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AUTHOR Stavros, Denny
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ABSTRACT

As part of the evaluation of the High School Improvement Project (HSIP), a survey was conducted to measure staff perceptions of school and instructional effectiveness behaviors and activities at Northwestern High School in Detroit, Michigan. The questionnaire used was an abbreviated version of the School Effectiveness Questionnaire developed by the Connecticut State Department of Education. The seven characteristics which were measured included: (1) safe and orderly environment, (2) clear school mission, (3) instructional leadership, (4) high expectations, (5) opportunity to learn and student time-on-task, (6) frequent monitoring of student progress, and (7) home-school relations. Results showed, respectively, that: (1) most of the respondents agreed that the school was neat, clean, and comfortable; (2) more than one-third of the respondents indicated uncertainty about the program objectives; (3) the principal was viewed by most respondents as having good personal relationships with students and teachers, good problem solving ability, and as being supportive of staff development; (4) over 75 percent of respondents agreed that low achieving students presented more discipline problems than other students; (5) class atmosphere was regarded as conducive to learning; (6) teachers monitored class assignments; and (7) there was too little communication between parents and the school. The survey instrument is appended to this report. (AOS)

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REPORT ON THE RESULTS OF A SURVEY OF
NORTHWESTERN HIGH SCHOOL STAFF

High School Improvement Project
June 1982

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Denny Stavros
General Evaluation Unit
Research and Evaluation Department
Office of Research, Planning and Evaluation
Detroit Public Schools

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UP 022 844

Report on the Results of a Survey of
Northwestern High School Staff
High School Improvement Project
June 1982

Introduction

A part of the evaluation design of the High School Improvement Project (HSIP) at Northwestern High School included the mounting of a survey to measure staff perceptions of school and instructional effectiveness behaviors and activities at Northwestern. This survey was initiated on June 4, 1982. The results of the survey--based on the responses of 39 staff members or approximately one-third of those receiving questionnaires--are presented in this report.

The questionnaire used in this survey was an abbreviated version (46 out of 80 items) of the School Effectiveness Questionnaire, the May, 1982 edition. This was the first of a set of revisions and modifications of an instrument developed by the Connecticut State Department of Education. It served as one component in their School Effectiveness Assessment Process. The Connecticut instrument was constructed to assess school effectiveness on seven characteristics. According to William J. Gauthier, Connecticut Department of Education, these seven characteristics emerged

.....from the literature on teacher and classroom instruction and school effectiveness that appear[ed] to be correlated with student achievement.¹

The Detroit versions represent modifications of the instrument's content to better fit the current instructional program in Detroit's high schools. The instrument's seven characteristics, as well as its factor structure, were kept intact.

The seven characteristics² are: safe and orderly environment, clear school mission, instructional leadership, high expectations, opportunity to learn and student time-on-task, frequent monitoring of student progress, and home-school relations.

¹William J. Gauthier, "The Connecticut School Improvement Project," in The Connecticut School Effectiveness Project, Development and Assessment, Connecticut State Department of Education, Hartford, December, 1981, p. 4.

²A full descriptive statement of each characteristic is given in the Appendix.

Tabular displays of the response frequencies are presented in the Appendix with the questionnaire items grouped on the basis of the school effectiveness characteristic the items most closely measure. In these presentations, the five point scale used on the instrument was collapsed to three. Thus, the percents answering 'Strongly Disagree' and 'Disagree' are combined and presented as a single percent and labelled 'Disagree;' and at the opposite side of the scale, the percents answering 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree' are combined and labelled 'Agree.'

The summary discussion that follows seeks, on the basis of response percentages, to identify the school's strengths, its weaknesses, and to point out those areas in the school's structure and functioning where there is a lack of concensus among the respondents. That is to say, there was a rather high percentage answering 'Undecided,' or there were roughly equal percents who agreed and who disagreed.

Summary

Safe and Orderly Environment

On two items that focus on physical appearance and condition of the school building, 90 percent or better of the respondents were in agreement that the school was neat, bright, clean, comfortable, and was not unpleasant nor unkempt. A third strength was an acknowledged responsibility for school discipline among teachers, administrators, and parents. Approximately two-thirds were in agreement.

