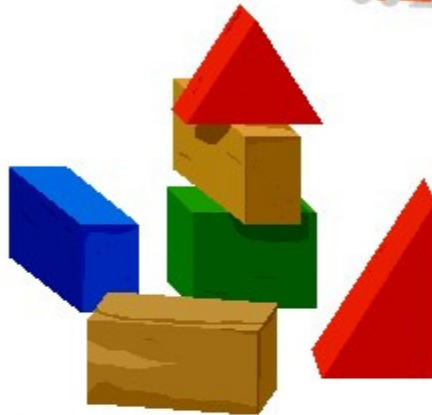


School District # 73 Parent Survey
on School Fees

Conducted by School District #73
District Parent Advisory Council

District Parent



Advisory Council

SD 73

Feb 09, 2007

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Executive Summary

In response to Justice Johnson's decision on School Fees (Supreme Court of British Columbia decision 1415), School District #73 District Parent Advisory Council (DPAC), working with seventeen other DPACS (Appendix 6) across British Columbia developed and administered an electronic survey designed to gain parent input on the school fees issue.

In School District #73, 407 completed surveys were submitted representing 722 students with the majority (98.5%) of students attending public school. While the majority of students represented were in the K-7 grades, overall, there was no significant difference in respondent's opinions between secondary and primary school levels. No significant difference in responses was detected when family income was analyzed as a variable.

In summary, the following profile describes the majority of respondents:

- 63% of students are in the primary grade level.
- 37% of students are in the secondary grade level.
- Over 98% of students attend a public school.
- 83% of respondents reported being two parent families.
- 37% of respondents reported that they have served on Parent Advisory Council and 11% have served on a School Planning Council¹.
- 51% of respondents reported family income exceeding \$70,000 per year.
- 42% of respondents reported volunteering at their school a few times per year.

The survey has provided a valuable insight in identifying what parents believe is "core" education (Table 5) and, by extension, what should be paid for by the province (and school board) (Table 2, 4, and 6) and what parents are willing to pay for outside of "core" education (Table 5, 6, and 7). Criteria, principles, and values have been identified that respondents find important; guidance for policy and decision-makers in developing a new school fee relationship with parents.

Parents are clear on their expectations in the event school fees are to be levied.

...parents and students should at least be given a choice as to whether or not they are willing to pay.

I feel their needs to be more accountability within the schools and the school districts.

¹ Based on 160 respondents who identified themselves as serving on either a Parent Advisory Council or School Planning Council.

Parents do not support paying school fees related to the delivery of “core” education. They have indicated that school fees for enhanced or extra curriculum activities may be appropriate providing:

- Parents are involved in the decision-making process that sets the fee schedule;
- Fees are reasonable and consistent across the district;
- Capacity to pay is addressed;
- There is transparency and accountability for funds spent;
- Systemic barriers are addressed.

The report recommends that:

1. The School Board defines “core” education courses and enhanced course offerings using criteria that is documented and transparent and provides this information to parents.
2. The School Board collaborates and engages with DPAC in designing, implementing, and monitoring strategy for any school fees that may be levied.
3. The School Board report annually, by school, the amount of school fees collected, how the funds were spent, assessment of value for funds spent, and where the planned outcomes achieved.
4. Request the School Board to undertake a review of district policies and procedures to ensure systemic barriers identified in this survey are proactively addressed. Parent engagement is strongly urged to ensure that solutions developed will have the desired outcome.
5. DPAC and the School Board work collaboratively to ensure government fully funds core education.

Background

On October 02, 2006, the British Columbia Supreme Court decision *Young versus Minister of Education* was released. This decision brought clarity to the issue of school fees, specifically the *School Board Fees Order*. Justice Johnston stated in his decision that “ *A board shall not charge fees for goods and services provided by the board to students of school age resident in the school district without which the student could not meet required learning outcomes or assessment requirements of an educational program provided by the board.*”²

Subsequently, School Board #73 (Kamloops/Thompson) obtained legal opinions as to the interpretation of the ruling and has conducted a potential impact assessment^{3,4}. In preparation for changes in program delivery to ensure compliance with Justice Johnson’s decision, the Board approved a public consultation process, which would engage stakeholders in dialogue around the issue.

