

# IN Brief

Issue 7 Fall 2014

# SCHOOL CHOICE

COMPLEX CHOICES: HOW  
PARENTS NAVIGATE SCHOOL  
OPTIONS IN DUVAL COUNTY



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The landscape of school choice options in public education has been expanding faster than ever over the past decade, nationwide and especially in Florida. With this expansion has come an unprecedented array of new decisions that parents and guardians must learn to navigate as they seek the best school for their children. Options available to students now — from traditional neighborhood schools to charter schools, virtual schools and private schools, among others — can differ greatly in terms of curriculum and testing requirements, classroom structures, application procedures, parent requirements and more.

This report takes a closer look at the evolution and impact of various school choice options in Duval County. We examined the enrollment patterns of more than 200,000 students in Duval County Public Schools (DCPS) over the past five years, and surveyed more than 1,000

parents of students in all types of schools across Duval County to better understand what they look for in choosing the right school for their children.

Findings indicate an increasing number of parents moving their children out of traditional neighborhood schools to choice options over the past several years — particularly during the transitions to middle and high school. Despite many parents' concerns about academic and safety issues at their neighborhood middle or high school, we found no significant differences on average in fifth to sixth grade learning gains between groups of students staying within or moving outside of their neighborhood zoned school.

Nearly across the board, parents at all types of schools rated teacher quality and safety among the most important factors to them in evaluating the best school for their children. Our recommendations, which can be found on page 9 of this brief, include

a number of specific ways that state or district systems and individual schools of any type can better address parent concerns and priorities, as well as tips for caregivers looking to identify the best school option for their own children.

## IN THIS REPORT

HOW PARENTS CHOOSE

WHERE STUDENTS GO,  
AND HOW THEY PERFORM

HOW TO MAKE THE  
SYSTEM BETTER FOR  
STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

WHAT PARENTS AND  
CAREGIVERS CAN DO



# THE LANDSCAPE OF SCHOOL OPTIONS

## WHAT IS SCHOOL CHOICE?

“School choice” is a broad term commonly used to refer to a variety of public school enrollment options designed to give students an opportunity to go to a school outside of the traditional neighborhood school they are zoned to attend. Some of the more prominent options under the umbrella of school choice include magnet programs and schools, charter schools, private schools, virtual education, home schooling, and other district transfer programs.

Though each of these options falls under the broad umbrella of “school choice,” each one varies in terms of structure, oversight and services for students. (See the included **School Choice Reference Guide** for definitions of each).

Individual student needs, abilities, and interests, as well as school costs, location, size, and surrounding community all factor in differently to each family’s decision about what choice is best for their child. We’ll look more at how parents in Duval County weigh these different factors in choosing a school in an upcoming section. First, though, we’re going to look at how the expansion of all these options has changed the landscape of student enrollment statewide and in Duval County over the past several years.

## A COMPLEX AND EXPANDING ARRAY OF CHOICES

According to a recent report from the Council of Chief State School Officers, Florida leads the nation in the number of school choice options available to students, and was also one of the first states to offer publicly funded private school choice programs such as private school vouchers and tax credit scholarships.<sup>1</sup> **Table 1** shows enrollment patterns among various school options at the statewide and local levels over the past five years. Consistent across this period, Duval County has a relatively higher percentage of students enrolled in home and private schools compared to the statewide average — a trend typical of the state’s larger, urban districts.

Within the public choice options, however, there has been an accelerated shift in the landscape. **Figure 1** shows the marked rise in charter school enrollment in the state and district over this same period. While Duval County remains below the statewide average in the percentage of public school students enrolled in charters, that percentage is growing at a much faster rate than statewide. Since 2009, the percentage of students enrolled in charters statewide has grown by 69%, while the percentage in Duval County has grown by 344%.<sup>2</sup>

