

High School Survey of Student Engagement

Using HSSSE Data

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Introduction

Your HSSSE school report provides a wealth of information about your students' experiences. Don't be overwhelmed – you do not have to be a statistician to understand and utilize your HSSSE data! Indeed, all you need is a commitment to school improvement and an understanding of the importance of student engagement.

This section will guide you through the process of interpreting, sharing, and using your HSSSE results. Whenever possible, we provide suggestions from previous HSSSE participants who have effectively used their data to inform meaningful school reform efforts. We hope that this advice will help you fully explore your HSSSE data and maximize its benefits.

Understanding Your HSSSE Data

Most HSSSE schools begin to analyze their data by first sharing it with school-level administrators. It is important for administrators to feel comfortable with the HSSSE data so that they can successfully share and use the findings. A meeting with school administrators could be organized using the following suggestions.

- Upon receiving their reports, many schools hold an initial meeting with key administrators to divide up tasks for reviewing the data. Some schools have found it helpful to make each administrator responsible for reviewing a specific section of the report based on individual interests. For instance, one person might be responsible for analyzing the means report, while another person can assume the task of reviewing the frequencies by gender. During their review, administrators should identify the most interesting or surprising findings in their section. At a follow-up meeting, administrators can then share these key findings with others and begin compiling data from the various sections to create a more holistic picture of student engagement at their school. Once a general understanding of the data is reached, administrators can work together to design a plan for sharing the data with others in the school, district, and community.
- Other schools have begun their review of the HSSSE data by asking each administrator to identify three major areas in need of improvement within the school. Administrators record and share their ideas with others, creating a list of common concerns. From this list, three or four key areas are identified. The administrative





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team is then able to pin-point aspects of the HSSSE data that relate to the initial concerns of the group. This has proven to be an effective strategy for these schools to begin analyzing HSSSE data.

We also recommend the following steps regarding how to interpret the data.

- Verify that the student demographic data in your school report are consistent with what you know about your students.
- Review the demographic differences between your students and the aggregate for all other HSSSE 2005 respondents. These variations will help you understand comparisons between your students' responses and the overall data.
- Remember not to rely exclusively on comparisons with the data from the aggregate of HSSSE 2005 respondents. A consistent pattern of percentages for your students above the averages for all HSSSE respondents may indicate positive school practices. At the same time, some schools with very high expectations for student engagement may fall short of their own aspirations even though comparisons with students from other schools are favorable.

Sharing Your HSSSE Data

To maximize the potential of your school report, the data needs to be shared, discussed, and analyzed by many different groups of people. Indeed, teachers, students, parents, and community members all need to be informed and involved in the discussion of your HSSSE findings. This section shares insights into how HSSSE schools have effectively disseminated their data, informed key constituent groups about the findings, and engaged these groups in making school improvements.

Teachers. Teachers are an essential part of students' overall school experience, and thus any school improvement efforts must begin with the support and feedback of teachers. Of course, teachers are extraordinarily busy people and likely will have little time to review this report in its entirety. As such, schools have found some creative ways to share HSSSE data with their teachers.

- To ensure that important details in the data were not overlooked, one school decided to focus on one finding each week. Every Monday, the principal distributed a selected finding to the teachers in their mailboxes. Because the teachers regularly

received small snippets of the report, they were able to analyze and address the data week by week, ensuring that conversations about student engagement continued throughout the school year.

- Some schools have shared their data with teachers during professional development workshops, school retreats, or teacher in-service days. These workshops provide teachers an opportunity to focus their attention exclusively on student engagement. In order to make these workshops most effective, schools have provided teachers a clear and concise overview of key findings. In addition, schools have given teachers the opportunity to work together in small groups to discuss various aspects of the data and brainstorm ideas for addressing the findings. Some schools have created a series of shorter professional development meetings throughout the year, with each meeting focused on sharing, analyzing, and suggesting changes for a specific aspect of the data.
- Other schools have created task forces composed of teachers who meet regularly to discuss HSSSE findings. These groups might tackle a particular topic, such as the amount of reading and writing students complete. One school organized task forces according to grade level, giving teachers the chance to look specifically at data about the grade that they teach. This approach has been particularly helpful in identifying and addressing concerns about the freshman and senior year experiences.

Students. The HSSSE survey was created with students as the focus, and its use is student-centered. For these reasons, it is important to incorporate students in your discussions and improvement initiatives. Sharing the data with your students, however, is a complex task, and some successful ideas for doing so are discussed below.

