

Chapter 5

Interdistrict Magnet School Teachers and Professional Staff

Introduction

Chapter 5 summarizes the results from a survey the CSDE administered to the teachers in the state's interdistrict magnet schools and magnet programs in spring 2002, which was initially described in the first chapter of this report. Some survey data has already been incorporated into Chapter 2, which provided information about the diversity of the teachers who work in Connecticut's interdistrict magnet schools and magnet programs, and Chapters 3 and 4, which examined magnet school and program teachers' perceptions of their schools' academic standards and the quality of the academic programs their schools offered.

This chapter begins with demographic and educational characteristics of interdistrict magnet school and program teachers, comparing them to their counterparts working in public schools across the state. As in previous chapters, 'teacher' refers to all certified, professional staff working in interdistrict magnet schools who responded to the survey. Summaries of survey responses follow, examining teachers' perceptions of school climate and their professional environment, school leadership, the integration of the school's mission and theme with its instructional program, and the adequacy of resources supporting the school's academic program, all factors associated with job satisfaction or dissatisfaction. It finishes with summaries of responses to statements about job satisfaction, and concerns magnet professionals expressed about their schools in response to an open-ended question on the survey.

Understanding teachers' perceptions of their work environment and their satisfaction with particular elements of it is important. Teachers who are satisfied with many aspects of their work are likely to be more effective working with students than those who are not, and less likely to leave the schools in which they work or the teaching profession (N.C.E.S, 1997). Recent national data indicate that job satisfaction, in general, has declined in the United States in recent years, from 59 percent satisfied in 1995 to 51 percent in 2002 (Conference Board, 2002). A national study of job satisfaction among public school teachers in 1993-94 concluded that 32 percent had a high level of satisfaction with their work. The proportion of highly satisfied teachers differed by school level with larger proportions of elementary teachers (36%) highly satisfied than secondary teachers (28%). Regardless of school level, working conditions in schools were found to be directly related to job satisfaction (N.C.E.S., 1997).

Characteristics of Magnet School Teachers and Professional Staff Members

Table 5.1 summarizes the characteristics of interdistrict magnet school teachers, disaggregated by the four school types: elementary, middle and high schools, and half-day magnet programs. Five hundred fifteen interdistrict magnet school and magnet program teachers and professional staff members responded for a response rate of 72 percent. Of the respondents, 45 percent were from elementary schools, 16 percent from middle schools, 23 percent from high schools, and 16 percent from half-day magnet programs or schools-within-schools.

Table 5.1: Magnet School Teacher Characteristics (Percentages) by School Type

	Elem	Mid	High	Pgm	Total
Respondents' Sex					
Female	86	62	63	47	71
Male	14	38	37	53	29
Race					
Native American	1	0	0	1	0
Asian American	1	3	3	4	2
Black	4	25	15	3	10
White	88	62	71	84	79
Hispanic	4	4	4	1	4
Multiracial	2	6	7	7	5
Highest Education Level					
Bachelor's degree	18	38	29	20	24
Master's degree	60	47	45	44	52
6 th Year degree	17	10	15	19	16
Ed. D. or Ph. D.	1	1	5	4	2
Other Advanced degree	4	4	6	13	6
Years of Teaching Experience					
0	6	10	9	3	7
1-2	11	16	11	13	12
3-4	15	12	17	7	14
5-6	15	9	11	13	13
7 or more	53	53	52	64	54
Years of Magnet School Teaching Experience					
0	29	28	22	26	27
1-2	28	30	22	31	27
3-4	18	18	17	13	17
5-6	14	4	13	7	11
7 or more	11	20	26	23	18
Full or Part Time					
Full	93	98	95	31	84
Part	7	2	5	69	16
Assignment					
Administrator	4	4	2	5	4
Academic Teacher	57	50	63	34	53
Support Staff	12	11	7	5	10
Support Teacher	13	9	10	3	10
Special Teacher	12	18	14	52	20
Other	2	8	4	1	3

The proportion of magnet school educators who are female, 71 percent, is in line with the state average of 73 percent and like at the state level, teachers at the elementary interdistrict magnet (86%) school are more likely to be female than teachers in the magnet middle (62%) and high (63%) schools, or in the programs (47%). The racial and ethnic composition of the magnet schools' professional staff varies considerably by school level. Overall, about 79 percent of the magnet respondents are white, compared with a statewide average of 93 percent. While still more diverse than public schools across the state, magnet elementary schools (88%) employ larger proportions of white staff members than magnet middle schools (62%), high schools (71%) or magnet programs (84%).

Seventy-six percent of magnet school teachers, administrators, and other professional staff members hold at least a master's degree, compared with 78 percent statewide. Larger proportions of magnet elementary (82%) and magnet program professionals (80%) earned at least a master's degree, compared with staff members at magnet middle (62%) and high (71%) school levels.

Magnet school educators were asked to provide information about their total number of years of teaching experience, and number of years of magnet school experience. The proportion of interdistrict magnet school educators (7%) who had no experience prior to the 2001-02 school year is consistent with the recent annual statewide novice teacher average of about seven percent. More than half of the educators in each type of school setting have at least seven years of prior experience. Magnet middle (10%) and high school (9%) educators are more likely to employ novice teachers than magnet elementary (6%) schools or magnet

programs (3%). Overall, 27 percent of the educators had no magnet school experience prior to the 2001-02 school year. The difference between the proportions of educators with no teaching experience and no magnet school experience is primarily the result of opening a new magnet school at the beginning of the 2001-02 school year.

The proportion of full time and part time teachers differs considerably between interdistrict magnet schools and half-day interdistrict magnet programs. About five percent of the teachers in the magnet elementary, middle, and high schools are part time, compared with 16 percent of the staff of half-day magnet programs. Statewide about five percent of the continuing educators are part time, annually, compared with about 15 percent of the newly hired educators. Administrators account for four percent of magnet schools' professional staff members and about six percent of the public school staff across the state. This does not necessarily suggest that interdistrict magnet schools and magnet programs are less administratively top-heavy than other public schools in the state, because only school-level personnel were surveyed. District-level administrators and administrators from the state's RESCs also provide administrative services to most of the interdistrict magnet schools and programs.

School Climate and Professional Environment

School climate is the social atmosphere in which teaching and learning take place. The effective schools literature frequently has cited school climate as one of the critical variables related to student achievement (Cruickshank, 1990; Bliss et al., 1991). School climate refers not only to the safety, discipline, and order in schools, but also to the

relationships that are established within and beyond the classroom. Several factors directly relate school climate to school effectiveness. These include a shared sense of mission within the school community, collaborative and cooperative efforts directed toward advancing the mission, parental involvement, and teacher satisfaction (Rosenholtz, 1991; Bryk, Lee, and Holland, 1993).

Interdistrict magnet school teachers and professional staff were asked to respond to five statements about the climate in their schools, using a five point scale from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘undecided’ to ‘strongly agree.’ For the purpose of the following discussions, the data are aggregated and percentages are provided for three categories: disagree (strongly disagree and disagree), undecided, and agree (strongly agree and agree). Results are broken out by four school groups: elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, and magnet programs.

Figure 5.1 summarizes the educators’ responses to the statement, ‘The school provides a safe and secure environment that fosters student learning.’

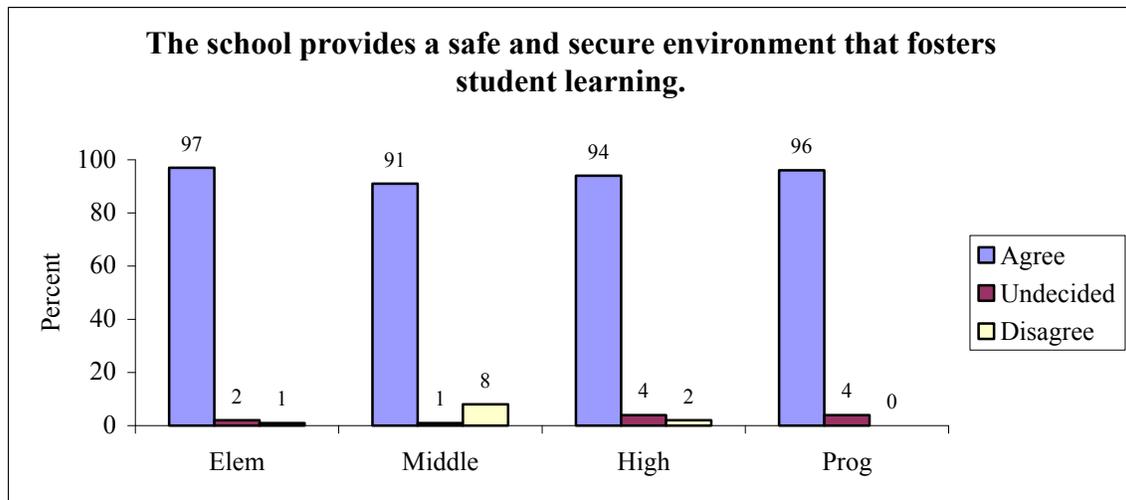


Figure 5.1: Teacher Responses to ‘The school provides a safe and secure environment that fosters student learning.’

There is a consistently high level of agreement with at least 91 percent of the teachers in each school group agreeing. Eight percent or less of each school group disagree with the statement that their schools provide safe, secure environments that promote teaching and learning.

The second and third statements about school climate relate to the behavior standards schools have established and the extent to which students adhere to those standards.

Figure 5.2 presents the responses to the statement ‘The school has appropriate standards for proper student behavior.’ Eighty-eight percent of the middle school and half-day magnet program educators agree with the statement compared with 81 percent of the elementary and 74 percent of the high school educators. The level of disagreement is relatively low, with no more than 14 percent of the teachers disagreeing, while 12 percent or less are undecided about their school’s standards for behavior.

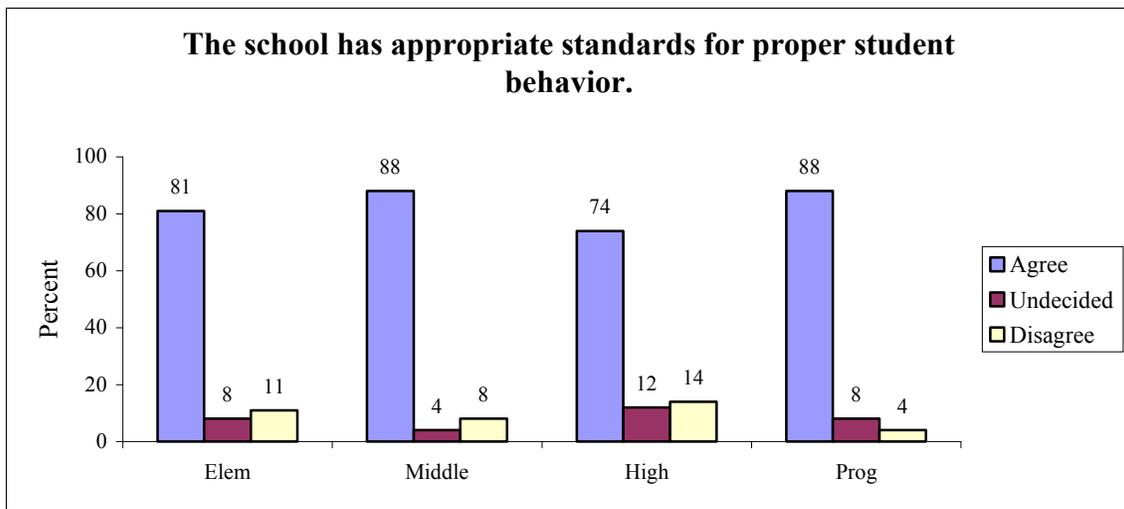


Figure 5.2: Teacher Responses to ‘The school has appropriate standards for proper student behavior.’

Figure 5.3 summarizes teacher responses to the statement, ‘Most students follow the behavior standards the school has set.’ Higher proportions of half-day magnet program

(88%) and elementary (80%) teachers agree with the statement, compared with lower proportions of magnet high school (72%) and magnet middle school (70%) teachers. Educators in magnet middle schools (17%) and high schools (16%) report the highest level of disagreement with the statement, while those in elementary schools (8%) and magnet programs (4%) disagree in much lower proportions.

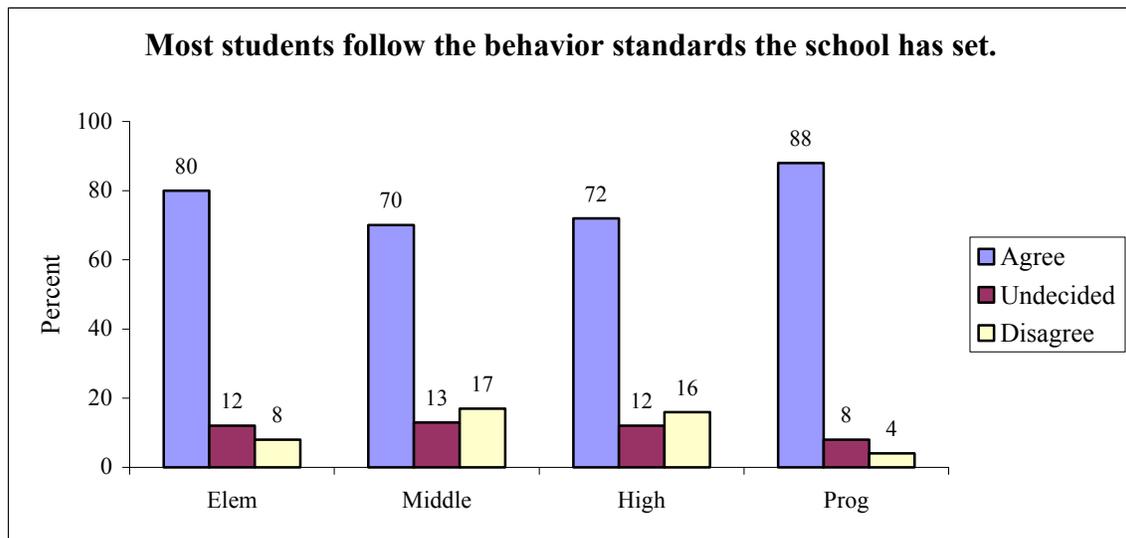


Figure 5.3: Teacher Responses to ‘Most students follow the behavior standards the school has set.’

Magnet school and program teachers responded to two additional statements about school climate relating to respect between teachers and students and among students in their schools. Figure 5.4 summarizes the responses to ‘There is mutual respect between teachers and students in the school.’ Agreement is highest among half-day magnet program teachers (88%), similar for elementary (83%) and high school (81%) teachers, and lowest among middle school (73%) teachers. Disagreement is highest among middle school teachers, with 16 percent disagreeing, and somewhat lower for elementary (8%), high school (7%) and half-day magnet program (1%) teachers.

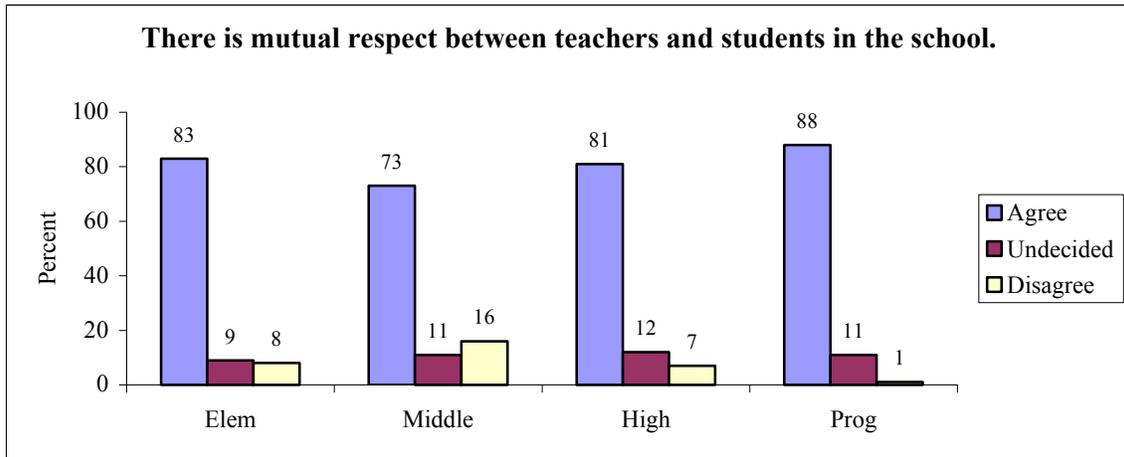


Figure 5.4: Teacher Responses to ‘There is mutual respect between teachers and students in the school.’

Figure 5.5 presents the distribution of educators’ responses to the statement ‘There is mutual respect among students in the school.’ There is a high level of agreement among half-day magnet program professionals that there is mutual respect among students in their programs, with 90 percent agreeing with the statement, while none disagree.

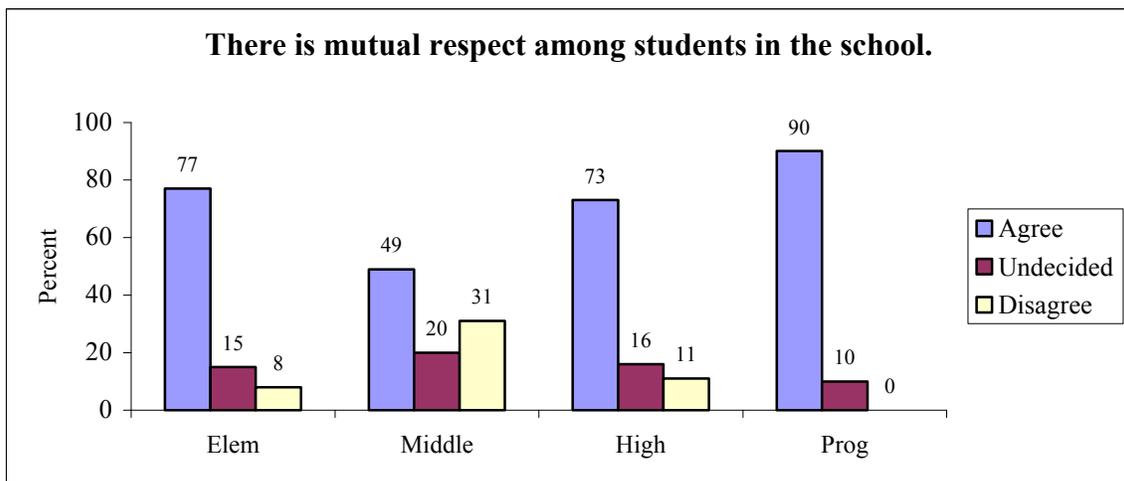


Figure 5.5: Teacher Responses to ‘There is mutual respect among students in the school.’

About three-fourths of the elementary (77%) and high school (73%) teachers agree, while only about half (49%) of the middle school teachers agree. The highest level of

disagreement is among middle school teachers, where 31 percent disagree with the statement, while only 11 percent of the high school and eight percent of the elementary teachers disagree.

An elementary magnet school teacher summed up her feelings about the climate of her interdistrict magnet school in the following manner: “If I were a child I would want to attend this school. It is a school where teachers and children feel safe being themselves. ... This is a community based on mutual respect and tolerance. It’s not perfect but it’s closer than I’ve ever seen in any school setting. I feel children learn best in this type of environment, where their individual needs are taken into considerations and their natural assets are fostered. I believe that the children in this school will be able to enter the world as adults and be authentic and positive contributors to their communities and to humanity in general.”

In addition, magnet school teachers were asked to respond to two statements about the professional environment in their schools:

The school promotes educational innovation. (Innovation)

Teachers collaborate on curricular and instructional issues. (Collaboration)

Figure 5.6 identifies the percentage of teachers in the four school groups who agree with each statement. There is a high degree of agreement with each statement among teachers across the school groups with at least 90 percent of the elementary, middle, and magnet program teachers agreeing that their schools foster innovation and that teachers in their schools collaborate on educational issues. For magnet high schools, which tend to be more departmentalized than elementary and middle schools, slightly lower percentage of

the teachers, 87 percent, agree that their school foster innovation, while 85 agree that staff members collaborate on curricular and instructional issues.

