

## Background

One of ESE's strategic priorities is to support students' social-emotional learning, health, and safety. Over the last three decades research has demonstrated the importance of school climate and how positive school climate supports learning and positive youth development. Further, one of the themes that emerged through numerous ESSA stakeholder forums and surveys, as well as conversations with district and school leaders, is the importance of the role of school climate in student success. To support this priority, ESE administered school climate surveys to students in grades 5, 8, and 10 as part of the 2017 MCAS test administration. The surveys were optional for districts, schools, and students; 69 percent of eligible students statewide participated.

Students responded to items related to nine indicators of school climate within three dimensions. The number of items for each dimension and indicator are listed here:

Dimension	Indicator	Number of items		
		Grade 5	Grade 8	Grade 10
Engagement	Cultural competence	2	2	2
	Relationships	4	7	6
	School participation	1	1	1
Safety	Emotional	3	3	3
	Physical	2	2	2
	Bullying/cyber-bullying	3	6	4
Environment	Discipline	3	3	3
	Instructional	3	8	6
	Mental health	2	2	2
Total		24	34	29

Appendix A presents a brief description of each indicator. Appendix B provides a crosswalk of all items on each survey. The grade 5 survey included 24 total items; grade 8 included 34; and grade 10 included 29. ESE piloted a total of 71 items across the three grades; 70 of the 71 items were used to generate school and district reports. A technical report available later this fall will provide further details on the development and validation of ESE's 2017 pilot surveys.

## How to use the school and district reports

The school climate reports include two types of data: responses to individual items and aggregate indices that combine item responses. Each can be used for different purposes.

**Item-level response data** show the percentage of students who responded within each of the four response categories. This information allows you to:

- ★ Assess the distribution of student responses. You can examine whether students respond relatively evenly across all four response categories (which suggests a variety of views regarding the item content) or respond predominantly in one or two response categories (which suggests a consensus of views).
- ★ Rank-order the items from most positive views of your school/district climate to least positive views (e.g., by combining the two most positive response categories and sorting them from highest to lowest).

However, item level response data does **not** allow you to:

- ★ Average the responses together. “Always true” is a stronger response than “mostly true,” and “mostly true” is stronger than “mostly untrue.” But the distance between “always true” and “mostly true” may not be the same as the distance between “mostly true” and “mostly untrue,” so they cannot be averaged together.
- ★ Directly compare student responses across dimensions or grades. Similar to academic assessments where items range in difficulty, some items on a school climate survey are easier for students to agree with than others. For example, if only a few students in your school respond “always true” to an item, that could be because your school’s climate is relatively weak on that dimension compared to other schools. But, it could also be the case that almost no students statewide respond “always true” to that item, and therefore your school is no weaker than any other. Statewide comparative response data is available in the data reports.
- ★ Directly compare students’ responses from one year to the next. The characteristics of a school’s students may vary from year to year. As a result, students’ responses may change over time even if the school climate itself has not changed.

**Aggregate index scores** address the disadvantages of using individual item responses. An index score is a composite measure that summarizes and averages scores across several content-related items. Using this methodology of linking items across grades, ESE developed four index scores: (1) an overall school climate score; (2) an engagement score; (3) a safety score; and (4) an environment score. Across the three grades, students’ four index scores range from 1 to 99 with a mean of 50. This type of data allows you to:

- ★ Directly compare student index scores across grades and dimensions
- ★ Directly compare aggregate index scores across the schools within your district
- ★ Make statements such as, “School A’s students score four points higher on the safety scale compared to their score on the engagement scale,” and “School A’s four-point gap between the safety and engagement dimensions is twice the size of the two-point gap in school B.”
- ★ Track school climate scores over time. Students in future years can be placed on the same scale as prior years, which will allow fair comparisons over time.

## How to review your survey data

Before you look at your school’s data, ESE recommends that you review three supporting documents first.

1. The *annotated sample report*, which provides an understanding of the layout of the reports and the data elements within them.
2. The *school climate profile*, which provides a description of what relatively strong, average, and weak school climates look like in Massachusetts.
3. The *two-page state summary*, which provides a summary of the school climate survey project and high-level results.

After reviewing these supporting documents, take a look at your school and district reports and considering the following questions:

- ★ Do the results make sense to you given the context of your school and district?
- ★ Do any findings surprise you (either positively or negatively)?
- ★ How big are the differences you see on the four indices? Differences of three to four points or more are meaningful.
- ★ What appear to be your school’s strengths and weaknesses within each of the dimensions of school climate?
- ★ Are there any other data sources (e.g., parent or staff survey data, discipline, absenteeism, etc.) that support or refute your summary conclusions?

Once you have taken an initial look at your data, drill down into comparisons across schools and item level data so that you can identify and focus in on specific strengths and weaknesses within your school or district.

On the following pages are two scenarios that schools or districts may face when they review their survey data. These scenarios provide an example of how to review your survey data so you can focus in on meaningful differences. In analyzing survey data, it is ultimately the content of the items and their relationship to each other that will provide you with the most relevant climate information. You can then use that information to build on the strengths you have and address any weaknesses that detract from your school climate.

**School-level scenario: Your school's safety and environment scores are above the district average but your engagement score is below the district average.**

- ★ Is your school's overall school climate score relatively weak, about average, or strong? Asking this question provides context for any score differences you observe. For example, if your school and district's overall average school climate and dimension scores are indicative of a relatively strong climate, is this difference of real concern?
  
- ★ Is the difference between dimension scores meaningful? Differences in school climate scores of 3 to 4 points or more are large enough to be meaningful.
  
- ★ Which specific survey items are contributing to the lower engagement score?
  - ★ How does the rank-ordering of your school's engagement items from most positive to least positive compare to that of your district?
  - ★ What are the largest percent differences in item responses between students within your school, and students across the district? For instance, if you notice that 64% of your students responded "always" or "mostly" true to an item, but the equivalent percentage for the district is 88%, it may be something worth investigating.
  
- ★ Do you observe patterns in the items' content?
  - ★ Are all the items, for example, related to student-student relationships or are they more related to teacher-student relationships? Identifying any patterns in your data will help you direct your resources and focus in on aspects of school climate that you can strengthen or improve.

**District-level scenario: Your district's school climate score is below the state average.**

- ★ Is the difference meaningful? Differences in school climate scores of 3 to 4 points or more are large enough to be meaningful.
- ★ Is the low score just in one particular grade, or are all grades' scores below the state average?
- ★ Are all your schools contributing to the lower overall district school climate score, or are the lower scores concentrated in only a few schools?
  - ★ If you find, for example, that two out of your six schools fall within the “weaker” overall school climate score category, whereas all other schools are within the “average” score category, revisit the School Climate Profile document to help you understand the factors that tend to distinguish schools across the two scoring categories.
- ★ Which dimensions of school climate (engagement, safety, and environment) are relatively weaker or stronger?
- ★ Which specific survey items appear to be contributing to the lower scores?
  - ★ Are patterns observable in the items' content? For example, are all low scoring items related to emotional or physical safety or are the items that measure bullying behaviors contributing to the differences you observe?

## Resources

If your next step is to strengthen or improve your school climate, below is a list of ESE and external resources that you may find useful:

Topic	Source	Link
Safe and Supportive Schools	Department of Elementary and Secondary Education	<a href="http://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/safety/">http://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/safety/</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ This web page outlines a number of Department of Elementary and Secondary Education programs and related resources that can help school districts and communities build safe and supportive learning environments for all students.</li> </ul>
Bullying Prevention and Intervention Resources	Department of Elementary and Secondary Education	<a href="http://www.doe.mass.edu/bullying/">http://www.doe.mass.edu/bullying/</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Model Bullying Prevention and Intervention plans</li> <li>★ A list of bullying prevention and intervention resources, evidence-based curricula, best practices, and academic-based research.</li> </ul>
Safe Schools Program for LGBTQ students	Department of Elementary and Secondary Education	<a href="http://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/lgbtq/">http://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/lgbtq/</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Provides training, technical assistance, and professional development to school administrators and staff on topics related to gender identity, sexual orientation, and school climate.</li> </ul>
Massachusetts Guidebook for Inclusive Practice	Department of Elementary and Secondary Education	<a href="http://www.doe.mass.edu/eeval/guidebook/">http://www.doe.mass.edu/eeval/guidebook/</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Created by Massachusetts educators, this Guidebook includes tools for districts, schools, and educators that are aligned to the MA Educator Evaluation Framework and promote evidence-based best practices for inclusion following the principles of Universal Design for Learning, Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports, and Social and Emotional Learning. Specific tools that may be useful include Master Schedule Review, Superintendent Self-Assessment, and What to Look For – School Level Administrator</li> </ul>
Leading Educational Access Project professional development	Department of Elementary and Secondary Education	<a href="http://www.doe.mass.edu/leap/pd.html">http://www.doe.mass.edu/leap/pd.html</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Statewide Cadre of Trainers from educational collaboratives to support school districts in developing sustainable systems and practices</li> <li>★ Online LEAP PD Tool intended to provide the user with a fundamental understanding of the impact that poverty can have on student performance and is intended for school and district use with groups or individuals allowing for direct instruction to school personnel</li> </ul>

