

**Illinois 2007 High School
Challenge Conference
Rigor + Relevance + Relationships = Results**

**End-of-Conference Evaluation Survey:
Summary Report**

July 2007



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Comprehensive Assistance Center**

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Overview

At the conclusion of the Illinois 2007 High School Challenge Conference held in Bloomington, Illinois on June 14–15, 2007, members of Great Lakes West Comprehensive Assistance Center collected individual End-of-Conference Evaluation survey responses. Conference attendees were asked to assess both the professional value of the conference and their personal satisfaction with the event. Of the 489 registered participants attending the conference, 205 participants (41.9 percent) completed an evaluation form.

The Data

An examination of the End-of-Conference Evaluation surveys was conducted during the second and third weeks of June. About one fourth of the evaluation forms (57) contained only Likert scale data with no additional written comments. Once the Likert scale data from the 205 surveys were entered into a spreadsheet, the surveys without accompanying comments were separated from the remaining 148 surveys, which were sorted according to comments found in each of these seven sections: 1) Assessment of conference registration and facilities, 2) Willard R. Daggett, Ed.D.'s keynote presentation, 3) Pedro Noguera's presentation, 4) Increasing student achievement breakout sessions, 5) High schools making gains tell their story session, 6) Team discussion session, and 7) Recommendations for the 2008 conference. A synopsis of the session ratings and comments is presented below.

Employing Wolcott's (1990) model for sorting and analyzing qualitative data, the first screening of the comments in each category identified broad themes. For each theme, the individual comments were screened and aligned or clustered with similar comments. This particular method of sorting qualitative data was chosen because it provides evaluators with a reasonable level of "face validity," which Patton (1997) argued is a primary criterion for utilization focused assessments.

Assessment of Conference Registration and Facilities

Overall impressions of the conference registration and facilities were generally very favorable. Roughly 88 percent and 92 percent of the respondents rated the conference registration process and facilities as *good* or *excellent*. One attendee remarked that Bloomington was an ideal central location that allowed everyone convenient access. Some attendees remarked that the Bloomington Doubletree Hotel was too small to accommodate a conference of this size. Along these lines, many noted that they were unable to stay at the site hotel because of room unavailability. Others noted that the conference facilities during the Thursday meetings were often overcrowded or filled to capacity.

Minor suggestions included having healthier options on the breakfast buffet. Some attendees thought that having something other than the pastries, doughnuts, and muffins would be welcomed. Cheeses and fresh fruit were among the recommended alternatives for menu choices next year. A few attendees also felt that the main conference room was too cold and the temperature could have been adjusted earlier to better suit their tastes.

