

**FACTORS INFLUENCING PRE-K TO EIGHTH GRADE SCHOOL CHOICE:  
A COMPARATIVE STUDY FOR THE ROBERT C. PARKER SCHOOL**

James Cashin, Gabrielle Sullivan, James Sullivan, Jacquelyn Verdon and Christopher White  
Siena College

# **FACTORS INFLUENCING PRE-K TO EIGHTH GRADE SCHOOL CHOICE**

## **Executive Summary**

Independent school leaders are continually faced with the task of demonstrating and communicating the value provided for the cost of their school's education. Stagnant wages, lingering effects of the 2008 recession, improved public schools, and increased availability of charter schools all had a negative influence on student enrollment in independent schools. Some independent schools were thriving, while others found the challenges daunting. We believed that developing a better understanding of the factors that influenced parents' enrollment choices might help school leaders address these challenges. This study was conducted with the participation of six independent schools in the Albany, NY area.

We explored the value proposition for the Robert C. Parker School as explained by members of its board, administration, faculty and parents. Four themes emerged that differentiated Parker from its competitors. These included applied, individualized and collaborative approaches to learning, combined with a strong sense of community. We found that all four of these themes were clearly and effectively articulated on the website and in the school's communication materials. The Parker website provided a comprehensive and easily accessible source of information for parents and guardians of current and prospective students.

Based on interviews with parents and guardians across all six schools, we identified twelve factors that could influence initial enrollment and reenrollment decisions. We developed measures for each factor and conducted an internet based survey with responses from nearly 600 families. We assessed the validity and reliability for each measure and conducted a multiple linear regression to test the hypotheses. The survey provided enough data to evaluate the influence of eight factors on enrollment choices. We confirmed that affordability, consistency of school and family values, individual attention, child development/maturity, sense of community, and continuity/friendships were statistically reliable predictors of reenrollment intentions. One hypothesized factor, extracurricular activities, was not a reliable predictor of intentions to reenroll.

We also conducted a compared the results for Parker with the other schools. Parker parents and guardians identified individual attention and child development/growth as the most important factors for reenrollment intentions. These were followed by education quality, espoused value and continuity/friendships. Parents and guardians of prospective and recently enrolled students indicated initial impressions as the most important factor for enrollment decisions, followed by reputation. Affordability and extracurricular activities were the least important factors for re enrollment, and child safety/security and facilities/infrastructure were the least important factors for initial enrollment intentions. Parents and guardians of currently enrolled students were most satisfied with individual attention and development/growth of the child, and were least satisfied with affordability.

The report categorized and summarized participants' comments for each factor to provide a greater sense of the variation in perceptions. The paper concludes with recommendations for next steps and an invitation to continue the partnership with Siena.

## **FACTORS INFLUENCING PRE-K TO EIGHTH GRADE SCHOOL CHOICE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY FOR THE ROBERT C. PARKER SCHOOL**

Tuition-based schools were reliant on recruiting and retention efforts to be viable education providers in their communities. Understanding the factors that influence school choice is critical for school leaders so that they may effectively communicate to parents and guardians. The Robert C. Parker School, located in Wynantskill, NY, was a private school for boys and girls in preschool through 8th grade. Parker taught its students academic and life skills both in the classroom and outside on a seventy-seven acre property. Parker incorporated various academic experiences into its educational system including regular trips to the Hudson River and an optional trip to Barcelona, Spain. Preparing students for life beyond Parker and college was a main goal from the first day a student arrived. The Head of School and the Board of Trustees would like to better understand which factors influence recruiting and retention of students at the school.

This study was conducted with the participation of six independent schools in the Albany, NY area. Three research questions guided this study: *what perceptions do internal and external stakeholders have about the school's value proposition; to what extent is the value proposition well represented in the school's communications; and what factors influence school enrollment choices for parents and guardians?* After a brief introduction to the history of independent and Catholic schools in the United States, the study explored the value proposition for each school from the perspectives of school board members, administrators and members of the faculty. We identified specific themes that were discussed by the internal stakeholders and assessed the extent of which these themes were present in the school's communications to current and prospective families. Based on interviews with 24 parents and guardians, we identified twelve factors that we believed influence initial enrollment and reenrollment decisions. We developed measures for each factor and conducted an internet based survey with responses from nearly 600 families. We assessed the validity and reliability for each measure and conducted a multiple linear regression to test the hypotheses. We also conducted a comparative analysis of the target school with the other schools in this study. The paper concludes with a discussion of the relative importance and performance of each factor for the target school compared with other schools in the study and provides recommendations for action.

### **Historical Perspectives**

Independent schools, both secular and religious, date back to colonial America and predate all forms of public education in the United States. Even the early "common schools," which were publicly operated, were not completely funded by the public (Goldin, 1999). Parents were billed for all of, or portions of the school year, depending on the location of the school. It was not until early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that free public schooling was widely available in all states. Schools were organized at the district level typically associated with cities, towns, or rural communities. Decisions concerning resources devoted to education were made by local taxpayers or their representatives. The quality of the education was often limited by the resources available in any particular community and created a disparity of education across socioeconomic and racial lines. Families in most areas had a choice between tax-supported public schools and tuition-based independent schools. Goldin (1999) explained that this created situations where some public schools were better funded than others. In locations with relatively homogeneous populations, public schools tended to receive strong support from the community because all

families received similar benefits. In locations where there was greater diversity in income, a situation was created where the wealthiest segment could opt out of the public school system for more prestigious independent schools. The middle would be stuck with an overburdened and underfunded school and the poorest segments would experience an environment where they felt unwanted.

It was exactly this situation that faced large numbers of immigrants entering the country in the late 19th and early 20th century which created a dramatic rise in Catholic parochial schools. The 1884 decree by the Council of U.S. Bishops required parishes to offer elementary education and parents were strongly encouraged to send their children to Catholic schools. An abundance of priests and nuns allowed parishes to operate these schools at relatively low costs to families. By 1930, Catholic schools enrolled almost one third of school children in large cities (Ewert, 2013). Enrollment in secular and religious independent schools kept pace with growth in the population. The peak enrollment in independent schools was nearly 15% in 1958 (Ewert, 2013).

Catholic school enrollment had decreased by 22.1% since 2000 and by over 50% since 1965, the peak of enrollment in the United States when it was educating 4.5 million elementary students (McDonald & Schultz, 2011). Nearly 50% of Catholic students were enrolled in a Catholic school during 1965 compared to 15% in 2009 (Meyer, 2007). Studies suggest that this was a result of rising educational costs associated with replacing religious teachers with lay people and a change in Catholic demographics (Vitello, 2009). Other factors included improved and more uniform quality of public schools systems, movement of Catholics to suburban and rural areas, and the rise of magnet and charter schools.

The growth of magnet schools in the latter half of the 20th century was an attempt to create greater opportunities for those with ability to move beyond their disadvantaged roots. Charter schools, developed in the late 20th and early 21st century, were the latest attempt to reform the public education system. Both charter and magnet schools were funded by school districts, but offered special classes and opportunities which standard public schools could not. In some areas of the country there had been a significant decline in enrollment in independent schools due to charter school influence in the area (Green, 2014). With more choices in the market, independent schools must put forth more effort to enroll and retain students. Data presented by Buddin (2012) indicated that growth in independent school enrollments did not keep pace with the growth in total enrollments (1.14%) during the period 2000-2008. Independent school enrollments dropped from 10.5% of total enrollments in 2000 to 9.2% of enrollments in 2008. This was primarily due to a decline in the number of Catholic schools (-1.65% growth) and increased attendance at charter schools (2.4%). The annual growth in attendance of secular schools was 1.75%. Buddin's national survey indicated continued growth of charter schools at the expense of independent schools. In 2011, about 9% of students were enrolled in independent schools whereas 3% were enrolled in charter schools.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) 2011-2012 Private School Survey, more than one million students in Pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade attended one of nearly 7,500 independent schools in the northeast section of the United States (Broughman & Swaim, 2013). More than 430,000 students attended one of nearly 2,000 independent schools in the state of New York. Approximately two-thirds of the schools and 80% of the students were affiliated with a religious organization. Catholic Schools represented the largest proportion of this group with 20% of the schools and 40% of the students. Most independent schools (70%) emphasized a regular elementary curriculum, 12% specialized in

early childhood development, and 8% employed the Montessori Method. The other 10% emphasized special and alternative educational programs.

Independent school leaders were continually faced with the task of demonstrating and communicating the value provided for the cost of their school's education. Stagnant wages and lingering effects of the 2008 recession had forced families to make difficult choices about spending. Downward pressures on tuition limited the funds available to independent schools for maintenance, improvements, specialized programs, and extracurricular activities which, in turn, impacted enrollment. Lower enrollments further exacerbated the problem and forced independent schools into charging additional fees and organizing fundraising activities to cover costs. Improved public schools and increased availability of charter schools offered parents meaningful alternatives. Some independent schools were thriving, but for others the challenges were daunting. Understanding what factors influenced parents' choice about enrolling and reenrolling their children in independent schools may help school leaders address these challenges and better communicate their schools' value propositions.

### **Understanding the Value Proposition**

A common characteristic of independent schools was the universal attempt to differentiate one school from all other competitors. In the Albany, NY area, the cost of preschool was equivalent to, if not cheaper than, available childcare alternatives. Beyond preschool, or in some communities, kindergarten, parents and guardians paid a premium for their children's private education. We interviewed members of the schools' board, administration, and faculty to answer the first research question: *what perceptions do internal and external stakeholders have about the school's value proposition?* We then conducted a review of the archival data provided by the six participating schools to answer the second research question: *to what extent is the value proposition well represented in the school's communications?*

The interviews with sixteen board/administration members and thirteen faculty members helped us to define the six schools' missions and value propositions. We focused on differentiating factors and then explored how that information was communicated to families of current and prospective students. We asked each group of internal stakeholders to explain what attributes set their school apart from competing schools and to provide specific examples of how these attributes had helped the school attract and retain its students. We also asked them what advantages their school had over its competitors and how the school's attributes and advantages were communicated to families. We ended the interviews by asking what aspirations they had for the school in 5 to 10 years.

The six schools within this study all found their own unique way of differentiating themselves from the public and private competition. One school set itself apart through its unique teaching style and the availability of its teachers to the parents. A small student-teacher ratio at this same school allowed for a greater sense of community where every parent, teacher, and child knew each other. The second school differentiated itself through its small class sizes and accelerated education. The flexible curriculum and caring teachers provided students the help they needed in a comfortable setting and allowed them to excel academically. A third school employed the Montessori Method to tailor the educational experience for each student. Parents who enrolled their children in this school were impressed with the superior level of self discipline and knowledge their child had acquired. A fourth school believed that faith was the catalyst of the educational experience, which enabled each person to overcome life's obstacles. A fifth school prided itself on its small class sizes which allowed teachers to provide individual

attention to each student. All students benefited, from those struggling to understand basic concepts to others who were prepared to master advanced material.

### **Differentiating Themes**

The Robert C. Parker School prided itself on its seventy-seven acres campus which was used as a learning tool to provide hands-on experiences in the areas of nature and science. Students attending that school were given two recesses each day in which they had the chance to explore and experience nature. Through discussions with parents/guardians, members of the board and administration, and the teachers we identified four areas that differentiated the Robert C. Parker School from their competitors. These included applied, individualized and collaborative approaches to learning, combined with a strong sense of community.

**Applied learning.** Parker's campus gave their students the unique opportunity for hands on learning experiences. The students had the opportunity to explore nature and science in the outdoors. Students were also subjected to a project driven curriculum, which gave them the tools to learn how to work and collaborate with their fellow students. Teachers facilitated learning by incorporating current events into the classroom if it coincided with their current subject material.

*We are based in the progressive tradition, which means we are hands on and the types of work that the kids do relates to real life problems.*

*It is very active and project driven across the curriculum so the students are very active and engaged.*

*I believe what sets the Parker school apart from other schools in the region is the preparation for the real world that we give our students. We try to incorporate real world issues and challenges, so it gives our students the tools for the future. We give them social and technical skills that help them in the real world.*

*Really educating the kids to be innovative, successful, high achievers; and also that social responsibility piece where they know that their actions have a meaning beyond the school. When they graduate they feel like they will make a difference in the world. We know that is our end goal so we create a program that will live up to that.*

**Individualized learning/flexibility.** Teachers described the flexibility they had to adjust curriculum for individual students as something that differentiated themselves from other schools. They were not required to keep all students on the same path to achieve pre-set goals on a pre-set schedule. Teachers could facilitate learning by allowing students to pursue subjects and continue projects which they found particularly interesting. Teachers could also survey their students and see what they were interested in doing. Activities for the day were then tailored to the students' interests.

*I would have to say that my favorite thing about teaching at the Parker School would be the freedom to teach my own curriculum. It is definitely more beneficial than teaching a set curriculum*

*I love the fact that we are able to spend a lot of time with certain projects, especially if the kids are really interested in a particular topic.*

*We are very flexible in the 4 year old room with plans and activities. I often “survey” the children to listen to what they are interested in and bring in materials or make plans that will foster that interest.*

*We really get to know our students as individuals with the way we do student centered teaching.*

Individualized learning however, did not mean learning without a plan. One teacher added:

*Controlled flexibility is a good thing in the classroom, in terms of having a master plan and then following the children’s interests in filling in all areas of the plan.*

The teachers we talked to believed that their individualized approach increased student satisfaction while encouraging learning. The individualized approach also helped the teachers instill self confidence in the students and also develop critical thinking skills.

*We do a lot of self reflections at the end of projects. We want them to be able to see themselves as being capable students and learners; that they can go out and try anything. They don't have to be successful the first time. Even if things do not turn out the way you want them to, they can try again. We encourage them and keep their curiosity.*

**Collaborative learning techniques.** The importance of collaboration and critiques by peers were stressed by teachers and members of the board and administration. Teachers believed it was important for students to learn how to work together and solve problems as a group. It was understood that critiques were used across the curriculum and as a major component of feedback in each of the classrooms.

Parker students were often challenged with extensive projects that required a lot of time and dedication to complete. Working on these projects individually and in a group helped students learn to take pride in what they were doing and taught them how to work with one another. The values learned from the projects helped students prepare for life beyond the classroom setting.

*They have a lot of enthusiasm for the projects that we do and what is interesting for me is we have guests that come in that are thinking about coming to the school and we have the students at our morning meeting go around and say what is there favorite thing about Parker and it is fascinating to me to hear all of the wonderful things they love about this school.*

*Students are able to critique in a positive way ... not putting each other down ... they are able to communicate effectively and in a positive way*

**Sense of community.** Members of the administration, board and teachers described the strong sense of community as something that differentiated Parker from other schools. Parker was unique in its ability to involve all grade levels in school community projects. All students, regardless of age felt comfortable working and interacting with each other. The recycling and reading buddies programs helped Parker students become comfortable with one another. This

sentiment fostered within the school translated to situations outside of the classroom. As a result, Parker leaders and teachers believed that their students were more open to interaction with adults and other people older than them.

*My favorite thing about Parker School is the sense of community that we foster, amongst family, students, faculty, and board. We all know each other and work well together.*

*At the Parker school we have a buddy club where an older kid is paired up with a younger student. It is really great for them all. The older kids really enjoy teaching the younger students and the younger students really look forward to playing and hanging out with the older kids. It is very beneficial for both the younger and older students. It teaches them how to interact and socialize with their peers.*

Communication among teachers and with families was another way Parker built a sense of community. The preschool and kindergarten teacher especially had a close relationship with parents and guardians.

*I blog every week about the classroom, our muddy boots club on Friday afternoons, and our kindergarten math group. I send home an "updates letter" to families with links to the blogs once a week ... parents really like the images that I share and enjoy knowing so much about classroom happenings*

*Parents drop off children and pick them up, and I have an open invitation to them to spend time in the room with us any time. We share a lot of time together!*

### **Communicating Value**

We were able to find evidence of all four themes differentiating themes on the school's website and in its communication materials. The applied, individualized and collaborative approaches to learning were captured in the Parker mission statement.

Robert C. Parker School engages each student in a thoughtful and challenging learning process that inspires curiosity and a passion to achieve, nurtures confidence and community, and cultivates purposeful action.

The strong sense of community was created by all members of the community embracing the school's motto.

In caring for our world, our community, and ourselves, we reach out to others with kindness, speak and act with respect, strive for understanding of differences and share our time, our talents, and our energy.

Parents and guardians would gain a good understanding of the school's teaching approach and commitment to community by reading Parker's teaching philosophy. Under the heading, *Key elements of our educational philosophy*, parents and guardians could find a detailed explanation of the Parker approach to education. Excerpts from the educational philosophy that emphasized an *individualized approach to learning* included:



The school offers a safe learning environment where students are encouraged to pursue intellectual risk-taking. Developmentally appropriate curricula, thoughtful challenges, and constructive feedback help each student succeed.

Teachers know students as individuals and leverage their strengths and interests. In making active choices about learning, students and teachers create a democratic community that is responsive to individual learning styles and strengths.

The school respects the capacity of each student and recognizes that each student develops at his or her own pace. Performance assessment is an ongoing dialog between students, teachers, and families. Teachers help students set high standards for themselves and find intrinsic motivation.

Excerpts from the philosophy that emphasized a *collaborative approach to learning* included:

Mixed-age classes offer opportunities for collaborative learning and peer support. Through partnerships between teachers, parents, and children, the school fosters an atmosphere of inquiry and learning at all ages.

Teachers and students collaborate to develop research topics and projects that meet curricular needs and capture the interests of individuals and the class.

Excerpts from the educational philosophy that emphasized *applied learning* included:

Parker celebrates a learning process that is open-ended and challenging, using an inquiry-based, hands-on approach to learning.

At Parker, learning is viewed as an active process that continues throughout a lifetime. Knowledge is rooted in students' experiences. We encourage independence of thought, emphasizing critical thinking and problem solving, while teaching basic skills and competencies.

Teachers offer varied opportunities for students to demonstrate acquired knowledge, both individually and collaboratively.

Parents and teachers share their thoughts about student work in formal and informal conferences and through narrative reports. Once a year students lead the conferences with their parents, fostering responsibility, self-assessment, and goal-setting.

Excerpts from the educational philosophy that emphasized *community* included:

Community service inside and outside the school helps students develop a social conscience and understand how to be active in creating change.

The Parker community is composed of students, teachers, administrators, families and friends of the school who are all integral to the life we share together. We come together

to celebrate life at the school during fairs, assemblies, social, and sporting events, learning about and from each other.

The website provided photographs of engaged children, individually and in groups, reading, acting, playing and experimenting, inside the classroom and on the grounds. The photos created a welcoming environment for prospective parents and a clear depiction of an applied, individualized and collaborative education. One other place we found the themes articulated well was in the *portrait of a Parker graduate*.

