



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION



TO: Clerk of the Senate
Clerk of the House of Representatives

FROM: Stefan Pryor
Commissioner of Education

DATE: April 12, 2013

SUBJECT: Report on the Status of Analysis of Safe School Climate Plans in Connecticut

In accordance with Section 10-222h of the 2012 Supplement to the Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.), enclosed is a copy of the Report on the Status of Analysis of Safe School Climate Plans in Connecticut. Also, please note that by copy of this letter, I am distributing copies of this report in accordance with C.G.S. Section 11-4a.

The following should be noted regarding this report submission:

- This report is being filed late due in part to personnel changes that occurred in the course of the agency review process. The Connecticut State Department of Education is taking steps to ensure that submission of future versions of this report occur in a timely fashion.
- The report is based upon data for the time period ending December 2011; this is the relevant information to fulfill the 2012 reporting requirement. The data was collected through a survey distributed in the Fall of 2011. This report acknowledges changes that have occurred in the policy environment since then.
- Recognizing the new landscape that resulted from the enactment of Public Act 11-232, the Department implemented a new data collection that will be available in the coming months. That data will be used to inform the report to be submitted in February 2014.
- Since the generation of this report, Public Act 13-3 also made additional changes to the existing statute, including changes to the report frequency, content, and report recipients. As such, future reports will be augmented to meet the requirements of the new legislation and will serve to inform the General Assembly and the public in light of the renewed focus on school safety and security.

If you have any questions or require additional copies, please contact 860-713-6520. Thank you.

SP:lfid

cc: Education Committee
Legislative Library
Office of Legislative Research
State Library
Select Committee on Children

Enclosure

Report on the Status of Analysis of Safe School Climate Plans in Connecticut

Introduction and Reporting Requirements

Section 10-222h of the 2012 Supplement to the Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) (herein after 2012 “Supplement”) requires the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) to submit a report to the legislature on the status of its efforts pursuant to Section 10-222h (a) of the C.G.S. Supplement including:

- documenting school districts’ articulated needs for technical assistance and training related to safe learning and bullying;
- collecting information on the prevention and intervention strategies used by schools to reduce the incidence of bullying, improving school climate and improving reporting outcomes;
- developing or recommending a model safe school climate plan for Grades kindergarten to twelve, inclusive; and
- collaborating with the Connecticut Association of Schools to disseminate to all public schools grade-level appropriate school climate assessment instruments approved by the department, including surveys, to be used by local and regional boards of education for the purposes of collecting information described in subdivision (2) of this subsection so that the department can monitor bullying prevention efforts over time and compare each district’s progress to state trends.

Summary Results

Districts’ Needs for Technical Assistance and Training

Along with the electronic submission of each district’s Safe School Climate Plan, the CSDE collected information regarding the district’s need for technical assistance and training related to safe learning, bullying and the prevention and intervention strategies designed to improve school climate. The CSDE distributed a survey (Appendix A) to all districts, charter schools, and regional educational service centers (RESCs), and 108 surveys were returned. Responses indicated that:

As of January 1, 2012, 91.7 percent of the districts, charter and magnet schools responded that they had appointed a Safe School Climate Coordinator in their district, while 8.3 percent responded that they had not. Responding districts indicated that 88 percent of the schools had appointed a Safe School Climate Specialist in each of their schools, 4.6 percent had not and 7.4 percent only had them in some of their schools. The responses indicated that 68.5 percent had a Safe Climate Committee in place, while 15.7 percent did not. The statutory requirement is that these specialists, coordinators and committees be identified and formed by July 1, 2012. Districts were well ahead of meeting the deadline. A new survey will be circulated in the Spring of 2013 that will collect the updated data and identify how schools have implemented the legislative requirements that took effect on July 1, 2012.

The CSDE disseminated school climate assessments. The statutory deadline for completion of this process was July 1, 2012. The process was on track to meet this deadline. Many

districts, charter and magnet schools have already engaged in school climate assessments. School climate surveys have been conducted with 43.5 percent of districts and schools surveying students, 24.1 percent surveying parents, 36.1 percent surveying staff and 49.1 percent that have not conducted school climate surveys. The majority of districts opted to wait for the CSDE to distribute the model climate assessment which was distributed in the Spring of 2012. Updated information will be available in the February 2014 report.

