

Syracuse City School District Survey

A Survey of Parents / Guardians with Children
in the City Schools, conducted December 1 - 4, 2009

Executive Summary

In February 2007 a survey of 1000 parents and guardians of students in the Syracuse City School District was conducted. The survey was repeated in January and February 2008, and January 2009. For the 2009-10 school-year the survey was conducted in December 2009, with 1006 respondents completing the survey. The highlights of the results of this year's survey are as follows:

- Parental assessments of the education their children are receiving in the city schools are again generally positive and again many are more positive than in prior years. Now 82 % of respondents agree they are satisfied with the education their child is receiving. In 2006-07 it was 75 %, in 2007-08 it was 80, and in 2008-09 it was 81 %. Reactions are largely positive, but not strongly so.
- Views about the schools are also highly correlated and consistent. Those parents positive about one matter are generally positive about another. Those negative about some aspect of the schools are generally negative about other aspects.
- The debate in America about whether to improve schools by providing more funding or require higher standards exists among Syracuse parents/guardians. Opinion remains divided about whether to spend money to improve schools or impose higher standards.
- When asked if they would support increasing property taxes if the funds were only for education, 60 percent favor that and 32 percent oppose it. Those who are more positive about the effectiveness of the schools are more supportive of raising taxes for the schools, but the willingness to raise taxes for education is widespread.
- Opinions about whether the district uses its funds well or wastes money continue to be divided. 40 % think they make good use of funds and 35 % think they waste a lot. Those who agree that the schools are effective in various ways are less likely to see waste. There is some skepticism that spending more money will result in improvement.

The Sample of Those Completing the Survey

One of the most important concerns in reviewing survey results is whether the sample contacted is representative of the population. If that is not the case, the results cannot be accepted as a valid reflection of opinions within the population of interest. In this case the population is the parents and guardians of students in the Syracuse City School district.

One of the simplest ways to assess this is whether those completing the survey are representative of the different areas of the city. While schools in Syracuse are grouped by Quadrant, the best information about the residence of each respondent on the master list of students is their zip code. The zip codes that define Syracuse are, however, not wholly within quadrants. That is, parts of 13202 are within Quadrant 1 and parts are within Quadrant 2, so a zip code address cannot be assigned to just one quadrant. Because of that limitation, only zip code addresses will be used here.

The table below indicates how the population of all students (19,882 for 2009-10) is distributed by zip code and how the sample of those completing the survey is distributed by zip code. Only zip codes with one percent of the population are shown. The zip codes shown include 98 percent of all student address within the district.

The entire list of all students was used to randomly call parents and guardians. 1,006 parents / guardians completed surveys. The distribution by zip codes of those completing surveys is very similar to the distribution of the population of students. All areas of the city are well represented in the responses. For the subsequent analyses, the zip codes were grouped into areas as shown below. The resulting distribution of all children by area in the sample is: East: 17.5; North: 35.0; South: 31.8; and West: 15.1.

The Population and the Sample

| Zip codes | All Students | Sample | Area |
|-----------|--------------|--------|-------|
| 13202 | 3.4 | 3.1 | South |
| 13203 | 10.2 | 7.5 | North |
| 13204 | 18.2 | 15.1 | West |
| 13205 | 16.6 | 16.8 | South |
| 13206 | 7.9 | 10.2 | North |
| 13207 | 11.1 | 11.3 | South |
| 13208 | 18.0 | 16.6 | North |
| 13210 | 8.8 | 11.4 | East |
| 13224 | 4.8 | 6.1 | East |

Note: a small percentage of zip codes were incomplete so the percentages above do not sum to 100.

Demographics of the Sample

The characteristics of those who completed the surveys in each year are shown below. Most have 1 or 2 children in the school. 90.3 % of respondents are either the mother or father of the children in the schools. Most respondents have been in Syracuse for a lengthy period of time, with 60 % having been here 20 years or more.

Q 1. Number of children in the city schools:

| | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 |
|-----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 1 | 41.3 | 43.2 | 40.4 | 39.3 |
| 2 | 31.9 | 31.5 | 34.8 | 34.2 |
| 3 | 15.4 | 15.9 | 14.4 | 17.0 |
| 4 or more | 9.2 | 9.5 | 10.4 | 6.2 |

Q 44. Could I ask your relationship to the child or children?

| | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 |
|--------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Mother | 70.7 | 73.9 | 72.6 | 75.2 |
| Father | 18.7 | 18.9 | 16.2 | 15.1 |
| Significant other | 0.3 | 0.5 | 1.0 | .5 |
| Grandmother/father | 6.2 | 3.8 | 6.2 | 4.5 |
| Relative | 3.2 | 0.7 | 3.4 | 1.1 |
| Refused | 0.9 | 0.3 | 0.5 | 2.9 |
| Guardian/ other | n/a | 0.5 | 0.1 | .7 |

Q 4. How long have you lived in the City of Syracuse?

| | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 |
|---------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 0 – 9 Years | 22.7 | 21.6 | 21.9 | 21.2 |
| 10 – 19 Years | 19.9 | 17.4 | 19.1 | 18.8 |
| 20 – 29 Years | 20.5 | 18.4 | 17.7 | 20.7 |
| 30 + Years | 36.9 | 42.6 | 41.2 | 39.3 |

The 2009-10 sample of respondents is comprised of 38 % African-Americans, 43 % White, and 6 % Latinos / Hispanics. 24 % have a college degree and 39 % have a high school degree or less.

Overall there are only slight differences among the samples for the four years.

