

Okaloosa Online Parent Survey 2007

As part of its Franchise Agreement with The Florida Virtual School (FLVS), Okaloosa County Schools has agreed to survey parents of its online students annually to learn about the strengths and weaknesses of its virtual education program. In April 2007, an email letter was sent to 543 parents throughout the state notifying them about the online Parent Survey and pointing them to the web-based instrument via its URL address.

The surveying process was comprised of two sections; section one posed school-specific questions as well as several questions about the learners and parents themselves. Parents completed this portion of the survey only once and then were redirected to the second section of the survey, where they were asked specific questions about their child's course and teacher. Parents were encouraged to complete section two as many times as necessary given the number of courses in which his/her child was enrolled. Of the 543 emails sent to parents, 122 surveys were completed for section one or twenty-two percent (22%) and 139 surveys were completed for section two (17%).

The two-step surveying process described above allows stakeholders to have distinct information on the virtual school, as a whole, as well as feedback on the overall quality of courses and teachers. The remainder of this report shows parents' responses to all of the survey items.

Section One: General Feedback & Student/Parent Information

Which option best describes your child?

Choice	Count	Percentage of Sample Answering	Percentage of Sample Asked	Percentage of Total Sample
Public education student	103	84.4%	84.4%	84.4%
Private education student	2	1.6%	1.6%	1.6%
Charter school student	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Home-school student	15	12.3%	12.3%	12.3%
Other	2	1.6%	1.6%	1.6%

How does your child access his/her online courses?

Choice	Count	Percentage of Sample Answering	Percentage of Sample Asked	Percentage of Total Sample
Both school and home, but mostly from home	19	15.6%	15.6%	15.6%
Both school and home, but mostly from school	3	2.5%	2.5%	2.5%
Equally from school and home	2	1.6%	1.6%	1.6%
Only at home	95	77.9%	77.9%	77.9%
Only at school	1	0.8%	0.8%	0.8%
Other	2	1.6%	1.6%	1.6%

The main reason your child enrolled in the virtual school was:

Choice	Count	Percentage of Sample Answering	Percentage of Sample Asked	Percentage of Total Sample
To take an extra course	9	7.6%	7.4%	7.4%
To take a course not offered at his/her school	9	7.6%	7.4%	7.4%
To raise a course grade/ grade forgiveness	23	19.5%	18.9%	18.9%
To balance academic and extracurricular activities	13	11.0%	10.7%	10.7%
Hospital Homebound	2	1.7%	1.6%	1.6%
Personal preference	36	30.5%	29.5%	29.5%
To accelerate graduation/ get ahead	6	5.1%	4.9%	4.9%
Other	20	16.9%	16.4%	16.4%
Don't know	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Has your child spoken to a guidance counselor regarding the virtual school experience?

Choice	Count	Percentage of Sample Answering	Percentage of Sample Asked	Percentage of Total Sample
Yes	64	53.3%	52.5%	52.5%
No	56	46.7%	45.9%	45.9%

If your child spoke to a guidance counselor regarding the virtual school experience, was the guidance counselor helpful?

Choice	Count	Percentage of Sample Answering	Percentage of Sample Asked	Percentage of Total Sample
Yes	62	52.1%	50.8%	50.8%
No	6	5.0%	4.9%	4.9%
Not applicable	51	42.9%	41.8%	41.8%

Please rate the level of technical problems experienced by your child in his/her online course(s):

Choice	Count	Percentage of Sample Answering	Percentage of Sample Asked	Percentage of Total Sample
He/she never has technical problems that interfere with getting work done	48	39.3%	39.3%	39.3%
He/she sometimes has technical problems that interfere with getting work done	54	44.3%	44.3%	44.3%
He/she often has technical problems that interfere with getting work done	4	3.3%	3.3%	3.3%
He/she has a great deal of technical problems that interfere with getting work done	5	4.1%	4.1%	4.1%
Don't know	11	9.0%	9.0%	9.0%

Most questions relating to technical problems are resolved:

Choice	Count	Percentage of Sample Answering	Percentage of Sample Asked	Percentage of Total Sample
Within 24 hours	28	23.5%	23.0%	23.0%
Within 2 to 3 days	19	16.0%	15.6%	15.6%
In a period greater than 3 days	11	9.2%	9.0%	9.0%
This question is not applicable because my child never has technical problems.	40	33.6%	32.8%	32.8%
Don't know	21	17.6%	17.2%	17.2%

Please rate the quality of your child's experience with his/her virtual school:

Choice	Count	Percentage of Sample Answering	Percentage of Sample Asked	Percentage of Total Sample
Excellent	55	45.5%	45.1%	45.1%
Good	51	42.1%	41.8%	41.8%
Fair	8	6.6%	6.6%	6.6%
Poor	7	5.8%	5.7%	5.7%

Would you encourage your child to participate in other online courses?

