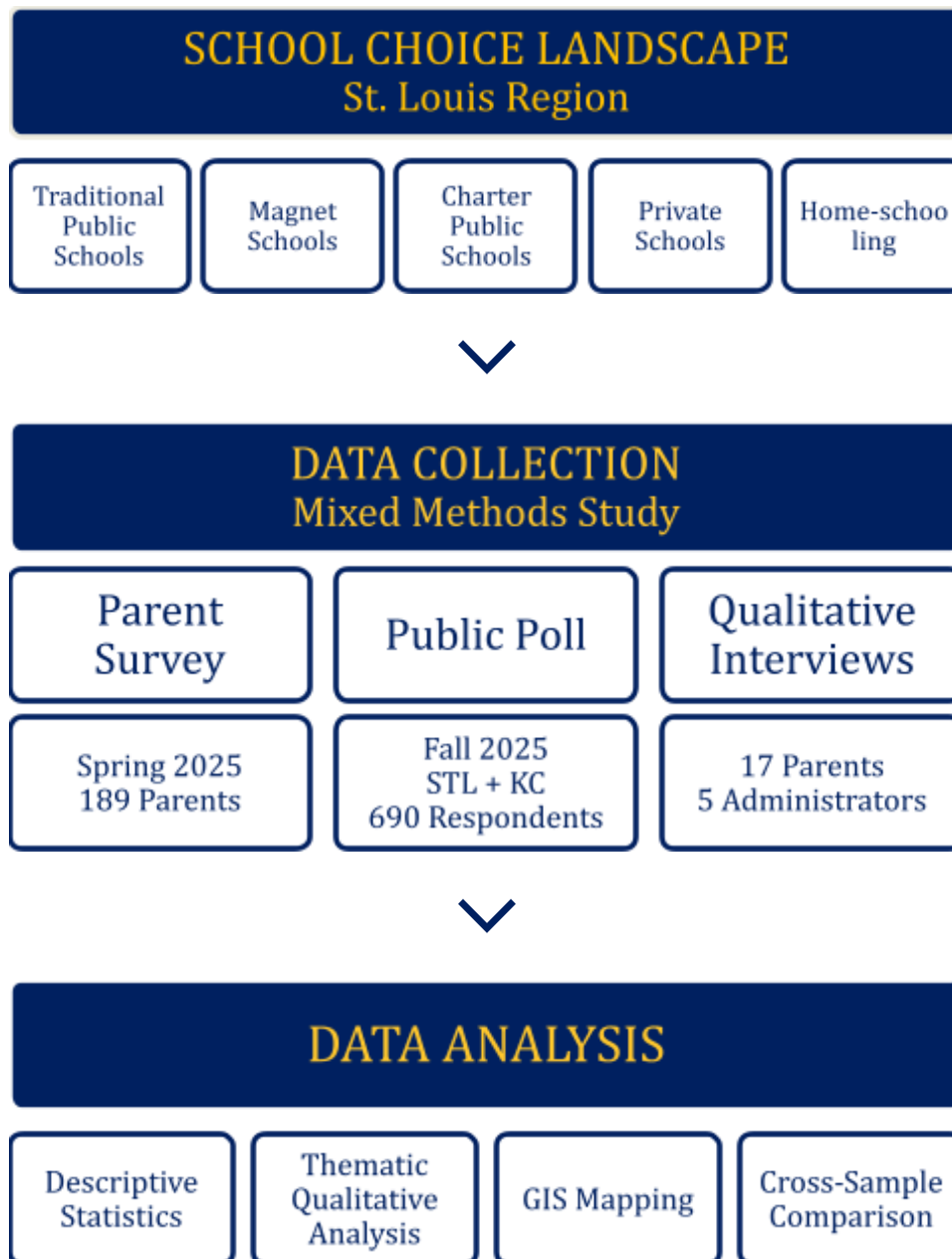
Study Design & Timing Context

To examine how families experience school choice in St. Louis, this study employed a **mixed-methods research design** combining survey data, public opinion polling, and qualitative interviews. Figure 1 illustrates the overall study design and relationship among data sources.

FIGURE 1

Study Overview

Understanding School Choice Dynamics in St. Louis



Mixed-methods research allows detailed analysis of complex systems from multiple perspectives. Quantitative data help identify broad patterns in family experiences, while qualitative data provide deeper insight into how families and school leaders interpret and navigate those experiences.

This study integrates three complementary sources of data:

- a parent survey of St. Louis families
- a public opinion poll conducted in both St. Louis and Kansas City
- in-depth interviews with parents and school administrators.

Together, these data provide insight into both **family decision-making processes and system-level enrollment dynamics**. Figure 1 illustrates the overall design of the study and the relationship between the different data sources.

The Choice Landscape

The school choice system in St. Louis is highly decentralized. Families choose among multiple schooling sectors, including:

- SLPS traditional neighborhood schools
- SLPS magnet schools
- Charter public schools
- Private and religious schools
- Homeschooling

No single school or sector dominates enrollment. Instead, the landscape is diverse but fragmented, requiring families to navigate multiple systems, application processes, and information sources when making schooling decisions.

In recent years, several cities have implemented centralized school application systems designed to simplify enrollment processes for families. These systems allow families to submit a single application to multiple participating schools while aligning timelines, lotteries, and enrollment processes across sectors.

Kansas City implemented such a system—SchoolAppKC—during the 2018–2019 school year. In St. Louis, a similar single application platform, SchoolAppSTL, was introduced during the 2024–2025 enrollment cycle through participation from 11 charter LEAs and partner schools.

The timing of this study coincides with the early implementation of the St. Louis single application system. As a result, the research provides insight into how families and schools

experience school choice during a period of transition toward greater coordination across enrollment systems.

Study Timing

Collecting data at different points in the enrollment cycle allows for a broader understanding of how families navigate the school choice landscape over time. The Spring and Fall data represent two distinct moments in the enrollment process:

- Fall—Anticipation, exploration, and public sentiment
- Spring—Decision-making under constraints and deadlines

This study draws on complementary data collections conducted as distinct points in the **2025-2026 school enrollment cycle**. Together, these time points capture both broader system perceptions and families' lived experiences navigating school choice decisions.

Spring 2025: Parent Survey

The parent survey was administered in Spring 2025, during the period when application deadlines were approaching or closing for most choice schools. This timing captured families actively navigating enrollment decisions under deadline pressure.

This dataset reflects the perspectives of parents who were:

- Currently enrolled in schools of choice, or
- Actively applying for the 2025-26 school year.

As a result, responses reflect lived, immediate decision-making experiences.

Survey respondents reflected families with children enrolled across **SLPS neighborhood schools, magnet schools, charter schools, private schools, and homeschooling**. Respondents represented a range of neighborhoods, grade levels, and prior schooling experiences.

The Spring 2025 parent survey yielded **189 completed responses**¹ from parents or guardians with children enrolled in schools across the St. Louis region. Because respondents were able to skip individual items and some questions allowed multiple responses, the number of responses reported in individual tables (Appendix A) may vary slightly across survey items.

¹ A total of 248 surveys were started, but 189 reflects the total that fit the criteria and opted in with usable responses.

In addition, several questions asked parents to provide information about multiple children within their household. As a result, child-level analyses reflect a larger number of observations than the number of parent respondents.

Fall 2025: Public Poll

The public opinion poll, fielded Fall of 2025, yielded 690 responses, 330 from St. Louis and 360 from Kansas City. The poll was administered when many school choice application windows were first opening for the **2026–2027 school year**, following families' first year navigating the St. Louis centralized application system (SchoolAppSTL).

This timing captured:

- early-stage exploration of school options
- community-level perceptions of local public schools
- broader public attitudes toward school choice systems

The poll included parents, caregivers, and community members and was adapted from the Spring survey to allow partial comparison across datasets.

The instrument was also expanded to include Kansas City in the sampling for comparability, as it represents the only other metropolitan area in Missouri operating a centralized school application system. Kansas City's SchoolAppKC system has been in operation since the **2018–2019 school year**, providing a useful point of comparison for understanding how centralized enrollment systems evolve over time.

Interview Participants

Parent interviews were conducted during Spring and Summer 2025, immediately following administration of the parent survey, to deepen understanding of patterns observed in the survey findings.

Participants were selected to provide insight into a range of school choice experiences, including:

- First-time school choice experiences
- Transitions between school sectors
- Use (or non-use) of support organizations
- Experiences with application timelines and transportation

Administrator interviews included staff with direct responsibility for enrollment, admissions, or family outreach. These interviews provide additional context for understanding how families interpret enrollment systems and how schools manage admissions processes within a decentralized school choice landscape.

Data Collection Methods

Data for this study were collected through a combination of surveys, public opinion polling, interviews, and focus groups. These complementary methods allow the study to capture both broad patterns in family experiences and deeper insights into how parents and school leaders interpret and navigate school choice systems.

These methods also allow the study to examine how families experience the early implementation of the St. Louis centralized application system (SchoolAppSTL) within the broader school choice landscape.

Parent Survey

A comprehensive survey instrument was developed by the PRiME research team in collaboration with Show Me MO Schools.

The survey asked parents about:

- How they obtain information about schools
- The characteristics they prioritize when choosing schools
- Barriers encountered during the search and application process
- Transportation access and travel patterns
- Satisfaction with available schooling options

Survey responses were collected through multiple recruitment channels to reach a broad range of families across the St. Louis region.

These channels included:

- Emailing school leaders or recruitment staff across all public magnet and charter schools in St. Louis City
- Distribution through school and community partner networks
- Outreach through education organizations serving families navigating school choice

This multi-channel recruitment strategy was designed to capture perspectives from families across **diverse socioeconomic, racial, and geographic backgrounds** within the St. Louis region.

Focus Groups

Focus groups were conducted to provide deeper insight into how parents navigate the school choice landscape. Focus groups allow participants to discuss shared experiences and generate insights that may not emerge through surveys alone.

Groups were intentionally structured around participants with similar relationships to the school system—for example:

- parents with children enrolled at the same school
- school administrators working within enrollment systems

This approach encourages open dialogue among participants with shared experiences.

Each focus group included approximately three to five participants and was designed to last 45 to 90 minutes. Sessions were audio recorded with participants' consent to support accurate transcription and analysis.

Interviews

Individual interviews were conducted with both parents and school administrators to provide deeper qualitative insight into how school choice systems function in practice.

Parent interviews explored:

- personal experiences navigating school choice
- perceptions of school quality
- challenges encountered during application processes
- decision-making factors influencing school selection

Administrator interviews focused on:

- enrollment and admissions processes
- experiences with centralized enrollment systems
- barriers faced by families
- operational constraints shaping school recruitment and capacity.

These interviews provided additional context for interpreting patterns observed in the survey and poll data.

Study Population

Participants in the study were adults aged 18 or older.

The primary participant population consisted of:

- Parents and caregivers of students attending schools in the St. Louis region
- School administrators and leaders involved in admissions and enrollment processes

Researchers sought to recruit participants representing a wide range of demographic backgrounds, including variation in race, income, and geographic location across the St. Louis metropolitan area.

The study used a combination of strategic and convenience sampling to recruit participants from families across different schooling sectors and communities. Additional participants were recruited through **snowball sampling**, in which survey respondents shared the survey with friends and other families in their networks.

Ethical Considerations and Data Protection

This research protocol was approved by the Saint Louis University Institutional Review Board (IRB).

All participation in the study was voluntary. Informed consent was obtained prior to participation in surveys, interviews, or focus groups. Parents were compensated with a gift card for participating in interviews.

Several measures were implemented to protect participant privacy:

- No personally identifiable information was collected or stored as part of the research dataset.
- Survey responses were collected anonymously.
- Interview and focus group recordings were stored on secure, university-managed devices and deleted after transcription.
- Findings are reported in aggregate form to prevent identification of individual participants.

These procedures were designed to ensure that participation in the study would not influence participants' relationships with schools or enrollment decisions for their children.

Parent Survey Results

The Spring 2025 parent survey captures the perspectives of families actively navigating school choice in the St. Louis region. The findings reflect a parent population that is highly engaged in evaluating schooling options, willing to travel to access schools they perceive as high quality but often constrained by transportation reliability and uneven access to information.

This section summarizes key patterns from the survey. Detailed tables and complete survey results are available in **Appendix A**.

Sample Characteristics

A total of **189 parents** completed the survey and provided usable information about their children's schooling experiences. Collectively, respondents represented **313 enrolled students** across grade levels, with the largest concentration in Pre-K through elementary grades—reflecting the stage at which many families actively make school choice decisions. Table

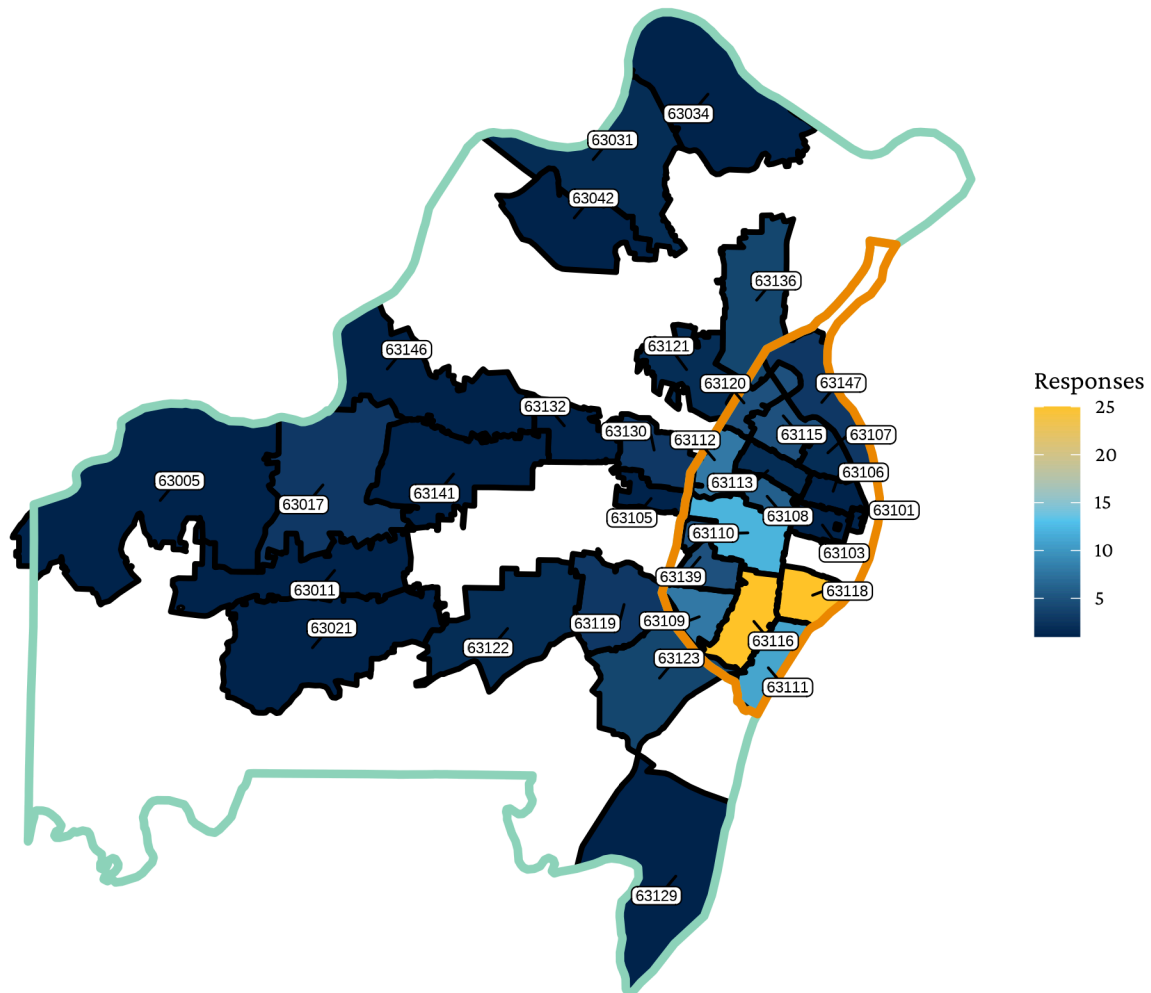
Parents reported **339 children across their households overall**, indicating that some households included younger children not yet enrolled in school. This reflects that many families in the sample were navigating schooling decisions for multiple children simultaneously, sometimes across different schools within the same household. Among children in households with at least one student: 53.7% were reported as male; 42.5% as female; and 3.9% identified as non-binary or were not reported.