Q 43. Would you describe yourself as:

| | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 |
|------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| African American | 38.5 | 36.6 | 38.2 | 37.7 |
| American Indian | 2.9 | 1.3 | 3.0 | 4.2 |
| Asian | 1.6 | 1.3 | 1.6 | 1.5 |
| Caucasian/ White | 43.5 | 46.1 | 40.8 | 43.3 |
| Latino/ Hispanic | 4.5 | 6.7 | 7.2 | 5.8 |
| Mixed/ Other | 4.6 | 5.6 | 5.5 | 3.5 |
| Refused | 4.4 | 2.4 | 3.6 | 4.2 |

Q 45. Could you tell me the highest education level you achieved?

| | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 |
|----------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| High school or less | 43.6 | 43.1 | 43.8 | 39.1 |
| Some college or less | 24.4 | 27.2 | 27.7 | 27.3 |
| College degree | 18.7 | 19.6 | 18.2 | 23.5 |
| Graduate work/degree | 10.1 | 9.0 | 7.9 | 7.8 |
| Refused | 3.2 | 1.0 | 2.4 | 2.2 |

General Reactions to Schools and Education

Over the four years of the survey there has been a slight increase in the percentage of respondents that are positive about the education of their children. In 2006-07 75.0 % either strongly agreed or just agreed that they were satisfied with the education their children. For 2009-10 the percentage is 81.9. The percentage disagreeing has declined from 23.2 to 16.1.

There has also been an increase in the percentage that agrees they are satisfied with the programs and services their children receive, from 74.0 to 77.3.

These assessments do not vary by area of the city, or race and education of respondents.

Q 5. In general, I am satisfied with the education my child is receiving.

| | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 |
|-------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Strongly Agree | 14.9 | 15.6 | 14.6 | 15.0 |
| Agree | 60.1 | 65.8 | 66.3 | 66.9 |
| Disagree | 18.2 | 13.4 | 13.5 | 11.9 |
| Strongly Disagree | 5.0 | 4.2 | 3.9 | 4.2 |
| No Opinion | 1.7 | 1.0 | 1.7 | 2.0 |

Q 6. I am satisfied with the programs and services my child has received from the district.

| | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 |
|-------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Strongly Agree | 14.6 | 16.3 | 15.6 | 14.3 |
| Agree | 59.4 | 65.0 | 62.9 | 63.0 |
| Disagree | 19.2 | 13.7 | 14.8 | 16.2 |
| Strongly Disagree | 5.0 | 3.3 | 4.4 | 4.1 |
| No Opinion | 1.8 | 1.8 | 2.3 | 2.4 |

The assessment of the learning environment has also improved. When asked if “the learning environment is excellent” in 2006-07 57.6 % agreed. The percentage agreeing has gradually increased to 60.1 %, while the percentage disagreeing has declined from 39.2 in 2006-07 to 32.9 in 2009-10. Those on the East Side (zip codes 13224 and 13210) are the least positive, with 53.8 % agreeing and 39.8 % disagreeing. Disagreement with this statement is higher among those with more education.

While these assessments of the education process are positive, it continues to be the case that a high percentage of parents want teachers to push their children more. When asked if teachers should push students more, about the same, or less, in 2009-10 44.4 % supported pushing students more and only 4.4 % indicated “less.” There are no significant variations in responses to this by the education level of parents, but 51 % of African American parents want the schools to push their children more while only 39 % of white parents choose that. The highest level of support for pushing children more is on the East side, where 51 % choose that position.

Q 8. The learning environment in the schools is excellent.

| | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 |
|-------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Strongly Agree | 9.1 | 11.0 | 8.8 | 8.8 |
| Agree | 48.5 | 49.0 | 50.1 | 51.3 |
| Disagree | 31.9 | 30.2 | 29.2 | 27.9 |
| Strongly Disagree | 7.3 | 6.9 | 7.4 | 5.0 |
| No Opinion | 3.1 | 3.0 | 4.4 | 7.0 |

Q 19. When it comes to how much teachers are pushing and challenging your children to achieve, do you think that they need to push more, they are pushing about the right amount or they should push less?

| | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 |
|-------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| More | | 48.4 | 46.7 | 44.4 |
| About right | | 44.4 | 46.3 | 45.4 |
| Less | | 3.5 | 3.7 | 4.4 |
| No Opinion | | 3.8 | 3.2 | 5.8 |

Reactions to the Staff and Their Practices

The reactions to teachers, the staff and how they treat students remain very positive and somewhat higher than in 2006-07. There are no consistent differences in these reactions by race, the education level of respondents, or the area of the city.

Q 7. Most teachers in the schools are competent and doing a very good job.

| | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 |
|-------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Strongly Agree | 17.6 | 17.6 | 16.6 | 16.2 |
| Agree | 61.6 | 63.4 | 64.1 | 64.9 |
| Disagree | 14.4 | 13.0 | 3.0 | 13.0 |
| Strongly Disagree | 2.9 | 3.4 | 3.7 | 3.0 |
| No Opinion | 3.5 | 2.7 | 0.1 | 2.9 |

Q 9. School staff – principals and the building staff – treat children fairly and with respect.

| | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 |
|-------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Strongly Agree | 15.8 | 13.6 | 16.6 | 15.1 |
| Agree | 60.5 | 64.2 | 63.4 | 63.8 |
| Disagree | 16.5 | 13.8 | 13.0 | 12.5 |
| Strongly Disagree | 3.9 | 4.4 | 4.1 | 2.6 |
| No Opinion | 3.2 | 4.1 | 3.0 | 5.8 |

Q 14. School rules are enforced consistently and fairly at my child's school.

| | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 |
|-------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Strongly Agree | 12.7 | 11.1 | 9.6 | 10.3 |
| Agree | 59.7 | 62.9 | 64.0 | 64.0 |
| Disagree | 18.8 | 17.8 | 16.3 | 14.4 |
| Strongly Disagree | 3.4 | 3.6 | 5.0 | 3.3 |
| No Opinion | 5.4 | 4.6 | 5.1 | 8.0 |

Q 15. The teachers do a good job keeping me informed about homework and issues involving my child.

| | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 |
|-------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Strongly Agree | 19.9 | 21.4 | 19.8 | 21.9 |
| Agree | 53.3 | 53.1 | 53.4 | 54.8 |
| Disagree | 19.1 | 17.1 | 18.0 | 15.1 |
| Strongly Disagree | 6.5 | 6.5 | 6.9 | 5.9 |
| No Opinion | 1.3 | 1.9 | 1.8 | 2.4 |

Transportation, Safety and Discipline Issues

Children continue to get to school in very diverse ways. Approximately 44 % take the bus, 23 % are taken by their parents, and 32 % walk. The choice of mode is consistent when parents have more than one child. When one child takes the bus, 80 % of the time the other child does. When one child walks, 88 % of the time the other walks.

