Use of the Illinois 5Essentials Survey Data (IERC 2014-2)

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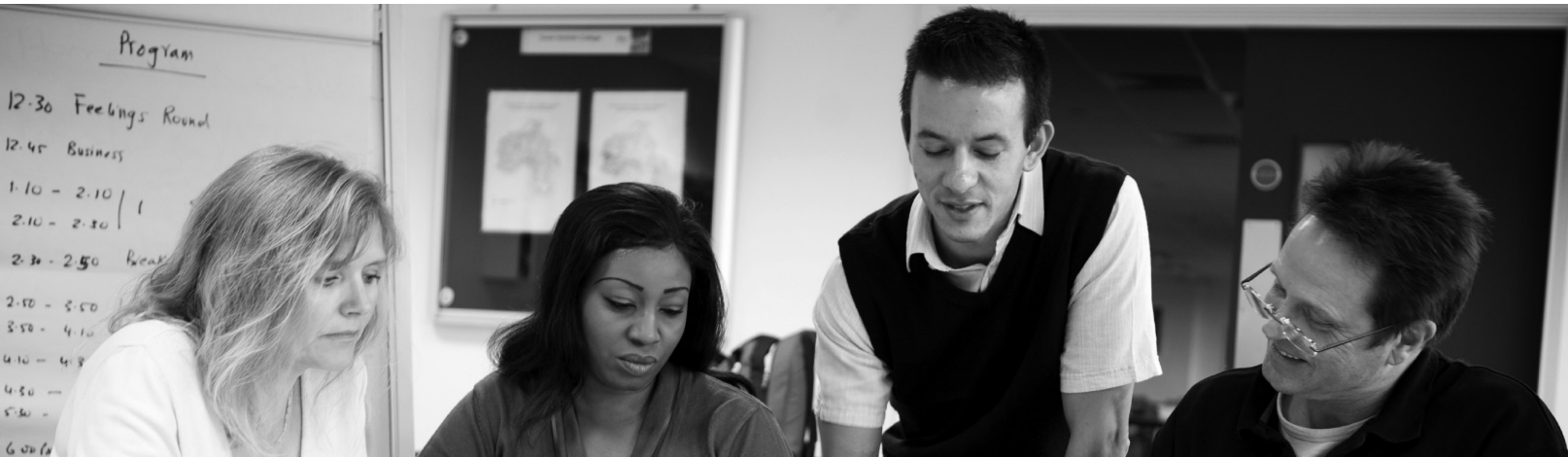Illinois Education Research Council

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

School climate refers to dimensions of school life (e.g. safety, relationships, teaching and learning, the environment) as well as to larger organizational patterns. School climate has been extensively studied and has been shown to be predictive of academic achievement, school success, effective violence prevention, students' healthy development, and teacher retention (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009). Yet, Cohen et al. describe a persistent gap between school climate research and policy and practice. In Illinois, the need for the measurement of school climate has been addressed by Public Act 098-0648[a] which requires Illinois schools to administer a biennial learning conditions and climate survey beginning with the 2012-2013 school year. Developed by the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research, the 5Essentials Survey of Learning Conditions, hereafter referred to as "5Essentials" or "5E" Survey, was developed based on nearly two decades of research (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010) and measures PK-12 schools' instructional environment, based on teachers' and students' input to inform schools' improvement processes in five areas identified as critical for school success: Effective Leaders, Collaborative Teachers, Involved Families, Supportive Environments, and Ambitious Instruction.[b] Also offered by UChicago Impact, was a parent survey supplement, developed by Chicago Public Schools to solicit parent feedback on school learning conditions and climate.

The primary purpose of this study was to examine how Illinois school districts are utilizing the Illinois 5Essentials Survey results, particularly for school improvement, to determine challenges to successful implementation, and to make recommendations for improvements to the 5E Survey and implementation process for statewide use. We also summarize district/school stakeholders' familiarity with the 5E Survey, perceived value of the survey, preferences for training, levels of supports, and reasons for not using the 5E Survey data.

