

**PISCATAWAY SCHOOLS
2012 NON-INSTRUCTIONAL SERVICES SURVEY**

Conducted for:

Piscataway Township School District

Conducted by:

Monmouth University Polling Institute

**Patrick Murray
Director**

**Tom Lamatsch
Assistant Director**

Data Collection:

May to June 2012



PISCATAWAY SCHOOLS 2012 NON-INSTRUCTIONAL SERVICES SURVEY

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

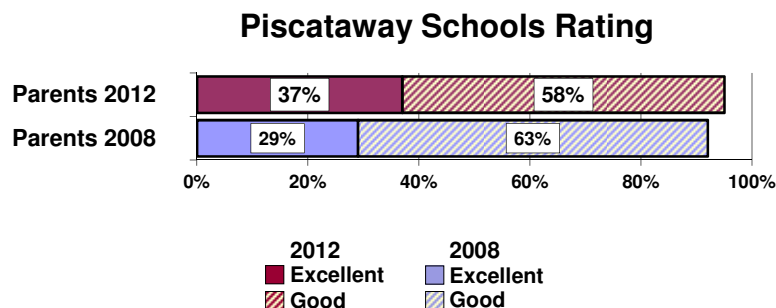
The Piscataway Public School District engaged the Monmouth University Polling Institute to conduct an independent survey to gain a better understanding of awareness, utilization, and satisfaction with non-instructional services as well as community support for district schools. The purpose of the survey was to identify trends and changes in constituent opinion compared to a similar survey conducted in 2008. As in the prior survey, the district identified two constituencies: district families (i.e. parents/guardians of students in the school system, referred to as parents in this report) and the Piscataway community (i.e. township residents in general). This resulted in two separate surveys which were used to obtain assessments of Piscataway schools' image, use of and satisfaction with non-instructional services, as well as information needs and sources. The surveys were conducted from May to June 2012.

A total of 759 parents and guardians participated in the parent survey and 269 Piscataway Township residents participated in the community survey. The parent survey has a $\pm 3.4\%$ margin of sampling error and the community survey has a $\pm 5.9\%$ margin of error. A more detailed discussion of both surveys' results follows this summary. A full set of data tabulations for the two surveys is available in a separate volume. This year's study also included a series of 14 focus groups with constituent groups to assist with strategic planning. That report is also available in a separate volume.

A. Parent Survey

School Ratings and Priorities

The vast majority of parents (95%) give Piscataway Public Schools a positive rating including 37% who say they are excellent. The overall number of parents giving Piscataway Public Schools a positive rating increased by a small amount compared to the 2008 survey, while the percentage of people who rate the schools as excellent has gone up by a statistically significant 8 points. These positive ratings have increased among every demographic group surveyed.



When asked to rate different priorities for the Piscataway schools, 91% of parents say that having their schools highly rated academically is *very important* and 70% say the same about having a wide range of extra-curricular activities. Only 31% of Piscataway parents rate doing well in

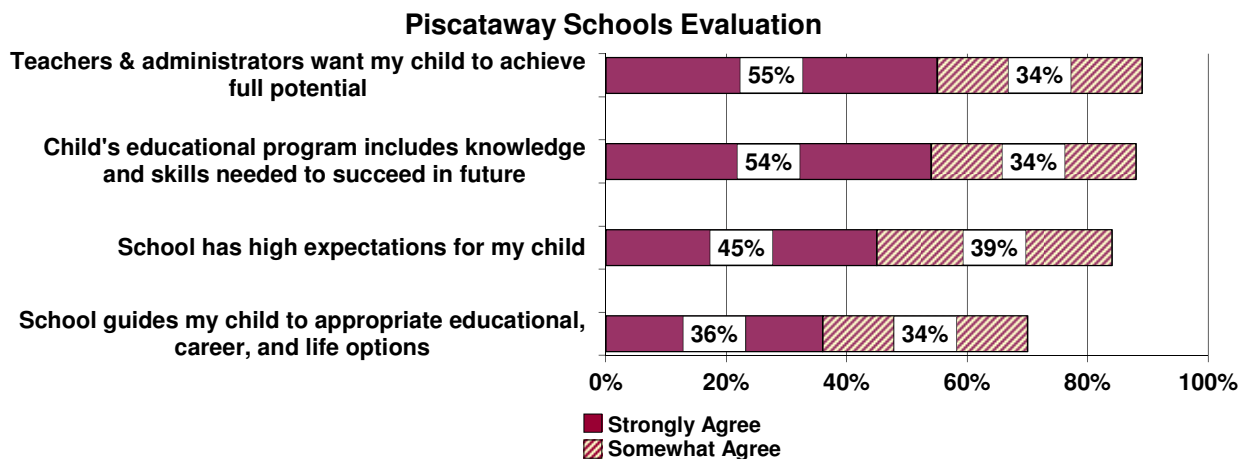
sports as very important. Also, 84% feel that the responsibility for educating students should be shared jointly by parents and teachers and 76% of parents believe that a college education is necessary for future success. These numbers are either identical to the 2008 survey or just slightly higher.

The focus group discussions identified student diversity as a key asset, as well as a challenge, for the Piscataway school system. The 2012 survey included a number of questions assessing diversity's impact on the educational environment. As in 2008, the vast majority of parents (93%) agree that children today need to work with and understand different cultures if they are to succeed, including 2-in-3 (66%) who agree strongly. These results are in line with the 2008 survey – overall agreement is up by a statistically insignificant 2 points while strong agreement is down by 2 points. As in 2008, *strong* agreement is lower among non-Hispanic white parents than among other cultural groups.

The current survey also finds that 4-in-5 parents (79%) feel that Piscataway schools place the right emphasis on diversity in the classroom. The remainder are evenly divided between saying there is too much (10%) or not enough (12%) emphasis. There are some slight differences by cultural group that are worth noting even though they represent a small segment of overall opinion (*see full report*).

