

MEMORANDUM

TO: SPS District Leadership, Department of Behavioral Health

FROM: Jessica K. Beaver, PhD, Research & Evaluation

RE: Preliminary Findings from Study of Fall 2016 Interim Climate Survey Administration

Overview

The Research & Evaluation Department has collaborated with the Behavioral Health Department to examine the 2016-17 administration of student Interim Climate Surveys. The goals of this research are to guide the development and rollout of system-wide support for interim climate survey implementation in 2017-18, as well as improve the quality of the student survey instrument itself.

This memo presents findings from interviews with school leaders following the fall 2016 administration of the interim climate survey. Interviews were conducted with school leaders at six schools (Arbor Heights, Daniel Bagley, North Beach, Wing Luke, View Ridge, and Gatewood). Schools were selected based on student response rates to the fall survey and school leader availability. The research team also gathered feedback from school leaders during the “Culture and Climate” breakout session in the 1/10 Leadership Learning Day (LLD).

The main findings that emerged from the interviews were that school leaders highly value the Interim Climate Surveys, but need additional support from the Central Office to translate the data into concrete actions for improvement schoolwide. Specifically, they suggest that the Central Office:

1. Provide protocols and other materials to guide school data conversations
2. Align Interim Climate Survey to other ongoing district efforts
3. Make K-2 climate surveys available to elementary schools
4. Make improvements to the existing student survey

In this memo, we present general findings about survey administration and data trends. We then present the four findings above in detail and spotlight emergent best practices in schools.

Survey Administration and Data Trends

Of the 59 schools that originally opted in to administer the Fall 2016 Interim Survey, 43 schools (73%) fully administered the survey to their students.¹ 40 schools did not opt in to the survey. Unlike the typical paper-and-pencil student School Climate Survey, the Interim Climate Survey was delivered via computer. No major technical issues were noted in the six interview schools.

Table 1. Districtwide Breakdown of Interim Climate Survey Administration

Full Administration (at least 75% response rate)	73% (n=43)
Partial Administration (< 75% response rate)	20% (n=12)
Opted in But Did Not Administer	7% (n=4)

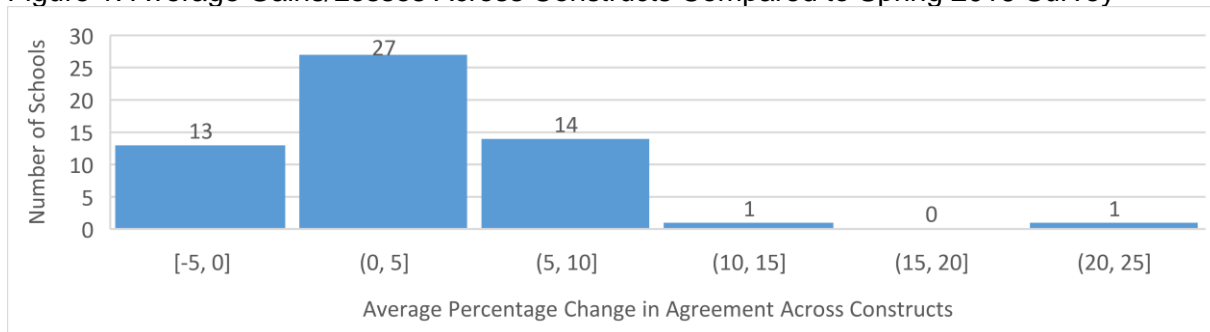
¹ Note: K-8 schools were separated into K-5 and 6-8 for the purposes of this tally.



School Spotlight: In-Person Explanation of the Purpose at Arbor Heights. The administrative team at Arbor Heights relayed that the smooth administration of the survey was in part due to classroom visits from a member of the school leadership team. Upon teacher request, this school leader explained to students the purpose of the survey and why completing it was important, and then stayed throughout the administration time to answer any questions that arose from either teachers or students. The administrator relayed that providing in-person assistance not only ensured high participation rates across the school, but also gave insight into students' levels of understanding of the survey questions themselves.

