

**Wildwood School Governance Council Survey Results  
June, 2011**

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In the 2009-10 school year, Wildwood had 368 students. When it re-opened for the 2010-11 school year, the school's population had grown to 471. The majority of the new students had previously attended Mark's Meadow School, which closed in June, 2010. Wildwood's staff also changed considerably, including a new principal, Nick Yaffe, and assistant principal, Linda Giancesin, as well as shifts in teaching staff. In the wake of all this change, the School Governance Council decided to conduct a survey this year to find out how parents and guardians at Wildwood perceive the school's overall climate.

This report begins with a description of the parents/guardians who participated in the survey, and then explains what the survey results say about the following questions:

- How do Wildwood students feel about coming to school?
- How do parents and guardians evaluate different sources of information about the school?
- How do parents and guardians feel about their contacts with school staff?
- What do parents and guardians think about relationships at the school?
- What do parents and guardians think the school is doing especially well this year?
- What do parents and guardians see as areas for concern at the school this year?
- How do parents and guardians feel about transportation to and from school?

**Who responded?**

The survey went home with students' first-semester report cards, to be returned to the main office. In addition, an electronic version of the survey was available in SurveyMonkey. We asked that each household complete only one survey, but we have no way of knowing whether or not people complied with this request. We received 129 print surveys and 54 online responses, for a total of 183. Based on how respondents answered the question about how many children from their households attend Wildwood, these surveys represent 235 students, or just under 50% of Wildwood's total enrollment. Table 1 shows how many students from each grade are represented in the survey.

**Table 1: Survey Responses by Grade**

Grade	Number of Students Represented in Survey	Total Number of Students	Percentage of This Grade's Students Represented in Survey
Kindergarten	24	50	48%
1st	39	67	58%
2nd	31	68	46%
3rd	45	77	58%
4th	31	79	40%
5th	29	60	48%
6th	34	70	49%

Parents of 4<sup>th</sup>-graders were less likely to have returned the survey than were parents of students in other grades, and 1<sup>st</sup>-grade and 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade parents were more likely to have returned surveys. In the other grades, the percentage of surveys returned was quite close to that of the school as a whole.

Table 2 shows where the children in the survey respondents' families were enrolled in school last year (2009-10). These numbers add up to more than 100% because some families may have chosen more than one response to the question (for example, a family might have had one child at Crocker Farm and one not yet old enough for school).

**Table 2: Where was/were your child/children in school last year? (If you have different answers for different children, check all that apply.)**

School enrollment in 2009-10	Number	Percentage of Surveys
Wildwood	93	50%
Mark's Meadow	49	26%
Fort River	8	4%
Crocker Farm	7	4%
Another public school (not in Amherst)	10	5%
Private school, charter school, or homeschooled	4	2%
Not old enough for school	15	8%

We asked parents/guardians where their children attended school in 2009-10 so that we could identify whether people whose children were previously enrolled in different schools answered the survey questions differently. For nearly all questions, there were no statistically significant differences.<sup>1</sup> Where there were statistically significant differences, we will describe them in this report.

Because we did not ask for demographic data in the survey, we cannot say for sure how representative the respondents are of the school as a whole in terms of race/ethnicity, free/reduced meal eligibility, or other categories.

The rest of this report summarizes the survey results. To see pie charts of the results, go to the end of the written report.

NOTE: Due to an error setting up the electronic version of the survey, some of the questions on the electronic version did not have "disagree somewhat" as an answer choice. However, judging from the patterns in the responses compared with the paper version of the survey, the error in the survey format probably did not affect the overall results.

### **How do Wildwood students feel about coming to school?**

Overall, 40% of parents/guardians "strongly agree" and 40% "agree" that their children look forward to coming to school (see chart 13). There are some statistically significant differences among parents/guardians whose children were enrolled in different schools, or not enrolled in school at all, in 2009-10. We asked this same question on the 2009-10 Wildwood school climate survey, so we can compare last year's with this year's results. Table 3 details these comparisons.

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<sup>1</sup> A "statistically significant" difference between groups is one that almost certainly reflects a real difference between the groups rather than one that was the result of random variation in who answered the survey.

**Table 3: “In general, my child looks forward to coming to school”**

	Comparisons According to Where Students Attended School Last Year				Wildwood Total This Year (2010-11)	Wildwood Total Last Year (2009-10)
	Too young for school	Mark’s Meadow	Wildwood	All other schools		
Strongly agree	78%	33%	38%	43%	40%	29%
Agree	0	38%	47%	38%	40%	55%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	22%	13%	12%	5%	12%	Choice not available in 2009-10
Disagree*	0	8%	2%	14%	5%	12%
Strongly Disagree	0	8%	1%	0%	3%	4%

Don’t know/no answer responses omitted

For 2010-11 results, Pr=.02 (X<sup>2</sup> test; 12 degrees of freedom)

\*This category was inadvertently left off the online version of the 2010-11 survey.

