

Community Perceptions Report



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Introduction

Saskatoon Public Schools has adopted the learning community model as one of the foundations of our strategic plan and our operations. The hallmark of a learning community is an atmosphere in which all stakeholders – especially staff and students – feel affirmed and welcomed and, at the same time, challenged to grow and learn together. Thus, a key aspect of Saskatoon Public Schools' strategic planning process is to provide stakeholders in our organization (i.e., students, parents, staff, and residential and business community members) with a venue for offering their advice and input regarding the operation and direction of the Division.

During this school year, we have conducted perception surveys with our staff as well as with members of the general public and the business community. This report focuses on the results of the surveys of both our residential community (residents who do not currently have children attending Saskatoon Public Schools) and members of Saskatoon's business community.

The Survey

This marks the second systematic collection of perceptual data from our residential and business community stakeholder groups. As was the case with the staff perception survey, the questions asked of residential and business respondents were based on learning community theory.

Learning communities are usually seen in the context of individual schools or small groups of individuals. However, we have uniquely applied the concept of a learning community to the broader audience of those residents of Saskatoon who do not have school-aged children and members of the business community. From this perspective, we wish to explore the possibilities and challenges associated with viewing our learning community in the context of this wider scope.

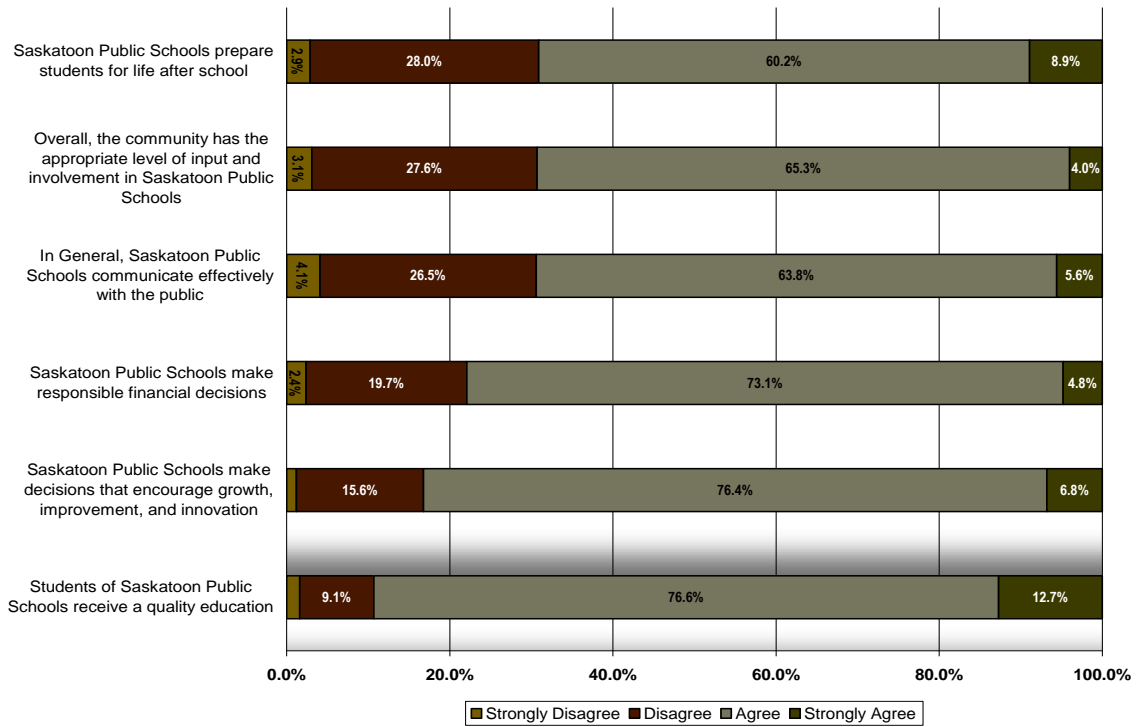
Earlier this year, statistically representative samples of community members who do not have children attending school (501 respondents) and business owners/managers (201 respondents) were contacted via telephone by a third-party market research firm. The survey instruments for both respondent groups asked respondents to comment on several statements that reflect the characteristics identified in educational research literature regarding the nature of the relationships between schools and the broader community. In addition, we invited both respondent groups to elaborate on their responses to the survey items or to offer their views on issues not directly addressed by the surveys through two open-ended questions.

Our Results: Residential Community

Overall, residents of Saskatoon who do not have children in Saskatoon Public Schools have a very positive opinion of Saskatoon Public Schools (see Figure 1). For example, respondents believe that:

- i) Students in Saskatoon Public Schools (SPS) receive a quality education (89.3%),
- ii) Decisions made by SPS encourage growth, improvement and innovation (83.2%), and
- iii) Saskatoon Public Schools makes responsible financial decisions (77.9%).

