

**The Academy for Academic Excellence
2000 Annual Family Survey:
Report on the Findings**

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May 2001

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Introduction

In its ongoing collaboration with the Lewis Center for Educational Research (LCER), the School Improvement Research Group (SIRG) recently administered the second Annual Family Survey to the parents of Academy for Academic Excellence (AAE) students. As last year, data were collected through a database-generated electronic survey during the parents' monthly meetings with their AAE Academic Advisor. The responses of 235 primary parent/teachers (PPTs) representing 391 AAE students were obtained from mid-November through mid-December 2000. As we learned last year, the vast majority of the PPTs are the mothers of AAE students. During the survey period the AAE had a total of 330 families with 557 enrolled students. While less than last year's, this 71% response rate is quite notable and is much higher than most voluntary surveys receive.

In this report the raw findings from the survey are presented. Given the variety of types of questions, the findings are presented in ten sections. These themes include: (1) parent demographics, (2) student demographics, (3) instruction, (4) standards, (5) networks, (6) enrollment motivations, (7) AAE involvement, (8) AAE attitudes, (9) general attitudes, and (10) civic engagement. When possible, we compare responses to this year's survey with those from last year's.

Raw Findings

Parent Demographics

First we begin with some basic demographic information that the PPTs provided. This data is an important description of the population. It could be useful in ascertaining whether AAE participants reflect the region's population or if they are similar to other social groups.

Figure 1 illustrates the number of children that AAE parents currently have living in their households. The most frequent response (the mode) was "2," as 41% of AAE families currently have two children residing with them. As the graph indicates, about 28% of families have only one child at home. Only 2.7% of PPTs have five or more children residing in their homes.

Figure 1: Number of Children in AAE Families

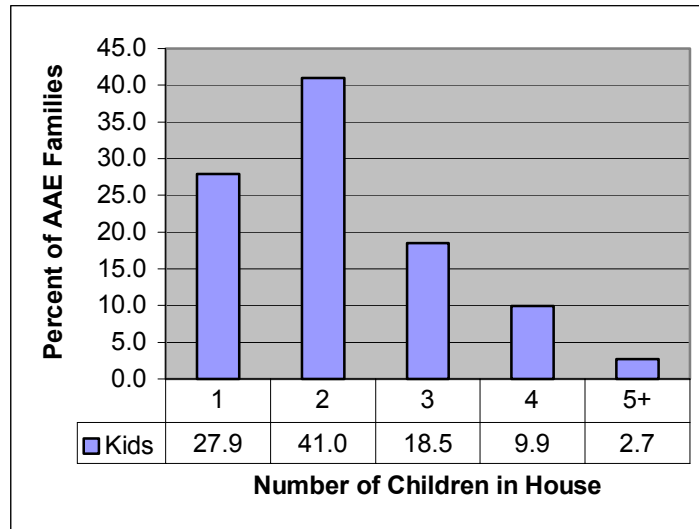


Figure 2 displays the total number of people residing in AAE households. One-third of AAE families have four household members. This coincides with the child results and suggests that many AAE families have the traditional structure of two parents and two children. There are many larger households as well. One-quarter have households containing five people while about another one-quarter currently have six, seven, or more members in their households.

Figure 2: Size of AAE Households

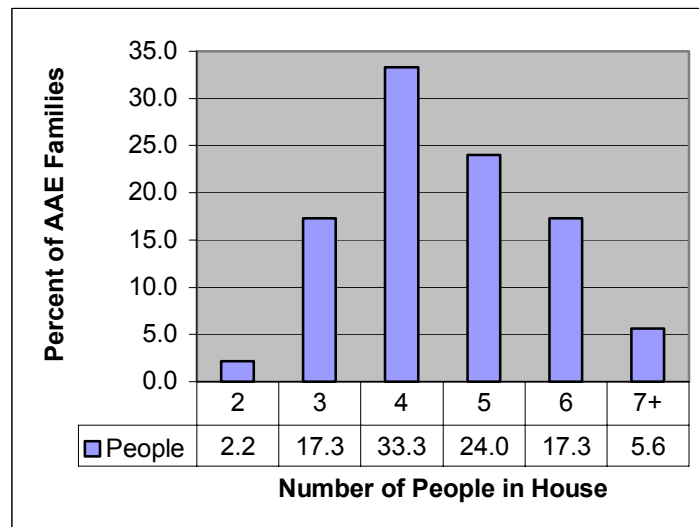


Table 1 provides the educational attainment of AAE PPTs and their spouses. Both last year's and this year's findings are included to determine if there has been a significant shift in the AAE population.

<i>Education</i>	Educational Attainment		Spouse's Education	
	<i>1999</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>1999</i>	<i>2000</i>
	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Not high school graduate	3.9	2.6	4.8	2.2
High school graduate	22.8	16.3	17.3	17.8
Attended some college	50.6	60.1	48.1	50.8
Earned Bachelor's degree	14.7	12.9	15.6	15.7
Earned Master's degree	3.5	3.0	8.7	6.5
Other graduate degree	4.6	5.2	5.6	6.5
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

The results for the PPTs do show that they have slightly higher levels of educational attainment this school year. In 2000, more PPTs have had some schooling beyond high school. With 60% of the PPTs having attended some college and another 21% holding a higher degree, it is clear that this is an educated population. The spouses of the PPTs (typically the fathers) are slightly more likely to have earned a higher degree. Overall, the educational attainment of the father population changed very little from 1999 to 2000.

