

Lawrence Township Public Schools

2008 Parent Opinion Survey



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Listed below are the committee members who worked on this project to develop and administer the survey, compile the results, and prepare the final report.

Al Gilson, Chair	Assistant Principal, Lawrence Middle School
David Adam	Assistant Principal, Lawrence High School
Melissa Lockett	Supervisor (K-5 math/science)
Lana Mueller	Operations Manager, Superintendent's Office
Chris Turnbull	Principal, Lawrence Intermediate School (Grade 4)
Patricia Wendell, Ph.D.	Principal, Slackwood School

Special thanks are extended to Dr. Leon Kaplan, Board of Education vice president, for his expertise and tireless assistance throughout this entire process, and to Patricia Nelson, secretary in the Superintendent's Office, for the many hours she dedicated to the project.

Background and Objectives

Lawrence Township Public Schools (LTPS) is engaged in setting priorities for the coming school year and setting its long-term goals. An important input for this planning process is knowledge of parents' perceptions of the school system, their child's education, and what they think should be LTPS's future priorities.

In an attempt to understand the perceptions and beliefs parents have about how well LTPS educates their children, and also the parents' educational priorities, the district conducted a study among a sample of parents of LTPS students.

Methodology

A questionnaire was developed after reviewing other school system surveys and literature on effective schools as well as having discussions with LTPS administrators and faculty. (A copy of the questionnaire is in Appendix A.)

Questionnaires were distributed to parents attending parent-teacher conferences (November 20-25, 2008) at all LTPS schools. Additionally, the questionnaire was posted on-line at www.ltps.org in January 2009, and other parents were encouraged to take the survey.

A total of 883 usable questionnaires were returned. Responses totaling 803 (91%) came from parents attending parent-teacher conferences, and a total of 80 (9%) surveys were completed via the Internet. All questionnaires were edited, processed, and analyzed by LTPS staff.

Conclusions

Generally, most parents had very favorable perceptions of LTPS.

Two out of three rated LTPS "Excellent" or "Very Good" overall. At least that many believed LTPS did an "Excellent" or "Very Good" job in teaching reading, math and writing. A majority rated LTPS "Excellent" or "Very Good" in most other academic areas. World Languages was the only area not rated "Excellent" or "Very Good" by a majority.

Schools rated very high, over 80% positive, on a variety of attributes ranging from communications to class size. Those who completed the questionnaire while attending a parent-teacher conference versus those who took the survey on-line tended to be more positive when answering these questions. No other consistent differences between the two groups were observed.

At least 60% rated all non-academic programs "Excellent" or "Very Good" with the exception of Gifted and Talented, which 45% rated favorably.

Parents' highest priorities were ensuring academic success, access to current technology, maintaining facilities, professional development (PD) and offering a wide range of electives. World Languages, upgrading athletic fields and free access to facilities after hours were a high priority for far fewer parents.

Most parents would prefer to be reached by e-mail. Back-to-School Bulletins, Newsletters, and *The Link* were the sources of information now relied on by half or more.

Comparisons Between Schools

Comparisons between schools can be misleading because of differences in grade levels and differences in demography among the elementary schools.

Findings

Perceptions of Student Learning

- Two in three rated LTPS “Excellent” or “Very Good” overall.
- At least seven in ten rated the job LTPS does in reading, mathematics, and writing “Excellent” or “Very Good.”
- Better than six in ten rated technology usage, science, citizenship, and preparation for post-high school “Excellent” or “Very Good.”
- Over half rated preparation in history, getting into the college of their choice, and career preparation “Excellent” or “Very Good.”
- Fewer than half (45%) rated basic foreign language competence “Excellent” or “Very Good.”

Perceptions of Schools

- Over nine in ten indicated “Agree” or “Tend to Agree” with several positive statements about their child’s school. The statements dealt with topics such as accessibility; communications; school appearance; safety; discipline; instruction; learning; the presence of a trusted adult in the school; feedback on homework, class work, and tests; and expectations.
- More than eight in ten indicated “Agree” or “Tend to Agree” with several positive statements about suitability of homework, computer technology, the Board of Education, class size, and information about their child’s achievements and successes.

