



July 29, 2025

TO: Camden Education Fund

FROM: Embold Research

RE: Camden superintendent search and public perception of schools

Embold Research surveyed 316 adult residents of Camden, NJ from June 13-July 24, 2025¹ to gain a deeper understanding of the qualities and experiences residents want in their next school superintendent, and to gauge their perceptions of Camden's schools and preferred focus areas for the school district. The research highlights the views of two core audiences: parents with children who attend school in Camden, and other adult residents of the city. Each of these groups makes up roughly half the sample, and results are presented separately for these two audiences throughout this memo.

Residents' priorities for the new superintendent and the Camden school district

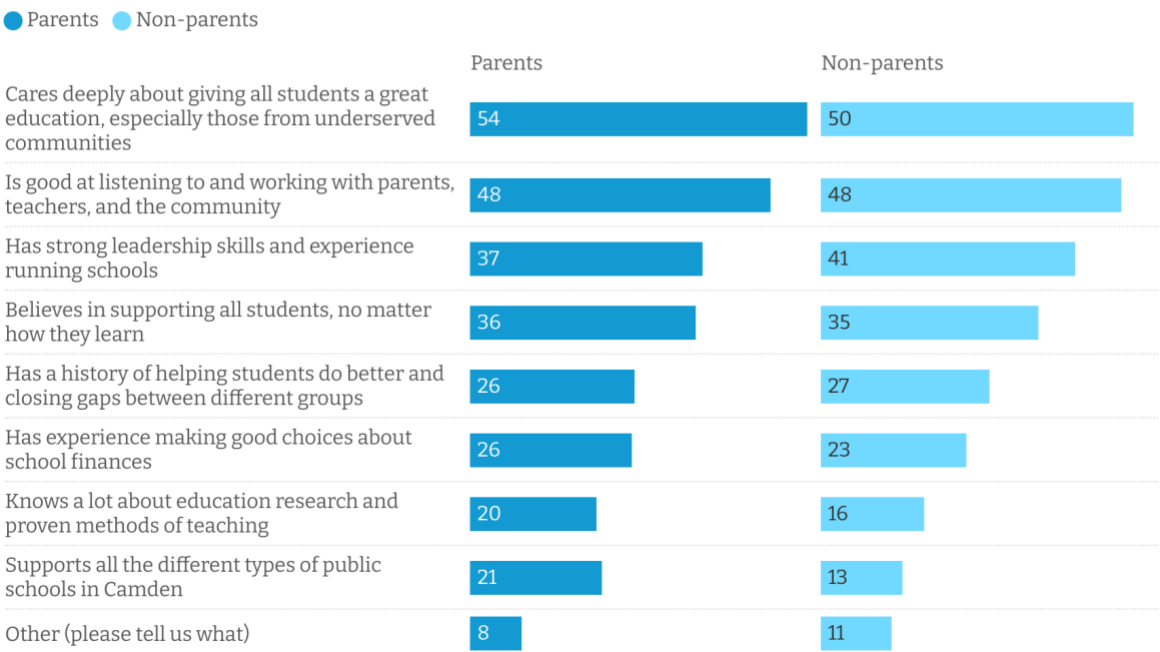
Residents of Camden highlight two top qualities and experiences they most want the city's next superintendent to have. The majority of parents with children in Camden schools (54%) and half of non-parents (50%) say it is a top priority to choose a superintendent who cares deeply about giving all students a great education. This quality was highlighted more often than any other by both groups. Camden residents also especially want the new superintendent to be good at listening to and working with parents, teachers, and the community. Nearly half (48%) of both parents and non-parents chose this as a top priority. Other desirable personal qualities selected by more than 1 in 3 respondents include having strong leadership skills and experience running schools, and believing in supporting all students no matter how they learn. Specific professional experiences such as having a history of helping students do better and closing gaps between groups, having a history of good decision-making around school finances, and expertise in education research were a top priority for fewer than 3

