

Research

R E P O R T

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What School Board Members and Directors Say About School Program Issues

by
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This report was commissioned by the Saskatchewan School Boards Association to support discussions regarding school program questions. Use this report to further explore key questions for program decisions in Saskatchewan schools. The opinions of school board members and directors of education are reported.

Research Report #08-05

Introduction

This document is the final report of the findings of a survey that asked school board members and directors of education to share their opinions on the goals of education for Saskatchewan.

The survey was conducted using a paper-based questionnaire distributed to school board offices by the Saskatchewan School Boards Association. The instrument was developed by Sigma Analytics in discussion with staff of the Association and representatives of the governance team subject group.

The survey was completed by 75 individuals for a response rate of 27%. Among respondents, 39% indicated the schools in their home divisions are largely in towns, 34% indicated their schools are largely in cities, and 26% indicated a mix.

The research was conducted as a census and not as sample survey. A census is a survey available to all members of a population, rather than to a subset chosen to represent them.

Context

School boards believe that enabling students to be successful is the highest and most important role of the school system. The future of our communities and the province of Saskatchewan is closely linked to the quality of our education system.

Many people have opinions and provide direction to the board of education about what should be taught in school, about what our priorities should be and how the system should be organized.

Only boards of education have the mandate to organize and oversee the school system. School board members must be proactive participants and prime movers, taking leadership initiatives as well as executing mandates.

Boards of education have a responsibility to provide confident leadership that can help ensure students have access the knowledge, skills and know-how to participate successfully in a competitive global economy. To plan for the future, boards must look beyond immediate issues of management to consider the broadest issues for the future direction of school programs.

The question is at the outset of this project was: “What do boards of education say about the ideal school program for Saskatchewan students?” This document surfaces data on program choices and options identified by the Association’s governance team subject group, to inform the work of Saskatchewan boards of education in defining their vision for the school program they are building. What do we want our students to know, to be

able to do, and to be like when they graduate from our schools? How do we best organize our available resources to achieve this?

Data reporting

The bulk of the survey is structured to collect data on 18 goal statements, each dealing with an aspect of the school program.

Respondents indicated their level of agreement with each statement, then indicated how well they felt the school system is organized for success in implementing the goal, first, in their home division, and secondly, across the school system province-wide. The result is a set of measures that provides proxies for importance and performance, allowing comparison using mean response levels and supporting gap analysis.

All data on the goal statements was captured on 1-5 numeric scales, verbally anchored at the end-points. Because the odd-number scale has a mid-point (3.0), ratings over 3 may be termed positive, those less than 3, negative. The equal numeric spacing between responses creates the mathematical basis for use of analytic tools, results of which are included in this document.

How the report is organized

This document opens with a section listing major findings and patterns, in a Highlights section. The remainder of the document reports results in the same order as the questionnaire.

The questionnaire included measures grouped into five categories (Finance, Services, Relationships, Program and Mandate), plus two additional sections probing demand on capacity and opportunities overall.

At the outset of each of the five sections covering the five categories, a chart shows how demand on capacity was rated for the relevant category by all respondents. Following this, a table displays an overview of the ratings for each measure in the category, for all respondents. The remainder of the section shows average levels of response for each individual measure, along with a table breaking out the average response for each of five types of respondent: board chair, board member, director, superintendent, and secretary-treasurer/business official. In this last table, ratings where the responses are statistically different are identified by italics.

Yellow highlights indicate the highest rating in a column; pale blue indicates the lowest rating.

Highlights

- ◆ **School board members tend to rate student-linked goals (e.g., “social skills”) above average in importance:** Goal statements that rate below average for importance are more commonly related to process (e.g., “time engaged in learning”) or to post-school preparation (“prepare for work”).

- ◆ **Division-level performance trumps performance province-wide:** On average, respondents graded divisional performance strongly positive at 3.56, compared to a marginally positive 3.09 across the province.
 - Divisional performance ratings averaged between 3.26 and 3.95, while province-wide ratings ranged from a negative 2.80 rating to 3.50.
 - There are wide gaps between average levels of importance and performance at both the division and provincial levels: 82 points divisionally, 1.29 province-wide.

- ◆ **Boards believe they do best at supporting students with learning challenges:** At 3.95, this goal is top-rated for performance at the division level. Provincially, it is rated at 3.17. Second is development of good character, at 3.92.
 - Province-wide, the goal with the highest performance rating is giving students a grounding in the fundamentals (3.50). Weakest ratings are given for providing distance learning (2.80), and support for students who excel (2.83).
 - Boards believe their weakest performance is in supporting students who excel (3.26), followed closely by providing courses oriented to post-school plans (3.28), and providing distance learning (3.30).

- ◆ **The best match between importance and performance is for the goal of playing a decisive role in choosing the nature of the school program:** The gap between importance and performance on this goal is the smallest among the 18 tested, at both the divisional (39 points) and provincial (87 points) levels .
 - Next at both levels is preparing students for university (with gaps of 39 and 74 points, respectively), and use of common assessments (53 and 93 points).
 - The widest gap between importance and performance at the division level is for supporting students who excel (1.16), and encouraging understanding of Canadian democracy (1.14).

Province-wide, the greatest gaps are for supporting good nutrition (1.84) and supporting students who excel (1.59).

- ◆ **Equitable access to a comprehensive program is very strongly supported:** At 4.52, the average response is exceptionally high. Two thirds believe it is “very important”, the top rating.
 - Despite the massive rating for equity in access as a principle, support falls off markedly when board members are asked if program access should have priority over geographic access. The average level is 3.60, still very strong, but more ambiguity is evident among respondents, with only one in five give the top rating.

- ◆ **Views are polarized over how effective the local mill rate is at addressing division program needs:** The property tax receives overall endorsement (3.41 average response, with top ratings double the lowest ratings), but opinion is not normally distributed, with the second largest group giving its effectiveness a mid-scale rating of 3, and ratings at either end of the scale out of normal proportions. On the whole, 50% rate it effective and 23%, ineffective.

- ◆ **Help for those with challenges is deemed more important than help for those who excel:** The average rating for help-challenged is 4.68, the second highest importance rating, while the rating for help-excel is 4.42, in the lower half of the 18 goals.
 - Ratings at the division level show a wide disparity, with help-challenged receiving the top rating for local performance, and help-excel, the lowest.
 - Performance at the provincial level is less high-contrast, but a large difference exists there as well: a moderately-positive rating of 3.17 for help-challenged, and a similarly-negative rating of 2.83 for help-excel.

- ◆ **Good in-school nutrition, supports for the learning-challenged and for development of social skills rated at the top for importance:** With average ratings of between 4.62 and 4.72, these three were ranked highest by respondents.

- ◆ **Requiring students to demonstrate learning in common assessments, rated second lowest in importance:** Measuring learning via standard tools, similarly applied, rated 4.11 – strongly positive, but next to last in priority among the 18 statements tested.

- ◆ **Preparation for work and preparation for university rated near the bottom of the importance list:** These goals received were rated fourth from last, or last, respectively, in the list of 18.

- ◆ **Board members feel their divisions deliver below-average performance on engendering understanding Indian culture and understanding Canadian democracy:** While both are rated positively as goals, their ratings fall below the average for all 18 goals tested.

