

School Climate Surveys
District Results for 2003-04

Miami-Dade County Public Schools
Office of Accountability and Systemwide Performance
Research Services
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**The School Board of
Miami-Dade County, Florida**

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Overview

Each school year, the School Climate Survey is administered to gather information on the perceptions that students, their parents, and school staffs hold concerning their schools and their performance. In 2003-2004, the survey was distributed to approximately 72 thousand parents, 46 thousand primary, secondary, and adult students, and 23 thousand staff. This report summarizes selected major points from the results of that survey, as they pertain to the Pre-k through 12th grade program.

The staff survey has been conducted on-line since the 2001-02 school year, and changes in the sampling method in 2002-03 substantially reduced the numbers of parents and students sampled. Despite these recent changes, the results continue to be very similar to those in past years. The majority of respondents from the three groups surveyed (parents, students, and staff) were satisfied with their schools in Miami-Dade County. Parents and staff from all educational levels (elementary, K-8, middle, and senior high) provided overall quality grades in the “B” range. As in previous survey administrations, responses from students were not as positive. Elementary and K-8 school students provided a “B” grade for the overall quality in their schools while both middle school and senior high school students assigned their schools an overall grade of “C+.”

With six years of comparable data available since new survey instruments were introduced in 1998-99, four of the groups surveyed— elementary, middle, and senior high staff, and senior high parents—appear to show a gradual trend toward more positive attitudes toward their schools. The K-8 level was added as a separate level this year, and there is no previous data for comparison.

Background

School Climate Surveys of parents, students, and staff have been regularly administered in the Miami-Dade County Public School district since the early 1990s. The purpose of these surveys is to gather information regarding what these groups think about the school and their perceptions concerning how the school can be improved. The results of the climate surveys are reported in the *Statistical Abstract*, and selected results are also reported in the *District and School Profiles*. The most recent two years are also available by school on the Department of Research Services website: <http://drs.dadeschools.net>. Besides providing information to the public, survey results are intended to assist schools to identify priorities for their annual School Improvement Plan.

The instruments used for the 2003-2004 survey administrations were constructed prior to the 1997-98 surveys by staff from the Department of Research Services and reviewed by representatives of district/region administration, parents, principals, teachers (UTD), students, and community. Although these surveys contain items similar to those found in earlier instruments, they are not identical to them. Therefore, caution must be used when making comparisons to earlier administrations of the surveys.

Following unanticipated delays in processing the data, detailed by-school results were provided to the schools in July. The primary purpose of these reports was to facilitate an in-depth view of the learning climate at each school. The present report represents a byproduct of these by-school reports and summarizes the average district-wide results from the January 2004 administration of the *School Climate Surveys of Parents, Students, and Staff*.

The following district-wide results pertain to the Pre-K through 12th grade program. Data from the charter schools have been integrated into these results. Results for the K-8 schools are now calculated as a distinct level, and are separately acknowledged here for the first time. However, the K-8 schools are few, and the summary results are tentative. Data regarding adult student programs were excluded from this district-wide summary. Percentages sometimes do not sum to 100 due to rounding error.

The 2004 Survey Results

All groups were generally positive in their responses, as they have been in previous years, expressing general agreement with the survey items. Parents and staff have a high percent of agreement with the items on the average. Students at the elementary level also have a high average agreement on the items, but middle and senior high students are less likely to mark agreement. With respect to school safety for example, elementary, middle school, and senior high parents agreed 85, 70, and 69 percent, respectively with the proposition that the school 'is safe and secure.' The responses from staff were 89, 84, and 84 percent. The average response of elementary school students was a comparable 82 percent, but the responses for middle school and senior high students were much lower, 58 and 66 percent respectively.