Districts have provided school climate improvement and bullying prevention training to a wide range of district employees, from the substitute teachers and food service workers to the district administrators and superintendent. Please see Appendix C for the complete list of trained employees and percentages of each group trained that had occurred as of January 2012. Additional training has been completed and will be reported in the February 2014 report.

- i. School districts have not only created and submitted Safe School Climate Plans at the district level (which is required by statute) but are also working at the individual school level (which is not required by statute). School districts reported that 55.6 percent of schools had individual school climate improvement plans, 22.2 percent reported that some of their schools had individual school climate improvement plans, and 22.2 percent reported that none of their schools had individual school climate improvement plans. Specific plans to include School Climate are included in 71.3 percent of the District School Improvement plans, while only 7.4 percent did not include such plans.
- ii. The final question on the survey asked how the CSDE could support the districts in their school climate improvement efforts. There was a wide range of responses to this question, many similar to the responses from the 2010 Report to the Legislature identifying trends in need for support. The following list represents the most prevalent responses:
 - more funding and resources are needed, particularly to support training on policy and bullying prevention strategies;
 - assistance in providing training to parents in order to raise awareness of what bullying is and the policies related to bullying; and
 - providing training to district staff to support the implementation of Safe School Climate Plans.

Districts are increasing their requests for support since 2010. In 2012, they have requested:

- online samples of District Improvement Plans that included school climate improvement and online samples of school climate improvement programs;
- training materials and opportunities in school climate improvement, data interpretation and conducting investigations;
- materials to train noncertified staff and parents, including a suggestion to develop statewide programs for specific subgroups such as bus drivers;
- development of a district mentoring program pairing successful districts with districts in need of support; and
- a model School Climate Survey to meet requirements under Section 10-222h.

It should be noted that where possible, the CSDE has been responsive to the requests by taking the following actions:

- providing statewide trainings (via the Connecticut Accountability for Learning Initiative (CALI)) in improving school climate;
- issuing two DVDs to all local education agencies for use in introductory training on school climate and bullying;
- developed and provided a model climate survey to meet the requirements of Section 10-222h; and
- continues to respond to district requests for training in order to raise awareness of bullying and related policies on an as needed basis.

Verified Acts of Bullying and Prevention/Intervention Strategies

Survey respondents reported a total of 332 verified acts of bullying. Responsive actions ranged from counseling to expulsion. (See Appendix B for full graphic.) When asked if they had a grade appropriate (K-12) Bullying Prevention and Positive School Climate program(s) or curricula, 79.6 percent responded “yes” and 20.4 percent responded “no”. Districts and schools are choosing from a wide range of research-based programs that are widely available. Thirty-four districts are using Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS), 18 are using Second Step, 13 are using Responsive Classroom, 2 are using Provided Alternate Thinking Strategies (PATHS), 2 are using Olweus, and 2 are using the RULER approach. Other schools are using a combination of programs or have created individual programs from a variety of resources. Updated information will be available in the 2014 report once the new survey results are compiled in the Summer and Fall of 2013.

The survey data gathered during the Winter of 2011 reveal several trends with respect to training and professional development activities in the area of bullying prevention and intervention as well as developing safe school climates. These trends include the following:

- There are three programs which are frequently used throughout the state that come from the federally approved Title IV (Safe and Drug Free Schools) “research based” or “promising program” list. These three are Second Step: A Violence Prevention Curriculum; Life Skills Training; and Social Decision Making and Problem Solving. A large number of responders indicated that they also use programs that are not on the federally approved list.
- PBIS, Responsive Classrooms and the RULER approach were the other most commonly reported programs being used in districts to address bullying beyond the federally approved list.
- Among those responders who indicated that they had a school climate improvement plan, a large majority (71.3 percent) indicated that this plan is integrated with their broader District Improvement Plan.
- Counseling was identified as a responsive action in 63 percent of the cases where there was a verified act of bullying. Districts also used in-school suspension almost as frequently at 57.4 percent.
- Adult mediation, restorative actions, community service, out of school suspensions and detentions. Less than 2 percent of the verified acts of bullying resulted in an expulsion.

See Appendix B for a complete list of restorative actions used.

Submission Status of Safe School Climate Plans

Section 10-222h of the Supplement requires local and regional boards of education, charter and magnet schools (“districts”) to submit their Safe School Climate Plan to the CSDE by January 1, 2012. The CSDE outlined procedures for submitting the plans to the CSDE in a memo dated December 8, 2012. As of January 24, 2012, 187 of the 221 districts, charter schools, and magnet schools had submitted their plans. The CSDE sent out follow-up electronic reminders and made individual telephone calls to superintendents and directors of magnet schools through the month following the January 1, 2012, submission deadline.