Separately, the District Parent Advisory Council (DPAC) #73, in partnership with like-minded DPACs across the province, prepared a questionnaire (Appendix 1) to gain insight on parents’ perspectives both locally and across the province. This was an opportunity to gather a broad cross section of perspectives and to identify common themes with a provincial scope. DPAC #73 contributed the results of this survey to the provincial roll-up. Results from this survey are also being submitted to School Board #73 as part of DPAC’s submission on school fees.

This report documents DPAC #73’s survey results.

Methodology

An electronic survey⁵ was developed and posted to the School District #73 website at www.sd73.bc.ca under School Fees (and related) Survey. For parents without Internet access, a paper copy of the survey was made available and DPAC volunteers then manually entered the data into the electronic survey database. Results were tabulated using the summary functions available through Survey Monkey.

² Reasons for Judgement, Justice Johnston *Young v British Columbia (Minister of Education)* 2006 BCSC 1415. www.courts.gov.bc.ca/Jdb-txt/SC/06/14/2006BCSC1415.htm

³ Stretch, Kelvin. Secretary-Treasure, School District 73. December 12, 2006. School Fees Report. Memorandum. 4 pp.

⁴ Sullivan, Terrence S. Superintendent, School District 73. December 15, 2006. School Fees Report, , Memorandum. 2 pp.

⁵ Survey Monkey at www.surveymonkey.com was used for collecting and compiling results from survey.

Notification to parents was done through the local media (Kamloops This Week, Kamloops Daily News and press releases to various other media) and direct notification through school newsletters and flyers. The survey was posted on December 19, 2006 and remained open until January 31, 2007.

Concurrently across the province, the same survey was administered to parents in seventeen other School Districts (See Appendix 6).

Survey Results

Demographics

Within School District #73 parents completed 407 surveys representing 722 students. The primary grades (K-7) were represented by 453 students and the secondary grade level (8-12) was represented by 269 students. Seven respondents choose not to indicate which grade their child(ren) was in. The majority of respondents have children attending a public school (98.5%) while the remainder (1.5%) attend private school. Only 1.5% of respondents reported that they home schooled their children.

In summary, the following profile describes the majority of respondents:

- 63% of students are in the primary grade level.
- 37% of students are in the secondary grade level.
- Over 98% of students attend a public school.
- 83% of respondents reported being two parent families.
- 37% of respondents reported that they have served on Parent Advisory Council and 11% have served on a School Planning Council⁶.
- 51% of respondents reported family income exceeding \$70,000 per year.
- 42% of respondents reported volunteering at their school a few times per year.

When comparing primary to secondary grade levels, there was no significant difference in demographic profile. Additional data analysis based on family income was also undertaken to determine if this was a factor in the responses. No significant difference was detected compared to the aggregate responses.

⁶ Based on 160 respondents who identified themselves as serving on either a Parent Advisory Council or School Planning Council.

Opinions on Public Education

When asked about public education, the majority of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the following statements (Table 1):

- “the public education system should provide every student with the opportunity to develop his/her full potential.” (97%).
- “Our schools should be places where every child has access to opportunities regardless of family income or capacity” (95%).
- “Refundable deposits teach students to have respect for property” (70%).

The clarity of agreement/disagreement was not as sharp for the statement “students should have to pay some fees and make choices based on their financial resources to teach them about the “real world”. Forty nine percent (49%) strongly disagreed or disagreed while 37% agreed or strongly agreed and 14% had no firm opinion.

Respondents overwhelming disagreed (80%) with the statement “ public education’s primary responsibility is to teach literacy and numeracy. Anything else is extra.”

