Using Data to Improve School Climate

Insights From Three California Schools

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Table of Contents

List of Figures and Tables

Executive Summary

Across the United States, there is an increased interest in improving school climate, reflecting a deepening understanding of the foundational role that school climate can play in supporting students' well-being, learning, and development. School climate is constructed from norms, expectations, and interpersonal relationships that come together to shape the experiences of students and educators in school.

Research from the science of learning and development (SoLD), which synthesizes insights from many fields, reveals that secure relationships and children's feelings of safety and support are foundational for effective learning and development. When positive school climates are in place, schools can support students' physical, psychological, cognitive, social, and emotional development and reduce stress and anxiety that can impair students' learning. Numerous studies link positive school climate to a range of student and teacher outcomes, including increased academic achievement and attendance, higher graduation rates, improved behavior, and lower rates of teacher attrition. This deepened understanding of school climate underlies educational priorities in the Every Student Succeeds Act, which introduced a more holistic approach to assessment and permits states to include data about school supports—including school climate—in their accountability systems. Currently, 14 states incorporate school climate surveys in their accountability or reporting systems, including California, which requires districts to report on local climate surveys as part of their Local Control and Accountability Plans and the California School Dashboard.

Though policymakers and researchers agree on the importance of positive school climates for learning and development, the field lacks a comprehensive understanding of how schools use climate data to inform improvement. This study addresses this gap by examining the processes used by three California middle schools to interpret and use climate data to inform practice and policy. These geographically diverse schools employ innovative data practices and use distinct districtwide climate surveys. Additionally, they operate in districts that systematically support climate data use, allowing for an examination of district-level conditions that enable data use at the school level.

Key Findings

- **Setting goals and priorities from climate data enabled these schools to improve the experiences of students.** Schools in this study used climate data to develop their goals and priorities. This is evident in their School Plans for Student Achievement as well as in additional school climate goals, developed by each school in the study, which are a driving force behind the practices and policies they employed to improve discipline policy and student engagement and to make school environments welcoming and inclusive. School staff reported that the use of school climate data helped to increase student engagement, attendance, and leadership and to support collaboration among educators. Staff perceptions of climate improvement were bolstered by on-site data sources such as school-developed surveys, incident reporting, and tracking of student participation in enrichment activities.

- **School climate data supported changes to these schools' discipline systems.** All three schools in this study utilized climate data to inform strategies to improve their discipline systems. These strategies included revisions to incident reporting systems, professional development for teachers focused on restorative classroom management and relationship building, and changes to schoolwide behavioral expectations. This suggests that school climate data were especially important for informing school efforts to improve disciplinary systems.

- **Using multiple data sources, including site-specific data sources, helped schools better understand their school climate and inform strategic planning.** Each of the schools in this study supplemented large-scale districtwide climate surveys with additional data sources, such as student focus groups, student engagement data, behavior referral data, and site-specific surveys, to inform their climate improvement strategies. Drawing on varied sources of data allowed schools to develop a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of their environments.
- **Collaboration among school leaders, teachers, and students improved buy-in, demonstrated administrator interest in educator and student perspectives, and created leadership opportunities for students.** In addition to the explicit purpose of making data-informed decisions, many of the processes that schools used to engage with their data are designed to include teacher and student perspectives. This sends a clear message to educators and students that their perspectives matter to school leadership; fosters student and teacher investment in school climate improvement; and provides opportunities to develop student leadership.
- **Survey design and management influenced school engagement with climate data.** Findings suggest that schools can better engage and use climate data when surveys are accessible, short, and engaging; surveys are scheduled with ample time to analyze and act upon them in the same school year; climate reports disaggregate for student groups; schools set aside structured time to examine and discuss survey results with students and staff; district- and school-level personnel have ownership over the process; and schools have external support to bolster their capacity.

Implications

Findings from this study elevate key considerations that inform how states, districts, and schools can support the effective use of climate data.

- **States can encourage or require local educational agencies (LEAs) to administer school climate surveys and integrate disaggregated results into reporting and continuous improvement systems.** California has established some essential building blocks that allow schools in the state to learn from school climate data. Starting in 2024, the state requires LEAs to administer school climate surveys annually (before that it was every 2 years) and to report results as part of their Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs) and the California School Dashboard. Other states can consider implementing similar policies so that districts and schools have the baseline infrastructure systems in place to support climate improvement. Additionally, states can support disaggregated data use by requiring LEAs to draw on disaggregated climate outcomes in their strategic plans and to report on disaggregated climate outcomes on public data dashboards.
- **Districts can structure data collection timing to increase utility.** Findings from this study suggest that data use was limited by the schedule for collecting survey data. Districts can maximize the usefulness of school climate data by modifying the schedule for data collection to ensure that schools receive climate survey results on a timeline that leaves them sufficient time to analyze their data and use it to inform strategic planning and climate improvement practices.

- **Investments in professional learning and collaboration time can build the capacity of schools to use their climate data.** Meaningful engagement with school climate data is time-intensive, skilled work that requires staff capacity. States, districts, and schools can use resources strategically to build staff capacity. States can consider investments that support district and school capacity for using climate data. Districts can provide professional learning opportunities focused on data analysis and using data to inform school climate practices and policies. Lastly, districts and schools can promote policies and systems that encourage greater collaboration among staff in schools, such as revised calendars and schedules and compensation for staff who participate in school-based climate teams.

- **States and districts can support the engagement of students, staff, and families in school climate data use.** Schools in this study reported that including staff and students in school climate work created opportunities for shared leadership and increased the overall investment of school community members in efforts to improve school climate. Districts can support the engagement of students, staff, and families by developing school climate work structures and teams that encourage the participation of various school constituents. Additionally, states and districts can support schools by communicating the benefits of engaging members of the school community in their data use processes and encouraging school leaders to adopt practices for sharing climate data with students, staff, and families.

- **District- and school-level tools to assess school climate can be designed and utilized in complementary ways.** Districtwide surveys and school-developed measures are intended for different purposes and are therefore most effectively utilized at different stages of the school improvement process. While large-scale surveys work well to diagnose problem areas at schools, they may not be ideal tools for schools to assess the effectiveness of newly implemented strategies and interventions. Typically, large-scale climate surveys measure *perceptions* of school climate, while school-developed tools assess the presence of and students' exposure to various school *practices*. States and districts can support schools through communication about when to use different data sources and how to develop practical, school-level climate measures that meet their specific needs and allow them to evaluate and improve upon the climate interventions they have put into place.

Introduction

Across the United States, there is an increased interest in improving school climate, reflecting a deepening understanding of the foundational role that school climate can play in supporting students' well-being, learning, and development. School climate is constructed from norms, expectations, and interpersonal relationships that come together to shape the experiences of students and educators in school. The science of learning and development (SoLD), which synthesizes research from many fields, has expanded our understanding of how young people grow, develop, and learn. This research demonstrates that as young people grow, many conditions and biological factors shape well-being and achievement. Specifically, the SoLD research determines that secure relationships; explicit teaching of social, emotional, and academic skills; and children's feelings of safety and support are critical for effective learning and development.[1]

A positive school climate is foundational for successful educational experiences because of the primary influence that secure relationships and students' feelings of safety and support have on learning. When positive school climates are in place, schools can support students' physical, psychological, cognitive, social, and emotional development and reduce stress and anxiety that can impair students' learning.[2]

Numerous studies find an association between positive school climate and student academic achievement, a finding that is consistent across elementary, middle, and high school levels.[3] Additionally, research findings link positive school climate with increased attendance, higher graduation rates, and improved behavioral outcomes such as lower levels of drug use and lower rates of suspension.[4] In addition to benefits for students, a substantial body of research links positive school climate with important outcomes for teachers; positive school climate is associated with lighter emotional exhaustion and improved feelings of personal accomplishment for teachers.[5] Research also links positive perceptions of school climate with lower levels of teacher burnout, greater job satisfaction, and lower attrition.[6]

The primary role that positive school climate plays in supporting student growth and development has led some states, districts, and schools to measure school climate and incorporate it into accountability and school improvement plans. However, for climate data to inform improvement, educators must interpret the data and use it to change practices and policies—and there is little evidence about how school actors engage in these processes.

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This set of case studies addresses these gaps in the field by providing rich examples of schools that use data-informed approaches to improve their school climate, highlighting the processes and strategies that appear to result in productive school improvement. The study is based in California, a state that has emphasized the importance of school climate assessment and improvement through several policy initiatives, and focuses on middle schools because research indicates that positive school climate is especially critical for students in this age group.[7]

Defining Positive School Climate

The National School Climate Center conceptualizes school climate in the following way:

> [School climate is] ... the quality and character of school life. School climate is based on patterns of students', parents' and school personnel's experience of school life; it also reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures.[8]

As this definition suggests, school climate is multidimensional and encompasses nearly all aspects of schools. It is important for policymakers and practitioners to understand the dimensions of school climate in order to plan interventions that target student outcomes as intended. In a review of the literature on school climate, Wang and Degol (2016) outline 13 dimensions of school climate, which fall under four domains:

1. **Safety.** The degree of physical and emotional security provided by the school, as well as the presence of effective, consistent, and fair disciplinary practices.
2. **Community.** The quality of interpersonal relationships within the school.
3. **Academics.** The overall quality of the academic atmosphere, including curricula, instruction, teacher training, and professional development.
4. **Institutional Environment.** A reflection of the organizational or structural features of the school environment.[9]

These domains reflect the aspects of school climate that the science of learning and development research underscores as essential for students, such as secure interpersonal relationships and children's feelings of safety and connectedness.

Schools in this study were largely focused on the Safety and Community domains, though they also touched on dimensions related to academics, such as student motivation and teachers' use of supportive practices. (School sites were not focused on the institutional environment since that domain—which refers to school features such as class size, building quality, and student–teacher ratios—is not typically under the control of site-level leaders.) Table 1 defines the three domains and the dimensions of school climate that they include, and the presentation of research findings in this report refers to the domains and dimensions outlined in this framework.

Table 1. Domains of Positive School Climate

Domain	Dimension	Definition
Safety	Social-emotional safety	Students and adults feel safe from verbal abuse, teasing, exclusion, and bullying at school.
	Behavioral supports, discipline, and order	School expectations and norms are reasonable, clearly communicated, and equitably enforced; supports are provided to support students in meeting school expectations and norms.
	Physical	Students and adults feel safe from physical harm at school.
Community	Partnership	Inclusion of parents and community members occurs in the school community.
	Quality of relationships	Interpersonal relationships (between staff and students and among students) are characterized by trust, care, and support.
	Connectedness	Students and staff feel a sense of belonging at the school.
	Respect for diversity	Cultural awareness, inclusion, appreciation, and celebration are incorporated.
Academics	Leadership	Principals and administration are supportive of teachers and maintain open lines of communication. Students and teachers experience autonomy and opportunities for decision-making.
	Teaching and learning	There is a high degree of quality instruction, relevant student assessments, student motivation, and achievement goal structure. Teachers have high expectations of students, have a willingness to implement best practices, and use supportive practices.
	Professional development	There is a review and assessment of teaching practices, and there are opportunities for growth through professional development.

Source: Adapted from Wang, M., & Degol, J. (2016). School climate: A review of the construct, measurement, and impact on student outcomes. *Educational Psychology Review*, *28*, 315–352.

Federal and State Policy Context

Several federal agencies have recommended school climate reform as a strategy for improving student outcomes such as school connectedness, dropout prevention, and healthy relationships. In 2007, the U.S. Department of Education launched the Safe and Supportive Schools initiative to promote measurement and improvement of school climate at the state level.[10] To encourage the improvement of learning environments through the use of climate data, the Department of Education also houses Education Department School Climate Surveys (EDSCLS), a collection of validated survey instruments developed by the National Center for Education Statistics, which can be downloaded and used free of charge.[11]

The growing focus on school climate is bolstered by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which prompts states to include school climate data in state accountability systems and identifies school climate and safety as one of several indicators states can use to assess "School Quality/Student Success."[12] Currently, eight states incorporate school climate surveys in their school accountability systems and an additional six states have described strategies for publicly sharing school climate data.[13]

Recent policy shifts in California reflect ESSA's emphasis on multiple measures of achievement and school climate. California's systems, such as the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), which allocates funds to districts based on their proportion of "high needs" students,[14] Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs),[15] and the California School Dashboard are designed around 10 state priorities, one of which is school climate.[16]

California newly requires LEAs to administer a school climate survey at least every year to a grade span served by the LEA (e.g., 6–8, 9–12); use climate surveys that include measures of school safety and school connectedness; and publicly report school climate results via governing board meetings and the California Dashboard.[17] (Before 2024 and during this study, the requirement was a survey every 2 years.) These efforts are bolstered by California's participation since 2010 in the Safe and Supportive Schools initiative, which has enabled a partnership between California Department of Education and WestEd, leading to the development of the California Center for School Climate to provide professional learning and technical assistance for California LEAs. The funding also supported 58 high schools to conduct data-informed school climate improvement efforts.

Both ESSA and California's accountability systems prioritize school climate. The increased emphasis on school climate in state and federal accountability systems raises important questions for district and school leaders about the types of systems and supports that can facilitate data use, the processes that can be used to interpret climate data, and the ways that climate data can inform school improvement.

School Use of School Climate Data

Research documenting the ways schools use data to improve their climate is limited, though several studies lend useful insights. For example, research examining how school leaders use Virginia's statewide school climate survey found that while school leaders were utilizing their data to support school planning and improvement, they wanted additional support to interpret their climate data more effectively.[18] An

evaluation of the California Safe and Supportive Schools Project indicated that participating schools saw notable improvement in their school climate index (a measure which includes 37 items that assess aspects of school climate, such as caring adult relationships, school connectedness, and violence prevention). Evaluators noted several factors that contributed to the success of participating schools, including dedicated school-level leadership and the presence of district supports (such as identifying additional funding opportunities) that facilitated data use and a greater frequency of climate data analysis over the course of the grant.[19]

It can be useful to look at studies related to schools' use of data more broadly, since so few studies focus specifically on schools' uptake of school climate data. For example, recent studies of school data use identify several facilitating factors, including a shared vision for data use in schools, supportive school leadership, collaboration and capacity-building opportunities for teachers, and the overall quality and usefulness of the data itself (e.g., accessibility and timeliness of data).[20] The two primary barriers to data use identified in the research literature were lack of time and lack of capacity or expertise.[21]

Notably, the studies referenced above are not focused on the processes that schools use to interpret their data or how schools use climate data to enact strategies and practices intended to improve school climate. This study aims to produce rich examples of these practices to inform policy and enhance the effective use of school climate data.

The Current Study

There is consensus among policymakers and researchers: Positive school climates are essential for student learning and development and for other important teacher and student outcomes. Federal and state policy priorities have increased the availability of school climate survey tools across the country. However, the field lacks a comprehensive understanding of the processes used by district and school leaders to make sense of school climate data or use it for improvement.

This study examines the types of data that schools use to understand their school climate, the processes that schools use to interpret climate data, and the changes that schools make to policy and practice to improve their climates. Additionally, the study examines the challenges that educators face as they use and interpret their data as well as the conditions that enable educators to use data for school improvement. These findings can inform federal and state priorities to improve the uptake of school climate data analysis, leading to better outcomes for schools.

This research studies three California middle schools: Mann Middle School in San Diego Unified School District, Los Osos Middle School in San Luis Coastal Unified School District, and Scandinavian Middle School in Fresno Unified School District. The research team selected schools that (a) utilize innovative data use practices on-site and (b) are situated in districts that systematically support the use of climate data for school improvement. We selected schools that are geographically diverse and that utilize different districtwide climate surveys. Middle schools were prioritized because research suggests that positive school climate is especially important for middle school students and is associated with higher levels of student achievement and lower rates of expulsion and suspension.[22]

The current study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What data are collected by schools focused on school climate?
2. How do schools focused on school climate interpret data related to domains of school climate?
3. How do schools focused on school climate use their interpretations of data to inform school improvement efforts?
4. How do various supports and conditions enable schools to use data to inform school climate changes?

To address the study's research questions, the research team drew upon interviews and focus groups conducted with a range of study participants. At the school level, these included interviews with principals, school administrators, and school staff members who lead work related to school climate, discipline, or data use, and focus groups with students, teachers, and school climate teams. Researchers also interviewed district-level leaders and staff (e.g., superintendents, executive directors, program managers of counseling and guidance) with ample knowledge of how their districts supported schools in engaging with school climate data. The research team also interviewed members of partner organizations that worked closely with schools and/or districts to support the use of climate data. Additionally, the research team conducted observations of school and district activities related to school climate and data use and reviewed district- and school-level documentation of climate data practices. Lastly, the researchers collected relevant documentation from schools, districts, and external partners (e.g., team meeting agendas, survey reports, professional learning plans). (For a detailed description of the study's methods, see Appendix A.)

This study found that schools are drawing on multiple data sources, including tools designed by the schools themselves, to assess their school climate, inform their strategic planning, and improve the experiences of students in school. We identified aspects of the processes schools used to collect and analyze their data that either hindered or helped their efforts to assess the health of their climate and address climate-related issues. For example, all three schools faced challenges related to survey design and staff capacity. Schools' efforts were supported by structures that promoted clear ownership of the processes related to data use and by services provided by external partners and districts. Additionally, schools reported several benefits of engaging with their school climate data, including increased student engagement, attendance, and leadership; greater collaboration among educators; and improved disciplinary culture.

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The report begins with an overview of each school's efforts to use their school climate data to improve the climate of the school. The following chapter reports cross-case findings on how the three case study schools make meaning of their school climate data, how they use school climate data for school improvement purposes, and which factors enable or inhibit these processes. The report concludes with a discussion of the findings and implications for states, districts, and schools.

Overview of Schools' Efforts to Use School Climate Data

Each of the schools in this study endeavors to use its school climate data to improve teaching and learning conditions within the school. Each drew upon district resources to support its work. In this section, we provide a brief description of each of these schools and its district context. We then describe the data that each school utilized to assess school climate. Research points to the importance of utilizing multiple data sources for school improvement[23] and each of the schools in this study drew on several sources to understand the health of its school climate, including surveys, interviews and focus groups, structured observations, and administrative data. (Note that each of these data types has benefits and drawbacks; see Appendix B for an overview.) School overviews then turn to the processes and structures that have been established to support data use.

Mann Middle School, San Diego Unified School District

School and District Context

Mann Middle School (Mann) is a midsized school serving grades 6–8 in San Diego Unified School District (San Diego Unified)—California's second largest district. Nearly all students at Mann are students of color, including 55% Latino/a students, 20% African American students, and 19% Asian, Filipino, and Pacific Islander students. Mann serves close to twice as many socioeconomically disadvantaged students and English learners than the district overall, as well as a greater percentage of students with disabilities (20% v 16%) than the district overall. (See Table 2.) While the district has been recognized as a "positive outlier" district in California, in which African American, Latino/a, and White students performed better than predicted on California's math and English language arts tests, after accounting for differences in socioeconomic status,[24] academic performance among Mann Middle School students has lagged behind the district average. For instance, in 2022–23, 27% of 6th–8th grade students met or exceeded proficiency standards on the English Language Arts California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress, compared to 52% of students in grades 6–8 across the school district.

Mann's current principal was recruited by district staff because she had worked closely with Mann in her district role as instructional coordinator. District personnel felt that her commitment to positive school climate would help her lead Mann to improve its environment, which had suffered due to leadership changes and the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, Mann's current principal views school climate as fundamental to reaching its academic and developmental goals for students. As she explained, "We must have that piece [school climate] in place before we can do anything else. Our environment—our safe, collaborative, inclusive way of being—has to be established [or] we can't do anything." This perspective is supported by the district as well. The first goal in San Diego's Local Control and Accountability Plan states: "Cultivating inclusive, anti-racist, and restorative schools, classrooms, and district, with equity at the core and support for the whole district."[25] Commitment to establishing a positive, inclusive, equitable school experience for students has led the district to invest in school health clinicians, partnerships that provide social and emotional learning programming, and support for school-based counselors to engage with their school climate data.

