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Cedar Rapids district gets Bs in satisfaction

By Kristina Andino
 The Gazette

CEDAR RAPIDS - The Cedar Rapids school district got Bs and B-plus from students, staff, and parents during a first-time poll.

In April, third through 12th graders and all district staff members and K-12 parents were asked about their satisfaction with school atmosphere, buses, technology, teachers and other issues.

"In Cedar Rapids, our secondary students reported much higher-than-average satisfaction ratings" than in the Harris poll's national database, district administrator Jay Marino told school board members tonight.

Meanwhile, the elementary students's, teachers and staff's, and parents' marks were slightly below the national averages.

District officials acted "courageously" by "asking the tough questions and (are prepared to) deal with the responses we get in the spirit of continuous improvement," Marino said.

"The absolute performance of the district matters much less than knowing how to improve," the report summary says.

Some parents, staff and students saw room to improve school behavior, safety, and rules and discipline.

Five percent to 9 percent of students and employees at all levels said they did not feel safe in school.

Twenty-one percent of the middle schoolers said their principal did not handle discipline fairly, and 17 percent said other students were not nice to them.

Of high schoolers surveyed, 35 percent said students were not well-

behaved at school. Twenty-two percent felt the rules at their high school were not fair, and the same percentage said their principal did not help them with problems.

Teachers and other staff members also saw room for improvement in this area.

Thirty-two percent of the employees felt that school rules did not keep order and discipline. Just over half of employees said lack of student support for one another was a problem. And 21 percent of teachers and staff said their principal did not handle student discipline fairly.

Eighteen percent of employees surveyed said student threats to employees were a problem at their school. Middle school teachers -- 32 percent -- indicated this most often.

Students, teachers and parents all noted, to some extent, the opportunity to improve the condition and cleanliness of buildings and grounds.

Some parents -- from 22 percent to 33 percent at elementary, middle and high school levels -- want to get more feedback on their children's progress and performance.

The poll summary indicates that the district could raise students' overall satisfaction levels most by making class fun and giving more interesting homework, especially in core areas like reading and math.

Students also would like more opportunities to get extra help.

Of teachers surveyed, 66 percent said home environments inadequately promote learning. And 60 percent of employees did not feel their salaries were fair.

The poll was part of a yearlong study by staff, administrators and parents.

District employees will prioritize and address issues, and representatives of those surveyed will help identify solutions.

The every-other-year surveys will be used to improve schools and the district.

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