

LEARNING MATTERS

2002 Statewide Results of Parent Survey

The following is an initial analysis of data provided by the parent surveys distributed by South Carolina schools to gauge parent perceptions of their child's school and reported on the Annual South Carolina School Report Card.

Background

The South Carolina Education Accountability Act of 1998 (EAA) requires the annual school report card to include parent perceptions of schools. The S.C. Parental Involvement in Their Children's Education Act requires schools, districts and state agencies to implement and evaluate the effectiveness of policies and programs to increase parental involvement.

This report is an initial analysis of parent responses to the three summary survey questions published on the 2002 Annual South Carolina School Report Cards. The questions fall under the following themes:

- School Learning Environment
- Home-School Relations
- Social and Physical Environment

Surveys included 46 questions, and item responses were made available to each school.

Overview of Responses

Parent surveys are distributed to parents or guardians of children in grades five, eight, and eleven, or in the highest grade of a school. The manner of survey distribution and collection was left to the discretion of the school district. A total of 55,864 parent surveys were returned to the State Department of Education (SDE) and analyzed. For comparison purposes only, according to the 135-day average daily membership, there were 145,550 students enrolled in grades five, eight and eleven in school year 2001-02. The returned surveys represented 38% of the potential distribution. The range of response rates by school was very broad.

Of the surveys returned:

- 86.44% contained responses to at least 45 of the 46 questions;

- 91.65% were missing responses to two or fewer of the 46 questions;
- 44.37% were from parents of elementary children;
- 38.84% were from parents of children in middle school and
- 14.87% were from parents of children in high school.

An analysis of respondents revealed they were:

- six times more likely to be women than males;
- about 57.54% were white;
- 44.2% had attended or completed college or postgraduate study (Note: according to the *2001 Statistical Abstract for South Carolina*, in 1990 10.4% of persons 25 years or older had less than a 9th grade education, 85.2% had a high school diploma and 20.3% had four or more years of college.);
- 5% did not answer the question on educational background;
- 48.17% had family incomes in excess of \$35,000 (Note: according to the *Abstract*, in 1989 64.6% of all household incomes in South Carolina were less than \$35,000. The median household income was \$26,256.);
- 10% did not answer the question on household income; and,
- 49.45% reported their child received mostly A's and B's on his or her last report card.

School Learning Environment

Responses to the statement "I am satisfied with the learning environment at my child's school" revealed 80.61% either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement while 15.5% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Responses across several variables suggest views balanced from racial, economic and educational backgrounds and greater variability from school levels and student achievement.

Parents of/with:	Agree or Strongly Agree	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
White Ethnicity	82.01%	15.21%
Non-White Ethnicity	78.70%	15.87%
Child in Elementary School	86.11%	10.98%
Child in Middle School	76.48%	19.15%
Child in High School	76.00%	19.52%
Child Making A's or B's	83.12%	13.71%
Child Making C's or Below	69.94%	24.18%
Family Income Over \$35,000	81.56%	15.43%
Family Income Under \$35,000	80.13%	15.44%
Some College Education	81.20%	15.75%
High School or Less Education	80.70%	15.01%

Are there any differences in parental perceptions across schools based on the absolute performance rating of the school? A breakdown of responses follows:

Parents Whose Child Attends a School Rated:	Agree or Strongly Agree	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
Excellent	87.81%	9.73%
Good	83.06%	13.36%
Average	78.75%	17.13%
Below Average	70.55%	23.95%
Unsatisfactory	65.20%	28.41%

Determining the effectiveness of state and local parental involvement programs is another objective of the survey concerning the school's learning environment. The analysis of responses to all questions in the surveys demonstrated the following (Note: totals do not equal 100% because some respondents gave either no response or the response of "I don't know."):

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT	Agree or Strongly Agree	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
My child's teachers give homework that helps my child learn.	89.38%	7.55%
My child's school has high expectations for student learning.	88.40%	8.03%
My child's teachers encourage my child to learn.	88.83%	6.87%
My child's teachers provide extra help when my child needs it.	77.42%	14.27%

Home-School Relations

Responses to the statement "I am satisfied with home-school relations at my child's school" revealed 68.59% of all respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement while 18.76% disagreed or strongly disagreed. A breakdown of responses across several variables shows:

Parents of/with:	Agree or Strongly Agree	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
White Ethnicity	70.49%	19.22%
Non-White Ethnicity	66.50%	18.14%
Child in Elementary School	76.25%	12.64%
Child in Middle School	63.54%	23.24%
Child in High School	61.21%	25.65%
Child Making A's or B's	71.07%	17.32%
Child Making C's or Below	59.66%	25.88%
Family Income over \$35,000	69.84%	19.44%
Family Income under \$35,000	67.54%	18.51%
Some College Education	70.37%	19.33%
High School or Less Education	67.84%	17.91%

Are there any differences in parental perceptions across schools based on the absolute performance rating of the school? A breakdown of responses follows:

Parents Whose Child Attends a School Rated:	Agree or Strongly Agree	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
Excellent	74.65%	15.03%
Good	70.06%	17.85%
Average	67.34%	19.71%
Below Average	63.21%	22.28%
Unsatisfactory	58.96%	26.94%

Responses highlight problems in home-school relations. Almost one-third of the parents believe they are not involved in school changes, are not told how to help their child learn and are not included in the decision-making process at the school. When analyzing results based on the child's grade level, home-school relations decline as the student progresses through middle and high schools. Unfortunately, these data are representative of national research.

