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Parent Focus group
C/o Mary King
124 Miron Drive
Hay River, NT
X0E 0R2

May 7, 1999

The Honourable Michael Miltenburger
Minister, Department of Education Culture and Employment
Government of the Northwest Territories
P.O. Box 1320
Yellowknife, N.W.T.

Dear Mr. Minister:

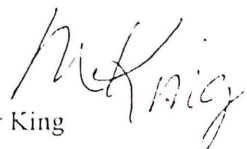
Further to our letter of April 29, 1999 we are enclosing the final compilation of the survey data gathered from parents and residents regarding the matter of educational issues in Hay River. The 270+ responses have been totaled onto one questionnaire. For quick visual reference, these totals were then charted onto percentage pie graphs indicating total % satisfied, total % dissatisfied and total % unaware for each question. Finally, we listed the comments that were added to the bottoms of the surveys.

As indicated earlier, parents are unhappy with many aspects of the educational system and have deep concerns for their children's future. Central to these concerns is lack of adequate funding which leads to high teacher-pupil ratios, wide range of abilities in classes, poor classroom support services for teachers and the list goes on.

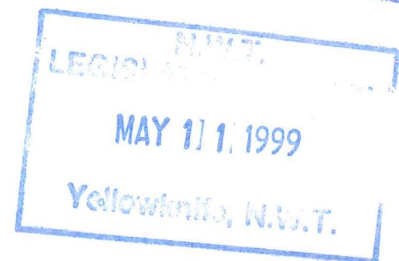
We are disappointed and seriously concerned that somehow this message is not being received and acted upon by the committees that develop the budgets in-camera behind closed doors. Please ensure that they receive a copy of our complaints. This is not the first year that concerns have been raised and ignored.

Please continue to pursue this and other problems that affect our youth so their future does not deteriorate any further. From our end, we will continue to heighten public awareness and work towards solving issues for children with needs. We can be contacted anytime through our spokesperson, Mrs. Mary King, at (867) 874-6718, or (867) 874-3626 (fax).

Yours truly


Mary King

✓ Cc. Jane Groenewagen, MLA Hay River

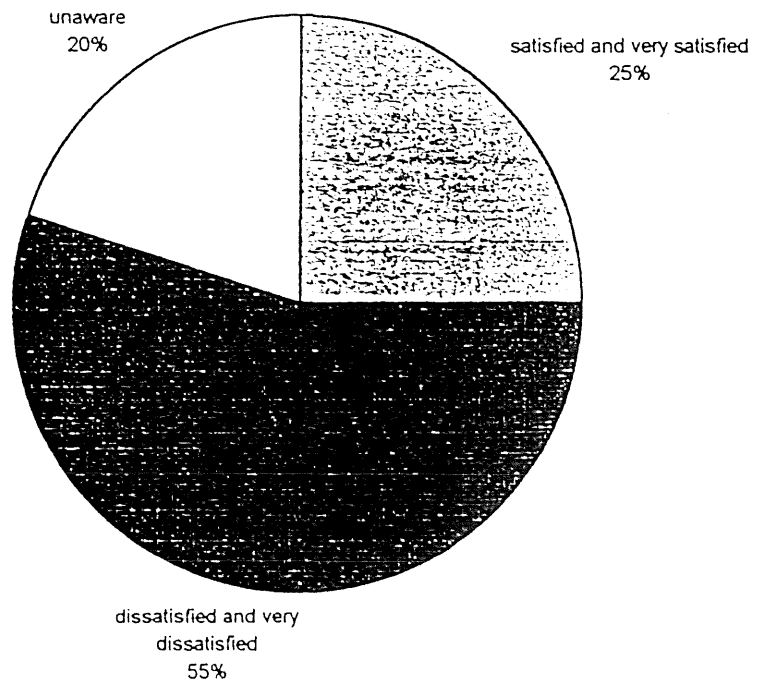


This is a survey to collect views on educational issues in Hay River. It is a followup to some concerns expressed at the Minister's Forum on Education held in Hay River February/99. Individual responses will be kept confidential.

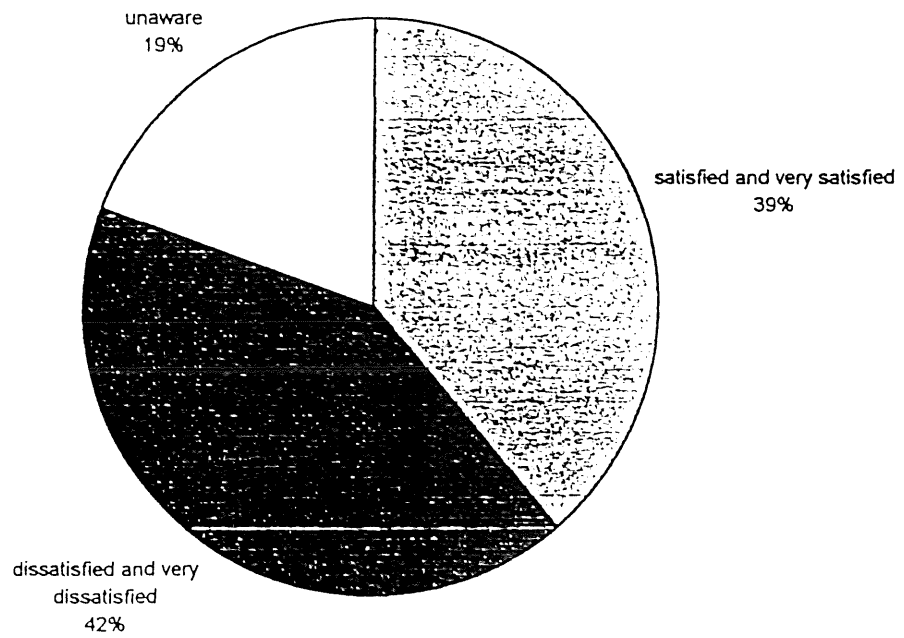
	very satisfied	satisfied	dissatisfied	very dissatisfied	unaware	total
1 How satisfied are you that our educational system is meeting student needs in the following areas:						
... below grade level students?	7	59	106	40	53	265
... above grade level students?	5	99	91	21	52	268
... students with physical disabilities?	9	83	52	21	100	265
... " " fetal acholol effect and related disabilities?	2	47	66	36	114	265
... " " severe behavior problems?	2	43	85	41	96	267
... " " auditory or visual problems?	5	58	56	21	126	266
... " " attention deficit and/or hyperativity disorder?	3	42	77	43	100	265
... " " learning disabilities?	4	47	93	41	81	266
... " " mild or moderate language delay?	3	55	71	27	101	257
2 ... with the number of students in each classroom?	1	81	108	66	17	273
3 ... with the wide range of grade levels in each classroom?	3	46	115	70	34	268
4 ... with student preparation for post secondary education	6	65	82	45	74	272
5 ... with student preparation for the work force?	3	82	72	40	74	271
6 ... with preparation of students for trades?	2	69	73	36	88	268
7 ... with opportunities offered in music, computer studies phys-ed and french?	12	91	87	47	31	268
8 ... with counselling services available in the schools?	3	80	81	27	81	272
9 ... with the new Dene Kede cultural program in schools?	5	74	39	26	126	270
10 ... with information provided on educational issues?	3	119	78	20	44	264
11 ... with your opportunities to express your views on educational issues in Hay River?	11	134	59	28	26	258
12 ... with levels of funding for:						
-staffing schools?	1	34	111	77	38	261
-operating & maintence	0	58	75	48	62	243
13 ... with advancing children through the system regardless of the grade level attained?	1	27	104	121	21	274
14 ... with the information you receive about the programs or courses available?	6	123	60	26	52	267
15 ... with the emphasis placed on the following in school?						
-reading?	16	133	69	32	19	269
-writing?	10	123	77	31	20	261
-mathematics?	15	135	72	26	19	267
-science and social studies?	13	145	58	21	23	260
16 ... with opportunities for involvement in the:						
-decisions that affect students?	10	120	69	23	42	264
-school activities?	18	160	41	16	29	264
-budget planning process?	7	78	69	31	78	263
17 ... with the emphasis placed on student attendance?	16	129	49	38	32	264
18 ... with the overall quality of education in Hay River?	7	124	81	37	8	257

comments (use other side too)

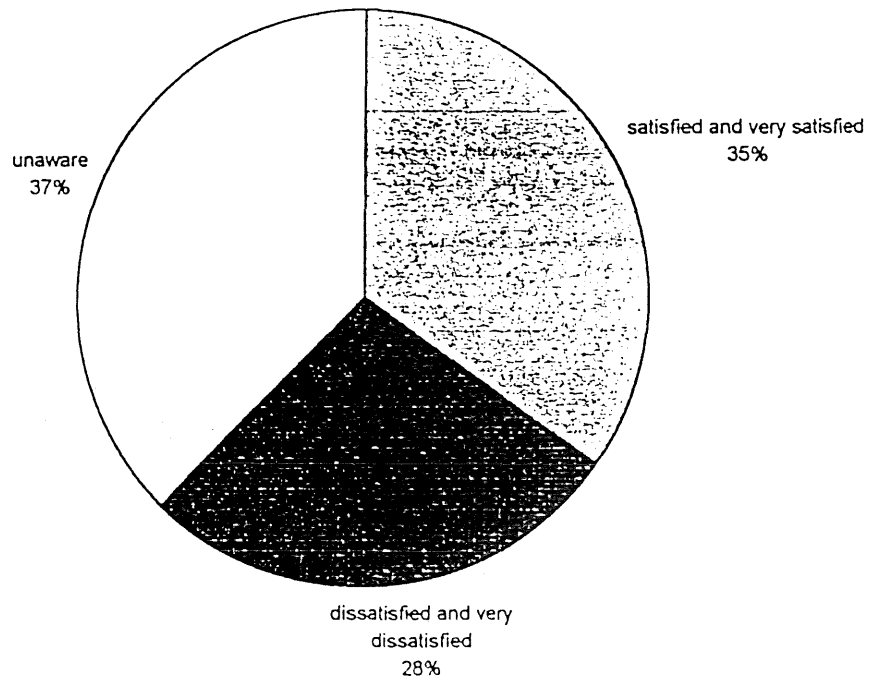
Question 1a: How satisfied are you that our educational system is meeting needs of below grade level students?