- One hundred eighty-seven districts’ policies, either drafts or board-approved, were submitted to the CSDE since July 1, 2011. (Although drafts have been submitted to the state, a majority are still pending local board approval).
- Thirty-four districts’ policies have not been revised and approved since July 1, 2011.

Relationship between Bullying, School Climate and Student Outcomes

Nationally, there is a large and growing body of research that documents the relationships among bullying, school climate and student outcomes. This research shows that students who are in physically, emotionally, socially and intellectually safe school climates are less likely to experience bullying, experience a sense of connection to their school, are more engaged in learning, are less likely to drop out, and are more likely to achieve to their potential. Additionally, health-related risk factors such as engaging in risky sexual behaviors, abusing substances, experiencing stress, attempting suicide and engaging in violent and deviant behaviors diminish substantially when students are learning in positive school climates. Every time a complaint of alleged bullying comes to the attention of CSDE staff, the call is logged and tracked. Although this collection of complaints is anecdotal and cannot be considered systematic research, the information provides a context for making recommendations that ultimately may diminish bullying in schools and improve the wider school climate. The following represent the important trends of these logged complaints:

- The number of complaints of “bullying” has increased steadily over the past seven years. This does not indicate that there is in reality more “bullying,” but rather that the language of “bullying” is so pervasive that many behaviors are increasingly perceived to be “bullying” (e.g., a paper being ripped in half, staring down, unintentionally hurtful greetings, pre-school-aged children pushing each other, etc.). By all measures, schools in Connecticut are becoming safer because the focus of their efforts is on improving school climate.
- Complaints of bullying are heard from all demographic areas (District Reference Groups, urban, rural, suburban, small schools, large schools, race, gender, and ethnicity, etc.).
- Complaints of bullying come from all school grade levels (PK–12):
 - there is a very slight increase during the middle school years but not enough to determine that bullying is a middle school problem; and
 - adults are routinely accused of engaging in bullying behavior although Section 10-222h(a) of the Supplement does not address adult bullying.
- Children with identified special needs are at least three times as likely to be either the targets of bullying or the alleged bully:

- of the complaints coming to the attention of CSDE staff, 30 – 50 percent involves children with identified special needs (the state average of children with identified special needs is 10.8 percent).
- Family perceptions about what is happening to their children in virtually all cases are entirely different from the schools' perceptions.

Model Safe School Climate Plan

Connecticut districts rely upon their school board attorneys or the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education to develop policies on bullying. Law firms are providing model bullying policies to be included in the Safe School Climate Plans. The CSDE, in collaboration with the Connecticut Association of Schools, has developed rubrics and templates for creating Safe School Climate Plans and assessing the status of district efforts. The model (template) for creating Safe School Climate Plans is contained in Appendix D.

Recommendations

Given recent legislative activity, including PA 13-3 and a new survey that will be distributed in the Spring of 2013, the CSDE plans to issue recommendations in the January 2014 report so that such recommendations address the current conditions in Connecticut. Presently, the CSDE expects that these recommendations may include but not be limited to the following subjects:

- How PA 13-3 will need to be studied in light of the changes made to the current Section 10-222h requirements. Specifically, the establishment of new security and safety committees and their interface with existing safe school climate committees, as well as expansion of the responsibilities of the existing safe school climate committees, will be considered and addressed.
- Examination of the terminology regarding *bullying* and *climate* in an attempt to signal increased and focused attention on improving school climate in addition to, or rather than, exclusively reacting to bullying incidents.
- Relationship between the definitions of *bullying* and *harassment* and the implications for actions that the district or state should take regarding reported incidents.
- Whether Connecticut should draw upon the National School Climate Standards in augmenting the work being done in the state.
- CSDE's role in supporting and tracking the implementation of school and district climate plans.

