



**Santa Fe Trail USD 434 School District
2014 Patron Online Survey
Final Report
May 29, 2014**

In May 2014, online surveys were made available to the patrons of the Santa Fe Trail USD 434 School District to determine their thoughts on the district's performance (questions whose results could be compared to the same questions last year), to hear the thoughts of those who had taken part in the College and Career Conferences, and to better understand where area residents turn for news and information about the school district.

A total of 120 patrons chose to participate in the survey, which means that the participation level continues to slide. However, the input provided – particularly on the College and Career Conferences – suggests that those who took part were actively engaged in the process.

As with all online surveys, there are some limitations that make them more of a quasi-quantitative process, than true quantitative research.

First, those who participate are self-selected, meaning that the results tend to lean more toward the passionate respondents than being representative of a true cross-section of opinions from the audience in question.

Second, because they are self-selected, there is also not the true “random sample” spread across the school district that would be seen in a quantitative method driven by population patterns. As such, certain regions are often overrepresented, while others are short.

Third, the format is more limiting than a telephone survey. Respondents can and do stop during the process, leaving one to wonder whether a person didn't answer a question, because he or she had a specific issue with the topic, simply got fatigued or some other reason.

Even so, this data still provides a valuable glimpse into the opinions of the patrons who chose to take part. This report presents a summary of the data by topic area, with commentary about the findings from each topic area included. The report closes with a brief summary.

Topic: District performance

For the third year in a row, respondents were asked to “grade” the district – A, B, C, D or F – on 18 different people, program, facility and district/patron relationship factors.

To simplify the analysis, a 5-point weighted scale is used, in which each grade of “A” is worth 5 points, down to each grade of “F” being worth 1 point. The points are totaled and divided by the number of respondents who were willing to offer a grade (rather than saying, “Don’t know”) to arrive at a single number between 1.00 and 5.00.

The dividing line between areas of strength and those that may need attention is typically a “B,” or 4.00, because securing an “A” would require all those with an opinion to say, “A,” and that has yet to happen in 22 years of research work for school districts. Considering that the Margin of Error for a survey of this type is plus or minus 5%, a score as low as 3.80 should still be considered a “B.”

(The Margin of Error is approximate in this case, because this is a self-selected survey, rather than a random sample from across the district. Yet, it does provide a measuring stick against which the change from the previous year’s responses can be evaluated.)

The results continue to show a generally positive view of the rated areas, with 12 of the 18 scoring at 3.80 or higher, and the lowest grade on the entire list being a 3.60 (which is not dramatically low).

Several factors saw a change in their scores of more than 5%, when compared to 2013. Those that increased were as follows:

- Performance of teachers
- Performance of the district in transporting students
- Quality of technology available to students
- Preparation of students for college, vocational training or employment

Only one area – The district’s efforts to involve the community in decision-making – saw a decline of more than 5%.

1. As you know, children in school are given a grade to reflect the quality of their work. What grade would you give the Santa Fe Trail School District on the following areas? Grades reported as a 5-point scale rating, with 5 points for each “A,” down to 1 point for each “F.” Points are totaled and divided by those offering a grade. While 4.00 is technically a “B,” a score as low as 3.80 is – statistically speaking – a “B” as well. Items in boldface changed by more than 5% from 2013 to 2014.

Factor	5-point scale rating/2014	5-point scale rating/2013	5-point scale rating/2012
The Overbrook Attendance Center	4.40	4.31	4.20
Class sizes	4.33	4.30	4.20
Performance of teachers	4.28	4.07	4.06
Performance of the district in transporting students	4.20	3.95	3.94
The Scranton Attendance Center	4.15	4.27	4.17
Quality of technology available to students	4.05	3.85	3.83
Quality of education	4.05	4.01	4.00
The district’s efforts to communicate with patrons	4.03	4.18	4.09
Upkeep and maintenance of school facilities	3.97	3.96	3.90
Performance of school principals	3.95	3.89	4.01
Preparation of students for college, vocational training or employment	3.93	3.69	3.65
The Carbondale Attendance Center	3.92	3.99	4.01
Performance of the School Board	3.79	3.86	3.77
Santa Fe Trail High School	3.74	3.78	3.79
The value received for the tax dollars spent	3.73	3.84	3.70
Performance of the superintendent	3.73	3.89	3.86
The district’s financial management, in the wake of cuts in funding from the state	3.69	3.88	3.77
The district’s efforts to involve the community in decision-making	3.60	3.98	3.66
The district’s reorganization efforts	Not asked	Not asked	3.79

Topic: College and Career Conferences

The survey then presented a series of questions about the College and Career Conferences, in a much simpler format than the 2013 survey.

