

Assignment #3: School District Almanac

In New York State, the home for St. John's University, school leaders employ a large range of district and school based data to make educational decisions. These data (yes, the word "data" is plural) are available on-line for all districts and schools to access.

This access, however, is most useful if you know Microsoft's ACCESS, which is a fine program but not necessarily the most friendly for non-data users.

Enter the School District Almanac, in which you should now have some familiarity. Built in FileMaker Pro, I have designed and constructed a statewide database for easy use by educational administrators. The Almanac, as it is commonly known, began as a project for my School Finance course because the necessary financial data were not easily accessible for students or administrators. As a result, The School District Almanac has become a well-known statewide database currently used in more than 400 districts across New York State.

In Assignment #3, you will become more familiar with this database by again exploring the 8 major areas of this database: achievement, financial (wealth), budget (expenditures), instruction, demographic, personnel, and student performance indicators.

Part 1

For this task you again need to look at the data for Suffolk County (or Nassau) and determine what makes a good district. In the last assignment you chose two indicators that fit each of the areas (Achievement, Budget, Census Trends, Enrollment, Fiscal Spending, Instructional Support, Personnel and staffing, Special Needs, Student Indicators). The difference this time is that we will now begin to "work the data" so that we might get a better understanding of just how "good" or "great" our target district is!

At this Stage, the data can appear to be Apples and oranges with percentages, dollar amounts, and comparison numbers that are unrelated. In order to make comparisons, there are various ways to accomplish the task. For this project, a ranking system will be the main method of comparison. Other comparison methods will be discussed later in the course.

Part 2: The "Top Ten"

In Action Assignment #1, you looked at lots of data in some very useful websites. Some of these data were ranked, so that any district could see where they stood with regard to an "Indicator". While some leaders might not find ranked lists palatable, rankings may easily provide an early answer to some essential performance questions for an organization. Where are we? How far must we still go? Are we better than we were last year? What will it take for us to improve?

Your task in the following charts is to use the Almanac .PDF's to determine what are the top 10 schools for each of the indicators you chose from the list. Then fill in the tables below with the data you found.

Post your top ten lists and share (COMPARE) them.

- 1) Are they similar?**
- 2) What did you learn?**
- 3) What other data indicators might you now consider for ranking?**
- 4) Is your target district on any of these lists? Where? If not, how does your target district compare with the 10th district on the rankings?**
- 5) BE CAREFUL OF WHAT YOU RANK!! When you rank an indicator, is it better to be “High” or “low”? For instance, your district’s Elementary Class Size is in the top 10 because it is high, is that good or not? (You would get varying answers from members of your community!) If Per Pupil Expenditures are in the top 10, is that good or not??HMMM...**

The “gap” between the target district and the bottom-most district on this list becomes a factor in developing a plan for future success. What might you conclude, comparatively, about where your target district is at this moment? Are you reconsidering your choice for a target district as a result of what you learned from these tables?