

# Parental satisfaction with school – determining factors

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The article presents the results from a questionnaire survey on the opinion of parents about pre-school and early school education conducted in 2011. This analysis focuses on school assessment by parents who have at least one child attending school. In analyses, five factors describing parental satisfaction emerged: child satisfaction with school, learning load attractiveness of classes, contact with peers, special classes. Regression analyses were used to examine relations between identified factors and a general assessment of satisfaction with the care and education of the child. The strongest predictors for satisfaction with care and the child's education are child's satisfaction with school (factor 1) and attractiveness of classes (factor 3).

KEYWORDS: parental satisfaction with school, parental attitudes towards school, school work evaluation.

Satisfaction of parents and the degree of contentment with different aspects of schools attended is crucial to parental involvement in their children's education. Positive opinion about school and satisfaction with contact with teachers is associated with greater readiness to active participation, which in turn may reinforce positive feelings about the school and promote further integration with school life. Activation of a friendly feedback may promote more extensive cooperation between parents and schools. Some models that illustrate the

complexity of interaction between schools and children's families emphasise the influence that opinions and beliefs about educational institutions held by parents have on their activity. This reflects in particular on the type and range of activities that they engage with, in and for schools and vitally, how they support the learning process of their children. Therefore, how parents perceive schools may be one of the main predictors of parents' involvement in school life and their role in their children's education (Eccles and Harold, 1996)

Parental involvement with children's education and participation in the life of the school is significant, as it benefits in the form of better school achievement (Epstein, 1991; Griffith, 1996; Grolnick, Friendly and Bellas, 2009). Moreover, such involvement is associated with positive changes in the social and emotional functioning of children. Hence, increasing participation of parents in everyday school life is an important concept to recognise for educational policy makers and school managers (Friedman, Bobrowski and

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Markow, 2006). Parental involvement is especially significant in Poland due to the low level of parental involvement which is limited to random financial support and assistance with organising school events, with minor participation on school boards or parents' committees (c.f. Winiarski, 1993) and the limit to access to information about their children has been emphasised for years (c.f. Mendel, 2006).

Parental beliefs about schools and their level of satisfaction, as well as participation of parents in school life have also taken on new significance in view of institutional changes, such as the reform concerning the lowering of the age of entry to obligatory schooling in Poland in the school year 2009/2010. Therefore, it is worthwhile to investigate factors that influence parents' evaluation of school. Factors that determine parental activity at schools have been the subject of many studies. This study reports on factors that influence parental satisfaction with the schools attended by their children.

### **Factors influencing parents' satisfaction with their children's schools**

Assessment of parental satisfaction is increasingly researched as a factor in the general evaluation of school functioning. Opinions of parents about school find applications, including in various school evaluation and inspection systems, for which the significance and scope of has grown in recent years in some countries (Faubert, 2009).

Surveys conducted e.g. in Scandinavia and Great Britain, have shown general satisfaction of parents with schools attended by their children. In many countries, parental evaluation of schools is more positive than evaluation by the general public. Such findings contradict the negative messages about schools that dominate the media. The surveys also show that parents are willing to form their opinion on schools on the basis of their personal experiences and beliefs, rather than

the media (Räty, Jaukka and Kasanen, 2004). In a survey conducted in 2007 by the Centre for Public Opinion Research (*Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej*, CBOS, 2007<sup>1</sup>) 51% of respondents assessed the Polish system as good. Respondents in the study were people that had contact with schools, including parents of children attending school during the study. In this group of respondents, the percentage of positive evaluation amounted to 60%. According to the authors of the report:

Respondents who have daily contact with school life (mostly parents of students, but also anyone who has a student in their family or household) have a more positive image of the educational system than people who are not in such close contact with students and therefore, are not that well informed about school life, or people who know educational problems only from the media (CBOS, 2007, pp. 2–4).

Among various theoretical approaches and studies on determinants of parental opinion about schools and different aspects of school functioning, three main tendencies may be pointed out: approaches in which parental school evaluation is analysed against social position, approaches that emphasise the importance of parents' experience beyond the education of their children, and approaches that are focused on experience directly associated with contact of parents with their children's schools and actions of schools alone. Naturally, the individual approaches are interlinked, e.g. social and demographical factors are taken into account in analysis of parental experiences.

