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Student School Climate Survey – Middle School Executive Summary 2006-07

Perceptions of school climate and safety can have a distinct impact on how well students learn. Research indicates that improved school climate can contribute to higher student achievement, higher moral among students and teachers, fewer student dropouts and reduced violence. While school reforms typically focus on student achievement due to external accountability systems, these reforms can be limited when school climate is a negative factor. In order to evaluate Aurora Public Schools students' perceptions of schools safety and climate, a survey was administered to middle and high school students in February of 2007. Note that students' perceptions are just that, perceptions, and does not reflect with certainty what is happening in APS schools.

Methodology

A 57 item school climate survey was given to APS middle and high school students in February 2007. Enrollment at the middle school level at the time of the survey was 7,027. A total of 5,788 students completed the survey for a completion rate of 92%.

Summary of Results

Results of the survey are grouped into six areas:

- General Climate
- Trust and Respect
- Academics
- Safety and Bullying
- Harassment
- Self Concept

Students' responses were analyzed at the district level, school level and disaggregated by ethnicity. In most cases, responses did not differ significantly by ethnicity.

General Climate. For general school climate, students responded most positively to the statements "There are clear rules for student behavior" (68% agreed), "I feel welcomed at school" (60% agreed) and "I feel supported by my friends" (71% agreed). When asked about feeling positive about their school, less students agreed (44%), with African American students having the lowest level of agreement (39%). Reasons for students feelings about their school may be tied to their responses about: Feeling encouraged to participate in school activities (20% disagreed); Believing school rules are consistently enforced (25% disagreed); Perceptions that they get help on non-academic issues (40% disagreed); and believing their belongings are safe at school (41% disagreed).

Trust and Respect. The majority of students agreed they had an adult at school they trust (60% agreed) while 19% of students disagreed with this statement. Similar findings were noted for overall responses to the statement "I have at least



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one adult in this school I can go to when I need help (64% agreed, 17% disagreed, 16% neutral).

Students in general appear positive in regard to having the respect of the teaching staff. When asked if they feel respected by teachers, 57% agreed, 26% were neutral and 16% disagreed. When asked similar questions like “I feel trusted by adults” and “I feel listened to by adults” which involve all school staff, 52% agreed with the first statement and 47% agreed to the second statement.

Students generally feel safe to ask questions in the classroom (69% agreed). Rules about name calling and put downs was also responded to positively as 67% agreed that these rules existed and only 14% disagreed.

Academics. The highest level of agreement to statements on academics included 76% of students responding that their teachers expect them to graduate from high school and at school they get the academic help they need (63% agreed).

Students were slightly less positive when responding to the statements “I receive helpful information about my academic progress (59% agreed), “Classes at this school provide a solid foundation for my future” (53% agreed), and “This school sets high and realistic learning expectations for me” (51% agreed).

Safety. The majority of students disagreed with the statement “I feel afraid at school” (73% disagreed, 12% agreed). When the question was turned around and stated positively “At school, I feel safe”, less students responded positively (53% agreed and 19% disagreed). For students who ride a schools bus 80% agreed that they feel safe riding the bus.

Students in general do not worry about being bullied (57% agreed, 17% neutral) and report that they know what to do about bullies (68% agreed, 19% neutral). However, a significant percent of students responded that they personally have been kicked or hit at school (44% agreed). While students perceived that adults will help if they see someone being bullied or harassed (65% agree), there was a small percent of students that disagreed with this statement (15%).

Threats to students is perceived to be a significant issue for students as 63% agreed that they have heard students threaten to hurt someone or take their things and 45% disagreed with the statement that “Other students help if they see someone being bullied or harassed.”

Harassed. A large percent of students responded that they have seen students of different cultural, racial or ethnic backgrounds made fun of at school (53% agreed). Harassment or discrimination for religious reasons was perceived as being much less frequent (74% disagreed) as was sexual harassment (67% disagreed, 11% neutral).

“I have been called names that are hateful” was agreed to by 38% of students and White students agreed to the statement more than other student groups (46%). Two student groups, those that speak a language other than English and students with disabilities were often perceived as being treated less than fairly (25% agreed for ELL and 25% agreed for students with disabilities.)



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Self Concept. Self Concept for the purposes of this survey is students' perceptions of how they 'fit in' at school and how well they believe they are doing academically. Few students reported that they feel isolated at school (16% agreed) and fewer still report they feel rejected by their classmates (15% agreed). Most students responded that they can say "no" when someone wants me to do things I know are dangerous or wrong (75% agreed) while less students perceived that they know how to deal with anger in an appropriate (non violent) way (49% agreed, 25% neutral, 23% disagreed).

Conclusions

Results from this survey indicate that school climate is multifaceted and that students do not perceive all aspects of school climate the same. Students report they are not afraid at school, they feel they fit in, and they feel supported by their friends. Students also believe that teachers expect them to graduate from high school and that they get the academic help they need.

While many positive aspects of school climate were reported, there are areas of school climate that need to be monitored and followed-up on. These include but are not limited to: students having an adult at school that they can trust and go to when they need help; more consistent enforcement of school rules; getting help with non-academic issues; feeling that their belongings are safe; and reduction of harassment and threats to themselves and fellow students.