

Accounting for Student Voice: Surveys, School Quality, and State Accountability Systems



James Noonan, Ed.D., Salem State University
Ashley Carey, University of Massachusetts Lowell
Jack Schneider, Ph.D., University of Massachusetts Lowell

Full paper now published in *AERA Open*
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2332858421990729>

Are existing systems too narrow?

Is demography destiny?

Can surveys be used for accountability?

Literature Review

Current accountability systems

- don't reflect the full breadth of how Americans view school quality (Schneider, 2017; Rothstein & Jacobsen, 2006)
- produce unintended consequences (Hamilton et al., 2002; Koretz, 2008; Lowe & Wilson, 2017; Dee et al., 2013; Jennings & Sohn, 2014)
- are highly correlated with student background characteristics (Davis-Kean, 2005; Hegedus, 2018; Reardon, 2011)

Student perception surveys

- have been used as a valuable source of information in school improvement (e.g. Tripod Student Survey, Consortium on Chicago School Research, California Office to Reform Education districts)
- show promise as a measure of school quality (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015)

How -- if at all -- does adding student voice, in the form of student perception surveys, alter these accountability systems?

Data Sources

Massachusetts Consortium for Innovative Education Assessment (MCIEA)

- Collaborative project committed to the development and piloting of broader school quality measures—including student perception surveys
- Surveys address various dimensions of school quality not presently measured by the state but identified as relevant by community, school, and district stakeholders
- Final sample included 100 K-8 schools

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

- Accountability formula weights absolute achievement at 67.5%, growth in achievement at 22.5%, and chronic absenteeism at 10%



Measure Construction

- We created an overall survey measure for each school using principal component analysis
- Next, we calculated an overall accountability score for each school using the most recent accountability formula from Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
- Both measures were expressed as percentiles relative to the sample.
- Then, we created a new accountability formula comprised of survey scores weighted at 25%
- We weighted the existing accountability formula at 75%, conserving DESE's relative weights.
- Analysis



SCHOOL QUALITY MEASURES FRAMEWORK

1 Teachers and Leadership

1A Teachers and the Teaching Environment
1A-i Professional qualifications
1A-ii Effective practices
1A-iii Professional community

1B Leadership

1B-i Effective leadership
1B-ii Support for teaching development & growth

2 School Culture

2A Safety

2A-i Student physical safety
2A-ii Student emotional safety

2B Relationships

2B-i Student sense of belonging
2B-ii Student-teacher relationships

2C Academic Orientation

2C-i Valuing of learning
2C-ii Academic challenge

3 Resources

3A Facilities and Personnel

3A-i Physical space and materials
3A-ii Content specialists and support staff

3B Learning Resources

3B-i Curricular strength and variety
3B-ii Cultural responsiveness
3B-iii Co-curricular activities

3C Community Support

3C-i Family-school relationships
3C-ii Community involvement, external partners

4 Academic Learning

4A Performance

4A-i Performance growth
4A-ii Performance assessment proficiency rates

4B Student Commitment to Learning

4B-i Engagement in school
4B-ii Degree completion

4C Critical Thinking

4C-i Problem solving emphasis
4C-ii Problem solving skills

4D College and Career Readiness

4D-i College-going and persistence
4D-ii Career preparation and placement

5 Community and Wellbeing

5A Civic Engagement

5A-i Appreciation for diversity
5A-ii Civic participation

5B Work Ethic

5B-i Perseverance and determination
5B-ii Growth mindset

5C Creative and Performing Arts

5C-i Participation in creative and performing arts
5C-ii Valuing creative and performing arts

5D Health

5D-i Social and emotional health
5D-ii Physical health

TABLE 8

Average Subgroup Composition of Schools That Rise or Fall in Accountability Ratings When Survey Dosage is 25% of Overall Formula

Shift, in percentile points	Number of schools	% Economically disadvantaged	% Black/Latinx	% Special education	% English language learners
Up 9 or more	10	60.7	80.5	20.5	37.6
Up 5 to 8	14	51.8	67.1	19.1	33.1
Up 1 to 4	28	51.4	59.9	18.8	25.2
0	6	59.2	69.3	20.8	29.9
Down 1 to 4	16	49.3	61.3	21.3	30.1
Down 5 to 8	17	44.2	52.7	17.5	19.8
Down 9 or more	9	35.5	41.4	15.2	12.5

Note. Survey weight derived from 2016–2017 survey results of 18,927 students in Grades 4 through 8 from 100 non-high schools in Massachusetts. Other data from Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (n.d.).

Three Key Takeaways

- Student surveys appear to add new information to the public's understanding of school quality.
- Student survey data were weakly correlated with achievement scores and chronic absenteeism, which are strongly correlated with student demographics.
- Adding more measures may make accountability systems harder to game.

One Key Caveat

- Adding surveys into a high stakes system may distort results in ways we cannot fully predict.

Are existing systems too narrow?

Yes.

Is demography destiny?

Perhaps not.

Can surveys be used for accountability?

Yes, but...

Thank you

James Noonan

jnoonan@salemstate.edu

Ashley Carey

ashley_carey@student.uml.edu

Jack Schneider

jack_schneider@uml.edu



- Required states to develop measures of “Annual Yearly Progress” (AYP), based on annual testing in math and reading, plus graduation requirements in high school and one other measure (such as attendance) in elementary schools
- Schools most likely to be identified as “needs improvement” tended to serve high proportions of students of color

- Preserved NCLB standards and testing requirements
- Directed states to incorporate one “non-academic” measure into state accountability systems
- Required that academic measures be given “much greater weight” in accountability determinations

