



Illinois State Board of Education

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Illinois 5Essentials Survey: Frequently Asked Questions October 2013

Illinois State Board of Education, Division of Public Information

Q: What is the Illinois 5Essentials Survey?

A: The Illinois 5Essentials Survey is a diagnostic tool based on 20 years of research, measuring schools' level of strength – or implementation – on leading indicators of school improvement. Survey results help schools organize, prioritize, evaluate and achieve sustainable improvement.

Research has shown that schools that were strong in at least three of the 5Essentials were 10 times more likely to have improved gains in math and reading than schools weak on three of 5Essentials. Strength on components within the 5Essentials was also correlated with other outcomes such as increased teacher retention, student attendance, college enrollment and high school graduation.

These 5Essentials are:

- Effective Leaders
- Collaborative Teachers
- Involved Families
- Supportive Environment
- Ambitious Instruction

The 5Essentials also identify positive developments that test scores — often a lagging indicator of improvement — have not yet captured.

Q: Why did Illinois administer this survey?

A: Several pieces of legislation, including Senate Bill 7, required the State Board to establish and administer a survey of school climate and learning conditions on a biennial basis, beginning in the 2012-2013 school year. ISBE will administer the survey again in 2013-14 in order to establish trend data.

Q: Why should parents or educators take these results so seriously? They are just opinions, right?

A: The 5Essentials were validated by nearly two decades of data from more than 400 Chicago Public Schools (CPS). CPS is a district composed of many different types of schools (large, small, magnet, neighborhood, charter), and all these school types were included in the validation.

The survey shows how teachers and students perceive their school, and these perceptions influence their behavior. Understanding these perceptions — even if you don't agree with them — is important, because it is these perceptions that influence how students and teachers are going to work together and whether a school will continue to improve. In aggregate, the reports reflect the perspectives of 140,409 teachers and 816,513 sixth- through 12th-graders in the state.

While the 5Essentials Survey measures concepts that are linked to school improvement, it is just one of many different metrics that should be considered together to judge overall school quality.

Q: What was done to ensure the integrity of results on this anonymous survey?

A: In order to ensure the integrity of Illinois 5Essentials response data, ISBE and the University of Chicago used both preventative approaches and analysis and data cleaning.

Preventative measures were applied to deter multiple entries and to ensure participants didn't inadvertently select the wrong school. Upon entering the survey, teacher respondents were required to: 1) enter background information, including school, grade level taught and other basic information; and 2) provide an email address, with a preference for school-issued emails. The University of Chicago has a thorough analysis and data auditing process that includes identifying surveys where responses have no variation and schools with a mismatch between number of teachers/students in ISBE lists and number of surveys submitted.

In 2013-14, ISBE will aim to provide lists of participants in a specified format that would enable the agency to enhance survey security by assigning participants specific identifiers while still maintaining anonymity.

Q: What will be released on the state-produced School Report Cards October 31?

A: School Report Cards will provide each school's survey participation rates among teachers and students and a link to illinoisreportcard.com, where they can find a summary of their students' and teachers' responses for each question in the survey, e.g. 70 percent of students strongly agreed that they feel safe in and around Lincoln Elementary.

In order to raise awareness about the survey and alert educators and families to the 5Essentials, the state-produced School Report Card will include a sample showcasing the 5Essentials Report graphic. Next year, on the 2014 Report Card, that graphic will feature scores that reflect each school's results on those 5 indicators or "essentials" for school success.

Q: How are scores developed?

A: The 5Essentials Reports are norm-referenced, meaning a school's survey results are compared to a specific normative group.

The 2013 5Essentials Survey for ISBE was originally normed to the CPS 2011 benchmark. However, based on feedback from educators across Illinois, University of Chicago conducted additional analyses and made adjustments to 5Essentials benchmarking, re-running Illinois reports using the Illinois state average as the benchmark rather than the Chicago Public Schools.

Each school is scored against the statewide average for their particular school type, i.e. elementary schools to elementary schools, middle schools to middle schools and high schools to high schools.

This scoring provides a new benchmark that represents the variety of schools in the state and can serve as the anchor going forward. While ISBE is not posting the 5Essential scores on the 2013 Report Card, parents and educators can expect to see them on the 2014 School Report Card.

Q: Why isn't ISBE releasing the 5Essentials scores on the School Report Card?

A: After consulting with Illinois educators, ISBE has decided to not release the 5Essentials scores on the 2013 report cards for three reasons:

- First, ISBE has decided to use this year to allow educators and school leaders to familiarize themselves with the tool, survey and items. This will allow school leaders to better understand how to use the tool for future school improvement.
- Second, ISBE wants to explore the relationship between survey results and school outcomes, statewide.
- Third, ISBE and the University of Chicago will review all survey items with Illinois educators for their applicability statewide prior to the next administration of the survey in Spring 2014.

Meanwhile, schools and all members of the public have access to their raw data, including the response rate for each question. They can and are using that information for school improvement planning purposes.

Q: Do the 5Essentials Survey results rank schools against each other?

A: The 5Essentials Reports are intended to be used by schools for improvement purposes; they do not prove which schools are best serving their students.

Q: Who else uses this survey?

A: In addition to the Chicago Public Schools, a version of the 5Essentials Survey has been administered in schools in Connecticut, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri and New York. Illinois' effort is the first time the survey has been administered on a statewide basis.

Q: How can these results drive school improvement?

A: The 5Essentials report — composed of detailed essential, measure and question results — allows schools to drill down to discover precise areas of strength and areas needing growth.

Q: Will the state mandate specific action, based on these results?

A: No, not at all. The 5Essentials Report does not dictate what a school should do to improve; instead it allows school communities to take ownership of their data to develop action plans for improvement in the areas they care about most. The 5Essentials Report also encourages collaboration within the school community for sustainable change.

Over time, the 5Essential Reports might inform state education policy but they are not intended to be used by the state to mandate local action.

Q: How will this help schools and communities?

A: The Illinois 5Essentials Survey results offer the public information about the implementation of best educational practices and give teachers and students a meaningful voice in school improvement.

- Sharing the data will allow schools to structure evidence-based conversations with teachers and community members to take ownership of their data in collaborative action plans.
- The Illinois 5Essentials Survey results and the improved Illinois State Report Card demonstrate our collective commitment to transparency as we work towards providing each student in the state with the knowledge, skills and abilities necessary to succeed in college and careers in the 21st century.

Ongoing student academic performance reports, homework assignments, everyday observations and interactions and local, state and national tests are among the myriad of other factors that can be used to help better understand your local schools.