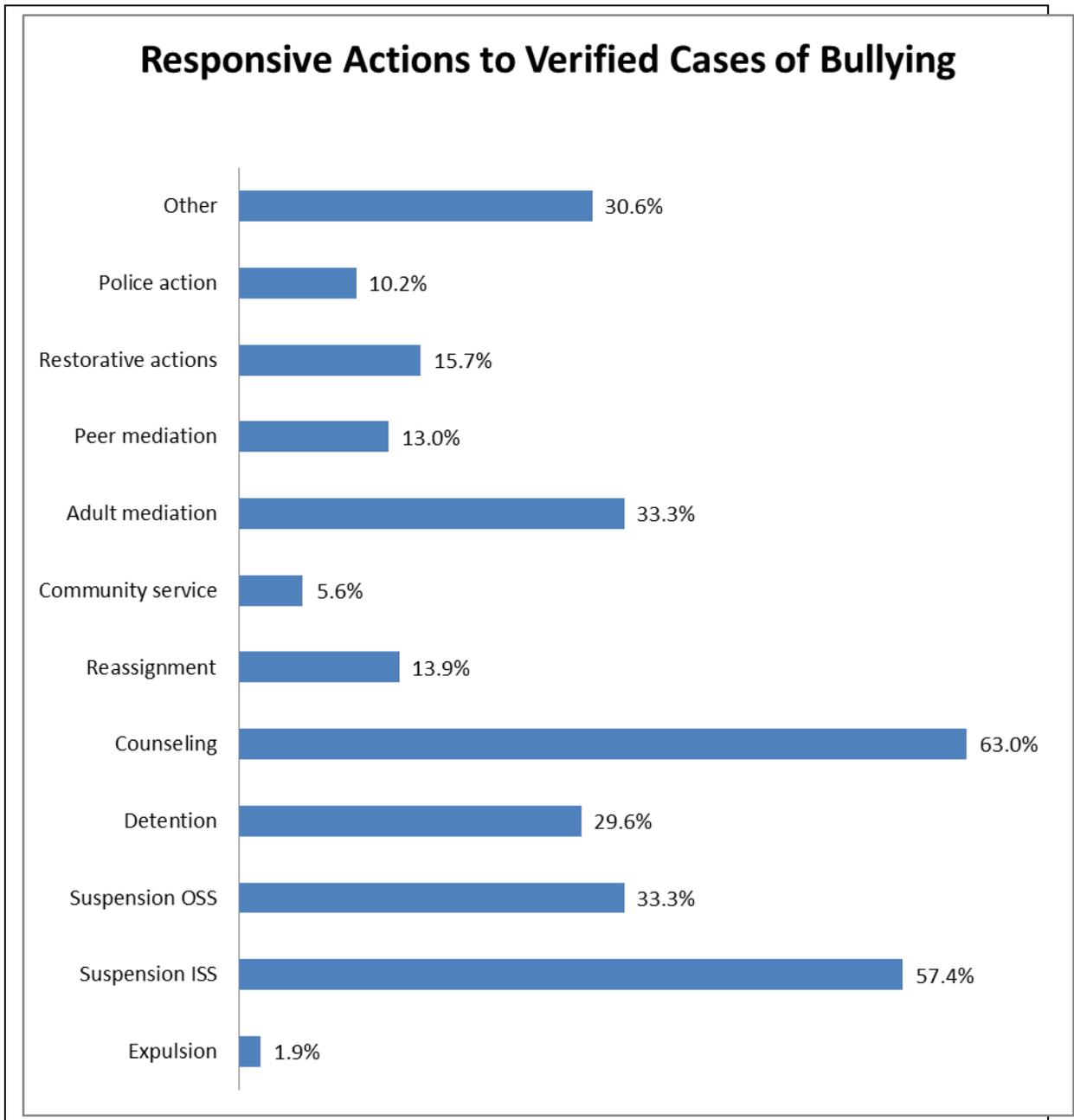
Appendix A

Name of district _____

Position of the person completing this survey _____

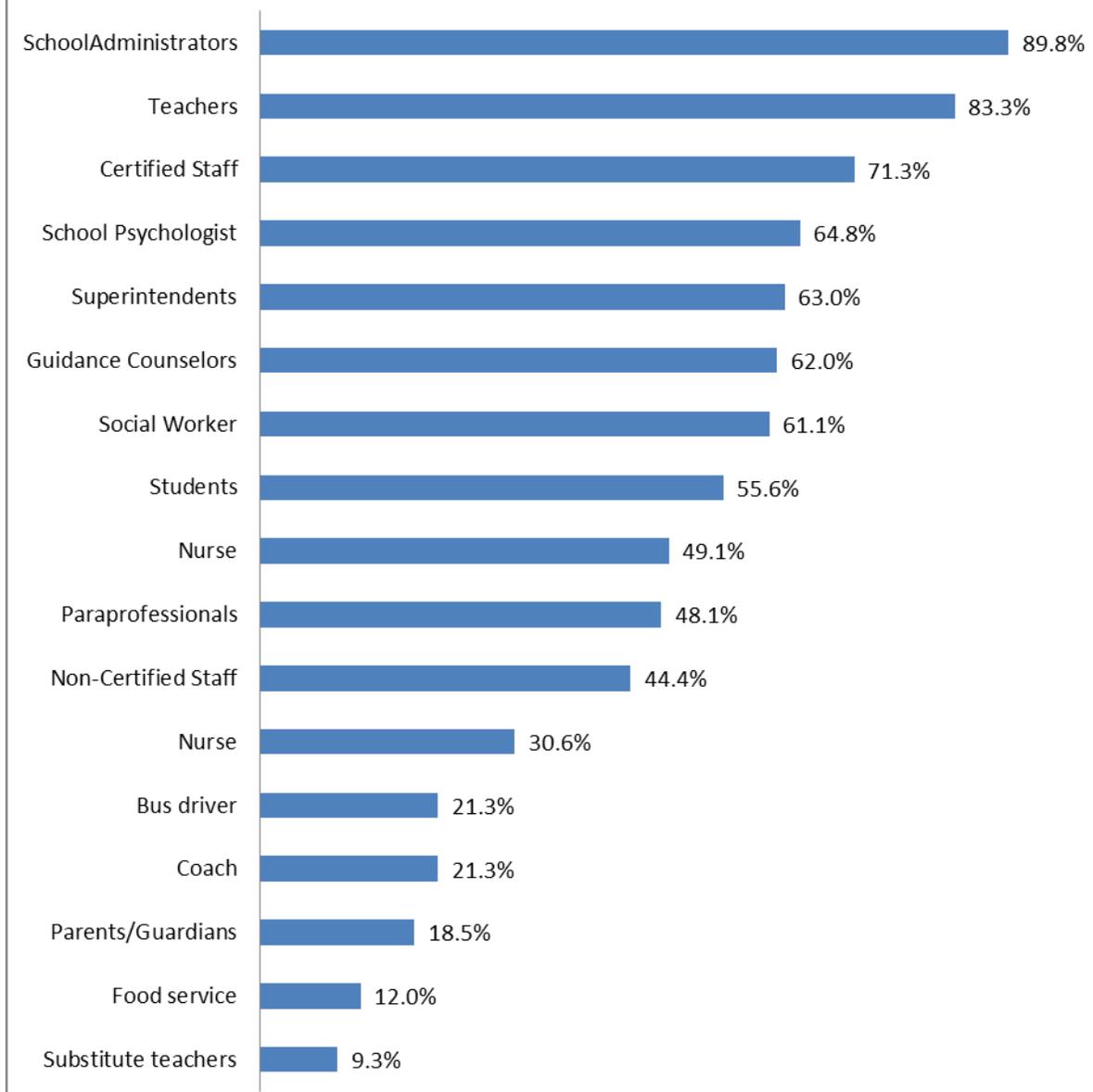
1. As of January 1, 2012, have you appointed a Safe School Climate Coordinator in your district? Y/N
2. As of January 1, 2012, have you appointed a Safe School Climate Specialist in each of your schools?
3. As of January 1, 2012, have you created a Safe School Climate Committee?
4. How many verified acts of bullying have you had in your district since July 1, 2011?
5. What was/were the responsive action(s) to these verified acts of bullying?
 1. Expulsion
 2. Suspension – ISS/OSS
 3. Detention
 4. Counseling
 5. Reassignment
 6. Community service
 7. Adult mediation
 8. Peer mediation
 9. Restorative actions
 10. Police action _____
 11. Other _____
6. Do you have grade-appropriate (K-12) Bullying Prevention/Positive School Climate program/curricula?
Name of programs/curricula _____
7. On/or before January 1, 2012, with which of the following groups have you conducted school climate surveys?
8. On/or before January 1, 2012, with which of the following groups have you provided school climate improvement/bullying prevention training for: students, parents/guardians, teachers, school administrators, superintendents, certified staff, non-certified staff, substitute teacher, guidance counselor, nurse, social worker, psychologist, nurse, paraprofessionals, coach, bus drivers, food service providers or any other individual who has contact with students on a regular basis?
9. As of January 1, 2012, in your district, does each school have an individual school climate improvement plan?
10. As of January 1, 2012, does your district improvement plan include school climate improvement?
11. How can the CSDE support you in your school climate improvement effort

Appendix B



Appendix C

District employees reporting that they had some form of training in positive school climate.



