Connecticut Department of Education
Bureau of Special Education

2005-2006 Connecticut Special Education Parent Survey

Key Findings

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2005-2006 Connecticut Special Education
Parent Survey

A Review of Key Findings

In spring 2006, the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), Bureau of Special Education, conducted a statewide survey of parents of students receiving special education services, ages 3 through 21. The survey offers insight into parents' satisfaction with their child's special education program, including parent training and support; participation in their child's program; transition planning; and their child's skills. The survey was the second year of a continuing collaborative effort between CSDE and the CT Parent Advisory Work Group to collect information regarding the provision of special education services in Connecticut.

Slight revisions were made in the second year of survey distribution in response to new federal reporting requirements from the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). As part of these requirements, all school districts in the state were randomly assigned to one of six data collection years. Twenty-one districts were selected to participate in the 2005-2006 data collection year, with data to be collected on all 169 districts by 2011.

Parent survey questionnaires were sent to 6,305 families of children receiving special education services and responses were received from 1,387 families, a 22.0% response rate. Response rates varied by district, ranging from 13.4% in the New Britain and Waterbury school districts to 33.8% in the Orange school district. In general, survey respondents were found to be representative of the overall statewide special education population.

This review includes key findings from the 2005-2006 parent survey. For more specific results, please refer to the 2005-2006 Connecticut Special Education Parent Survey Summary Report.

Key Findings

1. ***The majority of parents were pleased with the special education services their child received.***

- When asked, 83.5% of survey respondents agreed they were satisfied with their child's overall special education program.

- The majority (92.2%) of survey respondents indicated they had the opportunity to talk to their child's teachers on a regular basis and 92.1% of respondents indicated their child was accepted within the school community.

- Among respondents who chose to provide written comments, more than one-quarter (27.3%) reported they were pleased with their child's program and 23.5% reported they were pleased with school staff and administration[1].

2. ***Parents reported varied levels of satisfaction when asked about schools' efforts to communicate, involve and support them through the special education process.***

- When asked if administrators and teachers in their child's school encouraged parent involvement in order to improve services and results for children with disabilities, the majority (86.9%) of survey respondents agreed.

- However, 20.1% of written comments mentioned problems regarding school communication and parent support, while only 4.2% of respondents who provided written comments indicated they were pleased with the school's communication and support.

- Written comments most regularly mentioned a lack of direct communication between staff and parents, a need for support groups, and a need for parents' concerns to be more adequately heard.

3. ***Parents frequently reported an understanding of, and adequate involvement in, the IEP/PPT process. In comparison, parents were less likely to report (although the majority still agreed) they were satisfied with the provision of services as identified in their child's IEP.***

- Between 90-95% of survey respondents indicated they 1) had received a copy of their child's IEP within 5 school days; 2) understood what was written in the IEP; 3) understood what was discussed at PPT meetings; 4) were able to schedule meetings at a time and place that met their needs; and 5) were encouraged to give input and express concerns at PPT meetings.

[1] Of the 1,387 surveys returned, 553 included written comments, representing 39.9% of the total received.

- Between 82-83% of survey respondents agreed that 1) the IEP met their child's needs; 2) all services identified in the IEP had been provided; 3) accommodations and modifications as identified in the IEP were provided by general education teachers; 4) special and general education teachers worked together to implement the IEP; and 5) staff was appropriately trained to provide their child's specific services.

- Among written comments, survey respondents described concerns including inadequate, inconsistent or limited special education services; problems with teachers not following the IEP; and a delayed diagnosis of their child's disability.

4. Parents of secondary students expressed a considerable amount of dissatisfaction with services related to transition planning.

- When asked if outside agencies had been invited to participate in secondary transition planning, almost one-quarter (23.2%) of survey respondents disagreed and 19.9% of respondents indicated they didn't know.

- Over one-third (35.3%) of survey respondents with a 13 year-old child indicated that the PPT did not introduce planning for their transition to adulthood and 28.5% of respondents with a child age 15 or above indicated the PPT did not develop individualized goals related to post-secondary planning.

