

**The Power to Choose: Parental Preferences and School Enrollment at
KIPP Nashville's Ewing Park Campuses—KIPP Nashville College Prep
Elementary (KNCPE) & KIPP Nashville College Prep (KNCP)**



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Acknowledgements & Gratitude

Thank you to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Philippians 4:13 reminds me that through Him, all things are possible. He is the source of my strength and my success.

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Executive Summary

KIPP Nashville is a regional charter school program that is a part of a larger, national network of over 200 schools (KIPP Nashville, n.d.). KIPP Nashville educates students from Kindergarten through college graduation, and they empower students and communities to create opportunity-filled lives (KIPP Nashville, n.d.). KIPP has been a part of the Nashville community for 15 years and has experienced much academic success. KIPP Nashville has 3 elementary schools, 3 middle schools and one high school. Ewing Park is a KIPP Nashville campus that is comprised of two KIPP schools: KIPP Nashville College Prep Elementary (KNCPE) and KIPP Nashville College Prep Middle (KNCP). KNCP is KIPP's second middle school in Northeast Nashville, opened in 2013 and educates students in grades five through eight. In the 2017-2018 school year, KNCP students achieved the highest year over year academic growth possible and ranked among the best public middle schools in the city. KNCP outperformed the district and state in Math and Science on the Tennessee State test (TNReady) and was recognized as a 2019 Reward School for posting student growth in the top 5% of all public schools in Tennessee (KIPP Nashville, n.d.). KIPP Nashville College Prep Elementary School (KNCPE) is KIPP's second elementary school in Nashville, and the first elementary school in Northeast Nashville. KNCPE shares a campus with KNCP. In 2020, KNCPE grew to educate Kindergarten through fourth grade making Ewing Park a KIPP Nashville location that offered a complete K-8 pathway for Northeast Nashville families (KIPP Nashville, n.d.).

Despite KIPP Nashville's collective success as a large charter school network, three of its seven schools have experienced and continue to experience student enrollment challenges—which have significantly impacted its regional budget by nearly \$500,000 between 2018-2020. KIPP Nashville has not been able to leverage its relative success to sustain student enrollment. KNCPE and KNCP did not meet its enrollment target during the 2018-19 or 2019-20 school year. Additionally, KNCPE and KNCP has experienced the highest rate of student attrition between school years and within the school year. Since 2018, the Ewing Park campus has struggled to maintain student enrollment and achieve its enrollment

targets. The budgetary impact of Ewing Park's enrollment deficit has negatively impacted the financial health of the KIPP Nashville organization.

Throughout my partnership with KIPP Nashville, I had the opportunity to investigate more deeply why Nashville families are choosing other school options for their students. Current Ewing Park families and prospective Ewing Park families were surveyed to discover their preferences regarding school choice. Compellingly, the preferences that motivated prospective, non-KIPP families to apply to KIPP Nashville are the same reasons why current families ultimately enrolled in Ewing Park: strength of academic program, quality of teachers and location. When prospective families were asked why they ultimately did not choose Ewing Park, the most selected responses were other and location.

Below is a comprehensive list of findings determined from surveying prospecting and current KIPP Nashville families:

- Transportation and special education were selected as "most important" for both prospective and current families.
- The reasons why prospective families applied to Ewing Park and the reasons why current families chose Ewing Park were the same: strength of academic program, quality of teachers, and location.
- 'Other' and 'Location' were the top two reasons why prospective families chose not to send their student to Ewing Park.

Based on the findings above, the recommendations below are critical to the long-term health of KIPP Nashville's operational and financial sustainability:

- Incorporate feedback structures (surveys) in the student recruitment process that gives KIPP Nashville quick and timely insight regarding why families chose to accept or decline their student's seat.
- Incorporate accountability structures that hold school-based leadership staff responsible for applicant and enrollment metrics. Additionally, KIPP Nashville should incorporate incentive and punitive responses when school-based leadership staff achieve or do not achieve recruitment and/or enrollment targets.
- Distribute marketing materials to prospective families that highlight KIPP's academic program, teacher quality and benefits of Ewing Park's location and transportation program.

Introduction & Organizational Context

KIPP, the Knowledge is Power Program, is a non-profit network of 242 college-preparatory, public charter schools that educates students in early childhood, elementary, middle, and high school. KIPP schools are tuition-free, public charter schools open to all students (KIPP Nashville, n.d.). There are 28 KIPP regions across the country—all united by the same mission: a commitment to excellence and a belief that all children can excel in school and develop academic and character strengths to attend college and live choice-filled lives (KIPP Schools, n.d.). Families who are interested in attending KIPP are required to fill out an application, and their students are admitted based upon a lottery (KIPP Schools, n.d.). Supporters and advocates of charter schools believe that charter programs improve public education because of their ability to provide “choice in curriculum, structure and discipline; accountability for educational outcomes and student progress; and autonomy for teachers, parents and administrators” (Renzulli and Evans, 2005, p. 398).

KIPP Nashville is one of KIPP's 28 regional charter school networks. KIPP Nashville is a separate nonprofit that oversees its local KIPP schools and provides schools with shared supportive services, such as: alumni support, teacher training, leadership development, student recruitment and enrollment, community outreach, operations, and data analysis (KIPP Schools, n.d.). Along with its district authorizer (Metro Nashville Public Schools & Tennessee State Board of Education), KIPP Nashville is governed by a local board of directors, led by an executive director, and often partners with neighboring schools and community-based organizations (KIPP Schools, n.d.). In August of 2019, KIPP Nashville began its fifteenth year in Nashville and increased its regional enrollment to 2300 students from kindergarten through twelfth grade. Currently, KIPP Nashville has a total of 7 schools. Similarly, KIPP Nashville College Prep Elementary and KIPP Nashville College Prep Middle operates in the same way—and it is known as KIPP Nashville's Ewing Park Campus.

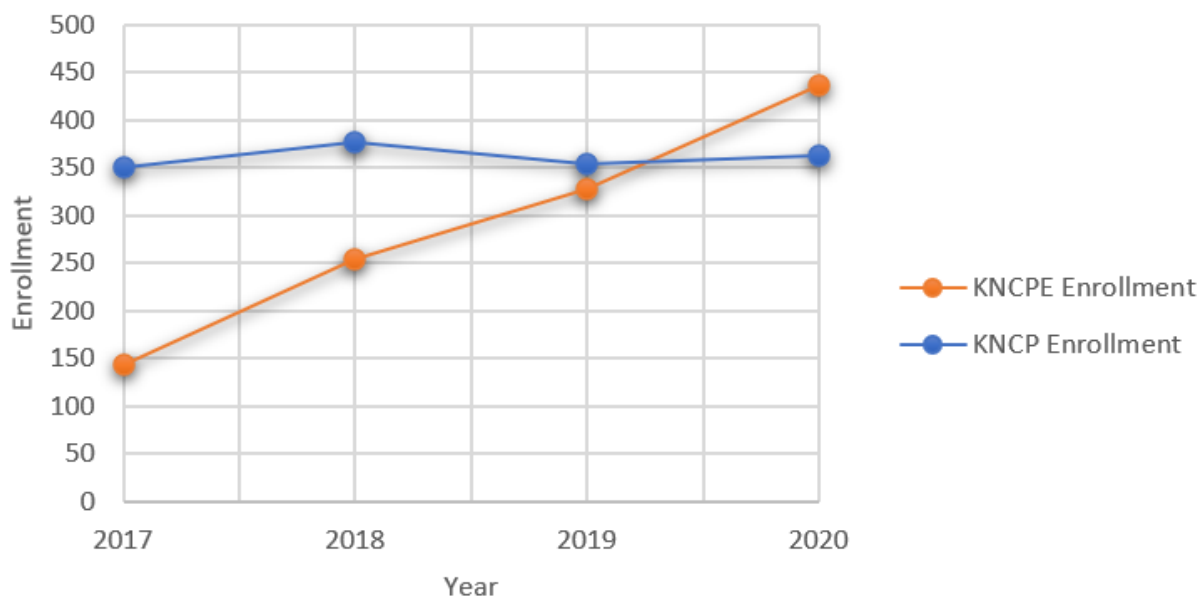
KIPP Nashville College Prep (KNCP), KIPP's second middle school in Northeast Nashville, opened in 2013 and educates students in grades five through eight. During its founding year and subsequent years thereafter, the KIPP community lobbied for an elementary school to feed the middle school—as many families had elementary-aged students and there was not an option for them. KIPP Nashville College Prep Elementary (KNCPE) opened in 2017, and it is KIPP Nashville's second elementary school in Nashville, and the first elementary school in Northeast Nashville. As mentioned before, KNCPE and KNCP share a campus called Ewing Park, and by 2020, KNCPE will grow to educate kindergarten through fourth grade—making the Ewing Park a complete K-8 campus.

