Discover a World of Opportunities with Wichita Public Schools

ENTRY CATEGORY: MARKETING/BRANDING CAMPAIGN

COMMUNICATIONS STAFF SIZE: 10

SCHOOL DISTRICT SIZE: OVER 25,000



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Synopsis

Magnet schools have been part of the Wichita Public School system for more than 30 years, providing choices to our families to find the best fit for their students. The importance of Magnet schools in providing choice to families and a way to increase diversity at schools across the system has been reflected in an investment in an annual event – the Showcase of Choices and Opportunities – to introduce families to Magnet options and other opportunities to support student success.

The development of the 2018 Showcase advertising plan, supported by a new emphasis on data, provided the Strategic Communications team an opportunity to utilize new and traditional advertising methods to drive attendance at the 30th annual event. It also provided an opportunity to examine trends in decreasing attendance at the event, decreasing applications to Magnet programs and decreasing market share of students among area public schools. Bringing together experts from multiple departments in the district, as well as an outside agency, we created a marketing plan that addressed multiple needs beyond attendance at a one-time event.

Our work with other departments revealed that additional advertising stages had not be used previously simply because they had not been presented as options. Working with an advertising agency, we identified the best, new methods to reach a target audience of parents who seek and receive information in ways that are different than previous generations. Then our creative team went to work creating compelling copy, graphics and scripts to showcase our district in the best ways possible.

The extended, comprehensive campaign led to a reversal in the trend of decreasing magnet applications, with a more than 70% increase in on-time applications over the application window for 2018-19. It also resulted in 175 applications to a new, high-quality academic program for which there are only 50 open spots for freshmen next year. The results from the first four mini-campaigns that comprise our enrollment marketing campaign give us confidence that we'll employ the strategies necessary to accomplish our goals related to kindergarten round-up attendance and overall elementary enrollment in the coming months.

RESEARCH

Beginning in fall 2018, three factors combined that led to the creation of an enrollment marketing campaign for the 2019-20 school year.

The Kansas legislature passed a funding bill that gave public schools an increased budget for the second consecutive year and a plan that provided a five-year forecast. The financial stability allowed the Strategic Communications team to tell the story of our district differently through paid strategies.

In April 2018 the Wichita Public Schools (WPS) Board of Education launched its first strategic plan in more than 15 years under the direction of the new superintendent, Dr. Alicia Thompson. During her first six months in the role, Dr. Thompson conducted a comprehensive listening tour. The notes taken at these meetings, combined with responses to an online survey, resulted in 3,465 data points that gave us feedback on four areas: strengths, challenges, resource needs and ways to communicate. It also created the expectation that we would become laser focused on district goals and use data to support all strategic initiatives moving forward.

Finally, district leadership looked at enrollment trends. We saw that WPS enrollment of 3,787 kindergarten students in fall 2018 was a 2% decrease from fall 2017 and a 7.6% decrease from the previous three years' average. Each kindergarten student lost represented \$14,052 in per-pupil funding from the state, a \$1,110,108 loss for the 2018-19 school year. It will compound over time with an average 10.9% attrition heading into 6th grade and 7.3% heading into 9th grade.

In addition, this contributed to a 1.15% decrease in district market share compared to fall 2017. According to Kansas Department of Education data, 6 out of 11 public school districts in Sedgwick County saw increases to their kindergarten classes from 2017-2018; 1 district was even compared to the previous year. Those with increases were primarily located to the west of our boundaries. With education funding once again being provided on a per-pupil basis, we knew maintaining and increasing student enrollment had to be a priority. We knew accomplishing our district's vision for all students and staff to dream, believe and achieve would require adequate funding.

The Strategic Communications team collaborated with the Deputy Superintendent, the Magnet Department (part of the Office of Equity and Accountability), the Office of Elementary Education and the Early Childhood executive director to identify enrollment goals for the 2019-20 academic year.

We identified the following goals and measurable objectives for the enrollment marketing campaign:

- 1. Increase attendance at November 1, 2018, Showcase of Choices and Opportunities to 4,000+.
- 2. Receive at least 50 applications for the new Early College Academy by January 25, 2019.
- 3. Increase the number of on-time applicants for Magnet programs by 25% compared to 2018-19.
- 4. Increase the number of total elementary school registrations (to be measured in fall 2019).
- 5. Increase attendance at kindergarten round-up on May 2, 2019.

