

I. Characteristics of MSAP-supported Schools and Programs

The 1998 funding of the federal Magnet Schools Assistance Program (MSAP) supports programs in 292 schools within the 57 school districts that received MSAP grants. In this chapter, we focus on characteristics of the MSAP-supported schools and programs within the districts operating MSAP projects: specifically, the grade levels served, types of school programs, themes of programs, first year (1998–99) program enrollment, characteristics of students, and Title I programs in MSAP schools. In later chapters, we turn our attention to what the district-level projects and school-based programs are doing.

Grade Levels of MSAP Schools and Types of Programs

Magnet programs funded by the 1998 MSAP grants are predominantly located in elementary schools,¹ comprising 60 percent of all MSAP schools. Middle schools represent another quarter (24 percent), and high schools account for less than one-sixth (14 percent) of the schools at which MSAP programs are operating. A handful of programs (2 percent) are in schools that serve a combination of grade levels.² The preponderance of programs in elementary schools is consistent with earlier patterns of magnet school programs: a national survey of schools in 1992 indicated that 53 percent of magnet schools (federal and nonfederal) served elementary school students.³

Magnet schools differ in the manner in which they structure enrollment in their programs. Some schools offer a magnet program to all students in the school who are in the grade levels at which the program operates. These are referred to as *whole school* magnet programs. They are distinguished from *programs within schools (PWSs)* that offer magnet curricula to some but not all of the students in the school. Of the schools supported by 1998 MSAP grants, almost nine out of ten MSAP schools (89 percent) maintain whole school programs.⁴ PWSs operated in only 33 (i.e., 11 percent) out of the 292 MSAP magnet schools. PWSs represented a larger proportion of the secondary as compared to elementary school programs. Nearly one-third (30 percent) of MSAP high schools are PWSs as compared with about one in 20 (6 percent) of MSAP elementary schools, as shown in Figure I-1.

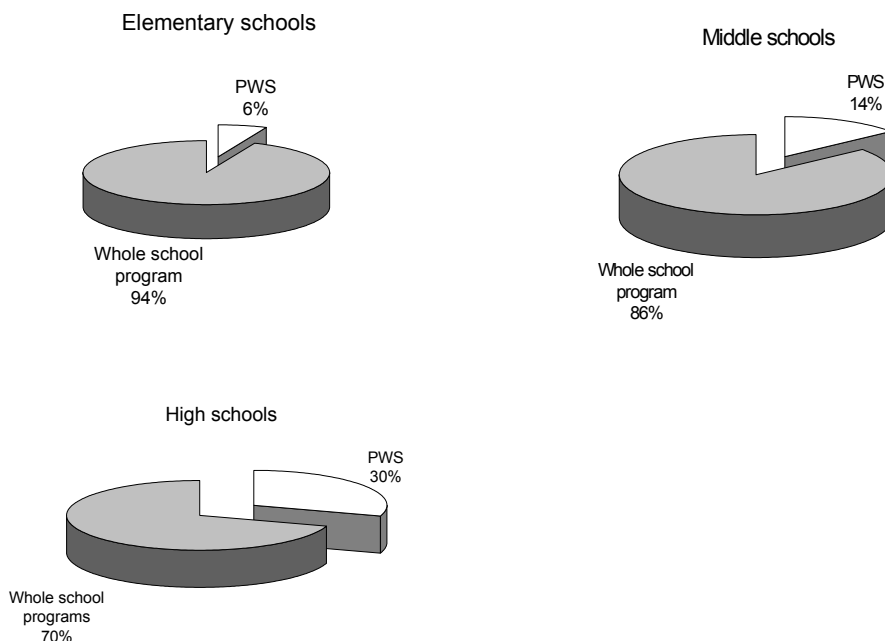
¹ See Glossary at the end of this document for definitions used to distinguish elementary, middle, high, and combined-level schools.

² Table A-I-1 in Appendix I.

³ Steel, L., and R. Levine. *Educational Innovation in Multiracial Contexts: The Growth of Magnet Schools in American Education*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Undersecretary, 1994, 34.