Figure 1: Graphic Representation of Residential Survey Results

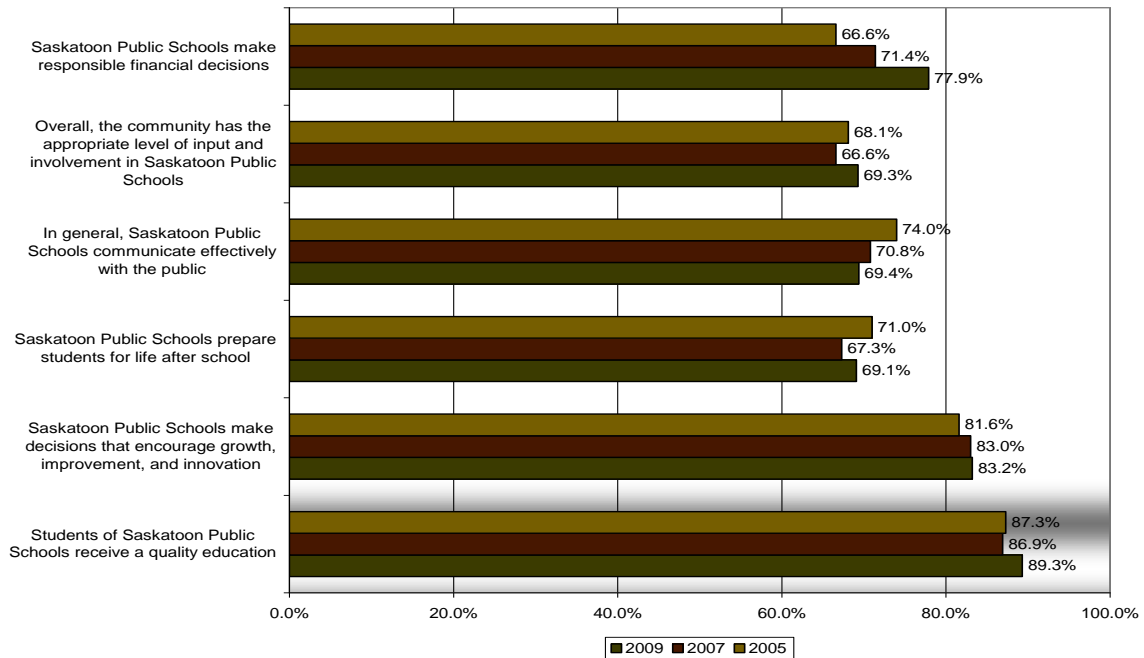


Longitudinal Comparisons

Survey Statements

From a statistical point of view, at least three data points are required in order to speak about trends. Since this marks the third iteration of this survey, we are now in a position to examine the data for trends. When residential respondents' comments are analyzed longitudinally according to the percentage of respondents who agree or strongly agree, the results tend to be statistically similar from one year to the next for five of the six items (see Figure 2). In other words, when we take into account the statistical margin of error ($\pm 4.4\%$) in the data collection, the results are essentially the same from one year to the next. The exception to this is that there has been a significant upward trend in the percentage of residents of Saskatoon who do not currently have children attending Saskatoon Public Schools who agree or strongly agree that "Saskatoon Public Schools makes responsible financial decisions".

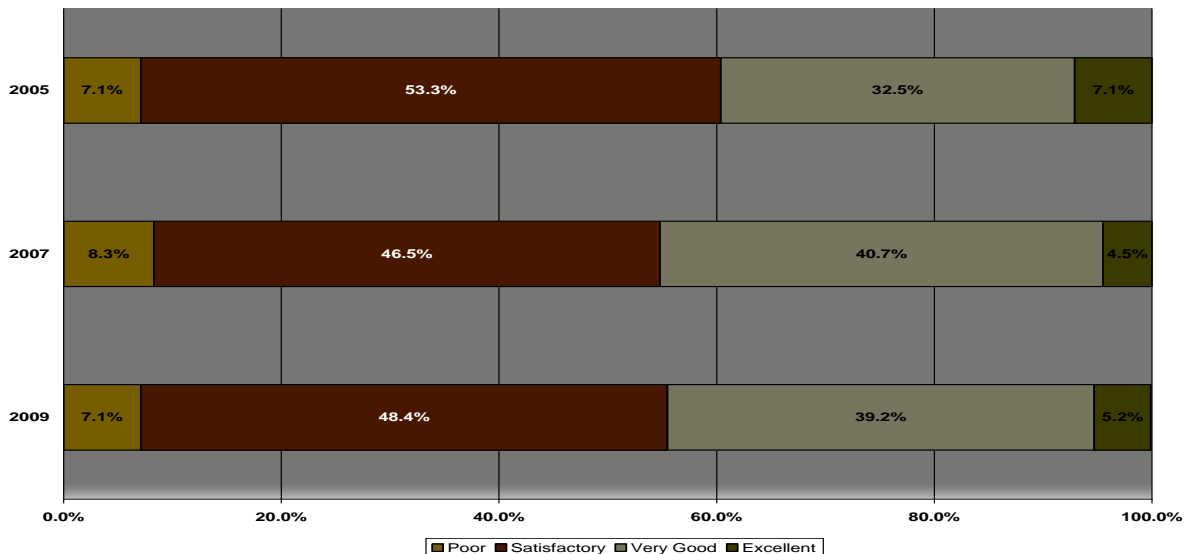
Figure 2 – Longitudinal Agreement Comparison for Residential Respondents



