



Promising Opportunities for Classroom Measures Within ESSA

by Dr. Ryan Balch, Founder/CEO, My Student Survey

This white paper is a special topic within a series on student surveys by Ryan Balch, CEO and founder of My Student Survey (www.mystudentsurvey.com). My Student Survey is a leading provider of stakeholder surveys for schools and districts across the country. With the recent passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act, states are seeking guidance for how to structure accountability plans in a way that supports growth in student outcomes and this special topic is designed to assist with the development of those plans.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provides states the opportunity to envision and create an accountability plan with greater flexibility. Accountability plans can expand our definition of school and student success to include test scores and a consideration of the many aspects of student learning that comprise a high-level, quality education. Within the new law, states are required to include one of the following measures of “Student Success and School Quality”:

- Student engagement
- Educator engagement¹
- Student access to and completion of advanced coursework
- Postsecondary readiness
- School climate and safety

The enhanced flexibility within ESSA allows the question to change from “what do we have to do?” to “what new opportunities exist?” as states can now design their accountability systems to accomplish their own goals rather than complying with federal demands. As states consider the wide variety of measures available for these non-academic factors, it is important to prioritize the inclusion of classroom-level indicators. While the safe option might be to use existing school-level data because it’s readily available, school-level data ignores important ways that performance varies within the school and that can lead to one-size-fits-all interventions that don’t address the underlying issues.

¹ **Note:** All measures need to be broken down by student subgroups, so a measure of educator engagement would not meet this criteria.

One of the few, consistent findings from education research is that the teacher has a greater impact on student outcomes than any other school factor.² If we think of school as a vehicle, the true engine for change in education is classroom-level instruction. We can change paint colors or measure the emissions or acceleration as much as we want to, but ultimately, the car will only perform differently if strategic enhancements are made within the engine. Why, then, are we continuing to focus only on school-level measures and subsequent school-level interventions?

The collection of classroom-level data that can inform instruction allows for feedback reports and professional development plans to be individualized. Supporting this proposition is the line of research showing as much variation between classrooms as there is between schools.³ The professional development needs of a beginning

“In short, research shows very large differences in teacher effectiveness. Moreover, variations in teacher effectiveness within schools appear to be much larger than variations between schools.”

-E. Hanushek (2016)

science teacher are likely different from those of an experienced art teacher in the same school. Principals and instructional leaders in the school need to be able to draw upon this differentiated data to suggest tailored improvements and strategies for each teacher that are informed by reliable data. Further, these data can be combined with school-level measures to gather a more

complete perspective of how the school is performing.

There is evidence of the powerful impact of classroom-level data from the use of interim assessments and benchmark tests by teachers. Instead of relying only on school-level interventions (such as implementing double class periods for math based on low school performance), teachers use classroom data to know exactly what objectives are not yet mastered by their particular students, and they can take more of a targeted, data-driven approach to interventions. The comprehensive approach of implementing both school-level *and* classroom-level strategies can allow for more effective outcomes.

Examples of classroom-level measures that inform instruction include classroom-level student surveys of teacher practice, student self-reported measures of engagement,

² Hanushek, Erik A. Ed., and F. Welch Ed. "Chapter 18." Handbook of the Economics of Education. Volume 2. <http://hanushek.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/publications/Hanushek%2BRivkin%202006%20HbEEdu%202.pdf> and

Haertel, Edward H. Reliability And Validity Of Inferences About Teachers Based Of Inferences About Teachers Based On Student Based On Student Test Scores. 2013. https://www.ets.org/s/pdf/23497_Angoff%20Report-web.pdf. 16 Sept. 2016.

and Rivkin, Steven G., Eric Hanushek A., and John Kain F. "Teachers, Schools, and Academic Achievement." *Econometrica* 73.2 (2005): 417-58. <http://econ.ucsb.edu/~jon/Econ230C/HanushekRivkin.pdf>. 16 Sept. 2016.

³ Hanushek, Erik A. "What Matters for Student Achievement." *Education Next* Spring (2016): 23-30. [http://hanushek.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/publications/Hanushek%202016%20EdNext%2016\(2\).pdf](http://hanushek.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/publications/Hanushek%202016%20EdNext%2016(2).pdf). 16 Sept. 2016.

and independent observations of classroom student engagement. Classroom-level student surveys ask questions about a specific teacher's instruction (e.g., my teacher reviews before the end of the lesson; we are learning or working during the whole class; etc.) or about a student's reported level of engagement. We've seen in the research that these measures predict both student achievement and other important outcomes such as student self-efficacy.⁴ Data from these measures can be aggregated to the school level for inclusion within the accountability system, with measures being weighted by student to ensure representation and fairness.