Problem of Practice

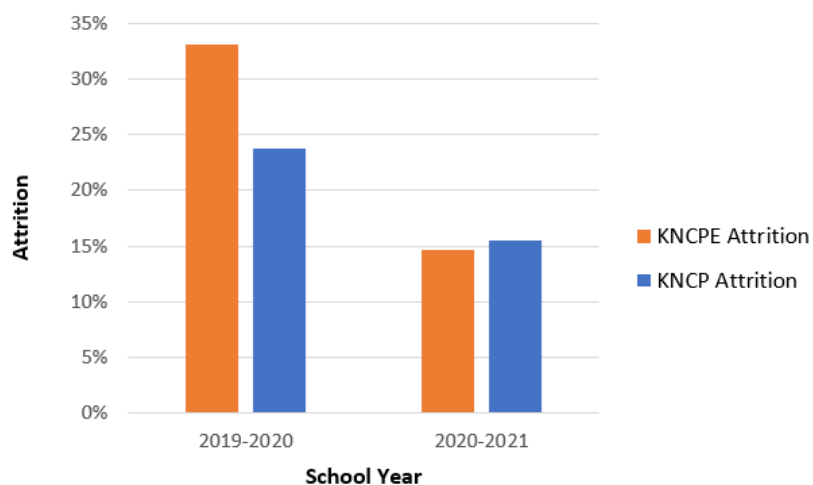
KNCPE and KNCP are in Nashville's most northeastern neighborhood: Whites Creek. KIPP Nashville operates as a neighborhood charter school—meaning most of their student population comes from the neighborhood in which it is located. More than 80% of the student body lives within 5-7 miles of the school—although in Davidson County, you can attend any traditional public or charter school in Nashville if you are accepted. KIPP Nashville currently has an under-enrollment challenge that has adversely impacted its bottom line. Ewing Park's under enrollment challenge dates to the 2018-2019 school year. During the 2018-2019 school year—specifically in quarter 3, KNCP fell short of its enrollment target by 7 students and KNCPE fell short of its enrollment target by 16 students—collectively under enrolled as a campus by 23 students. This is illustrated in Figure 1. KNCPE's 2019-2020 enrollment goal was 335, while KNCP's was 367. According to Figure 1, KNCPE's enrollment was 328 and KNCP's enrollment was 354 for the 2019-2020 school year. During the 2019-2020 school year, KNCPE was under enrolled by 7 students. Similarly, KNCP was under enrolled by 13 students. Collectively, the Ewing Park campus was under enrolled by 20 students during the 2019-2020 school year. Between 2018 and 2020, Ewing Park was under enrolled by 43 students, which has significantly impacted Ewing Park's budget. Between 2018 and 2020, KIPP Nashville experienced a net loss of \$408,500 specifically from

Ewing Park’s enrollment gaps—which made up nearly 75% of KIPP Nashville’s overall financial loss related to enrollment.

Figure 1: Ewing Park (KNCPE & KNCP) Enrollment Data Over Time (2017-2020)



Although Ewing Park experienced relative success with enrollment during the 2020-2021 school year, they also experienced high student attrition (the rate at which students transfer). Appendix I illustrates that both KNCP and KNCPE achieved and exceeded their enrollment target. However, according to Appendix J, KNCPE and KNCP experienced the highest rate of year-to-year attrition—meaning, more students at Ewing Park transferred to another school between the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school year than any other KIPP Nashville school. KNCPE’s attrition rate for the 2020-21 school year was 14.7% and KNCP’s attrition rate was 15.5%. This trend is consistent in previous academic years, which is reflected in Figure 2, Appendix G, H, and J. Despite Ewing Park meeting its enrollment goal during the 2020-21 school year, more students are leaving faster than any other KIPP Nashville school.

Figure 2: Ewing Park (KNCPE & KNCP) Attrition Data Over Time (2018-2020)

Ewing Park is considered a Title I campus—meaning that the school receives federal funds because they have a large concentration of low-income students, such that the school can assist in meeting students’ educational goals. Davidson County (Metropolitan Nashville) has more than 80,000 students (Data.Nashville.gov). Despite a robust student population, Ewing park remains under enrolled and underfunded. Even with Ewing Park’s ability to recruit students from all neighborhoods within Davidson County, the campus has not been able to solve their enrollment problem. This is a problem that has plagued and continues to plague KIPP Nashville’s ability to sustain its model at Ewing Park. Even though KIPP Nashville is a part of the largest national charter network that is considered one of the top performing networks, KIPP Nashville’s Ewing Park campus has not been able to successfully leverage KIPP’s national reputation to achieve and sustain enrollment targets.

Literature Review & Framework

Sustainable student enrollment is vital to a charter school’s economic and organizational performance. It is a metric that drives countless decisions. Charter schools use various techniques to recruit and retain students. From the school’s location to parent preferences, there are a plethora of factors that directly and indirectly impact a school’s enrollment. A major side effect to inadequate

charter school enrollment is negative budget implications. Knowing that every charter school's budget is based on the number of students enrolled, executive school and network leadership must understand recruitment and enrollment as it relates to building an adequate budget to fund the program. This will help inform the enrollment target number for the academic year. Regardless of how developed a charter school program is, it is critically important to have a solid strategy around student recruitment and enrollment (Williams 2018). Failing to meet enrollment targets can be expensive. What is vital to a charter school's enrollment strategy is its ability to access important drivers that greatly impact enrollment. School leadership, quality school experience, vision and school improvement, faculty and staff, parent satisfaction, school reputation, location, competition, and market analysis are all ingredients that make a well-crafted enrollment strategy (Newberry 2012). Beyond budgetary impact, a fully enrolled school can influence the overall student, teacher, and family experience. The literature presented aims to investigate these factors and their relationship to k-12 charter school enrollment.

Despite the number of factors that influence enrollment, charter schools are left with decisions to determine which factor(s) aligns most to their school's priorities and capacity. In other words, charter schools must determine the factors that have the highest leverage on their school community. In a study that analyzed charter school location and its relative distribution in various communities, Glomm, Harris, and Lo (2005) found that that parents do not live in districts with schools that reflect their preferences. Glomm, Harris, and Lo (2005) based their argument on the premise that charter schools can leverage the demand for stronger and more aligned options for parents in diverse communities. The emergence of charter schools empowers parents to choose schools that encapsulate their preferences.

Charter schools increase parent choice, inspire pedagogical innovation, and challenge regular public schools through market competition (Hanushek, et al., 2006). Hanushek et al. (2006) looked to school quality as one of the primary reasons why parents leave charter schools. Despite the plethora of reasons why parents choose charter schools over public and private school options, parents—

particularly low-income parents, are subjected to lower quality options (Hanushek, et al., 2006). Parents are the key drivers regarding whether students stay enrolled in their respective program. According to Hanushek, et al. (2006), charter school survival is predicated upon its ability to attract and retain students. The ways in which charter school programs attract students and parents will be essential in its ability to sustain enrollment overtime.

Over the last 20 years, the educational community has experienced a strong wind of change that fosters increased parental choice and empowerment. Now, more than ever, parents can determine where their student will go to school. Prior to the charter school movement, district zoning and socioeconomic status were largely responsible for determining where students spent their educational experience. With the implementation of No Child Left Behind, parents can prevent their children from being trapped in schools in need of improvement. Parents are equipped with new choices that allow them to choose where to send their child. Bosetti (2004) investigated how parents choose elementary schools by presenting different perspectives and rationalities that parents consider when selecting schools. Bosetti (2004) anchored her research in rational choice theory. Rational choice theory empowers families to maximize their decision by anchoring it in the preferences they value most—which families would then be able to leverage in holding schools accountable (Bosetti, 2004). Ultimately, parents want the best for their children, and parents are now operating in an environment where they are empowered to choose their student's educational journey and destiny. Bosetti (2004) acknowledges market-based approaches to charter school enrollment by arguing that market theory promotes competition across charter networks and school districts. Families can leverage the market theory approach by encouraging schools to respond to their needs, interests, and preferences. Market-based strategies increase school competition, and thus result in improved school effectiveness, productivity, and service, leading to higher quality education (Levin, 2002).

Rational choice theory informs most school choice plans (Bosetti, 2004). School choice policy and systems rely on the rational choice theory to willfully engage parents to determine the best options for their families (Olson and Hendry, 2012). Bosetti (2004) investigated not only the factors that lead families to deciding about their students' school, but also the processes that aid families in discovering the best option for them. Parents are the most important advocates for their student's learning experience. Bosetti (2004) claimed that if schools are responsive to the needs and preferences of families, then schools will be able to attract more families such that they are able to meet their enrollment goal and all associated per pupil funding. Families must hold schools accountable for supporting their needs and preferences. Bosetti's (2004) methods are consistent with other studies showing how families gain attraction to their student's school. Bosetti (2004) found that parents' top three methods for choosing were visits to the school, word of mouth (other families, neighbors, etc.) and communication with staff (teachers, administrators). The reasons parents cite and how parents choose are critical in the school-choice process. A market-based choice approach nearly demands schools to acknowledge the preferences of families (Olson and Hendry, 2012).

