

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 (Saskatoon Public Schools’ ratepayers who do not currently have children attending school) and members of Saskatoon’s business community.

The Survey

This is the fourth systematic collection of perceptual data from our residential and business community stakeholder groups. Earlier this year, statistically representative samples of Saskatoon Public Schools’ ratepayers who do not currently have children attending school (501 respondents) and business owners/managers (201 respondents) were contacted via telephone by a third-party market research firm and invited to participate in our surveys.

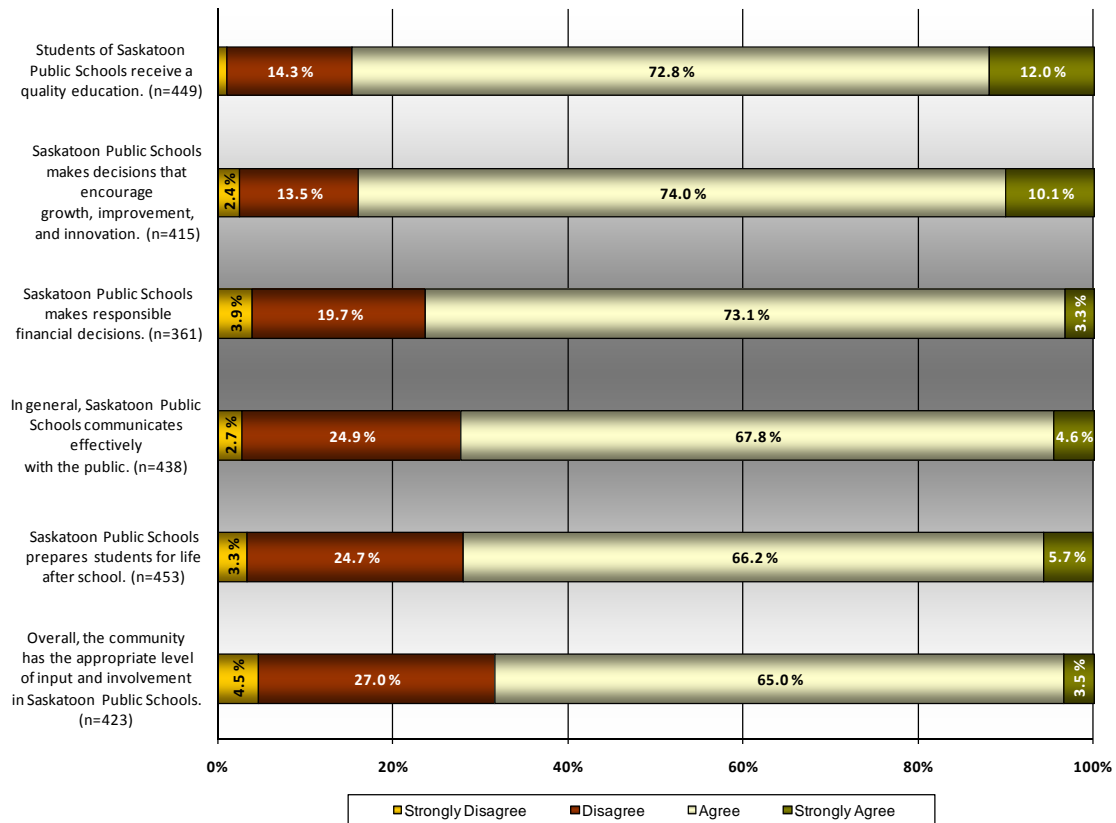
The survey instruments for both respondent groups asked respondents to comment on several statements that research has shown to affect the relationship between schools and the broader community. In addition, we invited both respondent groups to elaborate on their responses to the survey items or to offer 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 (85%),
- ii) Decisions made by SPS encourage growth, improvement and innovation (84%), and
- iii) Saskatoon Public Schools makes responsible financial decisions (76%).

Figure 1: Graphic Representation of Residential Survey Results



Longitudinal Comparisons

Survey Statements

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 (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. However, there was a 4.5% decline in the percentage of respondents who agree or strongly agree that "Students of Saskatoon Public Schools receive a quality education" – a finding that seems a bit out of character in light of the findings from the other survey items.

Overall Impression

Respondents' overall impression of Saskatoon Public Schools has also been relatively consistent over time (see Figure 3). Just over a third of 2011 respondents (40%) had a very good or excellent overall impression of Saskatoon Public Schools (previous years' results ranged from 40% to 45%). In addition, very small proportions of respondents stated that they had a poor impression of the Division in all four years.

