

Introduction: Getting Reliable Data

How do you get good and reliable information about what is going on at your school? How do you know what programs are successful? How do you understand the effects of your curriculum and pedagogy? Very often, decision makers rely on information they receive from conversations at football games, performances, or social events. Sometimes information comes from a spouse who had a conversation with another parent at the school or from a general impression that was created when the decision maker was a student at the school.

Think about this: have you ever gotten good and reliable information from carpool – probably not. Wouldn't it be more reasonable to devise a systematic way to get good information? Wouldn't it be reasonable to equip decision makers with a ready response to give to the parent or spouse who wants to bend their ear about a specific issue? Using the most reliable data possible will help you make informed decisions, so the question is: how will you get good and reliable information and how will your community feel like and understand that the decision makers are in fact listening and paying attention?

There are two basic concepts to consider in data collection: opinion gathering and benchmarking. Taken together along with regular department or committee reports are areas you can consider when looking for reliable and good information about the school. While there are many different models for opinion gathering (surveys, focus groups, interviews, behavior tracking, etc.), this paper will focus on surveys and specifically the SAIS Value Narrative Survey.

Opinion Gathering: The SAIS Value Narrative Survey

SAIS has produced a highly reliable survey that measures the congruence of the values of your community and the degree to which your community perceives that you are performing at delivering on those values. SAIS has a version of the survey available for five stakeholder groups: Parents, Trustees, Faculty, Students, and Alumni and we can help you decide whether to use a full census or a random sample technique in order to get a valid response rate. The survey is deployed by SAIS on line and there is a pre-notification, deployment, and reminder schedule that you develop with our guidance.

The survey consists of four parts: demographics, importance questions, performance questions, and the “ultimate” question. We tailor the demographics questions as needed – for example, in an all girls school, we won't ask how many boys attend – it wouldn't apply; or if you don't have an upper school, we don't ask about upper school students. The survey takes an average of four minutes to complete.

After the demographics questions, respondents are asked to rate the IMPORTANCE placed on a series of attributes (listed below). Next, respondents are asked to rate how well the school PERFORMS on the same attributes. Finally, respondents are asked the “ultimate question” also known as the Net Promoter question: on a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 is not likely and 10 is very likely, how likely are you to recommend the school to friends and colleagues? There are 28 unique attributes that a respondent scores which are broken down into eight categories:



CATEGORIES AND INDIVIDUAL ITEMS

1. Curriculum & Programming: Academic Rigor, Variety of Course Offerings, Character Education, Faith Based, Preparatory (college/next level), Travel Opportunities, Global Education
2. Faculty: Care and Concern, Inspirational and motivating, Subject Area Expertise
3. Athletics: Variety of Offerings, Quality of Offering, Opportunity to Participate
4. Fine Arts: Variety of Offerings, Quality of Offering, Opportunity to Participate
5. Clubs and other Co-curriculars: Variety of Offerings, Quality of Offering, Opportunity to Participate
6. Safety: Physical, Emotional, Spiritual
7. Diversity: Socioeconomic, Cultural, Religious
8. Technology: Availability, Current, School-provided

And the possible responses for each of the questions is listed below:

Importance Scale	Possible numerical value	Performance Scale
Not Important	1	Not Well
Somewhat Important	2	Somewhat Well
Important	3	Well
Very Important	4	Very Well
Extremely Important	5	Extremely Well
Not Applicable	0	Not Applicable

The categories and individual items cannot be modified; for statistical reliability they are set. While you can't add any questions to the survey, at the end of it, the survey can re-direct to a web page with questions you have designed.

Please remember that this survey is measuring the congruence between values held by stakeholders and the perception of delivery on those values. A school may not offer a particular item about which the questions are asked – it may not be financially feasible or culturally appropriate. The questions are constructed to help you reliably understand your community and its values – they do not solicit opinions about whether or not to start or stop any particular program. The validity studies conducted on the survey questions suggest that there is a high degree of similar understanding of questions from one respondent to the next.

The Report

The report that is produced looks at the congruence between how important an item is to stakeholders and how well the school is performing at delivering that item – we call this the congruence coefficient and we numerically show you where you have good congruence and where you don't at both the category level and at the individual item level. We also provide you with the raw mean scores for both questions by individual item so that you can see in some cases not being congruent might be desirable for you.



The technical manual gives an overview of what the numbers mean in a larger context and what constitutes a standard deviation when a Standard Nine (stanine) scale is applied.

Because we ask the “ultimate question,” we are able to break your respondents down into promoters (those who score you a 9 or 10), passives (those who score you a 7 or 8), and detractors (those who score you below a 6). This is known as the net promoter question and leads to a good look at what people think who are happy with you, neither happy nor unhappy with you, and those who are not happy with you.

In the analysis, an item or category that has both a high importance and a high performance score likely indicates an area of strength for the school that is likely aligned with the school’s mission and its desired outcomes for students. An item or category with a high importance score but a low performance score likely indicates an area of growth for the school. Likewise, an item or category with a low importance score but a high performance score may suggest an area on which the school is focusing too many resources.

For more information including the survey technical manual, a short video, and instructions on how to get started, please visit www.sais.org/surveys.

