

# How can your school district improve student engagement?

The National Center for School Leadership has studied the attitudes and beliefs of secondary students for the past five years. The findings are useful, at times surprising, and always informative.

## Are your students satisfied with their learning opportunities?

This year, we invite your school district to participate in our upcoming research on student engagement and satisfaction. As a research partner, you will receive valuable data and insights into the thoughts, attitudes and beliefs of your students.

Our research methodology is straightforward. We conduct a comprehensive survey and then benchmark those results for our study participants to better understand how they compare to other schools. We compile and publish the results as part of our Research Report Publications. All participating research partners receive a copy of the full research report and data specific to their school district – all at no charge.

Earlier this year we launched our School Climate & Culture study aimed at examining the attitudes and beliefs of school and school district employees. We surveyed almost 10,000 school district employees. In December 2009 we also launched our Parent Engagement and Satisfaction study with 345 schools to better understand the thoughts and perceptions of K-12 parents.

This next study takes us further by gaining an understanding of how students perceive our schools, assessing levels of student engagement and satisfaction across many factors, gaining insight into how we can best build student motivation and engagement and discovering what matters most to students.

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## We need your participation!

### Student Engagement and Satisfaction Survey

February 2010

**Overview:** Our third research project of the year focuses on K-12 secondary students. In the course of this study we hope to answer questions such as:

- What motivates students? How motivated are they?
- How connected do students feel towards the school?
- Do students feel safe? How do they perceive discipline issues such as bullying?
- What could better engage students in the learning process?
- Does the school offer a diverse curriculum that encourages learning and exploration?
- How do students feel about the quality of instruction?
- How do students perceive the quality of your schools?
- What factors do they use to arrive at these opinions?
- What types of interactions with teachers and staff are students most likely to find helpful?

Research partners will be asked to contribute to the list of research topics. As a partner, your district can directly impact the direction and course of this study.



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# The Research Results

## What to expect

The research results are broken down into three components.

### District Reports.

Participating school districts will receive a full report of survey responses aggregated by school. The survey report will outline results of each survey item by school in a side-by-side comparison. The district report will also provide normative comparisons for the district versus other participating school districts. This powerful report structure allows school districts to see a relative comparison of results – by question – across their schools and versus other school districts.

### Research Report.

The Center publishes the aggregated results in an annual research report. The report is free to all participating school districts. The report is made available for sale to non-participating districts and other organizations that work with schools. This comprehensive report includes survey data findings but also incorporates our analysis and commentary based on research data we have collected over the past five years. The price for this report is typically \$495 to non-participants.

### Additional Reports.

Participants may choose to purchase various breakdown reports as needed. Typical reports may include breakdown reports by school, by school and grade-level, by school and tenure, and many other permutations of the data. If you have specific requests, please let us know prior to survey launch so we can ensure that the survey instrument will address your needs.

## How do we solicit participation?

The survey will be available to schools in either online or on a paper form. The survey is designed strictly for secondary students. Primary students will not participate in this study.

**Online Survey.** Due to the cost of paper reproduction and the inherent waste, the Center encourages participants to use the online survey where possible. The online survey has the added benefit to districts of collecting answers to narrative, open-ended questions. These questions are not available on the paper survey form.

The methods that seem to work best for schools wishing to use the online survey is to either rotate classes through computer labs or to rotate students to classroom based computers. It is best, in our experience, to have a school complete the survey across all students in one day.

**Paper Survey.** The Center will provide a hardcopy of the survey form for use with students and will input all results. The district will be responsible for reproduction, distribution and collection of the manual survey forms as well as shipping the forms to the Center.

A typical approach that works well is to have students complete the survey in a homeroom location. It is helpful to have all students complete the survey within a single school day. This minimizes confusion associated with spreading the survey deployment across multiple days.

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## Our Research Methodology

Each of our research studies follow the same five steps:

1. **Looking at Past Data.** We use prior-year data to identify issues that tend to be hot button issues.
2. **Asking educators for input.** We seek advice and gain understanding of needs from participating school districts.
3. **Conducting a comprehensive survey.** Surveys are conducted via our online tool and paper surveys as needed.
4. **Analyzing survey results to identify trends and issues.** Survey data is analyzed for trends and patterns.
5. **Compiling findings and reporting results.** We develop the results into user-friendly survey report formats for individual participants and a comprehensive study report for all participants and for publication.

## FAQ's

### What is the purpose of your research?

Our research is geared toward helping K-12 institutions improve school leadership in order to improve school effectiveness. Everything we do revolves around that central theme.

