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<http://www.rsd13ct.org/schools/strong/index.html>

**Parent and Student Feedback Survey Report
2008 – 2009 School Year**

Written by Scott V. Nicol, Principal

Parent and Student Feedback Survey Report

2008 – 2009 School Year

Introduction:

This report is for the general public to view. It will be posted on Strong Middle School's website.

The address is <http://www.rsd13ct.org/schools/strong/index.html>.

In April 2009 Strong students and parents completed two separate anonymous surveys regarding their experiences, feelings and perceptions of Strong Middle School. 96% of students and 44% of parents took part in the survey. Strong was very pleased with the number of parents who participated in this on-line anonymous survey.

The staff at Strong understands the importance of systematically soliciting feedback from parents and students in order to improve our service. This report will provide a summary of the results with select commentary and Strong highlights over the past year.

All of the parent and student feedback is important. However, all of the comments will not be addressed in this report. This would not be practical for this publication. The major themes associated with the parent and student comments will be included.

Anyone wishing to discuss this report may contact Scott V. Nicol, Principal via phone (860)349-7222 or e-mail snicol@rsd13.org.

Parent and Student Feedback Annual Report

2007 – 2008 School Year

7th and 8th Grade Student Feedback Summary:

Students were asked to respond to the following statements with Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree.

Statement #1

I feel welcome and safe at Strong.

Strongly Agree / Agree -	92%
Disagree / Strongly Disagree-	5%
No Opinion	3%

Statement #2

I know an adult at Strong I trust and respect and who will help me if needed.

Strongly Agree / Agree -	83%
Disagree / Strongly Disagree-	14%
No Opinion	3%

Statement #3

I have a friend at Strong who I can trust and respect and who will help me if needed.

Strongly Agree / Agree -	98%
Disagree / Strongly Disagree-	1%
No Opinion	1%

Statement #4

Overall, I feel my teachers are receptive and responsive to my needs.

Strongly Agree / Agree -	75%
Disagree / Strongly Disagree-	22%
No Opinion	3

Statement #5

Mr. Nicol is a principal who is approachable.

Strongly Agree / Agree -	79%
Disagree / Strongly Disagree-	15%

No Opinion 6%

Statement #6

I am pleased with the grades I have earned this year.

Strongly Agree / Agree -	75%
Disagree / Strongly Disagree-	24%
No Opinion	1%

Statement #7

Overall, I feel my time (8th graders) or transition (7th graders) at Strong has been positive.

Strongly Agree / Agree -	87%
Disagree / Strongly Disagree-	12%
No Opinion	1%

Students were afforded the opportunity to make other comments (concerns, suggestions, etc.) regarding Strong Middle School. 65% of the students who completed the survey made additional comments. Below is a summary.

34% of the comments focused on **Strong being a great school.**

Example – *Overall, I think that Strong school has been the best school that I have attended in region 13 since kindergarten. I actually don't mind getting up for school in the morning due to my friends and caring teachers.*

12% of the comments focused on **Strong's cafeteria experience (food quality, time to relax)**

Example - *I think that the lunch waves need to be longer. This is mainly because when you buy lunch in the cafeteria, it takes a long time to get it and pay. Also, the snack times are really short.*

17% of the comments focused on **Strong teachers giving too much homework.**

Example - *The homework and projects over the weekends is too much and too many projects are clashing at one time.*

Example - *The teachers can be very strict at times...sometimes I feel that my teachers are not giving me all of the support that I sometimes need.*

20% of the comments focused on **Students opinion of Strong teachers (vast majority are positive).**

Example - *Strong has great teachers and they are friendly.*

Example - *Strong teachers are always there when I need them. They are funny too.*

Example - *I feel that many of the teachers at strong middle school are very snide and sarcastic and make comments that are inappropriate for teachers to say.*

The remaining 17% of responses were a potpourri of the following topics:

- A few students want more freedom from school policies they feel are unfair.
- A few students singled out several teachers feeling they could do a better job.
- A few students emphasized consistent use of homework stamps by teachers.
- A few students want more freedom with computers.