The 2012 survey also included questions on curricular emphasis and support, which are potential issues raised in the focus groups. More than 3-in-4 parents (77%) say that their child's school puts the right amount of emphasis on "teaching the basics." Another 14% say there is not enough emphasis and 9% say there is too much. Among the various demographic groups, non-Hispanic white parents are most likely to say that the basics don't receive enough emphasis, just as they are the most likely to say that a college education is not necessary for future success.

Another concern raised in the focus groups was whether students who perform "in the middle" academically received adequate levels of support compared to students on either end of the academic spectrum. Overall, parents are only slightly less likely to say that average learners get the right amount of attention (67%) compared to top performers (70%) and those who need extra help (72%). It's important to note that only 1-in-10 parents actually disagree that any of these student types get enough attention – the remainder say that they do not know.



On a personal level, nearly 9-in-10 parents agree that school staff want their child to achieve his or her full potential (89%), the school prepares their child for future success (88%), and the school has high expectations for their child (84%). They are somewhat less likely to agree to the school guides their child to appropriate educational, career, and life options (70%).

Satisfaction with Services

The survey asked parents about their satisfaction with 10 different areas or facets of non-instructional services and programs provided by Piscataway schools. Satisfaction is higher across the board and, importantly, significant numbers of parents have moved from being just somewhat satisfied to being very satisfied with most of these services. Compared to 2008, overall satisfaction is up in 8 of the 10 areas, and strong satisfaction is up in 9 areas.

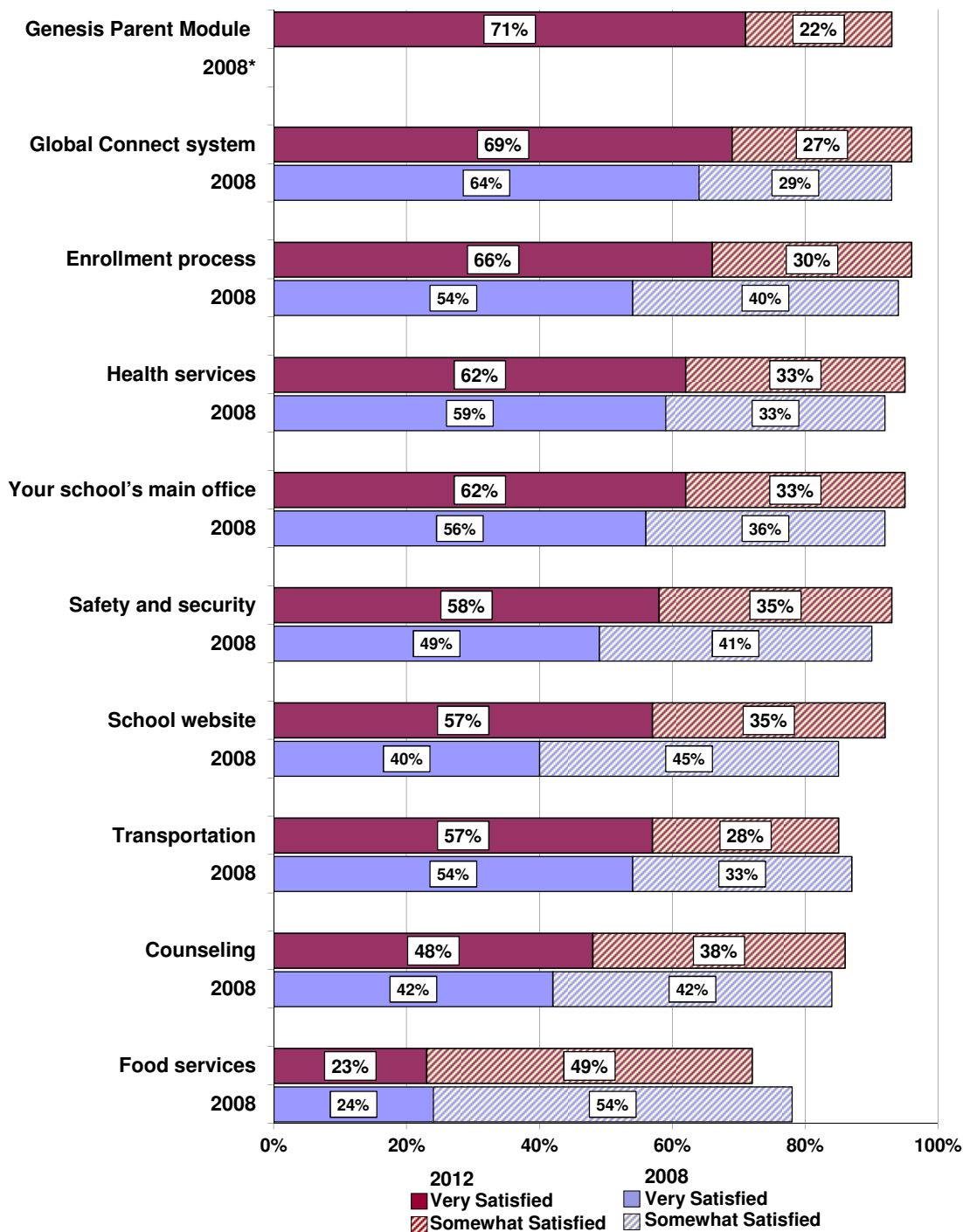
Overall satisfaction with the school's website stands at 92% among those who use or are familiar with the service, which marks a significant 7 point increase from 2008. The Genesis Parent Module satisfaction level stands at 93% among all parents. In 2008, this question was asked only of middle and high school parents. The comparable rating among this group is currently 96%, which is an 8 point improvement over four years ago.

More than 9-in-10 parents say they are also satisfied with Global Connect (96%), the enrollment process (96%), health services (95%), the school's main office (95%), and safety and security (93%). Satisfaction with counseling services stands at 86%. These reports are all slightly more positive than the 2008 results, although the 2 to 3 point increase is within the survey's margin of error.

