



# **Listening to Families and Faculty:**

**A Report on  
Family Involvement in the  
Alexandria City Public Schools**

**Rebecca L. Perry  
Superintendent**

**Karen Parker Thompson  
Family Involvement and Community Resources**



December, 2004

Dear Families, Community Members, and Staff:

The Alexandria City Public Schools surveyed every family, teacher, and school administrator in the system. We also conducted focus groups with parents, teachers, students and community members. I am pleased to present this report on survey findings about family involvement in the Alexandria City Public Schools.

While participation in the survey was not extensive, responses did offer some valuable insights. One goal of our school division is to consistently improve the satisfaction of families and faculty. I am encouraged by the many positive comments about the quality of our schools and the dedication of our teachers and administrators. Generally, there is a high level of satisfaction among our families. As part of our longstanding goal to increase family involvement, we plan to take these steps:

- Implement a campaign to raise awareness of the critical importance of family involvement in ensuring a quality education.
- Share responses from family and faculty surveys with each school and encourage use of the feedback to make improvements at that school.
- Create advocacy handbooks and workshops for parents.
- Develop a process for dealing quickly and responsively with families' concerns and problems.
- Develop communication strategies for assisting non-English speaking parents.
- Plan meaningful ways to connect family involvement to student achievement.
- Provide professional development to improve communication and leadership skills. Develop skills in building closer family-school partnerships, using cultural diversity as an asset in working with students and families.

Please share your ideas for ways we can engage families in our schools. Contact Karen Parker Thompson, Family Involvement and Community Resources Coordinator, at 703-824-6635 or [karen.parker.thompson@acps.k12.va.us](mailto:karen.parker.thompson@acps.k12.va.us), or me at [rebecca.perry@acps.k12.va.us](mailto:rebecca.perry@acps.k12.va.us). The full report will be on our website [www.acps.k12.va.us](http://www.acps.k12.va.us) after January 30, 2005.

Sincerely,

Rebecca L. Perry  
Superintendent



# Listening to Families and Faculty

## A Report on Family Involvement in the Alexandria City Public Schools

Alexandria City Public Schools is committed to making sure that every single child and family has an excellent educational experience. To develop effective family involvement strategies and programs that will empower parents and support students, ACPS wanted to hear from its families and faculty. First, we conducted focus groups. Then, using findings from the focus group participants, we developed a survey on family involvement. Next, we sent a survey to every family, teacher, and school administrator in ACPS. This information gave us a baseline to measure our progress. In this report, we will share the findings from the focus groups and the results from the survey.

### I. What Did the Focus Group Findings on Family Involvement Tell Us?

In January 2002, Alexandria City Public Schools hired KSA Plus Communications to facilitate 22 focus group conversations with approximately 100 parents, teachers, students, and community members. Each conversation was with a distinct group:

- Parents:** Hispanic, Middle Eastern, White and African American parents; parents of special education students; and parents of elementary, middle, and high school students
- Teachers:** Elementary, middle, and high school teachers
- Students:** High school students
- Community Members:** Staff of the Alexandria Juvenile Court and members of community groups



The focus group findings identified assets, challenges, barriers, and ideas for improvement.

<b>FOCUS GROUP KEY FINDING:</b>
<b>Focus group parents, students, staff, and community members agreed on how families should be involved</b>
Keep track of their children’s progress
Be aware of what’s happening at school
Listen to their children
Communicate expectations

*“There are a lot of different clubs and a lot of different people. You meet a lot of interesting people (at school).”*

—High School Student Focus Group

### Focus Group Finding: ASSETS

Across the focus groups, the participants praised ACPS cultural diversity and the variety of programs for students. “Check it out ...” one high school student said. “There are so many opportunities you would never have in smaller schools or private school, or in many public schools.” On the whole, most parents interviewed feel welcome and say the schools use many strategies to communicate with families.

## Focus Group Finding: CHALLENGES

Parents, and students identified several main concerns.

**ACPS schools vary in quality and practices.** As one parent put it, “The perception on the outside is that all the schools are not equal. Schools have personalities. They take on the personality of the principal. Some schools make sure parents know what’s going on, some don’t.”

**Expectations for students are inconsistent between schools and even within schools.**

One student said, “I moved from an AP and Honors class to a regular class and it’s totally different... My regular class teachers don’t pay a lot of attention to my progress in the class.”

**Advocating for children is not always easy.** Too often, parents say, they must choose between being labeled as a troublemaker, or letting issues drop. “Students who are academically and socially talented are the ones who seem to get a lot of attention and they do well,” observed a community member.

**Some parents feel afraid and intimidated,** especially those whose first language is not English. “IEP meetings are bad enough if you speak English. What if you don’t understand English?”

**There is no specific procedure for addressing parent concerns.**

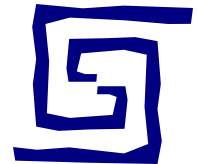
As one parent put it, “There is no active encouragement to help you figure out how to resolve problems, no effort to say, ‘here’s how to deal with that.’”

