

# Research Methodology and Data: Special Education and School Choice in New Orleans and Washington, D.C.

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With support from the Walton Family Foundation, we studied how parents of children with disabilities choose schools in two “high-choice”<sup>1</sup> cities—Washington, D.C., and New Orleans—to understand what supports were available to them, and their experiences using these supports to navigate the city’s school choice landscape. In each city we conducted:

1. A landscape analysis of services available to help parents of children with disabilities search for, select, and access resources in schools.
2. Focus groups with parents to discover how they used available resources in order to select schools to meet their children’s needs.

## Landscape Analysis

To conduct the landscape analysis, CRPE interviewed organizations that support parents of children with disabilities. We first identified organizations providing these supports through an internet search and based on recommendations from local and national education leaders. We requested an interview from a leader in each of the organizations on our original list. We further expanded the list through snowball sampling and asking for further recommendations from each organization leader we interviewed.

In total we interviewed thirteen D.C.-based and eleven New Orleans-based organizations, as well as three national organizations. The organizations included school districts, charter sector management, parent advocacy nonprofits, schools that offer specialized programs for special education, and government agencies in both cities.

## Parent Focus Groups

To better understand parents’ experiences in the school selection and application process, CRPE conducted in-person parent focus groups in both the cities in April 2019 where a total of 27 parents (15 in D.C. and 12 in New Orleans) participated. We created a website and a digital flyer to recruit parents for the focus groups in each city, specifically targeting parents who had recently gone through the school lottery process. The flyers and website were then shared widely with organizations that support families who have children with disabilities, as well as with the districts and the charter sectors in both cities. The parents who participated in the focus groups were recruited using targeted marketing via CRPE’s social media channels and through support from organizations. In New Orleans: Families

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1. Both D.C. and New Orleans are considered “high-choice” cities as they offer a range of school options for families, such as charter schools, traditional public schools in districts, and interdistrict choice.

Helping Families of Greater New Orleans, Urban League of Louisiana, and EdNavigator. In D.C.: Advocates for Justice in Education, DC School Reform Now, DC Special Education Cooperative, District of Columbia Public Charter School Board, and Parents Advocating Voices in Education. Interested parents signed up for the focus groups using a Google form available on the city-specific webpage.

Focus group participants were parents of children with disabilities who had recently gone through the lottery process. Participants were offered \$20 gift cards for their participation, as well as on-site childcare and food during the focus groups. We partnered with Parents Amplifying Voices in Education in D.C. and Urban League of Louisiana in New Orleans to help organize the parent focus groups. We sent a follow-up survey to participating parents to collect additional demographic information and to provide them with an opportunity to share more details about their school choice experience. Focus groups followed a semi-structured interview and lasted one hour.