Commentary on Student Feedback:

Overall, Strong was pleased with the feedback provided from Strong students. It is quite clear the vast majority of students are having an overall positive and productive experience at Strong. However, there is always room for improvement. Many of the students articulated thoughtful and constructive suggestions. The Strong staff greatly appreciates this approach.

It should be noted that the feedback instrument focused primarily on gauging students' connectedness to their middle school. Research overwhelming finds that when a student has a positive school connection with at least one adult and one peer, the probability that he or she will achieve both academically and socially dramatically increases. The Strong staff recognizes this and places a high priority on making this happen for all students.

One of the primary methods of **assuring a student's connectedness** is the number of extra-curricular activities Strong offers that are developed based upon student interest. Many activities were added at zero cost to the school district. In other words, staff members took on extra work without compensation for the benefit of the students they care about. The following activities were offered to Strong students over the past **TWO** years (each year offerings are added, dropped, or recur):

** Indicates club / activity developed and run at zero cost to school district.*

<u>Club / Activity</u>	<u>Approximate # of Students Who Participated</u>
*Sign Project Committee	11
*Mandarin Chinese Club	17

*Peer Tutoring Program	75 approved tutors
*Peer Mentors	10
*Pre-Algebra Challenge	15
*Talent Show	35
*Archaeology Club	15
*Guitar Club	10
*Yoga Club	20
*Principal's Advisory	14
*Creative Writing Club	20
*Radio Club	12
*Service Club	20
*Eco Club	12
*Cardio Kick Boxing	25
*Healthy Cooking	26
*Best Buddies	15
*Costume Club	10
Literary Magazine	4
Student Council	25
Art / Mural Makers Club	50
Drama Club	18
Math Club	15
Yearbook Committee	24
Soccer	70
Tennis	35
Golf	20

Mini-Hockey	15
Basketball	45
Volleyball	110
Cross Country	50
Cheerleading	24
Baseball/Softball	40

Strong has other structures in place to reach those students who appear to be disconnected from their school community. Through team meetings and the Student Assistance Team, Strong staff members consistently develop and implement action plans designed to support those students.

A significant number of students commented on the **Strong cafeteria experience (food quality, time to relax)**. This was the first full year of the cafeteria's menu overhaul since Region 13 changed the company in charge of food service. Strong still offers entrées that are typical (pizza, pasta, chicken etc.) These entrées tend to be high in carbohydrates; however, Strong offers several other healthy alternatives. Wraps or sandwiches are made to suit. Cafeteria workers prepare sandwiches and wraps in front of students as they choose their own contents. Premade salads are available. Fruit and/or vegetables are always available as part of any full lunch.

A significant number of students felt that **Strong teachers give too much homework**. There isn't any question this can happen from time to time. It is unavoidable. Teachers consistently plan together as a team, placing emphasis on making the work load for students manageable yet challenging. However, teachers can underestimate the amount of time it will take for students to complete such assignments. It is important to note that students work at varying rates. Some students may take 20 minutes to complete a homework assignment, whereas others may take 90 minutes to complete the exact same assignment. Remember, teachers have over 100 students. This makes measuring the workload a major challenge. Teams place an emphasis on visually and verbally reminding students of the major assignments they are responsible for. In the future, Strong has a goal of developing and maintaining teacher and team websites to further support this communication.

Moreover, teachers walk a fine line of providing students with enough support while at the same time not to providing too much. Part of the learning process is for students to grow and mature both academically and socially. Typically, this growth is accompanied with strife, in which a middle school student can perceive a teacher's attempt to challenge him or her as a lack of support. Parents should partner with teachers and encourage their children both to persevere through challenging times and when

appropriate to advocate for necessary support. These are important lifelong learning skills. The challenge for both parents and teachers is to decide when to push and when to pull back. In middle school, the amount and type of support can change from day to day making this process far from an exact science