Satisfaction with transportation services is currently 85%, which is down by 2 points from 2008. Food services, which was the lowest rated area in the 2008 survey, has dropped a little further. Satisfaction with this service now stands at 72%, down 6 points compared to four years ago.

It's also worth noting that "strong" levels of satisfaction are up by an even greater margin for most of these non-instructional services. This is especially true for the school website (57%, up 17 points), the enrollment process (66%, up 12 points), Genesis (78% among middle and high school parents, up 12 points), and security (58%, up 9 points). Factors that registered increases in strong satisfaction of 5 or 6 point, include Global Connect (69%), the main office (62%), and counseling services (48%). Non-significant increases of 3 points were registered for health services (62%) and transportation (57%). Strong satisfaction with food services (23%) dropped by one point.

Satisfactions with Non-Instructional Services
(among those who use or are familiar with those services)

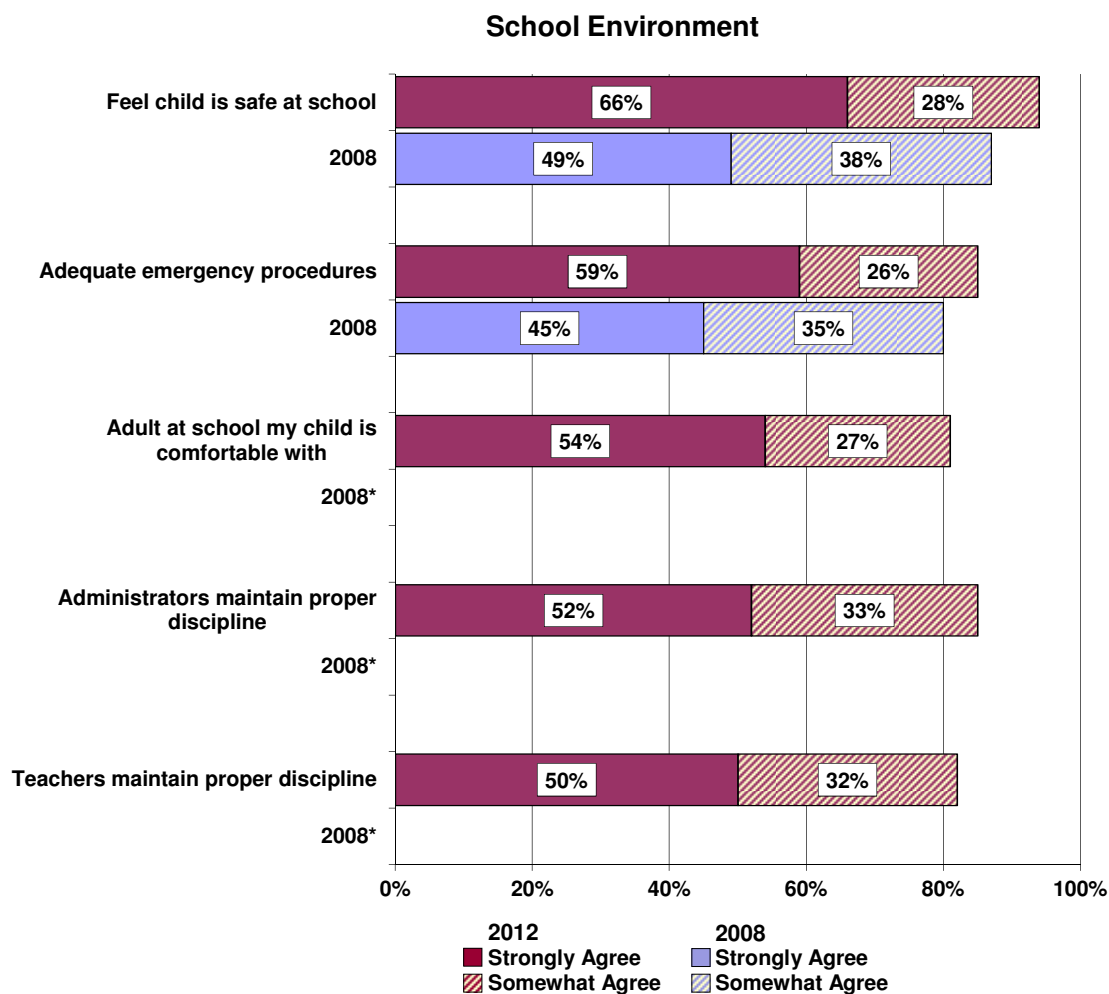


**Question was only asked of middle and high school parents in 2008.*

School Environment