Figure 1: Charter school enrollment in Duval County and statewide, 2010-2014

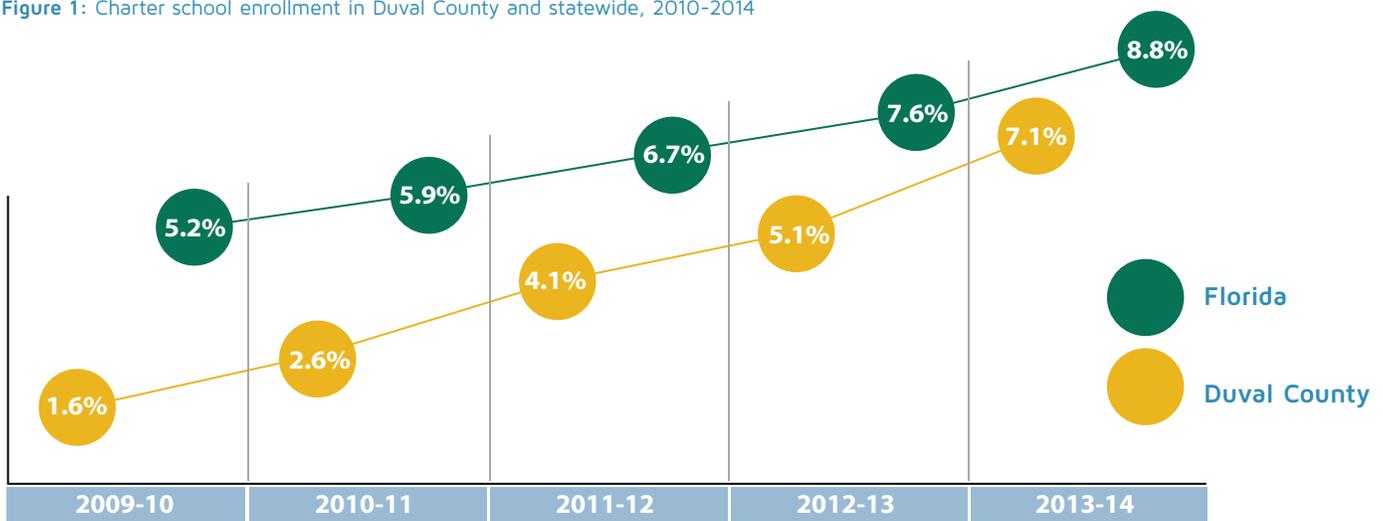


Table 1: Duval County & Florida statewide enrollment by school authority at beginning of year, 2010-2014

Students enrolled in:	2009-10		2010-11		2011-12		2012-13		2013-14	
	DCPS	FL								
District Public	78.3%	82.3%	77.9%	81.7%	77%	80.5%	75.3%	79.6%	73.4%	78.3%
Public Charter	1.6%	5.2%	2.6%	5.9%	4.1%	6.7%	5.1%	7.6%	7.1%	8.8%
Home School	2.7%	2.1%	3.4%	2.3%	3.5%	2.4%	3.8%	2.5%	3.7%	2.5%
Private School	17.4%	10.4%	16.1%	10.1%	15.4%	10.4%	15.8%	10.4%	15.8%	10.4%

One reason for this increase is that charter school capacity is simply expanding faster than any other choice option in Duval County as more new schools open each year.<sup>3</sup> In 2009-10, there were 9 charter schools in Duval County. By 2014-15, there were 34 charter schools in the county — increasing on average by four new charter schools per year.<sup>4</sup>

## SHIFTS AFFECT THE DISTRICT

The shifting enrollment patterns within the district, particularly with respect to charters, not only affects the students and families moving, but also has an impact on the way the district operates.

While the logic of per-pupil funding “following the student” to a choice or private option is reasonable, the real cost to the district is that part of the funding would go into district-wide

operating costs to cover items such as transportation and other services shared among schools. As enrollments drop, it puts a strain on the central infrastructure of the entire district and forces difficult decisions about downsizing central office functions.

According to one recent report, Duval County Public Schools reported having to cover a loss of \$51 million in 2013-2014 due to student funding lost to charters — in addition to competition for separate state building improvement funds.<sup>5</sup>

With this in mind, we took a deeper look at the enrollment records of more than 200,000 students who have moved through the district over the past five years to better understand patterns of movement to different school choice options, and whether there are important differences in student outcomes as a result.

## PARENT PROFILE: TRADITIONAL PUBLIC SCHOOL



Ronnie chose a traditional public school for his daughter, who is in fifth grade. Some of the key factors in their family’s decision were the ranking of the local school and its proximity to their home.

how well their daughter would perform in the traditional school environment. That’s in part because Ronnie is also a strong believer in ensuring that education happens at home.

Ronnie said he also places a high value on the opportunity for his children to be learning in a diverse environment.

The quality of the education available was important to Ronnie and his family, and they felt comfortable with

“It is important that our children are exposed to students from all backgrounds,” he said.

## WHERE STUDENTS ARE MOVING — AND WHEN

**Table 2:** DCPS magnet school/program enrollment and wait list at 20 days and beyond, totals and percentage of all students, 2010–2014

	Magnet Enrollment	Wait List Enrollment
2009-10	21,449 (17.5%)	5,988 (4.9%)
2010-11	20,106 (16.2%)	5,847 (4.7%)
2011-12	19,772 (15.8%)	4,971 (4.0%)
2012-13	20,037 (15.9%)	2,799 (2.2%)
2013-14	20,112 (15.8%)	2,740 (2.2%)

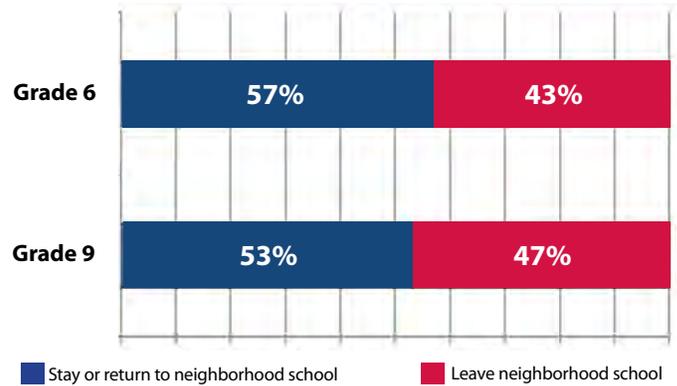
As we saw in **Figure 1**, one of the clearest trends in Duval County over the last five years is the significant increase in students attending charter schools. Considering the rate of expansion of charter schools in the district previously noted, it is not surprising that this growth has outpaced other options — such as magnet schools — which have maintained a comparatively fixed enrollment capacity over the same time.

