

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 250 401

TM 840 760

**AUTHOR** Wilson, Bruce L.  
**TITLE** The School Assessment Survey: A Data-Based Tool for School Improvement.  
**INSTITUTION** Research for Better Schools, Inc., Philadelphia, Pa.  
**SPONS AGENCY** National Inst. of Education (ED), Washington, DC.  
**PUB DATE** Oct 84  
**NOTE** 12p.; Small print in Figure 2.  
**PUB TYPE** Reports - Descriptive (141)

**EDRS PRICE** MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.  
**DESCRIPTORS** \*Attitude Measures; \*Educational Environment; \*Educational Facilities Improvement; Elementary Secondary Education; \*Evaluation Methods; Feedback; Improvement Programs; Profiles; \*School Effectiveness; School Surveys; \*Teacher Attitudes  
**IDENTIFIERS** \*School Assessment Survey

**ABSTRACT**

The school Assessment Survey (SAS) is a validated instrument that both assesses school conditions and provides useful feedback for staff. The SAS is organized around nine key organizational dimensions identified in the literature: (1) Goal Consensus; (2) Facilitative Leadership; (3) Centralization of Influence: Classroom Instruction; (4) Centralization of Influence: Curriculum and Resources; (5) Vertical Communication; (6) Horizontal Communication; (7) Staff Conflict; (8) Student Discipline; and (9) Teaching Behavior. It is administered to all teachers in a group setting. A school profile provides feedback on the overall organizational condition of the school, including normative comparisons with other schools. The SAS is most valuable when incorporated as part of development programs for school improvements which open up the decision making process and focus efforts on a few critical areas. (BS)

\*\*\*\*\*  
 \* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made \*  
 \* from the original document. \*  
 \*\*\*\*\*



X This document has been reproduced as  
received from the person or organization  
originating it.  
Minor changes have been made to improve  
reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this docu-  
ment do not necessarily represent official NIE  
position or policy.

ED250401

THE SCHOOL ASSESSMENT SURVEY:  
A DATA-BASED TOOL FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Bruce L. Wilson

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS  
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

M. L. Chapman

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES  
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Research for Better Schools, Inc.

October, 1984

TM 840 760

## The School Assessment Survey: A Data-Based Tool for School Improvement<sup>1</sup>

Effective school improvement programs are data-based and participatory (Louis, et al., 1981). Data can supply valid and reliable information about a wide range of school conditions--an important early step in identifying priority areas for improvement. However, data must also be shared with the school staff. That way everyone can consider the data, the discrepancy between ideal and actual conditions, and the implications of this assessment for future action. The data are more likely to be properly interpreted and used if there is broad participation.

Many modern school effectiveness programs do begin with a data collection step (Miles, et al., 1983). However, there is a shortage of validated instruments that both assess school conditions and also provide useful feedback for staff. The School Assessment Survey (SAS) is a teacher survey that fills both needs. It measures a variety of school climate and organizational factors related to school effectiveness and improvement. It is also linked to programs that encourage participation in the design and implementation of constructive improvement initiatives.

### The Instrument

The SAS instrument was developed through four rounds of revision, refinement, and validation. Each round permitted the collection of information from elementary and secondary schools in urban, suburban, and rural settings. A review of the theoretical literature on organizations identified important organizational conditions or "dimensions" related to improvement or effectiveness. Practical concerns were incorporated through

conversations with educators and trainers which broadened the scope of the SAS dimensions and further refined specific questionnaire items related to each dimension. Consequently, this instrument has face validity to those most directly responsible for the delivery and management of instruction.

While there are instruments designed to assess school conditions, most have been validated at the individual student or teacher level. The SAS instrument has a methodological focus on the school. This fits with the current focus on the school as the unit of analysis and change in effective schools programs. The data offer a constructive picture of the school as a whole and there is well-documented technical evidence of the utility of this approach.<sup>2</sup>

The SAS survey is administered in a group setting (e.g., a staff meeting) to all teachers. Administration takes no more than 30 minutes.

While each teacher is asked to provide his/her view of the school, the presentation of results combines all staff views within a school to arrive at a school score for each dimension.

