



Parent Perspectives

WHAT INDIANAPOLIS PARENTS AND RESIDENTS WANT FROM THEIR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

SEPTEMBER 2023

A JOINT REPORT FROM



The Mind Trust
Transformative education. Rooted in equity.





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About the Report

Parent Perspectives is a joint report from The Mind Trust, an Indianapolis-based education nonprofit, and EmpowerED Families, a local parent advocacy group. Both organizations are focused on creating better educational outcomes for Indianapolis students.

THIS REPORT HAS ONE MAIN GOAL: Amplify the voices of Indianapolis parents, especially those who make up the majority of public school families in Indianapolis Public School (IPS) boundaries: public charter and innovation network school families.

The research in this report comes from more than 2,000 survey responses and 1:1 interviews with adults living in Marion County and parents who have children in public charter, innovation, and district-run schools. Respondents shared demographic and school attendance information. Responses were anonymized so that parents could feel comfortable sharing their views, so no individual or school names are shared in this report.

Over the last two decades, Indianapolis has become a city of school choices. In the 2022–2023 school year, 58.3% of students attending public schools in IPS boundaries attended a public charter or innovation school. As the report shows, this is because the majority of families believe they should have the ability to choose the school that best fits their child’s needs.

The Mind Trust and EmpowerED Families believe those most impacted by the education system should influence future change. This report looks into what families want their schools to keep doing, as well as areas they’d like to see improve. We also share recommendations based parents’ views.

As our city, state, and country continue to recover from learning loss caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, parent views and experiences must be included as we find solutions that move us forward. We look forward to working with families to keep them at the center of decision-making.



+2,000

Research in this report comes from more than 2,000 1:1 INTERVIEWS and survey responses.

1



To learn more about this report, scan the QR code or visit [THEMINDTRUST.ORG/PARENTREPORT](https://themindtrust.org/parentreport).

A City of Public School Options

Indianapolis is a city of public school options. All of the school types listed below are free to attend, public, and must enroll any student who would like to attend, when space is available.

Independent charter schools: Schools that hold a charter with an authorizer and are operated by a nonprofit board of directors. They are held accountable for results by their authorizer and nonprofit board.

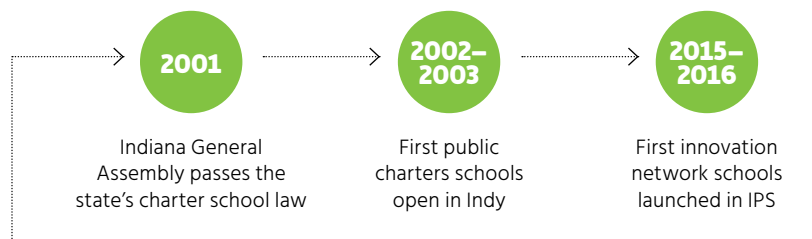
Innovation network schools: Schools that are part of a district, but have the autonomy to make decisions for their own school community, such as teacher pay, special programming, and school calendar. Some hold a charter and some do not, but all are public and held accountable for results.

Direct-run schools: Schools that are directly run by a district. Decisions about how these schools work are made at the district level.

● HOW ARE CHARTER AND INNOVATION SCHOOLS HELD ACCOUNTABLE?

- All public charter and innovation network schools in Indianapolis are managed by a nonprofit board of directors.
- All charter schools have an authorizer, which is a governing body that permits them to operate in the state. Most charter schools in Indianapolis are authorized by the Indianapolis Mayor's Office of Education Innovation.
- Innovation network schools are also held accountable by the district they partner with and often times their authorizer as well.

SCHOOL CHOICE TIMELINE



Independent charter schools, innovation network schools, and direct-run schools are:

FREE TO ATTEND

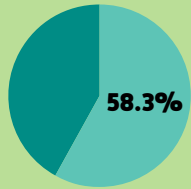


PUBLIC



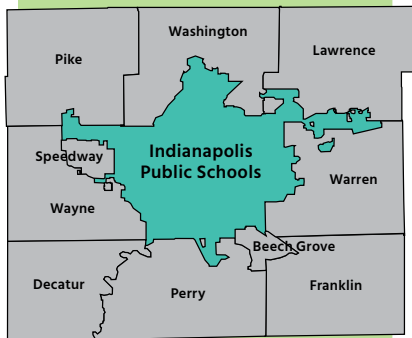
SPACE PERMITTING, MUST ENROLL ANY STUDENT





58.3% of students enrolled in a public school in IPS boundaries attend a PUBLIC CHARTER or INNOVATION NETWORK SCHOOL.