Figure 3: Employment Status and Work Hours, 1999 and 2000

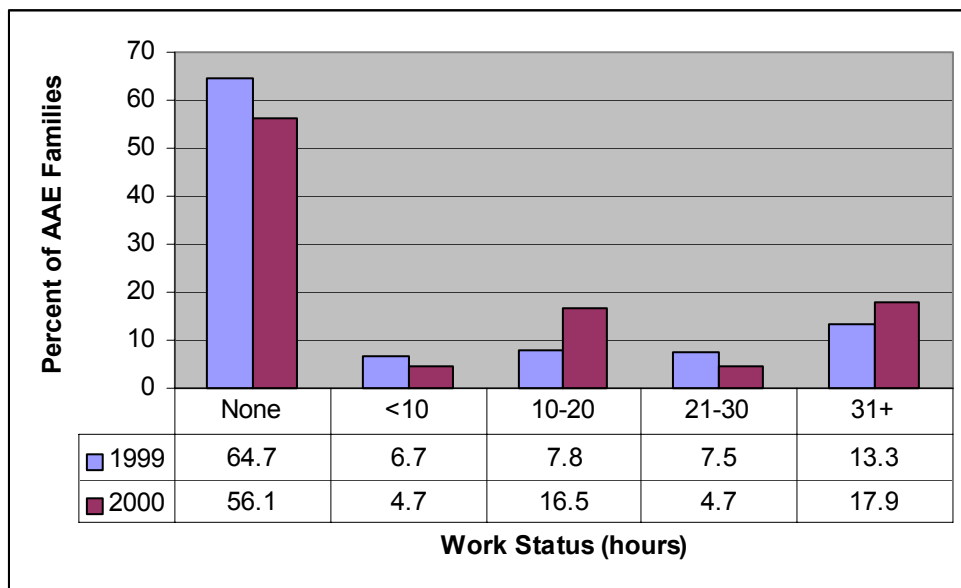
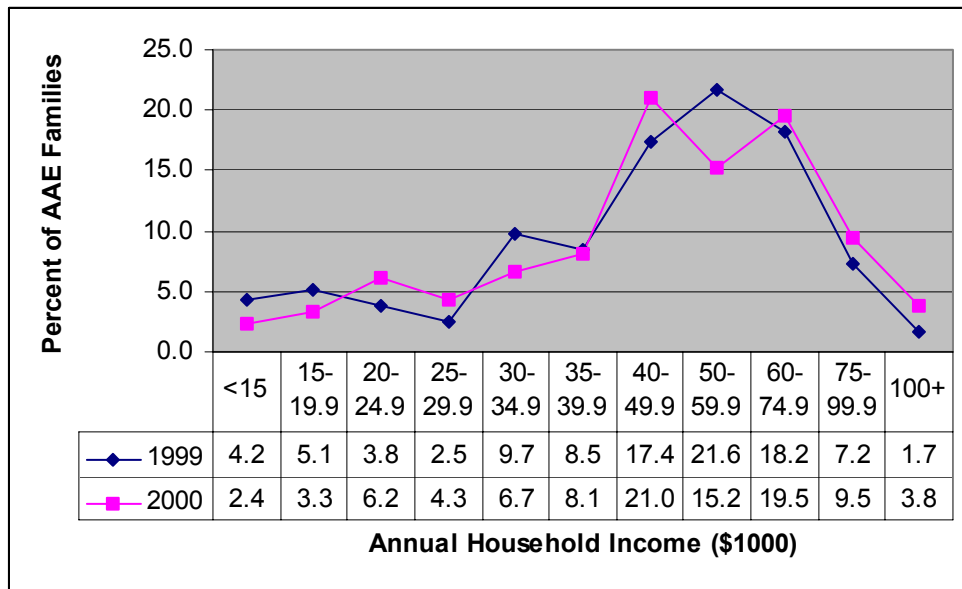


Figure 3 displays the employment status of the PPTs. First, more of this school year's PPTs are employed compared to last year's. In 1999 about 65% were not employed while that percentage has decreased to 56% in 2000. Thus, as the graph illustrates, more PPTs (typically the mother) are working 10-20 hours and over 31 hours a week this year compared to last. Indeed, 18% of the AAE mothers are now working over 31 hours a week.

Figure 4 displays the annual household income of AAE families in 2000 compared to that in 1999. Overall, the distribution is remarkably similar. As documented in the first two categories, fewer AAE parents are earning less than \$20,000 this year. For some reason, the percentage of AAE parents who earn between \$50,000 and \$59,999 dropped. Regardless, the findings mirror those of last year and confirm that the majority of AAE families are solidly "middle class."

Figure 4: Annual Household Income, 1999 and 2000



According to these survey data, the average age of the AAE PPTs is exactly 40 years and more PPTs are age 37 than any other (the mode). Table 2 presents the age distribution in six categories. About 9% of parents are 30 years old or younger and 7% are over 50 years old. Over half of the PPTs are between 36 and 45 years of age.

Table 2: Age of Primary Parent/Teacher

<i>Age</i>	<i>Percent</i>
30 years or younger	9.1
31-35	16.4
36-40	27.2
41-45	26.3
46-50	14.2
Over 50 years old	6.9
TOTAL	100

The last item that will be considered in this section is computer ownership. Table 3 demonstrates that slightly more AAE families have computers now than in 1999 (notice the drop in the “none” percentage). Of those with computers, more have internet access now as well. Clearly, the AAE families are “wired.”

Table 3: Computer Ownership

<i>Computer</i>	<i>1999</i>	<i>2000</i>
	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Yes, internet access	75.5	82.6
Yes, no internet access	15.7	11.1
None	8.8	6.4
TOTAL	100	100