School climate improvement resource package	National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments	<a href="https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/scirp/about">https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/scirp/about</a> ★ A variety of resources to help schools and districts improve school climate
School climate improvement process information	National School Climate Center	<a href="http://www.schoolclimate.org/climate/process.php">http://www.schoolclimate.org/climate/process.php</a> ★ A variety of resources to help schools and districts improve school climate
School climate tools and resources (including What Works Briefs)	WestEd for the California Department of Education	<a href="http://californias3.wested.org/tools/wwb/">http://californias3.wested.org/tools/wwb/</a> ★ A variety of resources to help schools and districts improve school climate

---

These websites may include content that do not necessarily represent the official views of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and listing them here does not imply endorsement of any kind. The Department assumes no responsibility for, or any obligation to monitor the content, privacy practices, operators, availability, accuracy, quality, advertising, products, services, or other materials of these sites. ESE is working on providing additional resources to support schools and districts that are related to school climate.

## Appendices

Appendix A briefly describes each indicator within the three dimensions. The items that were administered to students in spring of 2017 are summarized in Appendix B; the items, and their associated dimensions and indicators, are provided for grade 5, grade 8, and grade 10, respectively.

**Appendix A: Indicator descriptions<sup>1</sup>**

Dimension	Indicator	Description
Engagement	Cultural competence	The extent to which students feel the school and its staff value diversity, manage dynamics of differences, avoid stereotypes and acquire cultural knowledge.
	Relationships	The extent to which students perceive a social connection between staff/teachers and students, and between students and their peers.
	School participation	The extent to which students feel they or their parents are welcome or able to participate in school events.
Safety	Emotional	The extent to which students feel a sense of belonging to the school, and students/teachers/adults support the emotional needs of others.
	Physical	The extent to which students feel physically safe within the school environment and know how to respond to threats to themselves or the school.
	Bullying/cyber-bullying	The extent to which students report different types of bullying behaviors occurring in the school and the extent that school/staff/students try to counteract bullying and support a bullying free environment.
Environment	Discipline	The extent to which students perceive that school rules are fair and applied consistently and evenly, and that support is provided if needed.
	Instructional	The extent to which students feel the instructional environment is engaging, challenging and supportive of learning.
	Mental health	The extent to which students learn to self-manage their feelings and get support if needed.

<sup>1</sup>ESE used the United States Department of Education's conceptual framework and some of its items to develop our school climate surveys. Items were also taken from other publicly available resources and developed in-house.

**Appendix B: Grade 5 items**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Item code</b>	<b>Item prompt</b>
Engagement <sup>1</sup>	Cultural and Linguistic Competence	ENGCLC1	Adults working at this school treat <b>all</b> students respectfully.
Engagement	Cultural and Linguistic Competence	ENGCLC2	Teachers at this school accept me for who I am.
Engagement <sup>1</sup>	Relationships	ENGREL1	Students respect one another.
Engagement	Relationships	ENGREL2	Students will help other students, even if they are not close friends.
Engagement	Relationships	ENGREL3	My teachers care about me as a person.
Engagement	Relationships	ENGREL4	Students at my school get along well with each other.
Engagement	Participation	ENGPART1	I get the chance to take part in school events (for example, science fairs, art or music shows).
Safety <sup>1</sup>	Emotional	SAFEMO1	Teachers support (help) students who come to class upset.
Safety	Emotional	SAFEMO2	At our school, students learn to care about other students' feelings.
Safety	Emotional	SAFEMO3	I am happy to be at our school.
Safety	Physical	SAFPSF1	I feel safe at our school.
Safety	Physical	SAFPSF2	If I heard about a threat to our school or to my classmates, I would report it to an adult.
Safety <sup>1</sup>	Bullying/cyber bullying	SAFBUL1	If I tell a teacher or other adult that someone is being bullied, the teacher/adult will do something to help.
Safety	Bullying/cyber bullying	SAFBUL2	I have been punched or shoved by other students <b>more than once</b> in the school or in the playground.
Safety	Bullying/cyber bullying	SAFBUL3	Teachers don't let students pick on other students in class or in the hallways.
Environment <sup>1</sup>	Instructional	ENVINS1	Students help each other learn without having to be asked by the teacher.
Environment <sup>1</sup>	Instructional	ENVINS2	My teachers are proud of me when I work hard in school.
Environment	Instructional	ENVINS3	My teachers help me succeed with my school work when I need help.
Environment	Instructional	ENVINS4	My teachers use my ideas to help my classmates learn.
Environment	Mental health	ENVMEN1	In school, I learn how to control my feelings when I am angry or upset.
Environment	Mental health	ENVMEN2	I feel comfortable talking to my teacher(s) about something that is bothering me.
Environment <sup>1</sup>	Discipline	ENVDIS1	Students have a voice in deciding school rules.
Environment	Discipline	ENVDIS2	School rules are fair for all students.
Environment	Discipline	ENVDIS3	Adults at my school (for example, my school nurse, my teachers, or my principal) talk with students to help us know how to behave well.

**Appendix B: Grade 8 items**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Item code</b>	<b>Item prompt</b>
Engagement <sup>1</sup>	Cultural and Linguistic Competence	ENGCLC1	Adults working at this school treat <b>all</b> students respectfully, regardless of a student's race, culture, family background, sex, or sexual orientation.
Engagement	Cultural and Linguistic Competence	ENGCLC3	My textbooks or class materials include people and examples that reflect my race, cultural background and/or identity.
Engagement <sup>1</sup>	Relationships	ENGREL1	Students respect one another.
Engagement <sup>2</sup>	Relationships	ENGREL5	Students from different backgrounds get along well with each other in our school, regardless of their race, culture, family background, sex, or sexual orientation.
Engagement	Relationships	ENGREL6	Teachers are available when I need to talk with them.
Engagement	Relationships	ENGREL7	If I am absent from school, there is a teacher or other adult that will notice I was not in class.
Engagement	Relationships	ENGREL8	Teachers encourage students to respect different points of view when expressed in class.
Engagement	Relationships	ENGREL9	My teachers care about my academic success.
Engagement	Relationships	ENGREL10	My teachers inspire confidence in my ability to do well in school.
Engagement	Participation	ENGPART2	My parents feel respected when they participate at our school (e.g., at parent-teacher conferences, open houses).
Safety <sup>1</sup>	Emotional	SAFEMO1	Teachers support students who come to class upset.
Safety	Emotional	SAFEMO4	I feel comfortable reaching out to teachers/counselors for emotional support if I need it.
Safety	Emotional	SAFEMO5	Teachers and adults are interested in my well-being beyond just my class work.
Safety	Physical	SAFPSF3	Students at this school damage and/or steal other students' property.
Safety	Physical	SAFPSF4	I have seen students with weapons at our school.
Safety <sup>1</sup>	Bullying/cyber bullying	SAFBUL1	If I tell a teacher or other adult that someone is being bullied, the teacher/adult will do something to help.
Safety	Bullying/cyber bullying	SAFBUL4	Students at this school try to stop bullying when they see it happening.
Safety	Bullying/cyber bullying	SAFBUL5	Students have spread rumors or lies about me <b>more than once</b> on social media.
Safety	Bullying/cyber bullying	SAFBUL6	I have been teased or picked on <b>more than once</b> because of my religion.
Safety	Bullying/cyber bullying	SAFBUL7	I have been threatened by other students <b>more than once</b> on social media.