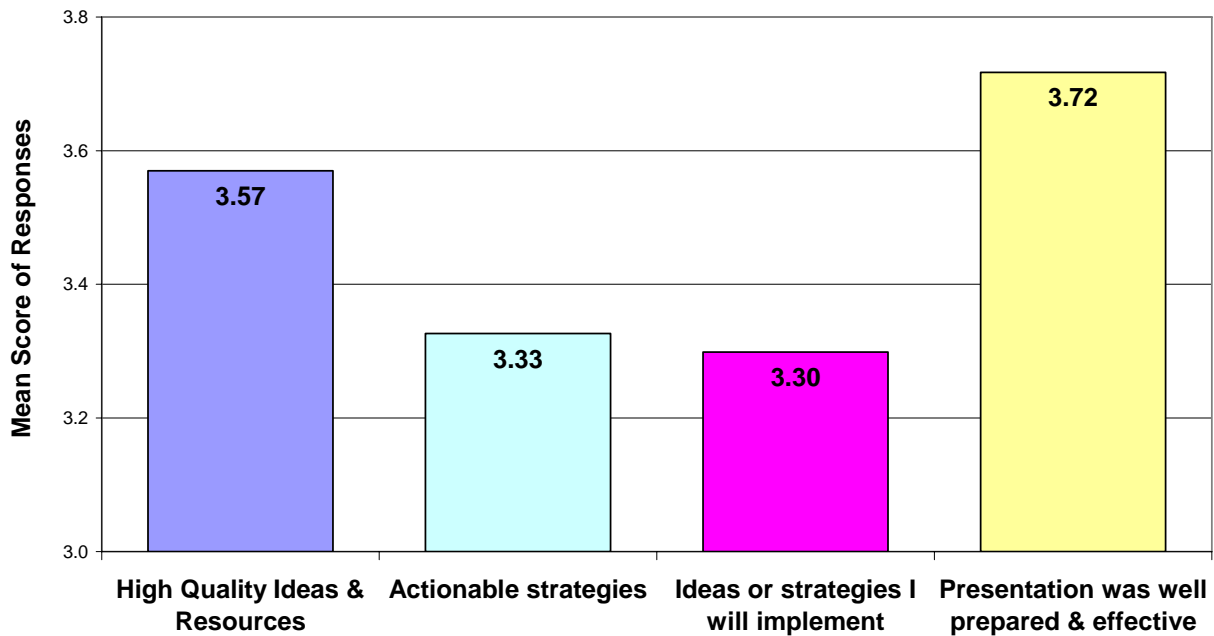
Willard Daggett's Keynote Presentation

Dr. Daggett's presentation was warmly received by nearly all of the attendees who responded to the surveys. Across the 205 respondents, Dr. Daggett's remarks were deemed the most effective presentation at the conference with a mean rating of 3.57 on a 4-point scale (with 4 defined as *strongly agree*).

Many acknowledged the salient points of the presentation by agreeing that little has changed in how we educate young people in high schools. Several survey responses suggested that Dr.

Daggett should be asked back again to the 2008 conference. A few dissenting comments raised questions about how the theories presented might actually transfer into the practical world of the school building and classroom. In terms of receiving actionable strategies that they are planning to implement, the mean scores for these scales (3.3 for both) were closer to the *agree* level and the *strongly agree* level. In addition, some respondents requested more practical examples of what works and why Dr. Daggett thought the improvements had been the result of his particular program for school reform. Other attendees concurred with Dr. Daggett’s points of emphasis, but asked why school board presidents, superintendents, and higher education representatives were not present to hear the message. Still another respondent questioned how Dr. Daggett’s prescription for school reform might align with the current reforms underway to make the state’s learning standards rigorous and relevant.

Dr. Willard Daggett Presentation

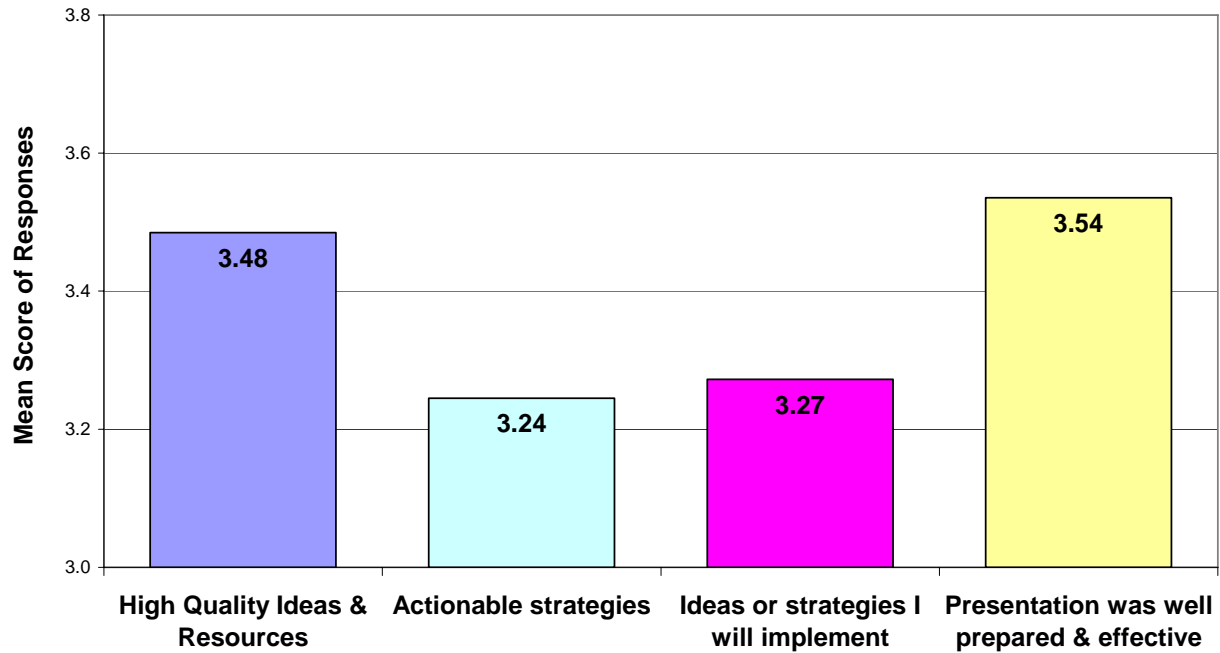


Pedro Noguera’s Presentation

Mr. Noguera’s remarks were praised by multiple respondents for their motivational and passionate qualities. One respondent noted a “strong emotional connection to the speaker’s theme of education for all students all the time.” The consensus perspectives of the respondents consistently noted Noguera’s motivation and enthusiasm. On average, the audience indicated a high level of agreement with the effectiveness of the presentation (3.5) and the relatively high quality of the ideas and resources presented (3.5). However, many of the respondents were also somewhat disappointed in the lack of remedies and details for addressing the problems raised during the talk. One attendee wrote that they felt that the presentation was “too broad a brush—I need more specifics [and] data.” Another was seeking a “transition from how . . . to what can we do with it so that staff can effect change.” Yet another respondent felt that Noguera did “too