Table 2. Student Demographic and Engagement Data for Mann Middle School, 2022–23

Enrollment, academic, and engagement data	Mann Middle School	San Diego Unified School District	California
Enrollment, by demographic group (all grades)			
Enrollment	715	112,790	5,852,544
Students eligible for free or reduced-price meals	93.7%	56.9%	59.9%
English learners	36.4%	18.1%	19%
Students with disabilities, 2023	20.0%	15.6%	13.1%
African American/Black	20.1%	7.6%	4.7%
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.0%	0.2%	0.4%
Asian, Filipino, Pacific Islander	19.0%	13.5%	12.1%
Hispanic or Latino/a	55.2%	47.3%	56.1%
White	2.9%	22.8%	20.1%
Two or more races	2.7%	8.5%	4.3%
Not reported	0.0%	0.2%	2.2%
Academic performance (grades 6–8)			
Percentage of students meeting or exceeding proficiency standards on the Math CAASPP	16.5%	39.5%	32.1%
Percentage of students meeting or exceeding proficiency standards on the English Language Arts CAASPP	26.8%	51.8%	45.8%
Engagement (grades 7–8)			
Chronic absenteeism	37.1%	22.2%	22.8%
Suspension rate	12.2%	6.4%	7.6%

Notes: The California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) is administered annually to students in grades 3–8 and 11. The percentage of students meeting proficiency standards in the CAASPP across grades 6–8 is calculated by averaging the percentage of students meeting or exceeding a level "3" cut score in grades 6–8.

Sources: Data on enrollment, students eligible for free or reduced-price meals, English learners, race/ethnicity, chronic absenteeism, and suspension were obtained from California Department of Education. *DataQuest*; data on students with disabilities were obtained from California Department of Education. *California School Dashboard*; academic data were obtained from California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress. *Test Results for California's Assessments*.

School Climate Data Gathered

To understand how students experience school climate, staff at Mann rely on a wide array of data, which is described below. Table 3 summarizes the primary data that staff at Mann draw upon to assess school climate. The table notes the type of tool, the system level (district- or school-level data collection), the frequency of administration, and which of the school climate domains—described in the introduction—are addressed by each tool.

- **Districtwide Survey.** San Diego Unified administers the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS), California School Staff Survey (CSSS), and California School Parent Survey (CSPS). The CHKS is a modular survey; most recently, San Diego Unified has been administering the Core Module, which includes 16 constructs related to student learning and engagement, student social-emotional and physical well-being, school climate conditions, and alcohol and drug use, and the Behavioral Health Module, which includes additional mental health and alcohol and drug use items. (See Appendix C.) The district administers the CHKS survey annually to students in 5th, 7th, 9th, and 11th grades. Additionally, the district administers the CSPS survey to parents and guardians of students in 5th, 7th, 9th, and 11th grades and the CSSS to school staff (instructional and non-instructional) at all grade levels. WestEd, an external partner, provides district and school-level survey results through a private dashboard platform where results can be typically accessed within 2 weeks after the close of survey administration. WestEd also provides school-level PDF reports of survey results in a similar timeframe.

- **School-Developed Surveys.** Mann administers three of its own surveys—a student survey, teacher survey, and parent/guardian survey—to obtain ongoing information to inform its continuous improvement processes. The school-developed student surveys are administered in the fall and the spring to capture school and classroom experiences. For example, the student survey asks for responses to statements such as "I feel welcome in my classes" and "My teachers make an effort to get to know me as a person." The school also surveys teachers every 6 weeks on a set of teacher practices. For example, the survey asks teachers how often they use welcoming/connecting strategies (e.g., personal greetings, ice breakers) in their classrooms. The parent survey, administered once a year, is offered in 11 different languages and asks for parent perceptions of teacher–student relationships and opportunities for parent participation.

- **Structured Classroom Observations.** Mann has introduced a system of peer observations conducted by teachers, on a voluntary basis, to assess the presence and frequency of welcoming and inclusive classroom practices.

- **Administrative Data.** This includes behavior referral data (reports of behavior incidents and students in need of behavior support, logged by teachers) and discipline and absenteeism data (suspensions and absences, recorded in the school's student information system).

Table 3. School Climate Tools Used by Mann Middle School

Type of tool	Instrument	System level	Frequency of administration	School climate domains
Survey	California Healthy Kids Survey; California School Staff Survey; California School Parent Survey	District	Annual	Academic, Community, Safety
Survey	Student survey	School	Twice per year	Community, Academic
	Teacher survey	School	Every 6 weeks	Community, Academic
	Parent/guardian survey	School	Annual	Community
Structured observations	Classroom observation protocol	School	Annual	Community
Administrative data	Behavior referral data, discipline data, absenteeism data	District	Ongoing	Safety

Note: San Diego administers three school climate surveys (staff, students, and parent/guardian), but Mann Middle School uses only data from the student survey for their climate work.

Source: This table is based on information obtained via interviews and documents provided by Mann Middle School. (2023).

Structures and Systems to Improve School Climate

With the support of the district, Mann has established a set of teams that meet regularly to review and utilize these data throughout the school year. These teams generally work independently, as they are focused on different aspects of school climate, but come together at intervals to collaborate and ensure that their efforts are aligned. The team structure in place at Mann ensures that school climate work is schoolwide and continuous throughout the school year. It also assigns the work to groups of educators who take ownership for moving the school's climate work forward and assessing progress.

The team structure in place at Mann ensures that school climate work is schoolwide and continuous throughout the school year.

Transformation Team. Mann has established a teacher-led Transformation Team intended to "shape the culture on campus and … mold it into a place that is safe and welcoming for everybody." This team created the three school-developed surveys (teacher, student, parent) that they use to assess school climate.

The team meets monthly to conduct its school climate work. The team members prepare documents summarizing the results of these surveys and progress over time. Team members share results with the broader staff, either via email or during staff meetings. Additionally, the team leads professional development sessions and supports a peer observation system for teachers, both with a focus on making classrooms more welcoming and inclusive for students. (See Using Data to Inform Strategic Planning and Goal Setting.)

Behavior Support Team. Mann's Transformation Team works in tandem with the school's Behavior Support Team, a committee that was developed by teachers and continues to be teacher-led. While the Transformation Team is responsible for whole-school interventions to improve school climate, the Behavior Support Team focuses on strategies to improve the support and experience of students who are struggling with behavior. For instance, this team develops approaches and interventions for averting and managing behavior-related incidents, such as establishing restorative conversations. The Behavior Support Team primarily uses behavior referral data (logged by teachers) to inform its decision-making and to identify students in need of behavioral support. The team meets monthly to review behavioral data, develop interventions for students, and plan professional development sessions for staff.

Counseling Team. All schools in the district are assigned to a district-level counselor who supports the school counseling team and its use of data. The two-person counseling team at Mann meets monthly with its district counselor. Each year, the school-based counselors and the district counselor use their analysis of the climate data to construct annual goals for the counseling team. For example, for the 2022–23 school year, the counseling team developed three goals which focused on postsecondary preparation, improving behavior for students participating in a mentorship program, and attendance. (See Appendix E.) In addition to goal setting, the school counselors and district counselor identify the data sources they will use to assess the achievement of their goals. In Mann's case, data sources included the CHKS survey as well as other data sources such as attendance data and behavior referrals. The district counselor assigned to Mann explained that the team uses the CHKS mental health items to identify needs for additional student mental health supports.

Changes to Policy and Practice

The multifaceted data-informed work of the Counseling Team, Transformation Team, and the Behavior Support Team has led to Mann's adoption of numerous strategies used to improve the school's climate. For example, the Behavior Support Team has initiated a process to reform Mann's behavior referral system so that referrals are made for students who are displaying patterns of problematic behavior, rather than one-time incidents. The Transformation Team has implemented a range of strategies to support teachers in making their classrooms more welcoming, inclusive, and engaging for students. These strategies include teacher and student surveys (described previously), professional development sessions, and targeted classroom observations. Additionally, Mann has implemented strategies to improve student attendance and engagement, such as mentorship programs and an attendance program developed to support chronically absent students.

Los Osos Middle School, San Luis Coastal Unified School District

School and District Context

Los Osos Middle School (Los Osos) is a midsized school located in San Luis Obispo County on California's Central Coast. With about 540 students, it is the smaller of two middle schools in San Luis Coastal Unified School District (San Luis Coastal). San Luis Coastal is a basic aid district, which means that the district receives little state funding; its revenue from local taxes exceeds what it would receive under the state's funding formula. (See Table 4.) Like San Luis Coastal overall, the Los Osos student body is predominantly White (61%). Just over a quarter (26%) of Los Osos students are Hispanic or Latino/a, and a small number of students are Asian, Filipino, or Pacific Islander (5%), American Indian or Alaska Native (0.7%), and African American or Black (0.4%). Forty-two percent of the students at Los Osos are classified as socioeconomically disadvantaged, higher than the district average of 34% but still much lower than the state average of 60%. Just 7% of students are Los Osos are English learners, which is slightly lower than the district average of 10% and substantially lower than the state average of 19%. Academically, Los Osos students lagged behind their district peers, with 46% and 63% of students meeting or exceeding the proficiency-level standards on the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress for Math and English Language Arts respectively (compared to district averages of 57% in Math and 66% in ELA). However, students at Los Osos outperformed their peers academically statewide, where 32% and 46% of students met or exceeded proficiency-level standards for Math and ELA respectively.

Los Osos is on the California "Schools to Watch" list, a designation that is awarded to schools across the state for "academic excellence, social equity, and responsiveness" to the needs of students.[26] According to its principal of 9 years, an important goal for the school is to develop a positive school climate, to create a learning environment "where kids can be socially-emotionally safe, which fosters great learning and builds a strong community bond … that's what all of our practices are designed to try to do." He shared that students have been less engaged since the COVID-19 pandemic, a challenge that is reflected in the school's high chronic absenteeism rate, which at 28% is higher than the district and state averages.

Los Osos school climate goals align with San Luis Coastal's focus on developing a "culture of care," which has been a district priority for over a decade and is currently one of the district's LCAP goals.[27] For over a decade, the district superintendent has been committed to improving school climate in San Luis Coastal. As he explained, this commitment is rooted in his observation that positive school climate is a common feature among high-performing school districts across the country. In addition, he noticed that students of color, English learners, and socioeconomically disadvantaged students in the district were disproportionately affected by negative school climates. The superintendent began investing heavily in building school and district capacity to use data-informed strategies to improve learning for all students. These investments included a partnership with YouthTruth, which provides the climate survey and platform used by San Luis Coastal as well as technical support for interpreting the data and incorporating students into the data use process.

Table 4. Student Demographic and Engagement Data for Los Osos Middle School, 2022–23

Enrollment, academic, and engagement data	Los Osos Middle School	San Luis Coastal Unified School District	California
Enrollment, by demographic group (all grades)			
Enrollment	539	7,717	5,852,544
Students eligible for free or reduced-price meals	41.6%	33.5%	59.9%
English learners	7.2%	9.5%	19.0%
Students with disabilities, 2023	18.2%	15.0%	13.1%
African American/Black	0.4%	0.6%	4.7%
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.7%	0.3%	0.4%
Asian, Filipino, Pacific Islander	4.6%	5.2%	12.1%
Hispanic or Latino/a	25.8%	30.0%	56.1%
White	60.9%	57.0%	20.1%
Two or more races	7.4%	5.9%	4.3%
Not reported	0.2%	1.0%	2.2%
Academic performance (grades 6–8)			
Percentage of students meeting or exceeding proficiency standards on the Math CAASPP	45.7%	56.6%	32.1%
Percentage of students meeting or exceeding proficiency standards on the English Language Arts CAASPP	62.7%	65.5%	45.8%
Engagement (grades 7–8)			
Chronic absenteeism	27.5%	24.4%	22.8%
Suspension rate	6.7%	6.8%	7.6%

Notes: The California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) is administered annually to students in grades 3–8 and 11. The percentage of students meeting proficiency standards in the CAASPP across grades 6–8 is calculated by averaging the percentage of students meeting or exceeding a level "3" cut score in grades 6–8.

Sources: Data on enrollment, students eligible for free or reduced-price meals, English learners, race/ethnicity, chronic absenteeism, and suspension were obtained from California Department of Education. *DataQuest*; data on students with disabilities were obtained from California Department of Education. *California school dashboard*; academic data were obtained from California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress. *Test results for California's assessments*.

School Climate Data Gathered

Los Osos Middle School uses a range of data, gathered primarily at the district level, to inform school climate improvements. (See Table 5.)

- **Districtwide Surveys.** Los Osos Middle School relies heavily on the YouthTruth surveys, which the district has been administering each fall since 2017 to all students in Grade 3 and above, parents/guardians of these students, and teachers. The district superintendent explained that he needed additional survey data (beyond what is available in the California Healthy Kids Survey) to accomplish his district and school climate goals: "[YouthTruth] was the tool I needed to bring an annual and valid source of information that really allowed … kids to speak about climate, about how they feel in terms of their own sense of agency, their relationships with adults, their sense of safety on campus." The YouthTruth surveys consist of nine core modules, which assess student engagement, academic challenge, relationships, belonging and peer collaboration, school culture, obstacles to learning, college and career readiness, instructional methods, and social and emotional learning. In addition to the core modules, San Luis Coastal's YouthTruth surveys include several optional modules: school safety, emotional and mental health, diversity, and inclusion. (See Appendix C.) The data are linked to student IDs, so survey results can be disaggregated by student demographic data. In addition, Los Osos also uses the my Social, Academic, and Emotional Behavior Risk Screener (mySAEBRS), a 20-item questionnaire administered by San Luis Coastal three times per year at all secondary schools to assess student well-being and social-emotional skills. The rationale for using the screener is for students to report unhealthy social-emotional tendencies in themselves and in peers before they present problems in school. The district also administers the SAEBRS companion survey to teachers, which allows student and teacher perceptions on student needs to be compared.
- **Student Focus Group Data.** Beginning in the 2022–23 school year, student senators at all San Luis Coastal schools conducted student focus group interviews. Each school develops their own protocol so that focus groups provide information that allows senators to better understand their schools' survey results. The data collected from focus groups serve to supplement the districtwide surveys and help schools better understand student perceptions of school climate.
- **Administrative Data.** This includes student discipline data (e.g., suspensions) and student engagement data (e.g., chronic absenteeism), which are recorded in the school's student information system.

Table 5. School Climate Tools Used by Los Osos Middle School

Type of tool	Instrument	System level	Frequency of administration	School climate domains
Surveys	YouthTruth student, staff, and parent/ guardian surveys	District	Annual	Academic, community, safety
	California Healthy Kids surveys	District	Biennial	Academic, community, safety
	mySAEBRS	District	Three times per year	Safety
Interviews	Student focus groups	School	Annual	Academic, community, safety
Administrative data	Student suspension rates	District	Ongoing	Safety

Sources: This table is based on information obtained via interviews and documents provided by Los Osos Middle School. (2023).

Structures and Systems to Improve School Climate

At Los Osos Middle School, the Student Senate and the Equity Committee are responsible for analyzing the school climate data and developing strategies to improve school climate.

- **Student Senate.** The districtwide student senate, launched by YouthTruth staff and the superintendent of San Luis Coastal Unified, is "a yearlong curriculum [for] student leaders" to take charge of the YouthTruth Survey. It is made up of school-based student senates at each school in the district. The Los Osos Student Senate includes 18 student senators, six from each grade, who are nominated by teachers and administrators and selected to represent the racial and ethnic diversity of the school's student body. Usually, students enter the Senate in 6th grade and have the opportunity to participate until they graduate from high school. In addition to making posters and videos to encourage peer survey participation, student senators analyze the YouthTruth data, identify areas to focus on, and develop recommendations to improve school climate. Student senators participate in monthly school meetings facilitated by their advisor and the assistant principal, and in districtwide meetings that bring together student senators from across the district. School, district, and YouthTruth staff guide students to "examine [their site's] data, … [consider] the subgroups, and work with each other in collaborative circles on what that [the data] could mean," said the district's superintendent. As priority areas are identified, the Los Osos assistant principal and student senators conduct focus group interviews with students to better understand survey results and to identify promising strategies for improving school climate. In the spring, Los Osos student senators discuss their findings and recommendations with their

teachers in "engagement circles" held at a staff professional learning session. Student senators also conduct presentations to the San Luis Coastal school board and serve as a student advisory board to influence the district's strategic planning process, including its Local Control and Accountability Plan.

- **Equity Committee.** In the summer of 2021, the assistant principal and several teachers, who had participated in a fellowship on equity and diversity at the local university, created a school-level equity committee. At the behest of Los Osos administrators, the district funded two consultants from Cultural Creations Collaborative (CCC) to guide the committee's work. During the 2021–22 school year, Los Osos teachers, the assistant principal, and consultants from CCC worked in close partnership meeting on a monthly basis to study administrative data such as attendance and discipline rates, climate survey data, and school norms and policies. Guided by the consultant, committee members considered what the survey results say about the experiences of students from diverse backgrounds and what changes may improve school climate for all students.

Changes to Policy and Practice

Drawing on a range of data in conjunction with recommendations from the student and teacher school climate teams, Los Osos administrators set goals to (1) ensure fair discipline; (2) increase students' sense of belonging and acceptance; and (3) increase school spirit (see Appendix E).

To promote fairness in school discipline, Los Osos teachers worked with equity consultants to review and revise the school's behavior matrix to be more culturally responsive. They also drafted a set of core values that staff voted to adopt schoolwide. In addition, the Equity Committee and the consultants led monthly professional learning sessions at all-staff meetings and created instructional videos to show during advisory classes. Such efforts were intended to solidify a schoolwide understanding of what behaviors were expected from school community members and encourage consistency in adult responses to behaviors that did not meet expectations.

Los Osos also made efforts to increase student belonging and school spirit, primarily through activities that are intended to deepen students' connection to school. The school offers a wide variety of clubs for students to join. Based on recommendations from student senators, Los Osos also hosted several schoolwide activities, such as spirit week, after-school dances, and special lunchtime activities. The school also adopts a no cell phone policy during the school day to improve student engagement and connection, a policy that is well respected by students in the school.

Student Leadership in San Luis Coastal Unified

On a January morning, students from across the San Luis Coastal Unified School District pile out of buses to gather at the county Veterans Hall for a districtwide Student Senate meeting. As students enter the Hall, they gravitate toward the breakfast buffet and pile their plates high with fruit and pastries before settling in at the tables assigned to each of their schools. In addition to students, meeting attendees include school staff members, representatives of the Superintendent's cabinet, and members of the district's Board of Trustees.

The Student Senate currently includes more than 100 6th– to 12th–graders from every school in the district and comes together approximately every 6 weeks during the school year. The group was formed by the superintendent in 2015 to analyze the results of the YouthTruth Survey, the school climate survey used by the district, and use their analysis to inform both district and school-level goals. As the superintendent explained:

> Each year I ask our student senators … to develop recommendations for improving those things that they find most important … and then those recommendations … influence the goals that are captured in the single school plans for achievement. Then, [the students] present to the school board annually. When they bring it to the board level, those recommendations become influencing factors in our LCAP as well as in the annual board priorities.

By elevating the areas of school climate that appear to need improvement and sharing their school goals, the Student Senate serves as an advisory board for the district's strategic planning process.

