

Using the Results of the Goals Survey: Two Districts Report

Sitting Under the Shade of the Tree Rather Than Falling Off the Limb

As Assistant Superintendent for Instruction in the small suburban school district referred to in Regina Paul's article, I had the privilege of working with her and "Mitch" Brickell to develop the first edition of their goals survey. While it might be interesting for the readers to know how the questionnaire was designed and field tested, it seems more important in this limited space to describe how the survey results were used to improve instruction.

The survey was used during the second year of a four-year curriculum development plan in which all subject areas, K-12, were undergoing a complete re-write. A process of "curriculum mapping" was used during the initial year to determine what was being taught at each level in all subjects. The primary thrust for the second year included the determination of a philosophy or mission statement for each subject area, development of broad goals, and the specification of major objectives or learning outcomes undergirding the mission and goals. Survey results provided valuable direction for curriculum committees as they proceeded with their work. As Paul indicated, the goals survey identified not only what the respondents believed *students should learn*, but indicated *what schools should teach*.

James E. Cole is Superintendent, Stevens Point Area Public School District, Stevens Point, Wisconsin.

JAMES E. COLE



Committees reviewed survey results and compared what actually was being taught in the district with those curricular concepts/topics thought to be most important by survey respondents. Each committee then made certain that the curriculum for their subject area included appropriate goals, objectives, and teaching/learning activities that addressed the critical skills and knowledge identified by the survey.

In addition to providing supportive data for curriculum development, survey results were used as follows:

- An "executive summary" of the results was mailed to all district residents and survey respondents. It gave an interpretation of the data and indicated how the results would be used by educators. Feedback from community residents was positive; they were pleased the district was making use of the results.

- A committee studying graduation requirements used the information as a basis for their decision against setting minimum competency requirements for graduation. They did, however, increase credit requirements in some of the basic skills that survey respondents thought were most important.

- A committee on promotion, retention, and grading studied the data as they examined whether to require students to meet certain expectations for learning before being advanced from one level of schooling to the next. The committee decided to require periodic competency tests that would be criterion-referenced directly to the curriculum. Students who failed to reach a minimum 80 percent correct response rate were given remedial instruction in the areas of deficiency and, in specific cases, were retained rather than promoted to the next grade level.

- Principals and teachers focused on the results as they determined the best use of classroom time. The goals survey helped them identify the learnings to receive emphasis during that

limited time frame. The survey information has also become an integral part of the teacher evaluation/observation process in terms of providing guidelines for improving time on task.

• The school board, administration, and others placed considerable weight on the results as they dealt with the increasingly important annual question, "What should be cut from the budget?"

Although results of the goals survey can be used for several purposes, it seems clear that the primary employment of the data is likely to be for decision making regarding the relative importance of curricular and co-curricular offerings when contemplating elimination or reduction of programs

due to budget cuts. Schools have been expected to provide instruction on almost every conceivable topic, and services to counteract almost every "ill" or need of society. The results of a comprehensive goals survey should uncover valuable information for deciding what is to be cut or retained. It should be recognized that a goals survey is not an "end-all" that can stand by itself; rather, it is a tool that can augment professional judgment, past practice, and many other considerations that enter into budget decisions. In its absence, program importance and the allocation of dollars may be determined by the lobbying strength of special interest groups and the seemingly important ingredient called "tradition." ■

began a 22-day strike that further crippled the district's image. (In fairness to the employee unions, they had predicted before the levy that it would not generate enough money to settle contracts.)

The task at hand was clearly one of "cutback" management. Cutback management in our situation required a two-pronged approach and had to be aimed at reestablishing public confidence sufficiently to pass a major permanent levy within the next 25-month period. The first approach would be to engage our entire community, all stakeholders that use or support the public schools, in defining our most important educational goals and priorities. The second approach would be to design and implement a human resource management strategy to assist us in selecting which personnel to let go and what programs to curtail or terminate.

To accomplish our first approach, and to support decisions made in the second, we decided to conduct a survey of our staff, clients, and supporters. We were familiar with Brickell's goals survey efforts and decided to engage his services along with those of several other evaluators.

The instrument collected responses from a wide variety of stakeholders in the educational process in Toledo; namely, parents, nonparents, teachers, administrators, and students. A scientific sampling plan was used to allow for district-level analysis and for individual school-level analysis in relation to districtwide results.

The use of the results was a major consideration. We created a rather involved process to ensure that the results were shared and discussed in the media and with parent and citizen groups at the school level. To get the process started, meetings were held with all principals and central office personnel to share with them:

- Systemwide survey results
- Systemwide student achievement test results
- Demographic information by district and by school
- Processes by which the school building and central office personnel could analyze the data to establish building-by-building priorities in keeping with public expectations.

A set of districtwide priority goals was drafted in consideration of the



Getting Out From Under the Gun

DON STEELE

On July 1, 1978, I assumed the very important responsibility for serving the citizens of Toledo, Ohio, as their superintendent of schools. I took this position knowing that citizen confidence in the Toledo Public Schools was at its lowest ebb. Public attitudes toward the schools were perhaps best described in a statement by Gene Maeroff (1978), national education correspondent for *The New York Times*:

Don Steele is Superintendent, Seattle Public Schools, Seattle, Washington.

Toledo's 54,000 school children have been facing the same plight as Mother Hubbard's dog, and the taxpayers and community nabobs have denied them even table scraps. Finally, last November 8, after the penniless school system had to suspend classes for seven days, 56% of Toledo's voters approved a 6.1 mill (emergency) operating tax increase. But the school officials maintain that the increase is far short of what is needed and that the school system, which has had to shut down for periods during each of the last two years to avoid bankruptcy, will face the same money shortages in a year or two.

Following the emergency levy passage referred to above, the teaching and nonteaching employee unions

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