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| ESE logo | | | |
|  | Views of Climate and Learning (VOCAL) Survey: Interpretive Guide and Action Planning template for Schools | | |
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| Guide on how to systematically analyze VOCAL survey data  November 2022 | | |
| Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education  75 Pleasant Street, Malden, MA 02148-4906  Phone 781-338-3000 TTY: N.E.T. Relay 800-439-2370  www.doe.mass.edu | | |
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**Using the interpretive guide and action planning templates to analyze your climate data**

**Interpretive Guide Template (step-by-step guide begins page 4)**

1. **Before you look at your school’s data, DESE recommends that you review** the [***grade-level* *school climate profile(s)***](https://www.doe.mass.edu/research/vocal/default.html)pertinent to your school. The profile is a narrative describing the perceptions of a student at three cut-points (30, 50, and 70) used to create four scoring (favorability) categories that characterize the school climate. Locate which category your overall school climate score falls and read the profile narrative related to that category. If your overall average score is located at the boundary of two categories, it is recommended that you read the contiguous narratives associated with that score. The scaled score point range for each favorability category is as follows:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| School Climate description | Index scaled score range |
| Least favorable climate | ≤ 30 points |
| Somewhat favorable climate | 31 to ≤ 50 points |
| Favorable climate | 51 to ≤ 70 points |
| Most favorable climate | > 70 points |

**Please note:** Prior to 2021, the profiles used different cut points to create the profile narratives. Your average score from prior years can be situated on the scale using the above data table and the narrative(s) applied to that score. Going forward, the benchmark scores of 30, 50, and 70 will be kept as the cut-points to create the four scoring (favorability) categories. As a result, these narratives will not change.

1. **After reviewing the profile, take a *brief* look at your school report to get a feel for the data and your gut reaction toward it. As you do this, consider the following questions:**
   1. Do the results make sense to you given the context of your school and district?
   2. Do any findings jump out at you and surprise you (either positively or negatively)?
   3. How big are the differences you see on the four indices? **Differences of three to four index points or more are likely meaningful.**
   4. What appear to be your school’s strengths and areas for growth within each of the dimensions of school climate?
   5. Are there noticeable patterns in index score differences that replicate each year?
   6. Are there any other data sources (e.g., parent or staff survey data, discipline, absenteeism, etc.) that support or refute your summary conclusions?
2. **Once you have a feel for your data, you can use the interpretive guide to analyze your school-level data more thoroughly by drilling down from the index level data to the item level data. This allows you to identify and focus in on specific strengths and areas for growth within your school.** **The interpretive guide:**
3. Takes you through a systematic approach to analyzing and interpreting your VOCAL data embedded in the dashboard tabs.
4. Asks guiding questions for what you may want to know
5. Points you to the data report element
6. Gives you an idea of what to look for when assessing the data and provides more specific guiding questions you may consider
7. Provides a column for you to write your observations based on your data analyses
8. **Item responses in all school reports can be organized from most positive student views to the least positive student views using (1) the state average for rank ordering, (2) the district’s average, or (3) the school’s average for rank ordering.** 
   1. The “always true” and “mostly true” response categories were combined and can be sorted from highest to lowest for each dimension.
   2. **Please note, your school’s rank ordering from most to least positive item responses may not mirror the state’s or district’s rank ordering.**

The graphic below summarizes the recommended approach and some guiding questions needed to analyze your school climate data. A step-by-step interpretive guide walking you through the dashboard screens begins on page 4.

This graphic is used to visualize the analytical approach that educators can use to analyze their school climate data. If provides a summary of the guiding questions used in the analyses. These guiding questions are provided in the body of the document.

**Action Planning Template (Page 11)**

The Action Planning template is designed to help those schools that have analyzed their school climate data and identified their strengths and areas for growth to plan goals and strategies to improve aspects of their school climate. Once you have identified the strengths and areas for growth of the climate in your building(s), **it is recommended that schools and districts focus on no more than 2 or 3 findings in any one year.** For each finding, include any other data sources (e.g., parent or staff survey data, Early Warning Indicator System (EWIS) data, discipline data, absenteeism, program, or practice implementation data, etc.) that support or refute your summary conclusions. Then consider how your findings inform your current practices, goals and/or priorities. Do you need to adopt new goals, adjust your existing goals, or stay the course? While developing next steps, carefully consider the rationale or evidence we have for these decisions.

