

Unifying Enrollment in Camden: How Families Experienced the New Enrollment System

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| ABOUT THIS REPORT

Acknowledgments

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About the Center on Reinventing Public Education

Through research and policy analysis, CRPE seeks ways to make public education more effective, especially for America's disadvantaged students. We help redesign governance, oversight, and dynamic education delivery systems to make it possible for great educators to do their best work with students and to create a wide range of high-quality public school options for families. Our work emphasizes evidence over posture and confronts hard truths. We search outside the traditional boundaries of public education to find pragmatic, equitable, and promising approaches to address the complex challenges facing public education. Our goal is to create new possibilities for the parents, educators, and public officials who strive to improve America's schools. CRPE is a nonpartisan, self-sustaining organization affiliated with the University of Washington Bothell. Our work is funded through philanthropy, federal grants, and contracts.

CRPE Quality Assurance Process

Independent peer review is an integral part of all CRPE research projects. Prior to publication, this document was subjected to a quality assurance process to ensure that: the problem is well formulated; the research approach is well designed and well executed; the data and assumptions are sound; the findings are useful and advance knowledge; the implications and recommendations follow logically from the findings and are explained thoroughly; the documentation is accurate, understandable, cogent, and balanced in tone; the research demonstrates understanding of related previous studies; and the research is relevant, objective, and independent. Peer review was conducted by research or policy professionals who were not members of the project team.

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INTRODUCTION: SUPPORTING PARENTS TO LEARN ABOUT AND APPLY TO ALL CAMDEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Camden’s public schools are undergoing a major transformation. With a leadership change at Camden City School District (CCSD) in 2013, leaders embarked on a 100-day initiative to hear from Camden families about the goals they have for their children, their frustrations with the city’s public schools, and what they most want in local public schools. From this feedback, district leaders created the “Camden Commitment” in 2014—a comprehensive effort to improve the quality of schools citywide. As part of that plan, leaders outlined a commitment to make enrollment simpler and fairer throughout the city, focusing on improved services to families and equity across all school types.

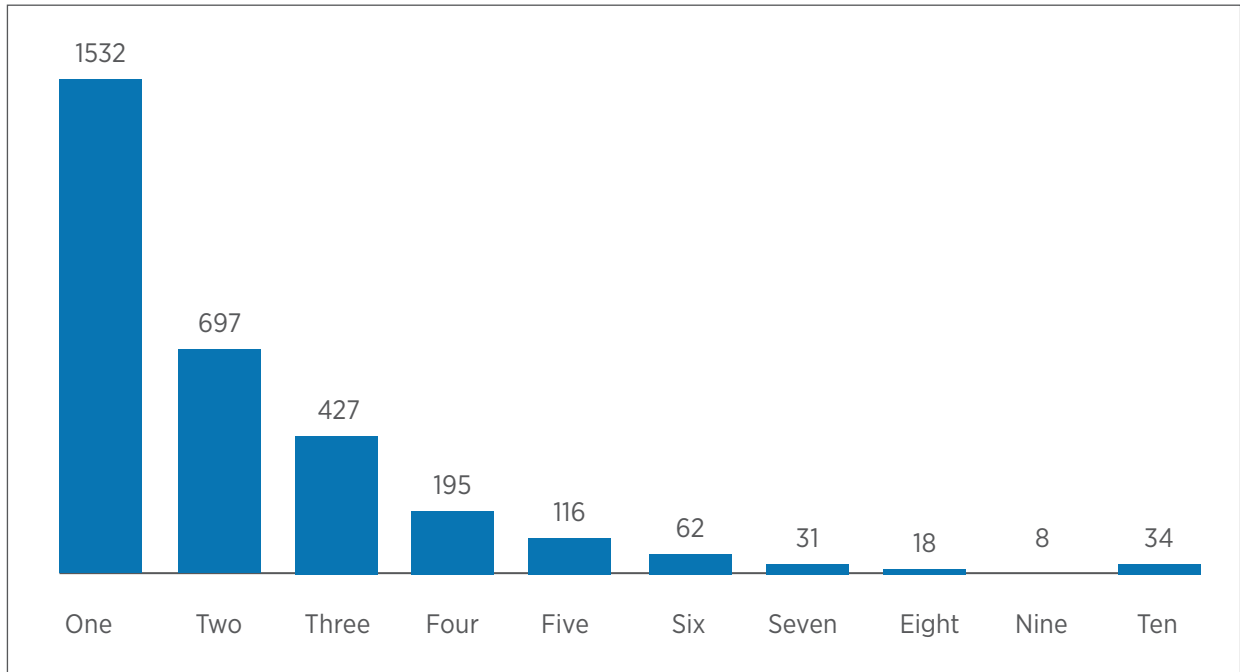
Coming out of the “Camden Commitment,” in the spring of 2015 the district and charter partners from across the city invested in a new enrollment system designed to provide families with a fair, informed, and coordinated choice system. This new system is known as Camden Enrollment.

To better understand families’ experiences choosing and enrolling in schools using the new system, Camden Enrollment requested an external study by the University of Washington Bothell’s Center on Reinventing Public Education. The purpose of the study is to inform how Camden Enrollment can adapt and improve its system based on families’ experiences during the first year of implementation. This report considers four questions, drawing from focus group conversations with 34 parents and survey responses from over 500 parents in June 2016.

Q 1. What were families’ experiences like in the first year of Camden Enrollment?

Families reported that the new enrollment system reduced paperwork and effort by being able to apply online. There were some minor login and account issues, but they were fairly easily resolved and families were not bothered by them. Some families, however, were unaware of the new system and its offerings. And though families could list up to ten options, as shown in Figure 1, enrollment data from Camden Enrollment revealed that most listed only one or two.¹ In focus groups, families said there weren’t enough good options to list more. On the whole, however, families reported that they trust the new system to be fair.

1. This low number is not necessarily concerning. All students in Camden have a default neighborhood school; as such parents were encouraged to only list those schools that they prefer to their neighborhood school. In cities with no default school, the best strategy for parents is to, again, list schools in their order of preference, but in this case, parents should list all the schools for which they have any degree of preference. Parents should theoretically feel indifferent between all unlisted schools. In these cities, listing a low number of choices is more concerning but not uncommon.

FIGURE 1. Most Families Listed Only One or Two School Choices on Their Enrollment Application

Number of 2016-17 applicants as of July 2016 who listed one to ten options on Camden Enrollment applications. The main application round closed in March; however, families could continue to submit applications for any remaining openings through the summer. Most schools in the city continued to have openings after the main round closed (some schools filled completely, others filled certain grades, and others were full at the end of the round but then lost some students in the registration process).

Q 2. What are families seeking in a school for their child?

We find that families want strong academics in their schools, but they also care about classroom and school safety, school location, positive relationships with their child's teachers, and enrichment opportunities.

Q 3. What information and support do families use to select a school for their child?

To find their schools, families used a combination of sources, including the Camden Enrollment web page, experiences of family and friends, and school visits. Those who used Camden Enrollment's web page to compare school quality ratings and school details found it to be particularly helpful. Many people would like even more information about curriculum, safety, and school offerings.

Q 4. How well do families think Camden’s schools are meeting their expectations?

Sixty percent of families believe it’s getting easier to find a good school in Camden, and 51 percent believe the schools are getting better. Though 71 percent of all families who participated in Camden Enrollment were matched with their first- or second-choice school, families felt that there weren’t a lot of strong options, and that they had to make tradeoffs between academic rigor and “whole child” needs (enrichment courses, sports and clubs, unstructured time, social supports).

2016–2017 Camden City Schools

- -18,000 students (including early childhood)
- 19 traditional district schools (including 3 selective-admissions schools)
- 9 charter schools (run by 6 operators)
- 9 Renaissance schools (run by 3 operators)
- 38 public and private pre-K sites
- 2 county vocational programs

CHOOSING SCHOOLS IN CAMDEN

To accompany the city’s evolving array of schools, the district and its charter partners are now focusing on ensuring equal access to schools through a neutral, unified enrollment system and an expanded set of informational tools to help parents make choices.

As the number of options has expanded, the logistics of many different deadlines and 17 different applications was demanding; consistent information on schools was spotty, making it hard to compare schools, and families expressed a sense of unfairness about who got accepted into high-demand schools.

Additionally, district administrators noted that schools also struggled with enrollment under the former system and faced challenges in attracting families to enroll. They dealt with a revolving roster of students throughout the summer and early fall as students applied and secured seats at multiple schools across the city, making planning difficult for schools. Managing separate enrollment systems across each school duplicated efforts and increased costs.

The district presented unified enrollment to schools as a way to mitigate the equity and operational challenges inherent in the old system. The new unified system, which is similar to those already launched in Denver, Washington, D.C., and New Orleans, would have one application with one deadline for all schools in the city, regardless of school operator—a system they hoped would be simpler and more consistent.

Beginning in the spring of 2015, district staff and partners from schools across the city started the planning and design of what this system would look like, learning lessons and getting technical advice from those leading this work in other cities. They sought feedback from families on the design through six community meetings attended by roughly one hundred families, community members, and educators in the late summer and early fall of 2015.

Following the conclusion of these community meetings, the district and charter partners launched a new process to enroll students for the 2016–2017 school year. The initiative was housed on its own website, [Camden Enrollment](#).

Basics of Camden Enrollment

- The Camden Enrollment application is only for K–12 students who want to attend a different school the following year, either because they are transitioning to a new grade span, or because they want to attend a different school. Students who want to continue at their current school do not need to submit an application, unless they are entering kindergarten for the first time.
- Students who want to go to their assigned neighborhood school do not need to submit an application.
- Students complete one application and rank order up to 10 public schools on the application. Families with more than one child who would like all of their children to be assigned to the same school can also use the “Family Link” option.
- Students get one best possible offer, which frees up spaces for more students earlier.
- Students are matched to their school based on family preference and a set of policies agreed upon in a school-driven design process.
- The method through which students are matched to schools allows families to list their true preferences in true order without compromising their chance of being assigned to their top choices.
- For applications received before a spring deadline (March 1st for the 2016–2017 school year), students are matched through a lottery, taking into account sibling and neighborhood preferences as well as available seats. Applications submitted after the deadline are considered on a first-come, first-served basis. Preferences, such as sibling or neighborhood preference, may also affect a student’s spot on a waitlist.
- District magnet schools have additional admissions criteria, such as report card submission and interviews. This is incorporated into the matching process to ensure equitable and efficient matching.
- A public campaign for unified enrollment sought to ensure all families are aware of the process and have access to the information necessary to drive decisions.

OUR METHOD: UNDERSTANDING CAMDEN PARENTS' EXPERIENCE

CRPE conducted a parent survey and a series of parent focus groups to understand how parents experienced choosing and applying to schools with the new Camden Enrollment application for the 2016–2017 school year.

A Survey of Camden City School District Families

Our survey population contained two subgroups of parents: those who completed a Camden Enrollment application for their child, and those whose children would move schools (students entering kindergarten or high school) but did not complete a Camden Enrollment application. (Those families had the option of a default to their neighborhood school.) Both groups of parents received the same core survey, asking them why they completed (or did not complete) a Camden Enrollment application, the sources and types of information they used in choosing the school their child would attend, and their overall confidence and satisfaction with the public schools in the city. Parents who completed the application were also asked about their experience navigating the application process and how they chose schools to apply to. Both groups of parents were offered an incentive to participate: entry into a drawing for one of five \$100 Target/Visa gift cards. Full results from each survey are included as Appendices A and B.

Camden Enrollment provided the dataset of both groups of names to CRPE in May 2016. It contained the student name and parent contact information for all students who submitted an enrollment application to date. The dataset was compiled by student name, so parent names were initially duplicated if they submitted separate applications for more than one child. 3,123 students were in the original dataset. CRPE cleaned the dataset of parent duplicates, leaving a total dataset of 2,338 parents who completed an enrollment application; this became our survey list. See Table 1 for the number of surveys received and the outreach methods used.

Of the 2,338 parents, 1,955 had email addresses; these parents received emails in June 2016 with links to the online survey. The 383 parents without email contact information received paper surveys in the mail. Email survey recipients who did not respond were also sent paper surveys. A final attempt was made by phone to reach parents who did not respond to earlier outreach. In total, 501 parents who completed a Camden Enrollment application responded to the survey and represented a range of the city's geographic, income, and ethnic and racial backgrounds. The survey response rate was 21 percent. The sample of respondents reflects the demographic profile of the city (see Appendix A for details).

CRPE followed the same process for parents who did not complete an application. Camden Enrollment provided a dataset containing student names and parent contact information for all Camden students entering kindergarten and 9th grade in the fall of 2016 for whom they had not received an enrollment application. 1,267 students were in this dataset, and after removing parent duplicates the final dataset contained 1,180 parents to be surveyed. The same outreach protocol was followed. Because we had emails for only 165 of the 1,180 parents, more offline outreach was conducted than with the parents who did

complete applications. In total, 61 parents who did not complete a Camden Enrollment application responded to the survey—a response rate of 5 percent. We believe the low response rate was due to the lack of email contact information for these parents, and because the survey asked them about a process in which they did not participate. Because of this low response rate and representativeness, we find the data about those who did not fill out an enrollment form to be unreliable, and therefore do not include it in this report.

TABLE 1. Number and Percent of Surveys Received Through Each Survey Outreach Method, by Survey Subgroup

	Parents who completed an application (out of 2,338 possible)		Parents who did not complete an application (out of 1,180 possible ²)	
	501 total surveys received	Percent of surveys received	61 total surveys received	Percent of surveys received
Online	255	51%	14	23%
Paper/mail	74	15%	6	10%
Phone	182	34%	41	67%
Response Rate	21%		5%	

Focus Groups of Camden City School District Families

We also conducted parent/caregiver focus groups in June 2016. Participants were identified through a random sampling of applications, focusing in on different types of applicants (families applying to transition versus non-transition grades, families applying to magnet schools versus non-selective-admissions schools, families with multiple students). Six focus groups were held with 34 participants at school and community sites across the city. Participants represented a wide range of backgrounds and experiences, including men and women, African Americans and Latinos, people who spoke only Spanish. These families represented students across grade levels, attending traditional and charter schools, living in neighborhoods across the city, and having a range of reasons for choosing a new school. We discussed their reasons for choosing new schools, their experiences with the new enrollment process, what they look for in schools, and their recommendations for process improvements going forward. Some participants had not participated in Camden Enrollment and shared their experiences with that choice as well. The protocol used in these focus groups is included as Appendix C.

