
III. Desegregation Objectives and Recruitment Strategies

One of the four federally mandated objectives of the Magnet Schools Assistance Program (MSAP) is to foster desegregation of schools. We begin this chapter by discussing the specific desegregation objectives that MSAP projects have set for targeted schools. We then turn to the recruitment strategies (e.g., brochures, tours, advertisements) that districts use to attract students to magnet programs. Finally, we consider the extent to which projects and schools employ performance-based criteria to select students from among those who have applied. The use of performance-based criteria (e.g., test scores) is an important issue because in the past, magnet schools have been criticized for favoring high achieving students in their selection processes.

Apart from performance-based criteria, projects and schools may, under specific circumstances, employ other criteria for the selection of students, including race. For districts with required desegregation plans, selection factors are determined by the court or agency that requires the plan and are subject to change over the MSAP grant period. For districts with voluntary plans, selection factors are reviewed by the U.S. Department of Education (ED) periodically and any use of race must be narrowly tailored.¹ Because the use of race or other factors in student selection is specific to each school district's unique situation and is permitted only on a case-by-case basis, ED determined that we should not gather or report data on the ways such criteria are applied in MSAP districts.

Desegregation Objectives of MSAP's Targeted Schools

The MSAP was initiated in 1984 to provide federal support for magnet schools that are part of an approved voluntary or required (i.e., required by court or other government agency) desegregation plan. Through the MSAP, funds are provided to support programs that will promote the *reduction, elimination, or prevention* of minority group isolation in elementary or secondary schools. Minority group isolation refers to schools in which minority group children constitute more than 50 percent of school enrollment.² Minority group is defined to include children from the following racial-ethnic backgrounds: American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, Hispanic, and black (not of Hispanic origin).

The categories of desegregation objectives are the following:

- Schools with the objective of *reducing* minority group isolation have over 50 percent minority enrollment before a program starts, and their objective is to lower the proportion of minority enrollment (although they may still remain minority isolated).
- Schools with the objective of *eliminating* minority isolation are also minority-isolated before a program begins, and their objective is to lower the percent of minority enrollment level below 50 percent during the grant period (i.e., for the 1998 grantees, between 1998-99 and 2000-01).

¹ The 1998 MSAP application notice informed applicants submitting required desegregation plans that they must demonstrate that the proposed magnet schools are part of the approved plans and, if necessary, must be approved by the court or other agency that ordered the plans. The notice informed applicants submitting voluntary desegregation plans that, in order to meet the requirements of Title VI of the Civil Rights of 1964 and of the Constitution, any plan involving the use of race must be narrowly tailored to achieve the MSAP statute specifying a compelling interest in reducing, eliminating, or preventing minority group isolation. The notice identified factors that ED's Office for Civil Rights would consider in determining whether a plan is narrowly tailored.

² 34 CFR §280.4

- Schools with the objective of *preventing* minority isolation are in danger of becoming minority isolated and aim to keep minority enrollments from rising above 50 percent of enrollment during the three-year project period. These schools' minority enrollment is expected to remain below 50 percent with the magnet program.

Although these categories generally apply to districts with required desegregation plans as well as those with voluntary plans, 6 of the current 57 MSAP districts are operating under court or other agency orders that differ in some respect from these categories. In these cases, the required desegregation plan establishes a different standard for defining minority group isolation. The standard differs with respect to the percentage of minority enrollment that constitutes minority group isolation and/or how minority and non-minority groups are defined. Schools targeted for desegregation in those six districts are classified in this report as having *uniquely required* desegregation objectives.

The schools that are “targeted” for the reduction, elimination, or prevention of minority group isolation typically are the same schools in which the magnet programs are implemented. However, school districts may establish a magnet program in one or more schools with the aim of drawing students from higher minority enrollment schools into those programs. In these situations, the objective is to reduce, eliminate, or prevent minority group isolation in the schools from which students are being drawn. Among the current MSAP grantees, the magnet programs in 23 of the 292 MSAP-supported schools are intended to have an impact on minority group isolation in other schools from which students are drawn, rather than on minority isolation in the MSAP school itself.

