

Connecticut School Climate Guidance



CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION — APRIL 2025

The purpose of this guidance is to (1) provide an outline of new school climate legislation required to be implemented in school year 2025-26; (2) provide resources for schools to begin to assess current efforts, artifacts and procedures; (3) facilitate supports to ensure district compliance and best practice implementation; and (4) assist in building welcoming and supportive school climates and cultures.

Public Act 23-167 significantly modified existing school climate legislation and policy. Districts may choose to implement these modified provisions in the 2024-25 school year, but the new school climate provisions become mandatory for all districts in 2025-26. The following elements are included among the changes:

- Requires the adoption of a new School Climate policy
- Outlines expectations on responding to “challenging behavior”
- Redefines terms and responsibilities associated with school climate personnel
- Establishes new training requirements

What is School Climate?

Before outlining critical elements of legislation, it is critical to frame this law in the context of best practices around school climate. According to legislation, school climate is, *“the quality and character of the school life, with a particular focus on the quality of the relationships within the school community, and which is based on patterns of people’s experiences of school life and that reflects the norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching, learning, leadership practices and organizational structures within the school community.”*

School climate is comprehensive, which emphasizes the need to align and integrate efforts across the district and with the community. School climate efforts should be embedded in district improvement plans, and district artifacts, like a Vision of a Graduate. Districts are encouraged to utilize multiple data sources and demonstrate the interconnectedness of various initiatives and programming (i.e., behavior/discipline, family engagement, attendance, social emotional learning, school counseling, advisory, etc.). Connecticut’s legislation supports districts in their attempts to align efforts, and work proactively with their community to co-create school environments that support student well-being and success.

Legislation at a Glance — Overview of Statutory Requirements

The new school climate legislation, inclusive of Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) Sec. 10-222aa–Sec. 10-222jj, establishes the following necessary components: a new school climate policy, a district-level school climate coordinator, school climate specialist at each school, school climate committees, school climate survey, school climate improvement plan and tiered behavior response, training requirements, and a restorative practices response policy. The following provides an overview of the statutory requirements and is therefore not intended to be exclusive.

Legislative Components and Expectations at a Glance

School Climate Policy

Districtwide (Sec. 10-222cc(b))

- Schools must adopt and implement the [Connecticut School Climate Policy](#) developed, updated and approved by the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE) and adopted by the Social Emotional learning and School Climate Advisory Collaborative (Collaborative).

School Climate Coordinator

District Level (Sec. 10-222dd)

- Must be the superintendent, or an administrator appointed by the superintendent;
- responsible for providing district-level support on the implementation of each school's climate improvement plan;
- must collaborate with the school climate specialist for each school to develop and disseminate strategies to prevent, identify and respond to "challenging behavior" in the school environment, including alleged bullying and harassment; and
- must collect and maintain data regarding school climate improvement and meet, at least twice per year, with each school's climate specialist for the following purposes: (1) identifying strategies to improve school climate; (2) proposing recommendations for revisions to the school climate improvement plan; and (3) assisting with the completion of the school climate survey.

School Climate Specialist

School Level (Sec. 10-222ee)

- Must be the school principal or certified staff designated by the principal, trained in school climate improvement or restorative practices;
- responsible for leading in the prevention, identification and responses to challenging behavior, including alleged bullying and harassment;
- implementing evidence and research-based interventions, including restorative practices;

- leading and scheduling meetings of the school climate committee; and
- leading the implementation of the school climate improvement plan.

School Climate Committee

School Level (Sec. 10-222ff)

- Each school must have a committee that is racially, culturally and linguistically diverse and representative of various roles in the school community;
- membership must be reviewed and approved annually and include: the school climate specialist; a teacher selected by the union; demographically representative students, families, and other members identified by the School Climate Specialist;
- must assist in the development, administration, revision of the school climate survey for each school biennially; use survey data to advise on improving school climate; and
- must assist in the development and implementation of the school climate improvement plan; advise on strategies to improve school climate and implementing evidence- and research-based interventions; annually providing notice to the school community of a bullying complaint form; and holding meetings, at least twice per year, with the school community concerning the school climate improvement plan.

