

Minnesota Voluntary Public  
School Choice  
2006–2007

**EVALUATION REPORT**

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*February 26, 2008*

*Prepared for the Minnesota Department of Education  
by ASPEN Associates, Inc.*

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Consultant's Report

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	i
INTRODUCTION .....	1
GUIDING EVALUATION QUESTIONS .....	5
HOW TO READ THIS REPORT .....	6
OUTREACH.....	8
<i>KEY FINDINGS</i> .....	12
EXPANDED SCHOOL CHOICE.....	18
<i>KEY FINDINGS</i> .....	20
REDUCING BARRIERS TO SCHOOL CHOICE THROUGH TRANSPORTATION .....	23
<i>KEY FINDINGS</i> .....	24
REDUCING BARRIERS TO SCHOOL CHOICE THROUGH PARENT CENTERS.....	26
<i>KEY FINDINGS</i> .....	27
ACADEMIC SUPPORT FOR STUDENT SUCCESS .....	29
<i>KEY FINDINGS – ACADEMIC SUPPORT</i> .....	32
<i>KEY FINDINGS – ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT</i> .....	38
APPENDIX A: FIGURES AND TABLES	

# Minnesota Voluntary Public School Choice 2006–2007

## EVALUATION REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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### BACKGROUND

In 2000, the settlement of an educational adequacy lawsuit filed against the State of Minnesota by the Minneapolis branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and Minneapolis parents resulted in an inter- and intradistrict voluntary desegregation initiative known as *The Choice Is Yours*. *The Choice Is Yours* program provides low-income Minneapolis families with enhanced access to suburban schools (“suburban choice”) and selected magnet schools (“Minneapolis choice magnets”) within the Minneapolis school district under the state’s open enrollment policy. Eligible students — those eligible for free or reduced price lunches — receive priority placement into open enrollment through *The Choice Is Yours* program.

In 2003, Minnesota received a 5-year federal grant through the Voluntary Public School Choice (VPSC) program to further enhance educational opportunities for urban and suburban families in the Minneapolis area by expanding upon *The Choice Is Yours* program. Under the MN-VPSC program, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS), the Minneapolis branch of the NAACP, and eight suburban school districts from the West Metro Education Program (WMEP) came together to achieve two broad goals: (1) to support parents in choosing the best school for their child and (2) to support student success in school. Key program activities included enhanced or expanded outreach, transportation, and academic tutoring and support, and expanded school choice options under *The Choice Is Yours* program.

On June 30, 2005, the legal settlement that led to for *The Choice Is Yours* program expired. However, ongoing support for the suburban choice option allowed it to continue operating in the eight participating suburban districts, as it had in previous years, under WMEP’s comprehensive desegregation plan.<sup>1</sup> The Minneapolis choice magnet option has also continued, but under the federal school choice grant, which continues through the 2006–2007 school year. State funding to support transportation of students under *The Choice Is Yours* program continues to be available to the program.

This summary highlights key findings from the 2006–2007 evaluation; the 6<sup>th</sup> year *The Choice Is Yours* program has been in operation. All findings are drawn from enrollment data, parent interviews, student and staff surveys, and student achievement data. The full report is available on the school choice portion of the MDE website under *The Choice Is Yours*.

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<sup>1</sup> A ninth WMEP school district, Eden Prairie, is not a formal partner in the federal school choice grant, but began accepting students to *The Choice Is Yours* program during the 2005–2006 school year under WMEP’s comprehensive desegregation plan.

**Note to the Reader:** To simplify the reporting of findings, the following nomenclature is used throughout this report: “Many” refers to at least 70% of respondents while “most” refers to at least 80% of respondents. Readers interested in the actual percentage may refer to the data tables in Appendix A as referenced in the text. Finally, any significant changes from one year to the next, or in some cases from 2 years ago when some data were last collected, are noted as such.

## OUTREACH

*To what extent did the enhanced outreach ensure that all parents were aware of their school choices? (See pages 8–17 in the full report.)*

1. Suburban choice parents continue to be twice as likely as parents of choice magnet participants and eligible, non-participants to know of open enrollment options, including *The Choice Is Yours* program (see page 12, finding #1). Some significant changes from the previous year include:
  - a. Parents of choice magnet students were less likely to view *The Choice Is Yours* as a viable option this year, perhaps because fewer magnet schools were eligible to receive students.
  - b. Parents of eligible, non-participants in the targeted attendance areas were much less likely to view Open Enrollment as an option this year.
2. A significant number of eligible families — participants and non-participants alike — continued to view home schooling and alternative, charter, and private schools as viable school choice options (see page 12, finding #2). Some significant changes from the previous year include:
  - a. Parents of eligible, non-participants from the targeted attendance areas were less likely, and those outside the targeted attendance areas more likely, to view home schooling as a viable option this year.
  - b. Parents of choice magnet students were somewhat more likely to view three of the four choices as viable options this year.
  - c. Parents of suburban choice and choice magnet students were more likely to view attending a private school as a viable option this year; parents of eligible, non-participants in the targeted attendance areas were less likely.
  - d. Parents of eligible, non-participants living outside of the targeted attendance areas were less likely to view attending a charter school as a viable option this year.
3. In previous years, suburban choice parents tended to be more aware of school choice options within the Minneapolis school district but outside of their neighborhood than other parents. Last year, parents of choice magnet students and some eligible, non-participants (those living in the targeted attendance areas) were just as likely to be aware of these choices. This year the targeted attendance parents were once again less likely as they had been in years past. (see page 12, finding #3).
4. The primary *source* of information on school choices for all eligible families continues to be the parents’ social network. Family, friends, neighbors, and representatives from schools and other community organizations were key sources of information. Very few families learned about

school choices from the major media, including newspapers, television, billboards, and radio (see page 13, finding #6).

5. Together, outreach that targeted parents' social networks and outreach through major media outlets continue to reach about 9 out of 10 eligible parents (see page 13, finding #6).
6. The actual decision to enroll their child in a particular school continues to be *most influenced* by the parents' social network. Recommendations from family, friends, or neighbors; visits to or contact with the new school; and recommendations from a school attended in the past were the most influential (see page 13, finding #7 and page 13, Figure 1).
7. Most parents — participants and non-participants alike — again said they look for schools with a reputation for providing a high-quality education in a safe and disciplined school environment. In addition, many parents are also looking for a school that can provide the special academic and/or language support their child may need (see page 14, findings #10 and #11, and page 15, Figure 2). One difference this year was the decrease in the number of parents of eligible, non-participants who said it was “very important” that the schools provide support for students that do not speak English to under two-thirds.
8. Over half of all parents again confirmed that they would like a school that will educate their child about the history, traditions, and values of their ethnic or cultural group; and one that has a diverse student body and teaching staff (see page 14, finding #12, and pages 15–16, Figures 2–4). A significant change this year was that parents of choice magnet students were less likely to rate a school that educates their child about the history, traditions, and values of their ethnic or cultural group as very important in selecting a school this year.
9. Choosing a school that is close to home continues to be important to parents of eligible, non-participants, but less so — and about the same as it is for choice magnet parents — this year. This year, parents in all groups were somewhat less likely to say finding a school that will educate their child about his/her religion was very important in their choice of school (see page 14, findings #13 and #14 and pages 15–17, Figures 2, 3, and 5).

## EXPANDED SCHOOL CHOICE

*To what extent were school choice options expanded under The Choice Is Yours program? (See pages 18–22 in the full report.)*

10. During the 2006–2007 school year, a total of 346 eligible students enrolled in a Minneapolis choice magnet school, 2 (0.6%) under *The Choice Is Yours* and 344 under other higher priority placements (see page 19, Minneapolis Public Schools, third bullet). This represents a significant drop in enrollment reflecting the fact that fewer magnet schools were eligible to receive students this year (only 6 schools compared to 11 in the other years).
11. Of the eligible students who enrolled in the Minneapolis choice magnet schools, Hispanic students were the least likely to enroll (see page 20, finding 2).

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12. Total enrollment in suburban choice schools has increased each year from 472 students in year 1, to 720 students in year 2 (53% increase), 1,030 students in year 3 (43% increase), 1,435 in year 4 (39% increase), 1,567 in year 5 (9% increase), and 1,867 in year 6 (19% increase) (see page 19, West Metro Education Program, first bullet).
13. Since the suburban choice program began, more African American students are choosing open enrollment transfers out of Minneapolis into suburban schools. The suburban choice program continues to attract relatively few Native American, Hmong, and Hispanic students (see page 20, finding #4). Enrollment levels by ethnic group have remained stable.
14. Less than half (40%) of all students ever enrolled in the suburban choice program were enrolled in a Minneapolis public school the previous year (see page 21, finding #6).
15. Just over half (51%) of all students ever enrolled in the suburban choice program live in 2 of the 22 zip codes served by *The Choice Is Yours* program. These zip codes represent the near-north and north Minneapolis neighborhoods (excluding northeast) where the predominant ethnic group is African American (see page 21, finding #9).
16. During the program's first 6 years, 62% of the students who were *ever* enrolled in the suburban choice program withdrew before the end of the school year. Many of these students did not reenroll in the program in subsequent years for an estimated 79% of students over the 6 years (see page 21, finding #7). Of those students who stayed through the end of the school year, each year about two-thirds returned to the suburban choice program the following year (see page 21, finding #8).
17. Parents of suburban choice students — and to a lesser extent, choice magnet participants — were more satisfied with their school choice than parents of eligible, non-participants. Both were more likely to choose the same school again and recommend it to others (see page 21, finding #12).
18. Almost all (96%) suburban choice parents would recommend the program to others; this year, 66% have already done so, just under the 70% from last year (see page 22, finding #13).

## **REDUCING BARRIERS TO SCHOOL CHOICE**

*To what extent did transportation and parent information centers reduce barriers to school choice? (See pages 23–28 in the full report.)*

19. In Minneapolis, a total of 244 students were transported to higher performing schools in the district. Funding from the federal grant supported this expanded transportation (see page 24, Measures of Progress, Minneapolis Public Schools, first bullet).
20. Almost all students who participated in the interdistrict portion of *The Choice Is Yours* rode a bus to their suburban choice school (91%) compared to 71% of students attending choice magnet schools in Minneapolis and 65% of eligible non-participants (see page 24, West Metro Education Program, first bullet). Only a few suburban choice students were transported to school by their parents (3%), drove themselves to school (3%) or took a city bus (1%). This year, transportation to the suburban choice schools was coordinated by the receiving districts.

21. Just over half of suburban choice parents might choose another school if free transportation to their child's current suburban school is not available, down from about two-thirds last year, i.e., this year just under half of the suburban choice parents would "definitely" choose the same school again, even if free transportation is not provided (see page 24, finding #2 and page 25, Figure 6).
22. The availability of free transportation also continues to be important to parents of eligible, non-participants, as just under half of those parents would "definitely" choose the same school again, even if free transportation is not provided. This year about 1 in 3 parents of choice magnet students said the same, down from just under half last year (see page 24, finding #2 and page 25, Figure 6).
23. Of the parents who would prefer to choose a school "close to home" — 50% of choice magnet students and eligible, non-participants — would also like to limit the bus ride to school to no more than 30 minutes (see page 25, finding #3). This year, fewer parents of non-participants said that finding a school close to home was important.
24. Relatively few parents reported visiting or talking to someone at one of the parent information centers. Fewer parents were utilizing the centers this year (on average about 1 in 4 parents, down from about 1 in 3 last year). Overall, parents rated the Minneapolis Parent Information Centers, Inc. less helpful this year, though many still found them very helpful. The Minneapolis Public Schools' Student Placement Center was again very to somewhat helpful (see page 27, findings #1 and #2 and page 28, Figure 7).
25. In the 2006–2007 lottery conducted by the Minneapolis Public Schools Student Placement Services, almost all of the entering kindergarten and most of the first through eighth graders and high school students received their first or second choice (see page 27, finding #3).
26. During 2006–2007, the Minneapolis Parent Information Centers, Inc. enrolled 17% of the new students enrolling in the suburban choice schools as compared to 6% in year 5, 12% in year 4 and 28% in year 3 (see page 28, finding #4).

## ACADEMIC SUPPORT FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

*To what extent did the enhanced academic support options promote school success for students who changed schools? (See pages 29–42 in the full report.)*

27. In comparisons of annual growth in student achievement in reading and mathematics for 2006–2007, **with one exception, suburban choice students in grades 3 through 7 performed as well as a matched sample of students who were eligible for the program but chose not to participate.** In reading, suburban choice students as a whole were *slightly outperformed* by non-participants (see all bullets and Figures 9–12 on pages 38–41). These findings differ from the previous 2 years in which suburban choice students were *outperformed* by non-participants (2005–2006) and suburban choice student *performed better* than non-participants (2004–2005).

This year, subgroup comparisons of low-performing students (i.e., students with baseline scores at or below the 50th percentile) also showed suburban choice students *performing as well as* the matched sample of non-participants. Likewise, suburban choice students who were new to the program and those that were returning performed equally well.

To determine what might account for the reversal of findings from one year to the next the data were examined further. As noted last year, the most probable reason for this change in findings is the fact that the suburban choice students tested each year are not the same students. From one year to the next, only half of the students in the grade levels being tested (i.e., grades 3–7) were enrolled the previous year (this reflects enrollment data showing that the return rate for students in these grade levels is about 50% from one year to the next). As such, the annual findings regarding student achievement should be viewed independently as they represent different groups of suburban choice students.

28. Most parents of suburban choice, choice magnet, and eligible, non-participating students felt schools did enough to help their child adjust to the new school (see page 33, finding #4).
29. Many parents — of suburban choice, choice magnet, and eligible, non-participating students — felt their child received all the help he/she needed to do well in school (see page 33, finding #6). The same percentage of parents of eligible, non-participants felt their child was receiving enough assistance this year, despite the fact that fewer of these parents were reporting that their child's school was providing or arranging for additional help. Also, slightly fewer choice magnet parents felt their child was receiving enough assistance this year, despite increased reporting that their child's school was providing or arranging for additional help. Roughly two-thirds of suburban choice students, however, felt they had received adequate assistance. Most choice magnet students report that they received enough support (see page 33, finding #6).
30. Just over half of all suburban choice parents would choose the same school again if extra support was not available for their child when needed, an increase from last year. The number of choice magnet parents responding likewise decreased slightly to under 2 in 5, and the non-participant parent response decreased from about 1 in 2 to 3 in 10 (see page 32, finding #2 and Figure 8).
31. Most parents — suburban choice, choice magnet, and eligible, non-participants — continue to agree that their child's school provided a safe and caring learning environment in which all students were held to high academic standards (see page 35, finding #23).
32. This year most choice magnet parents and parents of eligible, non-participants and many suburban choice parents said their current school was prepared to work with ethnically and economically diverse student populations. But, like last year, all three parent groups felt their child's school was less prepared to work with language-diverse students (see page 33, finding #9). This year, suburban choice parents were less likely to feel their child's school was prepared in these ways.
33. *Parents are involved in child's education.* Most parents believe they are making a significant contribution to their child's success in school and are doing so, primarily, by helping their child with homework, which most feel prepared to do (see pages 34–35, findings #17–18).
34. Suburban choice, choice magnet, and eligible, non-participants students and their parents reported high levels of parent involvement at home (see page 33, finding #7). Students in the upper grade levels, however, were less likely to agree.
35. Most middle and high school students enrolled in suburban choice schools through *The Choice Is Yours* program reported participation in extracurricular activities, an increase from 2 years ago when these data were last collected. Suburban choice students were, as was the case 2 years ago, less likely to be involved in such activities than other non-choice students enrolled in these schools (see page 33, finding #8).

