

SCHOOL SYSTEM VIABILITY COMMITTEE: QUALITY SURVEY RESULTS

Presented by the Quality Subcommittee
to School System Viability Committee
September 13, 2017



NOTES ABOUT THE FINDINGS REPORTED HERE

1. **Figures (percentages) reported on pie chart diagrams may not equal 100%**
 1. "Don't know" and "Not applicable" were options for every item, but they were not weighted (their value on the rating scale was zero).
 2. In creating the charts for this presentation, the "Don't know" and "Not applicable" responses were not included in the charts; therefore a certain percentage of respondents are not reflected in the diagram.
2. **Some responders used the exact phrase as a comment for nearly every item, even if the comment did not relate to the question being asked**
 1. Example: A responder may have written "Don't separate our schools" as a comment for every item, regardless of what the question asked. Looking through the raw data, seeing that response repeat does not mean that thirteen people expressed the same idea; instead it means that one person repeated that thought thirteen times.
3. **Some respondents inserted thoughts or ideas in the comments section of random items that are not apparently related**
 1. Example: Under a question on overall quality of education, a respondent noted that a later start time is needed at the middle/high school; this person did not repeat this suggestion under the item on school day policies. Therefore, it is not possible to determine, merely by looking at individual items, how often a thought or idea occurred, since respondents may have placed their comments in places where they do not naturally "fit."
4. **Quotes from respondents are indicated by italics.**



RESPONDENT & SURVEY DETAILS

Measurement Tool

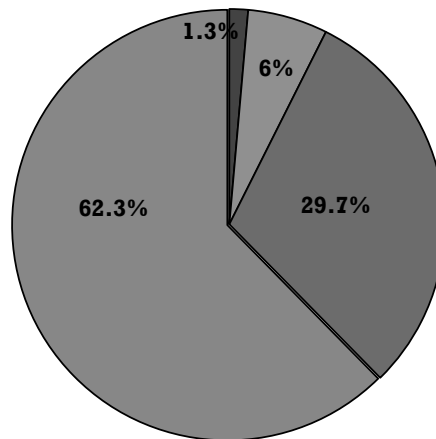
- 14-item Survey created by Quality Subcommittee
 - Likert Rating Scale
 - 1 (Unacceptable) to 5 (Excellent)
 - Don't know or N/A had zero numeric value
 - Open-ended comments/ suggestions [unlimited length]
- Collection via **Survey Monkey**
- Average Time: 8 minutes
 - range 34 seconds – 5 hours

N = 738

- 488 Parents/Guardians
 - 40 Elementary Teachers
 - 34 Middle/High Teachers
 - 0 Administrators
 - 156 Concerned Citizen/ Other
 - Multiple Categories
 - 21 Undeclared status
- **Collection dates:**
July 14 - August 25, 2017

QUESTION 1: OVERALL QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED IN SIGNAL MOUNTAIN SCHOOLS

Average Score: 4.5 (Good)



0% Unacceptable

Very Poor/Unacceptable
 Less than adequate
 Adequate
 Good
 Excellent as is

QUESTION 1: COMMENTS (187)

▪ **Perspective: the lens through which respondents appraised education**

▪ **Broad context of state and nation**

- *"For 2015-16: half or more of our students were below grade level as defined by end of course testing: Algebra 1: 55% - Algebra 2: 66% - English I: 44% - English II: 60% - English III: 55% - US History: 57% - Chemistry: 44% - Geometry: 61% - HS English: 52% -HS Math: 74% - HS Science: 33%. Despite how well SMMHS compares to other HCDE schools, having roughly half of its students below grade level in almost every subject is a major issue (<https://www.tn.gov/education/topic/report-card/>)"*
- *"Saying we have excellent education compared to the state is to be near-sighted. Our schools may be best in HCDE, but that does not equate to excellence. Hamilton County is not the best school district in the state, and TN ranks near the bottom nationally. Mountain parents want education that can truly compete with that offered in other states across the country whose education is much higher ranked."*
- *"I think Signal has strong schools, but it worries me that we are near the top of a state that is near the bottom of national rankings. We should be comparing our system to national systems and not just TN. Are we are on the leading edge? No."*

▪ **Local context of Hamilton County**

- *"Why reinvent the wheel? HCDE has more experience running schools than the Town Council."*
- *"Our schools are among the best in the county. How will being independent change that?"*
- *"We love our teachers at (Nolan/Thrasher); they truly care about our children and do their best every day."*



QUESTION 1: COMMENTS (CONTINUED)

▪ **Discrepancy between quality at elementary and middle/high (4%)**

- Elementary "superb"
- SMMHS performance much poorer

▪ **Different ideas about the motivation for the proposed municipal school system**

- Bring kids back from private schools
- Get football talent from other HCDE schools
- To segregate "rich" families