The template highlights five questions that can be used to guide your planning process.

1. What specific actions or implementation steps are necessary?
2. For each action, how will the school monitor implementation?
3. How will the school measure effectiveness?
4. Who will work on and be responsible for each part of the plan?
5. What is the timeline for each part of the plan?

The Office of Planning and Research (OPR) has developed a planning model and has several resources available to support school improvement planning. Educators can visit OPR’s [Planning for Success webpage](http://www.doe.mass.edu/research/success/) to access these additional resource

**Interpretive Guide Template (step-by-step guide)**

The interpretive guide template is designed to be used in conjunction with the Power Bi Dashboard displays of your school climate data. It will:

1. Take you through a systematic approach to analyzing and interpreting your VOCAL data embedded in the dashboard tabs.
2. Asks guiding questions for what you may want to know
3. Points you to the data report element
4. Gives you an idea of what to look for when assessing the data and provides more specific guiding questions you may consider
5. Provides a column for you to write your observations based on your data analyses

**Participation**

| **What do we want to know...** | **See...** | **Look for and ask…** | **Your School Climate Observations** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| What percentage of students from your school have participated in the VOCAL survey?  How does the percentage of students participating vary across the grades served by your school? | **Participation** **tab:**  **The graph** illustrates the percent participation for ‘All grades’ and for each grade served by your school. This is based on the number of students participating divided by the total number of students eligible to take the MCAS.  **The table** provides the number of students participating in the survey for all grades and for each grade served, and for comparison, provides the number of students eligible to take the survey (Total students). | A low participation rate (<70%) could mean that students who participated in the survey have views that are not representative of your student population as a whole, leading to bias and misinterpretation of the views expressed. Caution is advised when participation rates drop below 50%.  How can I improve participation rates to increase the accuracy of the VOCAL data?  Are all grades participating in the survey equally?  How does my school’s participation rates compare to the district average(s)? |  |

**School Results**

| **What do we want to know...** | **See...** | **Look for and ask…** | **Your School Climate Observations** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| How favorable is the overall school climate for all participating students (all grades) and for each grade in the school?  How does the distribution of students vary across the four scoring categories compare to that of the district or state? | **Index score for all students**: Overall index score for ‘all grades’ and for ‘each grade’.  **Four climate categories:**  < = 30: Least favorable  31 to < = 50: Somewhat favorable  51 to < = 70: Favorable climate  >70: Most favorable  **Hover on the bar for your school, district, or state to view the distribution of students in each of the four favorability categories. Compare results.** | Read DESE’s VOCAL grade-level profiles to read a summary description of school climate at the three cut-points used to create the four school climate scoring categories.  Does the overall climate score make sense/surprise you given the context of your school and district?  Does the favorability distribution of students make sense/surprise you (either positively or negatively)?  How do students’ item responses contribute to the overall score, dimension scores, and topic scores? (see Item Summary tab and guidance). |  |
| How favorable (category?) is the school climate for each of the three dimensions - engagement, safety, and environment?  How do dimension scores differ compared to the overall school climate score and to each other?  How do dimension scores differ compare to the district’s or state’s? | **Index summary**: View index scores in DIMENSIONS view (top right)  **Four climate categories:**  < = 30: Least favorable  31 to < = 50: Somewhat favorable  51 to < = 70: Favorable climate  >70: Most favorable | Do the scores differ by 3 or more points? What is the magnitude of the difference (see Getting Started tab for guidance on how to interpret whether a score difference is meaningful)?  Highest index scores? Lowest index scores?  Any other data sources (e.g., parent surveys; suspension data, etc.) to support your findings? |  |
| How favorable (category?) is the school climate for each of the three topics – participation, bullying, and instructional environment?  How do topic scores differ compared to the overall school climate score, and to its dimension score? | **Index summary**: View index scores in TOPICS view (top right)  **Four climate categories:**  < = 30: Least favorable  31 to < = 50: Somewhat favorable  51 to < = 70: Favorable climate  >70: Most favorable | Do the scores differ by 3 or more points?  What is the magnitude of the difference?  How do topic scores differ compared to the district’s or state’s?  Any other data sources (e.g., parent surveys; suspension data, etc.) to support your findings? |  |