2. On the non-completers, it is worth noting that some portion of them might not have completed the enrollment because they were happy enough with their desired school. In that case, the best option was to not fill out the form.

QUESTION 1: WHAT WERE FAMILIES' EXPERIENCES LIKE IN THE FIRST YEAR OF CAMDEN ENROLLMENT?

A unified enrollment system brings all of the city's schools under one tent, streamlining the enrollment application deadlines and materials. But it also introduces new procedures, materials, and, potentially, technological burdens of online systems that parents must sort out. Camden Enrollment rolled out a citywide outreach strategy that included holding information sessions, staffing enrollment centers at areas around town convenient for parents, partnering with schools and community organizations, and publicizing Camden Enrollment through various media outlets to provide parents with information about the process and how to navigate the process.

Parents' Experience With Camden Enrollment Outreach Efforts

Parents who completed the application mainly learned about Camden Enrollment from their child's school or friends and family

By and large, parents seemed to get the message that applying to and enrolling in schools was different for the 2016–2017 school year. Parents who completed the application report that they learned about Camden Enrollment from a variety of sources but primarily from their child's school or from a friend or family member (see Table 2). Across all responding parents, getting information from their child's school was most commonly reported, followed by word of mouth through friends and family. For parents with less than a college degree, however, friends and family were the most common source of information on Camden Enrollment (see Appendix G, Table G-3). In focus groups, parents of children in transition grades mentioned various ways they heard about the process from their child's school, including hearing directly from Camden Enrollment at information sessions or through phone calls, texts, or emails.

A parent of a rising 9th grader said she first learned of Camden Enrollment when her daughter brought home a letter from school. That prompted her to visit the website to find out more information and complete the application online.

“Anytime I learn about something new, it's never something I want to jump into. I thought it was going to be the same process as before. I would go to the school, get the application packet, fill it out and turn it in by the deadline. It was the Camden Enrollment this time, so it was different.”

She shared that while she was initially put off by a change in the process, she felt the simplified process was better because she could keep track of everything online.

Other parents mentioned learning about Camden Enrollment at enrollment events held around Camden. One parent reported that representatives of Camden Enrollment were at his child's pre-kindergarten during pick-up time distributing flyers about the process and helping families to complete the application on iPads.

He appreciated being able to complete it on the spot and get answers to his questions, including what school options were available. Two Spanish-speaking parents shared that they learned about Camden Enrollment during an information session following Mass at their neighborhood church. Said one parent:

“They were at the church where my family goes, with a computer. A lot of people went to fill out the application there.”

Camden’s community organizations and schools’ strategy of setting up “pop-up” enrollment events in places where parents congregated to inform parents and help them fill out the application on the spot was helpful to busy, working parents. It ensured that parents followed through after receiving the information, and that they filled out the application correctly.

A few parents of students in transition grades mentioned being contacted by Camden Enrollment staff. One parent of a rising kindergartener noted that she had first heard about the process and the deadline from her niece, but didn’t start her application until she received a call from Camden Enrollment.

TABLE 2. Parents Who Completed the Application Primarily Learned About Camden Enrollment From Their Child’s School or Friends and Family

How did you hear about the Camden Enrollment application?	Percentage of Respondents* (n=501)
The school my child currently attends told me about it	37%
A friend or family member told me about it	33%
Other	12%
A Camden Enrollment staff member called me	12%
I saw a billboard	11%
I saw it on social media	11%
Another school in the city told me about it	11%
A Camden Enrollment staff member stopped by my home	7%
I saw a television ad	3%
I heard a radio ad	2%

*Families could choose as many options as were relevant; totals add to more than 100%.

Despite Camden’s outreach efforts, some families were unaware of Camden Enrollment, including those who needed to make new school decisions for 2016–2017

A few parents of children in non-transition grades mentioned they either never heard about Camden Enrollment from a school or district source or that they heard about it late—they only happened to hear about it from friends and family. This impacted whether and when they applied for schools. They were in non-transition grades, but Camden Enrollment wished to give all families the option to consider whether they were satisfied with their current situation.

In focus groups, families talked about their own and others’ lack of awareness about the new enrollment system, even though Camden Enrollment shared information in several ways. These families said there’s a need to build awareness across the city. One father suggested:

“I think it’s important to have more community organizations involved: churches, community centers ... Families go to church, and to mosques. They should be connected, because you might not be able to reach people at home, but you might be able to reach them in other places. Even working with supermarkets, to have that kind of connection, saying to them, ‘Customers come to your stores and they have children. You should have a vested interest.’”

Parents’ Experience With Using the Process

Parents feel that Camden Enrollment simplified and streamlined the process of applying to schools and significantly reduced the time and energy spent compared to previous years

When asked to compare the experience of applying to and enrolling in schools through Camden Enrollment with previous years, the majority of parents said in focus groups that they appreciated the streamlining and centralization of the Camden Enrollment process. Several parents said that being able to apply to multiple schools with one application made the process less time- and energy-intensive, especially for parents with multiple children. Said a parent of a rising kindergartener and rising ninth grader:

“Before, I was trying to put my 14-year-old into a charter school and I would have to go to the school, fill out the information, and then go to the other school and do the same. Now I can just do it online, pick the schools that I want. It’s so much easier.”

Another benefit of consolidating the process and moving it online was parents’ ability to easily check the status of their application, versus time spent on the phone or in person at the school. A parent noted that she had a child on the waitlist for a school, and the online system made it easy for her to quickly check her child’s place on the list.

Finding, filling out, and submitting the Camden Enrollment application was fairly straightforward

Of those parents who completed the application, the vast majority reported that finding, filling out, and submitting the application was not a challenge (see Appendix G, Table G-4). In focus groups, some parents shared their relief over not having to deal with submitting a lot of paperwork. Seventy-five percent of survey respondents said the materials were easy to find and 80 percent said the materials were easy to understand

and submit. This positive response is shared across all race, education, and income groups in the sample (see Appendix G, tables G-5a – G-5c). Parents also appreciated having options for how to complete the application, whether they preferred over the phone, online, or in person at an enrollment center, school, or the district office.

Families appreciated the Camden Enrollment hotline for getting questions answered and submitting their application, all in one call

Multiple parents shared that the entire process of completing the application over the phone took only five or ten minutes. A parent recounted:

“For whatever question, there was a number to call and they answer. Last year when I put in the application, I didn’t get any phone calls to know if they would stay in the school. I didn’t know where to look. But this year it was a lot easier. There is the number and if I call, they answer.”

In addition to helping families complete their applications, hotline staff also reached out to parents who had not completed the application by the deadline and assisted them in learning about their school options. A parent of a rising kindergartener shared that she was intimidated by the school choice process and not knowledgeable about her school options, and so put off filling out the application. She didn’t realize she had forgotten until she received a call from Camden Enrollment. Talking with a hotline staff member helped her navigate the system and make informed choices about which schools to list:

“This is new to me. I didn’t have to physically go to the schools. They were able to tell me what schools were in my area, what schools were across the town, what they had, what they didn’t have. They helped me understand what was available, pick my choice. It helped me, because I forgot.”

Parents shared the same sentiments about their experiences at enrollment centers or at the district office. They appreciated being able to talk to someone who was knowledgeable about the process and school offerings available in Camden and who also provided good customer service.

Timing and Technological Problems Posed Some Challenges for Families

The timing of the process worked well for most families, who appreciated learning well in advance about which school their child would attend the next year

Parents of transition-age children who participated in focus groups generally shared that they were aware of the March 1st deadline and process in enough time to make an informed choice. These parents felt the timing of Camden Enrollment was mostly good. In mid-winter, they were starting to think about the next school year, and applying by March 1st to find out in mid-April about placement gave them enough time to plan for any changes.

While parents who participated in focus groups were mostly happy with the Camden Enrollment administrative process and accompanying support structures, they did name a few challenges they faced.

For some families, the timing of the process felt too early and they weren't ready to make decisions

The deadline of March 1st was not problematic for the majority of parents who participated in focus groups, especially because they were able to submit applications after the deadline and were still matched with a school they ranked highly. Prior to Camden Enrollment, application deadlines ranged from October of the previous year to May. Several high-demand schools traditionally held their applications in October, so the adjustment to a much-later March 1st deadline marked a significant shift to later in the year.

However, a few parents brought up challenges around being prepared to make decisions by the deadline. Two parents mentioned that they applied well after March 1st because although they knew about the deadline, they weren't thinking about making a change for the following year or prepared to make a decision at that point. A parent of three young children shared:

“I wasn't even thinking about changing schools before then. So, it was just like a last-minute thing. I just decided I wanted to have my boys go to the same school. It just came to my mind that day.”

In February, she was still in the thick of the current school year and was not yet ready to think about the next year.

Another parent who applied late, though he knew about the deadline, had a rising 5th-grade son who he was planning to keep at his current school in 2016–2017. This parent shared that he was on the district website a few weeks after the Camden Enrollment deadline and happened upon the school report cards released in Spring 2015 with school performance data for 2014–2015. When he learned that a school he passed every day while taking his son to his current school had higher test scores, he decided to apply through Camden Enrollment. He was very frustrated when he learned his son was eighth on the waitlist for his choice school—he felt the “first-come, first-served” assignment of students post-deadline was unfair. He acknowledged that applying prior to the deadline would likely have improved his chances of his son getting into the school, but was upset regardless.

A common thread between these three parents with complaints about not being prepared for the deadline was that their children were in non-transition grades. They did not have to apply for placement the following year through Camden Enrollment. The gaps in their awareness of the deadline, or the amount of importance they placed on it, may be due in part to the fact that they weren't the group to whom Camden Enrollment targeted information and outreach, and that they themselves weren't thinking about it.

A few parents had the opposite feeling about the timing of the application. They said, the earlier, the better—even January. Parents said that they needed time to learn about schools before applying, but also needed time afterward to find out about their match to make a final decision about where to send their child. Moving the process earlier in the year would allow them to be more confident in their choice. One parent noted that an earlier timeframe would allow visits to schools while they are still in session—a valuable exercise in choosing a school.

Some families ended up with multiple accounts, causing confusion and technical issues

Several parents mentioned technical issues related to multiple accounts or being unable to log in to their online account. A few parents of rising 9th graders shared that, unbeknown to them, their 8th graders had been encouraged to start their own Camden Enrollment accounts at school with their guidance counselors. When these parents tried to fill out the Camden Enrollment applications online for their students, they got error messages from the system that an account already existed or that the login information was incorrect.

One parent's experience was further complicated because she had visited several schools and different accounts were created at each. She recounted a very involved process of trying to get to the bottom of the situation with Camden Enrollment staff by the March 1st deadline:

“I think every time I went to a different school, they made my daughter an account, but I wasn't sure. It was confusing to me. Different people [from Camden Enrollment] just kept calling me up. I got on the phone with them and they fixed it. A couple of days later, a person would call me, say the same thing. I said, 'Can you please put a note in the file?' They all said I had several accounts, because I went to two schools and must have opened an account, and then I actually spoke with a representative, and they signed me up for a third account. The schools kept getting messed up ... but we finally got together, because I went to the school that I wanted, and I told them, and we just did it.”

Another parent had two accounts—one created using her email address for her username, and another using her phone number.

Another parent experienced issues signing up and then logging into her account. After having the same issue several days in a row, including the day after the March 1st deadline, she finally called her child's current school, which directed her to the Camden Enrollment hotline. They were able to help her through the process and said they would consider her application as part of the main-round pool because she was having technical issues accessing the application.

A third technical issue mentioned by one parent during focus groups was related to unavailable information. The parent reported that he received an email from Camden Enrollment informing him that the school match results were available in his online account, but when he logged in, there was no information there. He called Camden Enrollment and found out his son was on the waitlist.

All parents who discussed having technical issues related to multiple accounts or trouble logging in did report that Camden Enrollment staff helped resolve their problems. In addition, when parents told school staff they were having trouble with the application, school staff were well informed about the process and directed parents to the hotline.

Some parents were confused by the separate processes for enrolling in prekindergarten and in K-12 schools

Parents were unable to enroll prekindergarten students through Camden Enrollment for the 2016-2017 school year; parents with children entering prekindergarten and the K-12 system needed to enroll their students using two systems.

One parent who was unaware that there were two separate systems experienced a lot of confusion when she tried to enroll one son in prekindergarten and another in 1st grade, both through Camden Enrollment. She wanted to enroll both her children at the same school to make transportation easier. She reported that the system generated an error message that her prekindergartener was not eligible when she entered his information, but did not understand why; she thought he was ineligible for the school, rather than ineligible to participate in the enrollment system. This parent said that she did not like calling, so did not use the Camden Enrollment hotline for support. She ended up submitting an application for her rising 1st grader but left her other son at his current pre-school. With a daughter in daycare, this parent will have three children at separate locations throughout Camden this school year. Two of them are outside the transportation zone, so she will need to make daily pickups and drop-offs at those two schools. Only this parent called out this issue, but for her, being unaware of the different systems created significant confusion and influenced how she used Camden Enrollment.

Families found selective-admissions requirements were duplicative and confusing

Barring any technical issues, parents felt that applying to most schools through Camden Enrollment was fairly straightforward and simple. However, the additional requirements for some selective-admissions schools created confusion for some parents or seemed duplicative. One parent who participated in the focus groups was very knowledgeable about Camden Enrollment because he had been hired by the district to provide outreach to parents on how to use the new system, and still he found the process of applying to the three selective-admissions schools for his rising 9th grader complicated.³ He recalled having to submit essentially the same information for each school in a slightly different format, and felt that this likely could have been streamlined as well.⁴ Indeed, some of the requirements were slightly different (e.g., varied essay questions), though students were only required to upload report cards once, even if applying to multiple magnet programs. Schools are responsible for admissions steps such as testing and auditions, but all questions, report card uploads, etc., are coordinated centrally to streamline and ensure fairness. Camden Enrollment reports that it plans to minimize some of the requirements—for example, potentially requiring fewer essays and making letters of recommendation optional—in the next enrollment year.

Another parent mentioned that not only was she confused by the additional requirements for the selective-admissions schools, but that it seemed to her that school staff and Camden Enrollment staff were unclear about how the process worked for these schools. From her perspective, it felt that “the right hand didn’t know what the left hand was doing.”

Lastly, beyond the technical problems around the application process itself, we found that, at the school level, families can feel as though they are being intimidated or discouraged from pursuing other options for their children. One parent reported problems with their current school’s reaction:

“The principal at my son’s school asked everyone, ‘Who’s leaving? Who has put in applications?’ and asked those children to stand up.”

