

# ASSESSING PERCEPTIONS USING *EDUCATION FOR THE FUTURE* QUESTIONNAIRES

BY VICTORIA L. BERNHARDT

*Where did the questionnaires come from,  
what do they tell us, and are they valid and reliable?*

In 1991, while working intensively with a group of schools that were looking for ways to improve their results, *Education for the Future* created questionnaires to help the schools understand their learning environments from the perspective of students, staff, administrators, and parents. The schools thought they were doing a good job, but they did not have any real input from their customers and staff. The casual conversations in the school halls and teachers' lounge, at extracurricular events, parent conferences, and the grocery store provided narrow observations; and the schools wanted to hear from a wider range of those who lived in the community and those who were directly impacted by the services that the schools offered. *Education for the Future* designed, administered, and analyzed the results of the questionnaires. The questionnaire results helped each of the schools improve its operations and get student achievement increases.

*Not to understand  
another person's way  
of thinking does  
not make that  
person confused.*

Michael Quinn Patten

Today, *Education for the Future* continues to use updated versions of these questionnaires—across the United States as well as in other countries. *Education for the Future* has added related questionnaires to its collection, currently offering more than a dozen different questionnaires to assist schools and districts with continuous improvement.

This paper describes how these questionnaires were developed and how they are currently being used. Definitions of *perceptions*, *validity*, and *reliability* are presented first.

## Perceptions

The definitions of *perceptions* and its synonyms provide almost enough information to understand why it is important to know the perceptions of our students, graduates, teachers, administrators, and parents.

The word *perception* leads us to such words as “observation” and “opinion,” with definitions that include—

- a view, judgment, or appraisal formed in the mind about a particular matter
- a belief stronger than impression and less strong than positive knowledge
- a generally held view
- a formal expression of judgment or advice
- a judgment one holds as true

Synonyms offered by the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* include opinion, view, belief, conviction, persuasion, and sentiment:

- *Opinion* implies a conclusion thought out yet open to dispute.
- *View* suggests a subjective opinion.
- *Belief* implies often deliberate acceptance and intellectual assent.
- *Conviction* applies to a firmly and seriously held belief.
- *Persuasion* suggests a belief grounded on assurance (as by evidence) of its truth.
- *Sentiment* suggests a settled opinion reflective of one’s feelings.

All of us have perceptions of the way the world operates. We act upon these perceptions every day as if they are reality. Basically, we do not act differently from what we value, believe, or perceive. In schools, we want to know what is valued, believed, or perceived. In other words, we want to know what has to be in place in order for students to learn—from the student perspective—and what is possible from the teacher and administrative perspective.

## Assessing Perceptions

Common approaches to understanding perceptions in schools include the use of questionnaires, focus groups, and interviews. While each of these approaches provides good information, questionnaires may be the best way to assess perceptions because they can be completed anonymously and readministered to assess changes in individuals’ experiences and thinking over time.

A *questionnaire* is a system for collecting information to describe, compare, and explain knowledge, attitudes, perceptions, or behavior. Good questionnaires have the following features:

- Relay a strong purpose for participants to complete the questionnaire
- Are concise and to the point
- Contain items that everyone can understand in the same way
- Include all participants because we want all those answering the questionnaire to feel their opinions are valued, plus we want the results to be *used* later
- Start with more general items and lead to more specific items
- Have response options that make sense for the questions
- Use analyses appropriate to the items and their response options
- Provide reports that truly present the results clearly and accurately

Questionnaires must be based upon an underlying assumption that the respondents will give truthful answers. To this end, items or questions must be asked that are—

- valid—ask the right questions
- reliable—will result in the same answers if given more than once
- understandable—respondents know what you are asking
- quick to complete—brain-compatible, designed well, and concise
- able to get the first response from the respondent—administration and set-up
- justifiable—based on a solid foundation

## **Validity**

*Validity* is about asking the right questions to justify what you get in the end. If the content of a questionnaire matches a situation that is being studied, then the questionnaire has content validity.