The item by item results are listed by level for each of the three groups—parents, staff , and students—in the appendices. The last item in each survey asks the respondent to give his or her school a grade analogous to the grade that students receive for their work. This grade may be regarded as a summary of the attitudes that the respondent holds toward the school, and the district averages of those grades, by group by level, are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
School Grades from 2004 Survey Respondents, Aggregated to the District Level

	Parents	Staff	Students
Elementary	B+	B	B
K-8	B+	B	B
Middle School	B	B	C+
Senior High	B-	B-	C+

The on-line staff survey is now in its third year. A Canadian company, InfoPoll, provided the server and necessary services for the collection of the survey data, ensuring anonymity. Responses are entered by individual staff members over the Internet. Of 22,711 staff that were sent materials for participation, 13,126 responded, a return rate of 57.8 percent. This is an improvement over last year’s 54.7 percent, but still below the 62.9 percent rate of 2001, the last year in which a paper survey form was administered.

Of the 71,795 parents who were surveyed, 33,701 responded, or 46.9 percent, down from last year’s rate of 48.2 percent. In contrast, of the 45,568 students surveyed excluding adult students, 37,370, or 82.0 percent responded, up 2.6 percentage points from 2003’s 79.4 percent.

The patterns of the responses were for the elementary, middle and staff groups to be very similar to the previous year’s patterns, and do not deviate from the patterns of responses from earlier administrations. The K-8 group is new as a separate group this year.

Trends (6 years)

The School Climate Surveys have shown exceptional stability of response from one year to the next. Any trends that may be present will be incremental. There are now six years of comparable data available since the 1998-99 change in the survey instruments, enough to observe gross trends. There are three groups: staff, parents, and students. For this analysis, the responses for each group are broken down by level: elementary, middle, and senior, for a total of nine subgroups. Each subgroup was separately analyzed for change from one year to the next. Results are presented in terms of the percent of respondents agreeing with each item, where the “agree” and “strongly agree” responses are combined for an overall percentage.

With six years of results available for each survey, there are now five sets of year-to-year changes to observe. Counting the difference from one year to the next for each item as a score, there are 170 scores for each of the staff and parent subgroups (34 items x 5), and 130 scores for each student subgroup (26 items x 5). It is initially assumed that the changes that occur are random fluctuations caused by small independent changes in

respondents and conditions in each survey each year. Under this assumption (the null hypothesis), the mean annual change should not differ from zero.

The empirical mean annual change in all of the distributions is slightly positive; each having a mean greater than zero but less than two percentage points. Four of the nine groups were found in 2003-04 to have mean change scores that tested significantly different from zero. These are the elementary, middle, and senior high staff groups, and the senior high parent group. The mean change is small in each of these cases, and although the changes are statistically significant, none may be of any practical significance due to the large sample sizes involved. The reader should also bear in mind that results for any given school or selected group of schools may vary substantially from the averages.

Having stated these caveats, Table 2 lists the items that showed the most change over the six year period, for the four distributions found to be statistically significant. Included are the items in each distribution showing the two largest cumulative changes over the six year period.

Table 2
Survey Items Showing the Most Change: 1998-99 through 2003-04
(for the surveys showing statistically significant overall change)

Item #	Item	Annual percent agree						Cumulative Pct Change
		1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	
ELEMENTARY STAFF: Average annual change in Percent Agreement = 0.676								
15*	My ability to do the best possible job at this school is not limited by too many students in each class.	32	35	36	41	38	45	13
13	My principal is receptive to constructive criticism.	64	66	68	70	73	71	7
3	At my school personnel work together as a team.	75	79	79	80	83	82	7
31	Annual teacher evaluations are used to improve teacher performance.	70	72	73	75	78	77	7
MIDDLE SCHOOL STAFF: Average annual change in Percent Agreement = 1.059								
15*	My ability to do the best possible job at this school is not limited by too many students in each class.	26	25	25	31	34	40	14
13	My principal is receptive to constructive criticism.	54	57	56	59	65	65	11
SENIOR HIGH STAFF: Average annual change in Percent Agreement = 0.524								
33	I believe children attending my school are receiving a good education.	76	80	79	79	81	83	7
31	Annual teacher evaluations are used to improve teacher performance.	54	55	56	57	61	61	7
9	My principal demonstrates good interpersonal skills.	71	74	76	75	76	78	7
26	I have a feeling of job security in my present position.	73	77	79	79	80	80	7
3	At my school personnel work together as a team.	65	68	69	71	73	72	7
14	My principal is supportive of teachers.	73	74	77	75	78	78	5
4	At my school administrators solve problems effectively.	66	66	69	69	71	71	5
5	At my school I feel that my ideas are listened to and considered.	63	64	65	66	67	68	5

