

**STATE OF TENNESSEE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING**

This Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), by and between the State of Tennessee, Department of Education, hereinafter referred to as "TDOE" and hereinafter referred to as "LEA," is for the provision of establishing a framework or collaboration, as well as articulating specific roles and responsibilities in support of the TDOE in its utilization of the Tennessee School Climate Survey, as further defined in the "SCOPE OF SERVICES."

A. SCOPE OF SERVICES:

- A.1. The LEA shall provide all service and deliverables as required, described, and detailed herein and shall meet all service and delivery timelines as specified by this MOU.
- A.2. The overall mission of the Tennessee School Climate Survey is to create and sustain safe and supportive learning environments, thereby, increasing academic success for all students. The goals are to:
- a. Provide a school climate measurement system that gathers information via survey regarding student, parent or guardian, and teacher perceptions of engagement, safety and environment as an actionable measurement of conditions for learning in their school on an annual basis.
 - b. Provide data to schools and districts to drive programmatic interventions and establish links between climate/conditions for learning and academic outcomes.
- A.3. Definitions:
- a. **School engagement:** For students to feel supported and motivated to achieve, they must feel valued and supported in their relationships with other students, teachers, and school leaders, feel a sense of connection to school, and be meaningfully engaged in the school community. The five components of school engagement include:
 - (1) **Supportive peer relationships.** Students feel safe and supported in a peer environment that is trusting, respectful, caring, cooperative and helpful.
 - (2) **Supportive relationships with teachers.** Adults play a critical role in creating conditions that support student self-esteem, sense of accomplishment, and feelings of efficacy – all of these are critical for accomplishment and contribution later in life.
 - (3) **Supportive relationships with school leadership.** School leadership by principals and vice-principals is important to modeling and setting the climate of the school as an institution with which students must effectively interact. School leaders should be available to students, and relate to them with openness, respect and concern.
 - (4) **Parental involvement.** Student perceptions that parents and guardians are welcome in the school play an important part in it, and that they are interested and involved in their learning and in school events contributes to a meaningful connectedness to the school.
 - (5) **School connections and learning supports:** Students believe that they are valued members of the school setting, feel a sense of meaningful involvement, security, and belonging in the school environment, and feel that they are supported in their efforts to succeed.
 - b. **School safety:** For students to focus on learning, they must feel safe and secure while at school and free from threats or physical violence, bullying or harassment, or exposure to substance abuse and its negative consequences. Four components of school safety are:
 - (1) **Physical safety:** Students should perceive their school to be safe, secure, and free from any physical threats of harm to themselves or their personal property.
 - (2) **Freedom from substance abuse:** Alcohol, tobacco, and other illicit drug use undermines students' ability to achieve academically, is associated with other harmful behaviors, and is incompatible with a school climate of respect, safety, and support for learning.

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- (3) **Freedom from bullying:** Bullying is one of the most prevalent and harmful forms of school violence. Students experience freedom from bullying when they report little or no exposure to physical, verbal, or social forms of unwanted aggression.
 - (4) **Acceptance of differences:** Respect is a core component of social and emotional safety at school. Students perceive acceptance of differences in background, appearance, and personal lifestyle among students in school environments that are free from teasing or insulting based on personal characteristics.
- c. **School environment:** For students to feel engaged and motivated to learn, they should be in environments that value academic rigor and high expectations for student achievement, establish clear rules and procedures, and provide physical surroundings that are presentable and well-maintained. The three components of school environment are:
- (1) **Supportive discipline:** Rules and disciplinary procedures are perceived to be clear, well communicated and reasonable. School leaders, teachers, and other staff (e.g. School Resource Officers, transportation staff) should be perceived as fair in implementing rules and procedures. Fairness requires consistency and equity in applying rules, including consistency across individual teachers and school staff.
 - (2) **Academic challenge:** School work needs to be clearly presented and designed to be challenging with sufficient support to achieve. Student achievements should be noted and positive feedback provided.
 - (3) **Approval of the physical environment:** Students should approve of the physical appearance of the school. It should be seen as welcoming, comfortable and well-maintained. Students should feel a sense of ownership in the school building.

d. Survey Types:

Survey Type	Grade Level	# of Questions	Average Time to complete
High School Survey	9–12	104	15 minutes
Middle School Survey	5–8	98	15 minutes
Elementary School Survey	3–8	54	10 minutes
Teacher Survey	K–12	102	15 minutes
Parent/Guardian Survey	K–12	44	15 minutes