¹ Polling was conducted in two phases. In Phase 1, Embold Research used Dynamic Online Sampling to attain a representative sample of 230 adult residents of Camden, NJ from June 13-21, 2025. In Phase 2, from July 16-24, Embold and Camden Education Fund recruited 86 respondents via email invitation from a local parent list-serve. Post-stratification was performed on age, gender, education, and race/ ethnicity. You can see a full methodology statement [here](#), which complies with the requirements of AAPOR's Transparency Initiative. Members of the Transparency Initiative disclose all relevant details about our research, with the principle that the public should be able to evaluate and understand research-based findings, in order to instill and restore public confidence in survey results. The modeled margin of error = +/- 6.1%.

in 10 respondents. Supporting all different types of public schools in Camden scored at or near the bottom of residents’ priority list, with 21% of parents and just 13% of non-parents highlighting it as a top issue.

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The Camden City School District will soon hire a new superintendent to lead the schools. What qualities and experience do you think are most important for the new superintendent to have? Please choose up to THREE.



Residents have strong preferences about the new superintendent’s personal background.

Large majorities say it is extremely or very important for the new superintendent to come from a background similar to those of Camden’s students (69% of parents and 73% of non-parents), to have previous experience working in a school district similar to Camden’s (78% of parents and 77% of non-parents), and to support giving families choices between different types of schools (85% of parents and 69% of non-parents).

In your opinion, how important is it that the next superintendent...?

● Extremely important ● Very important ● Somewhat important ● Not too important ● Not at all important

Comes from a background similar to those of Camden's students



Has worked before in a city school district with students like Camden's



Supports giving families choices between different types of public schools



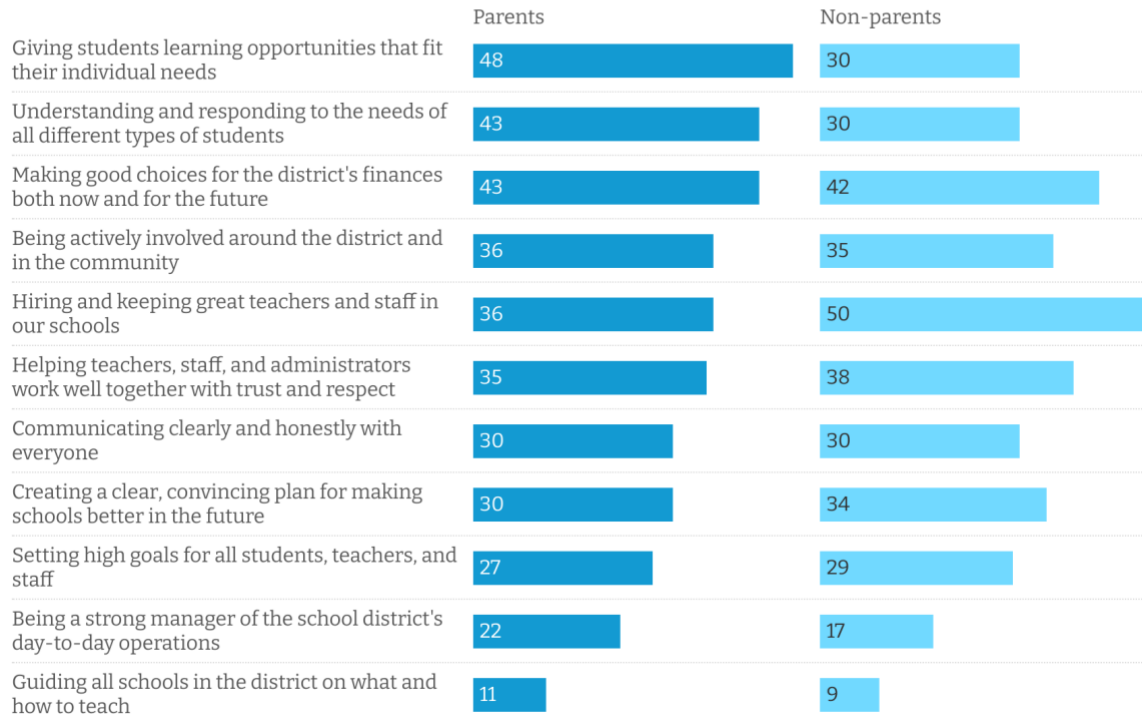
In the first year, Camden wants its new superintendent to focus on meeting individual students’ needs and on effective management of staff and finances.