This time, there was a general question about whether or not the respondent's child had participated in such a conference during this school year, rather than participation questions about each grade level. Exactly half of the survey participants who chose to answer this question said, "yes."

These individuals were then given the opportunity to rate various aspects of the conference experience either "Excellent," "Good," "Just Fair" or "Poor." The combined "Excellent/Good" percentages were very strong, ranging from a high of 87% for "Convenience of the conference to your schedule" (which had been identified as a shortcoming in the 2013 study) to a low of 75%, each, for "Quality of the information presented" and "Ability of the district representative to answer your questions."

This was followed by two open-ended questions, asking for feedback on the best part of the conference and what the individual would suggest be changed. All the verbatim comments are shown below, and they provide an important snapshot of stakeholder opinions on this topic.

This section closed by asking individuals who had attended multiple conferences this school year (because of having multiple children in the specific grades) whether one was better than the other and, if so, what made it better. Two individuals said that one of their conferences was better, but neither one of those respondents shared any details as to why he or she felt this way.

2. The school district conducts College and Career Conferences with students in grades seven through 10. Has your child (or have your children) participated in these conferences during this school year?

Response	Percentage
Yes	50%
No	50%

3. **How would you rate the following aspects of the College and Career Conference for your child (or your children)?** *Asked only of the 56 respondents who answered “yes” on question 2. Percentages are of 56.*

Quality of the information presented

Response	Percentage
Excellent	29%
Good	46%
Just fair	14%
Poor	4%
Don't know	7%

Ease of understanding the information presented

Response	Percentage
Excellent	30%
Good	46%
Just fair	13%
Poor	4%
Don't know	7%

Courtesy of the district representative

Response	Percentage
Excellent	40%
Good	43%
Just fair	5%
Poor	2%
Don't know	11%

Ability of the district representative to answer your questions

Response	Percentage
Excellent	36%
Good	39%
Just fair	13%
Poor	2%
Don't know	11%

Convenience of the conference to your schedule

Response	Percentage
Excellent	36%
Good	51%
Just fair	2%
Poor	2%
Don't know	9%

Value of the conference, overall

Response	Percentage
Excellent	29%
Good	48%
Just fair	13%
Poor	2%
Don't know	9%

Cross-tabulation: Combined “Excellent/Good” percentage for each factor.

Factor	Combined “Excellent/Good” percentage
Convenience of the conference to your schedule	87%
Courtesy of the district representative	83%
Value of the conference, overall	77%
Ease of understanding the information presented	76%
Quality of the information presented	75%
Ability of the district representative to answer your questions	75%

4. What did you like best about the College and Career Conference? All verbatim comments shown below from the 21 respondents who chose to answer this question.

Need more info on FAFSA.

Seeing my child’s test scores.

Information and questions answered.

The one-on-one attention, going over credits to make sure he has the credits he needed.

Knowing how my student ranks with other students, not only in our district, but throughout the U.S.

Tina McIver was very thorough and was able to answer all of our questions.

Mrs. Schmidt took the time to answer all our questions and clarify many issues. She had all my son's scores, grades etc....gathered and ready.

I like that we do it more than one year, and that we start early on.

Everything was right in front of you! Presenters were knowledgeable of the information.

Making sure our student was on track for college.

That the representative we met with knew our daughter well. We met with Tina McIver.

The fact that it was even available.

Helpful in getting my children thinking in the right direction.

It lets me know where my child is at and what classes she needs.

She answered all of our questions about grades, credits, college transfers, etc.

Advice about alternative schooling, other than college.

Meeting with an instructor who is well aware of her as a student – Tina McIver.

Melissa did a fabulous job laying out all the options available.

Made my child think more seriously about the future.

One-on-one meeting, giving us an idea of where our daughter stands and what she needs to get through high school in preparation for college.

It put us in the right direction.

- 5. What would you change about the College and Career Conference?** *Twenty-five respondents chose to answer. Nine said, "Nothing." The remaining 16 verbatim comments, from those who chose to answer this question, are shown below.*

More walk through on college applications.

Don't push tech school so much. College is important, and I feel like the district pushes kids more toward vocational education than college.

The connections necessary for transitioning a Special Needs children from high school to “the real world” are sketchy.