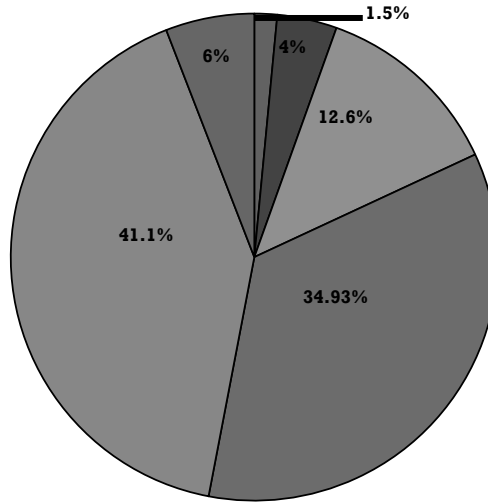
▪ **Education would not be as good without MEF**

- *"Nothing could improve Signal Mountain Schools more than local control. Our schools are as good as they are only because our community has been willing to support them through MEF, various booster organizations, and with a great deal of parental involvement."*
- *"Without MEF and the community providing more than \$500,000 per year for basics, our schools would not be up to standards."*



QUESTION 2: QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Average score: 4.1 (Good)



Very Poor/Unacceptable
 Less than Adequate
 Adequate
 Good
 Excellent
 N/A/Don't Know

COMMENTS: QUESTION 2 (141)

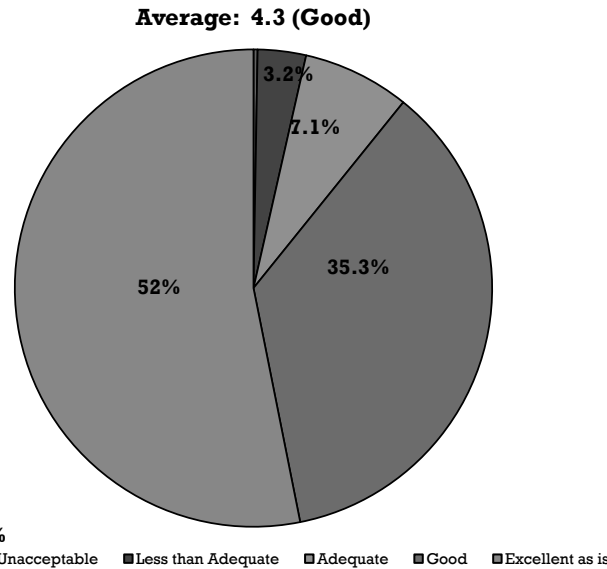
Hamilton County Department of Education Leadership

- *"Hamilton County Schools has been incapable of leading itself for many years and many different superintendents. The school board is no better. Both are infected with rampant cronyism."*
- *"HCBOD has done poorly at doing their job."*
- *"I am concerned about the abilities of the Hamilton County School Board. However, all of my dealings with Signal Mountain administrative staff has been excellent."*
- *"Let's give the new superintendent a chance."*
- *"Reorganization is needed to clear out teachers who don't teach any more."*

Local School Leadership

- **Contrasts between elementary and SMMHS**
 - *"Leadership at Nolan was exceptional...the SMMHS leadership has problems that have caused many...to remove their kids from SMMHS to go to other schools."*
 - *"Elementary schools have strong leadership, the high school does not."*
- **Strengths & Weaknesses**
 - *Leadership is consistently professional, and I trust [them] to make decisions with the best interest of our children in mind.*
 - *It's almost impossible to talk to an administrator. You have to go to the school and demand to talk to someone...they don't follow through with what they say.*
 - *Negativity from the staff and administration filters to our students and is unacceptable. Kids want to graduate early, not attend any schoolwide activities, not proud of their community school at all.*

QUESTION 3: QUALITY OF TEACHERS/TEACHING



QUESTION 3: COMMENTS (149)

▪ In Praise of teachers & teaching (45%)

- "Above excellent."
- "We have the best teachers around-I would put them against any teacher across our country."
- "My child struggled in her first few months of kindergarten; the teacher took the time to understand my child, my child's love of school was nurtured and she flourished."

▪ Criticisms (14%)

- "We have had some teachers that do not actually teach. They give the students handouts and tell them to read it and learn it on their own and refuse to help the students."
- "Teachers are below adequate."
- "I'm not interested in the HCDE requirement that a coach must also teach...sometimes the two don't go hand in hand."

▪ Mixed reviews of teaching (24%)

- "There are some teachers that love all of the kids and do an amazing job teaching, nurturing learners, and instilling confidence, but there are some who should not be teaching"

▪ Disparity betw. elementary and SMMHS (10%)

- "The vast majority of teachers are spectacular, [but] there have been some at the MS/HS level that have not been.. in key disciplines such as foreign language or math."
- "Nolan is terrific while SMMHS is poor at best with rude office personnel and teachers who only assign worksheets."

▪ Tenure

- "The tenure program needs to go away. If Signal Mountain were its own school district then we could do a better job of vetting teachers."

