



The Kalamazoo Promise: A Piece in the Puzzle of Housing Preferences

Contents

INTRODUCTION 2

HOUSING CHOICES 3

MOVING TO AND STAYING IN THE KPS DISTRICT.. 5

HOUSING DECISIONS OF KPS ALUMNI 6

KPS ALUMNI AND HOMEOWNERSHIP 9

CONCLUSION..... 10

ABOUT THE DATA 11

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KEY FINDINGS

- Place-based scholarships such as the Kalamazoo Promise are one of many factors that shape families' decisions about where to live.
- In a survey conducted by the Upjohn Institute in 2022, the Kalamazoo Promise was an important contributor to housing decisions, although other characteristics such as neighborhood safety, specific housing attributes, and monthly expenses were higher priorities.
- Place-based scholarships may be more important for retaining existing residents than for attracting new residents. While some families said the Kalamazoo Promise influenced their decisions to move into the KPS district, even more said it was important for their decision to stay in the district.
- Among families with school-age children who moved to Kalamazoo after the Promise went into effect in 2006, Kalamazoo Promise qualification ranked 5th out of 19 housing priorities.
- Half of families with school-age children said the Kalamazoo Promise was a very important reason for remaining in the boundary of Kalamazoo Public Schools (KPS) until their student graduates from school.
- Compared to KPS alumni who graduated before the Promise was introduced in 2005, post-Promise graduates of KPS were more likely to stay within the district and more likely to report being homeowners 10 years after graduating from high school.

INTRODUCTION

The benefits of place-based scholarships such as the Kalamazoo Promise may play out on both the individual and community level. On the individual level, the Kalamazoo Promise is associated with many positive impacts for graduates of Kalamazoo Public Schools (KPS), including increased rates of [college enrollment](#), [degree attainment](#), and [earnings](#). On the community level, the Kalamazoo Promise is correlated with benefits such as more KPS graduates [staying in the community](#), [a reported increase in homeownership rates for Promise Scholars](#), and [increased retention of students in KPS](#).

Less is understood about how place-based scholarships contribute to families' decisions about where to live. If the Kalamazoo Promise is a substantial attraction for families, it could encourage new families to move to Kalamazoo and encourage families to stay in the area. However, benefits such as place-based scholarship programs are likely to be one factor among many in housing decisions, including overall housing cost; access to amenities, jobs, or services; proximity to family and friends; and neighborhood characteristics such as perceived safety.

One of the best ways to find out what people value in their choices is to ask them directly.

The W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research reached out to residents as part of their 2022 Kalamazoo Housing survey, which sought to understand Kalamazoo's housing landscape. The survey aimed to document the characteristics and preferences of Kalamazoo County residents. Survey questions focused on demand for specific housing types, location preferences, housing challenges, and how different demographic groups in the county have fared in terms of housing (see page 11 for details of the survey design). The results also informed the design of the [Kalamazoo County Housing Plan](#).

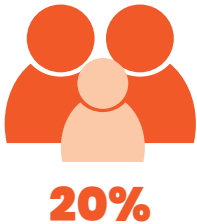
Overall, the survey reveals several interesting findings about how the Kalamazoo Promise reportedly influences families' decisions to live and remain in the KPS district.



HOUSING CHOICES

In the following section, the provided responses refer only to households who relocated to Kalamazoo after the introduction of the Kalamazoo Promise. Having school-age children indicates that the respondent's children were under 17 years old at the time the survey was conducted in 2022.

Countywide, only **20 percent** of households *with* school-age children who moved to Kalamazoo County reported Kalamazoo Promise qualification was one of the three most important factors when choosing their home.



Source: Upjohn Institute 2022 Kalamazoo County Housing Survey

Conversely, only **3 percent** of households *without* school-age children who moved to Kalamazoo County reported Kalamazoo Promise qualification was one of the three most important factors when choosing their home.



Source: Upjohn Institute 2022 Kalamazoo County Housing Survey

Among all the attributes households considered when choosing a home, Kalamazoo Promise qualification ranked **5th out of 19** priorities for households *with children* who moved to Kalamazoo County and **17th** among families *without children*.

