STUDENT SURVEYS *A fresh look*

No one spends more time observing teachers than students.
In recent years, district adopters of student surveys typically used them as a tool for assessing teacher performance. When educators resisted this approach, many schools lost enthusiasm for student surveys. Here, SREB offers ways for districts to take a fresh look at student surveys and their potential to transform schools — and applies lessons from earlier launches to help districts and schools overcome teacher resistance.

The Results Are In   *What does research say about student surveys?*

Students provide accurate feedback about instruction. Students as young as age 8 can differentiate between teachers' personal behaviors and effective instructional practices. Student feedback is more predictive of academic success than observation data and teacher self-assessments.

Student surveys are useful. Student surveys identify strengths and areas for growth related to a teacher's instruction and

When my teacher marks my work, he/she writes on my papers to help me understand.				
No/never	Mostly not	Maybe/sometimes	Mostly yes	Yes/always

-Kentucky Student Voice Survey, Grades 3-5

classroom management. Schools can use results to inform professional learning opportunities. For example, responses that say a teacher does not consistently provide helpful feedback on assignments suggest a concrete, bite-sized place for the teacher to focus improvement efforts.

A Fresh Look   *How should districts and schools (re)launch student surveys?*

Enhance Professional Learning
- Teachers can use student feedback to pinpoint new strategies to try in their classrooms.
- Instructional coaches can target their services and identify opportunities for peer collaboration.
- Principals can coordinate the school's professional learning offerings based on common areas of need.

Cultivate Student Engagement
- Teachers can open the door for two-way conversations with students about teaching and learning.
- Students can develop their ability to advocate for their learning needs.
- Schools can provide structured opportunities for students to reflect on learning processes, not just learning outcomes.

Improve School Culture
- Principals and teachers can form staff committees aligned with students' priorities.
- Principals and teachers can use results to adjust social and academic norms.
- Educators and parents can use feedback to explore student perceptions of instruction, belonging and safety.

Inform Practice Continually
- Districts can cultivate student understanding and comfort with the survey platform and purpose.
- Teachers can use survey platforms to gauge learning needs and teaching strategies throughout the year during units — enabling a faster cycle for adjusting instructional and managerial techniques.

SREB | Educator Effectiveness

Proven Practices *What should district leaders consider during each stage of implementation?*

Reach out to educators.
Perform early and frequent outreach to support educators' understanding of the survey's role in their work.

- Articulate the purpose for administering the survey.
- Explain how results will be used — and provide specific examples of these uses in action.
- Address survey methodology that teachers may worry about.
- Clarify misconceptions.

Plan and execute.
Plan for contingencies, but leave plenty of space for iteration based on feedback from educators and the public.

- Choose vendors that align with the district's purpose for implementing student surveys.
- Plan for the classroom technology needed to complete surveys.
- Create timelines to solicit educator feedback on survey administration.

Apply results.
Train educators to interpret data, and assist school leaders with how to act on feedback results.

- Design training on how educators can analyze and use data to plan changes to instruction and management.
- Provide tools and concrete guidance about using survey platforms for formative feedback purposes.
- Assist principals, instructional coaches and teacher-leaders with delivering professional learning based on results.

Overcoming Resistance ································

Why might educators resist student surveys? How can districts create buy-in?

When an initiative such as student surveys is introduced, educator resistance is normal. This resistance can take three main forms — natural, active or passive. **By better understanding each form and its causes, districts can prevent and respond to educator resistance in more meaningful and effective ways.**

1. Natural Resistance
Natural resistance is human nature. It stems from normal, instinctive emotions, such as care, weariness and stress.

Care
Teachers may feel uneasy or nervous when faced with the prospect of uncovering student perceptions in such a direct way — it can feel like hearing a friend say, "We need to talk." Teachers are invested in their work in ways that merge personal and professional identity — including the very instructional practices, classroom management techniques and student relationships that student surveys ask about.

Weariness

In recent years, districts have implemented a flurry of initiatives to improve the effectiveness of educators. However, districts have not always been strategic enough about the timing of these initiatives and the relationships among them. This can create fatigue among educators, who may perceive district strategy as trial and error and new initiatives as merely *du jour* projects.

Stress

The high value of student surveys does not offset the inherent pressures, added responsibilities and logistic stressors that come with executing them. Educators are the ones charged with directly implementing new systems and often grapple with managing, scheduling and coordinating many initiatives and tasks for students with diverse sets of needs. It is important to keep in mind that student surveys are an additional responsibility and logistical consideration on their plates.

District Actions Prevent and Respond to Natural Resistance

Districts should not focus on preventing natural resistance, but instead use it to involve teachers and guard against problems with design, implementation and messaging — issues that contribute to active and passive resistance. To harness natural resistance, districts should:

- conduct focus groups to generate ideas and capture feedback on plans before they are implemented
- convene advisory councils that are diverse and inclusive
- employ pilots in select schools to gather feedback and inform adjustments

2. Active Resistance

Active resistance to student surveys can stem from two categories of concern among educators: student contributions and adult uses.

Student Contributions

Educators may be skeptical of students' ability to understand nuances and express perspectives about the complexities of effective teaching.

District Actions Prevent and Respond to Active Resistance to Student Contributions

Districts can help alleviate skepticism by effectively reaching teachers to clearly explain answers to common questions about survey design elements, such as:

- What makes the survey developmentally appropriate?
- How will students on a variety of reading levels be able to access survey content?
- What will happen if a student does not answer survey questions seriously, or submits outlier answers?
- What accommodations will be provided to students who are English language learners, receive special education services, or have other individual needs?

Adult Uses

Active resistance can also stem from surveys' use, or perceived use, as an accountability "gotcha!"

District Actions Prevent and Respond to Active Resistance to Adult Uses

To prevent perceptions that the survey is being used as a negative accountability tool, districts should:

- reach teachers effectively to clearly articulate the survey instrument's purpose and rationale
- provide opportunities and scripts for routinely explaining the survey instrument's purpose to students
- share both survey uses and resources that align with professional practice and growth

3. Passive Resistance

Passive resistance often results if the survey tool is not meaningful or relevant during two points in time: implementation and follow-through. Often, passive resistance is unintentional, and people may not even be aware they are exhibiting it.

Implementation

People's first-hand experiences often determine their outlook on later follow-through efforts — so it is important to create a positive initial experience.

District Actions Prevent and Respond to Passive Resistance to Implementation

To create conditions for a smooth experience on the day of survey administration, districts should:

- provide technological capacity ahead of time — and sweat the details, such as providing the correct number of working headphones

- provide teachers with ways to give their students advance opportunities to learn how to navigate the survey platform independently

- be conscious of loss of instructional time and other teacher responsibilities when scheduling survey administration

Follow-Through

Meaning and relevance develop by circling back to survey results and their implications, consistently and across time.

District Actions Prevent and Respond to Passive Resistance to Follow-Through

To give school administrators and teachers something to say "yes!" to, districts should:

- eliminate barriers to access and use, such as confusion about login information

- create specific times for administrators and teachers to access and review reports in a structured and collaborative environment, instead of hoping people will do so on their own

- facilitate educators' ability to use the reports to create products, such as action plans, that have practical daily uses — for example, develop resources that can be used during professional development, faculty meetings, grade-level planning time and individual coaching sessions

We Can Help

SREB.org/StudentSurveys

SREB's educator effectiveness team is available for strategy advice, technical assistance, focus groups and on-demand analysis.

Join the conversation. Tweet @SREBeducation using #StudentVoice.

Change the scope. Go to SREB.org/StudentSurveys to explore ideas for states and schools.