much finger-pointing and not enough time explaining what effective schools were doing. He should have given examples of what the schools were doing. In other words, “too much focus on questions we all ask and not enough on the answers.” The audience ratings of the talk in terms of providing actionable strategies and ideas they were planning to implement were a bit lower (3.2 and 3.3, respectively).

Dr. Pedro Noguera Presentation

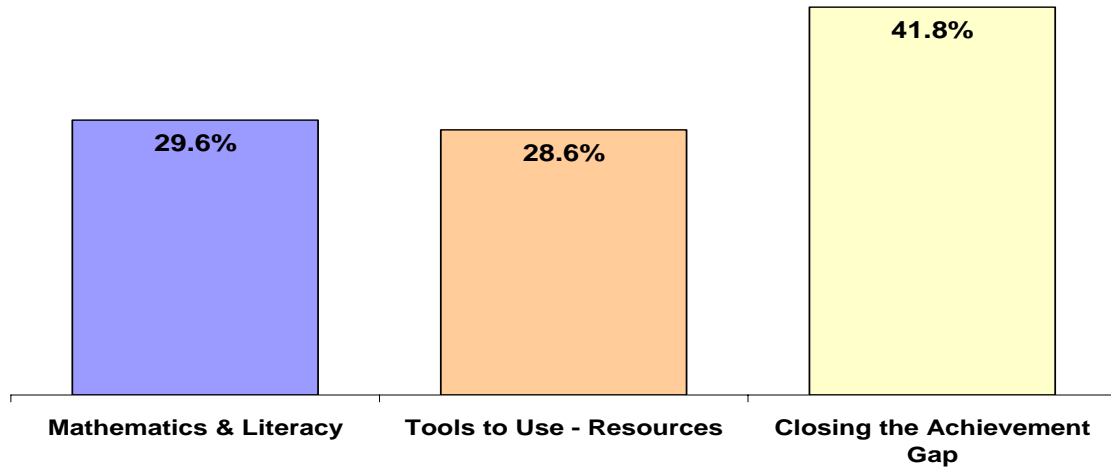


Increasing Student Achievement Breakout Sessions

On Thursday, three breakout sessions were offered in the afternoon. These sessions focused on: (1) Mathematics and literacy, (2) Tools to use and resources, and (3) Closing the achievement gaps for all students. Each of the sessions was well attended with the closing the achievement gaps session filled to capacity.