Bosetti's (2004) study investigated the top factors that influenced parents' decisions the most in selecting a school. Different groups of families (religion, socioeconomic status, etc.) were motivated by different factors. This is perfectly illustrated in Bosetti's (2004) findings when she confirmed that academic reputation is concerning for all parents but a leading concern for parents who send their students to alternative school. Families that send their students to alternative schooling search for options that cater to the preferences of teaching style, class size and overall school community. (Bosetti, 2004). Additionally, low-income families are concerned about location, teaching style, and community familiarity (Bosetti, 2004). Families are largely driven by the characteristics of academic strength and location (Burgess, et al., 2009). Bosetti (2004) concluded that parents employ a mixture of rationalities

in deciding the right school for their students: academics, social network, school visits and talks with teachers, and location.

Goldring and Phillips (2008) and Lacireno-Paquet and Brantley (2008) used Bosetti's (2004) framework around school choice and parental preferences and ultimately found that parent satisfaction of school is largely determined by their ability to choose the school. School choice impacts satisfaction (Goldring and Phillips, 2008). In addition, this framework guided Bell's (2009) case study, where she illustrated the impact that location and geography have on parental choice. Furthermore, Olson and Hendry (2012) examined the implications for fulfilling the promises of parent empowerment through school choice, and vehemently discussed Bosetti's (2004) idea that certain parental groups' race and socioeconomic status impact how families access school options—and the factors they use to determine the best fit for their students. Thieme and Trevino's (2011) results showed that parents have different preference functions depending on their socioeconomic level, a key finding that is grounded in Bosetti's (2004) framework that school choice and parental preferences are largely influenced by parent's socioeconomic level, and thus a key driver in student enrollment.

In school districts around the country, parent preferences and choice are some of the primary drivers for student enrollment in public charter schools. Parents are empowered to choose the best option that is aligned to their priorities and preferences. Renzulli and Evans (2005) analyzed the preferential differences between white and non-white families and argued that academic quality may not be the most important factor that influences white or nonwhite parents regarding critical preferences in school choice. School safety, library resources, and teacher quality may be more influential in parent choice than strength of academic programming.

Although location is important for all racial groups, Kleitz, et al. (2000) determined that “low-income parents are more likely than moderate-income parents to be concerned about school location,

and moderate-income parents are more likely than high-income parents to say this is a concern. Parental preferences are fueled by parental experiences (Kleitz, et al., 2000). Ultimately, Kleitz, et al. (2000) found that regardless of racial identity or income, nearly all families who were studied ranked educational quality as their most important factor that influences school choice. Moreover, although safety and location were relatively important to all families, safety and location were considered more significant in minority households than white households (Kleitz, et al., 2000). Jacobs (2013) specifically examined location as a factor in parents' choice. Minorities' lack of resources (transportation) supports minorities' reliance on school location. Location of a school can have a significant impact on parental preferences because it is connected to many other preferences and factors (Jacobs, 2013). The location of a charter school can significantly influence a parents' decision to ultimately enroll their student into that school (Jacobs, 2013).

The literature suggests that school preferences are deeper than the surface—in fact, parental preferences are strongly connected to parents' racial and economic backgrounds. Weiher and Tedin (2002) present analysis and findings that contradict or compete with Kleitz, et al. (2000) findings. Weiher and Tedin (2002) suggest that test scores are the most important factor for white parents, while teaching students morals and values are top priority for African-American families and second for Hispanic families. Despite Kleitz, et al. (2000) research, Weiher and Tedin (2002) determined that location and safety were, in fact, not top considerations for families of colors (African-American and Hispanic). Compellingly, Weiher and Tedin (2002) discovered that families' preferences did not necessarily match their behavior. A far more accurate predictor for the preferences that impact parental choice is the comparison of characteristics between their students' current school and former school. When Weiher and Tedin (2002) verified the parental preferences of test scores and racial compatibility—their findings challenged the idea that parents' preferences are consistent with parents' behavior. For example, over 60% of families selected test scores as an indicator for strength of academic

program and important preference for choosing a charter school, but a significant number of families transferred to charter schools that performed less competitively than their previous school (Weiher & Tedin, 2002). Parental behavior and race are indicators that silently influence school choice. African-American and Hispanic families are more likely to enroll their student into a school that has a student population with high concentrations of their respective demographics. Race, ethnicity, and economics intimately influence parental behavior in ways that hide parental preferences.

Understanding the motivations that guide parental choice is critical in the sustainment of charter programs. Furthermore, creating processes that retain students are equally important. Identifying ways to increase parental satisfaction in the student recruitment and enrollment process may positively influence schools' ability to recruit and retain students, such that they are able to achieve their enrollment target. Recruitment, enrollment, and student attrition can be positively influenced by the processes implemented by the school. Despite the factors that lead parent choice, charter schools can sustain enrollment with strong organizational and operational processes. Charter programs must attract stakeholders (parents and students) by satisfying the customer needs and wants to sustain success and remain financially viable (Wohlstetter, Nayfack, & More-Flores, 2008). Given the literature, the following research questions were used to address the problem of practice.

Research Questions

1. What factors contribute to the decision for Ewing Park (KIPP) families choosing a K-8 KIPP Nashville charter school program?
2. What factors contribute to the decision for families not to choose KIPP Nashville as the school of choice for their student?

Methods

A quantitative methods approach was used to analyze and guide this project. I analyzed Ewing Park's enrollment data over the last two academic school years (2018-2020) and it was primarily used to analyze the problem of practice. Additionally, I quantitatively analyzed survey data that was administered

during this capstone project. Using the Qualtrics survey platform, two surveys (to families who did or did not choose to enroll at Ewing Park) were administered to gain insight into the research questions presented. Qualtrics is a web-based survey tool used to conduct survey research. The surveys were created to examine how important certain factors and preferences influenced school selection. The surveys asked demographic information related to race/ethnicity, income, and parent education level to determine any correlation between demographics and school preferences. The factors outlined in the surveys were chosen based on the top academic and operational factors/preferences that were priorities of the organization. The questions were strategically created and decided based upon critical information that was of interest to KIPP Nashville. Additionally, the questions were modeled and slightly adapted from a similar parent-choice survey that measured the importance of certain academic and operational factors that lead to parent choice (Bayhan, 2014). The questions in both surveys were also grounded in the literature. Bayhan (2014) studied parental factors that influenced parent choice in urban city charter schools and used a similar survey structure to investigate the quantitative relationship between parental factors and its relative influence. Welner (2013) identified enrollment strategies that charter schools used to fill seats: description and design, location, marketing and advertising, application selection, limited services, discipline and school culture, and student mobility. The enrollment strategies were used to develop the parental factors and preferences listed in survey 1 and survey 2. Survey 1 asked 8 questions and survey 2 asked 9 questions. Both surveys required families to select the factors that were most important to them in selecting a school for their student(s). Additionally, the survey required families to select why they applied to KIPP Nashville.

Prospective families that applied to KIPP but chose not to attend completed survey 1. Survey 1 can be found in Appendix C. Survey 1 was emailed once to 1,255 participants. The 1,255 participants were families that applied for admission to Ewing Park (KNCP & KNCPE) between 2018 and 2020 but ultimately chose not to matriculate for that school year. Of the 1,255 participants, there were 62

respondents (4.9% response rate). Current Ewing Park families completed survey 2, which can be found in Appendix D. The main difference between survey 1 and survey 2 is that survey 1 asked Ewing Park candidates why they ultimately decided not to attend KIPP Nashville. Conversely, survey 2 asked current KIPP Nashville families to determine the factors that influenced their decision to apply and matriculate to KIPP Nashville. Survey 2 was emailed once to 925 Ewing Park families. Of the 925 participants, there were 120 respondents (12.9% response rate). Participants had a 2-month window to respond: 12/1/21 – 2/1/21. Surveys were used as the only instrument, due to limited access to both groups of families. I quantitatively analyzed the survey responses of families that chose to send their student(s) to Ewing Park, as well as the number of families that chose to decline their student(s) seat. The quantitative data illustrated the most common reasons families choose Ewing Park or declined Ewing Park. Analyzing two academic years' worth of data allows the possibility for year over year trends in parent-choice data.