Analysis/Planning

Preparation

In 2017, the name of the event intended to introduce families to Magnet schools shifted from the Choices Fair to the Showcase of Choices and Opportunities to reflect a new emphasis on opportunities beyond Magnet schools. This presented an opportunity to continue creating brand equity for that event.

We discovered that applications for Magnet schools were trending down (see <u>Evaluation</u>). We had not met the goal of increasing on-time applications for the 2018-19 school year, and the number had decreased. In addition, we discovered that previous marketing campaigns focused only on driving attendance at the event. Follow up with families after the event was done by individual schools on an ad-hoc basis.

This led us to conclude that an enrollment marketing campaign, wrapping Showcase advertising into a longer, cohesive strategy, might be the leverage needed to reverse the magnet application trajectory and accomplish the other identified goals.

We divided our campaign into six distinct mini-campaigns:

- 1. Drive attendance at Showcase.
- 2. Encourage attendance at School Visitation Days.
- 3. Remind families about the application deadlines for Northeast Magnet, the brand-new Early College Academy and the International Baccalaureate program.
- 4. Remind families about the application deadline for elementary and middle Magnet schools.
- 5. Inform people about kindergarten options in the district and how to prepare children for school; lead people to a web page that signs them up for an ongoing email campaign.
- 6. Drive attendance at kindergarten round-up.

Target Audience Identification

Our team identified target audiences based on the mini-campaigns described above. First, we knew that our most important audiences were the parents of students at transition years: selecting the elementary school at which to begin the education journey, transitioning to middle school and moving up to high school. These are the points at which the most open spots are available at Magnet schools.

Second, our market share loss indicated a need to target some of the areas of town where we compete heavily with surrounding suburban districts and/or private schools. Third, we knew that a goal of the Magnet program is to work toward schools having a racial make-up that closely reflects that of the district. In some of our core city neighborhoods, it is more challenging to accomplish that diversity with pure neighborhood schools.

- Primary Audience: parents of current, district pre-K, 5th grade and 8th grade students
- Secondary Audiences
 - o All area moms of students eligible for kindergarten in Fall 2019
 - o Parents of students at surrounding preschools
 - Families in 11 targeted zip codes
- **Tertiary Audience:** students preparing for the transition from 8th grade to high school

Team Roles and Responsibilities

With a campaign this extensive, we relied on the contributions of multiple team members in Strategic Communications and the broader district.

- **Marketing Supervisor, Suzy Finn:** Managed the overall campaign; coordinated with the advertising agency; wrote first-draft copy of TV and radio spots; tracked and reported data.
- **News and Media Relations Supervisor, Susan Arensman:** Communicated with media partners about new initiatives; scheduled interviews with principals and district leaders for radio and TV.
- **Graphic Designer and Marketing Specialist, Kayla Pennick:** Designed all print marketing materials and online graphics; coordinated printing and production of magnet office materials.
- **Media Production Specialist, Michael Smith:** Revised scripts for TV and radio; coordinated voice recording for both; created TV spots.
- **Social Media and Web Specialist, Maria Loving**: Created social media posts and paid social media ads; managed website updates to homepage and departments; tracked and reported data.
- Spanish-Language Support: Translated print materials and radio spots to Spanish.
- **Magnet Office:** Organized the Showcase event logistics; led transition of applications from paper to online-only; oversaw the application process for magnet schools.
- Advertising Agency Partner: Coordinated ad placement contracts; delivered creative content to contracted advertising outlets; aggregated multiple invoices into one easy payment method; provided guidance on best communication vehicles to reach target audiences.

Communication Vehicle Selection

Working with the agency partner, we identified the most effective communication vehicles to reach our target audiences. We kept in mind the fact that more than 50% of our families have not provided an email address to us, and that approximately 25% of Wichita homes do not have access to the internet. This meant that traditional communication vehicles would still have value. The specific vehicles used and concentration of budget toward those varied for each mini-campaign. For example, the Wichita Mom's Blog was not used for the high school deadlines because its target audience is moms of young children.