School discipline, per se, and students' lack of enthusiasm for learning were, by virtue of the magnitude of the response frequencies, school weaknesses. Two-thirds of the staff respondents rejected the assertion that most students were eager and enthusiastic about learning, and half disagreed with the statement that discipline was not an issue in the school.

Lack of concensus in the perceptions of the respondents was registered on the issues of school safety and student adherence to school rules. Forty-four percent, respectively, agreed and disagreed that the school was a safe and secure place to work. Forty-six percent disagreed and forty-one percent agreed with the idea that students abide by the school's rules.

Clear School Mission

All three of the items in this grouping dealt with instructional objectives and, for all three items, the percent of respondents indicating uncertainty was relatively high. The range in percents was between 26 and 39. To the more general statement of the coordination and monitoring of High School Proficiency Program (HSPP) objectives through all subject areas, 57 percent agreed and 26 percent were undecided. The magnitude of the response percentages on this item would suggest that this characteristic might justifiably be viewed as a school strength.

However, with one-third or more of the respondents indicating uncertainty that both English and math objectives of the HSPP are the focal points in the instructional program in these two areas and, notwithstanding, the small percentages of respondents indicating disagreement, the implementation of HSPP objectives in English and math, per se, may not be counted as a school strength given the response frequencies.

Instructional Leadership--The Department Head

Five items dealing with the various stages of the formal observation process, i.e., department heads observing the instructional practices of teachers in their respective departments, were interspersed throughout the questionnaire. Because of the magnitude of the positive responses on four of these items, the functioning of the formal observation process may be viewed as a school strength. Half of the respondents on three items, and two-thirds on a fourth item, expressed agreement with the item statement. These ranged from 67 percent who agreed that their department head made several observations each year to 49 percent who agreed that an improvement plan frequently resulted during the formal observation's follow-up.

That the department head is viewed as a resource for instructional improvement, is another school strength. Approximately three-fifths of the respondents agreed that discussions with their department head resulted in improved instruction, and that they turn to their department head with instructional concerns. Also, the same proportion of respondents agreed to the statement that their department head both required and reviewed lesson plans.

However, that only 44 percent of the respondents supported the assertion that their department head gave regular feedback on lesson plans, would cast doubt on any conclusion that all aspects of the use of lesson plans are school strengths.

A decided weakness in the formal observation process, and thus a school weakness, is the finding that half of the respondents agreed with the statement that individual teachers and their department heads do not meet regularly to discuss what will be observed by the department head.

Instructional Leadership--The Principal

The school principal's strengths lie in the areas of (1) interpersonal relationships with students and teachers--82 percent disagreed with the statement that the principal rarely made informal contacts with students and teachers, (2) leadership in problem solving--over half of the respondents felt that the principal and the faculty, without outside help, could solve most of the school's problems, and (3) staff development--approximately half of the respondents accepted the idea that the principal was active in securing resources, arranging opportunities, and promoting staff development activities.

There was a lack of consensus on the issue of leadership in the instructional area. Forty-six percent of the respondents agreed and 41 percent disagreed with the idea that clear, strong, centralized instructional leadership emanated from the principal. While thirty-nine percent viewed the principal as an important instructional resource person in the school, 36 percent did not. Much more an example of uncertainty is the response to the item stating that the principal uses test results to recommend modifications in the instructional program. Two-fifths were uncertain and one-third disagreed. The apparent weakness in this area is underscored by 62 percent agreeing that instructional issues are seldom the focus of faculty meetings, and by 54 percent disagreeing with the assertion that the principal frequently leads formal discussions concerning instruction and student achievement.

Lack of consensus and uncertainty were also reflected in the areas of student achievement and the use of standardized tests. Forty-four percent of the respondents rejected the statement that the principal frequently communicates to individual teachers their responsibilities relative to student

achievement; 39 percent agreed. Over half of the respondents could not agree or disagree with the statement that the principal does not put much emphasis on the meaning and use of standardized test results.

High Expectations

The two items measuring high expectations revealed weaknesses. Over three-fourths of the respondents agreed that low-achieving students present more discipline problems than other students. Ninety percent rejected the statement that 95 to 100 percent of the students in the school could be expected to complete high school.

Opportunity to Learn and Student Time-On-Task

A positive classroom atmosphere was perceived as a school strength. Three-fifths of the respondents agreed the class atmosphere is, generally, very conducive to learning for all students.