The content validity of *Education for the Future* questionnaires was ensured during the process of questionnaire development. Items were drafted based on the literature about effective schools and included issues important to students and teachers interviewed by *Education for the Future* staff before, during, and after questionnaire administration. The questionnaires were revised after years of input from all parties and are regularly monitored for updating. Why we use the items or questions we use are shown in Tables 1 through 3, discussed later in this paper.

## **Reliability**

*Reliability* is a measure of an assessment instrument, such as a questionnaire, that says that if we give the same instrument over time, we will get the same results.

*Education for the Future* wanted its questionnaires to be reliable. However, we also wanted the questionnaires to be able to show change, if there was change in a learning organization.

Our questionnaires were administered in the original *Education for the Future* schools in October and April three years in a row. We found mostly the same results for students and parents in October and April within each year. We could see the questionnaire results change from April to October when there were changes implemented in school processes. These findings made us think that whatever perceptions students and parents have at the beginning of a school year are the same perceptions they will have at the end of the year, unless there has been some systemic change.

Staff questionnaire results change when changes are made in the system, such as the creation of a vision or implementation of a new plan. If something different is implemented, or relationships change, teachers' responses on related items change. We find that student responses will change if teachers' responses change. If teachers' responses do not change, student responses do not change. Our current reliability quotients are .93 for the elementary student questionnaire, .97 for the secondary student questionnaire, .86 for the staff questionnaire, and .90 for the parent questionnaire.

## **Where the Items Came From**

The items used in the *Education for the Future* questionnaires were created from the research about student learning and what students, teachers, and parents tell us have to be in place in order for students to learn. For example, William Glaser (*The Quality School*, 1990) believes that students have to feel safe, like they belong, have freedom, fun, and choices in their learning in order to learn. Students tell us that the one thing that has to be in place in order for them to learn is that their teacher(s) cares about them.

Figures 1 through 3 describe why the different items are used in our student, staff, and parent questionnaires, respectively.

*Note:* We purposefully do not use exactly the same items or questions in student, staff, and parent questionnaires. In our experience with questionnaire administration, we have found that the items or questions for each of these

groups need to be different. For example, we think it is valid and important to ask students if they feel like they belong at school. It is not valid to ask parents if they think the students feel like they belong at the school—that information would be second-hand. It is valid and important to ask parents if they feel welcome at the school. It would not be appropriate to ask students if they think their parents feel welcome at the school. How does anyone know how someone else feels? We want to ask questions of the source.

**FIGURE 1**  
**Education for the Future Student Questionnaire**

<i>Questionnaire Items</i>	<i>Why We Ask These Items</i>
At school, I feel— I belong I am safe I have fun learning I have freedom at school I have choices in what I learn	William Glaser ( <i>The Quality School</i> , 1990) says students have to feel these things in order for them to learn.
I like this school This school is good	These statements come from the students. They think it is important that students like their school and think it is good.
My teacher cares about me My teacher treats me with respect My teacher thinks I will be successful My teacher listens to my ideas I am challenged by the work my teacher asks me to do The work I do in class makes me think	The number one thing that students tell us has to be in place in order for them to learn is a caring teacher(s). To students, caring means that the teacher knows, respects, and listens to them while making sure that the students are learning and actively doing challenging work. This information is consistent with the literature on dropout prevention.
My teacher is a good teacher My teacher believes I can learn I am recognized for good work I know what I am supposed to be learning in my classes Very good work is expected at my school	Teachers want students to say that they are good teachers, that they believe the students can learn, that teachers recognize students for good work, that students know what they are supposed to be learning, and that good work is expected of students. Teachers feel these are some of the most important things that students can say about their learning that will also help them learn.
My principal cares about me	Students asked us to add this item. They understand the importance of leadership in establishing a caring climate/ culture.
I am a good student I can be a better student I behave well at school	These items help students reflect on their efforts and encourage them to do better.

