



## WCPSS Student Survey Results: 2011-12

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### Introduction

The Wake County Public School System (WCPSS) has surveyed all 4<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students about their perception of various aspects of their school experience for a number of years. A few items were specific to a grade level. Trends for selected items related to the strategic plan are highlighted here. Full results are shared in the appendix to this report.

### Methods

#### Survey Distribution

In May 2012, Data and Accountability departmental staff surveyed all 4<sup>th</sup> -, 7<sup>th</sup> -, and 10<sup>th</sup> -grade students in WCPSS schools. This provided a sample of students from each grade span. Schools named contact persons, and online survey links were sent to the contacts for each grade level.

The survey was done electronically to be consistent with the last survey and to speed processing of results. Most schools scheduled students into a computer lab to complete the survey. A two-week survey window was established in early May. The survey window was extended for some schools who requested additional time.

#### Abstract

The overall results from the 2011-12 student survey were positive. The most positive results pertained to overall satisfaction with the participants' school, with the most unfavorable results centered on the consistency of challenging work being assigned to students and bullying.

In general, 4<sup>th</sup> grade students responded more favorably than 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students. Students also tended to pick the second most positive response rather than the most positive, indicating room for improvement. Items related to rigor, relevance, and relationships provided findings of interest in implementing the WCPSS strategic plan.

Recommendations include improving rigor and support for student learning, considering expectations for schools with and without STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) and Global themes for exposure to these areas, and discussing ways to address bullying in schools.

#### Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Quality of Schools	3
Science, Math and Global Themes	5
Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships	7
Recommendations	11
Appendix	13

The school district also opted to participate in a Tripod survey pilot that was being done in a sample of districts across the state. The administration dates overlapped. This was not ideal but could not be avoided; notification of the dates for the Tripod survey was provided quite late and central services staff decided that the regular student survey had unique and valuable information and should not be skipped. For example, some schools use the items to monitor their progress on school improvement efforts. Data and Accountability staff asked the North Carolina Department of Instruction if crucial questions could be added to the Tripod survey, but that was not allowed.

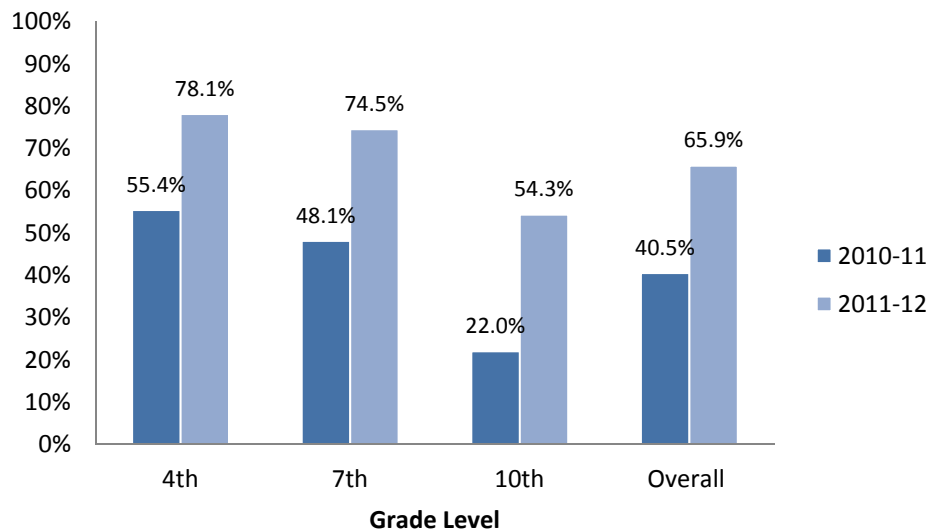
## Response Rates

The response rates for the 2011-12 WCPSS student survey are displayed in Table 1 and Figure 1 shows response rate percentages for 2010-11 and 2011-12. The 2011-12 response rates were higher than the previous year.

