

READY, WILLING AND ABLE?

A research report by
Public Agenda,
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Kansas City Parents Talk About How to Improve Schools and What They Can Do to Help



**Ready, Willing and Able?
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How to Improve Schools and
What They Can Do to Help**

A report from Public Agenda by
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Sponsored by the Ewing Marion
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INTRODUCTION

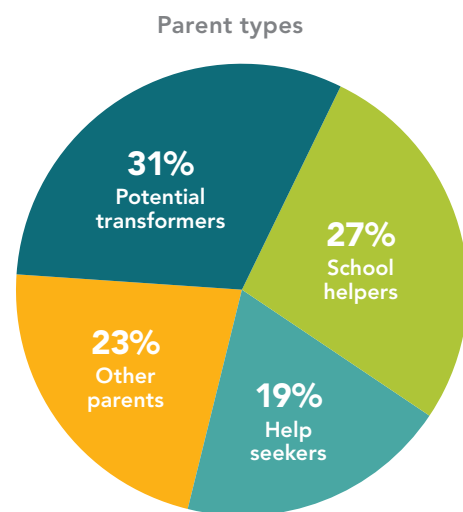
Are parents an untapped resource in improving and reimagining K–12 education in Kansas City? What do they think would enhance student learning and what are they willing to do to help their children get the education they deserve? These are among the questions explored in an in-depth survey of 1,566 parents with children now in public school in the Kansas City metropolitan area. This study finds the majority of parents in the Kansas City area ready, willing and able to be more engaged in their children’s education at some level. For communities to reap the most benefit from additional parental involvement, it is important to understand that different parents can be involved and seek to be involved in different ways.

The results of this research, detailed in the following pages, show that nearly a third of the region’s parents may be ready to take on a greater role in shaping how local schools operate and advocating for reform in K–12 education. These parents say they would be very comfortable serving on committees focused on teacher selection and the use of school resources. Their sense of “parental engagement” extends beyond such traditional activities as attending PTA meetings, coaching sports, volunteering for bake sales, chaperoning school trips and seeing that their children are prepared for school each day. Yet, despite their broad interest in a deeper, more substantive involvement in shaping the region’s school systems, relatively few of these “potential transformers” have actually participated in policy-oriented activities in the past year.

Moreover, this survey finds that even though the majority of parents seem less inclined to jump into school policy debates, many say they could do more to support local schools in the more traditional school parent roles.

This report portrays three distinct groups of parents:

- **“Potential transformers”**—parents who seem ready to play a bigger role in deciding how schools operate;
- **“School helpers”**— parents who say they could do more to help out at the schools their children attend; and
- **“Help seekers”**— parents who are concerned about their own children’s learning and seem to look for more guidance from their schools on how to help their children succeed.



Parents in the Kansas City area share many of the same goals, concerns and ideas about education and the schools, and many (about 23 percent, this study suggests) do not fall explicitly into any one of these three categories. Yet our hope is that understanding more about the characteristic thinking of these three specific groups can help school and district leaders, educators, funders and reformers reach out to them more effectively and plan programs that help them participate in the ways that best fit their needs.

This research also finds that, to some extent, parents' views and experience differ across school districts. Since

Kansas City Public Schools (KCPS), formerly the Kansas City Missouri School District, lost its accreditation in 2012, and since it is the only district in the region that allows charter schools, we take a special look (summarized in section five of this report) at the distinctive set of experiences and concerns among KCPS parents. For example, the survey shows—not surprisingly, perhaps—that KCPS parents are particularly frustrated with the public schools and worried about their children's education. At the same time, they remain optimistic that the right initiatives can mobilize parents to get more involved in their children's education and help change the public schools.

ABOUT THE STUDY

"Ready, Willing and Able?" is based on 1,566 telephone surveys with a representative sample of parents whose children attend public schools in one of five Kansas City counties: Jackson, Cass, Clay and Platte counties in Missouri and Wyandotte County in Kansas. These counties were chosen to represent the geographic and socioeconomic diversity of the Kansas City metropolitan area. Interviews were conducted from May 31 to July 3, 2012, by Clark Research, Inc., using both landline and cellular telephones, and respondents had the choice of completing the interviews in English or Spanish.

Statistical results reported here are weighted to balance the sample to known demographic characteristics of families with children under 18 in the region. The margin of sampling error for the complete set of weighted data is plus or minus 3.6 percentage points. It is higher, however, when comparing subgroups, or in questions that were asked of only some respondents. In addition to the survey, Public Agenda conducted eight focus groups with parents in the region. The methodology section at the end of this report provides detailed information on the study's methodology and data analysis.



Kansas City Parents Overall: Lackluster Reviews for Schools, but No Strong Impetus for Action



Parents in the Kansas City region see education and youth development as key challenges in raising their children, but most are not involved in local schools beyond the traditional support roles of attending PTA meetings and volunteering for events at the schools their own children attend. The question this study explores is the degree to which parents are prepared to take on more active roles advocating for the policies and practices they believe would improve schools and enhance student learning.

On the surface, the results of our survey seem to suggest that many parents might be ready to enlist in more assertive efforts to improve local schools. After all, fewer than 1 in 3 parents (30 percent) say local schools have been improving in recent years. Most say there hasn't been much change (39 percent), or the schools have actually gotten worse (29 percent). In fact, barely half of parents in the survey (53 percent) say they would keep their children in the schools they currently attend if money were not an issue. Forty-six percent would prefer a different option—either a private school (29 percent) or moving to a neighborhood with better public schools (17 percent)—which is not exactly a ringing endorsement of school systems in the region.

From criticism to action?

But do parents' doubts about the quality of local schools lead them to become forceful advocates for change in the system? Not necessarily. This survey shows about two-thirds believe that if parents like them came together as an advocacy group, they could successfully push for improvements in the local school system. At the same time, far fewer seem prepared or predisposed to take on advocacy roles personally. Some do; the "potential transformers" described in the next section do seem poised for action. But the majority of parents seem more inclined to confine their activities to more traditional school support roles.

Full survey results can be found at the end of this report.

The following are some of the factors that may shed light on why so few parents seem immediately drawn to political action in education.

1. Despite their lackluster marks for schools overall, most parents have much more positive attitudes about how principals and teachers perform in key areas.

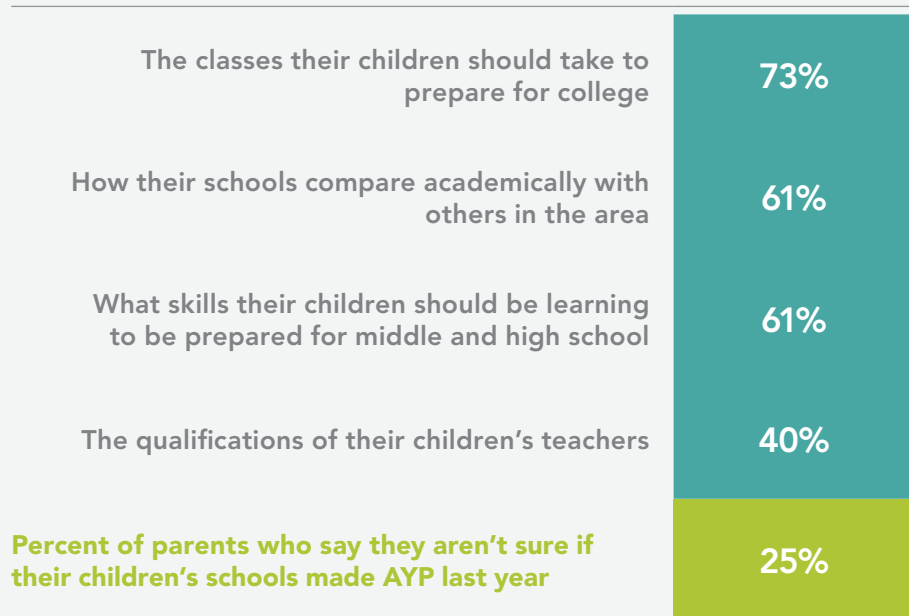
For example, 77 percent say the principals and teachers in the school their child attends are connected to the community and have a good feel for what is going on, and 71 percent say there is someone at their child's school who gives them good advice on helping their child with schoolwork. Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) say their school goes out of its way to encourage parents to get involved, and more than half (54 percent) say they can trust their school's principal and teachers to do what's right, although 39 percent say they have doubts on this score and need to keep their eyes on what's happening in their children's education.

2. Many parents lack knowledge about important school issues.

Even though the majority of parents consider themselves reasonably well informed about how their children's schools rank academically compared to others in the area, a substantial minority (37%) do not feel that way. Moreover, only 40 percent of all parents say they know "a lot" about the qualifications of their children's teachers, and a quarter are unsure whether or not their child's school made AYP (adequate yearly progress) the previous year.

A substantial number of parents lack knowledge of important school issues.

Percent of parents who say they know "a lot" about:

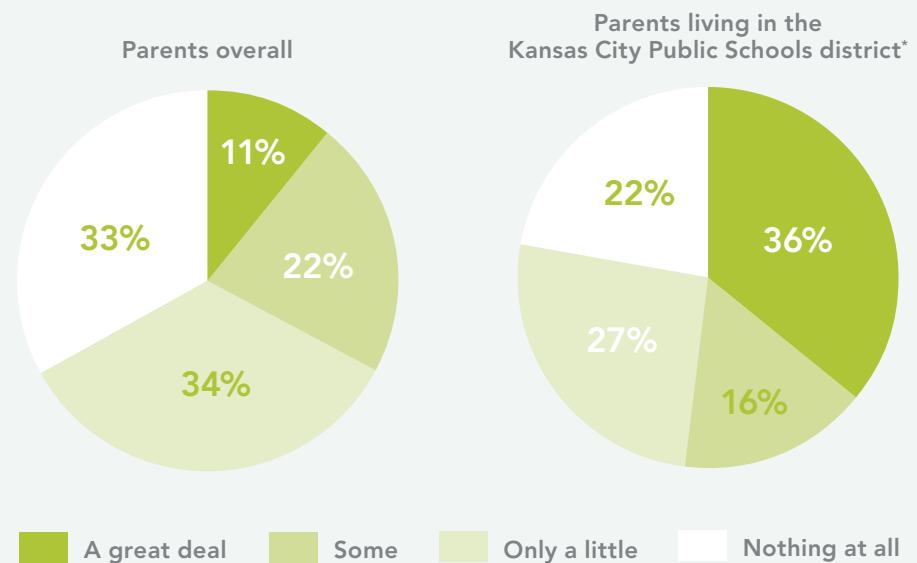


3. Parents aren't broadly informed about charter schools, and many don't necessarily view them as better alternatives to regular public schools.

In the greater Kansas City region, only Kansas City Public Schools (KCPS) offers parents the option of sending their children to charter schools. Even so, given the intensity and level of national debate about charters, it is perhaps somewhat surprising that just 1 in 10 parents in the region (11 percent) say they know a great deal about them. And even among those who see themselves as reasonably knowledgeable about charters, only 4 in 10 (39 percent) say they do a better job than regular public schools when it comes to having high academic standards and expectations. Most parents in the region say the local public schools are either the same (33 percent) or better (12 percent) than charter schools, or they simply admit they don't know (17 percent). The results are similar when parents are asked to compare charter and traditional public schools on preparing children for college and engaging parents in their children's education. In fact, having smaller classes is the only area where charter schools clearly outscore traditional public schools. According to an assessment by the Missouri State Department of Education,¹ most KCPS charter schools do not meet state performance standards, and our survey suggests most parents indeed don't view them as an unambiguously better alternative to traditional public schools.

Most parents know only a little or nothing at all about charter schools.

How much do you know about charter schools?



Base: All parents, including four percent of parents in the overall sample whose children attend a charter school.

*Slices in some pie charts may not total to 100 due to rounding.

¹Heather Staggers and Laura McCallister, "Charter Schools Get Mixed Report Card from State Performance Standards," KCTV, August 28, 2012, <http://www.kctv5.com/story/19278049/charter-schools-get-mixed-report-card-from-state-perfor>.

Parents don't think charter schools are necessarily a better alternative to regular public schools.