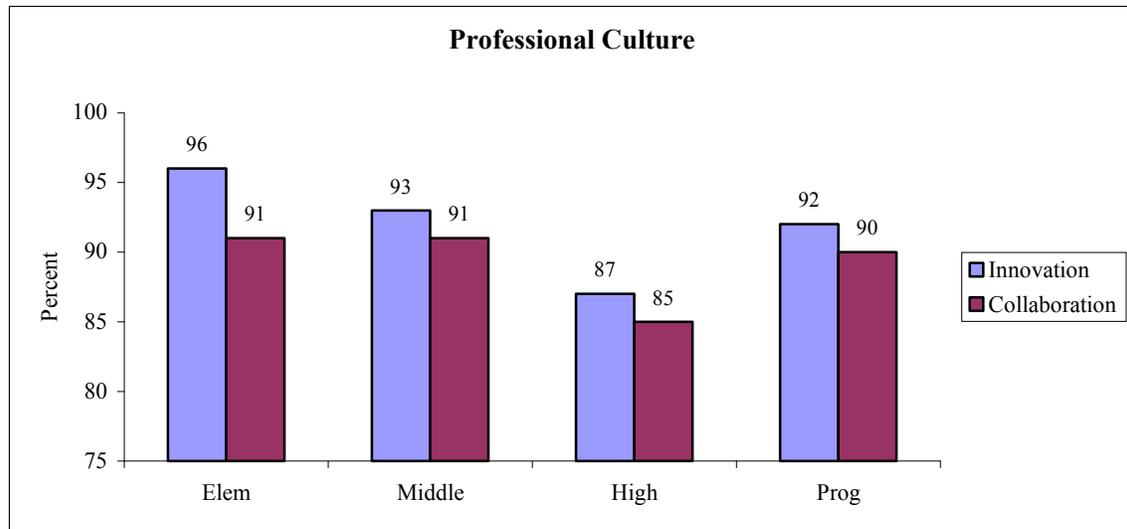


Figure 5.6: Comparison of the Percentages of Magnet School Teachers Agreeing With Statements About the Professional Culture of Their Schools

Magnet school and program teachers were asked to respond to two general statements about instruction and assessment in their schools:

Teachers use a variety of strategies to promote active learning. (Instruction)

Teachers use a variety of measures to assess student learning. (Assessment)

Figure 5.7 summarizes teachers' responses for the four school groups. There is a high level of agreement across all school groups with both statements. At least 89 percent agree that teachers use varied instructional strategies in their classrooms directed at active learning, while at least 85 percent of each school group agree that teachers use a variety of assessment tools to measure student learning.

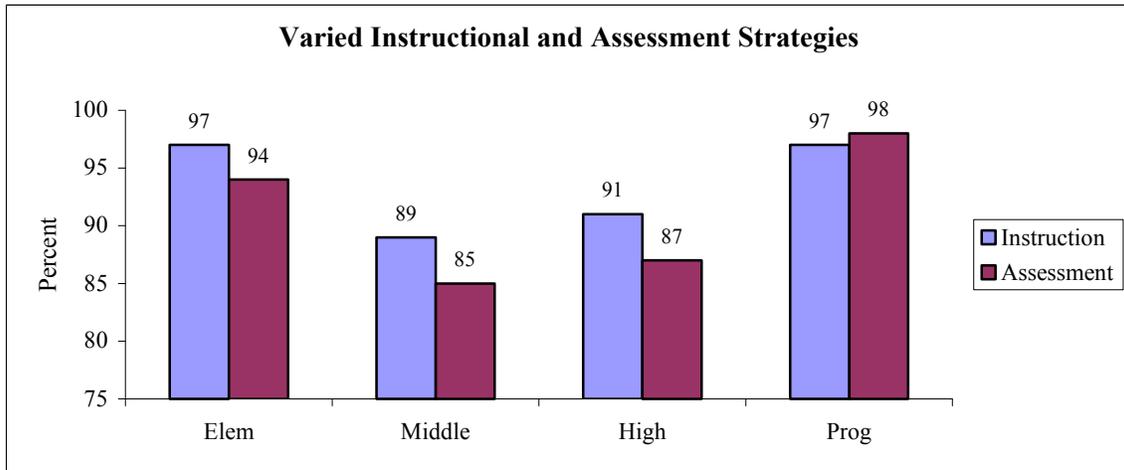


Figure 5.7: Teacher Responses to Statements About Instruction and Assessment

The teacher survey included one statement about accountability: ‘Teachers are accountable for students’ academic achievement.’ Figure 5.8 summarizes teachers’ responses. Overall, the majority of teachers agree with the statement with the highest level of agreement among magnet middle (84%) and elementary (83%) school teachers. For magnet high school and program teachers the percentages agreeing with the statement is somewhat lower, 73 and 71 percent, respectively.

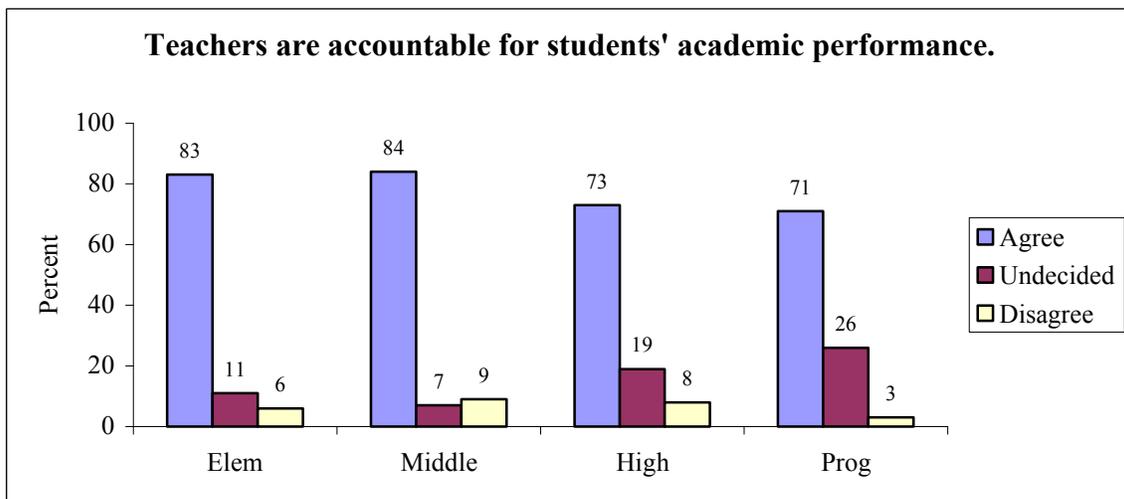


Figure 5.7: Teacher Responses to ‘Teachers are accountable for students’ academic achievement.’

School Leadership

Effective school leadership is an essential characteristic of schools where students perform at high levels. Effective school principals are adept managers and, more importantly, knowledgeable instructional leaders who can keep their schools focused on teaching and learning. Leadership attributes also contribute to the school’s climate and to the quality of the professional environment in which teachers work.

Interdistrict magnet school staff members responded to five statements about the leadership in their schools. Figure 5.9 summarizes the responses to the statement, ‘The principal is a knowledgeable, effective instructional leader.’ Overall, about 90 percent of the professional staff of the state’s interdistrict magnet schools agree with the statement, with the highest proportion of agreement among magnet middle school (95%) and magnet program (94%) teachers, and marginally lower proportions of teachers agreeing at the elementary (89%) and high school (84%) levels. Only five percent or less of the elementary, middle, and magnet program staff disagree, while ten percent of the high school staff disagree.

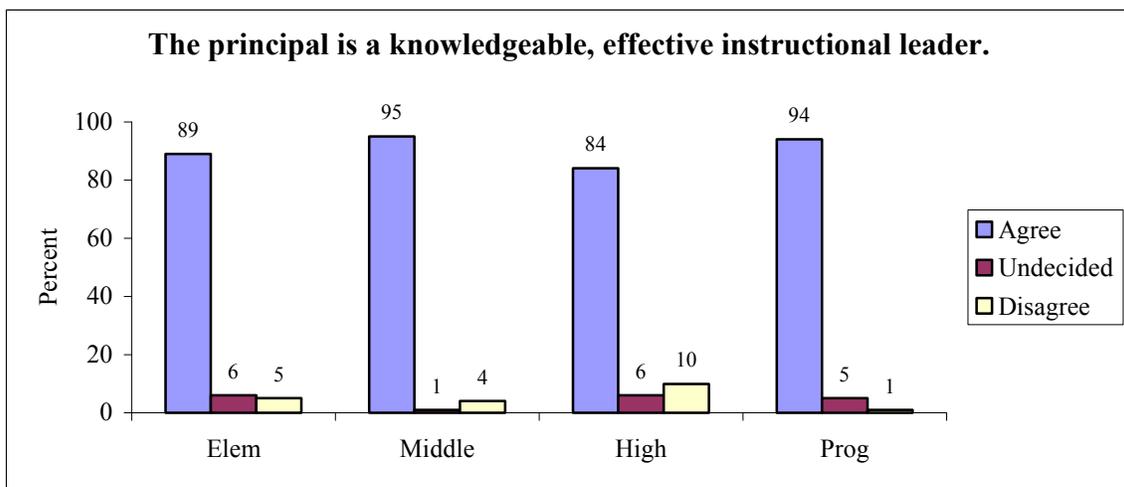


Figure 5.9: Teacher Responses to ‘The principal is a knowledgeable, effective instructional leader.’

Figure 5.10 presents the percentages of teachers in each school group who agree with each of the following statements about particular characteristics of their principal’s leadership style:

The principal encourages teachers to participate in instructional decision-making.

(Participation)

There is open communication between the principal and teachers. (Communication)

The principal is available to teachers when they need to discuss an issue.

(Availability)

Overall, there is a high level of agreement across schools that magnet school principals encourage teachers in their schools to participate in decisions-making related to their school’s instructional programs; 97 percent of the elementary, 94 percent of the middle, 90 percent of the magnet program, and 86 percent of the high school teachers agree.

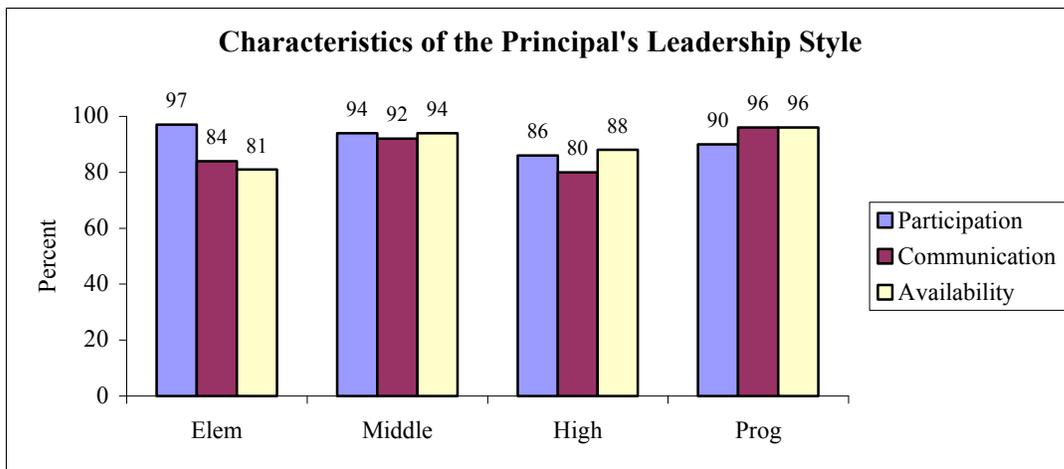


Figure 5.10: Comparison of the Percentages of Magnet School Teachers Agreeing with Statements About Characteristics of Their Principal’s Leadership Style

The majority of magnet school and magnet program teachers also agree that there is open communication between the principal and teachers in their schools, with the highest level

of agreement among magnet program (96%) and middle school (92%) teachers and slightly lower levels of agreement among elementary (84%) and high school (80%) teachers. Additionally, the majority of magnet school and program teachers concur that their principal is available to discuss issues when teachers need their advice, with 96 percent of the magnet program, 94 percent of the middle school, 88 percent of the high school, and 81 percent of the elementary school staff agreeing with the statement.

A magnet middle school teacher described the effectiveness of the school’s principal: “Having joined this school at its inception, I continue to be increasingly motivated, engaged, challenged and supported as a professional educator. Our principal knows well how to “grow” teachers and provides what we need to focus only on educating students.”

Many interdistrict magnet schools have formal school leaders working in roles in addition to the principal. Figure 5.11 summarizes the responses to the statement, ‘Other school leaders, such as assistant principals, effectively support the professional staff and school mission.’

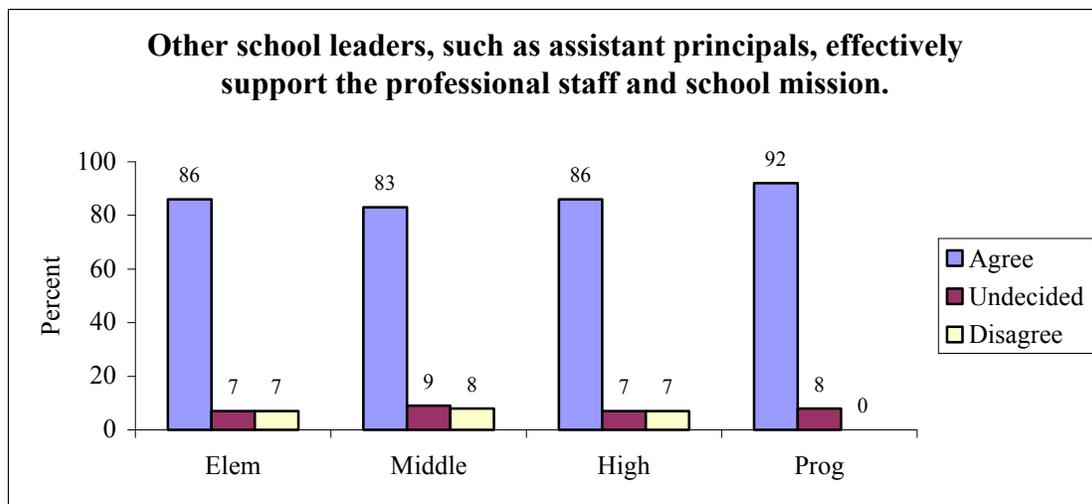


Figure 5.11: Teacher Responses to ‘Other school leaders, such as assistant principals, effectively support the professional staff and school mission.’

Across all types of magnet schools, at least 83 percent of the staff members agree with the statement, while at most eight percent disagree.

School Mission and Theme

The Connecticut statutes defining the purposes of interdistrict magnet schools indicate that magnet schools ‘must offer a special and high quality program.’ The school’s mission defines each magnet school and magnet school program’s unique curricular and pedagogical focus. Interdistrict magnet schools have developed mission statements that describe their school’s educational philosophy, beliefs about teaching and learning, and shared expectations about student achievement. The expectations for student academic achievement and social development are based on the mission, which drive the school’s curriculum, instruction, and professional development decisions.

Figure 5.12 presents a summary of magnet school and program teachers’ responses to the statement, ‘Teachers and administrators share a common mission for the school.’ Across the four magnet school groups the level of agreement is high among the schools’ professionals that teachers and administrators share a common mission for their schools, with 93 percent of the middle school, 92 percent of the magnet program, 91 percent of the elementary, and 83 percent of the high school staff members agreeing with the statement. High schools had the highest level of disagreement among the school groups, 12 percent, while elementary schools had the highest proportion of undecided educators, six percent.

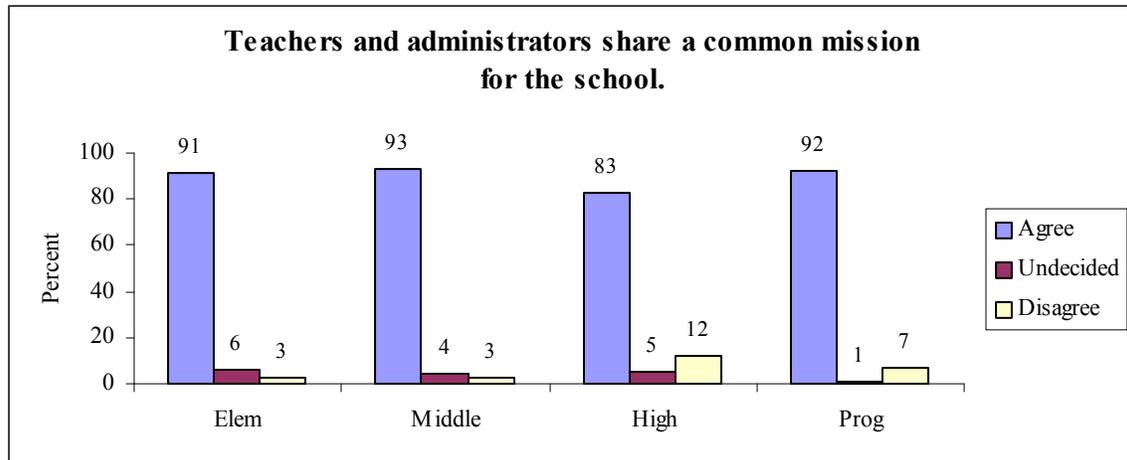


Figure 5.12: Teacher Responses to ‘Teachers and administrators share a common mission for the school.’

Figures 5.13 through 5.15 summarize magnet school teachers’ responses to statements relating their schools’ mission and theme to the academic program, curriculum, and professional development. There is a consistently high agreement among the teachers across interdistrict magnet schools and magnet programs that the mission and theme of the school is central to their academic decisions.

In elementary magnet schools, 87 percent of the professional staff agree that the theme and mission are the foundation of their school’s academic program, while 86 percent agree that the school’s curriculum incorporates the theme and mission, and 89 percent agree that the professional development opportunities provided support the theme and mission. There is little disagreement among elementary teachers with any of the three statements, with four percent or less disagreeing with each statement.

For interdistrict middle magnet schools, there is a consistently high level of agreement with each three statements among teachers, with between 93 and 94 percent of the professional staff agreeing with each statement. In contrast, five percent or less of the staff disagree with any one of the statements.

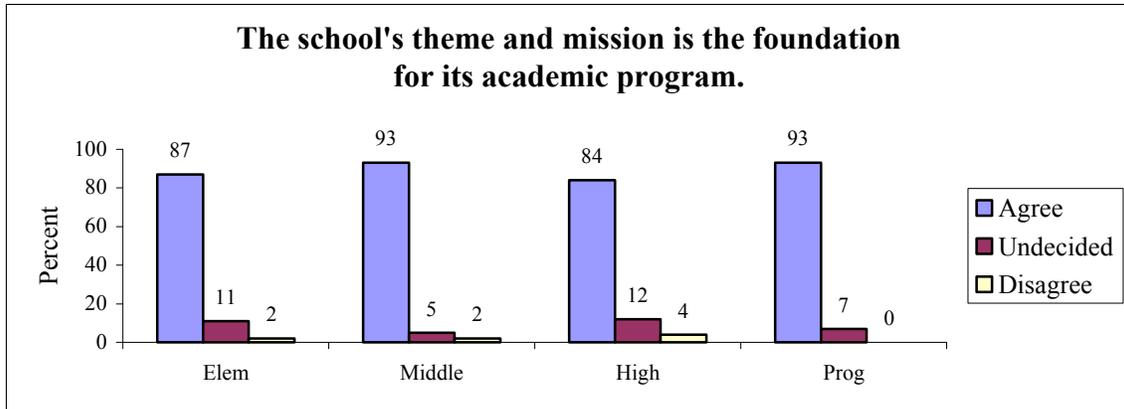


Figure 5.13: Teacher Responses to ‘The school’s theme and mission is the foundation for its academic program.’

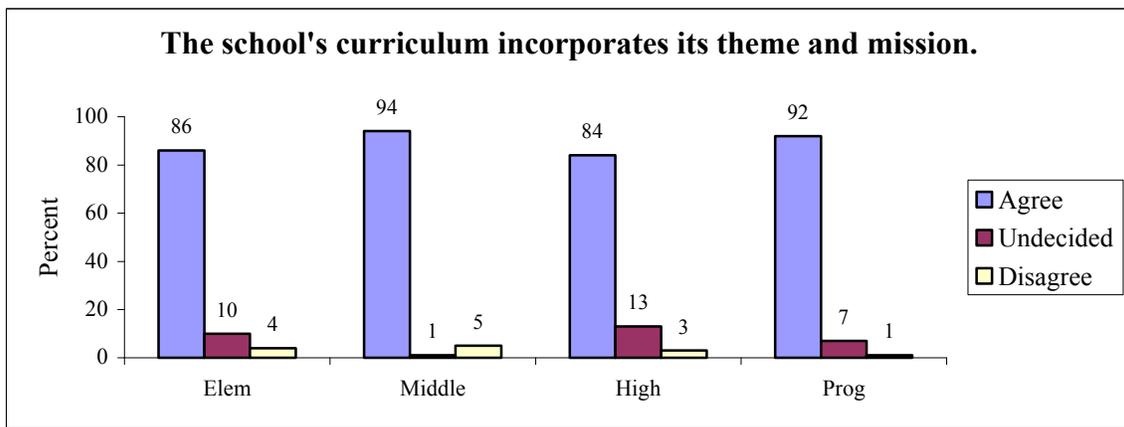


Figure 5.14: Teacher Responses to ‘The school’s curriculum incorporates its theme and mission.’