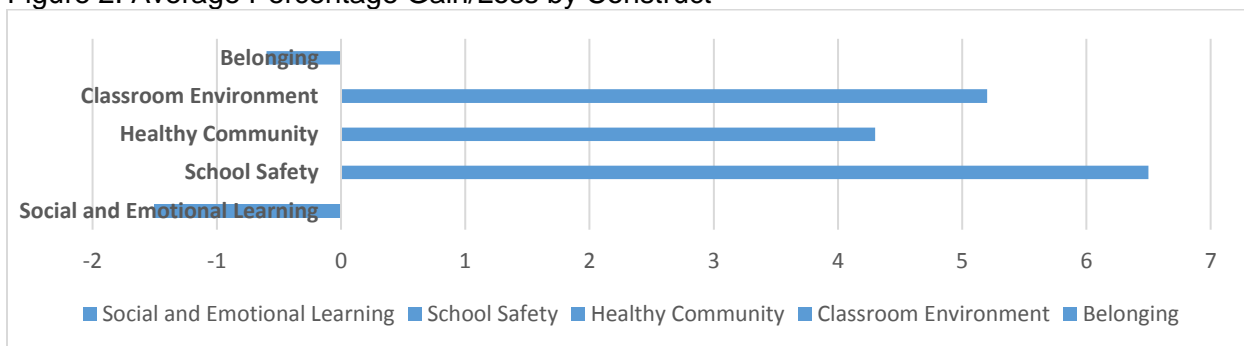
The Interim Climate Survey contained five constructs – Belonging, Classroom Environment, Healthy Community, School Safety, and Social Emotional Learning. Of the 43 schools that fully administered the Interim Survey, 28% (n=13) posted on average lower levels of agreement² or no change across the five constructs as compared to the Spring 2016 survey, whereas 72% (n=31) schools had higher levels of agreement across constructs (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Average Gains/Losses Across Constructs Compared to Spring 2016 Survey



Differences emerged at the construct level as well when comparing Fall 2016 to Spring 2016 results. Whereas agreement levels on “belonging” and “social emotional learning” dipped on average, the other three constructs made gains.

Figure 2. Average Percentage Gain/Loss by Construct



² Agreement is defined as responses of “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” on the survey.

Findings: Data Interpretation and Actions

In interviews, school leaders universally said that the Interim Survey was a worthwhile activity in their school because it gave them information in “real time” that could meaningfully guide improvement efforts in the school. At the January LLD breakout session, one principal described her school’s interim survey results as a “wake up call.” That said, school leaders were in very different stages of data interpretation and integration. While some schools were just starting to look at their data, others had already held intensive staff meetings to discuss results and co-construct school approaches to improvement based on results. However, even those schools in the beginning stages of data interpretation were able to give clear directives to the research team about the types of support they would like to see in the future to support their efforts.

Finding 1: Schools want protocols and other support materials to guide schoolwide conversations about climate data. In every school visited, school leaders said that they would greatly benefit from structured conversation guides to help them talk about school climate data in detail with their staff – particularly in all-staff meetings. These protocols, they said, should be general so that they can allow staff to see the “whole picture,” and neutral in tone so that they can guide conversation without being confrontational or accusatory. Additionally, three of the five school leaders mentioned that they would also like to have conversations with students about interim climate survey results.



School Spotlight: Follow-Up Focus Groups with Students at Daniel Bagley. *In January, Principal Carla Holmes at Daniel Bagley Elementary School conducted four focus groups with students in grades three through five. Each focus group lasted a half-hour and asked students to elaborate on certain survey questions that she wanted to understand more fully. Principal Holmes found that students were eager to speak about their experiences with inclusion, belonging, and bullying, and that their answers helped clarify next steps for setting school-wide common behavioral expectations. To make student focus groups successful, she suggested the following: a) have on hand visuals (for example bar graphs or pie charts) to explain survey results to students; b) ask students general questions about their peers or the school as a whole, taking care not to make questions personal to them; c) expect differences in the levels of sophistication with which older and younger students will speak to the survey; and d) have one staff member take notes while another person serves as the moderator.*

Along with the data protocols, school leaders said they would like tips and tools on how to move from the “conversation” phase to the “action” phase of their work. For example, half of the school leaders interviewed were looking for concrete action steps to refine their school’s Behavior Matrix. Three school leaders also said they would like to focus schoolwide efforts on specific climate survey questions or constructs that received lower levels of student agreement. District support for these efforts could take various forms, they said, for example personalized trainings from the Behavioral Health Department, or district or school generated frameworks to guide improvement efforts. An example of a school-generated framework is provided below.



School Spotlight: Staff Climate Survey Review Forms. Administrators at Wing Luke Elementary, which piloted interim surveys in 2015-16 as well, used a form to guide teachers to identify a specific lesson plan that they would implement to address areas highlighted by climate survey results. Using this form helped teachers to clarify how they would move from the observation of climate data into concrete actions in their classrooms.

Name: _____ Due Date: January 31st

1. Choose a Climate Data Area/Question to teach:

- ☐ Classroom Environment
 - o Question: _____
- OR
- ☐ Social Emotional
 - o Question: _____

2. I commit to:

- ☐ Whole class lesson
- ☐ Small group lesson
- ☐ Team teach lesson
- ☐ Teach a routine around climate data question
- ☐ Create a classroom meeting

3. Ideas for lesson:

Finding 2: Schools want the Interim Climate Survey to align to other ongoing district efforts. School leaders requested a district strategy that integrates the various data-driven initiatives in their school. Specifically, they would like clear articulation of district expectations for how climate survey data works in service of MTSS implementation, Cycles of Inquiry, CSIPs, and teacher goal setting conferences. They would also like a sequenced, unified calendar for all data, assessment and goal-setting activities. School leaders noted that this would be especially helpful for the fall administration, as this is the busiest and often most chaotic time of the year.











School Spotlight: Alignment to CSIP Plan at Gatewood. Following the fall administration of the Interim Survey, Principal Connie Aleman held an all-staff meeting in early November to share results with staff. The timing of this meeting allowed her to engage in schoolwide discussions about climate that were relevant to the current year's cohort of students, and resulted in the decision to focus on behavior in the schools 2016-17 CSIP. In the all-staff meeting, Principal Aleman also incorporated other schoolwide strategies, including trauma-informed practices, RULER, and social emotional learning strategies for teachers.

Finding 3: Elementary schools want aligned K-5 climate surveys. Currently, the district administers climate surveys for students in grades 3-12. Elementary school leaders noted that the information from these surveys provides only half of the picture for their schools, and they would like the district to adopt an aligned K-2 survey. In the absence of a districtwide K-2 survey, some schools have adopted and modified external surveys, whereas others have experimented with early grade observational tools, such as the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA).



School Spotlight: K-2 Survey Adoption at North Beach. North Beach Elementary has adapted an 11-question school climate survey for K-2 that uses a developmentally appropriate visual scale for early grades. Principal Julie Cox notes that the survey is immensely helpful in showing trends for the early grades in her school, although she hopes that the district will align the two surveys so that she can draw broad trends for all her staff in the future. A sample of the North Beach survey is provided below:

1	I like coming to school on most days.				
2	I like my teacher.				
3	My teacher likes me.				
4	My teacher gives me extra help when I need it.				

Finding 4: Schools proposed concrete suggestions for improvement to survey items. In interviews, at school visits, and at the LLD breakout session, school leaders and staff noted areas where the district could improve the survey. General suggestions, for example, were to make the phrasing of questions on the survey consistent (“Adults in my school...” “People...” etc.), and to ensure accessibility of Panorama Portal. They also provided item-specific suggestions for improvement, for example:

- Rephrase the question on bullying so that it asks about “bullying behavior” as opposed to “a bully”
- Wondering about whether “I belong to a group of friends at school” is confusing for students who might have many different friends at school
- “People at my school care if I’m not there” – students reported that they couldn’t answer this question because they don’t know what others think of them.

Research & Evaluation has tracked all suggested changes to survey items.

Summary

In the LLD session and in one-on-one interviews, the message from school leaders was consistent: those who opted into the survey believed that the exercise was valuable for their school. To fully leverage the power of student data on school climate, however, school leaders had targeted suggestions for district support and survey refinement.

Table 2. Proposed district actions aligned to identified findings

<i>School Feedback</i>	<i>Proposed District Action</i>
<i>Provide protocols and other materials to guide school data conversations</i>	The Behavioral Health Department, with guidance from Research & Evaluation, will develop a comprehensive packet – including protocols and frameworks – for schools to use with staff and students. These protocols will be based on existing materials and guidelines around the use of climate surveys (for example materials from the US Department of Education’s Safe and Supportive Schools initiative, Data Wise, and Panorama Education) but will be modified to meet the needs of Seattle Public Schools.
<i>Align Interim Climate Survey to other ongoing district efforts</i>	The district is working to integrate data driven functions into a user-friendly portal for school leaders in 2017-18. Simultaneously, as part of its implementation packet, Research & Evaluation and Behavioral Health will develop a calendar that maps Interim Climate Survey

	administration onto other important district events and deadlines. Research & Evaluation will also consider pushing up the administration window for the Interim Climate Survey slightly to allow for results to be used for fall goal-setting activities.
<i>Make K-2 climate surveys available to elementary schools</i>	Research & Evaluation will draft a Briefing Paper outlining the options and associated costs for the adoption of a K-2 climate survey that is aligned to the 3-12 survey. Included in the Briefing Paper will be the costs for administering interim K-2 surveys.
<i>Make improvements to the existing student survey</i>	The Research & Evaluation Department is currently working to revise the student school climate survey for the 2017-18 school year, and will continue to take school leader feedback into account during this process. As part of this process, R&E will consider revisions to the scale for future years. The goal for revisions is to make comprehensive revisions for 2017-18 and then keep the survey constant to allow for trend analysis.