

WHAT MATTERS IN EDUCATION

Parents and Guardians' Opinions on K-12
Public Education in New Orleans

Annual Poll Policy Brief No. 2



DECEMBER 2022

INTRODUCTION

This is the second and final brief on the Cowen Institute's 2022 annual poll of parents' and guardians' perceptions of K-12 public education in New Orleans. We have conducted these polls since 2007 with the intent of providing insight into how parents, guardians, and the general public view New Orleans' highly decentralized K-12 public education system. As we noted in our first poll brief for this year (released in November 2022), the questions in these polls were drafted by the Cowen Institute in consultation with our contracted polling firm, LJR Custom Strategies. The poll includes questions we ask each year to assess how opinions change over time, as well as new questions on the most urgent topics of the moment. We began releasing the poll findings in a series of

briefs rather than one comprehensive report starting in 2021 in an effort to make the results more digestible for the public. The first 2022 poll brief covered general perceptions about New Orleans K-12 public education; this brief explores specific education topics in greater depth.

To capture the experiences and attitudes of a wide range of parents, we polled 1,000 public and private school parents and guardians in Orleans Parish, as well as a small number who homeschool their children. This year, the breakdown of respondents was as follows:

81%

Parents and guardians whose children only attend New Orleans Public Schools (NOLA-PS)

2%

Parents and guardians who have some children who attend public schools and some who attend private schools

15%

Parents and guardians whose children only attend private and parochial schools

2%

Parents and guardians whose children are exclusively homeschooled



METHODOLOGY

This is the 13th opinion poll on public education in New Orleans published by the Cowen Institute. It was conducted between September 6-15, 2022. The survey items were developed by the Cowen Institute in consultation with LJR Custom Strategies, a strategic research and consulting firm led by Principal Jennifer Johnson. LJR has led our polling over the past five years.

The poll surveyed 1,000 adults who reside in Orleans Parish and are the parent/guardian/responsible party for one or more children who currently reside in their household and attend a K-12 school or are homeschooled. Of those adults surveyed, 90%

were reached by cell phone and 10% were reached by landline. The sample was representative of the location of residence of the population of New Orleans. Findings from the full 1,000 person sample are subject to a sampling error of plus or minus 3.1%. Subgroup analyses are subject to error of up to plus or minus 10%.

A full overview of question format and item-level descriptives are included on our website:

cowendata.org

OVERALL TRENDS

As noted earlier, our first 2022 poll brief focused on more general perceptions about K-12 public education in New Orleans. A key conclusion of that brief was that overall sentiments about education were notably more pessimistic this year than in previous years.

This brief examines responses on six specific issues. As was true with the findings in our first poll brief, throughout all six of the topics chronicles in this brief, responses often differed greatly based on the socioeconomic status of respondents. This trend in responses indicates that socioeconomic status impacts the way parents, families, and students experience K-12 public education, as well as the resources they are able to access.

The major findings for each issue examined in this report are summarized on the following page:



SCHOOL SELECTION



Families care deeply about students' overall academic performance, promotion and graduation rates, teacher certification, and change in student performance year over year. Student performance on standardized tests was the least important factor for families when selecting a school. Interestingly, school performance scores are calculated largely by using standardized test scores and the variation between these two responses suggest that there is a disconnect in parents' understanding of how school performance scores are calculated.

LIFE AFTER HIGH SCHOOL



A plurality of respondents believed that the best way to assess how well New Orleans' high schools were preparing students for life after graduation was to holistically consider high school graduation rates, college enrollment rates, college persistence rates after the first and second years, college graduation rates, employment rates, rather than focusing on any of those issues individually.

FEEDBACK TO NOLA-PS



Respondents indicated that they favored providing providing feedback to the school district through meetings and forums, or by responding to text or phone calls. There was less support for in person focus groups or interviews.

TRANSPORTATION



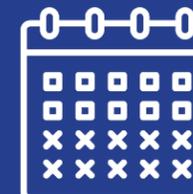
On average, respondents believed that around 20 minutes was an acceptable amount of time for students to travel one-way to or from school each day. Additionally, wealthier families were far more likely to drive students to school each day, while less affluent families were more likely to have students take the bus.

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES



Less than one-third of respondents with a NOLA-PS student stated they had a child engaged in extracurricular activities through school. Comparatively, 67% of parents with a child that was either in private schools or homeschool participated in extracurricular activities. This indicates that such activities break down along socioeconomic lines.

