

Illinois K-2 Workgroup Indicator Discussion Guide School Climate Surveys

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Indicator Summary

School climate is a concept that encompasses many dimensions of the school culture and systems beyond academic outcomes. The five dimensions of school climate often seen in research are safety, relationships, teaching and learning, school environment, and school improvement processes.¹ School climate measures usually involve staff, student, and/or family surveys, and may integrate other related measures such as discipline and attendance data. Research indicates that a strong and healthy school climate is associated with positive academic and behavioral outcomes for students.

In the context of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) school quality ratings, many states and stakeholders are interested in using school climate measures as a counterweight to assessments.² Measuring school climate has become more feasible with an increasing number of research-based survey instruments and measurement tools.³ Using climate measures in school quality ratings could encourage schools to focus on holistic approaches to school improvement. This could include student engagement, family engagement, behavior, school culture, and/or organizational systems.

School climate affects learning across grades, but it may be especially important in early learning settings. The core concept behind most school climate measures is the “whole child,” an approach that grew out of early education. For example, the National P-3 Center at the University of Washington emphasizes the importance of the physical and emotional learning environments, engaged families, and effective administrators in their pre-K to third framework, all of which are key elements of school climate.⁴

In its current ESSA plan, Illinois indicates that climate survey results will make up five percent of schools’ ratings.⁵ The five percent rating will be based on student survey participation for now, but may shift to student survey results in the future.⁶ Illinois is a pioneer in measuring school climate with surveys. Chicago Public Schools (CPS) have used survey data based on the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research (UChicago Consortium) 5Essentials since the early 1990s.⁷ CPS made these 5Essentials reports public in 2011 and made them part of local accountability in 2013-14. That same year, Illinois began requiring the 5Essentials or a similar survey in every school on an annual basis.⁸

The five key areas measured by the 5Essentials surveys are 1) effective leaders, 2) collaborative teachers, 3) involved families, 4) supportive environments, and 5) ambitious instruction.⁹ The 5Essentials surveys in K-12 includes students in grades 6-12, and teachers starting in kindergarten, and optionally, a parent supplement survey.¹⁰ Early childhood versions of surveys are under development by The Ounce of Prevention Fund and the UChicago Consortium.¹¹

Measurement Options and ESSA Alignment

For consistency with Illinois' overall rating system and the states' longstanding commitment to the 5Essentials survey, a new survey for K-2 is likely not feasible or desirable. Like many other research-based school climate surveys, the 5Essentials do not include a student component in the early grades.¹² 5Essentials results for Illinois schools with grades K-5 do not currently include student surveys.¹³ As mentioned above, Illinois plans to rate schools initially on student participation, not the content of the survey results. Additionally, there are not grade-band specific elements of the 5Essentials survey, and the survey is designed to measure school level characteristics. Emphasizing K-2 grades in this context could be difficult.

Potential Measurement Option: Giving schools extra credit for teacher and parent response rates to the 5Essentials in K-2 grades, as a proxy for teacher and family engagement.

Valid and Reliable: Maybe.

- Because the participation credit approach has already been approved at the student level, it is possible that teacher and parent participation in targeted grades could meet validity standards as a proxy measure for teacher and parent engagement. Reliability could be compromised if teachers or parents feel undue pressure to complete the survey or to answer positively.
- **Meaningfully Differentiated:** Likely.
 - Illinois has already indicated that it plans to have its technical advisory committee (TAC) analyze survey data for meaningful differentiation. Initial modeling of student survey responses in the ESSA plan indicates sufficient differentiation. Assuming parent and teacher responses follow a similar pattern, this could meet the differentiation standard.
- **Comparable:** Maybe.
 - Currently, schools are not required to administer the parent supplement to the 5Essentials, and parent responses are not part of the survey analysis. Parent surveys are only available in English and Spanish, which could introduce barriers to participation for parents who speak other languages.
- **Reportable Annually and By Subgroup:** No.
 - This measure would be difficult to disaggregate by student subgroup, as it would likely necessitate linking parent and teacher response statuses to student demographics, which could compromise survey anonymity.
- **Additional Considerations:** Parent and teacher survey participation may be a poor proxy for overall school climate in the early grades; this would require more research.

Potential Measurement Option: Using positive/negative responses from teachers in K-2 grades as a component of the K-2 quality rating.

Valid and Reliable: Maybe.

- The 5Essentials survey has been used and validated in accountability contexts; however, the validity and reliability of breaking out specific grades would likely require more analysis. Results for K-2 grades only would not include two of the five essential components: ambitious instruction and supportive environments.

Additionally, in most schools K-2 teachers make up a fairly small sample, which could be distorted by just a few responses.

- **Meaningfully Differentiated:** Likely.
 - Initial results from the statewide 5Essentials survey and survey data from CPS indicate meaningful differentiation; this would likely hold true for the K-2 grades.¹⁴
- **Comparable:** Maybe
 - One of Illinois' top reasons for not including survey results in the initial ESSA ratings was that students or teachers may change their responses if they felt pressure to produce positive results. In Chicago, however, response patterns did not change substantially as a result of local accountability ratings.¹⁵
- **Reportable Annually and By Subgroup:** No.
 - This measure could not be disaggregated by student subgroup.

Examples from Other States

Fewer than ten states are planning to use school climate surveys in their accountability reports. No state clearly indicated they will include K-2 grades as part of their student surveys. No state included teacher survey results, as they are not likely to meet ESSA standards for a measure in school quality ratings. Including states whose plans have not yet been approved:

- New Mexico has used student surveys for many years statewide, and plans to give schools a school climate grades based on student surveys starting in fourth grade. The state is developing an “opportunity to learn” survey for younger grades in future years.
- Idaho will administer a satisfaction and engagement survey starting from fourth grade.
- Iowa will use the results of a youth survey in fifth grade and up.
- Nevada plans to use student survey response rates in their ratings, starting with fifth grade.
- South Carolina plans to use a student survey in 2018-19, but has not chosen an instrument.
- Ohio, Maryland, Montana, Colorado, and New York are all exploring or piloting school climate surveys for accountability indicators in the future.

Pros/Cons of Using This Indicator in K-2 Accountability Ratings

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasizes the importance of holistic and healthy school climate, which is associated with positive student outcomes in early grades • Can encourage schools to look to important related improvement areas – such as family engagement, teacher satisfaction, social-emotional learning. • Most data are already collected via a high-quality survey instrument. • Consistent with other state measures, schools familiar with survey. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey designed as a whole-school measure, may not be valid in this variation. • Schools and districts already use the full survey data, but teacher/parent participation may not be a reliable proxy for quality. • Difficult to measure reliably and report by subgroup in early grades with available measures. • Extra emphasis/different rules in certain grades could create confusion. • Parent surveys not currently required. • Breaking out K-2 teachers at the school level introduces a small sample size challenges.

¹ Amrit Thapa, Jonathan Cohen, et. al. “A Review of School Climate Research.” Review of Educational Research v83 n3, 2013; Ming-Te Wang and Jessica L. Degol. “School Climate: A Review of the Construct, Measurement and Impact on Student Outcomes.” Educational Psychology Review v28 n2, 2016.

² Hanna Melnick, Channa M. Cook-Harvey, and Linda Darling-Hammond, “Encouraging Social and Emotional Learning in the Context of New Accountability,” Learning Policy Institute, 2017, https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Social_Emoional_Learning_New_Accountability_REPORT.pdf.

³ National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, “School Climate Survey Compendia,” U.S. Department of Education, accessed October 5, 2017 at <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/topic-research/school-climate-measurement/school-climate-survey-compendium>.

⁴ Kristie Kauerz and Julia Coffman, “Framework for Planning, Implementing and Evaluating PreK-3rd Grade Approaches, University of Washington, 2013, <https://depts.washington.edu/pthru3/content/p-3-framework>.

⁵ IL ESSA plan, pages 47, 56, 57.

⁶ Kate Stringer, “3 States Cite School Climate Surveys in Their ESSA Plans. Why Don’t Others Use Culture for Accountability?” The 74 Million, April 30, 2017, <https://www.the74million.org/article/3-states-cite-school-climate-surveys-in-their-essa-plans-why-dont-others-use-culture-for-accountability/>; correspondence with Dr. Jason Helfer, Illinois State Board of Education, October 9, 2017.

⁷ Penny Bender Sebring and Elain M. Allensworth, “Adopting School Climate Surveys Under ESSA: A Model from Chicago,” Education Week, April 3, 2017, http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/urban_education_reform/2017/04/school_climate_surveys_under_essa_model_from_chicago.html.

⁸ Illinois State Board of Education, “Consolidated State Plan under the Every Student Succeeds Act,” updated August 29, 2017, page 56, <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/ESSAStatePlanforIllinois.pdf>.

⁹ UChicago Impact, “5Essentials Tools and Trainings,” website accessed October 5, 2017, <https://uchicagoimpact.org/tools-training/5essentials>.

¹⁰ UChicago Impact

¹¹ The Ounce of Prevention Fund, “Five Essentials Early Ed Surveys,” website accessed October 7, 2017, <https://www.theounce.org/what-we-do/research/programs/five-essentials-early-ed-surveys/>.

¹² Counter examples: Some survey instruments administer surveys to young students in small groups with read-alouds, for example, the Tripod 7Cs survey.

¹³ Joshua Klugman, et. al., "A First Look at the 5Essentials in Illinois Schools," University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research, 2015, <https://consortium.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/publications/Statewide%20E%20Report.pdf>.

¹⁴ Klugman, 2015; Chicago Public Schools 5Essential School Reports, 2016, <https://cps.5-essentials.org/2016/>.

¹⁵ Sebring and Allensworth, 2017.