**FIGURE 1**  
**Education for the Future Student Questionnaire**

<i>Questionnaire Items</i>	<i>Why We Ask These Items</i>
<p>Students are treated fairly by teachers            Students are treated fairly by the principal            Students are treated fairly by the people on recess duty (grounds supervisors)</p>	<p>Fair treatment is a big issue for students, especially as they get older. Often we find that the adults who are supervising the students do not have the training they need to offer balanced and respectful supervision. Students are the first to know and some times the last to be listened to when it comes to fair treatment, both in and out of class.</p>
<p>Students at my school treat me with respect            Students at my school are friendly            I have lots of friends</p>	<p>These items on respect can give staffs a “heads up” on bullying and let them know what students are feeling about the other students.</p>
<p>I have support for learning at home            My family believes I can do well in school            My family wants me to do well in school</p>	<p>Students usually feel they have support for learning at home and that they are expected to do well in school. This is very interesting to teachers who feel that parents do little to help students learn at home. Perhaps teachers need to be clearer about how they help families help their children learn.</p>

**FIGURE 2**  
**Education for the Future Staff Questionnaire**

<i>Questionnaire Items</i>	<i>Why We Ask These Items</i>
<p>I feel like I belong at this school            I feel that the staff cares about me            I feel recognized for good work            I work with people who treat me with respect            I work with people who listen if I have ideas about doing things better            I love working at this school</p>	<p>These items help establish teachers’ belonging at the school. If teachers do not feel like they belong or are respected, they will neither be able to focus on the needs of the students, nor will they be able to collaborate with colleagues to create a continuum of learning for all students.</p>
<p>I feel that learning can be fun            I feel that learning is fun at this school            Learning is fun in my classroom</p>	<p>Students say they like school because it is <i>fun</i>. <i>Fun</i> to them means that it is challenging and worth their time. In order for the learning to be fun for students, teachers have to know how to make it <i>fun</i>, as well as challenging.</p>
<p>I feel intrinsically rewarded for doing my job well</p>	<p>How much are teachers feeling intrinsically rewarded for doing a good job, and how much do they need external rewards? Our most effective teachers feel intrinsically rewarded for doing their jobs well.</p>

**FIGURE 2**  
**Education for the Future Staff Questionnaire**

<i>Questionnaire Items</i>	<i>Why We Ask These Items</i>
<p>My administrator treats me with respect</p> <p>My administrator is an effective instructional leader</p> <p>My administrator allows me to be an effective instructional leader</p> <p>My administrator facilitates communication effectively</p> <p>My administrator supports me in my work with students</p> <p>My administrator supports shared decision-making</p> <p>My administrator is effective in helping us reach our vision</p>	<p>Teachers' perceptions of the administration help us see the impact of the leader(s) in the school. Is the administrator an instructional leader, or are the teachers the only instructional leaders? Does the administrator see her/his job to help all staff implement the shared vision? We believe that helping staff implement the vision is the leader's number one job.</p> <p>These items also help us see the degree of support the teachers feel they receive from administrators. Teachers feel supported when there is effective communication and mutual respect.</p>
<p>I have the opportunity to think for myself, not just carry out instructions</p>	<p>This item helps us understand how much teachers feel they are in control of their own classrooms.</p>
<p>I have the opportunity to develop my skills</p>	<p>This item helps us know if teachers feel they have support to improve their skills.</p>
<p>I love seeing the results of my work with students</p> <p>I believe every student can learn</p> <p>I love to teach</p>	<p>These three statements are what the most effective teachers in the United States say about why they got into teaching. We have found when these items are high, staffs usually got into teaching for the right reasons. Almost any kind of change is possible. When these items are low for an entire staff, there is not a single plan on the planet that will be implemented without some team-building and professional learning that remind teachers about why they got into teaching in the first place.</p>
<p>I work effectively with special education students</p> <p>I work effectively with limited English speaking students</p> <p>I work effectively with an ethnically / racially diverse population of students</p> <p>I work effectively with heterogeneously grouped classes</p> <p>I work effectively with low-achieving students</p>	<p>On an anonymous questionnaire, teachers say if they feel they work effectively with different types of students. Professional learning needs can be determined from the responses to these items.</p>

