

# FAMILIES' SCHOOLING EXPERIENCES IN KANSAS

NOVEMBER 2022



## KEY FINDINGS

- More than three out of four (77%) parents of children participating in the Kansas Tax Credit for Low-Income Students Program are satisfied with the program. A majority (52%) say they are more satisfied with their children's current schools than their previous schools prior to participating in the program.
- Nearly half (46%) of non-participating parents said they were unaware the tax-credit scholarship program existed. About a third (35%) said they did not participate because they did not meet the eligibility requirements, while a quarter (25%) said they did not participate because they were happy with their current school.
- Nearly two-thirds (63%) of participating parents said their children would attend a public school if they were not able to receive a tax-credit scholarship.
- A safe environment was the most influential factor for participating parents in their school selection (65%). It also was the most influential factor for parents overall (63%). Locational convenience (63%) and academics (61%) were the second- and third-most cited factors for participating parents.
- Parents are generally positive about their children's schools across multiple dimensions of school climate. Program participants consistently were more likely to feel positive about their children's education environments than traditional public school parents.

See the Kansas Parent Survey  
Questionnaire and Topline Results at  
[www.edchoice.org/KSParentSurvey](http://www.edchoice.org/KSParentSurvey)

## BACKGROUND

As is the case in many states, K–12 education in Kansas is at a crucial moment. While Kansas students' math and reading scores usually outpace the national averages, results have been trending downward for years. In 2019, fourth grade math proficiency was at its lowest level since 2000, and their reading proficiency was at its lowest since 2005. Eighth grade math proficiency declined eight percentage points from 2011 to 2019, while average eighth grade reading scores declined in 2019 for the first time since 2003 and reached its lowest point in the 21st century.<sup>1</sup> Notably, academic results were trending downward before the COVID-19 pandemic, which, on a national level, led to the largest average score decline in reading since 1990, and the first ever score decline in mathematics.<sup>2</sup>

Recent Kansas K–12 enrollment totals are fairly aligned with national trends. Like the rest of the country, the COVID-19 pandemic affected headcounts, with public school enrollment in Kansas declining 3.2 percent from Fall 2019 to Fall 2020. For comparison, total public school enrollment in the United States declined 2.7 percent over this period. Kansas public school enrollment recovered only slightly in Fall 2021, increasing 0.7 percent over the previous year. Private school enrollment in Kansas also suffered a shock during the pandemic, dropping 2.8 percent in the pandemic's first year. Unlike public schools, private schools recovered a substantial share of enrollment in 2021, with total headcount rising 2.2 percent over the previous fall. Altogether, public school enrollment in Kansas is 2.5 percent lower than it was prior to the pandemic, and private school enrollment is down 0.6 percent.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, homeschooling has skyrocketed in popularity after the pandemic began. Based a survey from the National Center for Education

Statistics (NCES) and another survey from the Census Bureau, the share of American K–12 children who were homeschooled jumped from 2.8 percent in Fall 2019 to 6.8 percent in Fall 2020.<sup>4</sup>

Kansas has one private school choice program, the Tax Credit for Low Income Students Scholarship Program, which is a kind of tax-credit scholarship program. Families with students between the ages of five and 21 years can participate in the Tax Credit for Low Income Students Scholarship Program provided they meet the eligibility requirements. Students are eligible for scholarships if they: 1) are a Kansas resident, 2) eligible for free or reduced-priced meals (household income is less than 185% of the federal poverty level, or \$51,338 for a family of four in 2021–22), 3) were enrolled in a public school the year prior to seeking a scholarship (or under the age of six), and 4) if they have not graduated high school.<sup>5</sup> Prior to May 2021, the annual household income threshold was 130 percent of the federal poverty level, which was \$36,075 for a family of four in 2021–22. Additionally, eligibility prior to May 2021 was limited families district-assigned to one of the 100 lowest-performing schools in the state according to the Kansas department of education. These eligibility limitations made Kansas' tax-credit scholarship program arguably the most restrictive in the state by multiple measures.<sup>6</sup> While the removal of the school assignment requirement successfully expanded student eligibility, the new income threshold of 185 percent of the federal poverty level is tied for the most stringent income restriction of all tax-credit scholarship programs. The program is funded by individuals and businesses making philanthropic contributions (incentivized by a tax credit valued at 70% of the contribution) to scholarship-granting organizations (SGOs). No donor may contribute more than \$500,000

each year, and the total tax credit cap is \$10 million annually. SGOs determine the amount of the scholarship it distributes and the amount cannot exceed the cost of tuition, fees, expenses, and transportation. The maximum scholarship amount is \$8,000. Scholarships are then used as part or full tuition support at qualified schools.<sup>7</sup>

This brief is the first empirical study on Kansas’ tax-credit scholarship program. We do so by surveying Kansas parents with children currently in K–12 education, both those who have participated in the program and those who have not. In analyzing responses to our survey, we identified families using these programs to understand who uses them, why parents decide to use these programs, and how parents feel about them. We also provide responses from parents of students enrolled in private school but not participating in voucher programs (non-program private), traditional public schools, and homeschooling.

