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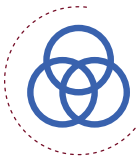
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HOW ARE SCHOOLS USING THE SCHOOL CLIMATE SURVEYS?

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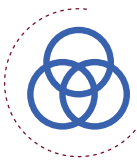


How are Schools Using the School Climate Surveys?

Author Tamika P. La Salle

Introduction

School climate can be defined as shared norms, beliefs, attitudes, experiences, and behaviors that shape interactions between and among students, teachers, parents and administrators (Emmons, Corner, & Haynes, 1996; Lindstrom Johnson, Pas, & Bradshaw, 2016). Measuring school climate is important because of its effects on student outcomes (Anderson, 1982; Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009). School climate impacts the effectiveness of academic programming and student achievement for all students, especially those with academic and behavior risks. Further, positive school climate has been linked to several important outcomes, including improved student self-esteem and self-concept, decreased absenteeism, enhanced risk prevention, reduced behavioral problems and disciplinary actions (in-school and out-of-school suspension), and increased school completion (Bear, Gaskins, Blank, & Chenm, 2011; Lindstrom Johnson et al., 2016). Establishing and maintaining a positive school climate benefits all students, including students with disabilities, English Learners, and students from economically disadvantaged families and culturally and racially diverse groups (Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2016).



When students complete school climate surveys, results can inform team action planning to improve perceptions of school climate. Further, school climate data can assist in considering questions related to equity, disproportionality, and cultural responsiveness and appropriateness. The freely-available School Climate Survey Suite offered in PBIS Assessment (www.pbisapps.org) includes the Georgia Elementary School Climate Survey for students in Grades 3-5, the Georgia Secondary School Climate Survey for students in Grades 6-12, the Georgia Personnel School Climate Survey, and the Georgia Parent/Guardian School Climate Survey (all surveys omit Georgia in their name to avoid confusion for respondents). The current brief will focus on the key features and implications of the elementary and secondary surveys.

The Georgia School Climate Survey: Elementary

This survey is brief, reliable, and valid for assessing perceptions of school climate among students in Grades 3-5 (La Salle, Zabek, & Meyers, 2016). The School Climate Survey: Elementary survey provides schools with an overall understanding of how elementary students perceive school climate. The survey includes 11 items scored on a 4-point Likert-type scale (Never, Sometimes, Often, Always). For all items on all surveys, higher scores represent more positive school climate perceptions. Elementary school students can complete the survey during school hours using campus computers under the guidance of teachers or other appropriate school personnel. Elementary student participants are typically in Grades 3-5, but students in Grade 6 may complete the elementary school survey if they are part of an elementary school. The time to complete the survey is approximately 10 minutes. Results



of the surveys can be viewed for all respondents or by grade, gender, or race/ethnicity.

The Georgia School Climate Survey: Middle/High

This survey is brief, reliable, and valid for assessing perceptions of school climate among students in Grades 6-12 (Hanson & Voight, 2014). It provides schools with an overall understanding of how middle and high school students perceive school climate. The survey includes 9 items scored on a 4-point Likert-type scale (from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree). For all surveys, higher scores represent more positive school climate perceptions. Middle and high school students (typically Grades 6-12) can complete the survey during school hours using campus computers or technology under the guidance of teachers or other appropriate school personnel. The time to complete the survey is approximately 10 minutes. Results of the surveys can be viewed overall at the school level and by grade, gender, or race/ethnicity.

Recommended Sampling

At both the elementary and middle/high school levels, it is recommended that at least 100 students per school complete the school climate surveys. This minimum ensures a representative sample of school climate perspectives at the school level (White, La Salle, Ashby, & Meyers, 2014). Note that in smaller schools, fewer participants (e.g., in schools with fewer than 200 at least 40% of students) may be adequate. Further, across subgroups, schools can access aggregate scores for each demographic group except in cases in which there are fewer than 5 respondents. In such cases, to protect anonymity, data for these subgroups will not be reported. However, their data will be included in overall scores.