Twenty percent of Strong's students shared their opinion of **Strong teachers (vast majority are positive)**. This report finds that most students have positive relationships with the adults at Strong. However, there are certainly times when educators (including the principal) make errors in judgment when assisting students. Sometimes, with good intentions, adults make decisions resulting in unintended outcomes. This is unfortunate yet also unavoidable. However, all of the employees including the principal are held accountable one way or another for their actions. For example, the principal, utilizing a process approved by the Board of Education, evaluates all teachers. A similar process is utilized with the principal, who reports directly to the Superintendent. The Strong staff encourages all students to share with an adult they trust their issues of concern. Strong staff members will work closely with students and parents to value their input and in turn improve their service. In fact, this report is one way for us to improve as professionals.

7th and 8th Grade Parent Feedback Summary:

Parents were asked to respond to the following statements with Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree or No Opinion.

Statement #1

To date, Strong has been an outstanding middle school for your child.

Strongly Agree / Agree -	80%
Disagree / Strongly Disagree-	18%
No Opinion	2%

Statement #2

To date, Strong's principal (Scott Nicol) has been an effective leader.

Strongly Agree / Agree -	79%
Disagree / Strongly Disagree-	13%
No Opinion	8%

Statement #3

Overall, Strong teachers have been receptive and responsive to the needs of your child.

Strongly Agree / Agree -	82%
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Disagree / Strongly Disagree-	17%
No Opinion	1%

Statement #4

I feel well informed about Strong's academic program and extra-curricular activities.

Strongly Agree / Agree -	92%
Disagree / Strongly Disagree-	7%
No Opinion	1%

Statement #5

Overall, I feel welcome to share my concerns and/or questions with the Strong School community.

Strongly Agree / Agree -	82%
Disagree / Strongly Disagree-	13%
No Opinion	5%

Parents were afforded the opportunity to make other comments (concerns, suggestions, etc.) regarding Strong Middle School. 39% of the parents who completed the survey made additional comments.

Because the 55 parent comments are very specific and difficult to group into a summary, this report will attempt to select a representative sample. After each of the parent comments, this report will then provide commentary addressing the issue. [Strong's response will be in blue.](#)

Commentary on Parent Feedback

The vast majority of the comments were constructive and written in a thoughtful manner. The Strong staff greatly appreciates this approach.

Parent Comment #1

I think one of the most frustrating things about Strong is that students miss academic classes for instrument lessons. I think this needs to be looked at more closely. Both of my children have had to quit band because of missing classes regularly - especially math and their grades being affected. I don't think kids should be put in this position to decide which is more important -participating in the band or being successful academically.

[Strong's Response:](#)

We are also frustrated that students must miss academic classes for instrument lessons. When we overhauled the master schedule three years ago this issue was closely examined. Students partake in lessons based upon a specific instrument. For example, those students specializing in flute play may consist of a group from ALL three teams both 7th and 8th grade. We haven't been able to develop a master schedule allowing for a common practice during the school day. The variables are simply too great. Lessons cannot occur before or after school. As it is, school starts at 7:15 AM. Currently, jazz band does meet prior to school. However, this is an exception. After school presents even more difficulties, students participate in a plethora of extra-curricular activities. It would be unworkable to get all students from a specific instrument together to practice on a regular basis. Moreover, we have examined similar middle schools and have found they also struggle with this same issue. Unfortunately, at this time we have been unable to find a solution. We will keep working on it.

Parent Comment #2

I feel there is a big step from Memorial to Strong, and not an overly smooth one. There is much more separation of the two programs (why do we still have the two programs if the curriculum is the same? I think if you integrated them for junior high it would be easier on the kids, at this age as they truly form themselves, the school is small enough, to separate creates a barrier). In addition, the teachers' attitudes towards the children are night and day from Memorial -- there should be more of a transition from the nurturing environment of Memorial to the abrupt hands-off style at Strong. I feel on the ID side the stronger math and science teachers should teach the advanced students. I don't like the way there are two teachers for 5 subjects, for this age the teachers should be teaching their specialty. I'm also not certain why grades in elective subjects like band are considered part of the honors/high honors evaluation, it will discourage the kids from continuing band if they don't get A's, you should want to encourage them to continue. I think Strong does a very good job of keeping parents informed with the daily announcements and emails and the office is very responsive to parent's and children's requests.

