



# STUDENT OPINIONS MATTER TO US: SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Operation: SMUSH Phase I Survey Report

2008 Social Justice Youth Leadership  
Summer Program Project Initiative

OPERATION: SMUSH  
**Student Opinions  
Matter to Us**  
SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Everyone is a potential winner.  
Some people are disguised as losers.  
**(We) don't let their appearances fool us.**  
(Taken from "The One Minute Manager" by Kenneth Blanchard)

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## **ABOUT HIGHLY FLAVORED, INC.**

Highly Flavored, Inc. is a community-based organization committed to assisting in the leadership development of children and teenagers in at-risk situations and/or communities through life-skills management training, empowerment programs and mentoring support services. Highly Flavored, Inc. participants develop the skills to make wise choices and contribute in a positive manner to their communities.

## **ABOUT OPERATION: SMUSH (STUDENTS MOVING UNTIL SOMETHING HAPPENS)**

During the summer of 2008, Highly Flavored, Inc. (HF, Inc.) ran its first *2008 Social Justice Youth Leadership Summer Program*. The program was designed to teach seven Gary, Indiana teenage residents the impact social justice issues have on their city. One main project that came out of the summer program was **Operation: SMUSH** (Students Moving Until Something Happens). This group was formed by six of the high school students who completed the 2008 program.

### **Project Mission:**

Operation: SMUSH will identify problems and create solutions within the Gary Community School Corporation.

### **Group Composition of Operation: SMUSH**

Operation: SMUSH will be comprised of high school residents of Gary, Indiana in grades 9-12. Students will possess a genuine passion to create positive change within Gary public high schools.

## SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Operation: SMUSH is a three phase project. This survey report includes the results of Phase I.

### Phase I – Conduct a City-Wide Survey

A six-question survey was distributed to students who attend Gary public and charter high schools during the 2008/2009 school year.

Social justice students compiled the following statements for the survey:

1. My school's staff and administration cares about their students.
2. Gary public schools and Gary charter schools are equal when it comes to education and other resources for students.
3. I am happy with the conditions of my school.
4. I am (or was) satisfied with the Gary School Corporation.
5. I want to join **Operation: SMUSH** (Students Moving Until Something Happens)
6. Where would you like to see improvements in your school?
  - o Education
  - o School safety (guns, gangs, etc.)
  - o Sports programs
  - o *"Students just need something to do!"*
  - o Better technology (computers, classroom equipment)
  - o Other \_\_\_\_\_

## SURVEY METHODOLOGY

### Method of survey distribution

1. Letters were sent to Gary, Indiana public and charter high school principals to obtain permission to distribute the survey to their student bodies. Letters were signed by a social justice student and a HF, Inc. Senior Mentor. Some students met opposition by their school officials when they followed-up to the letter that was sent. Some officials felt the survey would generate negativity among the student body.
2. Surveys were distributed in a grassroots method where social justice students handed out the survey to their peers in and out of school.
3. Social justice students completed surveys through phone interviews with their peers.
4. Social justice students who did not attend Gary public or charter high schools solicited the help of their friends who did attend Gary schools. Two social justice students attend private schools outside the City of Gary.
5. The survey was available on the Internet. Social justice students distributed the survey link via email for their peers to complete.

HF, Inc. received a total of 236 survey returns between January-March 2009. Results were entered into a database and checked for data entry accuracy.

#### HF, Inc.'s Quick Observations About Responses

Students surveyed from both public and charter Gary high schools do not feel their school's *"staff and administration care about their students."* It is also interesting to note that Technology and Education are the top two areas students would *"like to see improvements"* on within their schools.

## SURVEY RESPONDENT HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

The basic demographics of the survey respondents show the largest group, 73.5% (174/236) are from Gary, Indiana public high schools. Twenty-six percent of the students (62/236) participating in the survey are from Gary, Indiana charter schools.

<i>What school do you attend?</i>	Response Percent	Response Count
Emerson Visual Performing Arts	15.3%	36
Lew Wallace High School	7.6%	18
Thea Bowman Leadership Academy	26.3%	62
Theodore Roosevelt High School	8.1%	19
West Side High School	<b>30.1%</b>	71
William Wirt High School	12.7%	30
		<b>236</b>

<i>What grade are you in?</i>	Response Percent	Response Count
9 <sup>th</sup> Grade	18.6%	27
10 <sup>th</sup> Grade	20.0%	29
11 <sup>th</sup> Grade	<b>61.4%</b>	89

*Please note 91 students skipped this question.*

There are around 3,200 Gary public high schools students in grades 9-11; this survey captures about 6% of that population. With approximately 250 charter school students in grades 9-11 in the city of Gary; this survey represents 25% of the charter high school population in those grades.

## THE BASICS

Overall, 34% (80/236) of those completing the survey responded “not at all” or “not really” to whether they felt their *“school’s staff and administration cares about their students.”*

Your Opinion	Not at All	Not Really	No Opinion	Somewhat	Definitely
My school’s staff and administration cares about their students.	13.2% (31)	20.9% (49)	14.5% (34)	<b>31.1%</b> <b>(73)</b>	20.4% (48)
Gary public schools and Gary charter schools are equal when it comes to education and other resources for students.	<b>38.6%</b> <b>(91)</b>	25.8% (61)	18.2% (43)	13.6% (32)	3.8% (9)
I am happy with the conditions of my school.	<b>26.9%</b> <b>(63)</b>	21.8% (51)	14.5% (34)	26.1% (61)	10.7% (25)
I am (or was) satisfied with the Gary school system.	<b>28.8%</b> <b>(68)</b>	22.0% (52)	22.0% (52)	22.0% (52)	5.1% (12)
I want to join Operation: SMUSH	23.5% (54)	15.7% (36)	<b>25.2%</b> <b>(58)</b>	20.0% (46)	15.7% (36)

*Please note: Eighty-eight percent of charter high school students agreed their administration “Somewhat” or “Definitely” cares about them.*

*Please see the addendum to this report for separate public and charter school results.*

## THE SPECIFICS

Seventy-three percent of public high school students voice Education and Technology are the topics needing improvement in their schools followed by School Safety (guns, gangs, etc.) at 58%.

“Students just need something to do” is the main concern of charter high school students with a 62.7% rating; “Sports programs” is the number two concern at 54.9%.

These are combined results.

<i>Where would you like to see improvements in your school?</i>	Response Percent	Response Count
Education	60.9%	126
School safety (guns, gangs, etc.)	49.8%	103
Sports programs	52.7%	109
<i>Students just need something to do!</i>	55.6%	115
Technology (computers, classroom equipment)	<b>61.8%</b>	128

*Please see the addendum to this report for separate public and charter school results.*

**QUOTABLE COMMENTS ...**

Students were able to contribute additional comments outside of the standard survey questions.

**Regarding teaching staff and administration ...**

"Staff needs a change."

"(We need) teachers that value educating instead of getting money."

"(We need) new teachers with fresh ideas."

"(We need) teachers who care about us learning."

**Regarding school safety ...**

"Focus on safety. My old school was next to a police station. Now we are not near one."

"We must keep our schools safe!"

"Control stealing!"

**General comments ...**

"(There is) more focus on attire than education."

"Our opinions are really overlooked in things that are going to affect us."

"The world is constantly changing; we need to upgrade!"

## CONCLUSION: WHAT CAN WE DO?

HF, Inc. social justice students were excited to find that over 35% (82/236) of public and charter high school students completing the survey were interested in joining **Operation: SMUSH**.

### Operation: SMUSH moves into Phase II:

1. Distribute the results of the Operation: SMUSH Phase I Survey Report.
  - o Gary Community School Corporation
  - o Gary Post Tribune
  - o Highly Flavored, Inc. Board of Directors
  - o Legacy Foundation
  - o Other community educators and leaders
2. Contact students interested in joining Operation: SMUSH via phone or email before the end of the 2008/2009 school year to thank them for their interest and explain next steps.
3. Set a date to meet with interested students during the summer of 2009, prior to the beginning of the 2009/2010 school year.

## ADDENDUM

**ADDENDUM – ORIGINAL SURVEY**

**STUDENT OPINIONS MATTER TO US ...**

We are a group of teenagers who live in Gary. As a fellow student, we would like your input on your experiences in high school. We are starting an organization entitled:

**Operation: SMUSH (Students Moving Until Something Happens).**

Please answer these five (5) short questions and let us know if you are interested in joining our group to make positive changes at schools in Gary, Indiana.

Thanks for your help!  
 Student Founders of **Operation: SMUSH**

Your opinion ...	Scale of Importance – Circle one				
	Not at all	Not really	No Opinion	Some-what	Definitely
My school's staff and administration cares about their students.	1	2	3	4	5
Gary public schools and Gary charter schools are equal when it comes to education and other resources for students.	1	2	3	4	5
I am happy with the conditions of my school.	1	2	3	4	5
I am (or was) satisfied with the Gary school system.	1	2	3	4	5
I want to join <b>Operation: SMUSH</b> (Students Moving Until Something Happens)	1	2	3	4	5

Where would you like to see improvements in your school (check all that apply)?

- Education
- School safety (guns, gangs, etc.)
- Sports programs
- "Students just need something to do!"
- Better technology (computers, classroom equipment)
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Optional information – If you want to join Operation: SMUSH, we must have this information:**

Your name: _____ What grade are you in? _____	Your phone number: _____ Email address: _____
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THANKS A LOT – YOU WILL HEAR FROM US SOON.

## Addendum – Gary Charter High School Survey Results

Your Opinion	Not at All	Not Really	No Opinion	Somewhat	Definitely
My school's staff and administration cares about their students.	0.0%	3.2% (2)	8.1% (5)	38.7% (24)	<b>50.0%</b> <b>(31)</b>
Gary public schools and Gary charter schools are equal when it comes to education and other resources for students.	<b>35.5%</b> <b>(22)</b>	29.0% (18)	14.5% (9)	16.1% (10)	4.8% (3)
I am happy with the conditions of my school.	0.0%	14.5% (9)	9.7% (6)	<b>48.4%</b> <b>(30)</b>	27.4% (17)
I am (or was) satisfied with the Gary school system.	17.7% (11)	<b>25.8%</b> <b>(16)</b>	24.2% (15)	22.6% (14)	9.7% (6)
I want to join Operation: SMUSH	16.4% (10)	6.6% (4)	23.0% (14)	<b>31.3%</b> <b>(19)</b>	23.0% (14)

<i>Where would you like to see improvements in your school?</i>	Response Percent	Response Count
Education	23.5%	12
School safety (guns, gangs, etc.)	23.5%	12
Sports programs	54.9%	28
<i>Students just need something to do!</i>	<b>62.7%</b>	32
Technology (computers, classroom equipment)	29.4%	15

## Addendum – Gary Public High School Survey Results

Your Opinion	Not at All	Not Really	No Opinion	Somewhat	Definitely
My school's staff and administration cares about their students.	18.1% (31)	27.5% (47)	16.4% (28)	<b>28.7%</b> <b>(49)</b>	9.4% (16)
Gary public schools and Gary charter schools are equal when it comes to education and other resources for students.	<b>39.8%</b> <b>(68)</b>	24.6% (42)	19.3% (33)	12.9% (22)	3.5% (6)
I am happy with the conditions of my school.	<b>37.3%</b> <b>(63)</b>	24.3% (41)	16.6% (28)	18.3% (31)	3.6% (6)
I am (or was) satisfied with the Gary school system.	<b>33.3%</b> <b>(57)</b>	20.5% (35)	21.1% (36)	21.6% (37)	3.5% (6)
I want to join Operation: SMUSH	<b>25.9%</b> <b>(43)</b>	19.3% (32)	25.3% (42)	16.3% (27)	13.3% (22)

<i>Where would you like to see improvements in your school?</i>	Response Percent	Response Count
Education	<b>72.9%</b>	113
School safety (guns, gangs, etc.)	58.1%	90
Sports programs	51.6%	80
<i>Students just need something to do!</i>	53.5%	83
Technology (computers, classroom equipment)	<b>72.9%</b>	113

**SNAPSHOT: COMBINED CHARTER AND HIGH SCHOOL SURVEY RESULTS**

<b>Your Opinion</b>	<b>Not at All</b>	<b>Not Really</b>	<b>No Opinion</b>	<b>Somewhat</b>	<b>Definitely</b>
My school's staff and administration cares about their students.	13.2% (31)	20.9% (49)	14.5% (34)	<b>31.3%</b> <b>(73)</b>	20.4% (48)
Gary public schools and Gary charter schools are equal when it comes to education and other resources for students.	<b>38.6%</b> <b>(91)</b>	25.8% (61)	18.2% (43)	13.6% (32)	3.8% (9)
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I want to join Operation: SMUSH	23.5% (54)	15.7% (36)	<b>25.2%</b> <b>(58)</b>	20.0% (46)	15.7% (36)

<b><i>Where would you like to see improvements in your school?</i></b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Education	60.9%	126
School safety (guns, gangs, etc.)	49.8%	103
Sports programs	52.7%	109
<i>Students just need something to do!</i>	55.6%	115
Technology (computers, classroom equipment)	<b>61.8%</b>	128