5. The majority of parents indicated their child had the opportunity to participate in school-sponsored and extracurricular activities. However, a considerable percentage of parents indicated dissatisfaction with the schools' provision of extra supports for their child's participation.

- Close to all (94.6%) survey respondents agreed that their child had the opportunity to participate in school-sponsored activities and 88.8% of respondents agreed that their child had the opportunity to participate in extracurricular school activities.

- However, when asked if their child's school provided the supports necessary for their child to participate in extracurricular school activities, almost one-third (29.7%) of respondents disagreed and 17.9% of respondents indicated they didn't know.

6. ***A majority of parents had not attended parent training or information sessions in the past year and a majority of parents were not involved in a support network for parents of students with disabilities. In addition, many parents reported they didn't know if such opportunities were available in their district.***

- Close to two-thirds (60.4%) of survey respondents indicated they had not attended a parent training or information session in the past year and close to one-third (28.8%) of respondents indicated they didn't know if such sessions existed.

- Similarly, 68.6% of survey respondents indicated they were not involved in a support network for parents of children with disabilities and 32.5% of respondents indicated they didn't know if one was available.

7. ***The availability of parent training and a support network was more important than involvement in parent training or a support network, when examining a parent's satisfaction with 1) their child's program and 2) the school's encouragement of parent involvement.***

- There was a significant and positive correlation between respondents who agreed they were satisfied with their child's overall special education program and respondents who agreed 1) there were opportunities for parent trainings provided by their district and 2) a support network was available to them through their district or other sources.

- However, there was no significant correlation between respondents' satisfaction with their child's program and 1) their attendance at parent training or 2) their involvement in a support network.

- Similarly, there was a significant and positive correlation between respondents who agreed that administrators and teachers encouraged parent involvement and respondents who agreed 1) there were opportunities for parent training provided by their district and 2) a support network was available to them through their district or other sources.

- However, there was no significant correlation between respondent's satisfaction with administrators and teachers' encouragement of parent involvement and 1) their attendance at parent training or 2) their involvement in a support network.

Additional Findings

Demographic Differences

Survey responses were analyzed according to different demographic characteristics of the respondent's child including gender, race/ethnicity, grade level, and disability category. The type of district the child attended was also considered.[2] The race/ethnicity categories of American Indian/Alaskan Native and Asian/Pacific Islander were excluded due to the small number of respondents with children from these categories. Eleven survey statements, in which fewer than 50% of parents responded, were also excluded from this analysis.

Differences in responses, according to the child's gender, are not discussed as no notable differences were found. Overall, large differences across demographic categories most often occurred on survey statements regarding parent training and support. It was noted in the key findings that no significant correlation existed between parents' reported satisfaction level and their participation in parent training sessions or a support network. The analysis of responses by demographic categories revealed that the demographic groups least likely to report satisfaction overall were often the most likely to report they had attended parent training or were involved in a support network.

Race

- ✓ *On the majority of survey statements analyzed, there was a relatively small difference in the level of satisfaction expressed by parents of different race/ethnicity categories.*

  - There was a difference of less than 5 percentage points across all three race/ethnicity categories on 22 of the 29 statements analyzed.

- ✓ *Parents of Hispanic children were the most likely to report that their child's school provided extra supports for participation in extracurricular activities. They were also the most likely to report that their child had been denied access to non-school sponsored community activities.*

  - Close to two-thirds (62.5%) of parents of Hispanic children indicated that their child's school provided the supports necessary for their child to participate in extracurricular activities, while 60.5% of parents of Black children and 46.9% of parents of White children agreed.

[2] Districts classifications were determined by total school enrollment. Urban districts included Madison, New Britain, Shelton, Waterbury, Wilton, and Windsor; suburban districts included Canton, Derby, East Lyme, Killingly, New London and Orange; and rural districts included Andover, Ashford, Chester, Easton, Lebanon, North Stonington, Preston, Sharon, and Westbrook.

