

SURVEY RESPONSES

Last year's 68 question survey produced a dizzying array of data to sort through. We received 1366 responses, representing about 35% of the families in our district. We learned a lot from the survey, both about our district and about the individual schools within our district. Here are some of the district-level highlights.

There were many areas in which parents thought we were doing well. Parents are proud of their children's schools. 76% reported that their school is an "excellent school" that provides a high quality education, 79% report that their child is proud of his/her school. An equal number would recommend their child's school to a friend. Other areas in which we have reason to feel pride include:

Great Teachers and Staff – 87% of parents report that the teachers at their children's school are "enthusiastic about teaching", 85% report that school staff is "courteous and helpful", and 82% of parents report that the school staff is committed to their child's education and responsive to their concerns.

Engaged Parents - Our survey parents are engaged. 94% attend most conferences and open houses and believe that their involvement helps their children. 82% report that there is an active parent association at their child's school, and 83% of OMS and AHS parents regularly check their child's progress online.

Happy Self-reliant Students – 90% of parents say that their child's school encourages students to "be responsible." Students report knowing who to talk to or get help from when needed. Furthermore, over 85% of elementary-school parents, 67% of middle-school parents, and 74% of high-school parents say that their child "enjoys going to school."

Communication – 89% of parents say that they are "kept up-to-date on school activities and events," 78% say that "school information is communicated effectively," and 85% say that they "know how to get school information when they need it." Elementary school parents report getting most of their information from their child and their school's newsletter. Parents at the High School report getting most of their information from the Principal's e-mails. Few parents were interested in receiving information via Twitter or Facebook.

We also observed some areas of challenge. Unsurprising parents with students at the High School, Ottoson, and Stratton reported high levels of dissatisfaction with the facilities at their schools. Many of the areas of dissatisfaction were on issues that are not unique to Arlington. It is not unique to Arlington for parents to feel that their children have too much homework, to worry about bullying, and to be concerned about the level of anxiety that their children are experiencing. Nevertheless, just because Arlington is not unique in these challenges does not mean that we should not take these concerns seriously. Here are some areas of concern.

Homework - While 57% of parents felt that the amount of homework given to their children is "appropriate," 24% felt that it was not. Dissatisfaction is highest at the middle-school level at 41%. However, the overwhelming majority of parents felt that the level of difficulty associated with their child's homework was appropriate.

Anxiety – 20% of parents report that their elementary-aged children experience anxiety. That number jumps to over 40% for middle and H.S. students.

Curriculum Challenges - 26% of parents reported that their school could do more to challenge their child to “his/her full potential”. Middle and High School parents were more likely to say that their child was challenged in math (56%) or ELA (64%) than were elementary school parents. 21% wish their children had more opportunity to “explore areas of interest outside core content areas.”

Parent Understanding and Involvement – 61% of parents report that they understand the academic expectations for their child and 51% of parents report feeling involved in the decisions that affect their child’s education. On both measures dissatisfaction ranged from 15-20% across schools.

Discipline – Although 85% of parents report that their child’s school is a safe environment to learn, over 50% of parents reported that we could do a better job at dealing with student bullying, ensuring that our discipline policy is “fair and effective,” and involving them in the discipline of their children.

Fantasy Question

We also had the opportunity to ask five custom questions. One of the questions was a “fantasy” question, which asked parents how we should spend a fantasy million-dollar windfall from Beacon Hill. At all levels the most popular choice was to add more classroom teachers (27% of parents chose this as one of their top three choices). For Elementary School parents, the second and third most popular choices were split between adding a foreign language in the elementary schools and making the school day longer. Middle School parents wanted more math coaches (17%), increases in technology (15%), and a longer school day (15%). High School parents wanted more math coaches (17%) and increases in technology (16%). Among High School parents 11% chose eliminating sports and music fees as one of their top three choices.

Open Response Comments

Parents generally report high levels of satisfaction with teachers, staff and their community. They characterize their kids as “happy”. The greatest areas of dissatisfaction are with the facilities (mostly at the H.S., OMS and Stratton), homework load and quality, and class sizes.

At the high-school level parents liked the teachers and the community but wanted to “improve the utterly dispiriting facilities”, have smaller classes, a later start time, and more supports for children who are *lost*. Parents also wished for more technology in the classrooms.

At the middle-school level parents wanted better and less crowded facilities, more opportunity for students to move during the day and less punitive grading policies. They also wished teachers were more accessible and approachable.

At the elementary-school level parents are very concerned about class sizes. They want longer lunch and more time for recess, greater focus on project-based and experiential learning, and more challenges for advanced students. 5th grade parents wanted more challenging work in order to better prepare students for middle school.