Geographic Distribution

Survey respondents were primarily concentrated in the **City of St. Louis**, with the strongest representation from **South St. Louis City**, followed by **Mid/Central** and **North St. Louis City** neighborhoods. A smaller share of respondents resided in **St. Louis County** and **St. Charles County**, reflecting the broader regional dynamics that shape school choice decisions.

Although recruitment focused primarily on families within the St. Louis City schooling boundaries, snowball sampling resulted in participation from parents across the wider metropolitan region. This geographic distribution highlights that school choice decisions frequently extend beyond neighborhood or municipal boundaries.

Figure 2 maps the residential ZIP codes of survey respondents. Detailed ZIP code data for survey respondents are reported in **Appendix A (Tables 4—5)**.

FIGURE 2
Survey Responses Cluster in South STL City but Surpass City Limits
Survey Responses by ZIP Code – St. Louis City and County


Note: Orange outline = St. Louis City, Green outline = St. Louis County.

Schools Attended

Parents reported children attending a wide range of schools across St. Louis, including district, charter, private, and homeschool settings. When both structured school responses and “other” responses were combined:

- **292 children** had a clearly identified current school or schooling option.
- **Homeschooling** emerged as a meaningful and analytically important schooling choice and was included as a distinct category.

No single school dominated enrollment, though several charter and district schools appeared repeatedly, reflecting a diverse and fragmented school landscape rather than a single preferred pathway. The full distribution of reported schools is presented in **Appendix A (Table 10)**.

Transportation and Distance

Primary Method of Transportation

Transportation plays a central role in families' ability to access schooling options. Most parents relied on **personal vehicles (67.9%)** to get their children to school. However, a meaningful share depended on **school-provided transportation (15.5%)**, with smaller percentages walking, carpooling, or using public transit.

Transportation Challenges

While **75% of parents reported no transportation challenges**, approximately **one in four parents** experienced some form of barrier, most commonly:

- Unreliable school-provided transportation
- Other logistical challenges
- Unreliable public transportation

Willingness to Travel

Parents demonstrated a **high willingness to travel** for quality schools:

- Over **55%** were willing to travel **7 miles or more**
- Fewer than **5%** preferred a walkable school

Taken together, these findings suggest that **parent willingness is not the limiting factor** in school choice. Instead, **transportation reliability**—particularly for families without consistent personal vehicle access—acts as a key constraint.

Detailed transportation data are reported in **Appendix A (Tables 13–15)**.

What Parents Value When Choosing Schools

Parents prioritized **instructional quality and school climate** over traditional performance metrics. By contrast, **test scores (29.6%)** ranked lower than measures related to climate, inclusion, and student experience, underscoring that parents define “quality” broadly rather than narrowly through academic metrics alone.

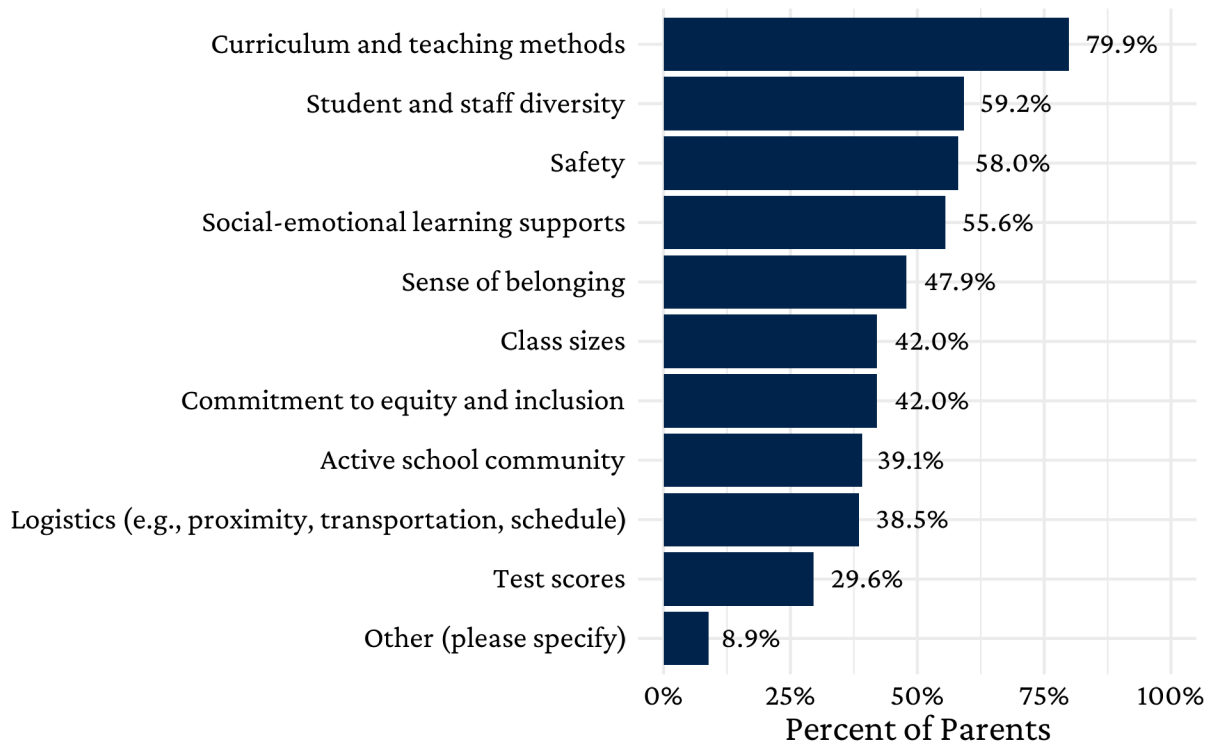
“Other” responses (6.6%) largely emphasized **specialized learning needs and program fit**, including special education quality, gifted programming, learning supports, and keeping siblings together. A few respondents also highlighted **school size, cost considerations**, or noted that priorities may **vary depending on the child**.

Figure 3 illustrates the ranking of factors parents reported as most important when selecting schools, while the full distribution of responses is available in **Appendix A (Table 16)**.

FIGURE 3

Curriculum & Teaching Prioritized Over Test Scores

Most important factors selected by parents when choosing a school.



How Parents Seek Information

Parents relied heavily on direct and informal information sources, including:

- School websites (60.1%)
- Family and friends (58.9%)
- School-choice navigator websites (43.5%)
- Search engines (40.5%)

Traditional channels such as printed materials and libraries played a limited role. These patterns suggest that **accurate, accessible online information** and **trusted personal networks** are critical for equitable school choice navigation.

Among respondents who selected “Other” (n=20), the most common additional source of advice was online research or internet-based resources (n=8), including Google searches, websites, Facebook groups, and neighborhood forums. A smaller number referenced community-based

sources (n=3) such as church, community leaders, or people in the community. A few respondents mentioned individual sources, including a counselor, peer-reviewed publications, school zoning maps, or relying on their own judgment.

Detailed response frequencies for all information sources are presented in **Appendix A (Table 17)**.

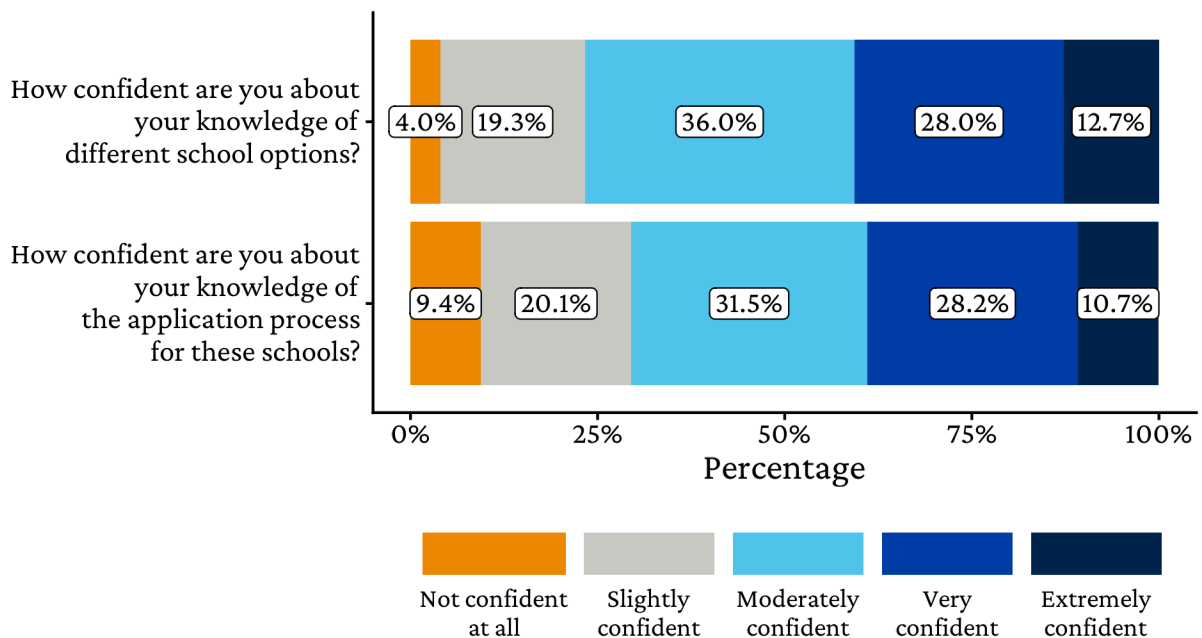
Knowledge of School Options

Parents were asked to assess their confidence in their knowledge of school options and enrollment processes. About 40% of parents responded that they were very or extremely confident both in their knowledge of different school options as well as their knowledge of the application processes at these schools. While only 4% of parents noted not being confident at all about their school options, around 9% were not confident in their knowledge of application processes for different school options.

Figure 4 shows the composition of responses parents selected indicating their level of confidence in their knowledge of schooling options and the application process. Complete response distributions are presented in **Appendix A**.

FIGURE 4

Less Than 50% of Parents Confident in Knowledge about STL Schools
Parents' knowledge of school options and their application processes.



Applications to Other Schools

Among parents applying to schools for the 2025–26 school year, nearly **half (48%) reported applying to magnet schools**, while others explored charter, district, or private options depending on their child’s needs and grade level transitions. Parents commonly applied to **multiple schools simultaneously**. Among the 81 parents who reported submitting applications, a total of **98 applications** were submitted, reflecting a strategy of applying to several schools in order to secure at least one desirable placement.

The most common reasons for applying to other schools included seeking a **higher-performing school**, children **starting school for the first time**, and **grade-level transitions** such as moving to middle or high school. A substantial share of responses also fell into an “other” category that included programmatic interests, academic rigor, specialized learning opportunities, and required reapplication processes. By contrast, fewer parents reported applying primarily because of dissatisfaction with their current school, suggesting that many applications reflect **proactive exploration rather than reactive departure**.

Parents generally reported that the application process itself was **manageable**, with most respondents describing the process as somewhat easy, extremely easy, or neither easy nor difficult. Only a small share reported significant difficulty completing applications.

Overall, parents apply to other schools for a broad set of overlapping reasons that combine proactive choice-seeking (**higher academic performance and program fit**), **natural entry points and grade transitions**, **dissatisfaction with current school experiences**, and family-driven circumstances such as **relocation**. The diversity of responses highlights the wide range of academic, programmatic, and logistical considerations shaping school enrollment decisions.

Complete response distributions for items related to school applications are presented in **Appendix A (Tables 20—26)**.

Open-Ended Survey Responses

In addition to structured survey items, parents were invited to provide open-ended comments about their experiences navigating school choice in the St. Louis region. These responses provide additional context for interpreting the survey findings and reveal several recurring themes related to system complexity, equity, and access. A full thematic summary of these responses is provided in **Appendix A (Additional Survey Comments)**.

The most common theme across comments was **frustration with the complexity of the current school choice system**. Approximately 41% of open-ended responses expressed concern that the system is fragmented, difficult to navigate, and places a substantial burden on families to independently interpret application processes, eligibility rules, and school options. Many

respondents described the system as overwhelming, particularly for families without strong information networks or flexible schedules.

A second recurring theme involved **calls to strengthen traditional neighborhood public schools**, particularly within St. Louis Public Schools (SLPS). Approximately 27% of comments suggested that improving the quality and reliability of neighborhood schools could reduce the need for families to navigate multiple choice systems across sectors.

Several responses also highlighted **equity and access concerns**, including disparities in access to information, transportation, and specialized student supports. Parents noted that families with greater time, resources, or familiarity with the system may be better positioned to navigate school options successfully.

Additional comments emphasized **practical barriers**, including transportation logistics, aftercare availability, and the complexity of application timelines across schools. A smaller number of respondents expressed satisfaction with their current school or support for school choice options.

Taken together, these open-ended responses reinforce patterns observed throughout the survey results. Parents value having access to multiple schooling options, but many experience the broader choice landscape as complex and unevenly navigable. These insights provide additional context for understanding how families interpret and experience school choice systems in practice.

Overall Implications

Taken together, the survey findings provide a consistent picture of how families experience school choice in the St. Louis region.

Parents in the sample are highly engaged in evaluating schooling options and demonstrate a strong willingness to travel to access schools they believe provide a strong academic and social fit for their children. However, transportation reliability—particularly for families without consistent access to personal vehicles—emerges as a key structural constraint that can limit the set of schools families are realistically able to consider.

Parents also define school quality broadly. Instructional approach, school climate, safety, diversity, and social-emotional supports were consistently prioritized above traditional performance indicators such as standardized test scores. Many families also emphasized the importance of programmatic fit, including specialized academic programs, learning supports, and the ability to keep siblings together within the same school community.

The findings further suggest that access to information plays a central role in shaping school choice decisions. Parents rely heavily on school websites, online searches, and informal networks

such as family and friends to learn about schooling options. At the same time, fewer than half of respondents reported strong confidence in their understanding of school options and application processes, indicating that information access and interpretation remain uneven.

Survey results also show that families frequently apply to multiple schools and often do so proactively—seeking better academic fit, preparing for grade-level transitions, or exploring specialized programs rather than leaving schools solely because of dissatisfaction. At the same time, open-ended survey responses highlight that many parents experience the broader school choice landscape as complex and fragmented, requiring significant time and effort to navigate.