## RESULTS

### Kansas Tax Credit for Low Income Students Scholarship Program

The Kansas Tax Credit for Low Income Students Scholarship Program was enacted in 2014 and

launched in 2015. For eligible students from low-income families, this program provides scholarships for part or full tuition support at nonpublic schools.<sup>8</sup> Program participation has steadily increased from 109 students participating during the 2015–16 school year, to 1,067 students participating during the 2021–22 school year. In total, 3,249 students have participated since the program launched.<sup>9</sup>

One out of four respondents indicated that one or more of their children have participated in Kansas’s tax-credit scholarship program at some point (25%). More than three-quarters (77%) of those who have ever participated in the tax-credit scholarship program indicated that one or more of their children currently participate. The top sources where these respondents heard about the program are their local traditional public school (42%), friends or relatives (19%), and a call from the school (17%). Satisfaction with the Tax Credit for Low Income Students Scholarship Program is generally high among respondents. Nearly four out of five (78%) parents who have ever participated in the program indicate that they were “somewhat” or “completely” satisfied with it (79% of current participants and 74% of previous participants).

When asked how their satisfaction with the school their child is enrolled in compares to

### TAX CREDIT SCHOLARSHIP SATISFACTION

*In general, how satisfied are/were you with the Tax Credit for Low Income Students Scholarship Program?*



n = 220

their satisfaction with the prior participating in the educational choice program, just over half indicate that they are “somewhat more” or “much more satisfied” (52%). Furthermore, over two-thirds of responding participants indicate that it was “somewhat” or “very easy” to find their current school under Kansas’s educational choice program (67%). Again, because a child must be a public school student or new to the Kansas K–12 education system to be eligible for the tax-credit scholarship program, these participating parents are most likely comparing their child’s current school to a Kansas public school.

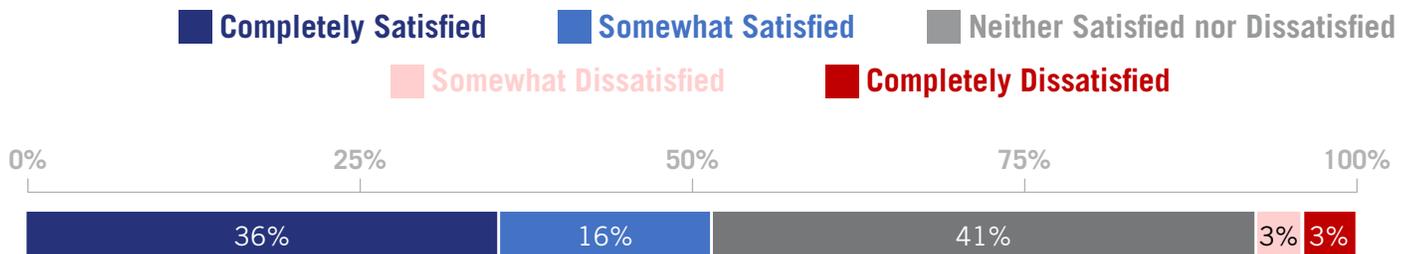
Most participating parents indicated little trouble finding their children’s new schools. Parents were more than five times more likely to say that finding

a new school through the tax-credit scholarship program was easy (67%) than they were to say it was difficult (12%). Just more than one-fifth (22%) of participating parents said finding their children’s current school was neither easy nor difficult.

According to participating parents, just over three out of five tax-credit scholarship students (63%) would be attending a public district school if they were not using the state’s tax-credit scholarship program. Another 16 percent would be attending a public charter school, and another 7 percent would enroll in a magnet school. Altogether, about seven out of eight tax-credit scholarship students (86%) would attend some kind of public school if the program did not exist. Just seven percent of parents indicated their children would attend their current private school regardless of the program.

## COMPARATIVE SATISFACTION

*How does your satisfaction with this school compare to your satisfaction with the school your child was enrolled in prior to participating in the Tax-Credit Scholarship Program?*