Appendix D

Safe School Climate Plan Template*
(School Year 20__ – 20__)

***This is a suggested Safe School Climate Plan Template that could serve as a framework and format.**

District: _____ **School:** _____

(To be completed at the School Level, submitted to the Safe School Climate Specialist and forwarded to the District Safe School Climate Coordinator for use in Creating the District Safe School Climate Plan)**

****This suggested Safe School Climate Plan Template follows/mirrors the Safe School Climate Rubric which should be used as a reference in completing the Template.**

National School Climate Standard	Current School Status (informed by data***) To What Extent is This Evident? *** It is recommended that the “Multiple Measures of Data” document be used as a guide for the kinds of data that would be important to review and include.	Areas Identified as Needing Improvement	Identified Strategies to Realize Improvement	Measurement and Documentation Options for Determining Improvement	Time Line for Reaching Improvement Goals

National School Climate Standard	Current School Status (informed by data) To What Extent is This Evident?	Areas Identified as Needing Improvement	Identified Strategies to Realize Improvement	Measurement and Documentation Options for Determining Improvement	Time Line for Reaching Improvement Goals
<p>Standard 1: Shared Mission Is it evident that all members of the school community are committed to physical, emotional and intellectual safety of the learners?</p>					
<p>Standard 1: Shared Mission Do participants share a vision of what a positive school climate looks, feels and sounds like?</p>					
<p>Standard 1: Shared Values What are the shared values?</p>					

National School Climate Standard	Current School Status (informed by data) To What Extent is This Evident?	Areas Identified as Needing Improvement	Identified Strategies to Realize Improvement	Measurement and Documentation Options for Determining Improvement	Time Line for Reaching Improvement Goals
Standard 1: Shared Goals What are the shared priorities?					
Standard 2: Shared School Policies Are there policies that promote the development of skills, knowledge and engagement?					
Standard 2: Shared School Policies Are there policies in place to address barriers to learning?					

National School Climate Standard	Current School Status (informed by data) To What Extent is This Evident?	Areas Identified as Needing Improvement	Identified Strategies to Realize Improvement	Measurement and Documentation Options for Determining Improvement	Time Line for Reaching Improvement Goals
<p>Policies on Dealing with P.A. 11-232 Bullying Allegations: Does the Plan include the specific requirements in An Act Concerning The Strengthening of School Bullying Laws? (This is generally the component of the plan provided to the district by the Law Firm advising the district.)</p>					

National School Climate Standard	Current School Status (informed by data) To What Extent is This Evident?	Areas Identified as Needing Improvement	Identified Strategies to Realize Improvement	Measurement and Documentation Options for Determining Improvement	Time Line for Reaching Improvement Goals
Standard 3: School Practices Are there practices in place to promote positive youth development?					
Standard 3: School Practices Are there practices in place that enhance teaching and learning?					
Standard 3: School Practices Are there practices in place to address barriers to learning?					

National School Climate Standard	Current School Status (informed by data) To What Extent is This Evident?	Areas Identified as Needing Improvement	Identified Strategies to Realize Improvement	Measurement and Documentation Options for Determining Improvement	Time Line for Reaching Improvement Goals
<p>Standard 3: School Practices Are there practices in place that develop and sustain infrastructure and capacity building?</p>					
<p>Standard 4: Safe Environment Is the school providing for a physically, emotionally, intellectually safe, healthy and welcoming environment?</p>					

National School Climate Standard	Current School Status (informed by data) To What Extent is This Evident?	Areas Identified as Needing Improvement	Identified Strategies to Realize Improvement	Measurement and Documentation Options for Determining Improvement	Time Line for Reaching Improvement Goals
<p>Standard 5: Social Justice Is the school engaging in practices that promote the social and civic responsibilities and a sense of social justice within school community?</p>					
<p>Continuous Improvement: Is there a clear understanding that school climate improvement is an ongoing organic process integral to wider school improvement?</p>					

National School Climate Standard	Current School Status (informed by data) To What Extent is This Evident?	Areas Identified as Needing Improvement	Identified Strategies to Realize Improvement	Measurement and Documentation Options for Determining Improvement	Time Line for Reaching Improvement Goals
Family/Community Partnerships: Are all stakeholders' interests represented and reflected in the school climate improvement efforts?					
Impact on Results: Is progress monitoring inherent in the school climate improvement process?					