ABSENTEEISM



Though the topic has received attention in local media, just 2% of respondents stated they had a child who had been chronically absent from school last year.

KEY FINDINGS

School Selection

This year, we asked parents and guardians to rank the importance of 11 different factors they could consider when selecting a school for their child(ren). Respondents were given the option of rating each issue on a scale from 1-10, where 1 means not important and 10 means extremely important.

As is evidenced by the findings, respondents rated all of the issues we asked them about as important – the lowest average for any of the 11 factors was a mean of 8.5, and nine of the factors had means over 9.0. Therefore, when evaluating parents’ and guardians’ rankings, it is worth remembering that parents value all of these factors as vital when evaluating schools, though they perceived some to be slightly more important than others.

Based on the mean response rate, parents and guardians ranked the factors involved in school selection in this order:

- » **9.6:** Student promotion and graduation rates
- » **9.6:** Change in student performance year over year
- » **9.6:** Students’ overall academic performance
- » **9.6:** Teacher certification
- » **9.5:** Student absenteeism rates
- » **9.5:** Parent feedback and satisfaction ratings
- » **9.5:** Student feedback and satisfaction ratings
- » **9.4:** The school’s letter grade
- » **9.2:** Racial diversity of the student body
- » **8.7:** Extracurricular activities
- » **8.5:** Students’ performance on standardized tests

Additionally, we also asked parents to respond to a list of factors that parents consider when selecting schools on the New Orleans Common Application (NCAP), the enrollment system for NOLA-PS schools. The top choice was clear: 58% of respondents said the academic performance of the school was the most important factor for them, followed by 11% who said location, and 9% who chose teachers. Notably, just 2% said they did not know or refused to answer the question.

Subgroup Breakdowns

- » As was apparent in responses throughout the poll this year, there were notable differences in responses based on the socio-economic status of respondents. Parents and guardians with household incomes of \$40,000 or less were more likely to cite the school’s letter grade, parental satisfaction and student feedback, change in student performance, student promotion and graduation rates, racial diversity, teacher certification, and absenteeism as important factors when selecting schools than respondents with household incomes of \$75,000 or more per year. The biggest gaps between respondents occurred when ranking the importance of racial diversity, where respondents with incomes under \$40,000 had a mean of 9.5 compared to a mean of 8.2 for respondents with incomes of \$75,000 or above; and with students’ performance on standardized tests, where respondents with incomes of \$75,000 or above had a mean of 8.8 compared to a mean of 7.6 for respondents with incomes of \$40,000 or less.

» There were not notable differences in responses based on the race of the respondents.

» When it came to selecting schools, 74% of respondents with household incomes under \$40,000 said academic performance of the school was their top choice, compared to only 41% of respondents with household incomes of \$75,000 and over. Teachers were the most important factor for 23% of higher income respondents.

