



RESEARCH BRIEF

Research Services

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Describing Magnet School Students

Applicants 2016-2017 – Students 2017-2018

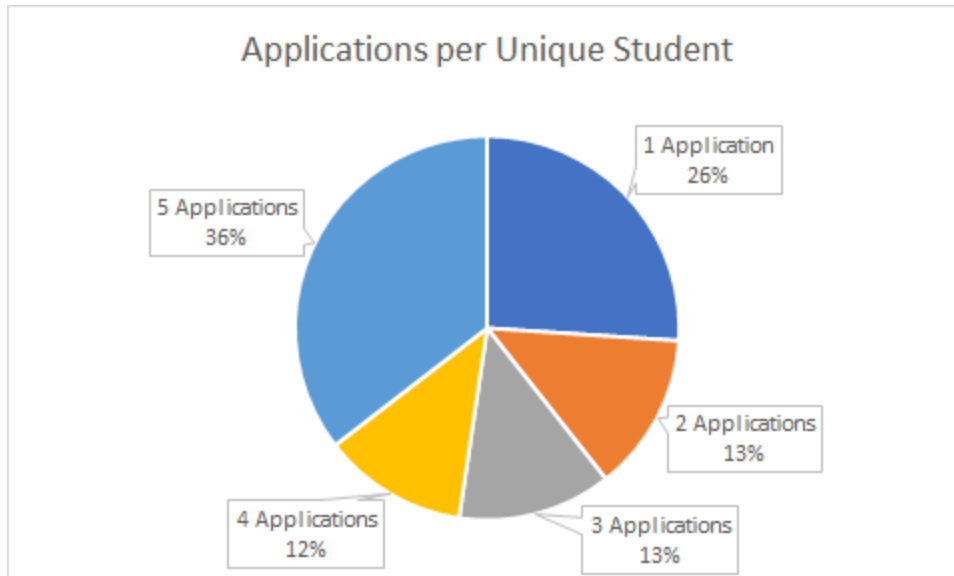
The Miami-Dade County Public School District is a nationally recognized leader in the quality and diversity of educational opportunities. Magnet Programs, in particular, offer distinctive educational choices to students. Magnet programs attract students by offering unique opportunities for in-depth experiences and study in specific areas of interest. Each magnet program emphasizes a specialized theme. The objectives are to create educational interests, honor cultural and ethnic diversity, and promote student achievement.

The purpose of this paper is to provide a brief snapshot of the student body applying to and attending magnet programs in Miami-Dade County schools. Comparisons will be made between accepted and not-accepted applicants and between magnet and non-magnet attendants. Demographic variables considered include the race/ethnicity and the gender of students, as well as their participation in the free/reduced price lunch (FRL) program. Additionally, comparisons in academic performance will be considered. It is hoped that studies such as this can help guide future decision-making processes and program offerings.

The Applicant Pool

There were 22,837 students applying during the 2016-17 school year for openings in magnet programs in the 2017-18 school year. Many of these students applied for more than one program. The resulting total number of program applications was 82,789. Over the years the magnet programs have become more popular and the number of applicants now far exceed the number of available openings. There were 26% more program applications for this year over two years ago. Among the roughly 23,000 unique student applicants, 12,813 ended up attending magnet programs for which they applied (not including students attending a magnet program other than those for which they applied in 2016-17). Although over-application to some programs results in some students not being able to attend the magnet program of their choosing, there remain some openings in other magnet programs.