As in prior years, there are significant differences in how children get to school by race and education of respondents. Among African-American parents 55 % have their child take the bus, 18 % have their children walk, and 26 % drive or walk their children to school. For those who are white, 31 % use the bus, 23 % have their children walk, and 44 % drive or walk their students to school. Usage of buses is also related to the education levels of parents. Among those with a high school degree or less, 50 % use buses for their children, while only 25 % of those with a graduate degree rely on a bus.

Q 3. Could you tell us how your children get to school each day: (Ask for each student)

Results for Child Number 1

| | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 |
|-------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Bus | 39.3 | 40.6 | 46.6 | 44.0 |
| Walk alone/ with others | 25.2 | 23.0 | 23.6 | 22.1 |
| Parents drive or walk | 33.8 | 34.1 | 27.9 | 31.8 |
| Drive on own | 1.8 | 2.4 | 1.9 | 2.1 |

Results for Child Number 2

| | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 |
|-------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Bus | 37.3 | 42.9 | 46.7 | 44.2 |
| Walk alone/ with others | 23.2 | 24.2 | 22.7 | 22.9 |
| Parents drive or walk | 31.9 | 31.8 | 29.8 | 31.8 |
| Drive on own | 0.7 | 1.1 | 0.8 | 1.2 |

Q 11. My child is safe going to and from the school on a bus.

| | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 |
|-------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Strongly Agree | 5.3 | 5.3 | 7.0 | 5.9 |
| Agree | 39.0 | 39.0 | 39.8 | 43.3 |
| Disagree | 16.0 | 12.4 | 10.7 | 11.4 |
| Strongly Disagree | 4.4 | 4.6 | 4.3 | 3.2 |
| No Opinion | 35.3 | 38.8 | 38.7 | 36.2 |

The responses about safety are more mixed than for education issues. One of the first issues relevant to safety involves transporting students to school. When asked about their child's safety while getting to and from school on a bus, 36 % have no opinion about that. 95 % of these

responses are from parents who either take their children to school or have them walk. Among those who have their children take the bus, 10 % strongly agree that their child is safe on the bus and another 68 % agree. African-American and white respondents who have children that take the bus have very similar opinions about the safety of taking the bus, but fewer whites have their children take the bus.

Differences in how children get to school also affect opinions about the safety of walking to school. Approximately 44 % say their children take the bus and 54 % of that group has no opinion about the safety of walking. Among those who do have their children walk alone or with other children, 71 % strongly agree or agree that their children are safe, while 26 % do not agree. There are no variations in views of the safety of walking by area or race.

83 % of parents think their children are safe at school and 69 % think discipline problems are under control in the schools. While these percentages are high, it is important to note that 13 % do not think their children are safe while at school and 24 % do not think that discipline problems are under control. Those are substantial percentages. These assessments do not vary by area, race, or education level of respondents.

Q 12. My child is safe walking to and from school.

| | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 |
|-------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Strongly Agree | 3.6 | 3.5 | 4.4 | 4.1 |
| Agree | 31.0 | 28.0 | 24.7 | 28.9 |
| Disagree | 25.6 | 18.3 | 15.4 | 18.0 |
| Strongly Disagree | 8.0 | 5.1 | 6.2 | 6.5 |
| No Opinion | 31.9 | 45.1 | 49.4 | 42.5 |

Q 13. My child is safe while at school.

| | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 |
|-------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Strongly Agree | 11.9 | 13.1 | 13.7 | 12.4 |
| Agree | 66.8 | 71.9 | 65.9 | 70.9 |
| Disagree | 17.9 | 10.9 | 14.3 | 10.4 |
| Strongly Disagree | 2.3 | 1.9 | 3.2 | 2.7 |
| No Opinion | 1.1 | 2.2 | 2.9 | 3.2 |

Q 14. Discipline problems are under control where my child attends school

| | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 |
|-------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Strongly Agree | 9.5 | 9.7 | 8.5 | 9.6 |
| Agree | 56.2 | 59.4 | 60.3 | 59.4 |
| Disagree | 25.6 | 21.0 | 20.2 | 20.0 |
| Strongly Disagree | 5.8 | 5.2 | 6.5 | 4.3 |
| No Opinion | 2.9 | 4.8 | 4.5 | 6.7 |

Opportunities for Parent Involvement

Respondents continue to be very positive about the opportunities for involvement in the schools. Only 11 % disagree that the schools provide good opportunities for involvement. Only 5.6 % disagree that they feel welcome at their child's school.

Q 17. The schools provide good opportunities for parents to be involved.

| | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 |
|-------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Strongly Agree | 19.6 | 19.6 | 19.6 | 19.0 |
| Agree | 66.8 | 66.7 | 65.0 | 66.8 |
| Disagree | 10.5 | 10.1 | 11.1 | 8.9 |
| Strongly Disagree | 2.1 | 1.6 | 2.0 | 2.1 |
| No Opinion | 1.0 | 2.1 | 2.2 | 3.2 |

Q 18. I feel welcome at my child's school.

| | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 |
|-------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Strongly Agree | 25.0 | 25.1 | 24.6 | 26.0 |
| Agree | 65.2 | 66.3 | 66.0 | 65.5 |
| Disagree | 6.4 | 6.0 | 6.0 | 4.6 |
| Strongly Disagree | 1.6 | 1.6 | 1.7 | 1.0 |
| No Opinion | 1.8 | 1.1 | 1.5 | 2.9 |

The Quality of Buildings

Most respondents are positive about the quality of schools, but not strongly positive. 15.7 % disagree (just or strongly) that the quality of the buildings is very good. These reactions do not differ by race or area of the district, but agreement does vary by education levels. Among those parents with a high school education or less 86 % strongly agree or agree that the quality of buildings is very good. That declines steadily as education increases and among those with some graduate work 58 % strongly agree or agree.