Strong's Response:

This parent has brought up many valuable issues to examine.

- 1) In regards to “why” there are two programs: the “contemporary” and “integrated day” programs have been studied at the Board of Education level as recently as two years ago by an independent group. The report can be accessed through the superintendent’s office. The short answer is...the parents want choice. Moreover, in terms of integrating the students more at Strong, when we changed the master schedule we were able to cross-team students in the following subjects: band, music, French, Latin, Spanish, health, technology education, and art. Moreover, all extra-curricular activities (we have over 30 clubs and teams) allow for the integration of all Strong students.
- 2) In regards to students’ transition from Memorial to Strong I reference our student survey in which 87 percent of students cite their transition (7th graders) to be positive. There are a substantial number of transition activities and policies that each team (contemporary and integrated day) employs each year to ensure a smooth transition. For some students the transition is easier than for others. Clearly, middle school students go through many changes between 6th, 7th and 8th grade. If there are specific issues we have not addressed I would encourage you to share them with us (maybe you already have). In any case, we are committed to transitioning students from one school to another in fine fashion. This is an area of our professional responsibilities that is emphasized every school year. Two standing committees at Strong are the Strong / Memorial transition committee and the CRHS / Strong transition committee. Moreover, a collaborative effort between schools is always a focus for our annual school improvement plan.
- 3) In regards to the “stronger math and science teachers should teach the advanced students,” I must respectfully disagree. We feel that all students should have the opportunity to experience all of the strengths all of our teachers have to offer. In the ID program, we rotate the teachers’ science and math assignments every couple of years. We feel comfortable with this practice.
- 4) In regards to “I don’t like the way there are two teachers for 5 subjects,” I must point out that 1) this is one of the characteristics of the ID program at Strong and 2) this is not always the case year in and year out at Strong. If a parent feels this isn’t a good practice due to their child’s developmental age than they should have his/her child enroll in the “contemporary” program. Here their child will have 4 to 5 teachers for their 5 academic subjects. Parents can elect to switch programs prior to February 1st every school year.
- 5) In regards to electives such as band/music being a part of the honors / high honors evaluation you bring up a good point. The faculty was charged with determining the evaluation criteria. In their defense there is great debate amongst this topic from middle school to middle school

across Connecticut. The policies vary a great deal. There are clear pros and cons to both sides of the argument. In the future, it is possible for this issue to be revisited by the faculty.

- 6) Thank you for your comments regarding the daily e-mails and the responsive nature of our main office. We have made this a priority over the past several years.

Parent Comments #3 - 8

I am very happy with the open communication between parents and teachers. The teachers are always willing to speak about my child's progress and keep me well informed.

I think there should be more communication between teachers and parents. Even though the children are getting older, it doesn't mean it should be up to them to do the communicating...

I think transition from Memorial has been great.

7th grade Strong Program perceptions - Complacency is accepted, Poor Communications by the teachers, Many Cracks for students to fall through, Teacher performance - Need metrics and pay for performance.

My son has been accepted into Vinal Tech and is looking forward to the transition. Strong school has been positive impact on him. Teachers & Principal very approachable and willing to assist, very happy with results.

I have had no concerns. The school seems to run adequately. The after school activities seem more than sufficient for most students. Overall, it scores very high with me.

Strong's Response:

It is truly a challenge to balance the feelings and perceptions of all parents even in a small school like Strong. Many times we receive conflicting assessments on the services we provide. Yet this fact doesn't minimize the value of all parents' perspectives. We are quite certain that pleasing all parents and students isn't attainable. Our duty is to process and reflect upon all input received.

From there Strong will be in a position to internalize much of what parents and students desire and, as a result, in the short and long term to improve Strong Middle School.