Student Demographics

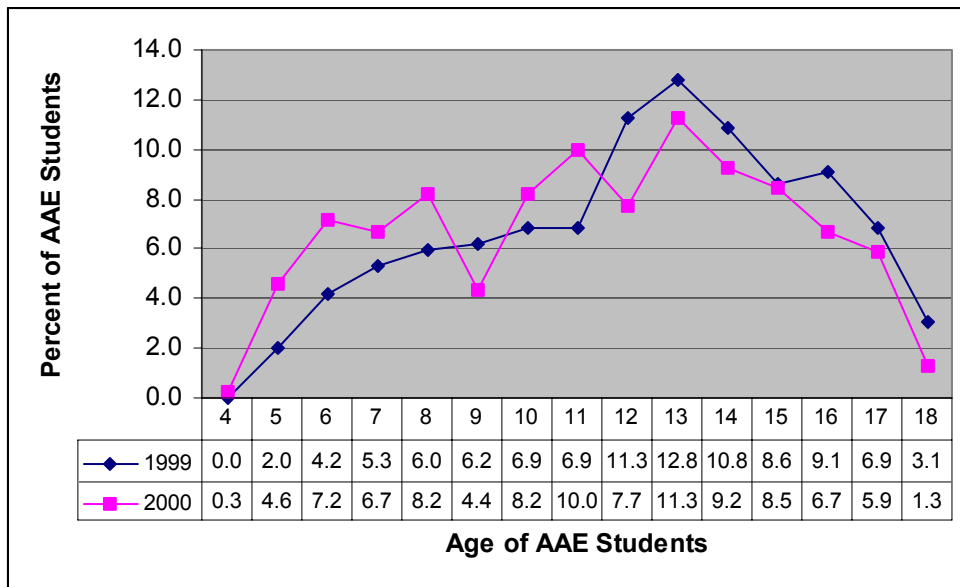
Basic student demographic information was also collected in the survey. In respect to gender, 51.9% of AAE students are female and 48.1% are male. Table 4 reports the ethnicity distribution of the AAE students in 1999 and 2000. As points of comparison, the ethnicity of Apple Valley Unified School District students in 1999 as well as the town of Apple Valley’s ethnicity distribution in 2000 is provided. Overall, the AAE population has remained quite stable over the one-year period. As the comparison data make clear, whites are over-represented at the AAE. Latinos are the most under-represented minority group at the AAE.

<i>Ethnicity</i>	AAE		Regional	
	<i>AAE</i>	<i>AAE</i>	<i>AVUSD</i>	<i>AV Town</i>
	<i>1999</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>1999</i>	<i>2000</i>
	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Percent^a</i>	<i>Percent^b</i>
African American	4.8	5.4	10.5	6.7
Latino	8.8	9.2	22.7	15.3
Asian Amer./Pacific Isl.	2.3	3.3	2.3	2.5
White	83.2	81.8	61.3	72.3
Other	0.9	0.3	3.2	3.2
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

^a Data obtained online at: <http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us/>
^b Data obtained online at: <http://factfinder.census.gov/>

Figure 5 illustrates the age distribution of AAE students in 1999 and 2000. The lines look fairly similar and 13 years was the single most populated age group in both years. However, there is an important difference in these distributions. This year's AAE students are slightly younger than last year's. With the exception of the nine year-olds, there are proportionally more students who are now 11 years of age or less. Notice that the distribution of 12 through 18 year-olds is similar in both years while there are fewer in each group this year.

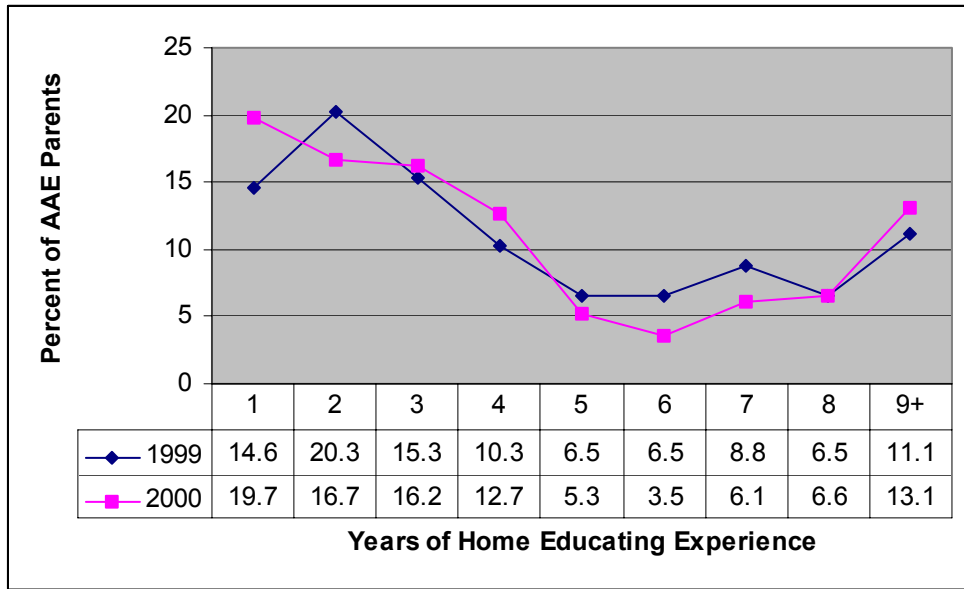
Figure 5: Age of AAE Students, 1999 and 2000



Instruction

The results for instruction-related factors are presented in this section. Figure 6 plots the years of home educating experience of last year’s PPTs with this year’s. The first category illustrates that there are more PPTs this year whom entered the AAE without any previous home educating experience. Otherwise, the distributions look remarkably similar. Roughly one-half of AAE parents have three or fewer years of home educating experience.

Figure 6: PPTs Years of Home Educating Experience, 1999 and 2000



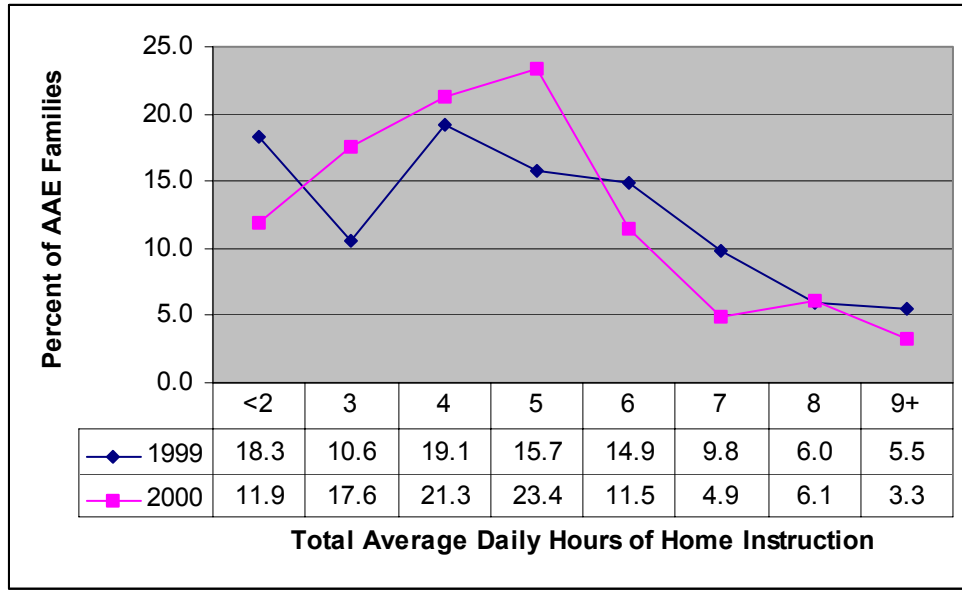
We also wanted to determine whether the PPTs are doing all of the home instruction or whether they are receiving teaching assistance from any one else. Of the married PPTs, 47% reported that their spouses do regularly participate in the home education of their children. We also asked if there is any other person who regularly participates in the home educating. A notable 22% of the respondents indicated that there is some one other than their spouse who assists them with teaching in the home.

