In the following report, Hanover Research provides an overview of various tools and methods school districts use to gather data on customer service. Drawing upon information from a range of sources, Hanover outlines a variety of assessment measures, including “secret shopping,” office and classroom inventories, and surveys. Hanover further considers other techniques to improve customer service, including the development of concerted customer service initiatives being implemented by a number of districts.
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, schools and districts at the primary and secondary levels have placed an increasing emphasis on measuring and improving customer service. This development is part of a larger trend in U.S. K-12 education, as administrators increasingly incorporate business practices alongside more traditional approaches to school and district management. Experts note that administrators are especially recognizing the importance of customer service in creating an open, welcoming learning environment, and are working to develop effective tools to measure customer satisfaction and improve customer service. Surveys of students, teachers, and parents; learning environment inventories; and a variety of other techniques have been developed to measure the satisfaction of both internal (students and staff) and external (parents, vendors, community members) stakeholders.

In this report, Hanover Research examines effective practices and tools used in guiding customer service efforts and measuring customer satisfaction within a school district setting. The report draws on information available through individual school districts as well as a small, but growing, literature on the success of various measurement techniques and tools, including “secret shopping” practices and learning environment inventories.

The report is broken down into two sections:

- **Section I** provides a general overview of effective practices and techniques for measuring customer service, as well as a review of trends in customer service assessment in K-12 education.

- **Section II** outlines a number of more specific guidelines for customer service assessment, including inventories and surveys developed by individual school districts and vendors.

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KEY FINDINGS

▪ Research indicates that tools to assess customer satisfaction are becoming increasingly common in the K-12 sector. Education researchers and school district administrators have developed a variety of quantitative and qualitative assessment tools, including parent, teacher, and student satisfaction surveys; classroom/learning environment inventories; and “secret” or “mystery” shopping.

▪ Parent, teacher, and student surveys are especially common tools for assessing district customer satisfaction. Surveys are relatively easy to administer and provide substantive feedback to improve a school district’s customer service. Many school districts and educational agencies have developed annual surveys to measure internal and external customer satisfaction.

▪ Classroom and learning environment inventories provide another effective tool in measuring customer satisfaction. These short inventories, typically designed to be completed by students during a class period, allow for quick assessment of a variety of different classroom features, such as student “satisfaction” or classroom “formality.” These inventories typically require students to rate a list of items on a four-point, three-point, or two-point scale.

▪ At the elementary level, “My Class Inventory,” or MCI, is one of the most commonly-utilized inventories. This simple, streamlined inventory developed in the early 1980s provides an effective metric for assessing student perceptions of a learning environment. Students are presented with a list of 25 or 38 items, to which they answer “yes” or “no.” Examples of items that students respond to include:
  o “Students enjoy their schoolwork in my class” or
  o “Certain students always want to have their way.”

▪ Office environment inventories or similar assessments specific to a district setting do not appear to exist. School district central offices do turn to surveys and other basic customer satisfaction assessments to determine effectiveness, but more focused inventories have yet to be developed. There have been recent calls for the development of more comprehensive assessments to determine the relationship between central office organization and learning within a school district, but these have not yet led to lasting change or standardized assessment tools.

▪ The National School Climate Center has developed the “Comprehensive School Climate Inventory,” or CSCI, which provides a short tool for assessing school district customer satisfaction more generally. The CSCI has separate inventories for parents, teachers, and students, and allows for a rapid assessment of customer service issues. The 15- or 16-item inventory has respondents rate items on a five-point agreement scale. Example items, for school personnel, include:
  o “The administration at this school is fair in the way they allocate resources” or
  o “Teachers encourage students to think independently.”
- **Secret shopping can play an important role in providing more qualitative customer satisfaction information.** Mystery shopping employs teams of shoppers posing as customers to evaluate school districts anonymously. Though not common, school districts that have employed mystery shopping have been able to identify and ameliorate customer service issues. For example, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, in North Carolina, employed secret shoppers to cold call, email, and make in-person visits to district schools, helping to identify a number of customer service issues and areas for improvement.

