

**2005 Parent Survey Report  
Needham Public Schools  
May 12, 2006**

**Introduction**

Last winter, the Needham Public Schools conducted the third systemwide survey of its parent community. The purpose of the survey is to help school personnel better understand what is important to the parent community, to gather information about their opinions on certain issues, and to determine their level of satisfaction with the various aspects of the school system. The questionnaire was first developed and administered in 2001, and this administration is part of a plan to survey the parent community biennially. Changes were made in the instrument to improve the clarity of a few questions, but an effort was made to keep the instrument as similar to the last one as possible in order to track trends reliably over time.

In early January, the survey was mailed to parents of all Needham students. Families received only one questionnaire for each level (elementary, middle, or high school) at which they had a child or children. The questionnaire included a cover letter with an explanation and instructions. (A copy of the letter and questionnaire are attached.) Parents were asked to return the survey to their child's school or to mail it to the Administration Building by January 20, 2006.

Following each of the last two surveys, school personnel spent considerable time analyzing the data, identifying areas of dissatisfaction, setting goals, and implementing response plans. Because this type of questionnaire is not constructed in a manner that readily identifies the reasons for dissatisfaction, it is often necessary to follow up on the survey results in order to gather more specific information. After the 2003 survey, mathematics was the area selected for further exploration. As a result, mathematics was chosen as the first subject area for assessment in the new curriculum review process.

**Response Demographics**

The response rate for the 2005 survey was 23.9% which is somewhat greater than the 20.4% in 2003, but not as high as the 2001 return rate which was 31.5%. The breakdown by schools is as follows:

| <b>School</b>         | <b># of Questionnaires</b> | <b>Survey Count</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Broadmeadow           | 384                        | 126                 | 32.8%             |
| Eliot                 | 265                        | 81                  | 30.6%             |
| Hillside              | 303                        | 112                 | 37.0%             |
| Mitchell              | 354                        | 117                 | 33.1%             |
| Newman                | 557                        | 151                 | 27.1%             |
| Pollard Middle School | 980                        | 192                 | 19.6%             |
| Needham High School   | 1253                       | 198                 | 15.8%             |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>4096</b>                | <b>977</b>          | <b>23.9%</b>      |

The desired return rate for this type of a questionnaire study is typically at 40%. Because the return rate is somewhat less, one must raise questions about the reliability of the results. Studies have shown that respondents tend to be somewhat more interested, involved, and positive than non-respondents. The results from the middle school and high school are particularly questionable. On the other hand, in most instances these results are very similar to the data gathered during the past two surveys; and consistency of results over time is considered a strong indicator of reliability. In addition, because parents were asked to complete only one questionnaire for all of their children attending the same school, the data may be representative of more children than the results seem to indicate.

In most instances, the respondents tended to reflect general demographics of the student population. This similarity of the respondent demographics to the general population also adds to the likelihood of data reliability. As one might expect, parents of younger children are more likely to respond than the parents of older students. Please see the respondent return rates below.

| <b>Student Demographics</b> |                   | <b>% of Respondents</b> | <b>Actual % of Entire Student Population</b> |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|--|
| <b>Level</b>                | PreK-2            | 32.3                    | 27.2   |
|                             | 3-5               | 26.5                    | 22.8   |
|                             | Middle School     | 21.1                    | 21.8   |
|                             | High School       | 20.0                    | 28.2   |
| <b>Gender</b>               | Male              | 52.1                    | 51.8   |
|                             | Female            | 47.9                    | 48.2   |
| <b>Race</b>                 | White             | 89.1                    | 87.2   |
|                             | Black             | 1.9                     | 3.2  |
|                             | Hispanic          | 1.7                     | 2.5  |
|                             | Asian             | 5.5                     | 6.9  |
|                             | Other             | 1.7                     | 0.2  |
| <b>Special Education</b>    | Special Education | 11.0                    | 12.2   |
|                             | Regular Education | 89.0                    | 87.7   |
| <b>METCO</b>                | METCO             | 2.1                     | 2.9  |
|                             | Non-METCO         | 97.9                    | 97.1   |

