



QUALITY OF LIFE IN NWA



Survey reveals Minorities support increasing school options

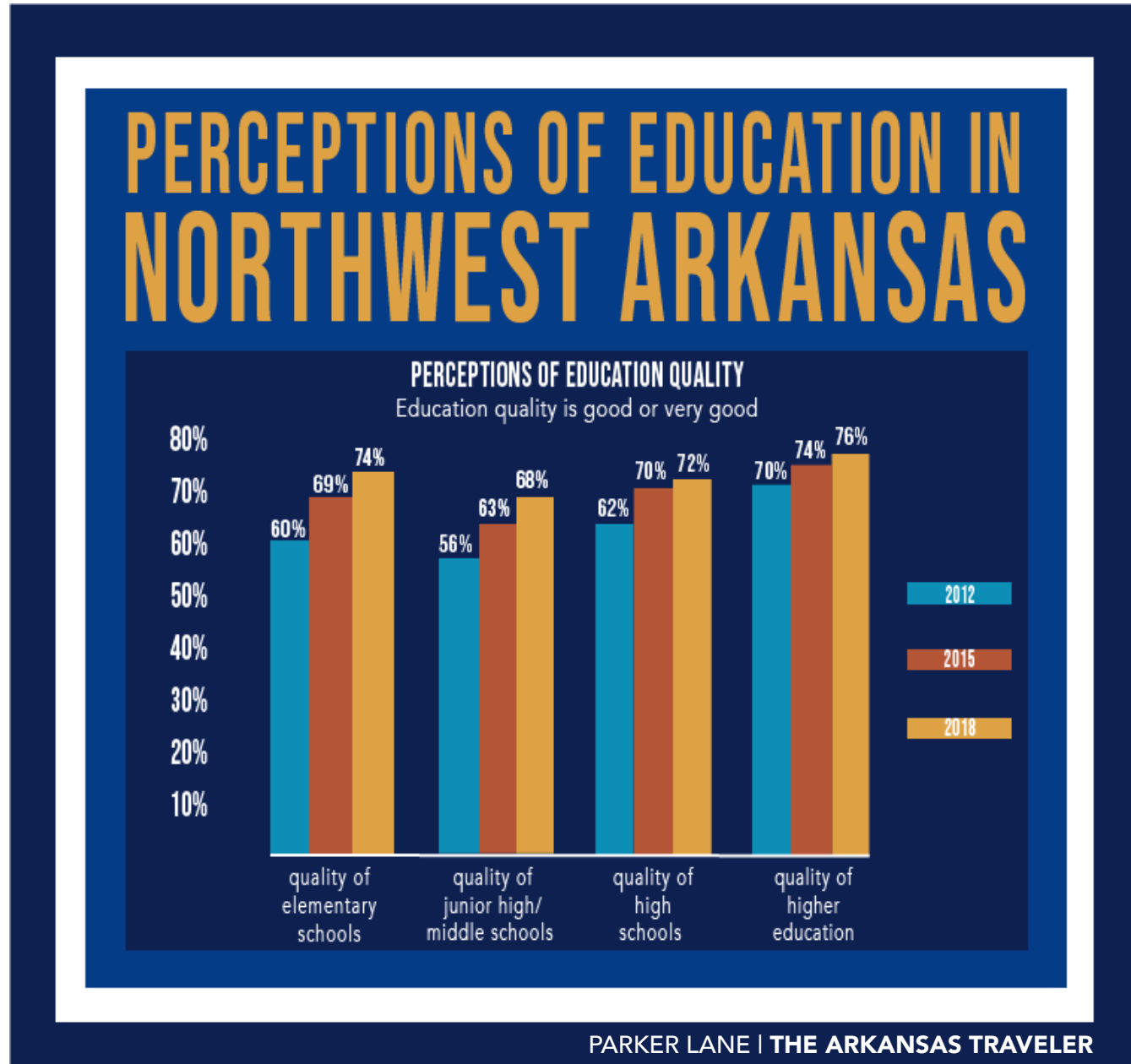
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The Northwest Arkansas school district has a majority white population, but a 2019 survey indicates that minorities want more school options for their communities.

Of the 966 respondents to the survey, 68-76% think that the quality of education in NWA is good or very good, according to the 2019 Northwest Arkansas Quality of Life Survey Report. However, 54% thought more K-12 school options would improve their community, with Hispanic people being more supportive of increasing availability. Sarah McKenzie, the executive director of the UA Office for Education Policy, thinks racial segregation may explain why people want more school options, she said. In NWA, minorities make up 34% percent of the region, according to the Office for Education Policy. The latinx population makes up 21% of enrollment.

"Oftentimes, the schools in those neighborhoods are perceived as being less high quality than schools in wealthier neighborhoods, but they don't have a choice," McKenzie said. "There's no other academic option for them."

Melissa Moznabi, a sophomore and graduate of Rogers High School, shares a similar perception. She thinks she attended the best schools in the district, which typically had a large white population, she said.



She thinks there is a noticeable racial and economic divide in Rogers, Arkansas, with .

"The PTA in affluent neighborhoods can put more money into funding and school fundraisers and make learning easier," Moznabi said.

McKenzie thinks one of the most important things

for schools to focus on is growth, she said. Economic, and sometimes geographic, segregation leads to some schools having lower proficiency on tests, but growth measures how much students improve yearly.

"Maybe you can't change from a neighborhood where houses are \$30,000 to one where houses are \$300,000,"

McKenzie said, "but maybe you can choose between a school within that neighborhood that is high growth versus low growth for your student."

Laura Olivares, a freshman and Bentonville West High School graduate, said she was aware of the majority white population in her school, but still thinks it set

her up for success. Olivares attended Bentonville High School her freshman year before the new school was built.

"There were a lot more wealthy kids at Bentonville High School," Olivares said.

"A majority was just white kids (at BWHS). I feel like it wasn't mixed."

As the daughter of Iranian

immigrants, Moznabi was very aware of race growing up, she said. She felt like a minority the most in elementary school, and noticed that the Latinx students and white students would usually stay with their groups. "They wouldn't intermingle with each other," Moznabi said. "I sort of found myself in between both of them because I wasn't a part of either. I was often mistaken as Hispanic, but I couldn't really intermingle a lot with Hispanic students because I couldn't speak Spanish."

The Hispanic population is slightly higher at Bentonville West compared to BHS, according to the Bentonville K12 website. There are also 7% more students eligible for free or reduced lunches at Bentonville West.

Economic division, which can correlate to diversity, is also prevalent in elementary schools in Bentonville. R.E. Baker Elementary School has a 37% minority population, with 45% of students eligible for FRL, according to the Bentonville K12 website. At Cooper Elementary School, 16% are minorities and 28% are qualified for FRL.

Olivares liked that the school split because she had more opportunities to ask for help, she said. Her grades were better at Bentonville West.

"It was really hard for me to get around and meet new people," Olivares said. "Academically, it was horrible to get help at Bentonville High School because there were so many other kids that needed help."

Associate Editor Samantha Van Dyke contributed to this report.



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