

A Post-Action Review of the Safe School Assessment Process: Perceptions of Participating Superintendents and Principals

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Prepared by:

David C. May, Ph.D.

Yanfen Chen, M.S.

Kentucky Center for School Safety

History of the Safe School Assessment Process

In the 2002-2003 academic year, the Kentucky Center for School Safety (KCSS), in collaboration with the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) and the Kentucky School Boards Association (KSBA, including its insurance service), developed a service designed to provide schools with an independent examination of their climate and culture that would broaden their existing efforts toward enhancing the school's learning environment. Since that time, this process has been refined and expanded to encompass more than 70 schools each year. The data presented in this report reflect responses received from principals and superintendents who participated in the safe school assessment process in their school or district during the 2007-2008 school year.

What is a Safe School Assessment?

A safe school assessment is an independent examination of a school, including its climate, culture, and physical plant as related to the enhancement of safe and healthy learning environments. The Safe School Assessment (SSA) typically begins with a written request from the school district's superintendent. A letter of confirmation is then sent to the superintendent confirming a date and time for an assessment team to arrive at the school. Included with the letter of confirmation are safe school surveys designed for three different groups: staff, students, and parents.

In the letter, the principal is asked to administer the surveys and then to send them to the KCSS office for coding and analysis prior to the visit by the SSA team. The school is also asked to provide several documents for team members, including the student handbook, the school's behavior management plan (if one exists), the district's student code of conduct, the school crisis response plan (Emergency Management Plan), and

other documents that relate to school safety issues. On the day of the visit, the SSA team (usually six members) arrives in time to observe the arrival of students, including school bus activity, and to meet with the school principal prior to conducting the assessment. During the day, the SSA team members: conduct extensive interviews with staff members, students, and parents; observe arrival and dismissal procedures; observe class changes and lunch/cafeteria procedures; and conduct a walk-through of the physical plant. Approximately an hour before school dismissal, team members convene to draft a preliminary report for the principal and, if the principal or superintendent desires, the team meets with the school staff after school to discuss the results of the assessment. Approximately three weeks after the visit, a comprehensive report is sent to the superintendent and principal. After receiving the final report, the staff may determine that additional assistance is needed to address specific recommendations made by the SSA team. Funded by a grant from KDE, KCSS will provide technical assistance and/or professional development (at no cost) to any school that has received a Safe School Assessment.

Safe School Assessments during the 2007-08 Academic Year

During the 2007-2008 academic year, the KCSS conducted safe school assessments in 44 districts at 83 schools. As part of an effort to assess the effectiveness of the SSA process, KCSS staff designed a questionnaire to elicit responses from principals and superintendents in the affected schools and districts. Both groups were sent a cover letter and a mailing with a questionnaire regarding this topic in mid-July. One follow-up mailing occurred in late-July and one in August to any principal or superintendent who had not responded to earlier mailings. The final sample for this

report is derived from the responses of 44 superintendents (from a pool of 44 superintendents who had a SSA conducted in their district, a 100.0% response rate) and 78 principals (from a pool of 83 principals who had a SSA conducted in their school, a response rate of 94.0%). The results from that data collection effort are presented in charts included in the Appendix; the discussion of those charts is included below.

Results

As this is the fifth year for which we have collected data using similar instruments regarding the effectiveness of the SSA, we have included data from 2003-04 to 2007-08 academic years in some of the charts below. For the small number of new questions that were added to the 2005-06, 2006-07, and 2007-08 principal and superintendent questionnaires, the charts reflect only 2005-06, 2006-07, and 2007-08 data.

We first asked both groups whether they were given notification prior to the visit by the SSA team. Responses to that question are presented in Chart 1. For each of the five years, the majority of principals and almost all superintendents indicated that they were notified prior to the visit. Moreover, for 2007-08, practically all principals and superintendents (93.4% and 100%, respectively) stated that they were notified prior to the visit. As such, the number of principals and superintendents who indicated they were notified prior to the visit of the SSA team increased by 3.2% and 12.5%, respectively, over the five-year period.

Respondents were then asked if it was their decision to conduct the SSA on the day that it was performed. These responses are presented in Chart 2. Over half of the principals in 2003-04, 2004-05, 2005-06, and 2007-08 (52.4%, 57.8%, 50.0%, and 56.8% respectively) and one in three principals in 2006-07 (36.8%) stated that they had made

the decision; all of the superintendents in 2003-04, two in three superintendents in 2004-05 and 2007-08 (66.7% and 65.9%, respectively), and the majority of the superintendents in 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 (83.3% and 84.2%, respectively) stated that they had made the decision. Open-ended responses to these questions indicated that, in some districts, the decision regarding the date the assessment would be conducted was made as a collaborative effort between the superintendent and the principal.

In 2005-06, a question was added to the questionnaire that asked how the respondent chose to be debriefed after the SSA was completed. Their responses are presented in Chart 3, 4, and 5. Two in five (40.7%) principals in 2005-06, and over half of the principals (50.0% and 57.3%, respectively) in 2006-07 and 2007-08; and over one in four (27.9%) superintendents in 2007-08 chose to be debriefed alone at the end of the assessment day (see Chart 3). In 2005-06 and 2006-07, less than half of the principals (49.2% and 48.4%, respectively), in 2007-08 more than one in three principals (38.7%), and three in five superintendents (60.5%) in 2007-2008 chose to be debriefed with designated staff members at the end of the assessment day (see Chart 4). From 2005-06 to 2007-08, only small percentages of principals (8.5%, 1.6%, and 5.3%, respectively) and around one in five superintendents (25.9%, 13.9%, and 18.6%, respectively) asked the team leader to return on a day some time after the visit for the debriefing (see Chart 5). Respondents were then asked if the debriefing was productive (responses presented in Chart 6). Practically all principals and superintendents (98.6% and 100.0%, respectively) indicated that the debriefing was productive.

Both groups were then asked if the “Areas of Mutual Concern” identified by the SSA team were “legitimate concerns” based on their knowledge of the schools. The vast

majority of the principals and superintendents (96.1% and 97.7%, respectively) that responded to this question felt that the concerns were legitimate (see Chart 7). Further, in five years, all superintendents and principal stated that the recommendations offered by the SSA team were helpful (see Chart 8). Thus, practically all of the principals and superintendents felt that the areas identified by the SSA team as weaknesses were legitimate and that the recommendations offered by the team were valid recommendations.

Additionally, in 2005-06, a question was added that asked the respondents whether "...a strategy to address the areas of mutual concern was included in the Action plan..." for the school (principals) and district (superintendents). In 2007-2008, the vast majority in each group (90.1% of the principals and 97.5% of the superintendents) responded affirmatively (see Chart 9). The results from other questions added for 2005-06 also indicate that the vast majority of superintendents and principals also responded that the results of the SSA were presented to the faculty (see Chart 10) and to the site-based council (see Chart 11). In 2007-08, more than four in five principals (84.1%) and three in four superintendents (79.5%) stated that the results of the assessment were presented to the Board of Education (see Chart 12).

Both groups were then asked whether the schools where the SSA was conducted requested additional help from the KCSS. Responses to that question are presented in Chart 13. In 2003-04, two in five principals and superintendents (42.9% and 44.4%, respectively) indicated their district had requested additional support from KCSS, and two in five principals and one in four superintendents (38.5% and 28.0%, respectively) in 2004-05 stated they had requested additional support from KCSS. In 2005-06, only one

in four principals and almost one in five of superintendents (24.6% and 19.2%, respectively) had requested additional support. Interestingly, one in eight principals and one in four superintendents (12.9% and 27.0%, respectively) in 2006-07 had requested additional support from KCSS. In 2007-08, one in four principals and superintendents (28.0% and 23.8%, respectively) had requested additional support from KCSS.

Nevertheless, the results presented in Chart 14 indicate that the vast majority of respondents from each group from 2003-04 to 2007-08 responded that the affected schools had developed action plans to address the issues identified by the SSA team during their visit and the percentage agreeing with that statement increased each year from 2003-04 to 2005-06 but decreased each from 2006-07 to 2007-08. Thus, most schools used the SSA results in a manner that would help enhance school safety at the affected schools.

Respondents were also asked whether they wanted their school or district to participate in the SSA. In 2007-08, the majority of the principals and the superintendents (91.9% and 86.4%, respectively) responded “yes” to that question (see Chart 15). In 2003-04, the vast majority of the principals and all the superintendents (94.7% and 100.0%, respectively) agreed with the question. In 2004-05, only two in three principals (66.7%), and the majority of the superintendents (96.2%) agreed with the question. In 2005-06, over seven in ten principals (72.1%) and the vast majority of the superintendents (96.7%) agreed with the question. In 2006-07, the majority of the principals and superintendents (91.8% and 89.5%, respectively) agreed with the question. Additionally, in each of the five years, all of the superintendents and practically all of the principals agreed that: (1) they were provided with the information that they needed to

ensure the SSA process went as smoothly as possible at their school(s) prior to the arrival of the SSA team (see Chart 16); and (2) the instructions regarding the expectations of the activities of the school staff during the visit were clear and easy to understand (see Chart 17). Thus, the vast majority of the respondents felt that the KCSS did a good job in preparing the schools for their visit.