36. Parents of suburban choice and choice magnet students agreed that their child's school provided a safe and caring learning environment in which all students were held to high academic standards, while students and teachers reported regular disruptions to teaching and learning as a result of student misbehavior. Students at choice magnet schools reported an increased incidence of disruptions due to student misbehavior from 2 years ago (see page 35, findings #19–20). Parents of eligible, non-participants gave similar ratings for school climate. (No comparable student or staff data were available for the schools attended by eligible, non-participants.)

## IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

At the end of six years, implications for policy and practice that may be drawn from the evaluation of *The Choice Is Yours* program have not changed substantially from those posed in year 5:

1. **OUTREACH:** For all eligible families, word-of-mouth and direct contact through parents' social networks continue to be more influential in the school choice *decisions* made by low-income families than traditional media campaigns. To *reach* the most parents, however, outreach should continue to access parents' social networks *and* utilize the major media (e.g., newspapers, television, radio) (see page 17, implication #1).
2. **OUTREACH:** Despite ongoing outreach efforts targeting other ethnic groups, the suburban choice program continues to attract primarily African American students and families living on the north and near-north side of Minneapolis (see page 22, implication #3). The availability of academic continues to be important to all parents (see page 42, implication #4). As the suburban choice program strengthens its language support programs, this option may become more appealing to other ethnic groups (see page 42, implication #5).
3. **SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL CHOICE:** Free transportation and academic support continue to be viewed as important features in parents' decision to choose a particular school (see page 25, implication #1 and page 42, implication #4).
4. **STAFF DEVELOPMENT:** Suburban choice schools need to continue providing staff development to increase teacher capacity to work effectively with language-diverse students (see page 42, implication #5).
5. **ACADEMIC SUPPORT:** Suburban choice schools need to examine why secondary students transferring in under *The Choice Is Yours* program do not feel they are receiving all the help they need to do well school when their parents feel that they are (see page 42, implications #2 and #3).

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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## INTRODUCTION

### BACKGROUND

In 2000, the settlement of an educational adequacy lawsuit filed against the State of Minnesota by the Minneapolis branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and Minneapolis parents resulted in an inter- and intradistrict voluntary desegregation initiative known as *The Choice Is Yours*. *The Choice Is Yours* program provides low-income Minneapolis families with enhanced access to suburban schools (“suburban choice”) and selected magnet schools (“Minneapolis choice magnets”) within the Minneapolis school district under the state’s open enrollment policy. Eligible students — those eligible for free or reduced price lunches — receive priority placement into open enrollment through *The Choice Is Yours* program.

In 2003, Minnesota received a 5-year federal grant through the Voluntary Public School Choice (VPSC) program to further enhance educational opportunities for urban and suburban families in the Minneapolis area by expanding upon *The Choice Is Yours* program. Under the MN-VPSC program, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS), the Minneapolis branch of the NAACP, and eight suburban school districts from the West Metro Education Program (WMEP) came together to achieve two broad goals: (1) to support parents in choosing the best school for their child and (2) to support student success in school. Key program activities included enhanced or expanded outreach, transportation, and academic tutoring and support, and expanded school choice options under *The Choice Is Yours* program.

On June 30, 2005, the legal settlement that led to *The Choice Is Yours* program expired. However, ongoing support for the suburban choice option allowed it to continue operating in the eight participating suburban districts, as it had in previous years, under WMEP’s comprehensive desegregation plan.<sup>2</sup> The Minneapolis choice magnet option has also continued, but under the federal school choice grant, which continues through the 2006–2007 school year. State funding to support transportation of students under *The Choice Is Yours* program continues to be available to the program.

### MINNESOTA’S OPEN ENROLLMENT POLICY

Minnesota Statute 124D.03 allows all of Minnesota’s public school students the opportunity to apply to attend school outside of the school district in which they live. More than 30,000 Minnesota students enrolled in a nonresident district in 2002–03. Students must apply to the school district of their choice by January 15 for the following fall to receive the best chance of being admitted. Families generally provide their own transportation. Open enrollment students do not pay tuition.

### ***THE CHOICE IS YOURS: SUBURBAN CHOICE SCHOOLS***

Under the interdistrict transfer (“suburban choice”) portion of *The Choice Is Yours* program, Minneapolis residents who qualify for free or reduced price lunch are eligible to receive priority placement in participating K–12 schools in eight suburban school districts when they apply by the January 15 deadline for open enrollment. Beginning with the 2001–02 school year a minimum of 500 priority placement slots each year — for an estimated 2,000 slots over 4 years — were set aside

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<sup>2</sup> A ninth WMEP school district, Eden Prairie, is not a formal partner in the federal school choice grant, but began accepting students to *The Choice Is Yours* program during the 2005–2006 school year under WMEP’s comprehensive desegregation plan.

among the eight suburban school districts for low-income students who live within the city of Minneapolis: Columbia Heights, Edina, Hopkins, Richfield, St. Louis Park, St. Anthony/New Brighton, Robbinsdale, and Wayzata (see Figure A1 on page A1). The cost of transportation to these suburban schools is covered by state desegregation transportation aid funding.

### ***THE CHOICE IS YOURS: MINNEAPOLIS CHOICE MAGNET SCHOOLS***

Minneapolis residents who qualify for free or reduced price lunch are also eligible to receive priority placement in participating K–8 magnet schools within the Minneapolis Public School District under the intradistrict transfer (“Minneapolis choice”) portion of *The Choice Is Yours* program. The Minneapolis Public Schools provides transportation to city schools according to school district policies on attendance zones and walking limits. A set percentage of available spaces in kindergarten and in grades 1–5 are made available for eligible students at the Minneapolis choice magnet schools. (For more information on the location and demographic characteristics of participating schools and districts, see Figure A1 on page A1 and Tables 1 and 2 on pages A10–A14 in Appendix A. For more information on student and school eligibility, see “Section 1: Participation” in the previous evaluation report, “*The Choice Is Yours After Two Years*” at: <http://education.state.mn.us/mdeprod/groups/Choice/documents/Report/001884.pdf>)

### **MINNESOTA’S VOLUNTARY PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE (MN-VPSC) PROGRAM**

In 2003, Minnesota received a 5-year federal grant through the Voluntary Public School Choice (VPSC) program. The federally funded MN-VPSC program began in the spring of 2003 and continues through the 2006–2007 school year. The purpose of the MN-VPSC program is to further enhance educational opportunities for urban and suburban families in the Minneapolis area by expanding upon the existing *The Choice Is Yours* program.

Specifically, the MN-VPSC program activities are designed to achieve two broad goals:

- to support parents in choosing the best school for their child and
- to support student success in school.

Program activities include enhanced or expanded outreach, transportation, and academic tutoring and support, and expanded school choice options under *The Choice Is Yours* program. The program goals, objectives, and key activities are summarized on the next page.

**MINNESOTA VOLUNTARY PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE (MN-VPSC) PROGRAM:  
GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND ACTIVITIES**

**GOAL 1: Support Parents in Choosing The Best School for Their Child**

OBJECTIVE 1.1: To provide all Minneapolis-area parents with information on *all* of their school choices.

**KEY ACTIVITY:** Enhance outreach to all Minneapolis-area urban and suburban families

OBJECTIVE 1.2: To expand school choice options for suburban students.

**KEY ACTIVITY:** Enhance opportunities for suburban students to attend school in Minneapolis

OBJECTIVE 1.3: To reduce barriers to school choice through additional transportation services.

**KEY ACTIVITY:** Enhance student transportation services within Minneapolis and from suburbs to Minneapolis

OBJECTIVE 1.4: To reduce barriers to school choice through parent centers.

**KEY ACTIVITY:** Provide information and support to Minneapolis parents during the school choice and enrollment process.

**GOAL 2: Support Student Success In School**

OBJECTIVE 2.1: To provide greater academic support to students who change schools to ensure academic success.

*Key Activity:* Enhance academic support for Minneapolis and suburban students

Four organizations are working together on the MN-VPSC program: the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), the Minneapolis Parent Information Centers, Inc.<sup>3</sup>, the Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS), and the eight suburban districts from the West Metro Education Program (WMEP) that participate in *The Choice Is Yours* program. A summary of the key activities for which each project partner is responsible and the sources of funding that support *The Choice Is Yours* program as enhanced under the federal grant are noted below.

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<sup>3</sup> During the 2004–2005 school year, the Minneapolis Parent Information Centers formed a nonprofit organization and received 501(c)(3) status. They continue to work cooperatively with the Minneapolis NAACP, one of the original project partners under the federal grant, but are independent from that organization.

**MINNESOTA VOLUNTARY PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE (MN-VPSC) PROGRAM:  
KEY ACTIVITIES AND FUNDING SOURCES BY PROJECT PARTNER**

	OUTREACH	TRANSPORTATION	ACADEMIC SUPPORT
MN DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION	Federal choice grant	State desegregation transportation funds	
MINNEAPOLIS PARENT INFORMATION CENTERS, INC.	Federal choice grant		Federal choice grant
WEST METRO EDUCATION PROGRAM		State desegregation transportation funds	Federal choice grant
MINNEAPOLIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS	Federal choice grant	Federal choice grant	Federal choice grant

**OTHER SCHOOL CHOICES IN MINNEAPOLIS**

Minneapolis residents have a variety of school choice options in addition to those available under the state’s open enrollment program. Community or neighborhood schools are elementary schools in the city with designated attendance areas that draw most of their students from the community surrounding the school. Magnet schools are another option within the Minneapolis school district, which draw from a larger attendance area. Magnet schools may be organized around a particular philosophy of teaching (such as Montessori or Open schools) or infuse a unifying theme (such as the arts, technology, or language) in all subject areas across the curriculum. Spanish dual-immersion schools offer students the opportunity to learn Spanish or English as their second language. At the high school level, Minneapolis also offers “small learning communities” to provide secondary students with the opportunity to learn in smaller groups and focus on particular themes — such as the arts, technology, liberal arts, business, automotives, language, and engineering. In 2006–2007, the Minneapolis Public Schools also had 26 charter schools located within the city of Minneapolis.

In recent years, enrollment in Minneapolis Public Schools has continued to decline as a significant number of students take advantage of other school choices, including private schools, charter schools, open enrollment, and *The Choice Is Yours* program.

## GUIDING EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The purpose of the MN-VPSC evaluation was to gather data to document the extent to which the overall purpose and goals of the MN-VPSC program were achieved. The evaluation was authorized by the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) and was designed to examine the nature, effectiveness, and impact of key activities funded by the MN-VPSC federal grant. The 2006–2007 evaluation documents activities and outcomes from July 1, 2006 through June 30, 2007.

The MN-VPSC evaluation was organized around the two program goals and five objectives. As such, it was designed to answer five key questions:

1. To what extent did the enhanced outreach ensure that all parents were aware of their school choices? (Goal 1, Objective 1.1)
2. To what extent did the program expand school choice options under *The Choice Is Yours* program? (Goal 1, Objective 1.2)
3. To what extent did the enhanced transportation reduce barriers to school choice? (Goal 1, Objective 1.3)
4. To what extent did the parent centers reduce barriers to school choice? (Goal 1, Objective 1.4)
5. To what extent did the enhanced academic support options promote school success for students who changed schools? (Goal 2, Objective 2.1)

The following data sources were analyzed for this report:

- annual progress reports submitted by each program partner,
- interviews with parents of students participating and not participating in *The Choice Is Yours* program,
- student and staff surveys,
- program enrollment records, and
- transportation records.

## HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

### ORGANIZATION

This report presents key findings from the 2006–2007 evaluation of the MN-VPSC program. It is organized around the five guiding evaluation questions. Each section summarizes the nature of key program activities implemented this year, measures of progress associated with these activities, key findings, and implications for policy and practice. Data figures and tables in support of these findings and conclusions are located in Appendix A and referenced throughout the report.

### WHAT'S NEW

This year's report again includes data from student and staff school climate surveys, which was last collected 2 years ago in 2004–2005.

### RESPONDENT GROUPS

The 2006–2007 evaluation was designed to gather data from program participants and non-participants, including parents, at participating and non-participating schools. As such, it includes a “main sample” that includes the following groups:

- “Suburban choice participants” are interdistrict transfer students who enrolled in participating suburban schools under *The Choice Is Yours* program. “Suburban choice non-participants” are students enrolled in the suburban choice schools but not through *The Choice Is Yours* program (i.e., other students at those schools).
- “Minneapolis choice participants” are intradistrict transfer students who enrolled in participating Minneapolis magnet schools.
- “Eligible, non-participants” are students who were eligible to participate in *The Choice Is Yours* program but chose neither the suburban choice nor the Minneapolis choice schools. Instead, these students chose to remain in a Minneapolis public school.

In this report, the eligible, non-participants are, at times, further delineated by the attendance area in which they live:

- Non-participants living in the attendance areas specifically targeted by *The Choice Is Yours* program (i.e., district attendance areas with 90% or more students in poverty or 90% or more students of color) are noted in data tables as “Non-Participant TAA” (see map showing targeted attendance area in Figure A2 on page A2).
- Eligible, non-participants living outside the targeted attendance areas are noted in data tables as “Non-Participant NTA”.

## NOMENCLATURE

To simplify the reporting of findings, the following nomenclature is used throughout this report:

- “Many” refers to at least 70% of respondents while “most” refers to at least 80% of respondents. Readers interested in the actual percentage may refer to the data tables in Appendix A as referenced in the text.
- All discussions of differences between program participants and eligible, non-participants represent statistically significant differences. Statistically significant differences in the data tables in Appendix A are marked with an \* to represent statistical significance of at least  $p \leq .05$ .
- Any significant changes from one year to the next, or in some cases from 2 years ago when some data were last collected, are noted as such in the text. Otherwise, the reader may assume that the findings have not changed significantly over time.

## OUTREACH

### 1. TO WHAT EXTENT DID THE ENHANCED OUTREACH ENSURE THAT ALL PARENTS WERE AWARE OF THEIR SCHOOL CHOICES? (GOAL 1, OBJECTIVE 1.1)

#### NATURE OF ACTIVITIES — OUTREACH

The purpose of the outreach activities under the MN-VPSC program was to ensure that the approximately 100,000 urban and suburban families living in the Minneapolis area were aware of all their school choices. Key outreach activities carried out by the project partners during the 2006–2007 school year are described below.

MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION. The Minnesota Department of Education led a comprehensive outreach effort to inform all parents in the Minneapolis area of all available school choice options. The wide-ranging outreach efforts included:

- **TABLE DISPLAY.** To tap into the effectiveness of “word of mouth” with regard to outreach, a table display was created, which allowed department staff and project partners to engage in direct marketing at strategic locations in south Minneapolis. The display supported distribution of information packets about *The Choice Is Yours* program to families in Latino and Somali shopping malls, and park and recreation centers. The table display will continue to be used at various tabling events, school fairs, and job fairs.
- **SCHOOL CHOICE VIDEO IN MULTIPLE LANGUAGES.** The department continued to distribute a school choice video (redesigned in 2003–04) on DVD in English, Spanish, Hmong, and Somali to community organizations, faith communities, home- and center-based daycare providers, and small businesses in immigrant communities and communities of color.
- **“SCHOOL CHOICE” MEDIA CAMPAIGN.** A variety of newspaper, television, billboard, and radio advertisements and public service announcements, many of which targeted high-poverty areas and non-English-speaking populations, were again developed and fielded. Paid advertising slots were purchased and public service announcements ran on radio stations with high listenership among communities of color. Free and paid play time of the school choice video occurred on local cable channels and thirty-second spots at the Mall of America. This year, two light rail cars were also wrapped with the inscription “*The Choice Is Yours*”.
- **SCHOOL DISTRICT DATA WEBSITE.** The department continued to update and maintain an online database of school data to inform parents’ school choices, including demographic characteristics of the student population, student achievement data, staff characteristics, school funding, and adequate yearly progress status.
- **COMMUNITY OUTREACH EVENTS.** A variety of collaborative marketing/outreach efforts to inform Minneapolis-area families about school choices were again coordinated by the department. Participation included, to varying degrees, representatives of Minneapolis Public Schools, West Metro Education Program, charter schools, and the Minneapolis Parent Information Centers, Inc.

- **SCHOOL CHOICE TELEPHONE INFORMATION LINE.** A local and toll-free telephone number for families to call with questions about school choices continued to be made available by the department. Telephone interpreters were provided for multiple languages.
- **PARTNERSHIP WITH HEAD START.** The department continued to share information about options for kindergarten with Head Start families.
- **PARTNERSHIPS WITH COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS.** Partnerships between the department and organizations serving immigrant communities to support dissemination of the information and resources listed above were expanded this year.

**MINNEAPOLIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS.** Several outreach efforts were conducted by the Minneapolis Public Schools in an effort to inform families in Minneapolis and the surrounding suburban school districts of school choices available within the Minneapolis Public School district:

- **ANNUAL SCHOOL CHOICE FAIRS.** The district continued to offer prospective parents information about all Minneapolis Public Schools and the opportunity to meet with staff and administrators to discuss various educational programs available in the district through three separate school choice fairs held on different dates and locations.
- **SEARCHABLE SCHOOL CHOICE DATABASE.** The Minneapolis Public Schools continued to host a redesigned school choice website (School Choice Center) to allow parents of prospective students to search for and compare schools by features important to them (e.g., arts, achievement data) within the district. The database includes charter schools in Minneapolis. An average of more than 200,000 visits are made to this website during each school choice season; typically late fall through late winter.
- **DIRECT MAILINGS.** Minneapolis continued outreach to parents of prospective students in Minneapolis and the surrounding suburbs, and parents of students currently enrolled in Minneapolis Public Schools. The direct mailing included charter school students that were graduating from the highest grade offered at their current school.
- **PARENT INFORMATION MEETINGS.** Small group meetings continued to provide information to parents of prospective K–8 students in Minneapolis and surrounding suburbs, including parents of children attending charter schools and current Minneapolis Public School parents, were held again this year. Meetings were held at Head Start-PICA locations, daycares, churches, community agencies, YMCAs, charter schools, and Minneapolis Public Schools.
- **COMMUNITY OUTREACH EVENTS.** Minneapolis Public Schools continued to participate in various collaborative marketing/outreach efforts at various locations around the city.
- **MINNEAPOLIS STUDENT PLACEMENT CENTER AND OFF-SITE ASSISTANCE.** Minneapolis Public Schools continued to operate a parent information/student placement center in north and south Minneapolis. Staff from the center coordinated the various marketing campaigns and events to inform area families of the school choices available in Minneapolis.

**MINNEAPOLIS PARENT INFORMATION CENTERS, INC. (NORTH AND SOUTH).** The Minneapolis Parent Information Centers (MPIC) have progressively continued to build relationships and partner with parents and other primary caregivers of Minneapolis to provide nonbiased, culturally sensitive information and resources that will enhance their ability to make informed educational choices for

their children. Although MPIC has been distinguished from the Minneapolis NAACP as its own 501(c)(3), both organizations continue to work cooperatively as needed.

- PARENT INFORMATION CENTERS provided information to families on all available school choice options in Minneapolis and the suburban school districts participating in *The Choice Is Yours* program via telephone, literature distribution, parent informational meetings, support groups, and walk-in appointments. Each of the centers also assisted interested parents in accessing Web-based data on schools and districts in their computer labs. The north PIC also began hosting biquarterly parent involvement/informational sessions to support and assist parents in becoming better equipped as advocates for their children, and provided a support group for parenting grandparents.
- COMMUNITY OUTREACH EVENTS. MPIC participated in several community events as a means of outreach to families, which were inclusive of but not limited to: Minneapolis School Choice Fair, Juneteenth Parade, Sabathani Days, Minneapolis Urban League's Family Day, and PICA Kindergarten Round-up, Jehovah Jireh Church College and Career Day, Up and Rising Festival, North Side Information Fair, and the Academy for Accelerated Learning Kwanzaa celebration. MPIC also distributed informational packets to suburban districts, and collaborated with the Minnesota Department of Education to provide "Choice" informational meetings to Somali families at the Brian Coyle Center. MPIC continued to distribute brochures and calendars of events to local churches, businesses, and social service agencies on a quarterly basis, and provided informational sessions for several organizations. As part of a community "blitz" MPIC placed ads in "One Nation News" (online and print) and The Spokesman Recorder, and placed infomercials on KMOJ radio.
- COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS. MPIC continued to develop relationships with suburban school districts, churches, and other community agencies. The collaboration between MPIC and NdCAD (Network for the Development of Children of African Descent) to provide after-school tutoring and summer "Lunch and Learn" continues to be a very successful relationship for the benefit of families. MPIC also developed a collaborative relationship with Lutheran Social Services (Grand Families Connection" to provide the "Generations" parenting grandparents support group. MPIC also sponsored the Men Cook King of the North BBQ contest in collaboration with Minneapolis Public Schools and North Point (Gateway Project).

WEST METRO EDUCATION PROGRAM. Outreach activities in each of the eight<sup>4</sup> suburban WMEP districts continued to include filling requests for information about their schools, talking with interested families, and conducting school tours for prospective students. As in previous years, the districts also attended community outreach events sponsored by the Minnesota Department of Education.

## **MEASURES OF PROGRESS - OUTREACH**

### MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION:

- The Minnesota Department of Education's media campaign included paid play time for the school choice video 100 times on a local cable channel; 2,475 thirty-second spots at the Mall of America; 262 paid advertising slots on a key radio station with an estimated 110,000; 1

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<sup>4</sup> A ninth WMEP district, Eden Prairie, is not a partner in the federal school choice grant, but participates in *The Choice Is Yours* program under WMEP's comprehensive desegregation plan.

wrap light rail train with an estimated 7,630,310 impressions per month; and Internet advertisements with an estimated 1,000 visitors per day.

- 30 community outreach events were hosted or attended by the Minnesota Department of Education.

#### MINNEAPOLIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS:

- Advertisements promoting new International Baccalaureate programs, the North Side Initiative and the School Choice Fair were placed at five local grocery stores.
- The Minneapolis School Fair was attended by 4,000+ families from Minneapolis and surrounding suburbs.
- Multiple direct mailings to families reached 5,000 – 30,000 each time.
- The “School Choice Center received over 200,000 visits.
- 35 parent information and community-based meetings were attended by more than 300 students and families.

#### PARENT INFORMATION CENTERS:

- The two Minneapolis Parent Information Centers served a total of 1,070 parents in north and south Minneapolis. Four hundred seventy-two (472) were served through direct services, which were inclusive of assistance with completing school choice application, advocacy, group presentations, informational sessions, support groups, and parent workshops. Five hundred ninety-eight (598) of them were served through indirect services which included telephone calls, program literature distribution, and referral to other agencies.
- MPIC served a total of one hundred forty-eight (148) free and or reduced lunch students through Saturday homework help, lunch and learn activities, after school tutoring, and special events.

#### ALL PROJECT PARTNERS:

- All of the project partners continued to support non-English-speaking families in the school choice process by providing outreach and/or application materials in multiple languages and/or multilingual staff to meet with prospective students.

## KEY FINDINGS — OUTREACH<sup>5</sup>

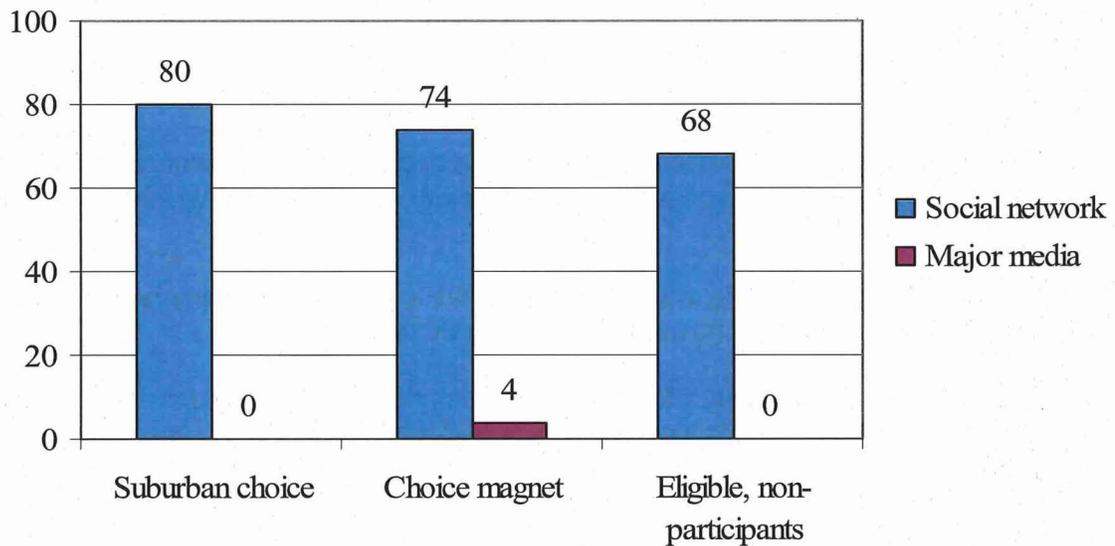
1. *Options outside of the district.* Parents of suburban choice participants continue to be twice as likely to be aware of their school choice options *outside* of the district — including Open Enrollment and *The Choice Is Yours* suburban transfer program — than parents of choice magnet participants and non-participants (see Table 14 on page A22). Some significant changes from the previous year include:
  - Parents of choice magnet students were less likely to view *The Choice Is Yours* as a viable option this year, perhaps due to the fact that fewer magnet schools were eligible to receive students this year.
  - Parents of eligible, non-participants in the targeted attendance areas were much less likely to view Open Enrollment as an option this year (29% less).
2. *Other school choices.* A significant number of parents— participants and non-participants alike — continued to view other school choices, such as home schooling, alternative schools, charter schools, and private schools, as viable options for their child (see Table 14 on page A22). Some significant changes from the previous year include:
  - Parents of eligible non-participants in the targeted attendance areas were less likely, and those in the nontargeted areas were more likely, to view home schooling as a viable option this year.
  - Parents of choice magnet students were more likely to view three of the four choices as viable options this year, particularly private schools.
  - Parents of suburban choice students and eligible, non-participants (especially those in the targeted attendance area) were less likely to view an alternative school as a viable option this year.
  - Parents of eligible, non-participants in the targeted attendance areas were less likely to view attending a private school as a viable option this year.
  - Parents of eligible, non-participants living outside of the targeted attendance areas were much less likely to view attending a charter school as a viable option this year (25% less).
3. *Most parents aware of choices outside of neighborhood but inside Minneapolis.* In previous years, suburban choice parents tended to be more aware of school choice options within the Minneapolis school district but outside of their neighborhood. Last year, parents of choice magnet students and some eligible, non-participants (those living in the targeted attendance areas) were just as likely to be aware of these choices. This year again suburban choice parents, followed by choice magnet parents, tended to be more aware of school choice options within the Minneapolis school district but outside of their neighborhood than eligible, non-participants. This year, parents of eligible, non-participants in the targeted attendance area were less aware of these choices than the previous year (see Table 14 on page A22).

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<sup>5</sup> “Many” generally refers to at least 70% of respondents; “most” refers to at least 80% of respondents.

4. *Prior school choices influence awareness.* Parents who had previously chosen home schooling, open enrollment, *The Choice Is Yours* program, or any private school were more likely to be aware of these options (see Tables 13 and 14 on pages A21 and A22).
5. *Some prefer to stay in Minneapolis.* Last year, similar to in previous years, more than 2 in 5 suburban choice parents would have preferred for their child to go to school in Minneapolis if there was a school that provided all of the things they like about their child’s current suburban school. This year just over 1 in 4 said the same (see Table 9 on page A20).
6. *Social networks combined with major media reach most parents.* Although parents of suburban choice, choice magnet, and eligible, non-participants were most likely to obtain information on school choices from their social networks, outreach efforts that targeted parents through their social networks *and* the major media reached over 90% of parents (see Table 16 on page A24).
7. *Outreach through social network most influential in making school choice.* As was true in previous years, all parent groups said their school choice was most influenced by their social network (see Table 17 on page A25 and Figure 1 below).

**FIGURE 1: PERCENTAGE OF PARENTS SAYING “SOCIAL NETWORK” OR “MAJOR MEDIA” OUTREACH EFFORTS WERE MOST INFLUENTIAL IN THEIR SCHOOL CHOICE DECISION.**



Source: 2007 TCIY Parent Interview (see Table 17, p. A25).

8. *Few use Minneapolis Public Schools school choice website.* About 1 in 6 parents of suburban choice, choice magnet, and non-participating students mentioned the district website as a source of school information (see Table 15 on page A23).