**Item Response by School (Detailed report)**

| **What do we want to know...** | **See..** | **Look for and ask…** | **Your School Climate Observations** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Before you begin**, from the school results analyses, review which index scores differed the most? | **Index dimension score on school results tab for each grade/dimension.** | How does your score(s) compare with the district? The state? 3 or more point difference?  What items are contributing to the difference(s) observed? |  |
| Within each dimension, what items did students feel most positively about?  Within each dimension, what items did students feel most negatively about? | **On the item summary tab, select grade and dimension of interest, and item data for ‘all students’ in the ‘Select a student group’ dropdown**  Percent ‘always true’ or ‘mostly true’ column allows you to compare your data to the district and state.  Use column header filter(s) to sort percent response from most positive to least positive views. | What 3 or 4 items have the highest percent totals?  Are these items higher/lower than the district %? By how much? Higher/lower than the state %? By how much?  **\*\*Special Note: For some items, a higher percentage responding, “Always true or mostly true” is a negative outcome. For example, in the Safety dimension, there are many items measuring bullying behaviors in school; a positive response to these items is to respond, “Never true” or “mostly untrue”. Please be aware of this when you sort your items using, “Always true or mostly true”. \*\*** |  |
| Within each dimension, what items differed the most from the district or state average? | **Cross reference index score and item data for ‘all students’**: Percent always or mostly true column | What items, if any, differed by at least 7 percentage points (either positively or negatively) from the district or state average? |  |
| Are there any patterns or narratives in item content that help explain the differences in the index scores? | **Index summary and item data for all students**: : Index scores and percent ‘always true’ or ‘mostly true’ column | What topics within the dimension do the items belong to? Are the items related in content?  Do items with related content trend in the same direction (positively or negatively)? |  |

| **Student Group Results (Note: Student group Dimension scores are not available until 2022. )** | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **What do we want to know...** | **See...** | **Look for and ask…** | **Your School Climate Observations** |
| How do the school climate results differ among demographic student groups (e.g., by gender, race/ethnicity etc.)?  How does each student group SCHOOL CLIMATE index score compare to the “**All student**” score? | **Select grade and Comparison filter: “All students in your school/district”**:  View: School Climate index score  **Use cursor to hover over Orange circle on each bar to highlight data specific to comparison chosen** | Does the student group average fall below or above the “All student” average?  Do the scores differ by 3 or more points?  What is the magnitude of the difference (see Getting Started tab)?  Highest/Lowest student group index score(s)? |  |
| How do student group SCHOOL CLIMATE scores differ from the comparison student **peer group** scores (e.g., EL students vs. Not EL)? | **Select grade and Comparison filter: “All students in your school/district”**:  View: School Climate index score  **Use cursor to hover over Orange circle on each bar to highlight data specific to comparison chosen** | Does one student group’s average fall below or above the other student group’s average?  Do the scores differ by 3 or more points? What is the magnitude of the difference? |  |
| How do student group SCHOOL CLIMATE scores differ compared to the district’s? To the state’s? | **Select grade and Compare filter: “Student group in district” or “Student group in state”**  View: School Climate index score  **Use cursor to hover over Orange circle on each bar to highlight data specific to comparison chosen** | Does the student group average fall below or above the “district” average? Above or below state average?  Do the scores differ by 3 or more points? What is the magnitude of the difference? |  |
| Based on the SCHOOL CLIMATE scorewhat conclusions can be made for the above analyses of the student group data? | **Summarize the data from analyses above using the SCHOOL CLIMATE** index score  (by student group) | Is there any score difference that is particularly concerning or suggestive of an inequitable provision of a safe and supportive school climate? |  |
| Based on *the* ***ENGAGEMENT DIMENSION climate score***, **repeat the analyses above**.  How does each student group ENGAGEMENT index score compare to the “**All student**” score? | **Select grade and Comparison filter: “All students in your school/district”**:  View: Engagement index score  **Use cursor to hover over Orange circle on each bar to highlight data specific to comparison chosen** | Does the student group average fall below or above the “All student” average? 3 or more-point difference?  What is the magnitude of the difference?  Highest/Lowest student group index score(s)? |  |
| How do student group ENGAGEMENT scores differ from the comparison student **peer group** scores (e.g., EL students vs. Not EL)? | **Select grade and Comparison filter: “All students in your school/district”**:  View: Engagement index score  **Use cursor to hover over Orange circle on each bar to highlight data specific to comparison chosen** | Does one student group’s average fall below or above the other student group’s average?  Do the scores differ by 3 or more points?  What is the magnitude of the difference? |  |
| How do student group ENGAGEMENT scores differ compared to the district’s? To the state’s? | **Select grade and Compare filter: “Student group in district” or “Student group in state”**  View: Engagement index score  **Use cursor to hover over Orange circle on each bar to highlight data specific to comparison chosen** | Does the student group average fall below or above the “district” average? Above or below state average?  Do the scores differ by 3 or more points?  What is the magnitude of the difference? |  |
| Based on the ENGAGEMENT score, what conclusions can be made for the above analyses of the student group data? | **Summarize the data from analyses above using the ENGAGEMENT** index score  (by student group) | Is there any score difference that is particularly concerning or suggestive of an inequitable provision of a safe and supportive school climate? |  |
| Based on *the* ***ENVIRONMENT DIMENSION climate score***, **repeat the analyses above**.  How does each student group ENVIRONMENT index score compare to the “**All student**” score? | **Select grade and Comparison filter: “All students in your school/district”**:  View: Environment index score  **Use cursor to hover over Orange circle on each bar to highlight data specific to comparison chosen** | Does the student group average fall below or above the “All student” average? 3 or more-point difference?  What is the magnitude of the difference?  Highest/Lowest student group index score(s)? |  |
| How do student group ENVIRONMENT scores differ from the comparison student **peer group** scores (e.g., EL students vs. Not EL)? | **Select grade and Comparison filter: “All students in your school/district”**:  View: Environment index score  **Use cursor to hover over Orange circle on each bar to highlight data specific to comparison chosen** | Does one student group’s average fall below or above the other student group’s average?  Do the scores differ by 3 or more points?  What is the magnitude of the difference? |  |
| How do student group ENVIRONMENT scores differ compared to the district’s? To the state’s? | **Select grade and Compare filter: “Student group in district” or “Student group in state”**  View: Environment index score  **Use cursor to hover over Orange circle on each bar to highlight data specific to comparison chosen** | Does the student group average fall below or above the “district” average? Above or below state average?  Do the scores differ by 3 or more points?  What is the magnitude of the difference? |  |
| Based on the ENVIRONMENTscore, what conclusions can be made for the above analyses of the student group data? | **Summarize the data from analyses above using the ENVIRONMENT** index score  (by student group) | Is there any score difference that is particularly concerning or suggestive of an inequitable provision of a safe and supportive school climate? |  |

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| Based on *the* ***SAFETY DIMENSION climate score***, **repeat the analyses above**.  How does each student group SAFETY index score compare to the “**All student**” score? | **Select grade and Comparison filter: “All students in your school/district”**:  View: Safety index score  **Use cursor to hover over Orange circle on each bar to highlight data specific to comparison chosen** | Does the student group average fall below or above the “All student” average? 3 or more-point difference?  What is the magnitude of the difference?  Highest/Lowest student group index score(s)? |  |
| How do student group SAFETY scores differ from the comparison student **peer group** scores (e.g., EL students vs. Not EL)? | **Select grade and Comparison filter: “All students in your school/district”**:  View: Safety index score  **Use cursor to hover over Orange circle on each bar to highlight data specific to comparison chosen** | Does one student group’s average fall below or above the other student group’s average?  Do the scores differ by 3 or more points?  What is the magnitude of the difference? |  |
| How do student group SAFETY scores differ compared to the district’s? To the state’s? | **Select grade and Compare filter: “Student group in district” or “Student group in state”**  View: Safety index score  **Use cursor to hover over Orange circle on each bar to highlight data specific to comparison chosen** | Does the student group average fall below or above the “district” average? Above or below state average?  Do the scores differ by 3 or more points?  What is the magnitude of the difference? |  |
| Based on the SAFETY score, what conclusions can be made for the above analyses of the student group data? | **Summarize the data from analyses above using the SAFETY** index score  (by student group) | Is there any score difference that is particularly concerning or suggestive of an inequitable provision of a safe and supportive school climate? |  |

**Item Responses by Student Group (these analyses are done by grade; all grades data is NOT available)**

| **What do we want to know...** | **See...** | **Look for and ask…** | **Your School Climate Observations** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| What item percents **help explain** the difference in index scores observed between the student group and “all students” in your school or district?  Are there any **patterns in item content** given the strengths and areas for growth identified in the student group results?  **It is recommended to focus on equity gaps.** | **Select grade and Comparison filter: “to all students in your school/district”**:  **Grey shading** highlights the “all student” percent totals (percent always true or mostly true).  **Cells shaded blue** indicate student group has more favorable views compared to all students (by 7% or greater difference).  **Cells shaded orange** indicate student group has less favorable views compared to all students (by 7% or greater difference). | How do the student group school climate item percent scores compare to the “All student” item percent scores across all three dimensions?  Identify items that are over 7% points lower (shaded orange) when compared to the All student percents. Are the items related in content (same topic?)?  Do items with related content within each dimension trend in the same direction (positively or negatively)?  Are there patterns in item content within and across dimensions? **What narrative could explain this pattern?** |  |
| What item percents vary across the **student peer groups** and help explain the difference in index scores observed between a student group and its comparison peer group (e.g., female vs. male or non-binary)?  Are there any patterns in item content given the strengths and areas for growth identified in the student group results?  **It is recommended to focus on equity gaps.** | **Select grade and Comparison filter: “to comparison student group”** (e.g., by selecting EL status, data comparing EL students to Not EL students is shown):  **Grey shading** highlights the “reference group” percent totals (percent always true or mostly true). For example, Not EL students are the reference group for the EL Status comparison.  **Cells shaded blue** indicate student group has more positive views compared to the reference group (by 7% or greater difference).  **Cells shaded orange** indicate student group has less positive views compared to the reference group (by 7% or greater). | How do the student group school climate item percent scores compare to their comparison student group item percent scores across all three dimensions?  Identify items that are over 7% points lower (shaded orange) when compared to the reference group. Are these items related in content (same topic?)?  Do items with related content within each dimension trend in the same direction (positively or negatively)?  Are there patterns in item content within and across dimensions? What narrative could explain this pattern? |  |
| Which items are highlighted by both sets of analyses above (comparison to all students and to reference group)? | Note items that highlight differences that are common and in the same direction in both sets of analyses. | Is there a narrative that **explains the student group index score** differences observed across the two sets of analyses? |  |