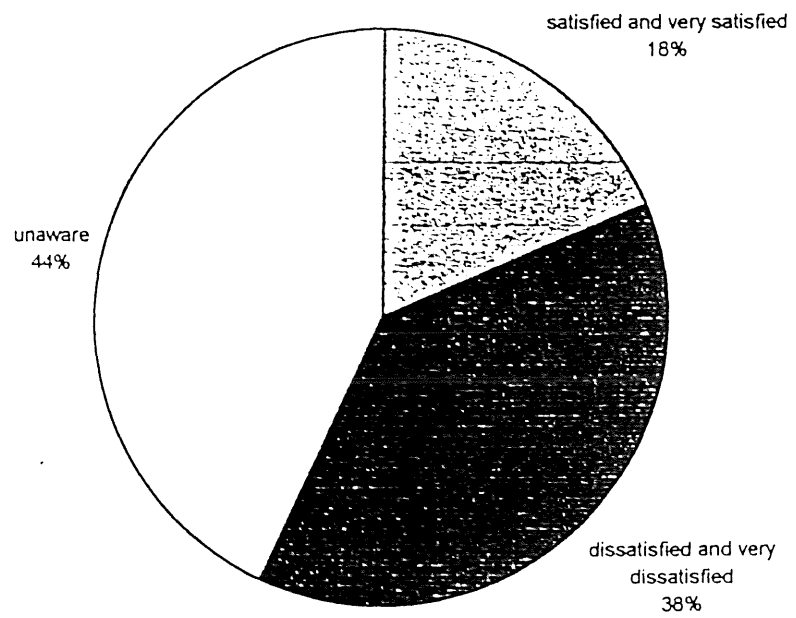
Question 1b: How satisfied are you that our educational system is meeting needs of above grade level students?



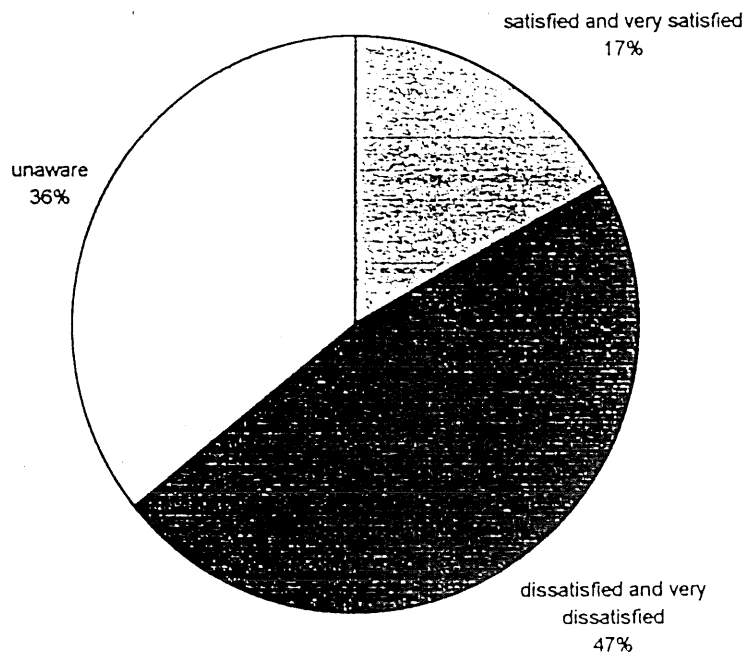
Question 1c: How satisfied are you that our educational system is meeting needs of students with physical disabilities?



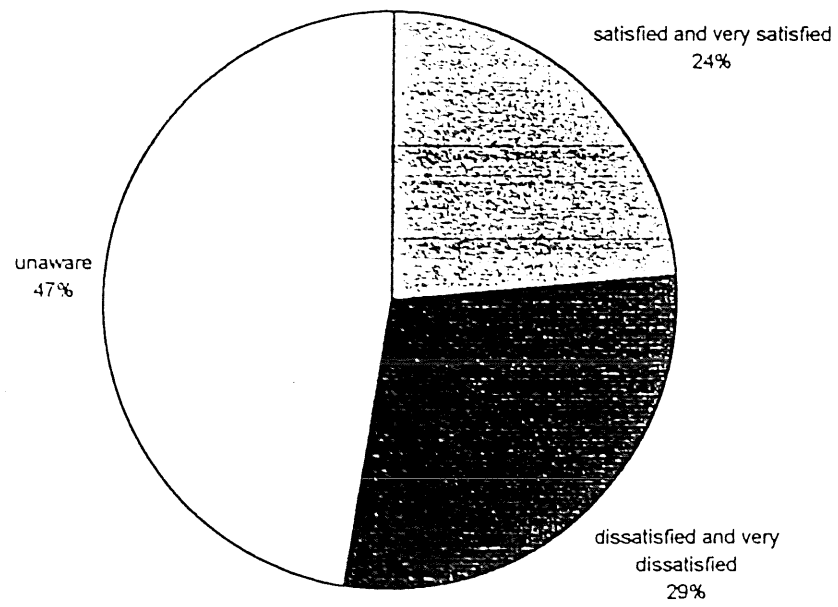
Question 1d: How satisfied are you that our educational system is meeting needs of students with fetal alcohol effect and related disabilities?



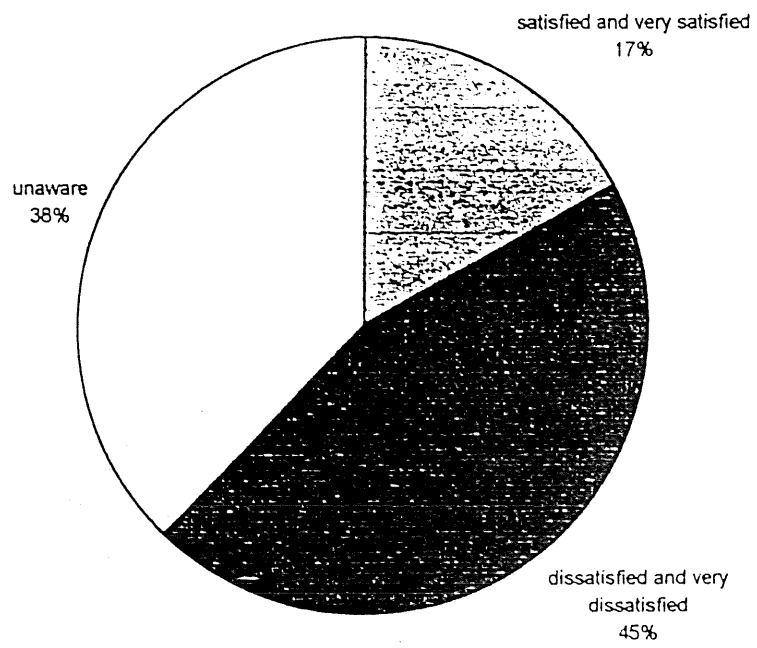
Question 1e: How satisfied are you that our educational system is meeting needs of students with severe behavior problems?



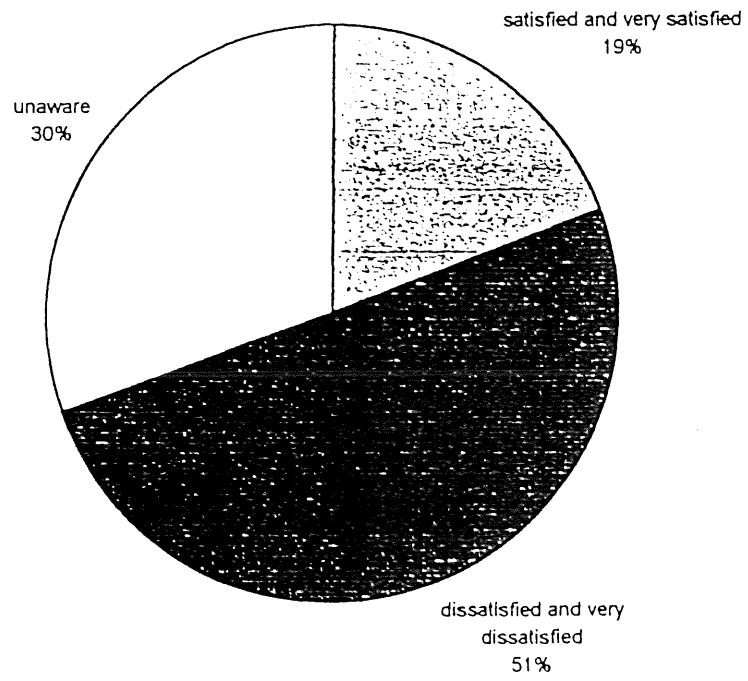
Question 1f: How satisfied are you that our educational system is meeting needs of students with auditory or visual problems?



Question 1g: How satisfied are you that our educational system is meeting needs of students with attention deficit and/or hyperactivity disorder?



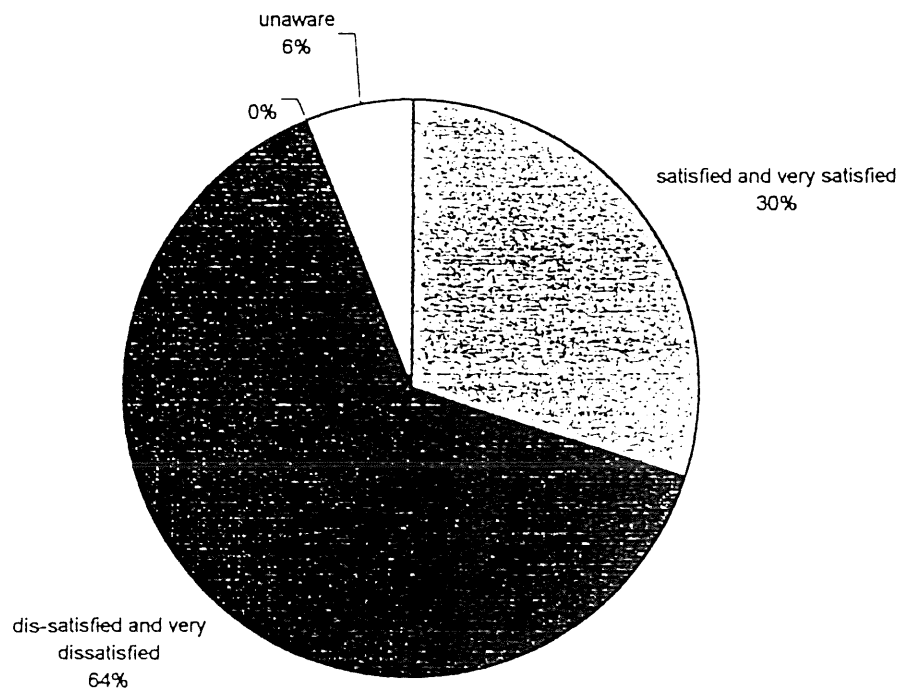
Question 1h: How satisfied are you that our educational system is meeting needs of students with learning disabilities?