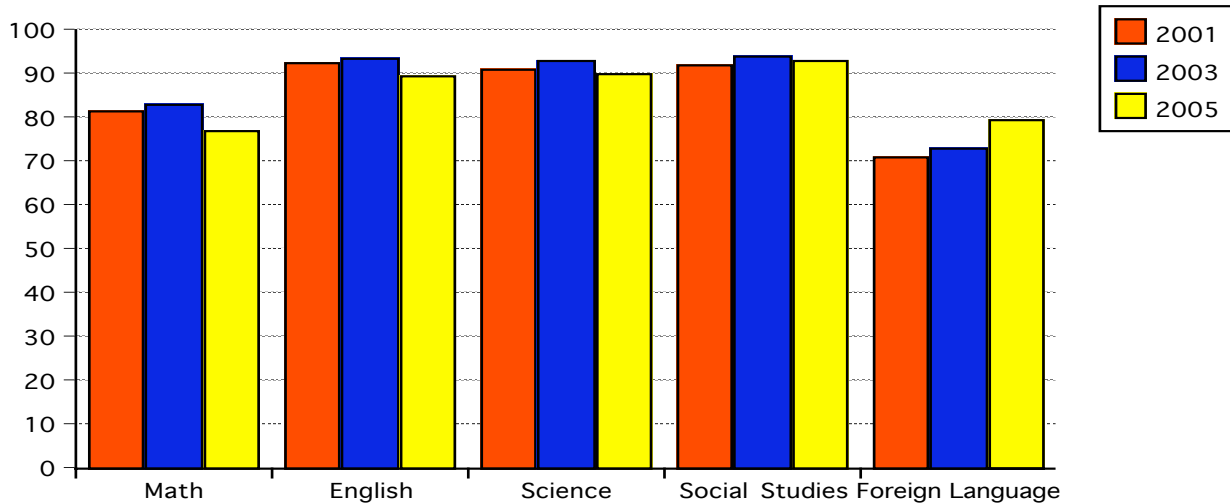
## Results

In answering questions, respondents were given the option of picking “Strongly Agree,” “Agree,” “Disagree,” or “Strongly Disagree.” Because people have different measures for the strength of their opinions, the “Strongly Agree” and “Agree” have been combined, as have “Disagree” and “Strongly Disagree.” Parents could also indicate that a question was not applicable to them or that they did not know about the area of questioning. For the purposes of this report, changes of five or more points will be considered significant when analyzing trend or comparison data.

The survey covers a number of areas, and for ease of analysis responses have been grouped into categories for this report. They were not necessarily grouped in this manner on the questionnaire itself.

### **Academic Subjects**

The questionnaires asked parents to indicate their levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with all of the major subject areas. The systemwide satisfaction average for all subjects was 87.2%. This number represents a slight decrease (0.5) from the 2003 survey and an increase of 1.5 percentage points over the 2001 average. (The chart below indicates the percentages of parents who were satisfied in each of the major subject areas. For purposes of comparison, the 2001 and 2003 results are also included.)



The percentages of satisfied parents have remained somewhat stable over the three surveys in English, Science, and Social Studies. Although there were slight dips in all three areas, the numbers are not considered significant. In each of these areas, about 9 in 10 parents indicate that they are satisfied or very satisfied with the school programs. Foreign Language demonstrated a significant gain in satisfaction levels, going from 71.1% in 2001 to 79.4% in 2005. This improvement is reflected at all three levels.

#### Foreign Language

|                           | % of Satisfied – 2001 | % of Satisfied – 2003 | % of Satisfied - 2005 |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Elementary Schools</b> | 69.9                  | 75.2                  | 79.8                  |
| <b>Middle School</b>      | 73.7                  | 74.7                  | 81.7                  |
| <b>High School</b>        | 70.8                  | 67.9                  | 77.0                  |

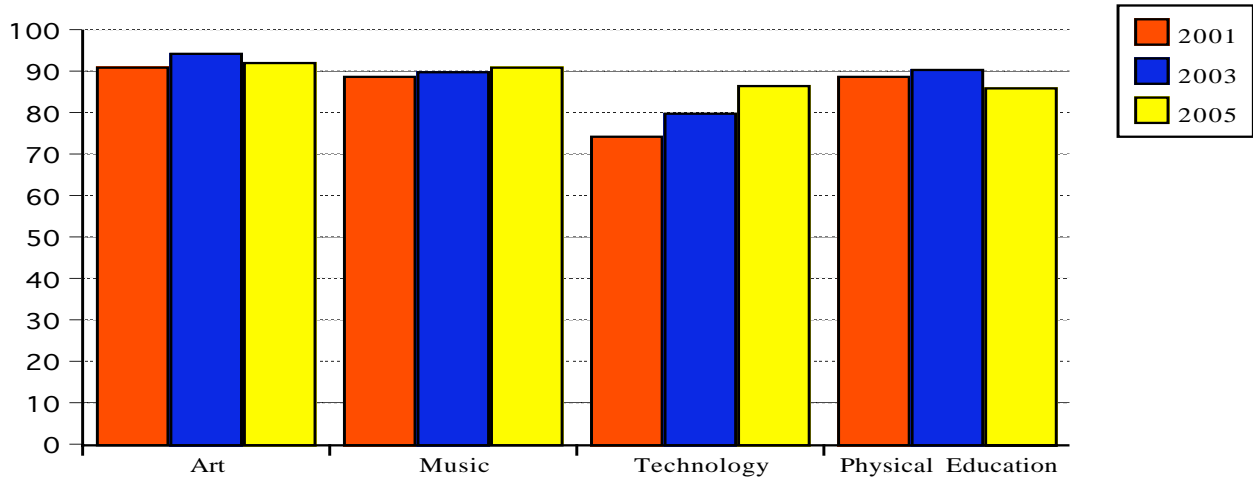
On the other hand, Mathematics has declined by six percentage points since the last survey. It is also informative to analyze these results by level.