The instrument is organized around nine key organizational dimensions. These dimensions are outlined in Figure 1. In addition to the definitions for each dimension, Figure 1 summarizes the most relevant research from the school improvement and school effectiveness research that supports their importance. Each dimension has been constructed by combining the results from multiple (five to eight) survey items. Not only is there technical evidence of the reliability and validity of the instrument, but comments from users indicate strong face validity. As one practitioner commented:

*I have worked here for 14 years and these are the most accurate data I have seen. These data tell it like it is in our school.*

## The Profile

The vehicle for feedback is a school profile. Figure 2 contains a sample. The profile provides a *snapshot* of the overall organizational condition of a school. Several educators have likened it to a human x-ray. The results enable practitioners to quickly identify strengths and weaknesses in their schools. The practical utility of the profile has been enhanced by careful attention to three important questions raised by educators:

- Can a school compare one dimension score with another?
- Is the group of schools with which a school is being compared meaningful?
- How can a school determine its relative standing on a dimension in comparison to other schools?

To answer the first question affirmatively, all scores have been standardized on a common metric.<sup>3</sup> This capacity to compare dimensions is important because no single dimension can fully capture the climate of a school (Rutter, et al., 1979). It is the mix of scores that is so important, and this mix can best be interpreted when the local context is fully understood (Corbett, et al., 1984).

The issue of an appropriate comparison is also addressed by the SAS profile. Recent research (Firestone & Herriott, 1982) using the SAS data indicates that elementary schools are organized quite differently from secondary schools. As a result, appropriate referent groups are necessary for meaningful comparisons and so separate profiles have been constructed for elementary and secondary schools.

A third concern of educators is that the profile offers a normative comparison with other schools. SAS uses a *box and whisker* format to graphically depict the spread of scores (see Figure 2). The *whiskers*, or vertical lines above and below the rectangular box for each dimension, represent the distribution of the top 25 percent and bottom 25 percent in the normed group. The rectangular *box* between the *whiskers* represents the distribution of school scores for the central 50 percent. An "X" somewhere along the *box and whisker* allows a school to quickly see its score relative to the range for other schools along each dimension.

In the case of Middletown Elementary School in Figure 2, a real strength of the school is the facilitative leadership of the principal while a clear weakness is the amount of communication among teachers. However, detailed interpretation of these data requires knowledge of the particular school context. That knowledge is best tapped by involving the full school staff.

#### Uses

A key to SAS is this ability to highlight strengths and weaknesses in a school. However accurate that portrayal, it holds little long-term utility unless it can be linked to a well-designed program to help schools focus on a need and work to strengthen the school. An important advantage of SAS is that it has been incorporated as part of development programs which help schools achieve their improvement objectives.

Two such programs are worth mentioning. The first, created by the School District of Philadelphia uses SAS as an important part of a school-wide needs assessment package. District facilitators work with representatives from all the groups in a school to identify areas of

concern, develop change strategies, and help implement new plans. A similar program designed by Research for Better Schools, a regional educational R&D laboratory, in conjunction with the New Jersey Education Association focuses on a collaborative, teacher-administrator approach that links school organizational factors and productivity with organizational development strategies to create a successful intervention program. Both programs place a major emphasis on staff participation in identifying areas for improvement and in carrying out programs to improve the quality of learning.

#### Summary

The core values in all the programs that use SAS to promote school improvement are:

- use of reliable, valid, and easily understood data about school conditions.
- identification of a process for school staff to openly discuss key issues deriving from the data as they impact improvement efforts.
- creation of a mechanism to allow targeted improvement ideas to be implemented.