To understand how schools are using the Elementary and Middle/High School Climate Surveys, this evaluation brief aims to answer the following questions:

1. How many times do schools administer the School Climate Surveys per year?
2. What are the average school climate scores for Elementary and Middle/High students?
3. Do ratings of school climate vary by demographic group?
4. Which items on the Elementary and Middle/High School Climate Surveys have the highest and lowest scores?

Sample Participants

For this evaluation brief, the sample consisted of 721 schools across 263 districts and 21 states that assessed student perceptions of school climate for the 2017-18 school year. School climate data were obtained from the PBISApps database, and school

demographic data were obtained from the National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data.

Sample Characteristics: Elementary

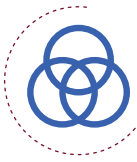
The sample included a total of 64,754 student participants from 357 elementary schools in 143 districts across 20 states. Students who did not report their grade ($n = 2,899$) were excluded from analysis, resulting in a final sample of 61,855 students.

Sample Characteristics: Middle/High

The Middle/High School sample included a total of 70,496 student participants from 364 schools in 120 districts across 16 states. Of the schools that completed the School Climate Survey, a total of 184 were middle schools (51%) and 180 were high schools (49%). The sample was comprised of 38,435 middle schoolers (56%) and 30,411 high schoolers (44%). Students who did not report their grade ($n = 2,012$) were excluded from analysis, resulting in a final sample of 68,846 students.

How Many Times Do Schools Administer the School Climate Surveys Per Year?

It is recommended that the surveys be completed twice per academic year. Generally, the first administration should be completed within the first 45 days of the school year, and the last administration should be completed within the last 45 days of the school year; however, frequency may vary based on intervention and progress monitoring timelines determined by school teams. In the sample, 11% of middle/high schools and 16% of elementary schools administered the survey at least two times over the course of one academic year.



What are the Average School Climate Scores for Elementary & Middle/High Students?

The average student rating of School Climate on the School Climate Survey: Elementary was **3.12** (Standard Deviation = 0.475; Table 1).

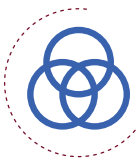
The average student rating of School Climate on the School Climate Survey: Middle/High was **2.92** (Standard Deviation = 0.570; Table 2).

Table 1. Item Level Averages: Elementary Survey

Question	Mean	SD
1. I like school.	2.8	0.964
2. I feel like I do well in school.	2.94	0.888
3. My school wants me to do well.	3.76	0.638
4. My school has clear rules for behavior.	3.65	0.717
5. I feel safe at school.	3.48	0.819
6. Teachers treat me with respect.	2.9	0.893
7. Good behavior is noticed at my school.	3.03	0.854
8. Students in my class behave so that teachers can teach.	3.22	0.969
9. I get along with other students.	2.63	0.840
10. Students treat each other well.	3.42	0.893
11. There is an adult at my school who will help me if I need it.	2.52	0.824

Table 2. Item Level Averages: Middle/High Survey

Question	Mean	SD
1. I like school.	2.74	0.86
2. I feel successful at school.	2.97	0.83
3. I feel my school has high standards for achievement.	2.99	0.87
4. My school sets clear rules for behavior.	3.16	0.89
5. The behaviors in my classroom allow the teacher to teach so I can learn.	3.17	0.9
6. Students are frequently recognized for good behavior.	2.83	0.91
7. I know an adult at school I can talk with if I need help.	2.55	0.92
8. School is a place at which I feel safe.	2.87	0.94
9. Teachers treat me with respect.	3.02	1.07



Ratings Across Demographic Groups

Average elementary student ratings of overall school climate for each grade, gender, and racial/ethnic group are represented in Table 3. The Standard Deviation refers to typical deviation from the Average rating of School Climate for each group; most members of that group would score between one SD above and below the Average value. For example, we would expect 66% of third graders to have a mean rating of school climate between 2.73 and 3.67 (i.e., 3.20 ± 0.467).

Average middle/high school student ratings of overall school climate for each grade, gender, racial/ethnic group, and sexual orientation are represented in Table 4.

