



Public Schools

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January 10, 2011

Dear Parents, Staff, Students, and Residents of the Danvers Community,

I want to start by wishing you all a Happy New Year. I would like to begin this New Year with a review of some important information you shared with us in November and December. At that time, you were kind to take the time to share your thoughts. Now it is my turn to share with you what we learned.

Let me start by expressing my most sincere thanks to everyone who participated in this survey. Responding to surveys takes time from our busy schedules and sometimes we are tempted to skip them. Therefore, I am sure you will appreciate the fact that we have decided to conduct only two parent surveys in any given year. Students will see three while staff and teachers will have a few more. By planning in advance and adopting a systematic approach, our goal is to reduce the number of times we interrupt your busy schedules. Yet, by using comprehensive surveys, we will have access to the feedback on how well we are meeting your expectations.

If you were unable to participate in this survey, you will have another chance in March. I urge you to share your thoughts with us. We want to hear from every parent and resident of this community – even if you have never completed one of our surveys before. What I can assure you is that every response is important; every viewpoint is considered and informs us about how to become better. I can also assure you that I will quickly turn around and share with you what we heard from you – everything as it is, the good news and the areas where you want us to improve. I believe our community expects this level of transparency and deserves this kind of collaborative decision making on the critical issues surrounding how we educate our children.

In 2008 we adopted our fourth Strategic Plan. A Strategic Plan is a statement of topics on which we commit to focus and highlights what we refer to as our “Success Measures.” Every year we must ask ourselves the tough questions: have we picked the right goals and are we meeting the goals we have set for ourselves? I am pleased to report that on each of the four Success Measure themes addressed in the recent survey, we received positive results. I am particularly gratified to note that all areas that were made a priority were also identified as areas of strength in the survey.

1. We had committed to doing a better job of preparing our students for the next grade level. The survey shows over 80% of parents and teachers believe we are doing a good job at this. Our commitment to ensure children feel well supported as they progress from elementary to middle and from middle to high schools is bearing fruit – nearly 90% of 6th grade parents indicated this was done well. We have improved in how we have helped our 9th graders transition to high school, but there is some work to be done there.
2. Overall, 92% of parents indicated they feel welcomed at their child’s school.
3. Over 90% of our teachers and staff feel respected by principals and other teachers, and overall 80% feel included in the decisions we make. We can be very proud of this positive culture among our teachers and staff and we intend to work hard to maintain and even further improve upon it.

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4. We are well into the 21st century. Today's educational methods and the way in which our children learn are very different from even that of a few years ago. I am pleased to note that the survey indicates that our students have access to and success with a variety of technology in everyday instruction.
5. We set ambitious goals concerning communication and partnership with our community. Over 90% of parents indicated they were able to reach their child's principal and received a courteous and professional consideration of their concerns.
6. Overall, 83% of our parents feel the decisions that principals make are made with the best interest of students in mind.

While I celebrate these findings, clearly, there is work ahead of us and we received feedback on the several issues that need greater attention. The School Committee and the district leadership team are looking closely at this list and we intend to prioritize making improvements in each of them.

1. Whereas nearly all teachers believe their students have an adult they can talk to concerning their progress, goals and issues, 77% of parents indicated they thought this was true. We will investigate why this gap exists and make sure all our children can find the help they need at school.
2. While the district has provided ongoing training for teachers, many of our teachers have asked for better tools and training towards meeting the individual needs of all students. We will look at this closely as we realign our budget to meet our priorities.
3. While our teachers feel that the way we embrace and attend to issues of diversity is an area of strength, our parents and students disagreed, indicating a need for more attention and growth in this area. We intend to have candid conversations with our students to explore how we can do a better job of encouraging respect for those who are different than us.
4. We realize we need to do and can do a better job of keeping parents informed about the behavior of their children at school and of sharing with parents ideas on how they can support their children at home.

Forty-two percent of parents, 67% of teachers and 81% of students participated in this survey. This represents high participation rates compared to surveys conducted in public schools in general. Many individuals and organizations assisted with this – I want to recognize and thank our principals and teachers. I also want to recognize the assistance received from Doug Rendell and the staff at Peabody Institute Library who offered assistance of any parent who needed Internet access to participate in the survey.

Our goal is to improve participation of our parents to over 50% in our next survey. I invite you to reach out to your neighbors and friends and invite them all to join this conversation to make Danvers Schools the best public school system in the state.

Sincerely,



Lisa Dana, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools