



TO: P-12 Education Committee

FROM: Cosimo Tangorra, Jr. 

SUBJECT: Development of a New York Statewide School Climate Index

DATE: April 6, 2015

AUTHORIZATION(S): 

SUMMARY

Issue for Discussion

Should the Board of Regents direct Department staff to develop a New York Statewide School Climate Index?

Proposed Handling

This issue will come before the Regents P-12 Education Committee for discussion at the April meeting.

Background Information

In January 2013, the Board directed the Department to re-establish the New York State Safe Schools Task Force. In September 2014, Department staff presented to the Board the 36 New York State Safe Schools Task Force recommendations listed in priority order. Second among the recommendations was development and implementation of a Statewide School Climate Index.

What is a School Climate Index?

A school climate index (SCI) is a tool that allows school buildings and districts to effectively assess and analyze school climate through school-to-school comparisons and to identify schools most in need at programmatic interventions aimed at improving school climate. An SCI creates and provides a state-normed, school-level description of multiple research-based factors that are known to influence learning success in schools.

Why Measure School Climate?

Measuring school climate is a crucial step in improving school climate and giving school administrators information regarding the climate in their respective buildings and districts. School administrators can then use the SCI to evaluate and improve school climate.

A school-wide climate survey will provide insight vital to school success by identifying strengths and areas in need of improvement. An SCI will then be used to assist a school to develop a school climate improvement plan with specific action items based on the results of the annual SCI. Additionally, the SCI will facilitate dialogue and strengthen communication and collaboration among school administrators, staff, students, parents, and the community.

New York Statewide School Climate Index

After seeking input from stakeholders within New York State and from states across the nation, the Department is recommending for discussion a School Climate Index that would be comprised of three measurements providing each participating school with its relative “climate index.”

AN SCI will illustrate a school building’s climate based on multiple measures aiding school leaders and the community in the identification of schools that could benefit from programmatic interventions to improve school climate. The implementation of an SCI also allows us to move away from exclusively relying on the Violent and Disruptive Incident Reporting (VADIR) System to designate safe and unsafe schools. VADIR is viewed by the field as punitive, overly complicated, and often inaccurate. Currently, schools are required on an annual basis to submit data to the Department in regard to the number of violent incidents that occur within the school year. The Department uses this data to calculate each school’s school violence index (SVI). A school’s SVI determines whether it is listed as “persistently dangerous.”

The Dignity for All Students Act (DASA) requires that schools also collect and record material incidents of discrimination and/or harassment, such as bullying, or cyberbullying. This information is collected in a report called the Report of Incidents Concerning School Safety and the Educational Climate and is required to be submitted to the Department at the conclusion of the school year.

A portion of the SCI would incorporate both VADIR and DASA reporting structures into each school’s climate index.

An SCI in New York State could be comprised of the three following measurements:

1. Survey Participation

New York State could implement three types of research-based surveys: one for students, one for school personnel, and one for the community (parents,

guardians, etc.). The results and responses of the surveys could be tallied and scored to provide feedback on the perceived safety and climate of a school district. These surveys would be based on those designed and used by other states, such as California and Georgia, in consultation with national and state researchers as well as our New York State Center for School Safety (Measurement, Inc.). The three survey results could be weighted as one of the three values within the overall School Climate Index.

2. VADIR and DASA reporting of violent incidents

School districts are required to report violent incidents pursuant to New York State statute. However, required VADIR and DASA reports are currently not linked and school districts are required to fill out two separate and administratively burdensome parallel reports. In an effort to increase accuracy and usefulness of these reporting structures, the Department will explore developing a single comprehensive data reporting system to collect both of these reporting requirements in lieu of the two systems currently in place. These data will be used to calculate a School Violence Index, which could be weighted as one of the three values within the overall School Climate Index.

3. Chronic Absenteeism

Other states use measures of absenteeism indicators as part of their SCI. Department staff is exploring methods for the use of chronic absenteeism data as the third measurement to determine a school's relative SCI.

Once the data are collected from these three components, a formula could be used to quantify the SCI to be used by schools to implement strategies that would help improve the school climate and culture.

Next Steps

Department staff will incorporate changes suggested by the Board and present a final recommendation for a statewide School Climate Index at an upcoming meeting, as well as a summary of the fiscal and personnel resources that would be required to successfully implement this recommendation.