Parents of children who were too young for school last year (in other words, children in kindergarten this year) are much more likely to “strongly agree” that their children look forward to coming to school. This result most likely indicates that kindergartners are more excited about school than older students are. Parents of students who were at Wildwood last year are less likely to “disagree” or “strongly disagree” that their children look forward to coming to school than are parents of students who were at Mark’s Meadow or at other schools last year, with 16% of parents of 2009-10 Mark’s Meadow students choosing one of these two responses. This result suggests that Wildwood students who used to be at Mark’s Meadow feel less positively about school than other Wildwood students do.

However, a clear majority even of former Mark’s Meadow students look forward to coming to school. In addition, the overall parent/guardian responses to this statement in 2010-11 were more positive than for Wildwood in 2009-10. In both years, 80% or more of parents/guardians “agree” or “strongly agree” with the statement, but in 2010-11, the balance is more in the direction of “strongly agree.” This trend suggests that students are approaching school more positively this year than last year; however, it is worth continuing to ask this question so that we can track how students feel about school and know whether students who were previously at other schools (especially Mark’s Meadow) are feeling more or less positive about Wildwood as they spend more time there.

**How do parents and guardians evaluate different sources of information about the school?**

Parents/guardians tend to “agree” or “strongly agree” with statements that the *Wildwood Window* (the newsletter that children bring home from school) “is a useful source of information” and that communications from their children’s teachers “keep me well-informed” (see charts 2 and 16). Opinion about the Wildwood PGO blog is more mixed. 34% of respondents “agree” that the blog “is a useful source of information,” but 30% don’t know or have no opinion, and 22% neither agree nor disagree (see chart 3). Written comments about the blog suggest that some parents/guardians do not know about the PGO blog, and that some people associate blogs (particularly blogs about Amherst schools) with intense disagreement and debate. Since the PGO blog is not actually a public discussion forum, it may make sense for the PGO to re-label it and explain its purpose.

### How do parents and guardians feel about their contacts with school staff?

Large majorities of people who responded to the survey either “strongly agree” or “agree” with the following statements:

“The principal and assistant principal are open and accessible.” (See chart 4)

“I feel welcome when I enter the school and go to the main office.” (See chart 5)

“I am comfortable approaching the principal, assistant principal, and guidance counselors with any issues or concerns.” (See chart 6)

Compared with responses to a similar question on the 2009-10 survey, a larger proportion of parents/guardians “strongly agree” that the principal and assistant principal are open and accessible.

Written comments were especially positive about Nick Yaffe and his approachability. There were some statistically significant differences in how parents/guardians whose children were in different schools last year responded to the statement about feeling welcome in the school and the main office. In particular, parents/guardians who had children at Wildwood in 2009-10 were likelier to choose “strongly agree,” and also less likely to choose the neutral “neither agree nor disagree.”

### What do parents and guardians think about relationships at the school?

More than half of parents/guardians either “agree” or “strongly agree” that they have “met some new parents this year” (see chart 1). Over half also “strongly agree” that their children have made at least one new friend, with an additional 42% choosing “agree” for this question (see chart 15).

In response to the statement “My child has a strong relationship with at least one adult in school who he/she feels comfortable talking to about a difficult situation,” 35% chose “strongly agree” and 41% chose “agree” (see chart 14). These responses are about the same as when we asked the same question in 2009-10.

### What do parents and guardians think the school is doing especially well this year?

The survey asked parents/guardians to indicate whether the school is doing an especially good job in four areas. People taking the survey could check any number of these areas, including all or none of them. Table 4 shows the numbers choosing each (also see chart 7). The percentages do not add up to 100% because of the option to choose multiple or no areas.

**Table 4: “In your experience, is the school doing an especially good job in any of the following areas?”**

Creating a sense of community among families	64 (35%)
Managing lunch, recess, and other non-classroom time in ways that help all students feel welcome and included	75 (41%)
Meeting students’ academic needs	97 (53%)
Managing classrooms in ways that help all students feel welcome and included	131 (72%)
Other	155 (85%)

Very few of the people who checked “other” used the comment box to explain what they had in mind, so it is impossible to draw any conclusions about what other areas of strength might be. One parent

mentioned the front office staff as a positive, and another commended the school staff as a whole for the way in which they respond to crises.

**What do parents and guardians see as areas for concern at the school this year?**

The survey also asked parents/guardians to identify whether any of those same areas are problematic. . Table 5 shows these results (also see chart 8). As in Table 4, the percentages do not add up to 100% because of the option to choose multiple or no areas.

**Table 5: “In your experience, have any of the following areas been problematic?”**

Managing classrooms in ways that help all students feel welcome and included	17 ( 9%)
Other	23 (13%)
Creating a sense of community among families	27 (15%)
Managing lunch, recess, and other non-classroom time in ways that help all students feel welcome and included	43 (23%)
Meeting students’ academic needs	47 (26%)

As with the question on what the school is doing well, very few of the people who checked “other” used the comment box to explain what they meant.

Note that, overall, parents/guardians identified fewer problematic areas than areas in which the school is doing an especially good job. However, people who identified problematic areas were much likelier to write comments that detailed their criticisms. Many of these concerned problems in managing lunch, especially perceptions that the cafeteria is too crowded and the staff is too rigid in its approach to discipline. There were also many specific criticisms of the school’s academic program, in particular the extent to which it meets the needs of students who are particularly strong in academics.

