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Survey: Springfield Public Schools students and teachers like schools

Participants quizzed on academics, buildings, support.

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News-Leader

Nearly all Springfield Public Schools students say they get it.

They understand that doing well in school will help them later in life.

Better yet, the majority of elementary, middle and high school students recently surveyed by the state say they have good teachers who care and are there to listen and help.

"We have great teachers," said school board president Gerry Lee. "It doesn't surprise me that students feel that way."

Last fall, more than 13,000 students in grades 3-12 -- plus a majority of educators, support staff, board members and parents -- completed in-depth surveys about the school environment and educational process.

They were quizzed on academic rigor, the condition of buildings and the level of community support for schools.

"It's one of the methods that we get feedback from our stakeholders," Lee said. "It's a really important piece of feedback about what our parents are thinking, what our community is thinking."

The results of all the surveys will be included in the district's state accreditation review.

Parent survey results are expected to follow a state visit in March but summary reports for the other groups were posted by the state in late December.

In a Sept. 27 letter to parents, Superintendent Norm Ridder said the survey results would make the district better.

"The aggregated results will be used to guide decisions regarding improvements in the programs and services we provide to our students," he wrote.

"strong numbers"

Survey results for various groups paint a picture of how groups view the district, schools and each other.

They offer insight into how classroom material is presented and key academic skills, like note-taking, are taught.

In most cases, the survey asked respondents to agree, disagree or remain neutral on a statement such as "I feel safe at school."

Most felt safe but the level varied by group, ranging from 56 percent among high school students to 93

percent among educators.

A majority of students indicate teachers believe in them and expect them to do well. Teachers, in turn, have faith in each other and their principals.

"Those are really strong numbers," said Ray Smith, president of the Springfield National Education Association. "Those are really healthy things."

At the high school level, 70 percent of students describe their education as good or excellent. Less than 7 percent mark it as below average or poor.

More than 90 percent of teachers stated they look forward to each working day. Almost as many stated if they were granted a do-over, they would still choose to teach.

"Teachers are committed to their professions and are truly dedicated to their work," Smith said. "It's hard work."

Among teachers, 91 percent agreed that "all staff in our school hold high expectations for student learning."

"We have very dedicated teachers across this district ... spending many hours outside of contract time to provide the best education possible for students," said Glenda Thurkill, president of the local Missouri State Teachers Association.

No major concerns were noted by faculty but some numbers were lower.

For example, less than 30 percent of faculty "strongly agree" the amount of "essential content" can be taught in the allotted time.

And only 54 percent of faculty agree the community provides enough funding to adequately maintain quality programs.

However, 9 out of 10 educators agree "the community is proud of this school." A majority of middle and high school students feel the same way.

upcoming report

District officials declined to be interviewed on survey specifics because they said they hadn't had a chance to fully review the results yet.

"Our established process is to conduct a formal analysis of this data, culminating with a public reporting to our stakeholders and the school board," spokeswoman Pam Bodine wrote in an e-mail.

The data is tentatively scheduled to be part of a quarterly report presented to the school board in April.

Lee and board members Kris Callen and Bruce Renner said it's not uncommon for survey results to trigger change.

Callen said they complement external surveys of frequent voters. "It gives us a good idea," she said. "We've used those a lot."

Renner said previous surveys have been used to improve schools.

"We ought to see some recommendations come to the board," Renner said. "It's valuable information at the school level and the district level."

Additional Facts

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