⁴ See Table A-I-2 in Appendix I.

Figure I-1
Type of Magnet Program, by Level



n=175 MSAP elementary schools; 71 MSAP middle schools; 40 MSAP high schools

Source: MSAP applications and 1998–99 performance reports

Among the current MSAP schools, the percentage of PWS magnets is lower than in federal and nonfederal magnet schools at the beginning of the 1990s. In 1992, the PWS structure was utilized by over one third (38 percent) of magnet schools, ranging from one quarter (27 percent) of elementary schools to two-thirds (69 percent) of high schools.⁵

Themes of Programs

Each magnet school may offer one program or numerous programs, depending on what the district and the school decide upon. In addition to instruction in the core subjects (reading/language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies) that all schools provide, a magnet school offers special curricula, instructional strategies, and activities that are not generally available in other schools in the district. Commonly referred to as “themes,” these special features may include extensive coverage of a core subject such as math or science. They may include a teaching methodology such as Maria Montessori’s concepts and strategies. They may provide a different context for instruction such as global studies; offer more intensive exposure to subjects such as dance, drama, or music; or link instruction to potential careers such as aviation or medicine. The themes in the 292 MSAP schools cover a broad spectrum and are further described in Chapter V, Innovative Practices.

⁵ Ibid., p. 41.

First Year (1998–99) Program Enrollment

Total Enrollment

During the 1998–99 school year, MSAP programs operated in 263 of the 292 MSAP schools.⁶ The remaining 29 schools had not yet implemented their programs because they either had not yet opened or were open but using their first year for planning. The 263 MSAP schools enrolled over 165,000 students,⁷ including the students in PWS magnets who were enrolled in the magnet curricula and all students in schools with whole school programs. About half of all these MSAP students (55 percent) were enrolled in elementary schools, one-quarter (24 percent) in middle schools, and about one-fifth (18 percent) in high schools. The remaining students (4 percent) were enrolled in schools serving combined grade levels.

The MSAP enrollment data indicate that the vast majority of MSAP students (95 percent) are enrolled in whole school programs.⁸ While on average only 5 percent of MSAP students are enrolled in PWS magnets, the percentage ranges from 3 percent of elementary school students to 7 percent of middle school students to 10 percent of high school students.

Minority Enrollment

MSAP magnets are intended to bring students from different socioeconomic, ethnic, and racial backgrounds together and improve the educational opportunities of students. In MSAP programs, minority students constitute about three-quarters (74 percent) of student enrollments and 70 percent or more of students enrolled at every grade level.⁹

Minority students represent about three-quarters (74 percent) of students in whole school programs, compared with two-thirds (66 percent) of PWS magnet students. As shown in Figure I-2, the difference in representation of minority students in PWS and whole school programs is more apparent in MSAP high schools than in middle and elementary schools.¹⁰

⁶ Note that the references to the number of schools in the Overview were for 1999-2000, the second year of program implementation and the year in which we administered surveys to the 1998 MSAP grantees.

