

RESEARCH BRIEF

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Educational Issues of Exceptional Importance to the M-DCPS

The Department of Research Services has conducted an inquiry to ascertain the district's need for information on research-based topics, and to prioritize the topics of interest. In order to identify issues of exceptional importance, a series of surveys was distributed to the Superintendent's Executive Staff, assistant superintendents, associate superintendents, region superintendents, district directors, administrative directors, executive directors, and directors. The priority issues or research agenda identified as a result of these surveys will be addressed by the Department as information summaries or as literature reviews that will be distributed district-wide in the format of brief capsules.

The project was conducted using a Delphi technique. The Delphi technique is designed to elicit information and judgments from participants to facilitate problem-solving, planning, and decision-making without physically assembling the contributors. In the first step, an initial list of 47 current national educational issues was assembled by the Department of Research Services and sent to the target population of 225 M-DCPS personnel. The recipients were asked to rank the importance of each issue on a scale of 1 to 5. Each respondent was also asked to indicate on a scale of 1 to 5 how much additional information on the topic should be supplied. In the second step, respondents were asked to select from lists of previously ranked and respondent-submitted topics, those to be included in a final determination of a list of issues most important to the district. In the third step, respondents were presented with a complete list of surviving topics, for final consideration. The average return rate for the three surveys was 43 percent.

From this procedure, a group of 14 issues—those with an average ranking greater than 4.0 of a possible 5—was selected as the educational issues most important to the district. Those issues are listed below in rank order starting with the most important issues:

- Effective school board leadership
- Changing public opinion/Countering misperceptions about public education
- Strategies for teaching reading at all grade levels
- School size and school performance
- Recruiting, hiring, and retaining teachers
- Class size reduction
- Improving morale
- Teacher expectations and their effect on student achievement
- Promoting student achievement in the middle school
- School safety and violence prevention
- Ethics for school personnel
- Parent involvement in schools
- Nurturing and supporting new/beginning teachers
- Promotion and retention rates

The survey respondents indicated that additional information was needed for each of these issues. Research Briefs or Information Capsules about these topics are planned by the Department. The possibility of addressing these issues through cooperative arrangements with other research entities from local colleges and universities will also be explored.