Survey Findings

SECTION A: PROGRAM

This section presented a set of statements, each related to a concept of how schools or the school program works. Respondents were asked to give three responses for each statement:

- a. Indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the goal statement.
- b. Indicate how well your school division is organized for success in implementing the goal
- c. Indicate how well the school system province-wide is organized for success in implementing the goal.

All responses were given on a 1 to 5 scale, where 1 was the lowest possible rating and 5 was the highest possible rating. The charts to follow show mean response levels for each statement.

Personal view of goal statement

Respondents agree quite strongly with all program statements. The highest level of agreement is for good nutrition in schools, while the lowest is for preparing students for university.

	Your view
5. The food and refreshment options available in schools should support good nutrition.	4.72
7. The school program should include a comprehensive range of supports for students who have learning challenges.	4.68
15. The school program should develop social skills.	4.62
1. The school program should provide students a strong grounding in the fundamentals of the subject matter taught in daily courses.	4.61
14. The school program should provide for student development and career guidance.	4.58
4. The school program should contain a strong element of physical development leading to fitness.	4.55
11. The school program should include an emphasis on analytic/critical thinking.	4.51
16. The school program should include development of good character.	4.51
17. The school program should provide all students with an understanding of the process and structure of Canadian democracy.	4.48
8. The school program should include a comprehensive range of supports for students who excel.	4.42
3. The school program should increase the amount of time students are engaged in learning.	4.23
10. The school program should provide all students with an understanding of Indian culture and history.	4.22
9. The school program should provide distance learning as a workable option to traditional classroom instruction.	4.20
18. The school program should enable high school students to focus on courses oriented to their post-school plans.	4.16
13. The school program should emphasize preparing students for work.	4.15
6. Boards of education should exercise a decisive role in making choices about the nature of the program available in their schools.	4.12
2. The school program should require students to demonstrate the level of their learning in common assessments, applied in a similar manner to all students	4.11
12. The school program should emphasize preparing students for university.	3.88

Success in division

School divisions receive high marks for success in implementing these goals. The highest grade is for offering a comprehensive range of supports for those with learning challenges, while the lowest is for offering a range of supports for students who excel.

	Success in division
7. The school program should include a comprehensive range of supports for students who have learning challenges.	3.95
16. The school program should include development of good character.	3.92
1. The school program should provide students a strong grounding in the fundamentals of the subject matter taught in daily courses.	3.87
15. The school program should develop social skills.	3.77
6. Boards of education should exercise a decisive role in making choices about the nature of the program available in their schools.	3.73
4. The school program should contain a strong element of physical development leading to fitness.	3.69
5. The food and refreshment options available in schools should support good nutrition.	3.65
3. The school program should increase the amount of time students are engaged in learning.	3.62
14. The school program should provide for student development and career guidance.	3.60
2. The school program should require students to demonstrate the level of their learning in common assessments, applied in a similar manner to all students	3.58
12. The school program should emphasize preparing students for university.	3.49
11. The school program should include an emphasis on analytic/critical thinking.	3.41
10. The school program should provide all students with an understanding of Indian culture and history.	3.36
17. The school program should provide all students with an understanding of the process and structure of Canadian democracy.	3.34
13. The school program should emphasize preparing students for work.	3.33
9. The school program should provide distance learning as a workable option to traditional classroom instruction.	3.30
18. The school program should enable high school students to focus on courses oriented to their post-school plans.	3.28
8. The school program should include a comprehensive range of supports for students who excel.	3.26

Success in province

The province receives high marks from respondents in providing fundamentals of subject matter in daily courses. The province receives a negative rating overall in 5 statement goals, the lowest rating being for providing distance learning as a workable option.

	Success in Saskatchewan:
1.The school program should provide students a strong grounding in the fundamentals of the subject matter taught in daily courses.	3.50
3. The school program should increase the amount of time students are engaged in learning.	3.35
6. Boards of education should exercise a decisive role in making choices about the nature of the program available in their schools.	3.25
15. The school program should develop social skills.	3.22
2. The school program should require students to demonstrate the level of their learning in common assessments, applied in a similar manner to all students	3.18
16. The school program should include development of good character.	3.18
7. The school program should include a comprehensive range of supports for students who have learning challenges.	3.17
12. The school program should emphasize preparing students for university.	3.14
14. The school program should provide for student development and career guidance.	3.13
17. The school program should provide all students with an understanding of the process and structure of Canadian democracy.	3.11
11.The school program should include an emphasis on analytic/critical thinking.	3.10
4. The school program should contain a strong element of physical development leading to fitness.	3.06
10.The school program should provide all students with an understanding of Indian culture and history.	3.00
13. The school program should emphasize preparing students for work.	2.90
5. The food and refreshment options available in schools should support good nutrition.	2.88
18. The school program should enable high school students to focus on courses oriented to their post-school plans.	2.86
8. The school program should include a comprehensive range of supports for students who excel.	2.83
9. The school program should provide distance learning as a workable option to traditional classroom instruction.	2.80

GAP analysis: Personal view vs. Success in division

The goal rated to have the lowest success in the division also incurs the largest gap.

	Your view:	Success in division:	GAP
8. The school program should include a comprehensive range of supports for students who excel.	4.42	3.26	1.16
17. The school program should provide all students with an understanding of the process and structure of Canadian democracy.	4.48	3.34	1.14
11. The school program should include an emphasis on analytic/critical thinking.	4.51	3.41	1.10
5. The food and refreshment options available in schools should support good nutrition.	4.72	3.65	1.07
14. The school program should provide for student development and career guidance.	4.58	3.60	0.98
9. The school program should provide distance learning as a workable option to traditional classroom instruction.	4.20	3.30	0.90
18. The school program should enable high school students to focus on courses oriented to their post-school plans.	4.16	3.28	0.88
4. The school program should contain a strong element of physical development leading to fitness.	4.55	3.69	0.86
10. The school program should provide all students with an understanding of Indian culture and history.	4.22	3.36	0.86
15. The school program should develop social skills.	4.62	3.77	0.85
13. The school program should emphasize preparing students for work.	4.15	3.33	0.82
1. The school program should provide students a strong grounding in the fundamentals of the subject matter taught in daily courses.	4.61	3.87	0.74
7. The school program should include a comprehensive range of supports for students who have learning challenges.	4.68	3.95	0.73
3. The school program should increase the amount of time students are engaged in learning.	4.23	3.62	0.61
2. The school program should require students to demonstrate the level of their learning in common assessments, applied in a similar manner to all students	4.11	3.58	0.53
16. The school program should include development of good character.	4.51	3.92	0.59
12. The school program should emphasize preparing students for university.	3.88	3.49	0.39
6. Boards of education should exercise a decisive role in making choices about the nature of the program available in their schools.	4.12	3.73	0.39

GAP analysis: Personal view vs. Success in Saskatchewan

The goal rated most important has the highest gap, while the goal rated least important has the lowest gap.