n = 174

## EASE OF FINDING PROGRAM SCHOOL

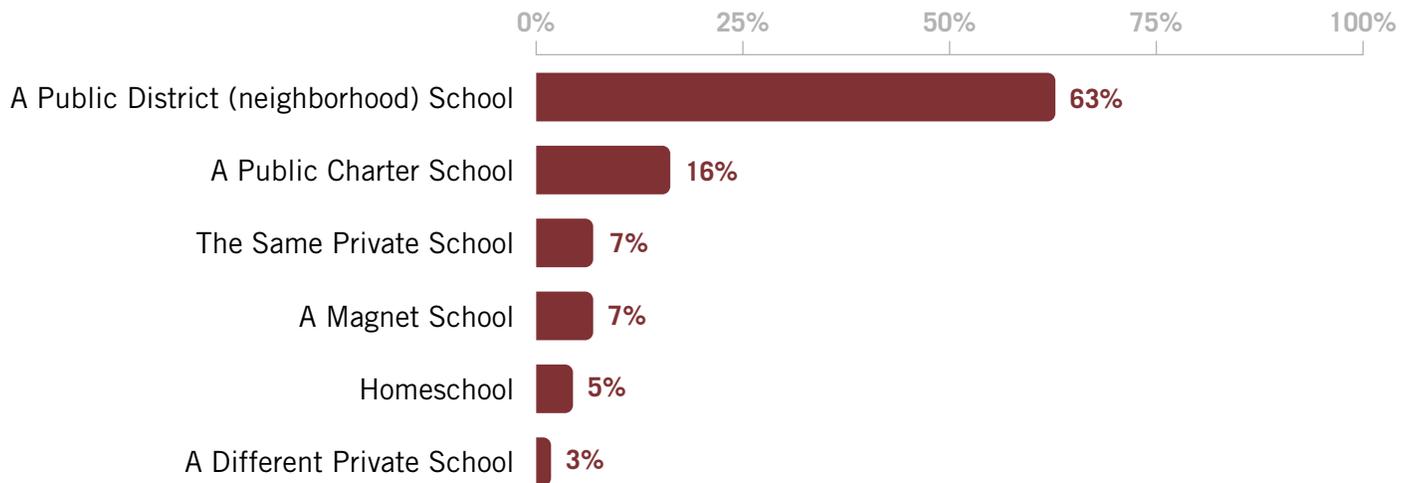
*How easy was it for you to find this school for your child under Kansas's Tax-Credit Scholarship Program?*



n = 174

## WHERE STUDENT WOULD ATTEND WITHOUT PROGRAM

What type of school would your child attend if they were not using the Tax Credit Scholarship Program? (n=167)



## Factors Underlying School Selection

Past research indicates some of the most common factors to influence parent school selection include: the safety and maintenance of the physical environment, interactions with staff and school culture, opportunities and options for students, and school reputation.<sup>10</sup> Past surveys of K–12 parents choosing a school, parents also report having a variety of educational priorities in mind. This diversity of educational preference has been well-documented in numerous surveys of parents across the country.<sup>11</sup> In our survey, we asked parents to identify school characteristics that were influential in selecting the school that their child currently attends.

Among all parents, the topmost influential factors in choosing a school are a safe environment (63% “very” and “extremely influential”), that it is close to home and/or work (59%), the schools’ academics (54%), and that it is their assigned neighborhood school (53%). Parents with children participating in the tax-credit scholarship program indicated somewhat different influences compared to all parents whose children were not participating. When considering the most

influential factors in choosing their school through the tax-credit scholarship program, participating families were 17 points more likely to name diversity, 14 points more likely to name morals, character or value instruction, 12 points more likely to name religious environment or instruction, 12 points more likely to name the school’s A–F letter grade, 10 percentage points more likely to name individualized attention, and 10 points more likely to name school discipline compared to all non-participating parents. Locational convenience, diversity, and a school’s A–F letter grade were the only influential factors that tax-credit scholarship parents cited substantially more frequently than non-participating private school parents. Only three factors were rated as influential by a majority of public school parents: residential assignment (63%), locational convenience (61%), and safety (59%).

Respondents were asked about their beliefs on the purpose of education. Parents saw five values and indicated how important they thought they were to the purpose of education. More than three-quarters of respondents indicated that providing children with skills for future employment and economic