MARION COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICTS



View a map of all public schools in IPS boundaries at [THEMINDTRUST.ORG/PARENTREPORT](https://themindtrust.org/parentreport) or scan this QR code.

ENROLLMENT IN IPS BOUNDARIES: SHAPED BY PARENT ACTION

Indianapolis is a city of school choices. Since public charter schools first opened in Indianapolis in the fall of 2002, students and families have shown growing interest in learning about their options and finding a school community that best meets their needs.

What schools are families choosing in IPS boundaries?

- 58.3% of students enrolled in a public school in IPS boundaries attend a public charter or innovation network school.

What are enrollment trends over time?

Over five school years (2018–2019 to 2022–2023):

- Enrollment at IPS direct-run schools decreased by 15%.
- Enrollment at charter and innovation network schools grew by 14%.

Over ten years (2013–2014 to 2022–2023):

- Enrollment at IPS direct-run schools decreased by 38%.
- Enrollment at charter schools increased by 89%.

What students do charter and innovation network schools serve?

In the 2022–2023 school year:

- 85.8% of charter and innovation school students were students of color, and 75.7% qualified for free or reduced lunch.
- 26,000+ students attended a charter or innovation network school.

What's causing these changes in enrollment?

1. A growing number of high-quality, K–12 school options and awareness in the community that these options are available.
2. The creation of a unified enrollment system, Enroll Indy, that streamlined information and enrollment processes.
3. Parent and student interest in different school models and parents making school choices based on student needs and preferences.



CITYWIDE VIEWS ON EDUCATION AND SCHOOL OPTIONS

To understand how the views of charter and innovation school parents compare with the general population, we surveyed Indianapolis residents to learn more about broad, citywide views on education.

Indianapolis residents overwhelmingly believe a strong education system is essential for our city. In our survey of the general population:

- 9 in 10 Marion County respondents agree parents should have the choice to send their kids to schools that best fit their children's needs.

However, Indianapolis residents—and parents especially—believe there's work to be done to ensure every student can access a high-quality school.

- Less than half (47%) of Indianapolis residents who responded rate the city as very good or excellent in ensuring that every student has access to an excellent education.
- 35% of Indianapolis parents of school-aged children rate the city as very good or excellent in terms of ensuring that every student has access to an excellent education.

When facts about public charter schools and innovation network schools are explained in clear terms, the public indicates support.

- Once provided a definition for innovation network schools, more than three-fourths (78%) of Indianapolis residents say it is "very or extremely" important for parents to have access to these schools.

Indianapolis residents surveyed also feel it is important to allow schools to make decisions based on the needs of their school community.

- 83% of respondents agree teachers and school leaders should have the ability to make key decisions about conditions such as length of the school day, curriculum, staff, student support, and more, without strong input from a school district.
- 75% of the population who live in Marion County believe government leaders should enact policies that help parents make the best decisions for their child's education.



90%

or 9 out of 10 Marion County residents agree parents should have the choice to send their kids to schools that BEST FIT THEIR CHILDREN'S NEEDS.