Which schools do a better job when it comes to...?

| | Charters | Regular public schools | About the same | Don't know |
|---|----------|------------------------|----------------|------------|
| Having smaller classes | 53% | 7% | 23% | 17% |
| Having high academic standards and expectations | 39% | 12% | 33% | 17% |
| Engaging parents in their children's education | 37% | 8% | 37% | 19% |
| Preparing children for college | 31% | 12% | 39% | 18% |



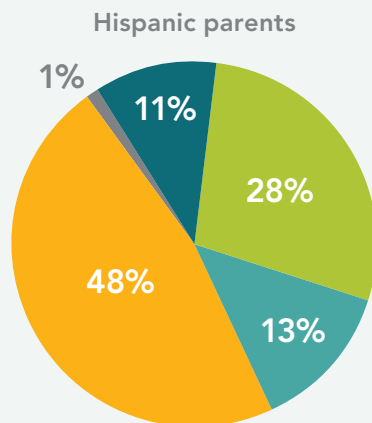
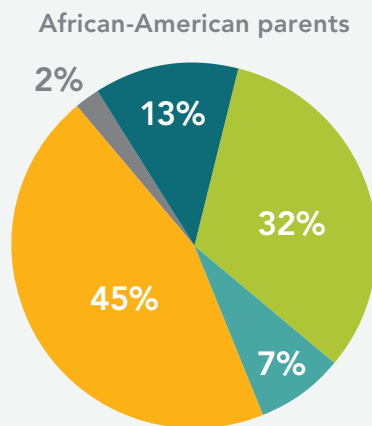
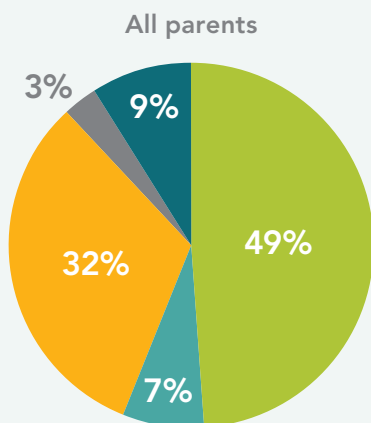
4. Many parents say they are already doing just about as much as they can at their children’s schools, and many don’t feel they have the time to get more involved. Notably, nearly a quarter say they have not been invited to be more involved.

Nearly half of parents (48 percent) say they are now doing as much as they can to be involved at their children’s schools—that they couldn’t do more even if they tried harder. Even more (63 percent) say they are doing as much as they can to support their children’s learning at home. Perhaps reflecting the pace of modern family life, half of parents say the best way for schools and teachers to communicate with them about their children’s academic progress is through email. Just 3 in 10 (32 percent) opt for face-to-face meetings, while just 9 percent prefer phone calls. African-American and Hispanic parents are more likely to prefer face-to-face meetings (favored by 45 percent and 48 percent, respectively), and about 1 in 3 of both groups say email is the best way to contact them (32 percent and 28 percent, respectively).

Parents most commonly say that work is the major reason they can’t be more involved at their children’s schools. The survey does, however, suggest one other telling reason why some parents aren’t more involved in activities at their child’s school: no one asks them to be. A quarter (24 percent) say that in the past year, they’ve never been asked to help out or volunteer at the school.

Parents differ in how they prefer to communicate with their children’s schools.

Other than report cards, which of the following is the best way for your child’s school and teachers to update you on your child’s academic progress?



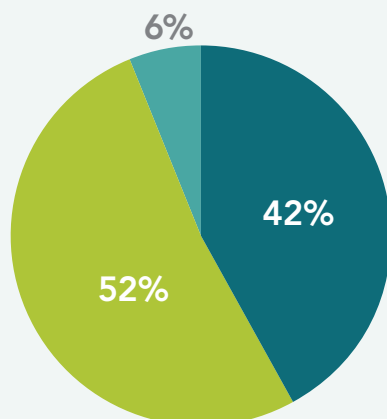
5. Many parents don't see greater parental involvement in school policy as necessarily the best way to improve schools.

Asked to choose between two ideas for improving schools—having parents more involved in setting school policies versus having them more involved in their children's education at home by, for example, limiting television and checking homework—more parents say focusing on what happens at home would do more to improve the public schools, by a 52 to 42 percent margin (6 percent say they are unsure). And, given a choice among three ideas for improving local schools—more money, better teachers, or more parental involvement—only a third (34 percent) of the parents opt for parental involvement. Just as many (34 percent) say more money would do the most to improve their children's schools, while 27 percent say better teachers are what's needed. To be clear, these findings do not mean most parents think in-school parent involvement is a bad idea or won't help to improve schools; it is just not the No. 1 priority for them.

Many parents think that getting parents more involved in their children's education at home is the best way to improve the local schools.

Which of the following will do more to improve the public schools?

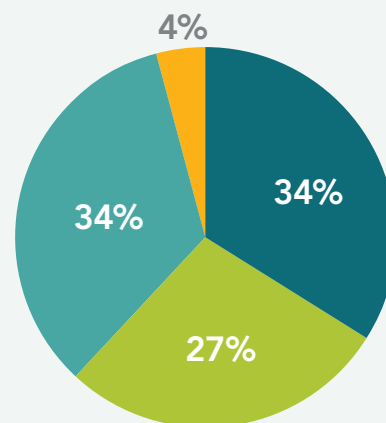
- Getting parents directly involved in running the school so that parents have some say over who the school hires and how money is spent
- Getting parents more involved in their children's education at home by such things as limiting television and checking homework
- Don't know



Parents are split on whether better teachers, more money or more parental involvement would do most to improve their children's school.

In your view, which of these three things would do the most to improve your child's school?

- More money
- Better teachers
- More parental involvement
- Don't know



6. For most parents, a good education is crucial to their children’s future, but making sure they get a good education is not the only challenge they face—and it is not the only factor they believe counts in whether their children will thrive as adults.

More than 4 in 10 parents in the Kansas City metropolitan region (43 percent) say that making sure their children get a good education is the biggest challenge they face in raising them. Other parents see other challenges as more pressing, however. Nearly 4 in 10 (38 percent) say their greatest worry is protecting their children from negative influences, and another 16 percent say it’s trying to make ends meet. Nor is education itself seen as the sole or predominant factor in helping children become successful as adults. Although more than a third (35 percent) of the parents surveyed pick getting a college education as the best way to ensure a young person succeeds in the world today, for 37 percent, a good work ethic is the most important factor. For 25 percent, “knowing how to get along with people” is the best way of ensuring success.

What to take away from these findings

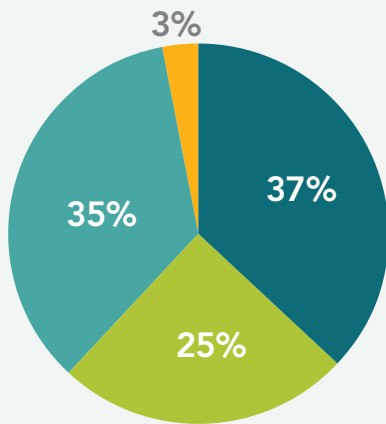
These prevailing views among parents don’t mean it is impossible to get them more involved in advocating for better schools and advancing policies they think will lead to better learning. But the cluster of attitudes does shed light on why, despite having a fairly broad sense that local schools aren’t improving quickly, many parents are not ready to storm the barricades. Many see other issues and problems as more important to raising their children successfully and other kinds of changes—getting more parents more involved at home, for example—as more effective remedies.

What’s more, although many parents have concerns about the schools overall, most parents report positive relationships with teachers and administrators at their own children’s schools. This doesn’t mean they don’t care about school improvement or that they don’t have important views and ideas leaders need to consider. It does mean, however, that even though many parents aren’t giving local schools top grades, activating broad swaths of them will not be easy.

For many parents, college is not necessarily the top factor in helping young people become successful in the world.

If you had to choose the one thing that can most help a young person succeed in the world today, would you say it is...?

- A good work ethic
- Knowing how to get along with people
- A college education
- Don't know





The Potential Transformers:

Parents Who Would Like More Say in their Children's Schools and are Poised to Take Action



While the majority may not be ready to take action on school reform, according to our analysis about 3 in 10 school parents (31 percent) are. These “potential transformers” are parents who seem ready to serve on committees deciding important policies in their children’s schools—such as how to spend the schools’ money, which teachers to hire, and how to handle student discipline—and willing to get involved in activities taking place beyond their own children’s school buildings. All the parents in this group say they would be very comfortable meeting with district administrators to seek improvements at their children’s schools or contacting local newspapers or radio stations to share their views on public education.

Typical in some respects...

How do attitudes and experiences among this potentially active group compare to those of other parents? For one thing, potential transformers don’t seem markedly more successful than other parents in teaching their own children always to do their best in school; about half (48 percent) say they “still have work to do” in that respect. Only about half (53 percent) say their children love to read. Most of the other parents report checking every day to make sure their children are completing homework, and potential transformers are only slightly more likely to say they do so. At the end of the day, this group of parents seems to face the same challenges as others in promoting study and learning at home.

Potential transformers also share key demographic characteristics with other parents, having comparable levels of education, employment status and income. They are more likely to be African-American than other parents, however: 26 percent of potential transformers identify as African-American or black, compared to 17 percent of other parents.

...but distinct on key attributes

Potential transformers differ from other parents by being better informed about some important aspects of education. For example, 73 percent say they know how their children’s schools compare academically to other schools in the area; only 56 percent of the other parents say they know this. Potential transformers are also more likely to say they know “a lot” about the qualifications of their children’s teachers and what

Potential transformers face the same challenges as other parents in promoting study and learning at home.

Percent of parents who say:



They check their children's homework every day



Reading is something their children love to do



There is still work to be done teaching their children to do their best in school



Potential transformers are better informed about some important aspects of education.

Percent of parents who say they know "a lot" about:



The classes their children should take to prepare for college



What skills their children should be learning to be prepared for middle and high school



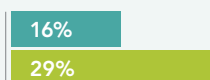
How their schools compare academically with others in the area



The qualifications of their children's teachers



Percent of parents who say they are not sure if their children's schools made AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) last year:



Full survey results can be found at the end of this report.

classes their children need to prepare for college. Finally, they are less likely than other parents to say they're "not sure" about the AYP (adequate yearly progress) status of their children's schools.

Potential transformers' views on the charter school movement are mixed. They are not more likely than other parents to have children currently attending charter schools, and, overall, their views on charters are quite similar to the views of other parents. They are, however, more likely to be very interested in having their children attend charter schools—22 percent say they are, compared to only 13 percent of parents generally.

The views of parents in this group may surprise reform leaders and advocates in one respect. While apparently more willing to take action to improve education, they are not more dissatisfied than other parents with local schools; rather, they are actually somewhat more upbeat about them. Potential transformers are more likely to say their children's teachers and school administrators are "excellent" when it comes to communicating about the academic progress of their children (52 percent say this, compared to 36 percent of other parents). They're also more likely to say their child's school "goes out of its way to encourage parents to get involved in the school" (71 percent, compared to 60 percent). And potential transformers are more likely to say the local public schools have been getting better (36 percent versus 27 percent). Though not especially so, they are somewhat more likely than other parents to believe that if parents came together as an advocacy group to push for school improvements, they could make a difference (72 percent versus 64 percent).

Most still standing in the wings

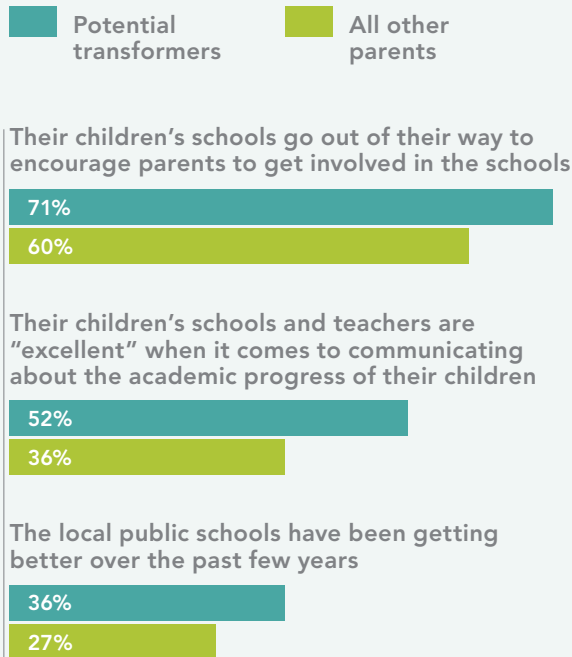
One important message from this survey, however, is that while all of the parents in the potential transformers group may be ready to get more involved in activities to change school policies, most have not done so. Just 1 in 5 (21 percent) have served on committees deciding major school policies, such as how to spend money or which teachers to hire. Only 24 percent have served on committees looking at school discipline issues. Only 19 percent have contacted local media to voice their views on local education, while 31 percent say they've met with district officials to seek improvements at their children's schools. Although these figures are higher than they are for the other parents, they are low considering that all parents in this group say they would be very comfortable participating in more robust kinds of advocacy. For now, potential transformers mainly engage in the same kinds of activities as other parents such as volunteering to help out at school events and attending PTA meetings.

