

A Parent Survey

An online survey was conducted by IEM beginning in June of 2007 to November. The survey was used to gather and identify issues, challenges, assessments, and perspectives from parents concerning the education of their children along with some demographic information.

Of the group of parents participating in the survey, over 50% had children in grades 4 through 8. The next largest group had high school children (nearly 35%), followed by children in grades 1 through 3. Less than 10% had college-age children and children of kindergarten age. Approximately 2% had children in pre-kindergarten.

Over 50% (53.5%) of the children of this group are enrolled in public schools, 27.9% are enrolled in charter schools, 18.6% in private schools, 9.3% are home schooled and 2.3% answered "other". Nearly three-quarters (73.8%) considered the most important factor in choosing their child's education to be the type of learning program. Nearly 29% considered teachers to be the most important factor, 11.9% considered location to be an important factor, and 4.8% considered cost. The next six questions invited narrative responses, which are summarized below.

When parents were asked what they were happy with in their children's current program, by far the majority of responses related to the instructional programs, among which were listed: innovation; challenging curriculum; religious instruction; gifted program; individualized programs; broad range of topics and programs offered; and the focus on certain subjects such as writing, math, and science. Other responses concerning instructional programs included: individualized programs allowing children to learn at their own pace while building a strong foundation and self confidence; accommodating children so they learn using their strengths; high levels of student achievement; and freedom of learning at home while still having the opportunity to take classes of interest. Several parent responses centered on support and communication. Specifically, these parents noted support for children in special education programs; excellent and timely communication among parents, teachers and administration; and parents being allowed in the classroom. Several parents felt the quality and dedication of the teachers, the supportive administration, the quality of the campus, and a school environment which promoted a morale focus by not tolerating violence were factors with which they were pleased. Approximately six simply responded that they were not happy.

The fifth question was, "What do you find to be most frustrating or challenging in the current program?" The answers to this question covered a broad spectrum ranging from lack of communication to inflexibility. Several parents expressed frustration with the teaching and curriculum not conforming to children's learning styles, focus on testing instead of teaching, limited curriculum, and inability to accommodate special needs of children. Some noted the teaching was not related to skills needed for career and workplace. There were numerous complaints concerning teachers and staff and the lack of follow-through, lack of compassion, lack of responsibility, lack of respect for involved parents, lack of accountability, lack of creative teaching, poor communication, and

inaccessibility of teachers and administrative staff. Several parents expressed concerns about teachers who are opinionated, self-righteous and narrow-minded and administrators who are not connected and unavailable. The turnover of both teaching and administrative staff was also expressed as a concern by one parent. An antiquated and rigid educational system along with bureaucratic requirements was also noted; and in connection with a few mentioned control by federal and state entities and teaching to test as problems. Parents also complained of a need for more physical education opportunities, a lack of rigor, too much homework because of the ways children were being taught, programs which were too difficult, low achievement scores, and cost.

In response to a question asking parents what they would like for their children to have more of in their current programs, many responded they felt there was a need for learned skills applicable to career and workplace with less focus on standardized tests. Some responded they would like more autonomy of subject content, including real learning experiences, more discussion of ideas, interesting projects, more attention to individual learning styles, flexibility for each child to progress at his/her own rate, more inquiries based on science, and offering other subjects. The responses of several parents centered on having good teachers and an improved teaching environment, such as consistency in the classroom, fewer students per class, newer and better campuses, and more accountability. Other parents expressed a desire for competition from other students, more materials other than textbooks, and a student-centered atmosphere.

In response to question 7, more than half of the parents listed “learning program not a fit for the child” as the key element which would prompt them to look at other educational programs. The next most common choice as a reason to consider other educational programs was “child unhappy”. The remaining responses were fairly equally divided between “issues with teachers”, “more extra activities or focus on art, sports, etc.”, and “poor performing school compared to others” as reasons to look at other programs.

Question 8 offered six answer choices in response to the question, “What potential issues are you most concerned with in your child’s educational environment?” Forty of the 44 participants responded to this question and 85 responses were recorded. Twenty-five selected “not getting enough individual attention” as the issue of most concern. The second most common answer selected was “situations that cause potential emotional damage”. Only six chose “too much freedom” as a point of concern. The remaining three choices: “mimicking undesirable behaviors from other classmates”, “lack of enough social stimulation” and “violence” were chosen 14, 12, and 10 times respectively.

Question 9 asked parents to share what issues they care about most regarding their children’s education. The responses mirrored those elicited from many of the other questions asked. A large number of parent responses related to greater flexibility in instructional programs, with responses such as more focus on student-centered education developing all facets of a child, allowing children to work at their own pace, respecting and accommodating individual needs, challenging students, instruction using the four learning styles and eight intelligences, less focus on standard testing, innovation, good quality academic instruction, educating the child, teaching children how to learn, and

developing tools and strategies for children who are different or have special needs. Some responses focused on curriculum and learning tools that prepare students for life and career. Several parents responded with answers relating to respect, self-esteem, and emotional and physical safety, including weeding out gangs and drugs. Some expressed a concern over behavior of others, teachers who need to retire, issues which take time away from teaching, inappropriate conversations by teachers, and too much control. Additional specific responses listed included: enthusiastic teachers, time and attention from teachers, more inclusion and opportunity to socialize, support from teachers and staff, good literature, and learning by experiencing natural and physical world through inquiry.

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