

Using Student Climate and Safety Survey Data

The purpose of the Student Climate and Safety Survey is to gather information about how engaged, respected, safe and supported students feel while at school. This report highlights areas of strength for your school and areas that may need improvement. On this and the following pages, you will find some suggested next steps that will guide you towards additional resources to improve areas of school climate. 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. Read pages 12-14 of this report to better understand why these questions were asked of your students and how their responses might relate to important outcomes like attendance, achievement, and other academic behaviors. 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 student learning, it is important to compare the data in your report with other sources of data at your disposal. For example, you may want to use the staff and parent climate surveys to see if concerns about safety or student behaviors are similar across respondent groups. You may also want to look at data on attendance and discipline, student monitoring tools, or Positive Behavioral Support surveys. For example, if you find most of the disciplinary referrals at your school are for violations of school dress code, you may want to examine whether dress codes are clearly communicated to students and staff.

3. Explore Solutions

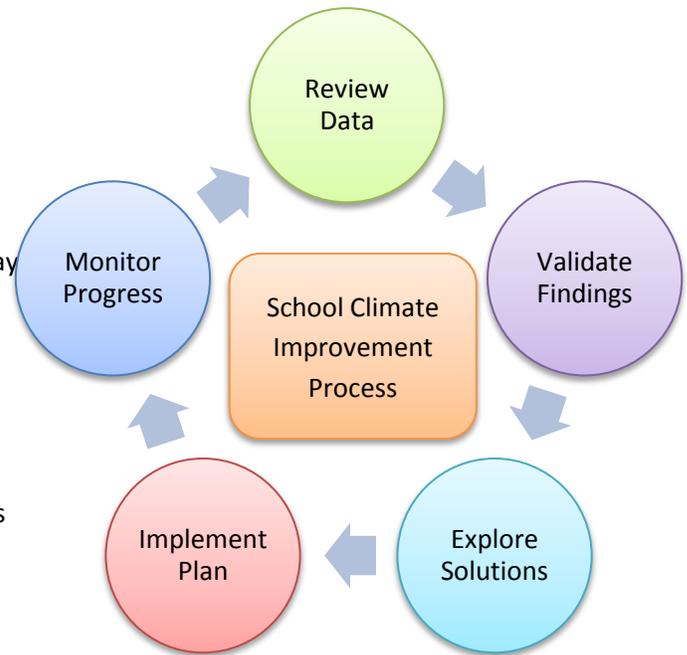
Conduct focus groups with your students to understand why they might feel the way they do. Examine your policies and practices and ask critical questions. Are there opportunities to further engage a student voice in school decisions? How are behavioral expectations communicated to students and reinforced by staff? Are social emotional skills integrated into curriculum and teaching? What about college and career planning? Examine the resources provided here and reach out to School Police, Safe and Drug Free Schools, Dept. of Family-School Partnerships, and other WCSD departments for further ideas about improving your school climate.

4. Implement Improvement Plan

Implement an action plan for improving student climate using input gained from students, 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 student 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 Student Climate Questions Asked?

Items selected for the Student Climate Survey have been shown through research and experience to be critical to student learning, discipline, teacher retention, and academic success. The following provides a brief overview of why each factor was included in WCSD's Climate and Safety Surveys.

Adult Respect

Items included in the "Adult Respect" inventory are designed to assess whether students believe that staff are respectful of students and each other, and whether staff enforce rules for behavior equally. Students are more likely to follow classroom rules when they are involved in the rule-planning process and if they think their teachers will enforce them. Teacher respect for students has been shown to relate to students' increased sharing of opinions in the classroom (Matsumara, Slater, & Cross, 2008).

Student Respect

Items in the Student Respect scale assess whether students feel like there is a culture of respect among students and whether students seem to respect adults and school rules. Caring and respectful relations among peers is associated with more positive ratings of classroom climate (Shann, 1999).

Parent Engagement

Items in the Parent Engagement scale assess the degree to which schools engage families in the learning and education process. Students believe they are more competent to do well in school when their families are involved in their education (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994), attend school functions, and believe that their families value education (Marchant et al., 2001).

Adult Caring

THESE ITEMS assess whether students feel like school staff care about them, would notice if they didn't show up for school, and are available when they need help. Data from students in high school established that students are more likely to perform well on tests when they believe that their teachers care about them, a relationship that is even stronger for students who are judged to be at-risk for dropping out of high school (Muller, 2001; Ryan & Patrick, 2001).

Academic Support

Research has shown that when students feel that teachers and other adults hold high expectations for their success, they are more likely to do better in school (Catalano et al., 2004). There is also evidence that these effects may be most pronounced for at-risk students (Shouse, 1996). Examinations of national data have shown that positive student beliefs about how much their teachers support their efforts to succeed in school can reduce the probability of their dropping out by half (Croninger & Lee, 2001).

Getting Started on Improving School Climate

Respectful School Climate



Resources

- *Transforming School Climate and Learning* by Preble and Gordon
- www.schoolclimate.org
- Youth Leadership Toolkit: (www.nrcyd.ou.edu/youth-engagement)

Where to Start: Meet with your IAT/PBIS and School Safety Teams, engage youth in decisions about school rules and expectations, examine your data, make an action plan. Visit schoolclimate.org for activities, videos, and assessments you can use with students and staff to build a more positive, self-renewing culture.

Caring and Support



Resources

- *Building Strong School Culture: A Guide to Leading Change*, by Kruse and Seashore Lewis
- *School Connectedness* (<http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/AdolescentHealth/connectedness.htm>)

Where to Start: Build your team- PLCs and collaborative activities are an essential part of a strong foundation for staff. To impact student culture you must start with staff. Use your Counselors and Psychologists, schedule Study Circles, provide ongoing deposits into the emotional bank, and try some of the activities listed in the facilitator's guide on the CDC website.

Student Academic Commitment

Items in the Student Academic Commitment scale assess students' beliefs about how well they think they can do in school (academic self-efficacy), how much effort they put into their school work, and how much they persist in their academic goals in spite of challenges faced. Higher academic self-efficacy and commitment to school are consistently shown to predict higher academic achievement (Bong, 2008).

Student Engagement in School

Student engagement refers to the extent that youth are interested in what they learn and how connected they feel to their school. School connectedness is associated with lower emotional distress, risk behavior, and aggression (Resnick et al., 1997). Student engagement is related to higher effort, persistence, concentration, and attention and has been associated with higher achievement (Skinner, Zimmer-Gembeck & Connell, 1998), lower dropout rates (Alexander, Entwisle, & Horsey, 1997), and increased graduation rates (Connell, Spencer, & Aber, 1994).

Social-Emotional Skills

Social and emotional skills help us manage our emotions, develop caring and concern for others, establishing positive relationships, making responsible decisions, and handling challenging situations. SEL skills help create and maintain safe, caring learning environments and are strongly linked to students' academic and social outcomes. According to one review of research evaluating the effectiveness of programs to enhance students' SEL skills, SEL programming yielded an average gain on achievement test scores of 11 percentile points (Durlak et al., 2010).

Student Engagement & Motivation



Resources

- *The Highly Engaged Classroom* by Marzano, Pickering and Heflebower
- *Best Practices to Help At-Risk Learners* by Franklin Schargel
- *Service Learning Guidebook for Teachers* by Smink and Duckenfield

Where to Start: Incorporate student engagement in teaching practices and school administration. Gather student feedback about classroom practices. Think about how to make lessons relevant to their interests. Education is something we do *with* kids not to them.

Social/Emotional Skills



Resources

- Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning <http://casel.org>
- *Social and Emotional Learning in the Classroom* by Merrell and Guedner

Where to Start: Directly teach and embed SEL using instructional practices as well as kits and materials in your school such as Second Step and Paths. Use these practices and materials with MTSS as the framework for all prevention and intervention.

Why Were the Student Safety Questions Asked?

Items selected for the Student Safety Survey were developed by Safe and Drug Free Schools and the WUSD Police Department. The Safety Survey is intended to inform targeted deployment of resources for prevention and intervention purposes.

School Safety

Students' perceptions of how safe they feel at school and while traveling to and from school are both strongly associated with standardized math and reading test scores (Milam, Furr-Holden, & Leaf, 2010). When youth are preoccupied about their safety while at school, they may have a harder time concentrating on school work and some students may even avoid school when they are fearful (Bowen & Bowen, 1999). By identifying "hot spots" or locations where students do not feel safe, staff can ensure all school areas are well-monitored and minimize opportunities for violence or inappropriate behavior (Dwyer & Osher, 2000).

School Safety and Violence



Resources

- *Safe and Secure Schools* by Brunner and Lewis
- *Bullying in Schools: An Overview* (www.ojjdp.gov/pubs/234205.pdf)
- www.schoolsafety.us

Where to Start: Examine your school safety plan, conflict resolution and bullying supports. Is PBIS implemented with fidelity? Are you examining your school safety plan and consulting with school police? Where do disciplinary infractions usually occur? Are there hot spots (dark hallways, bathrooms) where violence occurs more often where additional monitoring may be needed?

Physical Environment

Items in this scale assess perceptions of building cleanliness and maintenance. Research suggests that there is a direct association between the physical disorder of a school (broken windows, poor building conditions) and students' concerns for their safety (Chen, 2007).

Violence

Students who are bullied at school are significantly more likely to be frequently absent, get into excessive trouble at school, and receive in- and out-of-school suspensions (Gastic, 2008).

Risk-Taking Behaviors

Students who are at "high-risk" for dropping out are significantly more likely to use cigarettes, alcohol, and marijuana, report suicide ideation, and engage in delinquent behaviors than students at "low-risk" for dropping out (Hallfors et al., 2006).

Risk-Taking Behaviors



Resources

- Skill-Streaming the Adolescent by Goldstein and McGinnis (strategies for teaching prosocial skills)
- www.dropoutprevention.org
- www.Boystown.org

Where to Start: Examine the 17 effective drop-out strategies. Are you teaching student competencies and skills CASEL/ ASCA standards using the MTSS framework? Do you have a system in place for reviewing Risk Index data with school staff?

Frequently Asked Questions about the Student Climate Survey

Q: Is the survey confidential?

It is not possible for staff at the Washoe County School District to link an individual with their survey responses. Responses to the survey are immediately submitted electronically to an external survey provider where they are collected and maintained until the survey closes. The responses are returned to the Department of Accountability after identifying information has been removed (employee email addresses, parent email addresses, student ids). Individuals and individual classrooms are not identified. Data is only presented or reported 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 monitoring progress on foundational targets outlined in the district's strategic plan.

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 (consistency of responses) and validity (whether we are measuring what we think we are). 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 addressing areas of your school's climate, please contact the Department of Accountability at 348-3850 or ldavidson@washoeschools.net.