In addition to the years of home educating experience, it is also important to determine whether there exists any previous experience teaching in a school. Of the PPTs, 30% have taught in a public or private school. Fewer of the spouses of the PPTs who help in the home, about 18%, have taught while 32% of the “other” people who assist in the home educating do have experience teaching in schools.

It is also important to know how much home instruction AAE students receive. Figure 7 plots the average daily hours of home instruction reported this year and last year. First, there are fewer families this year who are providing two or less hours of home instruction on an average day. The distribution is more extreme this year as there are more cases in

the 3 to 5 hours range than last year, but less in the 6 to 7 hours range. About 25% of AAE families are now providing their children with 6 or more hours of home instruction per day compared to roughly 35% last year.

Figure 7: Average Daily Hours of Home Instruction, 1999 and 2000



Finally, we inquired about religious instruction and whether PPTs feel that standards-based curriculum infringes upon their ability to provide it. Nearly half of parents incorporate religion into their home curriculum to a great extent. Another 34% do so to some extent. While religious instruction is widespread, most feel that standards-based curriculum does not threaten its use. About 55% report that standards do not impose at all upon religious instruction. Around 26% believe that standards-based curriculum does infringe upon the incorporation of religion to some or to a great extent.

Table 5: Religious Instruction and Standards

	<i>Not at all</i>	<i>Very little</i>	<i>To some extent</i>	<i>To a great extent</i>
To what extent do you currently incorporate religion into your home curriculum?	8.3%	10.1%	34.2%	47.4%
Do you feel that using standards-based curriculum infringes upon your ability to provide your children with religious instruction?	54.5%	19.4%	16.2%	9.9%

Standards

Given the importance of standards-based instruction at the AAE, we asked the PPTs several questions regarding standards. The items and the response distributions are provided in Table 6. Item (a) concerns the clarity of standards-based education and 93% of PPTs report that the idea is clear “to some extent” or “to a great extent.” There is also widespread support for standards as item (b) demonstrates. Only 11% of PPTs are “not at all” or “very little” supportive. About 56% of the respondents also say that the standards are presented to them in a clear fashion and another 35% agree with this “to some extent” (item c).

The use of standards among AAE families is also apparently widespread. Item (d) indicates that roughly 42% of PPTs use standards “to a great extent” while another 50% use them “to some extent.” Parents also feel that they have been successful in using standards. Only 12% report that they have had very little or no success in using standards (item e).

We also wanted to determine whether the PPTs feel that there are any negative aspects to standards-based education. According to item (f), 75% of respondents do find that standards demand more instructional planning time on their behalf. We followed up with a question asking whether this issue of planning time affects their enthusiasm for standards. One-quarter say that it does not affect their enthusiasm at all while another one-quarter report that it affects them “very little.” About 46% of PPTs do say that their enthusiasm for standards is affected to some or to a great extent because of the demands of additional instructional planning time.

Table 6: Standards-related Questions and Responses

<i>Item</i>	<i>Not at all (%)</i>	<i>Very little (%)</i>	<i>To some extent (%)</i>	<i>To a great extent (%)</i>	<i>Not applicable (%)</i>
a. Is the idea of “standards-based” education clear to you?	1.8	5.3	40.4	52.6	
b. To what extent do you support “standards-based” education?	3.7	7.3	53.2	35.8	
c. Are AAE standards presented in a clear and user-friendly fashion?	0.4	5.5	34.5	56.2	3.4
d. To what extent is your home instruction currently standards-based?	2.2	5.8	49.6	42.4	
e. Have you found your efforts to employ standards to be successful?	2.1	10.2	45.5	34.0	8.1
f. Do standards demand more instructional planning time?	6.8	12.3	44.3	30.6	6.0
f (followup). Does this affect your enthusiasm for standards?	24.7	25.1	31.5	14.0	4.7
g. Do standards demand purchase of new instructional materials?	44.3	31.5	15.7	2.6	6.0
g (followup). Does this affect your enthusiasm for standards?	50.2	24.3	15.3	4.7	5.5

Along with the time dimension, we wanted to see if parents feel if there are any financial impacts accompanied with standards-based education. Only 18% of the PPTs report that standards require the purchase of significant amounts of new instructional materials. In the follow-up question, half of the respondents say that this does not affect their enthusiasm for standards at all. Only 20% state that the financial impact does significantly affect their enthusiasm.

Overall, these findings are very positive. The vast majority of AAE parents understand, support, and use standards successfully. The only potential negative consequence of standards-based education is the PPTs feeling that standards demand more instructional planning time. Given the high percentage of PPTs who are also employed, we know that time is a precious commodity. The additional time requirements accompanied with standards does affect the enthusiasm of a significant portion of AAE parents.

Networks

The survey also contained a few questions concerning social networks. These connections are important insofar as they tell us how parents came to join the AAE and how linked they are with others. Table 7 reports the results of the question about how the PPTs first heard about the AAE. Respondents were allowed to choose multiple responses. About two-thirds of the parents heard about the AAE from a friend and 23% heard about it at church or from a fellow church member. These were the two most popular responses as the other choices appeared much less often.