**Table 1**  
*2011-12 WCPSS Student Survey Response Rates by Grade Level*

	4 <sup>th</sup> Grade	7 <sup>th</sup> Grade	10 <sup>th</sup> Grade	Total
Participating students	9,029	8,362	4,619	22,010
Total Students at each grade level	11,566	11,232	10,623	33,421
Response rate	78.1%	74.5%	54.3%	65.9%

**Figure 1**  
*Two Year Response Rate Comparison*



Data source: 2010-11 and 2011-12 student survey results

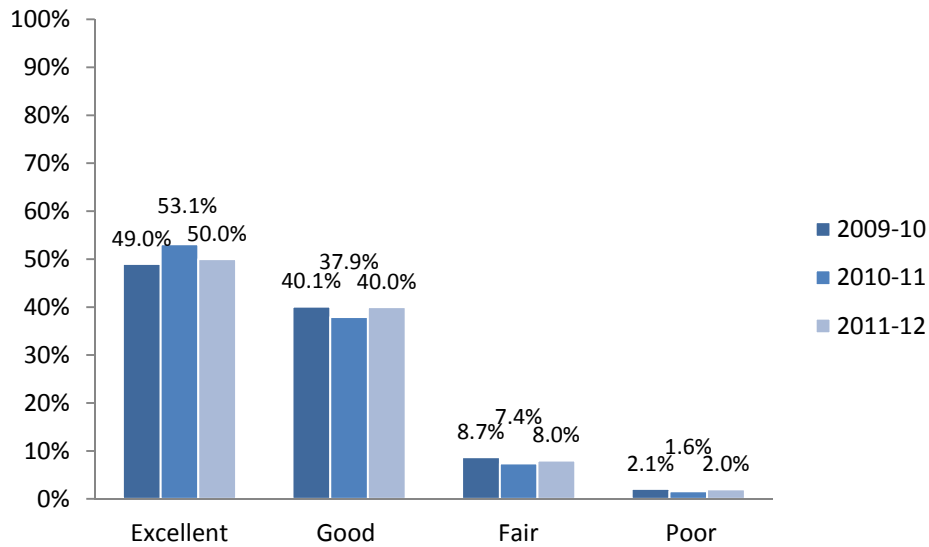
## Results

### Quality of Schools

Students were asked to rate the overall quality of their schools as excellent, good, fair, or poor. Figures 2, 3, and 4 show the three year trend –by school level—of students’ assessment of the overall quality of their school. Elementary students had the most positive responses.

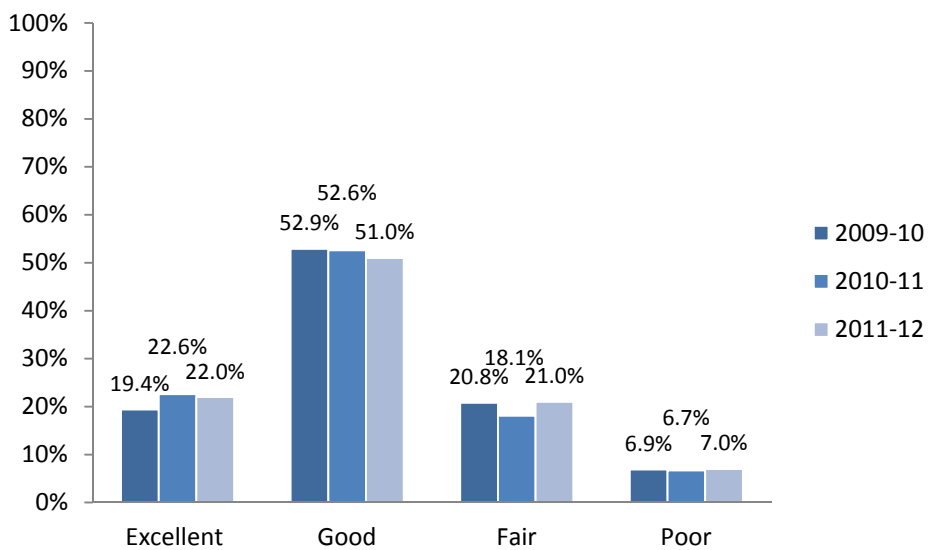
- A vast majority of 4th -grade students responded favorably, with 90% choosing excellent or good. About three fourths of 7th and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students had positive responses; 7<sup>th</sup> - grade students (73%), and 10<sup>th</sup> -grade students (74%) rated their school as excellent or good.
- Elementary students were most likely to rate their school as excellent; middle and high school students were most likely to rate their school as good.