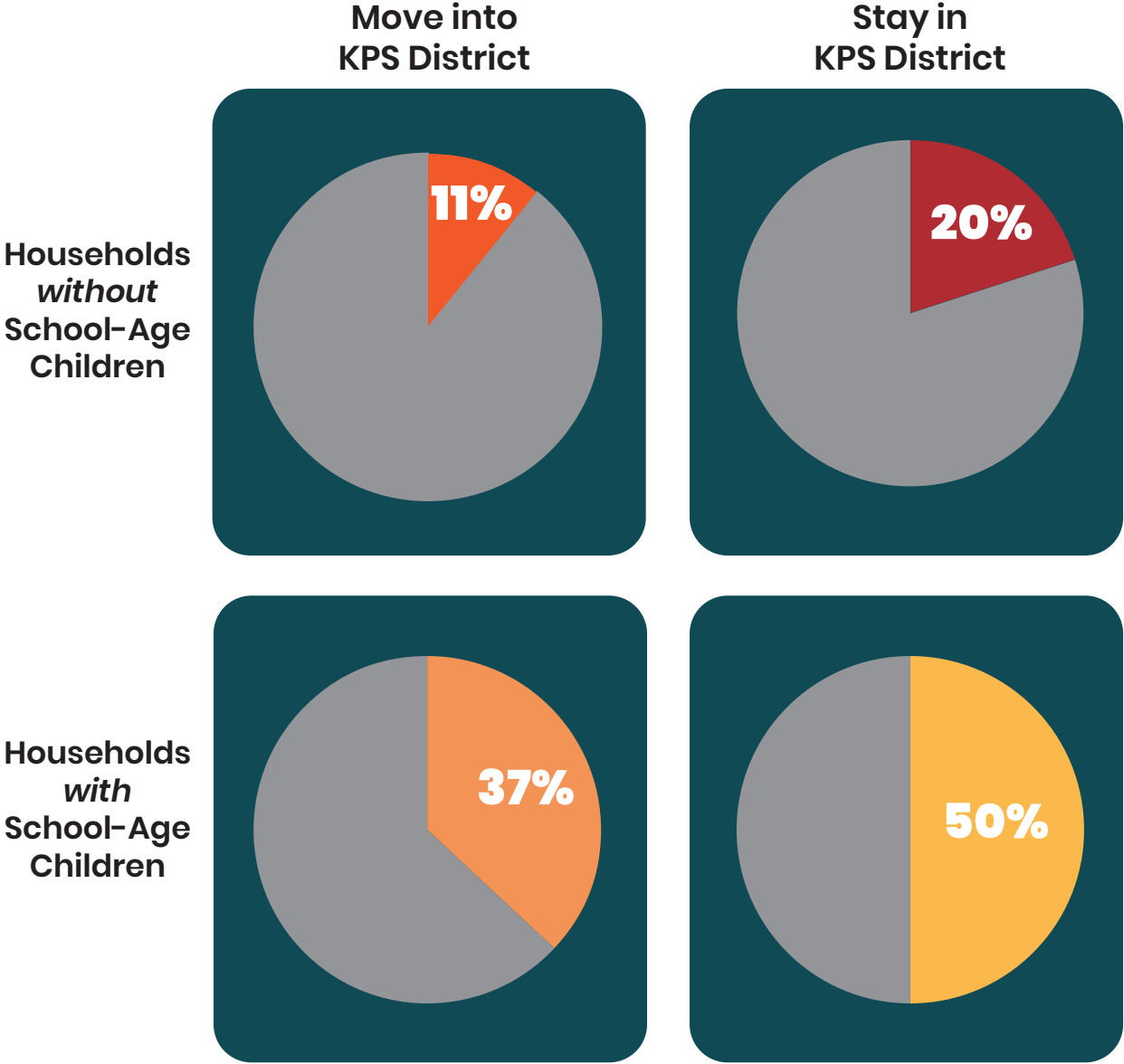
Top Priorities in Selecting Where to Live in Kalamazoo County

