



Association of Independent Schools NT

ASSOCIATION OF INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS NT

PARENT CHOICE REPORT

2023

CONTENTS

SURVEY PARTICIPATION	1
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	2
KEY INSIGHTS	3
CHOOSING A SCHOOL	4
WHAT PARENTS WANT FROM SCHOOLS	6
- YEARS T-6	7
- YEARS 7-9	8
- YEARS 10-12	9
SCHOOL FEES	10

Who is AISNT?

The [Association of Independent Schools of the Northern Territory \(AISNT\)](#) represents and promotes the diverse interests of Independent schools throughout the Northern Territory. Independent Schools have offered high-quality educational options for Northern Territory families since 1989, and AISNT takes pride in its role of representing and supporting these schools.

There are 25 Independent Schools located across the Northern Territory that provide choice and diversity to the communities they serve, ensuring all young people have access to quality education

and the ability to pursue educational excellence.

AISNT represents and advocates for Independent Schools to governments, education stakeholders and the greater community to ensure diversity in educational opportunities for students.

AISNT is a member of [Independent Schools of Australia \(ISA\)](#), which is representative of all State and Territory Independent School Associations.

PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS



7
PARTICIPATING
SCHOOLS



528
RESPONSES



REPRESENTING
AT LEAST
634 STUDENTS



TRANSITION
TO **YEAR 12**

SCHOOL	RESPONSES	YEAR LEVELS ON OFFER (YEAR LEVELS PARTICIPATING)	NUMBER OF STUDENTS
Alice Springs Steiner School	10	T - 8 (All)	138
Good Shepherd Lutheran College	150	T - 12 (All)	1002
Haileybury Rendall School	205	T - 12 (All)	827
Living Waters Lutheran School	42	T - 6 (All)	224
Milkwood Steiner School	19	T - 7 (All)	97
SEDA College	11	10 - 12 (All)	108
St Philips College	91	7 - 12 (Years 8, 9, 11, 12)	550

AISNT CONDUCTED A SURVEY OF PARENTS OF STUDENTS AT NT INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS TO ARTICULATE THE VALUE PROPOSITION OF INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PARENTS. INSIGHTS FROM THE SURVEY ARE SHARED TO ASSIST INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS IN STUDENT ATTRACTION AND RETENTION.

Background

There are 25 Independent Schools located across the Northern Territory that provide choice and diversity to the communities they serve, ensuring all young people have access to quality education and the ability to pursue educational excellence. Within the confines of the Education Act 2015, Independent Schools operate with autonomy in decision making, including allocation of resources towards student attraction and retention.

The Association of Independent Schools of the Northern Territory (AISNT) takes pride in its role of representing and supporting these schools. To support member schools in their decisions around student attraction and retention, AISNT has undertaken a survey of parents of students at NT Independent Schools to better understand when and how parents make decisions as to which school their children will attend, and what parents want from their schools.

Survey

The survey is the first of its kind delivered by AISNT.

All NT Independent Schools were invited to participate in the survey, with seven schools opting to circulate the survey to their families for completion. The survey was open for a period of 3 weeks at the start of Term 4, 2023.

The survey elicited 528 responses and was designed such that an entire family's views were captured on a single survey.

Insights

Key insights are found on the following page and detailed throughout the report.

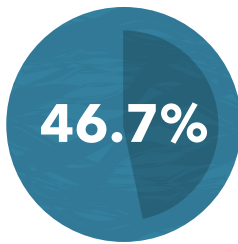
Whilst this is the first time AISNT has delivered this survey for its member schools in the Northern Territory, Independent Schools Australia (ISA), of which AISNT is a member organization, has delivered a similar survey on three separate occasions. Where it has made sense to do so, comparisons are drawn with the results of the most recent ISA report into school choice, "School Choice: A Research Report" published in 2021. It is generally accepted that 'things work differently' in the NT, so this comparison seeks to assist NT Independent Schools to understand where the differences exist and the implications of those differences.

Independent Schools Australia (2021). "School Choice: A research Report". Retrieved from https://isa.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/ISA260721_SCHOOL-CHOICE-REPORT_08.pdf

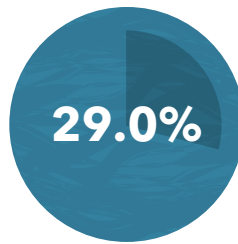
KEY INSIGHTS



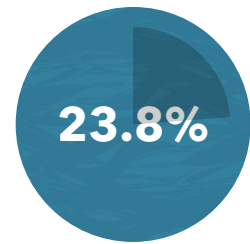
Parents apply for student enrolment...