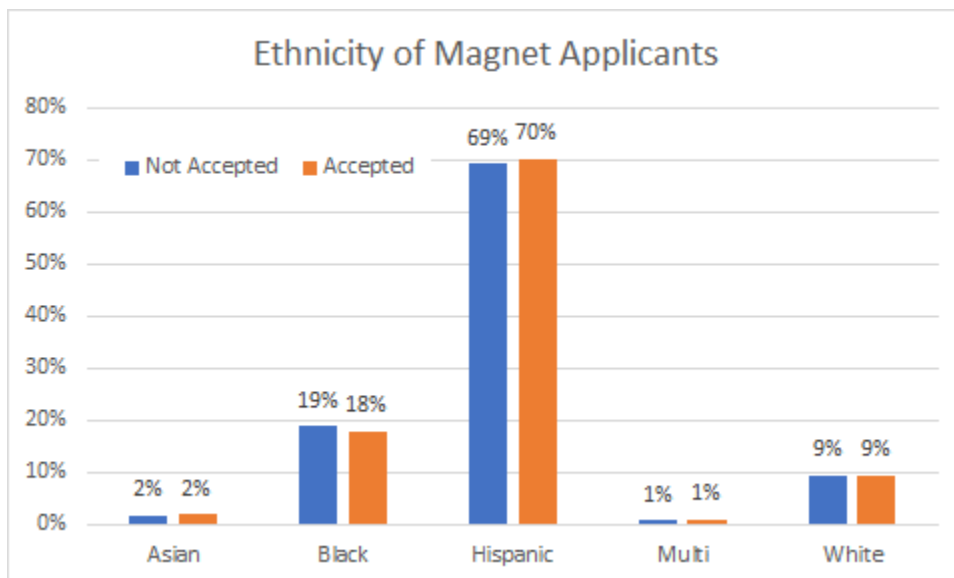
The number of applications per student ranged from 1 (about 26%) to 5 (about 36%). There were approximately 115 separate locations with magnet program applications. The number of applications per location ranged from about 50 to over 6,000.

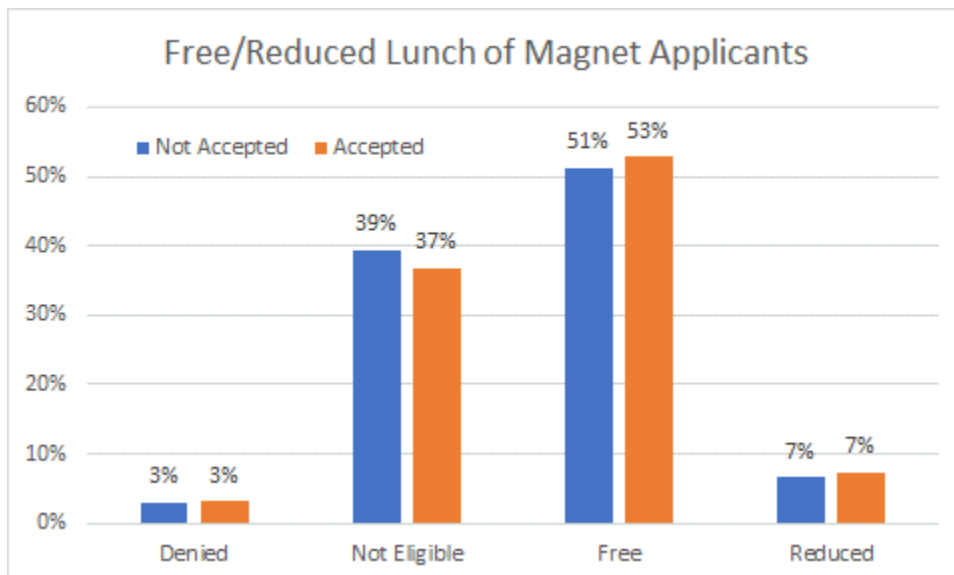
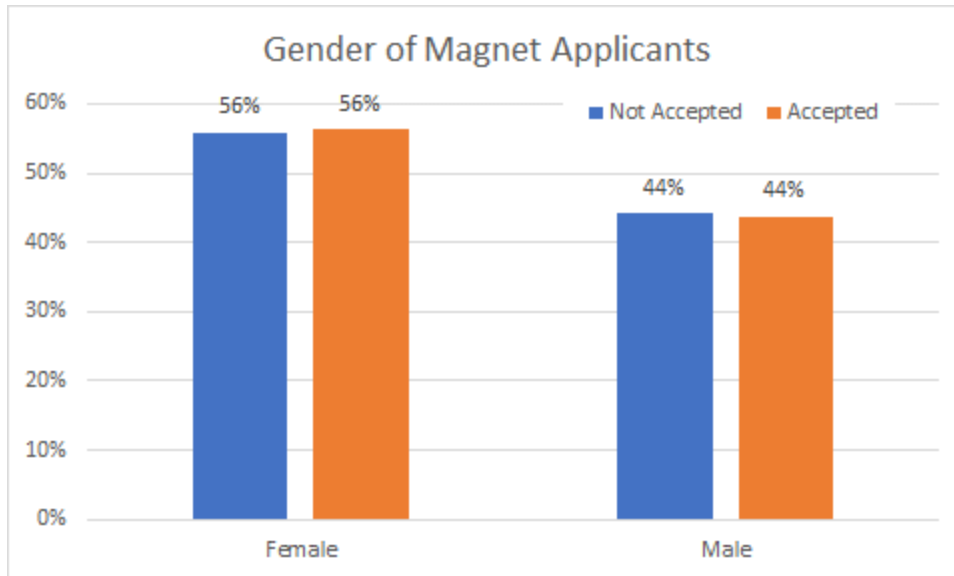