Using the conceptual framework developed by Means, Padilla, DeBarger, and Bakia (2009) for data-informed decision making, we used a mixed-methods approach to determine the supports and challenges for using the 5E data for decision-making. Fifteen Illinois school districts were selected as study sites for further in-depth investigation based on several selection factors, including early data use, Race to the Top and School Improvement Grant status, geographic diversity, urbanicity, and enrollment size. Interviews with 79 district/school administrators and school personnel involved in school improvement planning (SIP) teams during May–June,

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[a] http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/publicacts/98/098-0648.htm
[b] For more information about the 5Essentials Survey see: https://illinois.5-essentials.org/2014/ or http://www.isbe.net/5essentials/pdf/2013-14/faq-0114.pdf

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2014, as well as document review of the participating districts' Rising Star school improvement plans were key sources of data from the study sites. This information was supplemented with data from a statewide survey of district/school leaders conducted in early 2014 by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) that solicited their experiences and opinions of the 5Essentials Survey and reports. Survey respondents included 273 superintendents (32% response rate) and 634 principals (16% response rate).[c]

Familiarity & Training

Superintendents were generally the most familiar with the 5E Survey, while school improvement team members (typically teachers) were least familiar. This is understandable because superintendents and principals were the primary contact for the 5E administration; however, it may also indicate a lack of information dissemination beyond the district or school office. We also observed that familiarity with the 5E Survey tended to cluster within district, such that in some districts familiarity was high across district and school personnel while in other districts familiarity with the 5E Survey was generally low across district and school personnel.

Participants reported limited training on how to use the 5E reports and data. Training typically entailed superintendents and district office administrators participating in a webinar or short presentation on the basics of the 5E Survey and administration issues. Principals reported receiving most of their information from their superintendents (or district office), with just a few receiving additional information through a webinar. Some district office personnel and principals sought additional information on their own. Most of the district and building SIP members were only familiar with the 5E Survey because they took the survey in their roles as teachers. Some respondents indicated that with additional training, the data would be more effectively utilized. One respondent commented:

> *"I haven't had a full day of training on 5Essentials yet, and much less the kind of training that we got for the capacity builders training, where they're training you how to train other people on it. We need that and we need that done really effectively at the state level, because again, I see a lot of value in this data. I know*

that it won't get used well unless the districts have the ability to handle it themselves and understand it enough to support it, so we wouldn't be using Rising Star in our district as much if we weren't trained as capacity coaches."

Level of Supports

Participating districts were categorized by their level of supports for making data-informed decisions based on Means et al.'s (2009) six categories, which are listed in Table I. With only three exceptions, the overall assessments indicated that all of the districts in our sample were at least approaching a modest level of supports for data-informed decision making. However, only one district was rated as having supports available to a great extent (see far right column). In the words of one of the superintendents, all of these districts are "in transition to data-driven decision making."

Principals and teachers generally reported having access to all or most data for students in their schools, or at least for the students in their classrooms. The lowest rated support was the provision of professional development and technical support for data interpretation. Even those schools that have numeracy and/or literacy coaches to provide this support expressed concern that these positions are grant dependent and limited in what they could provide to teachers outside of the grant parameters. An exemplar of providing data support was in one setting in which district office personnel with expertise to serve as data coaches worked with teachers to understand the 5E data.

Unfortunately, data supports did not predictably translate into high usage of the 5E data among these participants. In the 15 participating districts, we found districts with modest to great supports on both ends of the continuum for utilizing the 5E data. Three of the districts would be considered advanced 5E data users; they shared, reviewed, analyzed, and implemented new programs based on their 5E results and they had modest levels of supports for data-informed decision making. On the other hand, the three districts who reported limited use (i.e., shared 5E data only) had modest to great levels of data supports. We found only a slight relationship between levels of data support and use of the 5E data, indicating other factors

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[c] Response rates were estimated based on data from the ISBE Directory of Education Entities for 2013-14 which reported 865 districts and 4008 schools.