9. *Some parents using parent information centers.* About 1 in 4 of all parents said they obtained information about school choice from a parent information center (see Table 11 on page A20 and Table 15 on page A23). Parents in all groups were somewhat less likely to report obtaining school choice information from a parent center than last year. Parents of eligible, non-participants were more likely to visit the Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) Student Placement Center than the north or south Minneapolis Parent Information Centers, Inc. (MPIC). Suburban choice parents were most likely to visit the MPS Center than the MPIC sites; choice magnet parents were most likely to visit the south MPIC facility (see Table 11 on page A20).
10. *Parents want quality, safety, and discipline.* Almost all suburban choice, choice magnet and eligible, non-participants want a high-quality, safe, and disciplined learning environment for their child (see Tables 20–22 on pages A27–A29 and Figure 2 on page 15).
11. *Academic and language support important.* Two-thirds or more of all parents — suburban choice, choice magnet, and eligible, non-participants alike — are also looking for a school that provides academic support for their child and/or support for students that do not speak English (see Tables 20–22 on pages A27–A29). This year, parents of eligible, non-participants were less likely to say that support for non-native speakers was important.
12. *Culture and diversity.* Over half of all parents want a school that will educate their child about the history, traditions, and values of their ethnic or cultural group and one that has a diverse student body and teaching staff (see Tables 20–22 on pages A27–A29 and Figures 3 and 4 on page 16). This year, however, finding a school with this feature declined in overall importance for parents of choice magnet students.
13. *Choosing a school close to home can be important to some.* Parents of eligible, non-participants and choice magnet parents were more likely than suburban choice parents to say that finding a school close to home was very important to them when selecting a particular school (see Tables 20–22 on pages A27–A29 and Figure 5 on page 17). This year, however, finding a school close to home declined in overall importance for parents of eligible, non-participants.
14. *Religion may not be as important.* Like last year, more parents of eligible, non-participants said that finding a school that would educate their child about their religion was very important in selecting a school than suburban choice or choice magnet parents. This year parents in all three groups responded that education about religion was somewhat less important than did parents last year (see Tables 20–22 on pages A27–A29 and Figure 3 on page 16).
15. *Parents satisfied with available school choices.* Overall, about 85% of parents of suburban choice and eligible, non-participants, and 94% of choice magnet parents, were satisfied with the school choices available to their child for the 2006–2007 school year (see Table 10 on page A20). Most parents had chosen a public school for the upcoming school year and were satisfied with their selection (see Tables 18–19 on page A26).

**FIGURE 2. PERCENTAGE OF PARENTS RATING VARIOUS FACTORS AS “VERY IMPORTANT” IN SELECTING A PARTICULAR SCHOOL.**

	Suburban Choice	Choice Magnet	Eligible, Non-Participant
Offers a high-quality education	97.9%	98.0%	91.5%
Provides a safe learning environment	100.0	100.0	93.8
Provides a disciplined environment	95.8	85.6	81.4
Provides support for children who do not speak English	62.8	73.2	63.9
Provides support for other special needs your child may have <sup>1</sup>	85.1	82.8	77.2
Educates them about the history, traditions, and values of your ethnic or cultural group	62.4	51.0	52.6
Has a diverse staff	57.0	56.4	50.0
Has a diverse group of students	58.7	62.2	58.0
Is close to home	22.1	48.0	49.0
Has other students who are like your children <sup>2</sup>	42.7	47.8	46.5
Educates them about your religion	20.7	16.3	28.9

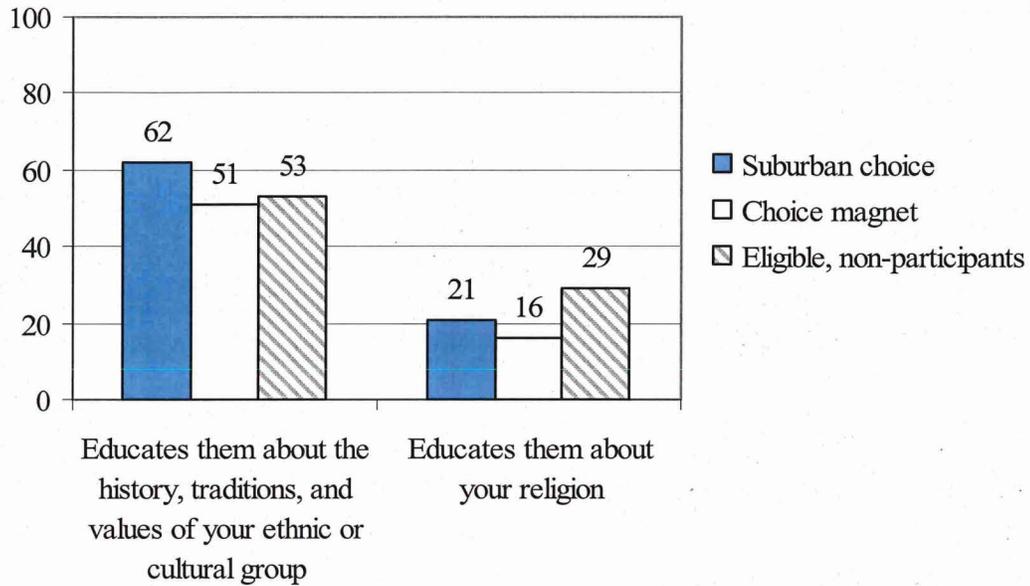
Note: <sup>1</sup> Parents typically cited academic support.

<sup>2</sup> Parents typically meant similar in terms of race, culture, or behavior (i.e., respectful).

Shading denotes statistically significant differences.

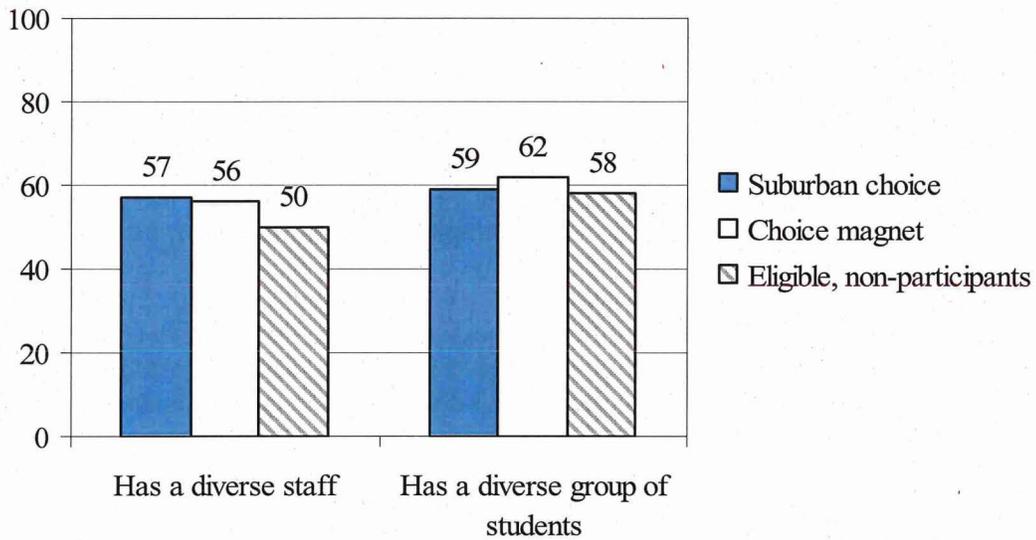
Source: 2007 TCIY Parent Interview (see Tables 20–22, pp. A27–29).

**FIGURE 3: PERCENTAGE OF PARENTS WHO SAY FINDING A SCHOOL THAT WILL EDUCATE THEIR CHILD ABOUT THEIR OWN CULTURE AND RELIGION IS “VERY IMPORTANT” WHEN CHOOSING A SCHOOL.**



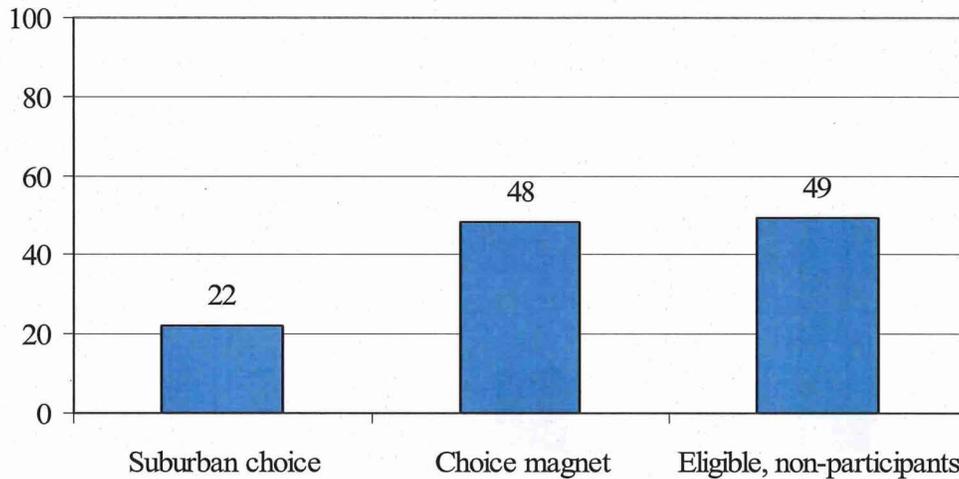
Source: 2007 TCIY Parent Interview (see Tables 20–22, p. A27–29).

**FIGURE 4: PERCENTAGE OF PARENTS WHO SAY FINDING A SCHOOL THAT HAS A DIVERSE STAFF AND STUDENT BODY IS “VERY IMPORTANT” WHEN CHOOSING A SCHOOL.**



Source: 2007 TCIY Parent Interview (see Tables 20–22, p. A27–29).

**FIGURE 5: PERCENTAGE OF PARENTS WHO SAY FINDING A SCHOOL CLOSE TO HOME IS “VERY IMPORTANT” WHEN CHOOSING A SCHOOL.**



Source: 2007 TCYI Parent Interview (see Tables 20–22, pp. A27–A29).

## **IMPLICATIONS - OUTREACH**

1. *How to reach most parents?* The current evaluation continues to support the conclusion that attempts to inform low-income parents about school choice options should include both outreach that targets parents' social networks (friends, neighbors, relatives, schools, parent information centers, and community organizations) and outreach that utilizes major media outlets (newspaper, television, billboard, radio) to ensure that most parents hear about their school choices. In the end, parents rely on their social networks to make their final school choice decision.
2. *Who is most aware of choices? Least aware?* This year's evaluation showed that parents of suburban choice students continued to be about twice as aware of school choices like Open Enrollment and *The Choice is Yours* program than the other parent groups. However, choice magnet parents this year emerged as being more aware of alternative, charter, and private school choices. They reported being slightly more aware than suburban choice parents, but significantly more aware than parents of eligible, non-participants.
3. *What are parents looking for in a school? How important is diversity?* In addition to offering a high-quality education in a safe and disciplined learning environment, many parents continue to value schools that provide academic and language support to students who need it and schools that reflect ethnic and cultural diversity in the curriculum, student body, and staffing.
4. *Many who stay close to home, want to be close to home.* Parents of eligible, non-participating students — that is, the students who remained in a Minneapolis school rather than choosing to attend a choice magnet or suburban choice school — continue to want a school that is close to home. The importance of this option has declined, however, for this group of parents.

## EXPANDED SCHOOL CHOICE

### 2. TO WHAT EXTENT DID THE PROGRAM EXPAND SCHOOL CHOICE OPTIONS UNDER *THE CHOICE IS YOURS* PROGRAM? (GOAL 1, OBJECTIVE 1.2)

#### NATURE OF ACTIVITIES – SCHOOL CHOICE

MINNEAPOLIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS. Under the federally funded MN-VPSC program, Minneapolis Public Schools was able to expand opportunities for both urban and suburban students.

- SPANISH IMMERSION SCHOOL. During the 2006–2007 school year Kindergarten –fourth grade classrooms at the Windom Spanish Immersion Magnet School were offered as bilingual classrooms. Key activities this year included staff development, publicity, and purchase of supplies.
- TRANSFERS TO HIGHER PERFORMING SCHOOLS. Minneapolis students attending schools that had not made adequate yearly progress were again given the option to transfer to a higher performing school in the district. Grant funding paid for expanded transportation to allow these students to select higher performing schools outside their regular transportation zones.
- INTRADISTRICT TRANSFERS TO CHOICE MAGNET SCHOOLS. The MN-VPSC program also provided continued funding to support the intradistrict (Minneapolis choice magnet) transfer portion of *The Choice Is Yours* program. Minneapolis residents who were eligible for free or reduced price lunches and who lived in the targeted attendance areas (e.g., 90% or more students of color and/or 90% or more students eligible for free or reduced price lunches), were eligible to attend a Minneapolis choice magnet school under *The Choice Is Yours*.
- EXPANDED FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN. Minneapolis increased opportunities for full-day kindergarten at high-performing schools to attract families to these schools. Six higher performer schools received funding to support six additional full-day kindergarten sessions. Often students that choose to go to a higher performing school may have to choose the option to give up their full-day kindergarten option as a number of the schools that are higher performing only can afford half-day kindergarten. Research shows that full-day kindergarten is one way to eliminate the achievement gap.
- NEW INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE (IB) PROGRAMS. Hall Elementary, Whittier Elementary, and Franklin Middle schools in Minneapolis received staff development, support for publicity and recruitment, and supplies to support these schools in their transition to IB programs. The schools will provide an early-years and middle-years IB option to families and are also open for suburban to urban transfers.
- CHARTER SCHOOLS. *The Choice Is Yours* program has been expanded to include charter school options. Beginning in the fall of 2005, eight new charter schools opened in Minneapolis.

WEST METRO EDUCATION PROGRAM. The federal grant also provided continued funding for the interdistrict (suburban choice) transfer option under *The Choice Is Yours* program.

- INTERDISTRICT TRANSFERS TO SUBURBAN SCHOOLS. Students living in Minneapolis who were eligible for free or reduced price lunch were eligible to attend selected schools in the eight<sup>6</sup> suburban districts participating in *The Choice Is Yours* interdistrict transfer program.
- EXPANSION OPTIONS FOR INTERDISTRICT TRANSFERS TO SUBURBAN SCHOOLS. The suburban choice option expanded to include schools in the Eden Prairie school district under the WMEP desegregation plan in 2005–2006. The district continues to enroll more students each year.

## MEASURES OF PROGRESS - EXPANDED CHOICE

### MINNEAPOLIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS:

- The Windom Spanish K–4 immersion program enrolled 380 students.
- A total of 224 Minneapolis students living outside the attendance boundaries received transportation to a higher performing school within the district.
- A total of 346 eligible students enrolled in a Minneapolis choice magnet school, 2 (0.6%) under *The Choice Is Yours* and 344 under other higher priority placements, such as sibling preference. Last year (year 5), 8% of the 917 eligible students enrolled under *The Choice Is Yours* program, up from 6% of 968 eligible students in year 4 and 3% of 872 eligible students in year 3.
- A total of 4 teachers were added at selected high-performing schools to offer expanded full-day kindergarten for 104 students.
- Two schools offering IB programs enrolled a total of 990 students in grades 6–8.