Comparing Accepted/Not-Accepted Applicants

For the purposes of this study, students were labeled as “Accepted Applicants” if they were attending, in the 2017-18 school year, the magnet program for which they applied. It should be noted that some students labeled as “Not-Accepted” may already have been attending magnet programs, but not the specific ones for which they applied in 2016-17.

Slightly more than half of the applicants were accepted into the programs for which they applied. The graphs below compare those who were Accepted to those who were Not-Accepted on the basis of Race/Ethnicity, Gender, and Free/Reduced Lunch status.

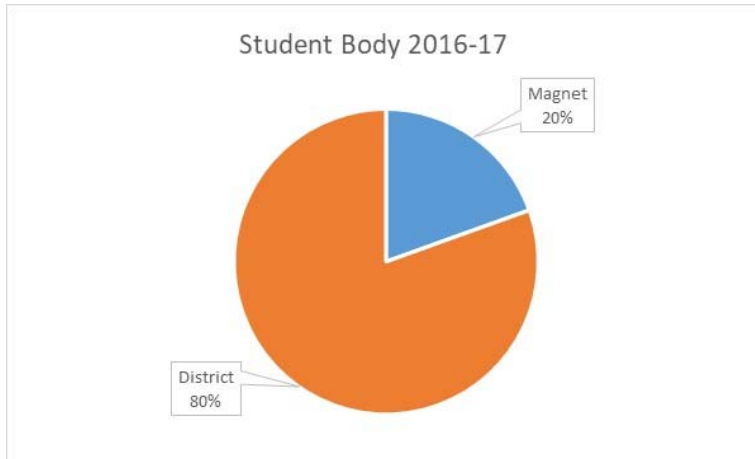




As can be seen from the graphs, the Accepted and the Not-Accepted students were remarkably similar on these demographic dimensions. Although these factors do not cover all possible sources of potential bias, the apparent conclusion is that the process of acceptance shows no partiality along these demographic elements.

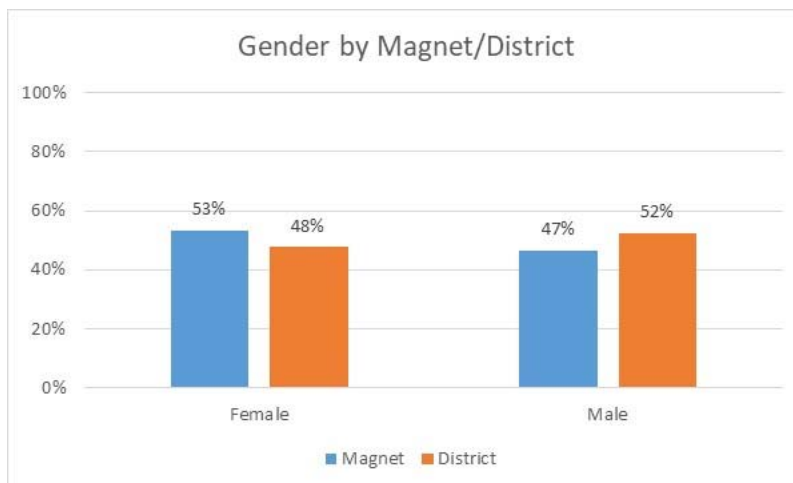
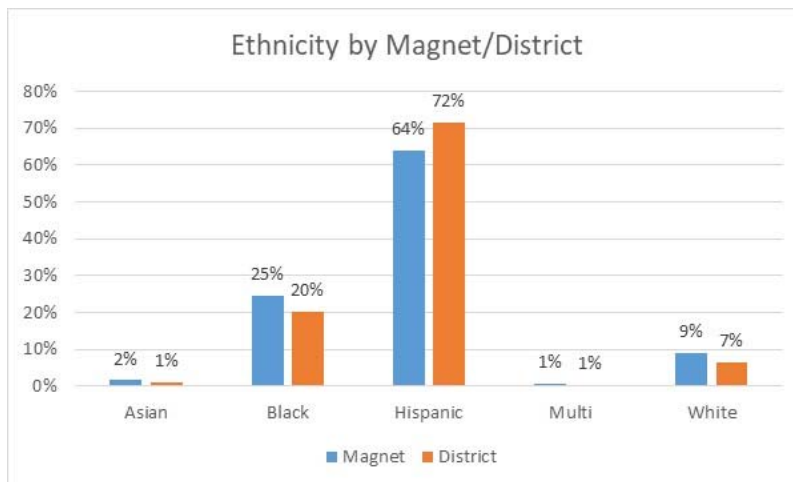
The Student Body