	Your view:	Success in Saskatchewan:	GAP
5. The food and refreshment options available in schools should support good nutrition.	4.72	2.88	1.84
8. The school program should include a comprehensive range of supports for students who excel.	4.42	2.83	1.59
7. The school program should include a comprehensive range of supports for students who have learning challenges.	4.68	3.17	1.51
4. The school program should contain a strong element of physical development leading to fitness.	4.55	3.06	1.49
14. The school program should provide for student development and career guidance.	4.58	3.13	1.45
11. The school program should include an emphasis on analytic/critical thinking.	4.51	3.10	1.41
9. The school program should provide distance learning as a workable option to traditional classroom instruction.	4.20	2.80	1.40
15. The school program should develop social skills.	4.62	3.22	1.40
17. The school program should provide all students with an understanding of the process and structure of Canadian democracy.	4.48	3.11	1.37
16. The school program should include development of good character.	4.51	3.18	1.33
18. The school program should enable high school students to focus on courses oriented to their post-school plans.	4.16	2.86	1.30
13. The school program should emphasize preparing students for work.	4.15	2.90	1.25
10. The school program should provide all students with an understanding of Indian culture and history.	4.22	3.00	1.22
1. The school program should provide students a strong grounding in the fundamentals of the subject matter taught in daily courses.	4.61	3.50	1.11
2. The school program should require students to demonstrate the level of their learning in common assessments, applied in a similar manner to all students	4.11	3.18	0.93
3. The school program should increase the amount of time students are engaged in learning.	4.23	3.35	0.88
6. Boards of education should exercise a decisive role in making choices about the nature of the program available in their schools.	4.12	3.25	0.87
12. The school program should emphasize preparing students for university.	3.88	3.14	0.74

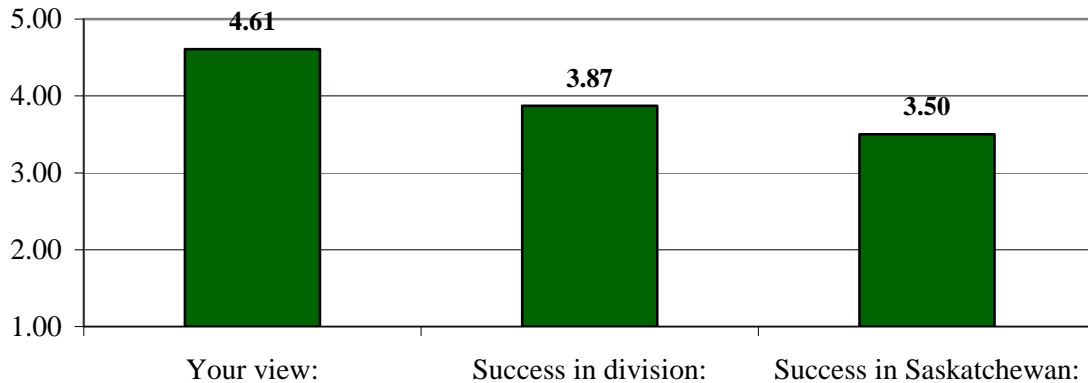
GAP analysis: Success in Division vs. Success in Saskatchewan

The goal rated to have most success at the division level incurs the highest gap.

	Success in division:	Success in Saskatchewan:	GAP
7. The school program should include a comprehensive range of supports for students who have learning challenges.	3.95	3.17	0.78
5. The food and refreshment options available in schools should support good nutrition.	3.65	2.88	0.77
16. The school program should include development of good character.	3.92	3.18	0.74
4. The school program should contain a strong element of physical development leading to fitness.	3.69	3.06	0.63
15. The school program should develop social skills.	3.77	3.22	0.55
9. The school program should provide distance learning as a workable option to traditional classroom instruction.	3.30	2.80	0.50
6. Boards of education should exercise a decisive role in making choices about the nature of the program available in their schools.	3.73	3.25	0.48
14. The school program should provide for student development and career guidance.	3.60	3.13	0.47
8. The school program should include a comprehensive range of supports for students who excel.	3.26	2.83	0.43
13. The school program should emphasize preparing students for work.	3.33	2.90	0.43
18. The school program should enable high school students to focus on courses oriented to their post-school plans.	3.28	2.86	0.42
2. The school program should require students to demonstrate the level of their learning in common assessments, applied in a similar manner to all students	3.58	3.18	0.40
1. The school program should provide students a strong grounding in the fundamentals of the subject matter taught in daily courses.	3.87	3.50	0.37
10. The school program should provide all students with an understanding of Indian culture and history.	3.36	3.00	0.36
12. The school program should emphasize preparing students for university.	3.49	3.14	0.35
11. The school program should include an emphasis on analytic/critical thinking.	3.41	3.10	0.31
3. The school program should increase the amount of time students are engaged in learning.	3.62	3.35	0.27
17. The school program should provide all students with an understanding of the process and structure of Canadian democracy.	3.34	3.11	0.23

The following pages will show the mean response levels for each individual goal statement.

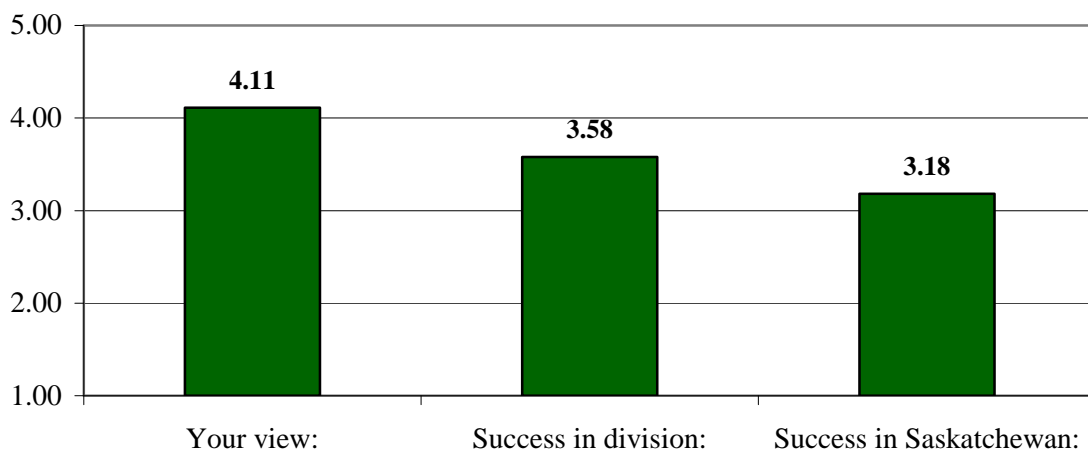
1. The school program should provide students a strong grounding in the fundamentals of the subject matter taught in daily courses.



