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SPRING 2022 SURVEY OF STRIDE K12 FAMILIES

**Why Do Families Choose These Virtual Schools For
Their Children?**

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Executive Summary

In March 2022 a random sample of one third of Stride K12 families (37,856) were emailed a survey asking parents a series of questions about their families' experiences in their children's current Stride K12-powered online schools and their experiences in their children's former schools, if applicable. 1,949 parents completed the survey, and of that total, 1,613 had Stride K12 students who had attended another school prior to attending their current online schools. These families reside in one of 28 states that have Stride K12-powered schools that were included in the survey (three states have laws that did not easily permit inclusion of their schools in the survey: California, Idaho, and Louisiana).

This report provides an analysis of the March 2022 Survey of Stride K12 parents and yields several interesting findings:

- According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the median income for U.S. families with children under 18 present in the household was \$85,766. For Stride K12 families the median income was between \$40,000 and \$60,000. Thus, Stride K12-powered schools serve families that have significantly lower incomes relative to the national average.
 - o As detailed in section II of this report, measures such as eligibility for a free or reduced-price meal or Direct Certification of economic disadvantage will not accurately measure the lower income levels present in Stride K12-powered schools as compared to other public schools. These measures will understate the degree of economic disadvantage in Stride K12-powered schools, as families in these online schools have incomes that are lower throughout the entire income distribution.
- Stride K12 families are much more likely to reside in rural areas relative to other public school students. While 38 percent of Stride K12 families live in rural areas, only 15 percent of all public school students in the U.S. live in rural areas and other 11 percent live in towns. Thus, Stride K12-powered schools are providing school choice options accessed by many in rural America.
- As compared to families with children in other public schools, Stride K12 families are also twice as likely to have only one parent (15 percent versus 30 percent of Stride K12 families), and more likely to have higher educational attainment.
- Stride K12-powered schools are more likely to serve White and African American students and less likely to serve Hispanic and Asian students, as compared to all public schools in the 28 states where the Stride K12-powered schools in the survey are located.
- Stride K12 students who were previously enrolled in other schools prior to coming to a Stride K12-powered school faced many difficult circumstances in their former schools (see table A1).

Table A1. Percent of Stride K12 Parents Who Said Their Children Faced the Following Difficult Circumstances in Their Former Schools

Bullying	48%
Academic needs not being met	44%
Concerns for health safety due to COVID	37%
Difficulty with teachers	36%
Educational environment had gotten worse B/C COVID	29%
Concerns for physical safety	28%
Special needs not being met	26%
Difficulty with administrators	26%
Burdensome COVID protocols (masking or social distancing)	22%
Things taught were different than your family's values and beliefs	21%
Cruelty	20%
Other	17%
Bad peer group	16%
Fighting	7%

- Parents are overwhelmingly satisfied with their children’s current Stride K12-powered schools, including a variety of aspects of their schools, including the academic progress their children are making, the quality of their teachers, the responsiveness of teachers and administrators, and the individual attention their children are receiving. Parents rate their Stride K12-powered schools significantly higher in each of these respects as compared to their children’s former schools (see table A2).

Table A2. Satisfaction of Parents with Respect to Various Aspects of their Children’s Stride K12-Powered Schools as Compared to their Children’s Former Schools
(Satisfaction levels ranged from 1 to 7, with 1 = extremely dissatisfied and 7 = extremely satisfied)

	Stride K12	Prior School
Individual Attention My Child Receives	6.1	3.8
Academic Progress	6.1	4.1
Quality of Teachers	6.2	4.2
Responsiveness to Parents of Admin and Teachers	6.2	3.7
Behavior of Other Students	6.0	3.2
Overall Satisfaction	6.2	3.3

These findings from the survey yield two implications:

1. If Stride K12-powered online schools were not available for these students, their parents would be forced to send them back to academic and social situations that are significantly worse for them.

2. Many Stride K12 students faced large numbers of difficult circumstances in their former schools, and many also face a significant number of learning and health challenges. Value-added studies of student learning gains, based on gains in student standardized test scores, are only reliable to the extent they are comparing apples-to-apples. Stride K12 students face a whole lot of challenges that surely impact test scores, where these challenges would not be observable to researchers estimating value-added models. Examples of these unobserved challenges include living with one parent (30 percent of Stride K12 students live with one parent as compared to the national average of 15 percent) and falling victim of bullying in their former schools (48 percent). Greene and Paul (2022a) estimated a value-added model for online students, where survey data were merged into administrative data.ⁱ They found, for example, that students who were bullied at their former schools had lower test score gains—where students being prior victims of bullying are data not generally available in administrative datasets available to researchers conducting value-added studies of student test score gains. Further, Stride K12 families have significantly lower incomes, on average, relative to students in brick-and-mortar schools, while researchers currently rely on measures (e.g. eligibility for a free or reduced price meal) that suggest online students come from families with higher incomes. Thus, absent significant improvements in the data used in future studies, researchers and policymakers should not rely on the research that endeavors to estimate the value-added of online schools to ascertain the academic quality of those schools. To improve the data and methods in value-added studies, researchers should copy the approach used in Greene and Paul (2022a).

Based on the survey results, I see two avenues for future research. First, researchers should endeavor to learn why parents are overwhelmingly satisfied with the academic progress their children are making (see figure A2) when studies of value-added test scores suggest that children in online schools have lower test score gains than other similar students, all else equal. While the value-added studies of test score gains are flawed and likely significantly underestimate the academic gains of online students, it would be interesting to learn why parents believe their children in online schools are doing well academically and what metrics they are using to judge academic progress.

Second, the same survey questions regarding difficult circumstances that Stride K12 students faced at their former schools should be asked to current traditional public, brick and mortar charter, and private school students—to see if and to what extent it is the case that Stride K12 students face more or less difficult school circumstances and familial and personal challenges relative to students in brick-and-mortar schools.

The results of both these future research avenues would shed even more light on the accuracy of value-added studies of student test score gains that seek to estimate the academic effectiveness of online schools relative to brick-and-mortar schools.

ⁱ Greene and Paul (2022a) may be accessed here: [EFI-WP Paul Greene OnlineEnrollment.pdf \(efinstitute.org\)](#) .

Introduction

In March 2022, Stride, Inc. emailed a survey to a random sample of families who had children attending a Stride K12-powered online school. Parents and caregivers who received the survey were asked a series of questions about:

- Their children, including where their children attended school prior to attending a Stride K12-powered online school or whether their children began at a Stride K12 school.
- Their experiences and their children's experiences at their children's former schools, if applicable, and their experiences at their current Stride K12-powered online schools, including their levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with various attributes of their children's schools and their children's outcomes.
- Why they decided to enroll their child in their current online school and any difficult circumstances their children have encountered prior to their enrollment in a Stride K12-powered online school.
- Their demographic characteristics, including household income, parent educational attainment, and race/ethnicity.

Among the 37,856 families who were emailed the survey (which represented a random selection of one-third of all Stride K12 families), 1,949 parents or caregivers completed the survey for a 5.15 percent response rate. These Stride K12 families reside in 28 states, including the District of Columbia. Hereafter, the survey respondents are referred to as "parents" as they are serving in a parental role regarding the education of their Stride K12 students.

The purpose of the survey, and this report, are to learn more about what parents value regarding the education of their children, why they chose to enroll their children in a Stride K12-powered online school, their degree of satisfaction with various aspects of their current online schools, and their satisfaction levels with their children's Stride K-12 powered schools as compared with their former schools, when applicable.

The survey results indicate that parents have overwhelmingly positive views of how their children are faring at their Stride K12-powered online schools and that their children who did migrate from other schools faced a variety of challenges in their former schools.

The report is organized as follows. Section II provides the characteristics of the Stride K12 families and students who are in the survey—and compares them to the characteristics of all public school students. Parents' responses to their levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with various aspects of their experiences at a Stride K12-powered school, are described in section III. Section IV contains the survey results regarding why parents chose Stride K12-powered online schools for their children. For children who had been enrolled in other schools prior to attending a Stride K12-powered school, their parents' comparisons of their former schools with their current online schools are presented in section V. Section VI reports some of the special

circumstances and challenges that Stride K12 students have faced. A discussion of the survey results and concluding remarks are provided in section VII.

Characteristics of Stride K12 Families and Students

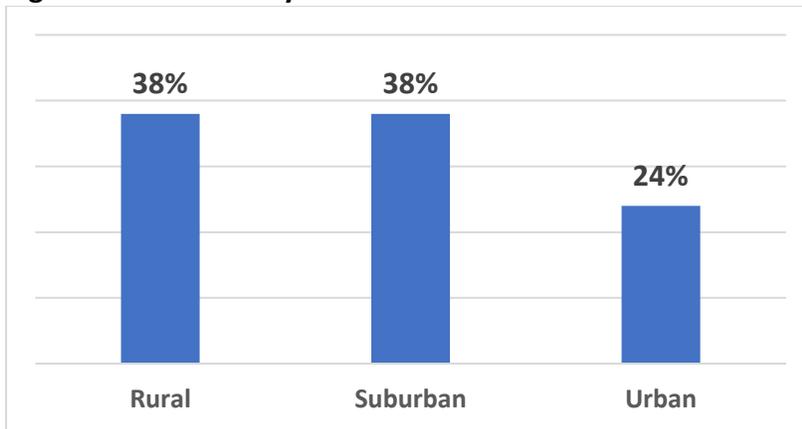
A total of 1,934 families who have their children enrolled in Stride K12-powered online schools completed the March 2022 survey. These families had children who attended one of the 61 Stride K12 public schools in 28 states (including the District of Columbia).ⁱⁱ The states where the survey respondents reside are listed in table II.1 below. Texas (17.9 percent of survey respondents) and Ohio (8.2 percent) are the two most represented states in the survey. The number of survey respondents by state varied based on the size of the Stride K12 schools in each state.

Table II.1. Stride K-12 Family Survey by State

State	Number of Survey Respondents	Percent of Total Survey Respondents
Alabama	80	4.1%
Arizona	74	3.8%
Arkansas	68	3.5%
Colorado	55	2.8%
Florida	111	5.7%
Indiana	127	6.6%
Iowa	12	0.6%
Kansas	16	0.8%
Maine	7	0.4%
Michigan	108	5.6%
Minnesota	37	1.9%
Missouri	17	0.9%
Nevada	39	2.0%
New Mexico	21	1.1%
North Carolina	85	4.4%
Ohio	158	8.2%
Oklahoma	49	2.5%
Oregon	12	0.6%
Pennsylvania	40	2.1%
South Carolina	111	5.7%
Tennessee	57	2.9%
Texas	346	17.9%

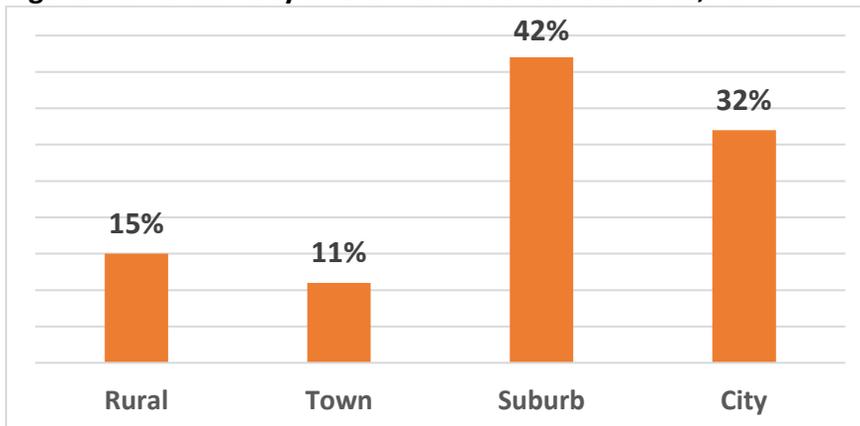
ⁱⁱ Given state laws, families with children in Stride K12-powered schools in California, Idaho, and Louisiana were not included in the survey.

Figure II.2. Urbanicity of Stride K12 Families



As shown below, Stride K12 families are much more likely to reside in rural areas as compared to public school students nationally. The National Center for Education Statistics at the U.S. Department of Education (NCES) categorizes the location of public schools as city, suburb, town, or rural. Cities and suburbs are areas that meet minimum population density requirements and have at least 50,000 people. Towns are defined as “urban clusters” that are located outside of city and suburban areas and have populations below 50,000 people. Figure II.3 shows that only 15 percent of public school students are in rural areas and only 11 percent are in towns. Thus, at most, 26 percent of U.S. public school students overall reside in rural areas.

Figure II.3. Urbanicity of U.S. Public School Students, 2020-21



Notes: These data represent percentages of students attending U.S. public schools in cities, suburbs, towns, and rural areas. Source: National Center for Education Statistics at the U.S. Department of Education, <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/elsi/>.

Thus, Stride K12 students are much more likely to come from rural areas, as compared to all public school students. However, this difference may be larger than indicated by the 38 percent rural figure for Stride K12 students and 26 percent (rural plus town) for all public school students. That is, if some Stride K12 families who live in “towns” with populations of 20,000 to 50,000 said they lived in urban areas in this survey, then the differences in urbanicity depicted

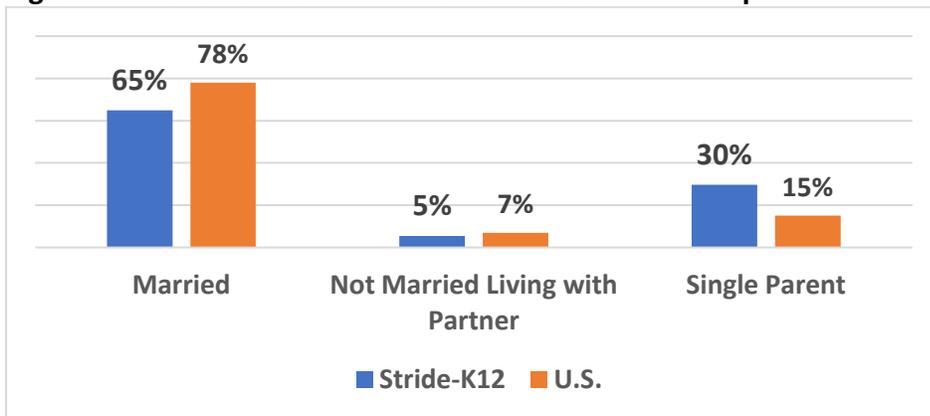
in figures II.2 and II.3 are even larger than 38 percent rural for Stride K12 families as compared to 26 percent for all U.S. public school students. Put differently, some Stride K12 residents of “towns” in the survey would say that they live in cities, so all “town” residents may not be counted as being in rural areas in the survey.

Given their relatively large enrollment share of rural students, it is clear that Stride K12-powered online schools are filling an unmet need for educational options in rural America. In addition, many brick-and-mortar charter schools are located in urban areas and urban areas tend to have a larger availability of private schools as well. That there are more choice opportunities for families in urban areas (opportunities separate from traditional district public schools) is perhaps why fewer urban families choose these online schools for their children.

Family Structure

Stride K12 families are more likely to be single parent families as compared to the national average (see figure II.4). While 78 percent of children in the U.S. live with married parents, only 65 percent of Stride K12 survey respondents are married parent households. Another 7 percent of U.S. children live with two unmarried parents, and the corresponding figure for Stride K12 families is 5 percent. Thus, 85 percent of U.S. children live with two parents, while only 70 percent of Stride K12 families have two parents. In other words, 15 percent of U.S. children live in homes with only one parent, while 30 percent of Stride K12 families have only one parent present in the home.

Figure II.4. Marital Status of Stride K12 Families as Compared to the U.S. Average



Notes: These figures for Stride K12 represent the percentage of families that are headed by a married couple, a couple that is not married, and a single parent. Thus, these figures are percentages of families—and not percentages of children. The data for U.S. families comes from the U.S. Census Bureau and are the percentage of children under 18 living in each marital situation, <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2020/estimates-families-living-arrangements.html#:~:text=In%202020%2C%2078%25%20of%20parents,compared%20to%2077%25%20in%202010.>

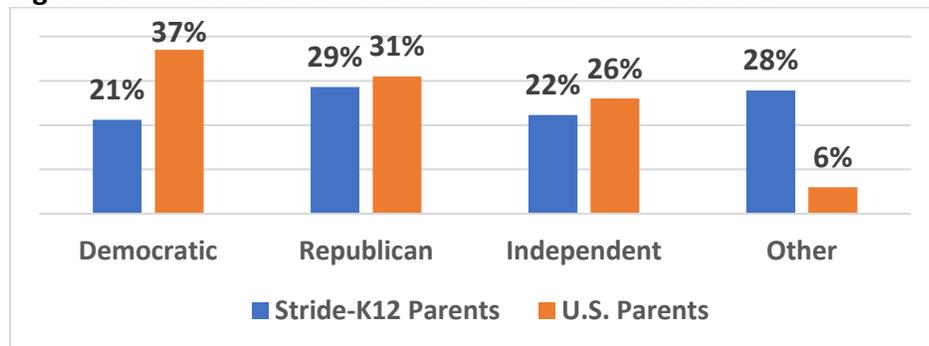
There is evidence that children living with only one parent have lower academic achievement, all else equal (see, for example, Brown, 2010; Amato, 2005; Gruber 2004; and McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994).ⁱⁱⁱ

Political Affiliation

There is significant diversity in the political leanings of Stride K12 parents, as is the case among all Americans with school-aged children (see figure II.5). The April 2022 EdChoice/Morning Consult Tracking Poll surveyed parents with children in grades K-12 in public, private, and homeschools. This poll did not break out results on political leanings for public school parents only. Among all Americans with school-aged children, 31 percent consider themselves Republicans, while 29 percent of Stride K12 parents considered themselves Republicans. The percent who consider themselves independents was similar as well—26 percent for U.S. parents and 22 percent for Stride K12 parents.