Investigations of the influence of parents' social position, social and demographic characteristics on their evaluation of school most often refer to theories that emphasise the differences between the social and cultural capital

<sup>1</sup> Survey *Aktualne problemy i wydarzenia* (Current problems and events) was conducted by the CBOS on May 11–14, 2007 on a random sample of 946 adult inhabitants of Poland.

of parents and values cherished by schools (Bourdieu and Passeron, 2006; Lareau, 1987). These studies emphasise unequal willingness of parents from various social groups to cooperate with schools and the schools' role in maintaining those inequalities.

The above perspective was applied by Rätty, Jaukka and Kasanen (2004) in their study. In their study in Finland investigated 486 parents of children who had completed first grade of primary school, several key factors were taken into account while assessing parental satisfaction: quality of teaching, method of child assessment, level of child school achievement, school-home cooperation, fairness in the treatment of children, parental ability to influence what was happening at school, schools' focus on individual characteristics of children, and schools' ability to cope with children's problems. It was revealed that over 90% of parents were satisfied with their children's education and achievement; 88% were happy with the method of child's assessment and 87% with manner of treatment (fairness). Least satisfactory was the way in which schools coped with children's problems of children, and focused on their individual characteristics, however, in this case, more than 60% of parents were satisfied. These studies demonstrated statistically significant influence of parental education and gender on school evaluation. Mothers were more satisfied than fathers, (explained by a greater involvement with children). Greater satisfaction was also reported by parents with higher education.

An attempt to assess satisfaction with the care of children as well as their school and developmental progress in view of various social and demographic factors was also undertaken by American researchers (Fantuzzo, Perry and Childs, 2006). They conducted studies with parents who used various types of care and education available in the United States. In collaboration with parents and teachers, they prepared a satisfaction scale that used 12 questions to measure three factors:

- satisfaction with contact with teachers,
- experience associated with classroom contact,
- experience associated with contact with school,

Among key findings, single parents were less satisfied with their contact with teachers than other parents. Professionally active parents were in general happier in all three areas than unemployed parents.

Erickson et al. (1996) conducted studies concerning how much race and ethnic origin influenced satisfaction of the parents of children who attended American primary schools. No significant correlation between the satisfaction with child education and the ethnic origin of parents was found. Differences due to ethnic origin have been found elsewhere: Americans of Asian origin are more willing to be involved with the education of their children outside school, and Afro-American parents are more engaged with activities in the school area and the ones organised by the school (Lee and Bowen, 2006 after: Grolnick, Friendly and Bellas, 2009).

Among the approaches demonstrating influence of parental attitudes and their experiences beyond their child's education on their evaluation of school, an interesting body of research analyses the influence of parents' own educational experiences in terms of how they evaluate their children's schools. Longitudinal studies conducted in Scandinavian countries confirmed a significant influence of parents' memories of school on satisfaction with the schools of their children (Rätty, 2007). How parents evaluated the primary school they attended had a bearing on their evaluation of their child's school in the first years (Rätty, 2007).

Many researchers are interested in the relationship between general parental satisfaction with schools and the activities of the schools, i.e. the effects of the schools' activities in various domains. The importance of the assessments made by parents is growing in view of school evaluation and

inspection systems as previously mentioned, as well as a kind of “commercialisation” of educational systems in some countries, which result in greater attention to parental opinions and expectations and in the form of a customer – service provider (school) relationship (Lumby, 2007). However, the areas of school functioning analysed and considered as key in parental satisfaction assessment are highly varied.

The areas often considered in studies on the level of parental satisfaction include: quality of teaching, quality of feedback that parents receive and school-home cooperation (c.f. Fantuzzo, Perry and Childs, 2006). It was revealed, among other things, that satisfaction of parents is closely linked with the evaluation of school effectiveness based on their children’s exam results. However, it seems that these analyses are too simplistic and do not include many important factors.

