Arianna Prothero
Staff writer, *Education Week*

Follow Arianna on Twitter: @AriannaProthero
Guiding Parents Through School Choice

Expert Presenters:

Brian Eschbacher, director of planning and enrollment services, Denver Public Schools

Betheny Gross, senior research analyst and research director, Center for Reinventing Public Education, University of Washington

Related Articles

Parents Confront Obstacles as School Choice Expands
Often Foes, Some Districts and Charters Forge Partnerships
An on-demand archive of this webinar will be available at www.edweek.org/go/webinar in less than 24 hrs.
Parents’ Experience with Public School Choice
Learning from Parents in Eight High Choice Cities
Charter sector growing nationwide

In some cities, choice goes mainstream

- DC: 41% vouchers
- Detroit: 34% vouchers
- New Orleans: 76% vouchers
Policy debates often focus on “horse race”

Charters not outperforming nation’s traditional public schools, report says

By Lyndsey Layton  June 25, 2013

The nation’s public charter schools are growing more effective but most don’t produce better academic results when compared with traditional public schools, according to a report released Tuesday.
Consultants Steer Parents Through Maze of School Choice

As public K-12 options expand, parents pay for guidance

By Arianna Prothero

The rapid expansion of charter schools and other public school options is fueling growth in another industry: education consulting.
What challenges and opportunities do parents face in high-choice cities today?
Parent surveys in eight cities

- Baltimore
- Cleveland
- Denver
- Detroit
- Indianapolis
- New Orleans
- Philadelphia
- Washington, DC
Challenges parents face in making choices

• Information and transportation are problems for about a quarter of parents

• Confusion over eligibility requirements the most-cited problem
Information a problem for less than 1 in 4

“I was able to get the information I needed to choose the best school for my child”
Transportation a problem for about 1 in 4

“Finding transportation for my child made choosing a school difficult…”
Most common problem: Eligibility confusion

“Did understanding which schools your child was eligible to attend make choosing a school difficult?”
Eligibility confusion bigger issue for parents with students in special education

“Did understanding which schools your child was eligible to attend make choosing a school difficult?”

Predicted probability of parents agreeing that understanding eligibility made choosing more difficult
Finding “good” schools pose bigger challenges

• Many say finding a school that fits is difficult
  – Especially parents of children with special needs

• About half say they don’t have good option besides current school

• Wide range of outlooks about performance trajectory of cities’ schools
Finding a fit can be difficult

“Available schools weren’t a good fit for my child…”
Fit especially problematic for SPED students

“Available schools weren’t a good fit for my child...”
About half say they don’t have other options

“…if your child couldn’t attend current school, is there another public school currently available to you that you would be just as happy to send him or her to?”
Are city schools getting worse, same, better?
Cities invest in systems to support parents in school choice
Denver Public Schools Choice & Enrollment

District Context Setting & Outreach Plans

May 2015
DPS Perspective on Barriers to “True Choice”

- Confusing application forms / submission dates / requirements
- Entrance requirements for high-performing schools
- Lack of transportation
- Difficulty navigating the process
Increasing Choice through Unified Enrollment Forms

- Launched in 2012
- One Form for every school: district-managed, charter, magnet
- One timeline
- 11 Languages available
- 20% completed online
- Can be dropped off at 150+ locations

### SchoolChoice Form: Kindergarten

**2015-16 School Year**

Form deadline: Friday, January 30, 2015, 4:00 p.m.
Age eligibility: Student must be 5 years old by October 1, 2015

This first round form must be filled out completely. Incomplete SchoolChoice Forms will not be processed. Be sure to initial required pages, and sign and date the last page. A parent/guardian signature is required for processing. Turn in the completed SchoolChoice Form and required documentation by Friday, January 30th at 4 pm via Parent Portal: [http://www.schoolchoice.org](http://www.schoolchoice.org), to your most preferred school or one of three Enrollment Centers:
- Central Office: 5131 S. St. Denver, CO 80251
- Ben Jealous Community Center: 4700 Telluride St. S.W. Denver, CO 80249
- Abraham Lincoln High Library: 2265 S. Federal Blvd., Denver, CO 80225 (forms due January 29th–January 30th, M-F, 8am-4:30pm)

Forms received by mail or fax will not be processed.

**1. STUDENT INFORMATION**

- Student’s Name
- Student’s Primary Home Address:
- Home: [ ] Parent/Guardian [ ] Student
- Birth Date: [mm/dd/yyyy]
- Current Age: [ ] City: [ ] Zip: [ ]

**2. PARENT/GUARDIAN CONTACT INFORMATION**

- Parent/Guardian’s Name
- Relationship to Student
- Primary Contact Phone Number:
- Alternate contact phone:
- Parent/Guardian’s home address:
- In case of an emergency, contact the person above:

**SCHOOL USE ONLY**

- Received by (print name)
- School:
- Date received:
- School Choice Form:
- Data scanned by OCR:
- Data left blank by OCR:
- Has student been involved in a child abuse investigation:
- Has student been a victim of child abuse:
- Student has been arrested:
- Student has been convicted:

[![SchoolChoice Form: Kindergarten](https://example.com/schoolchoice.png)](https://example.com/schoolchoice)
Eliminating Qualification Schools to Provide Accessible Options for All Students in All Neighborhoods

SPF Green/Blue Schools
Transportation: Connecting Students to Choices

- Northwest MS Access Zone
- North Denver Success Express: All Grades
- ES / MS Access Zone
- Far Northeast Success Express: All Grades
- West MS Access Zone
- Southwest MS Access Zone
Elimination of traditional boundaries where families have a right-to-attend a certain school based on their residence.

Introduction of Shared Access Zones require that families participate since there is no longer only one school.

50%+ of the district utilizes shared zones for middle school.
Helping Families Navigate Choice: Outreach

- **160-page enrollment guides** for every transitioning student that contains school information, including their quality indicator score

- **SchoolMatch**, an online tool that provides detailed information on every school and allows for parents to filter by distance, program offerings, etc. SchoolMatch.dpsk12.org

- **City-Wide Expo** at Mile High Stadium with every school participating and 3,000 attendees

- **Regional expos** in each region of the city

- **“Choice Navigators”** assigned to 350 5th grade students responsible for answering families questions and receiving their choice form. Navigators speak a variety of native languages and are matched to families based on language.

- **Classroom incentives**, such as pizza parties for high 5th grade participation

- **Connections** with each 5th grade teacher to help families determine their best options
Case Study: Increased Participation in Southwest Denver

2014: Prior to Zone Outreach Efforts
67% Participation Rate

2015: With Zone Outreach Efforts
92% Participation Rate
Participation Rates in Transition Grades

Participation rates are higher for English Language Learners than Non-ELLs.
Questions?
An on-demand archive of this webinar will be available at www.edweek.org/go/webinar in less than 24 hrs.
Guiding Parents Through School Choice

Required Reading from *Education Week*:

**Spotlight on Parent and Community Involvement**
Increasingly, parent engagement is becoming an important focus for district leaders. In this Spotlight, see how leaders are involving parent groups in district decision-making, how national organizations are introducing the common-core standards to parents, and see how digital tools and social media are playing a role in parent communications.