To kick off the agenda for today's meeting, the district director of learning and achievement shares a fable with the students. The fable tells the story of a lakeside village in which the villagers one day discover that many of the fish in the lake have died. "If you live near a lake and then one day you see *one* fish floating belly up dead," he says, "you might dissect the fish and try to learn the cause of death. But if you woke up one morning and found that half of the fish were dead in the lake, then it would make sense to examine the lake." The fable is a metaphor for the work of the Student Senate; the students will work to understand how school systems can better serve students, rather than placing the blame of systemic problems on individuals. "You are a fish," he explains, "and you're going to study the survey data to find out what's going on in your pond."

Following this introduction, two district administrators present YouthTruth Survey results for the district, highlighting data that indicate the district's strengths and weaknesses. They explain that student senators will use a similar process in their school groups. They ask the groups to identify items in their survey results that suggest negative perceptions of school climate and to reflect on the following questions: Why did students rate this area low? What additional information do you need from focus groups to better understand how to improve in this area?

The students gather in school groups to reflect on the questions posed by district administrators and brainstorm strategies for improving their school climate. Each group writes its ideas on large posters. For example, the student senators from Los Osos Middle School add ideas to their poster such as "more sports," "more clubs," "better school merchandise." The group also discusses problems with uneven enforcement of their school's dress code and contribute "work to change dress code" to their poster. After meeting in small groups, participants do a gallery walk to view their peers' work and to leave sticky notes with comments and questions.

Between inter-school Student Senate meetings, the student senators are busy at their own schools doing various activities to support school climate. For example, the senators at Los Osos meet regularly with the assistant principal, their advisor, to review their climate data, develop school goals and attendant strategies (see Appendix E), and assess their progress on meeting their goals. Additionally, the senators play a role in supporting survey administration by preparing videos that explain the importance of taking the survey to their peers; these videos are shared during advisory.

The student senators also conduct surveys and focus groups to better understand their peers' perceptions of school climate. For example, this past year, the senators facilitated focus groups with students from each grade that included questions such as: What makes you feel connected to others at Los Osos? What could we add at Los Osos to provide more opportunities to connect with others? These additional data collection activities help the student senators plan strategies to meet their school climate goals and inform the goal setting process for the following year.

It is also the job of the student senators at Los Osos to tell their peers and teachers about their work. They develop presentations that they deliver during student advisory periods in which they share school climate goals and related survey data. They also join professional learning sessions for staff in which they facilitate "engagement circles." These discussions are an opportunity for the senators to share their work, advocate for their ideas, and learn from staff perspectives.

The explicit purpose of the Student Senate is to engage in a process of data analysis that informs strategic decision-making, but the activities that the student senators engage in serve additional functions. As YouthTruth's partnership manager explained: "Our mission at YouthTruth is amplifying student voice to improve school climate and culture. San Luis Coastal is a great example of that. Beyond that, it's getting students involved in the process of making meaning of the data." The purpose of the district's partnership with YouthTruth is to support the district and its schools to understand and make use of their climate data. In addition, the processes are designed to center student voices and develop student leadership, activities which in and of themselves make a positive contribution to school climate. Arguably, the significant resources that San Luis Coastal Unified and its schools have dedicated to understanding student experiences and planning for climate improvement also play an important signaling function by sending a clear message to students and staff that student perspectives and school climate are district priorities.

Scandinavian Middle School, Fresno Unified School District

School and District Context

Scandinavian Middle School (Scan) is a midsized school serving 7th- and 8th-grade students in Fresno Unified School District (Fresno Unified), California's third largest district. Almost all of the school's 760 students are students of color (97%). Over two thirds of students (68%) are Hispanic or Latino/a, a fifth (20%) are Asian, Filipino, or Pacific Islander students, and 6% are African American or Black students. (See Table 6.) Fresno County, which is predominantly agricultural, has the highest rates of concentrated poverty in California,[28] and nearly all Scan's students are socioeconomically disadvantaged (95%). Scan's community was severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022–23, over a third of students were chronically absent. This rate is similar to the district overall but much higher than the state average of 24%. Approximately 1 in 5 students were suspended in the 2022–23 school year. Fifteen percent of Scan students met or exceeded proficiency-level standards on the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress for Math, below the district average of 18% and less than half the

state average of 32%. The percentage of students who met or exceeded proficiency-level standards on the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress for ELA was 27%, also lower than district and state averages (31% and 47% respectively).

At Scan, and across the district, school climate and culture is a key focus for continuous improvement. Fresno Unified is part of CORE Districts, a consortium of nine of California's large urban districts formed in 2010, which received a waiver from the federal No Child Left Behind accountability system to design and implement a holistic system of accountability and continuous improvement. In addition to academic outcomes, the accountability system focused on school climate and culture and student social-emotional learning.[29] At the school level, key goals for Scan's 2022–23 school year included increasing students' engagement in their school and community, increasing inclusive opportunities for family engagement, and increasing staff retention and diversity.[30] School and district leaders identified school climate as an important factor in achieving these goals. "I think a positive school climate is key to everything we do," said Scan's principal of 15 years. "We've been continuing to focus and rebuild … for our students and staff to [be] feeling safe, feeling valued, feeling appreciated, and having those connections." The district's superintendent also emphasized that "providing a safe and comfortable environment for kids to do their schooling is absolutely critical."

Table 6. Student Demographic and Engagement Data for Scandinavian Middle School, 2022–23

Enrollment, academic, and engagement data	Scandinavian Middle School	Fresno Unified School District	California
Enrollment, by demographic group (all grades)			
Enrollment	764	72,379	5,852,544
Students eligible for free or reduced-price meals	94.9%	86.4%	59.9%
English learners	21.9%	19.9%	19.0%
Students with disabilities, 2023	18.5	12.8%	13.1%
African American/Black	6.0%	7.6%	4.7%
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.8%	0.7%	0.4%
Asian, Filipino, Pacific Islander	19.8%	11.4%	12.1%
Hispanic or Latino/a	68.1%	69.3%	56.1%
White	3.4%	8.2%	20.1%
Two or more races	2.0%	2.9%	4.3%
Not reported	0.0%	0.0%	2.2%

Enrollment, academic, and engagement data	Scandinavian Middle School	Fresno Unified School District	California
Academic performance (grades 7–8)			
Percentage of students meeting or exceeding proficiency standards on the Math CAASPP	15.0%	17.9%	31.6%
Percentage of students meeting or exceeding proficiency standards on the English Language Arts CAASPP	27.2%	31.2%	46.6%
Engagement (grades 7–8)			
Chronic absenteeism	34.7%	35.1%	23.7%
Suspension rate	18.5%	14.4%	7.6%

Notes: The California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) is administered annually to students in grades 3–8 and 11. The percentage of students meeting proficiency standards in the CAASPP across grades 7–8 is calculated by averaging the percentage of students meeting or exceeding a level "3" cut score in grades 7 and 8.

Sources: Data on enrollment, students eligible for free or reduced-price meals, English learners, race/ethnicity, chronic absenteeism, and suspension were obtained from California Department of Education. *DataQuest*; data on students with disabilities were obtained from California Department of Education. *California school dashboard*; academic data were obtained from California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress. Test results for California's assessments.

School Climate Data Gathered

To measure and improve school climate, Scan uses data gathered at both the district and school levels. These tools, summarized in Table 7 below, include:

- **Districtwide Survey.** Fresno uses its own Climate and Culture (C&C) surveys, which the district adapted from CORE's Culture-Climate surveys. The C&C surveys include questions grouped into seven categories: Academic & Social Emotional Learning, Family Engagement, Organizational Environment, School Environment, Student Engagement, Student Wellness, and Student-centered and Real-world Experiences, and are administered twice a year to staff, parents/guardians, and all students in grades 3–12 throughout the district. (See Appendix C for additional survey information.) The surveys are administered over a 3-week period in the fall and spring using an electronic platform hosted by Panorama Education, which provides live data on response rates and preliminary responses to the survey questions during the survey window. The platform generates both district- and school-level data reports within a week after data collection.
- **Focus Group Data.** The Climate and Culture Team (CCT) conducts focus groups with both students and staff to better understand results from the C&C surveys.
- **School-Level Staff Surveys.** The CCT sends monthly emails with a different prompt each time to collect teacher input on a range of topics, including ideas for professional development and feedback on school initiatives.

- **Structured Observation Data.** Data are collected from classroom observations conducted by the CCT to diagnose health of classroom climates based on five elements, including positive interactions teachers have with students.
- **Student Engagement Data.** These data, collected by the Climate and Culture Team, track student participation in school activities (e.g., sports teams, clubs).
- **Administrative Data,** including student behavioral referral data, student absenteeism data, and records of student club/sports engagement.

Table 7. School Climate Tools Used by Scandinavian Middle School

Type of tool	Instrument	System level	Frequency of administration	School climate domains
Survey	Climate and Culture student, staff, and parent/guardian surveys	District	Twice per year (fall and spring)	Academic, Community, Safety
	Emails to school staff	School	Weekly	Academic, Community, Safety
Interviews	Staff and student focus group questions	School	Annual	Academic, Community, Safety
Structured observation	Classroom observation protocol	School	1–2 times per year	Academic, Community, Safety
Administrative data	Student suspension rates	District	Ongoing	Safety
	Student absenteeism rates	District	Ongoing	Community
	Student club participation data	District	Ongoing	Community

Source: This table is based on information obtained via interviews and documents provided by Scandinavian Middle School. (2023).

Structures and Systems to Improve School Climate

Each school in Fresno Unified has a Climate and Culture Team (CCT). A Climate and Culture Specialist, a district-level employee who provides coaching and guidance, is available to all CCTs. Each CCT is responsible for leading climate survey data collection, data analysis, and climate improvement at their

school site. The district employs approximately 20 Climate and Culture Specialists, who are Teachers on Special Assignment.[31] Scan's CCT is one of the largest in Fresno, enabled by its principal allocating school funding on top of district funding to compensate staff for their work on the CCT. Scan's team consists of 15 members, including six teachers, an assistant principal, three academic counselors, a social worker, a child welfare attendance worker, and the Climate and Culture specialist provided by the district. The Climate and Culture specialist and two other members of the CCT lead the team, which meets once or twice a month and is divided into two subcommittees that focus on engagement and school safety.

CCTs are responsible for analyzing school climate data, designing school climate goals, and taking action toward meeting these goals. As part of this work, Scan's CCT conducts multiple processes to engage with, and learn from, data, including:

- **Analyzing Climate and Culture Survey Data.** In reports distributed by the district, the CCT discusses findings and next steps to improve school climate and carefully analyze student, staff, and family responses.
- **Supporting Teachers in Analyzing Survey Results.** The CCT leads professional development sessions to facilitate teacher engagement with the C&C survey results provided by the district. The CCT also solicits teacher input on the CCT's suggested initiatives.
- **Analyzing Additional Data Collected at the School Level.** Including data on behavioral referrals, absenteeism, and student club engagement as well as input gathered from student focus groups and additional monthly student surveys, the focus groups helped in gaining students' interpretations about specific aspects of C & C survey questions—such as how they defined terms like "fairness." A video of student quotes related to survey findings was recorded and shared with staff during professional development sessions.

To guide their work, Scan's CCT utilizes a whole-school, Tier I Climate and Culture Implementation Rubric that Fresno adapted from a Safe and Civil Schools resource (see Appendix D). The rubric contains 20 different elements that fall under three broad categories: (1) Creating and Sustaining a Proactive Climate and Culture Team (e.g., Team Purpose, Admin Support); (2) Creating and Sustaining Proactive Schoolwide Conditions (e.g., Positive Relationships and Interactions, Responding to Misbehavior); and (3) Creating and Sustaining Proactive Classroom Conditions (e.g., Setting Classroom Conditions and Social-Emotional Learning). The CCT fills in the rubric to document and categorize the status of climate-related policies and initiatives at Scan as: (a) emerging, (b) partially in place, and (c) in place and/or sustaining.

Changes to Policy and Practice

Scan's school climate goals are heavily driven by the Climate and Culture survey data analysis, aiming to increase student perceptions of fairness in discipline and family engagement (see Appendix E). To reach these goals, the Climate and Culture Team led the school in implementing initiatives to improve school safety and engagement. For example, the CCT revised the school's discipline referral process to increase consistency of adult responses to misbehavior, reduce missed class time, and identify teachers and students in need of extra support. The new system was introduced to staff at

a professional development session, during which the CCT answered questions about the referral process and solicited feedback on the changes. In addition, at the principal's request, the district climate and culture specialist provided monthly professional development sessions for new teachers at the school with a focus on restorative classroom management and relationship building. Lastly, the CCT provided professional development for all Scan teachers with an emphasis on strategies that teachers can use to prevent misbehavior by building positive climate within their classrooms. They introduced a "5 to 1" initiative, where staff are encouraged to have a ratio of at least five positive interactions to one negative interaction with students. To support teachers in implementing positive interactions in the classroom, the Climate and Culture Team conducted observations to provide feedback to teachers. To encourage student and staff engagement, Scan also worked to ensure that all students participated in at least one school club; adjusted class schedules; and solicited staff input for school decision-making.

To support teachers in implementing positive interactions in the classroom, the Climate and Culture Team conducted observations to provide feedback to teachers.

Using School Climate Data to Improve School Environments

Interpreting School Climate Data

It is important to understand how schools analyze and make sense of their school climate data, and how they use this insight to cultivate a positive climate. Schools' understanding of climate data is influenced by the data reports they receive, the processes schools use to analyze data, and the district systems in place to support schools' data use. Below, we describe the process through which schools view and analyze the data to understand their climate growth areas and determine strategies to meet student and staff needs.

Who is involved in analyzing school climate data?

Each of the three schools in this study has a dedicated school climate team that analyzes and interprets school climate data. These teams vary in size and structure, and may include a mix of district staff, school administrators, teachers, and counselors (for details about school climate teams in each school, see Overview of Schools' Efforts to Use School Climate Data). For example, Los Osos Middle School, like all schools at San Luis Coastal Unified, has a student senate that plays a key role in the school's use of school climate data. The student senate's responsibilities include encouraging peers to take the survey, analyzing the survey data, developing school goals, and sharing findings and recommendations with students, staff, and the school board (see Student Leadership in San Luis Coastal Unified). School teams at all three schools receive support through their districts, including technical assistance, professional development, and opportunities for collaboration.

In addition to having dedicated data teams, two case study schools engage the broader staff community in analyzing school climate surveys. At Scan, this was motivated by teachers' feedback that they did not feel sufficiently included in school decision-making. Staff engage with school climate data during several hour-long professional development sessions throughout the school year. In these sessions, the Climate and Culture Team provides staff with printed versions of the data reports and allocates time for them to process the data independently and in groups. Staff generally discuss survey results with teachers from the same department, including what was surprising about the results and what might be driving data trends that caught their attention. Staff are also given the opportunity to guide the CCT's work by voting on which aspects of school climate they think the team should focus on, as well as providing additional feedback through monthly "Feedback Friday" email prompts sent by the CCT.

Mann Middle's Transformation Team also engages the broader staff with school climate data. The team shares results of the surveys it conducts with teachers and students at the school's all-staff meetings. The teachers then revisit the team's slide deck at their respective professional learning communities to discuss the data and note reflections. Through sharing the data with teachers and enabling discussions about survey results, the Transformation Team aims to support teachers' understanding of school climate and encourage them to center school climate considerations in their smaller team meetings.

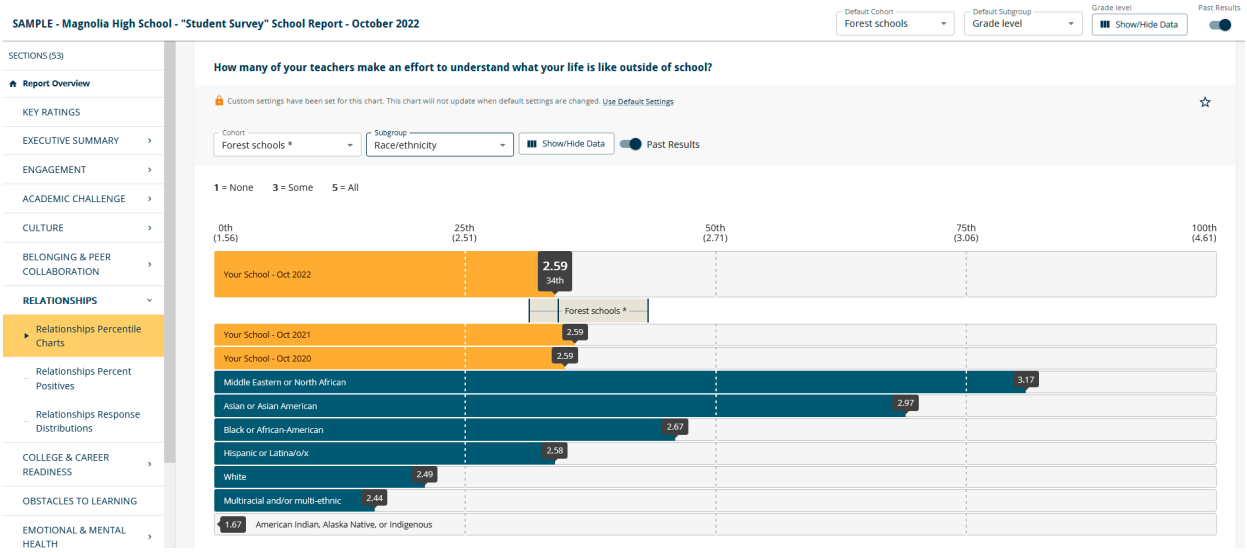
When and how are school climate data presented to schools?

In each district, external partner organizations supported districts to administer the school climate surveys and generate reports based on the survey results. The schedule and format of climate data reports influence how schools make sense of their data and use it to inform school planning. The timing affects the depth to which schools can analyze the data and the extent to which they can seek input from the school community, while report formats shape how school teams perceive data and approach their analyses.

Schools generally receive data reports from partner organizations within a few weeks after surveys are administered and begin data analysis soon after. The schedule of data collection varies for surveys that schools develop to supplement districtwide data collection. For example, Mann struggled to utilize results from a school-developed student survey because it was administered too close to the end of the school year.

The three schools in this study can access their climate data in two ways: logging on to the partner organization's data dashboard and receiving district-generated reports provided in PDF format. Most of the school data teams utilize the data dashboard and share PDF reports with the broader school community. Both the data dashboard and PDF reports present survey results graphically or in table form, providing the percentage and number of students who selected each response option for every item. To support interpretation, reports include a "percent favorable" response rate.[32] For each survey question in a school climate domain (such as "sense of belonging"), the percent favorable response is averaged to produce a domain average, which data teams view as an overall summary of how their school is doing in that domain. Data reports also provide domain averages at the district and state levels, which schools use as comparison reports to contextualize their school's average. The reports also compare the results of the current survey with prior survey data to give schools a sense of the changes in their school climate.

Figure 1. Screenshot of the YouthTruth Data Platform



Source: YouthTruth. Sample online reports.

When staff use the digital data platforms, they can toggle the settings to filter results for specific student groups, such as grade level, race/ethnicity, English learner status, disability status, socioeconomic level, and sexual orientation (see Figure 1). The PDF data reports generally do not disaggregate survey results by student groups. This can have implications for data interpretation. For example, at Scandinavian Middle School, while teachers can access the platform, usage is low; most reference only the PDF data reports, and their analysis therefore did not account for how experiences of various student groups might differ.

How do schools analyze school climate data?

Across the three case study sites, common key questions that school climate teams ask when looking at climate data include:

1. What challenges is the school facing with respect to school climate?
2. What factors are influencing the positive and negative perceptions of students and staff around school climate?
3. How are current efforts to improve school climate meeting the needs of students and staff?
4. What are areas for growth/improvement?

