

ASSESSING SCHOOL CLIMATE USING MULTIPLE MEASURES

Positive School Climate

A POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE IS FOUNDATIONAL TO THE ACADEMIC PROMISE OF THE SCHOOL AND REFERS TO THE WORK OF A SCHOOL COMMUNITY TO CREATE A QUALITY EXPERIENCE FOR ALL STUDENTS, STAFF, AND FAMILIES. THIS IS DONE BY COLLECTIVELY FOSTERING SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, PHYSICAL ACADEMIC AND IDENTITY SAFETY AND PROMOTING A SUPPORTIVE ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT THAT ENCOURAGES AND MAINTAINS RESPECTFUL, EMPATHETIC, AND TRUSTING RELATIONSHIPS; RESULTING IN A SENSE OF BELONGING FOR ALL.



As children in Colorado spend over 160 days per year (nearly 14,000 hours during K-12) in school, it is critical that systemic factors at the school, district, and state level provide adequate resources and opportunities for students to learn and grow intellectually, behaviorally, socially, and emotionally. It's important to measure school climate to understand the extent to which the environment and the relationships centered in the school building are positive, create a sense of belonging for students, and support students to succeed academically.

Sense of belonging is defined as the extent to which students, staff, and families feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment. Student sense of belonging is an outcome of a positive school climate and is associated with improvements in behavior attendance, engagement, and school connectedness as well as decreases in unwanted behaviors, discipline issues, and dropout rates. *Cohen, J., et al. (2009). Taylor, R. D., et. al. (2017). Loukas, A. (2007).*

As shown in the tables below, there are multiple indicators of, and ways to measure school climate and sense of belonging, all of which fall into two categories: quantitative and qualitative. **Quantitative** data is *numerical* data that can provide insights on groups within the school from a high level. This type of data answers questions such as "what", "how many", and "to what extent" in terms of numbers (e.g., averages, percentages). **Qualitative** data is *descriptive* data that can be observed and describes conceptual findings non-numerically. Often, qualitative information is used for data that cannot be easily reduced to numbers and answers the questions: 'what', 'how', and 'why'. Please note that the examples in tables below are not exhaustive of all indicators or measures of school climate but instead, represent some of the more common ways Colorado schools assess school climate.

SCHOOL CLIMATE SURVEYS (QUANTITATIVE)

MEASURE	PURPOSE	SCHOOL CLIMATE DOMAINS MEASURED	ASSESSES PERCEPTIONS OF:	SURVEY LENGTH	AVAILABILITY/USE/ COST
National School Climate Center Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (NCSS CSCI)	Measures 5 domains of school climate. Includes surveys for school personnel, parents/ guardians, & students to better understand perspectives of the full school community.	All Surveys: Safety, Teaching and Learning, Interpersonal Relationships, Social Media, Institutional Environment Staff Only: Leadership, Professional Relationships	Students, instructional and non-instructional staff, & families	15-20 min.	Pricing is on a sliding scale based on student enrollment. Completed online or on paper, and available in English and Spanish. Package includes analysis and reporting within 2 weeks of survey completion.
YouthTruth	Offers many classroom climate & school climate measures for students, staff, & families. Adapted across grade-levels (elementary, middle school, and high school) to be developmentally appropriate. Domains included can be tailored to fit the needs of the school/district.	Student Survey: Engagement, Academic Rigor, Instructional Methods, Relationships, Belonging/Peer Collaboration, Culture, and additional topics. Both Staff/Family Surveys: Engagement, Relationships, Culture, Communication Staff only: Professional Development, Support Family only: Feedback & Resources	Students, instructional and non-instructional staff, & families	10-17 min. (depending on age-group & additional measures)	Cost of a 3-year package discussed in a consultation process with YouthTruth. Completed online. Package includes analysis and reporting within 1 week of survey completion and includes an interactive dashboard with functions to disaggregate data.
Panorama	Offers many classroom and school climate measures for students, staff, & families. Includes a particularly robust survey bank for staff and families (from which you can choose which to administer).	Student Survey: Overall School Climate, School Rigorous Expectations, School Engagement, School Teacher-Student Relationships, School Belonging, School Safety, and additional topics. Staff Survey only: Professional Learning, Teaching Efficacy, Feedback & Coaching, Staff-Leadership Relationships, Educating All Students, School Leadership, Testing, Faculty Growth Mindset, Staff-Family Relationships, and additional topics. Family Survey: (Global) School Climate, Family Engagement, School Fit, Family Support, Family Efficacy, Barriers to Engagement, School Safety and additional topics.	Students, instructional and non-instructional staff, & families	Test length depends on domains schools choose to include.	Free copies of all measures can be found on the Panorama Education Website. Costs apply for administration, data analysis, & interpretation tools. Available in 30+ languages. Offers interactive dashboards with reports across surveys.
ED School Climate Surveys (EDSCLS)	National benchmark survey suite measuring 13 school climate subtopics across 3 domains for middle/high school students, staff, and families. Developed by the National Center on Educational Statistics (NCES) as an extension to activities by ED's Office of Safe and Healthy Students (OSHS).	All Surveys: Engagement (i.e., cultural and linguistic competence, relationships, and school participation); Safety (i.e., Emotional safety, physical safety, bullying/cyberbullying, substance abuse, and emergency readiness/management); Environment (i.e., Physical environment, instructional environment, physical health, mental health, and discipline).	Students, instructional and non-instructional staff, & families	Student and Staff Surveys 20-30 min. Family Surveys 10-15 min.	Survey instruments and platform are both free to administer. English and Spanish versions are available for students and parents; staff surveys are available in English only. Provides a free analysis and report after surveys are completed.
PBIS School Climate Survey Suite	This is a collection of four brief multidimensional surveys that measure school personnel, student, and family perceptions of school climate.	Elementary Survey: School Connectedness, School Safety, School Orderliness, Peer/Adult Relations Middle/High Survey: Teaching & Learning, Relationships, Safety School Personnel Survey: Staff Connectedness, Structure for Learning, School Safety, Physical Environment, Peer/Adult Relations, Parental Involvement Family Survey: Teaching & Learning, School Safety, Interpersonal Relationships, Institutional Environment, Parent Involvement	Students, instructional and non-instructional staff, & families	Student and Staff Surveys 10-15 min. Staff Surveys 15-20 min. Family Surveys 10-15 min.	A copy of the instruments & manual can be found for free on the PBIS Applications Website. Completed on the computer.

For additional school climate surveys and measures, please see the [National School Climate Survey Compendium](#)



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SCHOOL CLIMATE SURVEYS (QUANTITATIVE)

MEASURE	PURPOSE	SCHOOL CLIMATE DOMAINS MEASURED	ASSESSES PERCEPTIONS OF:	SURVEY LENGTH	AVAILABILITY/USE/ COST
Healthy Kids Colorado Survey	This survey focuses on health-related attitudes & behaviors of 6th-12th grade students, and includes several items related to school climate constructs.	All Students: Unintentional injuries & violence, mental health, school safety and physical fighting, tobacco/substance use, physical activity/nutrition, risk & protective factors and additional topics.	Students	45 min.	Administered every 2 years to randomly selected schools for free, but a copy of the instrument can also be found for free on CDE Healthy Kids Colorado. Completed on paper.
Teaching and Learning Conditions in Colorado (TLCC; formerly TELL Colorado)	A statewide survey, the TLC survey was developed as a tool to inform school planning, improvement and enhancement of teacher working conditions.	All Surveys: Quality of School Leadership (Team Climate, Evaluation), Quality of Teacher Leadership, Managing Student Conduct, Instructional Practices & Supports, Professional Development, Time, Facilities & Resources, and additional topics. Instructional Staff Only: New teacher supports School Leadership Staff: District supports	Instructional Staff	15-20 min.	Provided by the state to schools/districts for free. At least 50% participation is required per school to access data. Administration results/reports/resources are provided for all schools/districts for free.
**Family School Community Partnerships (CDE Survey)	Measures parent and staff perceptions of partnership outreach with families. Aligned with the National Standards for Family-School Partnerships.	Welcoming all Families into the School Community, Communicating Effectively, Supporting Student Success, Speaking Up for Every Child, Sharing Power, & Collaborating with Community.	Families & Instructional Staff	15-20 min.	Available for free from CDE. Written copies available online. Analysis help may be available.

POLICY AND PRACTICE INVENTORIES (BOTH QUANTITATIVE & QUALITATIVE)

MEASURE	PURPOSE	SCHOOL CLIMATE DOMAINS MEASURED	ASSESSES PERCEPTIONS OF:	SURVEY LENGTH	AVAILABILITY/USE/ COST
School Climate Improvement Self-Assessment and Action Planner	A self-assessment tool to determine the extent to which school climate improvements have been made and assists with identifying short- and long-term school climate improvement goals based on results and school improvement priorities.	All Surveys (School Climate Improvements): Planning for school climate improvements, engaging stakeholders in school climate improvements, collecting & reporting school climate data, choosing & implementing school climate interventions, Monitoring & evaluating school climate improvement efforts.	Instructional & Non-instructional Staff	15-20 min.	Self-assessment & Quick Guide on Making School Improvements can be found on National Center for Safe Supportive Learning Environments website .
Trauma-Responsive Schools Implementation Assessment	A self-assessment to examine 8 key domains for trauma responsiveness with automatically generated feedback provided to support districts trauma responsiveness needs.	8 key domains of district/school trauma responsiveness assessed: Targeted interventions for trauma, early interventions for trauma, classroom-based strategies, whole school trauma programming, whole school prevention programming, whole school safety planning, community & family supports.	Instructional & Non-instructional Staff	20 min.	*Free registration at thesapesystem.com is required to access & complete the TRS-IA. Access is only available to schools & districts.
RISE Index	A tool to help schools assess, prioritize, and plan key activities that promote the social-emotional health of staff & students.	Environment: School well-being, school systems, universal prevention strategies, targeted prevention strategies, collaboration.	Instructional & Non-instructional Staff	Time dependent on sub-test(s) chosen.	Access is free for schools & districts via the Alliance for a Healthier Generation's website .
Colorado Healthy Schools Smart Source	A team-based comprehensive inventory of practices and policies to guide CO school districts in their health and wellness efforts.	An inventory of best practices in school health to inform programs & policies to improve student health.	Instructional & Non-instructional Staff	Time dependent on sub-test(s) chosen.	The survey is administered during odd numbered years. Access is free through Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment's website .
PBIS Self-Assessment Survey	The PBIS Self-Assessment Survey (SAS) is used by school staff for initial and annual assessment of effective behavior support systems in their school.	The survey examines the status and need for improvement of four behavior support systems: (a) school-wide discipline systems, (b) non-classroom management systems (e.g., cafeteria, hallway, playground), (c) classroom management systems, and (d) systems for individual students engaging in chronic problem behaviors.	Instructional & Non-instructional Staff	20-30 min.	Access is free for schools through the PBIS.org Website .



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OBSERVATION DATA AND CHECKLISTS (BOTH QUANTITATIVE & QUALITATIVE)

MEASURE	PURPOSE	SCHOOL CLIMATE DOMAINS MEASURED	ASSESSES PERCEPTIONS OF:	SURVEY LENGTH	AVAILABILITY/USE/ COST
PBIS Classroom Management Self-Assessment	Assesses teachers' positive management of a classroom through self-reported or observer-reported feedback from an isolated activity. Resource also provides a framework for action planning.	Positive and negative student contacts during an activity, engagement, physical and practical structure, discipline and reward strategies, etc.	Instructional & Non-instructional Staff, & District Leaders	Time varies in relation to the activity chosen for observation	Observation tool is free on the PBIS website. The user is encouraged to complete, analyze, and interpret their scores.
MAEC School Climate Checklist	Assesses a birds eye view of all key stakeholders diverse voices (including administrators, faculty, staff, students, parents, & community members) regarding schools' ability to create a positive, equitable learning environment that allows students and staff to perform at their highest levels. Assists with anticipating potential challenges, developing a plan for addressing them, & determining next steps.	Schools' social & emotional climate expectations & training, ability to set clear, appropriate, & consistent expectations & consequences, and what is currently being done to continue equity improvements.	Instructional & Non-instructional Staff, & District Leaders	Time depends on discussions resulting from checklist answers provided - average 10-15 minutes	The MAEC Checklist is free to access & use. Schools are encouraged to interpret their own scores and engage in conversations based on outcomes
ASCD Whole Child School Improvement Tool	Assesses the 5 tenets of a whole-child approach that together provide a detailed needs, progress, & trends reports relating to the 10 School Health Components and policies, processes, and practices that improve learning & health. Can be used as an initial needs assessment or an ongoing annual school improvement tool.	Consists of a total of 6 components: 5 relate to the Whole-Child Approach: Health, Safe, Engaged, Supported, & Challenged. The 6th component assesses the sustainability of schools' approach.	Instructional & Non-instructional Staff	20 min.	This tool is free to access and use after registering in the ASCD database. ASCD's database saves report results and provides detailed suggestions for implementing a whole-child approach based on the results.

Classroom/Teacher Observations currently being used by the school.

POLICY AND PRACTICE INVENTORIES (BOTH QUANTITATIVE & QUALITATIVE)

MEASURE	HOW MEASURE MAY BE AN INDICATOR OF SCHOOL CLIMATE
Attendance Data	Decreasing attendance rates in both students and staff may be an indicator that the school environment and/or the relational aspects of school are not strong for students and/or their families and therefore, may indicate a need to focus on creating safe and welcoming environments that are built on trust and demonstrate the value of student and family inclusion and wellbeing.
Chronic Absenteeism	Chronic absenteeism is multi-faceted and is attributable to multiple causes, many of which are indicators of school climate. Students who are chronically absent are often absent because a need of theirs or their families is not being met. This may include not feeling safe at school, possibly experiencing harassment and bullying, not having access to healthy foods and health services, or transportation, etc. Understanding the root cause of individual student chronic absenteeism, can shed light on what supports can be implemented or strengthened within the school.
Discipline Data	Discipline data, including the number and nature of discipline incidences and office referrals, as well as the number and nature of suspensions (both in-school and out of school) and expulsions are indicators of school climate. Schools can glean more meaning by disaggregating discipline data by race/ethnicity, gender, disability status, etc. to determine disproportionality in discipline and address those disparities.
Universal screeners for social, emotional, mental health and behavior needs	While universal screeners for social, emotional, mental health and behavior needs are often designed to provide targeted (Tier 2) supports to students who are identified as needing more support, these screeners can serve as an important indicator of school climate and data from these screeners can be used to implement universal programs to support the social, emotional, mental health, and behavioral needs of all students.
Referrals to counselors, school psychologists, and social workers	Just as in the example above, referrals to counselors, school psychologists, and social workers are intended to provide targeted (Tier 2) supports to students who are identified as needing more support. Depending on the number of referrals, as well as the number of providers available in the school to meet the needs of these select students, these may be an indicator of overall school climate and therefore, there may be a need to implement universal programs to support the social, emotional, mental health, and behavioral needs of all students.

OTHER SCHOOL-LEVEL DATA (BOTH QUANTITATIVE & QUALITATIVE)

COLLECTION METHOD	SCHOOL CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS
Focus Group	Consists of a group conversation to better understand interests, concerns, and motivations of teachers, staff, safety personnel, stakeholders, family members, and students. Focus groups can be used to better understand qualitative data as reported in a school climate survey and to ensure a school is capturing the voice of the various school stakeholders.
Interviews	Consists of in-depth, one-on-one conversation guided by pre-written questions for individual teachers, staff, safety personnel, stakeholders, family members, and students. As noted above, interviews can be used to better understand data as well as gather perspectives from relevant stakeholders.
Other Methods	Other methods for gathering input, perspectives, and feedback can be more informal and even more fun. Ideas such as documenting school climate through pictures, mapping, diaries, and immersion are unique and fun ways to better understand school climate. For more information on these ideas as well as others, please see CEI's Discovery Toolkit .



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PROCESSES & PRACTICES SELECTING SCHOOL CLIMATE MEASURES

ADAPTED FROM THE COUNCIL FOR CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS'
MEASURING SCHOOL CLIMATE AND SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING RESOURCE

INVOLVE stakeholders (i.e., teachers, students, families, community members) throughout the process by proactively engaging them to give input on what the school community thinks is important in terms of school climate and creating a sense of belonging for all school stakeholders.

START with a clear theory of change. Clearly articulate the goals and objectives of your process, what your intended outcomes are and why those outcomes are important, and how you are going to measure those objectives.

For example, if a goal is to establish equitable learning environments that are safe and inclusive for all students then the district or school may ensure that school climate surveys include items related to student perceptions of safety and sense of belonging.

IDENTIFY existing data. First consider the data you are already collecting, such as other student/staff survey data, chronic absenteeism data or discipline and behavior data and determine if those fully measure school climate as specified in the theory of change or whether they would complement a newer effort to adequately assess school climate.

CONSIDER AND UNDERSTAND the implications for equity. The measures you use should not function or be understood differently across student groups; measurement results should point toward actionable change in the learning environment, as opposed to changes in students themselves.

Also consider and be responsive to how different stakeholders (e.g., educators, students, and families) will interpret the data and the narratives derived therefrom.

Finally, ensure that interpretation and use of the results do not exacerbate inequitable outcomes.



SELECT measures that are the right fit. Have a clear understanding of how the information you are seeking aligns with your theory of change and ensure that the measure(s) you select actually provide the right information. If needed, consider using multiple measures together to fully capture the complexity of information needed to inform action.

DETERMINE that the measures that you choose are valid and reliable for the purposes for which they are being used. Measure validity ensures that the selected instrument accurately measures what it was designed to measure. For example, surveys assessing school connectedness will analyze students' sense of belonging versus solely their academic progress. And reliability ensures that the selected instrument is consistently measuring what it intends to. Measures should be evaluated for validity and reliability for specific purposes.

Different purposes may include:

- Individualized student feedback
- School-level needs assessment
- Classroom/school improvement
- Data reporting
- School accountability



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PROCESSES & PRACTICES SELECTING SCHOOL CLIMATE MEASURES

ENSURE the measures provide data that are actionable and understandable. Data should drive action. Ensure that superintendents, principals, and teachers know how to use and understand the data and the practices and approaches necessary to drive change in learning environments.

CONSIDER the needs of the adults in the building when making decisions about which measures to use. Include measures that relate to their perceptions of the school climate in terms of conditions for teaching and be responsive to that data with improvements to the conditions for teaching.

INCLUDE a focus on the experiences of students from their perspective. One of the most important aspects of measuring school climate is students' perceptions of their experiences in the learning environment; particularly whether they feel socially, emotionally, physically, and identity-safe. Students are reliable reporters of their experiences in school and often experience learning environments differently, so it is important to disaggregate that data and explore and address the underlying reasons for different perceptions and experiences.



"Data should drive action."

PROCESSES & PRACTICES COLLECTING SCHOOL CLIMATE DATA

Schools are common sites for school climate data collection and interventions. However, school-based data collection can be subject to numerous methodological and practical problems that may arise in the planning and data collection phases. These problems need to be resolved to maximize response rate without running the risk of introducing sample bias or jeopardizing the validity of data.



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PROCESSES & PRACTICES COLLECTING SCHOOL CLIMATE DATA

Here are 10 recommendations for collecting valid (i.e., accurate) data in your school.