Table I. *Level of Data Supports for Participating Districts*

District	Locale	Size	Type	Data Systems Access	Leadership for Improvement	Tools for Generating Data	Social Structures	Professional Development & Tech Support	Tools for Acting on Data	District Score
1	City, Mid	L	P-12	M	M	S	G	M	M	M
2	City, Small	L	P-8	G	G	G	G	G	G	G
3	City, Small	L	P-12	G	M	G	G	S	S	M+
4	Suburban, Large	L	9-12	M	M	S	M	S	-M	-M
5	Suburban, Large	L	P-12	G	M+	G	M+	M+	M	M+
6	Suburban, Large	L	P-12	G	S	S	M	M	-M	-M
7	Suburban, Large	L	P-8	G	M	M	S	S	M	M
8	Town, Fringe	M	P-12	G	-M	M	S	S	S	S+
9	Town, Distant	M	9-12	G	M+	S	M	-M	S	-M
10	Town, Remote	M	P-8	G	M	—	S	-M	M+	M
11	Town, Remote	L	P-12	G	M	M	S	S	S	-M
12	Rural, Fringe	L	P-12	G	S	M	S	-M	M	-M
13	Rural, Fringe	S	P-12	G	M	M	G	-M	M	M
14	Rural, Distant	S	P-12	M	S	S	S	S	S	S
15	Rural, Distant	S	K-8	M	S	S	-S	-S	S	S

Notes: This data is arranged based on the locale code assigned to the school district by the National Center for Education Statistics.

Codes indicate the extent to which each support was present during the 2013-2014 school year based on interviews with district/school personnel:
-S = not at all to some extent; S = to some extent; S+ = to more than some extent;
-M = to a less than modest extent; M = to a modest extent; M+ = to a more than modest extent;
G = to a great extent.

An extended scale is used to report these findings because respondents frequently expressed gradations beyond the four choices (Great Extent, Modest Extent, Some Extent, or Not at All) given to them regarding the extent to which their district was moving towards implementation of a data-informed decision making culture.

are also contributing to districts' decisions to utilize the 5E data.

Value of the 5E Data and Reports

Many participants indicated the 5E Surveys were helpful because they provided data from multiple perspectives (i.e., teachers, students, and parents) that they did not currently have. Participants indicated the measure scores could be helpful, however, many participants were also interested in having access to results for the individual survey questions. Although a few districts felt the 5E data were not at all useful due to their strong concerns about the validity of the data, participants from several districts said the 5E data were very helpful for informing improvement plans, despite data concerns. From the survey data, we discovered that less than 50% of both superintendents and principals believed

Table II. *Survey Items with Moderate to High Correlations with Use of 5E Data for Planning Purposes*

		Continuous Improvement		Modified School Improvement Plan	
		Superintendents	Principals	Superintendents	Principals
Teacher Survey	Teacher survey generated data I found valuable	0.52	0.48	0.33	0.41
	Most of the survey questions adequately address issues of interest to my district/school	0.36	0.34	0.21	0.28
Student Survey	Student survey generated data I found valuable	0.42	0.42	0.36	0.32
	Most of the survey questions adequately address issues of interest to my district/school	0.31	0.28	0.28	0.29
Reports	Survey reports provided valuable information in my role as superintendent/principal	0.48	0.51	0.45	0.37
	Survey reports provided new information in my role as superintendent/principal	0.34	0.44	0.35	0.36
	Survey reports provided easy to use information in my role as superintendent/principal	0.51	0.44	0.40	0.36
	Teachers in my district/school found the survey reports valuable	0.51	0.45	0.43	0.43
	Parents in my district/school found the survey reports valuable	0.35	0.41	0.36	0.39

■ Large Effect　■ Medium Effect　□ Small Effect

that the teacher surveys, the student surveys, and the reports were valuable. Superintendents were significantly more negative in their ratings of the value of the surveys and reports than principals. In further analyses, we determined that there were moderate to strong correlations between perceived value of the surveys and reports with reported use of the data for district/school planning purposes. There were also moderate to high correlations between perceived local interest of the survey items with reported use of the data for district/school planning purposes (see Table II). These results indicate that those districts/schools that highly value the survey data and reports and those that perceive the items to be of interest to their district/school are those that also have higher 5E data use.

