

## Using Parent Climate and Safety Survey Data

The purpose of the Parent Climate and Safety Survey is to gather information about parents' perceptions about how engaged, respected, and supported they feel by their child's school. This report highlights areas of strength for your school and areas that may need improvement. On this and the next pages, you will find some suggested steps and resources to help you improve areas of school climate that may need additional consideration. You may also work with the Department of Accountability, Counseling, Family-School Partnerships, and School Police if you want assistance improving your school's climate.

### 1. Review Data

Review this report with your school staff and school improvement planning teams. You may want to read the next pages of this report to get a better understanding of why these questions were asked of parents and how their responses might relate to important outcomes like family engagement, student achievement, and other outcomes. Examine your composite scores to get a sense of how well your school is doing in each area of school climate and school safety. Finally, review your individual item scores to identify specific areas you may want to examine further.

### 2. Validate Findings

Because the Climate Survey is only one measurement of factors affecting family engagement, it is important to compare the data in your report by examining other sources of data at your disposal. For example, you may want to use the staff survey to examine whether your teachers report low involvement among their students' parents. You may also want to look at other sources of data, including attendance records at parent-teacher conferences, consent forms response rates, log-ins to the Parent Portal and other indicators of family engagement and

involvement to further validate the findings in this survey. For example, if teachers report that parents do not often attend parent-teacher conferences and you have a low score on the Communication from School scale of the Climate Survey, you might look into how you build relationships and conduct outreach to families.

### 3. Explore Solutions

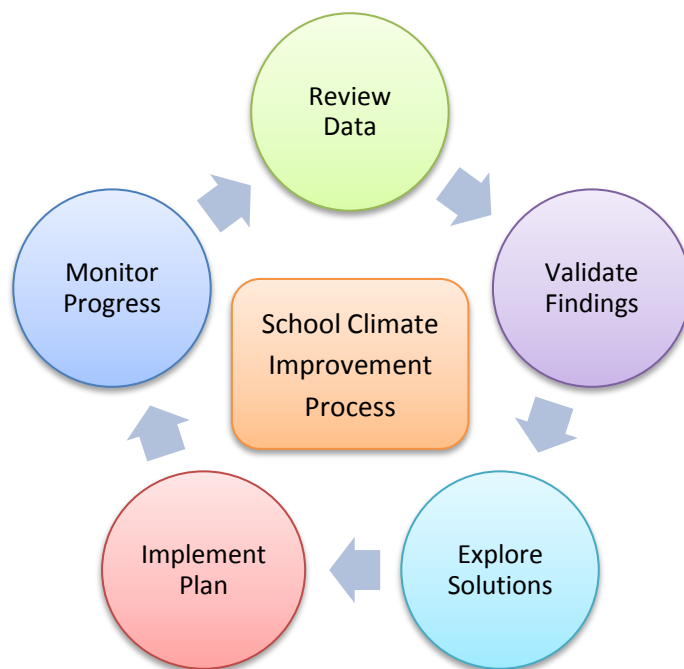
Conduct focus groups with parents and families to understand why they might feel the way they do. Examine your policies and practices and ask critical questions. Are there opportunities to further engage a parent voice in school decisions? What is the visitor policy at your school and is it displayed clearly? What is your process for outreaching to families, or informing parents about their students' academic or behavioral process? What proportion of staff contact with parents is focused on problems and what proportion is focused on progress or building relationships? Examine the resources provided here and reach out to the Department of Family-School Partnerships and other WCSD departments for further ideas about improving your school climate.

### 4. Implement Improvement Plan

Using your data to guide your selection, identify a few areas of school climate to improve for the upcoming school year. Implement an action plan for improving parent climate using input gained from students, parents, staff, and WCSD departments. Solutions could come in a number of forms, including professional development, book or video studies during PLC's, school assemblies, development of parent or staff task forces, and implementation of evidence-based programming.

### 5. Monitor Progress

Monitor progress by obtaining ongoing feedback from students, parents, and staff and by comparing with your 2013 climate and safety scores.



## Why Were the Parent Climate Questions Asked?

Items selected for the Parent Climate Survey have been shown through research and experience to be critical to family engagement and student learning. The following provides a brief overview of why each factor was included in WCSD's Climate and Safety Surveys.

### Supportive Place

Items included in the Supportive Place inventory are designed to assess whether parents feel their child's school is warm, inviting, and helpful. Karen Mapp (2008) emphasizes three elements that are critical to building positive relationships with families: welcoming, honoring, and connecting. Welcoming: Schools should make parents feel at home, comfortable, and part of the school community. Honoring: Family members should be respected, validated, and involved in decision-making. Connecting: School staff should actively invite families into the classroom and link all parent involvement activities to student learning.

### Quality of Education

These items assess whether parents feel like their children receive a quality education that is differentiated to meet their child's unique learning needs. Parents' beliefs about the quality of education provided by schools may affect where they decide to send their children to school, whether to decide to get involved in school activities, and how they support their child's learning at home.

### Contact with School Personnel

Items in this section assess whether communication from teachers, principals, and school counselors has been mostly positive (focused on progress or outreach) or mostly negative (focused on problems) in tone. Research suggests that families of lower socioeconomic status are less likely to have ongoing contact with schools (Kohl et al., 2000), yet are more likely to be contacted when problems with their children arise (Lareau, 2003). As a result, when communication from school is primarily negative, parents are subsequently less likely to be receptive to communication from school.

### Communication from School

These items are designed to help determine whether parents feel like teachers and school administration keep them well-informed about data reflecting their child's academic progress, as well as school events and opportunities for decision-making. From preschool to high school, positive communication between schools and families helps convey the importance of education, increases students' educational expectations, and ultimately impacts their achievement (see Weiss, Bouffard, Bridglall, & Gordon, 2009 for a review of this research). Regularly sharing and explaining students' data with parents can better enable them to enrich and scaffold their child's learning at home (Weiss, Lopez & Stark, 2011).

## Getting Started on Improving School Climate



### Supportive Place

#### **Resources**

- *Parent Friendly Schools – Starting the Conversation* at [www.iowaparents.org](http://www.iowaparents.org)
- National Policy Forum for Family, School, & Community Engagement at [Nationalpirc.org](http://Nationalpirc.org)

**Where to Start:** Is the visitor policy at your school posted in a place visible to parents? How are parents greeted when they enter the building? Create a warm reception for families at the front office. Send personalized invitations encouraging parents to visit the school. Send a thank you to parents from teachers/administration for bringing supplies, volunteering, or attending certain school-sponsored events. Ensure that schools respond to phone calls and emails within reasonable amounts of time. Are there child-sitting options available during school functions? Could community partners (high schools, community organizations) help provide child-sitting?

### Communication from School



#### **Resources**

- *Having their Say: Parents Describe Why and How They are Engaged in Their Children's Education* by Karen Mapp
- *Academic Parent-Teacher Teams: Reorganizing Parent-Teacher Conferences Around Data* by Maria C. Paredes

**Where to Start:** Think about your policies for involving parents in decisions about their child's education. For example, are parents informed when their child is assigned to a new reading intervention at school? What kind of media (Connect Ed, texts, emails) is used to communicate with parents? Do parents understand the process for GATE testing, AP/honors enrollment? Read about Academic Parent-Teacher Teams and other innovative ways to enhance home-school communication around student data on the Harvard Family Research Project website [www.hfrp.org](http://www.hfrp.org).

## **Safety and Behavior**

These items (paralleled in the student and staff climate survey versions) assess whether parents feel like their child's school is safe, and the extent to which parents believe student risk-taking behaviors are common at their child's school. These items are assessed across the three climate surveys to determine how consistently concerns for safety are felt by each group. Maxwell (2000) identified several factors that made a school seem safe to parents, including: (1) a policy in which visitors must sign in; (2) having a visitor policy that is enforced consistently; and (3) having hall monitors present during non-class time.

## **Physical Environment**

The physical environment items (assessed in staff, student, and parent surveys) assess perceptions of the cleanliness and maintenance of school property. Parents feel more welcome and safer in schools that have a positive, welcoming physical environment. Maxwell (2000) identified features that parents believed made schools feel more welcoming including: (1) student work was displayed; (2) the building was clean and maintained; (3) clear visitor policies were posted; (4) bulletin boards displaying information were visible; (5) the main office was centrally located; and (6) parking was readily available.

## **School Food**

Many families rely on schools to provide multiple meals to their children. Any time a student eats a meal provided by the school, it is essential that they have enough time to eat the lunch provided and that the meal provided is high in nutritional content to support better learning throughout the day.