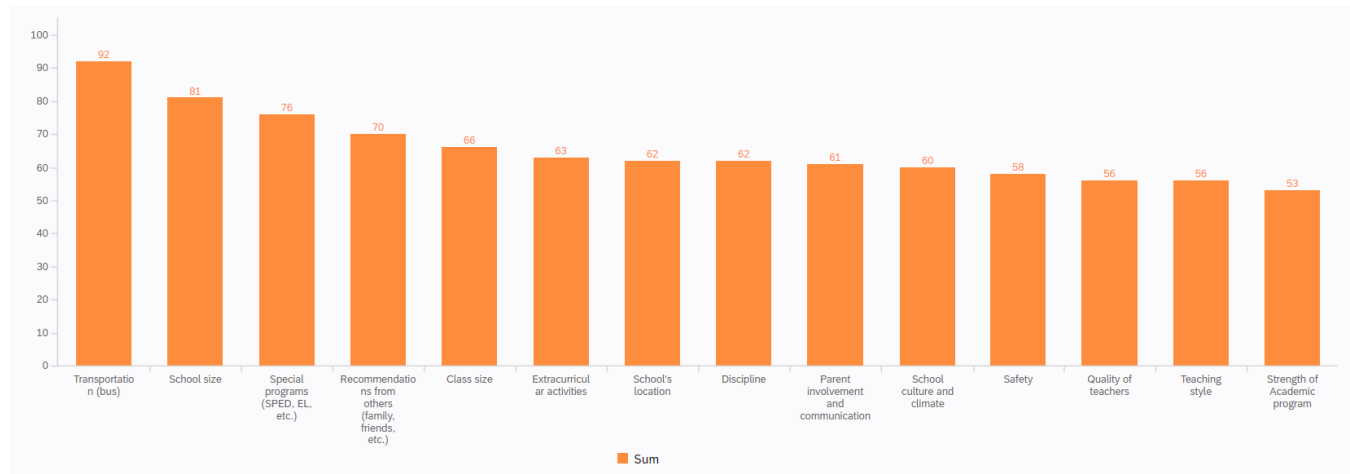
Data Analysis

My capstone project aims to answer two important questions: what factors are most important to KIPP families for choosing a KIPP Nashville school, and why do applicants who are accepted not choose KIPP Nashville? Survey 1 and Survey 2, question 7 attempts to determine the most important factors that influence parents' decision to choose their student's current school—whether KIPP Nashville or otherwise. Questions 1-5 of both surveys were not of interest to the organization for this capstone project. Questions 1-5 were included to evaluate the correlation between demographics and school preferences. KIPP Nashville ultimately decided not to consider the questions because majority of the respondents were of the same race, and thus did not include variation for comparison—94% of respondents of survey 1 self-identified as African-American, and, similarly, 96% of respondents of survey 2 self-identified as African-American.

Parents were asked which factors influenced their decision to choose their student's current school—whether KIPP Nashville or otherwise. Figure 3 ranks factors in descending order based on

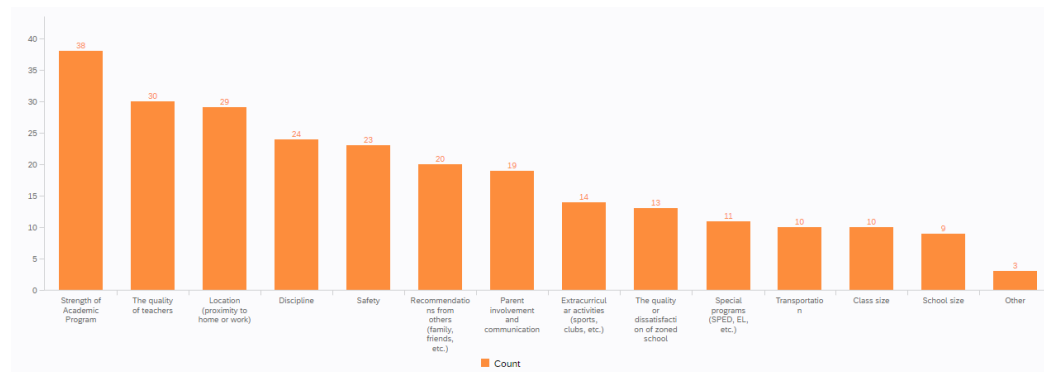
parent popularity. When non-KIPP families were asked how important certain factors were in choosing their student’s school, the top 3 responses, based on the number of times each option was selected were: Transportation (92), school size (81), and special education (SPED) programs (76). The factors that were selected the least were: quality of teachers (56), teaching style (56), and strength of academic program (53).

Figure 3: Survey 1, Question 7: Thinking about your child’s education, how important were the following factors in your decision to choose your student’s current school?



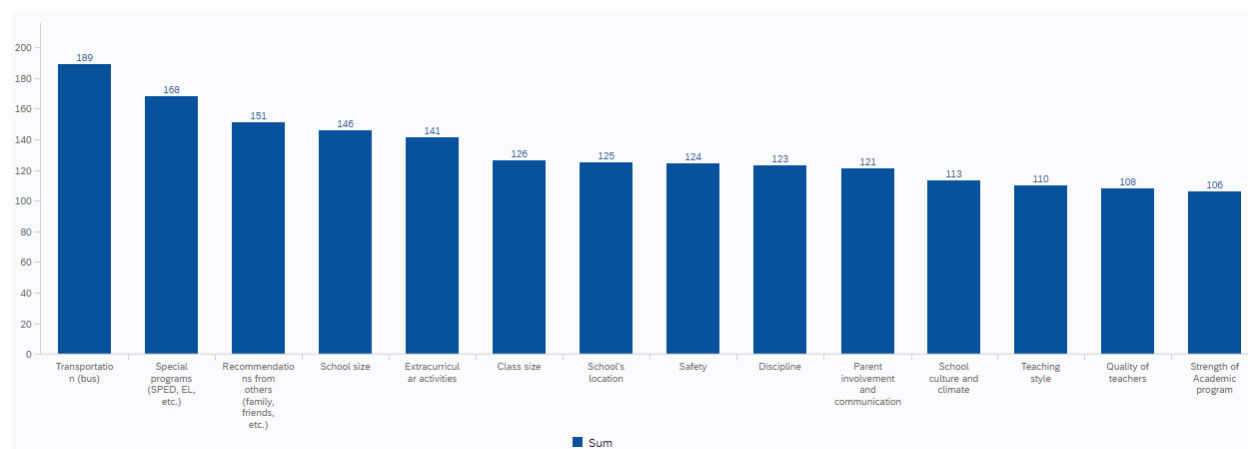
Based on Figure 4, the top 3 reasons why families chose to apply to KIPP Nashville are: strength of academic program (38), quality of teachers (30), location—proximity (29). Additionally, the options that were selected the least were: class size (10), school size (10), and other (3).

Figure 4: Survey 1, Question 8: what made you decide to apply to KIPP Nashville?



There were 120 current KIPP Nashville (KNCPE and KNCP) families who completed survey 2. Figure 6 illustrates the factors that were most salient to current KIPP families for choosing their student’s current school. Transportation (189) SPED (168), and Recommendations from families (151) were the top factors that influenced their decision. Teaching style (110), quality of teachers (108), and strength of academic program (106) were the least selected factors. Current KIPP families that completed survey 2 ultimately chose KIPP Nashville, based on the data reflected in Figure 7, due to the strength of the academic program (83), quality of teachers (57), and location (39). The least selected options were transportation (23), extracurricular activities (17), and other (16).

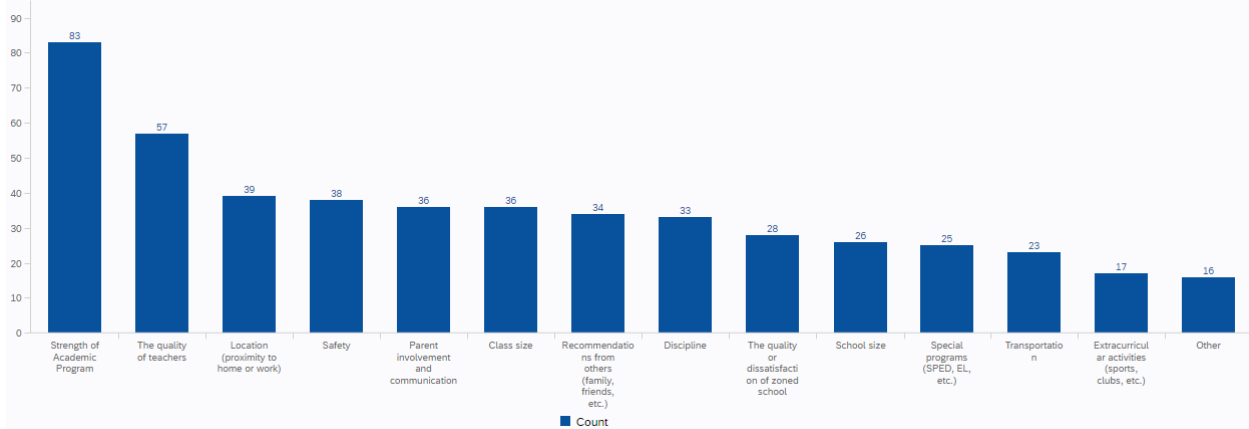
Figure 6: Survey 2, Question 7: Thinking about your child’s education, how important were the following factors in your decision to choose your student’s current school?