Although we asked parents in each focus group if they felt any pressure to not move their child to a different school, and there were parents who indicated feeling no such pressure, we are not able to determine from the data collected how widespread this practice is.

Parents’ Experiences Understanding the System of School Priorities, the Matching Process, and the Match They Received

Parents feel the system is fair and equitable, but not necessarily to their benefit

Of the parents who completed the application and responded to the survey, 74 percent strongly agreed and another 20 percent agreed that the application process treats all families the same. In focus groups, most parents’ responses bore this out; they felt that Camden Enrollment put everyone on a level playing field. However, parents didn’t necessarily feel that fairness worked in their favor. Intriguingly, 49 percent of

3. Three magnet or specialized schools in Camden have specific application and admissions requirements.

4. An enrollment administrator in another city using unified enrollment noted that centrally managing the specialized requirements for selective-admissions schools is difficult. Cities may not be able to avoid the complications associated with selective-admissions schools. Nonetheless, there may be opportunities for improvement in the communication with families.

parents who completed applications and responded to the survey said that Camden Enrollment lowered their chances of getting their child into the school they wanted.⁵

Thirty percent felt Camden Enrollment didn't affect their chances, and only 7 percent thought that Camden Enrollment improved their chances of getting their child into the school they wanted.

Families don't maximize their opportunity to choose schools

The Camden Enrollment application allows parents to request up to ten schools, and parents should list on the application any schools they prefer over their neighborhood school to maximize the opportunity to get the best available choice. On average, however, parents and students submitting Camden Enrollment applications requested between two and three schools on their application—far fewer than the maximum. However, based on the total number of schools in Camden, in some grades such as high school, it is unlikely that families would list ten options—in fact, there are only nine high schools in the city. Table 3 shows that almost two-thirds of parents (63 percent) submitting applications for kindergarten in the main round and 58 percent of parents submitting applications for 9th grade (grades at which most students change schools) requested only one or two schools on their applications. Only 34 parents requested the full ten schools on their application.⁶ Families who submitted their applications after the March 1st deadline were even more likely to only list one school on their application, perhaps in part because they were able to see on the Camden Enrollment website which schools still had open seats. Sixty-seven percent of parents of kindergarteners who applied after the deadline listed just one school, as did 48 percent of parents of 9th graders who applied after the deadline. An additional 19 percent of parents of kindergarteners and 25 percent of parents of 9th graders who applied after the deadline listed two schools. Overall, 86 percent and 73 percent of parents of kindergarteners and parents of 9th graders, respectively, who applied after the deadline listed only one or two schools.

As we report below, the vast majority of applicants ultimately received an offer from either their first- or second-choice schools. As such, few applicants suffer any penalty at this point from only listing two to three schools on their application. Should demand become more concentrated over time, it will be more important for parents to request more schools on their application to ensure that they have their best chance to receive an offer from a preferred school.

5. Unmanaged open systems like the system that existed prior to Camden Enrollment often reward parents who are most knowledgeable about the system, most persistent in their pursuit of their desired choice, and have personal connections in the school system or schools they desire. By eliminating opportunities for preferential treatment in the enrollment system, some parents will find that they have less advantage in the new enrollment system.

6. Applicant numbers are as of July 2016. These counts include the applications made during the main round and the first wave of parents submitting applications in the post-main round period. Parents continued to submit late applications through the beginning of the school year.

TABLE 3. Most Main-Round Applicants Listed Far Fewer Schools Than They Could

Grade level of applicant	Percentage of main-round applicants			
	One requested school (n=993)	Two requested schools (n=561)	Three requested schools (n=356)	More than three requested schools (n=392)
Kindergarten (n=734)	41%	22%	14%	23%
9th grade (n=348)	30%	28%	23%	19%
Other grades (n=1220)	48%	24%	14%	13%

Some families list few choices because they fear it shows lack of focus, others said there were no other good options

One parent did express reservations about the possible implications of listing more than one school. She was concerned that doing so, even if she listed schools in priority order, might suggest that she was willing to accept a lower-ranked school. And she was unsure of how Camden Enrollment selected which students go to which school, creating more uncertainty. She listed only one school on the application.

Although listing additional schools has no effect on the chances of being placed at a first-choice school, she thought that the “system” would think she was less serious about her first-choice school if she listed additional schools. Some parents only found one or two schools they wanted their child to attend. To them, listing more schools meant they found that school acceptable, and that’s not how they felt.

Focus group participants seemed to understand the matching process even if they did not take full advantage of it

For the most part, families understood what they needed to do to enroll. Some parents had misconceptions about how students were assigned if their application was submitted prior to or after the deadline. The father described earlier who applied late and whose son was 8th on the waitlist at his top-choice school thought the matching process was entirely first-come, first-served, rather than by lottery after the March 1st deadline:

“I didn’t realize that it’s first-come, first-served. It’s really about whoever got on the computer and signed up first, which is so flawed, which is the reason I came here to talk to you.”

Another parent in the same focus group concurred, saying that she had heard that the earlier you applied, the better. However, these parents’ mistaken understanding of the system was in the minority; most of the parents we spoke with grasped the basic idea of how students were matched to open slots at schools if their application was submitted prior to the deadline and that it was different, with a likely less favorable outcome, for applications after March 1st.

Most parents who participated in focus groups also understood that the order in which they listed schools on their application mattered. They knew that listing the school first that they most wanted their child to attend was important, and to list the other schools in rank-order importance after that.

QUESTION 2: WHAT ARE FAMILIES SEEKING IN A SCHOOL FOR THEIR CHILD?

Parents consider academic performance and the experiences their child will have in the school when making choices

Academic performance of a school is most prized by Camden parents when making school choices. Eighty-five percent of parents who completed the Camden Enrollment application and responded to our survey indicated that good academics was a factor in their school choice. But other factors clearly weigh into their decisions. Fifty-five percent also considered the curriculum program of the school, 49 percent considered the safety and security of the school, and nearly as many considered location when making a choice.

TABLE 4. Parents Report That School Academics, Performance, and Quality Are the Top Factors Considered When Making a Choice About a Particular School

Think about the school you most want your child to attend. Which of the following factors convinced you to apply to this particular school?	Number of Respondents (n=453)	Percentage of Respondents Reporting Factor in School Choice Decision
Good academics, performance, or quality	385	85%
Curriculum or programs (e.g., approach, arts, math)	251	55%
Safety of school	221	49%
Extracurricular (e.g., afterschool program, sports, etc.)	186	41%
Location near home	175	39%
Personal connection/family connection (I went there, siblings attend, etc.)	156	34%
Location is convenient (e.g., near child care or work)	134	30%
Special population services (e.g., gifted, special education, bilingual, etc.)	118	26%
Other	12	3%

When we asked parents to choose their top priority among academics, location, and safety, academics proved again to be the most important among the three concerns, and location proved to be the least important.

TABLE 5. Camden Enrollment Applicants Rank Academic Quality Higher Than School Safety and School Location When Considering a School

Understanding that these are all important, when you look for a school for your child, which of these is:	Percentage of Camden Enrollment applicants reporting factor is most important	Percentage of Camden Enrollment applicants reporting factor is least important
Quality of the academics	64%	6%
Safety of the school	31%	8%
Location of the school	6%	86%

Parents will allow their child to travel for a quality school but they worry about the demands travel places on their children

Families may place relatively less importance on school location or proximity to home due to the small geographic size of the city and district (only nine square miles). Parents described a willingness to drive their child to the school with the best fit if they could:

“I look at it like, what’s best for my child? If you know that a school is worth traveling to across town, then if you have a car, and you drive, then I think it’s worth it.”

Families complained that it was a real burden for young students to walk to school in harsh winter and summer weather. They also described dangerous areas that their children needed to walk through to get to school. In line with what we heard in focus groups about the challenges of walking in Camden, a relatively small proportion of parents (19 percent) who completed the application and responded to our survey reported that their children walked or biked to school during the 2015–2016 school year, and 10 percent of responding parents reported that their child would walk or bike to school in 2016–2017. The primary ways that parents reported their child got to school in 2015–2016 were driving the child themselves, or another adult drove the child (51 percent), and 23 percent reported that their child took a school bus or van. Very few parents—just 6 percent of survey respondents who completed the application—reported that their child took public transportation to school.

School performance and rigor are critical to Camden families but they don’t want that at the expense of joyful and positive experiences

Parents care about academic rigor and performance. As one mother explained:

“When I see his cousin, my god-kids, and they get homework, he’s like, ‘Mom, why don’t I get homework?’ When I ask the teacher, she’s like, ‘There is none,’ so I go online and I find things for him. That school ... they’re really not expecting enough.”

But families are also concerned about how some schools bundled rigor with pressure and created a joyless school. One mother lamented to the group about what a strict and unrelenting environment she was sending her son to every day and why she was moving her son to a new school:

“Don’t get me wrong, I like strict, but every kid is different. It’s almost like a militant environment, and he doesn’t fit well with that. It hasn’t been a good fit. They don’t let them talk, they don’t let them blow off steam. They’re in school from 7:15AM to 4:00PM. It’s a long day, they need to move their bodies, and I think they need to get recess, which now they have implemented. I am all about learning, but they need a break. Everybody needs a break. And there were a lot of days where they didn’t eat. They are pressured to take very short lunches and get back to class and there isn’t enough time to eat.”

Parents value the relationships between themselves, their children, and the child’s teacher

Parents want to know their child’s teacher and principal, they want that teacher to be deeply invested in the child, to reflect the child’s background and to be a reliable presence in their child’s education. As one father remarked:

“I want to know who my son’s teacher is. I want to be able to say, ‘Teacher Mary, I’m going to trust you with my son. I want you to give my son a grand education. I need to know who you are. I need to be able to meet you and you need to tell me, Mr. Smith, your kid is going to come to my class and I’m going to be hard on him. I’m going to make sure he does what he needs to do. I’m going to make sure he is successful and I’m not going to give up on him. I’m going to hold him to being great and you can hold me to being great.’”⁷

Parents also want to know and see the principal. A strong visible presence from the principal signals to them that the principal knows the students, knows the parents, keeps order, and carries unspoken authority that the school is in good hands:

“I like to see the principal involved in the school. I want to walk through the school, and if I don’t see the principal when I go in, it’s like, ‘Where is she? Can I talk to her?’ I look at things like that. I don’t want to ever feel like I can’t reach you, especially when it’s concerning my child.”

Parents want to see that the teachers are invested in their children and can connect with them on a personal level. One parent stressed the need for more diversity in the teaching ranks:

“This district as a whole needs to spend some time in attracting African-American men, Latino men, into the school district to teach because it’s not representative right now ... My son doesn’t have any black male teachers. Why?”

7. Names have been changed to protect anonymity.

Finally, the parents want teachers that are a reliable presence for their children. One mother declared:

“A big deal-breaker for me in choosing a school is teacher turnover. How long has the teacher not only been teaching, but been in that particular school?”

Several others told stories of moving their children out of new schools and back to a school they themselves had attended because the teachers stuck around, knew their families, and were committed to them, rather than schools where they said there was no year-to-year consistency as the children progressed through school. For one mother with a son with autism, that stability was everything. All the teachers in the school knew her son and had gone out of their way to assure her that they would be there for him and work with him all the way through 8th grade.

Families are very interested in their child’s day-to-day experience in the school

Safety in schools, addressing bullying in schools, opportunities for enriching activities, and learning models that personalize the educational experience to the unique needs and interests of students are some of the “under the hood” concerns parents prioritize.

Safety, security, and mutual respect among students is a baseline condition for choosing schools. Unfortunately, bullying is a strikingly common occurrence and a major concern for parents—both as a threat to their children but also as a frustration and disappointment with how schools handle it. Families want to know in detail how things are going to be dealt with. One parent stated that she asked of prospective schools:

“How do they handle bullying? Is it tolerated? Is it just, ‘Don’t do it,’ and then they brush it under the rug?”

Parents prioritize academics but they are clearly interested in a rich and holistic learning experience for their children. Forty-one percent of surveyed parents who completed an enrollment application reported that available extracurricular programs were a factor that convinced them to apply for the school. As one parent commented in the focus groups:

“The extracurricular programs are why I choose the schools I choose. I like after-school activities and in-school activities. What they do outside of academics gives them opportunities later on. The trips they go on, how often they go, if the parents are allowed to go with the students on the trips.”

Parents also value after-school care that is offered on campus, not at another location.

Finally, parents report that they are seeking schools that attend to the unique needs of students, particularly students with special needs. We learned of some families that were frustrated by how schools handled their own children with behavioral challenges, like ADHD, by constantly calling parents to come and pick their child up in the middle of the day. We talked to other families who were also frustrated when their children were in classes with children who had demanding special needs and felt like everything derailed because the schools couldn’t address those challenges.

Parents also wanted some level of personalized learning for all the students. As one mother reflected:

“I don’t ever want my daughter to feel like she’s getting bored because she has to keep learning the same thing over and over, so I want to know, is there an advanced group where you focus on this group at a certain reading level because they are further ahead? And do they have a group for children that are struggling so they can get some attention? I ask that question when I tour schools because I think that’s very important—to see if they are getting that one-on-one and learning to their level.”

QUESTION 3: WHAT INFORMATION AND SUPPORT DO FAMILIES USE TO SELECT A SCHOOL FOR THEIR CHILD?

Parents are using the information tools available to them but aren’t finding key information they seek

Camden Enrollment wasn’t just a new application system; it is a more comprehensive effort to provide families with high-quality, consistent, and robust information on schools. It is an improvement on what was previously available: parents can now view online a list of all the schools available and review their performance and school offerings. Camden Enrollment also encouraged families to start visiting schools. Parents are finding value in these information tools but they still seek more details on what is going on inside the school on a daily basis.

Parents use several information sources but web tools, friends and family, and school visits are the most valuable sources for them

Parents completing the Camden Enrollment application tapped several resources to help them select a school for their child, though it is clear that digital tools were among the most useful to them. In the survey, 45 percent reported using Camden Enrollment’s website, 41 percent visited school websites, and 25 percent visited the district’s website. (From the website launch in November 2015 to the time of the main round application deadline on March 1, 2016, there were over 29,000 page views, including non-parents and repeat viewers.) Parents most frequently identified CamdenEnrollment.org as the most useful resource providing information on schools. Despite the wide use of digital resources, in-person visits to schools, and family and friend experiences remain important information sources for families.⁸

8. Of those who visited schools, 50 percent listed the school visit as the most valuable source. Of those who consulted with friends and family, 46 percent defined it as their most valuable resource.

