

## IU researchers poll high school students

Study focuses on factors linked to effective education

By Steve Hinnefeld, Herald-Times Staff Writer

December 26, 2003

Indiana University education faculty say a new high school survey of student engagement will provide schools with important information that helps them see beyond their own test scores.

The survey, available to high schools for the first time this spring, questions students about their attitudes toward learning and their involvement in practices that are linked to effective education, such as writing papers, working on team projects and taking part in discussions.

"We're giving them data to help guide their school improvement efforts and their professional development activities," said Martha McCarthy, director of the survey and chancellor's professor in IU's department of educational leadership and policy studies.

The survey is modeled on the National Survey of Student Engagement, which faculty from the IU School of Education have given to more than 425,000 college and university students since 1999. The college survey, referred to as Nessie, was set up as a more meaningful alternative to the arbitrary rankings and ratings that had become a major way for colleges and universities to evaluate themselves.

McCarthy said the high school survey - already being called Hessie - won't replace high-stakes standardized tests as the primary tool for school accountability. But it will give schools a more in-depth picture of what they are doing right and wrong and how they can improve, she said. While standardized tests, such as Indiana's ISTEP-Plus, measure educational outcomes, the survey focuses on the educational process and how students perceive it.

"We're not saying, 'This is to replace your high-stakes tests.' We couldn't win that battle," McCarthy said. "What we are saying is, 'This gives you some additional information.' "

Officials expect about 100 schools to sign up for the survey this spring, and they anticipate it will grow in future years. Schools will get their results in August, allowing them to use the information in making changes the next school year.

Unlike many standardized test scores, the survey results won't be made public. It's up to the high schools to decide whether to share their results with students, parents and the broader community.

The IU staff administered a pilot version of the survey this spring to more than 7,500 students in the four schools of the Glenbard High School District in Glen Ellyn, Ill., an affluent suburban district on Chicago's west side.

Terry McHugh, director of school improvement for the Glenbard district, said

administrators and teachers were attracted to the survey as a counterbalance to the emphasis on standardized tests in the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

"We feel standardized testing is only one part of a much bigger picture," he said.

The district received results from the survey this fall, and McHugh said there were some surprises. For one thing, students had generally positive attitudes about their school experience. More than 75 percent across grade levels said they would choose to attend the same high school if they had it to do over.

"Typically, you don't think adolescents think that way," McHugh said.

McHugh said faculty are continuing to analyze survey results and look forward to being able to compare their results with those from other schools.

"All four of the buildings are using the data as part of the school-improvement process that's required here in Illinois," he said.

The high school survey includes questions similar to those on the college survey of student engagement, McCarthy said, allowing for comparisons and tracking of results. But it also focuses on attitudes and home and community activities, along with school practices.

There are questions about how often students take part in class discussions, how often they participate in community-based projects or volunteer service, how much time they spend studying and whether they ever have serious conversations with people of a different race or ethnic background. The 158-question survey also asks about attitudes, including whether students value learning, think school rules are fair and believe they fit in at school.

Schools pay to take part in the survey, with the cost ranging from \$750 for schools with an enrollment of fewer than 500 students to \$2,250 for more than 2,000 students. More information is available by e-mail at [hssse@indiana.edu](mailto:hssse@indiana.edu) or from the project's Web site, [www.iub.edu/~nsse/hssse/](http://www.iub.edu/~nsse/hssse/).

*Reporter Steve Hinnefeld can be reached at 331-4374 or by e-mail at [shinnefeld@heraldt.com](mailto:shinnefeld@heraldt.com).*