Half of potential transformers say they could be more involved at their children's schools if they tried harder. And here is the most important takeaway: this group of parents responds more positively than the others to every idea we tested for increasing parental involvement. These included, among others, offering parents workshops to train them to advocate for school reform, asking employers to give working parents more flexibility and publicizing more data so parents can compare schools on spending, student achievement and teacher quality.

In sum, the message for anyone hoping to enlist these parents in efforts to improve local schools is that they are comfortable taking action, knowledgeable and upbeat and optimistic about a number of ideas for increasing parental involvement. And, as of now, they have yet to enter the arena in large numbers.

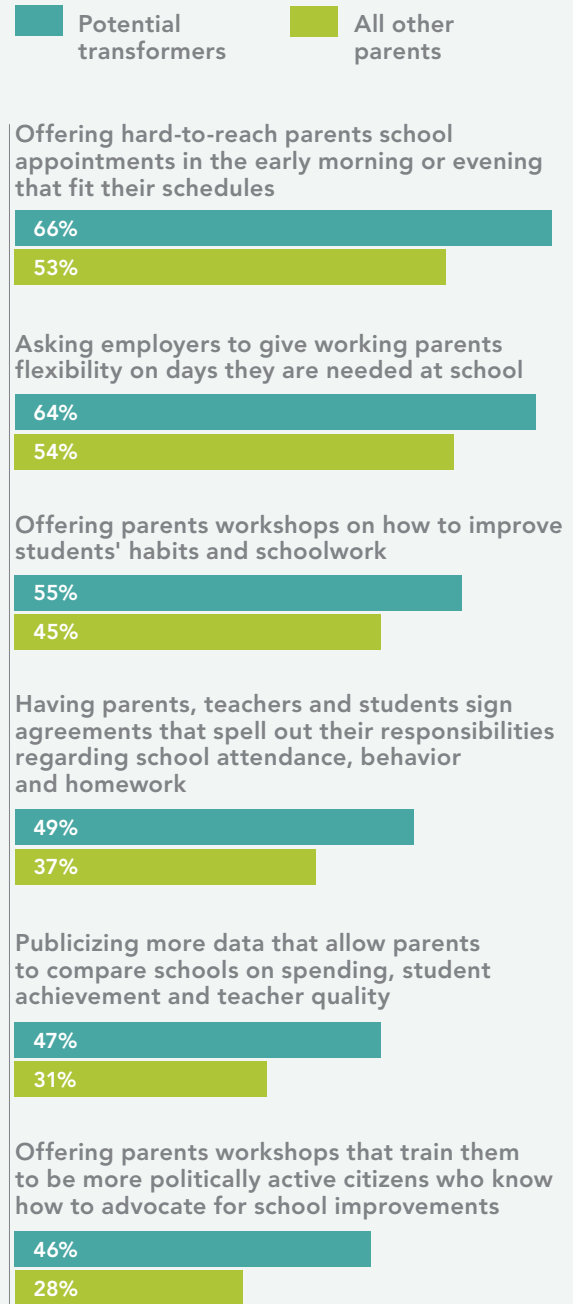
Potential transformers are more upbeat about their children's schools.

Percent of parents who say:



Potential transformers are more optimistic about various potential initiatives to increase parent involvement.

Percent of parents who say the following ideas would improve parental involvement "a great deal":





The School Helpers:

Parents Who Want to Help Out More in Traditional Ways at their Children's Schools



More than a quarter (27 percent) of parents in the Kansas City area qualify as “school helpers.” They have more traditional views than potential transformers about what parental involvement means, and, at least as of now, very few seem interested in activities designed to change school policies. Even so, all school-helper parents say they could be more involved at their own children’s schools if they tried harder. And they all say they would feel very comfortable with helping teachers in the classroom or joining forces with other parents to organize events and activities, or both. School helpers, as defined in this study, are unlikely advocates and transformers, but they are still an underutilized resource for local schools that seek more everyday supports and incremental improvements.

Already doing a lot

School helpers are already a pretty active lot. Nearly three-quarters (73 percent) report that in the past year they have volunteered for school activities like bake sales and sporting events; 6 in 10 report having attended PTA meetings. Nevertheless, all these parents say they could be more involved in their children’s schools than they currently are.

As might be expected, school helpers are most likely to believe that “more parental involvement” is the best way to improve their children’s schools, with 42 percent saying this, while 32 percent opt for “more money,” and 23 percent focus on “better teachers.”

While most parents in the study rate their children’s teachers and administrators as trustworthy and likeable, school helpers hold particularly positive views of them. More than 6 in 10 (63 percent) say they trust their children’s principals and teachers to do what’s right, compared to 50 percent of all other parents. More than 8 in 10 school helpers (85 percent) say their children’s principals and teachers are “connected to the community and have a good feel for what’s going on.”

School helpers are particularly positive about their schools' teachers and administrators.

Percent of parents who say:

School helpers **All other parents**

Principals and teachers have a good feel for what's going on in the community



They trust their principals and teachers to do what's right when it comes to their children



More parental involvement is the best way to improve their children's schools*



*Parents were asked to choose, from three options, the one they believed would do the most to improve their child's school (Q10). The options were: 1) More parental involvement, 2) Better teachers, or 3) More money.

Although school helpers are similar to other parents in terms of education levels and ethnicity, they are more likely to be members of two-parent households (71 percent, compared to 61 percent of other parents). They are also more likely to be in households with higher incomes.

Less drawn to policy or politics

A key message from the survey is that while school helpers say they can do even more than they are already doing in the traditional areas of school involvement, they are less attracted to activities that veer toward policy or politics. Only 30 percent say they would feel very comfortable speaking with district leaders about ways to improve their children's schools, and only 23 percent say they would feel very comfortable serving on a committee to decide policies, such as which teachers to hire or how to spend the school's money. Just 26 percent say that offering parents workshops to train them to advocate for school reform would help improve parental involvement a great deal.

In short, these parents are open to more engagement, but their focus is on traditional activities, such as volunteering at the school and working with students in other ways.



The Help Seekers: Parents Concerned About Their Own Children's Learning



Nearly 1 in 5 (19 percent) of the parents surveyed in the Kansas City area qualify as “help seekers.” These parents are concerned about their own children’s performance and success in school, and they are more critical of and disconnected from their children’s schools, teachers and principals than other parents. While it is not unusual for parents to voice some level of concern or doubt about children’s learning—about half of those in the survey say there is still work to be done in teaching their children to do their best in school—all of the parents in the help-seekers group hold this view. Moreover, they voice a troubling set of worries about their children’s schools and teachers on top of that concern. These parents aren’t potential transformers, and they don’t think they could be any more involved at their children’s schools than they already are. Instead, they seem to be waiting to see more determined and genuine efforts on the part of teachers and administrators to help their children succeed.

Less trust in their children’s schools and teachers

Help seekers are more likely than other parents to say their local public schools have been getting worse (36 percent, compared to 27 percent), and they are less likely to say they would like their children to stay in their current schools (just 43 percent, versus 56 percent). Of all the parent groups examined here, help seekers are the least likely to say they trust their children’s teachers and principals to do what’s right; fewer than 4 in 10 (39 percent) say this, compared to 57 percent of all other parents. Help seekers are also less likely to believe their children’s teachers and principals have a good feel for the community, that they encourage and welcome parental involvement, or that they deserve top ratings for communicating about their children’s academic progress. Possibly contributing to some of their frustrations, help seekers are more likely than other parents to say their children have been diagnosed with learning disabilities (25 percent say this, compared to 13 percent of other parents). Finally, parents in this group are somewhat more likely to say they’re very interested in having their children attend charter schools.

Help seekers are more critical about their children's schools.

Percent of parents who say:

Help seekers All other parents

Their children's schools are "excellent" when it comes to communicating about the academic progress of their children



They trust the principals and teachers to do what's right when it comes to their children



They would stay with their current schools if money were not an issue



Their children's schools go out of their way to encourage parents to get involved in the school



Principals and teachers have a good feel for what's going on in the community



The local public schools have gotten worse over the past few years



They are interested in their children attending charter schools



Help seekers feel less comfortable taking on responsibilities at their children's schools or as education advocates.

Percent of parents who say they would feel "very comfortable" taking on the following roles and responsibilities:

Help seekers All other parents

Volunteering with activities such as school trips, bake sales or sporting events



Sitting in to observe their children's classrooms



Helping to monitor the hallways, lunchroom or playground



Attending PTA meetings



Meeting with district administrators to ask for improvements at their children's schools



Serving on a committee deciding school policies like budgets and hiring



Serving on a committee deciding school policy on student discipline



Sharing their views about the public schools through local media



Help seekers are also substantially less likely than other parents to say they feel very comfortable doing traditional parental involvement activities, like volunteering at the school for bake sales and sporting events (60 percent, compared to 83 percent). While most parents say they feel very comfortable observing in their children's classrooms, attending PTA meetings or helping monitor hallways or playgrounds, less than half of the help seekers say this. In nearly every circumstance covered in the survey, help seekers seem more dissatisfied with and somewhat more alienated from their children's schools.

Help seekers are not absentee parents, though. In many respects, they are as likely or unlikely as other parents to have gotten involved in various ways in the past year, even though they feel less comfortable in these roles. Moreover, half say they have met more than three or four times during the school year with their children's teachers to discuss the students' academic progress. A quarter say they have met with their child's teachers five or more times in the past school year. They also say they check homework at least as often as other parents.

The help seekers would seem to pose a special challenge for school leaders in a number of respects. They feel more disillusioned with the schools than the other groups of parents, but very few of the ideas to increase parental involvement tested in the survey seem to respond to their needs. Only one—asking employers to give working parents flexibility on days when they are needed at school—attracted a majority endorsement; 53 percent of help seekers say this change would improve parental involvement a great deal. In contrast, only 40 percent say having “parents, teachers and students sign agreements that spell out their responsibilities on school attendance, behavior and homework” would improve involvement a great deal. Just 31 percent believe “publicizing more data that allow parents to compare schools on spending, student achievement and teacher quality” would help a great deal. Help seekers' views on these ideas stand in particularly stark contrast to those of our potential transformers, who (as described above) are especially upbeat about most of these initiatives.

Help seekers are somewhat more likely than other parents to live in urban neighborhoods and to have only completed a high school or GED degree. Even so, 54 percent have some college experience.

So what would make a difference?

In many respects, help seekers seem to be searching for a connection and type of communication and involvement with their children's schools that's not immediately clear from this survey, and finding out more about the sources of their skepticism or mistrust may warrant more research. Clearly, they are generally less satisfied than other parents with many aspects of their schools; it's also clear—perhaps because of their doubts about the schools—that these parents are far less comfortable taking on the roles that potential transformers and school helpers are ready to take on. Moreover, most help seekers believe they are already doing as much as they possibly can at their children's schools. Nevertheless, every one of these parents feels there is more work to be done to help their children succeed in school. This study suggests that, given the right supports and opportunities, this group could be more engaged.

In many respects, help seekers are as likely (or unlikely) as other parents to have gotten involved.

Percent of parents who did the following in the past school year:

■ Help seekers ■ All other parents

Attended PTA meetings



Volunteered with activities such as school trips, bake sales or sporting events



Sat in to observe their children's classroom



Met with district administrators to ask for improvements at their children's schools



Served on a committee deciding school policy on student discipline



Helped to monitor the hallways, lunchroom or playground



Served on a committee deciding school policies like budgets and hiring



Shared their views about the public schools through local media

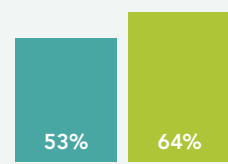


More flexibility for working parents is a favorite reform idea, but overall help seekers remain skeptical about most initiatives to improve parental involvement, especially when compared to the potential transformers.

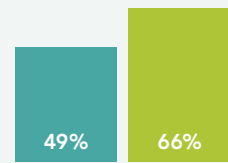
Percent of parents who say the following ideas would improve parent involvement "a great deal":

■ Help seekers ■ Potential transformers

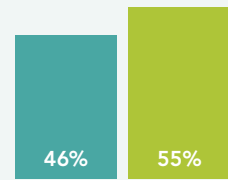
Asking employers to give working parents flexibility on days they are needed at school



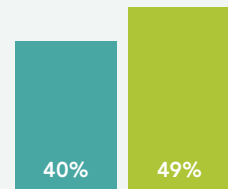
Offering hard-to-reach parents school appointments in the early morning or evening that fit their schedule



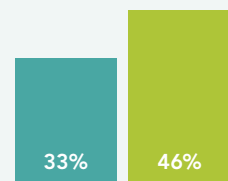
Offering parents workshops on how to improve students' habits and schoolwork



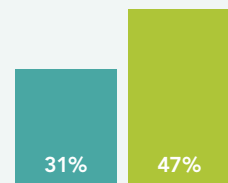
Having parents, teachers and students sign agreements that spell out their responsibilities regarding school attendance, behavior and homework



Offering parents workshops that train them to be more politically active citizens who know how to advocate for school improvements



Publicizing more data that allow parents to compare schools on spending, student achievement and teacher quality



SUMMARIES

of group characteristics

Potential transformers...