A Parker graduate: is confident in his or her independent thought and voice; has self-knowledge and self-direction as a learner; is passionate about learning and committed to academic and intellectual integrity; is a flexible, critical thinker; communicates effectively and clearly; works collaboratively; and, demonstrates a commitment to social responsibility with respect, kindness, understanding, and engagement in a diverse world

An important attribute of a strong sense of community was effective communication with parents and guardians. This was another area where the Parker School excelled. The Head's *Perspectives on Parker* blog and the teachers' blogs and websites were informative and current. We found the *News and Events* page interesting and informative. We were intrigued by the *Leave a Reply* feature and wondered how much that was used and whether the information was shared. You might consider replacing this with a comment feature as a way to stimulate dialogue and increase the engagement in the community.

Overall, the themes of applied, individualized and collaborative approaches to learning, and a strong sense of community were effectively communicated to parents and guardians of prospective and current students. At the end of this paper, recommendations for the school will be discussed to help Parker School clearly communicate these and other important factors that influence enrollment and reenrollment intentions.

### **Factors That Influence Enrollment and Reenrollment Intentions**

We reviewed the extant literature and conducted focused interviews with parents and guardians of currently enrolled and prospective students to answer the third research question: *what factors influence school enrollment and reenrollment choices for parents and guardians?* Our goal was to identify potential constructs that might influence enrollment decisions and develop a set of open ended questions to interview parents and guardians of currently enrolled and prospective students. We conducted sixteen interviews with family members of currently enrolled students and eight interviews with parents and guardians who were considering initially enrolling their child in one of the six independent schools. The interviews initially focused on the general aspects of the decision making process and then explored characteristics of the specific school. We asked parents and guardians to describe the factors that were most important to them when selecting a place to educate their children.

We followed the initial question by asking who else would participate in the decision and what factors were most important to them. The follow-up question often produced different contributing factors. We also asked parents and guardians about experiences they had that influenced their thoughts about education in general. We then transitioned to the specific school and asked questions concerning how they first learned about the school, their initial impressions, and characteristics of the school that they found impressive and that gave the school a

competitive advantage. We augmented our interviews with a review of the extant literature. Our analysis of the literature and interviews resulted in the model of factors that influence enrollment and reenrollment intentions depicted in Figure 1.

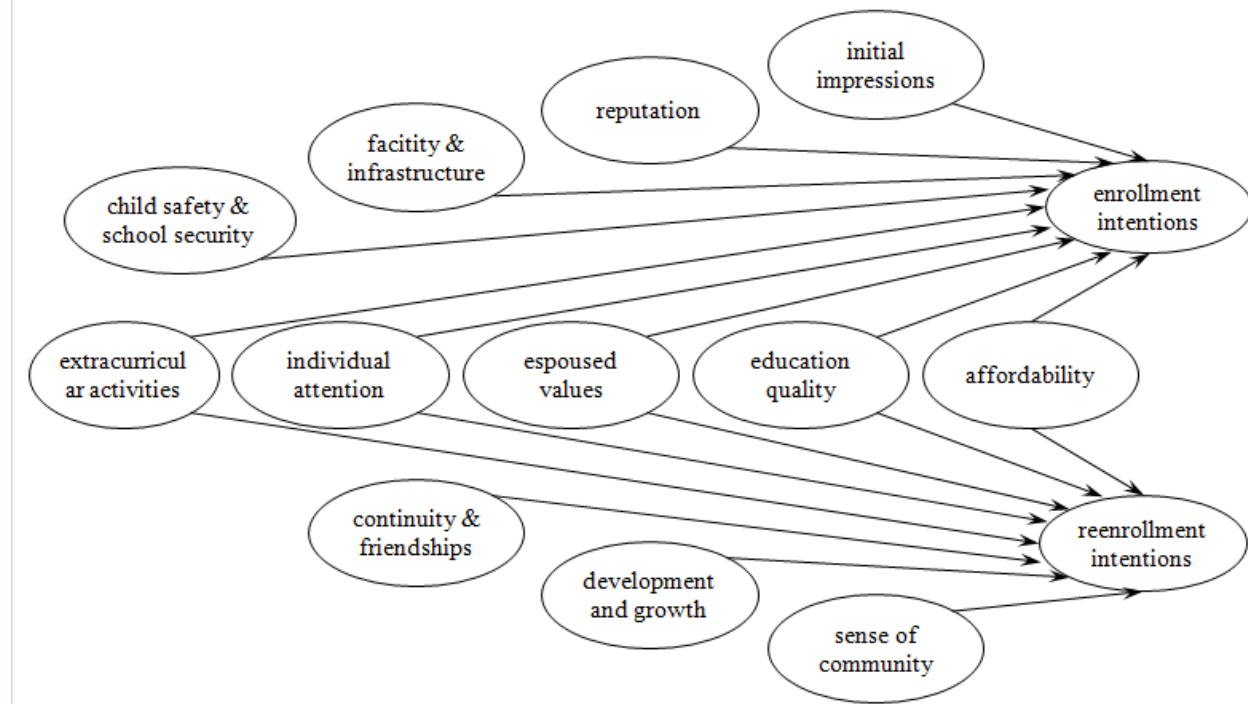


Figure 1. Predictors of enrollment and re-enrollment intentions.

### Parent and Guardian Choices

The initial decisions for parents and guardians were often among alternatives of keeping the child home, placing the child in daycare, or enrolling the child in a preschool program. Public preschool in New York State was not readily available at the time of the study. Some communities had full day kindergarten while others provided partial day programs. Families faced additional choices about public versus independent education and among various types of independent schools. Parents and guardians in some communities also had the additional choice of charter schools. Some parents and guardians believed they had several viable alternatives while others had either one or none.

We chose to model parent/guardian choice in line with the outcomes that concerned the admissions function in independent schools. The first was the decision to initially enroll a child in an independent school, which typically occurred when the child was ready to enter preschool or kindergarten. The second was the decision to reenroll the child.

### Factors Influencing both Initial Enrollment and Reenrollment Decisions

Factors we believed were common to both initial and reenrollment decisions included affordability, education quality, the alignment of family and school values, attention provided to individual students, and extracurricular activities.

**Affordability.** Tuition played a large role in the decisions families made when choosing a school to send their children. For many parents, the cost of independent preschool was substantially less than the alternative costs of childcare in or outside the home. According to the Child Care Aware (2012) annual report, the New York average annual cost was over \$14,000 for

infant care and over \$11,000 to care for a four-year old. Viable alternatives to preschool were limited. Day care programs and preschools, including the six schools in this study, often had waiting lists for the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten programs. Preschools gave parents and guardians an opportunity to jump-start a child's development and school readiness (Fram, Kim, & Sinha, 2012). This provided independent schools with an initial advantage because few public schools had pre-kindergarten programs.

After kindergarten, the number of alternatives increased as public and charter schools become viable substitutes. Parents chose to continue to pay for their child's independent school as long as they perceived the education was superior to other options.

*We chose private over public because we're not in a good school district.*

*The education is far above any other school. You get what you pay for. I found that in the public school there was no individual attention, and with my daughter, the more individual attention she receives the more comfortable I feel as parent.*

*As long as he is learning and we keep having good experiences, he is staying there. We moved him a lot trying to find a good fit for him. We are not wealthy by any means, so tuition is a factor. We made the decision that we are going to do whatever we have to do, so we will figure it out.*

For some families, however, the cost of tuition was the deciding factor. People with lower levels of discretionary income may only be able to put off other expenses for a few years until full day public school was available.

*The public schools have half-day kindergarten, but we have full day which acts like a day care. A lot of people leave after kindergarten because of the tuition.*

The drop in enrollment appeared to be a larger concern in the Catholic schools. In all three independent schools, tuition increased from preschool and kindergarten to elementary school. The opposite was true in the three Catholic schools. Tuition, which typically was less than half the amount charged by the participating secular schools, decreased once the child entered kindergarten. Families who chose to enroll their child in a Catholic preschool may have been more cost sensitive than those who sent their children to the secular independent schools. The result was a substantial drop in the Catholic schools' enrollment after kindergarten.

*I was not in the long term frame of mind when I went there for the open house. Had I been thinking about sending my son there long term, I would've asked a lot of questions about things like test scores and how their school compares to others. Not being too concerned about the Catholic religion, the cost probably would not be worth it for my son to attend there for more than next year. We have a very good school district. There's a reason my husband and I bought a house in this area.*

Nearly all of the independent schools offered some sort of tuition assistance to families who could not afford to send their children to the school on their own. Even with tuition assistance, independent school was beyond the means of many families.

Availability and affordability of before and after-school care was also a factor. Many parents needed someone to watch their child while they were at work. Childcare beyond the normal school hours was essential for parents who drove their child to the campus. Parents and guardians mentioned how important it was to have a safe and reliable environment for their child to stay before school began and after the school day ended because school schedules rarely lined up with the work day.

*At this point it's basically: do we send him to independent school or do we send him to a public school and make other arrangements for the afternoon? The before and after-care program is one of the main reasons we decided to look at independent schools again.*

*Our school district only offers a half-day kindergarten program. That's partially why we were looking for alternatives because certain days of the week we need afternoon care. The before and after-care programs are nice.*

Additional costs in the forms of uniforms, books, fees and fundraising also came into the equation. The seemingly “never ending requirement for fundraising” was a concern expressed by teachers, board members, and parents/guardians. Costs could also be viewed as a function of convenience. Transporting the child to and from school created additional demands on families. Some public school districts provided transportation to independent schools (typically within a 15 mile radius), while others did not provide any sort of transportation. The head of one school mentioned that there was a tendency for parents to drive the child for a few years, but then inconvenience prompted the parents to eventually choose public education for their child.

Interview responses suggested affordability was an important factor in both initial and continuing enrollment decisions. Costs of child care and the lack of viable public options provided an initial situation that was favorable for independent schools. This situation changed as transportation convenience costs rose and as public options expanded at kindergarten and first grade levels. Education quality and other factors may have influenced parents/guardians decisions to continue to enroll their child, but only to the extent that they could afford the costs or lacked reasonable alternatives. Our findings led us to the first hypothesis.

*H1: Parents and guardians who perceive the affordability of the school as important and have a favorable perception of the school's costs will report higher levels of commitment and stronger enrollment/reenrollment intentions.*

**Quality of educational programs.** Allen and Burgess (2013) investigated the effects that school performance information had on enrollment choices and the performance of the child. The study found that performance metrics, such as the proportion of students gaining five or more good grades, helped parents choose the best school for their children. Further, they found that children who attended the highest performing school within their choice-set were more than twice as likely to perform better than the average student in that area. Having information about school quality and then choosing the right school appeared to be important to parents and guardians. Throughout the interviews, parents and guardians discussed education quality in terms of teachers' expertise and teaching methods, student performance on standardized tests, and their perceptions of what their children were taking home from the school.

*I want quality teachers and education programs, especially math and science programs.*

*I would like to see the accelerated programs continue, because I know kids can do it.*

Parents recognized these aspects of education quality and reported them influencing their choices. Independent schools also had the freedom to offer highly specialized programs that differentiated the schools from others. The head/principal of one school described an example:

*One class was studying Native Americans. The students integrated art in an interesting way to portray Native Americans mythology. The class created a totem pole with animals chosen by the children to match their personality. Our students do more than learning from a book. The approach is hands-on and the students are going to remember.*

DiPerna (2013) gathered parental opinions on policies, perspectives of different school systems, and concerns for educating their child. The study found that parents valued the quality of education the most, followed by socialization with peers and individual attention. Several parents and guardians mentioned the flexibility that independent schools had over public schools. According to a GreatSchools Staff article:

The potential benefits of independent schools accrue from their independence. Independent schools do not receive tax revenues, so they do not have to follow the same sorts of regulations and bureaucratic processes that govern (and sometimes hinder) public schools. This allows many independent schools to be highly specialized, offering differentiated learning, advanced curriculum, or programs geared toward specific religious beliefs (2014, p 1).

The article discussed that this independence can, but did not necessarily lead to higher quality.

While most people assume that teachers at independent schools are as qualified as those at public ones, it's important to note that all teachers in a public school are usually state certified or, at a minimum, working toward certification. Certification ensures that a teacher has gone through the training required by the state, which includes student teaching and course work. Teachers in independent schools may not be required to have certification. Instead, they often have subject-area expertise and an undergraduate or graduate degree in the subject they teach (2014, p 2).

There's a similar discrepancy between curriculum development in independent and public schools. Public schools must follow state guidelines that set out specific standards and assessment procedures. In theory, this creates a certain amount of quality control. Private schools, on the other hand, can choose whatever curriculum and assessment model they wish. This freedom to design their own curriculum or avoid standardized tests can result in higher standards for students — or lower (2014, p 2).

The interviews with parents and guardians of prospective students shed light on how they interpreted and assessed the quality of education. Parents wanted a high quality educational program for their children, including effective administration and competent teachers.

*I'm looking for a curriculum that is appropriate for a kindergartner.*

*I want my son to get the best education he can get. I didn't have that growing up. I want him to achieve the best he can.*

*The most important factor is the quality of the education: this includes the education level and training of the teachers and the philosophy of the organization. The quality of the facility is a distant 3rd or 4th.*

Education quality could also be considered in terms of student performance on state standardized tests and the percentage of students placed into honors level classes when they entered high school. The information depicted in Figure 2 shows proficiency levels for one of the schools compared to statewide averages in math and in English/language arts.

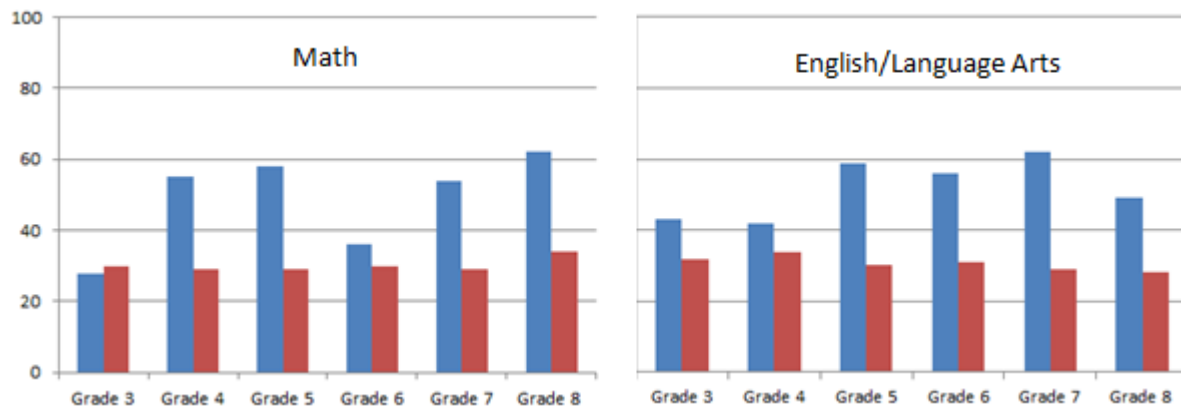


Figure 2. Percentage of students meeting or exceeding New York State Proficiency Levels. Blue bars represent selected school average and red bars represent state averages for academic year 2012-13. Source: author analysis.

Access to additional resources, should the child need them, was also important to parents. One prospective parent claimed they would choose the school that had the easiest access to additional attention if needed. Another stated:

*They have a really good network of teachers that go above and beyond what they need to do and always are willing to help. Students can easily call teachers and ask about homework or get extra help. My daughter has dyslexia so she has a hard time reading and everyone has been more than accommodating and helpful. It was a challenge to figure out where the right place to get that help is. Is it at a small or large school, a school with better funding that can get someone specialized in special education to help her read or a smaller setting? Even though our school has a hard time with money, they were still able to provide the care and help my daughter needed. My daughter probably wouldn't be reading if she were in a public school.*

Teacher expertise, unique and highly effective methods, resource availability for students with special needs, student competency, preparation, and performance all appeared to be important contributors to enrollment and reenrollment decisions. Our findings led us to the second hypothesis.

*H2: Parents and guardians who perceive education quality as important and have a favorable perception of the education provided will report higher levels of commitment and stronger enrollment/reenrollment intentions.*

**Alignment of family and school values.** Beyond academic achievement, schools strived to instill students with general life skills. Values taught may follow a particular belief system or simply helped students understand the difference between right and wrong. For some families, religion played a strong role in their day to day lives. Catholic schools, which offered religious as well as the traditional education, were highly regarded by religious families. Flick and Armstrong (2002) reported results from a five-year survey of more than 4,500 families from 55 Cincinnati Archdiocese schools. The survey asked families to identify their most important reason for choosing a Catholic education for their children. Morality and values taught in Catholic schools was the most frequent choice (31%) followed by overall academic excellence (26%). The next closest response was good discipline (18%). Parents and guardians who were considering one of the Catholic schools specifically mentioned the importance of faith in education.

*I want them to experience the Catholic religion. Moral values that are inscribed in the child are most important in education.*

*Both my husband and I attended Catholic school. I want my children to have the same experience.*

*It seemed family oriented, focused on academics, and faith, which we cared about a lot.*

*The emphasis on faith is important to us. They do a great job teaching Catholic values.*

While faith was particularly important to the Catholic schools, nearly all parents referred to the importance of developing life skills when discussing characteristics of schools.

*I wanted to have my kids brought up with a values education. I believe that other families that are willing to pay tuition have the same idea. It's important to me to send my kids to a valued based school with other kids sent by parents with the same idea of a value/moral-based education.*

*We seek a place that genuinely promotes a spirit of inquiry and discovery and fits our family values.*

Some parents truly valued the concept of sharing or respect, and they looked for a school that demonstrated those values and instilled them in the children. Another parent discussed the importance of diversity in the school both in terms of students and teachers.

*It was important to me for the school to have an ethnic diversity for the children and also for teachers and members of the administration. Most of the independent schools are primarily white.*



Ausbrooks and Martinez (2001) described tolerance as essential to a democratic society and a main theme in the school choice debate. The authors suggested that proponents of public education promoted diversity within the school systems as a means to instill tolerance towards others. They surveyed 2,184 eighth-grade social studies students in public and independent schools. The study concluded that the public schools did not teach tolerance better than independent schools and that increased diversity in the classroom did not increase tolerance or support for democratic norms. Although ethnic diversity did not increase support for democratic norms, interethnic friendships did have that effect and the students enrolled in the independent schools reported more interethnic friendships than their counterparts in public schools.

The alignment of faith-based and secular values systems appeared to be an important contributing factor towards enrollment and reenrollment decisions. These included time for prayer or quiet reflection, instilling an appreciation of diversity and a sense of purpose, and practicing respect and individual responsibility. Our findings led us to the third hypothesis:

*H3: Parents and guardians who perceive the espoused values of the school as important and have a favorable perception of the school's values will report higher levels of commitment and stronger enrollment/reenrollment intentions.*

**Attention provided to individual students.** Independent schools tended to have smaller class sizes and lower student to teacher ratios compared to public schools. This allowed teachers to provide more attention to individual students. The average class size of public schools in the Albany region ranged from 19.9 for kindergarten to 22.5 for the sixth grade (NYSED, 2013), while the average in the six schools participating in this study was about half of those numbers. Small classes and individual attention were frequently given as reasons for enrollment decisions.