**FIGURE 2**  
**Education for the Future Staff Questionnaire**

<i>Questionnaire Items</i>	<i>Why We Ask These Items</i>
<p>I believe student achievement can increase through differentiating instruction</p> <p>I believe student achievement can increase through effective professional development related to our vision</p> <p>I believe student achievement can increase through teaching to the state standards</p> <p>I believe student achievement can increase through student self-assessment</p> <p>I believe student achievement can increase through using ongoing student assessments related to state standards</p> <p>I believe student achievement can increase through teacher use of student achievement data</p> <p>I believe student achievement can increase through the use of computers</p> <p>I believe student achievement can increase through providing a threat-free environment</p> <p>I believe student achievement can increase through close personal relationships between students and teachers</p> <p>I believe student achievement can increase through addressing student learning styles</p> <p>I believe student achievement can increase through effective parent involvement</p> <p>I believe student achievement can increase through partnerships with business</p>	<p>As humans, we cannot act any differently from what we value, believe, or perceive. When we ask teachers if they believe student achievement can increase through specific methodologies that are spelled out in the literature on effective schools, their responses essentially tell us what they are doing in their classrooms.</p> <p>These responses can tell staffs if the shared vision is being implemented, and what professional learning might be necessary. If teachers say they do not believe student achievement can increase through strategies agreed upon, it does not necessarily mean they do not want to do them. It often means they need more learning on the topic and to “see what it would look like” if implemented in their own classroom.</p>
<p>The instructional program at this school is challenging</p> <p>This school provides an atmosphere where every student can succeed</p> <p>Quality work is expected of all students at this school</p> <p>Quality work is expected of me</p> <p>Quality work is expected of all the adults working at this school</p>	<p>These items provide information about the feelings teachers have about the quality of work offered and provided to students, and the equality of expectations. If there is a discrepancy between what teachers feel is expected of them and the other adults at the school, there probably is not a feeling of camaraderie or a chance that together they can create a continuum of learning for all students. These items could also point to a sense of fair treatment.</p>
<p>The vision for this school is clear</p> <p>The vision for this school is shared</p>	<p>The analysis of these statements show what staff is thinking about the clarity and commitment of staff in implementing the vision.</p>

**FIGURE 2**  
**Education for the Future Staff Questionnaire**

<i>Questionnaire Items</i>	<i>Why We Ask These Items</i>
We have an action plan in place that can get us to our vision	Does everyone know there is an action plan in place to implement the vision? Or did the Leadership Team create the vision and put it on the shelf? The collective results show what staff is thinking about the plan.
This school has a good public image	All members of the staff are responsible for the public image of the school. A good public image assists with staff morale.
I think it is important to communicate often with parents I communicate with parents often about their child's progress I communicate with parents often about class activities	These questions explore the discrepancy between knowing it is important to communicate with parents and actually doing it for the right reasons.
Morale is high on the part of teachers Morale is high on the part of students Morale is high on the part of support staff Morale is high on the part of administrators Teachers in this school communicate with each other to make student learning consistent across grades	Many staffs feel that teacher morale is the lowest of any group in the school, and is often the lowest scoring question on the staff questionnaire. If teacher morale is low, we have found that <i>Teachers in this school communicate with each other to make student learning consistent across grades</i> is also low, as well as items related to administrative communication and leadership of the vision. Teachers want to work together to create a continuum of learning that makes sense for students. If they cannot work together, a continuum of learning cannot be created.
I am clear about what my job is at this school I feel that others are clear about what my job is at this school	A discrepancy in responses between these two items can mean that teachers have a feeling of cognitive dissonance, or a feeling of not being valued.
The student outcomes for my class(es) are clear to me The student outcomes for my class(es) are clear to my students	If outcomes are not clear, there is little clarity in the school offerings or in what students should know and be able to do.