- However, almost one-third (31.5%) of parents of Hispanic children indicated their child had been denied access to non-school sponsored community activities due to his or her disability, compared to 13.3% of parents of Black children and 12.7% of parents of White children.

✓ *Parents of Hispanic children were the most likely to report that they had attended parent training in the past year, while parents of Black children were the most likely to report that opportunities for parent training were provided by their district. Parents of White children were the least likely to agree with both statements.*

- More than one-half (51.5%) of parents of Hispanic children indicated they had attended parent training in the past year, while 42.2% of parents of Black children and 36.8% of parents of White children indicated they had done so in the past year.

- Close to one-half (45.6%) of parents of Black children reported that opportunities for parent training were provided by their district, while 40.5% of parents of Hispanic children and 37.9% of parents of White children indicated that parent training was provided.

✓ *Parents of Black children were the least likely to report they had been involved in a support network for parents of student with disabilities. However, they were the most likely to report that a support network was available to them through their district or other sources.*

- When asked if they were involved in a support network for parents of students with disabilities, just over one-quarter (27.6%) of parents of Black children agreed, compared to 33.7% of parents of Hispanic children and 32.7% of parents of White children.

- When asked if a support network for parents of students with disabilities was available to them, 45.3% of parents of Black children agreed, compared to 40.5% of parents of White children and 38.4% of parents of Hispanic children.

Grade

✓ *Across almost all survey statements analyzed, parents of high school children expressed the lowest level of satisfaction when responses were disaggregated by the child's grade level.*

- The only survey statement response in which parents of high school children expressed a higher level of agreement than parents of children in any other grade level was when they were asked if parent training opportunities were available in their district.

- ✓ *Across almost all survey statements analyzed, there was a relatively small difference between the level of satisfaction expressed by parents of preschool children and the level of satisfaction expressed by parents of elementary school children.*

    - The only survey statement response in which a substantial difference occurred was when parents were asked if the school district had proposed the regular classroom for their child as the first placement option; 75.0% of parents of preschool children agreed while 86.7% of parents of elementary school children agreed.

- ✓ *Parents of preschool children and parents of elementary school children were the most likely to report they were satisfied with the special education services their child received.*

    - When asked if all special education services identified in their child's IEP had been provided, 89.5% of parents of preschool children agreed, followed by 86.3% of parents of elementary school children; 82.9% of parents of middle school children; and 73.5% of parents of high school children.

    - Close to all (93.4%) parents of preschool children agreed that their child was learning skills that would enable him or her to be as independent as possible, compared to 88.1% of parents of elementary school children; 82.8% of parents of middle school children; and 80.4% of parents of high school children.

    - Parents of elementary school children were the most likely (87.3%) to agree when asked if general education teachers made accommodations and modifications as indicated on their child's IEP, followed by 84.0% of parents of preschool children; 79.6% of parents of middle school children; and 73.6% of parents of high school children.

- ✓ *Parents of middle school children were the least likely to report they had attended parent training in the past year and were also the least likely to report they were involved in a support network for parents of students with disabilities.*

    - One-third (33.0%) of parents of middle school children reported they had <u>attended</u> parent training in the past year, while 43.2% of parents of preschool children reported having done so in the past year. The percent of parents of elementary school children and the percent of parents of high school children to report they <u>attended</u> training were almost the same, 41.7% and 41.8% respectively.

    - Similarly, parents of middle school children were the least likely (27.3%) to report they were <u>involved</u> in a support network for parents of students with disabilities, followed by 30.5% of parents of high school children and 32.2% of parents of elementary school children. Parents of preschool children were the most likely (37.4%) to report they were <u>involved</u> in a support network.

- ✓ *Parents of middle school children were the least likely to report that parent training opportunities were provided by their district and they were the least likely to report that a support network for parents of students with disabilities was available to them through their district or other sources.*

    - Approximately one-third (34.2%) of parents of middle school children reported parent training opportunities were provided by their district, while 36.0% of parents of preschool children agreed; 40.5% of parents of elementary school children agreed; and 42.0% of parents of high school children agreed.

    - When asked if a support network for parents of students with disabilities was available to them, 35.9% of parents of middle school children agreed, while 37.5% of parents of high school children agreed; 41.5% of parents of elementary school children agreed; and 46.0% of parents of preschool children agreed.

Disability

- ✓ *Across all disability categories, parents of children with a speech and language impairment and parents of children with a learning disability were the most likely to report satisfaction with their child's special education program.*

    - On 16 of the 29 statements analyzed, parents of children with a speech and language impairment reported the highest level of satisfaction among all disability categories, while parents of children with a learning disability reported the highest level of satisfaction on six survey statements.

- ✓ *Parents of children with autism and parents of children with a serious emotional disturbance were the least likely to report satisfaction with their child's special education program.*

    - On 17 of the 29 statements analyzed, parents of children with autism reported the lowest level of satisfaction across all disability categories, while parents of children with a serious emotional disturbance reported the lowest level of satisfaction on six survey statements.

- ✓ *When disaggregated by these four disability categories (speech and language impairment, learning disability, serious emotional disturbance and autism), differences in the level of satisfaction expressed by parents was often considerable.*

    - When asked if staff was appropriately trained and able to provide their child's specific program and services, 88.5% of parents of children with a speech and language impairment and 83.9% of parents of children with a learning disability agreed, compared to 70.8% of parents of children with autism and 78.7% of parents of children with a serious emotional disturbance.

- Almost all parents of children with a learning disability and parents of children with a speech and language impairment (97.5% and 96.0%, respectively) agreed that their child had the opportunity to participate in extracurricular school activities, compared to 66.7% of parents of children with autism and 79.2% of parents of children with a serious emotional disturbance.

- When asked if the school district proposed the regular classroom for their child as the first placement option, 89.8% of parents of children with a speech and language impairment and 84.3% of parents of children with a learning disability agreed, compared to 66.0% of parents of children with a serious emotional disturbance and 74.8% of parents of children with autism.

✓ *The greatest differences in satisfaction across disability categories occurred when parents were asked about parent training and support. Parents of children with a speech and language impairment were the least likely of all parents to agree with survey statements in this area.*

- Over one-half (51.2%) of parents of children with an intellectual disability/mental retardation and 48.8% of parents of children with autism reported they had attended parent training in the past year. In comparison, 37.8% of parents of children with a serious emotional disturbance and just 28.7% of parents of children with a speech and language impairment reported they had done so in the past year.

- Similarly, 47.8% of parents of children with autism and 44.2% of parents of children with an intellectual disability/mental retardation reported they were involved in a support network for parents of children with disabilities. In comparison, 20.5% of parents of children with a serious emotional disturbance and just 19.6% of parents of children with a speech and language impairment reported they were involved.

- Close to one-half of parents of children with a learning disability and parents of children with an intellectual disability/mental retardation (45.2% and 43.6%, respectively) agreed opportunities for parent training were provided by their district. In comparison, less than one-third of parents of children with a speech and language impairment and parents of children with an emotional disturbance (29.6% and 32.0%, respectively) agreed.

- Similarly, over one-half of parents of children with an intellectual disability and parents of children with autism (56.6% and 54.3%, respectively) agreed there was a support network for parents of students with disabilities available to them through their district or other sources. Less than one-third of parents of children with a speech and language impairment and parents of children with a serious emotional disturbance (28.0% and 29.4%, respectively) agreed.

District Type

- ✓ *The only considerable difference in satisfaction across district type occurred when parents were asked about parent training and support. Parents of children in rural districts were less likely than parents of children in suburban and urban districts to report they had attended parent training in the past year and were also less likely to report that they had been involved in a support network for parents of students with disabilities.*

    - Approximately one-quarter (27.0%) of parents of children in rural districts reported they had attended parent training in the past year, compared to 40.6% and 42.3% of parents of children in urban and suburban districts, respectively.

