

# Measuring Performance Through Surveys

## Introduction

Gathering feedback and perspectives from stakeholders and beneficiaries of the K-12 education system provides insight on the attitudes and opinions of Albertans on the performance of the learning system. Conducting survey research is an important tool for determining what is working well, where improvement is required and how it can be achieved.

## Required Surveys for Jurisdiction Accountability Pillar Measures

The Accountability Pillar consists of a set of measures selected by the Funding Framework Review Committee from the work of the Review Committee on Outcomes (RCO). Some of these are survey measures. To ensure consistency in results for the Accountability Pillar measures across the province and support jurisdictions in gathering and reporting these results in their Annual Education Results Reports, in 2003/04 Alberta Education implemented annual census surveys of Grades 4, 7 and 10 students and their parents, and of all K-12 teachers. The survey instruments are posted on Alberta Education's website at: <http://www.education.gov.ab.ca/educationsystem/Satisfaction/>.

## Jurisdiction and School Surveys

Many school jurisdictions routinely survey a variety of client groups. As the new provincial surveys are limited to the survey measures in the Accountability Pillar and those related to the Commission on Learning recommendations, it is anticipated that many jurisdictions will choose to continue their own surveys. These jurisdiction surveys provide a wealth of information that informs management and decision-making. Their continuation also adds to existing longitudinal data and provides more complete student, parent and teacher information for schools and school boards. If jurisdictions and schools choose to include local survey measures in their three-year plans as measures for provincial or local outcomes, these must be reported in their AERRs. If their jurisdiction surveys are online, they can be linked to the provincial survey for ease of administration.

It may occur that results differ for apparently similar measures or questions from jurisdictions' own surveys and from the jurisdiction results

on the Accountability Pillar surveys. Following are some possible reasons this might occur:

- The Accountability Pillar jurisdiction surveys use a census methodology; if the jurisdiction's own surveys are based on samples of the target populations, results likely will differ. Results also might differ if the jurisdiction was using a census survey and different individuals in the survey population responded.
- The jurisdiction's own surveys may address the same objectives/outcomes as the Accountability Pillar jurisdiction surveys, but word the questions differently.
- Targeted respondent groups may differ slightly (e.g. a jurisdiction's student survey may address a different subgroup of students, such as high school students, whereas the Accountability Pillar jurisdiction surveys focus on defined respondent groups – i.e., grades 4, 7 and 10 students, parents of grades 4, 7 and 10 students and all K-12 teachers).

**Note:**

Results from jurisdiction surveys cannot be used to report on the Accountability Pillar survey measures, as the methodologies are different from jurisdiction to jurisdiction and between jurisdiction survey results and the Accountability Pillar survey results.. Only the survey results provided by Alberta Education's Accountability Pillar surveys are used to report on the Accountability Pillar survey measures.

## Survey Resources

There are many published resources on conducting surveys. To assist school jurisdictions in planning, designing and implementing surveys, a handbook was prepared (under contract to Alberta Learning) and tailored to the type of surveys conducted by school jurisdictions. This document, *How to Conduct Satisfaction Surveys: A Practical Guide to Conducting Surveys within Alberta's Learning System*, is available online at <http://www.education.gov.ab.ca/educationsystem/Satisfaction/> and describes in detail (pages 4-33) the key steps to follow for those involved in conducting satisfaction surveys in Alberta's basic education system. The checklist that follows is summarized from the handbook.

## Phases of the Survey Process

### Planning a Survey

- Develop a description of the satisfaction survey project.
- Define the survey population (students, parents, teachers or citizens).
- Identify key research questions or objectives.
- Establish the project budget and timelines, including determining if the survey will be conducted in-house or contracted to a survey research firm.

### Designing the Survey

- Determine the data collection techniques.
- Design the survey tools and instruments (e.g. questionnaire).
- Pre-test the survey tools and instruments.

### Conducting the Survey

- Prepare instruments, staff and equipment for survey administration, including selecting a contractor, if used.
- Collect data from respondents.
- Prepare data for analysis.
- Analyze the data.

### Communicating Survey Results

- Identify stakeholder groups to report survey results.
- Determine methods to report survey results.
- Prepare survey results report.
- Communicate results to interested individuals or groups.

### Implementing Survey Results

- Develop and implement initiatives to address the survey results.
- Gain additional feedback from stakeholders.
- Evaluate the successes and challenges of the survey project.
- Plan future satisfaction measurement issues.

Another useful resource on conducting surveys in the public sector (*Client Satisfaction Surveys*, October 1998) was prepared by the Alberta Auditor General's Office. This document is available online at <http://www.oag.ab.ca> under "Reading Room."

## Statistics and Survey Research Terms

**Statistical Inference:** Using information from a sample to draw conclusions (inferences) about the population from which the sample was drawn.

**Population:** Any entire collection of persons or things from which we may collect data. It is the entire group we wish to describe or draw conclusions about.

**Sample:** A subset of units selected from the larger group (the population). Samples are studied, for reasons of efficiency, to draw valid conclusions about the population.

**Census Sample:** A sample is drawn from a finite population that includes all members of the population.

**Random Sample:** A subset of a population where every item in the population has the same probability of being in the sample. The primary goal of survey research is to use information collected from a sample to characterize a certain population.

**Convenience Sample:** A sample where cases are selected, in part or in whole, at the convenience of the researcher (e.g. selecting a sample of students in a school by standing in the hall and interviewing those students who walk by).

**Stratified Sample:** A sample selected to ensure that key characteristics of the target population (e.g. gender, age, geographic distribution) are adequately represented.

**Judgement Sample:** (also referred to as "purposive sampling") A sample selected based on the researcher's assessment of their suitability for inclusion in the sample (e.g. selecting persons to a sample who, in the researcher's judgement, are likely to be well informed about the issue under study).

**Confidence Interval:** A survey result obtained from a random sample of the target population has a confidence interval, expressed as a percentage above and below the obtained result, which indicates the expected variation from the obtained survey result as a consequence of sampling and diversity among respondents. Confidence intervals indicate whether differences in survey results over time (or differences

among respondent groups to the same question) are likely the result of sampling variation or represent actual differences.

**Standard Deviation:** A measure of the spread or dispersion of a set of data. The more widely the values are spread out, the larger the standard deviation.

**Survey Instrument (Questionnaire):** A set of questions designed and used to gather specific information from survey respondents.

**Scales (Measurement type):** a basis for ordering or categorizing data to facilitate meaningful comparisons of the aggregate data. Nominal scales are used for categorizing/ordering data having a limited number of possible outcomes that cannot be placed in any order representing the intrinsic properties of the measurements (e.g. male/female). Ordinal scales are used when the relative values of the data being collected are defined in terms of being lesser, equal to or greater than data elements (e.g. strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree). Interval scales are used when the magnitude of the differences among the observational units is defined in quantitative terms (e.g. amount of money expressed in dollars, weight in pounds, age in years).

**Mean:** The mean (or “average”) of a set of observations is simply their sum, divided by the total number of observations.

**Weighted Average:** A procedure for combining the mean of two or more groups of different sizes, and takes the size of the groups into account when computing the overall average.