IN THE **6 MONTHS** PRIOR TO COMMENCEMENT



6-12 MONTHS FROM COMMENCEMENT



GREATER THAN **12 MONTHS** FROM COMMENCEMENT

When enrolling, parents seek:

1

DEMONSTRATED RECORD OF HIGH ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

2

ABILITY TO HOLD THE SCHOOL ACCOUNTABLE

3

ALIGNMENT WITH FAMILY VALUES

Interpersonal relationships, discussions and recommendations are the most significant influence on a parent's decision to enrol in a school.

Once a child is at school, their happiness, safety and engagement with teachers are most important in retaining them at the school.

For the majority (75%), it is important that their child stays at their school for all available year levels on offer.

Continuity is important, but sometimes change is necessary...

At the date of this report, 30% of parents are considering moving their child to a different school. The primary reasons for moving schools are family relocation and difficulties in paying school fees. However, where parents are not forced to change by family circumstance, they are most likely to move because their child is unhappy at school, teachers have been unable to motivate their child to learn, or student behaviour is poorly managed.

What parents want from schools changes in focus and as their children grow:

IN YEARS T - 6

Parents place most importance on learning:

- Essential skills of reading, writing and numeracy
- Developing confidence and self-esteem
- Developing a love of learning

IN YEARS 7 - 9

Parents are less aligned in their needs, but most highly value:

- Developing confidence and self-esteem
- Developing skills for critical thinking
- Their child's happiness at school

IN YEARS 10 - 12

Divergence of need continues, with parents most highly valuing:

- Developing confidence and self-esteem
- Developing the ability to think for themselves
- Developing skills for critical thinking

THE DECISION AS TO WHICH SCHOOL A CHILD SHOULD ATTEND IS A VERY PERSONAL ONE FOR PARENTS, WITH MOST SEEKING SUPPORT IN MAKING THE DECISION FROM OTHERS THEY TRUST.

Parents vary in the timing with which they make decisions about the school their children will attend. Some prepare early (9% at least 2 years prior to commencement and a further 16% 1 to 2 years prior), whilst the majority (75%) apply for enrolment in the year immediately prior to commencement.

Overwhelmingly, parents make joint decisions about which school their children will attend, and seek input from family, friends, colleagues and other parents. This is consistent with national insights identified in ISA School Choice: A Research Report 2021.

The theme of personal connection continues once a parent actively seeks to engage with a school. More parents were influenced by a one-on-one school visit than an open day, and few were influenced to the point of decision via a school's website.

Once at the school nearly 50% of parents described that other parents and students had the most influence over their decision to attend, followed by teachers.

The most common criteria through which parents selected their schools were a demonstrated record of high academic achievement, alignment with family values, and the ability to hold the school accountable.

Many noted elements of personal attention as important in choosing a school, with comments provided around class sizes, dedicated focus, tailored support and adaptability to their child's individual needs.

In a separate survey question, alignment with religious beliefs, socioeconomic status of other families attending the school, and convenience of school location were identified as least important factors in choosing a school.

WHO IS INVOLVED IN CHOOSING A SCHOOL?

BOTH PARENTS	88%
ONE PARENT	11%
GRANDPARENTS	1%

Grandparents appear to have a more significant influence over school choice in instances where they provide the primary source of fee payment.

Where respondents identified additional participants to the decision, it was generally grandparents, the child enrolling or an older sibling in addition to one or both parents.

INFLUENCE - OVERALL

1: THE OPINIONS OF FAMILY, FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES

2: OTHER PARENTS' RECOMMENDATIONS

3: ONE-ON-ONE SCHOOL VISIT

The chart on the next page visually represents the Most Important Factors



MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS

1: DEMONSTRATED RECORD OF HIGH ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

2: ALIGNMENT WITH FAMILY VALUES

3: ABILITY TO HOLD SCHOOL ACCOUNTABLE FOR TEACHING QUALITY



WHEN ARE APPLICATIONS MADE RELATIVE TO COMMENCEMENT?

LESS THAN 3 MONTHS PRIOR	22%
3 - 6 MONTHS PRIOR	25%
6 - 9 MONTHS PRIOR	14%
9 - 12 MONTHS PRIOR	15%
12 MONTHS - 2 YEARS PRIOR	15%
2 - 3 YEARS PRIOR	3%
GREATER THAN 3 YEARS PRIOR	5%
WHEN/BEFORE MY CHILD WAS BORN	1%

