Beyond Achievement, Student/Staff/Parent Surveys used for Edina District School Profiles and Accountability System

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Introduction

Establishing an appropriate accountability system is a major challenge and opportunity for researchers, educators and administrators at school, district, state, and national levels. An effective accountability system should embody an assessment system, a set of indicators, school profiles, and a school improvement process. School profiles should contain educational indicators from assessment and beyond that describe and quantify student progress and school performance. Development of a comprehensive school profile is one of the main components for an accountability system.

More and more states and school districts have developed school profiles or report cards. Thirty-six states now require all schools to publish annual school progress report cards (Raham, 1999). Most, if not all, state and local educational indicator systems emphasize student achievement outcomes, while fewer contain context indicators that help to explain variations in outcomes not directly attributable to educational quality (Hansen, 1999).

Achievement scores are important indicators of students’ and schools’ performance and accountability. Academic indicators alone, however, have limited power to improve student learning and do not provide sufficient information on school success. In addition to testing scores, a broader range of indicators are needed, including parent, school staff, and student satisfaction levels, school leadership, curriculum and instruction, school learning climates, parent involvement, etc. These indicators represent the quality of the educational program in a school, district or state, directly or indirectly, which cannot be captured by testing scores.
The purpose of this paper is to introduce the Edina District School Profiles, which are composed of multiple indicators from survey data, assessment data and school demographics. In particular, this paper will focus on student/staff/parent surveys, and show the following aspects:

(1) how these surveys were developed so that they represent student, staff and parent satisfaction level, needs, perceptions, and opinions on instruction, learning climates, technology integration, parent involvement and so on;

(2) how these survey results were presented and visualized in a clear and useful way in school profiles so that audiences are able to understand and use them; and

(3) how schools use school profiles to monitor student progress, identify and prioritize school needs, set improvement goals, and to devise action plans to meet those goals.

**Perspectives of School Profiles**

Developing a school profile is similar to developing a process for school evaluation system. This process needs to clarify the relationship between assessment, indicators, and accountability. Accountability uses school profiles to make judgments about where we need to adjust behaviors in a constant cycle of assessment, indications, analysis and action to improve future performance. If we wish to encourage schools to use data to improve student success, the school profile must be designed in a way that both identifies problem areas and enables those responsible to respond. Some school profiles that merely contain academic performance data may fail because they only represent one aspect of students or a school, which ignore many factors or aspects necessary to
impact student learning. Some school profiles that present data in a very sophisticated and complex way may fail because it is hard for school staff to understand and digest.

Planning school profiles is a highly complex and collaborative exercise. Engagement of the total individual school community with multiple indicators in designing solutions and responses to their unique learning environment may be possible in any accountability plan. There may be many approaches available to link assessment, indicators, and accountability system to improve student learning and school performance. Truly effective school profiles will be helpful in changing the internal dynamics of schools, to nurture the leadership, and to encourage the flexibility required to design and implement pathways to success for every school.

**Methods and Procedures of Development of Surveys and School Profiles**

Major job of each school is student learning. Learning does not take place in isolation, or only at school, multiple indicators must be considered and used to understand the multifaceted world of school from the perspective of everyone involved, and to know if the school purpose is appropriate and being achieved effectively. Three components are used to develop Edina Public School Profiles. The first one is achievement data from standardized testing and statewide tests. In each school profile, achievement indicators represent students’ growth and gain, the gaps between gender and ethnicity, passing rates in the state graduation tests or standards tests, the locations in comparison with district, state, and the nation are identified. The second component is school demographic data such as attendance, dropout, graduation rates, students’/teachers’ gender, ethnicity, as well as teachers’ teaching experience and
educational levels. Third, survey data that represent satisfaction level, opinions, perspectives, feeling and attitudes from students, staff and parents are included. The survey information includes multiple aspects of a school such as instruction, learning climates, technology integration, parent involvement and so on. Figure 1 shows the three categories as overlapping circles.

**Figure 1 Multiple Indicators for School Profiles**

![Multiple Indicators for School Profiles](image-url)
Survey Development

Survey is a common approach to understand perceptions in school because they can be completed anonymously and readministered to assess the change in perceptions over time.

Survey development depends on collaborative efforts from schools, district and community, and includes multiple steps. The following procedures are what the Edina School District used.