Overall Impression

Respondents' overall impression of Saskatoon Public Schools has also been fairly consistent over the three iterations of this data collection initiative. Specifically, just less than half of 2009 respondents (44.4%) had a very good or excellent overall impression of Saskatoon Public Schools (a result that is nearly identical to the 2007 results). However, both years' results are up from the 2005 results when 39.6 percent of respondents indicated a very good or excellent overall impression of Saskatoon Public Schools (see Figure 3). In addition, very small proportions of respondents in all three years (7.1% in 2005 and 2009 and 8.3% in 2007) stated that they had a poor impression of the Division.

Figure 2 – Overall Impression Comparison



Open-Ended Responses

Survey respondents were asked to offer their comments regarding both the “Areas in which we are doing well” and the “Areas that they believe require improvement”. In each section there is a graphic showing the general themes emerging from the responses followed by representative quotations related to three most common themes.

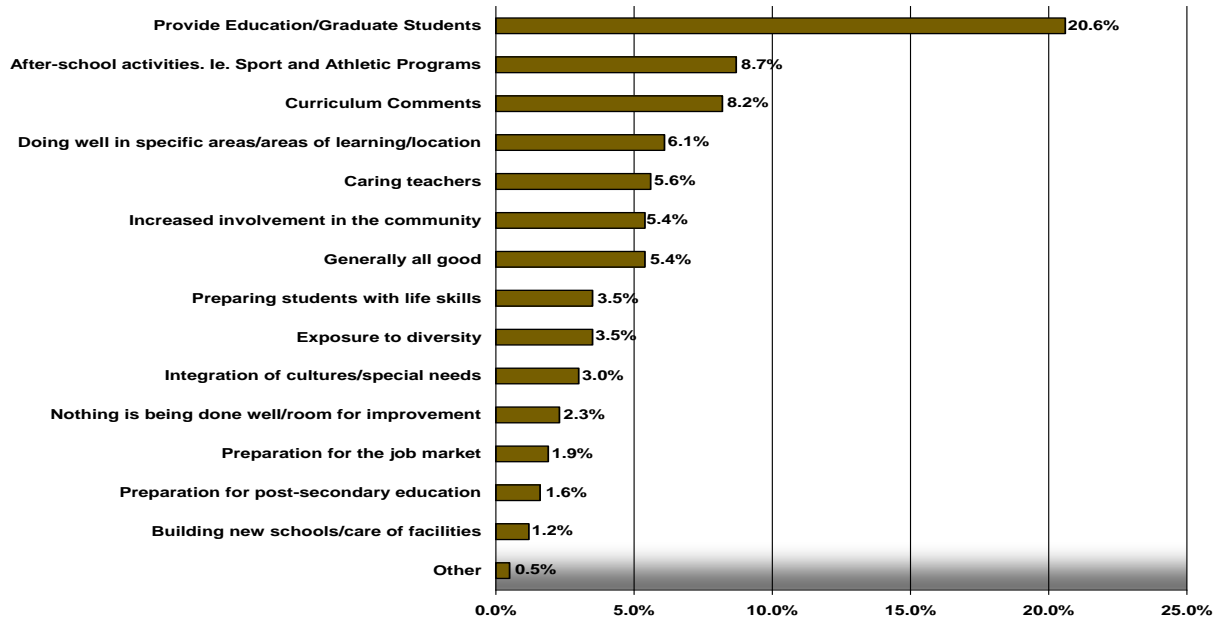
In what areas are Saskatoon Public Schools doing well?

Approximately eighty percent of residents of Saskatoon who do not have children presently attending Saskatoon Public schools offered opinions related to areas in which Saskatoon Public Schools are doing well (see Figure 4). Of these, the most common responses had to do with the quality of education provided (20.6% of all respondents). Other comments identified specific elements of the curriculum that they think are positive (8.2%), the positive nature of extracurricular programs (8.7%), and doing well in specific areas of learning (6.1%).

In what ways could Saskatoon Public Schools improve?