*The education you get is well above what you pay for. You don't have 30 children in one class. To have that many is disruptive. The students have more advantages in a small setting. Two teachers per 20 kids in the three- year old program, I really like that. I think it is more important when just starting school to have smaller classes for individualized attention. I want to put my son in an environment where he can get the attention and assistance he needs.*

Parents and guardians also noted the personal attention given to students by teachers, and the freedoms teachers had to attend to the social and academic needs of each individual child.

*We thought that for her personality it was a good fit ... The teachers have a lot of freedom to cater to the individual. If a kid is interested in a certain thing, they can take that and work with it. It seems that they are less constrained. In the public system the curriculum is pretty tight and seems to be getting tighter and tighter, especially with the new common core.*

*My oldest son started in kindergarten 17 years ago. He was very shy. Our public school was a large school with massive class sizes. I went to school in Long Island and knew what that was like. I had 1000 kids in my graduating class, so knowing how shy he was, I did not want him in an overwhelming setting. We enrolled my other two kids. My daughter still goes to school here. Someone from my family has been attending here for 17 consecutive years.*

*I like the warm and supportive atmosphere, small classrooms.*

*They have an outstanding staff. I really like their belief in nurture and joyful learners because that shows that they are concerned about each child. The staff takes the time out to teach in the style that the student is most comfortable with. That means a lot to me as a parent. They special attention that everyone receives is out of this world.*

Attention afforded for each child appeared to be another important contributor enrollment and reenrollment decisions. Parents and guardians mentioned fewer children assigned to each classroom, increased attention from teachers, and teachers that could adapt curriculum and assignments to individual students as important. This led us to the fourth hypothesis.

*H4: Parents and guardians who believe the individual attention given children as important and have a favorable perception of the attention provided to their children will report higher levels of commitment and stronger enrollment/reenrollment intentions*

**Extracurricular activities.** Offering programs that are compatible with the student's interest, may affect the family's initial and reenrollment intentions. A study by Gemello (1984) indicated that families chose a school for their child based on the variety and quality of extracurricular programs. Both the variety and quality of extracurricular activities appeared to be an important. Schools that offered languages and other programs, before or after school, attracted parents and guardians to enroll their children because they wanted to see their child excel.

*Activities after school at this school all started at a very young age. Other independent schools did not start those programs until the kids were in middle school or maybe 5<sup>th</sup> grade. It would be very hard to give that up. Seeing your kindergartener speak in front of the whole school is great.*

*The school starts the children in language classes at such a young age.*

*I think learning a language at that age is easier than at an older age for a basis in their knowledge.*

Extracurricular activities in the arts also appeared to be important to parents and guardians for initial and reenrollment decisions.

*We like the drama, music, and dance because our child will likely attend those events after school.*

*They have a very impressive music program. We worry that public schools are facing increasing pressures to cut arts and push math and science. Music is really how children first learn mathematics... even though they don't realize its math.*

Sports became important, particularly as the child entered middle school. Sports were becoming more and more popular among students not only for the fun and exercise but for the potential of college scholarships as well. If independent schools offered sports to their students, they would be less likely to lose those students that were athletic to other schools. The relatively

small size of the independent schools, however, could limit the variety of extracurricular activities and put the schools at a disadvantage. One parent mentioned:

*The school is doing everything it can with its time and attention, but there's only so much that limited body can do as far as sports teams, drama and music.*

The six participating schools offered extracurricular activities in the arts, languages, horticulture and sciences, as well team and individual sports. The extent that these programs were considered by parents to be of high quality and interest, may influence their enrollment and reenrollment decisions. Our findings suggested the fifth hypothesis.

*H5: Parents and guardians who believe extracurricular activities as important and have a favorable perception of those activities offered will report higher levels of commitment and stronger enrollment/reenrollment intentions.*

### **Factors Influencing Initial Enrollment Decisions**

Beyond the five common factors (affordability, quality, values, attention and activities), the interviews with parents and guardians of prospective students revealed four additional factors we believed may influence initial enrollment decisions. These included initial impressions, the school's reputation, facilities/infrastructure and safety. We believed that these factors were all likely to have an important impact on the initial enrollment decisions. A family was unlikely to enroll their child if they have serious concerns about any of these factors. Once the decision was made, however, we believed the factors became less important. A major change in any one of these factors could have an influence on reenrollment intentions, but changes like that tended to be rare.

**Initial impressions.** During the interviews, parents and guardians reported that the qualities and values of the schools were identified most effectively by the schools' websites and open houses. Some parents discussed the atmosphere and friendliness of the faculty and staff.

*There is a family atmosphere, everyone knows everyone's name.*

*I was impressed by the professional and friendly staff, the smallness of the school, the combined classrooms and the students' art work being exhibited on hallways.*

Several parents stated that they made their final decision based on what they saw at the open house. They fondly recalled their visits.

*We went to two open houses, and the teachers were very friendly. They were very open to our questions. Everyone was welcoming and helpful.*

*We went to the open house. It was organized well and the teachers took the time to explain everything. The current students were the chaperones for the day and they did a very good job.*

*The open house and the principle were both impressive.*

Other parents talked about receiving and not receiving answers to their questions.

*They seemed responsive to concerns. Everyone was kind and helpful. The focus on education stood out.*

*There was certain information they didn't have. They didn't have next year's tuition set. They didn't have information about new uniforms for kindergarteners.*

Initial impressions appeared to be an important contributor for enrollment decisions. It seems important that parents and guardians develop an initial understanding the schools mission and vision, get a sense of the friendliness of the faculty and staff, feel welcomed and have their questions answered, and perceive representatives of the school as genuinely interested in their child and family. Our findings suggested the sixth hypothesis.

*H6: Parents and guardians who believe initial impressions are important and have favorable first impressions will report higher levels of commitment and stronger initial enrollment intentions.*

**Reputation.** With reputation we referred to the generally held beliefs and opinions people in the community had about any particular school. Reputations grow as students and their families tell others what they liked, and disliked, about their school. Satisfied parents, guardians and children acted as ambassadors for the school, telling others about their great experiences. Quite often parents reported that they showed initial interest in a school because of what they heard from friends, coworkers or family.

*Parents of current students spoke very highly of the school, programs offered, academics, the sense of community and all the different activities that were available at the school.*

*My wife works with parents who are very pleased with the school. I was looking for something in the community that I could trust. So obviously if they've been around for 40 years then they can handle my 3 year old.*

*What other parents think of the school is important ... all parents rave about the teachers and programs, so that was something that mattered a lot.*

*Everything has been word of mouth from the beginning. The doctors at work rave about the school. They sent their kids there and say how the kids had their lives molded there. The kids are old enough where the doctor's son who went to the school is going to be a doctor at the office. He wants to send his son there now.*

Word of mouth marketing could strategically be helped along. Newberry (2014) described an innovative way one school used parents as a medium to market its weekly open house. The school printed fliers and business cards for their open house events which were held during the school day so that prospective families could get a real sense of school operations. The school assembled packets for families of current students and asked them to hand out the cards to friends and acquaintances. Approaches like this could work really well for smaller schools which operated on a tight budget. The principal of one of the Catholic schools stated:

*I rely almost 100% on word of mouth to market the school because our budget is not large enough to do any expensive advertising.*

One of the participating schools in this study was a Montessori School, which had an international reputation for its fairly unique and effective teaching methods. Among other things, children who attended Montessori schools were encouraged to choose when to start and stop an activity which allows them to acquire the ability to complete tasks without the stress of timelines and to continue their activities until they fully understand it (Karna, 2013; Angeline, 2012).

Reputation of the school appeared to be another important contributor to initial enrollment decisions. Parents and guardians mentioned what people know and say about the school, teachers, administration, other children attending the school and their own children's experiences were influential in their initial enrollment decisions. This led us to the seventh hypothesis.

*H7: Parents and guardians who believe the reputation of the school is important and have a favorable perception of the school's reputation will report higher levels of commitment and stronger initial enrollment intentions.*

**Facilities and infrastructure.** The quality of the facilities and the school infrastructure made an important initial and lasting impression of the school. Families normally received their first sense of the school during open houses or school tours.

*The school has a dedicated classroom where students learn to use computers. It is impressive and has up to date equipment, especially for the 4-5 year old age group.*

*I was impressed because it was nicer than the one that I had gone to ... the facilities and the scale of the school were surprisingly much bigger and nicer.*

*I fell in love with the buildings and the setting of the school; it was almost like a small university, campus feel.*

The six schools provided a wide variety of facilities that could prove attractive to families of potential students. Several schools offered a multi-purpose room, library, art and music rooms, stage, playground, sports field and gymnasium. More unique offerings included a darkroom for photography, a science laboratory, kitchen, swimming pool, garden/greenhouse, outdoor classroom and nature trails. Parents discussed facility cleanliness and maintenance, furnishings, décor, technology equipped classrooms, convenient access between classrooms, wireless internet access and school grounds. Our eighth hypothesis was:

*H8: Parents and guardians who believe the school's facilities and infrastructures are important and have positive perceptions of the school structures will report higher levels of commitment and stronger initial enrollment intentions.*

**Safe environment.** Parents and guardians wanted to know that their children would be safe while attending school. Although this had probably always been a concern, the December 2012 shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary School, made it painfully aware to all, how difficult it was for schools to guarantee safety. Parents were now vigilant about safety precautions, emergency action plans and school policies concerning issues pertaining to bullying and fighting.

*The thing that has kept us here throughout the years is that how much the teachers really do care about those kids. It goes beyond their learning. As a mother, when you see your kids hug their teachers it just makes you feel that you're ok to leave. Considering the events over the last couple of years, safety is important. The school safety has always been right there. The doors are always locked and constantly being monitored; not that things can't happen, but as a parent it is nice to know.*

Independent schools, with their relatively small cohorts (typically one class per year group), presented both a challenge for students to get along and an opportunity for students to develop necessary social skills. One teacher observed about the lack of bullying in the school:

*Because these kids are stuck with the same ten kids, they learn to get along. They're learning life skills that they will need in the future. They learn to get along with one another in these small class sizes so that bullying does not occur.*

Parents mentioned the ideals of ensuring student safety while maintaining a welcoming atmosphere, routinely practicing emergency action plans, secure entrances and exits, only allowing visitors with a valid reason for being in the school, notice of timely notice safety or security issues at the school, zero tolerance for bullying and teachers who show a genuine concern for the emotional welfare of each child. Our ninth hypothesis was:

*H9: Parents and guardians who believe child safety and security is important and have positive perceptions of the school's safety will report higher levels of commitment and stronger initial enrollment intentions.*

### **Factors Influencing Reenrollment Decisions**

Interviews with parents and guardians of currently enrolled students revealed three additional factors that may influence reenrollment decisions: sense of community, development/growth and continuity/friendships. We believed these factors would tend to reinforce the initial enrollment decision and influence intentions to reenroll. The factors would not influence initial enrollment decisions primarily because they took some time to develop.

**Sense of community.** Parents and guardians, teachers, board members and school leaders all discussed the importance of quality relationships among themselves and with the surrounding community. Parents and guardians discussed a sense of belonging they and their children felt towards the school. After being part of such a close knit community for so long, the schools became an important part of their lives.

*There is a sense of belonging with every grade and every class.*

*Anytime I need to talk to the teachers they are willing to work around my schedule. Also all of the parents know each other, which also makes it easier to communicate... you know how everyone thinks and works.*

Volunteer work could be beneficial to students and others. The community received the help it needed and the kids experienced giving their time and talents for a worthy cause.

*The kids get really involved and volunteer. I volunteer too. It shows the kids that not everyone's is as well off as them, and it can be an eye opening experience.*

Parents liked to know how well their child was doing in school. Being able to assist in their child's development and provide feedback to the teachers enabled the best possible learning outcomes. Open communication with their child's teacher helped parents and guardians stay fully informed on the progress of their child's education. Small class sizes allowed teachers to be able to give more direct feedback about their child because they had more one-on-one time with the students. If parents enjoyed the relationship that they had with their child's teacher, they were more likely to reenroll their child in that school.

*There are over 100 students in the school and every teacher that walks by knows exactly who I am and what kid belongs to me. It just seems like they are really close and they actually pay attention to everyone and by the end of the day everyone knows everyone.*

*When they say there is an open line of communication, I know that I can pick up the phone, I can email, I can text the principal, the president of the board, whatever I need; they're really accessible 24 hours a day. If I wanted them to come to my house and chat with me they would come right over.*

*The teaching staff is phenomenal, I have been incredibly happy with that.*

We learned that parents had a harder time removing their child from a school when they felt connected to the school through the community. A sense of community within the school drew parents and students in. Parents identified a high level of engagement among faculty, staff and parents, school spirit, community service and volunteerism, friendships, and meaningful communication between parents and teachers as important to reenrollment intentions. This led us to our tenth hypothesis:

*H10: Parents and guardians who believe a sense of community is important and have positive perceptions of the school's community will report higher levels of commitment and stronger reenrollment intentions.*

**Child development and growth.** Parents liked to know that their children were learning and maturing. Some parents claimed that growth was more visible in independent schools than public schools. Parents reported that it was easier for them to build relationships with teachers at the small independent schools, and this allowed them to easily contact the teachers and receive feedback about their child's progress.

*My 2<sup>nd</sup> grader spoke before the community at Mass. It wasn't just for her classmates, but the whole community. I like the notes and weekly newsletters that keep us informed. The expectation the children read for 20 minutes each night is good.*

*The students are challenged to go above and beyond the normal school routine. They teach them the core curriculum, but they also teach them to think outside of the box. Not many schools do that.*

Members of the faculty and administration also commented on learning and growth.

*Current families are pleased with not only the curriculum but also the individual attention. We really get to know the kids well. We get a lot of feedback that we are nurturing, and sometimes too nurturing, wondering what will happen when they leave the bubble. We find when they do leave, that it has served them well enough to be confident to make the right choices and make their own decisions.*

*From early on in preschool all the way to 6th grade, we give them opportunities to present in front of large groups, working on articulating a clear voice and message, eye contact, appropriate body language, giving them the experience to do this in the real world successfully.*

When asked what set their school apart from others, teachers responded:

*We can get more kids accelerated because we can reach more of them, and our kids have higher test scores. And I don't think it has anything to do with the kids that are coming here are more brilliant than other kids it's literally we have more time to teach more information so their standardized test scores are through the roof.*

*We have kids that leave here reading, and it would be like a step backwards. I find that a lot of the stuff that is taught here is at a higher level and the kids are held at a higher level.*

During the interviews, parents and guardians of currently enrolled students indicated that they hoped to see their children develop a love for learning and enjoyed seeing their children challenged and given opportunities to stretch their abilities and build their confidence. This led us to our eleventh hypothesis:

*H11: Parents and guardians who believe development and growth of their child is important and have positive perceptions of development and growth opportunities in the school will report higher levels of commitment and stronger reenrollment intentions.*

**Continuity and friendships.** One of the main reasons that parents kept their child enrolled in a school was their concern with the friendships their children had formed with other students. Closely related to continuity of friendships was the child's satisfaction. A school could have all of the qualities that the parents were looking for, but unless the child was satisfied, the partnership would be unsuccessful. The child's level of satisfaction was partly due to the social activities and friendships developed in school, and partly due to the child's academic success and maturation.

*My daughter is happy there, that and the education that she is receiving are the most important reasons for continuing at this school. I know when I drop her off that she's feels very secure.*

*There is only one class per grade, so the children really get to know each other and are able to bond with each other.*



Moving a child from one school to another had the possibility of creating resentment over the loss of friends. Schools with higher rates of turnover also created difficult situations for those children who remained, because they missed their friends. One teacher noted that parents were more likely to choose independent schools that had their middle school linked with a specific high school.

*Some independent Catholic schools in the area are attached to their high school. So the kids can have friends and keep those friends sixth grade through high school so it's a two edged thing that we lose kids into the middle school." It is clear that being able to remain with the same friends throughout school years is important to both students and their parents.*

The sense of community discussed in the previous section could also intensify feelings of loss as beloved members of the faculty and administration left the organization.

*We've had a lot of staff within the last two years leave or switch, which is challenging both for parents and for students. Staff retention is important to me, to keep us there.*

Parents and guardians of currently enrolled students as well as members of the faculty indicated continuity as potentially important to enrollment decisions. Low turnover, strong relationships and the formation of lasting bonds may be important indicators for continued enrollment. This led us to our twelfth hypothesis:

*H12: Parents and guardians who believe continuity and friendships are important for their child and have positive perceptions of the stability of enrollment and the faculty at the school will report higher levels of commitment and stronger reenrollment intentions.*

In summary, the third research question resulted in the identification of twelve factors that potentially influenced initial enrollment and reenrollment intentions. We stated hypotheses for five factors we believed influenced both enrollment and reenrollment decisions. These included affordability, education quality, espoused values, individual attention, and extracurricular activities. We stated hypotheses for four factors we believed would influence the initial enrollment decisions of parents and guardians. These included initial impressions, reputation, child safety/security and facilities/infrastructure. We also stated hypotheses for three factors we believed influenced reenrollment decisions. These included a sense of community, development /growth and continuity/friendships.

## **Methods**

In the qualitative phase of the study, we conducted 55 interviews with parents and guardians, teachers and members of the administration and governing boards for the six schools. We discussed the characteristics that helped set each school apart from the public and independent competitors, attracted prospects and retained existing students. We also asked the internal stakeholders to discuss the methods each school used to communicate its value proposition, the most important challenges they thought the school was facing, and their aspirations for the school in five years. The interviews with parents and guardians concentrated on their impressions of the school including its people, programs, and infrastructure, as well as

the factors that ultimately influenced their decision. We augmented our interviews with a review of the extant literature to identify major constructs, measures, and to develop a survey for parents and guardians. We also used the results of the qualitative study to develop an internet based survey for parents and guardians of currently enrolled and prospective students. We administered these surveys in April 2014. The data collected from the survey was then used to verify the theory, conduct comparative analyses, and make recommendations to the participating schools.

## Participants

Each of the six participating schools provided a list of parents or guardians of current and prospective students. The school principal/head sent a message informing parents and guardians that they would soon receive an email with a survey link from the research team. The email included an attached letter from the research team that explained in detail the purpose of the study and the protections in place to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. The following day either a member of the research team or the principal/head sent an email message with a link to an online survey. Approximately 900 families were invited to participate in the survey. Reminder emails were sent on two subsequent days. Each reminder reported the to-date response rate, thanked those who participated, and encouraged those who had not yet participated to do so. Both reminders included the link to the on-line survey.

A total of 573 (61%) of the parents and guardians responded to the survey: 24% of the participants were male and 76% were female; 16% reported family income greater than \$200K, 18% between \$150K and \$200K, 30% between \$100K and \$150K, 26% between \$50K and \$100K and 10% less than \$50K; 53% reported having one or more additional children enrolled in independent school. The sample sizes, response rates, and characteristics for all six schools are depicted in Table 1.