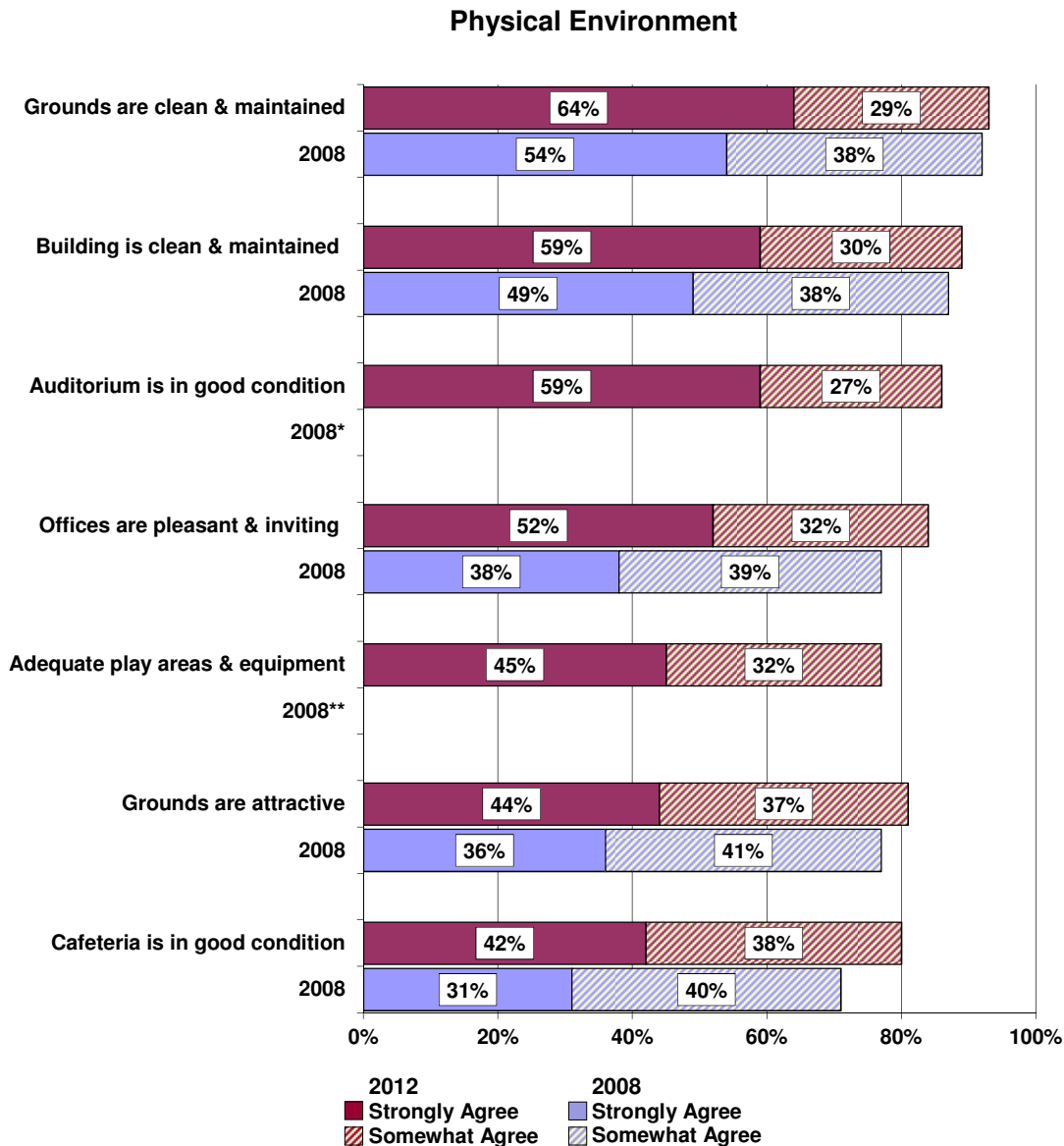
In terms of safety and security, about 9-in-10 parents say they feel their child is safe in school, including 66% who strongly agree with that sentiment – a 17 point increase from 2008. The survey also found a similar 14 point increase in strong agreement on the adequacy of emergency and lockdown procedures (59%).

About half of parents *strongly agree* that their child feels comfortable going to an adult in the school (54%) and that both administrators (52%) and teachers (50%) are able to maintain discipline. Overall, about 8-in-10 parents agree at least somewhat with these statements. High school parents are significantly less likely than elementary school parents to agree on discipline maintenance.



*Question was not asked in 2008.

Ratings of the schools' physical environments are also more positive this year. Strong positive sentiment is above the 50% mark for clean and well-maintained grounds (64%) and buildings (59%), auditorium conditions (59%), and pleasant and inviting offices (52%). All of these results are up by significant margins from the 2008 survey.