**How do parents and guardians feel about transportation to and from school?**

Transportation to school, especially traffic congestion and student pickup procedures, has been a particular area of concern for the SGC this year. Because of the closure of Mark’s Meadow and the shift of Mark’s Meadow students to Wildwood, there are many families whose children formerly walked to school who now ride the bus. To inform the SGC’s efforts to address transportation problems, this year’s survey included several questions about how Wildwood students travel to and from school (see charts 9, 10, 11, and 12; note that not all survey respondents chose to answer these questions).

The overwhelming majority of students never walk or bike to school, either with their parents/guardians (chart 11) or independently (chart 12). Presumably, they live too far away for this to be practical.

The survey shows that morning transportation to school looks different from afternoon transportation home. More students ride the bus in the morning than in the afternoon (chart 9). The average number of times per week that students ride the bus *to school* is 3.6; the average number of times per week that students ride the bus *home* is 2.9. Looking at the same question a different way, 100 people who responded to the survey said that their children always ride the bus to school, but only 60 said their children always are on the bus home. The likely explanation is that many parents/guardians pick up their children immediately after dismissal in order to get them to various activities, and other parents/guardians pick their children up after they participate in one of the two after-school programs.

Considering trips to and from school by car (chart 10), many children are never driven to or from school. The comparison between morning and afternoon is the reverse of what it was for bus travel, with more car trips in the afternoon than in the morning. The average number of car trips to school per week is 1.3 and the average number of car trips home per week is 1.9.

Many parents/guardians made comments about problems with, and potential solutions for, morning pickup and dropoff. The volume of comments is especially impressive considering that many parents/guardians never or rarely pick up or drop off their children. Comments addressed both the procedures for parents to find their children after school and the conditions in the parking lot. One common theme was the need for the school to be much clearer about stating what the rules actually are.

A few parents/guardians whose children could ride the bus but often do not offered suggestions for changes that would make the bus a more attractive option. Two suggested that a shorter trip time would help, and one made the related suggestion that there could be a single bus stop for the neighborhood rather than individual stops at each house. One parent suggested an earlier morning pickup time, and two cited the need to improve safety on the buses.

### **What did parents/guardians say in their comments on the survey?**

Overall, although parents and guardians who participated in the survey were much more likely to agree with positive statements about the school than to disagree with them, more of the written comments were negative than were positive. (Perhaps people felt a need to explain negative responses more than positive ones.)

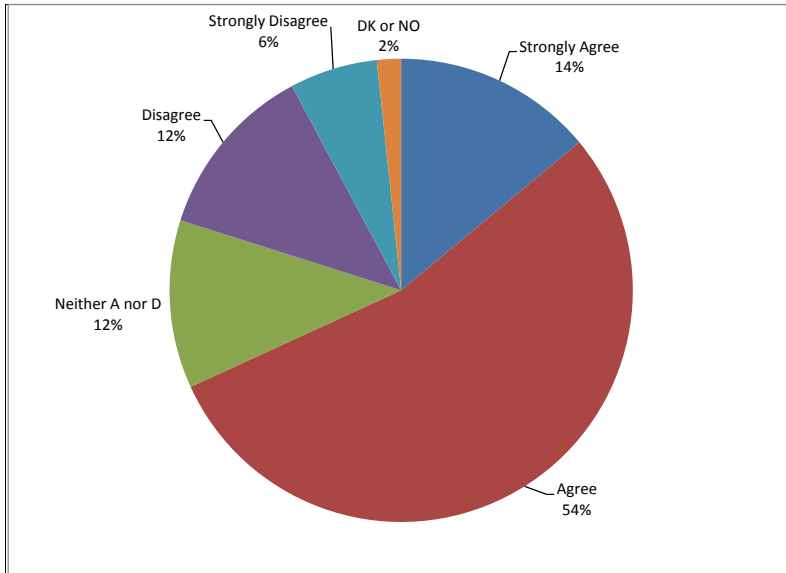
In addition to the issues noted above about pick-up procedures, lunch, and levels of academic challenge, some respondents wrote critical comments about community-building and opportunities to connect with other parents/guardians. Some of these specifically noted that the sense of community had been stronger at Mark's Meadow, and/or that there were not sufficient opportunities for parents/guardians to meet each other. Apparently, though some classes had family potlucks at the beginning of the year, others did not.

Positive comments included a great many about Nick Yaffe and the tone he sets for the school. A few other staff members were singled out for compliments (as were others for critiques).