Figure 2 – Longitudinal Agreement Comparison for Residential Respondents

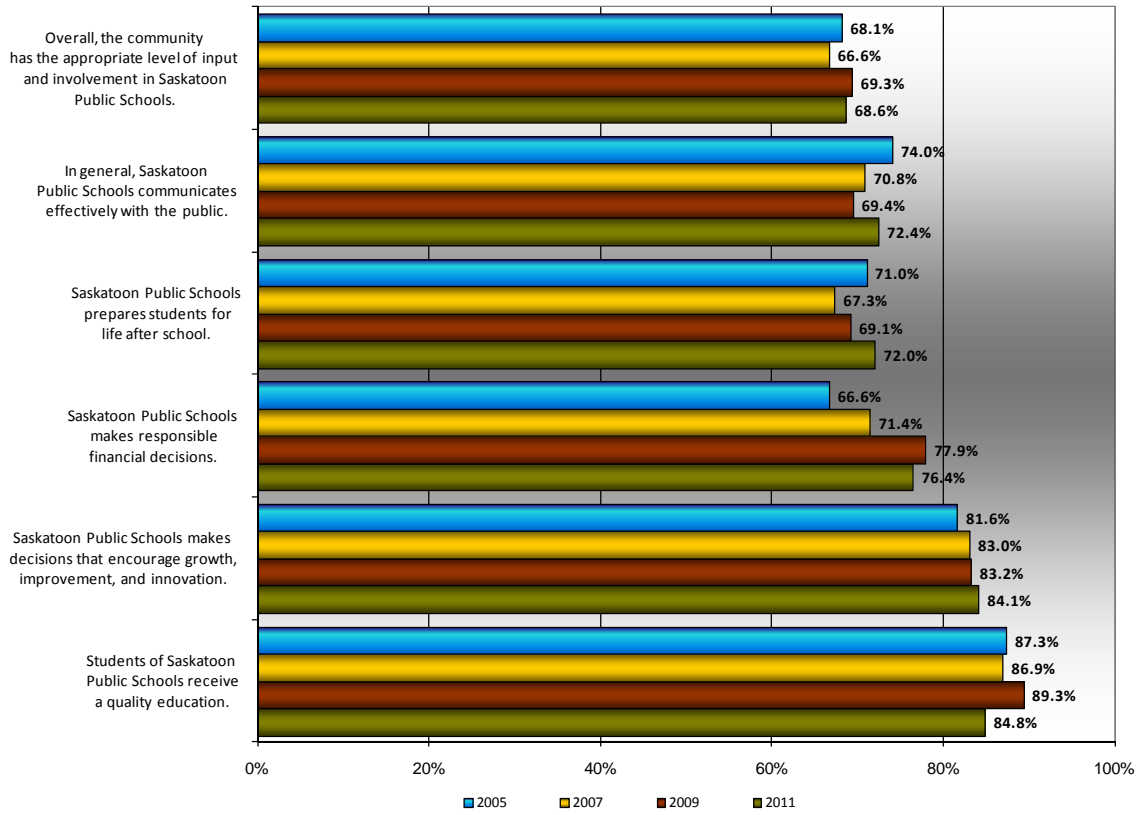
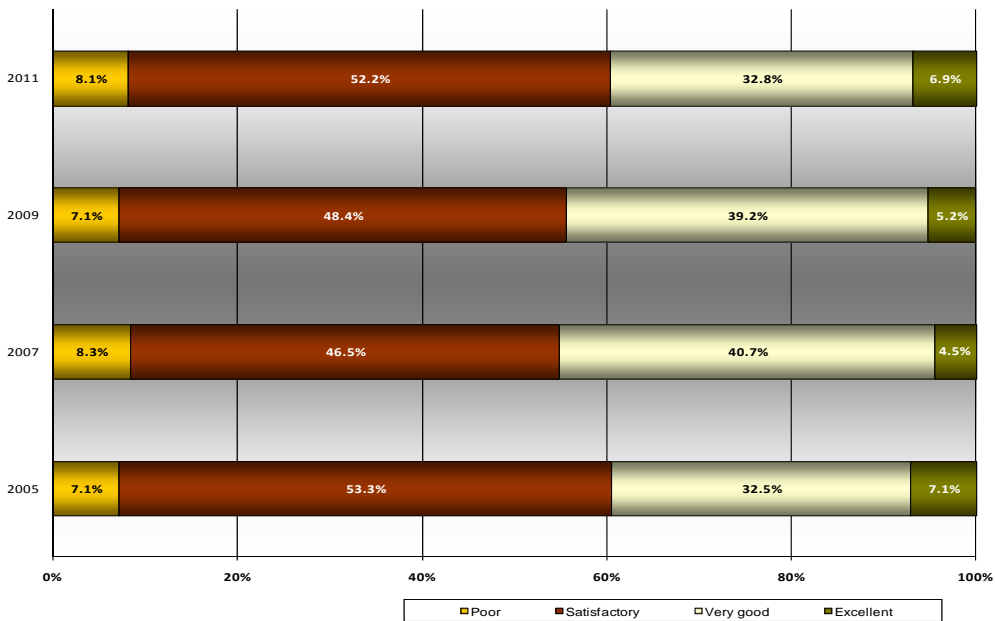