Taken together, these findings suggest that families value having multiple schooling options but often experience the system as difficult to interpret and unevenly accessible. Improving transportation reliability, strengthening communication and transparency around school programs and enrollment processes, and expanding navigation supports for families may help reduce barriers and improve how families experience school choice in practice.

Public Poll Results

The Fall 2025 public poll captured broader community perspectives on local public schools and school choice in both the St. Louis and Kansas City metropolitan areas. The poll was administered at the beginning of the 2026–27 school enrollment cycle, when application windows were first opening for many schools. This timing allowed the study to capture early-stage attitudes about school quality, school systems, and school choice before families were actively navigating application deadlines.

This section summarizes key findings from the poll. Complete poll results and detailed tables are available in **Appendix B**.

While the Spring parent survey focused specifically on families currently making enrollment decisions, the Fall poll was open to the public, allowing for the inclusion of parents and community members more broadly. As a result, the poll reflects a wider set of perceptions about public schools and school choice systems across Missouri’s two largest metropolitan regions.

Several questions in the poll were adapted directly from the Spring parent survey, enabling partial comparison of school priorities and information sources across different points in the enrollment cycle. Including Kansas City provides a useful comparison because the region has operated a centralized enrollment system (**SchoolAppKC**) since the 2018–2019 school year.

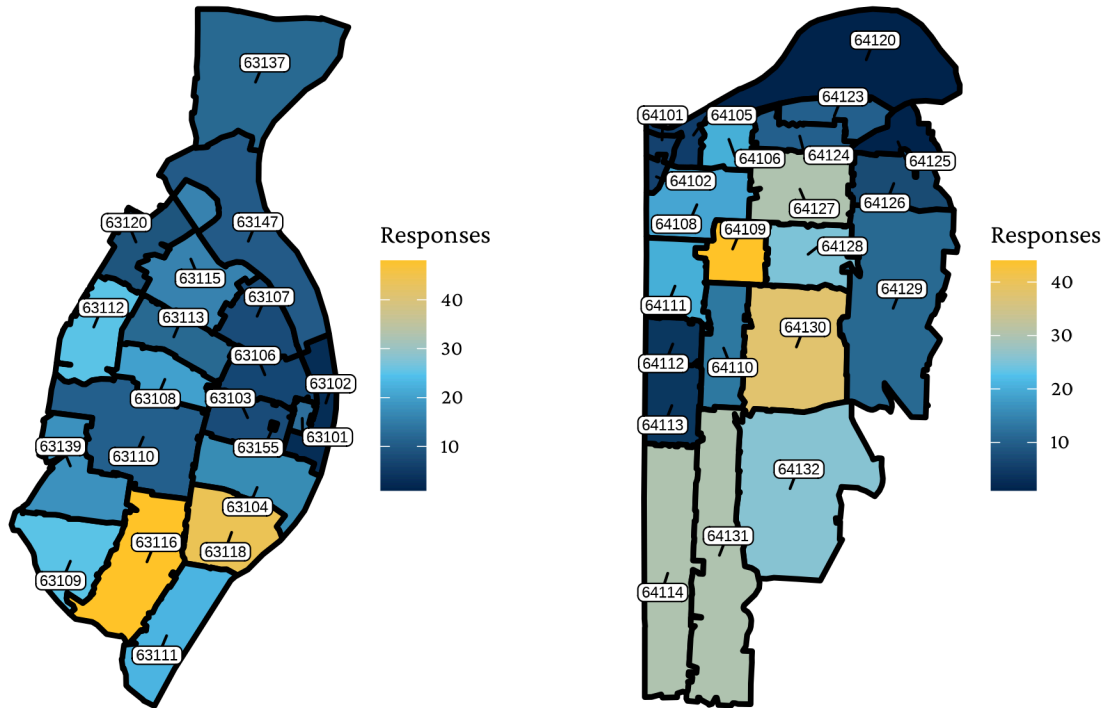
Figure 5 shows the concentration of poll respondents across both St. Louis and Kansas City.

FIGURE 5

Poll Responses Concentrated in South St. Louis and Central Kansas City

Poll Responses by Zip Code - St. Louis

Poll Responses by Zip Code - Kansas City



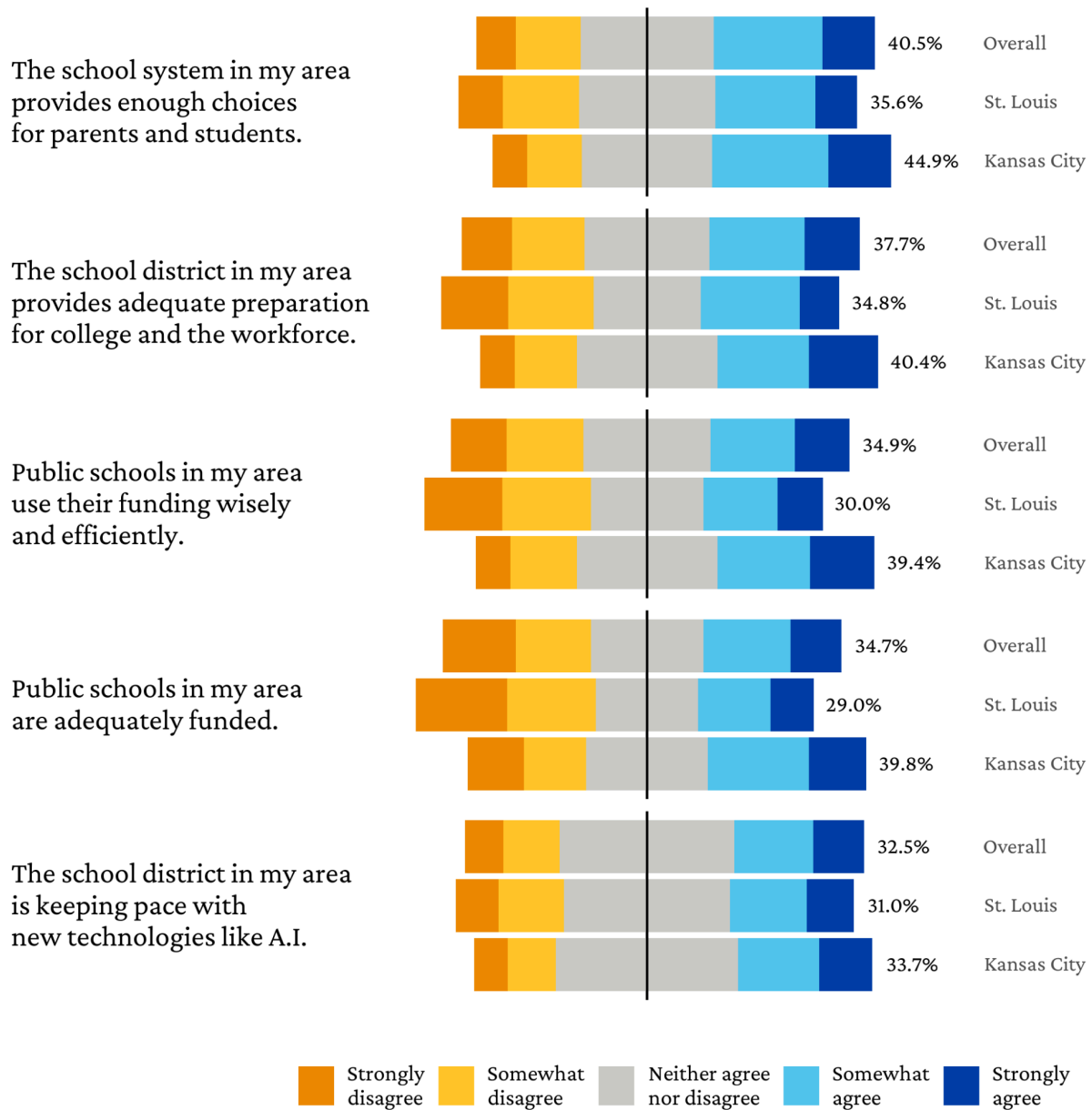
Perceptions of Local Public Schools

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with several statements about local public schools. Across both regions, responses suggest a mixed but generally moderate level of confidence in public schooling systems.

Most respondents expressed agreement with statements indicating that public schools play an important role in their communities and provide valuable opportunities for students. At the same time, responses also reflected ongoing concerns about consistency in school quality, transparency of information, and the complexity of navigating different schooling options.

Figure 6 displays the percentage of respondents who reported somewhat agreeing or strongly agreeing with each opinion statement about their local schools. Detailed response distributions are available in **Appendix B**.

FIGURE 6
STL & KC Respondents Diverge in Schooling Opinions
Agreement with statements about local public schools



Note: Percentage represents somewhat agree + strongly agree.

These findings indicate that while many residents maintain a baseline level of support for public education, perceptions of school quality and system performance vary across respondents. The results also suggest that attitudes toward public schools are shaped by both direct family experience and broader community narratives.

Satisfaction with School System Characteristics

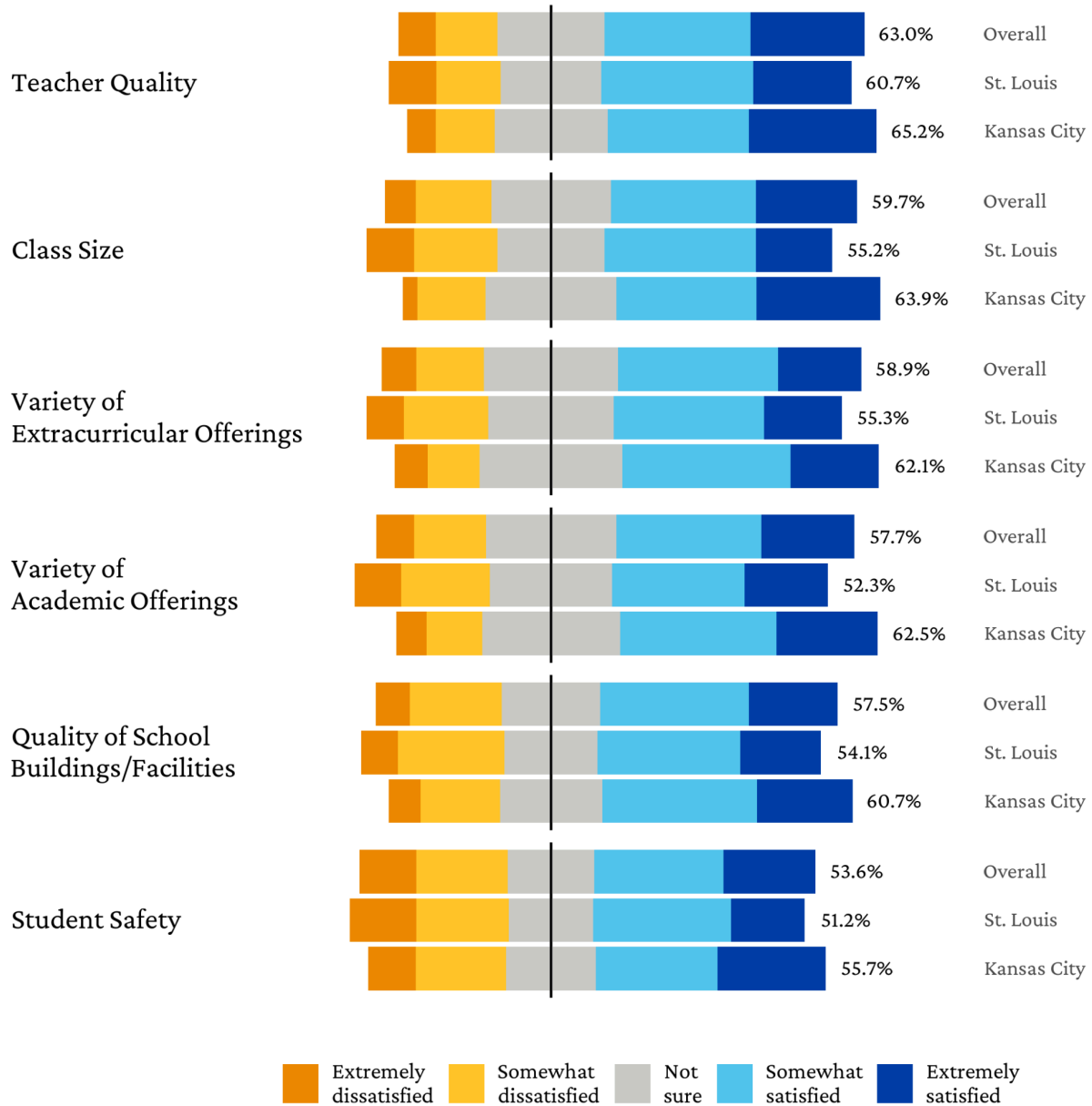
The poll also asked respondents to report their level of satisfaction with various aspects of local public schools. These included areas such as instructional quality, communication with families, school safety, and access to information about school options.

Overall satisfaction levels varied across categories, but several patterns emerged. Respondents tended to report higher satisfaction with aspects of schooling that are visible in day-to-day school experiences, such as teacher engagement and school culture. Lower levels of satisfaction were more often reported for system-level elements, including transparency of enrollment processes and clarity of information about available school options.

Notably, the highest rates of satisfaction for St. Louis and Kansas City parents were for teacher quality. Across both regions, the lowest rates of satisfaction were seen for student safety. Figure 7 summarizes levels of satisfaction across these areas. Detailed response distributions are available in **Appendix B**.

FIGURE 7
STL Respondents Less Satisfied with Local Schooling

Satisfaction with various aspects of local public schools



Note: Percentage represents somewhat satisfied + extremely satisfied.

These results highlight the distinction between perceptions of individual schools and perceptions of broader education systems. While families may feel positively about their own school communities, they may still experience difficulty navigating the larger school choice landscape.