### **What will be done with the survey results?**

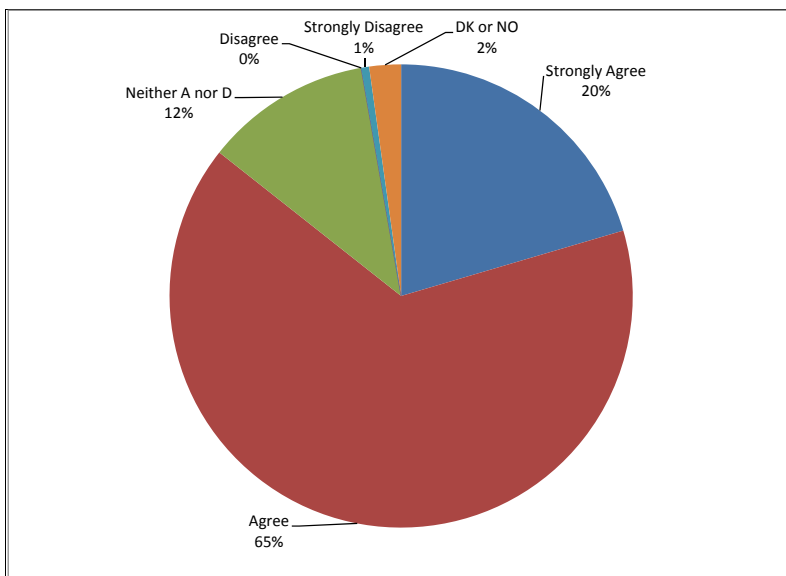
Nick Yaffe, the school staff, and the SGC will use the survey results to guide planning for school improvement, including the revised School Improvement Plan that will be presented to the Amherst School Committee. A committee is also forming to improve pickup and dropoff procedures.

1. I have met some new parents this year.



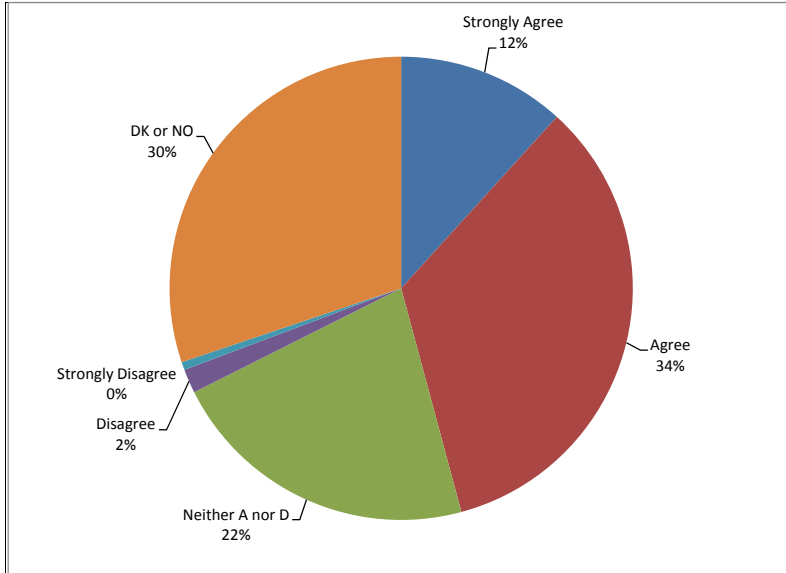
No statistically significant differences among parents whose children were in different schools last year.

2. The monthly newsletter (*The Wildwood Window*) is a useful source of information



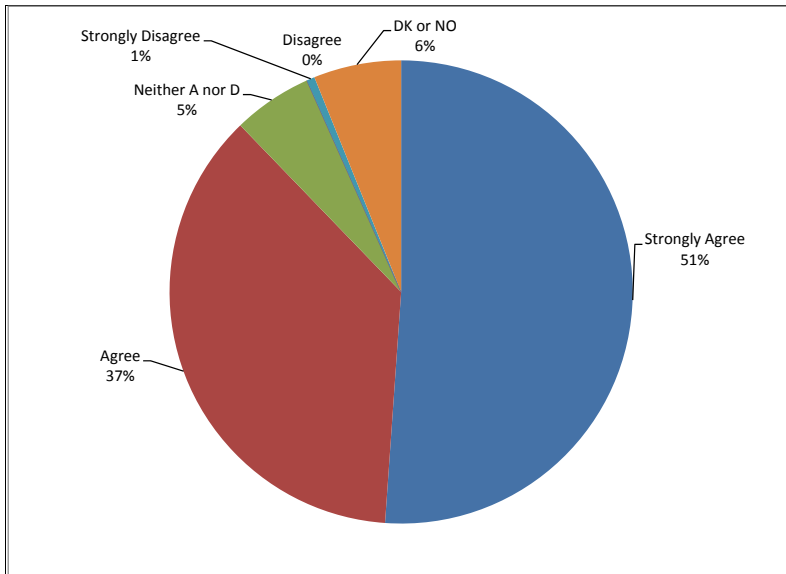
No statistically significant differences among parents whose children were in different schools last year.