Life After High School

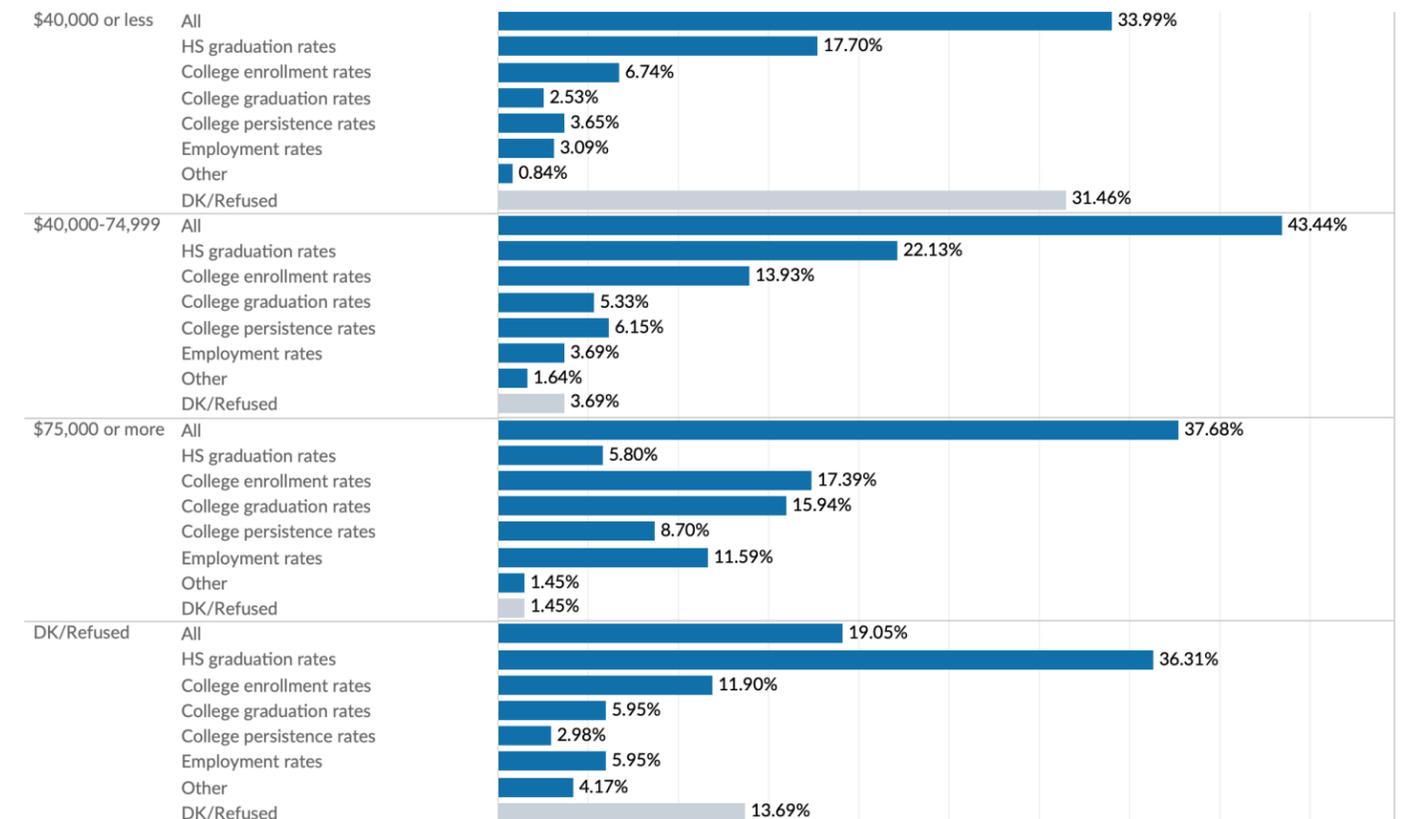
This year, for the first time, we asked respondents to choose from a list of topics what they thought was the best indicator to assess how well NOLA-PS is preparing graduates for life after high school. Respondents were given the choice of: high school graduation rates; college enrollment rates; college persistence rates after the first and second years; college graduation rates; employment rates; or all of the above.

The most common response (34%) was that all of these indicators collectively were the most important, followed by high school graduation rates (22%). The third most common response (17%) was those who said they didn’t know or did not want to answer, followed by college enrollment rates (11%). No other response received more than 5% of responses.

Subgroup Breakdown

- » 31% of respondents with household incomes of \$40,000 or less did not provide a response.
- » Respondents from higher income households put the greatest weight on college enrollment and college graduation rates. White respondents rated college enrollment rates as their top indicator.
- » 22% of respondents with household incomes of \$40,000-\$74,999 and 18% of respondents with incomes under \$40,000 rated high school graduation rates as their top indicator, compared to just 6% of higher income respondents. Black parents were also more likely (24%) to rate high school graduation as their top choice, than White respondents (13%).

What is the best indicator of how well NOLA public schools are preparing graduates for life after high school? (By household income)



% of Total Count of Cowen 2022 Raw Data-2.csv for each PrepareforPostSec broken down by Income SHT. Color shows details about PrepareforPostSec. The view is filtered on PrepareforPostSec, which excludes Missing.

Feedback for New Orleans Public Schools

Feedback from parents and guardians is one key way to judge how well schools specifically, and the district overall, are performing. It is also a way for schools and the district to improve and respond to families' needs.

