

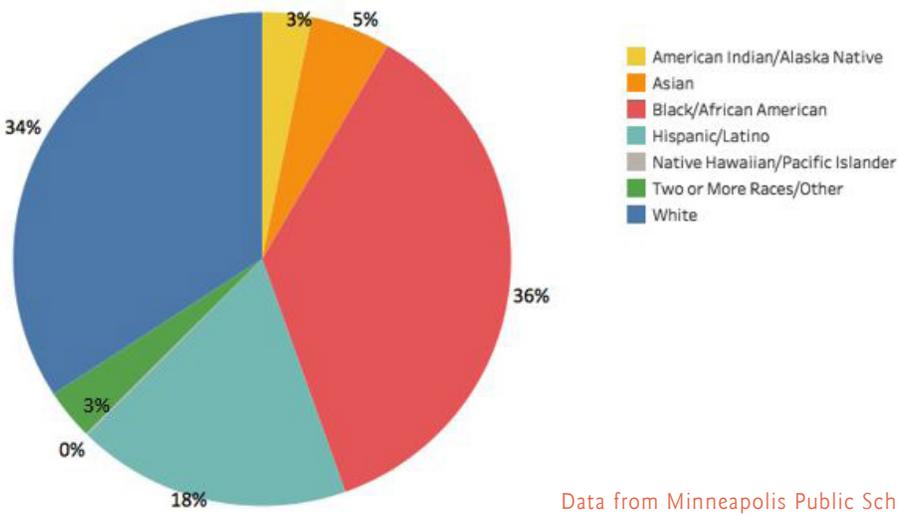
Demographics & Choice

Until the early 1990's children in Minneapolis had basically three options for their K-12 schooling: Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS), parochial schools or private schools. Times have changed dramatically since then, so it is important to understand who is and is not currently attending MPS, where children are attending school and what it may indicate about the future of education in our city. But first a look at MPS.

As the chart below explains, in the 2017-2018 school year 36,357 children attend Minneapolis Public Schools, including 1,000 students coming from outside the district. Of that number nearly 60% receive free or reduced-price lunch, nearly 22% are English Language Learners (ELL), 17% are receiving special education services (SPED) and 3% are homeless. The homeless figure does not include those who are "highly mobile" and therefore housing insecure. That accounts for at least another 7%.



Students in MPS identify themselves according to the following categories: 36% are African American, 34% are White, 18% are Hispanic/Latino, 5% are Asian American, 5% are American Indian or Native Alaskan, 3% are Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander and 3% identify as bi-racial or other. Children of all ethnicities may be receiving ELL or SPED services or be homeless or highly mobile. For example, African American students in this chart includes young people from East Africa who are also learning English.

