



## **Guidance on Addressing School Climate & Use of School Climate Surveys in LCAP**

---

By Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, Partnership for Children & Youth, and Children Now

### *Summary*

Under the School Climate state priority area for Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAP), school districts and county offices of education must provide, in addition to suspension and expulsion rates, “other local measures, including surveys of pupils, parents, and teachers on the sense of safety and school connectedness.” This memorandum provides detailed guiding questions and information specific to school climate and related surveys, to assist with completion of the LCAP. This material may help school districts and county offices of education become aware of widely-used available means to measure school climate, effectively articulate school climate related goals, and identify best practices for improving school climate.

### Information

#### **Existing Surveys**

A valuable, existing resource for meeting this requirement is the Cal-SCHLS data system including [the California Healthy Kids Survey \(CHKS\)](#), [the California School Climate Survey \(CSCS\) for staff](#), and [the California School Parent Survey \(CSPS\)](#). The Cal-SCHLS three interrelated surveys were developed for and supported by the California Department of Education and were recently improved to better support LCAP development and monitoring.

Cal-SCHLS provides critical data, including information about the learning and teaching environment, the health and well-being of students, school safety and bullying, student/teacher/parent engagement and attitudes, student connection to caring adults, academic mindset and social-emotional competencies, and substance abuse. Cal-SCHLS helps assess the needs, concerns, and successes of the whole school community—teachers, students, and parents.

Cal-SCHLS can also be customized so that districts can choose to pursue more in-depth data on specific issues of interest. For example, the Healthy Kids Survey is not limited to the core module, which assesses student connectedness to school, school safety, violence, bullying, resilience-promoting developmental supports, learning engagement and performance, attendance, and substance use on school property. There are also supplementary modules on School Climate, Social/Emotional Health, Resilience and Youth Development, and more. The supplementary School Climate Module for students (and complementary Learning Conditions Module for staff), for example, has been expanded to provide additional data on school academic supports, discipline and order, supports for social and emotional learning,

bullying prevention and positive peer relationships, respect for diversity, and the quality of the physical environment.

Cal-SCHLS is easy, familiar, customizable to district preferences (such as adding locally-designed questions), and inexpensive to employ. Prior to 2010-2011, Cal-SCHLS was required of all school districts. Two-thirds of all school districts are still implementing these surveys in the absence of a mandate. The fee in 2013-2014 was only 30 cents per student. According to districts, the most significant cost is staff time, which has been significantly reduced now that the surveys can be administered on-line. Eighty percent of districts in California pay fees under \$600, half under \$150. Cal-SCHLS is recommended to be employed at grades 5, 7, 9, and 11 every other year. Common use of Cal-SCHLS can permit comparisons to other districts and provide other local agencies like counties with a regional lens so they can prioritize services for children.

The Cal-SCHLS surveys can help address a variety of LCFF state priorities in addition to school climate, including academic achievement, pupil engagement, parent involvement and Common Core implementation. It is also useful to help LEAs identify local priorities. For more information about how the Cal-SCHLS surveys relates to these state priorities, see [https://chks.wested.org/resources/LCAP\\_Cal\\_SCHLS.pdf](https://chks.wested.org/resources/LCAP_Cal_SCHLS.pdf)

Results from these district-level surveys can be reported by school and disaggregated by subgroup, which is particularly helpful for LCAPs, which are required to provide goals and actions by school and subgroup.

Based on CHKS data, WestEd also has designed a School Climate Index and Report Card now being used by the state's Safe and Supportive Schools grantees and posted on CDE's DataQuest. Utilizing the School Climate Index, a May 2013 WestEd study of 1,715 California middle and high schools found that "beating the odds" schools (BTO), schools which have significantly better test scores than predicted based on student characteristics, have substantially more positive school climates than underperforming and all other secondary schools.<sup>1</sup>

