



Promoting Safe and Supportive Learning Environments

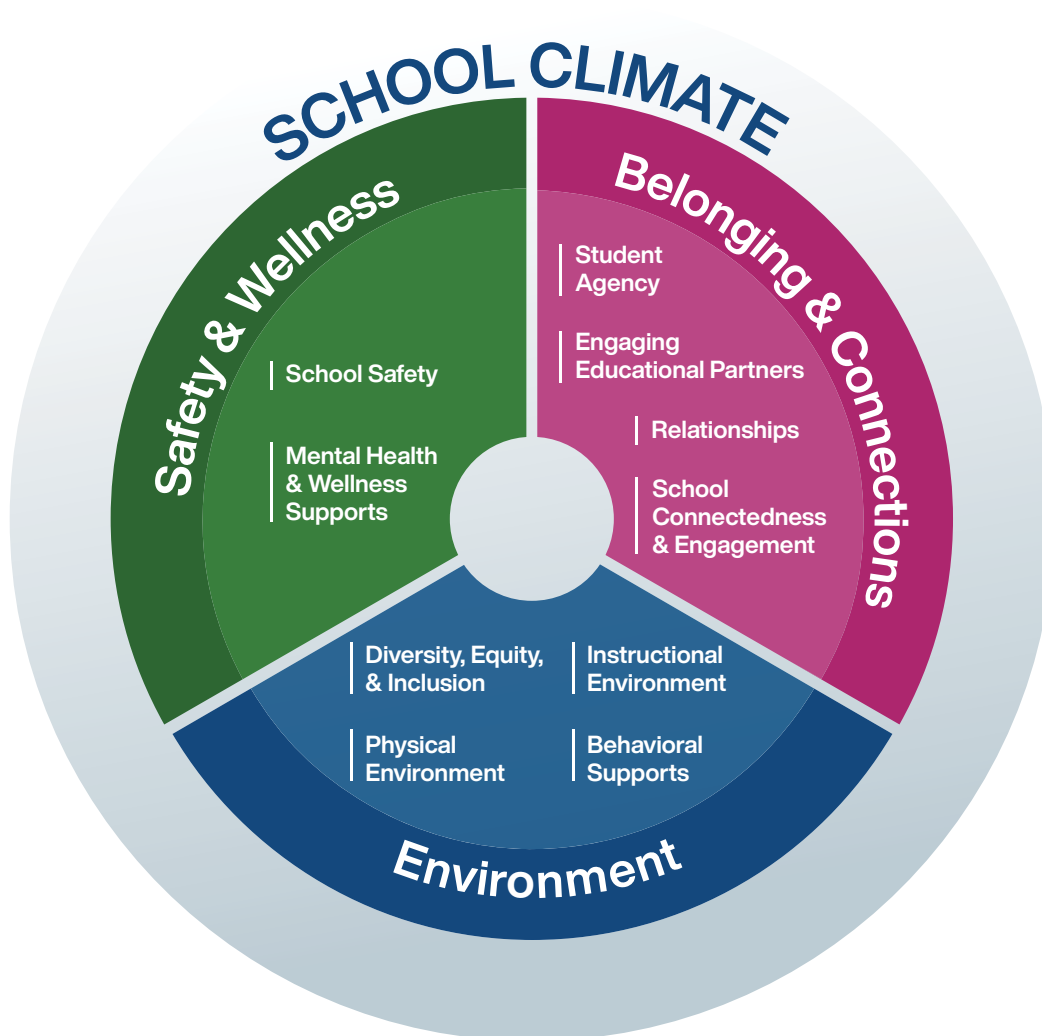
A School Climate Domain Assessment Tool

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What is school climate, and why is it important?

School climate can be “defined as the qualities of a school environment experienced by students and staff and encompassing relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures” (National School Climate Center, n.d., as cited in Magby & Cerna, 2023). This definition highlights the various aspects that contribute to school climate, which are characterized by three domains: Belonging and Connections, Safety and Wellness, and the Environment (Figure 1). Within each domain, there are interrelated subdomains (Magby & Cerna, 2023).

Figure 1. The Three Domains of School Climate



To strengthen school climate practices, school communities should

- » center efforts around equity,
- » engage all educational partners,
- » find opportunities for capacity-building and professional growth,
- » develop a practice of critical self-reflection, and
- » use data to help make informed decisions.