Breakout Session Attended

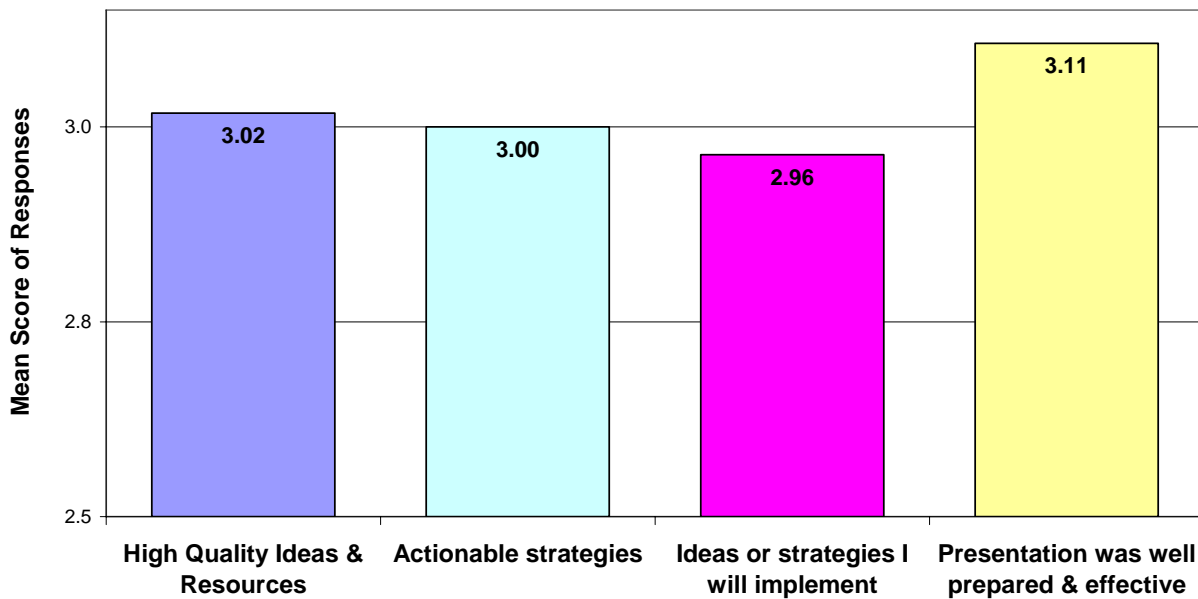
N = 189



Overall, the mathematics and literacy session received the highest ratings of the breakout sessions on all four criteria: quality of ideas (3.0), actionable strategies (3.0), ideas to be implemented (3.0), and presentation effectiveness (3.1). The tools to use session rated somewhat lower (between 2.8–3.0),

Math & Literacy Session

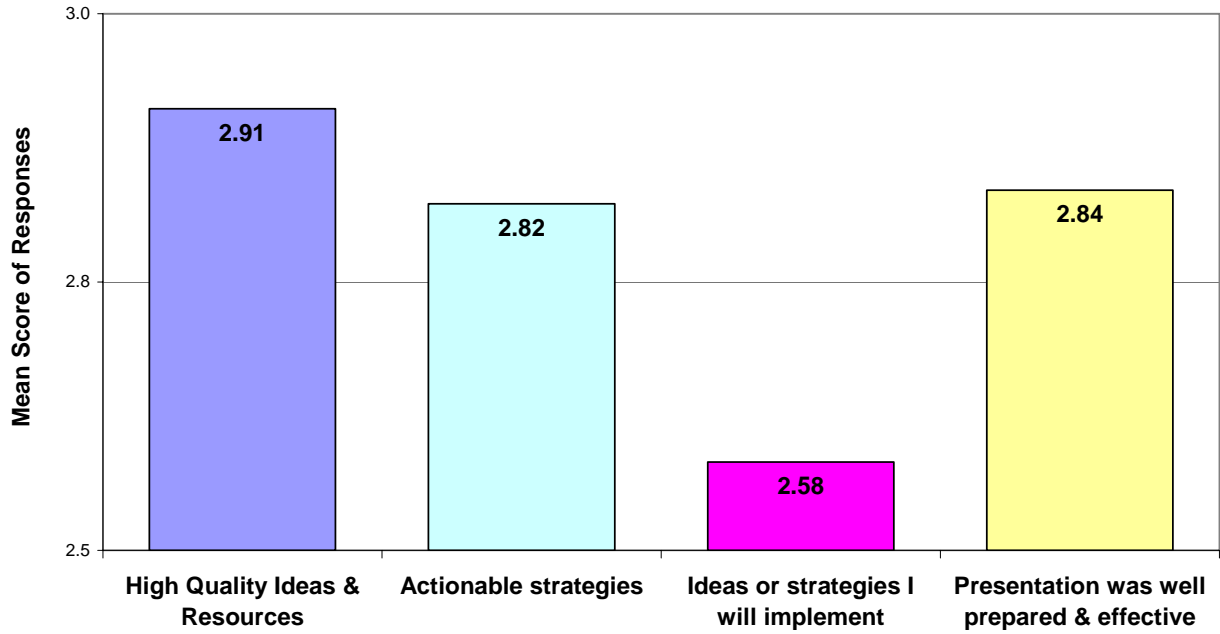
N = 56



The session on closing the gaps received scores ranging from 2.6 to 2.9.