- would be very comfortable serving on committees to decide school policies;
- would be very comfortable contacting local media to share their views about the public schools and meeting with district administrators to ask for improvements at their children's schools;
- are confident that if parents came together as an advocacy group they could push for improvements in the local school systems;
- are most optimistic that interventions and initiatives to improve parental involvement overall can lead to great success;
- are most informed about key education quality indicators; and
- give their children's schools high marks for parental engagement.

But...

- the majority of potential transformers have yet to act. Even though they all feel comfortable advocating for school improvement, most say they haven't done so in the past year.

School helpers...

- are already active volunteers at their children's schools;
- feel very comfortable helping teachers, monitoring hallways and organizing events with other parents; and
- are most likely to trust principals and teachers to do what's right when it comes to their children.

Moreover...

- school helpers all say they could be even more involved in their children's schools if they tried hard.

But...

- these parents don't—yet—feel comfortable taking on advocacy roles.

Help seekers...

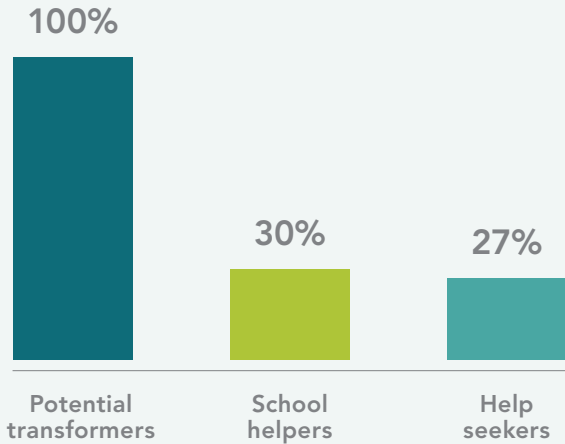
- say they haven't yet succeeded in helping their children to do their best in school;
- are least likely to say they trust teachers and principals to do what is right when it comes to their children;
- are most dissatisfied with the way schools communicate with them about their children's academic progress;
- are least likely to feel their children's schools welcome parental involvement;
- say they are already as involved in their schools as they possibly can be; and,
- like school helpers, do not feel very comfortable taking on advocacy roles.

But...

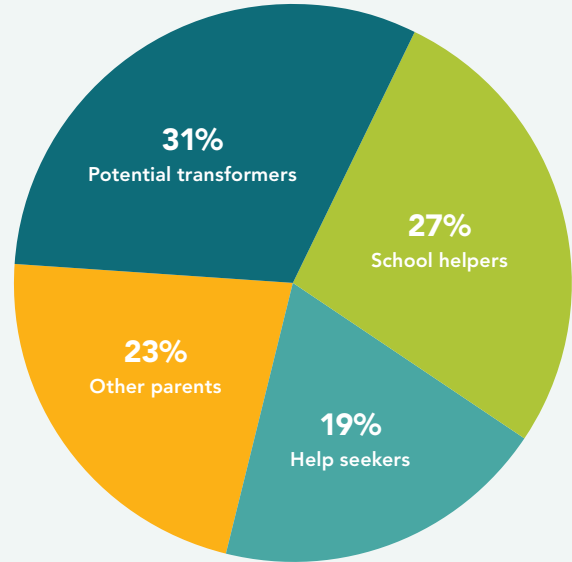
- these parents are present at their children's schools and are possibly looking for more support from teachers and school leaders to help them help their children succeed.

This typology is based on data collected through a representative telephone survey of 1,566 parents from the Kansas City metropolitan area whose children attend public schools. Interviews were conducted by Clark Research, Inc., from May 31 to July 3, 2012. Public Agenda designed the questionnaire and analyzed the data. The full research report is available at: <http://www.publicagenda.org/pages/ready-willing-and-able>

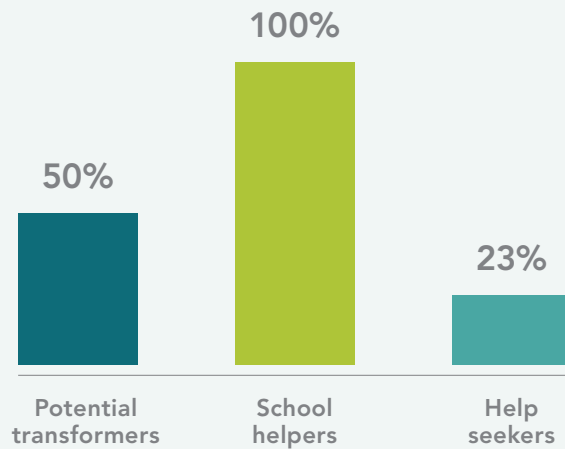
Percent of parents who would feel "very comfortable" meeting with district administrators to ask for school improvements



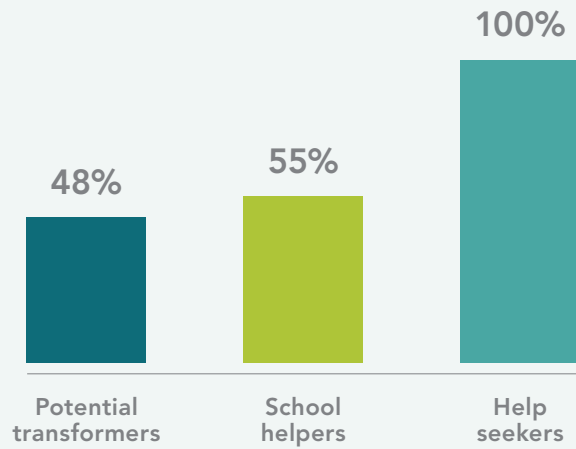
Parent types



Percent of parents who say they could be more involved at their children's schools if they tried



Percent of parents who say there's "still work to be done" teaching their children to always do their best in school





Special Focus on the Views and Experiences of Parents in the Kansas City Public Schools District



Kansas City Public Schools (KCPS), formerly the Kansas City Missouri School District, covers most of inner Kansas City, Missouri, and has had a different experience over the past decade than the school districts surrounding it. It operated with provisional accreditation after 2002, and since January 2012 has operated without accreditation at all. It is also the only district in the metropolitan area that allows charter schools—in fact, about a third of children living there attend them, one of the highest proportions in the country. It has struggled with problems common to urban districts throughout the nation: depopulation, declining tax revenues and budgets, poverty and school closings. Given this context, it was of particular interest to this study to gain a better understanding of KCPS parents' experiences and views, their relationships with their schools and readiness to get involved. To this end, we here compare survey responses from KCPS parents to those from parents who live in other, mostly suburban, parts of Jackson County, Missouri.

Deeply concerned...

This research finds—perhaps not surprisingly— that KCPS parents are more worried than their counterparts in other Jackson County districts about their children's education. About half say their biggest challenge in raising their children is making sure they get a good education, and 54 percent say their local public schools have gotten worse over the past few years. Maybe the best indication of their concern is that just 4 in 10 KCPS parents would keep their children in their current schools if money were not an issue. The rest say they would prefer moving to other neighborhoods or enrolling their children in private schools. In contrast, the majority of parents in other Jackson County districts say they would not change schools.

KCPS parents are more worried about their schools than other Jackson County parents.

Percent of parents who say:



Local public schools have gotten worse in the past few years



Making sure their children get a good education is the biggest challenge of raising their children*



They would stay with their children's current schools if money were not an issue



*Parents were asked to choose, from three options, the one they believed was the biggest challenge in raising their children (Q6). The options were: 1) Trying to protect your child from negative influences, 2) Trying to make sure your child gets a good education, or 3) Trying to make ends meet as a family.

KCPS parents rate charter schools better than regular public schools on many counts.

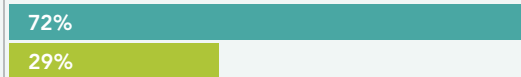
Percent of parents who say that charter schools do a better job than regular public schools when it comes to:



Having smaller classes



Having high academic standards and expectations



Preparing children for college



Engaging parents in their children's education



...yet not alienated from their schools

Despite their concerns, KCPS parents give their children's teachers and administrators positive ratings. Like other Jackson County parents, the vast majority feel they have a good sense for what's going on in their communities (77 percent) and rate them "good" if not "excellent" on communicating with parents (75 percent). Most say they trust their teachers to do what's right for their children (61 percent). KCPS parents are even more likely than other Jackson County parents to know someone at school who can give them advice when their children need help (86 percent versus 73 percent).

Moreover, a third of KCPS parents have children in charter schools (a choice not available to other Jackson County parents), and they give charters much higher marks—for academic quality, college preparation and involving parents—than other Jackson County parents do.

Ready to take on more active roles

Many KCPS parents seem ready to take on more active roles to help their schools and other district schools improve. The majority (62 percent) believe that if parents like them came together, they could successfully push for improvements in the local school system. And 1 in 4 (26%) are what we have called in this study “potential transformers”—parents ready to serve on committees that decide school policy and to become advocates for change at the district level.

Another 25 percent of KCPS parents qualify as “school helpers”—those parents who say that if they tried harder they could be more involved at their children’s schools and are particularly valuable resources for schools to tap into. These parents already feel very comfortable (and have experience) with such day-to-day school activities as monitoring the halls, helping in the classroom and working with the PTA.

The most important cause for many KCPS parents, however, may be getting more parents involved in their own children’s education at home. Nearly 6 in 10 (57 percent) say that parents taking more responsibility for things like checking homework and limiting television in their own homes would do more to improve the schools, overall, than parents getting more involved in running schools (which 37 percent believe would be more effective).

And the good news is that KCPS parents are optimistic—in fact, much more so than their counterparts in the other Jackson County districts—that a lot can be done to help parents be more involved, both at home and at their schools. For example, the idea of offering parents workshops on how to improve students’ habits and schoolwork receives nearly overwhelming support: 79 percent of KCPS parents believe this would improve parental involvement a great deal, while just 41 percent of parents in other Jackson County districts feel this way. Other ideas also find strong support.

Some distinct needs

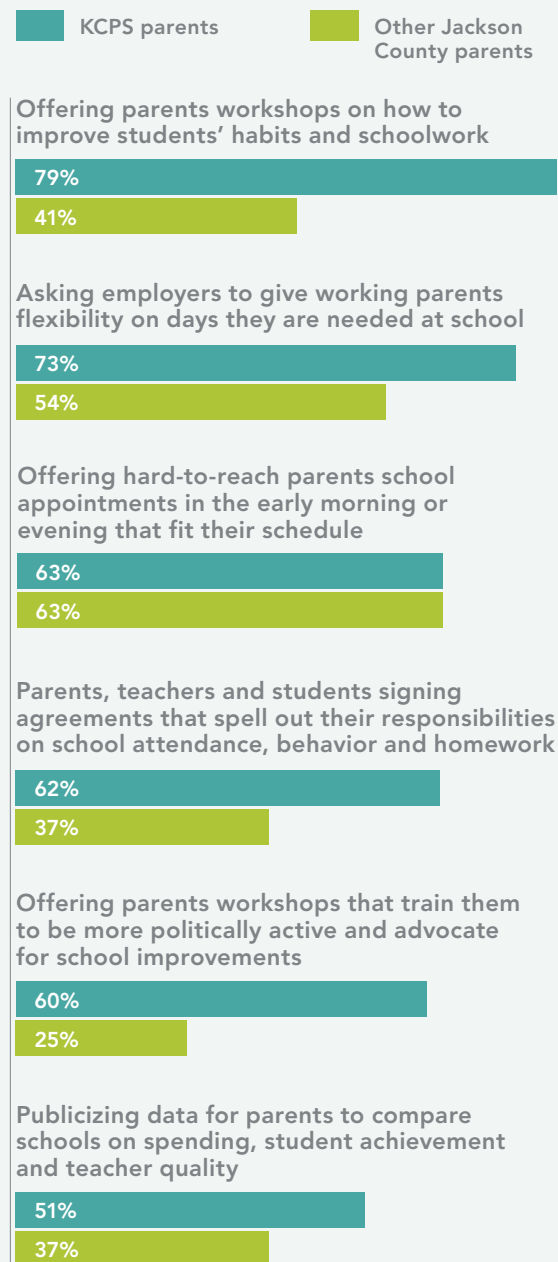
Our analysis of KCPS parent experiences finds a few specific needs that are more acute in this group than in others. For example, only about half of these parents say they know a lot about the classes their children need to take to prepare for college. But in other parts of Jackson County, fully three-quarters of parents say the same.

