

Creating a Dream School

Burlington School District
Burlington, VT

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Research Project Funding



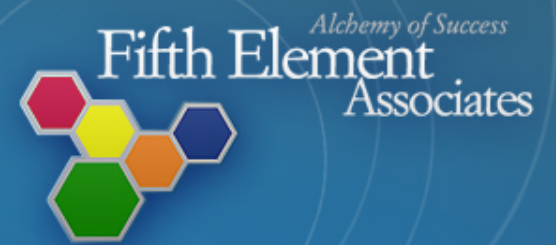
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Executive Summary

Project Description



The original RFP stated:

“We seek additional information [from K-5 parents] in the following *general* areas:

1. What are the most important components of education for your child?
2. How do you define “excellence” for your child’s education?
3. In your opinion, what is the best mix of students by socio-economic status in an ideal school?
4. Which elements of a magnet school appeal to you for an elementary aged student?
5. What elements of a magnet school would lead you to choose a magnet school over a neighborhood school for an elementary aged student?”

Executive Summary



- 56% of current K-5 parents would likely apply to their Dream School if it were located at Barnes or Wheeler
- 46% of Champlain, Edmunds, Flynn and Smith families would likely apply to a Barnes or Wheeler Dream School
- More than half of all parents definitely want the Dream School explored and the option to choose; 7 out of 10 view exploration and choice favorably

Executive Summary



- Parents want their children to get more exposure to, and education in, the arts
- Parents want the environment addressed in everything from the school building to what is taught in the classroom
- Parents in general want more subjects to be taught and they want them to be more connected to real life
- Parents want the school to be more connected to/integrated with the community

Executive Summary

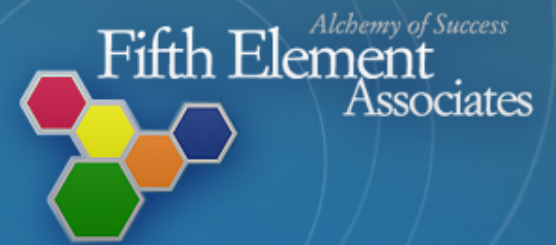


- Parents want more opportunities to be involved in the schools
- Individual attention for their child is very important to parents, but it is not at the top of their list
- Great educators are key, along with low teacher/student ratios
- Diversity brings many benefits to the classroom

Executive Summary



- Parents are tired of the process and want progress made
- Parents are concerned that changes will involve redistricting, bussing, and/or mandatory participation
- Parents believe that the Dream School concept will greatly benefit their children
- Many parents want the Dream School to be available at all schools



Background

Methodology



- Utilized a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods:
 - Randomly selected telephone survey among parents of K-5 students in the district
 - Internet survey among district parents and parents of pre-school children, as well as teachers, and community members
 - In-person survey among non-English speaking parents
 - Insight (focus) groups and in-depth telephone interviews among parents of K-5 and pre-elementary school-aged children

Methodology



- Quantitative research focused on a large number of participants to capture breadth of responses (margin of error +/-3%):
 - Telephone survey of 314 families with a child in one of the six K-5 schools in Burlington, including bilingual parents
 - 26 in person interviews with non-English speaking parents of K-5 children
 - 93 Internet surveys of Burlington pre-school parents and 54 with K-5 parents with children in independent schools

Methodology



- Contact was attempted with every K-5 custodial parent/guardian in the school district (1,469 total)
 - as many as 6 attempts were made
- Everyone with whom contact was established and who wished to be interviewed was included
- 394 completed surveys (plus 32 partials)
- 93 completed surveys from pre-K parents
- Surveys were proportional by
 - School enrollment
 - Child's lunch program
 - Language spoken at home

Note

- Internet based surveys were also conducted among
 - K-5 parents who were not reached by telephone or other means
 - Teachers, administrators and staff
 - and the general public in Burlington
- The results of these surveys will be reported separately and at another time

Methodology



- Qualitative research focused on a small number participants (23) to add depth and to understand the cultural context
- Three insight (focus) groups
 - One among K-5 parents
 - One among preschool parents
 - One among parents with K-5 children who were home schooled, in private/independent schools, or varianced from one public elementary school to another
- In-depth telephone interviews supplemented the groups

Methodology



- Qualitative groups and interview recruitment:
 - Contacted a percentage of K-5 parents from quantitative data collection list
 - Identified and contacted daycare, nurseries, playgroups, preschools in Burlington, and private/independent K-5 schools
 - Worked with directors/owners/principals
 - Sent letter from District encouraging participation in research
 - Posted flyers
 - Used word of mouth, referrals
- All different income levels and backgrounds were included

Implementation



- Project began in October
 - Development of research instruments (survey, recruitment screener, group/interview guides)
 - Collaborative process, including an input session among school board members and teachers
- Fieldwork was conducted in November and December
 - Telephone survey, in-person survey, and qualitative recruitment conducted in November
 - Internet, in-person surveys, groups, and in-depth interviews conducted in December
- Analysis and presentation prepared in December
- Results presented in the beginning of January



