



2004 Wake Public Education Community Assessment

An Initiative of
Wake Education Partnership

Supported by the Greater Raleigh Chamber of Commerce and IBM

Beginning in 1998 Wake Education Partnership, in cooperation with the Greater Raleigh Chamber of Commerce, launched a biennial public opinion study regarding public education in Wake County. The study, which includes focus groups and a randomly selected telephone poll, is intended to meet five objectives:

- **Clarify perceptions:** Reframe perceptions as an objective assessment of the issues;
- **Guide partnerships:** Move from good intentions to a more focused effort with volunteerism and private investment;
- **Engage community:** Strengthen community ownership for public education;
- **Validate parent surveys:** Confirm findings of surveys conducted by the Wake County Public School System from an objective source; and
- **Assist elected officials:** Move from partisan considerations of schools issues to a more objective assessment and provide data – such as gap analysis – to focus resources.

Since the Assessment began, the study has directly affected strategies tied to ongoing quality improvement in the public schools, including adoption of Goal 2003, initiation of an ongoing citizens' review of spending and performance in the public schools (*Quality Matters*), re-organization of communications in the public schools and development of community engagement meetings around student assignment and diversity.

General findings from the 2004 Assessment include the following:

- Overall perceptions of quality in the Wake County Public School System are positive and represent an upward trend from the 2002 poll. These positive feelings are held by respondents, regardless of age, race, ethnicity, gender or education level and by both parents and nonparents, and are confirmed both generally and regarding specific success factors.
- Support for the system remains fairly strong around questions regarding fiscal needs—a majority of respondents believe the school system needs more money and manages its funding effectively.
- Wake citizens hold conflicting opinions on diversity and student assignment. Although support for maintaining racial and economic diversity in the schools has increased and support for neighborhood schools has decreased, a majority also believe that students should be permitted to attend the school closest to their home, regardless of overcrowding or student population. Most respondents also admitted to knowing little about the system's assignment policy—when given the facts, support for the policy increases and opposition decreases.
- Focus groups suggest that with knowledge of Wake County Public School System's performance comes: 1) support for revenue initiatives and policies; 2) justification for initial general positive feelings; and 3) more positive feelings about the county overall.

On the reverse of this page is a summary of key findings from the Assessment. For a complete report, visit www.WakeEdPartnership.org.

Overview of Key Findings

School Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 82% of Wake citizens give the school system a passing grade, including 54% rating the system an “A” or a “B.” In 2002, 41% of citizens gave an “A” or a “B,” as did 51% in 2000 and 46% in 1998. These figures are slightly higher than grades in national polls. • 80% of respondents say the quality of education in Wake County has stayed the same or gotten better over the past five years. • 54% agree that WCPSS is improving over time, up from 36% in 2002. • 85% say that their local schools are better than or the same as schools in other parts of the county. This perception is highest in the Cary/Apex and Raleigh areas; those in the East/South and North regions of the county are more likely to believe their schools are the same, but not better than others in the county. • Responses confirm some of the previous findings about the most important characteristics of a successful school: “mastery of basics,” “students prepared for college,” “positive student-teacher relationship” and “teachers with strong subject matter knowledge.”
School Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 60% of respondents rate the Wake County Public School System positively on fiscal management, up from 51% in 2002. • 65% of respondents say the school system will need more money in the next three to five years to meet its needs, down from 70% in 2002. • 65% of respondents say that schools are overcrowded because the system is behind in meeting the needs of a rapidly growing student population and 64% believe the next school bond will be needed in five years or less. • 59% favor raising the local sales tax by one-half percent and dedicating the money to schools. • 49% recommend increasing spending on English as a Second Language programs, while 30% suggest maintaining current spending levels.
Diversity and Student Assignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 51% of citizens support maintaining racial and economic diversity in Wake County Public Schools, up from 40% in 2002 – 26% are neutral and 22% say it should not be a priority (down from 36% in 2002). • 60% say they agree with the WCPSS policy of assigning students to fill new schools, ease overcrowding and maintain diversity – support is strongest among African-American, Hispanic and Asian respondents. • 69% say students should be permitted to attend the school closest to their home, regardless of overcrowding or student population (down from 79% in 2000), while 52% say it’s a good idea to balance the percentage of students in each school on free-and-reduced-price lunch.
Goal-setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 74% say they are at least somewhat familiar with the federal No Child Left Behind Act • 85% prefer the standard of Goal 2008 over the federal NCLB goal

For a complete copy of the report, visit www.WakeEdPartnership.org