

Kenilworth School District No. 38-Annual Parent Survey 2013
Executive Summary

The Kenilworth School District No. 38 Board of Education annually solicits community feedback in the form of a parent survey. Two forms of the survey exist, a long and a short version, which are sent in alternate years. In June of the 2012-13 school year, short version parent surveys were sent electronically to 327 households representing 588 registered children. We requested that parents complete one survey per household. We received 121 responses, which represents a household response rate of 37%. In 2012 we conducted the long survey with a response rate of close to 49% and in 2011 we conducted the short survey with a response rate of 24%.

We would like to thank all those who participated. The full results of the survey are provided to each Board of Education member and are reviewed in detail by the Communication Committee of the Board. The feedback is highly valued as a tool for monitoring community opinion, preference and perception with regard to our school's educational culture and performance.

Some key highlights from the survey include:

- A majority of respondents rated favorably (Excellent or Good) their children's school year, quality of curriculum and quality of instruction.
- An overwhelmingly number of respondents shared praise for our teachers citing them as dedicated, outstanding, caring and passionate. Respondents valued their ability to instill a passion for learning, challenge students, provide a nurturing environment and know students as individuals.
- About half of the respondents thought the Kenilworth School District has been fiscally responsible. Respondents suggested the District continue to dedicate resources to attracting and retaining high quality teachers, enhancing the curriculum and improving the infrastructure.
- Respondents continue to value the small class sizes, close-knit community and K-8 neighborhood school.
- Most respondents felt their children were sufficiently challenged; however, several respondents shared concerns in regards to the curriculum and would like to see improvements in critical thinking, math, science and preparedness for high school.
- Respondents highlighted communication and transparency by the Administration as a clear area of improvement. Respondents would like to see more open, honest, concise, and timely communication from the Administration to parents, and improved 2-way dialogue on key issues.
- Respondents also expressed concerns with the leadership skills of the Administration and the high turnover of Principals. Respondents cited a need for the Administration to improve community relations, transparency and problem solving.

The following summarizes the responses to the Annual Parent Survey.

1. Please indicate the areas where you had children enrolled during the 2012-13 school year.

Primary (K-2)	Intermediate (3-5)	Junior High (6-8)
51.2%	54.5%	55.4%

2. Overall, how do you rate your child's (children's) school year?

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	No Opinion/ Don't Know	Rating Count
Child One	47.1%	39.7%	10.7%	1.7%	0.8%	121
Child Two	43.2%	50.6%	3.7%	1.2%	1.2%	81
Child Three	38.2%	47.1%	5.9%	5.9%	2.9%	34
Child Four	0.0%	66.2%	0.0%	33.3%	0.0%	3
Child Five	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0

The majority of respondents rated their child(ren's) school year Excellent or Good. In the 2012 Parent Survey, 47.9% of parents rated their child's school year as Excellent and 39.7% rated their child's school year as Good.

Comments ranged on a variety of topics. The majority of positive comments related to the high quality of the teaching staff across several grade levels and subject areas. Some positive comments were made regarding the *Math in Focus* pilot in 2nd and 4th grades. The three main opportunities for improvement were communication and visibility of the principal, leadership of the administration (including principal turnover, conflict resolution between parents and administration and swift, transparent problem solving) and inconsistency of curriculum with a desire for more differentiation and more challenging opportunities for the students.

3. Overall, how do you rate the quality of the curriculum?

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	No Opinion/ Don't Know	Rating Count
Child One	36.4%	42.1%	17.4%	2.5%	1.7%	121
Child Two	33.3%	43.2%	18.5%	3.7%	1.2%	81
Child Three	23.5%	47.1%	17.6%	8.8%	2.9%	34
Child Four	0.0%	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%	0.0%	3
Child Five	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0

The majority of respondents rated the quality of curriculum Excellent or Good. In the 2012 Parent Survey the question was structured by subject area so it is difficult to make a direct comparison. Comments were split regarding the math curriculum with positive comments about the *Math in Focus* and a challenging curriculum, as well as concerns about the inconsistency of the math curriculum. The majority of comments regarding areas of improvement were focused on the Junior High curriculum and overall Science curriculum. Parents cited concerns with the transition to Junior High and the desire for students to be better prepared in terms of time management, study skills and executive functioning. Additionally, respondents expressed concerns with the Junior High writing program and requested smaller groups along with more individualized attention in reading and writing. Concerns regarding Science were on the overall strength of the curriculum and did not emphasize a certain grade level.