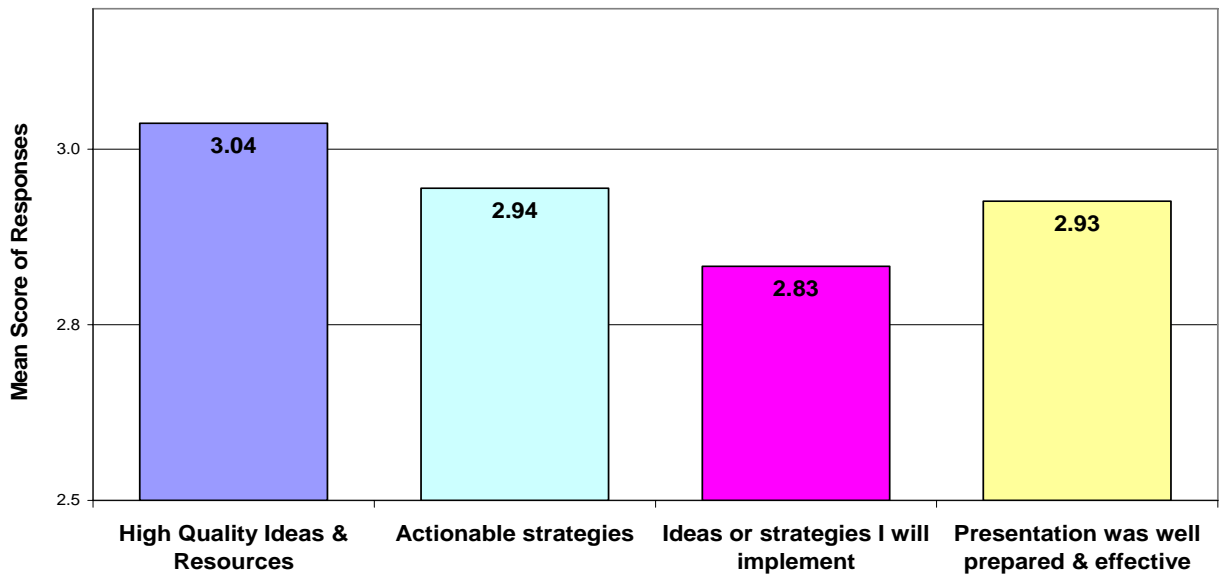
Closing the Achievement Gap Session

N = 79



Tools to Use - Resources Session

N = 54



The comments for the breakout sessions, as well as for the subsequent session on high schools making gains, were more critical in nature than those reported for the Daggett or Noguera presentations. For example, several survey responses were critical of the seemingly unprepared and technology-phobic nature of some of the presenters. One felt that the session on technology was “too vague” to be of much practical use. Others complained that the lecture format followed by limited opportunities for questions and answers in the closing the achievement gap session was contrary to what teachers are told to do in their classrooms.

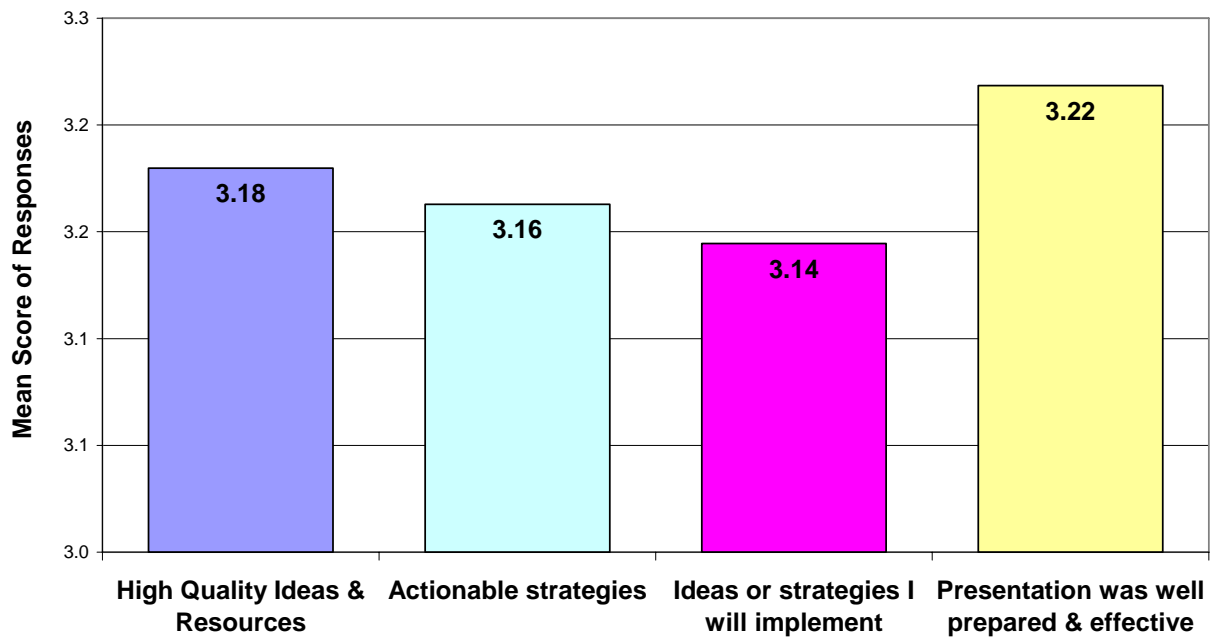
Other respondents did not think that the scope of what might be working at a particular local school or district was necessarily pertinent to their own school setting, especially if the demographics of showcased schools were substantially different.

Recommendations from a few attendees included designing breakout sessions according not only to content, but also to school size and demographics (e.g., large versus small or rural versus urban). To bolster this notion of a need for audience affiliation, one respondent noted that “wealthy districts have no idea how it works when you don’t have professional development dollars.”