School climate data teams use a range of strategies to make sense of school climate survey results. These teams, which are often groups of teachers, administrators, counselors, and/or students, take the lead in analyzing school climate data and identifying high-leverage areas to work on. (See Overview of Schools' Efforts to Use School Climate Data.) Across all three case study sites, schools focus primarily on the student and staff survey data. Although parent and guardian survey data were also collected, school staff indicated that response rates were too low to be informative.

Using Multiple Data Sources. The three schools in this study drew on multiple data sources to develop an understanding of their school climate, such as school climate survey results, school discipline data, student achievement data, and student engagement data. Referencing multiple data sources is helpful for drawing connections between perceptions, experiences, and outcomes, allowing schools to see a more holistic picture of their school climate. For example, Mann Middle School's administrators noted that the number of behavior incidents per student dropped by a third for African American/Black students (from 1.5 incidents per child in 2019–20, among the highest of all student races and ethnicities, to 0.5 in 2021–22), signaling that the school's efforts to implement restorative practices may be reducing exclusionary discipline for the students most disproportionately impacted. However, the school also noted that incidents of student defiance remained high and students reported feeling less safe in school. For the Behavior Support Team lead, this pointed to gaps in the school's efforts to implement restorative practices. "We have to step back and say, 'OK, maybe this intervention that all of us are using is not as effective or conducted with fidelity like it needs to be,'" said the team lead.

Referencing multiple data sources is helpful for drawing connections between perceptions, experiences, and outcomes.

Another way schools triangulated data was to compare the survey responses from students, staff, and parents/guardians. For example, Scan's Climate and Culture Team noted that they saw a significant drop in the percentage of both students and parents/guardians agreeing that "Adults in this school treat students fairly." Identifying this trend in multiple data sources helped the team affirm that this was an area of broad concern. In addition, triangulating data from multiple sources helped schools understand where there may be gaps in adult understanding of student needs. At Los Osos Middle School, administrators compared students' self-rating on the mySAEBRS tool with teachers' ratings of students on the companion SAEBRS questionnaire. The usefulness of multiple data sources was illustrated by one principal who explained:

> A kid may rate themselves as high as far as needs … a teacher may not see the same. And then we look at that data and we go, "Wow, the kid sees themselves having tremendous needs. The teacher doesn't."

Identifying Focus Areas for School Climate Improvements. When reading data reports, school staff reported that they look for the domain areas where students responded the most and least favorably to understand their strengths and areas for growth. To identify which domain of school climate they may need to focus on improving, data teams look for areas where the percentage of favorable responses has decreased compared to prior years and where students in their school were responding less favorably compared to other schools in the district and state. For example, the student senate identified fairness of discipline as a focus area because responses to "discipline in this school is fair" were less favorable than other indicators on the survey, at the 20th percentile of all California schools that participated in YouthTruth Survey, and had declined since 2018. After considering recommendations from the student senate, Los Osos administrators prioritized fair discipline as one of the school's three goals for the 2022–23 and 2023–24 school years.

Occasionally, staff at schools explored whether disparities in the data existed for different groups of students based on demographics. For example, when looking at school suspension data, a Los Osos teacher found that male students of Latino background with disabilities were disproportionately suspended and received less learning time. "So that was one of the target [student] groups to say, 'Whoa, what are we doing? How have we been contributing to this?'" said the teacher. However, the three schools in this study did not make consistent or systematic use of disaggregated data to inform their decision-making. (See Challenges to Using School Climate Data.)

Conducting Focus Groups. School staff across sites noted that while school climate survey data helped them identify areas for improvement, the survey data alone do not explain *why* students and staff are responding positively or negatively. For example, if students report that they do not believe they are treated fairly at school, it could be for a variety of reasons. Conducting focus groups helped schools better understand student and staff perceptions, dig deeper into what may be driving the survey results, and obtain ideas for possible solutions to improve school climate. At Los Osos and Scan, school climate teams conducted focus group conversations with student and staff members to discuss what shaped their perceptions of school climate.

The Los Osos assistant principal led the Student Senate to create a safe venue for diverse groups of students to share their feedback. Students were selected to represent different grade levels, including race and ethnicity, and different engagement levels. In confidential focus groups, Los Osos student senators asked their peers questions around community and safety, including what helps them feel connected to others and why they think relatively few students reported that the school was a place of respect and fairness. From the focus group, the student senators learned that students thought the dress code was unfair and targeted female students more than male students. Students expressed concern that teachers tended to notice misbehavior from lower-performing students more often than high-performing students.

Scan's Climate and Culture Team (CCT) also conducted student focus groups to ask students about their views on classroom practices and school discipline. In contrast with the confidential peer-to-peer setting used at Los Osos, Scan's video team filmed the students as they responded to interview questions and shared snippets of the interviews with teachers during professional development sessions. The CCT hoped the videos could elevate student voices and help teachers form a common understanding of how students perceived safety and fairness on campus. In addition to student focus groups, Scan also conducted teacher focus groups to better understand what drives the teacher survey results. These additional data informed their school climate goals and actions for the following school year.

Using School Climate Data for Planning and Decision-Making

The schools in this study used climate data for two primary purposes. Staff at school sites reported using climate data to (1) inform strategic planning and goal setting and (2) drive policies and practices intended to improve discipline systems and overall school climate.

Using Data to Inform Strategic Planning and Goal Setting

The processes schools used to create goals and strategically plan for school climate improvement were influenced by district-level priorities, systems, and personnel. District-level Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAP) priorities largely shaped School Plans for Student Achievement (SPSA)[33] goals. Additionally, district systems led schools to engage particular school constituents—students at Los Osos, a large and varied school staff team at Scan, and a counseling team at Mann—and use specific methods for goal setting and planning.

LCAP and SPSA Climate Goals

All three of the schools in this study included school climate goals in SPSAs, which are accompanied by the actions schools will take to achieve their goals and the measures they will use to assess their progress. School-level goal setting around school climate was strongly influenced by district-level climate priorities, which is evident in the way that schools' SPSA climate goals reiterated climate goals outlined by their districts' LCAP. For example, Table 8 depicts the similarities between Mann's SPSA climate goal and the school climate goal that San Diego Unified outlines in its LCAP. The executive director of San Diego Unified explained that the link between SPSA and LCAP goal setting around school climate is intentional. As she described:

> We do ask our school sites … to set a culture and climate goal. Our expectation is that school site plans are the same type of skeletal structure as our LCAP. So if our LCAP Goal 1 is about building inclusive, antiracist, and restorative school communities, then they [schools] are setting a similar Goal 1 in their school plan for student achievement.

At both the district and the school levels, school climate goals outlined multiple measures of assessment designed to capture dimensions of school climate, including feelings captured by climate survey results, suspension rates, and attendance rates, among others.

Table 8. Goals Around School Climate, Mann Middle School and San Diego Unified School District, 2022–23

School/ District	LCAP/SPSA climate goal	Measures/Indicators	Examples of planned actions
Mann Middle School	Goal 1: Safe, collaborative, and inclusive culture	• Chronic absenteeism rate • Suspension rate • California Health Kids Survey (CHKS) measures (high expectations, caring adult on campus)	• Implementing restorative practices • Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports program • Mentorship opportunities for students • Enrichment activities • Attendance support • Implementation of Site Equity Team
San Diego Unified School District	Goal 1: Cultivating inclusive, antiracist, and restorative schools, classrooms, and district—with equity at the core and support for the whole child	• Chronic absenteeism rate • Suspension rate • Number of expulsions • CHKS measures (safety, caring relationships, high expectations, meaningful participation)	• Restorative justice trainings and coaching • Professional learning opportunities to support the development of welcoming, inclusive learning environments • District support for schools to develop school culture and climate goals within SPSAs • Attendance supports • Expanded supports for special student groups (e.g., students experiencing homelessness, foster youth)

Note: LCAP = Local Control and Accountability Plans; SPSA = School Plans for Student Achievement.

Sources: Mann Middle School. (2022, October 25). *School plan for student achievement at Mann Middle School 2022–23*; San Diego Unified School District. *2022–23 Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP)*.

Additional School Climate Goals

Alongside the formal strategic planning process involved in developing SPSA, all three schools used climate data to develop additional goals that shape school decision-making around climate policies and practices. However, the processes of developing supplementary climate goals differed across schools and engaged different school actors.

As described in the previous section, the superintendent of San Luis Coastal Unified developed an interschool student senate to support the district in improving school climate. With the guidance of school staff, students from each school generated school climate goals based on their data analysis. The assistant principal at Los Osos, who advises her school's student senate, described how the process worked. She explained:

> I will work with my [student] senators, and we figure out what are three goals that we feel, based off this data, Los Osos wants to do. And from there, we share it out with our staff. … [We get] staff input so that it's a collaborative effort, but it is all led by students.

For the 2020–21 school year, these student senators from Los Osos developed three school goals that focused on improving the fairness of the school's disciplinary system, increasing students' sense of belonging and acceptance, and creating more opportunities for school spirit. (See Appendix E.) Students were guided to develop SMART (Specific, Measurable, Assignable, Realistic, Time-based) goals and therefore each goal outlined strategies to achieve the goal, indicate success, identify persons responsible for the suggested strategies, explain why students believe the goal is realistic, and outline a rough timetable for when the goal's associated strategies will be implemented. (See Student Leadership in San Luis Coastal Unified.)

Fresno Unified developed an infrastructure in which district-level Climate and Culture Specialists support the school-based Culture and Climate Teams (CCTs). As a Scan CCT lead described:

> Based on the spring survey data from last school year. … We looked at all of these different areas that we could possibly focus on. We narrowed it down and then we had the Climate and Culture Team decide on what area that we're really going to focus, and we created a SMART goal around that. We also took it to staff and said, "Is this something that you think is going to have an impact with students?"

The CCT team at Scan developed two climate goals for the 2022–23 school year, one focused on fair discipline and one focused on increased parent engagement. The goal on fair discipline specifies:

> By June 2023, Scandinavian MS will respond to classroom behaviors to ensure all students receive equitable adult responses to misbehavior as evidenced by a 10% increase (64% to 74%) in positive responses to the item "Adults in this school treat students fairly" on the 2023 Spring Student Survey.[34]

As this example shows, the CCT goal is linked to a measure from the district's culture and climate survey.

San Diego Unified developed a system in which district counselors support school-based counseling teams to analyze climate data and develop annual goals for the school counseling program. Through analysis and reflection on climate survey results, the district counselor and Mann's counseling team

developed three goals for the 2022–23 school year, which focused on postsecondary preparation, improving behavior for students participating in a mentorship program, and attendance. (See Appendix E.) With the guidance of the district counselor, the team also identified the data sources it will use to assess the achievement of its goals, which included items from the CHKS survey as well as attendance data and behavior referrals.

School Policies and Practices Intended to Achieve School Goals

In addition to using climate data to inform strategic planning and school goals, schools drew on climate data to implement new practices and policies intended to improve their environments. For these three schools, these changes generally fell into two broad categories: (1) revisions to disciplinary policy and practice and (2) the implementation of programs and strategies intended to make school climates more inclusive and welcoming. These changes to policy and practice are most closely linked to the safety and community domains of school climate.

Changes to policy and practice are most closely linked to the safety and community domains of school climate.

Changes to Discipline Policies and Practice

School staff reported efforts to change disciplinary policy and practice that included changes to discipline referral policies, revisions to schoolwide expectations, and professional learning opportunities focused on restorative approaches. The process used by the Climate and Culture Team at Scan provides an illustrative example of how schools in the study used climate data to revise their disciplinary systems. As noted above, one of the CCT's annual goals was focused on equitable responses to student behaviors. This was motivated by analysis of climate survey data indicating that some students at Scan felt they were not treated fairly. Prompted by this, the CCT examined teacher responses to classroom misbehaviors, as logged by teachers in the school's incident reporting system. This examination led them to understand that teachers often did not record their responses to behavior incidents. When responses to incidents were documented, the CCT was able to see that responses to student behaviors were inconsistent across teachers.

The CCT's understanding of climate survey data and incident reporting data prompted them to develop several new strategies intended to make discipline more consistent. They implemented a three-part approach: referral process, intervention approach, and teacher training. One strategy revised the school's types of adult responses that should be used in its tiered-level discipline referral process. The new referral system clarified that while level two (moderate) behaviors should not result in a classroom removal, they should be documented to notify the administration. Additionally, the team focused on clarifying a consequence from an intervention response from staff, with an understanding that interventions are more likely to change behaviors than consequences. Training was provided to build teacher capacity for addressing misbehaviors without removing students from the classroom. In this 3-part approach, the system aimed to increase consistency of adult responses to misbehavior, reduce missed class time, and identify teachers and students in need of extra support. The CCT introduced this new system to staff at a professional development session and answered questions about the referral process and solicited feedback on the changes.

Several additional strategies accompanied the new referral policy to improve the consistency and fairness of Scan's discipline practices. For example, at the principal's request, the district Culture and Climate Specialist provided monthly professional development sessions for new teachers at the school with a focus on restorative classroom management and relationship building. The CCT also provided professional development for all Scan teachers with an emphasis on whole-group (Tier 1) climate practices, practices that teachers can use to prevent misbehavior by building positive climate within their classrooms. Additionally, the CCT reviewed and revised Tier 1 behavior expectations for common areas at the school (e.g., cafeteria, hallways) and developed visual aids that were placed across the school campus to help teachers and students internalize behavior expectations.

The process used at Scan to implement these disciplinary changes looked similar to processes used at Los Osos and Mann. Like Scan, Los Osos and Mann teams used multiple data sources to inform the disciplinary changes made at their sites. Additionally, at all three schools, the SPSA climate goals or supplementary goals developed by school teams motivated disciplinary changes. All schools dedicated school-based teams to lead the work to improve school climate and incorporated opportunities to solicit feedback from the broader school staff.

Welcoming and Inclusive Practices

At all three school sites, administrators' understandings of school climate led them to prioritize the school climate aspects of safety, connection, and belonging. Their definitions centered around students' perceptions of, and feelings about, being in school; it was important that students *wanted* to be there and felt good when they were in school. As the assistant principal at Los Osos shared:

> When I think of positive school culture, I think of a place where students and staff feel safe, feel like they're supported, and they can take risks. … I think of a place where you can come and try new things and look forward to showing up every day because you feel welcome and because you just want to go there. It's a home away from home, really.

To this end, the teams dedicated to school climate at all three school sites implemented practices and professional development intended to increase student attendance and engagement and to make their school environments more inclusive and welcoming. These practices were wide-ranging and included attendance initiatives, engagement initiatives, and classroom environment professional development for teachers.

School Attendance and Engagement Initiatives. Like many schools across the country, the schools in this study have faced attendance and engagement challenges since the pandemic. For this reason, teams dedicated to improving the climate at all three schools focused on increasing student attendance and improving student engagement through enrichment initiatives. For example, staff at Mann noticed a substantial improvement in attendance after implementing a "2 by 10" initiative. This involved matching students with the highest levels of absenteeism to participating teachers who committed to conducting a 2-minute check-in with their assigned students for 10 days in a row. At Scan, the CCT has implemented an engagement initiative to increase student attendance and involvement in school activities such as intramural sports and clubs. To support this initiative, the CCT maintains engagement data tracking each student's involvement in school activities. The CCT identifies and supports students with low attendance. When a student with low attendance is identified, a CCT member conducts a one-on-one conference

with the student or a home visit with parents to better understand why the student is struggling with attendance and to develop a plan to address the main obstacles. After connecting with the student and, in some cases, their family, the CCT member monitors attendance and provides incentives, such as pizza parties and fun events during students' free period.

Los Osos made efforts to increase student engagement at school by providing activities intended to deepen students' connection to school. As the principal shared:

> We are a school that led the charge in our district to start adding sports left and right. We added soccer, we added boys' volleyball, we added wrestling, we added water polo. I mean, we were at the lead of that a few years ago before COVID. And when we did all that, we saw the involvement of kids start to grow and communities start to grow.

This past year, the student senators at Los Osos developed a climate goal focused on increasing school spirit to increase student excitement to attend school. Based on recommendations from the students, Los Osos hosted several schoolwide activities with this aim in mind, such as spirit week, after-school dances, and special lunchtime activities.

Professional Development to Improve Classroom Environments. At Scandinavian Middle School and Mann Middle School, the teams focused on school climate directly supported teachers to make their classrooms more welcoming and inclusive. The Climate and Culture Team at Scan implemented a system called "5 to 1 positive responses," which encourages teachers to increase the number of positive interactions that they have with students (with the goal of at least five positive interactions for every negative interaction). To support teachers, the CCT conducted observations of teachers, using a district form to track teacher–student interactions and other indicators of Tier 1 practices. The CCT uses this data to provide feedback for individual teachers but also to identify areas of improvement overall. For example, upon examining the "five-to-one positive responses" across teachers and throughout the day, the CCT identified a drop in positive interactions during the period after lunch, which prompted the CCT to brainstorm ways of supporting more positive interactions between teachers and students during that period.

The Transformation Team at Mann identified schoolwide practices that teachers can use to make their classrooms welcoming and inclusive, such as community circles, informal check-ins with students, discussions of current events, and mindfulness activities. The team led professional development sessions for the staff to model these practices and develop strategies for incorporating them into teachers' classrooms. The Transformation Team's in-house teacher surveys ask teachers to report on how often they incorporate welcoming practices into their classrooms, and which practices they use. The surveys are conducted every six weeks so the Transformation Team can regularly gauge teachers' progress on incorporating target practices and update the staff on how they are doing.

This past year, the Transformation Team incorporated an additional support for teachers in the form of "instructional rounds." Teachers voluntarily participated in observations of their peers to see target practices in action and to spur their thinking about practices they might incorporate into their own classrooms. Reflecting on this support, the Transformation Team lead shared that nearly every

participating teacher reported that they observed something in another teacher's classroom that they wanted to try in their own classroom. He provided an example from the classroom visit that he participated in:

> I visited a 6th-grade science teacher … and one thing that I saw that was really cool [was that he] had his instructions on the board in multiple languages, in the slides that he was projecting … which was cool and something I had never thought of doing.

Like the implementation of the "5 to 1 positive responses" at Scan, the efforts at Mann to increase the use of welcoming and inclusive practices benefit from the use of in-house data that can be collected with greater frequency than districtwide climate surveys.

Perceived Benefits of School Climate Data Use

The schools that participated in this study invest significant time and resources to engage with school climate data and use it to inform efforts to improve their school climate. What is the value of that investment? In this section, we describe school personnel's perceived benefits of school climate data use and the extent to which their current data corroborate these perceptions. School staff noted several areas of climate improvement, which they attributed to their data use practices: increased student engagement, attendance, and leadership; greater collaboration among educators; and improved disciplinary culture.

Increased Student Engagement, Attendance, and Leadership

All three of the schools saw notable declines in their rates of chronic absenteeism from the 2021–22 school year to the 2022–23 school year. Though it is challenging to disentangle improved attendance from the easing of COVID-19 restrictions and protocols, school personnel reported that their engagement with school climate data was linked to increased student engagement, attendance, and leadership. The School Policies and Practices Intended to Achieve School Goals section describes how all three schools in this study strategized to increase engagement and attendance in their overall approach to improve school climate. At Los Osos, student senators developed a climate goal focused on increasing school spirit to encourage student excitement about attending school. This led Los Osos to host several schoolwide activities such as spirit week, after-school dances, and special lunchtime activities. Mann implemented a "2 by 10" initiative that matches students with high levels of chronic absenteeism with participating teachers who conduct 2-minute check-ins with their assigned students for 10 days in a row. Scan implemented several initiatives aimed at increasing student attendance, including identifying students with low attendance, and supporting those students through conferences, home visits, and incentives for attendance such as pizza parties and other fun events. Another Scan engagement strategy was aimed at raising student involvement in school activities, such as student clubs and intramural sports teams. According to Scan's school counselor, a member of the school's Climate and Culture Team, this strategy resulted in notable improvements in student engagement, captured in the engagement data collected by the CCT.

> School personnel reported that their engagement with school climate data was linked to increased student engagement, attendance, and leadership.

The student senate structure used by San Luis Coastal was strategically designed to engage students in an authentic learning experience while developing their leadership. One district administrator shared how youth empowerment strategies engage students:

> Our student senators feel more empowered. We're sending them back to campuses to do focus groups to really dig into the data and then make goals with action items to improve what they were concerned about. … We've really empowered our students through Student Senate.

The success of the student senate also led administrators at Los Osos to develop additional leadership opportunities for students. As the assistant principal at Los Osos shared,

> For me, as a leader, it's always "How do I get the kids to do more and run this school? How do you have kids take more ownership and … give them these experiences to lead their people?" … That's what we're working on moving forward—how do we give them more control and responsibility? Because they'll run with it, and they'll do a great job. … They feel empowered with student senate.

School administrators and student senators expressed disappointment when they did not see improvements in YouthTruth Survey data. Nevertheless, administrators perceived that the opportunities for learning and leadership that student senators gained from engaging with school data were a benefit in and of themselves, both for the students who participated in the senate and for the school overall.

Informed by school climate data, these schools initiated different strategies to bolster engagement, attendance, and student leadership.

Collaborative Staff Learning Environment

At one school in our study, Scan, staff members noted an increase in collaboration among adults at the school as a benefit of engaging with school climate data. At Scan, the Climate and Culture Team created a goal to add more learning opportunities focused on interpreting school climate data and developing strategies for school climate improvement. As one of the CCT co-leads shared:

> I would say that the culture has become, on the staff side, more collaborative, … that staff feel like they're being asked for their voice and their perspective more often. I think you can see that in the PLs that we plan as well, that they're more collaborative, there's more ownership, there's more voice from the staff being integrated into that.

This perception was evidenced by staff feedback from their evaluations of professional learning opportunities. The professional learning evaluations served to monitor progress toward meeting the CCT's strategic goal of broader staff inclusion and allowed the CCT to continue to improve upon their offerings. For example, a CCT member shared that an evaluation of one learning session led by the CCT included asking staff members if they felt their voice was contributing to decision-making processes during the session. She shared that out of 24 teachers, 16 had responded "yes," four had responded "no," and four had responded "other." She interpreted this feedback as "generally positive."

CCT members perceived that their school climate work contributed to a professional environment that felt more collaborative and engaged staff input and decision-making.

Improved Disciplinary Culture

All three schools described improvements to their disciplinary culture, which they attributed to strategies that they had put in place because they engaged with their school climate data. In follow-up interviews at Mann and Scan,[35] administrators noted that their perceptions of school climate improvement were supported by declining suspension rates. The principal at Mann shared that, at the time of our interview, the school's suspension rate was 1.7% (compared to 12.2% the previous year). Similarly, a CCT co-lead at Scan reported that, at the time of our interview, Scan's suspension rate had decreased to 2.3% (compared to 18.5% the previous year). Schools primarily pointed to two areas of disciplinary improvement: more orderly campuses with clearer, more consistent norms and expectations, and an increase in the use of restorative disciplinary practices.

Staff at Scan and Mann shared that their campuses felt safer and more orderly and they attributed that improvement to the processes they used to engage with the school climate, which resulted in clearer norms and expectations. As the co-lead of the CCT at Scan explained, "The thing that stands out the most to me is that it's a more orderly campus. … It feels safer because the common expectations are much clearer." As described in the School Policies and Practices Intended to Achieve School Goals section, Scan's CCT worked diligently to increase the consistency and fairness of Scan's disciplinary system. The CCT's analysis of data on teacher responses to classroom misbehaviors in the school's incident reporting system revealed that teachers (a) inconsistently responded to student behaviors and (b) inadequately documented responses to student behavior. As a result, CCT strategically pushed teachers to properly document how they responded to classroom incidents. CCT meeting agendas and notes indicated substantial improvement in documentation (from 13% during the 2021–22 school year to 70% by November 2022).

A member of Mann's Behavior Support Team shared a similar perception of the ways her school climate had improved. The member said:

> The schoolwide expectation lesson [was delivered through] a set of slides and lessons that were made by the [Behavior Support Team] for all staff … to use during the first week of school. Everyone was on the same page and that helped a lot. … The Transformation Team student survey [showed] that they [students] actually felt a lot safer at school.

Not only does the Behavior Support Team member point to greater clarity around schoolwide expectations, but she notes that data collected by the Transformation Team indicated improvements in student perceptions of school safety.

All three schools in our study noted that their analysis of school climate data resulted in more restorative disciplinary approaches. For example, the assistant principal at Mann shared:

> We're paying attention to what our response needs to be. … If a student is cursing in your classroom, that's not an automatic referral. That's a conversation with a child, [where the teacher would ask] "What's going on with you? What's happened? What can I do to help you?"

Here, the assistant principal describes a restorative line of questioning which not only helps the student reflect on their behavior, but also demonstrates the teacher's care for a student and prevents students from being removed from the classroom. Similarly, one of the co-leads at Scan described an evolution in the process used by the school to reengage a student after he or she had been involved in a situation that

caused harm to the school community. As she said, "…that system has become more restorative, where the students are asked to do some sort of assignment or some sort of service related to the behavior that they exhibited." The assistant principal at Los Osos shared that her staff has been focused on using more positive language with students. As she explained:

> We've seen some positive differences in using common language for our students; when we're talking to students and correcting behavior, [we are trying] to say it in a positive way. Rather than [saying] "Stop hitting, stop kicking," [we'll say] "Safe hands, be safe."

Accountability Measures and Practical Measures

As described in school profiles, the schools in this study drew upon several types of data to understand and improve upon their school climate. These include large-scale climate survey data, administrative data, and in-house data sources such as student focus groups and school-developed surveys. For schools, large-scale surveys work well for diagnostic purposes, allowing schools to identify areas of improvement, but they are limited with respect to assessing the effectiveness of interventions. Large-scale surveys are typically administered only once a year, which does not allow schools to assess the effectiveness of the strategies and improve upon them. Additionally, it can take time for efforts to improve school climate to pay off. As a result, schools might not see significant improvements in their survey data from one year to the next, even if their school climates are improving. For these reasons, the fact that schools did not see notable improvements in their survey data does not necessarily mean that their school climates are not improving.

Schools need access to measures that can be administered frequently, are specific to their context, and are targeted to the specific strategies they implement. Researchers refer to these types of data sources as *practical measures*. Practical measures allow for the direct assessment of outcomes that may not be included on large-scale surveys but are crucial for specific school contexts.[36] For example, a practical measure would allow school staff to answer such questions about the impact and effectiveness of their implemented strategies as: Which students are benefiting most from a new discipline referral system? How many students are participating in enrichment activities and does that number change throughout the year? Practical measures that allow examination of these types of topics can be assessed frequently, facilitating the ongoing refinement of practices in response to data. Examples of practical measures include the teachers' documentation of responses to student misbehavior which were tracked by Scan's CCT and the survey measures developed by Mann's Transformation Team to assess students' exposure to welcoming and inclusive practices in their classrooms. School staff reported improvements on several practical measures.

In sum, though schools did not generally see improvements on their large-scale climate data, staff reported that engaging with their school climate data resulted in increased student engagement, attendance, and leadership; greater collaboration among educators; and improved disciplinary culture. Administrative and school-level data sources (e.g., school-developed surveys, engagement data collected by Scan's CCT) often, but not always, corroborated these staff perceptions. Together, these findings suggest that the robust efforts to engage with school climate contributed to tangible benefits experienced by staff and students at these schools.

Factors That Challenge and Enable School Efforts

It takes substantial effort and expertise to collect, analyze, and use school climate data to design policies and initiatives that improve school climate for all students.[37] This section describes the challenges that schools face as they use their data as well as the conditions and supports that facilitate their work with climate data.

Challenges to Using School Climate Data

There are three main challenges that schools face when using school climate data to inform climate improvements. These are insufficient time and capacity, limitations of the survey data, and biases that interfere with understanding school climate data.

Insufficient Time and Capacity

School staff often lack sufficient time and capacity to engage deeply in school climate data work and to develop the skills and expertise to do this work effectively. The teachers, counselors, and administrators who lead school climate teams are often juggling many responsibilities and taking on additional workstreams due to staff shortages. The assistant principal at Los Osos, who advises the Student Senate, explained that she is "constantly going in so many directions," such as covering for shortages of paraprofessional educators, which pulls her away from school climate work. In addition, school staff rarely receive release time for school climate data work. "I don't have an extra prep period or a 25th hour of the day to do in-depth stuff with [school climate data]," said the math teacher who leads Mann's Transformation Team, which administers and analyzes the school's climate survey data. He says the team meets once a month before the school day begins, with staff sometimes joining the meeting as they commute or missing the meeting due to scheduling conflicts. The team has also lost members, leaving those remaining with even more to do.

School staff often lack sufficient time and capacity to engage deeply in school climate data work.

School climate teams also have limited time to incorporate input from the broader staff and student body into their work, because to do so they need to use limited staff professional development time or pull students out of class. "We don't have a lot of time with staff … because our contract limits how much professional learning we can do with staff," said the principal of Scan. Though Fresno Unified offers two Climate and Culture Summits each year, which provide CCTs time to come together for a deep dive into their survey results, the time available for Scan's CCT to share their learning with the entire school staff is more limited. At one professional development session, Scan staff only had a few minutes to look at the data before it was time to discuss school climate goals and strategies. The short review time restricted how deeply the data was considered before using it to inform school policies and initiatives.

In some cases, the short timeframe between when schools administer their own climate surveys and when they need to finalize their goals for the next school year limits the extent to which they can use the data to inform school initiatives. For example, Mann's Transformation Team administers two student perception surveys, one in the fall and the other in the spring. The spring survey is given near the end of the school year. The team lead created a slide deck with the survey results and invited staff to share

written reflections, but, with the tight timing and the heavy workload of teachers as the school year closes, found that it was difficult for staff to deeply consider how these reflections could inform their current practice or plans for the next school year.

Overall, the challenge of limited time and capacity can lead to rushed data analysis and limited opportunities for staff and student input, undermining the goal of using the data to inform school climate practices and policies.

Limitations in Survey Data and Data Reports

While the schools in this case study referenced a range of data to understand and improve school climate, they relied most heavily on student survey data. To make sound inferences about school climate using survey data, schools must have access to survey data that are valid and reliable. The surveys used by these schools test to ensure that the questions are interpreted similarly by respondents from different backgrounds and, in the case of students, different age groups and reading levels. Sometimes, though, factors beyond the survey tool's design can limit schools' ability to use the data to inform schoolwide improvements; these may include low response rates, survey fatigue, and report format limits.

Low response rates impact how useful the data are for schools, a challenge that especially impacts the use of parent/guardian surveys. Across the three school sites, less than half of parents and guardians participated in the surveys. There are many reasons why guardians may not take the survey. For example, Mann's parent survey is offered in only eight of the 12 languages spoken by school families, and some families struggle to take the survey due to limited technology access. These types of accessibility issues were present at all three schools. Because the group of parents who take the survey is likely different from the population of parents who do not take it, the generalizability of the survey data is limited. As a result, none of the schools spent much time using the data from the parent/guardian survey. In addition, while schools dedicate class time for students to fill in the survey, student response rates may be a challenge for schools struggling with chronic student absenteeism. For example, Mann Middle School used to administer its student perception surveys during advisory classes, but response rates were low (about a third of students responding) due to low advisory attendance. After they made a change to conduct the survey during math class, the student response rate doubled.

Survey fatigue can also harm the reliability of survey data. At Los Osos, students shared that the YouthTruth Survey is lengthy and takes them up to an hour to complete, which can feel burdensome to middle school students. Student senators at Los Osos also told us that the surveys "look like a test," and some students respond by skipping questions or answering all the survey items with the same response. These responses create noise in the survey results, which leads to interpretation challenges. The superintendent of San Luis Coastal mentioned that it could be frustrating for his team to understand the school climate data, because "It's like some years we're up, some years we're down." He noted that, at times, certain survey results did not feel like reliable indicators of school and district climate.

Data report formats can limit the comparative potential of survey results. Report formats may limit the extent to which schools consider how groups of students may experience school climate differently. While schools can see a full range of disaggregated survey results on data platforms, disaggregated data are not always included in the PDF versions of data reports that are widely shared with staff. For example, the PDF version of the YouthTruth Survey report shared by Los Osos disaggregated responses only by

grade level; Fresno's Climate and Culture Survey PDF reports did not contain any disaggregations. As a result, staff discussions of data often lacked an equity focus and considerations for factors that may be driving variations in students' school experiences. In addition, the data reports of YouthTruth and Fresno's Climate and Culture survey place the school's survey results alongside state-level and district-level results, respectively. This led school teams to compare their school's data with those of the district and state when identifying areas for improvement, though they had little guidance about how to make appropriate comparisons, such as accounting for contextual differences across schools.

Both YouthTruth and Fresno's C&C survey reports also display how survey results have changed over time. However, research suggests that such comparisons may result in inaccurate conclusions due to mismatched comparisons that commonly occur with this type of data.[38] This is an issue particularly when comparing survey responses from different years, as a whole grade of students enter and leave the school each year.

The assistant principal of Los Osos realized the challenges of interpreting the data when she gave a group of students a 10-question survey in which one of the questions was printed twice by mistake. She was surprised to find that a number of students provided different responses to that exact same question, which points to the difficulty of dealing with "noise" in survey data. Noise refers to random errors (caused, for example, by inconsistent responses) that obscure the true pattern in the data, making it harder to interpret the actual opinions of respondents, especially when sample sizes are small.

Human Bias and Perception

Two forms of bias presented challenges to schools' use of climate data: the perception that improving school climate comes at the expense of academic outcomes, and the selective interpretation of the data by individuals.

Insufficient Buy-In for School Climate Efforts. Interview participants at all three case study sites, at both the school and district levels, shared that there is a misperception that working to improve school climate can supplant, rather than support, academic outcomes. For example, when Mann's principal focused on school climate as a schoolwide goal, she received pushback from the school community. "We were questioned … because it was not an academic goal," said the principal. The district counselor in San Diego Unified also shared that they experienced pushback on their school climate efforts because of pressure that schools feel about academic progress. The counselor said:

> They need these kids to pass … and every minute a counselor comes into a class is one more minute where the kid isn't getting ready for state testing … without understanding that … if a kid isn't functioning very well, they're not going to be able to learn what you're teaching them anyway.

If school staff members perceive that school climate work interferes with academic goals, it could undermine their participation and support for school climate efforts.

Selective Interpretation of Data. When analyzing data, school staff generally browse through data reports and dashboards and note results that stand out to them. As such, biases in data interpretation could influence key takeaways from the data. During our study, researchers noted instances where school staff dismissed survey results because the data did not resonate with their own experiences and perceptions. For example, upon seeing that student ratings of "Adults in my school seem to enjoy being here" were low during a professional development session, some teachers expressed that the findings did not apply

to them because they themselves were "always joyful." In another instance, teachers expressed that negative school climate survey ratings were driven by just a small number of disruptive students. Such subjective interpretations can lead teachers to dismiss the survey data instead of considering how it could inform school initiatives and policies that better meet the needs of students.

Enabling Factors That Support Use of School Climate Data

Several enabling factors at the school and district levels were instrumental to schools' climate data work. These include dedicated leadership, district support for school-level climate analysis and strategic planning, and technical assistance from external partners.

Dedicated Leadership

Sustained and robust school climate work requires dedicated leadership at the school and district levels that prioritizes school climate, allocates resources to support school climate work, and invests in multiple forms of data collection to support a comprehensive understanding of school climate.

Prioritizing School Climate. Administrators at all three schools and their districts saw a positive school climate as foundational to learning and then set goals and dedicated resources accordingly. In her first year at Mann, the principal placed school climate at the center of schoolwide goals. She emphasized that if students "don't feel welcome and [they] don't feel safe … there is no learning taking place." The principal made creating a safe and collaborative learning environment and reducing rates of chronic absenteeism and suspension her priorities; this led Mann's school climate teams to focus on cultivating welcoming and inclusive learning environments.

At the district level, the superintendent at San Luis Coastal Unified also drove discussions about school climate and encouraged the use of data to inform learning and continuous improvement. The superintendent led district and school personnel to create "intentionally inclusive environments through great instruction, engagement, and relationships with kids and parents" by seeking feedback from key groups, such as the student senators and parents, throughout the school year, to learn what was "important or lacking" in their district. Those areas were then identified as priorities in the district's long-term strategic plan, the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP).

Allocating Resources. School and district leaders increased the capacity of school climate teams when they invested resources and time toward school climate work. Scan's principal allocated funding from the school budget, on top of district funding, to increase the capacity of the school's Climate and Culture Team, enabling the school to have a larger team and to include staff from a range of positions, including teachers, counselors, administrators, and district support staff. In addition, the principal granted release time for the CCT lead to manage the team and allocated half of the school's monthly staff professional development sessions toward school climate efforts.[39]

Investing in Supplemental Data Collection. School leaders at all three schools incorporated some form of data collection that supplemented districtwide school climate surveys. The smaller scale of these data collection efforts allowed schools to administer them more frequently and to tailor them to specific school needs. The supplemental data included short surveys for students and staff, focus groups with students and staff, and classroom observations focusing on teacher–student interactions. For example, Mann Middle School sends Google form surveys to staff every 6 weeks to document the frequency at which

teachers incorporated positive learning interactions in their classes. The school also administers a student perception survey twice a year to assess the efficacy of school climate strategies and practices. All three schools also conducted focus groups to gain a deeper understanding of what may be driving school climate data trends. Focus groups also served as a space for school staff to solicit input for improving school climate from students and staff. Finally, classroom observations were helpful for providing feedback for individual teachers and identifying areas of improvement overall. At Scan, observation data revealed that student engagement was particularly low in the period immediately after lunch, prompting school administrators to adjust the class schedule to encourage engagement.

District Support for School-Level Climate Analysis and Strategic Planning

At all three case study sites, districts played a key role in leading and supporting schools in using climate data. They did so through improving data quality and establishing structures and systems for school climate work.

Improving Data. Districts facilitated schools' use of school climate data by selecting high-quality surveys that provide schools with the information they need in a digestible format. Districts assessed the length and accessibility of surveys for students representing a wide range of ages, linguistic backgrounds, and cultural differences.

For example, Fresno Unified embarked on a robust process to improve its districtwide climate survey. This included contracting survey specialists at Hanover Research and recruiting a 30-person committee made up of district management, school leadership, and teachers. The revised surveys are shorter, taking about 30 minutes to complete, and survey items are tailored to schools' needs, as described by the committee. Fresno also decided to administer the surveys twice annually so that schools could gauge whether their school climate efforts made a difference over the course of the school year. Fresno also switched to an electronic survey, which allowed the district to conduct live tracking of survey response rates and provide support to schools with low response rates. The district data team also provided incentives and prizes for students, staff, and parents/guardians to complete the survey to boost response rates. Upon switching to electronic data collection, Fresno was able to provide schools with data reports within a week after the survey window closed, which allowed schools more time to digest and use the data.

Establishing Structures and Support Systems. The schools in this study resided in districts with infrastructure and systems to support school-level use of data. These systems linked district-level personnel with school site teams dedicated to school climate, such as the Culture and Climate Teams at Fresno Unified, the student senate at San Luis Coastal Unified, and the Counseling Teams at San Diego Unified. Districts compensated non-administrative staff on school climate teams and set standards for what is expected of them. For example, Fresno Unified has an implementation rubric to guide the CCTs' work. The rubric contains 20 different elements that fall under three broad categories:

Districts compensated non-administrative staff on school climate teams and set standards for what is expected of them.