**Figure 2**  
*Elementary Overall Quality of Their School*  
 (Grade 4)



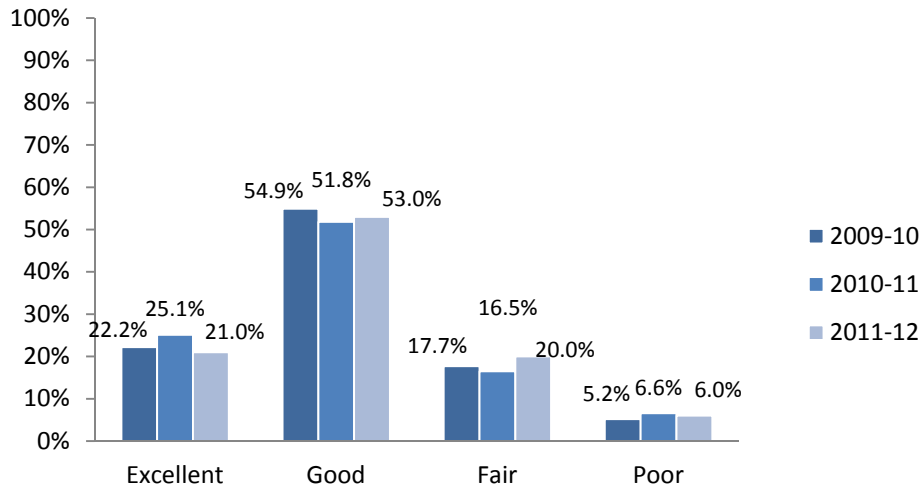
Data source: 2009-10, 2010-11, and 2011-12 student survey results

**Figure 3**  
*Middle School Overall Quality*  
 (Grade 7)



Data source: 2009-10, 2010-11, and 2011-12 student survey results

**Figure 4**  
*High School Overall Quality*  
 (Grade 10)



In terms of school safety, most students did feel safe at their schools (95% at elementary, 86% at middle, and 89% at high school). Bullying was noted as a problem by fewer than half of each group. It is interesting that, compared to the other levels, high school students cited safety as a concern more often, but saw bullying as a concern less often.

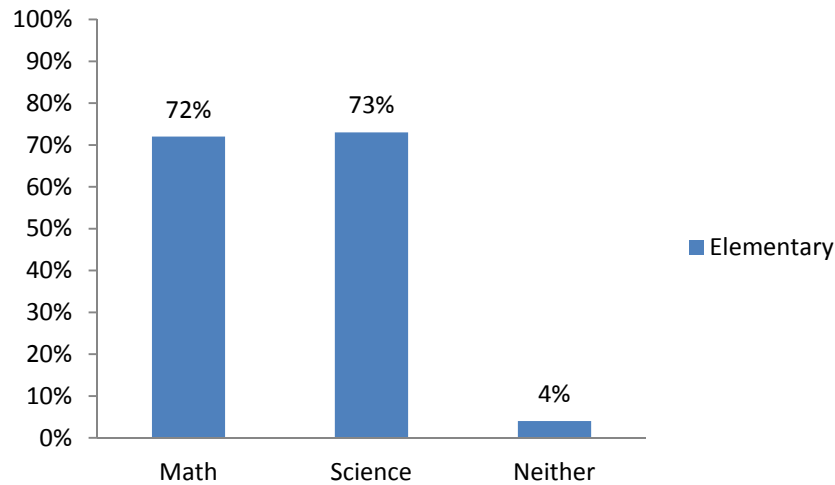
## Science, Math, and Global Themes

### Science and Math Preparation

WCPSS’ framework for success is designed to put all students on a college or career-ready trajectory. A major prerequisite to being college or career-ready in a 21<sup>st</sup> Century world is having a strong background in math and science. Science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) programs have been expanding in WCPSS as a way to prepare students for 21<sup>st</sup> century careers in these areas.

Figure 5 represents elementary students’ perceptions about math and science, with over 70% of elementary students reporting they like learning about math and/or science.