#### Mathematics

|                           | % of Satisfied – 2001 | % of Satisfied – 2003 | % of Satisfied – 2005 |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Elementary Schools</b> | 81.5                  | 82.8                  | 73.6                  |
| <b>Middle School</b>      | 85.1                  | 83.8                  | 79.0                  |
| <b>High School</b>        | 82.9                  | 82.8                  | 81.9                  |

Since the survey was first administered in 2001, there have been declines in mathematics at both the elementary and middle school levels. The high school numbers have remained similar over the 5 years. Research demonstrates that mathematics often receives lower scores than other school subjects on surveys of this type; however, the decline in satisfaction certainly warrants more study.

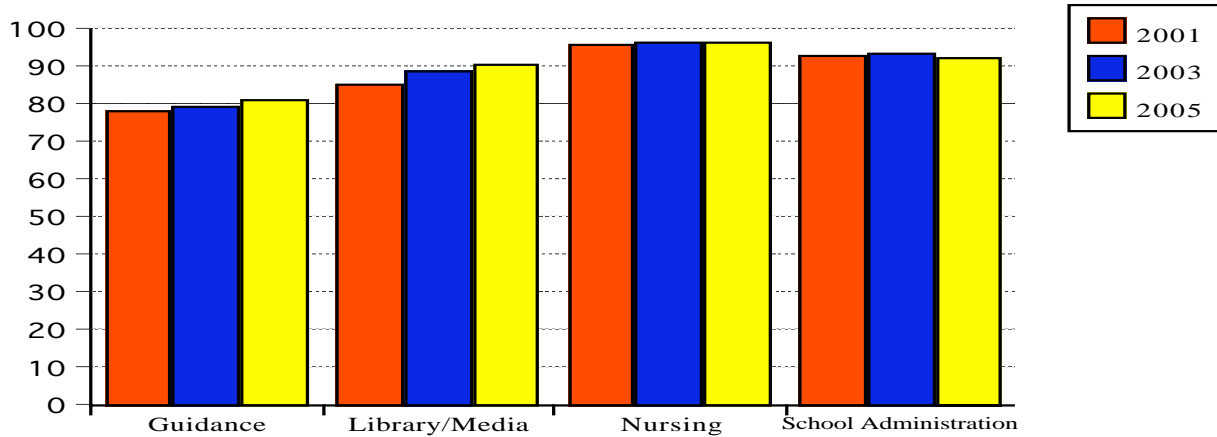
The other academic subject areas can also be compared to previous years.



The satisfaction levels in Art, Music, and Physical Education are relatively consistent over all three surveys. Technology has shown a significant growth in the percentage of parents who are satisfied – from 74.5% in 2001 to 86.8% in 2005 – an increase of 12.3 percentage points.

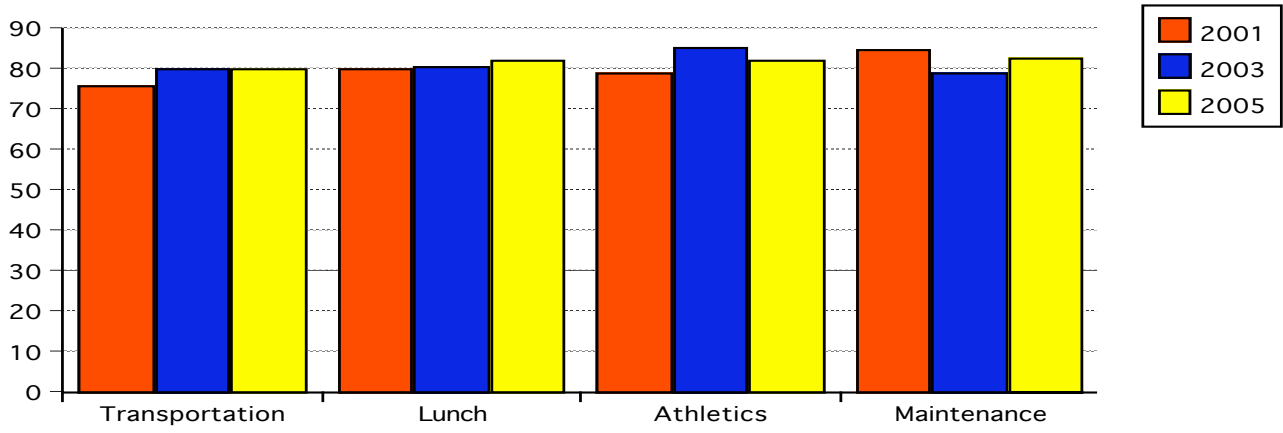
### Support Services / Ancillary Programs