Between both groups of respondents—KIPP Nashville families and non-KIPP Nashville families, transportation and special education programs were two of the top three factors that were selected as being most important in families’ decision to choose their student’s school. Comparably, between both survey 1 (non-KIPP families) and survey 2 (KIPP families) quality of teachers, teaching style, and strength of academic program were selected the least—and therefore not as important in selecting their student’s school. When non-KIPP families were asked why they applied to KIPP Nashville, the factors that were selected the most were strength of academic program, quality of teachers, and location.

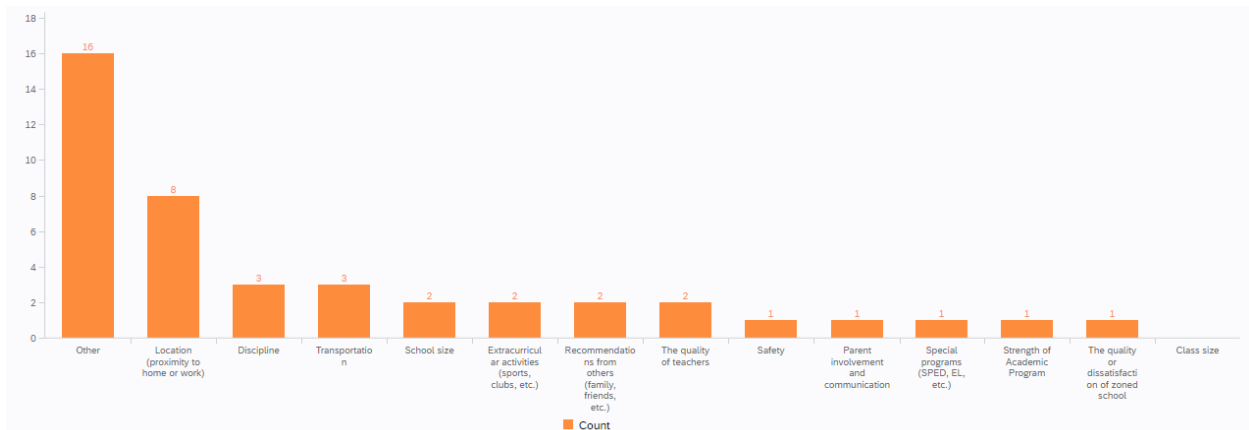
Similarly, current KIPP Nashville families identified strength of academic program, quality of teachers and location as the most important factors that influenced their decision to enroll into KIPP Nashville.

Figure 7: Survey 2, question 8: Why did you decide to enroll your child at KIPP Nashville?



As illustrated in Figure 8, non-KIPP families chose other (16) and location (8), as the top two reasons for ultimately not choosing KIPP Nashville. Families who selected other were unable to elaborate on their selection—a limitation of this data metric. Special education programs, strength of academics and quality of teachers were not significant reasons that influenced respondents’ decision for not selecting KIPP Nashville. Location was a top reason why KIPP Nashville respondents chose Ewing Park, but for non-KIPP families, location was a top reason that they decided not to attend KIPP Nashville.

Figure 8: Survey 1, Question 11—why did you decide not to attend KIPP Nashville?



Findings

Finding #1

Transportation and special education were selected as “most important” for both prospective and current families.

Transportation and special education were the top two of three parental preferences in survey 1 and survey 2. Finding 1 is illustrated in the data represented in Figure 3 and Figure 6. When sharing the initial results of the survey with KIPP Nashville, the Director of Enrollment shared that nearly 40% of Ewing Park families request bus transportation, and that transportation was indirectly considered a factor for families when discussing the importance of Ewing Park’s location. Additionally, KIPP Nashville uses pick-up points instead of bus stops in front of students’ homes. Families are required to drive to the pick-up point, and if families do not have transportation to the bus stop or if students are left alone with an older sibling, it creates a challenge for families to access the bus stop. Families’ lack of resources (transportation) influences their reliance of convenient location in relation to parents’ home or work. Transportation increases access for all families—current and prospective families alike. Due to the location of Ewing Park, public transportation is not an option for families—thus, families are forced to rely on the transportation provided by KIPP Nashville. Lack of transportation is a barrier for families and a convincingly important factor in a parent’s decision regarding school choice (Bosetti, 2004). The lack of transportation is limiting and reduces access for families. Consistent with my findings, transportation is essential for families to benefit and take advantage of school choice (Bosetti, 2004).

Charter school programs are not known to adequately support students with learning disabilities. While I can see how this factor may discourage families from choosing KIPP, I am surprised that this factor also ranked highly for current families. This is surprising because students in charter programs located in the inner-city have students in their special education program that are mostly

minorities. Historically, Ewing Park's SPED programs are developing. Ewing Park's SPED programs are worse compared to traditional public schools—due to lack of personnel, resources, and funding. Ewing Park does an exceptional job growing and developing general education students, but they face significant challenges with supporting their exceptional education population. From my experience, this is consistent across many charter programs.

Based on what I have learned from the literature, this finding is quite surprising. While transportation was a highly anticipated factor leading to school choice, I did not expect special education to be ranked as highly. Parents that have students with special needs encounter barriers that are not present for general education students. There are additional services, accommodations, and resources that the school must have access to adequately support students with learning disabilities. Options for families with students with disabilities are limited, due to the lack of resources and support for special education students (Jessen, 2012). This phenomenon may discourage families from attending certain school or matriculating to certain programs. School choice is designed to empower families to select the best school option that meets the needs of their student, but, often, students with special needs are left with fewer options (Jessen, 2012). School choice is complex, and even more complex for students with learning disabilities. Students with special needs have limited access to choice schools, and thus are unable to access the benefits of school selection (Jessen, 2012).

Special education is important—especially for families that have students with learning disabilities. Bosetti (2004) found that school preferences were largely influenced by the types of schools parents considered. For example, special education programs ranked top 3 for families that were mostly interested in alternative school. Private school families and public-school families did not rank special education as a top factor—which is inconsistent with my findings. Families that consider the charter school option are looking for programs that are tailored to meet the needs of their students—needs that may not be met in their zoned public school.

Finding #2

The reasons why prospective families applied to Ewing Park and the reasons why current families chose Ewing Park were the same: strength of academic program, quality of teachers, and location.

This is evident because the data reflects in Figure 4 that the top 3 reasons why prospective families chose Ewing Park were strength of academic programs, quality of teachers and school's location. Similarly, Figure 7 demonstrates that strength of academic programs, quality of teachers and location were the top reasons why current families ultimately chose Ewing Park. Finding 2 is consistent with the literature showing that school location, academic program and quality of teaching is important when it comes to family choice.

School location and proximity can be a critical factor in recruiting, attracting, and retaining students (Bosetti, 2004). Strong academic reputation and quality of teachers was a consistent theme in the literature regarding critical factors that largely influence family choice. Parents want strong academic programs that are led by high quality teachers (Beamish & Morey, 2013). Regardless of charter, private or public, strength of academics and teacher quality are extremely influential for families in their selection of school choice (Erickson, 2017).

Finding #3

'Other' and 'Location' were the top two reasons why prospective families chose not to send their student to Ewing Park.

Finding 3 is supported by the evidence represented in Figure 8. A major limitation to my capstone is that families who selected 'other' were not given the opportunity to expound. However, I can conclude that the other factors outlined in the survey were not the reasons why prospective families chose not to attend Ewing Park. Location was critical for prospective and current families. Consistent with the literature, location is a critical factor for choosing their student's school. Location ultimately determines access and convenience. Aside from location, school competition (increased number of

charter school programs), customer experience, the aesthetics of the school facility, and lack of extracurricular activities and programming (arts, sports, drama) may also be reasons why families ultimately choose not to attend Ewing Park.

Through the literature, I discovered location to be a critical reason for families in choosing their student's school. School location is important—and consequently, families that rank location as a top preference are families that may not have access to transportation to support their choice (Kleitz, et al., 2000). Ewing Park is located in Nashville's most Northeast, underdeveloped suburb. There is no access to public transportation, and thus families are forced to rely on limited transportation offered by the school or their own transportation. This phenomenon is a barrier for families that has significantly impacted student matriculation.

Recommendations

Recommendation #1

Incorporate feedback structures (surveys) in the student recruitment process that give KIPP Nashville quick and timely insight regarding why families chose to accept or decline their student's seat.

This project is the first time that data has been collected from individuals regarding school choice behaviors. This is a missed opportunity for KIPP Nashville, and I am therefore recommending feedback structures so that families can share their rationale for selecting or declining their student's seat. Surveys will give KIPP Nashville the opportunity to gain insight on the motivations behind family choice. Free, quarterly health surveys powered by Google Forms of current KIPP Nashville families will give the organization an opportunity to receive feedback and develop strategy informed by important stakeholders—KIPP Nashville families. KIPP Nashville must understand why families are choosing other options and why applicants ultimately matriculate to KIPP Nashville. It is my recommendation for prospective families to be surveyed once during the application process and secondly during the

selection process. Charter schools need to gather information from critical stakeholders to improve operational practices. The use of parent satisfaction surveys to gain process improvement input may give greater access to charter school leaders and inform them of critical feedback and parent information that may be used to attract and retain more students (Wohlstetter, Nayfack and More-Flores, 2008). The use of online surveys can be a useful tool to gather critical information from families (Wohlstetter, Nayfack and More-Flores, 2008). The first survey for prospective families will gather important preferences that motivate parent selection. The second survey for prospective families will inform KIPP Nashville why families selected or chose not to select KIPP Nashville.

