Students and families in Chicago are increasingly taking up school choice options. In the last five years, about 75 percent of eighth-grade students have decided to attend a high school other than the one designated by their neighborhood of residence. To understand the process of high school choice, it is essential to include student voices and experiences. A new brief from the UChicago Consortium on School Research offers key insights from focus groups with eighth-grade students about their experiences in the high school search and application process.

**Student Consideration Factors in High School Choice**

**Setting Factors**
- Distance
  - How far is a potential school from my home?
- Location
  - Is the school located in a neighborhood perceived as safe?
- Transportation
  - How will I get to a potential school?
  - What are the transportation options?
  - Does the commute have the potential to deter my attendance?

**School Factors**
- Auxiliary Programs
  - What sports are available?
  - What afterschool programs are offered?
- Academics
  - What special programs are available?
  - What courses are offered?
  - What instructional approaches are used?
  - How “hard” or “easy” is a school?
  - How much homework can I expect?
- Organizational Characteristics
  - What supports are available for me if I’m struggling?
  - How big are classes?
  - What is the student to teacher ratio?
  - Is there a dress code?
  - What is discipline like?

**Student Factors**
- Social
  - What are the demographics of the student body?
  - Do I have friends or family who attend?
  - Will social connections help or hinder my high school success?
- Personal
  - How does this school or program align with my personal priorities?
  - Will this school help me reach my personal and academic goals?

"My mom said, “Pick somewhere that’s closer to home because you’ve gotta think about the rainy days, the snow days, and how you’re gonna transport there.”"

"One of the schools that I picked, they’ve got small classes, no more than 12 to 15 people. So I figured I’m gonna be able to learn in a small class with a teacher there."

"I wanted to go to a school where not a lot of people go, but enough people I know that’ll help me once I first start and they’ll guide me around. ’Cause I know at first I be so scared, so lost, and everything."

To read the research, visit [consortium.uchicago.edu](http://consortium.uchicago.edu)
How Schools Can Help Students Through the Search and Application Process

Student consideration factors provide insights and implications for schools and student-support networks to help students apply to the high school of their choice. Students said that out-of-date websites, confusion about school ranking, and the inability to meet additional application requirements were barriers to the process.

To read the research, visit consortium.uchicago.edu

High School Actions

1. Keep websites up-to-date with information helpful for the high school choice process, including:
   - Academics (classes available, programs, workload)
   - Extra-curricular opportunities
   - Sports
   - Discipline and dress code policies
   - Photos or videos that give a sense of what the school is like
   - Transportation options

2. Find ways for prospective students to hear from current students:
   - Consider student voices on school websites talking about their experiences
   - Consider opportunities for prospective students to visit the high school and meet current students

3. Make it easy for students with fewer resources and greater challenges to fulfill any application requirements outside of the GoCPS system.

Middle School Actions

- Provide consistent, accurate information about how to use the GoCPS system to students and families. Include information about how offers will be made.
- Show students how to access information about high schools, and how to figure out transportation requirements and logistics for different schools.
- Make sure all students have the supports they need to fulfill any supplemental requirements to apply to their list of schools.
- Provide emotional support and reassurance. Help students to get excited about their high school choices and address their fears and concerns.