Survey Findings

Contextual Notes



- These findings are limited to K-5 programs. An examination of middle or high school parents could have different results
- Pre-school parents have less experience with current practices than parents with children in K-5, thus affecting their perceptions

Main Survey Sections



- Section 1: Open ended questions
 - A. Definition and benefits of a Dream School
 - B. Definition of Excellence
- Section 2: Prompted questions/rankings
 - A. Specific features of a Dream School
 - B. What's important to parents
 - C. Classroom make up
 - D. Barnes or Wheeler Dream School

Section 1: Open Ended Questions



- The survey began with an open ended examination of three elements:
 - How parents would define the ideal or Dream School
 - How parents view the benefits of a Dream School to themselves and their children
 - How parents define Excellence in education
- Results can be found later in this report

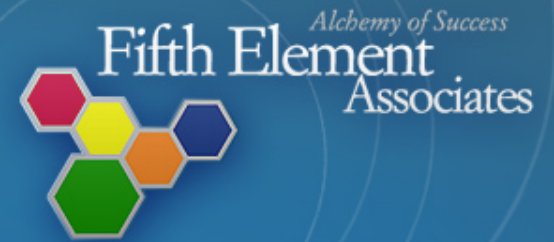
Section 2: Prompted Questions



Section 2 examines three elements:

1. Specific features that could be a component of dream school education
2. An examination of what is important to parents with regard to education
3. A determination of how well a Dream School could attract children from all over the city

Section 2 responses provide context for the Section 1 Dream School results



Section 2A: Specific Features of a Dream School

Ranking Specific Elements

(Prompted)

Dream School Features



Features were ranked on a 7 point scale

- Features ranked as “I would only send my child there if it is my local school” were scored “1”
- Features ranked as “I would send my child to that school even if it isn’t my neighborhood school” were scored “4”
- Features ranked as “I would send my child to that school no matter where it is in Burlington” were scored “7”

Highest possible score is 7, lowest is 1

- Higher scores indicate more favored features
- Actual scores range from 2.22 to 5.23
- Results in order from lowest to highest scores

Dream School Features



A before school program that starts at 7:30 in the morning

I would only send my child there if it is my local school	2	3	I would send my child to that school even if it isn't my neighborhood school	5	6	I would send my child to that school no matter where it is in Burlington
69.1%	4.3%	1.8%	8.5%	3.2%	2.5%	10.6%

All K-5 Parents Score: 2.22

Preschool Parents Score: 2.02

Dream School Features



An extended school day with classes starting at 7:30 and ending at 5:30

I would only send my child there if it is my local school	2	3	I would send my child to that school even if it isn't my neighborhood school	5	6	I would send my child to that school no matter where it is in Burlington
53.5%	6.5%	8.0%	7.6%	5.5%	5.1%	13.8%

All K-5 Parents Score: 2.76

Preschool Parents Score: 2.57

Dream School Features



An after school program that keeps kids until 5:30 in the afternoon

I would only send my child there if it is my local school	2	3	I would send my child to that school even if it isn't my neighborhood school	5	6	I would send my child to that school no matter where it is in Burlington
39.4%	5.0%	6.3%	15.6%	8.6%	6.6%	18.5%

All K-5 Parents Score: 3.43

Preschool Parents Score: 3.36

Dream School Features



A school for just pre-kindergarten through 3rd grade that focuses on early learning

I would only send my child there if it is my local school	2	3	I would send my child to that school even if it isn't my neighborhood school	5	6	I would send my child to that school no matter where it is in Burlington
33.4%	6.7%	5.4%	19.1%	9.0%	4.3%	22.1%

All K-5 Parents Score: 3.65

Preschool Parents Score: 3.18

Dream School Features



A school with the latest technology, including home Internet access and a laptop computer that each child can take home

I would only send my child there if it is my local school	2	3	I would send my child to that school even if it isn't my neighborhood school	5	6	I would send my child to that school no matter where it is in Burlington
30.0%	6.8%	7.5%	14.7%	10.1%	6.5%	24.4%

All K-5 Parents Score: 3.85

Preschool Parents Score: 2.82

Dream School Features



A school that specializes in the latest teaching methods

I would only send my child there if it is my local school	2	3	I would send my child to that school even if it isn't my neighborhood school	5	6	I would send my child to that school no matter where it is in Burlington
21.8%	5.9%	8.5%	20.2%	13.4%	6.8%	23.5%

All K-5 Parents Score: 4.12

Preschool Parents Score: 3.67

Dream School Features



A close educational partnership with Shelburne Farms that focuses on the environment, parent involvement, community service and social responsibility

I would only send my child there if it is my local school	2	3	I would send my child to that school even if it isn't my neighborhood school	5	6	I would send my child to that school no matter where it is in Burlington
23.3%	5.3%	8.1%	17.4%	11.8%	8.7%	25.5%