Home-School Relations	Disagree or Strongly Disagree		
	Elementary	Middle	High
My child's teachers contact me to say good things about my child.	31.74%	52.50%	56.40%
My child's teachers tell me how I can help my child learn.	20.26%	39.33%	51.34%
My child's teachers invite me to visit my child's classrooms during the school day.	25.87%	47.93%	57.41%
My child's school returns my phone calls or e-mails promptly.	11.01%	20.74%	24.64%
My child's school includes me in decision-making.	21.48%	33.97%	40.33%
My child's school gives me information about what my child should be learning in school.	13.71%	26.86%	33.65%
My child's school considers changes based on what parents say.	23.55%	35.17%	39.32%
My child's school schedules activities at times that I can attend.	17.18%	22.02%	22.68%
My child's school treats all students fairly.	16.45%	29.17%	34.62%
My principal at my child's school is available and welcoming.	8.98%	14.44%	18.45%

Social and Physical Environment

The survey explored parent's participation in or attitude toward parental involvement activities and/or parenting activities. Interestingly, 35.02% indicated they do not volunteer at school but would if asked. Again, it should be emphasized that the results are self-reported.

	Percentage Responding "I do this."
Attend open houses or parent-teacher conferences	76.99%
Attend student programs or performances	77.15%
Volunteer for the school	41.49%
Go on trips with my child's school	34.44%
Participate in School Improvement Council Meetings	12.26%
Participate in Parent-Teacher-Student Organizations	38.48%
Participate in school committees	17.42%
Attend parent workshops	25.45%
Visit my child's classrooms during the school day	35.79%
Contact my child's teachers about my child's schoolwork	71.31%
Limit the amount of time my child watches TV, plays video games, surfs the Internet, etc.	81.00%
Make sure my child does his/her homework	92.81%
Help my child with homework when he/she needs it	92.18%

A majority of parents stated work requirements are the most common obstacle to their involvement at their child's school. Almost one-third indicated that information on how to become involved either does not get to them or gets to them late.

	Percentage Replying "True"
Lack of transportation reduces my involvement.	12.61%
Family health problems reduce my involvement.	15.46%
Lack of available care for my children or other family members reduces my involvement.	15.25%
My work schedule makes it hard for me to be involved.	57.91%
The school does not encourage my involvement.	19.68%
Information about how to be involved either comes too late or not at all.	28.71%
I don't feel like it is appreciated when I try to be involved.	13.89%

Parents were asked several questions about their child's school and its efforts to increase parental involvement. Consistently, more than one-fourth of respondents rated their child's school's efforts as "okay."

	Good or Very Good	Okay	Bad or Very Bad
School's overall friendliness	71.67%	23.07%	3.63%
School's interest in parent ideas and opinions	54.60%	32.77%	10.03%
School's effort to get important information from parents	58.54%	28.82%	10.04%
The school's efforts to give important information to parents	64.81%	24.61%	8.36%
How the school is doing overall	67.31%	25.14%	5.33%

Responses to the statement "I am satisfied with the social and physical environment at my child's school" revealed 77.94% of all respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement while 16.07% disagreed or strongly disagreed. A breakdown of responses across several variables reveals:

Parents of/with:	Agree or Strongly Agree	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
White Ethnicity	79.79%	15.92%
Non-White Ethnicity	75.45%	16.29%
Child in Elementary School	85.22%	10.22%
Child in Middle School	72.85%	20.56%
Child in High School	70.79%	21.85%
Child Making A's or B's	79.83%	15.01%
Child Making C's or Below	70.78%	21.31%
Family Income Over \$35,000	79.40%	16.28%
Family Income Under \$35,000	76.84%	15.92%
Some College Education	79.43%	16.19%
High School or Less Education	77.08%	15.79%

Are there any differences in parental perceptions across schools based on the absolute performance rating of the school? A breakdown of responses follows:

Parents Whose Child Attends a School Rated:	Agree or Strongly Agree	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
Excellent	86.71%	9.61%
Good	80.71%	13.74%
Average	76.05%	17.42%
Below Average	66.42%	25.70%
Unsatisfactory	60.50%	31.31%

Social & Physical Environment	Agree or Strongly Agree	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
My child's school is kept neat and clean.	86.67%	9.61%
My child feels safe at school.	85.53%	10.73%
My child's teachers care about my child as an individual.	76.57%	11.79%
Students at my child's school are well behaved.	54.69%	29.74%

Summary Statewide

- Parent perceptions of the learning environment, home-school relations and the social and physical environment of their child's school were generally positive.
- Two-third of all parents were satisfied with home-school relations.
- About one-fourth of parents whose children made C's or below on their most recent report card were not satisfied with home-school relations or with the learning environment at their child's school.



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- Twice as many parents of middle and high school students had negative perceptions of all three indicators, as did parents of elementary students.
- The socioeconomic status and educational background of parents did not seem to affect parent perceptions.
- Parents whose children attend schools having a higher absolute performance rating had higher overall satisfaction levels with the learning environment, home-school relations and the social and physical environment of their child's school.
- More than one-fifth of all parents whose children attend below average or unsatisfactory schools are not satisfied with home-school relations or with the learning environment at their children's school.
- Results should be used to plan and provide parental involvement activities in schools and school districts and to devise statewide parental involvement programs.
- Information and procedures should be developed to assist school councils, parent support groups and principals to utilize survey results for increasing parental involvement and improving home-school relations. (Note: The EOC is conducting focus groups to identify needs and design "skills and tools" materials.)

School Level:

- School groups should utilize survey information to improve home-school relations.
- Schools should analyze local responses to understand and ensure that all parents are represented in the responses.
- Schools should study the responses to each item and incorporate appropriate strategies in their school plans.

Conclusions and Policy Implications

State Level:

- Surveys should be mailed to each parent/guardian, along with a self-addressed, stamped envelope for return to maintain the validity and confidentiality of responses and increase the response rate of the survey.