

Christensen Institute & EdChoice | School Moves Survey

School Switching in America: Key Findings

Based on a Morning Consult survey of 2,110 parents | October 2025 | Weighted national data

This briefing presents three key findings from a nationally-representative survey of US parents conducted by Morning Consult in October 2025.

1

Pent-Up Demand: Why Parents Want to Switch But Don't*Aspiration is widespread, but aspiration alone rarely crosses the action threshold.*

Of the parents we surveyed, roughly a third (33.6%) reported having switched their child's school and over a quarter (26.2%) are actively considering switching their child's school but haven't acted. What separates those who switch from those who merely consider it? The answer lies in the nature of the problem they face.

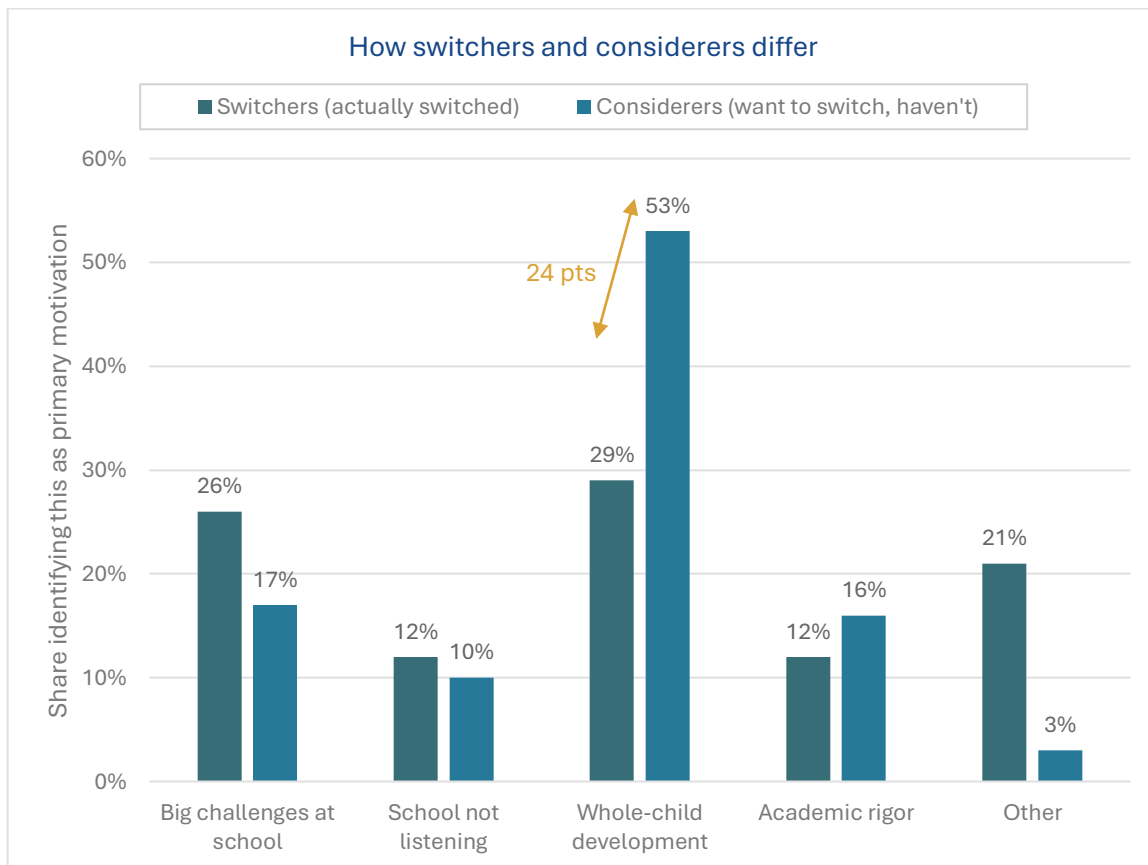


Figure 1. Primary motivation self-identified by switchers vs. considerers.

Switchers and considerers were asked to select from a list of statements a single statement that best describes their primary motivation. Among parents who switched, motivations are mixed. Roughly a quarter (29%) describe their primary driver as whole-child development, another quarter (26%) as big challenges at school, with academic rigor and feeling unheard by the school each accounting for 12%. Yet among considerers the picture is dramatically different: over half (53.2%) indicated they are seeking better whole-child development for their child.

Switchers	Considerers
28.6% Whole-child development	53.2% Whole-child development
26.3% Crisis relief	17.4% Crisis relief
12.4% Academic rigor	16.2% Academic rigor
12.1% School not listening	10.3% School not listening
20.6% Other	2.9% Other

This pattern has a clear interpretation through the lens of behavioral decision-making: switching requires overcoming the inertia of the status quo and dealing with challenges such as social disruption, logistical barriers, uncertainty about the new school. Aspirational parents may envision something better that they want for their child but find that real barriers stand in the way of making a change. Meanwhile, for many of those who actually make a switch, the acuity of real struggles seems to drive them past the barriers. When a problem becomes severe enough (a child dreading school, being bullied, falling behind; or a parent feeling frustrated that their concerns aren't being heard), families move even when it is hard.