High Schools Making Gains Tell Their Stories

Several favorable comments were made regarding how well the respondents enjoyed the session and some of the information that was provided. Overall, the three high school presentation teams received mean ratings of 3.14 to 3.22 on the four criteria, with the high score being given on presentation effectiveness.

High Schools Making Gains



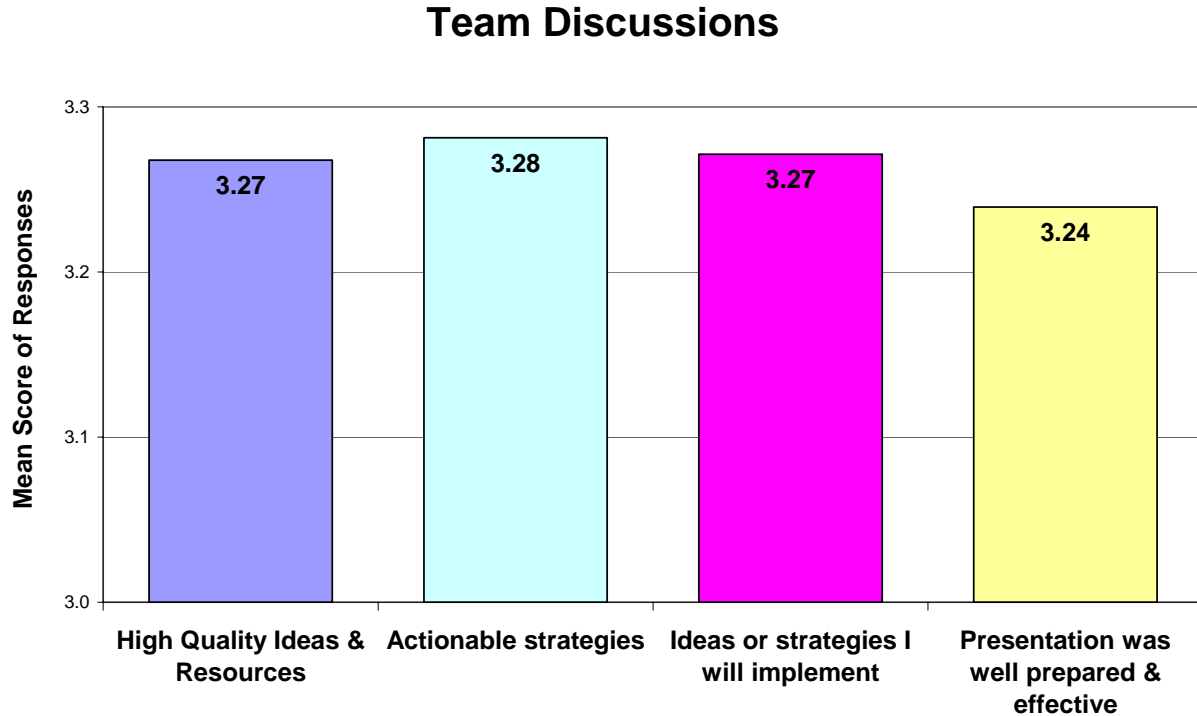
In the comments, Belleville East High School was singled out by several respondents for its exceptional use of data-driven information. One attendee noted: “[Belleville] shows they truly understand standards alignment and interdisciplinary instructional efforts.”

The lack of student, faculty, and community diversity in the successful schools was noted by several attendees. One respondent argued that some of these exemplary schools came from wealthy districts and enjoyed the necessary commitment of resources for achieving success in student outcomes. Other comments suggested that demographic profile of the presenting schools had an influence in the relevance of the information presented to audience members.

Other comments recommended allocating more time for discussion on how the lessons learned from the successful schools might apply to what is occurring in other schools. One recommendation was to provide multiple sessions in which presenters were grouped according to specific school demographics. Like the previously mentioned comments on the lack of diversity in school demographics, this session had a higher level of appeal for those in the audience with similar educational backgrounds and experiences.

Team Discussion Session

The self-facilitated team discussion sessions received the highest ratings for developing actionable strategies that will or can be implemented (mean scores of 3.2 and 3.3). While mostly positive in nature, the comments in this category were limited in number compared to those of other sessions. This session occurred during the final hours of the conference, which may explain the limited attention to comments from respondents.