TABLE 6. Parents Show Wide Use of Digital Tools, but Input From Family and Friends and School Visits Still Matter to Many Parents

Which of the following resources did you consult to find information about schools? Of the ways you got information about schools for your child, which was MOST useful?		
Information source	Percentage of respondents who reported having used each resource	Percentage of respondents reporting this resource was most useful
CamdenEnrollment.org	45%	26%
School websites	41%	20%
Friends and family	31%	14%
Visits to schools	25%	14%
Camden City School District's website	25%	7%
Family Enrollment Guide booklet	15%	4%
Phone call or visit from school representative	11%	4%
School information cards	13%	3%
Other resources	6%	2%
Camden Enrollment Hotline	5%	2%
Citywide School Fair	5%	2%
School Brochure	9%	1%
Camden business or local organization	4%	1%
TV or radio	5%	<1%

Similar to what was reported by families in the survey, focus group families relied on a mix of information to help them make their choices, with their experiences adding some texture to the survey data. Web materials provided many parents with a good starting point and an easy way to learn about many schools quickly without having to physically visit schools. As one parent said:

“I search the schools online and I try to find out whatever information I can, because even after talking to the teachers, I also went on the school website and I learned a lot. The different teachers, the different curriculum, and how they go about teaching and what the school is like.”

Even as many parents made use of the web tools, we learned from focus groups that other parents knew there was information on the web but didn’t reference it, and still others didn’t know or weren’t aware that those sources might answer questions they had about transportation or after-school care.

Many families paired online research with word of mouth recommendations and observations of school activities

Families relied heavily on word of mouth and other experiences to round out or lead their website research—for example, asking friends about experiences with their children’s schools. Camden Enrollment’s website also posts comments from parents that could be reviewed by applicants.

Some parents relied on teachers they knew to give them the straight story on quality schools:

“My son’s in kindergarten, but there’s things that he should know at that age that they don’t show him, but I show him because my aunt’s a teacher there, too. She tells me things that he needs to know. I asked her, and she told me, ‘You should go to this other school, because they have this, this, and this.’”

Of course, students also have an opinion about where they want to go, based on what they hear about schools from their friends and others, and they press their parents with this information. Other litmus tests for parents included observing teachers at pickup and drop-off times, and other out-of-school interactions:

“I’m always there picking up my nieces and nephews. I know all the teachers, and they’re also my son’s T-ball coach. I have a good feel for that school. That’s why it’s my first choice.”

TABLE 7. Many Parents Want More Information on School Academic Performance to Help Inform Their School Choices

What information did you NOT have that would have helped you decide on your school choices?		
Type of information	Percentage of respondents who completed a Camden Enrollment Application	Percentage of respondents reporting this resource was most useful
Academic performance of the school	37%	26%
School programs or teaching styles	36%	20%
Transportation availability and options	31%	14%
School safety	29%	14%
School culture	16%	7%
Other	13%	4%

School visits gave families a lot of valuable information, but opportunities to visit schools were inconsistent, limited in nature, or inconvenient for families to access

One mother emphatically advised other families in the focus group to go to the schools, that first-hand visits were key in the choosing process.

Often, families who seemed to do this were the ones choosing a new school not because of a transition year but because of unhappiness with the current school. Several families spoke from experience, having learned what they didn't like and becoming stronger consumers as they searched for a new school. As one mother explained:

“When my son initially started Pre-K, I didn’t like that I wasn’t able to talk to the teachers and have them respond, or find out on a daily basis how your child is doing. That was his very first year in school, so I wanted to know how he was progressing, and there was no communication. So I just started researching, and I asked a lot of questions. I was able to actually meet the teacher of the class that he’s currently in now, before the school year even started. So I talked to the teacher, and I found out about the curriculum, because I wanted to know what he would be learning.”

Not all schools offer tours or provide information to parents about when tours happen. One mother recounted how she had asked for a tour but in June, several months later, had still not been contacted by the school to arrange a visit.

Another father shared that there was an opportunity to visit an open house at the school he wanted, but that wouldn't provide him with the information he was looking for:

“Here's the thing. When you do an open house, they're after school and it's not a real tour. You want to know who your child's teacher is. They don't talk like that in open houses. You can't even visit with a teacher.”

Reflecting on his experience with his older children in private school, one father felt there should be even more engagement between students through a shadow day—where potential students can tour a school in session:

“I think when a new student applies to a school, they should have that student do a day in the school. Get a feel for it, have a student be their chaperone. I say that because my oldest kids go to private school, and that's what they did at those schools. Then, the kid can say, 'I don't like that school. They were rude.' Or, 'I like this school. They were fun. And the teachers seemed helpful.' That way with schools that have a really particular feel, a student would know what it's going to be like.”

Few reported knowing about the Family Enrollment Guide booklet, but those that did found it valuable

Though not widely used—perhaps in part because it wasn't provided directly to parents—the Family Enrollment Guide booklet helped some families navigate the many new options, school configurations, and amenities, as well as sort through school details. A parent who had been hired by the district to provide outreach to other parents on the enrollment process found the booklet and website very useful:

“The booklet helped a lot. It kind of broke down the class sizes, and different things they offer. That's really key, as far as just the type of classes they offer, like AP classes ... I showed my wife too so that she can really get an idea of the different schools we're looking at.”

Families say the information on CamdenEnrollment.org is a good start, but they want to know more about what happens inside schools every day

For some parents, data trumped everything. One parent explained:

“I definitely chose by just looking at the data. Fifth grade in my son's current school isn't strong. Sixth grade definitely isn't strong. When I looked at the data, the school I chose, it's the best in the city. And it's right there. It's a block away from his current school so that just makes sense. It happened to be the best school based on that data. That's really important.”

Another parent said that knowing the school test scores and graduation rate was important in choosing a school.

That said, families noted that the school quality ratings were missing for some schools. Some new schools understandably did not have performance data. However, there were some charter schools that opted not to share their performance data. Families viewed those omissions with suspicion—they didn't expect schools to have exceptional ratings, they said, but no ratings implied very poor performance.

Many other parents reported that they want to know more about the day-to-day experience in schools, ranging from the curriculum offered, the culture of the school, who would be teaching their child, safety policies, and the food options available in the cafeteria. One mother, echoing the comments of several others, remarked on the kinds of details that matter:

“I would like to know what my daughter’s being taught. I would like to know, not everything, but at least a run-down of the curriculum, and before- and after-school programs. I like to look at the lunch menus—is it free, things like that. Is there transportation for parents that can’t get their kids to and from? Mainly, for me, because I work, I would need before-care for the days that I have to go early, I would need an after-care for the days my daughter stays late. Is it offered on site? Would they have to bus her to another location? Also, when she’s in after-school, what activities do they participate in? I don’t want her to just do nothing. You never know what she’s going to be doing. That kind of stuff matters.”

School and classroom safety is one of the most significant “inside the school” concerns for parents. Specifically, families want reasonable plans and policies when it comes to supervision, bullying, and behavioral disorders, and they want to know what these policies are when considering the best school for their child. Unfortunately, this information is rarely provided. As one parent explained:

“When you go to the website, it doesn’t say anything about safety. I want to know about the incidents that have happened at the school. I want to know about supervision. Are they watching all the time? Because I see kids walking out the door at the school across the street from my house and nobody even knows they’re gone for hours.”

Others want to know about behavior plans—the number of behavioral modifications and the number of student and teacher one-on-ones. For behavioral issues, parents want to know if the school has a plan of action and how the school will address issues.

When it comes to safety and discipline, families also want complete transparency:

“You have to offer all the information to families whether it’s good or bad. You need to say, ‘This school had 12 fights last year, and this many bullying incidents.’ Everything.”

The survey shows that many of the above concerns are shared by others. More than one third of parents reported that they wanted more information on the school program and academic performance. Twenty-nine percent indicated that they wanted more information on school safety.

Families describe other issues for city leaders to be aware of: broader information sharing, fewer complicated school adjustments, and an awareness that a school or principal could actively discourage parents from moving their child out of one school and into another

- *The district's school changes every year make it confusing for families to know what's available.* For one seasoned parent of three, seeking a high school for her youngest daughter made her feel like she didn't recognize the district:

“What threw me off is that they changed the names of a lot of the schools, and they moved one school, and built new schools, so I almost felt like a first-time parent. I really didn't know, ‘Where is this school?’ The school my daughter got accepted to, I was trying to figure out where it was, and how she would be able to go to a school not even near the house—because of the name, I don't know that I would have chosen it.”

- *Transportation is lacking in a city with unsafe passages to school. In focus groups, parents voiced concerns about the safety of Camden's neighborhoods; some did not want their children walking to school.* The majority of parents reported that they or another adult drove their child to school or their child took a school- or district-provided bus. However, families only qualify for transportation if they live two miles or farther from the elementary school, and two and a half miles or farther from their high school. This is a long way for younger children to walk to school, so many families have no real option other than driving. The city of Camden does not have a convenient public transportation system for children to use if they don't qualify for a bus or are unable to get there by car. Just 6 percent of parents who completed applications and responded to our survey reported their child used public transportation to get to school. A lack of transportation options may restrict some parents' ability to choose the school that is the best fit for their child.

Unlike other cities that have moved to a unified enrollment system, some issues did not appear to come up. In some other cities, people have found the information about schools to be complicated or not clearly conveyed, but in Camden, people seemed to find the information easy to understand. If anything, they wanted more and possibly more complex information about the teaching, learning, and culture of the schools. School websites are notoriously vague in describing those issues. Families didn't voice frustration about unequal weight to preferences or felt like they had no good choices. That may be because the school performance rating system does not show stark extremes between high- and low-performing schools for families to choose from. A handful of charter and district schools stand out on the rating system, and several schools are not yet rated as they have recently opened, but otherwise, most public schools in Camden range from struggling to underperforming. In future years, families may express more unhappiness if school performance and safety do not improve or continue to remain high in only a small number of schools.

QUESTION 4: HOW WELL DO FAMILIES THINK CAMDEN'S SCHOOLS ARE MEETING THEIR EXPECTATIONS?

Parents' perception of their available choices weighs heavily in their overall satisfaction with a city's public schools and shapes the demand for schools. When only a few schools are recognized as quality schools, demand is concentrated in these few schools, many students miss out on their first-choice schools, and parents are frustrated that they have few alternatives. Though the enrollment system does not directly affect the supply of schools, the enrollment system and parents' experiences with it are clearly wrapped up in their perceptions of supply. Camden families generally seem to be getting offers from the top choices and, in many cases, are happy with that outcome. At the same time, however, they are frustrated with what they see as very little variation in the available options.

A large majority of applicants are offered one of their top choices and parents seem largely satisfied with this outcome

Across all enrollment rounds, 74 percent of applicants matched to one of the schools on their list, with 71 percent of applicants matching to their first or second choice. Main round applicants saw more favorable odds: 81 percent matched to a school on their list, with 77 percent matching to their first or second choice. Applicants for kindergarten were the most likely to match to any school and to match to one of their top two choices. Applicants for non-transitional grades were least likely to match to any school or match to one of the top two choices.⁹

TABLE 8. The Vast Majority of All Applicants Are Offered Their First or Second Choice

Rank of school offered	Percentage of rising kindergarten applicants	Percentage of rising 9th grade applicants	Percentage of other grade applicants
1st choice	74%	54%	50%
2nd choice	11%	12%	11%
3rd choice	6%	8%	6%
4th or lower choice	7%	4%	8%

**Percentage of total applicants offered a seat as of July 28, 2016*

9. Twenty-six percent of applicants across all enrollment rounds and 19 percent of those applying in the main round received no offer from a school. This will happen when applicants hold a relatively low lottery number and list only schools that had more requests than openings during the first round.

The majority of parents also seem to be satisfied with the school offer they received. Among the parents who submitted applications, 65 percent were very satisfied and another 20 percent were satisfied.

Regardless of parent education level, they all expressed similar levels of being very satisfied (between 59 percent and 68 percent), but the higher education level parents had, the stronger their dissatisfaction (expressed as being “very unsatisfied”) with their offer (see Appendix G, Table G-1).

Likely reflecting the high number of applicants receiving their first or second choice, most applicants surveyed (89 percent) expect their child to attend the school they were matched to—though parents with higher income and higher levels of education were notably less certain that their child would attend their offered school (see Appendix G, Table G-2).

Surveyed parents also show some dissatisfaction with the city’s available schools. Thirty-eight percent of the survey respondents who submitted applications and 33 percent of those who chose their neighborhood district school reported that one of the challenges they faced in making a choice was that available schools weren’t a good fit for their child.

Digging deeper into the survey and focus group conversations revealed two important themes in parents’ dissatisfaction with the supply of schools. First, while parents appreciate having options, they noted that the options offered little variety, especially when it comes to the high-performing schools. Second, parents see progress and are optimistic that they will soon have more to choose from.

Parents see a difference between the number of options and the diversity of options

Focus group participants shared that they were generally satisfied that there were a lot of schools to choose from but didn’t feel the options reflected much variation. As mentioned earlier, they seemed to be making choices between schools with very strict discipline and schools with a range of quality and safety issues (teachers who didn’t have high expectations for students or who didn’t respond to bullying issues in ways parents wanted them to).

Some parents feel charter schools seem to only offer one kind of option: a very strict discipline code in exchange for more academic rigor

As one father recalled:

“It’s challenging, because they’re very, I would say, strict and disciplined as far as what they do with the students. There’s no talking in the hallways. Some of that can be a little overboard, we found, when we had to talk to the teachers about a certain incident where my daughter stepped on the back of her classmate’s shoe. My daughter said, ‘Excuse me’ but the teacher gave her a mark against her behavior because she spoke when they were meant to be quiet. We were like, ‘Listen, come on, we have to teach these kids to also be polite. It’s not like she’s hitting her and talking, but ...’ They were open to it, and took the negative point away from her, and said, ‘Okay, we understand.’”

But this family had to overlook what they felt was an overbearing culture of discipline in order to get the rigorous education they had experienced in the private school they could no longer afford.

Families looking for high-performing schools didn't feel like they were finding many

A number of parents applied to only one school. If they didn't get into that school, were they happy with where their child ended up?

“No, you just had to stay where you are. There was nothing else out there that seemed interesting, not based on the data. You look at the schools based on the data. My son is an honor roll-type student in 5th grade. If we don't get our top choice, I might pull him out and put him in private school. When you look at the data there really wasn't a number two.”

