

Factors Driving School Choice in North Carolina During the COVID-19 Pandemic

OS Evaluation Report No. 9

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Abstract

In recent years, laws and regulations surrounding the enactment of new private school choice programs and the expansion of existing ones have broadened eligibility rules to include more and different types of students. These changes spurred an acceleration in usage brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, when families explored alternative schooling models for their children who were otherwise on track to attend a traditional public school. **How do today's users differ from those who participated in the early, targeted programs? And how have the reasons families offer to explain their application and subsequent usage of private school vouchers evolved over time?** We use descriptive statistics to analyze how the characteristics of applicants to North Carolina's Opportunity Scholarship program have changed since the program began and during the COVID-19 pandemic. These include grade level, county of residence, race/ethnicity, sex, household size, and household income. We rely on administrative data that is collected annually by the program operator, the North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority. These data allow us to document the changes that have occurred to the profile of the typical voucher applicant as this program has grown and evolved. We also describe the results of parent surveys administered to first-time applicants for school years 2020-21, 2021-22, 2022-23, and 2023-24. This research sheds light on student experiences during the peak pandemic years, when many schools were operating remotely, and during the reopening and academic recovery and re-engagement phase, offering insight into the evolving nature of private and public school dynamics in states that have created near-universal private school choice programs in recent years.

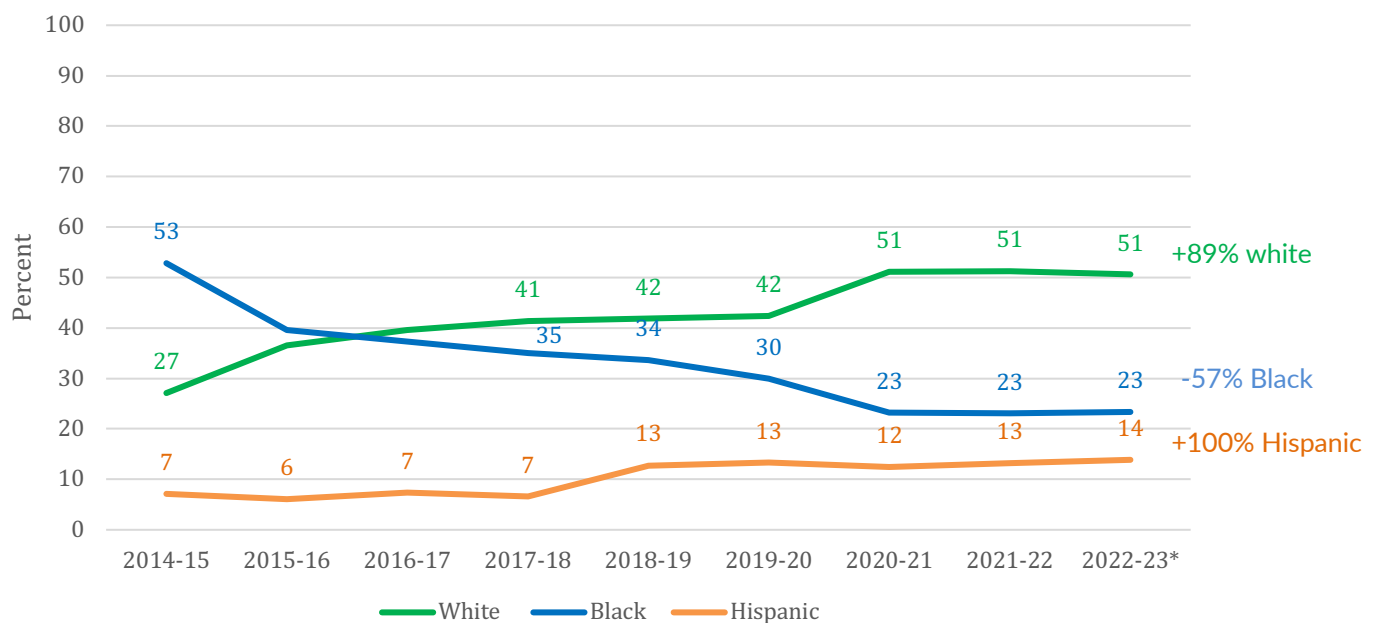
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Executive Summary

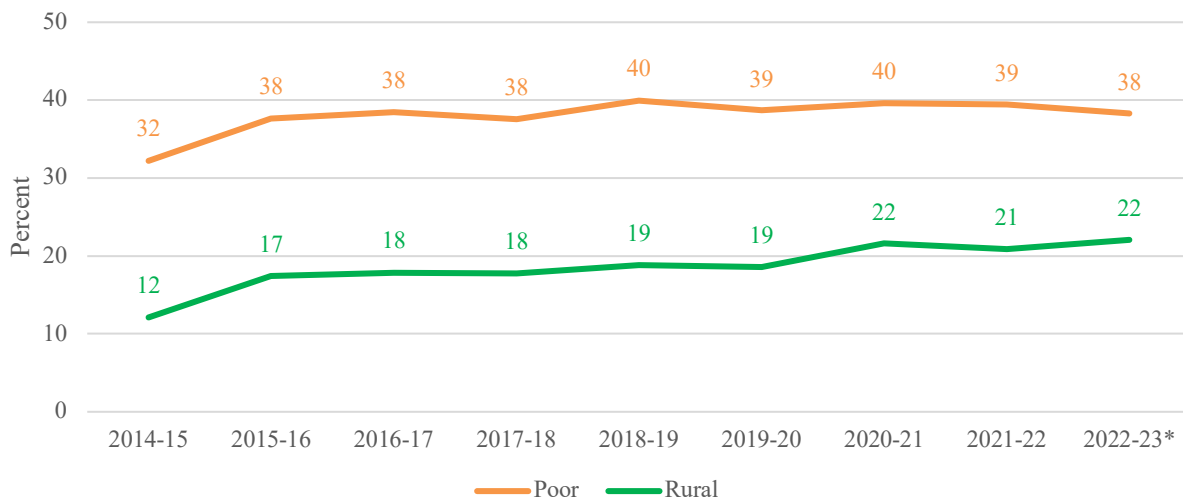
We use descriptive statistics to analyze how the characteristics of applicants to North Carolina's Opportunity Scholarship program have changed since the program began and during the COVID-19 pandemic. These data allow us to document the changes that have occurred to the profile of the typical voucher applicant as this program has grown and evolved. We also describe survey insights from parents who applied for the OSP for the first time for school years 2020-21, 2021-22, 2022-23, and 2023-24 (n=8,667 survey respondents). Our primary findings are as follows:

- **Changes in applicants' demographic characteristics:**
 - We observe increases in the proportion of applicants who identify as white (+89%) and Hispanic (+100%) and a decrease in the proportion of applicants who are black (-57%)

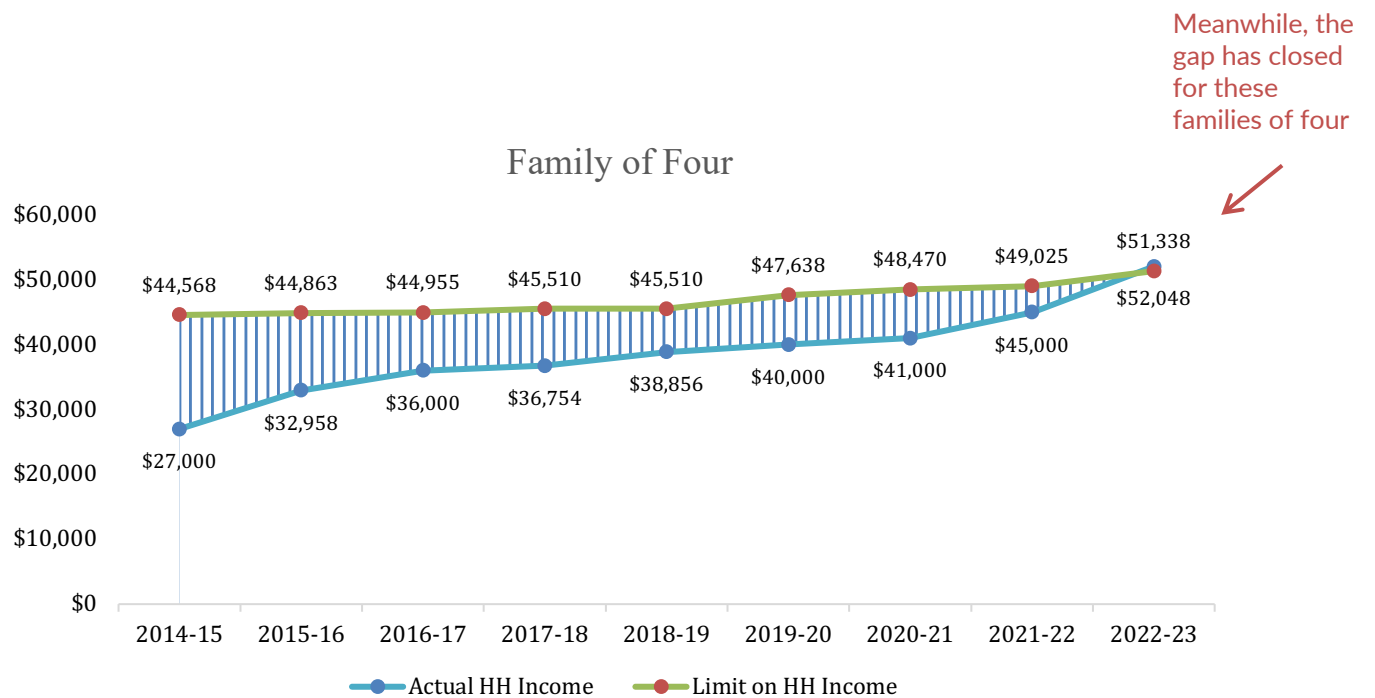
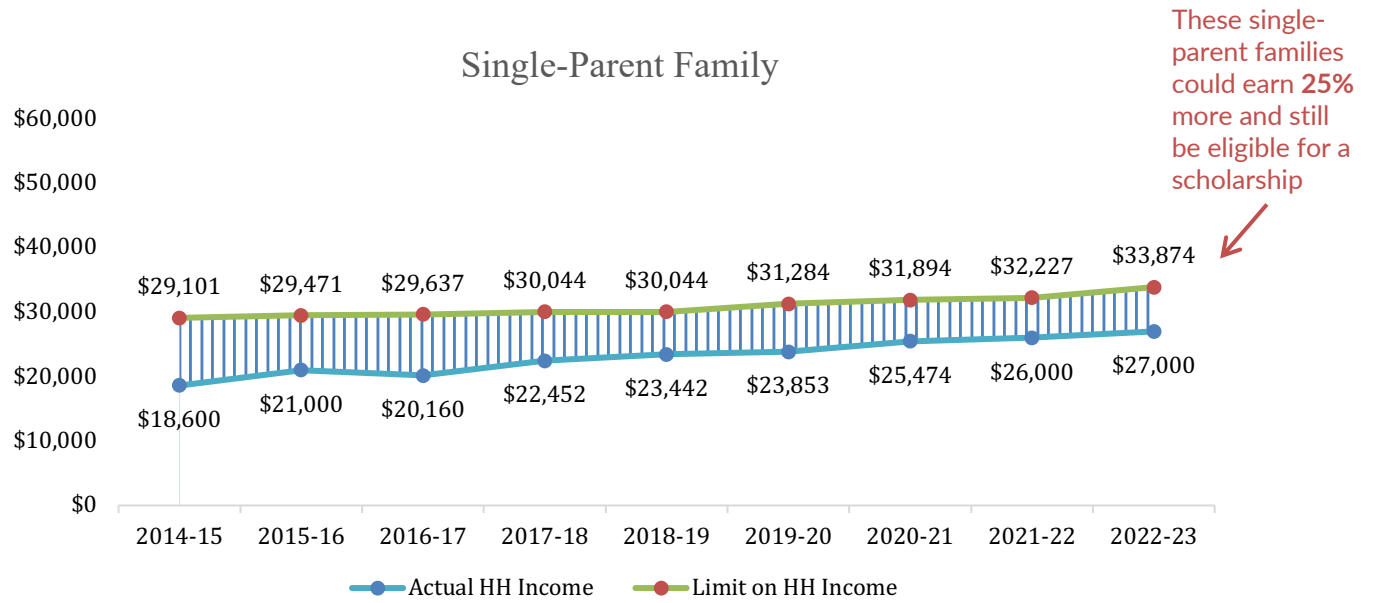


- **The elementary grades continue to be the most common entry level:**
 - The percent of applicants applying for elementary grades (K-5) was 67% by 2022-23, up from 58% in 2014-15. The percent of applicants applying for middle grades (6-8) was 20% by 2022-23, down from 25% in 2014-15. The percent of applicants applying for high school grades (9-12) was 13%, down from 17% in 2014-15.
 - Across all years, the most common entry grade was kindergarten.

- **The characteristics of participating counties signal disadvantage and they are enduring, even as the program has grown:**
 - Over a third (38%) of applicants are coming from poor counties, defined as counties in which the percent of individuals living in poverty is above the median for the 2020 US Census. This has increased 6 percentage points since the program began.
 - Similarly, we've seen an increase in the percent of applicants coming from rural counties, defined as not being part of a metropolitan statistical area. The most recent data show that 22% of applicants come from rural counties, which is almost double the percentage coming from rural areas in the program's first year.

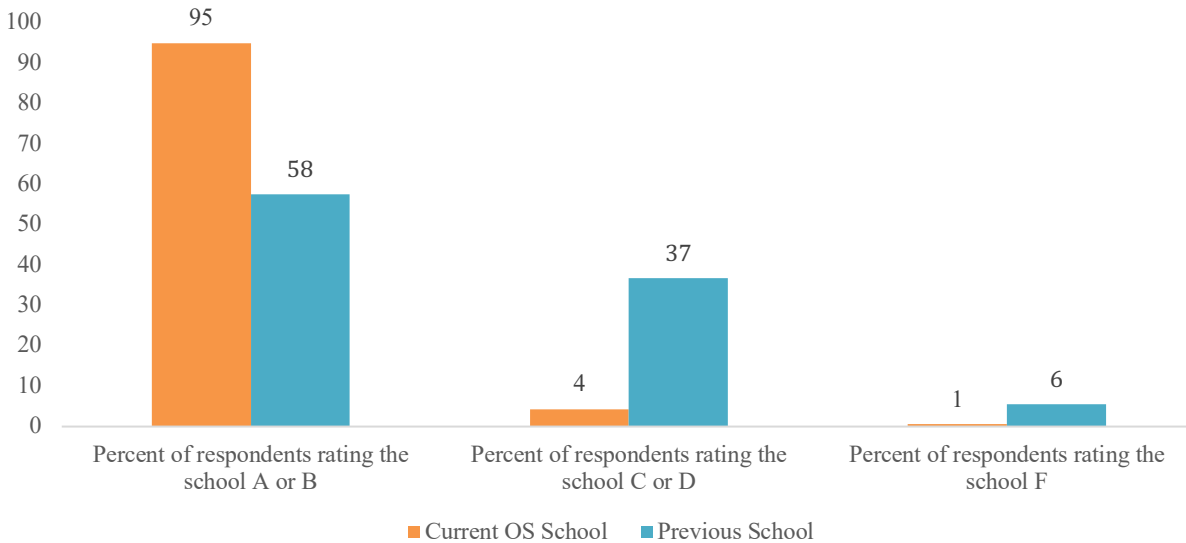


- **The OS program continues to attract applications from relatively disadvantaged families:**
 - We examine median household income for common household sizes (2–6) and find a consistent pattern: many applicants report incomes well below the eligibility threshold for the Opportunity Scholarship program. This suggests the program continues to attract relatively disadvantaged families, despite rising income limits. For families of four and five, this income gap has significantly narrowed over time—possibly due to increased program awareness. However, single-parent and large households remain more disadvantaged than the program's rules require for eligibility.



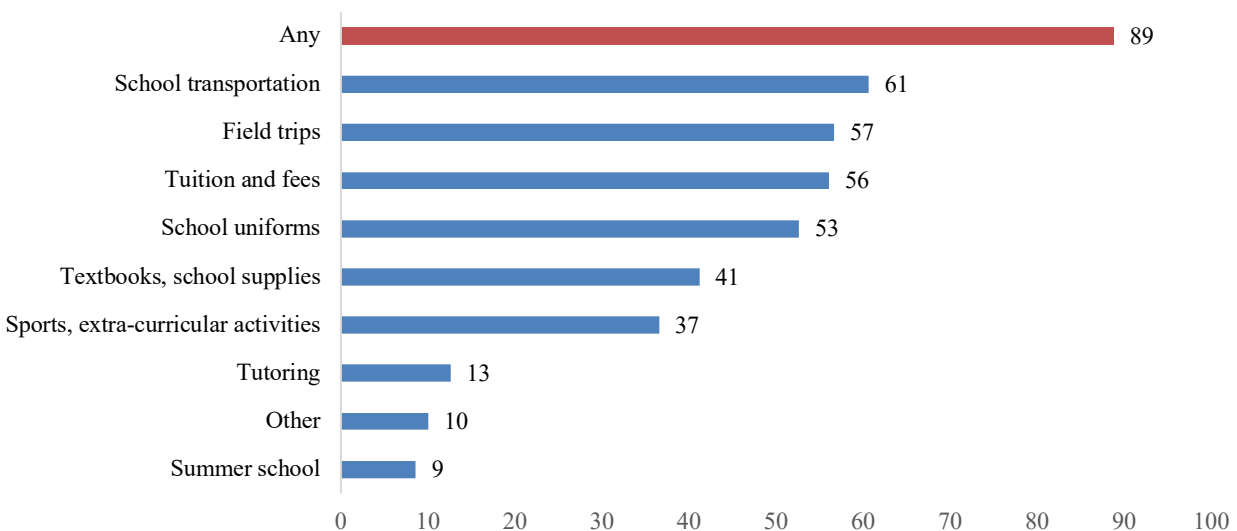
- **High satisfaction with OS schools:**

- The vast majority (95%) of families gave their OS-supported private school an "A" or "B" grade, compared to just 58% for their child's previous school.
- OS schools received significantly higher ratings across all categories, including social and emotional development, student behavior, and teacher quality.



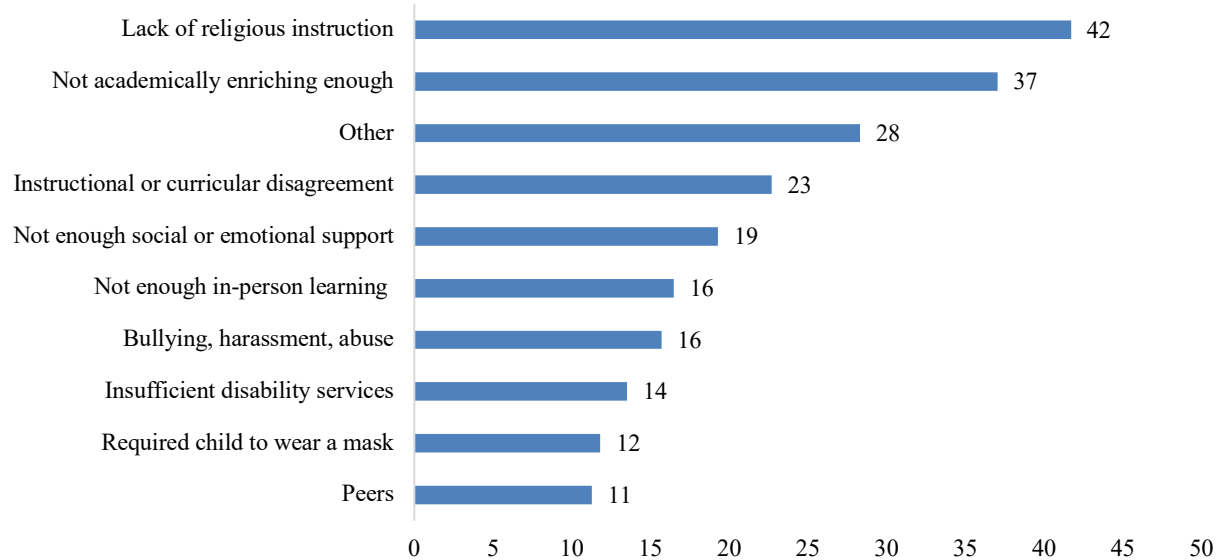
- **Out-of-pocket costs remain common:**

- 89% of respondents reported paying additional school-related expenses, with transportation (61%), field trips (57%), tuition and fees (56%), and uniforms (53%) being most common.
- Only 16% received supplemental aid beyond the Opportunity Scholarship.



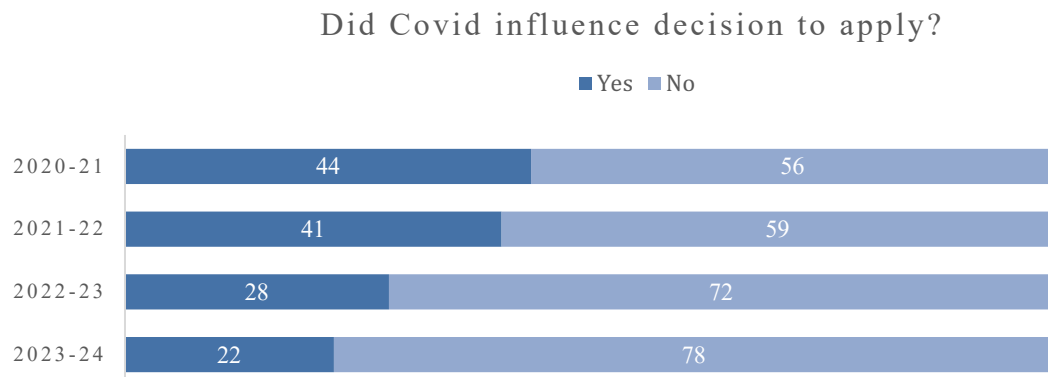
- **Top motivations for applying:**

- Most common reasons were lack of religious instruction (42%) and insufficient academic rigor (37%) in public schools.
- Families also cited disagreement with public school curriculum (23%), insufficient social or emotional support (19%), inadequate opportunities for in-person learning because of pandemic restrictions (16%), and concerns about school safety or bullying (16%).



- **COVID-19's influence was temporary but significant:**

- 44% of first-time applicants in 2020–21 cited the pandemic as a key factor, especially due to lack of in-person learning.
- Influence declined in later years, dropping to 22% by 2023–24.