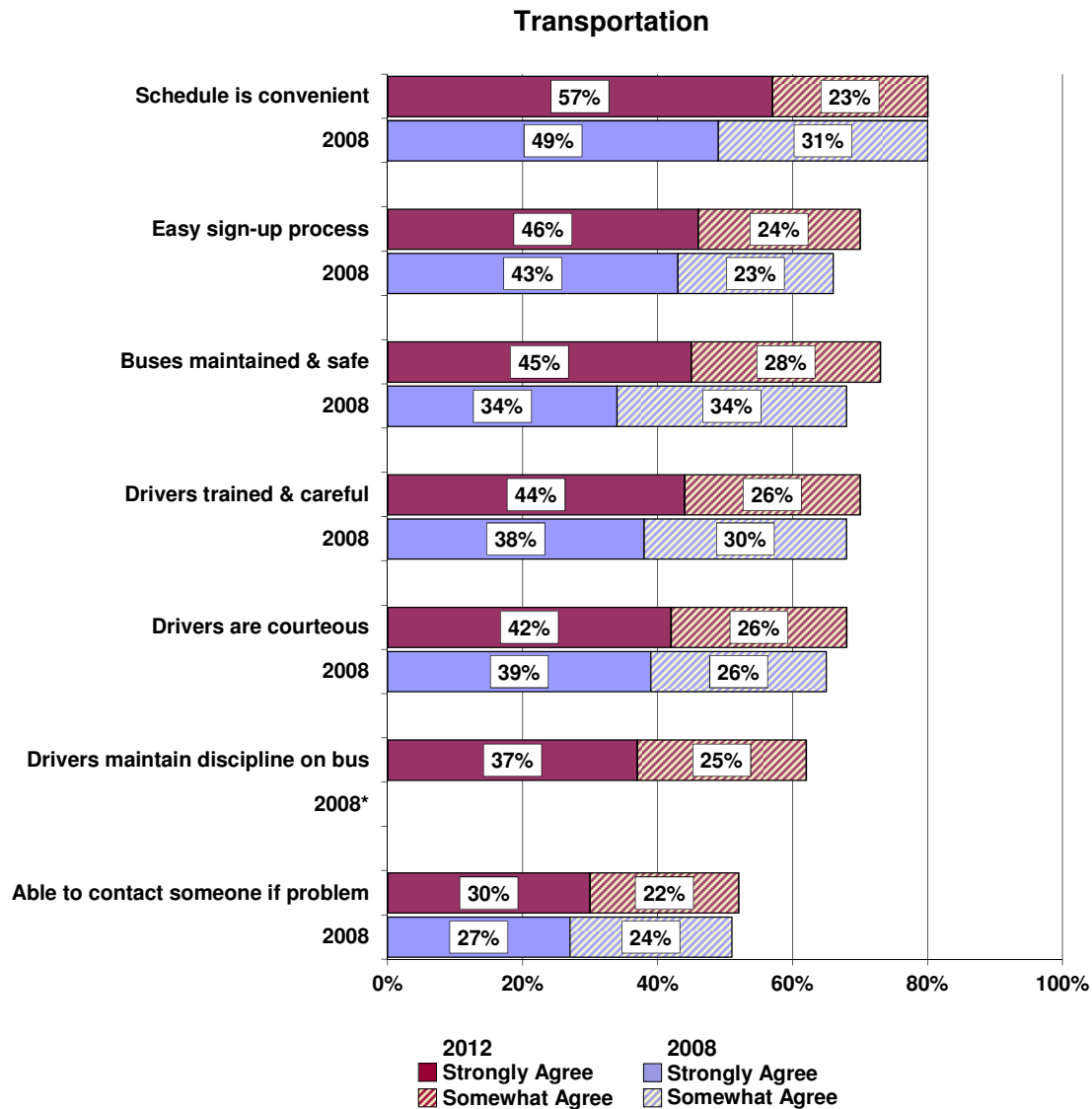


* Question was only asked of middle and high school parents in 2008.

** Question was only asked of elementary and middle school parents in 2008.

Transportation

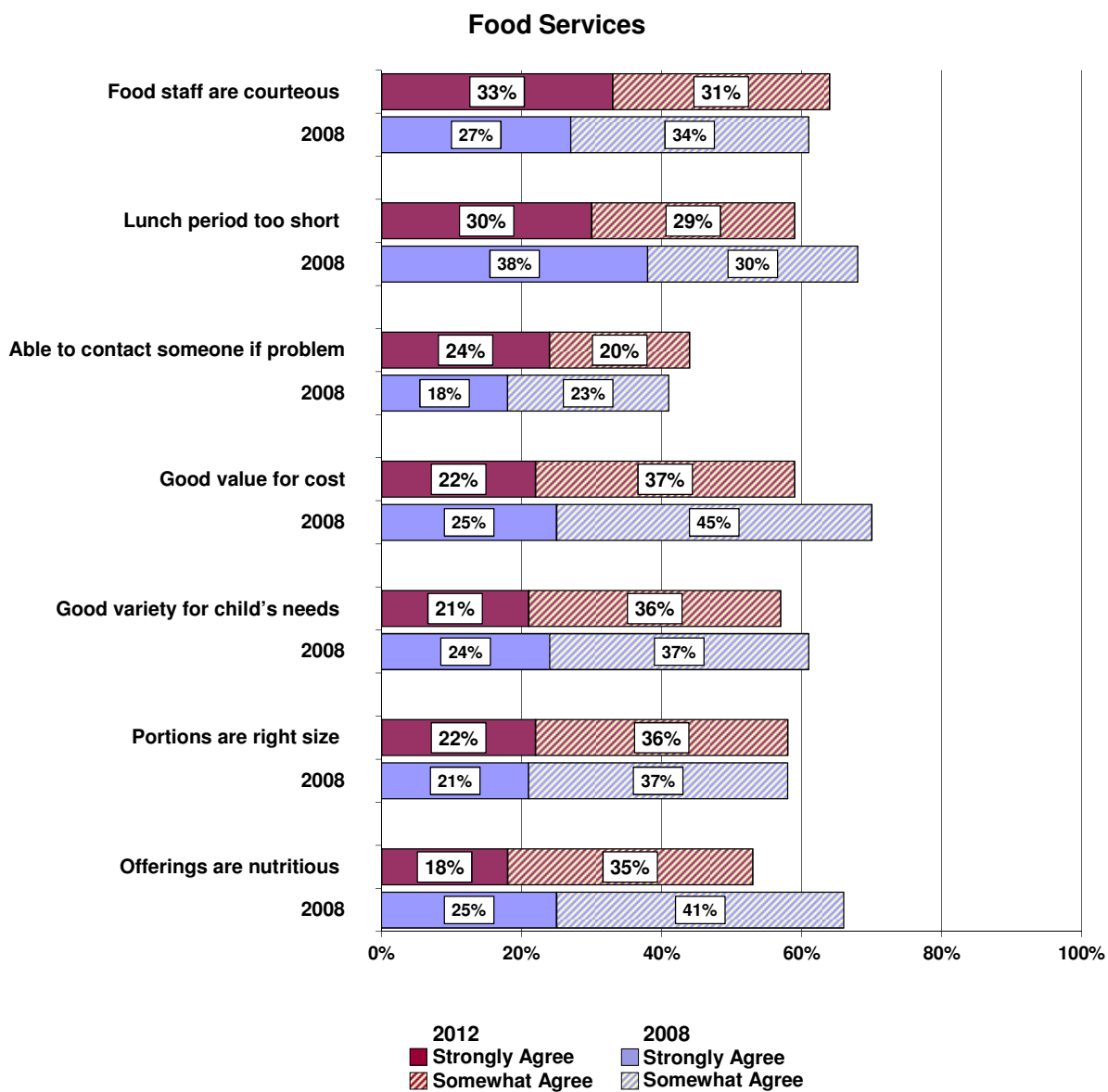
Positive reports on specific aspects of transportation services are in line with the 2008 survey results. Two exceptions are that parents are significantly more likely to *strongly agree* that schedules are convenient (57%) and that buses are well-maintained and safe (45%). For the most part, though, there has been no significant change in transportation service evaluations compared to four years ago, with between 2-in-3 and 4-in-5 parents giving general positive evaluations to specific aspects of this service.