## INFLUENTIAL FACTORS IN CHOOSING CHILD'S CURRENT SCHOOL

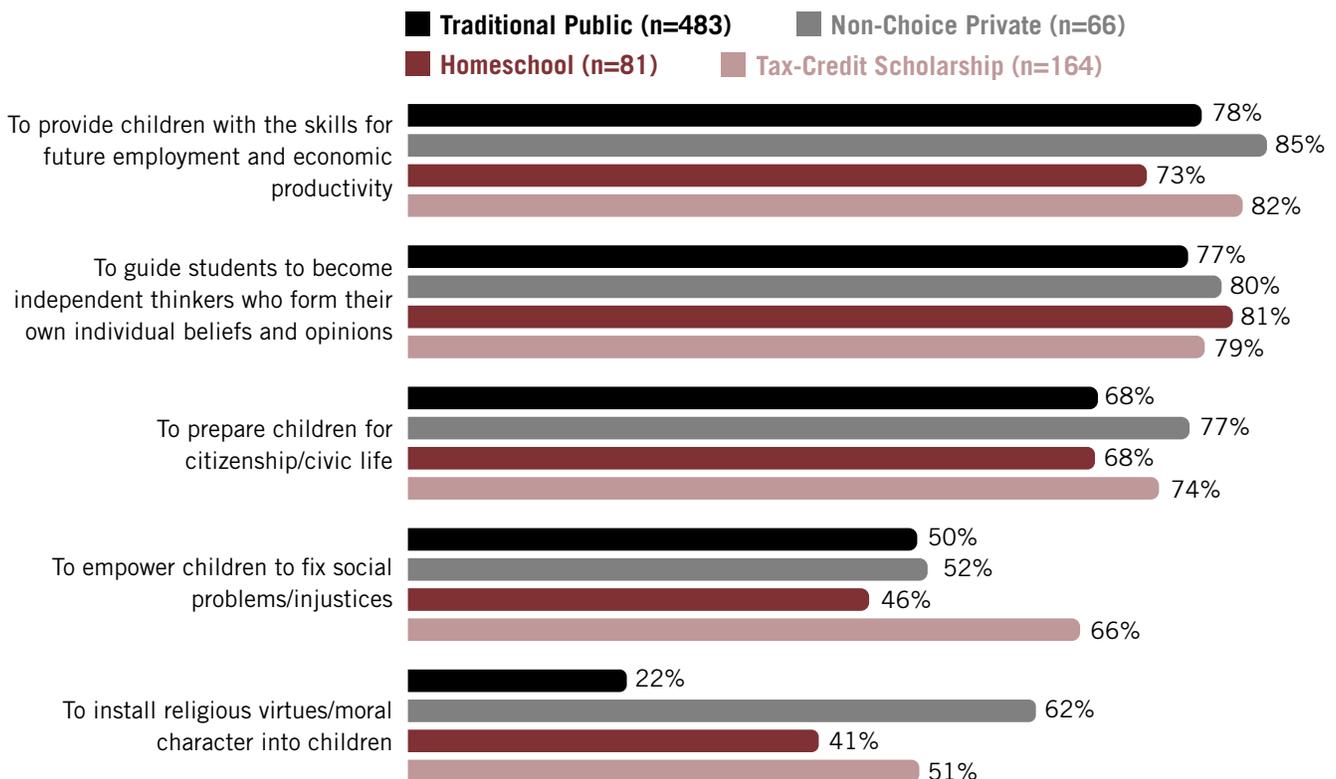
How influential were the following factors in your decision to have your child attend this school?

	Traditional public (n=476-483)	Non-program private (n=65-66)	Homeschool (n=78-80)	Tax-Credit Scholarship (n=167-169)
Safe environment	59%	79%	71%	65%
Close to home and/or work	61%	48%	60%	63%
Academics	48%	64%	60%	61%
Morals/character/values instruction	38%	71%	45%	60%
The school's reputation	40%	73%	45%	59%
Individual, one-on-one attention	34%	59%	69%	56%
Small classes	31%	59%	54%	49%
Diversity	26%	23%	25%	49%
Discipline	28%	52%	33%	48%
Extracurricular activities offered	35%	42%	25%	43%
Small school	29%	45%	42%	41%
The school's A-F letter grade	23%	31%	24%	40%
Religious environment/instruction	12%	64%	28%	38%
This is my assigned neighborhood school	63%	22%	21%	0%

Note: Chart displays Top 2 percentages (% Very + % Extremely Influential).

## IMPORTANCE OF PURPOSES OF EDUCATION

How important are the following purposes of education?



Note: Chart displays Top 2 percentages (% Very + % Extremely Important).

productivity (79%) and guiding students to become independent thinkers who form their own individual beliefs and opinions (77%) are “very” or “extremely important” to them. Significantly more non-program private school parents consider it “very” or “extremely” important for schools to prepare children for citizenship/civic life (78%) compared to traditional public school parents (68%). Parents with children participating in the tax-credit scholarship program were 16 points more likely than traditional public school parents to consider empowering children to fix social problems or injustices as important (66% and 50%, respectively), which was the largest gap between tax-credit scholarship parents and other brick-and-mortar parent groups for this survey question. Tax-credit scholarship parents are substantially more likely to value virtues or moral instruction than traditional public school parents (51% and 22%, respectively), but they are notably less likely to consider them important than private school parents not using the program (62%).

## Parental Involvement

Regardless of where their children attended school, parents generally reported that their schooling decision led to them feeling more involved with and confident about their children’s education. Tax-credit scholarship parents diverged from traditional public school parents in two areas of involvement, however. First, participating parents were eight percentage points more likely than traditional public school parents to agree that sending their child to their current school gives them peace of mind that their child’s needs are being met (69% and 61%, respectively). Second, participating parents were nine points more likely than traditional public school parents to feel more in charge of their child’s education (51% and 42%, respectively). Less than half (42%) of traditional public school parents said they feel in charge of their child’s education, the lowest number among all parent groups and all forms of involvement presented.