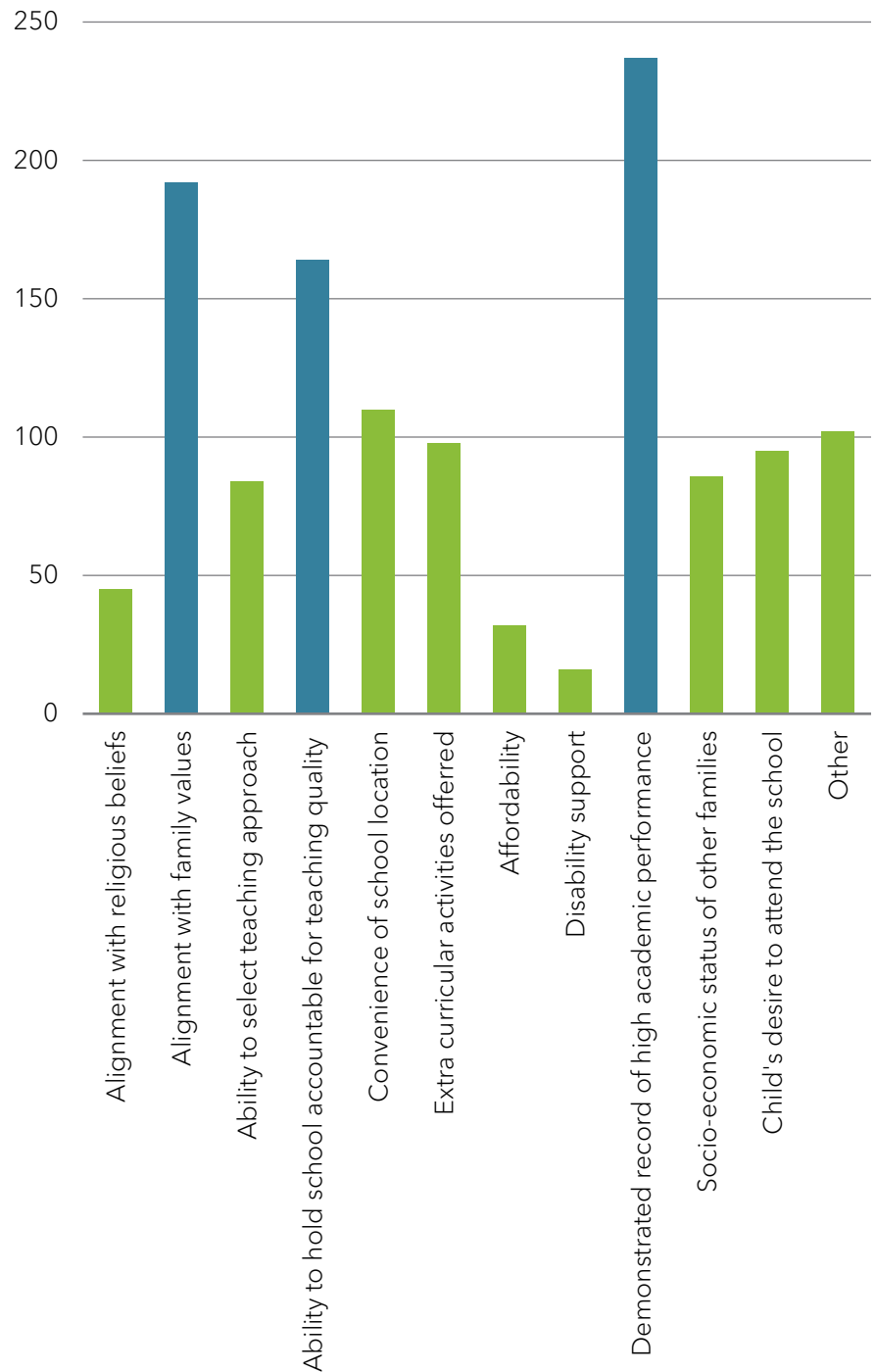
INFLUENCE - AT SCHOOL

- # 1: OTHER PARENTS
- # 2: TEACHERS
- #3: PRINCIPAL

LEAST IMPORTANT FACTORS

- # 1: ALIGNMENT WITH RELIGIOUS BELIEFS
- # 2: SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF OTHER FAMILIES ATTENDING THE SCHOOL
- # 3: CONVENIENCE OF SCHOOL LOCATION

Extract: Results to question: "From the list below, select the most important factors in your decision to select your school."



WHAT PARENTS WANT FROM SCHOOLS

FOR MOST PARENTS, ONCE THEY HAVE SELECTED A SCHOOL, THEIR CHILD'S HAPPINESS AND PROGRESS ARE PARAMOUNT TO RETENTION.

75% of parents surveyed stated that it was important to them that their child stays at their selected school to experience all year levels on offer at the school.

Interestingly, despite parents rating high academic performance most highly in selecting a school, 'motivation to learn' and 'strong emphasis on improvement' rank fourth and fifth in importance, behind happiness, wellbeing and safety in student retention. Comments from parents highlighted the power of consistency and friendships, noting that despite their dissatisfaction in other areas, they remain where they are to keep contact with friends, and to avoid unnecessarily disrupting their children.

