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Who was surveyed?

AISD 2014-15 eligible leaver population (n=11,567)

Survey sample* (n=6,181)

*Parents/guardians with available email addresses

Respondents (n=720)

Department of Research and Evaluation
Austin Independent School District

Austin Independent School District 2015 Family Leaver Survey

2014-2015 Leavers

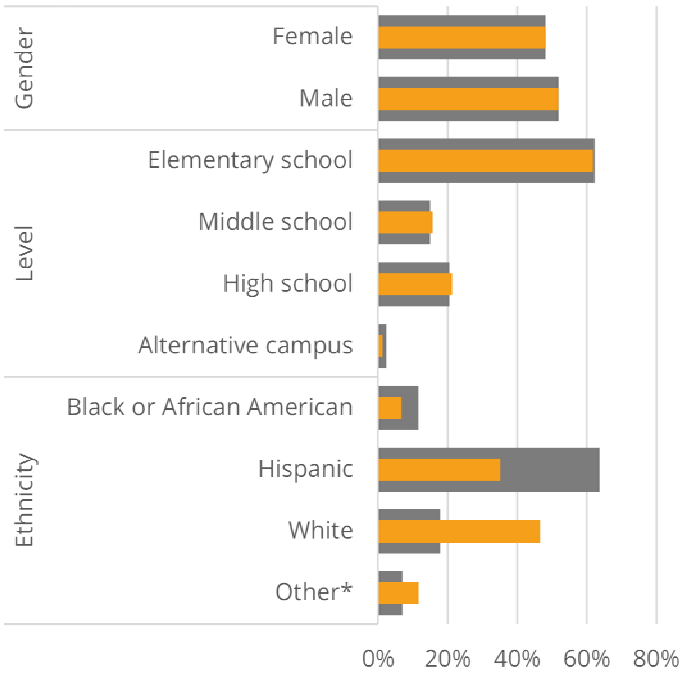
Introduction

Student membership has declined in the Austin Independent School District (AISD) for the past three consecutive years. The reasons for this are varied, including changing area demographics, decreased local birthrates, etc. However, in addition to fewer students enrolling in the district, some students who attend AISD ultimately withdraw from the district. To understand the most common reasons that students leave AISD, and identify where students go after they leave, the Department of Research and Evaluation conducted a survey in English and Spanish.

For the purpose of the survey, leavers were defined as students who attended AISD during the 2014-2015 school year, but who were not enrolled at AISD in October of 2015. Exceptions were those known to have been graduated, incarcerated, wards of the state, withdrawn for administrative reasons, or deceased. There were a total of 11,567 students in this group.

Figure 1

Survey respondents (n=720) matched the population of district leavers (N=11,567) on gender and school level, but not on ethnicity.



Source. AISD enrollment records and Fall 2015 Leaver Survey

A survey was emailed in December 2015 to 6,181 parents or guardians with email addresses on file. A total of 720 responses were received, resulting in a 12% response rate. This sample was large enough for the results to be representative of the overall group within 3.5 percentage points. However, the Hispanic students were less well represented by respondents, with a 6 percentage point margin of error.

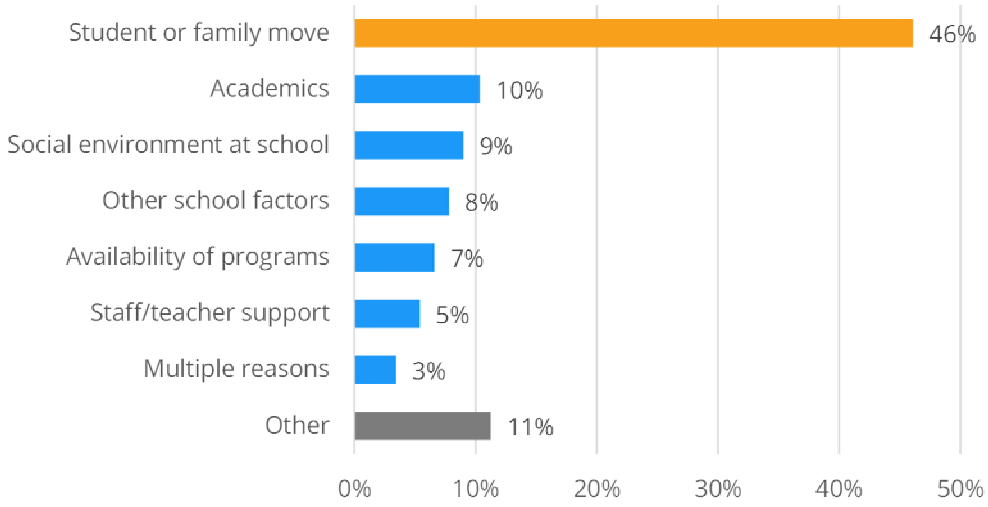
Students most frequently left AISD due to a student or family move