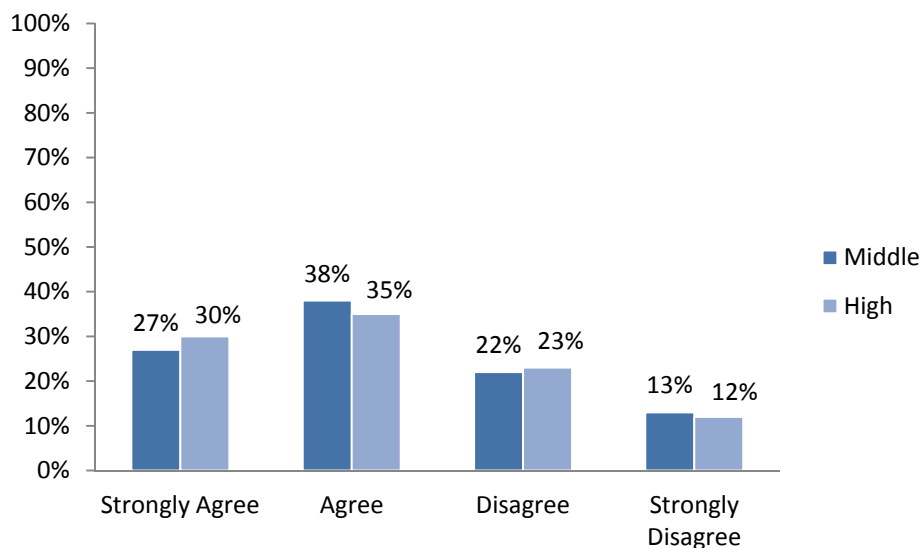
**Figure 5**  
*“I like learning about math and science.”*



Note: Participants were allowed to select more than one choice

Middle and high school students reported their interest in math and science (Figure 6). Sixty-five percent of both 7<sup>th</sup>-grade and 10<sup>th</sup>-grade students reported they “strongly agree” or “agree” that they are interested in a science or math related career. “Agree” was more common as a response compared to “strongly agree”. Only 13% of 7<sup>th</sup>-grade and 12% of 10<sup>th</sup>-grade students reported that they “strongly disagreed” that they were interested in a career in math, science, technology, or engineering.

**Figure 6**  
*“I am interested in a career in math, science, technology, or engineering.”*



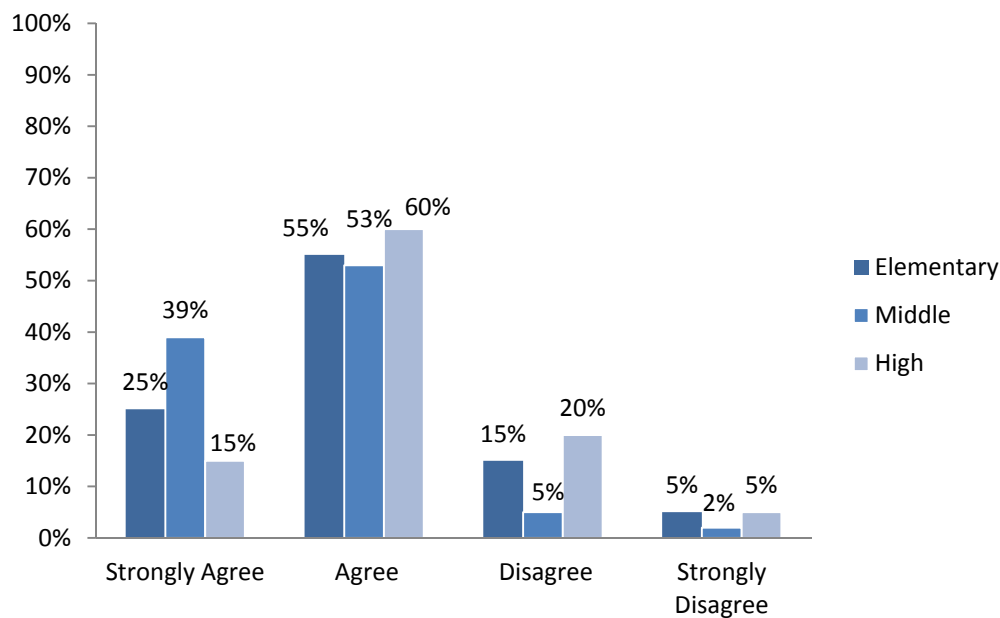
### Exposure to Diverse Cultures

Wake County Public Schools serves a very diverse community that represents cultures from across the world and over 200 different language groups. Social studies and other curriculums provide exposure to cultures around the world. Global network schools are designed to extend this understanding of our connection to other cultures around the world.