**Table 2** shows that the number of students attending magnet programs outside of their zoned neighborhood school has remained comparatively consistent. However, while the number of these programs has grown from 54 schools with magnet programs in 2009-10 to 61 in 2013-14, enrollment numbers have actually declined slightly.<sup>6</sup>

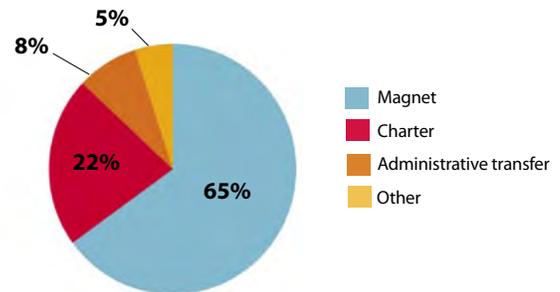
To get a better sense of how the shifts in **Table 2** look in terms of what types of schools students are moving between, when they are moving, and any potential impacts on student outcomes, we took a deeper look into student enrollment records in the district over the past five years.

The data showed that the most common times for students to change schools within the district are before sixth grade and ninth grade. While much of the movement at these grade levels would be expected as part of the natural transitions to middle and high school, a closer look finds more students leaving their neighborhood zoned school for a choice option at these transition points than any other year as well. **Figure 2** shows that nearly half of the students moving up to sixth or ninth grade over the past five years have chosen to leave their zoned school for a choice option within the district — more

**Figure 2:** DCPS transitions at grades 6 and 9, 2010–2014 totals



**Figure 3:** Intradistrict choice options among students leaving neighborhood zoned school at grade 6, 2010–2014 averages



than at any other grade levels. Among the parents we heard from in the survey and focus groups, using these key transition years as a natural opportunity to move their children out of their zoned neighborhood school was a very real, deliberate strategy, a trend which will be explored further in the next section.

**Figure 3** looks further into rising sixth graders who left their zoned neighborhood schools over the past five years. While magnet schools and programs still receive most students leaving neighborhood schools, year-by-year trends indicate a steady rise in students leaving for charter schools — likely in part due to the expansion of available charter schools. Before the 2010-2011 school year, nearly 67% of students leaving their neighborhood zoned middle school went to a magnet option. By 2013-2014, that percentage dropped to 60%. Over the same period, the percentage of rising middle school students leaving their neighborhood schools for charter schools rose from 19% to 24%.

Next, we studied why families are making the choices they are, and what the impact is on students.



# HOW PARENTS CHOOSE

## SURVEY REVEALS DUVAL COUNTY PARENTS' PREFERENCES

We surveyed more than 1,000 parents and guardians of students entering grades K-12 in a variety of school types throughout Duval County to learn more about the most important factors they looked for in selecting the right type of school for their children.<sup>7</sup>

The top ten most important factors across all respondents are shown in **Table 3**.<sup>8</sup> When considering parent responses across all types of schools, the quality of teachers and staff at a school was the most important factor to their decision. When parents were asked to elaborate on the items they rated, themes that came up repeatedly in their descriptions of teaching quality included:

- Teachers are invested in student outcomes.
- Teachers are strongly engaged with students on an individual basis and able to manage a classroom to create an environment where teachers can spend one-on-one time with students.
- Teachers communicate well with parents and students.
- Teachers with class sizes conducive to these practices.

To look deeper for identifiable patterns of priorities between parents who ultimately selected different traditional or choice options, **Table 4** breaks down the top five responses to this question by the types of schools. Looking at responses to the

same question this way, a number of new insights emerge:

- Teacher quality and safety remain the top two most important factors across parents at all types of schools.
- Charter, private, home and virtual school parents all rated individualized instruction in their top five factors.
- Private, home, and traditional school parents all emphasized concern about potential peer groups as a factor in their decision, with the private and home school parents giving it slightly more importance.

**Table 3:** Overall highest rated factors in selecting a school (All)

<b>Parents' Top 10 highest rated factors in selecting a school</b>	#1	Quality of Teachers/Staff
	#2	Safety
	#3	Academic Performance of School (test scores, grade, etc.)
	#4	Quality of Principals/Administrators
	#5	Peer Group/Other Students My Child Would Be Around
	#6	Specialized Academic Programs (AP, Early College, etc.)
	#7	Individualized Instruction
	#8	Access to Technology
	#9	Quality of School Buildings/Facilities
	#10	Word of Mouth/School Reputation

**Table 4:** Most important factors in choosing a school according to parents by school type

Traditional Neighborhood DCPS Public School	Another DCPS Public School	Charter School	Private School	Home School	Virtual School	Other (Alt. center, ESE, Hospital/ Home-bound, other)
Quality of teachers/staff	Quality of teachers/staff	Quality of teachers/staff	Quality of teachers/staff	Safety	Quality of teachers/staff	Quality of teachers/staff
Safety	Safety	Safety	Safety	Quality of teachers/staff	Individualized instruction	Quality of principals/administrators
School academic performance (test scores, school grades, etc.)	Specialized academic programs (AP, Early College, Magnet, Career Academy, etc.)	Quality of principals/administrators	School academic performance (test scores, school grades, etc.)	Individualized instruction	Virtual course options	Peer group/other students my child would be around
Quality of principals/administrators	School academic performance (test scores, school grades, etc.)	Individualized instruction	Peer group/other students my child would be around	Peer group/other students my child would be around	Safety	Individualized instruction
Peer group/other students my child would be around	Quality of principals/administrators	School academic performance (test scores, school grades, etc.)	Individualized instruction	Quality of principals/administrators	Peer group/other students my child would be around	Safety

