

# 2012 USA GYMNASTICS MEMBER CLUB SURVEY REPORT

REPORTED BY DAVID HOLCOMB

**I**n April 2012, USA Gymnastics surveyed the Member Clubs in order to explore the health and needs of gymnastics club owners. While not an in depth examination, the survey was effective in gauging the confidence level within the industry. As it happens, the news from the front lines is generally quite good.

The good news is that almost two-thirds of the 335+ gyms that responded to the survey report that enrollment, gross income, and net profits are all up as compared to one year ago. An additional 18% report that things are holding steady. Fewer than 20% of the Member Clubs report that enrollment, income, or profits are down from a year ago.

This positive news is not to imply that the economic meltdown has not affected the gym clubs. When compared to the total enrollment of the clubs 10 years ago in 2002, the size of the average gymnastics school has fallen. Here are the numbers (the clubs were divided roughly into thirds):

	<u>2002</u>	<u>2012</u>
The average "Small" Gymnastics School enrollment:	under 400	under 300
The average "Medium" Gymnastics School enrollment:	400-700	300-600
The average "Large" Gymnastics School enrollment:	over 700	over 600

Clubs with a total enrollment exceeding 1,000 students represent 16% of all gyms in 2012.

Total recreational enrollment (preschool plus school age) averaged 640 students.

Preschool Enrollment: 28% of total enrollment

Preschool enrollment up 47%; down 25%.

School age Enrollment: 72% of total enrollment

School-age enrollment up: 53%; down 18%.

87% of the Member Clubs competed in USA Gymnastics Girls Programs Levels 3-10.

46% indicated that these programs were up in enrollment, 33% report girls team levels had remained unchanged, 20% report a decline in girls team as compared to 2011.

40% of the Member Clubs competed in USA Gymnastics Boys Programs through Level 10.

17% indicated that these programs were up in enrollment, 72% report boy's team levels unchanged, 10% report a decline in boy's team as compared to 2011.

***Did you know that you can get pre-placed in the USA Gymnastics University based on your prior experience?***

Yes: 34%

No: 65%

***Did you get placed?***

Yes: 12%

No: 88%

***How do you think the 2012 Olympic Games will impact your gym's Fall enrollment?***

Increase enrollment: 88%

No impact: 12%

THE SURVEY ASKED TWO VERY IMPORTANT OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS:

***What challenges does your gym face right now?***  
and

***How can USA Gymnastics help you meet those challenges?***

I was both surprised and impressed by the number of gym owners who took the time to answer in a thorough and thoughtful manner. The responses were often poignant and heartfelt. There are gyms that face very tough situations. Unfortunately, many of those situations are the type that USA Gymnastics is powerless to assist with directly. And many of the respondents acknowledged that fact. All of the comments were shared anonymously and in their entirety with the leadership of USA Gymnastics including Steve Penny, Loree Galimore, and Cheryl Jarrett. They were discussed at length in a recent meeting with those named above plus gym owners from across the USA, and we all appreciated the time everyone spent in responding to these questions.

While it is impossible to adequately capture the disparate nature of those responses in a short report, some broad trends can be identified. The two most common responses centered on the need to find qualified staff and the need for more gym space. The need for qualified staff has remained unchanged over the 16 years that I have been asking these types of question in the surveys. Great people are hard to find in both our industry and in every industry. This is not a

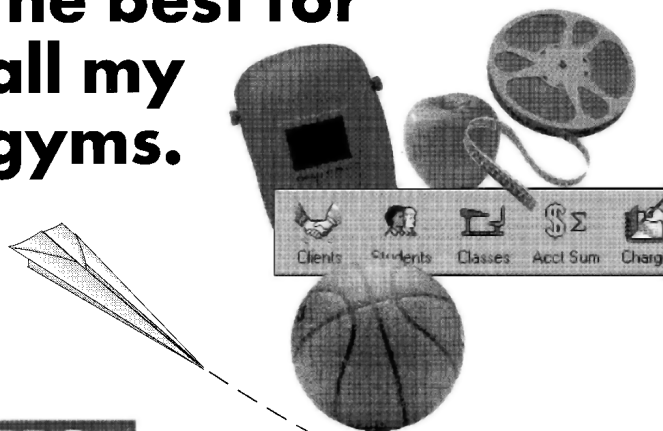
new challenge. The solutions are few, but it remains the case that often you have to "create" great teachers and coaches yourself. What has changed is that the surveys used to be full of cries for help for the creation of staff development materials. Now everyone seems well aware of the staff training opportunities available through the USA Gymnastics University (<http://edu.usa-gymnastics.org/moodle/>) State, Regional, and National Congress; and the on-site courses offerings. The need for more space and equipment is a positive challenge but a challenge nonetheless. USA Gymnastics can only help indirectly in this area through gym owner education opportunities.

There were other responses that sounded as if they were common concerns: the need for promotional and national advertising (particularly with the Olympics coming this summer); increased competition with an ever growing number of gym clubs plus competition from other sports; slow growth or no growth in enrollment; the difficulties faced by gyms in small communities or rural areas; the number of training hours needed to remain competitive; the increased difficulty required in the new compulsories; and the high cost of equipment, competing, and operating. This list represents the overwhelming majority of the comments, addressing the challenges and problems we face as an industry.

In answering the companion question (How can USA Gymnastics help you meet those challenges?), the answers were all over the place. The most common response was that USA Gymnastics could not really help (adding space, parking, the economic challenges brought on by the economy, operating in a small town, and so on). But there are some specific areas in which USA Gymnastics can help. USA Gymnastics can take the lead with national advertising and promotions, particularly in an Olympic year. Steve Penny, the CEO of USA Gymnastics, is all over it. Read *Technique*, visit the website, and become a Member Club and learn all about what has already been done and what is coming in the next few months.

There is still a call for more training and staff development opportunities, the creation of a national insurance plan available for the clubs through USA Gymnastics, and a plea for lower costs for USA Gymnastics materials and programs. This call for lower fees has been consistent through the many surveys that I have done for both USECA and USA Gymnastics. But the number of those who call for lower fees has dropped significantly over the years. I can share with you that there is a strong commitment within USA Gymnastics to hold the line of fee increases, and there is a push from the very top to lower some existing fees. I believe that you will see lower fees in some areas coming soon. In fact, read pages 21–22 of this issue to see the new membership structure and pricing. Thank you to all who took the time to respond to the survey. I hope you find the reporting valuable. Be assured that the leadership of USA Gymnastics looked closely at the responses and are committed to providing ever improving and comprehensive benefits for the membership. ✕

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