Importantly, teachers need access to personalized data that can support adjustments to a teacher's individual instruction. When combined with the necessary supports to implement changes suggested by the data, that's the sound of an engine that's revving.

As states develop plans for non-academic measures within ESSA (measures of school quality and student success), there are a variety of considerations that should be discussed:

Readiness Questions:

- What current indicators of school quality and student success (e.g., student engagement, school climate, etc.) are you already measuring?
- What data within your schools and districts is currently collected at the classroom level?
- How do teachers within your schools and districts use classroom-specific data (e.g., achievement data, data about teacher practice, etc.) to drive instructional decisions? Are there any models that you could learn from?
- Are there professional development classes or support available to help teachers learn how to use classroom-level data to drive instruction?

Next Steps:

- Decide what indicators of school quality and student success align with your state's vision and mission.
- Develop a plan for extending these indicators to the classroom level so the teacher can disaggregate the data.
- Investigate various feedback report structures that allow teachers to access and take action on classroom-level data.
- Develop a training module for instructional coaches and principals on how teachers can create actionable next steps based on classroom data.

4 "Asking Students about Teaching." Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. http://k12education.gatesfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Asking_Students_Summary_Doc.pdf. 16 Sept. 2016.

and
Balch, Ryan. "The Validation of a Student Survey on Teacher Practice." Diss. Vanderbilt U, 2012.
<https://mystudentsurvey.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Balch-Student-Surveys-2012.pdf>. 16 Sept. 2016.

How Can Scantron and My Student Survey Help?

Scantron has an extensive track record providing computer-adaptive (Performance Series) and fixed-form formative (Achievement Series) interim assessment solutions as well as high-quality item banks and a world-class assessment services team to help thousands of customers succeed in developing assessments that measure and accelerate student growth. We've delivered billions of assessments since 2010—more than 100 million of them online—and we are always exploring new assessment methodologies to help you move the needle forward.



My Student Survey, a leading provider of education surveys since 2010, specializes in providing a K-12 stakeholder survey solution that is comprehensive yet easy to design and administer.

Their team of researchers and former educators have the expertise you need to engage students, parents, teachers, and support staff in meaningful surveys that deliver actionable results. Stakeholder surveys form the backbone of an evidence-based approach to measuring the whole child and drive school improvement. My Student Survey is dedicated to ensuring you get the best information to make the best instructional decisions.

Beyond assessment vehicles, Scantron offers Scantron Analytics, powered by Qlik—one of the foremost analytics pioneers. Scantron Analytics presents up-to-date information through highly visual, easily understood dashboards. By storing all information in memory, Scantron Analytics delivers powerful analytics without the need for a separate data warehouse. Using information you're already collecting, sourced from a wide variety of educational systems, Scantron Analytics displays easy-to-read, graphical dashboards and data visualizations. Important trends and previously hidden connections jump out, so you can spend your time developing creative solutions instead of trying to make sense of rows and columns of numbers.

Whatever the measurement assistance you need, Scantron has the products, tools, services, and expertise to help you ensure that you have the right program for your students. Our award-winning, web-based software combined with our comprehensive suite of assessment services help you get the most out of your assessments and results.

We hope this article helps you to identify considerations important to your whole-child measurement approach and see how Scantron and My Student Survey can meet you where you are and help you get to where you want to be.

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About Ryan Balch



Ryan Balch is a national thought leader on using student surveys at the elementary and secondary level has expertise in measurement development. Before founding My Student Survey, Ryan Balch completed his Ph.D. in Education Policy at Vanderbilt University as an Institute of Education Sciences (IES) Fellow, where his dissertation focused on the development and validation of student surveys on teacher practice. He was the principal investigator for the student survey pilot of more than 15,000 students in seven districts as part of Georgia's Race to the Top initiative and worked for the National Center on Performance Incentives. In addition, Ryan was the director of teacher and principal evaluation for Baltimore City Schools. During this time, he oversaw the creation and implementation of the district's new systems of evaluation. Previously, Ryan worked as a science teacher and administrator for seven years at Riverwood High School in Atlanta, Georgia. He has a B.A. in Psychology from Duke University and an M.A. in Science Education from Georgia State University.