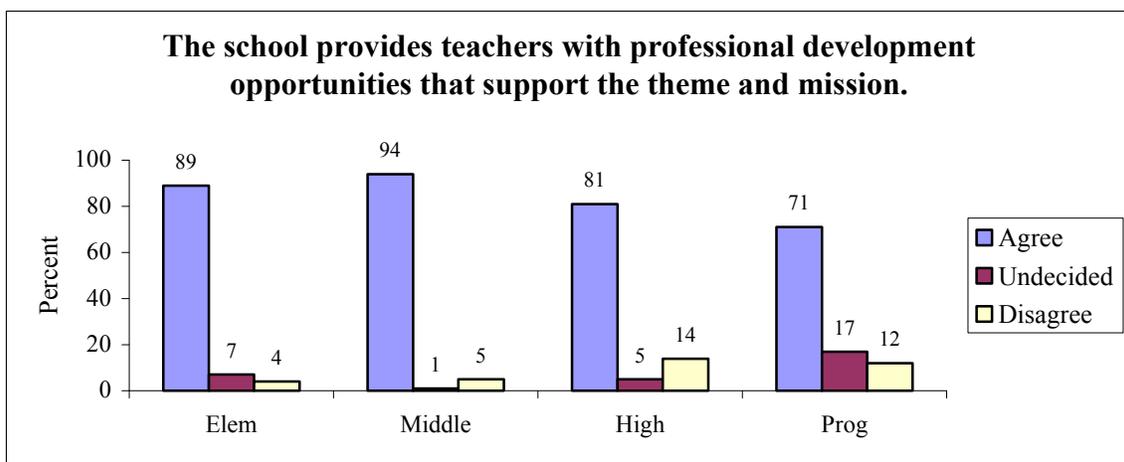


Figure 5.15: Teacher Responses to ‘The school provides teachers with professional development opportunities that support the theme and mission.’

The level of agreement among magnet high school teachers is similar to that of magnet elementary staff members, with 84 percent agreeing that the theme and mission are the foundation of their school's academic program, 84 percent agreeing that the school's curriculum incorporates the theme and mission, and 81 percent agreeing that the professional development opportunities supports the theme and mission. Magnet high school teachers register somewhat higher levels of disagreement (14%) than elementary or middle school staff members about the alignment of professional development opportunities with their school's theme and mission.

Large proportions of teachers working in half-day magnet programs agree with the first two statements that their program's theme and mission were central to the academic program (93%) and incorporated into the curriculum (92%), with little or no disagreement. A somewhat smaller proportion, 71 percent agree that professional development supports the mission, while 12 percent do not agree.

Interdistrict magnet school and magnet program teachers were asked to respond to the statement, 'Most parents are committed to the school and its mission.' Figure 5.16 summarizes their responses. Elementary (80%) and half-day magnet program (72%) teachers agree in larger proportions than middle school (59%) and high school (48%) teachers. There are relatively low levels of disagreement among elementary (9%) and magnet program (5%) teachers that parents are committed to the school's mission, compared with middle (15%) and high school (22%) teachers. Relatively large proportions of magnet program (23%), middle (26%), and high (30%) school teachers are undecided about parental commitment, compared with elementary (11%) teachers.

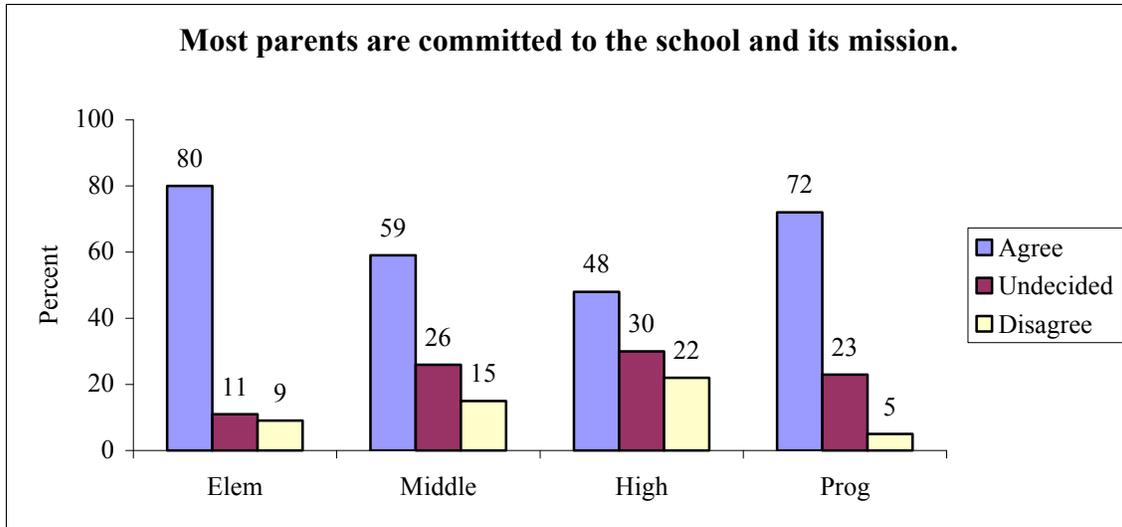


Figure 5.16: Teacher Responses to ‘Most parents are committed to the school and its mission.’

Resources Supporting the Academic Program

Human and material resources support the delivery of effective instructional programs designed to improve student learning and achieve magnet schools’ missions. Interdistrict magnet school teachers and certified staff members were asked to respond to eight statements about the adequacy of resources that are available in their schools.

The first two statements were directed at the human resources. Figure 5.17 illustrates teachers’ responses to the statement, ‘Classes are small enough so teachers can provide individual attention to students who need it.’ There is considerable variability across the school groups in responses about class size. Eighty-four percent of the magnet program educators agree that classes are sufficiently small so teachers can attend to the individual needs of students, compared with 72 percent of the elementary, 69 percent of the middle, and only 55 percent of the high school teachers. Compared with other survey statements, relatively large proportions of magnet school teachers disagree with this statement, with 31 percent the high school, 22 percent of the middle school, and 18 percent of the

elementary teachers disagreeing. Larger proportions of high school teachers (14%) were undecided about the adequacy of class size in their schools than teachers in the other school groups.

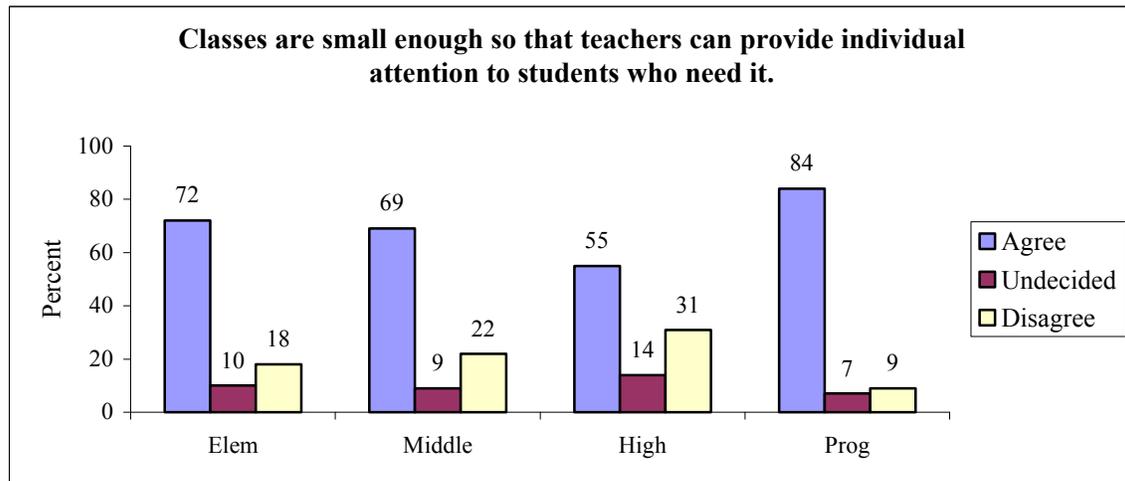


Figure 5.17: Teacher Responses to ‘Classes are small enough so teachers can provide individual attention to students who need it.’

Adequate support services are essential in order to insure that schools provide all students opportunities to achieve academically and develop socially. Figure 5.18 summarizes the responses to the statement, ‘Support services are adequate for students with special needs.’ The majority of teachers in each school group agree that their schools provide adequate support services, with 73 percent of the middle school, 60 percent of the high school, 58 percent of the elementary school, and 51 percent of the magnet program staff members agreeing. Again, relatively large proportions of magnet school professionals do not believe support services are adequate to address the special needs of all students, particularly at the elementary (26%) and high school (22%) levels.

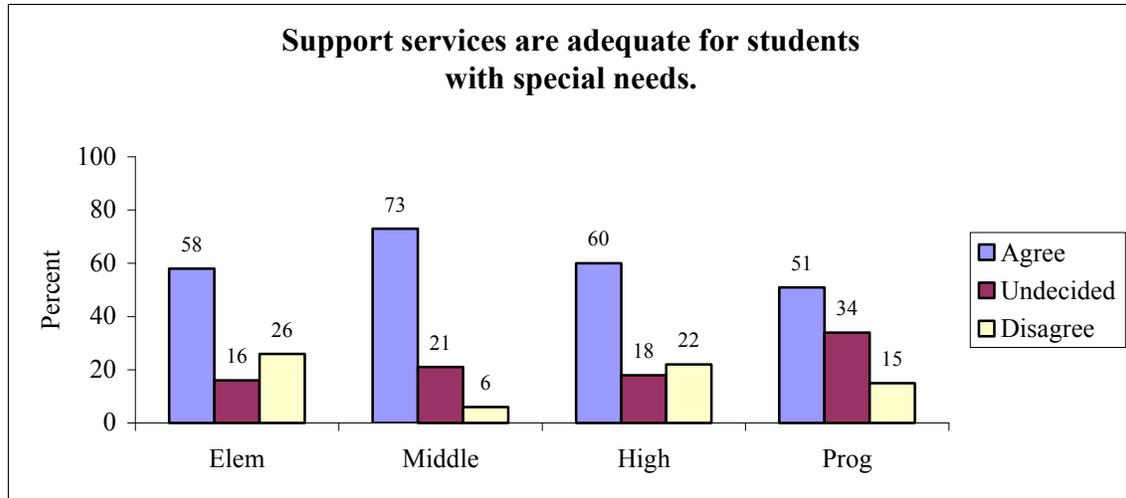


Figure 5.18: Teacher Responses to ‘Support services are adequate for students with special needs.’

Figure 5.19 illustrates the proportions of magnet school educators agreeing with the following three statements about their schools material resources:

The facility is well suited for the school’s academic program. (Facilities)

Textbooks and instructional materials are current. (Textbooks)

Sufficient instructional resources are available to support our program. (Resources)

The majority of educators in the four school groups agree with each of the three statements. The highest level of agreement is among magnet middle teachers where 95 percent believe their schools’ facilities suit their school’s academic programs, 91 percent acknowledge that textbooks and materials are current and 90 percent agree that sufficient resources are available. About three-fourths of the elementary and magnet program teachers, and about two-thirds of the high school teachers, agree with each of the three statements.

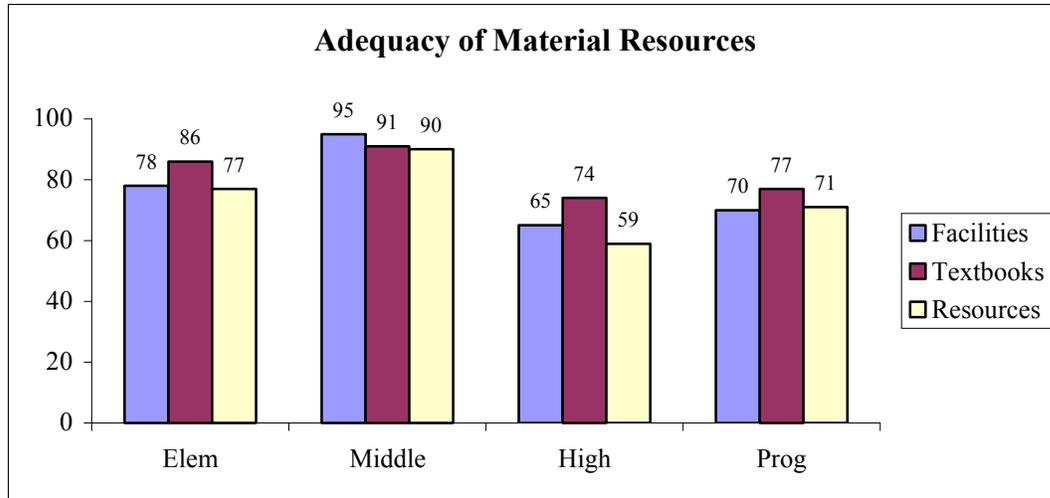


Figure 5.19: Comparison of the Percentages of Teachers Agreeing with Statements About the Adequacy of Material Resources in Their Schools

The survey contained two statements about the technology resources available in their magnet schools:

Teachers have access to computers for instructional and managerial activities.

(Computers)

Technology is available to support the school's educational program. (Technology)

Figure 5.20 illustrates the percentage of teachers and professional staff members agreeing with each statement. There is a high level of agreement across all schools about the adequacy of computers and technology in their schools. All magnet middle school teachers agree with both statements. In addition, 90 percent of the elementary, 86 percent of the high school, and 74 percent of the magnet program educators agree that teachers have access to computers for instructional and managerial purposes, while 83 percent of the elementary and high school professional staff members, and 78 percent of the magnet program staff agree that technology is available in their schools to support the educational program.

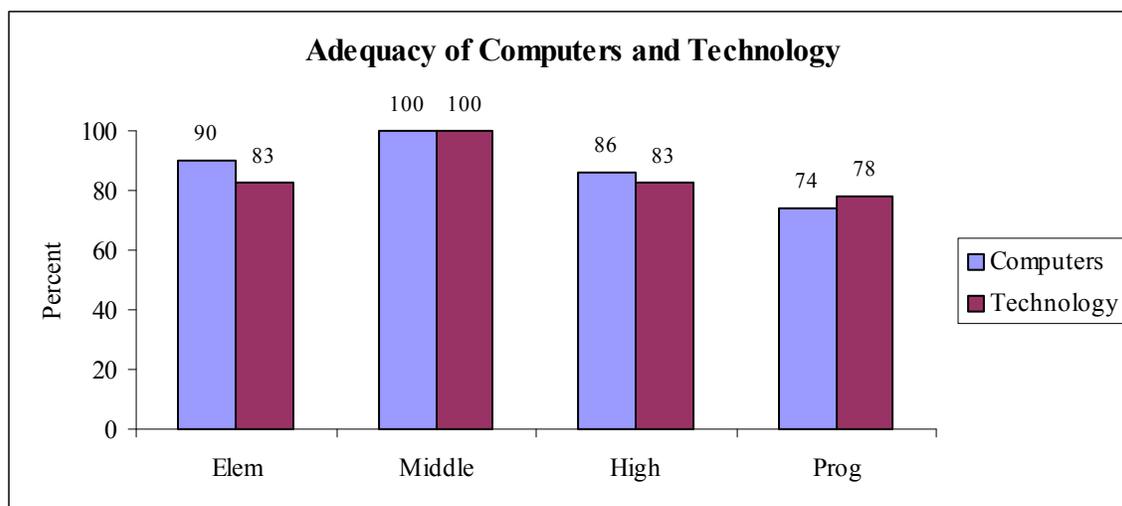


Figure 5.20: Comparison of the Percentages of Teaches Agreeing with Statements About Computers and Technology

Job Satisfaction

Teachers' job satisfaction is an affective reaction to their individual work circumstances. It is the collective feeling each teacher has about the multiple facets of the work they do. Intrinsic factors such as interest in working with children, making a social difference, or working with other professionals, and extrinsic factors such as adequacy of resources, security and compensation, contribute to each individual's sense of job satisfaction. Job satisfaction is a critical factor associated with teaching quality and retention, which in turn affect student academic achievement.

Magnet school and program teachers were asked to respond to two statements about job satisfaction. Figure 5.21 summarizes their responses to the first statement, 'I am satisfied with my position in this magnet school.' Overall, 92 percent of the magnet school and magnet program teachers agree that they are satisfied with their positions, and of those agreeing, 54 percent strongly agreed. The percentage agreeing is consistently high regardless of school group with 94 percent of the middle, 93 percent of the

elementary, 92 percent of the half-day magnet program, and 91 percent of the high school teachers agreeing. Across all four types of school staffs, at most four percent disagree with the statement.

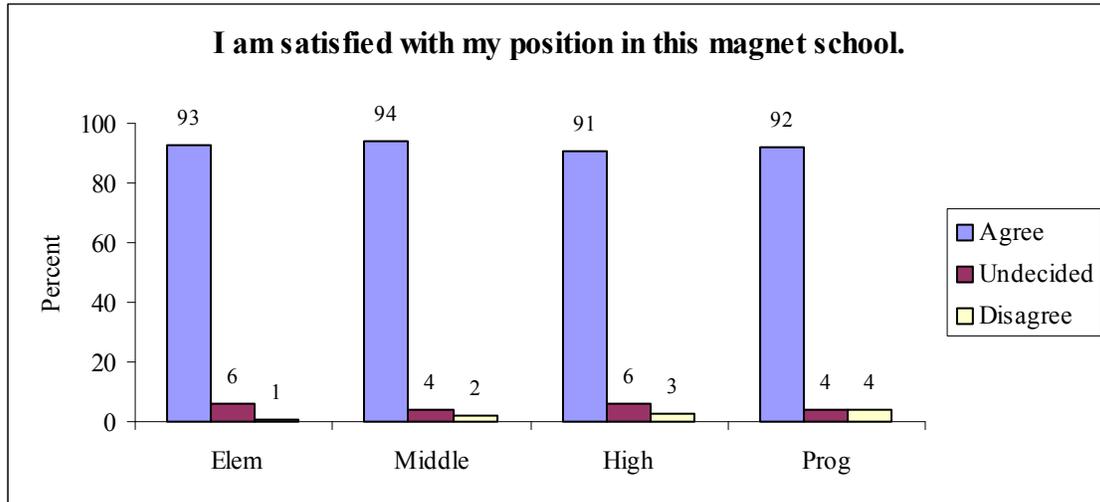


Figure 5.21: Teacher Responses to ‘I am satisfied with my position in this magnet school.’

Figure 5.22 summarizes teachers’ and responses to the second job satisfaction statement: ‘I am satisfied with the operation of this school.’

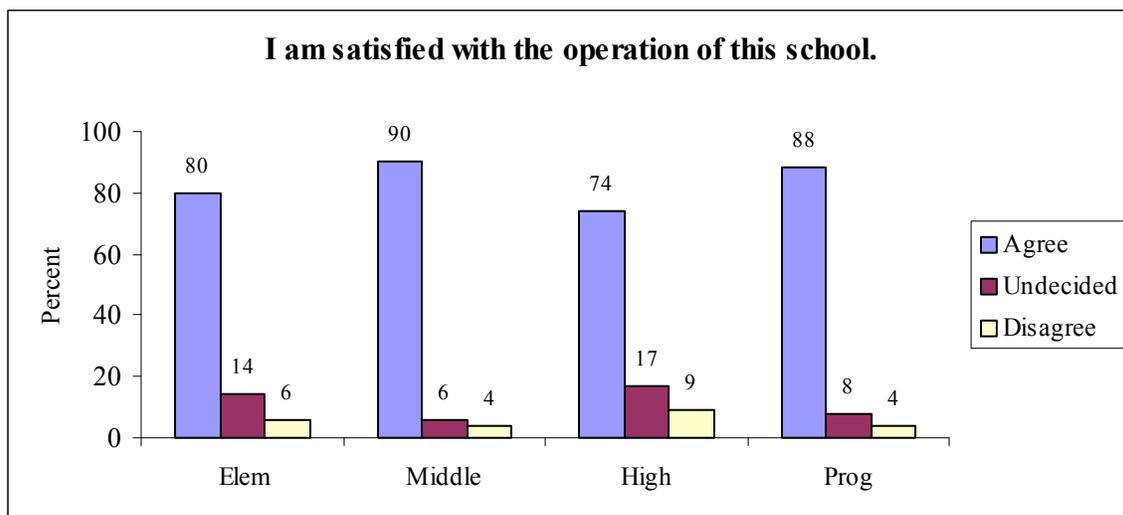


Figure 5.22: Teacher Responses to ‘I am satisfied with the operation of this school.’

Ninety percent of the middle and 88 percent of the magnet program teachers agree compared with 80 percent of elementary and 74 percent of high school teachers. No more than nine percent of any school group disagree with the statement.

Much of the research on teacher job satisfaction has found that intrinsic factors such as interest in working with children and making a difference in the lives of children are central to an individual's decisions to enter the education profession and to continue teaching. The following statements that magnet school educators volunteered are consistent with research on teachers and job satisfaction.

A high school teacher noted, "I selected this magnet school—and have wished to remain here—not because its location is convenient or its compensation is so competitive, but because I feel that the school has the best opportunity to offer students a thorough well-rounded education."

A K-8 magnet school professional staff member summarized her overall perception of the interdistrict magnet school in which she works, "Our school is an exciting learning community intensely committed to providing an excellent education for all of our students." An early elementary grade magnet school teacher concluded, "I am pleased to be part of a magnet school. The quality of education found at our school is quite commendable. The resources available to teachers and students are without a doubt far superior to any other school (district) that I have experienced. It would be hard to leave such a cohesive and hard working staff where all give 100% of themselves. I especially enjoy the multicultural aspect of our school. In today's society students need to become sensitive to other cultures and languages."

Concerns

While interdistrict magnet school teachers' responses about all aspects of their schools were generally positive, many expressed specific concerns about features of their schools that could be improved. Their suggestions and recommendation were directed, for the most part, at improving the quality of the academic programs the schools provide and experiences children have in their schools.