Figure 3 – Longitudinal Comparison of Respondents' Overall Impression of the Division



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 sixty 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 on page 5). The three most common responses identified:

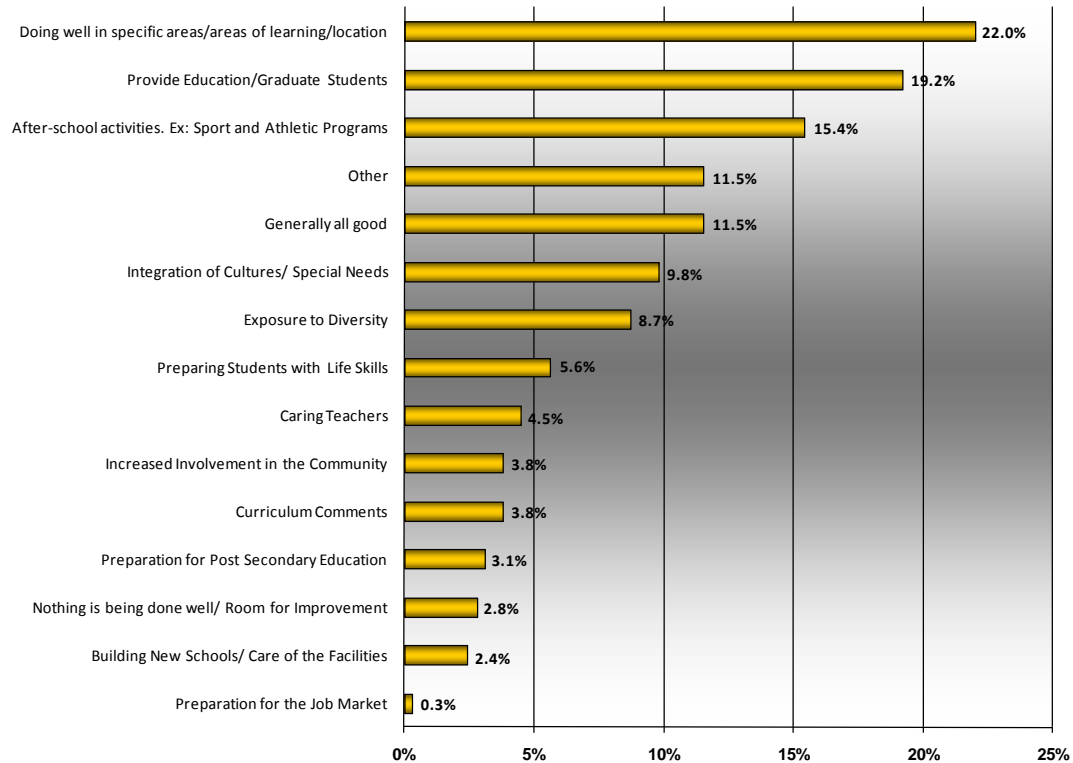
- Specific elements of the curriculum they believe to be positive (22% of all responses),
- Overall quality of education (19% of all responses), and
- Positive nature of extracurricular programs (15% of all responses).

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 on page 6). The three most common improvements suggested by respondents include:

- Effectiveness of the curriculum (24% of all responses),
- Increased community and parental involvement in the schools (16% of all responses), and
- Inclusion of life skills and money management in curricular offerings (12%).

Figure 4 – Areas in Which We Are Doing Well



Provide education:

“They do well teaching students the fundamental things of learning such as the subject that they are taking involving reading, writing, and arithmetic as the well-being of the students’ health and welfare.”

“They offer a lot of choices ... for handicapped persons and students who are very academic ... they are willing to try new things ... athletics are also an area they are doing well.”

“I think they are accessible ... they have good resources. They are trying to meet the needs of the community.”