Close to three-fifths agreed that individual teachers determine allocated time for basic skill instruction without guidelines or discussion with the administration. This constitutes the single school weakness in this area.

Forty-four percent were uncertain if during basic skills instruction students work independently on seatwork for the majority of the allocated time.

Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress

Close to two-thirds of the respondents felt that specific feedback on daily assignments was given regularly and followed up by the teacher. The suggestion of a second school strength appears to be in the area of student assessment, although on two assessment items where approximately half of the respondents answered positively, varying proportions of staff were undecided. On three other assessment items, the undecided response proportions ranged between 36 percent and 51 percent.

Half of the respondents rejected the assertion that there is no systematic, regular assessments of students' basic skills in most classrooms (with some 18 percent undecided), and half of the respondents agreed that multiple assessment methods are used to assess student progress in basic skills (with almost one-third uncertain).

On two items that dealt with criterion-referenced tests, 51 and 41 percent, respectively, were uncertain as to the use put to such tests. On a third item, the regular use of student assessment information to give specific student feedback and to plan appropriate instruction, 44 percent agreed, but 36 percent were uncertain.

Home-School Relations

Based on the proportions of respondent agreement on two items, school strength in the area of home-school relations lies in the variety of ways teachers communicate with parents, generally, and in regard to student progress, specifically. Two-thirds or more of the staff supported two items dealing with communications between school and home.

Notwithstanding the variety of communication methods purported to be used by the staff with school parents, such communication lacks substance when it relates to student homework monitoring and home-school cooperative plan development. Approximately seventy percent of the respondents felt there was little cooperation regarding homework monitoring between parent and teacher. Half of the respondents agreed that parent-teacher conferences seldom resulted in specific plans for home-school cooperation aimed at improving student classroom achievement. A more general weakness was registered in that half of the respondents rejected the statement that most parents would rate the school superior.

A P P E N D I X

A. Safe and Orderly Environment

There is an orderly, purposeful atmosphere which is free from the threat of physical harm. However, the atmosphere is not oppressive and is conducive to teaching and learning.

Item No.	Item Statement	Percents Of Responses		
		Disagree	Undecided	Agree
1.	This school is a safe and secure place to work.	44%	13%	44%
4.	Most students in this school are eager and enthusiastic about learning.	64	8	29
7.	The physical condition of this school building is generally unpleasant and unkempt.	90	0	10
18.	Teachers, administrators and parents assume responsibility for discipline in this school.	31	5	64
27.	The school building is neat, bright, clean and comfortable.	8	0	92
36.	Students in this school abide by school rules.	46	13	41
43	Generally, discipline is not an issue in this school.	51	8	41

B. Clear School Mission

There is a clearly-articulated mission for the school through which the staff shares an understanding of and a commitment to instructional goals, priorities, assessment procedures, and accountability.

Item No.	Item Statement	Percents Of Responses		
		Disagree	Undecided	Agree
10.	The reading and writing objectives of the High School Proficiency Program are a focal point of English instruction in this school.	10%	33%	57%
24.	High School Proficiency Program objectives are coordinated and monitored through all subject areas.	26	18	57
40.	Mathematics objectives of the High School Proficiency Program are a focal point of mathematics instruction in this school.	15	39	46

C. Instructional Leadership

The principal or department head acts as the instructional leader who effectively communicates the mission of the school to the staff, parents, and students, and who understands and applies the characteristics of instructional effectiveness in the management of the instructional program of the school.

Item No.	Item Statement	Percents Of Responses		
		Disagree	Undecided	Agree
3.	Most problems facing this school can be solved by the principal and faculty without a great deal of outside help.	36%	8%	56%
5.	My department head makes several formal classroom observations each year.	26	8	67
6.	Discussions with one's department head often result in some aspect of improved instructional practice.	28	15	57
9.	The guidance department head or the test coordinator reviews and interprets test results with and for the faculty.	59	10	31
11.	Instructional issues are seldom the focus of faculty meetings.	31	8	62
12.	The principal uses test results to recommend modifications or changes in the instructional program.	36	39	26
13.	There is clear, strong, centralized instructional leadership from the principal in this school.	41	13	46
15.	My department head regularly gives feedback to teachers concerning lesson plans.	36	21	44
19.	My department head requires and regularly reviews lesson plans.	26	13	61
20.	The principal is very active in securing resources, arranging opportunities and promoting staff development activities for the faculty.	36	18	47

