

Measuring school climate



Why measure school climate?

School climate is an important target of MTSS-B efforts and should be responsive to high-fidelity MTSS-B implementation, especially at the schoolwide level. School climate is often defined as a set of shared norms, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and experiences that influence how students, teachers, parents and administrators interact, and it has measurable positive impacts on student outcomes such as problem behaviors and associated discipline referrals, suspensions, academic engagement and achievement, absenteeism, prevention of risk behaviors, and school completion. Ideally, a positive school climate will impact all students universally, including vulnerable and/or underserved populations such as students with disabilities, English language learners, economically disadvantaged families, and culturally and racially diverse groups.¹

In practice, school climate represents the perceived quality of the culture and feel of classrooms and the school, including aspects such as safety, respectfulness, responsibility, and sense of community. The literature supports that in school settings described as having negative climates, an observer will be more likely to see students engaging in antisocial and atypical behavior, with reactive and punishing staff behavior. In school settings described as having a positive climate, an observer is more likely to experience prosocial student behavior and social-emotional skills, with school staff using more preventive and constructive supports.² Because MTSS-B is designed to increase student social-emotional functioning and pro-social behaviors as well as proactive, restorative staff responses to student behavior, school climate becomes a high-leverage schoolwide indicator of MTSS-B implementation success.

How do we measure school climate?

There are a variety of school climate surveys freely available via the internet. The national Center on PBIS offers a free school climate survey platform using the School Climate Survey Suite,³ a set of self-report surveys that measure student, staff, and family perceptions of school climate. To use the School Climate Survey Suite, you will need to set up a free account with PBIS Assessment (see <https://www.pbisapps.org/products/pbis-assessment#subscription> for instructions); additional information about the online school climate survey platform and accompanying manual are available at: <https://www.pbisapps.org/products/scs>. The survey measures aspects of school climate such as the learning environment, peer and staff relations, parent involvement, and school safety, among others. The surveys are anonymous and administered via an online survey link. School districts can administer the surveys annually to their students, staff, and families to track change over time.

Due to 2017 NH legislation requiring parent opt-in consent for non-academic surveys, schools now need to seek consent from parents/guardians to administer the student versions of the school climate survey. A policy that permits the use of written electronic consent in the form of email or some type of online form in which the school can be reasonably assured of the validity of the consent would meet the requirements of this law. Student response rates tend to be quite low with the opt-in legislation. If you choose to administer a student school climate survey, obtain sufficient responses to ensure you have a representative sample size (typically, about a 50% student response rate).

¹Sugai, G., La Salle, T., Freeman, J., Simonsen, B., & Chafouleas, S. (2016). *School Climate: Academic Achievement and Social Behavior Competence*. Center for Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports

²Ibid

³La Salle, T. P., McIntosh, K., Eliason, B. M. (2016). *School climate survey suite administration manual*. Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports.



Below we offer guidance on how to introduce and administer an online school climate survey.

School Personnel School Climate Survey

Each participating school administrator emails the survey link to all teachers, specialists, paraprofessionals, and administrators in their building. You should include all staff in these roles that work at your school site, even if they also work at another school(s). Obtain a count of the number of personnel in each school to whom the survey was distributed so that you can calculate survey response rates.

Suggested email text to accompany school personnel survey link:

Dear [staff name]:

[School District] is conducting an anonymous School Climate Survey of its (students), families, and school personnel. As a teacher/specialist at [insert school], we want to know what you think about your school. Please take 10 minutes today to complete the School Climate Survey. All responses are anonymous and will help us improve student relationships, learning conditions, and the school's overall environment.

Give school personnel a 2-week period to complete the survey. Prompt school personnel with reminders at regular intervals after the first email is sent, generally every 3 or 4 days, for a total of no more than 3 reminders.

Suggested email text to remind school personnel to take the survey:

Dear [staff name]:

Just a quick reminder to please complete the School Climate Survey link that I sent you on [insert date]. Your response is anonymous and will help us improve student relationships, learning conditions, and the school's overall environment. Click the link below to complete the survey today.

Family School Climate Survey

The family version of the school climate survey should be administered to parents/guardians for each school. Include the survey link as part of an email communication to parents/guardians. If available in your district, use a system such as One Call Now (parent/guardian alert system) to email all parents/guardians for whom you have an email address. School information systems such as PowerSchool have the ability to push email addresses into the One Call Now system. In addition, you may circulate the survey link on relevant social media sites and or other means of electronic distribution. The survey can be completed on a mobile device such as a smartphone or tablet. To increase response rates, you can have parents/guardians complete electronic versions on laptops/tablets at school events, such as open houses. You can also have parents/guardians complete paper versions at such events, but you will then need to input each survey manually using the electronic survey link.

Suggested email text to accompany family survey link:

Dear Parent/Guardian,

We want to hear what you think of your child's school! [School District] is conducting an anonymous School Climate Survey of its (students), families, and staff. Please take 10 minutes today to complete the School Climate Survey. Your responses will help us improve student relationships, learning conditions, and the school's overall environment.

Give families a 2-week period to complete the survey. Prompt families with reminders at regular intervals after the first email is sent, generally every 3 or 4 days, for a total of no more than 3 reminders. Additionally, send a paper announcement with the survey link home to all parents.



Student School Climate Survey

There are two versions of the student survey available on the School Climate Survey Suite:

- Elementary: Grades 3-6 (used for Grade 6 in K-6 schools)
- Middle/High: Grades 6-12 (used for Grade 6 when resides in Middle School)

To inform parents/guardians of the content of the student climate survey, post student survey questions on your school website(s) at least 10 days in advance of administration.

To obtain consent, you can use a system such as One Call Now (parent/guardian alert system) to email all parents/guardians for whom you have an email address. School information systems such as PowerSchool typically have the ability to push email addresses into the One Call Now system.

1. Embed a Google form into the email requesting permission for their child to take the school climate survey.
2. Responses to the form will populate a Google sheet where you can track which students' parents have opted in to the climate survey.
3. Identify those students for whom the electronic permission form was not completed, and/or for whom you do not have a parent email. Send a paper version of the opt-in consent home with those students. If possible, have a teacher review this form with students in smaller groups in a homeroom/flex period the day it goes home with them and track which students have returned/not returned the form in the following days.