The biggest difference was in the percent who responded “other” political affiliation—6 percent among all U.S. parents and 28 percent for Stride K12 parents. This difference may represent greater diversity in the political leanings of Stride K12 parents or less desire to disclose this information.

Figure II.5. Political Affiliation of Stride K12 and U.S. Parents



Notes: Political affiliation for U.S. parents comes from the EdChoice/Morning Consult April 2022 Tracking Poll, <https://edchoice.morningconsultintelligence.com/assets/166681.pdf>.

Another significant difference is in the percent who consider themselves Democrats—37 percent of all U.S. parents as compared to only 21 percent of Stride K12 parents. An important reason that fewer Stride K12 parents consider themselves Democrats appears to be that parents in many large, medium, and small states with very large percentages of Democrats do

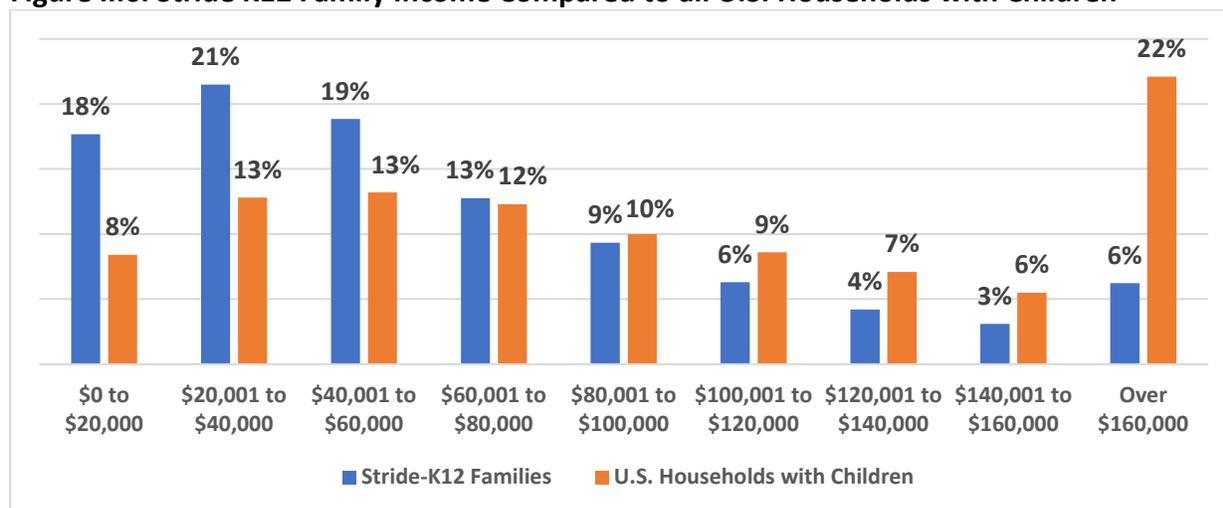
ⁱⁱⁱ Brown SL. Marriage and child well-being: Research and policy perspectives. *Journal of Marriage and Family*. 2010;72:1059–1077. Amato PR. The impact of family formation change on the cognitive, social, and emotional well-being of the next generation. *Future of Children*. 2005;15:75–96. Gruber, Jonathan. “Is Making Divorce Easier Bad for Children? The Long-Run Implications of Unilateral Divorce.” *Journal of Labor Economics*, vol. 22, no. 4, 2004, pp. 799–833. McLanahan S, Sandefur G. *Growing up with a single parent: What hurts, what helps*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; 1994.

not have access to Stride K12-powered schools. These states with large Democratic party leanings that do not have Stride K12 schools include Connecticut, Delaware, Hawai'i, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, and Vermont. California has Stride K12 schools, but parents from that state were not included in the survey because of state laws, which also contributes to the relative dearth of Democrats among survey respondents, as California has a high proportion of Democrats among its electorate. Unfortunately, the EdChoice/Morning Consult polling data are not reported by state, so I am not able to compare political leanings using only parents from Stride K12 states.

Family Income

As shown in figure II.6 below, Stride K12 families have significantly lower incomes compared to all U.S. households with children under age 18. For example, 44 percent of U.S. households with children have incomes of \$100,000 or more, and only 19 percent of Stride K12 families have incomes over \$100,000. While this difference is stark, the difference is even larger for the highest income category—22 percent of U.S. households with children and only 6 percent of Stride K12 families have incomes over \$160,000.

Figure II.6. Stride K12 Family Income Compared to all U.S. Households with Children



Notes: The U.S. data for all households with children under 18 present are from the U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2021 Annual Social and Economic Supplement (CPS ASEC), https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/cps-hinc/hinc-04.html#par_list_10.

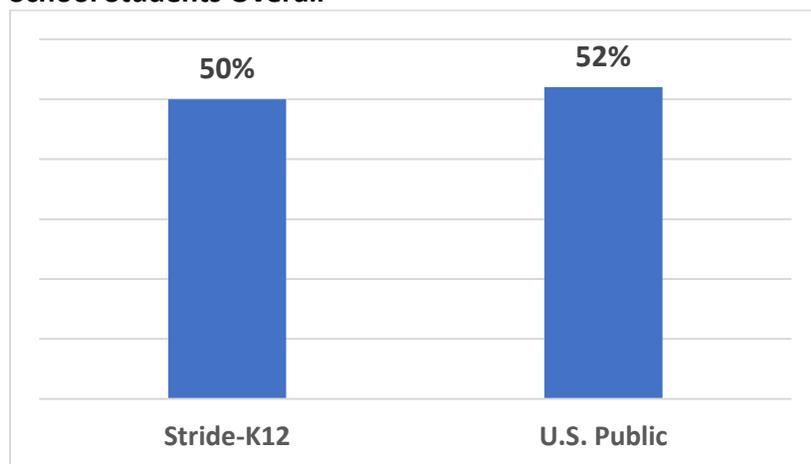
In the middle income range, \$60,000 to \$100,000, the two groups are equally represented, with 22 percent of both U.S. households with children and Stride K12 families reporting incomes in this range. At lower income levels, there is a stark difference as well, where 58 percent of Stride K12 families and 34 percent of all U.S. households with children have annual incomes below \$60,000.

One factor that explains these differences in income is that the U.S. data on income for households with children under age 18 includes households with children in private schools, and students in private schools have parents with higher incomes, on average, relative to students in public schools. That said, only 9.8 percent of students are in private schools^{iv} and not all private school students are from higher income families. Given the small percentage of American children in private schools, private school families having larger than average incomes cannot explain the large differences in income shown in figure II.6.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the median income for U.S. families with children under 18 present in the household was \$85,766. For Stride K12 families the median income was between \$40,000 and \$60,000. Thus, Stride K12-powered schools serve families that have significantly lower incomes relative to the national average.

Despite Stride K12 families having significantly lower incomes relative to the national average among families with children under age 18, the percent of Stride K12 families who reported in the survey that their children were eligible for a free or reduced-price meal (FRM), was slightly below the percent of public school students (see figure II.7). This FRM eligibility is mostly based on household income and is often used by researchers and policymakers as a measure of the extent to which schools serve students from lower income households. Only 50 percent of Stride K12 families reported that their children were eligible for a free or reduced price meal, while the corresponding figure for public schools nationally was 52 percent.

Figure II.7. Eligibility for a Free or Reduced Price Lunch, Stride K-12 Students and U.S. Public School Students Overall



Notes: Free and Reduced price meal eligibility for U.S. public school students overall are for 2019-20 and come from the National Center for Education Statistics at the U.S. Department of Education, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d21/tables/dt21_204.10.asp?current=yes. As discussed in the text, the figure for U.S. public school students may not be directly comparable to Stride K12 students.

^{iv} https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d21/tables/dt21_205.10.asp?current=yes.

There are four main reasons for this discrepancy between the significantly lower incomes of Stride K12 parents as compared to the national average for households with children under age 18 and the slightly lower self-reported FRM rate for Stride K12 families relative to all public school students. Given their lower incomes, Stride K12 families should be significantly more likely to be eligible for free or reduced-price meals, but they report that they are slightly less likely to be eligible for FRM as compared to all public school students. The four reasons for this discrepancy are as follows:

- 1) *As stated above, the national data on income includes private school parents who have higher incomes, on average.* However, given the small percentage of American students in private schools (9.8 percent) and the extremely large differences in incomes shown in figure II.6, the inclusion of private school households in the national data cannot explain this discrepancy of significantly lower incomes for Stride K12 families, yet lower self-reported FRM eligibility.
- 2) *FRM eligibility for Stride K12 families are self-reported, and some eligible families may not know they are eligible.* Stride K12-powered schools are online schools, and therefore do not serve meals. Thus, Stride K12 families have no reason to inquire if they are eligible for free or reduced-price meals—because their online schools do not serve meals—which means that some low income families who are eligible for FRM based on federal eligibility guidelines may not know they are eligible. Further, their online schools would also not know they are eligible for FRM, when reporting FRM eligibility to local and state education agencies.
- 3) *The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP).* All students attending brick-and-mortar public schools are eligible for FRM if more than 40 percent of their student are eligible, since the passage of the Obama-era CEP. Under the CEP, students who themselves are not living in low-income households are coded as eligible for FRM by virtue of their attendance in schools with more than 40 percent of students who are low income. Thus, the FRM measure itself, since the creation of this CEP, automatically overstates the percentage of public school students who live in low income families.
- 4) *Some students who receive FRM are not eligible to do so.* Families are not required to verify their incomes when applying for FRM for their children. When a small sample of families were asked to verify their incomes, a large percentage did not choose to submit the required documentation (Bass, 2010).^v Thus, the percent of FRM students in brick-and-mortar public schools may overstate the true percentage of children living in low income households.

For each of these reasons, FRM eligibility should not be used to compare the income status of public school students with the incomes of students in Stride K12-powered schools. For

^v <https://www.educationnext.org/fraud-in-the-lunchroom/>

example, recent reports by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) and the National Education Policy Center (NEPC) report that the percent of online school students nationwide who are eligible for FRM is in the 30 to 40-percent range, even below the 50 percent figure reported by Stride K12 households.^{vi} Of course, the GAO and NEPC reports use data from all online schools and not just the Stride K12 schools included in the survey data used in this report. That said, the survey data from Stride K12 parents show that Stride K12 parents have much lower income levels than what is portrayed by researchers who use the flawed FRM data. In the future, researchers should endeavor to collect actual household income data and not rely on FRM statistics.

Further, FRM status should not be used when estimating value-added models of student learning gains as a control measure, as it disadvantages online schools and therefore provides an inaccurate picture of economic disadvantage among online school students vis-à-vis economic disadvantage among brick-and-mortar public school students. The Data Quality Campaign (2022) recommends using “Direct Certification” of economic disadvantage as a better measure than FRM, where Direct Certification measures the percent of students who are documented as living in households who receive various forms of public assistance (TANF, Medicaid, SNAP—formerly known as Food Stamps, etc.).^{vii} That said, the data in figure II.6 suggest that even measures like Direct Certification will provide inaccurate measures of the income levels of online school students, because American households with school-aged children who have incomes above levels that determine eligibility for public assistance have significantly higher incomes than Stride K12 students. Thus, the survey data compared to national data shown in figure II.6 indicate that the Direct Certification measure of economic means will also disadvantage online schools in value-added models given the higher incomes of students in brick-and-mortar schools.

The lower household incomes of Stride K12 students, relative to all American households with children under 18, is likely due, in part, to the much higher proportions of Stride K12 students who come from rural areas and from households with only one parent (and therefore only one potential bread winner) present.

Parents’ Educational Attainment

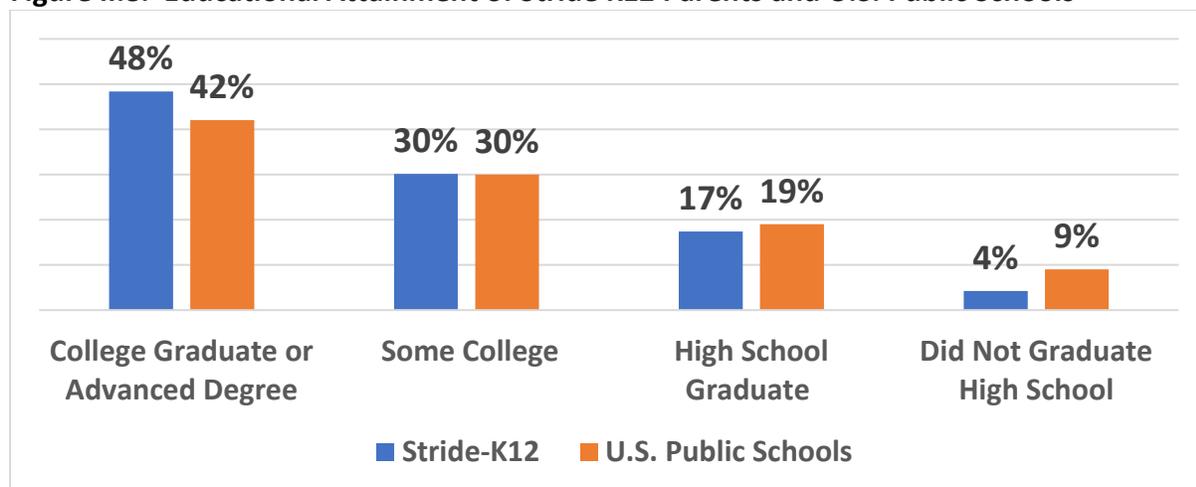
As compared to public school families in the United States, Stride K12 families are more likely to be college graduates or have higher educational attainment and less likely to have not finished high school (see figure II.8).

^{vi} The GAO report may be accessed here: <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-22-104444.pdf> . The NEPC report may be accessed here:

<https://nepc.colorado.edu/sites/default/files/publications/RB%20Virtual%20Schools%202021.pdf> .

^{vii} <https://dataqualitycampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/DQC-Toward-a-Better-Measure.pdf> .

Figure II.8. Educational Attainment of Stride K12 Parents and U.S. Public Schools



Notes: All percentages in this figure are for the highest educational attainment among parents and caregivers in each household. Data for U.S. public school families are for 2018 and are from the National Center for Education Statistics at the U.S. Department of Education, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/pdf/coe_cce.pdf.

Specifically, 48 percent of Stride K12 families report that the parent with the highest educational attainment in their families has a college or graduate degree, as compared to 42 percent among American public school parents overall. The same percentage of Stride K12 and public school parents overall (30 percent) report having taken “some college” coursework. Among the parent with the highest educational attainment in the household, 19 percent of American public school parents were high school graduates, and the corresponding figure for Stride K12 parents was 17 percent. Regarding households where the parent with the highest attainment did not graduate from high school, 4 percent of Stride K12 households and 9 percent of public school households overall were in this category.

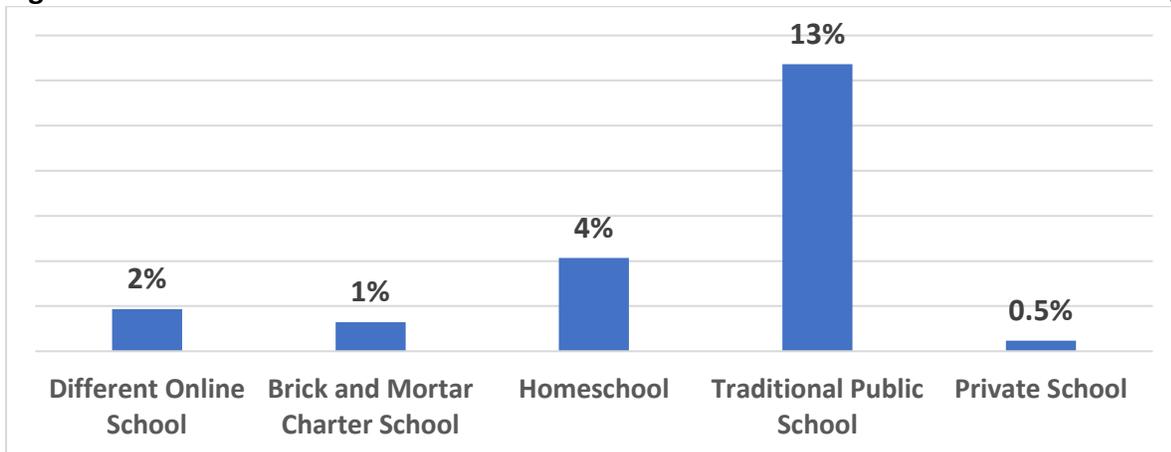
It is perhaps surprising that Stride K12 parents have higher educational attainment, but lower incomes, on average, when compared to the national average. However, this is likely explained by the differences in family structure between Stride K12 families and American families with children overall and differences in where they live. Specifically, as shown in figure II.4 above, Stride K12 families are twice as likely to have only one parent present relative to the national average, 30 percent as compared to the national average of 15 percent. Having less adults in the home indicates there are less potential bread winners. For example, in the survey data of Stride K12 families, the median income of families with two parents present, either married or unmarried, is between \$60,000 and \$80,000. The median income for Stride K12 families with only one parent present is between \$20,000 and \$40,000. In fact, just over two-thirds of Stride-K2 families with only one parent present reports an income of \$40,000 or less. In addition, figures II.2 and II.3 shows that Stride K12 families are much more likely to live in rural areas, where incomes are lower. Thus, the differences in family structure and urbanicity between Stride K12 families and the national average likely explains the fact that Stride K12 parents have more educational attainment, but lower family incomes, relative to the national average.