4. Overall, how do you rate the quality of instruction?

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	No Opinion/ Don't Know	Rating Count
Child One	47.1%	44.6%	7.4%	0.8%	0.0%	121

Child Two	50.0%	40.0%	10.0%	0.0%	0.0%	80
Child Three	50.0%	38.2%	8.8%	2.9%	0.0%	34
Child Four	0.0%	66.7%	0.0%	33.3%	0.0%	3
Child Five	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0

Almost 50% of respondents for each child rated the quality of the instruction as Excellent and approximately 40% rating the quality of instruction as Good. Comments were evenly split between strengths and weaknesses regarding the quality of instruction. Positive comments related to specific teachers across a variety of grade levels. Praise for teachers was centered on challenging the students, providing a nurturing environment and knowing them as individuals. Comments regarding opportunities for improvement with instruction ranged across a variety of topics with no real consistent response. A few comments were made about the homework being “busy work” and being used as an “instruction tool”. Some comments centered around Junior High with too many substitute teachers, a need for a more formal comment/feedback system, and teachers being limited by a poor curriculum in science, critical thinking and writing skills.

- Response to Intervention (RtI or “Enrichment”) is defined as a program that focuses on the individual needs of students. Has (Have) your child (Children) had experience with RtI and/or Enrichment during this school year?

	Yes	No	Not Sure	Rating Count
Child One	43.3%	40.0%	16.7%	120
Child Two	39.2%	45.6%	15.2%	79
Child Three	36.4%	36.4%	27.3%	33
Child Four	33.3%	66.7%	0.0%	3
Child Five	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0

Over half of the respondents for this question either did not believe their child(ren) received RtI or were not sure. Positive comments were more focused on grades K-5 where parents seem to be more aware of the specific enrichment block and the types of differentiation their children receive. Negative comments ranged on a variety of topics including: the program not being clearly communicated to parents, a few Junior High students having a negative experience with RtI, and parents not knowing if the program exists.

- Overall was (were) your child (children) sufficiently challenged academically during the past school year?

	Yes	No	Not Sure	Rating Count
Child One	79.3%	14.0%	6.6%	121
Child Two	75.9%	19.0%	5.1%	79
Child Three	67.6%	26.5%	5.9%	34
Child Four	33.3%	66.7%	0.0%	3
Child Five	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0

The majority of respondents believe that their children have been sufficiently challenged this year. In the 2012 Parent Survey, 54.8% of respondents agreed with their children being sufficiently challenged while 33.0% disagreed.

The majority of comments focused on the question being too broad and that in some areas their child was challenged and in other areas there were opportunities for improvement. Some respondents commented that it is very teacher dependent. A few comments were made regarding too much homework and/or the work being “busy work” rather than focusing on critically analyzing the material taught in class.

7. During the past school year there has been considerable discussion on the structure of the school day. Do you feel adequately informed on this topic?

Yes	No	Not Sure
50.4%	37.2%	12.4%

Responses to this question were almost evenly split between feeling adequately informed and not being adequately informed or not sure. There were a considerable number of comments for this question. The comments can be divided into three categories: how the master schedule changes were communicated, specific comments either for or against the proposed changes and specific comments about shortening the lunch period. A large majority of the comments pertained to the manner in which the master schedule was communicated to the parents. These comments centered on a lack of clear, concise communication of the need for the proposed changes. Parents commented on not being adequately informed by the administration, administrators contradicting themselves when presenting the information in various settings, uncertainty about the benefits and concerns of the proposed changes, and the enrichment period being misrepresented or not clearly explained. Responses regarding master schedule changes were mixed with some in favor of the proposed changes and others against them. These comments were split evenly with a slight favor against the proposed changes. There was a specific comment in favor of shortening lunch and closing the campus and a few comments in support of the current lunch period for students to have recess, go home or use the time to catch up on homework, meet with teachers, or attend a study session.

The 2012 Parent Survey asked parents to comment on the master schedule. The majority of comments in that survey were focused on the topic of lunch. Most felt that the current lunch model offered kids too little time to eat. Most indicated that they highly value the open campus with a small minority suggesting a closed campus to allow for more instructional time and more reliable safety. Responses regarding the length of the school day ran the gamut with some suggesting a longer day while others wanting a later start time or shorter day.

8. How often do you read the *Sears to Home*? Please provide comments regarding the format.

	Response Percent	Response Count
Every Week	61.2%	74
Almost Every Week	27.3%	33
Once a Month	9.1%	11
Never	2.5%	3

The majority of the respondents read the *Sears to Home* on a regular basis. A fair amount of respondents commented that the format is fine. Others felt that the format is difficult to read on a mobile phone. Some respondents prefer the old model of emails on Tuesdays/Fridays with current and critical information communicated in a timely manner with a longer

newsletter less frequently for information that is not time-sensitive. A few respondents commented that the information in the *Sears to Home* is not pertinent and lacks substance.

9. The Board of Education (BOE) is currently evaluating methods with which we communicate. Please indicate how often you use each of the following and provide comments as their effectiveness.

