Survey of Practitioners' Use of Research

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Center for Education Policy Research
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

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The National Center for Research in Policy and Practice (NCRPP) is composed of a team
of researchers from the University of Colorado Boulder School of Education, the Center for
Education Policy Research at Harvard University, and the Northwestern University School of
Education and Social Policy. The center studies how educational leaders use research when
making decisions and what can be done to make research findings more useful and relevant for
those leaders.
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About the Center for Education Policy Research at Harvard University

The Center for Education Policy Research is a unique partnership among districts, states,
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NCRPP
Survey of Practitioners' Use of Research

Welcome! You are being asked to take this survey as part of a research study conducted by the National Center for Research in Policy and Practice. This survey will take you about 20 minutes to complete and will help us understand when and how district and school leaders use research.

Before you begin, please note three important aspects of the survey:

1. Your participation in this research is voluntary. You may skip questions that you do not want to answer and stop the survey at any time. Your answers will be kept confidential, and your personal information will not be shared with anyone outside the research team.

2. The term **research** is used in questions throughout this survey. For the purposes of this study, we have adopted a specific definition of research:

   Research is an activity in which people employ systematic, empirical methods to answer a specific question. Research bases its conclusions in investigations involving statistical data, interviews, observations, and case studies, or a combination of these. Research can appear in books, academic journal articles, practitioner-oriented journals, and analyses of program implementation developed by researchers external to the district. It can also appear in policy and evaluation reports or presentations developed by researchers within a district.

   For this study, we differentiate between research, which involves systematic inquiry to answer a specific question, and the practice of looking at data from the district, school, or classroom, which is more open-ended and seldom addresses specific research questions. For instance, looking at state standardized test results to identify students who need extra support in the classroom would not be research. However, asking the question "what is the relationship between fourth grade state standardized test results and high school graduation?" would be research.

   Please keep this definition in mind as you respond to the survey questions.

3. Answer questions by checking each box, e.g.

	Never	Sometimes	Frequently	All of the time
A. I serve as a Principal Investigator (PI) or co-PI on a research grant in my district.	☒	☐	☐	☐
B. I have filled out surveys, been interviewed or been observed by researchers.	☐	☒	☐	☐

To begin the survey, please turn the page.

Instrumental Research Use

Definition of Research: For the purposes of this study, "research" is an activity in which people employ systematic, empirical methods to answer a specific question. Research, as we define it, is different than the practice of looking at data from the district, school, or classroom, which is more open-ended and seldom addresses specific research questions.

1. For each activity listed below, please indicate whether your district <u>has not engaged in the activity</u>, whether your district <u>engaged in the activity but you were not involved</u>, or <u>whether your district engaged in the activity and you were involved</u>. If you were involved, please indicate how often you used research as part of that activity. When answering, please consider activities that have occurred since you started working at the district.

	No, my district has not done this activity.	**My district has done this activity, but I was not involved.**	**My district has done this activity, and I was involved.**			
			How often have you USED RESEARCH as part of that activity?			
			Never	Sometimes	Frequently	All of the time
A. Conducted a major adoption of curriculum materials	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B. Considered purchasing a particular intervention or program targeted at a specific student population (e.g., low-achieving students)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
C. Considered scaling up a pilot program	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
D. Redesigned a program	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
E. Designed professional development for teachers	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
F. Designed professional development for school or district leaders	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
G. Considered eliminating a program or policy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
H. Considered directing new or additional resources (funds and/or people) to a particular program	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Organizational Routines

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For the next question, we ask you to first indicate how often you are involved in a particular type of meeting and then, if you are involved in those meetings, how often research comes up in those meetings. Please see below for two examples of how to fill out the item.

EXAMPLE 1: This indicates that you are not involved in meetings to review student test results.

	Never	Less than once a month	Monthly	Weekly or daily
Meetings to review student test results	☒	☐	☐	☐

Thinking about this past year, how often did research come up in these meetings?

Never	Occasionally	Often	All of the time
☐	☐	☐	☐

EXAMPLE 2: This indicates that you are involved in monthly meetings to review student test results and that research comes up often at those meetings.

	Never	Less than once a month	Monthly	Weekly or daily
Meetings to review student test results	☐	☐	☒	☐

Thinking about this past year, how often did research come up in these meetings?