Traditional Vehicles

- **Broadcast and Cable TV:** All four major broadcast networks as well as a subset of cable channels targeted at children, including Freeform, Nickelodeon, Cartoon Network and Disney XD
- **Radio Stations:** Eight radio stations, including a local Spanish-language station, focused on stations that included banner ads or promotions on Facebook pages at no additional cost
 - Students with a Hispanic heritage make up our largest ethnic group in the district at 35.2%;
 therefore, including Spanish-language tactics were determined to be of high importance.
- Billboards: Three digital billboards in high-traffic locations close to our targeted zip codes
- **Local Newspapers:** Two local newspaper outlets with audiences similar to the demographics of our targeted zip codes: *The Community Voice* (primarily African-American families) and the *East Side News/Westside Story* (families close to suburban districts)

Digital Vehicles

- **Spotify:** A new-to-us vehicle to reach the audience of parents of young children, likely in their 20s and 30s, who prefer streaming radio services
- **Online Display Targeting:** Geo targeting to send digital ads to the targeted zip codes, as well as appearing with contextual local news

Social Media and Content Marketing

- **Wichita Mom's Blog:** Primary channel for advertising Showcase and kindergarten enrollment, with 84% of readership having a child in kindergarten or younger; included a boosted post on Facebook, banner ads at the top of the page and a featured spot in the annual <u>Guide to Preschools</u> and <u>Schools in Wichita</u>
- **Wichita on the Cheap:** Vehicle for advertising Showcase to a broad audience (40,000-50,000 unique users monthly) primarily made up of families looking for free or low-cost activities
- Facebook, Instagram, Twitter: Regular stream of posts about Showcase, visit days and deadlines on Facebook and Twitter; occasional posts on Instagram; small budget of boosted posts on Facebook

Magnet Office Outreach

The Magnet office worked with our graphic designer to create <u>promotional materials</u> for school-based awareness. These included banners, posters, flyers and yard signs. In addition, they paid for and coordinated four post-card mailings to current families of pre-K, 5th grade and 8th grade parents about 1) magnet applications opening; 2) attending Showcase; 3) visiting schools; and 4) returning on-time applications.

Budget and Resource Allocation

Working with our Chief Financial Officer, we were able to identify up to \$50,000 in funds to use for the marketing campaign. We contracted with a local advertising agency to identify our options for local media and develop a budget for paid marketing strategies. Our final budget is reflected below. The agency fee reflects one direct charge for coordination of social media and content marketing. They received commissions from the advertising outlets to compensate for the remainder of their time.

The original campaign included only the budget for what is labeled below as "Kindergarten Campaign 2." When we began to see early results from the Magnet mini-campaigns, we decided to add a second

Kindergarten campaign. Our initial budget remaining under \$40,000 gave us the flexibility to add in a second mini-campaign specifically for Kindergarten enrollment.

	Showcase	Visit Days	High School Deadlines	Magnet Deadlines	Kindergarten Camp. 1	Kindergarten Camp. 2	Total by Vehicle
TV/Cable	\$2,955	\$1,116	\$1,519	\$1,479	\$2,140	\$0	\$9,209
Radio	\$4,522	\$1,340	\$1,507	\$5,381	\$3,047	\$625	\$16,422
Billboards	\$1,806	\$529	\$0	\$1,276	\$903	\$0	\$4,515
Newspaper Ads	\$785	\$1,570	\$650	\$1,435	\$950	\$785	\$6,175
Spotify	\$600	\$0	\$300	\$300	\$150	\$150	\$1,500
Online Display	\$2,000	\$750	\$750	\$750	\$500	\$500	\$5,250
Mom's Blog	\$294	\$412	\$0	\$294	\$0	\$894	\$1,894
Social Media	\$300	\$0	\$250	\$250	\$350	\$350	\$1,500
Agency Fee	\$250	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$250
Total by Campaign	\$13,512	\$5,717	\$4,976	\$11,166	\$8,040	\$3,304	\$46,715

COMMUNICATION/IMPLEMENTATION

Each mini-campaign was concentrated in a two-week time frame leading up to the key associated date, with some tactics starting or ending outside of each window depending on things such as publication dates for newspapers. Examples for each campaign tactic are included via links in the methods outlined below or in the <u>supplemental material</u> following this project summary.