Overall, 30% of parents are currently considering moving their child to another school. The rate of potential movement is higher in Years T - 6 (33%), than in Years 7 - 9 (29%) and in Years 10 - 12 (24%).

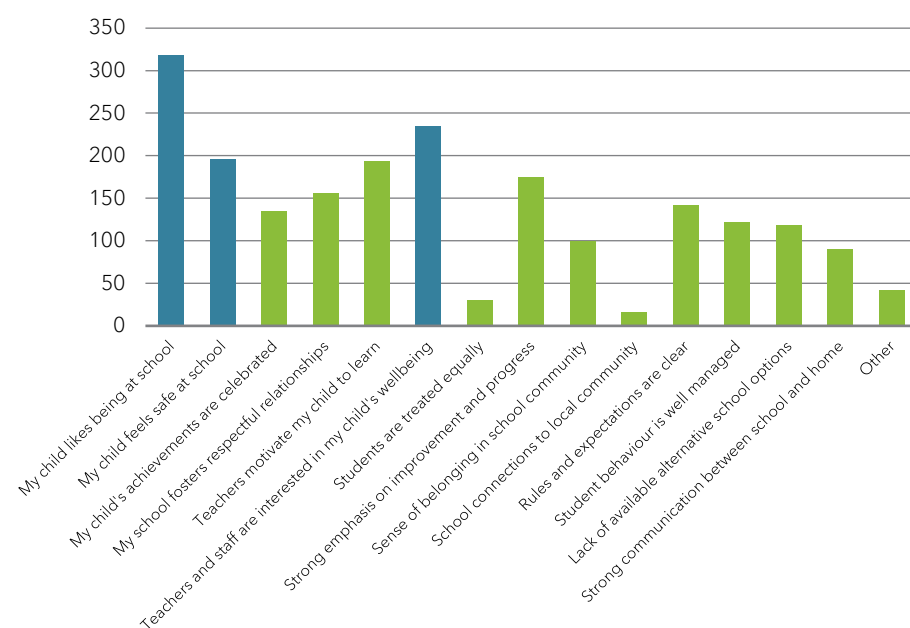
Of those seeking to move, 22% cite family moving away as the key driver, and a further 22% cite difficulty in paying fees as the driver. "Other" responses account for the greatest number of proposed movements with many comments highlighting a difference between a capacity to pay and a willingness to pay for the perceived value received. Other comments suggest unfulfilled expectations on matters that influenced school selection, particularly around tailored support and adaptability to student needs, provides a compelling reason to leave, as does poor behaviour management.

IMPORTANT TO STAY AT THE SAME SCHOOL FOR ALL YEAR LEVELS ON OFFER?

YES: 75%

NO: 25%

Extract: Results to question: "From the list below, select the reasons that you continue your child's enrolment at the school"

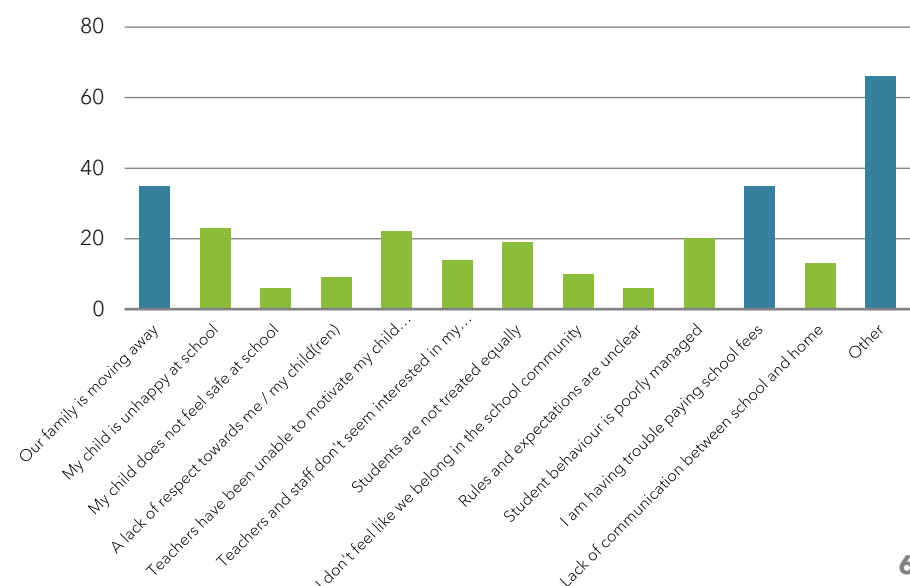


CONSIDERING MOVING SCHOOLS BEFORE CHILD COMPLETES ALL YEAR LEVELS ON OFFER?

YES: 30%

NO: 70%

Extract: Results to question: "What are the reasons for you considering moving your child(ren) to a different school?"