Some Stride K12 Families Have Children in Other School Settings

As shown in figure II.9 below, just over 20 percent of Stride K12 families have other school-aged children in different educational settings. That is, these families have children enrolled in Stride K12-powered schools, but they also have other children in grades K-12 who are enrolled in traditional public schools, brick and mortar charter schools, private schools, different online schools, or who are homeschooled.

Interestingly, 20.5 percent of Stride K12 families have children in grades K-12 who are in other educational settings. The numbers in figure II.9 below are percent of all survey respondents. For example, 13 percent of survey respondents have children enrolled in traditional public schools. The fact that so many Stride K12 families have additional children in other K-12 settings indicates that Stride K12-powered schools are meeting some unique need or some unique interest of at least one of their children.

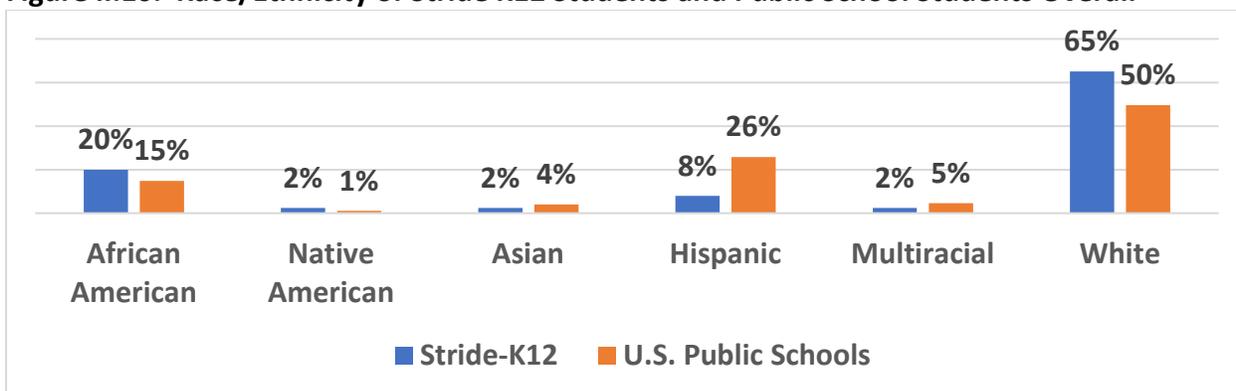
Figure II.9. Percent of Stride K12 Families with Children in Other K-12 Educational Settings



Racial and Ethnic Composition of Stride K12 Students

As compared to public school students overall in the 28 states where they are located, Stride K12-powered schools are more likely to serve White, African-American, and Native American students (see figure II.10). They are also less likely to serve Asian, Multiracial, and especially Hispanic students.

Figure II.10. Race/Ethnicity of Stride K12 Students and Public School Students Overall

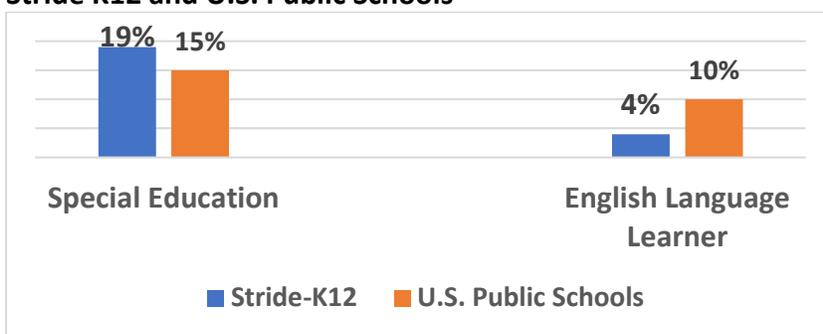


Notes: The data for all public school students in the 28 states with Stride K12-powered schools are for fall 2020, the most recent available, and come from the National Center for Education Statistics at the U.S. Department of Education, <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/elsi/>. Asian and Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students were combined into one category (Asian).

Students Receiving Special Services at Stride K12-Powered Schools

As compared to U.S. public school students nationally, Stride K12 students are more likely to be in special education, but less likely to be in English Language Learner programs (see figure II.11). 19 percent of Stride K12 students are in special education programs, as compared to 15 percent of public school students overall. Only 4 percent of Stride K12 students are in English Language Learner programs, as compared to 10 percent of U.S. public school students overall.

Figure II.11. Percent of Students in Special Education and English Language Learner Programs, Stride K12 and U.S. Public Schools



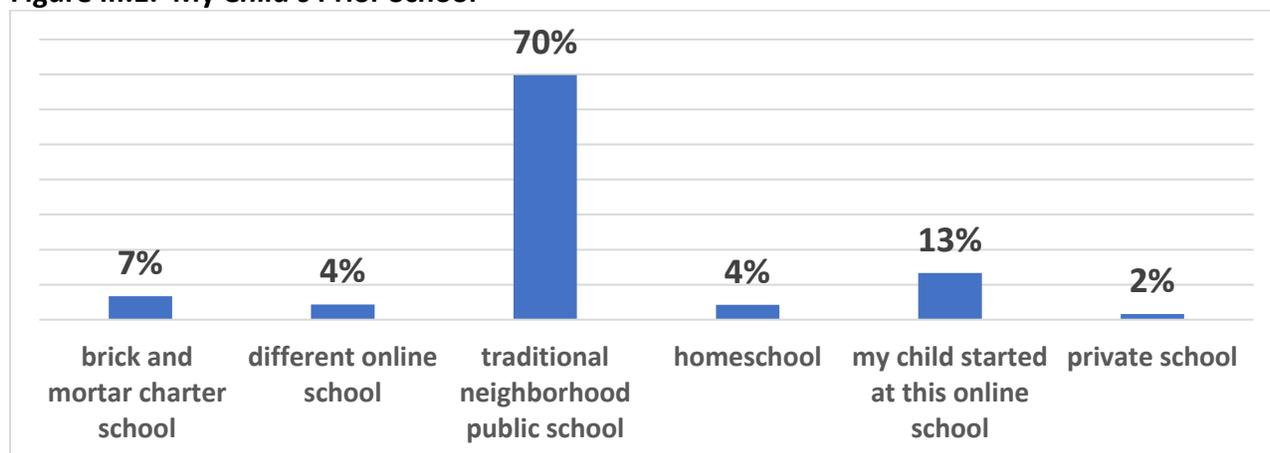
Notes: Data for U.S. public schools comes from the National Center for Education Statistics at the U.S. Department of Education, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d21/tables/dt21_204.20.asp?current=yes and https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d21/tables/dt21_204.70.asp?current=yes. Data for special education for U.S. public schools and English Language Learner percentages are for 2020-21 and 2019-20, respectively, as these were the most recent available.

Parents were also asked about their family’s experiences in their children’s current Stride K12-powered online schools, and their survey responses are described in the next section.

Difficult Situations that Stride K12 Students Faced in their Former Schools

Among the 1,924 parents who responded to the survey, 1,613 reported having their children enrolled in another school, before sending their children to their current online school. Among students who attended another school prior to attending a Stride K12-powered school, 77 percent were attending public schools—and of these 70 percent were attending a traditional neighborhood public school and 7 percent were attending brick and mortar charter schools (see figure III.1). Another 13 percent of students began their education at a Stride K12-powered online school. The remaining 10 percent of students came from a different online school (4 percent), a homeschool (4 percent), or a private school (2 percent).

Figure III.1. My Child’s Prior School



In the survey, for the 1,613 children who had attended another school before enrolling in a Stride K12-powered school, parents were asked if their Stride K12 students had faced any of the 13 difficult circumstances listed in table III.1 in their former schools. Ten of these potential difficult circumstances have been used in prior survey research analyzing why students change schools (see, for example, Kelly and Scafidi, 2012).^{viii} The remaining three pertain to COVID-19 and how students may have faced difficulties in their prior schools due to COVID-19 or their former schools’ reactions to the pandemic. Kingsbury (2021) surveyed parents who transferred their children to Stride K12-powered schools, where these students had been enrolled in brick and mortar schools in spring 2020—when COVID-19 led to brick and mortar schools transitioning to online learning.^{ix} His research found that parents gave substantially higher ratings to their new online schools, powered by Stride K12, relative to their former brick and mortar schools along the four dimensions studied: active learning, communication, pedagogical

^{viii} Kelly and Scafidi (2013) may be accessed here, <https://www.edchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/More-Than-Scores.pdf>.

^{ix} Kingsbury (2021) may be accessed here, [Online learning: How do brick and mortar schools stack up to virtual schools? | SpringerLink](#).

efficacy, and classroom management. The survey results in this section, related to COVID-19, are consistent with the findings of Kingsbury (2021).

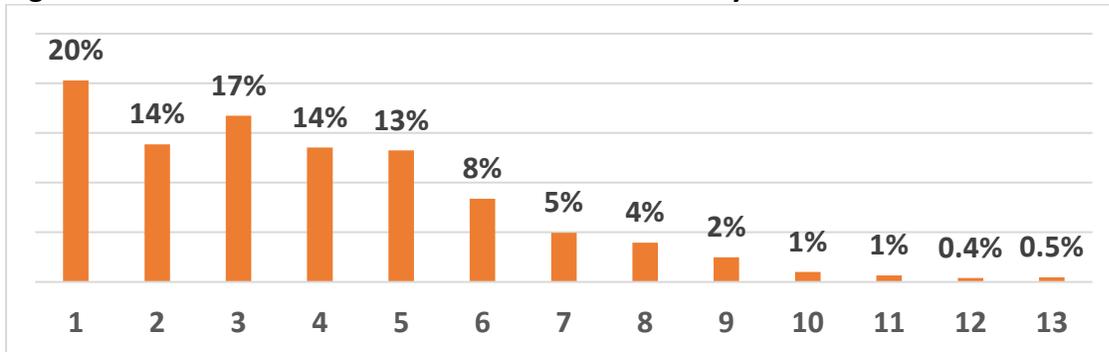
Table III.1. Possible Difficult Circumstances Faced by Child in Former In-Person School

Academic needs were not being met
Bad peer group
Bullying
Concerns about burdensome COVID protocols (e.g. masking or social distancing)
Concerns for health safety due to COVID
Concerns for physical safety
Concerns that things were taught that were different than your family's values and beliefs
Concerns the educational environment had gotten worse because of COVID
Cruelty
Difficulty with administrators
Difficulty with teachers
Fighting
Special needs were not being met

Parents were asked about each of these potential difficult circumstances one at a time. Thus, parents were able to say that their child experienced none, some, or all of these difficult circumstances in their former schools.

As shown in figure III.2 below, Stride K12 parents report that their students did face difficult circumstances in their former schools. In fact, all respondents said their child faced at least one of the 13 possible difficult circumstances they were asked about. 80 percent of parents said their child faced more than one difficult circumstance, and 49 percent said their child faced four or more difficult circumstances in their former schools that they attended prior to enrolling in a Stride K12-powered school.

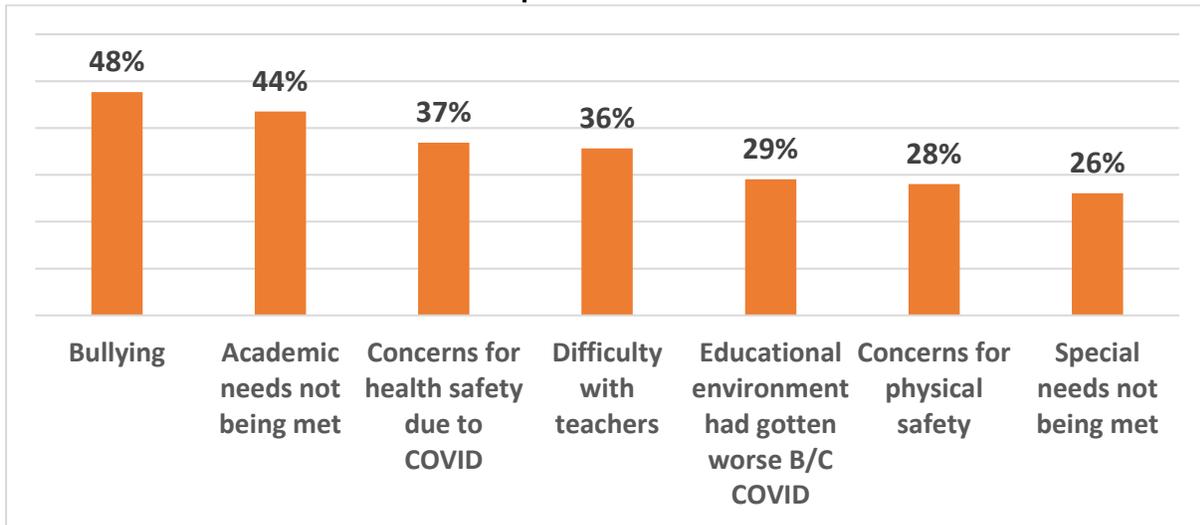
Figure III.2. Number of Difficult Circumstances Faced by Child in Former In-Person School



Among the 13 potential difficult circumstances presented in the survey, the seven difficulties most experienced in Stride K12 students' former schools are displayed in figure III.3. As shown

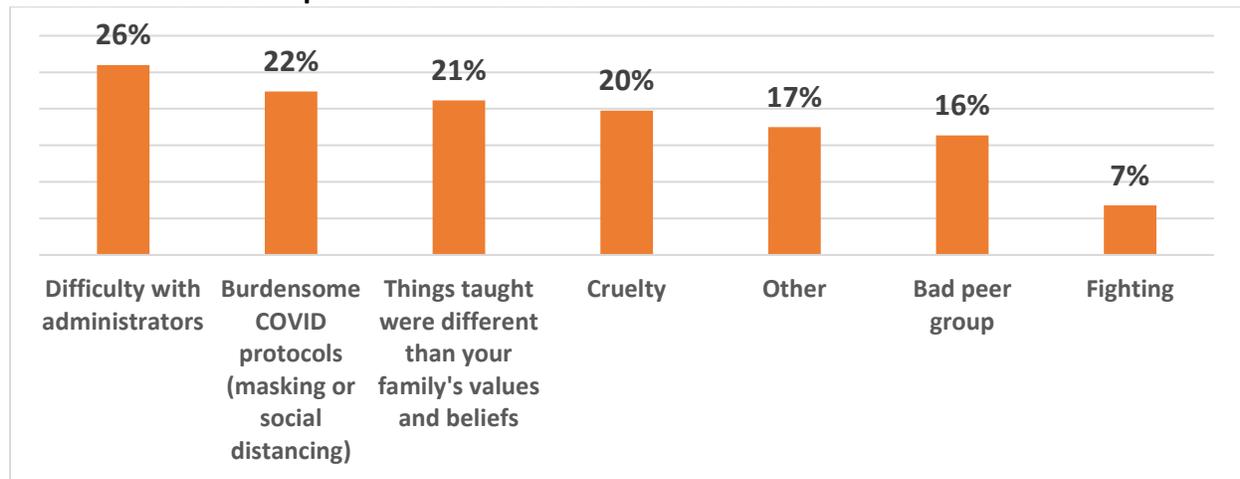
below, “bullying” was the most cited difficulty, with 48 percent of Stride K12 parents stating that their child faced bullying in their former schools. The next most cited difficulty was academics, with 44 percent of parents saying their students “academic needs were not being met” in their former schools. The other top difficulties faced by Stride K12 students in their former schools, according to their parents, were: “concerns for health safety due to COVID” (37 percent); “difficulty with teachers” (36 percent); “educational environment had gotten worse due to COVID (29 percent); “concerns for physical safety” (28 percent); and “special needs not being met” (26 percent).

Figure III.3. Did Your Child Experience Any of These Difficulties at Their Former In-Person School? The Seven Difficulties Most Experienced in Former Schools



Stride K12 parents reported that their children were less likely to face the remaining six difficult circumstances in their former schools, and their responses are displayed in figure III.4. While Stride K12 students were less likely to face these six difficulties in their former schools, significant percentages of them did face some of them, including 26 percent who reported difficulty with administrators and 22 percent who reported burdensome COVID protocols (masking and social distancing).

Figure III.4. Did Your Child Experience Any of These Difficulties at Their Former In-Person School? Next Most Experienced Difficulties in Former Schools



There were some differences across types of students with respect to bad experiences in the schools they attended prior to attending a Stride K12-powered school. 57 percent of parents with special needs students stated that their child had special needs that were not being met in their prior schools as compared to only 18 percent of parents whose children did not have an IEP. According to their parents, special needs students (who have an IEP) were more likely to be bullied in their former schools (55 percent versus 46 percent for other students) and more likely state that their prior schools did not meet their children’s academic needs—53 percent of special needs students’ academic needs were not met in their former schools, as compared to 41 percent for students who do not have an IEP. These results for special needs students are consistent with an earlier study (Beck, Egalite, and Maranto, 2014) that surveyed both parents of special needs students and special needs students themselves who attended an online charter school.^x

With respect to household income, low-income students were subject to more bullying. Specifically, 51 percent of students in households with incomes below \$40,000 were subject to bullying in their former schools, and 47 percent of students living in households with incomes above that level were subject to bullying. While that difference is not large, 34 percent of low-income parents said they were worried about their child’s physical safety in their former schools, this concern was shared by only 26 percent of middle and higher income parents.