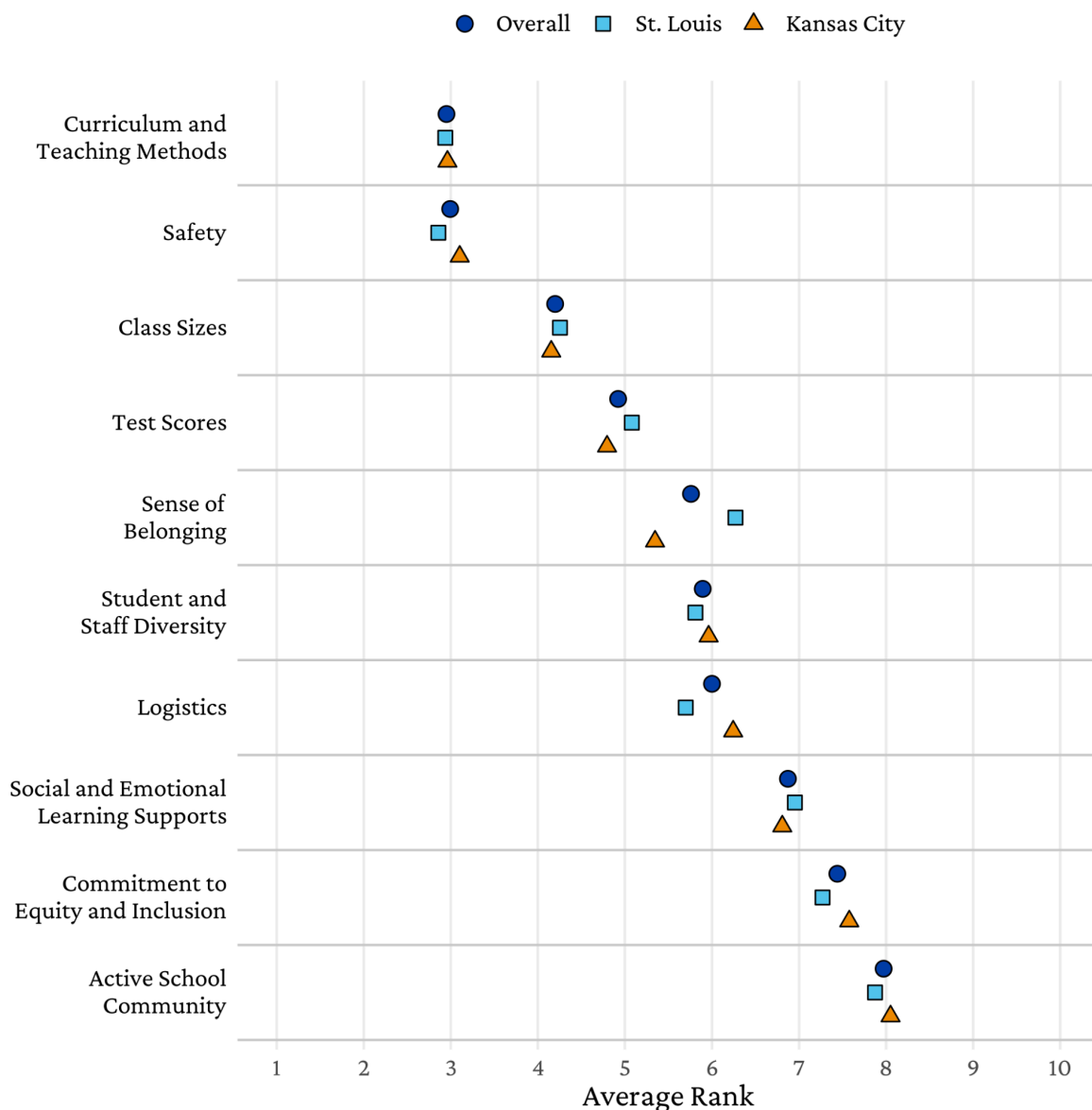
Factors Influencing School Choice

Respondents were also asked to rank factors that influence school selection decisions for children in their households. These items were adapted from the Spring parent survey to allow comparison across datasets collected at different points in the enrollment cycle. Figure 8 presents the ranking of factors respondents identified as most influential in school choice decisions. Detailed rankings are reported in **Appendix B**.

FIGURE 8

Parents in STL and KC Value Curriculum, STL Parents Value Safety More

Ranking factors important to parents when choosing a school for their child(ren)



Note: Rank 1 represents the most important while rank 10 represents the least important.

Consistent with the parent survey findings, respondents ranked school climate and instructional quality among the most important considerations when selecting a school. Safety, supportive learning environments, and instructional approaches were prioritized over traditional academic indicators such as standardized test scores.

Parents in St. Louis and Kansas City similarly ranked curriculum and teaching methods highly while they rated satisfaction with teacher quality most favorably. By contrast, they ranked safety as one of the most important factors in choosing a school, while expressing the lowest levels of satisfaction with student safety in both cities, respectively.

The alignment between the poll and survey results suggests that families evaluate schools using a broad conception of quality that includes safety, belonging, and responsiveness to student needs. These findings reinforce patterns observed in both the Spring survey and qualitative interviews, where parents consistently emphasized relational and experiential indicators of school quality.

Public Perceptions Within the Choice Landscape

Taken together, the poll results suggest that community members recognize the diversity of schooling options available in metropolitan areas such as St. Louis and Kansas City, but also perceive the choice landscape as complex and unevenly navigable.

While respondents generally value having multiple schooling options available, the poll responses indicate that access to clear information, transparency in enrollment processes, and confidence in school quality remain important considerations shaping public perceptions.

Because the poll was administered early in the enrollment cycle, these findings capture attitudes that may influence how families approach school exploration before formal application processes begin.

When considered alongside the Spring survey results, the poll provides additional context for understanding how community perceptions of school quality and choice systems evolve across the school enrollment timeline.

While the poll captures broader community attitudes toward school systems and school choice policies, qualitative interviews provide deeper insight into how families and school leaders interpret and navigate these systems in practice.

The following section synthesizes findings from interviews and focus groups with parents and administrators.

Parent Experiences and Perspectives

This section synthesizes insights from the parent survey, parent interviews, focus groups, and administrator interviews to examine how families navigate school choice in the St. Louis region. Across data sources, parents described school choice as a relational and often emotionally intensive process shaped by both personal priorities and structural constraints.

The findings highlight how families learn about school options, what factors they prioritize when selecting schools, and the barriers they encounter during the search and application process.

How Parents Learn About School Options

Information Is Fragmented and Unevenly Distributed

Across surveys and interviews, parents reported learning about school options primarily through informal networks rather than formal systems or centralized information sources. The most commonly cited sources of information included other parents and caregivers, friends and family members, and—when available—direct relationships with school staff or teachers. Formal sources such as school websites, district materials, or centralized choice tools were frequently described as incomplete, outdated, or difficult to navigate.

“You kind of just hear about schools through other parents. If you don’t know someone, you might not even know a school exists.”

— Parent interview

Poll data reinforced this pattern, showing that word-of-mouth and personal networks consistently outranked official sources as trusted channels for school information. As a result, access to information was uneven, often reflecting differences in social capital rather than differences in family engagement or interest.

Timing of Information Shapes Access

Timing emerged as a critical factor in parents’ ability to meaningfully exercise choice. Many parents reported receiving information too late to fully consider all available options, particularly selective or oversubscribed schools. Several interviewees described learning about application processes or deadlines only after they had already passed, effectively narrowing their options before decision-making began.

What Parents Look for in Schools

Safety, Academic Quality, and School Climate Are Core Priorities

Across data sources, parents consistently prioritized student safety, academic quality, and school culture or climate. Secondary considerations included class size, curriculum focus, extracurricular opportunities, diversity, and proximity, these factors were often weighed against perceptions of safety and support. Survey results suggested that while many parents value geographic proximity, they are frequently willing to travel farther for schools they perceive as safer or higher quality.

“I’ll drive across the city if I feel like my child is safe and supported.”
— Parent interview

School Choice as Risk Management

Qualitative findings further indicate that parents often experience school choice not as an opportunity to optimize outcomes, but as a high-stakes process of minimizing risk and avoiding harm. Decisions were framed around protecting children from bullying, unmet special needs, racial isolation, or unsafe or unsupportive learning environments. Parents frequently described the consequences of a poor school match as difficult to reverse, heightening the emotional weight of decision-making.

“We spent nights praying, crying, comparing notes, and talking to other parents. This wasn’t an easy decision — it felt like everything was at stake.” — Parent interview

This risk-oriented framing appeared regardless of whether families ultimately selected district, charter, private, or county schools, suggesting that perceived risk is a foundational driver of school choice behavior.

Relationships and Trust Shape Decisions

Parents consistently emphasized trust in people over trust in systems. Relationships with principals, teachers, and school leaders were often decisive, with some parents following trusted administrators across school transitions.

“I chose [STL city charter] because I have a relationship with the principal... they advocate for my son and they listen to me.”

— Parent interview

“You know my child and you know how to deal with him. That’s why I followed you to that school.”

— Parent interview

Even when parents referenced formal indicators such as test scores or school reputations, these metrics were often interpreted through relational experiences. Responsiveness, advocacy, and communication were repeatedly cited as indicators of whether a school could be trusted.

Individualized Support Needs Are Central

Many parents described their children as having specific academic, behavioral, developmental, or language-related needs, including autism, ADHD, speech delays, bilingual development, or social-emotional challenges. Access to individualized supports—and confidence that those supports would be consistently delivered—was often non-negotiable.

“The school was helping me get all her services — speech, occupational therapy — that’s why I chose that school.”

— Parent interview

Parents expressed frustration when schools appeared to shift responsibility for outcomes onto families, particularly around attendance, behavior, or special education compliance. In contrast, schools perceived as collaborative and proactive were viewed as higher quality.

Parents Define School Quality Holistically

Parents’ definitions of a “high-quality school” extended well beyond academic performance metrics. While some used test scores as an initial screening tool, quality was more often described in experiential terms, including respectful communication, emotional safety and belonging, teacher stability and morale, diversity, and support for the whole child.

“It’s not just test scores. It’s when you see your child becoming independent and confident — that’s how you know the school is doing something right.”
— Parent interview

These findings suggest a misalignment between commonly available performance indicators and how families evaluate school quality in practice.

Barriers to Navigating School Choice

Transportation as a Structural Constraint

Transportation emerged as one of the most consistently cited barriers across surveys and interviews. Parents described limited bus availability, long commute times, and uncertainty about eligibility as factors that narrowed their realistic set of options, often eliminating schools before they could be meaningfully considered.

“Transportation is the reason we had to change schools. It wasn’t about the school — it was about getting there.”
— Parent interview

Confusing and Misaligned Application Processes

Parents described significant difficulty navigating application systems, including separate applications for different school sectors, varying deadlines and requirements, and unclear enrollment priorities or waitlist processes. Administrator interviews confirmed that families frequently arrive confused or frustrated when attempting to manage multiple systems simultaneously.

“Parents assume there’s one process, but there really isn’t.”
— Administrator interview

Parents also described application timelines that varied widely across schools, further contributing to confusion and missed opportunities.

Structural Constraints Quietly Limit Choice

Beyond transportation and applications, eligibility rules, geographic boundaries, and enrollment priorities often constrained families' options in ways that were implicit rather than transparent.

“My son can stay because he started in pre-K there, but my daughter doesn't have that option because of where we live.”

— Parent interview

Several parents described moving homes, selecting less-preferred schools, or abandoning desired options due to logistical barriers.

Choice as an Emotional Burden

While parents valued having options, many described school choice as stressful and overwhelming, particularly those with limited time, language barriers, or less access to social capital. Parents consistently reported feelings of anxiety, exhaustion, and emotional strain, even among those with strong professional familiarity with education systems.

Many parents felt that the complexity of the system required families to resolve challenges individually rather than through coordinated support.

Summary of Findings

Taken together, these findings suggest that parents experience school choice as a relational and often high-stakes process shaped by both personal priorities and structural constraints. Information about school options is unevenly distributed, trust in schools is built primarily through relationships rather than formal systems, and logistical factors such as transportation and application timelines frequently shape which schools are realistically accessible.

While school choice policies emphasize expanding options, parents' experiences suggest that trust, communication, and practical feasibility often matter more than the number of schools available. These patterns highlight the importance of systems and tools that reduce informational burden, clarify processes, and better align with how families actually evaluate and navigate school quality.

School and System Perspectives

Administrator interviews were analyzed to surface system-level factors that shape how parents access information, navigate enrollment, and experience school choice. This section presents findings from semi-structured interviews with school administrators across five of the eleven charter LEAs participating in the 2024-25 implementation of School App STL. The participants represented a range of roles, including school-level admissions leadership, system intermediaries, and executive operations and finance leadership.

Collectively, these interviews provide a multi-level view of how schools experience centralized enrollment, family decision-making, recruitment, and funding shifts within the current choice landscape. Across interviews, administrators expressed broad support for centralized enrollment as essential infrastructure, while consistently identifying relational, operational, and capacity-based constraints that limit the extent to which access alone produces equitable outcomes.

Key Findings

Admissions Barriers Are Structural and Capacity-Based

Administrators consistently described barriers to enrollment that stem less from opposition to centralized systems and more from **structural and capacity constraints** embedded in school operations.

Commonly cited barriers included:

- Transportation limitations that restrict families' feasible choices
- Limited staff capacity to provide high-touch, individualized admissions support
- Capacity constraints during peak enrollment periods
- Late entry into the enrollment process, especially among families without early childhood pipelines

Administrators emphasized that families are often highly motivated but must navigate systems that assume a level of time, stability, and prior knowledge that is unevenly distributed. Barriers were described as **predictable outcomes of system design**, rather than failures of parent decision-making.

Key insight: Enrollment challenges arise less from opposition to choice or centralized systems than from **mismatches between system expectations and family realities**.

Information Asymmetry Is a Core System Challenge

A central theme across all five interviews was **information asymmetry**—the gap between how enrollment systems are designed to function and how families interpret and experience them. Administrators reported that families frequently:

- Overestimate the guarantees associated with applying early
- Misunderstand waitlist mechanics and lottery timelines
- Assume sibling preference or school ranking ensures admission
- Discover key constraints (e.g., transportation, calendar differences) late in the process

While schools believe they are providing accurate information, administrators acknowledged that families often encounter that information under stress, time pressure, or with limited prior context.

“There were families who assumed siblings were guaranteed a spot, and we had to really push the message that you still have to apply. Priority only works if you’re in the lottery.”
—Charter School Administrator

Key insight: Confusion in the enrollment process is not a function of parent disengagement, but of misaligned assumptions about how information is accessed, processed, and trusted.

“I would say less than ten percent of people had any real confusion, but the confusion that did come up was always the same things—transportation, calendar, or applying for the wrong year. It wasn’t that families weren’t paying attention; it was just easy to misunderstand.”
—Charter School Administrator

School App STL Improves Coordination—but Introduces Some Friction

Administrators uniformly supported centralized enrollment systems, citing clear benefits:

- Reduced administrative burden for families
- Improved waitlist integrity through automatic seat release

- Greater transparency across participating schools
- More reliable enrollment forecasting

However, administrators also identified new tensions introduced by School App STL:

- **Efficiency vs. Reassurance**
The new application & lottery system streamlined processes but delayed feedback, increasing anxiety for families awaiting outcomes.
- **Standardization vs. School Differentiation**
Common timelines and applications can obscure meaningful differences in school models, calendars, and expectations.
- **Access vs. Signal Clarity**
Increased application volume makes it more difficult for schools to distinguish genuine interest from exploratory applications, complicating seat allocation and staffing decisions.

Administrators framed these tensions as growing pains rather than fundamental flaws, emphasizing that centralized enrollment is necessary but not sufficient for equitable access to quality schooling options for families.

Data Capacity Has Emerged as an Equity Consideration

Several administrators—particularly those overseeing operations and finance—highlighted **data management and analytic capacity** as a growing constraint of the new enrollment platform.

Key challenges included:

- Manual reconciliation of enrollment data
- Limited real-time notifications when families decline seats
- Increased labor required to interpret application rankings and intent
- Dependence on staff with the analytic skills to quickly interpret new data

These challenges were described as unevenly distributed across schools, advantaging organizations with stronger back-office infrastructure.

Analytic insight: As enrollment systems centralize, **analytic capacity—not access—becomes a differentiating resource**, with equity implications for both schools and families.

Administrators Routinely Support Families Beyond Their Own Schools

All five administrators reported assisting families even when their school was not a good fit. This support included:

- Referrals to neighboring charter or district schools

- Explanations of programmatic differences and expectations
- Guidance on navigating waitlists or interpreting outcomes
- Acting as a trusted point of contact during moments of uncertainty

Administrators framed this work as an ethical obligation and a form of community stewardship, rather than as competitive disadvantage.