Among parents, key focus areas for the superintendent’s first year include helping individual learners and financial decision-making. Almost half of parents – 48% – say that giving students learning opportunities that fit their individual needs should be a top priority, and nearly as many – 43% – want the superintendent to focus on understanding and responding to the needs of all different types of students. Forty-three percent also place a priority on making good choices for the district’s finances now and in the future.

Among non-parents, financial and staff management is also a top focus. Making good choices for the district’s finances now and for the future is the second ranking priority for this group (42% list it as a focus area), while hiring and keeping great staff ranks first (50% list it as a focus area). Also in the area of staff management, helping teachers, staff, and administrators work well together is the third most mentioned priority among non-parents, with 38% listing it as a focus area.

What do you think are the most important things for the new superintendent to focus on in their first year? Please choose up to FOUR.

● Parents ● Non-parents



Over a longer time horizon of the next 5 years, Camden residents see several core areas where they want the district to improve.

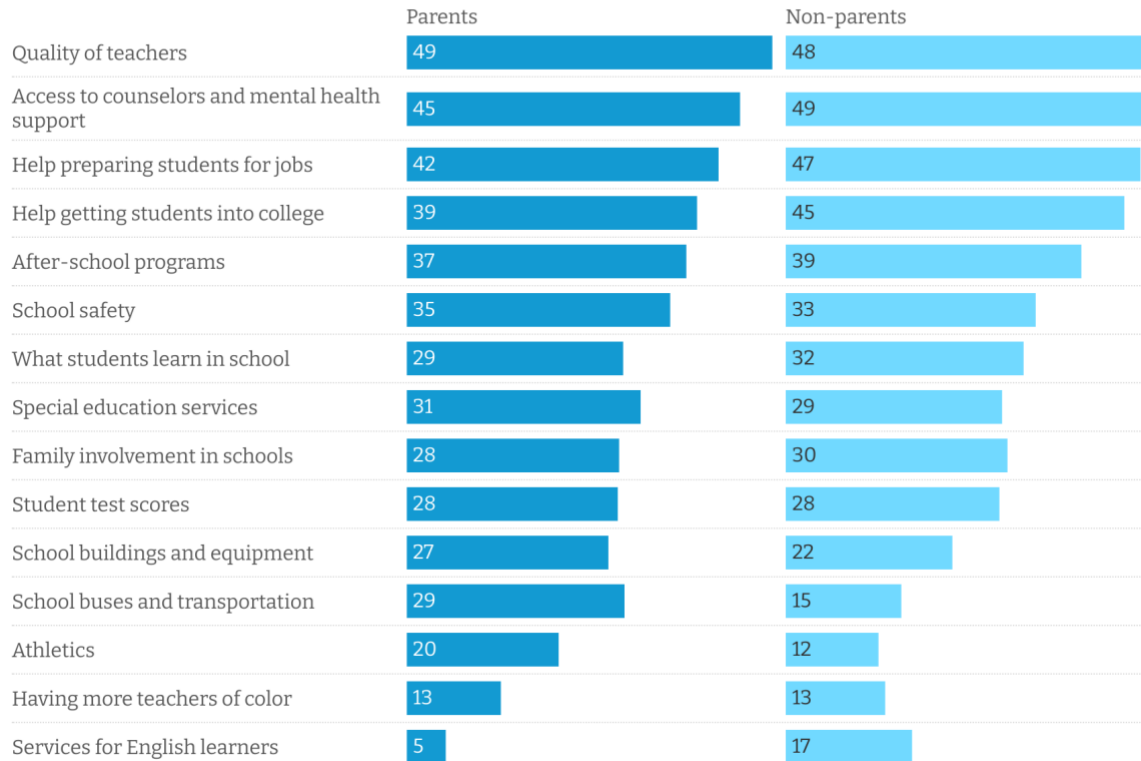
The first of these is teacher quality, chosen by nearly half of both parents (49%) and non-parents (48%). Other top areas focus on support services for students. Nearly half of both parents (45%) and non-parents (49%) cited access to counselors and mental health support as an area for improvement. Also top of mind is preparing students for life after high school. Forty-two percent of parents and 47% of non-parents said a top focus should be preparing students for jobs, and nearly as many – 39% of parents and 45% of non-parents – highlighted helping students get into college.

