Safe and Supportive Schools
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Survey Administration

WEBINAR QUESTION AND ANSWER SUMMARY

On April 27 and 28, 2011, the Safe and Supportive Schools Technical Assistance Center hosted a Webinar, titled *Survey Administration*. During the session, the presenter, Dr. Sally Ruddy, a Principal Research Analyst at American Institutes for Research, received several questions from the audience. Since the presenter could not answer all of the questions during the event, the Center has prepared the following Webinar Question and Answer Summary with responses to each question. For additional information, please email or call the Center (sssta@air.org; 1-800-258-8413).

Please note the content of this summary was prepared under a contract from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools to the American Institutes for Research (AIR). This Q/A summary does not necessarily represent the policy or views of the U.S. Department of Education, nor do they imply endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education.

Q1.   What is the difference between web-based and e-mail surveys?

A web-based survey is one in which respondents click on a link and go to a website that has secured log-in and is password-protected (or possibly, respondents have a pin code). Each respondent has a personal identifier, and they fill out their survey. It's the type of site where if you only have time to fill out half of it, you can save it and exit, come back into it again with your identification number, finish it up and click "Submit" when you're finished and that goes to a secured data server.

For an e-mail survey, these are questionnaires that are sent to people in tact right within their e-mail. So, you're asked to answer questions within this e-mail and then e-mail it back to someone. We really prefer the web-based over the e-mail. For one thing, e-mail surveys have very low response rates. People's inboxes get clogged, they forget about them, or they're suspicious of them because they think it's a marketing scheme or something. We really almost always use a web-based survey rather than an e-mail survey for those reasons.

Q2.   You mentioned not letting your sample "self-select." Can you give an example?

Let's say you're doing a family survey and the president of the PTA gives you a call and says, "I will solve everything for you; just give me the survey and I will take it to PTA meeting and have people in PTA fill it out." That's not a good sample because these are all one group, and even though you want some of them in your sample you don't only want the type of people that join PTAs because self-selected sample is not representative.

Q3. How do I know if my district has an IRB?

You need to call. It may not be at your district level; it may be at your state level. If you're partnering with a university, they always submit with IRB. If you are working with a data collection contractor, they can guide you. The first thing to do is to ask them about their IRB requirements; and if they have absolutely no idea what you're talking about, although I think they would, I would then go up to the state level and I can't imagine that states do not have some sort of IRB requirements or recommendations. And also if you are dealing with a data collection contractor or a partnering university, they will also have IRB information that they can share with you and help you through the process or in some instances, particularly if it's a university, just take it over themselves because all universities have an IRB.

Q4. What is the most common mistake school districts make and what are the consequences?

Make it really clear about who's going to pick up surveys and have it packed for scanning. You may have UPS all set to pick up from local school at a certain date and kept at school. A lot of the things seem small, but they can be a big problem. Try to have a way that students who are not Spanish or English speakers complete the survey. Administer the survey out loud by a translator. Have an option on the survey that asks if it is being translated for them.

Not preparing ahead of time is the most common mistake. It's important to try to think ahead, way at the beginning, what you are going to want to do at the analysis stage. What is it you want to be able to answer? It's really helpful to sit down and write down the questions you want answered with the survey. These are your research questions. Then everything else falls from that. The research questions drive everything else— what questions you want on your survey, how you're going to administer it, and to whom. So I would say that planning ahead is one of the hardest things.

You can't always think of everything, particularly with an ongoing survey that you will administer every year. As each year rolls around, you will think about things you should do this year that you haven't done in the past, and this is accepted practice in surveys. As an example, in Cleveland, the school district has been doing its conditions for learning survey for several years. We have a Spanish version of the survey that's already translated and printed out to be given to the students who are Spanish speakers. But we also have another relatively large group of students who speak other languages, and there is a multitude of them so it's really not feasible to have a printout for every single one of these smaller groups. That may be something we will do in the future, but not right now. So the procedure that we have come up with is that kids who speak a non-English, non-Spanish language are together in small groups, and a translator reads the survey to them in their native language, and they follow along and are told what the bubbles mean and fill them up. Now, this year we are thinking, "Let's filter our analysis so we can see what the responses are for those students versus other students to see if there is some problem in the cultural or linguistic translation." There's really no way to see who these students are, so this year we added an item at the beginning of the survey that asks, "Is the survey being translated for you? Yes or no." Now in

our analysis stage, we can filter on a variable and we can parse these students up. This is kind of an example of an issue and response to that issue that emerges as you go along.

Q5. **With all the budget cuts, we don't have much money for the monetary incentive to get parents to complete the survey. Can you give us some examples of school privileges that could work in helping parents complete to be more affective?**

That's a really good question and I can think mostly of examples actually for students. For students, something like maybe providing or allowing a picnic at lunchtime. Perhaps a field trip that you knew ahead of time was going to be optional, but you still have it in your budget. You could hold it back and tell the students, "If we get a good response rate on the survey, we are all going to go on this field trip." Another thing I have heard of is allowing a free dress day for schools with uniforms. April says that they have used coupons for homework-free night as an incentive.