Research shows that schools with a positive school climate have students who exhibit higher levels of motivation, connectedness, school attendance, and academic achievement (National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, 2022). A safe and supportive school climate also benefits adults. It fosters a greater sense of safety, morale, and pride among staff, leading to increased rates of teacher retention (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Safe and Healthy Students, 2016).

What is the School Climate Domain Assessment Tool?

The School Climate Domain Assessment Tool is an observation tool. It can be used for reflection and improvement by anyone interested in the cultivation of a safe and supportive learning environment. State, district, and school-based administrators, educators, students, and families/caregivers can utilize the tool. It helps identify, document, and communicate school climate strengths and opportunities for growth. This tool can help determine the extent to which universal climate improvement strategies are being implemented in each of the three school climate domains.

The purpose of this tool is to provide a high-level snapshot of school climate efforts. Potential uses of the tool include the following:

- » conducting an initial baseline review of school climate efforts, with the goal of providing a deeper dive into school climate strengths and challenges
- » monitoring ongoing progress in the implementation of key school climate improvement strategies, with the twin goals of identifying areas for continuous improvement and maintaining successes
- » gathering perspectives on school climate improvement initiatives, with the goal of identifying and monitoring gaps and inequities

How do I use the School Climate Domain Assessment Tool?

The School Climate Domain Assessment Tool is structured around three school climate domains that are aligned with school climate improvement strategies and subdomains. For each strategy, users should identify the level of implementation using status ratings that best reflect their experience and observations. The status ratings are defined as follows:

- » **Pending.** Nothing has been developed or implemented yet.
- » **Emerging.** Some areas of the indicator have been developed and are starting to be implemented.
- » **Implementing.** The indicator has been fully implemented.
- » **Sustaining.** The indicator has been fully implemented and is sustained.

There are various types of evidence useful for assessing school climate. Users of this tool can collect data from several sources:

- » personal observations of a school's physical environment
- » observed interactions among students, families/caregivers, or staff
- » staff surveys or interview data regarding school climate from students and families/caregivers
- » meeting notes and documentation of school climate improvement strategies and activities
- » plans and resources developed to promote staff and student well-being
- » community members' awareness of or active use of tools and supports that promote a positive school climate

The tool also provides a space for notetakers to capture any ideas that support the level of implementation. A list of resources is included in the Appendix to support the use of this tool.

Domain 1: Safety and Wellness

SUBDOMAIN: SCHOOL SAFETY

Indicator	Status	Notes
1a. The school has identified, collected, and reviewed qualitative and quantitative data to support school safety.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	
1b. The school has completed emergency readiness plans that are regularly updated and reviewed by a team of students, staff, and school community members, with an ongoing process to gather community input.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	
1c. The school has identified key school safety strategies it intends to implement related to the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ violence and victimization reduction ▪ substance use prevention ▪ bullying and harassment prevention 	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	
1d. Students, staff, and community members are knowledgeable about school safety strategies to support the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ prevent violence and victimization ▪ deter substance use ▪ stop bullying and harassment ▪ promote psychological and emotional safety 	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	

Indicator	Status	Notes
1e. The school has an ongoing professional learning plan that supports staff in learning strategies focused on violence and victimization reduction, substance use prevention, and bullying and harassment prevention.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	

SUBDOMAIN: MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS SUPPORTS

Indicator	Status	Notes
2a. The school has identified, collected, and reviewed qualitative and quantitative data to support the mental health and wellness of students and staff.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	

2b. Based on ongoing review of mental health and wellness data, the school has identified key mental health and wellness strategies that it intends to implement related to the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ attention to life satisfaction and optimism ▪ development of social-emotional skills ▪ access to mental health wellness supports for students and staff ▪ reduction of stigma and increased awareness of mental health issues among students, staff, and parents 	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	

Indicator	Status	Notes
2c. Students, staff, families/caregivers, and community members are aware and supported in utilizing available mental health and wellness strategies such as yoga, mindfulness, and breathing techniques and understand their roles in promoting wellness.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	
2d. All staff participate in professional learning focused on supporting mental health and wellness.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	
2e. School leadership fosters a culture of wellness by prioritizing, integrating, modeling, and embedding wellness strategies that support staff.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	
2f. The school implements key strategies, such as mindfulness, yoga, meditation, stress management sessions, and ergonomics, to support the wellness of staff on an ongoing basis.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	
2g. The school ensures ongoing collaboration between teaching staff and mental health counselors and social workers.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	