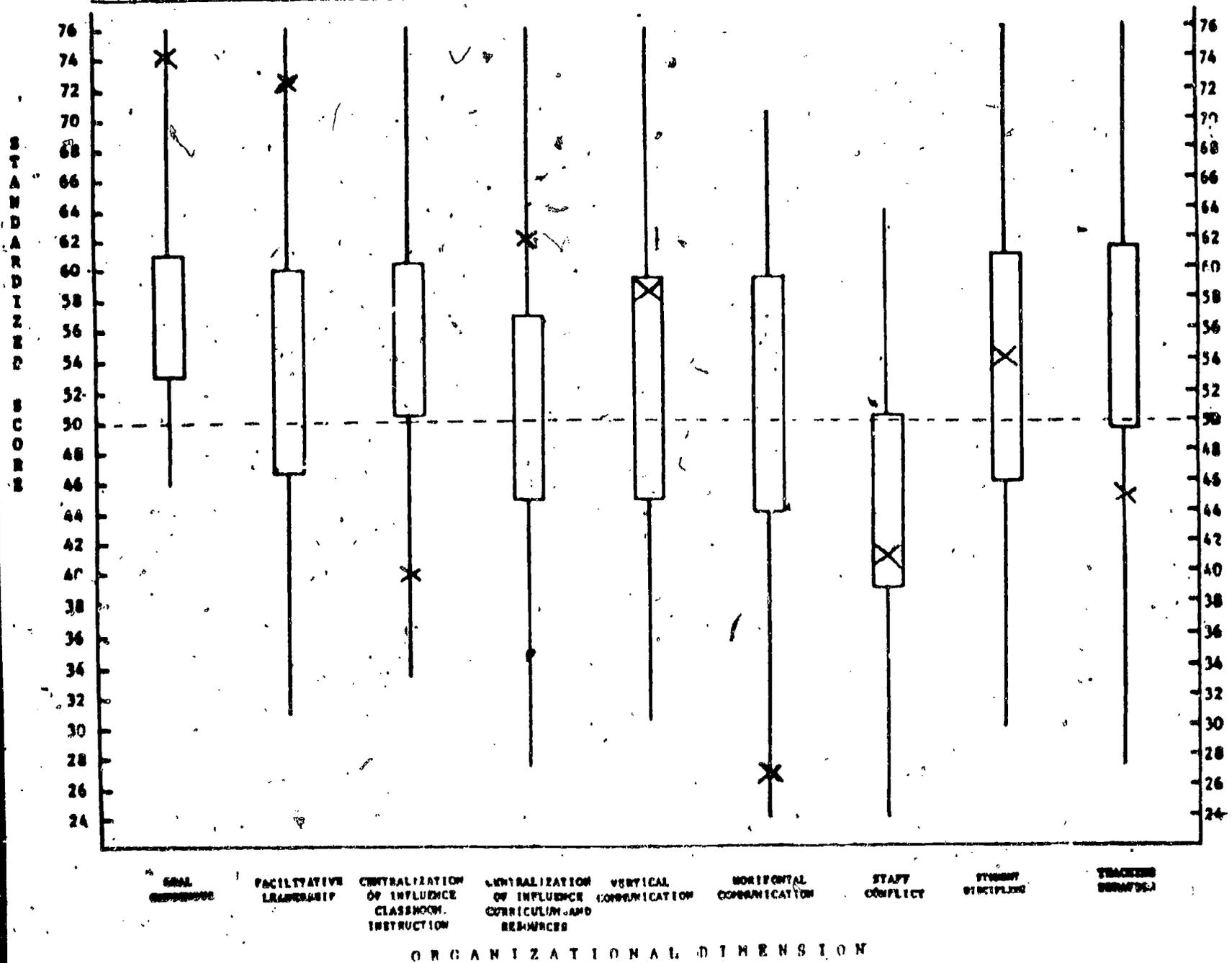
The programs that use SAS as a data-based improvement effort operate on the premise that schools can improve by making better use of their human resources, by opening up the decision making process, and by focusing efforts on a few critical areas. By embarking on this process, school staffs work successfully toward achieving improved learning environments and increased academic achievement; higher staff morale, improved relations between teaching staff and administration, clearer communication, and greater consensus about their mission.

FIGURE 1. The nine school climate dimensions measured by the School Assessment Survey (SAS).

