

What is Valued in Education in Ohio?

Abstract

In the last quarter of 2014, a statewide study throughout Ohio was conducted on what the general public deems valuable in education, as well as what the general awareness is on Family and Consumer Sciences' course offerings. To assist in this project, a variety of research techniques were implemented, including focus groups, an online survey, phone interviews and a random-sample phone poll that reached 603 Ohio residents. Respondents to the phone survey were asked a total of 32 questions. The poll boasted a confidence interval of 3.99 and an overall confidence level of 95%. The findings detailed a variety of subject areas that residents viewed as important, including but not limited to several that are specialized through Family and Consumer Sciences. The largest takeaways from the study include a significant importance placed on the management of personal finances, career planning and technology in education.

Summary

Family and Consumer Sciences is a branch of educational curriculum that focuses on teaching students the knowledge and skills needed to make informed choices about their wellbeing, relationships and resources to achieve optimal quality of life during and after high school. Areas of study may include human development, personal and family finance, housing and interior design, food science, nutrition and wellness, textiles and apparel, and consumer issues. In 2014, The Ohio Association of Family and Consumer Sciences and the Ohio Association Teachers of Family and Consumer Sciences jointly acquired the services of the Impact Group, a public relations and marketing agency in Northeast Ohio, to conduct a statewide study on the value of specific course subjects in education.

From Dec. 4, 2014 – Dec. 12, 2014, an independent third-party research company conducted a phone poll, with all age demographics equally represented, regarding education in Ohio. The poll

asked general questions related to several different school subjects, measuring the level of importance the respondents' placed on each subject. The first few questions asked respondents general questions about education in the state of Ohio. The majority of respondents, 49.4%, said that students were only somewhat prepared to succeed in the real world after graduating high school. Respondents identified the economy as the biggest challenge facing today's graduates, and said that the most important knowledge for students to have was technology or science knowledge. Respondents were also asked to rank the importance of teaching different FCS skills on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being very important and 1 being very unimportant. The majority of respondents said the skills were important to learn and they did not believe students in Ohio were currently learning those skills. The following is the net perceived importance for each skill that is taught in Family and Consumer Sciences: Manage personal finances - 89.4%; career paths and planning - 85.9%; independent living - 77.8%; healthy food decisions - 66.2%; child development - 58.7%.

Respondents were also asked specific questions about Family and Consumer Sciences to establish their familiarity with the program. 48.3% of respondents stated they were not familiar with the term "Family and Consumer Sciences," however, after being given the definition, 48.8% of respondents believed that their local district did offer Family and Consumer Sciences courses.

Respondents were very supportive of making a personal financial management class mandatory in high school, with 93.5% net support. Respondents were also supportive of a financial management class if it replaced a current mandatory class, retaining 89.2% net support. Respondents were then asked to rank the importance of mandatory mathematics, science, FCS, fine arts and technology classes. All classes, including FCS, were ranked as "somewhat important," with the exception of technology classes, which were ranked as "very important."

When respondents were also asked what their impressions were of the term "home economics," the precursor title to Family and Consumer Sciences, more than half of respondents (57.5%) stated "culinary skills."

Overall, 55.2% of respondents said they believed Ohio public schools are progressing in the right direction.

Evaluation

The results of the phone poll indicate that Ohio residents value the courses taught through Family and Consumer Sciences curriculum, but aren't familiar with whether or not their district offers them. The most important skills for high school students to be taught, according to respondents, were technology and personal finance. Respondents also stated that they do not believe students are currently prepared with the skills needed in finance and technology upon graduation to be successful.

Respondents believed that the skills taught in Family and Consumer Sciences courses were equally as important as traditional courses, such as math and science. Additionally, respondents stated that a course on personal financial management should be mandatory, while also recognizing the importance of Family and Consumer Sciences classes in preparing students for independent living.

Family and Consumer Sciences classes were perceived as a necessary element in education, and upon learning of the skills taught in Family and Consumer Sciences, respondents supported the need for the curriculum.

The data collected throughout the phone poll provides a solid starting point on what the public in Ohio values in education, as well as what skills are perceived to be important to student success after graduation. Future research on the subject could expand the study nationally, or follow up with students after their high school years to ask, in retrospect, what they felt were the most important lessons they learned from their high school curriculum.