In the study conducted in Finland, the parents were asked to recall two events in the first year of their children’s school education that were the most positive and two that they remembered as most negative. After appropriate coding of the responses, they found that most of the responses (slightly greater number of positive ones) referred to teachers – their qualifications, teaching methods and the treatment of students, while the second largest number of recollections was related to children’s experience of learning and school achievement (parents recalled the events relating to the children’s motivation, their desire to go to school, as well as their learning progress) (Räty, Jaukka and Kasanen, 2004). Interestingly, of the positive events recalled by the parents, it was the children’s learning experiences and achievement that were most often mentioned and made up 35% of all positive responses. As part of the study, an analysis of the relationship between satisfaction and the positive and negative experiences in the first year of children’s education was also conducted. According to Räty et al., it was the negative experiences that seemed to

influence school evaluation the most (Räty, Jaukka and Kasanen, 2004).

Studies conducted among 30 000 parents from 121 schools in the United States allowed identification of the main factors that shaped satisfaction (Friedman, Bobrowski and Markow, 2007). The most significant were found to be: providing appropriate information about children by schools, involvement of schools and teachers, as well as appropriate school infrastructure and efficient management of schools and their finances.

Friedman, Bobrowski and Geraci (2006) summarised the literature relating to determinants of parental satisfaction, and created a model that accounted for a number of variables that were significantly linked with the level of parental satisfaction – such as security level, quality of the curriculum, school budget and method of administration, effectiveness of teachers, equipment (including computer equipment), transportation of students, communication with parents and their participation in school life, school achievements of students and classroom teaching methods. Importantly, according to the authors, it was parents’ level of education, gender and ethnicity that determined which factors influenced parental satisfaction.

A similar integrated approach was applied to the analysis of this study: social and demographic characteristics of the parents participating in the study were accommodated by the study design; however emphasis was on the organisation of work with children, as perceived by parents. The question of what aspects of school functioning influenced parental satisfaction were formulated on the basis of the study *Education of young children* carried out in 2011 at the request of the Ministry of Education (*Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej*, MEN) in collaboration with the Educational Research Institute (*Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych*, IBE). The study was conducted in a period of a heated debate on the reduction of the age for obligatory schooling and on the conditions that must be

met for schools to be ready to accommodate younger children. Without referring directly to these matters, a look at schools was taken through the lens of parent satisfaction with various aspects of school, as it was believed that satisfaction of parents was mostly a construct of their beliefs about schools. From the perspective of socially and cognitively-oriented theories of personality (Dweck, 2008), it is here assumed that such beliefs greatly impact parental involvement which, according to the study, translates into motivation and a child's achievement at school (Grolnick, Friendly and Bellas, 2009).

### Research problem

The main aim of the investigation was to determine factors affecting parental satisfaction with their children's schools, in particular parents of young children, i.e. parents who have at least one child at primary school. Firstly, analysis was to discover if social and demographic characteristics of parents are associated with parental satisfaction with schools, and whether any factors relating to the organisation of activities with children at school impact parents' school evaluation.

### Research method and characteristics of respondents

Analyses presented here use data from a survey on a representative nationwide random sample of the parents of children born in 2004–2007, conducted in April and May 2011 at the request of the Ministry of Education in collaboration with IBE<sup>2</sup>. The subject

<sup>2</sup> Parents and legal guardians. Further in this article, reference to parents, unless otherwise stated, is also reference to legal guardians. Study *Education of young children* conducted by the CBOS from 29.04–12.05.2011. The basis for selection of the sample was the Personal Identification Number (PESEL) base, from which children born in 2004–2007 (4 strata) were drawn, questionnaire interviews were conducted with the parents of those children. A total of 1548 interviews were conducted with the response rate at 60.8 (CBOS, 2011).

Table 1  
*Social and demographic characteristics of the group selected for analysis*

Name of the variable/category	%
<b>Gender</b>	
Woman	82.7
Man	17.3
<b>Marital status</b>	
Single	3.2
Married	89.5
Divorced/separated	5.9
Widowed	1.3
Refusal of response	0.2
<b>Education</b>	
Incomplete primary	–
Primary	8.7
Lower secondary	0.2
Basic vocational	30.0
Incomplete secondary (incomplete general secondary)	0.3
General secondary	9.2
Vocational secondary	20.3
Postsecondary (post-general secondary)	3.3
Incomplete higher (no diploma)	1.1
Higher undergraduate, e.g. engineer's degree (no master's degree)	5.7
Higher graduate	21.0
Refusal of response	–
<b>Age</b>	
18–25	0.6
26–30	12.4
31–35	37.5
36–40	33.2
41–45	12.6
46 and more	3.7
<b>Size of the home town/city (number of inhabitants)</b>	
Village	45.9
City of 19 999	13.8
City of 20 000 to 49 999	9.9
City of 50 000 to 99 999	8.4
City of 100 000 to 499 999	14.8
City of 500 000 and more	7.2