- **Other measures of customer satisfaction employed by school districts include customer service cards, which stakeholders can fill out upon visiting a district site; community forums; focus groups; and customer interviews.** These less systematic customer satisfaction measures can be useful as qualitative supplements in the context of larger-scale initiatives to identify and improve customer service. These types of assessments are becoming increasingly common as school districts begin to focus more broadly on customer service.

- **Many school districts are developing comprehensive customer service plans and guidelines to help maintain a satisfactory level of customer service.** For example, Anchorage School District, in Alaska, has developed a booklet of standard customer service guidelines to ensure that all staff provide satisfactory services to both internal and external customers. Prescott Unified School District, in Arizona, has similarly created a customer service “pledge,” which all faculty and staff are asked to follow.
SECTION I: MEASURING AND IMPROVING CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

In this section, Hanover Research examines the role of customer service within primary and secondary schools, and provides a brief overview of the types of tools districts have employed to measure internal and external customer satisfaction.

A “CUSTOMER SERVICE” FOCUS IN EDUCATION

CUSTOMER SERVICE, BUSINESS MANAGEMENT, AND K-12 EDUCATION

Over the last 50 years, education leaders have attempted to adapt a range of business management practices to classrooms and school districts, “from the ‘planning-programming-budgeting system’ developed by the Defense Department in the 1960s to the ‘management by objectives’ in the 1980s.”\(^5\) Though never becoming fully entrenched in broader educational approaches, these short-lived efforts did serve to broaden awareness of customer service and satisfaction concepts in the education sector.

While many approaches introduced in early efforts – such as “warranties” on students – are no longer in use today,\(^6\) many of the core customer service concepts and satisfaction measures have remained central in current approaches, such as the concepts of “internal” versus “external” customers and the importance of “statistical tools and decisionmaking techniques” when assessing customer satisfaction.\(^7\)

Recent efforts to assess customer satisfaction in school districts have focused on the incorporation of business approaches within already-established management frameworks.

Rather than imposing a business “quality” construct onto traditional educational approaches, recent efforts have focused on integrating business approaches and customer service strategies into already-established frameworks. For instance, several school districts around the country, including Broward County Schools in Florida, Elizabeth Public Schools in New Jersey, and Montgomery County Public Schools in Maryland, have turned to the Disney Institute – a “professional development arm” of the corporation – to improve their customer service and district culture, with the ultimate goal of making districts “more

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\(^6\) An article describes student “warranties” as: “schools promise to take graduates back for remediation if their employers find them lacking in certain requisite skills.” See, Sommerfeld, M. “Satisfaction Guaranteed.” *Education Week*, March 1, 1992. http://www.edweek.org/tm/articles/1992/03/01/6warrant.h03.html

\(^7\) Olson, Op. cit.
pleasant . . . for students, parents, and district employees.” Training includes general customer service best practices, as well as instruction in effective employee onboarding.\(^8\)

Other school districts have pursued customer service initiatives on their own. **Cedar Rapids Community School District** in Iowa, for instance, has placed customer service at the forefront of its broader reform effort since the mid-2000s. With this approach, the district has seen a “systematic and systemic transformation” of services, resulting in a stronger, more flexible learning environment.\(^9\) **Anchorage School District** in Anchorage, Alaska, has developed a Customer Service Guide that provides “tips and guidelines” on customer service for all district employees.\(^10\)

In Florida, **Orange County School District** has placed increasing emphasis on meeting customer service and communication needs, and in 2012 its school board began to develop a comprehensive approach to improving customer satisfaction in the district.\(^11\) The plan centered around a new theme – “Thank you for choosing OCPS” – which was branded on email signatures and throughout the district. The plan also included:\(^12\)

- Surveys of students and parents;
- Retraining of front office and guidance staff;
- Initiatives to “hold management accountable for service measures,” such as responsiveness (e.g., how often cold-callers placed on hold hang up);
- New “service standards” to foster a culture of service.