School Climate Survey

Districtwide (Sec. 10-222gg)

- Must be administered for each school biennially;
- must be administered to students, families of students, and school employees; and
- parents/guardians must receive prior written notice of the content and administration of the survey and be provided a reasonable opportunity to opt the student out of the survey.

School Climate Improvement Plan

School Level (Sec. 10-222hh)

- Each school must develop a school climate improvement plan, based on the results of their school climate survey, school climate committee recommendations, protocols and supports outlined in the law, and other relevant data;
- must be aligned with the Connecticut School Climate Standards; and
- must include protocols and supports to enhance classroom safety and be used to prevent, identify and respond to challenging behavior, along with other components outlined in the legislation.

See [Appendix A](#) for additional guidance.

Tiered Challenging Behavior Response

Districtwide (Sec. 10-222hh)

A tiered response is required for an incident of challenging behavior that meets any of the following criteria:

- requires temporarily clearing a classroom or removing a majority of students to reduce the likelihood of injury; or
- indicates a credible intention to cause bodily harm to self or others; or
- results in an injury requiring medical attention beyond first aid (or less severe injuries caused by the same person on

more than one occasion, as verified by a school nurse or other medical professional).

See [Appendix B](#) for additional guidance.

Training Requirements

Districtwide (Sec. 10-222ii)

- Districts must provide resources and training to school employees in the following areas: social and emotional learning; school climate and culture; and evidence- and research-based interventions (including restorative practices). Training may be made available at each school and include technical assistance in the implementation of the school climate improvement plan.

Restorative Practices Response Policy

Districtwide (Sec. 10-222jj)

- School districts must adopt a restorative practices response policy, which school employees must implement for incidents of challenging behavior or student conflict that is nonviolent and not a crime; and
- the policy must not include the involvement of school resource officers or law enforcement – unless the conduct escalates to violence or constitutes a crime.

Conclusion

In the 2024-25 school year, districts may already be implementing Connecticut's new school climate policy, or they may be transitioning to that policy, which becomes mandatory for all districts beginning in the 2025-26 school year. We hope this document, including the following section that is based on district input, addresses questions districts may have about the new policy.

We encourage districts to assess your current school climate initiatives, behavioral response systems, data collection, and support structures.

For further questions or assistance, please contact:

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Resources

To support district implementation of the new requirements, below are some local and national resources.

- [SEL Collaborative](#) – the noted policy, challenging behavior form, and additional information on the Collaborative.
- [CABE School Climate Policy](#)
- [WestEd](#)
 - [School Climate Domains](#)
 - [Reimagining School Safety](#)
- [National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments](#)
 - [Reference Manual](#)
 - [US DOE March 2023 Guiding Principles for Creating Safe, Inclusive, Supportive and Fair School Climates](#)
- [School Safety.gov Back to School Campaign](#)
- [ED School Climate Surveys \(EDSCLS\)](#) an associated web-based platform. The EDSCLS allows States, local districts, and schools to collect and act on reliable, nationally-validated school climate data in real-time.
- The [Comprehensive School Climate Inventory \(CSCI\)](#) is a nationally-recognized school climate survey that provides an in-depth profile of your school community's particular strengths, as well as areas for improvement.

Appendix A: School Climate Improvement Plans

C.G.S. Sec. 10-222hh requires the school climate specialist, in collaboration with the school climate coordinator, to develop, and update as necessary, the school climate improvement plan. The school climate specialist must submit the plan to the school climate coordinator on or before December 31 each year. Upon approval, the plan must be made available to the school community. Under the law, the plan is to be used in the prevention of, identification of, and in response to “challenging behavior,” which the law defines as follows: “behavior that negatively impacts school climate or interferes, or is at risk of interfering, with the learning or safety of a student or the safety of a school employee.”

