

**Engaging School Administrators in Student Surveys:
A Response to IES Guidance on the Survey Research Process**

By Ryan Balch, Ph.D.

This white paper is part of a series on student surveys by Ryan Balch, CEO/Founder of My Student Survey (www.mystudentsurvey.com). My Student Survey is a leading provider of stakeholder surveys for schools and districts across the country. The goal of this series is to highlight key research related to student surveys, share best practices, and provide technical assistance for schools and districts using student surveys.

Student surveys can provide an invaluable source of data for helping teachers to grow as professionals. In a recent IES publication (see [HERE](#)), the authors provide helpful guidance for educators on how to create, administer, and report on survey results. However, the analysis is limited in one of the most crucial parts of the survey administration process: engaging administrators in analyzing and acting upon student survey data. Some of the most important advocates in using student survey data to drive instruction are school administrators (depending on the school, this could be the principal, an instructional dean, or an assistant principal in charge of academics and instruction). These individuals will greatly impact how survey results translate into action so engaging them in the process is a critical part of implementation.

On a daily basis, school administrators make decisions about how teachers and students allocate their time. It is therefore essential for the student survey process to demonstrate value to both administrators as well as teachers. To do this, data must be relevant, actionable and be able to support instruction. This paper will outline three different methods that support administrators

in using student survey data to improve teacher instruction, thereby justifying the time allocated by providing critical insights, connecting existing resources, and facilitating data-driven conversations about instructional practice. It extends information presented by IES to include essential characteristics of feedback reports that allow administrators to play an active role in answering the ‘Now What?’ question of using survey results.

The first method is creating feedback reports are relevant to administrators. Student survey feedback reports should therefore inform decisions at the school level for administrators to be fully engaged (in addition to teacher-level insights). An example is shown here in which administrators can see school-level results for each survey category in comparison to district average as well as a list of Areas of Strength and Areas of Focus. These Areas of Strengths and Areas of Focus strategically identify what their school is doing *differently* than other schools. It’s what sets them apart. The relevance of this data gives administrators *personal* guidance in parallel to supporting their ability to provide individualized guidance for each member of their staff.



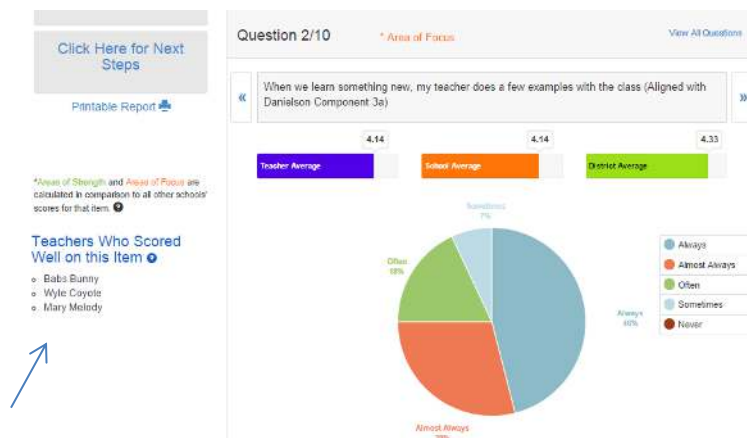
School Level Areas of Strength	School Level Areas of Focus
<p>Below are the 'Areas of Strength' for your school within each survey category. These were based on how your school's ratings compared to the ratings for other schools within the district.</p> <p>It is important to look at questions in which a school does or does not do as well on in comparison to OTHER schools. For instance, if the district average for an item is 3.0 and a school receives a 4.0, this would likely be their Area of Strength because the school had higher scores in comparison to other schools. At the same time, if the district average for an item was 4.5 and the school again receives a 4.0, this would likely not be noted as an Area of Strength because the school did not have a higher score in comparison to other schools.</p>	<p>Below are the 'Areas of Focus' for your school within each survey category. These were based on how your school's ratings compared to the ratings for other schools within the district.</p> <p>For instance, if the district average for an item is 3.0 and the school has an average of a 2.9, then this would NOT be noted as an Area of Focus. However, if the average for schools was a 4.5 and your school again scores a 2.9, this would likely be noted as the school's Area of Focus. Instead of just looking at the overall number (i.e. which number was the highest in the area), identifying answers relative to other teachers is a more strategic method of identifying practices that teachers in the school can work on rather than focusing on an item in which many teachers also had low scores.</p>
<p>Presenter Areas of Strength - Item 2/10 When we learn something new, my teacher does a few examples with the class (Aligned with Danielson Component 3a)</p>	<p>Presenter Area of Focus - Item 7/10 We learn in different ways during class (teacher explaining, class discussions, working in groups, doing projects etc.) (Aligned with Danielson Component 3c)</p>
<p>Manager Areas of Strength - Item 1/8 Students in this class behave the way the teacher wants them to (Aligned with Danielson Component 2d)</p>	<p>Manager Area of Focus - Item 3/8 My teacher tells us when we are behaving well (Aligned with Danielson Component 2d)</p>
<p>Counselor Areas of Strength - Item 5/8 My teacher walks around the room to check on students when we are doing work in class (Aligned with Danielson Component 3d)</p>	<p>Counselor Area of Focus - Item 3/6 My teacher checks to make sure I understand what we are learning (Aligned with Danielson Component 3d)</p>

The next method involved the type of data that administrators can access. One of the key roles for leaders in any organization is to tap into existing resources within a team. Great leaders connect the dots. If there is expertise on a particular topic within the team, the leader can

leverage that expertise to strengthen the skills of other team members. The key requirement is *access to information* about which team members possess this expertise and which team members are in need of learning these skills.