Domain 2: Belonging & Connections

SUBDOMAIN: RELATIONSHIPS

Indicator	Status	Notes
3a. The school has identified, collected, and reviewed qualitative and quantitative data to support relationship building between students, staff, families/caregivers, and community members.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	
3b. The school has identified relationship-building strategies for implementation, such as morning meetings, community circles, greetings, and student interest surveys.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	
3c. Data are collected using strategies such as listening circles, focus groups, forums, empathy interviews, and panels to assess and maintain the effectiveness of building positive relationships. Participants include students, staff, families/caregivers, and community members.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	
3d. Students, staff, families/caregivers, and community members are aware of relationship-building strategies, such as morning meetings, community circles, greetings, and student interest surveys, and they understand their role in facilitating the home-to-school connection.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	

Indicator	Status	Notes
3e. The school has an ongoing professional learning plan that supports staff to understand how to implement and practice relationship building strategies.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	

SUBDOMAIN: SCHOOL CONNECTEDNESS AND ENGAGEMENT

Indicator	Status	Notes
4a. The school has identified, collected, and reviewed qualitative and quantitative data to support the connectedness and engagement of students, staff, families/caregivers, and community members.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	
4b. Strategies such as listening circles, focus groups, forums, empathy interviews, and panels are implemented to promote student voice.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	
4c. The school features welcoming spaces that promote an inclusive physical environment through displaying welcoming signs, posters promoting diversity and inclusion, and artwork reflecting the school's values of respect and acceptance.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	

Indicator	Status	Notes
4d. The school has identified schoolwide events, activities, and projects that showcase diverse identities, cultures, languages, and traditions.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	
4e. Staff participate in professional learning focused on strategies for enhancing school connectedness and engagement.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	

SUBDOMAIN: ENGAGING EDUCATIONAL PARTNERS

Indicator	Status	Notes
5a. The school has identified, collected, and reviewed qualitative and quantitative data to support the engagement of families/ caregivers and community partners.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	
5b. The school has identified its educational partners and developed a plan that includes activities to keep them informed and engaged and activities that reach out to seek support, such as volunteer opportunities, suggestions, and feedback.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	

Indicator	Status	Notes
5c. Strategies such as focus groups, forums, empathy interviews, and panels are implemented to gather input from educational partners.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	
5d. The academic and social-emotional well-being of all students is recognized as a shared commitment and responsibility of all families/caregivers and community partners.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	
5e. Staff participate in ongoing professional development focused on authentic engagement with educational partners, including students, families/caregivers, and community partners.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	

SUBDOMAIN: STUDENT AGENCY

Indicator	Status	Notes
6a. The school has identified, collected, and reviewed qualitative and quantitative data to promote student agency.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	

Indicator	Status	Notes
6b. The school seeks student input to identify their interests, questions, and curiosities, using this information to create a collaborative school experience.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	
6c. Students provide input in decision-making processes through student government, student-led clubs and committees, school councils, advisory boards, and social justice initiatives within the school community.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	
6d. Staff provide meaningful opportunities for students to actively participate in their daily school experience through peer tutoring and mentorship, sports, music, clubs, debate, math leagues, community service, and awareness campaigns.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	
6e. Staff participate in professional development focused on best practices for uplifting student voice and choice.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	

Domain 3: Environment

SUBDOMAIN: DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

Indicator	Status	Notes
7a. The school has identified, collected, and reviewed qualitative and quantitative data to support diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	
7b. The school has allocated funds to purchase supplemental texts that are culturally relevant and inclusive of the school community. Such texts are available in every classroom and the school library.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	
7c. School leadership provides professional learning opportunities and resources for all staff, including but not limited to training focused on cultural competence, mindsets, anti-racist education, implicit bias, and culturally responsive support.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	
7d. The school and staff model critical thinking, empathy, and global awareness; provide opportunities for students to cultivate compassion; and become aware of local, national, and global issues.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	