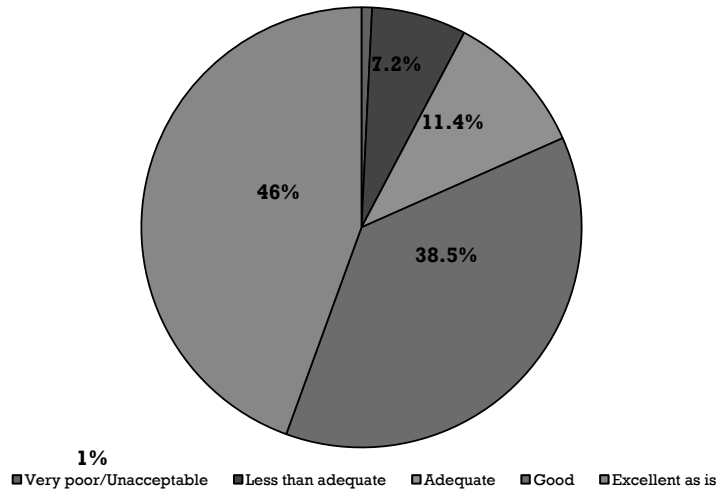
▪ Preferential treatment for IB students

- "Needs more focus on mainstream students, average achievers and not just high IQ or IB"

QUESTION 4: QUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL SUPPORTS

(INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY, CLASSROOM AIDES, GUIDANCE COUNSELORS)

Average: 4.3 (Good)



QUESTION 4: COMMENTS (130)

▪ Inadequate support from HCDE (25%)

- "We need to ensure technology (in classrooms and throughout the schools) is CURRENT..."
- "Staff need ready access to IT support. HCDE has expanded but needs to expand its IT dept/staff even more! Still NOT adequate."
- "Wi-Fi signal strength is AWFUL at the schools, particularly at SMMHS. Some sort of signal boosters are needed. "
- "There needs to be more support for the educators. Aids, materials, technology. It's sad when the teachers are running out of paper to make copies before the school year is half over."

▪ Importance of MEF (12%)

- "Instructional technology at Signal Mountain schools is a result of community contributions and fundraisers independent of Hamilton County"
- "Of course the resources are great, we as a community pay for most of it through MEF."

▪ Guidance counseling problems (17%)

- "Not enough attention given to the college advisory process. For the most part, students/parents are on their own. I'm confident that the administration isn't aware of students' college plans and I doubt the counselors are either."
- "The worst I have ever experienced...not approachable or inviting..."
- "Counselors are far too burdened with testing and scheduling and cannot provide true counseling assistance."

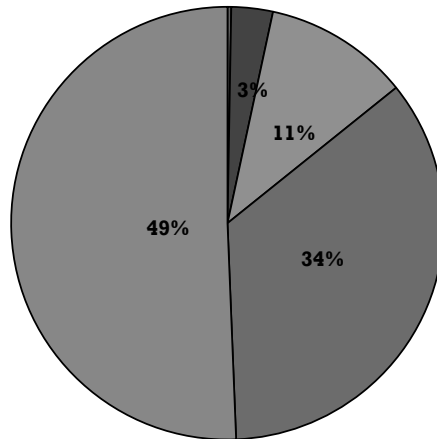
▪ Guidance counseling commendations (8%)

- "We have found the Guidance counselors, IB Coordinator, and College Coordinator to be very accessible and helpful. They provide great communication to parents/students and have helped answer numerous questions."
- "Excellent college advice"
- "Guidance counselors have been helpful and have offered beneficial programs for the student body as a whole.."

QUESTION 5: QUALITY & ADEQUACY OF FACILITIES

(CLASSROOMS, LABORATORIES, MEETING SPACES)

Average: 4.5



< 1%
 ■ Very poor/Unacceptable ■ Less than adequate ■ Adequate ■ Good ■ Excellent as is

QUESTION 5: COMMENTS (136)

▪ Space at or near capacity (28%)

- *“Both Elementary schools now have STEM labs, wonderful libraries and arts rooms. However, all need more storage space.”*
- *“String instruments for band meet in an old computer lab with minimal space for instrument storage and poor acoustics”*
- *“We are at full capacity.*
 - *Our SMMHS library is not adequate for the number of students.*
 - *Computer labs and conference rooms in the library are now used for ISS, Learning Center, and gifted education classes.*
 - *Need additional classroom space. We have a robotics group that meets in a storage closet.*
 - *Need a full sized auditorium.*
 - *Need a field house with locker rooms for both the home and visitors for the football field.*
 - *Need a well maintained practice field for the band.*
 - *SMMHS parking space is at capacity.”*

▪ Facilities commended as new, beautiful (32%)

▪ Cost concerns (20%)

- **Supply Fee**
 - *The “supply fee” is a tax on families that is non-compulsory but is expected to be paid.*
- **Building replacement/Upgrading Needed**
 - *“I’ve heard Thrasher needs to be replaced. How are you going to pay for that?”*
 - *“How can we afford upkeep on three schools?”*

▪ Maintenance/Janitorial issues (8%)

