



**Raymore-Peculiar School District  
2011 Patron Online Survey  
Final Report  
November 2, 2011**

In September and October 2011, an online survey was made available to the patrons of the Raymore-Peculiar School District through a link on the district's website.

The survey addressed two key areas:

First, patrons were asked to share their opinions on the current performance of the district on a variety of people, program, facility and district/patron relationship areas. They were also given the opportunity to pinpoint the strengths and weaknesses of the district.

Second, the district's efforts to communicate with patrons were evaluated, with the opportunity provided for patrons to share their specific information needs on those areas that they believed fell short of the mark.

Generally speaking, the patrons who took part in this survey followed a pattern familiar to many school districts, in terms of their evaluation of the district's performance. Specifically, the closer the topic was to a school building (safety, the facility itself, teachers, etc.) the higher the rating, while the further away it was (responsiveness to patron concerns, involving the community in decision-making, etc.) the lower the grade.

The grades on the lower-rated areas were not dramatically low – which is encouraging, considering that online surveys tend to draw more participation among the most passionate patrons than does a research process that generates more of a cross-section – but these areas still bear monitoring.

In terms of communication, the pattern continued, as patrons expressed a desire to hear more information on such topics as the budget, but – again, generally speaking – were quite satisfied with most of the other communication topics they evaluated.

This report presents each topic area separately, with a discussion of the findings and all the questions and answers. A brief summary closes the report.

## **Topic: Rating of the district's performance, its strengths and the areas needing improvement**

The survey began by giving patrons the opportunity to “grade” – either A, B, C, D or F – 18 different people, program, facility and district/patron relationship factors, plus the district's overall performance.

To simplify the analysis, a 5-point weighted scale is applied to the findings. In this scale, each grade of “A” receives 5 points, down to each grade of “F” receiving 1 point. The point values are totaled and divided by the number of respondents who offered a grade (rather than saying “don't know,” or simply leaving the question blank) to arrive at a single number between 1.00 and 5.00.

Recognizing that 5.00 (an “A”) is essentially impossible, because it would require all those who responded to say “A,” the dividing line between those areas considered strengths and areas which may require attention or monitoring is typically considered 4.00, or a “B.” (Statistically speaking, in a survey with 243 respondents in a district the size of Raymore-Peculiar, the Margin of Error is approximately 6%. This means that scores as low as 3.76 should still be considered a “B,” from a statistical perspective.)

In the case of the Raymore-Peculiar School District, 14 of the 18 areas (plus the district's overall performance) scored at the 3.76 level or higher. Among the leaders were:

- Upkeep and maintenance of school facilities – 4.35
- The ability of schools to operate in an orderly manner – 4.24
- Quality of technology available to students – 4.17
- Quality of education received by the students – 4.11

The four lowest-rated areas were:

- Performance of the School Board – 3.70
- District's record on making and fulfilling promises – 3.65
- District's responsiveness to patron concerns – 3.56
- District's efforts to involve the community in decision-making – 3.53

These grades, while somewhat disappointing, suggest a general mind-set among those with concerns, rather than a carefully selected evaluation of each topic. In other words, those who are upset about something related to the district and how it interacts with patrons generally marked all of district/patron relationship factors with a lower score, rather than selectively identifying areas of concern.

While this does not diminish the need to monitor these areas, it does suggest that the concerns among this modest, but noticeable, subset of patrons is likely systemic, rather than specific.

In terms of strengths, teachers and communication by the district received the most attention from those who chose to answer the question, while a lack of communication by the district, the need for more challenges for high-achieving students, and a request to spend tax dollars wisely topped the areas needing improvement.

(In reviewing the open-ended comments, it is important to note that only those areas mentioned by at least two respondents appear in the charts. There were numerous individual comments that did not tie together with other comments, which is why the total number of items appearing in the charts is quite a bit lower than the overall number of participants on each question.)

