Department of Accountability & Data Reporting

APS Student Climate Survey (2017-18)

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings:

- An area of relative strength on the survey was related to high expectations/academic rigor/challenge.

- Student support from teachers was another area of strength. For example, at least three out of four (75%) of students said that school staff take the time to give students extra help, that they have a teacher who makes them excited about the future, and that their teacher really cares about them. Further, 84% reported that teachers "give me feedback on my assignments that helps me improve my work."

- As found in prior years, challenge areas were regarding a safe and respectful climate and social emotional learning. While over three in four (75%) students feel that peers respect students from all cultures and races, ratings on other items were concerning. For example, approximately half of students perceive that students are teased or picked on and that peers think it's "OK to fight if someone insults them". One in three worry about crime and violence in school. Almost two in three students report that peers "get into arguments when they disagree with people" and less than two in five agree that peers "stop and think before doing anything when they get angry".

- With regard to questions on the strategic plan, 64% reported being on track to earn a credential, 58% reported talking to an adult at school about their future beyond high schools in the current school-year and 83% reported talking to a family member. Most students reported that their plan for the future included 4-year college (59%), getting a job (46%), and/or two year college (22%).

Recommendations:

- Given how crucial feelings of safety and social emotional learning are to student learning and achievement[1], additional actions should address these concerns. Optimal intervention for safe and respectful climate concerns would also address social emotional learning as the latter is known to be causally related to the former.[2] Examples of potential actions are:
  - Provide additional resources to ensure there are counselors or psychologists in elementary schools and K-8 schools and expansion of these resources in middle and high schools to address social emotional learning and mental health concerns.
  - Embed social emotional learning content in academic content for all school levels.

- Additional evidence based interventions to consider could include mindfulness training which is known to reduce reactivity and increase attention levels, emotion regulation, and engagement [3-7]; Mindfulness use has been expanding in U.S. schools including in Baltimore[8]. Further, teacher training in mindfulness benefits both students and teachers, who report higher job satisfaction and lower stress.[9-10]

- Finally, APS should consider using the U.S. Department of Educations' EDCLS Safe and Supportive Learning student climate survey, a psychometrically sound survey that provides more detailed information on student safety and engagement issues that help drive positive outcomes. The survey also provides benchmark data through the USDE EDCLS website and other tools that schools can use to both interpret survey data and take action and monitor changes: https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/edscls/

Student Climate Survey Report (2017-18)

Why is Climate Important?

- Perceptions of school climate and safety can have a distinct impact on how well students learn. Research has shown that the school climate can improve teaching and learning, increase student engagement in curriculum and the classroom, and lead to positive relationship development, higher student achievement, and fewer adverse behaviors. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) includes school climate as an indicator of school success (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Safe and Healthy Students, 2016). While school reforms typically focus on student achievement due to external accountability systems, the effectiveness of 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 February of 2017. Note that students' perceptions are just that, perceptions, and do not reflect with certainty what is happening in APS schools.

How Was the Survey Developed and Administered?

Survey Development

- A student climate survey has been administered every year since the spring of 2007. Starting in the spring of 2015, Aurora Public Schools utilized the Conditions for Learning Survey developed by the American Institutes for Research which assesses four core constructs within schools:
    1. The **safe and respectful climate** scale measures how physically and emotionally safe students feel.
    2. The **high expectations/academic rigor/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.
    3. The **student support** scale measures how much students feel listened to, cared about, and helped by teachers and other adults in the school.
    4. The **social and emotional learning** scale measures students' perception of their peers' social and problem-solving skills.

- For the 2017-18 survey four new questions were added to the Grade 9-12 survey to assess student engagement in plans (consistent with goals of the APS2020 Strategic Plan). These were:
    1. How often this school year have you talked to an adult at school about your future beyond high school?
    2. How often this school year have you talked to your family about your future beyond high school?