Approximately 60% of respondents indicated ways in which they think Saskatoon Public Schools could improve (see Figure 5). Changes to the curriculum were the most common suggestions, at 22.3% of all respondents. Another 13.9% think that there should be more community and parental involvement in the schools, and 12.7% mentioned class size/student-teacher ratio (more teachers).

Figure 4 – Areas in Which We Are Doing Well



Provide Education:

"I know that they are [stressing], the importance of an education, so that is what they are doing well. It is difficult for some kids to achieve a diploma and they are making it ... possible for kids to go back and upgrade and that's good."

"I think they're pretty innovative and they prepare the kids very well."

"Extending their programs, doing lots of community based supports for city parks, community based supports and programs, expanding their role with preparing students for the workforce, making education accessible for young teen parents, frequent enrolment periods instead of 2 semesters."

After-school activities:

"I'd say there are good extra curricular activities. I think they have a good focus on teaching about physical health and nutrition."

"They do a good job of kind of programs for after school, programs for after school if they need to get into the work force or develop their own business, or to go to university, or some sort of post secondary school."

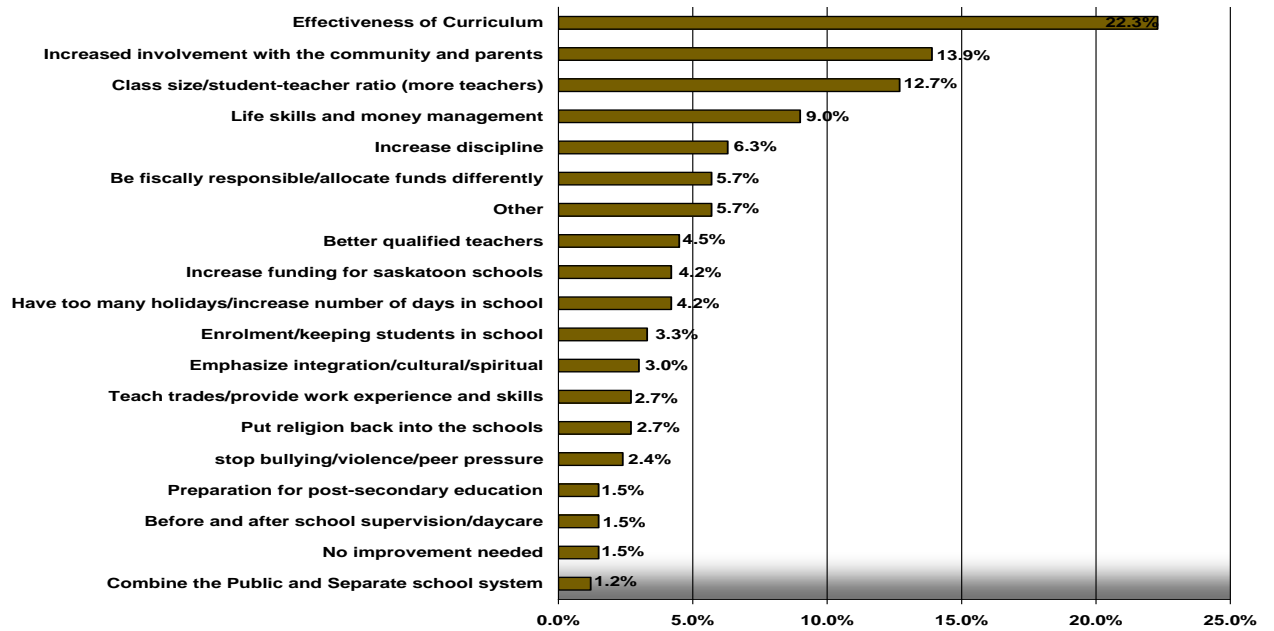
"My daughter went to public schools and the teachers were very involved and seemed to care for the students. I'm very impressed with the staff. Lots of opportunities to play sports, as well [as for those] who are marginalized."

Curriculum comments:

"They are doing well in literacy ... [and] instilling good harmony relationship/promoting multi-culture. Some of the schools promote the idea of community service, they also [instill] excellence [in students], they [also] encourage children to take part in sports, encouraging those who are not good in physical fitness."

"[They are doing well] accommodating the needs of various learners. [They are also] trying to revamp programs and curriculum to match changing needs of society."

Figure 5 – Areas in Which We Could Improve



Effectiveness of the Curriculum:

“They overlook the basics; teach the children good math. Right now, everything is emphasized on reading and they should emphasize in other areas. They should practice more on handwriting and spelling skills.”

“I think they need to improve their core curriculum, teaching of respect and values, discipline of the kids ... individual achievements and talents should be recognized, not trying to make everyone equal.”

“They need to make sure to teach all students life skills, like bookkeeping, balancing a budget, etc.”

Increased involvement with the community and parents:

“Communication with general public regarding the finances and their program because it is tough for public to know about them, unless they have children.”