Table 1: Public Education Responses to Statements (n=390)

		Categories ⁷	
		Disagree or Strongly Disagree	Agree or Strongly Agree
2a	The public education system should provide every student with the opportunity to develop his/her full potential.	3%	97%
2b	Students should have to pay some fees and make choices based on their financial resources to teach them about the 'real world'.	49%	37%
2c	Our schools should be places where every child has access to opportunities regardless of family income or capacity.	3%	95%
2d	Refundable deposits teach students to have respect for property.	17%	70%
2e	Public education's primary responsibility is to teach literacy and numeracy. Anything else is extra.	80%	11%

⁷ Totals of disagree, strongly disagree and agree or strongly agree do not necessarily equal 100%; the difference is the percentage of respondents who did not have a firm opinion for the statement.

Opinions on Funding Issues

Seventeen statements (Table 2) were presented with respondents asked to indicate whether they strongly disagree, disagree, have no firm opinion, agree, or strongly agree with each statement. The following guide has been used to color-code the responses. This provides a visual interpretation of the data showing the degree of agreement or disagreement to each statement.

Colour Indicator Guide

Strongly Agree	Agree	No Firm Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

For presentation purposes, Table 2 ranks each statement, based on the response average score, with the highest score (strongly agree) being ranked first and lowest score being ranked last (strongly disagree).

Table 2: Response to statements on funding issues (n=377)

Ranking	Statement	Response Average Score (All)	Strongly Agree/ Agree (%)	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree (%)	Colour Indicator
1	It is appropriate for the government to fully fund core public education	4.58	94	3	
2	The Ministry of Education should provide funds to cover the fees that can no longer be charged due to the Supreme Court ruling	3.93	71	13	
3	If it is worth doing, it is worth funding	3.89	75	9	
4	A voluntary fee system will not work because some people who can afford it simply will not pay	3.86	72	13	
5	School fees should be consistent across the school district	3.81	71	15	
6	School fees should only be charged to recover actual costs	3.73	68	15	
7	Parents should have input into setting school fee amounts	3.53	61	23	
8	One school fee at the beginning of the school year would make more sense than getting requests continuously all year long.	3.49	57	25	
9	As a parent, I expect to pay for enhancements to my child(ren)'s public education experience	3.32	58	28	
10	It is appropriate to charge school fees to provide educational	3.32	56	30	

Ranking	Statement	Response Average Score (All)	Strongly Agree/ Agree (%)	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree (%)	Colour Indicator
	opportunities beyond core education.				
11	It is appropriate for the government to fully fund programs of choice	3.29	44	31	
12	Schools should be fully funded including extra-curricular activities	3.09	39	44	
13	Corporate sponsorship is an appropriate way to raise funds for a school	3.02	41	34	
14	Parent fundraising is an acceptable alternative to paying school fees	2.80	36	46	
15	Parents who can afford to pay school fees should be required to do so.	2.73	33	49	
16	The public cannot afford to put more money into public education	2.53	22	54	
17	Parent fundraising should be increased to replace the money previously collected as school fees.	2.10	10	70	

Colour Indicator Guide

Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Equity and Opportunity

Thirteen statements were presented to respondents with each statement having five rating values: strongly disagree, disagree, no firm opinion, agree, and strongly agree. For presentation purposes, Table 3 below ranks each statement, based on the response average score, with the highest score being ranked first and lowest score being ranked last.

Table 3: Response to statements on equity and opportunity category (Primary and Secondary Combined) (n=372)

Ranking	Statement	Response Average Score	Strongly Agree/ Agree (%)	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree (%)	Colour Indicator
1	Graduation activities should be kept affordable so that all students can participate	4.54	96	1	
2a	Specialty programs such as sports academies and apprenticeships are critical to keeping some students in school	4.19	84	5	