of the study were opinions and experience of parents of young children. Respondents answered questions<sup>3</sup> on their children's education and the care provided. Questions referred to children born in 2004–2007, so to the three-, four-, five- and six-year-olds and older siblings already attending school. The study used the computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI) method.

The study covered 1548 people, including 1261 mothers and 256 fathers and 32 people legal guardians. The average age of the respondents was 34.5 years ( $SD = 6.34$ ). By contrast, the data analysed in the article are from parents who had at least one child studying in primary school at the time of the study. Respondents numbered 629, including 514 mothers, 108 fathers, and 7 legal guardians. The average age of respondents was 35.8 years ( $SD = 5.17$ ). When interpreting the data, it should be also kept in mind that the response rate in this study was 61%, which in the case of this type of survey is a fair proportion. A detailed breakdown of the classification of respondents is presented in Table 1.

### Satisfaction of parents with primary school

The index was created by averaging the responses to the three questions selected from the questionnaire was adopted as an indicator of satisfaction with schools by parents of children attending primary school. These questions referred to:

- education: “Are you satisfied with the education of your child at school?”;
- childcare: “In general, are you satisfied with the care that your child receives at school?”;

- teachers: “In general, are you satisfied with the teachers of your child?”;

Responses to these questions were given on a four-level scale (“completely satisfied – I have some reservations – I have serious reservations – completely dissatisfied”). These questions form a relatively consistent scale of satisfaction with schools. Reliability of the scale was measured with the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  method and was 0.75. The satisfaction index ( $M = 3.58$  on a four-level scale of responses,  $SD = 0.51$ ) has a skewed distribution in favour of the positive parental assessments of schools, which supports a generally good image held by parents of the schools attended by their children.

### Social and demographic factors

Due to the fact that mainly mothers participated in the questionnaire (82%), analysis of any relationship between gender and level of satisfaction with schools was abandoned. The analyses showed complete absence of significance in the relationship between age of respondents and satisfaction with schools. This variable will be ignored in future models. Size of settlement as an independent variable to the analysis of variances did not greatly differentiate the groups under study. No significant relationship between the size of the home town/city and satisfaction with schools was shown. There was a significant ( $p < 0.01$ ) but weak correlation between parental education and satisfaction with the care and educational functions of schools and with teachers' work ( $F(3.626) = 6.28$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ;  $\eta^2 = 0.029$ ). This relationship is accounted for solely by the group of parents with the lowest level of education, who evaluate primary schools better than parents from other groups. Post hoc tests (Tukey's  $b$ ) did not show any differences between groups of parents with secondary, post-secondary, undergraduate, incomplete higher and higher education. The dependencies observed are presented in Figure 1. Marital status of the respondents

<sup>3</sup> The questionnaire consisted of 6 blocks of questions (Polish education system; lowering of the obligatory schooling age, kindergarten, child care at home, school, personal information), which of these questions were answered by the parents depended on the age and situation of the child. In total, 130 questions were included in the questionnaire.

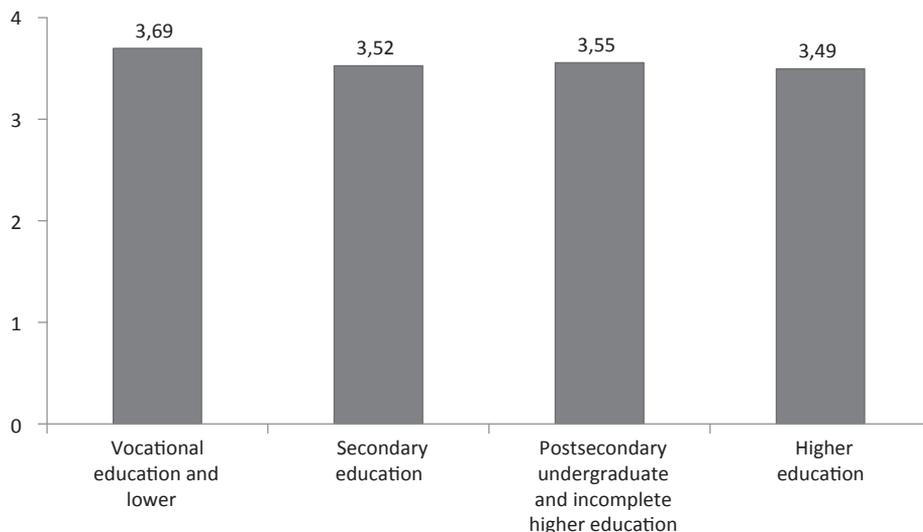


Figure 1. Average levels of satisfaction with primary schools by education of respondents.

was not included in the analyses due to the lack of diversity in the sample in this respect (89.5% of the respondents were married at the time of study).

### Parents' observations about primary schools

In the questionnaire, parents were also asked to assess the organisation of work with children at schools. Parents referred to activities organised for their children such as: trips to the swimming pool or the frequency of using the school playground. In total, they were asked to assess 19 statements that measured how they perceived what was happening in their children's schools. Answers were on a four-level scale ("definitely yes – rather yes – rather not – definitely not"). Table 2 summarises responses given for each statement.

Naturally, it should be borne in mind that these are only opinions which may be based on contact with the school, observation of the work of the school or on what they have heard from other parents as well as on the information provided by their children. A number of correlation coefficients were calculated to determine the extent to which

methods of working with children were linked with parents' satisfaction with the functioning of schools. The strength of the relationship was expressed with Pearson's  $r$  statistics. Table 3 presents a list of statements and their relationship with school functioning satisfaction, irrespective of rural and urban schools.

Directions of dependencies for the urban and rural area were identical, but the strength of the relationship between certain methods of work organisation and parental satisfaction differed between them. One can observe stronger relationships between the organisation of work with children and satisfaction with school functioning among parents of children living in the urban area, school satisfaction displayed by parents living in the urban area was strongly associated with the presence of activities conducted outside of school (e.g. going to theatre plays, exploring the surrounding natural world). These factors were also important for parents living in the rural area, but their relationships with school satisfaction were weaker. The fact that children lost enthusiasm for school and were bored during classes was negatively associated with satisfaction of both groups

Table 2  
*Descriptive statistics for individual statements\**

Statement	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
During classes, children participate in a large number of games and activities.	2.05	0.89
During classes, children spend a lot of time outside school to learn about the natural world.	2.37	0.84
During classes, children often visit places outside of school, they go to the theatre or participate in organised activities.	2.14	0.81
Children sit at their desks most of the time.	2.25	0.85
During classes, children have regular contact with the computer.	2.59	1.04
During classes, children spend a lot of time copying text to their notebooks.	2.64	0.86
Children often use the school playground.	2.04	0.85
Children attend swimming classes on a relatively regular basis.	3.25	1.09
Children with dyslexia participate in extracurricular activities.	2.23	1.09
Children have a lot of homework.	2.60	0.92
Teachers are focused on realising the curriculum following a textbook or exercise book.	1.59	0.59
Teachers do not give homework.	3.22	0.85
My child is very happy to participate in school activities.	1.61	0.70
My child was very happy to participate in school activities at first, but then he/she lost his/her enthusiasm.	3.19	0.92
My child is usually bored during classes.	3.14	0.83
My child feels dominated by other children in the classroom.	3.40	0.68
The good approach of teachers really encouraged my child to go to school.	1.98	0.87
My child falls behind other children.	3.40	0.86
My child is able to be part of a group where he/she has good relationships with other children.	1.50	0.73

\* Scale: 1 – definitely yes; 2 – rather yes; 3 – rather not; 4 – definitely not.

of parents, those living in the urban and rural area. In the case of parents living in urban areas, the strongest relationship was between parental satisfaction and attitude of teachers who encouraged children to go to school. In the group of parents living in rural areas the relationship was strongest for the willingness of children to participate in classes. There was no significant relationship between parental satisfaction and the realisation of the curriculum following the textbook or with homework load. With regard to the realisation of the curriculum, one may wonder

whether the lack of dependence is affected by the lowest variety of responses made by parents during the study ( $SD = 0.596$ ). However, the size of the sample in the study is relatively high, and what is more, the low variety in response even occurred for the statement with a high significance of correlation “My child is very happy to participate in school activities” or the one significant for the urban area: “My child feels dominated by other children in the classroom”. Therefore, it might be justified to conclude that there was no significant relationship.