3. The Wildwood blog is a useful source of information.



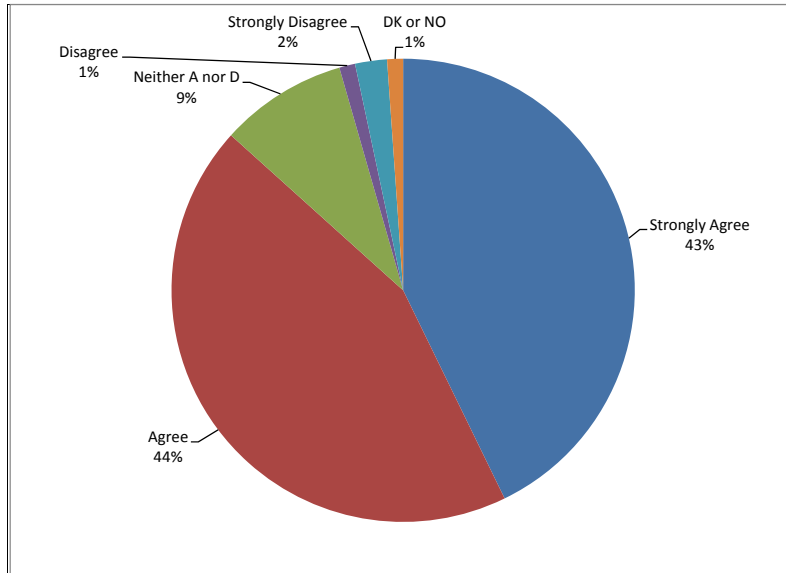
Note more "don't know or no opinion" here than for most questions. Some comments indicated that parents didn't know about the blog, or responded negatively to the idea of a blog. No statistically significant differences among parents whose children were in different schools last year.

4. The principal and assistant principal are open and accessible.



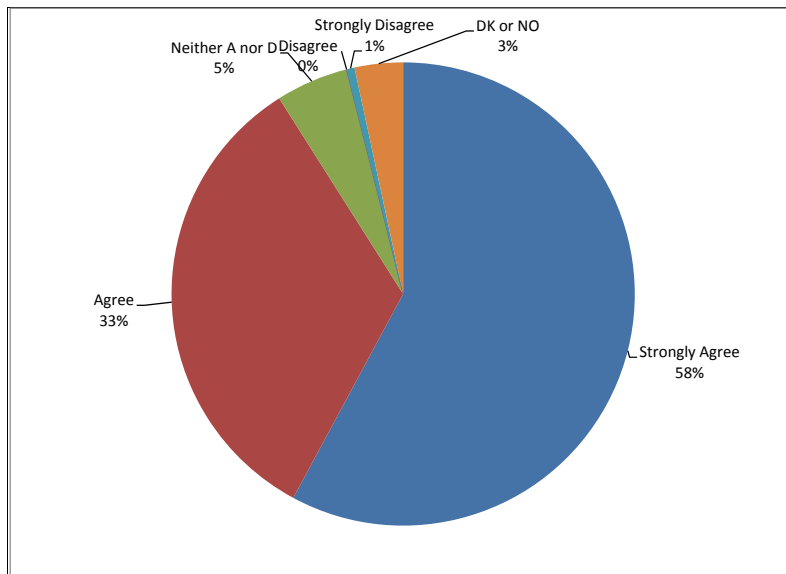
Very small statistically significant differences among parents whose children were in different schools last year. Parents of kids at Wildwood last year are a bit likelier to say "neither agree nor disagree," and parents whose children were too young for school are likelier to say "don't know or no answer," but the actual differences are tiny. In particular, people love Nick.

5. I feel welcome when I enter the school and go to the main office.



Some differences among parents whose children were in different schools last year. Parents who had kids at Wildwood last year were less likely to say "neither agree nor disagree" this year, and were also likelier to say "strongly agree" this year.

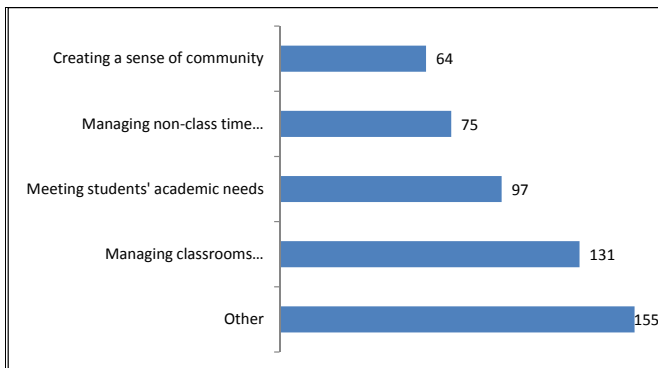
6. I am comfortable approaching the principal, assistant principal, and/or guidance counselors with issues or concerns.



No statistically significant differences among parents whose children were in different schools last year.

7. In your experience, is the school doing an especially good job in any of the following areas? Please check the box next to any that apply.

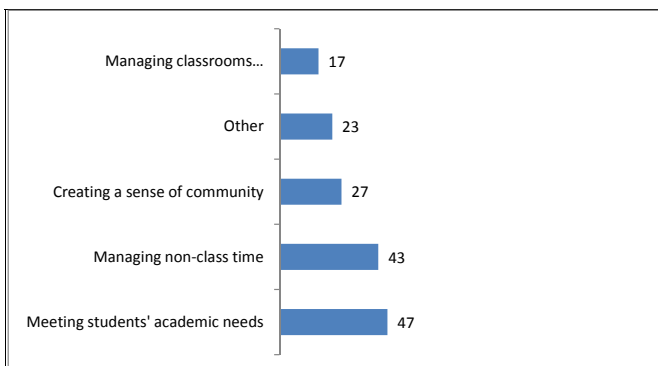
NOTE: Numbers represent the actual number of people who checked this choice, not the percentage.



No statistically significant differences among parents whose children were in different schools last year.