## WHEN PARENTS ARE MOVING THEIR CHILDREN

To learn more about some of the decision patterns we saw in the enrollment data, we also asked all survey respondents to chronicle their child's enrollment history to date and any future plans. A high response rate among parents who either already had, or intend to, place their student outside of their neighborhood zoned middle school at sixth grade indicated additional support for the apparent natural transition year strategy we first saw in the data.<sup>9</sup>

When describing their reasoning for moving their children at middle school, the most common responses were wanting to move to a magnet program (mentioned in 28% of survey open-ended comments for this question) or just not being satisfied with their zoned public middle school (mentioned in 24% of survey open-ended comments for this question).

In some of the parents' own words, "the transition from elementary to middle school and middle to high school can be very traumatic." Additionally, "moving away from friends," "large leaps in the curriculum," "a faster pace," and "less structure" were comments often repeated in one way or another across focus groups when discussing the middle school transition.

The next most frequent time parents discussed having

already or planning to move their students was at the transition to high school. In the survey and in focus groups, the most common reasons parents shared for moving their child to a different school at the high school level included concerns about school safety, perceived reputations of their neighborhood high schools, and the desire for advanced programs and college prep.

### MIDDLE SCHOOL: A TOUGH ADJUSTMENT FOR ALL

In the parent surveys and focus groups, concerns about the transition to middle school were a major recurring theme. Fears about academic quality and perceptions of student safety issues at their zoned neighborhood middle school were among the specific reasons frequently cited by parents. To get a better understanding of whether different choice options within the district appear to be supporting those concerns, in **Figures 4a, 4b and 5** we looked at average change in reading and math achievement levels and average change in reported behavior violations between fifth and sixth grade across students making different intradistrict enrollment choices at the middle school transition.

We found that on average different groups of students experience about the same degree of decline in achievement

## PARENT PROFILE: MAGNET SCHOOL STORY



Melissa is a mother of a fourth grader and twins in second grade at an elementary school with a magnet program. They have been there since Melissa researched the best place for her oldest to start kindergarten, with a school tour as the deciding factor.

"The level of magnet parent involvement is exciting,"

she said, adding that it's great to see magnet and non-magnet parents working together.

"I believe that a magnet program is a great way for parents and children to be able to choose the best for their family," she said. "I have a very active family where health and fitness is important, so choosing a school with a health magnet focus was an easy choice."

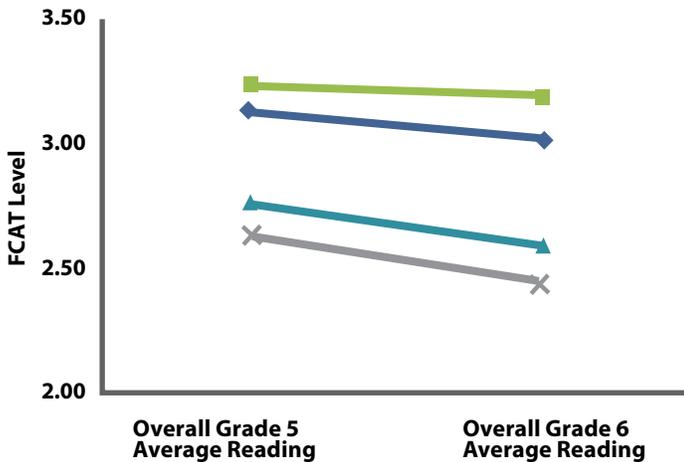


levels and increase in behavior referrals from fifth to sixth grade — regardless of whether they are moving outside of their neighborhood zoned middle school or not.

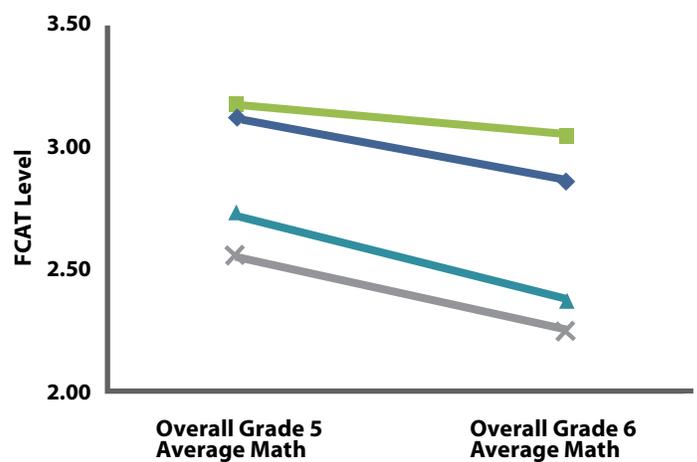
This indicates there are likely other, larger structural issues in the transition to middle school — such as more difficult content standards and assessments, or the adjustment to new classroom structures or social pressures — that affect students entering middle school similarly, regardless of the type of school they attend.