With respect of race/ethnicity, White parents were much more likely to say their children had bad peer influences at their former schools (43 percent). Parents with children of other races and ethnicities had this concern for only 24 percent of the cases. Black parents were most likely to say that they were unhappy with COVID safety at their children’s former schools. Specifically, 42 percent of African American parents expressed concerns for the health of their

^x Beck, Egalite, and Maranto (2014) may be accessed here, [PDF Why They Choose and How It Goes: Comparing Special Education and General Education Cyber Student Perceptions \(researchgate.net\)](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/312222222).

children due to COVID in their former schools, whereas only 31 percent of White parents had that concern regarding their children's former schools.

Other Difficult Circumstances

In the survey parents were asked whether their children had faced other difficult circumstances in their prior schools that were not reflected in the list shown in table III.1. Of the 1,613 students who had attended another school prior to attending a Stride K12-powered school, 220 of them (13.6 percent) faced "other" difficulties in their prior schools, according to their parents. And parents were given the opportunity to explain these other difficulties. Parents described a variety of these "other" difficult circumstances their children faced in the prior schools and many of them were disconcerting. Anxiety and depression were common answers as were schools failing to follow IEPs for special needs students or 504 plans for students who had them, but many parents went into more detail.

One parent said a teacher made fun of her Asian child's eyes and said it would be funny to use her as a prop at a rally. Several other parents mentioned racism or anti LGBTQ+ bias was present in their children's former schools, but did not get into the details. Another parent said her son had to frequently use the bathroom and the administration would not allow it, so he sometimes went to the bathroom in his pants while at school. Another said guns were being brought to their child's school and that the school was in denial about it. Another said the teacher asked her child if the child was "up for adoption" and detailed other poor treatment from the child's teacher in the former school.

A few parents were on differing sides of the COVID issue with some saying their children did not feel comfortable in face-to-face instruction when COVID rates were so high, while others did not like masking and other health requirements in their former school. Several more parents mentioned that their brick-and-mortar schools were not able to provide a good education via their sudden move to virtual instruction or their toggling between face-to-face, hybrid, and virtual instruction.

Some parents went into detail about serious chronic physical health issues or attention issues that their children had, and that these issues meant that sitting at a desk for a consecutive six hours was not the ideal way to educate their child.

A few parents mentioned that their children or other children at their former schools had been victims of sexual abuse at school.

Finally, several parents mentioned that their children learned in different ways and that brick-and-mortar schools with a teacher at the front of a class with many students was far from ideal for their children's learning styles. One Stride K12 parent wrote about their child's former school:

“[Name withheld] learns in a different way than most. At in-person school, ALL teachers are told to teach ONE WAY only. Nothing else is acceptable. He was struggling so much, he felt like he was stupid, and a failure. We worked with him at home every night to teach him in various ways until he truly understood the lesson. That was a bad year and his last year there. He ABSOLUTELY LOVES attending [Stride K12-powered school name withheld]. He is an A Honor roll student, he no longer feels stupid or feels like a failure. He loves learning again! Thanks to the AMAZING TEACHERS AND ONLINE PLATFORM!!!

As this brief discussion indicates, many Stride K12 families had a lot of idiosyncratic situations and experiences that suggested to them that online learning was best for their children. The results in this section are also consistent with a survey of Stride K12 parents conducted by Greene and Paul (2022b).^{xi} Why parents chose a Stride K12-powered online school for their children are explored more in the next section.

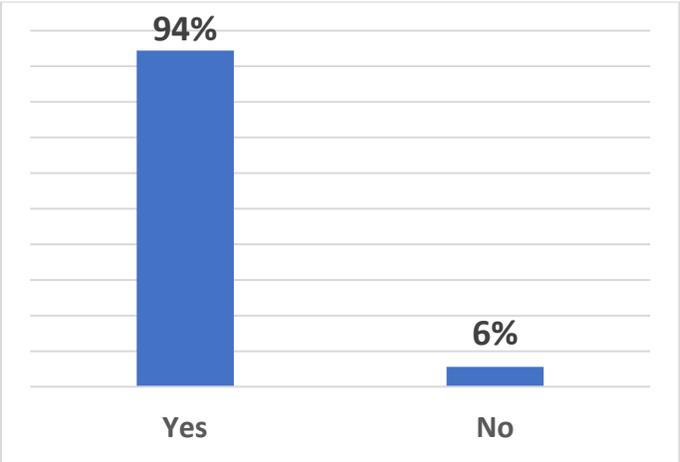
^{xi} Greene and Paul (2022b) may be accessed here: [EFI-WP_Satisfaction_GreenePaul2.pdf \(efinstitute.org\)](#).

Why Families Chose Stride K12-Powered Schools

For the set of survey questions presented in this section, Stride K12 parents were asked about the reasons why they initially chose a Stride K12-powered school for their children.

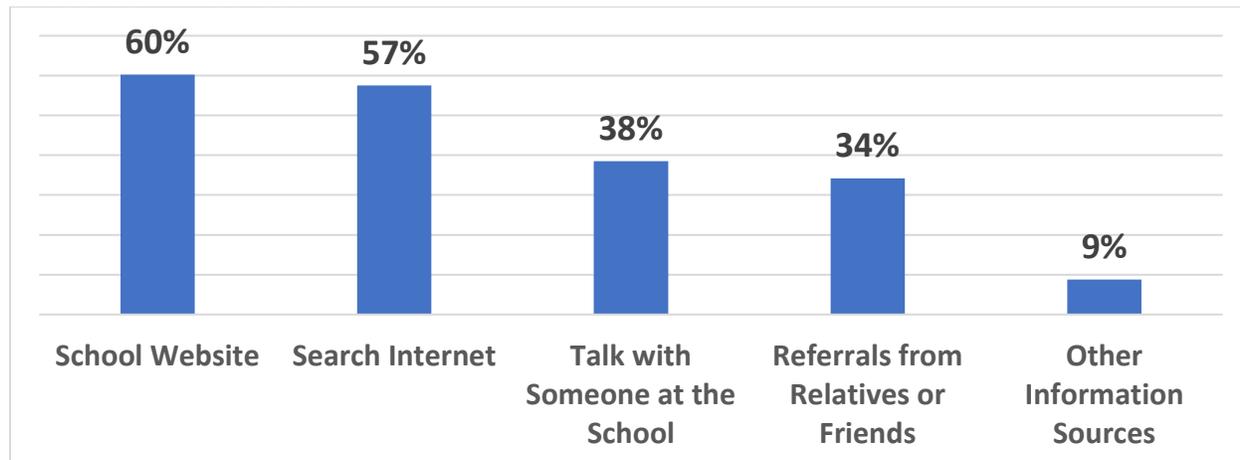
In this first question regarding why they chose a Stride K12-powered school for their children, parents were asked “When you were considering whether to send your child to this online school, did the Stride K12 school provide you with the information you needed to make the best decision.” Almost all parents said they were provided the information needed to make the best decision as to where to send their children to school—94 percent of Stride K12 parents said they were provided the information needed to make the best decision as to where to send their children to school, while only 6 percent said “no,” and they presumably would have preferred additional information (see figure IV.1).

Figure IV.1. When you were considering whether to send your child to this online school, did the Stride K12 school you chose provide you with the information you needed to make the best decision?



Parents were asked which of four information sources they used to help them decide whether to enroll their children in a Stride K12-powered online school. As shown in figure IV.2 below, substantial numbers of parents said they used these four information sources when deciding where to send their children to school: school website (60 percent); internet searches (57 percent); talked with someone at the school (38 percent); and received referrals from friends and relatives (34 percent).

Figure IV.2. What Information Sources Did You Use to Help You Decide to Enroll Your Child in this Stride K12 School?



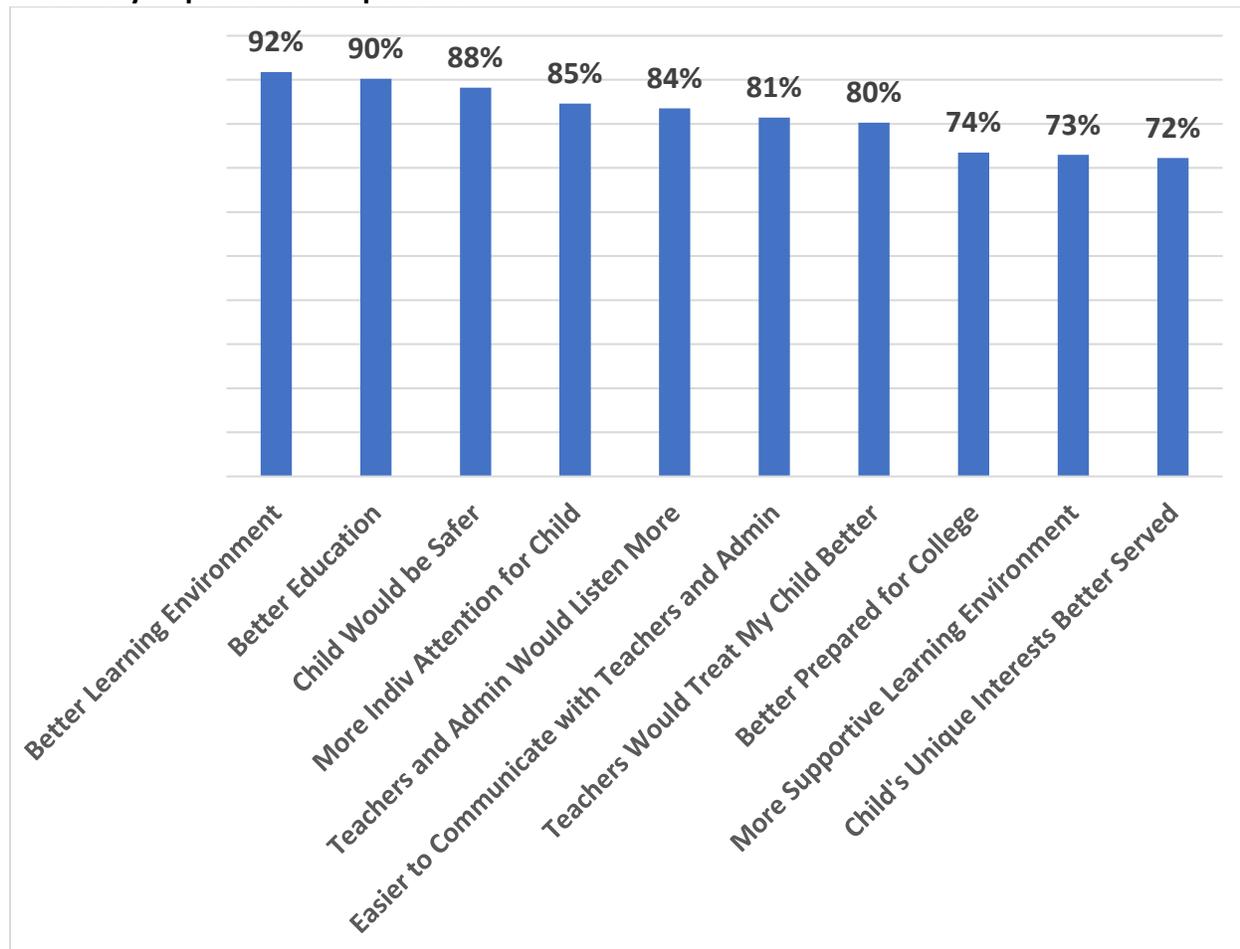
It is interesting that Stride K12 parents were more likely to use web-based resources rather than speaking with someone affiliated with Stride K12 schools or receiving referrals from friends and relatives. Perhaps these parents' facility and interest with the web and technology is what made them more comfortable choosing an online school for their children. Given the high levels of satisfaction that parents have with Stride K12 schools (described in the next two sections), it will be worth monitoring in the future if more parents say they receive referrals from family and friends. Further, if Stride K12 is interested in expanding its enrollments at some of their schools, they may seek ways to encourage their parents to share their children's experiences at their Stride K12-powered schools with other families who have school aged or even younger children.

Parents were also allowed to specify other information sources they used, and 9 percent of parents did indicate they used other information sources when deciding where to send their children to school. These other information sources included, viewing on YouTube or Facebook testimonials of parents or students or examples of projects that students had done and referrals from acquaintances who were not friends or relatives.

Next, families were given a series of 19 factors that potentially influenced their school choice decision when they were deciding whether or not to enroll their child in a Stride K12-powered school. For these 19 potential factors, parents were asked to rate the importance of each. Possible responses were: "extremely important," "important," "somewhat important," and "not important." Parents were asked, one at a time, to rate the level of importance for each of these 19 potential factors that they considered when deciding whether or not to enroll their children in their online schools.

Figure IV.3 contains the 10 most important factors for parents, where the percentages listed in the figure are the percent of parents who said each factor was "extremely important" or "important."

Figure IV.3. Top Ten in Importance in Deciding to Enroll Child in an Online School, Percent Extremely Important or Important



As shown above, Stride K12 parents care about a lot of different aspects of their children’s school, education, and environment. The two factors most often cited as “extremely important” or “important” to parents when they were deciding where to send their children to school both regarded the educational aspects of school. 92 percent of Stride K12 parents placed a high value on finding a “better learning environment” for their child, and 90 percent placed a high priority on finding a “better education” for their child.

Other educational factors given a high priority by parents were “more individual attention” for their child (85 percent), “better preparation for college” (74 percent), a “more supportive learning environment” (73 percent), and that their child’s unique interests would be better served (72 percent).

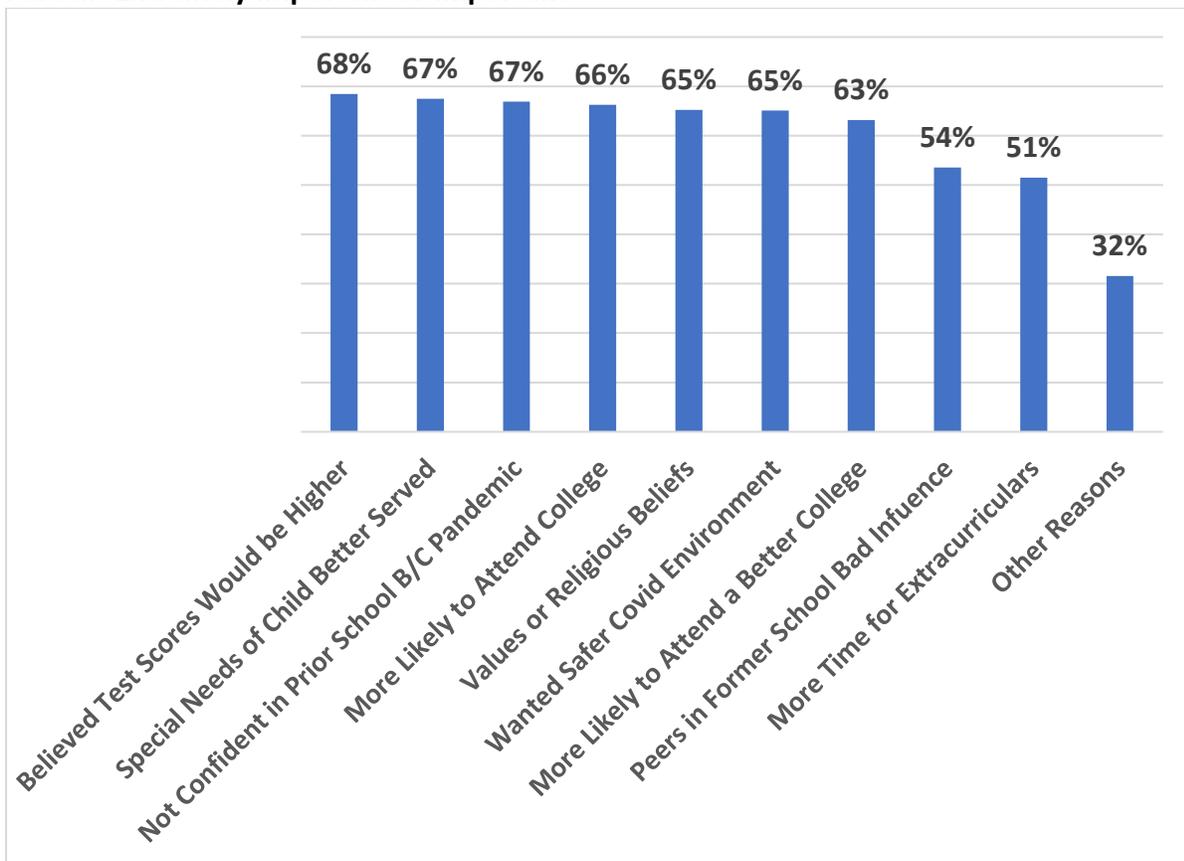
Throughout this section, if parents responded that a given factor was either “extremely important” or “important” to them when they were making the decision of whether to send their child to a Stride K12-powered school, I use the phrase that parents placed a “high priority” on that factor.

After the two educational factors, their child’s safety was the next highest priority (88 percent).