WHAT PARENTS WANT FROM SCHOOLS YEARS T-6

PARENTS OF STUDENTS IN YEARS T - 6 SEEK STABILITY AT SCHOOL, AND A VARIETY OF EXPERIENCES FOR THEIR CHILDREN WHILST THEY DEVELOP THE FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS AND ATTITUDES TO SET THEM UP FOR A LIFETIME OF LEARNING.

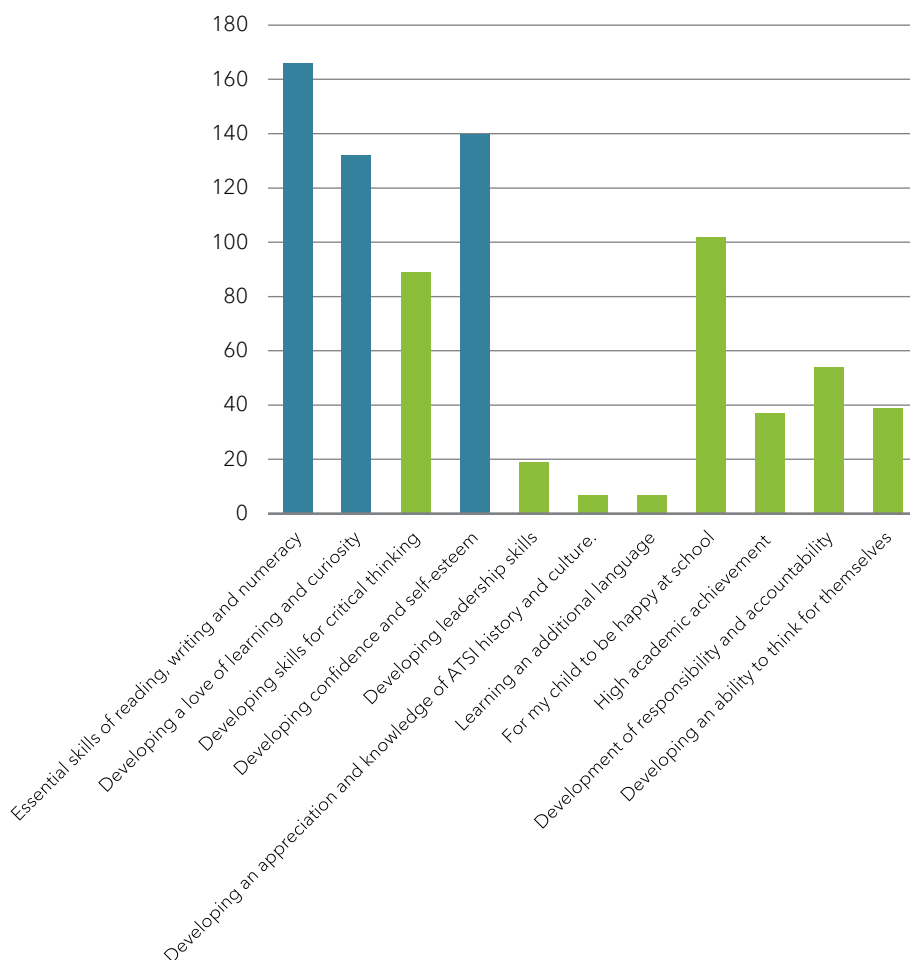
Years T - 6 is the only age cohort that cited reading, writing and numeracy in the Top 3 wants for their children. Child happiness is important, but not at the expense of setting the child up with the basic skills and attitude for lifetime learning. The highest-ranking priorities are similar to those identified for Primary aged students in ISA School Choices: A Research Report 2021.

Although "demonstrated record of high academic performance" was ranked most highly in attributes that parents seek when selecting a school, its importance falls once the child is attending the school (to 7th in the graph to the right).

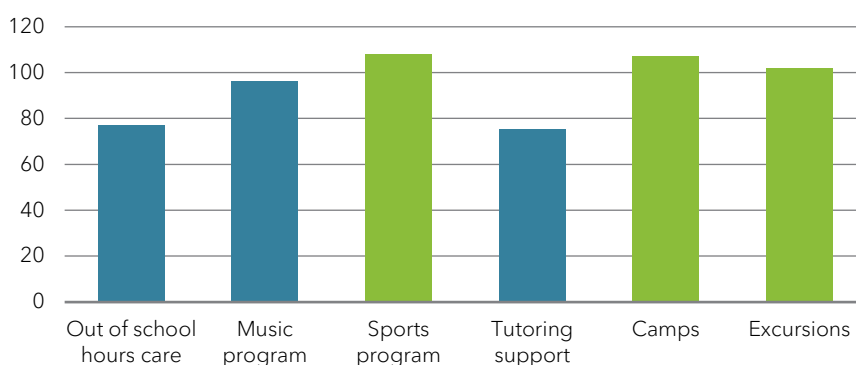
Preference for programs is more varied in Years T - 6, with less variation between preference for each of the options presented. Across all age cohorts, school camps are highest ranking programs, however in Years T - 6, they are only marginally outnumbered by sporting programs, which is possibly also a result of camps not yet being available to all responding families (where their children were in early years and still too young to attend).

