Using the SALT Survey

In 1998, nearly 200,000 people took part in the SALT survey. Teachers, administrators, students and parents from all 327 Rhode Island schools answered questions about attitudes and experiences. The purpose of the survey was to provide schools with a tool to use at their will. The great potential in the survey lies in its ability to ask questions of large groups – such as teachers – without having the answers dominated by a few strong personalities. The survey also asks students, teachers, administrators and parents some of the same questions. In those cases, the overlap provides an excellent opportunity to gauge differences in experience. Do teachers say that they are assigning two hours of homework nightly? Look to see what the parents and students said their kids are studying that much at home.

The survey provides an excellent starting point for learning what is happening in your school.

> Who reviews the SALT survey?

The school improvement team or one of its subcommittees should examine this information as part of their ongoing self-study process.

The SALT survey provides your team with varied perspectives about the conditions and practices that help define your school community. That information should be used in conjunction with other data about your school to help your team make better decisions about how to improve student learning.

Begin with what is most important to improve student learning in English language arts, mathematics, and writing at your school.

Look at your school improvement plan, and identify other areas of concern to the school.

Examine these charts related to the other areas of concern.

> What does your school improvement team do with its findings?

How to use the survey findings

Use these findings in conjunction with other information you have acquired as you conduct self-study about issues of importance.

Use these findings to refine and develop your school improvement plan.

Share these findings with teachers, parents, and students, and include them as part of your school report night.

Use these findings to document needs, write grants, and develop your school's reports.

Incorporating the SALT focus areas

> What are the three SALT focus areas that unify all SALT activities and how does the SALT survey relate to them?

SALT Focus Area 1: Student Learning

This first focus area concerns what the students in your school have learned and how well they have learned. This includes what your school knows and understands about what its students have learned. The focus area also includes how your school assesses student learning.

If you study the following chart, you will find the SALT survey can help you answer these questions:

- Do your teachers have high expectations for their students?
- Are their expectations different for students with certain characteristics?

- Are students provided with additional instruction, if they fall behind or are ready to move ahead?
- Do students think they have the potential to go to college?
- Do parents feel their child is learning as much as he/she can?

SALT Focus Area 2: Teaching

This focus area is about learning and teaching in your school. It focuses on the quality and effectiveness of the teaching that goes on in the school. It includes the role your teachers play in the focus area Student Learning. It also includes an assessment of how well your teachers move their students towards meeting standards. This focus area is not about the performance of individual teachers at your school, but rather about the overall quality of instruction in your school.

If you study the following chart, you will discover how the SALT survey can help you answer these questions:

- Do teachers think developing reading and writing skills across the curriculum is important?
- What practices do teachers use to enhance the reading, writing, and mathematical skills of students?
- How much are students reading outside of your school?
- Would parents spend more time helping their son/daughter if they knew what to do?
- Do seniors who receive free or reduced price lunches report differences in the types of math courses they have taken (high school only)?
- How familiar are teachers with the standards in their content area(s)?
- What kinds of professional development that is focused on standards are your teachers currently involved in?
- Do your teachers want more professional development related to standards?
- Are your teachers using instructional practices that complement the use of standards?
- What efforts do teachers make to integrate curricula across subject areas?

SALT Focus Area 3: The School

This focus area includes all the structures and processes within and outside your school that promote and support learning and teaching.

If you carefully study the following charts, you will discover how the SALT survey can help you answer these questions:

- How do teachers feel about the quality of their relationships with their colleagues?
- Do teachers feel they are making an impact on the learning of their students?
- Do students feel supported by their teachers?
- Do students feel the expectations and rules for their behavior are clearly defined?
- How do students and teachers feel about the school climate?
- What are teacher attitudes about certain instructional practices?
- How many years of experience do teachers in your school have?
- What have teachers identified as their most important professional development needs?
- How often are teachers engaged in certain professional development activities?

- What do teachers feel are the biggest barriers to school reform?
- How much decision-making authority do teachers feel they have?
- Do teachers feel they are getting the support they need from building and district administrators?
- Do parents feel your school does a good job involving them on committees, such as curriculum, budget, and school improvement?
- Are teachers integrating health concepts into the curriculum?
- How often do teachers have contact with the nurse, guidance staff, and special education teachers?
- Do students and teachers feel safe?
- About what are students feeling stressed?
- How often do students report they smoke cigarettes and use illegal drugs?
- How much contact and communication do teachers have with parents?
- How often do teachers use certain strategies to increase parent involvement?
- What do students report about the kind of involvement their parents have with them around schoolwork?
- How do parents rate the school's efforts to involve parents?
- What do parents want to know more about?
- How often do teachers report their students are involved in community-based activities?
- What classroom practices do teachers use to promote citizenship and social competence?
- In what kinds of outside school community activities are students involved?
- How much time are students spending unsupervised after school?

The following scenario provides an example of how one fictional school used the SALT survey as part of their self-study process.

(Fictional) SAMPLE SCHOOL:

Municipal Elementary School

A New Focus on Student Performance in Mathematics

Municipal Elementary School created a new mission statement that highlights standards-based literacy and numeracy.

To meet their goal of 100% proficiency in literacy and numeracy, the school improvement team examined their most recent scores on the state assessments for the 4th grade. The test results revealed that 54% — more than half of the 4th graders — were not meeting the standard on the Problem-Solving subtest of the New Standards Reference Exam for mathematics. Furthermore, these same assessment results revealed that while 46% of the total 4th grade population overall met the standard, only 30% of the Hispanic students met or exceeded the standard. Clearly an equity gap existed between the Hispanic students and the rest of the student population.