While student safety and the educational aspects of school are understandably most of the high priority factors parents considered when deciding where to send their children to school, parents also strongly prioritized how their students and how they as parents would be treated by their schools. Specifically, large majorities of parents place a high priority on “teachers and administrators would listen more” to parents and students (84 percent); “easier to communicate with teachers and administrators” (81 percent); and “teachers would treat my child better” (80 percent).

Figure IV.4 shows the extent to which parents placed a high priority on the remaining nine factors. Other educational factors were also important to parents when deciding whether to send their children to their Stride K12 schools, including 68 percent who believed their children’s test scores would be higher, 67 percent who believed that it was a high priority that their student’s special needed were better served, and that their students would be more likely to attend college (66 percent) or attend a better college (63 percent).

Figure IV.4. Next Most Important Factors in Deciding to Enroll Child in a Online School, Percent Extremely Important or Important



Majorities of Stride K12 parents also placed high priorities on aspects of schools that may not be solely academic, including a lack of confidence in their prior schools due to the pandemic (67 percent), that the school does not teach things that violate their values or religious beliefs (65 percent), more health safety in terms of COVID (65 percent), that they were concerned about their child’s peers in their former school (54 percent), and that they wanted more time for their children with respect to extracurricular activities (51 percent). While each of these factors surely impacts a child’s education, they also involve considerations that are not purely academic.

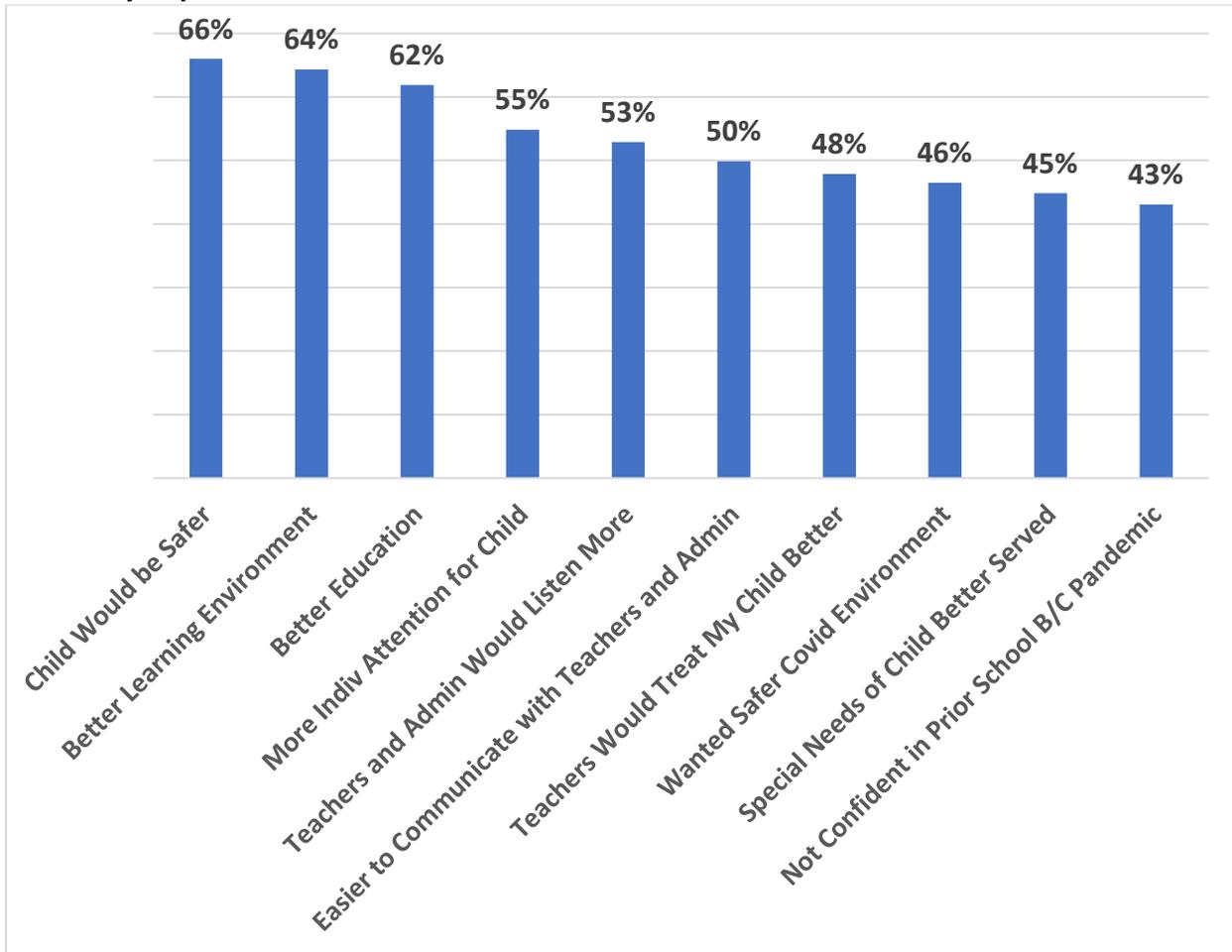
It is noteworthy that larger proportions of Stride K12 parents place high priorities on the academic/educational aspects of school, and that majorities of them also place high priorities on other aspects of schooling that are not purely academic.

For the two above figures, the numbers represented the percent of parents who responded that each factor was “extremely important” or “important” to them when they were deciding whether or not to send their children to a Stride K12-powered school. For the next two figures below, the numbers represent the percent of parents who said each factor was “extremely important.” Thus, responses of “important” are not included in the numbers in the two figures below.

Figure IV.5 shows the ten factors for which parents were most likely to say were “extremely important” in their decision to enroll their children in a Stride K12-powered online school.

As shown in figure IV.5, the factor most cited as “extremely important” by the most parents when deciding whether to send their child to a Stride K12-powered school was that their “child would be safer” (66 percent). That is, two-thirds of Stride K12 parents said that the safety of their child was an “extremely important” factor in their decision to send their child to their online school. The next two most cited factors as “extremely important” in families’ school choice decisions were educational: “better learning environment (64 percent of parents) and “better education (62 percent). The next four most cited factors had to do with how well the students and parents would be treated by the schools: “more individual attention for my child” (55 percent), “teachers and administrators would listen more” (53 percent), “easier to communicate with teachers and administrators” (50 percent), and “teachers would treat my child better” (48 percent).

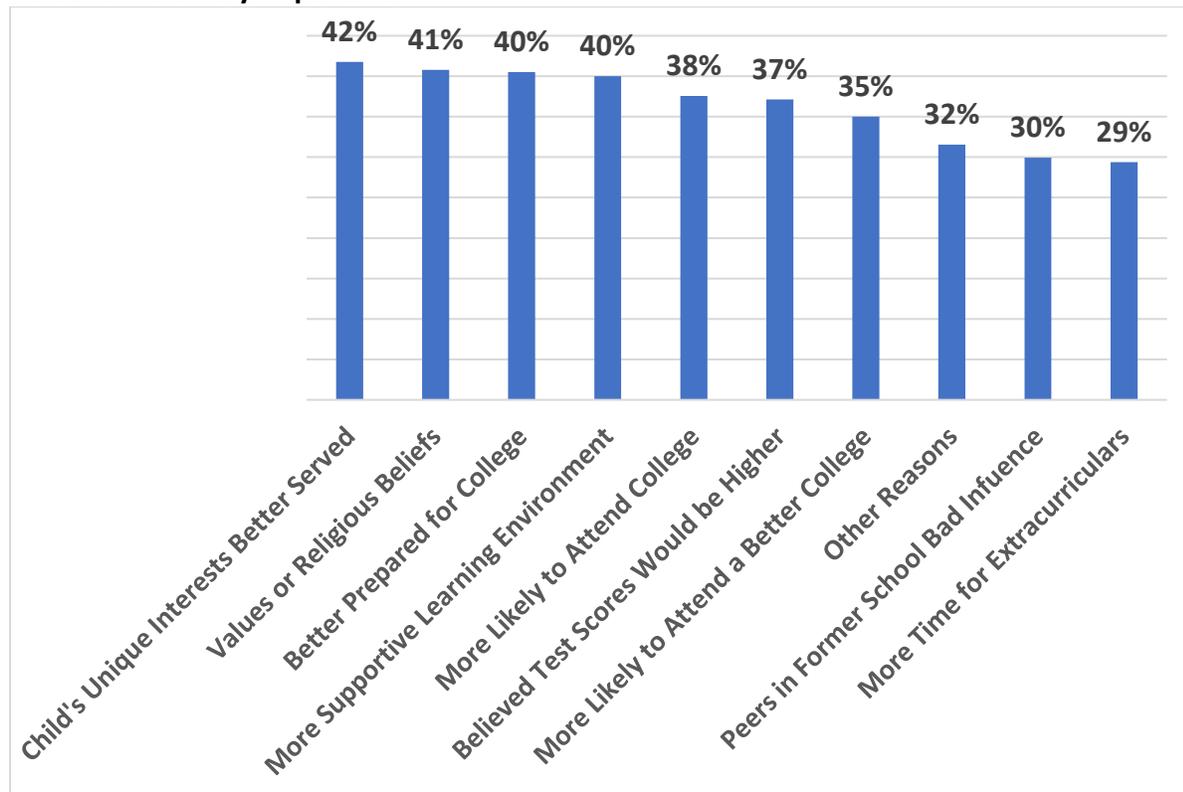
Figure IV.5. Top Ten in Importance in Deciding to Enroll Child in an Online School, Percent Extremely Important



The rest of the top 10 factors cited as “extremely important” by parents when choosing a school for their child were “special needs of my child better served” (45 percent) and two Covid-related factors: “wanted safer COVID environment (46 percent) and “not confident in my child’s school because of pandemic (43 percent).

Even though they were not in the ten most cited factors, the remaining nine factors were also cited by substantial fractions of parents (see figure IV.6). For example, although “more time for extracurriculars” was the least-most cited factor by parents, 29 percent of parents did say that this issue was “extremely important” to them when they were deciding whether or not to send their children to a Stride K12-powered online school. Another finding of interest is that higher test scores (37 percent) was less cited than “child’s unique interests better served” (42 percent), “values or religious beliefs” (41 percent), and “more supportive learning environment (40 percent). Parents’ interest in college for their children was also more important than test scores: “better prepared for college” (40 percent) and “more likely to attend college” (38 percent).

Figure IV.6. Next Most Important Factors in Deciding to Enroll Child in an Online School, Percent Extremely Important



Other Reasons Why Parents Chose a Stride K12-Powered Online School

In the survey parents were given the opportunity to specify other reasons why they chose a Stride K12-powered online school for their children. Of the 1,613 survey respondents, 419 (26 percent) detailed other reasons why they chose online schools for their children.

The other reasons for choosing an online school that these 419 parents offered were extremely diverse. However, there were some specific reasons that were raised by several parents. One big issue mentioned by over 25 parents were that their children’s special needs were not being met in their former schools, especially among children who were autistic and needed to be in secluded environments. The next largest common reason given was that a parent or someone in the household was immunocompromised and that in order for the family to be COVID-safe, it was best for their children to be educated from home. Another common answer was flexibility given some unique circumstance for the child or the family—one student was a top dancer who needed the flexibility of an online school, another had a father who travelled for work and online school allowed the child to sometimes travel with their father in order to have any time with him, etc.

Finally, another answer given by over twenty parents is that they had poor brick and mortar public school options in their community or they did not believe their neighborhood public schools were navigating COVID well in one or more respects—and they had nowhere else to turn because private schools were expensive, etc. For example, one parent wrote:

We originally started K12 due to Covid-19. When we started I was very nervous, but ended up really liking it. I plan on trying it with all four of my children.

Thus, it seems that Stride K12 parents:

- Value many different aspects of their children’s education, including academics and other aspects of education that are not purely academic such as the physical and health safety of their children.
- Have reasons different from each other as to what factors were most important when deciding where to send their children to school.

The next two sections report detailed ratings that parents gave to their children’s Stride K12-powered schools and comparisons that parents made between their children’s former schools and their current online schools.

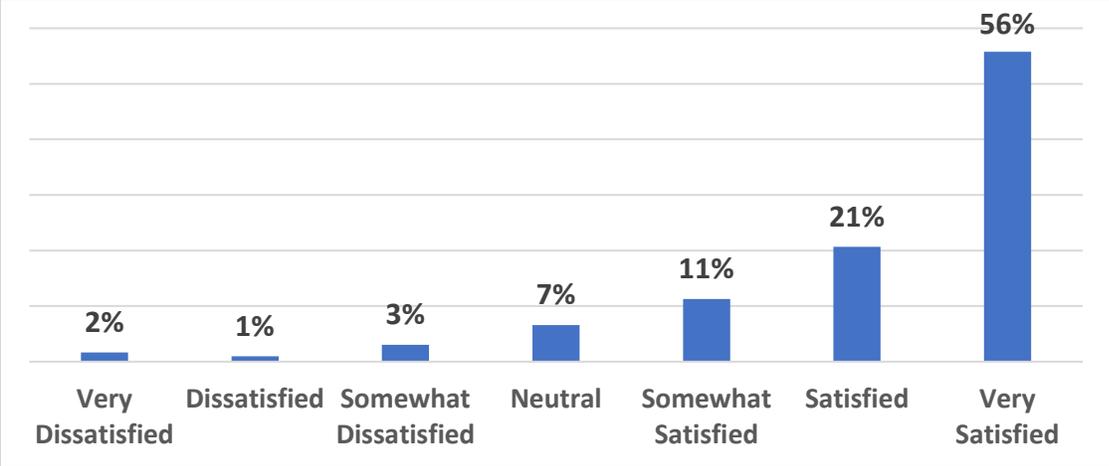
Experiences of Families with Stride K12-Powered Schools

One set of questions in the survey asked Stride K12 families about their experiences in their Stride K12-powered schools. The first question asked to what extent parents were satisfied with the “individual attention given to my child” at their Stride K12-powered schools. For this question and all others, parents were able to choose one of seven possible responses: “very satisfied, satisfied, somewhat satisfied, neutral, somewhat dissatisfied, dissatisfied, and very dissatisfied.”

Individual Attention Given to My Child

Families are overwhelmingly satisfied with the “individual attention” given to their children at their Stride K12-powered schools (see figure V.1). 77 percent of parents said they were “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with the “individual attention” their child has been given at their Stride K12-powered school, and a total of 88 percent of parents expressed some degree of satisfaction. Only 7 percent of parents were “neutral” on this issue, and the remaining 6 percent expressed some level of dissatisfaction.

Figure V.1. Satisfaction with Individual Attention Given to My Child at Stride K12 school

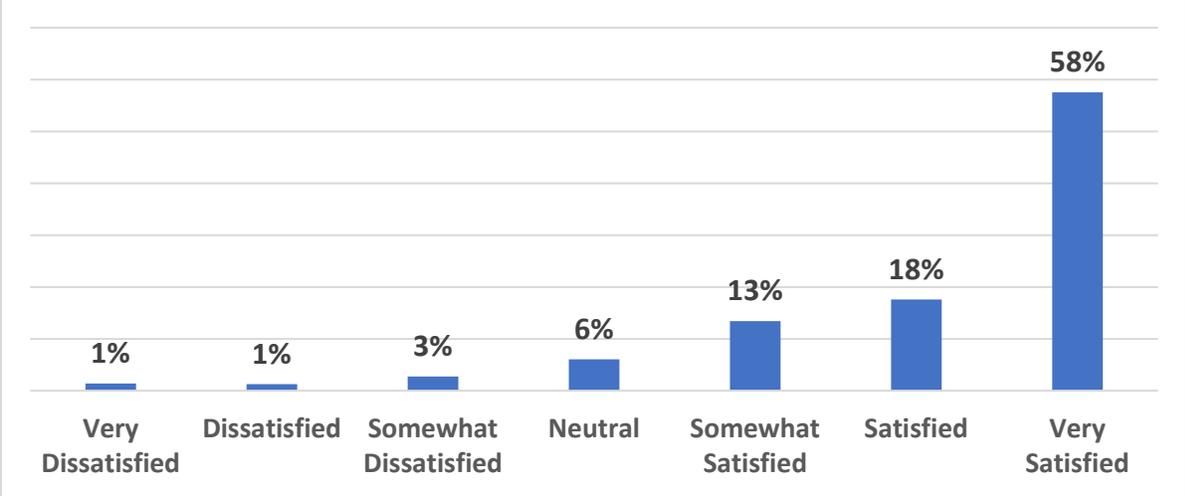


The percentages in figure V.1, and in some subsequent figures, do not sum to 100 percent because of rounding. And, these levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction parents have with various aspects of their Stride K12-powered schools will be compared to their children’s former schools in section VI, the next section, of this report.

My Child’s Academic Progress

With respect to their child’s “academic progress” at their Stride K12-powered schools, 76 percent of parents are “very satisfied” or satisfied” (see figure V.2). In total, 89 percent of parents expressed some degree of satisfaction with their child’s academic progress in their Stride K12-powered schools. Another 6 percent were neutral on this question, and only 5 percent expressed some degree of dissatisfaction.

