

### General notes and background

In my experience, treating these interviews like a survey is not as constructive as thinking of it as an extended conversation. Here's why. If a parent has the sense that you are working through a checklist of questions, they will most often give you the answer that is the quickest, the least controversial and the most polite. This answer will be accurate. They are not lying. But it is often not the full answer. Parents rarely choose to change their child's school based on just one factor. We want, and need, to hear the whole story.

If you approach this as a conversation, and work at actively listening to what a parent says (asking for clarification, asking for examples to help you understand, occasionally offering a rephrased reiteration of what you heard and verifying that is what they meant), you are more likely to eventually hear the full, multi-faceted answer. **The way to get a complete answer is to keep them talking until they start repeating themselves.**

Please note: The purpose of exit interviews is not to gather statistically significant, quantitative data. Exit interviews are valuable for gathering qualitative data. They are a one-on-one focus group, not a Gallup poll.

### Sample introduction

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_. I'm a member (or chair) of the \_\_\_\_\_ school board. Because we want our school to be constantly improving and growing, we are working to get input on what we've done well and what we can improve. Would you be willing to share your experiences with me—and do you have time now or is there another time that would be better for you?

### Questions

1. I understand that although you've had \_\_\_\_\_ enrolled at \_\_\_\_\_ before, you've chosen to enroll him/her/them somewhere else this year. Would you tell me why? [after the first answer] Are there any other reasons as well? [keep asking until they tell you there are no more reasons]
2. Are there things you believe \_\_\_\_\_ did well? [after the first answer] Anything else?
3. What are the things you think \_\_\_\_\_ should improve? [after the first answer] What else? [after the next answer] Anything else?
4. Is there anything we could do differently that would persuade you to try \_\_\_\_\_ again in the future?

### **Sample closing**

Thank you so much for your time. The board has asked me, and a couple others, to contact various families and report back. Are you comfortable with me sharing the information you told me today? Would you prefer to be anonymous?

We fully support and honor your responsibility to make the best possible choice for your child. We hope we could be that choice in the future and thank you again for helping us learn and improve.

Would you be interested in closing with prayer? [Any prayer should be short and focus on asking the Lord's blessing on the child and family.]

### **A couple dos and don'ts**

- Do take notes. You won't remember it all afterward.
- Do stay calm regardless of what they say.
- Don't try to correct their perceptions or erroneous information. Even if you aren't trying to argue with them, there is a high probability it will sound that way to them. If something is egregiously wrong you may say, "That hasn't been my understanding. Would you mind if I check that out and get back to you?" (If this happens, ***be sure to get back to them.***)
- Do try to find out if there is a family, person or staff member at the school with whom they have a friendship. These are the people who may be able to change poor perceptions in the future.