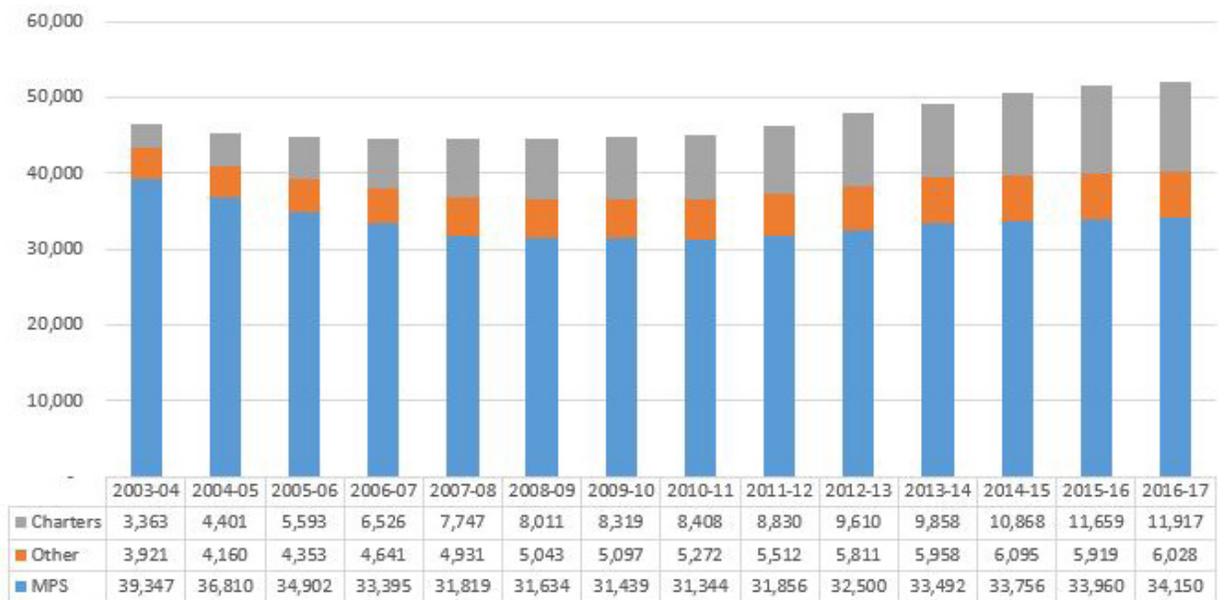


Data from Minneapolis Public Schools

If we consider attendance in MPS over time, we begin to comprehend a complex and challenging set of data. In 1996 there were 48,000 K-12 students who were residents of Minneapolis. Nearly 46,000 of those children attended Minneapolis Public Schools, while just over 2,000 attended private, parochial or suburban schools. With state legislation enabling public charter schools and open enrollment into suburban districts, the population of students in MPS began to shrink, at first gradually and then rather precipitously.

In 2000 with the settlement of a lawsuit brought by the NAACP, low-income Minneapolis student also were given free transportation to attend suburban school districts. This program known as The Choice is Yours transported 2,000 children annually from low-income Minneapolis neighborhoods to surrounding suburban districts. While the program has been discontinued, the large exodus of students from MPS that it promoted continues to this day. The difference is that now families drive their students to other districts.

The chart below tracks the attendance choices of Minneapolis students from 2003-04 to 2016-17. In it we see the range of decisions families are making about where their children will attend school and how those choices have changed over time.



Data from Minnesota Department of Education

In 2003-2004, there were 46,631 school-age children in Minneapolis. 84% of all of them attended MPS, 7% attended a public charter and 8% attended another public option or were home schooled.

By contrast, in 2016-2017 there were 52,095 school-age children in Minneapolis. 66% of them attended MPS, 23% attended public charters and 12% attended other options, mostly surrounding suburban districts (10%). Since 2003 MPS has dramatically been losing “market share”.

Good people can and will debate why this trend is happening, but the facts are irrefutable. MPS is losing students to various charter, private and suburban options because families are exercising their right to choose where their children will attend school. The overwhelming majority choose public options – charter schools or open enrollment into suburban public schools. Enrollment in private options has risen through the years, but only marginally.



Families make these choices for a variety of reasons, and different sub-groups prioritize different things. Some are seeking a school with higher academic standards (real or perceived), a stronger school climate, a school closer to the parent’s work, a more convenient start time, a school with specific services or pedagogy more appropriate to their child, a culturally-specific school or a school with smaller class sizes, better transportation or stronger parental involvement.

Whatever the reason, families are seeking something different for their young person. In some cases, they find schools that are a better fit, that challenge their children academically or meet their specific needs. In other cases,

however, their children do not experience better outcomes or higher satisfaction and thus begins a churn from one school to another. This instability means many students bounce from MPS to charters to the suburbs and back again as families search for a better or more appropriate school. This is a difficult dynamic both for young people and for the schools who serve them.

Finally, in a city that prides itself on its progressive values, we must admit that white families and middle -class families of all races have been exercising choice for several decades. They do so by choosing private schools, moving to the suburbs, moving to areas of the city where there are far fewer children in poverty or by ensuring that their children receive access to more selective programs within MSP. This dynamic is something we rarely talk about because it requires us to talk about difficult issues of race, social class and equity. We also often fail to acknowledge that several schools in Minneapolis are overwhelmingly white in a district that is only 1/3 white. But talk about this we must, if we are to truly understand how demographics have shifted and the role of choice.

While these are complex issues, school choice is here to stay. It is enshrined in state law and is being exercised by large numbers of families. Therefore our collective task is to ensure that all the public choices are high-quality and to uphold the right of every child to receive a great education regardless of their race, gender, zip code or circumstances.

