



CONCERNING KIDS SERIES  
AFFIRMS PUBLIC PRIORITIES IDENTIFIED  
IN COMMUNITY MEETINGS

A SKILLMAN STUDY SERIES  
COMMISSIONED BY  
THE SKILLMAN FOUNDATION  
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Conducted by



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The final survey in The Skillman Foundation's two-year *Concerning Kids* series of public opinion polls designed to gauge public opinion regarding issues facing children and youth in Metro Detroit has concluded that the general public supports the public priorities identified at community meetings.

In the fall of 2004, the Center for Survey Research and Analysis conducted a survey of 1607 Metropolitan Detroit adult residents to monitor change since the original poll conducted in fall 2001, and to determine public support for ideas proposed at community meetings. This final survey in the *Concerning Kids* series provides strong validation for the *Concerning Kids* model that The Skillman Foundation has developed; the general public supports the proposed ideas in large numbers.

The process of disseminating and sharing the findings of the *Concerning Kids* series has resulted in an important model of community engagement to determine priorities. In order to determine the framework of issues in Detroit that affect children, youth and families, The Skillman Foundation and CSRA first conducted informal focus groups and executive interviews with Metropolitan Detroit community leaders—people working on the ground on children's issues. Information garnered from the focus groups and interviews were then used to create the survey questionnaires.

After the release of each survey, The Skillman Foundation coordinated strategic media outreach and provided community education to increase awareness about the specific issues and to solicit feedback about the survey results from community residents. Working with specific agencies and non-profit organizations already doing relevant work on the ground, the foundation organized town hall type meetings around the themes of specific polls.

These meetings were organized as workshops at which relevant poll findings were presented, issues raised, and discussions facilitated. The meetings all concluded with the development of recommendations by concerned residents on ways to improve conditions for children and youth in Metro Detroit.

This final fall 2004 *Concerning Kids* survey included questions based on recommendations from three previous community meetings.

- In November 2002, more than 350 Detroit residents met to discuss and agree on indicators they felt were best used to measure the progress of improving schools in Detroit.
- The Detroit Urban League took the lead in organizing a community meeting in February 2003 around the findings of the violence, crime and youth development survey.
- In collaboration with Neighborhood Services Organization, a forum was convened with around 400 Metro Detroit parents and kids to discuss the findings of the innovative Parents and Kids survey in fall 2003.

### **Top Ten Concerns about Issues that Face Children *Parents and Kids Survey November 2003***

On December 6, 2003, The Skillman Foundation sponsored a town hall meeting where nearly 400 Metropolitan Detroit area parents and kids met to hear about the Parents and Kids survey findings and to discuss their concerns about those results. Residents shared insights and ideas about community issues. After lengthy discussion, participants collaboratively established a list of their top ten concerns about issues that face children in their communities. These issues included relationships and sexual concerns, such as rape,

HIV/AIDS, and STDs; crime and suicide; respect and discrimination; family issues and self-esteem; drug and alcohol abuse; peer pressure; school and higher education; gun violence; abandoned houses; and having a voice and having money.

In the Fall 2004 survey, respondents were presented with those ten issues and were asked to rank their concern about each issue on a scale of zero to ten (with 0 being “not at all concerned” and 10 being “extremely concerned”).

The survey indicates that the list of concerns established at the town meeting resonates strongly with the larger Metropolitan Detroit community. Overall Metropolitan Detroit residents were very concerned about the topics, with average ratings between 8.22 for the issue of drug and alcohol abuse and 6.35 for the issue of abandoned houses. The top issues that concern residents the most are drug and alcohol abuse (which ranks as the top concern in Oakland, Wayne and the city of Detroit and ranks second in Macomb); school and higher education (which ranks first in Macomb); relationships and sexual concerns, such as rape, HIV/AIDS, and STDs (which ranks second in Oakland); peer pressure; family issues and self-esteem; and gun violence (which ranks second in both Wayne and Detroit).