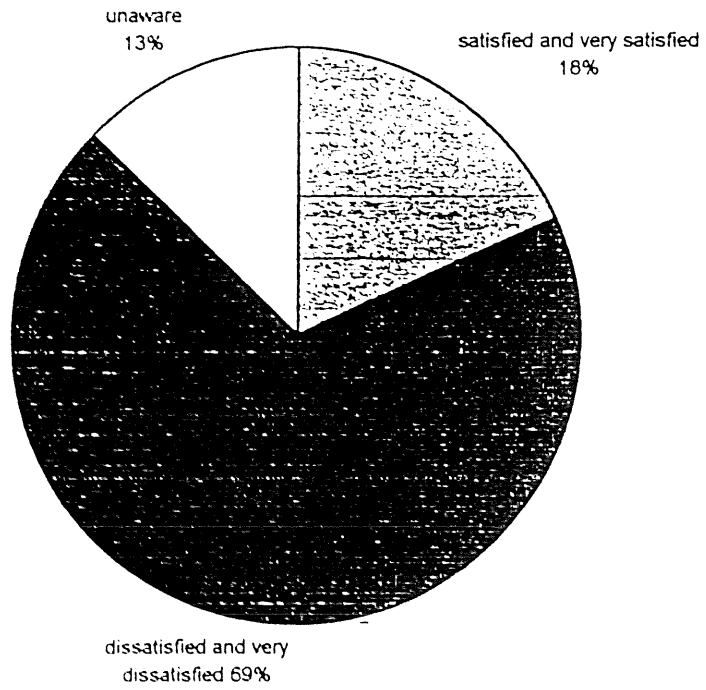
Question 11: How satisfied are you that our educational system is meeting needs of students with mild or moderate language delay?



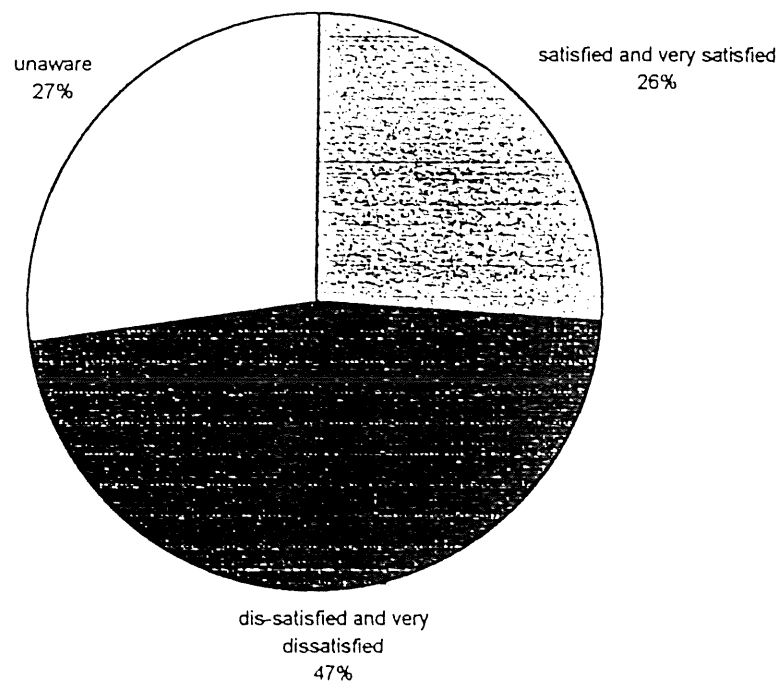
Question 2: How satisfied are you with the number of students in each classroom?



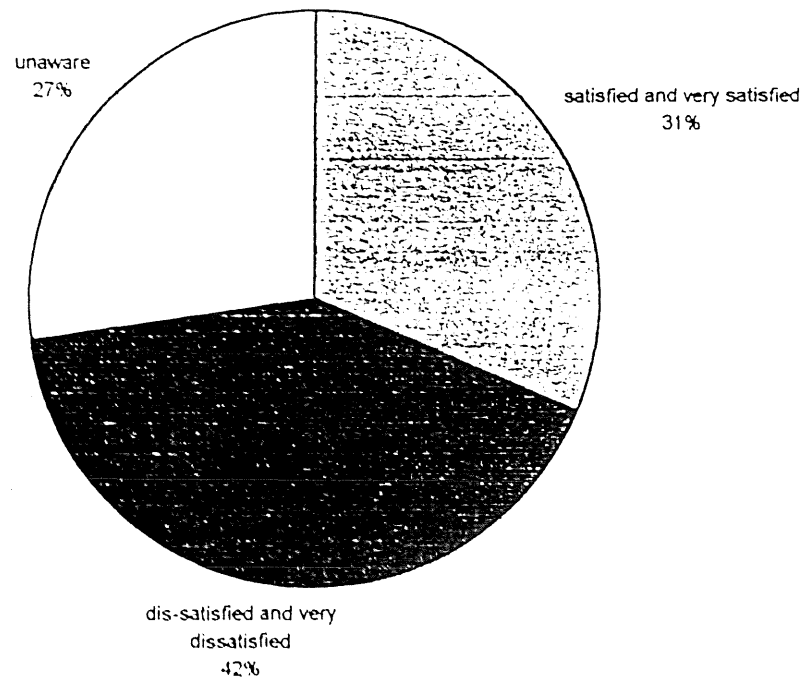
Question 3: How satisfied are you with the wide range of grade levels in each classroom?



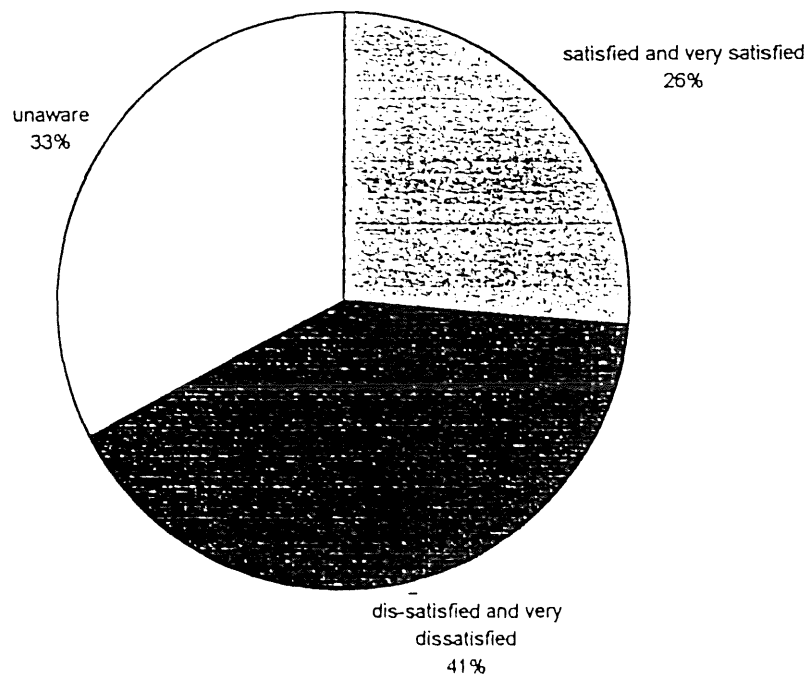
Question 4: How satisfied are you with student preparation for post secondary education?



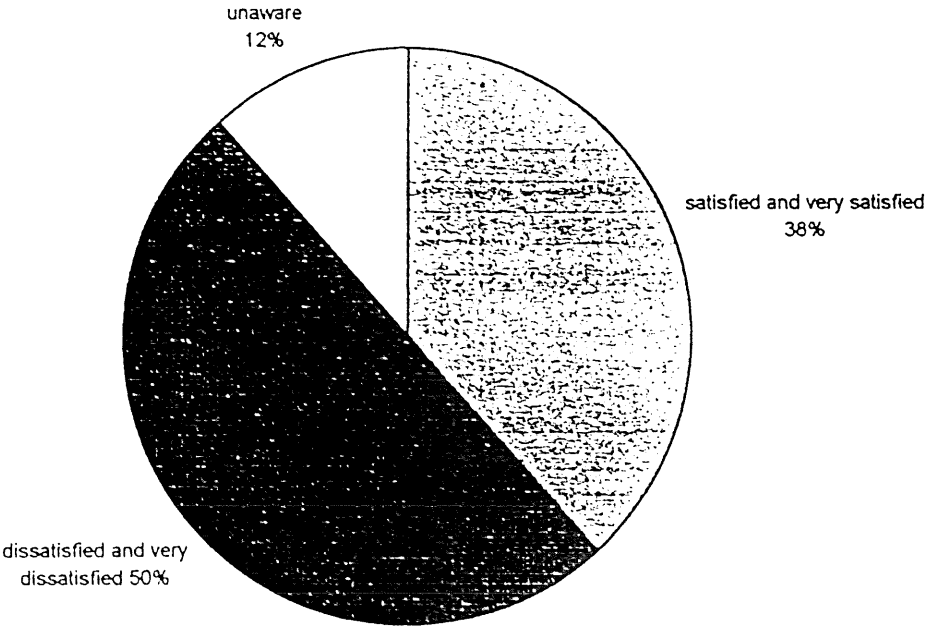
Question 5: How satisfied are you with student preparation for the work force?