We also find KCPS parents prefer face-to-face meetings and written notes over email as ways to learn about their children’s progress and communicate with their schools. This is in contrast to those living elsewhere in Jackson County, who generally prefer email both to learn about their children’s progress and to communicate with their schools.

Finally, about 1 in 5 (22 percent) of KCPS parents are “help seekers”—parents who are uncomfortable taking on active roles at their children’s schools but who are particularly concerned about their own children’s learning and schoolwork. This proportion is higher than in neighboring Jackson County districts, where only 13 percent of parents are help seekers. Help seekers tend to feel somewhat more disconnected from their children’s teachers and may wait for the schools to reach out to them and to their children.

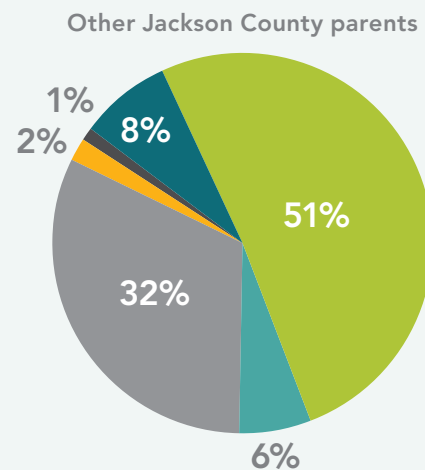
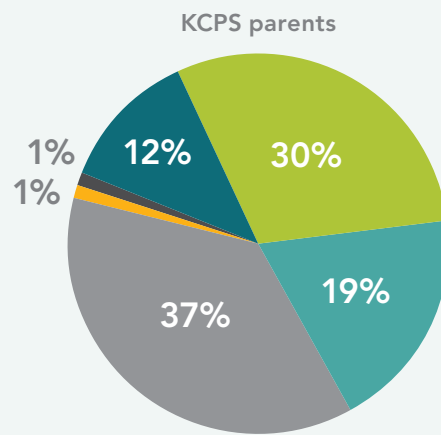
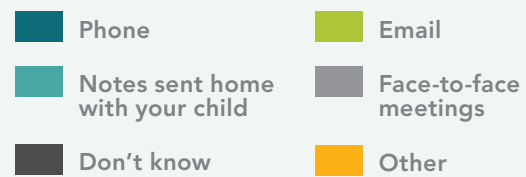
KCPS parents are more optimistic about various potential initiatives to increase parental involvement.

Percent of parents who say the following ideas would improve parental involvement a great deal:



Most KCPS parents prefer face-to-face meetings or notes sent home with their children over email when communicating with their schools.

Other than report cards, what is the best way for your child's school and teachers to update you on your child's academic progress?



RECOMMENDATIONS

for parental engagement: “Starting where the parents are”

Parents in the Kansas City area are at different “starting points” in their readiness, willingness and ability to engage as advocates for better schools or to advance policies that could promote better learning. “Potential transformers” are poised for action, “school helpers” are willing to be involved in traditional ways and “help seekers” are concerned about their own children’s education but more disconnected from the school system. To be effective, strategies to build momentum for change and improvement in education must meet parents at their starting points and be tailored to the different types of parents. The recommendations in this section are intended to honor the diversity of experiences and attitudes among parents in Kansas City while providing advice to educators, funders and reformers on how to engage and communicate in ways that will move the needle on change. In presenting the promising strategies that follow, we do not aim to minimize the work needed to meet the challenge of engaging parents as partners in reform. Instead, we emphasize that effective engagement of parents is indeed possible when done purposefully.

Quotes throughout this section are drawn from focus group conversations with Kansas City parents that were especially designed to explore parents’ views on different engagement approaches.



OVERARCHING PRINCIPLES

Based on this research and decades of experience supporting sound public engagement, we first want to urge change leaders to keep at the center of their engagement planning and execution four overarching principles.²

1. Communication goes two ways.

Leaders, policymakers and reformers sometimes assume “communication” means simply sending out information or articulating their messages. Surely, this is part of the picture; good, clear communication by teachers and school leaders about academic expectations, homework, absence and school safety policies, extra-help resources and so on are a prerequisite for more active and constructive parent involvement. But sound parent engagement entails more. It is an exchange, in which both parents and educators bring their concerns and ideas to the table to address problems and strengthen schools in ways that can help students succeed. School leaders can, in turn, bring broader concerns to local policymakers. A parent in Kansas City described one experience with ineffective communication:

I think parents need to be more involved, but the schools need to be informative without putting us to sleep. We’ve been to PTA meetings where the topics were, “Who wants to be on the board of this,” or “Who wants to be the chairman of this?” But we don’t even know what these things do.³

²Throughout this section, we refer to “change leaders” as those individuals, groups or organizations that represent school or district administrators and educators, local policymakers or reformers, concerned citizens and active parents or foundations and philanthropists who are both deeply concerned about educational opportunity in the Kansas City area and spearheading improvement efforts.

³Quotes have been edited from their original phrasings for clarity.

2. Begin by listening and addressing key concerns.

As we have learned, parents experience the Kansas City public education system in different ways, and one-size-fits-all communications or focusing on small subsets of issues will likely not work equally well for all of them. In large part, this means change leaders should begin by listening. It is critical to identify the burning “first-things-first” issues on parents’ minds and to know how they think and talk about them. Parents will be most open to constructive involvement if they know their chief concerns are understood and being attended to. For instance, focus groups, community dialogues, events where parents already meet or lower-intensity mechanisms like surveys with open-ended questions and feedback forms can help change leaders listen intentionally to the concerns and ideas that are foremost in parents’ minds.

3. Approach parents with a clear request.

This strategy is deceptively simple: it is to approach parents by asking for their help. As noted earlier, nearly a quarter of parents surveyed say that, in the past year, they’ve never been asked to help out or volunteer at their children’s schools. The importance of this principle is reflected in the comments of one parent in Kansas City,

Parents don’t understand that their presence makes a difference. Schools aren’t getting that message out. Even when the school was going through its worst times, they didn’t get the message out that they needed help from the community. It was just, “We’re going through this, and we’re trying to work it out.” They didn’t ever say to parents, “This is what’s going on. If we don’t get anything back from you, this is what will happen to your kids.”

4. Provide many and varied opportunities to engage.

When asked to describe effective ways in which parents can get involved in their children’s education, parents in focus groups listed many, varied activities, including monitoring their children’s homework, communicating with teachers via email, regularly visiting their children’s classrooms and attending community meetings. When it comes to engaging parents in school improvement, the more diverse the opportunities to get involved, the greater chance of attracting parents of varying degrees of readiness, willingness or ability. Moreover, it is important to engage parents not only on problems, such as school safety, but also on successes, such as celebrating improvements in student achievement.

Finally, as this study shows, providing many and varied opportunities also means attending to the different types of parents who seek to participate in different ways—the potential transformers, school helpers and help seekers.

For each of the categories of parents described in the research findings, we suggest several communication and engagement practices to help put these guiding principles into action.



Engaging POTENTIAL TRANSFORMERS

Making the most of potential transformers' readiness to engage in school change will mean approaching them as partners. Such partnerships can be cultivated in several ways.

- **Speak to parents' highest priorities to build the momentum for change.** School safety, bullying, basic educational opportunities for all children, supports for children who need extra help and assistance or resources for teachers were among the top concerns for parents who participated in the Kansas City focus groups. Since they may not necessarily agree on which issues are priorities, parents who are ready to roll up their sleeves may need opportunities to establish common ground on where they would like to begin directing their energies. Well-facilitated dialogue can help individuals with diverse priorities find common ground.
- **Build potential transformers' capacities to lead change efforts.** In a number of large urban school districts across the country, leadership academies offer parents and concerned citizens opportunities to participate in trainings that build skills and knowledge about important education issues. Trainings might cover such topics as the history and laws of the public education system; parent–community–school partnerships; strategies for increasing parent engagement; communication among parents, students and teachers; and understanding education terms and jargon. In both the survey and in the focus groups, we found parents who were encouraged by the idea of a leadership academy and saw its potential to build a cadre of citizens dedicated to improving educational opportunities for all children. As stated by one Kansas City parent,

[The leadership academy] I think is a good empowerment tool for parents, and it's also creating a pool for advocates and activists that help change systems that aren't working, and maybe help get more community-based educational institutions involved.

School administrators, district leaders and educators looking to explore parent leadership development programs may find it useful to connect with local or national organizations to learn more about such opportunities and with local leaders to underwrite them.

- **Build potential transformers' capacity to be authentic engagement facilitators.** Engagement is too often viewed as a one-off event—a single school board or town hall meeting, for instance. To be truly effective, it should be an ongoing process of communication among leaders and publics that is embedded in the life of community. These habits of communication can become points of departure for new forms of individual and collaborative action, as well as community leadership development. Potential transformers, with their unique talents and local knowledge, can play an important role in creating this culture of shared responsibility and collaborative problem solving. For example, they can be trained in dialogue facilitation by engagement experts and collaborate with local organizations on the design and organization of engagement processes.
- **Recognize successes and achievements in parent engagement.** Creating venues to recognize accomplishments, honor commitments and celebrate victories is an important early step in building a sense of shared ownership of problems and solutions. Such opportunities should be regular in order to maintain high-levels of engagement and energy for change and improvement.



Engaging SCHOOL HELPERS

As we have discussed, school helpers are already involved with their schools in traditional ways that are admirable and important to the schools' success. Can they be engaged in even more robust ways in addressing the issues that stymie school and student success, such as truancy problems, lack of essential resources or poor teacher preparation?

School helpers tend to believe they could be doing even more, and we believe that at least some of them can be more intensely engaged if they are asked in the right way and provided with "user-friendly" ways to get involved that respect their time and other commitments. Again, it's important to start with where these parents are by making the most of the support they are already providing to their children and schools.

- **Present options that provide a range of engagement levels and opportunities.**

When we advise leaders about how to think about sound public engagement, we like to say (as we did above) that it's not an event, but rather an ongoing process of enhancing communication and building trust, respect and collaboration. But the flipside is that everyone is busy, and their time should be respected. Although school helpers believe they could be doing more, they are already supporting their schools to some extent. Engagement in deeper ways to help improve school policies and practices or to forge new community partnerships should not be presented as an all-consuming involvement. Relatively quick-hit, high-quality engagement, such as participating in a focus group or a well-designed community forum rather than an ongoing task force, may allow more people to contribute. Some may then develop a taste for the process and want to do more. Also, since these sorts of parents are inclined to help out at school anyway, inviting them to do so at parent engagement events, such as asking them to provide food for a dinner prior to a community forum, can expose them to a broader range of issues needing attention. A Kansas City parent, a head of a PTA, described the activities at one school:

We try to give busy parents different avenues. We have different things throughout the school year at different times, different days of the week, because we realize everybody has different schedules, so we try to change up the schedules, change up the times, use different ways of communicating with the parents.

- **Raise awareness of important education policy issues.** Raising awareness of pressing policy issues will not necessarily influence behavior change or move people into problem solving, but it is an important prelude. Introducing the issues and providing a clear picture of how these play out in their own schools is a critical step in keeping the door open to parents who are already involved and may be spurred to further action on an issue of particularly deep concern. Since school helpers tend to feel comfortable in their school environments, using this setting as a launching place for civil and open dialogue on pressing public issues will be most effective.



- **Demonstrate the power of parent engagement.** With parents in this group saying parental involvement is not necessarily the highest impact way of changing schools, there is a need to connect the dots between parent involvement and policy or practice changes. Change leaders should help these parents answer the question, “What can I actually do if I don’t like what’s going on?” A parent participant posed the question in the following way:

As far as you’re talking about the importance of knowing where your school ranks—it would be nice to also know what you can do about it if you don’t like it. If Kansas City is not accredited, what the hell can you do about it?

- **Communicate through trusted sources.** School helpers have positive relationships with and trust in teachers and school principals. This provides a unique opportunity to strengthen and leverage these communication channels as a means to encourage parental engagement beyond traditional in-school and at-home activities. Moreover, building connections with fellow parents, especially those who are potential transformers, might build momentum for change among school helpers.