    - Similarly, 18.1% of parents of children in rural districts reported they had been involved in a support network for parents of students with disabilities, while 33.0% of parents of children in suburban districts and 35.0% of parents of children in urban districts indicated they had been involved.

- ✓ *Parents of children in urban school districts were less likely than parents of children in suburban districts to indicate there were opportunities for parent training provided by their district. However, a similar percentage of parents of children in urban school districts and parents of children in suburban school districts reported they had attended parent training in the past year.*

    - When asked if there were opportunities <u>provided</u> for parent training in their district, 28.0% of parents of children in urban districts agreed, compared to 48.3% of parents of children in suburban districts.

    - However, when asked if they had <u>attended</u> parent training in the past year, 40.6% of parents of children in urban districts agreed, compared to 42.3% of parents of children in suburban districts.

District-to-District Differences

Districts with fewer than 20 surveys returned were not included in the district-by-district analysis in order to safeguard against any possible breaches in confidentiality. These include Andover, Chester, Sharon and Westbrook. Similar to the demographic section, survey statements in which fewer than 50% of parents responded were also excluded.

The differences in districts described below should be considered within the context of the number of respondents from each district. The total number of parents per district varied considerably and therefore the number of parents per district to respond to each statement is provided. Similar to the previous demographic section, when parent responses were aggregated by district, the largest differences in parent response occurred on survey statements regarding parent training and support. Also, similar to the demographic section, the categories (or in this case districts) least likely to report satisfaction overall were often the most likely to report they had attended parent training or were involved in a support network.

Comparison by Survey Statement

✓ *The experience of parents of children with disabilities varied substantially across districts on a variety of questions.*

- While 93.3% of parents in Preston (n=31) agreed that all special education services identified in their child's IEP had been provided, less than three-quarters (74.4%) of parents from Orange (n=44) agreed.

- Almost all (96.7%) parents in Preston (n=30) agreed that general education teachers made accommodations and modifications as indicated on their child's IEP, while less than three-quarters (73.0%) of parents from New Britain (n=89) agreed.

- Almost all (95.8%) parents in North Stonington (n=24) agreed that administrators and teachers encouraged parent involvement in order to improve services and results for children with disabilities, while three-quarters (75.0%) of parents from Orange (n=44) agreed.

- All (100.0%) parents in Ashford (n=20) agreed that PPT meetings had been scheduled at times and places that met their needs, while just over three-quarters (79.8%) of parents in Waterbury (n=109) agreed.

- Only 8.6% of parents in Madison (n=70) agreed that their child had been denied access to non-school sponsored community activities due to his/her disability, while almost one-third (28.8%) of parents from Waterbury (n=59) agreed.

✓ *The largest differences across districts most often occurred on survey statements regarding parent training and support.*

- Almost two-thirds (65.7%) of parents from Orange (n=35) indicated they had attended parent training in the past year, compared to 13.3% of parents from North Stonington (n=15).

- Similarly, 71.9% of parents from Orange (n=32) indicated they were involved in a support network for parents of students with disabilities, compared to 6.3% of parents from North Stonington (n=16).

- When asked if there were opportunities for parent training provided by their district, 61.5% of parents from Wilton (n=104) agreed, compared to 17.9% of parents from Canton (n=39).

- Almost three-quarters (73.0%) of parents from Orange (n=37) agreed that there was a support network for parents of students with disabilities available through their district or other sources, while less than one-quarter (21.1%) of parents from Canton (n=38) agreed.

Comparison by Overall Response

An overall survey comparison of districts was approached using two distinct methods. First, the percentage of parents in the district to agree with a particular survey statement was compared to the percentage of parents overall to agree with that same statement. This comparison was made for each of the 29 survey statements in an effort to assess the degree of parents' satisfaction in a particular district to the degree satisfaction overall. Districts were then ranked by the number of statements in which the degree of satisfaction in the district was greater than the degree of satisfaction overall.

