| DESE logo | **VOCAL 2019 Summary**October 2019 |
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**Background**

* The Views of Climate and Learning (VOCAL) survey is designed to provide schools with information on student perceptions of three dimensions of school climate: engagement, safety, and environment. The topics measured within each dimension are summarized below.

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| **Engagement** | **Safety** | **Environment** |
| * The extent students feel adults/students value diversity, manage dynamics of differences, and avoid stereotypes.
* The extent students feel there is a social connection and respect between staff/teachers and students, and between students and their peers.
* The extent students feel engaged intellectually, emotionally, and behaviorally in the classroom, and the extent that students or their parents are engaged in school life.
 | * The extent students feel a bond to the school, and the extent adults/students support the emotional needs of students.
* The extent that students feel physically safe within the school environment.
* The extent that students report different types of bullying behaviors occurring in the school and the extent that school/staff/students try to counteract bullying.
 | * The extent that students feel the instructional environment is collaborative, relevant, challenging and supportive of learning.
* The extent that students have access to support systems that effectively support their social, emotional and mental health well-being.
* The extent that discipline is fair, applied consistently and evenly, and a shared responsibility among staff, teachers, and students.
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* The VOCAL survey is based on the conceptual framework of the [U.S. Department of Education’s School Climate Surveys](https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/edscls/index.asp).
* The survey helps the state to meet requirements included in the [Massachusetts’ Act Relative to Bullying in Schools](https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2014/Chapter86).

**Survey design, responses, scales, and reporting**

* Students in grades 4, 5, 8, and 10 were given the option to participate in the survey as part of the state MCAS administration in 2019. The survey was optional for districts, schools, and individual students.
* Statewide, 82% of students in grade 4, 84% in grade 5, 85% in grade 8, and 76% in grade 10 participated in the 2019 survey. Responding students were demographically similar to non-responding students.
* VOCAL provides two types of scores. DESE developed an overall school climate index score and index scores for the three dimensions of climate (engagement, safety, and environment). For districts, a bullying climate score is provided. In addition, individual item percent responses are reported for each item; students responded, “Always true”, “mostly true”, “mostly untrue”, and “never true”. Index scores and item response data are provided for “All students” and for subgroups of students. DESE also provides trend data.
* DESE administered 89 items in four grades with common items used to link all students and all items across the four grades onto the same measurement scale. As a result, index scores in 2019 can be compared across dimensions, subgroups, grade levels, and schools. Schools and districts that participated in the 2018 survey can compare index scores from 2019 to 2018. 2019 student responses were anchored on to the 2018 scale (mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 20); 2018 index scores form the baseline year for trend data.
* Index scores should be used to identify meaningful differences in student perceptions. The following guidance is tentative but offered to help understand differences in student perceptions. C**ohort (looking within one year)** differences of 3 to 4 points or more represent a meaningful difference in school climate. Looking within one year, for large schools or subgroups (>40 students), a difference of 5 points between schools or subgroups is likely meaningful; for small schools or subgroups (<=40 students), a difference of 8 points is likely meaningful.It is too early to offer guidance on what meaningful differences in index score trend data are; at least one more year of data is needed to do so.

**Findings**

* Students generally reported that they experienced positive school climates.
	+ In schools with typical school climates, the average student within the school responded “mostly true” to a majority of items and “always true” to a majority of the remaining items
	+ With the exception of grade 8 (57% of items), 7 in 10 students responded in the two most positive categories on over 60% of the items within each grade-level survey.
* Students in grades 4 and 5 reported more positive school climates than students in grade 8 or grade 10 across all three dimensions of school climate.

| Survey measure | Student-level average index score |
| --- | --- |
| **Grade 4** | **Grade 5** | **Grade 8** | **Grade 10** |
| Overall school climate | 61 | 57 | 43 | 44 |
| Engagement | 59 | 55 | 44 | 45 |
| Safety | 60 | 56 | 44 | 43 |
|  Bullying | 57 | 55 | 44 | 45 |
| Environment | 62 | 56 | 44 | 45 |

* + - In schools with typical school climates, the average fourth and fifth grade student responded “always true” to a 33% and 27% of the survey’s items, respectively. In comparison, the average grade 8 and grade 10 student within schools with typical school climates responded “always true” to only 8% and 12% of the surveys’ items, respectively. For example, 25% of grade 4 students and 20% of grade 5 students responded, “always true” to the statement, “My teachers use my ideas to help my classmates learn.” In comparison, 8% and 10% of grade 8 and grade 10 students responded similarly to this item.
* Among schools that had enough responses to receive reports, the overall school climate index ranged from 24 to 92, showing considerable variation in climate across schools. Schools serving grade 4 exhibit most variation, scores ranged from 41 to 92; schools serving grade 8 exhibited the least variation, 27 to 69.
* Across the four grades, students inschools with the **strongest** climates (the top 15% percent of schools) reported many more positive aspects of their school environments when compared to students in the **weakest** climates (the bottom 15% of schools).
	+ In grade 4, students in the strongest schools are more open to having inclusive relationships with a diverse range of students and the classroom environment is more collaborative and culturally relevant. Students feel happier and safer in the strongest schools with fewer bullying occurrences. They believe their school rules are fair for all students, not just some. Adults are also more active in helping students work on their social and emotional skills and in teaching positive behavior.
	+ In grade 5, students in the strongest schools are more open to having inclusive relationships with a diverse range of students and the classroom environment is more collaborative and culturally relevant. Teachers have higher expectations for student effort, perseverance, and academics. Students feel happier and safer in the strongest schools with fewer bullying occurrences. They believe their school rules are fair for all students, not just some. Adults are also more active in helping students work on their social and emotional skills and in teaching positive behavior.
	+ In grade 8, student-on-student relations in the strongest schools are more respectful and open to having inclusive relationships with a diverse range of students. Teachers have higher expectations for student effort and academics, and more often use student ideas and interests to plan and guide instruction. Students feel safer and can rely more on adults and, to a lesser extent, students, to counteract any bullying. Adults actively promote and model respectful relationships and students can rely to a greater extent on teachers and their peers for emotional and behavioral support. Teachers are more willing to listen to students when they are in trouble and guide behavior, rather than punish students.
	+ In grade 10, student-on-student relations in the strongest schools are more respectful and open. Teachers have higher expectations for student academics and provide more opportunities for students to challenge themselves. Teachers more often use student ideas, feedback, and interests to guide instruction. Students feel safer and can rely more on adults and, to a lesser extent, students, to counteract any bullying. Adults actively promote and model respectful relationships and students can rely to a greater extent on teachers and their peers for emotional and behavioral support. Teachers are more willing to listen to students when they are in trouble and guide behavior, rather than punish students.
* Students across all subgroups report more favorable school climate scores in the earlier grades (grade 4 and 5) when compared to subgroups in the later grades (grade 8 and 10).
* In all grades, Black students report less favorable perceptions of school climate when compared to Asian and White students. The index score difference between Black and Asian students is largest (6 points) in grade 8; the index score difference between Black and White student is largest (4 points) in grades 4 and 5.

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| Survey measure | Grade 4: Student-level average index score |
| **All students** | **Black** | **Asian** | **Hispanic** | **White** | **Other** |
| School climate | 61 | 58 | 62 | 61 | 62 | 60 |
|  | Grade 5: Student-level average index score |
| Survey measure | **All students** | **Black** | **Asian** | **Hispanic** | **White** | **Other** |
| School climate | 57 | 53 | 59 | 56 | 57 | 55 |
|  | Grade 8: Student-level average index score |
| Survey measure | **All students** | **Black** | **Asian** | **Hispanic** | **White** | **Other** |
| School climate | 43 | 41 | 47 | 43 | 43 | 41 |
|  | Grade 10: Student-level average index score |
| Survey measure | **All students** | **Black** | **Asian** | **Hispanic** | **White** | **Other** |
| School climate | 44 | 42 | 47 | 44 | 44 | 41 |

* Although there are a small number of non-binary (NB) students identified in grade 8 (N = 16) and grade 10 (N = 38) and *caution is advised in interpreting this data*, NB students’ scores are low compared to students who identify as female or male. In grade 8, NB students’ score is 11 points lower than the female and male score; in grade 10, NB students’ score is 5 and 7 points lower than the female and male score, respectively.
* Notable across the four grades, economically disadvantaged (ECODIS) students, and students with disabilities (SWD) views do not differ meaningfully when compared to their comparison groups.
* English learner (EL) students report more favorable school climates in three grades when compared to their comparison groups. The index score difference is 3 points in grade 5 and 4 points in grades 8 and 10.

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| Survey measure | Grade 4: Student-level average index score\* |
| **Female** | **Male** | **NB** | **ECODIS** | **Non-ECODIS** | **SWD** | **Non-SWD** | **EL** | **Non-EL** |
| SCL | 63 | 60 | -- | 61 | 62 | 61 | 61 | 62 | 61 |
|  | Grade 5: Student-level average index score\* |
| Survey measure | **Female** | **Male** | **NB** | **ECODIS** | **Non-ECODIS** | **SWD** | **Non-SWD** | **EL** | **Non-EL** |
| SCL | 58 | 56 | -- | 56 | 57 | 57 | 57 | 59 | 56 |
|  | Grade 8: Student-level average index score\* |
| Survey measure | **Female** | **Male** | **NB** | **ECODIS** | **Non-ECODIS** | **SWD** | **Non-SWD** | **EL** | **Non-EL** |
| SCL | 43 | 43 | 32 | 42 | 44 | 44 | 43 | 47 | 43 |
|  | Grade 10: Student-level average index score\* |
| Survey measure | **Female** | **Male** | **NB** | **ECODIS** | **Non-ECODIS** | **SWD** | **Non-SWD** | **EL** | **Non-EL** |
| SCL | 43 | 45 | 38 | 43 | 44 | 44 | 44 | 48 | 44 |

\*NB: Non-Binary; ECODIS: Economically disadvantaged; SWD: Student with disabilities; EL: English learner; SCL: Overall school climate score; --: two dashes indicate there are too few students to report out the data.