

Summary of 2015-16 Student Survey and Forums for Website

ACHS Student School Climate Surveys

In January 2016, Amherst County High School (ACHS) students, faculty, and parents/guardians participated in a school climate survey to collect data to plan school improvement. The survey was developed based on guidelines from Section 11 of the agreement with the Office of Civil Rights. The surveys were submitted to OCR on November 30, 2015 and approved. There were seven topics containing 27 items using Likert scales and two open-ended questions. The school climate survey topics were relationships among school community members, school safety, clear expectations, communication, comfort interacting with difference, clarity of rules, and fairness of rules. The two open-ended questions concerned discipline. The surveys for students, faculty, and parents/guardians had parallel design for comparisons between groups. Results from the survey were used to inform policy and procedure changes and revise the surveys for the 2016-17 school year.

Student survey results were disaggregated by whole group, race, sex, special education status, and grade level. Differences in perceptions of the school by different races were given special attention due to the focus by the Office of Civil Rights. The student results were compared to faculty results to analyze for difference of perception.

There were three topics that had positive results: Clear Expectations, Comfort Interacting with Difference and Clarity of Rules. These topics are areas of strength upon which ACHS can build. School assemblies focusing on rules and expected behavior each semester are informative and supported student understanding of expected behaviors. Students perceived diversity in the school as a positive characteristic and they reported being comfortable interacting with difference.

Three topics of concern became apparent from the survey results. These topics were also main topics of discussion in the student forums and are being addressed. The three items of concern are fairness of rules, the friendliness of the school, and bullying. Some procedure changes are already in effect and may affect the survey results for next year.

The main topic of concern was Fairness of Rules since students had the lowest agreement rates with this topic. In response to this perception, school administrators completed an overhaul of the discipline code to ensure that consequences for offenses are consistent across the division. The county distributed the Student Code of Conduct to all ACHS students this year, which includes expectations for behavior and consequences for offenses.

School friendliness and feeling welcomed was another topic students rated low on the survey. Only 35% of students agreed that the school was friendly. This was the single item that had the lowest agreement rate. Numerous school activities have been incorporated into the 2016-17 school year to so students feel more connected to the school.

The final topic about which students were concerned was bullying. The school uses the following state definition of bullying.

Bullying means any aggressive and unwanted behavior that is intended to harm, intimidate, or humiliate the victim; involves a real or perceived power imbalance between the aggressor or aggressors and victim; and is repeated over time or causes severe emotional trauma. 'Bullying' includes cyber bullying. 'Bullying' does not include ordinary teasing, horseplay, argument, or peer conflict." VA 2013 General Assembly Statute 22.1-276.01

While bullying was not a high area of concern on the survey, it is a topic we are addressing since bullying is so detrimental to educational experiences. Bullying was discussed in the student forums and commented on in the open-ended questions on the survey. Respect is a focus of ACHS this year and there will be continuing discussion and teacher training on all areas of concern.

ACHS Student Forums

The high school also conducted student forums in January 2016. Students met in groups of 30-60 with Dr. Wells to discuss school concerns. Concerns were recorded and used to improve school climate. Students seemed to appreciate the opportunity to express concerns during the forums. Forums are planned for January 2017 to improve school climate by providing a place for students to express concerns and feel that they are being heard. The forums allow the principal to answer questions from students and address their concerns personally.

Revised surveys and forums are scheduled for January 2017. For more information on surveys or results, contact Dr. Pam McFaden,
pmcfaden@amherst.k12.va.us