School climate improvement plans must align with Connecticut school climate standards¹ and must include protocols and supports to enhance classroom safety and address challenging behavior. C.G.S. Sec. 10-222hh(b) provides that those protocols and supports, must, at a minimum, include the following components:

- Contact information for an administrator designated by the school climate specialist, and other designated administrators, to be notified when incidents of challenging behavior result in student discipline or removal of a student from the classroom;
- The process by which this designated administrator will assess the facts, severity and intentionality of an incident of challenging behavior. The Collaborative has created a [Challenging Behavior Reporting, Investigation, and Response Form](#) that districts may use;
- The designated location that students may be sent when removed from class for disciplinary reasons pursuant to C.G.S. Sec. 10-233b. In addition, protocols and supports must include the supports each student may receive in this location, including, among other things, interventions from trained school employees, therapeutic resources, and mental health supports;
- The ways to “address challenging behavior, enhance resiliency, increase the use of de-escalation strategies and improve social and emotional skills.” These may include, among others, training, therapeutic mental health supports, restorative practices, or trauma-informed instructional strategies;
- Safeguards to ensure that supports, services or interventions are in compliance with the special education laws, including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and a student’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Section 504 Plan;
- A requirement that the Superintendent submit, at least annually, a report to the local or regional board of education concerning the number of tiered response incidents that occurred in the prior year. The report must comply with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Connecticut State Department of Education’s (CSDE) data suppression guidelines, and must include the grade level of each student involved in such incidents as well as the supports, services, or interventions provided; and
- A prohibition on discrimination or retaliation against individuals who report or investigate tiered response incidents.

¹ The Connecticut school climate standards are included in the Connecticut school climate policy, developed by C.A.B.E.

Appendix B: Tiered Response

Beyond the above protocols and supports, the new school climate policy defines a specific subset of challenging behavior that requires districts to respond with certain tiered interventions (referred to hereinafter as “tiered response incidents”). Pursuant to C.G.S. Sec. 10-222hh(b)(6), a tiered response (as detailed in the table below) is required for an incident of challenging behavior that meets any of the following criteria:

- a. requires temporarily clearing a classroom or removing a majority of students to reduce the likelihood of injury;
- b. indicates a credible intention to cause bodily harm to self or others; or
- c. results in an injury requiring medical attention beyond first aid (or less severe injuries caused by the same person on more than one occasion, as verified by a school nurse or other medical professional). The law goes on to provide that, if a district determines that conduct meets the above criteria, school climate improvement plans must include the following responses:

Occasion Number – Tiered Response Incident	Tiered Intervention Required
First offense	Principal must notify the parents/guardians of each student involved in a manner that complies with FERPA.
Second offense	Principal must invite the parent/guardian of involved students to a meeting (virtual or in person) to discuss supports and interventions applicable to each student – including, but not limited to restorative practices.
Multiple subsequent offenses (or single incident that causes severe harm)	Principal must notify the parents/guardians of involved students of other resources for supports and interventions, including, but not limited to the following: the 2-1-1 Infoline program; services/programs available through the Behavioral Health Partnership, established through C.G.S. Sec. 17a-22h; or other resources for professional services, support, or crisis intervention.

In addition, for tiered response incidents, there must be a meeting between an administrator and the school employee who witnessed the incident. The purpose of the meeting, which must occur within two days of the incident, is to determine the supports and interventions required to address the needs of students and school employees, although supports and interventions for special education students must be determined by the student’s Planning and Placement Team (PPT).² In addition, protocols and supports must include a process by which a teacher may request a behavior intervention meeting.³

² For special education students, notice of the incident must be submitted to the PPT no more than two days after the incident occurred.

³ C.G.S. Sec. 10-236c(b) permits any teacher of record in a classroom to request a behavior intervention meeting with the school’s crisis intervention team “for any student whose behavior has caused a serious disruption to the instruction of other students, or caused self-harm or physical harm to such teacher or another student or staff member in such teacher’s classroom.”

Commonly Asked Questions and Answers Regarding Connecticut School Climate Policy

Q: Who can serve as the “District” School Climate Coordinator?