A major opportunity for KIPP Nashville and the Ewing Park campus is to develop a partnership with Possip. Possip is a survey platform specifically for parents that gives families the opportunity to share feedback, and the platform generates reports in which partnering organizations can evaluate and analyze trends. While Possip gives organizations the ability to create their own survey questions, the organization is positioned to develop survey questions based on the interests of the organization. The feedback received from families using Possip is shared in real-time with strategic recommendations developed by Possip staff that directly responds to the data received from families. There are several packages that KIPP Nashville could purchase to implement program. KIPP could purchase one-time surveys or several—depending on need.

Similarly, current KIPP families should be surveyed quarterly to determine their satisfaction with Ewing Park. A single-question survey asking families if they were enjoying their experience as a part of the KIPP Nashville Family could provide considerable insight. The goal is to understand if this survey could be used as a precursor to predict end-of-year attrition, and proactively provide schools with a data point to help bolster retention. This feedback structure and cadence will create a continuous improvement model that allows KIPP Nashville to implement and inform strategy anchored in applicant feedback throughout the student recruitment and enrollment season. Furthermore, continuous

improvement strategies have shown to improve organizational effectiveness, success, and innovation (Bessant & Gallagher, 2001). Ewing Park's consistent implementation of continuous improvement will establish an opportunity for the charter network to refine practices and strategies that support its ability to achieve and maintain enrollment.

Recommendation #2

Distribute marketing materials to prospective families that highlight KIPP's academic program, teacher quality and benefits of Ewing Park's location and transportation program.

Charter schools that market their programs effectively yield strong student enrollment and retention outcomes (Welner, 2013). This recommendation directly speaks to Finding 2. Ewing Park must increase its community awareness on the strengths of the program. KIPP Nashville's academic program strength, location, and quality of teachers are important to families—and, if families were aware of these strengths, they would likely apply and matriculate. Effective marketing increases awareness. KIPP Nashville must position itself in a way that highlights its strengths and competitive advantage. Currently, KIPP Nashville's marketing and recruitment materials do not effectively leverage its location and transportation plan, and therefore families are not aware of the benefits of where Ewing Park is located and transportation options for students. Finding #2 and Finding #3 indicate that location is critical for families, and KIPP Nashville must continue to develop ways that increase access to its program to achieve its programmatic and financial goals.

KIPP Nashville can increase their marketing presence in the community by establishing a strong social media footprint. KIPP Nashville can increase brand awareness with the use of social media ads and targeted outreach. KIPP's social media campaign can potentially highlight the organization's strengths, parental preferences, and applicant information. KIPP Nashville's social media campaign. A strong social media campaign can effectively increase KIPP Nashville's reach and exposure to a more robust and

targeted consumer base. This marketing effort should be led by the Director of Development and Communications—a role that currently exists within the network. The average cost for social media ads is approximately \$8 for 1000 impressions. KIPP Nashville should develop a budget that allows the organization to effectively launch and maintain its social media campaign. Although KIPP Nashville currently has a social media presence—the content that is shared does not highlight the strengths or parent preferences. The Director of Development and Communications should develop a content calendar that strategically uses material that attracts families using preferences gathered from parent surveys. Leveraging technology and social media might position KIPP Nashville to increase its base exponentially.

Like many industries, schools must respond to market pressures to effectively recruit students. Because families have the option to choose their student’s K-12 school, charter schools must determine a way to appeal to the consumer—in this case, the parent. Increased marketing efforts will expand Ewing Park’s reach and impact—with an intentional effort to increase access for K-8 families. Effective marketing can be a helpful tool for schools to promote their strengths while simultaneously supporting families with choosing the school that mostly aligns with their preferences (Jabbar, 2016). Districts that promote school choice empower families to choose. For families to choose the best option that is aligned to their preferences, they must have access to information.

Recommendation #3

Restructure bus routes such that KIPP Nashville increases access for families that want to attend Ewing Park that otherwise would not be able to attend without transportation.

Transportation is a critical finding (Finding #1), based on the survey data received. Prospective students of Ewing Park lack access to its campus. Although transportation is provided, it is extremely limited. Buses do not go directly to student homes. In fact, KIPP Nashville’s transportation uses pick-up

points. For example, instead of the bus going directly to a student's home, the bus will go to a neighborhood library or grocery store. If the family does not have transportation to access the bus stop, then the bus stop is not helpful. Adding or restructuring bus routes that accommodate family needs will increase access, and thus ultimately increase student matriculation and enrollment. If KIPP Nashville does not address its location and transportation barrier, student enrollment will continue to be a challenge for the organization. KIPP Nashville's Ewing Park campuses are title 1, and most families are considered economically disadvantaged. Consistent and reliable transportation is essential, and thus increases access and equity (Summers, 2021).

Limited transportation is a barrier to access. The distance between a families' school and home can be a significant barrier. Families are often forced to send their student(s) to a less desirable choice because of the lack of transportation and their reliance on dependable and consistent transportation (Summers, 2021). Although KIPP Nashville offers bussing, their current routes do not meet the needs of many families—which has caused frustration for current and prospective families. The regional operations team should consider redesigning its routes such that KIPP Nashville is able to reach more families. Because KIPP Nashville owns and operates its transportation department, which is uncommon of most charter schools, it has the capacity to make necessary adjustments to increase family access and remove access barriers. Redeveloping bus routes to meet families' needs might increase routes times and cost, but it will allow KIPP to recruit a significantly increased number of students. The cost associated with this recommendation could be used from the surplus funds from other KIPP Nashville schools that have exceeded their enrollment targets. To determine the locations that need bus stops, KIPP Nashville must record the number of students and addresses of families that were selected to attend KIPP but chose not to because of the lack of transportation. For example, if a relatively large number of families are selected to attend Ewing Park from the same neighborhood but transportation is unavailable, then KIPP should add a stop in or near that neighborhood, such that families are able to

attend. For this to be sustainable, KIPP should develop a systematic way of determining when to add a stop—based on need. KIPP must determine a threshold at which they would add a stop—that is, the number of families needed to add a bus stop in a particular neighborhood or location. It is my belief that if there are at least 5 students within a 1–3-mile radius of one another, then a stop should be added to the route. The metrics and threshold should be adjusted to best operationalize this strategy and recommendation. This will increase families' access and move KIPP Nashville closer to achieving its enrollment target.

Conclusion

KIPP Nashville is Davidson County's oldest and largest charter school network, and since its founding has accomplished much academic and organizational success. Despite experiencing spurts of academic success, Ewing Park has constantly struggled with meeting their enrollment targets. Due to their inability to sustain enrollment, KIPP Nashville's budget and finance was adversely impacted. Through this capstone project, I have learned that KIPP's academic program, quality of teachers and location are the primary factors that influence both prospective and current families' rationale for applying or enrolling at Ewing Park. Additionally, transportation and special education programs are two of the top three important factors for choosing an elementary or middle school. KIPP Nashville's response to the findings and recommendations will be critical to its financial health, organizational sustainability, and family satisfaction.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Email to Current Ewing Park Families

Email to current Ewing Park Families: KNCP & KNCPE

Good afternoon—

With an intentional effort to improve our student recruitment experience for future KIPP Nashville families, we would love to hear and learn from you. Please consider sharing your feedback by taking 2-3 minutes to complete the **optional** survey below.

Click this link to complete the optional survey:

https://peabody.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9NYHCXs5ZYKHjZr

The data collected from the survey will be used in a quality improvement project led by Vanderbilt University and to develop recruitment processes at KIPP Nashville. Additionally, we hope to investigate the impact of the following influences: safety, transportation, academics, parent involvement, discipline, operations, and faculty, that led parents to apply to KIPP Nashville. The study aims to examine the factors that influenced families to apply and matriculate to KIPP Nashville. Most importantly, this study aims to determine why families choose KIPP Nashville for their student's school.

You are free to decide to ignore and not participate in this study or to withdraw your responses at any time. Participation in this survey is voluntary and confidential. The information you provide will not be associated with you or your student.

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Thank you in advance for your feedback and participation.

Appendix B: Email to Prospective Ewing Park Families

Email to Ewing Park (KNCP & KNCPE) applicants

Good afternoon—

You are receiving this email because you may have recently applied to a KIPP Nashville school within the last 1-2 years. **If this does not apply to you or your family, please disregard this email.**

With an intentional effort to improve our student recruitment experience for future KIPP Nashville families, we would love to hear and learn from you. Please consider sharing your feedback by taking 2-3 minutes to complete the optional survey below.