Parents also were asked to indicate their satisfaction with support programs. Again, the chart below compares services for the past three surveys. The numbers represent the percentage of parents who indicated satisfaction with each service area.



These support services are also very highly rated by parents. The satisfaction rates for all four services remain stable with the exception of Library/Media that has an upward trend over the three surveys, going from 85.1% to 90.7%.

Four other service areas were also examined.



In all four areas, about 8 out of every 10 parents indicated that they were satisfied with these services. The percentages have remained somewhat stable over all three surveys.

**Educational Issues**

Parents were asked about a number of issues which went beyond particular academic departments or service areas.

Academic Satisfaction

The chart below indicates the percentage of parents who were satisfied with certain areas related to our schools' academic programs. The satisfaction levels for the 2001 and 2003 surveys are also given for comparison purposes.

|                         | Elementary |      |      | Middle School |      |      | High School |      |      |
|-------------------------|------------|------|------|---------------|------|------|-------------|------|------|
|                         | 2001       | 2003 | 2005 | 2001          | 2003 | 2005 | 2001        | 2003 | 2005 |
| High Academic Standards | 90.7       | 95.1 | 90.1 | 89.0          | 94.0 | 89.9 | 95.2        | 96.3 | 95.4 |
| Curriculum              | 89.5       | 92.5 | 88.4 | 85.1          | 87.6 | 85.0 | 90.6        | 90.4 | 85.9 |
| Class Size              | 82.4       | 83.8 | 76.6 | 29.0          | 77.0 | 74.8 | 65.9        | 74.7 | 80.7 |
| Academic Recognition    | 73.0       | 84.9 | 81.5 | 79.0          | 81.2 | 88.3 | 90.7        | 89.7 | 89.6 |

Although a very high percentage of parents (91.0%) are satisfied with the academic standards for their children, there is some variability by level. At the high school, 19 out of every 20 parents are satisfied; and this percentage has remained very consistent over all three administrations of the survey. About 9 in 10 parents are satisfied at the elementary and middle schools. These percentages are very similar to the 2001 numbers and somewhat less than the 2003 results.

Satisfaction with the curriculum declined slightly at all three levels, but the changes cannot be considered significant. Satisfaction levels for class size decreased at the elementary level (83.8% to 76.6%), remained somewhat stable at the middle school (77.0% to 74.8%), and improved at the high school (74.7% to 80.7%). Parental satisfaction for the academic recognition given to their children remained somewhat similar to the 2003

survey results at the elementary and high school levels, and there was a significant increase at the middle school (81.2% to 88.3%).

Parents were asked a series of questions about homework. Systemwide, eight of ten parents (82.5%) indicated that they believed that their children were receiving an age-appropriate amount of homework. This percentage has remained remarkably consistent over all three surveys (81.8% in 2001, 83.3% in 2003, and 82.5% in 2005). The percentage of dissatisfied parents varied slightly by level: 15.8% at the elementary level, 22.1% of middle school parents, and 18.5% of high school respondents. It is interesting to see why the dissatisfied parents were dissatisfied. They were given three options, and the results are as follows. (Note: The numbers add up to greater than 100% because some parents responded positively to more than one option.)