All K-5 Parents Score: 4.17

Preschool Parents Score: 4.48

Dream School Features



A school that focuses learning in the sciences and math

I would only send my child there if it is my local school	2	3	I would send my child to that school even if it isn't my neighborhood school	5	6	I would send my child to that school no matter where it is in Burlington
18.2%	5.7%	6.3%	20.8%	13.5%	11.6%	23.9%

All K-5 Parents Score: 4.36

Preschool Parents Score: 3.02

Dream School Features



Science Labs

I would only send my child there if it is my local school	2	3	I would send my child to that school even if it isn't my neighborhood school	5	6	I would send my child to that school no matter where it is in Burlington
18.9%	3.3%	6.2%	18.2%	17.9%	10.1%	25.4%

All K-5 Parents Score: 4.45

Preschool Parents Score: 3.55

Dream School Features



A school that has state-of-the-art technology in classrooms

I would only send my child there if it is my local school	2	3	I would send my child to that school even if it isn't my neighborhood school	5	6	I would send my child to that school no matter where it is in Burlington
19.6%	2.8%	7.0%	17.7%	13.3%	11.7%	27.8%

All K-5 Parents Score: 4.49

Preschool Parents Score: 3.18

Dream School Features



Working closely with teaching colleges like UVM and St. Michael's

I would only send my child there if it is my local school	2	3	I would send my child to that school even if it isn't my neighborhood school	5	6	I would send my child to that school no matter where it is in Burlington
18.9%	2.6%	10.3%	15.1%	14.4%	9.0%	29.8%

All K-5 Parents Score: 4.50

Preschool Parents Score: 3.42

Dream School Features



The school has a dance studio, music studio and theater

I would only send my child there if it is my local school	2	3	I would send my child to that school even if it isn't my neighborhood school	5	6	I would send my child to that school no matter where it is in Burlington
18.9%	3.6%	5.2%	17.3%	14.3%	10.7%	30.0%

All K-5 Parents Score: 4.57
Preschool Parents Score: 3.98

Dream School Features



10. A school that offers children lots of opportunities for field trips and other learning outside the school

I would only send my child there if it is my local school	2	3	I would send my child to that school even if it isn't my neighborhood school	5	6	I would send my child to that school no matter where it is in Burlington
17.2%	4.1%	5.9%	17.8%	15.9%	10.6%	28.4%

All K-5 Parents Score: 4.57

Preschool Parents Score: 4.31

Dream School Features



9. A school that connects the environment and local community issues to reading, math, science and social studies

I would only send my child there if it is my local school	2	3	I would send my child to that school even if it isn't my neighborhood school	5	6	I would send my child to that school no matter where it is in Burlington
16.6%	4.7%	5.6%	18.8%	12.5%	11.3%	30.4%

All K-5 Parents Score: 4.61

Preschool Parents Score: 4.28

Dream School Features



8. A school that offers more world studies, cultures, geography, and current events to help kids learn

I would only send my child there if it is my local school	2	3	I would send my child to that school even if it isn't my neighborhood school	5	6	I would send my child to that school no matter where it is in Burlington
17.0%	3.1%	7.5%	14.5%	13.8%	13.8%	30.2%

All K-5 Parents Score: 4.67

Preschool Parents Score: 3.98

Dream School Features



7. A close educational partnership with the Flynn Center, the Vermont Youth Orchestra and other community partners that uses art, music, movement & drama to help kids learn

I would only send my child there if it is my local school	2	3	I would send my child to that school even if it isn't my neighborhood school	5	6	I would send my child to that school no matter where it is in Burlington
17.0%	3.1%	5.9%	15.8%	16.1%	10.2%	31.9%

All K-5 Parents Score: 4.69

Preschool Parents Score: 4.18

Dream School Features



6. A school with advanced classes

I would only send my child there if it is my local school	2	3	I would send my child to that school even if it isn't my neighborhood school	5	6	I would send my child to that school no matter where it is in Burlington
17.1%	2.5%	8.3%	16.5%	8.3%	14.9%	32.4%

All K-5 Parents Score: 4.70

Preschool Parents Score: 4.12

Dream School Features



5. A school where children learn a language other than English

I would only send my child there if it is my local school	2	3	I would send my child to that school even if it isn't my neighborhood school	5	6	I would send my child to that school no matter where it is in Burlington
19.20.48 %	2.9%	4.5%	12.4%	10.8%	10.2%	38.9%

All K-5 Parents Score: 4.76

Preschool Parents Score: 4.29

Dream School Features



4. The school is an energy efficient building with natural daylight in the classrooms, greenhouses and outdoor gardens

I would only send my child there if it is my local school	2	3	I would send my child to that school even if it isn't my neighborhood school	5	6	I would send my child to that school no matter where it is in Burlington
16.6%	4.5%	5.1%	14.3%	12.7%	13.4%	33.4%