Click this link to complete the optional survey:

https://peabody.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bPgoTexG2j8rhop

The data collected from the survey will be used in a quality improvement project led by Vanderbilt University and to develop recruitment processes at KIPP Nashville. Additionally, we hope to investigate the impact of the following influences: safety, transportation, academics, parent involvement, discipline, operations, and faculty, that led parents to apply to KIPP Nashville. The study aims to examine the

factors that influenced families to apply to KIPP Nashville. Most importantly, this study aims to determine why families applied but not choose KIPP Nashville.

You are free to decide to ignore and not participate in this study or to withdraw your responses at any time. Participation in this survey is voluntary and confidential. The information you provide will not be associated with you or your student.

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Thank you in advance for your feedback and participation.

[Appendix C: Survey 1](#)

Survey #1

[Parental Preferences and School Choice (Families that did not enroll)]

Q1 What is your child's grade band for the 2020-2021 school year?

- Kindergarten - 4th Grade (1)
- 5th - 8th Grade (2)
- 9th - 12th Grade (3)

Q2 What is your race/ethnicity?

- White / Caucasian (1)
- Black / African American (2)
- Hispanic / Latino (3)
- Asian (4)
- Native American (5)
- Other (6)
- Prefer not to answer (7)

Q3 What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- Did not complete high school (1)
- High School (2)
- Associate's Degree (3)
- Bachelor's Degree (4)
- Master's Degree (5)
- Doctorate / Professional Degree (6)
- Prefer not to answer (7)

Q4 Please select the approximate total income of your household / family last year (2019)

- Less than \$10,000 (1)
- \$10,000-\$19,999 (2)
- \$20,000-\$29,999 (3)
- \$30,000-\$39,999 (4)
- \$40,000-\$59,999 (5)
- \$60,000-\$99,999 (6)
- More than \$100,000 (7)
- Prefer not to answer (8)

Q5 Thinking about your child's education, how important were the following factors in your decision to choose your student's current school?

	Important (1)	Somewhat Important (2)	Not Important (3)
Safety (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
School's location (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Strength of Academic program (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
School size (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Class size (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Discipline (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
School culture and climate (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Transportation (bus) (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Special programs (SPED, EL, etc.) (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quality of teachers (10)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching style (11)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Extracurricular activities (12)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parent involvement and communication (13)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Recommendations from others (family, friends, etc.) (14)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q6 What made you decide to apply to KIPP Nashville?

- Discipline (1)
- School size (2)
- Safety (3)
- Transportation (4)
- Parent involvement and communication (5)
- Special programs (SPED, EL, etc.) (6)
- Strength of Academic Program (7)
- Class size (8)
- Location (proximity to home or work) (9)
- Extracurricular activities (sports, clubs, etc.) (10)
- Recommendations from others (family, friends, etc.) (11)
- The quality of teachers (12)
- The quality or dissatisfaction of zoned school (13)
- Other (14)

Q7 Why did you decide not to attend KIPP Nashville? (Select all that apply)

- Discipline (1)
- School size (2)
- Safety (3)
- Transportation (4)
- Parent involvement and communication (5)
- Special programs (SPED, EL, etc.) (6)
- Strength of Academic Program (7)
- Class size (8)
- Location (proximity to home or work) (9)
- Extracurricular activities (sports, clubs, etc.) (10)
- Recommendations from others (family, friends, etc.) (11)
- The quality of teachers (12)
- The quality or dissatisfaction of zoned school (13)
- Other (14)

Q8 Did COVID-19 impact your decision not to attend KIPP Nashville?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

[Appendix D: Survey 2](#)

Survey #2

[Parental Preferences and School Enrollment (Current KIPP Families)]

Q1 What is your child's grade band for the 2020-2021 school year?

- Kindergarten - 4th Grade (1)
- 5th - 8th Grade (2)
- 9th - 12th Grade (3)

Q2 How many years has your child attended KIPP Nashville?

- Less than half a school year (1)
- More than half a school year—less than three years (2)
- More than three years – less than five years (3)
- More than five years (4)

Q3 What is your race/ethnicity?

- White / Caucasian (1)
- Black / African-American (2)
- Hispanic / Latino (3)
- Asian (4)
- Native American (5)
- Other (6)

Q4 What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- Did not complete high school (1)
- High School (2)
- Associate's Degree (3)
- Bachelor's Degree (4)
- Master's Degree (5)
- Doctorate / Professional Degree (6)
- Prefer not to answer (7)

Q5 Please select the approximate total income of your household / family last year (2019)

- Less than \$10,000 (1)
- \$10,000-\$19,999 (2)
- \$20,000-\$29,999 (3)
- \$30,000-\$39,999 (4)
- \$40,000-\$59,999 (5)
- \$60,000-\$99,999 (6)
- More than \$100,000 (7)
- Prefer not to answer (8)

Q6 What is the distance from your home to your student's school (in miles)?

- 0-2 (1)
- 3-5 (2)
- 6-10 (3)
- 11-15 (4)
- 16+ (5)
- I'm unsure (6)

Q7 Thinking about your child's education, how important were the following factors in your decision to choose your student's current school?

	Important (1)	Somewhat Important (2)	Not Important (3)
Safety (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
School's location (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Strength of Academic program (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
School size (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Class size (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Discipline (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
School culture and climate (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Transportation (bus) (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Special programs (SPED, EL, etc.) (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quality of teachers (10)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching style (11)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Extracurricular activities (12)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parent involvement and communication (13)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Recommendations from others (family, friends, etc.) (14)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q8 Why did you decide to enroll your child at KIPP Nashville?

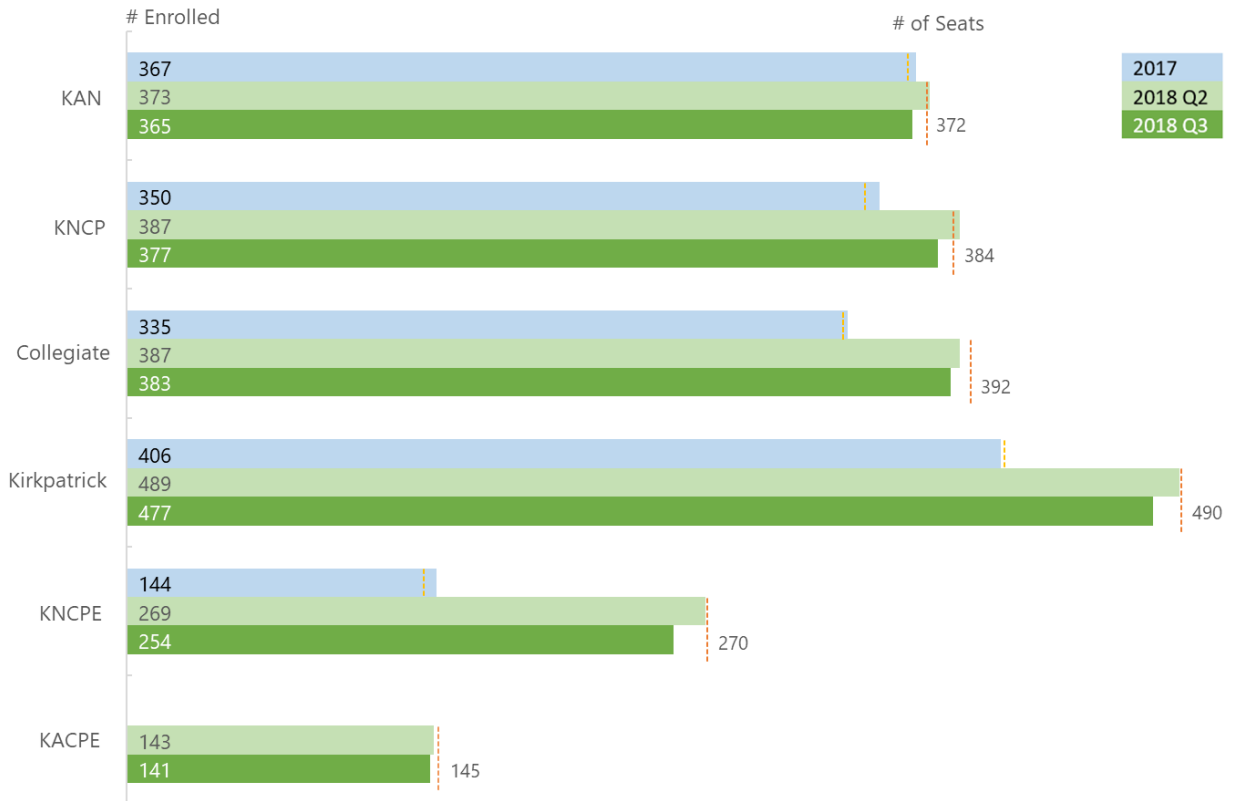
- Discipline (1)
- School size (2)
- Safety (3)
- Transportation (4)
- Parent involvement and communication (5)
- Special programs (SPED, EL, etc.) (6)
- Strength of Academic Program (7)
- Class size (8)
- Location (proximity to home or work) (9)
- Extracurricular activities (sports, clubs, etc.) (10)
- Recommendations from others (family, friends, etc.) (11)
- The quality of teachers (12)
- The quality or dissatisfaction of zoned school (13)
- Other (14)

Q9 Did COVID-19 impact your decision to stay at KIPP Nashville?