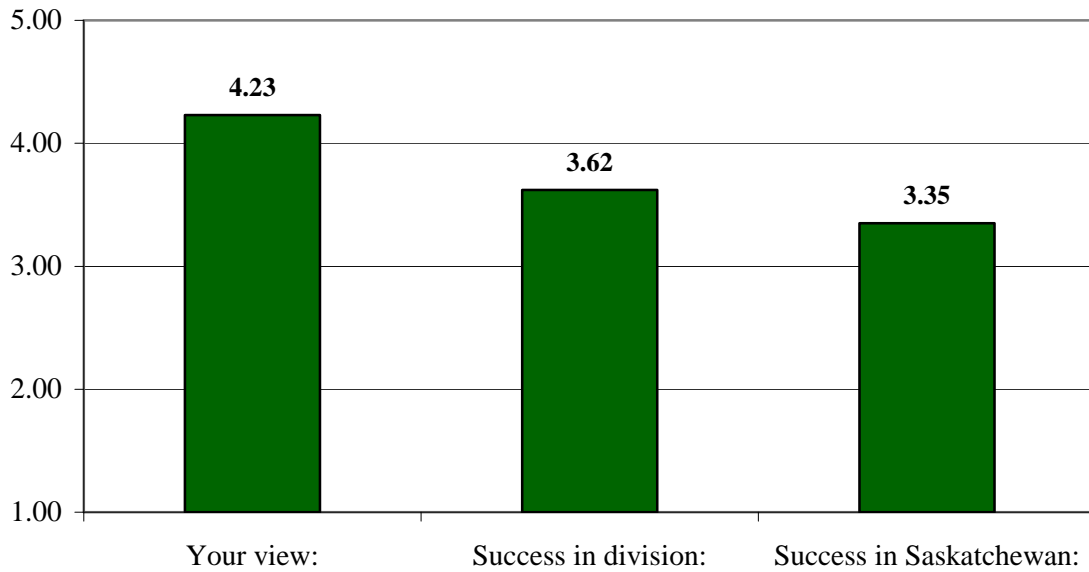
Statistically Significant

School board members (4.00) give a higher rating on their personal view of this goal than Directors of Education (4.69)

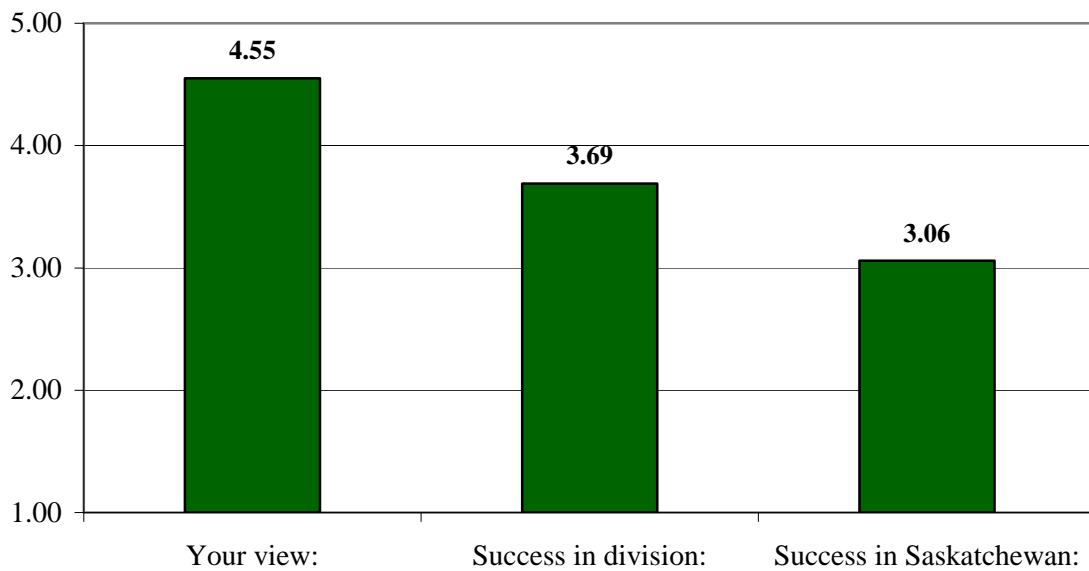
2. The school program should require students to demonstrate the level of their learning in common assessments, applied in a similar manner to all students



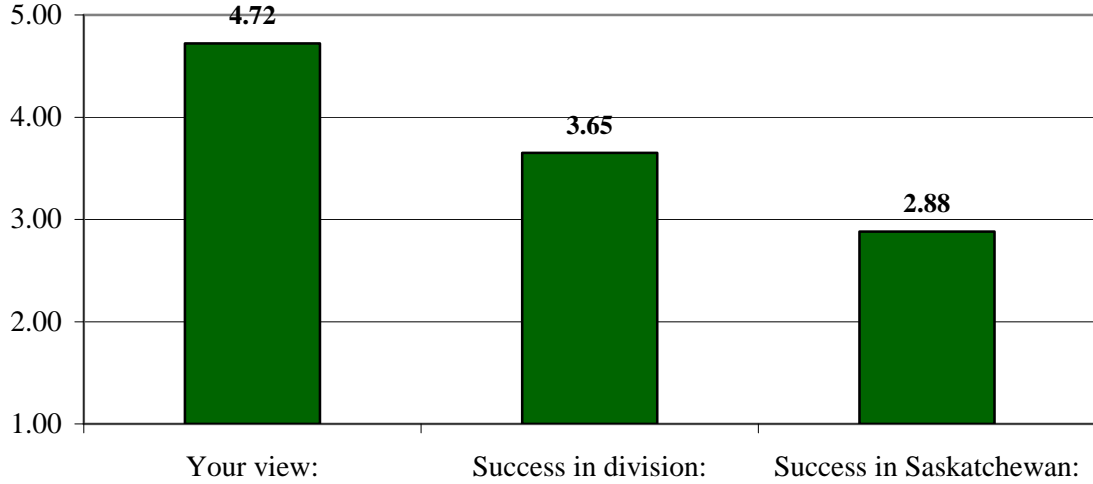
3. The school program should increase the amount of time students are engaged in learning.



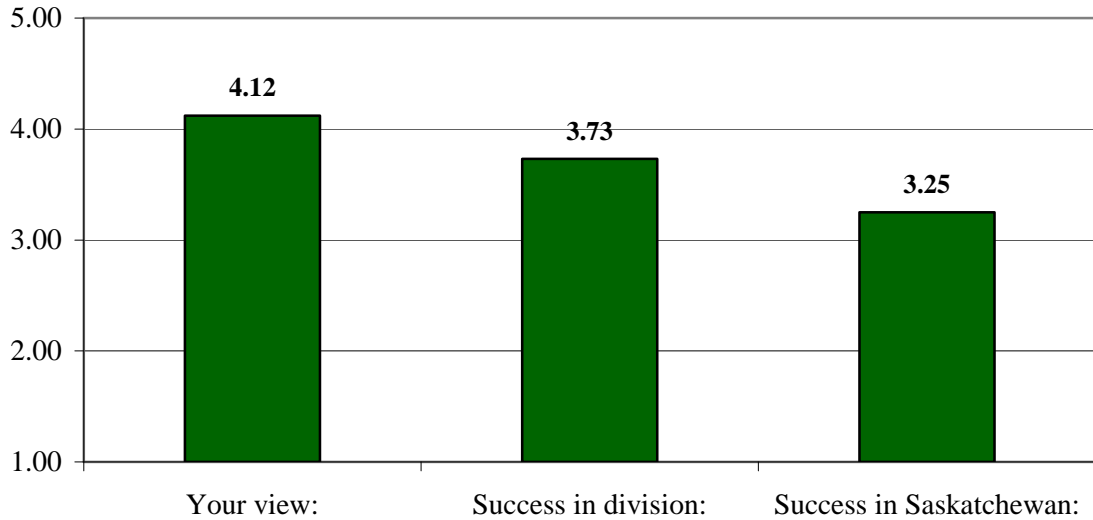
4. The school program should contain a strong element of physical development leading to fitness.



