

# Preface

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Increasingly more often, educators (teachers, school administrators, counselors, school board members, and other school leaders) are asked to gather information on which to base decisions. Questionnaires can be an effective means to gather such information. But creating a questionnaire that asks the right questions at the appropriate level for the intended audience can be a challenging task. Four years ago, I wrote *Designing Surveys That Work! A Step-by-Step Guide* to provide support to educators who need to create a high-quality questionnaire. Since that time, I've worked on several survey projects and advised on many others. What I learned was that educators need more examples, more details on how to use the information gathered from questionnaires to make data-based decisions, and more guidance on how to present the results to a variety of audiences. I also learned that educators need to know how to disaggregate data from questionnaires so they can make meaningful comparisons among subgroups based on demographic (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity) or experiential variables.

Web-based questionnaires are much more widely used now than they were four years ago. As I worked with my colleagues to create Web-based questionnaires for our own projects, we consulted many different resources and learned by trial and error. We also found that many of the methods used for paper-based questionnaires need some adapting to work well with Web-based questionnaires—and this was not always clear in the resources we consulted.

On the basis of these experiences, I created this book. I know that you are busy—and that collecting information is most likely not your full-time job. I also know that you have many challenging decisions to make and you need good data to guide your decision making. The reporting requirements of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act will mean that you'll need to gather data—and then disaggregate the results so you can examine the impact of various interventions on the racial/ethnic groups within your school and your district.

## ◆ WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK?

The main purpose of this book is to support the decision-making processes of educators as they collect and use data from questionnaires to make data-based decisions. But more than that, there's guidance for all phases of a survey project, beginning with the question of whether you really need a questionnaire to gather information for making decisions to reporting the results and recommendations to a variety of audiences. The book focuses on what's important to educators—from planning the

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administration of the questionnaire around the school calendar to using a variety of data sources to make important decisions.

I want you to be successful. I want you to be able to conduct a high-quality survey project, get the information you need, and have confidence that your questionnaires will be interesting to those who receive them and will yield accurate data to guide your decisions.

### ◆ **WHO SHOULD READ THIS BOOK?**

Although this book was developed primarily for school administrators, teachers, counselors, and other school leaders, anyone who is considering creating a questionnaire to gather information will find this book very useful. Data from questionnaires can be used for many purposes, such as describing behaviors, identifying preferences, and determining needs. This book, however, focuses on using the data gathered from a questionnaire to make data-based decisions.

### ◆ **WHAT ARE THE UNIQUE FEATURES OF THE BOOK?**

This book is designed to be a user-friendly how-to book, thanks to the feedback from the teachers, school administrators, school leaders, counselors, and other practicing professionals who took my research classes and used my early materials as they were developed. I also received useful feedback from several readers of the first book. The unique features of this book include the following:

*Sequential Arrangement of Chapters.* The chapters in this book follow the steps necessary to conduct a successful survey project. Each chapter presents the details of each phase of a survey project.

*Easy to Read.* This book is written in an informal style to help the reader understand the information easily. The writing style is engaging and conversational. Icons signal important points, such as the major steps in a survey project and helpful hints.

*Examples.* Each chapter contains examples of the points being made in the chapter. In addition, a case study of a survey project is developed throughout the book.

*Samples.* Sample cover letters, invitations, and parental permission forms are included, as are planning templates.

*Web-Based Questionnaire Guidelines.* In each chapter, information about how to apply the ideas and concepts in that chapter to a Web-based questionnaire are included and are identified with an icon.

*Checklists.* Each chapter concludes with a checklist containing the key activities included in that chapter. Readers are urged to use these checklists to ensure that they are ready to proceed to the next step in the process of creating their survey project.

*Activities.* Several chapters contain activities to check your understanding of the points made in that chapter. Answers to these activities are provided at the end of the chapter.

*Icons.* Icons are used to call out several special pieces of information. These include hints, parts of the case study, and the 16 steps to a successful survey project.

*Resources.* The full Web-based questionnaire for the case study appears at the end of the book, followed by a bibliography of useful sources and the reference list containing the sources cited throughout the book.

## ◆ **WHAT'S IN EACH OF THE CHAPTERS?**

There are five major components to a successful survey project:

1. Planning
2. Creating the questionnaire
3. Gathering the data
4. Analyzing the results and making decisions
5. Communicating the results

*Planning.* Chapter 1 focuses on planning, including identifying the purpose of the survey project and creating objectives to guide the development of the questionnaire, identifying the people who will respond to your questionnaire, determining whether a paper-based or Web-based survey is appropriate, and gaining the necessary approvals to conduct the survey project.

*Creating the Questionnaire.* Chapters 2, 3, and 4 provide guidance for creating the questionnaire, including writing the questions and carefully crafting the response choices and formatting the questionnaire.

*Gathering the Data.* Chapters 5, 6, and 7 provide information about gathering the data, including selecting the sample, creating cover letters, pilot testing everything, producing the questionnaire, and using it to gather the data.

*Analyzing the Results and Making Decisions.* Chapter 8 shows how to analyze the results from a questionnaire and provides examples of how data from questionnaires were used to make data-based decisions.

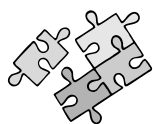
*Communicating the Results.* Chapter 9 provides examples of reports of survey projects for different audiences.

## ◆ **THE CASE STUDY OF A SURVEY PROJECT**

To help you get a better sense of how to develop a survey project, a case study of a survey research project is developed throughout the book. The focus of the case study is parents' involvement in their child's school. The purpose of gathering the

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data is to determine parental awareness of activities available in their school in which they can participate, their satisfaction with these activities, suggestions for other activities, barriers to their participation in these activities, and whether they would be likely to participate in some of these activities if the barriers were removed. Data from the questionnaire will be used to develop activities designed to support school-family partnerships based on identified needs rather than perceived ones, thus increasing the likelihood for success of a new parent involvement program.



When you see this symbol and shaded text, you'll know that it's part of the case study—and that these are “pieces” of the survey project. Throughout the book, the case study builds; you'll find the complete questionnaire for the case study in the Resource section at the end of the book.

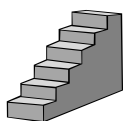
## ◆ **ICONS IDENTIFY SPECIAL FEATURES IN THE BOOK**



Other icons will alert you to specific kinds of information. For example, electronic or Web-based questionnaires are becoming increasingly popular. More and more people have e-mail and Web access. Some school districts have Web sites and post questionnaires there on a regular basis. Although many of the basic steps are the same whether you use a paper-based questionnaire or an electronic questionnaire, there are some important differences. This computer indicates special considerations for Web-based questionnaires.



Throughout the book, you'll find hints and reminders—things to remember as you create all the pieces of your survey project. Each of these hints has a light bulb icon.



There are 16 major steps in a successful survey project. Each time one of these steps is discussed, you'll see this icon to remind you. Table 1.2 in Chapter 1 describes these steps.

## ◆ **HOW SHOULD THE BOOK BE USED?**

The guidelines and activities included in this book are meant to help anyone creating any type of questionnaire—whether paper-based or Web-based, whether for a large survey project involving hundreds or even thousands of respondents or for a small survey project that focuses on gathering information from a relatively small target audience. The case study shows a relatively large project involving many interested stakeholders and multiple schools. Your survey project may be much smaller and less complex than this one.

*A survey project can be conducted by one to two individuals. The attention to detail and to quality is the same for all survey projects.*

## **LET'S GET STARTED!**