Due to the nature of the data available for this study, students who left public school for a private or home school option — or students who have never been enrolled in a local public school — are not reflected in the findings below. In order to compare different groups of students on a common assessment, these results include only students in Duval County Public School options or charter schools. (Several national studies have independently compared student performance at public vs. private schools on common assessments, for more information visit [www.jaxpef.org/schoolchoice](http://www.jaxpef.org/schoolchoice).)

**Figure 4a:** Grade 5 to 6 average Reading performance level change by mover type (2010-2014 average)



**Figure 4b:** Grade 5 to 6 average Mathematics performance level change by mover type (2010-2014 average)



**Types of 5th to 6th grade moves**

- ◆ Left neighborhood zoned school

---

- ▲ Stayed at neighborhood zoned school

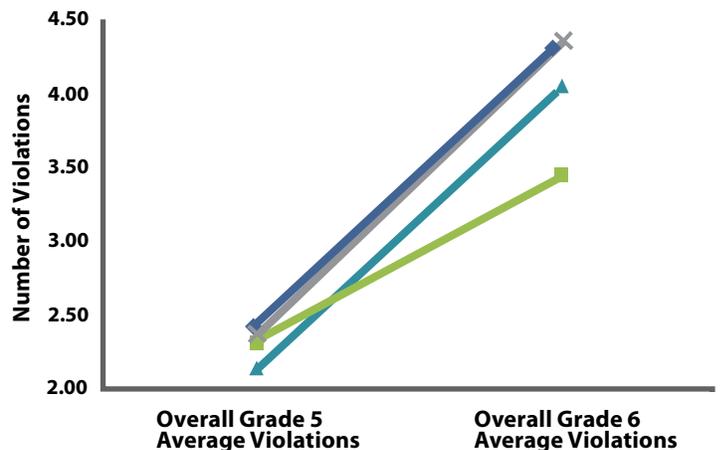
---

- Already out of neighborhood zoned school, stayed out

---

- ✕ Out of neighborhood zoned elementary school, returned to neighborhood middle school

**Figure 5:** Grade 5 to 6 average behavior violations change by mover type (2010-2014 average)



## THE 'BRAIN DRAIN' EFFECT

While the students in the groups shown in **Figures 4a, 4b and 5** tended to experience similar drops in performance between fifth and sixth grade, the data shows that average proficiency levels overall were slightly different. **Figures 4a and 4b** show that students who were already outside their neighborhood zoned school, and stayed in one of those choice options going into middle school, tended to start with the highest average achievement levels in fifth grade and consequently maintained relatively higher performance levels in sixth grade despite a similar year-to-year drop.

We also see that, on average, students leaving their zoned neighborhood school at this point tended to be relatively higher-performing students to begin with, and continued to outperform students remaining in their zoned middle school by about the same margin in sixth grade.

This would appear to indicate some support for the commonly heard concern among traditional public school supporters referred to as “brain drain.” Brain drain casually refers to the concern that some issues with apparent performance disparities or peer influences at some traditional neighborhood schools are exacerbated by the fact that certain choice programs may be “skimming” the highest performing students from neighborhood schools around the

district and bringing them together elsewhere.

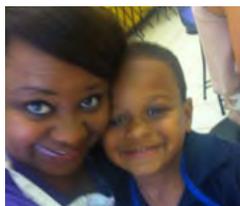
While this is a topic that is beyond the scope of this paper to fully explore, it’s important to note that the term “brain drain” may have misleading implications — as student performance and movement to choice options may both be as much a reflection of parental involvement as actual innate student ability.

Related to this, though less commonly discussed, is another trend we see in **Figures 4a and 4b**, in which the lowest-performing group of students on average are those who were out of their traditional neighborhood zoned schools in fifth grade and returned to them for sixth grade.

So there is at least some initial evidence here that not only are traditional neighborhood middle schools losing some of their highest-performing students to choice options at middle school; they are receiving back some lower-performing students who had previously left for a choice option.

This is one of the reasons why policy makers are exploring middle school reform as a key issue both statewide and locally, with several new initiatives being implemented in Duval County Public Schools.

## PARENT PROFILE: CHARTER SCHOOL



Crishana heard about a local charter school from a friend that worked at the school. Like every parent, she was concerned about the quality of education her son, a soon-to-be kindergartener, would have in the future. Crishana weighed the pros, such as the frequency of foreign language and other elective classes, versus the con, not being able to drop her child

off at a bus stop. The most important factor was the quality of teachers and staff.

She also liked the school’s “diverse curriculum” and the 50 minutes of resource classes such as art or P.E.

“I wanted my student to be able to enjoy school and not feel over-tested,” Crishana said. She cited teacher autonomy, wider curriculum scope, uniforms, and a positive environment as other attributes she liked.



