



PRE K – 12TH GRADE EDUCATION IN DETROIT:

PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS SURVEY RESULTS

DECEMBER 2005

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**The research contained in this report is the product of
Michigan State University Urban Affairs Programs
and the Department of Family and Child Ecology**



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New Detroit 2005 Parent/Caregiver Survey Summary Report December 2005

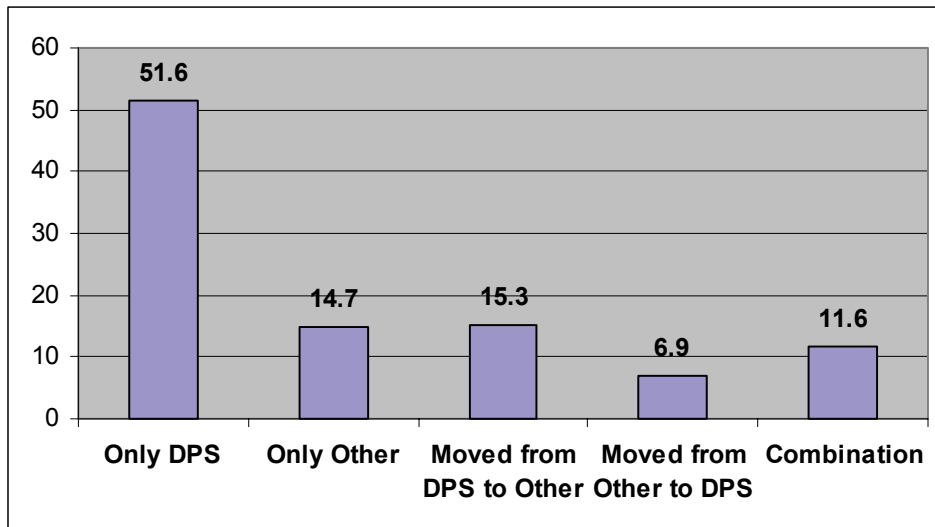
Background and Purpose

New Detroit has been a consistent advocate for improvement of public education in Detroit and has actively supported the Detroit Public Schools (DPS) since implementation of the state-ordered school improvement plan in 1999. Since then, New Detroit has conducted in-depth research among key Detroit Public Schools stakeholders to determine their views of the school system's challenges and progress.

The Skillman Foundation has funded this research, which was conducted by Michigan State University in conjunction with New Detroit staff. Comprehensive interviews, surveys and focus groups have been conducted with the Detroit Public Schools management team, community/civic leaders, DPS teachers, and parents. In addition, a 2004 research study investigated the individual environments of 24 low and high-achieving Detroit Public Schools to assess the correlation between academic performance and neighborhood conditions.

In 2005, a survey was conducted of parents and caregivers with school aged children (Pre K – 12th grade) living or attending school in Detroit. The following chart describes the schools attended by children of parents included in the survey sample.

Schools Attended by Respondents' Child(ren)



The purpose of the survey was to obtain the following information:

- How parents/caregivers rate their child's education, whether at a Detroit Public School, charter school, private, or parochial school
- Parents/caregivers' views on parental and community involvement in the schools
- Parents/caregivers' likelihood of moving their children to another school and their reasons for doing so
- Parents/caregivers' recommendations for improving the Detroit Public Schools

Methodology and Sample

A four-page survey with 18 questions (both closed-end and open-end) was administered to 344 parents/caregivers. Respondents were recruited from a variety of community organizations, which are listed in the appendix. In addition to questions about their children's education, the survey included basic

demographic information. The surveys were distributed and completed by three methods: in-person, by mail and via email from July to September, 2005.

While the survey sample was not randomly chosen from among all Detroit residents, an analysis of key demographics indicated comparability between respondents and the Detroit population as a whole. Analysis of race and ethnicity, income and the age of respondents indicated the following:

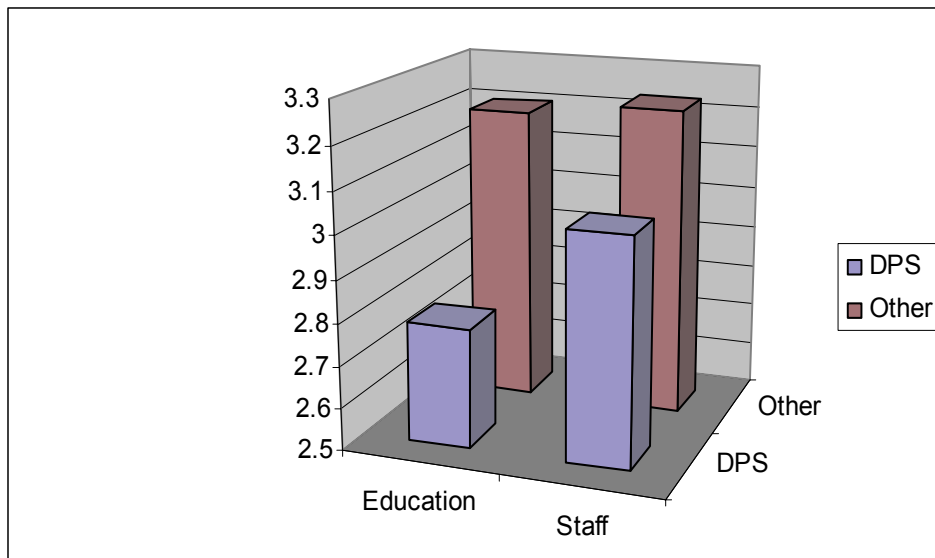
- Eighty-seven percent were African Americans and 6% were Latinos.
- The median family income was \$31,900. The incomes of families whose children attend non-DPS schools are significantly higher than the incomes of DPS students' families. Less than one-fifth of families with annual incomes under \$20,000 have children attending non-DPS schools.
- Three-quarters of respondents were females, reflecting the large proportion of female heads of households in the city and the greater likelihood of women to participate in a survey. There were no significant differences among the responses of females and males who participated in the survey.
- More than two-thirds of respondents were 30 to 40 years old, and one-fifth were over 50.
- Almost 60% of respondents had elementary school age children, about half had middle-school age children, and approximately 45% had children in high school. Forty-five percent of respondents had children in more than one level of school.

Findings

Parents/Caregivers' Ratings of Their Child's Education

More than two-thirds (65%) of all survey respondents rated their child's education at their current school as "great" or "good." Staff ratings were even higher—75% as "great" or "good." However, there is a significant disparity among DPS and non-DPS parents as shown in the table below. With a scale of 1 to 4, the mean rating of overall educational quality was almost 3.2 for non-DPS parents and approximately 2.7 for DPS parents. The gap in the rating of staff was less. The DPS parents rated staff at a mean of 2.8 and the non-DPS parents' mean score was over 3.2.

Ratings of Education and Staff by DPS and Other School Parents



While the DPS parents' ratings were lower, they were not as low as might be expected, given the wide-spread criticism of the school system reflected in a later survey question and their likelihood to consider other schools for their children. Perhaps the most dissatisfied parents have transferred their children to other schools and those who remain within the DPS have perhaps found an acceptable school.

Parental and Community Involvement in Their Child's Education

Parents/caregivers were asked to indicate their level of involvement in their child's education and more than 86% reported being "very involved" or "involved." "Involvement" wasn't defined but this response seems curious in light of the lack of parental involvement described by many teachers and principals in Detroit.

The number of parents who reported that they were "very involved" was higher for DPS parents—58.2% versus 51.6% for non-DPS parents.

When asked the most important way for a parent to be involved, respondents as a whole were almost evenly split between direct involvement with the child (38.3%) versus participation with the teacher and in the classroom. Involvement in school activities was given lesser weight—about one-quarter cited it as the most important form of parental involvement.

Examples of direct involvement with the child included: asking about and assisting with homework; showing love and support; monitoring attendance; knowing what is being taught; and listening to the child and knowing their friends.

Involvement with the teacher was reported as obtaining progress reports, visiting classrooms regularly, getting to know the teacher and attending a parent/teacher conference. Those who described school involvement as most important mentioned attending PTA and board meetings, participating in school activities and volunteering when needed.

Parent/Caregivers' Likelihood to Move Their Child to Another School

Many respondents have children (51.6%) that only attended DPS schools while others (14.7%) have children that only attended non-DPS schools. The remaining 33.7% of respondents include parents that have a child in both the Detroit Public Schools and some other non-DPS school system (12%) and 7% who moved their child from private, charter or religious school into the Detroit Public Schools.

Among those who had transferred their children to a non-DPS school (15.3%), reasons centered around the advantages of the other school, the lack of academic quality within the DPS, general dissatisfaction with the school system and safety issues.