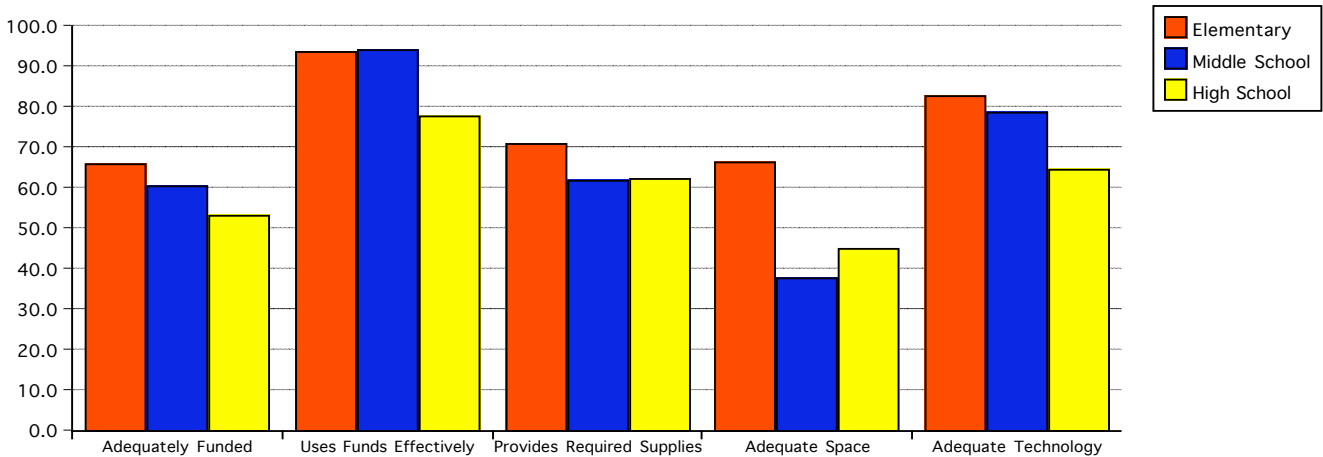
**Among Parents Dissatisfied with Homework: % Citing Various Reasons**

|                           | <b>Elementary</b> | <b>Middle School</b> | <b>High School</b> |
|---------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| Too Little Homework       | 52.4              | 41.1                 | 23.6               |
| Too Much Homework         | 18.6              | 34.7                 | 59.4               |
| Does Not Further Learning | 36.3              | 29.9                 | 21.6               |

Among the dissatisfied parents, it is obvious that elementary parents tend to believe that their children need more homework while high school parents think that their children have too much homework. The middle school parents were somewhat split on the issue.

Resources

Several questions were asked about school resources. The chart below indicates the percentage of people with positive responses to each of the five issues:



As in previous surveys, the percentage of satisfied parents were less in the Resource area than in any other area of the questionnaire. About two-thirds of the parents at the elementary level believe that their schools are adequately funded, but this percentage drops to about half at the high school. A very high percentage of parents believe that school funds are used efficiently, but the percentage is significantly lower at the high school than the elementary or middle school levels. The reason for the difference between levels is unclear and may be an area for further study. A majority of parents believes that their school provides their children with the necessary supplies, but significant percentages of people also disagree with this assertion at all three levels.

Space is the major area of dissatisfaction. Only at the elementary level do a majority (66.4%) of parents believe that there is adequate space in their children’s schools. The lowest percentage on the entire survey for satisfaction

is the 37.8% of middle school parents who think that the middle school building is adequate. Only 45% of high school parents are satisfied, but the current construction and renovation at that level should help change this unhappiness. Satisfaction for technological resources has continued to decline over all three surveys, and now fewer than two in three parents are satisfied with the technology available to their children.

Safety

There were several questions relating to safety in our schools.

**% Indicating Satisfaction**

| Statement   | Elementary |      |      | Middle School |      |      | High School |      |      | District Wide |      |      |
|---|------------|------|------|---------------|------|------|-------------|------|------|---------------|------|------|
|   | 2001       | 2003 | 2005 | 2001          | 2003 | 2005 | 2001        | 2003 | 2005 | 2001          | 2003 | 2005 |
| The school maintains high standards for student behavior.   | 94.6       | 96.3 | 94.6 | 88.8          | 93.5 | 92.7 | 91.3        | 86.6 | 83.4 | 92.3          | 93.8 | 92.3 |
| There are places in the school where my child feels unsafe. | 8.8        | 4.6  | 4.7  | 14.3          | 12.0 | 9.7  | 12.8        | 14.9 | 23.7 | 10.9          | 8.3  | 8.9  |
| Student discipline issues are handled fairly.               | 92.1       | 94.2 | 92.7 | 83.0          | 87.5 | 92.9 | 85.8        | 88.3 | 84.5 | 88.5          | 91.9 | 88.2 |
| Students are encouraged to be responsible citizens.         | 97.8       | 99.6 | 98.6 | 96.1          | 95.8 | 96.8 | 96.4        | 95.7 | 94.2 | 97.1          | 98.1 | 97.4 |

A very high percentage of parents (92.3%) believe that their child’s school sets high standards for student behavior. The percentage of parents at the high school who are satisfied has declined since the survey was first given in 2001, from 91.3% to 83.4%. The high school is also the school where the percentage of parents indicating that there are places in the school where their child feels unsafe grew significantly. The changes in these two areas certainly raise questions for the high school staff to explore.