### WEST METRO EDUCATION PROGRAM:

- Total enrollment in the suburban choice portion of *The Choice Is Yours* program, as based on official end-of-year enrollment figures, has increased each year (see Figure A3 on page A3):
  - Year 1 = 472 students
  - Year 2 = 720 students (53% increase)
  - Year 3 = 1,030 students (43% increase)
  - Year 4 = 1,435 students (39% increase)
  - Year 5 = 1,567 students (9% increase)
  - Year 6 = 1,867 students (19% increase)
- A total of 4,927 eligible students were enrolled in suburban choice schools under *The Choice Is Yours* priority placement at some point during the program's first 6 years: 558 in year 1, 567 in year 2, 759 in year 3, 1,037 in year 4, 908 in year 5, and 1,098 in year 6 (see Figure A6 on page A6).

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<sup>6</sup> Includes a ninth district, Eden Prairie, which is not a partner in the federal grant but included in *The Choice Is Yours* program under WMEP's comprehensive desegregation plan.

## KEY FINDINGS – EXPANDED CHOICE<sup>7</sup>

### INTRADISTRICT (MINNEAPOLIS CHOICE MAGNETS) TRANSFER PROGRAM:

1. *Fewer students with limited English proficiency.* This year, 38% of all eligible students placed into a Minneapolis choice magnet school had limited English proficiency down from 50% the year before when more Hispanic students enrolled in these schools (see Table 4 on page A16). In previous years, few if any students placed under *The Choice Is Yours* program had limited English proficiency. Now, the percentage of students with limited English proficiency enrolling in the choice magnet schools is much closer to the district average of 33%.
2. *Fewer Hispanic students enrolling.* Choice magnet schools in Minneapolis are attracting proportionally fewer Hispanic students than the district overall (see Table 4 on page A16).
3. *Participation by grade level.* Two-thirds (64%) of the 344 students placed into a Minneapolis choice magnet school under a priority placements other than *The Choice Is Yours* were enrolled into grades 1–5 while 21% enrolled in grades 6–8 and the rest in kindergarten (see Table 4 on page A16).

### INTERDISTRICT (SUBURBAN CHOICE) TRANSFER PROGRAM:

4. *African American students more likely to enroll.* Since the inception of *The Choice Is Yours* program, more African American students are choosing open enrollment transfers out of Minneapolis and into participating suburban districts (see Figure A7 on page A7):
  - In the 3 years prior to *The Choice Is Yours* program, 56% of all applications for open enrollment out of Minneapolis were Caucasian, 29% African American, and 15% other racial/ethnic groups.
  - Since *The Choice Is Yours* program began (now in its 6<sup>th</sup> year), 32% of all applications for open enrollment out of Minneapolis were Caucasian, 51% African American, and 17% other racial/ethnic groups.
  - The relative increase in the number of African American students transferring out of Minneapolis under open enrollment can be accounted for by the fact that during its first 6 years, 17% of all applicants to *The Choice Is Yours* program were Caucasian, 65% were African American, and 18% other racial/ethnic groups.
5. *Few with limited English skills enroll.* A comparison of participants in the suburban choice program to eligible, non-participants revealed some notable differences in these populations (see Table 3 on page A15). Caucasian students comprise 18% of the suburban choice population as compared to 9% of eligible, non-participants. The suburban choice population includes only 13% students with limited English proficiency compared to 33% of eligible, non-participants.

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<sup>7</sup> “Many” generally refers to at least 70% of respondents; “most” refers to at least 80% of respondents.

6. *Many not previously enrolled in a Minneapolis school.* Less than half (40%) of the 4,927 students who *ever enrolled* in the suburban choice program during its first 6 years had been enrolled in a Minneapolis public school the year prior to entering the program (see Figure A6 on page A6). Another 42% had been enrolled in another public school in Minnesota, 7% were previously enrolled in a public charter school or a private school, and 6% were incoming kindergartners.
7. *Half who enroll do not stay.* During the first 6 years of the program, 62% of the 4,927 students who were *ever enrolled* in the suburban choice program left the program before the end of the school year. Many of these students did not reenroll in the program in subsequent years for an estimated 79% of students over the 6 years (see Figure A6 on page A6). Of the students who withdrew, each year approximately 17% returned to a Minneapolis Public School after leaving. Anecdotal data suggests that some students left the suburban choice program because of a move (e.g., into the suburban choice district or into another district that did not offer the program) and/or dissatisfaction with the program.
8. *Of those who stay, most return next year.* During the first 6 years of the program, on average, about two-thirds of students who enrolled in the suburban choice option returned to the program (see Figure A4 on page A4). The return rate peaked in year 3 (68% returning) and has remained steady from years 4 to 6.
9. *Many students come from two zip codes.* A total of 51% of all students who *ever enrolled* in the suburban choice schools through *The Choice Is Yours* lived in only 2 of the 22 Minneapolis zip codes served by the program — 55411 and 55412 — the near-north and north Minneapolis neighborhoods, excluding northeast (see Figures A8–A9 on pages A8–A9). The predominant ethnic group in these neighborhoods — overall and among eligible families — is African American; the population most likely to enroll in the suburban choice program.
10. *Majority of students enrolled in just a few suburban districts.* Of all students *ever enrolling* in suburban choice schools through the program, 59% are enrolled in the Robbinsdale (30%), Richfield (14%), and Columbia Heights (15%) school districts (see Figure A8 on page A8). The remaining districts each enroll 10% or less of the students of the students. Districts are allocated slots based on their total enrollment.
11. *Enrollment in districts by ethnicity.* African American students are enrolling in all of the participating suburban districts, but are least likely to enroll in the St. Anthony school district (see Figure A5 on page A5).
12. *Suburban choice and choice magnet parents more satisfied.* Overall, 93% of suburban choice and 87% of choice magnet parents would choose the same school again. Parents of eligible, non-participants were less likely to choose the same school again (79%) (see Table 26 on page A30). Parent satisfaction with their child's current school was also evident in that most suburban choice and choice magnet parents would recommend their child's school to others, with 65% and 59% (respectively) having done so already. While most parents of eligible, non-participants would also recommend their school to others, only 41% already have (see Table 27 on page A30).
13. *Parents recommend suburban choice program.* As in previous years, almost all (96% this year) of the suburban choice parents would recommend *The Choice Is Yours* program to others. Two-thirds reported having already done so (see Table 28 on page A30).

## IMPLICATIONS – EXPANDED CHOICE

1. *Who is being placed in choice magnets?* As was true the previous year, of the eligible students who enrolled in a Minneapolis choice magnet school, most enrolled under a higher priority placement (e.g., sibling preference, English-language learner) and not through the intradistrict portion of *The Choice Is Yours* program.
2. *Availability of choice magnets as an option.* This year, only six choice magnet schools were eligible to receive students under *The Choice Is Yours* program.
3. *Need to target other ethnic groups and other geographic areas for suburban choice program.* Although *The Choice Is Yours* interdistrict (suburban choice) option is available to all Minneapolis residents who qualify for free or reduced price lunch, it is still primarily attracting African American students and students living in the north and near-north side of Minneapolis. This suggests a need to continue targeting outreach efforts to other ethnic groups and geographic locations within the city to ensure that the suburban choice option under *The Choice Is Yours* program is understood as one of several school choices by all low-income families.

## REDUCING BARRIERS TO SCHOOL CHOICE THROUGH TRANSPORTATION

### 3. TO WHAT EXTENT DID THE ENHANCED TRANSPORTATION REDUCE BARRIERS TO SCHOOL CHOICE? (GOAL 1, OBJECTIVE 1.3)

#### NATURE OF ACTIVITIES — TRANSPORTATION

The purpose of the transportation activities under the MN-VPSC program was to provide expanded transportation services within Minneapolis and, if possible, from the suburbs to Minneapolis to reduce barriers to choosing a Minneapolis public school.

**MINNEAPOLIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS.** Minneapolis continued to provide expanded transportation options to support school choice for Minneapolis residents.

- **TRANSFERS TO HIGHER PERFORMING SCHOOLS.** Students who previously attended schools identified as not making adequate yearly progress could choose to attend higher performing schools outside their regular transportation zones and receive free transportation.
- **HIGH SCHOOL SHADOWING.** The district provides transportation to allow eighth-grade students to “shadow” a high school student who is already attending a program they are interested in attending. Students attend classes and talk with teachers and students to get an up-close look at nearly 30 small learning communities offered by Minneapolis Public Schools.

**WEST METRO EDUCATION PROGRAM.** Under the federal grant, eight<sup>8</sup> suburban districts continued to provide transportation for suburban choice students to encourage full participation in all their schools had to offer.

- **INTERDISTRICT TRANSFERS TO SUBURBAN SCHOOLS.** This year, transportation of Minneapolis students to suburban schools under *The Choice Is Yours* suburban choice option was provided primarily by the receiving districts and, in some instances, the Wide Area Transportation System (WATS). The cost of this transportation was covered in its entirety by state desegregation transportation funding and not funding from the MN-VPSC program.
- **SUPPLEMENTAL TRANSPORTATION.** Participating WMEP districts continued to provide supplemental transportation to after school, summer school, tutoring, and orientation programs for Minneapolis students attending its suburban schools under *The Choice Is Yours* program. WMEP districts also provided transportation to ensure that parents of suburban choice students could attend school conferences and other family events.

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<sup>8</sup> Transportation to the ninth district, Eden Prairie, is also covered by state desegregation funding.

## MEASURES OF PROGRESS - TRANSPORTATION

### MINNEAPOLIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS:

- 224 Minneapolis students were transported to high-performing schools within the school district.

### WEST METRO EDUCATION PROGRAM:

- Almost all students who participated in the interdistrict portion of *The Choice Is Yours* rode a bus to their suburban choice school (91%) compared to 71% of students attending choice magnet schools in Minneapolis and 65% of eligible non-participants (see Table 31, page A-31). Only a few suburban choice students were transported to school by their parents (3%), drove themselves to school (3%) or took a city bus (1%). This year, transportation to the suburban choice schools was coordinated by the receiving districts.

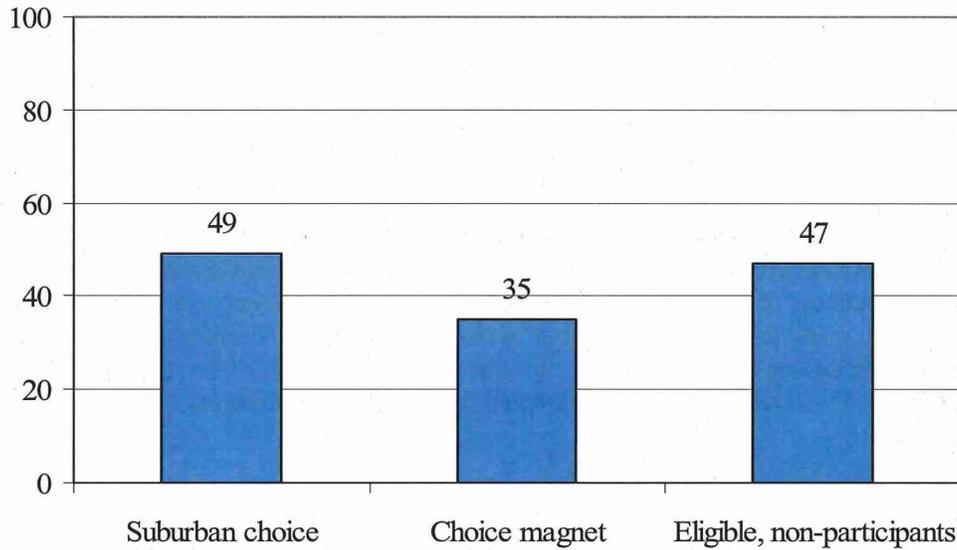
## KEY FINDINGS - TRANSPORTATION<sup>9</sup>

1. *Aware of free transportation.* When choosing to enroll their child in a suburban school, 85% of parents of suburban choice students were aware that free bus transportation was available to and from the school (see Table 29 on page A31). This corresponds to the percentage of suburban students who reportedly ride the bus (see Table 31 on page A31).
2. *Free transportation important to parents.* Asked if they would have chosen the same school for their child if free transportation was not available, parents of suburban choice and choice magnet participants were more likely than parents of eligible, non-participants to say that they would choose the same school again (see Table 30 on page A31 and Figure 6 on page 25). About one-third of choice magnet parents, and just under half of parents of suburban choice and eligible, non-participants, would “definitely” choose the same school again whether or not free transportation was available. This year, more parents of suburban choice participants reported that they would definitely choose same school again, while fewer choice magnet parents said the same.
3. *Allowable length of bus ride differs.* As reported earlier, suburban choice parents are the least likely to limit their school choice to ones that are close to home (see Tables 20–22 on pages A27–A29); consequently, they are also more agreeable to longer bus rides (median of 45 minutes to school) (see Table 32 on page A32). In contrast, parents of choice magnet students and eligible, non-participants preferred shorter bus rides (median 30 minutes) (see Table 32 on page A32).
4. *Parents satisfied with transportation.* Overall, 86% of suburban choice, 84% of choice magnet, and 81% of eligible, non-participant parents were satisfied with the transportation their child used to get to school. Over half of suburban choice and choice magnet parents were “very satisfied” with their child’s transportation. In contrast, 2 in 5 parents of eligible, non-participants were “very satisfied” with the transportation (down 20% from the previous year) (see Table 33 on page A32).

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<sup>9</sup> “Many” generally refers to at least 70% of respondents; “most” refers to at least 80% of respondents.

**FIGURE 6: PERCENTAGE OF PARENTS WHO WOULD DEFINITELY CHOOSE THE SAME SCHOOL IF FREE TRANSPORTATION WAS NOT AVAILABLE.**



Source: 2007 TCIY Parent Interview (see Table 30, p. A31).

### **IMPLICATIONS – TRANSPORTATION**

1. *Free transportation continues to matter.* About two-thirds of choice magnet parents and more than half of suburban choice parents and parents of eligible, non-participants might not keep their child in their current suburban school if free transportation is not provided.
2. *Schools “close to home” can include short bus ride.* Many parents who would rather choose a school that is “close to home” may allow bus rides to school that last about 30 to 40 minutes.

## REDUCING BARRIERS TO SCHOOL CHOICE THROUGH PARENT CENTERS

<p><b>4. TO WHAT EXTENT DID THE <u>PARENT CENTERS</u> REDUCE BARRIERS TO SCHOOL CHOICE? (GOAL 1, OBJECTIVE 1.4)</b></p>
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### NATURE OF ACTIVITIES – PARENT INFORMATION CENTERS

The purpose of the MN-VPSC program with regard to the parent centers was to provide information and support to all Minneapolis parents during the school choice and enrollment process (see Figure A2 on page A2 for the locations of the three parent information centers described below).

**MINNEAPOLIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS.** Minneapolis Public Schools has two offices called Student Placement Services, one in the north area of the city and the other in the south area of the city. Both offices service PreK–12 students and families.

