

Summer 2006

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Featured Article

Title: [Counseling: A School Improvement Tool](#)

Education World

Author: Ellen R. Delisio

To read the article: [click here](#)

Did you know...?

- 57% of respondents stated "things are fine as is" when asked "Do you think that your child's school should be teaching him/her a lot more math and science, less or are things fine as they are?"*
- Between 1996-1997 and 2004-2005, the number of students graduating from high school increased 14%. The number of graduates jumped from 2.6 million to more than 3 million students.*
- 34% of all students who left (dropped out of) high school had the necessary skills and qualifications to attend college**

Beyond Graduation Day

The importance of staying connected with graduates



Where can a district get information about the educational experience of their students? Truth is; there is a limited number of ways to finding out certain information about your district. At the same time, the information can be invaluable in your efforts to continually improve the process and the quality of education your district provides.

Graduates are a great source of information. Our experience with surveying graduates for school districts in Michigan has brought us to a conclusion: information gained from a graduate survey is not available from any other source.

An [article](#) from *The School Administrator* discusses graduate surveys and their benefits. Some of the benefits the [article](#) by Frank P. McNamara emphasizes include:

- **Candid Views.** Districts gain insight as to how graduates value their education after completing high school, sometimes in a very candid way. However, as the article states, the district can address "any number of subjects" and how graduates feel about the various subjects.
- **Measured Progress.** Seeing how your district has improved over the years is one of the main outcomes of graduate surveys. Similarly stated by McNamara in the article, this ability to "measure progress in subsequent years as program improvements are implemented" can be a way to create a benchmark of critical information about the district.
- **Future Use.** "A survey of graduates can be a tool that helps in reporting on the efficacy of the public school enterprise." Schools are able to use the information for future planning and curriculum adjustments; and in communication with the media, parents and community.

- 89% of graduates in a local district stated their high school education prepared them with the skills necessary to attend college
- Some of the highest graduation rates for states are around 85-89%; the lowest graduation rates for states are from 53 to 56%**

*Reference: Reality Check by Public Agenda

**Reference: A Manhattan Institute Education Working Paper, February 2005

Useful Links

The Education Trust

A valuable organization that provides advocacy for academic achievement, analysis of policy, research and assistance to districts

e-Lead

This page has links and an abundance of resources focused on leadership and development programs

Public Agenda

"An objective explorer of public opinion" related to public policy and research

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Research can **significantly impact a district's future** based on data received and information learned. Perspectives Consulting Group, Inc. provides information and services, which will allow you to plan and make informed decisions based on **benchmarking data** about the graduate's opinions and experiences with the district.

Questions Answered!

Three common questions about research

When making a decision about anything, many people begin the process by formulating a list of pros and cons. Districts making a decision about research and strategic planning go through a similar design. However, the process tends to be more complicated and involving a host of decision makers. To simplify that decision process, we wanted to provide you with some information and maybe address some of the "cons" on the list—or reasons why your district might have decided against conducting research.

Q: Is it necessary to have **scientifically conducted** community research?

A: It is always good to give the community an opportunity to provide input to the district.

When a survey is conducted in a scientific manner, the survey results **accurately represent** all members of the community, and can be considered statistically representative of the community. A survey that is just handed out at parent-teacher conferences is not a scientific survey as parents who do not attend the parent-teacher conferences would not have a chance to participate. Or, a survey included in the district newsletter is not scientific because only people who receive and read the district newsletter would have an opportunity to participate in the survey. If the goal is information that **represents the entire community**, it is essential to use a scientific survey and sampling method.



Q: Our community already has an opportunity for **feedback** and **communication** with the district. Why go beyond that?

A: There is a large difference in participation when you **ask someone to participate** versus when you offer someone the opportunity to participate. School boards give people the opportunity to participate during public comments at their board meetings. Does everyone participate? Hardly – in most cases there is little to no public comment at board meetings unless there is a controversial issue. When you

ask people to participate, for example using a telephone survey, then you get input from many people who would not have made the effort to speak at the school board meeting. Most people will gladly take a telephone survey about the school district, and the information provided will be information that you could not get any other way – even at a school board meeting.

Q: Our district is facing a tight budget year, how can we **justify** spending that money?

A: A tight budget year makes listening to the needs and concerns of parents and the community **even more important**. If budget constraints are going to force your district to trim communication efforts, for example, how do you know where is the best place to cut costs? In some school districts the district newsletter is read by over 90% of parents and community members, which makes it a very effective form of communication. Is your district newsletter that effective – or would it be better to trim costs from the district web page? Without finding out about the needs and concerns of parents and the community, you are only guessing at what to cut – when knowing what to cut can pay for itself in making the most cost effective and efficient decisions.

In the Next Issue:

Starting the School Year:

Connecting with Staff



Did you receive the Educational CD-ROM?

We have developed a **resource** for school districts that outlines the services Perspectives Consulting Group, Inc. offers. If you are **interested in receiving the CD-ROM**, please e-mail Katie at info@perspec.com. We will be happy to send the information.

We want your feedback!

Send us a quick e-mail with comments or questions about the e-newsletter.

E-mail info@perspec.com.

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