Families believe better schools are on the horizon

There is some indication, however, that parents are optimistic for the future. More than half of parents responding to our survey reported that they feel it is getting easier to find a good public school for their child. More than half of survey respondents also reported that they felt Camden's schools were getting better. However, 34 percent of respondents felt that Camden schools were not improving. Perhaps they are making the most of the available tools (choice, family information guides, school visits) and are finding it easier to sort through schools but are still not happy with what their choices are.

TABLE 9. Most Parents Are Optimistic About the Future of Schools in Camden

Is it getting easier to find a good public school in Camden for my child?	
	Percentage of respondents who completed a Camden Enrollment Application
Strongly agree	33%
Agree	27%
Disagree	13%
Strongly disagree	21%
Overall, would you say that the schools in Camden are getting better, getting worse, or staying the same?	
Getting better	51%
Getting worse	14%
Staying same	20%
Uncertain	15%

RECOMMENDATIONS

In September, students across the city arrived for the first day in new schools chosen by their families through the new enrollment system. In many ways, this new system has provided families with more information, clarity, and ease. In its inaugural year there are many lessons to take away, as evidenced by the findings above. Families who participated found the new system fair, but more families need to know about it. Many families got their first choices, but would like more quality schools, with more enrichment, to choose from. Families liked getting some information about schools through websites and the family guide, but crave more information. With those findings in mind, as well as other conclusions drawn from the focus group conversations and survey responses, we close out this report with some recommendations to consider in the effort to improve Camden Enrollment for next year, and to improve school choice for families in Camden more generally.

► Increase number and type of touch points with parents for information about process and timeline.

Moving forward, Camden Enrollment plans to continue outreach to families through community organizations and events, conduct an extensive phone and canvassing effort to reach families, and work directly through schools to get the word out to families of transition-grade students. Since paid advertising did not seem to be a significant way that families learned about the system, Camden Enrollment plans to lower the amount of paid advertising and instead rely on other outreach efforts. Several focus group participants mentioned how pivotal support was in completing the enrollment process. Comments seem to reflect an appreciation for both the type of support (parents calling parents, for example) as well as for how the support eased the task of enrollment. One Spanish-speaking parent filled out the application when a representative from a community organization showed up at her church after a Sunday service. Another completed the process in less than ten minutes over the phone during an unsolicited call from the district. In another focus group, a participant who had been trained by Camden Enrollment to reach out to families of rising kindergarteners to educate and assist them in the enrollment process shared that busy parents could benefit from additional information sessions while others needed multiple reminders about the process and timeline. She said:

“I think a lot of the parents, even when we had people come out and speak to them at the school, they didn’t come or missed that day. They didn’t have the information so I think it’s either having more time to explain to the parents the process ... because some parents, you do have to push. ‘Do you have this information? Do this, do that.’ There are certain parents you don’t have to push at all.”

While it is possible that parents will become more familiar with Camden Enrollment over time, and thus need less support in the coming years, there will always be incoming parents, as well as parents for whom additional support is necessary.

► Dedicate more resources to target transition grade students.

Given the heavy lift of introducing a new enrollment process, Camden Enrollment conducted a strong public awareness campaign prior to and during the enrollment period for the 2016–2017 school year. Survey and focus group data show that many parents were aware of the new system and successfully completed the enrollment before the deadline. However, some parents whose children were in transition grades did not complete the application. Although the number (approximately 30) is not high, and some of these families were likely content with their neighborhood school assignment, it is vitally important for

these families to know about Camden Enrollment. They are high-priority parents and a failure to reach them and ensure their timely enrollment creates complications for both the parents and the schools.

Address technical challenges of the online enrollment process.

A limited number of parents reported confusion and technical difficulties with the use of the online enrollment form. While these issues will inevitably arise even with the best online tools, Camden Enrollment should continue to hone how parents interface with the website and how accounts are created. Some parents cited problems with multiple accounts or being logged off the website. There was also some confusion between the pre-K and the K-12 systems, especially for parents needing to enroll in both systems. This suggests that parents might benefit from an integrated system across pre-K and K-12 systems.

Increase the breadth of school information available to parents.

A strong majority of parents (85 percent) responding to the survey listed academic performance as a factor they considered when choosing a school. It naturally follows that this information should be readily accessible to parents as they decide which schools to list on the enrollment application. However, we know from the survey, the focus groups, and other research on this topic that parents make choices based on a wide array of information.¹⁰ Below is a list of additional information parents expressed interest in having when choosing a school. While any district would be very hard-pressed to provide all of this information, some of it may be readily available and could be provided with relative ease to parents.

Transparent school climate information: Behavioral policies, teacher turnover, student and teacher absentee rates, uniforms or dress codes, school safety (including rates of use of discipline and reported incidences of bullying), programs in place to promote positive school climate (restorative justice, positive behavioral supports).

Beyond the school day: Before- and after-school child care, including cost, meals provided, transportation for after-school activities.

Instructional quality and type: Experience level and longevity of principal and/or teachers; percentage of teachers with advanced degrees, board certification, special education credentials; name and simple description of instructional model.

Increase the depth of school information available to parents.

Less tangible but no less important for many parents is a feel for the school and determination of “fit” for their child. School visits gave families a lot of valuable information, but opportunities to visit schools were inconsistent, limited in nature, or inconvenient for families to access. Providing parents with a limited number of evening open houses conducted by a principal may not provide them with enough information to assess fit. Other kinds of school visits could allow parents the opportunity to watch teachers and directly observe instructional practice and levels of student engagement.

Some cities offer more creative examples of providing parents with a closer look at school choices. The Washington, D.C., organization DC School Reform Now provides parents with the option of taking a “[virtual school tour](#)” of 30 district and charter schools in the city. It also provides parents with a checklist

10. Paul Teske, Jody Fitzpatrick, and Gabriel Kaplan, *Opening Doors: How Low-Income Parents Search for the Right School* (Seattle, WA: Center on Reinventing Public Education, 2007).

of what to look for in a school. A local foundation in Detroit recently organized bus tours for parents and provided a short training on how to assess school quality. In Los Angeles, Parent Revolution provided a similar option.

▶ **Encourage families to maximize their opportunity to choose schools.**

The Camden Enrollment application allows parents to request up to 10 schools, yet few parents exercised that option. On average, parents and students submitting Camden Enrollment applications requested between two and three schools. Perhaps a pop-up box could appear to encourage parents to list more schools, or Camden Enrollment staff, when assisting families with enrollment by phone could also prompt parents to include more choices. Camden Enrollment could also email applicants that submit applications with only one or two choices and encourage them to consider more schools.

▶ **Consider more ways to get the Family Enrollment Guide booklet into homes.**

Parents who knew about the booklet were enthusiastic about the information it provided and how it helped them consider one school over another, organize their choices, and pay attention to deadlines. Although the district sent the booklet home in the backpack of transition-grade students and delivered it to Pre-K programs, distribution to students may not have been consistent or not well-timed for when parents were most likely to be making school choice decisions. Having it available at churches, mosques, and grocery stores would also help to advertise the school-choosing season and get parents thinking about enrollment early.

▶ **Revisit the current transportation plan to include a smaller radius around schools.**

Families expressed concerns about how their children get to school when they live within two and a half miles from the school they want to attend. Although we do not have specific evidence that transportation options changed families' choices, it may be a factor in choosing schools farther from home. As schools in the city improve, it would be a negative unintended consequence if families continued to choose schools farther away from home simply because of better and safer transit for their children. Reducing the eligible distance might play an important role in family choosing, and might improve family engagement, attendance, and stability.

▶ **Increase the diversity of programming in quality school options.**

At least 60 percent of applicants for kindergarten, 9th grade, and other grades received an offer from their first or second choice. CRPE researchers have found that in other cities implementing a common enrollment system, parents who received an offer from their first or second choice are not necessarily "satisfied" with their choice, only that they were matched with what they saw as the best fit of what was available. However, in Camden, 65 percent of parents who were surveyed indicated that they were satisfied with their child's placement. Parent satisfaction is a crucial yet challenging goal given parental demand and variation in students' needs. However, we include it here as a reminder that ease and equitable choice is a complement to a system of high-quality schools offering a diverse array of curriculum, school culture, and enrichment options. The enrollment system doesn't control the school supply and programs in the system, but the enrollment data and parent feedback are useful resources to inform those decisions made by the district.

APPENDIX A. FREQUENCIES: SURVEY RESPONDENTS WHO COMPLETED A CAMDEN ENROLLMENT APPLICATION

Demographics of Survey Respondents (n=501)

	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents	Citywide Demographics*
Race (n=478)			
Hispanic/Latino	257	54%	53%
Black/African American	184	38%	45%
Multiracial	22	5%	
White/Caucasian	7	1%	1%
Something else	4	1%	
Native American/Native Pacific Islander	2	0%	<1%
Asian/Pacific Islander	2	0%	<1%
Prefer not to say	0	0%	
Highest level of education completed (n=485)			
Some college or technical school	170	35%	35%
High school graduate	157	32%	40%
College graduate	66	14%	*2%
Some high school	56	12%	--
Grades 1-8	25	5%	--
Post-graduate education	11	2%	--
Prefer not to say	0	0%	--
Annual household income in 2015 before taxes (n=436)			
Under \$15,000	160	37%	32%
\$15,000-\$24,999	107	25%	16%
\$25,000-\$34,999	86	20%	12%
\$35,000-\$49,999	51	12%	13%
\$50,000-\$74,999	23	5%	12%
\$75,000-\$99,999	6	1%	8%
\$100,000 or more	3	1%	6%
Prefer not to say	0	0%	
Language spoken most often at home (n=498)			
English	371	74%	56%
Spanish	112	22%	41%
Other	15	3%	3%
Prefer not to say	0	0%	

* The data for the citywide demographics was calculated using the [Common Core of Data, 2014-2015](#), at the National Center for Education Statistics.

1. Did you apply for more than one child? *(Select one response)*

Answer choices	Number of Respondents (n=501)	Percentage of Respondents
No	292	58%
Yes	205	41%
Unsure	4	1%

ONLY ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS IF YOU APPLIED FOR MORE THAN ONE CHILD

 1b. How important is it for all your children to attend the same school next year?
(Select one response)

Answer choices	Number of Respondents (n=204)	Percentage of Respondents
Very important	169	83%
Somewhat important	21	10%
Not important at all	8	4%
A little important	6	3%

 1c. Which of the two statements is MORE TRUE? *(Select one response)*

Answer choices	Number of Respondents (n=198)	Percentage of Respondents
It's more important that my students get into my preferred schools, even if it means they're attending different schools	120	61%
It's more important for my students to attend the same school, even if it's a school I want less	78	39%

 1d. Did you use the Family Link option? *(Select one response)*

Answer choices	Number of Respondents (n=202)	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	101	50%
Unsure	59	29%
No	42	21%

If you completed a Camden Enrollment application for more than one child, think about the child who most recently had a birthday when answering the rest of the survey questions.

2. What grade will this child be in next year? (Select one response)

Answer choices	Number of Respondents (n=499)	Percentage of Respondents
Kindergarten	165	33%
9th	80	16%
5th	42	8%
4th	36	7%
6th	34	7%
1st	28	6%
3rd	26	5%
7th	25	5%
8th	24	5%
2nd	22	4%
10th	9	2%
11th	6	1%
12th	2	0%

3. Does this child have an identified special education need, an IEP, or a 504? (Select one response)

Answer choices	Number of Respondents (n=501)	Percentage of Respondents
No	415	83%
Yes	71	14%
Unsure	15	3%

4. Why did you decide to apply? (Select all that apply)

Answer choices	Number of Respondents (n=498)	Percentage of Respondents
Did not want my child to attend their neighborhood District school	192	39%
Encouraged to apply by family or friends	128	26%
Unhappy with my child's current school	119	24%
Other	92	18%
Encouraged apply by my child's current school	59	12%
Encouraged to apply by a representative/recruiter from a school	46	9%

5. How did you hear about the Camden Enrollment application? (Select all that apply)

Answer choices	Number of Respondents (n=501)	Percentage of Respondents
The school my child currently attends told me about it	185	37%
A friend or family member told me about it	163	33%
Other	61	12%
A Camden Enrollment staff member called me	58	12%
I saw a billboard	57	11%
I saw it on social media	54	11%
Another school in the city told me about it	54	11%
A Camden Enrollment staff member stopped by my home	35	7%
I saw a television ad	14	3%
I heard a radio ad	10	2%

6. Thinking back to when you completed the Camden Enrollment application, how strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (Select one response for each question)
a. The application materials were easy to find.

Answer choices	Number of Respondents (n=495)	Percentage of Respondents
Strongly agree	371	75%
Mostly agree	114	23%
Mostly disagree	7	1%
Strongly disagree	3	1%

b. The application instructions were easy to understand.

Answer choices	Number of Respondents (n=497)	Percentage of Respondents
Strongly agree	395	79%
Mostly agree	96	19%
Mostly disagree	3	1%
Strongly disagree	3	1%

c. It was easy to submit the application.

Answer choices	Number of Respondents (n=499)	Percentage of Respondents
Strongly agree	403	81%
Mostly agree	81	16%
Mostly disagree	10	2%
Strongly disagree	5	1%

d. The Camden Enrollment application process treats everyone the same.

Answer choices	Number of Respondents (n=472)	Percentage of Respondents
Strongly agree	348	74%
Mostly agree	95	20%
Mostly disagree	19	4%
Strongly disagree	10	2%

e. I'm able to get the information I need to choose the best school for my child.

Answer choices	Number of Respondents (n=494)	Percentage of Respondents
Strongly agree	384	78%
Mostly agree	87	18%
Strongly disagree	12	2%
Mostly disagree	11	2%

7. Did your child get an offer to attend a school that you listed on your application?

(Select one response)

Answer choices	Number of Respondents (n=494)	Percentage of Respondents
My child received an offer from my top pick	355	72%
My child did NOT receive an offer from a school on my application	75	15%
My child received an offer but the school was not my top pick	64	13%

8. How satisfied are you with the offer you received? (Select one response)

Answer choices	Number of Respondents (n=500)	Percentage of Respondents
Very satisfied	324	65%
Satisfied	105	21%
Unsatisfied	28	6%
My child did not receive an offer	28	6%
Very unsatisfied	15	3%

9. Do you expect your child to attend the offered school next fall? (Select one response)

Answer choices	Number of Respondents (n=457)	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	384	84%
No	27	6%
My child did not receive an offer	27	6%
Unsure	19	4%

ONLY ANSWER IF YOUR CHILD WILL NOT ATTEND THE OFFERED SCHOOL.
9b. Why won't your child attend the offered school? (Select all that apply)

Answer choices	Number of Respondents (n=36) ¹¹	Percentage of Respondents
Decided that the school is not a good match for my child	11	31%
Learned about a new school that I like more	10	28%
Their sibling will be attending a different school and I want them to be in the same school	9	25%
Can't find transportation to that school	5	14%
My child will attend a private school or vocational school	4	11%
We are moving to another city	2	6%
We moved (are moving) to a new neighborhood and I prefer the neighborhood District school	1	3%
We moved (are moving) to a new neighborhood and transportation to the matched school will be too difficult	1	3%

11. Though this question was only intended for those respondents who reported that their child would not attend their offered school the following year (27 respondents), 9 respondents who answered "Unsure" to Question 9 answered this question, bringing the total number of respondents to 36.

