

INFORMATION ITEM

Date: November 18, 2019

To: Kari Cremascoli, Ph.D.
Superintendent

From: Mrs. Kelly Jackson
Administrator for 5-8 Education

Subject: New Trier Township Eighth Grade Survey Report

Background Information

During the spring of 2019, the New Trier Township Eighth Grade Survey was once again given across the township to eighth grade students. The survey focuses on preparedness in the areas of 21st century skills, as well as social emotional connections with the school.

834 eighth graders across the sender schools took the survey, 336 of which were eighth graders from WJHS. The survey was comprised of questions which asked students to comment on their middle school and junior high experiences including challenges faced, feelings of preparation in academic skills areas, and their feelings of preparation in social emotional areas.

For the purposes of this report, we will first review trends that were seen across the township schools, and then look at Wilmette's responses in those same areas. All principals have access to data in order to see discrepancies, should they exist, between the individual sender school data.

Township Trends

Challenges

For this question, students were asked to mark aspects of middle school they found challenging from a list of 11 options including peer pressure, making friends, and homework. Across the township over half of students identified being challenged by balancing schoolwork and a social life, lack of sleep, and managing the homework load. Lack of sleep was the top answer in the township, with close to 61% of students marking this as a challenge. These results are in line with last year's results.

The areas receiving the least amount of challenge as noted by students were peer pressure to use e-cigarettes (vape) and alcohol use. Again, these results are the same as last year.

Academic Skills

Students were asked to consider their school experiences and mark all areas listed according to one of four categories of preparation: Very Prepared, Prepared, Somewhat Prepared, and Not Prepared.

They were also able to mark N/A. For the purpose of this report, we combined the "Very Prepared" and "Adequately Prepared" categories as positive indicators of preparedness and the "Somewhat Prepared" and "Not Prepared" categories as negative indicators.

Across the township students marked positive feelings of preparedness in many areas, including technology, critical thinking, and research standing out at the top of the list with more than 80% of students saying they felt prepared in these areas. Technology was the area where students felt most prepared across the township, with 84% of students reporting feeling prepared or very prepared.

Students marked feeling prepared at a lesser rate in the areas of time management and study skills. Each of these categories had below a 67% positive indicator of preparedness. The academic skills areas continued the same trends that we saw in 2018-2019.

Social Emotional Skills

In the same way students were asked about academic skills, they were asked to consider their school experiences in social emotional areas and relationships, and mark all areas listed according to the four categories mentioned above.

Across the township students marked positive feelings of preparedness in many areas. 82% or more students indicated feeling positively prepared at having respectful relationships with others, understanding the perspectives and experiences of others, and making ethical, constructive choices. A close tie for fourth was advocating for yourself when you need help, and resisting peer pressure, both with 80% positive marks.

Receiving somewhat lower marks as feeling positively prepared were working on culturally diverse teams, overcoming adversity, set-backs, or challenges, and having a sense of personal goals, all of which indicated between 68 and 70% of students felt positively prepared.

Across the township students overwhelmingly reported that they had positive connections with friends and adults in their school, and that they felt supported as they prepared for their transition to high school.

Wilmette Junior High

In all of the aforementioned areas, Wilmette Junior High followed the trends seen at the township level.

Challenges

In the area of challenges, the top three areas of challenge indicated by WJHS students were balancing schoolwork and a social life, lack of sleep, and managing the homework load. Slightly different from the township was WJHS students' top challenge, which was balancing schoolwork and social life as opposed to lack of sleep.

Just as the township trend indicated, WJHS students cited challenges associated with substance abuse and peer pressure at a significantly lesser rate than the other areas. To address the areas of challenge that students are indicating at WJHS, we continue use social-emotional supports and lessons in our health curriculum, specifically highlighting ways to manage time, as well as the importance of sleep. While lack of sleep is still in the top three areas, different from the township as a whole, lack of sleep was not the top challenge for students, indicating that efforts to adjust our schedule and start time for instrumental music are having a positive effect on sleep habits.

Academic Skills

In this area, again, District 39 fell in line with the township trends. One area to note, however, is the area of technology where close to 90% of WJHS students indicated feeling positively prepared, with 56% of those students saying they felt “Very Prepared.” This is a direct result of the work that has been done across the 5-8 campus with respect to technology integration and preparation, and continues the trend that we saw last year.

Similar to the township trends, students marked feeling positively prepared at a rate of over 56% in the areas of time management and study skills, however, these received the lowest marks for preparedness, and will be areas that we examine more closely moving forward.

To address student feelings of lower preparedness in the areas of time management and study skills, we will look for ways to integrate executive functioning into classroom instruction, to help students feel more prepared in these areas.

Social Emotional Skills

In all areas asked under social-emotional skills, students across the township marked positive preparedness at a rate of over 70%. Students in Wilmette marked positive preparedness at a percentage the same as or higher than the township average in all areas. Wilmette showed over 71% positive preparedness in all areas mentioned on the survey.

While at the township level, the lowest areas of positive preparedness were setting goals, overcoming set-backs, and working with culturally diverse teams, in Wilmette the lowest areas were setting personal goals and advocating for peers in bullying situations.

Now that we have one year of data from the Mindsets, Essential Skills, and Habits (MESH) surveys that were administered to 8th grade to assess competencies and help understand students’ strengths and areas needing support to help students succeed in college, career and life, we look forward to digging into this data as well as additional information to indicate how our students are feeling with respect to social-emotional preparedness.

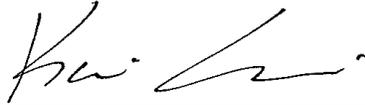
Adult Connections

One area of specific focus for students and staff across the 5-8 campus highlighted by the survey is in the area of adult connections. Students at WJHS indicated that almost 80% of them had an adult in the school they could go to if they had a problem, and close to 50% indicated that they had 5 or more adults who they felt cared for them at their school. At first glance, this number is an outstanding percentage, but coupled with last year’s MESH climate and culture data, which indicated our students’ sense of belonging was below the national average, we know that students’ sense of belonging is not where we would like it to be, so many measures have been put into place this year as we focus on improving the climate and connections our students have with adults at school. Included in these efforts have been specific community building lessons and discussions of identity and personality as a member of the classroom community. These have been aligned to our theme of being “Tied together as one community.” Additionally, our Student Advisory Boards have been working to create events that promote a positive school climate, including #StartWithHello week, Unity Day, and gratitude challenges.

Summary

As always, the New Trier Township Eighth Grade Survey provided information for us to analyze as we address our students needs with respect to academic and social-emotional preparation for high school. We look forward to increases, especially in the area of social-emotional preparation, as a result of the many steps we are taking this year to address information from this survey, as well as from other sources of social-emotional data.

**Recommended for presentation
to the Board of Education**



**Kari Cremascoli, Ph.D.
Superintendent**