Use of the 5E Data and Reports

Use of the 5E data varied greatly among the participating districts, ranging from fairly extensive use to no use at all. The majority of the districts, however, fell somewhere in the middle, using the 5E data for a limited number of activities. As shown in Table III, most of the superintendents from the participating districts reviewed the 5E data results with their principals, with many also reviewing the data with their SIP teams or their entire teaching staff. The survey data corroborates these findings, as the highest reported uses of the data by superintendents were to review/discuss results at the district leadership level (82%) and make efforts to ensure that teachers have received the data (68%). A high percentage of principals also reported making efforts to ensure teachers received the data (80%) and reviewing/ discussing the data at the district leadership level (70%). Also, another highly endorsed use by principals only was reviewing/discussing data with the school improvement teams (69%).

Survey respondents did not report high use of the 5E data for planning purposes, 33% of superintendents and 48% of principals reported using the data for continuous improvement planning, while only 14% of superintendents and 28% of principals reported using the data for modifying district/school improvement plans. However, there were consistent positive moderate to high correlations between opinions of the 5E reports and use of the 5E data for planning purposes (see Table II). Moreover, there were some examples of strong integration of the 5E data in a few of the study sites.

Following the 5E research that indicates strength in three of the five Essentials should have a positive impact on student outcomes (Bryk et al., 2010), one of the study site districts selected three Essentials as their focal points and conducted a SWOT analysis in 2013, examining Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities for improvement, and Threats to those opportunities. The teachers identified several areas that they felt were weaknesses or opportunities for improvement, and threats to those opportunities. The school repeated the SWOT analysis for 2014 for the same three Essentials, and the principal described the 5E data as "informing our work for the next year. So everything that we do is kind of around the 5Essentials Survey."

In our document review of the Rising Star school improvement plans, five of the participating 13 districts that had a SIP in the Rising Star system mentioned the 5E data in their plans. Although the level of integration of the 5E data was limited in the 15 districts participating in this study, some districts have begun to utilize the 5E data in their school improvement plans. One of the study site districts utilized the 5Essentials data by integrating it with their Rising Star and teacher evaluation data, specifically, in order to set goals for school and teacher improvement. Other examples of integration with the Rising Star system are provided in the full report.

Impediments to Use of the 5E Data and Reports

Most of the participants expressed some concerns about the 5E data. The main concerns were credibility of data, utilization of alternate climate surveys, and being overwhelmed by other mandated activities. Many of these districts still utilized the data, working within their perceived constraints, while other districts simply did not utilize the data due to their strong concerns. The most cited reason for concern about the credibility of the data was the potential for multiple responses from the same person or a person completing the survey for a school other than their own. Another major concern regarding the credibility was perceived problems with the survey language, such as confusing wording or lack of a "does not apply" option. Other concerns about the credibility of the data included poor generalizability due to low response rates or the original development of the survey for a different context, i.e., Chicago Public Schools; implementation issues due to technology problems or

unclear instructions or definitions; and having data only from 6th grade students for K-6 schools.