- 1. Showcase Attendance Campaign: October 17-31, leading up to November 1 event
- 2. *Magnet Visit Days Campaign:* November 26-December 14 to create awareness of visit weeks in December, January and February
- 3. *High School Deadlines Campaign:* January 14-25, leading up to January 25 deadline for application to Northeast Magnet and the Early College Academy
- 4. *Elementary/Middle Deadline Campaign:* February 4-15, leading up to February 15 deadline for application to all elementary and middle magnet schools
- 5. *Kindergarten Enrollment (general awareness) Campaign:* April 1-15, encompassing the Week of the Young Child (April 8-15)
- 6. Kindergarten Round-Up (event specific) Campaign: April 22-May 2, leading up to May 2 Kindergarten Round-Up events at all elementary schools

Showcase Attendance Campaign

There were two key messages for the Showcase attendance campaign. For vehicles with room/time for explanation, the call to action was to visit www.usd259.org/magnet to learn more about magnet programs and the Showcase event. For those where brevity was required, the message focused on creating the brand equity in Showcase and providing the date, time and location of the event. We also took the opportunity on social media to re-share videos made in 2017 that told the stories of each of our five magnet themes at the elementary and middle school level.

Our most comprehensive mini-campaign, we used all of the identified communication vehicles for this one. One reason for this was that Showcase had been our primary advertising campaign in the past, and we wanted to continue that level of support for our Magnet office while also exploring new channels and follow-up marketing with the new mini-campaigns.

Our *30-second TV spot* was also made available on <u>YouTube</u>. Our *radio spots* with iHeart Media included an interview with Mayberry Cultural and Fine Arts Magnet Middle School principal on the public affairs show. *Social Media* tactics included 1 Facebook ad, 1 Facebook event, 6 Facebook posts (10/12-31), 13 tweets (10/15-11/1), and 2 Instagram posts (10/15-16).

Magnet Visit Days Campaign

The call-to-action for this mini-campaign to visit www.usd259.org/magnet to find out what schools to visit during three weeks of Magnet school visit days. We included this mini-campaign with the assumption that visiting the schools in person would increase the likelihood they would select those schools to apply to.

While important, we decided return on this would be lower than the other mini-campaigns and chose to spend less on the selected vehicles. We only ran our <u>30-second TV spot</u> on two stations and the *radio commercial* on three (including one of the Spanish-language stations). We cut the Spotify option and cut back on *billboard* flights. *Social Media* tactics included 5 Facebook posts (11/8-2/6), 2 Facebook events (November and December visit weeks), 17 tweets (11/8-2/16), and 5 Instagram posts (11/8-2/4).

There was not a specific goal aligned with the Magnet site visits: no data existed about past number of visitors at the individual schools, and tracking that over 24 different schools would have required new work for our school-based office staff. However, two <u>social media posts</u> from parents showed the benefit of getting families in the schools to see the programs in action.

High School Deadlines Campaign

We only have one magnet high school, Northeast Magnet, so our plan called for less promotion for this limited target audience. Partway through our execution, we were contacted by the Deputy Superintendent to help with marketing the new Early College Academy at Northwest High School. We also knew we needed to include information about our prestigious International Baccalaureate Program as a reminder to those considering private or suburban high schools that we have high-quality academic programs. The calls-to-action on these ads emphasized returning an on-time application, though the specific website through which to do so varied depending on the program: www.usd259.org/magnet, www.usd259.org/northwest or www.usd259.org/northwest or www.usd259.org/northwest or www.usd259.org/northwest or www.usd259.org/east.

We continued 30-second <u>TV spots</u>, but we did not run them on the young child-focused cable stations. We eliminated the Spanish-language radio stations for the *radio spots* in this campaign, with students rather than parents being a primary target audience, and we added back in *Spotify*. We used both newspaper outlets for *print ads* in this campaign due to the wide-ranging target audience. *Social Media* tactics included 10 Facebook posts (10/1-1/24), 2 Facebook events (Early College and East IB parent information meetings), 30 tweets* (10/1-1/25) and 3 Instagram posts (11/19-1/4). Because the Early College Academy was a brand-new program, we also scheduled a *press conference* announcing the new program on October 22, followed by *presentation to the Board of Education* that evening.

Elementary/Middle Magnet Deadlines Campaign

The Magnet Office was particularly interested in increasing on-time applications for these two levels. In past years, additional work was created for the Magnet Office, the magnet schools and the Parent and Community Support Network when families with siblings already at a school did not turn in applications on time, losing their priority for placement.

The call-to-action for these tactics was to visit www.usd259.org/magnet to submit an application. This mini-campaign again used all of our identified communication vehicles, with the exception of Wichita on the Cheap (since it was not event-based). The <a href="magnet-submitted-s

school campaign to maintain consistency of branding and message. **Social Media** tactics included 10 Facebook posts (10/1-2/14), 21 tweets* (10/1-2/15) and 1 Instagram post (11/19).