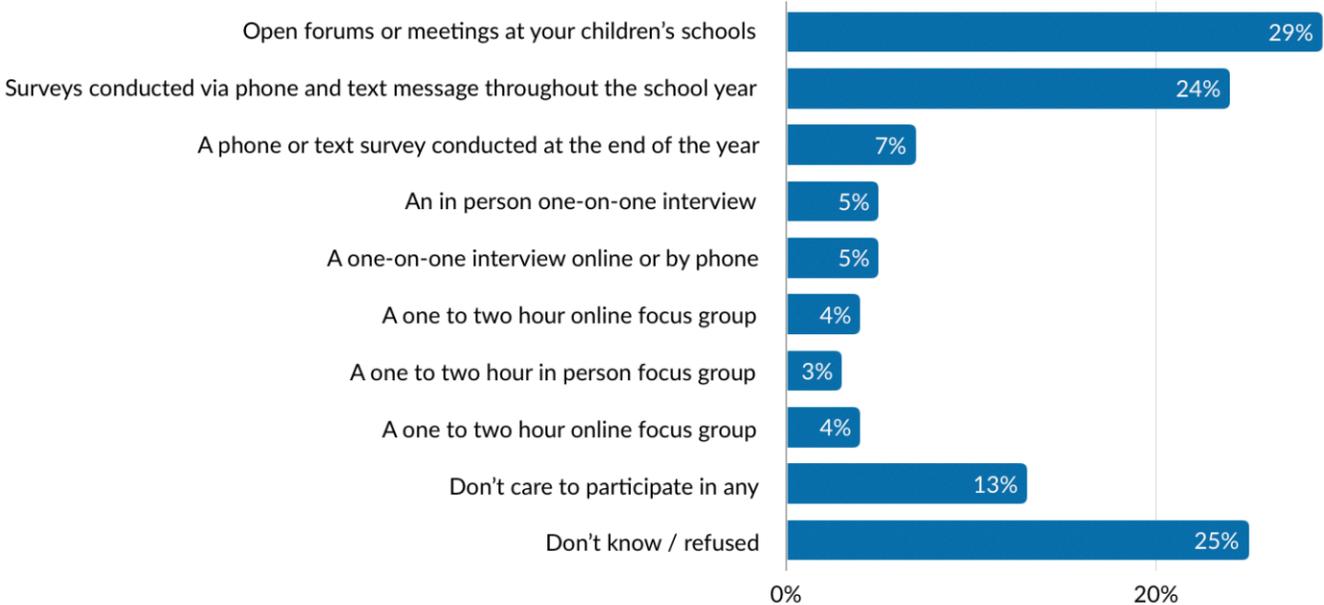
We created a list of ways that family feedback could be gathered to assess school performance. We then asked respondents to select the two options that they would be most willing to participate in to provide feedback to NOLA-PS.

Open forums or meetings throughout the school year was the most commonly selected response (29%), followed by phone or text surveys throughout the year (24%). No other option was selected more than 7% of the time, while 25% did not provide an answer or said they didn't know.

Subgroup Breakdown

- » Responses differed noticeably based on socioeconomic status: 33% of respondents with household incomes under \$40,000 or between \$40,000 and \$74,999 selected open forums or meetings at school, compared to only 13% of those with household incomes of \$75,000 or above. By contrast, 41% of those with incomes of \$75,000 or above opted for phone or text surveys, compared to just 18% of those with incomes under \$40,000.
- » Respondents with children in grades K to 5 were far more likely (34%) to select open meetings or forums than parents with students in grades 9 to 12 (19%).

Here are some ways parental feedback could be gathered by New Orleans Public Schools and used to help assess school performance. Please tell me which one or two you would be most willing to participate in, assuming all were conducted on behalf of New Orleans Public Schools? (All respondents)



Transportation

New Orleans has an open enrollment system, meaning that families can apply to have their child(ren) attend almost any public school in the city, regardless of where they live. This differs from the location-based method that was used to make school assignments in the city prior to Hurricane Katrina, and which is the way in which most U.S. school systems make assignments today, where students typically attend the school closest to their home.

The open enrollment system has the advantage of allowing families the option to find the right school for their student(s), regardless of where it is located, but it comes with the drawbacks including, among other things, longer commute times to and from schools. The open enrollment system therefore makes transportation an issue of elevated importance in New Orleans education compared to other school districts in Louisiana and across the country. Due to this, the Cowen Institute has polled parents and guardians on their transportation patterns and preferences throughout the history of our polling.

This year, we asked respondents what they thought was an acceptable number of minutes for their child(ren) to travel one-way to or from school each day and then we placed their responses into ranges of time. 33% said 15-19 minutes, 31% chose 20-29 minutes, 19% selected 30-45 minutes, and 14% opted for under 15 minutes. The mean response was 20.4 minutes.