	Often	Seldom	Never	No Opinion / Don't Know	Rating Count
BOE Agendas	30.0%	50.0%	17.5%	2.5%	120
BOE Minutes	26.3%	54.2%	16.1%	3.4%	118
BOE Briefs	48.3%	33.1%	13.6%	5.1%	118
BOE Videotape	18.5%	29.4%	48.7%	3.4%	119
BOE Live Streaming	11.8%	28.6%	52.1%	7.6%	119
BOE Annual Report	42.0%	30.3%	22.7%	5.0%	119
BOE <i>Joseph Sears Letter</i>	77.5%	17.5%	2.5%	2.5%	120

Based on the responses, the most frequently used method of communication from the BOE to the community is the *BOE Joseph Sears Letter*. This is a hard copy letter published by the BOE and sent to the entire community once per year. Based on the responses, it appears that this communication may be mistaken with the *Sears to Home* published by the Principal on a regular basis. The Board Briefs are the second most frequently used communication from the BOE and the BOE Annual Report is the third most frequently used. Respondents commented that they are pleased with the offering of Live Streaming and Videotaping of the meetings. Some concerns were shared regarding poor sound quality. Positive comments were shared in regards to the recent increase in transparency with the topics on the agenda, and information included in the Board Briefs and Minutes. One comment supported Public Comment at the beginning and end of meeting and the addition of community forums. A few comments suggested having agendas sent to the community prior to the meetings.

10. The Board of Education is considering offering interactive community forums where two Board members would be available for informal conversations. Please indicate how likely you would be to attend the following:

	Very Likely	Somewhat Likely	Highly Unlikely	No Opinion / Don't know	Rating Count
Morning Session	28.6%	31.3%	33.9%	6.3%	112
Afternoon Session	18.5%	35.2%	39.8%	6.5%	108
Evening Session	28.8%	36.9%	29.7%	4.5%	111

Only 29% of respondents are Very Likely to attend a community forum while another 30% are Highly Unlikely to attend. Morning and Evening Sessions are the most desirable times of day for the community forums. Comments were generally supportive of having these interactive community forums. A suggestion was made to have a current topic to base the discussion around.

11. Are you familiar with the Outdoor Classroom (west side of Baker Building) at Sears School?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	80.2%	97
No	15.7%	19
No Opinion / Don't know	4.1%	5

A large majority of the respondents are aware of the Outdoor Classroom. Positive comments included praise for the parents, students and JSSPVA efforts to bring this to fruition. Several respondents commented that they know of the classroom but would like more information about its purpose, how it will be used and the cost/benefit analysis of maintaining it. Some concerns were raised that a considerable amount of resources were deployed to create and maintain the classroom yet priority should be placed on other initiatives including the advancement of the curriculum.

12. For the 10th year in a row, the State Board of Education has awarded the Kenilworth School District with the highest financial rating. Do you think the District has been fiscally responsible this past year:

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	50.4%	61
No	16.5%	20
No Opinion / Don't know	33.1%	40

About half of the respondents rated the BOE as being fiscally responsible, a sixth rated otherwise and a third did not have an opinion or didn't know. In the 2012 Parent Survey 51.7% of the respondents were unsure if the District had been fiscally responsible but 66.8% felt the District resources added to the learning experience of their children. In that survey, respondents were split on opinions as to whether or not they feel informed about the financial status of the District (feel informed 32.5%, do not feel informed 35.5%, unsure 32.0%).

The majority of the comments from this survey expressed concerns about particular aspects of District expenditures. The most frequent concerns were regarding administrative costs and in particular the District having too many administrators, compensation too high for the administrators (Superintendent and Principal), overuse of consultants, and too many substitutes for teachers being pulled out of the classroom to attend meetings. Some respondents suggested that the Board should take a closer look at expenditures to ensure they are having a direct and positive impact on education quality.

13. In what area(s) should the District invest financial resources going forward?

There were a myriad of responses to this question with three key themes: teachers, curriculum enhancements, and infrastructure improvements. The majority of comments were focused on attracting and retaining high quality teachers and giving them the necessary resources to be most effective. There were also several comments about enhancing various aspects of the curriculum with a variety of subjects highlighted. The most frequent subjects mentioned were math, science (including science labs), and technology. A significant number of respondents would like to see infrastructure improvements primarily around adding air conditioning throughout the building and improving the cafeterias. Other comments around infrastructure mentioned the need to improve classroom space and general building improvements and enhancing the safety and security of our building.

14. The District is currently drafting a Strategic Plan. Are you familiar with the Strategic Plan Framework?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	56.2%	68
No	38.0%	46
No Opinion / Don't know	5.8%	7

Just over half of the respondents are familiar with the Strategic Plan. Comments were mixed between support for the efforts to date and a concern that the process is taking too long. A few comments suggested that there should be more awareness of the plan to the broader community.

