

ARE PARENTS SATISFIED WITH THEIR  
CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

Marilyn J. Floyd

The demands for changes in the instructional program of the public schools have been numerous in recent years. More often than not one of the major justifications for these demands is that parents are dissatisfied with the education their children are receiving.

After repeatedly hearing this statement made, this author began to question whether there was a basis for it. Had research shown parents to be dissatisfied? A survey of the literature on parental attitudes revealed little information pertaining to the level of parent satisfaction with the instructional programs in their children's schools. In addition, most of the information available had been collected through the use of written questionnaires. Problems with the representativeness of the samples made the validity questionable. When extensive interview data on parental attitudes about the instructional program in schools was collected in Florida during 1973, under a grant from the National Science Foundation,<sup>1</sup> it became possible to explore the level of parent satisfaction. It was also possible to relate this level of satisfaction to certain demographic characteristics of the parent and to characteristics of the school.

During the Spring of 1973, a total<sup>1</sup> of 4,545 public school parents were interviewed in eight Florida counties.<sup>2</sup> The group was composed of 1,512 men and 2,979 women; 29.2% of the people were minority group members and 70.8% were white. Parents of children at all grade levels were included with no grade having less than 5% of the sample.

Parents were asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with the quality of the instructional program on a four point scale - very satisfied, fairly satisfied, fairly unsatisfied and very unsatisfied. Table 1 presents the percentage breakdown of the responses.

-----  
Insert Table 1 here  
-----

---

<sup>1</sup>These data were collected under grant number GI-34955 from the National Science Foundation, Division of Social Systems and Human Resources. The opinions expressed are those of the author and should not be construed as representing the opinion of any agency of the United States Government.

<sup>2</sup>Dade, Duval, Escambia, Jefferson, Lee, Leon, Manatee, Palm Beach,

TABLE 1  
 LEVEL OF PARENT SATISFACTION WITH THE PERCEIVED  
 QUALITY OF THE INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM  
 (In Percentage)\*

Level of Satisfaction				
Very Satisfied	Fairly Satisfied	Fairly Unsatisfied	Very Unsatisfied	
34.4%	47.9%	10.6%	7.1%	100% (N=4481)

\*Percentages in tables may not total 100 due to rounding error.

TABLE 2  
 LEVEL OF PARENT SATISFACTION WITH THE PERCEIVED  
 QUALITY OF THE INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM BY RACE  
 (In Percentage)

Level of Satisfaction	Race		
	White	Black	Other
Very satisfied	28.4%	48.5%	55.2%
Fairly satisfied	49.9%	44.0%	33.3%
Fairly unsatisfied	13.2%	3.9%	9.4%
Very unsatisfied	8.5%	3.7%	2.1%
	100.0% (N=3178)	100.0% (N=1217)	100.0% (N=96)

$\gamma = .41$

Parents of Cuban, Puerto Rican, Mexican, Oriental and American Indian heritage were included in this category.

The high level of satisfaction may surprise many people. However, if the responses are dicotomized, the resulting 82% "satisfied" nearly matches Gallup's (1973) 81% "satisfied" found on the nation-wide poll conducted in the spring of 1973. Apparently, parents in general are satisfied with the instructional programs in the schools. The question still remains as to whether there are variations in the level of satisfaction of subgroups within the sample. Therefore, relationships were sought between level of satisfaction and demographic characteristics of the parents.

No significant relationship was found between level of satisfaction and age of the parents. However, a significant, but very weak, relationship was found between level of satisfaction and sex. Women indicated slightly higher levels of satisfaction. Race was found to be a highly significant variable in relation to the level of satisfaction, as shown in Table 2. Goodman and Kruskal's (1954) gamma was used to determine this relationship and resulted in an index of .41 with black parents decidedly more satisfied than white parents with the instructional program.

---

Insert Table 2 here

---

The education level of the parent had a strong inverse relationship to the level of satisfaction with a gamma of  $-.21$ . As shown in Table 3, the more highly educated the parent, the less likely the parent was to be satisfied.

---

Insert Table 3 here

---

Socioeconomic status, as measured by the Duncan (1961) Index, was inversely related to satisfaction with gamma of  $-.167$ . There was a gradual decrease in satisfaction from 93% at the lowest socioeconomic level to 77% at the highest level. (See Table 4). Only race and parental level of education had a stronger relationship to level of satisfaction than socioeconomic status.

Thus, quite a strong relationship appears to exist between parents' race, education and socioeconomic status and their degree of satisfaction with the current courses and methods of instruction in their child's school.

It is possible that relatively recent school integration programs may have been partially responsible for the variation in satisfaction between black parents and white parents. Relationships might exist between the level of parent satisfaction and the racial composition of the school and the racial status of the school prior to integration. No significant relationships were found, however, which indicates that integration was not a significant factor in parents' perceptions of the instructional programs.