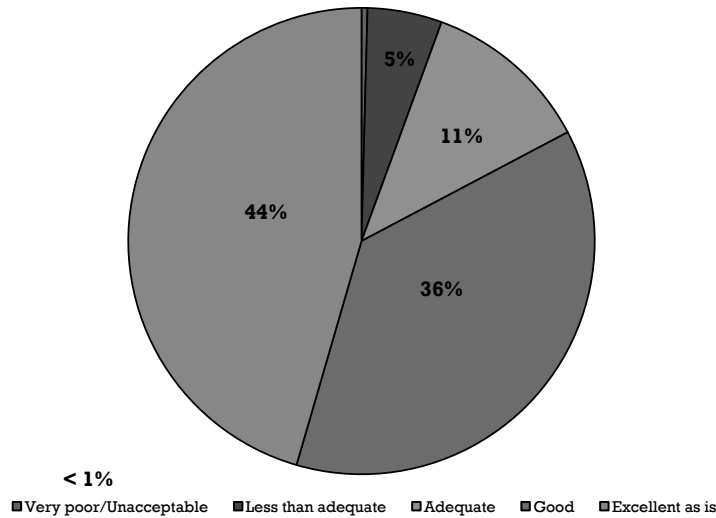
- *“Maintenance of the buildings needs to be improved. The HCDE maintenance department is slow to respond.”*
- *“School cleanliness is a problem. [Janitorial] does not do a good job and many times there is no toilet paper or hand soap in bathrooms.”*
- *“So much of the SMMHS is maintained by the parents...”*

▪ MEF contribution to facilities (3%)

- *“Since MEF makes up for any shortfalls in the Hamilton county budget everything seems to be great.”*
- *“The only reason they are as good as they are is because of MEF.”*

QUESTION 6: QUALITY OF CURRICULUM

Average: 4.2 (Good)



QUESTION 6: COMMENTS (157)

IB Curriculum Pros and Cons

PRO (25%)

- “Love the vision...it does an amazing job of preparing students for the future.”
- “Excellent curriculum”
- “Love the IB. Be certain we don't lose it in any district transitions!”

CON (12%)

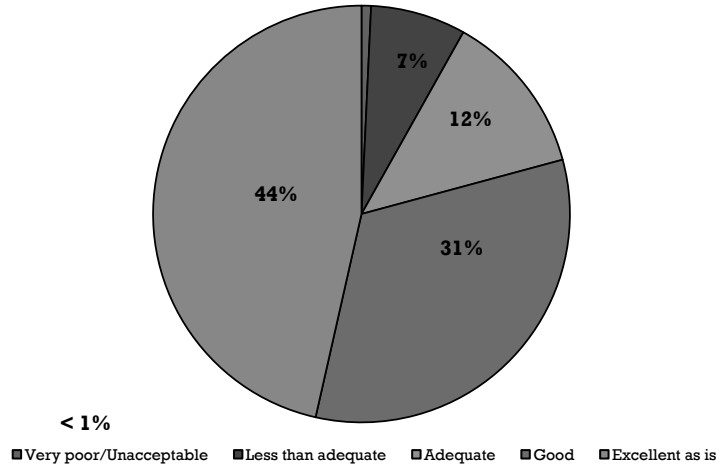
- “In order to keep in compliance with all of the various rules and requirements of the IB program, we use way too many of our resources.”
- The stress that the IB program puts on students is ridiculous. So many of those students give up their extra activities to be able to fulfill all the IB requirements and they end up going to the same colleges as the non-IB students.”
- “Disadvantages mainstreamed students and students who are not high achievers”
- “Curriculum is great for IB students and bad for non-IB”

Suggestions for Improvement

- More AP classes; not everyone wants IB
- Teach life skills (Home Ec., Auto repair, local civic life, personal finance skills)
- More technical training and pre-trade training for students not aiming for 4 year college, but who want a trade
- More electives to create well-rounded people
- Eliminate courses in Bible, religion (this is a public school)
- More options for foreign language
 - Chinese/Mandarin, Arabic, Latin
- “Need to distance from relying on technology for everything.”
- “Read more ‘actual’ books like the classics”
- Make SMMHS an IB Magnet
- Too much emphasis on testing
- Reduce homework vs. make it more challenging.

QUESTION 7: QUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL ENRICHMENT OPPORTUNITIES (FIELD TRIPS, DRAMA, BAND, SCIENCE CLUBS)

Average: 4.1 (Good)



QUESTION 7: COMMENTS (134)

▪ Suggestions for Improvement (20%)

- Have visiting artists in the schools, for a day or semester to expand appreciation for visual arts
- Compensate teachers for their time to work with clubs and extracurricular
- Expand theater to elementary and early middle school grades
- Spanish in elementary grades
- Add life skills and enrichment opportunities:
 - Home Economics
 - Auto Repair
 - Woodworking
 - Photography
- Add clubs like 4-H or Future Farmers (FFA) to offerings to expand student horizons
- Add opportunities to do more in the natural surroundings of SMMHS such as rock climbing, mountain biking, biology initiatives.

▪ Field trips (20%)

- "Too many" vs. Not enough
- "Waste of time" vs. Greatly enriching
- Fees associated with trips exceed many parent's capacity to pay.