At least 1 in 3 parents and non-parents alike also mentioned the quality of after-school programs and school safety. School buses and transportation were cited less frequently, but were raised twice as often by parents (29%) as non-parents (15%).

Residents are also eager for information they can use to make informed choices for their families and to hold schools accountable for outcomes. Ninety-two percent of parents and 89% of non-parents say it is extremely or very important for the district to share information about school performance on metrics like test scores, graduation rates, and enrollment statistics with families and the community.

Which of the following areas would you most like to see the Camden School District focus on improving over the next 5 years? Please choose up to FIVE.

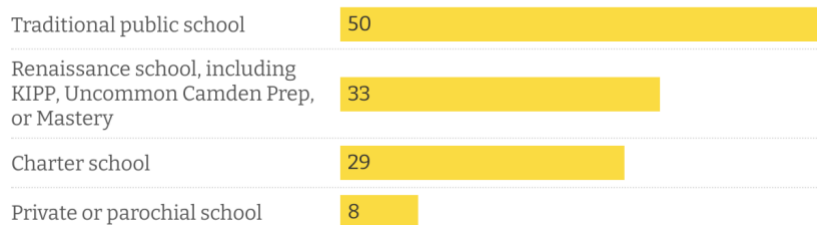
● Parents ● Non-parents



Parents' experiences with their children's schools

Nearly half of residents interviewed – 46% – identified as the parent of a child or children who currently attend K-12 schools in Camden. Of these parents, half (50%) have at least one child in a traditional public school, 1 in 3 (33%) have a child or children enrolled in a Renaissance school, and almost 3 in 10 (29%) have a child or children in a charter school (some parents have children enrolled in more than one type of school). Most parents are satisfied with their children's schools, with 58% saying they are extremely or very satisfied. Another 25% are somewhat

Which of the following types of schools do your child or children attend? Please choose all that apply.



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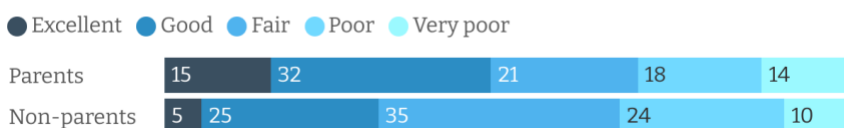
satisfied, and 17% are not too/not at all satisfied. For most parents – 62% – it was very or somewhat easy to find the right school for their child or children, while 1 in 3 (34%) report that it was somewhat or very difficult. Only 4% did not have a choice over where to enroll their children.

Perceptions of Camden schools

When it comes to the general quality of education in Camden, residents' views are mixed, with parents' assessments more positive than those of non-parents. The plurality of parents – 47% – rate the overall quality of education as excellent or good. One in five (21%) rate it as fair, and 1 in 3 (32%) rate it as poor or very poor. In contrast, only 3 in 10 (31%) non-parents rate educational quality as excellent or good, while 35% say it is fair and 34% say it is poor or very poor.

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How would you rate the overall quality of education in the Camden City School District?