TABLE 3

LEVEL OF PARENT SATISFACTION WITH THE PERCEIVED QUALITY  
OF THE INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM BY EDUCATION OF PARENT

(In Percentages)

Level of Satisfaction	Years of Education			
	8 or less	9-12	13-16	17 & over
Very satisfied	45.4%	34.9%	26.2%	23.9%
Fairly satisfied	44.2%	47.6%	52.9%	46.5%
Fairly unsatisfied	6.2%	9.9%	14.4%	18.1%
Very unsatisfied		7.6%	6.5%	11.5%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	(N=718)	(N=2696)	(N=803)	(N=243)

$$\gamma = -.21$$

The level of parent satisfaction was also compared with the grade level of the child and a significant relationship was found. As can be seen in Table 5, parents with children in the elementary grades of 1 through 5 had the highest levels of satisfaction. The percentage of satisfied parents of middle school-junior high grade (6-9) children was significantly lower. This was especially noticeable in the "very satisfied" category where the drop after grade 5 is extremely marked and continues through grade 12. The lowest level of satisfaction was reached in grade 9 where over 25% of the parents were dissatisfied. Parents of senior high students (grades 10-12) were more satisfied than middle school or junior high parents, but less satisfied than elementary parents. Thus, the differences in parental satisfaction by grade level were significant and a distinct pattern was discernible. Since no significant relationship was found between the age of the parent and the level of satisfaction, this variation must be the result of the parents' perceptions of the instructional program at the various levels rather than a reflection of any demographic characteristic of the parent. Any explanation of this variation requires further research which is presently being formulated.

The data were also analyzed by county and the resulting gamma of .005 showed no significant relationship between level of parental satisfaction and individual school systems.

From this study, it was apparent that the majority of parents are satisfied with the present instructional programs and that a disproportionate number of the dissatisfied parents are found within that sector of the population which is more apt to verbalize their dissatisfaction. It is not the contention here that the instructional program is not in need of change but simply that parental dissatisfaction is not as widespread as usually inferred, and should not be used as a primary justification for change.

#### REFERENCES

- Gallup, George H. "Fifth Annual Gallup Poll of the Public Attitudes Toward Education," Phi Delta Kappan, LV (September, 1973), 42.
- Goodman, Leo and Kruskal, W. H. "Measurement of Association for Cross Classification," Journal of the American Statistical Association, XLIX (1954), 260.
- Duncan, O. D. "A Socioeconomic Index for All Occupations," in Occupations and Social Status. ed. by A. J. Reiss, Jr., et al. (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961), p. 109-38.

-----  
Insert Table 4 and Table 5 here  
-----

TABLE 4

LEVEL OF PARENT SATISFACTION WITH THE INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM  
 BY THE SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS\* OF THE PARENT  
 (In Percentage)

		Socioeconomic Status in Duncan Deciles									
		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Level of Satisfaction											
Very Satisfied	39.2%	47.2%	41.8%	44.3%	44.3%	35.7%	33.2%	32.2%	32.0%	28.9%	25.0%
Fairly Satisfied	53.9%	41.5%	45.6%	39.2%	49.3%	49.0%	49.0%	50.0%	49.0%	49.7%	52.3%
Fairly Unsatisfied	3.9%	6.1%	6.3%	10.3%	8.6%	8.6%	9.2%	11.2%	11.0%	12.2%	15.8%
Very Unsatisfied	2.9%	5.2%	6.3%	6.2%	6.4%	6.4%	8.6%	6.6%	7.9%	9.2%	6.9%
	99.9% (N=102)	100.0% (N=561)	100.0% (N=79)	100.0% (N=273)	100.0% (N=499)	100.0% (N=258)	100.0% (N=337)	100.0% (N=453)	99.9% (N=1021)	100.0%	100.0% (N=583)

Y = -.167

\*As measured by the Duncan Index

TABLE 5

LEVEL OF PARENT SATISFACTION WITH THE INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM  
 BY GRADE LEVEL BEING CONSIDERED  
 (In Percentage)

Level of Satisfaction	Grade Level											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Very Satisfied	55.4%	42.6%	43.0%	41.6%	44.1%	28.2%	31.3%	28.7%	22.4%	27.9%	29.5%	34.9%
Fairly Satisfied	36.3%	44.7%	42.4%	44.9%	43.2%	50.0%	50.6%	47.9%	52.5%	53.1%	53.2%	47.8%
Fairly Unsatisfied	5.4%	8.5%	8.0%	8.2%	9.6%	12.6%	10.9%	13.6%	15.0%	11.5%	8.8%	10.5%
Very Unsatisfied	2.9%	4.2%	6.5%	5.2%	3.0%	9.1%	7.2%	9.7%	10.1%	7.5%	8.4%	6.7%
	100.0% (N=278)	100.0% (N=284)	99.9% (N=323)	99.9% (N=305)	99.9% (N=333)	99.9% (N=634)	100.0% (N=613)	99.9% (N=390)	100.0% (N=366)	100.0% (N=416)	99.9% (N=308)	99.9% (N=209)