Item #	Item	Annual percent agree						Cumulative Pct Change
		1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	
SENIOR HIGH PARENTS: Average annual change in Percent Agreement = 0.618								
12	My child's teachers take an interest in students educational future.	60	63	62	65	68	68	8
10	My child's teachers make learning interesting and relevant.	58	60	60	62	64	65	7

*Item has been reversed and reworded to be consistent with other item responses.

The first grouping in Table 2 displays the items showing most change in the elementary staff survey. The mean annual change per item for the elementary staff survey (from Table 2) is 0.676 points. This indicates that on average, a survey item for this group is expected to show a positive change in the percent agreeing or strongly agreeing with the item, of over half a percentage point. The item showing the greatest gain (13 percentage points) concerned classroom overcrowding. Three items showing a gain of 7 points deal with building-level administration and leadership. School overcrowding showed a relatively large gain for the middle school staff also. Eight more modest changes among the senior high staff seem to reflect improving conditions there. The changes in parent responses at the senior high levels indicate improvement in teacher-parent relations.

References

Cronbach, L. (1951). Coefficient alpha and the internal structure of tests. *Psychometrika*, *16*, 527-530.

Romanik, D., & Froman, T. (1992, December). *Results from the 1991-92 Administration of the School Report Card Survey*. Miami, FL: Dade County Public Schools, Office of Educational Accountability.

Appendices

Methodological Notes
District Summary of Parent Responses
District Summary of Staff Responses
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Methodological Notes

Survey Reliability

All measurement involves some error. However, there are several methods of estimating how accurate or reliable responses are to a survey. Reliability coefficients for the parent, student, and staff forms of the *School Climate Survey* were estimated from an internal consistency measure referred to as Cronbach's Alpha (Cronbach 1951). The value of an alpha depends on the average inter-item correlations (i.e., similarity or consistency in responses from item to item) and the number of items on the survey. The average correlation among items on a survey increases as the consistency of ratings across the various items increase. The closer the value of alpha approaches 1.00 the higher the survey's reliability. The total reliability estimate for the parent form (alpha = 0.96), student form (alpha = 0.88), and for the staff form (alpha = 0.88) support the usefulness of the surveys as reliable instruments.

Caveats

Several methodological factors must be considered when interpreting these survey results. In general, the larger the sample, the more accurate the results. The district-wide results reported here are based on sample sizes of several tens of thousands. These sample sizes may be excessive for insuring district-level reliability, but they are the result of aggregating the individual school samples necessary for intended interpretations at that level.

In theory, with district-level samples of these sizes, one can say with 95 percent certainty that the results have a statistical precision of plus or minus one percentage point of what they would be if the entire population had been surveyed with complete accuracy. In the school-level applications of the data derived from the *School Climate Surveys*, as the sample size decreases, the margin of error increases.

Other possible sources of error include wording and question order, inadequate weighting of the data, and (perhaps most important for this survey process) the refusal of sample members to respond to survey items or the survey as a whole. While it is difficult or impossible to quantify the errors that may result from these influences, there are some mitigating factors.