“If they want to reach the people who do not have school aged children, they should use the mass media to reach out more.”

“They need to communicate more with the workforce and community to see where students will be absorbed in [see what skills students will need].”

Class size/Student-teacher ratio:

“I think they could have more teacher assistants in the classroom with children that need special attention ... [some] children ... need more one on one support in the classroom, either physical or learning disability.”

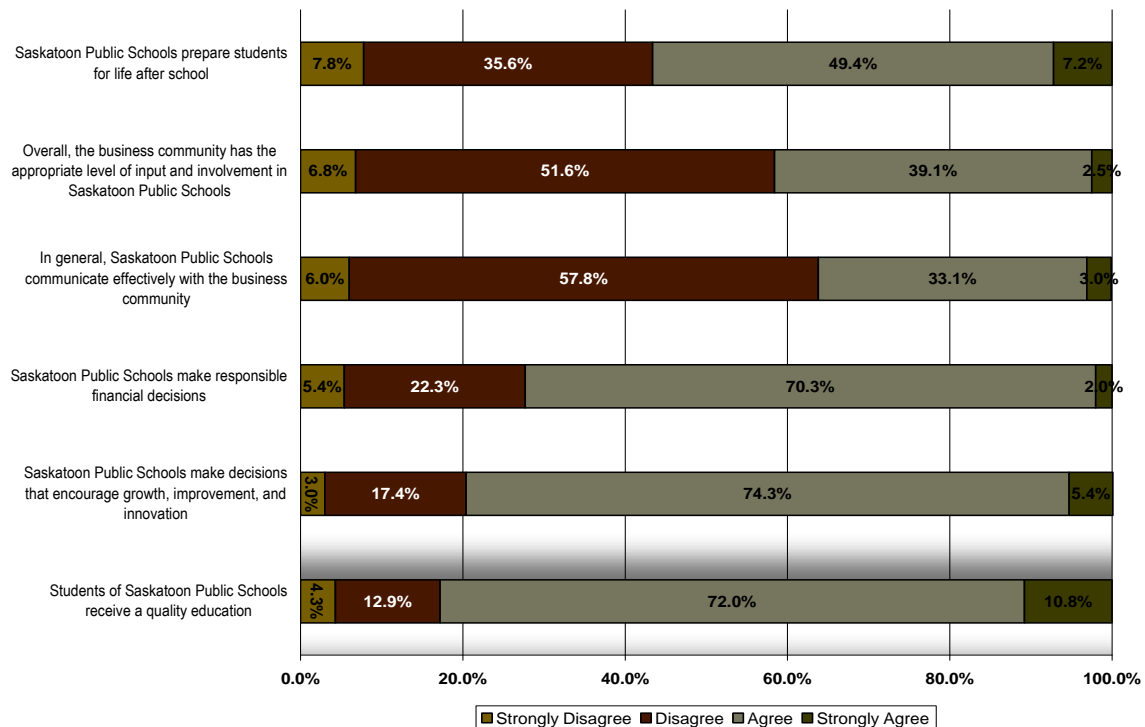
“[H]ire more teachers and make the classrooms smaller. They, the students, are not getting enough attention. If they hired more teachers, that would be a good thing for everyone involved.”

Our Results: Business Community

As was the case with the residential survey, business owners/senior managers who do not have children in the K-12 school division generally believe students of Saskatoon Public Schools receive a quality education (see Figure 6). This statement received the highest level of agreement (82.8%); followed by “Saskatoon Public Schools makes decisions that encourage growth, improvement, and innovation” (79.6%), and “Saskatoon Public Schools makes responsible financial decisions” (72.3%).

The remaining three statements received somewhat less favourable responses. Overall, 56.7% of respondents agree that, “Saskatoon Public Schools prepare students for life after school”, while 41.6% agree that “The business community has the appropriate level of input and involvement in Saskatoon Public Schools” and 36.1% agree that, “In general, Saskatoon Public Schools communicate effectively with the business community”.