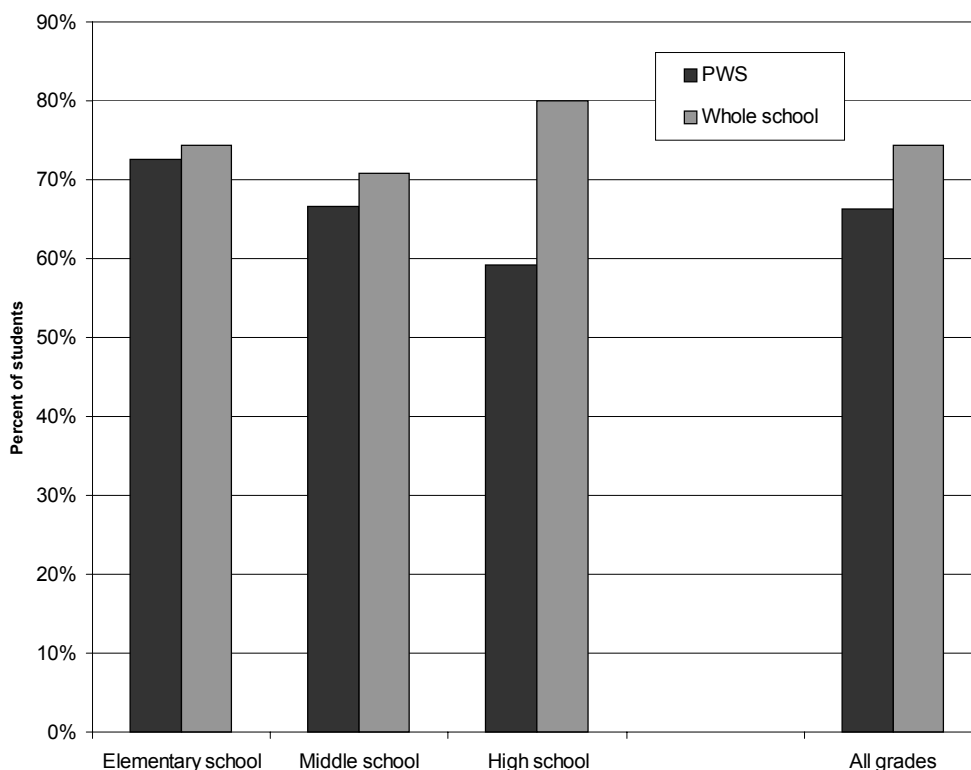
⁷ See Table A-I-3 in Appendix I.

⁸ See Table A-I-4 in Appendix I.

⁹ See Table A-I-5 in Appendix I.

¹⁰ See Table A-I-6 in Appendix I.

Figure I-2
Percentage of Minority Students Enrolled in PWS and Whole School Programs, by Level



n=292 MSAP schools for all grades

Source: MSAP 1998–99 performance reports; MSAP Principal Survey, 1999–2000, Item 45; and NCES 1998–99 Common Core of Data

Characteristics of Students in MSAP-supported Schools

How do students attending MSAP-supported schools compare to students attending non-MSAP schools in terms of minority status, racial and ethnic composition, and economic status? We examine this question by determining the characteristics of students attending MSAP and non-MSAP schools within the same district and comparing the average across districts for each group.

On average, minority students represent a larger percentage of the student enrollment in a district’s MSAP schools (71 percent) than in non-MSAP schools (62 percent) as shown in Figure I-3.¹¹ Differences of a similar magnitude can be found at every grade level. While MSAP schools have a higher average proportion of minority students, as one would expect in programs that target minority-isolated schools, the average for both MSAP and non-MSAP schools exceeds the 50 percent minority enrollment threshold by which the federal government defines minority-isolated schools.

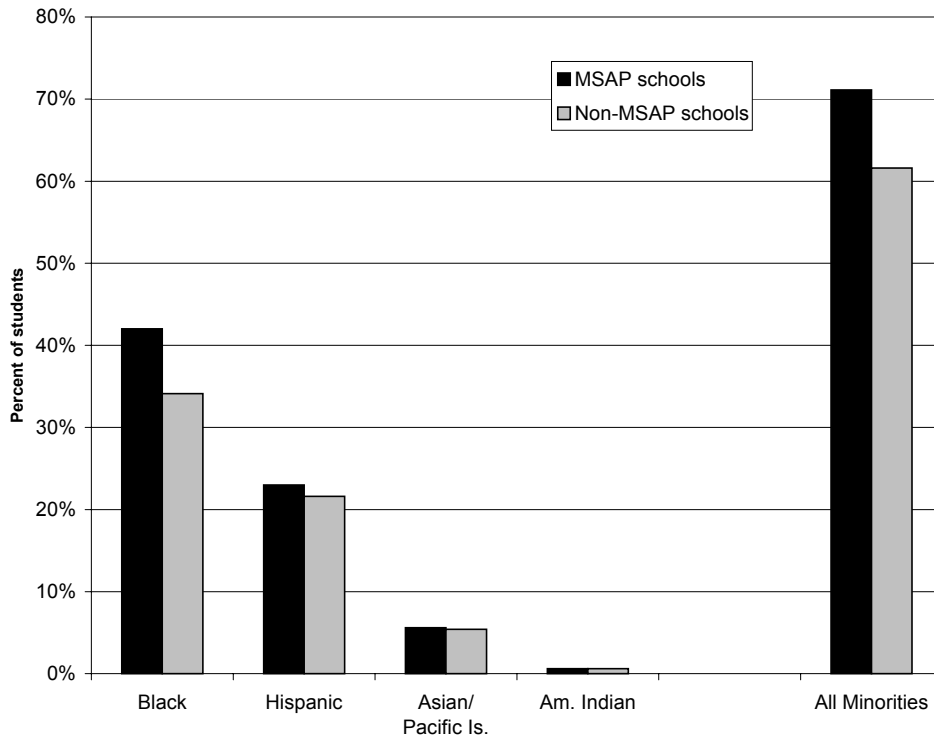
The greater average representation of minority groups in MSAP schools, as compared with non-MSAP schools in the same district, particularly applies to black students. As Figure I-3 shows, black students account for an average 42 percent of students enrolled in a district’s MSAP schools, compared with 34 percent of the student enrollment in non-MSAP schools.¹² Comparisons for other racial-ethnic minorities show little or no difference. Hispanics in both MSAP and non-MSAP schools average 22 to 23

¹¹ See Table A-I-7 in Appendix I.

¹² See Table A-I-8 in Appendix I.

percent of student enrollment.¹³ Asian and Pacific Islanders average 5 to 6 percent in both MSAP and non-MSAP schools, while American Indians average less than one percent in both types of schools.¹⁴

Figure I-3
Mean Percentage Enrollment of Racial-Ethnic Minorities within Districts for MSAP and Non-MSAP Schools: 1998–99



Source: NCES 1998–99 Common Core of Data

Both MSAP and non-MSAP schools in the 57 MSAP districts enroll a high proportion of socioeconomically disadvantaged students, as indicated by the percentage of students eligible for the Free or Reduced Price Lunch Program. Figure I-4 shows that on average, 60 percent of students attending a district’s MSAP schools are socioeconomically disadvantaged students, compared with 56 percent of students in the non-MSAP schools.¹⁵ Thus, MSAP schools have a marginally greater proportion of socioeconomically disadvantaged students than non-MSAP schools do. These differences between MSAP and non-MSAP schools become slightly more apparent when examined by grade level. For example, at the high school level, the mean percentage of low-income students enrolled in MSAP high schools is 52 percent, compared to 41 percent in non-MSAP schools.¹⁶

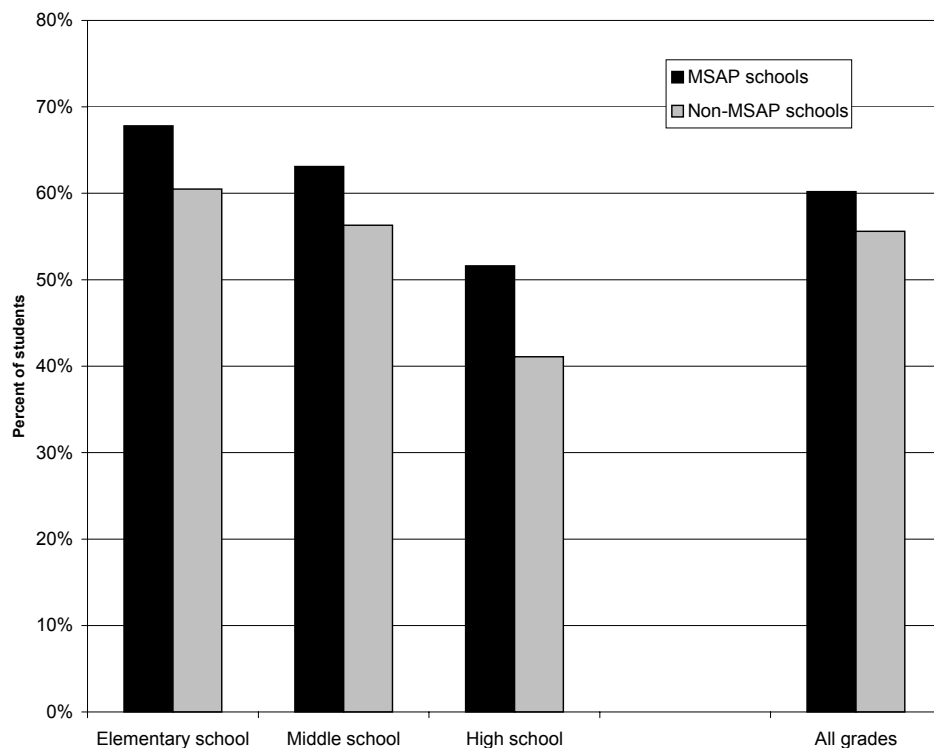
¹³ See Table A-I-9 in Appendix I.