**Trend Results**

| **What do we want to know...** | **See** | **Look for and ask…** | **Your School Climate Observations** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| How have student views changed over the last five years?  How does the trend in the SCHOOL CLIMATE score compare to how the score changed across the district or state?  **\*\*Special Note: due to the Covid Pandemic there are no data for 2020. It is also *strongly recommended* that the data for 2021 not be used in trend analyses as the context for learning and for taking the survey was different compared to prior years or to future years.\*\*** | **Select grade of interest (or all grades) in filter and then “All, All students” from keyed options on LHS.**  View graph and tabular data to understand trend in scores over time.  **\*\*Special Note: depending on what student group you are analyzing, the scaled score axis (Y axis) will adjust to accommodate the low and high of the data. The score range shown is NOT the same for all groups.\*\***  **\*\* Special Note: small schools’ scores will likely fluctuate more (consider using a 2- to 3- year rolling average).\*\*** | How many students contribute to each score over time (see Participation tab for percent participating each year)?  Is there a meaningful trend (increasing or decreasing) in scores over the last five years or have scores remained constant (within 0 to 2 points of each other) or fluctuated (ups and downs)?  Does your school’s SCHOOL CLIMATE score follow the same trend as the district’s or state’s? Diverge (widening gap) or converge (closing gap) from the district or state? Is the magnitude of differences getting smaller or larger over time?  Are their patterns in dimension scores/items that replicate in your annual assessment of your VOCAL data? (see past years’ school results) |  |
| How does the trend in student groups’ scores compare to that of ‘All students’ in the school? In the district? In the state?  How many students contribute to each score? | **Select “All students” and student group of interest.**  It is recommended to select one student group at a time for comparison, so the graph and table do not get overwhelming! | Does your student groups’ overall scores follow the same trend as ‘All students’? Same trend as the district’s student group trends or state’s?  Does your student groups’ pattern of scores diverge (increasing gap) or converge (decreasing gap) from the pattern for ‘All students'? |  |
| How does the trend in one student group’s scores compare to that of the reference group’s scores in the school? In the district? In the state?  How many students contribute to each score? | **Select student groups of interest** e.g., EL students versus Not EL students (reference group)?  It is recommended to select one student group at a time for comparison, so the graph and table do not get overwhelming! | Does your student group’s overall score follow the same trend in general as the reference group’s scores? As the district’s or state’s?  Does your student group’s (e.g., EL students) pattern of scores diverge (increasing gap) or converge (decreasing gap) from the pattern for the reference group (e.g., Not EL students)? |  |

**Favorability Trend Results**

| **What do we want to know...** | **See** | **Look for and ask…** | **Your School Climate Observations** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| How has the distribution of students across the four favorability categories changed over time for students enrolled in “**all grades**” served by the school? | **Trend distribution stack graph and table** | Are student views in all grades becoming more or less favorable over time?  Overtime, is a higher percentage of students in all grades falling within the ‘Favorable’ or ‘Most Favorable’ categories? |  |
| How has the distribution of students across the four favorability categories changed over time for students enrolled in “**each grade**”? | **Trend distribution stack graph and table** | Are student views in each grade becoming more or less favorable over time?  Overtime, is a higher percentage of students in each grade falling within the ‘Favorable’ or ‘Most Favorable’ categories? |  |
| How does the school’s distribution of students across the four favorability categories compare to the district’s distribution in **each grade** served by your school? | **Trend distribution stack graph and table**  These analyses are best done by grade as any one school will not likely serve students in all the grades served by the district. | For each year how does the school’s favorability distribution compare to that of the district’s (e.g., percent of students in the two most favorable categories (‘Favorable’ or ‘Most Favorable’)?  Overtime, is the distribution of students in the school diverging from or converging on the district’s distribution of students in the four favorability categories? |  |

**Action Planning Template**

**Given your analysis, what is your overall impression of the results?  List two to four of your most important findings.**  For each finding, include any other data sources (e.g., parent or staff survey data, discipline, absenteeism, program, or practice implementation data, etc.) that support or refute your summary conclusions. Then consider how your findings inform your current practices, goals and/or priorities. Do you need to adopt new goals, make adjustments to your existing goals, or stay the course? While developing next steps, carefully consider the rationale or evidence we have for these decisions.

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| --- |
| Finding: |

Arrow directing users to action planning template. Template is filled out based on the finding written above.

| **Related Goal or Focus Area:** | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **What specific actions or implementation steps are necessary?** | **How will we monitor implementation?** | **How will we measure effectiveness?** | **Who will work on and be responsible for this part of this plan?** | **What is our timeline?** |
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| Finding: |
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Arrow directing users to action planning template. Template is filled out based on the finding written above.

| **Related Goal or Focus Area:** | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **What specific actions or implementation steps are necessary?** | **How will we monitor implementation?** | **How will we measure effectiveness?** | **Who will work on and be responsible for this part of this plan?** | **What is our timeline?** |
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| Finding: |

Arrow directing users to action planning template. Template is filled out based on the finding written above.

| **Related Goal or Focus Area:** | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **What specific actions or implementation steps are necessary?** | **How will we monitor implementation?** | **How will we measure effectiveness?** | **Who will work on and be responsible for this part of this plan?** | **What is our timeline?** |
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