## HOW DISTRICTS, SCHOOLS AND PARENTS CAN FACILITATE THE BEST CHOICES

### Recommendations for: Districts & Systems

The major themes arising from parent survey and focus group feedback in this survey suggest a number of potential strategic reform efforts that DCPS may want to consider to better meet the needs of concerned parents, such as:

**Create a unified portal.** A major frustration we heard repeatedly from parents was confusion about how to find comparable information on all of the options available to them across different types of schools. In looking at the diagram on the **School Choice Reference Guide**, it is easy to see why. Parents exploring all options may need to go through multiple local or state agencies to learn about each. There already exist several good websites (such as [duvalchoice.com](http://duvalchoice.com)) but each covers a different sector and no single website includes information about all available options. To ensure that all parents are better able to access and understand their full range of options, one recommendation would be for a state or independent agency to pull all that information together into a unified portal that guides parents to the options available by asking a few questions.

**Pilot additional choice options to specifically respond to parent feedback.** For example, parents leaving for charter and private options, particularly, said they were looking for the strong, structured parental expectations (such as parent agreements, required meeting attendance or volunteer assistance) that they felt these types of schools could better offer than traditional public options. There are other districts in the state, such as Pinellas County, which has designated certain traditional public schools to operate with these same parent involvement requirements (typically called “fundamental schools”). Making this type of school a part of the district’s choice options may better meet the needs of families who might otherwise feel they have to leave the district to find the school they are looking for.

**Better address parent concerns about the transition to middle or high school by developing strong, structured cross-school teacher teams at key transition years as an expectation at all schools.** These types of teacher teams,

between schools zoned to feed into each other, are designed to allow (for example) sixth grade teachers to begin getting to know students and their parents, and help plan for their needs, while they are in fifth grade; as well as allowing fifth grade teachers to follow up on the progress of their students in sixth grade and offer their new teachers insight and advice. For both parents and students, that overlapping teacher involvement helps provide more stability through a potentially disruptive transition time.

**Consider the cost and feasibility of moving to full open enrollment system — with transportation provided — at the middle and high school levels only.** The majority of parents in the survey said they would take advantage of an open enrollment policy if it was available. Full open enrollment at all levels is something DCPS has considered before. Ultimately the proposal did not move forward, due in part to the inability to provide transportation for all students, and community concerns about whether that would disadvantage families who could not provide their own transportation. Given that less than a quarter of the district’s schools are middle, high or 6-12 combinations, an open enrollment plan starting at middle school would mean only providing transportation among 45 schools (as opposed to nearly 150 for open enrollment at all grade levels). This would be a more affordable plan that could meet the needs of families when they are most likely to want to explore options outside of their neighborhood school.

### Recommendations for: Schools

Just as parents in today’s education landscape should expect to invest more time in evaluating their options, schools also need to learn to focus more on attracting parents and addressing the individual needs of students and families.

This applies to all types of schools — traditional, charter, magnet, virtual, private and others. Promoting the strengths and unique advantages they offer over other schools vying for parents’ attention is critical to making sure they receive proper consideration and that the family makes the best, most informed decision possible.

## HOW DISTRICTS, SCHOOLS AND PARENTS CAN FACILITATE THE BEST CHOICES

Some simple ways for a school to be sure they are always putting their best foot forward to engage current and prospective families include:

**A clean, effective website.** Ideally, it should include prominent information on school offerings, unique programs and updated news current and prospective parents need to know.

**A clear and easy system for prospective parents to tour the school.** Parents want to have a chance to learn about the school and meet with administration, faculty and even parent representatives if possible. Many parents we spoke to expressed frustration about not knowing how to set that up.

**An easily understandable application or registration process.** Information and support opportunities for helping parents understand the requirements or application materials needed to transfer into a school should be readily accessible.

**An active and truly collaborative relationship with parents and community.** Parent and community committees may reach a larger circle of potential future parents through word of mouth, and are focused on the continuing improvement of the school. These groups can be any school's best advocates.

**Individualize instruction.** The survey and focus groups show that parents value individual attention highly. Supporting

teachers and administrators to more effectively use the tools many already have will turn academic data into a valuable tool to improve instruction and attention to individual students.

### Recommendations for: Parents, Guardians & Caregivers

Trends over the last several years, along with recent legislation designed to open more options to more families<sup>10</sup>, indicate clearly that the number of school enrollment options parents will have to choose from (and evaluate between) is only going to continue to grow. Those who haven't already should recognize that caregivers of today and tomorrow need to be much more active in the education choices for their children as compared with the parents and guardians of yesterday.

Another way of thinking about it is that choosing the right school now may be the biggest investment a parent or caregiver ever makes in a child's life, and as such they should expect to put a similar amount of thought into it as they would buying a house. This includes researching all available options, comparing data and information available to begin narrowing down options, talking to other parents with experiences at those schools, and actually visiting any options being seriously considered to tour and talk to administrators and teachers about exactly what they are looking for for their child.

## PARENT PROFILE: VIRTUAL SCHOOL



Charlene's eighth grader and 10th grader have been enrolled in virtual school for the past several years, an option she first researched after both children had unpleasant experiences with standardized testing and teacher engagement at two different public schools.

Charlene said she liked that in virtual school, students

are tested at the beginning of the school year to place them in the appropriate curriculum and from there are able to individually pace themselves with their work.

She also likes the interaction with the virtual school teachers.