After-school activities:

“ [They have programs to help kids realize that] who you are is who you are. You don’t need to feel like you belong [to a particular group], there are different things for different people. There’s a whole bunch of activities people can join according to where they fit in.”

“They do a good job of after school programs. They also give guidance to students 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.”

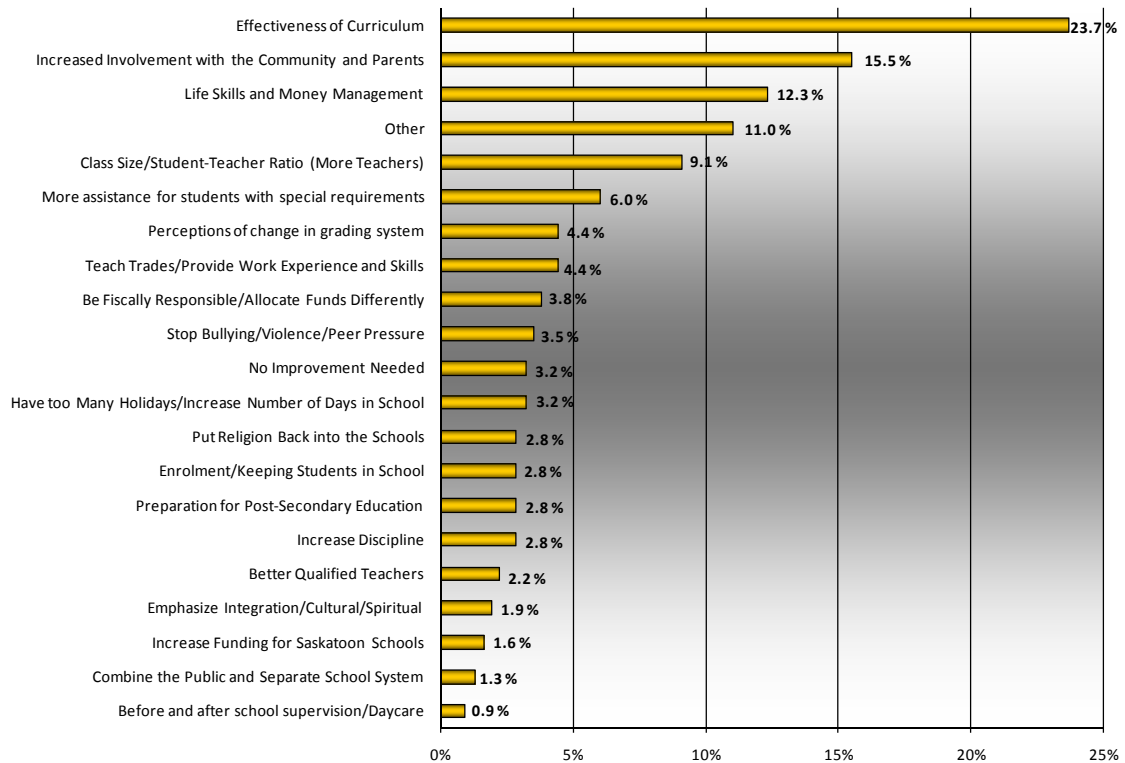
“ [In community schools] they are helping their students with programming like after-school programs.”

Curriculum comments:

“Technology has been well covered; [students] know all about the Internet and how to get information for projects.”

“I think they’re doing quite well in gifted education and in technologies and trades and in alternative programs.”

Figure 5 – Areas in Which We Could Improve



Effectiveness of the curriculum:

"I am concerned with math instruction. The approach being made in recent years is not effective ... the curriculum should be changed."

"They need to prepare students for life after school, focus more on reading, writing and math."

"The kids need to focus on science and math so that they don't end up just working in coffee shops – we need builders and inventors."

"They need more variety, specialized schools, more strong academic programs ... too many kids are not getting proper post-secondary guidance."

Increased involvement with the community and parents:

"Be more responsive to the public in general. A little bit more PR would be helpful. Even though we don't have kids and don't know the curriculum, they should involve us anyway."

"I would like to know who I can talk to ... I don't get any feedback. They need better communication before they make their decisions."

"The schools that are in the core neighbourhoods should have more outreach programs."

Life skills and money management:

"They could improve on things like mortgage and finance [education]. They didn't really explain mortgages and inflation – things like housing markets when kids grow up to buy a house ... I think they should teach that. [Teach] more real-life situations."

