

Indicator 3.2 states: “The school conducts regular demographic assessments of its constituents in order to better fulfill its stated mission: 1) educational levels, 2) ethnic diversity, 3) faith backgrounds, and 4) other pertinent family information.” The Compliance level of the Rubrics states: “The school conducts regular, comprehensive demographic assessments, and it has used some of its constituent responses in order to better fulfill its stated mission.”

Occasionally, we have schools ask us why we have included this in the accreditation standards? In other words, why is it important to gather this information regularly as a school?

The basic answer is that a school needs to know its constituents well in order to serve them most appropriately. There are significant differences in how a school plans its approach to students and families based on their educational backgrounds, resources at home, faith commitment, and other factors. A school that started out primarily for children in a suburban environment after several years may find itself in an urban setting because the neighborhood has changed. A school that once served primarily students with extensive church backgrounds might start taking in students in a voucher program or international students and soon find that a large percentage of their students have no church background. Occasionally, schools have started or absorbed an additional campus, and they do not realize that the new group of families have very different values, education levels, or economic situations. Schools with large numbers of families with two working parents or single parents may not have many field trip drivers and classroom volunteers, and they may struggle to transport students to games or practices if those occur at offsite locations. Families on vouchers, on financial assistance, or with otherwise limited budgets may not be able to pay for a lot of special project materials or support the school’s fundraisers. Choices about what lunch program to choose will be impacted by what families the school is currently serving. Assignment requirements such as having the internet may be a given in most families but not for all students. If the school knows its constituents, it may realize that it must make some accommodations for the few students who don’t have internet access.

The requirement to assess the school’s demographics is a mandate to have the most up-to-date information on the families that the school is currently serving so that it can plan the best education possible for these students and families.

The following is a suggested list of what the school might ask or data it might collect in some way.

While some of these questions might feel invasive, it is important to ask them in a way that would help families understand why they are being asked.

Questions – some examples of information to gather

1. How has the community changed in the last few years? How has that impacted the school family?
2. What is the family structure? Two parent or single parent families? Grandparents raising grandchildren? Immigrants? How many work outside the home? Multiple children families?
3. Socio-economic status (# receive financial aid) ? How many on free/reduced lunch? General income (dollar amounts optional but some ranges are needed)
4. % minority, what minorities?

5. Commuters, locals, busing?
6. Age of parents? Education levels? How many have Internet?
7. Attendance rates? How does this compare to years past?
8. Retention from year to year?
9. % going to college?
10. Church attendance? How has that changed over the last 5, 10, 15 years?
11. International students?
12. Levels of participation in students (sports, extra-curriculars like fine arts)
13. Communication with families. How did they used to get their information? How do they prefer it now? How many alumni are involved?
14. Volunteer participation among families?
15. Participation in giving campaigns of families, staff, board, alumni?

Where do we get this information?

1. Applications, school database – but you do have to keep refreshing this data. It changes.
2. Admissions department records on retention, ethnicity, enrollment, etc.
3. Satisfaction surveys? How often? To whom?
4. Exit surveys?
5. Course evaluations by students?
6. Do short surveys of 2-3 questions on the web or Facebook, specifically for accreditation, just on one of these topics
7. Focus groups
8. Stats from the community so that you can compare school families with community

What difference does this make? – a few examples

1. Marketing, area by area there might be a difference. For example, if you see that an outlying community has all working parents, consider offering a bus to and from school. If there are lots of single parents, perhaps an after-school care program is needed.
2. Program decisions - Extra-curricular programs, provide transportation instead of relying on parents
3. Course offerings – because of what the school learns about Church attendance, some schools find they must begin at a lower level for Bible instruction. Some schools offer an Intro to Bible course (for their non-Christians and International students.)
4. Parenting classes – or “Parent University” programs. This is often helpful to parents who are young or new to the Christian faith.
5. Support for minorities, increasing ethnic diversity – you can’t do anything about increasing diversity if you don’t know what you have!
6. Support for special populations - multiple child families? Pastors, full-time Christian workers, military? Could you offer them scholarships, support for those in transition (missionaries)?
7. Instructional support - correlate # years in the school with academic progress. Do new students with low test scores need additional academic help to make the transition to your school?
8. Curriculum choices - may be different based on the students/families coming to the school.