More information on scholarships. Maybe some class time should be devoted to filling out scholarship forms, or online.

Allow a little more time.

Although Mrs. Schmidt visited with us about scholarship information, I really could use more assistance to find what money is available to help pay for college (especially scholarships).

Not so sure it was needed for junior high.

It is hard to make a kid do/try something that they don't want to do, but I would like to see my child do a job shadow, or other on-site visit. It was offered. He hasn't taken the opportunity.

Make sure the adult was better informed.

Nothing, though I would recommend that, if possible, the students stay with the same representative through high school, so that they can stay on the same course.

I think more follow-up with the information would be helpful. A one-time interview can be a little overwhelming. Continuation of next steps would be beneficial.

I feel as though we are telling our kids that if they don't go to college, they have failed. I would like to see a little more emphasis on technical schools and trades.

Giving us more direction and help to find funds for college, and what we need to do.

Less students in one conference. Make sure each student has a complete “packet” before getting the parents there for the conference.

Less “by the book” and more geared to the individual student.

This year's for my daughter was much better than my son's three years ago. I would probably not change anything.

6. **If you had more than one child who had a College and Career Conference this year, was one better than the other (or others)?** *Percentages below are of the 50 respondents who were eligible and who chose to answer this question.*

Response	Percentage
Yes	4%
No	28%
Only had one child who had a College and Career Conference this year	68%

7. **What was the difference between the College and Career Conferences? What made one better than the other (or others)? Please be specific, so we can keep improving this process.** *Question was made available to the two respondents who answered “yes” on question 6, but neither one chose to respond.*

Topic: Other ways to assess student performance

The survey began to draw to a close with an open-ended question that asked respondents to share their views on other ways – besides state assessment testing – that the district could measure and report on student success.

The verbatim responses show a variety of opinions (including some criticism of state assessment) that lean toward a combination of delivering more frequent, “bite-sized” information – such as additional conferences, more e-mails and notes from teachers – to the respondents, when offered a more detailed explanation of how they would propose the district proceed on this matter.

8. The school district is always looking for ways to measure and report on student success. One way is through the state assessment testing. What other ways of measuring and reporting success would be meaningful to you? *Four respondents said, “Don’t know,” and four other respondents said, “MAP testing.” The verbatim comments from the remaining respondents who chose to answer this question are shown below.*

Their ability to pass their current grade without struggling.

Comparing fall and spring results.

Portfolio assessment, skill checklists similar to ones being sent home for math at the elementary level.

I wish I would have had more info about who qualified for the top 10. NHS needs to not measure success by club involvement. FBLA should have been enough!!!

The ACT tests were a great measure, as were the MAP tests that were previously administered.

Progress made during the school year, pre- and post-test information from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. Better communication from Principals.

I would like to see our district move away from valedictorian/salutatorian and only recognizing the top two students at graduation. I’ve noticed other schools recognizing summa cum laude students (which gave recognition to many more students).

The system is too focused on testing and lacking in LEARNING.

State assessment testing. Simple grade card with teacher’s personal comments about student’s performance.

Power School, e-mail or other notes from teachers.

Mid-term exams. I feel that students would benefit from this. It would also give them a chance to raise their grade before the marking period ends.

Keeping Power School grades current.

Guided Reading Levels and Lexile Reading Levels for elementary students.

Send a report card more often.

Quality of curriculum.

Appreciate e-mails and contact with teachers. Would encourage this type of correspondence.

Project-based assignments.

How about an annual report of vocational ed. and college graduates who were SFT graduates? It would be great to see where the students ended up.

Spring parent-teacher conferences.

Graduation rate, % reading/math at grade level, vo-tech success rate, % college/career ready.

I wish there was a way to measure potential VS grades. I am discouraged when I see my son with a very high IQ making Cs. It makes me sad, but I don't know how to fix that.

Plain and simple: Better communication between teachers and parents. Major flaws.

More teacher feedback. More conferences. Written explanation of the tiered/group programs and how they are structured.

Reports of growth, not grades.

The reading program that SAC has been using is awesome!

Apply learning to real-life situations to measure if the student has mastered that topic.

Assessment testing isn't accurate, in my opinion. Daily work and good interaction with each child will give teachers the best feel for what children are lacking in certain areas, as well as their strengths.

Overall performance.