10. In what way, if at all, do you think that the new Camden Enrollment process changes your chance of getting your child into the school of your choice? *(Select one response)*

Answer choices	Number of Respondents (n=495)	Percentage of Respondents
It lowers my chances	243	49%
It doesn't affect my chances	149	30%
Unsure	69	14%
It increases my chances	34	7%

11. Thinking about THIS year (2015-2016 school year), how does your child PRIMARILY get to school? *(Select one response)*

Answer choices	Number of Respondents (n=499)	Percentage of Respondents
You or another adult drives	256	51%
A school bus or van	116	23%
Your child walks or bikes	95	19%
Public transportation	31	6%
Unsure	1	0%

12. Thinking about NEXT year (2016-2017 school year), how will your child PRIMARILY get to school? *(Select one response)*

Answer choices	Number of Respondents (n=500)	Percentage of Respondents
You or another adult drives	221	44%
A school bus or van	192	38%
Your child walks or bikes	50	10%
Public transportation	21	4%
Unsure	16	3%

13. Which of the following resources did you consult to find information about schools?
(Select all that apply)

Answer choices	Number of Respondents (n=491)	Percentage of Respondents
CamdenEnrollment.org	218	44%
School websites	202	41%
Friends and family	158	32%
Visit(s) to school(s)	126	26%
Camden City School District Website	123	25%
Family Enrollment Guide booklet	72	15%
School Information Cards	61	12%
Phone call or visit from school representative	50	10%
School Brochure	44	9%
Camden Enrollment Hotline	35	7%
TV or radio	25	5%
Other	16	3%
Citywide School Fair	15	3%
Camden business or local organization	11	2%

14. Of all the ways you got information about schools for your child, which was most useful?
(Select one response)

Answer choices	Number of Respondents (n=484)	Percentage of Respondents
CamdenEnrollment.org	127	26%
School websites	97	20%
Friends and family	67	14%
Visit(s) to school(s)	66	14%
Camden City School District Website	33	7%
Family Enrollment Guide booklet	20	4%
Phone call or visit from school representative	20	4%
School Information Cards	16	3%
Other	11	2%
Camden Enrollment Hotline	8	2%
Citywide School Fair	8	2%
School Brochure	6	1%
Camden business or local organization	3	1%
TV or radio	2	0%

15. What information did you **NOT** have that would have helped you decide on your school choices? *(Select all that apply)*

Answer choices	Number of Respondents (n=452)	Percentage of Respondents
Academic performance	165	37%
School programs or teaching styles	163	36%
Transportation availability and options	142	31%
School safety	133	29%
School culture	73	16%
Other	61	13%

16. Think about the school you most want your child to attend. Which of the following factors convinced you to apply to this particular school? *(Select all that apply)*

Answer choices	Number of Respondents (n=453)	Percentage of Respondents
Good academics, performance or quality	385	85%
Curriculum or programs (e.g., approach, arts, math)	251	55%
Safety of school	221	49%
Extracurricular (e.g., afterschool program, sports, etc.)	186	41%
Location near home	175	39%
Personal connection/family connection (I went there, siblings attend, etc.)	156	34%
Location is convenient (e.g., near child care or work)	134	30%
Special population services (e.g., gifted, special education, bilingual, etc.)	118	26%
Other	12	3%

17. When you look for a school for your child, which of these is the **MOST** important to you? *(Select one response)*

Answer choices	Number of Respondents (n=498)	Percentage of Respondents
Quality of the academics	318	64%
Safety of the school	152	31%
Location of the school	28	6%

18. And which of these is the LEAST important? *(Select one response)*

Answer choices	Number of Respondents (n=488)	Percentage of Respondents
Location of the school	418	86%
Safety of the school	40	8%
Quality of the academics	30	6%

 19. Here is a list of reasons that can make choosing a school difficult. Which of the following made things difficult for you? *(Select all that apply)*

Answer choices	Number of Respondents (n=258)	Percentage of Respondents
None of these/unsure ¹²	133	52%
Understanding which schools my child was eligible to attend	122	47%
Finding transportation for my child to get to and from school	107	41%
Available schools weren't a good fit for my child	98	38%
Difficult or confusing paperwork to enroll or apply to schools	60	23%

 20. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? *(Select one response)*

It is getting easier to find a good public school in Camden for my child.

Answer choices	Number of Respondents (n=490)	Percentage of Respondents
Strongly agree	164	33%
Mostly agree	130	27%
Strongly disagree	103	21%
Mostly disagree	66	13%
Unsure	27	6%

 21. Overall, would you say that schools in Camden are getting better, getting worse, or staying the same? *(Select one response)*

Answer choices	Number of Respondents (n=499)	Percentage of Respondents
Getting better	256	51%
Staying the same	98	20%
Uncertain	73	15%
Getting worse	72	14%

12. Strategies360, the survey firm contracted to administer the survey, added an additional category, "None of these/unsure," to the online survey but not to the phone or paper versions. Respondents who took the survey by phone or on paper who were unsure or to whom none of the answer choices applied did not answer the question, likely skewing the results to this question.

APPENDIX B. FREQUENCIES: SURVEY RESPONDENTS WHO DID NOT COMPLETE A CAMDEN ENROLLMENT APPLICATION

Demographics of Survey Respondents (n=61)

	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Race (n=60)		
Hispanic/Latino	35	58%
Black/African American	20	33%
Multiracial	5	8%
White/Caucasian	0	0%
Native American/Native Pacific Islander	0	0%
Asian/Pacific Islander	0	0%
Something else	0	0%
Prefer not to say	0	0%
Highest level of education completed (n=60)		
High school graduate	15	25%
College graduate	13	22%
Some college or technical school	12	20%
Grades 1-8	10	17%
Some high school	10	17%
Post-graduate education	0	0%
Prefer not to say	0	0%
Annual household income in 2015 before taxes (n=53)		
Under \$15,000	17	32%
\$15,000-\$24,999	14	26%
\$25,000-\$34,999	9	17%
\$35,000-\$49,999	7	13%
\$50,000-\$74,999	4	8%
\$100,000 or more	2	4%
\$75,000-\$99,999	0	0%
Prefer not to say	0	0%
Language spoken most often at home (n=498)		
English	40	66%
Spanish	19	31%
Other	2	3%
Prefer not to say	0	0%

1. What grade will your child be entering next year? (Select one response)

Answer choices	Number of Respondents (n=61)	Percentage of Respondents
Kindergarten	31	51%
9th grade	30	49%

2. Which of these best describes the reason you didn't submit a Camden Enrollment application for your child entering kindergarten or 9th grade? (Select one response)

Answer choices	Number of Respondents (n=48)	Percentage of Respondents
My child's current school offers his/her next grade	14	29%
I didn't know about the Camden Enrollment application	14	29%
I want my child to attend their neighborhood district school	12	25%
I considered submitting a Camden Enrollment application but I didn't know where to get an application	4	8%
I considered submitting a Camden Enrollment application but I found the instructions to complete the application too hard or confusing	2	4%
I considered submitting a Camden Enrollment application but I missed the deadline to complete the application	2	4%
I tried to submit the application but I couldn't get the online form to work	0	0%

3. Thinking about THIS year (2015-2016 school year), how does your child PRIMARILY get to school? (Select one response)

Answer choices	Number of Respondents (n=61)	Percentage of Respondents
You or another adult drives	26	43%
Your child walks or bikes	19	31%
A school bus or van	15	25%
Public transportation	1	2%
Unsure	0	0%

4. Thinking about NEXT year (2016-2017 school year), how will your child PRIMARILY get to school? *(Select one response)*

Answer choices	Number of Respondents (n=61)	Percentage of Respondents
You or another adult drives	23	38%
A school bus or van	22	36%
Your child walks or bikes	12	20%
Public transportation	2	3%
Unsure	2	3%

5. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement? *(Select one response)*
I'm able to get the information I need to choose the best school for my child.

Answer choices	Number of Respondents (n=58)	Percentage of Respondents
Strongly agree	27	47%
Mostly agree	22	38%
Mostly disagree	5	9%
Strongly disagree	4	7%
Unsure	0	0%

6. Which of the following resources did you consult to find information about schools? *(Select all that apply)*

Answer choices	Number of Respondents (n=61)	Percentage of Respondents
Friends and family	25	41%
Visit(s) to school(s)	24	39%
School websites	14	23%
School Information Cards	14	23%
Camden City School District Website	13	21%
School Brochure	9	15%
CamdenEnrollment.org	8	13%
Phone call or visit from school representative	7	11%
TV or radio	4	7%
Family Enrollment Guide booklet	3	5%
Citywide School Fair	3	5%
Other resource	3	5%
Camden Enrollment Hotline	2	3%
Camden business or local organization	0	0%

7. Of all the ways you got information about schools for your child, which was most useful?
(Select one response)

Answer choices	Number of Respondents (n=59)	Percentage of Respondents
Friends and family	12	20%
Visit(s) to school(s)	11	19%
School websites	9	15%
Camden City School District Website	8	14%
Phone call or visit from school representative	7	12%
School Information Cards	5	8%
CamdenEnrollment.org	4	7%
Other resource	2	3%
Family Enrollment Guide booklet	1	2%
Camden Enrollment Hotline	0	0%
TV or radio	0	0%
Camden business or local organization	0	0%
Citywide School Fair	0	0%
School Brochure	0	0%

8. What information did you **NOT** have that would have helped you decide on your school choices? (Select all that apply)

Answer choices	Number of Respondents (n=48)	Percentage of Respondents
School programs or teaching styles	21	44%
Academic performance of the school	20	42%
School safety	18	38%
School culture	10	21%
Transportation availability and options	10	21%
Other	8	17%

9. Think about the school you most want your child to attend. Which of the following factors convinced you to apply to this particular school? *(Select all that apply)*

Answer choices	Number of Respondents (n=60)	Percentage of Respondents
Good academics, performance or quality	34	57%
Location is near home	24	40%
Curriculum or programs (e.g., approach, arts, math)	21	35%
Safety of school	21	35%
Special population services (e.g., gifted, special education, bilingual, etc.)	15	25%
Extracurricular (e.g., afterschool programs, sports, etc.)	15	25%
Personal connection/family connection (I went there, siblings attend, etc.)	15	25%
Location is convenient (e.g., near child care or work)	14	23%
Other	2	3%

10. When you look for a school for your child, which of these is the MOST important to you? *(Select one response)*

Answer choices	Number of Respondents (n=61)	Percentage of Respondents
Quality of the academics	40	66%
Safety of the school	19	31%
Location of the school	2	3%

11. And which of these is the LEAST important? *(Select one response)*

Answer choices	Number of Respondents (n=58)	Percentage of Respondents
Location of the school	45	78%
Safety of the school	7	12%
Quality of the academics	6	10%

12. Here is a list of reasons that can make choosing a school difficult. Which of the following made things difficult for you? *(Select all that apply)*

Answer choices	Number of Respondents (n=49)	Percentage of Respondents
Finding transportation for my child to get to and from school	22	45%
Understanding which school my child was eligible to attend	17	35%
Available schools weren't a good fit for my child	16	33%
Difficult or confusing paperwork to enroll or apply to schools ¹³	9	18%

13. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? *(Select one response)*

It is getting easier to find a good public school in Camden for my child.

Answer choices	Number of Respondents (n=57)	Percentage of Respondents
Mostly agree	18	32%
Strongly agree	15	26%
Mostly disagree	15	26%
Strongly disagree	9	16%
Unsure	0	0%

14. Overall, would you say that schools in Camden are getting better, getting worse, or staying the same? *(Select one response)*

Answer choices	Number of Respondents (n=61)	Percentage of Respondents
Getting better	34	56%
Staying the same	10	16%
Uncertain	10	16%
Getting worse	7	11%

13. Strategies360, the survey firm contracted to administer the survey, did not add the "None of these/unsure" option to the non-completer survey. Respondents who were unsure or to whom none of the answer choices applied did not answer the question, likely skewing the results.

APPENDIX C. CAMDEN ENROLLMENT PARENT FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

I. WELCOME.

Hello, and thank you so much for coming to participate in this focus group. My name is...and I work at the Center on Reinventing Public Education at the University of Washington. We're here as researchers on behalf of the Camden City School District.

The district has asked us to talk with parents to understand what it was like for you to enroll your child in school this year. Your experiences and opinions on enrollment that you share with us today will be used to make improvements to the process for parents going forward. We have also worked with other school districts and families regarding new enrollment processes in cities around the country. We have done focus groups in other cities as well to understand their experiences, which is why the school district here asked us to lead this group. We will meet with a total of 6 groups in Camden including this one and we are hoping to hear from a lot of different people.

If you have participated in focus groups before you'll be familiar with how they work. For anyone else, this is a conversation where we will ask questions and we encourage you to express your views freely. There are no right or wrong answers.

We will be recording our conversation and taking notes. All of your comments are confidential and if we share them with the district or in a report, they will never be connected to you in any way. The recording is to help us have a more natural conversation, rather than slow things down for note taking. **I'M GOING TO START THE TAPE RECORDER NOW.**

II. INTRODUCTIONS

Let's introduce ourselves. We'll just use our first names. Also, will you also tell us what grade your children or the children you care for are in?

III. BACKGROUND

1. I'd like to go around the room and ask how many children you have in school next year and in what grades they will be?
2. By show of hand, who has children going to a new school next year? **(MAKE SURE TO SAY OUT LOUD HOW MANY HANDS ARE RAISED FOR THE RECORDING.)**
3. Again, by show of hand, did any of you fill out the Camden Enrollment application?
4. For those of you who didn't, why didn't you? [probe for reasons: wanted neighborhood school, didn't know about it, etc]
5. If neighborhood school – Did you deliberately move to the neighborhood so your kids could go to that school?