First, a planning committee defined and prioritized the school specific needs and formulated research objectives related to those needs. Second, this committee reviewed current available survey instruments such as National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE), ACT Student Needs Assessment Questionnaire, ACT High School Student Opinion Survey, New York State Effective Schools Consortia Surveys, Surveys from Minnesota Elementary School Principals Association, etc. After a careful review of these instruments, this committee decided to develop survey questionnaires internally because locally developed surveys can be better tailored to address specific research needs of the district and meet the district’s budget constraints. Third, this committee decided to use the entire populations of students, school staff and parents because this approach will eliminate sampling error and is pragmatic for a district with 7,000 students. Finally, questionnaires for students, staff and parents, respectively, have been developed and finalized.

All of these survey questions are in a four-point Likert-type scale. The four categories are divided as Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. Twelve common questions are provided across the different populations so that different perceptions, opinions and attitudes can be examined.
These surveys were administered in April and May in Edina. Standardized administration procedures were provided to school staff for student and staff surveys to enhance the quality of the data. To ensure complete anonymity, no name or identification numbers were used. Parent surveys were distributed through the mail.

**Reporting and visualizing Survey Results in School Profiles**

A useful school profile must not only be appropriate to its purpose and technically sound, but it must communicate effectively to the stakeholders and users who receive the reports and read the results about the school or district status relative to the survey and assessment results. Therefore, the impact of survey results on school improvement plans depends both on what is communicated and how it is communicated.

These several ways are used to provide clear information in school profiles. First, identify specific audiences and their needs. Since the audiences of school profiles are school principals, school site council members, teachers, and parents, the results should be very straightforward and easy to understand. Second, relationships in the data that are most pertinent to the research objectives need to be identified. For example, analyses include comparisons among subgroups, within items, with expectations, and with reference groups results. Third, all data presented in the school profiles should be clear, concise and visualized. Graphic presentations, such as bar graphs, pie charts, line graphs are used heavily to enhance the ease with which individuals grasp key relationships and are usually much more effective than extended narratives. Fourth, statistics for analyzing survey data are straightforward and descriptive and only as complex as required to identify and keep concepts appropriate for a particular audience.
Because there is often a tendency to debate the accuracy of individual numbers or their meaning from the survey results in the school profiles, some guidelines for users to interpret are provided. First, the thresholds that make group differences significant and meaningful are provided. When schools use the results, they will understand if the differences shown are only by chance or are actually significant. Second, do not overwhelm others with numbers at the risk of losing their understanding of key messages. Rather, make more use of the figures that give the overall messages such as percent of agreement and disagreement.

Figure 2 shows 2000 Edina Grades 4 and 5 student survey results. The results indicate percentages of students who are very much in strong agreement or agreement with the statements asking about their learning environment of the schools. Only 2 items with below 90 percent of agreement or strongly agreement (schoolwork challenged and daily homework). The items that are the highest for this group of students were—

- I am learning a lot in school
- I am encouraged to do my best in school
- Teachers are willing to help students with their needs
- Technology (computers, software, etc.) is available for my use at school
Figure 3 shows 2000 Edina Grades 6 through 8 student survey results. Majority of students are in strong agreement or agreement or agreement with the statements asking about their learning environment of the schools. The items that are the highest for this group of students were—

- Technology in my school is available for students' use
- I usually have homework daily
- Student activities (clubs, plays, sports, student council, fine arts, etc.) are available to me.
Figure 4 shows 2000 Edina Grades 10 through 12 student survey results. Most students have positive attitude toward their school learning environment. Compared with the results with younger students, one can find that students become less positive when they become older.
Edina parents were surveyed to questionnaires in terms of what they thought the students’ learning environment. The results of middle school parents were compared to the middle school student survey results. Figure 5 shows that parents have more positive perception of students’ learning environment than students thought. There were some significant differences between parent responses and student responses. The greatest differences were in response to respect and a variety of teaching and learning activities.
Figure 5 Responses from Students and Parents on Common Questions

Response comparison among staff, students and parents on common questions are shown in Figure 6. In most cases, parents and staff show more positive perceptions of school learning environment than students' perception. Only one item that shows parents' perception is different from students and staff is "Students respect staff at school." Parents believe students respect staff at school. However, both students and staff rated this item the lowest in all items.
Different from the standardized assessment data, most survey data don’t have national norms to compare. Usually, an approach to identify schools’ strengths and weaknesses is to compare school summary data with the district summary data. Figure 7 compared school summary results to the district summary results. The results indicate that this school received less positive responses than the district in all questions. The school may need to set their school improvement goals to improve their learning environment for students.
This year, Edina Public Schools continued surveying the perceptions of students, parents and staff. Currently data collection is in the process. Two years' comparison will be made to see change over years.