**Prescott Unified School District**, in Arizona, has similarly developed a “customer service pledge” as part of its customer service initiative. The pledge provides a basic guideline for how teachers and other staff should act to provide effective customer service.\(^13\) Figure 1.1, on the next page, shows the elements of the pledge. The district has also developed an employee award program, sponsored by a local financial group, entitled “Staff Taking Action with Recognition” (STAR). The program “recognize[s] employees who consistently exhibit the highest level of customer service in all of their interactions” with a gift and recognition on the district website.\(^14\)


**Figure 1.1: PUSD Customer Service Pledge**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ELEMENT</th>
<th>WE PLEDGE TO ...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Courtesy and Respect  | - Treat you with respect and dignity, regardless of cultural or ethnic identities or language barriers.  
- Be courteous during our interactions.  
- Maintain your confidentiality and privacy.  
- Communicate with you from a positive perspective.  |
| Communication         | - Acknowledge and greet you upon entrance into our facilities. If necessary, we will ask you to wait until we are finished with the customer we are currently serving.  
- Answer phone calls in a friendly and helpful manner.  
- Ensure that the information we provide to you is accurate and consistent, even if it requires a call back.  
- Use active listening techniques in our interactions.  
- Provide options for immediate assistance when a staff member is out of the office for more than one business day. |
| Responsiveness        | - Take responsibility for helping you or directing you to the appropriate person who can meet your needs.  
- Return phone calls and emails within two business days. If this is impossible, we will let you know immediately and give you an estimated response time.  
- Provide a bilingual staff member to assist you as needed. |
| Environment           | - Create an inviting, family-friendly environment in all district facilities.  
- Wear our identification badges at all times.  
- Ensure that our facilities are easy to navigate and that signage is visible, understandable, and positive.  
- Clearly post our office hours.  
- Update all communications regularly. |

Source: Prescott Unified School District

**CHARTER SCHOOLS, SCHOOL CHOICE, AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION**

The rise of magnet schools in the 1960s and the subsequent development of charter schools in the early 1990s have further contributed to the focus on customer service in K-12 education. This is mainly due to the introduction of the concept of choice into public education. As school attendance in charter and magnet settings is not determined by geographic boundaries, such schools must make efforts to satisfy parent and student “customers” to ensure robust enrollments.

The need to compete effectively with traditional public schools, researchers note, has necessitated the development of “information tools to help . . . manage, grow, and improve [these] schools.” The school choice movement also helped to initiate the development and use of “satisfaction surveys for parents, students, and staff” to gauge school quality, and to launch and sustain broader conversations surrounding customer satisfaction in schools.

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15 “Customer Service Pledge.” Op. cit. Figure contents quoted from source.


17 Ibid., pp. 67-68.
**MEASURING CUSTOMER SERVICE**

School districts’ systematic approaches to customer service assessment are typically characterized by data-gathering across internal and external stakeholder groups. Common measurement tools for evaluating customer service include:

- Parent, student, and staff surveys;
- Classroom and learning environment inventories; and
- “Secret” or “mystery” shopping.

In the subsections that follow, Hanover discusses general practices related to each of these assessment tools. Section II provides more detailed examples of each.

**CREATING EFFECTIVE SURVEYS**

Surveys measuring the satisfaction of students, parents, and staff within school districts appear to be the most common measurements employed when assessing customer service. Across the country, school districts are implementing basic surveys, with varying frequency, to provide consistent, actionable information to improve customer satisfaction. For example, the Los Angeles Unified School District has developed an annual “School Experience Survey,” which allows the district to gather data from parents, students, and staff on a diverse range of district issues.18

As outlined in Hanover Research’s August 2012 report, *Measuring Customer Satisfaction for Internal School District Customers*, effective customer satisfaction surveys should follow a number of broad guidelines, including the following:19

- **Ask about overall satisfaction early.** General satisfaction questions should be asked at the beginning of the survey to avoid bias.
- **Use a five-point satisfaction scale.** All question scales should have descriptive labels associated with each number, with the end of the scale representing the highest possible form of satisfaction. By including extremes at each end of the scale, it is possible to gain a sense of the intensity of customers’ satisfaction.
- **Provide consistent questions.** Question scales should be consistent in order to provide a means of comparison. For example, a five-point scale for overall satisfaction should not be followed by seven-point scales for specific aspects of the service.
- **Be short and focused.** A survey should not ask more questions than needed, because respondents are more likely to abandon a survey if they feel it is too long.