Ranking	Statement	Response Average Score	Strongly Agree/ Agree (%)	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree (%)	Colour Indicator
2b	Extra-curricular fees should be structured to minimize the financial impact on families to ensure greater opportunity for participation	4.19	89	4	
3	Students in families with a lower income sometimes have difficulty asking parents for money to pay a school fee	3.99	74	4	
4	A student should not be denied access to a course due to unpaid course or other fees	3.94	73	12	
5	Some families will pay school fees even when they can't afford it	3.87	75	6	
6	Increased reliance on parent fundraising will lead to greater inequalities in our public education system.	3.76	64	13	
7	The existing practice of waiving fees for those who can't afford them ensures equality for all students	3.50	62	24	
8	All students are able to take advantage of the "programs of choice" that some of our schools now offer	3.05	36	32	
9	Some students avoid going to school or cut classes because they can't afford the cost of the scheduled activity	2.84	29	39	
10	The prohibition of school fees will lead to more equitable education system	2.76	28	46	
11	I would feel comfortable approaching my school principal to request a fee waiver	2.66	31	49	
12	It is appropriate to withhold a report card when fees are not yet paid	2.16	22	67	

Colour Indicator Guide

Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Parent Involvement

Four statements were presented to respondents with each statement offering five rating values: strongly disagree, disagree, no firm opinion, agree, and strongly agree. For presentation purposes, Table 4 ranks each statement, based on the response average score, with the highest score being ranked first and lowest score being ranked last.

Table 4: Response to statements on parent involvement (combined primary and secondary scores) (n=368)

Ranking	Statement	Response Average Score	Strongly Agree/ Agree (%)	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree (%)	Colour Indicator
1	All school fees should be accounted for and parents should have access to financial information related to the resulting expenditures	4.18	87	5	
2	Increased fundraising shifts “advisory” capacity away from Parent Advisory Councils.	3.16	24	26	
3	Increased fundraising by parents affects their ability to be involved in school decision-making processes	2.94	26	33	
4	Parents spend too much time fundraising resulting in reduced time with their families	2.86	26	40	

Colour Indicator Guide

Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Core Education

Thirty statements were presented to respondents with each statement offering five rating values: strongly disagree, disagree, no firm opinion, agree, and strongly agree. For presentation purposes, Table 5 ranks each statement, based on the response average score, with the highest score being ranked first and lowest score being ranked last.

Table 5: Response to statements on core education (primary and secondary scores combined) (n=359)

Ranking	Statement	Response Average Score	Strongly Agree/ Agree (%)	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree (%)	Colour Indicator
1	Textbooks	4.57	96	3	
2	Library books	4.51	95	3	
3	Safety items	4.44	91	7	
4	Course workbooks	4.39	88	8	
5	Computers (including software)	4.25	89	5	
6	Audio/visual equipment	4.22	86	7	
7	Technology (computer programming, keyboarding, etc)	4.18	88	10	
8	Physical education (gym, outdoor pursuit course, weight training, etc.)	4.15	86	12	
9	Small capital expenditures (curtains, lighting, fountains, etc)	4.13	80	13	
10	Fine arts (art, drama, music, etc)	3.88	76	19	
11a	Industrial Arts (shop, mechanics, woodwork, etc)	3.85	74	19	
11b	Playground equipment	3.85	72	21	
12	Home economics (foods, sewing, etc)	3.77	73	21	
13	Secondary apprenticeship programs	3.73	65	19	
14	Computer supplies (disks, paper, CD's etc.)	3.68	66	24	
15	Language immersion programs	3.52	57	26	
16	Tools for secondary apprenticeship programs	3.44	53	29	
17	Locker rentals	3.42	55	33	
18a	Drama and band equipment	3.37	53	32	
18b	Trip to a skating rink, swimming pool, bowling alley, etc as part of a PE program	3.37	56	34	
19	Educational field trips (i.e. trip to a science exhibit)	3.34	54	35	

Ranking	Statement	Response Average Score	Strongly Agree/ Agree (%)	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree (%)	Colour Indicator
20	Student agendas	3.29	51	38	
21	Multimedia (film, journalism, photography, etc)	3.21	44	37	
22	Supplies (pens, pencils, paper, erasers, notebook paper, scrapbooks, crayons, etc)	2.99	40	51	
23	Sport academies	2.95	34	42	
24	Music instrument rentals	2.93	36	49	
25	Deposits (locker, textbooks, etc.)	2.87	33	51	
26	Social/sports field trips	2.80	33	53	
27	Band trips	2.58	21	60	
28	Multi-cultural exchanges (i.e. trips out of province)	2.26	12	72	

Colour Indicator Guide

Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

School Fees

Thirty statements were presented to respondents with each statement offering five rating values: strongly disagree, disagree, no firm opinion, agree, and strongly agree. For presentation purposes, Table 6 ranks each statement, based on the response average score, with the highest score being ranked first and lowest score being ranked last.

