

# Volume I:

Fast Response Survey System (FRSS) 105:  
Condition of Public School Facilities  
- Feasibility Calls

OMB# 1850-0803 v. 67

May 1, 2012  
National Center for Education Statistics  
U.S. Department of Education

## **Justification**

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), U.S. Department of Education (ED), requests OMB approval under the NCES system clearance for Cognitive, Pilot and Field Test studies (OMB #1850-0803) to conduct feasibility calls for a Fast Response Survey System (FRSS) survey #105 on the condition of public school facilities. Congress has appropriated funds for NCES to conduct an FRSS survey on the condition of public school facilities, with a First Look report on the results to be released in late 2013. FRSS previously conducted a survey on this topic in 1999. The 2012 FRSS survey will cover many of the same topics as the 1999 survey, but will use a revised questionnaire. A few items from the 1999 survey will be included on the 2012 questionnaire for comparison. As was done in 1999, schools will be sampled, but surveys will be mailed to districts, where facilities personnel and records are located.

The purpose of feasibility calls is to explore topics for potential new survey items, identify and correct any potential issues with the content and format of the survey before conducting pretests, and to ensure that the survey captures the intended meaning of the questions and minimizes the burden imposed on respondents. A request to conduct pretest activities will follow completion of the feasibility calls. Feasibility calls will involve asking members of the target populations to *review*, but not complete, a draft questionnaire and participate in a telephone discussion. Pretests will involve asking respondents to *complete* the survey and participate in a telephone debriefing. Feasibility calls will be done before pretests to minimize the burden on respondents. Pretests will be done as a final test prior to OMB clearance submission to conduct the full-scale survey. The request to conduct the full-scale survey will be submitted at a later date under OMB generic clearance for quick response surveys (OMB#1850-0733), which are authorized under the Education Science Reform Act of 2002. NCES has contracted Westat for all stages of this survey.

## **Design**

### **Overview of Survey Development**

The upcoming survey will cover many of the same topics as the 1999 survey on this topic, but will use a revised questionnaire. The revised questionnaire reflects lessons learned from the 1999 survey, as well as topics and issues identified through literature review. The instrument will include a few items from the 1999 survey for comparison.

We anticipate conducting up to three rounds of feasibility calls, each with ten or fewer respondents, who will review the questionnaire without completing it. Conducting multiple rounds of feasibility calls will systematically inform us of respondents' perceptions of the survey and response burden, and will result in several iterations of the questionnaire. The first round of calls will focus on the current draft questionnaire that contains revised items on the topics covered in the 1999 survey and questions on the new survey topics. For the next round of feasibility calls, we may add new survey questions and make changes to the existing survey questions, instructions, and definitions based on the initial round of feasibility calls. In the second round, we will ask respondents about any modifications made to the survey. Based on feedback, we will make any necessary changes to the survey and test those changes in the third round (if necessary). The resulting draft of the survey will be reviewed by the NCES Quality Review Board (QRB) and revised as necessary to prepare it for pretesting.

### **NCES Review and Consultations Outside of Agency**

The NCES QRB members reviewed a draft questionnaire prior to this submission for the feasibility calls. The questionnaire was also reviewed by the Office of Innovation and Improvement (OII) in the U.S. Department of Education and was sent to the Environmental Protection Agency for review. Revisions were made to the instrument and a few new items were added based on input from the reviewers.

## Sample, Burden, and Cost

In this submission, we are requesting approval for feasibility calls with members of the target population. We will conduct up to three rounds of feasibility calls for the survey, with 10 or fewer respondents per round. School districts will be recruited to participate in feasibility calls based on various district characteristics including size, locale, and geographic region. Respondents will be recruited by telephone and will be identified as the person in the district who is most familiar with the school facilities in their district.

Telephone interviewers will recruit participants for the feasibility calls using the recruitment script in attachment 1. Since facilities personnel and records are generally located at the district, we are recruiting district-level personnel to participate in the feasibility calls. Interviewers will schedule an appointment to complete the feasibility calls with cooperating district-level personnel. Following telephone recruitment, interviewers will either email, mail, or fax a cover letter and draft questionnaire to the participating districts (as discussed below in the Data Collection Instrument section). In order to recruit 10 respondents per round, we anticipate contacting 30 public school districts (Table 1). On average, recruitment calls with respondents who agree to participate in the feasibility calls are expected to take about 10 minutes to explain the purpose of the call and set up an appointment to discuss the survey; all other recruitment calls are expected to take about 3 minutes. Prior to the feasibility calls, respondents will be asked to review (but not complete) a draft survey, which should take approximately 10 minutes. The feasibility call should take approximately 30 minutes to complete. The estimated burden for one round of feasibility calls is approximately 10 hours, and total estimated burden time for all three rounds of feasibility calls is approximately 30 hours. We anticipate that the estimated cost to the federal government will be approximately \$4,000 for each round of feasibility calls.

