

RESEARCH BRIEF

Department of Research Services

Vol. 0302
October 2003

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Schools with Survey Responses Diverging from the Average

On all the School Climate Surveys (staff, student, parent, adult student), it has been customary, in reporting survey results, to report the percentage of a school's respondents who agree with an item (pooling strongly agree and agree). These school-by-school "All Agree" responses are then averaged across group and/or educational levels to arrive at selected aggregate totals. As with any average, however, there may be schools whose percentage falls a great deal above or below that average on one or several items. It is customary to define "a great deal" as two standard deviations (StDs) above/below the mean or average.

While it is possible to identify all schools which are exemplary on an item (the schools with an unusually high staff agreement on school safety, for example), this report identifies schools where such large deviations could indicate problems. On a few items, this will mean two standard deviations above the mean (because of the way the item is stated), but it is more often those schools with a percent agreement much below the average. Deviations of this kind can be very instructive in helping to identify problems or difficulties that those schools may be undergoing.

The purpose of this report is to provide counts of the extent to which these deviations occur, with respect to each item, by surveyed group by educational level. Each group-by-level sub-group has its own mean and standard deviation. The attached tables report—by item—the number of schools in these sub-groups with a percent agreement two standard deviations below (or occasionally above) the sub-group average.

Only data aggregated to the district level are provided in this report. The names of individual schools are intentionally withheld. While it is true that large deviations from the average could well indicate serious problems at a school, particularly with respect to items referring to safety, discipline, and related subjects, it is also possible that such information can be misleading. The surveys report not actual conditions but the perceptions of the respondents concerning conditions. As such they are subject to various limitations. First, the result can be greatly skewed by a low response rate. Second, it is possible that a clique of respondents who have a particular ax to grind can skew the results. Third, a very low agreement response to an item may reflect an overreaction to a recent, and isolated, incident. Finally, it is prudent to bear in mind that perceptions tend to be relative to expectations. Thus, respondents at a school with a reputation for high achievement, for example, may perceive conditions to be very poor that respondents from a school with a less remarkable reputation would find more tolerable.

The consequence of these cautionary remarks is that—though potentially valuable—the information concerning particular schools needs to be assessed carefully in a balanced manner by qualified personnel. Consequently, a compilation of named schools has been separately prepared, to be made available to the appropriate senior staff.

Table 1
Schools beyond 2 standard deviations on the Parent Survey, by item

(All figures represent 2 standard deviations below the mean except where indicated)

Survey Item	Number of Schools beyond 2 St. D.				
	Elem	K-8	Mid	Sr	Alt
1. The school is safe and secure.	6	1	2	1	1
2. The school is kept clean and in good condition.	11	1	2	0	1
3. The school is overcrowded to the degree that it affects learning.*	4	0	1	0	0
4. The school maintains high academic standards.	5	2	0	0	0
5. The school uses adequate disciplinary measures in dealing with disruptive students.	4	0	0	0	1
6. The school makes available textbooks, equipment, and supplies needed for learning.	10	1	3	1	0
7. The school serves lunches that are nutritious and taste good.	2	1	2	2	0
8. The school keeps bathrooms clean and in good condition.	3	0	0	0	0
9. Teachers are friendly and easy to talk to.	7	0	1	0	0
10. Teachers make learning interesting and relevant.	7	1	0	0	0
11. Teachers motivate students to learn.	9	0	0	1	1
12. Teachers take an interest in students' educational future.	7	0	0	1	0
13. Teachers are knowledgeable and understand their subject matter.	5	0	1	0	1
14. Teachers assign meaningful homework that helps students learn.	5	0	2	0	2
15. Teachers do their best to include me in matters directly affecting my child's progress in school.	4	0	1	2	0
16. The school teaches students the basic academic skills in reading.	6	0	1	1	1
17. The school teaches students basic academic skills in mathematics.	6	1	0	0	1
18. The school teaches students to speak and write correctly in English.	8	1	2	0	1
19. The school teaches how to solve problems in science.	7	1	1	1	1
20. The school teaches use of computers.	8	0	1	0	1
21. The school teaches students to think critically.	2	1	1	0	1
22. The school teaches students to develop good study and work habits.	5	1	0	0	1
23. The school teaches students to get along with different kinds of people.	6	0	0	0	1
24. The school is free of violence.	6	2	1	1	1
25. The school is free of gang activity.	7	1	0	0	1
26. The school is free of substance abuse.	7	1	0	0	1
27. The principal does an effective job running my child's school.	8	1	3	0	0
28. The principal is available and easy to talk to.	5	1	1	1	0
29. The assistant principals are effective administrators.	9	0	0	0	1
30. Guidance counselors are concerned about and try to help students with educational and personal problems.	6	0	0	0	0
31. Staff in the principal's office treat me with respect when I contact my child's school.	10	0	2	1	1
32. School staff respond to my needs and concerns in a reasonable period of time.	9	0	1	2	1
33. My child is getting a good education at this school.	9	0	1	1	1
34. The overall climate or atmosphere at my child's school is positive and helps my child learn.	8	2	2	0	1

*Item counts represent the number of schools 2 standard deviations above the average.