¹⁴ See Tables A-I-10 and A-I-11 in Appendix I.

¹⁵ See Table A-I-12 in Appendix I.

¹⁶ See Table A-I-12 in Appendix I.

Figure I-4
Mean Percentage Enrollment of Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Students^a in MSAP and Non-MSAP Schools within Districts, by Level: 1998–99



Source: NCES 1998–99 Common Core of Data

^a Socioeconomically disadvantaged students are defined as students eligible for the Free or Reduced Price Lunch Program.

Title I Programs in MSAP-supported Schools

Title I programs serve disadvantaged students who are considered to be at risk of poor academic achievement in school because they come from low-income families or lack proficiency in English. School-wide programs that offer Title I assistance to all students in a school are reserved for schools in which 50 percent or more of the students qualify to receive support from a Title I program. For schools in which less than 50 percent of students qualify, Title I assistance is targeted to only those students who qualify.

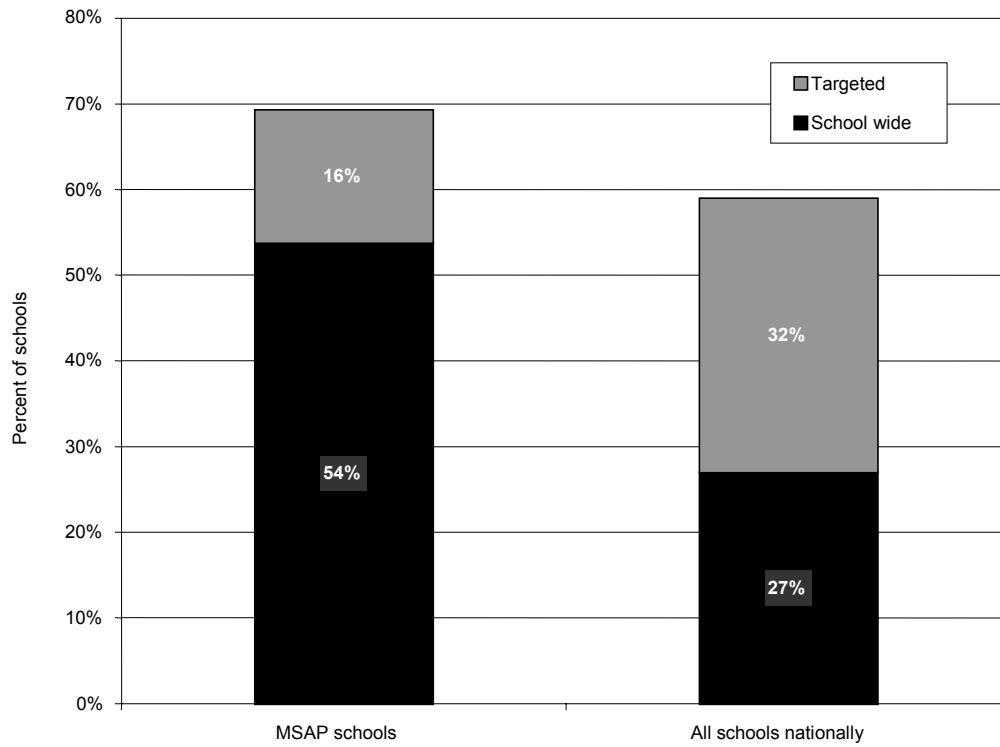
The percentage of MSAP-supported schools operating a Title I program is higher than the national average. As seen in Figure I-5, about 70 percent of MSAP schools receive Title I program funds, compared to 50 percent of the schools in the United States identified in a recent national survey as receiving Title I funds. The proportion of MSAP schools operating a Title I program is greater than the national percentage for elementary, middle, and high schools.¹⁷

