| DESE logo | **VOCAL 2022 Summary**September 2022 |
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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](https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2014/Chapter86).

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

* Students in grades 4, 5, 8, and 10 can participate in the survey as part of the state MCAS administration in 2022.
* Statewide, 76% of students in grade 4, 77% in grade 5, 78% in grade 8, and 51% in grade 10 participated in the 2022 survey. Black students and English learners were slightly under-represented among participants. White students and low-income students were slightly over-represented among participants.
* DESE developed index scores for the three dimensions of climate (engagement, safety, and environment) along with an overall school climate index score (SCL). Index scores range from 1 to 99, but most scores fall between 35 and 75. Scores below 30 are categorized as *least favorable*, 31 to 50 as *somewhat favorable*, 51 to 70 as *favorable*, and over 70 *most favorable*. Districts and schools also receive a bullying score; as with other index scores, a higher bullying score represents a more positive, safer environment for students. New to 2022, a participation score (engagement topic) and an instructional environment score (environment topic) was reported to educators. 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 groups of students.
* Index scaled scores in 2022 can be compared across dimensions, student groups, grade levels, and schools. DESE introduced a new reporting format in 2022. Districts and schools can now review their VOCAL data in a Power BI dashboard (they also can examine their data using a paginated report).
* Index scaled scores can be used to identify meaningful differences in student perceptions. As a guide, a difference of 3 points is a meaningful but small difference in student perceptions. In contrast, a difference of 8 points is considered a large disparity in student perceptions.

**Student-Level Findings**

* Students generally reported that they experienced positive school climates. There is considerable variation in student scores. For example, in grade 4 most scores (68%) range between 43 and 79; similarly, there is large variability for grade 5 (68% of scores range between 37 to 76), grade 8 (27 to 60), and grade 10 (27 to 61).
* Students in grades 4 and 5 reported more positive school climates than students in grade 8 or grade 10 across all three dimensions and all three topics of school climate. There is a notable decline in the average instructional environment score (6 points) between grade 4 and grade 5; this point decline is 2 to 3 times larger in magnitude when compared to other dimension/topic score differences.
* Except for grade 5, students have less favorable views of their safety when compared to the school environment within their schools. In grades 4, 8, and 10, there is a 3- or 4-point difference between the average safety dimension score and the average environment dimension score.

| Survey measure | Student-level average index score |
| --- | --- |
| **Grade 4** | **Grade 5** | **Grade 8** | **Grade 10** |
| Overall school climate (SCL) | 61 | 57 | 43 | 44 |
| Engagement | 59 | 56 | 45 | 45 |
|  Participation | 57 | 55 | 46 | 46 |
| Safety | 58 | 55 | 42 | 43 |
|  Bullying | 56 | 54 | 42 | 43 |
| Environment | 62 | 57 | 45 | 47 |
|  Instructional | 62 | 56 | 45 | 46 |

* + - Differences in item responses account for the differences in index scores. For example, 26% of grade 4 students and 22% of grade 5 students responded, “always true” to the Engagement item statement, “My teachers use my ideas to help my classmates learn.” In comparison, 8% and 11% of grade 8 and grade 10 students responded similarly to this participation item. Within the safety dimension, 64% of grade 4 students and 59% of grade 5 students responded, “always true” to the bullying safety item statement, “Teachers, students, and the principal work together to prevent (stop) bullying.” In comparison, 28% and 25% of grade 8 and grade 10 students responded similarly to this safety item. Within the Environment dimension, 61% of grade 4 students and 52% of grade 5 students responded, “always true” to the instructional environment item statement, “My teachers support me even when my work is not my best.” In comparison, 27% of grade 8 and grade 10 students responded similarly to this item.
* Almost a fifth of all students in grades 8 and 10 rate their school climate in the least favorable category; this compares to less than a tenth of all students in grades 4 and 5.
* Students across all student groups report more favorable school climate scores in the earlier grades (grade 4 and 5) when compared to student groups in the later grades (grade 8 and 10).
* In general, Asian students have the most favorable views of school climate (SCL) across each grade. In the older grades, Multi-race, Native Americans, and Pacific Islander students (Other), Black, Hispanic, and White students all have less favorable perceptions of school climate than Asian students. Of all student groups, Black students in the three younger grades have the largest difference in school climate views (4 to 5 points) when compared to Asian students; in grade 10, the gap (4 points) between Black and Asian students is still moderate in size. Except for grade 10 (small gap), a large gap exists between Asian and Black student perceptions of safety (data not shown). Black students also report a less supportive environment in all grades (small gap) and less engagement in the two older grades (small/moderate gap). Overall, these gaps between Asian and Black student perceptions replicate previous years’ findings.