Nearly half of the survey respondents indicated that they left AISD due to a student or family move (figure 2). Many who left due to a move commented that they were very happy with their AISD school but had to leave due to a job change or the rising cost of Austin housing. Some indicated that providing transportation to their school had become a challenge, and some commented that they moved outside of the enrollment boundary and were no longer allowed to attend, indicating that they (or school staff) may not have been well informed of AISD's inter-district transfer policy.

Those who left for reasons associated with the school shared wide-ranged details about their situations. Some believed their students were bored or not challenged enough, while others felt that the high demands were too stressful. There were concerns about school- and class-size, and about overemphasis on preparing for state tests. Several families wanted all of their children to be in the same school. Many respondents said that their students were bullied at school, they didn't feel safe there, or that they needed to remove their student from being involved with the wrong crowd. Some mentioned that adults in the school were disrespectful or unsupportive of their students' needs. Many indicated that their student was not getting the individual and personal attention that they needed, or that the school or teacher did not make accommodations to students who were either above or below the average achievement level of the students. A few mentioned that they were happy with their elementary school, but left because they were worried about the reputation of the middle school to which they were zoned.

Figure 2

Respondents most frequently indicated they left AISD due to a residential move (n=307). Those who left for reasons associated with the school (n=284) cited various reasons including: academics, programming, school climate, and staff support.



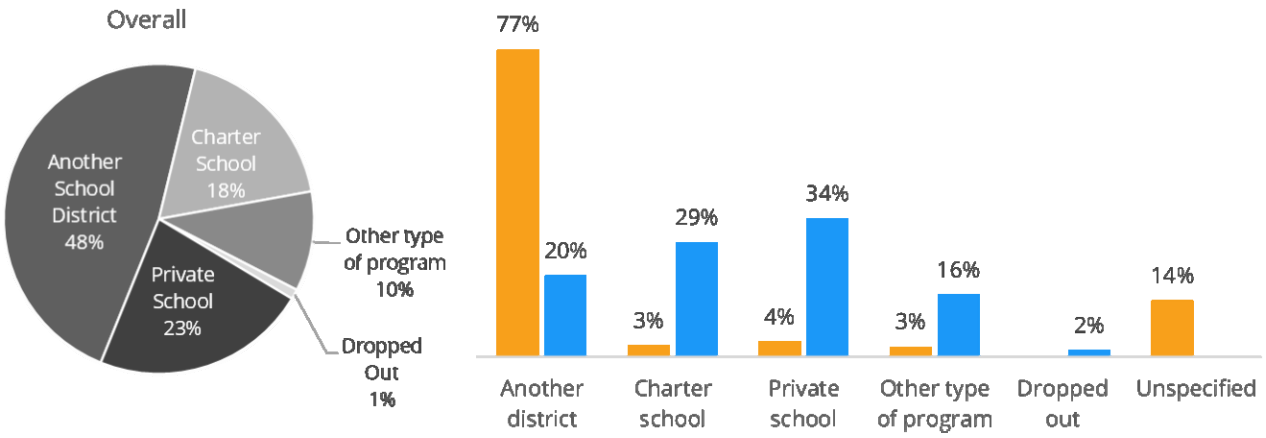
Source. AISD Fall 2015 Leaver Survey
Note. "Other" includes: student physical or mental health, homelessness, denial of transfer, and administrative withdrawal (e.g. for attendance or immunizations).

Where did students go after leaving AISD?

On average, nearly half of the respondents indicated they enrolled in another school district after leaving AISD. However, where they went varied by their primary reason for leaving. Those who left AISD due to a student or family move were much more likely than those who left for other reasons to enroll in another school district. While one fifth of non-moving students also enrolled in another school district, they were more likely to enroll in a private or charter school.

Figure 3

Overall (n=715), nearly half of the respondents indicated their students enrolled in another school district after leaving AISD, however, those who left due to a student or family move (n=312) were much more likely to do so than whose reason for leaving AISD was not a move (n=403).