Q6. **We have a survey with an item and students are always asking for help. Is there an exception to your rule?**

No. First of all, if the item has repeatedly been a problem, rethink including it in the survey. I would advise some sort of cognitive lab with a representative small group of students from the school, perhaps 10-15 students, and have them to get through and think about it out loud to see why this is causing a problem. Change the items accordingly. It may not be possible. Perhaps you want to turn the data and maybe this has been done for several years in a row. If that is the case, whatever help is giving to students regarding the item should be given to all of the students. For instance, if you keep having to provide an example for students, provide that example upfront to all students.

Q7. **What if you started administering a survey and you see you have a lower response rate than you had hoped. Is there anything you can do to quickly boost the response rate?**

Yes. I'm thinking in particular about a staff and family survey where the response windows are open a little bit longer and it is not quite such a controlled environment. It really is a good idea actually to monitor the response rate on a daily basis as the window is open. Then you can see how things are going. If the response rate is not healthy within two or three days, I think that is when you need to implement your all-in procedures. Have your telephone follow-up option implemented and get that in place ahead of time. If you need it, it is ready. Start calling people. This means you will need to have, for staff, their schools' numbers where they can be reached. Some districts are quite reticent to give out staff home phone numbers and staff may not want to be reached at home, so I would try them at school. For families, if you can get an updated list of home addresses and telephone numbers from the school, start calling to remind people and leave messages. If they've lost the survey, tell them you'll resend it. Saturate the non-respondents and get that response rate up as fast as you can.

Q8. **Earlier you discussed how you can administer surveys to all -- can you give some guidance on making that decision, for example when to choose whole staff or teachers?**

This will be determined by several things. One is going to be cost considerations. If you have a large staff in a school and you plan on casting the widest net so that you involve all support staff, you can have a pretty large group there. So if you are thinking about cost considerations, that's one of the things to think about is what is the total number of staff you're going to try to get to if you're going to do a census? And besides just sending them the questionnaire, there are other things to think about, one of which is following up to make sure they do the survey. So, just giving them the questionnaire is just the first step in the process. Now, you've got to try to get as many as you can to actually complete it. You've got that follow-up expense. Cost is one of the things. Now, if you are thinking instead of doing a sample, that is going to be less expensive in terms of labor, printing, scanning and all that; but on the other hand, you're going to want to get help from a sampling statistician who can help you pull the sample so that cost can potentially upset your savings in doing the sample versus census survey. The biggest consideration for staff and family is how to maximize the response rate. What is it going to cost you?

Q9. Should you provide a paper and online survey for parents and guardians? In order to ensure more participation in the survey?

Yes, having multiple modes really helps. Now, with parents and guardians, you have always got the compounding factor that you don't know how many have Internet access and/or are comfortable doing an online survey. So, providing both can help boost response rates, but you are also going to have to find out which of them the parent or guardian prefers. And you can do this by just offering both upfront— mail them a questionnaire and include the link to the online version if they'd prefer to fill the survey out that way. Now, you're going to have some parents and guardians in your sample who are not going to do either one for many reasons. So again, you're going to have the follow-up and reminders and so on to try to get them to do both modes, either mode or get them to do one or the other.

If you are giving the survey in multiple forms, you want to be very clear with your instructions to avoid introducing some type of bias those taking the online versus paper format. There should be as little difference as possible in formatting and look of the online versus paper versions of the survey to avoid this bias.

Q10. Is there a concern with "ballot stuffing" when offering both paper and online options? That parents may take the survey more than once?

That's a really good question. I haven't heard about stuffing for a long time. What you'll want to do is make sure that you have ID numbers that are specific just to each individual respondent. So, they are going to have to give the ID number that's on their paper questionnaire when they do it online. So that there is a database that can make sure that each respondents' unique ID number only shows up once. Your data collection contractor can help you with that.

Q11. The first is, in my district, we have struggled with getting a couple of schools to follow the instructions in the manual. Do you have any tips for working with schools like this?

Well, I'm not sure if you mean like the school coordinator or if it is the actual administrator or people who are in the classroom proctoring the student survey. But, there are two things that are necessary. One is to create a really detailed manual. Everything needs to be written down. But people do not always read manuals, so it is important to actually train people. Get everyone together and go over the manual in a training session; offer makeup training sessions for those that cannot attend. For coordinators and principals, it's important to do more than just email; get them on the phone and go over the material with them. This also allows you to answer any questions they may have. There will be questions for which you don't know the answer right then- talk to your data collection contractor, your state coordinator, or your funding source and get these answers back to people. And not just those who asked the questions; send the answers to these questions to everyone as they may have the same questions and simply didn't ask.

Have a written manual and be sure to train the staff.