A: Under the new law, this individual must be the Superintendent or an administrator designated by the Superintendent. An individual appointed by the Superintendent to serve as school climate coordinator must hold the 092 endorsement.

Q: Who can serve as the School Climate Specialist?

A: The school climate specialist is the staff member, appointed at each school, who oversees school climate efforts at the individual building level. C.G.S. Sec. 10-222ee requires either the school principal, or another professional certified staff member trained in school climate improvement or restorative practices and so designated by the principal, to serve in this role. No particular level of certification or specific endorsement is required, and it is not required that this individual be a certified administrator.

Q: What needs to be included in the School Climate Survey?

A: The law requires that the survey be “research-based, validated and developmentally appropriate” and it must be in the “predominant languages of the members of the school community.” It may be the statewide school climate survey developed by the Collaborative or it may be a survey developed elsewhere, provided it meets the school climate survey standards developed by the Collaborative. Moreover, pursuant to C.G.S. Sec. 10-222aa(12), the law provides that the survey must measure and identify school climate needs and must track progress through a school climate improvement plan.

C.G.S. Sec. 10-222gg requires the school climate committee, beginning in the 2025–26 school year, and biennially thereafter, to administer a school climate survey for each school. The survey must be administered to students, school employees and student families. However, each student’s parent/guardian must receive prior written notice of the content and administration of the survey and shall have a reasonable opportunity to opt the student out of the survey administration.

Q: Who decides the training, and who is mandated to attend?

A: The school climate coordinator is responsible for selecting and approving the individuals or organizations to provide this training, which must be open to any school employee wishing to participate. While the law mandates that districts “provide” this vitally important training to school employees, there is no requirement in the law that the district document the attendance of each employee in such training sessions.

Q: Do we have to provide our school climate improvement plan to the CSDE?

A: No. C.G.S. Sec. 10-222hh requires the school climate specialist to submit a plan to the school climate coordinator on or before December 31 of each year and must be made available to the school community upon approval.

Q: How is “challenging behavior” defined and how is it relevant to this work?

A: “Challenging behavior” is a term defined in the law as follows: “behavior that negatively impacts school climate or interferes, or is at risk of interfering, with the learning or safety of a student or the safety of a school employee.” C.G.S. Sec. 10-222aa(16). Under the law, schools and districts are required to enact various plans, policies, and procedures to address such challenging behavior. More specifically, school climate improvement plans must include various protocols and supports, as described in C.G.S. Sec. 10-222hh, to address challenging behavior and enhance classroom safety.

Q: What about bullying? Where does that fit into this new school climate policy construct?

A: Bullying is still covered under the law and is considered a subset of “challenging behavior” with the latter term broader in scope.⁴ For instance, pursuant to C.G.S. Sec. 10-222ee, one of the school climate specialist’s primary duties is “leading in the prevention, identification and response to challenging behavior, *including, but not limited to, reports of alleged bullying and harassment*” (emphasis added). Thus, bullying is one type of challenging behavior covered under Connecticut’s new school climate policy.

The law required the Collaborative to convene a subcommittee to, among other things, create a uniform bullying complaint form. This form must be included on the website of the CSDE and of boards of education and must also be included in each district’s student handbook. C.G.S. Sec. 10-222bb(2). The law further requires the school climate committee annually to provide notice to the school community of the uniform bullying complaint form developed by the Collaborative, or a similar form. C.G.S. 10-222ff(b)(5). In addition, the school climate coordinator’s duties include, among other things, collecting and maintaining data regarding the “types of bullying complaints submitted by members of the school community.” C.G.S. Sec. 10-222dd(3).

Q: How about “verified acts of bullying?” The law currently requires district reporting in this area. Will that still be required?

A: No. Districts are still required to maintain data regarding bullying, but reporting “verified acts of bullying” to the CSDE will no longer be required.⁵

Q: What are a district’s responsibilities under school climate improvement plans? Is there a template?