Source. AISD Fall 2015 Leaver Survey

Students who stayed in the Austin area

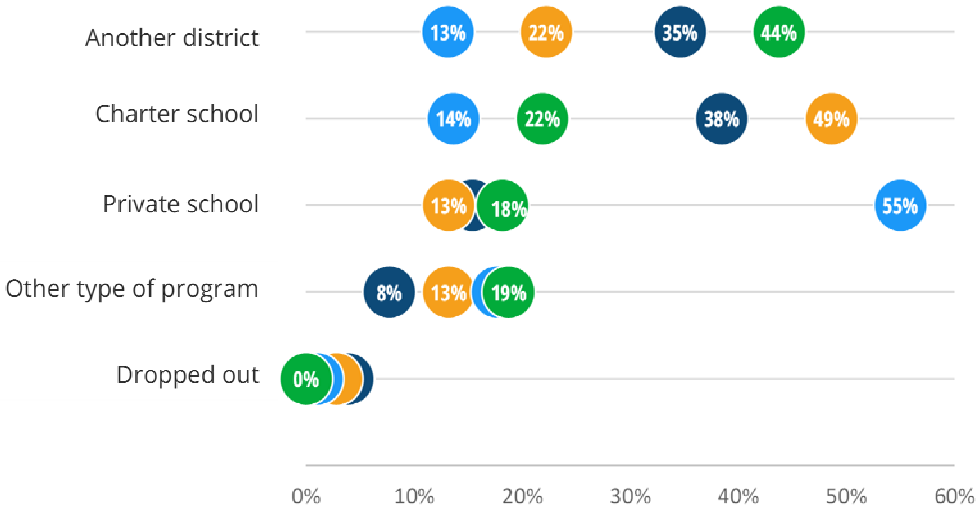
Those who stayed in Austin had predominately different reasons for withdrawing from AISD than those who left the Austin area, and they subsequently enrolled in different types of programs. Because those who stayed in Austin exercised a choice to leave AISD, despite still being in the area, it is important to examine this group more closely. Within the group of respondents who stayed in Austin, distinct patterns emerged that may lend insight to better understand student experiences associated with the decision to leave AISD. Specifically, where Austin-area students subsequently enrolled was related to both their ethnicity and to their primary reason for leaving.

Differences by ethnicity

After leaving AISD, Hispanic students were much more likely, and African American students slightly more likely, to enroll in charter schools than in other types of schools or programs (Figure 4). The majority of white students enrolled in private schools, while students of other ethnicities most frequently enrolled in other Austin-area school districts. This ethnicity-based pattern of enrollment was consistent across elementary, middle, and high school leavers. This pattern was also consistent between male and female students who left AISD. The exception was that male African American students were most likely to enroll in another Austin-area school district and female African American students were most likely to enroll in a charter school.

Figure 4

Of those who left AISD for reasons other than a student or family move, where they enrolled after leaving differed by ethnicity. White students most frequently enrolled in private schools, Hispanic and African American students in charter schools, and other students in other Austin-area school districts.