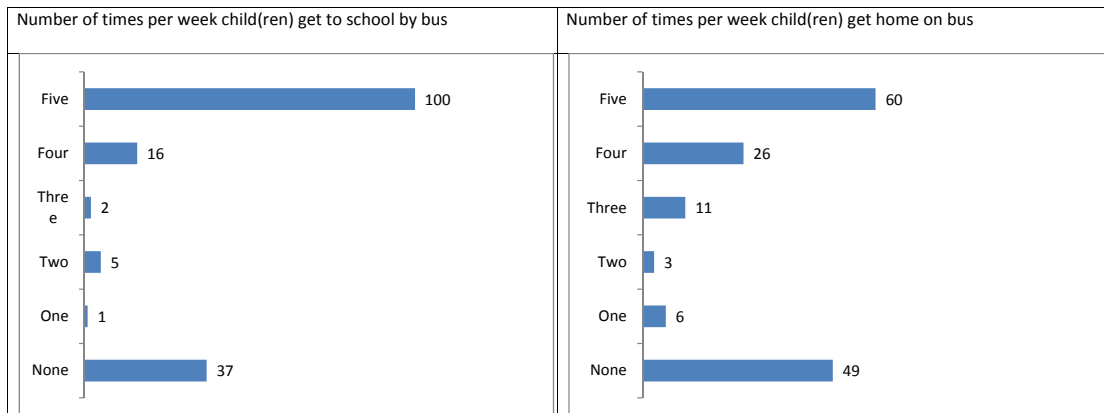
8. In your experience, have any of the following areas been problematic? Please check the box next to any that apply.

NOTE: Numbers represent the actual number of people who checked this choice, not the percentage.



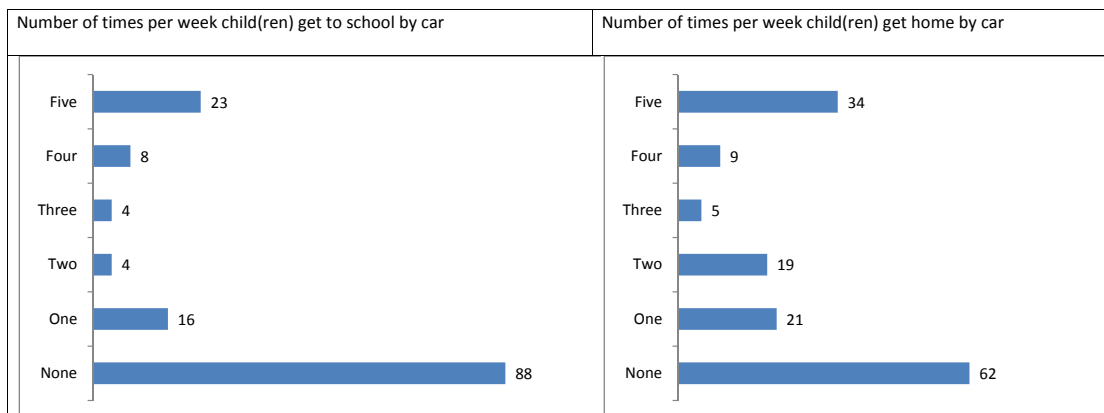
No statistically significant differences among parents whose children were in different schools last year.

9. Estimated morning and afternoon bus trips per week



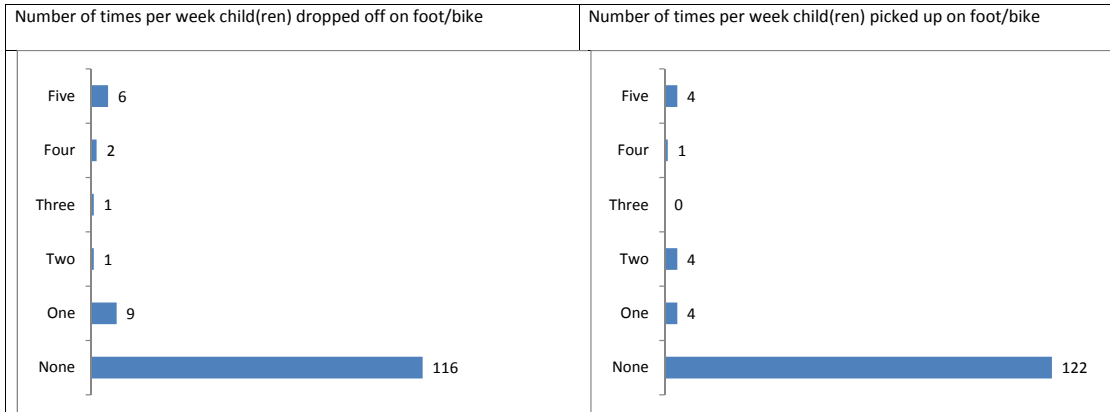
Note that more students are always on the bus in the AM than are always on the bus in the PM. "None" is the reverse.