Figure 6: Graphic Representation of Business Survey Results



Longitudinal Comparisons

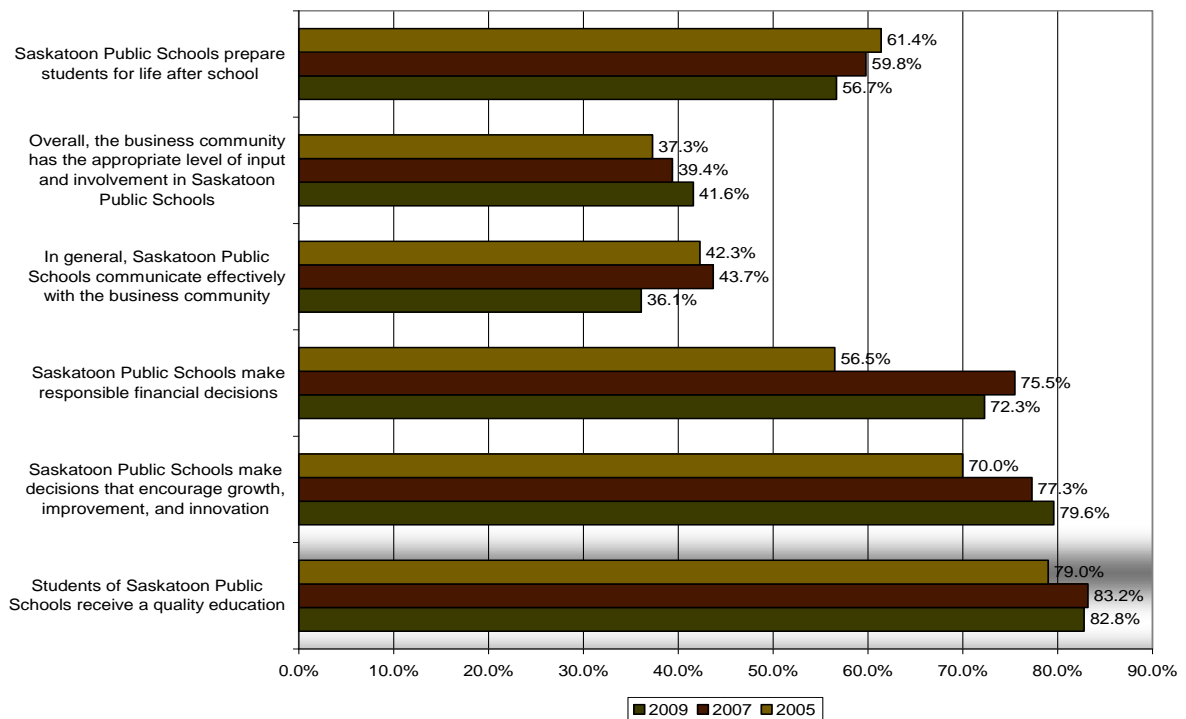
Survey Statements

When respondents' comments are analyzed longitudinally according to the percentage of respondents who agree or strongly agree, the results tend to be statistically similar from one year to the next (see Figure 7) for three of the six items. In other words, when we take into account the statistical margin of error ($\pm 6.9\%$) in the data collection, the results are

essentially the same from one year to the next for “Students of Saskatoon Public Schools receive a quality education”, “Saskatoon Public schools prepare students for life after school”, and “Overall, the business community has the appropriate level of input and involvement in Saskatoon Public Schools.”

There has been a statistically significant improvement over the past five years (the period of time over which these three surveys were conducted) in the percentage of business respondents who believe that “Saskatoon Public Schools makes decisions that encourage growth, improvement, and innovation”. While there was a substantial improvement between 2005 and 2007 in the percentage of respondents who felt that “Saskatoon Public Schools make responsible financial decisions”, that trend did not continue in 2009 (there was a 3.2% decline between 2007 and 2009 – although this decline is not statistically significant). Finally, there has been a decline between 2007 and 2009 in the percentage of respondents who stated that “Saskatoon Public Schools communicate effectively with the business community.”

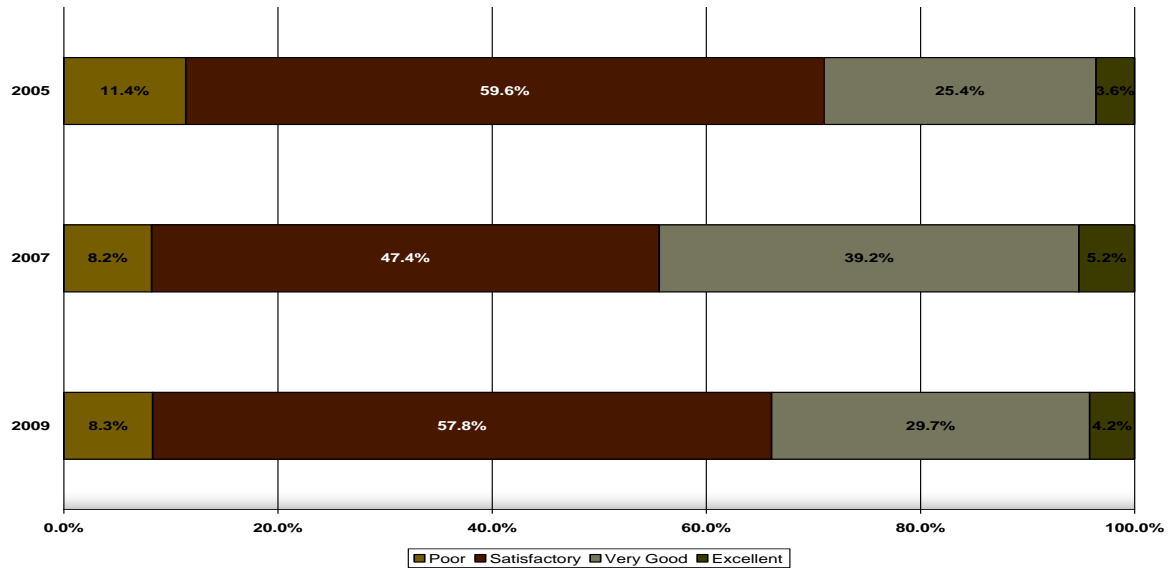
Figure 7 – Business Community’s Percentage Agreement Comparison



