

Summary of enrollment study

- **Goal of report:** Understand the factors contributing to enrollment decline in Seattle Public Schools (SPS), and the implications these factors have for a sustainable, high-quality, and equitable school district in the future
- **Research partners:** SPS Enrollment Planning team, the research firm Strategies 360, and researchers at MIT's Blueprint Labs, a policy research lab
- **Methods:** 1) Conducted a representative survey of caretakers; 2) Analyzed trends in enrollment decline in Seattle, neighboring districts, and similar cities; and 3) Analyzed data from external factors, like household mobility data
- **Survey information:** Strategies 360 conducted a representative survey (offered in English, Spanish, Cantonese, Vietnamese, Somali, and Amharic) by gender, race, and geography of caretakers of former and current students. A non-representative survey was conducted of caretakers of students who have never attended SPS. All survey participants reside in Seattle due to cost and feasibility constraints. The survey collected 1,420 responses achieved by contacting approximately 125,000 adults.

Key findings

Overview of survey results

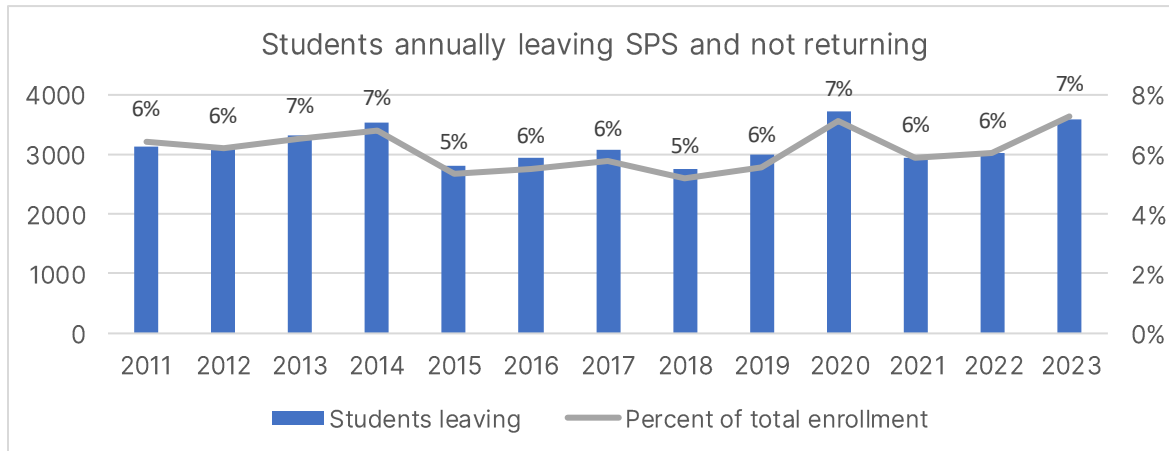
- **Satisfaction with SPS:** Among current students, 86% are satisfied with SPS. 66% of former students and 53% of students who have never attended are dissatisfied with SPS.
- **What people like about SPS** (in order of prevalence, similar among current and former students): Sense of belonging and community, dedicated and caring teachers, and proximity of school to home
- **What people dislike about SPS** (in order of prevalence, similar among current and former students): Concerns about the quality of education and curriculum overcrowded classrooms, lack of funding and overcrowding
- **Reasons to potentially disenroll** (in order of prevalence among current students): Concerns about quality of education, a better option available, sense of lack of safety, and curriculum being taught
- **Most important future priority for SPS** (in order of prevalence among current students): Improvements to educational quality and increasing funding while reducing class size and improving school operations
- Two out of five caretakers of former students said they would not consider re-enrolling in SPS. Those who were more **open to re-enrolling** cited improvements to academic rigor more than any other factors as a reason to re-enroll.

Indicators of enrollment decline

- **Shrinking kindergarten class:** The rate of children born in Seattle who enroll in kindergarten has dropped significantly since 2012. Kindergarten cohort sizes have declined steadily: the 2023 cohort was 3,714 students compared to a pre-COVID average kindergarten cohort size of 4,668 students. This shrinking kindergarten class accounts for most of SPS's enrollment decline.
- **Decline in households with children:** Households with children in Seattle have declined by 16% since 2017. Almost 70% of these households with children that left Seattle moved out of state, while 15% relocated elsewhere in King County.

Factors not contributing significantly to enrollment decline

- **Percentage of leaving students has remained stable:** The percentage of students leaving since 2011 has fluctuated between 5% and 7% of total enrollment.



- **Private school enrollment change:** Between 2019 and 2023, private school enrollment across King County (including Seattle) increased by 3,182 students. During this same period, 11,131 students left SPS. Even if every new private school student across King County came from SPS, this would only explain 25% of the students that left the district during COVID.

Racial equity impacts

- Black, Native American, and Pacific Islander students have left the district at a higher rate than Latino, multiracial, and white students.
- Income-subsidized two+ bedroom housing yields the most SPS students. However, there is a significant lack of family-sized affordable housing.

Next steps and recommended actions

SPS approached solutions to enrollment decline from a structural lens — how can we create a system that better supports students, their families, and their communities? We offer recommendations toward this end that respond to the findings.

- Focus on engagement with early learners, meaning caretakers of pre-K students as well as pre-K and childcare partners, to increase the percentage of children who enroll in SPS for kindergarten and beyond.
- Engagement with the SPS community around curriculum and instruction.
- Find “unaccounted for” students and reengage them in SPS.
- Create a task force for specific groups of students of color and the reasons they leave SPS, which includes students, families, and community members.
- Continue to partner with city agencies to address housing availability for families.
- Conduct further research on how nearby districts and cities, such as Minneapolis and Atlanta, have increased student enrollment in recent years.