* Some tweets included reminders for both high school programs and elementary/middle magnet. There were 12 that advertised both deadlines; 18 were about high school only; 8 were about elementary/magnet only.

EVALUATION

Showcase Attendance

This was our least successful outcome of the campaign, with a count of **1,500 attendees**, **significantly under our target of 4,000**. Tracking of attendance at the Showcase event had previously been a responsibility of the Magnet office. According to their data, the most recent years had seen attendance ranging from just under 2,000 to almost 3,500.

In the past, youth volunteers counted attendees using clickers at the door. For 2018, we changed to having the door volunteers use a ticket system to give one drawing ticket to each attendee who came through the door. Some considerations as to why there may have been such a drastic difference in the attendance numbers include: in the clicker system, some employees working the event may have been counted multiple times instead of not at all; in the ticket system, some families took only one ticket or did not take one at all, leading to an undercount of attendees. The lack of consistency in the data has led us to consider alternative options for attendance counts in the future.

Early College Academy Applications

The primary measure associated with our high-school deadlines campaign was the number of applicants to the Early College Academy. The results for Northeast Magnet were included with the overall goal of ontime magnet applications. The program was created with a maximum of 50 first-year students being accepted into the program, so our goal was to receive at least that many applications. By the time the application window closed on Friday, **we had received 175 applications for 50 spots.**

On-Time Magnet Applications

We not only met our goal of increasing on-time applications by 25%, we increased them by more than 70% over the previous year. A few other factors may have contributed to the results. First, we returned to a longer academic year with shorter days. In AY 2016-17 and 2017-18, budget constraints led to a shorter academic year with longer days, a schedule that particularly impacted the magnet schools who start an hour earlier than their counterparts. Second, the application window was extended by two months, a change made possible by the third factor – a switch to a 100% online application.

Academic Year	On-Time Applications	Percent Change
2016-17	2,960	
2017-18	2,833	(4.29%)
2018-19	2,158	(23.83%)
2019-20	3,716	72.19%

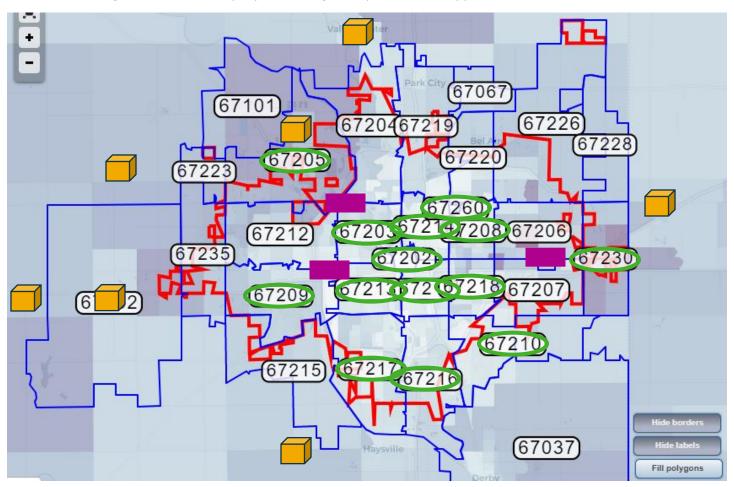
For future evaluations, we plan to work with the Magnet office to identify when spikes occurred in applications received to see how closely they correlate with specific marketing tactics. The new online application system allows their office to track applications as they're being completed; however, due to glitches in the system in March, that data was not available in time for submission.

Our positive outcomes in two of the three major goals led us to double down on efforts to advertise for kindergarten enrollment. It showed us that regular communication with easy calls-to-action led to positive outcomes over the course of the full campaign. It also showed us that the amount of money we're spending on advertising Showcase, rather than the follow-up steps, is something we should reevaluate for future years.

