

# Gauging Community and Staff Feedback

## SERVICE ASSOCIATES Q & A



**Sue Peterson** is a project manager with School Perceptions and **Bill Foster** is president of School Perceptions.



**Q.** *Why is it important for school districts to survey community members?*

**A.** We strongly believe in utilizing a process that builds ownership among stakeholders, leading to ownership of an ultimate solution. We have found that a community survey is a critical first step. We do not advocate a random sampling, a process that, by definition, excludes most members of the community. Instead, we specialize in a process that includes every member of the community. The process begins with the mailing of a survey to district households. The survey's cover letter explains the nature of the survey and encourages the respondent to participate online, if possible, by using a unique survey access code. With this approach, each community member is educated about the needs and challenges of the district.

**Q.** *Why is it important for school districts to survey staff members?*

**A.** Although staff members represent less than 1 percent of the total community, they are critical communicators, having hundreds of conversations everyday with parents, friends and neighbors. It is through these informal conversations that the perceptions of the community regarding the quality and needs of the district are estab-

lished. Additionally, school district staff is in the trenches every day and as a result, in the best position to establish planning priorities. Therefore, involvement and engagement with the staff is critical to every project's success.

**Q.** *What can school boards learn from polling these groups?*

**A.** While it is important for each school board member to have their own opinions, a successful referendum must reflect what the majority of the community wants, not what the majority of the school board wants. Defining what will be supported can only be done with good data. Over the years, we have found our survey methodology to be highly predictive. However, the true benefit of this "engagement" process is to educate community members on the needs of the district. Simply stated, people are more likely to support a plan if they have a voice in creating it.

**Q.** *School Perceptions worked with WASB to develop the Annual Board Development Tool, an online survey where board members rate their work on various governance areas. How does this tool help school boards improve?*

**A.** The School Perceptions' Annual Board Development Tool was designed based on elements of the

National School Boards Association's research, known as The Key Work of School Boards, which includes relationships, vision, accountability, community leadership and policy. The Annual Board Development Tool is broken into nine sections. Respondents are asked to evaluate the board performance in each category: data-driven decision making, board operations, culture, planning, budgeting, district operations, community engagement, policy and vision.

The results help school boards identify their areas of strength and alignment as well as where further dialogue and discussion are needed. ■

*The WASB Service Associates Program includes businesses and organizations that have been recognized by the WASB Board of Directors as reputable businesses and partners of public education in Wisconsin. For more information, visit [wasb.org](http://wasb.org) and select "Service Associates."*

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