*Question was not asked in 2008.

Food Services

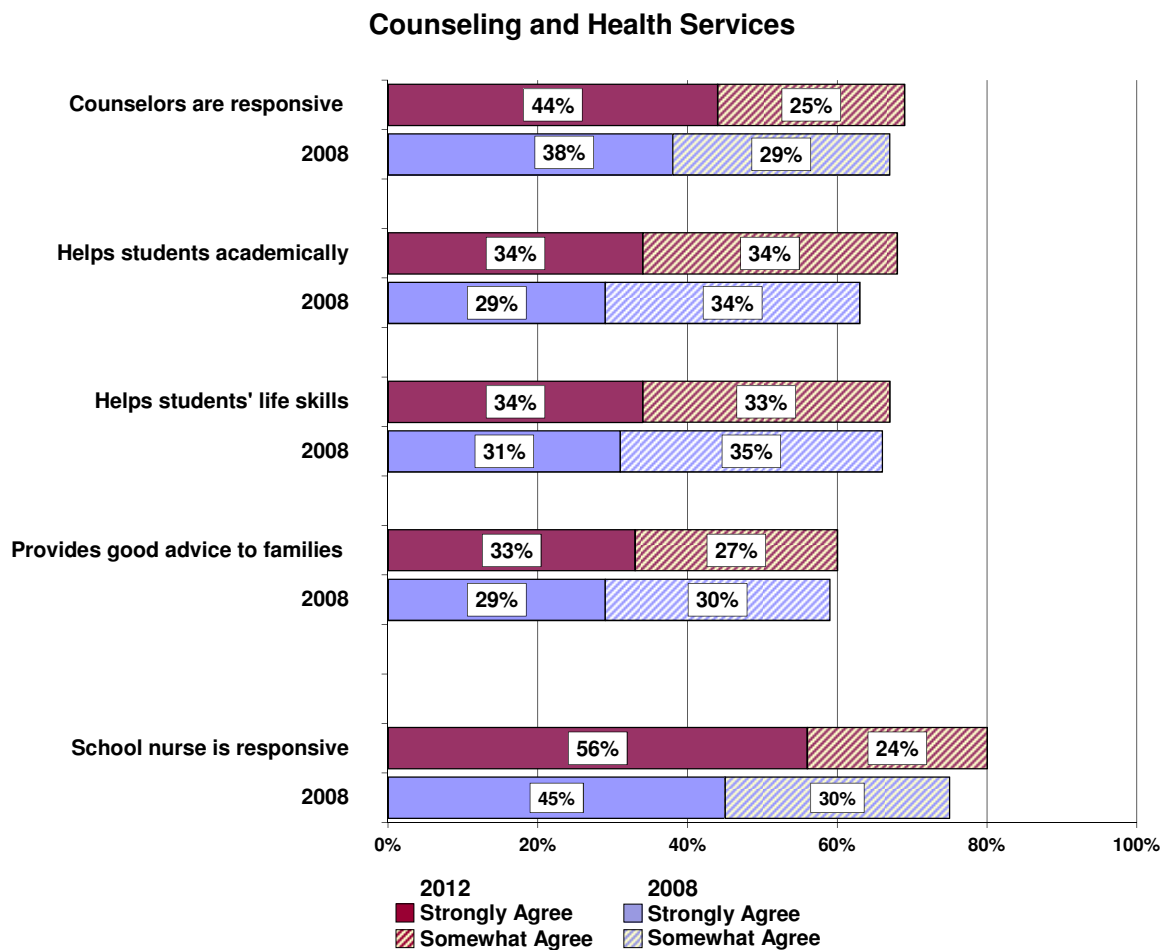
Food services continue to be an area of concern for parents. The highest overall positive rating is 64% for the courtesy of food staff, which is not significantly different from the 2008 survey. Areas that have declined in positive evaluations include food being a good value for the cost (59%, down 11 points) and the offerings being nutritious (53%, down 13 points).



Counseling and Health Services

Positive evaluations of counseling services have all increased slightly, by anywhere from 1 to 5 points, since 2008. About 2-in-3 parents give positive marks to counselor responsiveness (69%) and help with both academics (68%) and life skills (67%). Six-in-10 say the same about advice provided to families (60%).

Ratings of the school nurse's responsiveness are even higher (80%). Total positive evaluations of the school nurse are up by 5 points, while strong positive evaluations now stand at a majority of 56%, up 11 points since 2008.