### **School Climate by Design - Process for Needs Assessment, Understanding Data, & Developing Action Plan**

As part of its technical assistance to Safe and Supportive Schools grantees, WestEd has developed and successfully implemented a School Climate by Design process to help guide schools/districts in understanding their data, identifying needs, and developing an action plan that meets those needs using evidence-based strategies. The process begins with a thorough needs assessment using data from Cal-SCHLS and other sources, including a Student Listening Circle to incorporate student voice, to identify their school's strengths and needs. Stakeholder school climate teams (including teachers, administrators, students, and parents) then develop specific action plans to address the identified needs, incorporating evidence-based practices, programs, and strategies that meet their goals and

---

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.wested.org/online\\_pubs/hd-13-10.pdf](http://www.wested.org/online_pubs/hd-13-10.pdf)

objectives. For more information about the School Climate by Design process or other technical assistance in measuring or improving school climate, email [schoolclimate@wested.org](mailto:schoolclimate@wested.org).

This process aligns with the intent of LCAP and provides a model for the process of how an LCAP can be developed and implemented.

### **Baseline school climate data**

Baseline school climate data for the needs assessment could include, for example:

- Answers to specific questions from the California Healthy Kids Survey on school connectedness and sense of safety<sup>2</sup>;
- Use of WestEd’s validated five-item School Connectedness Scale that reports the percentage of students who are categorized as high, moderate, or low in School Connectedness;
- Use of WestEd’s School Climate Index that measures the following variables: school connectedness, perceived school safety, violence/victimization/substance abuse, overall supports and engagement, high expectations and caring relationships, and opportunities for meaningful participation. Schools receive an overall School Climate Index score as well as scores broken down by individual variables.

### **Actions/What works**

To identify potential actions to improve school climate:

- Utilize the School Climate by Design process described above
- See “What works” briefs on school connectedness, safety, family engagement and more at <http://californias3.wested.org/tools>
- See Description of several evidence-based school climate strategies including social emotional learning, restorative practices, and positive behavior intervention and supports, at <http://www.fixschooldiscipline.org/toolkit/lcffadministrators/>

Guiding questions:

### **Metrics**

Which survey(s), survey questions, and indicators will be used to measure the “sense of safety and school connectedness” among pupils, parents, and teachers, EC 52060(d)(6)(C),

---

<sup>2</sup> For example survey questions include:

- On school safety: I have been in a physical fight, been threatened, been afraid or beat up; How safe do you feel at school.
- On school connectedness: I feel close to people at this school, I feel like I am a part of this school, The teachers at his school treat students fairly.

as well as other factors related to the extent to which school climates are supportive, safe, healthy and engaging? Is the survey instrument valid, reliable, and evidence-based?

## **Goals**

Are the goals measurable and does the target represent a meaningful change from the baseline?

In establishing school and district goals in the LCAP, districts may wish to consider the following questions:

- How do the school safety and connectedness indicators compare to other schools in the district;
- How much of an increase in school connectedness among pupils, parents, and teachers does the district want to achieve;
- How much of an increase in pupil, parent, and teacher perceptions of safety does the district want to achieve;
- Does the district want to include a goal for improving positive caring adult relationships for students;
- Does the district want to include a goal for improving meaningful student engagement and active participation of students in the school community;
- How much of a decrease of bullying and victimization does the district want to achieve;
- How and what mechanisms for student, parent, and teacher voice are in place;
- Does the district have a goal for professional development and active participation of teachers and administrators on how to build and nurture positive caring adult relationships; and
- Does the district want to prioritize supports for all schools in the lowest quartile or decile of indicators with respect to school climate.

## **Actions**

What evidence-based strategies--such as positive behavior support programs, anti-bullying initiatives, peer-to-peer leadership programs, mentoring, restorative justice programs, programs teaching prosocial behavior or anger management --will the district use to achieve the goal(s)?

What training will the district provide to teachers, administrators and/or other staff to increase their ability to promote the sense of safety and school connectedness?

Is the specific action a district-wide, school-wide, or targeted program, and is the character of the program likely to allow the district to meet the goal, particularly goals specific to a particular subgroup?

How are parents, students, and communities (including other child serving agencies) being engaged with data and survey results in service of improving the school climate and culture?