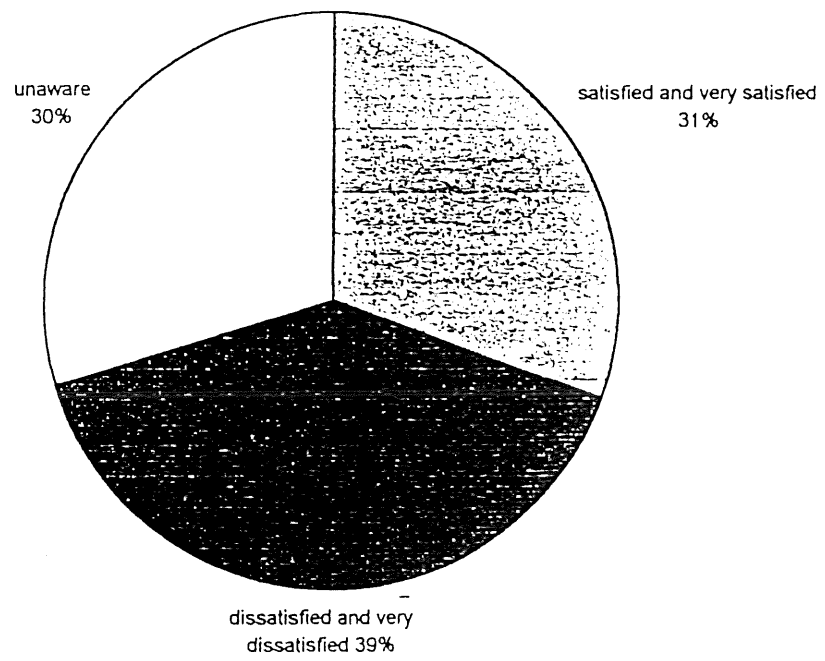
Question 6: How satisfied are you with preparation of students for trades?



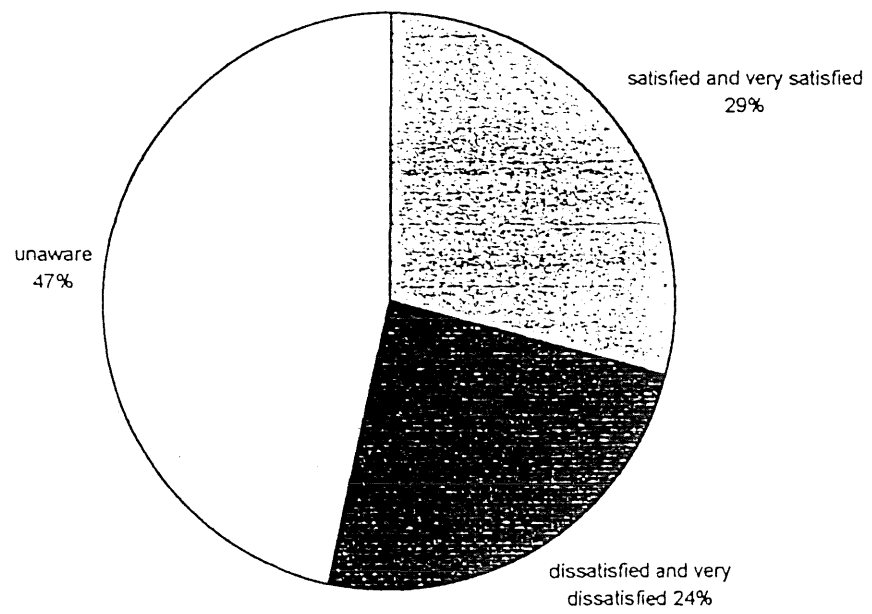
Question 7: How satisfied are you with opportunities offered in music, computer studies, physical and french?



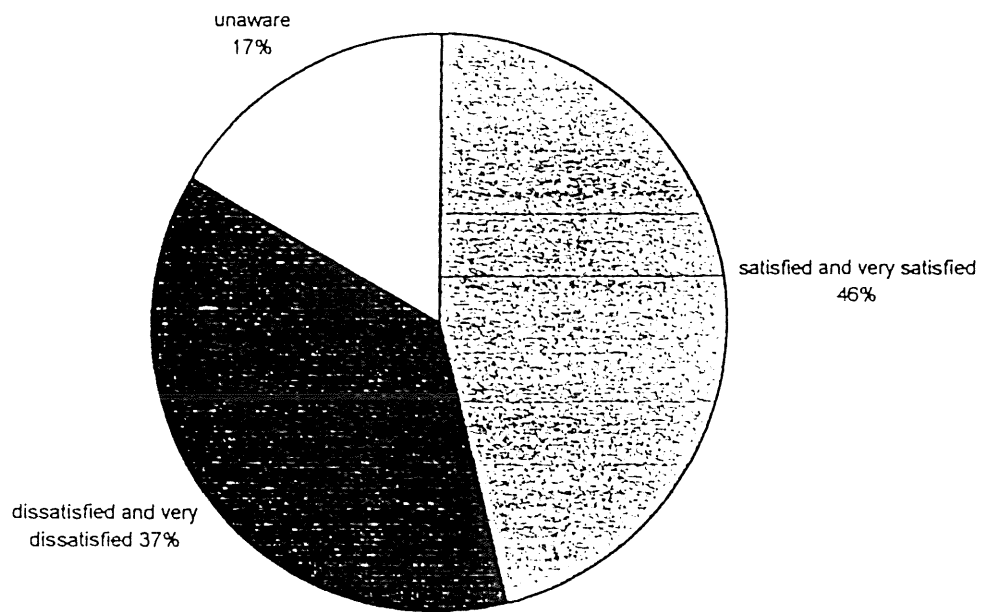
Question 8: How satisfied are you with counselling services in the schools?



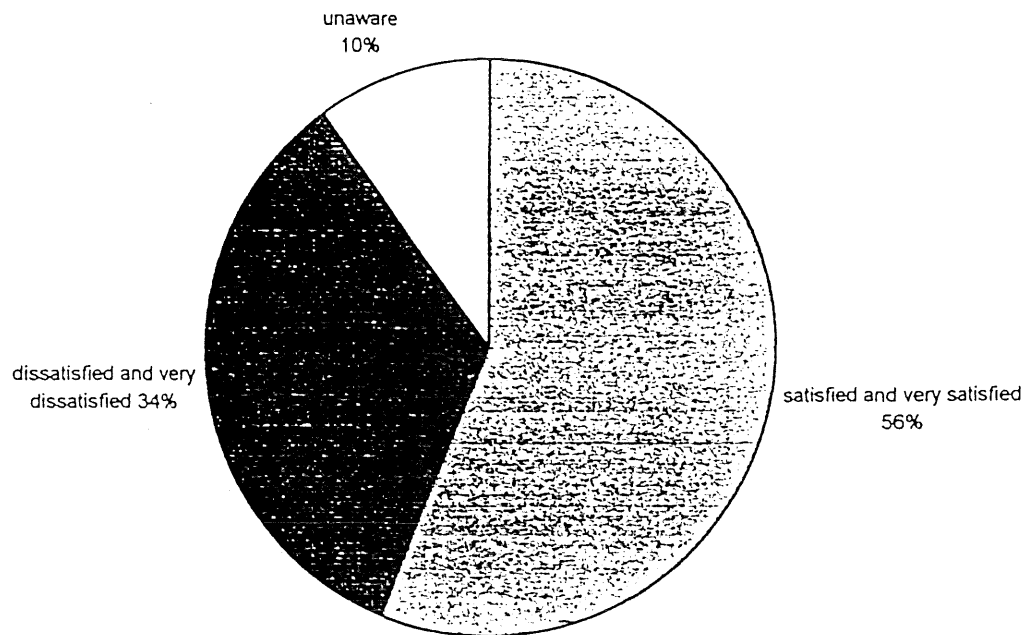
Question 9: How satisfied are you with the new Dene Kede Cultural program in schools?



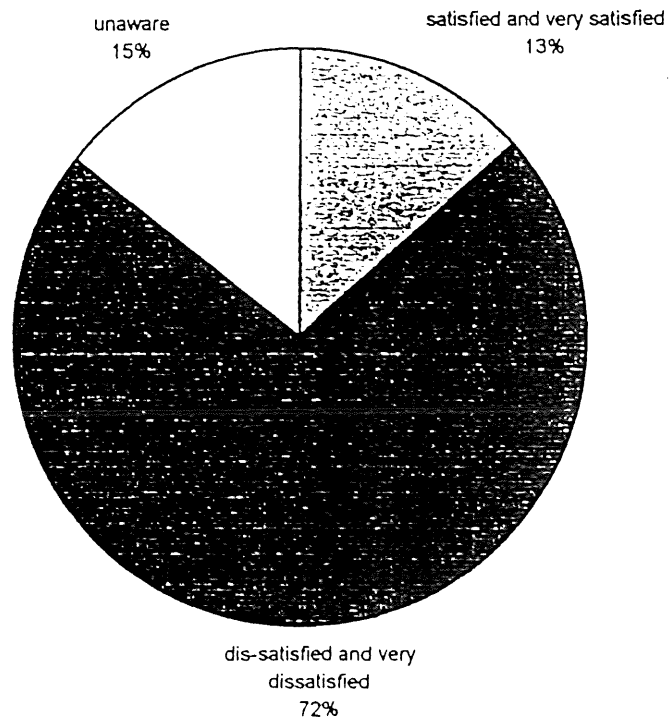
Question 10: How satisfied are you with information provided on educational issues?