Overall Impression

The business owners’/senior managers’ overall impression of Saskatoon Public Schools saw improvement between 2005 and 2007 but has declined since 2009 (see Figure 8). This year, 33.9 percent of respondents indicated that their impression was very good or excellent; whereas, 44.4 percent had this impression in 2007 and 29% had this impression in 2005. Finally, the percentage of respondents who had a poor impression of the Division remained the same as compared to 2007.

Figure 8 – Overall Impression Comparison



Open-Ended Responses

Survey respondents were asked to offer their comments regarding both the *Areas in which we are doing well* and the *Areas that they believe require improvement*. In each section there is a graphic showing the general themes emerging from the responses followed by representative quotations related to the three most common themes.

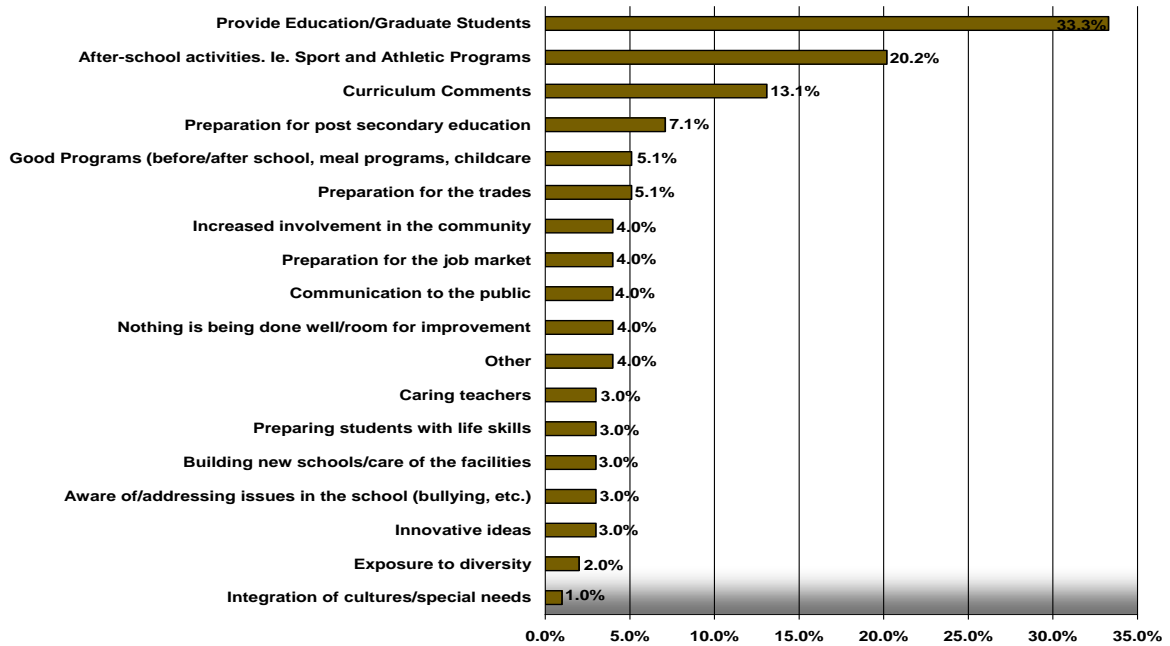
In what areas are Saskatoon Public Schools doing well?

Approximately 50% of respondents indicated areas in which Saskatoon Public Schools are doing well (see Figure 9). The most common responses were related to quality education (33.3%), extra-curricular activities (20%), and elements of the curriculum (13.1%).

In what ways could Saskatoon Public Schools improve?

Sixty-six percent of respondents mentioned ways in which Saskatoon Public Schools could improve (see Figure 10). Comments related to teaching life skills and money management (23.5%) and teaching trades/provide work experience and skills (16.7%) and increasing involvement with the community and parents (14.4) were the most common among respondents.

Figure 9 – Areas in Which We Are Doing Well



Provide Education:

"[Overall, the] education and training [offered] is good. [Based on talking to people with children], the teachers are doing an excellent job."

"I think ... [students] come out with good basic skills. The technical abilities of students are really advanced."

"[They] are doing well in all areas. [Students] seem to be learning more than in previous years."