The primary function of Minneapolis Student Placement Services (SPS) is to place PreK–12 students into schools that families choose as quickly and efficiently as possible. As noted under the section on outreach, another goal of SPS is to effectively market the Minneapolis Public Schools as schools of choice. SPS assists parents in examining their school choices and completing their School Request Card over the telephone and through walk-in appointments. Information on the school choices available to Minneapolis residents is available at the center or by mail.

**MINNEAPOLIS PARENT INFORMATION CENTERS, INC. (MPIC)** As noted earlier under the Outreach section, the MPIC has maintained the two sites established by the Minneapolis branch of the NAACP; one on the north side of Minneapolis and the other on the south side. Both sites are still housed in buildings with ties to the African American community: the former Urban League building in North Minneapolis and the Sabathani Community Center in South Minneapolis. During the 2006–2007 school year, the MPIC continued to distinguish itself from the Minneapolis NAACP as a free-standing nonprofit organization.

Each of the MPIC sites continues to provide information to families on all available school choice options in Minneapolis and the suburban school districts participating in *The Choice Is Yours* program over the telephone and through walk-in appointments at hours that are convenient for families. The MPIC also continues to maintain its school choice website, which provides objective and subjective information to assist parents in accessing information to inform their school choice. MPIC representatives are very active in the community, attending a variety of events to talk directly to parents and partnering with community organizations to spread the word about services available through the MPIC.

The MPIC actively enrolled students into the suburban choice program by assisting parents in completing the school application forms. Parents interested in enrolling their child in a Minneapolis Public School were also assisted through MPIC. In addition to assisting many parents through the school choice process, staff continued to advocate for parents/students and work schools to resolve school-related questions and issues that arise before and after enrolling in a school.

## MEASURES OF PROGRESS – PARENT INFORMATION CENTERS

- The Minneapolis Public Schools Student Placement Services (SPS) made 15,221 preK–8 placements for the 2006–2007 school year including lottery placements. At the high school level, SPS placed a total of approximately 4,900 high school students of which 2,400 were placed through the lottery process.
- On average, the Minneapolis Public Schools Student Placement Services serves more than 20,000 students and families each year.
- The two Minneapolis Parent Information Centers served a total of 1,070 parents in north and south Minneapolis. Four hundred seventy-two (472) were served through direct services, which were inclusive of assistance with completing school choice application, advocacy, group presentations, informational sessions, support groups, and parent workshops. Five hundred ninety-eight (598) of them were served through indirect services which included telephone calls, program literature distribution, and referral to other agencies.
- The MPIC served a total of one hundred forty-eight (148) free and or reduced lunch students through Saturday homework help, lunch and learn activities, after school tutoring, and special events. Students who participated in the NdCAD after-school tutoring collaborative (3 days a week) made gains in one or more areas of phonics, phonemic awareness, reading levels, comprehension, and fluency.

## KEY FINDINGS – PARENT INFORMATION CENTERS<sup>10</sup>

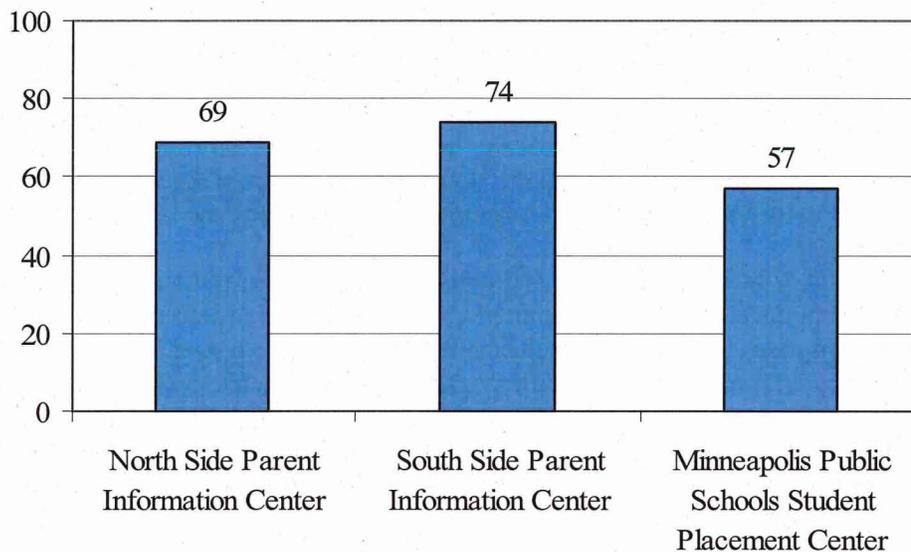
1. *Only some parents using parent information centers.* About 1 in 4 parents of choice magnet and eligible, non-participating students — and about 1 in 5 suburban choice parents — said they obtained information about school choice from a parent information center (see Table 11 on page A20 and Table 15 on page A23). Parents of eligible, non-participants were less likely than last year to report obtaining school choice information from a parent center. Parents of eligible, non-participants were more likely to visit the Minneapolis Public Schools Student Placement Center than the north or south Minneapolis Parent Information Centers, Inc. Suburban choice parents went to the Minneapolis Public Schools facility about as much as the north and south combined, while choice magnet parents went to the south facility about as much as the north and the Minneapolis Public Schools facilities together (see Table 11 on page A20).
2. *Parents say information centers are useful.* Like last year, when asked to rate the usefulness of each parent information center, the small population of parents who visited or talked with someone from the North Side and South Side PICs rated the usefulness of these centers higher (“very helpful”) than parents who had visited or talked with someone from the Minneapolis Public Schools Student Placement Center. However, the percentages of those who found the North Side and South Side facilities “very helpful” were lower than last year (see Table 12 on page A21 and Figure 7 on page 28).
3. *Most students enrolling in a Minneapolis Public School receive first or second choice of schools.* Annual progress reports from the Minneapolis Public Schools Student Placement Services indicated that in the 2006–2007 lottery almost all entering kindergarten and most of the first through eighth graders and high school students received their first or second choice.

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<sup>10</sup> “Many” generally refers to at least 70% of respondents; “most” refers to at least 80% of respondents.

4. *Minneapolis PIC, Inc. continues to enroll suburban students.* Annual progress reports from the Minneapolis Parent Information Centers, Inc. indicated that the centers enrolled 148 of the 846 new students (17%) enrolling in the suburban choice schools during the 2005–2006 school year. The Minneapolis Parent Information Centers, Inc. enrolled 6% of new suburban choice students in year 5, 12% in year 4 and 28% in year 3.

**FIGURE 7: PERCENTAGE OF PARENTS WHO UTILIZED PARENT INFORMATION CENTERS AND RATED THEM AS “VERY HELPFUL.”**



Source: 2007 TCYIY Parent Interview (see Table 12, p. A21).

### IMPLICATIONS – PARENT INFORMATION CENTERS

1. *Parent Information Centers reach some parents.* After an increase last year to 1 in 3 parents visiting the parent information centers, this year the proportion was back to 1 in 4.
2. *Parent Information Centers helpful.* Last year over 80% of the parents utilizing the Minneapolis PICs rated them as very helpful, but this year only about 70% did. In each of the last 2 years, over half of the parents that utilized the Minneapolis Student Placement Center rated it as very helpful.

## ACADEMIC SUPPORT FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

<p><b>5. TO WHAT EXTENT DID THE ENHANCED <u>ACADEMIC SUPPORT</u> OPTIONS PROMOTE SCHOOL SUCCESS FOR STUDENTS WHO CHANGED SCHOOLS? (GOAL 2, OBJECTIVE 2.1)</b></p>
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### NATURE OF ACTIVITIES – ACADEMIC SUPPORT

The purpose of the MN-VPSC program with regard to academic support was to provide enhanced support to Minneapolis and suburban students that transfer to new schools. The eight suburban WMEP districts, the Minneapolis Public Schools, and the Minneapolis Parent Information Centers, Inc. all provided some form of enhanced academic, social, and emotional support for newly transferred students through services and supplies to support academic success and the schools' ongoing efforts to provide educational environments where all students can learn.

**MINNEAPOLIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS.** Minneapolis provided funding for curriculum and instructional materials, professional development opportunities, all-day kindergarten, and transportation to academic support programs to ensure that students who transferred to higher performing schools from lower performing schools would have the resources they needed to achieve academic success.

- **CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS.** The Windom Spanish Immersion, Elizabeth Hall, Whittier, Armatage Montessori, Anwatin and Northeast programs received supplies and/or instructional materials.
- **ALL-DAY KINDERGARTEN.** The district continued to offer all-day kindergarten at high-performing schools and provided access to these programs to families in areas with traditionally lower performing schools.
- **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT.** Administrators and staff attended workshops on middle grades International Baccalaureate Program to support IB authorization.

**MINNEAPOLIS PARENT INFORMATION CENTERS, INC. (MPIC)** In addition to supporting parents through the school choice process, the MPIC continued to provide academic support to students and advocacy for families.

- **TUTORING PROGRAM.** MPIC completed the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of "Lunch and Learn," in partnership with the Minneapolis Public schools food program (North Minneapolis site), and the new addition of NdCAD. The program worked with 25 students (current capacity) for 4 hours per day, Monday through Thursday with a primary focus upon enhancing students understanding of math, reading, African American history and culture, and themselves utilizing a mix of curriculums of which one was developed by Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu called SETCLAE (Self-Esteem Through Culture Leads to Academic Excellence). The students were able to explore African American History and culture through a positive lens. The long-range goal of the program is to promote the joy of learning (self-empowerment) and to encourage parental involvement in their children's education. Students were also provided experiential learning opportunities via field trips to the Sumner Library, Fire Safety Fair, Twins games, and the

Minnesota Science Museum. The MPIC summer tutoring program was open to all choice students.

- **HOMEWORK HELP.** During the 2006–2007 school year, the MPIC offered 24 sessions of Saturday morning Homework Help session. The program offered homework assistance for students in grades 2–6 and established mentoring relationships between high school students and elementary school students.
- **ADVOCACY.** Counselors from the MPIC continued to assist parents in identifying school and community resources to promote student success in school (e.g., referrals to test their child’s language or developmental skills), accompany parents to meetings with school officials to discuss school-related issues, and give presentations at schools on issues of diversity and equity.

**WEST METRO EDUCATION PROGRAM.** The eight participating suburban districts continued to provide some form of academic, social, or emotional support to students transferring into their districts through the suburban choice component of *The Choice Is Yours* program.

- **STUDENT SUPPORT SPECIALISTS.** Several suburban choice schools continued to utilize the federal funding to support a liaison/outreach position to work with families in *The Choice Is Yours* program. The liaisons provided support to families and students around attendance, social issues, academic planning, and parent involvement. The WMEP collaborative itself continued to provide a full-time family liaison to work directly with families and schools participating in *The Choice Is Yours* program.
- **TUTORING AND/OR TEST PREPARATION.** Students at risk of failing the state’s eighth-grade Basic Skills Test were again able to participate in test preparation classes at some of the schools.
- **DIRECT INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT.** Reading and mathematics specialists who worked directly with students in the classroom were another type of academic support made available at some of the schools through the grant funds.
- **NEW-STUDENT ORIENTATION PROGRAMS.** All of the suburban districts had some form of orientation program for new students. Some, however, continued to provide additional programming to welcome and orient participants in *The Choice Is Yours* program as they made the transition to their new suburban school.
- **EXTENDED LEARNING PROGRAMS.** Some suburban districts used funding from the MN-VPSC program to provide scholarships for students in *The Choice Is Yours* program to participate in summer school programming. Other districts offered extended day classes to support math, reading, and writing skills.
- **LANGUAGE SUPPORT PROGRAMS.** Some suburban districts provided additional support for students with limited English proficiency.
- **INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS.** Some suburban schools provided supplies, materials, and equipment to support improved academic performance, including computer and musical instrument loan programs, and books for recreational reading.

## **MEASURES OF PROGRESS — ACADEMIC SUPPORT**

The primary means of assessing the effectiveness of academic support on students' success in school is an analysis of student achievement data. Efforts in this area are discussed below along with other indicators of progress related to academic support.

### **MINNEAPOLIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS:**

- 104 students attended 4 full-day kindergarten classes offered at higher performing schools.
- 992 students attended IB programs at two middle schools.

### **MINNEAPOLIS PARENT INFORMATION CENTERS, INC:**

- The tutoring, homework, and special activities offered by the MPIC served 148 students.
- 5 trained volunteers assisted MPIC staff with assessments and tutoring for homework help and Lunch and Learn.
- MPIC staff attended 77 advocacy appointments with parents
- Provided 12 support group sessions for 15 parenting grandparents

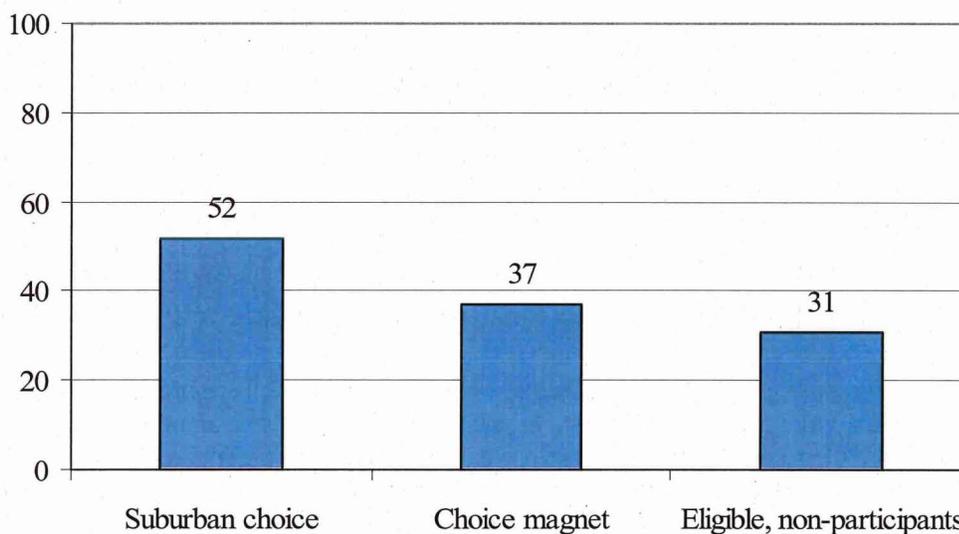
### **WEST METRO EDUCATION PROGRAM:**

- It is estimated that 2,400 students (duplicated count) received academic and/or social support from the suburban schools.

## KEY FINDINGS – ACADEMIC SUPPORT<sup>11</sup>

1. *Some parents were aware of available academic support when choosing a school, others were not.* When choosing to enroll their child in a suburban school, 68% of suburban choice parents, and 53% of parents of choice magnet and eligible, non-participants were aware that extra support or assistance was available to their child if needed (see Table 35 on page A33). This year, fewer parents of eligible, non-participating students were aware of the availability of academic support when choosing a school for their child.
2. *Some parents would choose same school even without academic support.* Fifty-two percent of suburban choice parents, 37% of choice magnet, and 31% of eligible, non-participants said they would choose the same school again, even if extra support or assistance was not available to their child (see Table 35 on page A33 and Figure 8 below). This year, parents of eligible, non-participants were much less likely to say they would choose the same school again even if academic support was not available.