- A.4. The LEA has volunteered to utilize the Tennessee School Climate Survey at no cost to the LEA. The LEA has agreed to administer an online version of school climate surveys as instructed by the TDOE within the survey administration window of January 12, 2021, through March 12, 2021, to high school and/or middle school and/or elementary school students, parents/guardians, and school staff. The TDOE shall provide a master file of all survey instruments to the district level contact.
- A.5. The Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA), 20 U.S.C. § 1232h, requires LEAs to notify parents/guardians and obtain consent or allow them to opt their child out of participating in certain school activities. These activities include a student survey, analysis, or evaluation that concerns one or more of the following eight areas (“protected information surveys”):
1. Political affiliations or beliefs of the student or student’s parent;
 2. Mental or psychological problems of the student or student’s family;
 3. Sex behavior or attitudes;
 4. Illegal, anti-social, self-incriminating, or demeaning behavior;
 5. Critical appraisals of others with whom respondents have close family relationships;
 6. Legally recognized privileged relationships, such as with lawyers, doctors, or ministers;
 7. Religious practices, affiliations, or beliefs of the student or the student’s parent; or
 8. Income, other than as required by law to determine program eligibility.

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In accordance with the PPRA, the LEA shall inform parents and guardians of the school climate survey administration at least two weeks before the survey administration window opens. LEAs must obtain at least passive consent prior to administering the survey but have the option of obtaining active consent depending upon local board policy. The TDOE will provide LEAs with samples of both passive and active consent forms.

Under passive parental consent, LEAs must inform parents and guardians of the exact dates of this voluntary anonymous student survey and offer a copy of the survey for them to view so that they have the opportunity to tell the school that they do not want their child to participate. If parents or guardians do not indicate that their child cannot participate, and reasonable notice has been given, then their child may voluntarily participate.

Under active parental consent, LEAs must inform parents and guardians of the exact dates of this voluntary anonymous student survey, offer a copy of the survey for them to view, and require signed approval from parents or guardians before students can participate.

- A.6. The LEA shall note that as data is collected to be disaggregated by the subgroups of race, gender and grade, compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), which requires state and LEAs to protect the confidentiality of personally identifiable student information, must be maintained. Therefore, subgroups with populations of less than 15 will not be reported. Information regarding FERPA can be found here: <http://www.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html>

A7. Open-ended comments

- a. The TDOE shall provide LEAs with open-ended comment data from the parent, teacher and student surveys.
- b. The survey is designed to be anonymous and respondents will not be asked to provide their names or any identifying information about themselves or anyone else. Directions provided within the survey instruments request that respondents NOT include any names or identifying information. However, open-ended comments place no restrictions on the information that respondents may choose to include. As such, within these open-ended comments, there is a chance that respondents may include reference to names of individuals or other personally identifiable information. In compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), LEAs are responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of any personally identifiable information. LEAs are also responsible for ensuring that any individual who is provided access to Tennessee School Climate Survey data is responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of personally identifiable student information.
- c. Further, these open-ended comments may include information that LEAs may wish to investigate further in relation to potential health and safety issues (i.e. threats of harm). The State does not investigate these comments and does not draw any conclusions regarding these matters. Additionally, there is a delay between the administration of the survey and the State's analysis of data, so the TN School Climate Survey should not be viewed as a means of communicating health or safety risks. Thus, it is the sole responsibility of LEAs to determine any actions to take in response to the information in these comments and to comply with mandatory reporting requirements relating to abuse and neglect.

A.8. The TDOE shall train and support LEA and school staff in online survey administration procedures.

A.9. The TDOE shall provide feedback on data submitted to both district and school designated contacts.

A.10. Unless required by law, the TDOE shall not publicly release school- and/or district-level data without giving notice to the LEA. Individual student-, teacher-, or parent-level data will never be made available to the LEA or the public.

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A.13. The TDOE shall ensure that all survey instruments are valid, reliable, and provide an accurate reflection of school climate in Tennessee's schools.

B. COMMUNICATIONS AND CONTACTS:

B.1. Communications and Contacts. All instructions, notices, consents, demands, or other communications required or contemplated by this MOU shall be in writing and shall be made by certified, first class mail, return receipt requested and postage prepaid, by overnight courier service with an asset tracking system, or by EMAIL or facsimile transmission with recipient confirmation. Any such communications, regardless of method of transmission, shall be addressed to the respective party at the appropriate mailing address, facsimile number, or EMAIL address as set forth below or to that of such other party or address, as may be hereafter specified by written notice.

TDOE:

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Nashville, TN 37243
Rashida.Askia@tn.gov

LEA:

Name, Title:

District:

Address:

Email:

Phone number:

All instructions, notices, consents, demands, or other communications shall be considered effectively given upon receipt or recipient confirmation as may be required.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF,

LEA:

LEA SIGNATURE

DATE

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PRINTED NAME AND TITLE OF LEA SIGNATORY (above)

TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION:

PENNY SCHWINN, COMMISSIONER

DATE