Q 19. The quality of the building my child attends is very good.

| | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 |
|-------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Strongly Agree | 12.2 | 11.8 | 13.0 | 12.2 |
| Agree | 63.3 | 68.0 | 65.1 | 67.2 |
| Disagree | 18.2 | 15.0 | 14.6 | 12.7 |
| Strongly Disagree | 3.8 | 2.2 | 4.6 | 3.0 |
| No Opinion | 2.5 | 3.1 | 2.6 | 5.0 |

Consistency of Assessments

As in prior years, opinions about the schools are strongly related. Those parents positive about one matter are generally positive about another. Those negative about some aspect of the schools are generally negative about other aspects.

The table below indicates just how consistent these views are. Along the left is the reaction to the statement “In general, I am satisfied with the education my child is receiving.” To the right is how those with an opinion about the general quality of education judge other aspects of schools. The first row within each year shows all those who strongly agree that they are satisfied with the education received by their child. It then shows the percentage of those respondents who agree (either strongly agree or just agree) with the statement about programs and services, the competence of teachers, discipline problems being under control, and the quality of the buildings. Among those in 2009-10 who strongly agree that they are generally satisfied with the education their child is receiving, 98.7 % agree they are satisfied with programs and services, 95.5 % agree that teachers are competent, 89.8 % agree that discipline problems are under control, and 87.8 % agree that the quality of buildings is very good. A positive reaction on one issue is strongly associated with a positive view about other aspects of the schools.

Those negative are also consistently negative. Among those who strongly disagree that they are generally satisfied with the education their child is receiving, only 23.8 % agree they are satisfied with programs and services, 38.1 % agree that teachers are competent, 36.6 % agree that discipline problems are under control, and 52.5 % agree that the quality of buildings is very good.

| Satisfied with education child is receiving | Percent Strongly Agreeing or Agreeing with Statements | | | |
|--|---|-----------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| | Programs - services | Teachers Competent | Discipline Under control | Quality of buildings |
| 2007-08 | | | | |
| Strongly agree | 98.7 | 95.5 | 89.8 | 87.8 |
| Agree | 88.4 | 86.6 | 71.4 | 83.8 |
| Disagree | 47.4 | 53.3 | 48.2 | 64.4 |
| Strongly disagree | 16.7 | 28.6 | 26.2 | 41.5 |
| 2008-09 | | | | |
| Strongly agree | 98.0 | 94.6 | 80.1 | 85.5 |
| Agree | 86.5 | 86.0 | 73.6 | 81.9 |
| Disagree | 38.5 | 56.7 | 44.8 | 57.9 |
| Strongly disagree | 20.5 | 28.2 | 33.3 | 59.0 |
| 2009-10 | | | | |
| Strongly agree | 96.7 | 94.7 | 85.3 | 92.7 |
| Agree | 85.9 | 85.5 | 72.6 | 81.3 |
| Disagree | 30.3 | 57.1 | 42.6 | 64.0 |
| Strongly disagree | 23.8 | 38.1 | 36.6 | 52.5 |

The positive news is that those who are positive about the schools are generally positive about multiple aspects of the schools. Most respondents are in this group. The negative news is that those dissatisfied with the schools are consistently dissatisfied and it will be difficult to change their views. They are not, however, a majority of parents and guardians.

Problems and Positives

When asked about the biggest problem facing the school district, in 2009-10 two responses were mentioned the most: student discipline (3 %) and lack of money for the schools (29 %). Next were lack of parent interest, poor curriculum / low standards, and quality of staff / teachers, which drew roughly equal percentages.

When asked about the positive aspects of the district, 32 % mention the quality of staff / teachers, 30 % the variety of programs and services, and 17 % the quality of curriculum and programs.

Problems and Positives

Q 21. In your view, what's the biggest problem facing the school district?

| | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 |
|---|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Student discipline/lack of student interest in learning | 20.6 | 15.7 | 19.6 | 23.3 |
| Lack of adequate money for the schools | 22.4 | 23.3 | 24.2 | 29.0 |
| Lack of parent interest/family support | 6.9 | 4.6 | 11.9 | 14.3 |
| Poor curriculum/low standards for students | 5.8 | 7.1 | 5.6 | 12.2 |
| Quality of staff/teachers | 11.4 | 10.3 | 11.9 | 16.3 |
| School district wasting money | 3.1 | 2.8 | 2.9 | 4.4 |
| Other – buildings, crowding, budget problems, tax base limited, more after school programs, problems on bus, too few teachers | 15.0 | 29.0 | 23.6 | .4 |
| Nothing offered | 14.8 | 7.2 | .3 | 0 |

Q 22. Now, on the positive side, is there anything about the district that you think is particularly good?

| | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 |
|--------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Quality of curriculum/programs | 14.4 | 17.0 | 19.1 | 17.2 |
| Quality of teachers/staff | 26.8 | 27.2 | 26.4 | 31.6 |
| Opportunities for parent involvement | 8.6 | 6.0 | 9.7 | 11.9 |
| Variety of programs and services | 10.7 | 13.2 | 16.7 | 30.3 |
| Accessibility of teachers/staff | 4.9 | 4.0 | 4.6 | 5.9 |
| Adult/continuing education | 0.9 | 0.8 | 2.0 | 3.2 |
| Other – miscellaneous | 33.7 | 31.9 | 21.1 | 0 |

Priorities to Improve Schools

For some time there has been a debate about how to improve schools. Is the answer to provide more funding or require higher standards? 35 % of respondents think the first priority in trying to improve the schools is to spend more money to hire teachers. Another 10 % supports spending more money to rebuild the schools. Putting these two together, 45 % support greater spending. In contrast, 46 % think the first priority should be to set higher standards either for students (25 %) or for teachers (21 %). Another 10 % thinks the priority should be to improve students' discipline. These opinions do not vary by race, education level, or area of the city. The divisions about how to improve schools that exist in the nation also exist in Syracuse.