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS

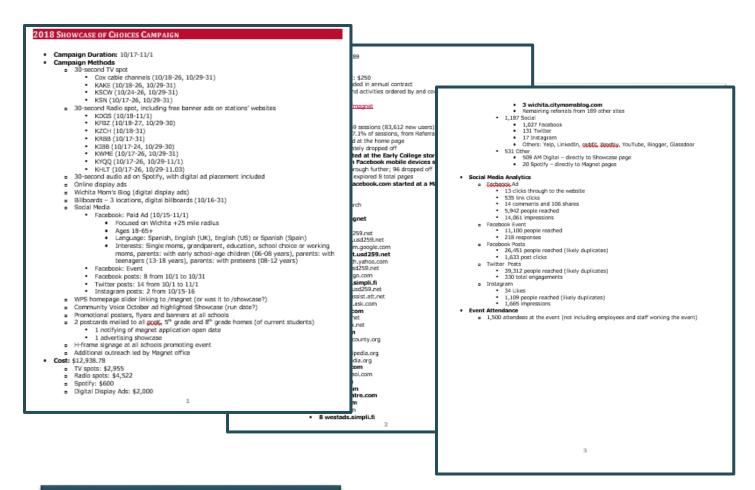
Zip Codes

In the map of Wichita and immediately surrounding suburbs below, the zip codes circled in green represent those who were part of the geotargeted areas for display ads. The red lines represent the City of Wichita boundaries. The gold cubes represent surrounding school districts that had increases in their 2018-19 Kindergarten class. The purple rectangles represent the approximate location of billboards.



Social Media Campaign Data and Feedback

The event attendance and on-time applications returned were the post important metrics in this campaign. However, social media tracking and feedback also helped us monitor which tactics worked to gain attention that might lead to taking the actions suggested. For each mini-campaign, we tracked communication vehicles used, website traffic data and social media responses.

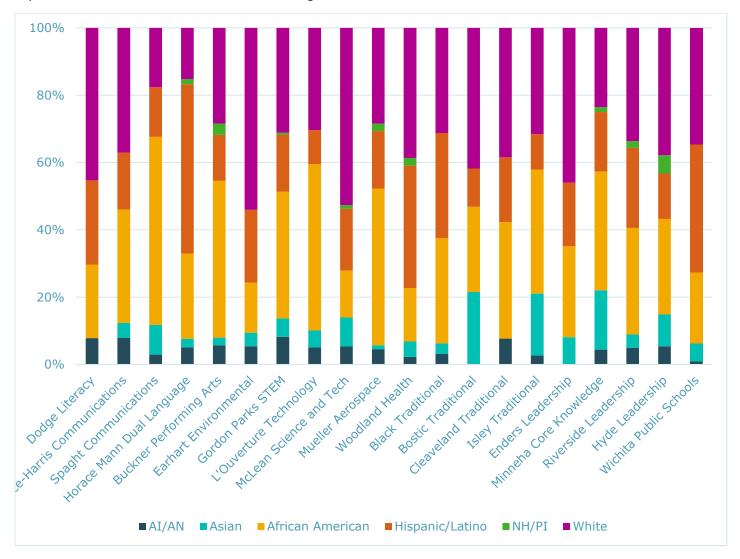




reese4pizza My journey in raising this little one may be in transition, and I might be utilizing public school next year. Happily, she was accepted into the Gordon Parks Academy STEM Leaders in Applied & Media arts! We toured recently, and fell in love. It's right up Ru's alley when it comes to her interests and talents. Weather woman? Music artist? Radio personality? Robotics specialist? Park ranger and photographer? The sky's the limit! We're studying him and his life, both to celebrate Black History Month (every month) and this wonderful school. Gordon's son even visits every year and talks with the students! @wichitausd259 #RucaElin #GordonParks #HalfPastAutumn #MediaArts #STEM

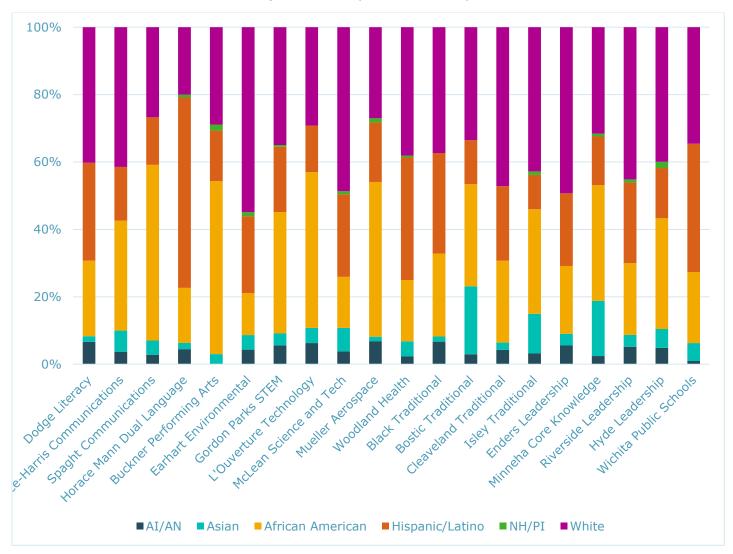
Demographic Data for Selected Students - 2019-20 Elementary Schools Only

The Strategic Communications office had not previously tracked data related to demographic characteristics of applicants or selected students. The demographic data for the district as a whole is represented in the column farthest to the right in the below charts.