<i>Item</i>	<i>Percent</i>
a. From a friend	66.0%
b. At church or from a fellow church member	23.0%
c. From an acquaintance	9.4%
d. From a family member	8.5%
e. From a co-worker	5.5%
f. From a neighbor	5.1%
g. An information meeting	4.3%
h. Driving by/seeing site constructed	3.4%
i. A newspaper article	3.0%
j. An advertisement	1.3%

Another important measure is one's previous involvement with the home-schooling movement before joining the AAE. We asked the PPTs how involved they were with the home-schooling movement prior to the AAE. Table 8 provides the results. About 42% of the respondents stated that they had no previous involvement with the home-schooling movement. The remaining 58% of the sample are spread fairly evenly across the other

levels of involvement. Only 19% of PPTs report that they were greatly involved prior to joining the AAE.

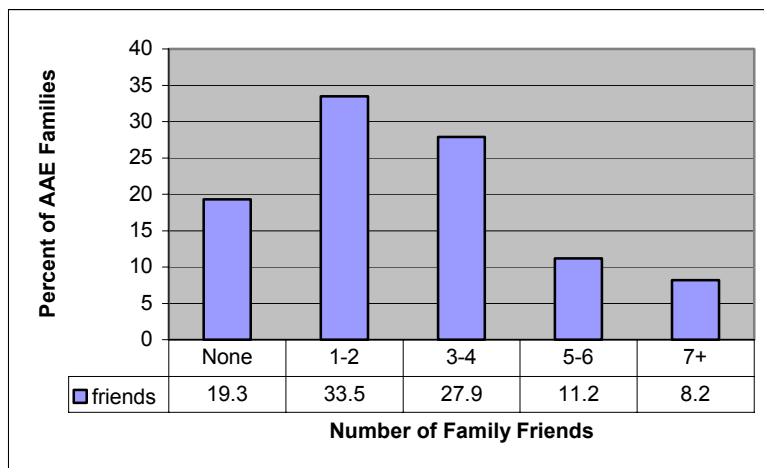
We also cross-tabulated this previous involvement variable with the PPTs years of home educating experience. The correlation was nearly perfect as 96% of those who were “not at all” involved with the home-schooling movement had five or less years of home educating experience (which implies that they had never home schooled prior to joining the AAE). As a whole then, 60% of PPTs have previous home-schooling experience while 40% were not at all connected with this movement before they came to the AAE.

Table 8: Previous Home-schooling Involvement

<i>Involvement</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Not at all	41.7
Marginally involved	18.4
Somewhat involved	21.1
Greatly involved	18.9
TOTAL	100

Lastly in respect to networks, we asked the PPTs about how many AAE families that they are close friends with. Figure 8 displays the results. About 19% of the parents report that they are not friends with any other AAE families. One-third of the respondents indicate that they are close friends with one or two other families. Nearly 20% of the PPTs are close friends with five or more other AAE families. This population does appear to be very well connected with each other.

Figure 8: Number of AAE Family Friends



Enrollment Motivations

As in last year’s case, we spent considerable time in the survey trying to determine exactly why the parents decided to enroll their children at the AAE. These enrollment motivations serve as an excellent description of the population and reflect the different types of people who come to the AAE. We repeated the majority of the questions that we asked last year. We excluded a few questions because they were redundant and added a few new ones to better reflect the full range of motivations. Respondents were asked to rate each of the reasons on a scale of 1 to 5 with “1” meaning that the reason is not important at all and “5” meaning that the reason is extremely important.

Table 9 reports the average (mean) scores for each item in descending order. The items received remarkably similar degrees of support in both years. The top two reasons that parents enrolled their children at the AAE in both years reflect their concerns about the quality of teaching and the cultural environment and negative influences at other schools. Item (c) was added this year and the vast majority of parents were also attracted to the AAE because it offers resources and support for home schoolers.

<i>Item</i>	<i>1999 Mean</i>	<i>2000 Mean</i>
a. Concerned about the quality of teaching at other schools	4.50	4.57
b. Concerned about the cultural environment/negative influences at other schools	4.46	4.54
c. The AAE offers resources and support for home schoolers	N/A ^a	4.47
d. It provides me with the opportunity to use diverse and innovative curriculum	4.38	4.40
e. My child(ren) prefer the AAE and/or home schooling over other schools	N/A	4.39
f. Concerned about the curriculum at other schools	4.33	4.33
g. At home during the day regularly and want to provide guidance to child(ren)	4.23	4.10
h. Concerned about the safety and security of my child(ren) at other schools	4.21	N/A
i. The AAE’s educational program is of superior quality	3.97	4.18
j. The AAE is an important part of the charter school reform movement	N/A	4.07
k. It provides me with the opportunity to give my child(ren) religious instruction	3.90	4.00
l. The AAE’s strength and focus on science education	3.67	3.75
m. It supports my religious beliefs	3.58	N/A
n. It provides me with the opportunity to use liberal, nontraditional curriculum	3.58	3.56
o. I do not trust the government’s ability to provide an adequate education	3.53	3.61
p. I have always believed in the philosophy of home schooling	3.53	3.48
q. My child(ren) have unique abilities that would not be fostered in other schools	3.33	3.53
r. The testing programs at other schools are inappropriate	3.18	3.26
s. My family knows other families whose children have been successful at the AAE	N/A	3.22
t. It is not the government’s responsibility to provide public education	3.07	3.06
u. My family has close friends whose children are also enrolled at the AAE	2.64	N/A
v. My child had a difficult experience at his/her previous school	N/A	2.59
w. The scheduling of other schools is too inflexible for my family’s situation	2.55	2.54
x. My child(ren) have special learning needs that cannot be met in other schools	2.32	2.17
y. Child was often treated poorly by other children at his/her previous school	1.99	N/A
z. Child was often in trouble for treating other children poorly at previous school	1.18	N/A

^a Not applicable (question not asked in that year)

The opportunity to use diverse and innovative curriculum is also quite important to PPTs. Another item (e) which we added this year concerns the children’s preferences. The majority of these parents’ children simply prefer the AAE and/or home schooling. The concern about curriculum at other schools item (f) received identical levels of support in both years.