Table 3  
*Work organisation and parental satisfaction in rural and urban schools\**

Statement	Rural area	Urban area
During classes, children participate in a large number of games and activities.	0.31	0.35
During classes, children spend a lot of time outside school to learn about the natural world.	0.29	0.39
During classes, children often visit places outside school, they go to the theatre or participate in organised activities.	0.23	0.42
Children sit at their desks most of the time.	-0.24	-0.24
During classes, children have regular contact with the computer.	n.s.	0.13*
During classes, children spend a lot of time on copying text to their notebooks.	-0.12*	-0.15
Children often use the school playground.	0.19	0.13*
Children participate in swimming classes on a relatively regular basis.	n.s.	–
Children with dyslexia participate in extracurricular activities.	–	0.17*
Children have a lot of homework.	-0.16	-0.16
Teachers are focused on realising the curriculum according to a text-book or work book.	n.s.	n.s.
Teachers do not give homework.	n.s.	n.s.
My child is very happy to participate in school activities.	0.39	0.37
My child was very happy to participate in school activities at first, but then he/she lost his/her enthusiasm.	-0.32	-0.43
My child is usually bored during classes.	-0.29	-0.39
My child feels dominated by other children in the classroom.	-0.14*	-0.30
The good attitude of teachers really encouraged my child to go to school.	0.38	0.49
My child falls behind other children.	n.s.	-0.11*
My child is able to be part of a group where he/she has good relationships with other children.	n.s.	0.18

\* Relationships measured using Pearson's *r*-coefficient for  $p < 0.01$  (\* $p < 0.05$ ).

### School activities

Responses to the 19 statements described were subject to factor to identify the dimensions, in which parents perceive school activities. To that end, an exploratory factor analysis with VARIMAX rotation was conducted. It revealed a scale structure consisting of five factors (Table 4). These factors accounted for 55% of the scale variance

and the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure was 0.805. Other solutions were also examined, but they accounted for a smaller percentage of variance and were not as well matched with the data.

The analysis yielded 5 factors relating both to how parents perceived the satisfaction of their children and their motivation to go to school (factor 1 – motivation to study). Another factor (2 – active forms of classes)

Table 4  
*Factor structure of the scale of perception of work organisation at schools*

Factor name and item contents	1	2	3	4	5
<b>1. Motivation to study</b>					
My child is usually bored during classes.	-0.77				
My child is very happy to participate in school activities.	0.77				
My child was very happy to participate in school activities at first, but then he/she lost his/her enthusiasm.	-0.71				
Good attitude of teachers really encouraged my child to go to school.	0.67				
<b>2. Active forms of classes</b>					
During classes, children participate in a large number of games and activities.		0.82			
During classes, children spend a lot of time outside of school to learn about the natural world.		0.76			
During classes, children often visit venues outside of school, they go to theatre plays or participate in organised activities.		0.73			
Children often use the school playground.		0.41			
<b>3. Teaching</b>					
Children have a lot of homework.			0.79		
Teachers do not give homework.			-0.69		
During classes, children spend a lot of time on copying text to the notebook.			0.66		
During classes, children have a regular contact with the computer			0.48		
Teachers are focused on realising the curriculum according to a textbook or exercise book.			0.21		
Children sit at their desks most of the time.			0.49		
<b>4. Relationships with peers</b>					
My child feels dominated by other children in the classroom.				0.63	
My child is able to be part of a group where he/she has good relationships with other children.				-0.63	
My child falls behind other children.				0.41	
<b>5. Extracurricular activities</b>					
Children with dyslexia participate in extracurricular activities.					0.77
Children participate in classes at swimming pool on a relatively regular basis.					0.60