Respondents were then asked three questions regarding their interaction with the SSA team on the day of the visit. With the exception of one principal in 2007-08, all superintendents and principals felt that the SSA team members were friendly and approachable throughout their visits (see Chart 18) and that members of the SSA team performed their duties in a professional manner (see Chart 19). Additionally, practically all principals and superintendents agreed that the SSA process flowed well and was minimally disruptive to the school activities on the day that it was performed (see Chart 20). Thus, the respondents from both groups agreed that the SSA process went smoothly on the day it was performed at their school(s).

Respondents were then asked whether the recommendations from the SSA team were included in the school and district comprehensive plans. From 2003-04 to 2007-08, the majority of superintendents and principals stated that the recommendations from the team were included in the district plan (see Chart 21) and that the recommendations of the SSA were included in the affected school's *Comprehensive School Improvement Plan* (see Chart 22). Thus, the vast majority of the schools and districts are using the recommendations from the SSA visit to improve the safety of the schools where the visits occurred.

Respondents were then asked questions regarding their opinion on how to improve the SSA process. Respondents were asked whether a review of the recent school insurance and worker's compensation claims submitted by school district employees by the SSA team would be a valuable improvement in the SSA process. All respondents in 2003-04, and vast majority of the respondents from 2004-05 to 2007-08 agreed that step would be an improvement to the SSA process (see Chart 23). Thus, while the responses throughout the report indicate that the principals and superintendents feel the SSA process was useful and helpful; both groups also felt the review of these components would be useful. Finally, respondents were asked whether they would recommend the SSA process to a colleague in another district. With the exception of one principal in 2005-06 and two principals in 2007-08, for each of the five years in question, all principals and superintendents agreed that they would recommend this service to a colleague (see Chart 24).

It is evident throughout the survey that the respondents find value in this process and endorse the continuation of this collaborative service. Therefore, one could conclude that the SSA process will become an even more widely used service in the future; the increasing number of requests for assessments gives evidence to this finding as well.