The response rates for this survey process are among those generally considered by the field to be more than minimally adequate for providing meaningful data. Follow-up telephone survey studies conducted in previous years by the predecessors of the Office of Evaluation and Research regarding similar procedures suggest that district-wide survey results are exceedingly reliable (Romanik & Froman 1992). Also, consistent patterns of response across similar items can substantially contribute to the readers' confidence in the reported opinion percentages. In addition, it is reasonable to assume that whatever factors contribute to response bias, they are consistent from one year to the next. Thus, yearly changes in reported opinions (except in cases of extremely aberrant response levels) are advanced as representing real changes worthy of serious consideration.

Additionally, the opinions offered in the survey represent anonymous and self-reported perceptions by parents, students, and staff and may not precisely describe the actual situation in the district. However, these opinions represent a reality to the respondents and should afford insight into the impression the district is making on the local community.

District Summary of Parent Responses

Survey Item	Percent Responding*											
	Elementary			K-8			Middle			Senior		
	A	D	U	A	D	U	A	D	U	A	D	U
1. The school is safe and secure.	85	8	8	87	6	7	70	14	16	69	13	17
2. The school is kept clean and in good condition.	89	7	5	88	7	5	66	20	13	58	26	16
3. The school is overcrowded to the degree that it affects learning.	31	48	21	26	57	18	35	42	23	39	39	22
4. The school maintains high academic standards.	78	5	16	83	6	12	64	12	24	60	16	24
5. The school uses adequate disciplinary measures in dealing with disruptive students.	72	6	22	76	6	18	69	13	19	62	13	25
6. The school makes available textbooks, equipment, and supplies needed for learning.	89	5	6	86	8	7	81	11	8	74	15	11
7. The school serves lunches that are nutritious and taste good.	62	19	20	53	27	20	37	39	24	36	34	30
8. The school keeps bathrooms clean and in good condition.	56	22	22	59	21	21	29	48	23	30	48	22
9. Teachers are friendly and easy to talk to.	95	3	3	90	5	5	78	9	13	72	10	19
10. Teachers make learning interesting and relevant.	91	3	6	86	4	9	72	11	18	65	13	23
11. Teachers motivate students to learn.	91	3	6	88	4	8	74	11	15	64	13	22
12. Teachers take an interest in students' educational future.	89	3	9	84	4	12	74	8	17	68	12	21
13. Teachers are knowledgeable and understand their subject matter.	90	2	8	88	3	10	78	6	16	73	7	20
14. Teachers assign meaningful homework that helps students learn.	92	4	3	89	6	5	77	13	10	69	16	15
15. Teachers do their best to include me in matters directly affecting my child's progress in school.	88	6	5	83	9	8	68	17	14	56	23	21
16. The school teaches students the basic academic skills in reading.	93	3	5	91	3	5	86	6	9	83	7	11
17. The school teaches students basic academic skills in mathematics.	92	2	5	93	3	4	85	7	8	82	7	11
18. The school teaches students to speak and write correctly in English.	92	3	5	92	3	5	85	7	9	81	8	11
19. The school teaches how to solve problems in science.	76	4	20	82	4	13	78	7	15	69	11	20
20. The school teaches use of computers.	78	7	15	71	13	16	70	14	16	68	14	18
21. The school teaches students to think critically.	83	4	14	81	4	14	74	8	17	70	9	20
22. The school teaches students to develop good study and work habits.	89	4	8	85	5	9	74	11	15	67	13	20
23. The school teaches students to get along with different kinds of people.	88	3	10	85	4	10	73	9	17	67	11	21
24. The school is free of violence.	81	6	13	82	7	10	70	17	14	66	16	17
25. The school is free of gang activity.	79	6	15	80	7	13	69	15	17	63	16	21
26. The school is free of substance abuse.	82	5	13	82	6	12	69	12	18	56	21	23
27. The principal does an effective job running my child's school.	86	5	10	85	5	10	74	10	17	64	14	23
28. The principal is available and easy to talk to.	74	8	19	74	8	18	58	14	27	45	20	34
29. The assistant principals are effective administrators.	76	4	21	75	5	20	67	8	23	59	11	30
30. Guidance counselors are concerned about and try to help students with educational and personal problems.	71	5	25	66	7	27	74	9	17	68	14	18
31. Staff in the principal's office treat me with respect when I contact my child's school.	91	4	4	92	3	5	82	9	10	72	13	16
32. School staff respond to my needs and concerns in a reasonable period of time.	86	6	8	85	6	9	73	11	15	61	17	22
33. My child is getting a good education at this school.	92	3	5	90	5	6	80	9	11	78	9	12
34. The overall climate or atmosphere at my child's school is positive and helps my child learn.	92	3	6	89	5	7	73	12	15	67	15	19
35. What overall grade would you give to your child's school?	B+			B+			B			B-		