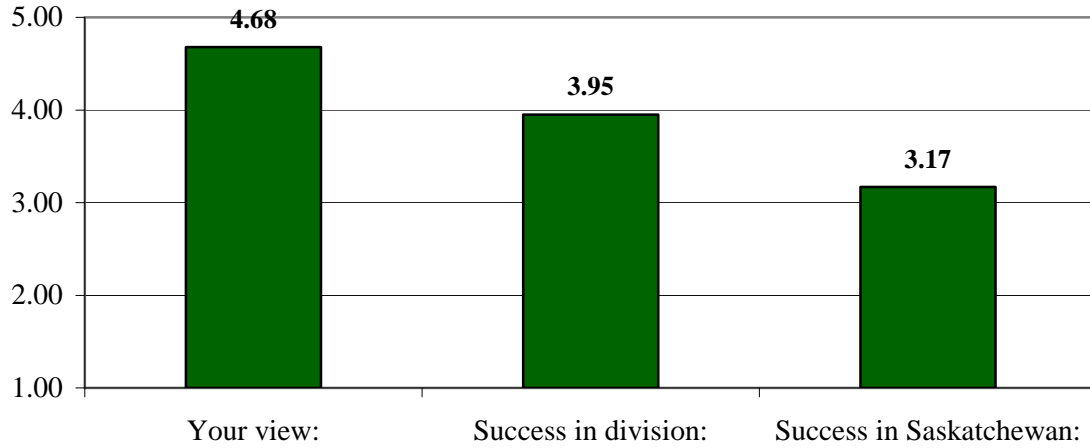
5. The food and refreshment options available in schools should support good nutrition.



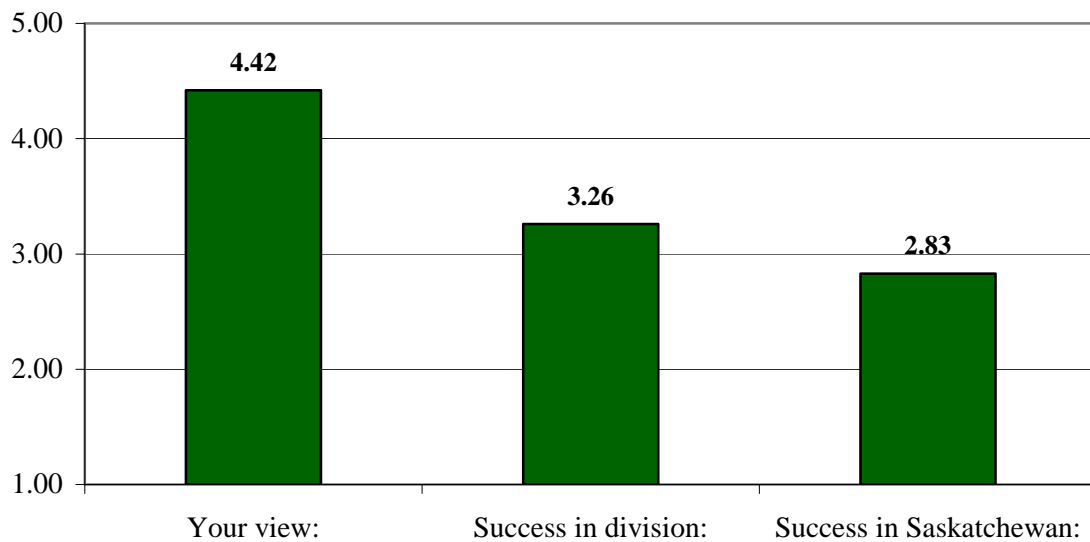
6. Boards of education should exercise a decisive role in making choices about the nature of the program available in their schools.



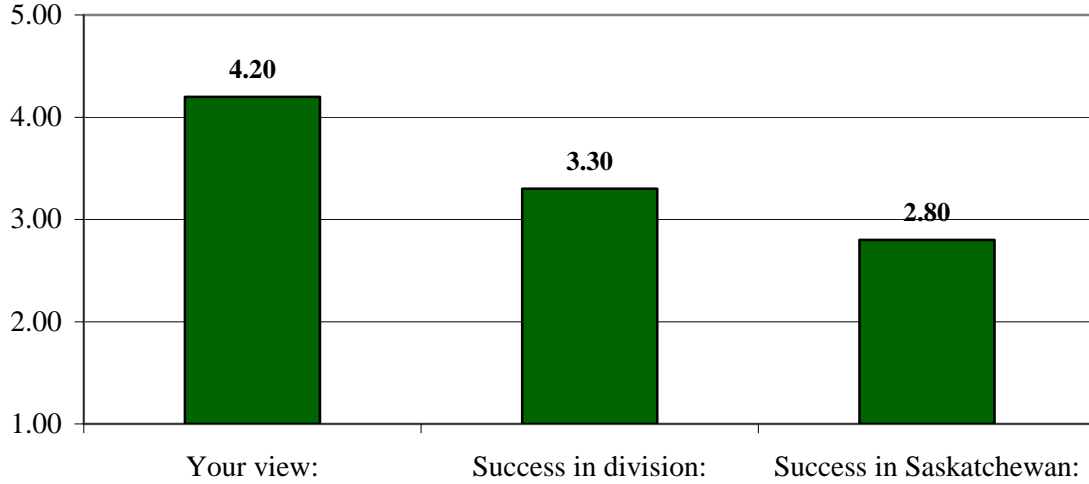
7. The school program should include a comprehensive range of supports for students who have learning challenges.



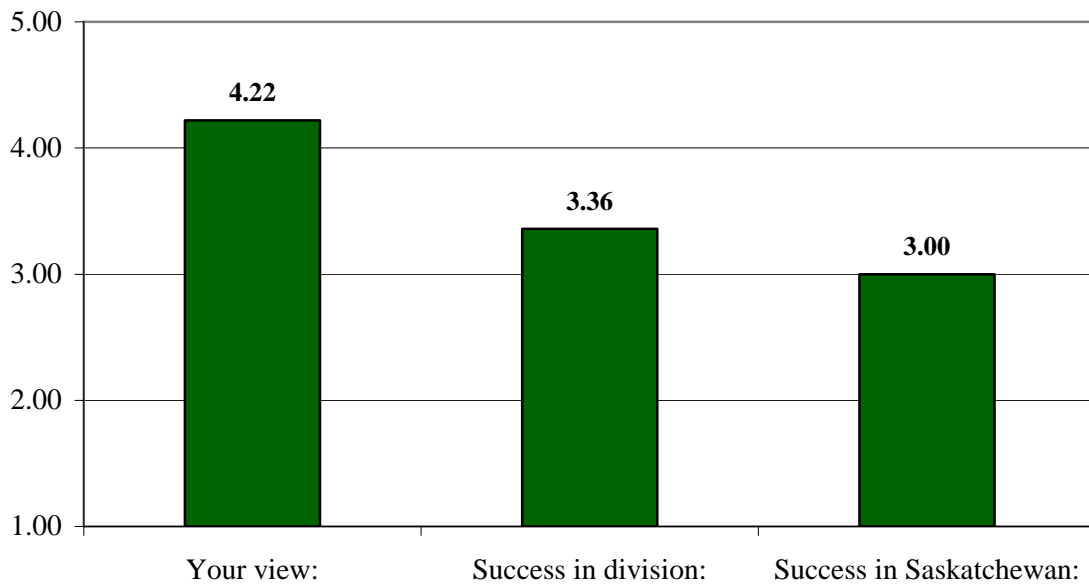
8. The school program should include a comprehensive range of supports for students who excel.



