

RESULTS OF THE 2002 PARENT SURVEY

February 13, 2003



Background

In the spring of 2002 the Department of Education in cooperation with the Education Oversight Committee asked all public school principals to distribute to the parents or guardians of children in grades five, eight, and eleven, or in the highest grade in their school a parent survey. The manner of distribution and collection of the survey was left to the discretion of the school district and/or school. All completed surveys were returned to the Department of Education.

The parent survey was commissioned by the Education Oversight Committee and designed by the Institute for Families in Society at the University of South Carolina. The purpose of the survey is twofold: (1) to determine parent perceptions of their child's school and (2) to evaluate the effectiveness of state and local parental involvement programs. The Education Accountability Act requires the annual school report cards to include parent perceptions of schools. The Parental Involvement in Their Children's Education Act requires the EOC to evaluate the effectiveness of policies and programs in increasing parental involvement at the school level.

Following is an initial analysis of the data provided by the parent survey. Also included is an appendix that contains summary tables of the responses to each survey question and socioeconomic indicator along with the actual parent survey. Questions 1 through 46 of the survey were designed to elicit information on parental perceptions and parental involvement patterns. The remaining questions, which were optional, asked for information on the socioeconomic and ethnicity of the respondent.

Response

A total of 55,864 parent surveys were returned and analyzed. For comparison purposes, according to the 135-day average daily membership there were 145,550 students enrolled in grades 5, 8 and 11 in school year 2001-02.

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Enrollment</u>
5 th	54,096
8 th	52,924
11 th	38,530

Of the surveys returned, 86.44% of the surveys contained responses to at least forty-five of the forty-six questions regarding parent perceptions and parental involvement. 91.65% of the surveys were missing responses to two or fewer of these questions.

A review of the responses reveals the following:

- Parents overwhelmingly indicated that they had a child in either elementary or middle school. 44.37% of the responses were from parents of elementary children. 38.84% of the responses were from parents of children in middle school. Only 14.87% of the survey responses represented the perceptions of a parent of a high school student.
- The respondents were six times more likely to be women than males.
- Approximately 57.54% of the respondents were white.
- 44.2% of the respondents had attended or completed college or had postgraduate study. According to the 2001 Statistical Abstract for South Carolina, in 1990 10.4% of persons twenty-five years of age or older had less than a ninth grade education, 85.2% had a high school diploma and 20.3% had four or more years of college. Approximately 2,781 parents did not answer this question.
- When asked about their family's total yearly household income, 48.17% of the parents had family incomes in excess of \$35,000. According to the 2001 Statistical Abstract for South Carolina, in 1989 64.6% of all household incomes in South Carolina were less than \$35,000. The median household income for the state was \$26,256. Approximately, 5,421 parents did not answer this question.
- When asked about their child's academic success, 49.45% reported that their child received mostly A's and B's on his or her last report card.

Parent Perceptions

On the 2002 annual school report cards, parental responses to three questions were published. An analysis of the responses to these questions follows:

Question 5: I am satisfied with the learning environment at my child's school.

80.61% of all respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement while 15.5% of all respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed. Breaking down the responses across several variables revealed the following:

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%

Question 16: I am satisfied with home-school relations at my child's school.

68.59% of all respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement while 18.76% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Breaking down the responses across several variables revealed the following:

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%

Question 21: I am satisfied with the social and physical environment at my child's school.

77.94% of all respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement while 16.07% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Breaking down the responses across several variables revealed the following:

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%

On a statewide basis, parent perceptions of their child's learning environment, of home-school relations at their child's school, and of the social and physical environment of their child's school were generally positive. However, only two-thirds of all parents who responded to the survey were satisfied with home-school relations. And, of those parents whose children made C's or below on their most recent report card, approximately one-fourth were not satisfied with home-school relations or with the learning environment at their child's school. The data also consistently revealed that 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.