"I think they do well [providing] general education that encompasses most students' requirements."

Extra-curricular activities:

"They have a lot of sporting activities and the entertainment such as shows and musicals are great."

"The inner-city schools have some programs that are excellent, like the meal programs and one [school] I know about has a cultural dance program."

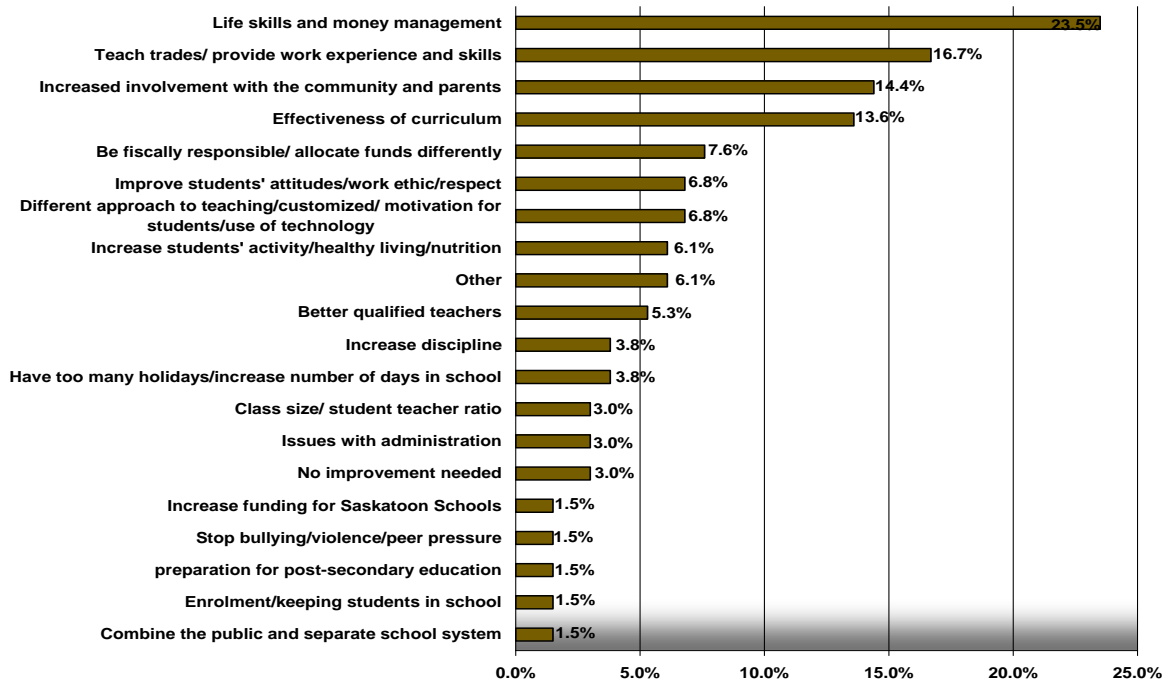
"[They are] doing well in all areas, [students] seem to be learning more than in previous years, also ... the sports [programs are good]."

Curriculum Comments:

"They are looking at a more rounded education offering – more of a variety rather than [just] the three R's."

"Overall, [the] curriculum is good. They provide opportunities for students in terms of further education and career options."

Figure 10 – Areas Which Require Improvements



Provide life skills and money management instruction:

"They need to concentrate more in preparing the students for real life ... teach them how to buy groceries, save money, the real life stuff. Not every student is going to university [many] go straight to the work force. [they] need to learn how to balance a chequebook borrow money from the bank ..."

Teaching trades/work experience:

"They should inform all students of the trades whether they are really bright or not, it should be based on their aptitude."

"There should be more involvement from businesses, more work experience programs for students before they go to university or trade school to let the students find their interests."

Involvement with community and parents:

"They could get their students more involved in the community with volunteer work."

"[I think they could improve] overall communication with the business community at large; [inform them] where they're at."

"Listen to parents more, provide more individualised programs to see where the students are to stimulate them."

Concluding Statement

In the future, we must continue our efforts to communicate with residents who do not have children attending Saskatoon Public Schools and with Saskatoon's business owners regarding our Board's priorities and strategic plan. This enhanced effort will help to ensure that our initiatives are at the forefront for all of our stakeholder groups. We will also continue to consult with members of our community through such avenues as: School Community Council Assemblies, Mount Royal Collegiate Institute Skills and Trades Centre Industry Roundtable meetings, and through our many partnerships. We also look forward to strengthened communication with these groups through the development of the Saskatoon Public Schools Foundation.

Nevertheless, the results from these surveys suggest that, while there is always room for growth, we are viewed positively by our public. Perhaps most importantly, in the view of both the residents of Saskatoon and our business community, we are particularly effective in achieving our primary mandate – providing a quality education for the young people of Saskatoon.