Key pattern: Informal cross-school navigation already exists, but it is **relationship-dependent and under-resourced**, rather than systematized.

Enrollment Strategy Prioritizes Stability and Fit Over Scale

Contrary to market-based assumptions about school choice, administrators consistently rejected enrollment growth as an unqualified goal. Instead, they described enrollment strategies guided by:

- Instructional quality
- Staffing stability
- Organizational culture
- Long-term sustainability

High-demand schools in particular expressed caution about expanding enrollment in ways that could dilute program coherence or strain staff capacity.

Analytic insight: Administrators frame enrollment as a **stewardship function**, balancing access with responsibility to existing students and staff.

Transportation and Calendars Are Decisive, System-Level Constraints

Transportation availability and academic calendars emerged as among the most decisive factors shaping family choice. Administrators emphasized that these constraints:

- Frequently override academic alignment or school preference
- Are poorly understood by families early in the process
- Are largely inflexible at the school level

Administrators stressed that these are not individual school shortcomings, but **system-wide access constraints** that shape who can realistically choose which schools.

Recruitment Relies on Trust and Relationships More Than Marketing

Recruitment strategies described across interviews emphasized:

- Word-of-mouth referrals
- Community events and school tours
- Early childhood partnerships

- Direct relationships with current families

Traditional marketing played a secondary role. Administrators consistently noted that **relational trust**—particularly in communities with historical distrust of institutions—was the most effective recruitment mechanism.

However, this relational work was described as time-intensive and often under-resourced.

Funding Shapes Enrollment Capacity Indirectly Through Staffing Stability

Administrators described funding as influencing enrollment primarily through its effects on staffing and program continuity, rather than through direct recruitment efforts.

ESSER funds were widely characterized as a **stabilization tool**, used to:

- Retain existing staff
- Offer temporary stipends
- Avoid unsustainable staffing expansions

Recent increases in charter funding were described as having material impacts on:

- Teacher compensation
- Retention and recruitment
- Long-term financial planning

Notably, administrators reported that families are largely unaware of these funding changes, limiting their influence on parent decision-making.

Enrollment Is a Relational System, Not a Market Transaction

Administrators described budgeting decisions as increasingly strategic, emphasizing sustainability and risk management. Despite improved funding conditions, uncertainty remains around:

- Long-term revenue stability
- Policy implementation details
- External cost pressures

Budgeting was consistently framed as a series of trade-offs, rather than an opportunity for expansion without constraint.

Summary

Across five administrator interviews, school leaders consistently described enrollment as a relational and capacity-dependent system rather than a simple market transaction.

Administrators broadly support SchoolAppSTL as essential infrastructure that reduces family burden and improves coordination, but they emphasized that access alone does not ensure equitable outcomes. Persistent challenges include information asymmetry for families,

transportation and calendar constraints, limited staff capacity for individualized support, and growing demands for data and analytic expertise.

Administrators also reported routinely assisting families beyond their own schools, framing this work as community stewardship rather than competition. Taken together, these findings suggest that investments in navigation supports, communication, analytic capacity, and system coordination—alongside application access—may improve both family experience and enrollment outcomes.

Cross-Cutting Themes

The survey, public poll, parent interviews, and administrator interviews each capture different perspectives on the school choice landscape in the St. Louis region. While these data sources vary in size and methodology, several consistent patterns emerge across the findings. Taken together, the results provide insight into how families evaluate schools, how they navigate school choice systems, and how structural factors shape the options available to them.

Families Define School Quality Holistically

Across the survey, poll, and interviews, families consistently described school quality using a broad set of indicators that extend beyond traditional academic performance measures.

Parents frequently prioritized instructional approach, safety, diversity, and social-emotional supports when evaluating schools. Standardized test scores were considered by some families but were rarely the primary factor guiding final decisions.

Interview participants described evaluating schools based on whether their children felt safe, supported, and able to build meaningful relationships with teachers and peers. These findings suggest that publicly available performance metrics may not fully reflect the dimensions of school quality families consider most important.

Information Networks Play a Central Role in School Choice

Across data sources, parents reported relying heavily on both formal and informal networks when learning about school options.

Survey respondents frequently cited school websites, online search tools, and school-choice navigator platforms. At the same time, both survey and interview participants emphasized the importance of conversations with other parents, community members, and educators when gathering information about schools.

These relationship-based information networks often served as the most trusted source of insight into school culture, leadership, and student experiences.

Administrator interviews reinforced this finding. School leaders described recruitment and outreach efforts that rely heavily on current families and community relationships rather than traditional marketing approaches.

Structural Constraints Shape Which Schools Are Accessible

Although families often express a willingness to travel for schools they perceive as a strong fit, structural constraints frequently shape which options remain realistically accessible.

Transportation emerged as one of the most consistent barriers reported across data sources. While many parents indicated they were willing to travel significant distances, the reliability and availability of transportation services often determined whether those options were practically accessible.

Families also described navigating multiple application platforms, timelines, and enrollment rules across schools. These system-level complexities frequently narrowed the set of schools families were able to consider during the enrollment process.

Administrator interviews confirmed that transportation logistics, enrollment timelines, and staffing constraints all influence how schools manage admissions and enrollment.

School Choice Systems Function as Complex Ecosystems

The findings across data sources suggest that the school choice landscape in St. Louis operates less like a single coordinated system and more like a complex ecosystem composed of multiple sectors, policies, and organizations.

Families navigate choices across district schools, charter schools, magnet programs, and private schools, each with distinct enrollment processes and communication practices. Even when centralized enrollment platforms are available, families must still interpret information across multiple institutions and decision points.

As a result, navigating school choice requires both access to information and the ability to interpret how different schools and systems interact.

School Choice Is Often Experienced as Risk Management

Parents frequently described school choice as a process of minimizing uncertainty rather than maximizing opportunity.

Families often applied to multiple schools in order to ensure they would have at least one acceptable option. Decisions were shaped not only by school quality but also by application timelines, waitlists, transportation availability, and the perceived stability of schools.

These dynamics suggest that school choice systems place significant decision-making responsibility on families, who must balance educational preferences with logistical realities during the enrollment process.

Implications and Opportunities

Findings from this study highlight several opportunities to improve how families access information, navigate enrollment systems, and connect with schools that meet their children's needs. While the St. Louis region offers a wide range of schooling options, the findings suggest that expanding options alone does not necessarily translate into equitable access or ease of navigation for families.

The following implications emerge from the combined survey, poll, and qualitative findings.

Improve Early and Transparent Information Access

Families consistently reported learning about school options through informal networks rather than through centralized or official sources. Improving the clarity, accessibility, and timing of information about school programs, application timelines, and enrollment requirements could reduce the informational burden placed on families.

Providing clear and centralized information earlier in the enrollment cycle may help families explore a broader set of options before application deadlines approach.

Align Enrollment Processes Across Schools

Parents frequently described confusion related to different application systems, enrollment timelines, and waitlist processes across schools. While centralized enrollment tools have improved coordination among participating schools, continued efforts to align application timelines and clarify enrollment rules may reduce barriers for families navigating multiple options simultaneously.

Greater alignment across sectors may also help families better understand how their choices interact with admission processes and transportation availability.

Increase Transportation Clarity and Reliability

Transportation was consistently identified as one of the most significant constraints shaping families' final school choices. Even when parents were willing to travel across the region, uncertainty about transportation eligibility, routes, and reliability often limited which schools were practically accessible.

Improving transportation coordination, transparency, and reliability may significantly expand the range of schools families are able to consider when making enrollment decisions.

Strengthen Navigation Supports for Families

Families navigating school choice systems often benefit from guidance provided by trusted intermediaries such as school staff, community organizations, and experienced parents. Expanding access to navigation supports that help families understand application timelines,

evaluate school options, and interpret enrollment outcomes may reduce confusion and stress during the decision-making process. This support may be particularly valuable for families entering the school choice system for the first time.

Invest in Data and Analytic Capacity

Administrator interviews highlighted growing demands for data interpretation and analytic capacity within centralized enrollment systems. Schools must increasingly analyze application patterns, waitlist movement, and enrollment projections in order to make informed decisions about staffing, classroom capacity, and program planning.

Strengthening analytic infrastructure within enrollment systems may improve both family experience and system coordination by allowing schools and intermediaries to better anticipate enrollment dynamics.

Findings from this study suggest several opportunities to strengthen school choice systems in practice:

- 1. Improve centralized, early, and transparent access to school information**
- 2. Align application timelines and enrollment processes across sectors**
- 3. Increase transportation clarity and reliability**
- 4. Strengthen trusted navigation supports for families**
- 5. Invest in analytic capacity within enrollment systems**

Reducing informational and logistical barriers may improve equitable access to schooling options more effectively than expanding the number of options alone.

About the PRiME Center and Research Team

This study was conducted by researchers affiliated with the Policy Research in Missouri Education (PRiME) Center at Saint Louis University's School of Education as part of an effort to better understand how families experience the St. Louis school choice system and to inform improvements to school search and enrollment processes.

The research team included:

Collin Hitt, Ph.D. — Principal Investigator

Executive Director; PRiME Center

Dr. Hitt is an education policy researcher specializing in school choice and charter schools. His work includes extensive scholarship on charter school impacts and education policy, including contributions to leading meta-analyses examining charter school effects on student outcomes. His research also focuses on education finance and policy in Missouri.

Deanna C. Childress, Ph.D. — Project Lead and Research Team Member

Director—Billiken Data Corps, Postdoctoral Research Fellow; PRiME Center

Dr. Childress brings more than fifteen years of experience conducting both quantitative and qualitative research. Her expertise includes large-scale data analysis, survey research, and qualitative methods such as interviews and focus groups. For this study, she served as project manager and led key aspects of data collection, analysis, and report development.

Juan Cortes, Ph.D. — Research Team Member

Postdoctoral Research Associate; Washington University in St. Louis

Dr. Cortes studies how educational inequalities emerge as students navigate complex institutional systems. For this study, he managed the public opinion poll and produced data visualizations to support analysis and reporting.

Kathryn Coleman, Ph.D. — Research Team Member

Director of Research Practice Partnerships; PRiME Center

Dr. Coleman has extensive experience facilitating community-based research with education stakeholders. For this study, she led the design and facilitation of stakeholder focus groups.

Alexandra Boyd, Ph.D. — Research Team Member

Assistant Dean, Assistant Professor; Office of School and Community Partnerships

Dr. Boyd is an education researcher and former charter school leader with more than a decade of experience studying school systems and educational opportunities. For this study, she facilitated connections with local education networks that supported outreach and engagement.

APPENDIX A

Full Survey Results

Demographic Items

Table 1

What is your racial/ethnic identity?²

Category	Responses	Percent
Asian or Pacific Islander	7	3.6%
Black or African American	86	44.8%
Hispanic or Latino	7	3.6%
White	96	50.0%
Other	4	2.1%

Table 2

What is your highest level of education completed?

Category	Responses	Percent
8th grade or less	3	1.6%
Some high school	4	2.1%
High school diploma or GED	20	10.5%
Some college	35	18.4%
Associate's degree	19	10.0%
Bachelor's degree	31	16.3%
Some graduate school	2	1.1%
Graduate or professional degree	76	40.0%

Table 3

What is your yearly household income?

Category	Responses	Percent
Under \$15,000	18	9.5%
\$15,000 - \$24,999	8	4.2%
\$25,000 - \$34,999	17	8.9%
\$35,000 - \$49,000	22	11.6%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	25	13.2%
\$75,000 - \$99,999	18	9.5%
\$100,000 or more	82	43.2%

² Respondents were able to select all that apply.

Table 4
What is your ZIP code?

Category	Description	Responses	Percent
63104	City of St. Louis – Near South	25	13.4%
63116	City of St. Louis – South	25	13.4%
63118	City of St. Louis – South (Cherokee / Benton Park)	25	13.4%
63110	City of St. Louis – Central (Midtown)	12	6.5%
63111	City of St. Louis – South (Riverfront / Carondelet)	11	5.9%
63109	City of St. Louis – South (St. Louis Hills)	8	4.3%
63112	City of St. Louis – North-Central	8	4.3%
63108	City of St. Louis – Central (Central West End)	6	3.2%
63115	City of St. Louis – North	5	2.7%
63120	City of St. Louis – North	5	2.7%
63139	City of St. Louis – South (Southwest City)	5	2.7%
63123	City of St. Louis – South	4	2.2%
63136	City of St. Louis – Far North	4	2.2%
63017	St. Louis County (Chesterfield)	3	1.6%
63119	St. Louis County (Webster Groves area)	3	1.6%
63130	City of St. Louis – Central (U. City Border Area)	3	1.6%
63147	City of St. Louis – Near North (Riverfront)	3	1.6%
63031	St. Louis County (Florissant)	2	1.1%
63107	City of St. Louis – Near North	2	1.1%
63113	City of St. Louis – North	2	1.1%
63121	City of St. Louis – North (City/County Border)	2	1.1%
63122	St. Louis County (Kirkwood)	2	1.1%
63301	Outside Region (St. Charles County)	2	1.1%
63005	St. Louis County (Chesterfield)	1	0.5%
63011	St. Louis County (Ballwin)	1	0.5%
63013	Outside Region (Franklin County, MO)	1	0.5%
63020	Outside Region (Jefferson County, MO)	1	0.5%
63021	St. Louis County (Ballwin / Manchester)	1	0.5%
63034	St. Louis County (North County)	1	0.5%
63042	St. Louis County (Hazelwood)	1	0.5%
63101	City of St. Louis – Downtown	1	0.5%
63103	City of St. Louis – Central (Downtown West / Midtown)	1	0.5%
63105	St. Louis County (Clayton)	1	0.5%
63106	City of St. Louis – Near North	1	0.5%
63129	St. Louis County (South County)	1	0.5%
63132	St. Louis County (Olivette)	1	0.5%
63141	St. Louis County (Creve Coeur)	1	0.5%
63142	St. Louis County (North County)	1	0.5%
63146	St. Louis County (Creve Coeur / Overland)	1	0.5%
63376	Outside Region (St. Charles County)	1	0.5%

Category	Description	Responses	Percent
63401	Outside Region (Hannibal, MO)	1	0.5%
65602	Outside Region (Southwest MO)	1	0.5%

Table 5

Region (Grouped by ZIP Code)

Category	Responses	Percent
South St. Louis City	78	41.9%
Mid / Central St. Louis City	48	25.8%
North St. Louis City	32	17.2%
Other St. Louis County (incl. St. Charles)	19	10.2%
North St. Louis County	5	2.7%
Outside of St. Louis	4	2.2%

Table 6

How many adults reside in your household?

Category	Responses	Percent
1	47	24.9%
2	118	62.4%
3 or more	24	12.7%

Table 7

Which language(s) do you speak at home?³

Category	Responses	Percent
English	187	92.6%
Spanish	8	4.0%
Other	7	3.5%

Child / Student Characteristics

Table 8

Please indicate the gender of your child(ren).⁴

Category	Responses	Percent
Male	182	53.7%
Female	144	42.5%
Non-binary / third gender	5	1.5%

³ Respondents were able to select all that apply.