Appendix

Chart 1

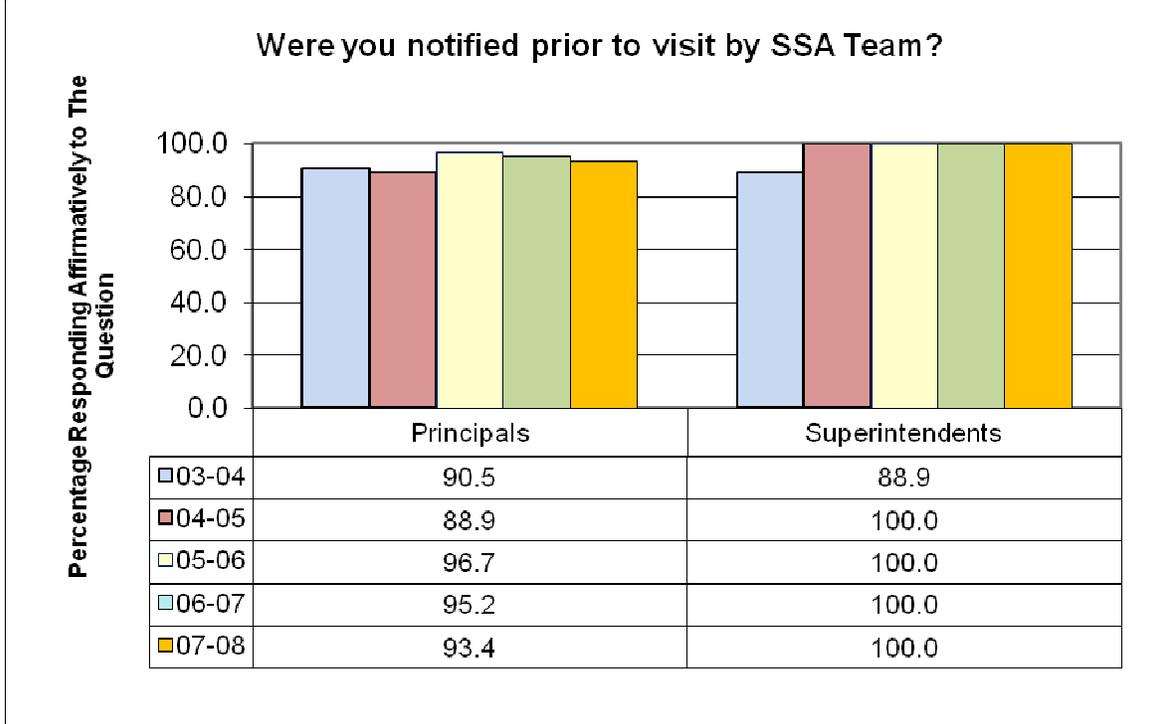


Chart 2

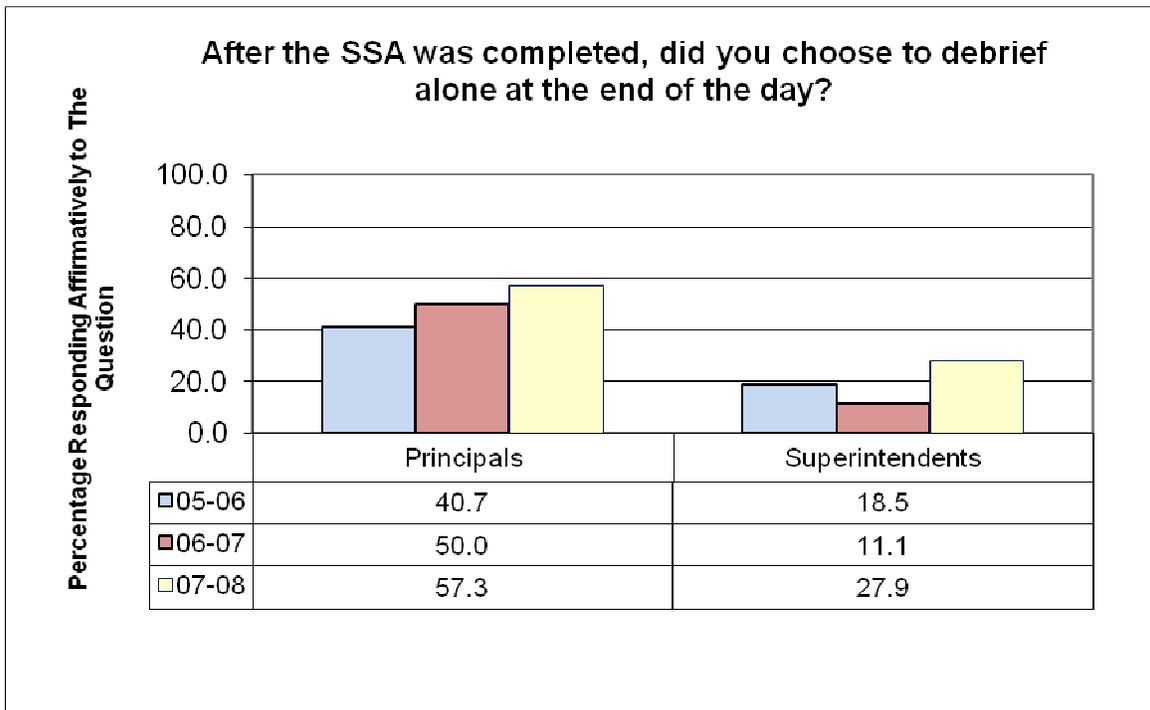


Chart 4

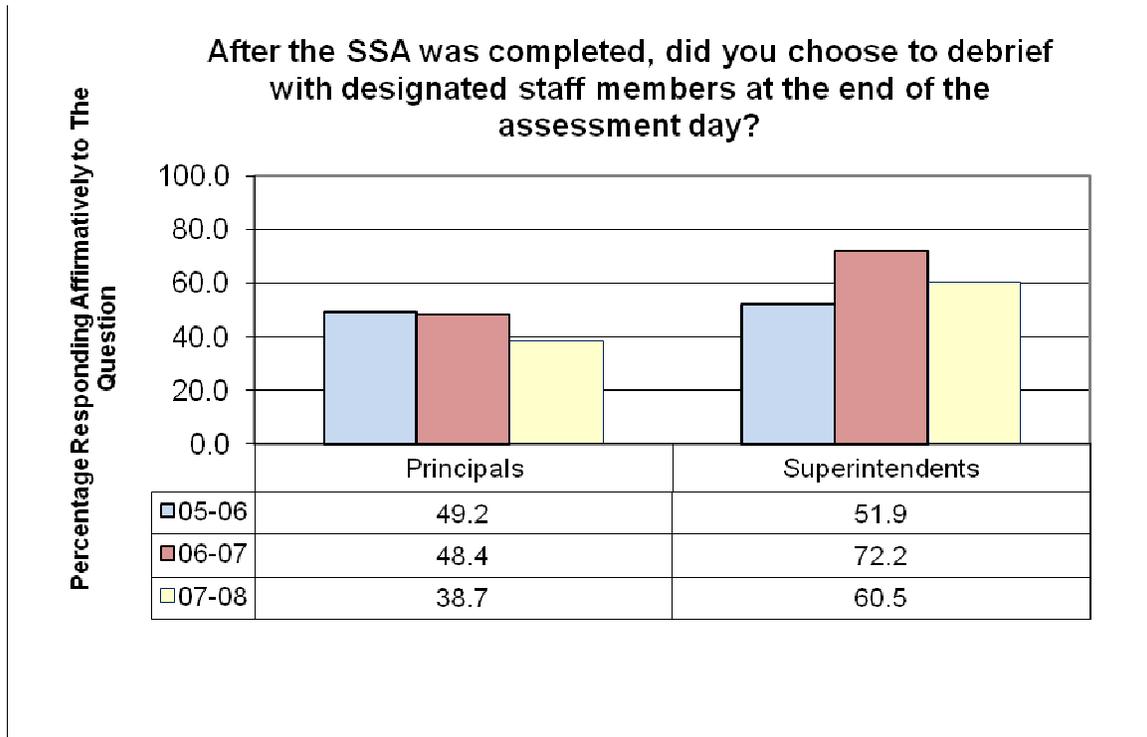


Chart 5