These opinions about proper priorities vary by satisfaction with education in the schools. Those who say they are satisfied with education in the schools are more supportive of spending more money. Those dissatisfied are more supportive of higher standards. Among those who strongly agree that they are satisfied with their children's education, 51 % support more spending (combining responses for both teachers and buildings). This declines to 47 % among those who just agree, to 35 % among those who disagree, and to 22 % among those who strongly disagree. Those less satisfied with the schools place more emphasis on standards. It should be noted, however, that concern about standards is not confined to the dissatisfied. Even among those who strongly agree that they are satisfied with their child's education, 41 % choose higher standards as their first priority.

Priorities to Improve Schools

Q 24. There is often discussion of the need to improve education in the city public schools. Which of the following would be your first priority?

| | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 |
|--|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Spend more money to hire more teachers | 25.9 | 33.1 | 36.7 | 34.7 |
| Spend more money to rebuild city schools | 12.9 | 9.5 | 11.2 | 10.2 |
| Improve student discipline | 12.8 | 10.0 | 10.2 | 9.9 |
| Set higher academic standards for students | 21.2 | 19.8 | 20.9 | 24.5 |
| Set higher standards for teachers | 21.9 | 20.3 | 17.9 | 20.5 |
| Other | 5.3 | 7.3 | 3.0 | .2 |

Budget Issues

The school system regularly faces revenue problems. When respondents were asked, given their view of the quality of the schools, whether their taxes are too high, 33 % think that taxes are too high, while 8 % think they are too low. 47 % think they are about right. There is no variation by education, area of the city, or length of residency in the city. There is a difference by race, however. 40 % of African-Americans think their taxes are too high, while only 26 % of whites choose that option.

The major difference in how respondents see taxes stems from how people assess the school system. As satisfaction with education declines, the sense that taxes are too high increases. For those who strongly agree that they are satisfied with their child's education, 24 % think taxes are too high. That increases to 30 % for those who agree, 50 % for those disagree, and 47 % for those who strongly disagree. In general, those who disagree about some aspect of the school's effectiveness are more inclined to think their taxes are too high. Those satisfied are more likely to say that their taxes are about right.

Budget Issues

Q 28. Given your views about the quality of the city schools, do you think taxes are too high for what you get, about right, or too low?

| | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 |
|-------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Too High | 37.4 | 37.3 | 32.8 | 32.7 |
| About Right | 45.4 | 47.4 | 49.8 | 46.7 |
| Too Low | 7.3 | 7.6 | 7.9 | 7.5 |
| No Opinion | 9.9 | 7.7 | 9.4 | 13.1 |

Q 23. Some people suggest raising city property taxes and spending the extra money on education. Would you favor increasing property taxes if it was only for education or oppose that?

| | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 |
|------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Favor | 61.9 | 64.5 | 64.1 | 59.9 |
| Oppose | 32.7 | 27.8 | 28.6 | 31.6 |
| No Opinion | 5.4 | 7.7 | 7.1 | 8.6 |

When asked if they would support increasing property taxes if the funds were only for education, 60 % favor that and 32 % oppose it. Those who are more positive about the effectiveness of the schools are somewhat more supportive of raising taxes, but support exists even among those more critical. Among those who strongly agree that they are generally satisfied with their child's education, 67 % support raising taxes. Among those who just agree, 62 % support raising taxes. Among those who disagree, 56 % support this and 35 % oppose it. Even those who think the way

to improve the schools is higher standards for teachers are supportive (63 %) as are those who stress higher standards for students (56 %).

When asked what to do with more money, the highest priority, mentioned by 43 %, is to reduce class size with more teachers. Next are providing more after school programs and improving access to technology such as computers. Paying teachers more and improving the quality of buildings are mentioned by only a total of 13 %. Respondents want the money spent on matters that they see as directly affecting students.

Q 24. If the city schools had more money, which of the following should have the highest priority?

| | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 |
|--|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Reduce class size with more teachers | 36.6 | 42.6 | 41.8 | 43.2 |
| Improving the quality of buildings | 4.5 | 3.7 | 5.0 | 4.4 |
| Pay teachers more | 9.3 | 6.7 | 8.6 | 8.2 |
| Provide more after school programs | 16.1 | 14.1 | 17.2 | 18.4 |
| Provide more textbooks and reading materials | 12.1 | 11.5 | 10.3 | 10.3 |
| Improve access to technology such as computers | 16.7 | 17.8 | 15.1 | 15.5 |
| Other | 4.7 | 3.7 | 2.0 | 0 |

Q 25. Overall, do you feel that the city school system makes good use of its financial resources, or do you feel that the city schools waste a lot of money?

| | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 |
|---------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Make good use | 37.0 | 41.2 | 41.0 | 39.6 |
| Waste a lot | 40.6 | 36.8 | 35.0 | 34.8 |
| Uncertain | 21.6 | 21.3 | 23.2 | 22.7 |
| Refused | 0.8 | 0.7 | 0.6 | 2.8 |

There continues to be a division of opinion about how well the district uses its funds. 40 % think the district makes good use of its funds and 34 % think they waste a lot. Another 23 % say they are uncertain. The percentage seeing a lot of waste has declined somewhat over the last four years. Among those who strongly agree that they are satisfied with the education of their children, 55 % think the district uses resources well and 24 % think they waste a lot of money. Among the 11 % that disagrees, 20 % think it uses resources well and 49 % think it wastes a lot of money.

When presented with the negative statement that more money is unlikely to improve the schools, 44 % are pessimistic about change, agreeing that spending more money would be unlikely to create change in the schools. 44 % are more optimistic and disagree with the statement. There is a continuing division of opinion about waste and the likelihood of change that the district has to try to dispel.