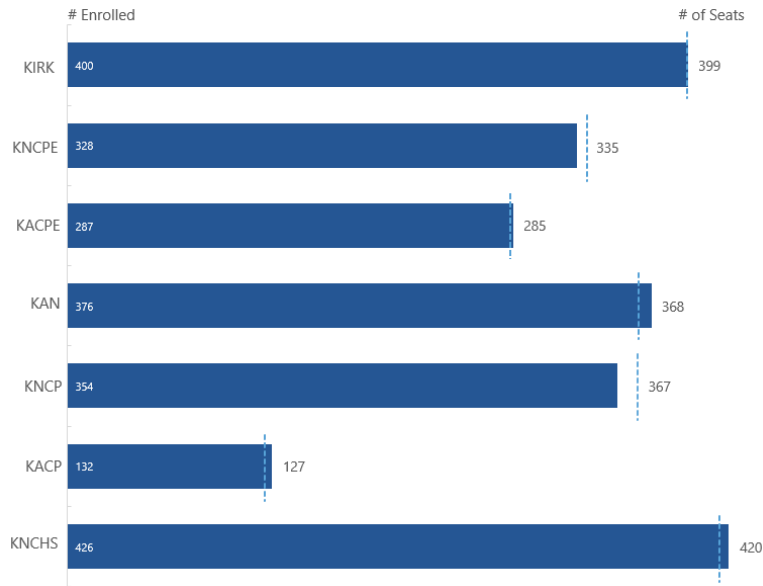
Yes (1)

No (2)

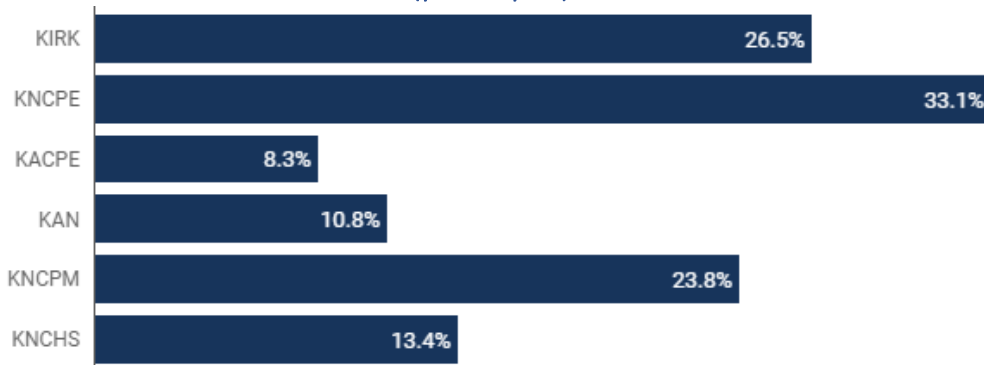
Appendix E: 2017 -2018 Summary of Enrollment for all KIPP Nashville Schools



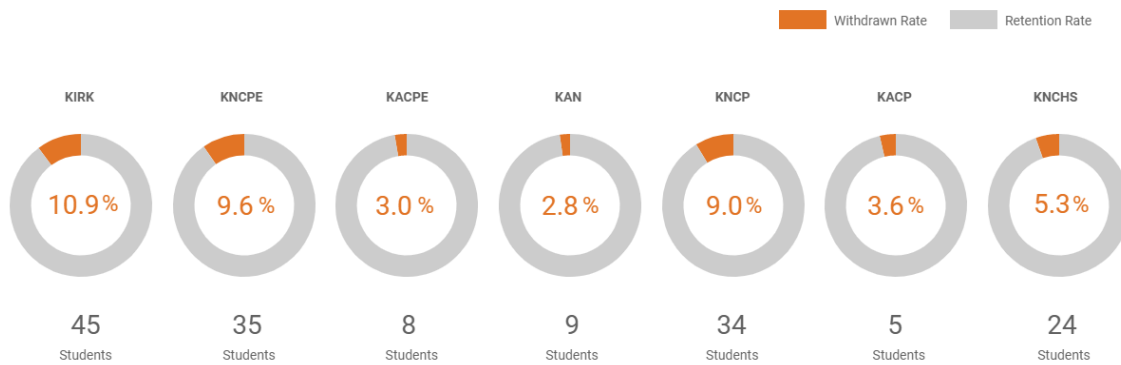
Appendix F: 2019 - 2020 Summary of Enrollment for all KIPP Nashville Schools



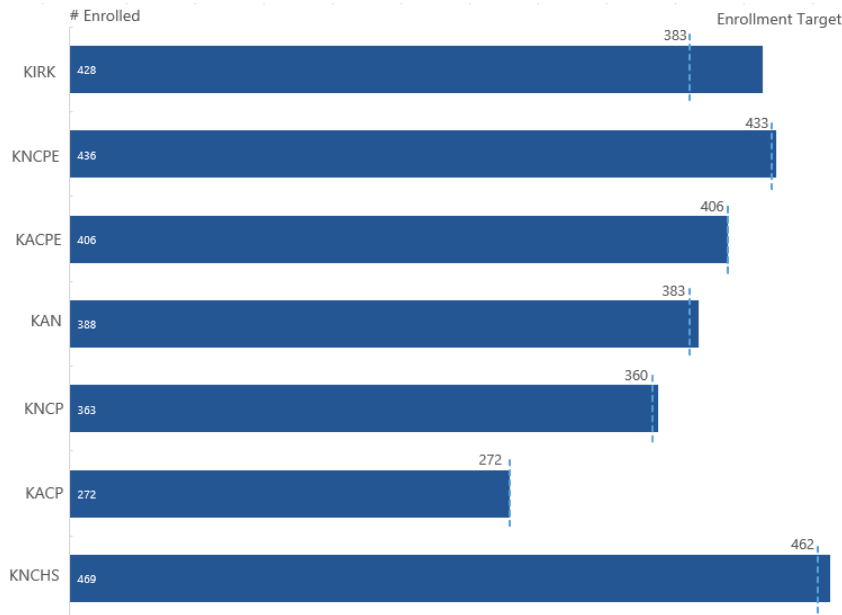
Appendix G: 2019-2020 Attrition Data (year to year)



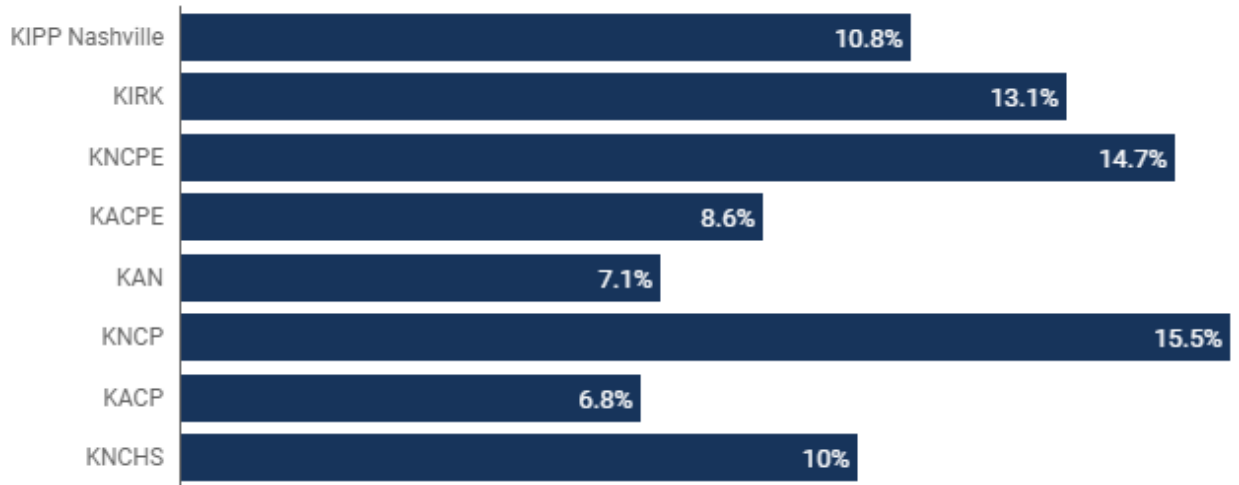
Appendix H: 2019-2020 Attrition Data (within the school year)



Appendix I: 2020-2021 Enrollment Data



Appendix J: 2020-2021 Attrition Date (year to year)



Appendix K: 2020-2021 Attrition Data (within school year)