Table 6: Response to statements on school fees (primary and secondary scores combined) (n=349)

Ranking	Statement	Response Average	Strongly Agree/ Agree (%)	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree (%)	Colour Indicator
1	Multi-cultural exchanges (i.e. trips out of province)	3.76	72	15	
2	Band trips	3.57	67	21	
3	Social/sports field trips	3.35	61	29	
4	Musical instrument rental	3.22	56	33	
5	Sports academies	3.15	45	31	
6a	Deposits (locker, textbooks, etc.)	3.10	52	37	
6b	Multimedia (film, journalism, photography, etc)	3.10	50	36	
7	Educational field trips (i.e. trip to a science exhibit)	3.05	50	41	

8	Trip to a skating rink, swimming pool, bowling alley, etc as part of a PE program	2.99	48	45	
9	Supplies (pens, pencils, paper, erasers, notebook paper, scrapbooks, crayons, etc)	2.97	50	43	
10	Tools for secondary apprenticeship programs	2.89	38	42	
11	Home economics (foods, sewing, etc)	2.83	44	50	
12	Drama and band equipment	2.82	38	45	
13	Industrial Arts (shop, mechanics, woodwork, etc)	2.77	41	53	
14	Student agendas	2.73	39	51	
15	Secondary apprenticeship programs	2.67	30	51	
16	Language immersion programs	2.65	32	55	
17	Fine arts (art, drama, music, etc)	2.63	37	58	
18	Locker rentals	2.39	25	62	
19	Computer supplies (disks, paper, CD's etc.)	2.38	25	66	
20	Technology (computer programming, keyboarding, etc)	2.22	19	75	
21	Physical education (gym, outdoor pursuit course, weight training, etc.)	2.18	20	75	
22	Playground equipment	1.99	11	79	
23	Audio/visual equipment	1.91	9	82	
24	Computers (including software)	1.89	6	88	
25	Small capital expenditures (curtains, lighting, fountains, etc)	1.80	7	86	
26	Course books	1.76	9	86	
27	Library Books	1.68	6	91	
28	Safety Items	1.65	5	90	
29	Textbooks	1.61	6	92	

Colour Indicator Guide

Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

PAC Expenditures

Thirty statements were presented to respondents with each statement offering five rating values: strongly disagree, disagree, no firm opinion, agree, and strongly agree. For presentation purposes, Table 7 ranks each statement, based on the response average score, with the highest score being ranked first and lowest score being ranked last.

Table 7: Response to statements on PAC expenditures (primary and secondary grade level scores combined)

Ranking	Statement	Response Average Score	Strongly Agree/ Agree (%)	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree (%)	Colour Indicator
1	Social/sports field trips	3.28	60	28	
2	Playground equipment	3.23	57	31	
3	Educational field trips (i.e. trip to a science exhibit)	3.12	55	34	
4	Band trips	3.06	49	34	
5	Trip to a skating rink, swimming pool, bowling alley, etc as part of a PE program	3.02	51	38	
6	Multi-cultural exchanges (i.e. trips out of province)	3.00	47	37	
7	Drama and band equipment	2.86	41	43	
8	Sport academies	2.67	32	47	
9	Audio/visual equipment	2.62	35	51	
10	Library books	2.56	34	54	
11	Computers (including software)	2.44	27	59	
12	Multimedia (film, journalism, photography, etc)	2.38	24	61	
13	Music instrument rentals	2.37	24	61	
14	Fine arts (art, drama, music, etc)	2.32	23	65	
15	Computer supplies (disks, paper, CD's etc.)	2.28	22	66	
16	Tools for secondary apprenticeship programs	2.23	15	64	
17	Home economics (foods, sewing, etc)	2.22	18	70	
18	Industrial Arts (shop, mechanics, woodwork, etc)	2.19	17	70	
19	Technology (computer programming, keyboarding, etc)	2.19	19	70	