Table 2
Schools beyond 2 standard deviations on the Staff Survey, by item
 (All figures represent 2 standard deviations below the mean except where indicated)

Survey Item	Number of Schools beyond 2 St. D.					
	Elem	K-8	Mid	Sr	Alt	Voc
1. At my school I feel safe and secure.	9	1	2	2	0	1
2. At my school the school building is kept clean and in good condition.	10	1	1	0	1	0
3. At my school personnel work together as a team.	11	0	0	2	0	1
4. At my school administrators solve problems effectively.	9	1	2	2	0	0
5. At my school I feel that my ideas are listened to and considered.	9	0	3	0	1	0
6. At my school adequate disciplinary measures are used to deal with disruptive behavior.	6	0	1	0	0	0
7. My principal is an effective administrator.	11	1	2	3	0	1
8. My principal represents the school in a positive manner.	8	1	2	2	1	1
9. My principal demonstrates good interpersonal skills.	6	0	2	2	1	1
10. My principal deals with conflict constructively.	10	0	1	0	0	1
11. My principal responds in a reasonable time to my concerns.	10	1	2	1	1	1
12. My principal treats me with respect.	13	1	2	2	1	0
13. My principal is receptive to constructive criticism.	8	0	2	0	0	1
14. My principal is supportive of teachers.	7	0	2	1	0	1
15. I am limited by too many students in each class.*	2	0	0	0	1	0
16. I am limited by student deficiencies in basic academic skills.	0	1	0	0	0	1
17. I am limited by lack of concern/support from parents.*	0	1	0	0	0	1
18. I am limited by lack of concern/support from the principal.*	11	0	2	2	0	1
19. I am limited by lack of concern/support from the district administration.*	3	1	3	2	1	1
20. I am limited by insufficient resources (e.g., funds, books, equipment, supplies, etc.).*	10	0	1	0	0	1
21. I am limited by school violence.*	12	1	4	2	0	1
22. I am limited by student gang activity.*	5	1	4	2	1	1
23. I am limited by student substance abuse.*	13	0	4	2	1	1
24. Students generally come to my class at the beginning of the term prepared for the grade level or courses I teach.	0	1	0	0	0	0
25. I feel satisfied concerning how my career is progressing at this school.	5	1	2	1	1	0
26. I have a feeling of job security in my present position.	7	0	1	1	0	1
27. I like working at my school.	5	1	2	1	1	1
28. Staff morale is high at my school.	3	1	0	0	0	1
29. I frequently feel overloaded and overwhelmed while working at my school.*	2	0	0	1	0	1
30. Annual teacher evaluations are fair and reasonable.	7	1	2	2	1	1
31. Annual teacher evaluations are used to improve teacher performance.	10	0	1	1	0	0
32. Inservice programs keep me informed of the latest educational strategies.	7	0	1	2	0	1
33. I believe children attending my school are receiving a good education.	10	1	3	1	1	1
34. The overall climate or atmosphere at my school is positive and helps students learn.	10	1	2	2	1	1

*Item counts represent the number of schools 2 standard deviations above the average.

Table 3
Schools beyond 2 standard deviations on the Student Survey, by item
 (All figures represent 2 standard deviations below the mean except where indicated)

Survey Item	Number of Schools beyond 2 St. D.				
	Elem	K-8	Mid	Sr	Alt
1. I feel safe at my school.	10	1	2	0	1
2. My school building is kept clean and in good condition.	3	1	0	0	1
3. Students in my school usually follow school rules.	0	0	0	0	0
4. There are too many students in my classroom and that affects how much I learn.*	6	0	2	0	0
5. My teachers require that I work very hard for the grades I get.	8	0	2	1	0
6. My school has enough books and equipment to help me learn.	7	2	2	0	0
7. Food served for lunch at my school looks good and tastes good.	0	0	1	1	0
8. Bathrooms in my school are clean and in good condition.	0	0	0	0	0
9. My teachers are friendly and easy to talk to.	6	0	1	0	1
10. My teachers make learning fun and interesting.	6	0	1	1	0
11. My teachers make me want to learn.	5	0	2	0	0
12. My teachers know a lot about the subjects they teach.	5	1	2	1	0
13. My teachers give me meaningful homework that helps me learn.	7	0	2	1	1
14. My teachers are interested in how I do in the future.	5	1	2	0	0
15. My teachers let me know how I am doing on my schoolwork.	9	0	1	1	0
16. Violence is a problem at my school.*	2	1	0	1	0
17. Gangs are a problem at my school.*	9	1	1	1	0
18. Student drug and alcohol use are problems at my school.*	8	1	0	0	1
19. My principal does a good job running the school.	5	0	0	0	0
20. The assistant principals are available when needed.	9	0	2	0	1
21. My guidance counselor helps me with school and personal problems.	6	0	2	1	1
22. Adults at my school care about me as an individual.	4	0	1	0	0
23. Adults at my school help me when I need it.	7	0	2	0	0
24. I like coming to my school.	7	0	3	0	0
25. I am getting a good education at my school.	10	1	2	1	0
26. The overall climate or feeling at my school is positive and helps me learn.	9	0	1	0	0

*Item counts represent the number of schools 2 standard deviations above the average.