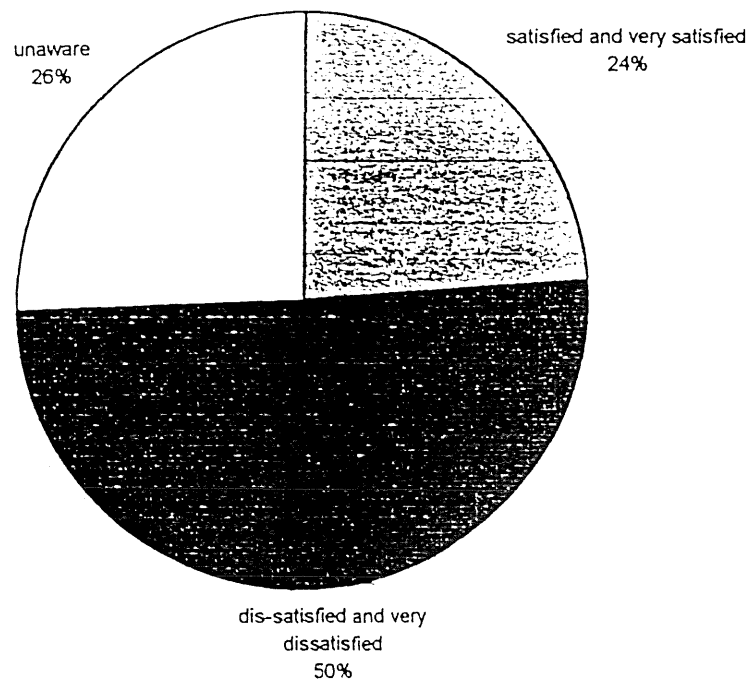
Question 11: How satisfied are you with your opportunities to express your views on educational issues in Hay River?



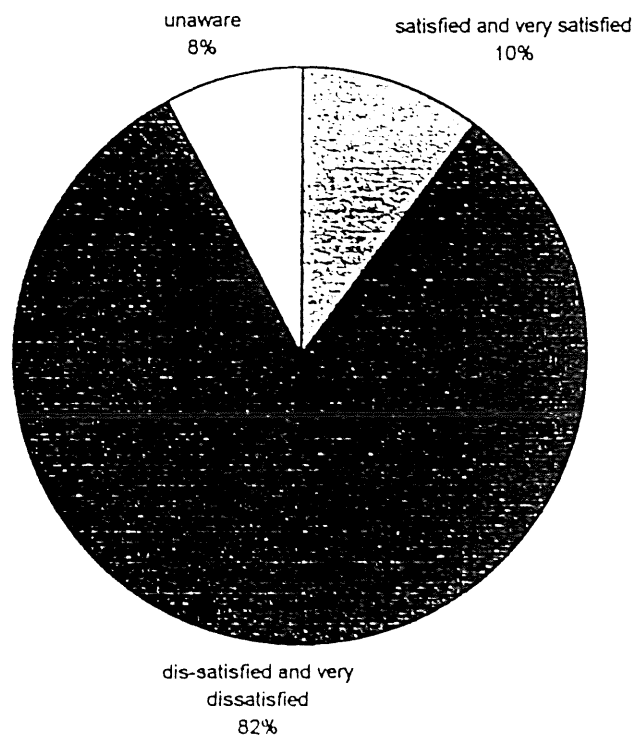
Question 12a: How satisfied are you with the levels of funding for staffing schools?



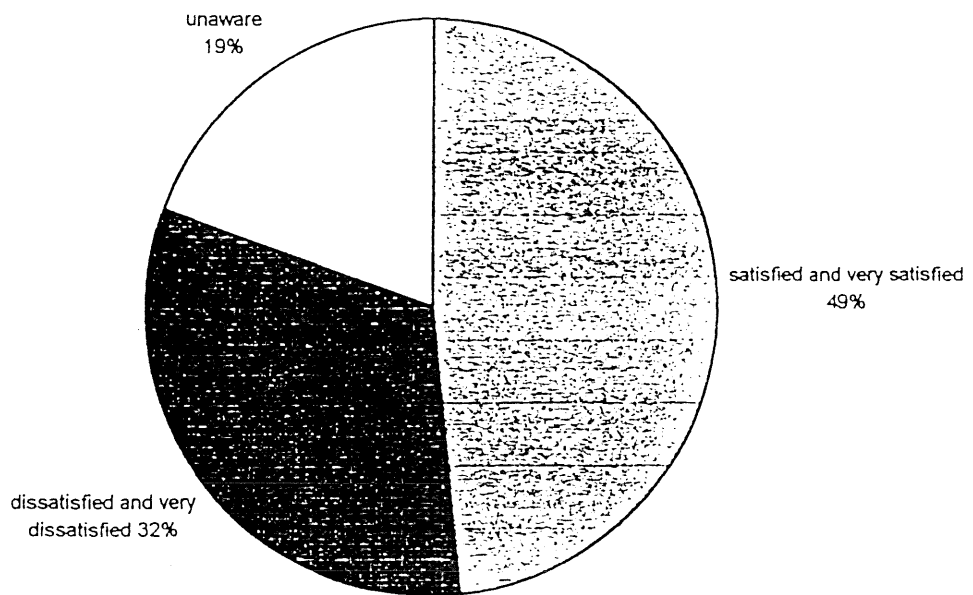
Question 12b: How satisfied are you with levels of funding for operating & maintenance?



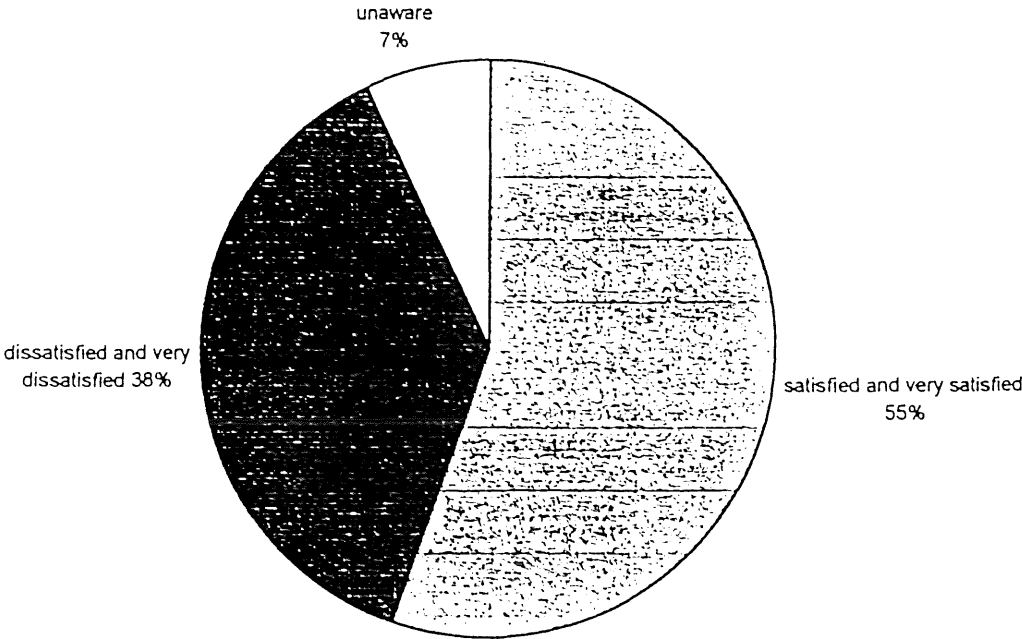
Question 13: How satisfied are you with advancing children through the system regardless of the grade level attained?



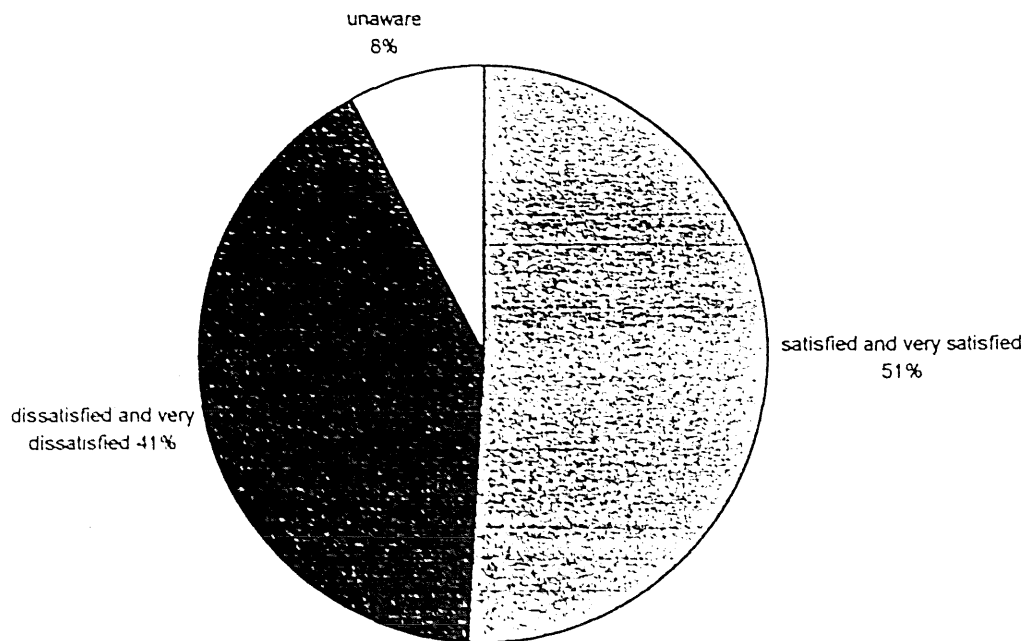
Question 14: How satisfied are you with the information you receive about the programs or courses available?