20	Small capital expenditures (curtains, lighting, fountains, etc)	2.18	21	68	
21	Secondary apprenticeship programs	2.16	13	66	
22	Language immersion programs	2.14	14	70	
23	Student agendas	2.12	19	71	
24	Physical education (gym, outdoor pursuit course, weight training, etc.)	2.13	16	73	
25	Safety items	1.98	15	74	
26	Supplies (pens, pencils, paper, erasers, notebook paper, scrapbooks, crayons, etc	1.94	11	79	
27	Locker rentals	1.85	7	80	
28	Deposits (locker, textbooks, etc.)	1.84	6	80	
29	Course workbooks	1.81	10	83	
30	Textbooks	1.77	9	84	

Colour Indicator Guide

Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Comments

Forty three percent (176) respondents provided comments (see Appendix 5 for original text) that upon analysis, yielded four key themes:

1. The writer feels some school fees should be allowed as per previous practice.
2. The writer feels the provincial government should fully fund the education system; there should be no fees except for extra-curricular programs or non-essential enhancements.
3. The writer feels fundraising is already onerous for parents – don't ask PACs to do more!
4. The writer feels that a greater accountability for monies collected, and greater consultation with parents is required.

Briefly, the following excerpts capture the perspective presented by parents in each of the themes.

Previous Practices

I think it's appropriate to charge parents for some fees, but not all.

I would like to see the provincial government change the law to allow the schools to charge fees to cover costs for these valuable programs.

...parents and students should at least be given a choice as to whether or not they are willing to pay.

Change the legislation to allow fees, within clearly prescribed limits.

School fees should be reinstated.

I don't have a problem paying for school fees. I think the system was fine.

Provincial Government

I feel strongly that any courses that are offered in the school system must be funded by the Ministry of Education. The source of these funds should be from general taxation and decreases in other government ministries, eg, transportation - education is more important than being able to speed along a highway with no potholes.

Parents are taxed too much money as it is, and fees need to stop, they are just another form of taxes.

I personally have had difficulty in the past few years to budget for all three of my children's fees.

I think that the school district should pay for all core funding. I think that all things are core, because the musicians and actors of the world also went to school at one time.

I believe that there is a need for new legislation within the government to change the education rules to allow more funding for education, including the extra core related courses such as the shops and home economics.

Additional fees are becoming excessive for the average family.

PAC Fundraising

I am absolutely appalled that PAC has to raise money for items that I think are essential to a school, like playground equipment, sports equipment, or the cost of a bus to take children on a field trip!

PAC's can assist in those areas but cannot be expected to take over the complete expenditures.

PAC monies were a hint of encouraging the vast program requests for optimal class utensils. A hint, not a budgetary line responsibility.

I've been involved with PAC"s and to expect the PAC's to pay is ridiculous...that is just a circle route of having the parents pay.

Your survey seems to indicate that you plan to pass over the ostra costs over to the individual PAC's. I would recommend against that idea.

As Pac chair I know that parent fundraising cannot be counted on. In our school we have ten women who do the majority of the fundraising and repeated attempts to get help and support have been refused

The PAC's have enough to raise funds for, they should not be burdened to cover school fees.

The trouble with asking the PAC to raise money is it is always the same small group of parents who do the fundraising and therefore it becomes a lot of work on a small amount of people.

Greater Accountability\Consultation

I personally would like advance discussion with the teachers/school before getting the permission notices sent home with our children!

I feel their needs to be more accountability within the schools and the school districts.

I feel strongly that the school board blew their opportunity for good to charge fees because they got TOO GREEDY imposing fees on worthless and unnecessary and frankly often "made up" items

I have paid fees for my daughter in PE (\$10.00). It was never explained what for exactly but my daughter thought it was a "field trip" fee. They went bowling which I had to pay for, then at end of year went to beach and I paid for pizza. What happened to the \$10.00 that I paid?? I think it probably went into general funds for the PE department. These small fees that are not accounted for are something I'd like to see done away with.