SAS DIMENSION	DEFINITION	RESEARCH BASE	
		School effectiveness	School improvement
GOAL CONSENSUS	Agreement among teachers on which student skills and characteristics should receive most attention for development.	When staff agree on the importance of basic skills instruction in urban schools achievement increases: • Brookover et al., 1979	Goal consensus plus the belief that an innovation facilitates meeting valued goals leads to implementation: • Hilton & Corbett, 1983
FACILITATIVE LEADERSHIP	Actions of the principal that encourage and support the professional behavior of the teaching staff.	This measure of principal leadership contributes to student achievement both directly and by working through teaching behaviors when controlling for student SES: • Calif. State Dept. of Ed., 1980	Principal support for an innovation contributes to its implementation: • Berman & McLaughlin, 1977
CENTRALIZATION OF INFLUENCE: CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION	The ability of the principal to get teachers to carry out his/her wishes with respect to teaching activities.	Strong principal influence that is not dictatorial promotes higher achievement: • Wellisch et al., 1978	
CENTRALIZATION OF INFLUENCE: CURRICULUM AND RESOURCES	The ability of the principal to get teachers to carry out his/her wishes with respect to courses, schedules, staff assignments, and the allocation of resources.	Strong principal influence that is not dictatorial promotes higher achievement: • Edmonds, 1979	
VERTICAL COMMUNICATION	The extent to which information about instruction is shared between teachers and administrators.	Frequent communication between teachers and administrators about instruction promotes higher achievement: • Wellisch et al., 1978	
HORIZONTAL COMMUNICATION	The extent to which information about instruction is shared among teachers.		Frequent communication leads to the spread of change and promotes the effectiveness of instruction: • Little, 1982
STAFF CONFLICT	The frequency of disputes about school-related matters.		Conflict reduces the chances of the implementation and spread of change: • Corbett et al., 1984
STUDENT DISCIPLINE	The presence of an orderly environment in the school.	A sense of order that is fair, consistent and encourages responsibility will promote higher achievement: • Rutter et al., 1979	
TEACHING BEHAVIOR	Actions of teachers that enhance the quality of instruction for all students in their classrooms.	High quality teaching of all children promotes student achievement: • Gross & Herriott, 1965	

FIGURE 2. Sample SAS Profile.

Middletown Elementary School



## Notes

1. Readers interested in learning more about SAS can write to the SAS Program at Research for Better Schools, 444 North Third Street, Philadelphia, PA 19123. The SAS instrument has been a joint effort with contributions being made by the author, William A. Firestone, and Robert E. Herriott. Funding for this effort has been supported by the National Institute of Education (NIE), United States Department of Education. The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the NIE, and no official endorsement should be inferred.
2. The specific technical details for SAS can be found in B. L. Wilson, W. A. Firestone, and R. E. Herriott (1984). The School Assessment Survey: A Technical Manual. Philadelphia: Research for Better Schools.
3. The metric chosen was a t-score with a mean of 50 (the dotted horizontal line on the profile in Figure 2) and a standard deviation of 10. While the original metric for each dimension varies, this standardization procedure permits the important comparison across dimensions.

## References

- Berman, P. E., & McLaughlin, M. W. (1977). Federal programs supporting educational change, Vol. VII: Factors affecting implementation and continuation. Santa Monica, CA: Rand.
- Brookover, W., Beady, C., Flood, P., Schweitzer, J., & Wisenbaker, J. (1979). School social systems and student achievement: Schools can make a difference. New York: Praeger.
- California State Department of Education. (1980). Report on the special studies of selected ECE schools with increasing and decreasing reading scores. Sacramento, CA: Office of Program Evaluation and Research.
- Corbett, H. D., Dawson, J. A., & Firestone, W. A. (1984). School context and school change: Implications for effective planning. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Edmonds, R. (1979). Effective schools for the urban poor. Educational Leadership, 37(1), 15-23.
- Firestone, W. A., & Herriott, R. E. (1982). Prescriptions for effective elementary schools don't fit secondary schools. Educational Leadership, 40(3), 51-53.
- Gross, N., & Herriott, R. E. (1965). Staff leadership in public schools. New York: Wiley.
- Little, J. W. (1982). Norms of collegiality and experimentation: Workplace conditions of school success. American Educational Research Journal, 19 325-340.
- Louis, K. S., & Rosenblum, S. (1981). Linking R&D with schools: Strategies for knowledge use and school improvement. Washington, DC: National Institute of Education.
- Miles, M. B., Farrar, E., & Neufeld, B. (1983). Review of effective schools programs, Vol II: The extent of adoption of effective schools programs. Cambridge, MA: Huron Institute.
- Rutter, M., Maugham, B., Mortimer, P., Ouston, J., & Smith, A. (1979). Fifteen thousand hours: Secondary schools and their effects on children. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wellisch, J. B., MacQueen, A. H., Carriere, R. A., & Duck, G. A. (1978). School management and organization in successful schools (ESAA in-depth study of schools). Sociology of Education, 51, 211-227.
- Wilson, B. L., & Corbett, H. D. (1983). Organization and change: The effects of school linkages on the quantity of implementation. Educational Administration Quarterly, 19(4), 85-104.