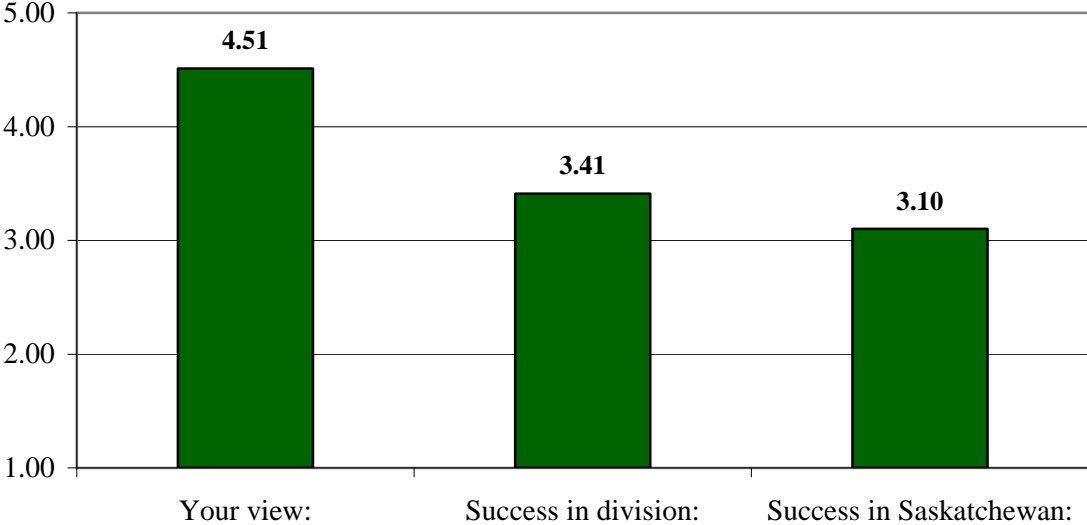
9. The school program should provide distance learning as a workable option to traditional classroom instruction.



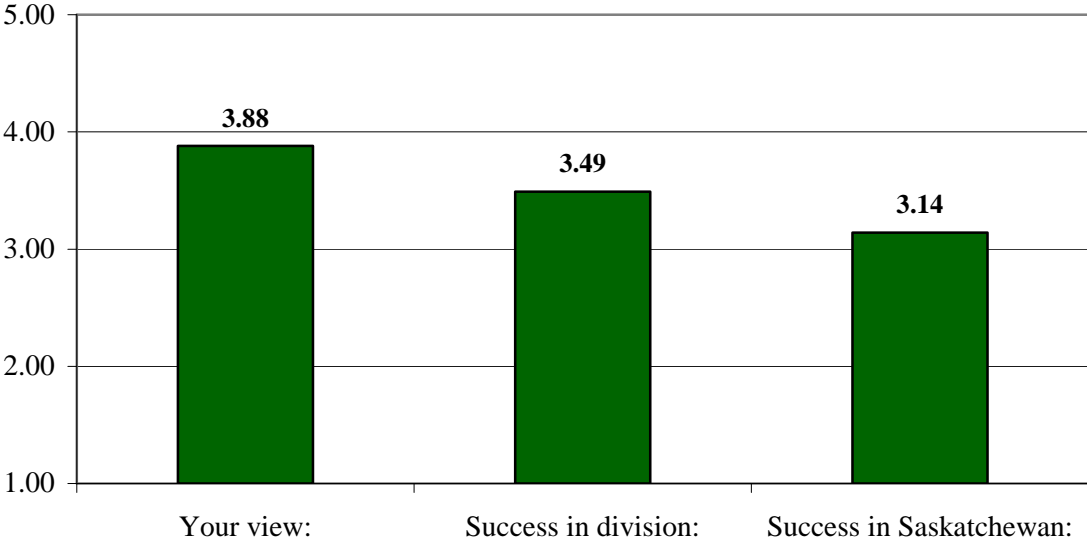
10. The school program should provide all students with an understanding of Indian culture and history.



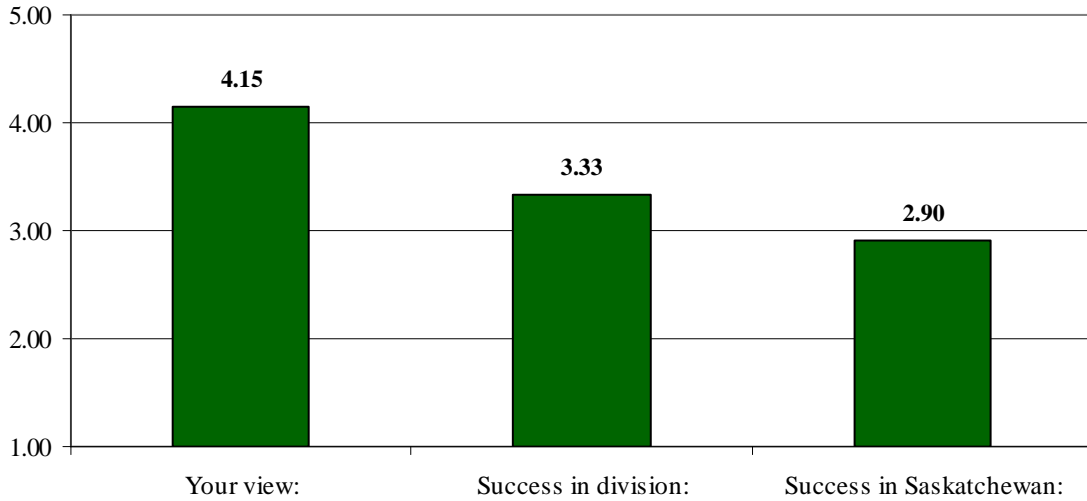
11. The school program should include an emphasis on analytic/critical thinking.



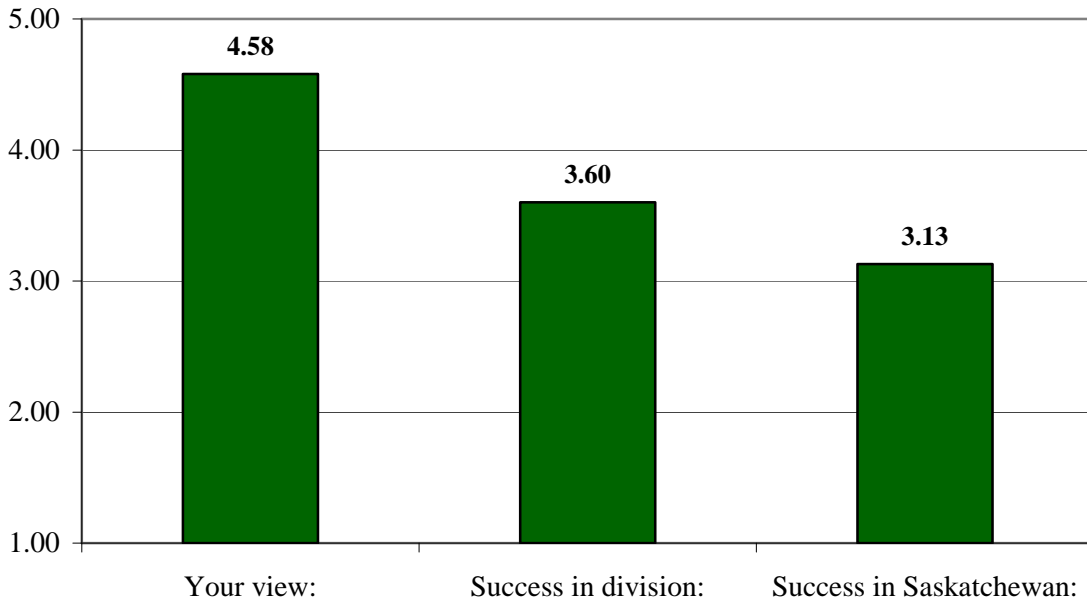
12. The school program should emphasize preparing students for university.