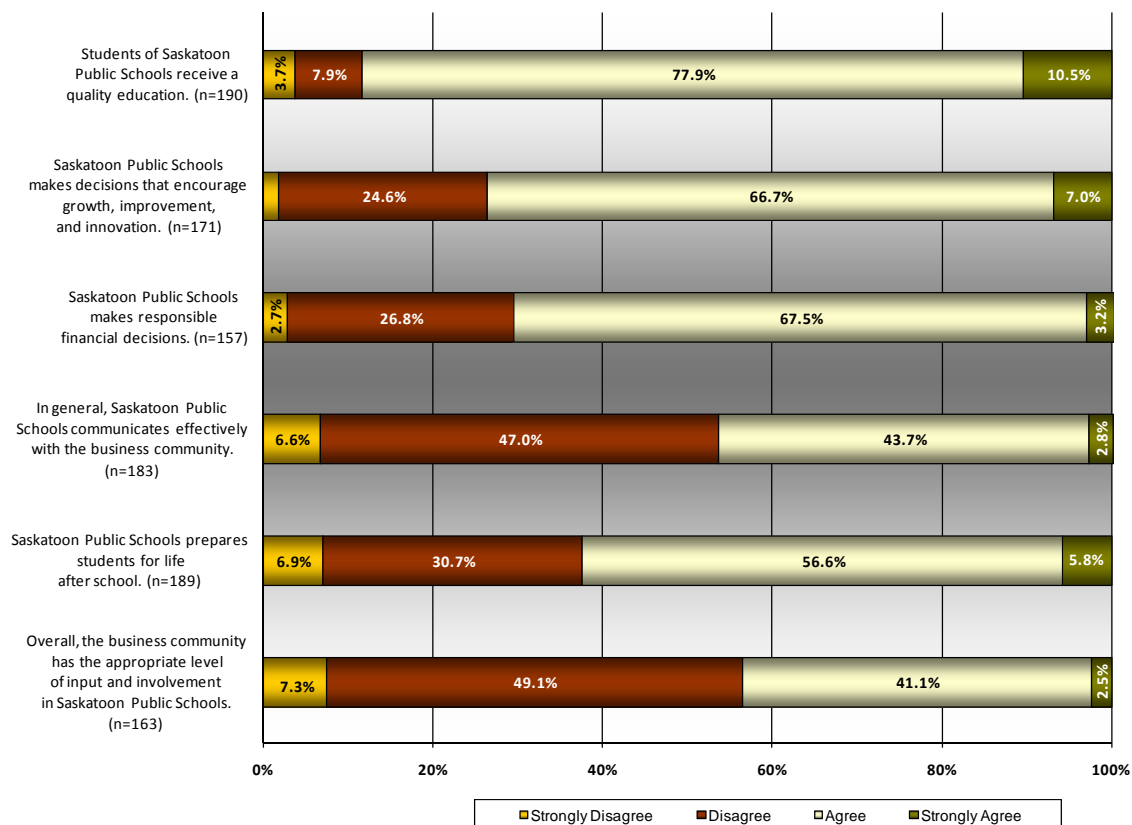
"Focus on life skills ... give them community work to obtain life skills that can help them in the work world."

Our Results: Business Community

As was the case with the residential survey, business owners/senior managers generally believe students of Saskatoon Public Schools receive a quality education (see Figure 6). This statement received the highest level of agreement (88% - an increase of 4% over 2008-09); followed by "Saskatoon Public Schools makes decisions that encourage growth, improvement, and innovation" (74%), and "Saskatoon Public Schools makes responsible financial decisions" (71%).

The remaining three statements received somewhat less favourable responses. Overall, 62% of respondents agree that "Saskatoon Public Schools prepare students for life after school", while 47% agree that "In general, Saskatoon Public Schools communicate effectively with the business community", and 44% agree that "The business community has the appropriate level of input and involvement in Public Schools".