6. For those of you that did fill out the application, how many schools did you list on your application form?
 - a. If you applied to more than one school, did you apply to both charter and district schools, just charter schools, or just district schools?
 - b. Did anyone apply to selective admissions?
7. Did anyone also apply to pre-K for one or more of your children this year?
8. By show of hands, who got their first choice school? Second choice? Third choice? Did anyone not get assigned to any school on their list? **(MAKE SURE TO SAY OUT LOUD HOW MANY HANDS ARE RAISED FOR THE RECORDING.)**
9. What were you expecting to get and did your school assignment surprise you?
10. Can someone explain to me how your child gets matched to a school?
 - a. Is it important to apply to more than one school? Why?
 - b. Does it matter how you order the schools on your application? Why?
11. Did anyone try to enroll their child in a school with a sibling? How does that work?
12. Is anyone here on a waitlist for a school they applied to?

IV. EASE OF USE

13. Show of hands - did anyone make use of the hotline? In person enrollment centers? Any of the other supports offered by the district?
14. Did you use the printed school guide? Was it helpful?
15. How simple was it to use the online choosing system?
16. Was the timeline clear?
17. Families who applied by the deadline found out their results in mid-April. Do you think that's too early, too late, or about right?
18. Was the form simple?
19. Was the upload process simple?
20. Did you use a computer, a phone or paper form to submit your enrollment? Did that process go smoothly?
21. For those who also applied for preK, was it challenging to have a different process for enrolling your pre-K student vs. enrolling your older children?
22. If your child is on a waitlist, is it easy to understand how that process works?

V. SATISFACTION AND FAIRNESS IN THE SYSTEM

23. Can you compare this year and last year's process in terms of fairness? In terms of how easy it was to do?
24. Did you feel as though you had control over where your child will go to school?
25. Did you feel as though you understood how the system worked? Are you planning to participate in after round enrollment?
26. Was it important to you that your current school didn't know that you were submitting an application to other schools?
27. Do you feel satisfied with the school options that were available to you?

VI. PARENT INFORMATION NEEDS AND QUALITY OF RESOURCES

28. I want to try to understand how you went about applying for a school for your child. Probe: How did you get information?
29. Can you tell me about how you picked a school for your child?
 - a. What was the first thing you did and when did you start?
30. Did you feel as though you had more or less, better or worse information than in the past?
31. What kind of information did you have to help you make your choices? Was it enough?
32. Think about the schools that were your top choice for your child. What did you want to know about them to make them the top pick? Probes (need to go through each of these):
 - a. School culture/discipline
 - b. Transportation? Location? Why? Near home? Near work?
 - c. Performance?
 - d. Activities/extra curricular?
 - e. Safety?
 - f. After/before school care?
 - g. Other?
33. What does a good [insert factor] look like to you? (E.g. what does a good school culture look like to you? What does good school performance look like to you?)
34. Did you talk to the principal or any teachers when you visited? What kinds of questions did you ask them?
35. How else did you learn about the schools?
 - a. School fairs
 - b. School Choice website
 - c. Visited the school

- d. Counselor/principal info from the sending school
- e. Newspaper, radio, television, billboards
- f. Other parents, friends, teachers?
- g. Anything else?

36. Which of these was most valuable?

37. What was your reaction when you heard the district was changing the enrollment process? Why?

VII. IMPROVING THE APPLICATION/ENROLLMENT PROCESS

38. What advice would you give a neighbor or a family member about how to pick a school?

39. Thinking back over your experience enrolling your child in Camden City School District, what would make it better for you?

40. Does it feel like everyone was treated the same?

41. If you had to sum up the experience of enrolling your child prior to this school year in one word, what would that be?

42. If you had to sum up the experience of enrolling your child in school this school year in one word, what would that be?

APPENDIX D. CAMDEN ENROLLMENT INSTRUCTIONS TO FAMILIES

How Camden Enrollment works:

The figure below is drawn from the Camden Enrollment website and explains to families what they need to do to enroll a student.

1. Learn About School Options

Click on Find a School to learn about your public school options in Camden, including dates and times of school open houses, which are a great opportunity to meet principals and teachers.

2. Select Your Schools

Once you've done your research, make a list of schools that you want for your child by adding them to your list of Favorite Schools. You'll be able to list up to 10 schools on your application, and you'll need to put them in the order you prefer them, so take time to think about which school is your top choice, which is your second choice, and so on.

3. Apply

The main round application deadline was March 1, 2016. If you missed this deadline, you can still fill out an application beginning Monday, March 7. The application can be completed online on your computer or smartphone, by calling our hotline at (856) 536-3999, or by visiting a Family Enrollment Center. Click here to see a list of Family Enrollment Center locations and hours.

You will need to:

Provide basic information about your child, such as their date of birth and their current grade.

- Rank your school selections in the true order that you prefer them.
- You can choose up to 10 schools on each child's application.
- If you have more than one child, you will have to fill out a separate application for each child.

4. Get Your School

If you applied before March 1, log in here to see your child's results. Camden Enrollment works to give as many students as possible a seat in their first choice school, then their second choice, and so on.

You'll be waitlisted at any schools you listed higher than your placement. For example, if you are placed at your 3rd choice school, you'll be waitlisted at your 1st and 2nd choices.

You will only be eligible for schools that you have listed on your application. You will not be assigned to a school that you did not list.

If you applied after March 1, your application will be considered on a first-come, first-served basis, with families notified beginning in late April.

5. Register

After you receive your school placement, you must go to that school in person by June 30, 2016 to register and turn in your paperwork.

APPENDIX E. CAMDEN ENROLLMENT APPLICATION

Camden Enrollment Application | 2016-2017 | Need Help? (856) 536-3999 | Due March 1, 2016 by 6pm to a Family Enrollment Center

This application can only be turned in at participating schools or Family Enrollment Centers. For a list of Family Enrollment Center locations and hours, see page 3 of this application.

Section A: Student Information

Student First Name	Student Middle Name	Student Last Name	
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	
Student Email (optional)	Date of Birth (MM/DD/YYYY)		
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Student Address	City	State	Zip Code
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Current School	Current Grade	Grade Applying to	
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	

Section B: Parent/Guardian Information

Relationship to Student	First Name	Last Name
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Home Address <input type="checkbox"/> Check box if same as Student Address	Apartment, Unit, Suite Number	
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	
City	State	Zip Code
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Mobile Phone Number †	Home Phone Number	Work Phone Number
(<input type="text"/>) <input type="text"/>	(<input type="text"/>) <input type="text"/>	(<input type="text"/>) <input type="text"/>
Email	Select How You Want to Be Contacted	
<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Email and Text Message <input type="checkbox"/> Email Only <input type="checkbox"/> Text Message Only	
<input type="checkbox"/> Check this box if you are not currently a Camden resident, but are moving into Camden City before next school year OR if you live outside of Camden, but have a child currently attending a Camden charter school.		
Alternate Contact Name	Relationship to Student	Phone Number
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	(<input type="text"/>) <input type="text"/>

We will reach out to your alternate contact if we have questions about your application and are unable to reach you.

† Message and data rates may apply based on your wireless carrier's rate plan.

Have questions? Need help? Call (856) 536-3999
Application is not valid until it is turned in to a staff member and you receive a receipt.

Camden Enrollment Application

2016-2017

Need Help?
(856) 536-3999

Due March 1, 2016 by 6pm to a
Family Enrollment Center

Section C: Select Schools



List all of the schools you want apply to in the order you prefer them. **The order is important!** Put your first choice first, your second choice second, etc.

You do not need to apply to your current school or neighborhood District school—you already have a guaranteed seat. If you apply to a magnet school, see page 4 for admission requirements.

	School Name	School Code (pg. 3)
1st Choice	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
2nd Choice	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
3rd Choice	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
4th Choice	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
5th Choice	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
6th Choice	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
7th Choice	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
8th Choice	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
9th Choice	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
10th Choice	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Keep Siblings Together: To some families, it is more important for all their K-8 children to go to the same school than for each individual child to get his or her highest ranked choice. If that applies to your family, check this box, and we will prioritize keeping your children together. **IMPORTANT!** You must list the same schools in the same order for all K-8 children.

Section D: Sibling Information

Does this student have a sibling who is:

- Currently attending a school you are applying to?
- Also applying through Camden Enrollment this year?

If so, list that sibling's information below so that your child can receive a sibling preference, if applicable. You must complete a separate application for each student applying.

Sibling 1 First Name	Sibling 1 Middle Name	Sibling 1 Last Name
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Date of Birth (MM/DD/YYYY)	Sibling 1 Current School	Sibling 1 Current Grade
<input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Sibling 2 First Name	Sibling 2 Middle Name	Sibling 2 Last Name
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Date of Birth (MM/DD/YYYY)	Sibling 2 Current School	Sibling 2 Current Grade
<input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

If you need to list more than 2 siblings, attach another paper application with only Section D filled out.

Camden Enrollment Application | 2016-2017 | Need Help? (856) 536-3999 | Due March 1, 2016 by 6pm to a Family Enrollment Center

Guardian/Parent Signature

By submitting this application, you declare that the information in the application, including the primary residence of the child, is true and correct. Providing false information on this application may void your application. If the address of your child changes, please notify Camden Enrollment immediately by calling (856) 536-3999. Once your child is admitted to a school, you must comply with additional registration requirements.

_____ Guardian / Parent Signature Date (MM/DD/YYYY)

Admins Only

_____ Print Name Sign Name Date (MM/DD/YYYY)

School Code	School Name	School Code	School Name
17	Alfred Cramer College Preparatory Lab School (K-6)	49	Hope Community Charter School (K-4)
38	Camden Academy Charter High School (9-12)	05	J.G. Whittier Family School (3-4)
60	Camden Community Charter School (K-8)	47	Katz-Dalsey Academy Charter School (K-4)
01	Camden High School (9-12)	55	KIPP Cooper Norcross Academy - Primary (K-2)
45	Camden's Pride Elementary School (K-4)	55	KIPP Cooper Norcross Academy - Middle (5-8)
39	Camden's Promise Middle School (5-8)	03	LEAP Academy University Charter School (K-12)
27	Charles Sumner Elementary School (K-8)	59	Mastery High School (9)
06	Cooper B. Hatch Family School (2-8)	56	Mastery: Cramer Hill Elementary (K-4)
19	Cooper's Poynt Family School (K-8)	10	Mastery: East Camden Middle School (6-8)
08	Creative Arts Morgan Village Academy (6-12) **	23	Mastery: McGraw Elementary (K-5)
02	Dr. Charles E. Brimm Medical Arts High School (9) **	18	Mastery: Molina Elementary (K-8)
16	Dr. Henry H. Davis Elementary School (K-8)	58	Mastery: North Camden Elementary (K-7)
29	Dr. U.S. Wiggins College Preparatory Lab School (K-8)	34	Met East High School (9-12)**
14	Early Childhood Development Center (K)	35	Octavius V. Catto Family School (K-8)
44	Environment Community Opportunity (ECO) Charter School (K-5)	36	R.T. Cream Family School (K-8)
32	Freedom Prep Charter School (K-11)	20	Thomas H. Dudley Family School (K-8)
21	Forest Hill School (K-8)	57	Uncommon: Camden Prep (K-5)
11	H.B. Wilson Family School (K-8)	09	Veterans Memorial Family School (K-8)
26	Harry C. Sharp Elementary School (K-6)	04	Woodrow Wilson High School (9-12)
15	Henry L. Bonsall Family School (6-8)	30	Yorkship Elementary School (K-8)

** This is a magnet school and has additional application requirements. See page 4.

Enrollment Centers

<p>Central Administration Building 201 N. Front Street Monday - Friday, 8am - 6pm</p>	<p>District Parent Center at Pyne Poynt Trailers 800 Erie Street Monday - Friday, 10am - 1pm</p>	<p>Ferry Avenue Library 852 Ferry Avenue Monday & Wednesday, 10am - 1pm</p>
<p>Isabel Miller Community Center 8th & Carl Miller Boulevard Monday - Friday, 3pm - 6pm</p>	<p>Boys and Girls Club - East Camden 2 N. Dudley St. Tuesday & Thursday, 3pm - 6pm</p>	

Camden Enrollment Application

2016-2017

Need Help?
(856) 536-3999

Due March 1, 2016 by 6pm to a
Family Enrollment Center

Section E: Magnet School Requirements **

If you are applying to any of the schools below, please **attach** the required documents to this application.

Brimm Medical Arts High School

1. **Attach** most recent report card.

2. Letters of Recommendation: Provide the contact information for the people you want to write your recommendations.

Language Arts Teacher Name	Phone	Email
<input type="text"/>	(<input type="text"/>) <input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Math or Science Teacher Name	Phone	Email
<input type="text"/>	(<input type="text"/>) <input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Guidance Counselor Name	Phone	Email
<input type="text"/>	(<input type="text"/>) <input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Creative Arts Morgan Village Academy

1. Which arts area are you applying for? Choose up to two:

Vocal Music
 Instrumental Music
 Strings
 Creative Writing
 Art
 Dance
 Drama
 Fashion Design

2. **Attach** most recent report card.

3. **Attach** a typed essay (250 words) that answers the following:

Many students from Camden will be applying for admission to Creative Arts Morgan Village Academy. What special characteristics, skills, or talents do you have that make you the best candidate? Where do you plan to take your art beyond high school? Applicants may also choose to highlight their participation in community service projects or unique volunteer experiences. Optional: list any awards or certificates received.

4. Letters of Recommendation: Provide the contact information for the people you want to write your recommendations.

Teacher Name	Phone	Email
<input type="text"/>	(<input type="text"/>) <input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Arts Teacher Name	Phone	Email
<input type="text"/>	(<input type="text"/>) <input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Guidance Counselor Name	Phone	Email
<input type="text"/>	(<input type="text"/>) <input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Met East High School

1. **Attach** most recent report card.

2. **Attach** typed essay: There are several other high school options in the Camden City School District. What aspect of MetEast High School is most appealing to you?