Table 1

### *Sample Sizes, Response Rates and Characteristics for Participating Schools*

School	Sample (n)	Response (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)	Additional Children (%)	< \$50K	\$50-75K	\$75-100K	\$100-125K	\$125-150K	\$150-200K	>200K
Parker	84	70%	29%	71%	55%	12%	7%	8%	15%	12%	22%	25%
B	88	39%	23%	77%	50%	17%	10%	11%	25%	15%	14%	7%
C	61	72%	26%	74%	48%	12%	24%	27%	10%	10%	14%	4%
D	95	66%	16%	84%	51%	13%	14%	19%	19%	9%	14%	10%
E	47	58%	30%	70%	56%	14%	18%	11%	18%	7%	16%	16%
F	198	71%	24%	76%	55%	4%	7%	13%	14%	17%	22%	22%
Total	573	61%	24%	76%	53%	10%	11%	15%	17%	13%	18%	16%

*Note.* Sample size (*n*) refers to respondents to any portion of the survey. Response rates were calculated by dividing *n* by the number of families invited to complete the survey. Additional children reflect the percentage of families who have other children enrolled in private schools.

## Measures

The survey presented participants with the five factors common to both enrollment and reenrollment decisions first, followed by factors unique to either type of decision, and then questions concerning affective commitment and enrollment/reenrollment intentions and

demographic information. We followed the approach used by Flick and Armstrong (2002) and asked respondents to answer questions regarding the influencing factors in terms of importance and the schools' performance. Flick and Armstrong asked participants to rate importance and quality for each of the eleven contributing factors in their study. The comprehensive nature of our study's survey made strict adherence to this procedure unreasonable.

**Importance and agreement scores.** Participants were presented eight statements describing the content for each factor and asked to respond using a five-point importance scale (1 = not at all important, 2 = very unimportant, 3 = neither important nor unimportant, 4 = very important, and 5 = extremely important). Example importance items for education quality included: *teachers have expertise in the subjects they teach, the school employs highly effective teaching methods, and students outperform their public school peers on standardized tests.* Participants were then asked to indicate the extent of which they agreed with a general statement in respect to the school's performance on that factor using a five-point scale (-2 = strongly disagree, -1 = disagree, 0 = neither agree nor disagree, 1 = agree and 2 = strongly agree). For example, the agreement question for educational quality was: *overall, the school provides an excellent education.* The survey also contained an open-ended question for each factor that allowed participants to provide additional thoughts about the school. For example, the question for educational quality was: *what thoughts do you have concerning the education quality associated with this school?*

**Composite importance-performance scores.** We conducted a principal components confirmatory factor analysis with varimax rotation for the items measuring the five hypothesized common predictors of enrollment and reenrollment intentions (affordability, education quality, espoused values, individual attention and extracurricular activities) and the three hypothesized unique predictors for reenrollment decisions (sense of community, development/growth and continuity/friendship). There was an insufficient number of responses from the parents of prospective students ( $n = 55$ ) to include the four hypothesized predictors of initial enrollment intentions (initial impressions, reputation, facilities/infrastructure and safety/security) in the confirmatory factor analysis.

We followed an iterative approach to identify a set of predictors that demonstrated both convergent and discriminant validity. The first iteration identified two distinct forms of espoused values. One focused on faith-based learning (*the school provides a faith-based learning environment and children spend time each day in prayer or quiet reflection*) and the second included all of the other value related items. In the second iteration, we determined that the entire set of items measuring education quality lacked convergent and discriminant validity. As a set, the education quality items were most closely correlated with the items measuring development and growth, but individually cross loaded with a variety of factors. There were a handful of additional items that lacked convergent and discriminant validity. Some items did not relate to any of the factors (e.g., *fewer children assigned to each classroom than in public schools*). Other items were related to two or more factors (e.g., *teachers provide parents and guardians frequent and meaningful feedback about their children*), which correlated equally with sense of community and development/growth. We developed a single measure for each of the factors by averaging the items with high discriminant and convergent validity. We estimated the reliability of each measure by looking at its internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha), which is based on the number of items and the correlations among the items. Factor loadings and the descriptive statistics for items and scales are depicted in Table 2.

Table 2

*Scale and Item Statistics*

	components	1	2	3	4	5	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>
<b>Affordability (<math>\alpha = .78</math>)</b>							<b>3.4</b>	<b>0.8</b>
Tuition compared to other private schools.		.74					3.8	1.0
Stability of tuition costs as child progresses through grades.		.78					4.1	0.9
Tuition assistance based on financial need.		.66					3.3	1.4
Discounted tuition for families with multiple children enrolled at the school.		.54					3.3	1.4
Additional costs for uniforms, books and other fees.		.79					3.4	1.0
Requirements for fundraising.		.67					3.3	1.0
<i>To what extent do you agree with this statement?</i> The costs of sending my child to this school are reasonable.							0.7	0.9
<b>Faith Based Learning (<math>\alpha = .96</math>)</b>							<b>2.6</b>	<b>1.5</b>
The school provides a faith-based learning environment.		.85					2.7	1.5
Children spend time each day in prayer or quiet reflection.		.83					2.6	1.4
<b>Espoused Values (<math>\alpha = .85</math>)</b>							<b>4.6</b>	<b>0.5</b>
Teachers foster an appreciation for diversity in the classroom.				.61			4.4	0.8
Creativity of each child is celebrated.				.55			4.6	0.6
Children are instilled with a sense of purpose to create a better world for themselves and others.				.69			4.6	0.6
Ethical principles of justice and morality are reinforced in the classroom.				.70			4.6	0.6
Children learn about and practice individual responsibility.				.67			4.7	0.5
Children are taught to respect the property and rights of others.				.63			4.7	0.5
<i>To what extent do you agree with this statement?</i> There is a good match between my family's values and those embraced by this school.							1.5	0.7
<b>Individual Attention (<math>\alpha = .87</math>)</b>							<b>4.5</b>	<b>0.5</b>
Teachers make time to answer each child's questions.				.62			4.6	0.6
Even small changes in student behavior are recognized by the teachers.				.62			4.5	0.6
Teachers are aware of each student's progress.				.58			4.7	0.5
Each child's unique learning style is supported.				.76			4.5	0.7
Teachers have time available for one-on-one interactions with each student.				.72			4.6	0.6
Teachers adapt lesson plans to student's interests.				.77			4.3	0.8
Teachers adapt assignments to each child's ability.				.77			4.3	0.8
<i>To what extent do you agree with this statement?</i> I'm very satisfied with the level of individual attention given my child at this school.							1.4	0.8
<b>Extracurricular Activities (<math>\alpha = .85</math>)</b>							<b>3.7</b>	<b>0.7</b>
Acting, Drama, Theatre, Dance					.70		3.5	1.0
Art, Music, Band, Chorus					.73		3.9	0.9
Foreign Languages					.66		4.0	0.9
Horticulture (e.g., Farming, Gardening, Beekeeping)					.69		3.3	1.0
Science (e.g., Lego Robotics, Odyssey of the Mind, Science Fair)					.67		4.1	0.8
Team Sports (e.g., Basketball, Soccer, Track, Volleyball)					.62		3.7	1.0
Individual Sports (e.g., Bowling, Karate, Skiing, Swimming, Tennis)					.65		3.5	0.9
<i>To what extent do you agree with this statement?</i> I'm very satisfied with the quality and variety of extracurricular activities at this school.							0.8	1.0

*table continues*

Table 2 (continued)

	components	6	7	8	9	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>
<b>Sense of Community (<math>\alpha = .82</math>)</b>						<b>3.9</b>	<b>0.6</b>
Children are involved in community service activities.		.61				4.2	0.8
A strong sense of volunteerism.		.63				4.1	0.8
Friendships among parents within the school.		.58				3.6	0.9
Parents/guardians can rely on each other to look after their children.		.53				3.6	1.0
School spirit -- children identify with their school.		.46				4.1	0.8
<i>To what extent do you agree with this statement? I'm very satisfied with the sense of community at this school.</i>						1.2	0.9
<b>Development and Growth (<math>\alpha = .93</math>)</b>						<b>4.7</b>	<b>0.4</b>
Children are challenged to do their best.			.80			4.7	0.5
Students develop a love of learning.			.75			4.8	0.5
Children are given opportunities to stretch their abilities.			.84			4.8	0.5
Children are provided opportunities to build confidence.			.75			4.8	0.5
Teachers challenge the students to go beyond the core curriculum.			.75			4.6	0.6
Teachers encourage students to be creative and think outside the box.			.77			4.7	0.5
Children are given opportunities to develop critical life skills like public speaking.			.75			4.7	0.6
Students develop confidence to make the right choices.			.76			4.8	0.5
<i>To what extent do you agree with this statement? I'm very satisfied with the development and growth of my child at this school.</i>						1.4	0.8
<b>Continuity and Friendship (<math>\alpha = .85</math>)</b>						<b>3.9</b>	<b>0.6</b>
Low turnover among students.				.68		3.8	0.8
Children continuing with the school through all levels offered.				.75		3.7	0.9
Friendships among classmates.				.59		4.3	0.6
Children having friendships with students older and younger than themselves.				.58		4.0	0.8
Keeping students together through middle school.				.76		3.7	0.9
Children build lasting bonds with other students at the school.				.71		4.1	0.7
<i>To what extent do you agree with this statement? I'm very satisfied with the friendships and sense of continuity my child has developed at this school.</i>						1.1	0.8
<b>Intentions to Re-enroll (<math>\alpha = .94</math>)</b>						<b>4.1</b>	<b>0.9</b>
This school continues to be my first choice for my child's education.					.89	4.2	1.0
It would be difficult to explain to my child why we chose not to continue with this school.					.77	3.9	1.2
I am satisfied with the school.					.85	4.3	0.8
Overall, I think this school is an excellent fit for my child.					.88	4.3	0.9
My child is very happy with this school.					.77	4.5	0.8
I intend on re-enrolling my child here next year.					.82	4.2	1.2
I will re-enroll my child here for as long as I can.					.86	4.0	1.3
My child will attend this school for all of the grades offered.					.79	3.7	1.3
I will not re-enroll my child in this school. ( <i>R</i> )					.82	4.2	1.2
I have concerns about re-enrolling my child in this school. ( <i>R</i> )					.75	4.1	1.2

*Note.* Confirmatory principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation; total explained variance was 64.3%; factor loadings < .40 were suppressed. The sample size *n* ranged from 471 to 549. Importance items were measured on a 5-point scale (1 = very unimportant to 5 = extremely important). Agreement items were measured on a 5-point scale (-2 = strongly disagree to +2 = strongly agree). Intention items were measured on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

We multiplied each of the factor importance scores by the single agreement item that measured perceptions of the school's performance. The resulting composite measure produced scores on attributes that were deemed extremely important but not well executed by the school at the lowest end (-10) and scores representing well executed and extremely important attributes on the highest end (+10). Observed scores were distributed through the entire range of values, with the exception of the composite measure for FAITH ( $min = -6$ ,  $max = +10$ ). Scale means and standard deviations are depicted in Table 3.

Table 3

*Regression Variables and Correlation Coefficients*

	<i>m</i>	<i>s</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. RE-ENROLL	4.1	0.9									
2. FAITH	3.8	3.1	.32**								
3. FAITH * TYPE	2.3	3.6	.15**	.84**							
4. VALUES	6.8	3.4	.54**	.62**	0.35**						
5. AFFORDABILITY	2.4	3.1	.25**	.19**	0.16**	0.25**					
6. ATTENTION	6.1	3.7	.53**	.27**	0.11**	0.46**	0.28**				
7. DEVELOPMENT	6.6	3.9	.56**	.25**	0.08 *	0.51**	0.19**	0.60**			
8. ACTIVITIES	3.1	3.8	.37**	.23**	0.08 *	0.35**	0.24**	0.34**	0.45**		
9. COMMUNITY	4.7	3.7	.55**	.36**	0.20**	0.44**	0.21**	0.46**	0.47**	0.39**	
10. CONTINUITY	4.6	3.5	.58**	.25**	0.11**	0.39**	0.18**	0.49**	0.55**	0.43**	.56**

*Note.* TYPE is a dummy coded variable that categorized respondents into secular (0) and Catholic (1) schools. The predictor variables were calculated by multiplying the importance score and the agreement item for each construct, producing a theoretical range of -10 to +10. The sample size, *n*, ranged from 476 to 539; \*\*  $p < .01$  and \*  $p < .05$  (two-tailed).

**Intentions and affective commitment scores.** The survey contained items used to measure parents' and guardians' intentions to initially enroll and reenroll their children as well as their affective commitment towards the school. The items were based on measures used by Mayer and Schoorman (1992). Initial enrollment outcomes included four items measuring affective commitment (e.g., *I think this school is an excellent fit for my child* and *I am confident my child will do well in this school*) and four items measuring intentions, (e.g., *I intend on enrolling my child here next year* and *this school will be my first choice if I enroll my child in a private school*). The reenrollment outcomes included five items measuring affective commitment (*this school continues to be my first choice for my child's education* and *it would be difficult to explain to my child why we chose not to continue with this school – reverse coded*) and five items measuring intentions (e.g., *I will reenroll my child here for as long as I can* and *I have concerns about reenrolling my child in this school – reverse coded*).

Each question was measured using a five-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree and 5 = strongly agree). The low response rate from families of prospective students produced insufficient data to perform any statistical analyses on initial enrollment intentions. The items for reenrollment outcomes were included in the confirmatory factor analysis with its predictors. A single factor for reenrollment intentions was produced. The factor loadings for reenrollment intentions and the descriptive statistics for both outcomes are depicted in the bottom section of Table 2.

## Results

The fundamental purpose of this study was to identify a set of factors that were reliable predictors of initial enrollment and reenrollment intentions. As stated in the methods section, there was insufficient data collected from the families of prospective students to test the factors that we believed uniquely influenced initial enrollment decisions. Because of this, we were unable to test the hypotheses for initial impressions, reputation, facilities/infrastructure, or safe environment (*H6* through *H9*). Also, because of a lack of construct validity associated, we were unable to test the hypothesis that education quality influenced intentions (*H2*).

Correlation coefficients and internal consistency estimates for each of the composite scales and measures of intentions are depicted in Table 3. We created a dummy coded variable named TYPE in order to distinguish the potential difference in reenrollment intentions between the secular and Catholic schools. The three secular schools were coded with a “0” and the three Catholic schools were coded with a “1”. The regression coefficient for TYPE was the difference in the intercept between the secular and Catholic schools, and could be interpreted as the difference in the average level of intentions holding everything else in the model constant. We also modeled the interaction effect of school type with the importance of faith-based education by multiplying FAITH by TYPE. The interaction coefficient reflected the difference in the regression coefficient for the Catholic schools from the secular schools. The reenrollment outcomes scale was regressed on the dummy coded type variable, the eight factors, and the interaction. The unstandardized and standardized regression coefficients are depicted in Table 4.

Table 4

### *Regression Results*

Variables	<i>b</i>	<i>β</i>	<i>se</i>	<i>t</i>
(Constant)	3.14			
TYPE	-.66	-.36 **	.12	-5.40
FAITH	-.01	-.04	.02	-.50
FAITH * TYPE	.08	.33 **	.02	3.47
VALUES	.03	.11 *	.01	2.02
AFFORDABILITY	.03	.09 **	.01	2.68
ATTENTION	.03	.13 **	.01	3.08
DEVELOPMENT	.03	.12 **	.01	2.61
ACTIVITIES	.00	-.02	.01	-.53
COMMUNITY	.05	.19 **	.01	4.54
CONTINUITY	.06	.24 **	.01	5.73

*Note.* Sample size,  $n=470$ ;  $R^2=.55$ ;  $b$ = unstandardized coefficient and  $\beta$  = standardized coefficient.

The entire set of factors explained more than half of the variation in the intentions to reenroll measure ( $R^2 = .55, p < .01$ ). The statistically reliable negative coefficient for TYPE ( $b = -.66, p < .01$ ) indicated that, on average, respondents from the Catholic Schools scored .66 points lower on the intentions measure than the respondents from the secular schools. The coefficients for the faith-based learning measure and its interaction with type of school ( $b = -.01, p > .05$  and  $b = .08, p < .01$ ) indicated that these values were only important for the parents and guardians

with children enrolled in the Catholic schools. Values ( $b = .03, p < .05$ ), affordability ( $b = .03, p < .01$ ), individual attention ( $b = .03, p < .01$ ), child development and maturity ( $b = .03, p < .01$ ), a sense of community ( $b = .05, p < .01$ ), and continuity of friendships ( $b = .06, p < .01$ ) were all statistically reliable predictors of intentions to reenroll. The only factor that wasn't related to intentions was extracurricular activities ( $b = .00, p > .05$ ). The results indicate support for hypotheses 1, 3, 4, 10, 11 and 12. Hypothesis 5 was not supported and hypotheses 2 and 6 through 9 were not tested. The good news for the leaders of the participating schools was that many of the factors they thought were important; were in fact reliable predictors of reenrollment intentions. The bad news was that none of the factors stood out as being an extremely important predictor. Other than extracurricular activities, schools would benefit from paying to attention to all of these factors.

A comparative analysis of importance ratings and the agreement item for each of the twelve factors was summarized in Table 5. The table contrasts the mean scores for the school to its secular and Catholic counterparts. The table provides the subsample sizes ( $n$ ), means ( $m$ ), and standard deviations ( $sd$ ) for each importance item, multi-item importance scale, and agreement item organized by factor. Statistically reliable differences ( $p < .05$ ) between the means were marked with an asterisk. The factors appear in the order each was presented in the theory development section of the paper. We explored the comparisons and comments provided in the open-ended questions throughout the next section.

## Discussion

Having six schools participate in the research project allowed us to compare the information provided for the Robert C. Parker School with the other schools. The results of the comparative analysis are summarized in Table 6. The factors were grouped by type (common, unique to reenrollment, and unique to initial enrollment) and then ordered based on the number of items within each factor that had an importance rating of 4.0 or higher. This represented the number of items rated very important or extremely important on the five-point rating scale. The table also presents the differences on the agreement items between the Parker School and its secular and Catholic counterparts.

Parker parents and guardians identified individual attention and development/growth as the most important factors for reenrollment intentions. These were followed by education quality, espoused value and continuity/friendships. Parents and guardians of prospective and recently enrolled students indicated initial impressions as the most important factor for enrollment decisions, followed by reputation. Affordability and extracurricular activities were the least important factors for re enrollment, and child safety/security and facilities/infrastructure were the least important factors for initial enrollment intentions. Parents and guardians of currently enrolled students were most satisfied with individual attention and development/growth of the child, and were least satisfied with affordability.

For each factor we explored its relative importance among the twelve factors, the relative importance of specific aspects of the each factor, the differences between the school and its secular and Catholic cohorts in terms of importance and agreement, and the comments to the open ended questions made by parents and guardians who responded to our survey. We also identified challenges and opportunities where appropriate and suggested recommendations. The section concludes with a discussion of next steps.