	Families <i>with</i> School-Age Children		Families <i>without</i> Children	
	Percent	Rank	Percent	Rank
Neighborhood safety	51%	1	48%	2
Features of the dwelling (size, yard size)	50%	2	38%	3
Monthly housing cost	42%	3	55%	1
Reputation of public schools	29%	4	7%	13
Kalamazoo Promise qualification	20%	5	3%	17
Close to parks, trails, green space, or other recreation areas	18%	6	16%	6
Setting: in town, in a neighborhood, or in the country	18%	7	22%	5

Source: Upjohn Institute 2022 Kalamazoo County Housing Survey

The findings from this survey show that while the Kalamazoo Promise was important for some households in their decision to *move into* the KPS district, it was even more important for households to *stay* in the district.

Percent of Respondents Indicating the Kalamazoo Promise Was Very Important in Their Decision to ...



Source: Upjohn Institute 2022 Kalamazoo County Housing Survey

The findings from the Kalamazoo Housing Survey align closely with previous studies on the economic impact of the Kalamazoo Promise. An [examination of students](#) entering and leaving KPS before and after the Kalamazoo Promise was announced found the Kalamazoo Promise had a significant impact on retention rates of KPS students, keeping more students (and their families) who likely would have gone to other school districts if the Kalamazoo Promise had not been in place.

[This research](#) estimated that each year, more than 250 students and their families are staying in KPS who would likely have left the area without the Kalamazoo Promise.



This retention finding is in line with [other studies](#) that have also found that Promise programs reduce migration out of an area.