Students rated their learning experiences based on global cultures or connections. These results show positive results for the district. Almost all (92%) middle school students and three fourths of elementary and high school students in the surveyed grade levels responded that they “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with the statement “I am learning about our connections with other cultures and countries around the world” (Figure 7).

**Figure 7**

*“I am learning about our connections with other cultures and countries around the world.”*



### Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships

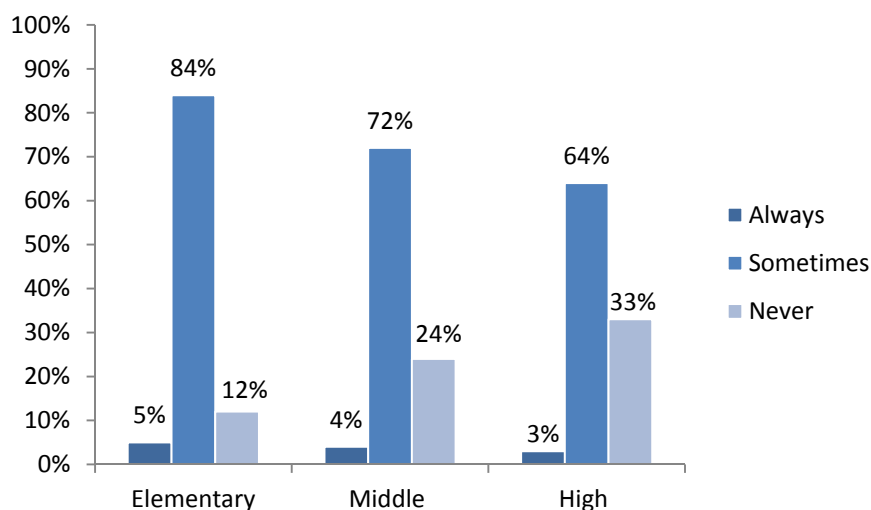
The WCPSS strategic plan includes seven steps to college or career readiness in an effort to help all students become successful productive citizens. Research on school reform suggests that rigorous instruction, which is clearly relevant to students’ futures, delivered by teachers with strong relationships to their students, can contribute to student success. A number of survey items relate to these areas.

## Academic Rigor

One of WCPSS's six core beliefs in the strategic plan is challenging all students through academic rigor. An item that provided the least positive results asked whether the work given to students was too easy (Figure 8). While it must be recognized that students' responses usually reflect multiple teachers, student responses reflect room for improvement.

- The most common response was that work given was “sometimes” too easy.
- Eighty-nine percent of 4<sup>th</sup>-grade students stated that work prescribed by their teachers was either too easy “sometimes” or “always.” The percentage of students with these responses decreased at the higher grade levels, with 7<sup>th</sup>-graders at 76% and 10<sup>th</sup>-graders at 67%. Still, at least two thirds agreed at all three levels (see Figure 8).

**Figure 8**  
*“The work I am given is too easy.”*



In related items, students were most likely to say work given was challenging and interesting “sometimes.” High school students were most likely to say it was always challenging (17%) but least likely to say class work was always interesting (7%).