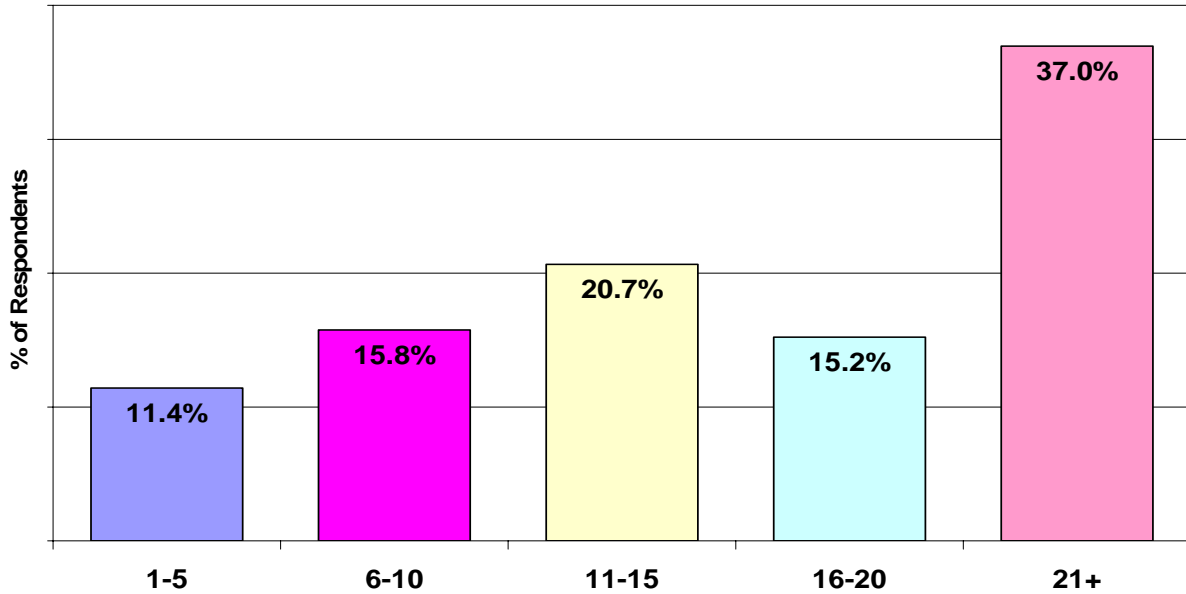
The comments revealed a high level of satisfaction in being able to discuss with their colleagues some of the lessons learned over the previous two days. This was especially true when multiple attendees from the same schools or districts participated in the conference collectively. During these single-table discussions, decision makers and key stakeholders revealed a capacity to debate school redesign alternatives and to formulate plans to take home for future implementation.

The greatest concerns flowing out of the team discussion sessions were related to finding adequate resources and sufficient support from superiors, peers, and other stakeholders. Some respondents considered adequate resources and collective support to be essential if the proposed plans were to be implemented.