- One school relayed interesting portions of the data to the student body over the intercom and closed-circuit television on a weekly basis. Following these announcements, students were given time to discuss the data with peers in their classes or homerooms. This school also created a comment box for students to provide their ideas or suggestions about school improvement to school administrators and teachers. The comment box proved a simple, yet effective, tool for obtaining anonymous student feedback about HSSSE data.
- To show students that the school administration valued student opinions when making important school decisions, one school administrator asked a handful of teachers to pick one student

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from their classes every week to meet with him. He emphasized that teachers should consider diversity in selecting students. Every Tuesday during homeroom, he convened this group of students to discuss one aspect of the survey with the administrative staff. This practice gave students a chance to learn more about the HSSSE data, and simultaneously fostered a sense of community between the students and administrators. The students offered insights regarding the data and some creative suggestions for school improvements.

Parents and Other Community Members. Parents also have a vested interest in school improvement and should be informed of relevant HSSSE findings. This can be done in several different ways, and some ideas for disseminating findings to parents are shared below.

- Many schools have created a summary of interesting findings and posted this synopsis on their school's website or included the information in parent newsletters. Schools often point specifically to trends in their data relating to attendance, homework, class participation, or other topics of particular interest to parents. Some schools have chosen to focus an entire parent newsletter on sharing HSSSE results, while others have included short sections of interesting findings in many newsletters throughout the year.
- Parent organizations at some schools have shared the data with interested parents at their meetings. Similarly, some schools have held meetings specifically to share interesting aspects of their HSSSE data with parents and community members.

HSSSE schools have also found it helpful to share their results with interested members of the community and local media outlets in addition to their school boards. Indeed, some schools have noticed an increase in parental participation and community volunteers after sharing HSSSE data with the community.

Summary. The examples provided in this section simply offer ideas from HSSSE schools who have successfully shared their data. We encourage you to use these suggestions as a starting point and expand upon them to fit the needs of your particular school. Remember, sharing your data will take time; in fact, many schools have found it most helpful to disperse the information a little at a time throughout the school year. Sharing your HSSSE data with policymakers, school administrators, teachers, students, parents, and the community is an important step toward maximizing the benefit of this report. With all parties informed of the findings, you can focus your attention on using the data to direct and implement improvement initiatives in your school.

Interpreting Your HSSSE Results

Your school report gives you a substantial amount of useful data. How you analyze, interpret, and use HSSSE results will depend on the vision and goals for your school. There are numerous possibilities for you to make immediate changes in school practices as well as incremental changes over a longer period. Ideally, HSSSE results should be used in combination with other assessment tools to capture the most complete picture of the student experience at your school. But, with or without other assessments, there are several key ways you can use your HSSSE results. For example, the data can be used:

- To determine what is being done well and identify areas where improvement is desirable,
- To document and report effective educational practices at your school and then share this information with others to promote student learning, and
- To focus school resources on effective educational practices.

Below you will find examples of how HSSSE participants have used their data in actionable and meaningful ways. The reasons why schools use HSSSE vary greatly; as such, we encourage you to consider the vision of your school when reviewing these examples and determining your plan for using your HSSSE results.

School Improvement Plans. The most common way schools are using their HSSSE data is within their school improvement plans. Since these plans tend to be extensive, they lend themselves well to using HSSSE results. When writing such plans, some schools include participation in HSSSE as a tool to learn more about certain aspects of their student population, their programs, or other initiatives. Other schools use HSSSE data within their plan to report progress in key areas that were previously targeted. Many schools opt to participate in HSSSE on a continuous basis to closely monitor the programs and initiatives that they have instituted. Lastly, some schools have applied for grants within their school district or state aimed at improving a certain aspect of their school identified by HSSSE data.

- One school targeted three areas to address in its school improvement plan. When the HSSSE report arrived at the school, members of a task force of school administrators, teachers, and other staff were each assigned part of the data to

“I am so excited about the possibilities that are open to us because we have this information in hand. We are going to use our HSSSE data as part of our school-wide goal-setting process...”

—Patti Harrold,
Edmond Memorial High School,
2004 HSSSE participant





“We are acutely aware of the problems confronting our school — your survey provided us a vehicle to make decisions as to how to address them.”

— Rich Gelb, Ph.D., Benito Juarez Community Academy, 2004 HSSSE Participant

analyze with these three areas in mind. At the next meeting, the task force began by discussing the positive responses received on the survey and then turned attention to the areas most in need of improvement. Groups were established within the task force to concentrate on one aspect of the three identified as needing attention. Students, parents, and community members were all included in the discussions. One year later, students at this school took the HSSSE survey again. Results were compared with the previous administration, and areas where progress had been made were noted. When completing the evaluation of their school improvement plan, the school was able to provide statistically sound evidence of improvement in the areas identified.

