



COLLABORATIVE FOR
CUBES[™]
Customer-Based Execution & Strategy



SPORTS OR ACADEMICS: SHARPEN YOUR DISTRICT'S FOCUS WITH THE RIGHT STRATEGIC CHOICE

ACHIEVING CUSTOMER FOCUS AT SCHOOL DISTRICTS

“Our community really values sports. As a student I benefitted from sports. So, we are going to emphasize sports, because it is the best way to attract new families.”

- Principal of an underperforming middle school

“As part of strategy planning, we listened to hundreds of students, parents, and community members. Sports was mentioned many times – sports brings the community together, teaches students discipline, and creates a whole child.”

- Superintendent of an urban school district

Sports and Academics in K-12 School Districts

Many public-school leaders and school-district executives believe that sports will help differentiate their school from competitors. They believe a strong sports program can help them gain and retain families that may otherwise defect to competitors.

School leaders cite perennially complaining parents as a rationale to promote sports over academics. When a few parents harangue school leaders demanding a stronger sports focus, should school leaders invest in sports to appease them?

Setting strategy based on the few, but vocal parents can be misleading.

C-CUBES-K12™ Parent Voice Study: 2022

The Parent Voice Study is based on parents residing in the U.S., are 18 years of age, and currently have a child in school.

Survey Administration

Results are based on a national sample of 10,633 parents who completed an online survey from November 2022 to November 2023. The survey uses proprietary items to measure their student’s school and educational experience.

Methodology

This report analyzes two items rated as: completely disagree=1, somewhat disagree=2, neither agree/nor disagree=3, somewhat agree=4, completely agree=5.

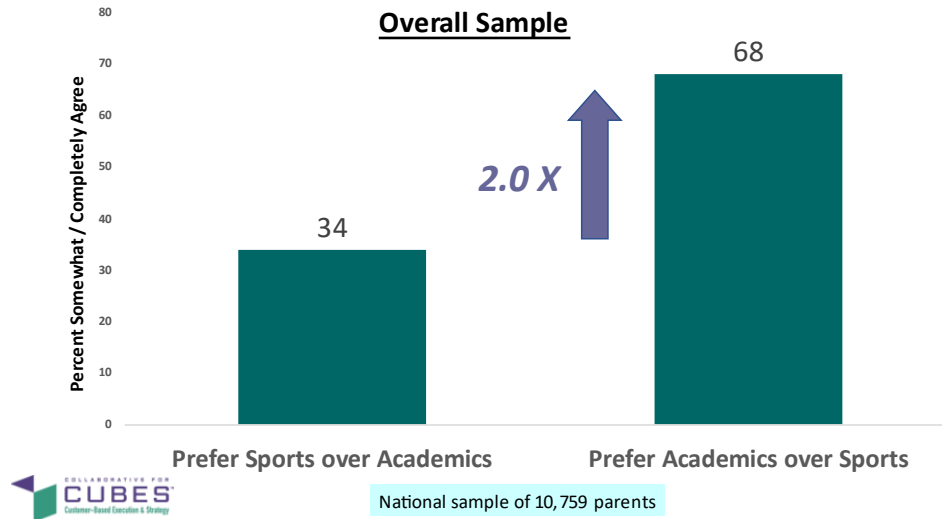
Prefer Sports over Academics: *I prefer a school that has a strong sports-program even if it is weak in academics*

Prefer Academics over Sports: *I prefer a school that has strong academics even if it has a weak sports-program*

Results

Parents are 2.0 times more likely to prefer stronger academics over stronger sports.

Figure 1: Overall Results



These results hold for different subgroups. In general, parents are 1.7 to 2.8 times more likely to prefer a school that has stronger academics (but weak sports) over a school that has stronger sports (but weak academics).