In many cases, individual teachers across the magnet schools and magnet school programs cited a need for increasing the human resources in their schools. Some teachers expressed concerns about large class sizes in their schools. Other teachers identified the need for assistant principals or additional administrative staff members to reduce the principal's managerial responsibilities and improve discipline, so the principal can devote more time to instructional issues. A number of teachers suggested their schools' needed additional teachers and social workers to assist them in meeting the needs of all students, while others hoped for increased parental investment and involvement. Still others suggested increased professional opportunities to improve their capacity to work with their schools' racially and ethnically diverse student populations.

While many interdistrict magnet schools have new, state-of-the-art buildings, some educators reported they were teaching in facilities that originally were not designed for educational purposes and have yet to be renovated to support the magnet school's program and mission. Similarly, several interdistrict magnet schools have extensive technology to support their academic programs, while educators in other schools identify limited computer facilities and library resources as a problem.

Summary

The survey of interdistrict magnet school and program teachers found that magnet educators are considerably more diverse than their counterparts in Connecticut public schools as a whole. Yet many characteristics of magnet school and program teachers are consistent with those of educators in other public schools across the state. Magnet schools employ similar proportions of female teachers and teachers who have earned at least a master's degree to other public schools statewide. They also employ comparable proportions of novice and experienced teachers.

Survey results suggest that magnet school teachers believe that the climate in their schools supports children as learners and teachers and staff members as professionals. Overall, magnet school teachers believe their schools provide safe environments that promote teaching and learning. There is a high level of agreement that magnet schools, regardless of grade-level organization, and magnet programs have set appropriate standards for proper student behavior, with somewhat lower levels of agreement that students do in fact adhere to the established standards. The vast majority of magnet teachers believe that mutual respect exists between teachers and students; there is less agreement, except among magnet program teachers, that students display mutual respect among themselves. Large proportions of teachers in all four school groups also believe that their schools promote innovation and foster collaboration among professional staff members on curricular and instructional issues, that teachers use a variety of instructional and assessment strategies, and are accountable for student academic performance.

Leadership is essential in schools where students perform at high levels. In the state's interdistrict magnet schools, the teachers concur that their principals are effective

instructional leaders and other administrators are effective in supporting them in their efforts to meet the school mission. Teachers characterize their schools as organizations where the principal encourages professionals to actively participate in instructional decisions, communicates openly with staff, and is available to discuss classroom and instructional issues.

By statute, interdistrict magnet schools and magnet programs ‘must offer a special and high quality program.’ In the previous two chapters, the survey results suggested there is a high level of agreement among teachers that their academic programs are high in quality. Each school’s mission articulates the special curricular and pedagogical aspects of the magnet school’s program. There are generally high levels of agreement among interdistrict magnet school and magnet program teachers that teachers and administrators share a common mission. In addition, magnet school and program teachers commonly believe that the mission is the foundation for the academic program, the curriculum incorporates the mission, and most professional development activities support the mission. While overall magnet school professional staff agree that parents support the mission, the level of agreement is clearly higher for elementary schools and magnet programs, than for middle or high schools.

Effective, high quality programs that improve student academic achievement require adequate human and material resources to support a well-designed standards-based curriculum, in which well-qualified teachers teach and effective administrators lead. While the majority of professional staff members responding to the survey agree that class sizes are sufficiently small so teachers could provide students the individual attention they need, about one-fourth disagree, the largest proportion doing so at the high

school level. Except for magnet middle school teachers, even lower proportions agree that their schools provide adequate support services for special needs students. With regard to material resources, the majority of magnet school and program professionals reported that their facilities are suited to the school's program, textbooks and other instructional materials are current, adequate instructional materials are available to them, and they have access to technology to support their school's program. In open-ended responses, magnet school and program teachers also expressed concerns about the lack of resources specific to their own school's situation, most often citing the need for additional human resources such as assistant principals to support the principal or special education teachers to provide assistance to those students with needs beyond the level that classroom teachers were able to address.

Given the generally positive responses to statements about school climate, leadership, mission, and resources, it is not surprising that more than half of the professionals in all the magnet schools and programs strongly agree they are satisfied with their positions. This proportion of Connecticut interdistrict magnet school teachers is considerably higher than national averages where less than one-third of public school teachers are highly satisfied with their work.

This chapter encapsulated teachers' perspectives of the magnet schools and programs in which they work. The next two chapters examine parents' and students' perceptions of various aspects of magnet schools and magnet programs.

Chapter 6

Interdistrict Magnet School Parents and Guardians: Perceptions of the Schools Their Children Attend and Parental Involvement in Interdistrict Magnet Schools

Introduction

Chapter 2 provided information about the diversity of student populations and professional staff populations in interdistrict magnet schools and magnet programs, along with summaries of survey responses reflecting parents' perceptions about diversity in the interdistrict magnet schools and magnet programs their children attend. Chapters 3 and 4 examined the academic performance of students who attend interdistrict magnet schools and integrated parents' perceptions of magnet schools' academic standards and the quality of the academic programs these schools offer with those of the professional staff and students.

This chapter summarizes additional information gathered from the survey the CSDE administered to a sample of parents and guardians who had children enrolled in grades two, five, eight, and ten of the state's interdistrict magnet schools and magnet programs in spring 2002. The survey sample was described in Chapter 1. For the purpose of the discussions in this chapter, 'parent' includes both parents and guardians.

The chapter begins with descriptions of magnet school parents' demographic and educational characteristics, along with home characteristics and information about students' magnet school history. Summaries of survey responses follow, examining parents' perceptions of school climate and the adequacy of resources supporting the school's academic program. It closes with a discussion of the amount and type of involvement that magnet school parents have with the schools their children attend.

Parent Survey Respondent and Home Background Characteristics

Table 6.1 summarizes the characteristics of the parents who responded to the survey. Parent respondents were predominantly female; 74 percent of the respondents were female, compared with 21 percent male, while both parents in the family filled out five percent of the surveys. Overall, survey responses were evenly divided between white and non-white parents, although the racial and ethnic composition of respondents varied by school group. Seventy percent of the half-day magnet program parents were white, compared with 54 percent of the elementary, 41 percent of the high school, and 31 percent of the middle school parents.

Table 6.1: Characteristics of Magnet School Parent and Guardian Survey Respondents (Percentages)

	Elem	Mid	High	Prog	Total
Sex of Respondent(s)					
Female	73	72	83	68	74
Male	21	21	17	27	21
Both	6	7	0	5	5
Race					
Native American	0	0	2	2	1
Asian American	1	7	0	0	3
Black	19	48	50	15	27
White	54	31	41	70	50
Hispanic	14	7	5	5	10
Multiracial	12	7	2	8	8
Highest Education Level					
Less than high school grad	4	11	10	2	6
High school grad	12	32	24	20	18
Some college	27	25	26	23	26
Associate's degree	13	18	10	7	12
Bachelor's degree	28	11	24	24	25
Advanced degree	16	4	7	24	14

The parents' highest education level also varied considerably by school groups. Overall, only six percent had less than a high school diploma and 18 percent had only a

high school diploma. In addition, 26 percent had completed some college coursework, 12 percent had earned associate's degrees, 25 percent had earned bachelor's degrees, and 14 percent had earned advanced degrees. The elementary school group had the largest percentage of parents educated beyond high school, with 84 percent having completed at least some college coursework, compared with 78 percent of the magnet program, 66 percent of the magnet high school, and 55 percent of the magnet middle school parents responding to the survey.

Table 6.2 provides characteristics of the homes in which magnet school students live along with the number of years students attended magnet schools. The largest proportion, 71 percent of the respondents, indicated that two parents were responsible for the student attending the magnet school, while 21 percent were single parents, and one percent each was either a grandparent guardian or non-relative guardian. The proportion of two-parent families varied somewhat across school groups, with middle (62%) and high (60%) school subgroups containing lower than average proportions, and elementary (77%) school and magnet program (78%) groups containing higher than average proportions of two-parent families.

With regard to employment status of the adults in the home, 45 percent of the respondents indicated that two adults worked full-time, 46 percent had one adult employed full-time, and nine percent of the households had no adult employed full-time. The distribution of respondents' employment status was fairly consistent across school groups, except for the middle school group, where a slightly larger proportion of the parents indicated that no adult in the household was employed full time.

Table 6.2: Magnet School Students' Home Characteristics and School Background (Percentages)

	Elem	Mid	High	Prog	Total
Adults Responsible for Student					
Two parents	77	62	60	78	71
Single parent	21	38	33	22	27
Guardian	2	0	7	0	1
Adult Employment Status					
Two work full-time	45	43	48	46	45
One works full-time	47	43	43	46	46
None works full-time	8	14	9	8	9
Primary Home Language					
English	90	86	93	94	90
Spanish	7	0	2	3	5
Other	3	14	5	3	5
Student Eligibility for Free/Reduced Lunch					
Free lunch	28	32	22	15	25
Reduced lunch	10	13	10	0	8
Not eligible	62	55	68	85	67
School Student Attended Previous Year					
Same magnet school	86	66	77	54	77
Another magnet school	0	0	7	2	2
Public school	10	34	9	44	19
Private school	4	0	7	0	2
Number of Years Student Attended Magnet School					
1	11	31	21	37	20
2	24	10	55	63	34
3 or more	64	59	24	-	46
Total	50	13	19	18	100

The primary language spoken in the home was English for 90 percent of the respondents and Spanish for five percent. An additional five percent of the households reported the primary language spoken in the home was a language other than English or Spanish. The middle school group had the lowest proportion of homes in which English was the primary language, 86 percent, and the largest proportion of 'other language' households. The elementary school group had the largest proportion of respondents, seven percent, from households in which Spanish was the primary language.

Student 'eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch' is a measure of the economic status of magnet students' homes. Two thirds (67%) of the respondents indicated that their child was not eligible, while 25 and 8 percent were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, respectively. The proportion of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch differed among the school groups. The children of 45 percent of the middle school parents were eligible compared with 38 percent of the elementary, 32 percent of the high school, and 15 percent of magnet program respondents.

About three-fourths (77%) of the parents indicated their child attended the magnet school or program the previous year. For elementary magnet schools, which can span as many as ten grades (PK-8), 86 percent of parents' children were enrolled in the same magnet school the previous year, in comparison to 77 percent of the high school, 66 percent of the middle school, and 54 percent of the magnet program parents' children. Overall, 20 percent of the students attended the magnet school or program for only one year, 34 percent for two years, and 46 percent for at least three years. The children of half (50%) of the survey parents were enrolled in elementary magnet schools, while 13 percent were in middle schools, 19% in high schools, and 18 percent in half-day magnet programs.

School Climate

Schools where high quality teaching and learning take place provide a supportive environment that is safe and secure for teachers and students. School climate reflects the extent to which the school environment promotes high-level learning. The ‘Magnet School Parent and Guardian Survey’ included five statements aligned with statements from the ‘Teacher and Professional Staff Survey’ to gauge parents’ perceptions of the educational climate in their child’s school. The statements focused on safety, standards, discipline, and respect. Parents were asked to respond to each statement using a five-point Likert scale ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ (1) to ‘undecided’ (3) to ‘strongly agree’ (5). For the purpose of the following discussion the responses have been aggregated into three levels categories: disagree (strongly disagree and disagree), undecided, and agree (strongly agree and agree). Like teacher findings, the results for the parent survey are also broken out by four school groups (elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, and magnet programs) to examine whether or not parental perceptions differ across school groups.

Figure 6.1 summarizes interdistrict magnet school parents’ responses to the statement ‘The school provides a safe and secure environment that fosters student learning.’ Overall, the majority of parents of students in each of the four school groups agree with the statement, with the largest proportions of elementary (94%) and middle (90%) magnet school parents agreeing, while only three percent of each of these two parent groups disagree. Elementary and middle school parent perceptions are consistent with those of teachers summarized in the previous chapter. The proportions of magnet high school (76%) and magnet program (85%) parents agreeing with the statement are lower

than the 94 and 96 percent, respectively, of the teachers from the two school groups who agreed with the statement. Only 10 percent of the magnet high school and five percent of the magnet program parents disagree with the statement, while 14 percent of the magnet high school and 10 percent of the magnet program parents are undecided about the safety and security of their child’s school.

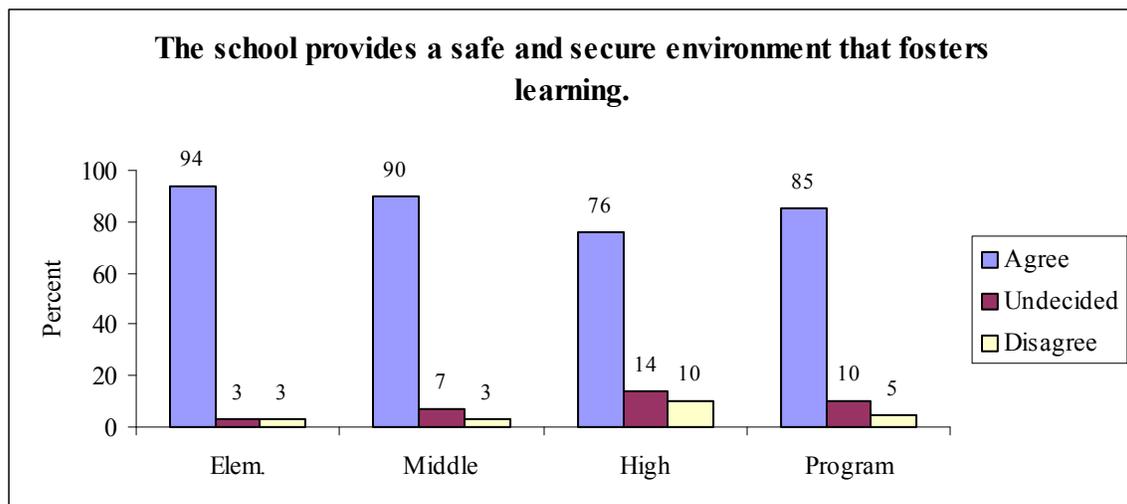


Figure 6.1: Parent Responses to ‘The school provides a safe and secure environment that fosters student learning.’

Parents were asked to respond to two statements regarding the behavioral standards established in their child’s interdistrict magnet school, which also were included on the teacher survey. Figure 6.2 illustrates the distribution of parental responses to the first statement, ‘The school has appropriate standards for proper student behavior.’ The majority of parents of students in each school group agree with the statement. At least 90 percent of the elementary (91%) and middle (90%) magnet school parents agree, compared with about three-fourths of the magnet high school (74%) and the magnet program (78%) parents. In comparison to teachers’ responses to the same statement, the proportion of elementary parents agreeing is ten percentage points higher than the

percentage of teachers agreeing, while the percentage of middle and high school parents agreeing is about the same as the percentages of teachers at the two school levels, and the percentage of magnet program parents agreeing is ten percentage points lower than the proportion of teachers. Again, relatively large percentages of magnet high school (16%) and magnet program (17%) parents are undecided about the statement, while overall, 10 percent or less of each of the four school groups of parents disagree that their school’s behavior standards are appropriate.

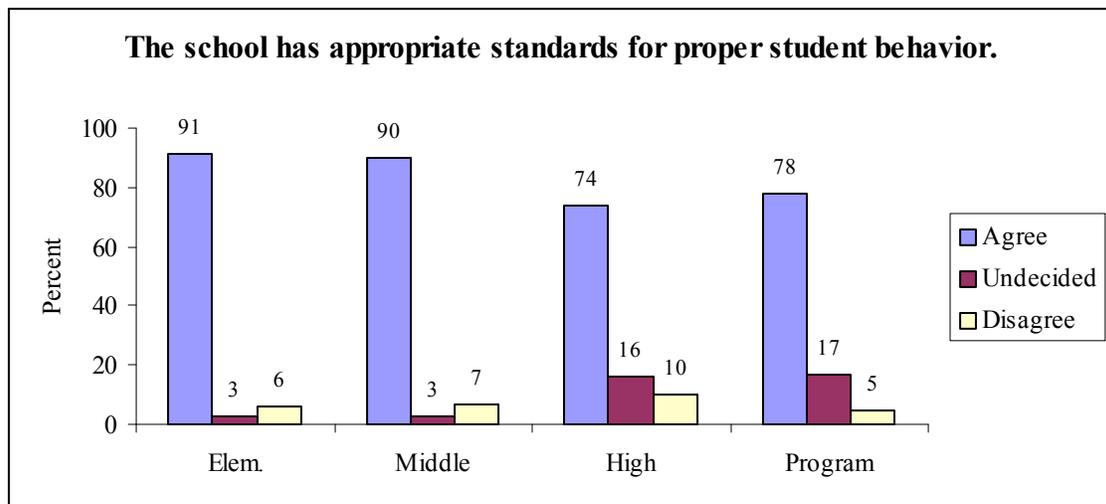


Figure 6.2: Parent Responses to ‘The school has appropriate standards for proper student behavior.’

Figure 6.3 provides a summary of parents’ responses to the second statement about school behavior standards, ‘Most students follow the behavior standards the school has set.’ Again, larger percentages of elementary (87%) and middle school (80%) parents agree with the statement than magnet high school (67%) and magnet program (72%) parents. Overall, at most 12 percent of any school group of parents disagree, and relatively large percentages of middle school (17%), high school (21%), and magnet program (18%) parents are undecided. Comparing parental perceptions with teachers’

perceptions from the previous chapter, larger percentages of elementary and middle school parents respond positively to the statement than the teachers in the respective school groups, while the opposite is true for magnet high school and magnet program parents' and teachers' responses.

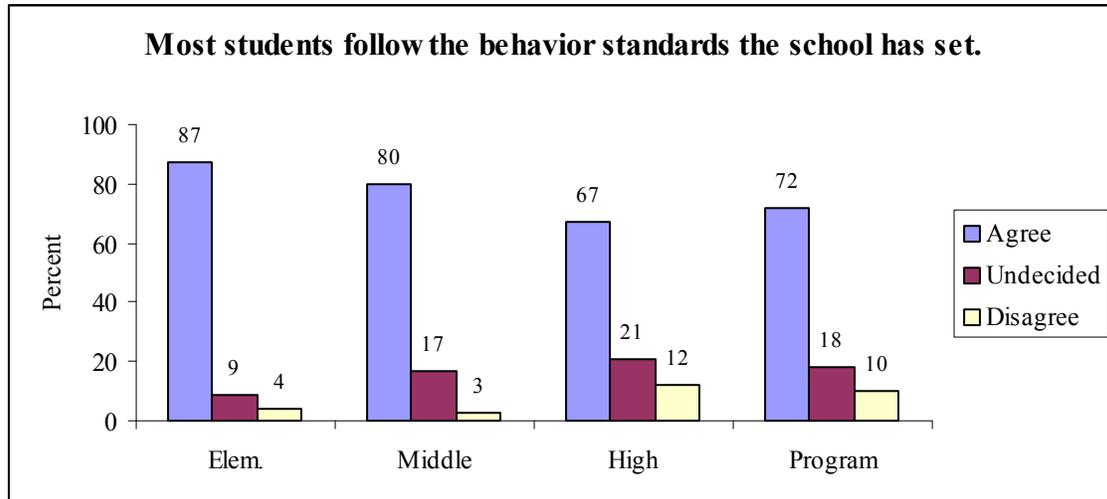


Figure 6.3: Parent Responses to ‘Most students follow the behavior standards the school has set.’

The parent survey contained two statements about respect among members of the magnet school community. Parents were asked to respond to the statement, ‘There is mutual respect between teachers and students in the school.’ Figure 6.4 presents a summary of the responses. The highest level of agreement is among parents of elementary magnet school students, where 93 percent agree. About three-fourths of the middle school (76%), high school (73%) and magnet program (73%) also agree with the statement. Compared with teachers responses for the same school groups, the percentage of parents agreeing with the statement is higher for elementary and middle parents than for teachers at the two school levels, while the opposite was true for magnet high schools and magnet programs. Again, beyond the elementary level relatively large percentages of

parents are undecided about the extent to which there is mutual respect between teachers and students in the magnet schools and programs their children attend.

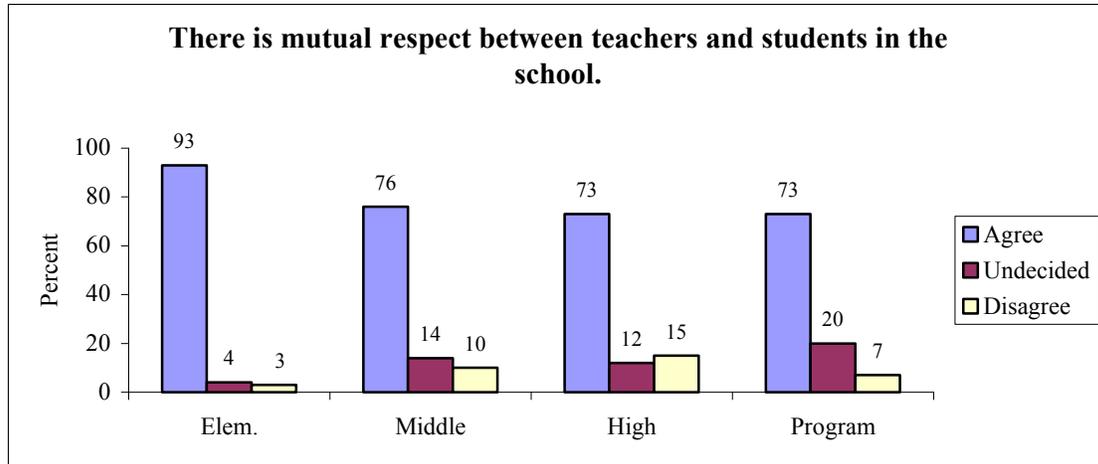


Figure 6.4: Parent Responses to ‘There is mutual respect between teachers and students in the school.’