The large considerer population does not represent satisfied parents. It represents parents with unmet aspirations whose situation has not yet become acute enough—or whose barriers are too high—to cross the action threshold. Non-switching is not the same as satisfaction.

2

The Affordability Wall

Low-income parents face a fundamentally different barrier landscape.

Among parents actively *considering* a school switch, barriers vary significantly by income.

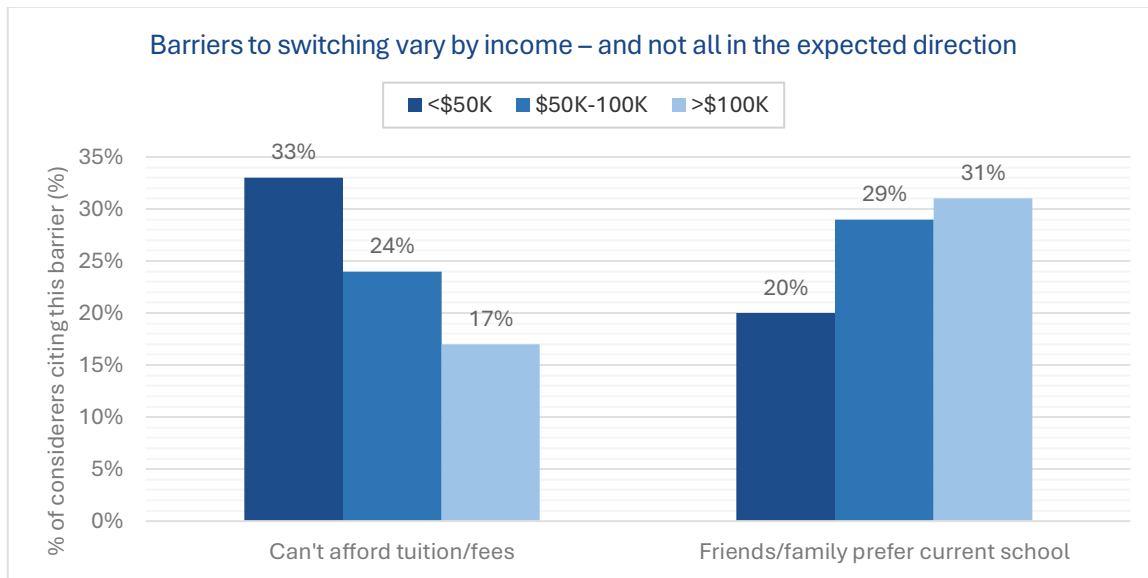
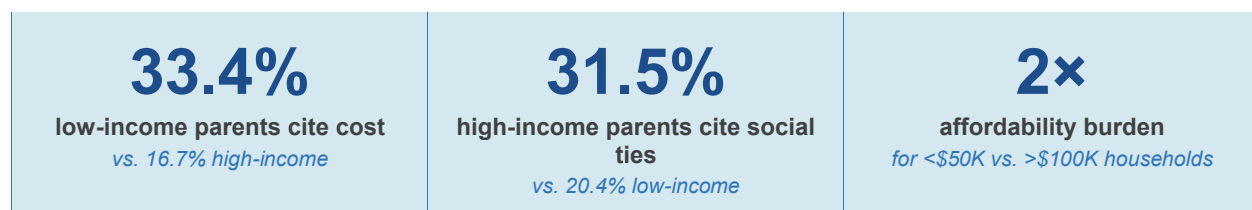


Figure 2. Barriers to switching by household income among considerers (weighted). Note: Barrier questions were asked only of considerers. The survey doesn't include a retrospective barrier question for parents who have already switched, so direct comparison of barrier rates across groups isn't available.

The affordability gap is stark: 33.4% of low-income considerers (household income below \$50,000) cite the cost of tuition and fees as a barrier, compared to 16.7% of high-income considerers—a gap of nearly 17 percentage points. Cost is a structural constraint that disproportionately suppresses switching among lower-income families.

A finding on social ties runs in the opposite direction and is equally noteworthy: high-income parents are more likely to say that friends and family preferring the current school is a barrier to switching (31.5% vs. 20.4%). This insight suggests that for higher-income families, the obstacle is often not financial, but rather, social embeddedness. Their children are more socially invested in their current schools, and their networks may actively discourage switching.



Takeaway: Two very different challenges hinder school switching. For low-income families, it's the financial cost. For high-income families, it's the social cost of leaving.