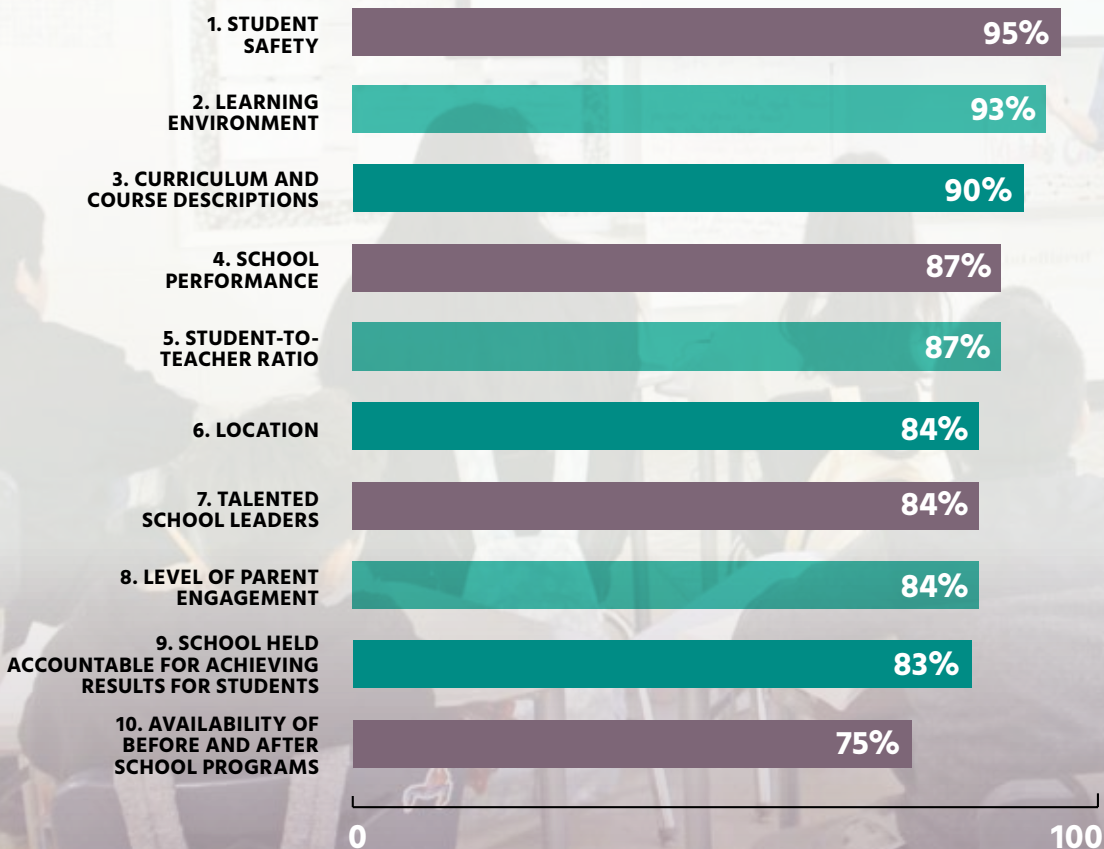
75%

of Marion County residents believe GOVERNMENT LEADERS SHOULD ENACT POLICIES that help parents make the best decisions for their child's education.

CITYWIDE VIEWS

TOP 10 SCHOOL CHOICE FACTORS FOR MARION COUNTY PARENTS

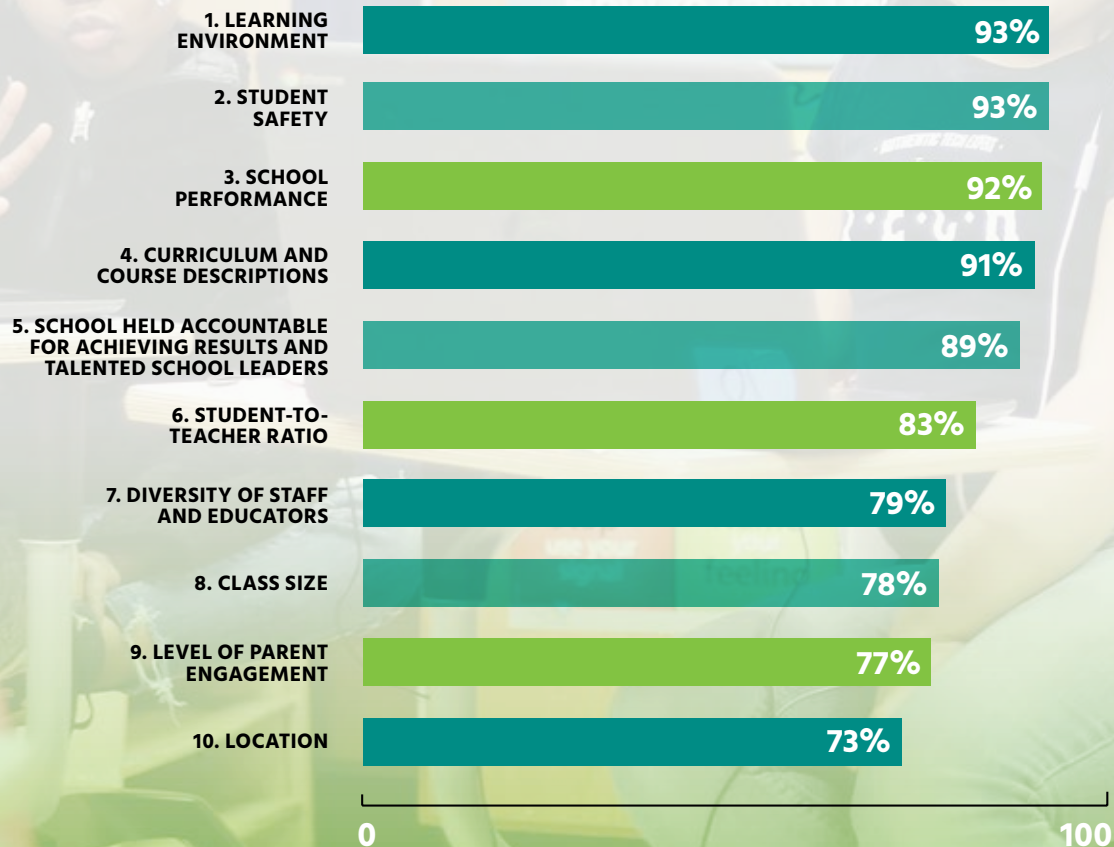
IMPORTANT FACTORS MARION COUNTY PARENTS RANKED AS EXTREMELY OR VERY IMPORTANT IN CHOOSING THEIR CHILD'S SCHOOL WERE:



CHARTER & INNOVATION PARENT VIEWS

TOP 10 SCHOOL CHOICE FACTORS

WHEN ASKED WHAT FACTORS WERE EXTREMELY OR VERY IMPORTANT IN THEIR SCHOOL CHOICE, THE TOP AREAS FOR CHARTER AND INNOVATION SCHOOL FAMILIES WERE:





On the 2022 ILEARN exam, independent charter school students made **LARGER PROFICIENCY GAINS** than the state overall and for Black, Latino, low-income, special education, and English Language Learner student groups.

7.5x

Innovation charter school 2022 SAT college readiness rates were **7.5X HIGHER** than IPS direct-run high schools and almost double the township average.

PUBLIC CHARTER AND INNOVATION SCHOOL PARENT VIEWS ON THEIR SCHOOL CHOICE

With the majority of public school students attending a public charter or innovation school, it is important to understand their unique views on education so we can create a system that reflects the current needs of our community.

Our survey of public charter and innovation school parents shows that the majority are pleased with their school choice.

- 68% of respondents rated their schools as very good or excellent at having high expectations for their students.
- 57% rated them very good or excellent for ensuring students learn what they need for future success.

About one-third of parents surveyed previously sent their student to an IPS direct-run school.

- “Learning Environment” was the top reason these parents chose to look for a different school option.

The majority of public charter and innovation school parents feel that their student has a good learning environment and are supported.

- 70% rated their schools as very good or excellent in terms of making their students feel welcomed and valued.
- More than half (58%) of autonomous school parents surveyed rated their school as very good or excellent at supporting families with needs outside of education.

Most charter and innovation network school parents (67%) would recommend their school to another family.

WHAT CHARTER AND INNOVATION PARENTS LOVE ABOUT THEIR SCHOOLS

A safe and welcoming community, high expectations, and academics are common themes for parents who choose charter and innovation network schools.

When surveyed about the strengths of their school, charter and innovation network school parents rated several factors highly:

1. The school has a diverse student population. (85%)
2. The school has high expectations for my student(s). (82%)
3. The school provides a safe environment. (81%)
4. The school has the appropriate curriculum for my student. (80%)
5. The school makes me and my student(s) feel welcomed and valued. (79%)

● SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Charter and innovation network families believe their school's teachers and staff demonstrate love and genuine care toward them and their students. Relationships are at the center of what autonomous schools do. Many parents interviewed elevated a few key ways their schools do this:

- Teachers and staff build strong relationships that feel more like family than a transactional school relationship.
- There is open and frequent communication from school to families. Many parents applauded how well their schools keep them informed.
- Parents like that charter and innovation schools center student voice.
- More than half (58%) of families surveyed rated their school as very good or excellent at supporting their needs outside of school.

More than a school: One mom shared, "They had a pantry for kids who go home and don't have enough food. They have hair supplies for the young ladies who don't have the money to get their hair braided. That was the selling piece—they were trying to meet the child's needs on every level."

85%

When surveyed, 85% of charter and innovation network parents rated a **DIVERSE STUDENT POPULATION** as one of their child's school's strengths.