**FIGURE 3**  
**Education for the Future Parent Questionnaire**

<i>Questionnaire Items</i>	<i>Why We Ask These Items</i>
I feel welcome at my student's school	If parents do not feel welcome at the school, they will not come to the school. This answer gives us a clue about how much students feel welcome at school. Parents' comfort with the school is often symptomatic of students' comfort with the school.
I am informed about my student's progress I know what my student's teacher expects of my student	Parents cannot help their children learn at home if they do not know about teacher expectations or student progress.
My student is safe at school My student is safe going to and from school There is adequate playground supervision during school There is adequate supervision before and after school	One of the first issues that parents have with school is the safety of their children. The items are separated by "at school" and "going to and from school" to know the parents' major concerns about safety.
The teachers show respect for the students The students show respect for other students	Parents have to know that teachers and students are treating their children with respect. In most instances, if students and teachers feel and show respect for one another, bullying will not be an issue.
The school meets the social needs of the students The school meets the academic needs of the students The school expects quality work of its students The school has an excellent learning environment	In order for parents to say that the school has an excellent learning environment, parents have to know that social and academic needs of the students are being met. Parents also want their children to be engaged in quality work, in an excellent learning environment.
I like the school's report cards/progress report	If parents do not understand how progress is reported to them, they cannot help their children learn at home.
I respect the school's teachers I respect the school's principal	Without feelings of respect for the adults at the school, parents will not get involved with the school—sometimes not even in their children's learning.

**FIGURE 3**  
**Education for the Future Parent Questionnaire**

<i>Questionnaire Items</i>	<i>Why We Ask These Items</i>
Overall, the school performs well academically The school succeeds at preparing children for their future	These statements give us the parents' perceptions of the quality of the school in preparing their children for the future.
The school has a good public image	Parents' responses to this statement will coincide with the greater community's perceptions of the school's image.
The school's assessment practices are fair	If parents do not feel the school's assessment practices are fair, they might not encourage their children to work their hardest.
My student's teacher helps me to help my student learn at home I support my student's learning at home	These are very important statements for understanding parent support, or lack thereof. If the parents do not know how to help their children learn, they will not be as supportive as they might be.
I feel good about myself as a parent	Parents asked us to add this item to help understand their responses to the other questions. If I do not feel good about myself as a parent, how can I help my child learn? This could help schools know if parenting classes are something they might want to offer.

### **Disaggregations**

We believe that, collectively, these questionnaire items are powerful. We also know that the items become even more powerful when we disaggregate the responses. The disaggregations that we use for each questionnaire grouping follow:

#### *Students*

- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Grade
- Extracurricular participation (high school)
- Grade level when first enrolled in the school (high school)
- Plans after graduation (high school)
- School within schools identification

### *Staff*

- Gender (if there are appropriate numbers in each subgroup)
- Ethnicity (if there are appropriate numbers in each subgroup)
- Job Classification
- Grades and subjects taught
- Number of years of teaching
- Optional: Teaching Teams, Professional Learning Communities, etc.

### *Parents*

- Number of children in this school
- Number of children in the household
- Children's grades
- Native language
- Ethnic background
- Who responded (Mom, Dad, Grandparent, Guardian)
- Graduate of this school (high school)

## **The Scale**

*Education for the Future* staff worked hard to create items that participants could respond to quickly, with results that could be displayed in a meaningful way and easily interpreted. We wanted staffs to be able to see the item results relative to each other. To do this, we piloted many different scales, including 99, 10, 7, 6, 5, 4, and 3-point scales. We ultimately and easily chose the use of a 5-point scale. Any scale that had more than 5 points upset the respondents—it was too difficult to respond to such intricate distinctions. Respondents gave us less information and did not complete the questionnaire when they did not like the response options. The even numbered scales did not allow us to average the responses, and averaging provides the easiest understanding of the relationship of the responses to each other. The even numbered scales did not allow respondents to give a response that indicated half the time “yes” and half the time “no,” or “just do not have an opinion at this time.” The three-point scale did not discriminate enough.

Most staffs are used to results being displayed by the percentage or number of responses in agreement or disagreement with each item. Staffs struggle to find the most important, the least important, and what to do with the information. By using averages and displaying those averages together on a line graph, staffs see the degree of agreement and disagreement across items and can look at the relationship of the item content to other item content.