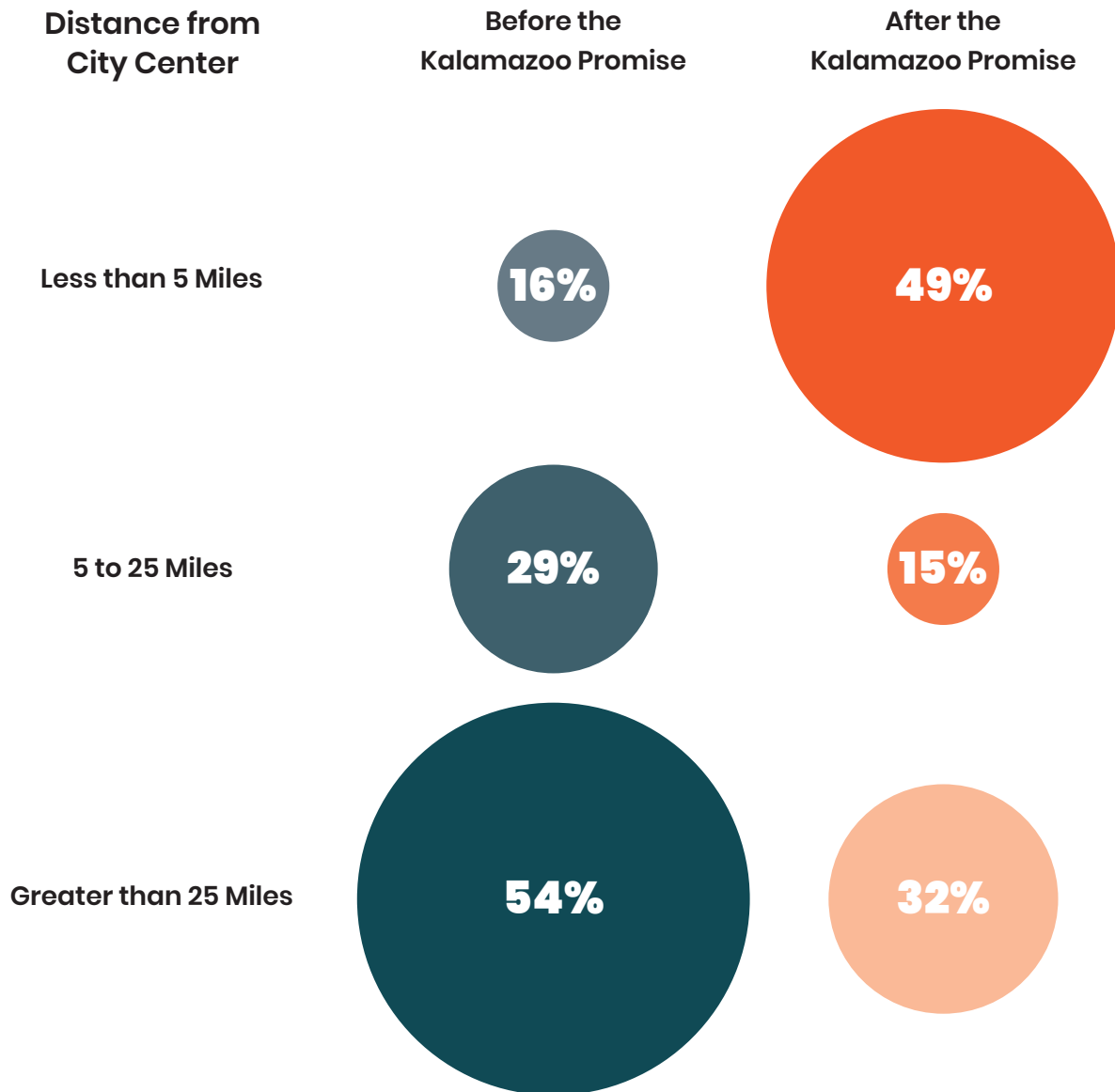
HOUSING DECISIONS OF KPS ALUMNI

The impacts of the Kalamazoo Promise on the perceptions of the Kalamazoo community are felt not only by households with school-age children, but also by graduates of KPS themselves. To gauge how the Kalamazoo Promise has impacted community perceptions and housing choices, we turn to the Kalamazoo Promise alumni survey, which is administered to alumni of KPS 10 years after their high school graduation.

In the following section, the provided responses refer only to KPS graduates.

Since the introduction of the Kalamazoo Promise, more graduates of KPS report [staying in the community](#).

**Percent of Graduates of Kalamazoo Public Schools
Living Near the Kalamazoo City Center 10 Years Post-High School Graduation**



Source: Kalamazoo Promise Alumni Survey

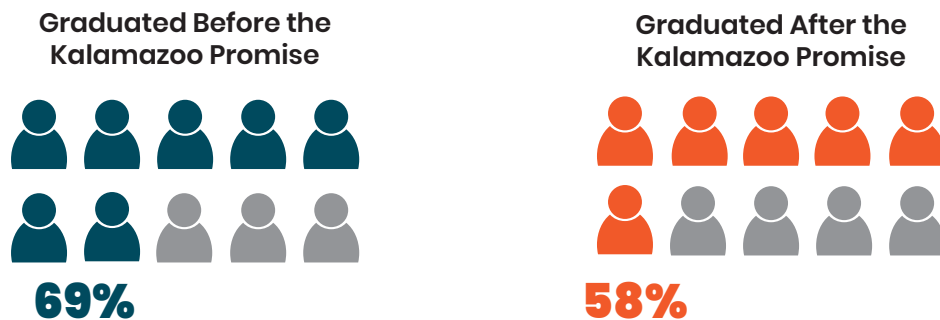
Two in three post-Promise KPS graduates still living in the KPS district 10 years after graduation cited personal enthusiasm for the Kalamazoo Promise as an important reason for living within the KPS district, as compared to only half of pre-Promise KPS graduates still living in in the KPS district 10 years after graduation.

Reasons for Living in KPS District	Before the Kalamazoo Promise	After the Kalamazoo Promise
Live close to family	87%	71%
Live near job opportunities	86%	56%
Personal enthusiasm for the Kalamazoo Promise	51%	65%

Source: Kalamazoo Promise Alumni Survey

Among post-Promise graduates still residing within the KPS district 10 years after graduation, about **6 in 10** said that the availability of the Promise for their children (or future children) was an important reason for living in the district; among pre-Promise graduates, who are slightly older, this share was **7 in 10**.