Examples of Positive Comments about the Other School:

- Better curriculum
- More opportunities
- Christian education
- Better location

Academic Reasons:

- Lack of interest by teachers
- Low MEAP scores
- Lack of class work

General Reasons:

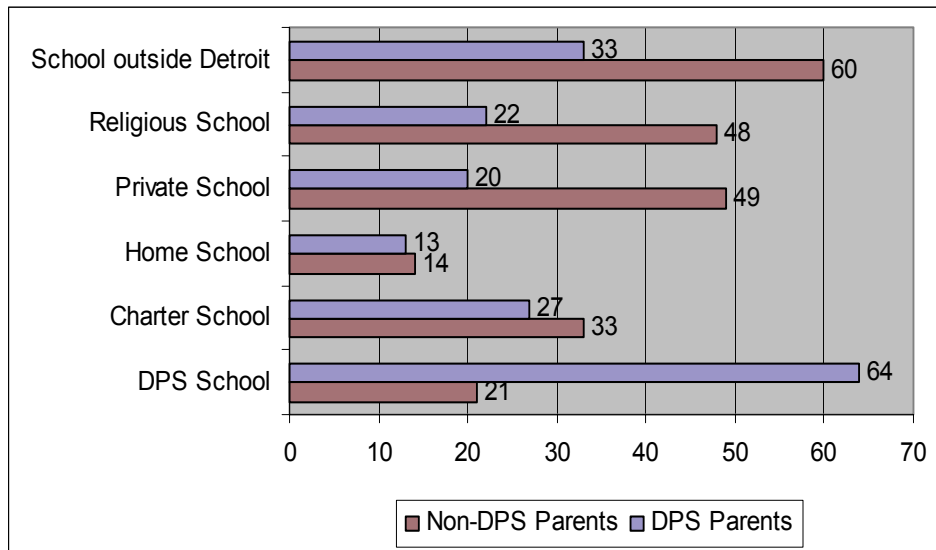
- Displeasure with school system
- Inadequate resources
- Too many teachers laid off
- Dissatisfied with the way the school handles business
- Discipline problems

Safety/Security Reasons:

- Unsafe environment in the school
- School in dangerous area

All survey respondents were asked how likely they were to consider moving their child to another school. With the exception of home schools, which had less appeal, at least 20% of DPS and non-DPS parents said they were considering a school change to each of these school settings: a school outside Detroit, a religious school, private school, charter school, or DPS school.

Likelihood of Parents to Consider Moving Child(ren) to:



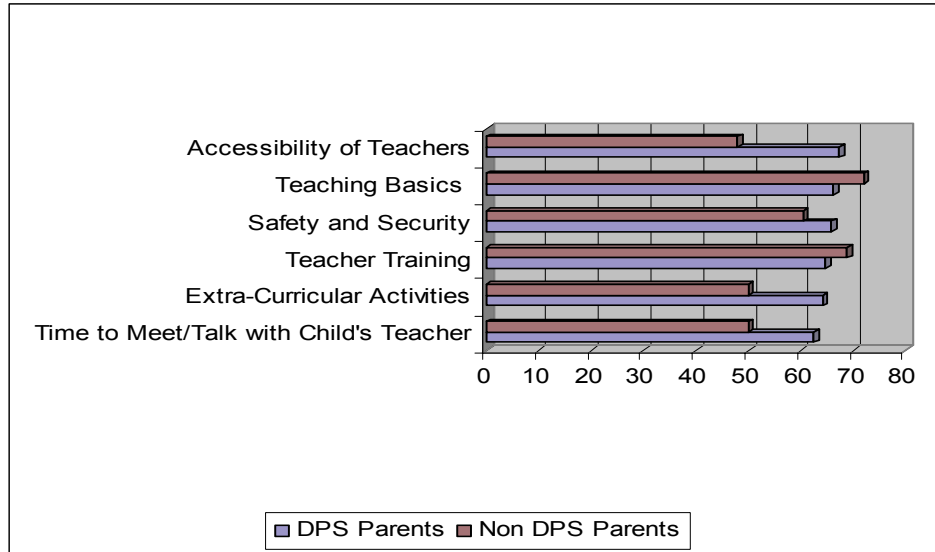
However, more than two-thirds of DPS parents say they are somewhat likely to consider moving their child to a non-DPS school. Only one-fifth of non-DPS parents say that they are somewhat likely to consider moving their child to a Detroit Public School.

