

Representativeness of the 2018-19 Senior Exit Survey

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The Senior Exit Survey first launched in 2014-15 and is administered annually each spring by the Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE). The survey is required by the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) to be given to all high school seniors in each district in the state. It asks students about their high school activities (including volunteering, internships and clubs); whether they are planning to pursue additional education, employment or other activities after high school; and what support they received in preparing for college and career, including who the most influential people were when helping them plan for life after high school.¹

This brief examines the representativeness of the Senior Exit Survey and aims to describe how generalizable these responses are to the entire population of District seniors.² First, we look at how closely the sample of 2018-19 Senior Exit Survey respondents reflect the demographic and educational characteristics (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, English Learner(EL) status, special education status, and graduation status³) of all District seniors.⁴ However, because the intent of the Senior Exit Survey is to capture information on students exiting the District, we also compared the demographic characteristics of respondents to those of 2018-19 District seniors who went on to graduate from SDP at the end of the year that they responded to the Senior Exit Survey. This distinction is especially important because the characteristics of graduating students who responded to the Senior Exit Survey proved to be different from the overall population of District seniors who responded to the Senior Exit Survey.

Why are “external validity” and “representativeness” important?

External validity is the extent to which scientific conclusions can be generalized across settings or samples. A *representative sample* has strong external validity in relationship to the target population it is intended to represent. In collecting and analyzing Senior Exit Survey response data, it is important to consider the extent to which characteristics of survey respondents are representative of those of the larger population (all District seniors) to ensure that certain group’s opinions are not magnified while others are understated.

¹ For more information on the Senior Exit Survey, please see ORE’s Senior Exit Survey website: <https://www.philasd.org/research/programsservices/projects/senior-exit-survey/>.

² Charter school students do not take the SDP Senior Exit Survey and are not included in this analysis.

³ For this brief, graduation status refers to whether or not a student graduated at the end of the year that they responded to the Senior Exit Survey (2018-19), regardless of their 9th grade cohort.

⁴ Only District students with 12th-grade status who were enrolled on April 29, 2019 were eligible to take the Senior Exit Survey and are included in enrollment totals.

Findings

Overall, there were 8,348 District seniors enrolled in the District at the time the Senior Exit Survey launched on April 29, 2019. Of these District seniors, 5,680 (68%) completed the Senior Exit Survey. Of those who completed the Senior Exit Survey, 92.4% went on to graduate at the end of the 2018-19 school year compared to 77.2% of all District seniors.

Graduates were over-represented among Senior Exit Survey respondents.

Graduates completed the Senior Exit Survey at higher rates than non-graduates: 92.4% of respondents graduated from SDP at the end of the 2018-19 school year compared to 77.2% of District seniors (+15.2 percentage points: Table 1). Conversely, only 7.6% of Senior Exit Survey respondents did not graduate, compared to 22.8% of District seniors (-15.2 percentage points).

Table 1. Characteristics of District seniors compared to students who completed the Senior Exit Survey in 2018-19

	2018-19 District Seniors (A)		2018-19 Senior Exit Survey Respondents (B)		Difference (percentage points) (C)
	#	%	#	%	
Race/Ethnicity					
White	990	11.9%	768	13.5%	+1.7
Black/African American	4,580	54.9%	2,840	50.0%	-4.9
Hispanic/Latino	1,480	17.7%	961	16.9%	-0.8
Asian	932	11.2%	828	14.6%	+3.4
Multi-Racial/Other	351	4.2%	273	4.8%	+0.6
Gender					
Male	4,020	48.2%	2,612	46.0%	-2.2
Female	4,328	51.8%	3,068	54.0%	+2.2
EL Status					
English Learner (EL)	855	10.2%	618	10.9%	+0.7
Not an English Learner (EL)	7,493	89.8%	5,062	89.1%	-0.7
Special Education Status					
Has an IEP	796	9.5%	278	4.9%	-4.6
Does not have an IEP	7,552	90.5%	5,402	95.1%	+4.6
Graduation Status					
Graduated from SDP	6,445	77.2%	5,249	92.4%	+15.2
Did not Graduate from SDP	1,903	22.8%	431	7.6%	-15.2
Overall					
Total	8,348	100.0%	5,680	100.0%	-

Source: Qlik Senior Exit Survey Application. Data retrieved April 3, 2020.

How to read this table: This table allows you to compare the percentage of District seniors to the percentage of Senior Exit Survey respondents (Columns A and B). The percentage point differences between the columns are in Column C. When the difference is positive, that means there is a higher percentage of students who completed the survey compared to the full population of District seniors. When the difference is negative, the reverse is true. For example, students with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) represent 9.5% of District seniors but only 4.9% of Senior Exit Survey respondents.

Senior Exit Survey respondents were relatively representative of the full population of District seniors by a margin of less than five percentage points across all racial/ethnic groups.

Overall, Senior Exit Survey respondents were relatively representative of the full population of District seniors by a margin of less than five percentage points across all race/ethnicity groups (Table 1). White, Asian, and Multi-Racial/Other students were slightly over-represented among respondents. For example, in 2018-19, Asian students comprised 11.2% of District seniors but 14.6% of all Senior Exit Survey respondents (+3.4 percentage points), White students comprised 11.9% of District seniors compared to 13.5% of Senior Exit Survey respondents (+1.7 percentage points), and Multi-Racial/Other students comprised 4.2% of District seniors compared to 4.8% of Senior Exit Survey respondents (+0.6 percentage points). On the other hand, Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino students were under-represented. Black/African American students comprised 54.9% of District seniors compared to 50% of Senior Exit Survey respondents (-4.9 percentage points) and Hispanic/Latino students comprised 17.7% of District seniors and 16.9% of Senior Exit Survey respondents (-0.8 percentage points).