Table 1. Estimated maximum burden time for up to three rounds of feasibility calls for FRSS 105

Respondents	Number of Respondents	Number of Responses <sup>1</sup>	Burden Hours per Respondent	Total Burden Hours
Each Round				
Recruitment – Schools not participating in the feasibility call	20	20	0.05	1
Recruitment – Schools participating in the feasibility call	10	10	0.17	2
Survey review and feasibility call	10	10	0.67	7
Total per round	30	40	-	10
Total for three rounds	90	120	-	30

<sup>1</sup> Counts each contact (e.g., recruitment and feasibility call are counted separately even when they are with the same respondents).

## Data Collection Instrument

For each round of feasibility calls, a cover letter and draft questionnaire will be emailed or faxed to each participating school district. The cover letter and questionnaire for the first round of feasibility calls are included in this document as Attachments 2 and 3. The cover letter thanks the respondent for agreeing to participate in the feasibility call, introduces the purpose and content of the survey, indicates that participation is voluntary, indicates that respondents should review the questionnaire without providing responses, includes questions for respondents to consider while reviewing the survey to help in providing feedback about the survey, and provides contact information should any questions arise before the scheduled discussion with the survey manager. On the cover letter and on the cover of the survey, respondents are assured that their participation is voluntary and their answers may only be used for statistical purposes and may not be disclosed or used in identifiable form for any other purpose unless compelled by law. The public law is cited on the cover letter and the front page of the survey. The

materials for subsequent rounds of calls will be similar, except the survey instrument for each round will include the modifications that resulted from the previous rounds. The current instrument is discussed below.

## **Questionnaire**

The survey is designed to collect information on the condition of the building systems/features in permanent and portable (temporary) buildings in schools, and on the satisfaction with the building environmental factors that result from them. Respondents will be asked (as they were in 1999) for their estimate of the total cost of repairs/renovations/modernizations to put the school's buildings in good overall condition, and on which sources (e.g., facilities inspections, capital improvement master plans) this estimate is based. Additionally, respondents will be asked to for their estimate of the total cost to replace the school's existing onsite buildings with new buildings of the same size at the same location. They will be asked about plans for major repair or renovation or replacement of building features and systems, and about plans for construction at the school in the next few years. Additional items will ask about the school's long-range educational facilities plan, actions taken to improve energy efficiency, and the availability of school construction funds.

Question 1 asks whether the school has two types of onsite buildings -- permanent and/or portable (temporary) buildings. Responses to the question indicate which parts of questions 2 and 8 should be completed.

Question 2 lists 13 building systems/features and asks about the condition of each in the school's permanent and portable (temporary) onsite buildings. Building features include things such as roofs, plumbing/lavatories, heating and air conditioning systems, electrical system, and life safety features. Part A asks about the condition of the various systems/features in the school's permanent buildings and part B asks about the condition of the same systems/features in the school's portable (temporary) buildings. Question 2 is a modified version of an item that was included in the 1999 survey. During the calls we will ensure that respondents understand the distinction between the dashes and zeros in the 'not applicable' column. We will also make sure that respondents can correctly interpret the rating scale and use the response grid.

Question 3 asks about the condition of various outdoor features at the school: school parking lots and roadways, bus lanes and drop-off areas, sidewalks and walkways, outdoor play areas/playgrounds, and outdoor athletic facilities.

Question 4 asks for an overall rating on the condition of the permanent and portable (temporary) onsite buildings at the sampled school. The question includes a 4-point rating scale (excellent, good, fair, poor) and a "not applicable" option if the school does not have either permanent and/or portable onsite buildings. This is a modified version of an item that was included in the 1999 survey.

Question 5 asks for the best estimate of the total cost of all repairs/renovations/modernizations required to put the school's onsite buildings in good overall condition. If the school's onsite buildings are already in good or excellent overall condition, respondents are instructed to enter zero. This item was included in the 1999 survey.

Question 6 asks about the sources on which the cost estimate given in question 5 is based. This item was included in the 1999 survey.

Question 7 asks for the best estimate of the total cost to replace the school's existing onsite building with new school buildings. During feasibility calls, we plan to discuss this item with respondents to determine if this information is readily available.

Question 8 asks how satisfactory various environmental factors are in the school's onsite buildings. Environmental factors include things such as artificial and natural lighting, heating, air conditioning, ventilation, indoor air quality, water quality, and acoustics or noise control. Satisfaction is rated separately for permanent and portable (temporary) buildings. This is a modified version of an item that was included in the 1999 survey. We will ensure during feasibility calls that respondents can correctly use the response grid.

Question 9 asks in what year the school's main instructional building was constructed, and question 10 asks in what year the last major renovation of the main instructional building took place. Both items were included in the 1999 survey. Question 11 asks in what year the last major renovation/addition/replacement was made to the school. These items provide information about the functional age of the school.

Question 12 asks whether any major repair/renovation/modernization work is currently being performed at the school. Question 13 asks whether any major repair/renovation/modernization work for the school is currently under contract, but not yet begun. These items provide information about current and future work to improve school conditions.

Question 14 asks which kinds of construction projects, if any, are planned for the school in the next 2 years. The construction projects include building new permanent buildings or permanent additions to buildings; major repairs, renovations, modernization of existing permanent buildings; and installing new portable (temporary) buildings. This is a modified version of an item that was included in the 1999 survey.