Table 3. Demographic Characteristics of Elementary Participants

Demographic	n	%	Mean	SD
Grade				
3rd	16,809	27.2	3.20	0.467
4th	17,397	28.1	3.14	0.461
5th	18,576	30.0	3.09	0.473
6th	9,091	14.7	3.01	0.489
Gender Identity				
Male	28,848	46.6	3.18	0.451
Female	29,192	47.2	3.08	0.480
Other/Prefer not to say	3,825	6.2	3.04	0.545
Race/Ethnicity				
Black/African American	7,164	11.6	3.04	0.514
Hispanic/Latinx	17,068	27.6	3.14	0.472
White	18,214	29.4	3.16	0.451
Asian	1,321	2.1	3.09	0.492
American Indian/Alaska Native	1,696	2.7	3.10	0.499
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	397	0.6	3.08	0.545
Multiracial	3,264	5.3	3.03	0.493
Prefer not to say	12,731	20.6	3.12	0.467

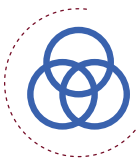
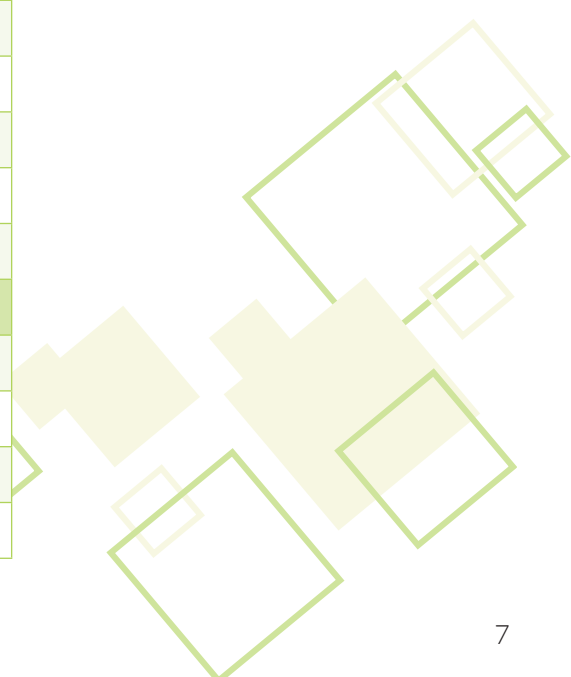


Table 4. Demographic Characteristics of Middle/High Participants

Demographic	<i>n</i>	%	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Grade				
6th	8,586	12.5	3.11	.586
7th	14,853	21.6	2.95	.574
8th	14,996	21.8	2.88	.572
9th	8,528	12.4	2.88	.550
10th	7,887	11.5	2.82	.549
11th	7,396	10.7	2.89	.531
12th	6,600	9.6	2.92	.566
Gender Identity				
Male	33,414	48.5	2.92	.568
Female	32,719	47.5	2.94	.549
Transgender	904	1.3	2.40	.828
Prefer not to say	1,809	2.6	2.92	.651
Race/Ethnicity				
Black/African American	7,487	10.9	2.88	.594
Hispanic/Latinx	25,918	37.6	2.91	.571
White	21,916	31.8	2.96	.543
Asian	2,831	4.1	3.00	.551
American Indian/Alaska Native	944	1.4	2.91	.635
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	270	0.4	2.91	.640
Multiracial	5,163	7.5	2.83	.583
Other	4,317	6.3	2.91	.607
Sexual Orientation				
Heterosexual/Straight	53,597	77.9	2.93	.553
Bisexual	4,173	6.1	2.71	.596
Gay/Lesbian	1,376	2.0	2.62	.714
Prefer not to say	9700	14.1	3.0	.579





What Items on the Elementary and Middle/High School Climate Surveys Have the Highest and Lowest Scores?

Figure 1 shows the average student ratings for each of the 11 items of the School Climate Survey: Elementary. Among the elementary school sample, the items with the lowest ratings included: “There is an adult at school who will help me if I need it,” “I get along with other students,” and “I like school,” with mean ratings of 2.52, 2.63, and 2.8, respectively. The highest rated items included: “My school wants me to do well,” “My school has clear rules for behavior,” and “I feel safe at school,” with mean ratings of 3.76, 3.65, and 3.48, respectively.