Notably, though, non-program private school parents and homeschool parents were more positive than participating parents in each of the five areas of parental involvement presented in the survey. Most significantly, non-program private school parents were 19 points more likely than participating parents to feel more in charge of their child’s education (70% and 51%, respectively), and homeschool parents were 22 points more likely than program parents to report a greater involvement with their child’s education after choosing their current schooling situation (73% and 51%, respectively). Regardless, most of participating parents said that using the program increased their confidence to select the best education for their child (58%), and 63 percent of them said they were proud to be a part of the tax-credit scholarship program.

Parent involvement in schools ranges from active communication with teachers, supporting learning activities at home, participating in school events or extra-curricular activities, volunteering, and even participating in school governance.<sup>12</sup> Over the past three decades, literature has consistently shown the benefits of parental involvement on a host of academic, socioemotional, and developmental outcomes for children.<sup>13</sup> In theory, schools of choice can increase parent participation by leveraging their operational flexibility to address the needs of their school community and alleviate obstacles to parent participation.<sup>14</sup>

After enrolling their children in the Tax Credit for Low Income Students Scholarship Program, a notable number of respondents indicated that they engaged in activities related to their child’s education more often than they did when their child was enrolled in their previous school. In fact, at least 40 percent of respondents report that they attend family events/social organized by their child’s school (40%), participate in school activities (44%), and volunteer at their child’s school (41%) “somewhat more” or “much more often” than when they were enrolled in their previous school.

## SENTIMENT ABOUT PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Participation in the program/sending my child to their most recent school...

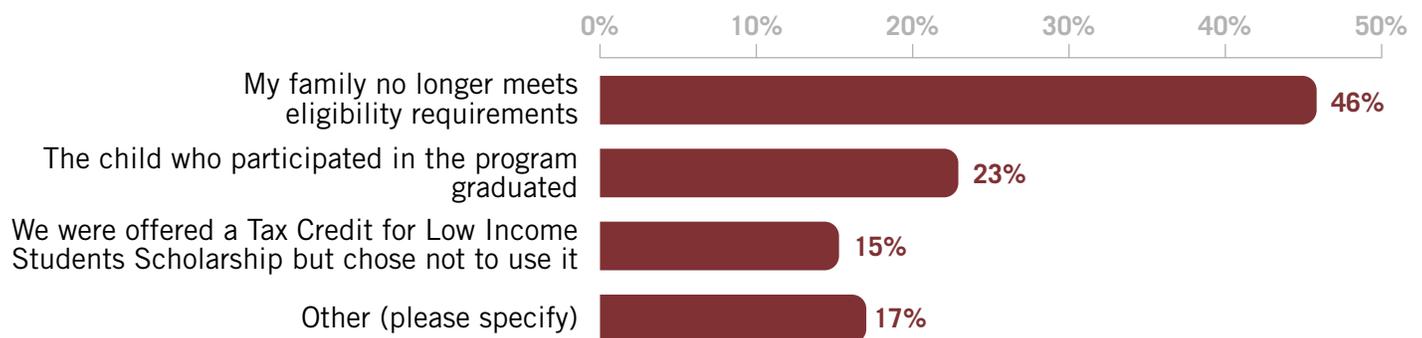
	Traditional public (n=490)	Non-program private (n=66)	Homeschool (n=84)	Tax-Credit Scholarship (n=166)
...gives me peace of mind that my child's needs are being met.	61%	74%	71%	69%
...led me to learn more about what my child needs.	59%	68%	70%	61%
...led me to learn more about how my child learns.	57%	71%	69%	53%
...led to greater involvement in my child's education.	51%	61%	73%	51%
...made me feel like I'm more in charge of my child's education.	42%	70%	58%	51%
...makes me proud to be part of this program.	-	-	-	63%
...increased my confidence in my ability to choose what is best for my child.	-	-	-	58%

Note: Chart displays Top 2 percentages (% Somewhat + % Completely Agree).

## WHY STUDENTS LEAVE THE PROGRAM

Can you please tell us why your child no longer participates in the Tax Credit Scholarship Program?

