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.

You may use the two indicators you developed in Assignment #2 or you may use new ones. For example, insert one indicator to the left of "Achievement" and the other in the space to the right of Achievement.

Then using the spreadsheet data, put the names and data for the top 10 districts for the first indicator in the left hand column and put the other top 10 districts in the right hand column, also with names and data.

After each table is complete, ask yourself the essential questions for your target district: Where are we? How far must we still go? Are we better than we think we are? What will it take for us to improve? The table, below, is a sample.

% Grade 4 ELA Passing Rate	Achievement	% Grade 4 Math Passing Rate
Amangansett 100%	Qougue 100%	
Cold Spring Harbor 95.7%	Remsenburg 100%	
Westhampton Beach 95.3 %	Fire Island 100%	
Quogue 94.7%	Sag Harbor 98.5%	
Sag Harbor 92.8%	Cold Spring 93.2%	
Shelter Island 90.4%	Half Hollow Hills 91.4%	
Harborfields 90%	Westhampton Beach 90.6%	
Port Jefferson 88.04%	Southampton 90.1%	
Elwood 87.8%	Tuckahoe Commons 89.8%	
Half Hollow Hills 84.4%	Port Jefferson 89.3%	
Babylon 78.6%	Babylon 77.4%	

Chart 1- Top 10 Rankings

For Each Area list the top ten districts

	Achievement	

Budget Expenditures

Enrollment

Fiscal Wealth

Instructional Support

Personnel	

Pupils with Disabilities (PWD)	

Student Indicators	

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 you target district compare with the 10th district on the rankings?**
5) **BE CARFUL 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 you 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?