Perceptions of Programs Offered by LTPS

- Between six and seven in ten rated most LTPS programs – Physical Education, Music, Special Education, Athletics, Character Education, health and drug education, visual arts, and academic support “Excellent” or “Very Good.” Less than half (45%) rated Gifted and Talented “Excellent” or “Very Good.”

Priorities for LTPS

- There appeared to be three tiers of priorities. Nearly nine in ten or more believed academics, up-to-date technology, maintaining facilities, PD, a wide range of electives, small class size, and long-range planning and reducing costs were “Extremely Important” or “Very Important.”
- Two-thirds or more believed maintaining athletic programs, visual and performing arts, engaging the community, and expanding world languages in lower grades were that important.
- About six in ten rated upgrading athletic fields and offering free access to facilities when school is not in session “Extremely Important” or “Very Important.”

Sources of Information – Preferred and Actually Relied On

- Nearly eight in ten preferred to receive information from LTPS by e-mail.
- Back-to-School Bulletins, Principals’ or Guidance Newsletters, and *The Link* were the sources of information for half or more respondents. Also mentioned were student orientation (47%), *Lawrence Ledger* (44%) and www.ltps.org (42%). Other sources were mentioned less frequently.

Detailed Findings

Two-thirds rated LTPS “Excellent” or “Very Good” overall.

<u>Rating of LTPS</u>	<u>%</u>
Excellent	19
Very Good	47
Good	29
Fair	5
Poor	1

Two-thirds rated education in Reading, Math, Writing, Use of Technology, Understanding Science, and Citizenship “Excellent” or “Very Good.”

Respondents rated LTPS overall on 11 areas relating to educational outcomes and on nine programs.

World Language was the only educational area rated “Excellent” or “Very Good” by less than half of parents. Gifted and Talented was the only program rated “Excellent” or “Very Good” by less than half of parents.

	% Exc + VG
LTPS overall	66
AREA	
B. Students can read various materials with comprehension.	73
C. Students are able to solve mathematical problems.	71
A. Students can write in clear, concise language.	70
H. Students are able to use technology to gather information.	67
D. Students understand the application of scientific principles.	66
E. Students understand the responsibilities of democratic citizenship.	66
J. Students are well prepared for post-high school.	61
F. Students understand the history of the United States and the world.	59
I. Students are accepted to the college of their choice.	59
K. Students are well prepared for career education.	57
G. Students can communicate at a basic level in at least one language other than English.	45
PROGRAM	
G. Physical Fitness Education	67
A. Music	65
E. Special Education	65
H. Athletic Program	63
I. Character Education	63
F. Health and Drug Education	61
B. Visual Arts	60
D. Academic Support	60
C. Gifted & Talented	45

At least eight in ten had favorable perceptions of their child’s school and/or LTPS.

Parents responded to 20 statements about their child’s school and/or LTPS. The statements dealt with a range of important topics such as accessibility; communications; school appearance; safety; discipline; instruction; learning; the presence of a trusted adult in the school; feedback on homework, class work and tests; and expectations. Lawrence schools were viewed favorably (“Agree” + “Tend to Agree”) on all 20 statements. Those who completed the questionnaire while attending a parent-teacher conference tended to be more positive in answering these questions than those who completed the questionnaire on-line.