Parents appreciate a school that challenges their student(s): **82% RATED HIGH EXPECTATIONS** as one of their chosen school's strengths.



70%

In a survey of 100 parents of autonomous school students conducted in spring 2023, 70% rated their school as **VERY GOOD OR EXCELLENT** in terms of making their students feel welcomed and valued.



Scan this QR code to learn more about charter and innovation school performance or visit [THEMINDTRUST.ORG/PARENTREPORT](https://themindtrust.org/parentreport).

PERSONALIZED ATTENTION AND HIGH EXPECTATIONS CREATE BETTER ACADEMIC OUTCOMES

Charter and innovation network schools have smaller class sizes that allow for students to receive personal support from teachers. In 1:1 interviews and our survey with charter and innovation families, they shared a few key ways they are seeing this benefit their students:

- Teachers are able to identify when students need additional support faster than they would if they had a larger class.
- Students can get tailored instruction if they need coursework that is above their current grade level.
- 68% of respondents rated their schools as very good or excellent at having high expectations for their students.

State assessments, like the ILEARN and SAT, as well as independent national research from the Center for Research on Education Outcomes at Stanford University, show public charter and innovation network school students outpacing their peers in district-run schools. Scan the QR code to learn more about charter and innovation school academic performance or visit themindtrust.org/parentreport.

Meeting individual needs: One parent noticed her son was struggling with reading in second grade. His teacher shared her hypothesis: He was bored. To address this, the teacher assigned him work that was more challenging, including tougher reading assignments and a book report. His mom saw a transformation in him. "He's loving it," she said. "I really appreciate she has taken the time to sit down with him individually."

CONTINUED ON PG 10

When asked why she chose to transfer her 13-year-old son from an IPS direct-run school to a public charter school, one mom shared it was strong communication between the school staff and families and the strong academic tenets of the school that appealed to her. "It was the curriculum, the homework, the smaller classes, and the expectations they held for our children."



WHAT CHARTER AND INNOVATION PARENTS LOVE ABOUT THEIR SCHOOLS

CONTINUED FROM PG 9

● DIVERSE TEACHERS AND STAFF

In the 2022–2023 school year, 86% of public charter and innovation network school students identified as students of color. More than 22,500 students of color attended a charter or innovation network school, with that number growing year after year.

In 1:1 interviews and a survey, charter and innovation school parents indicate having diverse teachers is an important piece of their school choice. 79% of charter and innovation network families surveyed rated staff diversity as very or extremely important.

Charter and innovation network schools tend to have more diverse staff than other types of schools, with higher percentages of Black, Latino, and multiracial teachers. In 2022, the percentages of teachers of color were: 29% at public charters, 28% at innovation schools, and 18% at school corporations.

Shared backgrounds create trust: One mom reflected on her son’s transfer from a township high school to a charter high school that weaves cultural competency into its school model. She shared, “Our current school is the ideal situation for a Black male, and I say that because they understand the needs of our particular demographic,” she said. “I think it’s important for students to see Black male teachers. I think it’s important for teachers to be able to understand the students. They all speak the same language.”

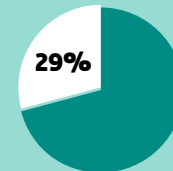
● INNOVATIVE CURRICULUM AND 21ST CENTURY APPROACH

Parents of charter and innovation school students care deeply about a school’s academic offerings. They want schools that prepare their students for the rest of their lives. Now that students and families have options to choose from, they are paying close attention to the unique school models available to them.

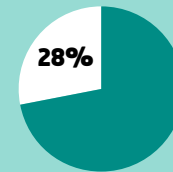
- 93% of charter and innovation families surveyed ranked learning environment as an important factor in school choice.
- 90% of charter and innovation school families ranked curriculum and course descriptions as important to their school choice.

PERCENTAGES OF TEACHERS OF COLOR PER SCHOOL TYPE IN 2022:

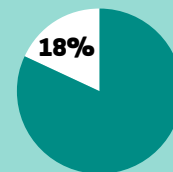
PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS



INNOVATION SCHOOLS

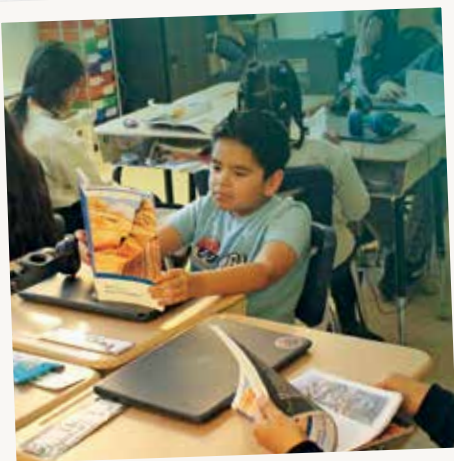


SCHOOL CORPORATIONS





Visit [INDYSCHOOLS.ORG](https://www.indyschools.org) or scan this QR code to learn more about school options in Indianapolis.