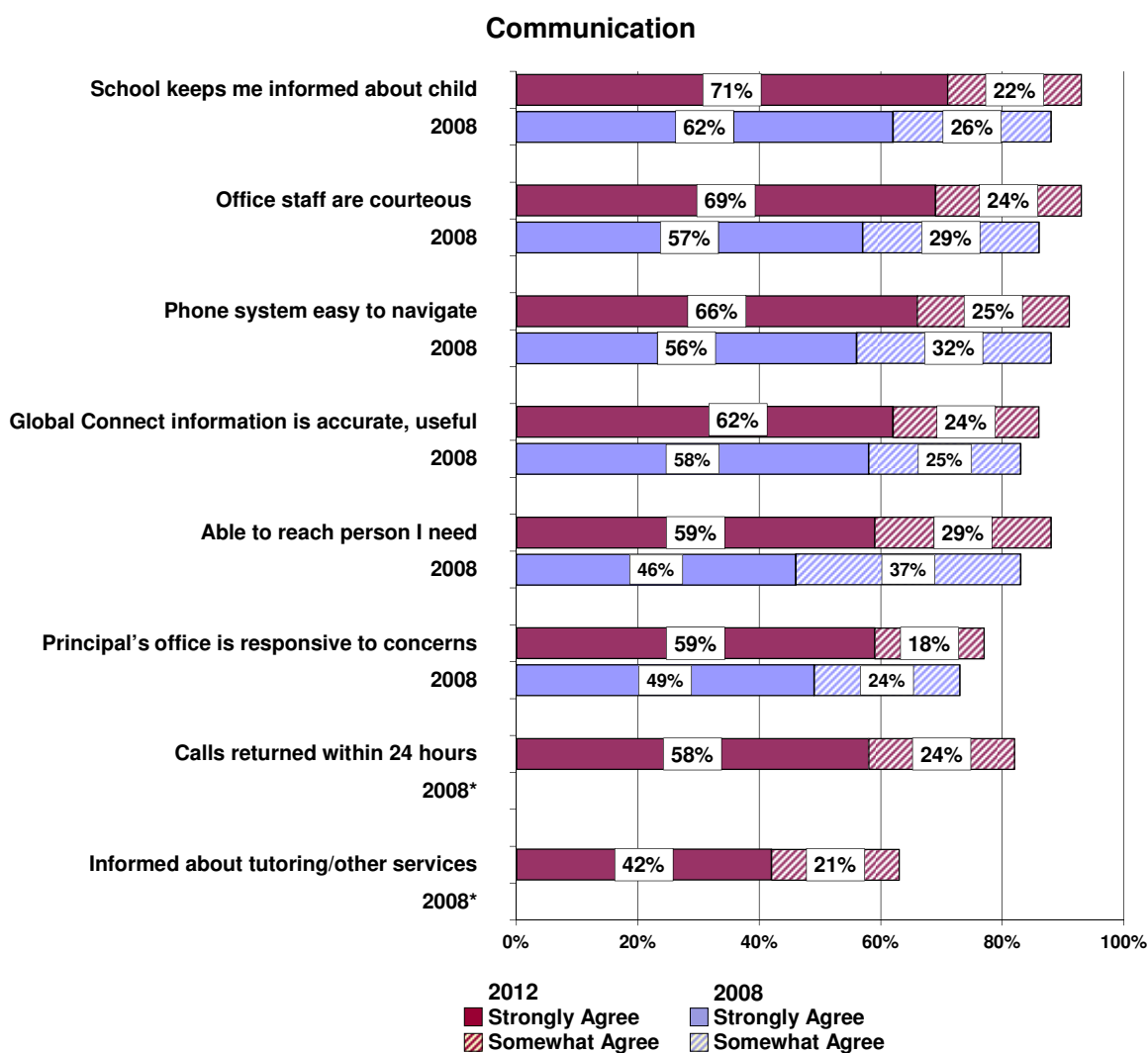


Interaction with the School

Overall satisfaction with the amount of information received about their child's education is nearly identical to 2008. This now stands at 90% overall satisfaction and 49% strong satisfaction. Positive evaluations of specific aspects of school communication, though, have increased by 3 to 7 points overall and by even larger 4 to 13 point margins for strongly positive ratings.

Specifically, more than 9-in-10 parents agree that the school keeps them informed of their child's progress (93%), the office staff are courteous (93%), and the phone system is easy to navigate (91%). About 2-in-3 parents strongly agree with each of these statements.

More than 3-in-4 parents give positive ratings to their ability to reach the person they need at school (88%), Global Connect's accuracy and usefulness (86%), having calls returned in 24 hours (82%), and responsiveness of the principal's office (77%). About 6-in-10 parents strongly agree with these statements.

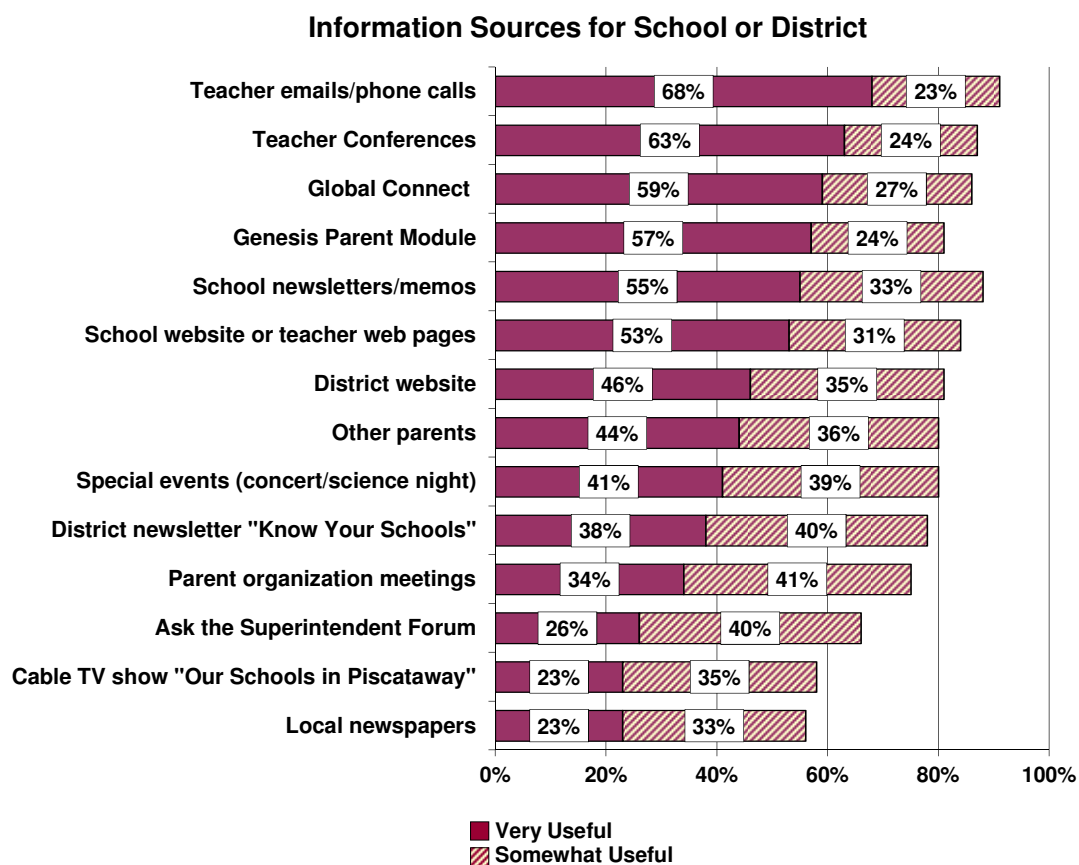


* Question was not asked in 2008.