1. **As you know, students in school are given grades to reflect the quality of their work. What grade would you give the Raymore-Peculiar School District in the following areas?** *Grades are reported on a 5-point weighted scale, in which each “A” is worth 5 points, down to each “F” being worth 1 point. Points are totaled and divided by the number of respondents who offered a grade, rather than saying “don’t know.” A score of 3.76 or higher is the statistical equivalent of a “B,” which is typically considered the dividing line between areas that are seen as strengths, and those which may need attention.*

Area being rated	5-point scale rating
Upkeep and maintenance of school facilities	4.35
Quality of school facilities	4.35
The ability of the schools to operate in an orderly manner	4.24
The level of caring from staff members, in general, about students	4.21
Quality of technology available to students	4.17
Performance of teachers	4.16
Safety of students	4.15
Ability of school personnel to make you feel welcome when you visit	4.14
Quality of education received by students	4.11
Performance of school principals	4.06
Quality of communication coming from the district to residents	4.04
Preparation of students for college, vocational training or employment	3.95
Value received for the tax dollars spent on education in the district	3.82
Performance of the district’s administration	3.78
Performance of the School Board	3.70
District’s record on making and fulfilling promises	3.65
District’s responsiveness to patron concerns	3.56
District’s efforts to involve the community in decision-making	3.53

- 2. Overall, what grade would you give the Raymore-Peculiar School District?**  
*Five-point scale rating was 4.02.*

<b>Response</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
A	29%
B	51%
C	13%
D	5%
F	1%
Don't know	<1%

- 3. What are the strengths of the Raymore-Peculiar School District?** *A total of 139 respondents chose to answer this question. Answers were coded from open-ended comments, based on common words, phrases or ideas. Only those answers mentioned at least twice are noted below. Numbers, rather than percentages, displayed.*

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number</b>
Teachers	18
Communication by the district	9
Administration	6
Staff	5
Community	5
Facilities	4
Safety	4
Curriculum/courses offered	4
Everyone is very caring	4
Principals	3
Special education	2

- 4. In what ways could the district improve?** *A total of 147 respondents chose to answer this question. Answers were coded from open-ended comments, based on common words, phrases or ideas. Only those answers mentioned at least twice are noted below. Numbers, rather than percentages, displayed.*

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number</b>
Need better communication by the district	8
Need more challenges for high-achieving students	6
Keep working to spend tax dollars wisely	5
Need more consistent performance from building to building/staff and teachers	5
Agendas aren't needed/too costly/not used	4
Need better principals	4
The structure of the high school facility doesn't work	3
Need less emphasis on sports	3
Teachers need to be evaluated more effectively/some are good and some are poor, but they keep teaching anyway	3
Too much emphasis on MAP scores	3
Need more help for struggling students	2
Teachers need more money; administration needs less	2
Bus issues are a regular problem	2
Need to improve safety/security	2

**Topic: Information about what happens in the classroom**

Patrons gave the district a strong, positive evaluation on its performance in providing information on classroom topics, such as student learning/grades, and attendance updates. When those who said “I don’t have children/I’m not interested in this topic” are removed from the calculations, those who said they “always get the information” they need ranged from 56% up to 74%. Those who had a concern in this area primarily wanted an earlier update on the status of their student’s lunch account, and wanted more current information about their student’s performance.

5. **As you can imagine, a school district has a lot of information to share with residents on topics like activities, student achievement, the budget and so on. We’d like to know whether or not we’re doing a good job in sharing information that interests you. Let’s start with what happens in the classroom. Please rate the level of information you receive from the district on the following:** *(The numbers in parenthesis are the percentage for “always” after the “I don’t have children/I’m not interested in this topic” responses are removed.)*