Table 5

*Comparative Analysis of Importance to Enrollment Decisions and Agreement Ratings*

	<i>n</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>
<b>Affordability</b>									
<i>How important is each of the following factors to your enrollment decision?</i>									
<b>1. Availability of affordable before and/or after-school care.</b>	78	2.8	1.4	233	3.3	1.3 *	237	3.6	1.3 *
2. Transportation to the private school is provided by the local school district.	78	3.0	1.3	234	2.8	1.2	236	3.1	1.4
<b>3. Tuition compared to other private schools.</b>	78	3.7	0.9	235	3.6	0.9	234	4.0	1.0 *
4. Stability of tuition costs as child progresses through grades.	78	4.1	0.8	235	3.9	0.9	236	4.2	0.9
<b>5. Tuition assistance based on financial need.</b>	78	3.8	1.2	235	3.1	1.4 *	235	3.3	1.4
<b>6. Discounted tuition for families with multiple children enrolled at the school.</b>	78	3.0	1.5	235	3.2	1.4	236	3.6	1.3 *
<b>7. Additional costs for uniforms, books and other fees.</b>	78	3.2	1.1	235	3.2	1.0	236	3.6	1.0 *
<b>8. Requirements for fundraising.</b>	76	2.9	1.0	234	3.2	1.0	235	3.6	1.0 *
<i>To what extent do you agree with this statement?</i>									
<b>The costs of sending my child to this school are reasonable.</b>	78	0.5	0.8	235	0.7	0.9	237	0.9	0.9 *
<b>Education Quality</b>									
<i>How important is each of the following factors to your enrollment decision?</i>									
1. Teachers have expertise in the subjects they teach.	77	4.5	0.7	228	4.7	0.5	227	4.7	0.5
2. The school employs highly effective teaching methods.	77	4.7	0.6	228	4.9	0.4	227	4.7	0.5
3. The school employs unique teaching methods.	77	4.2	0.9	228	4.3	0.8	227	4.3	0.7
4. The school assesses student competency in core subjects at appropriate intervals.	76	4.3	0.9	228	4.0	0.8	227	4.3	0.8
5. The school provides appropriate resources to students with special needs.	77	3.8	1.0	227	3.7	1.1	227	4.0	0.9
<b>6. Students outperform their public school peers on standardized tests.</b>	76	3.1	1.0	228	3.4	1.1 *	227	3.9	1.0 *
<b>7. The school provides advanced placement programs.</b>	76	3.4	1.0	226	3.8	1.0 *	225	4.1	0.9 *
8. Students are well prepared when they transition to other schools.	77	4.7	0.6	228	4.7	0.6	226	4.8	0.5
<i>To what extent do you agree with this statement?</i>									
<b>Overall, this school provides an excellent education.</b>	77	1.4	0.7	227	1.5	0.6	226	1.3	0.9

*table continues*

Table 5 (continued)

	Parker			Other Secular			Catholic		
	<i>n</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>
<b>Esposued Values</b>									
<i>How important is each of the following factors to your enrollment decision?</i>									
<b>1. The school provides a faith-based learning environment.</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>0.9</b>	223	1.7	1.1	<b>217</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>0.9 *</b>
<b>2. Children spend time each day in prayer or quiet reflection.</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>1.1</b>	223	1.7	1.1	<b>219</b>	<b>3.8</b>	<b>0.9 *</b>
3. Teachers foster an appreciation for diversity in the classroom.	76	4.3	0.8	223	4.4	0.9	219	4.3	0.7
4. Creativity of each child is celebrated.	76	4.6	0.7	223	4.6	0.6	219	4.5	0.7
5. Children are instilled with a sense of purpose to create a better world for themselves and others.	76	4.6	0.7	223	4.6	0.5	219	4.6	0.5
<b>6. Ethical principles of justice and morality are reinforced in the classroom.</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>4.4</b>	<b>0.8</b>	222	4.5	0.6	<b>217</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>0.5 *</b>
<b>7. Children learn about and practice individual responsibility.</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>4.6</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>4.8</b>	<b>0.4 *</b>	219	4.7	0.5
<b>8. Children are taught to respect the property and rights of others.</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>221</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>0.5 *</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>4.8</b>	<b>0.4 *</b>
<i>To what extent do you agree with this statement?</i>									
There is a good match between my family's values and those embraced by this school.	76	1.4	0.7	221	1.5	0.6	217	1.4	0.8
<b>Individual Attention</b>									
<i>How important is each of the following factors to your enrollment decision?</i>									
<b>1. Fewer children assigned to each classroom than in public schools.</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>4.4</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>0.9 *</b>	218	4.2	0.8
2. Teachers make time to answer each child's questions.	76	4.6	0.7	222	4.6	0.7	217	4.6	0.5
3. Even small changes in student behavior are recognized by the teachers.	76	4.3	0.7	222	4.5	0.7	218	4.5	0.6
4. Teachers are aware of each student's progress.	76	4.7	0.6	222	4.8	0.4	218	4.7	0.5
5. Each child's unique learning style is supported.	76	4.5	0.7	222	4.6	0.6	218	4.4	0.7
6. Teachers have time available for one-on-one interactions with each student.	76	4.5	0.7	222	4.7	0.5	218	4.5	0.6
<b>7. Teachers adapt lesson plans to student's interests.</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>4.2</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>4.4</b>	<b>0.7 *</b>	217	4.2	0.8
<b>8. Teachers adapt assignments to each child's ability.</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>4.1</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>0.7 *</b>	218	4.3	0.8
<i>To what extent do you agree with this statement?</i>									
<b>I'm very satisfied with the level of individual attention given my child at this school.</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>0.7</b>	222	1.4	0.8	<b>216</b>	<b>1.3</b>	<b>0.8 *</b>

table continues

Table 5 (continued)

	Parker			Other Secular			Catholic		
	<i>n</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>
<b>Extracurricular Activities</b>									
<i>How important is each of the following factors to your enrollment decision?</i>									
1. Acting, Drama, Theatre, Dance	76	3.5	1.0	220	3.6	0.9	215	3.4	1.0
2. Art, Music, Band, Chorus	75	3.9	0.9	220	3.9	0.9	215	4.0	0.8
3. Foreign Languages	75	4.0	1.0	220	4.1	0.8	215	4.0	0.9
4. Horticulture (e.g., Farming, Gardening, Beekeeping)	76	3.3	1.0	219	3.3	0.9	213	3.2	1.0
5. Science (e.g., Lego Robotics, Odyssey of the Mind, Science Fair)	76	4.0	1.0	219	4.0	0.9	215	4.1	0.8
<b>6. Team Sports (e.g., Basketball, Soccer, Track, Volleyball)</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>1.0 *</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>3.9</b>	<b>0.8 *</b>
<b>7. Individual Sports (e.g., Bowling, Karate, Skiing, Swimming, Tennis)</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>0.9 *</b>	<b>214</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>0.9 *</b>
<b>8. Before and After-school Care</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>1.2 *</b>	<b>216</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>1.1 *</b>
<i>To what extent do you agree with this statement?</i>									
I'm very satisfied with the quality and variety of extracurricular activities at this school.	76	0.7	1.0	220	1.0	0.8	211	0.7	1.0
<b>Sense of Community</b>									
<i>How important is each of the following factors to your enrollment decision?</i>									
1. Parents/guardians feel comfortable to contact teachers and ask how their child is doing.	76	4.6	0.6	211	4.7	0.5	206	4.7	0.5
2. A high level of engagement among faculty, staff and parents.	76	4.4	0.7	212	4.4	0.6	207	4.5	0.6
3. Children are involved in community service activities.	76	4.1	0.8	211	4.1	0.8	205	4.2	0.7
4. A strong sense of volunteerism.	75	3.9	0.8	212	4.0	0.8	206	4.2	0.8
5. Friendships among parents within the school.	76	3.5	0.9	212	3.6	0.8	206	3.7	0.9
6. Parents/guardians can rely on each other to look after their children.	76	3.5	1.0	212	3.5	0.9	207	3.7	1.0
7. Teachers provide parents and guardians frequent and meaningful feedback about their children.	75	4.5	0.6	212	4.6	0.5	206	4.6	0.5
<b>8. School spirit -- children identify with their school.</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>3.9</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>207</b>	<b>4.3</b>	<b>0.7 *</b>
<i>To what extent do you agree with this statement?</i>									
I'm very satisfied with the sense of community at this school.	75	1.0	1.0	212	1.3	0.8 *	206	1.1	0.9

table continues

Table 5 (continued)

	Parker			Other Secular			Catholic		
	<i>n</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>
<b>Development and Growth</b>									
<i>How important is each of the following factors to your enrollment decision?</i>									
1. Children are challenged to do their best.	75	4.6	0.7	210	4.7	0.5	206	4.7	0.5
<b>2. Students develop a love of learning.</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>4.9</b>	<b>0.3 *</b>	206	4.7	0.5
<b>3. Children are given opportunities to stretch their abilities.</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>4.8</b>	<b>0.4 *</b>	206	4.7	0.4
<b>4. Children are provided opportunities to build confidence.</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>209</b>	<b>4.9</b>	<b>0.3 *</b>	206	4.8	0.4
5. Teachers challenge the students to go beyond the core curriculum.	75	4.6	0.7	210	4.6	0.6	206	4.5	0.6
6. Teachers encourage students to be creative and think outside the box.	75	4.7	0.6	210	4.8	0.4	205	4.7	0.5
7. Children are given opportunities to develop critical life skills like public speaking.	75	4.7	0.7	211	4.7	0.5	205	4.6	0.5
8. Students develop confidence to make the right choices.	75	4.7	0.7	211	4.8	0.5	205	4.7	0.4
<i>To what extent do you agree with this statement?</i>									
I'm very satisfied with the development and growth of my child at this school.	75	1.5	0.7	210	1.5	0.7	202	1.2	0.9
<b>Continuity and Friendship</b>									
<i>How important is each of the following factors to your enrollment decision?</i>									
<b>1. Low turnover among faculty and staff.</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>0.7</b>	211	4.2	0.7	<b>204</b>	<b>4.3</b>	<b>0.7 *</b>
2. Low turnover among students.	72	3.8	0.8	211	3.7	0.8	204	3.9	0.9
3. Children continuing with the school through all levels offered.	72	3.7	0.9	211	3.6	0.8	204	3.9	1.0
4. Strong relationship between children and their teachers.	72	4.6	0.6	211	4.6	0.5	203	4.6	0.5
5. Friendships among classmates.	72	4.2	0.7	211	4.4	0.6	206	4.4	0.6
6. Children having friendships with students older and younger than themselves.	72	4.0	0.9	211	4.1	0.7	203	3.9	0.9
7. Keeping students together through middle school.	72	3.7	0.9	211	3.7	0.9	206	3.7	0.9
8. Children build lasting bonds with other students at the school.	72	4.1	0.9	211	4.1	0.7	205	4.2	0.7
<i>To what extent do you agree with this statement?</i>									
I'm very satisfied with the friendships and sense of continuity my child has developed at this school.	72	1.2	0.8	211	1.2	0.8	202	1.0	0.9

table continues

Table 5 (continued)

	Parker			Other Secular			Catholic		
	<i>n</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>
<b>Initial Impressions</b>									
<i>How important is each of the following factors to your enrollment decision?</i>									
1. Clear on the first visit, what the school stands for.	10	4.2	0.4	26	4.3	0.7	19	4.2	0.6
2. A clear vision for educating its students.	10	4.5	0.5	26	4.5	0.6	19	4.4	0.6
3. All teachers and staff embrace the school's mission.	10	4.3	0.7	26	4.5	0.6	19	4.4	0.7
4. Friendly faculty and staff.	10	4.4	0.7	26	4.5	0.6	19	4.6	0.5
5. Feeling welcomed when I visit the school.	10	4.5	0.7	26	4.4	0.6	19	4.5	0.5
6. Representatives of the school who are interested in my child and family.	10	4.7	0.5	26	4.5	0.6	19	4.4	0.6
7. Answers to all of my questions.	10	4.3	0.5	26	4.6	0.5	19	4.4	0.6
8. Receiving valuable information.	10	4.3	0.5	26	4.4	0.6	19	4.5	0.5
<i>To what extent do you agree with this statement?</i>									
My initial impression of this school was highly favorable.	10	1.9	0.3	26	1.9	0.3	19	1.5	0.5
<b>Reputation</b>									
<i>How important is each of the following factors to your enrollment decision?</i>									
1. People talk about the school in a positive way.	10	4.1	0.7	25	4.0	0.7	19	4.3	0.7
2. The school has a good reputation within the community.	10	4.2	0.8	25	4.0	0.7	19	4.4	0.5
3. People say positive things about the teachers	10	4.1	1.1	25	4.2	0.7	19	4.2	0.8
4. The school has a long history of providing a quality education.	10	4.3	0.7	25	4.2	0.9	19	4.4	0.7
<b>5. People know the school.</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2.9</b>	<b>0.7</b>	25	3.2	1.0	<b>19</b>	<b>3.8</b>	<b>0.9 *</b>
6. People say positive things about the administration.	10	4.0	0.9	25	3.9	0.8	18	3.9	0.8
7. People respect the school.	10	3.8	0.8	25	3.8	0.7	19	4.1	0.7
8. People say positive things about the children who attend the school.	10	4.0	0.8	25	4.2	0.7	19	3.9	0.7
<i>To what extent do you agree with this statement?</i>									
The school has an outstanding reputation in this community.	10	1.0	0.8	25	1.5	0.6	19	1.1	0.7

table continues

	Parker			Other Secular			Catholic		
	<i>n</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>
<b>Facilities and Infrastructure</b>									
<i>How <u>important</u> is each of the following factors to your enrollment decision?</i>									
1. Clean and well maintained facilities.	10	4.1	0.6	23	4.3	0.8	18	4.2	0.7
2. Cheerful and welcoming decor.	10	3.8	1.1	24	3.6	1.0	18	4.1	0.8
3. Technology equipped classrooms.	10	2.8	1.5	24	2.6	1.3	18	3.2	0.9
4. Wireless internet access available throughout the school.	10	4.5	0.8	24	4.8	0.4	18	4.7	0.5
5. School grounds provide a safe place for the children.	10	3.1	0.7	24	3.9	0.9	18	3.8	0.9
6. Convenient access among various structures/buildings.	10	3.4	0.5	24	3.8	0.8	17	3.6	0.7
7. Up to date furnishings.	10	4.3	0.8	24	4.4	0.8	18	4.5	0.6
<b>8. School grounds provide an inviting place for children.</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>0.5</b>	24	4.6	0.7	<b>18</b>	<b>4.4</b>	<b>0.5 *</b>
<i>The following features exist in one or more of the private</i>									
<b>1. Multi-purpose room</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>0.8 *</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>3.1</b>	<b>0.9 *</b>
2. Library	10	4.1	0.7	24	3.4	1.1	17	4.1	1.0
3. Art room	10	4.1	0.6	24	3.5	1.0	17	3.9	0.9
4. Music room	10	3.9	0.9	24	3.4	0.9	18	3.9	0.8
5. Stage	10	2.1	0.9	24	2.5	0.9	17	2.5	0.7
6. Darkroom (photography)	10	3.5	1.4	24	3.3	1.2	17	3.6	1.0
<b>7. Science Lab</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>1.1 *</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>3.9</b>	<b>0.7 *</b>
8. Kitchen	10	4.2	0.8	24	4.2	1.0	18	4.2	0.7
9. Gymnasium	10	4.2	0.8	24	4.3	0.9	18	4.4	0.5
10. Playground	10	3.3	1.1	24	3.7	1.2	17	3.6	0.9
11. Sport fields/courts (e.g. baseball, soccer, basketball)	10	1.7	0.9	24	2.3	1.1	17	2.4	1.0
12. Swimming Pool	10	3.2	1.0	24	3.1	1.2	17	2.5	1.1
13. Garden/Greenhouse	10	3.5	1.1	24	3.3	1.0	17	2.5	1.2
<b>14. Outdoor Classroom</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>3.8</b>	<b>0.8</b>	24	3.1	1.0	<b>17</b>	<b>2.6</b>	<b>1.1 *</b>
15. Nature Trails	10	3.5	1.3	24	3.3	1.0	17	3.1	0.6
<i>To what extent do you <u>agree</u> with this statement?</i>									
This school has excellent facilities and infrastructure.	10	1.1	0.6	24	1.3	0.8	18	0.6	0.9

Table 5 (continued)

table continues

Table 5 (continued)

	Parker			Other Secular			Catholic		
	<i>n</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>
<b>Child Safety and School Security</b>									
<i>How important is each of the following factors to your enrollment decision?</i>									
1. Ensuring student safety while maintaining a welcoming atmosphere.	10	4.3	0.8	24	4.7	0.6	18	4.8	0.4
2. Routinely practicing Emergency action plans (e.g. fire and lock-down drills).	10	3.6	1.2	24	4.1	1.0	18	4.4	0.7
3. A security presence during school hours.	10	3.0	1.5	24	3.2	1.2	18	3.6	1.1
4. Entrance and exit doors secured at all times.	10	3.8	1.1	24	4.3	0.8	18	4.5	0.5
5. Visitors show identification and demonstrate a valid reason before entering the school.	10	3.8	0.8	24	4.2	0.9	18	4.5	0.7
6. Parents are notified if there are any safety or security issues at the school.	10	4.4	0.7	24	4.5	0.8	18	4.8	0.5
7. The school takes bullying issues seriously.	10	4.6	0.5	24	4.4	0.9	18	4.5	0.5
8. Teachers show a genuine concern for the emotional welfare of each child.	10	5.0	0.0	24	4.7	0.7	18	4.7	0.5
<i>To what extent do you agree with this statement concerning the safety of your child?</i>									
I feel very comfortable sending my child to this school.	10	1.7	0.5	24	1.5	0.6	17	1.5	0.6
<b>Intentions to Re-enroll</b>									
<i>To what extent do you agree with these statements?</i>									
1. This school continues to be my first choice for my child's education.	70	4.3	1.0	210	4.4	0.9	203	4.0	1.1
2. It would be difficult to explain to my child why we chose not to continue with this school.	70	3.9	1.2	206	4.1	1.1	202	3.7	1.3
3. I am satisfied with the school.	70	4.3	0.8	207	4.5	0.7	202	4.2	0.9
4. Overall, I think this school is an excellent fit for my child.	70	4.4	0.9	209	4.5	0.8	202	4.1	1.0
5. My child is very happy with this school.	69	4.6	0.7	208	4.6	0.6	202	4.3	0.9
<b>6. I intend on re-enrolling my child here next year.</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>4.4</b>	<b>1.1</b>	205	4.4	1.0	<b>201</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>1.4 *</b>
7. I will re-enroll my child here for as long as I can.	71	4.1	1.2	204	4.2	1.1	201	3.8	1.4
8. My child will attend this school for all of the grades offered.	71	3.9	1.1	205	3.8	1.2	201	3.5	1.5
<b>9. I will not re-enroll my child in this school.</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>1.1</b>	202	1.6	1.1	<b>199</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>1.4 *</b>
10. I have concerns about re-enrolling my child in this school.	70	1.9	1.3	204	1.7	1.1	200	2.0	1.3

*Note.* An asterisk indicated a statistically reliable difference between the school and the comparison group ( $p < .05$ ). Importance items were measured on a 5-point scale (1 = very unimportant to 5 = extremely important). Agreement items were measured on a 5-point scale (-2 = strongly disagree to +2 = strongly agree). Intention items were measured on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

Table 6

*Relative Importance of Factors and Differences in Agreement Ratings*

	#	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>mean differences</i>	
				<i>Secular</i>	<i>Catholic</i>
<b>Factors Influencing Enrollment/Reenrollment</b>					
Affordability	1	0.5	0.8	-0.1	-0.3 *
Education Quality	5	1.4	0.7	-0.2	0.0
Espoused Values	6	1.4	0.7	-0.1	0.0
Individual Attention	8	1.5	0.7	0.2	0.3 *
Extracurricular Activities	2	0.7	1.0	-0.3	0.0
<b>Factors Influencing Reenrollment</b>					
Sense of Community	4	1.0	1.0	-0.3 *	-0.1
Development and Growth	8	1.5	0.7	-0.1	0.2
Continuity and Friendship	5	1.2	0.8	0.0	0.2
<b>Factors Influencing Initial Enrollment</b>					
Initial Impressions	8	1.9	0.3	0.0	0.4
Reputation	6	1.0	0.8	-0.5	-0.1
Facilities and Infrastructure	4	1.1	0.6	-0.2	0.5
Child Safety and School Security	4	1.7	0.5	0.2	0.2
Reenrollment Intentions		4.2	0.9	-0.1	0.3

*Note.* The numbers under the "#" heading indicate the frequency of items that had a mean importance rating of at least 4.0 (very important). The importance items were measured on a 5-point scale (1 = very unimportant to 5 = extremely important). The mean (*m*) and standard deviation (*s*) is reported for the agreement items related to each factor. Agreement items were measured on a 5-point scale (-2 = strongly disagree to +2 = strongly agree). An asterisk indicated a statistically reliable difference between the mean agreement items for the school and the comparison group ( $p < .05$ ).

