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Selected Results of the 2002 M-DCPS School Climate Surveys

The School Climate Surveys are administered annually to gather information on the perceptions that students, their parents, and school staffs hold concerning their schools. In 2001-2002, the surveys were distributed to approximately 71 thousand parents, 52 thousand primary, secondary, and adult students, and 22 thousand staff. This brief summarizes selected major points from the results of those surveys, as they pertain to the Pre-k through 12th grade program.

The administration of the 2001-02 Surveys differed from past administrations in significant ways. The staff survey was conducted on-line for the first time. No major difficulties were encountered with the on-line survey, although minor obstacles were met and overcome by the various schools. Of 22,179 staff who were sent materials for participation, 11,117 responded, a return rate of 50.1 percent. This rate is lower than last year's rate of 62.9 percent, a result most probably due to lack of familiarity with the procedures, and/or lack of experience in using the Internet for this purpose.

There were also changes in the sampling method used for parents and students, which substantially reduced the numbers sampled. The response rates for these groups also differed from those of last year. Of the 70,949 parents who were surveyed, 32,325 responded, or 45.6 percent. This is lower than last year's rate of 50.8 percent. In contrast, of the 46,068 students surveyed excluding adult students, 40,101, or 87.0 percent, responded. This is a 16 percentage point increase over the previous year's 71.1 percent.

Despite the variation in return rates, the changes were achieved without affecting the survey results. The patterns of the responses in every case were nearly identical to the previous year's patterns. All groups were generally positive in their responses, as they have been in the past, 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 show agreement. 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 displayed in Table 1.

Table 1
2002 School Grades from Survey Respondents, Aggregated to the District Level

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

There are now four years of comparable data available since the 1998-99 revision of the survey instruments, enough to observe gross trends but insufficient for an analysis of particular items. All groups show slight increases in mean overall agreement with the survey statements over the time period. Three of the groups—elementary staff, senior high staff, and senior high parents—appear to show a small, gradual trend toward more positive attitudes toward their schools over time.

These topics are discussed in greater detail, along with displays of the item-by-item results, in the annual report; available from the Department of Research Services.