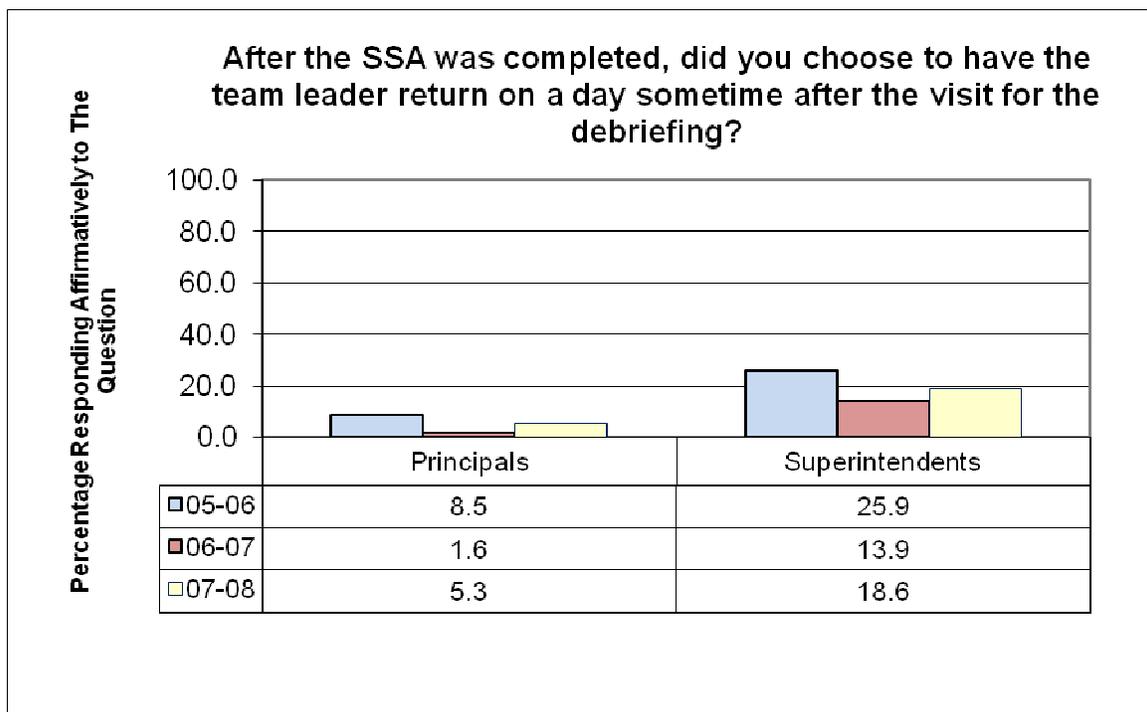


Chart 6

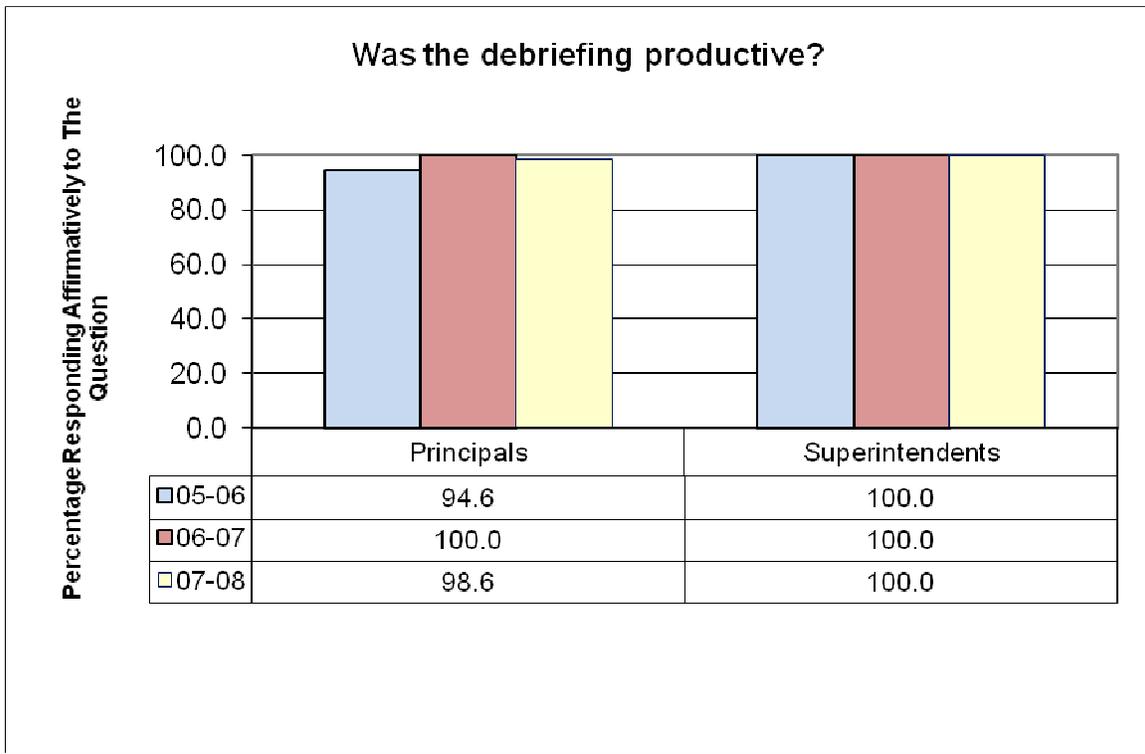


Chart 7

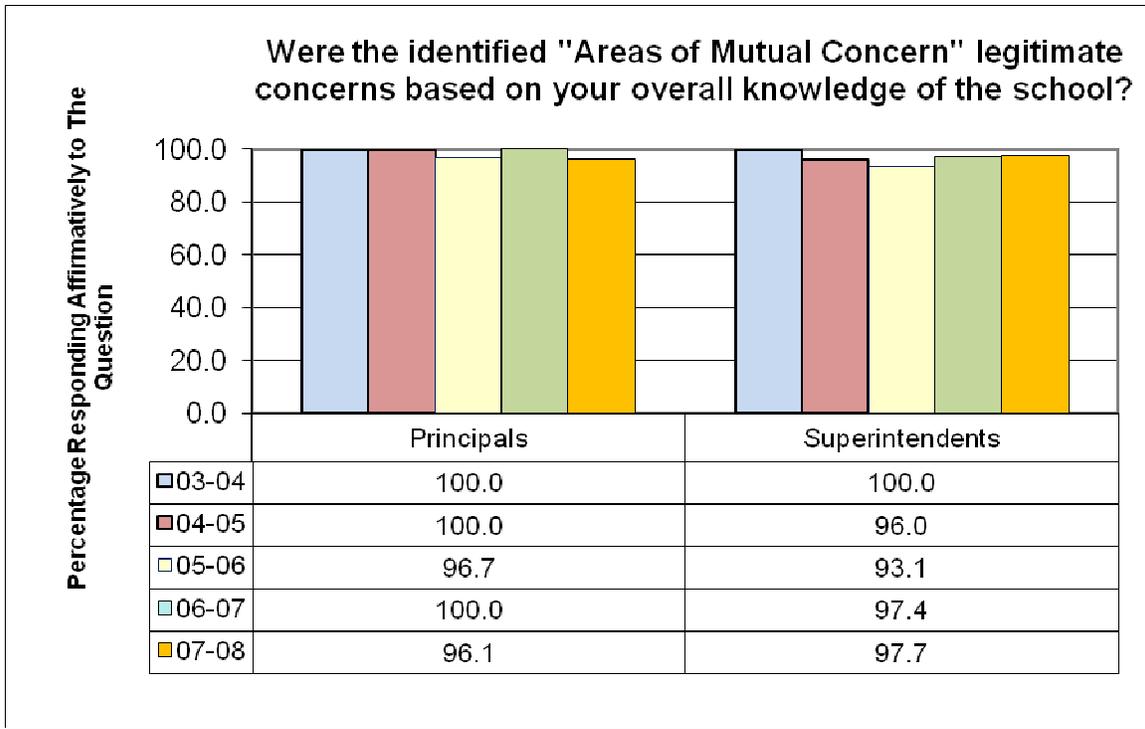


Chart 8

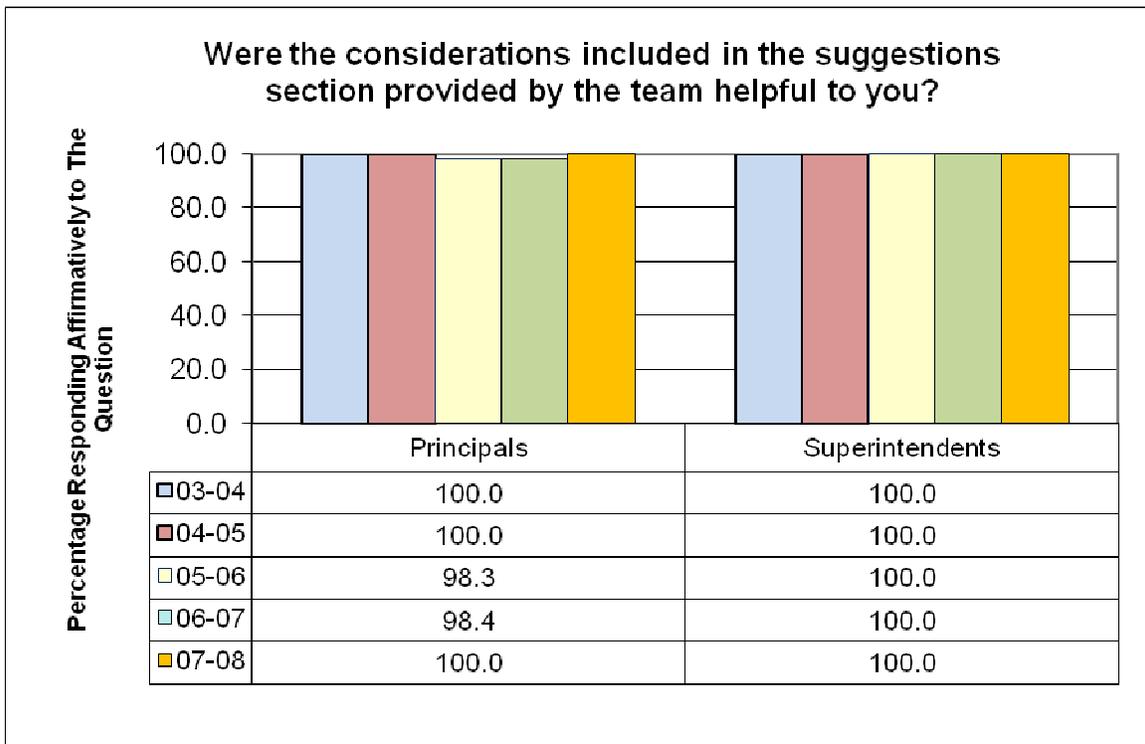


Chart 9