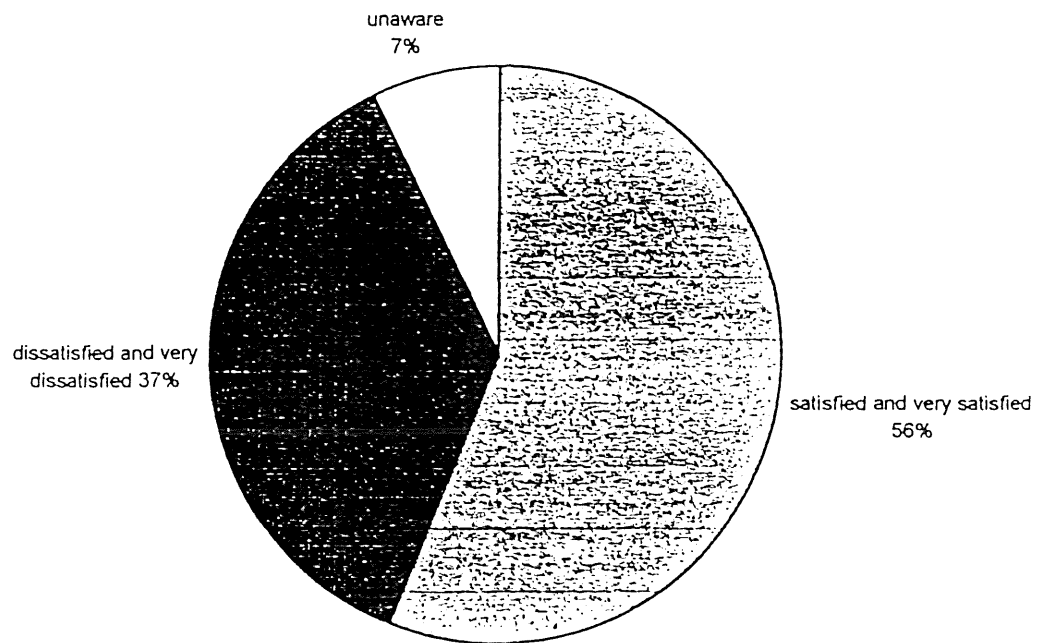
Question 15a: How satisfied are you with the emphasis placed on reading in school?



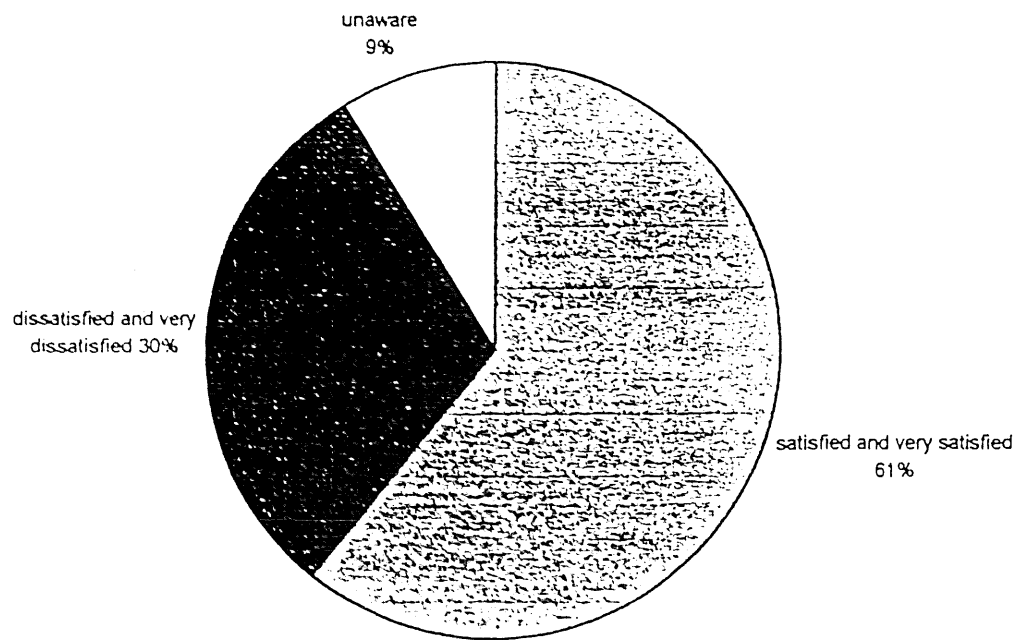
Question 15b: How satisfied are you with the emphasis placed on writing in school?



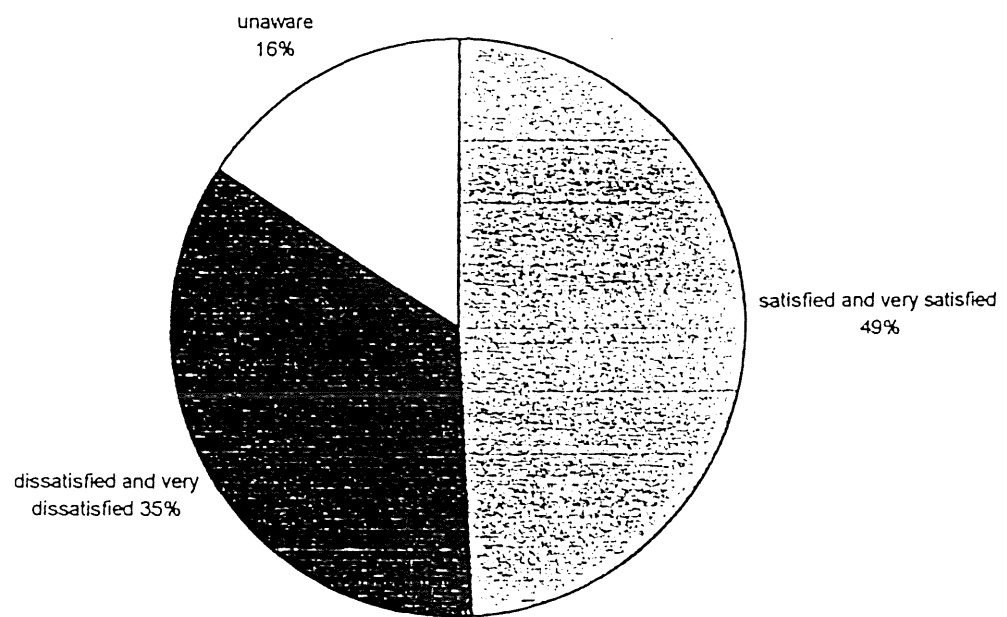
Question 15c: How satisfied are you with the emphasis placed on mathematics in school?



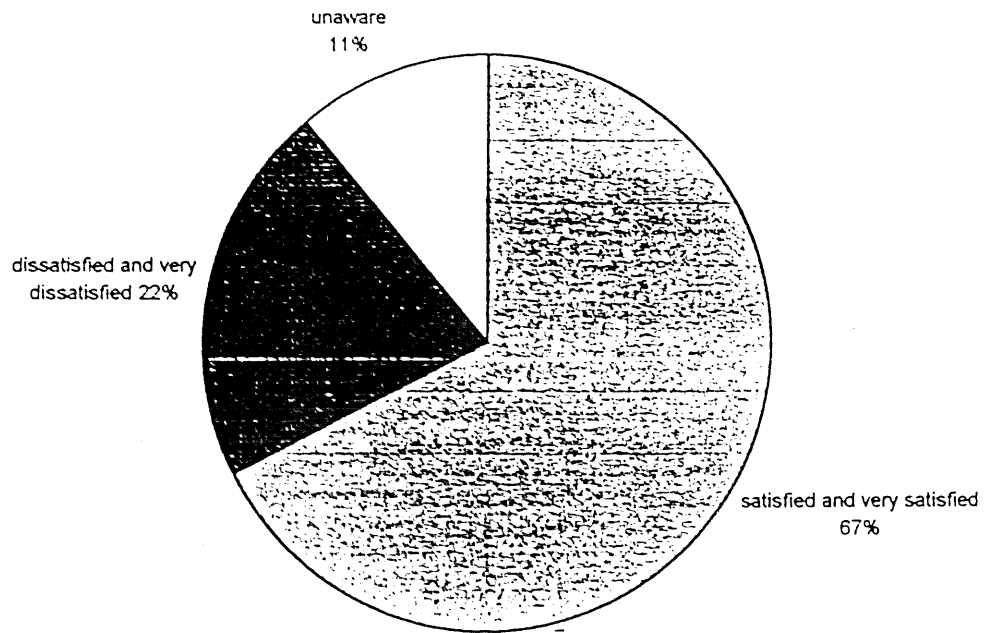
Question 15d: How satisfied are you with the emphasis placed on science and social studies in school?



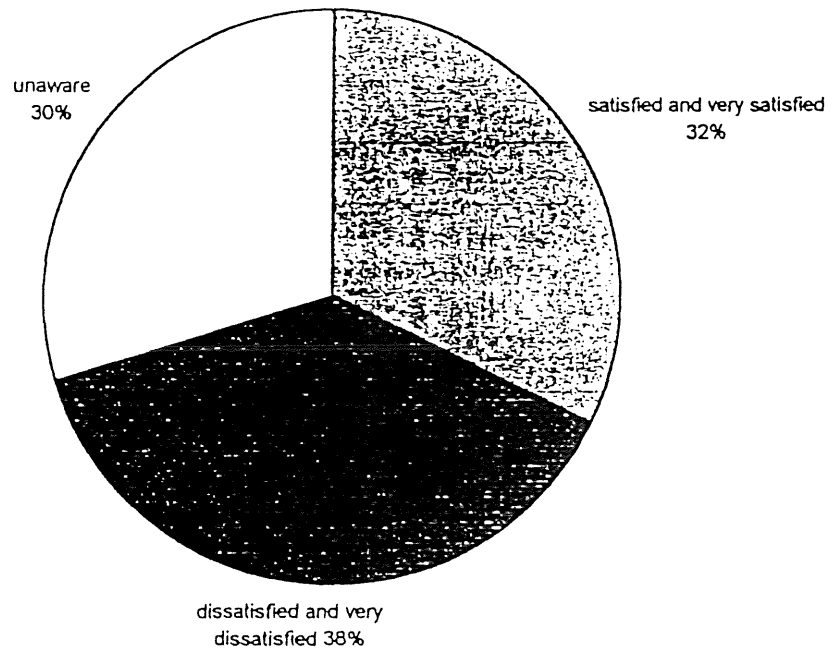
Question 16a: How satisfied are you with opportunities for involvement in the decisions that affect students?