The quality of the AAE’s educational program (item i) and their strength in science education (item l) are slightly more important for the PPTs this year than previously. Item (j) is new this year. The belief that the AAE is an important part of the charter school reform movement is a salient enrollment motivation for this population. Indeed, this item received much greater support than item (p) concerning beliefs in the philosophy of home schooling. The opportunity to provide religious instruction is slightly more important this year than it was last year. The items that remain gradually diminish as important reasons for the average AAE parent.

AAE Involvement

Respondents were also asked a series of questions to determine how they perceive their involvement with the AAE. Table 10 provides the distribution of responses to seven attitudinal items.

<i>Item</i>	<i>Not at all (%)</i>	<i>Very little (%)</i>	<i>To some extent (%)</i>	<i>To a great extent (%)</i>
a. Has your involvement with the AAE significantly diminished the free time that you previously had available?	17.8	27.1	35.6	19.6
b. Has your involvement had any negative financial consequences (i.e., large purchases, forced to work less)?	66.1	19.7	12.9	1.3
c. To what extent do you think the home-schooling movement is uniquely contributing in preparing students to be tomorrow’s leaders?	0.0	0.0	22.8	77.2
d. To what extent do you think that the charter school reform movement is uniquely contributing in preparing students to be tomorrow’s leaders?	0.0	2.7	38.8	58.5
e. To what extent do you think that the AAE is uniquely contributing in preparing students to be tomorrow’s leaders?	0.0	1.3	27.8	70.9
f. To what extent do you feel that your participation at the AAE sets an example for how families can improve the schools?	1.3	3.1	35.4	60.2
g. If given the opportunity, do you feel that the majority of Americans are able to participate in educational programs like the AAE?	4.9	20.8	51.3	23.0

Item (a) concerns the availability of free time. About 20% of PPTs say that their involvement with the AAE has diminished their free time to a great extent. For another 36%, this is true to some extent. Item (b) follows this theme and inquires about negative financial consequences. Money constraints are much less of a problem as only 14% believe that their involvement has hurt their finances to some or to a great extent.

The next three items in Table 10 ask respondents whether they feel that the home-schooling movement, the charter school movement, and the AAE are preparing students to be tomorrow’s leaders. Nearly all of the responses fall within the “to some extent” or “to a great extent” categories and not a single PPT feels that any of these are “not at all” preparing students. So, the last category serves as the most important point of comparison. The home-schooling movement receives the most praise as 77% believe it is uniquely preparing students. This is followed closely by the AAE of which 71% feel it is greatly contributing. The charter school movement receives the (relatively) lowest degree of support. Only 59% believe that it is uniquely preparing students.

Item (f) concerns the extent to which PPTs feel that their participation at the AAE sets an example for how families can improve schools. A full 60% feel their involvement does have this larger consequence to a great extent. Only 4% say that this likelihood is very little or not at all. Item (g) takes this theme further and asks whether the majority of Americans would be able to participate in an educational program like the AAE. Here, respondents are slightly more pessimistic. Only 23% believe that this is true to a great extent. However, just over one-half of PPTs think this is true to some extent. About 26% are doubtful, comprising the “not at all” and “very little” categories.

Next, PPTs were asked to evaluate their participation at the AAE (see Table 11). First, we wanted to determine whether parents see their participation as part of a larger school reform movement. Exactly one-half of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement and another 31% agreed somewhat. Most parents clearly do see their participation as something larger. No respondents strongly disagreed with the statement and only one disagreed somewhat. The next item regards the personal efficacy that the AAE has had. PPTs do believe overwhelmingly that the AAE has made them more effective teachers as 62% strongly agreed and 20% agreed somewhat.

<i>Item</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Somewhat Agree</i>	<i>Neither Agree nor Disagree</i>	<i>Somewhat Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
“I see my participation at the AAE as an important part of a larger school reform movement”	50.0%	31.0%	18.5%	0.4%	0.0%
“My participation at the AAE has made me much more effective in educating my child(ren)”	61.9%	20.3%	13.4%	3.5%	0.9%

To further explore how parents view their involvement at the AAE, we asked them to identify what they value most with respect to their children’s education. Five statements were provided and respondents were instructed to choose only one. Just over two-thirds chose the statement (d) which concerns confidence and poise to pursue opportunities. The next most popular response is the foundation of religious knowledge item which 15% of PPTs chose. For around 11%, it is most important that their children appreciate intellectual and cultural values. The first two items are quite particularistic and each received only 3% of responses.

Table 12: What PPTs Value Most in Children’s Education	
	%
a. Getting high scores on standardized tests	3.1
b. Attaining specific occupational skills	3.1
c. Appreciating intellectual and cultural values	11.4
d. Gaining confidence and poise needed to pursue social, civic, and economic opportunities	68.0
e. Providing a solid foundation of religious knowledge	14.5

Finally, in respect to AAE involvement, we asked parents to think about their responsibility to their children versus that to all children. Two statements were provided and respondents could agree with both equally. The first is more individualistic, concerning their own children. The second is more collectivist, concerning the well-being of all children. Slightly more than one-half of the respondents agree more with the first statement. A notable 12% of PPTs agree more with the collectivist statement concerning all children. The last 36% agree with both statements equally. The bottom line here is that many parents do see their participation in a larger light—helping to create good schools from which all children can benefit.

Table 13: PPT Views about their Children versus Schools	
A. <i>I am responsible for giving my child(ren) a head-start in the competition to get ahead</i>	
B. <i>I am responsible for helping to create good schools from which all children can benefit</i>	
Agree more with statement A than B	52.0%
Agree more with statement B than A	11.9%
Agree with statements A and B equally	36.1%

AAE Attitudes

Respondents were also asked several attitudinal questions regarding the AAE. We repeated a question that was asked in the last school year about how parents perceive their role in educating their children vis-à-vis the AAE’s role. Table 14 reports that there are notable differences across the two years. First, the percentage of parents who feel

completely responsible (a) decreased by nearly half as only 12% chose this response this year compared to 21% last year. Those who say that they only rely on the AAE to supplement their children’s education (b) also decreased this year.