STATEMENT	% Agree + Tend to Agree
B. I know how to contact someone at the school when I have questions and concerns.	98
A. I feel welcome in my child’s school.	97
U. My child’s school appears clean.	97
S. My child feels safe at school.	97
V. The presence and actions of the security guards/Student Resource Officer, and the administration help promote a safe and respectful learning environment.	97
C. My child’s school makes it easy for me to attend meetings by holding them when I can come, providing an interpreter, or in other ways.	96
H. I receive responses to my phone calls or inquiries within a reasonable period of time.	96
E. The school contacts me when my child breaks school rules.	96
D. The school keeps me informed about my child’s progress.	95
T. Discipline is enforced fairly at my child’s school.	93
N. The quality of instruction meets the needs of our students.	93
L. My child is learning what he or she needs to know to succeed in later grades or after graduation from high school.	93
G. There is an adult at the school whom my child trusts and can go to for help with a school problem.	92
K. My child receives helpful feedback on homework, class work, and tests.	91
J. The school clearly communicates its expectations for my child’s learning to me and my child.	90
Q. The Superintendent and his staff listen to my concerns.	90
I. The school has high expectations for my child.	90
P. The homework is relevant to both the curriculum and student needs.	89
M. Computer technology is utilized effectively in the classroom.	89
R. The Board of Education is in step with community concerns.	85
O. I am currently satisfied with the average class size.	84
F. The school contacts me to tell me about my child’s achievements and successes.	81

Academic Success for All, Access to Current Technology, Maintaining Facilities, Professional Development in Support of Academic Success, and having a Wide Range of Electives were “Extremely Important” or “Very Important” to nine in ten parents.

Small class sizes and financial planning were “Extremely Important” or “Very Important” to nearly nine in ten parents.

Maintaining athletic programs, the arts, engaging the community, and world languages seemed to form a second tier of priorities. Finally, upgrading athletic fields and offering free access to facilities when schools are not in session were least important.

PRIORITY	% Ex. + Very Imp.
C. Ensuring and improving academic achievement, success, and equity for all students	97
D. Ensuring student access to up-to-date technology	95
K. Maintaining facilities	93
G. Creating focused opportunities for administrators, teachers, and staff to ensure success for all students	90
B. Continuing a wide range of electives at Lawrence High School	90
A. Providing small class sizes	89
L. Exploring and developing long-range planning strategies, cost containment, and new revenue sources	88
F. Maintaining the athletic programs	80
H. Providing every student with experience in the visual and performing arts	79
J. Engaging the Lawrence Township community within the schools	73
E. Expanding world language at the elementary level	68
I. Upgrading district fields	60
M. Offering free access to facilities, other than during school times	58

Nearly eight in ten preferred to get information by e-mail. In actuality, parents tended to rely on printed materials that were brought or mailed home. www.ltps.org and QuickNews were used far less than preferences would suggest.

Notification by telephone was preferred by about half as many as preferred e-mail. Other methods were less preferred.

METHOD	% Prefer
E-mail	79
Telephone	42
Opinion Surveys	41
PTO Meetings	22
BOE Meetings	15
Other	4

Use of the district website and QuickNews was about half of what preference would have predicted.

Perhaps LTPS should take the initiative in putting people on the QuickNews distribution list and offer an unsubscribe option. They also could notify people about new information posted on www.ltps.org.

The relative popularity of the *Lawrence Ledger* made it the newspaper of choice when trying to reach parents.

SOURCE	% Use
Back-to-School Bulletin	61
Principals' or Guidance Newsletters	54
<i>The Link</i>	50
Student orientations (K, 4 th , 7 th , 9 th)	47
<i>Lawrence Ledger</i>	44
District and individual school websites	42
Parent packet sent at end of summer	39
QuickNews	38
Individual school PTO	31
Personal participation with schools/system	31
LTPS-TV	28
<i>Lawrence Gazette</i>	23
<i>Trenton Times</i>	20
School Board Mailings, Newsletter	19
<i>Trentonian</i>	6
School Board Meetings	6
Direct Link Meetings	3
Senior Center	<.5

Appendix A

Lawrence Township Public Schools
2008 Parent Opinion Survey

The information you provide in this survey will be used as part of the Lawrence Township Public Schools long-range planning process. Your responses will remain confidential. Thank you in advance for your feedback.

Unless otherwise indicated, please respond to each question by placing an "X" in the appropriate space.