A total of 303 schools are targeted for desegregation, and the objective in two thirds (66 percent) of them is to reduce minority group isolation.³ One-tenth (10 percent) of the schools are seeking to eliminate minority group isolation, and 1 in 20 (6 percent) are seeking to prevent minority group isolation. The small percentages of schools seeking to prevent or eliminate minority group isolation is understandable in that the average minority enrollment in both MSAP and non-MSAP schools within these districts is over the MGI threshold of 50 percent at every grade level.⁴

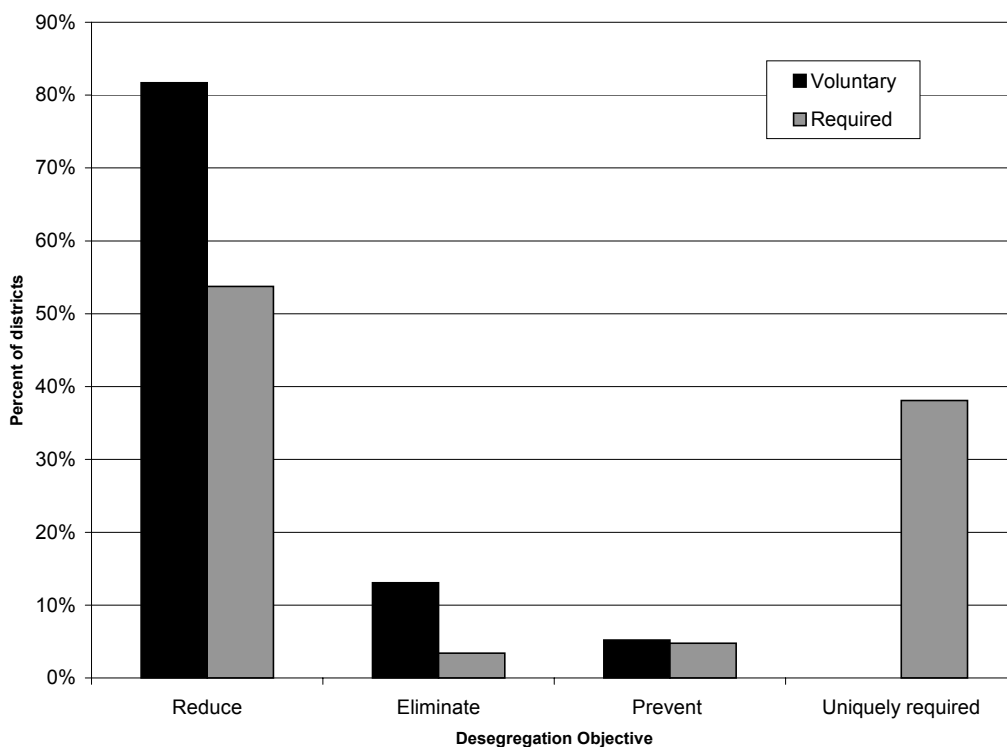
Figure III-1 summarizes the desegregation objectives for voluntary and required plans. A total of 56 targeted schools (19 percent) have uniquely required desegregation objectives that reflect specific court or agency orders that differ in some respect from MSAP standards. These schools, all in districts with required desegregation plans, represent over one third (38 percent) of those districts.⁵ Nevertheless, reducing minority group isolation is the major objective of schools in districts with required desegregation plans (52 percent), as well as in districts with voluntary desegregation plans (79 percent). If schools with uniquely required desegregation objectives are excluded from analysis, the proportion of schools in required desegregation plan districts seeking to reduce minority group isolation totals 85 percent, which is more comparable to districts with voluntary plans.

³ The baseline against which to evaluate programs is the October school enrollment data from the year of application (i.e., 1997–98). New schools, which were not previously open, are permitted to set their goals relative to an estimate of what their enrollment might have been without the magnet program (*Federal Register* 2/17/98, p. 8026–7). Approximately four percent of the targeted schools identified their objective as reducing minority group isolation based on such a hypothetical baseline as opposed to actual enrollment.

⁴ See Table A-I-7 in Appendix I.

⁵ See Table A-III-1 in Appendix III.