A: The required components of school climate improvement plans are set forth in C.G.S. Sec. 10-222hh and are outlined in Appendix A and B of this guidance document. The Collaborative has released a [School Climate Improvement Plan Template](#) that schools may utilize to support their planning.

Q: C.G.S. 10-222jj requires districts to adopt a restorative practices response policy “to be implemented by school employees for incidents of challenging behavior or student conflict that is nonviolent and does not constitute a crime.” Is this required?

A: Yes, districts must adopt such a policy beginning in the 2025–26 school year. Districts must apply this policy in all instances of challenging behavior or student conflict that is nonviolent and does not constitute a crime.

4 It is important to observe that the definition of the term “bullying” changes under Connecticut’s new school climate policy. As outlined more fully in C.G.S. Sec. 10-222d(a)(1), the legacy school climate provisions define “bullying” in very specific fashion: a direct or indirect act that is “severe, persistent or pervasive,” and which (A) causes physical or emotional harm, (B) places an individual in reasonable fear of physical or emotional harm, or (C) infringes on the rights or opportunities of an individual at school. This definition goes on to specify that the term includes, but is not limited to, communications, acts or gestures based on a series of “actual or perceived differentiating characteristic.” The new definition of “bullying,” as specified in C.G.S. Sec. 10-222aa(4) is more general and includes a broader range of conduct. The term will now be defined as follows: “unwanted and aggressive behavior among children in grades kindergarten to twelve, inclusive, that involves a real or perceived power imbalance.”

5 C.G.S. Sec. 10-222d(b)(11), which is included among the legacy school climate provisions, currently requires districts to report such acts to the CSDE on an annual basis. This provision is set to be repealed effective July 1, 2025. See P.A. 23-167, Sec. 87.

Q: How does the restorative practices response policy relate to the tiered interventions that must be in each school's climate improvement plan? How do these provisions fit together?

A: First, a tiered response is required any time the conduct at issue constitutes challenging behavior that meets the criteria set forth in the law (i.e., requires temporarily clearing a classroom or removing a majority of students to reduce the likelihood of injury; indicates a credible intention to cause bodily harm to self or others; or results in an injury requiring medical attention beyond first aid or less severe injuries caused by the same person on more than one occasion, as verified by a school nurse or other medical professional). See C.G.S. Sec. 10-222hh(b)(6). Whenever student conduct meets this standard, a tiered response is required – without exception. The restorative practices response policy may be used only for incidents of challenging behavior or student conflict that “is nonviolent and does not constitute a crime.” It will be rare for conduct to simultaneously meet these two standards (that is, to require a tiered response intervention while also being nonviolent and non-criminal). Nevertheless, in the event given conduct does meet both standards, the district would be required to address the conduct both through using the applicable tiered intervention and through the district's restorative practices response policy.

Q: Can you elaborate on how to count the incidents of challenging behavior that require tiered responses? When the law refers to “a single incident” or “a subsequent incident,” does that mean subsequent incidents of the same specific type of challenging behavior?

A: This refers to any incident of challenging behavior that meets the criteria for implementing a tiered response. For an instance to constitute a subsequent offense, the conduct need not be precisely the same type of challenging behavior nor the same tiered response. For instance, a student's first offense might be some behavior that requires temporarily clearing the classroom. A subsequent incident would occur if, for example, the student was to engage in challenging behavior resulting in an injury requiring medical attention beyond basic first aid. Because these are two instances of behavior that meet the criteria set forth in C.G.S. Section 10-222hh(b)(6), they would be counted as two separate tiered response incidents.

Q: The types of challenging behaviors requiring a tiered response are outlined in Section 10-222hh(b)(6) of the General Statutes. One criterion listed there requires a tiered response for incidents of challenging behavior that “result in an injury that requires medical attention beyond basic first aid, or less severe injuries caused by the same person on more than one occasion, verified by the school nurse or other medical professional.” Would this include physical and non-physical (emotional) injuries?

A: The language of this particular provision, C.G.S. Sec. 10-222hh(b)(6)(C), is intended to encompass only injuries that are physical in nature.