Introduction

In recent years, laws and regulations surrounding the enactment of new private school choice programs and the expansion of existing ones have broadened eligibility rules to include more and different types of students. These changes spurred an acceleration in usage brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, when families explored alternative schooling models for their children who were otherwise on track to attend a traditional public school. How do today's users differ from those who participated in the early, targeted programs?

This research project studies changes to North Carolina's Opportunity Scholarship program during the COVID-19 pandemic. It sheds light on changes in the characteristics of applicants over time, parents' motivations for leaving the public school system during the pandemic years, and families' experiences with the program. Using a two-pronged approach, we analyze administrative data collected by the program operator and original survey data we collected from program applicants.

We ask, "In what ways have the characteristics of applicants to the Opportunity Scholarship program changed since the program began and during the COVID-19 pandemic?" These include grade level, county of residence, race/ethnicity, sex, and household income. To answer this question, we rely on administrative data that is collected annually by the North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority (NCSEAA). Analyzing the application data allows us to document the changes that have occurred to the profile of the typical voucher applicant as this program has grown and evolved.

We also ask, "What reasons do families give for applying to the Opportunity Scholarship program?" This question includes, for example, the reasons families provide for leaving the public school system and the characteristics they rate most highly in schools they are considering for their child.

These data shed light on student experiences during the peak pandemic years, when many schools were operating remotely, and during the reopening and academic recovery and re-engagement phase. We document parents' reasons for applying to the Opportunity Scholarship program, their experiences in the program, and why they left the public school system in the first place. We offer insight into the practices and experiences that parents say are attractive to them when choosing a school environment for their child. This information can be used to shed light on strategies for improvement that could be undertaken by both schooling sectors.

Evolution of the Opportunity Scholarship Program

Figure 1 provides a timeline of the OS program, which was established by North Carolina's General Assembly in 2013 and funded the first cohort of 1,216 students to attend one of 226 participating private schools in the fall of 2014. In fiscal year 2014-15, North Carolina's General Assembly appropriated \$10.8 million to the program.

The legislation establishing the program explained its purpose as improving overall educational quality in the state. Specifically, the Opportunity Scholarship Act (House Bill 944) called for the creation of “additional education environments that enable each child to learn” so that North Carolina can “improve the quality of the education it funds.”

The program was targeted to low-income families because eligibility for one of these \$4,200 scholarships was limited to students living in households where the income level did not exceed the amount required for federal free or reduced-price lunch eligibility. The program was restricted to students transferring from a public school, which is a mechanism commonly employed by legislators to limit potential costs in a program’s early years by excluding otherwise eligible students who are homeschooled or attending private schools (and thus not currently supported under existing state educational expenses). Specifically, eligibility was restricted to students who attended a public school during the previous semester. There were only three exceptions to this rule — students who were entering Kindergarten or first grade, students who were recently adopted, or students in foster care.

The program gave priority to students with the lowest household income, stipulating that at least 50% of funds remaining after renewal of the previous year’s scholarship grants must go to students in households where the income level did not exceed the amount required for federal free or reduced-price lunch eligibility. The program also gave priority to the oldest applicants by stipulating that no more than 35% of the remaining funds could be used to award eligible students entering kindergarten or first grade (thus limiting one of the carve-outs to the rule stipulating prior public school enrolment).

For participating private schools, the statute required that they share documentation of their tuition and fees with the state, conduct a criminal background check on the highest-ranking school staff member, provide the parent or guardian with an annual progress report that includes standardized test scores, and administer a nationally standardized test for students in grades three or higher. Furthermore, participating private schools were required to report graduation rates of students receiving Opportunity Scholarships and to contract with a certified public accountant for an annual financial review for any year in which they receive more than \$300,000 in scholarship money. Participating private schools were also required to report aggregate standardized test performance of scholarship students to the state. Finally, participating private schools were prohibited from discriminating against students on the basis of their race, color, or national origin.

Figure 1. *Timeline of the OS Program*

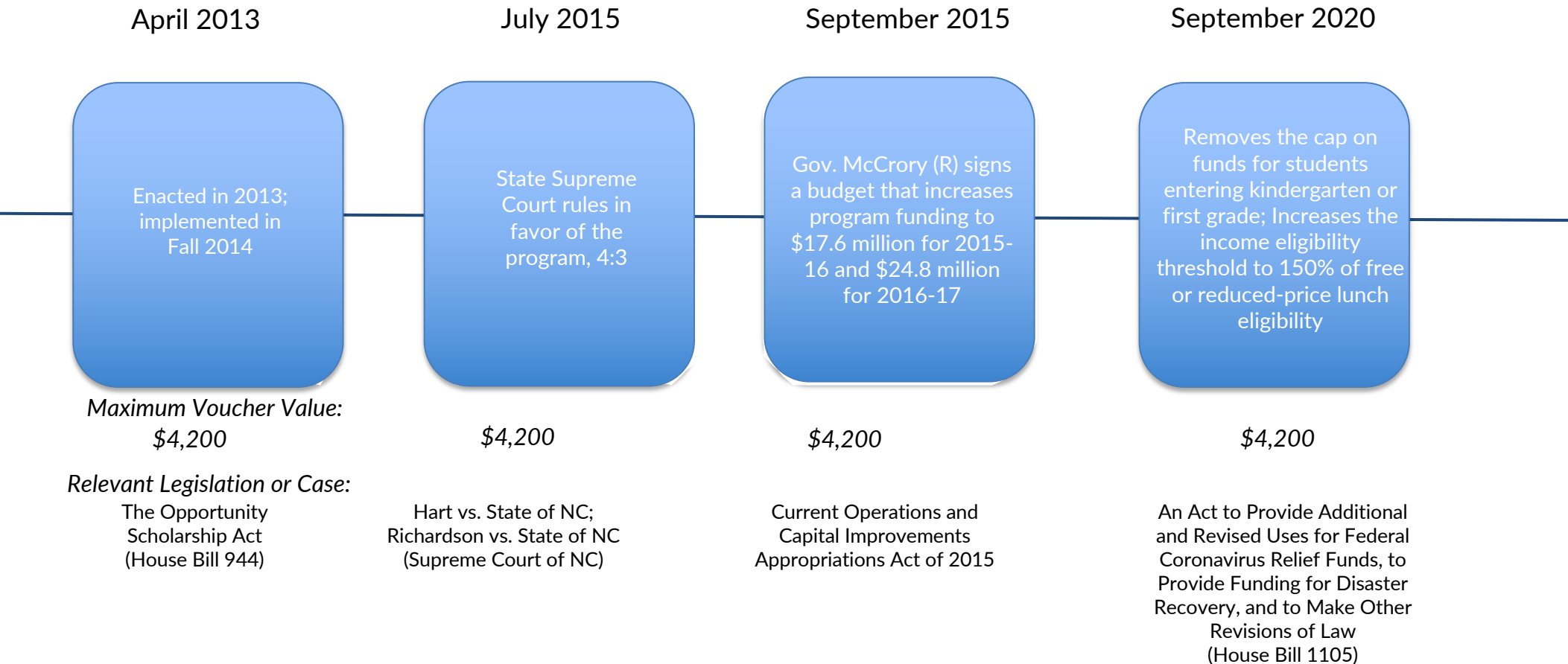
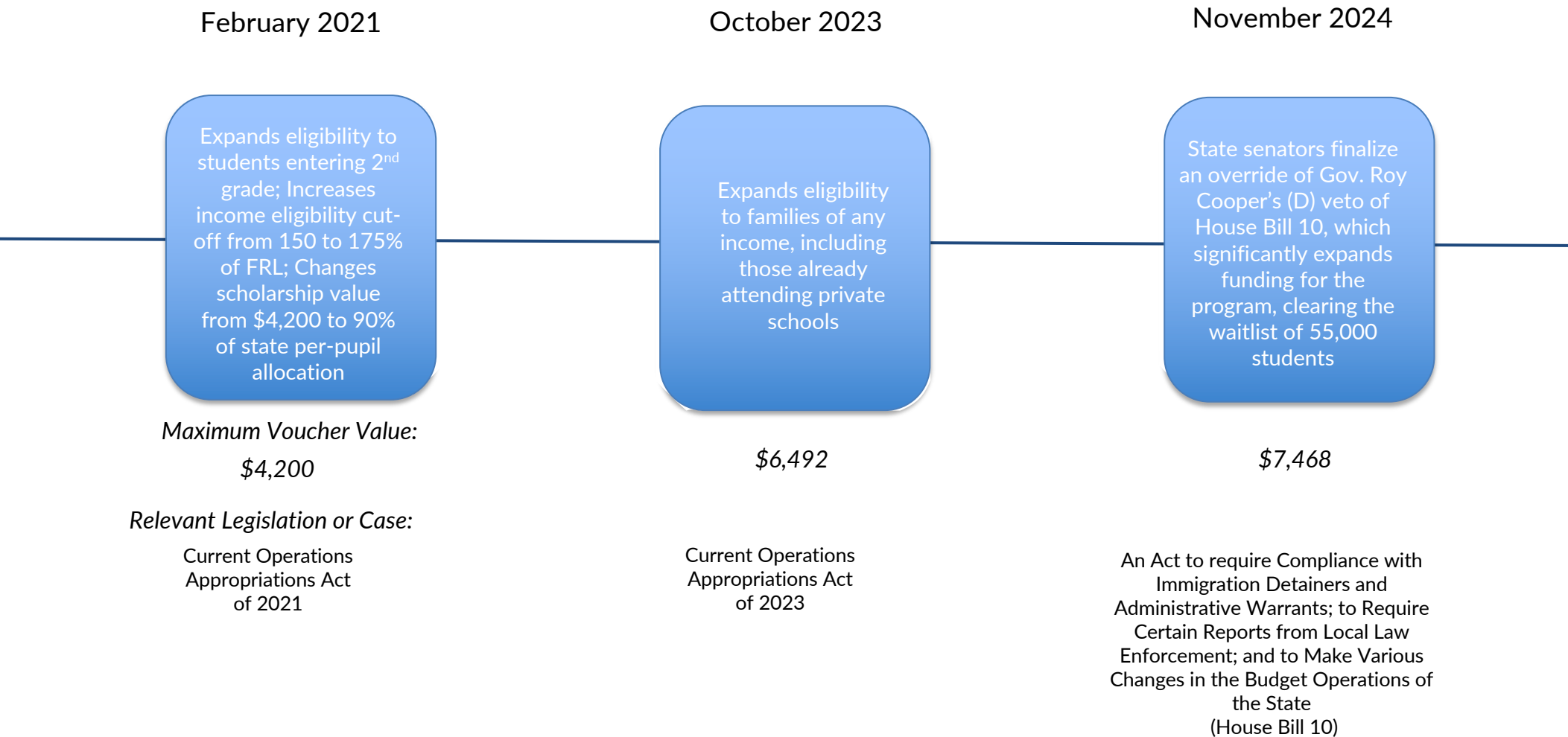


Figure 1. *Timeline of the OS Program (contd.)*



The North Carolina State Supreme Court heard a constitutional challenge to the program on February 24, 2015, ruling in favor of the program. Writing the Opinion of the Court, justices explained, “no prohibition in the constitution or in our precedent forecloses the General Assembly’s enactment of the challenged legislation.”

The Opportunity Scholarship program was subsequently expanded under the Appropriations Act of 2015. The budget that Governor McCrory signed in September 2015 increased program funding to \$17.6 million for 2015-16 and \$24.8 million for 2016-17. With the legal hurdles cleared and increased funding allocated, student enrollment increased to 3,982 students in the program's second year of operation, 2015-16 (Figure 2).

Five years later, further changes to the program were included in a coronavirus relief bill enacted in September 2020. First, lawmakers removed the cap on funds for students entering kindergarten or first grade. Second, they increased the income eligibility threshold to 150% of free or reduced-price lunch eligibility. For school year 2020-21, 16,042 students used Opportunity Scholarships to attend private schools.

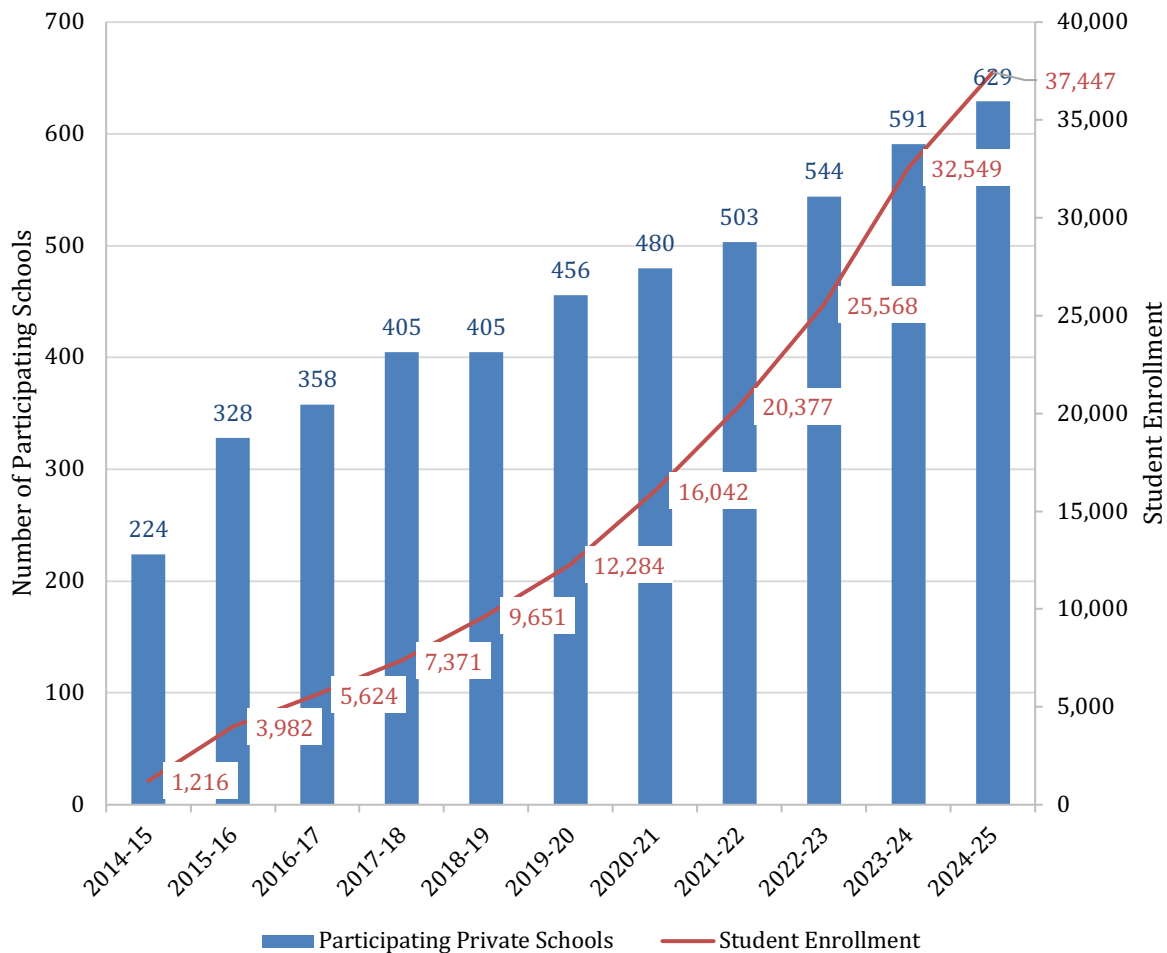
The Appropriations Act of 2021 expanded the program again, this time changing eligibility rules. Students entering second grade were added to the category of early elementary student applicants who did not need to show prior public school enrolment.

Just a few months later, in February 2021, lawmakers voted to further expand eligibility by removing the prior public school attendance rule for students entering second grade and by increasing the income eligibility cut-off from 150 to 175% of FRL. A further change that occurred at this time was a modification to how the scholarship value was calculated, moving from a static \$4,200 to a dynamic rule, calculated as 90% of the state per-pupil allocation that year. Another notable change at this time was the decision to allocate up to \$500,000 to a non-profit organization for outreach and application assistance. For school year 2021-22, enrolment was now at 20,377 students.

An October 2023 provision in the state budget expanded eligibility to families of any income, including those already attending private schools. Lawmakers heralded this change as the largest expansion of school choice since the program was created, with Sen. Michael Lee explaining at the time, “Republicans in the Senate have made it a goal to continue expanding school choice” (Senator Berger Press Shop, 2023). The public response to this change was significant, with SEAA reporting 69,511 applications by the deadline of March 1, 2024. This resulted in an Opportunity Scholarship waitlist, which legislators vowed to clear. By November 2024, State senators finalized an override of Gov. Roy Cooper’s (D) veto of House Bill 10, which significantly expanded funding for the program—an increase of \$463.5 million for that fiscal year alone—clearing the backlog of 55,000 students.

The most recent data show that in school year 2024-25, 37,447 students used an Opportunity Scholarship to attend one of 629 participating private schools. This implies that between program inception and the most recent school year, the program experienced a 3X growth in participating private schools and 31X growth in the number of student participants.

Figure 2. *Historical student enrollment and private school participation counts*



Since fall 2024, new voucher awards have been distributed to applicants based on income tier (Table 1). Students in Tier 1 receive priority and are eligible for a scholarship worth up to \$7,468 if their previous year’s household income falls beneath the relevant threshold. For example, for a family of four in 2025, total household income from 2024 cannot exceed \$59,478 for a student to fall in Tier 1. Awards are distributed to students in this first tier until all eligible applicants in that tier have been offered a scholarship. At this point, offers are made to students in Tier 2. Students in this category are eligible for a scholarship worth up to \$6,722 if their household income falls beneath the relevant threshold. For example, for a family of four, total household income from 2024 cannot exceed \$118,956. In Tier 3, household income for a family of four cannot exceed \$267,651 and a scholarship is worth up to \$4,480. In Tier 4, household income is not considered, and scholarships are worth up to \$3,360. Applicants in Tiers 3 and 4 are only considered after offers have been made to applicants in Tiers 1 and 2. Scholarships are awarded on this sliding scale until the funding that has been allocated by the General Assembly for the program is exhausted.

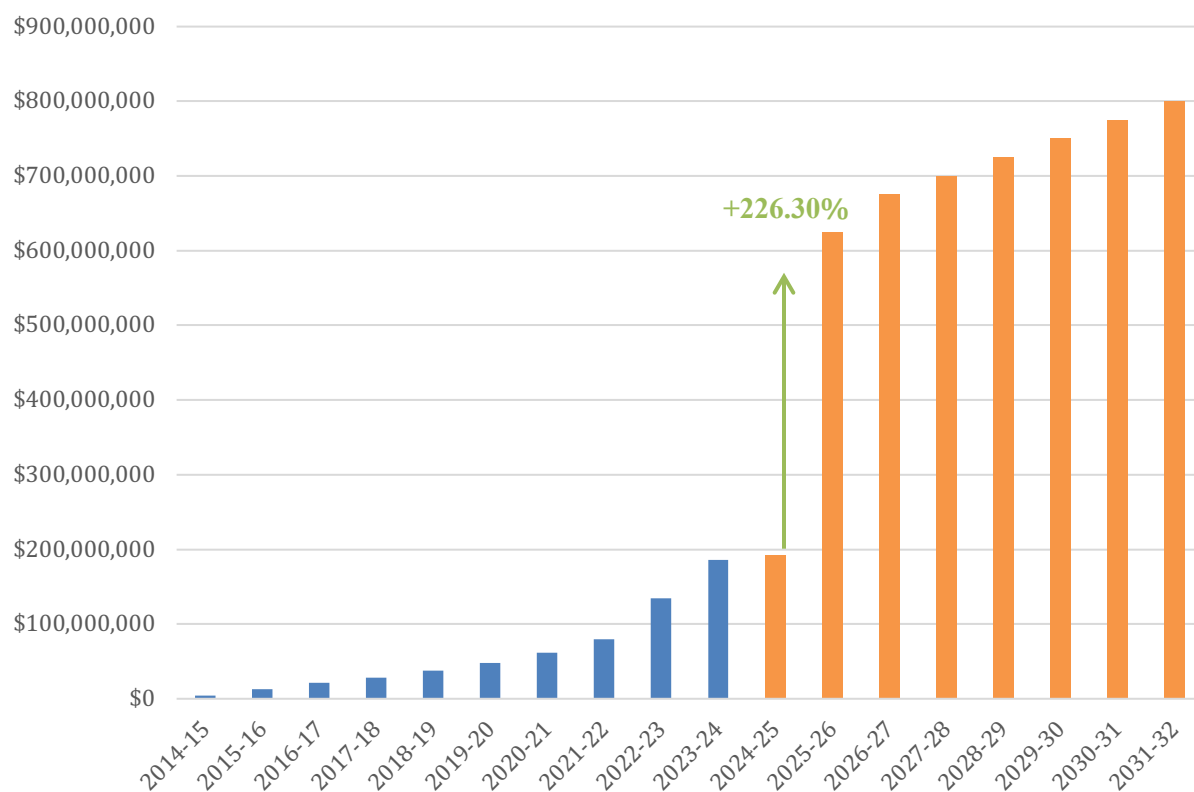
Table 1.
Eligibility Tiers, 2025-26

Tier	Award Limit	Household Income (Family of Four)
1	\$7,468	\$59,478
2	\$6,722	\$118,956
3	\$4,480	\$267,651
4	\$3,360	No limit

Notes: Award tiers are posted on k12.ncseaa.edu.

The priority rules just described, which allocate scholarship offer on a sliding scale, imply that eligible students in the tiers that correspond with higher household income (e.g., Tiers 3 and 4) are not guaranteed a scholarship. In practice, however, increases in state financial support have maximized the total number of possible scholarships that could be awarded to all eligible applicants (Figure 3). There is currently \$192 million allocated for this program for the 2024-25 school year, a figure that is scheduled to rise to \$625 million next year. This 226 percent increase will be the largest single year funding change in the program's history.

Figure 3. *Funding growth of the OS program.*



Notes: The blue bars represent funds expended to date, as per SEAA records. The orange bars represent funds appropriated under House Bill 10, which became law in November 2024.

Empirical Approach

This research project studies changes to North Carolina’s Opportunity Scholarship program during the COVID-19 pandemic by leveraging a two-pronged approach. Administrative data collected by the program operator sheds light on changes in the characteristics of applicants over time, whereas original survey data from program applicants sheds light on parents’ motivations for leaving the public school system during the pandemic years, and families’ experiences with the program.

Research Questions

We ask, “In what ways have the characteristics of applicants to the Opportunity Scholarship program changed since the program began and during the COVID-19 pandemic?” These include grade level, county of residence, race/ethnicity, sex, and household income. To answer this question, we rely on administrative data that is collected annually by the North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority (SEAA). Analyzing the application data allows us to document any changes that have occurred to the profile of the typical voucher applicant as this program has grown and evolved.

We also ask, “What reasons do families give for applying to the Opportunity Scholarship program?” This question includes, for example, the reasons families provide for leaving the public school system.

Data Sources

Data for this report come from two sources:

- Student-level application data were provided by the North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority for 2014-15 to 2023–24. These include applicant demographic characteristics, grade level, county of residence, household size, and household income.
- A researcher-designed survey was administered to four cohorts of applicants, 2020–21 to 2023–24. A copy of this survey is provided in Appendix A.

Survey Methodology

We administered the applicant survey in Spring 2023 with the distribution assistance from the North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority. The survey was sent to all families that had applied to the OS program for the first time for school years 2020-21, 2021-22, 2022-23, and 2023-24. Participants were offered a chance to win one of 500 Amazon gift cards worth \$5 each for their participation. We received responses from 10,070 families in total. Of those, 8,667 families completed at least 25% of the survey and thus generate the analysis sample for this report. This represents a response rate of 12 percent (Table 2).

Table 2.

Response Rates of New OS Applicants, by Cohort and Overall

Year	New Applicants	Survey Responses	Response Rate
2020-21	13,571	1,554	11%
2021-22	12,880	1,725	13%
2022-23	21,349	2,778	13%
2023-24	24,848	4,013	16%
Total, Survey Respondents	72,648	10,070	14%
Total, Survey Completers	72,648	8,667	12%

Note: Survey completers are defined as those who completed at least 25% of the survey.

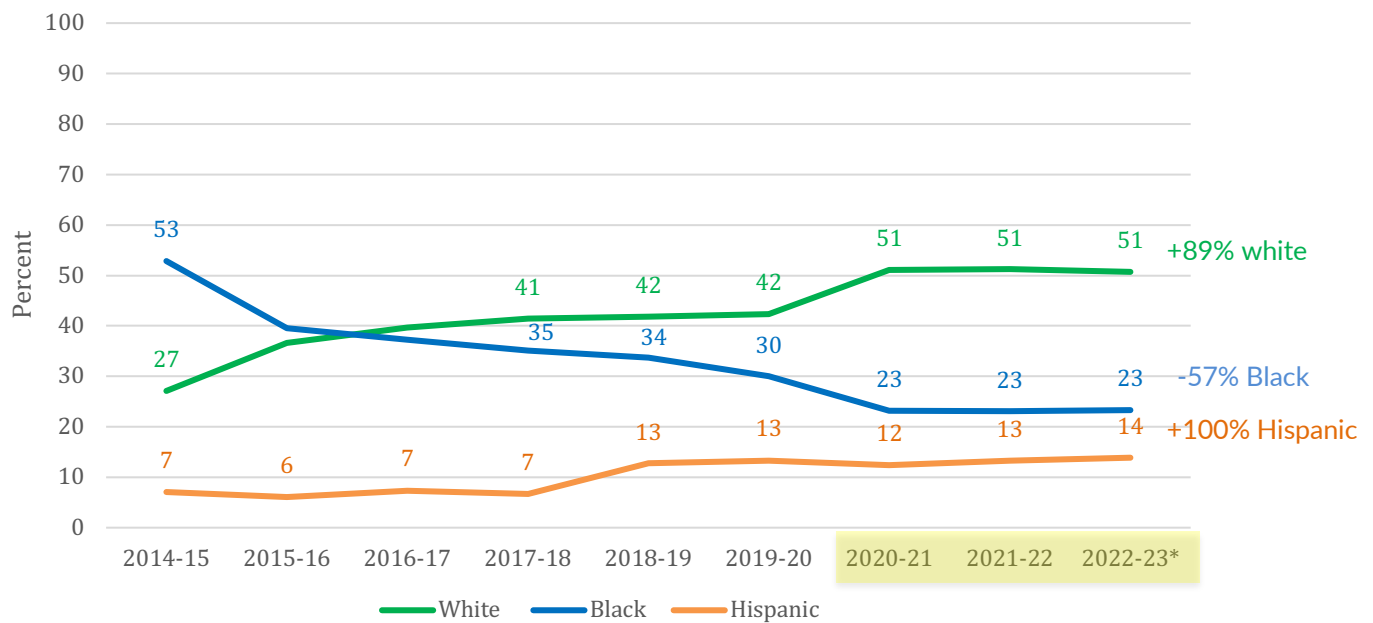
Findings from Administrative Data

We start by documenting changes in the demographic characteristics of applicants over time. Not all applicants are ultimately awarded an Opportunity Scholarship, but this group represents the population of interested families, which is why we focus on them here. In a previous report, we document the percentage of applicants that become awardees and the primary reasons why some do not ultimately use an Opportunity Scholarship (Egalite, Porter, & Stallings, 2017)

In the program's first year of operation, the racial/ethnic make-up of applicants was 53 percent Black, 27 percent white and 7 percent Hispanic (Figure 4). Examining the trend line through 2022-23, we see a decrease in the proportion of applicants who are Black and increases in the proportion of applicants identifying as white and Hispanic.

When we quantify the changes from 2014-15 to 2022-23, the largest percent change we observe is among Hispanic students. Specifically, the proportion of applicants identifying as Hispanic increases from 7% to 14%, which is a 100% increase. The increase in representation among white students is also large. The proportion of applicants identifying as white increases from 27% to 51%, which is an 89% increase. At the same time, we see a decrease in the proportion of applicants who are Black, decreasing from 53% to 23%, which is a 57% decrease.

Figure 4. *Applicant Race and Ethnicity*

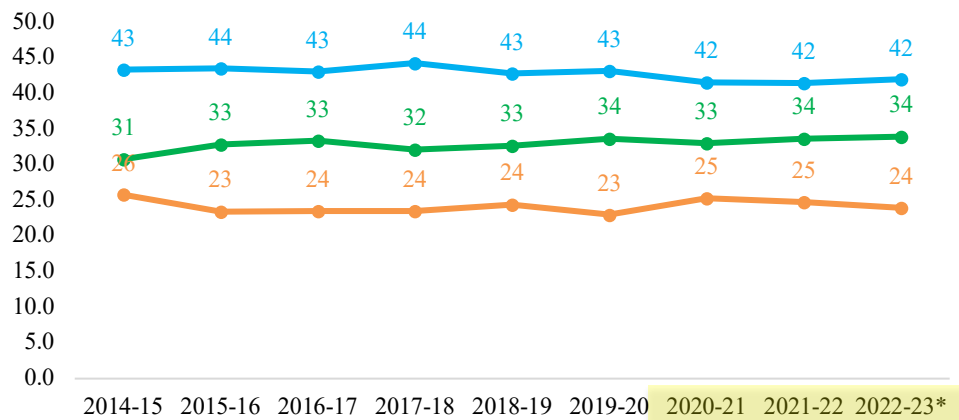


Notes: Data were transferred in April 2023 so the 2022-23 counts may differ marginally from other reports of final application data for that school year which would include May 2023. The years affected by the COVID-19 pandemic are highlighted in yellow.

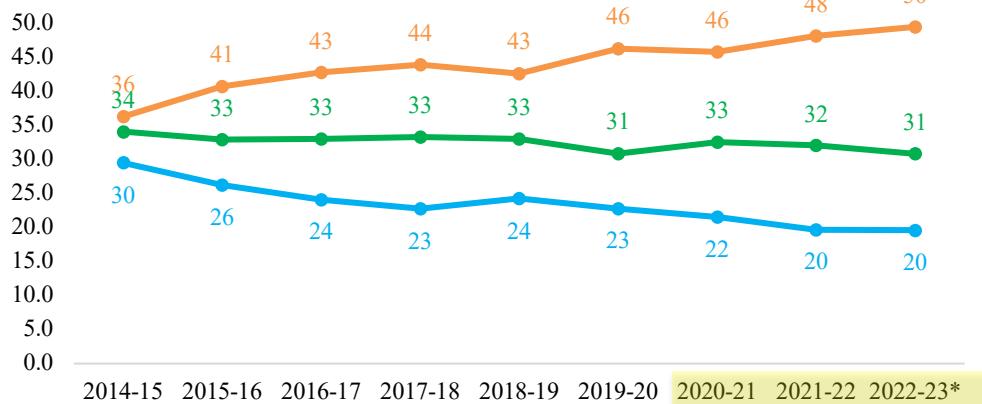
To better understand the changing characteristics of applicants, we compute the adjusted household income among all applicants in that year, a commonly used measure that is calculated as household income divided by the square root of household size. We then group students into three categories of adjusted household income: bottom third (lowest earners, relative to other applicants that year), middle third, and top third (highest earners, relative to other applicants that year). We compare changing representation of students with different levels of household income, within racial/ethnic categories. This helps us understand if the changing representation of students in a particular racial or ethnic group is driven by changes in relative advantage of applicants in that category. Figure 5 presents applicants of each of the three major racial/ethnic categories, grouped by adjusted household income.

Figure 5. *Applicant Race/Ethnicity, by Household Income Level*

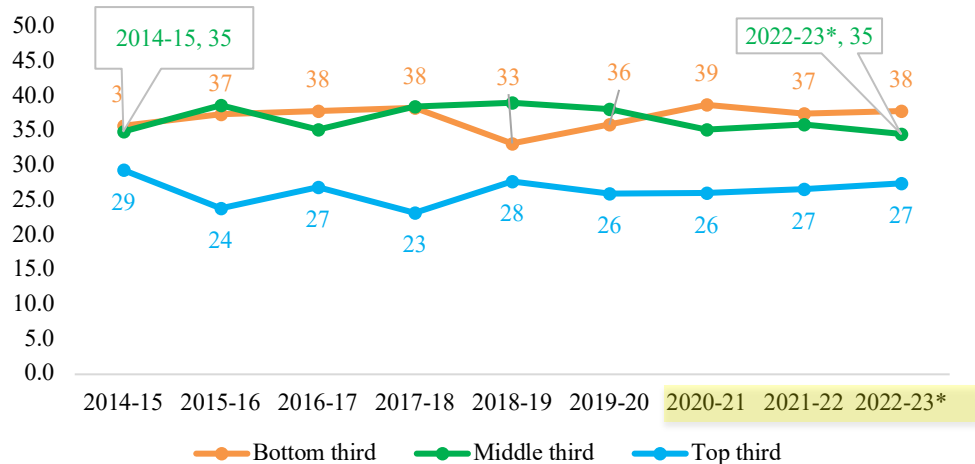
Panel A: White



Panel B: Black



Panel C: Hispanic



Notes: Data were transferred in April 2023 so the 2022-23 counts may differ marginally from other reports of final application data for that school year which would include May 2023. The years affected by the COVID-19 pandemic are highlighted in yellow.

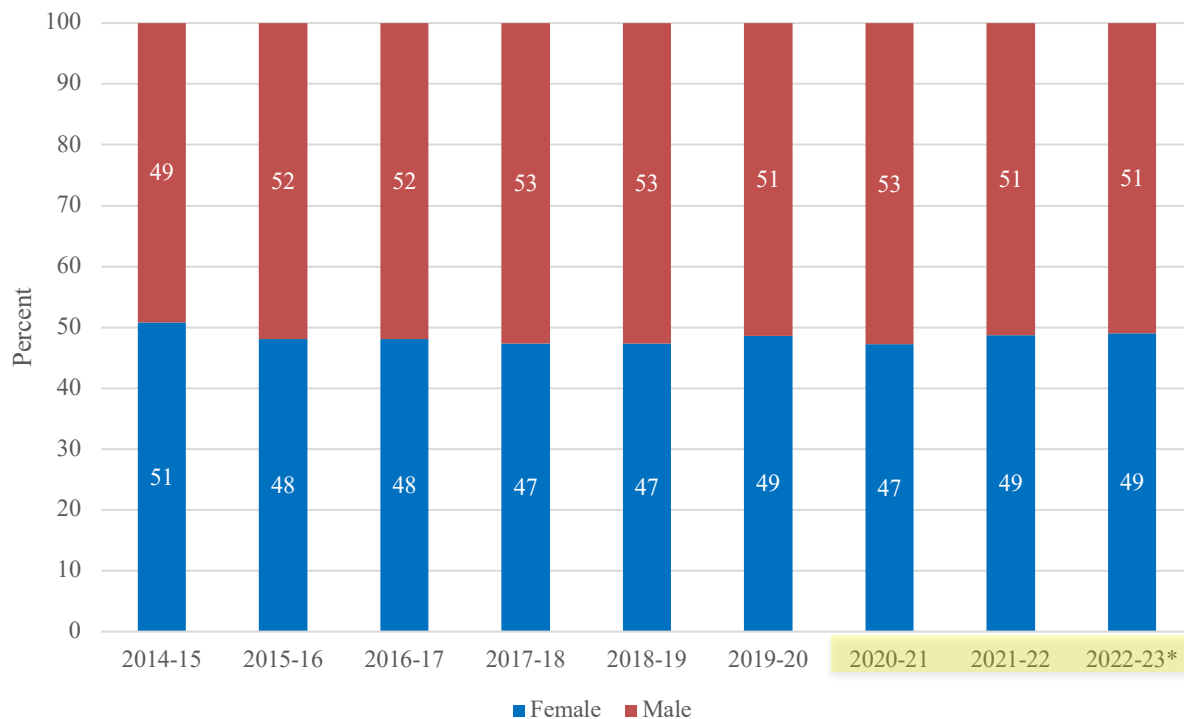
Among white applicants in the most recent year of data, 42% came from the top third of applicant households, about a third (34%) came from the middle third of households, and about a quarter (24%) came from the lowest-income households. This distribution experienced little change over the eight-year period of applications examined here. The years affected by the COVID-19 pandemic are highlighted in yellow. We don't see different patterns during those years. This implies that even though the overall representation of white applicants increased by 87% between 2014-15 and 2022-23, this was not driven by relatively more or less advantaged white applicants applying in greater numbers. The distribution of adjusted household income among white applicants has been relatively constant, even as more white families have been applying for Opportunity Scholarships.

Among Black applicants in 2022-23, 19.6% came from the top third of applicant households, 30.9 percent came from the middle third, and half (49.5%) came from the bottom third of applicant households. This distribution has widened over the eight-year period of applications examined here. The years affected by the COVID-19 pandemic are highlighted in yellow. We don't see different patterns during those years. In fact, existing trends simply continued during 2020-21, 2021-22, and 2022-23. Specifically, in the program's first year, it was closer to an even split of income categories among Black applicants – with 29.5% coming from the top third of applicant households, 34.1% coming from the middle third, and 36.3% coming from the bottom third. Over the eight-year period examined here, we see a widening among those categories, which means we see greater representation of bottom-third households now and lower representation of top third households among Black applicants. This implies that although there are relatively fewer Black applicants to the OS program today, those that do apply are more likely to come from households with the lowest adjusted household income among all applicants.

Among Hispanic applicants in 2022-23, 27.5% came from the top third of applicant households, 34.6% percent came from the middle third, and 37.9% came from the bottom third of applicant households. This distribution experienced little change over the eight-year period of applications examined here. The bottom- and middle-third categories have tracked each other very closely, always falling within a few percentage points of one another. At the same time, after an initial figure of 29.4% in the first year, the top-third line has since hovered consistently between 23% and 27%. This implies that the distribution of adjusted household income among Hispanic applicants has been relatively constant, even as more Hispanic families have been applying for Opportunity Scholarships.

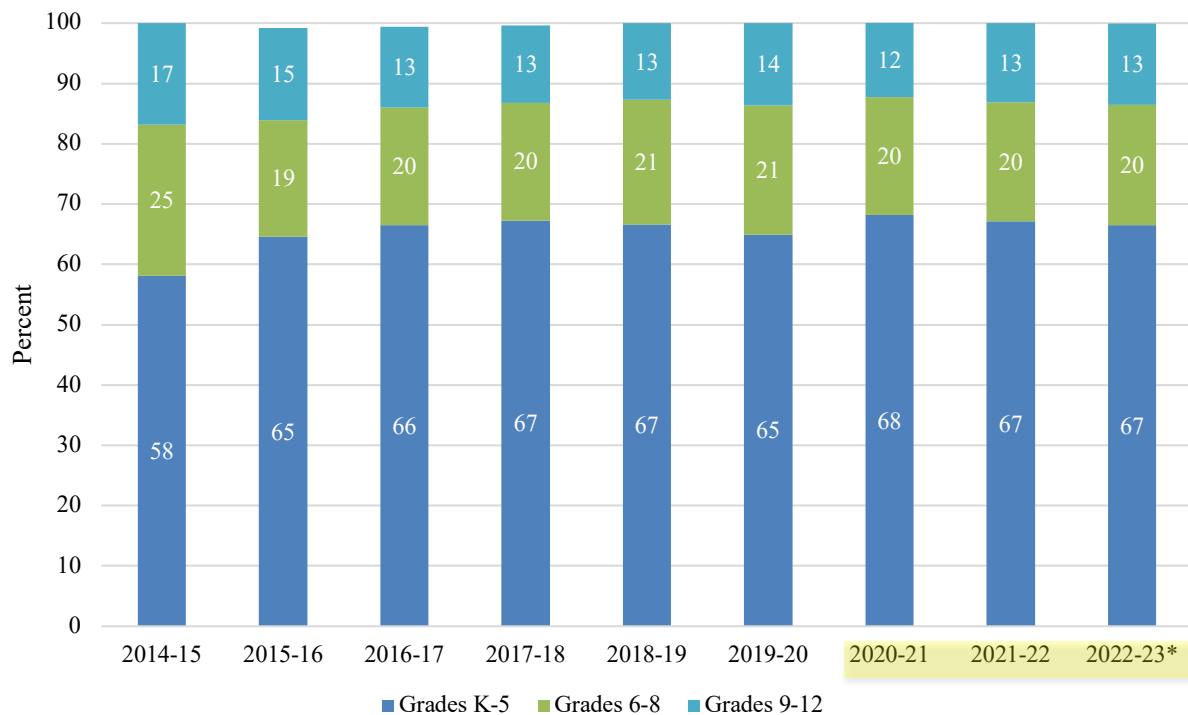
We also examine applicant gender, by year (Figure 6), observing little change over time.

Figure 6. *Applicant Gender, by Year*



We turn next to an examination of the grade-level for which a student was applying (Figure 7). In the program’s first year, the elementary grades (K-5) were the most common application grade (58% of applications), a pattern that continues throughout all years of data. By 2022-23, two-thirds of applications (67%) were for the elementary grades, 20% of applications were for the middle grades, and 13% of applications were for the high school grades (9-12). The years affected by the COVID-19 pandemic are highlighted in yellow. We don’t see different patterns during those years. In all years, the most common entry grade is Kindergarten.

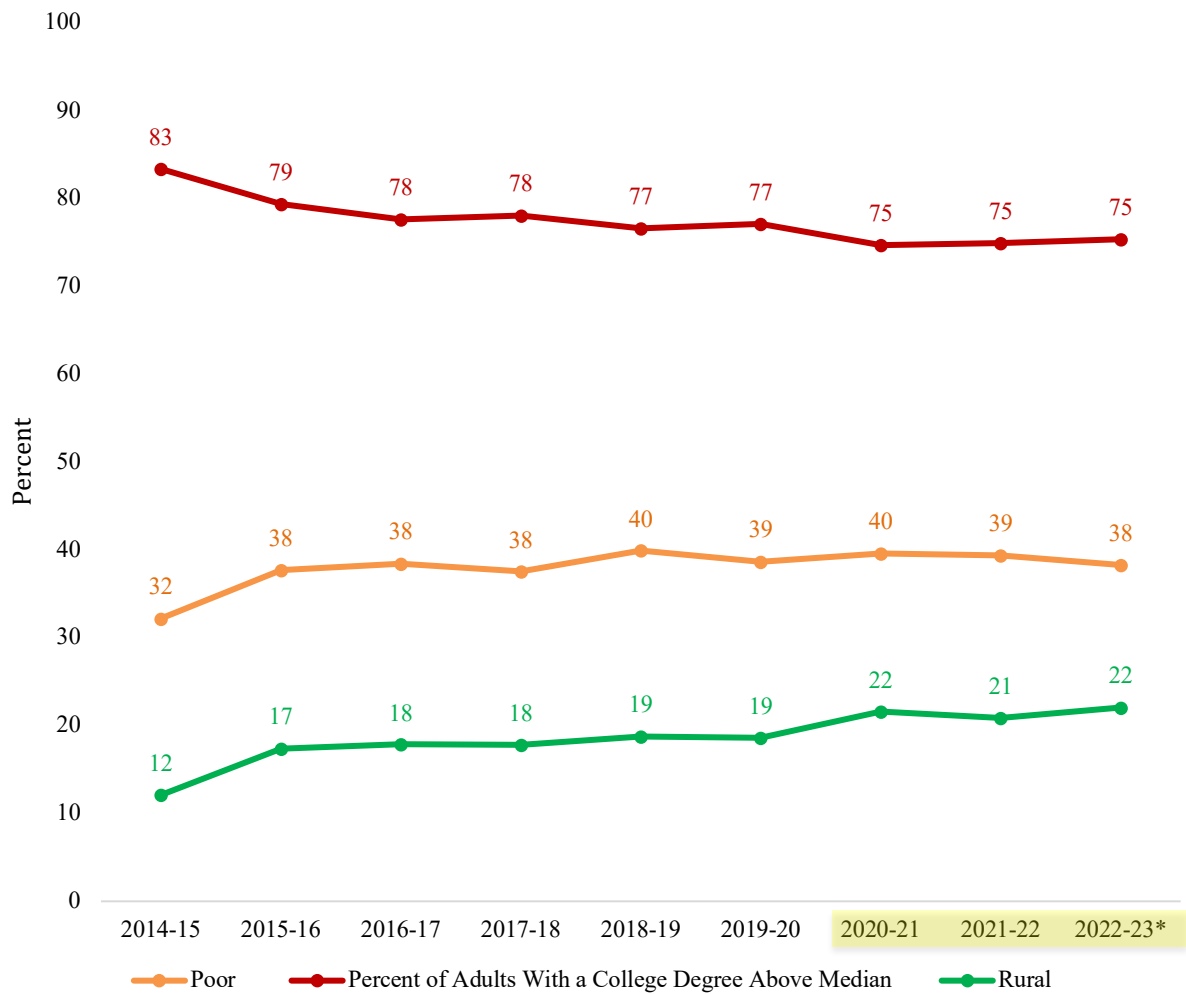
Figure 7. *Grade level For Which Student Applied*



Notes: The years affected by the COVID-19 pandemic are highlighted in yellow.

