

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," establishes a framework for collaboration and LEA responsibilities in administering the Tennessee School Climate Survey.

A. School Climate Survey Administration

- B. 1. 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 LEAs to drive programmatic interventions and establish links between climate/conditions for learning and academic outcomes.
 - c. To ensure effective administration of the School Climate Survey, LEAs are required to follow the processes detailed herein by the dates specified in this MOU.

A. 2. Definitions

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- 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 parents' and guardians' interest and involvement in the student's learning and school events contribute 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:

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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.
 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. **Respect for others:** Respect is a core component of safety at school. Students should experience 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.

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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	91	20 minutes
Middle School Survey	5–8	85	20 minutes
Elementary School Survey	3–8	51	15 minutes
Teacher Survey	K–12	108	20 minutes
Parent/Guardian Survey	K–12	47	15 minutes

A.3.The LEA has volunteered to utilize the Tennessee School Climate Survey at no cost to the LEA and agrees to the following in order to support consistency and validity in administration of the survey:

- a. The LEA shall use the survey instrument provided by the TDOE to the LEA contact and follow any instructions or guidance provided by the TDOE.
- b. The LEA shall administer an online version of school climate surveys as instructed by the TDOE within the survey administration window of

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October 19, 2026, through December 18, 2026, to high school and/or middle school and/or elementary school students, parents/guardians, and teachers.

c. The LEA shall provide the TDOE with a list of schools that will administer the survey.

A. 4. 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.

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 written, informed consent from all parents of students in accordance with local school board policy.

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The TDOE will provide LEAs with a sample active consent form.

The LEAs shall comply with all applicable state laws including T.C.A § 49-2-211, and the district's own policies regarding the administration of surveys, analyses, or evaluations of students. Specifically, all LEAs obtain the written, informed, and voluntarily signed consent of a student's parent or legal guardian, or the student if the student is eighteen (18) years of age or older, prior to the student's participation in the school climate survey. Additionally, parents or legal guardians shall be provided the opportunity to review the survey in its entirety and be informed of the purpose of the survey and who will have access to the results prior to administering the survey. The LEA shall also ensure that parents or legal guardians, or the student if eighteen (18) years of age or older, may withdraw consent at any time prior to the administration of the survey.

A. 5. Open-ended comments

- a. The TDOE shall provide LEAs with open-ended comment data from the parent, teacher and student surveys.
- (1) 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 request that respondents do 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. 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.
- b. Further, these open-ended comments may include information that LEAs may wish to investigate further in relation to potential health and

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safety issues (i.e., threats of harm). The TDOE 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. 6.

- a. The LEA and the TDOE shall comply with all applicable federal, state, and local confidentiality laws and policies. This includes the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), which requires protection of personally identifiable student information (information regarding FERPA can be found at the following website:
<http://www.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html>).
 - b. The TDOE will not report data for LEAs and schools with fewer than 15 responses.
- (2) The TDOE will not share any data from the survey in any form with the LEA, school, or the public except to comply with legislative or statutory requirements.
- c. The PPRA requires the LEA to make survey materials, including survey questions, available for inspection by parents/guardians. However, the LEA shall not share or otherwise further disclose survey data or responses with any party, including parents and guardians, unless a legal exception applies, such as the health or safety emergency exception under FERPA.
- (3) The LEA and TDOE (hereinafter "the Parties") shall comply with open records laws and applicable local policies when responding to requests from parties who are not parents or guardians to view survey

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materials.

- d. The Parties should consult with their legal counsel regarding compliance with this MOU, including adherence to confidentiality laws and policies and open records requests.

B. Communication 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.

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LEA:

Name, Title:

LEA:

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

PRINTED NAME AND TITLE OF LEA SIGNATORY (above)

TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION:

LIZZETTE REYNOLDS, COMMISSIONER

DATE