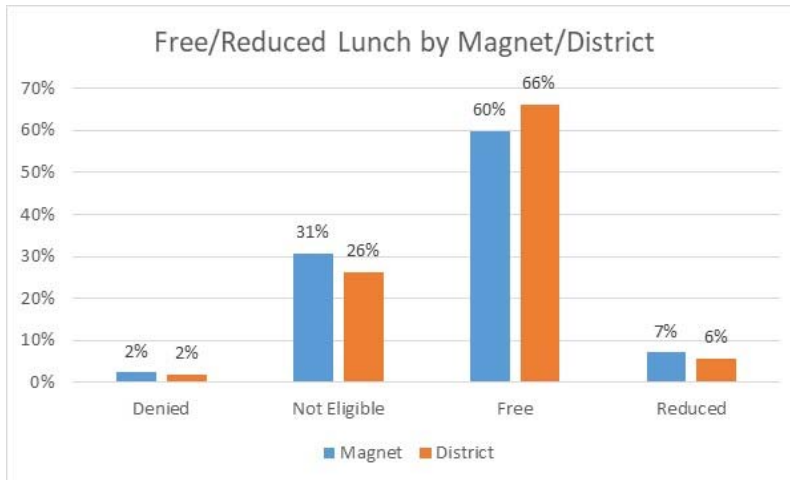
The focus on the previous page was on comparing Accepted and Not-Accepted students applying in 2016-17. Now the attention turns to comparing Magnet and District (non-magnet) students in 2017-18. Of the 356,950 students defining the student body for this study, 69,700 (approximately 20%) were attending magnet programs.



Comparing Magnet to District Students

The graphs below compare students that were attending Magnet programs to those who were attending District (non-magnet) programs on the basis of Race/Ethnicity, Gender, and Free/Reduced Lunch status.