Next, we examine the characteristics of applicants' county of residence (Figure 8). First, we examine the percent of applicants coming from poor counties, defined as counties in which the percent of individuals living in poverty is above the median for the 2020 US Census. This statistic was 32% in the program's first year and has increased 6 percentage points since then to 38% in 2022-23. Second, we examine representation among applicants from counties where the percent of adults with a college degree is above the median. This statistic was 83% in the program's first year and has declined to 75% in 2022-23, which represents a 10% decline. Third, we examine representation among rural counties, which we define as counties that are not part of a metropolitan statistical area. In the program's first year, 12% of applicants were from rural counties, a figure that has risen to 22% in 2022-23, which represents an 83% increase. Putting these three data points together, we conclude that the characteristics of applicant's counties of residence signal disadvantage and they are enduring, even as the program has grown.

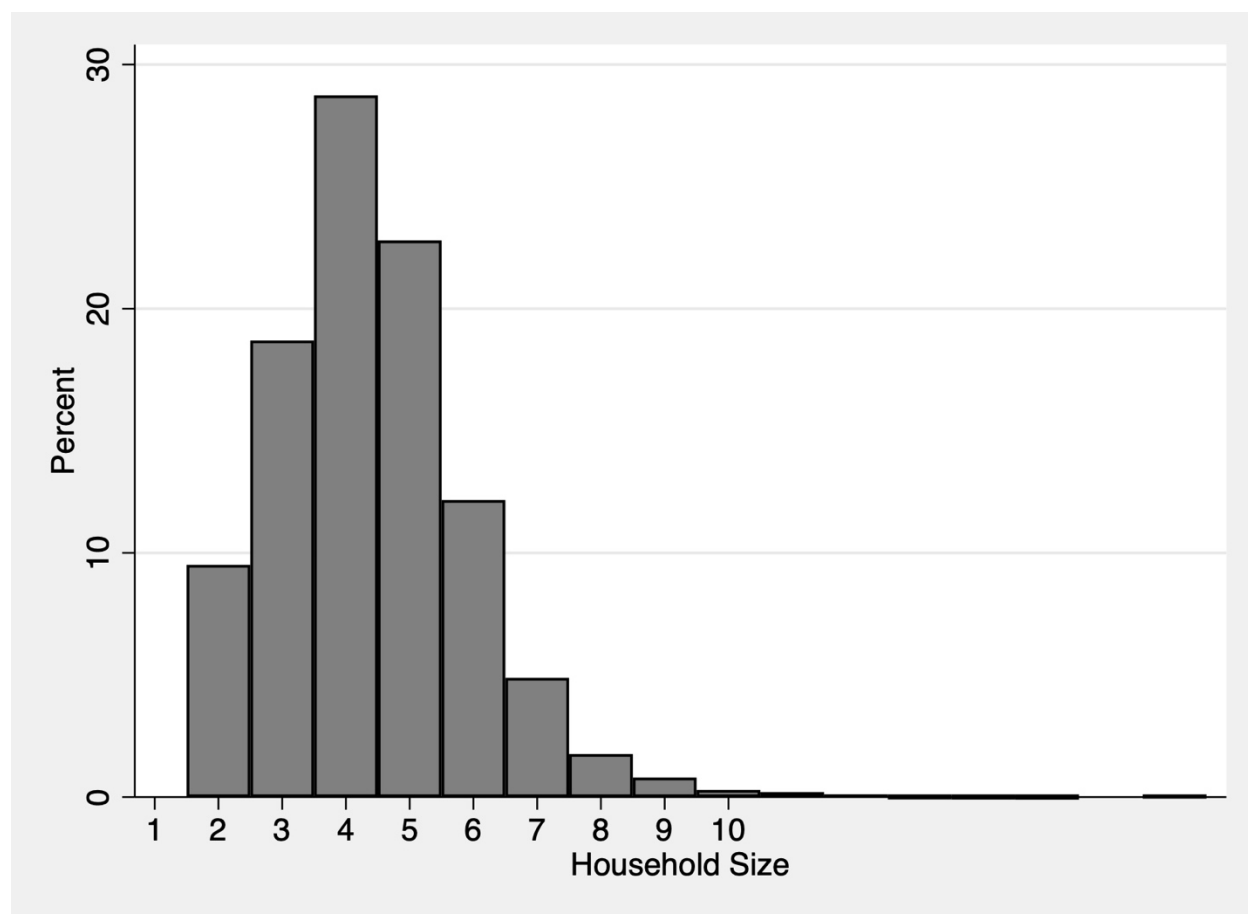
Figure 8. *Characteristics of Applicants' County of Residence*



Notes: “Poor” counties are defined as counties in which the percent of individuals living in poverty is above the median for the 2020 US Census. Rural is defined as not being part of a metropolitan statistical area. The years affected by the COVID-19 pandemic are highlighted in yellow.

We can also examine trends in household size and household income. Median household size in all years examined was four individuals. To illustrate the distribution of all possible household sizes, we show the histogram of 2022-23 data in Figure 9.

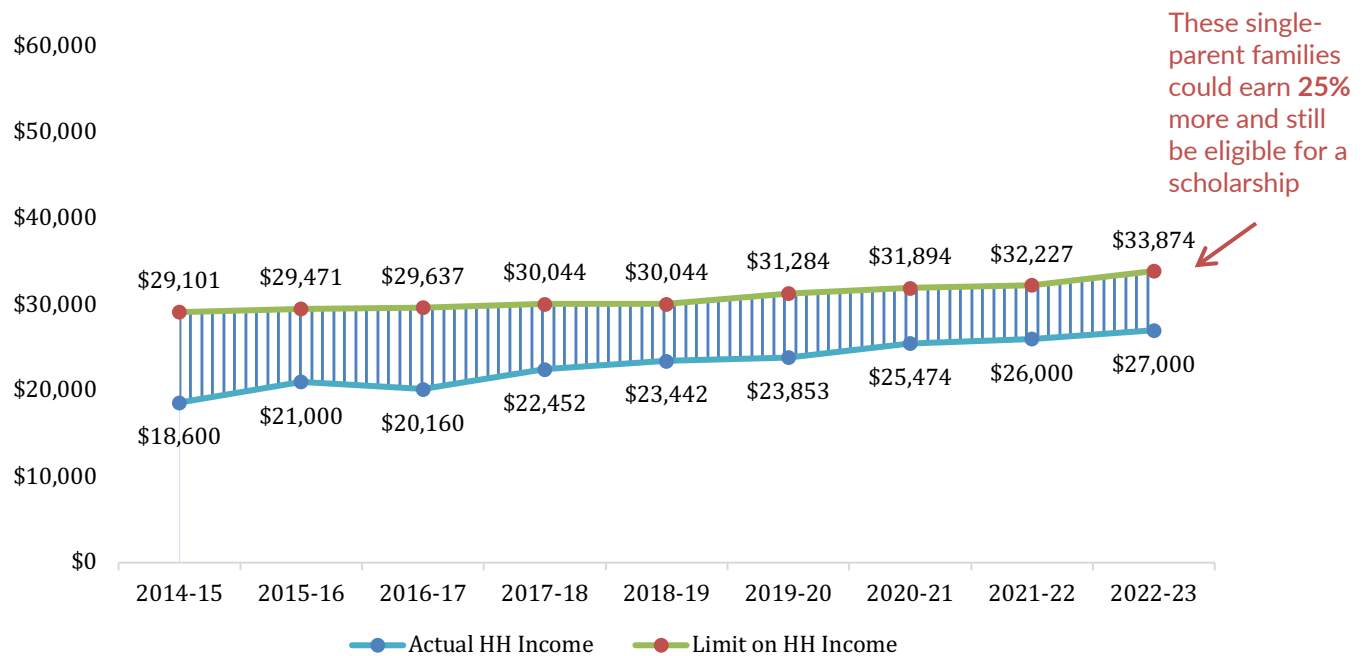
Figure 9. *Household Size of Opportunity Scholarship Applicants in 2022-23*



Median household income among applicants was \$26,400 in 2014-15, rising to \$48,000 by 2022-23. To better unpack the data on household income, we calculate the median value for each household size and compare that to the income limit for the relevant household size from the program’s eligibility guidelines for those wishing to receive full tuition under the OS program, by year. We graph this for the most common household sizes (2, 3, 4, 5, and 6), which we present in Figures 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14. What emerges is a clear pattern: There is a significant gap between applicants’ reported household income and the maximum possible income they could report while remaining eligible for the OS program. This implies that, despite rising eligibility thresholds, the OS program continues to attract applications from relatively disadvantaged families. For families of four and families of five, this gap has been closing over time, perhaps driven by greater awareness of the program. Nevertheless, in the tails of the distribution, single parent families and families with large households continue to be more disadvantaged than what program rules require for scholarship eligibility.

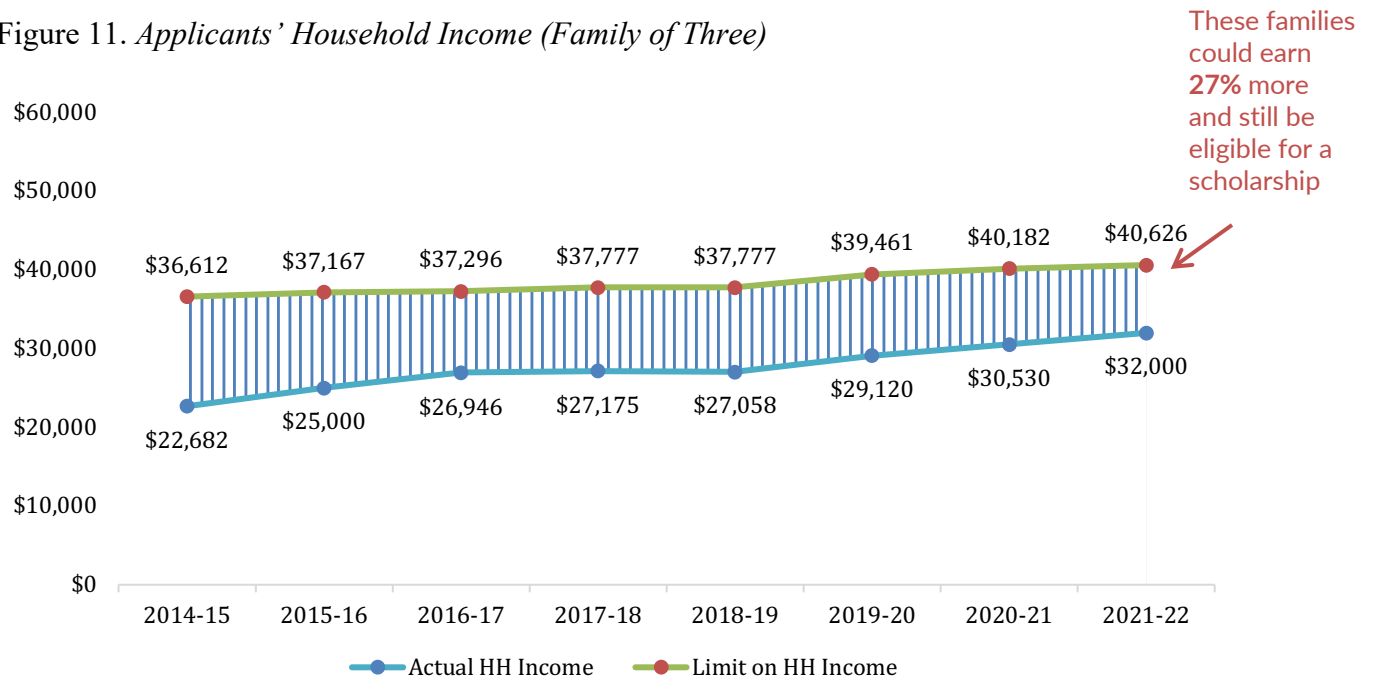
For example, in Figure 10 we show the gap between the \$27,000 median household income for a family of two in 2022-23 and the \$33,874 maximum permitted income for applicants to be eligible for the OS program. This implies that these single-parent families could earn 25% more and still be eligible for full tuition support under the OS program.

Figure 10. *Applicants' Household Income (Family of Two)*



This pattern is repeated for families with three household members (Figure 11). That is, despite legislative increases in the maximum household income that is permitted for program eligibility, the average applicant with this household size remains far below that threshold. For families of three, the median applicant could earn 27% more and still be eligible for full tuition support under the OS program.

Figure 11. *Applicants' Household Income (Family of Three)*



For families of four (Figure 12) and families of five (Figure 13), the gap has been closing over time, perhaps signaling greater awareness of the program and its eligibility thresholds among the general public.

Figure 12. *Applicants' Household Income (Family of Four)*

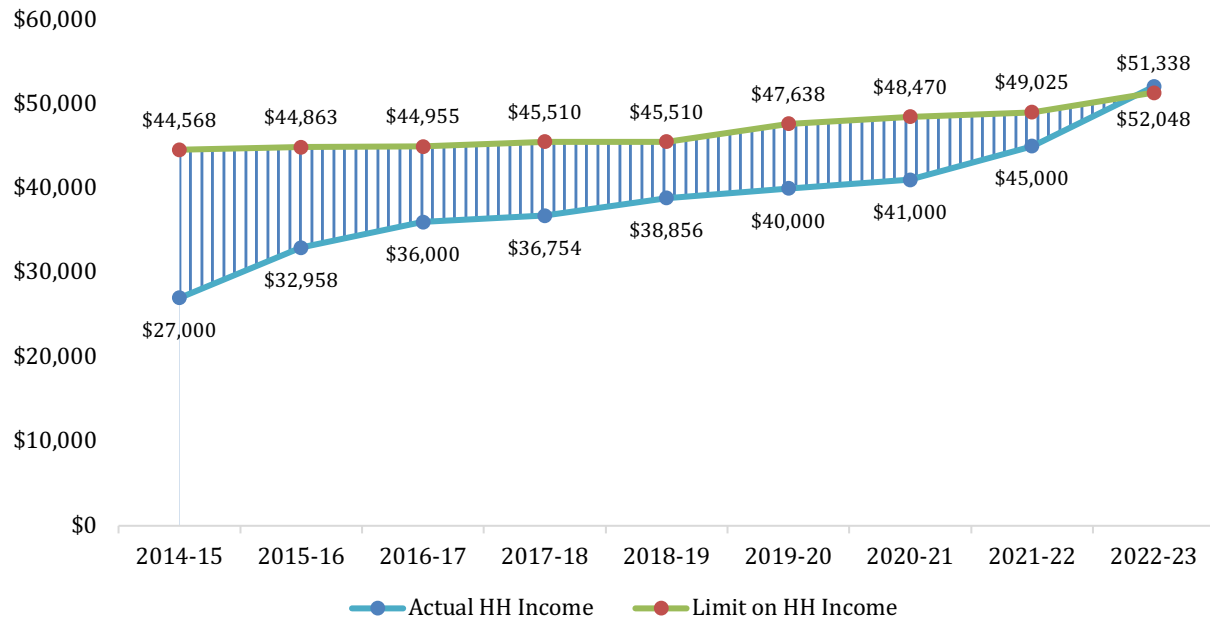
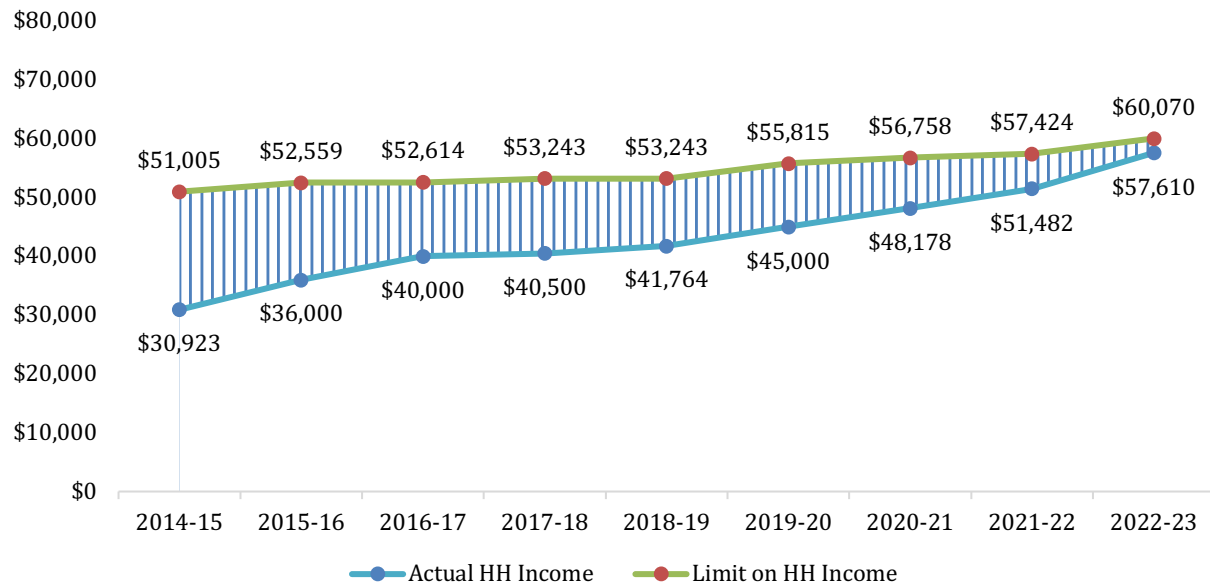
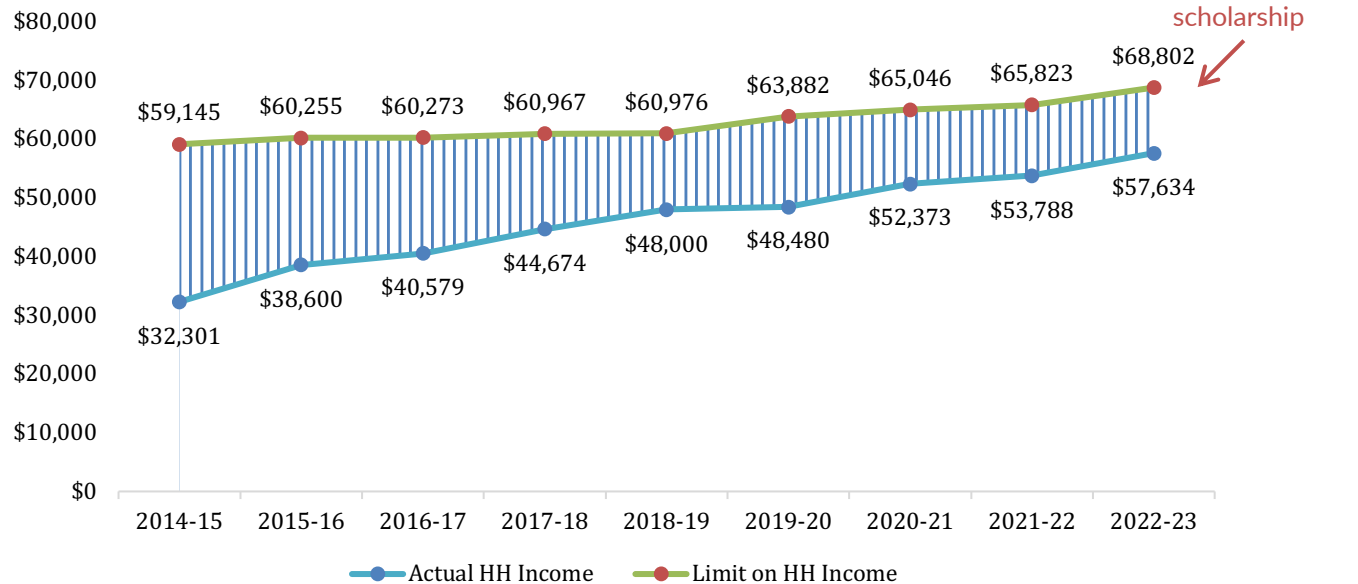


Figure 13. *Applicants' Household Income (Family of Five)*



For larger households, however, the gap persists. For applicants in a six-person household, they could earn 27% more, on average, and still be eligible for full tuition support under the OS program (Figure 14).

Figure 14. *Applicants' Household Income (Family of Six)*



In summary, despite rising eligibility thresholds, the OS program continues to attract attention from relatively disadvantaged families. For families of four and families of five, this gap has been closing over time. Nevertheless, single parent families and families with large households continue to be significantly more disadvantaged than what program rules require for scholarship eligibility.

Survey Findings

Sample Description

We start by describing the demographic characteristics of the survey respondents (Table 3). In most cases (83%), the mother completed the survey. We asked respondents if their OS applicant child has a learning exceptionality, such as special educational needs or advanced academic ability for their age. It appears that the program is drawing applicants from both pools. For example, 19% of respondents indicated that their child has a learning, physical, or developmental disability. We also asked if the child struggles with academic learning, which 25% of respondents affirmed. At the same time, almost half (48%) of respondents indicated that their child demonstrates advanced academic ability for their age.

On average, respondents' households consist of 2 adults and 2 children. Most of our respondents (86%) attended some college, with 62% of respondents having attained a college degree of some kind. Most respondents (53%) reported the racial make-up of their family as white, 17% reported it as Black, 8% reported it as Hispanic or Latino/a, and 17% reported it as mixed race/ethnicity. In most cases (88%), respondents reported English as being the main language spoken in their home. When asked to report their political affiliation, most respondents described themselves as unaffiliated (42%). Focusing on responses for the two largest political parties, 37% of respondents described themselves as a Republican and 16% of respondents described themselves as a Democrat. We also asked respondents to report their religious affiliation, and the majority (65%) described themselves as Christian-Protestant (e.g., Baptist, Episcopalian, Lutheran, Methodist, Nondenominational, etc.). The next biggest category after that was Christian-Catholic at 13%. Almost two-thirds of respondents (64%) are married. Finally, we asked respondents if they have ever worked in a public school and, if so, in what capacity. Twenty percent of respondents have public school work experience. Specifically, 10% of our sample has worked as a public-school teacher, a further 10% has worked as a staff member in a public school, 2% of respondents have worked as a public-school sports coach and 1% of respondents have served as a public-school administrator.

