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# SPEAK OUT LEXINGTON 1999

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## SUMMARY REPORT

*Speak Out Lexington 1999* focused on an issue of crucial importance: How Can Our Community Be More Connected to Our Schools? The Fayette County Board of Education adopted a resolution endorsing the program and recommending participation by staff, students, parents, family members, and all others who care about our schools.

Fifty-nine groups of friends, neighbors, students, colleagues, civic organizations, and school associations gathered throughout Lexington-Fayette County in January and February to discuss this topic. A total of 35 adult community groups, seven adult school groups, eight adult mixed groups (composed of school and community representatives), and nine young people groups participated. Trained moderators and reporters led all sessions.

Reports from the moderators and reporters for *Speak Out 1999* indicate that this topic often stirred strong emotions and strong responses based on participants' personal experiences. Groups appeared to be engaged by the topic, reflecting the

extent to which these issues affect nearly everyone in the community, even those without children in schools. School personnel in particular seemed to appreciate the opportunity to address this topic and to be consulted. The wide range and large number of responses provided in the sessions indicate that people have many differing notions about what needs to be done to improve the connection between our community and our schools.

*Speak Out* moderators asked a series of four to five questions in each session. The project managers compiled and reviewed the responses and then analyzed and categorized them according to the diverse themes and ideas that emerged. This Summary Report presents a brief description of the most frequent responses to each question asked during the *Speak Out* sessions. See the back page for information about the full report, which contains a complete categorized listing of all comments and suggestions, and the frequency with which they occurred.



### **Question One: When you think about grades k-12, what do you care most about?**

People from all groups care about many of the same things when it comes to our schools. Foremost, they care about the physical and psychological safety of students and the quality of education that students receive. They also care about parent or other adult involvement, competent and caring instructors, and students' readiness for life and the workforce. In addition, participants care about equal opportunities, equal resources, and equal expectations for all students.

<b>Most Frequent Responses</b>	<b>Adult Community</b>	<b>Adult School</b>	<b>Adult Mixed</b>	<b>Young People</b>
Safety (physical and psychological)	28	5	6	3
Students' readiness for life and the workforce	22	3	4	3
Quality of education/academic achievement	23	2	3	1
Equal opportunities, expectations, and resources for all students	21	3	4	0
Parent/adult involvement	21	0	5	1
Competent, caring instructors	17	2	4	2

When asked to vote on their top three concerns about grades k-12, participants' top priorities, in order, were: psychological and physical safety (23 group responses); the quality of education/academic achievement (21 group responses); parent/adult involvement (10 group responses).

**Question Two: What prevents our community and our schools from being more connected?**

Participants in an overwhelming number of groups believe the present location of schools outside of many students' neighborhoods or communities contributes to the lack of connection between the community and schools. Their responses suggest that this physical separation is a factor in many other kinds of disconnection. People also contend that gaps in communication on both the community and school side, a lack of accurate, positive information, apathy, and lack of time prevent our community and schools from being more connected.

<b>Barriers on the School Side...</b>				
<b>Most Frequent Responses</b>	<b>Adult Community</b>	<b>Adult School</b>	<b>Adult Mixed</b>	<b>Young People</b>
Schools are located outside of children's neighborhoods or communities	34	5	12	4
Schools don't communicate, they just assume that the community knows what is going on	21	4	9	6
Schools are not welcoming to all parents or members of the community (especially minorities)	18	1	3	2

<b>Barriers on the Community Side...</b>				
<b>Most Frequent Responses</b>	<b>Adult Community</b>	<b>Adult School</b>	<b>Adult Mixed</b>	<b>Young People</b>
Apathy, disinterest (people don't speak up)	19	7	2	8
Lack of communication from community to schools	15	4	7	5
Lack of time	20	3	5	3
Lack of knowledge and understanding about what goes on in schools	13	5	6	1
Parents can't get off of work	11	1	6	6

**Question Three: How can these barriers be overcome so that our community and our schools are more connected?**

While participants generally agreed on the range of barriers that exist between our community and schools, they offered an extremely wide variety of ideas for ways that individual and group efforts can overcome these barriers. Their responses indicate that many are willing to personally commit to creating stronger connections between our community and our schools. People see many potential opportunities for engaging our community and schools in a deeper, more meaningful relationship and recognize the role that such an improved relationship could play in leading to better outcomes for students.

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Participants' responses fall into two main categories: what schools can do and what the community can do to overcome the barriers that exist between them.

<b>What Schools Can Do...</b>				
<b>Most Frequent Responses</b>	<b>Adult Community</b>	<b>Adult School</b>	<b>Adult Mixed</b>	<b>Young People</b>
Clear accurate information and regular, positive contact between schools and parents	13	4	5	5
More communication from schools to neighborhoods and the community	11	5	5	3
Return to neighborhood schools	11	6	6	1
Make school buildings part of the community (provide learning as well as social opportunities)	10	6	6	1
Make time during the school day for community relations and community/parent involvement activities	10	4	2	6

<b>What the Community Can Do...</b>				
<b>Most Frequent Responses</b>	<b>Adult Community</b>	<b>Adult School</b>	<b>Adult Mixed</b>	<b>Young People</b>
More family and parent involvement in schools	11	5	4	4
Better media relations (not just with the Herald-Leader) and more positive publicity	7	6	4	3
Businesses need to do more, require employees to volunteer	5	2	1	2

### **Question Four: What can you -- and people like you -- do to help our community be more connected to our schools?**

This question called for participants to focus specifically on what individuals can do to enhance the connection between our community and our schools. Participants offered wide-ranging ideas for their own — and other people's — role in improving the relationship between our community and schools.

<b>Most Frequent Responses</b>	<b>Adult Community</b>	<b>Adult School</b>	<b>Adult Mixed</b>	<b>Young People</b>
Volunteer, get involved, donate time and resources	30	2	9	3
Join the community conversation about school issues — talk with neighbors, parents, and colleagues	9	4	2	1
Become a positive advocate, set an example	9	1	3	2
Join the PTA or a similar organization; be active on committees	9	2	2	0
Mentor or tutor a child	9	0	3	0



*Speak Out Lexington 1999*  
Vital Statistics

*Speak Out Lexington*  
Is Sponsored By:

Total Meetings ..... 59

Total Participants ..... 1,018

Total Group Leaders ..... 85

The full report for *Speak Out Lexington 1999*, which contains a complete categorized listing of all comments and suggestions and the frequency with which they occurred, is available at no charge from Urban County Government. Call the Council Office, (606) 258-3200, or the Mayor's Office, (606) 258-3100. Mayor Pam Miller and the Lexington-Fayette Urban County Council sponsored *Speak Out Lexington 1999*, with cooperation from the Fayette County Schools. Roberts & Kay, Inc. served as consultants for the project.

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