In the next two categories (c and d) there were dramatic increases. Almost twice as many PPTs said this year that the responsibility is evenly divided (25.4% compared to 13.5%). About five times as many parents now argue that the AAE is largely responsible and that they are playing only a supplementary role (7.3% compared to 1.6%). Overall, parents are now more likely to see AAE as having a larger role in the education of their children.

Table 14: PPT Views about their versus AAE’s Role, 1999 and 2000

	1999 Percent	2000 Percent
a. I am completely responsible for educating my child(ren)	21.1	11.6
b. I am largely responsible and only rely on the AAE to supplement their education	63.7	55.6
c. The responsibility is divided equally between the AAE and myself	13.5	25.4
d. The AAE is largely responsible and I only supplement it	1.6	7.3
e. The AAE is completely responsible for educating my child(ren)	0.0	0.0

Table 15 reports the findings from four items concerning parents’ attitudes toward the AAE. Item (a) regards special learning needs and is not applicable for about two-thirds of the respondents. Of those PPTs whose children have special learning needs, the majority (18.7%) believe that the AAE is meeting their children’s needs to a great extent. Very few parents feel that the AAE is doing very little or is not at all meeting the needs of these children. Item (b) is an overall satisfaction measure and indicates that over three-quarters of PPTs are extremely satisfied with the AAE.

Item (c) concerns the efficacy of the AAE. A full 80% of respondents feel, to a great extent, that the AAE is a dynamic, effective organization which is capable of continuous improvement. Another 18% believe that this is true to some extent. The last item in this table (d) asks parents to think about their peers and whether they question the AAE’s recommendations. These responses are more evenly divided. About 13% feel that families find it necessary to question the AAE’s educational recommendations to a great extent. Roughly 39% think that this is the case to some extent. So, this is a concern for slightly more than half of PPTs. Another 39% feel that this occurs very little. About 9% believe this never happens.

Overall, PPTs are very satisfied with their AAE experience. The first three items in Table 15 show that there is remarkable enthusiasm for the organization. Item (d) does deviate from this trend as most parents do feel that families find it necessary to question the educational recommendations made by the AAE. Since parents are now seeing the AAE as having a larger role in their children’s education (see Table 14), they apparently (and understandably) tend to scrutinize the AAE’s educational program.

Table 15: Attitudes about the AAE

<i>Item</i>	<i>Not at all (%)</i>	<i>Very little (%)</i>	<i>To some extent (%)</i>	<i>To a great extent (%)</i>	<i>Not applicable (%)</i>
a. Extent to which child(ren)'s special learning needs are being met?	4.0	2.5	9.1	18.7	65.7
b. How satisfied are you with your child(ren)'s experience at AAE?	0.0	0.9	22.1	77.1	
c. AAE is a dynamic, effective organization capable of improvement?	0.0	2.3	17.6	80.2	
d. Extent to which families question recommendations made by AAE?	9.2	38.8	38.8	13.2	

The last item concerning attitudes about the AAE attempts to determine whether parents see the organization individualistically, as an asset to their home education, or in a more collectivist fashion as part of the charter school reform movement. Almost one-third of PPTs believe that the AAE is more of an organizational resource for home schoolers. One-half feel that it is both an asset and an important part of a larger movement. Only 18% interpret it as more a part of the charter school movement.

Table 16: PPT Views about the AAE

<i>A. The AAE is an organizational resource for home schoolers</i> <i>B. The AAE is an important part of the charter school reform movement</i>	
Agree more with statement A than B	32.3%
Agree more with statement B than A	17.5%
Agree with statements A and B equally	50.2%

General Attitudes

Survey respondents were also asked several questions pertaining to their attitudes about educational issues in general. Item (a) is a statement about the failure of public schools to adequately educate children. Well over half of PPTs (62%) strongly agree with this statement and another 28% agree somewhat. About 10% of parents are less critical, ranging from neither agreeing nor disagreeing to strongly disagreeing. There is even greater consensus that improving the public schools is important (item b). A little more than three-quarters of PPTs strongly agree while another 16% agree somewhat.

Item (c) receives even more support as 88% believe that creating alternatives to public schools is important. AAE parents are clearly concerned about education. It is interesting that they are more likely to support the improvement of public schools than they are to criticize them. Not surprisingly, they are most likely to support alternatives (such as the AAE).

<i>Item</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Somewhat Agree</i>	<i>Neither Agree nor Disagree</i>	<i>Somewhat Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
a. The public schools are failing to adequately educate children	62.1	28.4	3.9	4.3	1.3
b. Improving the public school system is of vital importance	77.6	15.9	2.6	2.2	1.7
c. Creating more alternatives to public schools is important	87.5	8.2	3.9	0.0	0.4
d. Educational research can help improve student achievement	66.2	26.0	5.2	1.3	1.3
e. Computer technology can help improve student achievement	64.1	32.0	2.2	1.7	0.0
f. Home education builds stronger families	81.8	14.7	3.5	0.0	0.0

Two items were asked which concern student achievement. Given the Lewis Center’s focus on educational research, we asked PPTs whether they feel that research can help improve student achievement. Two-thirds strongly agreed with the statement. Another 26% agreed somewhat in the potentiality of research. We followed up with an item on computer technology and 64% strongly agreed that such technology can assist in improving student achievement. Finally, we simply asked whether home education builds stronger families. Over 80% strongly agreed with this statement and 15% agreed somewhat. The attitudes of the AAE population are very well aligned with the mission of the organization.

Civic Engagement

The last theme of this report on the findings concerns civic engagement. AAE participants have taken on a major responsibility and are likely to have made tremendous sacrifices in their decision to home educate their children. We wanted to estimate their citizenship behavior in order to determine how active AAE parents are in the public sphere. Seven acts of civic engagement were provided and respondents were asked if they have done the act, if they would do it, if they might do it, or if they would never do it.

Table 18 presents the findings of this previous and potential civic engagement. These items form a scale of participation as the acts increasingly require more effort and determination. The first two items (a and b) are in regard to voting for officials and voting on specific issues. Nearly 9 out of 10 PPTs do vote regularly for officials and 86% vote regularly on specific issues. This is clearly a high rate of voter participation and only one respondent indicated that they would never vote for officials.

