

Educational Program Survey

JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS SUMMARY

689 students responded; 286 from Clarke, 220 from Diamond, 183 from Muzzey.

On questions concerning attitudes about school

- * 53% of junior high students agreed that school has helped them develop intellectually about as well as they could have hoped (28% disagreed)
- * 50% agreed that they usually enjoy their classes (29% disagreed)
- * 47% agreed that they found school work interesting and challenging (31% disagreed).

(Note: Responses were remarkably uniform over the three junior high schools. The positivity of response seemed always to increase as one went from Clarke to Diamond to Muzzey, but the magnitudes of differences were small.)

On questions about teachers

- * junior high students (70%) agreed that, in general, teachers do a good job (16% strongly agreed)
- * a substantial majority said they have respect for their teachers (60% agreed, 18% strongly agreed)
- * the students had mixed feelings when asked if many of their teachers give them support and encouragement in their studies and school activities, responding this way:

	Clarke	Diamond	Muzzey	Total
strongly agree	10%	12%	20%	13%
agree	43%	39%	43%	41%
disagree	33%	33%	26%	31%
strongly disagree	12%	14%	10%	12%

When questioned about distribution of their time and work

* the junior high students did not feel that they were given too much responsibility (class work, etc.) 55% disagreed and 12% disagreed strongly with the statement that they were given too much.

* the students felt that more class time should be spent on group work (37%) and discussions (31%).

(Note: Once again, responses very similar in the three schools)

When asked about facilities

* a sizable majority felt that facilities and equipment are adequate in their school (64% agreed, 7% strongly agreed), but the breakdown by school shows the majority less sizable at Muzzey.

	Clarke	Diamond	Muzzey	Total
strongly agree	12%	5%	5%	7%
agree	67%	71%	53%	64%
disagree	15%	20%	34%	22%
strongly disagree	1%	1%	8%	3%

*two-thirds of the junior high students overall felt that newer schools provide educational advantages not found in older schools (while at Muzzey less than half did).

many advantages	27%	24%	8%	21%
some advantages	47%	47%	39%	45%
no advantages	9%	13%	38%	18%

* half of the students (60% at Muzzey) felt that older schools provide educational advantages not found in newer ones.

many advantages	5%	7%	20%	10%
some advantages	42%	39%	40%	41%
no advantages	29%	29%	24%	28%
no opinion	20%	19%	11%	17%

On questions about grading

- * 70% of junior high students feel that the grading system at their school is probably as good as any evaluation method.
- * a sizable majority (70%) rejected the idea that there is not enough emphasis on getting good grades (at Huzzey, 84% did).

When asked about discipline

- * an overwhelming majority (88%) felt that students do not have too much freedom in school.
- * about two-thirds felt that better communication between parents, students and staff was the way to reduce discipline problems, in preference to stricter rules or more enforcement.

On questions about the educational programs in junior high school

- * students (collectively) were undecided about the balance between required courses and electives, as many feeling it is good as bad.
- * a majority (57%) agreed that there should be more career, vocational and technical training available.
- * among eleven specific academic programs presented to them, nine were rated as either satisfactory or excellent by at least two-thirds of the students; phys. ed., composition, research skills, art, math computation, math reasoning, foreign language, social science, reading comprehension.
- * overall, students (50%) rated music satisfactory or excellent; Clarke 37%, Diamond 54%, Huzzey 71%. 33% felt music needs improvement.
- * handwriting was judged satisfactory by 44%, needs improvement by 25%, and 25% had no opinion.
- * 78% rated counselling services "adequate or excellent."

If junior high students were School Committee members, deciding where to cut costs, they would:

reduce specialists/administrators	27%
eliminate 12th grade by covering requirements in three years	18%
the athletic budget	16%
other	16%

In allocating funds their preferences would be:

hiring top quality teaching personnel	30%
continuing present level and choices of curriculum, expanding career and vocational training	21%

Those who would allocate funds to keep all schools open despite a drop in enrollment were Clarke 7%, Diamond 5%, Muzzey 10%.

When asked what was most important to them in elementary school, junior high high students gave a multitude of answers which fell generally into six categories:

good teachers	46%
classmates	34%
what I learned	19%
small classes	13%
the principal	4%
small school	3%

Most of the lengthier answers focused on these aspects as well:

"Teachers had more time for you"

"Teachers were more involved with us"

"Teachers made learning fun"

"My teachers liking me"

"Getting to know other people and making friends"

"Learning to think, learning basic skills"

"Learning to communicate with people"

"Learning to be in a class and respect the teacher"

"Understanding the world outside of school"

"Classes that stayed with you all day"

"When you get split from friends, you make new ones, but then you get some old ones back. You can't learn well without some old friends back."

Two general responses about early education are worth special note:

"A very large and spread out system of studies so you learn a little of everything."

"Time for maturing, developing, learning respect and how to function in an educational environment."

But a prize should go to the young person who said the most important thing was:

"Whether I got to hold the flag and whether I got to feed the fish."

Students listed the strengths of the Lexington Public Schools as follows:

- * far and away the most frequent reply was "good teachers." (Over 30%.)
- * educational programs, particularly math and gym (7%) and social science, science, foreign languages and English (4%)
- * facilities and equipment (5% and 4%) were mentioned much less frequently among Muzzey students than among those from Diamond and Clarke.

Other strengths cited by several students included environment, relationships, understanding, competition, good discipline, field trips, students.

"In general, there is an excellent faculty"

"We have many smart students and most of the teachers try to fill your brain with everything they know."

"Living in a wealthy town where the School Committee should be able to reach its budget."

"I think questions like these are good because you will find out how the people who 'live' with the school feel."

"That we really care about the teachers and equipment and keep wanting to be better."

What do you feel are the weaknesses of the Lexington Public Schools?

The diversity in the responses to this question is mind-boggling. Almost everything came in for some criticism. The few items which were cited a significant number of times were:

Lunches	12%
Teachers (some teachers)	7%
Long school year	5%
Equipment	4%
Lack of discipline	3.5%
Grading system	3%
Art programs	3%
Old buildings (mostly at Kuzzey)	2.5%
Facilities	2.5%
Music (Diamond and Clarke)	3%

The remaining criticisms can only be sampled: lack of geography, discrimination against girls in athletics, too few electives, not enough outside activities, lack of books, daily school hours too long, smoking in lavs, principals, the School Committee, not enough freedom, etc.

Once again a few quotes are in order:

"Teachers should consult one another about homework and projects, so we're not overloaded"

"Don't learn what is important to know"

"Too much competition -- levels and phases all over this place"

"Weaker students constantly reminded of their lesser ability, therefore they continue to do poorly"

"Passing kids from one grade to another who have lousy handwriting and reading ability"

"Not enough excitement -- it's boring sitting in class day after day"

"The old schools always get the last of things "

"More time for discussion of issues, to help prepare us for the world"

The three most important goals for the Lexington Public School System, identified by junior high school students, are:

To have good teachers	20%
To prepare students for career, college, life	14%
To provide a good education	10%

Hundreds of other "goals" were mentioned, from "developing kids mentally" or "keeping them off the streets" to "making school a worthwhile place to go" or "staying ahead of other towns in education". Reflected in the collective items mentioned, which include many very specific programmatic and human goals, is a set of expectations which some would describe as "out of sight". For more modest goals, one might try "making school a good place to go, since we have to go" or "keep scum off bubblers".

When asked what makes a good teacher good?, students described a person who:

Understands kids	22%
Knows his/her subject	8%
Gives extra help	5.5%
Is fair	5.4%
Nice, but firm discipline	3.5%