Most of the districts interviewed already administered a locally-developed or national climate survey which they believed met their needs. This was a concern both because they felt the redundancy with the 5E Survey was not needed and also because they were concerned about the impact of "survey burnout" on both the 5E and other surveys' response rates. Study site participants were frustrated by the number of new mandated activities (e.g., new administrator and teacher evaluation, PARCC, Common Core) and in many instances, saw the 5E

Table III. *Summary of Use of the 5Essentials Data by Districts/Schools*

District #	Reviewed data	Shared with others	Compared 5E with Rising Star	Compared 5E with Danielson	Developed goals	Benchmark/ waiting for trend data	Identified improvement areas	Identified strength areas	Identified PD areas	Used with data coaches	Evidence for principal evals	Posted on website
4	X with principals with SIP team	School Board	X	X	X	X	X			X		
1	X with principals with teachers (in detail)	School Board Parents Community				X	X (e.g., increased teacher observations)	X			X Possibility for future to provide evidence	X
9	X with principals with teachers with Rising Star team with Bldg SIP team	School Board Parents Media	X			X	X (e.g., created freshman monitoring program)	X				
6	X with principals with SIP team	School Board Parents Community			X	X	X	X				
8	X with principals with SIP team	School Board Parents Community				X	X	X				
11	X with District SIP Shared with principals	School Board Parents Community	X				X	X				X
10	X with principals with teachers	unknown					X			X		
5	X with principals	Parents			X		X (principal plans for upcoming year)	X				
14	X with teachers	School Board			X limited		X (future when data are valid)					
13	X with principals	unknown					X (e.g., added parents to school committees)					
3	X with principals	School Board	X (future plans)			X (future plans)						
15	X with teachers	School Board				X (might consider in the future)	X (might consider in the future)					
2	X with principals	unknown										
7	X	No										
12	X superintendent only	No										

NOTE: Information gathered from interviews with 15 districts.

Survey as one more burden, particularly during the spring term, when testing is heavy. With unfortunate timing in several districts we visited, the 2014 5E Survey administration coincided with reduction-in-force notices which could have affected opinions on the survey, as well as response rates. Other reported impediments to implementation and data use included lack of encouragement to use the data from school administrators, confidentiality concerns in small districts, lack of information about the survey and its technical properties, concerns about its use for evaluative purposes, concerns about the insufficient financial support for implementing the survey, and public posting of the data, especially in the context of the concerns about data credibility.

Suggestions for Improvement

Participants had numerous suggestions for improving the 5E Survey and its implementation.

1. **Market the survey—frame and motivate participation and utilization—in order to increase buy-in**
   Based on both the comments regarding the value of the 5E and the moderate to strong positive correlations of survey value and use, if perceived value can be increased, one would expect more buy-in and better use across and within districts. In the words of one respondent: *"Provide us something that meets a need and we're probably all ears."*

2. **Increase breadth of participation and response rates**
   Many suggestions were made regarding how to increase participation rates, including specific strategies for higher parent participation, emphasizing the importance of the survey, and letting respondents know that results will be publicly posted.

3. **Rostering**
   To address the issue of potentially invalid entries, many participants suggested using a rostered survey to ensure that participants do not take the survey more than once or for the wrong school. They noted that rostering would also provide survey administrators with the ability to monitor responses in order to target

reminder notices and check the representativeness of local responses.

4. **Improving the survey items**
   Several suggestions were made to revise items to reflect the specific school context and to clear up confusing wording and make the survey more parent-friendly. Additional suggestions included adding a progress bar to the online survey, providing login assistance, and simplifying the login process. Many respondents suggested making the survey shorter to help ensure respondents are taking the survey seriously and to increase response rates.

5. **Timing of the survey**
   For reasons previously noted, respondents felt the current survey administration window should be moved earlier in the school year—but not so early that respondents cannot accurately respond to items.