▪ Strengths (39%)

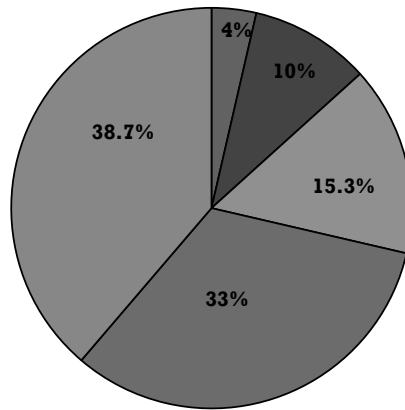
- Band
- Youth in Government
- Model UN
- Renaissance Night
- Drama/Theater
- Robotics

▪ MEF & Parent /Volunteer support

- "I don't think there is anything that HCDE has done to make these programs good but rather the teachers who volunteer their time and the community, parents, and kids who donate/contribute to these programs."
- Opportunities exist but are grossly under-funded by HCDE, putting financial burden on families.

QUESTION 8: QUALITY OF SERVICES TO CHILDREN RECEIVING INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PLAN (IEP)

Average: 3.9 (Good)



■ Very poor/Unacceptable ■ Less than adequate ■ Adequate ■ Good ■ Excellent as is

QUESTION 8: COMMENTS (144)

■ IEP Services in high regard (22%)

- Individual schools were singled out for comment
- Teachers go above and beyond
- Success with IEP process maximized the educational experience
- *"In Signal Mountain schools [special ed] has always been the most impressive feature of the education provided here. Our schools have always done a spectacular job of recognizing and accommodating for the special needs of certain students."*

■ IEP services inadequate (17%)

- More services and access to specialists needed
- More classroom aides/assistants needed
- Regular ed. teachers need more training in how to work effectively with both gifted and mainstreamed special needs students

■ Disparity between elementary and SMMHS (4%)

- *"The CDC program at Nolan is EXCELLENT! However, CDC at SMMHS is constantly changing which is not good for these individuals or their parents."*

■ Challenges in Gifted Services (18%)

- Minimal services offered, and what was offered in past years has been reduced
- Students need more time with teacher
- Need more resources
- Quality has diminished in recent years due to cost-cutting by HCDE

■ Gifted Services Effective (12%)

- Made a positive difference for my child
- Offered services are strong

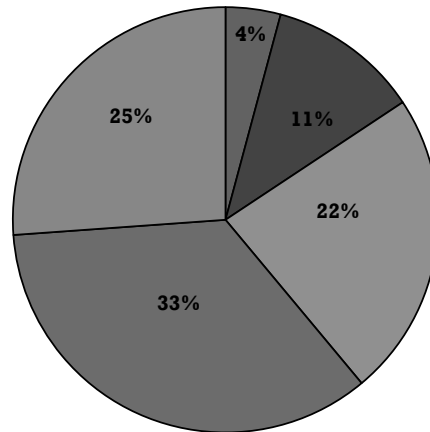
■ HCDE as cause of inadequacy (7%)

- Intent to provide minimum service under IDEA
 - *"The [HCDE Exceptional Education Director] has been quoted publicly as stating that they simply want to fulfill the bare minimum of IDEA vs. working to maximize a child's potential. This is something for all of us to be ashamed about and it is very telling that [HCDE] is not ashamed at all. This is one of the most compelling reasons to to leave."*
- Understaffed/caseload too high
- Poor communication
- *"Special ed services could only get better under a smaller municipal system"*

QUESTION 9: CURRENT POLICIES REGARDING THE SCHOOL DAY

(START/END TIMES, TRANSPORTATION)

Average: 3.6 (Adequate/Good)



Very poor/Unacceptable
 Less than adequate
 Adequate
 Good
 Excellent as is

QUESTION 9: COMMENTS (200)

▪ Later start time at SMMHS (61%)

- Research shows later start time best fits with adolescent biorhythms
- Safety at bus stops when students wait in the dark or cold
 - *"Students do not need to be waiting for a bus at 6 in the morning and be let out of school unsupervised at 2."*
- Switch elementary start time to earlier (6%)

▪ Bus issues

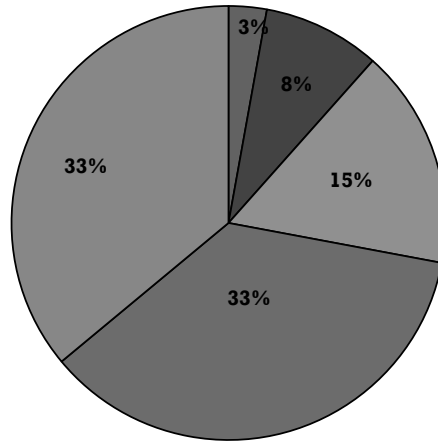
- Consider changing routes for economy of time and later start time
 - *"My student is picked up by bus at 5:45 am. The bus arrives at school at 7:00. He is first to be picked up. The route is reversed in the afternoon and he is last to be dropped off at 3:45pm. That is 2 1/2 Hours on a bus. Appeals to HCDE have been futile."*
- Switching start times could relieve congestion at Nolan
 - Health issue since traffic snarls would preclude EMS vehicles from getting to Nolan or SMMHS if needed.