Figure 6.5 summarizes parents’ responses to the statement, ‘There is mutual respect among students.’ Like the teacher responses in the previous chapter, the highest proportions of parents agreeing with the statement had children in magnet elementary schools (91%) and magnet programs (80%), while somewhat lower proportions of magnet middle (65%) and high school (66%) parents agree. Compared with teacher responses for the same school groups, the percentage of parents agreeing with the statement is higher again for elementary and middle school parents than for teachers at the two school levels, and the percentage agreeing is lower for magnet high school and magnet program parents than for teachers in the two school groups. Relatively large proportions of parents above the elementary level are undecided in their response to this statement.

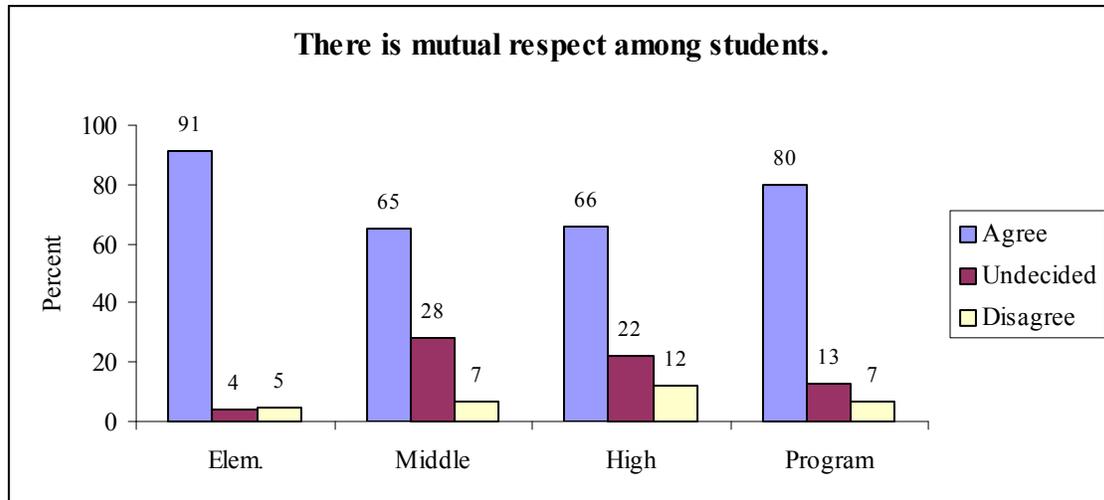


Figure 6.5: Parent Responses to ‘There is mutual respect among students.’

The mother of two magnet elementary school students depicted her family’s experience in the following manner: ... “When I made the decision to switch my children to this school I was a little scared. Now I can’t stop talking about what a wonderful school we have! This was the best decision for my children and me. The school has a strong family community. They make you feel lucky to be part of their community. The teachers (principal, secretaries etc) are caring and loving people. My children and myself are happy to be a part of this ‘special family’.”

Another parent of an elementary student noted: “The magnet school has made a total change in my son. His self-esteem has shot right up. He actually loves going to school. ... Socially he has made many friends and he is not afraid to be involved in school activities. The teaching staff is very caring and treats my son with respect. ... Placing my son in a magnet school has also taught him to respect all -- we are all the same and equal. I feel this was the best move I have ever made in my son’s education, and personal well being.”

Resources

Parents were asked to respond to six statements about the availability and adequacy of human and material resources in their child’s interdistrict magnet school or magnet program, and the access their child had to specific types of resources. Several of the statements parallel those that teachers responded to in the previous chapter.

Figure 6.6 provides the distribution of parents’ responses to one of two statements about the adequacy of human resources in magnet schools, ‘Classes are small enough so that teachers can provide individual attention to students who need it.’ Eighty percent of

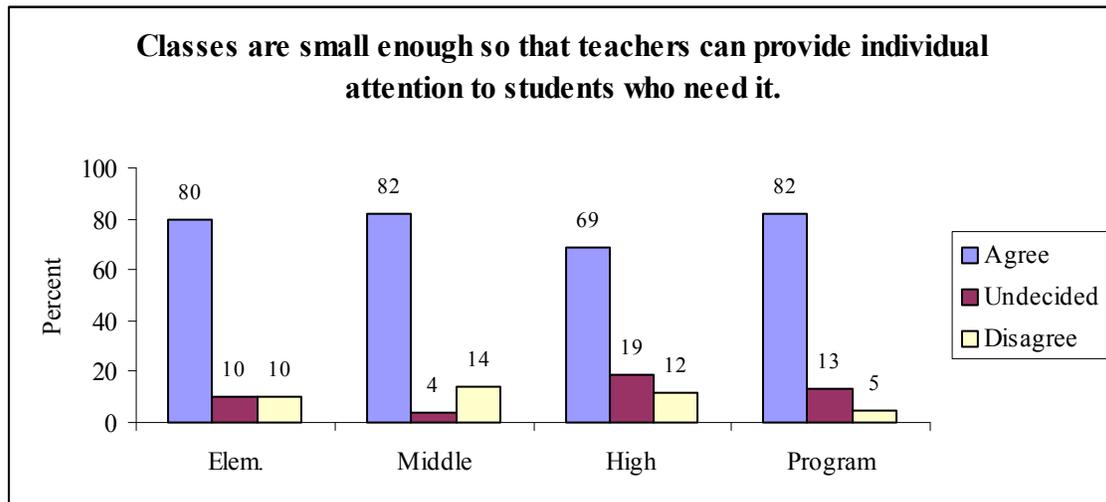


Figure 6.6: Parent Responses to ‘Classes are small enough so that teachers can provide individual attention to students who need it.’

the elementary school parents, 82 percent of the middle school and magnet program parents, and 69 percent of the high school parents agree with the statement. The proportion of parents agreeing that class size in their child’s school is sufficiently small to permit teachers to address students’ individual needs is higher than the proportion of teachers agreeing for elementary, middle, and high schools and similar for magnet program parents and teachers. The issue of class size in public schools is a concern that

the Gallop Poll has raised nationally and that Connecticut residents have identified, in general. In a recent poll conducted by the New England Center for Educational Policy and Leadership at the University of Connecticut's Neag School of Education, 45 percent of a sample of Connecticut residents identified crowded classrooms as a major problem for the state's public schools (2002). Magnet school parents appear to be more satisfied with the size of the classes in their schools than the public is with class size in the state's public schools, in general.

The parent of an elementary magnet school student noted: "This is my son's first year in a magnet school and for him it is as if he has always attended the magnet school. For him it's been safe, friendly, and inviting. His sociability has improved and he's much more eager to learn. The classrooms are small enough to help him interact and develop confidence in relating to his classmates. . . I am enjoying his growth and change, and believe that this school is the best place for his learning in all aspects of development including, social, emotional, and physical." Another parent offered the following comment: "Classroom sizes were very important. My children get more one-on-one in this school than (their previous school) where class sizes are up to 25 or 30."

The second statement about the availability of human resources in interdistrict magnet schools focuses on the support services schools provide. Figure 6.7 summarizes parents' responses to, 'The school provides academic and guidance services to support its academic program.' The largest proportion of parents who agree that their child's school provides academic and guidance support services have children enrolled in magnet middle schools (86%), with marginally lower levels of agreement among elementary (80%), magnet program (79%), and magnet high school (71%) parents. High school

parents register the largest amount of disagreement, with 12 percent disagreeing with the statement. At least 11 percent of the parents in each school group are undecided about support services. Across all school groups, parent responses to the statement are more positive than those of teachers in the same school groups.

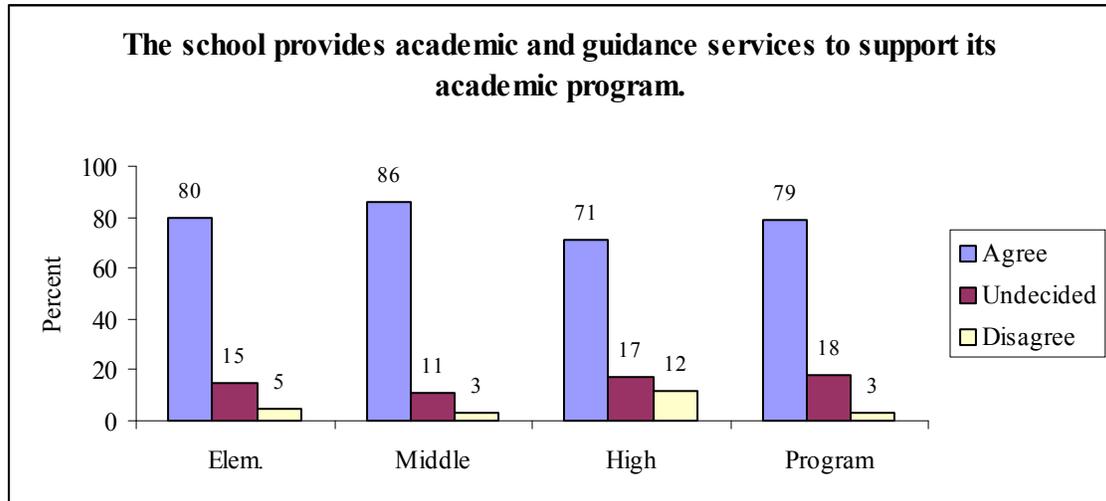


Figure 6.7: Parent Responses to ‘The school provides academic and guidance services to support its academic program.’

The facilities that house the state’s interdistrict magnet schools range from state-of-the-art school buildings designed specifically to support the mission of the magnet school to facilities that were not initially designed to be schools and are yet to be renovated to serve the school’s needs. Parents were asked to respond to the following statement about their child’s magnet school facility, ‘The school facility is well-suited for the school’s academic program.’ Figure 6.8 illustrates that parents’ responses to this statement vary considerably by school group, with 93 percent of the magnet middle school parents agreeing, compared with 88 percent of the elementary school, 74 percent of the magnet program, and 64 percent of the magnet high school parents. The proportion of parents in each school group agreeing is consistent with the proportions of teachers agreeing, except

for elementary schools where the level of parental agreement is ten percentage points higher than the percentage for the elementary teachers agreeing.

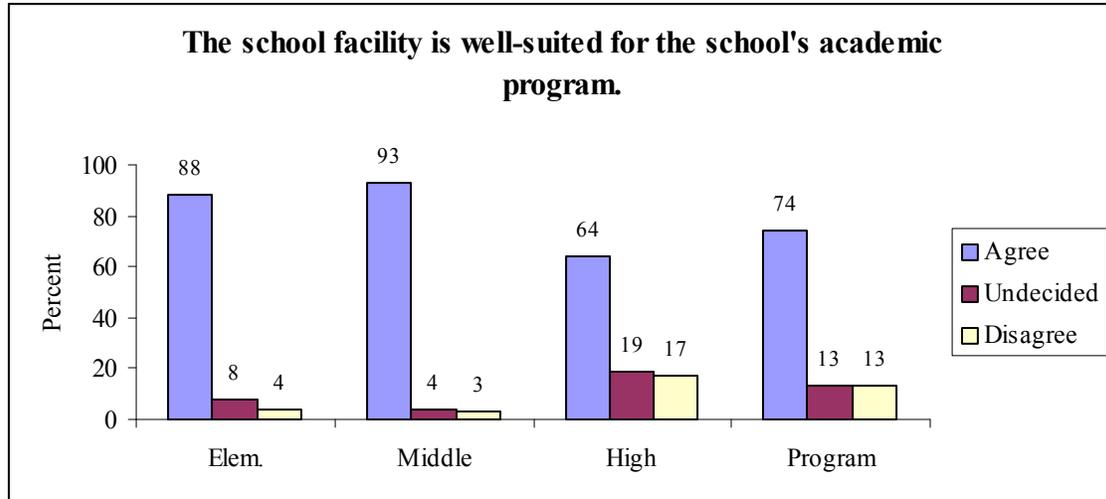


Figure 6.8: Parent Responses to ‘The school facility is well-suited to the school’s academic program.’

The parent survey contained one statement about the use of computers and technology in their child’s school, ‘Students use computers and other forms of technology to enhance learning.’ Figure 6.9 illustrates the distribution of responses across school groups. There is a high level of agreement among magnet middle (96%), elementary (89%), and high (88%) school parents that computers and technology are available to enhance student learning in the magnet schools, with three percent or less of each group of parents disagreeing with the statement. In contrast only 68 percent of the magnet program parents agree with the statement, while 18 percent disagree and 13 percent are undecided. Across the school groups, the perceptions of parents about the use of technology in their child’s school are consistent with those of the teachers for the same school groups.

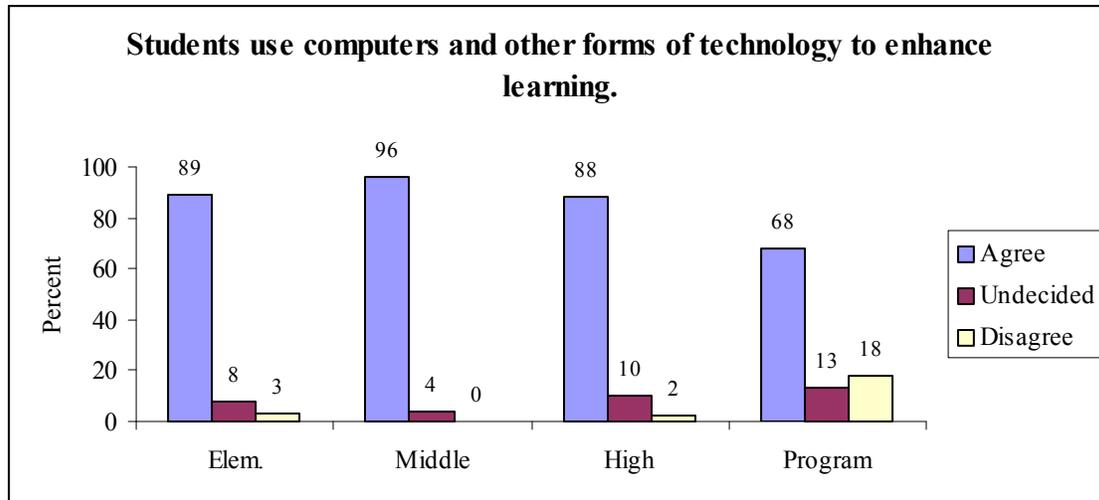


Figure 6.9: Parent Responses to ‘Students use computers and other forms of technology to enhance learning.’

Parents were asked to respond to two statements about resources the magnet schools make available to students outside of the school day:

The school provides a number of before and after-school activities such as clubs, teams, etc. to meet students’ interests. (Activities)

Transportation to and from school is available for my child. (Transportation)

Figure 6.10 presents the percentages of parents who agree with each statement by school group. Compared with responses to other statements, the percentage of parents agreeing that their child’s magnet school provides a range of before and after-school activities to meet students’ interests is relatively low. The percentages agreeing ranged from a high of 72 percent of the magnet high school parents to a low of 46 percent for magnet program parents; 63 percent of the middle and 61 percent of the elementary parents agree with the statement.

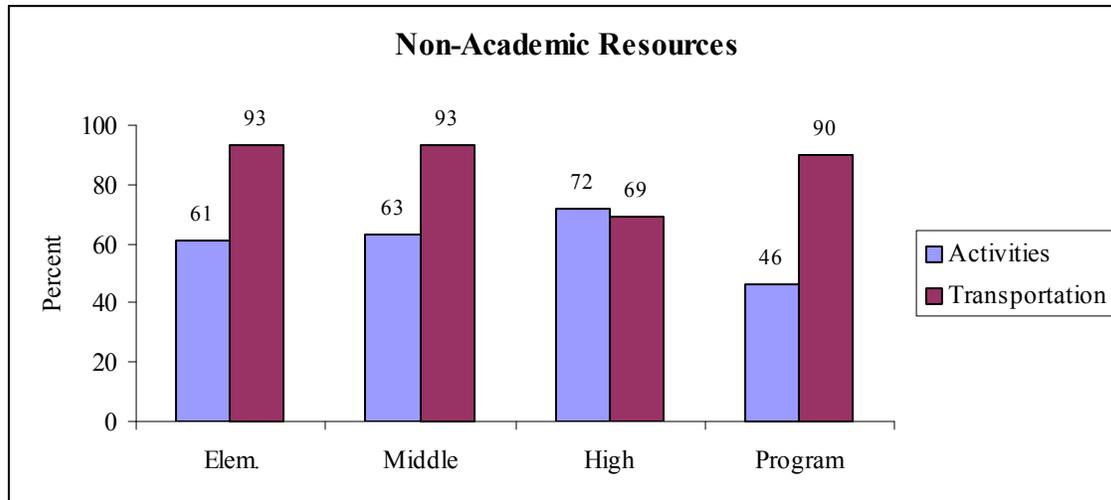


Figure 6.10: Percentages of Parents Agreeing with Statements about the Availability of Co-curricular Activities and Transportation at Interdistrict Magnet Schools and Programs.

Parents' provided a wide range of comments about the before and after-school activities interdistrict magnet schools offered. The parent of an elementary magnet school student contributed the following positive comment: "The after school program offered does much to encourage multicultural friendships. My daughter attended the school's before and after school programs for the last four years. This quality program is run and taught by the school's teachers. My child does all her homework in the 1½ hours she attends this program. There is a certified schoolteacher in every classroom available to help with any difficulties the children have with their homework. The children are allowed to play together only after all the children finish their homework. This encourages character education of helpfulness, cooperation, fairness and group interaction. It also encouraged good study habits. My daughter has met most of her school friends from attending this program."

Some parents of middle and high school students identified the lack of athletic programs as a deficit for the schools. A magnet middle school parent who made positive

comments about the school's academic program, teachers, administrators, and technology, closed with a concern that "...the school will lose scholars because a sports program is lacking." Another middle school parent noted, "My only concern is what appears to be a minimal amount of after-school activities and the lack of sports teams." A high school parent expressed a similar concern, "We think the lack of sports programs really hurts the community-building experience."

With regard to transportation, at least 90 percent of the elementary, middle, and magnet program parents agree that transportation to and from school is available for their child, in contrast with only 69 percent of magnet high school parents. Some parents identified difficulty in coordinating bus transportation with before or after-school daycare as a problem.

Parental Involvement

Research on student academic achievement suggests that, on average, when parents are more involved in their child's education, their children perform better in school (Vassallo, 2000). Parents can play an active role in the education of their children in a variety of ways ranging from reading to young children, insuring that their children attend school regularly and complete assignments on a daily basis, communicating with school staff, and participating in school activities. In the aforementioned Neag School of Education poll, 46 percent of the respondents identified lack of parental involvement as a major problem for Connecticut public schools. This section examines the interdistrict magnet school parental involvement in the education of their children from three perspectives: parents, teachers, and students.

The parent and teacher surveys posed two common statements about parental involvement in interdistrict magnet schools and magnet programs. Figure 6.11 compares the proportions of parents and teachers, by school group, who agree with the first statement, ‘There is open communication between teachers and parents.’ The largest proportions in agreement are from the magnet elementary schools, where 90 percent of the parents and 97 percent of the teachers conclude that there is open communication between the school and home, and middle schools where 93 percent of parents and 84 percent of the teachers agree with the statement. About three-fourths of the parents and teachers in the magnet high schools and magnet programs agree. Within school groups the perceptions of parents are fairly well aligned with those of the teachers in the same schools.

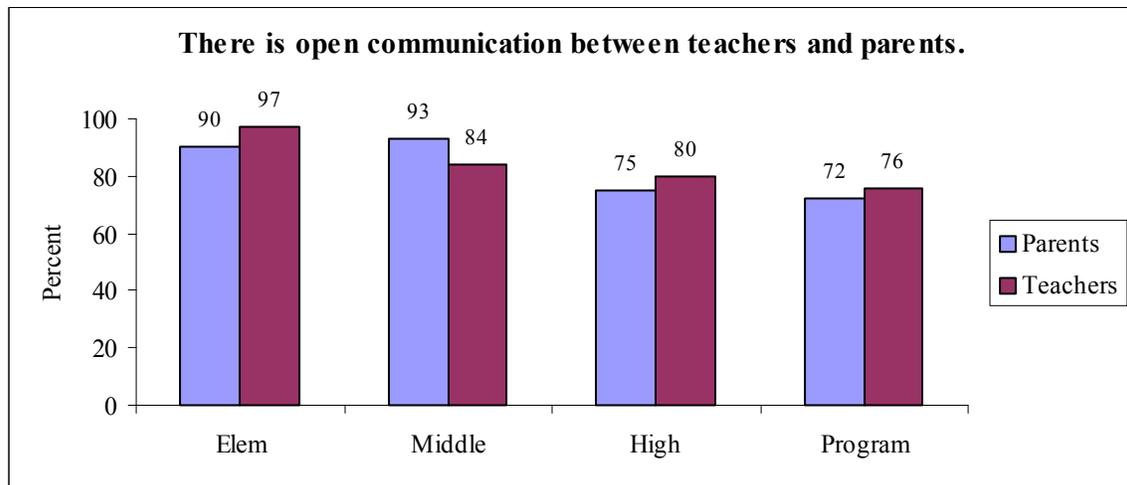


Figure 6.11: Percentages of Parents and Teachers Agreeing ‘There is open communication between teachers and parents.’