The Senior Exit Survey was even more demographically representative of 2018-19 District seniors who went on to graduate from SDP at the end of the 2018-19 school year and, in this case, differed by less than two percentage points across all race/ethnicity groups (Table 2). Still, Black/African American students were slightly under-represented (-1.3 percentage points) compared to students of other races/ethnicities.

Table 2. Characteristics of District seniors who graduated from SDP at the end of the 2018-19 school year compared to students who completed the Senior Exit Survey in 2018-19

	2018-19 Graduates (A)		2018-19 Senior Exit Survey Respondents (B)		Difference (percentage points) (C)
	#	%	#	%	
Race/Ethnicity					
White	837	13.0%	768	13.5%	+0.5
Black/African American	3,306	51.3%	2,840	50.0%	-1.3
Hispanic/Latino	1,107	17.2%	961	16.9%	-0.3
Asian	874	13.6%	828	14.6%	+1.0
Multi-Racial/Other	310	4.8%	273	4.8%	0.0
Gender					
Male	2,963	46.0%	2,612	46.0%	0
Female	3,482	54.0%	3,068	54.0%	0
EL Status					
English Learner (EL)	678	10.5%	618	10.9%	+0.4
Not an English Learner (EL)	5,767	89.5%	5,062	89.1%	-0.4
IEP Status					
Has an IEP	337	5.2%	278	4.9%	-0.3
Does not have an IEP	6,108	94.8%	5,402	95.1%	+0.3
Overall					
Total Graduates	6,445	100.0%	5,680	100.0%	-

Source: Qlik Senior Exit Survey Application. Data retrieved April 3, 2020.

How to read this table: This table allows you to compare the percentages of District seniors who graduated from SDP at the end of the 2018-19 school year to the percentage of Senior Exit Survey respondents (Columns A and B). The percentage point differences between the columns are in Column C. When the difference is positive, that means there is a higher percentage of students who completed the survey compared to the percentage of students who went on to graduate from SDP at the end of the 2018-19 school year. When the difference is negative, the reverse is true. For example, Black/African American students represent 51.3% of District seniors who went on to graduate from SDP at the end of the 2018-19 school year but only 50% of Senior Exit Survey respondents.

Male students were slightly under-represented and female students were slightly over-represented among Senior Exit Survey respondents.

Male students comprised 48.2% of District seniors compared to 46% of Senior Exit Survey Respondents (-2.2 percentage points). Conversely, female students comprised 51.8% of District seniors compared to 54% of Senior Exit Survey Respondents (+2.2 percentage points) (Table 1).

The difference in the percentage of female students and male students who responded to the Senior Exit Survey was the same as the percentage of female and male students who went on to graduate in 2019 (Table 2).

English Learners (ELs) were slightly over-represented among Senior Exit Survey Respondents.

English Learners (ELs) were relatively well-represented among Senior Exit Survey respondents (Table 1). For example, ELs comprised 10.2% of District seniors and 10.9% of Senior Exit Survey respondents (+0.7 percentage points). Conversely, non-ELs comprised 89.8% of District seniors and 89.1% of respondents (-0.7 percentage points).

ELs and non-ELs who responded to the Senior Exit Survey were also relatively representative of 2018-19 District seniors who would later go on to graduate from SDP at the end of the 2018-19 school year (Table 2). ELs comprised 10.5% of all graduates and 10.9% of Senior Exit Survey respondents (+0.4 percentage points).

Students with an IEP were under-represented among Senior Exit Survey respondents.

Students with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) were under-represented among Senior Exit Survey Respondents (Table 1). For example, students with an IEP comprised 9.5% of District seniors but 4.9% of Senior Exit Survey respondents (-4.6 percentage points). Conversely, students who did not have an IEP comprised 90.5% of District seniors and 95.1% of respondents (+4.6 percentage points).

Students with an IEP who responded to the Senior Exit Survey were more representative of 2018-19 District seniors with an IEP who would later go on to graduate from SDP at the end of the 2018-19 school year compared to all Senior Exit Survey respondents (Table 2). For example, students receiving special education services comprised 5.2% of students who graduated from SDP at the end of the 2018-19 school year and 4.9% of Senior Exit Survey Respondents (-0.3 percentage points).

Conclusions

Overall, 2018-19 Senior Exit Survey respondents were representative of District seniors, particularly those seniors who graduated from SDP at the end of the 2018-19 school year. The demographic characteristics of the Senior Exit Survey respondents in 2018-19 were within 5 percentage points of the demographic characteristics of seniors enrolled in District schools and within 2 percentage points of District Seniors who graduated from SDP at the end of the school year. Black/African American students, Hispanic/Latino students, male students, and students with IEPs were all slightly under-represented among Senior Exit Survey Respondents. Aside from demographics, students who graduated from SDP at the end of the 2018-19 school year were over-represented among 2018-19 Senior Exit Survey Respondents by a margin of 15.2 percentage points compared to students who did not graduate.