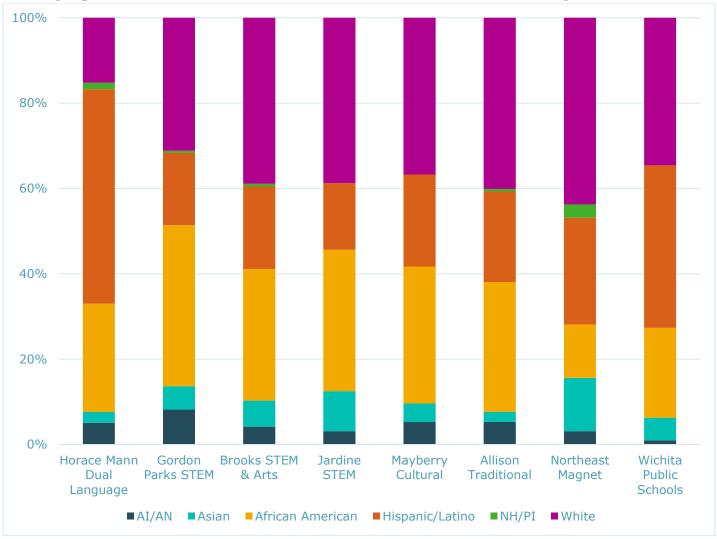


Demographic Data for All Applicants - 2019-20 Elementary Schools Only

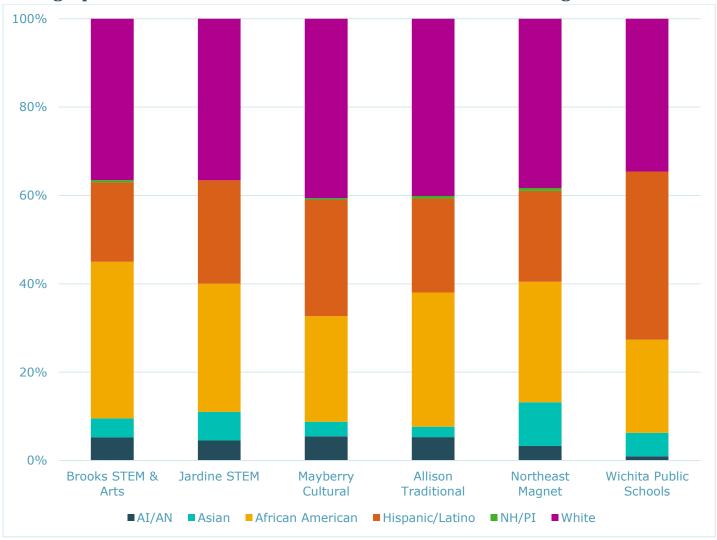
These charts show that there are some differences between the percentage of students in each demographic group that applied versus those accepted. In most cases, the demographic that had the high percentage of applicants ended up having a lower percentage of students selected. The application data also showed that there were large differences between the number of applicants at each of the 24 Magnet schools. Additional research may include looking at the zip codes from which applications arrived versus schools applied to; level of communication via social media for schools with higher numbers of applicants; and external data available for the Magnet schools (i.e., test scores).



Demographic Data for Selected Students - 2019-20 Middle and High Schools



Demographic Data for Selected Students – 2019-20 Middle and High Schools







Mini-Campaign 3: High School Application Deadlines



Radio Script

The holidays are over and it's time to start thinking about the 2019-20 school year. The deadline is fast approaching for your students to apply to one of Wichita Public Schools' high school choice programs. Applications for Northeast Magnet and the brand-new Early College Academy at Northwest High School are due January 25. All students entering ninth grade who live in the Wichita area are invited to apply now for two of the region's unique programs where students are empowered to dream, believe and achieve. Visit usd259.org for more information.



Local Newspaper Ad



Mini-Campaign 4: Elementary and Middle School **Magnet Application Deadlines**