Magnet school students in grades five, eight, and ten were asked to respond to a survey statement regarding communication between their teachers and parents. Figure 6.12 summarizes students’ responses to ‘Teachers communicate with my parent/guardian

frequently.’ The figure suggests an inverse relationship between school level and the extent to which students believe there is frequent communication between their teachers and parents. Sixty-three percent of the students in elementary schools agree with the statement, compared with 39 percent of the middle school, 32 percent of the magnet program, and 31 percent of the high school students. Half of the magnet high school and magnet program students disagree. At all levels, student responses about communication between school and home are consistently lower than those of parents and teachers, for the same school groups.

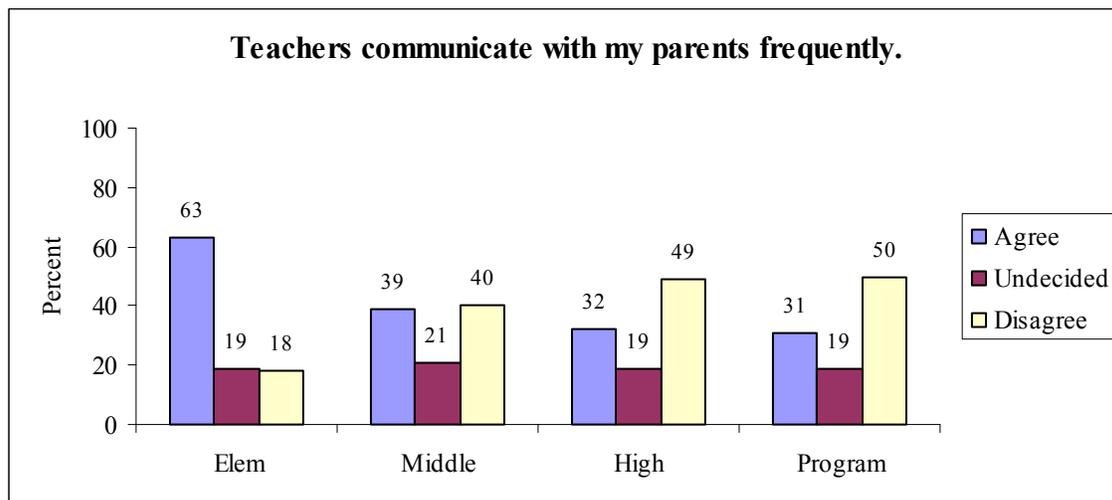


Figure 6.12: Student Responses to ‘Teachers communicate with my parent/guardian frequently.’

Figure 6.13 compares the percentages of parents and teachers in each school group agreeing with the second statement common to both surveys, ‘Parents are encouraged to voice their opinions of the school’s academic program.’ Again the perceptions of parents and teachers are fairly consistent within the school groups. Larger proportions of elementary magnet school parents (83%) and teachers (90%), than those from the other school groups, acknowledge that parents are encouraged to voice their opinions about

their school’s academic programs. About three-fourths of the parents and teachers in the magnet middle and high schools agree, compared with about two-thirds of magnet program parents and teachers.

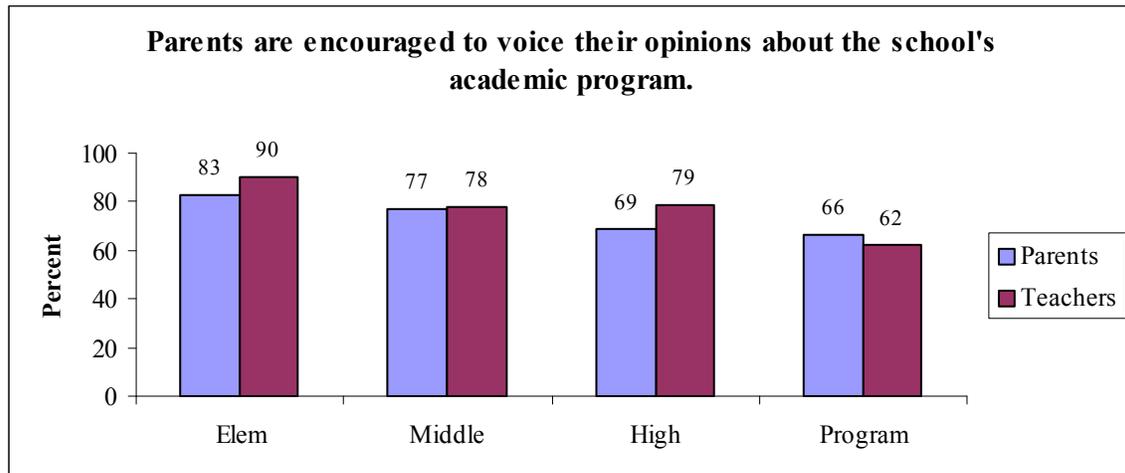


Figure 6.13: Percentages of Parents and Teachers Agreeing ‘Parents are encouraged to voice their opinions about the school’s academic program.’

Parents were asked to respond to the following statement about volunteering in interdistrict magnet schools and magnet programs: ‘Parents are encouraged to volunteer in the school.’ Figure 6.14 summarizes their responses by school group. Ninety-four percent of the elementary parents agree with the statement, compared with 83 percent of the high school, 79 percent of the middle school, and 68 percent of the magnet program parents. Beyond the elementary school level, relatively large proportions of parents are undecided whether or not parents are encouraged to volunteer in their magnet schools or magnet programs. Magnet program (14%) and middle school (10%) parents disagree in larger proportions than elementary (5%) and high school (2%) parents.

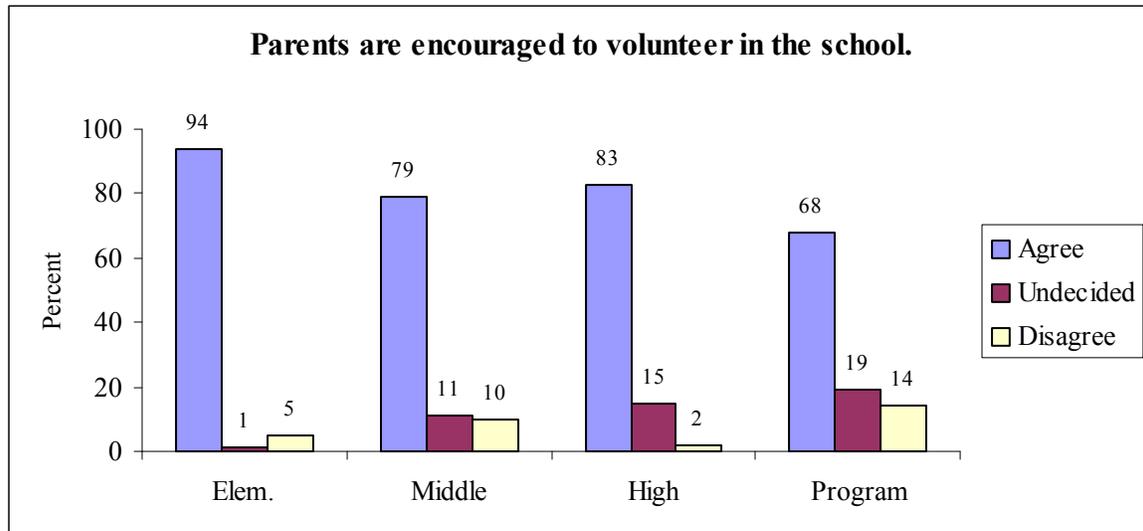


Figure 6.14: Parent Responses to ‘Parents are encouraged to volunteer in the school.’

The parent survey contained statements about parental involvement in five types of school activities. Parents were asked to respond using a five-point Likert scale ranging from never (1) to always (5). Table 6.3 identifies the percentages of parents from each school group who indicate they are involved ‘frequently’ (‘often’ or ‘always’) in the activity. Participation in each of the five types of school activities is highest for the parents of elementary students and lowest for the magnet program parents. Of the five activities, the largest proportion of elementary (88%), middle (55%), and high school (62%) parents indicate they meet with their child’s teachers frequently, while the magnet program parents are more likely to attend meetings and programs (48%) than actually meet with teachers (23%). Elementary parents are considerably more likely to attend school meetings (64%) and visit classes (61%) than middle, high school, and magnet program parents. The smallest percentages of parents across the four school groups indicate that they are directly involved in organizing activities for their child’s magnet school or magnet program.

Table 6.3: Percentages of Interdistrict Magnet School and Magnet Program Parents Who Have Participated in Selected School Activities 'Frequently'

School Activity	Elementary	Middle	High	Program
Attend school meetings and programs	64	36	33	48
Visit classes	61	21	15	8
Volunteer in school	42	11	10	8
Meet with teachers	88	55	62	23
Organize activities	24	7	8	8

The teacher survey contained two statements about parental involvement in their magnet schools and programs:

Most parents take an active role in their child's education. (Role)

Most parents are actively involved in the school. (Involved)

Figure 6.15 provides the percentages of teachers who agree with each statement.

For each school group the proportions agreeing are marginally higher for the first statement than for the second, yet both had relatively low levels of agreement compared with other statements on the survey. As students progress through school levels, smaller proportions of the teachers in the schools believe that parents take an active role in their child's education and that parents are actively involved in the school. Larger proportions of teachers in half-day magnet programs agree with the two statements than their counterparts in magnet high schools. The proportions of magnet program teachers agreeing with the statements are much more similar to the proportions found for middle school than for high school teachers.

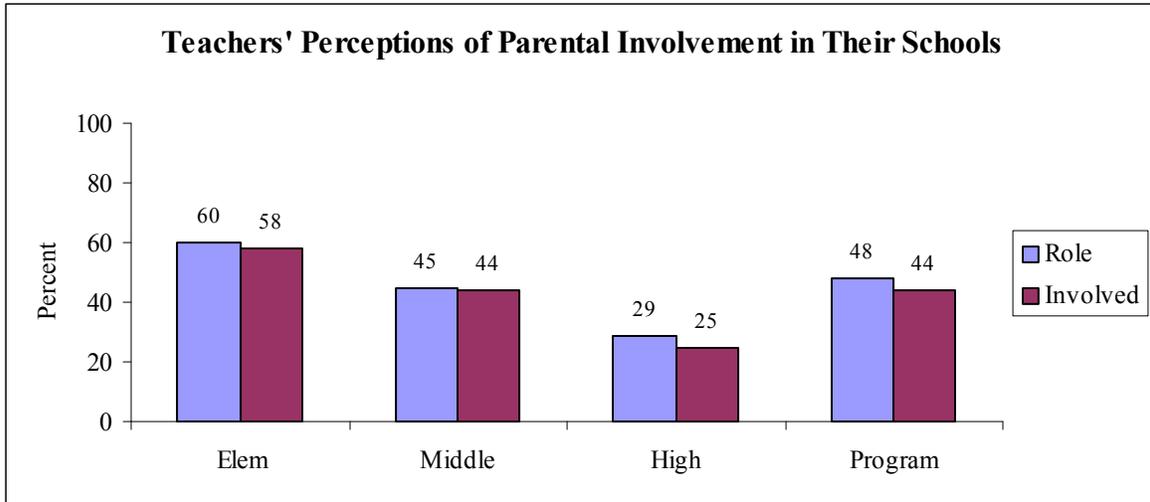


Figure 6.15: Teachers' Perceptions of Parental Involvement in Magnet Schools and Magnet Programs

Students also were asked to respond to a similar statement about their parents' involvement in school activities. Figure 6.16 provides a summary of student responses to the statement, 'My parent/guardian participates in school activities.'

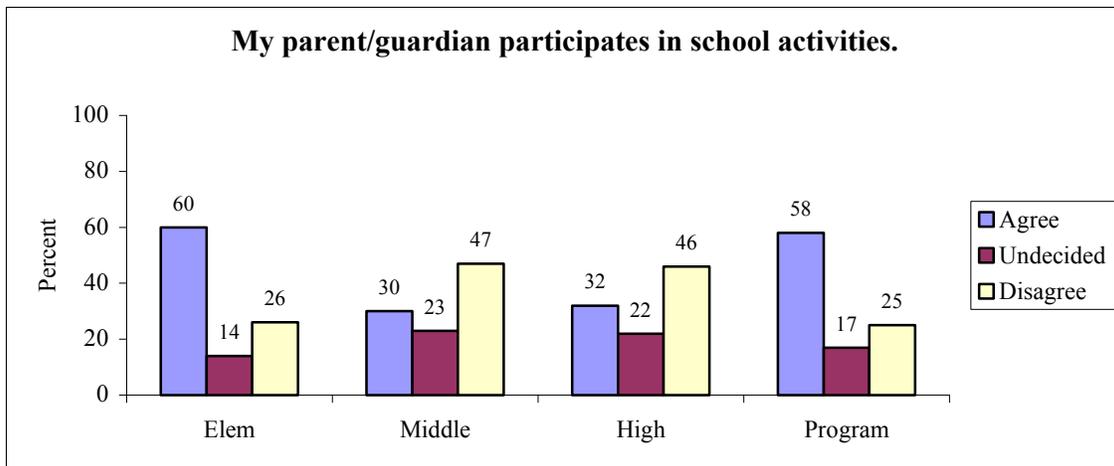


Figure 6.16: Student Responses to 'My parent/guardian participates in school activities.'

The largest percentages of students agreeing with the statement are in magnet elementary schools (60%) and magnet programs (58%), with considerably lower percentages of middle school (30%) and high school students (32%) agreeing. Nearly half of the middle

and high school students disagree, compared with about one-fourth of the elementary and magnet program students. Elementary students' perceptions of their parents' involvement in their magnet schools are more closely aligned with those of the elementary teachers, than student and teacher perceptions for the other school groups.

Summary

The survey of a sample of magnet school and magnet program parents and guardians of students in grades two, five, eight, and ten, provided demographic characteristics of the families of students who attend Connecticut's interdistrict magnet schools and magnet programs, along with parents' perceptions of school climate and resources, and information about parental involvement in the schools their children attend.

Parents responding to the survey reflect the diverse backgrounds of the students attending the state's magnet schools. Half identified themselves as racial/ethnic minorities. For ten percent of the households, the primary home language was a language other than English. One-third of their children were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Eighty percent of the parents had children who had been enrolled in the magnet school or program for at least two years, so they had sufficient time to familiarize themselves with the school and its operations.

Survey responses suggest that the majority of parents, across all four school groups, believe that their schools provide a safe and secure environment that fosters learning. Elementary and middle school parent responses are closely aligned with teacher perceptions, while the proportions of magnet high school and magnet program parents in agreement are somewhat lower than that of the teachers. Most parents agree that the

schools have appropriate behavior standards and students adhere to the standards, for the most part. In addition, parents generally believe that there is mutual respect between teachers and students, and among students. The highest levels of agreement consistently are among elementary and middle school parents. For parents in these two school groups, the proportion agreeing with each statement is higher than the proportion of the teachers agreeing from the same school groups, while the opposite is true for high school and magnet program parents and teachers. The parents of elementary school students are less likely than parents from the other school groups to respond that they are ‘undecided’ regarding any statement about their child’s school, suggesting they are more knowledgeable and informed about the schools their children attend.

In general, interdistrict magnet school parents believe their schools provide adequate human and material resources to support their academic programs. Larger proportions of elementary, middle, and high school parents, than teachers at those respective levels, agree that classes are small enough so teachers can that provide students with the individual attention they need, while similar proportions of magnet program parents and teachers agree. The majority of parents across school groups also agree that their child’s school provides services to support the school’s academic program. Parents perception of the adequacy of the school’s facility to suit the school’s mission varies across school groups with about 90 percent in agreement among elementary and middle school parents, compared with about 70 percent of the high school and magnet program parents. Most elementary, middle, and high school parents believe that students have access to computers and other forms of technology in their schools which enhance their opportunities to learn, while only about two-thirds of magnet program parents agree.

Compared with other school resources, parents across the four school groups expressed lower levels of agreement that their schools provide an adequate number of before and after-school activities to meet the needs of students, particularly athletic and sports teams at the middle and high school levels.

Teacher, parent, and student surveys contained statements about parental involvement in the interdistrict magnet schools and magnet programs. In general, parental involvement in schools and teachers, parents, and students perceptions of the level of parental involvement decline as students progress through higher school levels. Larger proportions of elementary parents meet with teachers, attend school activities, visit classes, volunteer in their child's school, and help organize school activities than parents of students in the other school groups. Moreover, larger proportion of teachers in elementary schools than teachers in the other school groups believe that parents take an active role in their child's education and are actively involved in their school, although teachers across all four school groups desire parents to participate more actively in the education of their children. Larger proportions of elementary students, than students in the other school groups, indicate there is communication between their school and home, and their parents are involved in their school activities.



Chapter 7

Interdistrict Magnet School and Magnet Program Students: Perceptions of the Schools They Attend

Introduction

CSDE administered a survey in spring 2002 to students in grades five, eight, and ten, described in Chapter 1, to gather the data presented in previous chapters and in this chapter. Previous chapters in this report examined the diversity and academic performance of interdistrict magnet school and magnet program students. They also presented students' perceptions about the diversity of their school-mates, the academic standards and quality of their school programs, and the involvement of their parents in the schools. This chapter provides information about students' perceptions of the educational climate in their schools, the school's mission and theme, and the availability of educational resources. The findings complement the discussion of teacher and parent perceptions, in previous chapters. The chapter begins with a description of the sample of students who participated in the survey. Summaries of student survey responses follow, with comparisons to teacher and parents responses, where applicable.

Characteristics of Student Survey Respondents

Table 7.1 summarizes the characteristics of interdistrict magnet school and magnet program students who responded to the survey, by four school groups: elementary, middle school, high school, and magnet program. A total of 1077 students were surveyed, or 17% of the students enrolled in magnet schools and magnet programs during the 2001-02 school year; 42 percent of the students included written comments about

their experiences in their magnet school or magnet program. Of the students responding to the survey, 377 (35%) were enrolled in elementary schools, 262 (24%) in middle schools, 310 (29%) in high schools, and 128 (12%) in magnet programs.

Elementary students were nearly equally divided between female and male students, while middle schools (53%), high schools (55%) and magnet programs (67%) had larger proportions of female than male students. Overall, female students completed 55 percent of the surveys.

Table 7.1: Characteristics of Magnet School and Program Student Survey Respondents (Percentages)

	Elem	Mid	High	Prog	Total
Sex of Respondent					
Female	51	53	55	67	55
Male	49	47	45	33	45
Race					
Native American	1	2	2	2	2
Asian American	2	4	1	2	2
Black	22	40	37	17	30
White	46	14	33	70	37
Hispanic	19	18	16	3	16
Multiracial	10	22	11	6	13
Grade Level					
Fifth	29	8	0	0	37
Eighth	6	16	2*	0	24
Tenth	0	0	27	12	39
Years in the Magnet School					
1	3	9	5	4	21
2	3	2	21	8	34
3 or more	29	13	3	0	45
Residence					
Local	72	61	51	38	59
Feeder	28	39	49	62	41
Total	35	24	29	12	100

* Collaborative Alternative had expanded to include middle grades in 2001-02.

The racial breakout of survey respondents reflects the diverse populations of interdistrict magnet schools and magnet programs. Thirty-seven percent of the students

identified themselves as White, 30 percent as Black, 16 percent as Hispanic, 13 percent as multiracial, and two percent each as Native American and Asian American. Magnet programs had a relatively large proportion of White student respondents, compared with the other school groups, while middle schools had a relatively large proportion of students who identified themselves as multiracial.

Thirty-seven percent of the students were enrolled in fifth grade, while 24 percent were in eighth grade and 39 percent in tenth grade when the survey was administered. Only 21 percent of the students had attended the school for only one year, compared with 34 percent who had attended the school for two years, and 45 percent who had attended for three or more years.

Fifty-nine percent of the students lived in the district where the magnet school or program was located, while 41 percent of the students resided in feeder districts. The proportion of local and feeder students enrolled differed by school group, with nearly two-thirds of the magnet program students residing in feeder districts outside the local district, while the opposite was true for magnet elementary and middle school students. Nearly equal proportions of high school students resided in the local and feeder districts.

School Climate and Interpersonal Relationships in the School

Students responded to ten statements about the educational climate in their interdistrict magnet schools and magnet programs, and about their interpersonal relations with adults and other students in their schools. Some statements on the student survey were similar to statements on the parent and teacher surveys, summarized in Chapters 5

and 6, which permits comparing the perceptions of parents and teachers with those of students.