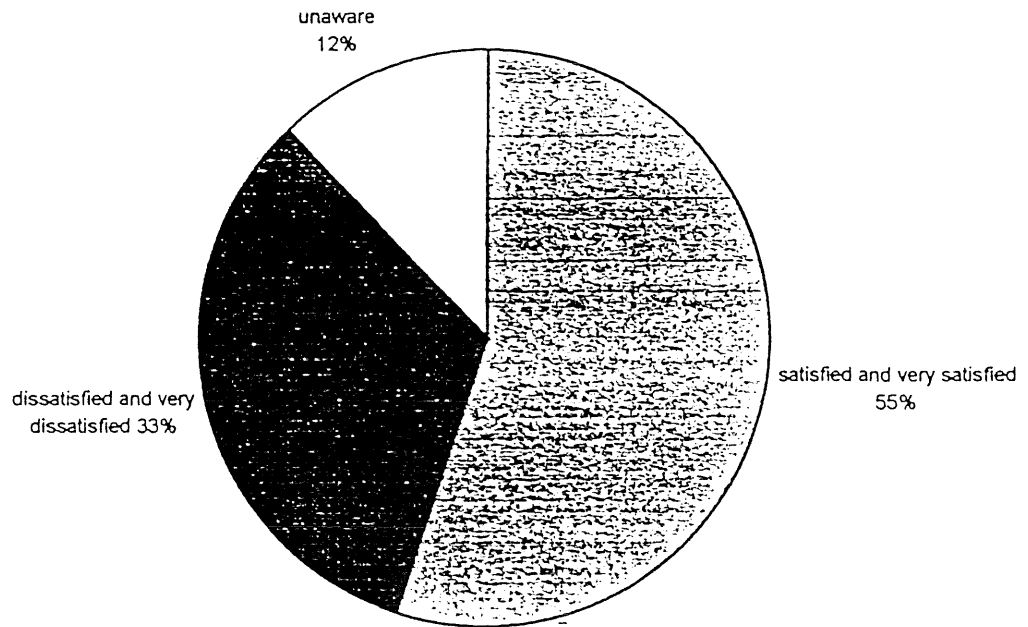
Question 16b: How satisfied are you with opportunities for involvement in school activities?



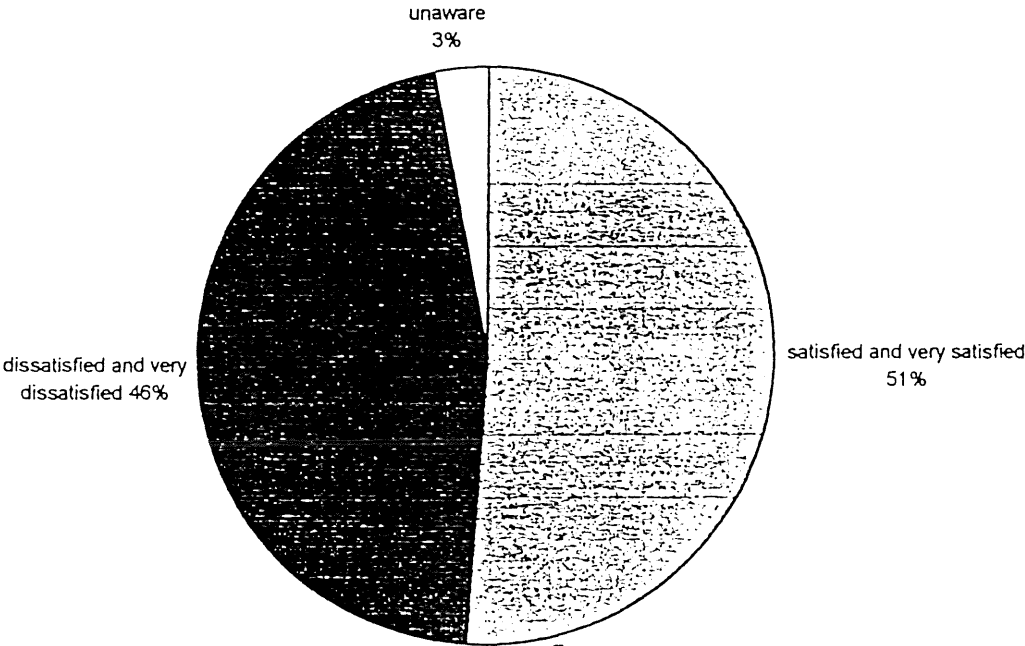
Question 16c: How satisfied are you with opportunities for involvement in the budget planning process?



Question 17: How satisfied are you with the emphasis placed on student attendance?



Question 18: How satisfied are you with the overall quality of education in Hay River?



Educational issues survey, Hay River, April-May 1999.

Comments referring to overcrowded, multi-ability classes and need for improved funding levels:

1. Our classrooms are widely affected by the student/teacher ratios due to funding cuts. All of the above is affected in some way or form by the issues of overcrowded classes. Teachers of the 90's have to shuffle to meet every student's needs and the wide range of grade levels in each classroom, this makes teaching a bigger challenge. We need to re-evaluate our system.
2. The problem is not with the teachers, most-times, but with large classes and varied levels and problem children. Too many students in each classroom. Up the staff levels and training for teachers for learning/behavior problems. I don't agree with putting kids ahead to keep with their age level/friends. No one benefits. It would be better to put kids together who want to learn and have ability to advance. They are held back working with children who need more help or who aren't interested in learning. Also I would agree that the classes are too big and some teachers are not very strict and it is hard for students who are interested in learning and can't work in the class with so much noise and disruptions.
3. (referring to Q13): should not be advanced if they don't meet grade level. Is this a student need?
4. (referring to Q12, funding for staffing schools): need to better address special needs. Support "streaming of student at the junior high level, i.e., matriculation (academic), vocational, commercial. One size fits all doesn't work at that age.
5. I have two children in the school system and they are two grades apart. I have noticed a big decline in the education system. When my older daughter was in grade 2, we had a choice of a second language (French or Slavey) in which I chose her to take French. Now with the second child in grade two, there is no French available unless you're in French emersion. With my older daughter there was music, the second child never mentions it. For how much everything has change in two years I'm really scared as to what the system will be like when my youngest is in grade two! That won't be for another 5 years!!!
6. (referring to Q1 and it various components): job could be done much better with more funding. (referring to Q13): can't be answered with a good or bad. General comment: Many of these questions are hard to answer with satisfied or dissatisfied for answers. I feel Harry Camsell does a great job with the system they have to work within – the school is wonderful – the funding is deplorable.
7. (referring to Q18): very satisfied, despite overwhelming obstacles.
Additional comments: Any comment I have made that are negative are not to be used as criticism or blame on the teachers or schools but rather blame is placed on the Dept. of Education which creates unrealistic demands on teachers and schools while at the same time severely under-funding education. Parents also cannot expect teachers to give quality education in overcrowded, multi-ability classrooms. Teachers and schools in Hay River already give 200% to the job. Many hours over and above the regular workday are spent in program preparation, evaluation, extra-curricular activities and parent contact. (few other unions would allow its employees to work overtime without compensation). Perhaps government should close the gap between expectations and what is actually possible to achieve with limited staff and resources. **Put more money in the schools.** Expectations cannot be lowered for our children. I have a concern with question 15. I KNOW heavy emphasis is placed on the academic areas, however, current teaching methods and philosophies are employed and some parents may be expecting the knowledge level types of teaching they were subjected to rather than the effective application approach currently employed. I hope ill-informed answers are not accepted at face value.
8. I wish to comment in that I feel there needs to be less of a difference in grade levels in classrooms. It makes it more difficult for the average or above-average students. I would like to see less emphasis on drawing, coloring and artwork and more put on writing, reading & math subjects. Personally, I have a

great deal of difficulty in the behavior of the kids in hallways and outside. It is often rough and the swearing is bad. On the other hand, I believe the teachers are doing an excellent job and are to be commended for their time and patience with the kids. Thanks.

9. We need school/community counselors, like in Fort Smith, to get more information to parents. We need more information about what our kids take in school. Music is very necessary in K-6. Rather should be 1:15 or 20, not more. Every class should have an assistant. More volunteers needed.
10. Many parents send their children south for education because of the northern school system. Other parents move with their children. The school system in Hay River is not meeting the needs of students compared to the rest of Canada. If students do not know materials required for certain grade they should have to repeat those grades. This would certainly be incentive to do better, but to simply advance children through the system is unacceptable. It certainly will not prepare them for the real world when they will have to work. I have a son in Kindergarten this year. He goes out for one on one reading once a week for ½ hour, not because he is behind but because he is advanced. I did not realize this was happening until he told me. When I spoke to his teacher she said that he should be doing this three times a week, plus doing math also. She said the school was too understaffed to provide this to him. Shortly after this I read in the paper that next year P.A. school will lose 2.5 teachers. If my child is not getting what he needs from this school system in Kindergarten, I do not hold much hope for him getting what he needs in the future. I am already trying to decide where and when we will be going south so he can be challenged and stimulated to his full potential.
11. From what I can gather, there is a need for more student-teacher involvement, one on one, some of the teachers in all 3 schools show that they can't want to be there and they should be. It is a shame that students are continuously pushed to the next grade without/with being tested for grade level abilities. The (some) teachers within the system simply don't care.
12. (referring to total of Q1): as long as all in one class, not enough time for all. Additional comment: far too crowded, need separate high school.
13. Not enough teachers. Should be prepared for university when finished grade 12.
14. (referring to Q4, 5): satisfied. This year! (referring to Q18): satisfied. Within the budget confines. Additional comments: We can't keep turning a blind eye to the holistic attitude for classrooms. The above-level students are bored and will not ever achieve the capabilities and the below level student are only falling back farther and losing self-esteem as well. This all spells disastrous ends to me.
15. It's very hard for children to learn when there are such wide ranges of grade levels in a class, and when there are numerous behavior problems and no help for the teacher, i.e. SNA's, CA's. Thus it is a question of quality of learning environment as opposed to quality of education, etc.
16. Schools are doing the best they can with what they have. They need more \$!
17. Social promotion has not been successful in Hay River.
 - appears to be very little teacher 'enthusiasm', "effort to care" from some of those who are retiring soon
 - grades seem to be doing the same 'units' year after year.
 - not enough assistants to help in oversized classes.
18. My child has just started school so there are a lot of issues we are unable of and have not had the opportunity to deal with yet. Overall I think the education system is on par with other provinces. but lack funding, for additional teachers, activities etc.
19. -way too much cut back. -lack of funding. -pupil-teacher ratio too high.