Choice	Count	Percentage of Sample Answering	Percentage of Sample Asked	Percentage of Total Sample
Yes	99	81.8%	81.1%	81.1%
No	22	18.2%	18.0%	18.0%

Would you recommend this virtual school to other parents?

Choice	Count	Percentage of Sample Answering	Percentage of Sample Asked	Percentage of Total Sample
Yes	111	91.0%	91.0%	91.0%
No	11	9.0%	9.0%	9.0%

What part of the virtual school motto, "Any time, any place, any path, any pace," is most important for your child?

Choice	Count	Percentage of Sample Answering	Percentage of Sample Asked	Percentage of Total Sample
Any Time	63	52.9%	51.6%	51.6%
Any Place	15	12.6%	12.3%	12.3%
Any Path	5	4.2%	4.1%	4.1%
Any Pace	36	30.3%	29.5%	29.5%

Has your child experienced any school or district level barriers that have kept him/her from taking courses with the virtual school?

Choice	Count	Percentage of Sample Answering	Percentage of Sample Asked	Percentage of Total Sample
Yes	7	5.8%	5.7%	5.7%
No	113	94.2%	92.6%	92.6%

What is the highest degree earned by your child's mother, father, or guardian?

Choice	Count	Percentage of Sample Answering	Percentage of Sample Asked	Percentage of Total Sample
High School Degree	25	20.7%	20.5%	20.5%
Associate's Degree	21	17.4%	17.2%	17.2%
Bachelor's Degree	35	28.9%	28.7%	28.7%
Master's Degree	28	23.1%	23.0%	23.0%
Doctoral Degree	5	4.1%	4.1%	4.1%
Other	7	5.8%	5.7%	5.7%

I found out about this virtual school from:

Choice	Count	Percentage of Sample Answering	Percentage of Sample Asked	Percentage of Total Sample
a school counselor	60	49.2%	49.2%	49.2%
a friend	20	16.4%	16.4%	16.4%
an ad in the high school newspaper	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
a newspaper article	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
a TV news report or advertisement	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
a radio advertisement	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
a home education office	3	2.5%	2.5%	2.5%
a home school meeting or convention	2	1.6%	1.6%	1.6%
my child	26	21.3%	21.3%	21.3%
an Internet search	4	3.3%	3.3%	3.3%
a family member	2	1.6%	1.6%	1.6%
a community event or meeting (festivals, Rotary, etc)	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
other	5	4.1%	4.1%	4.1%

Do the virtual school courses engage your family in the learning process?

Choice	Count	Percentage of Sample Answering	Percentage of Sample Asked	Percentage of Total Sample
yes	89	74.8%	73.0%	73.0%
no	30	25.2%	24.6%	24.6%

Section Two: Course/Teacher Items

On average, the number of hours per week your child spends/spent on this online course is:

Choice	Count	Percentage of Sample Answering	Percentage of Sample Asked	Percentage of Total Sample
0 - 1 hour	3	2.2%	2.2%	2.2%
1 - 2 hours	11	8.2%	7.9%	7.9%
2 - 4 hours	65	48.5%	46.8%	46.8%
5 - 10 hours	43	32.1%	30.9%	30.9%
Over 10 hours	12	9.0%	8.6%	8.6%

Communication between your child and the teacher of this course is:

Choice	Count	Percentage of Sample Answering	Percentage of Sample Asked	Percentage of Total Sample
Great	67	50.8%	48.2%	48.2%
Good	49	37.1%	35.3%	35.3%
Fair	7	5.3%	5.0%	5.0%
Poor	8	6.1%	5.8%	5.8%
Don't know	1	0.8%	0.7%	0.7%

What communication mode did you/your child find most helpful with this particular virtual school course and teacher?

Choice	Count	Percentage of Sample Answering	Percentage of Sample Asked	Percentage of Total Sample
Email	85	64.9%	61.2%	61.2%
Telephone	45	34.4%	32.4%	32.4%
Instant Message	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Other	1	0.8%	0.7%	0.7%

Communication with your child and other students enrolled in this course(s) is:

Choice	Count	Percentage of Sample Answering	Percentage of Sample Asked	Percentage of Total Sample
Great	12	9.3%	8.6%	8.6%
Good	26	20.2%	18.7%	18.7%
Fair	8	6.2%	5.8%	5.8%
Poor	10	7.8%	7.2%	7.2%
Don't know	73	56.6%	52.5%	52.5%

Most questions relating to course content or assignments are resolved:

Choice	Count	Percentage of Sample Answering	Percentage of Sample Asked	Percentage of Total Sample
Within 24 hours	78	59.5%	56.1%	56.1%
Within 2 to 3 days	38	29.0%	27.3%	27.3%
In a period greater than 3 days	8	6.1%	5.8%	5.8%
This question is not applicable because my child never has questions about the course content or assignments.	3	2.3%	2.2%	2.2%
Don't know	4	3.1%	2.9%	2.9%

Please rate your child's learning experience in this online course(s) as compared to most traditional high school courses.