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- **Ask demographic or “firmographic” questions.** Inquiring about demographics or characteristics of the respondent’s organization allows for the segmentation of data by different subgroups.

Such satisfaction surveys can either take a **census** or a **sample** of the population; the former covers an entire population (e.g., all students), while the latter surveys just a representative subset. Sample surveys, however, run the risk of being too small to achieve statistical robustness.²⁰

To provide further insight into effective survey design in the school context, Section II of this report discusses a range of customer satisfaction surveys currently in use at school districts and other educational centers, including an outline of an actual survey.

**DEVELOPING ENVIRONMENT INVENTORIES**

Alongside surveys measuring customer satisfaction, classroom and learning environment “inventories” can play an important role in determining overall levels of customer service. Inventories typically provide a list of classroom features, such as “satisfaction” or “formality,” that students can rate on a multi-point scale. The Learning Environment Inventory, discussed below, asks students to rate agreement on a five-point scale: “strongly agree, agree, unsure, disagree, and strongly disagree.”²¹ Inventories designed more specifically for elementary students are typically shorter, and employ ‘yes’ or ‘no’ questions or a three-point scale, rather than a five-point scale. Since the late 1960s, numerous inventories have been developed at the primary, secondary, and post-secondary levels to measure whether a certain learning environment, such as a classroom, promotes effective learning and provides a stable social climate.²²

Figure 1.2 provides an overview of classroom features assessed by the Learning Environment Inventory, a “widely-used” measure for junior and senior high schools.²³ The elementary-level complement to the Learning Environment Inventory – the My Class Inventory (MCI) – is discussed in detail in Section II.

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Figure 1.2: Features Measured by Learning Environment Inventory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENVIRONMENT FEATURE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION OF FEATURE</th>
<th>SAMPLE STATEMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>Enjoyment of work</td>
<td>There is considerable satisfaction with the classwork.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>Difficulty with work</td>
<td>Students tend to find the work hard to do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohesiveness</td>
<td>Whether students know, help, and are friendly toward one another</td>
<td>Students know one another very well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Environment</td>
<td>Availability of adequate books, equipment, space, and lighting</td>
<td>Students can easily get the books and equipment they need or want in the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy</td>
<td>Extent to which students share equally in class decision making</td>
<td>Class decisions tend to be made by all the students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal direction</td>
<td>Clarity of goals</td>
<td>The class knows exactly what it has to get done.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>Emphasis on competition</td>
<td>Students seldom compete with one another.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formality</td>
<td>Extent to which formal rules guide behavior</td>
<td>The class if rather informal and a few rules are imposed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speed</td>
<td>How quickly class work is covered</td>
<td>Students do not have to hurry to finish their work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>Extent to which student interests differ/differences are provided for</td>
<td>Students have many different interests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apathy</td>
<td>Student affinity with class activities</td>
<td>Members of the class don't care what the class does.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favoritism</td>
<td>Teacher favoritism</td>
<td>Every student enjoys the same privileges.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cliquishness</td>
<td>Extent to which some students refuse to mix with others</td>
<td>Certain students work only with their close friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dis-organization</td>
<td>Extent to which activities are confusing and poorly organized</td>
<td>The class is well organized and efficient.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friction</td>
<td>Tension and quarreling among students</td>
<td>Certain students instigate petty quarrels</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Reproduced from Wahlberg & Greenberg, “Using the Learning Environment Inventory.”