Figure III-1
Desegregation Objectives of MSAP's Targeted Schools, by Type of Desegregation Plan



n=303 targeted schools

Sources: Grantee applications, 1997–98 performance reports, NCES 1997-98 and 1998-99 Common Core of Data, and ED personnel

Recruitment Strategies

Magnet programs must attract students from outside the immediate school area or neighborhood in order to meet their desegregation objectives. Recruitment of students is intrinsic to the concept of a “magnet” school. In this section, we describe three aspects of district strategies for recruiting applicants to MSAP programs:

- personnel resources assigned to recruitment
- outreach activities used to interest students and their parents in MSAP schools
- extent to which districts focus recruitment on a targeted group of students

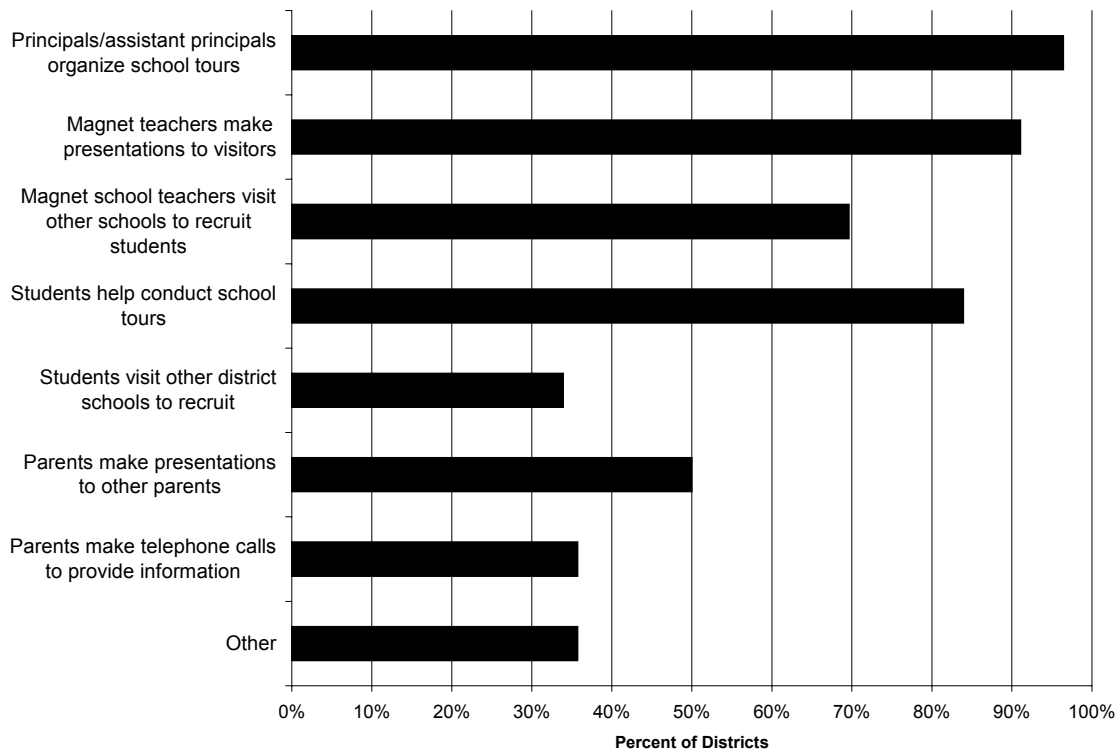
Personnel Resources. The personnel that districts can use to assist in recruiting efforts include the MSAP Project Director and other district staff, along with principals and teachers at the school level. In addition, magnet programs often involve students and their parents in outreach activities that publicize the school’s program.

The reports from MSAP Project Directors indicate that an average full-time equivalent (FTE) of 2.1 district-level staff is devoted to the MSAP projects’ recruitment efforts. The largest portion of that effort (FTE of 1.7) is from MSAP-funded staff, while a district-funded recruitment specialist on average provides the equivalent of about a half-time position to recruitment efforts. MSAP Project Directors in districts with required desegregation plans on average report a greater amount of staff time devoted to recruitment efforts than do Project Directors in districts with voluntary desegregation plans (FTEs of 2.4

and 1.9, respectively). In particular, districts with required desegregation plans tend to devote about one half FTE more of MSAP-funded staff time than do districts with voluntary desegregation plans.⁶

Figure III-2 indicates the percentage of MSAP districts that engage in various types of recruitment activities. In almost all of the districts, principals, and assistant principals organize school tours, and teachers make presentations to visiting parents and students. In over two thirds of the districts, teachers also assist with recruiting students by visiting other schools to meet with potential students. Students play a role in the recruitment effort in over 80 percent of the districts by conducting school tours; however, only one third of the districts have students visit other schools to help recruit students. Parents are the least used resource for recruitment. Just half of the districts report that parents have been enlisted to make presentations to other parents about magnet schools. In one third of the districts, parents make telephone calls to provide information to others about the magnet schools.