▪ School year

- Start in September when temperatures are cooler, and go longer into June
 - Would conserve energy and reduce costs
- Year-round school schedule

QUESTION 10: QUALITY OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN SCHOOL AND HOME

Average: 3.9 (Adequate/Good)



Very poor/Unacceptable
 Less than adequate
 Adequate
 Good
 Excellent as is

QUESTION 10: COMMENTS (129)

▪ “One of SM schools’ best qualities” (32%)

- Love Power School and Managebac at SMMHS
- Communications clear and detailed
- Can always reach a teacher if needed

▪ Parents perceived by teachers to be the problem (2%)

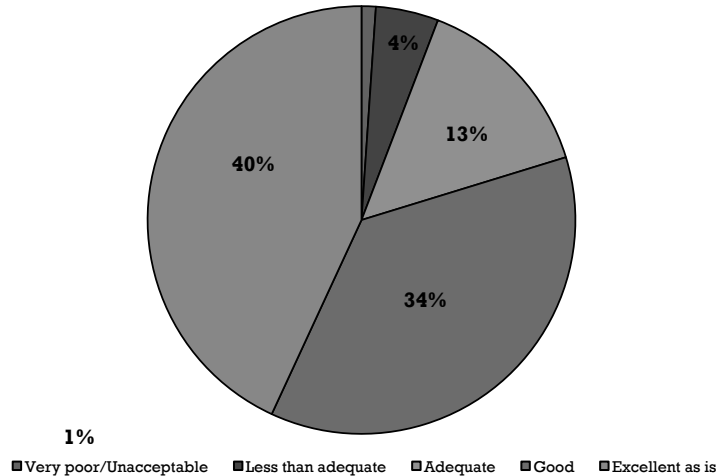
- “Parents are the worst part of teaching at SMMHS. They are, as a whole, completely unrealistic about their child’s ability and behavior. We are not supported by parents, they are the enemy.”
- “The only way it could be better is to have a holding area for the helicopter parents. When it comes to high school, kids need to learn to speak for themselves.”
- “Parents don’t go straight to teachers with issues. The concept of “going above someone’s head” is very present among parents.”

▪ Concerns & Suggestions (39%)

- Disparity between elementary and SMMHS (9%)
 - Excellent at the Elementary schools, from both teachers and principals as well as website and social media.
 - Less than adequate from SMMHS overall.
 - Once my daughter reached high school, the communication from the teachers when she was struggling was non-existent. I emailed multiple times to ask for assistance and rarely got an answer.
 - Some teachers do not keep Power School updated
 - SMMHS teachers need to learn to return e-mails.
- Inconsistent, or not timely
 - Need to have calendar updates WAY more often
- Some teachers much more communicative
 - Principals should insist on regular communications ; communication is good if principal expects it to be
- Need to standardize communication
- Communication could be used to foster spirit and community—but its not
 - “There is no sense of being included in a community. We are just told facts - dates, times, events.”

QUESTION 11: QUALITY OF COOPERATION BETWEEN TEACHERS AND PARENTS/GUARDIANS

Average: 4.1 (Good)



QUESTION 11: COMMENTS (103)

High levels of cooperation (45%)

Comments from Parents

- “Signal Mountain has some of the best cooperation between parents and teachers. There are schools in the valley where the teachers meet very few parents...I’m not sure how we can do much better. The bar is already set pretty high. Not sure how much higher it can go.”
- “Our teachers are amazing and have gone above and beyond to communicate and assist. They really come along side us.”
- “Teachers and parents in the Signal Mountain schools have a great working relationship.”

Comments from Teachers

- “The amount of volunteers that are in our building on a daily bases is mind blowing! We (teachers) would be lost without the constant support of the parents. I know for a fact that almost every teacher in our building hands out their cell phone number the first day of school and are available to parents 24/7 - which, personally, I don’t agree with. My point is, teachers are constantly communicating with the parents and visa versa.”
- “From my own experiences, I have had great communication with parents.”

Challenges (9%)

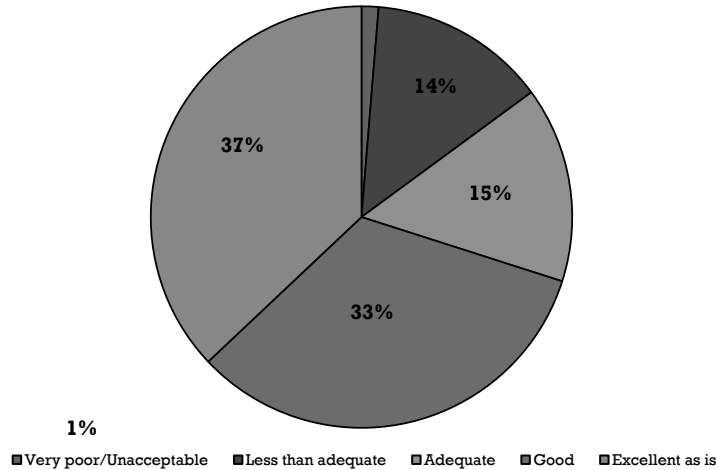
- “Parents who work have a harder time with this as teachers are not available after traditional work hours”
- “The school is doing their job and trying to work with the community/parents but the parents aren’t letting the students live with consequences.”
- “There is a fine line between healthy cooperation between parents and teachers and parents attempting to exert their influence over teachers. The “mountain entitlement” creates an environment where that line is often crossed.”
- “Mostly teachers are too busy and overloaded to know much about your individual child.”