"The teachers are pros. They give one-on-one attention," she said. "If there is a problem, usually there is a response within 24 hours."



Some key points that our findings here suggest parents should keep in mind as they begin this process include:

**Begin the process without preconceived notions about any type of school being better in general for all students.** While there is a growing body of national research showing specific connections between certain types of schools and particular subgroups of students, there is no evidence that any one type of school is objectively better than another overall. The more important question for parents is to determine what specific school among all your options is best for your individual child.

**Take the time to visit all the schools you are considering, and schedule time to meet with some administrators and teachers.** In our focus groups with parents from all different types of schools, it was clear that the most important

consideration to many of them was feeling comfortable and connected with teachers, administrators, and the students and parents at their school — regardless of the type of school.

**Research your options.** Detailed academic and enrollment data, as well as school and contact information, on every public and charter school in Duval County is available on School Facts Jax. Visit [www.SchoolFactsJax.org](http://www.SchoolFactsJax.org) to get started.

**To learn more about how to identify all of your school choice options and choose the best one for your child, as well as explore some more interactive information about the issues and possibilities explored here, visit [www.jaxpef.org/schoolchoice](http://www.jaxpef.org/schoolchoice).**

## PARENT PROFILE: PRIVATE SCHOOL



Through a private scholarship, Maris and her family last year chose private school for their daughter, now in second grade. “Our faith was a major factor influencing our decision to choose the school,” she said. “The school is at our church.”

“There are only 400 students from pre-K to eighth grade,” she said. “Parents are very involved at the school and pay attention to their child’s development.”

The high cost of private school is a downside, however, so Maris said she may consider enrolling her daughter in a high-performing or magnet public high school in the future.

### FOOTNOTES:

1 – Council of Chief State School Officers. (February 2013). School Choice in the States: A Policy Landscape. Retrieved from [http://www.ccsso.org/Documents/2013/Choice\\_by\\_State\\_2013.pdf](http://www.ccsso.org/Documents/2013/Choice_by_State_2013.pdf)

2 – <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data#FL/2/0>; [https://www.floridaschoolchoice.org/information/charter\\_schools/files/fast\\_facts\\_charter\\_schools.pdf](https://www.floridaschoolchoice.org/information/charter_schools/files/fast_facts_charter_schools.pdf); <http://www.publiccharters.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/New-and-Closed-Report-February-2014.pdf>; <http://>

[www.jaxpef.org/news/2014/04/new!-mobility-from-duval-county-neighborhood-schools-shows-trends.aspx](http://www.jaxpef.org/news/2014/04/new!-mobility-from-duval-county-neighborhood-schools-shows-trends.aspx)

3 – Dejong-Richter, Enrollment Projections Report (April 2014). Presented at Duval County School Board meeting on May 13, 2014.

4 – Duval County Public Schools. (Updated July 10, 2014) 2014-2015 List of Charter Schools. Retrieved from <http://duvalchoice.com/sites/default/files/pdf/Charter%20School%20List%202014-2015%20%28Basic%20Information%29.pdf>.

5 – <http://lwvjacksonvilleleague.org/files/CS2.pdf>

6 – Duval County Public Schools. Magnet Application for 2013-2014 School Year. Report received August 27, 2014.

7 – Note: Some survey respondents were targeted and responses weighted to approximate a sample of parents as demographically representative as possible of the Duval County population in terms of race, ethnicity, and types of schools children are enrolled in. More information on sample

demographics available at [www.jaxpef.org/schoolchoice](http://www.jaxpef.org/schoolchoice).

8 – Note: For this item, respondents were presented 20 items in random, rotating order as well as provided an open-response option for additional issues.

9 – Note: Full survey results data available at [www.jaxpef.org/schoolchoice](http://www.jaxpef.org/schoolchoice).

10 – <http://www.redefinedonline.org/2014/06/scott-signs-school-choice-legislation/>

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:** Special thanks to all the parents, schools, administrators and the Duval County Council of PTAs for promoting and participating in the survey and focus group sessions. Additional thanks to Duval County Public Schools for research access.



245 Riverside Avenue, Suite 310  
Jacksonville, FL 32202

NON-PROFIT ORG  
US POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
JACKSONVILLE, FL  
PERMIT NO 34

# **SCHOOL CHOICE**

## COMPLEX CHOICES: HOW PARENTS NAVIGATE SCHOOL OPTIONS IN DUVAL COUNTY

### A REPORT FROM THE JACKSONVILLE PUBLIC EDUCATION FUND

In this report, Duval County's complex school choice landscape is examined, with a focus on how parents make decisions about where their children attend school.

The Jacksonville Public Education Fund is an independent nonprofit organization that works to connect research with civic voice to bring about unified action in support of universally high-quality public schools for all children in Duval County. We believe that an informed and active citizenry, together with attentive and aligned community and district leadership, will move our schools forward to prepare students with the skills they need for future success.



# IN Brief | SCHOOL CHOICE REFERENCE GUIDE

In Duval County, there are many different types of schooling options. Here's a quick guide to all the choices.