⁴ Total is higher than total by grade level as parents were allowed to enter gender for children who were not school age at the time of the study.

Category	Responses	Percent
Prefer not to say	8	2.4%
Total Children Represented	339	100%

Table 9

In which grade(s) do you have children enrolled in school? [Check all that apply]

Category	Responses	Percent
Pre-K	58	18.5%
Kindergarten	36	11.5%
1 st Grade	26	8.3%
2 nd Grade	28	8.9%
3 rd Grade	18	5.8%
4 th Grade	29	9.3%
5 th Grade	28	8.9%
6 th Grade	23	7.3%
7 th Grade	20	6.4%
8 th Grade	7	2.2%
9 th Grade	13	4.2%
10 th Grade	15	4.8%
11 th Grade	9	2.9%
12 th Grade	3	1.0%
Total Children Represented	313	

Table 10

Which school does your child currently attend?⁵

School Name	Number of Children	Percent of Total
Ackerman School (Special School District)	1	0.3%
Adams Elem. (St. Louis City)	4	1.4%
Ames Visual/Perf. Arts (St. Louis City)	1	0.3%
Arrowpoint Elem. (Hazelwood)	2	0.7%
Ashland Elem. And Br. (St. Louis City)	4	1.4%
Atlas Elementary (Atlas Public Schools)	30	10.3%
Barack Obama Elementary School (Normandy Schools Collaborative)	1	0.3%
Barbara c Jordan elementary (u city)	1	0.3%
Bayless Junior High (Bayless)	1	0.3%
Beaumont CTE High School (St. Louis City)	4	1.4%
Betty Wheeler Classical Jr. Ac (St. Louis City)	11	3.8%
Bishop Dubourg	2	0.7%

⁵ Parents were asked to indicate current school for each child by grade level indicated in previous question.



School Name	Number of Children	Percent of Total
Bryan Hill Elem. (St. Louis City)	1	0.3%
Buder Elem. (St. Louis City)	3	1.0%
Busch MS Character & Athletics (St. Louis City)	1	0.3%
Central Visual/Perf. Arts High (St. Louis City)	2	0.7%
City Academy School	1	0.3%
City Garden Montessori School	16	5.5%
Clay Center at Harris-Stowe	1	0.3%
Collegiate School Of Med/Bio (St. Louis City)	1	0.3%
Compton-Drew ILC Middle (St. Louis City)	1	0.3%
Confluence Preparatory Academy (Confluence Academies)	1	0.3%
Cornerstone Center for Early Learning	3	1.0%
DuBray Middle - Fort Zumwalt	1	0.3%
Earl Nance, Sr. Elem. (St. Louis City)	1	0.3%
Early Child. Education (Riverview Gardens)	1	0.3%
F.P. Tillman Elementary (Kirkwood)	1	0.3%
Flance	1	0.3%
Flynn Park Elementary	2	0.7%
Forest Park Montessori School	2	0.7%
Forsyth School	1	0.3%
Friendly academy	2	0.7%
Friendship Academy	1	0.3%
Froebel Elem. (St. Louis City)	1	0.3%
Gateway Middle (St. Louis City)	1	0.3%
Gateway Science Acad/St. Louis (Gateway Science Acad/St. Louis)	2	0.7%
Gateway Science Academy High (Gateway Science Acad/St. Louis)	1	0.3%
Gateway Science Academy Middle (Gateway Science Acad/St. Louis)	1	0.3%
Gateway Science Acad-South Ele (Gateway Science Acad/St. Louis)	2	0.7%
Gateway/Hubert Wheeler School (Mo Schls For The Sev Disabled)	1	0.3%
Grand Center Arts Acad Middle (Confluence Academies)	1	0.3%
Guidepost Montessori - Central West End	1	0.3%
Hazelwood East High School	1	0.3%
Herzog Elem. (St. Louis City)	1	0.3%
Hixson Middle (Webster Groves)	1	0.3%
Hodgen Elem. (St. Louis City)	1	0.3%
Homeschool	2	0.7%
Idea Center	1	0.3%
Kairos Academies (Kairos Academies)	9	3.1%



School Name	Number of Children	Percent of Total
Kairos High (Kairos Academies)	7	2.4%
Kehrs Mill Elementary (Rockwood District)	2	0.7%
KinderCare - Kirkwood	1	0.3%
Kipp Inspire Academy (Kipp St. Louis Public Schools)	4	1.4%
Kipp St. Louis High (Kipp St. Louis Public Schools)	3	1.0%
Kipp Triumph Academy (Kipp St. Louis Public Schools)	5	1.7%
Kipp Victory Academy (Kipp St. Louis Public Schools)	4	1.4%
Kipp Wisdom Academy (Kipp St. Louis Public Schools)	2	0.7%
Kipp Wonder Academy (Kipp St. Louis Public Schools)	7	2.4%
Kirk Day School	1	0.3%
Laclede Elem. (St. Louis City)	2	0.7%
Ladue Middle (Ladue)	1	0.3%
Lafayette Preparatory Academy (Lafayette Preparatory Academy)	9	3.1%
Lindbergh	1	0.3%
L'Ouverture Middle School	1	0.3%
Lusher	1	0.3%
Mallinckrodt A.B.I Elem. (St. Louis City)	1	0.3%
Mann Elem. (St. Louis City)	2	0.7%
Mason Elem. (St. Louis City)	2	0.7%
Mckinley Class. Leadership Ac. (St. Louis City)	10	3.4%
Meramec Elem. (St. Louis City)	1	0.3%
Metro High (St. Louis City)	1	0.3%
MICDS	2	0.7%
Miriam School	3	1.0%
Momentum Acad. Tower Grove South (Momentum Academy)	1	0.3%
Momentum Fox Park (Momentum Academy)	4	1.4%
Montessori Lab School at Grand Center	4	1.4%
Mullanphy Botanical Gardens (St. Louis City)	3	1.0%
North Side Community School (North Side Community School)	3	1.0%
North Side Community-Grand Center (North Side Community School)	1	0.3%
Oak Brook elementary (in Ballwin)	1	0.3%
PATTONVILLE Early Chol (Pattonville R-III)	1	0.3%
PEGS Idea Center	1	0.3%
Premier Charter School (Premier Charter School)	13	4.5%
Rainbow Castle- St. Louis City	1	0.3%
Robinwood	1	0.3%
Roosevelt High (St. Louis City)	1	0.3%
Saint Stephen Protomartyr	1	0.3%

School Name	Number of Children	Percent of Total
Shaw Visual/Perf. Arts Center (St. Louis City)	1	0.3%
South City Community School for our pre-k	1	0.3%
Spoede Elementary (Ladue)	1	0.3%
St. Louis Lang Immersion School (St. Louis Lang Immersion School)	3	1.0%
St. Louis Public Schools	1	0.3%
St. Louis Voices Academy (St. Louis Voices Academy)	2	0.7%
St. Cecilia School academy	1	0.3%
Stix Early Childhood Center (St. Louis City)	5	1.7%
Sumner High (St. Louis City)	1	0.3%
The College School	1	0.3%
The Soulard School (The Soulard School)	6	2.1%
The Wilson School	1	0.3%
University City High School	1	0.3%
Urban League Headstart Magnolia	1	0.3%
Vashon High (St. Louis City)	2	0.7%
Villa di Maria Montessori	1	0.3%
Virtual School	2	0.7%
Walbridge Elem. Community Ed. (St. Louis City)	1	0.3%
Webster Groves High (Webster Groves)	1	0.3%
Westminster Christian Academy	1	0.3%
Wilkinson Early Childhood Center (St. Louis City)	4	1.4%
Woerner Elem (St. Louis City)	8	2.8%
Word of Life Lutheran School	2	0.7%
Total Children Represented	290	100.0%

School Characteristics

Table 11

Did you have to complete an application to attend this school?⁶

Category	Responses	Percent
Yes	146	84.4%
No	22	12.7%
Other	5	2.9%

⁶ Parents were instructed to answer this for the oldest child if they had children at different schools.

Table 12
Did your child have to achieve any of the following to attend this school?⁷

Category	Responses	Percent
No specific requirements	126	72.8%
Minimum GPA	13	7.5%
Minimum Test Score	24	13.9%
Letter(s) of Recommendation	14	8.1%
Essay or Personal Statement	11	6.4%
Other (Including gifted testing, IEP documentation, interviews, and talent auditions)	16	9.2%

Table 13
What is the primary method of transportation to and from your child's school?⁸

Category	Responses	Percent
Personal vehicle	131	67.9%
School-provided bus	30	15.5%
Walking	10	5.2%
School-provided cab or other non-bus transportation	7	3.6%
Other (please specify)	6	3.1%
Carpool with family, neighbors, or friends	5	2.6%
Public transportation	4	2.1%

Table 14
How far does your child travel daily to/from school?⁹

Category	Responses	Percent
Less than 1 mile (roughly 15 minute walk)	28	16.4%
1-3 miles (roughly 10 minute drive)	56	32.7%
3-6 miles (roughly 15 minute drive)	47	27.5%
7-9 miles (roughly 20 minute drive)	19	11.1%
10 miles or more (more than 20 minute drive)	21	12.3%

Table 15
Do you have challenges with transportation?

Category	Responses	Percent
No	129	75.0%
Yes – school-provided transportation is unreliable	20	11.6%
Yes – other issues (please specify)	17	9.9%

⁷ Totals may sum to greater than 100% because parents could select all that apply.

⁸ Parents were asked to refer to the school furthest from where they reside if they had children at multiple schools.

⁹ Parents were asked to refer to the school furthest from where they reside if they had children at multiple schools.

Category	Responses	Percent
Yes – public transportation is unreliable	6	3.5%

Table 16
What Parents Say Is Most Important When Choosing a School¹⁰

Category	Responses	Percent
Curriculum and teaching methods	135	79.9%
Student and staff diversity	100	59.2%
Safety	98	58.0%
Social-emotional learning supports	94	55.6%
Sense of belonging	81	47.9%
Class sizes	71	42.0%
Commitment to equity and inclusion	71	42.0%
Active school community	66	39.1%
Logistics (e.g., proximity, transportation, schedule)	65	38.5%
Test scores	50	29.6%
Other (please specify)	15	8.9%

Table 17
Where parents go to find information about schools¹¹

Category	Responses	Percent
Specific school’s website	101	60.1%
Family and friends	99	58.9%
School choice navigator website (e.g., Show Me Schools)	73	43.5%
Google or other search engine	68	40.5%
Parents at my child(ren)’s current school	56	33.3%
Recruitment events	42	25.0%
Staff at my child(ren)’s current school	37	22.0%
Printed materials	17	10.1%
Other (Including DESE, school ranking sites, social media, billboards, and newsletters)	16	9.5%
The library	2	1.2%

¹⁰ Percent of parents selecting each factor; multiple selections allowed.

¹¹ Parents could select multiple options – percentages represent the percent of parents that selected each item.

Table 18
How happy are you with the choices of schools available to you?

Category	Total	Percent
Very happy	29	17.4%
Somewhat happy	67	40.1%
Neutral	35	21.0%
Somewhat unhappy	22	13.2%
Very unhappy	14	8.4%

Table 19
What Types of School Informational Events Would You Be Interested In?¹²

Category	Total	Percent
Individual / family school tours	101	63.1%
School open houses for all families	92	57.5%
Online multi-school informational event	70	43.8%
Other (specified elsewhere)	16	10.0%

Table 20
Have you applied to any magnet schools for the next school year?

Category	Total	Percent
Yes	81	48%
No and do not plan to	67	40%
No but still plan to apply	20	12%

Table 21
How difficult or easy was the application?

Category	Total	Percent
Extremely easy	19	24%
Somewhat easy	23	29%
Neither easy nor difficult	25	32%
Somewhat difficult	10	13%
Extremely difficult	2	3%

Table 22
Reasons applying to other schools:

Category	Total	Percent
I want to find a school that is higher performing	20	25.3%
My child is just starting school	20	25.3%

¹² Parents could select multiple options – percentages represent the percent of parents that selected each item.

Category	Total	Percent
Other (Including academics, rigor, specialized interests, grade changes, and reapplication rules)	20	25.3%
My child is not happy with their current school	16	20.3%
My child is transitioning to middle school or high school	15	19.0%
My family is relocating	6	7.6%

Table 23

Which School are you applying to for 2025-26?

School Name	Total	Percent
AESM	1	1.2%
Atlas	7	8.6%
Betty Wheeler	6	7.4%
Chaminade	1	1.2%
City Garden Montessori	14	17.3%
Crossroads College Prep	1	1.2%
Friendly Temple Academy	1	1.2%
Gateway Science Academy	4	4.9%
Grand Center Arts Academy	2	2.5%
Holy Family Parish School (Arnold, MO)	1	1.2%
Kairos Academies	8	9.9%
KIPP	1	1.2%
Lafayette Prep	11	13.6%
Lift for Life	1	1.2%
Mallinckrodt Academy	3	3.7%
McKinley	2	2.5%
Momentum Academy	6	7.4%
Premier Charter School	8	9.9%
SLPS Tech School (SSD)	1	1.2%
Soulard School	9	11.1%
St. Louis Voices Academy	2	2.5%
Stix	3	3.7%
Wilkinson Early Childhood Center	1	1.2%
Woerner Elementary	4	4.9%
Total Applications (Among 81 parents)	98	1.2%

Table 24

Top Priority When Applying to Schools

Category	Total	Percent
Curriculum and Teaching Methods	68	40.7%
Social Emotional Learning Supports	19	11.4%
Sense of Belonging	14	8.4%

Category	Total	Percent
Logistics; Things like proximity to your home, bussing, before and after care, etc.	14	8.4%
Safety	14	8.4%
Other [Please specify]	11	6.6%
Student and Staff Diversity	9	5.4%
Active School Community	6	3.6%
Commitment to Equity and Inclusion	5	3.0%
Test Scores	4	2.4%
Class Sizes	3	1.8%

Table 25

How many schools have you visited as part of the application process?

Category	Responses	Percent
0	14	10.9%
1	31	24.0%
2	30	23.3%
3	29	22.5%
4	7	5.4%
5	12	9.3%
6 or more	6	4.7%

Table 26

Who do you ask for advice during the school search?¹³

Category	Responses	Percent
Other parents	90	60.8%
Family or friends	89	60.1%
School staff	71	48.0%
Coworkers	29	19.6%
Other	20	13.5%

Table 27

How confident are you about your knowledge of different school options?

Category	Responses	Percent
Extremely confident	19	12.7%
Very confident	42	28.0%
Moderately confident	54	36.0%
Slightly confident	29	19.3%
Not confident at all	6	4.0%

¹³ Respondents could select all that apply.

Table 28
How confident are you about your knowledge of the application process for these schools?

Category	Responses	Percent
Extremely confident	16	10.7%
Very confident	42	28.2%
Moderately confident	47	31.5%
Slightly confident	30	20.1%
Not confident at all	14	9.4%

Table 29
What are your preferred channels of communication?¹⁴

Category	Responses	Percent
Email	102	67.5%
Online	80	53.0%
Verbally (word-of-mouth)	57	37.7%
Flyers sent home with students	32	21.2%
Flyers in mail or public places	23	15.2%
Billboards or radio advertisements	11	7.3%
Other [Including open house, text, & Facebook]	6	4.0%

Table 30
What types of school informational events would you be interested in participating in if offered?