20. (referring to Q15/writing): dissatisfied. -spelling. Additional comments: At the risk of sounding like a grinch, I believe that severely disabled and disturbed children should not be instituted in the classrooms. I can't see how: 1.) teachers are coping with the disruptions. 2.) what good it's doing anybody. 3.) the government can get away with further funding cuts just because these wee people have now been mainstreamed, and it has become less apparent the needs of these young people.
21. Need more teachers available because the ones we have now are being overworked and no time for day planning. More testing should be done to see what grade level students are, then work to bring them up to appropriate level, may it be grade level they are presently in, or up another grade.
22. (referring to Q1): programs are completed to the best of the school's ability with the funds provided. (referring to Q13): this cannot be answered with a negative or positive. Additional comments: PA School is an excellent school, but with limited funding I have grave concerns about what will happen in the future!
23. I feel we have good school and some great teachers in Hay River. I'd love to see slightly smaller classes and more staffing to deal with the just-below and above-average kids that need help and/or challenges respectively, as well as helping teachers with FAS/ADD/special needs children that can take a lot of time and attention from a classroom teacher.
24. (referring to Q7): very dissatisfied, computer skill opportunity -computer vs. student ratio.
25. We only have one student in grade 1 and have been satisfied but would like to see music and art classes brought back.
26. Overall Camsell has excellent staff and programs. Where we as a community fall short is in the grades 7-12.
27. I feel strongly our children are not being prepared for the future or helped to find their potential.
28. (referring to Q17): I think the schools cannot do anything about student attendance, that's a parent's job! Additional comments: I think that Ministers are unaware of the educational problems, and can not learn anything from walking through a classroom—I think that they should have each spend a day in a class at different grade levels then report back to each other.
29. (referring to Q12/staffing schools): very dissatisfied. Not enough teachers for the #'s of students. Additional comments: I am happy with the education provided for my children. I fear the budget cuts and position cuts rumoured to be forth coming will seriously jeopardize future learning opportunities for our students. I would like to see lower student-teacher ratios. I believe this would facilitate improved learning for all. I believe there is a very real need for assistance in and out of the classroom. For several of the student, if staffing is reduced, their chances to learn, to become literate, functioning, contributing members of society will also be reduced. These same non-contributors will become burdens for the next generation and so on. Stop the patterns now, with learning. Decrease the burden on society for the next generation. Thanks!
30. (referring to Q2): need to go back to streaming for the student's sake. (I have some experience in this having had children in both systems). Additional comments: Now, this cannot be totally blamed on staff. Lack of funding in proper areas, lack of real, true knowledge in proper learning problem areas, and too many students in with one teacher. If the system cannot afford more teachers then they had better look into up-ing the numbers of classroom and special needs assistants. By going back to streaming then we can give more assistance to the lower level classroom. A lot of these kids, with extra help are then able to bring their grades up, and can, a lot of times, be placed in the higher levels. It is common knowledge that most children with ADD or ADHD are at the higher end of the scale with higher IQ's then most, but because of their inability to focus get lost in the shuffle, making them look and feel slower. There are many out there with these types of disabilities that could be successful

students, but form behavioral problems because they get frustrated and can't progress. (Thus classed as a slower learner, etc. etc.) Also, more funding should come to the schools, cut out top administration positions in Dept.s.

31. I have a concern that children with behavior problems are not helped, they are just pushed aside and forgotten. Also there is not enough emphasis on basic reading & writing skills. How can someone graduate High School if they can't read or write??
32. Growing up in Hay River, I have always known that we have a lower standard of education here. Which makes it very difficult for students who want to do well in school or students that move to another province. I've had cousins (bright students) who were kept back a grade after moving to Sask. Could we not have a system that is more up to date and consistent with the rest of Canada. I now have young children in school, one of which is considered above average, but unfortunately because of a lack of one thing or another, my child is not being given the opportunity or challenges needed to encourage his love of learning. Instead he's being stalled and stifled. It's truly disheartening to see an old story replayed. If our children are the future why are we not able to put more into this investment. Same old complaints, same old responses, when can we expect a change to this vital program that will, if at the least satisfy the majority. How about a fresh start with fresh ideas for the new millenium.
33. I feel every school is doing the best they can with resources (monetary and personnel) available. Policies in education are to be followed so staff has very little choice in what to teacher or how. Passing students on is causing a bottleneck at the grade 10 level. If students do not achieve the basics by that time they hit a brick wall in grade 10. Multilevel classrooms are a major difficulty. It is extremely difficult to help all levels of students during a class period. Our gifted students miss out because of teachers lacking time and facilities to guide. Students generally lack good working skills. Our students today are not as well prepared for the world of work today as students were 10 years ago were. There appears to be an attitude of "do only the bare minimum so as to get by".
34. Teachers are trying best.
35. Special Needs can use more help.
36. Teacher needs over student needs.
37. Overcrowded, too many students, not enough teachers. Teachers are not telling parents about the attendance until it's too late.
38. (referring to Q6): satisfied. Should separate at Gr. 10 level: academic vs. trade
39. (referring to Q16. budget planning): unaware. Should be open to public input.
40. Not notified of child not attending at high school.
41. (referring to Q17): satisfied. Only phoned to parents or people who care. Additional comments: we expect teachers to do all discipline and they can't. -need to have discipline back in school with parent support. Students need deterrence, we need vocational school to build skills (electrician, builders, carpenters, plumbers) to make students useful and productive in society. Not all kids are academically smart. But they are not stupid! If we don't provide these opportunities they will end up in jails, or on welfare and in constant trouble and not be productive members of society.
42. Teachers do okay with what they have to work with. More funding needed.
43. Need more in budget to accommodate special needs student in classroom or in separate classes.

44. Due to large class sizes and needy students it is hard to meet all needs. Student preparation for work force and trades lacking due to high school funding. Too many cutbacks. Parent awareness available if parents attend meetings. Funding for more help. Need more parent involvement. Need help.
45. Biggest concern is of course, lack of funding to provide proper textbooks and materials for students to provide special resources for challenged and/or high achieving students. Teachers are exhausted just assembling and copying materials, which should be readily available. Other serious concerns include: (1.) integrating behavioral problems into classrooms, which lack teacher/staff who can appropriately deal with them. Too many teachers just let disruptive behavior continue or they lose control themselves. My children have been in classroom situations that have caused them to say they hate school because it's impossible to learn anything. (2.) High school students who don't know how to write or spell at the level they should because when they were in the primary grades the teacher said don't worry about spelling it correctly, we'll fix that later, we want you to try and use the new and bigger words. The spelling/sentences never did get fixed. (3.) Schools are not using the info collected from participation in standardized/national testing. Either that, or they are refusing to acknowledge that there are problems. I would like to know how our students compare with students across the country because I believe that overall our students (especially in DJSS) perform at a lower level than southern school students do. (4.) Too much time and money is being wasted on forcing cultural programs onto students who do not need them or want them and would prefer to be doing real schoolwork -i.e., the 3 R's. (5) Too much time and money is being focussed on minority interests in the schools. We should never have undertaken to cater to everyone's needs/wants/cultures/disadvantages, etc., unless we were prepared to provide enough support. Too often supporting and integrating all these people into our school system takes away resources and time from the basic education of All students.
46. More teachers needed for special needs and also classroom assistants needed to help teachers who have a big class and also who are dealing with a lot of special needs students. Students need more gym time, music, French and Slavey. I feel as a parent that these subjects are very important to children's learning and growing.
47. Hay River education is totally lower level than Alberta. Two students who previously moved to Alberta have to be held back because we are so far behind. These two were excellent students here. Something has to be done.
48. I am concerned with the classroom pupil/teacher ratio and the need for classroom and special needs assistance not being met. Also concerned that FFL was instituted in PA School for a small percentage of the children while the rest of the children lost their option to take French.
49. The only question that we should all look for answers to is why is it if a family leaves Hay River or goes out to school in the south, why are our children so far behind them???
50. I am satisfied with the Kindergarten program with the exception of number of student in the classrooms.

Concerns expressed about responsibility, Dene Kede program, writing/spelling

51. (referring to Q15a.): they can't punctuate! Or spell!
52. (referring to Q15/writing): very dissatisfied - spelling
53. I don't mind having an aboriginal language taught, but not the cultural component.
54. (referring to Q9): the course should be optional.
55. (referring to Q9): unaware. Important, but could seniors teach it.

56. (referring to Q9): unaware. Not necessary.
57. (referring to Q9): more time is needed for 3 R's , not less
58. Why is DeneKede cultural program not being used in the school?
59. I believe much more emphasis should be placed on the 3 "R's", special needs, educational programs, and discipline. I realize the onus is on the parents to teach 'responsibility' at home but our attempts to bring up responsible children go to hell in a hand-basket when they are allowed to get away with murder at school. If I were to have talked to my teachers the way some of these kids do these days, there would have been "severe" consequences. Yes, students have rights but those rights should be earned as a result of responsible actions on their part. Teachers and parents have rights too
60. (referring to Q9): the course should be optional.
61. What Hay River needs most is a junior high school – grades 7-9. 12 yrs. olds should not be influenced by 18 yr. olds.
62. (referring to Q11): very dissatisfied. Nothing done about concerns raised.
63. (referring to Q11): listen but don't respond.
64. (referring to Q11): very satisfied. Lack of response to views.
65. (referring to Q18): satisfied. Although room for improvement, especially in high school.
66. referring to Q17): emphasis on parent responsibilities in ensuring that education is a priority for their children; this is not always the case. Sometimes it is easier to blame the schools; no one should be "blamed". Also where is the an area regarding parental involvement concerning their children from K-12. Often involvement decreases as the student gets into higher grades.
67. Comments are not related to the French program.
68. (referring to Q13): no response indicated but wrote "parental choice".
69. (referring to Q13): no response indicated but wrote "mixed feelings"
70. Satisfied with emphasis placed on student attendance in younger grades, but not in the high school. In the high school, it seems the teachers really don't care if their students are all there or not. What happened to the good old days when parents received a phone call right away to let them know that their child is not in class?