

Behind the MMSD Climate Survey:

2021-22 to 2022-23 Survey Revision Process

Background on the Climate Survey

For the past decade, MMSD administered a district-wide climate survey to students, families, and staff in the spring to understand perceptions of school climate at the end of the school year. MMSD leaders identified climate survey data as integral metrics in the district’s Strategic Framework, as well as for goal-setting in schools’ annual School Improvement Plans (SIPs). The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 required MMSD to shift this practice, replacing the climate survey with a series of questionnaires aimed at understanding needs and experiences directly related to the unprecedented disruption in the education service model wrought by the pandemic and MMSD’s policies and practices in response to it (i.e. Virtual Learning, Phased Reopening, etc).

When the district resumed in-person instruction for all grades for the full school year in August 2021, schools faced several challenges related to cultivating a positive school climate: reestablishing school and classroom routines (while also balancing rigorous COVID mitigation strategies), tending to student mental health needs, and doing more with less as districts nationwide faced staffing shortages. Consequently, staff in MMSD agreed it was not only critical to resume collecting data on school climate, but also to improve on this process. This brief describes the process undergone in the 2021-22 through 2022-23 school years to revise the district’s suite of climate survey instruments.

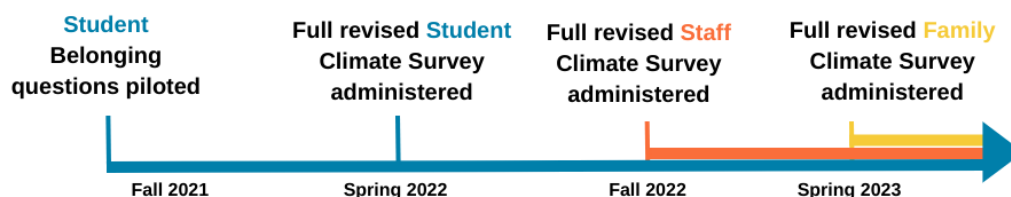
Our Goals

In re-assessing our climate survey, the R&I team aimed to achieve the following goals:

- Adopt or partially adopt a nationally-validated climate survey instrument(s) to ensure that our surveys are psychometrically sound and to allow our climate work to enter into wider conversation with places using similar surveys
- Engage MMSD practitioner partners in the development and analysis of the survey to ensure that the data collected is aligned to local questions of practice and that results can be used to meaningfully adjust policy and practice
- Nurture a culture of improvement around the climate survey data, beyond accountability

Redevelopment Process

Revising the Climate Survey was a two-year process involving multiple stakeholders, depicted in the graph below and summarized in the following bullets.



2021-22 School Year

- In fall of 2021, the R&I team collected information about climate surveys used throughout the country by conducting internet searches and holding conversations with local climate experts and staff in other districts.
- Working with a team of MMSD staff in Student & Staff Supports, we tested an optional, short student survey in the fall, focusing exclusively on the construct of Student Belonging.
- We worked with MMSD Student & Staff Supports throughout the remainder of the year to build out a full student climate survey, incorporating reviews from district leadership.
- In the spring of 2022, we launched a revised, full version of the student survey, and launched abbreviated versions of the staff and family surveys. The student survey adapted survey constructs and items from the 5Essentials and Virginia Climate Survey, as well as some questions from Madison Education Partnership (MEP) surveys and MMSD's prior Climate Survey.
- We analyzed student survey data collaboratively with MMSD staff in Student & Staff Supports (photo at right), and shared results with school and Central Office staff, the Board of Education, and the public (follow the links to view [student](#), family, and staff reports available on the MMSD public site).