Engaging HELP SEEKERS

Unlike the potential transformers and school helpers, help seekers don't seem ready or willing to take on more active roles in their schools or to become education advocates. Instead, this group is somewhat more alienated from their schools and don't see teachers and administrators making genuine efforts to help their children succeed. To engage these parents effectively, it seems important to gain a deeper understanding of their core needs and experiences. This can be achieved by conducting targeted research into the views, values and concerns of this particular group and by utilizing these research findings to develop engagement approaches that speak to these parents' needs. Meanwhile, change leaders should focus on opening up new lines of communication to better understand and reach this group of parents.

- **Strengthen relationships and understanding between school personnel and the community.** Help seekers are less likely than other parents to trust principals and teachers to do what's right when it comes to their children and to say they have a good feel for the community. To overcome this disconnect, schools should make concerted efforts to establish relationships with the school community and build a greater understanding of the social, cultural and environmental factors that affect the education of their students. For instance, parents in focus groups offered ways for schools to provide services that address common community concerns:

The teachers know who [the students with less engaged parents] are. Get to know that student. Get to know what is going on in their lifestyle and in their family and what is going on, and then maybe they can step out of the school and go to their home and communicate with their family.

- **Create opportunities and policies that welcome parents into schools.** Help seekers are less likely than other parents to believe their schools welcome parental involvement, and several focus group participants shared experiences of being treated as unwelcome outsiders by school staff and administrators. While they recognized the safety concerns with allowing pedestrians to enter and exit school buildings during school hours, several parents said they had become frustrated by the attitudes of staff and administrators at the schools or felt they were treated with suspicion when their intentions were to visit their children, check in with teachers and monitor student progress. School personnel might be able to find ways to reduce teachers' perceptions of parental visitation as a threat or provide professional development that cultivates the teachers' skills in conflict resolution and moderation. As one parent stated, a welcoming environment and attitude can go a long way:

I love it when teachers thank me for coming. I love it when the principal says, "Glad to see you. Hope to see you again." I think it is just old-fashioned, hey, being polite and thanking each other and making people feel welcome and not making parents feel like, "Hey, you're infringing on us"—making parents feel like, "Hey, we're really glad that you were part of this process," and make a concerted

effort. This is something that we have to do, and so I think a person ought to talk to the staff and say, "Hey, when parents come around, make them feel good. Make them feel comfortable. Make them feel welcome."

- **Help parents' efforts go further.** Many help seekers feel as though they are doing as much as they can to be involved. In fact, they are not absentee parents—most report checking homework regularly and meeting several times a year with teachers. Yet many are dissatisfied with the ways teachers and principals communicate with them about their children's progress. To make parents' efforts count more, school personnel might strengthen communication between teachers and parents about the issue these parents tend to care about most: helping their students learn. In focus groups, some parents expressed great frustration at not having the support they need as parents to help their kids succeed in school. Parents shared the following comments:

Teachers don't send any textbooks home. When kids get homework, they get a packet stapled together, and schools want you to help these kids with homework. [The packet is] not explaining to me how I'm supposed to explain [the homework]. When he is doing homework and he's looking at me like "help me," I have to call up the school. They have a hotline or something that you call, but they're not really explaining, not even trying to explain to you how to explain it to him.

I had a teacher tell me if my son had paid attention in class that I wouldn't be calling up there asking for help. "You're so right, but I am calling, and I'm saying that I don't understand how to help my son, so don't expect the homework back tomorrow. You need to send home better instructions so that he can get help." Her exact words were, "Your son should have paid attention in class and you wouldn't be calling up here asking for help."

Some parents say that prioritizing communication about the most critical instances of disciplinary issues or the most important meetings to attend can help them have greater impact despite their limited capacity to get involved. One mother explained,

You got some teachers in some schools that will call you for everything that your kid did. But in this school, they have a disciplinary person... This person will mediate, she'll calm him down, and nine times out of ten I probably won't even know that he got a write-up that day because it wasn't serious enough to call home. That works out for me because say if I have a call center job, I cannot get off of the floor every time the school calls.

DON'T OVERDO THE TYPOLOGY; SOME FUNDAMENTAL PRACTICES CUT ACROSS PARENT TYPES.

The typology emerging from this research has important implications for effective parent engagement and serves as a useful framework to plan tailored engagement strategies. Overusing it, however, runs the risk of pigeon-holing parents or catering to types that are easier to reach. In addition to tailoring strategies to the needs and inclinations of different types of parents, we also urge change leaders to return to the principles that began this section and use them to guide engagement efforts that cut across parent types or situations, as well. The principles can be translated into broader stakeholder engagement strategies using several concrete practices outlined here.

- **Find the priorities that overlap.** When seeking to engage larger groups of parents and other stakeholders, engagers should still begin with the overall guiding principle: start where people are. While issue priorities will vary among stakeholders, parental concerns, community concerns and experts' concerns are likely to have some overlap, indicating the areas or issues around which to begin a broader engagement strategy. Opinion research, gap analyses and facilitated dialogues can help illuminate the overlaps among stakeholders' views.
- **Use the right amount and the right types of information.** Data are just one piece—albeit a very important one—of how people form their views and judgments about a given topic. As we learned in the parent survey, only about one-third of parents overall see publicizing more data about schools' spending, student achievement and teacher quality as a way to improve parent engagement greatly. Instead, education change leaders must take care to find the very few key data points that can help people work through their knowledge gaps, clarify misperceptions or open up space for new thinking and problem-solving ideas. More detailed and comprehensive data should still be made available to those who seek it, as stakeholders often begin to have more questions and need more information as they become engaged and dig into an issue. Making information available at events or on websites are ways of filling this need once it arises.
- **Cultivate a deeper understanding of how problems can be addressed.** People often need to go through a variety of stages to come to terms with an issue, decide what approaches to problem solving they are willing to support and figure out how they can make their own contributions to change efforts. Schools, funders and community organizations can provide opportunities that help parents work through this process in two important ways:

-
- **By supporting parents’ “self-organizing” tendencies.** Regardless of typology, parents face similar pressures and want the same things for their children. They therefore see potential in mutual support through parent networks and community-building efforts to help them navigate shared challenges. For instance, one parent shared this statement:

We need to connect with each other, and that is where the breakdown is coming into play, as well. We can't rely just on the school. Us parents got to group together and say, "Okay, we all have work schedules. We all have to make meals when we get home and do homework and do all of this. Why don't this week, Jake makes chili and we all get together and we sit down and let the kids do homework and talk about some issues—network—and find out agencies to help each other."

Change leaders and engagement experts can also create user-friendly online tools to support parents’ desire to network, share information and develop mutual support systems.

- **By providing opportunities for dialogue and deliberation.** In our view, carefully designed, community-based face-to-face dialogue is the most effective and powerful vehicle to move people from awareness of a problem to developing solutions. Remember that parents and other concerned citizens can come to an engagement process with a sense of “meeting fatigue”—that is, feeling as though they are already doing as much as they can, or having participated in previous engagement efforts that lacked adequate opportunities to contribute or meaningful follow-up. For these reasons, community dialogues must be structured to be as productive as possible.

Several ingredients go into well-designed engagement efforts, including, but not limited to, a diversity of participants; discussion materials that prompt meaningful conversations about areas of common ground, disagreement, questions and ideas for action; high-quality facilitators; careful attention to event logistics and space; and a clear plan for follow-up on the discussions.⁴

Broad-based dialogue with a diversity of stakeholder groups creates new lines of communication and forges new ways of working together for people at varying degrees of readiness, willingness or ability. Whether in large public forums or small-group meetings, in face-to-face settings or via the Internet, dialogue among citizens and across different perspectives can be key to building public understanding and to addressing problems facing schools, districts and communities. Planners who attend to important details while keeping these guiding principles at the fore will have the best chance of making the most of potential transformers’ energies, spurring school helpers to contribute in new ways, and bringing the voices of help seekers to the conversation on improving public education for all students in the Kansas City area.

⁴Public Agenda has produced hands-on materials and tools to help public engagers organize, implement and follow up on community dialogues that follow different formats. For information on these materials and our technical assistance, please visit our website: www.PublicAgenda.org.

METHODOLOGY

Summary

The findings in “Ready, Willing and Able?” are based on 1,566 survey interviews with parents in Jackson, Cass, Clay and Platte counties, Missouri, and Wyandotte County, Kansas. The counties were chosen to represent the geographic and socioeconomic diversity of the Kansas City metropolitan area. The survey was conducted by phone (landline or cell), in English or Spanish, from May 31 to July 3, 2012, and was carried out by Clark Research, Inc. Interviewees were a randomly selected, representative sample of parents who had at least one child in a regular public or a charter school. The survey was preceded by four focus groups with Kansas City public school parents and 12 interviews with local educators and funders of education initiatives; four additional focus groups with parents were conducted after the survey.

The survey

Parents were invited to participate and complete the survey by phone. Any parent in one of the five designated counties was considered eligible as long as he or she had a child in grade K–12 in a regular public or charter school. The sample characteristics section at the back of this report provides a detailed picture of the parents in the sample.

Once collected, the final data were weighted to balance the sample to known characteristics of families with children under 18 in the five Kansas City counties. The following parameters were included in the weighting process:

- Race/Ethnicity: White, African-American, Hispanic, Asian, something else
- Socioeconomic status: Education level, household income, one- or two-parent household

The design effect for the survey was 2.11, and the weight-adjusted margin of error plus or minus 3.60. The final weights for individual respondents were trimmed to range from .2 to 8.

As in all surveys, question order effects and other non-sampling sources of error can affect the results. Steps were taken to minimize these issues, including pretesting the survey instrument and randomizing the order in which some questions were asked.

Subgroup analysis

The three groups of parents portrayed in this report—“potential transformers,” “school helpers,” and “help seekers”—were identified through a stepwise analysis of the survey data, conducted by Public Agenda. First, we grouped as “potential transformers” all parents who indicated they would feel “very comfortable” both with serving on a committee that makes decisions about important school policies and with advocating for improvements in the local schools by contacting the media or a district-level administrator (Q31, Q33, Q35, Q37). In this step, we identified 31 percent of the sample as “potential transformers.” Second, we grouped as “school helpers” all those parents who did not qualify to be transformers but who said if they tried hard they could be more involved at their children’s schools (Q41) and said they would be “very comfortable” getting involved with at least one of the more traditional parent engagement activities we asked about—that is, volunteering for trips and at sporting events, monitoring the lunchroom or hallways, sitting in the back of the classroom or attending a PTA meeting (Q23, Q25, Q27, Q29). In this step, we identified 27 percent of parents as “school helpers.” Finally, we grouped as “help seekers” all parents who indicated they had not yet succeeded in helping their children to always do their best in school (Q51) and who seemed unlikely transformers or school helpers (that is, they did not fall into either of the previous categories). In this step, we identified 19 percent of parents as “help seekers.” Twenty-three percent of parents did not fall into any of these groups.



Focus groups with parents and expert interviews

Public Agenda conducted eight focus groups with socioeconomically diverse groups of parents whose children attended either regular public or charter schools in the greater Kansas City metropolitan area. The first four, held prior to the survey in February 2012, explored parents' perceptions of and experiences with the Kansas City schools and informed the design of the survey instrument. The latter four, conducted after the survey in October 2012, sought feedback from parents on several preliminary survey findings and also explored how parents, schools and other community partners could best work together to improve public schools. A total of 75 parents participated in the eight focus groups. In addition, Public Agenda conducted 12 interviews with local educators and funders of education initiatives, which also informed the design of the study.

FULL SURVEY RESULTS

“Ready, Willing and Able?” is based on 1,566 phone (landline and cell) interviews with a representative sample of Kansas City parents from five counties in the Kansas City metropolitan area, including Jackson, Cass, Clay and Platte counties, Missouri, and Wyandotte county, Kansas, and whose children attend either regular public or charter schools. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish from May 31 to July 3, 2012. The survey was fielded by Clark Research, Inc., and the questionnaire was designed by Public Agenda.

The margin of error for the complete set of weighted data is plus or minus 3.6 percentage points. It is higher, however, when comparing subgroups or question items that were not asked of all respondents. Survey results of less than 0.5 percent are signified by an asterisk, while results of zero are signified by a dash. Responses may not always total 100 percent due to rounding. Combining answer categories may produce slight discrepancies between numbers in these results and numbers in the report.

| | Total N=1,566 % | Potential transformers n=488 % | School helpers n=418 % | Help seekers n=298 % |
|---|-----------------------|---|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Q1–5 are screening questions | | | | |
| Q6. Which of these three is the biggest challenge you face in raising your child? | | | | |
| Trying to protect him/her from negative influences | 38% | 36% | 41% | 37% |
| Trying to make sure he/she gets a good education | 43% | 45% | 38% | 45% |
| Trying to make ends meet as a family | 16% | 16% | 19% | 14% |
| Don't know | 3% | 2% | 3% | 4% |
| Refused | * | - | - | - |
| Q7. If you had to choose the one thing that can most help a young person succeed in the world today, would you say it is...? | | | | |
| A college education | 35% | 37% | 29% | 37% |
| Knowing how to get along with people | 25% | 23% | 27% | 24% |
| A good work ethic | 37% | 36% | 42% | 35% |
| Don't know | 3% | 4% | 2% | 4% |
| Refused | * | * | - | - |
| Q8. Over the past few years, would you say that your local public schools have been getting better, worse or has there been little change? | | | | |
| Getting better | 30% | 36% | 27% | 25% |
| Worse | 29% | 30% | 27% | 36% |
| There has been little change | 39% | 32% | 45% | 37% |
| Don't know | 2% | 2% | 1% | 3% |

| | Total N=1,566 % | Potential transformers n=488 % | School helpers n=418 % | Help seekers n=298 % |
|--|-----------------------|---|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Q9. If money were not an issue, would you...? | | | | |
| Stay with the school your child currently attends | 53% | 52% | 56% | 43% |
| Move to a neighborhood with better public schools | 17% | 17% | 16% | 21% |
| Send your child to a private school | 29% | 31% | 26% | 36% |
| (VOL) Enroll her/him in a charter school | * | * | * | - |
| Don't know | 1% | * | 2% | * |
| Refused | * | - | - | - |
| Q10. In your view, which of these three things would do the most to improve your child's school? | | | | |
| More parental involvement | 34% | 34% | 42% | 28% |
| Better teachers | 27% | 23% | 23% | 39% |
| More money | 34% | 38% | 32% | 31% |
| Don't know | 4% | 5% | 3% | 3% |
| Refused | * | * | - | - |
| Q11. How much would you say you know about how your child's school ranks academically compared to others in your area? | | | | |
| A lot | 61% | 73% | 56% | 50% |
| A little | 32% | 24% | 39% | 41% |
| Nothing at all | 5% | 2% | 5% | 6% |
| Don't know | 1% | 1% | 1% | 3% |
| Q12. How much would you say you know about the qualifications of your child's teachers? | | | | |
| A lot | 40% | 53% | 34% | 30% |
| A little | 43% | 36% | 50% | 40% |
| Nothing at all | 16% | 10% | 16% | 29% |
| Don't know | 1% | 1% | * | 1% |
| Q13a. How much do you know about what skills your child should be learning to be prepared for middle and high school? [Base: Parent of K-5 child] | | | | |
| A lot | 61% | 73% | 52% | 60% |
| A little | 32% | 26% | 41% | 25% |
| Nothing at all | 4% | 1% | 5% | 11% |
| Don't know | 3% | - | 2% | 2% |
| Refused | * | - | - | 2% |

| | Total N=1,566 % | Potential transformers n=488 % | School helpers n=418 % | Help seekers n=298 % |
|---|-----------------------|---|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Q13b. How much do you know about what classes your child should be taking to prepare for college? [Base: Parent of 6–12 child] | | | | |
| A lot | 73% | 78% | 79% | 53% |
| A little | 22% | 16% | 18% | 37% |
| Nothing at all | 5% | 5% | 3% | 10% |
| Don't know | 1% | 1% | - | 1% |
| Q14. As far as you know, did your child's school make AYP last year? Yes, no, or are you not sure? | | | | |
| Yes | 62% | 68% | 60% | 57% |
| No | 13% | 16% | 11% | 15% |
| Not sure | 25% | 16% | 29% | 28% |
| Refused | * | - | * | - |
| Q15. Other than report cards, which of the following is the best way for your child's school and teachers to update you on your child's academic progress? | | | | |
| Phone | 9% | 7% | 7% | 17% |
| Email | 49% | 49% | 50% | 47% |
| Notes sent home with your child | 7% | 7% | 7% | 4% |
| Face-to-face meetings | 32% | 33% | 34% | 29% |
| (VOL) Other | 3% | 3% | 2% | 4% |
| Don't know | * | * | * | - |
| Q16. Which of the following is the best way to update you about school-wide developments such as changes in staff or curriculum? | | | | |
| Meetings at the school | 14% | 17% | 12% | 13% |
| The school's website | 10% | 9% | 9% | 14% |
| A notice or newsletter that comes home with your child | 27% | 25% | 23% | 30% |
| Emails | 47% | 47% | 52% | 42% |
| Other | 2% | 2% | 3% | 1% |
| Don't know | * | - | * | - |
| Q17. When it comes to doing what is right for your child, which of the following best describes how you feel toward the principal and teachers in your child's school? | | | | |
| I trust them to do what's right | 54% | 53% | 63% | 39% |
| I sometimes have doubts so I need to stay alert | 39% | 40% | 33% | 48% |
| I don't think they care | 7% | 6% | 3% | 12% |
| Don't know | * | 1% | - | 1% |

| | Total N=1,566 % | Potential transformers n=488 % | School helpers n=418 % | Help seekers n=298 % |
|---|-----------------------|---|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Q18. During the school year, how often have you personally met with your child's teacher(s) to discuss his/her academic progress? | | | | |
| Never | 5% | 3% | 3% | 7% |
| 1–2 times | 38% | 32% | 45% | 34% |
| 3–4 times | 33% | 32% | 37% | 33% |
| 5 or more times | 24% | 32% | 15% | 25% |
| Don't know | * | * | - | 1% |
| Q19. How would you rate your child's school and teachers when it comes to communicating about the academic progress of your child? | | | | |
| Excellent | 41% | 52% | 37% | 25% |
| Good | 38% | 28% | 46% | 43% |
| Needs improvement | 16% | 17% | 14% | 22% |
| Failing | 4% | 3% | 4% | 9% |
| Don't know | * | - | - | 1% |
| Q20. If you needed good advice on how to help your child with schoolwork, is there a specific person at the school you can rely on or not? | | | | |
| Yes | 71% | 75% | 75% | 64% |
| No | 22% | 21% | 18% | 27% |
| Not sure | 6% | 4% | 7% | 9% |
| Refused | * | * | - | - |
| Q21. Overall, is it your sense that the principal and the teachers in your child's school are connected to the community and have a good feel for what is going on there, or not? | | | | |
| Yes, have a good feel for what is going on there | 77% | 78% | 85% | 63% |
| No | 17% | 19% | 11% | 23% |
| Don't know | 6% | 3% | 4% | 13% |
| Q22. Would you say your child's school goes out of its way to encourage parents to get involved in the school, does it mostly leave it up to the parents, or does it seem to discourage parents from getting involved in the school? | | | | |
| Encourages parents to get involved | 64% | 71% | 63% | 53% |
| Mostly leaves it up to the parents | 31% | 22% | 33% | 39% |
| Discourages parents to get involved | 5% | 6% | 3% | 5% |
| Don't know | 1% | * | 1% | 2% |

| | Total N=1,566 % | Potential transformers n=488 % | School helpers n=418 % | Help seekers n=298 % |
|--|-----------------------|---|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Battery 1 | | | | |
| (Q23–38): How comfortable would you feel doing each of the following? | | | | |
| Volunteering with activities such as school trips, bake sales or sporting events? [Base: Random 1/2 of parents] | | | | |
| Very comfortable | 79% | 91% | 92% | 60% |
| Somewhat comfortable | 15% | 7% | 6% | 26% |
| Not too comfortable | 4% | 2% | 2% | 8% |
| Not comfortable at all | 2% | * | * | 7% |
| Don't know | * | - | - | - |
| Have you personally done this during the past school year? | | | | |
| Yes | 65% | 68% | 73% | 51% |
| No | 35% | 32% | 27% | 49% |
| Sitting in to observe your child's classroom? [Base: Random 1/2 of parents] | | | | |
| Very comfortable | 65% | 82% | 69% | 48% |
| Somewhat comfortable | 21% | 11% | 16% | 30% |
| Not too comfortable | 8% | 3% | 13% | 11% |
| Not comfortable at all | 4% | 4% | 1% | 9% |
| Don't know | 1% | - | * | 2% |
| Have you personally done this during the past school year? | | | | |
| Yes | 34% | 48% | 27% | 33% |
| No | 66% | 52% | 73% | 67% |
| Don't know | * | - | - | - |
| Attending PTA meetings? [Base: Random 1/2 of parents] | | | | |
| Very comfortable | 61% | 80% | 77% | 39% |
| Somewhat comfortable | 20% | 7% | 14% | 35% |
| Not too comfortable | 7% | 4% | 5% | 15% |
| Not comfortable at all | 6% | 4% | 2% | 8% |
| Don't know | 5% | 4% | 1% | 3% |
| Refused | * | 1% | - | - |
| Have you personally done this during the past school year? | | | | |
| Yes | 52% | 58% | 60% | 53% |
| No | 47% | 42% | 40% | 47% |
| Don't know | * | - | - | - |

| | Total N=1,566 % | Potential transformers n=488 % | School helpers n=418 % | Help seekers n=298 % |
|--|-----------------------|---|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Helping monitor the hallways, lunchroom or playground? [Base: Random 1/2 of parents] | | | | |
| Very comfortable | 60% | 82% | 65% | 41% |
| Somewhat comfortable | 22% | 9% | 23% | 31% |
| Not too comfortable | 7% | 2% | 9% | 11% |
| Not comfortable at all | 9% | 7% | 3% | 14% |
| Don't know | 2% | - | 1% | 3% |
| Refused | * | - | - | 1% |
| Have you personally done this during the past school year? | | | | |
| Yes | 22% | 28% | 22% | 12% |
| No | 76% | 72% | 77% | 83% |
| Don't know | 1% | - | 1% | 3% |
| Meeting with administrators at the district office to ask for improvements at your child's school? [Base: Random 1/2 of parents] | | | | |
| Very comfortable | 54% | 100% | 30% | 27% |
| Somewhat comfortable | 28% | - | 49% | 42% |
| Not too comfortable | 9% | - | 14% | 17% |
| Not comfortable at all | 7% | - | 6% | 14% |
| Don't know | 1% | - | 1% | 1% |
| Have you personally done this during the past school year? | | | | |
| Yes | 24% | 31% | 10% | 29% |
| No | 76% | 69% | 90% | 71% |
| Serving on a committee that decides school policy on how to deal with student misbehavior and discipline? [Base: Random 1/2 of parents] | | | | |
| Very comfortable | 50% | 100% | 25% | 21% |
| Somewhat comfortable | 35% | - | 56% | 50% |
| Not too comfortable | 10% | - | 13% | 18% |
| Not comfortable at all | 5% | - | 6% | 9% |
| Don't know | * | - | - | 1% |
| Refused | * | - | - | 1% |
| Have you personally done this during the past school year? | | | | |
| Yes | 17% | 24% | 8% | 23% |
| No | 83% | 76% | 92% | 75% |
| Refused | - | - | - | 1% |

| | Total N=1,566 % | Potential transformers n=488 % | School helpers n=418 % | Help seekers n=298 % |
|---|-----------------------|---|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Serving on a committee that decides important school policies, such as how to spend your school's money or which teachers to hire? [Base: Random 1/2 of parents] | | | | |
| Very comfortable | 48% | 100% | 23% | 23% |
| Somewhat comfortable | 34% | - | 54% | 43% |
| Not too comfortable | 10% | - | 13% | 16% |
| Not comfortable at all | 8% | - | 9% | 18% |
| Don't know | 1% | - | 1% | 1% |
| Have you personally done this during the past school year? | | | | |
| Yes | 13% | 21% | 8% | 12% |
| No | 87% | 79% | 92% | 86% |
| Don't know | * | - | - | 2% |
| Contacting the local newspaper or radio station to give your views about the public schools? [Base: Random 1/2 of parents] | | | | |
| Very comfortable | 34% | 100% | 12% | 10% |
| Somewhat comfortable | 26% | - | 40% | 26% |
| Not too comfortable | 20% | - | 26% | 28% |
| Not comfortable at all | 19% | - | 22% | 34% |
| Don't know | 1% | - | 1% | 2% |
| Have you personally done this during the past school year? | | | | |
| Yes | 10% | 19% | 5% | 6% |
| No | 90% | 81% | 94% | 94% |
| Don't know | * | - | 1% | - |
| End of Battery 1 | | | | |
| Q39. Which of the following will do more to improve the public schools? | | | | |
| Getting parents directly involved in running the school so that parents have some say over who the school hires and how money is spent | 42% | 44% | 42% | 41% |
| Getting parents more involved in their children's education at home by such things as limiting television and checking homework | 52% | 49% | 52% | 51% |
| Don't know | 6% | 7% | 6% | 7% |