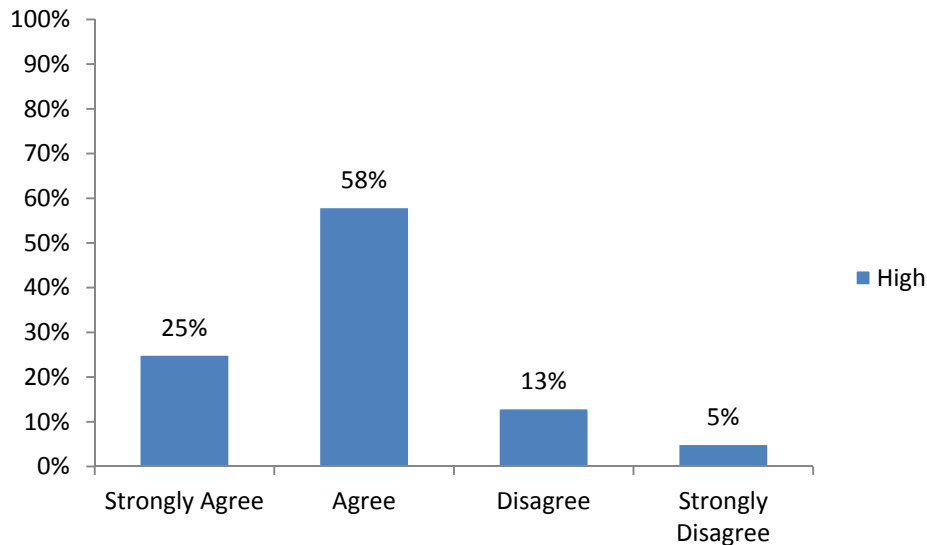
## Relevance of Learning

In one item, 10th-grade students were asked whether they felt the information they were learning would help them after high school. The vast majority (83%) of 10th-grade students responded either “strongly agree” or “agree.” (See Figure 9.) The most common response by far was “I Agree”, which suggests some room for improvement.



**Figure 9**

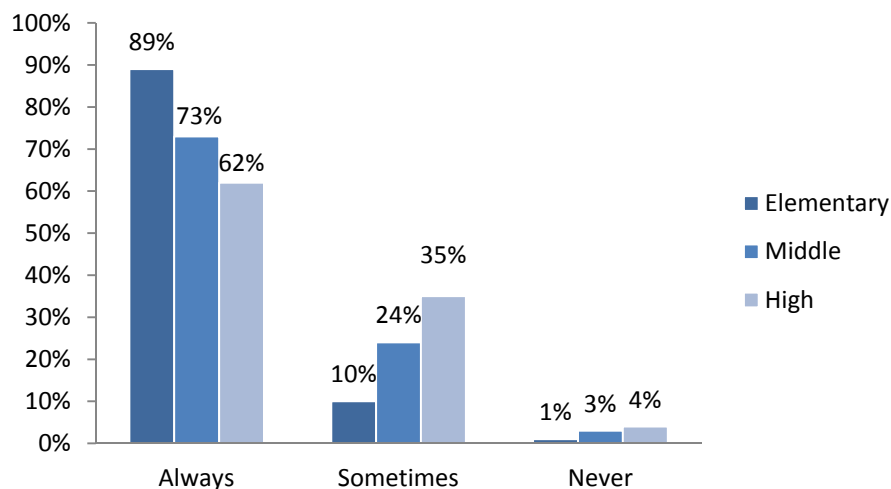
*“The information I am learning in school will help me after high school.”*



The appendix includes student ratings of the extent to which their school helps them learn various subjects. Elementary responses of “excellent” are much more positive than those for middle school which are more positive than high school. At the elementary level, math and science support for learning are most often rated as excellent. At middle school, physical education and social studies have that distinction. At high school, physical education had the highest ratings of “excellent” at only 36%, but when combined with ratings of “good” English and Language Arts produced the highest results (78%).

### **Student Relationships**

As shown in Figure 10, most students responded that their teachers always encouraged them to do their best. The percentage of students responding that their teachers “always” encourage them to do their best decreased from elementary to middle and middle to high school. Even though there is a large difference between 4th grade and the other two grade levels, all three grade levels responded over 90% for either “sometimes” or “always”.

**Figure 10***“My teacher encourages me to do my best.”*

In other items about student - teacher relationships:

- Responses across grade levels varied considerably for the item, “My teachers help me to be successful in my classes.” While 80% of elementary students reported this to always be the case, 56% of middle school students, and only 20% of high school students, reported this to always be true.
- About one third (33-39%) of students reported always understanding how teachers decided on grades.
- Elementary students were more likely to say teachers always gave them a second chance if their work was not right the first time (28% elementary, 16% middle, and 11% high school). Students most commonly responded “sometimes.”

### **Trends across Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships Items**

Table 2 is based on the highest standard reflected in the survey items about rigor, relevance and relationships. While it may be feasible to expect all teachers to consistently display these characteristics, patterns suggest stronger and weaker areas for teachers.

- Consistent with the past, students have more positive views of teacher support at the elementary level than at the secondary levels. The extent to which teachers help students succeed shows the starkest contrast (see Item 2). While the extent to which students work independently should definitely increase over time, supporting success is a broader concept applicable to all levels.
- Items related to relationships were generally more positive than items for rigor or relevance.

- ▶ At all three school levels, the majority of students responded that teachers “always” encourage them to do their best and “always” believe they are good students.
- ▶ Elementary students are most likely to say their teachers “always” help them to be successful in classes (80%), with much lower percentages at middle school (56%), and especially high school students (20%).
- In terms of rigor, students at all levels were unlikely to say their work was always challenging or never too easy.
- In terms of relevance, less than one fifth of students at each level indicated teachers asked them how to make their classes better. In addition, only about one third of elementary students, and approximately one tenth of secondary students, considered school work to always be interesting.