15. One goal of the Strategic Plan focuses on curriculum. What do you feel should be the top priority for curriculum?

There were a variety of responses to this question with some key themes. The most frequent response was around a deeper focus on the core curriculum – math, science, reading and writing. Respondents mentioned a desire to focus more on the basics of the core curriculum while providing more opportunities for critical thinking, analysis and conceptual understanding of topics. There were also several comments pertaining to Junior High students being inadequately prepared for high school / New Trier with some desire for a more demanding Junior High curriculum and an improved writing program. Some comments mentioned a desire for a more established gifted program as well as a more personalized and differentiated education. Some comments were made in regards to enhancing the curriculum beyond the required Common Core State Standards.

16. One goal of the Strategic Plan focuses on school and community culture. What do you feel should be the top priority for culture?

Respondents had a wide variety of comments regarding the school culture. A handful of respondents commented that the culture at the school is great. The most frequent response related to discipline and the need to continue to focus on the anti-bullying policy. Some comments suggested that the school should have stricter discipline and a “no tolerance” bullying policy. The second most frequent response focused on improving respect along core constituencies including students, parents, faculty, and administration. Along these same lines, comments were made about more appreciation for students’ differences and the value of diversity. There were several comments about accountability and personal responsibility of the students. Some of these comments mentioned the desire for parents to be more “hands off”. Several comments were also made in regards to a desire to improve the relationship between the community and the Board of Education (BOE) and Administration. These comments focused on more transparency and openness by the BOE and Administration, improved communication and collaboration with the community, rebuilding trust and listening to the input of the community. Comments were also made in regards to a desire for teachers to feel like they can express their opinions and be heard even if their perspective is different from that of the administration. Some respondents commented on the importance of long-standing traditions at the school. In contrast, others suggested evaluating traditions making changes where appropriate.

17. One goal of the Strategic Plan focuses on District, School and community communication. What do you feel should be the top priority for communication?

There were a variety of responses to this question with some consistent themes in the comments. The largest majority of respondents communicated a desire for increased transparency primarily by the Administration but also by the Board of Education. Many parents expressed a strong desire for open, honest and timely communication that is clear and concise. Respondents would like to see the trust rebuilt between the community and the Board of Education and Administration. Several comments were made about a need for the Administration and Board of Education to be in front of the community soliciting input from stakeholders (faculty, parents, community members) on key decisions, proactively communicating issues well in advance of decisions and providing a forum for the community to openly discuss topics with the Board of Education and Administration. Some respondents also commented about a need for the Administration to be more open about sharing weaknesses or issues and the plan to fix or improve them. Respondents also commented on need for the District to share the Strategic Plan with the community and openly monitor progress. There were also positive comments related to communication being “sufficient” and generally working well.

18. What do you think is especially good about Sears School?

Respondents gave a variety of answers to this question with the following top three themes: teachers, sense of community and small class sizes. A large majority of respondents cited teachers as a core strength at Sears School and described them as caring, excellent, outstanding, dedicated and having a passion for learning. Several respondents also highlighted the community involvement / sense of community / close-knit community as being especially good at Sears School. A number of other responses included the following strengths: small class sizes, warm, safe neighborhood school, traditions, academics, K-8 school, students, music program, ability to go home for lunch, facility, student services, and technology.

19. What would you like to see changed or improved?

There were a multitude of responses to this question with the majority of comments focusing on curriculum and Administration. Suggestions for improvement in the curriculum focused on math, science, foreign language and physical education. Other comments mentioned a desire to see improvements in enrichment opportunities, preparedness for high school, more focus on core subjects, and a reduction in school concerts, assemblies, activities, etc.

A large majority of comments cited a desire to see improvements with the Administration, primarily the Superintendent and Principal. Respondents expressed a desire to have better leadership, improved communication, and more transparency. Several respondents cited a broken or strained relationship between the Administration and the community. Some respondents expressed a desire to see changes in the Administration. Respondents expressed frustration in the turnover of Principals and would like to see the District attract and retain a high quality Principal with longevity. Respondents commented on a need for strong, stable leaders who view the community as partners and who place the teachers and students first. Some respondents would like to see the Administration more open to parents’ ideas while others feel parents have too much influence in decision-making. Respondents also mentioned

a need to improve the culture between the Administration and faculty. Several respondents highlighted a need for better communication with parents. Respondents would like to see frequent communication on key issues impacting student and families, and more two-way dialogue with the Administration.

Other responses included a desire to see more discipline and emphasis on anti-bullying, a friendlier front office staff, and improvements to lunch/ recess.

Once again, we would like to thank those parents who participated in the survey. All of the data and comments provided are reviewed carefully and help to provide direction to the Board of Education. The more parents that participate in the survey, the better we are able to respond to consensus concerns and determine the priorities parents have for the children of the Kenilworth School District No. 38 and the Joseph Sears School.

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