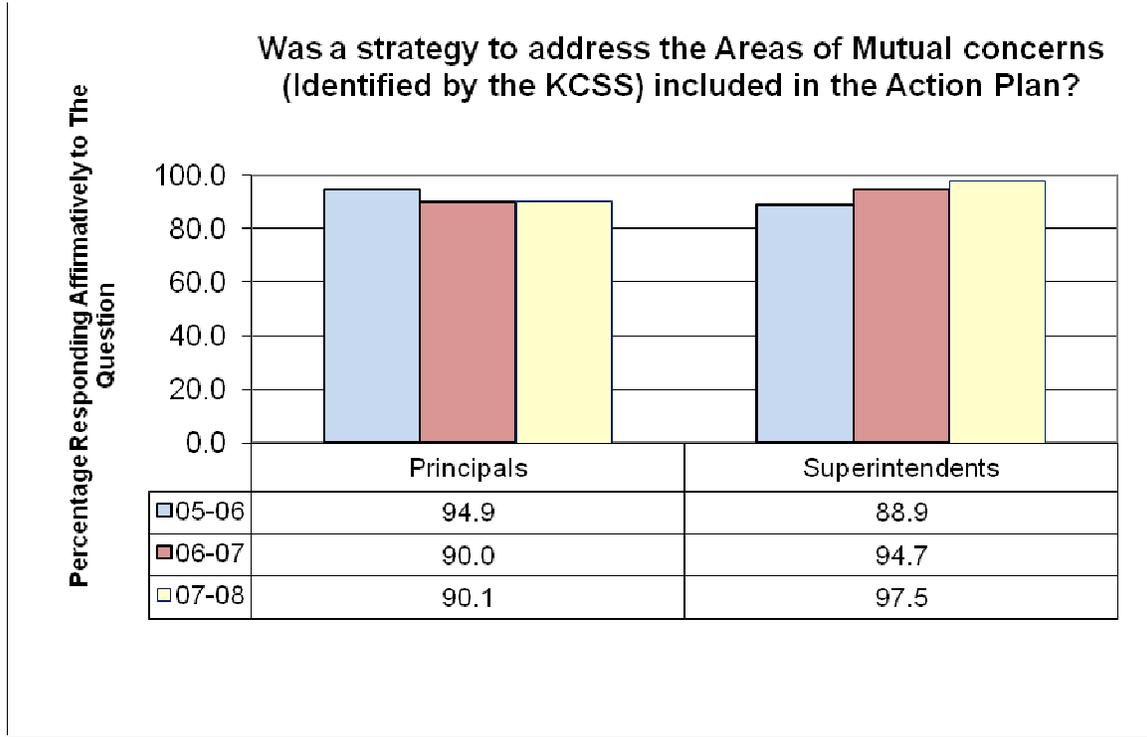


Chart 10

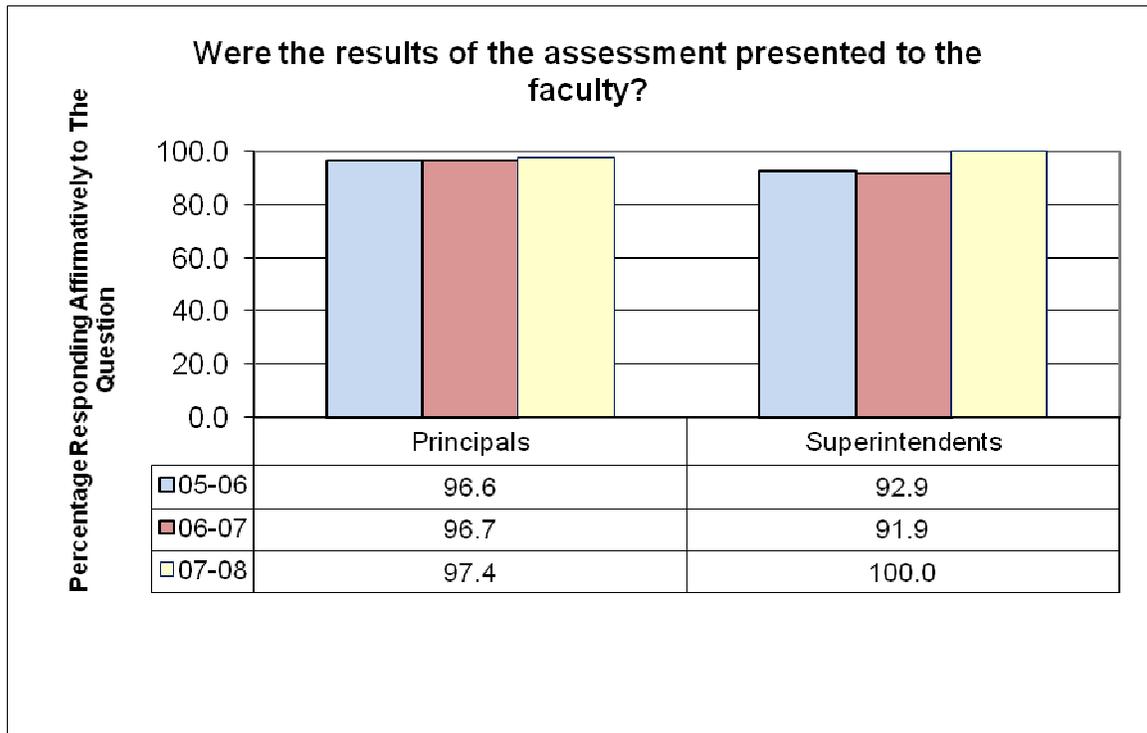


Chart 11

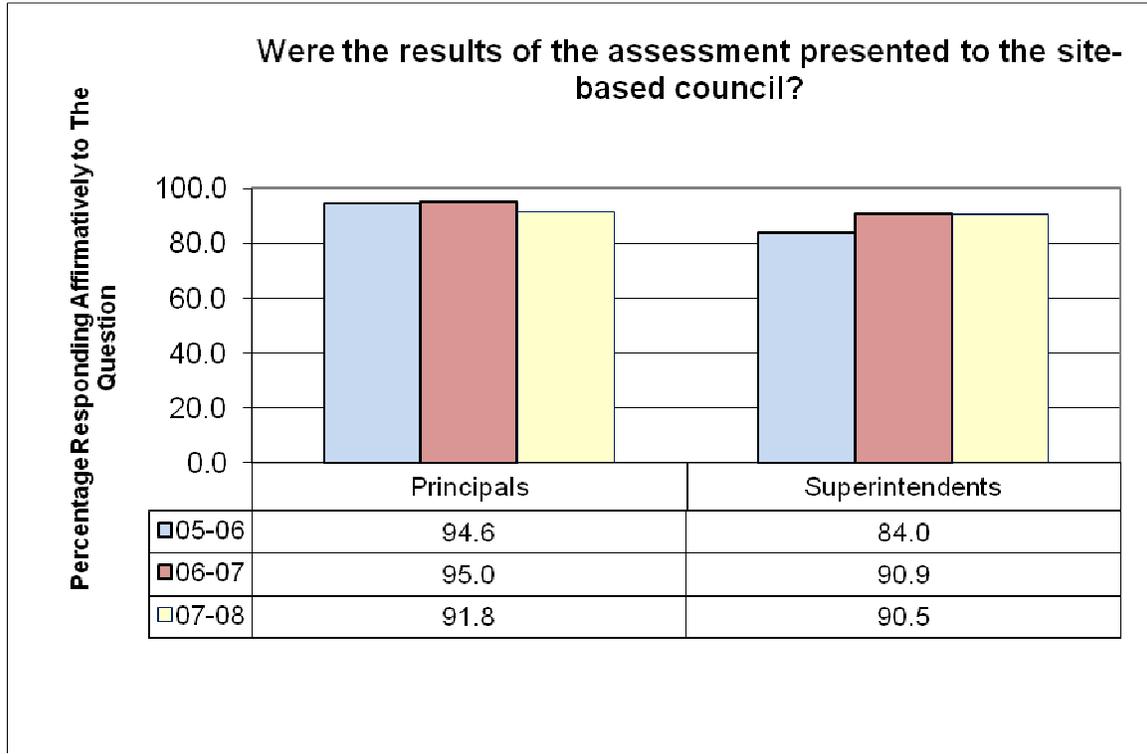


Chart 12

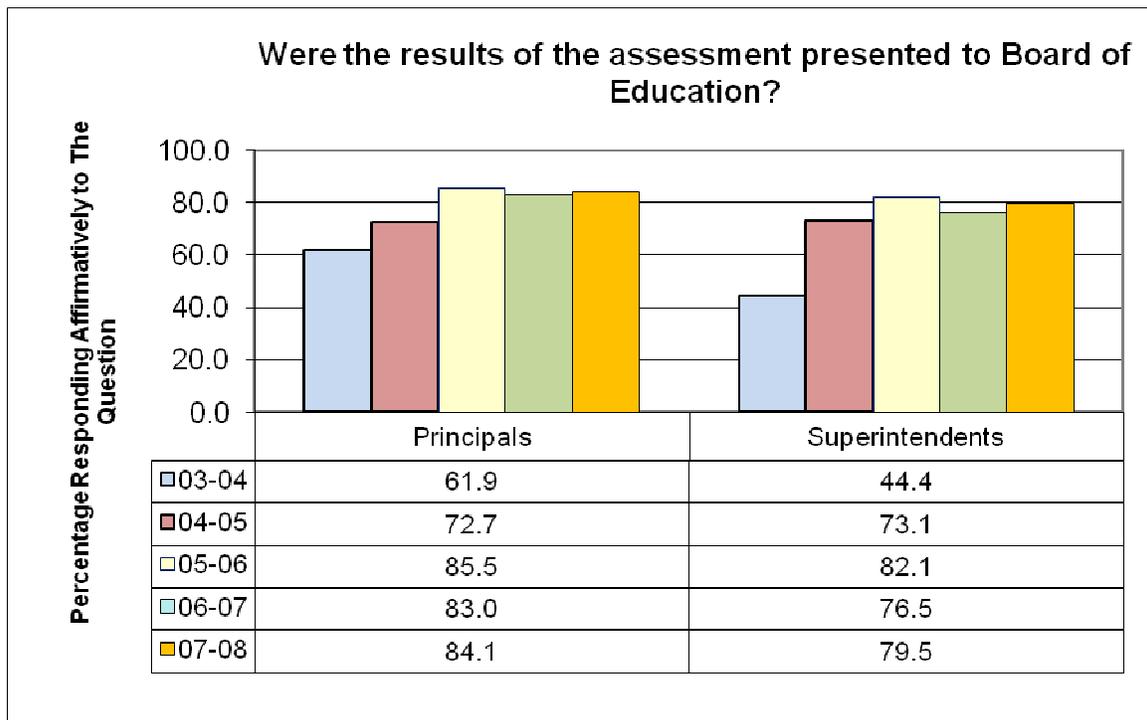