Living in KPS District 10 Years Post-High School Graduation So Children Can Take Advantage of the Kalamazoo Promise



Source: Kalamazoo Promise Alumni Survey

KPS ALUMNI AND HOMEOWNERSHIP

Homeownership rates among KPS alumni rose after the introduction of the Promise program.

KPS alumni who graduated after the introduction of the Kalamazoo Promise report higher homeownership rates 10 years after graduation than those who graduated before the introduction of the Kalamazoo Promise. This is true overall and for both white and Black graduates.

Homeownership among All KPS Graduates 10 Years Post–High School Graduation

	Before the Kalamazoo Promise	After the Kalamazoo Promise
All Graduates	24%	39%
White Graduates	23%	43%
Black Graduates	22%	35%

Source: Kalamazoo Promise Alumni Survey

Homeownership rates were even higher for KPS alumni who still lived in the KPS district 10 years after graduation. **Two in five** KPS alumni who graduated after the Kalamazoo Promise was introduced reported owning a house, compared to only **one in four** who graduated before the introduction of the Promise.

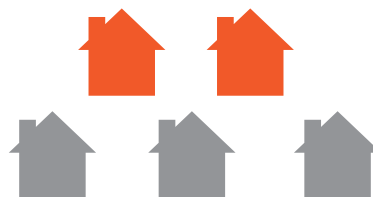
Homeownership among KPS Graduates Living in KPS District 10 Years Post–High School Graduation

Before the Kalamazoo Promise



25%

After the Kalamazoo Promise



43%

Source: Kalamazoo Promise Alumni Survey

CONCLUSION

The influence of place-based scholarships such as the Kalamazoo Promise on the attraction and retention of families is a multifaceted issue. Housing choices are affected by a multitude of factors, including housing expenses, amenities, employment prospects, proximity to loved ones, and more. Interestingly, while the Kalamazoo Promise holds importance for some families who have relocated to the area, it is outweighed by factors like neighborhood safety, housing characteristics, and monthly expenses. Families who made the decision to live in the KPS district report the Kalamazoo Promise was an important reason for doing so, particularly for families with school-age children.

The impact of the Kalamazoo Promise extends beyond families; it can also shape the perceptions and housing opportunities of KPS graduates themselves. The results of the alumni survey show a substantial rise in the number of post-Promise graduates choosing to remain within the KPS district. For some, personal enthusiasm for the Promise serves as a motivating factor, although it is not the sole determinant of their housing decisions.



ABOUT THE DATA

2022 KALAMAZOO HOUSING SURVEY

The survey aimed to capture housing characteristics and preferences of housed residents in Kalamazoo County. Questions focused on housing demand, location preferences, challenges, priorities, and demographic impacts related to the housing crisis. The collected data informed the [Kalamazoo County Housing Plan](#). The survey targeted all adults living in households within the county and used a multifaceted approach, including mailed paper prompts to randomly selected households and online social media sharing. Conducted from March 1 to May 22, 2022, the survey received 3,000 responses. Responses were weighted to align with county demographics, adjusting for an overrepresentation of homeowners and white individuals. This process, including reweighting for renters and owners and race/ethnicity using iterative proportional fitting, aimed to enhance representativeness and mitigate response bias concerns.

KALAMAZOO PROMISE ALUMNI SURVEY

The 10-year Kalamazoo Promise Alumni Survey was developed by the Upjohn Institute for Employment Research in collaboration with the Kalamazoo Promise. The survey instrument was heavily based on the longitudinal high school surveys administered by the U.S. Department of Education, modified to include several Promise-specific questions, and takes an average of 20 minutes to complete. The instrument was administered electronically through SurveyMonkey. The surveys included in this report were conducted from December 2016 through Summer 2022. All graduates of KPS for the targeted classes were eligible to participate. Earlier pre-Promise cohorts were asked to participate in the first year of the survey in 2016. Response rates have varied across cohorts, high schools, and demographics. To adjust for these differences, we created response weights so that the distribution of characteristics in the sample, when weighted, equaled the distribution of the KPS graduating classes.

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