Never	Occasionally	Often	All of the time
☐	☐	☒	☐

2. Please indicate how often you are involved in the following types of meetings. Then, for meetings that you attend, please indicate how often research comes up in those meetings.
PLEASE REFER TO THE EXAMPLE ITEMS ABOVE.

	Never	Less than once a month	Monthly	Weekly or daily
A. Meetings related to instruction	☐	☐	☐	☐

Thinking about this past year, how often did research come up in these meetings?

Never	Occasionally	Often	All of the time
☐	☐	☐	☐

	Never	Less than once a month	Monthly	Weekly or daily
B. Meetings related to designing new programs or adapting programs for use	☐	☐	☐	☐

Thinking about this past year, how often did research come up in these meetings?

Never	Occasionally	Often	All of the time
☐	☐	☐	☐

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(Continued) Please indicate how often you are involved in the following types of district meetings. Then, for meetings that you attend, please indicate how often research comes up in those meetings.

	Never	Less than once a month	Monthly	Weekly or daily
C. Meetings related to strategic planning	☐	☐	☐	☐
		Thinking about this past year, how often did research come up in these meetings?		
		Never ☐	Occasionally ☐	Often ☐	All of the time ☐
D. Meetings about parent or community issues	☐	☐	☐	☐
		Thinking about this past year, how often did research come up in these meetings?		
		Never ☐	Occasionally ☐	Often ☐	All of the time ☐
E. Meetings about how well a program was implemented	☐	☐	☐	☐
		Thinking about this past year, how often did research come up in these meetings?		
		Never ☐	Occasionally ☐	Often ☐	All of the time ☐
F. Meetings related to selecting curricula or intervention programs	☐	☐	☐	☐
		Thinking about this past year, how often did research come up in these meetings?		
		Never ☐	Occasionally ☐	Often ☐	All of the time ☐

Symbolic Research Use

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3. How often have you done the following since you've worked in your district?

	Never	Sometimes	Frequently	All of the time
C. Used research to mobilize support for important issues?	☐	☐	☐	☐
D. Used research to get others to agree with a point of view?	☐	☐	☐	☐
E. Selectively used research because it would support a decision?	☐	☐	☐	☐
F. Used research to discredit a policy or program?	☐	☐	☐	☐

Participation in Research Activities

4. Since starting work in your district, how often have you done the following?

	Never	Occasionally	Often	All of the time
A. Helped launch an evaluation study of a school- or district-wide program or intervention?	☐	☐	☐	☐
B. Participated in developing a grant proposal to conduct research in your school/district?	☐	☐	☐	☐
C. Collaborated with others to analyze data from a program or intervention in your school/district?	☐	☐	☐	☐
D. Collected data as part of a research study in your school/district (e.g., administered a survey, conducted a focus group or interviews)?	☐	☐	☐	☐

Imposed Research Use

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5. Please respond to each of the statements below regarding uses of research in your district.

	Never	Sometimes	Frequently	All of the time
A. State or federal agencies require us to choose curricula from a list of approved "research-based" programs.	☐	☐	☐	☐
B. State or federal agencies require us to use research to justify plans and/or program adoptions.	☐	☐	☐	☐
C. We are required to conduct research or evaluate programs as part of a grant.	☐	☐	☐	☐

Individual Demographics

6. Do you hold or are you working toward a doctoral degree?

   ☐ Yes   ☐ No

7. Do you currently have access to a university library (online or in person)?

   ☐ Yes   ☐ No

8. What describes your position in the district? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.)

   ☐ Supervisor of teaching, learning, and curriculum across multiple subject areas
   ☐ Mathematics coordinator
   ☐ Science coordinator
   ☐ Reading or ELA coordinator
   ☐ Accountability, research or assessment director
   ☐ Special education director
   ☐ Assistant superintendent or other district administrator who supervises schools
   ☐ Principal or assistant principal
   ☐ Federal programs director
   ☐ Other: _____

Culture of Research Use

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9. Please respond to each of the statements below regarding uses of research in your district/department.
   - If your district has only one department OR if you are the only member of your department, answer the following questions with reference to your district.
   - If your district has multiple departments AND you are not the only member of your department, answer the following questions with reference to your department.