Setting Performance Targets for the Future

In conjunction with school community representatives, the team set a performance target of an increase of 12% of the number of students meeting or exceeding the standard in mathematics over the course of the

next three years. They also committed to decreasing by 15% the number of students who were scoring in the bottom category called “Significantly Below the Standard.”

Choosing Strategies to Meet the Targets

The school improvement team is aware of research showing that incorporating mathematical concepts, problem solving, and skills into all sectors of the curriculum can boost student achievement in mathematics. The team turned to their SALT sourcebook to find information that could help them plan how to increase the achievement of their students.

Using the Charts

The team formulated this question: “Is the staff at our school supporting standards-based practices for numeracy across the curriculum?” After consulting the Guide, the team determined that the following charts would be useful to them:

B.1. Teacher Attitudes Toward Educational Practices

C.1 Team or Grade Level Practices

C.2 Teacher Reports of Integrated Thematic Units and Homework

D.1 Teacher Reports of Classroom Practices

D.1.2 Teacher Reports of Integration and Interdisciplinary Practices

D.1.10 Teacher Reports of Mathematical Reasoning and Skill Enhancement Practices

D.1.17 Teacher Reports of Standards-Based Practices for Numeracy

G.2 Teacher Reports of Additional Staff Development Activities Wanted or Needed

B.1 Student Reports of Classroom Instructional Practices

B.1.1 Student Reports of Classroom Instructional Practices by Grade Level

The Team’s Findings Regarding Mathematics Practices

The team discovered that the teachers’ enthusiasm about integrating mathematics instruction across the curriculum was fairly strong. On their Chart M-B.1 (Attitudes Toward Educational Practices), the average of the teacher responses was closer to “strongly agree” with math skill development and integration across the curriculum than to simply “agree” (4.7 on a scale of 5).

However, on Chart SF-D.1 (Classroom Practices), teachers at Municipal reported using mathematical and skill enhancement practices on slightly more than a monthly basis (3.2 on a scale of 7). Chart SF-D.1.2 (Integration and Interdisciplinary Practices) confirmed that only moderate levels of implementation of interdisciplinary practices exist at Municipal. Teachers reported that teachers from other subject areas help to plan and carry out instruction only monthly (3.0) and that classroom curricula are integrated with topics in other subject areas slightly more than once a month (3.1). Chart SF-D.1.10 (Mathematical reasoning and Skill Enhancement Practices. See Fig. 2) also indicated that mathematical concepts and reasoning are integrated into lessons slightly more than once a month (3.2). On Chart SF-G.2 (Teacher Reports of Additional Staff Development Activities Wanted/needed), teachers at Municipal ranked integration of mathematical reasoning and concepts throughout the curriculum as the 4th most wanted/needed professional development activity.

Examining Other Issues — High Expectations

During the time that Municipal Elementary School was writing its mission statement, the school leaders held public forums to clarify the priorities of its school community. The community expressed their concern that the school staff will have to have high expectations for all students if the students are to achieve 100% proficiency in literacy and numeracy. Municipal's improvement team has become aware of research indicating that students perform to the levels expected of them, and not much higher. The school improvement team decided to explore the issue of expectations by investigating what roles teacher, parent and self-expectations might play in the lives of their learners.

Using the Charts

The team formulated this question: "What kind of expectations do the various members of our school community (teachers, parents, students) have for students at Municipal? After consulting the Guide, they decided to examine the following charts that are related to expectations:

C.3 Quality of Team or Grade Level Interactions, Teacher Expectations, and Focus on Cultural Pluralism

TSRS-

A.4 Expectations of Academic Potential

TSRS-

A.6.3 Student Behavior by Expectations of Academic Potential (New Chart 1998-99)

TSRS-

A.7 Early Childhood/Kindergarten Program

TSRS-

A.8 Grades, Academic Behavior, and Expectations of Academic Potential (New Chart 1998-99)

D.1 Student Reports of Academic Expectations

D.1.1 Student Reports of Academic Expectations

D.1.2 Student Reports of Academic Expectations

The Team's Findings Regarding Expectations

On the one hand, the team was pleased to discover that teachers have relatively high expectations for all of their students. Chart TSRS-A.4 (Expectations of Academic Potential) indicated that teachers felt that almost 80% of their students had the potential to graduate from at least a 4-year college (see Fig. 1). However, the team was not pleased to learn that teachers still expected smaller numbers of Hispanic students than other students to complete college and graduate programs. While teachers expected approximately 80% of white and black students to graduate from at least a 4-year college, they expected the same of only 63% of Hispanic students.

Student Perceptions

Also, the team was surprised to learn from Chart E-D.1 (Student Reports of Academic Expectations) that while 76% of all students reported that they "probably will" go to college and 68% reported that their parents think that they "probably will" go to college, only 45% reported that their teachers think that they "probably will" go to college.

New Priorities

The team concluded that the teachers at Municipal do have high expectations for their students in general, but there is some residual feeling that the Hispanic students will not achieve at the same levels as other students. The team felt that lower expectations could affect the mathematics performance of students and decided that this was an issue that needed attention.

Taking Action — Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement

The school improvement team concluded that even though the teachers recognize the importance of integrating mathematical concepts into the curriculum, they clearly are not doing so, at least not frequently. The high rank they gave to the practice on Chart SF-G.2 indicates that they may not feel prepared to implement the practices. The improvement team formed an action team to investigate attitudes and practices and to make specific recommendations about what is needed to reach their performance targets in mathematics. The school improvement team suggested that the action team might want to investigate the nationally known project TESA (Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement) and how they could better connect to the district standards work.

Monitoring

To monitor the effects of these initiatives, the team set specific indicators based on this year's data. They cited certain charts to examine next year to see if student perceptions of their teachers' expectations had changed. They also identified four classroom practice charts to see if the specific practices had increased in frequency.