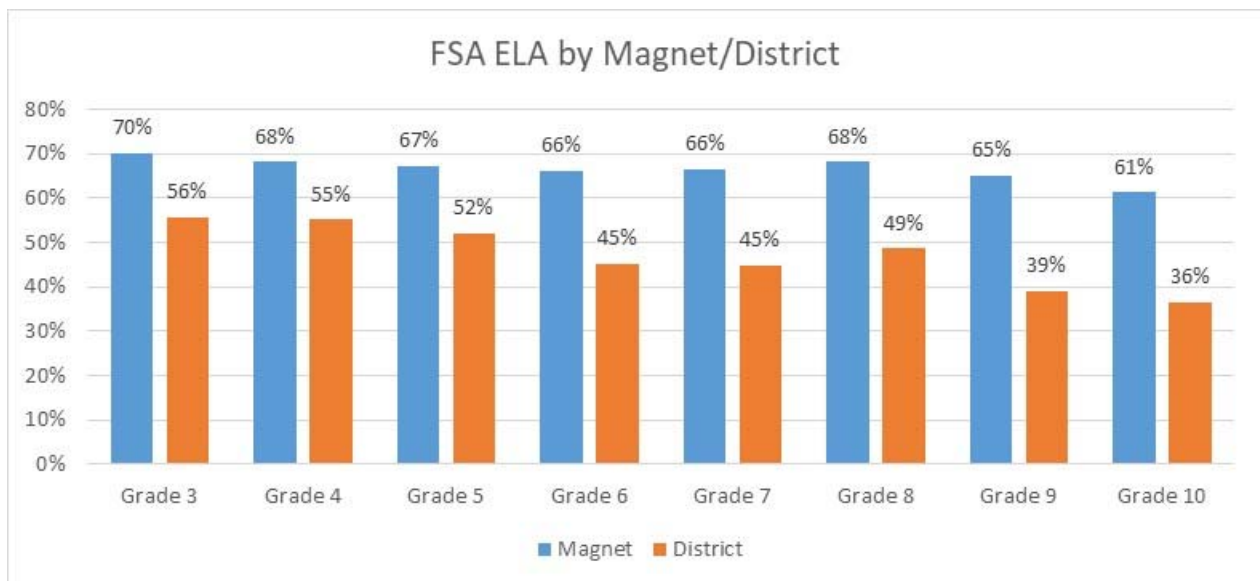


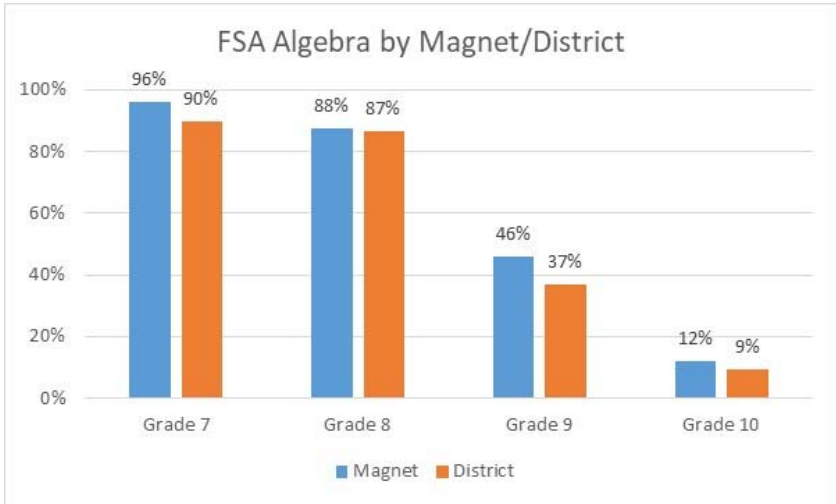
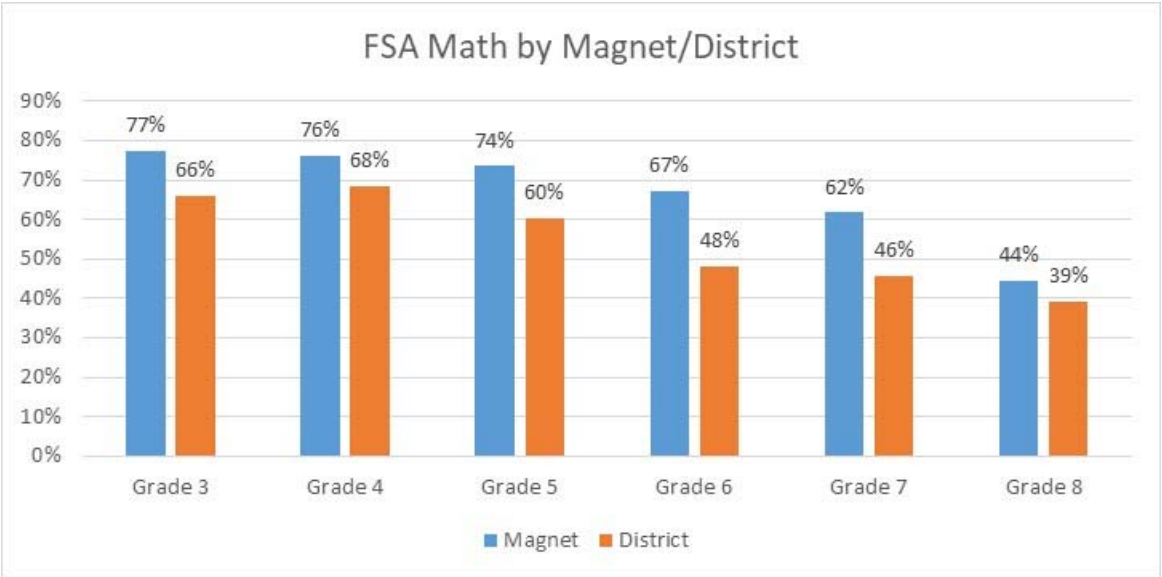
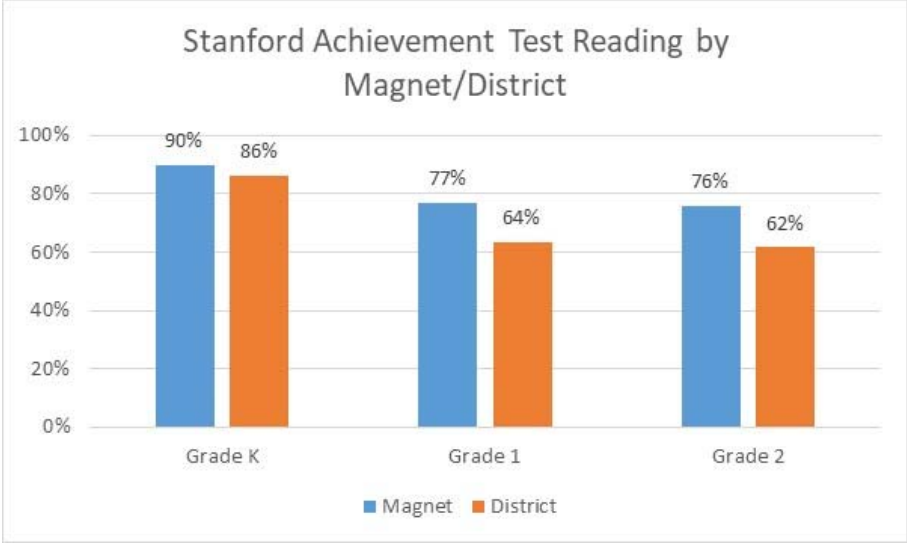