Programs that are on application and knowledge level of the student's ability, not on grade level. If ability level is below 1.0, aggressive mediation for the student. If ability level is below 1.5, retention or extra class time should be required. Students should understand accountability and responsibility for their learning growth.

Teacher's observations, since they work closely with them every day. Some students do not test well. They know the material, but when faced with a formal test, get nervous and it seems as if they have forgotten what they do, in fact, know.

Asking my student how they feel they are doing from point to point in the year. Let them write goals for themselves at the beginning of the year that they work toward all through the year to accomplish and then meet with me at the end of the year to see if the staff and my student were able to achieve those goals.

State assessment is a joke. Some kids never test well. More teacher/student interaction. Improved parent involvement.

I appreciate the few personal notes we've received from teachers. Would like to see more of these. I believe there needs to be one more parent/teacher conference during the school year. One seems insufficient. The meet-the-teacher-before-class-starts should not be considered a conference.

Subject mastery and educational proficiency developed by multiple methods of delivery, not measured solely by standardized testing.

Comments from teachers on what can be done at home to improve student skills.

Standardized testing is a waste of student and teacher time, and a waste of taxpayer money.

Improving the curriculum in the classroom so that it is more rigorous and prepares students for the real world.

Number of scholarships received by seniors each year.

More parent/teacher conferences.

Reporting average ACT scores of SFT High School students. These scores are of great importance for our college-bound students, and it would be nice for the community to know how we are doing in that regard.

I have no idea, but I'm also not a very big fan of the state testing process.

Non-standardized testing.

Continued public recognition of students who excel in all areas.

Everyday class work. The state testing is good, but by the end of it the kids are burned out and just start putting down whatever they want as answers, just to be done.

I wish we could add one more parent/teacher conference during the school year. The school district dropped down to one after the schools were consolidated. I am sure it is partly a budget thing.

Topic: Information sources

The question regarding where respondents get their news about the school district shows the continued strong interest in such information, and the ongoing expansion of social media sites as sources that are becoming more and more regularly consulted.

- 9. The Santa Fe Trail School District wants to know where you look most frequently for school news, or who you talk to when you want to find out what’s going on with the district. From the list of potential sources for district news listed below, please check those that you consult “frequently” for news – OTHER THAN weather-related school closing information.**

Source	Percentage/2014	Percentage/2013	Percentage/2012
District e-mails	76%	69%	60%
The Santa Fe Trail School District website	63%	76%	74%
E-newsletters from the district	52%	50%	58%
Social networking sites, like Facebook and Twitter	52%	36%	14%
Friends and neighbors	46%	37%	32%
Teachers in the district	39%	27%	34%
<i>The Osage County Herald-Chronicle</i>	34%	31%	33%
Building newsletters	30%	29%	38%
School building principals	27%	19%	22%
Television stations	21%	27%	21%
<i>The Topeka Capital-Journal</i>	17%	21%	21%
The superintendent, or others in the Central Office	14%	8%	10%
The Parent Teacher Organization, also called the PTO	9%	11%	8%
School Board members	7%	7%	9%
Radio stations	5%	7%	9%
<i>The Metro News</i> newspaper	1%	1%	<1%

Topic: Demographics

Close to three-fourths of the survey participants were current student families, which is typical for an online survey of this type.

- 10. And, finally, which of the following best describes your family? (If more than one describes your family, please check all those that apply.)** *The responses will add to more than 100%, because participants were permitted to select more than one response, if more than one applied to their situation.*

Response	Percentage
I currently have a child (or children) in the Santa Fe Trail School District	74%
I had a child (or children) in the Santa Fe Trail School District, but they have all graduated	18%
I have school-age children who attend private or parochial school, or who are home-schooled, rather than attending school in the Santa Fe Trail School District	3%
I have never had a child (or children) who attended school in the Santa Fe Trail School District	10%

Summary

This year's survey showed that the district continues to be held in high regard by the 120 individuals who chose to take part in the process.

Grades were strong – with four elements of district performance improving more than 5% as compared to 2013, and only one declining by more than that amount – and the interest in district news remained high, with dramatic growth seen in social media as a source of such information.

Perhaps most encouraging, however, was the good reviews of the College and Career Conferences. Elements of the conference program received strong reviews from those who took part, and the scheduling issue, which was clearly a concern last year, appears to have been corrected.

It is also encouraging to see the depth of commentary about the conferences and about assessment options. While the number of respondents may not have been plentiful, their engagement in this process suggests a solid level of involvement and participation – which is something that every school district strives for.