All K-5 Parents Score: 4.76

Preschool Parents Score: 4.80

Dream School Features



3. A school that connects the arts to math, reading, science and social studies

I would only send my child there if it is my local school	2	3	I would send my child to that school even if it isn't my neighborhood school	5	6	I would send my child to that school no matter where it is in Burlington
12.6%	4.7%	6.6%	17.0%	13.9%	12.6%	32.5%

All K-5 Parents Score: 4.83

Preschool Parents Score: 4.07

Dream School Features



2. A school that has lots of hands on activities and lets children learn by doing

I would only send my child there if it is my local school	2	3	I would send my child to that school even if it isn't my neighborhood school	5	6	I would send my child to that school no matter where it is in Burlington
14.0%	3.4%	6.2%	10.6%	13.7%	13.0%	39.1%

All K-5 Parents Score: 5.02

Preschool Parents Score: 4.72

Dream School Features



1. An individualized approach to teaching that focuses on each child's needs

I would only send my child there if it is my local school	2	3	I would send my child to that school even if it isn't my neighborhood school	5	6	I would send my child to that school no matter where it is in Burlington
13.4%	1.6%	4.8%	11.5%	12.7%	9.6%	46.5%

All K-5 Parents Score: 5.23

Preschool Parents Score: 4.29

Top 10 Features



Current Champlain, Edmunds, Flynn, & Smith Parents

1. Individualized approach
2. Hands on activities
3. Connect arts to reading, math, sciences, social studies
4. Energy efficient
5. Partnership with Flynn, VYO and others
6. Language other than English
7. World studies
8. Advanced classes
9. Connects environment and local issues to reading, math, sciences, social studies
10. Dance, music, theater

Parents willing to enroll at Barnes or Wheeler Dream School

1. Individualized approach
2. Hands on activities
3. Connect arts to reading, math, sciences, social studies
4. Energy efficient
5. Partnership with Flynn, VYO and others
6. Dance, music, theater
7. Language other than English
8. World studies
9. Field trips and other learning outside the school
10. Connects environment and local issues to reading, math, sciences, social studies

Interest in Dream School Choice

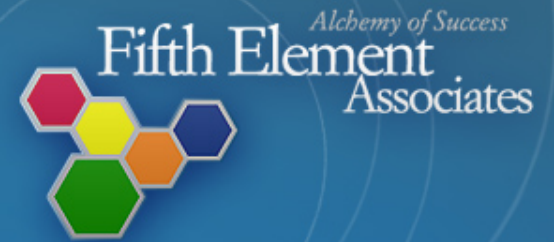


Are you interested in having more choices for your child by having the Burlington School District offer an elementary school option with special features, such as those explored in the last group of questions? Please assume that transportation would be provided.

No, definitely not	2	3	Unsure	5	6	Yes, definitely
5.0%	0.6%	5.3%	17.3%	8.8%	9.7%	53.1%

All K-5 Parents Score: 5.66

Preschool Parents Score: 5.74



Section 2B: What's Important to Parents

Educational Elements

(Prompted)

Importance to Parents



Importance was ranked on a 7 point scale

- Features ranked as “Not at all Important ” were scored “1”
- Features ranked as “Neutral ” were scored “4”
- Features ranked as “Extremely Important ” were scored “7”

Higher scores indicate greater importance to parents; range is from 3.40 to 6.42

- Results in order from lowest to highest scores

How important is...



Having kids in the class that share similar backgrounds and family situations

Not at all Important	2	3	Neutral	5	6	Extremely important
32.2%	9.0%	10.0%	16.7%	12.9%	6.8%	12.5%

All K-5 Parents Score: 3.40

Preschool Parents Score: 3.23

How important is...



Homework

Not at all Important	2	3	Neutral	5	6	Extremely important
8.9%	7.7%	6.7%	22.0%	16.9%	10.5%	27.2%

All K-5 Parents Score: 4.71

Preschool Parents Score: 3.95

How important are...



Close ties with teaching colleges

Not at all Important	2	3	Neutral	5	6	Extremely important
3.5%	2.3%	8.4%	19.3%	18.3%	20.6%	27.7%

All K-5 Parents Score: 5.19

Preschool Parents Score: 4.39

How important is...



After school tutoring

Not at all Important	2	3	Neutral	5	6	Extremely important
5.5%	4.5%	4.2%	17.0%	19.9%	17.4%	31.5%

All K-5 Parents Score: 5.20

Preschool Parents Score: 4.76

How important is...



Discipline

Not at all Important	2	3	Neutral	5	6	Extremely important
4.5%	2.9%	4.8%	21.5%	16.4%	15.1%	34.7%

All K-5 Parents Score: 5.27

Preschool Parents Score: 4.74

How important are...



After school activities

Not at all Important	2	3	Neutral	5	6	Extremely important
5.4%	3.2%	4.5%	15.3%	18.2%	22.9%	30.6%

All K-5 Parents Score: 5.29

Preschool Parents Score: 5.25

How important is...



More physical education/sports

Not at all Important	2	3	Neutral	5	6	Extremely important
2.9%	3.5%	3.5%	17.6%	26.8%	15.0%	30.7%

All K-5 Parents Score: 5.30

Preschool Parents Score: 5.13

How important is...