The fairness of discipline remained fairly similar at all three levels to the 2003 percentages, but it is notable that the percentage at the middle school has increased by almost 10 percentage points since the survey was first given in 2001. Almost all parents (97.4%) believe that the schools encourage students to be responsible citizens.

Diversity

A very high percentage of parents (94.4%) feel that their schools foster an appreciation of diversity, and 91.5% believe that the instructional materials and textbooks are representative of diverse cultures. These percentages have not changed significantly since the 2003 survey. When the responses from the non-white populations are analyzed, 92.8% are satisfied with the school’s efforts to foster an appreciation of diversity; however, only 83.1% believe that the materials reflect diverse cultures. The percentages for the non-white populations have improved very significantly since the 2001 survey when 75.7% were satisfied with their school’s fostering an appreciation for diversity and over half of the parents indicating a lack of satisfaction with diversity in the materials.

## Communication

A number of questions had to do with communication and relationships between the home and school.

### **% Indicating Satisfaction**

| Statement  | Elementary |      |      | Middle School |      |      | High School |      |      |
|--|------------|------|------|---------------|------|------|-------------|------|------|
|  | 2001       | 2003 | 2005 | 2001          | 2003 | 2005 | 2001        | 2003 | 2005 |
| School personnel are respectful, receptive, and responsive to input from parents.  | 93.9       | 95.2 | 95.4 | 88.4          | 92.3 | 89.4 | 88.5        | 94.1 | 82.0 |
| School personnel are respectful, receptive, and responsive to input from students. | 95.2       | 94.1 | 94.9 | 86.3          | 87.9 | 87.2 | 87.2        | 87.3 | 77.1 |
| Teachers help me understand the strengths and needs of my child.                   | 94.7       | 94.9 | 93.8 | 63.5          | 68.8 | 56.7 | 55.9        | 52.2 | 41.9 |
| I am involved in decision-making about the education of my child.                  | 72.9       | 78.2 | 76.8 | 60.3          | 67.9 | 68.2 | 76.7        | 80.0 | 74.2 |
| I am provided opportunities to volunteer at my child's school.                     | 96.0       | 96.6 | 96.2 | 84.2          | 80.1 | 66.5 | 75.8        | 78.8 | 66.5 |
| I feel welcome at my child's school.   | 96.9       | 96.6 | 96.4 | 87.5          | 83.3 | 87.0 | 90.7        | 87.0 | 86.9 |
| My child's school effectively communicates information to me.                      | 91.3       | 93.3 | 93.0 | 75.6          | 80.8 | 78.2 | 71.8        | 78.6 | 81.1 |

At the elementary level, parents tended to rate all areas of communications and relationships very highly. Almost 95% of all parents rated each area satisfactorily. The only area of exception was involvement in decision-making about their child's education. No response differed significantly from the 2001 or 2003 surveys at the elementary level.

Similar to the elementary responses, most of the middle school numbers remained very similar to the rates in the previous two surveys; however, two areas declined significantly. Only 56.7% of the respondents indicated that they felt that teachers helped them understand the strengths and weaknesses of their children, a decline of 12.1 points from 2003. The percentage of parents who said that they were provided volunteer opportunities declined by 13.6 percentage points.

At the high school level, only two areas remained similar to 2003, while the other five areas declined significantly. It is difficult to determine the reasons for these changes in parent perception, but the decline certainly deserves further study. It would appear that most parents are satisfied with the general information that they receive from the high school but are less satisfied with the specific communication pertaining to their child. Parents appear to value the school websites, and the high school website was valued by the largest percentage of parents at the high school.



## Fees

Fees are increasing in schools across the Commonwealth. Not only are parents being asked to pay for more and more school supplies, but there are also fees for many services that have been free in the past. We asked parents who were paying a particular fee to tell us if they were satisfied with the fee.

The following table indicates their responses:

| Type of Fee    | Satisfied |       | Dissatisfied |       |
|----------------|-----------|-------|--------------|-------|
|                | 2003      | 2005  | 2003         | 2005  |
| Athletics      | 63.8%     | 70.5% | 36.2%        | 29.5% |
| Transportation | 57.1%     | 52.9% | 42.9%        | 47.1% |
| KASE           | 94.5%     | 84.1% | 5.5%         | 15.9% |
| Pre-school     | 88.5%     | 73.0% | 11.5%        | 27.0% |

A majority of parents are satisfied with the fees charged for all four services. Since 2003, the percentage declined in three of the four areas. Only in athletics did more parents say they were satisfied with the fee they were paying for their children to participate. It should be noted that the fees did not change between 2003 and 2005 for athletics, transportation, or KASE. The Pre-school fee did increase from \$2,600 to \$3,000.