- Train survey, interview, or focus group administrators on best practices for data collection.
- Assure respondents that there are no write or wrong answers to the questions.
- Tell respondents whether their responses will be anonymous.
- Ensure that all participants, regardless of ability, have enough time to complete data collection.
- Ensure that those providing data are comfortably situated, in a quiet space, for the duration of data collection.
- Briefly explain the study before administering surveys, starting focus groups, etc. Keep the explanation short! No big words. No jargon. No detail.
- If reading questions to children, read the questions exactly as written.
- If surveying respondents, have them answer every question they feel comfortable answering. If interviewing or conducting focus groups, ask every question.
- Do not assist respondents when answering questions, unless only minor clarifications are needed regarding what is being asked.
- If there is a need to link multiple waves of data over time, ensure that surveys at each wave can be linked by either name (if not sensitive information or part of a research study) or unique identification number (if sensitive information or part of a research study).



Brief Data Collection Checklist

- ✓ What data do you need to collect to assess your areas of interest?
- ✓ Do you need to include multiple perspectives in your data collection?
- ✓ What are the best methods for collecting this data (Qualitative, Quantitative, or Mixed)?
 - ✓ How will the data be collected (paper or online format)?
 - ✓ How much time do you need to allow for your data collection?
 - ✓ What are the best ways to analyze and use provided data?

PROCESSES & PRACTICES ANALYZING SCHOOL CLIMATE DATA

Compile and Analyze School Climate Data

- 1 Compile various school climate data including perception/survey data, discipline and attendance data, office referrals, and observation data to inform school climate improvement.
- 2 If perception data was collected at the student-level, ask students to participate in the review of data and have them identify areas of focus as well as potential strategies to implement.
- 3 Set up a meeting(s) with a team, usually a school leadership team, MTSS team or other existing team that can make decisions on behalf of the school to review and discuss the data.



Triangulate Data

Look at multiple sources of information to validate the primary data source (i.e., climate/perception survey data) by cross-verifying and observing it from more than one point of view. For example, interviews with teacher personnel may be compared with teacher surveys or key focus group observations.

For more information on triangulating data, see: [Multiple Measures and Data Triangulation](#) and [Guion, 2002](#)



Apply an Equity Lens

Disaggregate all data possible to better understand disproportionality in how subgroups of students experience school and create solutions that meet the needs of the subgroups that are negatively impacted.

Key questions to ask:

- 1 Are there disparities among subgroups as defined by race/ethnicity, gender, free and reduced lunch, students with disabilities, sexual orientation, gender identity, etc. in the following data?
 - o Climate surveys/other perception data collected from Students, Staff, & Families
 - o Discipline data such as office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions.
 - o Attendance and chronic absenteeism data?
- 2 What can be implemented to address inequities?



Determine Areas of Focus

As a team, determine an area(s) of focus based on the data. For example does your data show low student engagement or the need for stronger behavior expectations? Name the overall themes that emerged from the analysis and possible strategies to implement.



PROCESSES & PRACTICES ANALYZING SCHOOL CLIMATE DATA

Action Plan

- 1 Once data have been analyzed and areas of focus agreed upon, determine how to address the issue(s) that can improve school climate.
- 2 As a team, discuss and identify evidence-based strategies that could improve the areas of focus. These may include focusing on school-wide SEL instruction, strengthening positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS), addressing bullying and harassment, implementing restorative practices, etc.
- 3 Ensure strategies support the larger mission/vision or strategic plan of the school as well as the Unified Improvement Plan (UIP).
- 4 Establish a plan that includes goals (i.e., SMART Goals), objectives, timelines, people responsible to ensure a roadmap for success.
- 5 Determine the staff professional development needed to implement strategies.



Continuous Performance Monitoring

Check in on progress throughout implementation with the school team and make improvements/adjustments as needed (i.e., through PDSA cycles, etc.).

CONCLUSION

This guide is intended to provide a high-level summary of the types of data that can be used to measure school climate, as well as how a school or district can use these data to make improvements that ensure the needs of the whole child are met.

As the research continues to grow on how learning environments shape student academic achievement, measuring school climate can serve as a way to better understand barriers to learning in order to put in place the right supports for students, staff, and families.



For additional information, please see:

Collecting Data in Your Classroom
<https://kstatelibraries.pressbooks.pub/gradactionresearch/chapter/chapt5/>

School Climate Data Analysis Protocol
https://www.cacepartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/12/2019/06/School_Climate_Data_Analysis_Protocol.pdf



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