**FIGURE 8: PERCENTAGE OF PARENTS WHO WOULD CHOOSE THE SAME SCHOOL AGAIN IF EXTRA ACADEMIC SUPPORT OR ASSISTANCE WAS NOT AVAILABLE.**



Source: 2007 TCIY Parent Interview (see Table 35, p. A33).

3. *Some suburban choice students perceive greater academic rigor.* At all grade levels, many (70% or more) students felt that the rigor of their schoolwork was “about right.” This was true for both suburban choice students and choice magnet students. About 13% of suburban choice elementary students said their schoolwork was “too hard” as did 19% of the students enrolled at the middle and high school levels. Students enrolled in the elementary grade levels at choice magnet schools were similar in their ratings as their peers in the suburban choice schools; however, only 6% of middle school students in the choice magnet schools felt their schoolwork was “too hard” (for suburban choice students see Tables 54e, 54m, and 54h

<sup>11</sup> “Many” generally refers to at least 70% of respondents; “most” refers to at least 80% of respondents.

on pages A46, A50, and A54; for choice magnet students see Tables 72e and 72m on pages A73 and A76).

4. *Schools helping new students adjust.* Most parents — 92% of suburban choice, 90% of choice magnet, and 88% of non-participants — felt that the school did enough to help their child adjust to the new school (see Table 34 on page A33).
5. *Parents satisfied with home-school communication and parent involvement.* Most parents of suburban choice, choice magnet, and eligible, non-participants were pleased with the manner and frequency with which their child's school communicated with them and with their opportunities to be involved (see Table 44 on page A36 and Tables 39–40 on page A35). Parents of choice magnet students, however, were less likely say it was easy for them to become involved with the school and were less satisfied with how often the school communicated with them.
6. *More suburban choice parents believe child is receiving the help they need to succeed; parents and students not in agreement at secondary level.* This year, 87% of suburban choice parents (an increase over last year), 73% of choice magnet parents, and 70% of parents of eligible, non-participants felt their child was getting the help they needed (see Table 36 on page A33). Many suburban choice parents once again reported that the school provided extra support for their child. Over half of choice magnet parents and parents of eligible, non-participants reported likewise (see Table 37 on page A34). This represented an increase in extra support for choice magnet students and a decrease in support for eligible, non-participants. Many to most of the elementary students enrolled in a suburban choice school and about 60% of the middle and high school students feel that they are receiving all the help they needed (see Tables 53e, 53m, and 53h on pages A45, A49, and A53). Most choice magnet students report that they received enough support (see Tables 71e and 71m on pages A72 and A75).

(For additional data on parent involvement, see Tables 39–44 on pages A35–A36.)

7. *Parents stay involved with child's schooling at home.* Most parents of suburban choice, choice magnet, and eligible, non-participants reported that an adult in their household talks with their child about school every day and almost all parents reported checking in with their child at least once a week (see Table 89s, 89m, and 89n on pages A93–A95). For the most part, student reports confirm this level of parental involvement at home (see Tables 55e, 55m, and 55h on pages A46, A50, and A54 and Tables 73e and 73m on pages A73 and A76).
8. *Suburban choice students involved in extracurricular activities.* More than 4 out of 5 middle and high school students who enrolled in a suburban choice school under *The Choice Is Yours* program participated in extracurricular activities, up from 2 out of 3 when surveyed 2 years ago (see Tables 56m and 56h on pages A50 and A54).
9. *Parents feel suburban schools least prepared to support language diversity.* Many suburban choice parents feel their child's school was prepared to meet the needs of students of different races/cultures (74%) and economic backgrounds (76%), but were less likely to feel that their child's school was prepared to meet the needs of students who speak different languages (66%). Most (over 80%) choice magnet parents and parents of eligible, non-participants felt their child's school meets the needs of students of different races/cultures and economic backgrounds. Many (over 70%) of these two parent groups feel that their child's school was

prepared to meet the needs of students who speak different languages (see Table 38 on page A34).

10. *Suburban teachers feel prepared to work with diverse populations.* More than 3 in 4 elementary and middle school teachers at suburban choice schools feel that their staff development opportunities support them in teaching diverse student populations. About the same percentage of these teachers feel they can meet the instructional needs of all students in their class. While fewer than 2 in 3 suburban choice high school teachers agree about staff development, over 3 in 4 still agree they could meet the instructional needs of all students in their class (see Table 49e, 49m, 49h on pages A38, A40, and A42).
11. *Choice magnet teachers feel prepared to work with diverse populations.* More than 2 in 3 teachers at choice magnet schools feel that their staff development opportunities support them in teaching diverse student populations. Overall, 3 in 4 choice magnet teachers feel they can meet the instructional needs of all students in their class (see Table 67 on page A70).
12. *Parents feel prepared to help child succeed in school.* Across all three parent groups — suburban choice, choice magnet, and eligible, non-participants — most parents feel they know how to help their child succeed in school and feel they are making a significant difference their child’s school performance (see Tables 86s, 86m, 86n on pages A84–A86).
13. *Suburban teachers vary in belief that school is preparing students for academic and social success.* Almost all teachers at suburban choice elementary schools agree that their school is preparing all students to “succeed academically” and to “appreciate differences in others.” Their colleagues at the middle school level are less likely to hold that belief and at the high school level much less likely to agree (see Tables 49e, 49m, and 49h on pages A38, A40, and A42).
14. *Choice magnet teachers believe school is preparing students.* Almost all of choice the magnet teachers agree that their school is preparing all students to “succeed academically” and to “appreciate differences in others” (see Table 67 on page A70).
15. *Nearly all parents believe their child’s school is preparing student for academic and social success.* Almost 90% to over 90% of parents of suburban choice, choice magnet, and eligible, non-participants believe their school is preparing their child to “succeed academically” and to “appreciate differences in others” (see Tables 75–77 on pages A77–A79).
16. *Many to almost all parents believe volunteering and helping the school improve is their responsibility, active choosers most likely to agree.* Almost all suburban choice parents and parents of choice magnet students and many parents of eligible, non-participants were likely to view volunteering at the school as part of their role (see Tables 87s, 87m, and 87n on pages A87–A89). Similarly, suburban choice and choice magnet parents (87% and 88%) were the most likely to feel that “making the school better” was one of their responsibilities versus only 78% of parents of eligible, non-participants.
17. *Most parents talk with child about school.* When parents were asked more specifically about what they feel they are responsible for with regard to their child’s education, almost all felt their role included talking with their child about school (see Tables 87s, 87m, and 87n on pages A87–A89). Ninety percent or more parents said their child talked to them about school at least once a week (see Tables 89s, 89m, and 89n on pages A93–A95).

18. *Most parents feel their role is to help child with homework.* Most parents also felt it was their role to help their child with homework or by explaining tough assignments (see Tables 87s, 87m, and 87n on pages A87–A89). Most parents felt they had the knowledge and skills they needed to assist their child academically, including working with their child on homework, and communicating effectively with their child and their child’s teacher (see Tables 88s, 88m, and 88n on pages A90–A92). Also, most suburban choice parents reported that their child has a set time to do schoolwork and that their child has a specific place to do it; although fewer than last year, many choice magnet parents reported the same. Most parents of eligible, non-participants reported that their child has a specific place to do homework, but only 2 in 3 reported that their child has a set time to do it (fewer had a “set time” this year) (see Table 85 on page A84).
19. *Student misbehavior at suburban choice schools influences learning.* About 2 in 5 teachers at suburban choice elementary and middle schools, and about 1 in 3 at high school, report that they are often kept from teaching because of student misbehavior (see Tables 47e, 47m, and 47h on pages A37, A39, and A41). Suburban choice students and their non-choice counterparts across the grade levels concur with their teachers in reporting that student misbehavior interrupts their learning (though a little lower for middle) (see Tables 51e, 51m, and 51h on pages A44, A48, and A52). These same students also report a lack of respect for adults on the part of students at all grade levels with a greater increase at the elementary level from 2 years ago (see Tables 50e, 50m, and 50h on pages A43, A47, and A51).
20. *Student misbehavior at choice magnet schools influences learning.* More than 1 in 4 teachers at choice magnet schools report that they are often kept from teaching because of student misbehavior (see Table 65 on page A69). Choice magnet students across the grade levels are even more likely than their teachers to report that student misbehavior interrupts their learning, at the elementary (55%) and middle school (59%) (see Tables 69e and 69m on pages A71 and A74). These same students report a lack of respect for adults on the part of students at all grade levels (see Tables 68e and 68m on pages A71 and A74).
21. *Suburban teachers and students vary widely in perceptions of students’ intercultural relationships.* While almost all teachers at suburban elementary schools report that students of different races “work well together” and “get along socially” at their school, their colleagues at the middle and high school levels are much less likely to agree (see Table 48e, 48m, and 48h on pages A38, A40, and A42). In contrast, about 50% to 60% of suburban students across the grade levels report that students of different races do get along well in these ways. Student reports of getting along well, however, are significantly down from 2 years ago (see Tables 52e, 52m, and 52h on pages A44, A48, and A52).
22. *Choice magnet teachers similar in perceptions of students’ intercultural relationships.* Almost all teachers at choice magnet schools report that students of different races “work well together” and “get along socially” at their school (see Table 66, page A69). About the same percentage of choice magnet students across the grade levels report that students of different races do get along well in these ways; this represents a significant increase at the middle school level from 2 years ago (see Tables 70e and 70m on pages A72 and A75).
23. *Parents say overall school climate is positive.* Most parents — suburban choice, choice magnet, and eligible, non-participants — characterized their child’s school as a welcoming, safe, and caring learning environment designed to meet high standards (see Tables 75–77 on pages A77–A79).

24. *Suburban parents and staff say overall school climate is positive; students less so.* Most parents of suburban choice participants characterized their child's school as a welcoming, safe, and caring learning environment designed to meet high standards (see Table 75, page A77). Most teachers in suburban schools are in agreement with parents, though agreement decreased through the middle and high school levels (see Tables 46e, 46m, and 46h on pages A37, A39, and A41). Unlike 2 years ago when this data was last gathered, far fewer suburban choice students characterized their schools as welcoming, safe, caring, and supportive of learning (see Tables 50e, 50m, and 50h on pages A43, A47, and A51). Suburban choice students were just as likely as non-choice students in their schools to feel that they belonged, were safe, and were cared about and respected by staff.
25. *Choice magnet parents, staff, and students say overall school climate is positive.* Almost all parents of choice magnet participants characterized their child's school as a welcoming, safe, and caring learning environment designed to meet high standards (see Table 76 on page A78). Teachers in choice magnet schools were in agreement with parents (see Table 64 on page A69). Like their parents and teachers, for the most part choice magnet students characterized their schools as welcoming and supportive of learning (see Tables 68e and 68m on pages A71 and A74).

## STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Since 2004–2005, the suburban portion of *The Choice Is Yours* program evaluation was designed to answer the question: “What impact does *The Choice Is Yours* program have on student achievement?” To answer this question, the annual growth of suburban choice participants in reading and mathematics was compared to that of eligible, non-participants.

In 2004–2005, the first year that student achievement data was available, the findings revealed that students opting to transfer into a suburban choice school under *The Choice Is Yours* program appeared to benefit from their participation. In contrast, the analysis of student achievement data the following year (2005–2006) suggested the reverse to be true as suburban choice students were outperformed by a comparable group of eligible, non-participants. **This year (2006–2007), with one exception, the findings indicated that overall (i.e., across grades 3–7) the suburban choice students performed at the same level as the eligible, non-participants. Suburban choice students as a whole were slightly outperformed by non-participants in reading.**

To determine what might account for the reversal of findings from one year to the next, the data were examined further. As noted last year, the most probable reason for this change in findings is the fact that the suburban choice students tested each year are not the same students. From one year to the next, only half of the students in the grade levels being tested (i.e., grades 3–7) were enrolled the previous year (this reflects enrollment data showing that the return rate for students in these grade levels is about 50% from one year to the next). As such, the annual findings regarding student achievement should be viewed independently as they represent different groups of suburban choice students.

## METHODOLOGY

In keeping with the same methodology, during the 2006–2007 school year, third- through seventh-grade students in *The Choice Is Yours* interdistrict transfer (“suburban choice”) program were tested in the fall and spring using the Northwest Achievement Level Tests in reading and mathematics.

Suburban choice students for whom achievement data was available for both fall and spring were matched one-to-one with eligible, non-participating students on demographic characteristics (i.e., gender, ethnicity, special education status, and limited English proficiency) and baseline achievement.

A total of 650 suburban choice students were enrolled in grades 3–7 at some point during the 2006–2007 school year. Of these, 450 had both fall and spring achievement data in reading and 468 had fall and spring data in mathematics. The suburban choice students included in the achievement data analyses are representative of the population from which they were drawn in terms of grade level, ethnicity, gender, limited English proficiency, and special education status.

The annual growth in reading and mathematics demonstrated by suburban choice participants and eligible, non-participants were compared. The first comparison examined the annual growth for all students — suburban choice participants and comparable non-participants — in the matched sample. The second comparison examined annual growth for a subset of students: those with pretest scores at or below the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile. In addition, the annual growth of students returning to and new to the suburban choice program was compared.

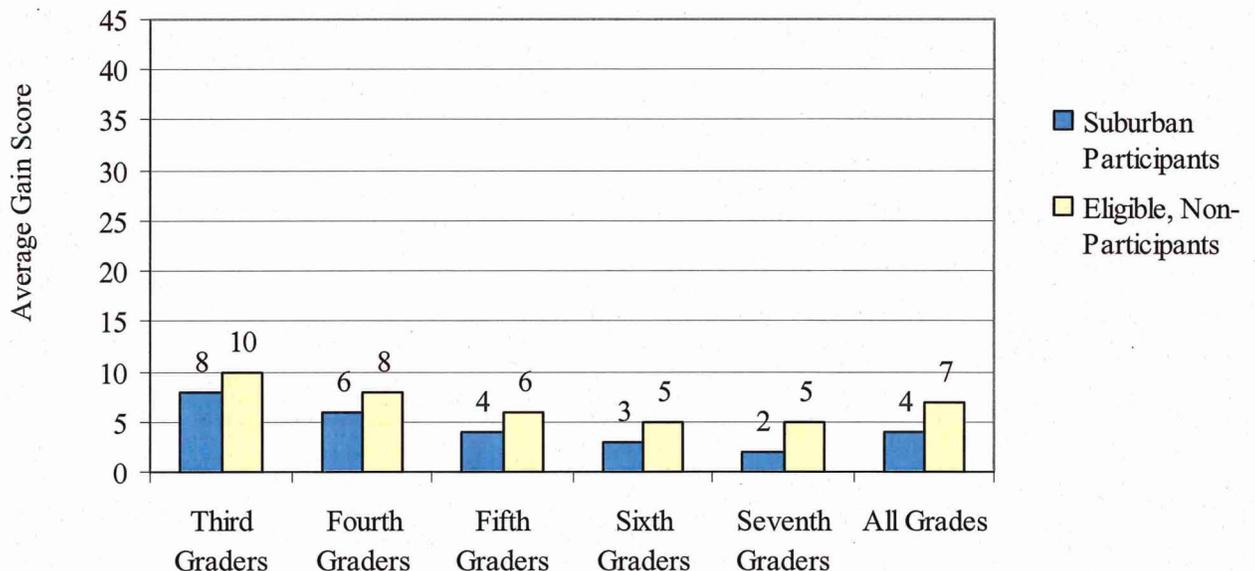
Average gain scores reflect the calibration of a particular test at a particular grade level. To allow for comparison of annual growth across grade levels, the difference in the average gain scores for participants and non-participants shown in Figures 9 through 12 was expressed as an effect size (to create standardized scores across grade levels). These effect size scores were then translated into percentile differences for ease of interpretation (see Tables 83 and 84 on page A83).