Mixed Reviews (38%)

- Varies greatly from teacher to teacher
- Elementary school teachers more cooperative in dealing with child issues than SMMHS
 - “Excellent for Nolan elementary, teachers seem to work with the parents and in the interest of the students. SMMHS leaves much to be desired. When mentioning my child’s struggle adjusting to middle school one teacher suggested my child may be faking it due to laziness.”

QUESTION 12: QUALITY OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OFFERED TO TEACHERS/STAFF

Average: 3.9 (Good)



QUESTION 12: COMMENTS (36)

▪ Responses specific to IB-related Professional Development

- Negative specific to IB Program (19%)
 - "Much of what is done under the name of professional development is just a deeper and deeper dive into the IB world. If it disappeared, overall the teachers would be relieved, happier."
 - "So much international baccalaureate and nothing else makes a staff numb to it's amazingness."
 - "Sick to death of IB training, It would be nice to hear something else."
- Positive specific to IB Program (19%)
 - "Incredible options for training all over the country that are taught by some of the most well known college professors and educators in the field."
 - Training is specific to IB

▪ Benefits of local control

- "With local control, professional development could be designed specifically for our teachers and our schools' needs"

▪ Generally positive responses (31%)

- "I have had numerous opportunities for PD, more than I ever had in my previous system. It is evident that administrators and teachers are aware of best practices in education."
- "I think there are more options within a larger system. A smaller system just does not have the funds to provide what larger systems provide."
- "My principal promotes PD well; creative about helping me find what I need."
- "In-house PD is more effective than district wide PD."
- "There is an abundance of professional development offered during anytime of the year."

▪ Generally negative responses (20%)

- "Dreaded, endured"
- "County wide not so great, but some of the summer professional developments are useful"
- "No one has every asked me (or other teachers whom I know) what kind of PD session I would like to experience. PD sessions often focus on the latest technological fad or educational whimsy that the state or county is pursuing."
- "Most seek their own PD due to funding not being available to send to individualized training."

QUESTION 13: ANY ADDITIONAL COMMENTS OR SUGGESTIONS (263)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Comments in Opposition to Independent Municipal District (41%) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Financial concerns, taxes or expenses, paying for buildings (20) ▪ Existing system not broken, great teachers (18) ▪ Don't abandon HCDE, improve what we have, give new superintendent a chance (9) ▪ Elitist, self-centered, morally wrong, isolationist (9) ▪ Causing unnecessary angst, divisive, insulting to teachers (7) ▪ Concerns about magnet school and/or special ed. students losing out (6) ▪ Concerns about exclusion of Walden and Unincorporated areas (3) ▪ Specific Suggestions (10%) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Address drug use and bullying at SMMHS ▪ Improve nutrition in school lunches ▪ Mandate school uniforms ▪ Need more diversity in students/staff (10) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Comments in Support of Independent, Municipal School District (14%) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ HCDE does not serve us well, SM parents have to pay more in order to get quality they want (10) ▪ Need local control, better use of taxes, keep taxes paid on SM, within SM to support SM children's education (8) ▪ HCDE sub-par, poorly run (5) ▪ Advances opportunities for kids, keeps best, brightest on Signal, and not going off mountain to private schools (4) ▪ Examples of other communities which have succeeded or excelled post split (3) ▪ Mixed Feelings or General Concerns (13%) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Not sure of the benefit of an independent district ▪ Too many unanswered questions to make a decision ▪ What's the point of investigating a new district? ▪ Concern about unintended consequences. ▪ How will new district be better than what we have? |
|--|---|

THEMES ECHOED REPEATEDLY ACROSS MANY SURVEY ITEMS

- **Current state of Quality in SM schools is "Good enough"**
 - Comments reflect focus on local situation in education
 - Existing system is the best in Hamilton county
 - Signal Mountain schools are well-regarded in state
 - Our graduates are accepted to colleges of their choice, all good schools
 - Teachers in all three schools demonstrate commitment to SM children
 - "Good enough" comments do not take into consideration (or do not explicitly state) where TN falls within the broader context of the United States:
 - Tennessee's ranking at #37 (US News & World Report)
- **SM Elementary education perceived to be of higher quality than SMMHS**
- **Need later start time at SMMHS**
- **Issues identified as impacting motivation/morale at SMMHS**
 - Absence or declining school spirit
 - Students eager to graduate early
 - Students disinterested in school activities/events
 - Teachers who don't want to teach, or who are demoralized
 - Teachers who see parents as adversaries
 - Substance abuse at SMMHS
 - Bullying at SMMHS
- **Questions re: motivation for exploring feasibility of forming an independent municipal district**
 - Many questions about why the town council would want to explore an independent district
 - Many questions about how town could afford to run an independent district
 - Many questions about how (or if) Walden, unincorporated, and Sequatchie children living on the mountain could attend