1. Creating and Sustaining a Proactive Climate and Culture Team (e.g., Team Purpose, Admin Support);
2. Creating and Sustaining Proactive Schoolwide Conditions (e.g., Positive Relationships and Interactions, Responding to Misbehavior); and

3. Creating and Sustaining Proactive Classroom Conditions (e.g., Setting Classroom Conditions and Social-Emotional Learning).

CCTs across the district utilize the rubric to set goals and report their progress toward these goals. As a member of the Culture and Climate Team at Scan explained, the rubric helps schools comprehend how site-level work should look. The member said:

> I think a lot of people [on the CCT team] don't really have an understanding of what actions we even have to choose from. And for me the rubric very much so lays out: These are the things that you should be doing.

In some cases, districts also structured school climate teams to incorporate multiple perspectives in school climate decision-making. According to San Diego's instructional coordinator for Mann Middle School:

> You want everybody's voice in there, because as many voices as possible, those most impacted, most involved, basically. Everybody who's going to be living this and watching this and going to be implementing what we're coming up with, you want to have a voice in it so that you feel a part of it and have buy-in.

These structures help ensure that the opinions and feedback from members of the school community are considered in school decision-making, ultimately developing a school culture where all voices are heard. Through San Luis Coastal's sustained investment in its student senate, student input has become an integral part of school and district decision-making. "How [schools] work with the kids. … It's something that is spread throughout the culture of the school district," observed a YouthTruth staff.

Finally, districts played an important role in facilitating opportunities for interschool learning. For example, the student senators from each school in San Luis Coastal meet regularly to analyze data together and provide feedback to each other. Fresno Unified also organizes a full-day summit twice a year for school Culture and Climate Teams to workshop goal setting for their school sites and discuss methods for measuring success against those goals.

Technical Assistance From External Partners

School climate data collection and analysis is labor intensive and technical. All three school sites and their districts rely on support from external partners that specialize in school climate measurement. Districts hire the external partners, who provide a range of supports, including the provision of survey instruments, platforms for data collection and results display, and data reports; technical assistance for data collection and analysis; and trainings for school and district leaders, staff, and students. The strong partnerships in place in San Luis Coastal Unified illustrate how external partners can support and facilitate the use of school climate data.

The primary partner that supports school climate work in San Luis Coastal Unified is YouthTruth. "The goal of our partnership is … to create… spaces where students feel a sense of agency, they feel like they can be leaders and … make data-driven decisions to impact their school," said YouthTruth's senior manager of partnerships. YouthTruth staff supports school and district leaders as well as student senators in analyzing the data. The district has adopted YouthTruth's suite of products and services, including school

climate surveys, online access to the survey data platform, tools and resources to support school action planning, and ongoing training for students and district and school leaders. In addition, YouthTruth also participates in presentations to the school board and family members to share survey results.

San Luis Coastal also utilized external partners for data analysis. For example, the district collaborated with an external consultant to analyze results from the California Healthy Kids Survey in order to look specifically at the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students and better understand disparities in perceptions of safety, belonging, and well-being for this group of students. The consultant used his analysis to inform professional development sessions for school counselors and psychologists to better support sexual and gender minority students and their families.

External partners can also support school-level work. For example, San Luis Coastal contracted with Cultural Creations Collaborative, which supports schools to create racially and culturally inclusive environments that promote belonging. At Los Osos, the consultants guided school staff to consider school climate data and improvement efforts through a racial equity lens. When leading schools in analyzing data, the consultants dedicated time for teachers to unpack their personal biases and reflect on how such biases may impact their data interpretation. The consultants also encouraged staff to consider how the survey data varies for different groups of students. Because fair discipline was one of the school's goals, the consultants also worked with Los Osos teachers to redesign the school's behavior matrix to be more equitable. They led teachers to discuss the implications behind behavioral expectations. "What does the quiet voice mean? That could be very different from a student who has a big family and [needs to speak up] to be heard," one consultant explained. With the support of the consultants, Los Osos teachers were able to reach a consensus on new norms for student behavior.

San Luis Coastal's partnership with external organizations shows how districts can leverage the expertise of partners to select survey tools, train staff and students, collect data, and analyze survey results to provide a deeper understanding of the diverse needs of students, ultimately enabling schools to use data more effectively to improve their climate.

Conclusion

A deepening understanding of the foundational role that the school environment plays in supporting student learning, development, and well-being has led to an increased interest in school climate reform across the country. The science of learning and development, which draws on research from the fields of neuroscience, psychology, and other developmental and learning sciences, suggests that positive school environments are crucial for facilitating school support of students' psychological, cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development.[40] A substantial body of research links positive school climate to important outcomes for teachers and schools, including teacher job satisfaction and retention and student academic achievement.[41]

The primary role of school climate in supporting student development and growth necessitates that schools assess their climate's health to inform improvement efforts. This case study provides examples of schools that are using robust practices to engage with climate data for school improvement.

Findings

Below, we summarize key findings about the types of systems and supports that facilitate schools' use of climate data, the data-informed changes that schools are making to policy and practice, and the conditions and factors that facilitate or hinder schools' data use.

- **Setting goals and priorities from their climate data enabled these schools to improve the experiences of students.** The schools in this study use school climate data to develop their goals and priorities. This is evident in their School Plans for Student Achievement, which are influenced by districtwide strategic planning, as described in Local Control and Accountability Plans. Additionally, each of the schools use climate data to inform additional school goals, which are a driving force behind practices and policies related to discipline policy, student engagement, and strategies to make school environments welcoming and inclusive.

- **School staff reported that the use of school climate data helped to increase student engagement, attendance, and leadership, and to support collaboration among educators.** Though schools did not see immediate or notable improvement in their large-scale school climate survey results, school staff perceived several benefits of engaging with their climate data, including increased student engagement, attendance, and leadership, and greater collaboration among educators. Many of these benefits were captured using practical measures from schools' data sources, such as school-developed surveys, incident reporting, and tracking student participation in school enrichment activities.

- **School climate data supported changes to these schools' discipline systems.** All three schools in this study drew upon school climate data to inform strategies used to improve their discipline systems. For example, the Climate and Culture Team at Scan launched school discipline changes based on an analysis of data that indicated that some students at Scan felt they were not treated fairly. Schools initiated discipline-related strategies such as revisions to incident reporting systems, professional development for teachers focused on restorative classroom management and

relationship building, and changes to schoolwide behavioral expectations. This suggests that school climate data were especially important for informing school efforts to implement discipline systems that contributed to positive school climates.

- **Using multiple data sources, including site-specific data sources, helped schools better understand their school climate and inform strategic planning.** Each of the schools in this study supplemented large-scale districtwide climate surveys with additional data sources to inform their climate improvement strategies. These data sources included input gathered from student focus groups, student attendance and engagement data, behavior referral data, and site-specific surveys developed by school climate teams for in-house use. While large-scale, districtwide climate surveys provide diagnostic information about school member perceptions of school climate, they do not shed light on why school members perceive the school's climate as they do. Schools have to rely on a larger portfolio of data to better understand what is driving their diagnostic large-scale survey results. By drawing on varied sources of climate data, which assess multiple dimensions of school climate, these schools were able to develop a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of their environments.

- **Collaboration among school leaders, teachers, and students improved buy-in, demonstrated administrator interest in educator and student perspectives, and created leadership opportunities for students.** While the explicit purpose of the processes used by schools to engage with their climate data is to make data-informed decisions that improve conditions for students, these processes can benefit schools in additional ways. Many of the processes are designed to include and, in some cases, center teacher and student perspectives. Staff reported that inclusive practices like these increased teacher and student investment in their schools and in efforts to improve their school climate. These processes also send a clear message to educators and students that their perspectives matter to school leadership, which may in and of itself contribute to a positive school climate. In some cases, the processes used by schools, such as the Los Osos Middle School student senate's leadership of the school's engagement with climate data, are designed to develop student agency and leadership skills; these can also positively influence school climate. The processes that schools use to engage with their climate data lead to myriad benefits, suggesting that the school processes derived from climate data may be as important as the data itself.

- **Survey design and management influenced school engagement with climate data.** Findings suggest that schools' engagement and use of climate data are strengthened when:

  - *Surveys are designed to be accessible, short, and engaging.* Some students reported that both the look and the length of districtwide climate surveys could undermine student engagement. Students shared that districtwide climate surveys "look like a test" and that their peers skipped items because the survey was too long, which hindered the schools' ability to interpret results. Schools also reported the inability of caregivers to access online surveys or to take the survey in their native language, which resulted in such low response rates that the data were not representative enough to be usable.

- *The schedule of survey administration allows educators and other interest holders sufficient time to analyze data and use it to inform climate improvement practices.* The timing of districtwide surveys influences the depth to which schools can analyze data and seek input from the school community. This can also be true for surveys that schools develop to supplement districtwide data collection. For example, Mann struggled to utilize results from a school-developed student survey because it was administered too close to the end of the school year.

- *Climate survey reports are disaggregated by student groups.* While schools can see results that are disaggregated by student groups on data platforms, these data are not always included in PDF versions of data reports that are shared widely with staff. This limited the extent to which school staff could consider how student groups experience school climate differently.

- *Schools set aside structured time for examining and discussing survey results with various groups.* Staff members at schools in this study reported that their ambitious plans for engaging with school data were limited by the reality of what their time and capacity allowed for. For example, school teams sometimes struggled to find time for staff and students outside their teams to explore climate data. Often, this happened in short time intervals during a professional development session where it would be nearly impossible to make meaning of the amount of data that was shared. In some cases, this resulted in rushed or surface-level analytic processes.

- *District- and school-level personnel have ownership over the process.* Assigning school climate work to particular people and locating it within specific processes and structures ensured that the work would progress. District-developed systems (e.g., climate teams, interschool professional learning communities) and personnel were important for advancing data-informed climate work. Additionally, each school located its school climate work within a team that met regularly to develop school goals, interpret climate data, and plan strategies for climate improvement.

- *School capacity is bolstered by external support.* Schools in this study benefited from technical assistance provided by districts and external partners for data collection, reporting, and analysis. Districts and external partners provided several types of services and supports that made staff members' use of climate data more productive. Assistance included such tasks as revisions to climate surveys, the provision of customized data reports, technical assistance for data collection and analysis, and interschool professional learning communities. These types of supports and services by districts and external partners helped schools overcome barriers such as limited time and lack of experience with data analysis.

Implications for States, Districts, and Schools

The school environment plays a primary role in students' growth and development. Schools must use tools to assess the climate of their environment in order to improve it. This priority is reinforced by federal and state policies, such as the Every Student Succeeds Act and California's adoption of the Local Control

and Accountability Plan process, that emphasize the importance of multiple measures of achievement that include school climate. Findings from this study elevate key considerations that inform how states, districts, and schools can support the effective use of climate data to improve school environments.

- **States can encourage or require LEAs to administer school climate surveys and integrate disaggregated results into reporting and continuous improvement systems.** California has established some essential building blocks that allow schools in the state to learn from school climate data. The state requires LEAs to administer school climate surveys annually[42] and to report results as part of their Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs) and the California School Dashboard. Other states should consider implementing similar policies so that districts and schools have the baseline systems in place to support climate improvement. In addition, state-level systems can do more to support the use of disaggregated climate data. Research documents that students from marginalized groups have the most to gain from positive school climate and that these students tend to perceive school environments more negatively than their peers.[43] However, findings from this study indicate that schools do not systematically or consistently make use of disaggregated climate data. States can support disaggregated data use by requiring LEAs to draw on disaggregated climate outcomes in their strategic plans and to report on disaggregated climate outcomes on public data dashboards.

- **Districts can structure data collection timing to increase utility.** Findings from this study suggest that data use was limited by the schedule for collecting survey data. Districts can maximize the usefulness of school climate data by modifying the schedule for data collection to ensure that schools receive climate survey results on a timeline that leaves them sufficient time to analyze their data and use it to inform strategic planning and climate improvement practices.

- **Investments in professional learning and collaboration time can build the capacity of schools to use their climate data.** Meaningful engagement with school climate data is time-intensive, skilled work and all three schools in this study reported that limited staff capacity restricted their ability to utilize school climate data effectively. States, districts, and schools can use resources strategically to build staff capacity. States can consider investments that support district and school capacity for using climate data, such as continuing California's investment in a long-term partnership with WestEd that has resulted in the development of the California School Climate, Health, and Learning Survey System, a climate survey system used widely across the state, and the California Center for School Climate, which provides professional learning and technical assistance for California LEAs. Districts can consider providing professional learning opportunities focused on data analysis and using data to inform school climate practices and policies. Lastly, districts and schools can promote policies and systems to encourage greater collaboration among staff in schools, such as revised calendars and schedules and compensation for staff who participate in school-based climate teams.

- **States and districts can support the engagement of students, staff, and families in school climate data use.** Schools in this study reported that including staff and students in school climate work created opportunities for shared leadership and increased the overall investment of school community members in efforts to improve school climate. Districts can support the engagement of students, staff, and families by developing school climate work structures and teams that encourage the participation of various school constituents. Additionally, states and districts can support schools

by communicating the benefits of engaging various members of the school community in their data use processes and encouraging school leaders to adopt practices for sharing climate data with students, staff, and families.

- **District- and school-level tools to assess school climate can be designed and utilized in complementary ways.** Districtwide surveys and school-developed measures are intended for different purposes and are therefore most effectively utilized at different stages of the school improvement process. While large-scale surveys work well to diagnose problem areas at schools, they may not be ideal tools for schools to assess the effectiveness of newly implemented strategies and interventions. Typically, large-scale climate surveys measure perceptions of school climate, and school-developed tools assess the presence of/students' exposure to various school practices. Though schools in this study drew on multiple sources of climate data, including districtwide climate surveys, student focus groups and school-developed teacher surveys, they would have benefited from additional guidance on the purpose and utility of various data sources as well as on how multiple data sources can complement one another to support a holistic picture of school climate and to inform the school improvement process. States and districts can support schools through communication about when to use different data sources and how to develop practical, school-level climate measures that meet their specific needs and allow them to evaluate and improve upon the climate interventions they have put into place.

The increased recognition of the importance of school climate raises important questions for district and school leaders about systems and supports that facilitate data use, the processes that can be used to interpret climate data, and the ways that climate data can inform school improvement. This study broadens the scarce research on school climate data use and elevates findings that can inform the effective use of climate data at multiple levels of the education system.

Appendix A: Methodology

This case study provides rich examples of schools that use data-informed approaches to improve their school climate. It investigates the types of data that schools use to understand their school climate, the processes that schools use to interpret climate data, and the changes that schools made to policy and practice to improve their climates. Additionally, the study examines the challenges that schools faced as they engaged in data interpretation and use and the enabling conditions that supported them. Findings from this study are intended to help policymakers and practitioners at multiple levels of the education system understand how to support the use of effective climate data.

Key Inquiries Guiding Our Study

The study focused on the following research questions:

1. What climate data do schools collect?
    - What motivates climate data collection?
    - How frequently and when are school climate data collected?
    - Which survey instruments are used and why?
        - Who is surveyed?
        - What roles do different personnel play (site or district admin/staff, students, partners, etc.) in collecting climate survey data?
    - What challenges are encountered in data collection, and how are those barriers overcome?
    - What changes have been made in data collection methods or survey items over the years, and what prompted those changes?
2. How do schools interpret their school climate data?
    - How frequently and in what spaces is school climate data reviewed?
    - What roles do different school actors (site or district admin/staff, students, partners, etc.) play in organizing and interpreting school climate data?
    - When and in what formats are data presented to schools/districts?
    - What aspects of the data reports are most helpful in identifying improvement actions to take?
    - What limitations do schools encounter with districtwide survey data?
    - What challenges do schools encounter in reviewing and understanding climate data, and how do they overcome those barriers?
    - In addition to districtwide survey data, what other data do schools use to understand their school climate?

3. How do schools use climate data to inform school improvement efforts?
    - How are climate-related initiatives implemented?
    - What roles do different personnel play (site or district admin/staff, students, partners, etc.) in making changes based on school climate data? Who are the decision-makers and whose buy-in is critical?
    - What challenges are encountered when action is taken to improve school climate, and how are these overcome?
    - How, if at all, do schools track and measure the impact of climate improvement efforts?
4. How do various supports and conditions enable schools to use school climate data to inform change?
    - What skills, knowledge, and dispositions contribute to the utilization of school climate data?
    - What training and/or supports help schools utilize school climate data for improvement?
    - What district or external partner policies/practices/systems enable data use?
    - What additional supports/conditions would help schools use their data more effectively?

Selection of Schools to Study

Because this study is focused on how schools approach interpretation and use of school climate data, the research team located the study in California, a state that has prioritized school climate assessment through its implementation of several policies. These include the 2013 adoption of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), a funding reform which reallocates state funding to local educational agencies (LEAs) based on their proportion of "high needs" students. The LCFF system requires that LEAs develop Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs), three-year strategic plans that articulate LEA goals, attendant strategies, and expenditures. The LCAP process is supported by the California School Dashboard, a publicly available set of data that incorporates multiple state and local measures that LEAs are required to use to inform their LCAP. All three of these systems—the LCFF, the LCAP, and the Dashboard—are designed around California's 10 state priorities, one of which is school climate.

In addition to these state policies, California's School Board of Education mandates that LEAs administer a school climate survey at least once every other year to a grade span served by the LEA (e.g., 6–8, 9–12); use climate surveys that include measures of school connectedness and school safety; and publicly report school climate results through the Dashboard and governing board meetings. These state policies, which promote the use of school climate data, make California a desirable context for this study.

This study sought to provide rich examples of the processes that schools use to collect and interpret school climate data, the data-informed changes that schools enact, and the factors that facilitate or impede schools' use of data. In identifying schools to participate in the study, the research team looked for schools that utilize robust data use practices and that serve substantial populations of students who are disproportionately impacted by negative climates, including students of color, students with disabilities,

and students from low-income families. We prioritized middle schools (grades 6–8) in our site selection process because research suggests that positive school climate is especially important for middle school students and is associated with higher levels of student achievement and lower rates of expulsion and suspension.[44] Additionally, the research team sought to include schools that engaged with varied types of districtwide climate surveys. To identify schools that met these criteria, the team conducted informational interviews with experts in the field (e.g., technical assistance providers, survey developers) and consulted publications written about districts and schools throughout the state because of their data use practices. The team triangulated what we learned through this process with publicly available school demographic, engagement, and out-of-school suspension data to ensure that our schools were varied in demographics while similarly focusing on school climate priorities. This process led the team to select Los Osos Middle School (San Luis Coastal Unified), Scandinavian Middle School (Fresno Unified), and Mann Middle School (San Diego Unified). In addition to serving school populations that are disproportionately affected by negative school climates, these three schools utilize distinct districtwide climate studies and engage in robust and varied school-level data use practices. The variety of instruments and strategies utilized by these schools maximizes the potential to learn about a range of practices that support climate data use.

A three-person research team utilized a multiple case study approach[45] to answer the study's research questions. Our study focuses on the ways that schools utilize climate data to inform practice, a phenomenon that is best examined within its institutional, political, and social context. This made our study well-suited for a case study approach, which allows researchers to investigate a phenomenon as it is situated within real-life complexities and dynamics. Utilizing a case study approach also allows for an examination of processes and systems, enabling our research team to explore the "how" questions that guide our study.

Data Collection

Data collection for this study took place between December 2022 and June 2023. Data collection was conducted virtually and through site visits to two of the three schools included in the study. When conducting case studies, researchers typically draw upon multiple data sources to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the central research topics.[46] Data sources for this study included interviews and focus groups, observations, documents, and publicly available administrative records.