6. **Provide more actionable feedback**
   Recommendations for improving the presentation and usefulness of the survey results also emerged from the study. In order to increase utilization of the 5E results, many respondents expressed the need for training and explicit directions for using the data. Related suggestions included allowing for time to be set aside to review and interpret the survey results as a school-wide or district-wide team. Importantly, several participants also noted that they needed assistance implementing actionable plans. One participant noted:

   > *"But we're at the point now where we need help with the implementation, having to help principals. How do I use this information to put into my plans? What does going from yellow to red and green look like in terms of a lesson plan? You know, boiling it down to that level."*

Progress to Date

It should be noted that ISBE and UChicago Impact have begun to address many of the concerns raised by interview participants and survey respondents. For instance, in Spring 2014, they conducted focus groups with administrators and teachers around the state to solicit feedback for problematic language or context and developed a set of recommendations.[d] In addition, pilot

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[d] http://help.ccsrsurvey.uchicago.edu/customer/portal/articles/1461143-illinois-5essentials-focus-group-report

testing of alternative language for survey items took place during the 2014 survey administration and a pilot study utilizing rosters for survey participation was conducted in Spring 2014 to examine issues with multiple entries and invalid respondents.[e] Based on the roster pilot study, ISBE, in consultation with UChicago Impact, decided to roster all student surveys and extend the rostering pilot for the teacher survey to 75 districts for the 2015 survey administration. Moreover, the 2015 5E administration dates have been moved earlier in the spring term to January 12, 2015 – March 13, 2015. Further, the 2013 and 2014 data have been re-benchmarked to 2013 data for similar Illinois schools. Additionally, Public Act 098-0648[a] was recently modified to allow school districts to elect to use an alternate survey which is required to be pre-approved by ISBE.

Conclusions and Implications

Some stakeholders found value in the 5E data because it added additional perspectives, although this was not true for the majority of the participants. It is interesting to note that principals generally had a more positive view of both the value of the 5E Surveys and reports and their local relevance than superintendents did. We also found that use of the 5Essentials results is still in early stages of adoption for many districts in which usage was primarily limited to general discussions about districts' strengths and weaknesses. Additionally, many participants, particularly teachers on SIP teams, were not familiar with even the basic information about the 5Essentials and research supporting its use. The findings indicate that there is room to grow in building consensus around the value of the 5E data and this would likely facilitate more use of the survey data and reports. Given the between-district differences in data use, this may be most effective if district leadership were convinced of the relevance and value of the data and reports.

Respondents noted many reasons for not utilizing the 5E Survey results. Concerns about the credibility of the data created major barriers for many districts to utilize the 5E results and to generate buy-in. Many districts had their own climate survey that they perceived as providing comparable information and they did not see the need for an additional survey due to both time and cost pressures. The 5E Survey implementation was one of many recent new initiatives in the state, increasing the perception of the 5E Survey as a burden or an unfunded mandate. Despite these concerns, there were districts which perceived some usefulness of the data and were using it in some capacity.

The participants in this study had several ideas for improvement, both for the survey and for implementation and use of the data and reports. Some of the frequently noted ideas included increasing training, similar to what is provided for the Rising Star system; inspiring the district leadership to create a data culture, receptive to the value and possibilities of the data; and providing additional supports, especially for districts with fewer financial and personnel resources. In addition, we determined that there are some districts with more buy-in and/or resources, in which the 5E data are being used in innovative and seemingly effective ways. Creating a learning community of district/school data users to share workable and successful data integration practices would be one strategy to scale up the effective practices that are already occurring around 5E data and report use.

To conclude, utilization of the 5Essentials Survey of Learning Conditions results varied widely across the 15 participating districts in this study, ranging from districts that have implemented programs to districts refusing to use the 5E data due to data validity issues and other concerns. Steps to address some of these issues are currently underway, which will likely increase buy-in in the future. Additional strategies such as training or external resources to increase districts' capacity to analyze and apply the 5E results to school improvement planning may be needed in districts with fewer data supports and emerging data-based cultures. A positive environment in which districts are interested in collecting school culture and climate data from their stakeholders to improve their schools currently exists in Illinois. The ability to capitalize on and cultivate these positive attitudes to increase utilization of the 5Essentials data, or other climate survey data, will be greatly influenced by addressing the concerns identified by its stakeholders.

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[e] For more info on roster pilot study see: http://www.isbe.net/5essentials/pdf/5E-roster-survey-rpt14.pdf

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