3. My plan for the future after high school is (check all that apply): Trade or technical school; 2-year College/Community College;4-year College; Get a Job; Join the Military; Take a year off and then go to college; Other; I don't know.
4. I am on track to earn at least one credential (e.g., Advanced Placement (AP) Classes, International Baccalaureate (IB), Digital Badges, Workforce Certificate, College Credit, Internship) that I need to pursue my plan for the future.

- The Conditions for Learning Survey was administered to all students via an online survey in grades 5-12 and Pickens in November and December of 2017. In previous years, the survey was administered in Spring, to allow school and district leaders to act upon results earlier in the school year, the timing of the survey was moved up this school year.The survey was available in both English and Spanish to provide equity across the two most common languages.

- Of the 20,318 students from grades 5-12 or Pickens who were actively enrolled at the beginning of the survey window, 13,772 surveys were completed. This represents a response rate of 67.8%. This is an increase of 2.8 percentage points from last year and decrease of 6.5 percentage points since the 2012-13 survey. Table 1 shows the total percentage of students responding to the survey over the last few years.

Table 1. Student Climate Survey: Historical Percent Response Rates

Grade Level	Total	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	1 Yr Ch.	5 Yr Ch.
Overall	13,772	74.3%	67.1%	71.7%	71.0%	65.0%	67.8%	+2.8	-6.5

Note. Total reflects number of survey responses in 2017-18.

- In the 2017-18 survey, the distribution of student-reported ethnicity reflected an under-representation of the Hispanic student group and over-representation of the Two+ student group for both high school students and students in grades 5-8. Tables 2 and 3 below provide the distribution of grades 9-12 and grades 5-8 students' ethnicity on the October Count report and as self-identified on the student survey. This over-representation of the Two+ student group is consistent with results from the 2014-15, 2015-16, and 2016-17 surveys, whereby students in the Hispanic student group were under-represented and students in the Two+ student group were over-represented.

Table 2. Distribution of Students' Ethnicity High School

	Nat Am	Asian	Black	Hispanic	White	Nat Haw	Two+
October Count (Grades 9-12)	0.7%	5.4%	18.2%	57.5%	14.2%	0.6%	3.4%
Survey (HS)	0.7%	6.9%	14.1%	47.8%	12.5%	0.0%	16.6%
Difference	**0.0%**	**+1.5%**	**-4.1%**	**-9.7%**	**-1.7%**	**-0.6%**	**+13.2%**

Table 3. Distribution of Students' Ethnicity 5-8

	Nat Am	Asian	Black	Hispanic	White	Nat Haw	Two+
October Count (Grades 5-8)	1.0%	4.6%	18.2%	57.1%	14.0%	0.7%	4.4%
Survey (Grades 5-8)	2.2%	5.4%	14.2%	40.9%	13.7%	0.0%	21.6%
Difference	**+1.2%**	**+0.8%**	**-4.0%**	**-16.2%**	**-0.3%**	**-0.7%**	**+17.2%**

Survey Results

Overall Agreement Results

- For overall and scale agreement calculations, negatively worded questions were recoded so that agreement refers to a positive perception (e.g. disagreement with "I wish I went to a different school" is coded as agreement for these summary metrics).

- Across all returned surveys, the overall agreement rate was 67%. This was unchanged from the overall agreement rate (67%) from 2016-17. This indicates that overall, students were satisfied with the climate at their schools and results varied little from last year.

- When examining overall satisfaction by survey form, the overall agreement rate for the high school form is 66% and for the grades 5-8 form is 67%; this was unchanged from last year. This indicates that students at younger grades are slightly more satisfied with their schools.

- Although grade was an optional reported field, all grade levels (5-12) except grade 7, 8, and 10 had an overall agreement rate over 65%. The highest grade-specific overall agreement rate was for grade 12, with an agreement rate of 71%. The lowest overall agreement rate was for grade 8 (63%).