Please select all that apply . (n=52)



## Reasons for Leaving/Not Using the Program

Of the respondents who indicate that at least one of their children has participated in the Tax Credit for Low Income Students Scholarship Program, nearly a quarter (23%) report that their child no longer participates. The top reasons these parents give for no longer participating in the program are that their

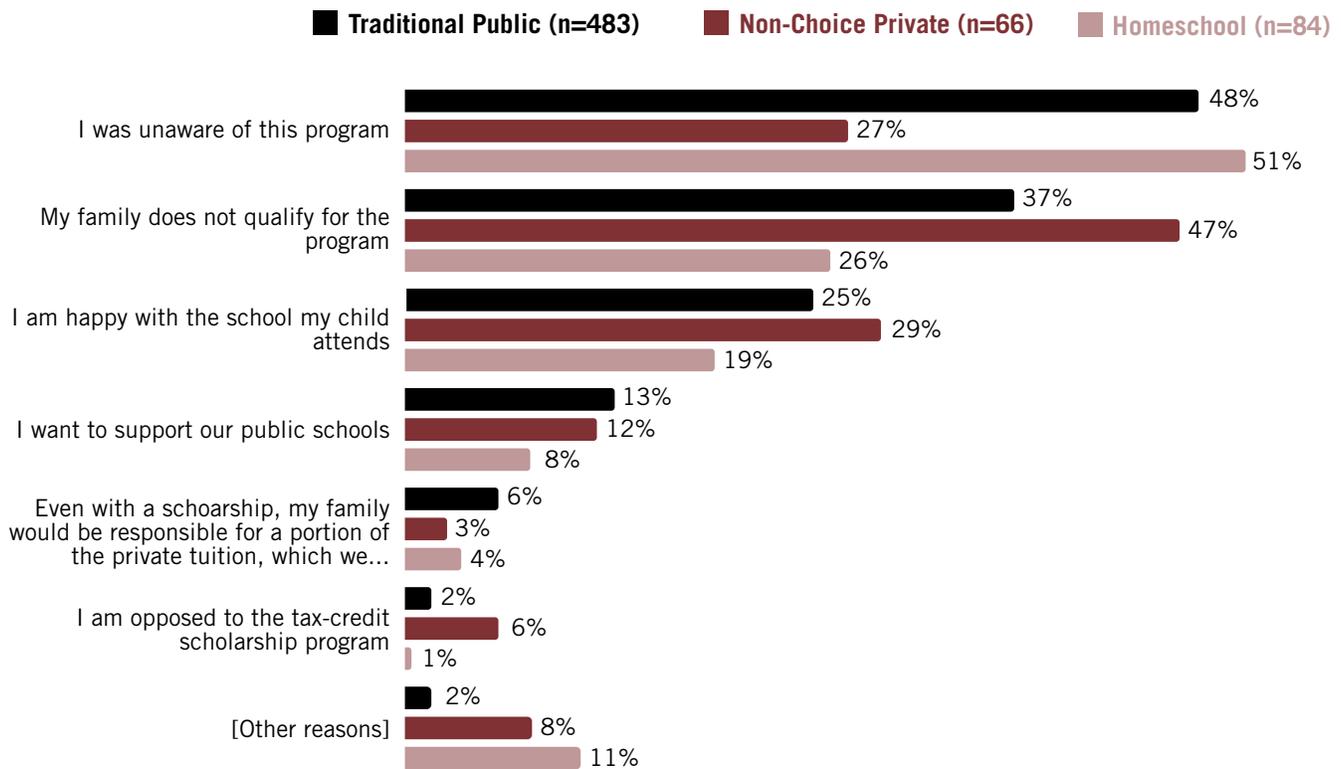
family no longer meets the eligibility requirements (46%) and the child who participated in the program graduated (23%). Influences from other factors are relatively low. Parents of students that leave the program are more likely to be satisfied with their new school than dissatisfied (37% vs. 11%), though that is a lower rate than that of parents who enroll their children in a new school through the program.

Most of the K–12 parents surveyed have never had a child participate in the tax-credit scholarship program (75%). Nearly half of this group indicated that the reason that their children have not used the program is because they are unaware of it (46%). Significantly fewer respondents whose children attend non-program private schools say they were unaware of this program (29%) than do respondents whose children are either homeschooled (51%) or attend traditional public schools (47%). Further, 35

percent of parents who never participated indicated that their families did not qualify for the program, and 25% reported that they are happy with the school their child attends. Over half of parents who never used the program (55%) said they would have been “very” or “extremely likely” to enroll their child in the program if they qualified for it or if the award amount was enough to cover all their child’s tuition and expenses.