1. In which grade(s) do you have a child (ren) within the Lawrence Township Public Schools (LTPS)?

- | | | | | |
|--|--|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-School | <input type="checkbox"/> Kindergarten | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 st grade | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 nd grade | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3 rd grade | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 th grade | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 th grade | <input type="checkbox"/> 6 th grade | <input type="checkbox"/> 7 th grade |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 8 th grade | <input type="checkbox"/> 9 th grade | <input type="checkbox"/> 10 th grade | <input type="checkbox"/> 11 th grade | <input type="checkbox"/> 12 th grade |

2. What is the highest level of education attained by an adult member of your household?

- | | |
|----------------------|-----|
| High school or less | [] |
| Some college | [] |
| Bachelor's degree | [] |
| Post graduate school | [] |

3. How long have you lived in Lawrenceville?

- [] Less than 2 years [] 2 - 4 years [] 5 or more years

4. How important was the public school system in your decision to live in Lawrenceville?

- [] Very important [] Somewhat important [] Not too important

5. Which of the following statements best describes your current involvement with Lawrence Township Public Schools? **Please check only one response.**

- [] I am (or my spouse is) involved in school activities (PTO, committees, task force, etc.).

OR

- [] I am not (or my spouse is not) involved in school activities.

6. How would you rate the Lawrence Township Public School system overall?

- Excellent Very Good Good Fair Poor Not familiar

7. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your child's school?

	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Tend to Agree</u>	<u>Tend to Disagree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Does Not Apply</u>
A. I feel welcome in my child's school.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
B. I know how to contact someone at the school when I have questions and concerns.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
C. My child's school makes it easy for me to attend meetings by holding them when I can come, providing an interpreter, or in other ways.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
D. The school keeps me informed about my child's progress.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
E. The school contacts me when my child breaks school rules.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
F. The school contacts me to tell me about my child's achievements and successes.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
G. There is an adult at the school whom my child trusts and can go to for help with a school problem.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
H. I receive responses to my phone calls or inquiries within a reasonable period of time.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
I. The school has high expectations for my child.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
J. The school clearly communicates its expectations for my child's learning to me and my child.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
K. My child receives helpful feedback on homework, class work, and tests.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
L. My child is learning what he or she needs to know to succeed in later grades or after graduation from high school.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
M. Computer technology is utilized effectively in the classroom.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
N. The quality of instruction meets the needs of our students.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
O. I am currently satisfied with the average class size.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
P. The homework is relevant to both the curriculum and student needs.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
Q. The Superintendent and his staff listen to my concerns.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
R. The Board of Education is in step with community concerns.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
S. My child feels safe at school.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
T. Discipline is enforced fairly at my child's school.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
U. My child's school appears clean.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
V. The presence and actions of the security guards (if applicable), Student Resource Officer (SRO), and the administration help promote a safe and respectful learning environment.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]

8. The following is a list of priorities that the Lawrence Board of Education must consider. **Please indicate the importance of each item.**

	<u>Extremely Important</u>	<u>Very Important</u>	<u>Somewhat Important</u>	<u>Slightly Important</u>	<u>Not at all important</u>	<u>Does Not Apply</u>
A. Providing small class sizes	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
B. Continuing a wide range of electives at Lawrence High School	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
C. Ensuring and improving academic achievement, success, and equity for all students	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
D. Ensuring student access to up-to-date technology	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
E. Expanding world language at the elementary level	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
F. Maintaining the athletic programs	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
G. Creating focused opportunities for administrators, teachers, and staff to ensure success for all students	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
H. Providing every student with experience in the visual and performing arts	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
I. Upgrading district fields	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
J. Engaging the Lawrence Township community within the schools	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
K. Maintaining facilities	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
L. Exploring and developing long-range planning strategies, cost containment, and new revenue sources	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
M. Offering free access to facilities, other than during school times	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]

9. How would you rate the success of the Lawrence Township Public Schools in preparing students in the following areas? **Please provide a rating for each area.**