Parent Comment #9

In Short, Strong has sucked my son's love for the acquisition of knowledge out of his life. He is currently counting the days down until he is not only out of Strong school, but out of this district. As his parents, we have tried over and over again to work with teachers and administrators to pull all that our son could out of Strong School, but at every turn we were met with obstacles. It is okay to be an "average" student at Strong, it is not okay to excel or to want to excel beyond the average. Scott Nicol is not an effective principal. He is a talker, he talks a lot about his ideas, very little is ever done.

Strong's Response:

This parent's comments are unfortunate. However, we appreciate that this parents took the time to provide us with his or her perspective. Obviously, his/her experience and that of his or her child's wasn't positive.

Our goal at Strong is to establish a productive relationship with all parents. Productive doesn't mean that all are always in agreement. Productive doesn't mean that emotions at times do not run high. Productive means that we, the Strong staff, are able to work with parents to support their child's development to the best of our ability. Regardless if one conversation or one meeting goes poorly, parents can be assured that we will reflect, regroup and do our best to support their child.

We wish the parents and their child well in their future endeavors.

Parent Comment #10 - 12

I find Strong school's principal (Scot Nicol) to be extremely arrogant.

Mr. Nicol is not respected by parents nor students. He is completely out-of-touch.

I suggest that Mr. Nicol work on being visible and getting to know students' names. In a school of two grades it is appalling that the only administrator is rarely seen and less frequently heard from by parents and students alike.

Strong's Response

I have been called arrogant before. I certainly haven't handled every situation well this current and past school years. However, I always strive to treat all people with respect.

I do try to learn each of the 350 plus students' names. I admit I have not been successful (although I am getting close) and at times it has been embarrassing not to remember a student's name. In terms of visibility, this is very challenging for I am typically wanted and required to be at every meeting, every event, everything. Each year I evaluate how I spend my time and prioritize being as visible as possible. I do not think "appalling" is the appropriate way to characterize this issue.

Parent Comment #13 - 17

...I have been equally impressed with Scot Nicol and his openness, honesty and desire to have a great school, not only for the students but for the parents & community!

Mr. Nicol is terrific. He is compassionate to the children's needs, as well as a strong role model for the young men to follow. He has been very helpful to both my son and daughter in ways he is probably not even aware of. I hope he remains in district 13 for many more years.

Scott Nicol has made dramatic improvements to the Strong School environment.

I feel better about Strong since Scott Nicol showed up. The previous principal treated the students as the enemy...

Scott Nicol has done an extremely tremendous job taking the school from where it was 5 years ago to where it is now.

Strong's Response

These comments are appreciated. There isn't any question that we, the entire Strong staff, have been able to work in partnership with parents and students to offer a school experience that provides great opportunities for all students. We feel proud and confident of this as evidenced by the next set of comments.

Parent Comment #18 - 24

Awesome ID team!

The Strong staff are kind, engaging, creative and professional teachers who appear to enjoy their work....your special education department and guidance staff are outstanding...

I am very happy with the education my child receives from Strong.

My daughter likes the school and the teachers. I'm happy with Strong and have no complaints.

Strong has been a very positive experience and we have found the teachers to be receptive and responsive. Special education teacher...is amazing!

This year my daughter has really matured and become confident in herself. She has become very focused in her schoolwork and has really benefited by being at Strong. Thanks!

School spirit is very high at Strong! My daughter is involved in many activities offered at school, and loves it!

Strong's Response

This positive feedback is appreciated. Typically, in many different ways, educators aren't able to see the true impact they have on a student's life. To often this impact isn't realized until long after a student moves on to college and beyond.

All parent and student feedback is important. It keeps us grounded, in check and most of all keeps us energized to continue to support families and their children through good times and bad.

Conclusion:

The students of Strong Middle School have had many successes this past school year. Also, many parents feel positive about the education their child has received. However, this was not the case for some students and their families. As educators the staff at Strong accepts their significant role in the life experiences of all students and firmly believes, that with perseverance, a productive partnership can be established with all parents. This is our pledge to the students and parents of Strong – past, present and future.