## WHY PARENTS HAVE NEVER USED THE TAX-CREDIT SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

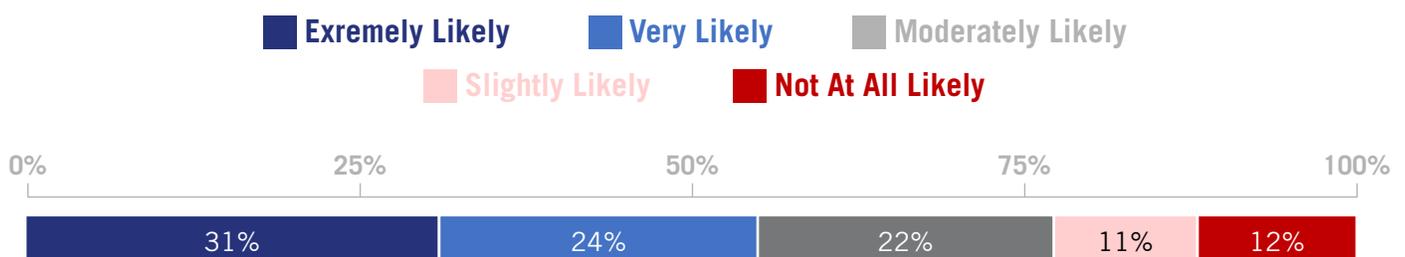
Why have none of your children used Kansas's educational choice program (i.e., the Tax Credit for Low Income Students Scholarship Program)? Please select all that apply.



Note: Chart displays Top 2 percentages (% Very + % Extremely Important).

## LIKELIHOOD OF USING PROGRAM

If you did qualify for Kansas's educational choice program, or if the award amount was enough to cover all of your child's tuition and expenses, how likely would you have been to enroll your child in the program?



## School Climate

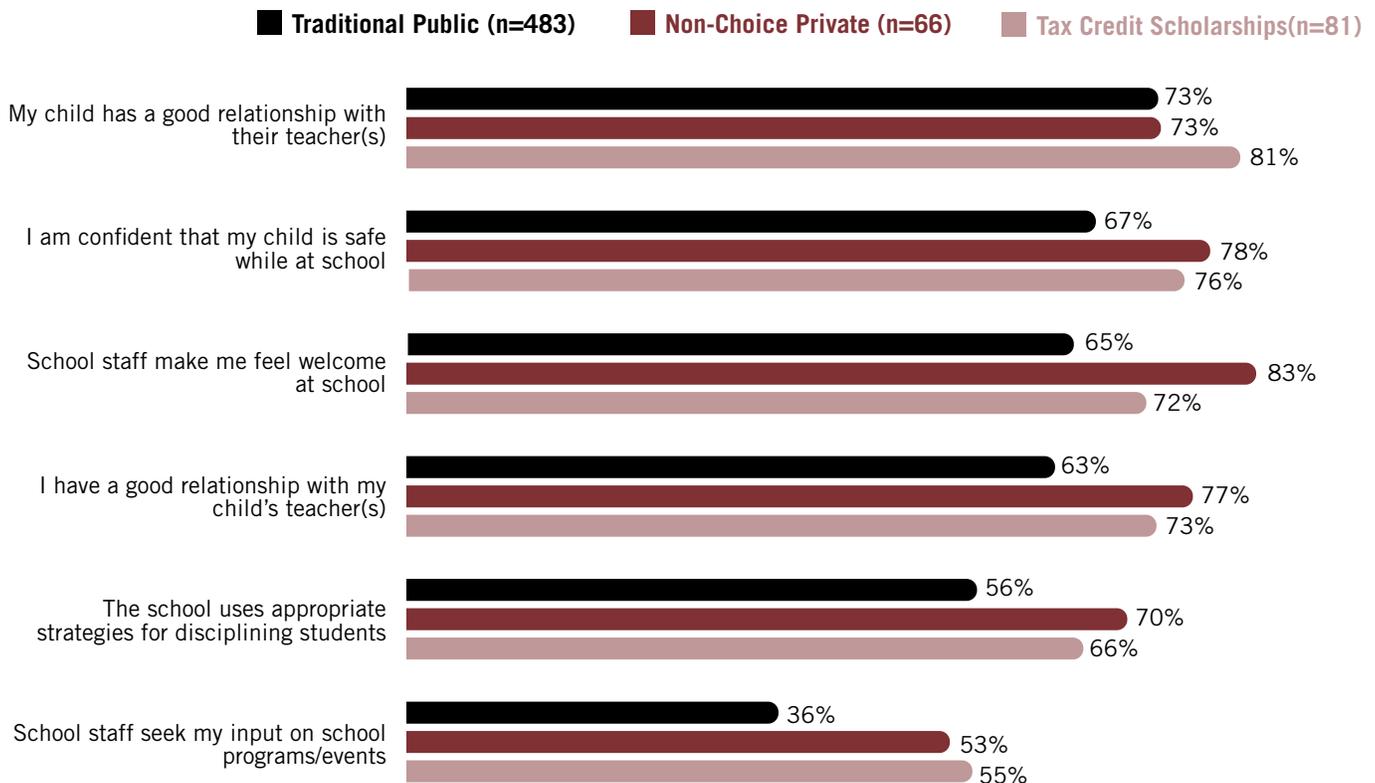
A healthy school environment is foundational to students’ success. A substantial body of research has demonstrated a strong positive relationship between school climate and academic performance and other important aspects of student development, such as socio-emotional development.<sup>15</sup> One expectation for school choice policies is that parents will be able to access schools that maintain a culture for learning that suits the needs of their child.<sup>16</sup>

