

**VOCAL 2024 Summary**

October 2024

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.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **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. |

* 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 were able to participate in the survey as part of the state MCAS administration in Spring 2024.
* Statewide, 78% of students in grade 4, 79% in grade 5, 80% in grade 8, and 58% in grade 10 participated in the 2023 survey. Participation rates among student groups closely reflected state enrollment rates.
* 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. 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. As of 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”. Aggregate index scores and item response data are provided for “All students” and for groups of students.
* Index scaled scores in 2024 can be compared across dimensions, student groups, grade levels, and schools. 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.Explaining why scores differ is facilitated by determining which survey items differed in their response rates.

# Student-Level Findings

* Students in grades 4 and 5 responded in a way consistent with a perception of school climates more positive than students in grade 8 or grade 10 across the survey. The decline in scores in lower grades in 2024 is consistent with a pattern emerging post-pandemic where all grade levels are reporting less favorably on peer behavior related items since pre-pandemic. However, 8th and 10th grade scores are supported by more favorable responses about teacher, discipline, and student voice related items.

# Table 1. State: Average index scores among students by grade level

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Survey Measure** | **Grade 4** | **Grade 5** | **Grade 8** | **Grade 10** |
| Overall school climate (SCL) | 58 ↓1 | 52 ↓2 | 43 - | 45 - |
| Engagement | 57 ↓1 | 53 ↓1 | 45 - | 46 - |
| Participation | 56 - | 53 ↓1 | 47 ↑1 | 47 - |
| Safety | 56 - | 51 ↓1 | 42 ↑1 | 44 - |
| Bullying | 53 - | 49 ↓1 | 40 - | 42 ↓1 |
| Environment | 59 ↓1 | 53 ↓1 | 45 ↑1 | 48 - |
| Instructional | 59 ↓1 | 52 ↓2 | 45 - | 47 - |

**Note**: Red and green arrows indicate the difference between this year’s score and last year’s.

* Differences in index scores represent differences in student response patterns. Table 2 shows the most highly rated items among students. For example, 96% of the State’s 4th grade respondents reported it was always true or mostly true that their teachers care about them as a person.

**Table 2. State: Items with the highest favorable response rates (Always True or Mostly True)**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Grade** | **Engagement** | **Safety** | **Environment** |
| 4th | My teachers care about me as a person. (96%) | If I tell my teacher my classmate is being bullied, my teacher will help that person.  (93%) | My teachers are proud of me when I work hard in school. (96%) |
| 5th | My teachers care about me as a person. (93%) | Teachers support (help) students who come to class upset. (90%) | My teachers are proud of me when I work hard in school. (94%) |
| 8th | Students are open to having friends who come from different backgrounds (for example, friends from different races, cultures, family incomes, or religions, or friends of a different sex, or sexual orientation). (92%) | If I tell a teacher or other adult that someone is being bullied, the teacher or adult will do something to help. (85%) | My teachers believe that all students can do well in their learning. (91%) |
| 10th | Students are open to having friends who come from different backgrounds (for example, friends from different races, cultures, family incomes, or religions, or friends of a different sex, or sexual orientation). (92%) | If I tell a teacher or other adult that someone is being bullied, the teacher/adult will do something to help. (88%) | My teachers set high expectations for my work. (88%) |

* Index scores below 30 are classified as *least favorable*, 31 to 50 as *somewhat favorable*, 51 to 70 as *favorable*, and over 70 *most favorable*. Figure 1 displays these classification rates by grade level.

# Figure 1. State: Percent of students responding within each school climate category

%

7

%

11

%

19

17

%

13

%

%

26

%

35

50

%

49

%

%

40

%

42

37

%

%

24

24

%

32

%

25

%

%

17

%

7

10

%

15

%

%

0

25

%

%

50

%

75

%

100

Grade 4

Grade 5

Grade 8

Grade 10

ALL

**Percent of Students**

**Grade Level**

Least favorable (<=30)

Somewhat favorable (31-50)

Favorable (51-70)

Most favorable (>70)

* When considering student groups in terms of race and ethnicity, Asian students tended to have the most favorable views of school climate across each grade. The difference between Asian students’ responses and their peers’ responses in other groups was more pronounced in each subsequent grade level.

# Table 3. State: Average student Overall School Climate index scores, by grade level and race/ethnicity

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Grade 4** |  |  |  |  |  |
| **All students** | **Asian** | **Black** | **Hispanic** | **Other\*** | **White** |
| 58 ↓1 | 60 | 55 ↓1 | 58 | 57 ↓1 | 59 ↓1 |
| **Grade 5** |  |  |  |  |  |
| **All students** | **Asian** | **Black** | **Hispanic** | **Other\*** | **White** |
| 52 ↓2 | 55 ↓2 | 50 ↓1 | 52 ↓1 | 51 ↓2 | 53 ↓2 |
| **Grade 8** |  |  |  |  |  |
| **All students** | **Asian** | **Black** | **Hispanic** | **Other\*** | **White** |
| 43 | 47 | 42 ↑1 | 42 | 42 ↑1 | 43 |
| **Grade 10** |  |  |  |  |  |
| **All students** | **Asian** | **Black** | **Hispanic** | **Other\*** | **White** |
| 45 | 50 | 45 ↑1 | 44 ↓1 | 44 ↑1 | 46 ↑1 |

\*“Other” includes Multi-Race (non-Hispanic), Native American, and Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander students

• Although there were a relatively small number of Non-binary (NB) student participants identified in grades 4 (N = 31), 5 (N = 38), 8 (N = 101) and 10 (N = 164), NB students’ scores were generally lower compared to students who were identified as female or male across grade levels.

• Mixed patterns among averages are observed with other student groups. Students in families with lower incomes generally responded in a way to indicate a slightly less favorable climate, while the opposite was true among students with disabilities and English learners. However, these differences were generally very small, often within a margin of rounding error; deeper consideration is warranted at the item response level.

# Table 4. State: Average student Overall School Climate index scores, by grade level and student groups

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Grade 4 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Female** | **Male** | **NB** | **Low-Income** | **Not-Low Income** | **SWD** | **Not-SWD** | **EL** | **Not-EL** |
| 59↓1 | 57↓1 | 54 ↓2 | 57 ↓1 | 59 ↓1 | 58 ↓1 | 58 ↓1 | 58 ↓1 | 58 ↓1 |
| Grade 5 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Female** | **Male** | **NB** | **Low-Income** | **Not-Low Income** | **SWD** | **Not-SWD** | **EL** | **Not-EL** |
| 53 ↓1 | 52 ↓2 | 47 ↓1 | 51 ↓2 | 53 ↓2 | 53 ↓3 | 52 ↓2 | 54 ↓2 | 52 ↓2 |
| Grade 8 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Female** | **Male** | **NB** | **Low-Income** | **Not-Low Income** | **SWD** | **Not-SWD** | **EL** | **Not-EL** |
| 43 ↑1 | 43 | 38 | 42 | 44 | 44 ↓1 | 43 | 44 ↓1 | 43 ↑1 |
| Grade 10 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Female** | **Male** | **NB** | **Low-Income** | **Not-Low Income** | **SWD** | **Not-SWD** | **EL** | **Not-EL** |
| 44 | 46 ↓1 | 37 ↑1 | 44 | 46 | 45 ↓1 | 45 | 46 ↓1\* | 45 |

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

\*Additional items are included in the 2024 score; this is the difference had the additional items not been included in 2024.

# Trend in Students’ School Climate Views

• Except for 2021, Massachusetts’ average school climate score has remained relatively stable over the last five years in the four grades. However, because many items from all dimensions are included, stable overall scores do not guarantee there are no meaningful differences at the item level. Figure 2 displays the year-to-year total average school climate scores with notes about interpretation.

# Figure 2. State: Year-to-year average Overall School Climate index scores by grade level

\*The VOCAL survey was not administered to grade 4 students in 2018, or to any students in 2020 (due to the pandemic). 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.

\*\*Y-axis displays a portion of the entire VOCAL scale (1-99). Distance between averages appear magnified.

# School-Level Findings

* School averages of overall index scores were divided into four classifications from least favorable to most favorable. 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.

**Figure 3. State: Percent of schools in each school climate category for each grade level**

Grade 4

Grade 5

Grade 8

Grade 10

Least favorable (<=30)

%

0

%

0

1

%

%

0

Somewhat favorable (31 - 50)

%

7

%

33

%

88

%

85

Favorable (51 - 70)

92

%

%

66

10

%

15

%

Most favorable (>70)

%

1

1

%

1

%

0

%

%

0

25

%

50

%

%

75

100

%

% of schools