**Factors Common to Enrollment and Reenrollment Decisions**

**Affordability.** Only one of the eight affordability items (stability of tuition costs) in Table 5 had an average importance rating greater than or equal to 4.0 (very important). Next in importance was comparability to other independent schools and need-based tuition assistance. Before and after school care, requirements for fundraising, transportation and discounted tuition for families with multiple children in the school appeared to be the least important attributes of this factor. Transportation, family discounts and fundraising requirement appeared to be the least important factors. The average for each of these items fell very close to the midpoint of the scale which was labeled neither important nor unimportant. There were statistically reliable differences on six of the eight items between the importance ratings of Parker parents and guardians compared to those provided for the Catholic schools. The availability of before/after school care was less important for Parker parents/guardians than it was for the other secular schools. Tuition assistance based on financial need, however, was more important to the Parker parents/guardians than it was for the other secular school.



Based strictly on the data, this factor appeared to be one of the least important for enrollment decisions. The number of responses to the open ended question, however, provided a different perspective; 44 of 84 respondents (52%) had some comment about the affordability of the school. We grouped the comments into six major categories: not affordable (7), affordable with aid (5), reasonable for education provided (12), concern with additional costs and fundraising (8), concerns for expenditures (2) and willingness to pay higher tuition to enable financial based scholarships (2). The numbers in parentheses indicate the number of respondents who provided comments in that category.

Seven comments specifically stated that the tuition was too costly or unaffordable. There were concerns about both tuition increases and ability to pay. Tuition raised each year was going to make things difficult for some people to continue at Parker.

*Each year the tuition increases, which will most likely prevent my child from continuing through the 8th grade.*

*It is expensive, and as tuition costs increase I have concerns that we will not be able to continue to afford to send our children there. I do feel it is worth the money, but the cost of a private school education is a hardship for middle class families, at best.*

*I can no longer afford to send my child to Parker. I'd love to enroll both my children, it is simply out of price range for any, struggling 'middle class American'.*

*While the costs may be reasonable in light of what it costs to educate a child in this manner, what matters more is my ability to pay.*

*I understand the cost of operating the school versus the cost of the school. But that does not change that it is a struggle to afford the school.*

*I think it is too costly.*

*I wish that we could afford to send our children to such a good school without having to constantly thinking about how much money it is going to cost us this year. I really wish that the cost didn't go up.*

Five of the parents responded that the tuition was affordable because of the tuition assistance they received. Parents who receive financial aid were grateful for the help with their child's education.

*Costs were reasonable because the aid was generous.*

*We receive financial aid to send our child to Parker and the cost is still over what we can comfortably afford. Without financial aid, we would be unable to send our child to Parker. Right now, we feel the value for our money is unparalleled. However, should the financial aid package we receive change or the tuition rise greatly, we would be unable to afford a Parker education.*

*Our income sometimes fluctuates, so tuition assistance has been critical for us at times.*

*Knowing that we don't have to change schools when our circumstances vary is an important consideration in our school choice.*

*It would be helpful if there was a siblings discount on tuition.*

*We are fortunate to pay far less than the education is worth based upon our income level/scholarship. If transportation was not available or we did not have discounted tuition we would not be able to make it work.*

The largest number of comments (12) was from families who believed that the tuition was reasonable, especially for the quality of the education received. Some examples were:

*The costs are quite reasonable considering the excellent education provided.*

*Reasonable cost especially considering tuition only covers 80 percent of the actual cost to educate a child per year.*

*Private school tuition does limit us in some ways from doing other things but at this point we feel it is well worth it.*

Although there are many good things that parents had to say about the school's affordability there were also some concerns. Eight respondents commented about additional costs associated with extracurricular activities and the requirements for fundraising.

*I am willing to pay the costs for tuition but wonder about all the add-on costs associated with afterschool clubs and additional activities.*

*We pay tuition without big facilities and everything is an add-on (clubs, lunches, etc.).*

*There are many additional costs on top of tuition that come up throughout the year. They are hard to turn down, and perhaps should be addressed up front at enrollment.*

*I believe the tuition is essentially reasonable, but I was not prepared for the number of unannounced "hidden costs" that popped up as the school year progressed. From pizza lunch to spaghetti lunch to Panera lunch to book fairs to etc. I wished the school had let us know before school started (or before we enrolled?).*

*In an attempt to provide a holistic educational experience, a la carte activities add up quickly. Those costs are not always obvious when selecting a school (2).*

*It is very frustrating that even with the high cost of tuition we are constantly bombarded with fundraising requests (2).*

*Unexpected costs along the way create a negative feeling and I prefer to avoid this. Robert C Parker is quite good about minimizing and warning about any extra costs which keeps me much happier, but keeping the pressure to engage in fundraising down is important to me. Life is stressful enough without this, and I actually like if once or twice a year they do a fundraiser with art projects my child has done, those are fun to have!*

In addition to additional fees and fundraising, two parents raised concerns about how the money was expended. This was offset by a positive comment from a parent who believed tuition dollars were well spent and two comments about raising funds for additional need-based scholarships.

*I have doubts concerning oversight of expenditures.*

*We are told fees only cover 85% of operating costs yet the school is more expensive than the nearby Montessori and close in price to others with much greater facilities...constant fundraising, with monies going into scholarship funds. Perhaps there are too many scholarship students and not enough of a base of full-fee paying students. Amenities are in need of updating.*

*The tuition feels like a lot, but I know it is allocated to worthy endeavors - good pay for teachers, high-quality education and enrichment programs, and an educational and community philosophy I would choose to support. In other words, it's worth it.*

*I would approve of paying slightly more tuition if the money was used for scholarships to bring in diversity or simply to bring in great kids and role models who might not be able to afford the tuition otherwise (2).*

Parents had mixed feelings in regards to the Parker School affordability. This could be partly attributed to the variation in family income. Although 47% earned more than \$150K, there were 27% who earned less than \$100K. The majority of the families with children enrolled at the school were able to comfortably afford its tuition. Financial assistance, discounts for families with more than one child enrolled, and stability of tuition were ways in which the school could help those with financial need. Finding the right balance of fees, fundraising, and tuition was another way to minimize dissent. Families on a limited income often found that they could better budget their finances when presented with a stable monthly payment. Replacing fees with a slightly higher tuition may be preferable for these families. For some families, time could be scarcer than money. These families may prefer higher tuition in exchange for fundraising. Ultimately, affordability was a matter of balancing needs and wants. It was impossible to please all families in this category because there would always be those who wished to pay less.

**Quality of educational programs.** Five of the eight of education quality items in Table 5 had an average importance rating greater than or equal to 4.0 (very important) indicating that Parker School parents valued education quality. Teacher expertise, effective and unique teaching methods and well prepared students were the attributes rated most important for this factor. Least important were the sixth and seventh items (outperform peers on standardized tests and provides advanced placement programs). The means for these items were statistically less than the ratings provided for the other schools. The scores on the other items were similar to the other schools. The mean of 1.4 indicated the parents and guardians agreed/strongly agreed that the school provided an excellent education.

About 50% of the parents and guardians responded to the open ended question on education quality. There were more favorable comments than there were critical. We grouped the 39 comments into several categories: satisfaction with the quality of programs (19) and teaching (5), concerns with assessment (7) and lack of rigor (4), dissatisfaction (4) and questions about the

survey (1). The in parentheses indicated the number of respondents who provided comments in that category. The majority of the comments were provided by parents/guardians who were very satisfied with the education that the Parker School provided.

*Extremely satisfied – 8th graders complete a thesis, take 9th grade regents for several courses. Collaborative process is what colleges and the job market is looking for. The educational process creates a confident and thoughtful learner.*

*I am very satisfied with the quality of education and am blessed to have the resources to send my children there.*

*I believe that Robert C. Parker School is providing the absolute best education possible - in the area. I have been beyond impressed by the thoughtfulness, care and consideration that are taken by the teachers regarding the students. I understand education better now through watching my children be educated.*

*I couldn't be happier with the quality of education provided by Parker.*

*It is beyond compare, from what I have seen, based upon the needs of my daughter and her love of learning.*

*My children are taught in a way that they are excited about learning. I believe that are educated as well or better than peers in public school.*

*The multi modality approach and experiences are above and beyond what public school provides, although public schools could learn from Parker's approach to teaching and child development.*

*Not only the education but the self confidence my child gained is invaluable.*

*Quality of education is on par with the best schools available in Albany (3).*

*The quality of education exceeded my expectations. It's the way all children should be taught.*

*The education at RCP encompasses not only the academic challenges but social and ethical challenges as well.*

*The hands on education paired with challenging students to be both independent and to think critically with a larger community is important for real world application.*

*The project-based experiential education Parker offers works well for my child's learning style. The kind, caring, compassionate teachers and staff make for a wonderful environment in which to send my elementary school child off to school every day.*

*The personalized attention to each student's strengths and needs has been one of the assets of Parker education that my family values immensely.*

*To my knowledge, Parker utilizes best practices in education to provide a very high quality, individualized education for students. I think that is what makes the tuition dollar worth it- knowing my children are getting the very best education money can buy.*

*To the extent I have observed them, the diversity of educational opportunities and commitment to stimulating intellectual curiosity in children seems outstanding.*

*We appreciate that AP and Regents courses are offered in 8th grade. We also appreciate that there is no standardized testing in the lower grades, and that the curriculum is not test-driven.*

Some of the praise was directly toward the teachers.

*We are very happy with the way teachers invest so much into each child.*

*Good job with team approach to education. Good job teaching to student strengths.*

*Parker's teaching and learning experiences have been tried and true for my family for over 13 years. For us it has always been all about the quality of our children's teachers and Parker's teachers are a head above the rest.*

*Student-teacher ratio provides individual attention; teachers are very involved in all activities and really know each student. The amount of effort they put into the assessment of the student's progress is tangible.*

*Teachers are very engaged with students and are available after hours for consultation.*

Several parents and guardians commented about assessing student progress. The comments were not really critical of the academic approach, but rather indicated their uncertainty that the children would be prepared for what awaited them after Parker.

*I am generally pleased, but concerned about lack of assessment.*

*I am hoping that when they leave Parker that they have gained enough/more education to transition them into the next level of education and into college.*

*I don't have enough information to know whether the school provides a good education. The need of the school to sell itself to people seems to mean that the communication related to the actual educating and learning that occur tends to be overshadowed by sales-pitch-tinged communication. Authentic communication from the teachers is limited.*

*There is a great emphasis on community at Parker and many kids thrive in their personal development in the program. Academically, the school claims it provides "the best"*

*education (what does that mean, exactly?), but it sometimes seems that academics are less important than personal development. Yes, the two go hand in hand in many senses, and the school is effective at communicating this relationship, but I found the "everyone matures and develops as a reader at their own pace" sometimes too casual, vague, and not beneficial to the students.*

*More thought given to benchmarks to assess student progress outside of the testing environment would be helpful; also, ensuring that teachers are well-matched to all facets of the topics that they teach.*

*Even though the school does not participate in the Common Core Testing, it would be a good idea to test the students in some way that is comparable. These students, after Grade 8, will be going to more traditional schools and should be ready for such testing.*

*Would like to know what my child is doing on a day to day basis however I realize that this is not easy in a school that does not use worksheets (though I agree that the current approach of teaching is better than worksheets). It is hard to get feedback from my child.*

Others were concerned with what they perceived as a lack of rigor in the Parker programs.

*Education, as strictly defined, is very important, and while Parker's quality is high, we think it may not be as rigorous as some other schools. That said, the overall school environment and philosophy are also crucial, and it's those aspects of Parker that combine with the quality of education to make Parker on balance the best choice for our family.*

*Excellent innovation, creativity, building student strengths - problem solving, skills for future. Not enough academic rigor in fundamentals: reading, writing, music, as foundational skills; no testing at all (pros and cons to this - children may not be prepared for testing which will be a feature of later education). Very nurturing environment, lots of outdoor field work time, but very little pressure on children to perform to the best of their abilities, to challenge themselves.*

*Good overall education but there seems to be a lot of 'free' time -- recess, breaks, etc. -- and not enough homework.*

*The middle school curriculum lacks some of the depth and variety of experiences found at other area schools. They could improve in this area.*

Beyond rigor, some parents and guardians showed dissatisfaction with the quality of the programs.

*Math and music teachers are too rigid. Need to be more responsive. Parts of the program are excellent. Others are lacking or, in some cases, an embarrassment. In a school this small (in terms of enrollment and finances), it's*

*important that every component (be it faculty, staff, curriculum) be as solid as possible. Weakness should be addressed and the money/time spent on them should be redirected.*

*The art program could also be a bit more vibrant- overall I wish there was more respect paid to the arts. The science, math, English, and social studies programs are exceptionally good.*

*Not all of the teachers are equally strong or experienced. The music and physical education/health programs are weak (2).*

The final comment was critical of our survey rather than the quality of education provided at the Parker School. Our goal always was to ask questions in ways that were respectful and would provide meaningful responses. We failed to meet that goal in this case.

*Some of these survey questions are not well-thought out. For example: what does a question about advanced placement mean in a K-8 school? I have no idea how to respond to that. Or students outperforming their peers on standardized tests; we don't take them!! If I didn't think that this school provided excellent education, whatever that might mean, I wouldn't have my child there. I don't care very much whether the teachers are "experts" in their respective fields; they do t need PhDs to teach third grade, or eighth grade, effectively. What I care about is their ability to motivate and inspire my child; their understanding of how to plan and structure developmentally-appropriate experiences and education; their ability to communicate with me and my child; and their ability to produce inquisitive, confident, poised; adolescents when given several years to work with a child. This is what I am paying for at RCPS.*

Members of the school's board, administration and faculty attributed Parker's unique approach of applied, individualized and collaborative learning as what differentiated the school's education program. Parents and guardians confirmed this by rating education quality as an important factor for reenrollment intentions, and most either agreed or strongly agreed that their children received an excellent education. More than two-thirds of the comments were highly favorable about the programs or the teachers. We suggest further investigating the issue of assessment. There were other ways in which the Parker School could demonstrate the quality of education besides standardized testing. An expanded alumni page that showed what schools Parker students attended and testimony of how well they performed could be informative. The page now features interesting stories of former students who are now successful adults. It might be informative to hear about Parker students who are now in High School. This may also help allay any concerns parents have about the rigor of the programs. We do recommend you look into the concerns made by a few parents/guardians about teacher quality; any part of the program that is not operating at a high level, will likely stand out.

**Alignment of family and school values.** Six of the eight espoused values items in Table 5 had an average importance rating greater than or equal to 4.0 (very important). The only two items that were not rated highly were the two faith-based values that were important to the Catholic schools. The relatively high ratings on these six items suggested that alignment of family and school values was one of the most important factors for enrollment decisions. The importance ratings for two items (children learn about and practice individual responsibility and

children are taught to respect the property and rights of others) were statistically lower than the ratings provided by parents/guardians from the other secular schools. In addition to the two faith-based items, one item (ethical principles of justice and morality reinforced in the classroom) had a statistically lower importance rating than the Catholic schools. The mean of 1.4 on the agreement item indicated that parents and guardians agreed/strongly agreed that there was a good match between their values and those embraced by this school. This rating was similar to the other schools.

About 35% of the parents and guardians responded to the open ended question on espoused values. The majority of comments stating that the Parker School was strong in the area of values, but there were some comments made by parents that showed there was room to improve. We grouped the 27 comments into three major categories: appreciation (16), celebrations (5) and concerns (4). The number in parentheses indicated the number of respondents who provided comments in that category.

Most of the comments demonstrated the parents and guardians appreciation for the values instilled in their children at the Parker School.

*Although not religious, RCP is a very value-based environment. They appear to place value on each individual child entrusted to them. And my child sees this, which is important to me.*

*We like Robert C Parker School because it is secular. However it provides a very strong character education which is really important to us. It also fosters a community of diversity and open mindedness which is crucial.*

*Good values; everyone is well-respected.*

*I feel they are the result of great thought, educational research, and common sense - and they resonate with me.*

*I love that Parker teaches the children meditation and they spend time on that type of activity.*

*Parker provided my child with a reinforcement of the values stressed at home regarding responsible citizenship, environmental concerns and empathy.*

*Parker transmits valuable lessons about personal responsibility and the rights of others, and inspires its community to think outside of itself. It is not especially diverse racially or socio-economically in the younger grades, which challenges diversity training.*

*The independence that Parker considers and challenges each student to become. Also, that each student is allowed to discover ideas and become themselves as they change and develop.*

*The Peace Assembly says it all.*

*The responsive classroom approach very in line with parenting style utilized at home.*



*Their values are in line with my own – nature, community, caring.*

*They are a good match to our family's values.*

*The values of being a contributing and respectful member of society, taking care of the earth, and respecting each other are values our family holds in high importance. Parker reflects these values in its educational philosophy, and it plays out each day in the behavior of its students and teachers.*

*We agree, from what I can tell, about the importance of community, love of learning and honoring the uniqueness of the individual.*

*We like the integration of the Responsive Classroom philosophy. Also, the younger children receive appropriate guidance in social skill development in a way that helps them take responsibility for the consequences of their words and actions.*

*It's the teachers that make the values real. The branding is a bit lame as it feels too sterile. The way the teachers work as a team and adjust is impressive in living the values.*

Several parents commented on the school's policy concerning religious and cultural celebrations.