3 The District School Paradox

Most school movement stays within public education, and district schools are both the source and the destination.

The conventional school choice narrative imagines a one-way exodus: families leaving district schools for private, charter, or homeschool alternatives. The actual flow is far more circular—and the district public school plays a more complex role than the narrative allows.

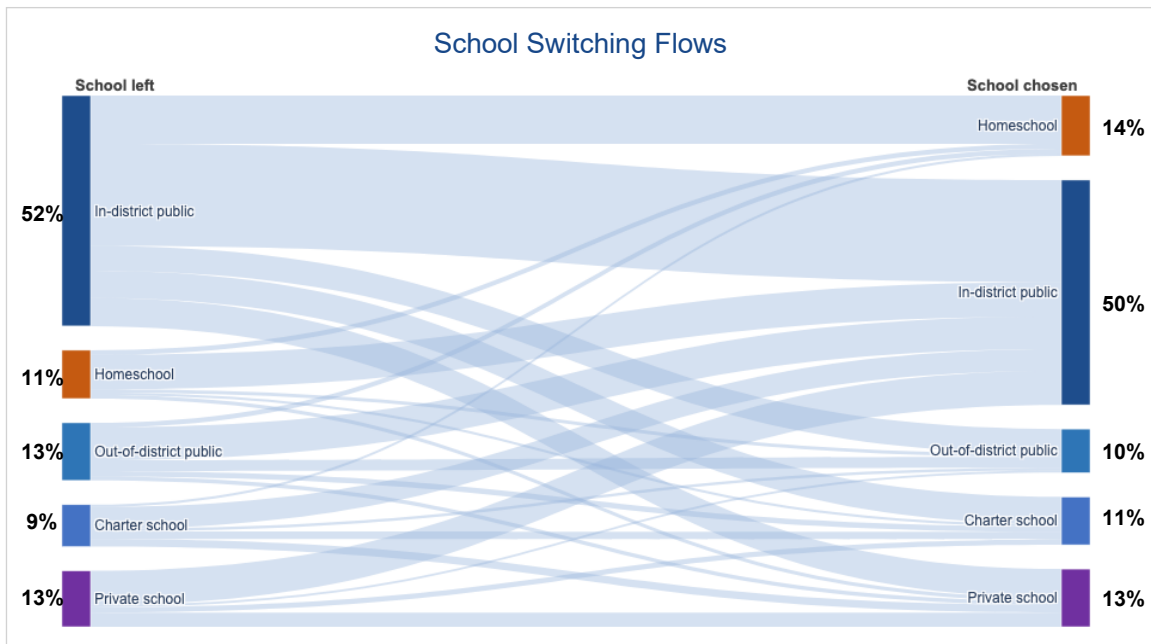


Figure 3. School movement flows among switchers (weighted, % of all switchers). Line thickness proportional to flow size.

Among survey respondents, the largest single flow in the data shows families moving between schools in their district (22.9%). Meanwhile, a large portion of school switchers leave local district schools to choose non-district options (23.2%). Notably, 10.8% of all switchers moved from in-district schools to homeschool—the second-largest single flow.

At the same time, a large flow *into* district schools comes from non-district schools: homeschool (7.7%), private school (7.6%), out-of-district public (7.3%), and charter schools (4.9%). Combined, 20.2% of all switchers made the journey from a non-district school (private, charter, or homeschool) to an in-district school. Put differently, of the families who started in a non-district option, 60.9% switched to a district school. Meanwhile, approximately 45.1% of all switchers who chose an in-district school came from another in-district school (intra-district movement).

<p>44.2%</p> <p>of switchers from in-district schools switched to non-district schools</p>	<p>60.9%</p> <p>of switchers from non-district schools switched to schools in their district</p>	<p>45.1%</p> <p>of switchers into in-district schools came from another in-district school (intra-district movement)</p>
---	---	---

This raises an important question: why do families return to district schools? And how does that compare to why they left? The data paint a clear contrast.