I would like to emphasis the importance I feel about adequate accounting of what money is collected, and what it is used for. There doesn't seem to be enough of a priority placed on this, and it makes me as a parent very nervous. I think the money has come too easily and not been accounted for closly enough.

All money should be accounted for in the School District.

Discussion

The results are reflective of the public school system and the full spectrum of grade levels. There was higher representative of students in the primary grade levels – but this did not affect overall trends observed in the opinions of parents. There was insufficient data collected ($n < 6$) on private or home school children to identify any unique issues/features for these groups - instead their opinions and values were included in the aggregate results.

While the profile of respondents trended to the higher income brackets ($> \$60,000$), all family income brackets were represented in the survey. Fifty percent of respondents had a family income of less than \$70,000 per year.

Over 82% of respondents are from two parent families with the balance being single parent families. Approximately 39% of respondents have served on the Parent Advisory Council School Planning Council. As well, over 77% of respondents reported that they have volunteered at least a few times per year at their schools. Twenty two percent reported that they were unable to volunteer.

The questionnaire presented a series of statements relating to public education (Table 1) and public education funding (Table 2). Parent opinion on public education (Table 1) was strongest with:

- Principle #1 - “every student should be provided with the opportunity to develop his/her full potential”, and;
- Principle #2 “our schools should be places where every child has access to opportunities regardless of family income or capacity”.

When statements probed public education funding, parents were clear that they expected the province to fully fund core education (94% agree/strongly agree-question 3c) but parents also recognized that school fees might be appropriate for enhanced or extra-curriculum activities (question 3a & 3f with 58% and 56% respectively agree or strongly agree). Interestingly, the majority of respondents (71%) felt that the Ministry should provide the funds to cover the fees that are no longer to be charged because of the Supreme Court decision. One interpretation is that parents believe that the now disallowed school fees were being charged on what is now believed to be “core” education. Based on Table 5 and 6 results, parents do not believe that school fees for core education should be levied. The challenge is that parents, based on the survey results, have a different interpretation of the definition of “core” education than the Ministry of Education and School Boards.

Principles 1 and 2 noted above are important in providing guidance in determining the process and method of establishing, implementing, and monitoring, a school fee system within the school district. Respondents further refined (Table 2 and 4) these two principles by indicating that:

- Fees should be consistent across a school district.
- Parents should have input into the fee schedule.
- Only actual charges should be recovered.
- Fees should be mandatory (voluntary fee system unlikely to work).
- Core education is a government funding responsibility.
- All school fees should be accounted for and parents should have access to financial information related to the resulting expenditures

In determining a school fee schedule, the issue of equity and opportunity (Table 3) must be considered with parents expressing the importance of:

- Offering specialty courses to improve student retention.
- Minimizing financial impact on families by considering capacity to pay.
- Maintaining equality through waiving fees for those unable to pay.
- Keeping graduation affordable (secondary school).

These factors listed above must be considered in developing an appropriate fee schedule. Furthermore, it was noted that parents are concerned that:

- Low income family students find it difficult to ask for funds from their parents, and;
- Low-income parents find it challenging to ask for fee waiver.

These two systemic barriers may result in students from this economic spectrum not being able to fully participate in school learning opportunities offered. Strategies need to be developed to address these barriers – whether perceived or real. A new school fee approach needs to account for and accommodate this reality.

Parents felt strongly that it was inappropriate to:

- Withhold a report card when fees are not paid, and;
- Students should not be denied access to a course due to unpaid fees.

Finally, respondents (62%) believe that the existing practice of waiving school fees for students who cannot afford them ensures equality for all students. Furthermore, increased reliance on parent fundraising will lead to greater inequalities in our public education system. These perspectives on equity should be considered going forward. Especially when the majority (75%) of respondents felt that some families would pay school fees even when the family cannot afford it.

Outlined above are principles, factors, systemic barriers, and social considerations that should guide policy-makers in ensuring that school practices and district policies are aligned with these values.