| | Total N=1,566 % | Potential transformers n=488 % | School helpers n=418 % | Help seekers n=298 % |
|--|-----------------------|---|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Q40. This past year, how often were you personally asked by someone from your child's current school to help out or to volunteer for a school activity? | | | | |
| Never | 24% | 19% | 22% | 33% |
| Once or twice | 26% | 23% | 28% | 26% |
| Three times or more | 50% | 58% | 49% | 41% |
| Don't know | * | - | - | - |
| Q41. Realistically, do you think that if you tried hard you could be more involved at your child's school or are you now doing as much as you possibly can? | | | | |
| Could be more involved | 51% | 50% | 100% | 23% |
| Now doing as much as you possibly can | 48% | 49% | - | 76% |
| Don't know | 1% | 1% | - | 1% |
| Q42. Again, being as realistic as you can be, do you think that if you tried hard you could be more involved in your child's education at home or are you now doing as much as you possibly can? | | | | |
| Could be more involved | 36% | 38% | 46% | 35% |
| Now doing as much as you possibly can | 63% | 62% | 54% | 64% |
| Don't know | * | * | - | 1% |
| Battery 2 (Q43–48): Here are some ideas for improving parental involvement in education. Do you think this would improve parental involvement a great deal, some, very little, or not at all? | | | | |
| Asking employers to give working parents flexibility on days they are needed at school? [Base: Random 1/2 of parents] | | | | |
| A great deal | 57% | 64% | 54% | 53% |
| Some | 26% | 20% | 29% | 31% |
| Only a little | 12% | 8% | 15% | 13% |
| Not at all | 5% | 8% | 2% | 4% |
| Don't know | * | * | - | - |
| Offering hard-to-reach parents school appointments in the early morning or evening that fit their schedule? [Base: Random 1/2 of parents] | | | | |
| A great deal | 57% | 66% | 53% | 49% |
| Some | 28% | 23% | 34% | 29% |
| Only a little | 10% | 6% | 10% | 15% |
| Not at all | 3% | 3% | 2% | 4% |
| Don't know | 2% | 3% | 1% | 3% |

| | Total N=1,566 % | Potential transformers n=488 % | School helpers n=418 % | Help seekers n=298 % |
|---|-----------------------|---|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Offering parents workshops on how to improve students' habits and schoolwork? [Base: Random 1/2 of parents] | | | | |
| A great deal | 48% | 55% | 46% | 46% |
| Some | 32% | 26% | 39% | 32% |
| Only a little | 13% | 12% | 10% | 19% |
| Not at all | 6% | 6% | 4% | 2% |
| Don't know | 1% | 1% | 1% | 1% |
| Having parents, teachers and students sign agreements that spell out their responsibilities on school attendance, behavior and homework? [Base: Random 1/2 of parents] | | | | |
| A great deal | 40% | 49% | 37% | 40% |
| Some | 30% | 23% | 37% | 28% |
| Only a little | 14% | 13% | 14% | 17% |
| Not at all | 13% | 12% | 10% | 11% |
| Don't know | 3% | 4% | 2% | 4% |
| Refused | 1% | * | - | - |
| Publicizing more data that allow parents to compare schools on spending, student achievement and teacher quality? [Base: Random 1/2 of parents] | | | | |
| A great deal | 36% | 47% | 31% | 31% |
| Some | 33% | 25% | 37% | 35% |
| Only a little | 16% | 15% | 19% | 19% |
| Not at all | 12% | 12% | 8% | 10% |
| Don't know | 3% | 1% | 5% | 4% |
| Offering parents workshops that train them to be more politically active citizens who know how to advocate for school improvements? [Base: Random 1/2 of parents] | | | | |
| A great deal | 33% | 46% | 26% | 33% |
| Some | 35% | 31% | 41% | 32% |
| Only a little | 19% | 12% | 23% | 25% |
| Not at all | 12% | 9% | 9% | 7% |
| Don't know | 2% | 2% | 1% | 2% |
| Refused | 1% | - | - | - |
| End of Battery 2 | | | | |

| | Total N=1,566 % | Potential transformers n=488 % | School helpers n=418 % | Help seekers n=298 % |
|---|-----------------------|---|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Q49. Do you think that if parents like yourself came together as an advocacy group to push for improving the local school system they could make a difference OR is the system tied up by too many rules and interest groups that prevent parents from having an impact? | | | | |
| Parents could make a difference | 66% | 72% | 69% | 62% |
| Parents prevented from having an impact | 29% | 25% | 28% | 33% |
| Don't know | 4% | 3% | 3% | 5% |
| Q50. How often do you check your child's homework to make sure it gets done? | | | | |
| Every day | 62% | 67% | 56% | 62% |
| Most days | 22% | 21% | 28% | 20% |
| Occasionally | 8% | 6% | 10% | 10% |
| Rarely | 7% | 5% | 7% | 6% |
| Don't know | 1% | 1% | - | 2% |
| Q51. When it comes to teaching your child to always do his/her very best in school, do you think you have succeeded or is there still work to be done? | | | | |
| Succeeded | 51% | 52% | 45% | - |
| Still work to be done | 49% | 48% | 55% | 100% |
| Don't know | * | 1% | - | - |
| Q52. Would you say that reading is something your child loves to do, something your child does as little as possible, or is it somewhere in between? | | | | |
| Reading is something my child loves to do | 51% | 53% | 47% | 44% |
| Something my child does as little as possible | 11% | 11% | 11% | 15% |
| Somewhere in between | 36% | 35% | 42% | 41% |
| Don't know | * | 1% | * | * |
| Q53. Which of the following best describes you? | | | | |
| I'm a parent who is very active at my child's school—I often volunteer for events and many people in the building know me | 37% | 48% | 27% | 26% |
| I'm not very active at the school, but I get very involved with my child's education at home | 53% | 44% | 62% | 63% |
| I don't really have a chance to get as involved as I'd like to be with my child's education | 10% | 7% | 11% | 11% |
| Don't know | * | 1% | 1% | - |
| Refused | * | * | - | - |

| | Total N=1,566 % | Potential transformers n=488 % | School helpers n=418 % | Help seekers n=298 % |
|--|-----------------------|---|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Q54. What is the main reason you don't get as involved as you'd like to be? [Base: Asked of parents who said they "weren't as involved as they'd like"—Q53] | | | | |
| Work | 55% | 62% | 63% | 45% |
| Other family responsibilities | 5% | 6% | 9% | 6% |
| Not feeling welcomed by the school | 7% | 9% | 2% | - |
| Not sure what to do | 6% | 6% | 9% | 6% |
| Child doesn't want parent to get involved | 3% | - | 7% | 3% |
| Other | 23% | 18% | 7% | 39% |
| Don't know / Refused | 1% | - | 4% | - |
| Q55. How much do you know about charter schools? | | | | |
| A great deal | 11% | 16% | 9% | 5% |
| Some | 22% | 23% | 24% | 26% |
| Only a little | 34% | 31% | 37% | 32% |
| Nothing at all | 33% | 30% | 30% | 37% |
| Q56. Charter schools are public schools that have a lot more control over their own budget, staff and curriculum and are free from many existing regulations. In general, do you favor or oppose this idea? | | | | |
| Favor | 63% | 65% | 68% | 63% |
| Oppose | 19% | 21% | 17% | 19% |
| Don't know | 18% | 14% | 15% | 18% |
| Refused | * | - | * | - |
| Q57. How interested would you be in your child attending a charter school—very interested, somewhat interested, not too interested, or not interested at all? [Base: Regular public school parents] | | | | |
| Very interested | 15% | 22% | 12% | 16% |
| Somewhat interested | 28% | 26% | 29% | 34% |
| Not too interested | 15% | 12% | 19% | 15% |
| Not interested at all | 37% | 35% | 35% | 32% |
| Don't know | 4% | 5% | 4% | 4% |
| Refused | * | - | - | - |

| | Total N=1,566 % | Potential transformers n=488 % | School helpers n=418 % | Help seekers n=298 % |
|---|-----------------------|---|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Battery 23 | | | | |
| (Q58–61): When it comes to [INSERT], which schools do a better job—charters, regular public schools, or are things about the same? [Base: Parents who said they knew “a great deal” or “some” about charter schools] | | | | |
| Having smaller classes | | | | |
| Charters | 53% | 52% | 58% | 51% |
| Regular public schools | 7% | 9% | 4% | 8% |
| Things are about the same | 23% | 21% | 25% | 25% |
| Don't know | 17% | 17% | 13% | 16% |
| Having high academic standards and expectations | | | | |
| Charters | 39% | 39% | 45% | 34% |
| Regular public schools | 12% | 18% | 7% | 13% |
| Things are about the same | 33% | 28% | 36% | 42% |
| Don't know | 17% | 16% | 12% | 11% |
| Refused | * | - | - | - |
| Preparing children for college | | | | |
| Charters | 31% | 31% | 36% | 24% |
| Regular public schools | 12% | 13% | 12% | 13% |
| Things are about the same | 39% | 38% | 36% | 46% |
| Don't know | 18% | 17% | 16% | 17% |
| Engaging parents in their children's education | | | | |
| Charters | 37% | 39% | 40% | 31% |
| Regular public schools | 8% | 9% | 4% | 8% |
| Things are about the same | 37% | 32% | 43% | 48% |
| Don't know | 19% | 19% | 14% | 13% |
| Refused | * | - | - | - |

SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

| | Sample N=1,566 % |
|---|------------------------|
| Respondent gender | |
| Male | 33% |
| Female | 67% |
| Refused | - |
| Race/Ethnicity | |
| White | 77% |
| African-American/Black | 13% |
| Hispanic | 7% |
| Asian | 1% |
| Something else | 2% |
| Don't know | * |
| Refused | 1% |
| Highest education completed | |
| Less than high school | 2% |
| High school graduate | 16% |
| Some college or trade school, no degree | 20% |
| Associate's or two-year degree | 13% |
| Bachelor's or four-year degree | 29% |
| Graduate or professional degree | 20% |
| Don't know | * |
| Refused | * |
| Employment status | |
| Employed full time | 63% |
| Employed part time | 10% |
| Self-employed | 7% |
| Not employed | 14% |
| Retired | 4% |
| Student | 1% |
| Don't know | * |
| Refused | 1% |

| | Sample N=1,566 % |
|--|------------------------|
| Parent most involved with school and schoolwork [Base: Two-parent households] | |
| You | 37% |
| Partner | 18% |
| About the same | 46% |
| One- or two-parent household | |
| One-parent household | 14% |
| Two-parent household | 86% |
| Don't know | * |
| Refused | * |
| Number of people living in household | |
| Two | 4% |
| Three | 23% |
| Four | 41% |
| Five | 19% |
| Six | 9% |
| Seven | 2% |
| Eight | 1% |
| Nine | * |
| Ten | * |
| Eleven | * |
| Twelve | * |
| Twenty-six | * |
| Don't know | * |
| Annual household income | |
| Under \$30,000 | 11% |
| \$31,000 to \$40,000 | 11% |
| \$41,000 to \$50,000 | 7% |
| \$51,000 to \$60,000 | 11% |
| \$61,000 to \$100,000 | 26% |
| More than \$100,000 | 24% |
| Don't know | 1% |
| Refused | 8% |

| | Sample N=1,566 % |
|--|------------------------|
| Urbanicity | |
| Urban | 18% |
| Suburban | 68% |
| Rural | 13% |
| Don't know | 1% |
| Refused | * |
| County | |
| Wyandotte | 12% |
| Cass | 9% |
| Clay | 18% |
| Jackson | 53% |
| Platte | 8% |
| Child's gender | |
| Boy | 51% |
| Girl | 48% |
| Refused | 1% |
| Child with special needs or learning disability | |
| Yes | 12% |
| No | 87% |
| Don't know | * |
| Refused | * |

| | Sample N=1,566 % |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Child's grade in school | |
| Kindergarten | 5% |
| 1st grade | 7% |
| 2nd grade | 6% |
| 3rd grade | 7% |
| 4th grade | 6% |
| 5th grade | 7% |
| 6th grade | 8% |
| 7th grade | 9% |
| 8th grade | 10% |
| 9th grade | 7% |
| 10th grade | 8% |
| 11th grade | 10% |
| 12th grade | 9% |
| Refused | 1% |
| Child in a charter school | |
| Yes, enrolled in a charter school | 4% |
| No, enrolled in regular public school | 96% |
| Refused | - |

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