In the survey, parents described their perceptions of five key aspects of the learning environment at their child’s school.<sup>17</sup> Satisfaction with the overall climate of their child’s school is generally high, with nearly three-quarters of respondents are “somewhat” or “completely satisfied” with the school their child currently attends or most recently attended (72%). Most respondents agree that their child has a good relationship with their teachers (75%) and that they

are confident that their child is safe while at school (70%). Additionally, over two-thirds of respondents agree that school staff make them feel welcome at school (68%) and that they have a good relationship with their child’s teachers (67%). Fewer agree that school staff seek their input on school programs or events (42%).

Consistently, parents using the tax-credit scholarship program are more positive about their children’s current school climates than traditional public school parents. Participating parents are more likely to say that their children have good relationships with their teachers (81% versus 73%), that their children are safe at school (76% versus 67%), that their current schools’ staff makes the parents feel welcome (72% versus 65%), that the parents have good relationships with the teachers (73% versus 63%), that their schools use appropriate disciplinary strategies (66% versus 56%), and that their schools seek parents’ input on events and programs.

### PERSPECTIVES ON SCHOOL CLIMATE



Note: Chart displays Top 2 percentages (% Somewhat + % Completely Agree).

# APPENDIX 1:

## Survey Project and Profile

<b>Title:</b>	<i>2022 Kansas Parent Survey</i>	
<b>Survey Sponsor:</b>	EdChoice	
<b>Survey Developer:</b>	EdChoice	
<b>Survey Data Collection &amp; Quality Control:</b>	Hanover Research	
<b>Survey Dates:</b>	April 25-August 7, 2022	
<b>Survey Platform:</b>	Qualtrics	
<b>Language(s):</b>	English	
<b>Sampling Method:</b>	Panel and contact list	
<b>Population Sample:</b>	Parents in Kansas	
<b>Sample Size:</b>	Traditional Public School Parents	N=520
<i>All sample sizes listed include complete and partial responses</i>	Homeschool Parents	N=92
	Non-program Private School Parents	N=89
	Tax-Credit Scholarship Parents	N=177
	Magnet School Parents	N=25
	Public Charter School Parents	N=33
	Total Sample Size	N=932
<b>Margin of Error:</b>	Traditional Public School Parents = $\pm 5.3\%$	
	Homeschool Parents = $\pm 10.2\%$	
	Non-program Private School Parents = $\pm 10.4\%$	
	Tax-Credit Scholarship Parents = $\pm 6.7\%$	
<b>Response Rate:</b>	0.18%	
<b>Weighting?</b>	No	
<b>Quotas:</b>	Traditional Public School Parents	N=350
	Homeschool Parents	N=150
	Non-program Private School Parents	N=200

The authors are responsible for this paper's analysis, charts, and writing as well as any unintentional errors or misrepresentations.

## APPENDIX 2:

# Survey Methodology and Data Sources

The online survey solicited responses from Kansas parents of children who attended kindergarten through 12th grade during the 2021–22 or 2020–21 school years. To be eligible for participation, parents could have a child enrolled in a traditional public school, a magnet school, a community (charter) school, a non-program private school, or a homeschool program. Additionally, a portion of the parents participated in Kansas’s educational choice program: the Tax Credit for Low Income Students Scholarship Program.

Responses to the survey were solicited primarily through a panel company, EMI Research Solutions, as well as via an open link sent to prospective respondents by Kansas Scholarship Granting Organizations (SGOs). The survey was launched on April 25, 2022. Screener questions were included in the survey to ensure that all respondents live in Kansas and either currently have school-aged children or have had school-aged children within the last two years. The final sample consists of 84 complete and 50 partial responses, of which 909 responded to the survey via the panel company and 25 via the open link.

After full data collection, a total of 2,247 responses were received. Of these, 1,313 respondents were excluded from the analysis. Of these dropped respondents, 647 were dropped for being disqualified, 345 were dropped for being over set quotas, 224 were dropped for having too few respondents, and 97 were dropped for having specious responses. Note that all sample sizes in this report reflect the final, cleaned data, with all errant responses dropped. After data cleaning, a total of 934 responses were included in the analysis.

Because we utilized a snowball sampling technique, the descriptive differences presented throughout the report are not necessarily representative of the population of parents in each school sector. Furthermore, the analyses are primarily descriptive and should not be interpreted as establishing any causal relationships.

In this report, we primarily disaggregate responses into the following five sub-classifications, or segments: (1) traditional public-school parents, (2) non-program private school parents, (3) homeschool parents, and (4) choice program parents. For full aggregate and segmented results, please consult the accompanying data supplement and topline report.

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