Figure 6: Graphic Representation of Business Survey Results

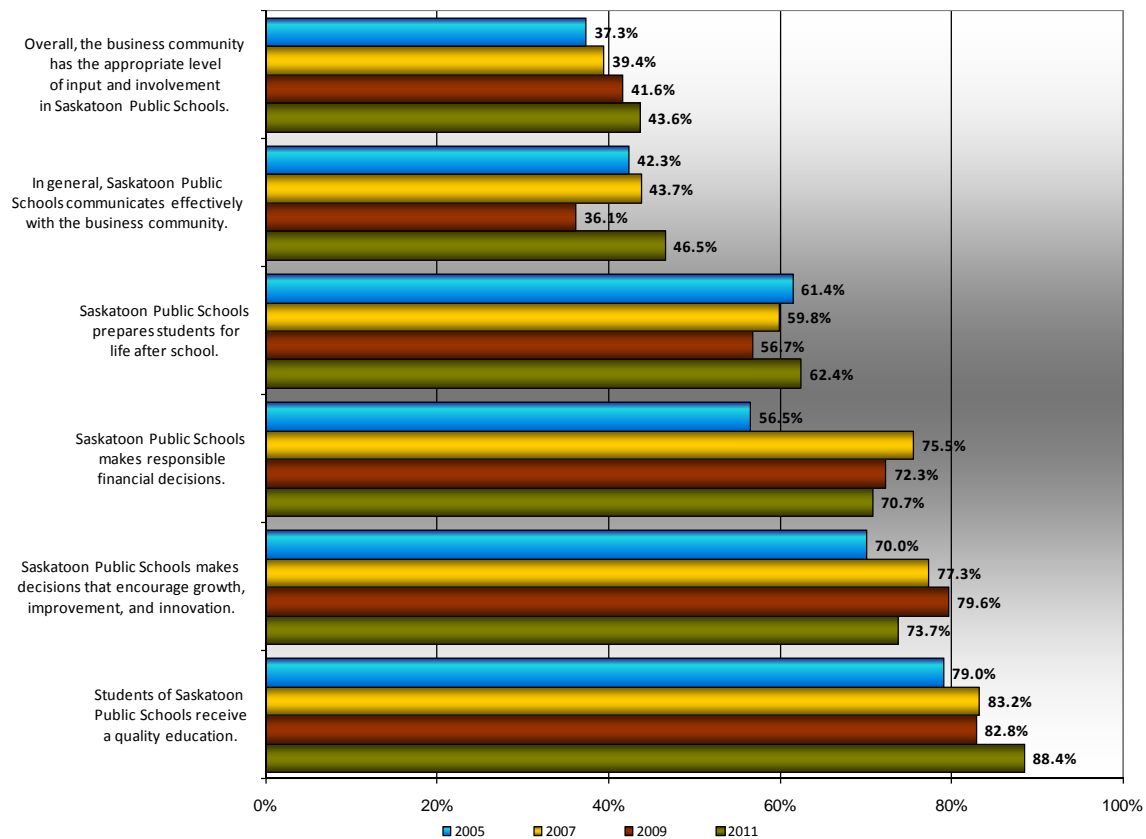


Longitudinal Comparisons

Survey Statements

When respondents' comments are analyzed longitudinally according to the percentage of respondents who agree or strongly agree, the results tend to be fairly constant from one year to the next when we take into account the statistical margin of error (see Figure 7). However, there has been a statistically significant improvement between 2009 and 2011 in the percentage of business respondents who believe that *"In general, Saskatoon Public Schools communicate effectively with the business community"*.

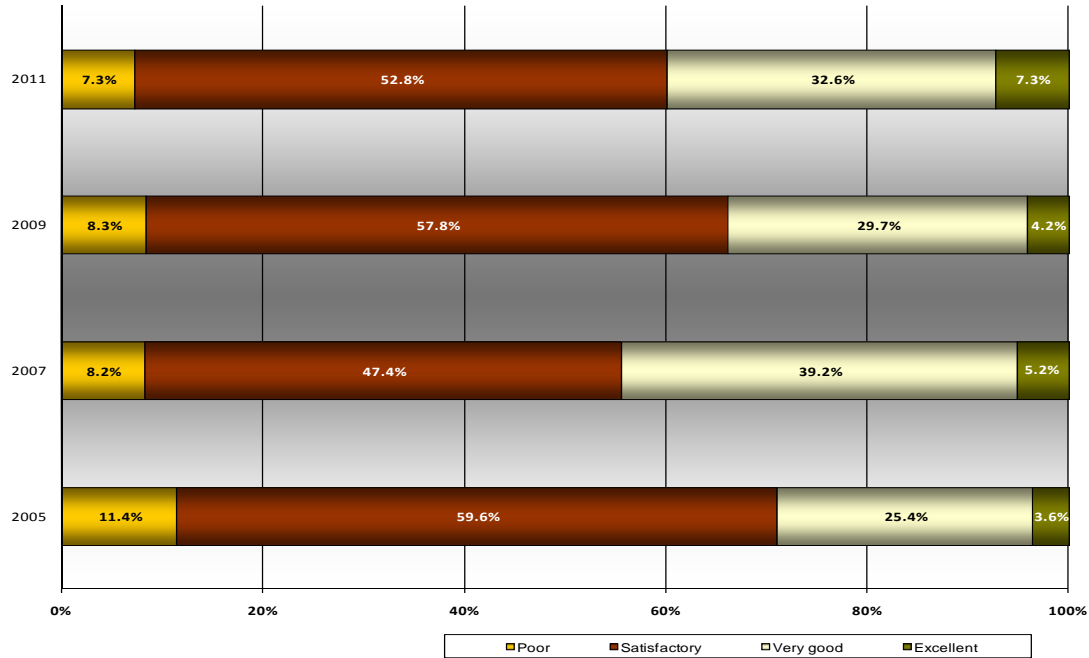
Figure 7 – Business Community's Percentage Agreement Comparison