	Never	Occasionally	Often	All of the time
A. In this district/department, research is seen as a useful source of information.	☐	☐	☐	☐
B. In this district/department, we are genuinely encouraged to use research as part of our ongoing work.	☐	☐	☐	☐
C. In this district/department, we conduct studies on programs we select and implement to see how they work.	☐	☐	☐	☐
D. In this district/department, it is expected that if you make a claim at a meeting, you will be able to cite research evidence to back it up.	☐	☐	☐	☐

Polarization

10. Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the statements below.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
A. People in my district or school agree on what the important issues are.	☐	☐	☐	☐
B. There is no consensus about the central problems facing my school or district.	☐	☐	☐	☐
C. My school or district is divided and polarized.	☐	☐	☐	☐
D. People in this district show respect for one another's perspectives.	☐	☐	☐	☐

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11. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
A. Research helps identify solutions to problems facing schools.	☐	☐	☐	☐
B. There is a disconnect between the research world and the educational world.	☐	☐	☐	☐
C. Research addresses questions that help us make better decisions about schools.	☐	☐	☐	☐
D. When confronted with a new problem or decision, it is valuable to speak with education researchers.	☐	☐	☐	☐
E. Education research is too narrow to be useful to district and school leaders.	☐	☐	☐	☐
F. Education researchers work in an ivory tower and are isolated from practice.	☐	☐	☐	☐
G. By the time research findings are published, they are no longer useful to me.	☐	☐	☐	☐
H. Research can address practical problems facing schools.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I. Researchers provide a valuable service to education practitioners.	☐	☐	☐	☐
J. Education researchers are unbiased.	☐	☐	☐	☐

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12. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
A. Education research is a waste of money.	☐	☐	☐	☐
B. Education research provides results that can help leaders improve educational outcomes.	☐	☐	☐	☐
C. The claims that research studies make are trustworthy.	☐	☐	☐	☐
D. Education research reports are rarely consistent with each other.	☐	☐	☐	☐
E. Education research can be used to support any opinion.	☐	☐	☐	☐
F. Education research is generally conducted to improve the careers of researchers, not to improve schools.	☐	☐	☐	☐
G. A well-designed study with strong findings can change people's minds.	☐	☐	☐	☐
H. Researchers frame their results to make political points.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I. Education research is usually objective.	☐	☐	☐	☐
J. I can find evidence to contradict the findings of any education research study.	☐	☐	☐	☐

Conceptual Research Use

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13. How often have you encountered research that:

	Never	Sometimes	Frequently	All of the time
A. Changed the way you look at problems facing the school/district?	☐	☐	☐	☐
B. Expanded your understanding of an issue?	☐	☐	☐	☐
C. Suggested alternative solutions to a district problem?	☐	☐	☐	☐
D. Brought attention to an issue that your school/district has not yet faced?	☐	☐	☐	☐
E. Provided a framework for structuring improvement efforts?	☐	☐	☐	☐
F. Provided a common language and set of ideas for you and your colleagues?	☐	☐	☐	☐

Research Leaders Find Useful: Version A

14. Think about a time when you used research to inform a decision in your district or school. What is the single most valuable piece of research you used to inform your decision? Please provide as much information as you can about this piece of research so that we can locate it ourselves.

Title: _____

Author: _____

Year Published: _____

Publisher: _____

Topic: _____

Why was it useful? _____

_____

_____

_____

Research Leaders Find Useful: Version B

14. Think about a time when a piece of research you encountered changed your thinking or opinions about possible solutions to your district's/school's problems. What was that piece of research? Please provide as much information as you can about this piece of research so that we can locate it ourselves.

Title: _____

Author: _____

Year Published: _____

Publisher: _____

Topic: _____

Why was it useful? _____

_____

_____

_____

Sources Where Leaders Obtain Research

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15. During the past twelve months, how often have you sought out or acquired research from the following sources?

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	All of the time
A. Professional associations (including conferences, list serves, and publications)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B. University researchers	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
C. Regional Education Laboratories (RELs)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
D. County offices of education	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
E. State department(s) of education	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
F. National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
G. People in other school districts	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
H. What Works Clearinghouse (WWC)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I. Social media (Twitter, Facebook, other)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
J. Newspaper or magazine	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
K. Vendors	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
L. Consultants working with the district	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
M. Wikipedia	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
N. Conferences where research is presented	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

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16. How often do you do each of the following?