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Very Good</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>Does Not Apply</u>
A. Students can write in clear, concise language.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
B. Students can read various materials with comprehension.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
C. Students are able to solve mathematical problems.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
D. Students understand the application of scientific principles.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
E. Students understand the responsibilities of democratic citizenship.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
F. Students understand the history of the United States and the world.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
G. Students can communicate at a basic level in at least one language other than English.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
H. Students are able to use technology to gather information.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
I. Students are accepted to the college of their choice.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
J. Students are well prepared for post-high school.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
K. Students are well prepared for career education.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]

10. How would you rate the following LTPS programs?

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Very Good</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>Does Not Apply</u>
A. Music Program	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
B. Visual Arts Program	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
C. Gifted and Talented Program	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
D. Academic Support	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
E. Special Education	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
F. Health and Drug Education	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
G. Physical Fitness Education	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
H. Athletic Program	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
I. Character Education Program	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]

11. In which way(s), if any, of the following means do you prefer to communicate your ideas and opinions to members of the Lawrence Township Board of Education? **Please check all that apply.**

- Email
- Telephone
- Opinion surveys like this
- Board of Education meetings
- PTO meetings
- Other (please specify) _____

12. From which, if any, of the following sources do you receive information about Lawrence Township Public Schools? **Please check all that apply.**

- The Link*, newsletter to the Lawrence community
- Back-to-School Bulletin
- Principals' or Guidance newsletters
- Parent packet sent at end of summer
- Student orientations (Kindergarten, 4th grade, 7th grade, 9th grade)
- Direct Link meetings
- QuickNews*
- Trenton Times*
- Lawrence Ledger*
- Lawrence Gazette*
- Trentonian*
- Senior Center
- School Board meetings
- School Board mailings, including the newsletter
- LTPS-TV
- District and individual school Web sites
- Individual school PTO
- Personal participation directly with the schools and/or school system
- Other (please specify) _____

Thank you for taking the time to answer this questionnaire. Feel free to use the bottom of this page to record any additional comments or concerns that you would like to share with the Lawrence Board of Education.

*Please return the survey to the main office of your child's school.
Your participation in this survey is appreciated.*

*Your cooperation will help us to keep the Lawrence Township Public Schools among the best in
New Jersey!*

For additional comments or concerns:

Appendix B

Comments on the Sample

This sample of 883 parents represented well over 30% of the families of LTPS students. Because the majority of those completing questionnaires were attending parent-teacher conferences, the sample cannot be described as a random sample of all LTPS parents. A comparison of the results for those who completed the questionnaire at a school during a parent-teacher conference visit with the results from those who completed the questionnaire on-line revealed that the only consistent differences were that those in the former group tended to be more positive in answering the statements about their child's school and/or LTPS (see page 6).

Reports of having attended or completed college were particularly high among participants in the study. Most rated the school system "Very Important" and nearly half claimed to be involved in school activities. Based on these considerations, it was felt that these respondents would be more knowledgeable and more demanding than other LTPS parents.

Elementary schools were over-represented in the sample, and Lawrence High School was under-represented. This is not surprising in that elementary school parents are more likely to request parent-teacher conferences. Also, parents of high school students are more likely to be at a parent-teacher conference at the request of the teacher or school administrator. This may have contributed to many of their perceptions being less positive than those of elementary school parents.

- **Sample Composition**
 - Attendees at Parent-Teacher Conferences (91%)
 - Completed questionnaire on-line at www.ltps.org (9%)
 - Distribution by School:

SCHOOL	% of Students*	% of Sample
BF	11	16
EP	6	8
LES	9	16
SL	7	6
LIS	21	24
LMS	15	17
LHS	31	13

*Percent of total district enrollment at each school

- **Parent Characteristics**
 - 95% some college or more education
 - 74% resident of Lawrence for 5 or more years
 - 49% involved in school activities
 - 75% school system "Very Important"