Overall Impression

Forty percent of business owners'/senior managers' overall impression of Saskatoon Public Schools was very good or excellent (see Figure 8). The percentage of respondents who had a poor impression of the Division was the lower than any of the previous surveys (7.3% in 2011, 8.3% in 2009, 8.2% in 2007, and 11.4% in 2005).

Figure 8 – Longitudinal Comparison of Respondents’ Overall Impression of the Division



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.

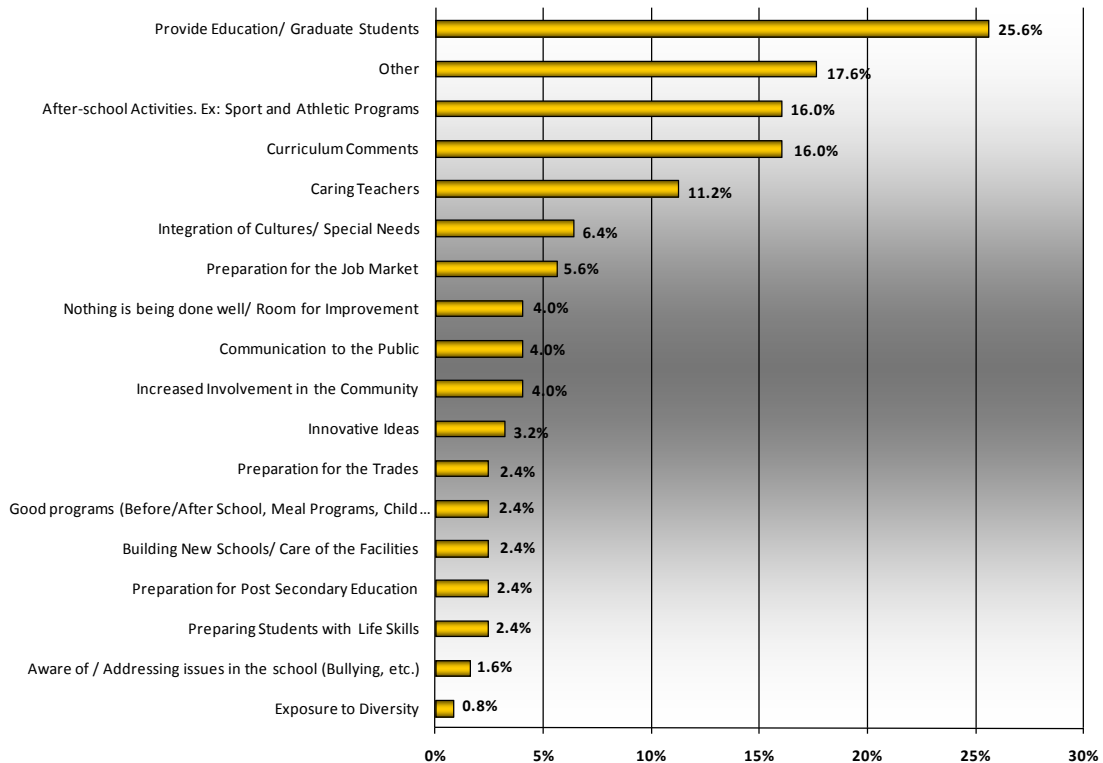
In what areas are Saskatoon Public Schools doing well?

Approximately 60% of respondents indicated areas in which Saskatoon Public Schools are doing well (see Figure 9). The most common responses were related to quality education (26%), elements of the curriculum (16%), and extra-curricular activities (16%).

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 increasing involvement with the community and parents (20%); individualizing instruction and incorporating more technology (17%); and teaching life skills and money management (15%) were the most common among respondents.

Figure 9 – Areas in Which We Are Doing Well



Curriculum comments:

"[Saskatoon Public Schools] allow opportunities for students to participate at a job site ... and partner with businesses to get students to see what the world of work is like."

