

**Wheaton/Warrenville District 200**  
**Community Survey**  
June 2005

<b>Executive summary</b>
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In June 2005, UNICOM-ARC completed fieldwork in a survey on behalf of Wheaton/Warrenville District 200. The purpose of the survey was to better understand area residents' perceptions of and priorities for the District.

Five hundred (500) interviews were completed from a random telephone sample of registered voters in the District. A sample of this size yields an error margin of  $\pm 4.4\%$ .

Key findings of the survey are noted below.

- ✓ **Most respondents had favorable perceptions of the District and the quality of education it provides.**

At several points in the survey, strong majorities of respondents gave positive marks to the District. More than four in five (80.4%) respondents gave the District an "A" or "B" grade. One fourth of respondents answered that the District has "improved" (25.2%) over the past five years while a solid majority felt that the District has "stayed the same" (54.6%). Only 8.2% answered that the District has declined.

When asked about improvements in the District, respondents were most likely to answer that they had seen improvement in "curriculum" (18.3%) and "teachers" (14.3%). Although few respondents saw a decline in the quality of education the provided by the District, the areas where they perceived the decline the most were "teachers" (14.3%), "principals and administrators" (14.6%), and "financial condition" (14.6%).

A strong majority (67.6%) agreed with the statement "I trust the District 200 Board of Education to make the right decisions about the overall direction of our school district," while 75.8% agreed that "I'm optimistic about the overall direction of my school district."

Results of questions about specific aspects of the District also elicited positive responses from majorities of respondents. Eight in ten (81.6%) respondents said the phrase "one of the best districts in the Collar counties of Chicago" was descriptive of the District (5 -

7 on a seven point scale). Another 89.8% considered the phrase “safe learning environment” to be descriptive of the District. “Excellent teachers” and “maintains high academic standards for all students” were also considered descriptive to more than eight in ten respondents.

Close to eight in ten respondents (78.6%) thought the phrase “modern and well-maintained buildings and facilities “ was descriptive, while 74.6% answered that “outstanding student performance on standardized tests” was descriptive. The only phrases considered not descriptive to a majority of respondents were “experienced recent cutbacks in important programs and services” (28.2%) and “too old fashioned with respect to educational programs” (22.4%).

✓ **Respondents would generally be supportive of a tax increase if it would improve the quality of education in the District.**

Nearly three-fourths of respondents (72.0%) agreed that they would be “willing to invest in education by paying higher taxes, provided that the schools are being operated efficiently and offering a high quality of education.” More than six in ten respondents (64.0%) agreed that they would be willing “to support an increase in taxes to make sure we have a high quality of education in our school district.” In contrast, a slightly majority (52.4%) agreed that “people like me can’t afford to pay higher property taxes, no matter the cause.”

When asked if the District should cut programs and services or raise taxes, a plurality (48.0%) answered that taxes should be raised, with three in ten (29.4%) answering that the District should make cuts. Of those who would support a tax increase, 33.7% would pay between \$101 and \$300 yearly, while an additional 27.5% would pay \$100 or less per year in increased taxes. Less than one in five (17.3%) answered that they “...trust the Board to ask for the amount they need.”

✓ **While most respondents believed that the District does well communicating with area residents, there was some room for improvement in asking for and responding to public input.**

A strong majority (66.2%) of respondents gave the District high marks (excellent/good) for the job it does communicating with area residents. Slightly less gave excellent/good

ratings to the job the district does responding to public input (50.2%) or for the job it does asking for public input (47.0%).

- ✓ **A majority of respondents would prefer the District to remain competitive with neighboring districts and not try to be a “world class district.”**

Six in ten (60.4%) respondents answered that the “District should focus on remaining competitive with neighboring districts,” while 35.8% agreed that “District 200 should work to become a world-class school district, where students would be competitive with leading school systems throughout the world.” When asked specifically what District 200 needs to do or to have to become among the best Districts in the world, approximately two in ten answered that it should have “quality staff/teachers” (22.7%) and “quality curriculum/programs” (18.2%).

In looking at comparisons in the quality of education between neighboring districts, respondents feel District 200 has a better “quality of staff/teachers” (19.8%), “good parental involvement” (16.0%) and “quality of curriculum/programs” (10.2%). Close to one in ten respondents perceived that the District fell short in “lack of financial support” (9.8%) and “high class sizes” (9.8%) compared to neighboring districts.

Respondents also placed a high priority on maintaining current class sizes and keeping teachers’ salaries competitive. More than nine in ten respondents (91.6%) answered that it was either “very” or “somewhat” important to have competitive teachers’ salaries, while 85.4% said it was important that District 200 maintains current class sizes.

When asked what should be the top priority for District 200, 35.2% answered “a challenging and balanced curriculum that leads to success,” while 27.8% answered “a highly qualified and well-training staff.”

- ✓ **When told the District didn’t have enough funds to meet all needs, majorities of respondents didn’t think the district should reduce expenditures on any item, with most wanting the District to keep the same spending level.**

Respondents were read a list of ways the District could spend available funds and were asked if the District should increase, keep the same or reduce funds in each area. In almost every case, a plurality of respondents wanted the District to keep funds the same. A slight plurality (39.2%) thought the District should increase funds in “offering

foreign language instruction at lower grade levels," where 33.6% thought funds should be kept the same. The following areas topped the list in terms of respondents answering funds should remain the same: "maintaining the current level of extra-curricular activities" (72.6% - keep funding the same), "continuing sports programs at their current level" (71.2%), "maintaining average class sizes (70.4%) and "reducing average class sizes" (63.4%).

"Maintaining a quality teaching staff" had the highest percentage of respondents who answered that funds should be increased (46.2%), although a plurality (52.4%) wanted funds to remain the same in this area.

In only two areas did more than two in ten respondents answer that funds should be reduced: "providing all day kindergarten" (37.2%) and "providing early childhood education" (21.8%).