City of Detroit residents are more concerned about these issues overall, with average ratings ranging from 9.17 for the issue of drugs and alcohol to 8.81 for the issue of family issues and self-esteem. Another issue that is especially concerning to Detroit residents is the issue of abandoned houses. It is the fourth top concern among Detroit residents, with 69% rating it a 10.

**For each of the following please tell me on a scale of zero to ten with 0 being “not at all concerned” and 10 being “extremely concerned”; how concerned are you about each item in <region>.**

**Total (n=1607)**

	Issue (in order of average ranking)	Mean	Percent ranking issue as “10 – very important”
1	Drug and alcohol abuse	8.22	47%
2	School and higher education	8.09	43
3	Relationships and sexual concerns such as rape, HIV/AIDS, and STDs	8.00	42
4	Peer pressure	7.81	34
5	Family issues and self-esteem	7.78	35
6	Respect and discrimination	7.67	39
7	Gun violence	7.61	48
8	Crime and suicide	7.60	39
9	Having a voice and having money	7.38	31
10	Abandoned houses	6.35	35

Metropolitan Detroit residents feel that parents are the most responsible for *improving* most of these issues. Survey respondents were asked who they believed was most responsible for improving these issues: parents, community organizations, political leaders, children, or someone else. A greater percentage of respondents name parents as being the most responsible for every issue, with the exception of abandoned houses. For that issue, most residents (63%) name political leaders or the government as those most responsible for improving the issue.

Residents of the city of Detroit are less likely to name parents as those who are most responsible for improving several of the issues, including relationships and sexual concerns, crime and suicide, respect and discrimination, and drug and alcohol abuse. Both Wayne County and City of Detroit residents are less likely than residents of the other counties to name parents as those who are most responsible for improving school and higher education and gun violence.

**Drug and Alcohol Abuse—Top 5 groups most responsible for improving conditions.**

	Total (n=1607)	Macomb County (n=400)	Oakland County (n=401)	Wayne County (n=402)	City of Detroit (n=404)
Mentioned parents (and families—volunteered)	91%	91%	94%	92%	86%
Mentioned community organizations	40	37	37	40	46
Mentioned political leaders (and government—volunteered)	28	30	24	28	32
Mentioned children	31	34	34	28	28
Mentioned school system or teachers (volunteered)	19	12	12	9	3

**School and Higher Education—Top 5 groups most responsible for improving conditions.**

	Total (n=1607)	Macomb County (n=400)	Oakland County (n=401)	Wayne County (n=402)	City of Detroit (n=404)
Mentioned parents (and families—volunteered)	72%	76%	77%	66%	69%
Mentioned community organizations	45	43	42	46	49
Mentioned political leaders (and government—volunteered)	43	40	42	44	47
Mentioned children	25	25	27	23	25
Mentioned school system or teachers (volunteered)	18	24	24	16	8

**Relationships and sexual concerns such as rape, HIV/AIDS, and STDs—Top 5 groups most responsible for improving conditions.**

	Total (n=1607)	Macomb County (n=400)	Oakland County (n=401)	Wayne County (n=402)	City of Detroit (n=404)
Mentioned parents (and families—volunteered)	85%	89%	86%	86%	80%
Mentioned community organizations	45	46	40	45	52
Mentioned political leaders (and government—volunteered)	30	28	25	31	35
Mentioned children	33	33	36	29	32
Mentioned school system or teachers (volunteered)	11	16	15	8	4

**Peer Pressure—Top 5 groups most responsible for improving conditions.**

	Total (n=1607)	Macomb County (n=400)	Oakland County (n=401)	Wayne County (n=402)	City of Detroit (n=404)
Mentioned parents (and families—volunteered)	79%	80%	79%	77%	78%
Mentioned community organizations	31	31	28	30	35
Mentioned political leaders (and government—volunteered)	13	13	11	13	18
Mentioned children	39	41	41	36	37
Mentioned school system or teachers (volunteered)	17	25	22	13	7