<b>Topic</b>	<b>I always get the information I need</b>	<b>I sometimes get the information I need</b>	<b>I rarely get the information I need</b>	<b>I never get the information I need</b>	<b>I don’t have children/I’m not interested in this topic</b>
Student learning/grades	53% (59%)	31%	5%	1%	10%
Homework assignments	50% (56%)	31%	7%	3%	11%
Attendance updates	65% (74%)	17%	3%	3%	13%
Fees/lunch accounts/other student money issues	60% (69%)	20%	3%	4%	12%

6. **If you said that you “rarely” or “never” get the information you need on these topics, what additional information would you like to receive? (Please be as specific as possible.)** *A total of 46 respondents chose to answer this question. Answers were coded from open-ended comments, based on common words, phrases or ideas. Only those answers mentioned at least twice are noted below. Numbers, rather than percentages, displayed.*

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number</b>
Need to get earlier alert when lunch account is running low	9
Need more communication from teachers about homework/student progress	8
Need to keep SIS updated more regularly	8
Never get word when my child is tardy/absent	3

**Topic: Information about student activities**

There was even less concern about the quality of information being provided by the district on student activities, with “I always get the information I need” scores ranging from 60% to 83% among those who had an interest in this set of topics. Those who had a concern were mostly interested in getting earlier alerts about tryouts and other schedule items, along with a better system to alert those with an interest about changes in the time or venue for activities.

**7. What about student activities? Please rate the level of information you receive from the district on the following:**

<b>Topic</b>	<b>I always get the information I need</b>	<b>I sometimes get the information I need</b>	<b>I rarely get the information I need</b>	<b>I never get the information I need</b>	<b>I don't have children/I'm not interested in this topic</b>
Game and activity schedules	57% (64%)	28%	<1%	3%	11%
Cancellation updates	77% (83%)	14%	<1%	1%	7%
News about student programs and performances	57% (60%)	31%	4%	2%	6%

**8. If you said that you “rarely” or “never” get the information you need on these topics, what additional information would you like to receive? (Please be as specific as possible.)**

*A total of 23 respondents chose to answer this question. Their responses were varied, with the primary concern being a need for earlier (and more complete) alerts on all activities, tryouts, games, contests, etc. Also, there was some sentiment toward the need for a better system to update students and their families regarding cancellations, or changes of event dates, times and locations.*

**Topic: Information about student and/or school building achievements**

This area received fairly strong scores, although there was some modest concern expressed by survey participants in the area of student awards and awards for individual school buildings. Those with a concern, again, focused on the district providing earlier alerts regarding the awards so that parents can attend the awards ceremony, as well as making sure these areas were highlighted in news provided by the district, so that they would be certain to be seen.

**9. What about the subject of achievements by students, or school district buildings? Please rate the level of information you receive from the district on the following:**

<b>Topic</b>	<b>I always get the information I need</b>	<b>I sometimes get the information I need</b>	<b>I rarely get the information I need</b>	<b>I never get the information I need</b>	<b>I don't have children/I'm not interested in this topic</b>
Student awards	49% (52%)	39%	5%	1%	6%
Employee awards	53% (57%)	28%	10%	2%	7%
Awards for individual school buildings	49% (53%)	34%	8%	3%	7%
Awards for the school district	61% (64%)	27%	6%	1%	5%

**10. If you said that you “rarely” or “never” get the information you need on these topics, what additional information would you like to receive? (Please be as specific as possible.)** *A total of 29 respondents chose to answer this question. Answers were coded from open-ended comments, based on common words, phrases or ideas. Only those answers mentioned at least twice are noted below. Numbers, rather than percentages, displayed.*

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number</b>
Never hear about awards my student wins until after it has been presented/would like to have been there	7
Don't ever hear about individual school or employee awards	5
Should pull out student awards in announcements, not bury them with a lot of other news	2

**Topic: Information about the operation of the school district**

Communication about the district’s budget, financial audit, long-range plan and overall performance drew the most criticism from patrons who participated in the survey. When those who do not have an interest were removed from the calculation, the scores for “I always get the information I need” ranged from 26% to 49%. In all but “overall district performance measures,” those who said they “sometimes get the information” they need were more numerous than those who said “always.” Those who wanted additional information focused on the need for the district to provide more detailed budget information, and to make such information more easily retrievable by the typical patron. Again, the percentages are still positive, but there are some patrons with concerns.