The second method compared districts according to the relative intensity of satisfaction by measuring the strength of agreement/disagreement with each survey statement. A mean score was calculated for each statement (by district and overall), ranging from a score of 1 (strong disagreement) to a score of 6 (strong agreement). The mean response for each district was compared to the mean response overall for each of the 29 survey statements. Similar to the first method, districts were then ranked by the number of statements in which the intensity of satisfaction in the district was greater than the intensity of satisfaction overall.

The total number of respondents per district is provided in order to provide the appropriate context for comparison.

✓ *The degree of parent satisfaction in Madison (n=131) was higher than the degree of parent satisfaction overall on 27 of the 29 statements compared. The intensity of parent satisfaction in Madison was greater than the intensity of parent satisfaction overall on 24 of the 29 statements compared.*

- Other districts that commonly had a higher than average degree of parent satisfaction were Preston (n=31), New London (n=84), North Stonington (n=25), and Shelton (n=150).

- Other districts that commonly had a higher than average intensity of parent satisfaction were Lebanon (n=38), East Lyme (n=106), New London (n=84), and Shelton (n=150).

✓ *In comparison, the degree of parent satisfaction in Killingly (n=106) was lower than the degree of parent satisfaction overall on 24 of 29 statements and the intensity of parent satisfaction in Waterbury (n=112) was less than the intensity of parent satisfaction overall on 27 of the 29 statements compared.*

- Other districts that commonly had a lower than average degree of parent satisfaction were Waterbury (n=112), Easton (n=40) and Orange (n=44).

- Other districts that commonly had a less than average intensity of parent satisfaction were Killingly (n=106), Derby (n=43), Easton (n=40) and Orange (n=44).

Year-to-Year Differences

A comparison between the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 parent surveys should be interpreted with caution due to changes in survey design between the two years. The most notable difference between the two surveys was a modification in the response scale; the 3-point Likert scale of "Yes", "Sometimes/Somewhat", and "No" that appeared on the 2004-2005 survey was changed to a 6-point Likert agreement scale on the 2005-2006 survey. (In the following section, the word "indicate" refers to "Yes" in 2004-2005 and refers to "Strongly/Moderately Agree" in 2005-2006.)

- ✓ *Parent survey responses between 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 appeared to be fairly similar, with a slightly higher percentage of parents indicating overall satisfaction in 2005-2006.*

    - On 26 of the 32 statements common to both surveys, the percentage of parents who answered strongly/moderately agree in 2005-2006 was greater than the percentage of parents who answered yes in 2004-2005.

    - However, in almost half (n=14) of the 32 statements, the difference between parents who answered strongly/moderately agree in 2005-2006 and parents who answered yes in 2004-2005, was less than 5 percentage points.

- ✓ *In 2005-2006, there was a considerable increase from the previous year in the percentage of parents who reported they had attended training in the past year or had been involved in a support network for parents of students with disabilities.*

    - In 2005-2006, 32.2% of parents indicated they had attended parent training in the past year, while in 2004-2005, 16.4% of parents indicated they had done so.

    - In 2005-2006, 23.1% of parents indicated they had been involved in a support network for parents of students with disabilities, while in 2004-2005, 11.8% of parents indicated such involvement.

- ✓ *When compared to 2004-2005, parents in 2005-2006 were more likely to indicate their child had been sent home due to behavioral difficulties and were more likely to indicate their child had been denied access to non-school sponsored community activities.*

    - The percentage of parents who indicated their child had been sent home from school due to behavioral difficulties was approximately 10 percentage points greater in 2005-2006 than in 2004-2005.

    - The percentage of parents who indicated their child had been denied access to non-school sponsored community activities was approximately 6 percentage points greater in 2005-2006 than in 2004-2005.

- ✓ *Comparing written comments between the two years, parents in 2005-2006 were more likely to have reported dissatisfaction with communication and parent support and were less likely to have reported problems with services.*

    - In 2005-2006, 20.1% of parents noted they were dissatisfied with communication and parent support, compared to 14.1% of parents in 2004-2005.

    - In 2005-2006, 18.4% of parents noted problems with services, compared to 22.3% in 2004-2005.