3. Letters of Recommendation: Provide the contact information for the people you want to write your recommendations.

Teacher, Principal or Guidance Counselor Name	Phone	Email
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Parent or Responsible Adult	Phone	Email
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

APPENDIX F. EXAMPLE PAGES FROM CAMDEN ENROLLMENT GUIDE BOOKLET

3-4 J.G. Whittier Family School

Address: 465 Berkley Street
Camden NJ 08103

School Type: District School **School Code:** 05

Start Time: 8:20 AM **End Time:** 2:55 PM

Contact: (856) 966-8999 | www.jgwhittier.org

Academic Focus: Literacy & Math

Neighborhood: Lanning Square

The mission of Whittier Family School is to encourage academic excellence through child-centered planning and development, creating equitable opportunities for all students to learn. We promote maximum growth and achievement academically, emotionally, socially, and physically and a safe environment that celebrates our diversity.

2014 SCHOOL QUALITY RATING

Academic Performance: Under Performing

+ School Visit: Needs Improvement

= Overall Score: Under Performing

On Track: On Track

Making Progress: Making Progress

Needs Improvement: Needs Improvement

Admissions Preference: Guaranteed seat for students in neighborhood. Sibling preference for out-of-neighborhood students.

PROGRAMS

Mentorship
 Art
 Music
 STEM
 Health Clinic
 ROTC

After School Programs (End Time: 5:30 PM):

Homework Help	Enrichment Circle for Literacy & Math
Test Readiness	Intramural Sports & Activity Clubs
Edmentum Prep	

Community Partnership:

Rutgers University	Read Across America Lenape High Schools
College Access Program	Literacy Fun Day with Lenape High School
Reading Tutor Program	GoNoOde
Campbell Soup	

Social Services Resources: No

Summer Programs: No

Parent Education Program: No

Computer Access for Parents: No

Sports Offered:

Baseball	Soccer	Track & Field
Basketball		

Special Needs Programs:

Autism	Cognitive Disabilities (Mild)
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AP Classes & SAT/ACT Prep: Not Applicable

Foreign Languages Offered: No

School Transportation: In Some Cases

Public Transportation: 401, 402, 410, 412, 450, 452, 453, 457, 460 Bus

Total Number of Students: 129

Student/Teacher Ratio: 10:1

Average Class Size: 17

% English Language Learners: 7.0%

African American: 55.8%

Hispanic: 43.4%

White: 0.8%

Asian: 0.0%

Other (Native American or Pacific Islander): 0.0%

Uniform Vouchers: Yes

Uniform Colors: Shirts: White, Light Blue, Navy Blue; Pants: Khaki & Navy

K-4 Katz-Dalsey Academy Charter School

Address: 1725 Park Blvd; 309A Pleasant St
Camden NJ 08103

School Type: Charter School **School Code:** 47

Start Time: 8:15 AM **End Time:** 3:15 PM

Contact: (856) 375-1140 | www.promiseacademycharter.org/katz

Academic Focus: Hands-on theme-anchored learning experiences.

Neighborhood: Parkside

The purpose of Katz Dalsey Academy Charter School is to provide a nurturing educational learning community where all students acquire the foundational skills necessary for the development of inquiring, educated, forward-looking, and responsible young adults.

2014 SCHOOL QUALITY RATING

Academic Performance: Needs Improvement

+ School Visit: Making Progress

= Overall Score: Needs Improvement

On Track: On Track

Making Progress: Making Progress

Needs Improvement: Needs Improvement

Under Performing: Under Performing

Admissions Preference: Sibling

PROGRAMS

Mentorship
 Art
 Music
 STEM
 Health Clinic
 ROTC

After School Programs (End Time: 6:00 PM):

Extended School Day	Before-School Program
---------------------	-----------------------

Community Partnership:

Camden's Charter School Network	Friends of Katz Dalsey Academy Hopeworks
Allied Resources for Kids	
Boys and Girls Club	

Social Services Resources:

On-site Social Worker	Summer Programs: Extended School Year
Free Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner	

Parent Education Program: Yes

Computer Access for Parents: Yes

Sports Offered: No

Special Needs Programs: Services provided for students with special needs, including behavioral disabilities, autism, learning disabilities, cognitive disabilities, and English Language Learners.

AP Classes & SAT/ACT Prep: Not Applicable

Foreign Languages Offered: Spanish

School Transportation: Busing for 2+ miles away

Public Transportation: 404 Bus

Total Number of Students: 311

Student/Teacher Ratio: 15:1

Average Class Size: 16

% English Language Learners: 1.0%

Hispanic: 55.3%

African American: 44.4%

Asian: 0.3%

White: 0.0%

Other (Native American or Pacific Islander): 0.0%

Uniform Vouchers: Yes

Uniform Colors: Blue, Gold, Khaki

APPENDIX G. DETAILED TABLES (AS REFERENCED IN REPORT)

TABLE G-1. Parent Satisfaction With Offer Received, By Self-Reported Education Level and Income (n=500)

How satisfied are you with the offer you received?	Very satisfied (n=324)	Satisfied (n=105)	Unsatisfied (n=28)	Very unsatisfied (n=15)	No offer (n=28)
Education Level					
Grades 1-8 (n=25)	60%	32%	4%	0%	4%
Some high school (n=56)	59%	23%	7%	4%	7%
High school graduate (n=157)	66%	21%	4%	3%	6%
Some college or technical school (n=169)	68%	19%	8%	2%	3%
College graduate (n=66)	65%	21%	5%	5%	5%
Post-graduate education (n=11)	64%	9%	0%	9%	18%
Income					
Under \$15,000 (n=159)	68%	18%	6%	2%	5%
\$15,000-\$24,999 (n=107)	60%	24%	6%	5%	6%
\$25,000-\$34,999 (n=86)	69%	16%	8%	5%	2%
\$35,000-\$49,999 (n=51)	73%	18%	6%	0%	4%
\$50,000-\$74,999 (n=23)	57%	30%	0%	4%	9%
\$75,000-\$99,999 (n=6)	67%	17%	0%	17%	0%
\$100,000 or more (n=3)	67%	0%	0%	33%	0%

Referenced in report, page 28

TABLE G-2. Parents' Plans for Their Child to Attend Offered School, By Self-Reported Education Level and Income (n=457)

Do you expect your child to attend the offered school next fall?	Yes (n=384)	No (n=27)	Unsure (n=19)	No offer (n=27)
Education Level				
Grades 1-8 (n=19)	100%	0%	0%	5%
Some high school (n=50)	96%	2%	2%	10%
High school graduate (n=148)	85%	10%	5%	6%
Some college or technical school (n=154)	89%	6%	5%	3%
College graduate (n=61)	95%	3%	2%	5%
Post-graduate education (n=10)	75%	12%	12%	20%
Income				
Under \$15,000 (n=139)	88%	6%	6%	6%
\$15,000-\$24,999 (n=100)	88%	7%	4%	6%
\$25,000-\$34,999 (n=77)	92%	8%	0%	3%
\$35,000-\$49,999 (n=50)	85%	6%	8%	4%
\$50,000-\$74,999 (n=22)	85%	15%	0%	9%
\$75,000-\$99,999 (n=4)	75%	0%	25%	0%
\$100,000 or more (n=2)	100%	0%	0%	0%

Referenced in report, page 28

TABLE G-3. Parents’ Sources of Information About Camden Enrollment, By Self-Reported Race, Education Level, Income, and Language Spoken at Home (n=501)

How did you hear about the Camden Enrollment application?	I heard a radio ad	I saw a TV ad	I saw a billboard	I saw it on social media	The school my child currently attends told me about it	Another school in the city told me about it	A Camden Enrollment staff member called me	A Camden Enrollment staff member stopped by my home	A friend or family member told me about it	Other
Race										
Black/African American (n=184)	2%	2%	9%	6%	29%	9%	11%	6%	16%	9%
Hispanic/Latino (n=257)	1%	2%	8%	9%	24%	6%	7%	4%	30%	8%
Multiracial (n=22)	4%	4%	4%	0%	31%	15%	0%	4%	19%	19%
Education Level										
Grades 1-8 (n=25)	3%	0%	7%	10%	10%	3%	3%	7%	45%	10%
Some high school (n=56)	1%	2%	12%	11%	28%	2%	5%	2%	31%	4%
High school graduate (n=157)	1%	2%	8%	9%	27%	9%	9%	6%	21%	7%
Some college or technical school (n=170)	2%	2%	7%	7%	22%	10%	10%	5%	25%	10%
College graduate (n=66)	1%	2%	7%	4%	42%	6%	10%	3%	16%	9%
Post-graduate education (n=11)	0%	0%	17%	6%	28%	6%	6%	11%	11%	17%
Income										
Under \$15,000 (n=160)	1%	2%	8%	8%	27%	8%	8%	7%	25%	7%
\$15,000-\$24,999 (n=107)	1%	2%	8%	9%	23%	8%	10%	3%	25%	11%
\$25,000-\$34,999 (n=86)	2%	1%	6%	7%	26%	10%	7%	5%	26%	8%
\$35,000-\$49,999 (n=51)	3%	2%	11%	6%	34%	6%	12%	3%	15%	8%
\$50,000-\$74,999 (n=23)	2%	2%	12%	5%	18%	8%	10%	5%	25%	12%
\$75,000-\$99,999 (n=6)	11%	11%	11%	11%	22%	0%	0%	0%	0%	33%
\$100,000 or more (n=3)	0%	0%	33%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	33%	33%
Language spoken at home										
English (n=371)	1%	2%	9%	7%	26%	9%	10%	6%	21%	9%
Spanish (n=112)	2%	1%	8%	9%	26%	5%	5%	4%	32%	8%

Referenced in report, page 7

TABLE G-4. Parent Reports on Ease of Finding, Filling Out, and Submitting the Camden Enrollment Application, Overall

Thinking back to when you completed the Camden Enrollment application, how strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?	Strongly agree	Mostly agree	Mostly disagree	Strongly disagree
The application materials were easy to find. (n=495)	75%	23%	1%	1%
The application materials were easy to understand. (n=497)	79%	19%	1%	1%
It was easy to submit the application. (n=499)	81%	16%	2%	1%

Referenced in report, page 9

TABLE G-5a. Parent Reports on Ease of Finding the Camden Enrollment Application, By Self-Reported Race, Education Level, Income, and Language Spoken at Home (n=495)

Thinking back to when you completed the Camden Enrollment application, how strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

The application materials were easy to find.	Strongly agree	Mostly agree	Mostly disagree	Strongly disagree
Race				
Black/African American (n=183)	80%	17%	1%	1%
Hispanic/Latino (n=252)	72%	24%	2%	0%
Multiracial (n=22)	68%	32%	0%	0%
Education level				
Grades 1-8 (n=25)	72%	24%	4%	0%
Some high school (n=56)	75%	21%	4%	0%
High school graduate (n=154)	73%	23%	1%	2%
Some college or technical school (n=168)	79%	18%	1%	0%
College graduate (n=66)	67%	32%	2%	0%
Post-graduate education (n=11)	91%	9%	0%	0%
Income				
Under \$15,000 (n=158)	73%	24%	3%	0%
\$15,000-\$24,999 (n=106)	72%	24%	2%	1%
\$25,000-\$34,999 (n=86)	81%	19%	0%	0%
\$35,000-\$49,999 (n=49)	78%	14%	0%	2%
\$50,000-\$74,999 (n=23)	52%	43%	4%	0%
\$75,000-\$99,999 (n=6)	50%	50%	0%	0%
\$100,000 or more (n=3)	100%	0%	0%	0%
Language spoken at home				
English (n=367)	78%	21%	1%	0%
Spanish (n=110)	68%	29%	2%	1%
Other (n=15)	60%	33%	7%	0%

Referenced in report, page 10

TABLE G-5b. Parent Reports on Ease of Understanding the Camden Enrollment Application Instructions, By Self-Reported Race, Education Level, Income, and Language Spoken at Home (n=497)

Thinking back to when you completed the Camden Enrollment application, how strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

The application materials were easy to understand.	Strongly agree	Mostly agree	Mostly disagree	Strongly disagree
Race				
Black/African American (n=182)	85%	14%	0%	1%
Hispanic/Latino (n=255)	77%	21%	1%	0%
Multiracial (n=22)	77%	18%	5%	0%
Education level				
Grades 1-8 (n=25)	84%	16%	0%	0%
Some high school (n=56)	80%	18%	2%	0%
High school graduate (n=155)	76%	20%	1%	2%
Some college or technical school (n=169)	82%	18%	0%	0%
College graduate (n=65)	76%	21%	2%	0%
Post-graduate education (n=11)	91%	9%	0%	0%
Income				
Under \$15,000 (n=159)	78%	21%	1%	0%
\$15,000-\$24,999 (n=107)	79%	21%	0%	0%
\$25,000-\$34,999 (n=86)	84%	15%	1%	0%
\$35,000-\$49,999 (n=50)	82%	10%	2%	4%
\$50,000-\$74,999 (n=23)	65%	35%	0%	0%
\$75,000-\$99,999 (n=6)	67%	33%	0%	0%
\$100,000 or more (n=3)	100%	0%	0%	0%
Language spoken at home				
English (n=367)	83%	17%	0%	0%
Spanish (n=112)	69%	22%	2%	1%
Other (n=15)	87%	13%	0%	0%

Referenced in report, page 10

TABLE G-5c. Parent Reports on Ease of Submitting the Camden Enrollment Application, By Self-Reported Race, Education Level, Income, and Language Spoken at Home (n=499)

Thinking back to when you completed the Camden Enrollment application, how strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

It was easy to submit the application.	Strongly agree	Mostly agree	Mostly disagree	Strongly disagree
Race				
Black/African American (n=183)	86%	12%	1%	1%
Hispanic/Latino (n=256)	77%	19%	3%	1%
Multiracial (n=22)	77%	18%	0%	5%
Education level				
Grades 1-8 (n=25)	64%	32%	0%	4%
Some high school (n=56)	75%	21%	4%	0%
High school graduate (n=156)	82%	13%	3%	1%
Some college or technical school (n=169)	84%	14%	1%	0%
College graduate (n=66)	79%	18%	2%	2%
Post-graduate education (n=11)	91%	9%	0%	0%
Income				
Under \$15,000 (n=159)	78%	18%	2%	1%
\$15,000-\$24,999 (n=107)	81%	17%	2%	0%
\$25,000-\$34,999 (n=86)	85%	14%	1%	0%
\$35,000-\$49,999 (n=50)	84%	10%	2%	2%
\$50,000-\$74,999 (n=23)	65%	30%	4%	0%
\$75,000-\$99,999 (n=6)	67%	33%	0%	0%
\$100,000 or more (n=3)	67%	33%	0%	0%
Language spoken at home				
English (n=369)	84%	14%	2%	1%
Spanish (n=112)	72%	23%	3%	2%
Other (n=15)	67%	27%	7%	0%

Referenced in report, page 10