10. Estimated morning and afternoon car trips per week



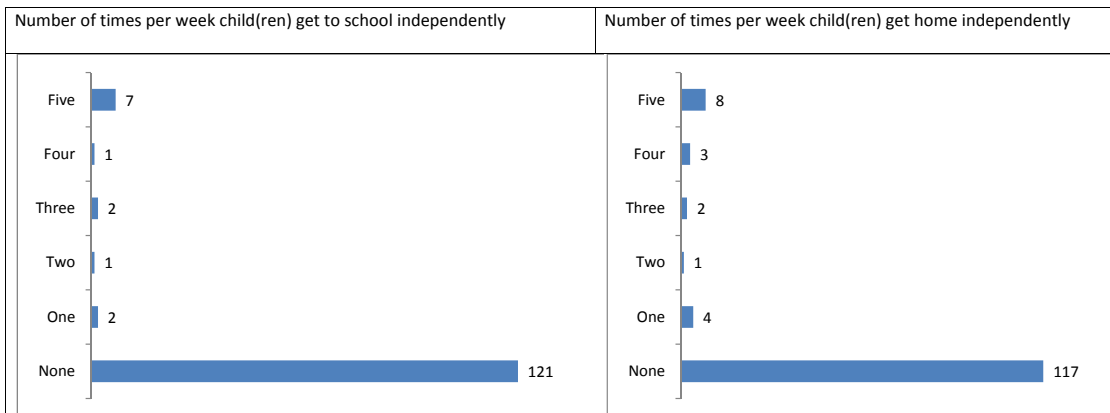
Lots of kids never get driven to or from school, but more pickups happen than dropoffs.

11. Estimated number of parents dropping off and picking up children on foot or bike per week

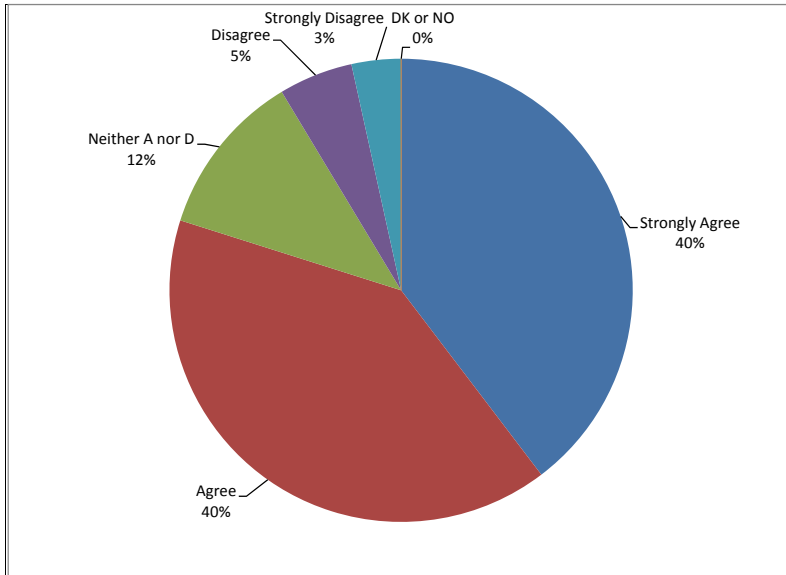


Not very many!

12. Estimated number of times per week children travel to/from school independently



13. In general, my child looks forward to coming to school.



See table for details of different responses for parents whose children were in different schools last year.

“In general, my child looks forward to coming to school.”  
Detailed Table

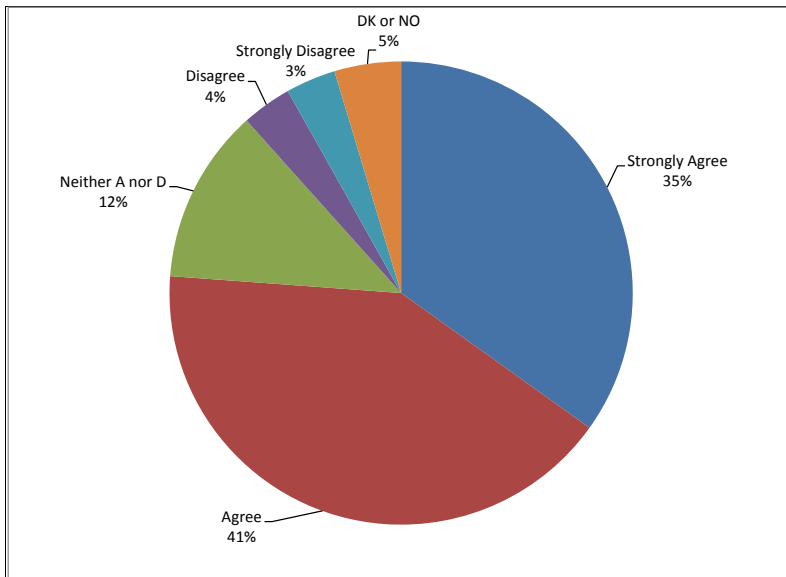
	Too Young for School Last Year	At Mark's Meadow Last Year	At Wildwood Last Year	All Others	Total Percentage
Strongly Agree	78%	33%	38%	43%	40%
Agree	0	38%	47%	38%	40%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	22%	13%	12%	5%	12%
Disagree*	0	8%	2%	14%	5%
Strongly Disagree	0	8%	1%	0	3%

Don't know/no answer responses omitted.