13. The school program should emphasize preparing students for work.



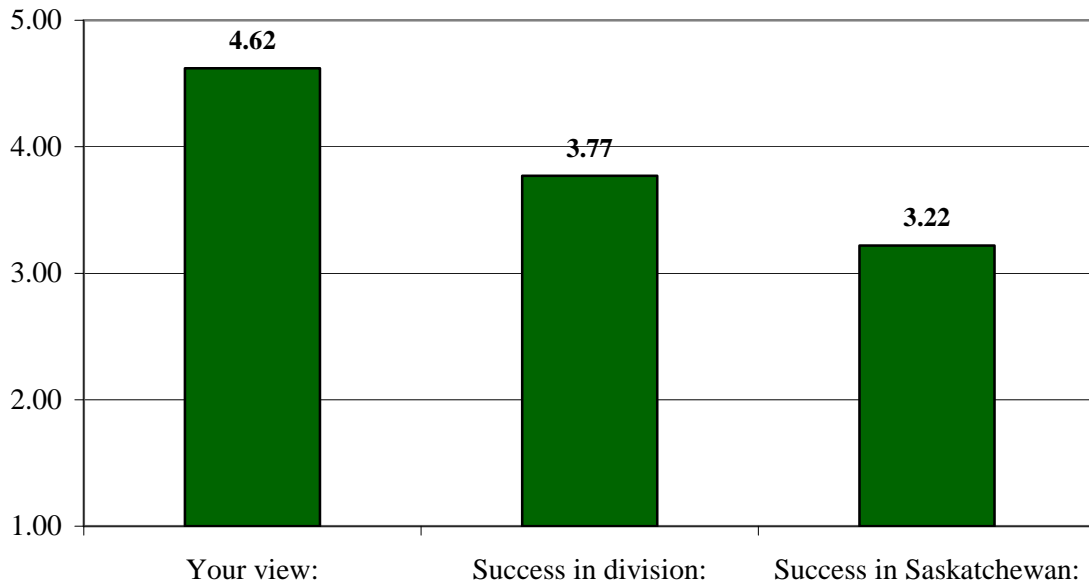
14. The school program should provide for student development and career guidance.



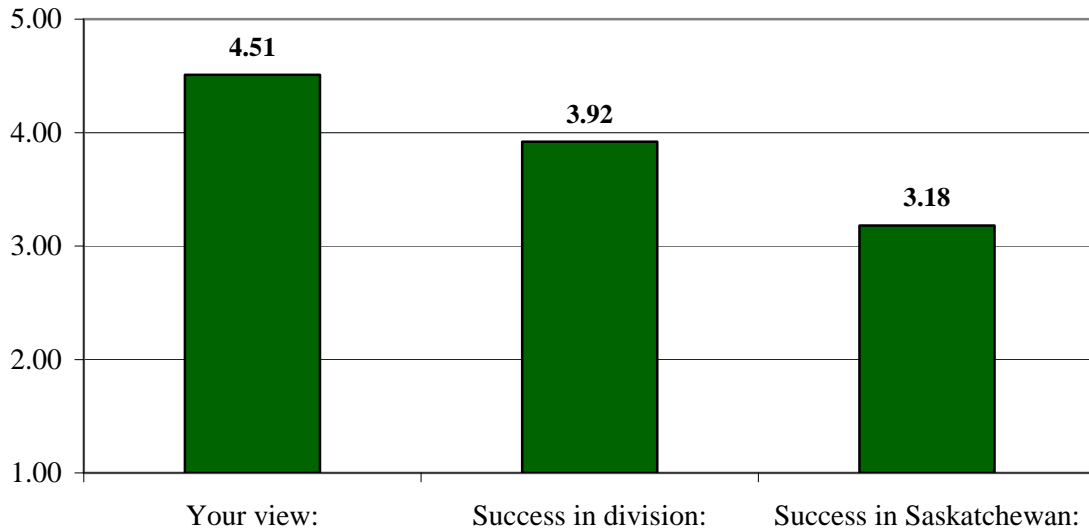
Statistically Significant

Those from rural school divisions (4.77) have a higher view on the importance of this goal than those from urban school divisions (4.47). Those from urban school divisions (3.33) rate success in Saskatchewan higher than those from rural school divisions (2.90).

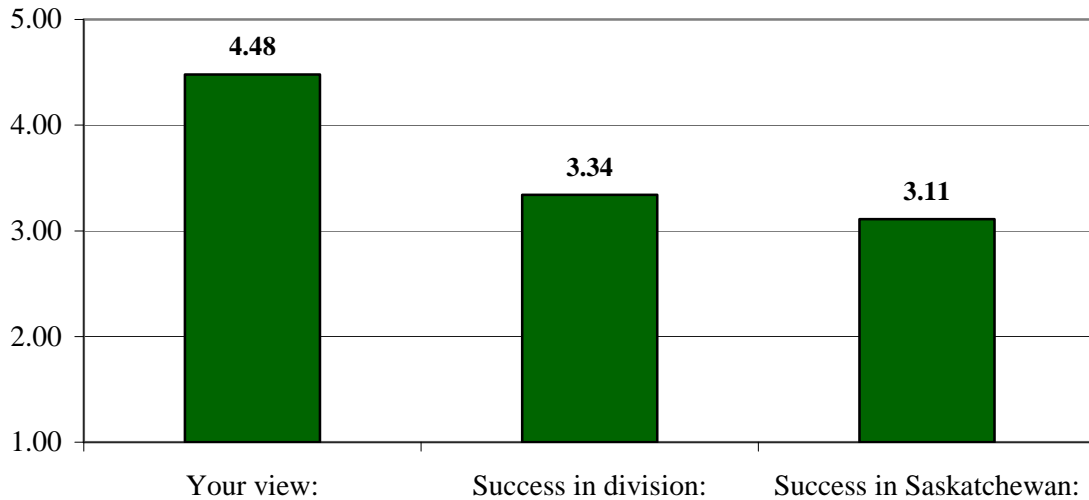
15. The school program should develop social skills.