- Across the schools that participated in the survey, overall agreement rates ranged from 84% (at William Smith) to 59% (at Vista Peak Preparatory and Tollgate). Of the 50 schools (excluding Pickens Technical College) that participated in the survey, 36 schools had an overall agreement rate over 65%. Only seven schools had an overall agreement rate over 75% (a threshold which indicates very high ratings of climate).

Scale Agreement Results

- Scale agreement results by school type and by individual school suggest that high expectations/academic rigor/challenge are a strength, but safe and respectful school climate and social emotional learning climate are a challenge.

Scale Agreement by School Level/Type

- Students at all levels had high agreement rates for the **high expectations/academic rigor/challenge** scale; for all levels (excluding Pickens) this scale had the highest agreement rates. Agreement rates ranged from 74% (for high schools) to 81% for elementary and K-8 schools.

- Agreement rates for **safe and respectful climate** were only 56% for elementary school students and 57% for middle school students. Rates were 69% and 70% respectively for high school and K-8 school students. This indicates that students in elementary and middle schools generally don't perceive their schools as having very safe and respectful climates.

- Agreement rates for the **social emotional learning** scale were below 65% for all levels and only about 50% for middle school and high school students. This indicates that students do not perceive their peers as having strong social and problem-solving skills.

- Agreement rates for the **student support** scale were all above 65% and were highest (75%) for both elementary and K-8 school students; rates were lowest for high school students (67%).

Scale Agreement by School:

- When examining the schools which responded to the survey, all of the 50 schools had an agreement rate over 65% on the **challenge** subscale. This indicates that students perceive their schools to be academically rigorous and challenging.

- On the subscale measuring **student support**, 45 of the 50 schools had an agreement rate over 65%, indicating that students perceive high levels of support from adults in their schools.

- Only 16 of the 50 schools had agreement rates of 65% or higher on **safe and respectful climate**, suggesting a need for improvement in this area.

- Only 20 schools had agreement rates above 65% for **social emotional learning,** indicating that additional supports are needed for student social emotional learning.

Item Agreement Results

- Item agreement rates are presented in Table 4. Comparisons of agreement to each question from the current year versus last year found only one item with a meaningful change (i.e., changes of greater than three percentage points). The item was in the **high expectations/academic rigor/challenge** subscale and related to students being encouraged to take advanced courses.

- With regard to new questions on the high school survey related to the **APS2020 strategic plan**:
    - Over two-thirds (64%) reported being on track to earn a credential.
    - A total of 58% reported talking to an adult at school about their future beyond high schools.
    - More than four out of five (83%) reported talking to a family member about their future beyond high schools.
    - Most students reported that their plan for the future included 4-year college (59%), getting a job (46%), and two year college (22%). Smaller percentages of students reported that they plan to take a year off before attending college (16%), or plan to attend a technical school (10%). Additionally, a total of 16% answered "I don't know" to the question about their future plan.

- Consistent with findings on scale agreement, areas of relative strength on the survey (75%+) agreement rates for positively worded questions and below 25% for negatively worded questions) related to **high expectations/academic rigor/challenge**. These included students' perception that they are encouraged to take advanced classes, that their school provides them with information on behavior and discipline policies, that they are expected to learn challenging math material or take four years of math in high school, that their teachers require them to explain their answers, and that they have at least one teacher who makes them excited about the future. Students also reported that they are encouraged to share ideas about what they are studying in class and that their teachers think all students can do challenging work.

- **Student support** from teachers was another area of strength, with the highest ratings for the following questions:
    - "Adults in this school are usually willing to make the time to give students extra help." (75%)
    - "I have at least one teacher who makes me excited about the future." (78%)
    - "Teachers at the school really care about me." (76%)
    - "Teachers give me feedback on my assignments that helps me improve my work."(84%)

- As found in the prior few years, results on a **safe and respectful climate** and **social emotional learning** suggest that these are areas of challenge within APS.