Figure III-2
Percentage of Districts with Specific Types of Participation of School Staff, Students, and Parents in Recruitment Effort



Source: Project Survey, 1999–2000, Item 6

Students and parents are involved in recruitment efforts more frequently in districts with required desegregation plans than in districts with voluntary plans. Although not shown in the figure, students in 46 percent of districts with required desegregation plans make recruitment visits to students in other schools, compared with students in 23 percent of voluntary desegregation districts. Parents in half (50 percent) of the

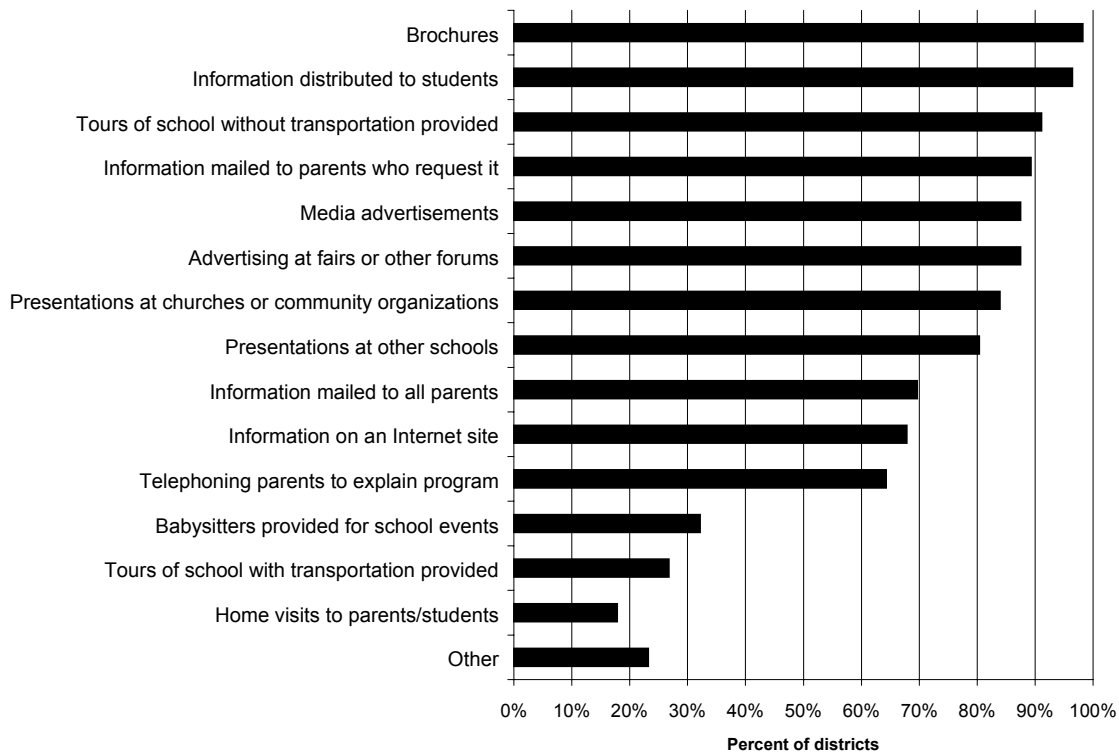
⁶ See Table A-III-2 in Appendix III.

required plan districts assist with recruitment efforts by making telephone calls, compared with parents in about one quarter (23 percent) of voluntary desegregation districts.⁷

Outreach Activities

The typical MSAP district, either with a required or voluntary desegregation plan, engages in more than 10 outreach activities to provide information to students, parents, and the community about its magnet programs. The number of activities is one indicator of the importance that most districts place on outreach. Figure III-3 arrays a wide range of outreach activities from those that districts most frequently report using to those that are used least often. The most frequently used strategies include making printed brochures available and distributing information and applications to students. Nine out of ten districts also plan tours of their MSAP schools for visiting parents and students, mail information and applications to parents upon request, and advertise in the media and at fairs or forums. Eight out of ten schools take their presentations on the road and make presentations to church congregations or other community organizations and schools. Over two thirds canvass their districts by mailing information and applications to the parents of all eligible students.⁸

**Figure III-3
Percentage of Districts Using Specific Types of Outreach to Recruit Students**



Source: Project Survey, 1999–2000, Item 7

⁷ See Table A-III-3 in Appendix III.