Figure 2 shows the average student ratings of each of the 9 items of the School Climate Survey: Middle/High. Among the middle/high school sample, the items with the lowest ratings included: “I know an adult I can talk to if I need help,” “I like school,” and “Students are frequently recognized for good behavior,” with mean ratings of 2.55, 2.74, and 2.83, respectively. The highest rated items were: “The behaviors in my classroom allow the teachers to teach so I can learn,” “My school sets clear rules for behavior,” and “Teachers treat me with respect,” with mean ratings of 3.17, 3.16, and 3.02, respectively.

Figure 1. Item Level Mean Averages: Elementary Survey

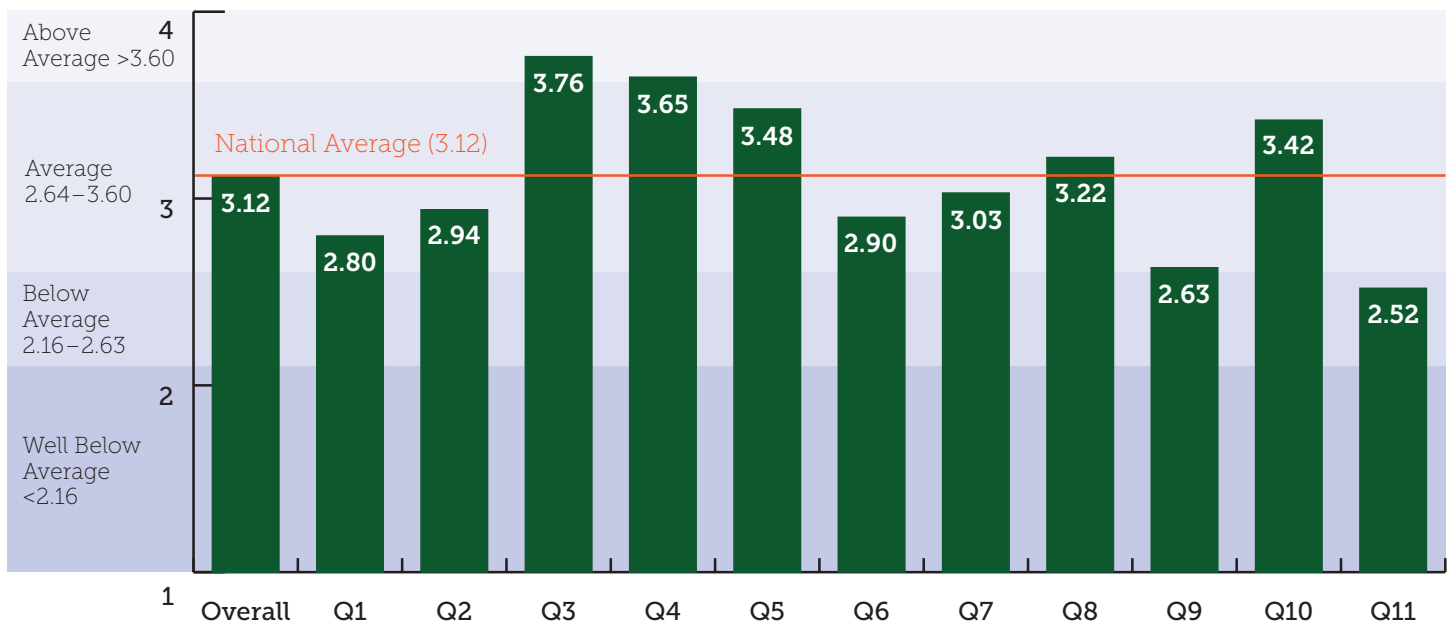
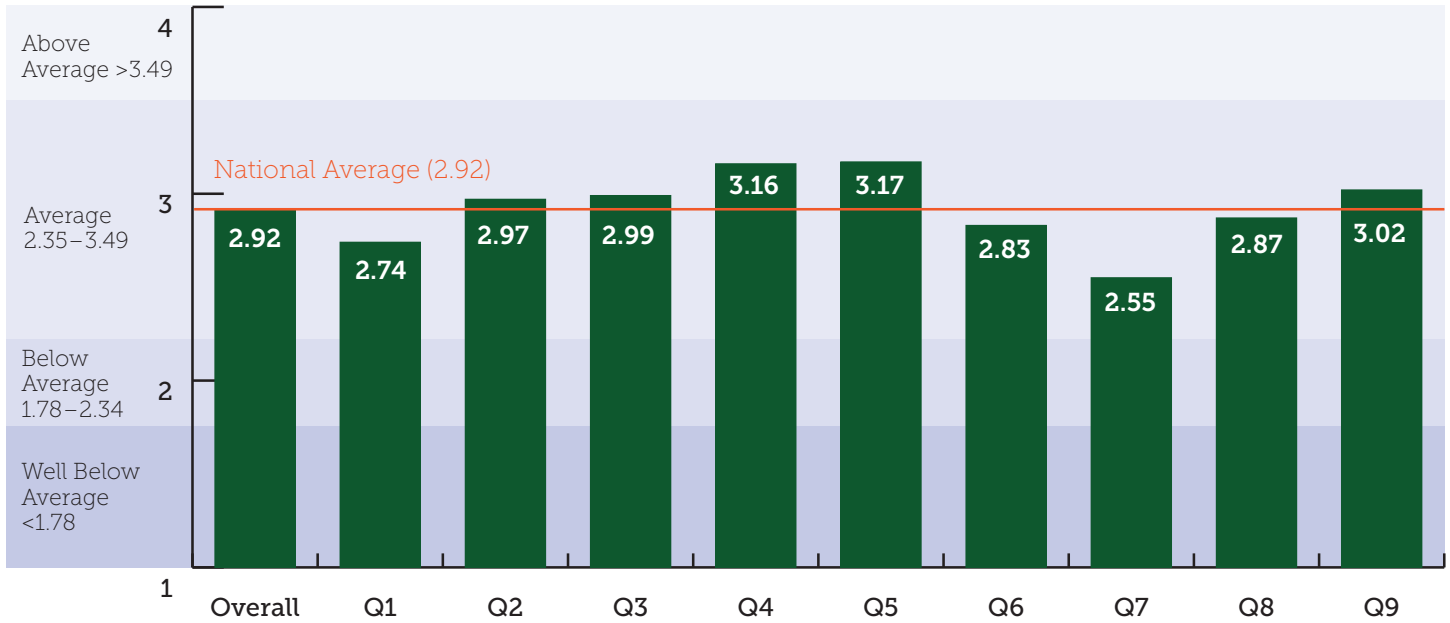