Figure 7.1 displays the student responses to the statement about their individual sense of safety and security, ‘I feel safe and secure in this school.’ Overall, 69 percent of the students agree with the statement, 18 percent are undecided, and 13 percent disagree. There is considerable variability across school groups in responses. The largest proportion of students agreeing (86%), and smallest proportion disagreeing (5%), are enrolled in the interdistrict magnet programs. In contrast, only 72 percent of the elementary, 70 percent of the middle school, and 58 percent of the high school students agree with the statement. Relatively large percentages of the high school students disagree (18%) or are undecided (24%) regarding the safety and security in their schools.

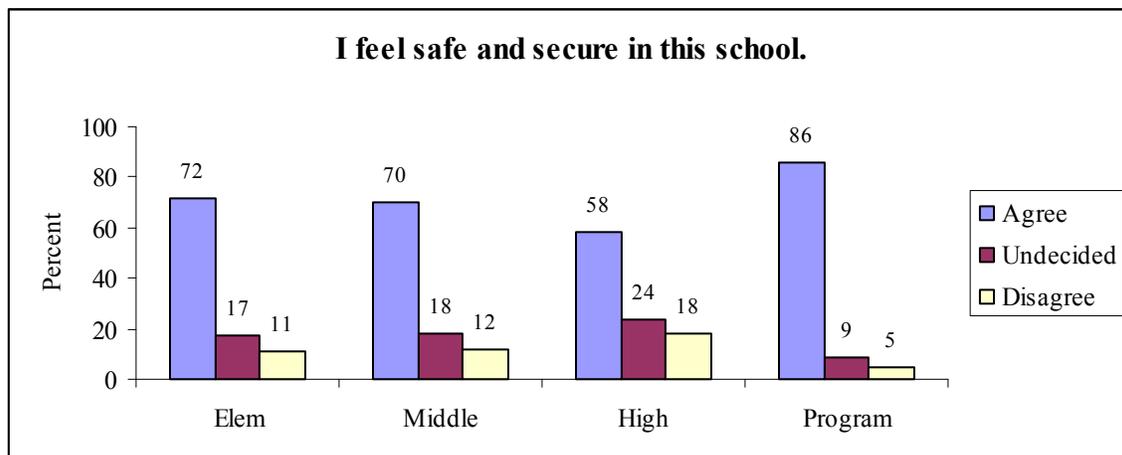


Figure 7.1: Student Responses to ‘I feel safe and secure in this school.’

The magnet school and program parent and teacher responses to a similar statement, ‘The school provides a safe and secure environment that fosters learning,’ reported in the previous two chapters were decidedly more positive than students’ responses. Overall 95 percent of the teachers and 88 percent of the parents agreed with the statement. While

the majority of students agree with the statement, student responses suggest that a smaller proportion of students perceive their school environment as safe and secure than parents and teachers in the same school groups.

Students were asked to respond to a general statement about their perception of the atmosphere in their schools, ‘Students feel welcome in this school.’ Figure 7.2 displays the distribution of responses. The responses mirrored those for the previous statement about school safety and security. The highest percentage of students agreeing attended magnet school programs (83%) and elementary schools (76%), where only five percent of the respondents from each school group disagree. Lower percentages of middle (69%) and high (52%) school students agree with the statement. About one-third of the high school students who responded to the survey are undecided and 15 percent disagree, while 23 percent of the middle school students are undecided and eight percent disagree.

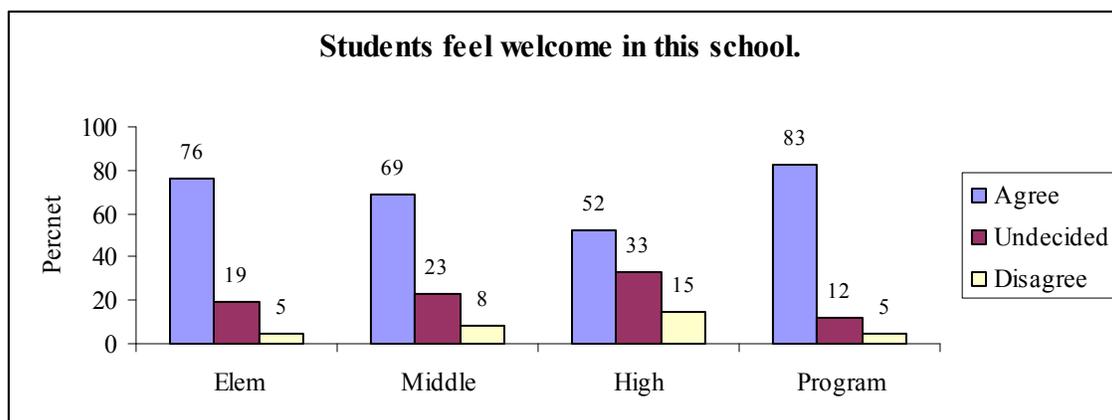


Figure 7.2: Student Responses to ‘Students feel welcome in this school.’

The written comments that students provided typically described positive interactions they experienced in their schools. A fifth grade student offered the following comment about her school, “In this school I have made a lot of friends and don’t want to leave

them. They have made me feel welcomed here. I wish there were sixth and seventh grades.”

Students were asked to respond to two statements about behavior standards in their magnet schools and magnet programs:

I understand my school’s behavior rules. (Understand)

Most students follow the behavior rules the school has set. (Follow)

Figure 7.3 provides the percentages of students agreeing with the two statements for the four school groups. The highest proportion of students agreeing with both statements attended magnet programs, with 92 percent indicating they understand school rules and 83 percent responding that most students in their school follow the rules. For elementary and middle magnet schools, 85 percent of the students agree that they understand the established rules, while 50 and 37 percent, respectively, believe that most students in their schools follow the rules. The lowest proportion of students agreeing with either statement attended magnet high schools, where only 68 percent of the students respond that they understand the behavior rules their school has set, and only 31 percent believe that most of their classmates actually follow the established rules.

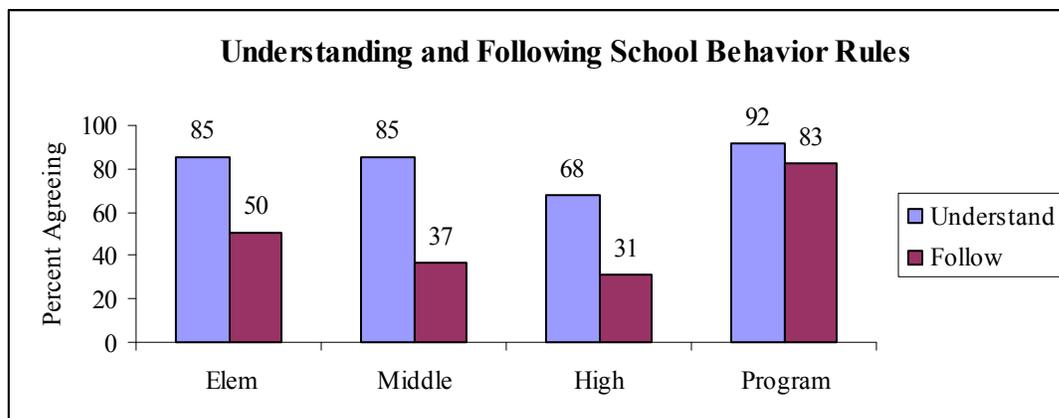


Figure 7.3: Student Responses to Statements About School Behavior Rules.

Again, except for magnet programs, students' perceptions of the extent to which most classmates follow their school's behavior rules is inconsistent with parent and teacher perceptions. About 80 percent of the parents and teachers believed that most students did, in fact, adhere to the established school rules for appropriate behavior.

Students were asked to respond to two statements about mutual respect in their schools, which the parent and teacher surveys also included. Figure 7.4 summarizes students' responses to the first of the two statements, 'There is mutual respect between teachers and students in the school.' In general, over 80 percent of the parents and teachers agreed with the statement, as illustrated in the previous chapters. The proportion of students agreeing is considerably lower for all school groups, except magnet programs. For magnet programs, 81 percent of the students agree, compared with 88 percent of the teachers and 73 percent of the parents. In elementary magnet schools, 62 percent of the students agree, compared with 93 percent of the parents and 88 percent of the teachers. At the middle school level, 45 percent of the students agree, while about three-fourths of the teachers (73%) and parents (76%) agree. The greatest disparity between perceptions is at the high school level, where only 37 percent of the students agree there is mutual respect between teachers and students, compared with 73 percent of the parents and 81 percent of the teachers. A magnet high school student provided this observation about students and teachers in his school: "The teachers need to become stronger. Some teachers get pushed around by students and I don't even think they know it."

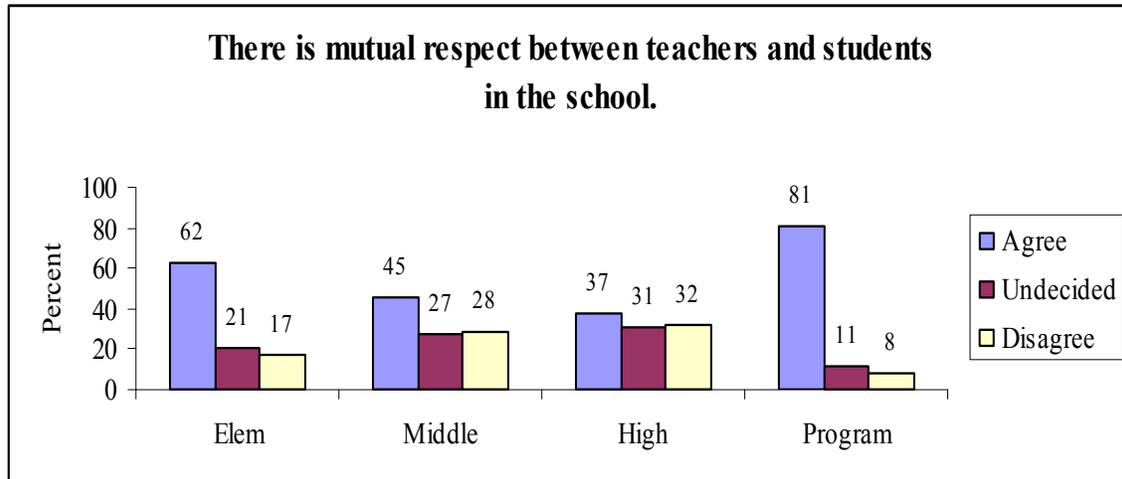


Figure 7.4: Student Responses to ‘There is mutual respect between teachers and students in the school.’

Figure 7.5 summarizes student responses to the statement, ‘There is mutual respect among students in the school.’ Parent and teacher responses to this statement are included in the previous two chapters. Across all school groups, smaller proportions of students agree with this statement than did parents or teachers. The largest percentage of student respondents agreeing with the statement again are enrolled in magnet programs, with 77 percent agreeing, compared with 80 percent of the parents and 90 percent of the teachers from the magnet program group. For the elementary school group, 55 percent of the students agree there is mutual respect among students in their schools, while 91 percent of the parents and while 77 percent of the teachers believe there is mutual respect among students in magnet elementary schools. Less than half of the middle (48%) and high (45%) students agree, compared with 49 and 73 percent of the teachers, respectively, and two-thirds of the parents in the two school groups.

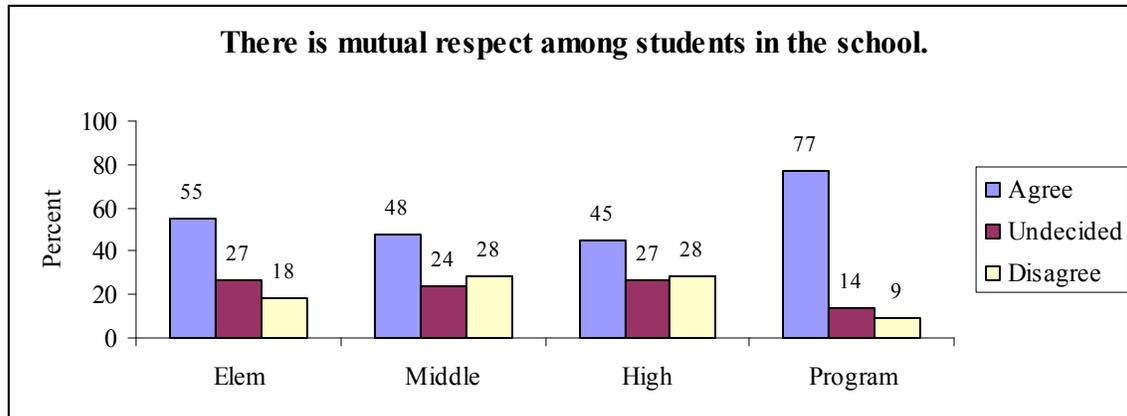


Figure 7.5: Student Responses to ‘There is mutual respect among students in the school.’

While most students wrote positive comments about their magnet schools and magnet programs, several were critical of their classmate’s behavior. For example, a middle school student noted, “I really enjoy this school and I hope to attend it through high school. The main problem is that too many students aren’t serious about school.” A high school student added, “This school provides its students with many aspects of life, college related and in the work field. The teachers are great at keeping subjects interesting and challenging. The only negative comment I bubbled in is due to the students this school has accepted. Students need to be more carefully screened and be at a higher maturity level, for students who come here to learn and leave with a good experience.” A magnet program student complained, “This year I am frustrated with my school. The new students I came in contact with were lazy, with little or no respect for our environment, teachers, etc. They didn’t practice. We looked shabby compared with last year.”

Three statements on the student survey were directed at students’ perceptions of their teachers’ interest in students’ school performance and the availability of help for students who need it, either during or after class:

My teachers are interested in how well students perform in school. (Interest)

My teachers give the help I need in class. (Help in Class)

Classroom teachers provide extra help for students who need it. (Extra Help)

Figure 7.6 compares the proportions of students agreeing with each statement, by school group. Agreement across the three statements is consistent among students in elementary schools, where 83 to 84 percent agree with each statement, and in middle schools, where 75 to 78 percent agree with each statement. Of the respondents in magnet programs, 87 percent agree that their teachers are interested in students' performance, 83 percent agree that teachers give individual students the help they need in class, and 73 percent agree that teachers provide extra help for the students who need it. The proportions of students agreeing with the statements are somewhat lower for high school respondents than for students in the other school groups. Sixty-three percent of the high school respondents agree that their teachers are interested in students' performance and provide the help they need in class, while 70 percent agree teachers do provide extra help for students who need it.

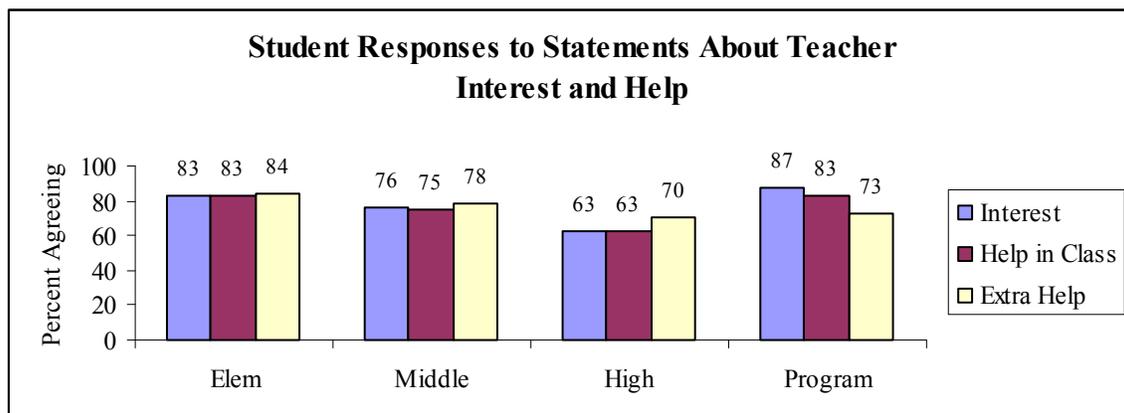


Figure 7.6: Student Responses to Statements About Teacher Interest and Help at School.

A middle school student offered the following observation about her magnet school and teachers: “I really enjoy attending this magnet school. It often startles me when I talk to students from other schools and think, “How could I ever stand that place?” My school is a wonderful school that provides many opportunities. The teachers and staff are very supportive.” A high school student contributed the following thought: “I think it’s easier to get help when you need it than in public school because the teachers have more time to explain when you don’t understand and the smaller classes make it easier to ask questions and participate.” Another student from the same high school commented: “The school gives students who need that little extra the help they need to be successful and be proud of the work they do.”

Figure 7.7 provides student responses to the statement, ‘If I have a problem I can talk to the principal or other adult in the school.’ On average, about 65 percent of the students agree with the statement, and 17 percent either disagree or are undecided. About three-fourths of the magnet program (74%) and elementary (73%) students agree, compared with 65 percent of the middle school and 55 percent of the high school students.

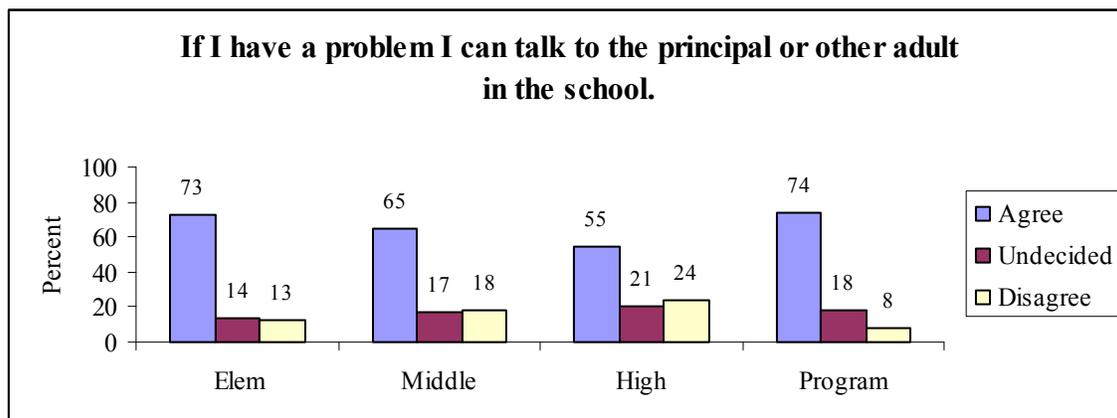


Figure 7.7: Student Responses to ‘If I have a problem I can talk to the school principal or other adult at school.’

Only eight percent of the magnet program responded that they did not feel they could talk to their principal or another adult in their schools if they have a problem, while 13 percent of the elementary, 18 percent of the middle, and 24 percent of the high school did not agree with the statement.

School Mission, Theme, and Instruction

Each Connecticut interdistrict magnet school and magnet program has defined a unique mission based on a curricular theme or pedagogical focus. Figure 7.8 summarizes student responses to the statement, ‘We use our themes (magnets) in classes.’ Most students in magnet programs (89%), elementary schools (82%), and middle schools (80%) agree that their school’s theme is incorporated into their classes, while less than 10 percent of the students in each of these three school groups disagree. In contrast, only 44 percent of the students in each of these three school groups disagree. In contrast, only 44 percent of the magnet high school students agree, while 34 percent disagree and 23 percent are undecided about the incorporation of their school’s theme in their classes.

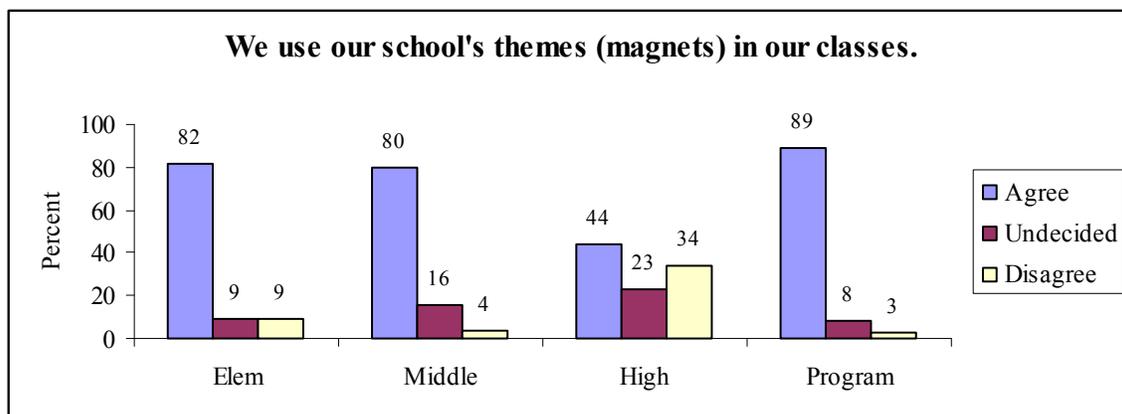


Figure 7.8: Student Responses to ‘We use our school’s themes (magnets) in our classes.’

The integration of the school’s theme/mission into its academic program and curriculum is clearly more evident to teachers in the four school groups than it is to the

students, particularly in the full-day high schools. As noted in Chapter 5, about 93 percent of the magnet program and magnet middle school teachers indicated that their school’s academic program and curriculum incorporated its theme/mission, compared with about 85 percent of the elementary and high school professionals.

Figure 7.9 displays the distribution of responses to the statement, ‘The school prepares me to deal with the real world and solve problems. About three-fourths of the elementary school (72%), middle school (70%), and magnet program (72%) students agree with the statement, compared with about half (53%) of the magnet high school students. Compared with the other school groups, relatively large proportions of magnet high school (27%) students disagree while a relatively large proportion of middle school students are undecided.