Table 3.
Demographic Characteristics of Survey Sample

	Mean
Survey Respondent's Relationship to the Child	
Mother	83
Father	11
Grandparent	3
Other	2
Percent of respondents indicating their OS applicant child has one of the following exceptionalities:	
Child has a learning, physical, or developmental disability	19
Child struggles with academic learning	25
Child demonstrates advanced academic ability for their age	48
Child has a primary language other than English	22
Number of People Living in the Household	
Adults	2
Children	2
Survey Respondent's Highest Level of Education Completed	
Master's, doctoral, or other advanced degree	17
Bachelor's degree	26
Associate's degree	19
Some college	24
GED or high school diploma	11
Some high school	3
Racial Make-Up of the Respondent's Family	
White	53
Black or African American	17
Hispanic or Latino/a	8
Asian	2
American Indian	1
Mixed Race	17
Other	2
Main Language Spoken in the Respondent's Home	
English	88
Spanish	3
English and Spanish Equally	4
Another Language	2
English and Another Language Equally	3
Respondent's Political Affiliation	
Democrat	16
Republican	37
Unaffiliated	42
Other or Chose Not to Respond	6
Respondent's Religious Affiliation	
No religious affiliation	7
Agnostic	1

Atheist	0.32
Buddhist	0.19
Christian-Catholic	13
Christian-Orthodox (e.g., Greek, Russian, etc.)	1
Christian-Protestant (e.g., Baptist, Episcopalian, Lutheran, Methodist, Nondenominational, etc.)	65
Hindu	0.09
Jewish	0.23
Latter-day Saint/Mormon	0.33
Muslim	2
Religious/spiritual but unaffiliated	6
Other or Chose Not to Respond	5
Respondent's Marital Status	
Married	64
Not Married, but Living with a Partner	4
Never Married	13
Divorced	12
Separated	5
Widowed	2
Respondent's Public School Work History	
None	80
Some	20
Administrator	1
Teacher	10
Staff Member	10
Sports Coach	2

Notes: Sample consists of first-time applicants to the Opportunity Scholarship program, 2020-21 through 2023-24. Respondents were permitted to select all that apply when reporting public school work history, therefore the categories of administrator, teacher, staff member, and sports coach are not mutually exclusive. n = 8,667 respondents.

Application Experiences

Table 4 describes respondents' experiences of applying to the OS program. Roughly two-thirds of applicants (67%) were applying for an Opportunity Scholarship for just one child, 23% were applying for two children, and 7% were applying for three children. Sixty-nine percent of respondents indicated that their child was subsequently awarded and used a scholarship. For those who did not ultimately use a scholarship, they might not have been eligible, or they might have decided for personal reasons not to use one. We asked applicants who did not use an OS after applying for one which school type their child ultimately attended and responses were bimodal—45% attended a private school (37% in religious private school and 7% in non-religious private school) and 29% attended their assigned traditional public school. The remaining students were homeschooled (8%); attended a charter school (7%); or a district-run public school of choice, such as a magnet school or early college (2%). Among those who selected "Other" (6%), in the comments, many indicated that they kept their child in preschool or daycare.

Table 4.
Opportunity Scholarship, Descriptive Questions

	Percent
For how many children did the respondent apply for an OS?	
1	67
2	23
3	7
4	2
5	0.47
6 or more	0.17
Percentage of respondents indicating that their child/ren were awarded and used an OS	69
School attended by applicants who did NOT use an OS after applying for one	
Traditional public school that was assigned	29
District-run public school of choice (e.g., magnet school or early college)	2
Charter school	7
Private school (religious or parochial)	37
Private school (non-religious)	7
Public virtual school	2
Private virtual school	0.65
Homeschool	8
Other	6
What type of school, if any, did the applicant attend in the year immediately prior to using an OS?	
Traditional public school that was assigned	37
District-run public school of choice (e.g., magnet school or early college)	2
Charter school	5
Private school (religious or parochial)	27
Private school (non-religious)	5
Public virtual school	2
Private virtual school	0.19
Homeschool	6
Other (e.g., Pre-K)	15
Percentage of respondents indicating that their child was ever enrolled in a traditional public school, excluding rising Kindergarteners	58

Notes: Sample consists of first-time applicants to the Opportunity Scholarship program, 2020-21 through 2023-24.

We were also interested in learning more about the “sending schools,” from which OS applicants were applying so we asked about the type of school they attended in the year immediately prior to using an OS. A little more than one-third (37%) of OS students in our sample were previously attending an assigned traditional public school. Roughly another third (32%) were previously

attending a private school (27% in a religious private school and 5% in a non-religious private school). In terms of the homeschool population, 6% of respondents selected this option, which is roughly the same as the 5% of respondents who selected charter school. Just 2% of respondents indicated that their previous school was a district-run public school of choice, such as a magnet school or early college. Finally, 15% of respondents selected “Other” and explained in the comments that their child was previously in pre-K or daycare.

Experiences in the Program

To gain more insight into how families are experiencing the OS program, we asked survey respondents to grade specific components of their OS-supported private school experience. We first asked respondents to assign an overall grade to the private school their child attended with an Opportunity Scholarship and to the school their child previously attended (A - Excellent, B – Good, C- Average, D- Below Average, F- Failing). Table 5 shows the breakdown of grades awarded and calculates a percentage point difference between the two school types. Respondents are overwhelmingly satisfied with their current school, with 76% assigning the school an A grade. Just 33% of respondents assigned their previous school an A grade, a 43 percentage point difference. At the other end of the spectrum, just 1% of respondents assigned their current school an F grade, compared to 6% of respondents assigning their previous school an F grade, a 5 percentage point difference.

Table 5.

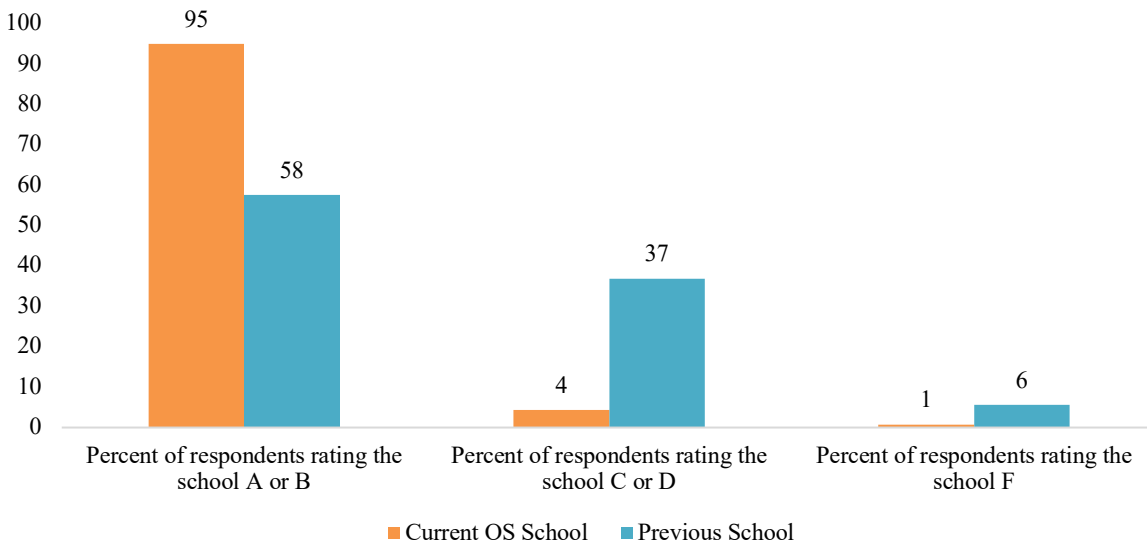
Overall grade assigned to the private school attended with an OS, compared to grade assigned to previous school

	Current School	Previous School	Difference
A	76	33	43
B	19	24	-5
C	3	26	-22
D	1	11	-10
F	1	6	-5

Notes: Current school is referring to the private school attended by way of an Opportunity Scholarship. Previous school is referring to whichever school the child attended prior to receiving an Opportunity Scholarship. This might be an assigned traditional public school, magnet school, charter school, private school, etc.

In Figure 15, we group the assigned grades into three categories: high (A or B), middle (C or D), and low (F). Looking at the data this way reveals that 95% of respondents assign a high rating to their child’s current school, compared to 58% assigning a high rating to their child’s previous school.

Figure 15. *Percent of respondents assigning an overall grade of A or B, C or D, or F to the private school attended with an OS, compared to grade assigned to previous school*



We can also dig a little deeper on this topic and compare respondents' ratings of individual school characteristics, by school (Table 6). What we observe is universally high ratings across the board. Over 91% of respondents assign an A or B grade to their current OS school across every category examined. The highest rating is for teachers (95%) and the lowest rating is for facilities (92%).

Looking at ratings for the child's previous school, between 50 and 64% of respondents assign an A or B grade across the various categories examined. The highest rating is for facilities (64%) and the lowest rating is for student behavior (51%).

We compare their ratings for their current school, attended by way of an Opportunity Scholarship, with their previous school and note the differences in grades assigned, by category. The greatest difference is observed in the area of social development, with 94% of respondents assigning their current OS school an A or B grade, compared to 52% of respondents assigning their previous school such a high grade. We observe the same 42-point difference in the areas of student behavior and emotional development.

Table 6.

Percent of Respondents Rating Each School Characteristic an A or B Letter Grade, by School

	Previous School	Current OS School	Change
Overall	58	95	+37
Social development	52	94	+42
Student behavior	51	93	+42
Emotional development	52	94	+42
School culture	53	95	+41
Academic quality	56	95	+38
Breadth of academic offerings	56	92	+36
Pandemic response	59	94	+35
School leadership	58	93	+35
School safety	62	95	+33
Teachers	63	95	+32
Facilities	64	92	+28

Notes: Respondents were asked, “How would you grade the private school [child’s name] attended with an Opportunity Scholarship?” and “How would you grade the school [child’s name] attended prior to using an Opportunity Scholarship? (A - Excellent, B – Good, C- Average, D- Below Average, F- Failing)”

We turn next to a set of questions we asked respondents about the costs associated with their child’s use of an Opportunity Scholarship. Over this period, the scholarship was worth a maximum value of between \$4,200 and \$6,492. Although detailed private school data is not readily accessible in North Carolina, in a previous report, we documented that the median tuition charged in North Carolina private schools was \$5,483 (Egalite, Barriga, Stallings, & Antoszyk, 2020). The minimum tuition value was \$2,025 and the maximum tuition value was \$27,500. To better understand how this variation in tuition might be experienced by respondents, we asked, “Did you receive extra scholarships from your private school, a church, or another organization to help pay for any part of your child’s education cost?” Most respondents (84%) indicated no. Looking at the answers to this question over time, it doesn’t change by more than one or two percentage points each year, ranging from 82% in 2021-22 to 86% in 2023-24.

Of those that answered yes to this question, 12% indicated that the supplemental support they received was targeted towards private school tuition and fees. About 3% of respondents indicated that they received some “other” type of support. In the comments, many respondents referenced Education Student Accounts (ESA+), which is a state-funded program for students with disabilities who require special education services.

We also asked respondents, “Did you or your family personally cover any tuition costs or other school expenses for your child to attend private school?” Most respondents answered yes to this question (89%). Looking at the answers to this question over time, it doesn’t change by more than one or two percentage points each year, ranging from 88% in 2020-21 to 90% in 2023-24. Of those that answered yes, the most common educational expense they reported personally contributing towards was transportation (61%). Over half selected field trip fees (57%), private

school tuition and fees (56%), and school uniforms (53%). Respondents also selected textbooks and other school supplies at a high rate (41%), sports and other extra-curricular activities (37%), and tutoring (13%). In the comments, respondents explained the other expenses they were paying, which include before- and after-school care and school lunches.

Table 7.

Educational Costs Associated with Participating in the OS Program, by Year

	Overall	2020- 21	2021- 22	2022- 23	2023- 24
<i>Did you receive extra scholarships from your private school, a church, or another organization to help pay for any part of your child's education cost?</i>					
No	84	83	82	83	86
Yes	16	17	18	17	14
Private school tuition and fees	12	14	15	13	10
School uniforms	1	1	1	1	1
Transportation to and from school	0	0	0	0	1
Summer school	0	0	0	0	0
Sports and other extra-curricular activities	0	0	0	1	1
Tutoring	1	0	1	1	1
Textbooks and other school supplies	1	1	1	1	1
Field trip fees	1	1	1	0	1
Other	3	3	3	3	3
<i>Did you or your family personally cover any tuition costs or other school expenses for your child to attend private school?</i>					
No	11	12	12	12	10
Yes	89	88	88	88	90
Private school tuition and fees	56	58	56	55	56
School uniforms	53	52	52	52	54
Transportation to and from school	61	60	59	57	65
Summer school	9	8	9	7	10
Sports and other extra-curricular activities	37	32	34	32	43
Tutoring	13	12	11	9	16
Textbooks and other school supplies	41	38	40	38	45
Field trip fees	57	55	57	53	60
Other	10	9	9	12	9

Notes: Personal cost estimates are restricted to costs paid by applicants who received an OS so that they reflect the additional cost for private schooling, above and beyond what was awarded via the OS program (i.e., excluding costs reported by families who were not deemed eligible for an OS and paid out of pocket for private schooling instead).

Reasons for Applying to the OS Program

To learn more about families' reasons for applying to the OS program, we started by asking families to reflect on their child's assigned public school (Table 8). The number one reason why families applied to the OS program is that their child's assigned public school did not provide religious instruction (42%). The second most common reason why families applied to the OS program is that their child's assigned public school was not academically enriching enough for

their child (37%). The third most common reason is that their child's assigned public school provided instruction or curriculum they did not approve of (23%). These three reasons have held steady across all years surveyed.

We also asked about pandemic-related factors that might have motivated parents to consider alternative schooling options. In 2020-21, a third of respondents said their child's assigned public school did not offer any or enough in-person learning because of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. In 2021-22, 26% of respondents said this was a reason they applied to the OS program. This reason lost relevance in later years. Similarly, mask requirements due to the COVID-19 virus were relevant in 2020-21 (selected as a reason by 17% of respondents) and in 2021-22 (selected as a reason by 19% of respondents) but have since lost relevance.

For public schools seeking to learn more about families' motivations for departing the public school system, several other factors stand out. Nineteen percent of respondents said their child's assigned public school did not offer enough social or emotional support, a figure that barely budged across all four cohorts of respondents. Similarly, 16% of respondents said their child's assigned public school was a place where their child experienced bullying, harassment, or verbal or physical abuse. Finally, 14% of respondents said their child's assigned public school did not provide the right level of services for their child's physical, emotional, or learning disability.

Table 8.
Reasons for Applying to the OS Program, by Year

My Child's Assigned Public School:	Overall	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Did not provide religious instruction	42	38	41	42	43
Was not academically enriching enough for my child	37	35	35	38	38
Provided instruction (or curriculum) I did not approve of	23	23	23	24	22
Did not offer enough social or emotional support	19	19	18	20	20
Did not offer any or enough in-person learning because of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions	16	33	26	13	9
Was a place where my child experienced bullying, harassment, or verbal or physical abuse	16	14	13	17	17
Did not provide the right level of services for my child's physical, emotional, or learning disability	14	15	12	15	13
Required my child to wear a mask due to the COVID-19 virus	12	17	19	11	7
Had students who I did not want my child to become friends with	11	8	10	12	12
Had a teacher or school administrator who treated my child disrespectfully	8	8	6	8	8
Led to my child feeling socially isolated due to remote learning	6	9	10	5	4
Did not provide any or enough before- or after-school care	5	4	5	5	5
Did not offer a sport or extra-curricular activity that my child wanted	4	4	4	4	5
Was too academically difficult for my child	4	5	4	3	3
Did not fit well with my work schedule due to remote learning	4	7	6	3	2
Was not strict enough with my child	3	3	3	3	3
Was far from home or hard to get to	3	2	3	3	3
Was not where my child's friends attended school	3	2	2	3	3
Was overly strict with my child	2	2	2	2	2
Did not offer remote or hybrid learning options	2	2	1	2	2
Did not require my child to wear a mask due to the COVID-19 virus	1	2	2	1	1
Held my child back a grade, and I disagreed with the school's decision	1	0	1	1	1
Asked my child to leave or expelled my child	1	1	0	1	1
Other	28	23	28	29	30

Notes: Participants were permitted to mark all that apply.

The structure of our survey and our ability to identify first-time applicants by year allows us to compare how applicant's decisions changed over time. Moreover, since motivations may differ based on partisanship, we are able to break down our findings by whether or not parent/guardians identified as Democrats or Republicans. This sheds light on how motivations differ by political party (Table 9).

Table 9.

Comparison of Respondent's Primary Reason for Applying to the OS Program, by Political Affiliation and Year

	2020-21			2023-24		
Child's Assigned Public School:	Democrats	Republicans	Gap	Democrats	Republicans	Gap
Was not academically enriching enough for my child	22	12	+10	26	16	+10
Did not provide the right level of services for my child's physical, emotional, or learning disability	10	6	+4	15	9	+6
Was a place where my child experienced bullying, harassment, or verbal or physical abuse	12	5	+7	15	5	+10
Did not provide religious instruction	12	26	-14	11	32	-21
Did not offer enough social or emotional support	7	2	+5	5	3	+2
Provided instruction (or curriculum) I did not approve of	1	10	-9	1	15	-14
Did not offer any or enough in-person learning because of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions	8	23	-15	1	2	-1

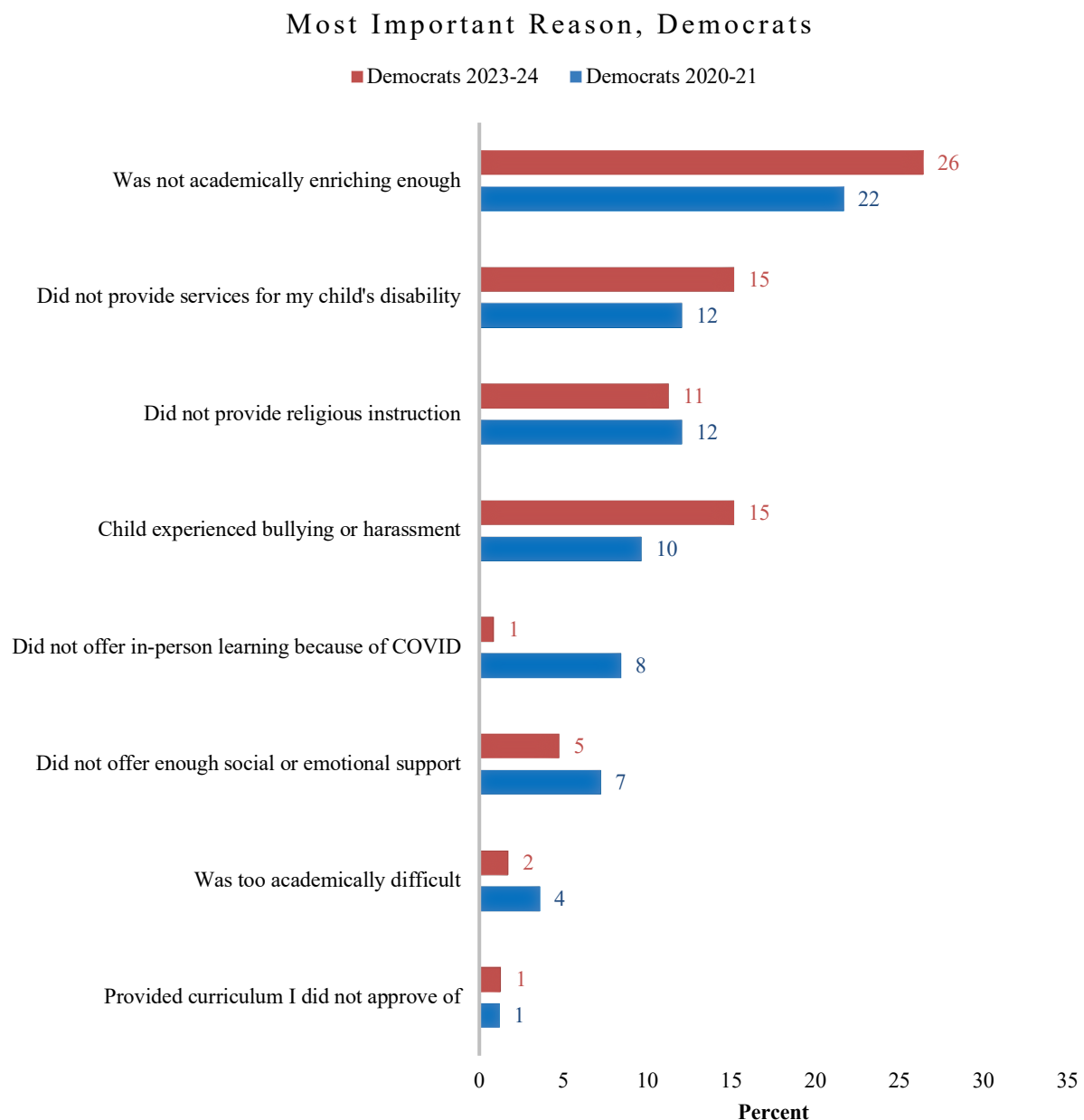
Notes: Participants were asked to report the primary reason they applied for an Opportunity Scholarship for their child.

In 2020-21, the biggest difference between these two groups was the 14-point gap in the percentage of Republicans selecting “did not provide religious instruction” as their primary reason for applying to the OS program (26%) compared to the percentage of Democrats selecting this reason (12%). There was also a 14-point gap in the percentage of Republicans selecting “did not offer any or enough in-person learning because of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions” as their primary reason for applying to the OS program (23%) compared to the percentage of Democrats selecting this reason (8%). There was also a 10-point gap in the percentage of Republicans selecting “Was not academically enriching enough for my child” (12%) compared to the percentage of Democrats selecting this reason (22%).

In 2023-24, the biggest difference between these two groups was the 21-point gap in the percentage of Republicans selecting “did not provide religious instruction” as their primary reason for applying to the OS program (32%) compared to the percentage of Democrats selecting this reason (11%). There was also a sizable gap of 13 points between the percentage of Republicans selecting “Provided instruction (or curriculum) I did not approve of” (15%) compared to the percentage of Democrats selecting this reason (1%). There was also a 10-point gap in the percentage of Republicans selecting “Was not academically enriching enough for my child” (16%) compared to the percentage of Democrats selecting this reason (26%).