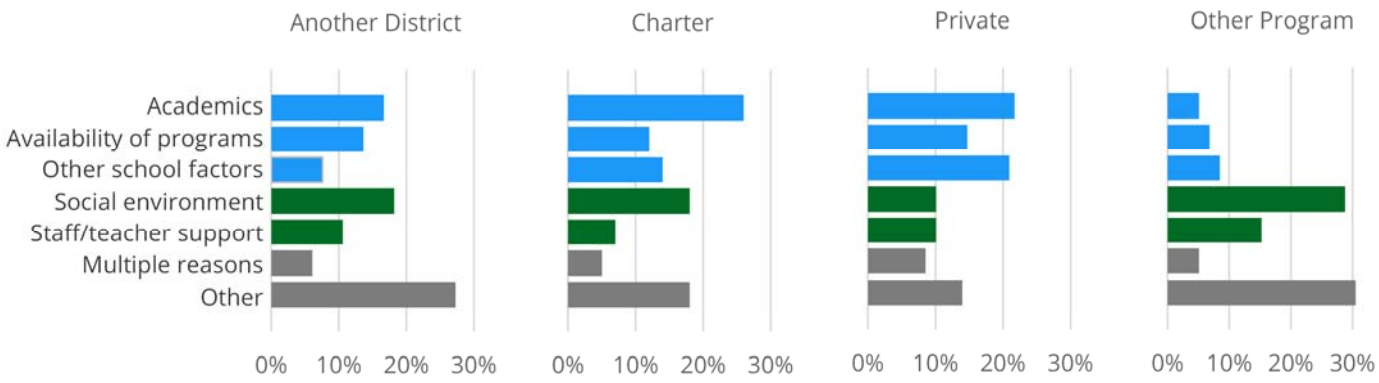
Source. AISD Fall 2015 Leaver Survey

Differences by reasons for leaving

Among those who did not move out of the Austin area, respondents' reasons for leaving AISD varied by where they subsequently enrolled. Those who left AISD for other, non-traditional, types of programs (e.g., GED, homeschool, or residential treatment) were much more likely than those who enrolled in private, charter or other district schools to report leaving due to dissatisfaction with the social environment at the school, unsatisfactory staff or teacher support, or other reasons (in this case, most commonly, student physical or mental health issues). Students who left for private schools were most likely to cite reasons of dissatisfaction with academics or other school factors (e.g., schedule, class size, or resources). Those who went to charter schools also primarily left for academically related concerns, but also indicated social environment reasons. In contrast, the reasons of those who enrolled in another district in the Austin area were more evenly distributed between academic/school, social/support, and multiple/other reasons.

Figure 5

Where students enrolled after leaving AISD differed by academic/school, social/support, and multi reason groupings



Source. AISD Fall 2015 Leaver Survey

Recommendations for encouraging re-enrollment at AISD schools

Respondents were asked if there was anything that AISD could do to encourage them to re-enroll their student at an AISD school. At the two extremes, many either indicated that they could not be persuaded to re-enroll, or that they loved their school and would definitely re-enroll if they still lived in the area. Most comments reflected the primary reasons for leaving, but the vast majority provided recommendations across multiple areas of concern. Themes from the comments were centered around class size and programming, testing, behavior and discipline, and communication and school culture. Some example suggestions from those who stayed in the Austin-area but chose to go to another school or program are provided below:

Recommendations regarding class size and programming

- *Smaller class sizes and specific and targeted academic support*
- *Reduce class sizes. Focus on teaching kids critical thinking skills. Get rid of common core style teaching. Reduce the number of standardized tests, with less pressure/focus on these tests. Increase physical activity.*
- *Too many students in the class, teacher would not keep appointments with me, interpreter was not present for the meetings that we did manage to have, did not see the teacher or school as responsive to my child's needs. (translated from Spanish)*
- *Continue a rigorous dual language program into middle school and high school.*
- *Academic rigor is low, perhaps some students need lower or fewer expectations but students who have academic talent are not challenged. (translated from Spanish)*
- *The only thing I did not like about AISD was that kids were not grouped by class by ability. Gifted, special ed, and ESL were mixed around creating too many levels in a class for a teacher to deal with.*
- *Yes, more options in AISD middle schools than the few magnet programs that are overly sought after.*
- *Major Improvement on your special ed departments - better qualified special ed staff, better communication with parents and people who work with the students outside of school, better OT and PT options for special ed students during school hours, better ways to handle special ed student's behaviors while at school, etc..*
- *If there were support/services specific to gifted and talented kids who learn differently, then we would consider it.*
- *... provide better coordination on accommodations for dyslexic kids, the teachers need more education about how to screen and teach dyslexic children. Accommodations could easily be provided if the dyslexic children were grouped into a similar class schedule and the resource they are provided could be available to them in each classroom for a more coordinated and cohesive curriculum instead of a one hour a day pullout program.*

Recommendations regarding testing

- *We would consider public school again if the excessive benchmarking were discontinued; also, if creative learning/project based learning/etc became a part of the public school experience!*
- *Less testing. Greater teacher support. More options for creative learning styles.*

Recommendations regarding behavior, discipline, and safety

- *Attendance record keeping at the school continues to be incorrect, programs are not of quality, safety is a concern (translated from Spanish)*
- *Monitor the students closer and work more with the parents on discipline.*
- *Yes, actually provide a healthy, learning environment for children to thrive in. The system is more concerned with what color shoe laces my child had on than helping her in math or keeping the boys hands off her body! The office staff could be polite to parents and welcome their involvement and questions!*
- *At (school) the teacher would put his foot up on the desk and soon, my child began to emulate those behaviors at home....putting his feet on the table. (translated from Spanish)*

Recommendations regarding communication and school culture

- *Acknowledge that our family's concerns are real and valid and that our child deserves to be heard and have her needs met...Take responsibility for setbacks and make things right when they have gone wrong.*
- *Smaller, more caring schools and classes.*
- *The teachers should practice culture sensitivity training. They also need better communication. Aim for deep learning and transferrable skills. Help foster a generation of thoughtful creative people who are not afraid to ask questions. Be respectful to kids.*

Other recommendations

- *For taxes paid, children shouldn't be taught in portable buildings.*
- *If i could use my current address I would definitely re-enroll her with AISD.*
- *Increase outdoor playtime. Kids don't need to be sat at a desk all day long.*

AUSTIN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

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