

Student Survey Results Summary

2016-17 results compared to 2015-16 results

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During January-February 2017 Amherst County High School (ACHS) students, faculty, and parents/guardians participated in a school climate survey to collect data to be used to plan school improvement. The surveys were developed based on guidelines from the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) Agreement. Additional items were added to this year's survey for clarity. The surveys were submitted to the OCR in November 2016 and approved.

Student surveys were conducted January 30-31, 2017 in English classes, thereby providing all students access to the online survey. The survey was completed by 957 students, or 76% of the student body. This was 10% fewer students than last year (86% to 76%). However, this may be due to illness going through the school at that time as more than 200 students were absent each day. Surveys were analyzed using a 5% difference as meaningful. This was the measure used to analyze last year's surveys, however, any movement was noted. The open-ended questions were coded using last year's codes for continuity. Any responses falling outside last year's codes were coded using emerging categories.

Student survey results were disaggregated by whole group, race, sex, and special education status. Differences in perceptions of the school by different races were given special attention due to the focus of the OCR.

Student surveys included seven categories, which contained fifty-five items and two open-ended questions. The seven categories remained constant from last year's survey and were based on the agreement signed with the OCR. Categories included relationships among school community members, school safety, clear expectations, communication, comfort interacting with difference, clarity of rules, and fairness of rules. The topics contained 55 items, 35 from last year's survey and 20 new items added to clarify results.

Thirty of the thirty-five items from last year's survey showed an increase in positive perceptions. Two item results did not change and three items showed a decrease. Five topics, Relationships among school community members, School Safety, Clear Expectations, Communication, and Comfort interacting with Difference, showed an increase in student agreement with every item in those categories. One topic, Clarity of Rules, showed the same agreement rate. The final topic, Fairness of Rules, showed decreases in two of the three items compared to last year.

The five topics that showed an increase in student agreement are strengths that the school can continue to build upon. There have been many school climate initiatives this year that supported these topics and those initiatives are planned to continue, while adding more support. One area of interest is the increases made in School Safety, with students agreeing by six percent more that they feel safe at school (70% to 76%). New brighter lights were installed this fall throughout the building, which may have contributed to students feeling safer. There was a continued emphasis on teachers monitoring the halls and more cameras were placed in the halls. A focus on respect and

building relationships may have contributed to students feeling more secure. These changes may have supported students feeling safer in the building.

Student agreement that they felt welcomed at school increased by seven percent (62% to 69%). Several initiatives, such as free Lancer T-shirts with the purchase of a sporting event ticket during lunches, may have supported students feeling more connected to their school. Positive Behavior Referrals, more club activities, and other initiatives may have supported students feeling more welcomed. These increases in student perception of safety and belonging may illustrate the effect of the teacher professional development, climate initiatives, and changes in policies.

Relationships among school community members was another topic with increased student agreement in all nine items when compared to last year's survey. "My principals show me respect" increased by 6% (82% to 88%). "My teachers show me respect" increased by 1% (78% to 79%). This may be related to the concept of respect being one focus of the school this year. Teachers received respect training (Covert, 2011) during the teacher workweek before the school year began. Teachers then used the respect activity in their classes to begin the year with their students focused on respect. Several teachers and students used the word "respect" in their responses to the open-ended questions on the survey. Since the word "respect" was seldom mentioned in the results of the open-ended questions in the 2015-16 survey, the focus this year on respect may have influenced student perceptions.

"My school is a friendly place" showed a five percent increase in student agreement (51% to 56%). The increased emphasis on relationship building this year may have supported that increase. The school began using the Two for Ten strategy for

supporting struggling students. Clubs continue to meet during the school day with more student involvement. Club participants sponsored tables at community festivals and worked with community groups on landscaping projects. The students participated in more field trips, such as the environmental science students participating in a river float to test water quality and conduct critter counts. These and other climate initiatives may have affected the increases in student perception of friendliness. Perceived school friendliness should continue as a focus for school climate improvement, since even with the increases it is still low at 56%.

Communication was another topic that showed increases in every item. The four items related to student interaction with principals showed the largest increases. “My principals respect all races and cultures” showed an eleven percent increase (73% to 84%). “My principals value what I have to say” showed a nine percent increase (67% to 76%). Several initiatives, such as positive behavior referrals, may have supported these increases. Student forums, held a few weeks before the survey was given, may have influenced these perceptions. The principal met with all students in groups of about 50 students to discuss concerns. “My teachers respect all races and cultures” showed a six percent increase in student agreement (75% to 81%). These increases may be due to the professional development on equity, relationship building, and the focus on respect. This is an area where the initiatives appear to have supported increased student satisfaction with the school. The faculty focusing on relationship building and equity should continue to support student perception of a positive school climate.

Fairness of Rules was the only topic that showed decreases in student agreement; this is a topic of concern since it was low in last year’s survey. One item in this topic did

show an increase in student agreement, but the two other items showed decreases. The item, “Principals are fair to all students when they apply the rules” showed a six percent increase in students agreeing with the item. While only 58% of the students agreed with the item this year, it did show an improvement, from 52% to 58%. The Progressive Discipline Chart created last year for administrators to follow could have affected this perception.

Both of the other items in the Fairness of Rules topic from last year’s survey showed a decrease in students agreeing with the items. The item, “The rules in my school apply to all students” decreased from 59% of students agreeing to 55% student agreement. The item, “Teachers are fair to all students” decreased from 49% to 45%. These numbers were lower than we would have liked last year; seeing a drop in the number of students agreeing with these two items is a cause for concern. Comments on the open-ended questions such as, “The discipline is not at all fair” and “Teachers and coaches pick favorites ” were a theme in the survey. This spring the county created a Guideline for Behavior Management Chart for all instructional personnel and transportation employees to follow. We will monitor the impact of this initiative to see if it affects student perception. A Behavior Management Center is being used this year for teachers to provide an alternative to correct classroom behavior. These items should be monitored since Fairness of Rules was a low topic both years of the survey. Professional development on consistency of discipline is planned for next year.

A concern is the difference in perception based on race. Even items that showed increases in student perception revealed a difference based on the student’s race. This

difference may indicate the need for continued professional development focused on equity.

Two new items were added to this year's survey to clarify concerns about the Fairness of Rules category. Sixty-four percent of students agreed or strongly agreed with the item, "Students are treated fairly regardless of their race or ethnicity." However, more than a third of the students disagreed or strongly disagreed with the item. Analyzing the item by race, Black students agreed 54%, students identifying as two or more races agreed 55%, and White students agreed 69% of the time. This was a large difference in perceptions by different races, however, Black students had a lower agreement throughout the survey.

"The school rules are fair" was the other new item added to the survey this year. This item had 46% of the students agree or strongly agree with the statement. Analyzing this item by race, Black students agreed 33%, two or more races agreed 39%, and White students agreed 51% of the time. This item showed the largest difference in student perception. School climate initiatives should focus on improving perceptions of under-represented groups.

It appears that students perceived the school more positively this year and that the faculty is dealing with equity issues. However, there is room for improvement and ACHS will strive to provide an equitable, quality education for all of our students.

For further information concerning survey results, contact Dr. McFaden

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