*I am grateful that we do not celebrate popular religious holidays at Parker. I would like to see the children empowered with a greater sense of democracy and inclusion in administrative decisions.*

*For the most part it is a good match. The school is very much focused on the child and a wonderful nurturing learning environment. We do feel the school tries too hard to ignore the existence of any religious holidays or events, going beyond 'not celebrating' with a refusal to even acknowledge the many world holidays which, we feel, is sad for the students collectively. This plays out even on small scale e.g. with the December Scholastic book fair (not positioning any religious books visibly no matter whether they are Christmas, Kwanzaa or Chanukah) and students and parents instructed not to mention or bring in anything for Valentine's Day or Halloween. This comes from a commitment to recognizing and not alienating any one cultural event but we feel the school lacks cultural diversity and provides a sanitized calendar.*

*For the most part we are in agreement. I do find their policy of not celebrating anything a bit extreme...an attempt to be "all inclusive" seems to result in complete exclusion.*

*I appreciate the reason to not celebrate holidays however I believe that something special is lost as a result of this.*

*I appreciate the values taught at the school but sometimes feel that anything having to do with my religion is shunned but the religions of other cultures are studied at length. The children should learn about all religions.*

Several parents had concerns about the application of values.

*In my opinion, the school occasionally is too permissive in an effort to respect kids' individuality and eccentricities at the expense of maintaining an environment of appropriate behavior in the classroom. Discipline of students for their lack of respect for the educational process and certainly their peers is a valuable learning experience for those students and a valuable lesson for the other students who witness the discipline. In a society where people are often not held responsible for their transgressions, it is crucial for kids to develop a sense of moral behavior and ethical consideration of others - as queried above. I'm not sure the school is succeeding in this way.*

*Issues of diversity are generally supported, but less attention is given to economic diversity and gender diversity than I would like.*

*More experiences that help children understand how to make the world a better place for themselves and others would improve Parker's existing program.*

*Sometimes Parker appears too willing to address the concerns of donors despite concerns expressed by non-donors.*

There was also another critical comment about the survey.

*It's very important that the school NOT provide a faith-based education!!!! So would that make my answer to the first question important or unimportant? I can't see how your construction of these questions could possibly lead you to valid conclusions when the answers you might get are to questions that are so ambiguously posed. Better might be a question like "I very much want my child enrolled in a faith-based school." Agree, disagree, etc. Your first question here doesn't give me enough options. It's not that faith-based education is unimportant to me; it's abhorrent. What the he'll does "prayer or silent reflection" mean? Yes, I want my kid to be self-reflective. Doesn't mean I want prayer (god-forbid!) and I don't want "silent reflection" as some sort of substitute. The school encourages independent thought. This is important. I would not have my child in a religious-based environment.*

The survey was designed to collect data for both secular and religious schools. The person who provided this comment chose to skip the two faith-based questions, which was an appropriate response in this situation. We designed the survey so that participants were not forced to respond. We checked the data and found that 98% of the Parker parents/guardians provided a very unimportant, unimportant or neutral response to the first attribute (the school provides a faith-based learning environment). We found just the opposite effect for the Catholic families who participated in this study where better than 90% of the responses were either important or very important. About 90% of the Parker parents/guardians provide similar responses to the second item (children spend time each day in prayer or quiet reflection). Parker participants who responded that this was important or very important, interpreted quiet reflection in its secular sense (e.g., one parent commented "I love that Parker teaches the children meditation and they

spend time on that type of activity”). We are confident that the results reported in this survey are not biased. The results indicate that the secular values described in the third through eighth items were very to extremely important to Parker families.

Given the positive response, we believe that the alignment of family and school values could be something that differentiated the Parker school from its competitors. Current parents were thrilled with the values practiced by the school and felt comfortable enrolling their child at Parker. Although the majority of parents and guardians who commented supported the values instilled in their children while at Parker; some concerns were raised. An exercise where parents/guardians, members of the faculty, administration and board discussed the values held and practiced by members of the school community could prove fruitful. Possible questions could include: what are our values, where do we succeed and where do we fall short in application of these values, and are these the right set of values to prepare the children for the future?

**Attention provided to individual students.** All eight of the individual attention items in Table 5 had an average importance rating greater than or equal to 4.0 (very important). With the exception of the first and last two items, Parker School parents and guardians had similar importance ratings to the other schools. The importance rating for the first item (fewer children assigned to each classroom than in public schools) was higher than the other schools. The difference on this item between the Parker School and the other secular schools was statistically reliable. The importance rating for the seventh and eighth items (teachers adapt lesson plans to student's interests and teachers adapt assignments to each child's ability) were lower than the other secular schools. The average score of 1.5 on the agreement item (I'm very satisfied with the level of individual attention given my child at this school) was also higher than received by the other schools. The difference between the level of agreement among parents/guardians of the Parker School and the Catholic schools was statistically reliable.

About 30% of the parents and guardians responded to the open ended question on individual attention. Most of the 21 comments were favorable, and showed a general appreciation of the attention provided to their children. Some of these comments were oriented to the school in general (8) and others were more focused on the teachers (7). Several parents indicated some concerns with the individual attention received as a result of disruptive behavior (6). The numbers in parentheses indicated the number of respondents who provided comments in that category.

The most common comments were provided by parents/guardians who communicated a positive experience in regards to individual attention provided to their child.

*We are very happy with the amount of attention given (2).*

*Parker is superb in this regard (3).*

*Parker excels in this area. I am thrilled with the school in this aspect.*

*They know her almost as well as we do at home, sometimes even better than we do!*

*We see great progress in our child's ability and confidence.*

Some parents/guardians directly attributed the individual attention to their children's teachers.

*At least one teacher, Shelly (math), makes herself available by phone. What a privilege!*

*Both of my children's teachers know my children well. They are sensitive to their needs and strengths, and communicate both their concerns and my children's achievement to myself and my husband at regular intervals.*

*Different teachers excel at this. Recent staff changes have been helpful. Appreciate responsiveness to teach to the whole child.*

*Excellent. Teachers are very knowledgeable about students' individual progress and very accessible for any conversations about the child's performance or issues whether academic or social.*

*His teacher is TERRIFIC!*

*Teachers are amazingly adept at identifying each child's strengths and identifying what needs more work. They are also very caring and invested in each child's education*

*My child has experienced an environment where he is wonderfully connected to by his classroom teacher as well as several other teachers in the school. There is an outstanding community of teachers who attend to each child's development at Parker.*

Several comments indicated concerns over the attention provided to students who were disruptive in class, particularly where came at the expense of attention to their children.

*Behavioral issues of certain students in my child's (now middle school) class have been an ongoing issue and a source of great frustration for parents, children and teachers since pre-K. While finally recognized and addressed with specific measures that are appreciated, too little was done too late and learning suffered. Teachers were not supported and those children ready to learn had their teacher's attention regularly diverted to address the fits and tantrums and issues of a few. The teachers at Parker are amazing, supportive, and have provided excellent attention to my child - except when they couldn't.*

*Each child is provided adequate attention but it would help much more if children with special needs are provided extra care when needed and not singled out when there is a squabble among children.*

*I think students with special needs may receive more attention than those without. Changes and needs of my child are not always recognized in the way that I would hope from a small environment.*

*My child is not a squeaky wheel but the squeaky wheel does get greased. Sometimes the teachers are too focused on the children that are causing disruptions and the kids that are engaged and ready to learn suffer.*

*Parker is a too relaxed with regard to socializing children to respect their peers and the educational process. Student outbursts in class, constant interruptions and teasing on the playground are often tolerated without much reprimand. This cannot be acceptable behavior nor should it be an example for other children. Without doubt, Parker should be a context in which all students are welcomed, but this cannot be at the expense of students who truly want to learn and are willing to do so in a courteous and civil manner.*

An individual approach to education was one of the differentiating attributes identified by members of the Parker School board, administration and faculty. Parents and guardians confirmed this by rating attention to individual students as an important factor for reenrollment intentions, and most strongly agreed that they were very satisfied with the level of individual attention given their children at the Parker School. The general consensus regarding the individual attention given to students was positive. Several parents/guardians expressed concerns. Demands placed on teachers increased not only with class size, but also with the variation of the abilities and discipline of students. We recommend you further investigate this challenge and determine the nature, extent and causes of any problem that exists. Smaller class sizes, additional teacher assistants when and where needed and special help sessions are methods that could be used to address challenges.

**Extracurricular activities.** Two of the eight extracurricular activities in Table 5 had an average importance rating greater than or equal to 4.0 (very important). Foreign languages and science were the most important aspects of this factor followed by arts/music/band/chorus and acting/drama/theater/dance. Parents and guardians were neutral on the other activities. Individual and team sports and before/after school care were less important for the Parker School than the other schools. Overall, extracurricular activities appeared to be less important for enrollment decisions than the other factors. The mean of 0.7 on the agreement item indicated that parents and guardians on average agreed with the statement that they were very satisfied with the quality and variety of extracurricular activities. This rating was similar to the other schools.

About 30% of the parents and guardians responded to the open ended question on extracurricular activities. About a third of the 24 comments received were from parents and guardians who were pleased with the school's programs and the progress made (7). Some parents were concerned about the cost of extracurricular activities (3). Other parents wanted to see improvements or indicated a desire for more or different activities (13). A final comment put extracurricular activities in perspective to the other factors. The numbers in parentheses indicated the number of respondents who provided comments in that category.

Several parents/guardians indicated their satisfaction with the extracurricular activities and recognized the improvements that have been made in the quality and variety offered

*The activities offered range from traditional activities to more current interests. Students are given the idea that if they dream it, they can make it happen. We appreciate this.*

*Art and foreign language at Parker are excellent.*

*For a small school, Parker does a great job have diverse offerings. The quality of those offerings varies somewhat.*

*Horticulture is an excellent addition, but it wasn't/isn't a factor in our decisions.*

*It seems there are a good variety offered for the size of the school - there are always other options it would be nice to have, but these seem sufficient. It's getting better. It's hard as a small school. I like the nature-based approach. The summer camp is much better than in the past.*

*The school always strives to improve the overall personality of each and every child through various extracurricular activities and that according to me is extremely important.*

Some parents/guardians were concerned about the cost of extracurricular activities.

*After school activities are overpriced.*

*Although most likely not possible, it would be nice if some (even if just 1 or 2) after school activities were provided at no extra charge, or a nominal fee. While the variety I think is adequate, some of the options are just not affordable for the average family on top of the tuition we already pay.*

*I wish that there were more options for extracurricular that was not an added cost*

Some comments called for particular improvement in the performance arts.

*It would be great if Parker could collaborate with some of the other private schools in the region to create larger group experiences for our children -for example, a regional private school orchestra*

*There is fairly limited access to music for younger students, no theatre/drama/school plays, only Circus. Most other area schools seem to offer more.*

*Performing arts and music are either completely lacking or extremely weak. I would like to see a stronger drama/performance program. Would like to see more opportunities for singing such as an optional choir group or more hands on singing and instrument use in music class instead of research based activities.*

Others recognized gains made and called for additional improvements in the athletic programs.

*Parker has made great strides in recent years in providing more opportunities for team sports*

*There appears to be growth in this area with the school expanding extra-curricular team sports.*

*I would like to see a stronger sports program (3). Although the school has made some improvements, the coaching is not strong and the children don't know how to work to win or even try to win. When we go play other teams, we do not even appear as if we are a team or even know what we are doing. This year's soccer team finally started getting it*

*together by the end of the season but it's really quite embarrassing. The children need more guidance and structure in their sports.*

Several parents/guardians identified other needs for improvement.

*Some of the after school activities are great such as circus, but the oversight provided in the traditional after care program is horrendous.*

*I think the extracurricular offerings at Parker could be improved.*

*I would like to see more group community building activities such as full class snowshoeing, field trips and events.*

*We would like you to bring back chess club.*

*Wish there was more diversity of activities for the under 2nd grade crowd - lots of interesting things are only available to the older kids.*

Finally, one parent put extracurricular activities in perspective to the other factors.

*The students have a long day as it is, I would rather see attention paid to their programming IN SCHOOL.*

Extracurricular activities play an important role in the life of all children, no matter the age. Parents steer their children toward extracurricular activities as a means to make friends and to find out what types of activities they truly enjoy. However, given what we learned during the course of this study, extracurricular activities did not appear to be a factor that warranted greater allocation of scarce resources. The only factor with lower importance ratings was affordability, and the extracurricular activities composite score of importance and agreement ratings was the only tested factor that was not a statistically reliable predictor for reenrollment intentions. Offering a low quality activity likely did more harm than good.

We recommend you focus on a few high quality activities that appealed to a wide variety of students and their families at all grade levels. Parents had other alternatives for activities through private and public organizations in the community. Any assistance you could offer like partnerships with a local swimming pool or things like the ski club, band, chorus or performing arts would be much appreciated by parents. We also recommend you provide a set of activities after school that appealed to those students and families who make use of the after-school program. After-school activities became an important factor for enrollment and reenrollment when it provided a safe and productive environment for the children.

### **Factors Unique to Re-enrollment Decisions**

In addition to the five common factors, we identified three factors that we believed were unique to reenrollment decisions. The factors were unique primarily because it took some time for parents and guardians to form an opinion on these attributes.

**Sense of community** Four of the eight items in Table 5 had an average importance rating greater than or equal to 4.0 (very important) and two items were close (importance ratings of 3.9). The three items related to parent/teacher interactions were the most important aspects of

this factor. Friendships among parents and their ability to rely on each other were less important. Other than school spirit, which was rated less important than in the Catholic schools, the importance ratings were similar to the other schools. The mean of 1.0 on the agreement item indicated that parents and guardians agreed with the statement that they were very satisfied with the sense of community at this school. This mean was lower than the level of agreement for the other secular schools. The results indicated that the Parker School parents/guardians valued the sense of community at the school, and that parents wanted to be informed and communicated with frequently from teachers and staff.

About 30% of the parents and guardians responded to the open ended question on sense of community. Of the 25 comments received, more than half were from parents and guardians who believed there were strong bonds among community members (14). The remainder called improvement (11). The numbers in parentheses indicated the number of respondents who provided comments in that category.

The most common comments were provided by parents/guardians who were pleased with the sense of community found at the Parker School.

*Children and parents have plenty of opportunities to interact socially and build strong relationships.*

*Community at Parker is one of the things that keep us there.*

*Everyone feels included; good sense of community.*

*I enjoy that I can drop in the school at any point and chat with the staff. Also, if they notice anything about my child they e-mail me and I can e-mail them and expect a response back in a timely manner.*

*I think parent community could be strengthened at Parker.*

*I think there is a strong sense of community at Parker School. There is definitely a small group of parents that do much of the volunteering and leg work, but everyone is very nice and welcoming.*

*I feel welcomed when I enter the school. As a working parent, I don't often have time to make a lot of the activities geared towards parents (e.g. coffee with Meg, parent council meetings) but I do appreciate that they exist.*

*It is one of the school's greatest assets, and makes it a very welcoming place.*

*One of the hallmarks of Parker is the strong, engaged, involved, friendly, supportive community. This is what makes the school a true gem, in my opinion.*

*Parker has a strong sense of community (4).*

*I think I get as much sense of community as the school can foster. I have really wished for more, but the things that get in the way aren't of the schools making. I think they work hard to foster inclusion.*



Several parents/guardians suggested additional opportunities to increase the sense of community.

*This is a great little school with many naturally invested parents. There could be better information flow for parents and more organized parent engagement.*

*It's tough as two working parents to come to the before or after coffees. That's ok. Stronger personal communication would help.*

*IF you become part of the Parker community it is enormously supportive, but it is not easy for everyone to belong. As with any small group, it can feel exclusive. The dialogue between parents and administration could be more open and mutually supportive.*

*More could be done to foster school spirit among students. Parker could improve by adding more hands-on community service activities. New families are not quickly included in the "community." Lack of diverse parent representation on the school board and on the parent council has been detrimental to the sense of community among the parent population. Parent help is not always made to feel valued or appropriately recognized which seems to lead to a decline in parent involvement.*

*Lower grades appear to have more parent involvement than upper grades - why?*

*Parents seem to have minimal desire to create a sense of community on ongoing basis. The teachers are very affable but the same can't be said about most of the parents. It would be very helpful if the school could help foster friendships among parents.*

*Most of the parents of the younger kids start with a strong sense of community...show up for community work days, volunteer and want to contribute to the school in many ways. As their kids move up through the school, this sense of community seems to fade away. Part of this can be attributed to the kids' increased time in activities outside of Parker. But, unfortunately, part of this is also due to the attitude of the Head.*

*Our engagement with the teachers is and has always been excellent. We have not always been satisfied with Meg's responses to issues that have arisen (while recognizing the complexity of her responsibilities).*

*The parents are marginalized and not seen as a real part of the community. Parents are seen to be for filling in staffing needs- driving for trips and such and for fundraising. The school has systematically decreased parents as a part of the community over the last several years. It's an unfortunate development for a school that was started by parents.*

*While parents and children and teachers create community at Parker, the school does not support an authentic sense of community. Children and parents are not included in decision making. Information sharing about issues in the school and dialog and partnership in dealing with school community issues are not supported.*

A lot of things go into building a sense of community including family and children involvement, friendships, school spirit, and open communications. Communication with parents and guardians was the fourth of four differentiating attributes identified by members of the Parker School's board, administration and faculty. Parents and guardians confirmed the importance of this factor, but not its implementation. The agreement score was lower than the other participating schools. For the most part, the Parker School had created a welcoming environment for children and their families. Given that this was expected to be one of the differentiating factors, additional effort is warranted. Some initiatives could be based on the ideas suggested here by parents.

**Child development and growth.** A student's development and growth was crucial in the eyes of parents when deciding to enroll and re-enroll their children. All eight items in Table 5 had an average importance rating greater than or equal to 4.5 (very important to extremely important). With the exception of three items (students develop a love of learning, children are given opportunities to stretch their abilities, and children are provided opportunities to build confidence.) the importance ratings were similar to the other schools. The average ratings for these items were statistically lower than those received by the other secular schools. The mean of 1.5 indicated that on average, parents and guardians agreed/strongly agreed they were very satisfied with the development and growth of their children. This mean was similar to the other schools.

About 25% of the parents and guardians responded to the open ended question on child development and growth. Half of the 16 comments received, were from parents and guardians impressed with the development and growth of their child (8). Several parents were concerned that the children were not being challenged (4), while others reported lacking information to measure their children's development. Two comments indicated concerns about things that were inhibiting their child's growth. The numbers in parentheses indicated the number of respondents who provided comments in that category.

Positive comments included:

*All of these are just as important as the academics themselves, and they make Parker an active learning environment instead of a passive one.*

*This is another area where Parker absolutely shines.*

*Children are given ample opportunity to grow and explore.*

*He is doing exceptionally well.*

*I cannot imagine who she would be without the Parker School!*

*My child is doing well in these areas at Parker. When I talk to other parents about my child's experience at Parker, these are often the things I mention (love of learning, confidence, etc.). It's the Parker difference!*

*Our son has been very happy at Parker and feels comfortable there.*

*This is Parker's real strength. The confidence my child has developed is a strong foundation for promising future.*

Several parents/guardians were concerned that the children were not being challenged to reach their potential.