**11. What about information related to the operation of the school district? Please rate the level of information you receive (or you can access) from the district on the following:**

<b>Topic</b>	<b>I always get the information I need</b>	<b>I sometimes get the information I need</b>	<b>I rarely get the information I need</b>	<b>I never get the information I need</b>	<b>I don’t have children/I’m not interested in this topic</b>
The district’s budget	28% (30%)	47%	12%	6%	8%
The district’s financial audit	27% (30%)	42%	16%	7%	9%
The district’s long-range plan	25% (26%)	43%	17%	10%	5%
Overall district performance measures, such as accreditation, Annual Yearly Progress on No Child Left Behind, etc.	48% (49%)	36%	9%	5%	3%

**12. If you said that you “rarely” or “never” get the information you need on these topics, what additional information would you like to receive? (Please be as specific as possible.)** *A total of 51 respondents chose to answer this question. Answers were coded from open-ended comments, based on common words, phrases or ideas. Only those answers mentioned at least twice are noted below. Numbers, rather than percentages, displayed.*

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number</b>
Need to see how money is spent/decisions are made on budget	19
Very hard to get budget information/difficult to find on the website/not sent to patrons	10
Haven’t ever seen a long-range plan	4

**Topic: Information about the operation of the school district**

While the concerns were not as strong as they were on the business issues, a notable number of respondents expressed the need for more information on specific, individual building issues, such as schedules, courses, counselor services, etc. When those who had no interest were removed from the calculations, the total of those who said they “always” get the information they need ranged from 32% to 57%. A lack of information about tutoring and enrichment opportunities topped the areas of concern among those who had criticisms on these topics.

**13. And finally, what about issues that are more specific to individual school buildings? Please rate the level of information you receive from the district on the following:**

<b>Topic</b>	<b>I always get the information I need</b>	<b>I sometimes get the information I need</b>	<b>I rarely get the information I need</b>	<b>I never get the information I need</b>	<b>I don't have children/I'm not interested in this topic</b>
Building schedules	49% (54%)	36%	4%	2%	9%
Courses that are available	48% (57%)	28%	5%	3%	16%
Counselor services	36% (41%)	38%	11%	4%	12%
Student intervention and assistance, such as tutoring	31% (38%)	32%	16%	3%	17%
Vocational programs	19% (32%)	27%	12%	3%	39%
Special education	23% (41%)	18%	10%	4%	45%
Enrichment opportunities, such as Advanced Placement courses	28% (35%)	31%	13%	9%	19%

**14. If you said that you “rarely” or “never” get the information you need on these topics, what additional information would you like to receive? (Please be as specific as possible.)** *A total of 39 respondents chose to answer this question. Answers were coded from open-ended comments, based on common words, phrases or ideas. Only those answers mentioned at least twice are noted below. Numbers, rather than percentages, displayed.*

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number</b>
Never receive any information on tutoring/enrichment opportunities	14
Don't know what the counselors do/role they play in helping students	3
If your student is not “average,” the services for him or her are lacking	3

## Topic: Information sources

When asked to identify the sources they consulted “frequently” for school district news and information, 10 of the 11 most frequently consulted sources had some sort of district connection. This means that efforts by the district to shore up communications in the areas where patrons had a concern will likely reach those individuals, because they appear to be scouring district sources for news first, and then turning to the news media or to more informal sources.