It is worth noting that in our 2019 poll, we asked parents how long their child(ren) spent going to and from school each day: Parents who drove their student(s) to school provided an average of 43 minutes, compared to 58 minutes for students who rode the bus (which would be averages of 22 and 29 minutes each way, respectively). This year's

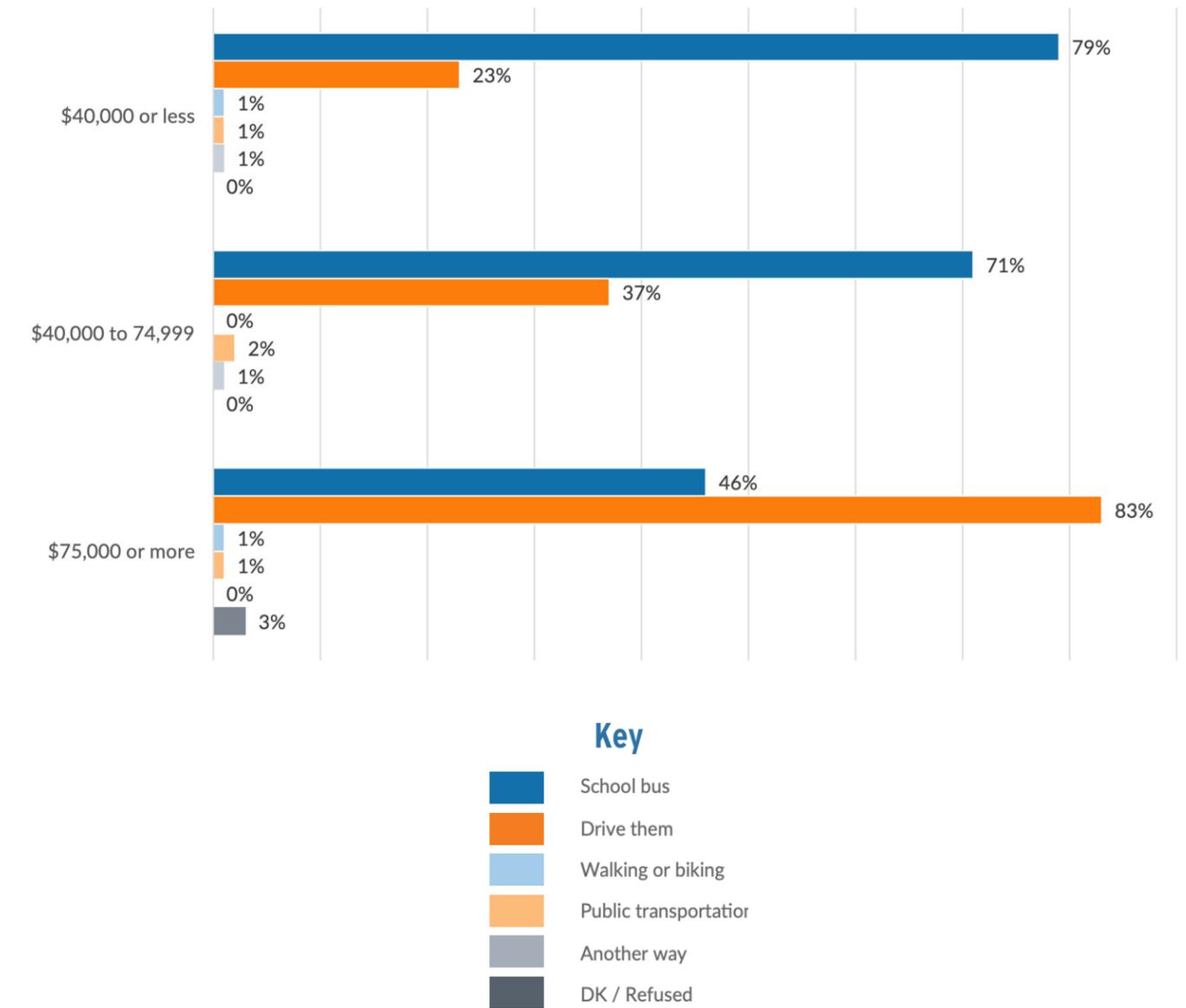
responses therefore indicate parents and guardians would like to have their children spend less time commuting than they actually do.

We also asked respondents the one or two main ways in which their child(ren) get to school each day: 72% said by school bus (up from 68% in 2021), while 32% said they drove them (down from 47% last year). (Note: the percentages exceed 100% because parents were allowed to provide more than one answer.) Just 3% said their children either walked or rode their bike to school.

