The Role of School Climate Data in Assessment and Accountability

Tamara Lewis, Florence Chang, Judi Vanderhaar, and Beverly Winsch

Department of Accountability, Research, and Planning

Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS)

Abstract

In order to help students develop socially, emotionally, ethically, and intellectually, schools must deliberately provide significant and engaging learning opportunities, opportunities that allow students to experience membership in a safe and caring community of learners. Often lost in the shuffle of school accountability and assessment is the importance of the school learning environment. Despite the knowledge that school culture and climate are vital to student learning, schools and districts continue to struggle to embed school climate data in the assessment and accountability systems. The current presentation will show how one large urban district is continuously monitoring school climate data to inform and improve the context of learning for students.

School Climate Data Collection

•In Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) the school climate surveys, called the Comprehensive School Surveys (CSS), are distributed annually.

• These surveys are provided to all classified and certified staff, all parents, all middle and high school students, and all elementary school students in grades 4 & 5.

•The questions measure comprehensive areas such as school climate and atmosphere, quality of education, safety and job satisfaction.

•Demographic data is also collected in the survey. In 2010, a total of 124,717 surveys were collected across the district. The results of the CSS are available as reports via an internet web application which enables the user to generate disaggregated reports.

•Comprehensive School Survey reports can be filtered by district, school, school level, race, gender and grade. Reports can also be exported which allow users to customize Comprehensive School Survey reports. With the combination of disaggregated and comprehensive data, staff and schools have the ability to analyze school climate and its impact on accountability. Additionally, the data also make it possible for examination of areas where perceptions between the students, school staff, and parents may diverge.

Use of School Climate Data

•At the district level, the data is used to monitor the social-emotional health of the overall school learning environment. School climate data is a part of the district's quality indicators of schools.

•This presentation gives three specific examples of how school climate data are used for assessment and accountability.

•At the school level, the data is used to develop their annual improvement plans, as well as monitor programs such as CARE for Kids, the district's social-emotional program. (Example 1)

•School level climate data are also used to track progress in school reconfiguration initiatives such as with the district's two same gender middle schools which opened in 2007. (Example 2)

•At the student level, the data is disaggregated to monitor the sense of engagement and belonging from different subgroups (e.g., racial, poverty, etc.). Data provide information for initiatives such as the cultural competence initiative . (Example 3)

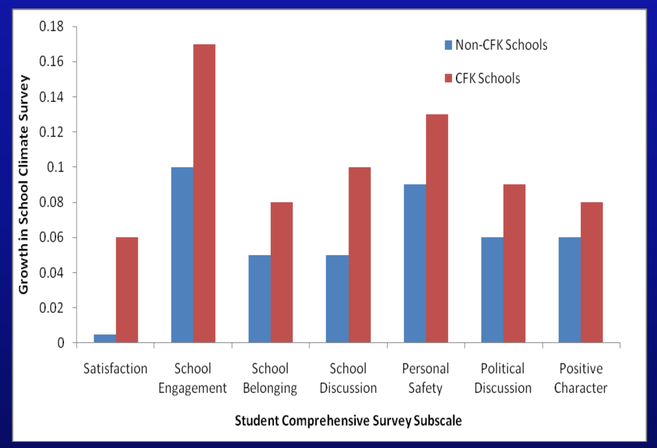
Example One: Care for Kids

CARE for Kids is the district's social and emotional learning program. The program's principles include that at the heart of a caring school community are *respectful*, *supportive relationships* among and between students, educators, support staff, and parents as well as the principle that community is strengthened when there are frequent opportunities for *students* to *exercise their voice, choice, and responsible independence* to work together for the common good.

In 2008-2009, the CARE for Kids initiative was rolled out to 28 elementary schools, and in 2009-10 an additional 28 elementary schools were added for a total of 54 participating elementary schools. The annual Comprehensive School Surveys (CSS) are used to assess the impact of the CARE for Kids initiative on school culture, student connectedness to school, and staff and parent satisfaction.

The examples below show two ways CSS data help monitor the impact of the program. First, data are tracked longitudinally to examine change in school climate over time. Second, change in school climate is examined in relation to the schools' growth in academic achievement.

In terms of change in school climate, since the inception of the program, CARE for Kids schools showed statistically significant improvements in almost all of areas of school climate. As shown below, CARE for Kids schools outperformed non-CARE for Kids schools in growth of Overall Satisfaction, School Engagement, School Belonging, School Discussion, Personal Safety, Political Discussion, and Positive Character.



Second, growth in school culture was also examined in relation to growth in academic achievement. In 2009-10, the CARE for Kids schools that showed growth in school climate (School Belonging, School Support, Positive Character, and Overall Satisfaction) were also the schools most likely to make gains in Reading, Math, Science, Social Studies, and Writing on the state achievement test. The chart below shows the correlations between growth in school climate and change in academic index scores from 2009 to 2010.

Growth in School Climate from 2009-2010 (Student Surveys)	Growth in Academic Index Score from 2009 to 2010				
	Reading	Math	Science	Social Studies	Writing
Overall Satisfaction	.33*	.38**	.28*	.26	.25
School Belonging	.33*	.31*	.36**	.37**	.36**
School Support	.30*	.24	.16	.25	.23
Positive Character	.33*	.30*	.22	.25	.20

Note: *p < .05; **p < .01

Example Two: Reconfiguration of two schools

Olmsted Same Gender Middle Schools: Two of the district's middle schools were reconfigured into same gender schools in 2007. Student and teacher responses on the JCPS Comprehensive Survey items (2007-2008 is the baseline year) related to school climate showed both schools outperformed the district on the majority of items related to school satisfaction, principal leadership, curriculum, and teaching effectiveness. The data also showed academic gains in reading and math for girls and in math for boys. Suspensions declined for both schools while the district average slightly increased. Together, these preliminary findings suggest that the same gender initiative which also included reduced class size and a school climate curriculum shaped a school culture that promoted academic gains.

SELECTED 2008-2010 JCPS COMPREHENSIVE SURVEY RESULTS (%SATISFIED)

	OLMSTED NORTH (Boys)			OLMSTED SOUTH (Girls)			DISTRICT MIDDLE SCHOOL		
STUDENTS	2008 (N=566)	2010 (N=627)	CHANGE	2008 (N=533)	2010 (N=702)	CHANGE	2008 (N=14,797)	2010 (N=18,865)	CHANGE
I am very satisfied with my school	47.86	59.00	11.14	50.57	49.78	-0.79	69.97	72.08	2.11
I am very satisfied with JCPS	68.98	74.70	5.73	73.95	71.78	-2.17	73.93	72.73	-1.20
My principal provides effective leadership at my school	65.08	87.17	22.09	64.08	69.26	5.17	78.58	84.59	6.01
My teachers provide academically challenging content	68.68	83.00	14.32	74.29	80.89	6.60	82.56	86.43	3.87
Teachers at my school provide effective teaching	68.76	80.93	12.17	76.91	84.05	7.14	82.24	86.06	3.82
TEACHERS	2008 (N=44)	2010 (N=43)	CHANGE	2008 (N=49)	2010 (N=54)	CHANGE	2008 (N=787)	2010 (N=904)	CHANGE
My principal provides effective leadership	81.82	95.35	13.53	87.76	98.15	10.39	87.93	86.95	-0.98
My school is effectively implementing a plan to close the achievement gap	75.00	81.40	6.40	93.88	100.00	6.12	91.5	87.61	-3.89
Teachers at my school provide effective instruction	93.18	100.00	6.82	100.00	98.15	-1.85	97.51	96.9	-0.61

COMMONWEALTH ACCOUNTABILITY TESTING SYSTEM %PROFICIENT/DISTINGUISHED

OLMSTED NORTH (Boys)	2008	2010	CHANGE	OLMSTED SOUTH (Girls)	2008	2010	CHANGE
READING	**32.41**	29.35	-3.06	READING	**39.93**	48.36	8.43
MATH	14.68	26.83	12.15	MATH	28.8	35.75	6.95

SUSPENSIONS*

OLMSTED NORTH (Boys)**	2008	2009	2010	%CHANGE
OUT OF SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS	315	285	282	-11%
OLMSTED SOUTH (Girls)**	**2008**	**2009**	**2010**	**%CHANGE**
OUT OF SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS	303	187	176	-42%

*Middle school district suspension data slightly increased since 2008. **Enrollment increased by 8% and Olmsted North and by 31% at Olmsted South since 2008.

Example Three: Cultural Competence Initiative

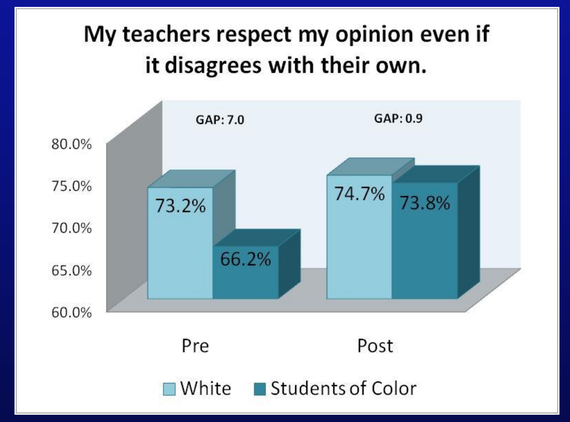
A primary goal of JCPS is creating caring and culturally responsive classroom communities. JCPS is committed to promoting a district culture in which individual differences are respected and valued by offering professional development that supports and enhances the staff's cultural competency and world view.

Since 2008, the JCPS Department of Diversity, Equity, and Poverty Programs has offered institutes for Cultural Competence. The institute is designed for teachers and administrators to learn the theory and practice of cultural competence. The focus is on the deeper work of personal, professional, and systemic transformation for the purpose of achieving social justice and equity in our schools.

The institute requires a four-day commitment by at least three people that is centered on "training the trainer" and building Cultural Competence Leadership Teams in each participating school.

The Comprehensive School Student survey data is disaggregated and used in the cultural competence initiative for several purposes: (1) to identify schools with large gaps to target for participation in the initiative, (2) to evaluate the impact of initiative in changing gaps, and (3) as an ongoing activity for school staff to engage in collaborative analysis and dialogue about the survey results for different groups of students.

Below is a result of a descriptive analysis of a cohort of schools that participated in the cultural competence training comparing pre gap data from students in participating schools in 2008 with results from the same students in 2009.



Summary

Monitoring and analyzing school climate data is essential to ensuring that the context for learning is conducive for the development of the whole child-emotionally, behaviorally, and academically. Though many acknowledge the importance of school climate in student learning, often data are not monitored systematically or longitudinally. This presentation aimed to show how a large urban district is utilizing and analyzing school climate data to monitor a wide-range of initiatives at both the district and school level.

CSS interactive web site:
https://www.assessment.jefferson.k12.ky.us/survey2010