OFFICE ENVIRONMENT INVENTORIES

While classroom inventories are relatively common, similar instruments for gauging the effectiveness of district offices appear to be rare. As a recent article in the American School Board Journal laments, despite a “growing level of interest in measuring the effectiveness of school district central offices,” there are not currently sophisticated measures available to

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Ibid.
assess “central office practice” or the role this plays in “improved school and student performance.”

On the other hand, tools do exist to more comprehensively measure school climate, such as the “Comprehensive School Climate Inventory” (CSCI), developed by the National School Climate Center. The CSCI “provides an in-depth profile of your school community’s particular strengths and needs” and helps districts “quickly and accurately assess student, parent, and school personnel perceptions, and get the detailed information [needed] to make informed decisions for lasting improvement.” Section II discusses the CSCI in more detail. In conjunction with customer satisfaction surveys and more qualitative tools such as “secret shopping,” the Inventory can provide an effective means of comprehensively assessing a school district’s performance.

**SECRET SHOPPING**

Many school districts are turning to “secret” or “mystery” shopping to provide objective analysis of the strength of their customer service measures. In use within the private sector and within higher education for a number of years, mystery shopping “employs teams of shoppers posing as customers to evaluate a business anonymously.” Shoppers can identify issues in customer service that might be overlooked, and provide a more qualitative assessment of satisfaction that can be used to supplement survey and inventory data.

Research suggests that school districts have found secret shopping an effective tool in the assessment and improvement of customer service. In 2006, the Hawaii Department of Education initiated Project Aloha, which employed “unannounced evaluators, or ‘mystery shoppers,’ posing as parents, secret callers to schools and state and district offices, and a survey of all personnel beforehand to see where the institution [was] falling short.” In 2008, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools in North Carolina undertook a similar initiative, hiring the company Customer Service Solutions to cold call, email, and make in-person visits to schools and departments within the district. This helped the district uncover a variety of issues with its customer service, including lack of response to emails, lack of attentiveness during in-person visits, and a lack of response to incoming phone calls.

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29 Ibid.


OTHER MEASURES OF CUSTOMER SERVICE

Aside from the three broad assessment approaches discussed above, school districts have begun to measure customer service through alternative channels. Granite School District, in Utah, places “customer service cards” throughout its schools, encouraging staff, students, and parents “to fill cards out and explain their customer service experiences.”  

Cedar Rapids Community School District, in initiating the customer service reforms discussed earlier in this section, used various in-person measures to gauge satisfaction:  

Through community and staff forums, focus groups and individual solicitation, district leaders asked internal and external stakeholders questions such as, "What are the key challenges our district faces to provide an effective education?" and "What are the most important skills our students will need to be world-class learners?"

Through these measurements, along with surveys, Cedar Rapids was able to design an effective framework for improving customer service within the district. These basic examples highlight only a portion of more qualitative, hands-on approaches to measuring customer service, but do suggest that qualitative measures can be effective alongside more systematic assessment tools.

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SECTION II: CUSTOMER SATISFACTION MEASUREMENT TOOLS AND PROVIDERS

This section provides an example of a comprehensive customer satisfaction survey, as well as additional sample learning environment inventories. It also provides details on select vendors offering secret shopping services for school districts.

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY EXAMPLE

HOUSTON INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT STAKEHOLDER SATISFACTION SURVEY

Like a number of other school districts throughout the country, Houston Independent School District conducts an annual survey of students, parents, staff, and community members to gauge current customer service standards, as well as areas in need of improvement.34 Below, Hanover reproduces the survey instruments completed during the 2012-2013 year by parents/guardians and students, respectively.

Parent/Guardian Survey35

- How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement?
  (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree)
  o Overall, I am satisfied with my child’s school.

- How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your child’s school?
  (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Don’t Know, Does Not Apply)
  o Academic Rigor, Consistency & Learning
    ▪ I am satisfied with the education provided by my child’s school.
    ▪ I am satisfied with the consistency of education provided by my child’s school from year-to-year.
    ▪ I am satisfied with the rigor of my child’s education.
    ▪ The school maintains high academic standards and expectations.
    ▪ The school gives instruction that meets the individual needs of my child.
    ▪ The school teaches students solid academic skills in reading.
    ▪ The school teaches students solid academic skills in mathematics.
    ▪ The school teaches students to think critically and reason out problems.
    ▪ The school teaches students to develop good study and work habits.
    ▪ My child’s school gives excellent academic counseling and/or career planning services.

