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## Student Voices from CommPACT Schools

*A major goal of CommPACT schools is to create conditions that enhance student learning. A student survey gathered information on key antecedents to student learning, including school climate, student attitudes toward school, and engagement. This brief describes the origins of the survey, its potential utility in the school reform process, and summarizes Year 1 baseline data. Results indicate that, overall, students in CommPACT schools are proud of their school and maintain good relationships with teachers, but do not always find their school as a safe or friendly place. A large percentage of students reported being bored in the classroom. Future analyses will be necessary to examine responses by specific demographic categories and to determine if there are differences across those groups.*

### Background

The CommPACT Schools Initiative (CSI) represents a new approach to improving high-need urban schools in Connecticut. A CommPACT school is an existing public school reorganized by teachers and administrators to increase organizational responsiveness and to maximize shared decision-making and collaboration. The name "CommPACT" symbolizes a shared commitment by key school partners including community members, parents, administrators, children, and teachers to improve student learning and close persistent achievement gaps. Designation as a CommPACT school means that district leadership and

union membership can provide school faculties increased flexibility on issues of governance, budgeting, and curriculum so that school communities can implement evidenced-based and context-specific decisions to increase student achievement. CommPACT schools receive technical support from faculty at the Neag School of Education at the University of Connecticut. Eight schools adopted the model in the inaugural 2008-09 academic year.

### What Was Examined Using a Student Survey?

The Center for Education Policy Analysis (CEPA) is being funded by a National Education Foundation (NEA)

gift to research the CSI. As part of their research agenda, CEPA researchers are administering an annual student survey to collect information on school context, antecedents to improved student achievement, and nontraditional student outcome indicators. The survey is designed to measure changes over time. During Year 1 the survey data represent baseline data and are also being used to inform ongoing case study analyses. The surveys are coded so that they can be linked to state standardized test scores to explore relationships between survey responses and academic performance. As part of an ongoing feedback loop to the implementers of the CSI, individually tailored survey reports are being provided to each school.

### **The Student Voice Survey**

The *Student Voice Survey* is a 48-item instrument designed to capture student perceptions of school climate, academic engagement, academic aspirations and expectations, teacher-student relationships, supports outside of school, classroom academic press, and personalization of learning. These indicators were selected due to their empirically established relationships with student achievement. They represent contextual conditions and student orientations that bear upon academic achievement in school, and arguably embody valued student outcomes in and of themselves.

The *Student Voice Survey* was developed and validated by CEPA researchers. A review of relevant survey literature identified several items and scales with established reliability and validity and that matched our constructs of interest. Where necessary new items were also constructed and field-tested. All items were piloted by a sample of students for clarity of understanding and to ensure face validity. A sample of student data was psychometrically tested using descriptive

techniques, principal components analysis, and measures of internal consistency. Many items were eliminated, reworded, or regrouped as a result of the initial testing.

Scales were established for *school climate, academic engagement, academic aspirations and expectations, teacher-student relationships, supports outside of school, classroom academic press, and personalization of learning*. A scale is a composite of items designed to measure a construct or indicator. For instance, for the *academic engagement* scale students indicate how true a series of statements are for their school. Students respond on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “always true” to “never true” to statements like, “I feel bored in school” or “I am excited about what I do in school.” Collectively, scores on these items can be averaged to serve as an overall score on the *academic engagement* scale. The other scales were constructed in a similar manner. In the spring and early fall of 2009, the student survey was administered to students in grades 3 and above in seven CommPACT schools. Both English and Spanish versions were available to students. Nearly 1,200 students completed the survey in Year 1. Survey data were entered and analyzed descriptively.

### **What Have We Learned Thus Far?**

At this time we can only report on baseline, descriptive data for Year 1. Baseline data are important to determine future changes over time and to be able to attribute any changes to the CSI. No inferences other than descriptive can be drawn at this time. Nevertheless, the data give a picture of the overall perceptions of students at seven of the schools during the 2008-09 school year. At the time of the first survey administration the CommPACT schools, per the deliberate CSI process, had

not yet engaged in reforms that would have an impact at the classroom level.