Our 5-point response options are most often: *strongly disagree*, *disagree*, *neutral* (neither agree nor disagree), *agree*, and *strongly agree*. Sometimes we use “effective” response options in place of “agree,” when appropriate for the items. These options are placed from lowest to highest, or left to right, in brain compatible order. All items are written in a positive manner so the results do not need to be inverted to understand the most positive and the most negative responses. We totally disagree with statisticians who say you need to ask questions in two different ways to make sure your respondents are telling the truth. We have found this method frustrating to respondents; plus, writing questions in a negative fashion leads to double negatives and is usually not brain compatible. Not using brain compatible methods will elicit results that make you think some of the respondents must have inverted the scale. However, one cannot arbitrarily invert the scale for them. The analyst must accept their responses. Typically, one could end up getting unreliable data, or have to throw out such questions.

### **Changing Perceptions**

Is it possible to change perceptions? Absolutely. How do we get perceptions to change? The most effective approach to changing perceptions is through behavior changes. This means if some teachers do not believe in an approach being proposed for implementation in the classroom, one way to change the teachers’ minds is to increase their understanding of the approach and give them an opportunity to experience it. Awareness and experience can lead to basic shifts, first in opinions, and then attitudes and beliefs. This is why many schools have parent nights when there is a change in a math or technology curriculum. Giving parents an opportunity to *experience* the approach helps them understand the different perspective, which could make them more supportive of the program. This is also why excellent Professional Development programs have coaching and demonstration components along with their content training.

Another way to change perceptions is through *cognitive dissonance*, an inconsistency between two or more thoughts, opinions, or ideas. Cognitive dissonance is the discomfort one feels when holding two ideas that are inconsistent. Cognitive dissonance creates perception changes when people experience a conflict between what they believe and what they, or trusted sources, experience.

In order to change the way business is done, schools establish guiding principles, which include the purpose and mission of the school. These principles grow out of the core values and beliefs of the individuals who make up the school community. Sometimes school communities adopt guiding principles that they *want* and *hope* to believe in, as opposed to those that they *do* believe in. The idea is that those who try out behaviors that are consistent with these principles will see positive impact, leading to change in their internal thinking and beliefs in those principles. This is okay. Changed attitudes represent change at the deepest level of an organization's culture.

Too often schools think of their guiding principles as being sacred and static. They might be sacred, but they should never be static. Even if a school keeps its guiding principles intact, their meanings evolve as people reflect and talk about them and as the principles are applied to guide decisions and actions.

An example of behavior changes preceding perception changes follows:

*Blossom Middle School teachers were given a questionnaire about their values and beliefs about technology — how they believed technology would increase student learning, and in what ways e-mail, the Internet, and videoconferencing used in instructional units would impact student learning. Additionally, the students were given a questionnaire asking them their impressions of the impact of technology on their learning.*

*For two years, the results were almost the same: Nothing was happening with respect to the implementation of technology or perceptions about technology in the classroom. In the meantime, teachers became involved in their own professional learning with demonstration and coaching components; administration placed typical staff meeting items on e-mail, requiring teachers to begin implementing technology for personal use. With these strategies; teachers began implementing technology in their classrooms - resulting in major behavior changes.*

*During the following year, it became clear from the questionnaire results that the classrooms were different because teachers were using technology — first for their own benefit, and then with and for students. When teachers' actions changed in the classroom with the use of technology, their ideas and attitudes changed about the impact technology could have with respect to increasing student learning. It was also easy to see in the student questionnaire responses that student perceptions of the impact technology could have on their learning also changed — after the teachers' behaviors and attitudes changed.*

Again, if we want perceptions to change — and we usually do as we implement new concepts and innovations — we need to change behaviors. As the example above illustrates, to change student perceptions, teacher perceptions must change, which requires teacher behavior to change.

Just a quick note about changing teacher behaviors: When we survey teachers about making desired changes in their classrooms, very close to 100% of the teachers who are not implementing the vision, or teaching to the standards, will say it is because they do not know what it would look like if they were implementing these concepts in their classrooms. This has huge implications for how change is supported. Powerful professional learning designs need to be incorporated to support and ensure that behaviors change.