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- I am satisfied that my child’s school is providing the skills and education necessary to be successful at the next level.
  
  **Campus Administration & School Staff**
  - I am satisfied with the teachers and staff at this school.
  - Campus administration does a good job running my child’s school.
  - School staff is friendly and easy to talk to.
  - School staff treats me with respect.
  - Teachers make learning interesting and relevant.
  - Teachers motivate students to learn.
  - My child’s school communicates with me in a language that I can understand.

  **School Environment**
  - I am satisfied with the environment at my child’s school.
  - The school is kept clean and in good condition.
  - My child feels welcome at his/her school.
  - The overall climate or feeling at my child’s school is positive and helps my child learn.
  - There is at least one teacher or other adult in this school that my child can talk to about a problem.

  **School Safety**
  - I am satisfied that my child’s school is safe and secure.
  - The school uses adequate disciplinary measures in dealing with disruptive students.
  - My child feels safe on the bus.
  - My child’s school is free of bullying.
  - My child’s school is free of violence.
  - My child’s school is free of gang activity.
  - My child’s school is free of student drug and alcohol use.
  - Discipline rules are consistently and fairly enforced at my child’s school.

- **Students get grades A, B, C, D, and F for the quality of their school work. What overall grade would you give your child’s school?**
  (Check one: A, B, C, D, or F)

- **Thinking about all your experiences with this school, how likely are you to recommend your child’s school to others?**
  (Scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is Extremely Unlikely and 10 is Extremely Likely)

- **Based on your experience, do you agree with each of the following statements about Parental Engagement at your child’s school?**
  (Yes or No)
  - The school and district give opportunities for me to give input on improving parent involvement and parent engagement.
  - My child’s school gives opportunities for and encourages me to participate in parent/teacher conferences, school activities, and meetings.
The school and district have given me a copy of the parent involvement policies and the parent/school compact.

My child’s school has explained academic expectations to me.

My child’s school has explained the curriculum to me.

My child’s school has explained the different assessments used to determine student academic achievement to me.

My child’s school gives me the training and materials to help me to help my child.

**Student Survey**

- How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement?
  - (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree)
    - Overall, I am satisfied with my school.

- How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your school?
  - (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Don’t Know, Does Not Apply)
    - **Academic Rigor, Consistency & Learning**
      - I am satisfied that I am getting a good education at my school.
      - My classes are challenging.
      - My classes hold my interest.
      - My school expects me to get good grades.
      - My school encourages me to work at my highest level.
      - My school gives me the resources/tools and help I need to learn.
      - I am learning solid reading skills.
      - I am learning solid math skills.
      - I am learning things I can use in the real world.
      - I am learning good study and work habits at school.
      - I have good support at my school (such as academic counseling and/or career planning).
      - My classes this year are going to help me to do well in the next grade (or to graduate).
    - **Teachers & School Staff**
      - I am satisfied with the teachers and staff at my school.
      - School leaders do a good job running the school.
      - Teachers and staff at my school are friendly and easy to talk to.
      - Teachers and staff at my school treat me with respect.
      - Adults that work at my school care about me as an individual.
      - Adults that work at my school treat all students fairly and equally.
      - School leaders are available when I need help with things besides school work.

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The teachers at my school...
- make learning fun and interesting.
- make me want to learn.
- expect that I work very hard for the grades I get.
- are available when I need help with school work.
- let me know how I am doing on my schoolwork.
- know a lot about the subjects they teach.
- give me meaningful homework that helps me learn.

School Environment
- I am satisfied with the environment at my school.
- My school is kept clean and in good condition.
- I like coming to my school.
- Students respect adults at my school.
- Students in my school treat each other with respect.
- The overall climate or feeling at my school is positive and helps me learn.
- There is at least one teacher or other adult in my school that I can talk to if I have a problem.
- I ride a Houston Independent School District bus and I like it.