**Table 2**

*Percentage of Students with Most Positive Response to Survey Items About Teacher Support and Rigor*

(Percentage responding “always” except when otherwise indicated)

<b>Item</b>	<b>Elementary</b>	<b>Middle</b>	<b>High</b>
1. My teachers encourage me to do my best.	89%	73%	62%
2. My teachers help me be successful in classes.	80%	56%	20%
3. My teachers believe I am a good student.	71%	55%	61%
4. My teachers help me set learning goals for myself.	59%	31%	
5. The information I am learning in school will help me beyond high school. (% strongly agree)			25%
6. I know how my teachers decide what grades I get.	39%	35%	33%
7. The work I do in class is interesting.	32%	10%	7%
8. My teachers give me a second chance if my work is not right the first time.	28%	16%	11%
9. My teachers ask me how they can make the classes better.	19%	14%	16%
10. The work I am given is too easy. (% never)	12%	24%	33%
11. The work I am given is challenging.	9%	12%	17%

Key: Rigor—no shading    Relevance—green    Relationships—blue (Some could fit two categories.)

Note: Ordered by elementary percentage of most positive responses.

Blanks indicate questions that were not included in the survey.

## Recommendations

Students tend to have positive views of their school overall, especially about the overall quality of their school. Teacher support of student learning could be more consistent. Responses about global and STEM issues raise questions about goals in these areas. Bullying tends to be a concern for too many students, especially at the middle school level. We have three recommendations based on these results.

**1. Discuss ways to improve support for the learning of all students.**

The WCPSS strategic plan focuses on making sure all students are college ready, with increased student achievement as a key goal. Schools' staffs as well as central staff should discuss implications of the survey results regarding ways to better support all students to reach the high standards set for them. Some specific questions for consideration include:

- Why are elementary responses more positive than secondary responses? Are there practices that might be adapted from elementary to improve secondary student perceptions of school?
- How can school staff provide rigorous coursework more consistently and support students in meeting the higher standards represented in the Common Core state standards? How can second chances be provided in a way that will not compromise standards? Can learning goals and a clear statement of grading standards help?
- How can teachers more clearly convey to students the relevance of their present coursework to their lives now or after high school? How can learning tasks be made more interesting?
- How can secondary teachers, especially high school teachers, build independence in students while supporting their success?
- How can students further build relationships with their students to promote their success? Could students provide ideas on how classes could be improved?
- Why are students' perceptions of excellence in teaching so different by grade span and sometimes subject?

**2. Discuss expectations for STEM and global education in all schools versus schools with one of these foci.**

Responses for students in all schools seem reasonably positive. Is it sufficient that two-thirds of secondary students stated interest in professions in science, math, or engineering? How should offerings in schools without global themes vary from other schools? Should expectations for students vary for all schools versus those with a global or STEM focus?

**3. Discuss how concerns about bullying can be addressed.**

While many students do not have a concern about bullying, a reasonably high percentage of elementary (44%), middle (52%) and high school (35%) students do have concerns. How can concerns be addressed beyond what is currently done? How should approaches vary across grade spans?

## Appendix

Please rate the overall quality of your school.

	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
Excellent	50%	22%	21%
Good	40%	51%	53%
Fair	8%	21%	20%
Poor	2%	7%	6%

I feel safe at school.

	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
Strongly Agree	46%	21%	25%
Agree	49%	65%	64%
Disagree	4%	10%	8%
Strongly Disagree	1%	4%	4%

Bullying is a problem at my school.

	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
Strongly Agree	14%	14%	8%
Agree	30%	38%	27%
Disagree	38%	40%	55%
Strongly Disagree	19%	8%	10%

I like my school

	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
Strongly Agree	53%	24%	21%
Agree	40%	56%	57%
Disagree	5%	13%	14%
Strongly Disagree	2%	7%	8%

I am learning about our connections with other cultures and countries around the world.

	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
Strongly Agree	25%	39%	15%
Agree	55%	53%	60%
Disagree	15%	5%	20%
Strongly Disagree	5%	2%	5%

My teachers encourage me to do my best.