Next, the survey sought insights on what core education (Table 5) represented from a parent's perspective. Parents reported, that from their perspective, the following items are part of "core" education and as such should be paid for by the provincial government (Table 2) without additional fees being levied against parents:

Core Public Education

- Textbooks
- Library books
- Safety items
- Course workbooks
- Computers (including software)
- Audio/visual equipment
- Technology (computer programming, keyboarding, etc)
- Physical education (gym, outdoor pursuit course, weight training, etc.)
- Small capital expenditures (curtains, lighting, fountains, etc)
- Fine arts (art, drama, music, etc)
- Industrial Arts (shop, mechanics, woodwork, etc)
- Playground equipment
- Home economics (foods, sewing, etc)
- Secondary apprenticeship programs
- Computer supplies (disks, paper, CD's etc.)
- Language immersion programs
- Tools for secondary apprenticeship programs
- Locker rentals
- Drama and band equipment
- Trip to skating rink, swimming pool, bowling etc as part of a PE program
- Education field trips (i.e. a trip to a science exhibit)
- Student agenda

There was a direct correlation noted between what parents felt was “core” education and who should pay for these items. School fees (Table 6) levied for the following items was not supported (disagree or strongly disagree categories) by parents:

No School Fee Zone

- Industrial Arts (shop, mechanics, woodwork, etc)
- Student agendas
- Secondary apprenticeship programs
- Language immersion programs
- Fine arts (art, drama, music, etc)
- Locker rentals (although a deposit fee is supported)
- Computer supplies (disks, paper, CD’s etc.)
- Technology (computer programming, keyboarding, etc)
- Physical education (gym, outdoor pursuit course, weight training, etc.)
- Playground equipment
- Audio/visual equipment
- Computers (including software)
- Small capital expenditures (curtains, lighting, fountains, etc)
- Course books
- Library Books
- Safety Items
- Textbooks

The majority of parents indicated that school fees for the following courses or activities would be acceptable (Table 7).

Fees

- Multi-cultural exchange trips (i.e. trips out of province)
- Band trips
- Social/sports field trips
- Musical instrument rental
- Deposits (locker, textbooks, etc.)

Again, when it came to PAC funding (Table 8) activities and/or courses, parents expressed a reluctance to be providing financial support to those items they believe formed part of the “core” education. Parents indicated support for using PAC funds to support the follow areas (>50% agree and strongly agreed combined):

PAC Funding

- Social/sports field trips
- Playground equipment
- Educational field trips (i.e. trip to a science exhibit)
- Trip to a skating rink, swimming pool, bowling alley, etc as part of a PE program

Summary and Recommendations

Summary

The survey has provided a valuable insight in identifying what parents believe is “core” education and, by extension, what should be paid for by the province (and school board) and what parents are willing to pay for outside of “core” education. Criteria, principles, and values have been identified that respondents find important; guidance for policy and decision-makers in developing a new school fee relationship with parents. Parents are clear on their expectations in the event school fees are to be levied. Parents do not support paying school fees related to the delivery of “core” education. They have indicated that school fees for enhanced or extra curriculum activities may be appropriate providing:

- Parents are involved in the decision-making process that sets the fee schedule;
- Fees are reasonable and consistent across the district;
- Capacity to pay is addressed;
- There is transparency and accountability for funds spent;
- Systemic barriers are addressed.

Recommendations:

1. The School Board defines “core” education courses and enhanced course offerings using criteria that is documented and transparent and provides this information to parents.
2. The School Board collaborates and engages with DPAC in designing, implementing, and monitoring strategy for any school fees that may be levied.

3. The School Board report annually, by school, the amount of school fees collected, how the funds where spent, assessment of value for funds spent, and where the planned outcomes achieved.
4. Request the School Board to undertake a review of district policies and procedures to ensure systemic barriers identified in this survey are pro-actively addressed. Parent engagement is strongly urged to ensure solutions developed will have the desired outcome.
5. DPAC and the School Board work collaboratively to ensure government fully funds core education.