SUBDOMAIN: INSTRUCTIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Indicator	Status	Notes
8a. The school has identified, collected, and reviewed qualitative and quantitative data to implement instructional best practices that accommodate the needs of all learners, including foundational skills.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	
8b. Site leadership and staff model and use the three social-emotional learning signature practices—inclusive welcome, engaging strategies, and intentional close—in classrooms and at all meetings.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	
8c. All classrooms are text-rich environments. Some examples include the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ classroom library ▪ word walls ▪ student work displays ▪ anchor charts ▪ technology integration such as e-books, audiobooks, and educational apps 	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	
8d. Students are empowered to use rubrics in support of goal setting and self-assessment, enhancing their ability to track and achieve their learning goals based on rigorous grade-level standards.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	

Indicator	Status	Notes
8e. Staff consistently participate in ongoing professional learning that is focused on best instructional practices, such as Universal Design for Learning, centers, discussion/participation protocols, correction of mistakes, and group work.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	

SUBDOMAIN: PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Indicator	Status	Notes
9a. The school has identified, collected, and reviewed qualitative and quantitative data to support the physical environment.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	
9b. The school has a welcoming and inclusive physical environment that displays welcoming signage, posters promoting diversity and inclusion, and artwork that reflects the school's values of respect and acceptance.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	
9c. Staff arrange physical spaces that are inclusive and responsive to students' physical, mental, and emotional needs.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	

Indicator	Status	Notes
9d. Bulletin boards and displays highlight student work and reflect value for the diverse languages and cultures of the school community.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	
9e. Staff participate in ongoing professional learning focused on maintaining safe and supportive physical environments.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	

SUBDOMAIN: BEHAVIORAL SUPPORTS

Indicator	Status	Notes
10a. The school has identified, collected, and reviewed qualitative and quantitative data to support culturally responsive and restorative behavior supports.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	
10b. Discipline policies, behavior plans, and progressive discipline responses are developed collaboratively with educational partners.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	

Indicator	Status	Notes
10c. School staff maintain shared definitions and a common understanding of behavioral supports to ensure consistency and effectiveness in managing student behavior across all settings.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	
10d. Staff consistently use behavior and referral form data to guide daily behavioral support strategies, such as Check in Check Out, Check and Connect, behavior intervention charts, and incentive charts.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	
10e. Routines and procedures are cocreated with students, posted, and implemented to provide proactive behavior supports, such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, restorative conversations, proactive circles, restorative games, and embedded social-emotional learning supports.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	
10f. Staff participate in ongoing professional learning focused on positive behavior supports.	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	
10g. Staff have multiple ways to highlight and acknowledge positive student behavior (e.g., recognition boards, weekly shout-outs, in-class and schoolwide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports recognition).	Pending	
	Emerging	
	Implementing	
	Sustaining	

Special Consideration

To ensure the success of continuous school climate improvement efforts, it is crucial that these efforts be supported by ongoing data collection and analysis. This approach enables educators and administrators to assess the effectiveness of various resources and support mechanisms. By continuously monitoring and evaluating the impact of these interventions, schools can make informed decisions and tailor their strategies to address specific needs and challenges. This evidence-based approach ensures that interventions are not only effective but also adaptable, fostering a safe and supportive climate that promotes academic achievement and the wellness of students and staff.

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Appendix

Following is a list of essential resources to support the use of the School Climate Domain Assessment Tool. These resources offer practical guidance and best practices to support the implementation of the tool. By utilizing these resources, educators and administrators can gain a clear understanding of the school's environment, identify areas for improvement, and develop strategies to create a safe and supportive school climate that fosters student success and well-being.

Here are some resources you might consider using with this school climate assessment tool.

- » [The Impact of Student–Staff Relationships on School Climate](#) video
- » [Three SEL Signature Practices](#)
- » [Street Data](#)
- » [Cultivating Caring Relationships at School: 15 Activities That Promote Staff and Student Connection](#)

- » [*Understanding School Climate: An Overview of School Climate Domains*](#)
- » [*Designing Safe and Supportive Physical Classroom Environments: A Checklist*](#)
- » [*Reframing and Understanding Staff Resistance to Advance Positive School Climates*](#)
- » [*Participatory Systems Change for Equity: An Inquiry Guide for Child-, Youth- and Family-Serving Agencies*](#)
- » [*Calming Spaces in Schools and Classrooms*](#)
- » [*Working Well Podcast*](#)
- » [*Engaging Students as Leaders to Reimagine School Safety: An Educator Case Story*](#)



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