Accreditation. Many schools apply for accreditation with their regional accreditation association or commission. To complete the accreditation process, a school must meet and document adherence to the standards and criteria established by the association. Often a school improvement plan is required as part of the process. The school must demonstrate ongoing commitment to improvement, and HSSSE results provide one way to focus on and assess these initiatives.

Curricular Changes. HSSSE participants report that the data on class preparation and school work have been extremely beneficial as a basis to alter school practices. HSSSE can provide meaningful information about your students and their course work. Please note that state and district requirements will impact curriculum decisions; therefore, HSSSE data should be used to complement these curricular frameworks. A few examples from schools are provided below.

- One school realized that its 9th graders were spending far less time writing papers than the average for the total HSSSE respondents. Believing that writing is essential to the high school experience, the school staff decided to require more writing of their 9th grade students, and to provide more feedback and analysis of that writing. The following year the students' improvement was demonstrated in their state test scores as well as their school work.
- Another school was discouraged to find that its students read much less than the total HSSSE respondents in terms of both academic and personal reading. The school staff began a campaign to encourage reading for all students. Homeroom was extended by 10 minutes, and a 15 minute school-wide reading time was implemented each morning. All school staff members participated in the initiative. In addition, the faculty increased the students' reading requirements throughout their classes and

established reading incentive programs. Incentives included bonus points for participating in a student-led book discussion group, participation in monthly read-a-thons, and recognition at a school assembly for students who met their reading goals.

- School administrators at one high school noticed that only 10% of their students participated in community service, an activity that the community members highly valued. To address this need, the school implemented a new graduation requirement that mandated community service for all students and also created a community service fair where students could learn about the opportunities available to them. To foster collaboration and share resources, the school partnered with another small high school to create the fair and organize community service projects.
- Teachers and students at one large high school brainstormed about ways to increase student study time after learning that 55% of their students spent three hours or less per week preparing for all of their classes. Among strategies adopted were a peer tutoring program in the library during school hours, a homework hotline staffed by volunteer teachers and honor students two evenings each week, brief quizzes over homework at the beginning of class on a random basis, and periodic bonus questions on assigned readings. All of these strategies were effective, and none were costly.

School Climate. It is important that students feel they fit in and are valued by their school. Some HSSSE schools have focused their improvement efforts on making a better climate for learning. Using HSSSE data, schools have learned what students value and view as problematic about their school.

- One HSSSE high school has seen many changes over the past decade. In 10 years the school has gone from 20% to 85% minority students. The area where the school is located has experienced a large influx of Latino families. The school wants all children to feel welcome and involved in the school; however, HSSSE results indicate that most of the minority children do not feel they fit in, nor do they feel supported and respected by the school staff. Thus, the school implemented multiple changes aimed at helping these students feel better about their high school and the community in which they live. Because of the large number of non-English speaking parents, the school applied for a state grant and was funded to offer adult English as a Second Language classes and provided city bus transportation to parents interested in taking the classes. Parents learned more about the high school, met the teachers, and became knowledgeable about the education system in the



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Participating schools have successfully used HSSSE findings to identify and change school practices as well as to guide and define large-scale restructuring of school objectives and goals.



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United States. A multicultural curriculum was adopted for students, and the school staff made it a priority to learn about the culture and background of each student. Students began participating in more school-sponsored activities and were generally more excited about coming to school. Also, parents became more interested in the school, curriculum, and the success of their children.

Conclusion

We are enthusiastic about the many benefits that schools, districts, and students will receive from using HSSSE data to guide school improvement efforts. Participating schools have successfully used HSSSE findings to identify and change school practices as well as to direct large-scale restructuring of school objectives and goals. We welcome your feedback and suggestions about how your school is using HSSSE data and encourage you to create and share your own school improvement scenarios.

Things to Think About When Using HSSSE Data

1. *Make sure teachers and other school staff members understand the concept of student engagement.* Teachers who may not be familiar with student engagement need to see how HSSSE results can be used to improve teaching and learning.
2. *Report student engagement results thoughtfully.* We encourage schools to share their results in ways that lead to a better understanding of the student experience and promote school improvement initiatives.
3. *Don't allow the numbers to speak for themselves.* Every reported number and comparison should be accompanied by an explanation and interpretation of what can and cannot be concluded from the results.
4. *Link your HSSSE results to other information about the student experience and complementary initiatives.* The positive impact of student engagement results will be multiplied if the data can be made relevant to groups of teachers and staff working on different reform efforts within your school and district.
5. *Don't go it alone.* Experts agree that the chances of successful innovation improve when teams are formed and schools work together on topics of mutual interest.