The responses to the questions about waste and the prospects for change can be used to sort respondents into pessimists, optimists, and the ambivalent. In the first group are those who think the district wastes a lot *and* agree that money will not create change. 18 % are in this most critical group. In contrast are the optimists. 19 % think the district uses its money well *and* disagree that money will not create change. Then there are the ambivalent. 14 % think the district wastes a lot but disagree that money will not create improvement. Another 17 % think the district uses its money well but agree that more money will not improve the schools. As the district lobbies for additional funds it is crucial to be able to establish how the funds will be used and that they will result in positive changes. Changing the perception of how the district uses its funds continues to be central to gaining support for more funds.

75 % of respondents agree that if the schools could be improved that it would help keep people in the city. This view does not vary with satisfaction with the schools, with assessment of how well the district uses its money, by race, education, or area of the city. It is a widespread perception.

Q 26. Let's assume that city taxes were raised and used for education. Would you agree or disagree with this: The increased money is unlikely to result in change or improvement in the schools.

| | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 |
|------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Agree | 50.6 | 42.5 | 44.8 | 43.6 |
| Disagree | 42.9 | 46.4 | 44.7 | 43.8 |
| No Opinion | 6.5 | 11.2 | 10.5 | 12.6 |

Q 27. Would you agree or disagree with this? If the funding improved schools, it could keep people in the city and maintain property values.

| | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 |
|------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Agree | 77.1 | 78.0 | 74.5 | 74.5 |
| Disagree | 16.0 | 13.3 | 17.3 | 14.9 |
| No Opinion | 6.9 | 8.7 | 8.0 | 10.6 |

Retaining Parents

A majority of respondents indicate they are not planning on leaving the city, but 35 % either might be or are planning on moving. 16 % say they are planning on moving somewhere else altogether and 13 % say they are considering moving to somewhere within the county. Among the 10 % who are considering moving within the county, 65 % say they schools are a reason or are somewhat of the reason. Overall, 5.6 % of all 1006 respondents are considering moving *within* the county *and* schools are the reason.

Q 38. Over the next several years are you considering or planning to move outside the city to the towns within the county or somewhere else?

| | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 |
|------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| No | 56.2 | 63.9 | 64.6 | 65.6 |
| Yes, towns within the county | 14.5 | 12.1 | 12.7 | 10.0 |
| Yes, elsewhere | 21.8 | 17.0 | 16.9 | 15.9 |
| Maybe | 6.3 | 6.0 | 4.5 | 6.3 |
| No Opinion | 1.2 | 1.0 | 1.4 | 2.3 |

Q 39. (If yes or maybe): Is the quality of the city schools a reason you are considering moving?

| | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 |
|-------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| No | 34.5 | 46.9 | 47.8 | 50.3 |
| Somewhat | 12.3 | 12.9 | 11.6 | 10.3 |
| Yes | 39.0 | 37.7 | 34.2 | 34.3 |
| No Response | 14.2 | 2.6 | 6.4 | 5.1 |

Satisfaction with the schools plays a significant role in these responses. Among those who strongly agree or just agree that they are generally satisfied with their child's education, 69 % are not planning to leave, and 9 % are planning to move somewhere or might be moving. The inclination to move increases as dissatisfaction increases. Among those indicating they are not satisfied (just or strongly disagreeing), 46 % are planning to move somewhere or might be considering this. Among those considering moving, 26 % of African-Americans say the schools might be a reason while 44 % of whites indicate that. Among those considering moving, the mention of the schools as a reason increases with education. 32 % of those with a high school education mention the schools while 57 % of those with graduate work indicate that reason.

Those who said they were considering moving and who said that the schools were or might be a reason for moving were then asked what improvements in the schools would it take to keep them in the city. 105 individuals offered responses. Their responses (next page) are grouped into

different types of answers. They indicate a variety of responses, but many of them deal with the education process and the environment in schools.

Q 40. *(If yes or maybe to Q 39):* **What changes in the school would it take for you to stay?**
(open-ended responses grouped)

| | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 |
|----------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| After school programs / tutoring | 4.5 | 5.5 | 2.1 | 2.2 |
| Better academics / education | 13.6 | 15.9 | 13.9 | 18.0 |
| Class size | 9.8 | 13.1 | 6.5 | 7.2 |
| Discipline / safety | 13.9 | 15.9 | 18.9 | 19.4 |
| Problems with teachers / staff | 11.5 | 12.4 | 11.8 | 6.5 |
| Special needs education | 1.7 | 2.8 | 3.1 | 3.6 |
| Transportation | 3.1 | 4.4 | 5.2 | .8 |
| Other – miscellaneous | 18.6 | 16.6 | 17.7 | 14.2 |
| Say Yes | | | | 3.6 |
| No response | 23.3 | 18.1 | 21.1 | 24.5 |

(Percentages above may sum to more than 100% because respondents were able to offer multiple answers)

Transportation

There is still strong support for reducing the distance necessary for a student to be bused to school, though this percentage has gradually declined over time. 68 % want to reduce this distance. As might be expected, those who drive their children to school are much less supportive of reducing this distance.

Transportations and Transfers

Q 29. Currently students in elementary school who live within 1.5 miles of their school must walk. Those in junior high and high school within two (2) miles of school must walk. Would you like to reduce the distances necessary for busing to school – so that those closer would get a bus ride – or leave it like it is?

| | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 |
|------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Reduce | 77.9 | 75.3 | 74.4 | 68.4 |
| Leave like it is | 18.7 | 20.2 | 22.0 | 24.3 |
| No Opinion | 3.4 | 4.6 | 3.6 | 7.3 |

The Say Yes Program

36.2 % of all respondents indicate they are very familiar with the Say Yes program, and another 34.4 % is somewhat familiar. Awareness increases with the education level of respondents. Among those with a high school education or less 25 % are very familiar. That increases to 50 % among those with a graduate degree. Awareness is also considerably higher within the southern part of the city, with 47 % indicating they are very familiar.