**Appendix B: Grade 8 items continued**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Item code</b>	<b>Item prompt</b>
Environment <sup>1</sup>	Instructional	ENVINS1	Students help each other learn without having to be asked by the teacher.
Environment <sup>1</sup>	Instructional	ENVINS2	My teachers are proud of me when I work hard in school.
Environment <sup>2</sup>	Instructional	ENVINS5	My teachers set high expectations for my work.
Environment	Instructional	ENVINS6	My teachers give me individual help with my school work when I need help.
Environment	Instructional	ENVINS7	I have a choice in how I show my learning (e.g., write a paper, prepare a presentation, make a video).
Environment	Instructional	ENVINS8	My teachers believe that <b>all</b> students can do well in their learning.
Environment	Instructional	ENVINS9	My school work is appropriately challenging.
Environment	Instructional	ENVINS10	I am not scared to make mistakes in my teachers' classes.
Environment	Mental health	ENVMEN3	Our school offers guidance to students on how to mediate (settle) conflicts by themselves.
Environment	Mental health	ENVMEN4	If I need help with my emotions (feelings), help is available at my school.
Environment <sup>1</sup>	Discipline	ENVDIS1	Students have a voice in deciding school rules.
Environment	Discipline	ENVDIS4	School staff are consistent when enforcing rules in school.
Environment	Discipline	ENVDIS5	In school, students learn how to control their behavior.

**Appendix B: Grade 10 items**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Item code</b>	<b>Item prompt</b>
Engagement <sup>1</sup>	Cultural and Linguistic Competence	ENGCLC1	Adults working at this school treat <b>all</b> students respectfully, regardless of a student's race, culture, family background, sex, or sexual orientation.
Engagement	Cultural and Linguistic Competence	ENGCLC4	I am encouraged to take upper level courses (honors, AP).
Engagement <sup>1</sup>	Relationships	ENGREL1	Students respect one another.
Engagement <sup>2</sup>	Relationships	ENGREL5	Students from different backgrounds get along well with each other in our school, regardless of their race, culture, family background, sex, or sexual orientation.
Engagement	Relationships	ENGREL11	My teachers are approachable if I am having problems with my class work.
Engagement	Relationships	ENGREL12	At our school, a teacher or some other adult is available to help students who have experienced sexual assault or dating violence.
Engagement	Relationships	ENGREL13	Adults at our school are respectful to student ideas even if the ideas expressed are different from their own.
Engagement	Relationships	ENGREL14	My teachers promote respect among students.
Engagement	Participation	ENGP3	I feel welcome to participate in extra-curricular activities offered through our school, such as, school clubs or organizations, musical groups, sports teams, student council.
Safety <sup>1</sup>	Emotional	SAFEMO1	Teachers support students who come to class upset.
Safety	Emotional	SAFEMO6	I have at least one friend who I can count on to support me.
Safety	Emotional	SAFEMO7	I feel as though I belong to my school community.
Safety	Physical	SAFPSF5	I sometimes stay home because I don't feel safe at our school.
Safety	Physical	SAFPSF6	Students know what to do if there is an emergency at school.
Safety <sup>1</sup>	Bullying/cyber bullying	SAFBUL1	If I tell a teacher or other adult that someone is being bullied, the teacher/adult will do something to help.
Safety	Bullying/cyber bullying	SAFBUL9	Teachers, students, and the principal work together in our school to prevent bullying.
Safety	Bullying/cyber bullying	SAFBUL10	I have been teased or picked <b>on more than once</b> because of my real or perceived sexual orientation.
Safety	Bullying/cyber bullying	SAFBUL11	I have been teased or picked <b>on more than once</b> because of my race or ethnicity.

**Appendix B: Grade 10 items continued**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Item code</b>	<b>Item prompt</b>
Environment <sup>1</sup>	Instructional	ENVINS1	Students help each other learn without having to be asked by the teacher.
Environment <sup>1</sup>	Instructional	ENVINS2	My teachers are proud of me when I work hard in school.
Environment <sup>2</sup>	Instructional	ENVINS5	My teachers set high expectations for my work.
Environment	Instructional	ENVINS11	My teachers support me even when my work is not my best.
Environment	Instructional	ENVINS12	The things I am learning in school are relevant (important) to me.
Environment	Instructional	ENVINS13	Teachers ask students for feedback on their classroom instruction.
Environment	Mental health	ENVMEN5	Students at this school try to work out their problems with other students in a respectful way.
Environment	Mental health	ENVMEN6	I have access to help at school if I am struggling emotionally or mentally.
Environment <sup>1</sup>	Discipline	ENVDIS1	Students have a voice in deciding school rules.
Environment	Discipline	ENVDIS6	The consequences for inappropriate behavior are enforced fairly.
Environment	Discipline	ENVDIS7	Teachers give students a chance to explain their behavior when they do something wrong.

<sup>1</sup>Common linking item on grade 5, grade 8, and grade 10 surveys. <sup>2</sup>Common linking item on grade 8, and grade 10 surveys.