Question 15 lists the same 13 building systems/features used in Question 2, and asks which, if any, have major repairs renovations, or replacements planned for the next 2 years. If major repairs, renovations or replacements are planned, part B asks for the main reason for this work.

Question 16 asks if there is a written long-range educational facilities plan for the school. This item was included in the 1999 survey. If the response is "no," then Q17 is skipped.

Question 17 asks if the school's long-range educational facilities plan includes improving energy efficiency, improving environmental conditions (e.g., air quality, acoustics), and creating a Green School or Green Classrooms. This is a new item, which will be discussed with respondents and modified as necessary for later drafts of the survey.

Question 18 asks about the use of licensed professionals within the last 3 years to perform a facility inspection/assessment, energy review walk-through, and evaluation of the indoor air quality. Question 19 asks about actions undertaken within the last 3 years to improve energy efficiency at the school. Actions include replacing lighting fixtures or bulbs, or installing motion-sensors for lighting; replacing windows and/or doors; and replacing insulation, outer walls and/or siding. These are new items which will be discussed with respondents and modified as necessary for later drafts of the survey.

Question 20 asks whether the school district in which this school is located have the ability to issue bonds or increase levies for school construction. Question 21 asks about the availability of state funds for school construction. The items about school construction funding were requested by OII. They will be discussed with respondents to determine whether this information is readily accessible.

Question 22 asks whether there are significant problems with the facilities at the school that are not covered in this survey. If the response is "yes," space is provided to describe the problems. During feasibility calls, this information will be used to assess whether additional items are needed in the survey.

## **Timeline**

Feasibility call activities are expected to begin in May 2012, as soon as approval is received from OMB. Feasibility call activities are anticipated to take about three months to complete, including potentially three rounds of feasibility calls and revisions to the survey between each round.

## Attachment 1: FRSS 105 Feasibility Call Recruitment Script

### FRSS 105 Condition of Public School Facilities Feasibility Call Recruitment Script

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_.

I am calling from Westat on behalf of the U.S. Department of Education regarding a survey on the condition of public school facilities. I would like to ask the district-level person who is most familiar with school facilities in your district to review a draft questionnaire and provide feedback.

Who is the person in your district who is most knowledgeable about school facilities?  
(*This is often a district facilities coordinator or an assistant superintendent.*)

May I please speak to that person?

#### **CONNECTED TO DISTRICT-LEVEL PERSON MOST FAMILIAR WITH SCHOOL FACILITIES IN THE DISTRICT**

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_.

I'm calling from Westat on behalf of the U.S. Department of Education regarding a survey on the condition of public school facilities. We would like your help in reviewing our draft questionnaire to ensure that it is clear and easy to complete. Specifically, we would like you to review a draft questionnaire and then obtain your comments about the survey by telephone. You will not need to complete the questionnaire. [The call will take about 30 minutes.]

1. How would you like me to send you the survey materials (email, fax, FedEx)?
2. We ask that you review the questionnaire before you talk to the survey manager. When would be a good time for the survey manager, Debbie Alexander, to call you to discuss the survey and obtain your comments? How about [SUGGEST A TIME]. [*Just to be sure, you are in the [Eastern, Central, Mountain, Pacific] time zone?*]
3. What is the best telephone number for the survey manager to reach you on?

Thank you. Your insights will be very helpful.



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U.S. Department of Education • Institute of Education Sciences • National Center for Education Statistics

May 2012

Dear Participant,

Thank you for agreeing to give us feedback on the draft survey on the condition of public school facilities. Westat, a research company located in Rockville, Maryland, is conducting this survey for the National Center for Education Statistics, U. S. Department of Education. As part of our survey development, we are looking for feedback from district-level personnel about the draft questionnaire and topics that might be included in the survey. Your input will be essential in ultimately developing a questionnaire that is clear and relevant and not overly burdensome to respondents. All information you provide may be used only for statistical purposes and may not be disclosed, or used, in identifiable form for any other purpose unless otherwise compelled by law (Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002, 20 U.S.C. § 9573).

We ask that you *review* the enclosed/attached draft questionnaire, including the instructions and each questionnaire item prior to our telephone conversation. It is not necessary to provide answers to the questions at this stage. Feel free, however, to offer any relevant feedback. It may be helpful to keep the following questions in mind as you review the materials:

- 1) Are the instructions on the questionnaire clear and easy to interpret?
- 2) Are the survey questions clear and easy to interpret?
- 3) Are we missing any questions that you feel are important to include in the survey? Are there any questions that should be deleted?
- 4) This survey is designed to be completed at the district level. Is there any information requested in the survey that is only available at the school level? Would you be able to obtain the information necessary for answering these questions?

My colleague and I will call you at the scheduled time to get your feedback on the materials and to discuss any comments or suggestions you may have. In the meantime, feel free to call me at Westat's toll-free number, 800-937-8281, ext. 2088, if you have any questions. You may also reach me by email at [DebbieAlexander@westat.com](mailto:DebbieAlexander@westat.com).

Thank you for your much needed assistance!

Sincerely,

Debbie Alexander  
Westat Survey Manager