



For Immediate Release

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**MARICOPA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ALLIANCE SURVEYS COMMUNITY ABOUT
K-12 EDUCATION IN MARICOPA**

Report Provides Findings and Recommendations to Support and Improve MUSD Schools

Maricopa, Ariz. – May 12, 2014 – The Maricopa Economic Development Alliance (MEDA) today released the major findings of a community opinion poll conducted late last year and in the spring of this year. The purpose of the community opinion survey was to develop a baseline of understanding in terms of how K-12 public schools are perceived in the City of Maricopa.

“The quality of K-12 education matters to MEDA because it is a foundational building block for creating a high quality workforce, and to retaining and attracting highly educated and talented workers and job opportunities in the City of Maricopa. The business community needs to champion and support our K-12 schools”.

MEDA commissioned O’Neil Research Associates, a leading national research firm based in Tempe, AZ, to conduct the survey. More than 600 Maricopa residents participated in the survey, providing an important window into how the Maricopa community perceives K-12 education in the city.

Survey Respondents

In the survey, all respondents were asked not only whether they had children of school age, but also which types of schools they attended. Of the respondents, 41 percent of the overall respondent base had children of school age; 29 percent had children in grade school; 16 percent in middle school, and 17 percent in high school. Of the Maricopans with children of school age:

- 47 percent are exclusively MUSD parents
- 28 percent have children in non-MUSD, non-public institutions
- 11 percent have children in both MUSD and non-MUSD schools
- 14 percent have children in non MUSD public schools

Because much of the MUSD district consists of non-parents, the entire sample is comprised of:

- 19 percent exclusively MUSD parents
- 12 percent non-MUSD parents
- 4 percent have children in both MUSD and non-MUSD schools
- 6 percent have children in non MUSD public schools
- 59 percent are non parents

Key Findings of the MEDA Survey

- Two-thirds of Maricopa residents (66%) trust their schools, teachers and administrators. They also believe that the quality of the education available through MUSD schools in the last five years is either “about the same” (44%) or improving (36%).
- For parents who send their kids to MUSD schools, 78% trust the teachers and principals. Residents with children in MUSD are satisfied (60%) or very satisfied (15%) with the quality of the education their K-12 children are receiving. 49% of these parents believe the education at MUSD schools is improving.
- Maricopa enjoys firm support for its public school system from those residents with children attending MUSD public schools (24% of total residents). It enjoys moderate support from residents who do not have school aged children (59% of total residents) and weak support from those who have elected to send their children to non-MUSD charter or private schools, or who home school (18% of total residents).
- Of the parents who hold a college or graduate degree, 41% send their children to MUSD system schools.
- 88% of Maricopa residents think it is “important” or “very important” to improve student academic achievement in the basics - science, math and reading (about two thirds - 68% - wish to see indicators of improvement across all grade levels). 83% of respondents think increasing teachers’ salaries will be “important” or “very important” to reaching these goals.
- 41% of parents who send their children to MUSD schools believe their children would get a better education at a charter school. The percentage believing their child would get a better education at a charter school is 83% among parents who choose not to send their children to MUSD schools.
- Despite the belief that charter schools will provide students with a better education, Maricopa residents see charter schools as only marginally better than public schools. When asked to “grade” schools by type, survey respondents gave public schools across the nation a grade of “C,” MUSD schools a “C,” and charter schools a “C” (see table that follows).

Recommended Action Steps

Dr. Steve Chestnut, MUSD Superintendent, acknowledged the importance of having a baseline of data to track perceptions and improvements in the MUSD public schools. “I was pleased that the survey said that two-thirds of parents trust their schools, teachers and administrators. The survey also showed areas where our school district needs to improve and we will continue to work on those issues.”

MEDA, in cooperation with Dr. Chestnut, has developed recommended actions to champion the importance of MUSD K-12 schools to the economic and community well-being of Maricopa. Among those recommended actions are:

1. The MUSD should continue to implement the newly approved Strategic Plan and each school’s School Improvement Plan to improve the academic program of the school district.
2. The MUSD Governing Board should consider placing an override proposal on the ballot to replace the charter funding that ends after the 2014-15 school year.
3. The MUSD Superintendent will develop an action plan to address issues raised in this study. Progress on the action plan will be reported to the MUSD Governing Board.

4. The Maricopa business community should work with the MUSD to explore the potential of developing and implementing an “adopt a school” or similar program, using best practices from other school districts in Arizona and across the United States. These programs have been highly effective in fostering improvement within K-12 public schools.
5. The MUSD should consider securing funds for a full/part time communications officer; the functions of this individual would be to disseminate timely and accurate information about the achievements and challenges of the District. Possible funding sources could be derived from adjustments in the M&O budget or from supporting entities such as the Maricopa Education Foundation

The Maricopa Economic Development Alliance (MEDA) is Maricopa’s private-public partnership for economic development. As a 501(c)3 corporation, the organization champions strategies and solutions that foster economic growth and prosperity in the City of Maricopa by bringing together the business, government, education and civic sectors to identify and advance forward-looking policies that facilitate investment, growth and workforce development. MEDA’s board is comprised of the leading executives of Maricopa’s major business sectors, representing expertise and experience in utilities, finance, development, health care and infrastructure development. Equally important are the elected officials and public sector executives who bring the essential representation of the City of Maricopa’s Mayor and City Council, City Management and Economic Development functions.

For more information about MEDA, please visit www.MaricopaEDA.com.

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