Q. 30. Next I'd like to ask you some questions about the Say Yes Program. Would you say you are very familiar, somewhat familiar, or not very familiar with the program?

| | |
|------------|------|
| Very | 36.2 |
| Somewhat | 34.4 |
| Not very | 26.9 |
| No opinion | 2.6 |

Q 31. To receive this benefit your child must qualify for admission to a college and you must be a resident of the city for three years. Do you think this program will make you more or less likely to stay in the city, or make no difference?

| | |
|--------------------|------|
| More | 53.1 |
| Less | 1.4 |
| Make no difference | 36.7 |
| No opinion | 8.9 |

Q 32. The program involves more resources devoted to preparing students for college. The hope is that with more training and a greater possibility of attending college more students will work harder and go to college. Do you think that is likely that many more students will end up going to college, just some will, or it won't make much difference?

| | |
|----------------------------|------|
| Many more | 53.7 |
| Only some | 22.7 |
| Won't make much difference | 14.9 |
| No opinion | 8.7 |

When asked if they think the program will make them more likely to stay in the city or make no difference, 53.1 % say more likely and 36.7 % say it will make no difference. There is no difference by race or area in these responses, but an interesting pattern emerges by the education level of respondents. The percentage saying it will make them more likely to stay in the city is 46 for those with high school or less, 59 for those with some college and 63 for those with a college degree. It then drops to 48 % for those with some graduate work. We did not ask about income, but education is highly correlated with income. The variation found may indicate that the middle class, with less income than those with some graduate work, are more inclined to find the Say Yes program attractive. Those with some graduate work may have more income and enough

resources to be able to send their children to college without this program. But if one goal is to retain the middle-class within the city, this program may help.

The Say Yes program may also slow the movement of those who say they are considering moving because of the schools. Among those who agree that they are satisfied, 55 % indicate the program will make them more likely to stay in the city. The important group consists of the 15 % that do not indicate they are satisfied. These respondents are more likely to leave the city. Among this group of dissatisfied respondents 45 % indicate they may be more likely to stay in the city. The percentage is lower than for those satisfied, but it is still the case that 45 % indicate the program may incline them to stay. Likewise, among those who say they are considering moving and that the schools are a reason, 40 % say they are more likely to stay.

When asked if the program is likely to result in more students going to college, 53.7 % say that many more students will end up going to college. That reaction is very similar across race, area of the city, and education of respondents.

The School Reconstruction Board

The reactions to the decisions of the School Construction Board are very mixed. 25.7 % think they are doing a good job, while 20.4 % think they are doing a poor job. Another 24.2 % say they do not have an opinion about the matter. There is no significant variation by area, race, or education level of the respondent. The percentage saying they do not know enough increases with education level, rising to 44 % among those with some graduate. In surveys the percentage saying no opinion usually decreases with education. The lower percentage among those with less education may be because most people know little about this but thought they should offer some opinion.

Q 37. Decisions about what schools to renovate and improve are made by the School Construction Board. Do you think that board has done a good, fair, or poor job in making decisions in the last few years?

| | |
|--------------------------------|------|
| Good | 25.7 |
| Fair | 29.7 |
| Poor | 20.4 |
| Don't know enough / no opinion | 24.2 |

Encouraging Parent Involvement

When asked what would encourage more parent involvement, 350 respondents offered suggestions. The most frequently mentioned ones are listed below.

Q 36. Encouraging more parent involvement in the schools is often of concern. If you were to name one thing that would make your involvement greater, what would it be?

| | |
|--|----|
| More communication with parents | 81 |
| Meetings at different times / after work times | 64 |
| More opportunities, activities, events | 59 |
| More after school programs | 25 |
| More opportunities to visit, work in classes | 23 |
| Better / more parent – teacher interaction | 21 |
| Friendlier environment for parents | 19 |
| More special needs focus / meetings | 15 |
| Miscellaneous (parents need to do more, more programs fun for families, | 43 |

Participation in Small Group Discussions

A substantial percentage of respondents again indicate that they would be willing to participate in small group discussions about the school. Two focus groups of respondents will be held December 16 and 17.

Participation in Small Group Discussions

Q 40. If we were to hold a small group discussion about the schools lasting about 90 – 120 minutes in the evening at a local school, and you get paid \$30, would you be willing to attend such a discussion?

| | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 |
|-----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| No | 17.8 | 9.9 | 10.2 | 13.9 |
| Maybe | 17.2 | 16.1 | 11.0 | 19.1 |
| Yes | 62.8 | 72.2 | 77.8 | 64.7 |
| No answer | 2.2 | 1.8 | 1.1 | 2.3 |

Providing Electronic Access to Records for Parents

Only 38.2 % of all respondents are aware of the Parental Portal. Of those who are aware of it, 48.5 % indicated that they have or may have used it. That means that 18.5 of all respondents to the survey indicate they have used it. A large percentage of respondents indicate they would access reports about their children if they were put on the internet.

Q 33. Are you aware of the Parental Portal or Home Access Center?

| | |
|-------------|------|
| Yes | 38.2 |
| Maybe | 3.2 |
| No | 56.9 |
| No response | 1.8 |

Q 34. (If yes): Have you used it?

| | |
|-------------|------|
| Yes | 39.2 |
| Maybe | 9.3 |
| No | 35.8 |
| No response | 15.8 |

Q 35. If the school district put on the internet your child's attendance, behavior, grades, homework completion, available only to you, would you use that regularly, sometimes, or probably not much?

| | |
|--------------|------|
| Regularly | 60.7 |
| Sometimes | 20.1 |
| Probably not | 14.6 |
| No opinion | 4.6 |

General Comments

257 respondents offered responses when asked if they wanted to make general comments. The table below summarizes those comments. Some respondents offered two comments so the total number of matters mentioned is more than 257.

