

## City pre-K parents satisfied, survey says

### Pre-K

**JUSTIN MURPHY**

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Ninety-eight percent of parents with children in prekindergarten in the Rochester City School District were satisfied with the program in 2015-16, according to a recent survey.

The finding echoes earlier feedback for prekindergarten in Rochester and highlights a major strength in the city's push for better and more comprehensive early education.

Recent efforts have focused on expanding early education to reach more children, to begin at age 3 rather than 4 and to stretch into the summer, not just the traditional school year. Those gaps can undo some of the developmental and academic progress young children make from September to June.

But while there is much room for improvement in those margins — and certainly in expanding successful practices to higher grades — parents whose children spent 2015-16 in prekindergarten were almost unanimous in their praise.

In a survey of 132 parents at a Transition to Kindergarten Fair this spring, 98 percent gave the district an A or B grade in meeting their child's needs, and 97 percent gave an A or B grade for teacher quality.

Every respondent said their child

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feels safe at school and is learning to get along with others. Nearly every respondent was pleased at the number of books provided for the children to take home, and many reported reading dozens of books a week with their child.

This is the second year the survey has been conducted; 94 percent of parents said they were satisfied with the program last year.

A separate survey of teachers and paraprofessionals in a subset of district- run prekindergarten programs, on the other hand, pointed to problems in the way prekindergarten is integrated into the rest of the school.

Last year, the district made a significant structural change at about half its school-based prekindergarten programs. Those 15 programs had been essentially autonomous with respect to their host schools; in 2015-16, they were incorporated into the schools and put under the responsibility of the principals.

That led to concerns that school administrators, unversed in the nuances of teaching 3- and 4-year-olds, would muss up what had been working. And indeed, a midyear survey of 29 prekindergarten teachers and paraprofessionals revealed some dissatisfaction with the new arrangement.

According to those respondents — representing about a quarter of all teaching staff — 50 percent of principals and 72 percent of assistant principals “expressed little interest in prekindergarten.” Additionally, 70 percent of principals and 79 percent of assistant principals “demonstrated little knowledge of early childhood education.”

Robin Hooper, the district’s executive director of early childhood education, said there is now a dedicated employee to serve as a liaison between administrators and prekindergarten, hopefully addressing the teachers’ concerns. “There’s so much specific information you need to know about prekindergarten, I knew it would be a challenge for the principals. ... Some people had a harder time than others,” she said. “We tried to be as supportive as possible.”

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**Becky Cincebox eats lunch with her prekindergarten class at School 33 in Rochester earlier this year.**

FILE PHOTO



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