

School Climate Assessment Policy Q & A



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This policy Q & A addresses the topics related to the School Climate Assessment.

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Under Nebraska Law, are schools required to complete climate assessments every year in each building the school district maintains?

No, not exactly. School districts are not required to complete climate assessments. However, under the regulations for accreditation of schools (Rule 10) there is a requirement that at least once every five years a school district must gather and analyze data about the learning climate in order to better develop goals related to increased student learning and achievement. Specifically, schools must “review and update their mission statements”, as well as collect data regarding demographics, learning climate, and former students. This data is then employed to identify at least one school improvement goal and a plan for evaluating progress towards that goal (Nebraska Rule 10, p. 26).

For more information on these requirements, please refer to the publication by the Nebraska Department of Education entitled *A Handbook for Continuous Improvement in Nebraska Schools*.
<http://www.education.ne.gov/APAC/Documents/School-Improvement/NEFrameworks.pdf>

What are some of the topics that are included in school climate assessment?

The National School Climate Center (2014) asserts that school climate assessment should include the following 12 domains: Rules and Norms, Sense of Physical Security, Sense of Social-Emotional Security, Support for Learning, Social and Civic Learning, Respect for Diversity, Social Support-Adults, Social Support-Students, School Connectedness/Engagement, Physical Surroundings, Leadership, and Professional Relationships. A description of each subtopic is available through the National

School Climate Center: [School Climate\National School Climate Center \(2014\)-dimensions of school climate.pdf](#). In addition to broad surveys of school climate that are completed by students, teachers, or parents, many of these more specific domains often warrant their own survey system (e.g., surveys related to student perceptions of diversity).

Although the terms “school climate” and “classroom climate” are often used interchangeably, assessing classroom climate is a component of a more comprehensive school climate assessment. Both subjective perceptions of classroom and school climate contribute to school culture (i.e., more stable school value systems, traditions, and ideologies) (Adelman & Taylor, 2005). Perceptions of classroom and school climate are considered more fluid than school culture (National School Climate Center, 2014).

Even if not required, should schools conduct climate assessments?

According to the U.S. Department of Education, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, the Institute for Educational Sciences, and a growing number of state departments of education, school climate reform is an evidence-based school improvement strategy that supports the stakeholders in education to create a safer, more supportive, and engaging school climate. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention stated that school climate reform is a data-driven strategy that promotes healthy relationships, school connectedness, and dropout prevention. The Institute for Educational Sciences declared school climate is a sound strategy for dropout prevention ([Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013](#)). Therefore, it is best practice to conduct climate assessments periodically to help guide the school improvement process, as well as to assist in determining which strategies to use for discipline and dropout prevention.

How often should a school climate assessment be conducted?

While school climate can be changed, it is not likely to change a great deal in a short period of time. As a result, a general climate assessment might be warranted only every year or two. However, specific components of an overall school climate might be assessed more frequently, such as Sense of Physical Safety (e.g., feeling secure and free from physical harm or violence) and Sense of Social-emotional Security (e.g., assessing students’ perceptions of teasing, bullying, exclusion, and prevalence of mental health issues). Schools may choose to assess these components of climate whenever such an assessment would be useful.

Where can more information be obtained about measuring and improving school climate?

Several of the agencies listed below publish information related to school climate, discipline, and school improvement. See also the [School Climate Strategy Brief](#).

- **Centers for Disease Control:** <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/schoolhealth/index.htm>
- **Institute for Education Sciences:** <http://ies.ed.gov/>
- **National Center for Safe and Supportive Learning Environments:** <http://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/topic-research/environment>
- **National School Climate Center:** <http://www.schoolclimate.org/>
- **Nebraska Department of Education Rule 10:** http://www.education.ne.gov/legal/webrulespdf/RULE10_PLEDGE_2012.pdf
- **Research Summary from the National School Climate Center:** Thapa, A., Cohen, J., Guffey, S., & Higgins-D'Alessandro, A. (2013). A review of school climate research. *Review of Educational Research*, (83)3, 357-385. Doi: 10.3102/0034654313483907
- **U.S. Department of Education Office of Safe and Healthy Students:** <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oese/oshs/index.html>

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