- 15. There are a lot of places where citizens can look for information about a school district and its activities. Below is a list of some of the places where you might look for information about the Raymore-Peculiar School District. Please check those you consult “frequently” for district and individual school news – beyond just weather-related school closing information.**

Source	Percent who consult it “frequently”
E-mail alerts from the district, also known as The Raymore-Peculiar Update	90%
Automated phone messages from the district	79%
Raymore-Peculiar School District website	71%
Individual school newsletters	57%
Teachers in the Raymore-Peculiar School District	54%
Friends and neighbors	52%
The district’s pages on social media sites, like Facebook and Twitter	33%
Text messages from the district	28%
Secretaries in the Raymore-Peculiar School District	28%
Outdoor marquees at the schools	26%
Principals in the Raymore-Peculiar School District	22%
<i>The Journal</i> newspaper (either in print or online)	20%
<i>The Kansas City Star</i> (either in print or online)	11%
The Raymore-Peculiar School District administration, either in person, or when a member of administration is quoted in the news media	11%
The Raymore-Peculiar School Board, either in person, or when a member of the Board is quoted in the news media	11%
Comcast Cable Television Channel 15	4%

## Topic: Demographics of the participant group

With online surveys, the demographic questions are much briefer, because individuals are much less willing to provide detailed personal information via their computer.

In the case of this survey, the four geographic quadrants had nearly equal representation. And, as is typical, the overwhelming majority of respondents were current student families.

### 16. Our last two questions will help divide the responses into groups. First of all, which of the following best describes where you live?

Response	Percentage
North of Lucy Webb and east of School Road/Madison Street	20%
North of Lucy Webb and west of School Road/Madison Street	29%
South of Lucy Webb and east of School Road/Madison Street	23%
South of Lucy Webb and west of School Road/Madison Street	25%
I live outside of the school district's boundaries	4%

### 17. Which of the following best describes your situation? (If more than one fits your situation, please check those that apply.) Percentages will add to more than 100%, because respondents were permitted to provide more than one response.

Response	Percentage
I have a child (or children) who attend school in the Raymore-Peculiar School District	82%
I had a child (or children) who attended school in the Raymore-Peculiar School District, but they have all graduated	14%
I have never had a child (or children) attend school in the Raymore-Peculiar School District	7%
I have a school-age child (or children) who attends private or parochial school, or who is home-schooled, rather than attending school in the Raymore-Peculiar School District	3%

## Summary

The results from the survey of 243 Raymore-Peculiar School District patrons who chose to take part suggest a community that has a strong affection for its schools and teachers, but that also has modest concerns on some specific communication areas.

The overall view is definitely positive. The topics that seem to generate concerns are loosely connected to some of the areas that generated lower grades earlier in the survey. This means that the patrons are consistent: Areas where they have a concern are often those in which they also wish they were getting more information.

In considering how to put this data to use, the district should focus on the following:

- **Recognize the strong likelihood that those who have criticisms in these specific areas have a general view of the district that transcends these topics**

The pattern of responses suggests quite strongly that the critical group of survey participants generally lumps together areas related to the district's management and finances, rather than has a specific criticism of an individual area. This is not to diminish their concerns. Rather, it is to point out that securing stronger advocacy from these individuals will not come from simply increasing communications about the audit, for example.

- **Set reasonable expectations for improvement**

It would be very easy to get tripped up by expecting dramatic improvement within a year in the areas where criticisms were seen. Set solid strategies and appropriate targets, and aim to move the needle in the positive direction. However, do not expect to change people overnight who have a long-standing concern.

- **Remember the “As we told you” principle**

One of the biggest mistakes that school districts make is providing information and then forgetting to remind patrons that they did so. The “As we told you” principle says that it's perfectly acceptable – and strategically important – to remind patrons about past communication efforts when you are sharing new information. Something as simple as saying, “When we shared the budget information via e-mail in August” in a communication in October provides a gentle reminder to patrons that the district does, in fact, communicate actively.

- **Fix the “low-hanging fruit” where possible**

Issues such as keeping parent portals up-to-date and finding a way to better publicize tryouts would go a long way toward having patrons (in this case, district parents exclusively) feel good that their requests have not fallen on deaf ears.