* A = agree, D = disagree, U = undecided/unknown

District Summary of Staff Responses

Survey Item	Percent Responding*											
	Elementary			K-8			Middle			Senior		
	A	D	U	A	D	U	A	D	U	A	D	U
1. At my school I feel safe and secure.	89	6	5	92	6	3	84	10	6	84	10	6
2. At my school the school building is kept clean and in good condition.	75	20	5	80	15	4	72	23	5	65	29	6
3. At my school personnel work together as a team.	82	11	7	82	10	7	74	16	9	72	17	11
4. At my school administrators solve problems effectively.	80	11	8	75	17	8	70	18	12	71	18	11
5. At my school I feel that my ideas are listened to and considered.	80	10	10	72	15	13	72	15	13	68	18	15
6. At my school adequate disciplinary measures are used to deal with disruptive behavior.	73	17	10	77	16	7	62	28	10	68	23	9
7. My principal is an effective administrator.	83	9	8	79	11	9	78	12	11	77	11	12
8. My principal represents the school in a positive manner.	88	6	6	84	10	7	87	7	7	85	6	9
9. My principal demonstrates good interpersonal skills.	81	12	7	75	16	10	76	15	9	78	13	10
10. My principal deals with conflict constructively.	79	10	11	74	14	12	72	13	14	71	12	17
11. My principal responds in a reasonable time to my concerns.	85	7	8	80	10	9	79	9	11	75	10	15
12. My principal treats me with respect.	89	5	5	86	8	6	88	7	5	86	7	7
13. My principal is receptive to constructive criticism.	71	11	18	67	14	18	65	13	22	60	12	29
14. My principal is supportive of teachers.	82	8	9	75	12	13	77	11	12	78	9	13
15. I am limited by too many students in each class.	48	45	7	45	49	6	52	40	7	51	40	10
16. I am limited by student deficiencies in basic academic skills.	59	32	9	53	40	8	64	28	8	71	21	9
17. I am limited by lack of concern/support from parents.	54	38	8	40	50	10	59	33	9	60	29	12
18. I am limited by lack of concern/support from the principal.	9	83	8	14	76	9	11	77	11	10	76	14
19. I am limited by lack of concern/support from the district administration.	19	53	28	19	51	30	20	48	33	24	42	35
20. I am limited by insufficient resources (e.g., funds, books, equipment, supplies, etc.).	24	67	8	33	57	9	30	60	9	41	50	9
21. I am limited by school violence.	7	88	6	8	88	4	14	77	10	12	77	11
22. I am limited by student gang activity.	2	92	6	4	88	7	5	81	14	8	77	15
23. I am limited by student substance abuse.	2	93	6	3	88	8	6	76	18	16	63	22
24. Students generally come to my class at the beginning of the term prepared for the grade level or courses I teach.	43	45	12	50	38	12	38	48	13	34	51	15
25. I feel satisfied concerning how my career is progressing at this school.	77	11	12	75	12	13	72	15	13	72	16	12
26. I have a feeling of job security in my present position.	84	7	9	80	10	10	79	9	11	80	10	11
27. I like working at my school.	87	5	7	86	7	6	84	8	9	86	7	6
28. Staff morale is high at my school.	61	23	15	59	24	16	50	32	19	54	30	16
29. I frequently feel overloaded and overwhelmed while working at my school.	55	35	10	49	43	8	49	42	10	47	43	11
30. Annual teacher evaluations are fair and reasonable.	86	3	11	77	3	19	83	4	13	82	4	14
31. Annual teacher evaluations are used to improve teacher performance.	77	6	17	67	10	23	68	10	21	61	14	26
32. Inservice programs keep me informed of the latest educational strategies.	86	7	7	70	14	17	77	12	10	71	17	12
33. I believe children attending my school are receiving a good education.	91	3	5	93	3	4	84	6	10	83	7	10
34. The overall climate or atmosphere at my school is positive and helps students learn.	87	7	6	87	8	6	77	13	10	78	12	10
35. What overall grade would you give to this school?	B			B			B			B-		