10. The reputation of the principal

Not at all Important	2	3	Neutral	5	6	Extremely important
3.2%	3.5%	4.2%	14.5%	12.9%	16.4%	45.3%

All K-5 Parents Score: 5.61

Preschool Parents Score: 5.23

How important are...



9. Programs for gifted children

Not at all Important	2	3	Neutral	5	6	Extremely important
3.2%	1.3%	3.9%	14.6%	16.9%	19.5%	40.6%

All K-5 Parents Score: 5.61

Preschool Parents Score: 5.57

How important is...



8. More science education

Not at all Important	2	3	Neutral	5	6	Extremely important
1.6%	1.3%	3.9%	15.4%	21.5%	18.0%	38.3%

All K-5 Parents Score: 5.61

Preschool Parents Score: 5.08

How important are...



7. More arts, music, movement, and drama

Not at all Important	2	3	Neutral	5	6	Extremely important
2.2%	1.3%	4.8%	12.1%	19.7%	19.4%	40.4%

All K-5 Parents Score: 5.66

Preschool Parents Score: 6.11

How important is...



6. Classroom diversity

Not at all Important	2	3	Neutral	5	6	Extremely important
3.5%	0.6%	3.5%	11.0%	15.2%	18.4%	47.7%

All K-5 Parents Score: 5.80

Preschool Parents Score: 5.65

How important are...



5. Teacher reputations

Not at all Important	2	3	Neutral	5	6	Extremely important
2.2%	1.9%	2.6%	13.1%	14.1%	15.3%	50.8%

All K-5 Parents Score: 5.84

Preschool Parents Score: 6.11

How important is...



4. Individual attention for my child

Not at all Important	2	3	Neutral	5	6	Extremely important
1.0%	1.3%	1.3%	7.4%	14.8%	14.5%	59.8%

All K-5 Parents Score: 6.16

Preschool Parents Score: 6.26

How important is...



3. Parental involvement in the school

Not at all Important	2	3	Neutral	5	6	Extremely important
0.3%	0.0%	0.6%	5.4%	17.3%	19.2%	57.2%

All K-5 Parents Score: 6.26

Preschool Parents Score: 6.32

How important is...



2. Communication with teachers and the principal

Not at all Important	2	3	Neutral	5	6	Extremely important
0.0%	0.6%	1.3%	5.4%	10.9%	17.6%	64.2%

All K-5 Parents Score: 6.36

Preschool Parents Score: 6.51

How important are...



1. A good mix of subjects and materials

Not at all Important	2	3	Neutral	5	6	Extremely important
0.0%	0.0%	0.6%	3.9%	10.9%	21.5%	63.0%

All K-5 Parents Score: 6.42

Preschool Parents Score: 6.19

10 most important elements



All Champlain, Edmunds, Flynn, & Smith Parents

1. Good mix of subjects
2. Communication with teachers/principal
3. Parental involvement
4. Individual attention
5. Teacher reputations
6. Classroom diversity
7. More arts/music/movement/drama
8. Programs for gifted children
9. Reputation of principal
10. More science education

Parents willing to enroll at Barnes or Wheeler Dream School

1. Good mix of subjects
2. Communication with teachers/principal
3. Parental involvement
4. Individual attention
5. Classroom diversity
6. More arts/music/movement/drama
7. Teacher reputations
8. Programs for gifted children
9. More science education
10. More physical education/sports



Section 2C: Makeup of the Ideal Classroom

You get to pick the class...



What would be the mix of boys and girls?

All Boys	2	3	An even mix of boys and girls	5	6	All Girls
0.6%	0.0%	0.3%	92.6%	2.6%	0.6%	3.2%

You get to pick the class...



What would be the mix of children?

All kids like my child	2	3	An even mix	5	6	All different from my child
1.3%	0.6%	4.2%	68.5%	3.3%	3.3%	18.8%

You get to pick the class...



Where would the kids come from?

All from my neighborhood	2	3	4	5	6	From all over the city
21.2%	3.5%	5.5%	20.6%	7.1%	1.6%	43.1%

You get to pick the class...



Is the class made up of kids the same age, or kids who are in the same place with their studies?

Kids the same age, regardless of academics	2	3	4	5	6	Kids studying at the same level, regardless of age
27.2%	2.9%	5.5%	16.8%	9.7%	4.5%	33.3%

You get to pick the class...



What would be the mix of cultures?

