

Certification: Does It Matter?

Survey explores the value of certification to school business officials and chief state school officers

In spring 2003, ASBO International and Purdue University collaborated on two similar but distinct surveys. The surveys were designed to assess the opinions of school business officials and chief state school officers regarding the benefits of two prospective professional development programs for school business managers: (1) a nationally available graduate certificate and (2) a nationally available master's degree. One survey was sent to nonvendor ASBO International members; the other was sent to the chief state school officer in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The article that follows reports the results of these surveys.

Each survey described the prospective certificate program as an opportunity to pursue professional development and earn graduate credit for courses directly related to school business management. Respondents were informed that students would receive a certificate issued by Purdue University and endorsed by ASBO International upon completion of the program. Graduate credit earned with the certificate could be transferred to Purdue's prospective master's degree for business managers or other institutions for use in a master's or doctoral program.

Regardless of whether students chose to pursue an advanced degree, the certificate would signify mastery of the essentials of the profession. The prospective master's degree program was described as an opportunity for students to complete at their own pace a 39-credit graduate degree examining the broad issues of school business management. Full-time students could complete the degree in 18 months; part-time students who remained employed could earn the degree in as little as two years.

Demographics

The response rate for both surveys was strong, with 49% of association members participating in the first survey and 61% of chief state school officers responding to the second survey. Nearly half (44%) of the association respondents indicated they were 36–45 years old; 28% said they were 26–35 years old; and 24% said they were 46–55 years old.

Of the association respondents, 30% had worked in the school business management field for 20 or more years,

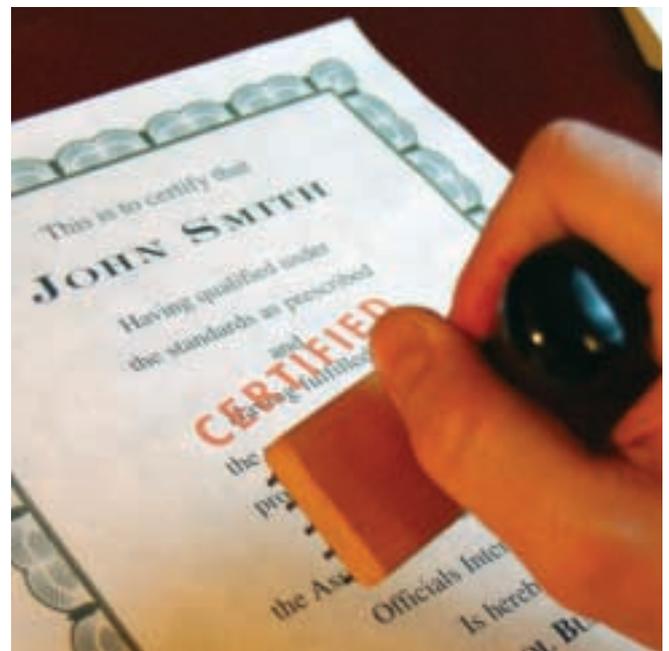
with the remaining 70% representing roughly equal distributions across the 0-to-5-, 6-to-10-, 11-to-15-, and 16-to-20-year time periods. Thirty-six percent of respondents had a bachelor's degree; 46% had a master's degree; and 8% had a doctorate.

Demographic information was not requested on the survey of chief state school officers.

Participation Levels

Based on the foregoing program descriptions, 25% of ASBO International members aged 65 or younger responded that they would *likely* or *very likely* pursue the prospective certificate. The response was even stronger within segments of the sample population. When cross-tabulating participation by number of years in the school business management field, for example, 33% of respondents in the profession fewer than five years said they would *likely* or *very likely* participate; 30% of those in the field fewer than 10 years responded *likely* or *very likely*.

Similar patterns existed among the various age groups. Among respondents aged 23–35, 44% indicated they would



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Survey of Chief State Officials Benefit of Nationally Available Certificate

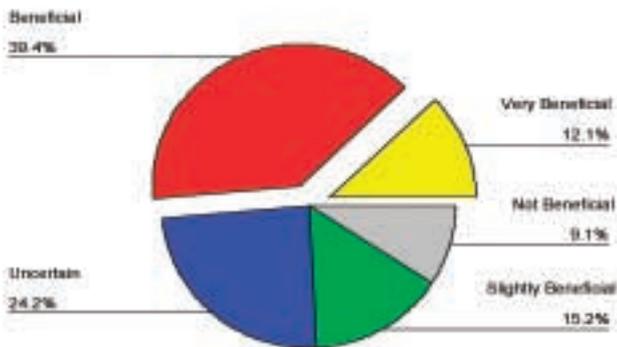


Figure 1. Chief state officials' responses on the benefit of a nationally available certificate.

likely/very likely pursue the certificate. For school business managers aged 36–45, the likely/very likely response was 30%. Cross-tabulating participation by the highest degree held yielded comparable patterns, with 37% of respondents with a bachelor's degree stating they would likely/very likely participate and a surprising 16% of those with a master's degree and 13% with a doctorate answering likely/very likely.

When queried about their participation in the prospective master's degree program, 21% of association members aged 65 or younger answered they would likely/very likely participate. Demographic segments of the data again yielded patterns similar to those in the preceding paragraph. Among those in the field fewer than five years, 28% responded likely/very likely; for those in the field 10 years or fewer, the response was 26%. Considering respondent age, 35% of individuals 23–35 years old and 28% of those 36–45 said they would likely/very likely pursue the degree. Finally, 37% of school business managers with a bachelor's degree responded likely or very likely when questioned about their participation in the prospective master's degree.

In the second survey, chief state school officers were asked their opinions concerning the benefits of a nationally available certificate for school business managers in their states. As figure 1 shows, more than 50% said a certificate would be beneficial or very beneficial.

Chief state school officers also were asked about the benefit of a master's degree program. Nearly two-thirds (64%) declared that a master's degree available on a national level would be beneficial or very beneficial for school business managers (see figure 2).

Preferred Curriculum Topics

The ASBO/Purdue University professional development surveys queried association members and chief state school officers regarding their preference of curriculum topics for the prospective certificate and master's degree programs. Figure 3 illustrates school business managers' responses.

The responses of chief state school officers were very similar to those of the association members. Financial re-

Survey of Chief State Officials Benefit of Nationally Available Master's Degree

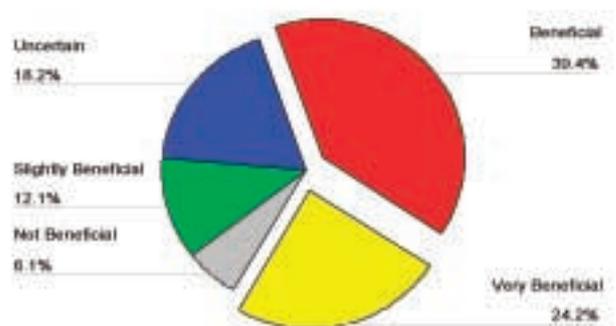


Figure 2. Chief state officials' responses on the benefit of a nationally available master's degree.

source management was the most preferred curriculum topic for both the certificate and the master's degree, followed by legal issues, human resource management, facility management, and information technology management in nearly equivalent distributions.

Preferred Delivery Methods

School business officials and chief state school officers also were asked about the delivery method(s) they preferred.

Among association members who preferred a combination of delivery methods, the overwhelming preference was for short-term sessions supplemented by asynchronous distance education (see table 1, p. 8). Numerous respondents wrote notes on their surveys stating the need for courses that are conveniently delivered for working professionals. Many indicated that relocating to pursue either a certifi-

Preferred Curriculum Topics K-12 Certificate & Degree

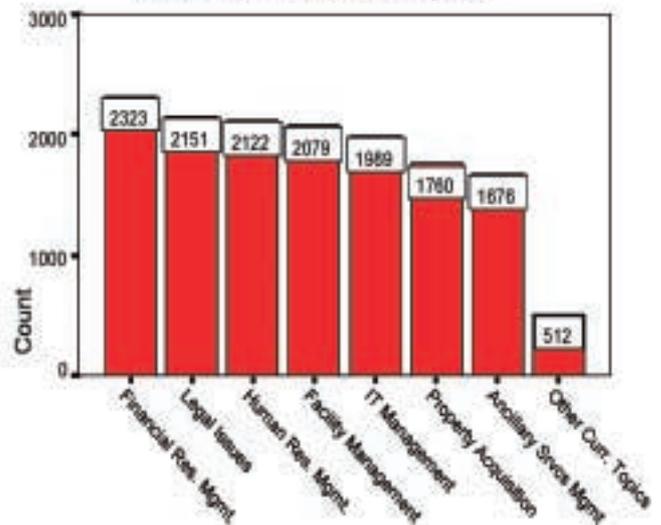


Figure 3. Association member responses on preferred curriculum topics for certificate and master's degree programs.

Table 1. ASBO Members' Preferred Delivery Methods for K–12 Certificate and Degree

Delivery Method	All Respondents
	Mean Degree of Preference (1 to 5 scale; 5 = most preferred)
Combination of methods	4.66
Traditional residential	3.55
Two-way interactive	2.51
Short term (3–5 days)	2.19
Asynchronous distance education	1.93

Table 2. Chief State Officers' Preferred Delivery Methods for K–12 Certificate and Degree

Delivery Method	All Respondents
	Mean Degree of Preference (1 to 5 scale, 5 = Most Preferred)
Combination of methods	3.30
Traditional residential	2.96
Two-way interactive	2.50
Asynchronous distance education	2.11
Short term (3–5 days)	2.38

cate or a master's degree was simply infeasible. For these busy individuals, the apparent desire was for both convenience and maximum flexibility.

The responses of the chief state school officers approximated this pattern (see table 2).

Conclusion

Does certification matter to school business managers? The results of the ASBO/Purdue University professional development surveys suggest that it does. One-fourth of association members aged 65 or younger indicated that they would likely or very likely pursue a certificate if it were available. (Interestingly, nearly half of the retired school business managers who participated in the survey included handwritten notes stating either they would like to see a certificate developed to enhance the profession or they wish one had been available while they were employed in the field.)

Certification appears to matter, especially to particular groups within the profession, namely, those who have worked in school business management fewer than 10 years, those aged 23–45, and those who do not have a graduate degree. If a common theme exists among these groups, it may be that certification—or at least some form of recognized professional preparation/development—is desired to maximize career opportunities.

Finally, does certification matter to chief state school officers? The answer again appears to be yes. Of the respondents, 52% said a certificate would be *beneficial* or *very*

beneficial to their school business managers, whereas 64% said a nationally available master's degree related to the profession would be *beneficial/very beneficial*. Additional research regarding the utility of certification seems warranted. ■

Resources

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