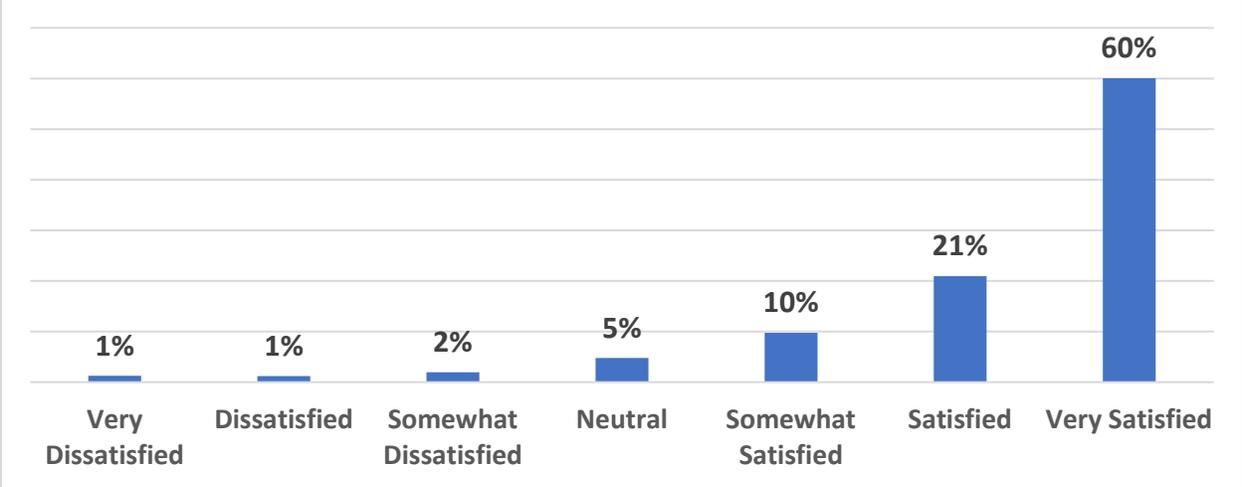
Figure V.2. Satisfaction with My Child’s Academic Progress at Stride K12 School



Quality of My Child’s Teachers

Parents in the survey were overwhelmingly satisfied with the quality of their children’s teachers (see figure V.3). Specifically, 91 percent of parents expressed some degree of satisfaction with their children’s teachers in their Stride K12-powered schools, with 81 percent stating they were “very satisfied” or “satisfied.” Only 5 percent were neutral on the question, and only 4 percent expressed some degree of dissatisfaction. Clearly, Stride K12 parents believe that their online schools are hiring quality teachers.

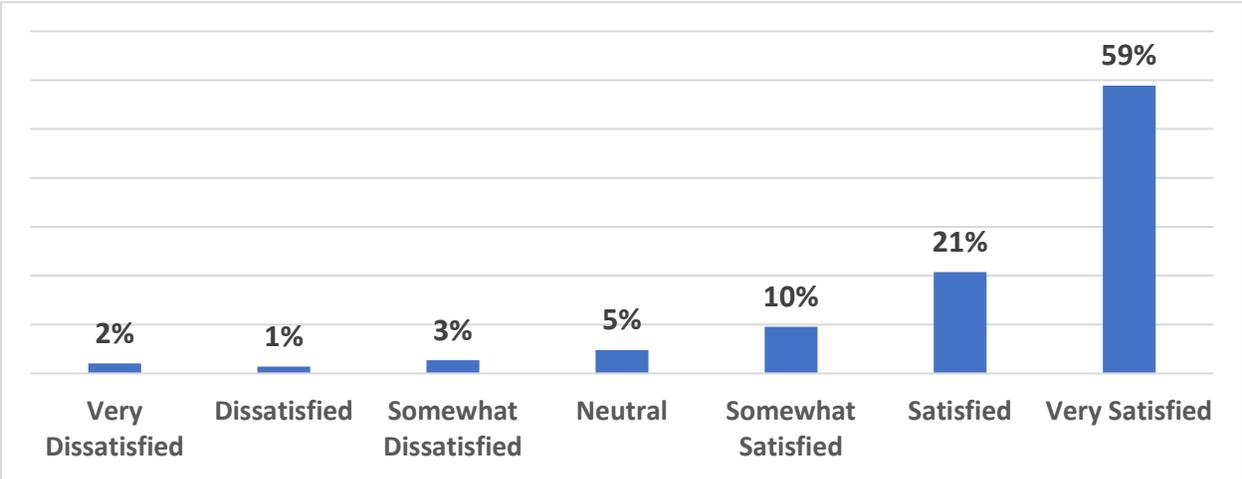
Figure V.3. Satisfaction with the Quality of My Child’s Teachers



School’s Responsive to Parents

Families were also asked about their satisfaction with their Stride K12 school’s “responsiveness to my needs as a parent or guardian” (see figure V.4). Nine out of ten respondents expressed some level of satisfaction, with 80 percent either very satisfied” or “satisfied” with their Stride K12 school’s responsiveness to their needs. Only 5 percent were neutral on the question, and only 6 percent expressed any degree of dissatisfaction.

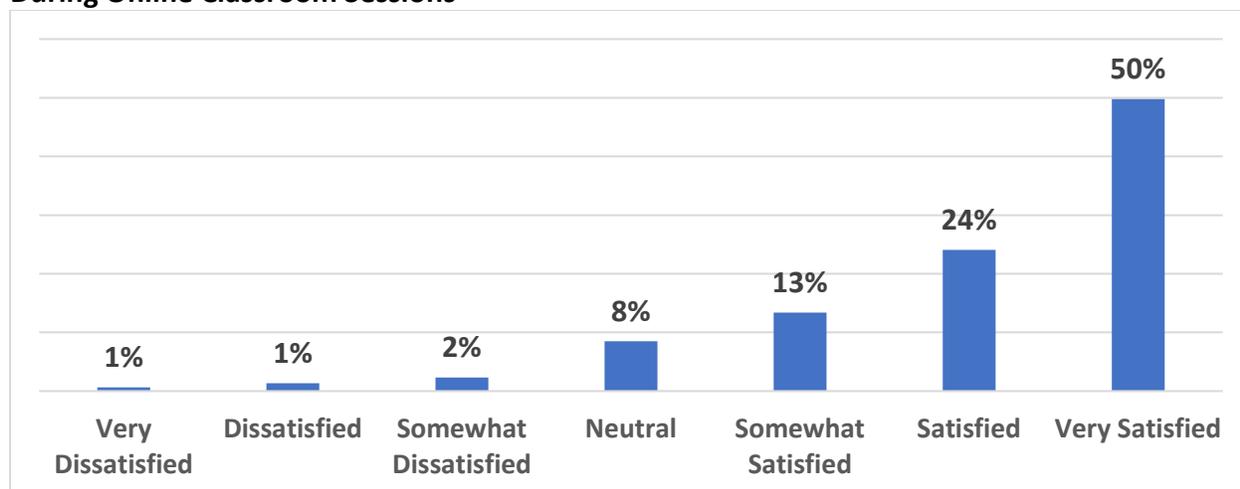
Figure V.4. Satisfaction with Stride K12 School’s Responsiveness to My Needs as a Parent or Guardian



Behavior of Other Students During Online Classroom Sessions

Stride K12 students generally spend significant time each week with their teachers and peers in online classroom sessions. Parents were asked how satisfied they were with the behavior of the other students during these online classroom sessions. 87 percent of parents had some degree of satisfaction with the behavior of other students during these online sessions, while 74 percent were either “very satisfied” or “satisfied” (see figure V.5). The remaining parents were either “neutral” on the subject (8 percent) or expressed some degree of dissatisfaction (4 percent).

Figure V.5. Satisfaction with the Behavior of Students at Your Child’s Stride K12 School During Online Classroom Sessions

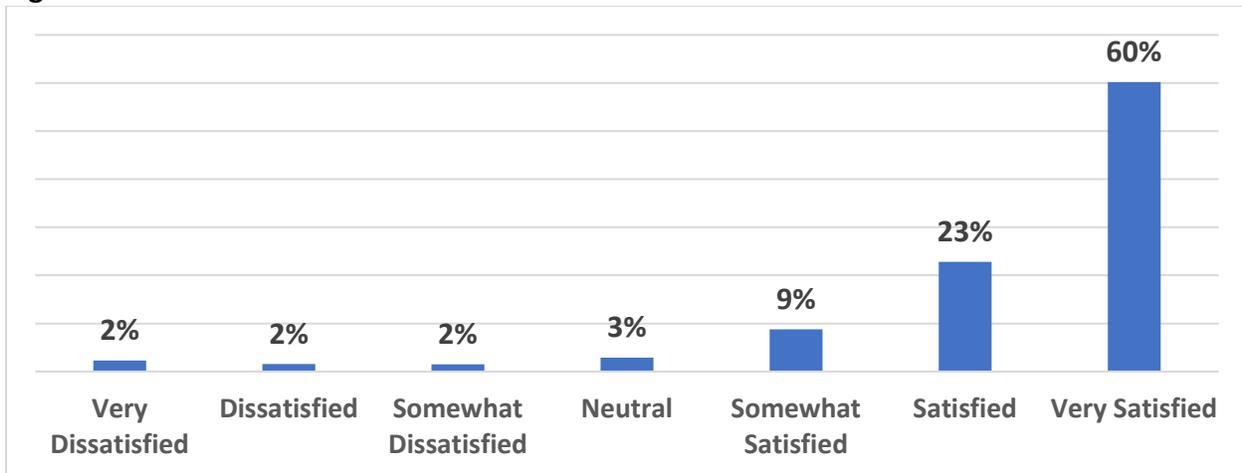


Overall Satisfaction with Stride K12-Powered School

To conclude this set of questions, parents were asked to rate their “overall satisfaction with your child’s Stride K12 school this year.” Given the parent responses described above regarding various facets of their ratings of their children’s Stride K12-powered schools, it is not surprising that 92 percent of parents had some degree of satisfaction with their children’s Stride K12 schools (see figure V.6). Of these 92 percent who expressed some degree of satisfaction, 83 percent were either “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with their child’s Stride K12 school this year, and an additional 9 percent were “somewhat satisfied.” Only 3 percent were “neutral” and only 6 percent registered any degree of dissatisfaction.

Put differently, almost all parents are happy or very happy with what their children are getting from their Stride K12-powered schools.

Figure V.6. Overall Satisfaction with Your Child’s Stride K12 School This Year



In the free response comments, many parents made effusive comments about how they believed that their Stride K-12 school had been very beneficial for their children, including providing a better educational and social environment. Of the 1,613 parents who completed the survey, over 960 of them took them time to share their families’ positive experiences with their Stride K12-powered schools. As an example, one parent said:

This is the best thing for my son. He is so much more relaxed and confident. His grades are outstanding and he loves having the free time. I am happy that he is no longer being bullied.

There were myriad positive comments about Stride K12 teachers, including:

Allows my child to use a one-on-one Teaching Coach. Allows children to work at their own pace. Allows extra time to complete assignments. Our Teacher is wonderful, a great listener, trusted, respected, problem solver, shows true concern about my child's learning experiences, treats my child as a person not a group.

A very large number of parents cited the strong academics at their Stride K12-powered schools, including one parent who said that their child’s school is:

Challenging him academically, meeting his special needs, supporting his growth as a total individual, providing him a vast array of electives to explore, providing unique science course offerings, providing social engagement opportunities, and preparing him for college.

Another parent said:

Giving my child the help needed to understand what is being taught. Teachers are very caring about our children's education. My child has

stopped looking at school as a burden and now looks forward to attending and learning new things and challenging herself to keep her grades up and feel proud of her hard work and achievements. I have noticed so much change in a positive way and I am so proud of her hard work and grades. Teachers are amazing and awesome keeping my child motivated and all students in class. We are so glad we chose [Stride K12-powered school name withheld] for our child's education.

And many others liked the high standards and large number of course offerings, including college preparatory courses:

We love the concurrent enrollment and college opportunities, as well as the advanced/honors classes that are offered.

The next section goes in depth regarding how parents compared their children's former schools to their current online schools, for families whose children attended another school before coming to their current Stride K12-powered school.

Families’ Comparisons of their Stride K12-Powered Schools and their Former Schools

In the survey parents were asked to rate from one to seven several aspects of the Stride K12-powered schools and their children’s former schools, if applicable. Per the latter, if their children did not begin their education at a Stride K12-powered school, parents were asked to rate various aspects of their children’s former schools, where the ratings signified their levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction:

Table VI.1. Ratings Parents Could Choose Regarding Each Aspect of Schooling

1	Very Dissatisfied
2	Dissatisfied
3	Somewhat Dissatisfied
4	Neutral
5	Somewhat Satisfied
6	Satisfied
7	Very Satisfied

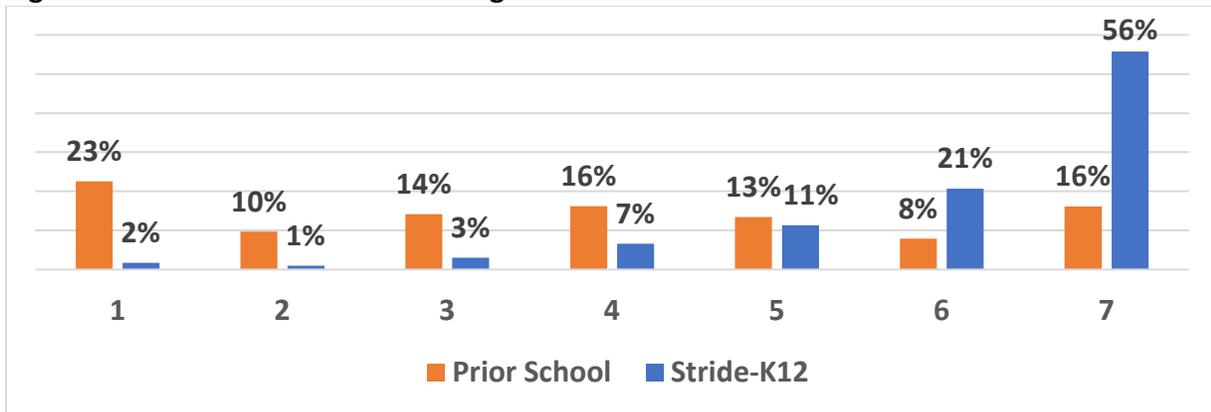
Thus, the questions discussed below offer parents’ direct comparisons of their levels of satisfaction with their children’s current Stride K12 schools and their children’s former schools. As shown below, their levels of satisfaction are strikingly different.

Individual Attention Given to My Child

Parents were asked to rate the “individual attention” given to their child in their current Stride K12-powered schools and in their former schools. 77 percent of parents rated the “individual attention given to their child in their Stride K12-powered schools as a six or a seven, with seven indicating they were “very satisfied” (see figure VI.1). Only 24 percent of families had these levels of satisfaction in their former schools.

While 47 percent of Stride K12 parents expressed some level of dissatisfaction with the “individual attention” given to their children in their former schools (ratings of one, two, or three), only six percent had any dissatisfaction in this respect for their child’s current online school.

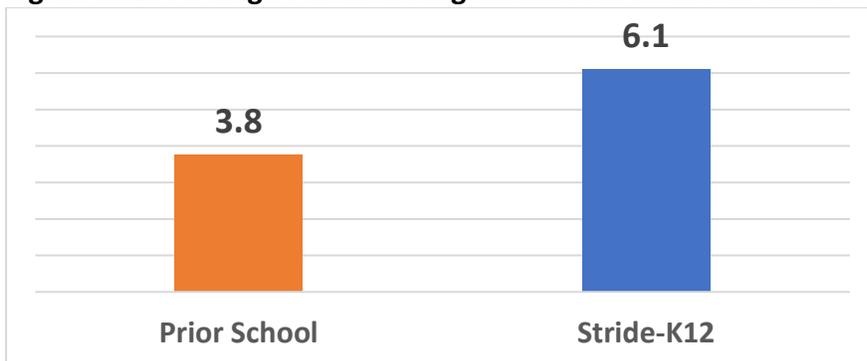
Figure VI.1. Parent Satisfaction Rating for the “Individual Attention Given to Your Child”



I display the data in two ways for each of these items—(a) percent of parents providing each level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, as in figure VI.1 just above and (b) the average of parents’ numerical ratings, which can range from one to seven, as shown in figure VI.2 just below here. With regards to the latter, if every parent said they were “very satisfied,” then the average numerical rating would be a seven—as seven is the highest possible average numerical rating. The lowest possible average numerical rating is one, which would only occur if each parent stated they were “very dissatisfied” with some aspect of their children’s schools.

As shown in figure VI.2, on average, parents rated the “individual attention” given to their children at their Stride K12-powered schools as a 6.1 as compared to only 3.8 at their children’s former schools, where both of these numbers are out of a possible seven.

Figure VI.2. Average Parent Rating: Individual Attention Given to My Child

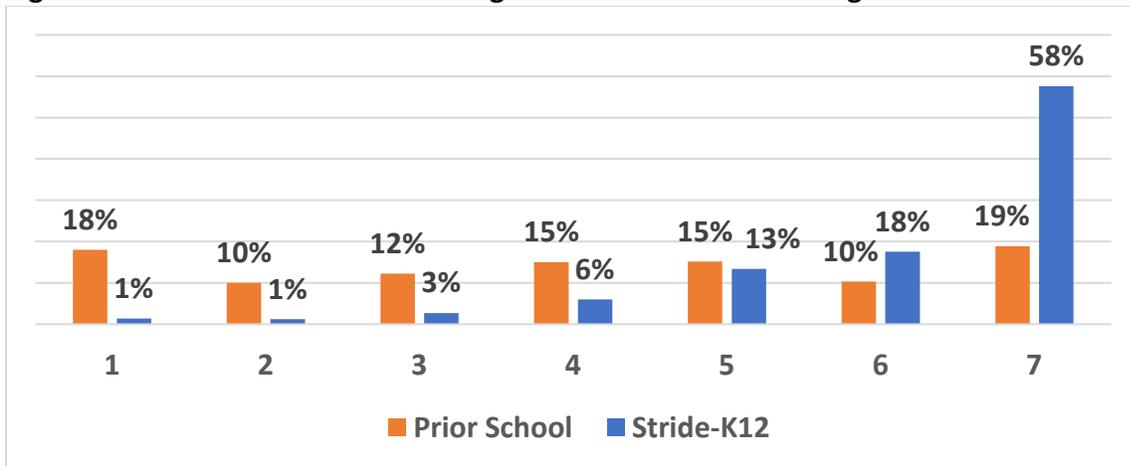


Note: Parent Satisfaction Ratings range from a low of “1” to a high of “7.”