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| Survey measure | Grade 4: Student-level average index score |
| **All students** | **Asian** | **Black** | **Hispanic** | **Other** | **White** |
| SCL | 61 | 62 | 58 | 60 | 60 | 62 |
| Survey measure | Grade 5: Student-level average index score |
| **All students** | **Asian** | **Black** | **Hispanic** | **Other** | **White** |
| SCL | 57 | 59 | 54 | 55 | 56 | 57 |
| Survey measure | Grade 8: Student-level average index score |
| **All students** | **Asian** | **Black** | **Hispanic** | **Other** | **White** |
| SCL | 43 | 48 | 43 | 43 | 43 | 43 |
| Survey measure | Grade 10: Student-level average index score |
| **All students** | **Asian** | **Black** | **Hispanic** | **Other** | **White** |
| SCL | 44 | 47 | 43 | 44 | 42 | 44 |

* Although there are a relatively small number of Non-binary (NB) students identified in grades 4 (N = 15), 5 (N = 15), 8 (N = 85) and 10 (N = 123), NB students’ scores are very low compared to students who identify as female or male. NB students’ average score is 9- and 7- points lower than females’ average score, in grades 4 and 5, respectively. The gaps in grade 8 and grade 10 are similarly big (9 points and 11 points, respectively). These gaps are large to very large and replicate findings from prior years.
* Except for grade 5 low-income students (small gap exists), low-income 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 the older grades when contrasted with their comparison groups. The index score difference is 3 points in grade 8, and 5 points in grade 10.

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| Survey measure | Grade 4: Student-level average index score\* |
| **Female** | **Male** | **NB** | **Low-Income** | **Not-Low Income** | **SWD** | **Not-SWD** | **EL** | **Not-EL** |
| SCL | 62 | 60 | 53 | 60 | 62 | 61 | 61 | 60 | 61 |
| Survey measure | Grade 5: Student-level average index score\* |
| **Female** | **Male** | **NB** | **Low-Income** | **Not-Low Income** | **SWD** | **Not-SWD** | **EL** | **Not-EL** |
| SCL | 57 | 56 | 50 | 55 | 58 | 57 | 56 | 58 | 56 |
| Survey measure | Grade 8: Student-level average index score\* |
| **Female** | **Male** | **NB** | **Low-Income** | **Not-Low Income** | **SWD** | **Not-SWD** | **EL** | **Not-EL** |
| SCL | 43 | 44 | 34 | 43 | 44 | 45 | 43 | 46 | 43 |
| Survey measure | Grade 10: Student-level average index score\* |
| **Female** | **Male** | **NB** | **Low-Income** | **Not-Low Income** | **SWD** | **Not-SWD** | **EL** | **Not-EL** |
| SCL | 43 | 46 | 32 | 43 | 45 | 45 | 44 | 49 | 44 |

\*NB: Not-Binary; SWD: Student with disabilities; EL: English learner.

**Trend in Students’ School Climate Views**

* Except for 2021 (see graph note), the average school climate score has remained relatively stable over the last five years in the four grades. Notably, pre-pandemic, the grade 8 average score declined between 2018 (46 points) and 2019 (43 points) with the average remaining low in 2022 (43 points).

\*The VOCAL survey was not administered to grade 4 students in 2018, or to any students in 2020 (due to the pandemic). The dashed lines symbolize the break in data collection. 2021 data should be viewed with caution as many students had either just returned to in-person learning or were transitioning to in-person learning at the time of the survey administration.

**School-Level Findings**

* Among schools that had enough responses to receive reports, the overall school climate index ranged from 25 to 90, showing considerable variation in climate across schools. Schools serving grade 5 show the most variation; average scores ranged from 35 to 90. Schools serving grade 10 exhibited the least variation; average scores ranged from 33 to 67.
* The distribution of scores was divided into four categories from least favorable to most favorable. Notably, there are few schools with an average score equal to 30 or lower (the average of five schools serving grade 8 fall into the lowest category). In the younger grades, a large majority of schools fall into the *favorable* school climate category. In the upper grades, most schools’ average score falls within the *somewhat favorable* category with no schools categorized as *most favorable* and only about a tenth of schools in the *favorable* category.