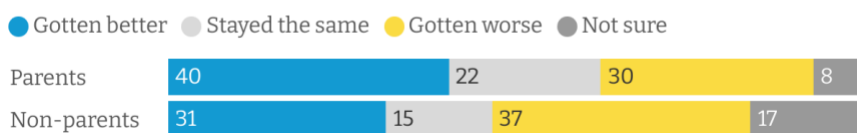


Similarly, more than 6 in 10 parents are very (28%) or somewhat (34%) confident that Camden's schools are preparing students to succeed in college or a career. Among non-parents, just 14% are very confident and 40% are somewhat confident.

Perceptions of the direction the district is heading – whether improving or worsening – are also split. On net, parents are more likely to say schools have gotten better over the past 10 years (40% better vs. 30% worse), while non-parents are more likely to say they have gotten worse (37% worse vs. 31% better).

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In your opinion, have schools in Camden gotten better, stayed the same, or gotten worse over the past ten years?



When asked about specific campuses or types of schools, residents are somewhat more positive and the perceptions of parents and non-parents are more aligned. Majorities ranging from 56-62% of parents and 55-61% of non-parents have at least a somewhat favorable opinion of each of five schools or types of schools in the city.

On the whole, there are no major differences in overall favorability between the different campuses and types of schools. Parents are slightly more likely to hold very favorable views of the various schools. They also express more negative views of Renaissance schools and Leap Academy, while non-parents are more likely to say they have never heard of these schools.

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Do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of the following schools in Camden? If you haven't heard of one or more, please let us know.

● Very favorable ● Somewhat favorable ● Somewhat unfavorable ● Very unfavorable ● Haven't heard of / Not sure

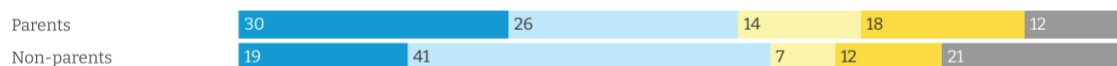
Traditional public schools



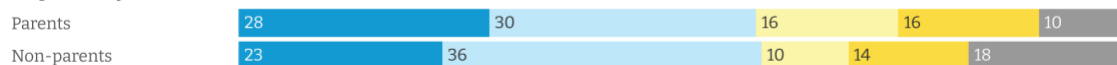
Charter schools



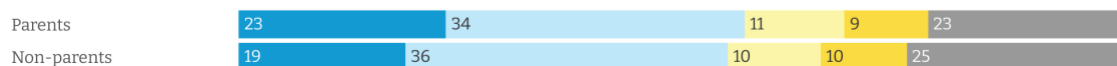
Renaissance schools



Leap Academy



Camden's Promise



Many residents are unfamiliar with Camden's different types of schools, though parents are better informed than others. The majority of parents are aware that charter and renaissance schools are free (62%) and open to all (53%), but only 44% know that these are public schools. About half of non-parents say they are not sure about each of these characteristics of charter and renaissance schools. Four in ten non-parents know they are free while just 3 in 10 know they are open to all.

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As far as you know, are each of the following true or false of Camden's renaissance and charter schools?