The high proportion of MSAP-supported schools with a school-wide Title I program is further evidence of the prevalence of disadvantaged students in MSAP schools. Over half of the MSAP schools (54 percent) report operating a school-wide Title I program, compared with 27 percent of schools

¹⁷ Compare Tables A-I-13 and A-I-14 in Appendix I.

nationally. The proportion of MSAP schools with school-wide Title I programs is twice the percentage nationally for elementary, middle, and high schools.¹⁸

Figure I-5
Percentage of MSAP-supported Schools with Targeted and School-wide Title I Programs
Compared with Schools Nationally



Source: MSAP data are from the MSAP Principal Survey, 1999–2000, Items 31 and 32 and responses to the District Data Request. National data are reported from the 1998–99 National Longitudinal Survey of Schools (NLSS) in Berends et al.

¹⁸ Compare Tables A-I-13 and A-I-14 in Appendix I

What We Learned

- As was the case in the early 1990s, elementary schools and their students still represent the majority served by the federal magnet school programs.
- Federally funded magnets are overwhelmingly whole school programs, and schools with whole school programs enroll the vast majority of magnet students.
- The total number of PWSs is small, and they constitute a much smaller percent of federal magnet programs at every grade level in comparison with the structure of magnet programs in the early 1990s. As in the past, programs-within-a-school (PWSs) represent a larger proportion of the programs in high schools than in elementary or middle schools.
- Minorities comprise 75 percent of the students in federally funded magnet school programs. Representation is somewhat higher in whole school programs than in PWSs. In particular, the percent black enrollment tends to be higher in MSAP schools than in non-MSAP schools in the same district.
- Although on average slightly more MSAP students are eligible for free or reduced price lunches than non-MSAP students, eligibility in both MSAP and non-MSAP schools averages over 50 percent for the 57 school districts.
- MSAP schools are over-represented among schools receiving Title I funds and are more likely to operate a school-wide Title I program than other schools nation-wide.

What We Hope to Learn

- Our efforts to compile data on characteristics of students in MSAP schools, as compared with non-MSAP schools, were limited by the difficulty that many school districts had in supplying current information for each school within their district. Consequently, in this report we relied extensively on the Common Core of Data (CCD). We are turning to state agencies to help us obtain data on student characteristics by school, but the data for some districts may not be available from either district or state agencies. We plan to use the data that can be collected over the next year to provide additional comparisons of the composition of students in MSAP and non-MSAP schools, such as the percentages of students with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) and Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs).
- We have shown how Title I programs in MSAP schools compare to national averages. In future reports, we also hope to compare the prevalence of Title I programs in MSAP schools and non-MSAP schools within the same district.
- We requested information from districts on the characteristics of principals and teachers, but districts also had difficulty providing these school-level data. We are supplementing our district requests for the 1999–2000 school year by turning to state agencies for these data. Here too, state and district agencies vary greatly in the information they maintain and make available, with information on staff qualifications being particularly difficult to obtain. In future reports, we plan to use the data that we are able to compile over the next year, comparing the demographic composition of the teaching and administrative staff in MSAP and non-MSAP schools. We also plan to compare student-teacher ratios and any of the staff qualifications (e.g., years of teaching experience, educational levels) for which we can obtain information.