

School Climate and Stakeholder Engagement Measures

How are states measuring the conditions of their schools and the engagement of stakeholders (e.g., parents, students, educators, and communities)?

As states begin to revisit or revise their accountability systems to include an additional indicator of school quality or success under the new Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the Center on Standards and Assessment Implementation (CSAI) has received queries regarding whether and how states are measuring school climate and stakeholder engagement. CSAI recently sought to answer these questions through a scan of states' efforts to measure these factors, reviewing websites maintained by state departments of education and other government agencies. This CSAI Update provides the results of that scan, including information on the school climate and stakeholder engagement initiatives with which states are engaged and on tools that are used to gauge or measure school climate and engagement.¹

What is School Climate?

"School climate" refers to the quality and character of school life, which is "based on patterns of students', parents', and school personnel's experience of school life and [which] reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures."² Research has shown that a positive school climate is associated with improved student achievement, lower dropout rates, fewer student discipline problems, decreased incidences of violence, and increased teacher retention.³ When educators and students feel safe, they are better able to effectively teach and to learn, respectively. In short, school climate is a crucial factor in the successful implementation of school reform initiatives.



1 For the purposes of this update, the term "states" refers to the 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia.

2 National School Climate Center. (2016). School climate. Retrieved from <http://www.schoolclimate.org/climate/>

3 O'Brennan, L., & Bradshaw, C. (2013). Importance of school climate (Research Brief). Washington, DC: National Education Association. Retrieved from https://www.nea.org/assets/docs/15584_Bully_Free_Research_Brief-4pg.pdf; Thapa, A., Cohen, J., Higgins-D'Alessandro, A., & Guffey, S. (2012). School climate research summary: August 2012 (School Climate Brief, 3). New York, NY: National School Climate Center. Retrieved from <https://www.schoolclimate.org/climate/documents/policy/sc-brief-v3.pdf>; WestEd. (2016, February). How campus climate can help schools beat the odds. R&D Alert Online. San Francisco, CA: WestEd. Retrieved from https://www.wested.org/rd_alert_online/how-campus-climate-can-help-schools-beat-the-odds/

School Climate Grant Programs

A number of states have engaged in school climate initiatives and/or provided resources to districts and schools in efforts to improve school climate for educators and students.

SCHOOL CLIMATE GRANT/PROGRAM	SUMMARY	STATES
Safe and Supportive Schools (S3) Grant	From 2010 to 2014, 11 states implemented S3 Grants to create and support safe and drug-free learning environments, as well as to increase academic success for all students.	Arizona, California, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, South Carolina, Tennessee, West Virginia, Wisconsin
School Climate Transformation Grant	Since 2014, 12 states have implemented five-year School Climate Transformation Grants to develop, enhance, and/or expand statewide support systems for, and technical assistance to, districts and schools that are implementing an evidence-based, multitiered behavioral framework for improving behavioral outcomes and learning conditions for all students.	Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Iowa, Michigan, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, Ohio, Virginia, Wisconsin
Now is the Time Project Advancing Wellness and Resilience Education (AWARE) Grant	Since 2014, 20 states have administered five-year Project AWARE Grants, aimed at building states' and districts' capacity to increase awareness of mental health issues among youth, to train school personnel and other adults on how to detect and respond to mental-health issues, and to connect youth and their families with appropriate services.	Alaska, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, Ohio, Tennessee, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin
Safe School Certification Program	Beginning in 2016–17, the District of Columbia will administer the Safe School Certification Program to provide selected schools with support and technical assistance in using student and teacher feedback to identify needs and implement strategies to improve school climate and prevent bullying.	District of Columbia