*Most of time the above qualities are encouraged, but the emphasis on following a child's lead, and non over-emphasizing achievements leave some students to not push themselves to their full potential.*

*Not sure right now. The school approach is nurturing and engaging, encourages students to think and ask questions, is supportive, and has great student buddy relationships. It is unclear whether the students are effectively challenged academically though. Some students may be sufficiently self-motivated. Friday assembly is a good attempt to give children a taste of public speaking to an audience but since they are not really taught how to project their voices, speak clearly, or use a microphone so we are not really sure how much they gain from that experience. And with no school play there are no lines to learn or public performances other than the Shakespeare event which is limited in scope.*

*I think children should be taught to stretch themselves--to try and fail and try again!*

*Very happy, always room for improvement, of course; for example, we are told on the status reports that our child is not a "risk taker" but, to the best of our knowledge, we're not clear that the faculty are taking extra measures to foster risk taking in those kids who are reluctant.*

Two comments indicated concerns about measuring progress.

*While the school believes itself to excel in this area, and certainly has activities and provides opportunities meant to develop the things mentioned on this page, it lacks in follow up and specific actions plans to make specific and incremental assessments and improvements in children that are consistently rated low on the risk taking metric.*

*It is difficult to tell where my child falls academically among peers within and outside of Parker so it is difficult to know how successful my child is.*

There were also two comments that were more critical in nature and indicated concerns for the development and growth of the child.

*Some classes lack the variety and depth needed to fulfill these goals.*

*There is too much attention and time being given to students who are poorly behaved. These students either need to be removed from the school or separated from their peers. In many instances, the "wait and see" approach does not work, and results only in reinforcing poor behavior among children who are not acting in an appropriate manner. Faculty attention is diverted away from students who truly want to learn, thereby teaching them that in order to get attention one must misbehave.*

In addition to education quality, child development and growth described the differentiating attributes that were highly consistent with the Parker School's applied, individualized and collaborative approach to education. Parents and guardians confirmed this by rating development and growth as the most important factor for reenrollment intentions. The agreement rating, however, did not indicate differentiation from the competing schools. Finding mechanisms to provide feedback to parents on their child's progress will likely enhance these perceptions and serve as helpful tools to attract new students. Identifying the underlying causes to the continued behavioral problems and improving curricula will likely help.

**Continuity & friendships.** Friendship was an important part of a child's education. It helped make the learning environment positive, as well as help the students develop and grow throughout their educational experience. Five of the eight items in Table 5 had an average importance rating greater than or equal to 4.0 (very important). The fourth item (strong relationship between children and their teachers) had the highest importance rating, followed by the three items concerning friendship among the children. Other than the first item which was less important to the Parker parents/guardians than it was to the Catholic schools, the importance ratings were similar to the other schools. The mean of 1.2 on the agreement item indicated that parents and guardians agreed/strongly agreed with the statement that they were very satisfied with the friendships and sense of continuity their child had developed at this school.

About 20% of the parents and guardians responded to the open ended question on continuity and friendships. More than half of the 13 comments received were favorable (8). Several parents/guardians discussed concerns about size of the student body (4) and comment discussed the lack of friendships after Parker. The numbers in parentheses indicated the number of respondents who provided comments in that category.

The most common comments were provided by parents and guardians who believed that the Parker School helped students establish friendships.

*I appreciate that she makes all kinds of friends of all ages and isn't limited by the imagination of the architect designing age-appropriate rooms or shoving children together by a grade number.*

*I really like many of the other students that I have met. My child has many great choices for friends. I like how concerned to teachers are about anti bullying.*

*Our son enjoys his classmates and sense of continuity.*

*The buddy program is wonderful and helps my kids feel connected to many others they would otherwise have no access to.*

*There are some very odd dynamics that the school is trying to manage. I appreciate that.*

*Very positive, although our child has natural tendencies towards "stranger danger" which can come off as shy or mean.*

*With a small school, turnover is extremely noticeable, so low turnover is especially important. Also, we value the fact that teachers in the older grades knew our child (and she knew them) well before she was actually in their classes. We also value the interaction between older and younger kids.*

*Yes my child identifies with his school, his teacher and his classmates. There is a very strong sense of friendship established among students from various grades and age groups.*

Several parents and guardians made comments concerning the number of students.

*Continuity is pretty good (though kids have been disappointed to see friends leave the school). The biggest problem here is the small school population. There simply aren't enough kids to provide a varied pool for friendships.*

*It's unfortunate that the school has shrunk to the size that it is now- a handful more students would broaden the social life considerably. But the bonds that come from keeping the classes together are extremely important. It gives the children the tools to learn to accept and work with their group- regardless of how difficult some social dynamics may be.*

*Sometimes the small numbers of students and the numbers of behavioral issues make this more difficult. The student and teacher relationships formed at Parker are very successful. It provides peace of mind that my child feels comfortable speaking with the teachers and that the teachers will protect and care for my child.*

*We agree but there does seem to be a high turnover both in children who leave at natural gateways (K, 5), but also in children the school appears unable to accommodate. Not many peers from pre-K continued to K.*

One parent/guardian made a comment about a Parker graduate.

*One thing that I did not anticipate was that my Parker graduate would have no communication with her former class/ schoolmates upon entering high school. She is still very close to many of the teachers at Parker but only they form the basis of a "Parker Community" for her.*

The structure of having older and younger children in the same classroom appeared to be something truly appreciated by parents/guardians and their children. To address the challenge of transitioning out of the Parker School, we suggest the school explore the idea of a one-year reunion for alumni. Students would then be brought back together in their comfortable environment, and this will help them rekindle relationships. You might even use this as a mentoring event so that the students understand what life is like in the various school options. The conversations could give current students some insight on what to expect.

### **Factors Unique to Enrollment Decisions**

There were four factors that were initially only provided in the survey to the parents and guardians of prospective students. Due to a low response rate from that group, we sent a second survey to parents and guardians who enrolled their students in one of the six schools during the past year. In the follow-up survey we asked these parents to think back to the time that they initially enrolled their children in the school. Ten parents and guardians responded to questions

concerning these factors compared to the 70-80 who responded to the factors previously discussed.

Our recommendations for all four factors that were unique to enrollment decision were the same. We recommend you continue collecting data. You could ask each prospective family to fill out a short survey after their initial visit. Think about the message you are trying to send and assess whether parents and guardians are receiving those messages. Also, find out what is important to them and assess where you stand on those things. Continued collection of data will help you keep pace with changing needs and desires, and will provide feedback on how well the Parker School was performing on the things parents and guardians cared about most.

**Initial impressions.** All eight items in Table 5 had an average importance rating greater than or equal to 4.0 (very important). The items were relatively equal in importance and ratings were similar to the other schools. The mean of 1.9 on the agreement item indicated that parents and guardians strongly agreed that their initial impression of the school was highly favorable. The average score on the agreement item was similar to the other schools. Three comments were made concerning initial impressions.

*As a teacher myself, I felt especially tuned in to the teachers I saw when I first visited. They all seemed engaged, appealing, rested, at home. This was a big determining factor for me in my decision to send my child to Parker.*

*Great school, great faculty.*

*We liked the faculty to student ratio, the emphasis on involving nature into the curriculum and collaborative projects. We also were impressed with how our daughter's impression of the school was taken so seriously.*

**Reputation.** Six of the eight items in Table 5 had an average importance equal to 5.0 (extremely important) and one item had a rating of 4.0 (very important). The fifth item (people know the school) had the lowest rating, and this rating was statistically lower than the importance rating for the Catholic schools. The mean of 1.0 on the agreement item indicated that parents and guardians agreed/strongly agreed with the statement that the school had an outstanding reputation in the community. With the exception of the fifth item, the importance ratings and agreement score were higher than the other schools. Some of these differences were statistically reliable. We received two comments on this factor.

*I just didn't have any experience of people in the community saying anything about this school. Perhaps because we were coming from a different community in the Capital Region where most people we said "Parker" to responded with "What's Parker?" We just had to go with our gut. We also knew some people who had been involved in the school long ago, but that was really not a determining factor for us in deciding to attend.*

*I knew little about the school before I decided to send my child to Parker. My child attended summer camps there and I loved the positive vibe I felt every time I set foot on the school premises. Few people knew about the school but it did not take a second thought that I would send my child there if I could arrange for a financial aid. However, after I became a Parker parent, I met several ex-Parker parents (some are my colleagues*

*and others are people I have walked into at work and other places). They only had good things to say about the school, their experience with the school and the way it shaped their child's personality and set them up for a successful future. It gives me nothing but hope and confidence that I made the right decision for my child.*

**Facilities and infrastructure.** Four of the eight of items in Table 5 had an average importance rating greater than or equal to 4.0 (very important). Wireless internet access, up-to-date furnishings, clean and well maintained facilities, and school grounds that provided an inviting place for children were rated as most important; and technology equipped classrooms was rated least important. The mean of 1.1 on the agreement item indicated that parents and guardians somewhat agreed with the statement that the school had excellent facilities and infrastructure. The scores were similar to those received by the other schools.

Parents and guardians were also presented a list of 15 features that were available across the six schools in the study. The most important features were the kitchen, gymnasium, library and the art room. The quality of the facilities and the school infrastructure make an important initial and lasting impression of the school. Families normally received their first sense of the school during open houses or school tours. We received four comments on this factor.

*Outdoor access, space, trails, classroom, etc are probably THE defining feature of Parker's physical plant and a huge draw for applicants. When my child was applying, I was as impressed and drawn to these elements as many are, but I also tried to separate them out in my mind and ask myself if what I wanted for my child was there in the program and the people (mostly in the people and community) minus the wonderful outdoor stuff. Just so we were keeping clear about what a school is really based on -- its people and its program.*

*Really needs an improved sound system*

*Venues for performing arts -- stage, lighting and sound require the most improvement. Maybe locker rooms for PE and sports.*

*We liked the fact that the campus has such a variety of outdoor venues available for classes.*

**Child safety and school security.** Amidst the recent violence having taken place in schools and other public places, it is reasonable to assume that a safe environment is vital to prospective parents. Four of the eight of items in Table 5 had an average importance rating greater than or equal to 4.0 (very important). The third item (security presence during school hours) had the least important rating. The mean of 1.7 on the agreement item indicated that parents and guardians agreed/strongly agreed with the statement that they felt very comfortable sending their children to the school. The ratings were similar to the agreement ratings given for both the other Catholic and the secular schools. We received no comments on this factor.

### **Intentions to Reenroll**

The ten items used to measure reenrollment intentions were measured on a five point scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. The overall mean for the multi-item intentions scale was 4.2. This was 0.1 points lower than the other secular schools and 0.3 points

higher than the Catholic schools. Two of the ten items indicated statistically stronger intentions to reenroll than the Catholic schools. The results were favorable for the school. After reenrollment intentions parents had another opportunity to provide comments. Most comments were positive. Some parents/guardians provided suggestions for improving Parker. Several comments provided constructive critique on the survey.

*I do think RCP is a fabulous place, a very special place. Like anywhere, though, it's hard to fit in if you don't fit in. I think the teachers and staff work hard to make a place for every child and foster an environment of kindness amongst the children toward one another that would be hard to match.*

*If our child/children were not at the Parker School, we would probably opt to home school them instead of sending them elsewhere where their love of learning and sense of community would be in danger.*

*My child is very happy and fortunately very smart. I think she would be fine anywhere. I love the teachers, the children and the parents. I love the art, the frog, the values, that the curriculum crosses classes and themes for the year, multi-age classes, the pairing of older and younger students, the property/woods/nature. I also love the rituals they have. Students grow up seeing the signature activities at each age or those that are annual and can anticipate them. It is lovely.*

*Parker is a wonderful school.*

*Overall we are very happy with Parker! Parker core values and philosophies seem to be internalized by faculty, staff and students and carried throughout, which makes it a supportive place to stretch and take some risks.*

*This school is a hidden gem, and we often wonder if Parker should be promoting itself more; or is it better just the way it is?*

*This school spends tuition money well. Quality education is expensive. We will continue to enroll as long as we can afford it. It would be helpful if there was non-financial needs based tuition assistance.*

*We are extremely happy with the way the school has changed our child in a matter of less than a year. However, we are very dependent on financial aid and, in the absence of adequate aid we will very reluctantly have to withdraw our child from our school. The aid is greatly appreciated. The teachers and staff are amazing and I love the community feeling that this school harbors.*

*We wish Parker had a high school.*

Several parents offered additional suggestions to improve the Parker School.

*My ONLY concern about re-enrolling my child at Parker is a financial one; If it were not for the decrease in financial aid for my family, I would have no concerns at all.*



*Parker is a unique and wonderful place. It has so many strengths and a deserved excellent reputation. In the spirit of constructive criticism, I offer this: could do more to reach out to its community to ask "what could we do better?" Certainly it does not intend to come off as a self-satisfied school, but its tone (in communications and interpersonally) is sometimes so much "see how great we are?" An example is the "Parker Smarter" branding that it lacks in humility, which is surely one of the tenants it seeks to instill in its students. Thank you for this opportunity to provide meaningful feedback.*

*Parker should develop a hiring process that involves the parent council and decreases the reliance on hiring faculty related to existing faculty members*

*The administration at Robert C Parker needs to be more open to listening to concerns brought up by parents.*

*The lack of lunch service is very problematic for our family. Also, we feel that music instruction is quite lacking and the Assemblies coordinated by the Music teacher are embarrassingly awful!*

*There are too many days off at Parker that are not covered with childcare. They often close for teacher development the day AFTER being closed for a week or two for break. Also, daily child care - Parker Play dates- are quite costly.*

We also received several comments on the survey itself, which we appreciate and employ in our next project.

*Some of the survey pages were missing back buttons.*

*I kept wishing there was one category labeled "Important" (2).*

*Maybe you should add a go-back-in-time question. "Knowing what you know now about Parker School and its program, if you could go back in time would you still enroll your children?" As a parent, when answering the questions in this survey, I always consider the impact of my decisions on the kids. It's difficult to answer these questions without doing that. New parents considering choosing Parker would not be facing the same considerations.*

*What does "household income" mean in the context of separated/divorced families? In other words, what is the survey trying to correlate with the income question? Aggregated meaninglessness is still devoid of valid interpretation. My household income is one thing, but the financial circumstances of the combined households that determine our ability to have our child in private school are another, and considerably different. How can the survey produce meaningful results with so much ambiguity in the meanings/interpretations of the questions, and therefore the answers? Wouldn't some question like proximity of the school or difficulty of transport be a (possibly) significant factor in enrollment (or re-enrollment)? "We thought we could manage the transportation, but it*

*turned out to be too much, so our child will now go to the local public school" or whatever. This is just a hypothetical statement; doesn't reflect our situation. What about some question like: "The school makes evident improvements from year to year." Agree? Disagree? Importance?*

### **Next Steps**

We recommend you communicate the findings in this report with parents, teachers and other key stakeholders as soon as reasonably possible. Many parents, guardians, teachers and members of the board and administration team have invested substantial time through participation in interviews and the online survey. We think disseminating the information in a town hall meeting or workshops could provide additional benefits over simply posting the entire study. The school website could be utilized as a vehicle to circulate sections of the report. Members from our management research team are available to participate in any seminars, workshops, or town hall meetings at your request.

We believe that understanding the factors that influenced re-enrollment intentions may help you reduce student turnover and allow the school to maintain a consistent enrollment base throughout all grades. The information presented in this report can serve as the groundwork needed to develop the strategies and action steps that are aligned with the school's mission, and can create opportunities for sustainable change. We would greatly appreciate a continued partnership with the Robert C. Parker School in the fall of 2014.

## References

- Allen, R., & Burgess, S., (2013). Evaluating the provision of school performance information for school choice. *Economics of Education Review*, 34, 175–190.
- Angeline S., L. (2012). Preschool children's development in classic Montessori, supplemented Montessori, and conventional Programs. *Journal Of School Psychology*, 50, 379-401.
- Broughman, S.P., and Swaim, N.L., (2013). Characteristics of Private Schools in the United States: Results From the 2011–12 Private School Universe Survey (NCES 2013-316). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved April 21, 2014 from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch>.
- Ewert, S, (2013). The Decline in Private School Enrollment, SEHSD Working Paper Number FY12-117, U.S. Census Bureau Social, Economic, and Housing Statistics Division. Website accessed April 27, 2014  
[https://www.census.gov/hhes/school/files/ewert\\_private\\_school\\_enrollment.pdf](https://www.census.gov/hhes/school/files/ewert_private_school_enrollment.pdf) .
- Flick, M., & Armstrong, P., (2002). Parents examine schools and say ... Catholic schools are very successful. *Momentum*, 33(3), 32-35.
- Gemello, J., (1984). Estimating the demand for private school enrollment. *American Journal of Education*, 92(3), 262-279.
- Goldin, C., (1999). A brief history of education in the United States, Historical Paper 119. National Bureau of Economic Research, Cambridge, MA. Accessed 4/29/2014  
[http://www.nber.org/papers/h0119.pdf?new\\_window=1](http://www.nber.org/papers/h0119.pdf?new_window=1) .
- Karna, A., (2013). Why Montessori? Answers from a parent's perspective. *Montessori Life: A Publication Of The American Montessori Society*, 25(1), 24-29.
- Mayer, R. C., & Schoorman, F. D., (1992). Predicting participation and production outcomes through a two-dimensional model of organizational commitment. *Academy of Management Journal*, 35(3), 671-684.
- McDonald, D., & Schultz, M. (2011). United States Catholic elementary and secondary schools, 2010-2011: The annual statistical report on schools, enrollment and staffing. National Catholic Educational Association. Accessed 4/29/2013  
<http://www.edweek.org/media/graduationstats-33condition.pdf> .
- Meyer, P., (2007). Can Catholic Schools Be Saved? *Education Next* 7, (2), pp. 1–8.
- Newberry, R., (2012). A Better Way to Market Your School's Open House. *Enrollment Catalyst*. Accessed March 14, 2014 <http://www.enrollmentcatalyst.com/2012/01/09/a-better-way-to-market-your-schools-open-house/> .
- New York State Department of Education, (2013). New York State Education Department Information, Reporting and Technology Services Average Class Size for Selected Assignment Codes, 2012-2013. Website accessed March 14, 2014  
[http://www.p12.nysed.gov/irs/pmf/2013/2013\\_Avg-Class-Size.pdf](http://www.p12.nysed.gov/irs/pmf/2013/2013_Avg-Class-Size.pdf) .
- Parents and the high cost of child care (2012). Child Care Aware of America, Arlington, VA. Website accessed March 14, 2014  
[http://www.naccrra.org/sites/default/files/default\\_site\\_pages/2012/cost\\_report\\_2012\\_final\\_081012\\_0.pdf](http://www.naccrra.org/sites/default/files/default_site_pages/2012/cost_report_2012_final_081012_0.pdf) .
- Vitello, P., Hu, W., (2009, January 18). For Catholic Schools, Crisis and Catharsis. *New York Times*.
- U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Services. (2012). What are the enrollment trends in public and private elementary and secondary schools? Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=65>.