

Special Interest Group on Measuring School Climate/Safety and Well-Being

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 KNOWLEDGE NETWORK
for STUDENT WELL-BEING


THE ASSOCIATION OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCHERS OF ONTARIO

 **Offord** CENTRE
FOR CHILD
STUDIES

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Executive Summary

The Knowledge Network for Student Well-Being (KNSWB), in partnership with the Association of Educational Researchers of Ontario (AERO-AOCE), and the Offord Centre for Child Studies at McMaster University, convened a Special Interest Group (SIG) on Measuring School Climate/Safety and Well-Being. On April 24, 2018, stakeholders from various school boards, as well as academics and education policymakers in Ontario gathered in Hamilton, ON to exchange knowledge on measuring school climate, school safety, and student well-being.

The day began with a presentation entitled “School Climate and Student Well-being Surveys: A Case Example” by Dr. Kathy Georgiades from the Offord Centre for Child Studies.

Participants were then divided into three groups to discuss key issues in: 1) the selection of measurement tools/items; 2) the administration of measurement tools/items; 3) the analysis of the resulting data; and 4) the mobilization of new knowledge. A series of structured questions explored important considerations, current practices and their strengths and limitations, as well as potential strategies for improvement.

Selecting measurement tool/items: A number of important technical considerations were raised, including validity and reliability of measures, clarity of constructs, and readability. Contextual considerations included the alignment of measures with local and provincial policies. Current practices reflected a wide range of third party and ad hoc surveys, many of which lacked comprehensiveness and methodological rigour. Potential strategies suggested were the development of a common measurement tool through multi-stakeholder collaboration.

Administering of measurement tools/items: Considerable variation in current practices exist, surrounding paper versus electronic administration, timing and consistency of administration, and the availability of system-wide resources and support. Potential strategies for improvement reflected efforts to broaden participation and buy-in across the school system and community.

Analyzing resulting data: There are differences in research capacity and level of reporting across school boards, with smaller boards tending to rely on third party surveys with built-in analysis functions (e.g. Learning Bar, MeritCore, etc.) Potential strategies to address data literacy and comparability issues included building research capacity across school boards, and standardizing reporting processes across the province.

Mobilizing new knowledge: This theme was not thoroughly explored by all groups due to time constraints. Similar to the previous theme of analyzing data, there exist differences in capacity for and knowledge of sharing and acting on emerging findings. It was particularly noted that monitoring and quality improvement processes should be implemented for any potential interventions.

Objectives

Ontario School Boards have been mandated to measure students' perceptions of the climate and safety in their schools for nearly a decade. In 2014, the Ontario Ministry of Education also developed a renewed vision for the education system, including a focus on well-being. Individual school boards have been implementing unique practices in collecting and using these data. However, shifts in methodology may be needed to achieve uniform performance across the province.

The purpose of the SIG on Measuring School Climate/Safety and Well-Being was to convene diverse stakeholders in the education system to gain insight into school boards' current practices in the routine collection of school climate and student well-being data.

Key themes derived from these dialogues serve to inform future directions in developing best practices in survey design, administration, and analysis for school boards to ultimately improve school climate and student well-being outcomes across the province.

Stakeholders

Key stakeholders in the Ontario education system participated in the SIG on Measuring School Climate/Safety and Well-Being. Approximately 30 representatives from across the Ontario Ministry of Education, universities, and 13 school boards were present. Their roles included:

- Assessment Associate
- Associate Professor
- Chief Assessment Officer
- Chief Officer, Research and Development
- Consultant
- Dean of Students
- Director
- Education Officer
- Instructional Program Leader
- Program Evaluator
- Project Manager
- Research Associate/Officer/Specialist/Coordinator
- School Principal
- Senior Policy Advisor

Overview of Sessions

The SIG on Measuring School Climate/Safety and Well-Being was organized as a forum for knowledge exchange and deliberation. All insights and ideas provided by the participants were anonymized to protect privacy while promoting open discussion.

The participants were evenly divided into three multi-stakeholder groups to facilitate knowledge exchange from diverse perspectives. These three groups separately, but concurrently, engaged in a series of four roundtable sessions. The resulting dialogues were documented, aggregated, and coded to generate key themes.