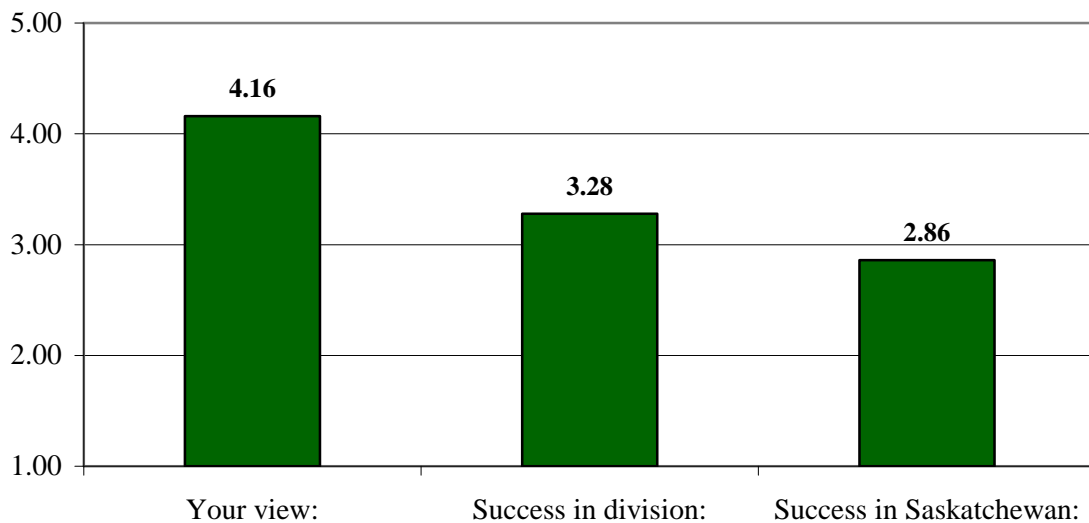
16. The school program should include development of good character.



17. The school program should provide all students with an understanding of the process and structure of Canadian democracy.



18. The school program should enable high school students to focus on courses oriented to their post-school plans.



Statistically Significant

Directors of Education (3.87) rate success at the division level higher than school board members (3.15).

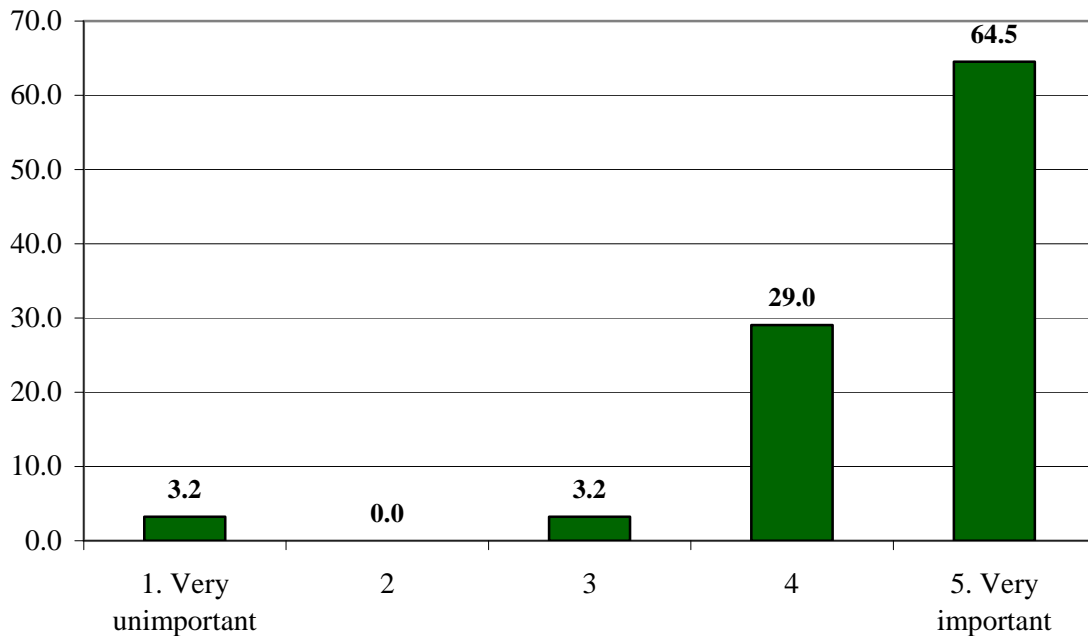
SECTION B: PARTICULARS

On a 1 to 5 scale where 1 is Very Unimportant and 5 is Very Important, how important is it to you that the school division should ensure all students equitable access to a comprehensive school program?

More than two-thirds of respondents say that this is very important.

How important is it to you that the school division should ensure all students equitable access to a full service school program?

Mean response level = 4.52

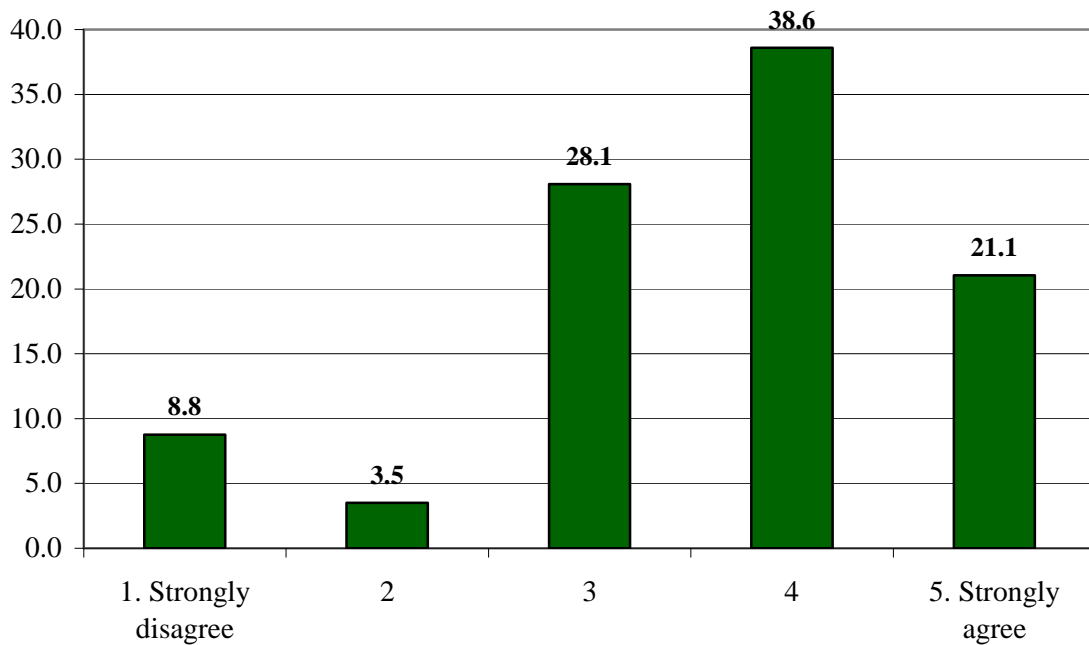


On a 1 to 5 scale where 1 is Strongly Disagree and 5 is Strongly Agree, how strongly do you agree that access to a full service school program should take priority over access to a school facility near the home community?

A majority of respondents agree with the above statement, while just over 1 in 10 say they disagree.

How strongly do you agree that access to a full service school program should take priority over access to a school facility near the home community?

Mean response level = 3.60



On a 1 to 5 scale where 1 is Very Ineffective and 5 is Very Effective, how effective is the use of the local mill rate in addressing school program issues at the division level?

Again, a majority say the use of the mill rate is effective, but there is a portion (23%) who say it is ineffective.

How effective is the use of the local mill rate in addressing school program issues at the division level?
Mean response level = 3.41