- With regard to a **safe and respectful climate**, findings of concern include:
    - Over half (55%) of students agree that students at their school are often teased or picked on.
    - Over two in five (42%) of students agree that "students are often bullied because of certain characteristics" such as race, religion, weight or sexual orientation.
    - Over one in three (38%) reportedly "worry about crime and violence in school".
    - Over one in ten (11%) students report that they sometimes stay at home because they don't feel safe at school.

- On the other hand, over three in four students (76%) agreed that peers "respect students from all cultures and races". This result somewhat contradicts beliefs that students are bullied because of characteristics such as race, religion, weight, or sexual orientation. Greater understanding of these contradictory results could be provided by using more detailed and specific questions on this topic as is available in the EDSCLS climate survey.[7]

- With regard to **social emotional learning**, findings of concern included:
  - Almost two out of three students (62%) report that peers "get into arguments" when they disagree with people."
  - Almost half (49%) report that peers think it's "OK to fight if someone insults them".
  - Less than two in five (37.5%) students agree that peers "stop and think before doing anything when they get angry."

Conclusions

- Areas of relative strength on the survey include the areas of **high expectations/academic rigor/challenge** and **student support**.

- Areas to be addressed include a **safe and respectful climate** as well as **social emotional learning** environment.

- There were some encouraging results related to the **APS2020 strategic plan** including two-thirds reporting that they were on track to earn a credential, and four out of five students talking to a family member about their futures within the current school year. Attending a four-year college was the most commonly reported plan for students' futures (59%).

Recommendations

➢ Poor performance on such **social emotional learning** measures as reactivity (not stopping to think before doing anything when angry, getting into arguments when disagreeing, and thinking it's OK to fight when insulted), may be causally related to bullying and disruptive, disrespectful and unsafe behavior.[2] Thus, interventions for social emotional learning, trauma and other mental health issues can also address underlying issues causing bullying and other safety-related problems.

➢ Given how crucial feelings of safety and social emotional learning are to student learning and achievement[1], additional actions should address these concerns. Examples of potential actions are:
  - Provide additional resources for counselors in elementary schools and K-8 schools and expansion of these resources in middle and high schools to address social emotional learning and mental health concerns.

- o Embed social emotional learning content in academic content for all school levels.

➢ Additional evidence based interventions to consider might include mindfulness training which is known to reduce reactivity and increase attention levels and emotion regulation. [3-7] Mindfulness use has been expanding in U.S. schools including Baltimore and New York City[8] and was found to increase student attention levels, engagement, and showing care for others in the highly diverse district of Oakland, CA.[9-10] Further, teacher training in mindfulness also benefits teachers, who report greater job satisfaction, lower stress, and are less reactive to student misbehavior. [9-10]

➢ APS should consider using the U.S. Department of Educations' EDCLS Safe and Supportive Learning student climate survey, a psychometrically sound survey that provides more detailed information on student safety and engagement. The survey also provides benchmark data through the USDE EDCLS website as well as other resources and tools that schools can use to understand and take action on their survey findings[11]: https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/edscls