Kids from the same or similar cultures	2	3	4	5	6	Kids from as many cultures as possible
2.6%	0.6%	2.9%	19.2%	7.3%	3.8%	63.6%



Correlations

Correlations



- Correlations look at whether there is a relationship between factors
- **Direct** relationships are those where preference for one factor is tied to the preference for another
- **Inverse** relationships are those where preference for one factor runs counter to preference for another

Direct Relationships



- Preference for one is directly related to preference for another:
 - Between teaching the environment and being environmentally state-of-the-art
 - Partnerships with Shelburne Farms and the Flynn, Vermont Youth Orchestra and others
 - After school activities and after school tutoring
 - Hands on activities with the arts

Direct Relationships



- Teacher reputations and principal reputations are intertwined with each other
- Teacher and principal reputations are related to communication(s) between teachers and parents
- Connecting the arts, environment and local issues to math, reading, science and social studies
- There is a high correlation between programs for gifted children and homework

Direct Relationships



- Parents want to connect subject matter to the environment, and local and global issues
 - They think the way to achieve it is by working closely with teaching colleges like UVM and St. Michael's, and Shelburne Farms
- Parents think that more arts education is tied to partnerships with the Flynn, VYO, and other local arts organizations
- More field trips and outside learning will give children a more hands-on education

Inverse Relationships

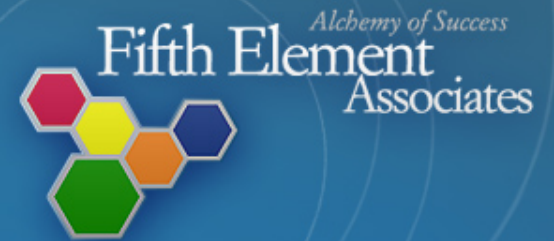


- Obviously, having similar children in the class runs counter to classroom diversity
- Parents think more arts, movement, dance and drama are not possible with a class of similar children
- Parents believe that more arts education decreases the need for discipline
- Parents think individual attention for their child and offering more subjects are mutually exclusive – you can't do both

Indications for the Dream School



- Field trips and other opportunities for learning outside the school
- A school that connects the environment and local community issues to the subjects taught
- More arts, world studies, sciences, math
- Latest teaching methods/working with teaching colleges like UVM and St. Michael's
- More hands on opportunities
- Energy efficient and sustainable building
- After school activities



Focus Groups and In-depth Interviews

Context

Note



- The aim of the groups and interviews was to understand more deeply parents' beliefs, attitudes, and emotions as they relate to elementary education and the current situation with the K-5 schools in the district
- Such understanding provides a clearer lens with which to see and appreciate parents' views and reactions
- Responses expand on the survey results, adding depth and richness to the Dream School and the meaning of excellence

Note



- Group and interview findings are presented in this report as key insights within the following areas:
 - Core strengths of existing educational models (this section)
 - Dream School collages and quotes (following Dream School Word Map from survey open ended responses)
 - Defining Excellence insights and quotes (following School Excellence Word Map from survey open ended responses)
 - The process and moving forward

Core Strengths



- Parents identify key aspects of current educational models that can be applied to the Dream School
- Identifying these core strengths reinforces the importance of honoring what is already working as we move forward
- The educational models are:
 - Private/independent and preschools
 - Parochial schools
 - Home schooling
 - Public schools

Core Strengths



- Private/independent (and preschools)
 - Innovative educational approaches (play based)
 - Small class sizes/group work (low teacher/student ratio)
 - Time and space for creativity, exploration
 - Focus on social skills development
 - Parent/family involvement expected
- Parochial schools
 - Clearly stated values/higher purpose
 - Respect and discipline expected

Core Strengths: Private/Independent Schools



"In early education, social issues are the bigger component. You can't go back and teach the social stuff. How to be friends and have manners are way more important... Conflicts are mediated, often peer mediated with older kids. The private school model, for social stuff, is a much better model." (Private/independent school parent)

"You see more parents present [at parochial school] than in public schools.... Also, the values are really clear and strong. You can disagree, but they are there.... Even if they are not religious, you get a sense of higher purpose." (Private school parent)

Core Strengths



- Home Schooling
 - High parental involvement
 - Individual attention
 - Nurturing environment
 - Safe (physically, emotionally and socially)
 - Use of the home, community, and outdoors as experiential learning environment

*“We wanted the family to be primary.... We don’t want to lose our family connection.”
(Parent who home schools)*

Core Strengths



- Public Schools
 - Variety of cultures and ages
 - Diversity of educational topics and educational approaches
 - Structure
 - Strong ties to the neighborhood/community

Core Strengths: Public Schools



"I am thankful that we can walk to [our public school], and it is a privilege that my son can interact with kids from Sudan and hear their stories." (K-5 public school parent)

"Our commitment to the public schools is the social context in which we have chosen to live... to be part of the Burlington school system and have adult peer relationships, and most of [their] kids are in public schools." (K-5 public school parent interview)



Section 1A: The Dream School

(Unprompted, Open Ended)

Note



- Please note that this section and the section on Excellence actually came first in the survey to avoid bias
- The prompted questions covered in the earlier sections of the report came last, but were reported upon first to provide context for this report
- Please also note that some of the aspects of a Dream School and Educational Excellence may be things that are currently being done

Parents' Hierarchy of Needs

Classroom diversity

Good teacher reputations

Individual attention for my child

Parental involvement in the school

Communication with teachers and the principal

Teach basic subjects with more emphasis on the arts, sciences and the environment, tying them to local and global issues