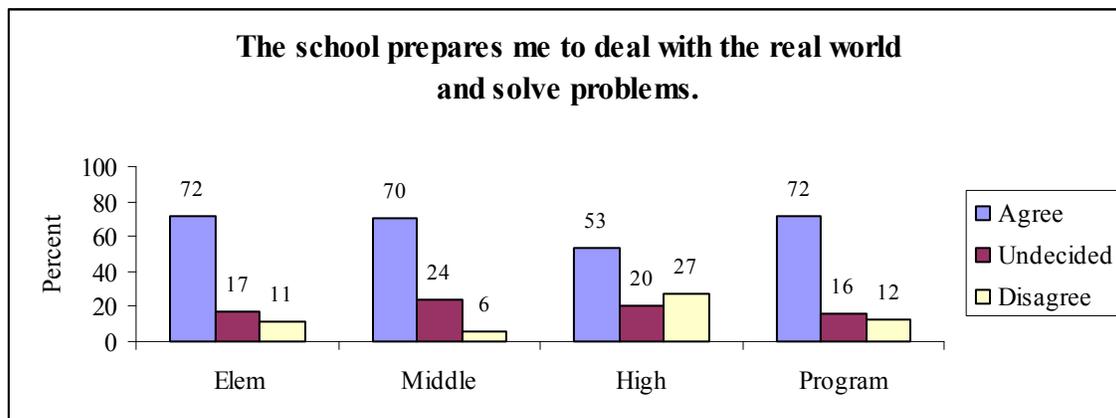


Figure 7.9: Student Responses to ‘The school prepares me to deal with the real world and to solve problems.’

The student survey contained two statements about the assessment of student learning in their schools:

I understand how I am graded (assessed) in my classes. (Understand)

Teachers test what I have learned in a variety of ways. (Variety)

Figure 7.10 presents the proportions of students agreeing with each statement. The majority of students in each school group agree with both statements. Eighty-two percent of the elementary students indicate they understand how they are graded in their classes, compared with 70 percent, each, of the middle school and magnet program students, and 61 percent of the high school students. Eighty-six percent of the elementary and 82 percent of the middle school students agree that their teachers use a variety of techniques to assess learning, compared with 69 percent of magnet program and 63 percent of high school students.

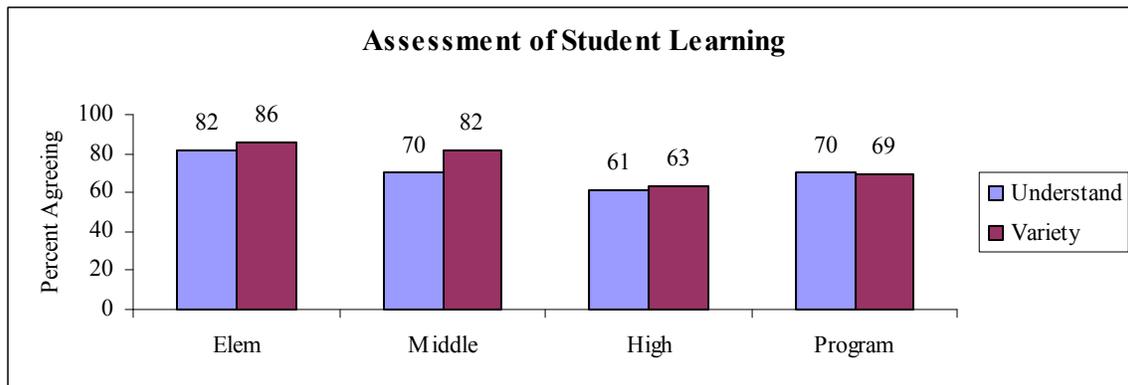


Figure 7.10: Students Responses to Statements About Assessment of Learning

The student survey contained three statements about homework:

My homework assignments help me learn at high levels. (Helps Learning)

I complete my homework assignments each day (Complete Daily)

I work on reading or homework at home with my parent or guardian. (Parents Help)

Figure 7.11 provides a summary of the proportions of students agreeing with each statement. About two-thirds of the elementary (67%) and middle school (66%) students and about half of the magnet program (51%) and high school (46%) students agree that their homework helps them to learn at high levels. Seventy-seven percent of the

elementary, 66 percent of the magnet program, 61 percent of the middle school, and 51 percent of the high school students indicate they complete their homework assignments on a daily basis. It is not surprising that as students progress through higher grades, smaller proportions of parents work with their children on reading or homework. The largest proportion of students agreeing that their parents help with reading or home work, while only slightly more than half, attend magnet elementary (55%) schools. Less than half of the middle school (41%) students agree, while only about one-fourth of the high school (27%) and magnet program (21%) students indicate they have parental help with homework.

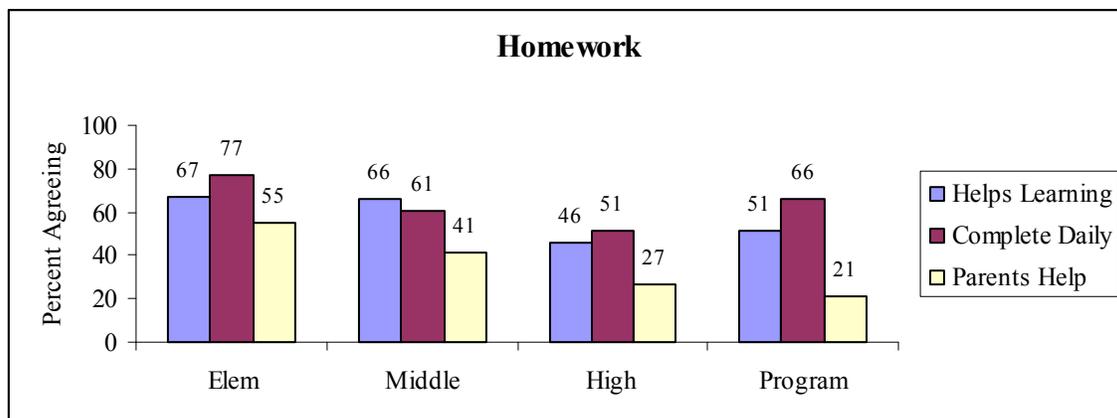


Figure 7.11: Students Responses to Statements About Homework

Figure 7.12 displays the distribution of student responses to the statement, ‘I am learning at a good pace.’ The distribution of elementary, middle, and magnet program responses are similar with 82 to 84 percent of the students in each school group agreeing, 10 percent undecided, and eight or less percent disagreeing. For high school respondents, 65 agree, 20 percent are undecided, and 15 percent disagree.

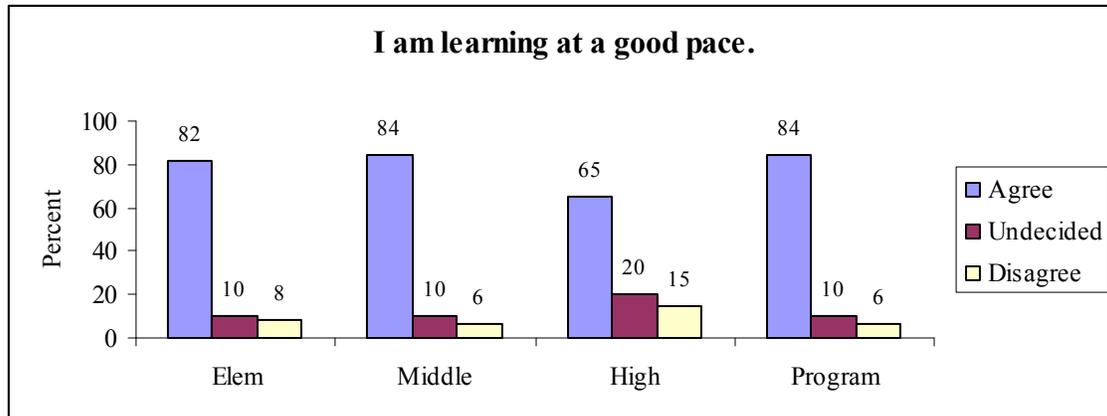


Figure 7.12: Students Responses to ‘I am learning at a good pace.’

Resources

Students were asked to respond to two statements about the use of computers and technology in their schools:

Teachers use computers and technology in class activities. (Teachers)

I use computers, videos, and other technology at school. (Students)

Figure 7.13 compares the percentages of students from the four school groups who agree with the two statements. There is considerable variability across school groups in the extent to which students agree that teachers and students use technology in the interdistrict magnet schools and magnet programs. The largest proportions of students agreeing with the two statements are in middle schools, where 82 percent of the students agree that teachers use computers and other technology in class activities and 92 percent agree that students use technology in school, and in elementary schools where 74 percent agree that teachers use technology and 88 percent agree that students use technology. Somewhat lower proportions of high school and magnet program students agree with each statement, with 62 percent of the high school and 47 percent of the magnet program students agreeing that teachers use technology in their classes and 78 percent of the high

school and 61 percent of the magnet program students agreeing that the students themselves use technology in their classes.

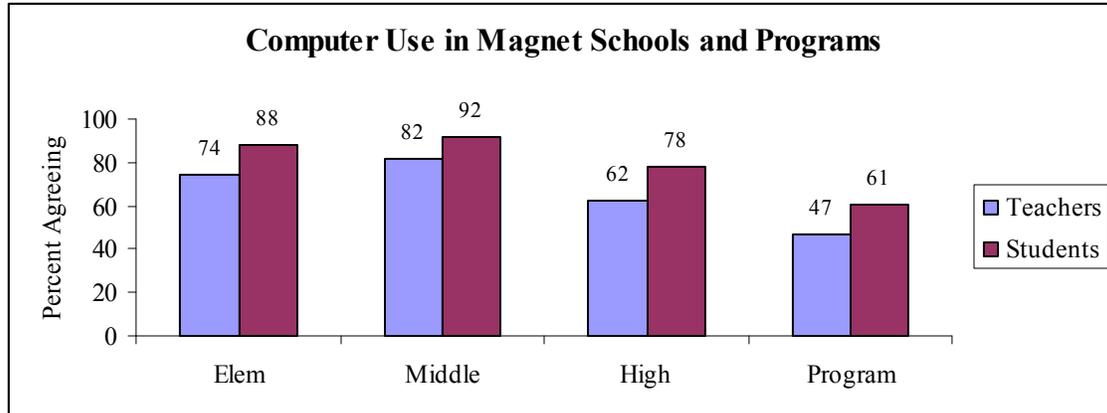


Figure 7.13: Student Responses to Statements About the Use of Computers and Technology in Their Schools.

Students provided many positive comments about the availability and use of technology in their schools. Some elementary students indicated that they had lap-top computers which they use in school and then can take home to complete homework or other activities. Other students commented that the ‘hands-on’ activities in many of their classes using technology, rather than only reading text-books, provided great learning experiences for them.

The student survey contained two statements about textbooks and instructional materials used in their schools:

Textbooks and classroom materials relate to what I am learning in class.

(Materials Relate)

I use materials besides textbooks to improve my learning. (Other Materials)

Figure 7.14 displays the distribution of students agreeing with each of the statements.

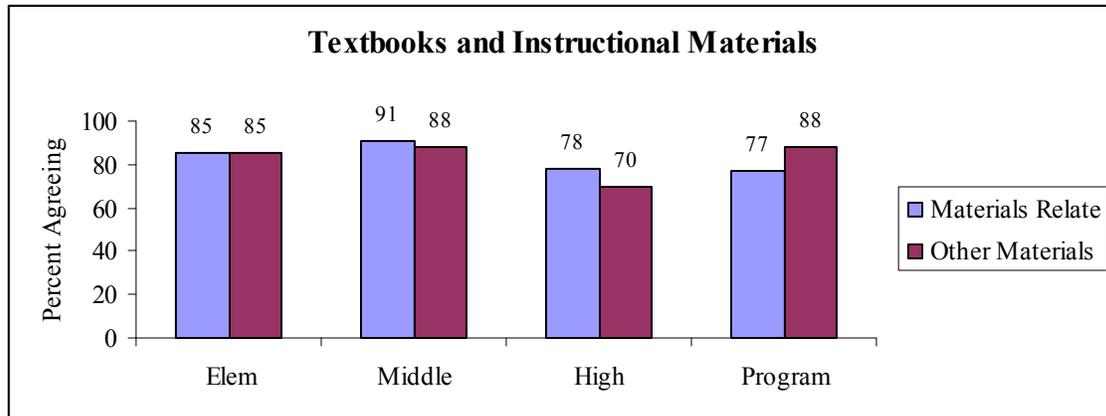


Figure 7.14: Student Responses to Statements About Textbooks and Instructional Materials

Ninety-one percent of the middle school and 85 percent of the elementary students agree, compared with 78 percent of the high school and 77 percent of the magnet program students, that their classroom texts and materials relate to what they are learning. With regard to using instructional materials in addition to textbooks, 88 percent of middle school and magnet program students agree, while 85 percent of elementary school and 70 percent of high school students agree.

The student survey contained one statement, similar to a statement on the parent survey, about student activities, ‘I am satisfied with the types of student activities this school provides.’ Figure 7.15 summarizes students’ responses. About three fourths of the elementary (76%) students are satisfied, compared with about two thirds of the middle school (69%) and magnet program (67%) students, and only half of the magnet high school (49%) students. In comparison to student responses, higher percentages of magnet elementary and high school parents were satisfied with the types of student activities their schools offered, while the opposite was true for magnet middle school and magnet program parents and students.

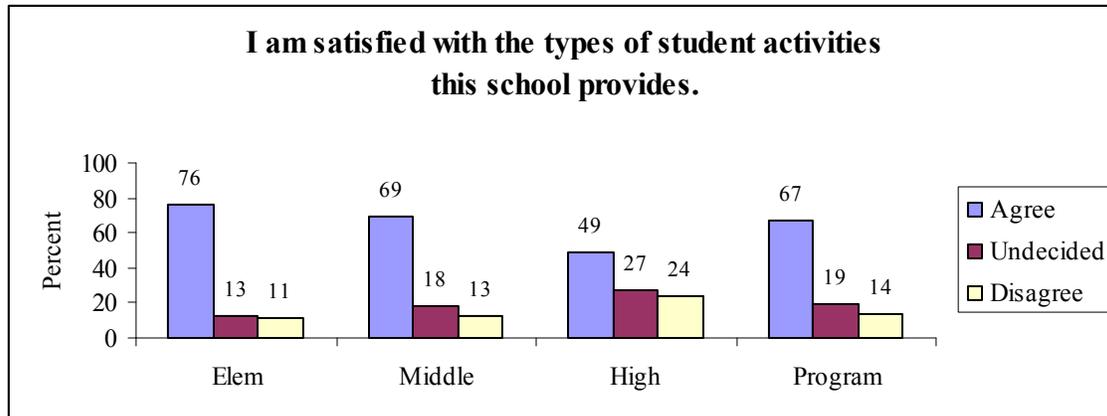


Figure 7.15: Students Responses to ‘I am satisfied with the types of student activities this school provides.’

Across the school groups, many students commented about the varied activities their schools offered both during the school day and after school, while others expressed concern about the lack of activities or need for more varied activities to meet the needs of all students. One high school student commented, “We have a disturbing lack of extracurricular activities.” Others noted their schools lack a variety of athletic programs and sports teams.

Other Comments

Students provided a wide range of written comments about the aspects of their magnet schools and magnet programs they find exciting and exceptional as well as features that concerned them. In addition to the comments cited earlier in this chapter, a large number of students wrote enthusiastically about the opportunities their schools provide: field trips, theater groups and artistic performances, instrumental lessons and band, Japanese language instruction, enrichment activities, field days, new state-of-the-art facilities, and the ‘brand new things’ in the school.

In contrast, students also commented on some negative aspects of their schools: poor facilities, lack of supplies, poor and ‘unhealthy’ school lunches, longer school day and school year, longer bus rides to and from school, lack of bike racks to secure their bicycles, too many rules, not enough rules, and large class size. Several students at the elementary and middle school levels expressed concern that once they complete the highest grade in their schools, there are no magnet school options in their region for them to transfer into in order to continue their education in an interdistrict magnet school.

Half-day magnet program students identified a problem unique to them: being in two different schools each day. This creates a tension when they are required to participate in a local school activity such as a class field trip, which extends into magnet program time, or when they need to get extra help in an academic class at their local high school. Several proposed a solution of extending magnet programs to full-day status and adding the academic disciplines to the curriculum.

Summary

The survey of interdistrict magnet school and magnet program students in grades five, eight, and ten provides information about students’ perceptions of the magnet schools and magnet programs from the racially and ethnically diverse groups of local and feeder district students who attend them. Most students have been enrolled in the school or program for at least two years, so at the time they were surveyed in spring 2002 they had been in the magnet school or program long enough to have developed opinions about their magnet school or program.

There are striking differences across the school groups in students' perceptions of several aspects of their magnet schools and magnet programs, and between students' views and those of their parents and their teachers within the same school group.

In responding to statements about school climate, tenth grade students attending the half-day magnet programs are decidedly more positive than tenth grade students attending full-day high schools. The level of agreement of magnet elementary and middle school students are generally between those of the high school and magnet program students. For the most part, magnet school and program students feel safe and secure as well as welcome in their school building, believe that students understand the school's behavior rules and to a lesser extent follow the established rules, and acknowledge there is mutual respect between teachers and students and among students. Magnet school and program students also believe that, in general, teachers are interested in their academic performance and provide them with help during class and outside of class, if they need it. Also, if they have a problem, many indicate they can find an adult in their school to help them resolve the problem. However, parent and teacher perceptions of school climate presented in Chapters 5 and 6 were considerably more positive than student perceptions summarized in this chapter, across all school groups.

The explanation for the differences in students' perceptions of the climate within their schools and those of parents and professional staff members is unclear and needs further investigation. One explanation is that students, parents, and teachers may be basing their observations on different contexts. For students, 'school' consists of many structured and unstructured experiences ranging from their bus ride or walk to and from school, before and after school activities, and interactions in the classroom, halls, lavatories, cafeteria,

and playground. The context of teachers and professional staff members is likely to be more limited than that of students, as teachers and other professionals engage students in activities that are structured and observe student interactions in the aggregate. As students progress through school levels, most parents are less involved in the day-to-day school activities, spend less time in schools during the school day, and have more-limited first-hand information about the school. Their perceptions are likely to be based on observations their children or other parents share, or from meetings and school activities they attend outside of the school day. As a result, the perceptions of issues like safety and security, and mutual respect within schools for students, parents and teachers are based on different ranges of information. Students' perceptions are more likely to be based on their individual personal experiences, while parents' and teachers' perceptions may be based on more generalized information.

An alternative explanation may be that students have higher expectations for the experiences that define a safe and secure environment, mutual respect, and appropriate behavior in schools. While some students desire fewer rules in school, most others may be seeking the security and structure that enforced rules provide, however in a more personal and nurturing environment.

Magnet school missions and themes unify the education experience within the schools and programs. Larger proportions of students in magnet elementary and middle schools and in magnet programs indicate that their school's theme is used in their classes, than students in magnet high schools. Particularly for magnet high schools, students' perceptions that the school theme is integrated into classroom instruction are decidedly lower than teachers' perceptions. The information in this and previous chapters suggests

that high school teachers believe the school's mission/theme is incorporated into the curriculum and instructional program. However, that integration of theme in the classroom is not evident for many magnet tenth grade high school students. As a result, some further examination is warranted to determine why student and teacher perceptions differ so widely. Is the theme truly integrated across the school's instructional program for all grades, or only for the upper grades? Are the connections insufficiently developed so that students are unable to recognize the thematic integration? Or, is the integration of the theme so diffuse that it needs to be strengthened?

With regard to instructional issues, larger proportions of elementary and middle school students than high school and magnet program students indicate they understand how they are assessed and that their teachers use a variety of means to assess their learning. While the majority of magnet school and magnet program students complete homework on a daily basis, smaller proportions believe that the homework they do actually helps them to learn at high levels. As students progress through higher grades, parents are less likely to assist them with their homework, and they are less apt to complete daily assignments. The majority of magnet school and magnet program students believe that their experiences in magnet schools and magnet programs prepare them for the real world and to solve problems.

Magnet school and program students provided mixed responses to statements about the availability and use of resources in their schools. Large proportions of elementary and middle school students are in classes where teachers use technology and in schools where they have access to computers and technology to improve their learning. Across all school groups most students acknowledge that the texts and materials they use in their

classes relate to what they learn and that they use materials in addition to their textbooks to learn. Magnet elementary school students were most satisfied with the variety of co-curricular activities their schools offer, while magnet high school students were least satisfied. Students' written responses identified a lack of athletic activities and sports teams as a concern for middle and high school students.

Finally, more than 80 percent of the elementary school, middle school, and magnet program students and two-thirds of the magnet high school students consider the pace at which they are learning appropriate.

The first chapter of this report briefly described the academic focus of interdistrict magnet schools and magnet programs. Subsequent chapters investigated diversity, student academic achievement, and teacher, parent, and student perceptions of their magnet schools and programs. The next chapter describes the theme/mission of magnet schools and unique practices that contribute to magnet school and program success.