Interviews and Focus Groups

The researchers conducted a total of 34 interviews and focus groups with key constituents (see Table A1). At school sites, we conducted interviews with school administrators, teachers, and other school staff (e.g., counselor, librarian) who either led or were involved in school climate work. In two of our three school sites, we also conducted focus groups with students to better understand the practices in place at their school to use school climate data. We did not conduct student focus groups at one school because we were unable to visit the school in person, due to scheduling conflicts. Additionally, we interviewed district leaders and staff to understand the systems and supports in place at the district level intended to facilitate schools' use of climate data. Because each of the schools was situated in a district that partnered with external organizations that provided surveys, support for data collection, and technical assistance, we also conducted interviews with staff of these organizations to better understand their roles and the services they provide.

Table A1. Interviews Conducted

Role	Number of interviews/focus groups
External partner	4 interviews
District staff	11 interviews
School admin	6 interviews
Teacher	7 interviews
Other school staff	4 interviews
Student	2 focus groups
Total	**34**

Source: Learning Policy Institute. (2024).

To identify interviewees, the research team engaged in varied recruitment processes. Administrators, district leaders, and external partners were identified and recruited by the researchers. The researchers also requested school administrators and district leaders for referrals to interview school and district staff because these leaders knew who was involved in their school's and district's use of climate data and the systems in place to support school-level climate work. Students were identified and recruited to participate in focus groups at the two school sites that we visited. At Los Osos Middle School, the research team worked with school administrators and staff to organize a focus group with 8th-grade student senate members. The research team selected 8th-grade students because they are likely to have been part of the student senate for a longer period, as students usually join the student senate in 6th grade and continue in grades 7 and 8. At Scandinavian Middle School (Scan), the teacher leading the school's Culture and Climate Team (CCT) invited seven 8th-grade students to participate in a focus group interview. The teacher selected students who were of different racial/ethnic backgrounds and levels of school engagement and leadership, so that a range of student voices could be represented in the data collected. Scan's CCT lead also invited teachers to participate in a focus group about the school's climate data use. The teachers selected were not CCT members, taught different subjects, and had varying years of experience at the school.

Interviews with school staff, teachers, and administrators included questions about how they conceptualize school climate; the types of climate data that schools use; approaches that school staff use to interpret school climate data; and practices and policies that staff have implemented at their school sites in response to climate data. Researchers also asked school staff to describe challenges related to using climate data and supports/conditions that facilitate climate data use. Student focus groups focused on student perceptions of school climate; their involvement in analyzing school climate data; and their participation in selecting and implementing strategies for achieving school climate goals. District staff interviews were focused on the structures and systems that districts have implemented to support schools to use their climate data. Lastly, interviews with external partners were designed to understand their role in supporting survey development, data collection, and technical assistance for districts and schools.

Interviews and focus groups were semistructured and lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Some interviews were conducted virtually, and others were conducted in person during site visits to schools and districts. With permission from participants, all interviews and focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed.

Observation

The research team observed approximately 10 hours of school and district events and activities at case study sites. Due to scheduling challenges, the researchers were able to visit only two of our school sites in person, but the researchers were able to observe school activities virtually at the site we did not visit. Researchers observed a variety of activities, including lunch periods, professional learning sessions, and school climate team meetings. Additionally, the research team observed an all-day district-level meeting at San Luis Coastal Unified, which gathered student climate teams from across the district. These observations provided insights into the school's instantiation of school climate practices and allowed researchers to triangulate data obtained from interviews, focus groups, and relevant documentation. Raw field notes were taken during observations and converted into narrative field notes shortly afterward (typically within 1–2 days of the observation).

Documents and Administrative Records

In addition to interviews and observation, researchers collected relevant school-level artifacts. These artifacts included materials and documents such as school climate team meeting agendas, professional development agendas and slide decks, documents outlining school climate goals, survey reports, school expectations, School Plans for Student Achievement, and behavior referral forms. These documents allowed researchers to better understand what they observed at school events and activities and provided a source of triangulation for information retrieved from interviews, focus groups, and observations.

Because the study also included a focus on district and external support for schools' use of climate data, the research team also amassed documents provided by districts and external partners such as Local Control and Accountability Plans, meeting agendas, school climate rubrics, professional learning plans, and fact sheets. Researchers reviewed these documents to better understand the role of districts and external partners in facilitating schools' use of data.

In addition to these documents, the research team accessed publicly available school-, district-, and state-level data on student demographics and student engagement and achievement outcomes.

Data Analysis

Researchers used a multistep process to analyze data. First, they created a preliminary codebook based on a review of relevant literature and the study's research questions. Researchers then independently analyzed and compared their code applications to create inter-rater reliability and to assess the clarity and utility of initial codes. Throughout this process, researchers deleted, added, and refined codes and code definitions to minimize redundancy and ensure that salient themes were captured.

Once the codebook was established, researchers uploaded all interview and focus group transcripts, observation notes, and relevant documentation into Dedoose, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software program, to facilitate the coding process. As the researchers coded the full data set,

they wrote several analytic memos focused on the study's research questions. The analytic memos described cross-case themes and processes related to school climate data collection and interpretation, data-informed changes made by schools to improve school climate, challenges faced by schools as they engaged in climate data use, and supports/conditions that enabled climate data use at the school level. In addition to cross-case memos, researchers wrote memos that described data use practices at each school site, including descriptions of district/external partner support for schools' use of climate data. Researcher memos noted data points that needed further clarification and follow-up data collection activities to be conducted with school staff and district/external partner staff. Researchers used the memos to draft outlines, which became the basis of this report.

Appendix B: Data Used to Assess School Climate

Table B1. School Climate Survey Tool Options

Type	Definition	Examples	Pros	Cons
Survey	Respondents rate their perceptions of school climate, typically on a Likert sliding scale or by selecting yes/no responses	Student, staff, and parent/guardian school climate surveys	Relatively cheap and easy to administer; allows data to be collected from a large number of respondents on a range of topics	Survey fatigue when there are too many surveys or questions, resulting in low response rates or increased response bias
Interviews and focus groups	An interviewer asks questions to prompt responses or discussion of school climate topics	Student and teacher focus groups	Provides nuanced understanding of school climate; identify causes of problems	Time and labor intensive; risk of response bias
Structured observations	Raters conduct observations of school or classroom climate using a standardized rubric	Classroom observations that note the extent to which teachers are using instructional practices that foster positive climates	Not subject to response bias	Risk of observer bias; time and labor intensive
Administrative data	Data that schools record and collect as part of their daily operations and management	Educational records such as student suspensions and student attendance data	Updated regularly; unbiased data; no additional time and cost as data are often already collected for reporting requirements	Errors in data entry; incomplete or inaccurate reporting of items

Source: Schweig, J., Hamilton, L.S., & Baker, G. (2019). *School and classroom climate measures: Considerations for use by state and local education leaders*. RAND.

Appendix C: Districtwide Climate Surveys

Table C1. California Healthy Kids Survey, Utilized by Mann Middle School

Constructs	Description	Number of items	Example items
Core module			
School performance, engagement, and supports			
Caring adults	The degree to which students feel they receive support and personal attention from their teachers	3	• There is a teacher or some other adult from my school who really cares about me.
High expectations	The degree to which adults in the school believe in and support students' success	3	• There is a teacher or some other adult from my school who tells me when I do a good job.
Meaningful participation	The extent to which students feel a sense of meaning and agency in school	5	• At school/When I participate in school, I do interesting activities.
School connectedness	The degree to which students feel a sense of belonging to their school	5	• I feel close to people at/from this school.
Academic motivation	The amount of effort students put toward their academic learning	4	• I try hard to make sure that I am good at my schoolwork.
Maintaining focus on schoolwork	The extent to which students feel they can focus on their schoolwork	1	• It is hard for me to stay focused when doing my schoolwork.
School boredom and value of school	The extent to which students feel that school is interesting and worth their time	2	• School is really boring.
Promotional of parental involvement	The degree to which schools encourage parent/guardian involvement in the school	3	• Teachers at this school communicate with parents about what students are expected to learn in class. • Parents feel welcome to participate at this school.

Constructs	Description	Number of items	Example items
Checking student progress	The extent to which school staff checks on how students are feeling	1	• A teacher or some other adult from my school checks on how I am feeling.
Quality of school physical environment	The extent to which the school is clean and tidy	1	• My school is usually clean and tidy.
Social and emotional health			
Chronic sadness, optimism, life satisfaction	Whether students experienced chronic sadness and satisfaction with their school, family, friendships, and self	7	• During the past 12 months, did you ever feel so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more that you stopped doing some usual activities?
Social-emotional distress	The extent to which students experience social-emotional distress, including being sad or easily irritated	5	• Over the past 30 days, how true do you feel these statements are about you? … I had a hard time relaxing.
School violence, victimization, and safety			
Perceived safety at school	Extent to which students feel safe at school	1	• How safe do you feel when you are at school?
Harassment	The extent to which students experienced harassment and bullying at school for various reasons	7	• During the past 12 months, how many times on school property were you harassed or bullied for any of the following reasons? (Your race, ethnicity, or national origin [in-school only]
School violence victimization	The extent to which students experienced various types of harassment and bullying at school	8	• During the past 12 months, how many times on school property have you … been pushed, shoved, slapped, hit, or kicked by someone who wasn't just kidding around?
School violence perpetration	The extent to which students conducted various types of harassment, bullying, and drug or weapon possession at school	5	• During the past 12 months, how many times on school property have you … been in a physical fight? … been offered, sold, or given an illegal drug?

Constructs	Description	Number of items	Example items
Threats and injuries with weapons at school, weapons possession	The frequency of student exposure to physical threat at school	3	• During the past 12 months, how many times on school property have you … been threatened or injured with a weapon (gun, knife, club, etc.)?
Behavioral health module			
Mental health supports			
Mental health perceptions	The frequency that students felt lonely	1	• In the past month, how often did you feel very lonely?
Availability of mental health supports at school	Whether an adult at school connected students to mental health supports	1	• In the past year, did an adult at school refer or connect you to a counselor or therapist outside of school to talk about your feelings?
Mental health awareness and help-seeking attitudes	Student attitudes toward seeking help from adults or peers when they feel sad, lonely, or depressed	6	• If I was very sad, stressed, lonely, or depressed … talking to an adult could help me feel better.
Mental health services usage	Extent to which students used mental health services and barriers preventing them from doing so	13	• In the past year, did you get help from a counselor or therapist when you needed it?
School promotion of mental health	The extent to which students feel that the school values their mental health and provides mental health supports	4	• How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement? … I have an adult at my school that I can talk to about my problems.

Notes: This table lists survey questions related to school climate but is not a complete list of all the questions in the survey. Technical details, such as information on their reliability and validity, can be found at https://calschls.org/docs/measurementstructurecalschls_final.pdf (Mahecha & Hanson, 2020).

Source: Calschls. (n.d.) *The surveys – California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS)*. WestEd for the California Department of Education.

Table C2. YouthTruth Survey, Utilized by Los Osos Middle School

Constructs	Description	Number of items	Example items
Student engagement	The degree to which students perceive themselves as engaged with their school and their education	9	• I enjoy school most of the time. • I take pride in my school work. • My teachers' expectations make me want to do my best.
Academic challenge	The degree to which students feel they are challenged by their coursework and teachers	10	• My teachers explain things in a way that I understand. • My teachers give me assignments that really help me learn. • Most of my teachers don't let people give up when the work gets hard.
School culture	The degree to which students believe that their school fosters a culture of respect and fairness	12	• Adults from my school treat students with respect. • Discipline in this school is fair. • I feel safe during school.
Belonging and peer collaboration	The degree to which students feel welcome at their school and have collaborative relationships with their classmates	5	• Most students are friendly to me. • I really feel like a part of my school's community. • I can usually be myself around other students.
Relationships	The degree to which students feel they receive support and personal attention from their teachers	7	• How many of your teachers try to understand what your life is like outside of school? • How many of your teachers believe that you can get a good grade if you try? • How many of your teachers are willing to give extra help on school work if you need it?

Constructs	Description	Number of items	Example items
Obstacles to learning	Factors that make it difficult for students to learn in school	13	• Do any of the following make it hard for you to do your best in school? (Feeling depressed, stressed, or anxious; not feeling safe at school; not having an adult who can help me with my schoolwork.)
Emotional and mental health	The degree to which students have external supports and intrinsic resources they can use to cope with problems	7	• When I'm feeling upset, stressed, or having problems, there is an adult from school who I can talk to about it. • When I'm feeling upset, stressed, or having problems, my school has programs or services that can help me.
Diversity	The extent to which students perceive representation and social justice in the school	21	• Within your school, how often do you learn about the lives and experiences of people of different religions, faiths, or spiritual beliefs? • My school has taught me how people have been treated differently because of their races and/or ethnicities.
Inclusion	The extent to which students perceive how people from diverse backgrounds are valued	28	• I feel like I can talk to students from my school about my (religion, sexual orientation, gender, how much money my family has, my race and/or ethnicity, where my family is from, a disability I have).

Notes: This table lists survey questions related to school climate but is not a complete list of all the questions in the survey. Technical details on the measures, such as information on their reliability and validity, can be found by requesting documentation from YouthTruth. (2023).

Source: Provided by Los Osos Middle School.

Table C3. Fresno Unified Climate and Culture Student Survey, Utilized by Scandinavian Middle School

Constructs	Description	Number of items	Example items
District vision	The degree to which students have the opportunity to provide feedback to their school and the extent students feel their learning is relevant	6	• This school provides me with opportunities to share my input and feedback. • What is one thing that could make your learning experience better at your school?
Climate of support for academic learning	The degree to which students feel adults support their academic, social, and emotional learning	7	• Adults at school encourage me to work hard so I can be successful in college or at the job I choose. • Teachers go out of their way to help students.
Sense of belonging	The degree to which students enjoy being at school and feel they are part of the school community	6	• I feel close to people at this school. • There is a teacher or some other adult at my school who cares about me.
Knowledge and fairness of discipline, rules and norms	The degree to which students are informed about school rules	4	• This school clearly informs students what would happen if they break school rules. • Students know how they are expected to act.
Sense of safety	The degree to which students perceive they are safe and the frequency they are subject to bullying at school	6	• How safe do you feel when you are at school?

Notes: This table lists survey questions related to school climate but is not a complete list of all the questions in the survey.
Source: Provided by Fresno Unified School District. (2023).

Appendix D: Sample District Climate and Culture Implementation Rubric

Table D1. Fresno Unified School District's Tier I Climate and Culture Implementation Rubric

	Emerging (1)	Partially In Place (2)	In Place and/or Sustaining (3)
Creating and Sustaining a Proactive Climate and Culture Team			
1.1 Team Purpose	• Team identifies schoolwide Tier I needs pertaining to social emotional, behavioral, mental health awareness/ wellness and attendance. • Team analyzes data and develops a plan to support schoolwide and classroom level Tier I practices based on needs aligned to team goals that are equitable, inclusive, instructional, restorative, and trauma informed, within the MTSS framework.	• Team designs, implements, and monitors progress of Tier I practices schoolwide and at the classroom level that are equitable, inclusive, instructional, restorative, and trauma informed within the MTSS framework.	• Team adopts a comprehensive systemic approach aligning goals to Tier I practices within the MTSS framework. • All students receive differentiated Tier I supports based on individual needs and student outcome data. **Evidence for In Place and/or Sustaining:** • Use of Tier I implementation Rubric as a guide to move the climate and culture work at their site through high leverage actions. • Engages in CCI and uses the Four Guiding Questions of a PLC. • Use of common data points (ex: ODRs, suspensions, attendance, survey results, observations, etc.)
1.2 Administrative Support (A5)	• Admin. is a member of the team, attends 75% of the trainings and team meetings and is an active participant. • Admin. provides clear communication and facilitates or promotes communication among all educational partners.	• Admin. attends all trainings and meetings. • Admin. allots time for team to present ideas to staff. • Admin. assumes co-chair role and plans team meeting agenda with staff co-chair. • Admin. ensures decisions are driven by data and that team uses a problem-solving protocol (i.e., Team MAP).	• Admin. actively communicates and demonstrates their commitment to Climate & Culture initiatives. • Admin. co-chair and staff co-chair guide the Cycle of Continuous Improvement (CCI) for Climate and Culture initiatives. • Admin. involves educational partners in shared decision making. **Evidence for In Place and/or Sustaining:** • Attends and participates in all CCT meetings. • Provides time at staff meetings for CCT to share data, seek feedback, present PL. • CCT initiatives align with SPSA actions. • Embeds community building activities throughout PL sessions.

	Emerging (1)	Partially In Place (2)	In Place and/or Sustaining (3)
1.3 Team Process and Effectiveness (A2, A3)	• Teachers, classified, and admin. staff have representation on the team and meet at least monthly. • Team members perform their assigned roles & responsibilities. • Meeting norms are established and agreed upon by all members. • Team meetings are scheduled so that all team members can participate. • Team annually establishes a SMART goal based on data. • Team Minutes and Action Plan (MAP) used to structure and conduct meetings and upload monthly to archiving page.	• Team involves staff in setting priorities and in implementing new ideas and improvements. • Team drafts action plans and engages the staff in the decision-making process. • Team is aware of CCI process and keeps staff informed. • Team frequently monitors progress of SMART goal and adjusts actions accordingly. • Staff members know which team member represents them to provide input and feedback to the team. • Team presents information to staff at least quarterly. • Team assists in the development of PL.	• Team actively participates in the CCI process and embodies the principles of an effective PLC. • Procedures developed are always archived and are not dependent on any single team member. • Team provides on-going PL to entire staff. • Team goals align with the site's SPSA and the MTSS framework. • Team works in collaboration with ILT at least quarterly. **Evidence for In Place and/or Sustaining:** • All members participate in monthly meetings and Team MAP is utilized and archived monthly. • Team members have collective ownership regarding team effectiveness and initiatives. • Staff is involved in decision making process. • One member of CCT serves on ILT and both teams meet quarterly to ensure practices are aligned. • CCT information is communicated to staff regularly.
1.4 Data-Driven Decision Making (A3, A4)	• Team collects and analyzes common data points that include attendance, office discipline referrals, behavior notifications (chronic level 2), suspension, Climate & Culture Survey results quarterly. • Team drafts a plan for revisions of identified schoolwide policies and procedures informed by data.	• Team analyzes data monthly. • Team shares findings and recommendations with staff for adoption (i.e., during meetings, PLCs, PLs). • Team utilizes CCI process to revise or modify practices, which are shared with all educational partners.	• Policies, procedures, and guidelines are reviewed and modified continuously, based on data, and using the CCI process. **Evidence for In Place and/or Sustaining:** • At least one common data point is reviewed and analyzed monthly. • Data is utilized consistently and at regular intervals to guide decisions documented on Team MAP. • Tier II data is used to determine fidelity of Tier I.

	Emerging (1)	Partially In Place (2)	In Place and/or Sustaining (3)
Creating and Sustaining Proactive Schoolwide Conditions			
1.5 Staff Beliefs (F3)	• Team drafts a statement(s) that outlines the school's beliefs in educating the whole-child which guides the practices of all staff aligned to PBIS, SEL and RP principles. • Classified and certificated staff are involved in the decision-making process for developing and adopting the staff beliefs statement.	• Staff beliefs are finalized, posted, and addressed regularly with both certificated and classified staff. It serves to guide PL and decision making.	• The staff beliefs are lived and solidify the culture of the school. • Beliefs create a sense of unity, belonging, and pride among staff members. • Staff beliefs are reviewed, discussed, and revised as needed, at least annually. **Evidence for In Place and/or Sustaining:** • Staff beliefs are archived and are incorporated into Staff Handbook. • Used during the interview process when hiring new staff members. • Staff beliefs are linked to PL and decision-making process by staff. • All staff are collectively committed to and support implementation of Tier I practices.
1.6 Staff Engagement (A5)	• Team communicates with staff through a variety of avenues. • Staff norms are established and agreed upon by all. • Processes for collecting staff input, consensus building, and inclusive decision making have been established. • Admin. provide opportunities for staff to foster positive relationships. • Staff celebrations and recognition systems have been established.	• Staff participates in community building activities at least quarterly. • Staff celebrations and recognition systems are implemented at least quarterly. • A consensus building protocol and inclusive decision-making practices (i.e., problem solving circles and fair process) are in place for staff and used consistently. • Procedures for welcoming, orienting and supporting all new staff and guest teachers have been developed, taught to staff, and archived.	• Team values and seeks staff voice and input. • All staff work in unity towards a common purpose and goal. • Staff beliefs drive decisions and demonstrate the staff's commitment to creating a positive climate and culture. • A consensus building protocol and inclusive decision-making practices are used to build trust and create staff efficacy. **Evidence for In Place and/or Sustaining:** • Staff survey results support evidence of sustaining staff engagement. • Staff celebrations and recognition programs occur at least quarterly. • Site PL agenda regularly includes community building activities.