General Comments

Q 41. Are there general comments you would like to offer about the schools?

Positive comments in 2009-10

| | |
|-------------------------------------|----|
| Schools / teachers are good | 55 |
| Doing well with resources they have | 10 |
| Staying because of Say Yes | 6 |
| Good special education programs | 3 |
| People are caring | 2 |
| Miscellaneous | 12 |

Negative comments in 2009-10

| | |
|--|----|
| Teacher-staff issues: unmotivated, untrained, incompetent, poor communication | 55 |
| Discipline problems | 27 |
| Special education issues not addressed | 13 |
| Need more resources | 13 |
| Standards not high enough | 13 |
| Buildings not well-maintained | 11 |
| Class sizes are too big | 10 |
| More after school programs | 9 |
| Money is wasted | 6 |
| Need more teachers | 5 |
| Miscellaneous | 17 |

Summary of focus group discussions about schools

I convened two groups of parents who had completed the survey to discuss the Syracuse City Schools. One was held December 16 at Nottingham High School and another was held December 17 at the Frazer School. Both sessions were held from 6:00 – 7:30 p.m. In contacting individuals to participate we sought and were able to attract groups that included a balance of those positive and negative about the schools. We were also able to balance the groups by race.

Each session ran about 90 minutes. Each attendee was presented with the set of questions attached at the end of this summary of comments. Those who attended were thoughtful, articulate and very concerned about the schools. Their comments are summarized below. The discussions progressed by going through the questions and regularly asking if there were other topics the participants would like to discuss.

The Quality of Education and Concerns

The parents attending these sessions expressed many positive feelings about the education their children were receiving but also expressed concern that there was considerable variation in their experiences. All the parents had multiple children, with some having already graduated. The variation in their experiences revolved around teachers. Some teachers were very good and excelled at motivating their children to learn. Others seemed unmotivated and without much energy or commitment. Other teachers seemed very concerned but appeared to be overwhelmed by disruptive students and unable to create the kind of classroom environment and experience that was desired. The general consensus was that all the teachers were competent, but that some were doing a better job than others in making the classroom experience rewarding for students.

In addition to variation among teachers, parents mentioned three specific problems that concern them. First, all of them mentioned the size of classes as a source of problems. Parents indicated that sometimes their children were in classes with 30 students. With considerable variation in the capabilities and progress among the 30 students, teachers found it difficult to keep track of the progress of all students and they often had to devote most of their time to the students making the slowest progress. The result was that students who were already doing adequate work or better got neglected and their motivation declined. Students in large classes who came to the class with above-average capabilities were not being challenged as much as should have been the case. With the large class sizes, and the focus on the students not doing as well, a good student who was losing interest was not given adequate attention. The general recommendation was that more attention should be given to reducing class size or creating more uniformity within classes.

Second, the issue of too many study halls was mentioned. The presence of many lengthy study halls in high school seems to make the problem of boredom greater. Some students have large blocks of time with nothing to do and that diminishes their motivation.

The third problem mentioned by many parents involves disruptive children. As in prior years, many report persistent problems with disruptive students. In some cases it is the same student over and over again. Discipline is a problem that is mentioned again and again. This year's group of parents expressed concern that teachers be given more authority to remove continually disruptive students from the classroom. As in prior years, parents are sympathetic to the problems that the schools and teachers face, but they think students who cause trouble have too much influence and should be dealt with better. They think there are too many limits

on what a teacher can do to remove disruptive students and that students are aware of this and become more disruptive.

The School Environment

While disruptive students were mentioned as a concern, the majority of parents indicated that their children feel safe while at school. Some parents mentioned anxiety about the situation in the middle schools (Lincoln and Levy), but the general sense is that the schools are safe, if often disrupted, and the media exaggerate safety problems.

Parents continue to feel very welcome in the schools. Several indicate they often visit classrooms and feel well-received. They see many opportunities for involvement, and wish that more parents were involved. They report that staff and teachers treat their children well.

When asked about the physical quality of school buildings, parents did not express dissatisfaction. They noted that all the buildings are old, but there was little concern about the quality of buildings. When asked directly if the district should devote money to improving the physical quality of the schools or to providing more books and materials for the schools, all the parents chose the latter.

Communication and Meetings

When asked about the communication they receive from teachers about their children, the responses were varied. A majority said they have no problem getting feedback about how their children are doing. Some found the Parent Portal very valuable and use it regularly. A minority said they had gotten no information (or missed it) about the Parent Portal and also expressed some frustration about the extent of information they get. One parent expressed frustration about the practice of sending grade reports home with the student (as opposed to mailing it to the parent), indicating that several weeks passed before the report was found among some other papers.

For those parents who work full-time, the timing of parent-teacher meetings presents a significant problem. Apparently most of them are held shortly after school, and that makes it very hard for working parents to make such meetings. They expressed a wish that parent – teacher meetings could be held at more diverse times.

When asked whether the amount and quality of homework are appropriate, parents say that there is considerable variation. Some say their children regularly have homework, while others say their child never brings any work home, indicating that they do assigned work during a study hall while at school.

Priorities and Budget Issues

The consistent priorities of parents, as indicated above, are to provide more materials and books and to have smaller class sizes.

When asked if they would support higher taxes if the money went to the schools, all supported that proposal, and especially if the resources provide more books and materials and smaller class sizes. The parents did express sympathy for not raising taxes on seniors. They all have confidence that more resources can improve the schools. No parents mentioned support for increasing the salary of teachers. As in prior years, parents again say they have little sense of the overall school budget, how the budget process works, and how resources are allocated among schools. Parents do not recall receiving a district newsletter.

When asked if the school district wastes a lot of money, none of the parents agreed with that statement. All of these parents indicate that they are in the schools off and on and they think the district is doing a very good job with the resources it has. They do not see waste in the use of resources, except for problems in controlling the heating of buildings. They all said their children complained about buildings being too hot and having to open windows to cool off the rooms. .