## After-School/Co-curricular Activities

Responses from High school parents indicated that 72.3% were satisfied with the athletic program, a number that has remained somewhat stable over all three surveys (76.2% in 2001 and 72.2% in 2003). The survey also asked parents at all levels about other extended day opportunities for their children.

### **% Indicating Satisfaction**

| Statement   | Elementary |      |      | Middle School |      |      | High School |      |      |
|---|------------|------|------|---------------|------|------|-------------|------|------|
|   | 2001       | 2003 | 2005 | 2001          | 2003 | 2005 | 2001        | 2003 | 2005 |
| Teachers are available beyond the school day.               | 83.2       | 85.7 | 81.2 | 95.8          | 96.3 | 96.8 | 93.2        | 95.7 | 91.5 |
| My child is provided with ample after school opportunities. | 54.9       | 66.0 | 59.8 | 58.1          | 80.8 | 70.9 | 86.6        | 85.1 | 79.2 |
| After school programs meet the needs of my child.           | 58.9       | 74.2 | 61.5 | 57.7          | 79.4 | 72.6 | 79.1        | 77.8 | 71.9 |

Parents continue to be very satisfied with teacher availability beyond the school day, particularly at the middle and high school levels. Although a majority of parents are happy with the after-school programs and programs available to their children, the percentages have decreased at all levels since 2003. Because the reasons for the increasing dissatisfaction are unclear, this is an area for further discussion and data gathering.

## District Initiatives

A number of questions related to district level initiatives:

| <b>Question</b>  | <b>Yes</b> | <b>No</b> |
|--|------------|-----------|
| Are you aware of the district goals?                         | 60.2%      | 39.8%     |
| Are you aware of progress being made to achieve these goals? | 49.9%      | 50.1%     |
| Did you look at the 2003 Performance Report?                 | 94.9%      | 5.1%      |
| Did you find the Performance Report informative?             | 93.8%      | 6.2%      |
| Are you satisfied with systemwide administrative services?   | 91.5%      | 8.5%      |
| Do handbooks clearly convey school policies?                 | 97.0%      | 3.0%      |

Parents indicate that they are less aware of system goals than in the previous two surveys (72.3% in 2001 and 71.6% in 2003). In addition, slightly less than half of the parents were aware of progress being made to achieve these goals. School system goals should be well known, and efforts should be made to make parents more aware of the goals and the work being done to achieve them.

A very large majority of parents continue to find the Performance Report a useful and informative report. Also, significant majorities of parents were satisfied with systemwide administrative services and with school handbooks.

### **Opinion of Subgroups**

In addition to looking at results by level, the answers of two particular groups - parents of Black and Hispanic students and special education students - were analyzed. It is important to make sure that the feelings of smaller subgroups do not get lost in the overall averages. One must be somewhat circumspect in interpreting the data associated with both groups of parents because of the limited number of returns. Only 34 parents or 12.0% of the Black and Hispanic families returned their questionnaires, as compared to 23.9% of the general population. The 96 responses from parents of special education students represent 15.6% of their population.

The satisfaction rates for both of these subgroups were very similar in most areas to the overall results. Similar to the 2001 and 2003 responses, there were no significant differences with regard to the specific departments or the support services. Some of the other questions did generate some differences.

### **% Indicating Agreement**

| <b>Statement</b>  | <b>System</b> | <b>SPED</b> | <b>Black/Hispanic</b> |
|---|---------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| The school has high academic standards.                           | 91.0          | 88.5        | 91.1                  |
| The school maintains high standards for student behavior.         | 92.3          | 90.2        | 93.5                  |
| Student discipline issues are handled fairly.                     | 88.2          | 92.7        | 69.6                  |
| My child's school seems adequately funded.                        | 61.7          | 60.7        | 89.7                  |
| Teachers help me understand the strengths and needs of my child.  | 77.1          | 87.5        | 85.7                  |
| I am involved in decision making about the education of my child. | 75.1          | 91.5        | 60.0                  |
| There are places where my child feels unsafe.                     | 8.9           | 11.5        | 15.1                  |
| The school fosters an appreciation of student diversity.          | 94.4          | 94.5        | 91.3                  |
| Instructional materials are representative of diverse cultures.   | 91.5          | 84.0        | 60.9                  |

Parents of special education and Black and Hispanic students were very similar to the general population in believing that their schools had high standards for academics as well as behavior. About 9 in 10 of the respondents in each of these areas indicated satisfaction. Although all groups believe that there are high standards for behavior, the parents of Black and Hispanic students are less likely to believe disciplinary issues are handled fairly. The parents of Black and Hispanic students are also much more likely to be satisfied with the funding for their schools than the general population.