Chart 13

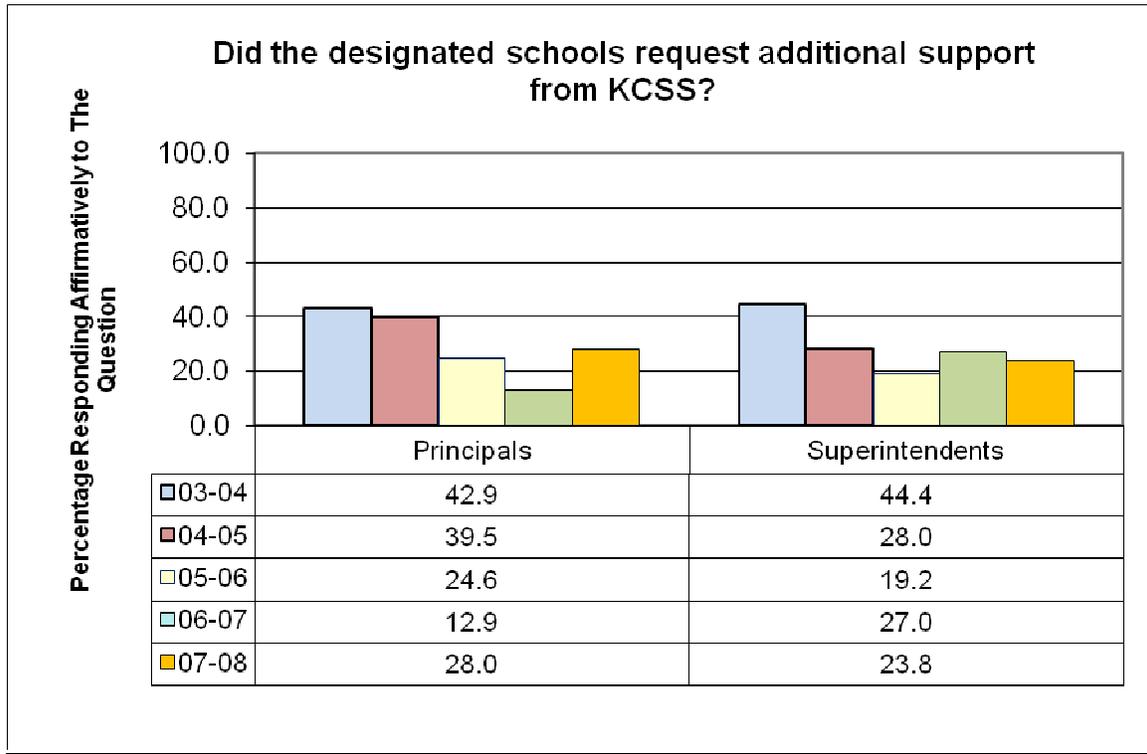


Chart 14

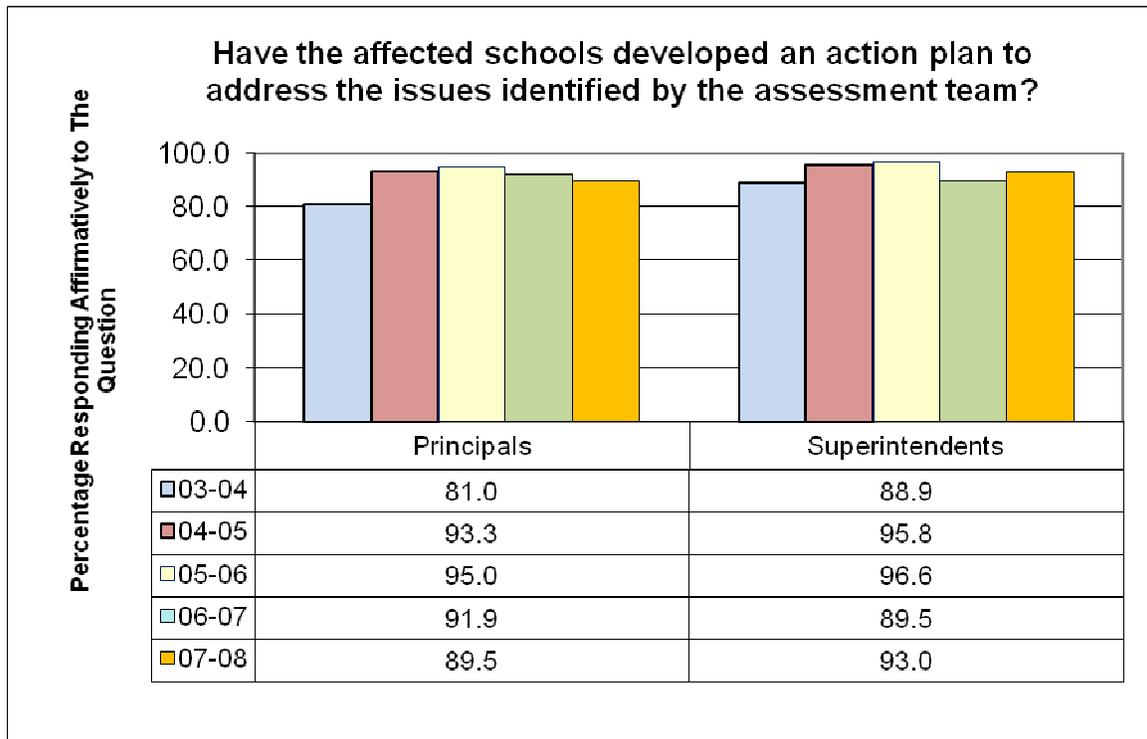


Chart 15

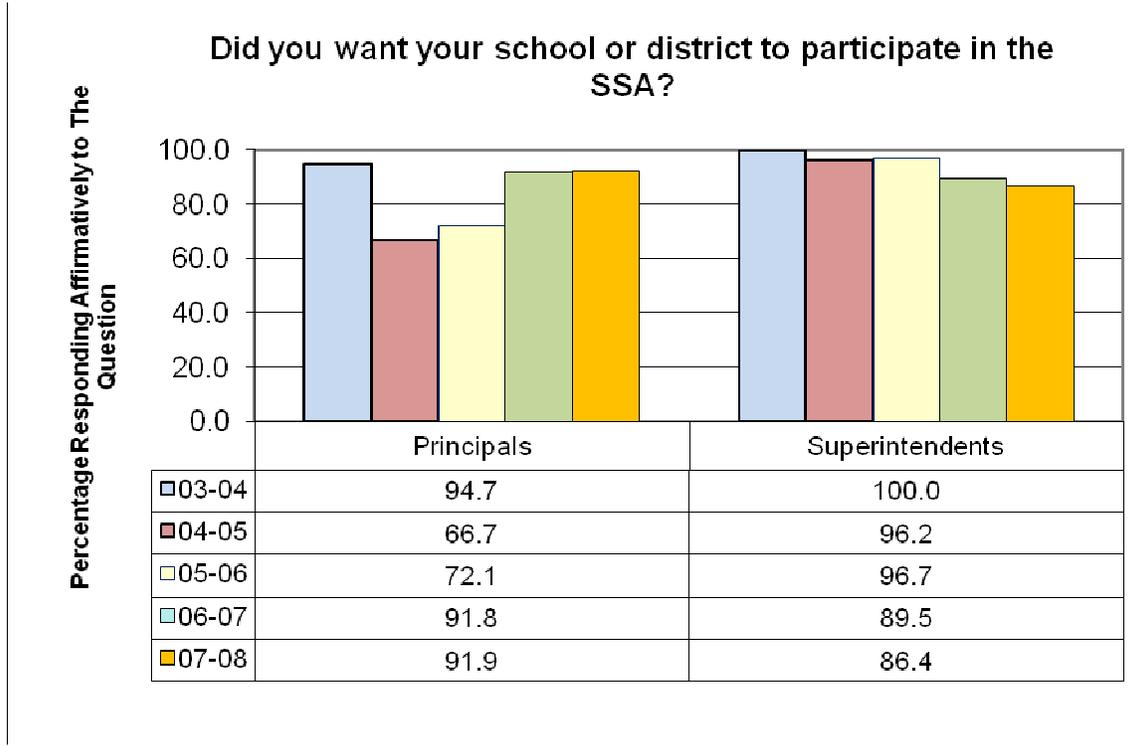


Chart 16

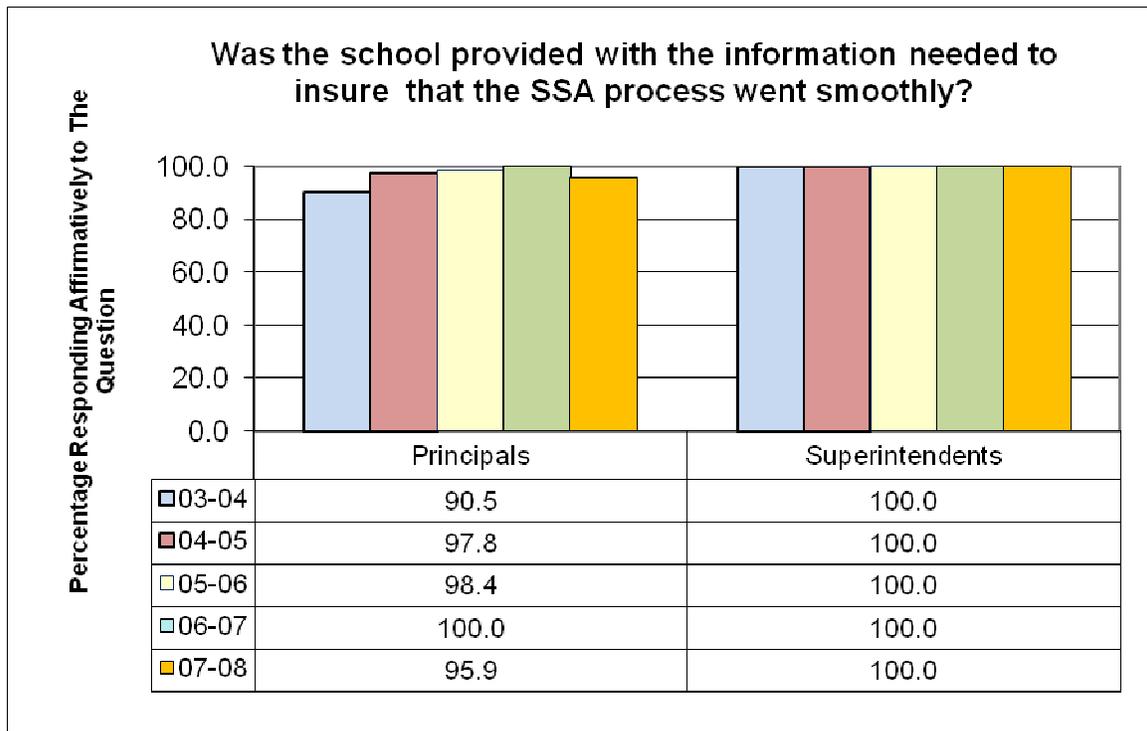


Chart 17

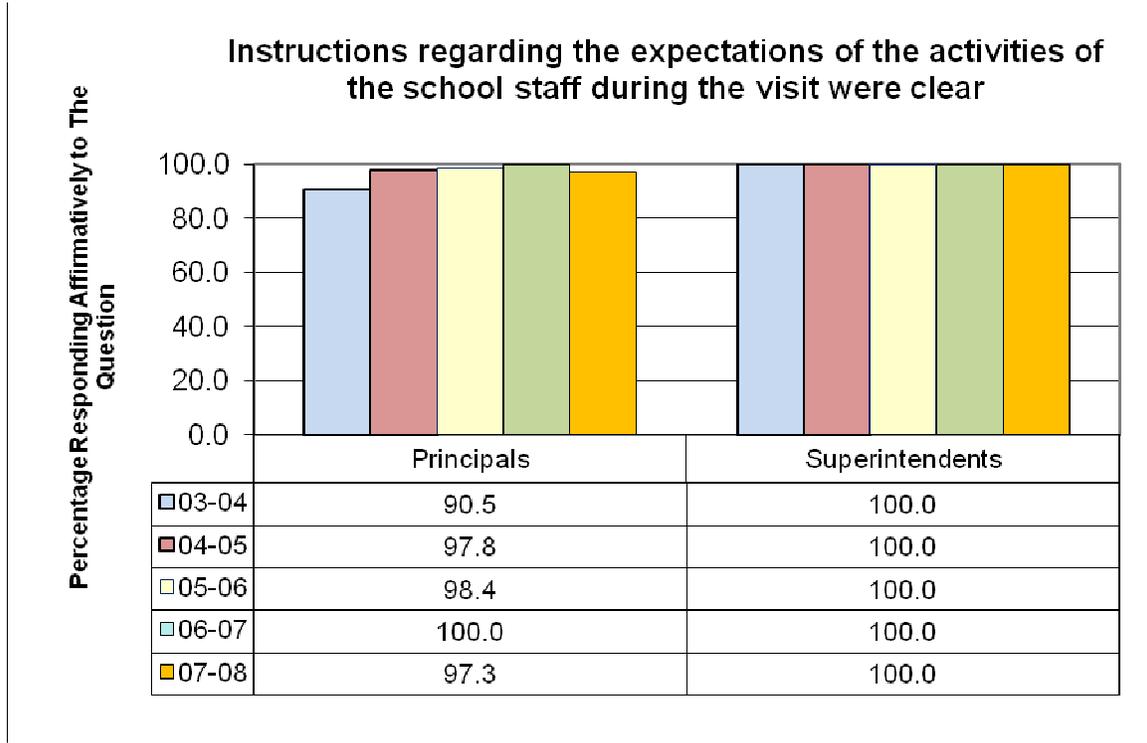


Chart 18

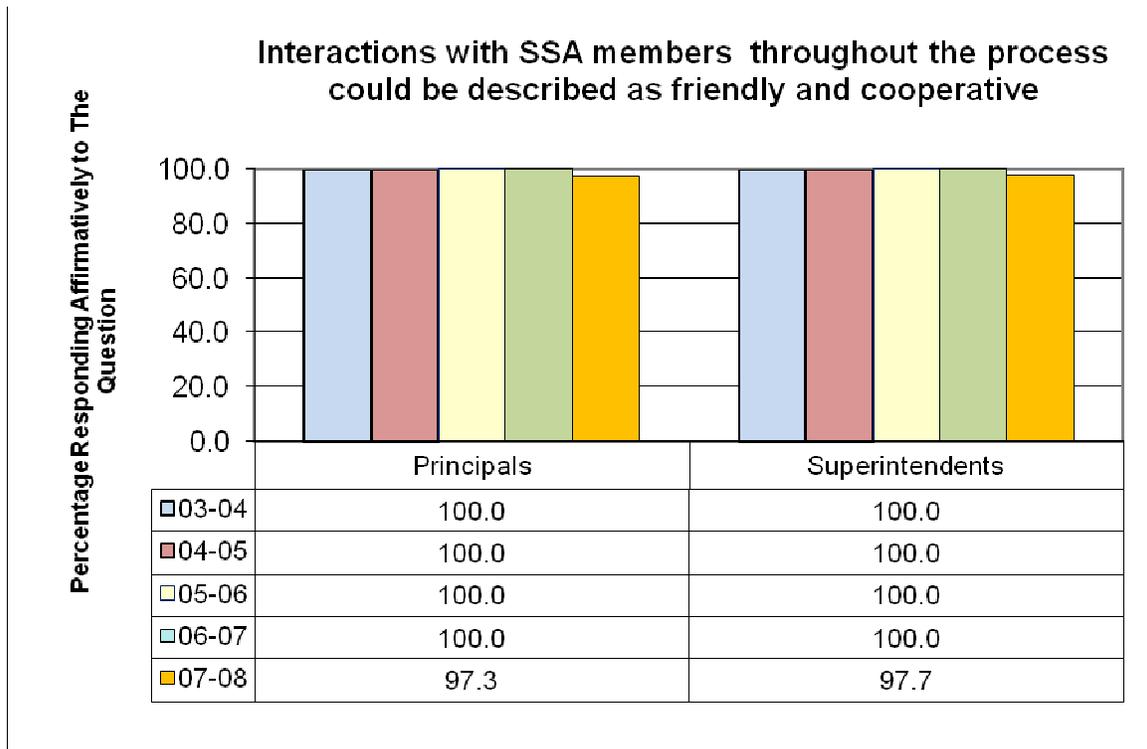


Chart 19

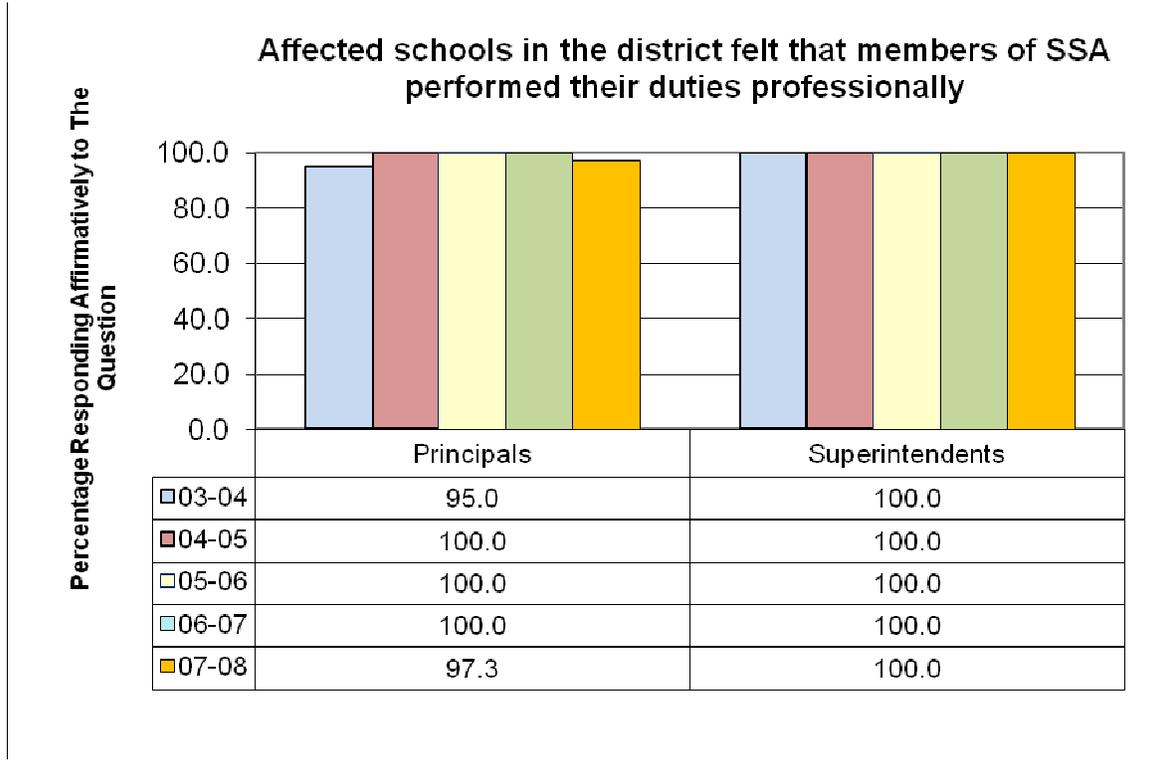


Chart 20.