2022-23 School Year

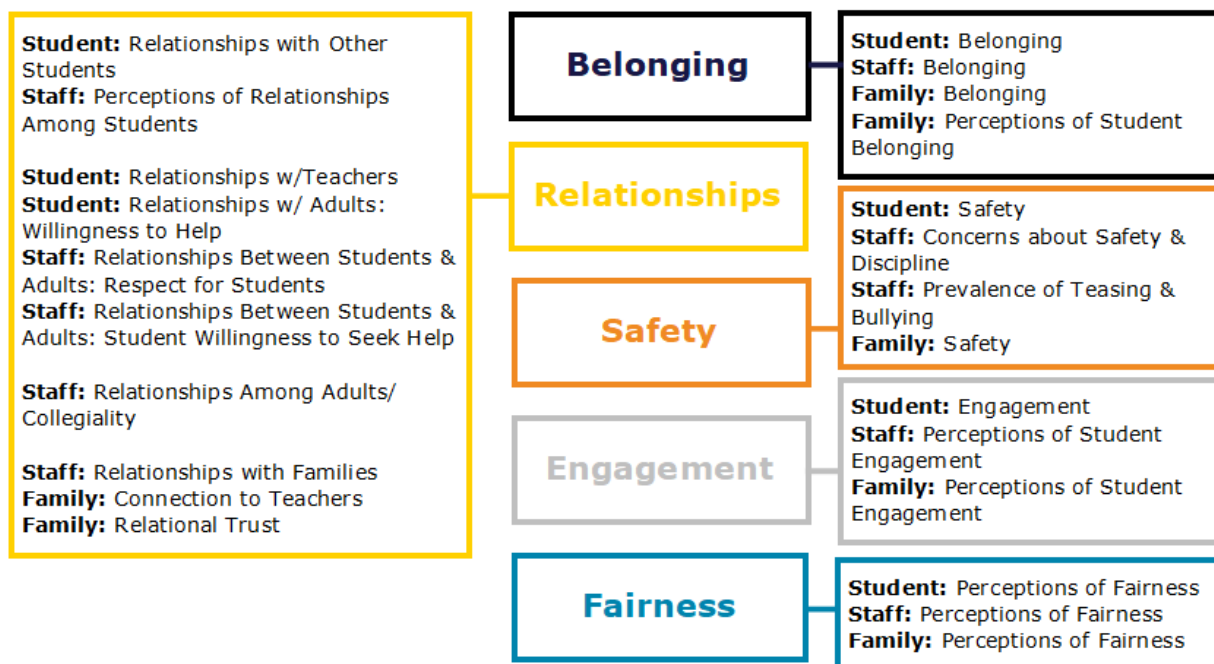
- MMSD added the surveys to the district mandatory assessment calendar for the first time post-COVID, including a shift to implement the student and staff surveys twice per year, once in the fall and once in the spring to facilitate learning and improvement throughout the year.
- The R&I team incorporated minor changes to the student survey based on feedback and analysis from the spring 2022 survey, including an additional battery of Safety questions to better understand variance in sense of safety throughout school buildings.
- We updated the two versions of the staff survey (In-school Staff and Out-of-School, or Central Office, Staff) in alignment with the student survey.
- We administered the student and staff surveys in the fall and worked with the MMSD Tech Services team to create visuals that school and Central Office leaders could access to review results.
- In March of 2023, we began conversations with family and community engagement staff in the Equity, Diversity, Engagement, & Inclusion (EDEI) department to build out an updated Family Climate survey in alignment with the student and staff versions.

- In April, we launched the updated versions of all three (student, staff, and family) climate surveys and shared results back with schools and district leaders in May.

What does the Climate Survey measure?

The MMSD Climate Survey is adapted from several validated climate surveys, specifically the [5Essentials](#) and [Virginia School Climate & Working Conditions Survey](#). The 5Essentials survey was developed, tested, and validated by the University of Chicago Consortium for School Research and is used in Chicago Public Schools and many districts across the country. The Virginia survey is administered to students and school staff in the state of Virginia as the result of a collaboration between the Virginia Department of Education and Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services. In addition, a few survey items come from prior work on [student belonging](#) undertaken in MMSD by the Madison Education Partnership.

While the student, staff, and family surveys are slightly different, they are intended to complement each other so that we can begin to develop a comprehensive, holistic understanding of school climate using triangulated data from multiple different perspectives and sources. Thus, each of the surveys features questions organized into similar themes and sub-themes, or constructs. The graphic below shows each of the constructs utilized in the MMSD Climate Surveys, aligned to the five major themes present across the surveys.



What's next?

MMSD will continue to administer the revised Climate Surveys to students and staff twice per year, and annually to families in the 2023-24 school year.