Both minority and special education parents are more likely to believe that teachers are helpful to them in understanding the needs of their children; however, involvement in decision-making shows great variability. Special education parents feel much more involved, probably because of the mandated participation and approval process demanded in the special education regulations, while minority parents feel much less involved in the decision-making process.

Special education parents are slightly more likely to indicate that there are places where their children feel unsafe in school, but a much higher percentage of minority parents (15.1% as opposed to 8.9% of the general population) indicate that their children have felt unsafe in school. Both minority and special education parents believe that the schools foster an appreciation of diversity, but a much small percentage of minority parents believe that diverse cultures are represented in school instructional materials.

### **Technology**

In addition to issues of satisfaction, each of the parental surveys has been used to gather information about a particular issue (e.g. East Asian studies). This year the questions related to technology. The information gathered included the following:

|  |                         |   |                    |
|--|-------------------------|---|--------------------|
| Do you have a home computer?   | <b>Yes</b> - 99.0%      | <b>No</b> – 1.0%                                  |                    |
| Which computer platform do you have at home?   | <b>Macintosh</b> – 7.8% | <b>Windows</b> – 82.5%                            | <b>Both</b> – 9.7% |
| Does your child have access to a computer at home for schoolwork?  | <b>Yes</b> – 96.8%      | <b>No</b> – 3.2%                                  |                    |
| Is your computer connected to the Internet?  | <b>Yes</b> – 98.6%      | <b>No</b> – 1.4%                                  |                    |
| Which type of Internet connection do you have?   | <b>Dial-up</b> – 5.6%   | <b>High-Speed/DSL</b><br><b>Broadband</b> – 94.3% |                    |
| For middle school parents, would you be interested in your child having access to a laptop to use for school-related projects both in school and at home?                    | <b>Yes</b> – 73.8%      | <b>No</b> – 26.2%                                 |                    |
| For middle school parents, would you be interested in participating in a program that would enable you to purchase a laptop at a reduced rate over a period of 3 to 4 years? | <b>Yes</b> – 66.3%      | <b>No</b> – 33.7%                                 |                    |

### **Summary and Conclusion**

Academic areas, the core mission of a school system, continue to be the highest rated areas by parents. Almost seven out of eight parents indicate that they are satisfied or very satisfied with the academic instruction that is given to their children. A very similar percentage of parents (86%) say they are pleased with school services (nursing, guidance, lunch, etc.). Parents are also very happy with the work their schools are doing to prepare their children to be citizens in today’s society. Over 97% believe that the schools are doing a good job of encouraging their children to be good citizens.

While most of the results are positive, the survey results raise a number of questions and concerns for further study or consideration:

- 1) Parents indicated their greatest levels of dissatisfaction in their responses to questions about resources. (It is significant that the survey was administered in January, long before the Town's override vote.) Only 60% of parents believe that their schools are adequately funded, and only 56.6% believe that the schools have adequate space for their children. Also within the financial realm, parental dissatisfaction with fees, while still a minority opinion, is growing; and the survey preceded recent significant increases in a number of the fees.
- 2) Parents should be aware of systemwide goals and the progress being made towards achieving them. It is unclear why so many parents were unfamiliar with the goals (almost 40%) or were unaware of the system's progress in achieving them (over 50%). Information about these goals is reported annually in the system's Performance Report, and almost 95% of the parents reported reading the report; however, this mechanism is obviously not achieving the desired result in this area.
- 3) While academic areas were rated very highly, the decline in satisfaction in elementary and middle school mathematics deserves further analysis. These efforts have already begun. Also, while there have been significant gains in satisfaction for foreign language instruction, it still lags significantly behind the other subject areas.
- 4) At the high school, the number of parents indicating concern around safety increased from 14.9% to 23.7%. They also are less satisfied with standards of behavior than in the past (83.4% in 2005, 86.6% in 2003, 91.3% in 2001).
- 5) Parents are less satisfied with communication at the high school level. While they seemed happy with the general information made available to them through handbooks, newsletters, etc., their responses indicate that they are less happy with communication about their individual children.
- 6) Dissatisfaction seems to be increasing about the types and amount of after-school programming available to children. While this is not always a direct school responsibility, it will be important to try to understand what parents are looking for in after-school programs for their children.
- 7) It is always important to pay attention to discrepancies in subgroup data. While the number of minority respondents raises some questions about the reliability of the data, efforts should be made to reach out to the larger population of Black and Hispanic parents to understand how they feel about their involvement in decision-making in school and whether or not they believe disciplinary issues are handled fairly.