

How are Schools Using the School Climate Surveys?

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School climate can be defined as shared norms, beliefs, attitudes, experiences, and behaviors that shape interactions between and among students, teachers, parents and administrators.ⁱ⁻ⁱⁱⁱ Measuring school climate is important because school climate has been recognized as a critical component of school improvement efforts because of its effects on student outcomes.^{iv-v-viii} School climate impacts the effectiveness of academic programming and student achievement for all students, especially those with academic and behavior risks (e.g., disability, mental health, disadvantaged, language). Further, positive school climate has been linked to several important outcomes including increased student self-esteem and self-concept, decreased absenteeism, enhanced risk prevention, reduced behavioral problems and disciplinary actions (in-school detention and out-of-school suspension), and increased school completion.^{viii-ix} It has been demonstrated that establishing and maintaining a positive school climate benefits all students, including students with disabilities, English language learners, children and youth from economically disadvantaged families, and students from culturally and racially diverse groups.^z

When students complete school climate surveys, data collected can inform team action planning to improve perceptions of school climate. Further, school climate data can assist in considering questions related to equity, disproportionality, and cultural responsiveness and appropriateness. The freely-available school climate survey suite offered in PBIS Assessment (www.pbisapps.org) includes the Georgia Elementary School Climate Survey for students in grades 3-5, the Georgia Secondary School Climate Survey for students in Grades 6-12, The Georgia Personnel School Climate Survey, and the Georgia Parent/Guardian School Climate

survey (all surveys omit Georgia in their name to avoid confusion for respondents). The current brief will focus on the key features and implications of the elementary and secondary surveys.

The Georgia School Climate Survey: Elementary. This survey is brief, reliable, and valid for assessing perceptions of school climate among students in grades 3-5^{vi}. The School Climate Survey: Elementary survey provides schools with an overall understanding of how elementary students perceive school climate. The survey includes 11 items scored on a 4-point Likert-type scale (Never, Sometimes, Often, Always). For all items on all surveys, higher scores represent more positive school climate perceptions. Elementary school students complete the survey during school hours using campus computers under the guidance of teachers or other appropriate school personnel. Elementary student participants are typically in grades 3-5, but students in grade 6 may complete the elementary school survey if they are part of an elementary school. The time to complete the survey is approximately 10 minutes. Results of the surveys can be viewed for all respondents or by grade, gender, or race/ethnicity.

The Georgia School Climate Survey: Middle/High. This survey is brief, reliable, and valid for assessing perceptions of school climate among students in grades 6-12^{vii}. It provides schools with an overall understanding of how middle and high school students perceive school climate. The survey includes 9 items scored on a 4-point Likert-type scale (from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree). For all surveys, higher scores represent more positive school climate perceptions. Middle and high school students (typically Grades 6-12) complete the survey during school hours using campus computers or technology under the guidance of teachers or other appropriate school personnel. The time to complete the survey is approximately 10 minutes. Results of the surveys can be viewed overall at the school level and by grade, gender, or race/ethnicity.

Recommended Sampling. At both the elementary and middle/high school levels, it is recommended that at least 100 students per school complete the school climate surveys. This minimum ensures a representative sample of school climate perspectives at the school level^{xiii}. Note that in smaller schools, fewer participants (e.g., in schools with less than 200 at least 40% of students) may be necessary. Further, across subgroups, schools will receive aggregate scores for each demographic group except for in cases where there are fewer than 5 respondents. In such cases, to protect anonymity, data for these subgroups reported. However, their data will be included in overall scores.

To understand how schools are using the Elementary and Middle/High School Climate Surveys, this evaluation brief aims to answer the following questions:

1. How often do schools administer the School Climate Surveys per year?
2. What are the average school climate scores for Elementary and Middle/High students?
3. Do ratings of school climate vary by demographic group?
4. What items on the Elementary and Middle/High School Climate Surveys have the highest and lowest scores?

Sample Participants

For this evaluation brief, the sample consisted of 721 schools across 263 districts and 21 states that assessed student perceptions of school climate for the 2017-18 school year.

Sample Characteristics: Elementary

Elementary School demographic information was gathered from data PBIS Apps database from the most recent school year (2017-18). The sample included a total of 64,754 student participants from 357 elementary schools in 143 districts across 20 states. Students who

did not report their grade were excluded from analysis ($n = 2,899$), resulting in a final sample of 61,855 students.

Sample Characteristics: Middle/High

The Middle/High School sample included a total of 70,496 student participants from 364 schools in 120 districts across 16 states. Of the schools that completed the School Climate Survey, a total of 184 were middle schools (51%) and 180 were high schools (49%). The sample was comprised of 38,435 middle schoolers (56%) and 30,411 high schoolers (44%). Students who did not report their grade were excluded from analysis ($n=2,012$), resulting in a final sample of 68,846 students.

How Often Do Schools Administer the School Climate Surveys Per Year?

It is recommended that the be completed twice per academic year. Generally, the first administration should be completed within the first 45 days of the school year, and the last administration should be completed within the last 45 days of the school year; however, frequency may vary based on intervention and progress monitoring timelines determined by school teams. Among the 2017-2018 sample, 11% of middle/high schools and 16% of elementary schools administered the survey at least two times over the course of one academic year.

What are the average school climate scores for Elementary and Middle/High students?

The average overall student rating of School Climate on the School Climate Survey: Elementary was **3.12** (Standard Deviation=.475; Table 1).

The average overall student rating of School Climate on the School Climate Survey: Middle/High is **2.92** (Standard Deviation= .570; Table 2).

Table 1. Item Level Averages- Elementary Survey

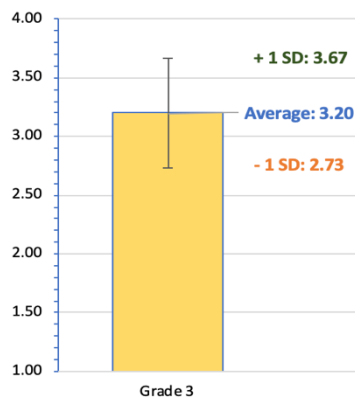
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. I like school.	2.8	0.964
2. I feel like I do well in school.	2.94	0.888
3. My school wants me to do well.	3.76	0.638
4. My school has clear rules for behavior.	3.65	0.717
5. I feel safe at school.	3.48	0.819
6. Teachers treat me with respect.	2.9	0.893
7. Good behavior is noticed at my school.	3.03	0.854
8. Students in my class behave so that teachers can teach.	3.22	0.969
9. I get along with other students.	2.63	0.840
10. Students treat each other well.	3.42	0.893
11. There is an adult at my school who will help me if I need it.	2.52	0.824

Table 2. Item Level Averages: Secondary Survey

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. I like school.	2.74	0.86
2. I feel successful at school.	2.97	0.83
3. I feel my school has high standards for achievement.	2.99	0.87
4. My school sets clear rules for behavior.	3.16	0.89
5. The behaviors in my classroom allow the teacher to teach so I can learn.	3.17	0.9
6. Students are frequently recognized for good behavior.	2.83	0.91
7. I know an adult at school I can talk with if I need help.	2.55	0.92
8. School is a place at which I feel safe.	2.87	0.94
9. Teachers treat me with respect.	3.02	1.07

Ratings Across Demographic Groups

Average elementary student ratings of overall school climate for each grade, gender, and



racial/ethnic group are represented in Table 3 . The Standard

Deviation refers to typical deviation from the Average rating of

School Climate for each group; most members of that group would

score between one SD above and below the Average value. For

example, we would expect 66% of third graders to have a mean

rating of school climate between 2.73 and 3.67 (e.g. $3.20 \pm .467$).

Table 3. Demographic Characteristics of Elementary Participants

	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>
Grade				
3 ^a	16,809	27.2	3.20	0.467
4 ^a	17,397	28.1	3.14	0.461
5 ^a	18,576	30.0	3.09	0.473
6 ^a	9,091	14.7	3.01	0.489
Gender				
Male	28,848	46.6	3.18	0.451
Female	29,192	47.2	3.08	0.480
Other/Prefer not to say	3,825	6.2	3.04	0.545
Race/Ethnicity				
Black/African American	7,164	11.6	3.04	0.514
Hispanic/Latinx	17,068	27.6	3.14	0.472
White	18,214	29.4	3.16	0.451
Asian	1,321	2.1	3.09	0.492
American Indian/Alaska Native	1,696	2.7	3.10	0.499
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	397	0.6	3.08	0.545
Two or more races	3,264	5.3	3.03	0.493
Other	12,731	20.6	3.12	0.467

^aStudents in grade 6 may take the elementary schools serving k-6

Average middle/high school student ratings of overall school climate for each grade, gender, racial/ethnic group, and sexual orientation are represented in Table 4. The Standard Deviation refers to typical deviation from the Average rating of School Climate for each group; most members of that group would score between one SD above and below the average value. For example, we expect 66% of seventh graders to have a mean rating of school climate between 2.52 and 3.70 (e.g. $3.11 \pm .586$)

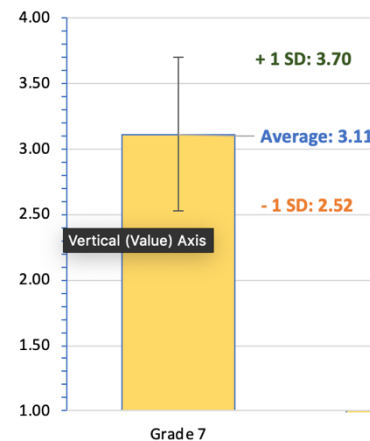
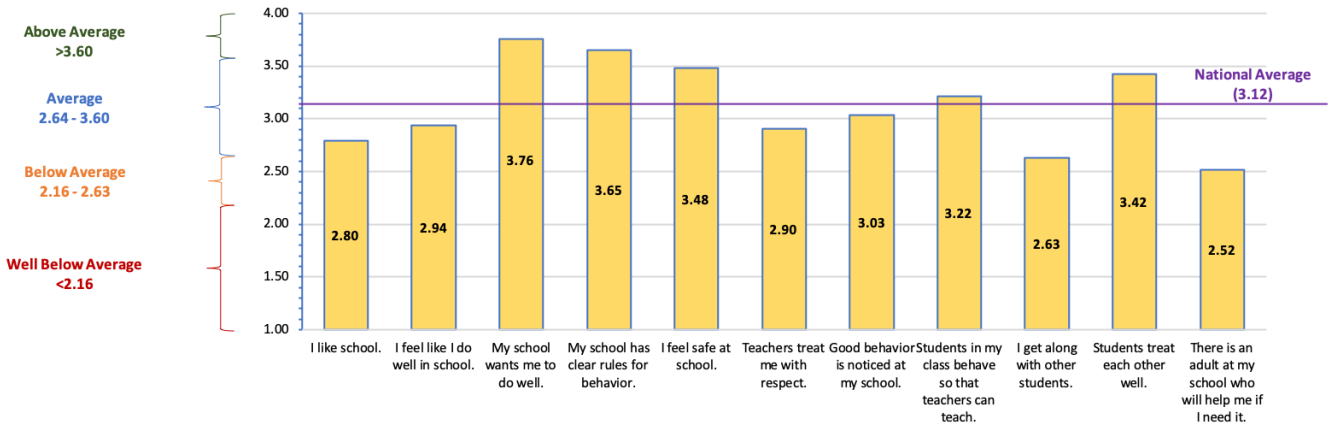


Table 4. School Climate Survey: Middle/High Results by Demographic Group

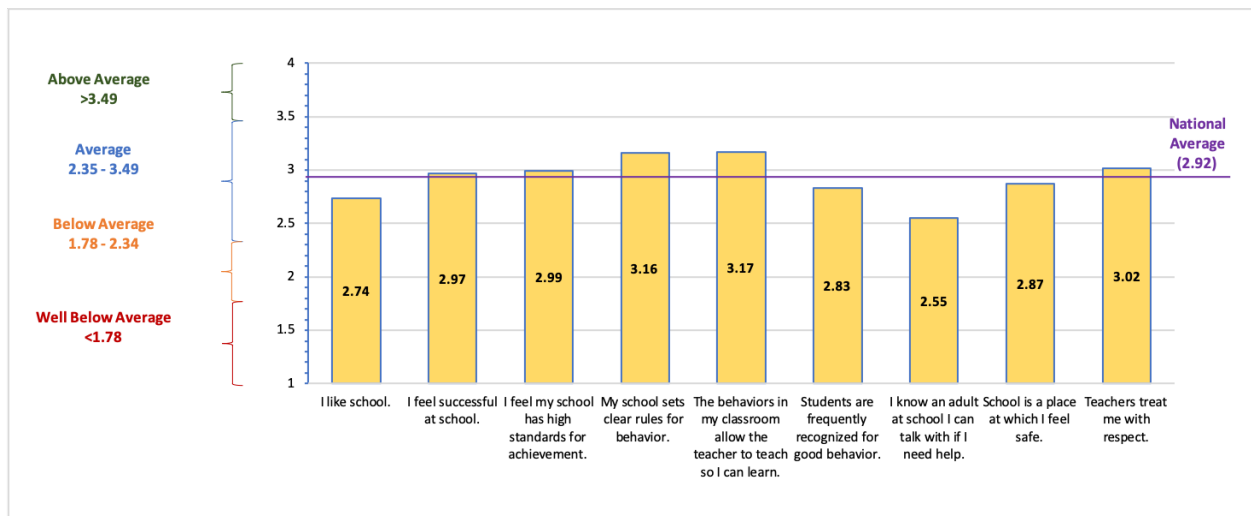
	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>
Grade				
6 ^a	8,586	12.5	3.11	.586
7 ^a	14,853	21.6	2.95	.574
8 ^a	14,996	21.8	2.88	.572
9 ^a	8,528	12.4	2.88	.550
10 ^a	7,887	11.5	2.82	.549
11 ^a	7,396	10.7	2.89	.531
12 ^a	6,600	9.6	2.92	.566
Gender				
Male	33,414	48.5	2.92	.568
Female	32,719	47.5	2.94	.549
Transgender	904	1.3	2.40	.828
Prefer not to say	1,809	2.6	2.92	.651
Race/Ethnicity				
Black/African American	7,487	10.9	2.88	.594
Hispanic/Latinx	25,918	37.6	2.91	.571
White	21,916	31.8	2.96	.543
Asian	2,831	4.1	3.00	.551
American Indian/Alaska Native	944	1.4	2.91	.635
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	270	0.4	2.91	.640
Two or more races	5,163	7.5	2.83	.583
Other	4,317	6.3	2.91	.607
Sexual Orientation				
Heterosexual/Straight	53,597	77.9	2.93	.553
Bisexual	4,173	6.1	2.71	.596
Gay/Lesbian	1,376	2.0	2.62	.714
Prefer not to say	9700	14.1	3.0	.579

What Items On The Elementary And Middle/High School Climate Surveys Have The Highest And Lowest Scores?

The table below represents the average student ratings of each of the 11 items of the School Climate Survey: Elementary. Among the elementary school sample, the items with the lowest ratings included: “There is an adult at school who will help me if I need it,” “I get along with other students,” and “I like school” with mean ratings of 2.52, 2.63, and 2.8, respectively. The highest rated items included: “My school wants me to do well,” “My school has clear rules for behavior,” and “I feel safe at school” with mean ratings of 3.76, 3.65, and 3.48, respectively.