Dream School Word Map

Groups/Interviews: Dream School



“My idea of a dream school would be vastness.... Who knows what they could be! They can do anything. The world is your oyster. Seek it, grasp it, be it. Vastness. Touch them on all kinds of things.” (K-5 public school parent)

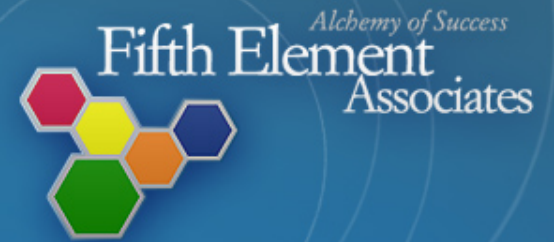
“We have a space at [our public school] which is [for] joy. The principal is out front. Music is playing to welcome kids. It’s like Cheers, the old TV show. Everybody knows everybody’s name.... I think its extraordinary.” (K-5 public school parent)

Groups/Interviews: Dream School



*"It is not much like a school but more like a learning center where kids come and go. It is experiential learning and discovery."
(Preschool and K-5 parent, private and public school)*

*"Helps kids who love learning to soar... And supports teachers to break out of the box."
(Preschool and K-5 parent, home schooling and public school)*



Section 1B: Defining Excellence

(Unprompted; Open Ended)



School Excellence Word Map

Groups/Interviews: Excellence



- Fostering a love of learning
- Providing a solid foundation in basic academic and social skills
- Preparing children to be successful in school as they grow and mature
- Encouraging and challenge each child to realize his or her potential
- Reinforcing school's role as the "glue" that binds the community together

Groups/Interviews: Excellence



- Emphasize the wonder and delight of learning while building a solid foundation in academic content and social skills:
 - Balance structure with creativity
 - More room for exploration, imagination, discovery, and movement
 - Focus learning on being real, relevant, and fun
 - Combining arts and movement with math, science, language, etc.
 - Integrating theory and basic principles into tangible projects
 - Balance learning in the classroom and outside the classroom
 - Broaden awareness
 - Uncover passions: “Velcro learning”
 - Provide exposure to the community and the world

Groups/Interviews: Excellence



“Praise individual strengths while still getting the structure... how to get the absolute basics to be able to succeed in higher grades and also to teach them how to learn and... to love learning, not to hate learning.” (K-5 varianced public school parent)

Groups/Interviews: Excellence



- Challenge each child to realize their potential so that boredom, behavioral issues, and the need to focus on discipline become non issues
- Focus on increasing comfort levels & strengthening self esteem as children stretch to their full potential
- Create emotionally and socially safe environments
 - Small class sizes and group work
 - Low student to teacher ratios
 - No labels (school uniforms)
 - De-emphasize competitiveness

Groups/Interviews: Excellence



“I want a place that is going to hold a high bar of excellence for all the children.... Rules are important, AND they are meant to be shaped and broken, twisted to support the growth of the child and the school community.” (Pre-school parent)

“Uniforms in public school would be a great idea. It eliminates the issues that one might have more money to spend on clothing, and it eliminates the issue of inappropriate clothing. It eliminates the issue of disrespect for clothing.” (K-5 public school parent)

Groups/Interviews: Excellence



- Focus on having diversity of educational approaches to meet different needs
- Focus on having a diversity of backgrounds and ages
 - Older students act as mentors; develop pride in sharing their work
 - Younger students see what they can aspire to; encourage older students
- Offer support and training for teachers to continuously raise the educational bar

Groups/Interviews: Excellence



"[Our school] did an open house and had kids in the classroom who were there as ambassadors. There were so excited to show [us] what they were learning – their assignments, and taking little kids by the hand and showing them, 'look what we do.' " (K-5 varianced public school parent)

"Letting [children] fly – mentoring helps them feel incredibly successful and empowered." (Private school parent)

Groups/Interviews: Excellence



- Public school is the glue of the community
- Parents want to feel a part of their children's educational experience and to feel welcome engaging in the school community
- Parents also embrace tangible ways the school is part of the community, e.g., partnerships with community organizations, colleges, and local businesses

Groups/Interviews: Excellence



“Deep roots, Strong branches. I think that the school should be part of the community, a place where all parents feel welcoming coming into and being able to come in to talk to principal and teachers.... Some parents will feel more comfortable with a sit down [meeting]. Another thing is having a community dinner where anybody can bring something or donate and participate.” (K-5 public school parent)

“Invite people into the classroom who do non-traditional skills.” (K-5 public school parent)

Groups/Interviews: Excellence



- Respect for the distinct but complementary roles of teachers/principals and parents:
 - Teachers/principals as the education experts
 - Pre K-5 parents seek guidance and support as they transition into elementary schools
 - Parents as the experts on their child's needs
 - Values, discipline, structure expected in the home and reinforced at school
- Opportunity to hold parent forums and workshops at school