*Teachers find ACPS diversity both an asset and a challenge. “The spectrum of kids that we have is so great in terms of their academic levels, it poses a real challenge to teach them. ...The challenge is to find a way to meet all their needs on a daily basis.” –Teacher*

## Focus Group Finding: BARRIERS

Parent and teacher focus groups also identified barriers to parent involvement.

**Cost of Living** Alexandria has the highest housing costs in the area. Child-care and transportation are expensive and hard to find. “We have people from Third World countries trying to fit in and survive, working two to three jobs just to pay rent. They are tired and can’t make it. Then there’s the language issue,” a teacher commented.



**Cultural Disconnect** ACPS children come from 92 countries, and speak 66 languages. Many families do not understand the American educational system or how parents should be involved. As one Latina parent said, “Our husbands are not supportive. ...They don’t see it’s necessary for mothers to participate. They say this is for people who are rich and have a cleaning lady.”

**Poor Communications** Parents’ calls to schools sometimes are not answered. “Response is slow. I called. No one called back for the third day.” “Voicemail? You just try to call \_\_\_ Elementary!” Parents find their offers to help sometimes are ignored.

**Fear Factor** Sometimes, parents feel intimidated when they go to school. One parent commented, “Some schools haven’t found a way for parents to volunteer. Sometimes they are afraid parents are spying and will complain. There doesn’t seem to be an understanding.” A teacher observes: “We also have parents that fear coming to the school because they are afraid teachers will talk over their head. ...Sometimes those parents will avoid coming and talking to teachers.”

**The PTA In-Crowd Syndrome** Mention of the PTA sparked controversy. “There is a clique with the PTA. No matter how often you go, or what you say, you are not heard. They have already made up their mind about what they want to do.” Some parents say White parents tend to run the show. Teachers often don’t come to the meetings, some parents complained, and when they do, there may not be a chance to talk to them. “Our PTA is an old girls’ network. They didn’t want the participation. Hispanic parents came to one meeting, but they were observers.”

## Focus Group Finding: IDEAS FOR IMPROVEMENT



**Develop better communications.** Be more specific about helping students meet learning objectives. “Team letters are more about events, less about substantive information and where kids need help,” commented a middle school parent. “Provide as part of our in-service training some workshops on effective ways to communicate with parents,” advised a teacher.

**Keep parents and students better informed about student progress, including early warnings.** “They spend too much time...telling you if you’re failing. They need to focus on people who are getting C’s, too. Help those students out and maybe they could get an A if they knew what was wrong,” advised a high school student.

**Create schools that are equally strong choices for parents and children.** Give families more information about school and program options. “I get the sense that all schools don’t get the same programs, opportunities and resources...I would want to know that you don’t have to compete for a piece of the pie,” a parent said.

**Reach out more to families.** Extend hours of operation and outreach. A teacher remarked, “I was in marketing before teaching and one of the basic tenets is if the customers aren’t coming to you, go to the customers.” A parent observed, “Parents are working any number of jobs, and number of hours, and our system is geared for time during the day, 8:00-4:00.” “Schools should be available to the community, so that parents could go into the computer lab with a guide to help students with homework or whatever skills,” another parent said.

*“My son was borderline for special services and did not receive it. The kids in middle school need more discipline. Middle school kids get lost. I had to enroll my son in private school.”*

*— Middle School Parent*

**Improve parent-teacher relationships.** “Parents need to meet the teachers in a friendlier atmosphere. “When we have diversity night, the parents come but I don’t see a lot of teachers. Teachers could bring their kids and meet the parents.”

## Focus Groups: STUDENT VOICES

“My parents have never been involved in my education. Parents, even though we push them away, I don’t think they know how important their participation is. My sister is the one who asked me questions like, ‘what did you learn today? What was the happiest moment of the day? They (parents) need to participate more in your life by being more communicative.”  
—High School Student/Focus Group

**“The only time I see how I’m doing is mid-term grades or quarter grades. On a regular basis they don’t let you know how you’re doing. You can turn in your stuff and think you have a C+ and you want to get a B, but they don’t tell you that and you won’t find out until it’s too late to raise the grade.”**  
—High School Student/Focus Group

**“You got more attention and emphasis on what you needed to do in 5th grade than you do in high school. We got progress reports every week in elementary school.”**  
—High School Student/Focus Group

## II. What Did the Survey Results on Family Involvement Tell Us?

**WHO RESPONDED?** ACPS worked with Customer Care Measurement and Consulting to develop a survey instrument on family involvement. In April 2003, surveys were placed in elementary students' weekly folders and mailed to middle and high school families' homes. The overall response rate from families (20 percent) was average for such surveys. The surveys received were higher from elementary school families and White families. Faculty surveys were distributed at each school. The response rate from faculty was 23 percent. Response rates for faculty survey is low by almost any benchmark. (See charts in appendix for the family and faculty response rate by individual school.)

Family Response Rates	Faculty Response Rates
2,126 responses received from families (about 20%)	395 responses received from faculty (about 23%)
Elementary schools: 24%	The range of responses from elementary, middle, and high school varied from 40% to 1%
Middle/High Schools: 12-15%	ACPS Total Faculty: 1,685
White families : 29%	<p><b><i>“Shoot for the stars! Have goals higher than the SOLs, meaning kids should walk away from a class with practical lessons they will use throughout life.”</i></b>                      —Middle School Teacher</p>
Latino families 14%	
African American families 13%	
ACPS Total Students: 10,716	

### WHAT THE SURVEY COVERED

In the survey, we asked families and faculty their views about:

- The teacher-parent relationship to support children's progress
- The school environment and level of care for children
- Parent involvement in learning and decision making
- Two-way communication and problem solving
- Level of satisfaction with their school and with ACPS

*“I would like a more comprehensive statement explaining what (students) are working on. Kind of a road map. Then you can look at the homework and sort of pair that. For parents who are interested and involved, you can use it to get more mileage.”*  
 —High School Parent

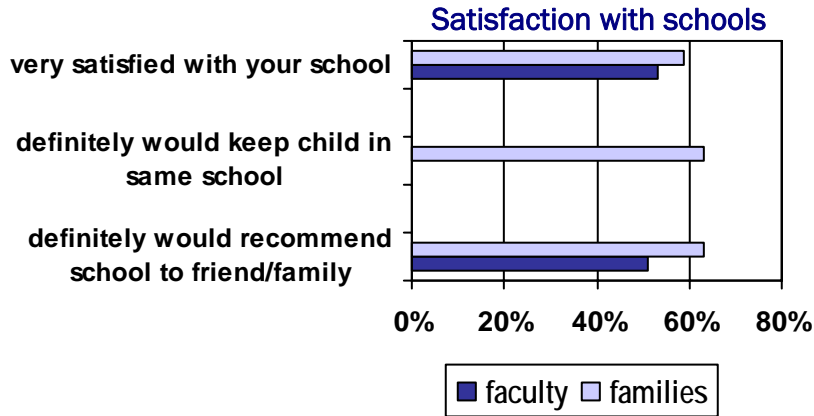
In addition, we asked families how well their complaints and concerns are handled and we asked teachers what challenges they face in involving families. Finally, we asked families and teachers to tell us, in their own words, what they think is working to engage families at their schools, and what they think would help.

*“We have a great PTA who sponsors pizza and pillow night, Bingo nights, a sock hop and many other family events. We provide day care and Spanish interpreter for most meetings. We have focus meetings like parenting groups and Hispanic family meetings.”*  
 — Elementary Teacher

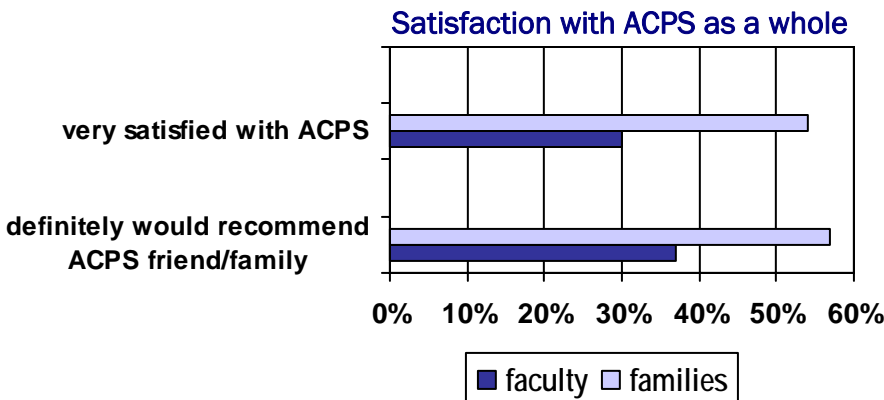


## QUICK SUMMARY OF SURVEY FINDINGS

A majority of families and teachers are very satisfied with their schools. Less than 10 percent of both groups are dissatisfied. The bar graph below shows that over half of our families (59 percent) and faculty (53 percent) are very satisfied with their schools. Less than 10 percent of both groups are dissatisfied. About half the faculty (51 percent) definitely would recommend their school to a friend or relative with children. Even more families (63 percent), given a choice, definitely would keep their child in their current school.



The bar graph below shows that families are more satisfied with ACPS than are faculty. Over half of our families (54 percent), but less than a third (30 percent) of faculty, are very satisfied with ACPS as a whole. Over half of families (57 percent), but only about a third of faculty (37 percent), would definitely recommend ACPS to a friend or relative with children.



*“My son’s teacher is the best and I can see that she loves her job and she loves working with kids. My son loves her and she helped me with my son. We need teachers like her. This school is the best.”*

—Elementary Parent



*“It’s two-way: hand in hand with the teacher and parent. Those who make it without that partnership are exceptional.”*

—High School Parent

*“They embraced my child academically and emotionally since he moved here. His school is filled with dedicated caring adults.”*

—Elementary Parent

*“We could plan a ‘bring your parents to school day’, perhaps this could be organized by team and involve an awards ceremony to recognize student achievement.”*

—High School Teacher

*“Each of my son’s teachers has stuck with him through his difficulties. They have been consistently positive, caring, and professional. They expect him to do well and he has moved from a D student to a B+ student as a result.”*

—High School Parent

The table on the right shows that school ratings were higher from elementary schools and from Latino families. Very satisfied ratings came from 70% of elementary school families, compared to 45% of middle and high school families. Among groups, very satisfied ratings came from 68% of Latino families, compared to 58% of African American and 55% of White families.

**School satisfaction by school level and ethnic group**

VERY Satisfied with their Schools	Percentage
Elementary school families	70%
Middle and high school families	45%
Latino families	68%
African American Families	58%
White families	55%

**Key Survey Finding: THREE CRITICAL AREAS FOR FAMILIES**

Families reported three areas critical to their satisfaction and loyalty to ACPS.

**1. Being treated fairly and with respect.**

When families feel that they and their children are treated well, they are more likely to be very satisfied with ACPS and loyal to their school. Very satisfied families tend to answer “always” to these statements:

- My child’s school is willing to work with me as a partner in my child’s learning.
- Students at my child’s school are treated fairly no matter what their race or cultural background.
- I’m treated with respect at my child’s school.
- My child’s teacher helps my child understand how he/she is doing in school.

**2. Being pleased with the quality of their children’s learning and communications with the school.**

Families who are very satisfied with ACPS and loyal to their school tend to say they are very satisfied with:

- The ability of their child’s school to create a caring and nurturing environment for learning.
- The way their child’s school responds to individual problems and concerns.
- Their child’s learning and progress.
- The quality of communication received from their child’s school.

*“Please notify parents when a child is doing well and not only when a child is experiencing a problem.”*

– Middle School Parent

*“I wish they will provide me with more information about how to do the homework, because sometimes I don’t know or don’t understand how to help my child with it.”*

–Elementary Parent

*“Everyone knows each other; teachers, parents, staff. It’s a very good tight-knit community that seems to look out for each other.*  
– Elementary Parent

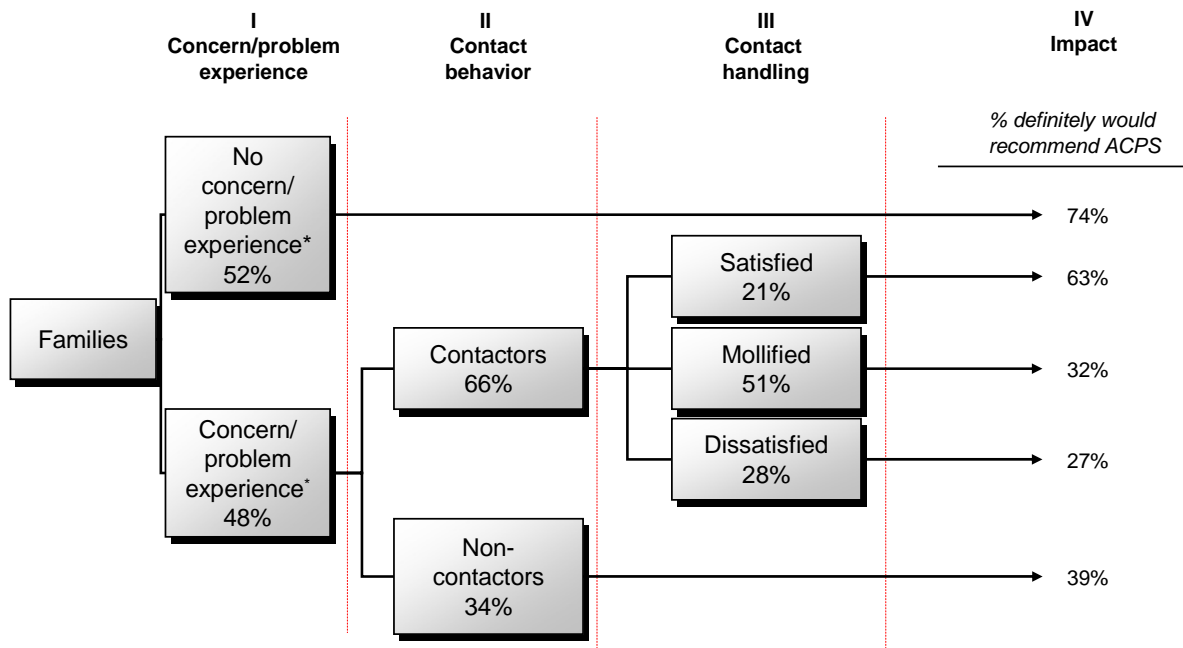
### 3. Feeling that ACPS or the school responds well to their problems and concerns.

Families who were satisfied with how their concern was handled were more than twice as likely to recommend ACPS compared to families who were dissatisfied with how their concern was handled.

- Of families who did contact the school about a problem, only one in five (21%) was fully satisfied. Most concerns involved a child’s needs or some difficulty with teachers or staff.
- About a third of families with concerns (34%) did not try to report them. Most of these felt that contacting the school “would not do any good” (39%) or that the problem was “not serious enough” (34%). Seventeen percent (17%) feared “negative consequences” for their child.
- Nearly half (44%) of families that did report concerns had to contact the school three or more times before the matter was settled.

Clearly, ACPS needs to do a better job handling families’ concerns. The diagram below shows the connection between complaint handling and parent satisfaction. (See charts in appendix for more information on complaint handling.)

### Impact of Concern/Problem Experience on Family Loyalty



*“As my child has recently transferred to the USA from Asia, it will be helpful if he could visit places that he learns about in his Virginia History class.”*  
—Elementary Parent

*“Place more responsibility for learning on students! As a teacher, I can only do so much. We have too many students who just show up. They expect teachers to do it all.”*  
—Middle School Teacher

*“I feel more guidance should be given in course selection (is it better to get a higher grade in an easier class or lower grade in a high level class, etc.?) and help in deciding which colleges to apply to.”*  
—High School Parent

## Key Survey Finding: TWO CRITICAL AREAS FOR FACULTY

Teachers reported two areas critical to their satisfaction and loyalty to ACPS.

### 1. Feeling that their school is working as partners with parents.

Teachers who are highly satisfied with their schools tend to answer always to these statements:

- It's easy for parents to get a translator when they need one.
- Teachers discuss strategies with parents on how to improve student progress.
- Parents are willing to work with the school as partners in their child's learning.

### 2. Being pleased with their school's communications with parents.

Teachers who are both highly satisfied with ACPS *and* loyal to their school tend to say they are very satisfied with:

- Responsiveness to individual parent concerns and problems.
- Quality of communications between school and parents.
- Student learning and progress.

Teachers identified three major obstacles to involving families in their schools:

1. Engaging parents in homework.
2. Encouraging parents to take ownership of their children's behavior and learning.
3. Communicating with parents who don't speak English.

## Key Survey Finding: HOW TO INVOLVE MORE FAMILIES

The chart below compares the top five family and faculty responses to the question, "What should schools do to get families more involved?" On the whole, parents want more communication and outreach from schools, while faculty want parents to be more accountable.

PARENT RECOMMENDATIONS	FACULTY RECOMMENDATIONS
More activities for families at more convenient times, and with more notice	Provide parenting workshops
More communication about students' progress, and not just about problems	Insist on greater parent accountability
More opportunities to connect with teachers one-on-one	Require attendance at conferences and events
Reach out more: Go to families' homes and have meetings in the community	Hold more events and activities for families
More translators	Offer adult education for ESL families

*"At the end of the first quarter, instead of asking the parents to come in, we go to the homes and select homes of children that we have concerns about, but also kids that are doing well. The teachers are available if parents want to come in and meet with the teachers too. We have been trying a lot of different ways to reach out to parents – invite them to the quarterly awards programs. Kids are shocked when we come to their houses."* — Elementary Teacher



## VOICES FROM FAMILIES: ADVICE ON GETTING MORE FAMILIES INVOLVED



Families shared ideas on what schools should do to get parents more involved.

### **Give more notice of events and activities, schedule them at times that are convenient to families, and take them into the community.**

- “My only complaint is that most special events and all PTA meetings are on Monday nights and I work until 8:30 on those nights.” (*Elementary Parent*)
- “My problem is time. My children go to bed at 7:00P.M., and I’m tired after that. I’m a grandmother!” (*Elementary Grandparent*)
- “I am working sometimes night time. If the school inform a week in advance, I like to be involved in school activities and programs.” (*Middle School Parent*)

### **Provide more information about children’s progress and what they are learning – and notify parents when their children are doing well – not just when they’re having problems.**

- “I need regular reports on how my child is doing in school, like a weekly folder. Let’s keep this practice in middle school.” (*Middle School Parent*)
- “Listen to parents. In my experience so far, parent involvement is only encouraged as long as parents listen while teachers talk. It needs to work in both directions.” (*Elementary Parent*)
- “Communicate directly with families! Too much information is kept closely held and it can be difficult to find out. (My son's science grade went from an A on interims to a C with no communication from teacher. He didn't do work that was assigned but I was not given info.)” (*Middle School Parent*)

### **Make it easier for parents to be involved in middle and high school. Give parents more opportunities to connect with teachers one to one. (For example: classroom meetings, more frequent conferences, social events on the team level, and visits to families at home.)**

- “Offer focus sessions, outreach to parents, breakfast with the principal, sessions to meet administrative staff and teachers (not Back to School Night, which is worthless).” (*High School Parent*)
- “It would be helpful to have a “handbook” of sorts that explained the school activities, programs, policies, etc. I felt pretty much in the dark at the beginning of middle school.” (*Middle School Parent*)
- “Parents feel less needed in classrooms as the child goes to middle and high school. Parents could be asked to help in classroom.” (*High School Parent*)

### **Show a greater level of care and concern.**

- “Children are not blind or deaf! Show interest in the child in a positive way with positive comments instead of negative comments. Stop punishing Black boys for the same thing as a White or right race child does [without getting punished].” (*Elementary Parent*)
- “Be more friendly and welcoming when a parent calls or comes to school. The secretaries are haughty and rude.” (*Middle School Parent*)
- “I don’t attend to any of the programs because I have bad experiences with the school, teachers, and principal.” (*Elementary Parent*)



**Offer alternatives to PTA meetings, involve children in the programs, and have more fun and games for families. Have more workshops and activities on helping with homework, getting ready for college (including financial aid), improving math and reading skills, and helping children explore career choices.**

- “PTA meetings should be widely announced and not held in the very cozy private office next to the principal’s office. It sometimes seems like a private club.” (*High School Parent*)
- “Do more activities and programs having child care.” (*Elementary Parent*)
- “Get parents who are already involved to take new parents under their wings as a mentor and work with them on programs and activities.” (*Elementary Parent*)

**Embrace families from different cultures. Offer more multicultural activities, provide translation and parent liaisons to communities with families in need, and improve the diversity of the PTA.**

- “Have staff to visit parents at home. Have meetings in the students' communities. Offer other alternatives besides PTAs.” (*Elementary Parent*)
- “Ensure translation into Spanish of all their communication to parents. Perhaps have parents of all children in one classroom meet to get to know each other? (*Elementary Parent*)
- “Schools should become family learning centers and (help) families learning to read, offer ESL classes while children receive extra tutoring.” (*Middle School Parent*)



**VOICES FROM FACULTY: ADVICE ON GETTING MORE FAMILIES INVOLVED**



Teachers agreed with families that there should be more activities for families, translation services for families who do not speak English, and workshops on how to help their children. Teachers often suggested parenting workshops, but **not one** of the thousands of parent suggestions listed help with parenting. Instead, parents requested more information and support to help their children. While parents’ comments seem to come from the heart, faculty suggestions came more from the head.

**Require more accountability and responsible behavior from families**

- “Talk about the importance of good behavior at the beginning of each school year. This needs to be discussed at length with parents.” (*Elementary Teacher*)
- “Hold parents as accountable for their students’ academic progress as teachers are held.” (*Elementary Teacher*)
- “Teach parents English with their children. Improve parental skills through workshops.” (*High School Teacher*)

**Communicate better with families**

- “We need to communicate better with home. Students throw away letters and delete phone messages from school. We do have a Web page, phones, PTA, newsletters, but somehow the message gets lost.” (*Middle School Teacher*)
- “I try to send *positive* letters home with students who have done well or improved greatly.” (*High School Teacher*)
- “I think a lot of parents do not know what to ask. They come and wait to be told...Sometimes the information we give really doesn’t tell the parents much that they can get a hold on. We need to be more specific...about what it is that students are doing or not doing, and what the parent actually can do. What should they see their child coming home with? What does the homework look like? For many parents, they don’t know how to find out.” (*Elementary Teacher*)

### **Be more open and innovative in working with families.**

- “Teachers need to be willing to open up to new ideas and different ways of doing things. Many of our teachers are comfortable with their old ways and are adamant about not changing anything although our population is changing.” (*Elementary Teacher*)
- “We have not done enough. I feel like everything is for show. It is not the quality stuff that parents can use.” (*Elementary Teacher*)
- “We call every home of every child in our homeroom and say, ‘Let’s start a partnership.’ It starts with getting your child to school on time. For our parents, we’ll call you with good news and bad...My most important job is to get to know parents...to understand the family situation and to try to build a connection.” (*High School Teacher*)

### **III. Next Steps**

The Alexandria City Public Schools has listened to the voices of our families, faculty, students and community members through the focus groups and survey responses.

As a result, we will move forward with a number of recommendations for action. First, we will launch a campaign to raise family and faculty awareness of the critical importance of parent involvement to the quality our children’s education. Second, district staff will meet with each school to go over the responses from their families and faculty and to plan programs and activities based on this feedback. Third, we will take several steps that align with the Alexandria City Public Schools’ Division Plan:

- Create workshops and a handbook for families to connect family involvement to student achievement and to learn how to navigate the school system.
- Plan innovative strategies to reach families and use school and community resources to assist with language translation.
- Provide professional development for faculty and families to improve communication and leadership skills, develop closer family school partnerships, and use cultural diversity as an asset in working with students and families.
- Develop a clear and accessible process for dealing responsively and quickly with families’ concerns and problems.

Last, ACPS will continue to survey families and faculty. The next survey will be conducted in fall 2005. It will be compared to the baseline provided by this report. Our goal is for 90 percent of families and faculty to feel highly satisfied with both ACPS and their schools.

We thank our families, students, community, and faculty members for taking part in this important survey. Please continue to give us your comments and reactions. For a copy of the full report, please visit [www.acps.k12.va.us](http://www.acps.k12.va.us) after November 1, 2004 or call 703-824-6635. We will continue to work closely with all of our stakeholders to develop a school district that is high quality in every respect.

## APPENDIX

### Response Rate by School – Family Segment

School	# Out	# Returns	Response Rate*
Jefferson-Houston	395	78	20%
Lyles-Crouch	187	59	32%
Cora Kelly	521	104	20%
Douglas MacArthur	550	189	34%
George Mason	305	103	34%
Maury	215	31	14%
Mt. Vernon	499	112	22%
John Adams	624	121	19%
Charles Barrett	226	68	30%
Patrick Henry	488	123	25%
James Polk	476	138	29%
William Ramsay	616	137	22%
Samuel W. Tucker	573	173	30%
Francis C. Hammond	1278	194	15%
George Washington	1007	140	14%
Minnie Howard	741	99	13%
T.C. Williams	1904	228	12%
STEP	68	2	3%

\*Response rate based on number of students per school. Assumed a census of students with populations provided by ACPS.

### Response Rate by School – Faculty Segment

School	# Out	# Returns	Response Rate*
T.C. Williams	268	68	25%
Francis C. Hammond	181	36	20%
Samuel W. Tucker	80	29	36%
Minnie Howard	98	28	29%
Jefferson-Houston	90	25	28%
John Adams	124	24	19%
Douglas MacArthur	66	23	35%
Mt. Vernon	87	23	26%
Charles Barrett	52	21	40%
Patrick Henry	77	18	23%
Cora Kelly	79	16	20%
STEP	21	14	67%
George Mason	50	13	26%
James Polk	65	11	17%
William Ramsay	78	11	14%
Lyles-Crouch	43	7	16%
Maury	54	1	2%
George Washington	154	1	1%
Northern Virginia Juvenile Detention Home	8	1	13%

\*Response rate based on number of faculty in school system. Assumed a census of faculty with populations provided by ACPS.

## APPENDIX

### Concern/Problem Experience – Family Segment By Grade Level

Concern or problem	% Overall	% Pre-K-			
		2nd grade	% 3rd-5th	% 6th-8th	% 9th-12
1 Teachers/staff/administration	39	31	41	39	45
2 Responding to my child's needs	32	28	32	30	37
3 Communication with parents/community	26	25	18	30	29
4 Discipline	22	20	20	30	17
5 Transportation	20	20	23	27	12
6 School buildings/grounds	18	17	17	23	14
7 Food/meals	18	22	21	17	15
8 Other	16	20	19	12	14

### Satisfaction with Action Taken by Type of Most Serious Concern/Problem – Family Segment

Concern or problem	% Respondents		
	Satisfied	Mollified	Dissatisfied
Discipline	40	49	11
School buildings/grounds	27	27	46
Food/meals	24	35	41
Other	22	52	27
Responding to my child's needs	19	52	30
Transportation	18	23	59
Communication with parents/community	17	72	11
Teachers/staff/administration	14	54	32

## APPENDIX

Topics Families Want to Learn More About (40% or more)	K-5	6-8	9-12
Helping my child with homework	✓		
Getting ready for college, including financial aid		✓	✓
Improving math skills	✓		
Improving reading skills	✓		
Experiencing career choices		✓	✓
Graduation requirements			✓

Ways Families Prefer to Find out about Programs/Activities	
Meeting at my child's school	64%
Pamphlets and brochures	57%
Web site	39%
Video programs	25%

Incentives that Encourage Family Attendance	
Advance notice	73%
Convenient time/day	72%
Topic is of interest	55%
Childcare provided	22%

## APPENDIX

### Ways of Receiving/Sharing Information - Family & Faculty Results Pre-K through Second Grades

Method	% Families		% Faculty	
	Used	First or second most effective	Used	First or second most effective
1 Weekly folders sent home with children	91	71	73	43
2 Notes/letters mailed home	67	35	89	42
3 Your child/student	64	8	64	3
4 School/PTA newsletters	56	20	55	2
5 Classroom visits	53	16	63	12
6 Telephone call	38	15	96	69
7 ACPS website	25	2	19	0
8 ACPS-TV station	22	1	22	1
9 E-mail	21	13	64	12
10 Student agendas	21	2	17	3
11 Voice mail/answering machine	16	2	76	1
12 The school's website	15	2	18	0
13 Grade-level class meetings	15	3	38	0
14 Parent workshops/training activities	12	1	38	4
15 Other	4	1	11	4
16 Information in the parent resource center	4	0	26	0
17 Homework hotline	3	0	0	0
18 Home visits	1	0	22	6

### Ways of Receiving/Sharing Information - Family & Faculty Results Third through Fifth Grades

Method	% Families		% Faculty	
	Used	First or second most effective	Used	First or second most effective
1 Weekly folders sent home with children	85	64	68	43
2 Your child/student	70	7	81	4
3 Notes/letters mailed home	68	34	82	21
4 School/PTA newsletters	54	18	60	0
5 Classroom visits	48	11	47	7
6 Telephone call	38	17	99	71
7 Student agendas	31	8	44	8
8 ACPS website	27	4	16	0
9 E-mail	26	19	65	17
10 ACPS-TV station	22	2	20	0
11 Grade-level class meetings	19	3	25	0
12 Voice mail/answering machine	17	2	71	4
13 The school's website	15	1	20	1
14 Parent workshops/training activities	11	1	22	1
15 Information in the parent resource center	6	1	18	0
16 Other	4	2	22	16
17 Homework hotline	4	0	5	0
18 Home visits	2	0	21	4

## APPENDIX

### Ways of Receiving/ Sharing Information - Family & Faculty Segments Sixth through Eighth Grades

Method	% Families		% Faculty	
	Used	First or second most effective	Used	First or second most effective
1 Notes/letters mailed home	73	48	78	17
2 Your child/student	69	11	69	0
3 School/PTA newsletters	49	19	42	3
4 Telephone call	38	22	100	75
5 Student agendas	36	10	72	25
6 E-mail	34	33	86	50
7 Weekly folders sent home with children	29	17	17	3
8 Classroom visits	29	8	40	3
9 ACPS website	24	6	11	0
10 Homework hotline	18	2	61	3
11 Voice mail/answering machine	16	3	83	0
12 Grade-level class meetings	16	6	28	3
13 The school's website	15	4	14	0
14 ACPS-TV station	15	1	3	0
15 Other	6	1	14	3
16 Parent workshops/training activities	5	1	8	3
17 Information in the parent resource center	4	1	3	0
18 Home visits	1	0	11	8

### Ways of Receiving/ Sharing Information - Family & Faculty Segments Ninth through Twelfth Grades

Method	% Families		% Faculty	
	Used	First or second most effective	Used	First or second most effective
1 Notes/letters mailed home	73	48	78	17
2 Your child/student	69	11	69	0
3 School/PTA newsletters	49	19	42	3
4 Telephone call	38	22	100	75
5 Student agendas	36	10	72	25
6 E-mail	34	33	86	50
7 Weekly folders sent home with children	29	17	17	3
8 Classroom visits	29	8	40	3
9 ACPS website	24	6	11	0
10 Homework hotline	18	2	61	3
11 Voice mail/answering machine	16	3	83	0
12 Grade-level class meetings	16	6	28	3
13 The school's website	15	4	14	0
14 ACPS-TV station	15	1	3	0
15 Other	6	1	14	3
16 Parent workshops/training activities	5	1	8	3
17 Information in the parent resource center	4	1	3	0
18 Home visits	1	0	11	8

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The four-page survey instrument was designed by Scott Broetzmann, president of Customer Care Measurement & Consulting, and an ACPS parent; Anne T. Henderson, a national expert on parent and family involvement, and an ACPS graduate; Karen Parker Thompson, ACPS family involvement and community resources coordinator; and Pam Miller, ACPS retired teacher. The focus groups were facilitated by Kathy Leslie and Sylvia Soholt of KSA-Plus Communications.

**Scott M. Broetzmann** has provided a broad range of customer care services to hundreds of companies in many major industries around the world. In 2002, Scott co-founded Customer Care Measurement & Consulting and serves as its president. His customer care roots were established through his work for the Council of Better Business Bureau's Alternative Dispute Resolution Division. Scott assisted in the development of BBB Care, the Better Business Bureau's national customer care program. Scott joined Technical Assistance Research Programs (TARP) in 1990 and spent nearly 12 years building a customer care practice founded on significant innovations in customer care assessment and measurement methodologies. Scott was a senior consultant, vice president of Measurement, and chief operating officer during his tenure with TARP. Scott also has hands-on expertise assisting companies with their international customer care challenges, having served as TARP Europe's Head of Consulting (1995) and Managing Director (1998-2000). Scott graduated from the University of Wisconsin, Madison in 1982, with a B.A. in Psychology and Communication Arts.

**Anne Henderson** is a Washington, D.C. based Education Policy Consultant for the Institute for Education and Social Policy at New York University. Anne's work is focused on engaging families to improve student achievement, particularly among students in diverse and low-income communities. She is a consultant to state and national organizations, foundations, school districts, and parent and community groups.

Over the past 20 years, she has written and co-authored numerous articles, reports, informational materials and books. These include the *Evidence* series, which reviews the research on the relationship between parent involvement and student achievement. The latest edition, written with Karen L. Mapp, is *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, published by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory in 2002. *Urgent Message: Families Crucial to School Reform* (1997), *Urgent Message for Parents* (1999), *Parents Are Powerful* (1996), and the classic, *Beyond the Bake Sale: An Educators Guide to Working with Parents* (1986) are available from the Center for Law and Education. Anne has a bachelor's degree from Oberlin College, and a master's degree in political science from Eagleton Institute at Rutgers University.

**KSA-Plus Communications** is based in the Washington, D.C. area with offices around the country. It is a leading firm in communicating the complexities of education reform in clear language and powerful images and in helping education and community leaders build the public support necessary for high-achieving schools. KSA-Plus provides strategic communications and marketing advice, products and services to education, nonprofit and business clients. KSA-Plus core services include: Communications Consulting, Creative Services, Publications Management, Web Consulting, Workshops and Presentations, Public Opinion Research, School Reports, Media Services, and Education Communication Solutions.