Subgroup Breakdown

- » As we have found in past polling on transportation, responses varied greatly based on the income of parents and guardians. 79% of respondents from households with incomes under \$40,000 had their children ride the bus; comparatively, 83% of respondents with incomes of \$75,000 and over drove their kids to school.
- » White and Other race respondents were far more likely to drive their children to school than Black or Hispanic respondents.
- » Bus ridership was highest amongst families with K to 8th grade students and lower for families with students in grades 9 to 12.
- » When it came to travel times, higher income respondents, who were more likely to drive their children to school, said an average of 28.1 minutes each way was acceptable, which was notably higher than the mean for all respondents. By contrast, respondents with household incomes under \$40,000 had a mean acceptable time of 18.8 minutes.

What are the one or two main ways your children get to school each day? (By household income)



Extracurricular Activities

National education research has long found a link between students' involvement in extracurricular activities and engagement in school. Extracurricular activities can include sports like football or basketball, or participation in music, band, clubs, or art programs. In New Orleans' decentralized education system, schools have a great deal of autonomy to decide what type, if any, of extracurricular activities they offer to students. This year, we asked a series of questions to gauge the level of involvement of students, and preferences of parents and guardians related to these activities.

Overall, only 38% of respondents stated their child(ren) were involved in extracurricular activities, compared to 61% who said they were not. However, there were significant differences based on where students went to school, indicating a divide in participation based on socioeconomic status: 67% of respondents who had a child that was either in private school or homeschool stated their student participated in extracurricular activities, compared to just 32% of respondents with a child in a NOLA-PS school.

Regardless of whether or not their student(s) participated in activities or not, parents and guardians were split over whether schools should offer more activities than they currently do: 39% said the amount of activities offered at their children's school was about right and 39% said there were not enough; just 4% said there were too many.

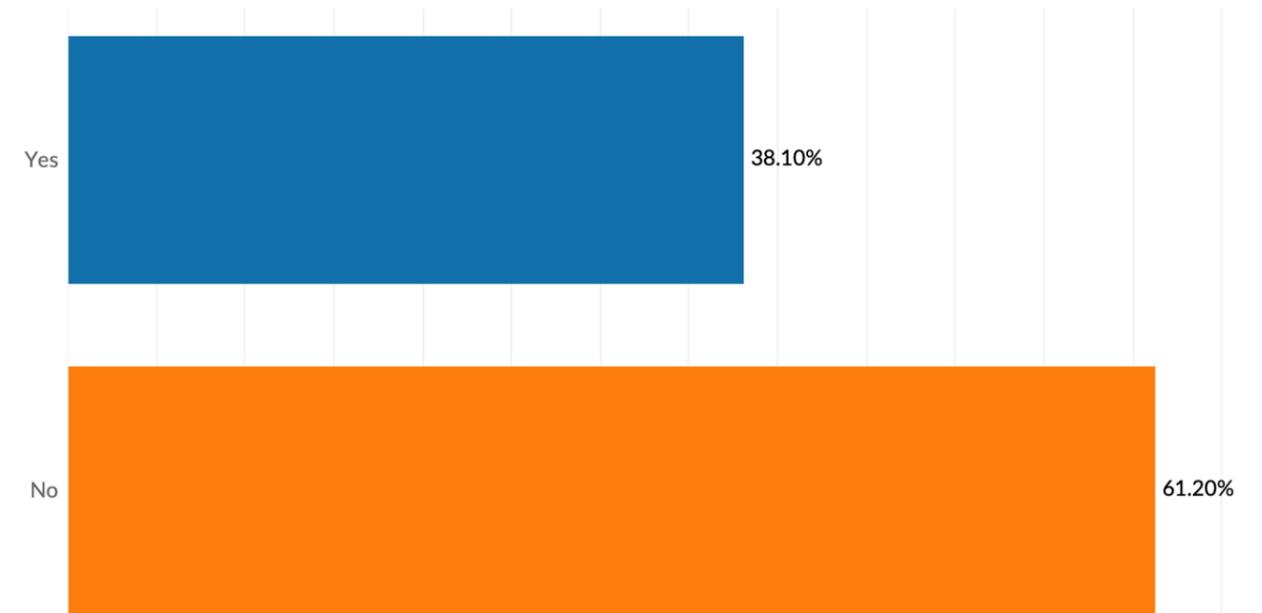
Respondents also did not offer a clear consensus about whether their child(ren) would be more or less likely to participate in extracurricular activities if

they were offered outside the school by entities like the New Orleans Recreation Department (NORD) or the New Orleans Public Library: 44% of respondents stated they didn't know or refused to offer an answer, while 26% said it would make no difference, and 24% said it would make it more likely.