Groups/Interviews: Excellence



"I want teachers and grown ups to be these beautiful guiding ships that hold our children and keep them from the rocky shores." (Parent who home schools)

"We need to be colleagues with [teachers] and partner in our child's education. We have a piece and can support teachers." (Pre K-5 parent)

Groups/Interviews: Excellence



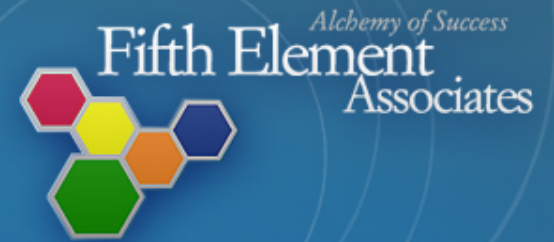
- Regular parent/teacher communication and interaction is vital:
 - Not just dropping off and picking up kids at the school entrance
 - Parents want to feel welcomed in the schools
 - Eating lunch with kids
 - Playground duty
 - Volunteering in the class room
 - Chaperoning field trips
 - Sharing aspects of their work or community life

Groups/Interviews: Excellence



"Having more parental involvement... make an effort a couple times a week to come in the building to pick up, so I can look around the classroom, look on the walls, say, "hello." It really helps a lot.... With the safety issue, it took me a while to figure [it] out... to get comfortable with that. I am just wondering how many other parents know." (K-5 public school parent who had home schooled)

"It is important [to go into the classroom.] You talk to other parents. You hear other things that are going on. You hear about other social issues. There can be problem solving just by getting in the building. (K-5 public school parent)



Section 2D: Barnes or Wheeler Dream School

Key Question

Key Question (all respondents*)



- Would you send your child to either Barnes or Wheeler to attend your Dream School?

NO, I definitely would NOT send my child there	2	3	4	5	6	YES, I would definitely send my child there
13.4%	2.3%	1.2%	8.9%	5.6%	6.1%	34.3%

Please note that 28.2% of the sample did not respond; mostly parents with children in private/parochial/independent schools

* Includes preschool parents and parents with children in private/independent/parochial schools

Key Question (BSD parents only)



- Would you send your child to either Barnes or Wheeler to attend your Dream School?

NO, I definitely would NOT send my child there	2	3	4	5	6	YES, I would definitely send my child there
17.4%	2.6%	1.7%	10.6%	6.9%	6.0%	43.4%

56.3% (positions 5, 6 and 7) would *likely* apply to the Dream School

Please note that 8.6% of the sample did not respond



Focus Group and In-depth Interviews

Key Insights

The Process



- Parents appreciate the District's efforts
- They want to feel that their voices are being heard
- The uncertainty about the future direction of their children's elementary education in Burlington has bred anxiety, fear, and anger
- Parents are tired of the process and want clarity and action

Concerns



- Parents are anxious about possible drastic “solutions” that are seen to overlook the strengths in the current schools:
 - Schools labeled as “failing” and needing an overhaul
 - Mandatory instead of voluntary
- Emphasis on SEI has turned an emotional human situation, the well being of parents’ children, into a numbers game
 - Fixation on redistricting
 - Bussing solely to achieve SEI
 - Fears of breaking up neighborhoods and the community

Concerns



- The term “Magnet School” may have outlived its usefulness
- There is lack of a common definition for a Magnet School
- This is where the confusion over whether SEI is a goal or outcome comes into sharp focus for parents

Desired Next Steps



- Clearly communicate the vision
 - Perhaps link it to an overarching educational philosophy
 - Demonstrate how the parts support the whole
- Emphasize a voluntary system: parents have choices
- Provide a clear framework
 - Include specific a timetable and actions steps
 - Allow for opportunities for community input and involvement
- Communicate a clear financial approach
 - Reassure that no school will suffer financially in this process
 - Emphasize smart use of resources, of spending, and of investing in appropriate efficiencies (especially related to the buildings)

Moving Forward: Dream School



- Modern physical facility; excellent condition, safe, clean, environmentally state-of-the-art, accessible
- Also serves as a community center
- Small classes and lower teacher student ratios
- Individual attention and learning programs
- More arts, languages
- Learning that is linked with the real world (the environment and local issues; partnerships)
- More greenspaces and play surfaces outside; good gym inside, sports program; available to the community as well

Moving Forward: Parents Want



- Diversity in the classroom; diverse classmates and a diverse education (more arts; also more environment, science and math)
- Well rounded, well educated world and local community citizens
- Environmental awareness and practice
- Great communications with teachers
- Individual attention for their child(ren)
- Small teacher-student ratios

Moving Forward



- Parents want all children to benefit and all schools to become Dream Schools
- Now is the opportunity to inspire all with this compelling vision of educational excellence that also includes the aspirations of teachers, administrators, and community residents
- Now is the time to create and implement a strategic (and communication) plan that:
 - Keeps all connected to the vision and remains true to its collective hopes and aspirations
 - Strengthens the sense of unity and trust within the community

Q&A