Stability at school appears to be most important to parents of students in Years T - 6, with 79% confirming that it is important to them for their child to complete all available year level at their current school. The top reasons for leaving in Years T - 6 are difficulty in paying fees, family moving away, student behaviour being poorly managed and tailored learning not delivered to expectations.

Extract: Results to question: "What do you want for your child(ren) in Transition to Year 6?"



Extract: Results to question: "Select the programs on offer at your school that are important to you in continuing your child's enrolment" (dissected by age cohort to identify programs important to Years T - 6)



WHAT PARENTS WANT FROM SCHOOLS YEARS 7-9

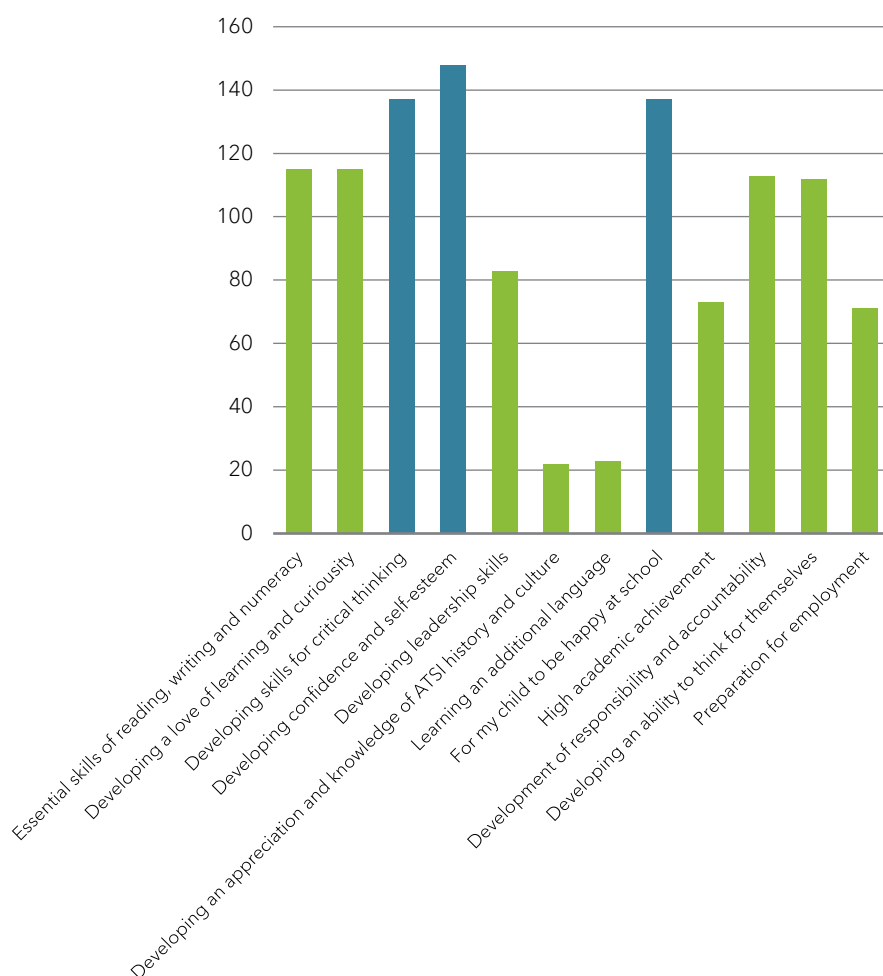
PARENTS OF STUDENTS IN YEARS 7 - 9 ARE PRIMARILY FOCUSED ON WELLBEING OF THEIR CHILD THROUGH DEVELOPMENT OF SELF-ESTEEM AND THEIR DESIRE FOR THEIR CHILD TO BE HAPPY ABOVE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT.

Parents of students in Years 7 - 9 are more varied in their wants for their children, with greater diversity of priorities displayed in the graph to the right. Student wellbeing ranks most highly amongst parents of this cohort, with confidence, self-esteem and happiness carrying greatest importance. Development of skills for critical thinking are viewed as favourable over reading, writing and numeracy and high academic achievement; this is despite parents seeking a demonstrated record of academic achievement when selecting the school.