**Family Issues and Self-Esteem—Top 5 groups most responsible for improving conditions.**

	Total (n=1607)	Macomb County (n=400)	Oakland County (n=401)	Wayne County (n=402)	City of Detroit (n=404)
Mentioned parents (and families—volunteered)	96%	96%	96%	96%	95%
Mentioned community organizations	24	23	25	20	28
Mentioned political leaders (and government—volunteered)	10	9	12	7	13
Mentioned children	25	23	32	20	23
Mentioned school system or teachers (volunteered)	9	12	12	8	5

**Gun Violence—Top 5 groups most responsible for improving conditions.**

	Total (n=1607)	Macomb County (n=400)	Oakland County (n=401)	Wayne County (n=402)	City of Detroit (n=404)
Mentioned parents (and families—volunteered)	82%	78%	70%	72%	75%
Mentioned community organizations	44	47	47	48	47
Mentioned political leaders (and government—volunteered)	50	42	50	47	47
Mentioned children	29	32	25	29	29
Mentioned school system or teachers (volunteered)	7	9	5	1	6

**Building Safe Neighborhoods for Youth  
Violence and Youth Development Survey November 2002**

In November 2002, the Concerning Kids Series released the results of the violence, crime and youth development survey, third in the *Concerning Kids* survey series. Working with the Detroit Urban League, another grassroots organization, The Skillman Foundation sponsored a community forum in February 2003 at which Metro Detroit residents met to hear about the survey findings and to discuss how to build safe neighborhoods for youth. Participants drew up ten action steps that could contribute towards safety in neighborhoods. These steps included teaching peace as a preferred way of life; develop comprehensive ways of identifying and communicating the availability of youth programs; lobby for youth programs during lean budget times; strengthen parenting skills; reach out to school dropouts; implement the model programs for parenting, life skills, and education; engage youth, have a dialog, and listen to them; increase partnerships of businesses, organizations, churches, schools, and government agencies; positively impact media by encouraging positive images for children’s television and video games; and develop positive youth development programs.

Fall 2004 survey respondents were presented with those ten ideas and were asked to rate each issue on its importance in encouraging positive youth development (with 0 being “not at all important” and 10 being “very important”).

Again, the survey indicates that the ideas developed in the community forum receive strong support from the larger Metropolitan Detroit community. Overall Metropolitan Detroit residents think the topics are very important, with average ratings between 7.9 and 8.9. The top issues that concern residents the most are strengthening parenting skills (which ranks as the top concern in Oakland, Macomb, and Wayne and ranks second in Detroit); engaging youth, having a dialog and listening to them (which ranks second in Macomb, Oakland and Wayne); reaching out to school dropouts; teaching peace as a preferred way of life (which ranks first in Detroit); developing positive youth development programs; and implementing the model programs for parenting, life skills and education.

Again, City of Detroit residents rate these issues more highly than residents of the other counties (with average ratings between 8.6 and 9.2).

In 2003, Detroit area residents met to discuss ways to build safe neighborhoods for youth. A list of concerns was developed at this conference. On a scale of zero to ten with 0 being “not at all important” and 10 being “very important”, please rate the following on their importance in encouraging positive youth development.

**Total (n=1607)**

	Issue (in order of average ranking)	Mean	Percent ranking issue as “10 – very important”
1	Strengthen parenting skills	8.9	60%
2	Engage youth, have a dialog and listen to them	8.7	52
3	Reach out to school dropouts	8.6	51
4	Teach peace as a preferred way of life	8.5	47
5	Develop positive youth development programs	8.5	55
6	Implement the model programs for parenting, life skills, and education	8.4	44
7	Increase partnerships of businesses, organizations, churches, schools, and government agencies	8.3	44
8	Develop comprehensive ways of communicating the availability of youth programs	8.2	41
9	Positively impact media by encouraging positive images for children’s television and video games	8.2	47
10	Develop comprehensive ways of identifying the availability of youth programs	8.1	38
11	Lobby for youth programs during lean budget times	7.9	37

**Importance in Improving City of Detroit Schools**

***Education Survey September 2002***

In November 2002, more than 350 City of Detroit residents met to discuss and agree on the top nine issues that were the most important to improving schools in the city of Detroit. Those issues included parent and community involvement, including parent outreach and training; accountability; focus on ways to close the achievement gap between students in poor communities and other students; quality of teaching and class size reduction; governance and finance; classroom technology upgrading; equity in resources; improved curriculum and professional development; and high expectations for academic standards and behavior.