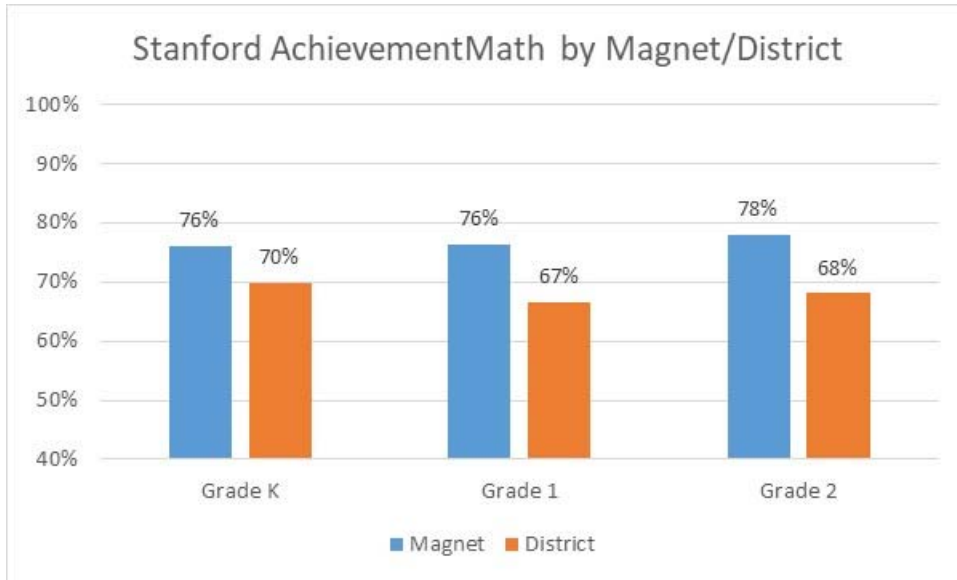
As can be seen from the graphs, the Magnet and the District students were, again, quite similar on these demographic dimensions. Although these factors do not cover all possible sources of potential bias, the apparent conclusion is that the participation in magnet programs shows no partiality along these demographic elements.

Student Achievement

Beyond demographic considerations, it is instructive to look at academic performance differences. These comparisons are confined to statewide achievement test scores, including Florida Standards Assessments (FSA) in English Language Arts (ELA), Mathematics, and Algebra I. These tests cover grades 3 through 10. Included also are comparisons on the Stanford Reading and Mathematics tests for Kindergarten through 2nd grade. The graphs present the percent of students scoring at or above proficiency level, defined as Level 3 or higher for the FSA tests and the 50th National Percentile for the Stanford tests.







In all comparisons made here the Magnet students' academic performance exceed that of District students to a considerable degree.

Summary

Magnet programs comprise a significant proportion of educational offerings in the district. The overall popularity of the magnet programs is evidenced by the high number of applications each year. For the years under consideration in this study, slightly more than half of the students applying ended up in magnet programs. Although this study is far from a definitive exploration of potential bias, the demographic comparisons between accepted/not-accepted and magnet/district student groups are strong evidence of impartiality. Moreover, in all the academic comparisons studied here, the magnet students substantially outperformed students in non-magnet programs.