### How much does participation in a study cost?

As part of our annual research agenda, we solicit free participation from a select number of school districts. These selected districts do not pay anything for participation. While some participants choose to pay for additional, in-depth reporting and research assistance, this is entirely optional.

### Where do you conduct your focus groups and interviews following the survey?

We rely on participating school districts, on a volunteer basis, to help us form focus group panels. These panels are critical for us to draw insights and conclusions based on survey data.

### Does the Center have much experience in doing this?

As a Center, we have been conducting leadership coaching, organizational consulting and climate surveys for six years. Our staff and associates have been working with schools for most of their careers.

### Are the results confidential?

Yes. Participating districts are mentioned by name only. All data is aggregated and is never isolated within the research report. Only the district will receive district-specific results. Responses by individuals are only reported in aggregate form.

### If I don't participate in this study, will I still be able to in future studies?

For simplicity, we often rely on past participants for inclusion in future studies. That said, we recognize the need to diversify our base and always include new school districts in each study we conduct.

## School Climate & Culture Survey October 2009 - COMPLETED

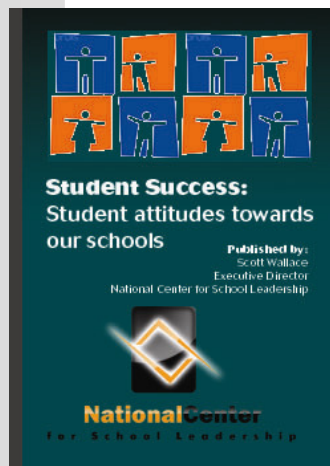
**Overview:** This survey focuses on school-based and district-based employees. The emphasis is on identifying common factors that lead to positive or negative climate and culture within school and school districts. We have conducted climate and culture surveys of this type with school districts for over 6 years.

## Parent Satisfaction Survey December 2009 – IN PROGRESS

**Overview:** This survey focuses on parents. The emphasis is on assessing their levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction on a number of issues and topics. The goal of this will be to better understand parent needs and gain ideas for how to better engage them in the learning process. We have conducted climate and culture surveys of this type with school districts for over 5 years.

## Student Engagement & Satisfaction Survey February 2010

**Overview:** This survey focuses on students and their attitudes and beliefs related to the school and the learning process. The emphasis is on measuring relative levels of comfort and discomfort of students with the school along a number of dimensions. This study will incorporate input from secondary schools only.



## Teacher Attitudes & Beliefs Survey April 2010

**Overview:** This survey represents a significant shift from our typical climate & culture survey. The emphasis is on measuring teacher attitudes towards various internal (curriculum, professional development) and external (current local, state and national legislation) factors. Focus will be solely on classroom teachers.

## Understanding student motivation and school connections

This study seeks to develop a better understanding of what motivates, engages and satisfies the needs of students. Through this understanding, school districts are better able to adopt best practices and implement programs to improve student achievement and reduce student attrition.

Research suggests that there are nine essential elements to motivating students:

- Positive relationships & school climate;
- Feedback and helping students succeed;
- Hands-on, active work;
- Variety and attention to learning styles;
- Tying learning into interests and making it interesting;
- Avoiding bribery rewards;
- Giving students voice and choice;
- Making connections and higher order thinking; and
- Putting learning into context and making real world connections.

In addition to understanding these motivational factors across schools, we also seek to understand the dynamics behind:

- Safety and bullying – do students feel comfortable in the school?
- Resources and technology – does the school have adequate resources for students to learn what they want and need to learn?
- Time-on-task – how productive is a student's day in terms of focus on academic work?
- School activities – how important of a role do extra-curricular activities play in engaging students and bonding them with their school?

Your district will be better informed and better equipped to create a school environment to engage students. We all intuitively understand the importance and complexity inherent in this process. Partner with the National Center for School Leadership as a Research Partner to ensure you are doing all that you can to engage students.

## About Us

The National Center for School Leadership is dedicated to assisting public schools and school districts to improve educational outcomes for students. The way in which we do that is simple: we work to improve organizational effectiveness by improving and enabling leadership within schools and school districts.

The National Center for School Leadership is focused on leadership and organizational issues that impact K-12 public schools and school districts today. The Center was founded to work with schools on a range of issues related to this central theme including:

- Addressing school climate and culture
- Developing leadership capacity within public schools
- Improving and strengthening organizational structures within public schools and school districts.

For more information, contact Scott Wallace, Executive Director at [swallace@ncfsl.org](mailto:swallace@ncfsl.org).



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