

School Climate and Physical Safety



Climate Connection is a publication of the NYS Center for School Safety.

What is school climate and why is it important?

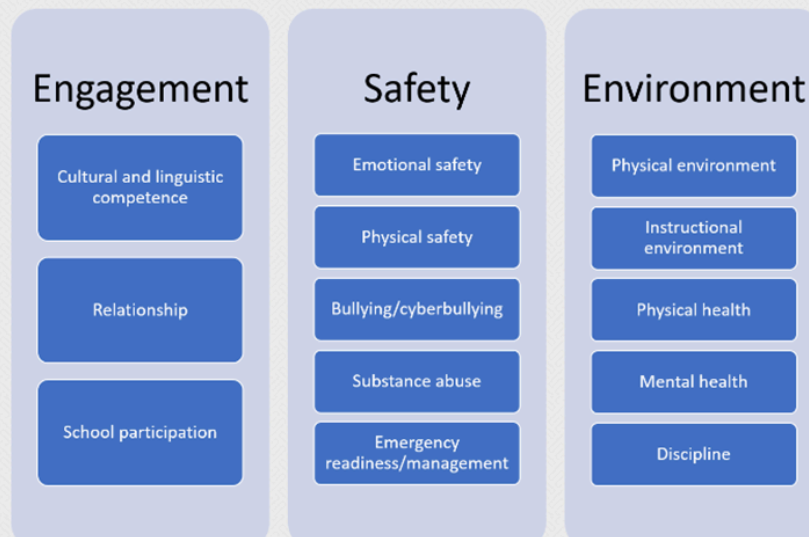
School climate refers to the quality and character of school life. A positive school climate is a place where students feel a sense of safety, belonging, and trust. Research has shown the impact of a positive school and classroom climate on student academic performance, test scores, and engagement (Erdem, Cahit & Kaya, Metin, 2023). Additionally, school climate is a leading predictor of students' emotional and behavioral outcomes (Brand et al., 2008).

How is school climate measured?

The U.S. Department of Education (ED) has prioritized research about school climate and developed the ED School Climate Surveys (EDSCLS), a suite of survey instruments available at no cost for schools, districts, and states. The EDSCLS organizes school climate measures into the following domains and subtopics:

Topic Areas (The EDSCLS School Climate Model)

The three domains of school climate and the topics within each (as shown below) are measured in the EDSCLS.



Students must *feel* safe - without worries or concerns about their own physical safety or the physical safety of others - in order to learn. A school's physical environment encompasses the physical appearance and functioning of the building. This includes lighting (artificial and natural), thermal comfort, air quality and ventilation, acoustics and noise control, size and configuration of rooms, permanent versus portable rooms, safety measures (cameras, signage, metal detectors, etc.), location, and neighborhood surrounding it (Earthman 2004; National School Boards Association 1996; O'Sullivan 2006; Planty and DeVoe 2005; Schneider 2002).

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CLIMATE CONNECTION

Information and strategies
linking Climate and School Safety.

There are a variety of low-cost or no-cost methods to collect data on your school's physical environment:

- Conduct a Walk-through Assessment
- Create a Method to Collect Student and Staff Reports
- Conduct School Climate Surveys
- Conduct Student and Staff Focus Groups



Sample Walk through Assessment Questions:

Grounds and Exterior

- What is the overall condition of the grounds?
- Is there graffiti?
- Is there a designated & monitored traffic area for pick up/drop off?
- Are signs for parking lots and entrances clear and prominent?

Building Access

- Is there a policy and procedure for ensuring secure entry and exit?
- Is there a single point of entry/exit?
- Are there visitor policy/procedure signs posted at all doors?
- Are there informative signs?
- Are the entrances/exits staffed?
- Are sign-in stations identified and staffed?
- Are visitors required to wear ID badges?

Building Interior

- Are stairwells properly lit?
- Are hallways properly lit?
- Are hallways supervised during transition?
- How are bathrooms accessed?
- Is graffiti present?
- Are hallways, bathrooms and public spaces clean and in good repair?

School Climate and Culture:

- Is the Dignity Act Coordinator contact information posted?
- Is there evidence of school-wide climate initiatives and behavioral supports?
- Is there evidence that the school promotes respect for differences and emphasizes equity and inclusion?
- Did you observe evidence of positive interactions?
- Are there routines and smooth transitions for
 - Student arrival and dismissal
 - Class transition time
- Does the main office offer a welcoming atmosphere?
- Is there evidence of support for students and staff who might have access and functional needs?

Sample Student Survey Questions

from the EDSCLS

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about this school?

- I feel safe in this school.
- The bathrooms in this school are clean.
- The temperature in this school is comfortable all year round.
- The school grounds are kept clean.
- I think students are proud of how this school looks on the outside.
- Broken things at this school get fixed quickly.
- I know what to do if there is an emergency or dangerous situation during the school day.

Sample Staff Survey Questions

from the EDSCLS

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about this school?

- I feel safe in this school.
- The school looks clean and pleasant.
- The school is an inviting work environment.
- My teaching is hindered by poor heating, cooling, and/or lighting systems at this school.
- There is adequate instructional space (e.g., classrooms) at this school.
- There is inadequate equipment or facilities at this school.

Sample Focus Group Questions:

- Do you feel safe in this school? Why or why not?
- If you had a safety concern, is there someone you could tell?
- What do you like about your school as it relates to safety?
- Do you have concerns about safety in this school?
- Are there places in this school where you feel unsafe?

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The [EDSCLS Climate Surveys](#) are free to use and include surveys for students, staff and caregivers.

The Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools ([REMS](#)) TA Center has developed a free site assessment walk through tool, [Site Assess](#).

For additional resources and professional development related to school safety and climate, visit nyscfss.org