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	All of the time
A. I contact researchers to find out more about articles they have written.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B. When confronted with a new problem or decision, I contact researchers I already know who have relevant expertise.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
C. When confronted with a new problem or decision, I contact researchers I don't already know who have relevant expertise.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
D. When confronted with a new problem or decision, I look for research studies that might be relevant.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
E. When confronted with a new problem or decision, I find it valuable to consult education research.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

We will use your answers to questions in this section to understand how knowledge of research methods relates to research use. Please answer the items based on your current understanding of how research is conducted and interpreted.

17. Imagine that a large district wants to evaluate the impact of a new curriculum. Which of the following is the biggest advantage to randomly assigning 200 teachers (e.g., using a lottery) to either a treatment group (which receives the new curriculum) or a control group (which does not)?

    ☐ Randomization increases the likelihood that the two groups of teachers will be similar in all ways except exposure to the new curriculum.

    ☐ Randomization increases the likelihood that the results of the study will apply to other school districts.

    ☐ Randomization increases the likelihood that the results of the study will be statistically significant.

    ☐ Randomization increases the likelihood that there will be a large difference in outcomes between the treatment and control groups.

18. In a large district, a group of 1000 math teachers was offered the opportunity to take an intensive professional development (PD) course. Of these teachers, 575 chose to take the course, and 425 did not. Over the following three years, researchers determined that average student achievement scores were higher for teachers who took the PD course than for those who did not; this difference was statistically significant. Which of the following is the biggest threat to the district's ability to draw conclusions based on this study?

    ☐ Other education interventions may have occurred in the district during this period.

    ☐ It is unclear how student achievement was measured.

    ☐ Teachers who chose to participate in the PD course may be different from those who did not.

    ☐ A majority of eligible teachers took the PD course, making the group sizes unequal.

19. Researchers studied one elementary school teacher's efforts to change her teaching in mathematics and English Language Arts (ELA) in response to new state standards. In ELA, she sought out and actively participated in professional development, asked for advice from colleagues, and created opportunities for collaboration around ELA instruction at her school. In mathematics, she relied exclusively on required professional development workshops and focused on memorizing the material presented so she could apply it in her classroom. Which of the following inferences can you draw from this case?

    ☐ Elementary school teachers' learning experiences may differ depending upon the school subject, and this accounts for why elementary teachers often excel in teaching one subject but not another.

    ☐ Nothing, because the study only involves one teacher.

    ☐ Elementary school teachers' type of engagement in learning may differ by school subject, and these differences may contribute to very different opportunities to learn for teachers, depending on the school subject.

    ☐ Elementary teachers typically change their ELA teaching more easily than their mathematics teaching in response to reform initiatives.

Thank you for filling out the survey!

If you have any comments regarding research use in schools and districts and/or these questions, please write them here.

15

17. A large number of students were randomly assigned either to a treatment group that received an intensive tutoring program in reading or to a control group that did not. After participating in the program for 10 weeks, students were given a reading assessment. Results show that students in the treatment group scored higher than students in the control group, with an effect size of 0.3. In this context, what does "an effect size of 0.3" mean?

   ☐ On average, students in the treatment group scored 0.3 percent higher than students in the control group.

   ☐ On average, students in the treatment group scored 0.3 points higher than students in the control group.

   ☐ On average, students in the treatment group scored 0.3 standard deviations higher than students in the control group.

   ☐ The correlation between the curriculum and test scores was 0.3.

18. Researchers randomly sampled six middle schools in order to study the implementation of a new middle school science curriculum. They observed and interviewed teachers over the first three years of using the curriculum. They found that teachers who implemented the curriculum with fidelity worked in schools where leaders learned about the curriculum and allocated time for teachers to talk with one another about it. They concluded that school leadership for instruction was essential for helping teachers to implement the new curriculum with high fidelity. The researchers have funds to continue the study in six more schools. What would be the best way to provide better support for this conclusion?

   ☐ Randomly sample six more schools to ensure that they can generalize appropriately to the population of middle schools.

   ☐ Select schools not implementing the new science curriculum to provide a comparison group.

   ☐ Select a purposeful sample of schools with different levels of leadership for instruction.

   ☐ The study does not need to be improved, as the design is already rigorous.

   ☐ Collect survey data to standardize the kinds of questions asked of teachers during the study.

Thank you for filling out the survey!

If you have any comments regarding research use in schools and districts and/or these questions, please write them here.