"Saskatoon is known for innovation in science, research, and technology ... [students must be learning these subjects because] it starts in high school [and we] wouldn't have such a good university otherwise."

"The level of education is top-notch as far as training students for a career path is concerned."

Extra-curricular activities:

"Every school is different but a lot of high school kids are going into sports way more than before."

"[Teachers] are very dedicated, they do a lot of extra-curricular and they deal well with the kids."

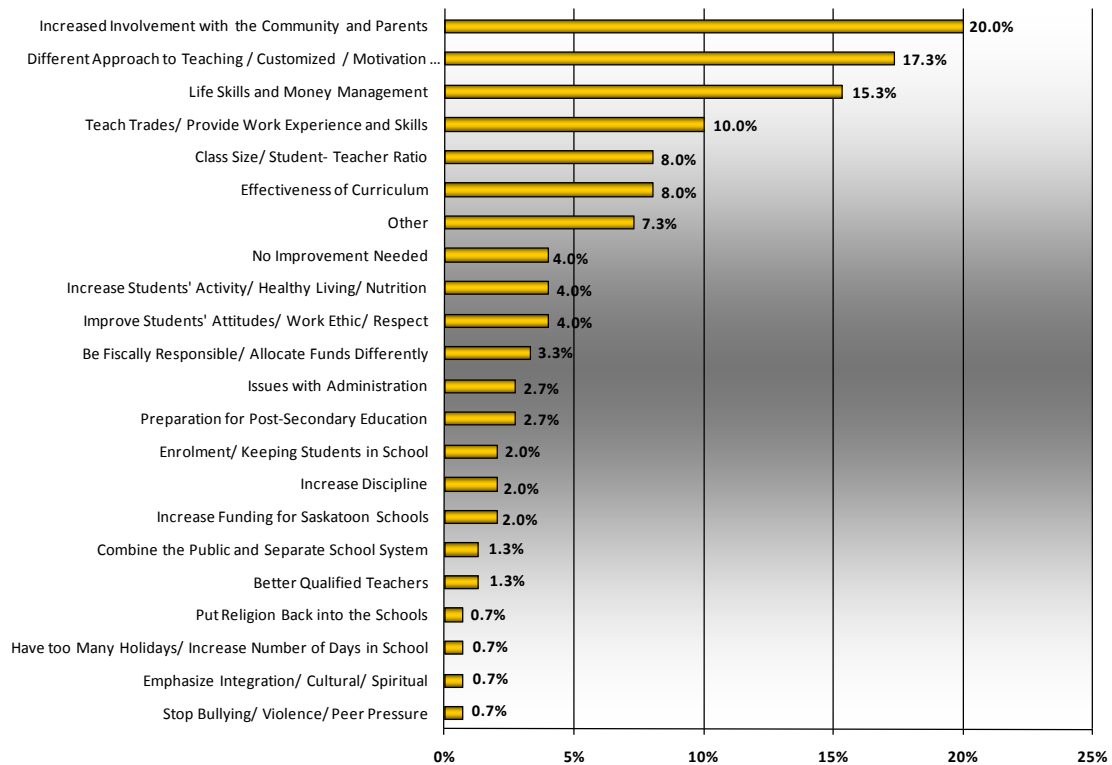
"They are doing well in education and their sports academies are very good for children going out into the world. Sport teaches them a lot."

Quality education comments:

"They're good at offering alternative programming for children at differing levels of development; not only programs for those that are struggling but programs for those that are advanced"

"They are doing well with diversity in classes, teaching children about the environment and social responsibility."

Figure 10 – Areas Which Require Improvements



Provide life skills and money management instruction:

“There should be more experiences to prepare students for life after school ... like work placement, budgeting, job interviews. Have more job expos to tell students what businesses are looking for and preparing them for getting a job so they don't feel discouraged.”

Individualize instruction/more technology:

“Improve by having a more inclusive school system by providing programming for special needs students.”

“Be realistic with what they are teaching, things more relevant to the times ... and where we are as a society.”

“When I was in public schools it was a technological grave yard ... technology is something schools should not shy away from.”

Involvement with community and parents:

“Communicate with business more so we would have [a more informed] opinion of them.”

“Schools need to cross over into the business sector more ... to prepare our kids for the bigger world that's out there.”

“They could do a better job of communication with the immediate community, parents and guardians, as well as the general community. They should also do better promotion of the schools and teachers to the broader community.”

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 Trades and Skills 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.