Fall 2004 survey respondents in the City of Detroit were presented with those nine issues and were asked to rate each issue on its importance in improving schools (with 0 being “not at all important” and 10 being “very important”).

Residents overwhelmingly think that these issues are important for improving schools. For eight of the nine issues, at least half of Detroit respondents rated the issue a “10.” (Forty-five percent rated “equity of resources” a 10.) The four issues that ranked the highest were—in order of average rating—improved curriculum and

professional development; parent and community involvement, including parent outreach and training; high expectations for academic standards and behavior; and the quality of teaching and class size reduction.

**On a scale of zero to ten with 0 being “not at all important” and 10 being “very important”, please rate the following on how important it is for improving schools.**

**Total (n=1607)**

	Issue (in order of average ranking)	Mean	Percent ranking issue as “10 – very important”
1	Improved curriculum and professional development	8.89	59%
2	Parent and community involvement, including parent outreach and training	8.79	61
3	High expectations for academic standards and behavior	8.62	56
4	Quality of teaching and class size reduction	8.60	54
5	Classroom technology upgrading	8.59	57
6	Focus on ways to close the achievement gap between students in poor communities and other students	8.49	55
7	Governance and finance	8.45	55
8	Accountability	8.44	50
9	Equity in resources	8.29	45

### **Next Steps**

Now that it has ascertained the strong levels of support for the ideas raised in its community forums and town hall meetings, The Skillman Foundation plans to continue to work with neighborhood organizations to focus on encouraging positive youth development, building safe neighborhoods for youth, and improving schools in Metropolitan Detroit. Using the ideas developed by residents as a springboard, neighborhood organizations can collaborate with each other to continue to work on practical ways to address the issues of common concern.

### **Background**

In November 2001 The Skillman Foundation commissioned the Center for Survey Research and Analysis at the University of Connecticut to conduct a series of *Concerning Kids* surveys in order to gauge public opinion regarding issues facing children and youth in the Metropolitan Detroit area.

The Baseline Survey was the first in the *Concerning Kids* series. It was released in April 2002 and focused on several different issues related to children and youth. Three specific issue surveys followed and focused on education (released in September 2002), violence, crime and youth development (November 2002) and public health (April 2003). Community outreach—including community meetings—followed the release of each report.

In November 2003, The Skillman Foundation and the Center for Survey Research and Analysis at the University of Connecticut released the results of the Parents and Kids survey, also part of the *Concerning Kids*



survey series. The survey was conducted with both parents and their children and focused on how parents and children spend their time, what parents and children are concerned about, children's self-esteem and their plans for the future, prejudice and discrimination, safety in schools, and health related questions including a series of alcohol and drug use questions, and questions regarding sex.

### **Methodology**

This survey was conducted from September 27 to November 21, 2004. A total of 1607 interviews were conducted with residents of the Detroit Metropolitan area and the sample was stratified by four metropolitan areas:

Detroit	N=404
Wayne	N=402
Macomb	N=400
Oakland	N=401

The margin of error is  $\pm 2.4\%$  for the total population and  $\pm 4.9\%$  for each of the metropolitan areas. The margin of error may be greater for smaller sub-groups.

Telephone numbers for this survey were generated through a random-digit-dial telephone methodology to ensure that each possible residential telephone number in the tri-county region had the opportunity to be selected for this survey. Once selected, each telephone number was contacted a minimum of four times to attempt to reach an eligible respondent. Households where a viable contact was made were called additional times. Within each household one adult was randomly selected to complete the interview.

To ensure the survey data were projectable to all adults in the tri-county area, data were weighted to adjust for probabilities of selection, sample design, and to ensure that characteristics of survey respondents match known population estimates for each county.