School Safety
- I am satisfied that my school is safe and secure.
- Students in my school usually follow school rules.
- I feel safe on the bus.
- My school is free of bullying.
- My school is free of violence.
- My school is free of gang activity.
- My school is free of student drug and alcohol use.
- School discipline (e.g., detention, suspension, etc.) is enforced in a fair and consistent manner.

- Students get grades A, B, C, D, and F for the quality of their school work. What overall grade would you give to your school? (Check one: A, B, C, D, or F)

- Thinking about all your experiences with this school, how likely are you to recommend your school to others? (Scale of 0 to 10. 0 is Extremely Unlikely, 10 is Extremely Likely)
**School, Classroom, and Learning Environment Inventory Examples**

Classroom/learning environment inventories can be useful tools in providing feedback on student perceptions of the learning environment. While there are a number of such inventories available at the secondary school level, few appear to be geared specifically toward elementary students. The most commonly cited example of such a tool is the “My Class Inventory,” or MCI. The following subsections provide details on MCI, as well as information on the CSCI, discussed in Section I, which is designed to measure stakeholder perceptions on a broader scale.

**My Class Inventory (MCI)**

The MCI, developed in the early 1980s, is a simplified version of the “Learning Environment Inventory,” or LEI, designed for secondary school students. To accommodate the needs of elementary students, the MCI differs from this longer inventory in four important ways:

1. To combat fatigue, the MCI includes five scales, as opposed to the 15 in the LEI.
2. Item wording in the MCI is simplified to ensure comprehension.
3. The MCI’s response format is two-point (yes/no), versus the LEI’s five-point scale.
4. Students provide their answers to the MCI on the questionnaire itself, rather than transferring responses onto a different answer sheet, as in the LEI.

The MCI is offered in a 38- or 25-item version, and is easily modified to assess the specific concerns of an individual teacher. Figure 2.1, below, reproduces the 25-item version of the MCI.

**Figure 2.1: 25-Item My Class Inventory (MCI) Example**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>This Is How I Think About My Classroom...</th>
<th>Circle Your Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Students enjoy their schoolwork in my class.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Students are always fighting with each other.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Students often race to see who can finish first.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. In our class the work is hard to do.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. In my class everyone is my friend.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Some students are not happy in class.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Some of the students in our class are mean.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Most students want their work to be better than their friends’ work.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Most students can do their schoolwork without help.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Some people in my class are not my friends.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Students seem to like the class.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Many students in our class like to fight.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Some students feel bad when they don’t do as well as the others.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Only the smarter students can do their work.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. All students in my class are close friends.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Some of the students do not like the class.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Certain students always want to have their way.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

38 Ibid., p. 11.
39 Ibid., p. 12.
**THINK ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE IN YOUR SCHOOL AS YOU READ EACH STATEMENT BELOW. THEN FILL IN THE CIRCLE THAT BEST DESCRIBES HOW MUCH YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH EACH STATEMENT.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. My school tries to get students to join in after-school activities.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Adults who work in my school treat students with respect.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. In my school, we talk about ways to help us control our feelings.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Many students at my school go out of their way to treat other students badly.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Adults in my school seem to work well with one another.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Students in this school respect differences in other students (for example, if they are a boy or girl, where they come from, what they believe).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. In my school, we have learned ways to solve arguments so that everyone can be happy with the result.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. My school tries to get all families to be part of school activities.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. My teachers help me to try out new ideas and think for myself.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I have been insulted, teased, or made fun of more than once in this school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. In my school, we talk about how our actions make others feel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Students have friends at school they can turn to if they have questions about homework.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. In my school, we talk about ways to be a good person.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE INVENTORY (CSCI)**

The CSCI is an empirically validated assessment that educators across the country have used to assess district climate.Districts can partner with the National School Climate Center, which developed the CSCI and helps to administer the questionnaire to customers of interest. The inventory takes less than 20 minutes to complete. Hanover presents example inventories for students, personnel, and parents/guardians in Figures 2.3 through 2.5.

