

Summary of Parent Surveys by iSeek Solutions for Minnesota ParentsKnow Website

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Overall Summary

The survey confirmed that many parents have a variety of concerns about helping their teens with their current education, and with setting them on a course for success in careers and post-secondary education, as well as help in making that transition. Questions about health were also prominent, and safety was a lesser concern. The survey also confirmed that many parents need and seek additional information about these topics and could get that information from a website.

Survey Process Overview

In July and August 2008, iSeek Solutions administered 18 parent surveys. Two of these surveys represent combined responses from couples, one was with a community-based social worker speaking on behalf of his community, one was with a sister who had a parent-like role with her teen brother; and the remaining 14 were with individual parents. With the exception of the social worker, they were all families of Minnesota students in 6th through 12th grades. They represented a mix of ethnic groups – Asian Americans, American Indians, one Somali (the social worker), one Latina, and many white folks. I administered five in-person, nine over the phone, and four were filled out independently (either electronically or on paper) and returned to me.

A summary of their responses follows, illustrating themes. For a complete picture of the results, please see the full listing of responses, compiled by question in a separate document. Also, each individual interview is available by request in an electronic format.

Responses to Each Survey Question

1) What information would be most helpful to you, on a website for parents?

In answer to this broad opening questions, many parents listed questions about careers and college. This is likely because of how I introduced the survey, explaining about the ISEEK and MNPk websites. Clearly their responses also validated that these are areas in which many families have significant questions. Other responses included questions about schools and school-based activities, curfews, and summer jobs.

2) What question or concerns do you have as a parent in thinking about your child's career, education after high school, and/or jobs in their future?

Responses to this question confirmed the importance of much of the content we offer at ISEEK and that we submitted for MNPk:

- preparation for careers and college, in terms of high school courses, jobs and internships, and other activities both in-school and out of school
- career exploration, matching a child's interests and talents with career choices as well as with realistic opportunities in the market
- college exploration and application, including paying for college

3) What questions or concerns do you have about your child's education, learning, or development?

Respondents shared concerns about schools and classes

- Are they being challenged and supported to learn the right skills, including academic, organizational and thinking, self-advocacy, and are those the skills that will help them in decades to come?
- Many had concerns about their kids' special needs (fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, learning disabilities, kinetic learner, poor test-taker) and making sure students get adequate support
- Several parents rely on their schools' website for practical information concerning classes, schools, schedules, activities, requirements, etc.
- A primary concern in the Somali community concerns the difficulty of basic communication between families and schools, and the importance of good communication in the face of the many cultural and educational leaps most students make in starting schools.

4) What questions or concerns do you have about your child's health (general health as well as issues around alcohol, drugs, sex)?

Many families expressed health concerns, and they varied tremendously. Many were concerned about drugs and alcohol. Several expressed concerns about diet or obesity. A couple respondents talked about teens' challenges in handling stress. Somali community concerns include diabetes, autism, mental health, and others.

5) What questions or concerns do you have about your child's safety?

Most respondents had safety concerns, and these were also quite varied. Some were concerned about safety at schools and others were not. A few voiced safety concerns about teen driving or bike riding. [These concerns may be greater among parents of rural and/or suburban teens.] Somali community has recently become concerned about gang violence, and how to report crimes while remaining anonymous to perpetrators.

6) Are there other topics about which you have questions or concerns, as a parent?

We got only four responses and they were all over the map: the inaccuracy of historical information being taught in schools with respect to relations between U.S. government and American Indians; “their friends”; gangs; financial literacy.

7) Where do you look for information, or answers to your parenting questions?

Respondents used resources that are all over the map, including family and friends, schools, professionals within and outside their communities, internet searches, religious organizations, magazines.

These answers confirm the importance of hosting this information on a website, and serving parents as well as intermediates (counselors and other community-based professionals who help parents). These results make me wonder about numbers – what percent of people might use a website for parenting questions? To answer this, an online survey would add useful data.

8) How might a website help with any of these questions?

- Many respondents suggested the site needs to be searchable by topic.
- Several respondents didn’t distinguish a parent-oriented site from a student-oriented site. It was as if, since both parties would have similar questions, they should / would use the same resources to get help.
- A few emphasized the importance of *quality* of information, reliability (they want to know where info is from and what credentials accompany it), and referrals to additional sources of help.
 - These comments confirm a basic approach of MNPK, to offer trusted information vetted by a university source.

9) Have you used any websites for help with these questions about careers and education? If so, which websites, and what do you like about them?

No themes emerged from this question. Several people mentioned specific sites they’ve found useful, but none was mentioned by more than one respondent. These include: FastWeb, Naviance (proprietary system used in Minneapolis Public Schools), Learnmore, ISEEK, UM’s website for School of Public Health, Hennepin Co Library’s teen site.

10) Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

No themes emerged from this question, but many people had interesting comments.

- Design it well, and pilot test it a lot.
- List programs that are important even to a small number of people
- To reach the Somali community, consider placing links on popular Somali sites.