Academic Progress

Next, parents were asked to rate their level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their child’s “academic progress” (see figure VI.3). With regards to their Stride K12-powered schools, 76 percent of parents rated their child’s academic progress as a six or a seven, while only 29 percent gave those high ratings to their children’s former schools.

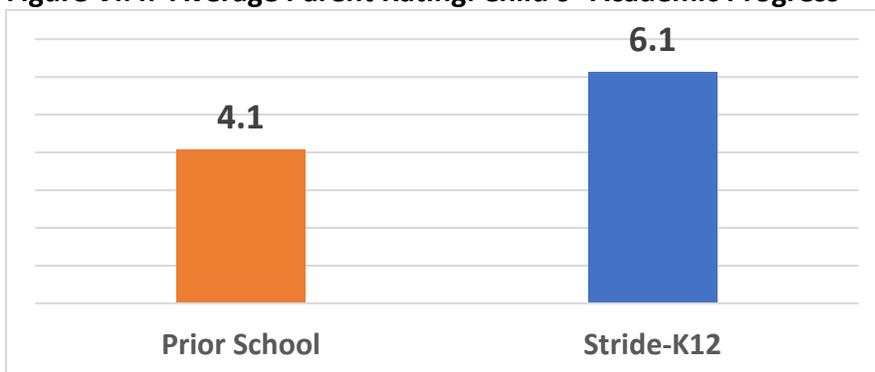
Figure VI.3. Parent Satisfaction Rating for Child’s “Academic Progress”



While only five percent expressed any level of dissatisfaction with their child’s “academic progress” at a Stride K12-powered school, 40 percent of parents expressed dissatisfaction with their child’s academic progress in their former schools. As discussed in section VII, these responses of parents—who view their children’s academic progress as much better at their online schools as compared to their former schools—are a stark contrast with the research on the academic performance of online schools.

As shown in figure VI.4, the average parent rated their satisfaction with their child’s academic progress as a 6.1 out of seven in their Stride K12-powered school and only 4.1 at their child’s former school.

Figure VI.4. Average Parent Rating: Child’s “Academic Progress”



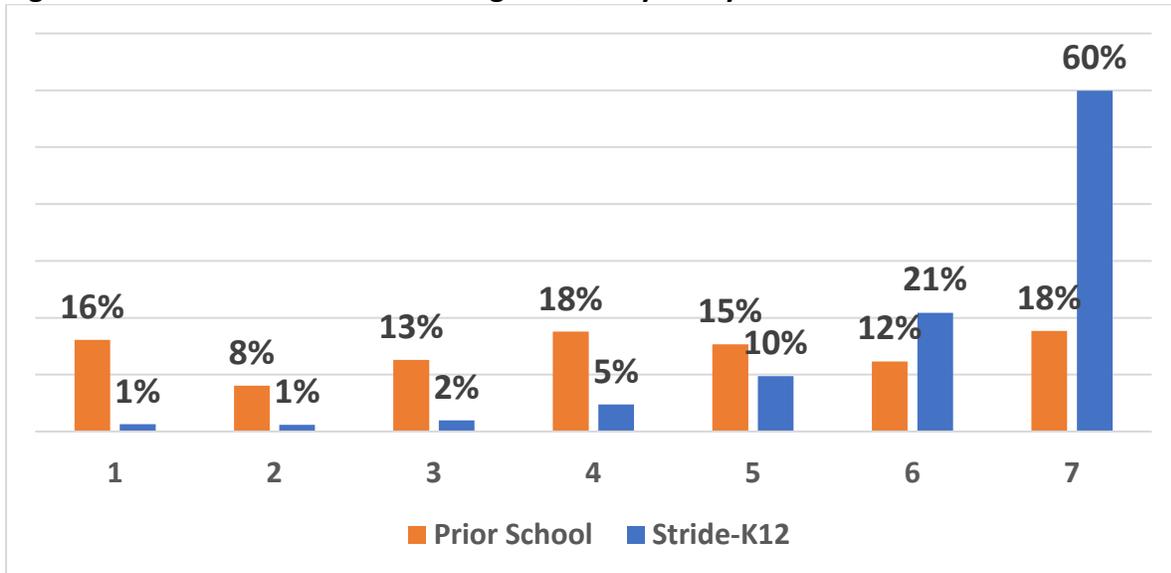
Note: Parent Satisfaction Ratings range from a low of “1” to a high of “7.”

Quality of My Child’s Teachers

In terms of their ratings of the “quality of my child’s teachers,” the differences between parental satisfaction at Stride K12-powered schools and prior schools was extremely large—81

percent of parents rated their satisfaction with their Stride K12 teachers as a six or seven, while the corresponding figure for teachers at their children’s former schools was only 30 percent.

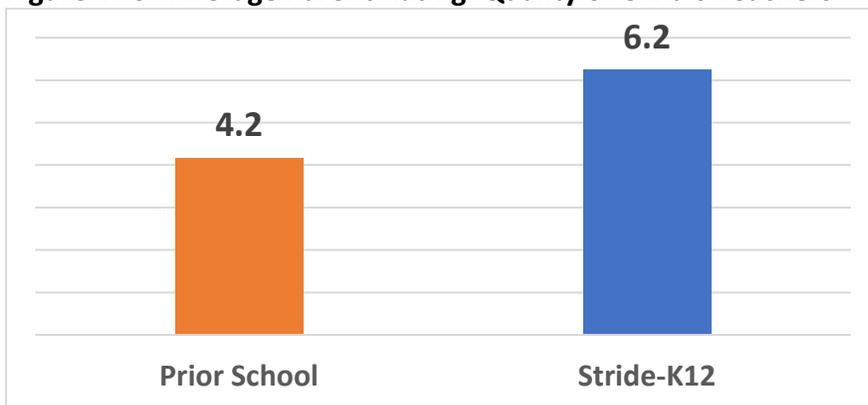
Figure VI.5. Parent Satisfaction Rating for Quality of My Child’s Teachers



Only four percent of parents expressed any level of dissatisfaction (rating of one, two, or three) with their child’s Stride K12 teachers, while 37 percent expressed some level of dissatisfaction with teachers at prior schools.

On average, parents rated their satisfaction with Stride K12 teachers as 6.2 out of seven, while their satisfaction with teachers at prior schools was only 4.2 out of seven (see figure VI.6).

Figure VI.6. Average Parent Rating: Quality of Child’s Teachers

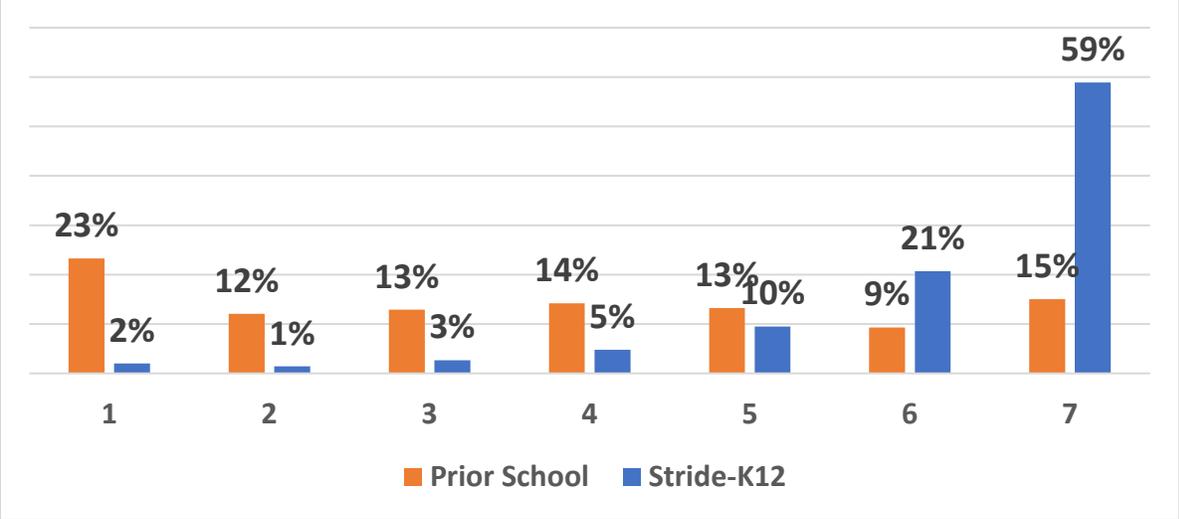


Note: Parent Satisfaction Ratings range from a low of “1” to a high of “7.”

Responsiveness to Parents

As shown in prior sections, Stride K12 parents place a high priority on their children’s schools being attentive to their family. Figure VI.7 shows they are highly satisfied with their Stride K12 schools in terms of “responsiveness to parents”—with 80 percent rating their satisfaction level as a six or seven, while giving those high ratings only 24 percent of the time with regards to their children’s former schools.

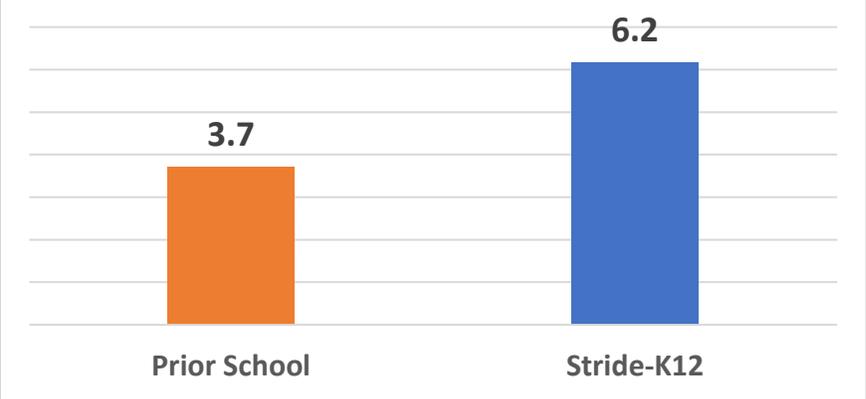
Figure VI.7. Parent Satisfaction Rating for School’s Responsiveness to Parents



Almost half of Stride K12 parents expressed some degree of dissatisfaction regarding their children’s former schools “responsiveness to parents” (48 percent), while the corresponding figure for their Stride K12-powered schools was only 6 percent.

For average ratings on a scale of one to seven, the average satisfaction levels parents expressed in terms of “responsiveness to parents” was 6.2 for Stride K12-powered schools and 3.7 for their children’s former schools (see figure VI.8).

Figure VI.8. Average Parent Rating: School’s Responsiveness to Parents

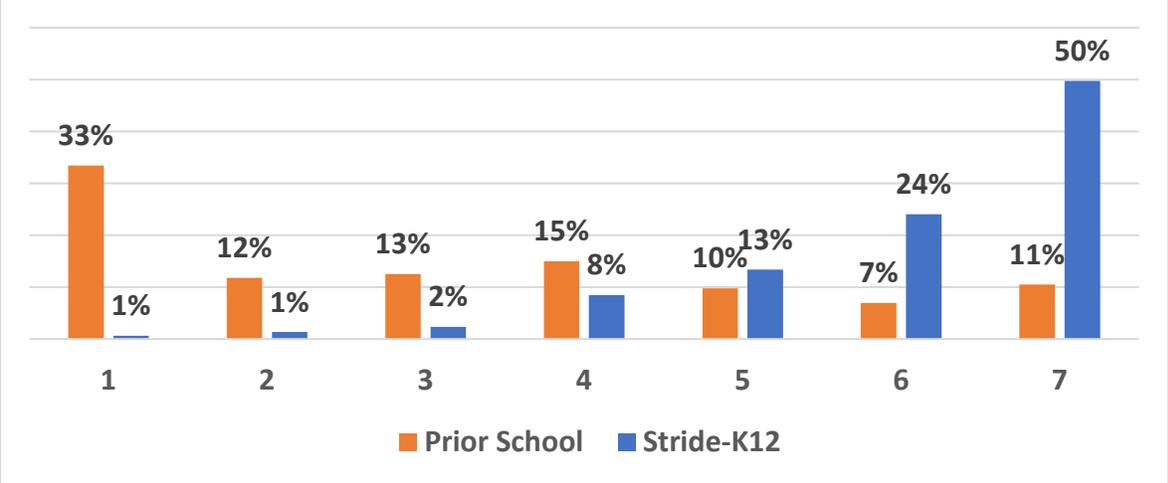


Note: Parent Satisfaction Ratings range from a low of “1” to a high of “7.”

Behavior of Other Students

Parents also indicated there were significant differences in the behavior of other students in their child’s former schools as compared to the behavior of Stride K12 students. Specifically, 74 percent were “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with the behavior of other students during online classroom sessions at Stride K12-powered schools, while these high ratings were only given for 18 percent of parents for their children’s prior schools (see figure VI.9).

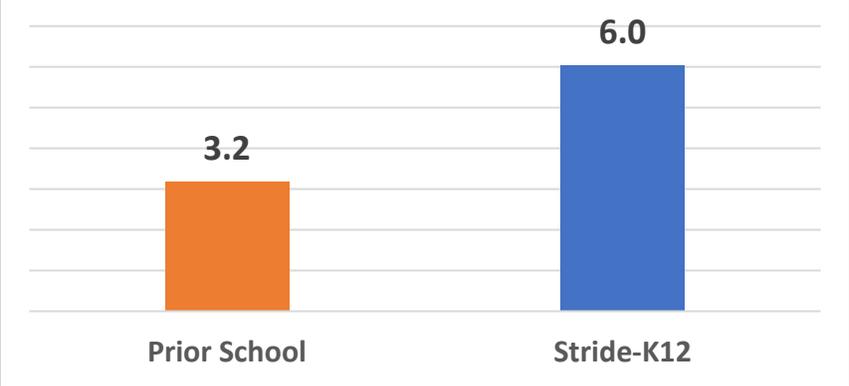
Figure VI.9. Parent Satisfaction Rating for Behavior of Other Students



In terms of dissatisfaction with the behavior of other students, there was an extreme disparity between parents’ views of their children’s Stride K12 schools and their former schools. Over half (58 percent) expressed some level of dissatisfaction with the behavior of other students in their children’s former schools, while only 4 percent expressed this concern for students at Stride K12 schools.

Consequently, the average satisfaction level of parents with the behavior of other students was six at Stride K12-powered schools and only 3.2 at their child’s former schools (see figure VI.10).

Figure VI.10. Average Parent Rating: Behavior of Other Students



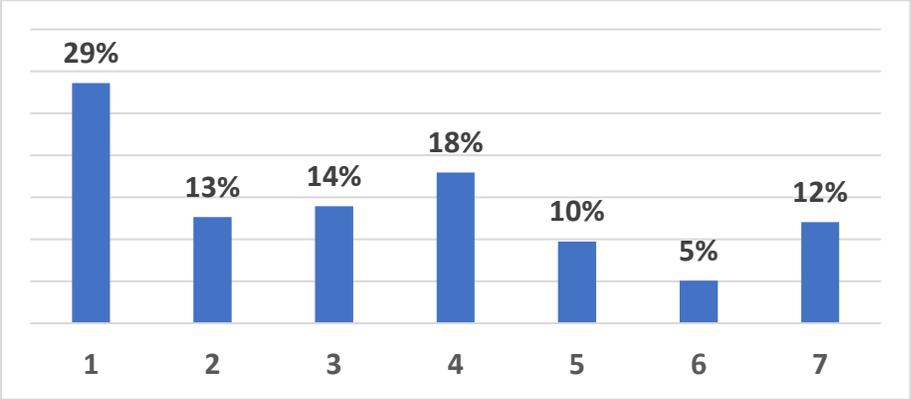
Note: Parent Satisfaction Ratings range from a low of “1” to a high of “7.”

The next three questions about parent satisfaction were asked only in regard to their children’s former schools because each question inquires about parents’ ratings of how their children experienced the physical environment in their former schools. Since Stride K12-powered schools are online schools, these three questions about how students experienced the physical environments of schools are not relevant. Nevertheless, these questions address issues that are relevant as to how parents assessed their child’s overall situation in their former schools.

Quality of Educational Environment

As shown in figure VI.11, with regards to the “quality of the educational environment” in their children’s former schools, parents expressed a satisfaction level that averaged 3.3 out of seven, with 17 percent rating their satisfaction as a six or a seven and 56 percent expressing some level of dissatisfaction (one, two, or three).

