

Background

- Over the last three decades there has been a substantial amount of research that attests to the importance of school climate and how positive school climate supports learning and positive youth development.
- With the introduction of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), many states, including Massachusetts, are exploring the use of a school climate indicator in their measures of school performance
- The school climate surveys also help the state to meet related requirements included in the Act Relative to Bullying in Schools.

Survey design, responses, scales, and reporting

- ESE developed a pilot school climate survey based on the conceptual framework of the U.S. Department of Education's School Climate Surveys, which focus on three dimensions of school climate: engagement, safety, and environment.
- Students in grades 5, 8, and 10 were given the option to participate in the survey pilot as part of the state MCAS administration in 2017. The survey was optional for districts, schools, and individual students.
- ESE piloted 71 survey items across the three grades, including 7 items common to all surveys and an additional 2 common across the grades 8 and 10 surveys to allow later data linking. All items used common response options: always true, mostly true, mostly untrue, and never true. Reports are based on 70 of the 71 items.
- Statewide, 69 percent of eligible students participated in the pilot survey: 73% in grade 5, 70% in grade 8 and 64% in grade 10. Most schools and districts had at least one student respond. Responding students were demographically similar to non-responding students.
- In addition to reporting individual item responses, ESE developed an overall school climate index score and index scores for the three dimensions of climate (engagement, safety, and environment). These indices were set to a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 20; differences on the indices of about 3 to 4 points or more represent a meaningful difference in school climate. All indices are directly comparable to one another and across grade levels.
- To preserve respondent confidentiality, ESE suppressed data if fewer than 10 students responded, if all students responded identically on an item, or if the reliability of the responses was less than 0.7 on a scale from 0 to 1. After accounting for these business rules, 89% of districts and 56% of schools received a report.

Findings

- Students generally reported that they experienced positive school climates.
 - Across all three grades, for example, over 80% of students responded “always” or “mostly” true to the statement, “Teachers support (help) students who come to class upset.” Nearly 80% of students responded similarly to the statement, “Students help each other learn without having to be asked by the teacher.”
 - In schools with average school climates, the average student within the school responded “mostly true” to a majority of items and “always true” to the remaining items.
- School climate varied by grade and dimension. Grade 5 students reported stronger school climates than students in grades 8 and 10. Grade 5 students also reported greater strength in the

safety and environment dimensions than in engagement. Grade 8 students reported similar climate across the three dimensions, while grade 10 students reported stronger climates for engagement and environment than safety. (See summary table on next page.)

	Student-level average index score		
	Grade 5	Grade 8	Grade 10
Overall school climate	58	45	46
Engagement	55	47	48
Safety	59	46	45
Environment	57	45	47

- Among schools that had sufficient responses to receive reports, the overall school climate index ranged from 27 to 78, showing substantial variation in climate across schools.
- Students in schools with the **strongest** climates (about 12 percent of all schools) reported many positive aspects of their school environments.
 - In these schools, student-on-student and student-on-teacher interactions are mostly respectful, caring, and collaborative within the classroom. Adults actively engage to help students emotionally and teach positive behaviors. Teachers encourage effort, set high academic expectations, and actively promote and support individual students' success.
 - Students in these schools have a say in school rules and perceive school rules as fair and consistently enforced. Students feel safe, with few if any bullying behaviors, and report a strong sense of belonging to the school.
- Even schools with the **weakest** climates (about 10 percent of all schools) still demonstrated some strengths, though they also had areas for improvement. This speaks to the fact that students in general reported positive school environments statewide.
 - Students in these schools report that adults address safety issues, that support systems are available, and that they feel safe (though some bullying behaviors may be reported). They also say that their teachers generally encourage and support individual students' academic success.
 - However, these schools also have opportunities to improve in areas such as caring and respectful relationships between students and with teachers; encouraging student autonomy and feedback; and engaging with students to support them emotionally and to teach them positive behaviors.

Next steps

- Districts and schools will receive individual reports of their findings, with comparisons to statewide results, in early October. ESE will also provide interpretive materials and references to resources for districts interested in working on school climate issues.
- Over the fall, ESE will gather feedback from various stakeholders to learn more about which parts of the survey districts find most valuable and how they are using the data in their districts. This will inform next steps for the 2018 surveys.
- ESE will also produce a statewide summary report later this fall that will provide a breakdown of statewide responses by student subgroup and by district and school characteristics.