## KEY FINDINGS – ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

### ANNUAL GROWTH IN READING — ALL STUDENTS

- Overall, suburban choice students made slight but significantly<sup>12</sup> *lesser* gains in reading than the comparable non-participants. Figure 9 below shows these differences expressed as average gain scores (see also Table 81 on page A81). These annual “gains” translate into reading scores for suburban choice students that were, on average, 9 percentile points *lower* than those of comparable non-participants (see Table 83 on page A83).
- Suburban choice students made significantly *lesser* gains in reading than the comparable non-participants in grades 3, 4, and 7. Figure 9 below shows these differences expressed as average gain scores (see also Table 81 on page A81). The annual “gains” made by suburban choice students at these grade levels translated into reading scores that were 9 to 14 percentile points *lower* than those of comparable non-participants (see Table 83 on page A83).
- On average, returning suburban choice students *did not* gain more in reading over the course of a year than students new to the program (see Table 83 on page A83).

**FIGURE 9: ANNUAL GROWTH IN READING FOR SUBURBAN CHOICE PARTICIPANTS AND ELIGIBLE, NON-PARTICIPANTS, 2006–2007 SCHOOL YEAR.**



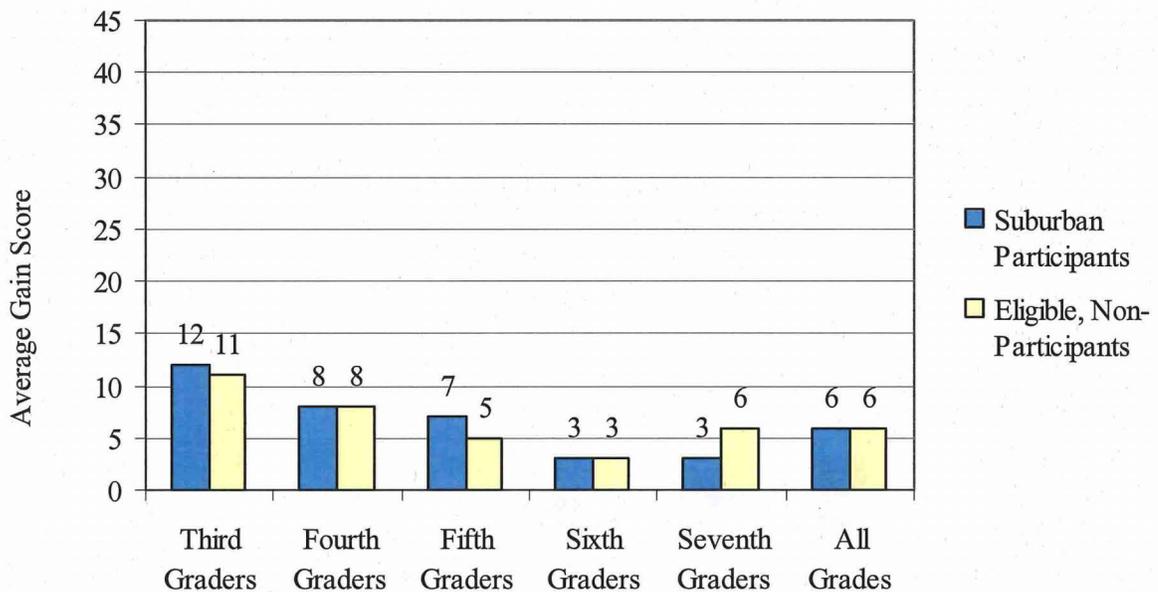
Source: NWEA Reading Scale Scores.

<sup>12</sup> The difference in the average gain score was “practically significant” as noted by all effect sizes being greater than 0.20. The fact that the effect size was not “statistically significant” at some grade levels is due to the slightly smaller sample which diminishes the power to detect a statistically significant difference. Effect sizes are not biased by sample size and thus are used here to determine the magnitude of the difference in gain scores between suburban choice and eligible, non-participants.

ANNUAL GROWTH IN MATHEMATICS — ALL STUDENTS

- Overall, suburban choice students demonstrated gains in mathematics that were *equal to* those of the comparable non-participants. Figure 10 below shows these differences expressed as average gain scores (see also Table 81 on page A81).
- Suburban choice students made significantly *greater* annual gains in mathematics than the comparable non-participants at grade 5 and significantly *lesser* annual gains at grade 7. Figure 10 below shows these differences expressed as average gain scores (see also Table 81 on page A81). The annual “gains” made by suburban choice students at these grade levels translated into mathematics scores that were 9 percentile points *higher* at grade 5, and 12 percentile points *lower* at grade 7, than those of comparable non-participants (see Table 83 on page A83).
- On average, returning suburban choice students *did not* gain more in mathematics over the course of a year than students new to the program (see Table 83 on page A83).

**FIGURE 10: ANNUAL GROWTH IN MATHEMATICS FOR SUBURBAN CHOICE PARTICIPANTS AND ELIGIBLE, NON-PARTICIPANTS, 2006–2007 SCHOOL YEAR.**

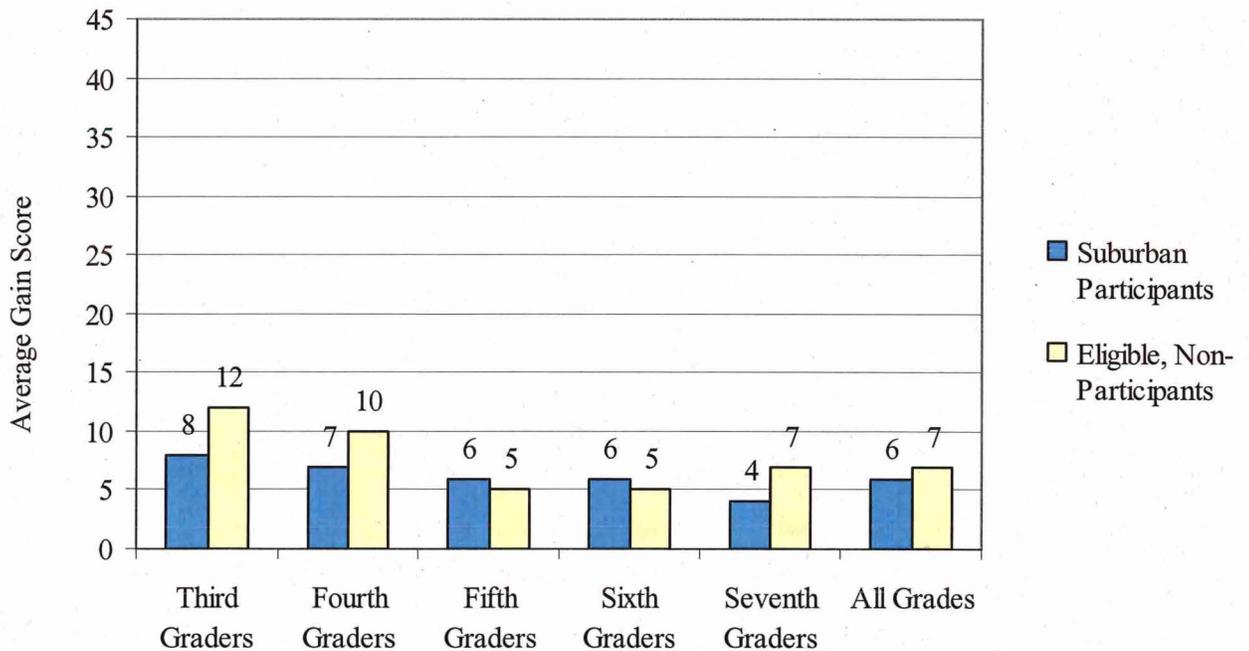


Source: NWEA Mathematics Scale Scores.

ANNUAL GROWTH IN READING — LOW-PERFORMING STUDENTS

- Overall, suburban choice students who initially scored at or below the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile demonstrated gains in reading that were *equal to* those of the comparable non-participants. Figure 11 below shows these differences expressed as average gain scores (see also Table 82 on page A82).
- Of the students who initially scored at or below the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile, suburban choice students showed significantly *lesser* annual gains in reading at grades 3, 4, and 7. Figure 11 below shows these differences expressed as average gain scores (see also Table 82 on page A82). The annual “gains” made by underperforming suburban choice students at these grade levels translated into reading scores that were 9 to 14 percentile points *lower* than those of comparable non-participants (see Table 84 on page A83).
- On average, returning suburban choice students who initially scored below the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile *did not* gain more in reading over the course of a year than their counterparts who were new to the program (see Table 84 on page A83).

**FIGURE 11: ANNUAL GROWTH IN READING FOR SUBURBAN CHOICE PARTICIPANTS AND ELIGIBLE, NON-PARTICIPANTS WHO INITIALLY SCORED AT OR BELOW THE 50<sup>TH</sup> PERCENTILE, 2006–2007 SCHOOL YEAR.**

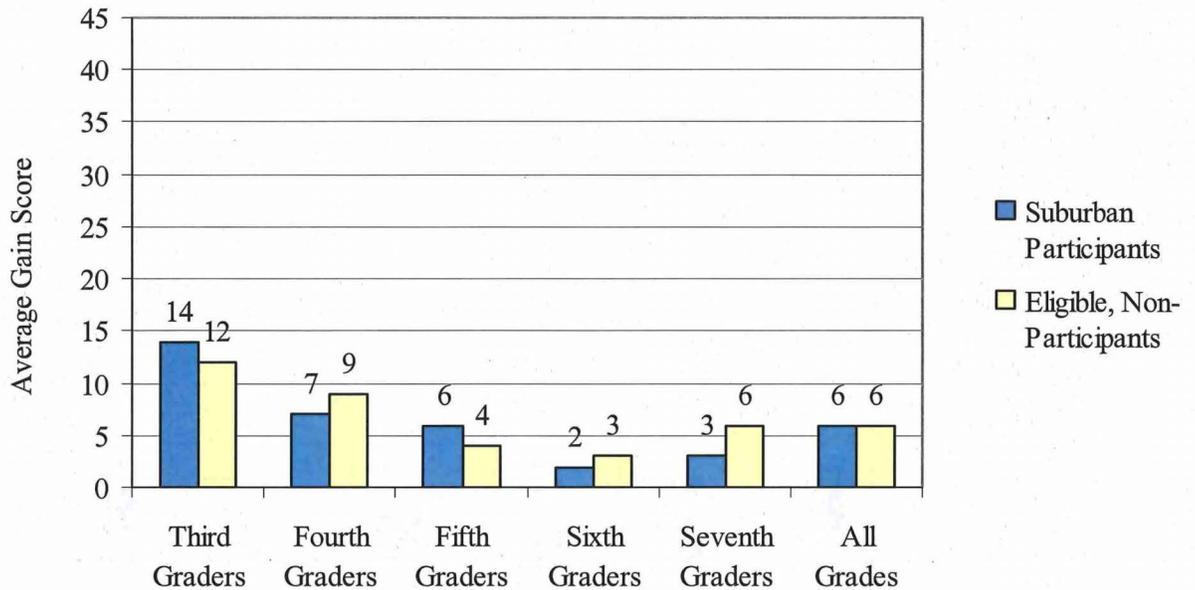


Source: NWEA Reading Scale Scores.

ANNUAL GROWTH IN MATHEMATICS — LOW-PERFORMING STUDENTS

- Overall, suburban choice students who initially scored at or below the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile demonstrated gains in mathematics that were *equal to* those of the comparable non-participants. Figure 12 below shows these differences expressed as average gain scores (see also Table 82 on page A82).
- Of the students who initially scored at or below the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile, suburban choice students showed significantly *lesser* annual gains in mathematics at grades 4 and 7. Figure 12 below shows these differences expressed as average gain scores (see also Table 82 on page A82). The annual “gains” made by underperforming suburban choice students at these grades translated into mathematics scores that were 10 and 12 percentile points *lower* than those of comparable non-participants (see Table 84 on page A83).
- On average, returning suburban choice students who initially scored below the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile *did not* gain more in mathematics over the course of a year than their counterparts who were new to the program (see Table 84 on page A83).

**FIGURE 12: ANNUAL GROWTH IN MATHEMATICS FOR SUBURBAN CHOICE PARTICIPANTS AND ELIGIBLE, NON-PARTICIPANTS WHO INITIALLY SCORED AT OR BELOW THE 50<sup>TH</sup> PERCENTILE, 2006–2007 SCHOOL YEAR.**



Source: NWEA Mathematics Scale Scores.

## IMPLICATIONS – ACADEMIC SUPPORT

1. *Overall, suburban transfer students performed as well as eligible, non-participants.* Students who transfer to suburban choice schools under *The Choice Is Yours* program performed as well as students who chose to not to participate in the program being only *slightly* outperformed in reading (9 percentile points). Low-performing suburban choice students performed as well as their counterparts. There was no difference in performance between students new to the suburban choice program and students who were returning.
2. *All parents believe their child is getting help needed to succeed; suburban choice students in upper grades do not agree.* Although parents in all groups — suburban choice, choice magnet, and eligible, non-participants — report that their child was receiving all the help needed to be successful in school, middle and high school suburban choice students were less likely to agree.
3. *Parents are involved in child's education.* Most parents believe they are making a significant contribution to their child's success in school and are doing so, primarily, by helping their child with homework, which most feel prepared to do. Parents of suburban choice and choice magnet students are more likely to believe that it is their responsibility to help make the school better.
4. *Academic support is still an important draw.* About half of the suburban choice parents might not keep their child in their current suburban school if academic support is not available for their child if needed.
5. *More language support still needed at suburban choice schools.* Parents continue to express a need for suburban schools to increase their capability to work with language-diverse populations.