(more)

C. Instructional Leadership, Continued

Item No.	Item Statement	Percents Of Responses		
		Disagree	Undecided	Agree
22.	The principal leads frequent formal discussions concerning instruction and student achievement.	54%	21%	26%
28.	Formal observations by my department head are regularly followed by a post-observation conference.	31	13	56
30.	The principal frequently communicates to individual teachers their responsibility in relation to student achievement.	44	18	39
32.	The principal <u>does not</u> put much emphasis on the meaning and use of standardized test results.	31	56	13
33.	The principal is an important instructional resource person in this school.	36	26	39
35.	During follow-up to formal observations by my department head, a plan for improvement frequently results.	33	18	49
37.	Teachers in this school do <u>not</u> turn to their department heads with instructional concerns or problems.	59	13	28
39.	During follow-up to formal observations, my department head's main emphasis is on instructional improvement.	28	21	51
41.	The principal <u>rarely</u> makes informal contacts with students and teachers around the school.	82	8	10
45.	Individual teachers and their department head do <u>not</u> meet regularly to discuss what the department head will observe during a classroom observation.	31	18	51

D. High Expectations

The school displays a climate of expectation in which the staff believes and demonstrates that students can attain mastery of basic skills and that they (the staff) have the capability to help students achieve such mastery.

Item No.	Item Statement	Percents Of Responses		
		Disagree	Undecided	Agree
2.	In this school, low-achieving students present <u>more</u> discipline problems than other students.	10%	13%	77%
14.	Ninety-five to one hundred percent of students in this school can be expected to complete high school.	90	8	3

E. Opportunity to Learn and Student Time-on-Task

Teachers allocate a significant amount of classroom time to instruction in basic skill areas. For a high percentage of that allocated time, students are engaged in planned learning activities.

Item No.	Item Statement	Percents Of Responses		
		Disagree	Undecided	Agree
26.	Individual teachers determine allocated time for basic skill instruction without guidelines or discussion with the administration.	28%	15%	56%
38.	Class atmosphere in this school is, generally, very conducive to learning for all students.	28	13	59
46.	During basic skills instruction, students are working independently on seatwork for the majority of the allocated time.	33	44	23

F. Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress

Feedback on student academic progress is frequently obtained. Multiple assessment methods such as teacher-made tests, samples of students' work, mastery skills checklists, criterion-referenced tests and norm-referenced tests are used. The results of testing are used to improve individual student performance and also to improve the instructional program.

Item No.	Item Statement	Percents Of Responses		
		Disagree	Undecided	Agree
16.	Criterion-referenced tests are <u>not</u> used to assess basic skills throughout the school.	26%	41%	33%
17.	Multiple assessment methods are used to assess student progress in basic skills (e.g., criterion-referenced tests, work samples, mastery checklists, etc.).	21	31	49
25.	Specific feedback on daily assignments is given regularly and followed up by the teacher.	18	18	64
29.	There is <u>no</u> systematic, regular assessment of students' basic skills in most classrooms.	51	18	31
31.	Student assessment information (such as criterion-referenced tests, skills checklists, etc.) is regularly used to give specific student feedback and plan appropriate instruction.	21	36	44
42.	Criterion-referenced tests are used to give specific student feedback in basic skills throughout the school.	15	51	34

G. Home-School Relations

Parents understand and support the basic mission of the school and are made to feel that they have an important role in achieving this mission.

Item No.	Item Statement	Percents Of Responses		
		Disagree	Undecided	Agree
8.	Most parents would rate this school as superior.	49%	28%	23%
21.	There is <u>little</u> cooperation in regard to homework monitoring between parents and teachers in this school.	13	18	69
23.	Parent-teacher conferences <u>seldom</u> result in specific plans for home-school cooperation aimed at improving student classroom achievement.	36	13	51
34.	Home visits, phone calls, newsletters, regular notes, etc., are all ways that most teachers frequently communicate with parents in this school.	31	0	69
44.	Beyond parent conferences and report cards, teachers in this school have several other ways for communicating student progress to parents.	26	8	67