The next analysis seeks to determine if there are any differences in parental perceptions across schools based on the absolute performance rating of the school. Again, questions 5, 16, and 21 are analyzed.

Question 5: I am satisfied with the learning environment at my child's school.

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%

Question 16: I am satisfied with home-school relations at my child's school.

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%

Question 21: I am satisfied with the social and physical environment at my child's school.

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%

Clearly, the data reveal that parents whose children attend schools having a higher absolute performance rating have higher overall satisfaction levels with the learning environment, home-school relations and the social and physical environment of their child's school. Over one-fifth of all parents in the survey 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.

Parental Involvement Programs and Initiatives

The second objective of the survey was to determine the effectiveness of state and local parental involvement programs. Upon analyzing the responses to all questions in the survey, Table A was devised: (Totals due not add to 100% because some respondents gave either no response or the response of "I don't know.")

Table A

	Agree or Strongly Agree	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
LEARNING ENVIRONMENT		
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		
My child's teachers contact me to say good things about my child.	53.28%	43.52%
My child's teachers tell me how I can help my child learn.	64.24%	32.36%
My child's teachers invite me to visit my child's classrooms during the school day.	55.35%	39.17%
My child's school returns my phone calls or e-mails promptly.	71.25%	16.90%
My child's school includes me in decision-making.	62.20%	29.21%
My child's school gives me information about what my child should be learning in school.	74.66%	21.83%
My child's school considers changes based on what parents say.	45.11%	30.47%
My child's school schedules activities at times that I can attend.	73.77%	19.87%
My child's school treats all students fairly.	59.39%	24.18%
My principal at my child's school is available and welcoming.	77.66%	12.59%

SOCIAL & PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT	Agree or Strongly Agree	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
	My child's school is kept neat and clean.	86.67%
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%

Again, the parent survey highlights problems in home-school relations in the schools where the respondents' children attend. Almost one-third of the parents who responded to the survey believed that 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 site. When analyzing the results based on the child's grade level, the results show that home-school relations only worsen as they child progresses through middle and high schools. Unfortunately, this data is 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%

Disagree or Strongly Disagree

HOME-SCHOOL RELATIONS	Elementary	Middle	High
My principal at my child's school is available and welcoming.	8.98%	14.44%	18.45%

The next analysis dealt with the parents' responses to questions regarding specific parental involvement activities and/or parenting activities in which the respondents participate. Again, it should be emphasized that the results are self-reported.

Table B

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%

Interestingly, when asked about volunteering at school, 35.02% of the respondents indicated that they don't do this but would like to.

When looking at the obstacles to parental involvement, the survey showed that parents believe that their work was the most common obstacle to their involvement at their child's school. However, almost one-third of the respondents also 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 also asked several questions about their child's school and its efforts in increasing parental involvement. Consistently, over one-fourth rate their child's school's efforts at parental involvement as only "okay."

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

Conclusions and Policy Implications

1. To maintain the validity and confidentiality of the survey, a uniform distribution and collection of the parent survey is needed. As the EOC has already recommended in its EIA budget recommendation for Fiscal Year 2003-04, the parent survey should be mailed to each parent along with a self-addressed, stamped envelope for return. Mailing should also increase the response rate. Furthermore, to increase the parent response rate, the EOC recommends that principals encourage parents to complete the survey and communicate to parents the importance of the information to be obtained from the survey.
2. School Improvement Councils and principals attempting to increase parental involvement and improve home-school relations could use the extensive amount of data provided by the survey. Comparing the perceptions of parents and teachers regarding home-school relations could provide valuable insight into possible discrepancies between the perceived role of parents in their child's education. The EOC should contract this year with an independent entity to provide information and procedures for schools to analyze and utilize the results of the parent survey as well as the teacher survey.
3. The results of the 2002 parent survey will be distributed to the Department of Education for their consideration and use in assisting schools and school districts in parental involvement initiatives and programs and in devising statewide parental involvement programs.

APPENDIX