Each session focused on a distinct phase in measuring school climate/safety and well-being:

1. **Selecting** measurement tools/items
2. **Administering** measurement tools/items
3. **Analyzing** resulting data
4. **Mobilizing** new knowledge

Under each sessions, five subtopics were deliberated:

- A. **Important considerations**
- B. **Current practices**
- C. **Strengths** of current practices
- D. **Limitations** of current practices
- E. **Strategies** to address outlined limitations

Session 1:

Selecting School Climate/Safety and Well-Being Measurement Tools/Items

The following findings reflect aggregate opinions of the SIG participants, and not necessarily those of the Knowledge Network for Student Well-Being, the Association of Educational Researchers of Ontario, or the Offord Centre for Child Studies.

Important considerations:

- Adherence to requirements of *Education Act*
- Clarity of constructs being measured
- Comparability of measures across schools and school boards
- Cultural sensitivity and language inclusivity
- Evidence-based measures
- Holistic range of well-being constructs
- Multi-stakeholder approval of measures
- Qualitative and quantitative measures
- Standardized tool reflecting grade appropriateness
- Strategic alignment with school and provincial policies and objectives
- Tool functionality and practicality
- Utility of measures (degree to which yielded results are actionable)
- Validity and reliability of tool

Range of current practices:

- COMPASS Questionnaires
- Early Development Instrument (EDI)
- ED School Climate Surveys (EDSCLS), US Department of Education
- MeritCore (formerly “Resiliency Initiatives Questionnaire”)
- Middle Years Development Instrument (MDI)
- Ontario Ministry of Education School Climate Surveys (status quo, or adapted with added/removed items)
- Smaller boards were likely to use third-party tools with built-in analysis functions, as internal resources may not be available
- Surveys developed “in-house”
- The Learning Bar “OurSCHOOL” Survey (formerly “Tell Them From Me”)

Range of strengths of current practices:

- Appropriate length
- Clearly defined survey constructs
- Comprehensive measures
- Convenience/ease of use
- Items focused on diversity and inclusion
- Longitudinal data collection cycles
- Multi-informant questionnaires
- Online platform availability
- Psychometrically validated measures

Range of limitations of current practices:

- Complexity of questions (e.g. terminology may not be at grade-appropriate level)
- Items are not reflective of current youth lifestyle (e.g. does not explicitly assess online bullying)
- Lack of inclusivity (e.g. community members not surveyed)
- Lack of reliability in online access (e.g. rural communities)
- Lack of specificity
- Lengthy questionnaires result in survey fatigue
- Little flexibility in tool (e.g. non-customizable to school boards' interests)
- Measures are poorly aligned with school board priorities and planning
- Non validated measures
- Non-comprehensive measures
- Situational questions (e.g. think of a time when...) resulting in biased responses

Strategies to address outlined limitations:

- Create professional development and learning opportunities regarding survey design
- Develop succinct surveys with clearly defined key constructs
- Encompass both qualitative and quantitative items to better contextualize research
- Improve internal and external communication on how to select and use tools
- Include comprehensive measures to capture holistic understanding of students
- Provide universal template for school boards to customize and align with strategic goals

Session 2:

Administering School Climate/Safety and Well-Being Measurement Tools/Items

The following findings reflect aggregate opinions of the SIG participants, and not necessarily those of the Knowledge Network for Student Well-Being, the Association of Educational Researchers of Ontario, or the Offord Centre for Child Studies.

Important considerations:

- Accessibility of surveys
- Availability of guidelines and support for implementation
- Clear expectations on timelines and staff roles
- Communication strategy
- Consent policies and procedures
- Costs and capacity (e.g. staff, time, small vs. large school board)
- Ease of administration
- Privacy and data housing procedures
- Sample representativeness and response rates
- School/community buy-in (e.g. administrators, principals, teachers, parents, students)
- Supports for survey triggers (e.g. reaction to questions on bullying, mental health, etc.)
- Survey format (e.g. online vs. paper)
- Timing of survey (e.g. conflicts with exams, EQAO, holidays)

Range of current practices:

- Administration every year vs. administration every two years
- Emails, memos, “School Connects”, social media, etc. for communication
- English only vs. multiple survey languages
- Online only vs. paper only vs. both online and paper surveys
- Parents surveyed every other year vs. every three years
- Separate vs. tandem administration to parents, students, and teachers
- Staggered vs. concurrent survey administration to elementary and secondary schools

Range of strengths of current practices:

- Diverse stakeholder voices engaged (e.g. staff, families, students)
- Frequent communication with survey stakeholders (e.g. principals, parents)
- Openness of principals to provide feedback on survey administration processes
- Strong collaboration at the board level with different committees on school climate

Range of limitations of current practices:

- Lack of staff support and time to administer surveys
- Lack of stakeholder/community buy-in
- Lack of uniform survey administration procedures
- Limitations of online surveys (e.g. privacy, accessibility)
- Limitations of paper surveys (e.g. costs, management)
- Low response rates (especially secondary students, parents, and teachers)
- Non-feasibility of survey translation in different languages
- Timing conflicts with other school and survey priorities

Strategies to address outlined limitations:

- Develop guidelines for standardized survey administration
- Encourage teachers' union buy-in
- Provide small incentives for completion to improve response rates
- Tailor communication strategies to each stakeholder (e.g. principals, teachers, students, parents) to convey the importance and purpose of the surveys
- Translate surveys into major languages to reflect diversity of the sample

Session 3:

Analyzing Results on School Climate/Safety and Well-Being

The following findings reflect aggregate opinions of the SIG participants, and not necessarily those of the Knowledge Network for Student Well-Being, the Association of Educational Researchers of Ontario, or the Offord Centre for Child Studies.

Important considerations:

- Accessibility of data and results
- Audience
- Biases (e.g. reporting bias)
- Comparability of results across schools and school boards
- Contextualization of results
- Use and implications of results for all stakeholders (e.g. staff, parents, students)

Range of current practices:

- Different levels of analysis (e.g. school level, board level, themes)
- EQAO reporting procedures followed (e.g. non-identifiable data)
- Generic reports generated by third-part measurement tools
- Online tools provided to schools to disaggregate their own data
- Results reported by grade level (e.g. elementary, junior, secondary)
- Specific analytic roles assigned at school board level (e.g. quantitative vs. qualitative)

Range of strengths of current practices:

- Trends compared across different school years
- School- and board-level reports created
- Principals/ school board research team receive training (e.g. from MDI team) on data literacy and research methodology
- Support received from external groups (e.g. COMPASS team) to analyze data and provide reports

Range of limitations of current practices:

- Concerns regarding data misinterpretation
- Lack of staff and capacity for routine and advanced data analysis
- Lack of time to analyse qualitative data to contextualize findings (e.g. focus groups)
- Non-representative and small sample sizes limit power and generalizability of results

Strategies to address outlined limitations:

- Build research capacity within all school boards (e.g. data literacy, statistics, evaluation)
- Develop effective data sharing and third-party agreements for research support
- Generate provincial reports in addition to school- and board-level reports
- Identify gaps in representativeness at school and board level to inform future data collection and analysis
- Share data with the community, and solicit their perspectives to contextualize results

Session 4:

Mobilizing New Knowledge on School Climate/Safety and Well-Being

The following findings reflect aggregate opinions of the SIG participants, and not necessarily those of the Knowledge Network for Student Well-Being, the Association of Educational Researchers of Ontario, or the Offord Centre for Child Studies.

Important considerations:

- Audience
- Capacity
- Clarity and conciseness of message
- Costs
- Existing and potential partnerships
- Knowledge channels
- Knowledge format
- Purpose and actionability

Range of current practices:

- Findings to be shared with the community are selected by senior administrators and subject matter experts at the board level
- Infographics and/or data briefs generated
- Only surface-level findings presented
- School- and board-level results unpacked with school teams (in secondary schools)
- Students do not directly receive survey results

Range of strengths of current practices:

- Quick
- Convenient
- Non-intensive

Range of limitations of current practices:

- Comfort in data literacy and knowledge sharing may be a challenge for school administrators
- Difficulty in identifying actionable findings and next steps
- Lack of resources to convene community members for knowledge exchange and mobilization
- Political (e.g. biased selection of findings to be shared)

Strategies to address outlined limitations:

- Develop school- and board-level plans for knowledge uptake
- Generate a list of actionable items by consulting community members
- Monitor and implement quality improvement processes for any potential interventions
- Provide guidelines and examples on how to act on findings/mobilize knowledge

Future Directions

The following findings reflect aggregate opinions of the SIG participants, and not necessarily those of the Knowledge Network for Student Well-Being, the Association of Educational Researchers of Ontario, or the Offord Centre for Child Studies.

- 1.** Consider multi-stakeholder collaboration to identify clear constructs and arrive at a common tool for measuring school climate/safety and student well-being. This tool should reflect best practices in research and should be drawn from valid and reliable measures.
- 2.** Consider multi-stakeholder collaboration to develop common practices for the implementation of school climate/safety and student well-being surveys. This would facilitate comparable results/reporting across and between schools on a provincial scale.
- 3.** Consider increasing province-wide support and resources for the processing and analysis of data from school climate/safety and student well-being surveys, in addition to building capacity to assist school administrators in purposefully using and sharing new knowledge.