Want to get involved in Indianapolis education? Connect with EmpowerED Families at [EMPOWEREDFAMILIESINDY.ORG](https://www.empoweredfamiliesindy.org), or scan this QR code.

Innovative schools across the city: Indianapolis high school students in particular have a wide range of high-quality, innovative school models to choose from. Almost 20 public charter high schools are serving students with unique offerings like early college, STEM-related course options, tech-focused internships, healthcare certifications, and more.

● A SAFE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

All Indianapolis parents surveyed, including charter and innovation network school parents, ranked safety as a top concern when choosing a school. In 1:1 interviews, parents shared what their child's safety at school means to them:

- Parents feel safer when their student is in a smaller environment, which charter and innovation network schools can provide.
- Parents perceive larger district schools to be less secure, with bigger class sizes giving students the ability to be more anonymous.
- Families want safety concerns to be addressed as soon as possible and believe smaller schools can do this better.
- Indianapolis parents know that safety is a growing concern nationwide and want schools to communicate proactively about their plans to keep their children safe.
- Safe facilities and procedures are key for parents. Locked doors, cameras, buzzers, ID checks, and other building updates are noticed and appreciated.

Keeping parents informed: In a 1:1 interview, one parent shared that she appreciates her school's regular communication to keep parents updated. "I love how serious they are about safety. If a bus is late or something else happens, they waste no time getting to the bottom of it and communicate to parents."

Families: Looking for ways to deepen your involvement in Indianapolis education? Connect with EmpowerED Families to learn more about advocating for equitable public education, upcoming parent trainings, and more! Visit [empoweredfamiliesindy.org](https://www.empoweredfamiliesindy.org) or scan the QR code at left to get connected.



WHAT CHARTER AND INNOVATION PARENTS WOULD IMPROVE AT THEIR SCHOOLS

While most charter and innovation network families would recommend their school to other families, there are a few ways they would like to see their schools improve. These insights are valuable to organizations and leaders who support our city's schools.

● ENSURE SCHOOLS FOCUS ON TEACHER RETENTION

Retaining teachers is a challenge for schools of all types across the country, especially since the pandemic. Charter and innovation network families want their schools to continue focusing on this issue because they know how important great teachers are for their children.

An analysis by Chalkbeat published in March 2023 shows that the in eight states examined over the 2022–2023 school year, turnover was as high as it has been in five years. Additionally, across those states, turnover was about two percentage points higher than before the pandemic.

While there is room for improvement, innovation network schools outperformed local school districts in teacher retention rates. According to the Community Data Snapshot published by the Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation, in 2022:

- Innovation network schools had a teacher retention rate of 82% compared with the 71% average retention rate for school corporations in Marion County.
- IPS' overall teacher retention rate was 74%.

Families want more resources for their schools: When asked in the autonomous parent survey about their suggestions to ensure every child has access to an excellent education, many raised this idea.

One parent wrote: "They need more resources and the [money] to hire more qualified adults such as counselors, teachers' aids, reading specialists, etc."



82%

IPS innovation network schools had a TEACHER RETENTION RATE of 82% in 2022, while IPS's overall retention rate was 74% and Marion County's was 71%.





Many parents hope their charter or innovation network school can INCREASE THE NUMBER OF EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AND ELECTIVE CLASSES they offer.

● GROW ACCESS TO TRANSPORTATION

While many charter and innovation school families are willing to drive to their chosen school, this isn't an easy option for every family. To make sure they can access their school, families want more student transportation support.

- Multiple parents mentioned a lack of transportation as one of the only drawbacks of their chosen school.
- Families who have multiple children who attend different schools mention the importance of transportation access.
- Parents know that their student needs to get to school on time, so for some families, access to school-provided transportation is a deciding factor in their choice to enroll in or stay at a school.
- Unfortunately, a few parents shared that they had to leave a school of their choice due to moving farther away.

● ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES AND SPECIALIZED CLASSES

When asked about the things they would like to see change about their schools, many parents hope their charter or innovation network school can increase the number of extracurricular activities and elective classes they offer.

- While families are looking for smaller schools to get a personal touch, these schools might have fewer opportunities for extracurricular activities.
- Some families noted that schools are still building back more course options and activities after the pandemic. They want this to be a priority for their school's leadership.
- Parents recognize that their school's facility might not be able to accommodate all options, especially for athletics.
- This concern also overlaps with transportation. If activities are offered after school, they may need transportation services to participate.

USING THE PARENT PERSPECTIVES REPORT

How charter and innovation network school parent views should shape our public education system.

School leaders, lawmakers, community leaders, and other stakeholders should take the views of charter and innovation network school parents seriously as they represent the majority of public school families in IPS boundaries.

Continue to expand property-tax sharing with charter schools.

Closing the funding gap between public charter and district schools will help fund solutions to areas parents want to see improve, like transportation and additional extracurricular activities. In 2023, our state took a big step in the right direction to decrease this gap by:

- Sharing future operating referendum proceeds proportionately with charter schools in four counties, including Marion County.
- Sharing future increases in local property taxes proportionally with charter schools.
- Giving charter schools access to state funding sources that support facility costs.

Our state should build upon this success by continuing to push for access to tax dollars that support a growing number of public school students, not only in Indianapolis but across the state. Indianapolis charter and innovation school families are paying taxes that don't end up making it to the schools their children attend.

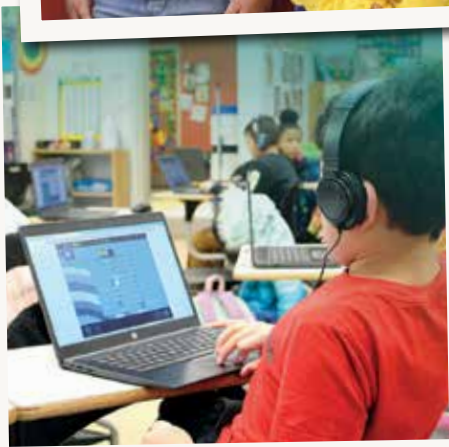
Embrace partnerships with innovation network schools.

Since innovation network schools first opened in IPS in the 2015–16 school year, they've become well-established choices for families in Indianapolis. With 31 schools serving more than 12,400 students in the 2022–2023 school year, these options have been a win-win for the district and for families and students. For IPS, innovation network schools have enabled the district to grow enrollment and offset the declines seen in other urban school systems. Innovation network schools have also helped increase the district's academic achievement results, particularly through high-performing high schools.

-\$7,863

A 2023 study from the University of Arkansas found that **INDIANAPOLIS CHARTER SCHOOLS RECEIVE \$7,863 LESS** in total annual funding than the city's district-run schools.





To learn more about
this report, scan
this QR code or visit
[THEMINDTRUST.ORG/
PARENTREPORT.](https://themindtrust.org/parentreport)

Families and students are finding schools that fit their needs, drive strong academic outcomes, and are held accountable for results. Because of this, the district should continue to support and build upon its innovation network school strategy, as they are a vital part of Indianapolis' education system.

Create solutions to transportation challenges.

Providing efficient transportation is a challenge schools of all types are facing. While choices have increased, the way children get to school has largely not changed. This lack of innovation has created challenges that affect students across the state, like driver shortages, long travel times, and high costs for smaller schools.

Indianapolis is a hub of education collaboration, as shown by innovation network schools. Public schools of all types should be open to solutions that could create shared routes, management services, drivers, and vehicles.

Focus on collaboration over competition.

Major shifts in public school enrollment have happened over the last ten years. Indianapolis parent and student choices have driven these changes and have shown our community what is possible when family needs are put at the center of education decisions. While our city has made strides to grow access to more high-quality schools, there is still work to do to ensure all schools are serving students well.

Specifically in Marion County, families want charter schools and IPS to work collaboratively with each other, rather than looking out for their own interests separately. Our city is a national model for improving academic achievement, collaboration, and innovation. Families want schools and districts to continue to lean into those values to ensure progress isn't lost.



PARENT
PERSPECTIVES
IS A JOINT
REPORT
FROM



The Mind Trust
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