	Emerging (1)	Partially In Place (2)	In Place and/or Sustaining (3)
1.7 Guidelines for Success (C2)	• Students and staff are involved in developing and adopting the school's GFS. • GFS are adopted and aligned with schoolwide expectations. • GFS are aligned to staff beliefs, vision, and mission statements.	• GFS are finalized, posted, and reviewed quarterly with staff and students. • GFS lessons are taught to all students. • School rules are aligned to GFS. • GFS apply to both students and staff in all settings.	• GFS are embedded into the school's culture and are part of the common language of the school. • GFS are communicated to parents through newsletters and school events. • GFS are utilized to help connect positive behaviors with schoolwide expectations. **Evidence for In Place and/or Sustaining:** • Students and staff can articulate the GFS and what they look and sound like. • GFS are used in daily announcements and communicated to staff, students, & families. • GFS are embedded in classroom lessons and expectations. • School adopted GFS are incorporated into recognition and incentive systems.
1.8 Positive Relationships and Interactions (C1, C3)	• Team examines relationships between staff-student and student-student through data. • Team trains staff on strategies for building and maintaining relationships. • Team creates structures that support relationship building, schoolwide positive recognition systems, and non-contingent interactions that are taught to all staff.	• Relationship building structures, positive recognition systems, and non-contingent interactions are implemented effectively and consistently. • Site conducts observations and calculates RPIs in all settings (common areas and 20% of classroom), aggregated data is shared and an opportunity to debrief is provided.	• Site has sustainable systems and structures to promote positive interactions and relationship building between staff-staff, staff-student, and student-student and with families and the community. • Observation data shows 85–90% of staff interact with students at a ratio of 3:1. **Evidence for In Place and/or Sustaining:** • Relationship building structures are in place and consistently used. • 3:1 RPIs data is collected and used to refine practice. • Recognition programs are established and archived.

	Emerging (1)	Partially In Place (2)	In Place and/or Sustaining (3)
1.9 Belonging and Student Engagement (C5, C6)	• Team analyzes the degree to which current programs, activities, and practices are inclusive and culturally responsive for all students. • Student input is solicited to determine interest in activities, programs, and recognition systems. • Team drafts actions and presents to staff for input and adoption to address needs related to belonging and engagement.	• Programs, activities, and practices designed to meet the needs of all students are in place and fully implemented. • A broad range of student engagement activities are offered meeting the varying needs of students. • Procedures for welcoming and orienting new students are developed and in place.	• Using the CCI process, programs, activities, and practices are analyzed quarterly for effectiveness. **Evidence for In Place and/or Sustaining:** • Established programs, activities, and practices are archived (i.e., meaningful jobs). • Common data points are analyzed to measure student perception through CC survey. • Student voice is sought out and collected frequently (community building activities, focus groups, surveys, etc.)
1.10 Common Areas and School-wide Expectations (B)	• Site conducts common area observations. • Common area and schoolwide expectations are established using the S.T.O.I.C. variables with student and staff input. • Effectiveness of common area structures and procedures are monitored and modified based on the data. • Revisions are presented to staff for input.	• Common area and schoolwide expectations address all S.T.O.I.C. variables and are followed by all staff. • Lesson plans for all common area procedures have been developed archived, taught, practiced quarterly, or as needed, based on data collection results and feedback from staff. • Common area supervisory procedures are communicated to staff and monitored for implementation.	• Team identifies one common area in which to conduct an observation each quarter. • Using the CCI process, common area procedures are reviewed with the team and modified as needed. • Common area procedures and schoolwide expectations are reviewed twice a year with staff and students. **Evidence for In Place and/or Sustaining:** • Policies, procedures, and lessons are documented and archived, in the Staff Handbook. • Use of observation forms from Foundations Module B as needed.

	Emerging (1)	Partially In Place (2)	In Place and/or Sustaining (3)
1.11 Levels of Misbehavior (LOM) (D1, D2)	• Staff receives PL regarding the three levels of misbehavior: Level 1–3 (LOM). • PL includes strategies teachers can use in the moment to address misbehaviors and deescalating strategies. • Staff discuss, agree on, and adopt LOM. This includes behaviors that can be handled in the setting where they occurred and behaviors which must be sent on a referral to the admin. • Disciplinary roles and processes of staff and administration are clearly defined and understood.	• A notification/referral form reflects the agreed upon definitions of level 2 and 3 misbehaviors has been developed. • Accurate data is kept, analyzed, and shared quarterly for all level 2 and 3 misbehaviors with the entire staff. • Staff has been trained in writing appropriate office referrals/ATLAS entries and use these practices consistently, including interventions used.	• Using the CCI, the team analyzes data quarterly on the implementation of the three-level system for responding to misbehavior. • Staff utilize LOM consistently as intended. • CCT seeks staff and administration feedback and reviews LOM annually. **Evidence for In Place and/or Sustaining:** • LOM are documented and are calibrated with the office discipline referral. Discipline data reflects the consistent use of levels of misbehavior. • Discipline Flowchart is developed and utilized.
1.12 Responding to Misbehavior (D3, D4, D5)	• Staff receives PL on identifying the needs behind the misbehavior and how to match the response to the need. • Staff and admin. have generated a menu of responses to misbehavior, which includes strategies, interventions, and disciplinary actions. • Practices and procedures have been developed and adopted by staff for responding to all LOM that are respectful, reasonable, related and restorative. • Responses are aligned to RP principles, are trauma informed, equitable, inclusive, and meet the SEL skill building needs of each student. • For Level 3 behaviors administrators utilize the Discipline Guidelines/ Behavior Response Matrix, pairing disciplinary actions with interventions.	• Staff receives PL on how to provide feedback, respond appropriately, administer disciplinary actions, and use restorative approaches. • Site consistently utilizes schoolwide responses to misbehavior that are immediate, respectful, reasonable, related and restorative. • Students and staff have an opportunity to participate in an intervention and/or restorative process. • Admin. and support staff respond quickly with appropriate actions. • Procedures to respond to students referred to the office have been developed, written, and taught to all staff (i.e., teachers, aides, NTAs and office staff).	• Admin. use a variety of disciplinary actions that incorporate interventions, rather than suspension, as the initial measure to address the behavior, when appropriate. • Staff reporting discipline incident(s) receive timely feedback. • The three-level misbehavior system is in place and fully implemented schoolwide. • Behavior referral data is used for moving toward collaborative planning for severe or repeated behavior issues. • Restorative processes are used by 85–90% of all staff. **Evidence for In Place and/or Sustaining:** • Menus and procedures for responding to misbehavior are documented and archived. • Discipline data reflects consistent use of responses outlined in Discipline Guidelines/Behavior Response Matrix. • Reduction of Office Discipline Referrals (ODRs).

	Emerging (1)	Partially In Place (2)	In Place and/or Sustaining (3)
1.13 Promoting Attendance (C4)	• Team reviews attendance trends and compares data with site attendance goals (i.e., chronic absence, truancy, attendance rate). • Based on data, team drafts schoolwide plan to promote daily attendance for all students and reduce chronic absenteeism and truancy. Plan is shared with staff for input, adoption, and implementation.	• Team monitors schoolwide attendance data quarterly. • Students and families are educated on importance of attendance and impact on learning, strategies to improve attendance. • Team plans with attendance staff for those chronically absent (10% or more of school days). Implementation plans are shared with all staff.	• The team incorporates family and community involvement in its attendance initiatives. • Based on attendance data, the action plans are reviewed and modified using the CCI process quarterly. • All staff collectively contribute to improving attendance. **Evidence for In Place and/or Sustaining:** • Data on average daily attendance and chronic absenteeism as well as efforts to improve attendance are evident. • Increase in student attendance rates.
1.14 Bullying Prevention (Olweus)	• Team examines bullying reporting procedures to ensure compliance with district, state, and federal policies. • Team trains all staff on BP, including school site reporting and discipline procedures and responses. • Data from the Climate & Culture Survey is analyzed. • Incident data is used by the team to examine the supervision zones and evaluate "hot spots".	• BP rules are posted throughout campus. • Staff teaches BP rules in conjunction with the four mandated BP lessons annually. • Staff teach, model, and promote norms of kindness and inclusion. • A system is in place to train new staff members in BP. • Team shares data findings and makes recommendations for improvement with admin.	• BP practices are followed by staff and students and revisited with all educational partners quarterly. • Using the CCI process, procedures are reviewed and modified as needed. • Staff embed opportunities for students and staff to demonstrate kindness and inclusion. **Evidence for In Place and/or Sustaining:** • Staff training on all bullying prevention modules. • Bullying prevention rules are posted around campus. • Evidence of student and staff activities that promote kindness (i.e., service projects, kindness campaign). • Climate and Culture Survey
1.15 Family Engagement (C7)	• Team analyzes the school's family Climate & Culture survey data and reviews opportunities for inclusive family engagement. • Team develops recommendations for family engagement and share with staff for input and adoption. • Team has developed protocols for welcoming and orienting new families at the beginning of the school year, or as families enroll. • Site develops processes to communicate to families, keeping them well informed.	• Site provides multiple opportunities for positive family interactions and involvement with school and staff. • Family input is solicited to determine interest in activities and programs. • All staff follow the welcoming and orientation procedures.	• Based on family survey data and input, team reviews and modifies parent and family engagement practices annually, using the CCI process. **Evidence for In Place and/or Sustaining:** • Improved survey results and increased attendance of families at school events, conferences, and meetings. • Family voice is solicited and collected frequently. • Family involvement is evident in school teams, parent groups, surveys, etc.

	Emerging (1)	Partially In Place (2)	In Place and/or Sustaining (3)
Creating and Sustaining Proactive Classroom Conditions			
1.16 Setting Classroom Conditions (CHAMPS)	• Team members provide PL on the pedagogy, key concepts, and strategies for setting proactive classroom conditions for learning to all staff. • Teachers who have been trained have developed a FUSD Classroom Management Plan. • Plans for teaching classroom expectations to students have been established and taught.	• 50% of teachers have completed PL on setting conditions for learning and are implementing strategies in their classroom. • Teachers receive implementation and support. • Teachers have developed a FUSD Classroom Management Plan.	• 85–90% of teachers have completed PL and are implementing their FUSD Classroom Management plan effectively and with fidelity. • Time is provided to evaluate effectiveness and share ideas and best practices. • An onboarding plan is in place and implemented to support new teachers. **Evidence for In Place and/or Sustaining:** • Each teacher has FUSD Classroom Management Plan, and it's provided to guest teachers. Plan is revisited at least annually. • Survey and discipline data demonstrate effective implementation.
1.17 Circles	• All teachers have received PL on the purpose, structure, the different types of circles and their use, and how to facilitate circles. • Admin. team conducts circles observations in all classrooms to ensure quality and fidelity. • Site has established a schedule to ensure consistent use of circles (K–8 weekly, 9–12 bi-monthly).	• 50% of teachers are implementing circles as part of a schoolwide plan • Student and staff feedback is collected quarterly to improve process and content. • Admin. team conducts circles observations and provides feedback to staff to ensure quality and fidelity.	• 85–90% of teachers utilize circles effectively to build relationships and caring communities, create equity of voice, practice SEL skills, and address classroom community needs. • Team monitors effectiveness and adjusts accordingly with staff and student input. **Evidence for In Place and/or Sustaining:** • Written observational feedback is provided to teachers to improve practice. • Circles are scheduled and implemented consistently across content areas in all classrooms.

	Emerging (1)	Partially In Place (2)	In Place and/or Sustaining (3)
1.18 Social Emotional Learning (SEL)	• Staff receive ongoing PL in strengthening their own SEL skills and expanding their knowledge in SEL competencies and practices. • Staff receive PL on the impact of SEL on student academic, behavioral, social, and emotional development. • Teachers receive PL in district baseline SEL curriculum (Second Step K–8, School Connect 9–12).	• Staff receive ongoing PL in teaching students SEL skills and embedding them across content areas using various SEL practices. • 50% of teachers are explicitly teaching and consistently incorporating SEL skills into their lesson design. • Students have opportunities to practice SEL skills in all settings and receive feedback across all school settings.	• Staff maintain a culture where personal SEL skills are promoted, valued, and continuously reflected upon. • SEL practices are integrated into site PLs, PLC time, and other site meetings. • PLCs discuss strategies on how to embed SEL skills and practices across content areas. • 85–90% of teachers explicitly teach and integrate SEL skills into all content areas. • Admin. provide teacher feedback on SEL instruction (explicit and integration) **Evidence for In Place and/or Sustaining** • Decrease in office discipline referrals and suspensions. • Increase in school attendance, Climate and Culture surveys, and social emotional screener (coming soon). • Lesson design includes SEL skill development in all content areas.
1.19 Early-Stage Interventions (F4)	• Staff agree on the interventions that should be included in the early-stage protocol that align to MTSS framework. • Staff have received PL on early-stage interventions, including data collection for monitoring progress, based on student needs and SEL skill development. • Staff are aware of available resources (i.e., Teacher's Encyclopedia, CHAMPs, and Positive Discipline).	• 50% of staff are implementing early-stage interventions. • Students are taught and can practice appropriate replacement behaviors and/or social skills as part of their intervention. • Interventions are documented and monitored.	• Data is utilized to identify the appropriate early-stage intervention based on student needs. • Data is charted and interventions are attempted with fidelity for 2 weeks before a formal request for assistance is submitted to the Tier II Targeted Support Team. **Evidence for In Place and/or Sustaining:** • Expectations about when and how to get assistance are archived. • All aspects of the agreed upon interventions/resources are documented, used, archived, and monitored.

	Emerging (1)	Partially In Place (2)	In Place and/or Sustaining (3)
1.20 Conflict Resolution (E3)	• All staff have been provided PL on conflict resolution skills and structures that are aligned to RP principles. • A schoolwide plan is developed to implement conflict resolution structures. • Procedures are established on when and how staff utilize the identified structures when students are not able to resolve their own conflict.	• Conflict resolution skills are taught to students. • Each classroom has established structures to support students in resolving conflict aligned to site practices. • Conflict resolution structures are implemented consistently.	• Conflict resolution structures are revised if needed, staff are retrained when necessary, and successes are celebrated. • 85–90% of students use restorative dialogue and conflict resolution skills to resolve conflict. **Evidence for In Place and/or Sustaining:** • Conflict resolution is evidenced in ATLAS as an intervention to addressing conflicts. • Conflict resolution structures include a variety of strategies such as problem-solving circles and peer mediation. • Conflict resolution lessons are developed, scheduled, utilized, and archived.

Source: Fresno Unified School District, adapted from Randy Sprick's *Safe and civil schools*.

Appendix E: Sample School Climate Goals

Figure E1. School Climate Goals and Activities Planned by Mann Middle School Counselors

Source: Mann Middle School Counseling Team. (2023).

Figure E2. Los Osos Middle School S.M.A.R.T. Goals, Planned by the Student Senate

Los Osos Middle School

S.M.A.R.T. GOALS 2022–2023

Specific: The goal should be very precise with no room for misinterpretation.
Measurable: The goal should be quantifiable, and progress should be easy to track.
Achievable: The goal should be attainable—not outlandish or unrealistic.
Relevant: The goal should contribute to your broader, overarching goals.
Time-bound: The goal should have a defined start and end date.

SMART GOAL #1: Fair discipline

- **Specific:** Student discipline would be fairly implemented at a school-wide and classroom level that works to support students. This would include a revision of the student handbook, a school-wide implementation and education of behavior expectations and the restorative approach, and interpersonal and intrapersonal conflict management.
- **Measurable:** Discipline data on education code violations, suspensions, other means of correction, and survey teachers and students, track Think Sheets data.
- **Assignable:** Students, teachers, support staff, administrators, parents
- **Realistic:** Students feel that focusing on the culture and processes of discipline is a tenable and relevant goal. In looking at 21–22 YTS data, 37% of students feel that discipline is fair, decreasing by 2% from 20–21 YTS data.
- **Time-Based:** Begin work in late Spring 2022 and continue to do in the 22–23 school year.

SMART GOAL #2: Increase a sense of belonging and acceptance

- Specific: There is a need to increase a sense of belonging and acceptance. When students feel accepted and that they belong, they learn more and will enjoy going to school more. To increase a sense of belonging and acceptance, LOMS can implement school-wide lessons on respecting others and their differences, encourage students to try out for new activities (sports, drama, etc.) and offer intramural leagues for sports and non-sports activities. LOMS teachers have done equity work this school year with outside consultants that can be carried into the classrooms for student growth.
- Measurable: Data on students involved in various activities, the number of times lessons are taught to all students during advisory, student surveys on citizenship and Second Step, continue equity training for staff and students, etc.
- Assignable: Students, teachers, support staff, administrators, parents
- Realistic: Students feel that this is realistic. YTS data shows that 55% of students have a sense of belonging. While this increased 5% from the previous year, it is still too low and all students deserve to feel like they belong and are accepted within their school community. In addition, only 41% felt that there was a sense of culture (respect among each other).
- Time-Based: Begin work in late Spring 2022 and continue to do in the 22–23 school year.

SMART GOAL #3: Increase school spirit

- **Specific:** There is a need for students to feel excited to go to school, have fun, and socialize with one another. Middle school is a time to develop the sense of self and identity. There are many differences between elementary and middle school that often cause students to deal more with social-emotional feelings and responsibilities. Because so much time is spent at school, it's important that there be things at school that offer a lightness of fun. This could include lunchtime activities, House assignments for friendly competition (think Hogwarts!), spirit weeks, after school dances for all.
- **Measurable:** Surveys, decrease in discipline data, data on attendance and participation
- **Assignable:** Students, teachers, support staff, administrators, parents
- **Realistic:** Students feel that this is a realistic goal that will increase the data of culture (41%), engagement (53%), belonging (55%), and relationships (53%) that was collected in the YTS.
- **Time-Based:** Begin work in late Spring 2022 and continue to do in the 22–23 school year.

Source: Los Osos Middle School. (2023).

Figure E3. Scandinavian Middle School Climate and Culture Team S.M.A.R.T. Goals

- By June 2023, Scandinavian MS will respond to classroom behaviors to ensure all students receive equitable adult responses to misbehavior as evidenced by a 10% increase (64% to 74%) in positive responses to the item "Adults at my school treat all students fairly" on the 2023 Spring Student Survey.
- By June 2023, Scandinavian MS will respond to Parent Engagement Data as evidenced by a 10% increase (28% to 38%) in positive responses to the item "My family feels like they are part of my school" and "My school encourages family participation" on the 2023 Spring Student Survey.

Source: Scandinavian Middle School Climate and Culture Team Minutes and Action Plan. (2023).

Endnotes

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33. The School Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA) is a strategic plan developed by each school in California on an annual basis. SPSAs outline school goals improving student outcomes and strategies that will be used to achieve them.

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