### **What We Have Learned About the *Education for the Future* Questionnaires**

People ask us all the time what we should expect to see in the results—what are typical results for different student age groups, parents, and staff members. They also ask what the results say about their learning organization. While we prefer respondents to bring their own meaning to the results, below are some of the typical findings.

#### *Across All Respondents*

What respondents, especially school staffs, like most about our questionnaires are the displays of results and the fact that the items are meaningful (Figure 4). By showing the average responses of each item with all other items on the same line graph, staffs can understand relationships of the items to each other and the relationship of the high responses to the lower responses and how the highs could provide leverage for bringing up the low item responses. This display has additional advantages: Staffs are more likely to look across all of the items before creating a plan, as opposed to picking the lowest item and then creating a plan.

**FIGURE 4**  
**Our Elementary School**  
**Total Student Responses by Gender**  
**Month / Year**



The line graphs provide clear displays of disaggregated responses by different groups of respondents, e.g., males/females. The disaggregated responses have helped many staffs find issues within different student groups they did not know existed. The disaggregated responses have also shown differences in how teachers perceive their work, by the number of years of teaching, and the grades or subjects they teach.

When questionnaire items are short and understandable to all respondents in the same way, when the items progress from general to more specific, respondents are able to tell us very quickly if they agree or disagree with each of the items. We have found that it takes passion for respondents to “strongly disagree” or “strongly agree.” When first looking across items, we search for those items about which students, staff, and parents are most passionate. These are leverage for improving the low scores. When we look across the low scores, we can see relationships of these items to each other. The plan for improvement might include one major piece that will improve all items.

No matter what questionnaire you choose to use, you must always follow-up on the information to understand what respondents are saying – never assume.

### *Students*

For the most part, the younger the students, the more in agreement they are to all the items. The older the students, the less in agreement they are. Certainly there is a developmental aspect in play here; however, there are young students who are not in strong agreement with the items, and there are high school students who are in strong agreement with most of the items. We think the item responses truly reflect the learning environment. If students are treated well and they like the way they are learning, their responses will be mostly in agreement and higher. If students do not have fun learning, and they do not like the way they are learning, most of their responses will be low. Students who do not feel that the teacher, or teachers, care about them or treat them fairly, have overall low responses.

### *Staff*

Teacher questionnaire responses show the degree to which staff work together to create a continuum of learning for all students, if there is a clear and shared vision, and if the administrators are adding value to school processes, from the perspective of staff. We have found that teacher morale is very closely related to how much staffs work together and are lead by strong administrators.

Teacher questionnaire responses tell us what is being implemented and what is possible with respect to school improvement.

### *Parents*

Parents basically report back to us what their children tell them about school over the dinner table. Most often the degree of parent agreement to items matches student agreement/disagreement. However, if parents do not feel welcome at the school, or feel that they are not sure how to help their children learn, they will not be involved their children's learning.

### **Summary**

*Education for the Future* created a valid and reliable set of questionnaires for students, staff, and parents in 1991 that continue to be used extensively today. The questionnaires have been updated over time based on feedback provided by *Education for the Future* customers. These questionnaires have shown the impact of school change on student, staff, and parents. In addition, the questionnaires have provided valid and reliable information for schools to know what needs to change in order to get different results. All of the people involved in schools, as well as those who are not directly involved, have perceptions about how well schools are doing. We can use questionnaires to discover the perceptions that people have so that we can improve the negative perceptions and build on the positive ones. Perceptual data are valuable and useful to ensure positive changes in schools and in entire districts.

### ***About Education for the Future***

The mission of the *Education for the Future Initiative* is to support and build the capacity of schools to provide an education that will prepare students to be anything they want to be in the future. *Education for the Future* strives to assist schools to become better equipped to educationally prepare students to achieve their goals.

*Education for the Future* is a not-for-profit initiative, located on the California State University, Chico campus, that focuses on working with schools, districts, State Departments of Education, and other educational service centers and agencies on systemic change and comprehensive data analyses that lead to increased student learning. In addition to workshops and consulting, *Education for the Future* provides questionnaire support services to schools and districts who are participating in school reform efforts and not yet able to facilitate parts of the entire questionnaire process.

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