In addition to making comparisons between political groups, it’s also helpful to graph this information to better observe patterns *within* groups. Looking first at Democrat parents, the top reason in 2020-21 and 2023-24 remained the same: Parents reported that their assigned school was not academically enriching enough (Figure 16). First-time applicants were slightly more likely to choose this reason in 2023-24 (26%) than applicants in 2020-21 (22%). The next most cited reason for first-time Democrat applicants in 2023-24 was that their assigned public school did not provide services for their child’s disability (15%), up from 12% in 2020-21. Fifteen percent of Democrat applicants in 2023-24 reported that they applied because their child was being bullied or harassed, up from 10% in 2020-21. Roughly the same number of Democrat applicants (11-12 percent) reported a preference for schools that provided religious instruction.

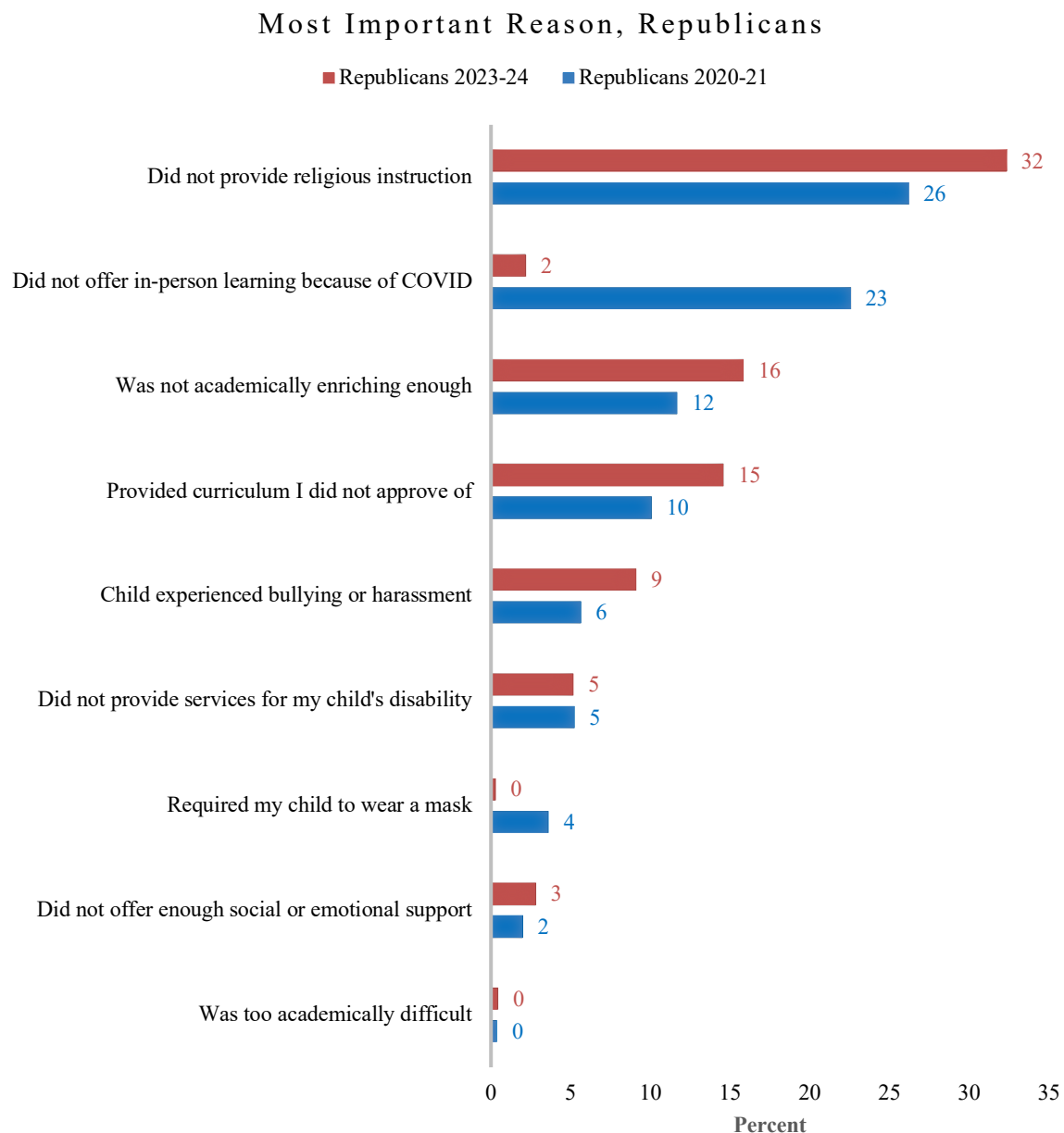
Figure 16. *Comparison of Primary Reason for Applying to the OS Program for First-Time Applicants (Democrats), 2020-21 and 2023-24*



Turning to the same set of survey questions for first-time applicants that identified as Republicans tells a different story (Figure 17). The top reason for these applicants in 2020-21 was a preference for schools that provided religious instruction, cited by 26% of applicants. For those applying for the first time in 2023-24, that share rose to 32%. COVID-19 was the second highest reason cited for Republican parents in 2020-21, at 23%. As would be expected, this dropped sharply as a motivating factor by 2023-24, registering only 2%. There was an increase from 2020-21 to 2023-24 for Republican parents citing that their assigned school was not academically enriching enough, from 12 to 16%. We observe a similar increase in the share of

parents citing that their assigned school provided curriculum that they do not approve of, rising from 10 to 15%. Similar to Democrat applicants, there was an increase in parents citing that their decision was motivated by their child being bullied or harassed at their assigned school, which rose from 6 to 9% among Republicans.

Figure 17. *Comparison of Primary Reason for Applying to the OS Program for First-Time Applicants (Republicans), 2020-21 and 2023-24*



To better understand the motivations of different groups, we also examine respondent's reasons for applying to the OS program by two further background characteristics: their public-school work history, if any, and religious affiliation (Table 10).

In 2020-21, 18% of public-school employees said their primary reason for applying to the OS program was because their child's assigned public school was not academically enriching enough. A further 18% said their primary reason was because it did not provide religious instruction. Similar proportions of non-public school employees selected these same reasons. The biggest difference between the two groups was a 5-point gap in the proportion of respondents saying their assigned public school did not offer any or enough in-person learning because of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, which was selected by 13% of public-school employees and 18% of non-public school employees. We also observe a 5-point gap in the proportion of respondents saying their assigned public school provided instruction or curriculum they did not approve of, which was selected by 7% of public-school employees and 11% of non-public school employees.

By 2023-24, the biggest difference between these two groups was a 6-point gap in the proportion of respondents saying their assigned public school did not provide religious instruction, which was selected by 26% of public-school employees and 20% of non-public school employees. We also observe a 4-point gap in the proportion of respondents saying their assigned public school was not academically enriching enough for their child, which was selected by 19% of public-school employees and 23% of non-public school employees.

We can also group respondents by religious affiliation to make comparisons on this question. We combine those who describe themselves as atheist, agnostic, or having no religious affiliation into one group and all the other denominations into another group (i.e., Catholic, Protestant, Hindu, Jewish, etc.). In 2020-21, 20% of religiously affiliated respondents said their primary reason for applying to the OS program was because their child's assigned public school did not provide religious instruction. By comparison, none of the respondents in the comparison group describing themselves as atheist, agnostic, or not religiously affiliated selected this reason. Another major difference between these two groups was a 13-point gap in the proportion of respondents saying their assigned public school did not provide the right level of services for their child's physical, emotional, or learning disability, which was selected by 8% of the religiously affiliated respondents and 21% of non-religiously affiliated respondents.

By 2023-24, the biggest difference between these two groups was still the gap between the percentage of respondents saying their assigned public school did not provide religious instruction, selected by 23% of the religiously affiliated and just 2% of the non-religiously affiliated. By this later time point there was still a sizable gap between the proportion of respondents saying their assigned public school did not provide the right level of services for their child's physical, emotional, or learning disability. This gap grew from 13 points in 2020-21 to 17 points in 2023-24.

Table 10.

Comparison of Respondent's Primary Reason for Applying to the OS Program, by Respondent's Background Characteristics and Year

2020-21				2023-24		
Panel A: Comparisons by Respondents' Work History						
Child's Assigned Public School:	Public School Employee	Non-Public School Employee	Gap	Public School Employee	Non-Public School Employee	Gap
Was not academically enriching enough for my child	18	16	+2	19	23	-4
Was a place where my child experienced bullying, harassment, or verbal or physical abuse	7	5	+2	9	12	-3
Did not provide the right level of services for my child's physical, emotional, or learning disability	10	9	+1	9	7	+2
Did not provide religious instruction	18	18	0	26	20	+6
Did not offer enough social or emotional support	4	3	+1	5	3	+2
Provided instruction (or curriculum) I did not approve of	7	11	-4	8	11	-3
Did not offer any or enough in-person learning because of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions	13	18	-5	1	2	-1
Panel B: Comparisons by Respondents' Religious Affiliation						
	Religiously Affiliated	Atheist, Agnostic, or No Religious Affiliation	Gap	Religiously Affiliated	Atheist, Agnostic, or No Religious Affiliation	Gap
Was not academically enriching enough for my child	16	23	-7	21	26	-5
Was a place where my child experienced bullying, harassment, or verbal or physical abuse	5	8	-3	11	15	-4
Did not provide the right level of services for my child's physical, emotional, or learning disability	8	21	-13	6	23	-17
Did not provide religious instruction	20	0	+20	23	2	+21
Did not offer enough social or emotional support	3	8	-5	3	6	-3
Provided instruction (or curriculum) I did not approve of	11	5	+5	11	2	+9
Did not offer any or enough in-person learning because of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions	17	10	+7	2	3	-1

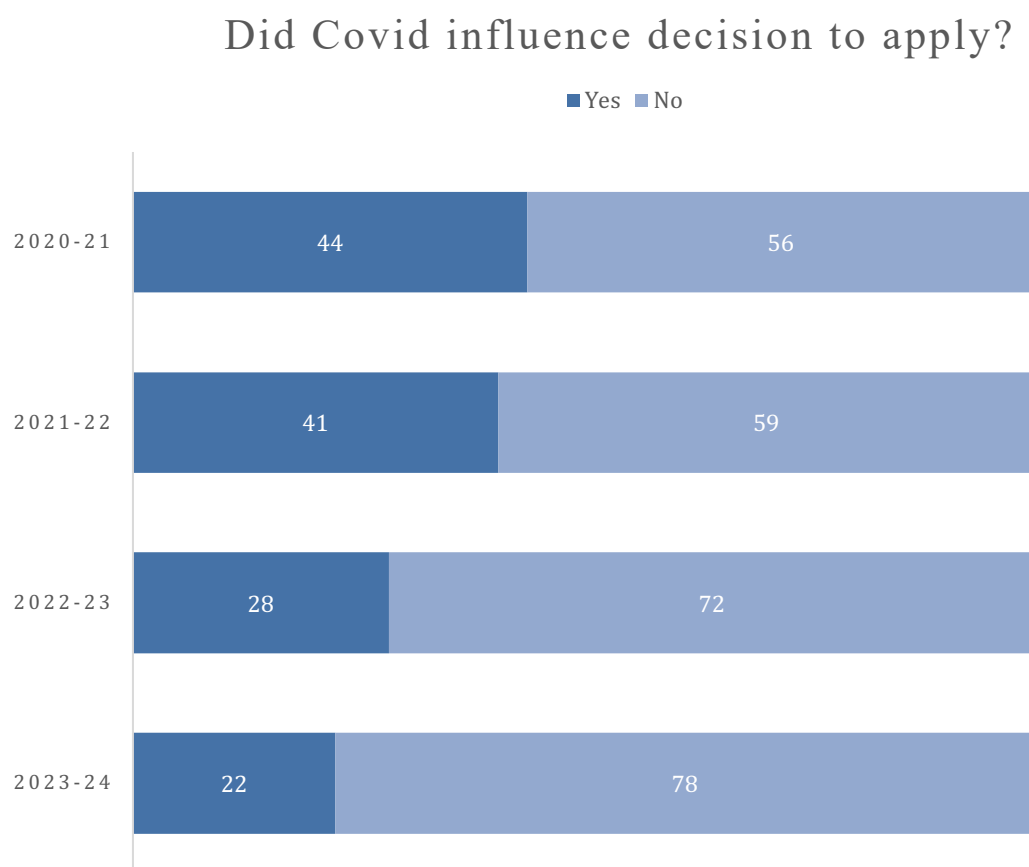
Notes: Participants were asked to report the primary reason they applied for an Opportunity Scholarship for their child.

The Role of COVID in Application Decisions

Until now, policymakers have not been able to quantify the role of the COVID-19 pandemic in families' OS application decisions both during and after the pandemic. Our survey findings indicate that the pandemic played a significant role in the first pandemic year and continued to play an important but declining role in subsequent years.

Specifically, for families who applied for the first time to receive an OS scholarship for the 2020-21 school year, 44% reported that the pandemic influenced their decision (Figure 18). The pandemic remained a major factor for those who first applied to the OS program for the 2021-22 school year, with 41% reporting that it was influential in their application decision. The role of the pandemic diminished in subsequent years, dropping to 22% for first-time applicants in 2023-24.

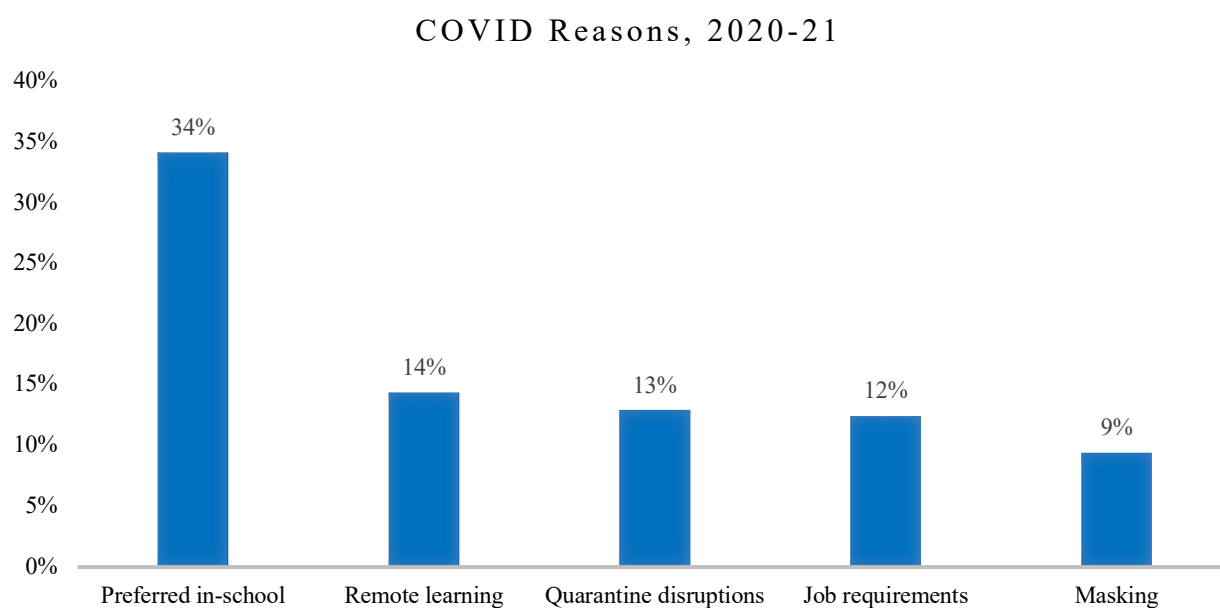
Figure 18. *COVID Influence on First-Time Applicants, By Year of Initial Application*



We also followed up with the 44% of respondents who indicated that the pandemic influenced their decision to apply to the OS program for the first time for school year 2020-21, probing a little further to learn more about the specific ways in which the pandemic affected their decision to apply (Figure 19). The most important reason was a preference for in-person schooling, which was reported by 34% of families. Other reasons highlighted by parents included the role of

parental job requirements that conflicted with remote learning (12%), too many COVID-19 quarantine disruptions (13%), and disagreement with school masking requirements (9%).

Figure 19. *Ways in Which the COVID-19 Pandemic Affected Decisions for Parents in School Year 2020-21*



Note: Respondents were asked, “Did the COVID-19 virus outbreak that started in the spring of 2020 influence your decision to apply for the Opportunity Scholarship Program? Mark all that apply.”

Desirable School Characteristics

We turn next to the specific schools selected by parents to learn more about the most desirable school characteristics among applicants. We asked families to report the reasons why their first-choice school was so desirable (Table 11). The most important school characteristic was class size, selected by two-thirds of parents and guardians. Academic quality was also important, selected by 64% of respondents. Another important characteristic was the ability for students to observe religious traditions, selected by 60% of respondents and respect between students and teachers, selected by 58% of respondents. Three other school characteristics were selected by over half of respondents: school safety (53%), an inviting school culture (53%), and the school’s reputation (50%). The least important characteristics were offering virtual or hybrid learning (5%), COVID-19 masking requirements (3%), and COVID-19 vaccination requirements (1%). Seven percent of respondents selected “Other.” In the comments, they spoke about seeking a Christian environment, wishing to avoid “woke ideology,” searching for better support for their child’s disability/ies, and having a parent who works at the school.

We also break out these findings by year. It is interesting to note how little variation there is over time. Families’ preferences for certain school characteristics over others appear to be quite stable.

Table 11.

Preferred School Characteristics, by Year

	Overall	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Class size	66	63	64	70	66
Academic quality	64	58	63	64	66
Students can observe religious traditions	60	56	60	60	62
Respect between students and teachers	58	53	56	59	60
School safety	53	48	51	54	54
An inviting school culture	53	48	48	54	56
School's reputation	50	46	48	51	52
Parent involvement	49	45	49	50	50
Teachers keep parents informed about a student's progress	48	45	49	51	46
Overall teacher quality	47	44	45	49	47
Location	44	45	43	45	44
Offered in-person learning	39	49	46	39	34
Approach to discipline	34	33	35	35	34
Peer group child is exposed to	30	26	26	32	32
Educational resources available (e.g., library books, technology, and labs)	25	25	23	27	26
School principal	24	20	22	25	25
Type of coursework available (e.g., foreign language instruction)	23	21	20	24	24
Accredited	22	22	19	23	22
Sports, extra-curricular activities or other before/after school programming offered	18	17	16	16	20
Did not have COVID-19 vaccination requirements	17	19	20	19	14
Services for students who struggle academically	16	18	16	15	17
Requires uniforms	15	15	14	16	14
Pedagogical style	15	13	13	15	16
Did not have COVID-19 masking requirements	14	14	16	16	11
Affordability	10	13	11	10	10

Services for students who struggle with behavioral or emotional issues	9	10	9	9	9
Other	7	7	6	7	6
Racial composition of the students at that school	6	6	5	7	6
Offered virtual or hybrid learning	5	8	5	3	4
Had COVID-19 masking requirements	3	7	4	2	1
Had COVID-19 vaccination requirements	1	2	2	1	1

Notes: Participants were asked, "What are the reasons that this was your first choice for [child's name] for the [relevant date] school year? Mark all that apply."

Pedagogical style includes Montessori, hands-on learning, mixed-grade classrooms, etc. _____

In a follow-up question, we ask participants to focus on the single, most important school characteristic that determined their first-choice school. We then break out responses for the most popular answers by the following background characteristics: political affiliation, work history, and religious affiliation (Table 12). We also compare responses in the first and last year of data collected to see if the observed gaps in preferences are stable or dynamic. We analyze patterns by political affiliation, work history, and religious affiliation.

Republicans are more likely than Democrats to choose “students can observe religious traditions” as the most important reason that this school was their first choice in 2020-21. Twenty-eight percent of Republicans selected this characteristic compared to 11% of Democrats, resulting in a 17-point gap. This gap grew to 30 points by 2023-24 when 37% of Republicans selected this characteristic, compared to 7% of Democrats.

Interestingly, both public school employees and non-public school employees believe it is important that students can observe religious traditions, with roughly 20% of each group selecting this as the most important characteristic.

When we compare the religiously affiliated to the non-religiously affiliated, we see a 21-point gap in the percentage of respondents selecting “student can observe religious traditions.” Twenty-two percent of religiously affiliated respondents selected this as the most important school characteristic, compared to just 1% of non-religiously affiliated respondents. This gap grew to 24 points in 2023-24.

Table 12.