Figure 2. Item Level Mean Averages: Middle/High Survey



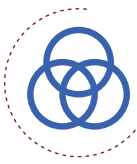
Discussion

School climate has increasingly become recognized as a critical component of effective schools. The Georgia School Climate Surveys provided through PBIS Assessment can be a useful tool for schools because they have been psychometrically validated, are of no cost to schools, provide immediate data feedback, and can be completed within a reasonable amount of time. The School Climate Surveys have been available for only a few years; however, with continued use, schools will increasingly be able to use school climate data alongside other school data examined on a regular basis (e.g., attendance, discipline, disproportionality). Such processes will inform the degree to which states, districts, and schools require support in streamlining

important data when making decisions about targeted strategies and interventions to support school improvement for all students.

Recommendations

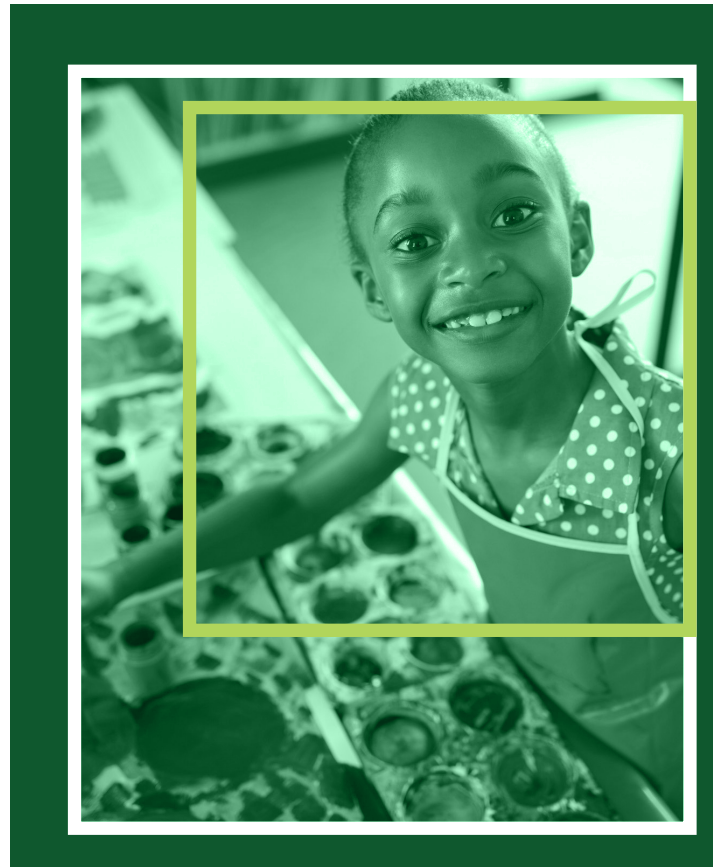
Overall data analysis. We recommended that school teams collect school climate data in the fall (e.g., after 4 weeks of school) and spring (e.g., 4 weeks before the end of school). Teams can initially examine overall data to determine the degree to which students within the school perceive a positive school climate. Interpretations of overall averages should be interpreted alongside the national means reported above. Secondary school teams should know that on average, perceptions reported at the secondary level are often lower than those of elementary students.



Still, states, schools, and districts should also monitor localized trends, as various contextual influences (e.g., interventions, turnover, negative incidents) can affect school climate positively or negatively. School-wide data trends can inform Tier 1 efforts where there is a general consensus in student experiences. If students rate the overall climate as negative, schools should examine the degree to which PBIS is being implemented with fidelity and evidence-based interventions and strategies are being utilized. Establishing a strong Tier 1 system, in which students perceive the environment is safe, predictable, and supportive, is an essential first step.

Although overall data can be useful in getting a pulse of the school, schools can disaggregate data and examine specific items that have a particularly negative impact on school perceptions, especially if data indicate low ratings of school climate. For example, national data indicate that among both elementary and secondary students, the lowest average is on the item referring to the degree to which they can identify an adult with whom they can connect. At the school-wide level, interventions or strategies can be implemented to ensure that all students are comfortable with identifying an adult in school they can talk to if they need support.

Subgroup analysis. PBIS Assessment also allows school teams to disaggregate data by grade, gender identity, and race/ethnicity (as well as sexual orientation for the middle/high survey). Schools are encouraged to examine subgroup data within the context of related data, including, but not limited to, discipline data, attendance data, and academic data. School climate



data allow schools to understand how various groups of students feel about their school environment, and having such information can improve the degree to which we implement targeted strategies and interventions to support students. For example, in the data examined for this brief, sexual minority youth reported the lowest perceptions of school climate. Identifying targeted interventions to support marginalized populations can increase the experiences of students in schools and the likelihood that they will experience success in school. Although the national norms do not note significant differences across race/ethnicity or grade, localized norms may reflect different patterns and should be considered.

Conclusion

School teams increasingly use school climate data to understand the perceptions and experiences of individuals within the school. The Georgia School Climate Surveys provide a comprehensive series of surveys to gather such information at the student, parent or guardian, and personnel perspective. The aim

of this evaluation brief was to (a) describe the school climate surveys available through PBIS Assessments, (b) share data to help schools interpret school climate scores, and (c) identify and offer suggestions for school teams on how to utilize school climate data within a PBIS framework.

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