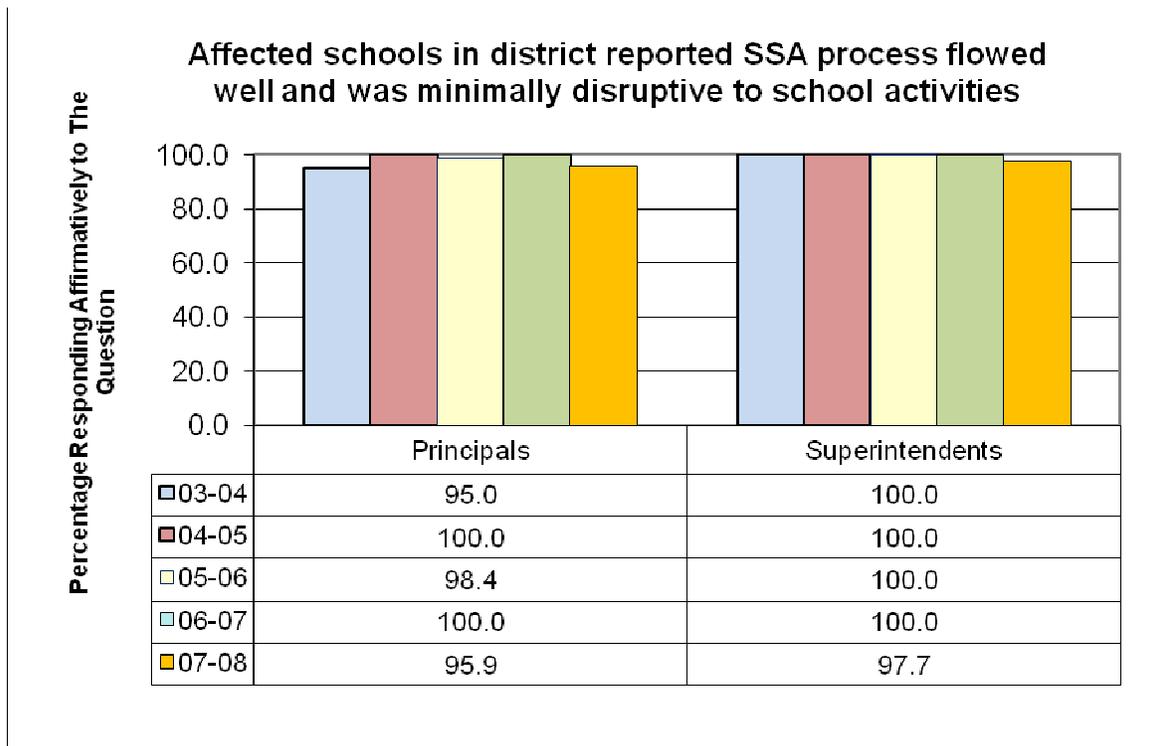


Chart 21

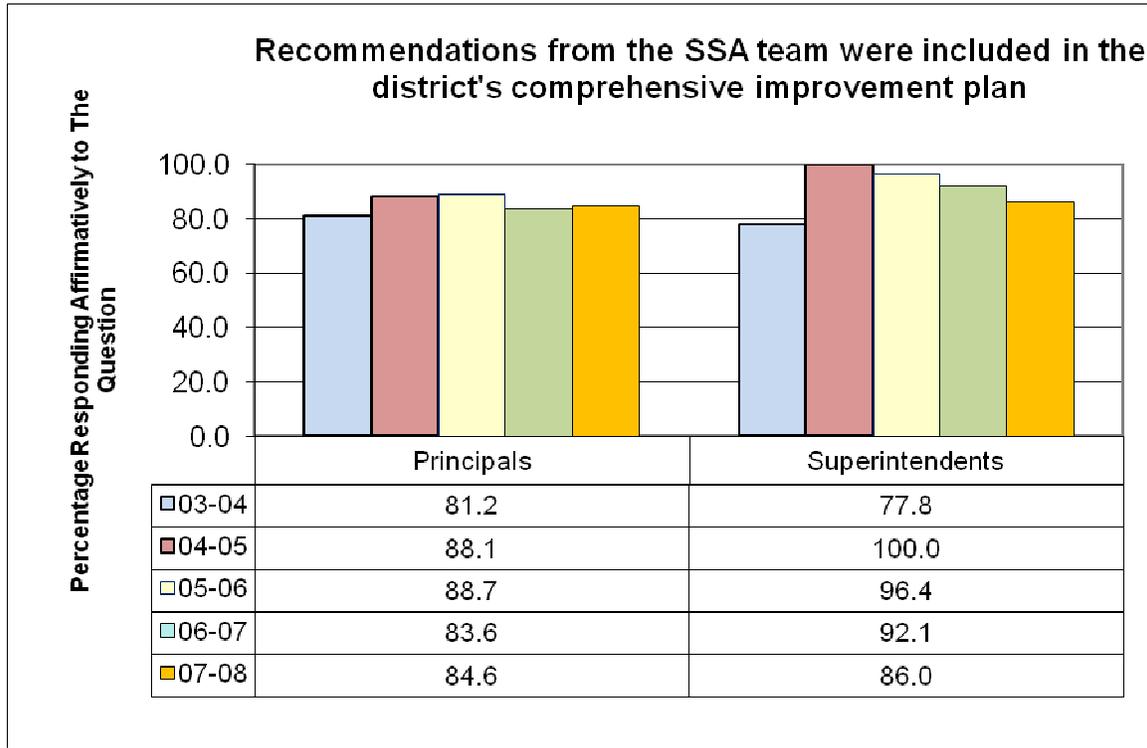


Chart 22

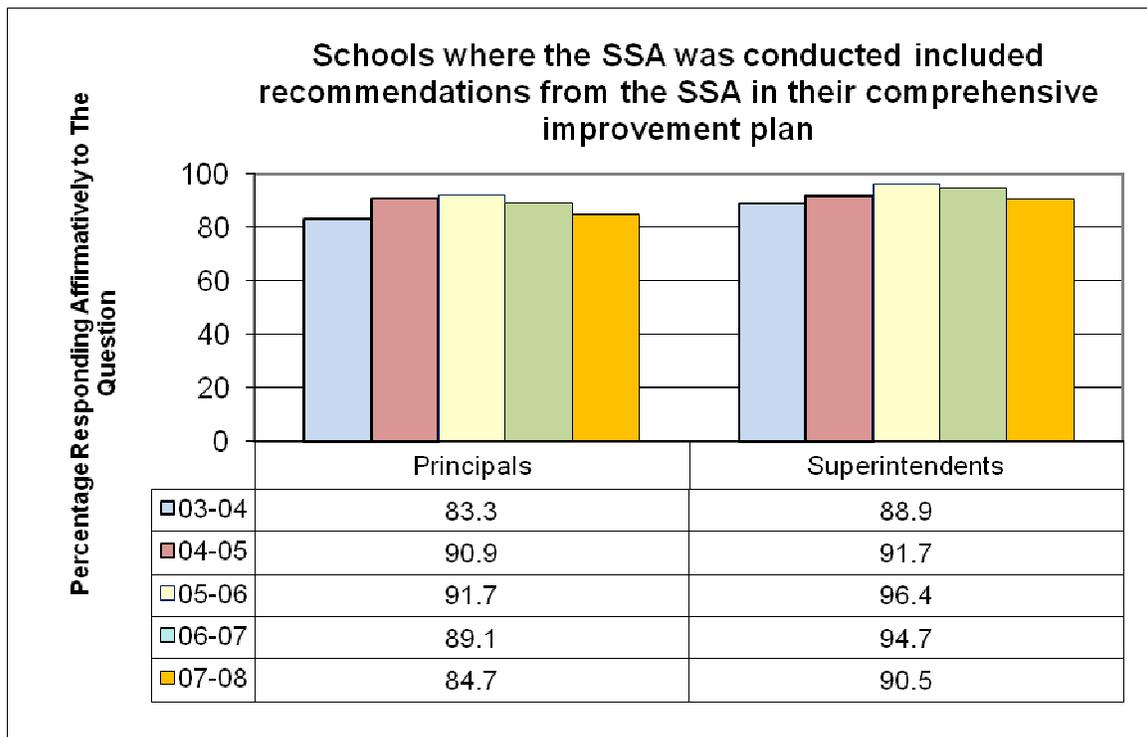


Chart 23

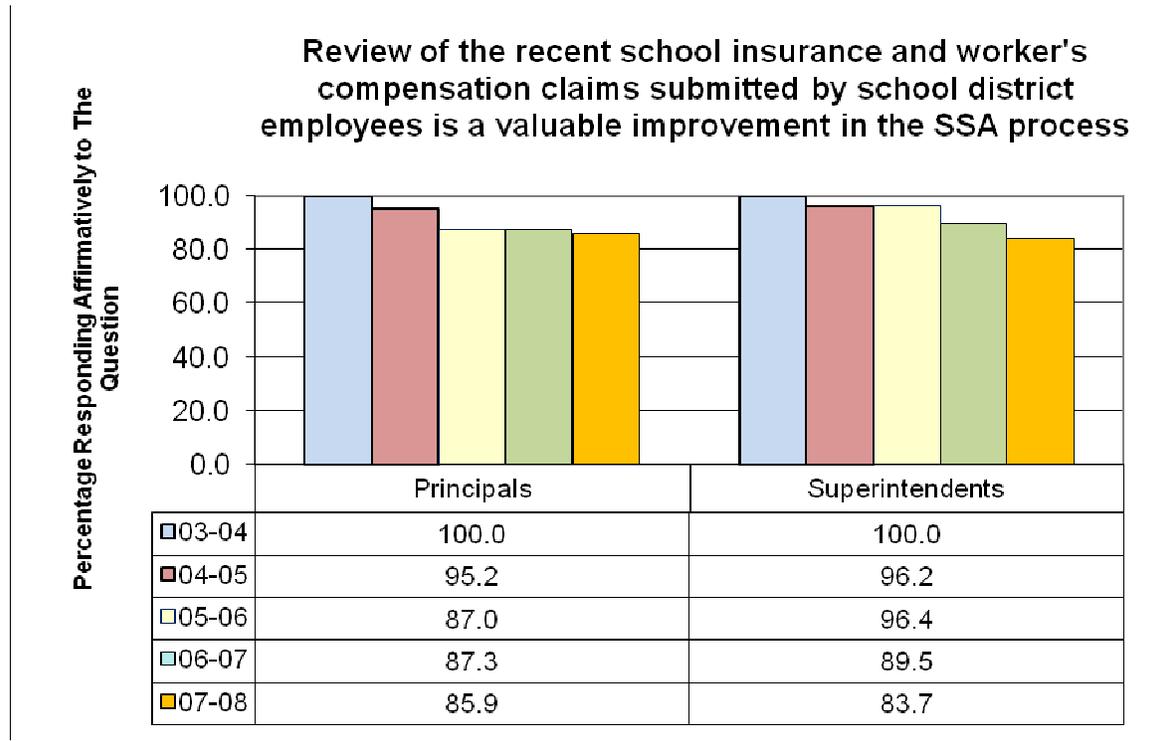


Chart 24