refers to how parents perceived their children's participation in classes and classes organised by schools that required active participation (such activities not limited to sitting at their desks but which allow for leaving the school premises). The third factor (3 – teaching) refers to the manner of conducting lessons, including children's study load, often in traditional forms, but also with the use of computers in the classroom. The fourth factor (4 – relationships with peers) is associated with how parents perceived their children's relationships with the other pupils in the class, including if they felt comfortable in a peer group and whether they are accepted by their peers as well as what the children's achievements were in comparison to their peers. The last of the factors identified indicated parental satisfaction with activities offered by the school beyond the standard educational offer (5 – extracurricular activities). These include classes for children with dyslexia or trips to the swimming pool.

### School activities and demographic factors characterising parents

The identified factors describing how parents perceived school activities were subject to further analysis. Average values and standard deviations for the identified factors broken down by rural and urban schools are presented below. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) did not reveal any relationship between the place of residence and parents' observations about

school activities. Only in the case of extracurricular activities, such as swimming or care provided to children with dyslexia, were lower mean values observed among parents in the rural area ( $F(1.624) = 16.66$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ;  $\eta^2 = 0.026$ ). This relationship seems understandable in view of the limited availability of activities of this type outside urban centres. Mean values and standard deviations for the described comparisons are presented in Table 5.

### School satisfaction and the perception of work organisation at schools

As the next step, a number of linear regression analyses which examined how significantly school activities, as subjectively perceived by parents and described on the five scales, correlated with parental satisfaction with school. The first model was statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ) and allowed for prediction of 31.1% variance. Standardised linear regression coefficients for the scale of satisfaction with schools as the dependent variable and the factors describing the perception by parents of work organisation at schools as predictors, were: motivation to study ( $\beta = 0.403$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), active forms of classes ( $\beta = 0.265$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), teaching (n.s.), relationships with peers (n.s.), extracurricular activities (n.s.).

In the model, only observed children's motivation to attend school and active forms of classes outside of school, e.g. trips to the

Table 5

*Mean values and standard deviations for the identified factors describing the perception by parents of work organisation at schools*

Factor	Rural schools		Urban schools		Total	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Motivation to study	1.83	0.62	1.80	0.67	1.82	0.65
Active forms of classes	2.88	0.62	2.83	0.60	2.85	0.61
Teaching	2.76	0.53	2.76	0.53	2.76	0.53
Relationships with peers	1.58	0.57	1.56	0.52	1.57	0.54
Extracurricular activities	1.91	0.84	2.22	1.03	2.08	0.96

forest, to the playground or to the cinema was found to be significant predictors of satisfaction. Interestingly, various classes or relationships of children with peers were in no way linked with satisfaction.

The second model, calculated only for rural schools, only accounted for 24.6% of the variance of parental satisfaction ( $p < 0.001$ ). Standardised linear regression coefficients for the scale of satisfaction with schools as the dependent variable and the factors describing the perception by parents of work organisation at schools as predictors, were: motivation to study ( $\beta = 0.383$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), active forms of classes ( $\beta = 0.217$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), teaching (n.s.), relationships with peers (n.s.), extracurricular activities (n.s.). The third model, calculated only for urban schools, accounted for 35.8% of the variance of satisfaction ( $p < 0.001$ ). Standardised linear regression coefficients for the scale of satisfaction with schools as the dependent variable and the factors describing the perception by parents of work organisation at schools as predictors, were: motivation to study ( $\beta = 0.412$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), active forms of classes ( $\beta = 0.303$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), teaching (n.s.), relationships with peers (n.s.), extracurricular activities (n.s.).

In the models calculated independently for urban and rural schools, the sequence of predictors did not change. How parents assessed their children's motivation to study and additional, attractive and non-standard forms of teaching are linked to parental satisfaction with schools – both in the rural and urban areas. It was revealed that the way in which parents perceived school in terms of requirements and organisation of lessons (work with the textbook, copying texts to the notebook, homework load), was not associated with level of satisfaction. Similarly, there was no relationship between the factors describing perception of children's contact with their peers and available extracurricular activities and parental satisfaction.

Comparison of predictive values of the independent variables seems remarkable.

School activities are a much stronger predictor for satisfaction with school for parents from urban settings than for those from rural areas.