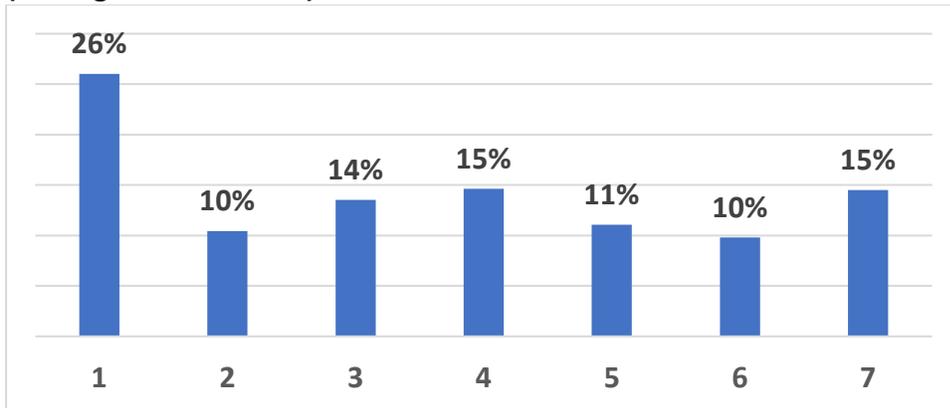
Figure VI.11. Parent Satisfaction Rating for Quality of Educational Environment in Prior School (Average = 3.3 out of 7)



School Safety

Parents rated their satisfaction with school safety at their child’s prior schools as a 3.6 out of seven, with 25 percent “very satisfied” or “satisfied” and 50 percent registering some level of dissatisfaction (see figure VI.12).

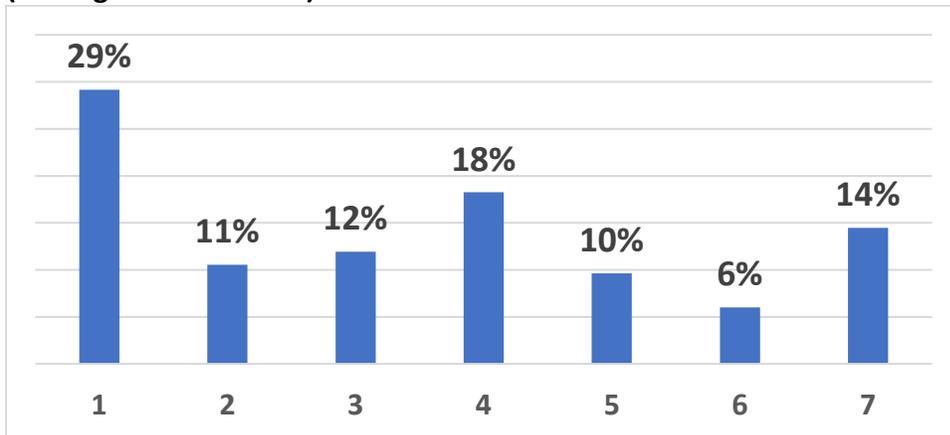
**Figure VI.12. Parent Satisfaction Rating for Safety in Prior School
(Average = 3.6 out of 7)**



COVID Safety

Regarding the COVID health and safety, situation in their children’s former schools, only 20 percent of parents rated their satisfaction as a six or seven, while 52 percent expressed some degree of dissatisfaction (see figure VI.13).

**Figure VI.13. Parent Satisfaction Rating for Covid (Health) Safety in Prior School
(Average = 3.4 out of 7)**



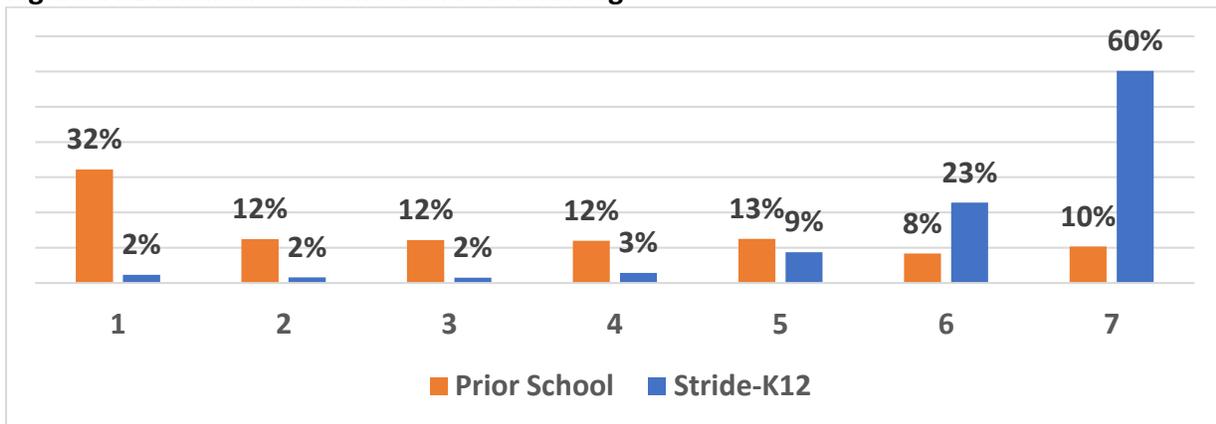
Overall Satisfaction

Clearly, majorities of Stride K12 parents were not satisfied with how their children experienced the physical environments present in their former schools in terms of educational environments, physical safety and COVID health safety. These amounts of dissatisfaction coupled with the large differences in satisfaction levels between the various attributes of their Stride K12 and former schools that were presented earlier in this section likely contributed to

the large difference in the overall level of satisfaction that parents have experienced with their children’s Stride K12-powered schools and their former schools.

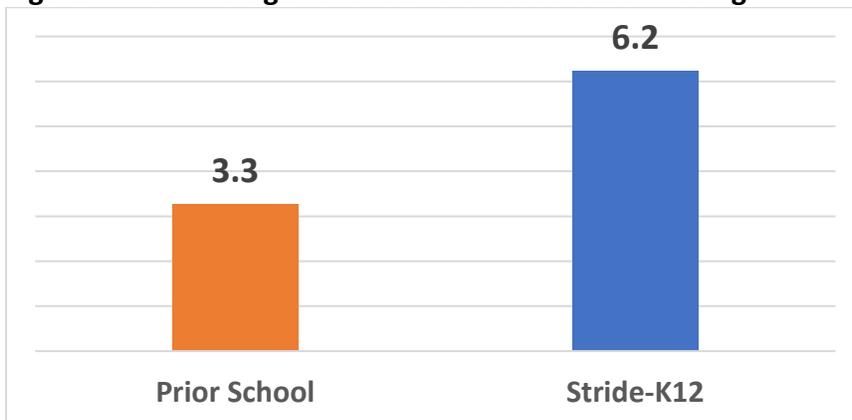
Specifically, 83 percent of parents had the highest levels of “overall” satisfaction with Stride K12-powered schools (six or seven), as compared to only 18 percent having the highest levels of satisfaction with their children’s former schools (see figure VI.14). In terms of dissatisfaction with schools “overall,” 56 parents expressed a degree of dissatisfaction with their child’s former schools, while only six percent of parents expressed any degree of “overall” dissatisfaction with their child’s current Stride K12-powered schools.

Figure VI.14. Parent Overall Satisfaction Rating



While over 80 percent of parents expressed one of the highest levels of “overall” satisfaction with their children’s Stride K12-powered schools, over 50 percent expressed some degree of “overall” dissatisfaction with their former schools. This dichotomy produced the following difference in “overall” average parental satisfaction ratings: On average, parents rated their overall satisfaction with their child’s current Stride K12 schools as 6.2 out of seven, while rating their children’s prior schools as only 3.3 out of seven (see figure VI.15).

Figure VI.15. Average Parent Overall Satisfaction Rating



Note: Parent Satisfaction Ratings range from a low of “1” to a high of “7.”

Of course, most American parents are not dissatisfied with their brick-and-mortar schools, regardless of whether they are traditional public schools, charter public schools, or private schools. That said, the survey results presented in this section strongly indicate that Stride K12 parents were not satisfied about many aspects of their children’s former schools and are overwhelmingly satisfied with their Stride K12-powered schools. Thus, from these parents’ point of view, their children are in better academic and social situations because of the opportunity they received to send their children to a Stride K12-powered online school. Further, the results regarding COVID situations in their former schools are consistent with Kingsbury (2021) and the other results in this section are consistent with the survey of Stride K12 parents conducted by Greene and Paul (2022b).^{xii}

The next section describes some of the free response answers parents gave regarding their family’s experiences in their children’s former schools and their experiences in their Stride K12-powered schools. These free response answers highlight just a few of parents’ specific reasons for the differences in satisfaction levels across schools that were shown in this section and why some families chose to send their children to an online school.

The next section shows parents’ responses to where their children would attend school if a Stride K12-powered online school had not been available to them.

^{xii} Kingsbury 2021 may be accessed here: [Online learning: How do brick and mortar schools stack up to virtual schools? | SpringerLink](#) and Greene and Paul (2022b) may be accessed here: [EFI-WP Satisfaction GreenePaul2.pdf \(efinstitute.org\)](#).

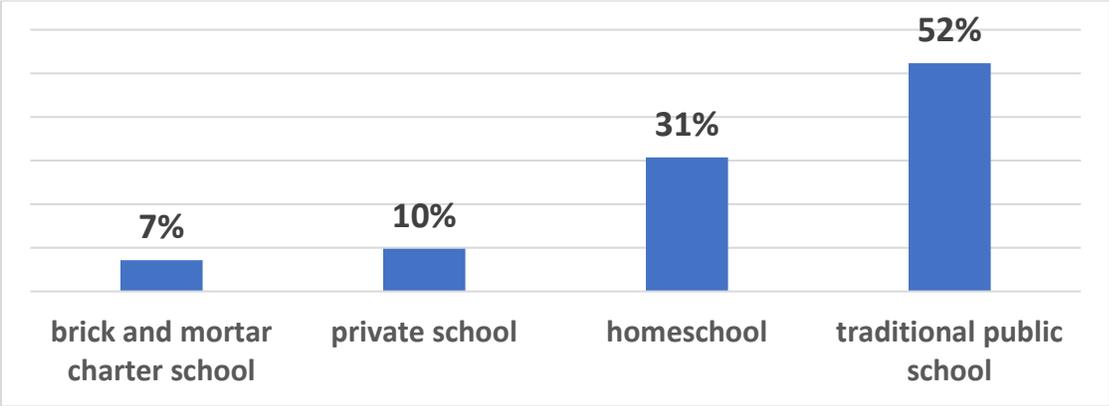
Where Children Would Enroll if Stride K12 Were Not Available

Stride K12-powered schools are very beneficial for their students according to an overwhelming percentage of their families. Families with children in grades K-12 have to consider their educational options available to them and ultimately choose the option they deem best for their children—given their children’s unique interests and their unique academic and personal needs. As presented earlier in this report, Stride K12 parents rate their overall satisfaction with their children’s former schools as a 3.3 out of seven, while they rate their current Stride K12-powered schools as a 6.2 out of seven. Ninety-two percent of parents expressed some level of satisfaction with their Stride K12-powered schools, and 83 percent of parents said they were “extremely satisfied” or “satisfied” with their children’s current online school.

Parents said their children experienced significant difficulties in their former schools, where the most common difficult circumstances were their child was a victim of bullying (48 percent) and that their academic needs were not being met at their former schools (44 percent). Eighty percent of families said their child suffered from more than one difficult circumstance in their former schools, prior to attending a Stride K12-powered online school, and 49 percent said their children faced more than four difficult circumstances. Parents also expressed overwhelming satisfaction with a wide array of aspects of their Stride K12-powered schools including their child’s academic progress, the individual attention their children were receiving, the quality of their child’s teachers, and the responsiveness of Stride K12 teachers and administrators to both students and parents.

Despite these benefits to families, what if Stride K12-powered online schools had not been available to the families in the survey? Where would these families send their children to school if their online schools had not been available to them? Stride K12 parents were asked this question (see figure VII.1), and 59 percent said they would send their child to a brick-and-mortar public school (52 percent to a traditional public school and seven percent to a charter public school). Ten percent of parents said they would send their children to a private school, and the remaining 31 percent said they would homeschool their children.

Figure VII.1. If Stride K12 and No Other Online School Were Available, what Type of School Would Your Child Likely Attend?



If Stride K12-powered schools had truly not been available to these families, it is likely that—when faced with the substantial monetary and time costs—more of their students would have ended up in a public school. That said, the answers in figure VII.1 show what parents would like to do, if their online schools had not been available.

Implications and Future Research

The results of the March 2022 survey of 1,613 Stride K12 parents indicate several clear findings:

- Stride K12 parents were often not happy with a large number of aspects of their children's former schools, including their children's physical safety, their academic progress, the responsiveness of teachers and administrators, the quality of teachers, the behavior of other students, and various aspects of how their former schools handled the pandemic. Overwhelmingly, Stride K12 parents expressed some level of overall dissatisfaction with their children's former schools.
- Significant proportions of Stride K12 students faced a number of difficult circumstances in their former schools, including being victims of bullying, poor academic progress, bad peers, etc. Further, many Stride K12 students face other challenges as well, including anxiety and physical and mental health challenges.
- Parents are overwhelmingly satisfied with their children's current Stride K12-powered schools, including a variety of aspects of their schools, including the academic progress their children are making, the quality of their teachers, the responsiveness of teachers and administrators, and the individual attention their children are receiving. Parents rate their Stride K12-powered schools significantly higher in each of these respects as compared to their children's former schools.

Implications

These findings suggest two implications that come from the survey:

1. If Stride K12-powered online schools were not available for these students, their parents would be compelled to send them back to academic and social situations that are significantly worse for their students.
2. Many Stride K12 students faced large numbers of difficult circumstances in their former schools, and many also face a significant number of learning and health challenges. Value-added studies of student learning gains, based on gains in student standardized test scores, are only reliable to the extent they are comparing apples-to-apples. That is, value-added studies of online schools endeavor to estimate the differences in learning gains between students in online schools and students in brick-and-mortar schools—when the students in the online schools and brick-and-mortar schools are equivalent with regards to all factors that impact student test scores. To that end, researchers use administrative data provided by states and public school districts to control for student demographic characteristics and special needs in their analyses. Nevertheless, the survey results presented in this report showed that using eligibility for a free or reduced

price meal (FRM) is an invalid control for economic disadvantage. Specifically, Stride K12 families have significantly lower incomes than other families with school aged children, but report slightly lower levels of FRM eligibility. This issue is discussed at length in section two of this report, which also shows that using the “Direct Certification” measure of economic disadvantage would not be an accurate measure of the economic circumstances of online school students relative to brick and mortar students. Further, as shown in sections II, III, and VI, Stride K12 students face a whole lot of challenges that surely impact test scores, where these challenges would not be observable to researchers estimating value-added models. Examples of these unobserved challenges include living with one parent (30 percent of Stride K12 students live with one parent as compared to the national average of 15 percent) and falling victim to bullying in their former schools (48 percent). Thus, researchers and policymakers should not rely on the research on the value-added of online schools to ascertain the academic quality of those schools—when that research does not include data of the sort discussed here. Greene and Paul (2022a) discuss this issue at length and show the benefits—in terms of increasing the accuracy of value-added estimates of student learning gains—of merging survey data with administrative data.^{xiii} That said, the results from the present study show that additional information (e.g. better income measures, family structure, etc.) are needed to make estimates of value-added models even more accurate.

Future Research

Based on the survey results, I see two avenues for future research.

Per the implication mentioned just above, future research should endeavor to learn why parents are overwhelmingly satisfied with the academic progress their children are making (see figure V.2) when studies of value-added test scores suggest that children in online schools have lower test score gains than other similar students, all else equal. The survey results discussed in this report suggest two possible reasons for this discrepancy: (a) household income of online students appears to be significantly lower than students in brick-and-mortar public schools (see figure II.4), and this income difference is not reflected in studies of value-added test score gains; and (b) as presented in section III and elsewhere in this report, there may be factors that are typically unobserved to researchers that disproportionately and negatively impact test scores among online school students, and these unobserved factors that may have impacted students in their brick-and-mortar schools may be why families chose online schools for their children (see section VI). All of that said, future research should analyze this issue more directly and ask parents why they believe their children are making good academic progress in their online schools and what metrics are they using to judge academic progress.

^{xiii} Greene and Paul (2022a) may be accessed here: [EFI-WP Paul Greene OnlineEnrollment.pdf \(efinstitute.org\)](#) .

Second, the same survey questions regarding difficult circumstances that Stride K12 students faced at their former schools should be asked to current traditional public, brick-and-mortar charter, and private school students—to see if and to what extent it is the case that Stride K12 students face more or less difficult school circumstances and familial and personal challenges relative to students in brick-and-mortar schools.

The results of both these future research avenues would shed even more light on the accuracy of value-added studies of student test score gains that seek to estimate the academic effectiveness of online schools relative to brick-and-mortar schools.

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Ben Scafidi is a professor of economics and director of the Education Economics Center at Kennesaw State University. He is also a Friedman Fellow with EdChoice (the legacy foundation of Milton and Rose Friedman), a senior fellow with the Georgia Public Policy Foundation, and was recently appointed by Governor Brian Kemp to serve a second stint on the Georgia Charter Schools Commission. Previously, he served as the director of education policy for the Georgia GOAL Scholarship Program, the first chair of the state of Georgia's Charter Schools Commission, a member of the Charter Advisory Committee, the Education Policy Advisor to Governor Sonny Perdue, a staff member to both of Governor Roy Barnes' Education Reform Study Commissions, and as an expert witness for the state of Georgia in school funding litigation. He received a BA in Economics from the University of Notre Dame and a PhD in Economics from the University of Virginia.