School Climate Measures

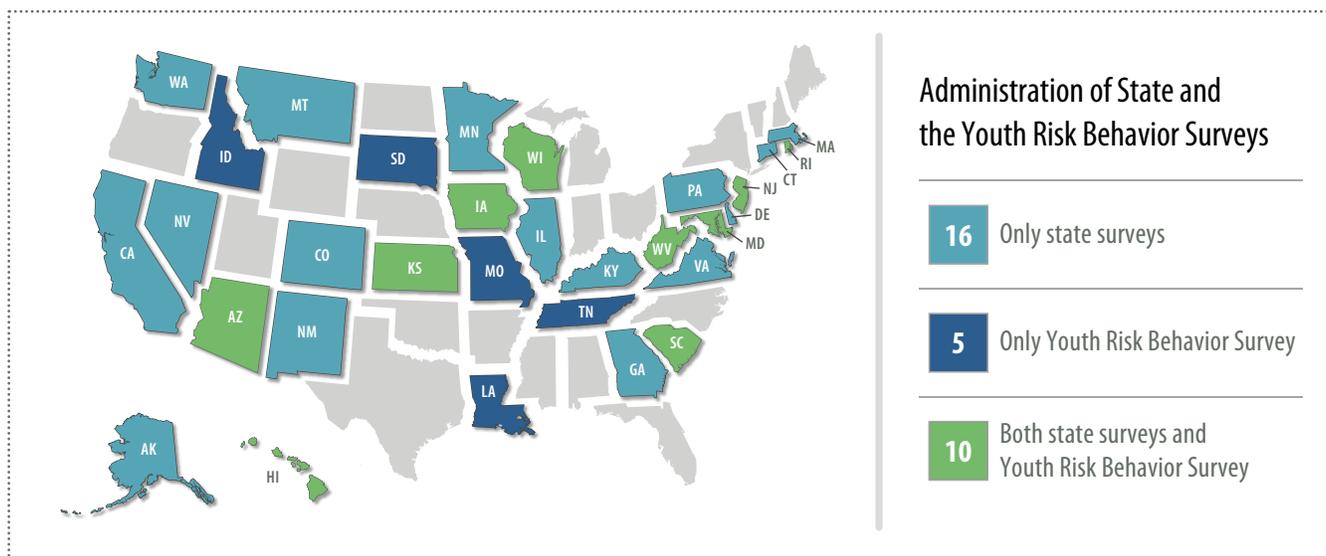
According to the scan, indicators or tools that measure school climate include:

- ◆ Student, staff, and/or parent surveys;
- ◆ Student, staff, and/or parent focus groups;
- ◆ Discipline and incidence data (e.g., in-school and out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, fights, harassment/bullying, alternative school assignments);
- ◆ Attendance records of students and staff; and
- ◆ Data on chronic absenteeism.

Four states use a combination of these indicators as evidence of school climate: California (particularly the CORE Districts⁴), Colorado, Georgia, and Kentucky.

⁴ CORE is a nonprofit organization that seeks to improve student achievement by fostering meaningful collaboration among its nine-member school districts: Fresno, Garden Grove, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Oakland, Sacramento, San Francisco, Sanger, and Santa Ana Unified.

Twenty-six states currently administer their own surveys to students, educators, and/or parents. Such surveys are intended to measure perceptions of school safety and climate, relationships, health and risk behaviors, support, and engagement, and to help schools improve learning environments for all students. Georgia, Illinois, and New Mexico include survey results in their accountability systems, while Hawaii uses survey results in its teacher evaluation system. Additionally, 15 states administer the Youth Risk Behavior Survey biennially, as part of the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Overall, 10 states administer both their own surveys and the Youth Risk Behavior Survey. As states look to revise their accountability systems to comply with ESSA, more states may turn to school climate as a potential additional indicator of school quality or success.



Stakeholder Engagement

A separate scan of stakeholder (e.g., student, family, educator, and community) engagement in 13 states⁵ yielded little information about how states are measuring engagement. Based on this scan, it is apparent that most states provide resources on working together (e.g., engagement plans, frameworks, and policies) to families, communities, and educators, and/or provide resources to families on how to be involved in their children's education. Of the states included in this scan, Texas is currently the only state in which school districts are required, as part of the state's accountability and accreditation systems, to evaluate community and stakeholder engagement efforts in individual schools and in whole districts. However, how such evaluations are conducted and what the evaluation process entails are unclear.

⁵ These states include Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Nebraska, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, and Utah.

For additional information about states' measurement of school climate and stakeholder engagement, please visit the [CSAI website](#) and read the full report.



CSAI Update is produced by the The Center on Standards and Assessment Implementation (CSAI). CSAI, a collaboration between WestEd and CRESST, provides state education agencies (SEAs) and Regional Comprehensive Centers (RCCs) with research support, technical assistance, tools, and other resources to help inform decisions about standards, assessment, and accountability. Visit www.csai-online.org for more information.



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