Figure 2: Whether Student is Eligible for Free & Reduced Lunch

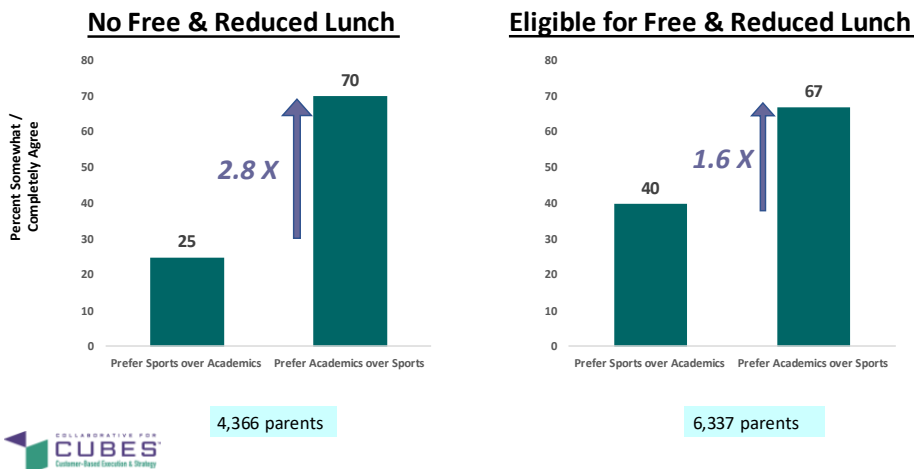
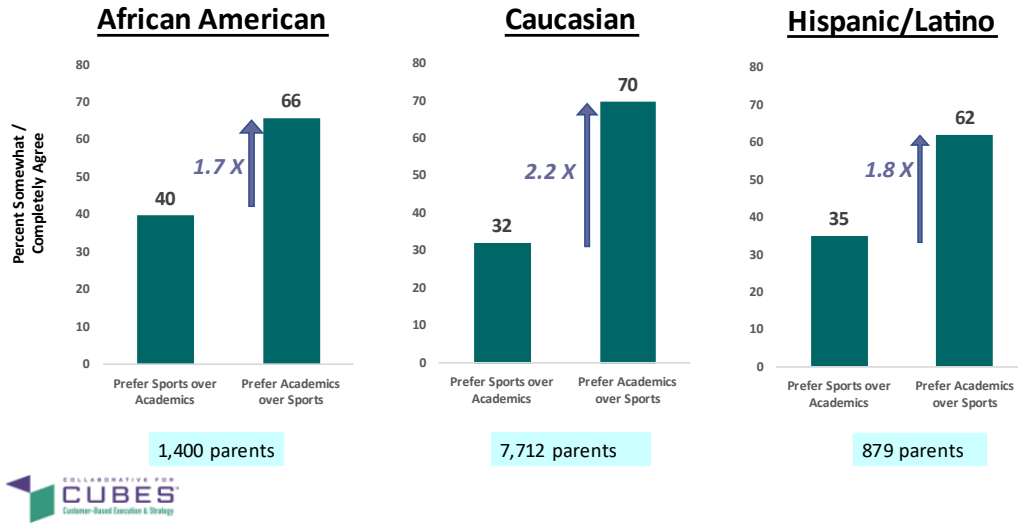
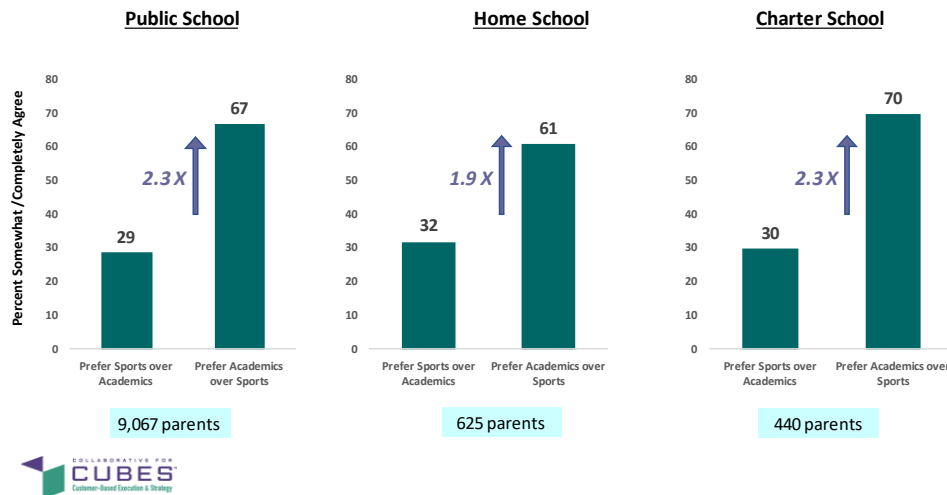


Figure 3: Race/Ethnicity



Parents' preference for schools with stronger academics is consistently strong among African American, Caucasian, and Hispanic/Latino parents. They do not differ among public schools, home schoolers or charter schools.

Figure 4: Type of School



Shaping School District Strategy: What's Next?

[Physical activity](#) has a small positive association with academic achievement. However, school leaders should not see sports as a substitute for strong academics.

The vast—but silent--majority of parents prefers a school with strong academics even if sports are weak! To succeed school leaders must keep the main thing the main thing. And the main thing is strong academics.

Author Bio

Dr. Vikas Mittal has published more than 100 articles on customer-focused strategy and worked with senior executives at more than 200 organizations. He is the co-author of a 2021 book: [FOCUS: How to Plan Strategy and Improve Execution to Achieve Growth](#).

Suggested Citation

Mittal, Vikas (2023), "Sports or academics: Sharpen your district's focus with the right strategic choice," *STRATONOMICS® Insight Series*, November, 1-5.

Free download: <https://ccubes.us/k12/briefs/>