## **Bus Service**

Every school day, school bus drivers are often the first and last school personnel to have contact with students during the school day. Many parents rely on bus services to transport their children to and from school. It is critical that school buses are on-time and safe, and that they reinforce the same expectations for student behavior that are taught during the school day.

## **Quality Education**



### **Resources:**

- *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships* by Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, and Davies
- *Taking Leadership, Innovating Change: Profiles in Family, School, and Community Engagement* (12 innovative family engagement strategies) at [www.hfrp.org](http://www.hfrp.org).

**Where to Start:** Does your school have a school family engagement policy that outlines a plan for building effective home-school education partnerships? If not, consider Henderson et al.'s (2007) suggestions for what to include in a high quality policy: (1) A vision statement about the school community's beliefs about the importance of the school policy; (2) Specific steps schools and families will take as partners in promoting achievement (e.g. learning activities, action groups); (3) Terms of engagement including times parents can attend the school to observe classrooms, availability of interpreters and translation services, and staff's office hours; (4) An indication of which stakeholders will be responsible for carrying out the policy (staff, community members, families); and (5) resources devoted to carrying out objectives (e.g. space, staff time).

## **Frequently Asked Questions about the Parent Climate Survey**

### **Q: Is the survey confidential?**

It is not possible for anyone at the Washoe County School District to link an individual with their survey responses. Responses to the online version of the parent survey are immediately submitted electronically to an external survey provider where they are collected and maintained until the survey closes. Parents do not write their names on the paper surveys to ensure complete anonymity. Data is returned to Department of Accountability after specific identifying information has been removed (parent email addresses etc.) by the external survey provider. Individuals are not identified. Data is only presented or reported in aggregate form for all parents at the school- or district-level.

### **Q: How will WCSD use the data?**

Schools may use the climate data to guide school improvement planning, spark discussion about climate during staff meetings, and help identify areas of professional development and programming that might be needed. At a district level, administrators will use climate and safety data to identify patterns in school climate that will help guide decision-making. Data may also be used for writing grants and evaluating the effectiveness of programs aimed at improving school climate. Finally, data may be used to monitor progress on foundational targets outlined in the district's strategic plan.

**Q: How was my school's response rate calculated?**

Every household that had an email address listed in Infinite Campus received a link to the Climate Survey through email and was invited to complete the survey multiple times for multiple schools if desired. Parents without an email address listed in IC received a paper version of the survey for each child they had at each school level (elementary, middle, or high school). For example: If the Smith family had three children that attended ABC Elementary School, the Smith family only received one paper survey for the eldest child at ABC school. If the Smith family also had a child at a middle school, they received one paper survey to complete for their eldest child at the elementary school and one paper survey for their child attending middle school. However, parents were notified in media advertisements for the survey that they could complete the survey through a link on the WCSD website for as many children as they wished. The response rate calculated for your school reflects the total number of electronic and paper surveys completed by parents at your school out of the total possible number of emails and paper surveys sent out to parents of students at your school based on the sampling criteria discussed above. However, because parents were allowed to complete the survey multiple times online, the response rate may be slightly inflated if parents responded to the survey for multiple children attending your school.

**Q: I would like to see the open-ended comments from parents about my school. Where can I access those?**

Because many parents specifically mentioned individuals (staff, other parents, students) or included information that would identify themselves in their comments, this information must be removed before we can send you any open-ended data. If you would like the open-ended comments from parents, please email [ldavidson@washoeschools.net](mailto:ldavidson@washoeschools.net) and she will send them to you within one week of your request.

**Q: Can I compare my school data from last year to my data from this year to assess trends?**

The Climate Survey was first launched in 2011. After this pilot administration, a number of changes were made to the instrument to enhance its reliability (how consistently we see the same response or pattern of responses) and validity (whether we are measuring what we set out to measure). As a result of these changes, we do not recommend that you compare scores from 2011 to 2012. You will be able to compare 2014 data with data from 2012 and 2013.

**Q: Who can I talk to about the School Climate Project?**

If you have suggestions about how to improve the School Climate Project, would like help interpreting your data, or would like additional ideas about improving areas of your school's climate, please contact the Department of Accountability at 348-3850 or [ldavidson@washoeschools.net](mailto:ldavidson@washoeschools.net).