

# Delaware School Climate Survey: Frequently Asked Questions

## WHY IS SCHOOL CLIMATE IMPORTANT?

School Climate is linked to a wide range of academic, behavioral, and social-emotional outcomes for students, including:

- Increased academic achievement
- Increased academic motivation and positive personal attitudes
- Higher attendance and decreased school avoidance
- Lower rates of behavior problems, delinquency, victimization
- Greater sense of emotional well-being

## WHAT ARE THE DELAWARE SCHOOL CLIMATE SURVEYS AND WHAT DO THEY MEASURE?

The DSCSs provide schools with a free, brief, useful measure of school climate assessing how students, teachers/staff, and parents perceive the school environment.

Psychology research and theory shows that individuals' perception of their environment is a strong predictor of important social, emotional, and academic outcomes.

DSCSs measure perceptions of:

- **School Climate:**
  - relationships among the school community members (e.g., teacher-student relationships, teacher-parent relationships and student relationships)
  - school safety
  - fairness and clarity of rules and behavioral expectations
- **Social and Emotional Competencies:**
  - responsible decision making
  - social awareness
  - self-management of emotions & behavior
  - relationship skills
- **Classroom Management Techniques:**
  - positive and punitive disciplinary techniques
  - techniques targeting social-emotional competencies
- **Bullying:**
  - physical
  - verbal
  - social
  - cyberbullying
- **Engagement**
  - cognitive
  - behavioral
  - emotional

## ARE THE DSCSs VALID AND RELIABLE TOOLS?

Yes! Research supporting the validity of the surveys (including confirmatory factor analyses) has been published in several of the top peer-reviewed journals and presented at multiple national conferences. Scores on the surveys are reliable and are related to important outcomes, particularly academic achievement and suspensions/expulsions. The Delaware surveys are also part of the survey compendium maintained by the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments (NCSSLE) to provide information about valid and reliable surveys.

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## WHAT INFORMATION DO THE DSCSs PROVIDE?

A detailed data report is developed for each population surveyed (Student, Teacher/Staff, and Home). Three types of scores are reported: *Standard Scores*, *Average Item Scores* for each subscale, and *Individual Item Responses*.

- Standard Scores: Answer how a school compares to other schools in Delaware that completed the survey
- Average Item Scores: Shows if the scores reflect positive or negative perceptions of school climate, regardless of how a school compares to other schools
- Individual Item Responses: Given a subscale score, what specific items caused the score to be low (or high)

Three separate interpretation worksheets have been developed to help schools systematically walk through the results of each survey. These are provided to each school with their data report, and schools are invited to a workshop to support their data analysis and understanding.

## HOW ARE THE DSCS RESULTS UTILIZED BY SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS?

The surveys are intended to provide schools with useful information for needs assessment, program development, and program evaluation.

- Survey data can be used for evaluation purposes and as part of the consolidated application to the Delaware Department of Education to show growth in school climate/discipline.
- Results can be used by school leadership teams (which may include families and students) to pinpoint areas of strength and those for improvement. Teams use this information to make program improvements and develop their school improvement plan.

## WHO COMPLETES THE SURVEYS AND HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE?

- There are three separate surveys: *Student*, *Teacher/Staff*, and *Home*. The Teacher/Staff and Home surveys are appropriate for all grade levels, and the Student survey is for grades 3-12.
- The DSCS is not mandated by the State, but some districts throughout the state see great value in the data and require all schools to participate. In general, schools enroll to participate on a voluntary basis.
- Currently the staff survey is administered in the fall and student and home versions in the winter. Each version takes approximately 15-20 minutes to complete.

## WHO PROVIDES THE DSCS?

The surveys are administered in partnership between the Delaware Department of Education and the Delaware Positive Behavior Support (DE-PBS) Project at the University of Delaware's Center for Disabilities Studies. The surveys are provided at no cost to the schools. For the last several years, over 150 schools annually have participated in the DSCS.