For student survey data, effective feedback reports allow school administrators to easily access this type of information. They should know who the experts on specific practices are within the building so that they can organize focused

observations of model teachers or use the data to establish mentor/mentee relationships. At My Student Survey, we use a



Top Teacher function that lists teachers who scored well on each of the items (see screen shot below), but there are a variety of ways that administrators could be given access to this important information.

The final strategy for engaging administrators is to provide tools that help translate survey data into action. Administrators bring a wide variety of experience in using data to drive instruction, and even experienced principals will seek out new techniques or strategies for discussing results. The critical role for administrators is to create time for conversations about teacher practice that are driven by reliable data. We recommend both individual coaching conversations and school-wide professional development sessions to facilitate these conversations.

In some schools, it may work better for the administrator to meet with individual teachers and talk through the student survey results as part of an existing conversation (such as a mid-year

check in). We have included a sample conversation guide that can facilitate this process and provides ideas for how administrators can structure this conversation (see example in Appendix A). In other schools, there may be an existing culture of analyzing data and using results to identify plans of action. Student survey reports can therefore provide a source of data for an upcoming faculty meeting or professional development session where teachers use their results as an opportunity for sharing best practices with each other. To assist with this type of session, we have provided a sample agenda that administrators can use as a model for sharing best practices among teachers using student survey feedback reports (see examples in Appendix B).

As schools and districts plan for engaging administrators in student surveys, there are a variety of considerations that should be discussed:

Readiness Questions:

- Do your student survey feedback reports provide information about school level trends and practices?
- Do feedback reports allow administrators to identify model teachers?
- What resources are available for administrators to have focused conversations with teachers about student survey data?

Next Steps:

- Develop an analysis plan for calculating and reporting school level trends from student survey data.
- Adjust reports (or work with a vendor who currently has these reports) so that they allow for the identification of model teachers.
- Create or adapt conversation guides and professional development session plans that administrators can use facilitate teacher use of feedback reports.

About Ryan Balch



Ryan Balch is a national thought leader on using student surveys at the elementary and secondary level has expertise in measurement development. Before founding My Student Survey, Ryan Balch completed his Ph.D. in Education Policy at Vanderbilt University as an Institute of Education Sciences (IES) Fellow, where his dissertation focused on the development and validation of student surveys on teacher practice. He was the principal investigator for the student survey pilot of more than 15,000 students in 7 districts as part of Georgia's Race to the Top initiative and worked for the National Center on Performance Incentives. In addition, Ryan was the director of teacher and principal evaluation for Baltimore City Schools. During this time, he oversaw the creation and implementation of the district's new systems of evaluation. Previously, Ryan worked as a science teacher and administrator for seven years at Riverwood High School in Atlanta, Georgia. He has a B.A. in Psychology from Duke University and a M.A. in Science Education from Georgia State University.

Appendix A – Sample Templates for Individual Conversations and School Wide Sessions

**Coaching and Goal Setting Session Template
Student Survey Administration**

Questions for Discussion:

- What kind(s) of feedback from my students was I expecting?
- What did I discover about my students and/or the classroom environment that was most surprising?
- How does what I learned connect with my recent observation feedback?

Focusing on Strengths:

What were some of the areas of strengths that students noted? What are the strategies that I use that students were picking up on?

Areas of Focus:

Using your student feedback teacher report, choose 2-3 “Areas for Improvement” that were listed on your report that you feel are things that you would like to focus on. For each, write down some of the strategies that you might use to help you be successful in this area. These could either be from some of the techniques you come up with in collaboration with your coach or ones that you know of that you would like to try.

Area of Improvement #1: _____

Instructional Strategies for Area of Improvement #1:

Person who I can observe and collaborate with on this teaching practice: _____

Area of Improvement #2: _____

Instructional Strategies for Area of Improvement #2:

Person who I can observe and collaborate with on this teaching practice: _____

Area of Improvement #3: _____

Instructional Strategies for Area of Improvement #3

Person who I can observe and collaborate with on this teaching practice: _____

Next Steps

What are 2 things I can do to make sure I continue using these strategies beyond today?

- 1.
- 2.

What are some of the instructional strategies that you use that I might be able to share with other teachers?

Appendix B – Sample Agenda for School Level Professional Development Session



STUDENT SURVEYS OF TEACHER PRACTICE – SCHOOL PRESENTATION

Today's Agenda

- Warm up: What motivated you to start teaching?
- Identifying strengths and sharing best practices
- Identifying instructional goals based on Areas of Focus
- Applying new techniques to upcoming lessons