⁸ See Table A-III-4 in Appendix III.

Telecommunications plays a role in the outreach activities of most districts. Two-thirds of districts use an Internet site to convey information about their programs. A similar proportion of districts report telephoning parents of potential students to explain their MSAP programs.

Strategies that require personal service or attention are used by a much smaller percentage of districts. For example, one quarter to one third of the districts provide transportation or baby sitting service to allow parents to tour the MSAP school or participate in a school event. Less than one fifth of the districts make home visits to parents of potential students, perhaps the most personal attention of all the strategies.

During our interviews, MSAP Project Directors shared their thoughts about these successful recruitment and outreach strategies:

MSAP Project Directors told us:

- A recruitment strategy that has proven particularly effective for an MSAP high school is the development of ongoing communication with the principals of the district's elementary and middle schools. Information sessions have been scheduled with groups of 20–30 students and periodic meetings with parents have been held. Extensive efforts have also been made to involve the community (and parents in particular); and a bilingual Outreach Counselor, acting as a liaison between the parents and school, has been instrumental in improving communication and outreach.
- Thirty-second TV commercials, featuring a teacher and/or student enthusiastically describing a magnet program, have been effective recruitment tools for an MSAP project. This same project also holds a Magnet Fair at the district's central office building, which 4,000 people attended last time.
- An MSAP district has found that direct mailing and advertisements on the back of buses have been successful and noteworthy for recruiting purposes. When the MSAP grant was implemented in the district, a grand opening celebration was held in each MSAP school, with information booths and student performances. The celebrations were well publicized and termed "a great success" by the Project Director, who recommends that other projects use the same strategy. Parent attendance was high, and reporters who attended then wrote positive articles about the schools.
- A Saturday program has been a successful strategy for one MSAP project to connect with students in private schools, a primary target for their recruitment. The project has also undertaken outreach efforts through civic organizations.

Targeted Recruitment

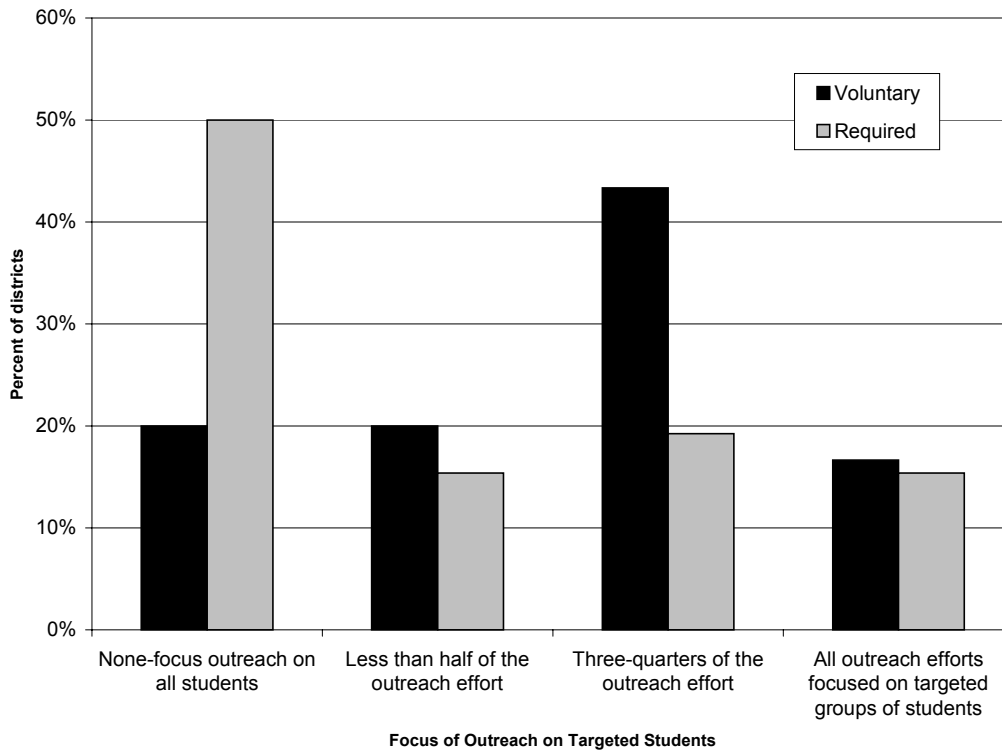
MSAP districts vary considerably in the extent to which their recruitment efforts focus on targeted groups of students. One third of the districts report that they recruit students from throughout the district and make no effort to target any particular group of students. On the other hand, slightly less than half of the districts indicate that they focus at least three quarters of their outreach on targeted groups of students.⁹