About 7-in-10 parents report that they are kept aware of nearly all (30%) or most (39%) of what is being taught in their child's classroom. This finding is significantly higher among elementary school parents than it is for middle or high school parents. Nearly all parents report feeling comfortable contacting a teacher (96%), counselor (91%) or principal (87%) when they have concerns, with at least 2-in-3 feeling very comfortable doing this. Parental comfort level with contacting the main district administrative office (79%) is somewhat lower.

Use of online school communication resources is up compared to four years ago, with 4-in-10 parents reporting that they visit the school website (40%) or the Genesis module (42%) at least once a week. The number visiting the school website weekly is up by 12 points since 2008. Among middle school and high school parents, the number using Genesis at least weekly is up by 11 to 14 points. Fewer parents report visiting the district website weekly (27%), but even this report is up by 12 points since 2008.

Among 14 different sources of information presented in the survey, the most useful sources for parents are teacher emails and phone calls (68%), teacher conferences (63%), Global Connect (59%), Genesis (57%), school newsletters and memos (55%), and the school website or teacher web pages (53%).



B. Community Survey

School Ratings and Priorities

Piscataway residents' ratings of both their town and their schools remain high, with 87% giving the town a positive rating and 67% saying the same for the schools. These results are 2 to 3 percentage points higher than the 2008 survey, a difference that is within the survey's margin of error.

Ratings of the schools are higher among current public school parents (83%) than other residents (60%), mainly because one-quarter of the latter group does not feel they know enough to give the schools a rating. Among parents especially, the schools are about as positive as other aspects of living in Piscataway, including cultural diversity, parks and recreation, as a place to raise a family, and shopping. These aspects are rated positively by at least 3-in-4 township residents. Piscataway residents give lower ratings to the town's sense of community (58%), affordability (56%), job opportunities (43%), and transportation access (42%), although these tend to be rated more highly by parents than they are by non-parents.

One third (33%) of residents say that Piscataway Public Schools are better than other area districts, 35% say they are the same and 9% say they are worse. Parents of public school children (42%) are more likely than non-parents (28%) to say Piscataway schools are better than other public school districts in the area. These results are similar to the 2008 survey.

Four-in-five residents (81%) say it is very important that the schools' academics are highly rated; a majority (57%) say the same about providing a wide range of extra-curricular activities; and just 28% say the same about having the schools do well in sports. These results differ by no more than three percentage points from 2008.

Almost all township residents agree that children today need to work with and understand different cultures (94%) if they are to succeed and more than 8-in-10 agree that it is important that all Piscataway residents are committed to educating the town's children (87%), the school system's success contributes to the town's quality of life (85%), and it is important to vote in school board elections (81%). The largest difference, compared to 2008, is among those who say it is important for all residents, whether they have children in the schools or not, to be committed to student education. While the percentage of agreement among parents has not changed (88%) the level of agreement among non-parents has increased by 10 percentage points, from 76% in 2008 to 86% in the current survey.

Piscataway Schools Information

About 1-in-5 residents (20%) have a great deal of interest in attending adult evening classes or community programs offered by the Piscataway school district and another 44% express some interest. These results are similar to the 2008 survey. The current survey asked about specific types of community programs and found the greatest levels of interest in fitness and exercise (72%), followed by cooking (56%), computers and technology (55%), and hobbies and crafts (55%). Foreign languages (47%) and creative or visual arts (45%) programs generate interest among just under half of township residents.

Nearly 9-in-10 parents feel at least somewhat informed (86%) about the Piscataway Public Schools compared to 47% of non-parents. Both of those numbers are down from 2008 by 7 to 11 percentage points. The most used sources of information about the programs and services at Piscataway schools is the township newsletter (78%), parents and neighbors (68%), and the school district newsletter (65%).

C. Conclusions

Most residents of Piscataway Township – including parents of public school children and non-parents alike – have positive views of their local school system. General ratings of the quality of the school system are generally comparable to the results of the 2008 survey, with the notation that *excellent* ratings have gone up among parents.

The township's schools rank highly with other factors that contribute to Piscataway's quality of life. Almost all residents agree that the town should be committed to educating all Piscataway children, a view that has increased among non-parents over the past four years.

The vast majority of parents and non-parents alike say that the Piscataway schools should focus on high academic ratings as a key priority and most feel the schools should offer a wide variety of extracurricular activities. Fewer parents and non-parents say that the schools should focus on excelling in sports. However, when presented with nine different phrases to describe Piscataway schools, "sports-minded" continues to top the list among local residents. These results are similar to the 2008 survey.

Piscataway's diverse student body is a distinctive feature of the local school system. The vast majority of parents continue to believe that their children need to develop an understanding of different cultures in order to succeed. Furthermore, they feel that the schools are doing a good job emphasizing diversity in the classroom.

In terms of non-instructional services, parental satisfaction has increased in nearly every area. Of particular note are school websites, the enrollment process, the Genesis program, security, and facilities. Satisfaction levels with counseling services and the main school office have also experienced modest gains. While overall satisfaction with information about their child's progress remained stable, specific aspects of communication saw notable increases in positive evaluations compared to 2008.

It is worth noting that while ratings in these areas ticked up across the board, even larger increases were seen in the percentage of parents who shifted from being somewhat positive to strongly positive.

One major area of concern among non-instructional programs is school food services. This was the lowest rated area in the 2008 survey and evaluations have decreased even further in the current survey. The survey also found little movement in parental satisfaction of transportation services.