Measuring the School Climate and Safety Indicator Under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Students cannot succeed if they are not in school and learning in positive school environments. DSC strongly urges states to include "school climate and safety" as an indicator in their accountability systems under ESSA.[i]

Recommendations for Measuring the School Climate Indicator

Using data on chronic absenteeism is a start but not enough. States should take a comprehensive approach to assessing school climate by incorporating multiple measures that provide critical information about the quality of the school environment, including:

- **Discipline Data**

  - At a minimum, set annual targets for all students and each subgroup in:
    1. Decreasing the percentage of students who receive **in- and out-of-school suspensions**, **expulsions**, **referrals to law enforcement**.[ii]
    2. Decreasing the **days of instruction missed due to disciplinary actions**.
  - ESSA already requires states and districts to collect and publish discipline data on annual report cards.[iii]
  - Also include students who self-identify as LGBTQ as a subgroup.

- **School Climate Surveys**

  - Incorporate feedback from student and parent surveys.
  - Surveys should include a range of questions regarding the quality of interactions between students and staff and parents and staff, as well as cultural competency and sensitivity to LGBTQ issues.
  - American Institutes for Research offers a free a school climate survey at safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/edscls

> ### DISCIPLINE DATA
>
> **In 2013-2014, 2.8 million K-12 students were suspended out-of-school. [iv] Students of color, students with disabilities, English language learners and LGBTQ students are impacted at higher rates.**

ED School Climate Surveys (EDSCLS)

Broader Measures of School Climate for Use in Other Parts of State Plans

In addition to accountability indicators, states and districts should track, share, and use additional information when conducting district needs assessments and in preparing State (and District) Report Cards. Report cards should provide student demographics for context. At a minimum, this information should include:

- Staff-to-student ratio for support staff (counselors, social workers, psychologists, peace builders, etc.) per school.
- Number of School Resource Officers (SROs) and other law enforcement per school.
- Number of schools with metal detectors and other security equipment (for districts that use equipment that moves from school to school, a comprehensive reporting of number of days a piece of equipment was used at each school).
- Use of evidence-based restorative practices, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and other positive approaches.
- Observational assessments of school environment.
- Data on teacher recruitment and retention.
- Access to the arts (e.g. dance, visual arts, music and theater).
- Access to SAT/ACT preparation and examinations.
- Number of students referred to "alternative schools" and the number who return to their traditional school.

Examples of School Climate Measures Implemented by School Districts

California's CORE Data Collaborative

A consortium of school districts in California uses a [multiple measures accountability system](http://coredistricts.org/) that includes: suspension/expulsion rates, chronic absenteeism, school climate surveys, and students' social-emotional skills. Learn more at http://coredistricts.org/.

Baltimore City Public Schools

Baltimore uses the [School Climate Walk](http://bit.ly/2gVvVSD) tool to conduct observational assessments of the school environment and identify areas for improvement. You can download the tool at http://bit.ly/2gVvVSD.

Rochester City School District

[Rochester's Code of Conduct](http://www.rcsdk12.org/domain/16) codifies a role for community members in annual review and revision of the Code of Conduct. You can read more at http://www.rcsdk12.org/domain/16.

Buffalo Public Schools

[Buffalo's Code of Conduct](http://bit.ly/2gD511o) (http://bit.ly/2gD511o) limits the use of suspensions for non-violent offenses and collects and publishes updated suspension and attendance data on its [website](http://bit.ly/2gp7wBw) (http://bit.ly/2gp7wBw) throughout the year.

EXCERPT FROM BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS SCHOOL CLIMATE WALK

	Observation	Observed	Not Observed	Comments
School Entrance	1. Visitors (including yourself) are greeted by staff, provided with a visitor's pass, and directed to the appropriate location upon entering the building.			
	2. The main office is an orderly and well-managed environment.			
	3. The main office had students seated during instructional time. Note in the comments if the same students were in the office when you departed, and what the students were doing.			
Physical Environment	4. The physical environment is welcoming and supportive of learning for all students (e.g., well-lit, graffiti-free, painted walls, etc.).			
	5. Self-contained classrooms (including City Wide programs) are supportive of learning and are included within the school community; classrooms are not identified as 'special education' or 'SPED.'			
	6. The physical space is utilized effectively (i.e., not overcrowded or underutilized) and routinely checked by staff for students lingering or loitering.			
	7. The physical school environment is secure (i.e., outside doors are kept closed or monitored, and outside student activities and transitions are monitored).			
Student/Staff Interaction	8. Students are being respectful to one another and to staff members. Provide examples in the comments section.			
	9. Staff members are being respectful to students and to one another. Provide examples in the comments section.			
	10. Students are complying with the City Schools exclusionary dress code. Provide examples in the comments section as needed.			

[i] *Every Student Succeeds Act*, Public Law No. 114.95, S. 1177, 114th Cong. §1111(c)(4)(B)(v)(II) (Dec. 10, 2015) (hereinafter *ESSA*).

[ii] The Office for Civil Rights defines "referrals to law enforcement" as: an action by which a student is reported to any law enforcement agency or official, including a school police unit, for an incident that occurs on school grounds, during school-related events, or while taking school transportation, regardless of whether official action is taken. Citations, tickets, court referrals, and school-related arrests are considered referrals to law enforcement.

[iii] *ESSA, supra note* i, at §1111(h)(1)(C)(viii)(I).

[iv] U.S. Department of Education, 2013-2014 Civil Rights Data Collection: A First Look (June 7, 2016), http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/2013-14-first-look.pdf.