● TRUE ● FALSE ● Not sure

Charter and renaissance schools are free



Charter and renaissance schools are public



Charter and renaissance schools are open to all

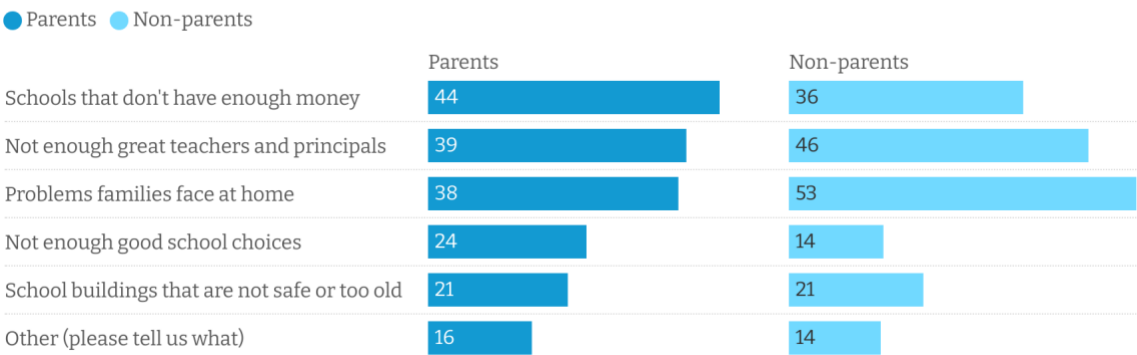


Residents see both schools and families as obstacles to students getting a great public education in Camden. Among parents, the issue cited most often was schools that

don't have enough money (44%), followed by not enough great teachers and principals (39%) and problems families face at home (38%). Meanwhile, non-parents identified the same top three issues, but in the opposite order. Among this group, problems families face at home was the most commonly cited barrier (53%), while not enough great teachers and principals came in second (46%), and schools that don't have enough money came in third (36%).

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In your opinion, what are the biggest problems that stop Camden students from getting a great public education? Please choose your top TWO.



Many Camden residents are skeptical that access to great public schools is equal across race, income, and neighborhood.

Here again, there are substantial differences between parents and non-parents. The majority of parents with children in Camden's schools (55%) think all families have equal access, while 29% think they do not. Among non-parents, in contrast, 34% think all families have equal access, while 43% do not. Among Black and Hispanic respondents, a plurality

– 46 and 47%, respectively – agree that all families have equal access to great schools, versus 39% and 31% who disagree. White respondents are least likely to believe all families have equal access: 36% agree while 33% disagree.

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In your opinion, do all families in Camden—no matter their race, income, or neighborhood—have equal access to great public schools?



Bars show the percentage of respondents who answered "Yes."

Summary and strategic insights

Camden parents and residents agree that it is most important to have a new superintendent who values ALL of the district's students, and who is committed to working closely with the community.

- The majority of parents with children in Camden schools (54%) and half of non-parents (50%) say it is a top priority to choose a superintendent who cares deeply about giving all students a great education. This quality was highlighted more often than any other by both groups. Camden residents also especially want the new superintendent to be good at listening to and working with parents, teachers, and the community.

94% of parents say it is important (somewhat, very, or extremely) for the new superintendent to support giving families choices between different types of schools.

- Large majorities also say it is important for the new superintendent to come from a background similar to those of Camden's students, and to have previous experience working in a school district similar to Camden's.

To succeed in the areas residents identify as first year priorities, the new superintendent must both be focused on individual student needs and be a skilled manager of staff and finances.

- Almost half of parents – 48% – say that giving students learning opportunities that fit their individual needs should be a top priority, and nearly as many – 43% – want the superintendent to focus on understanding and responding to the needs of all different types of students.
- Forty-three percent also place a priority on making good choices for the district's finances now and in the future.

More than 6 in 10 parents are very (28%) or somewhat (34%) confident that Camden's schools are preparing students to succeed in college or a career, and on net, parents say schools have gotten better over the past 10 years (40% better vs. 30% worse).

- Parents, who interact with schools the most, are more likely than other residents to believe that the quality of education is good or excellent, to say that things are improving, and to say that all types of families have equal access to quality schools.
- Most parents report that it was reasonably easy to find the right school(s) for their child(ren), and a majority (58%) are quite satisfied with their children's schools.

- Many residents are unfamiliar with some of Camden’s innovative campuses and school types, and this may be a source of differences in perceptions of school quality between parents and other residents.
- Residents identify inadequate resources at school and challenges at home as top reasons why some students may not get a great public education in Camden.

Over the next 5 years, residents have specific areas in which they want the district to improve. Both parents and non-parents agree on the need for improvements in teacher quality, access to counselors and mental health resources, and preparing students for life after high school, whether in a career or higher education.

- Other important areas include after-school programs and school safety. Sharing data on student performance and enrollment metrics is seen as crucial to informing families and the community about progress in these efforts.