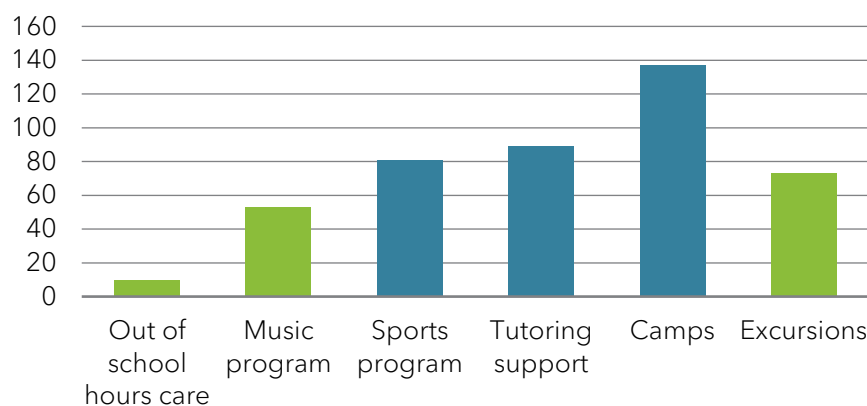
As would be expected as students become more self-sufficient, out of school hours care significantly reduces in importance by Year 7. As for other student cohorts, camps rank most highly of the programs that are important in continuing a child's education at a school. Tutoring support starts to take a stronger priority than sports and music/arts in Years 7 -9.

75% of parents of students in Years 7 - 9 feel it is important for their child to complete all available year levels at their current school.

Extract: Results to question: "What do you want for your child(ren) in Year 7 to Year 9?"



Extract: Results to question: "Select the programs on offer at your school that are important to you in continuing your child's enrolment" (dissected by age cohort to identify programs important to Years 7 - 9)



WHAT PARENTS WANT FROM SCHOOLS YEARS 10-12

PARENTS OF STUDENTS IN YEARS 10 - 12 HAVE MORE DIVERSE VIEWS ABOUT WHAT THEY SEEK FOR THEIR CHILDREN, HOWEVER KEY THEMES EMERGING FOR THIS COHORT ARE INDEPENDENCE AND PREPAREDNESS FOR THE WORKFORCE OR CONTINUED STUDIES.

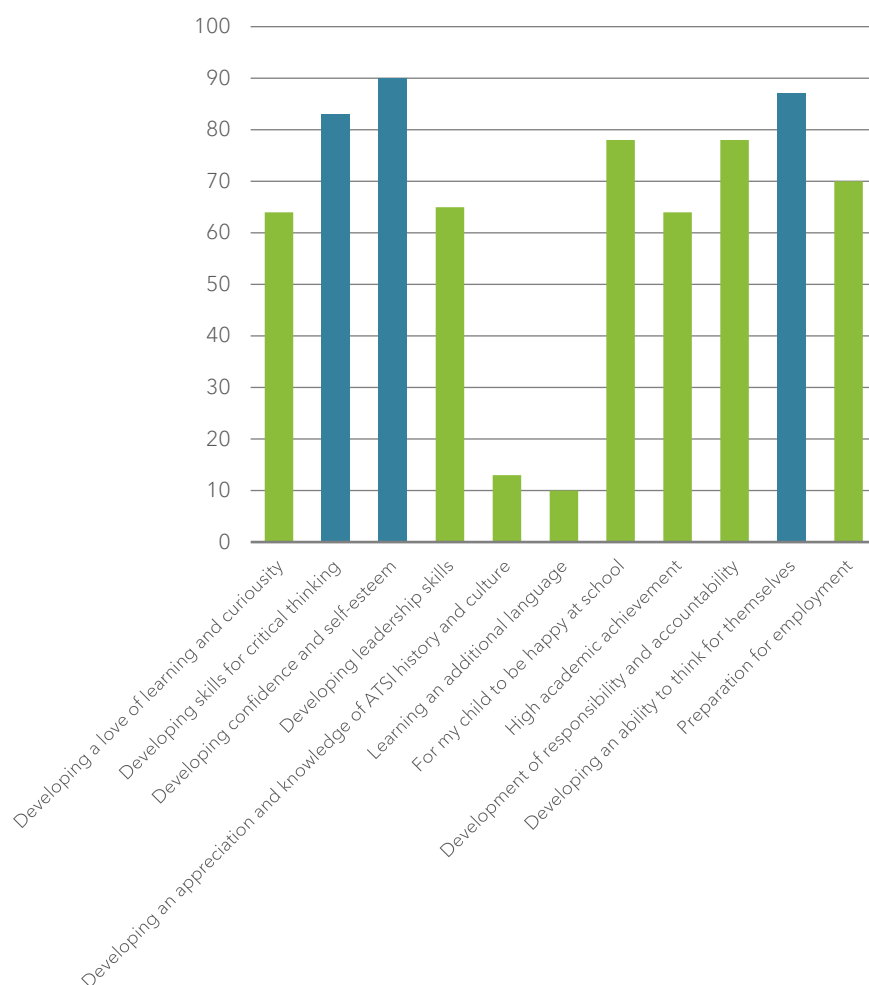
Similarly to the Years 7 - 9 cohort, parents of students in Years 10 - 12 demonstrated more diversity in wants from their school than in younger cohorts. In a slight shift from the Years 7 - 9 cohort, which had a stronger focus on wellbeing, the Years 10 - 12 cohort leans slightly more towards independence. Developing skills for critical thinking and developing confidence and self-esteem remain high in importance, but happiness at school is overtaken by development of an ability to think for themselves, and development of responsibility and accountability is on par with happiness.