Category	Responses	Percent
In-person multi-school informational event	96	66.2%
Online multi-school informational event	57	39.3%
Individual/family school tours	84	57.9%
School open houses for all families	91	62.8%
Other [Including student-led videos and emails]	5	3.4%

Table 31
How happy are you with the choices of schools available to you?

Category	Responses	Percent
Extremely happy	35	23.5%
Somewhat happy	54	36.2%
Neither happy nor unhappy	25	16.8%
Somewhat unhappy	20	13.4%
Extremely unhappy	15	10.1%

¹⁴ Respondents could select all that apply.

Table 32
What other types of schooling options would parents like to see?

Category	Responses	Percent
Stronger Traditional Public Schools	12	19%
Curriculum / Program Enhancements (hands-on, outdoor, languages, life skills, etc.)	11	17%
Charter / Magnet / Expanded Choice Access	9	14%
Special Education / Mental Health Supports	6	10%
Montessori (public or affordable traditional)	5	8%
Private / Religious School Access or Scholarships	4	6%
Logistics & Access (transportation, before/aftercare, sibling access)	4	6%
Year-Round / Virtual / Homeschool	4	6%
Early Childhood / Pre-K Expansion	2	3%
Class Size / Safety / Behavioral Environment	3	5%
Governance / District Structure Reform (single district, cross-district access)	3	5%

Table 33
How far would you travel to a quality school?

Category	Responses	Percent
Less than 1 mile (roughly 15-minute walk)	7	4.7%
1-3 miles (roughly 10-minute drive)	16	10.7%
3-6 miles (roughly 15-minute drive)	43	28.9%
7-9 miles (roughly 20-minute drive)	47	31.5%
10 miles or more (more than 20-minute drive)	36	24.2%

Additional Survey Comments:
A. Strong Dissatisfaction with the Current System (Most Dominant Theme)

Approximately **18 responses (~41%)** express frustration, anger, or deep concern about how the system operates.

Common elements:

- “Broken system”
- Too complex / overwhelming to navigate
- Divides city vs. county
- Reinforces inequity
- Requires too much work from families
- Dilutes quality across too many schools
- Funding structure is flawed

- Politicization of education
- Racial segregation via gifted testing
- Charter system not meeting special needs
- Families forced into private schools

Tone: Emotional, urgent, and systemic rather than isolated complaints.

B. Desire to Strengthen SLPS / Neighborhood Public Schools

Approximately **12 responses (≈27%)** directly call for investing in and improving SLPS rather than expanding choice.

Requests include:

- Fund SLPS at higher levels
- Invest like county districts
- Reduce reliance on charters
- Fewer schools, stronger schools
- Reliable neighborhood schools
- Improve literacy and baseline performance
- Make city schools viable so families stay

This theme overlaps with dissatisfaction but is forward-looking and solution-oriented.

C. Equity & Access Concerns

Approximately **10 responses (≈23%)** focus explicitly on inequity.

Concerns include:

- Choice favors families with time/resources
- Racial segregation via gifted testing
- County vs. city funding divide
- Political/geographic funding boundaries
- Tuition-based private schools as default option
- Homeschooling families excluded from resources
- Application complexity disadvantages working families

This reflects structural access barriers rather than school quality alone.

D. Navigation & Application Complexity

Approximately **8 responses (≈18%)** emphasize difficulty navigating:

- Overwhelming number of options
- Confusing application timelines
- Multiple distinct platforms
- Lack of transparency
- Need for simplified centralized system
- Hard-to-find information (PreK, aftercare, summer care)
- Uncertainty about participation in school choice

Navigation stress is a consistent subtheme.

E. Special Education & Student Needs

Approximately **5 responses (≈11%)** explicitly address:

- Charters unable to meet disability needs
- Mental health / trauma supports
- Learning support affordability
- SSD access
- Students being told limited options exist

This aligns with earlier survey sections — families perceive significant gaps in specialized supports.

F. Logistics & Practical Barriers

Approximately **6 responses (≈14%)** focus on:

- Transportation / carpool feasibility
- Aftercare / summer care
- PreK costs
- Staff engagement / turnover transparency
- Extracurricular offerings

These comments highlight real-world constraints beyond academics.

G. Positive or Neutral Remarks

Approximately **5 responses (≈11%)** express:

- Satisfaction with current school
- Praise for specific schools (e.g., LPA)
- Support for school choice
- Appreciation for improvements in application process

Positive sentiment is present but notably smaller than dissatisfaction.

Across all responses, three clear structural tensions appear:

1. Choice vs. Public System Strength

Some respondents strongly defend school choice; many more argue that school choice exists because public schools are not functioning equitably — and that strengthening SLPS would be preferable.

2. Complexity vs. Accessibility

The system is described as:

- Overwhelming
- Fragmented

- Hard to navigate
- Resource-intensive

Families with time, knowledge, and transportation benefit disproportionately.

3. City–County Divide

Multiple comments reference:

- Geographic funding boundaries
- County investment levels
- Migration out of the city
- Political fragmentation

APPENDIX B

Full Poll Results

Demographic Items

Table 34

What is your age? (*age*)

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
18-34	35.9%	34.6%	37.1%
35-44	17.0%	17.4%	16.7%
45-64	29.0%	29.5%	28.4%
65+	18.0%	18.4%	17.7%
Respondents	690	330	360

Table 35

Which of the following best describes your gender identity? (*xdemGender*)

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
Male	47.9%	48.0%	47.7%
Female	52.2%	52.0%	52.4%
Respondents	685	326	359

Table 36

Race/Ethnicity (*xrace_eth*)

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
White (Non-Hispanic)	46.1%	46.0%	46.2%
Hispanic	9.1%	4.2%	13.5%
Black (Non-Hispanic)	35.7%	41.5%	30.4%
Asian + Other (Non-Hispanic)	9.1%	8.3%	9.9%
Respondents	690	330	360

Table 37

What is your current marital status? (*demMarital*)

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
Single, never married	42.9%	44.1%	41.8%

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
Married	32.4%	32.6%	32.3%
Separated	2.8%	2.9%	2.7%
Divorced	8.4%	7.9%	8.8%
Widowed	3.4%	1.7%	4.9%
Living with a partner	10.2%	10.9%	9.5%
Respondents	690	330	360

Table 38

How would you describe your present employment situation? (*xdemEmploy*)

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
Private Sector	36.2%	32.6%	39.5%
Government	4.7%	4.0%	5.4%
Self-Employed	10.3%	10.2%	10.4%
Homemaker	3.8%	4.2%	3.4%
Student	4.1%	5.9%	2.5%
Retired	16.1%	17.2%	15.2%
Unemployed	15.2%	15.4%	15.0%
Other	9.5%	10.4%	8.7%
Respondents	690	330	360

Table 39

Are you the parent or guardian of any children under 18 now living in your household? (*xdemKids*)

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
Yes	36.4%	34.0%	38.6%
No	63.6%	66.0%	61.4%
Respondents	690	330	360

Table 40

Which languages do you speak at home? (*PRIMEdem1*)

Please select all that apply.

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
English	99.3%	99.4%	99.2%
Spanish	5.2%	2.5%	7.6%
French	0.6%	1.0%	0.2%
Other (please specify)	0.9%	0.8%	0.9%
Respondents	690	330	360

Note: Percentages may add to more than 100% due to “select all that apply.”

Languages for “Other (please specify)”:

Language	Responses
Arabic	1
Filipino	1
German	1
Japanese	1
Russian	1

Schooling Opinions

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

Table 41

Public schools in my area are adequately funded. (PRIME1_1)

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
Strongly disagree	18.4%	23.0%	14.1%
Somewhat disagree	18.8%	22.2%	15.7%
Neither agree nor disagree	28.2%	25.7%	30.5%
Somewhat agree	21.9%	18.1%	25.3%
Strongly agree	12.8%	10.9%	14.5%
Respondents	690	330	360

Table 42

Public schools in my area use their funding wisely and efficiently. (PRIME1_2)

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
Strongly disagree	14.0%	19.6%	8.8%
Somewhat disagree	19.3%	22.2%	16.6%
Neither agree nor disagree	31.9%	28.2%	35.3%
Somewhat agree	21.1%	18.7%	23.3%
Strongly agree	13.8%	11.3%	16.1%
Respondents	690	330	360

Table 43
The school system in my area provides enough choice for parents and students. (PRIME1_3)

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
Strongly disagree	9.8%	11.1%	8.7%
Somewhat disagree	16.3%	19.1%	13.7%
Neither agree nor disagree	33.4%	34.2%	32.7%
Somewhat agree	27.3%	25.2%	29.2%
Strongly agree	13.2%	10.4%	15.7%
Respondents	690	330	360

Table 44
The school district in my area provides adequate preparation for college and the workforce.
(PRIME1_4)

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
Strongly disagree	12.6%	16.8%	8.8%
Somewhat disagree	18.3%	21.4%	15.5%
Neither agree nor disagree	31.3%	26.9%	35.3%
Somewhat agree	23.9%	24.9%	23.0%
Strongly agree	13.8%	9.9%	17.4%
Respondents	690	330	360

Table 45
The school district in my area is keeping pace with new technologies like A.I. (PRIME1_5)

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
Strongly disagree	9.6%	10.8%	8.5%
Somewhat disagree	14.2%	16.4%	12.1%
Neither agree nor disagree	43.8%	41.7%	45.7%
Somewhat agree	19.8%	19.2%	20.3%
Strongly agree	12.7%	11.8%	13.4%
Respondents	690	330	360

Table 46
Overall, how satisfied are you with the quality of public schools in your area? (PRIME2)

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
Extremely dissatisfied	13.1%	17.0%	9.5%
Somewhat dissatisfied	22.0%	22.9%	21.1%
Not sure	10.4%	10.0%	10.7%

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
Somewhat satisfied	34.6%	31.3%	37.7%
Extremely satisfied	19.9%	18.8%	21.0%
Respondents	690	330	360

Now, please rate your satisfaction with the following aspects of public schools in your area.

Table 47

Teacher quality. (PRIME3_1)

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
Extremely dissatisfied	9.1%	11.5%	6.9%
Somewhat dissatisfied	14.9%	15.6%	14.3%
Not sure	13.0%	12.2%	13.7%
Somewhat satisfied	35.4%	36.8%	34.2%
Extremely satisfied	27.6%	23.9%	31.0%
Respondents	690	330	360

Table 48

Student safety. (PRIME3_2)

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
Extremely dissatisfied	13.7%	16.1%	11.5%
Somewhat dissatisfied	22.2%	22.5%	21.9%
Not sure	10.5%	10.2%	10.9%
Somewhat satisfied	31.3%	33.4%	29.4%
Extremely satisfied	22.3%	17.8%	26.3%
Respondents	690	330	360

Table 49

Class size. (PRIME3_3)

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
Extremely dissatisfied	7.4%	11.5%	3.6%
Somewhat dissatisfied	18.3%	20.2%	16.5%
Not sure	14.5%	13.0%	15.9%
Somewhat satisfied	35.2%	36.7%	33.9%
Extremely satisfied	24.5%	18.5%	30.0%
Respondents	690	330	360

Table 50
Variety of academic offerings. (PRIME3_4)

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
Extremely dissatisfied	9.2%	11.3%	7.3%
Somewhat dissatisfied	17.4%	21.5%	13.5%
Not sure	15.8%	14.8%	16.7%
Somewhat satisfied	35.2%	32.1%	38.0%
Extremely satisfied	22.5%	20.2%	24.5%
Respondents	690	330	360

Table 51
Variety of extracurricular offerings. (PRIME3_5)

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
Extremely dissatisfied	8.4%	9.0%	8.0%
Somewhat dissatisfied	16.4%	20.5%	12.6%
Not sure	16.3%	15.2%	17.3%
Somewhat satisfied	38.7%	36.4%	40.7%
Extremely satisfied	20.2%	18.9%	21.4%
Respondents	690	330	360

Table 52
Quality of school buildings/facilities. (PRIME3_6)

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
Extremely dissatisfied	8.3%	8.9%	7.8%
Somewhat dissatisfied	22.3%	25.8%	19.2%
Not sure	11.9%	11.3%	12.4%
Somewhat satisfied	36.1%	34.6%	37.5%
Extremely satisfied	21.4%	19.5%	23.2%
Respondents	690	330	360

Table 53
Which of the following statements describes your relationship with schools in St. Louis? (PRIME3a)

Category	Percentage
I was previously enrolled as a student in a school in St. Louis.	29.2%
I currently have or previously had a child enrolled in a school in St. Louis.	34.4%



Category	Percentage
I am related to a child, who is not my own (e.g., niece, nephew, grandchild) who is currently or was previously enrolled in a school in St. Louis.	22.4%
I am currently or was previously employed by a school in St. Louis.	7.2%
None of the above apply to me.	32.7%
Respondents	330

Table 54

Which of the following statements describes your relationship with schools in Kansas City?

(PRIME3b)

Category	Percentage
I was previously enrolled as a student in a school in Kansas City.	28.5%
I currently have or previously had a child enrolled in a school in Kansas City.	35.9%
I am related to a child, who is not my own (e.g., niece, nephew, grandchild) who is currently or was previously enrolled in a school in Kansas City.	24.1%
I am currently or was previously employed by a school in Kansas City.	6.8%
None of the above apply to me.	28.5%
Respondents	360

Table 55

In which grade(s) do you currently have children enrolled in school? (PRIME4)

Please select all that apply.

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
Pre-K	15.4%	17.6%	13.7%
Kindergarten	13.5%	12.0%	14.6%
1st grade	9.8%	12.8%	7.6%
2nd grade	12.9%	15.1%	11.2%
3rd grade	4.8%	6.8%	3.3%
4th grade	13.0%	16.5%	10.4%
5th grade	8.6%	6.4%	10.2%
6th grade	6.6%	7.6%	5.9%
7th grade	3.3%	3.6%	3.1%
8th grade	6.8%	5.5%	7.8%
9th grade	5.8%	10.0%	2.6%
10th grade	4.8%	9.1%	1.5%
11th grade	8.8%	6.8%	10.3%
12th grade	7.5%	11.7%	4.4%
None of the above	18.1%	13.1%	21.9%



Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
Respondents	186	80	106

Note: Percentages may add to more than 100% due to “select all that apply.”

Table 56

Are any of the children living in your household currently homeschooled? (PRIME4a)

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
Yes	26.0%	28.5%	24.0%
No	73.3%	70.0%	76.0%
Unsure	0.7%	1.7%	NA
Respondents	251	112	139

Table 57

Did you have to complete an application to attend this school? (PRIME6)

If you have children at different schools, answer this for the oldest child.

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
Yes	75.1%	73.5%	76.3%
No	24.6%	25.9%	23.5%
Respondents	131	59	72

Please indicate the gender of your child(ren).

Start with oldest to youngest if you have multiple children.

Table 58

Child 1 Gender. (PRIME8_1)

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
Male	52.6%	46.3%	57.5%
Female	45.3%	53.5%	39.1%
Prefer not to say	2.2%	0.8%	3.2%
Respondents	127	55	72

Table 59

Child 2 Gender. (PRIME8_2)

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
Male	52.2%	72.5%	29.3%

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
Female	44.4%	26.4%	64.5%
Prefer not to say	2.8%	1.5%	4.1%
Respondents	51	27	24

Table 60

What is the primary method of transportation to and from your child's school? (PRIME9)

If you have children at different schools, think about the school furthest from where you reside.