Table 4. Item Agreement and 1-Year Change

High Expectations/Academic Rigor/Challenge	2016-17	2017-18	Change
7. My school provides me with information about what I can expect from my courses, special programs, school activities, and school services (Parent-Student Handbook).	81.3%	79.9%	-1.5%
8. My school provides me with information about the expectations for school appropriate behavior and discipline policies (Parent-Student Handbook).	84.0%	83.8%	-0.2%
40. When students in this school already know the material that is being taught, the teacher gives them more advanced assignments.	63.0%	62.1%	-0.9%
42. Students at this school are expected to learn challenging math material to get them ready for high school.	78.2%	78.3%	0.1%
44. In my classes, we often discuss different interpretations of things we read.	74.0%	75.6%	1.6%
Classes at this school are preparing me for my future.	76.5%	75.0%	-1.5%
45. Students in this school are expected to take four years of math.	88.2%	86.8%	-1.4%
46. Students in this school are expected to take four years of science.	56.7%	55.4%	-1.3%
47. Students in this school are encouraged to take advanced classes, such as honors, Advanced Placement (AP), or International Baccalaureate (IB), or classes that lead to professional certification.	82.9%	79.2%	**-3.6%**
27. Often connect what I am learning to life outside the classroom.	67.7%	67.5%	-0.2%
28. Encourage students to share their ideas about things we are studying in class.	82.2%	83.1%	0.9%
29. Often require me to explain my answers.	88.7%	88.8%	0.2%
33. Often assign homework that helps me learn.	72.0%	71.1%	-0.9%
34. Think all students can do challenging school work.	76.3%	77.1%	0.8%
Safe & Respectful School Climate	2016-17	2017-18	Change
15. Treat each other with respect.	64.7%	64.7%	0.0%
26. Respect students from all cultures and races.	75.2%	76.3%	1.1%
***12. Don't really care about each other.	37.5%	37.7%	0.2%
***13. Like to put others down.	31.7%	31.5%	-0.2%
14. Don't get along together very well.	41.3%	41.7%	0.4%
***1. I worry about crime and violence in school.	39.6%	38.2%	-1.5%
***2. Students at this school are often bullied	43.1%	41.9%	-1.2%
**3. Students at this school are often teased or picked on	55.9%	54.6%	-1.3%
***4. Students at this school are often bullied because of certain characteristics (for example, their race, religion, weight, or sexual orientation.)	43.8%	41.5%	-2.3%
***5. I sometimes stay home because I don't feel safe at school.	10.9%	10.5%	-0.4%

***These questions are negatively worded so agree/strongly agree indicate a negative perception.

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Table 4. (continued)

Social Emotional Learning	2016-17	2017-18	Change
16. Stop and think before doing anything when they get angry.	37.7%	37.5%	-0.2%
17. Do their share of the work when we have group projects.	66.0%	65.8%	-0.2%
20. Do their best, even when their school work is difficult.	66.6%	66.7%	0.1%
22. Do all their homework.	37.3%	38.5%	1.1%
23. Try to work out their disagreements with other students by talking to them.	46.7%	47.3%	0.5%
25. Try to do a good job on school work even when it is not interesting.	65.7%	65.8%	0.1%
***18. Give up when they can't solve a problem easily.	39.2%	38.3%	-0.9%
***19. Get into arguments when they disagree with people.	61.7%	62.1%	0.4%
***21. Think it's OK to fight if someone insults them.	48.5%	49.1%	0.6%
***24. Think it's OK to cheat if other students are cheating.	32.5%	33.3%	0.9%
Student Support	2016-17	2017-18	Change
6. My opinions are valued.	69.0%	68.2%	-0.8%
36. Adults in this school apply the same rules to all students equally.	63.3%	64.1%	0.8%
38. I can get extra help at school outside of my regular classes.	69.8%	68.3%	-1.5%
39. A counselor at this school has helped me plan for life after high school.	56.1%	53.9%	-2.2%
41. Adults in this school are usually willing to make the time to give students extra help.	76.0%	74.9%	-1.1%
42. I have at least one teacher who makes me excited about the future.	77.8%	77.7%	-0.1%
43.. My school is committed to building the strengths of each student.	74.5%	73.6%	-0.9%
***35. Adults in this school are often too busy to give students extra help.	36.3%	36.6%	0.4%
***37. I wish I went to a different school.	29.7%	29.3%	-0.4%
30. Really care about me.	75.9%	75.6%	-0.3%
31. Help me make up work after an excused absence.	68.0%	68.2%	0.2%
32. Give me feedback on my assignments that helps me improve my work.	83.3%	83.9%	0.6%
Strategic Plan - Student credentials	2016-17	2017-18	Change
56. I am on track to earn at least one credential (e.g., Advanced Placement (AP) Classes, International Baccalaureate (IB), Digital Badges, Workforce Certificate, College Credit, Internship) that I need to pursue my plan for the future.	--	82.9%	--

***These questions are negatively worded so agree/strongly agree indicate a negative perception.

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