### Discussion of results

In the analyses presented in this article, the opinions of parents about schools, both in the dimensions of education and child-care and the evaluation of the work of teachers are positive. Parents in the study seemed satisfied with their children's schools. Maybe a conclusion similar to that of Rätty, Jaukka and Kasanen (2004) can be drawn. School evaluation by this group is more positive than the assessments from other studies that are not focused on parents of children currently attending school. According to public opinion surveys in 2007, about half adult Poles had a favourable opinion about education (CBOS, 2007), in the case of the group of parents of primary school children analysed in this article, it was a much higher percentage. We can only assume what mechanisms are responsible for this positive shift in opinions.

Firstly, parents having real contact with schools, even if it only involves gathering information from their children and participation in the meetings organised by schools, have wider experience on which to base an opinion. Secondly, in explaining the observed positive shift in the opinions of parents, the mechanisms to which Wojciszke refers when he speaks about the standard of negative thinking about the social world, cannot be excluded. According to this author:

data that have been collected for 20 years by Janusz Czapiński prove that discontentment is mostly caused by matters that are distant from the self, such as future prospects and the overall situation in the country. In turn, matters close to the self – children, marriage or sexual life are a source of satisfaction (Wojciszke, 2011, p. 114).

Following this reasoning, we may regard that the school of one's own child is close to the self and is a source of satisfaction, which perhaps explains the positive slope of assessment by the parents in the study.

A key factor in the level of parental satisfaction with schools was revealed to be child motivation (attitude and satisfaction). The analyses show that matters that might seem very important for parents, such as whether children come into contact with computers or regularly attend swimming lessons are not significantly related to the overall satisfaction with the school. Parents who are satisfied with schools are the ones who see their children going to school with pleasure and enthusiasm. Of all the statements concerning organisation of work with children, parental satisfaction with school is mostly linked to just two questions relating to motivation/attitude of children: "The good attitude of teachers really encouraged my child to go to school" and: "My child was very happy to participate in school activities at first, but then he/she lost his/her enthusiasm". According to Rätty et al., the negative experiences seem to influence school assessment the most (Rätty, Jaukka and Kasanen, 2004). It can be assumed that bad attitude, children's lack of motivation to go to school or situations whereby children lost their good attitude because of their schools, are salient in the case of negative assessments of schools.

As already remarked upon, the surprising fact is that the factor defined in this article as "Teaching" has no effect on parental satisfaction with schools (Figures 2, 3 and 4). The factor referred to the method of teaching, which may be described as traditional, including realisation of the curriculum according to the textbook, setting homework or rewriting materials to a notebook in class. No relationship between this and parents' satisfaction is puzzling also for the reason that the presence of more interactive classes that allow children to go outside of school (factor "Active forms of classes", see Figures

2, 3 and 4) is a significant predictor of parental satisfaction. Both in rural and urban areas, parents approve of classes in the playground, physical activities, exploring the natural world or participating in extracurricular cultural events. This is important information in the light of the discussion that took place in relation to the need to provide young children with attractive forms of learning, away from the traditional scheduled lesson. Some parents presented lack of such classes as an argument against lowering the age for compulsory school. This seems then, to be an important factor explaining the satisfaction of parents, which could in turn to some extent explain their opinions about schools.

It is plausible that the observed weak relationship between the "Teaching" factor and satisfaction of parents with simultaneous strong relationships of parental satisfaction with the "Active forms of classes" factor can be explained by the fact that parents are less aware about classes and are more aware about occasional events and events that break the daily routine of school work. A parent who has to provide consent for such activities or participates in their organisation knows more about them as a basis for opinions and which translates into a level of satisfaction with schools. What is more, to account for the low variation in responses to the statement concerning realisation of the curriculum according to the textbook, we may be led to wonder whether this approach to the classroom is not considered something universal, not for assessment and unquestionable. It is not linked to the general assessment of perception of school effectiveness.

In our analyses we only focused on one area of school activity – the organisation of work with children. Future analysis should investigate other factors specified in the literature as having major impact on the satisfaction of parents, such as school–parent communication, openness to parents and information provided to parents (c.f. Fantuzzo, Perry and Childs, 2006).

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