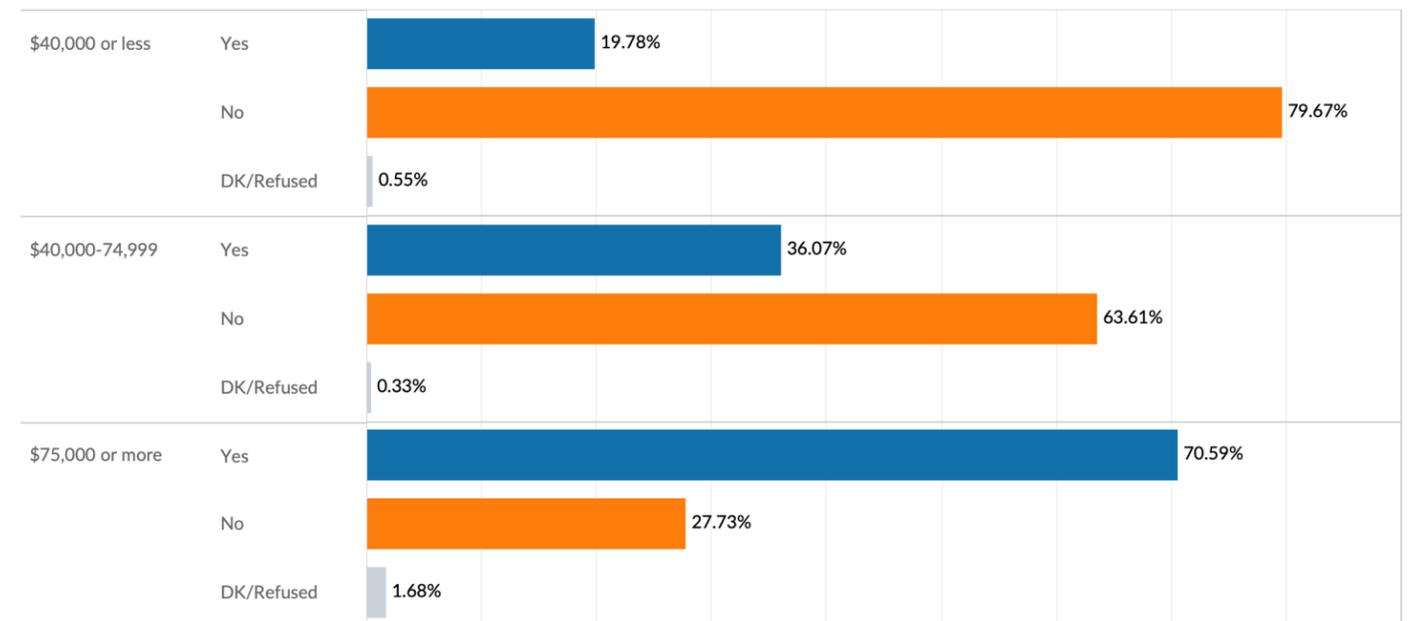
Subgroup Breakdown

- » 62% of respondents with a student in the 9 to 12 grades participated in extracurriculars, as do 41% of 6 to 8 grade households. This compares to just 30% of K to 5 households.
- » Income is a huge driver of participation in activities: 71% of respondents with household incomes of \$75,000 and over said their child(ren) participated, while just 20% of students in households with incomes under \$40,000 did.
- » Driving children to school also appears to make extracurricular participation higher.
- » There is only minimal variation by race, with 42% of White, 37% of Black, and 33% of Hispanic respondents stating they had kids participating in extracurricular activities.
- » A plurality (44%) of NOLA-PS parents and guardians indicated their children's schools do not offer enough extracurricular activities. Comparatively, only 16% of non-NOLA-PS parents and guardians agreed with that statement and 69% said their schools offered about the right amount of activities.

Are any of your children involved in extracurricular activities at their school? (All respondents)



Are any of your children involved in extracurricular activities at their school? (By household income)