	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
Always	89%	73%	62%
Sometimes	10%	24%	35%
Never	1%	3%	4%

I like learning about math and science (Choose all that apply).

	Elementary
Math	72%
Science	73%
Neither	4%

Note: Students were able to choose more than one choice for this question.

I am interested in a career in math, science, technology, or engineering.

	Middle School	High School
Strongly Agree	27%	30%
Agree	38%	35%
Disagree	22%	23%
Strongly Disagree	13%	12%

The information I am learning in school will help me beyond high school.

	High School
Strongly Agree	25%
Agree	58%
Disagree	13%
Strongly Disagree	5%

The work I am given is too easy.

	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
Always	5%	4%	3%
Sometimes	84%	72%	64%
Never	12%	24%	33%

The work I am given is challenging.

	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
Always	9%	12%	17%
Sometimes	85%	83%	79%
Never	6%	5%	4%

The work I do in class is interesting.

	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
Always	32%	10%	7%
Sometimes	63%	77%	81%
Never	4%	13%	12%

My teachers help me set learning goals for myself.

	Elementary School	Middle School
Always	59%	31%
Sometimes	36%	51%
Never	5%	18%

My teachers help me to be successful in my classes.

	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
Always	80%	56%	20%
Sometimes	19%	40%	56%
Never	1%	5%	24%

My teachers ask me how they can make the classes better.

	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
Always	19%	14%	16%
Sometimes	53%	51%	56%
Never	28%	35%	28%

I know how my teachers decide what grades I get.

	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
Always	39%	35%	33%
Sometimes	46%	49%	53%
Never	16%	16%	14%



My teachers believe I am a good student.

	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
Always	71%	55%	61%
Sometimes	27%	41%	36%
Never	2%	5%	3%

My teachers give me a second chance if my work is not right the first time.

	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
Always	28%	16%	11%
Sometimes	65%	75%	74%
Never	7%	9%	15%

Elementary Schools: Please rate your school in helping you learn in each subject area  
(1=Excellent; 2=Good; 3=Fair; 4=Poor):

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Language Arts	3838 44%	3755 43%	906 10%	276 3%
Mathematics	5815 66%	2113 24%	639 7%	233 3%
Social Studies	3583 41%	3504 40%	1332 15%	349 4%
Science	5392 62%	2388 27%	736 8%	220 3%
Arts	4995 58%	2478 29%	854 10%	338 4%
World Languages	1667 22%	2185 29%	1392 18%	2377 31%
Health and Physical Education	6560 75%	1492 17%	464 5%	266 3%

Middle School: Please rate your school in helping you learn in each subject area (1=Excellent; 2=Good; 3=Fair; 4=Poor):

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Not Applicable
Language Arts	3002 37%	3235 39%	1414 17%	452 6%	115 1%
Mathematics	3593 44%	2624 32%	1302 16%	537 7%	143 2%
Social Studies	3875 47%	2536 31%	1139 14%	440 5%	180 2%
Science	3649 45%	2578 32%	1226 15%	546 7%	180 2%
Arts	2900 37%	1984 25%	882 11%	298 4%	1814 23%
World Languages	1586 20%	1886 24%	1338 17%	523 7%	2603 33%
Career and Technical Education	2235 28%	2364 30%	1204 15%	394 5%	1790 22%
Health & Physical Education	4228 52%	2280 28%	910 11%	413 5%	314 4%

Note: Not applicable percentages skew results for elective subjects.

High School: Please rate your school in helping you learn in each subject area (1=Excellent; 2=Good; 3=Fair; 4=Poor):

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Not Applicable
English or Language Arts	1541 34%	2003 44%	780 17%	224 5%	32 1%
Mathematics	1358 30%	1776 39%	995 22%	410 9%	38 1%
Social Studies	1507 33%	1927 42%	766 17%	262 6%	103 2%
Science	1558 34%	1826 40%	777 17%	307 7%	85 2%
Arts	1483 33%	1124 25%	487 11%	209 5%	1214 27%
World Languages	1096 24%	1489 33%	869 19%	428 9%	659 15%
Career and Technical Education	1192 26%	1537 34%	658 14%	240 5%	930 20%
Health & Physical Education	1651 36%	1597 35%	644 14%	303 7%	356 8%

Note: Not applicable percentages skew results for elective subjects.