## Neighborhood Public School



## Magnet Programs



## Dedicated Magnet



## Choice/Other Programs



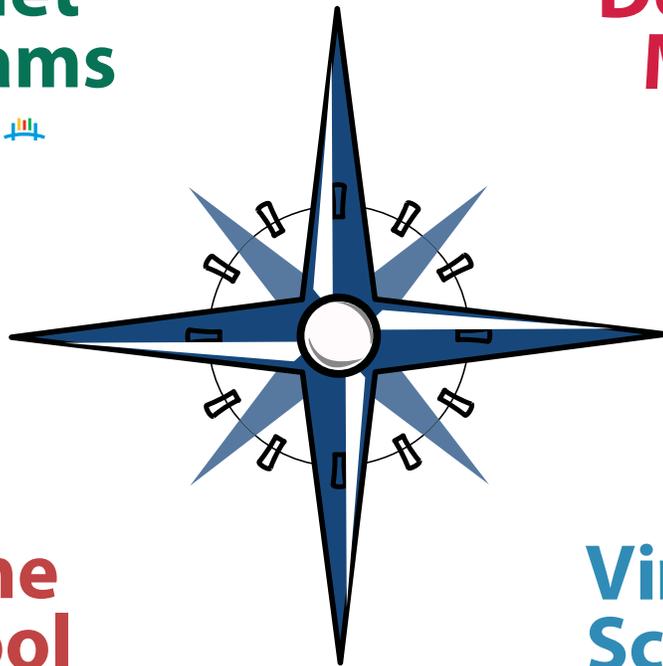
## Charter School



## Home School

## Virtual School

## Private School



- Application Required
- Lottery for Admissions May Apply
- Transportation Provided
- Limited Transportation
- Public School Option
- DCPS Option
- Costs Tuition

See other side for definitions, details and contact information.

Researching options for your child? Find detailed information about all public schools in Duval County on School Facts Jax. Go to [jaxpef.org](http://jaxpef.org) to get started. Then use this handy School Choice Reference Guide to find out who to contact.

**NEIGHBORHOOD PUBLIC SCHOOL** – A neighborhood school is the public school a student is assigned to attend based on his or her residential address. Every residential address is assigned to an elementary, middle and high school. Locate your zoned school on [SchoolFactsJax.org](http://SchoolFactsJax.org). Visit [duvalschools.org](http://duvalschools.org) and click on Parents to learn more about registration or call (904) 390-2144.

**MAGNET PROGRAMS** – A public school program with specialized theme(s) that allows students to explore a special talent, interest, or skill. Magnet programs are typically located within a traditional neighborhood school but are open to students from other zones to attend. To learn more go to [duvalchoice.com](http://duvalchoice.com) or call (904) 390-2082.

**DEDICATED MAGNET** – A district public school with no specified attendance boundary that has a specific subject or theme at its focus. Students must apply to attend and be accepted. Seats may further be determined through a lottery. All students in the school are part of the magnet program. To learn more go to [duvalchoice.com](http://duvalchoice.com) or call (904) 390-2082.

**CHOICE/OTHER PROGRAMS** – A neighborhood school offering a special program which is designed to offer educational and vocational opportunities to students that might not otherwise be available in the neighborhood school, such as acceleration programs, career academies, or other special programs. To learn more go to [duvalchoice.com](http://duvalchoice.com) or call (904) 390-2082.

**VIRTUAL SCHOOL** – An education option not bound by a particular location, as all student courses and services are delivered using online instruction. For more information go to [duvalschools.org/dvia](http://duvalschools.org/dvia) or [www.fldoe.org/schools/virtual-schools](http://www.fldoe.org/schools/virtual-schools).

**CHARTER SCHOOL** – A charter school is a public school. It is operated by an independent management organization on a performance contract with the local school board. Charter schools are tuition-free and are held accountable

for academic and financial results, but may be exempt from some of the requirements of traditional public schools. To learn more go to [duvalchoice.com](http://duvalchoice.com) or call (904) 390-2082.

**PRIVATE SCHOOL** – A private school is independently owned and operated and is not administered by a local or state agency. Private schools can determine their own tuition fees, student selection criteria, and other administrative requirements. For more information and listings, go to [floridaschoolchoice.org](http://floridaschoolchoice.org).

**HOME SCHOOL** – A parent or guardian may opt to teach their child at home rather than in a traditionally structured school environment. Parents do not need to be certified to teach, but must notify the school district or partner with a private school. For more information, go to [floridaschoolchoice.org](http://floridaschoolchoice.org) and click on Home Education.

**K-12 SCHOLARSHIP/VOUCHER PROGRAMS** – A variety of different scholarship or voucher programs are available to allow students to transfer to another public school outside of their residential zone or receive funding to help pay for tuition at a private school (learn more about these options at [floridaschoolchoice.org](http://floridaschoolchoice.org)). These include:

**OPPORTUNITY SCHOLARSHIP** – A scholarship provided to parents to move their child from a failing neighborhood school to a higher-performing public school.

**TAX CREDIT SCHOLARSHIP** – Scholarships to subsidize private school tuition, funded by tax credits companies receive for making donations.

**MCKAY SCHOLARSHIP** – A scholarship providing students with disabilities an opportunity to attend a public or private school equipped to meet their needs.

**PRIVATE SCHOLARSHIP** – Some private organizations and private schools help fund tuition to a private school for families based on income level and merit.