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
Walking	2.8%	3.5%	2.2%
Personal vehicle	40.7%	48.3%	34.4%
Carpool with family, neighbors or friends	5.7%	4.4%	6.7%
School-provided bus	43.5%	36.3%	49.4%
School-provided cab or other non-bus transportation	1.0%	NA	1.8%
Public transportation	5.6%	5.9%	5.3%
Other, please specify	0.5%	1.1%	NA
Respondents	131	59	72

Table 61

How long does your child travel daily to or from school (one way, whichever takes longer)?

(PRIME10)

If you have children at different schools, think about the school furthest from where you reside.

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
15 minutes or less	49.8%	45.3%	53.5%
16-30 minutes	39.2%	40.8%	37.8%
31-45 minutes	10.0%	11.9%	8.5%
46-60 minutes	0.7%	1.4%	NA
Respondents	131	59	72

Table 62

What challenges, if any, do you experience with transportation related to getting your child to or from school? (PRIME11)

If you have children at different schools, think about the school furthest from where you reside.

Select all that apply.

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
None	66.2%	62.8%	69.1%
Yes - school-provided transportation is unreliable	18.1%	15.5%	20.2%
Yes - public transportation is unreliable	12.7%	13.4%	12.2%
Other (please specify)	5.2%	8.8%	2.2%
Respondents	131	59	72

Note: Percentages may add to more than 100% due to “select all that apply.”

Please rank the following factors in order of their importance to you when choosing a school for your child(ren). Drag and drop the answer options, with rank 1 representing the most important.

Table 63

Class Sizes. (PRIME12_1)

Rank 1 represents most important.

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
1	21.7%	17.6%	25.1%
2	10.7%	12.5%	9.2%
3	14.2%	15.4%	13.2%
4	13.3%	13.3%	13.2%
5	12.0%	13.5%	10.7%
6	9.1%	3.9%	13.4%
7	3.6%	2.2%	4.8%
8	6.6%	10.0%	3.7%
9	3.8%	5.4%	2.6%
10	4.6%	5.6%	3.9%
Respondents	131	59	72

Table 64
Curriculum and Teaching Methods. (PRIME12_2)
Rank 1 represents most important.

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
1	24.5%	22.8%	25.8%
2	30.8%	35.6%	26.9%
3	20.6%	20.0%	21.2%
4	5.3%	5.3%	5.2%
5	8.7%	6.1%	10.8%
6	0.8%	1.7%	NA
7	4.5%	2.4%	6.2%
8	1.7%	2.7%	0.8%
9	2.9%	2.8%	2.9%
Respondents	131	59	72

Table 65
Test Scores. (PRIME12_3)
Rank 1 represents most important.

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
1	2.0%	2.2%	1.8%
2	13.3%	13.3%	13.3%
3	22.0%	24.9%	19.7%
4	12.6%	10.5%	14.3%
5	10.3%	7.1%	12.9%
6	11.4%	11.4%	11.3%
7	6.6%	8.3%	5.2%
8	11.6%	9.9%	12.9%
9	5.2%	5.7%	4.7%
10	4.8%	6.2%	3.6%
Respondents	131	59	72

Table 66
Safety. (PRIME12_4)
Rank 1 represents most important.

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
1	38.5%	47.7%	30.9%

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
2	9.2%	8.6%	9.7%
3	7.8%	6.1%	9.2%
4	22.4%	21.8%	23.0%
5	5.6%	2.1%	8.5%
6	4.5%	4.3%	4.6%
7	7.8%	5.6%	9.7%
8	3.3%	2.1%	4.3%
10	0.5%	1.1%	NA
Respondents	131	59	72

Table 67

Logistics (Things like proximity to your home, bussing, before and after care, etc.). (PRIME12_5)

Rank 1 represents most important.

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
1	2.8%	3.7%	2.1%
2	8.1%	2.8%	12.4%
3	5.8%	6.1%	5.5%
4	10.2%	14.0%	7.2%
5	18.2%	25.9%	11.8%
6	13.7%	12.3%	14.9%
7	13.3%	15.9%	11.1%
8	11.5%	5.2%	16.6%
9	8.1%	7.4%	8.6%
10	8.0%	6.1%	9.6%
Respondents	131	59	72

Table 68

Student and Staff Diversity. (PRIME12_6)

Rank 1 represents most important.

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
1	1.4%	1.1%	1.7%
2	8.2%	11.4%	5.6%
3	8.6%	8.7%	8.4%
4	13.5%	9.8%	16.5%
5	8.9%	8.7%	9.0%
6	18.7%	20.0%	17.7%
7	13.2%	13.1%	13.2%



8	12.7%	12.2%	13.1%
9	8.7%	10.0%	7.7%
10	5.8%	4.4%	6.9%
Respondents	131	59	72

Table 69
Sense of Belonging. (PRIME12_7)
Rank 1 represents most important.

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
1	5.8%	1.1%	9.7%
2	7.6%	5.2%	9.6%
3	5.8%	4.6%	6.7%
4	8.9%	9.5%	8.5%
5	14.4%	9.5%	18.4%
6	10.8%	16.4%	6.1%
7	20.3%	20.9%	19.7%
8	9.8%	8.4%	10.9%
9	12.7%	18.3%	8.1%
10	3.6%	5.4%	2.2%
Respondents	131	59	72

Table 70
Commitment to Equity and Inclusion. (PRIME12_8)
Rank 1 represents most important.

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
2	2.0%	1.1%	2.7%
3	5.5%	7.6%	3.9%
4	4.7%	5.0%	4.4%
5	4.0%	3.8%	4.1%
6	8.4%	5.5%	10.8%
7	8.5%	12.2%	5.6%
8	25.9%	26.6%	25.3%
9	24.4%	21.5%	26.7%
10	16.3%	16.2%	16.4%
Respondents	131	59	72

Table 71
Social Emotional Learning Supports. (PRIME12_9)
Rank 1 represents most important.

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
1	1.9%	2.1%	1.8%
2	6.7%	6.9%	6.6%
3	8.8%	5.0%	12.0%
4	5.2%	5.9%	4.6%
5	10.6%	14.2%	7.6%
6	8.2%	6.5%	9.6%
7	6.8%	9.4%	4.8%
8	9.4%	16.7%	3.4%
9	25.8%	22.1%	28.8%
10	16.2%	10.7%	20.7%
Respondents	131	59	72

Table 72
Active School Community. (PRIME12_10)
Rank 1 represents most important.

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
1	1.0%	1.1%	0.8%
2	3.0%	2.1%	3.8%
3	0.5%	1.1%	NA
4	3.6%	4.3%	2.9%
5	7.1%	8.4%	6.0%
6	14.1%	17.4%	11.4%
7	15.1%	9.5%	19.6%
8	7.4%	5.7%	8.9%
9	8.1%	6.1%	9.8%
10	39.8%	43.7%	36.6%
Respondents	131	59	72

Table 73
Where do you go to find information about school choices for your children? Please select all that apply. (PRIME13)

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
School choice navigator website	25.6%	24.3%	26.6%
Specific school's website	43.3%	41.5%	44.8%

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
Printed materials	17.9%	12.5%	22.2%
Recruitment events	7.5%	7.7%	7.3%
Google or other search engine(s)	35.4%	32.4%	37.8%
Family and/or friends	41.0%	23.8%	55.0%
School staff	32.2%	36.2%	29.0%
Other parents	21.3%	20.1%	22.3%
The library	9.1%	9.7%	8.6%
Coworkers	6.4%	6.5%	6.4%
Other (please specify)	2.7%	6.0%	NA
Don't know or N/A	2.7%	2.3%	3.1%
Respondents	131	59	72

Note: Percentages may add to more than 100% due to “select all that apply.”

Please rank the information sources you use to learn about school choices for your children by their importance.

Table 74

School choice navigator website. (PRIME13a_1)

Rank 1 represents most important.

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
1	16.6%	11.0%	19.1%
2	51.3%	60.7%	47.1%
3	20.5%	14.8%	23.0%
4	11.2%	16.4%	8.9%
Respondents	26	8	18

Table 75

Specific school's website. (PRIME13a_2)

Rank 1 represents most important.

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
1	48.6%	41.3%	54.2%
2	31.6%	31.7%	31.5%
3	11.6%	21.2%	4.3%
4	3.1%	NA	5.4%
5	3.4%	2.7%	3.9%
7	1.2%	2.7%	NA
Respondents	51	22	29

Table 76
Printed materials. (PRIME13a_3)
Rank 1 represents most important.

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
1	14.2%	NA	20.4%
2	20.5%	34.7%	14.2%
3	34.0%	27.7%	36.7%
4	16.1%	17.9%	15.4%
5	10.4%	14.1%	8.8%
6	3.1%	NA	4.5%
Respondents	23	7	16

Table 77
Recruitment events. (PRIME13a_4)
Rank 1 represents most important.

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
1	22.7%	30.6%	12.8%
2	19.8%	23.7%	14.8%
3	20.2%	36.3%	NA
4	25.3%	NA	57.0%
5	9.9%	NA	22.2%
Respondents	9	5	4

Table 78
Google or other search engine(s). (PRIME13a_5)
Rank 1 represents most important.

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
1	35.2%	46.1%	28.2%
2	27.4%	20.3%	31.9%
3	17.9%	22.0%	15.3%
4	6.9%	4.9%	8.2%
5	7.7%	4.2%	10.0%
6	3.9%	NA	6.4%
Respondents	36	14	22

Table 79
Family and/or friends. (PRIME13a_6)
Rank 1 represents most important.

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
1	27.7%	16.9%	32.7%
2	31.3%	20.9%	36.1%
3	25.1%	38.1%	19.0%
4	10.6%	4.5%	13.4%
5	3.7%	11.6%	NA
6	2.7%	8.4%	NA
Respondents	44	14	30

Table 80
School staff. (PRIME13a_7)
Rank 1 represents most important.

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
1	33.9%	48.9%	22.7%
2	16.5%	22.6%	11.9%
3	37.1%	20.5%	49.6%
4	8.3%	4.2%	11.4%
5	2.2%	NA	3.8%
6	2.8%	6.6%	NA
Respondents	35	15	20

Table 81
Other parents. (PRIME13a_8)
Rank 1 represents most important.

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
1	21.7%	32.9%	14.0%
2	39.8%	57.0%	28.0%
3	11.9%	NA	20.1%
4	22.9%	5.4%	34.9%
5	1.9%	NA	3.2%
6	2.7%	6.6%	NA
Respondents	27	11	16

Table 82
The library. (PRIME13a_9)
Rank 1 represents most important.

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
1	14.2%	NA	31.2%
2	21.8%	22.2%	21.2%
3	24.3%	12.0%	38.9%
4	21.8%	40.0%	NA
5	17.6%	21.3%	13.3%
Respondents	11	6	5

Table 83
Coworkers. (PRIME13a_10)
Rank 1 represents most important.

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
1	11.9%	23.9%	NA
2	12.4%	NA	19.8%
3	30.3%	25.5%	28.0%
4	36.8%	47.1%	21.2%
6	14.2%	NA	22.7%
Respondents	8	4	5

Table 84
Have you applied to any magnet, charter, or other choice school for the 2026-2027 school year?
(PRIME14)

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
Yes	19.9%	23.9%	16.7%
No but still plan to apply	31.1%	26.2%	35.0%
No and do not plan to	49.1%	50.1%	48.3%
Respondents	251	112	139

Table 85
How difficult or easy was the application process? (PRIME15)

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
Somewhat difficult	5.0%	5.7%	4.2%
Neither easy nor difficult	14.4%	19.0%	8.9%

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
Somewhat easy	45.5%	53.4%	36.2%
Extremely easy	35.1%	21.0%	51.6%
Respondents	50	27	23

Table 86

Why are you applying to other schools for the 2026-2027 school year? (PRIME16)

Please select all that apply.

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
My child is not happy with their current school	24.1%	21.9%	25.9%
I want to find a school that is higher performing	31.7%	33.9%	30.0%
My child is transitioning to middle school or high school	29.6%	33.2%	26.8%
My child is just starting school	21.3%	21.9%	20.8%
My family is relocating	15.9%	16.4%	15.4%
Other (please specify)	8.3%	10.5%	6.6%
Respondents	128	56	72

Note: Percentages may add to more than 100% due to “select all that apply.”

Table 87

How confident are you about your knowledge of different school options (e.g., district public schools, charter public schools, magnet public schools, private schools, homeschooling)?

(PRIME21)

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
Not confident at all	9.3%	9.7%	9.0%
Slightly confident	15.8%	19.0%	13.3%
Moderately confident	32.3%	30.7%	33.5%
Very confident	28.0%	32.8%	24.2%
Extremely confident	14.6%	8.0%	20.0%
Respondents	251	112	139

Table 88

How confident are you about your knowledge of the application process for choice schools within your public school system? (PRIME22)

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
Not confident at all	9.2%	11.7%	7.2%
Slightly confident	11.8%	10.8%	12.6%

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
Moderately confident	34.0%	31.6%	35.9%
Very confident	26.8%	32.3%	22.4%
Extremely confident	18.3%	13.8%	22.0%
Respondents	251	112	139

Table 89

What are your preferred channels to receive information about schools you are interested in or may apply to in the future? (PRIME23)

Please select all that apply.

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
Online	57.3%	51.8%	61.8%
Email	60.2%	55.1%	64.3%
Verbally (word-of-mouth)	33.4%	31.1%	35.3%
Flyers sent home with students	26.8%	28.0%	25.9%
Flyers in mail or public places	23.0%	22.6%	23.4%
Billboards or radio advertisements	20.4%	27.0%	15.0%
Other (please specify)	1.3%	3.0%	NA
N/A	5.5%	6.1%	4.9%
Respondents	251	112	139

Note: Percentages may add to more than 100% due to “select all that apply.”

Table 90

What types of informational events would you be interested in participating in regarding schools you are interested in or may apply to in the future? (PRIME24)

Please select all that apply.

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
In-person multi-school informational event	48.3%	41.4%	53.9%
Online multi-school informational event	39.6%	34.4%	43.9%
Individual/family school tours	36.8%	29.1%	43.0%
School open houses for all families	57.2%	55.7%	58.4%
Other (please specify)	0.2%	NA	0.4%
N/A	10.8%	10.5%	11.0%
Respondents	251	112	139

Note: Percentages may add to more than 100% due to “select all that apply.”

Table 91
How long would you travel to a quality school for your child(ren)? (PRIME27)

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
15 minutes or less	26.8%	23.9%	29.1%
16-30 minutes	39.6%	45.9%	34.5%
31-45 minutes	26.3%	23.7%	28.4%
46-60 minutes	5.7%	5.6%	5.8%
Over 60 minutes	1.7%	1.2%	2.1%
Respondents	251	112	139

Table 92
How many children in your household are currently enrolled in school from kindergarten through high school? (PRIME29)

Category	Overall	St. Louis	Kansas City
0	2.6%	5.8%	NA
1	58.4%	47.7%	67.2%
2	29.7%	35.3%	25.1%
3	5.3%	7.5%	3.5%
4	2.0%	1.1%	2.7%
5+	1.7%	2.1%	1.4%
Respondents	131	59	72