* A = agree, D = disagree, U = undecided/unknown

District Summary of Student Responses

Survey Item	Percent Responding*											
	Elementary			K-8			Middle			Senior		
	A	D	U	A	D	U	A	D	U	A	D	U
1. I feel safe at my school.	82	9	9	84	7	9	58	22	19	66	18	17
2. My school building is kept clean and in good condition.	53	31	15	61	20	18	36	46	18	45	40	16
3. Students in my school usually follow school rules.	34	45	21	35	38	28	18	59	23	29	47	24
4. There are too many students in my classroom and that affects how much I learn.	24	67	10	17	72	10	23	60	16	28	54	17
5. My teachers require that I work very hard for the grades I get.	88	5	7	85	4	10	79	8	12	79	8	13
6. My school has enough books and equipment to help me learn.	84	8	7	77	13	10	60	23	16	56	28	16
7. Food served for lunch at my school looks good and tastes good.	34	48	18	27	54	19	21	58	20	28	46	26
8. Bathrooms in my school are clean and in good condition.	21	68	11	35	49	16	13	75	12	19	69	13
9. My teachers are friendly and easy to talk to.	82	8	10	81	8	10	57	20	22	62	19	19
10. My teachers make learning fun and interesting.	84	8	9	73	10	17	51	25	24	45	29	25
11. My teachers make me want to learn.	84	6	9	73	11	16	55	22	23	48	27	26
12. My teachers know a lot about the subjects they teach.	92	3	6	88	4	8	79	8	14	74	12	15
13. My teachers give me meaningful homework that helps me learn.	85	7	8	76	9	15	60	20	20	52	24	23
14. My teachers are interested in how I do in the future.	79	7	15	73	10	17	57	18	25	52	22	26
15. My teachers let me know how I am doing on my schoolwork.	88	5	6	83	7	10	74	13	12	70	16	14
16. Violence is a problem at my school.	36	50	13	24	59	17	44	34	22	27	50	23
17. Gangs are a problem at my school.	22	66	12	16	70	13	27	51	22	16	61	22
18. Student drug and alcohol use are problems at my school.	15	78	7	11	75	14	23	53	24	29	43	29
19. My principal does a good job running the school.	82	9	9	76	11	13	57	22	21	50	22	27
20. The assistant principals are available when needed.	70	13	18	63	14	23	51	24	25	42	26	32
21. My guidance counselor helps me with school and personal problems.	68	10	22	49	13	39	56	18	26	52	22	26
22. Adults at my school care about me as an individual.	68	12	19	58	15	27	41	27	32	34	30	36
23. Adults at my school help me when I need it.	79	9	13	70	12	18	52	21	27	46	24	30
24. I like coming to my school.	70	18	12	62	23	16	48	33	20	51	30	19
25. I am getting a good education at my school.	86	4	10	82	5	12	68	13	19	66	15	19
26. The overall climate or feeling at my school is positive and helps me learn.	74	9	17	70	10	20	48	23	29	52	23	26
27. What overall grade would you give to your school?	B			B			C+			C+		

* A = agree, D = disagree, U = undecided/unknown