

DATE: June 9, 2020

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Trustee Michelle Draper

SUBJECT: Motion re: Edmonton Public Schools Survey Design

REFERENCE: [Trustees' Handbook – Section 5.2.2. – Notices of Motion](#)

ISSUE

Given that the Edmonton Public Schools Division regularly engages in surveys with stakeholders to collect information that helps to inform decision-making, I propose the recommendation within be approved for the development of any future survey design.

BACKGROUND

A crucial part of good research design is making sure the questionnaire design addresses the needs of the inquiry, provides useful information and engages the intended population. The pre-test phase is arguably the most critical part of the survey process. Pre-testing a questionnaire means testing out the survey with a small sample of the intended population to assess if questions make sense, check for flow, and assess timing etc., and then making changes to the tool based on feedback received.

Malone (2018)¹ identifies three purposes to pre-testing a survey questionnaire:

1. Identifying technical issues in completing the questionnaire.
2. Checking whether the questions and answers are clear, and follow a logical structure.
3. Noting the time needed for completion (which is often longer than expected).

Generally, completing surveys should take between 5-10 minutes to encourage more respondents and to prevent survey fatigue. Questions should use simple and direct language to be easily understood by respondents. It is especially important to consider the education level of the survey population when thinking about how easy it will be for respondents to interpret and answer a question.²

There exists several well established and widely used measures of readability (see Patalay, P., Hayes, D., & Wolpert, M., 2018). Readability experts often advise the scores be interpreted in a more general way. For example,³:

- Material written at the fourth-to-sixth grade level is considered easy to read.
- Seventh-to-ninth grade materials are considered to be of average difficulty.
- Anything written at a 10th grade level or above is considered difficult.
- Text intended for readership by the general public should aim for a grade level of no more than 8⁴.

1 Patalay, P., Hayes, D., & Wolpert, M. (2018). Assessing the readability of the self-reported Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. *BJPsych open*, 4(2), 55–57. <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjo.2017.13>

2 <https://www.pewresearch.org/methods/u-s-survey-research/questionnaire-design/>

3 <https://www.ahrq.gov/talkingquality/resources/writing/tip6.html>

4 <https://readable.com/blog/the-flesch-reading-ease-and-flesch-kincaid-grade-level/>

RELATED FACTS

- Our Division undertakes several surveys per year to engage stakeholders (including students, staff, parents and caregivers and community members) and collects information to inform decision-making.
- **Over 25 per cent of our population are English Language Learners** and a high language level in Division surveys may be excluding some respondents.
- As a Division that prides itself on being evidence based, consistently using strong survey design will help ensure valid surveys that are inclusive of the stakeholder population. Adhering to the recommendation would also help ensure that as a Division we are modelling good survey design practices.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Division pre-tests each survey tool, including assessing each questionnaire for its readability level and reports this internally as part of every future survey design.

OPTIONS

1. Approve the recommendations.
2. Provide feedback and request changes to the recommendations for approval.

NEXT STEPS

Upon approval of this recommendation, the Division will adhere to it in the development of future surveys.

MD:km