Surveys that Assess your Technology Program

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At about this time of year, technology coordinators are implementing surveys of their teachers and students to assess the value of their programs and to gain insight into ways to improve the delivery of services. In a time when surveys seem to be all too common and the last thing anyone wants to do is fill out yet one more, we must be careful to ask only the pertinent questions to get the data that will truly assist us with meeting our goals. This is not a needs assessment or a way to determine what staff development steps we need to take next. Although these types of assessments are critical to the functioning of a quality educational technology program, here we are talking about assessing the programmatic value of a technology department's offerings at a county, district or site level. Information gleamed from your survey should be useful to more than just you and your department. If you can offer school sites a summary of their students' perceptions about educational technology in the seventh grade, along with the number of students that have a computer with Internet access at home, then you might have some useful information that your school sites can use as well.

Why Ya Gonna Do This?

The first component to consider is why you are asking people to take time from their busy schedule to fill in a survey. What information are you hoping to gain from this activity and what will you do with it once you get it? This article focuses on the resources available to help you develop a pertinent survey that will assist you in assessing the value of your technology program. Hence, the two questions you are trying to answer would be: How has technology affected you as it relates to education and what role has our department played in this impact?

Who Ya Gonna Call?

Knowing your audience is an important factor in developing your survey. What population of your community do you hope to poll and how will the survey be delivered and collected? If you are going to survey your student population, you may want to focus on a particular set of grade levels such as middle and high school. Otherwise you may need to make two or more distinctly different surveys to meet the grade level of each student. If you are surveying teachers, you probably should have a section on the survey that delineates their position, grade(s) taught and subject area(s) to better help you with understanding your results. If parents are your target audience, then you should consider asking the age of their children and the school that they are presently enrolled in.

What Ya Gonna Ask?

The content of the survey is obviously a key component to the success of the information received. Ask enough detail to get viable results but not so much that you have an exorbitant number of questions and/or intimidate people with the personal nature of the survey. One of the best ways to assist you in figuring out what questions you should ask is to look at other surveys that exist. One example is the student survey for Santa Cruz City Schools located at www.sccs.santacruz.k12.ca.us/survey. This survey was designed for students in junior and senior high school. Another example would be the WestEd Educational Technology Needs Survey located at www.wested.org/edtechsurvey/survey.html. This survey attempts to find out what the teachers believe are the most important services that they could receive. From Now On web site offers *The Technology in My Life Survey* at emifyes.iserver.net/fromnow/techlife.html. One important check is, to after each question, ask yourself "How will I use the response to this question to better my educational program?" With this thought in mind for each question you add to your survey, you are less likely to have frivolous questions that do not provide you with the needed information.

What Ya Gonna Give In Return?

Incentives will always assist in getting a higher response rate. Perhaps people could be entered into a drawing for a technology item or other reward. You could also offer a group incentive such as rewarding the school or department with the most responses by a certain date.

When Ya Gonna Ask it?
The timing of the distribution will also have a large impact on the number of responses you receive. Educational Institutions often leave these types of activities for the end of the school year. Remember that springtime is when so many other items need to be completed as well, and the to-do list gets very long. March and April are probably the latest months in the traditional school year that you would want to ask people to complete your survey. Early in the school year can result in a good response rate but technology departments usually have their school year plan in place by then and change is more difficult in late fall than when you have the spring and summer to adapt and plan for the following school year.

How Ya Gonna Get it to Them?
The distribution of your survey is instrumental in getting a good response rate. Not all of the people you plan to survey feel comfortable with or have easy access to the Internet. You should offer a paper version of your questions available for people who prefer to respond in this manner. Your distribution and collection network is greatly improved with the assistance of leaders at the sites and/or in the departments of the teachers you are surveying. If the survey just lands in the workroom, you will be fortunate to get a 20-30 percent return rate. If the survey is passed out at a staff meeting or to students during a core or computer class, then your response rate will go up dramatically.

How Ya Gonna Get it Back From Them?
The Internet has made the data retrieval process much more manageable when you can get a large number of your responses via a database. The Santa Cruz City School Student Survey cited above links into a FileMaker Pro database so when the survey is completed there is no further data entry required. A paper version is still an option for this survey but requires the data to be entered into the database, which can be a very daunting task when there are a large number of paper responses. There are some web sites that will do this work for you for free. Zoomerang, www.zoomerang.com, offers a front and back end for your survey and will assist you in not only developing your survey but also with tallying the results. North Central Regional Educational Laboratory also offers a similar service at www.ncrtec.org/capacity/profile/profwww.htm. The Profiler Online Collaboration Tool located at profiler.scrtec.org has an online survey option and a survey library. Taking advantage of these services has the drawback of pointing people to their web address instead of your school web address that they are all so familiar with. Also, their interface is not as customizable as if you were to serve your own.

For more resources, be sure to look at Jamie McKenzie's Technology Program Assessment Resource Page at emifyes.iserver.net/fromnow/dec95/resources.html. Also the Tech Tamers' web site offers Assessing Technology Programs Resources at www.techtamers.com/followup/assesstech.htm. Although we have not laid out a complete list of all the concerns, questions and resources one should take into consideration when developing a survey, these should get you started down the road to a data driven technology department.

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