District schools: What drives parents out vs. what draws them back

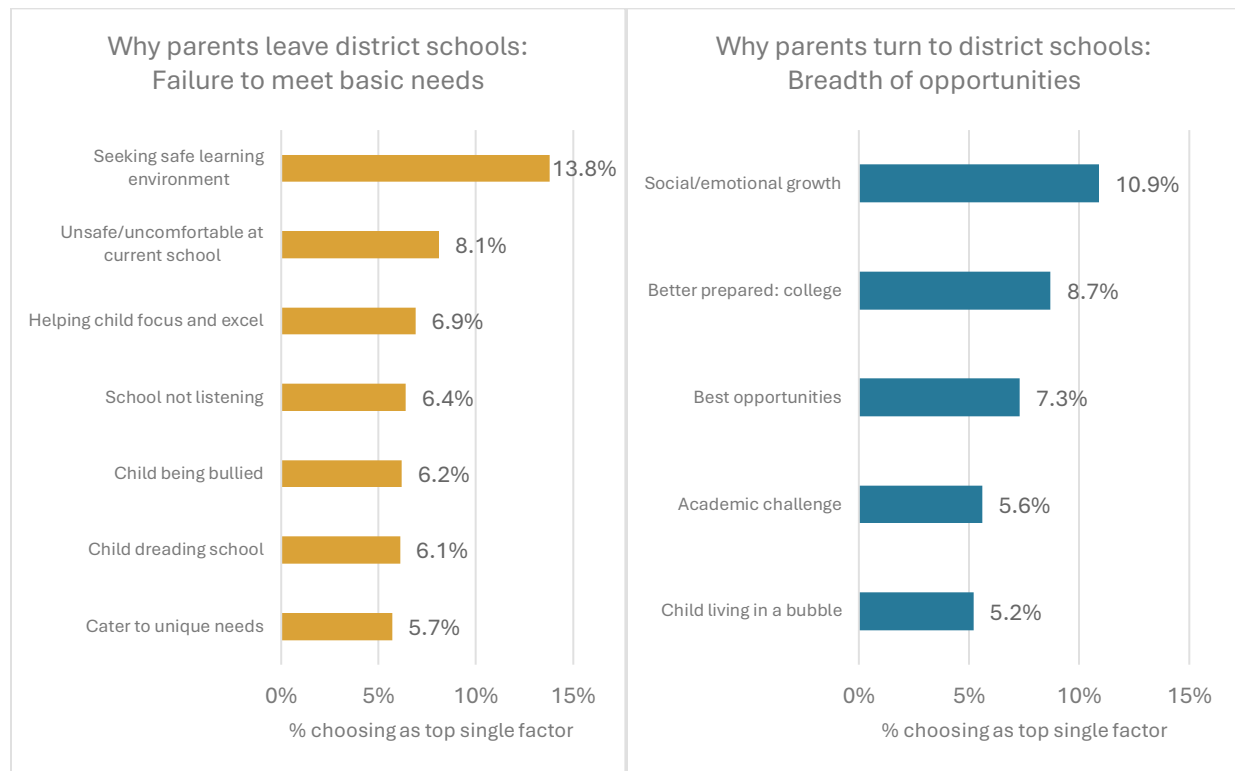


Figure 4. Top single factors for families leaving district schools for non-district options vs. switching to district schools from non-district options. (Note on precision: Because the percentages in Figure 4 represent small subgroups, individual percentages should be read as illustrative rather than precise. What is robust is the directional pattern: the factors that dominate the left panel are categorically different from those on the right.)

Parents who leave district schools for private, charter, or homeschool options are almost always responding to a safety or environment failure: their child feels unsafe or is being bullied, dreads going to school, or the parent feels the school has stopped listening or stopped meeting their child's individual needs. Above all else, these parents are seeking an environment where their child can simply feel safe. In contrast, parents who return to district schools from non-district options are motivated by something different entirely—not what they're escaping, but what they're gaining: social and emotional development, preparation for college, access to the fullest range of opportunities, and a growing sense that their child has been missing out on a broader world.

Takeaway: District schools lose students when they fail at the basics—keeping children safe, responding to parents, and meeting individual needs. They attract students when parents come to believe that non-district alternatives, for all their appeal, can't match what district schools offer in scope: social integration and preparation for life beyond school. In short, their weakness is in the basics; their appeal is their breadth.

Methodology

Survey conducted by [Morning Consult](#) on behalf of [EdChoice](#), October 2025. The parents surveyed had no affiliation with EdChoice. All figures use Morning Consult's US Custom 2025 survey weights. Total sample: n = 2,110 US parents with school-age children. Switchers (n≈710 weighted): Parents who switched their child's school in the past year. Considerers (n≈553 weighted): Parents who are actively considering switching but haven't yet switched.

This survey builds on two streams of prior qualitative research. The first, conducted in partnership with the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), explored why families choose independent schools, using in-depth interview methods to surface the language parents use when describing school decisions. The second examined the Jobs to Be Done of families choosing to switch to microschoools, again using interviews to understand what pushed parents away from traditional schools and what drew them toward new options. The push and pull factors that appear in this survey reflect the language that emerged from those interviews, grounded in how parents actually talk about school choices, not researcher-generated hypotheses. This gives the survey items validity that distinguishes them from prior work in this space.

Additionally, a survey instrument developed using the research in Job Moves (Horn, Bernstein, and Moesta, 2023) provided a methodological precedent: it demonstrated how JTBD interview language could be translated into a scalable survey instrument. We adapted that approach here, applying it to the school-switching context with items drawn from interviews with parents of K–12 students who recently switched their children's schools.