In summary, several important comparisons among the relationships are used for survey data analysis. First, results from all survey questions within each population are compared. This comparison provides information about what kinds of questions were responded to positively, what kinds of questions were responded to less positively. In 2000 surveys, results show more than 90% of students are satisfied with the availability
of technology and student activities provided by school. However, they feel less satisfied with respect shown between students and staff. This finding indicates that the Edina School District has done great job at integrating technology in learning and providing many activities for students, but may need to enhance supporting respect relationships between students and staff. Secondly, comparison helps examination of discrepancies from different populations to identify problems. On the questions about staff caring about students, 99% of staff believes they really care about students, but only 83% of students feel cared about in school. In particular, as students get older, they feel less cared about by adults at school. In elementary schools, more than 90% of students feel cared about, but in high school, only 50% of students feel cared about by staff at school. These findings are helpful for staff to target their goals to improve schools. Third, comparison in subgroups is useful to identify problems further and deeper. For example, 86% of staff responded that students show respect for staff at school. When breaking down by grade and staff job, results show that high school staffs feel less respected by students than elementary staff and non-licensed staffs feel less respected than licensed staff. Thus, schools are able to identify subgroups set specific goals.

The results of surveys in school profiles offer educators a means for examining aspects of the Edina Public Schools’ educational experience. The further years’ survey results will represent how these feelings, perceptions and opinions change over time.
Once information from the surveys is reported in the school profiles, schools and the district begin the important work of using school profiles for school improvement process. School profiles are usually completed in August, combining all achievement data, survey data and outcome data. Each September, members of Edina School District community come together to decide how their school can become better at helping students achieve high standards. This process is called School Improvement Planning.

In order to identify on which areas the school should focus for performance improvement, it is necessary to identify each school’s current level of performance. School profiles contain a wealth of information about individual schools, including data on achievement, attendance, student/staff demographics and student/staff/parent perceptions of the school. Schools must analyze and digest information provided in the school profiles to review past performance, set specific, measurable targets for improvement aligned with district goals. In this way, the schools profile guides school through a systematic process for continuous school performance improvement and provides a basis for implementation.
Implications

The purpose, process and reporting considerations discussed above suggest that educators and administrators may use surveys as one component in school profiles and with continuous monitoring for school improvement process and accountability system. So far not many researchers and districts discuss or use surveys for school profiles and school improvement plans. Only a small number of studies and a few instruments have been published on the indicators of schools and student learning. Yet, we believe that educators cannot ignore the possibility that learning climates, school leadership, parent involvement, students’ attitudes affect student learning and school improvement.

We expect school indicators beyond achievement in student learning and school performance to become increasingly important. Therefore, three challenges face school profile development and reporting. First, the existing achievement indicators are only partially suited to assess all the variables of student learning and school improvement. The development of survey instruments capable of providing information relevant for learning and school improvement involves many challenges, both conceptual and methodological.

Second, there is almost no research on the nature of the indicators beyond achievement with student and school achievement. Research based on longitudinal and other appropriate designs for surveys and employing relevant measures is needed if we want to better understand how learning environment and school cultures develop and change throughout encounters with student learning.

Finally, in order to make the school profile effectively represent student learning and school performance, further attention by educators and administrators may be
focused on the attitudes and beliefs students bring into their learning as well as school climates students experience every day, and how they develop and change during their educational experiences and impact they have on students’ achievement and eventual application of their future lives.

This study has presented procedures, approaches, and issues of surveys in school profiles. Educators and administrators at all levels may find it helpful to use these approaches to develop their own surveys and school profiles to monitor students and evaluate their schools and increase effectiveness of student learning and school performance.
References