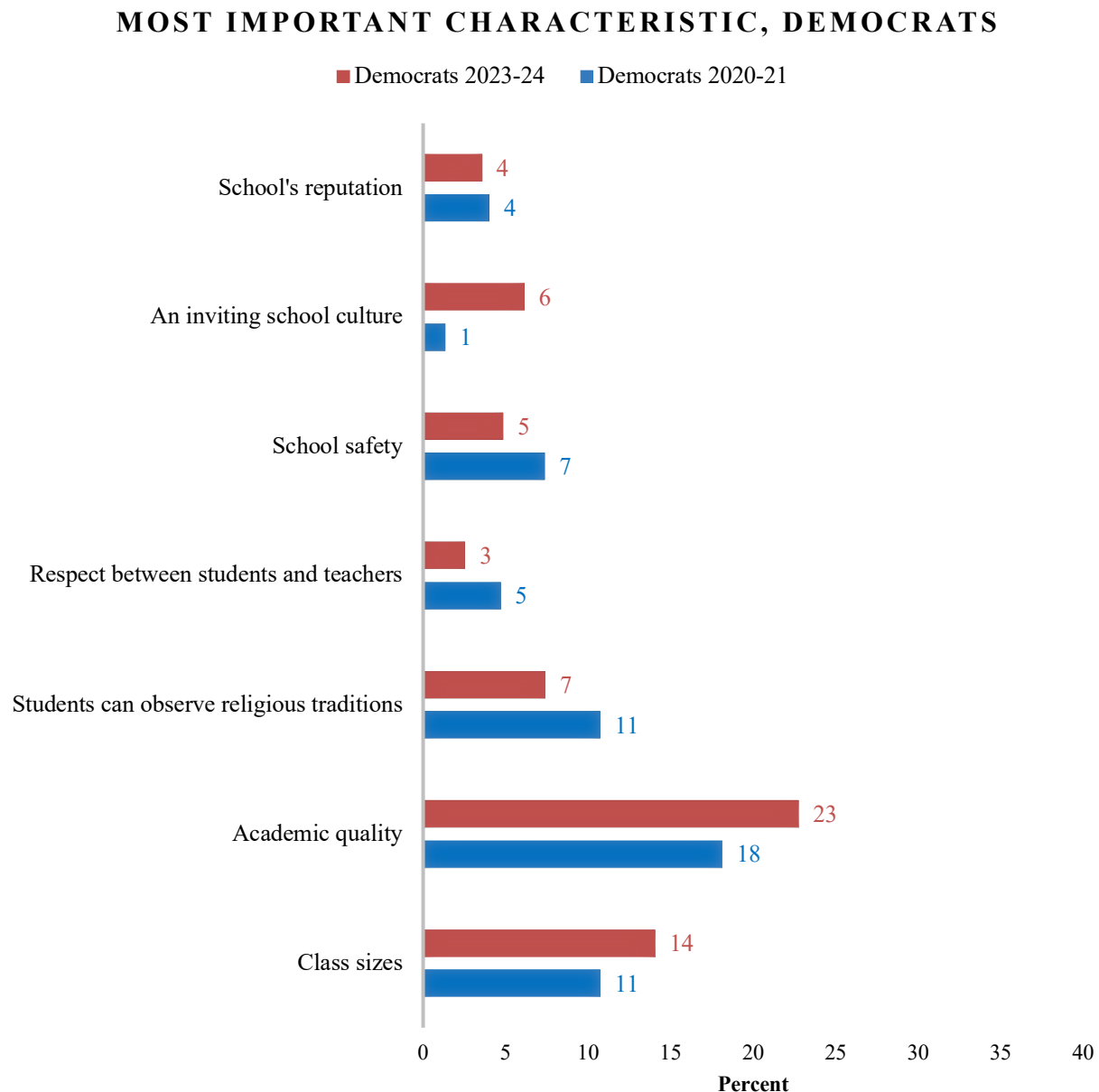
Comparison of Primary Preferred School Characteristics, by Respondent's Background and Year

	2020-21			2023-24		
<i>Panel A: By Political Affiliation</i>	Democrats	Republicans	Gap	Democrats	Republicans	Gap
Class size	11	8	+3	14	7	+7
Academic quality	18	11	+7	23	16	+7
Students can observe religious traditions	11	28	-17	7	37	-30
Respect between students and teachers	5	2	+3	3	2	+1
School safety	7	4	+3	5	6	-1
An inviting school culture	1	2	-1	6	4	+2
School's reputation	4	5	-1	4	5	-1
<i>Panel B: By Work History</i>	Public School Employee	Non-Public School Employee	Gap	Public School Employee	Non-Public School Employee	Gap
Class size	12	7	+5	12	7	+5
Academic quality	12	19	-7	20	19	+1
Students can observe religious traditions	20	21	-1	21	25	-4
Respect between students and teachers	3	2	+1	5	3	+2
School safety	4	5	-1	4	7	-3
An inviting school culture	3	3	0	6	5	+1
School's reputation	6	4	+2	4	5	-1
<i>Panel C: By Religious Affiliation</i>	Religiously Affiliated	Atheist, Agnostic, or No Religious Affiliation	Gap	Religiously Affiliated	Atheist, Agnostic, or No Religious Affiliation	Gap
Class size	8	13	-5	8	7	+1
Academic quality	16	28	-12	18	23	-5
Students can observe religious traditions	22	1	+21	26	2	+24
Respect between students and teachers	2	4	-2	3	4	-1
School safety	5	4	+1	6	6	0
An inviting school culture	3	1	+2	5	3	+2
School's reputation	5	1	+4	5	2	+3

Notes: Participants were asked, "What was the most important reason that this school was your first choice [child's name] for the [relevant date] school year?"

In addition to looking at differences between groups over time, we can compare within groups. For Democrats, academic quality grew in importance between 2020-21 and 2023-24, climbing five points from 18 to 23% (Figure 20). Students being able to observe religious traditions declines in importance between 2020-21 and 2023-24, dropping four points from 11 to 7%.

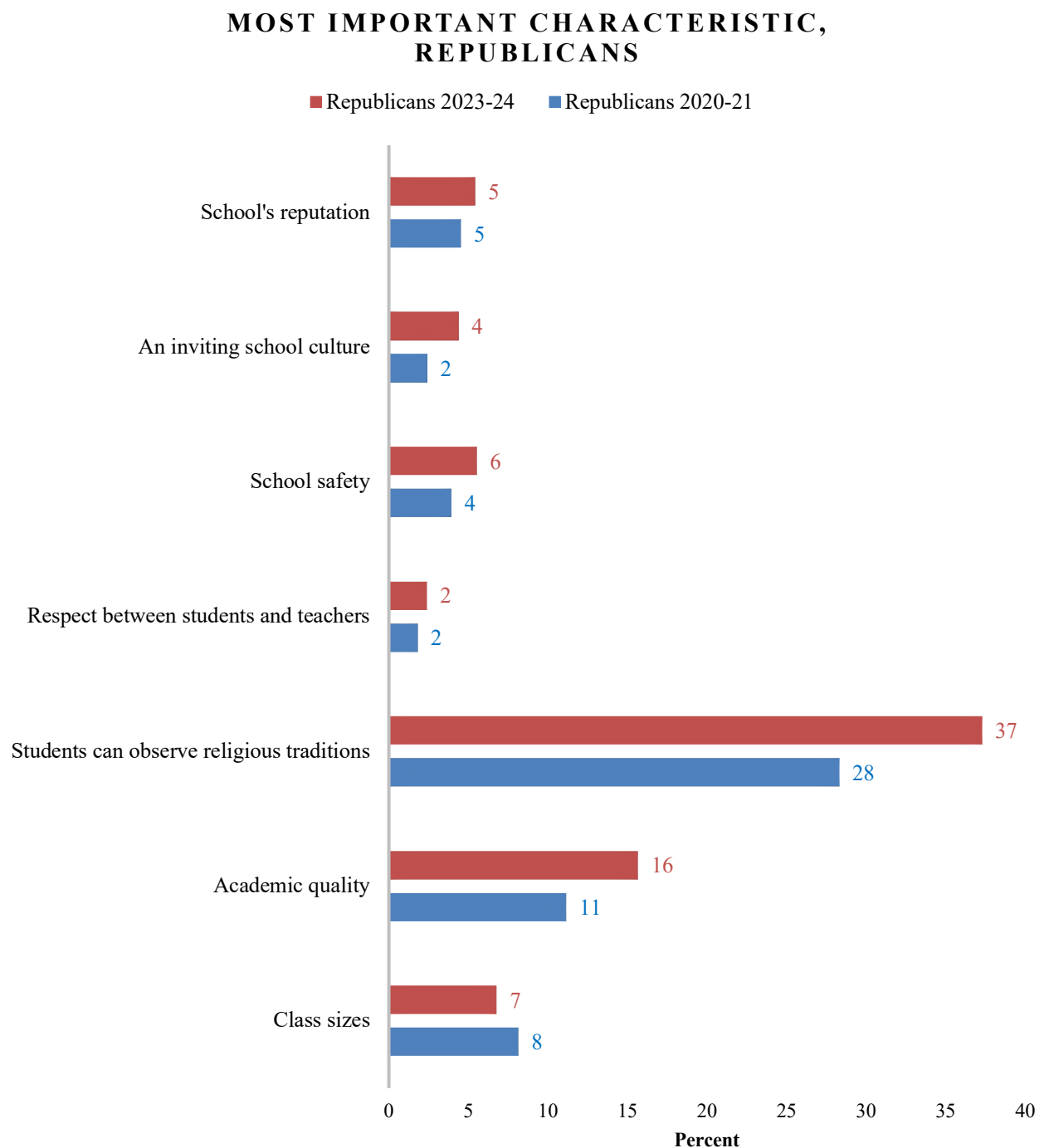
Figure 20. *Comparison of Most Important School Characteristic, as Rated by First-Time Applicants (Democrats), 2020-21 and 2023-24*



For Republicans, academic quality also grew in importance between 2020-21 and 2023-24, climbing five points from 11 to 16% (Figure 21). A key difference between Democrats and

Republicans, however, is the importance assigned to students being able to observe religious traditions. In 2020-21, 28% of Republicans in our sample selected this as the most important school characteristic. By 2023-24, that figure had climbed nine points to 37%.

Figure 21. *Comparison of Most Important School Characteristic, as Rated by First-Time Applicants (Republicans), 2020-21 and 2023-24*



Comfort with Subjects Taught in their Child's School

In the next set of questions, we asked parents to rate their comfort level with various subjects being taught in a school in which they were thinking about enrolling their child (Table 13). This exercise can offer further insight into parents' motivations for school selection.

Majorities of parents were “very comfortable” with a school in which they were thinking about enrolling their child teaching religion (74%) and environmental issues (59%). Forty-six percent of parents were very comfortable with a school teaching about racial inequality. The two subjects with the lowest proportions of parents reporting they felt “very comfortable” were sex education (28%) and gender identity (22%). At the other end of the scale, we observe that a quarter of parents reported feeling “very uncomfortable” about a school in which they were thinking about enrolling their child teaching about sex education and over half (53%) of parents reported feeling “very uncomfortable” about a school teaching about gender identity.

Table 13.

Percent Very Comfortable or Somewhat Comfortable with Subject being Taught in a School in Which They Were Thinking about Enrolling their Child

<i>Panel A: All Years, All Responses</i>				
	Very Comfortable	Somewhat Comfortable	Somewhat Uncomfortable	Very Uncomfortable
Religion	74	18	4	4
Environmental Issues	59	29	8	4
Racial Inequality	46	28	12	14
Sex Education	28	29	18	25
Gender Identity	22	13	11	53

<i>Panel B: Percent Very Comfortable or Somewhat Comfortable Over Time</i>					
	All Years	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Religion	92	91	93	92	92
Environmental Issues	88	86	87	88	89
Racial Inequality	73	72	71	74	75
Sex Education	57	58	55	56	58
Gender Identity	36	37	33	35	37

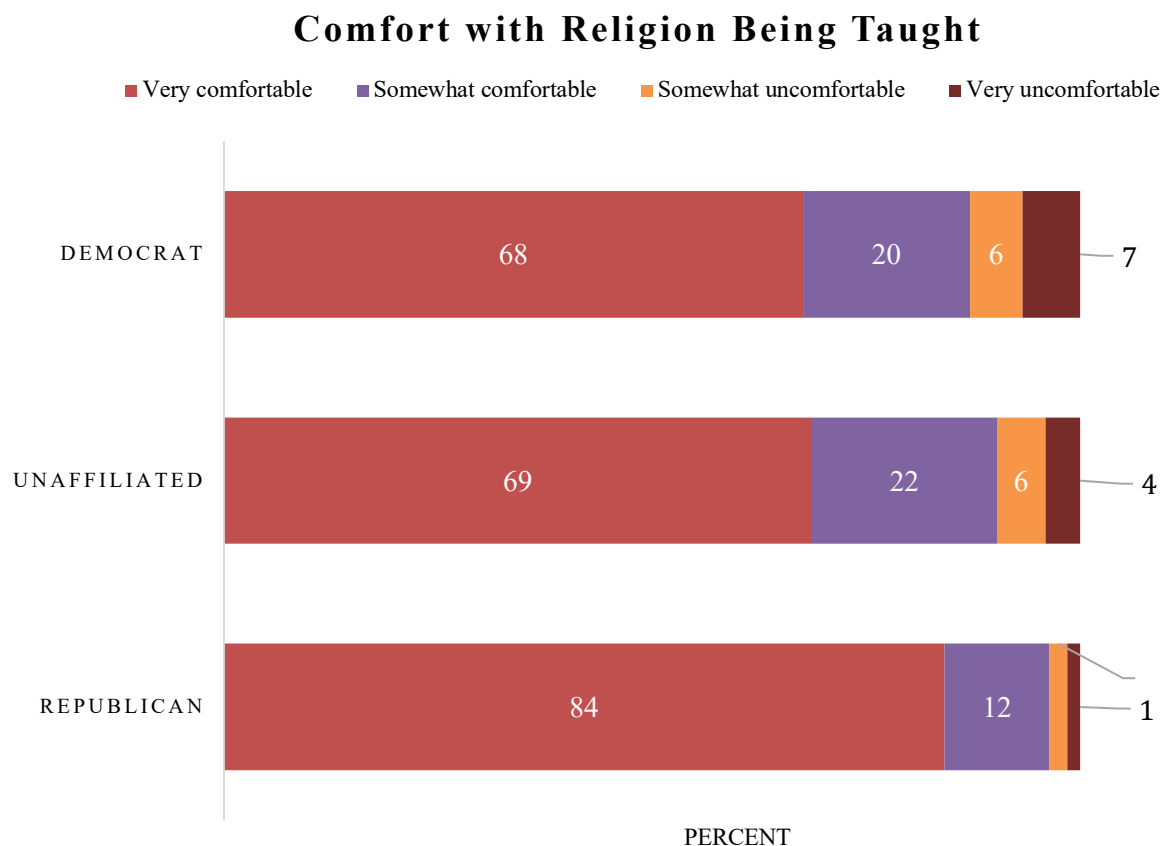
In Panel B of Table 13, we combine the “very comfortable” and “somewhat comfortable” responses into a single metric. Pooling all years of data, we see that almost all parents (92%) reported feeling very or somewhat comfortable with religion being taught, 88% reported feeling “very” or “somewhat comfortable” with environmental issues being taught, 73% reported feeling “very” or “somewhat comfortable” with racial inequality being taught, 57% reported feeling “very” or “somewhat comfortable” with sex education being taught, and 36% reported feeling “very” or “somewhat comfortable” with gender identity being taught in a school in which they

were thinking about enrolling their child. These percentages do not vary much by year, indicating consistency in comfort levels with these subjects by application cohort.

We can also examine responses by political affiliation. Republicans are the most comfortable with religion being taught (Figure 22), with 84% indicating they felt “very comfortable,” compared to 68% of Democrats and 69% of Unaffiliated voters.

Figure 22.

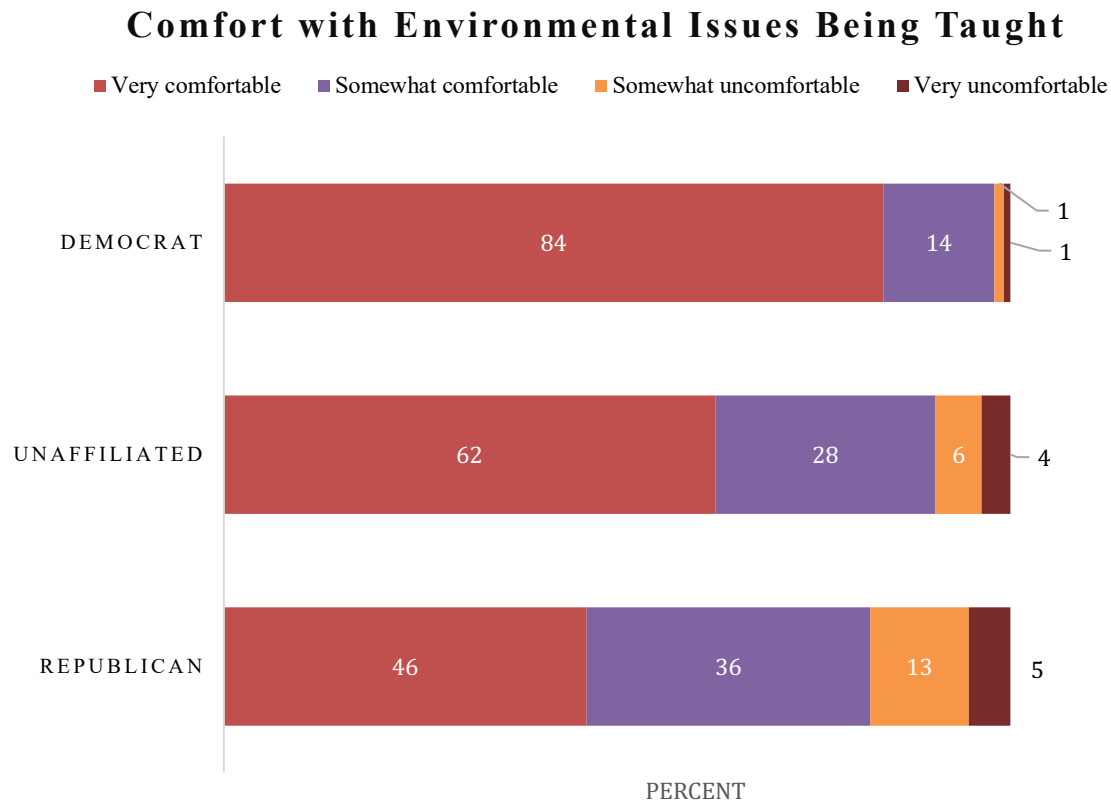
Respondents' Comfort Level with Religion Being Taught at a School in Which They Were Thinking about Enrolling their Child



Looking next at environmental issues (Figure 23), we see that 84% of Democrats reported feeling “very comfortable” with this subject, compared to 46% of Republicans and 62% of Unaffiliated voters.

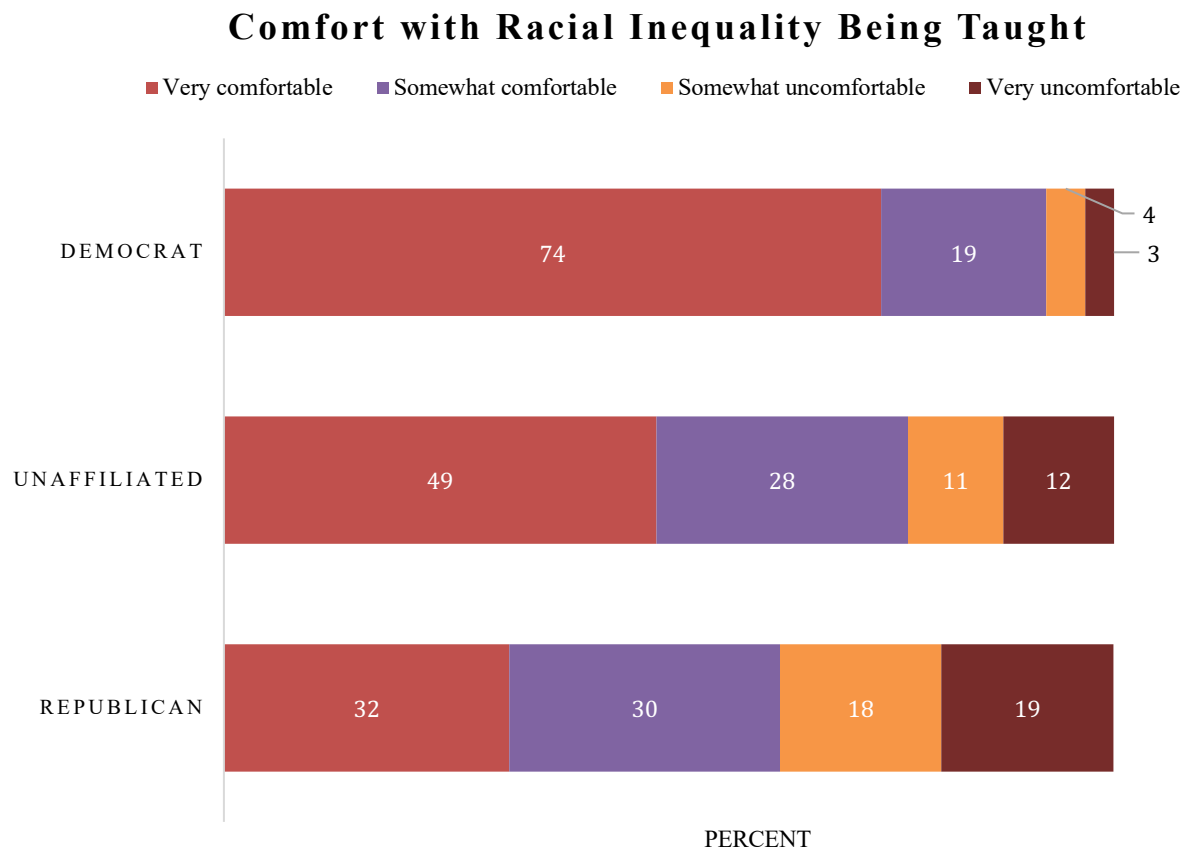
Figure 23.

Respondents' Comfort Level with Environmental Issues Being Taught at a School in Which They Were Thinking about Enrolling their Child



Next, we asked about racial inequality, finding that most Democrats (74%) reported feeling “very comfortable” with this topic being taught a school in which they were thinking about enrolling their child. By comparison, just 32% of Republicans and 49% of Unaffiliated voters felt “very comfortable” with this topic (Figure 24.).

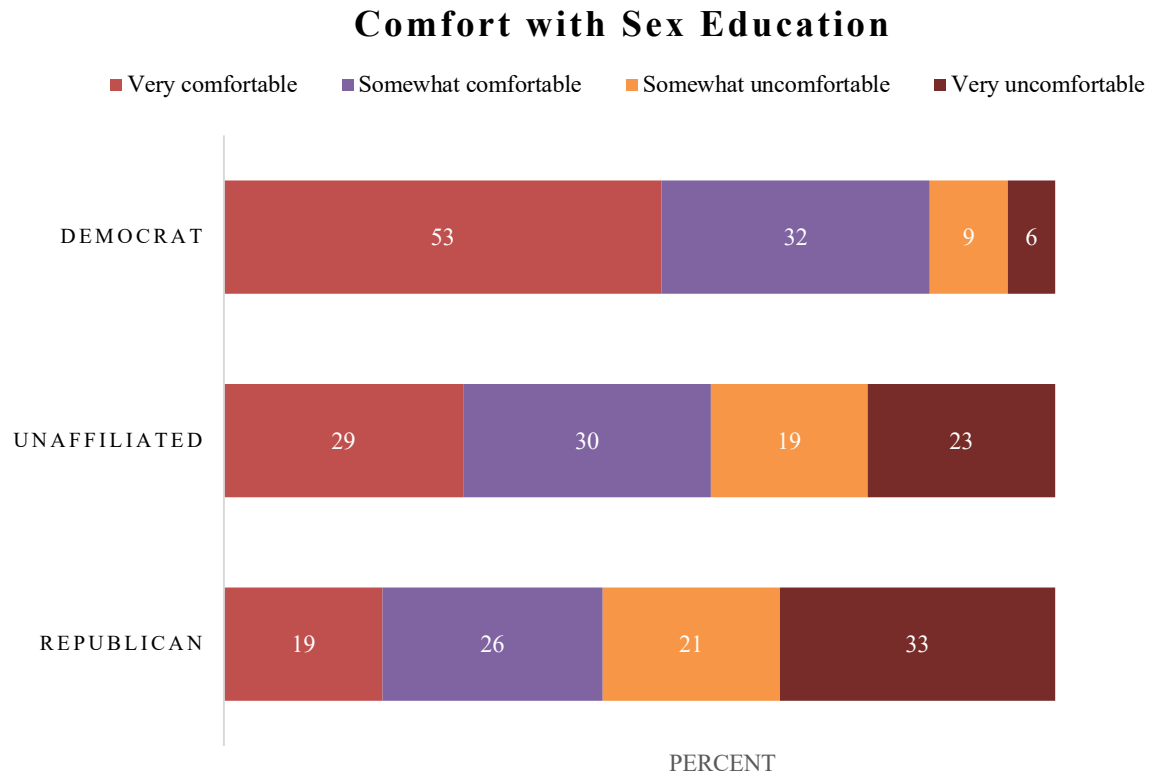
Figure 24.
Respondents' Comfort Level with Racial Inequality Being Taught at a School in Which They Were Thinking about Enrolling their Child



Next, we asked about comfort with sex education (Figure 25). Slightly more than half of Democrats (53%) reported feeling “very comfortable” with this subject, compared to 29% of Unaffiliated voters and 19% of Republicans.