Recommendations for Improving the Detroit Public Schools

Respondents were given a list of 24 potential areas for improvement, ranging from academic standard to teacher union involvement and asked to rate whether they would like to see much more, more, no change, less or much less of each item. A solid majority of all DPS parents wanted “much more” of many of these elements. Non-DPS parents were positive but not as strongly in favor of

some elements. However, non-DPS parents gave more emphasis to community involvement, teaching basics and teacher training.

Things Respondents Want to See **Much More Of** (continued)



Many wrote in personal suggestions, which focused on these areas:

- Teacher quality, accountability, pay and training
- Parental involvement and input
- Better DPS administration, board operations and accountability for both leadership groups
- Improved curriculum, equipment and supplies
- Classroom operations
- Facility maintenance and safety
- After-school and other programs
- Effective purchasing and cost control

Analysis

Clearly, the reputation and selection of a school is based on multiple factors and many survey respondents have searched and continue to search for the best option for their children. The survey shows that parents are making diverse educational choices, sometimes choosing different types of education (DPS, charter, private) for individual children within their family.

Since the survey indicates that there are many characteristics which parents consider important in education, educational administrators and others involved in policy face a challenge in meeting their expectations. Also, some aspects of parental decisions about schooling are outside the direct influence of school personnel—such as individual location convenience, the desire for a religious education and dissatisfaction with the neighborhood environment around a school.

While more than 60% of all respondents thought that the Detroit Public Schools would benefit from “much more” of 24 potential changes, all of these criteria were rated highly by DPS and non-DPS parents. As a result, the relative priorities of parents cannot be discerned from this measure. The 24 areas encompassed a wide range of educational components from homework and academic standards to teacher accessibility and sports.

Another survey question focused in on parental views of the “biggest problems” facing the Detroit Public Schools. The views of parents of DPS students and non-DPS students are somewhat different. Eighty-one percent of DPS parents and caregivers rate “money” as the most serious problem for the school system while 54% of non-DPS parents consider this a major problem. (This could reflect non-DPS parents’ experiences with charter, parochial and private schools which may have budgetary limitations but still provide what is perceived as a higher quality education.)

A large majority of both groups (70.3% of DPS parents and 67% of non-DPS parents) agree that improving student performance in core academic subjects is one of the Detroit Public Schools’ biggest problems. This indicates

that visible academic progress is fundamental in improving parents/caregivers' perceptions of the DPS. The "reputation of the DPS" and "loss of students" also were cited by large numbers of respondents as major problems although both of these issues would likely be offset by significant system-wide academic improvement.

The finding that two-thirds of DPS parents report that they are at least somewhat likely to consider a move for their child indicates a continuing potential problem with student retention within the DPS. Among non-DPS parents, almost 21% say that they are likely to change their child's school as well. Also, almost 7% of parents have moved their child from a non-DPS setting to a Detroit Public School, indicating that home schooling, charter and private schools do not always measure up to expectations either. In addition, 11.6% of all respondents are educating their children in both DPS and non-DPS settings, again showing that public schools are sometimes considered preferable to other options. This could reflect the age of children and the perceptions about local elementary schools versus middle and high schools. Also, some individual schools undoubtedly have better reputations than others.

While a solid majority of parents report that they are quite involved in their child's education, they were not asked whether other parents are equally committed. Since the question about involvement with the child's education was general in nature, it is difficult to know what this really means in terms of the quality (nature of involvement) and quantity (time expended). This question bears additional exploration to obtain more actionable information.

Next Steps

This summary report will be shared with Detroit Public Schools administrators and representatives of the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) and other parent groups. It is hoped that this information will foster better understanding of critical educational issues and choices among parents and caregivers, communicate their views about parent and community involvement in

the schools, and ultimately lead to changes that will enhance parents and caregivers' satisfaction with public education in Detroit.

Appendix

Sources of Survey Respondents

New Detroit thanks the following organizations for their assistance in distributing and collecting the Parent/Caregiver Surveys that provided the data for this report.

Alkebu-lan Center	Lutheran Synod of Southeast Michigan
Black Family Development	Marygrove College
Coalition on Temporary Shelter	Neighborhood Services Organization
Communities in Schools	Operation Get Down
Detroit Parent Network	Rosedale Park Baptist Church Center
Detroit Public Schools Parent Center	SER Metro
Education Station	Detroit Urban League
Focus HOPE	The Family Center
Latino Family Services	Warren Conner Development

This report, the complete Parent/Caregiver Survey, and previous New Detroit Progress Reports are available for viewing and printing at our website: www.newdetroit.org.

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