Choice	Count	Percentage of Sample Answering	Percentage of Sample Asked	Percentage of Total Sample
My child learned more in this online course than in most of his/her traditional courses.	67	51.9%	48.2%	48.2%
My child learned the same in this online course as most of his/her traditional courses.	42	32.6%	30.2%	30.2%
My child learned less in this online course than in most of his/her traditional courses.	7	5.4%	5.0%	5.0%
Don't know	13	10.1%	9.4%	9.4%

The online teachers are required to speak to their students and parents once per month. Do you feel this expectation has been met?

Choice	Count	Percentage of Sample Answering	Percentage of Sample Asked	Percentage of Total Sample
yes	123	93.9%	88.5%	88.5%
no	8	6.1%	5.8%	5.8%

My child's teacher has shown a special interest in my child's success with his/her online course.

Choice	Count	Percentage of Sample Answering	Percentage of Sample Asked	Percentage of Total Sample
yes	113	86.9%	81.3%	81.3%
no	17	13.1%	12.2%	12.2%

Conclusion

Some of the 2007 findings were less favorable over last year's findings, while others were more favorable. For example, parents seemed to be less satisfied with the quality of their child's overall virtual school experience as compared to last year. Last year, 94% of parents answering the survey responded that the quality of their child's experience was either "excellent" or "good." In 2007, this number dropped slightly to 87.6%. Some of the open-ended comments point to particular personal situations, slow-starts, work load issues, and specific communication problems which may account for the drop:

- *The time zone problem started the other class off on the wrong foot, so she withdrew before even getting started. The other class we had difficulties communicating with the instructor...since that is her weakest subject, I determined on-line was not the best choice for her.*
- *The first semester (Fall 2006) experience was not good at all. However, the second semester (beginning Jan 2007) has been excellent. My son's second semester teacher is always available, either by e-mail or telephone, when my son has questions or needs assistance with the course.*
- *She has some trouble learning the program, but once she caught on it was great.*
- *We feel that the amount of work required was way beyond what would have been required in a regular class.*
- *It makes it a long day for him...*
- *Not for everyone, she struggled with the amount of reading and she is a strong reader.*
- *Lack of teacher involvement, took weeks sometimes to get a response. When phoning the teachers residence, meet resistance from teachers husband. Not at all a pleasant experience.*
- *My daughter has never felt like she could interrupt the class she was in for help... and there is too little correspondence too late about progress and grades.*

Other indicators of overall satisfaction with the virtual school were down since last year: Only 81.8% of parents said they would encourage their child to take other online courses (as compared to 91% last year) and only 91% of parents said that they would recommend this virtual school to other parents (versus 100% last year). Most comments point to the suitability of the virtual environment for the capabilities and personalities of their children as the factor that would determine whether or not they would encourage online courses with their children and other parents.

Whereas overall satisfaction may have dipped slightly since last year, communication seemed to have either improved steadily or held strong over the last couple of years. This year, 87.9% of parents who responded said that student-teacher communication was either "great" or "good," as compared to 79% in 2006 and 71% in 2005. Another significant improvement: This year, 93.9% of those responding said that the online teachers spoke to their students and to parents once per month as required. In 2006, only 82% of parents responded that this communication took place, and in 2005 only

54% responded as such. Responsiveness of communication held steady since the last survey, resulting in the exact same results: Over half of the respondents (59.5%) felt that most questions relating to course content or assignments were resolved within 24 hours, and 29% said resolution generally came within 2 to 3 days.

In conclusion, although some areas have improved and others need improvement, overall parents seemed to be pleased with the virtual school, as evidenced through many positive comments throughout the 2007 survey:

- *It has allowed my son the ability to take courses that are mandatory for graduation and/or college entry without causing him to give up band or the gifted program.*
- *My son and I can discuss the assignments online allow me to stay involved more easily than if the work is taught in a classroom.*
- *She can balance her other interests, and she is strengthening her study skills in preparation for college.*
- *It has allowed my son to continue his education since it was no longer possible for him to feel safe in the public school he was attending.*
- *My child has been able to complete classes that was not offered for her grade level when she transferred from another state. She was able to make up classes that she failed due to missing the entire first semester of the class because she was a transfer student.*
- *Students are able to learn without the stress of being labeled slow or stupid because they need extra direction.*
- *My daughter could take her time and work at her own pace. She feels that she learned a little bit more working independently than she would have learned in a classroom setting. Working on her own forced her to really pay attention to what she was learning and also to be more responsible for getting the assignments completed in a timely manner.*
- *It gave my daughter an opportunity to complete her junior year despite being diagnosed with a mild illness which, at the beginning of this school left her very tired in the mornings. It also allowed her to get use to her medication which in the beginning made her sick at her stomach.*