Figure 25.

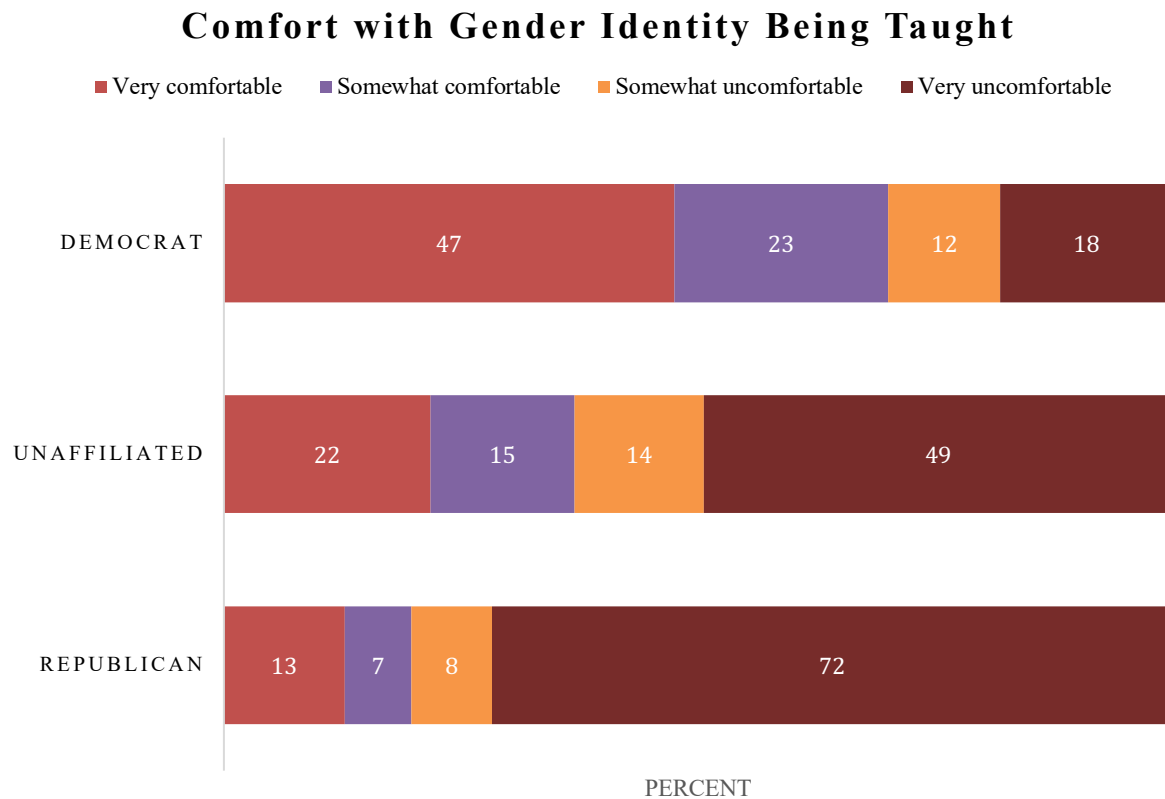
Respondents' Comfort Level with Sex Education Being Taught at a School in Which They Were Thinking about Enrolling their Child



The final subject we asked about is gender identity. Slightly less than half of Democrats (47%) reported feeling “very comfortable” with this topic, compared to 22% of Unaffiliated voters and 13% of Republicans. Of all the subjects examined, this is the one that stands out among Republicans for having the highest percentage of respondents (72%) report feeling “very uncomfortable” with this subject being taught at a school in which they were thinking about enrolling their child.

Figure 26.

Respondents' Comfort Level with Gender Identity Being Taught at a School in Which They Were Thinking about Enrolling their Child



Discussion

As the Opportunity Scholarship (OS) program has expanded, the demographic composition of its applicants has grown more diverse. In the most recent year of application data, half of all applicants identified as white, while 23% were Black and 14% were Hispanic—a notable increase from just 7% Hispanic applicants in the program’s first year. This evolution suggests that awareness and accessibility of the program have broadened across different racial and ethnic communities. In addition, the program continues to attract a high number of applicants from economically and geographically disadvantaged areas: 38% of applicants reside in poor counties and 22% come from rural counties. These figures have remained stable over time, underscoring the OS program’s role in reaching families with fewer educational options. Notably, elementary grades (K–5) continue to dominate application submissions, comprising two-thirds of all applications in 2022–23, which may reflect families’ desire to set strong educational foundations early.

Financial data from applicants further reveal that the OS program is serving families who are often well below the maximum income threshold for eligibility. This significant gap between reported income and the eligibility cap indicates that, even as income thresholds have risen, the program remains especially attractive to low-income households. While this income gap has narrowed somewhat over time for families of four or five, other family types—such as single-parent households and larger families—remain considerably more disadvantaged than what program guidelines require for participation. These patterns suggest that the OS program is not just technically available to low- and moderate-income families but is actively serving a population with substantial financial need. This has important implications for how the program might continue to prioritize and support the most economically vulnerable families as it grows. The survey findings offer a comprehensive view into families’ experiences with the Opportunity Scholarship (OS) program, revealing strong patterns of satisfaction among participants. One of the most consistent findings is the marked improvement in how families rated their child’s current OS-supported private school compared to their previous school. While just 33% of respondents assigned their previous school an “A” grade, over 76% awarded that top rating to their current school. Satisfaction extended across all evaluated dimensions, including teacher quality, student behavior, and emotional and social development, with the largest gains observed in social development. These differences suggest that the OS program is helping families access educational environments that better meet their children’s academic and developmental needs.

Despite these positive experiences, the cost of private schooling remains a significant factor for OS families. Although the scholarship covered a substantial portion of tuition for many, nearly 89% of families reported paying out-of-pocket for additional expenses. Transportation, uniforms, field trips, and extracurricular activities were among the most common costs shouldered by families. While some received supplementary aid from schools, churches, or programs like ESA+, most families did not report additional financial support beyond the OS itself. This highlights a gap between the scholarship’s value and the full cost of participation in private education, which could present access barriers for lower-income families.

In terms of school selection motivations, parents consistently identified religious instruction and academic quality as top reasons for applying to the OS program. Across all survey years, the leading reason for families departing the public system was the absence of religious instruction in assigned public schools, followed closely by a desire for a more academically enriching environment. A significant portion of parents also cited dissatisfaction with the curriculum offered in public schools. These motivations remained stable over time and aligned closely with the characteristics families valued most when selecting a school—namely, small class sizes, academic rigor, and the ability to observe religious traditions.

Political affiliation shaped these motivations in important ways. Republican parents were far more likely than Democrats to cite religious instruction and disagreements with public school curricula as primary drivers of their decision to apply. For example, in 2023–24, over 37% of Republican parents reported that the ability for students to observe religious traditions was the most important reason for selecting a school, compared to just 7% of Democrats. Meanwhile, Democrats were more likely to prioritize academic enrichment and services for students with disabilities. Differences in comfort levels with school subjects—such as gender identity and sex education—further underscored the role of political identity in shaping parents’ educational preferences.

Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic had a measurable, though declining, impact on families’ decisions to apply for an Opportunity Scholarship. In 2020–21, 44% of first-time applicants reported that pandemic-related factors influenced their decision, with a strong preference for in-person learning being the most cited reason. While this influence decreased in subsequent years, especially as schools returned to in-person instruction, the pandemic initially acted as a powerful catalyst for many families considering educational alternatives. These findings collectively underscore the interplay between educational satisfaction, cost, family values, and external events in shaping school choice decisions among OS participants.

Recommendations

The goal of this research was to shed light on student experiences during the peak pandemic years, when many schools were operating remotely, and during the reopening and academic recovery and re-engagement phase. Through our applicant surveys, we heard first-hand from parents about reasons for applying to the Opportunity Scholarship program, their experiences in the program and why they have or have not returned to the public school system. By documenting families’ exit from the public school system, we learned more about the practices and experiences that parents say are attractive to them when choosing a school environment for their child. This information can shed light on strategies for improvement that could be undertaken by both schooling sectors.

Based on the findings documented in this report, we offer the following recommendations:

- Share these findings with public school leaders to support formative improvement, helping them understand which school characteristics families value most and how their schools might better align with these priorities.

- Spread awareness about the OS program: The patterns in household income among applicants, which show a gap between applicants' reported income and the maximum possible income they could report while maintaining eligibility for the voucher program, leads us to suggest that the state could take additional steps to spread awareness of the program.
- Improve data collection and commit to ongoing program evaluation. The pandemic initially played a major role in application decisions, but its influence declined over time, illustrating how motivations shift with context. We recommend continuing annual surveys of OS participants to monitor evolving reasons for participation, satisfaction levels, and financial burden. Use this data to adapt the program over time and respond to emergent trends.
 - In particular, we recommend administering another wave of applicant surveys: Given recent legislative changes to the program, such as the Current Operations Act of 2023, which expands eligibility to families of any income, including those already attending private schools, and House Bill 10 (November 2024), which significantly expands funding for the program, we recommend another wave of applicant surveys. This would update our knowledge about the reasons why *newly eligible* families applied to the OS program and why they subsequently did or did not use the scholarship. Such results could be compared with our findings from earlier cohorts, documented here.
- Continue targeted outreach to underserved communities: The persistent participation of families from poor and rural counties, highlight the OS program's appeal across disadvantaged communities.

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Appendix A

Applicant Survey

Background Information

Q1.1 *Welcome and solicitation of informed consent.*

Q2.1 To start, we want to understand a little more about your background as it relates to the Opportunity Scholarship Program.

Q2.2 Our records indicate that you FIRST applied for the Opportunity Scholarship for the 2020-21 school year. Is this correct?

Q2.3 When did you FIRST apply for the Opportunity Scholarship for your child(ren)?

Q2.4 For how many of your children did you APPLY for an Opportunity Scholarship that year?

Q2.5a How many of your children were then awarded an Opportunity Scholarship and used it to ATTEND a private school in the [relevant dates] school year?

Q3.1 For the rest of this survey, we would like you to think about your YOUNGEST/OLDEST (*selection is randomly determined*) child for who you applied for an Opportunity Scholarship in the 2020-21 school year. Enter the child's first name, nickname, or initials:

Q4.1 Did [child's name] use an Opportunity Scholarship to attend a private school in 2020-21?

- Yes
- No, but [child's name] used an Opportunity Scholarship in a subsequent year
- No, [child's name] has never used an Opportunity Scholarship

Q4.2a Specifically, what type of school did [child's name] attend during the [relevant dates] school year? [display if answer to Q4.1 was no]

- Traditional public school that was assigned (sometimes called your "base school")
- District-run public school that we chose (e.g., magnet school or early college)
- Charter school
- Private school (religious or parochial)
- Private school (non-religious)
- Public virtual school
- Private virtual school
- Homeschool
- Other (please specify)

Q4.2b Specifically, what type of school did [child's name] attend during the [relevant dates] school year? [display if answer to Q4.1 was yes]

- Private school (religious or parochial)
- Private school (non-religious)

- Private virtual school

Q4.3 What type of school did [child's name] attend in the year immediately PRIOR TO the [relevant dates] school year?

- Traditional public school that was assigned (sometimes called your "base school")
- District-run public school that we chose (e.g., magnet school or early college)
- Charter school
- Private school (religious or parochial)
- Private school (non-religious)
- Public virtual school
- Private virtual school
- Homeschool
- Other (please specify)

Q4.4 What type of school does [child's name] CURRENTLY attend?

- Traditional public school that was assigned (sometimes called your "base school")
- District-run public school that we chose (e.g., magnet school or early college)
- Charter school
- Private school (religious or parochial)
- Private school (non-religious)
- Public virtual school
- Private virtual school
- Homeschool
- Other (please specify)

Q4.5 What is the name of the school [child's name] is currently attending?

Q4.6 Is [child's name] a boy or a girl?

Q4.7 Does [child's name]...

	Yes	No
Have a learning, physical, or developmental disability?		
Struggle with academic learning?		
Demonstrate advanced academic ability for their age?		
Have a primary language other than English?		

Q4.8 What grade will [child's name] be in in fall [relevant date]?

Q4.9 Was [child's name] ever enrolled in a traditional public school?

Reasons for Applying to the OSP

Q5.1 Why did you apply for an Opportunity Scholarship for [child's name]? Mark all that apply. [child's name] 's assigned public school:

- Did not offer any or enough in-person learning because of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions

- Required my child to wear a mask due to the COVID-19 virus
- Did not require my child to wear a mask due to the COVID-19 virus
- Was far from home or hard to get to
- Was not academically enriching enough for my child
- Was too academically difficult for my child
- Did not provide any or enough before- or after-school care
- Did not offer enough social or emotional support
- Did not offer a sport or extra-curricular activity that my child wanted
- Did not provide the right level of services for my child's physical, emotional, or learning disability
- Did not provide religious instruction
- Provided instruction (or curriculum) I did not approve of
- Asked my child to leave or expelled my child
- Was not strict enough with my child
- Was overly strict with my child
- Led to my child feeling socially isolated due to remote learning
- Did not offer remote or hybrid learning options
- Did not fit well with my work schedule due to remote learning
- Was not where my child's friends attended school
- Held my child back a grade, and I disagreed with the school's decision
- Had students who I did not want my child to become friends with
- Had a teacher or school administrator who treated my child disrespectfully
- Was a place where my child experienced bullying, harassment, or verbal or physical abuse
- Other (Please explain)

Q5.2 What is the PRIMARY reason that you applied for an Opportunity Scholarship for [child's name]?

Q5.3 Did the COVID-19 virus outbreak that started in the spring of 2020 influence your decision to apply for the Opportunity Scholarship Program? Mark all that apply.

- Yes, my child preferred in-person schooling
- Yes, my work requirements rely on in-person schooling for my child
- Yes, I disagreed with my assigned public school's masking requirements
- Yes, my assigned public school had too many disruptions due to COVID-19 quarantines
- Yes, my assigned public school only had remote learning options
- Yes, for another reason. Please specify:
- No, the COVID-19 virus outbreak did not influence my decision to apply for the Opportunity Scholarship program

Q5.4 To how many private schools did you apply for [child's name] for the [relevant date] school year?

Q5.5 How many of the private schools you applied for offered [child's name] admission for the 2020-21 school year?

Q5.6 Did you also apply to charter or magnet schools in the [relevant date] school year?

Q5.7 What was your first choice school for [child's name] for the [relevant date] school year?

- Traditional public school that was assigned (sometimes called your "base school")
- District-run public school that we chose (e.g., magnet school or early college)
- Charter school
- Private school (religious or parochial)
- Private school (non-religious)
- Public virtual school
- Private virtual school
- Homeschool
- Other (please specify)

Q5.8 What are the reasons that this was your first choice for [child's name] for the [relevant date] school year? Mark all that apply.

- Location
- School safety
- Class sizes
- An inviting school culture
- Students can observe religious traditions
- Respect between students and teachers
- Pedagogical style (e.g., Montessori, hands-on learning, mixed-grade classrooms, etc.)
- Academic quality
- Offered in-person learning
- Offered virtual or hybrid learning
- Had COVID-19 vaccination requirements
- Did not have COVID-19 vaccination requirements
- Had COVID-19 masking requirements
- Did not have COVID-19 masking requirements
- Teachers keep parents informed about a student's progress
- Approach to discipline
- Parent involvement
- Sports, extra-curricular activities or other before/after school programming offered
- Reputation of the school
- The racial composition of the students at that school
- Services for students who struggle academically
- Services for students who struggle with behavioral or emotional issues
- Affordability
- The school requires student uniforms
- The peer group my child would be exposed to
- The type of coursework my child would have available to them (e.g., foreign language instruction)

- The educational resources my child would have available to them (e.g., library books, technology, and labs)
- Overall teacher quality
- The school principal
- The school is accredited
- Other (Please specify)

Q5.9 What was the most important reason that this school was your first choice [child's name] for the [relevant date] school year?

Experiences in the Program

Q6.1 How would you grade the private school [child's name] attended with an Opportunity Scholarship? (A - Excellent, B – Good, C- Average, D- Below Average, F- Failing)

- Condition of classrooms and other spaces, such as library, computers, or science labs
- School leadership
- Academic quality
- Teachers
- Student behavior
- School culture
- Safety
- The school's response to the pandemic
- The breadth of academic offerings
- Emotional development/well-being
- Social development/well-being

Q6.2 How would you grade the school [child's name] attended prior to using an Opportunity Scholarship? (A - Excellent, B – Good, C- Average, D- Below Average, F- Failing)

- Condition of classrooms and other spaces, such as library, computers, or science labs
- School leadership
- Academic quality
- Teachers
- Student behavior
- School culture
- Safety
- The school's response to the pandemic
- The breadth of academic offerings
- Emotional development/well-being
- Social development/well-being

Q6.3 Did you receive extra scholarships in [relevant date] from your private school, a church, or another organization to help pay for any part of [child's name]'s education cost? Mark all that apply.

- Yes, for private school tuition and fees

- Yes, for school uniforms
- Yes, for transportation to and from school
- Yes, for summer school
- Yes, for sports and other extra-curricular activities
- Yes, for tutoring
- Yes, for textbooks and other school supplies
- Yes, for field trip fees
- No, I did not receive any extra scholarships
- Other (Please specify)

Q6.4 Did you or your family personally cover any tuition costs or other school expenses in [relevant date] for [child's name] to attend private school? Mark all that apply.

- Yes, for private school tuition and fees
- Yes, for school uniforms
- Yes, for transportation to and from school
- Yes, for summer school
- Yes, for sports and other extra-curricular activities
- Yes, for tutoring
- Yes, for textbooks and other school supplies
- Yes, for field trip fees
- No, I did not personally cover any tuition costs or other school expenses
- Other (Please specify)

Q6.5 About how much, in total, did you or your family personally have to pay for [child's name] to attend a private school in the [relevant date] school year? (Consider costs like school tuition or fees, transportation, school uniforms, textbooks, or school supplies, and sports/activity or field trip fees.) Please enter your best estimate and round to the nearest dollar.

Q7.1 In thinking about the public schools in your area, what grade would you give them? (A - Excellent, B – Good, C- Average, D- Below Average, F- Failing)

Q7.2 There are many states around the country that are considering school choice programs like the Opportunity Scholarship Program. Some people support these programs, and some people

oppose them. Do you support or oppose other states adopting programs like the Opportunity Scholarship Program?

Q7.3 Parents have different opinions about what their children should be taught in school. To what extent would you be comfortable with the following subjects being taught in a school that you were thinking about sending [child's name] to?

	Very Comfortable	Somewhat Comfortable	Somewhat Uncomfortable	Very Uncomfortable
Religion				
Racial Inequality				
Environmental Issues				
Sex Education				
Gender Identity				

Demographic Characteristics

Q12.1 What is your relationship to [child's name]?

- Mother
- Father
- Adult sibling
- Aunt/Uncle
- Grandparent
- Other family member
- Guardian who is not a family member (e.g., foster parent)
- Other (please specify):

Q12.2 How many adults (age 18 or older) are living in your household, as of today?

Q12.3 How many children (under age 18) are living in your household, as of today?

Q12.4 In what county do you reside?

Q12.5 What is the HIGHEST level of education that you have completed as of today?

- Some high school
- GED or high school diploma
- Some college
- A two-year college degree (Associate's degree)
- A four-year college degree (Bachelor's degree)
- A master's, doctoral, or other advanced degree

Q12.6 What is the racial/ethnic makeup of your family? Mark all that apply.

- Black or African-American
- Hispanic or Latino/a
- White
- Asian
- American Indian
- Other (please specify)

Q12.7 What is the main language spoken in your home?

- English
- Spanish
- English and Spanish equally
- Another language (please specify)
- English and another language equally (please specify other language)

Q12.8 What is your political affiliation?

- Democrat
- Republican
- Unaffiliated
- Other (please specify)

Q12.9 Please estimate your total household income from all sources. Please include all income such as income from work, investments, and alimony.

- Less than \$25,000 per year
- \$25,000-\$49,999
- \$50,000-\$74,999
- \$75,000-\$99,999
- \$100,000-\$124,999
- \$125,000-\$149,999
- \$150,000 or more

Q12.10 What is your religious affiliation, if any?

- No religious affiliation
- Agnostic
- Atheist
- Buddhist
- Christian-Catholic
- Christian-Orthodox (e.g., Greek, Russian, etc.)
- Christian-Protestant (e.g., Baptist, Episcopalian, Lutheran, Methodist, Nondenominational, etc.)
- Hindu
- Jewish
- Latter-day Saint/Mormon
- Muslim
- Religious/spiritual but unaffiliated
- Other (please specify)

Q12.11 What is your current zip code?

Q12.13 What is your marital status?

- Married
- Not married, but living with a partner
- Never married
- Divorced
- Separated
- Widowed

Q12.14 Have you ever worked in a public school? If so, in what capacity? (mark all that apply)

- Yes, as a public school administrator
- Yes, as a public school teacher
- Yes, as a public school staff member
- Yes, as a public school sports coach
- No, I have not worked in a public school

[End]

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