Although still not the identified as being of highest importance amongst the entire group of respondents, high academic achievement grows significantly in relative importance for this cohort, as students prepare to move on from school. Relative importance of high academic achievement grows from 14% of respondents noting its importance in Years T - 6, and 31% of respondents noting its importance in Years 7 - 9, to 49% of respondents noting its importance for Years 10-12.

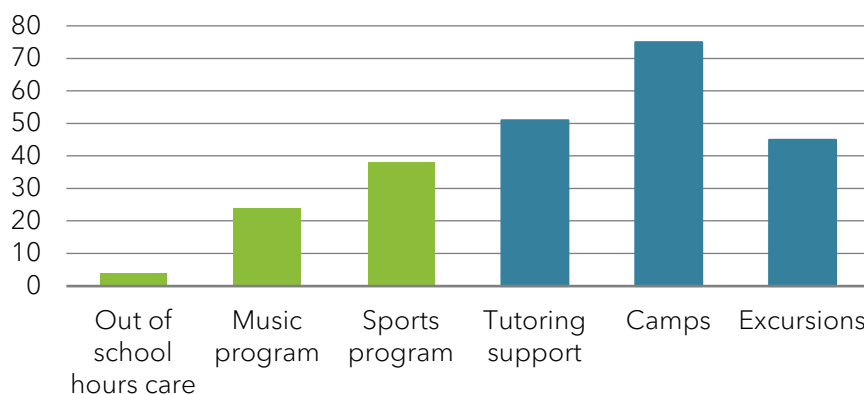
Consistent with the trend in program preferences from Years T - 6 into Years 7 - 9, parents of students in Years 10-12 continue to prefer camps over any other form of program, and tutoring support continues to grow in importance relative to music/arts and sports programs.

For 76% of parents, completion of all available year levels at the current school was important.

Extract: Results to question: "What do you want for your child(ren) in Year 10 to Year 12?"



Extract: Results to question: "Select the programs on offer at your school that are important to you in continuing your child's enrolment" (dissected by age cohort to identify programs important to Years 10 - 12)



MANY FAMILIES USE A SINGLE CONTRIBUTION SOURCE TO PAY ALL SCHOOL FEES, WHILST OTHERS USE A MIX OF SOURCES TO PAY SCHOOL FEES.

For the majority of families (81%), salary is the primary source of payment of school fees, and for 75% of those families, it is the only source of payment for school fees.

Other families rely on savings (9%), other sources (5%) and contributions from family members (3%) to provide the primary source of payment for fees. Other sources include direct payment by the parent's employer, Abstudy or other government payments.

Only 8% of families surveyed did not include salary in either their primary or secondary source of payment for school fees, highlighting a potential sensitivity to economic conditions in the willingness and ability of parents to pay school fees.

20% of families started saving before their child commenced at their school, which aligns to 19% of respondents identifying savings as either the primary or secondary source of funds for school fees.

For those that set aside savings for school fees, the majority (63%) only did so in the year prior to commencement, whilst a further 18% saved from 1 – 3 years prior, and 19% saved for greater than three years prior to commencement.

For the most part, the period for which savings were set aside to pay school fees was approximately equivalent to the period of prior application for enrolment.



PRIMARY SOURCE OF FUNDS FOR SCHOOL FEES

SALARY	81%
SAVINGS	9%
OTHER	5%
OTHER FAMILY MEMBER	3%



SECONDARY SOURCE OF FUNDS FOR SCHOOL FEES

N/A. ALL FEES PAID USING PRIMARY METHOD	69%
SALARY	11%
SAVINGS	11%
SCHOOL BURSARY/FEE REDUCTION	4%



SAVING FOR SCHOOL FEES

YES	20%
NO	80%



WHEN DOES SAVING COMMENCE, RELATIVE TO COMMENCEMENT AT SCHOOL?

3 – 6 MONTHS PRIOR	33%
6 – 9 MONTHS PRIOR	15%
9 – 12 MONTHS PRIOR	14%
12 MONTHS – 2 YEARS PRIOR	15%
2 – 3 YEARS PRIOR	3%
GREATER THAN 3 YEARS PRIOR	4%
WHEN / BEFORE MY CHILD WAS BORN	15%



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