**Figure 2.3: Elementary Student CSCI Template**

---


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>14. In my school, there are clear rules against hurting other people (for example, hitting, pushing or tripping).</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15. Students have friends at school they can trust and talk to if they have problems.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Adults in this school expect all students to succeed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: National School Climate Center

---

**Figure 2.4: School Personnel CSCI Template**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. This school encourages students to get involved in extracurricular activities.</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Adults who work in this school treat students with respect.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Adults in this school talk with students about strategies for understanding and controlling their emotions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The administration at this school is fair in the way they allocate resources.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Many students at this school go out of their way to treat other students badly.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. This school encourages staff to get involved in extra-curricular activities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Staff in this school typically work well with one another.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Students in this school respect each other’s differences (example, gender, race, culture, etc.).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. The administration at this school provides teachers with opportunities to work together collaboratively.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. In this school, we teach ways to resolve disagreements so that everyone can be satisfied with the outcome.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. This school encourages all families to be part of school activities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Most staff in this school are generous about helping others with instructional issues.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Teachers encourage students to think independently.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. It’s common for students to tease and insult one another.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. There are areas of this school where adults do not feel physically safe.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: National School Climate Center

---


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THINK ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH YOUR CHILD’S SCHOOL AS YOU READ EACH STATEMENT BELOW. THEN FILL IN THE CIRCLE THAT BEST DESCRIBES HOW MUCH YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH EACH STATEMENT.</th>
<th>STRONGLY DISAGREE</th>
<th>DISAGREE</th>
<th>NEUTRAL</th>
<th>AGREE</th>
<th>STRONGLY AGREE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. My child’s school tries to get students to join in after school activities.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Adults who work in my child’s school treat students with respect.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. In my child’s school, he/she talks about ways to help control his/her emotions.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Many students at my child’s school go out of their way to treat other students badly.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Adults in my child’s school seem to work well with one another.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Students in my child’s school respect each other’s differences (for example, gender, race, culture, etc.).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. In my child’s school, students have learned ways to resolve disagreements so that everyone can be satisfied with the outcome.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. My child’s school tries to get all families to be part of school activities.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. My child’s teachers encourage him/her to try out new ideas (think independently).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. My child has been insulted, teased, harassed or otherwise verbally abused more than once at this school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. In my child’s school, he/she talks about the way his/her actions will affect others.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Students have friends at school they can turn to if they have questions about homework.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. In my child’s school, he/she discusses issues that help him/her think about how to be a good person.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. In my child’s school, there are clear rules against physically hurting other people (for example, hitting, pushing or tripping).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Students have friends at school they can trust and talk to if they have problems.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: National School Climate Center

**Mystery Shopping**

Most companies providing “mystery” shopping services appear willing to work within the education industry. A variety of mystery shopping consultants examined by Hanover all suggested that they provide services to the “education sector,” though these mainly appear to focus their services on higher education. For example, **ICC/Decision Services** focuses on how “colleges and universities can benefit greatly from mystery shopping,” but does not discuss its role within primary and secondary education.\(^{46}\)

Nonetheless, there are suggestions that mystery shoppers are willing to provide services to primary and secondary school districts. As discussed above, Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools turned to a mystery shopping company, **Customer Service Solutions, Inc.**, to identify a variety of issues within the school district,\(^ {47}\) and the company explicitly targets its services at the education sector, including K-12 school districts.\(^ {48}\) Further, the company’s president, Ed Gagnon, has further advocated for increased use of mystery shopping within public schools, notably in a guest column in the journal, *The School Administrator*.\(^ {49}\) Other mystery shopping companies have also provided services to K-12 schools, such as **Shoppers’ Critique International**.\(^ {50}\)

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\(^{50}\) Shoppers’ Critique International has worked with World Class Learning Schools. See “Educational Institutions.” Shoppers’ Critique International. https://www.shopperscritique.com/industries-served/education/
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