



Division of Accountability & Research

Grades 5-8 Student Climate Survey Executive Summary (2014-2015)

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 morale 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 school safety and climate, a survey was administered to students in grades 5-12 in January of 2015. Note that students' perceptions are just that, perceptions, and do not reflect with certainty what is happening in APS schools.

Survey Development

A student climate survey has been administered every year since the spring of 2007. This year, for the first time, Aurora Public Schools utilized the Conditions for Learning Survey developed by the American Institutes for Research. Previously, APS administered an internally developed survey with items developed with input from principals, students, the Division of Instruction, and the Division of Accountability and Research. The Conditions for Learning Survey assesses four core constructs within schools:

- A safe and respectful climate
- Challenge / high expectations
- Student support
- Social and emotional learning

The safe and respectful climate scale measures how physically and emotionally safe students feel. The challenge scale measures how much students perceive that teachers and other adults in the school encourage them to think, work hard, do their best, and connect what they are learning in school to life outside of school. The student support scale measures how much students feel listened to, cared about, and helped by teachers and other adults in the school. Finally, the social and emotional learning scale measures students' perception of their peers' social and problem-solving skills.

Survey Participants

The Conditions for Learning Survey was administered to all secondary students in January 2015. Schools had the option of administering the survey on paper or online. Of the 8,157 students in grades 5-8 who were actively enrolled at the beginning of the survey window, and at a school that elected to complete the survey, 6,994 surveys were completed. Overall, this represents an approximate response rate of 85.7%, which was an increase of 3.3 percentage points since the inception of a survey in 2007, and a 6.1 percent increase in the response rate from the previous year. However, response rates for previous years do not include fifth grade students, who previously took a separate student climate survey. The

total percentage of students responding to the survey over the last few years can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. Student Climate Survey: Historical Percent Response Rates

Grade Level	Total	2007*	2012*	2013*	2014*	2015	1 Yr Ch.	9 Yr Ch.
Overall	13,378	76.5%	77.8%	74.3%	67.1%	71.7%	4.6%	-9.4%
Grades 5-8	7,164	82.4%	86.1%	81.3%	79.6%	85.7%	6.1%	3.3%

Note. Total reflects number of survey responses in 2015. Pickens Technical College surveys aren't reflected in the presented counts/percentages. *For these years, fifth grade students were not included in the response rate.

In 2015, the distribution of student reported ethnicity by students that took the survey showed an underrepresentation of Hispanic and Black student groups and an overrepresentation of the Two+ student group. Table 2 below provides a distribution of grades 5-8 students' ethnicity on the October Count report and as self-identified on the student survey.

Table 2. Distribution of Students' Ethnicity

	Nat Am	Asian	Black	Hispanic	White	Nat Haw	Two+
October Count (Grades 5-8)	0.9%	5.0%	18.0%	55.6%	16.3%	0.5%	3.8%
Survey	2.5%	6.4%	13.2%	47.5%	13.0%	0.0%	17.5%
Difference	1.6%	1.4%	-4.8%	-8.1%	-3.3%	-0.5%	13.7%

Survey Results

At the district level, there were 37 of 45 items (82%) that had favorable agreement rates exceeding 60%. This indicates that overall, students were satisfied with the climate at their schools (see report 4.3). The subscales measuring high expectations / challenge and student support both had agreement rates greater than 60%. Students at K-8 schools had greater rates of agreement than those at elementary or middle schools, especially on questions related to safe and respectful school climate.

Areas of relative strength on the survey (70%+ agreement rates) included students' perception that their classes are preparing them for their future, that their school provides them with information on what to expect and behavior and discipline policies, that their teachers give them feedback on their assignments and require them to explain their answers, and that their teachers really care about them. Students also reported that they are encouraged to share their ideas about things they are studying and that their homework helps them learn.

Areas at the district level that showed the lowest agreement rates were questions regarding the behavior of students' peers. Students disagree that other students do all their homework and stop and think before doing anything when they get angry. In addition, nearly half of

students agree that students at their school are often bullied because of certain characteristics, such as race, religion, weight, or sexual orientation.

Analysis of district results by race/ethnicity showed few questions had agreement rates that differed by 10% or more between students identified as Black, Hispanic or White. These questions related to students being bullied, students thinking it is OK to fight if someone insults them, and wishing they went to a different school. On these questions, agreement rates for students that identify as Black or White differed by more than 10%.

Conclusions

- For the 2015 Conditions for Learning Survey the response rate for grades 5-8 was 75.3% which represents a 4% decrease from the previous year. At the district level, there were 37 of 45 items (82%) that had favorable agreement rates exceeding 60%.
- Areas of relative strength on the survey include the areas of academic rigor and challenge, and student support.
- Areas to be addressed include a safe and respectful school climate and the social emotional learning environment and how students' perceive their peers social and problem-solving skills.
- Analysis of student responses by race/ethnic groups showed the general trend of Black students perceiving a less positive school climate than the White or Hispanic students.