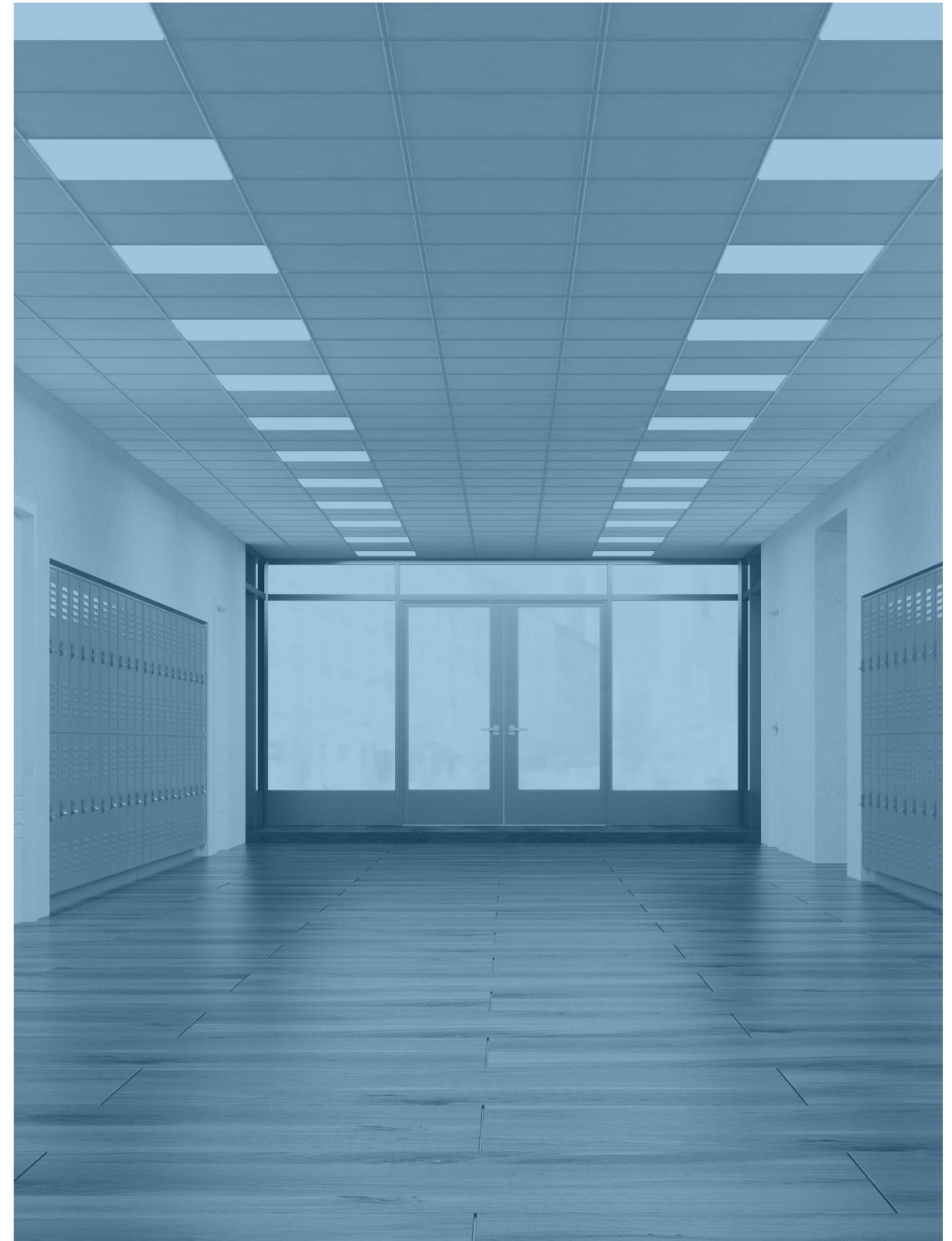
Absenteeism

The issue of chronic absenteeism has gained more attention during and in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic as [some preliminary research indicates](#) that absenteeism spiked over the past two years. There are many possible reasons for this apparent increase, from the economic, financial, and health disruptions the pandemic caused, to the difficulties many families experienced with remote learning.

Chronic absenteeism has also been an issue on the minds of educators locally and we therefore asked parents two questions related to it this year. To qualify as chronically absent, students would have to miss 18 days or more of school in a year. It should be noted that it is difficult to assess the true level of chronic absenteeism in New Orleans schools, as charter

schools self-report the data and the [Louisiana Department of Education](#) has acknowledged that the truancy and absenteeism data on its website is not always accurate.

Only 2% of respondents we polled stated their children were chronically absent during the 2021-2022 school year. Of those who said their children did miss this many days of school, 55% said it was due to COVID. However, because the sample size is so small in this case, these numbers may not be reliable. That is also why we are not including a subgroup breakdown for this issue. Also, it is worth noting that the only respondents to this question were parents and guardians with students in a NOLA-PS school.





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To explore the data in greater depth and
for interactive poll visuals, visit:
cowendata.org