Demographics of Conference Participants

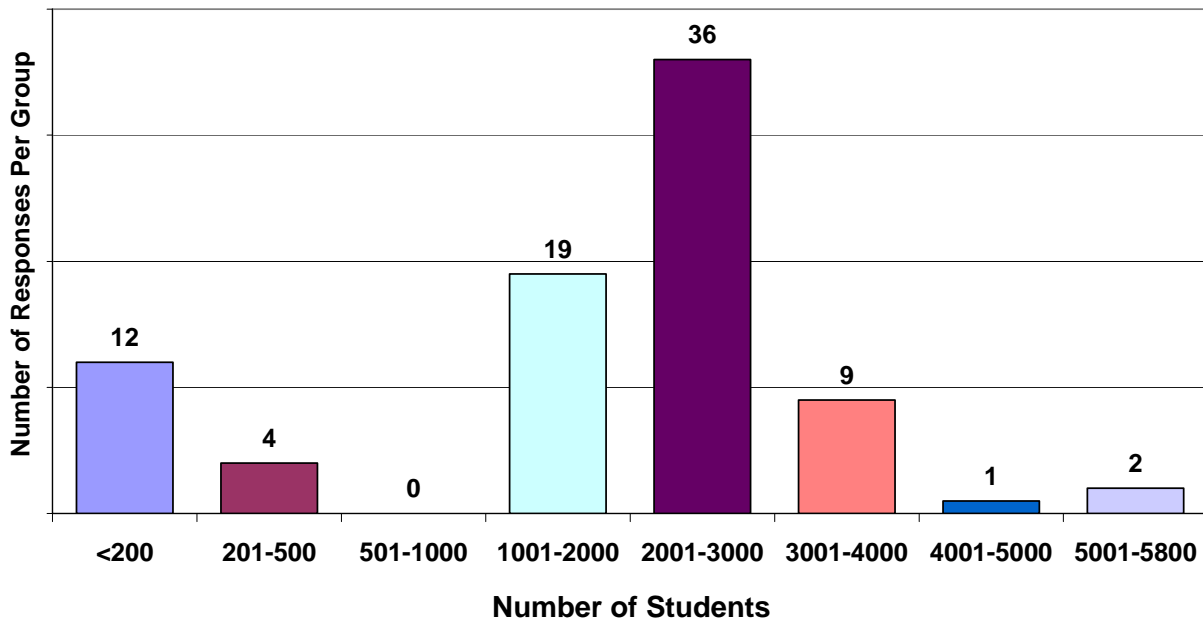
Years of Experience

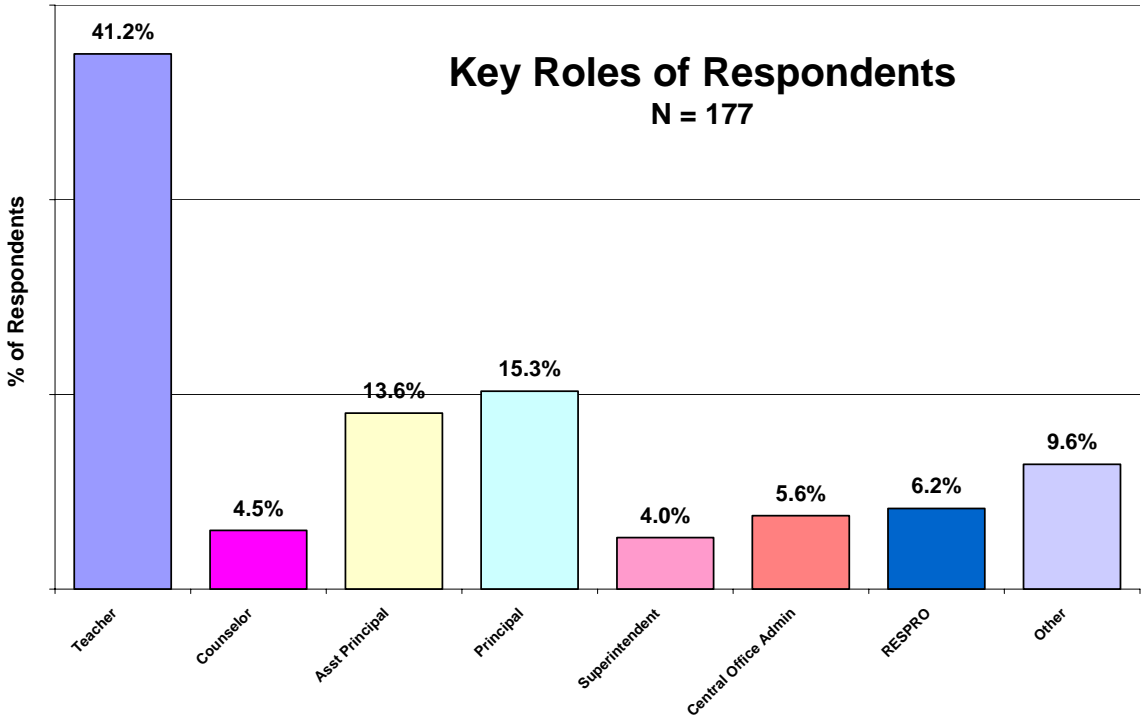
N = 184



Number/Size of Students/High School Served by Respondents

N = 145 Responses





Recommendations for the 2008 Conference

In sum, the 205 attendees who responded to the End-of-Conference Evaluation survey reported having a high level of satisfaction with this year's event and looked favorably toward the opportunity to attend next year. As noted earlier, there was an assortment of concerns found across the seven sessions. In most cases, however, these issues were accompanied by recommendations on how to improve the respondent's criticism. Lastly, and perhaps far more interesting, there were no surveys that expressed an overall dissatisfaction for the conference or its agenda.

Following is a list of 10 themes or topics the respondents recommended for attention or consideration in planning the 2008 conference:

- Align the breakout sessions according to school demographics.
- Allow more time for discussion and conversation among the presenters and attendees.
- Consider sessions on effective professional development and strategies for funding professional development.
- Emphasize school law updates, special education, Illinois High School Association, and effective discipline issues. What is working in these arenas?
- Consider presenting practical application ideas that conference attendees can implement immediately in their districts and schools.
- Incorporate more cross-curricular ideas.
- Limit the time devoted to formal lectures and create more time for small groups to discuss similar challenges.
- Provide handouts for all presentations.
- Encourage presenters to provide more insight into how their theories and ideas might transition into the practical world of the attendees' districts and schools.
- Provide more data on Illinois high schools and the challenges and successes being experienced.

References

Patton, M. Q. (1997). *Utilization focused evaluation: The new century text*. (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Wolcott, H. F. (1990). *Writing up qualitative research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage