School Environment Surveys: Technical Information

The most widely used school culture and climate surveys and referral form for district and school data-based planning, research, and program evaluation. The construct validity for the surveys is founded on the work of Carl Rogers, William Glasser, and others. Over a decade of research and development has gone into providing valid, easy to use school environment surveys. In the fall 2011, student engagement factors and alcohol and substance use items were added to the student survey.

Go to the Survey Information link for background, administration and cost information.

Operational Definitions and Reliability – 1

ABCs of Healthy Schools - 11

Operational Definitions and Scale Reliabilities

Student Survey

The student survey is based on the foundation of a healthy school including students' sense of autonomy and influence, feelings of belonging, and sense of competence. In a healthy school students have a sense of community and high parent involvement.

Operational Definitions for Student Survey Factors [High Positive Scores]

- *Students' Feelings of Belonging*

  Students are nice to each other; they get along; they treat each other fairly, and they tell the truth.

- *Students' Sense of School as a Community*
  Students feel that the school is like a family; students help each other learn and treat each other with respect; they work together to solve problems and feel good when someone does well.

- *Autonomy and Influence*

  Students feel that they plan things together with their teachers, have a say in what goes on in their classes, decide the rules together with their teachers, help plan what they do in school, are asked by their teachers to help decide what they are to do, and help decide rules for the school.
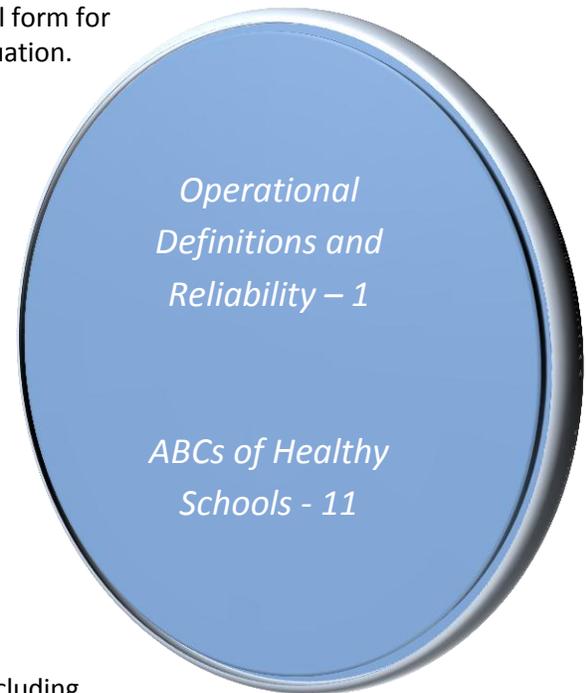
- *Feelings of Competence*

  Students believe that they can do the school work teachers ask of them, do not have difficulty with their school work or figuring things out, do not worry when they have to take a test, find school work easy to understand, and teachers' expectations are reasonable.

- *School Safety*

  Students believe that teachers in this school care that they are safe; students feel safe when at school; students do not pick on (or bully) others; students respect school property; students feel safe going to and from school; and students do not take things that do not belong to them.

- *Parent Involvement at School*
  Parents volunteer to help with school activities, attend parent-teacher conferences, talk with teachers about their children's progress in school, and attend school activities.

- *Parent Involvement at Home*
  Parents set study times at home, are interested in what their children are doing at school, go over student's homework, talk with the student about what s/he is doing in school, and set up a place at home for their children to do homework.

- *Behavioral Engagement New*
  Students who have high behavioral engagement have good school attendance, participate in school activities, and concentrate on their work.

- *Emotional Engagement New*
  Students who have high emotional engagement are happy with school, interested in school activities and enjoy both academic and non-academic endeavors.

- *Cognitive Engagement New*
  Students who have high cognitive engagement are self-regulated, use higher cognitive skills in their studying and learning, and see importance of schooling.

- *Alcohol and Substance Use Items New [Middle School, Jr. High, Secondary and High School]*
    - *Alcohol*
    - *Tobacco, Cigarettes*
    - *Marijuana*
    - *Stimulants, speed*
    - *Ecstasy*
    - *Other Illegal Drugs*

Factor Reliabilities

Factor reliabilities are estimated using alpha-coefficient. Two of the seven overall reliability estimates are in the .80s, four were in the high .70s, and one in the high .60s. The highest reliabilities are for Feelings of Belonging (.82) and Sense of Autonomy and Influence (.82). Sense of School as a Community is a close third (.79). In general, the reliabilities are higher for higher grade levels than for lower grade levels.

Student Survey Factor Reliabilities

Factor	N	Reliability
Students' Feelings of Belonging		
Overall	14,900	.82
Grade 4	4,400	.75
Grade 6	873	.77
Grade 8	4,628	.81
Grade 11	4,181	.81
Students' Sense of School as a Community		
Overall	14,466	.79
Grade 4	7,292	.72
Grade 6	859	.76
Grade 8	4,567	.79
Grade 11	4,144	.76
Students' Sense of Autonomy & Influence		
Overall	14,619	.82
Grade 4	4,279	.75
Grade 6	848	.77
Grade 8	4,570	.84
Grade 11	4,138	.83
Students' Feelings of Competence		
Overall	14.319	.75
Grade 4	4,194	.73
Grade 6	839	.74
Grade 8	4,481	.78
Grade 11	4.053	.77
Students' Sense of School Safety		
Overall	14,582	.69
Grade 4	4,286	.64
Grade 6	862	.64
Grade 8	4,555	.67

Student Survey Factor Reliabilities		
Factor	**N**	**Reliability**
Grade 11	4,106	.64
Parent Involvement at School		
Overall	14,459	.77
Grade 4	4,241	.69
Grade 6	851	.68
Grade 8	4.517	76
Grade 11	4,085	79
Parent Involvement at Home		
Overall	14,454	.78
Grade 4	4,249	.70
Grade 6	853	.74
Grade 8	4,509	.80
Grade 11	4,075	.77

Staff Survey

The staff survey is based on the foundation of a healthy school. This includes students' sense of autonomy, feelings of belonging, and sense of competence. In addition, in a healthy school there are good parent-staffs relations, staff have a culture of belonging, strong school leadership, and parent involvement.

Operational Definitions for Staff Survey Factors [High Positive Scores]

- *Students' Feelings of Belonging*

   Staff members perceive that students are nice to each other; they get along; they treat each other fairly, and they tell the truth.

- *Students' Sense of School as a Community*
   Staff members perceive that students feel that the school is like a family; students help each other learn and treat each other with respect; they work together to solve problems and feel good when someone does well.

- *Autonomy and Influence*

   Staff members perceive that students feel that they plan things together with their teachers, have a say in what goes on in their classes, decide the rules together with their teachers, help plan what they do in school, are asked by their teachers to help decide what they are to do, and help decide rules for the school.

- *Parent & Staff Relations*
   School staff members treat parents with respect, make parents feel welcome at school, value parents' ideas and input, encourage parents to be involved in school, communicate effectively with parents, and care about students' families.

- *Staff Culture of Belonging*

   School staff members are supportive of one another, cooperative and help each other, and provide good counsel when there are teaching problems; share the same beliefs about the central mission of the school; do not fall into conflicting cliques.

- *School Leadership*

   Administrators actively support new ideas; teachers take active roles in school activities; things are well organized; staff members are recognized for a job well done; staff is involved in decisions that affect them; and there is interest in innovation and new ideas.

- *Parent Involvement at School*

  Parents volunteer to help with school activities, attend parent-teacher conferences, talk with teachers about their children's progress in school, and attend school activities.

Factor Reliabilities

The factor reliabilities are estimated using alpha-coefficient. The reliabilities are generally in the middle to high .80s. The lowest reliability is for the factor Staff Culture of Belonging (.71). The highest reliability is for Parent Involvement at School (.92).

Staff Survey Factor Reliabilities

Factor	N	Reliability
Students' Feelings of Belonging	4,236	.89
Students' Sense of School as a Community	4,159	.81
Students' Sense of Autonomy & Influence	4,161	.86
Parent & Staff Relations	4,098	.89
Staff Culture of Belonging	4,121	.71
School Leadership	4,147	.86
Parent Involvement at School	4,192	.92

Parent Survey

The parent survey is based on the foundation of a healthy school that includes students' feelings of belonging and sense of competence. Also, surveyed are parents' perceptions of the quality of their children's education, parent-staff relations and parent involvement.

Operational Definitions for Parent Survey Factors [High Positive Scores

- *Students' Feelings of Belonging*
  Parents perceive that students are nice to each other; they get along; they treat each other fairly, and they tell the truth.

- *Students' Sense of School as a Community*
  Parents perceive that students feel that the school is like a family; students help each other learn and treat each other with respect; they work together to solve problems and feel good when someone does well.

- *Parent & Staff Relations*
  School staff treats parents with respect, make parents feel welcome at school, value parents' ideas and input, encourage parents to be involved in school, communicate effectively with parents, and care about parents and their families.

- *School Quality*
  Parents believe that their children are learning how to work with and respect others, learning to read and write, learning about science and how to do math, receiving a well-rounded education, and getting an excellent education.

- *Parent Involvement at School*
  Parents volunteer to help with school activities, attend parent-teacher conferences, talk with teachers about their children's progress in school, and attend school activities.

- *Parent Involvement at Home*
  Parents set study times at home, are interested in what their children are doing at school, go over student's homework, talk with the student about what s/he is doing in school, and set up a place at home for their children to do homework.

Factor Reliabilities

The factor reliabilities are estimated using alpha-coefficient. Four of the six factor reliabilities are in the .90s. The highest reliability is for Parent and Staff Relations followed by Students' Feelings of Belonging, School Quality, and Students' Sense of School as a Community. The parent involvement factors have reliabilities in the .70s.

Parent Survey Factor Alpha Reliabilities

Factor	N	Reliability
Students' Feelings of Belonging	1,539	.93
Students' Sense of School as a Community	1,492	.90
Parent & Staff Relations	1,468	.94
School Quality	1,445	.92
Parent Involvement at School	1,454	.79
Parent Involvement at Home	1,452	.74

Implementation Survey

The Implementation Survey is based on the context, process and content of healthy school constructs. This includes the school as a learning community, strong leadership supporting database decision making, a healthy school climate with staff collaboration and implementation of classroom strategies that build community, and implementation of the Ten Essentials.

Operational Definitions for Implementation Survey [High Positive Scores]

- *School is a Learning Community*

  School has a safe, orderly learning environment; students are supported emotionally and academically; parents have opportunities to experience the school as a learning community; school leaders understand the characteristics of a program to build a caring environment; administration, staff, and students share the core values of the school.

- *Leadership Support*

  District leaders visit the school on a regular basis; school climate data are collected from parents, students, staff, and community members; staff analyze and discuss the implications of data collected from parents, staff, and students; budget and other resources are provided to develop and sustain a caring school environment; and school and district leaders support implementation of a program to build positive school climate.

- *School Climate*

  Staff create partnerships with parents; students take part in setting classroom norms and rules; students pairs work collaboratively on activities that are aligned to the academic curriculum; students learn to work cooperatively; and student feel competent that they can achieve academic success.

- *Staff Collaboration*

  Teachers collaborate on instructional planning; staff share ideas, strategies, and successes; staff form collaborative teams; staff engage together in reflection on the results of instructional activities; and teachers take a major role in shaping the school's norms, values, and practices.

- *Classroom Applications*

  Cross-age student pairs engage in interviewing, listening, speaking, and helping; students are taught to reflect on their personal values; take-home activities that relate to academic, social, citizenship themes that are important to the instructional program; reflection is encouraged on what has been learned from experiences of working together; and students have a sense of democratic values.

- *Ten Essentials*

  Specific character traits have been defined for this school (or district); Students reflect on character traits in our education process; character education is defined in terms of core ethical values; character traits defined for this school/district include both thinking and feeling; district commitment for the character education processes is evident by high levels of continuous support; our character process is infused throughout the school day; all school staff help carry out the school's character education process; our character education process is planned and proactive; frequent communications on character education are common among the school, parents, and broader community; regular assessments are made of students, parents, and staff to check the impact of the character education process.

Factor Reliabilities

The factor reliabilities are estimated using alpha-coefficient. Two of the six factor reliabilities are in the .90s; all are in the middle .80s or higher. The highest reliability is the level of implementation of the Ten Essentials followed by the level of Staff Collaboration.

Implementation Survey Alpha Reliabilities

Factor	N	Reliability
School is a Learning Community	4,131	.86
School Leadership	4,075	.83
School Climate	4,080	.84
Staff Collaboration	4,054	.90
Classroom Applications	4,082	.86
Ten Essentials	4,018	.96

ABCs of Healthy Schools

The theoretical framework for healthy schools is drawn from Glasser's[i] fundamental needs of all people and Deming's[ii] humanistic organizational principles. The basic needs identified by Glasser are survival, power, love, belonging, freedom, and fun. These needs are met for both students and staff in a healthy school environment. The six basic needs identified by Glasser are condensed into three student constructs.

Autonomy and Influence

 Students are provided opportunities to engage in meaningful conversation to help decide class norms, work with others, engage in meaningful relationships, and enhance their learning. Students engage in meaningful discussions on social conventions, determining classroom and school behavior. These opportunities address the basic needs of power and freedom. Carl Rogers[iii,iv] was an early champion of person-centered learning, which encompasses the construct of autonomy and influence. Cornelius-White[v] reports in a meta-analysis that person-centered learning has a strong influence on teacher-student relationships, student pro-social behavior, and student achievement. Klem and Connell[vi] conclude that there is a direct link between students' levels of engagement in the learning process and academic performance.

Belonging

Students feel connected to their school and classroom. Glasser's basic needs of love and belonging fit within this construct. Libby[vii], in a review of literature on school connectedness, concluded that within the extensive research on this topic, a positive association between students' feelings of belonging and behavioral and academic outcomes has been shown. This was echoed by Catalano and Others[viii] and Blum[ix] when they reported that school bonding (connectedness) is highly related to student behavior and academic performance. They reported finding decreased drug, gang, and related behaviors when students have a high sense of school bonding. It is the sense of belonging that gives students the confidence, competence, and motivation to learning[x].

Competence

Students feel safe in the school and classroom and are able to meet expectations. Safety is a basic issue for all schools including both the physical and emotional school environments. Students feel competent when they know that they are safe and they have the support of others who care, listen, understand, respect them, and are honest, open, and sensitive[xi]. Rogers[xii] saw the goal of education to facilitation growth of competent, fully functioning individuals in a democratic society. This has been echoed by Comer[xiii].

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[i] Glasser, W (1998). Choice theory. NY: HarperCollins, Publishers, Inc.
[ii] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/W._Edwards_Deming

[iii] Rogers, C. R. (1969). *Freedom to learn.* Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill

[iv] Rogers, C. R., & Freiberg, H. J. (1994). Freedom to learn (3rd. ed.). New York: Merrill.

[v] Cornelius-White, J. (2007). Learner-centered teacher-student relationships are effective: A meta-analysis. Review of Educational Research, 77(1), 113-143.

[vi] Klem, A. M.; & Connell, J. P. (2004). Relationships matter: Linking teacher support to student engagement and achievement. Journal of School Health, 74(7), 262-273.

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[ix] Blum, R. A (2005). Case for school connectedness. The Adolescent Learner, 62(7): 16-20.

[x] Comer, J. P. (1988). Educating poor minority children. Scientific American, 259(5), 42-48; Comer, J. P. (2004). Leave no child behind: Preparing today's youth for tomorrow's world. Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press; Comer, J. P. (2005, June). Child and adolescent development: The critical missing focus in school reform. Phi Delta Kappan,80, 757-763; Bransfor, J. D., Brown, A. L., Cockings, R. R. (Eds.). (2002). How people learn: Brain, mind, experience, and school. Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press; Darling-Hammond, L. (1997). The right to learn. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

[xi] Poplin, M., & Weres, J. (1994). Voices from the inside: A report on schooling from inside the classroom. Claremont, CA: Institute for Education in Transformation at the Claremont Graduate School.

[xii] Rogers, C. R. (1969). Freedom to learn. Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill; Rogers, C. R., & Freiberg, H. J. (1994). Freedom to learn (3rd. ed.). New York: Merrill.

[xiii] Comer, J. P. (1988). Educating poor minority children. Scientific American, 259(5), 42-48; Comer, J. P. (2004). Leave no child behind: Preparing today's youth for tomorrow's world. Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press.