The table below represents the average student ratings of each of the 9 items of the School Climate Survey: Middle/High. Among the middle/high school sample, the items with the lowest ratings included: “I know an adult I can talk to if I need help,” “I like school,” and “Students are frequently recognized for good behavior” with mean ratings of 2.55, 2.74, and 2.83, respectively. The highest rated items were: “The behaviors in my classroom allow the teachers to teach so I can learn,” “My school sets clear rules for behavior,” and “Teachers treat me with respect” with mean ratings of 3.17, 3.16, and 3.02, respectively.



Discussion

School climate has increasingly become recognized as a critical component of effective schools. The Georgia school climate surveys provided through PBIS Assessment can be a useful tool to schools because they have been psychometrically validated, are of no cost to schools, provide immediate data feedback, and are able to be completed within a reasonable amount of time. The school climate surveys have been available for only a short period of time; however, with continued use, schools will increasingly be able to use school climate data alongside other school data examined on a regular basis (e.g., attendance, discipline, disproportionality). Such processes will inform the degree to which states, districts, and schools require support in streamlining important data when making decisions about targeted strategies and interventions to support school improvement for all students.

Recommendations

Overall data analysis. It is recommended that schools collect school climate data at the beginning and end of the school year. We recommend that schools initially examine overall data to determine the degree to which students within the school perceive a positive school climate. Interpretations of overall averages should be interpreted alongside the national means reported above. It should be taken into consideration that on average, perceptions reported at the secondary level are often lower than those of elementary students. Still, states, schools, and districts should also monitor localized trends as various contextual influences (e.g., interventions, turnover, negative incidents) can have an overall impact on school climate resulting in scores above or below the national average. School-wide data trends can inform Tier 1 efforts in cases where there is a general consensus in experiences. If students rate the overall climate as negative,

schools should examine the degree to which PBIS is being implemented with fidelity and evidence-based interventions and strategies are being utilized. Establishing a strong Tier 1 system, where students perceive the environment is safe, predictable, and supportive, is an essential first step.

Although overall data can be useful in getting a pulse of the school, schools can disaggregate data and examine specific items that have a particularly negative impact on school perceptions, especially if data indicate low school climate. For example, national data indicate that among both elementary and secondary students the lowest average is on the item referring to the degree to which they can identify an adult that they can connect with. At the school-wide level, interventions or strategies can be implemented to ensure that all students are comfortable with identifying an adult in school that they can talk to if they need support.

Subgroup analysis. PBIS Assessment also allows school teams to disaggregate data by grade, gender identity, and race/ethnicity (as well as sexual orientation for the secondary survey). Schools are encouraged to examine subgroup data within the context of related data including, but not limited to, discipline data, attendance data, and academic data. School climate data allows schools to understand how various groups of students feel about their school environment and having such information can improve the degree to which we implement targeted strategies and interventions to support students. For example, in the data examined for this brief, sexual minority youth reported the lowest perceptions of school climate. Identifying targeted interventions to support marginalized populations can increase the experiences of students in schools and the likelihood that they will experience success in school. Although the national norms do not note significant differences across race/ ethnicity or grade, localized norms may reflect different patterns and should be considered.

Conclusion

School teams increasingly use school climate data to understand the perceptions and experiences of individuals within the school. The Georgia School Climate Surveys provide a comprehensive series of surveys to gather such information at the student, parent or guardian, and personnel perspective. The aim of this evaluation brief was to (a) describe the school climate surveys available through PBIS Assessments (b) present data to help schools interpret school climate scores through averages as well as have information to interpret the range of scores on the survey, and (c) identify and offer suggestions for school teams on how to utilize school climate data within a PBIS framework.

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