Overall results suggest that most students were proud of their school and report good relationships with teachers, but did not overwhelmingly view their school as a friendly or safe place (see Figures 1-3 below). Moreover, students reported that support for education among their families was very strong. Of important note, a large percentage of students reported being bored in school (Figure 4). Disaggregating the data by school showed that student perceptions of school climate and culture varied across and even within schools. Further analyses are required to determine the apparent reasons for these differences. We will be able to disaggregate these and other responses by grade level and other demographic indicators to get a more nuanced perspective on student perceptions and attitudes.

### Where Are We Going From Here?

Survey data from Year 2 will allow us to detect any changes over time on any of these indicators. These data are still being entered, however, and are not ready for analysis. The survey data can ultimately be linked to scores on statewide assessments, which will allow us to explore the relationships among our scales with traditional measures of student achievement.

Lastly, during the first year, school specific data were shared with each school to assist in their data collection and planning. We will continue to share information that can help bear upon the work of CommPACT schools.

Figure 1. Student responses from Year 1 CommPACT Schools (n=1,996)

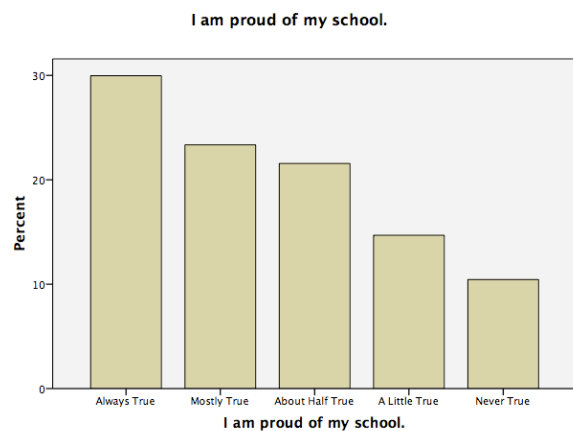
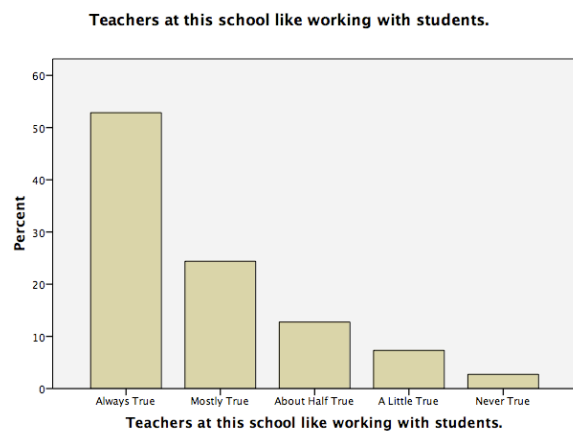


Figure 2. Student responses from Year 1 CommPACT Schools (n=1,989)



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Figure 3. Student responses from Year 1  
CommPACT Schools (n=1,996)

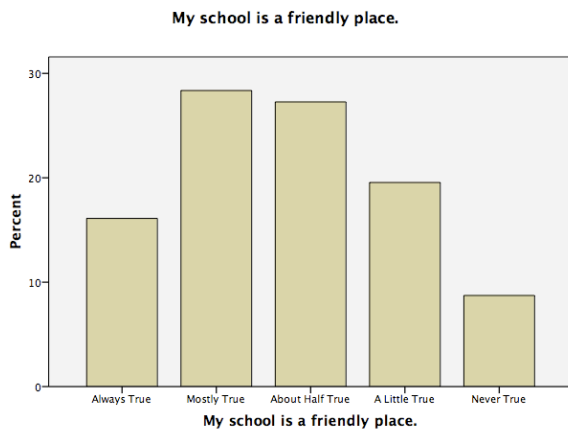


Figure 4. Student responses from Year 1  
CommPACT Schools (n=1,992)