**THINGS FOR TOWN COUNCIL TO CLARIFY:
RESPONSES TO SURVEY ITEMS THAT REVEALED
LACK OF UNDERSTANDING ABOUT PURPOSE OF FEASIBILITY STUDY**

- **Aim of separation is to take back enrollment of SM children from private schools**
- **Trying to create a private school supported by public money**
- **Trying to further segregate SM students, so it is an all-white, “all-rich” school district**
- **Only student-residents of SM town limits would be able to attend new municipal schools**
 - Tuition for Walden students?
 - Busing Walden and Sequatchie kids off mountain and across the city
- **Trying to recruit more minority students so we can win football games.**
- **Teachers’ health insurance and other benefits would be discontinued**
 - Teachers would need to find their own insurance
 - There would be no retirement benefit
- **All teachers would be fired if independent district is formed**



SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT: LEADERSHIP & TEACHERS

- Principals should have doctorate in education, live in the district, be present at school events
- Need consistency and stability in local school leadership
- More diversity of race/ethnicity/background among teachers and administrators
- Local school leadership should share their vision and mission for the schools, as well as goals, with both teachers and parents
- “Tenure needs to go away” so school district can remove teachers who are not effective
 - Municipal district could have control over vetting teachers
- Need better trained/effective teachers in math and foreign language
- Teachers better trained to deal with special ed/IEP/gifted
- Improved teacher motivation and improved communication & collaboration with parents
- Coaches should not be required to teach core academic classes
- Rotate teachers every year between teaching AP and regular level classes, forcing teachers to stay fresh and rethink pedagogy every school year.



SUGGESTIONS: SCHOOL DAY, STUDENT ISSUES & CURRICULUM

▪ **School Day/School Year**

- Later start time at SMMHS to better match biorhythms of adolescents/teens & improve performance
 - Traffic management at elementary schools (safety issue, emergency access)
- Better quality lunch; improve nutritional quality
- Have late bus to take kids home after activities (would increase school participation & spirit)
- Year-round classes/September start

▪ **Student Issues to Address**

- Bullying
- Substance abuse & Personal health
 - Vaping/smoking, Illicit Drugs at SMMHS
- School uniforms
- School spirit
 - Eliminate supply fee to encourage extracurricular participation

▪ **Curriculum Issues**

- Provide technical “trade” instruction
- Teach life skills (managing finances, interpersonal skills, learn about civic life, auto repair, home economics photography)
- Expand foreign language offerings to include Chinese/Mandarin, Arabic
- Reading classics literature
- Improved music facilities and offerings
- More dance and theater options in SMMHS as well as elementary
- Need full range of AP as well as IB options
- More outdoor activities to capitalize on trails, natural world near campus (something like Baylor Walkabout)
- “Discrimination” against kids not in IB; children who are not high achievers or who have lower IQ get lost in the crowd and are disadvantaged
- Project-based learning

SUGGESTIONS: FACILITIES, TECHNOLOGY & COMMUNICATION

- Ensure technology is current at all schools, and that IT support is available to all teachers all day (need more than currently exists)
- WiFi signal strength improved
- **Facilities needed:**
 - STEM classrooms
 - Storage space
 - Performing arts building
 - Meeting spaces for community and parents
- **Communication**
 - Hearing from school
 - Keeping website current
 - Systematic/uniform communication strategies for all 3 schools (right now Thrasher/Nolan do different things with regard to posting on Facebook/Twitter/ web, and SMMHS does something else altogether)
 - Conduct similar quality and performance questionnaire every year to foster communication between school/home

SUGGESTIONS: GUIDANCE ISSUES & HCDE

▪ **Guidance Counselors**

- Need more and more-knowledgeable Guidance Counselors
 - Conveying awareness and knowledge about the college application process and scholarships needs improvement and should start sooner.
 - Counselors should schedule 1-on-1 time with every student starting in the spring semester of 11th grade and fall semester 12th grade. Students can seek follow-up guidance, if desired.

▪ **Community & Service Focus**

- *"We need service programs that really help others to instill importance of giving back-not just collecting toiletries."*

▪ **HCDE-related Issues**

- *"We could easily bring this school up to excellent by focusing on needs of our students rather than always being told "no" by county. Budget restrictions, leadership inconsistencies, and ownership issues prevent our school from being everything it could be."*
- *"I am fed up with my student coming home and telling me they did nothing in class today...or worse, watched a movie. This is coming from middle schooler AND high schooler."*
- *"If we had our own school district, we could voice those concerns and be heard."*
- *"SM is not a squeaky wheel in Hamilton County, therefore gets no grease."*



QUESTIONS