Less than one fifth of the districts focus *all* of their outreach on targeted groups of students. As may be seen in Figure III-4, districts with required and voluntary desegregation plans differ in the extent to which their outreach efforts focus on targeted groups of students. One half (50 percent) of the districts with required desegregation plans make no effort to target any particular group of students, while nearly 60 percent of districts with voluntary desegregation plans report that they focus three quarters or more of their outreach on

⁹ See Table A-III-5 in Appendix III.

particular groups of students. Required and voluntary desegregation plan districts are similar in that only 15 to 17 percent of each type of district report that all of their outreach focuses on targeted groups of students.

Figure III-4
Extent to Which Districts Focus Outreach Efforts on Targeted Groups of Students, by Type of Desegregation Plan



Source: Project Survey, 1999–2000, Item 3

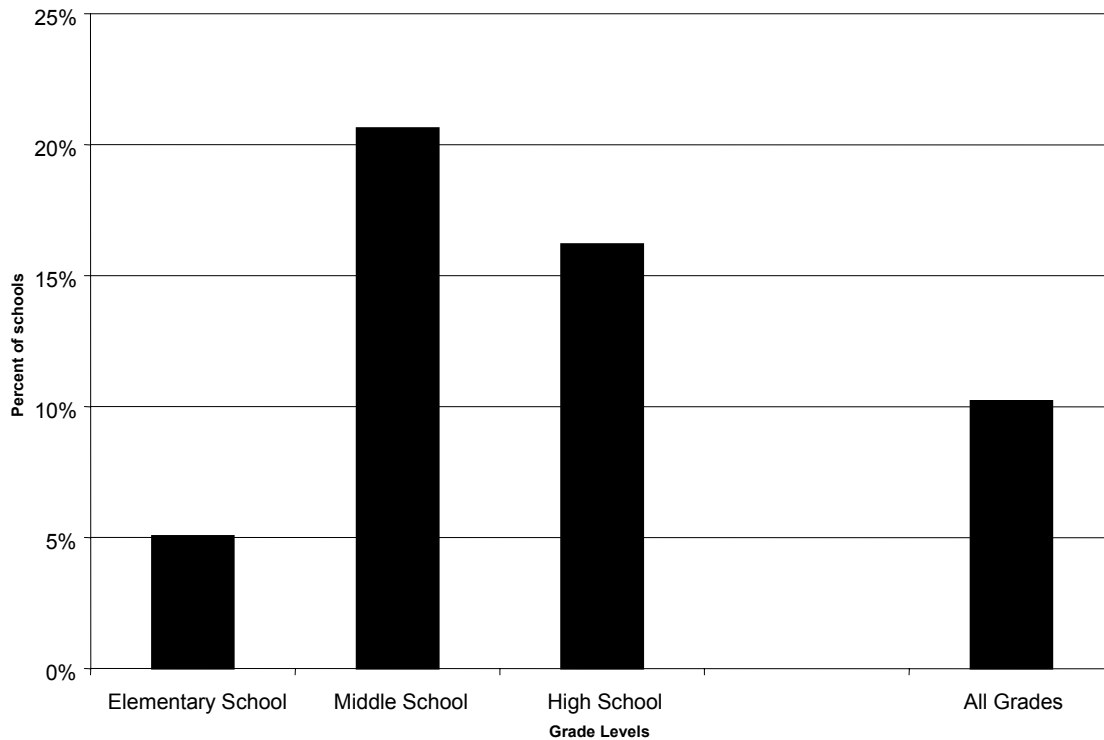
Use of Performance Criteria for Selection of Students

A common criticism of magnet schools is that they tend to use admission practices favoring high-achieving students. For this evaluation, we asked MSAP principals whether admission of students into their magnet programs is based on performance (i.e., test score, demonstrated skill or talent, or past academic record). Responses show that while there are differences across grade levels and types of programs, the vast majority of schools do not admit students on the basis of performance.

Only ten percent of all MSAP schools use performance-based procedures for admitting students, as presented in Figure III-5. This small proportion may be a reflection, in part, of the large percentage of MSAP programs in elementary schools, where the use of performance criteria to select students is less common. Performance-based admission practices are more prevalent in middle schools (21 percent) and high schools (16 percent) than in elementary schools (5 percent).¹⁰ Nevertheless, the vast majority of MSAP schools at all levels do not rely on performance-based criteria for admitting students.

¹⁰ See Table A-III-6 in Appendix III.

Figure III-5
Percentage of MSAP Schools Using Performance Criteria for Admitting Students, by Grade Level



Source: MSAP Principal Survey 1999–2000, Item 43

The use of performance-based admission criteria differs more by program type than by grade level. Nearly one third of all program-within-school (PWS) magnets (32 percent) use performance criteria for admitting students, compared with less than one tenth (7 percent) of MSAP schools with whole school programs. A higher percentage of PWS magnets at every grade level relies on performance-based admission criteria compared with whole school programs. The greatest reliance on performance criteria occurs in middle school PWS magnets, where 44 percent of the programs use performance measures to admit students.¹¹ This relationship should be placed in perspective, however. PWS programs in middle schools represent only three percent of all magnet programs, and fewer than half of those use performance-based criteria. Among the students enrolled in MSAP programs in 1998–99, fewer than 10 percent were enrolled in programs that use performance criteria to admit students. That overall proportion was similar for minorities and non-minorities.¹²

¹¹ See Table A-III-6 in Appendix III.

¹² See Table A-III-7 in Appendix III.

What We Learned

- Overwhelmingly, the desegregation objective for MSAP targeted schools is to reduce the percentage enrollment of minority students without the expectation of eliminating minority group isolation during the course of the grant.
- The average amount of staff time dedicated to recruiting students for MSAP schools is greater in districts with required desegregation plans (an FTE of 2.4 persons) than in districts with voluntary desegregation plans (an FTE of 1.9 persons).
- As part of recruiting efforts, MSAP principals and assistant principals organize school tours and teachers make presentations to visitors in almost every district.
- Students attending MSAP schools play a role in recruiting other students in most MSAP districts (e.g., conducting school tours or visiting other schools). About half of the MSAP districts use parents to assist with publicizing magnet school programs.
- In addition to the array of traditional practices of developing brochures, distributing or mailing information and applications to students and parents, attending forums, conducting school tours, and making local presentations, a majority of MSAP districts now include use of internet sites as a tool for informing students and other about their magnet programs.
- One third (34 percent) of MSAP districts report directing their recruitment efforts to all eligible students rather than focusing on targeted groups of students.
- Districts with voluntary desegregation plans report focusing a larger proportion of their recruitment effort on targeted groups of students, compared to districts with required desegregation plans.
- Few MSAP programs (10 percent) use performance as a criterion for admitting students.
- Only 6 to 7 percent of minority and non-minority MSAP students are in programs that use performance as a criterion for admitting students.

What We Hope to Learn

- How successful are projects in meeting their desegregation objectives? We plan to examine the benchmarks that schools have set for meeting their desegregation objectives and evaluate the extent of progress on meeting those objectives in the targeted schools during the first year of the project. The recent release of the 1998–99 Common Core of Data has provided us with the October 1998 enrollment counts for a number of schools whose information in the first year reports was unclear.
- As additional data are available, we will conduct analyses to determine what district and school characteristics relate to the desegregation objectives and goals that projects have identified for targeted schools.
- We will examine the extent to which district context, as discussed in Chapter II, and differences in recruitment and outreach strategies relate to MSAP districts' success in achieving their desegregation objectives.