Table 18: PPT Previous and Potential Civic Engagement

	<i>Have done</i>	<i>Would do</i>	<i>Might do</i>	<i>Would never do</i>
a. Voting regularly for officials	89.4%	6.6%	3.5%	0.4%
b. Voting regularly on specific issues and referenda	86.3%	10.6%	3.1%	0.0%
c. Signing a petition regarding educational matters	73.9%	16.8%	8.8%	0.4%
d. Attending a school board meeting	52.4%	27.6%	19.1%	0.9%
e. Writing letters requesting policy changes	38.2%	22.3%	36.4%	3.2%
f. Speaking at a school board meeting	17.3%	29.2%	40.3%	13.3%
g. Attending demonstrations over school policies	11.2%	29.6%	45.7%	13.5%

Item (c) concerns signing a petition regarding educational matters. Nearly three-quarters of the PPTs say that they have signed such a petition before. This again illustrates how important educational issues are to this population. Another 17% (who have never signed an education-related petition) indicate that they would perform this act if given the opportunity. The next item of civic engagement is school board meeting attendance. Slightly more than half of AAE parents have attended a board meeting. In the public school system, this is an important venue in which parents can express their concerns. This high rate reflects the determination of AAE parents. Another 28% say that they would attend a school board meeting and 19% say they might do it.

Next we included an item about letter writing. Contacting public officials through written letters is a long-held practice of citizen attempts to influence policy. A notable 38% of PPTs have written such letters. Another 22% say that they would engage in this form of civic participation. Slightly more than one-third might write letters and 3% say that they would never perform such an act. The next concerns speaking at a school board meeting. Naturally, this implies that they must first be willing to attend a meeting. Being an active participant is a higher level of engagement and fewer AAE parents have previously performed this act (only 17%). However, nearly 30% say that they would speak at a school board meeting and another 40% might do so if the issue was pressing enough. About 13% indicate that they would never do such a thing.

Finally, the most active form of civic engagement that we explored is the attendance of demonstrations concerning school policies. The collective gathering of people at a public demonstration serves to unite a constituency for a particular cause and gives the movement voice. Only 11% of PPTs have attended school-related demonstrations. However, 30% are willing to do so and another 46% might be compelled to attend a demonstration. About 14% indicate that they are not willing to do so.

The patterns in Table 18 are quite consistent. As the acts of civic engagement require more energy and determination, their frequency of occurrence dwindles. Moreover, the amount of people who state that they would never engage in such actions increases as the engagement becomes more risky. Nonetheless, the percentages of PPTs who would or might engage in such acts are remarkably high. This population clearly has a high degree of civic engagement.

To look more closely at the civic engagement question we focused explicitly on what AAE parents have previously done. Through a statistical procedure known as cluster analysis, we analyzed the seven types of civic action and determined that the AAE population contains four groups of people who have experienced different levels of previous civic engagement. These four groups comprise a scale of engagement which ranges from more traditional actions to more confrontational, risky ones. The first group we label as “conventional” participants. They comprise 31% of the AAE population. The largest group are the “moderates” as 48% of the PPTs have these forms of experience. The “assertive” group makes up 11% of the population. Lastly, 11% of AAE parents comprise the “activist” group.

Table 19 better describes the four groups by providing the degree of previous engagement on each of the seven actions for each of the groups. Conventional participants are less likely than the other groups to engage in all the forms except letter writing. Overall, more people have attended board meetings than have written letters. However, letter writing is a more traditional form of civic engagement that requires less effort. So, while 41% of the conventional participants have written letters, only 3% have attended board meetings. Notice that the trend is the opposite for the moderates. Here, nearly two-thirds have attended board meetings while only 24% have written letters. This reflects a different style of civic participation. The moderates apparently feel that their presence at these meetings is more efficacious than any letter that they could write. The moderates are also more likely to vote and to have signed a petition than the conventional participants.

Table 19: Typology of Previous Civic Engagement

<i>Type</i>	<i>Voted for Officials</i>	<i>Voted on Issues</i>	<i>Signed Petition</i>	<i>Attended Board Meeting</i>	<i>Written Letters</i>	<i>Spoke at Board Meeting</i>	<i>Attended Demon- stration</i>
Conventional	78.8%	78.8%	34.9%	3.0%	40.9%	0.0%	0.0%
Moderate	93.3%	89.4%	88.5%	64.4%	24.0%	0.0%	1.0%
Assertive	100.0%	91.3%	100.0%	100.0%	60.9%	100.0%	0.0%
Activist	91.3%	91.3%	95.7%	95.7%	73.9%	60.9%	100.0%
Total	89.4%	86.6%	74.1%	52.8%	38.4%	17.1%	11.1%

All of those who comprise the assertive group vote regularly for officials, have signed a petition, and have attended and spoken at a board meeting. More than half (61%) of these assertive participants have also written letters. The activists are the last group and they are defined according to their demonstration attendance. Notice that only 1% of moderates and none from the other groups have attended a demonstration. The activists have very high levels of all forms of participation. They do have a much lower degree of speaking at board meetings compared to the assertive group. Activists prefer the demonstration and to “take it to the streets.”

Conclusion

This report has summarized the major findings from the AAE's 2000 Annual Family Survey. This survey is an important source of data and an integral part of the Lewis Center's ongoing research mission. Where possible, we have compared this school year's data with those of last year's. Most of these comparisons indicate that the AAE has remained quite stable over this period. There are two notable exceptions (which are likely to be interrelated): primary parent/teachers are now more likely to be employed and they are now more likely to see the AAE as having a greater responsibility in the education of their children.

This first report from the 2000 survey data serves as a useful snapshot of the AAE participants. Our next step will be to analyze the relationships between the various themes that we presented here. Do parent and student demographics affect one's enrollment motivations or their involvement with the AAE? Does one's instructional practices and experience affect one's attitudes about the AAE? Are those who are most concerned about education more likely to participate in more confrontational forms of civic engagement? These and many other questions will be thoroughly explored through this data set. This database is a significant archive to which student achievement and instructional practices data can be linked and analyzed. We look forward to our ongoing collaboration in this important research project.