Pr=.02 (X<sup>2</sup> test; 12 degrees of freedom)

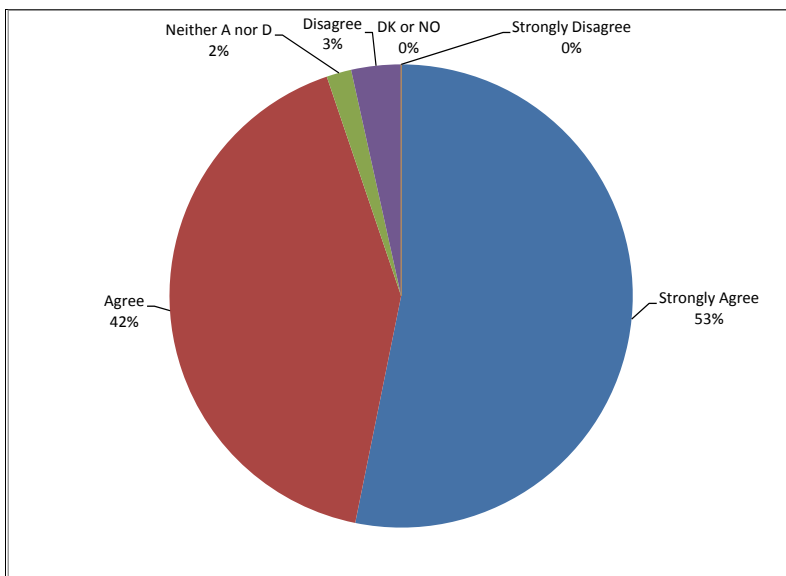
\*This category was inadvertently omitted from the online version of the survey.

14. My child has a strong relationship with at least one adult in school who he/she feels comfortable talking to about a difficult situation.



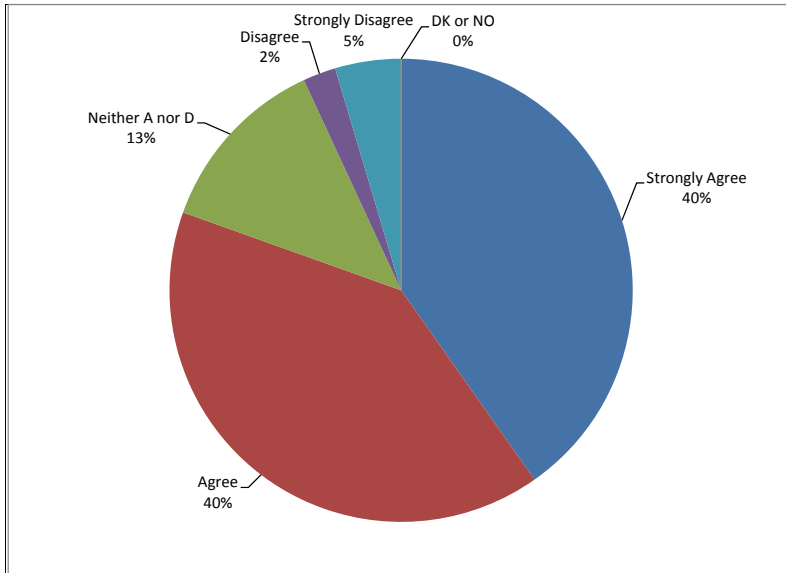
No statistically significant differences among parents whose children were in different schools last year.

15. My child has made at least one new friend this year.



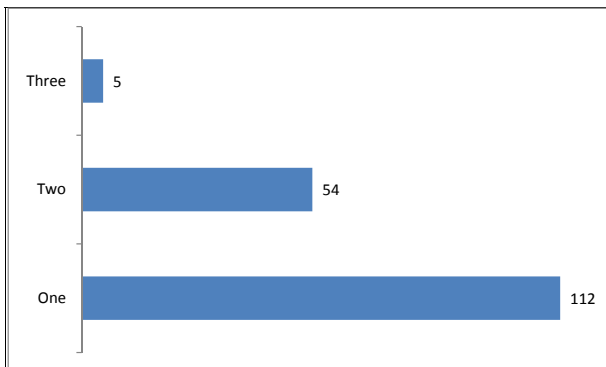
No statistically significant differences among parents whose children were in different schools last year.

16. The communications from my child's classroom teacher keep me well-informed.

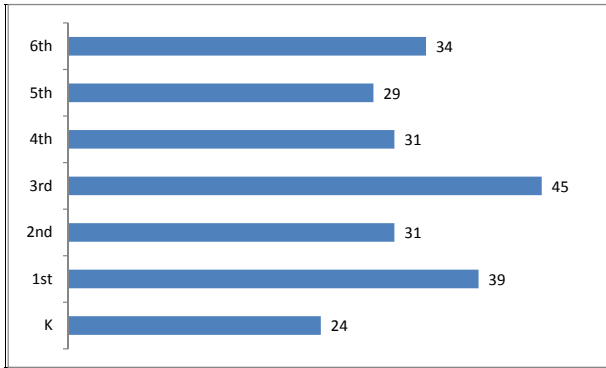


No statistically significant differences among parents whose children were in different schools last year.

17. How many children from your family go to Wildwood?



18. In what grades?



19. Where was/were your child/children in school last year?

