

Louisiana School Psychological Association

LSPA - Protecting the Dreams of Children Through Better Education

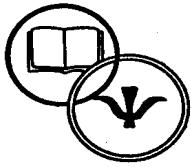
LSPA's Proposal for the Louisiana ESSA Plan School Climate Indicator

Rationale for the Inclusion of the School Climate Indicator:

- The Office for Civil Rights in collaboration with the US Department of Education claims in their publication, *Guiding Principles-A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline*, that school climate is the **#1 thing that can change and prevent inappropriate behaviors**. It also suggests that we need social-emotional learning curriculum (SEL) and that Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) is the vehicle to target both school climate and SEL initiatives.
- Research has consistently shown that a positive school climate is associated with academic achievement, effective risk prevention, and positive youth development.
- A major cornerstone in the development of ESSA was to allow states to expand their school performance accountability systems to include non-academic indicators. School climate is one recommended indicator that addresses critical needs in Louisiana schools and aligns with current state PBIS initiatives and ESSA's funding priorities.
- **Title IV, Part A Funding Allocation**-ESSA states that at least 20% of Title IV, Part A grants **must be spent** on initiatives to address school climate, such as mental health service delivery, trauma-informed practices, bullying and harassment prevention, social-emotional learning, improving school safety and school climate, mental health first aid training, and professional development activities. Social-emotional learning may be funded **through several funding sources**, such as Title I Part A, C, and D; Title II Part A; Title IV Part A and B; and Title V Part B. The multi-tiered behavioral support provided through PBIS may be funded through Title I Part A Section 1115 as well as professional development for supporting students who are deemed at-risk may be funded through Title I Part D Section 1414. Unless this is specified in the Louisiana's ESSA regulations, school districts will not allocate this funding for these initiatives. LSPA feels strongly that this funding allocation should be included in Louisiana's regulations with examples of each of these areas to provide guidance for district spending. LSPA would also strongly advocate for crisis preparedness training, which could be considered a school safety initiative, due to Louisiana's geography and our frequent natural disasters.

LSPA's Proposal for Areas to be Included within this Indicator:

- **PBIS Implementation Fidelity**-This is measured by the Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI) which was adopted by the state DOE during the 2016-17 school year. Every district in the state is **already required to complete this and report results to the DOE**. This required task would become even more meaningful if it contributed to our accountability system under ESSA. The TFI assesses all three levels of PBIS implementation from school-wide prevention to small group and individual student intervention using school-based teams and school data to drive decision-making for all students. Additionally, the TFI assesses professional development and program evaluation, thereby promoting continual growth.

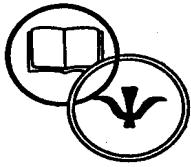


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It is a nationally recognized tool for assessing PBIS and the only tool that assesses all three levels. Currently on the TFI, 80% is considered “implementation level” for each of the three tiers, which are assessed individually. In consideration of the newness of this tool to the districts, LSPA strongly recommends a gradual implementation with use of the Tier I data only for the 2017-18 school year, Tier I & II for the 2018-19 school year, and Tier I, II, & III, for the 2019-20 school year and forward. We also recommend the consideration of a rubric for giving a performance score within this indicator, such as $\geq 80\%$ earning maximum points, followed by 50-79% earning reduced points, and then $<50\%$ earning the least or no points for each tier. This would reward schools who are making the effort to implement changes. Given the global nature of PBIS, which encompasses school climate, risk prevention, and frameworks for addressing universal and individual student behavior needs, LSPA recommends that **this area of the indicator account for half** of the overall School Climate Indicator score. Although the state has mandated positive behavior supports and interventions for 14 years beginning with the Juvenile Justice Act and reiterated in Act 136, barriers persist to fully implementing PBIS in Louisiana, therefore *it has not been fully implemented* in most districts with fidelity or not at all. The two greatest barriers are the lack of funding and the lack of accountability, which result in a lack of administrative support. Funding allocations through Title IV, Part A Grants, have the potential to finally provide funding for a mandate that has been required but unfunded for 14 years, therefore **leading to greater success of implementation**. Including PBIS fidelity in this indicator will also overcome the second barrier of lack of accountability, and increase buy in and participation from administrators and their school staffs. Research indicates that for PBIS to be truly effective all three tiers must be implemented with fidelity and it must have administrative support.

- **Suspension/Expulsion Rates**-This can be measured by comparing the school and districts data to the state average. Suspension and expulsion rates are an important source of data when considering school climate. Further, by disaggregating the data by disability status and race/ethnicity, we can measure disproportionality. These rates are under close review by the LA DOE as well as the US DOE’s Office of Civil Rights. Efforts to reduce reliance on exclusionary discipline would also address optimization of instructional time, which would in turn impact student achievement. Using the state average as the goal mark makes this specific to Louisiana rather than comparing our schools to a national standard. It also provides for growth in that the state average should become lower as the high suspension/expulsion, outlier districts reduce their numbers. LSPA suggests using the previous school year’s average each year so that schools know their target. This information can easily be gathered through JPAMS or other school data collection programs that all of our schools have in place. It can serve as a fidelity measure for schools’ TFI scores as well. If schools have high TFI scores, their suspensions/expulsions should decline or be at or below the average in theory. Funding through Title IV Part A can be used for alternatives to suspension and proactive behavior measures to support the improvement in this area. We also recommend a rubric for scoring examines discipline data by frequency, duration, and total days out of school, so that districts may receive



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points on a sliding scale while making efforts for improvement and ideally disproportionality can be examined and addressed.

- **Absenteeism/Truancy**-Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing more than 10% of school days. Chronically absent students are at increased risk of academic failure, dropping out, and involvement with the criminal justice system. LSPA recommends the consideration of using the 10% or the state average, whichever target is higher, in the event that the state drops below the 10% mark.
- **Climate/Connectedness Satisfaction Surveys from Families and Students**-Federal guidance stresses family engagement and input regarding their child's education. Further, research indicates that climate and belongingness factors predict student behavior and achievement outcomes. Climate/Connectedness surveys would assess student and parent perceptions of climate and connectedness, providing schools with valuable feedback to inform improvement efforts. There are valid and reliable climate surveys that are publicly available so there would be no cost for this assessment to the state or schools. LSPA recommends using a measure that is aligned with PBIS principles. Gathering feedback from stakeholders regarding school climate is also a component of the PBIS framework.
- **Social-Emotional Learning Standards**-LSPA would like to offer our support to the LA DOE to develop a task force to write social-emotional learning standards for the state by the end of the 2017-18 school year. There are approximately 15 states in the US that have already developed these social-emotional learning standards informed by child development research. These pre-existing standards may serve as models or spring boards for this initiative. These standards can be part of the PBIS programming, as PBIS requires the teaching of appropriate behavior and strongly emphasizes character development at all tiers. Workforce readiness is a current DOE priority. Social-emotional learning standards can be the vehicle to teach our students the "soft skills" needed for workforce success and healthy relationships. Social-emotional learning standards could also fuel use of other programs and practices that reduce problematic behaviors and improve school climate. Additionally, social-emotional learning is heavily stressed in federal ESSA guidance and its benefits are well documented in peer reviewed research. A measure of students' attainment of these standards could be a metric within this indicator.

In researching for this proposal, a work group was developed within LSPA to research school climate. It should be noted that there is a research basis for each of the above mentioned areas to be measured and their relation to school climate. It should also be noted that this work group reviewed over twenty state plans in this process and these areas were common themes for other states attempting to follow federal ESSA guidelines. LSPA is willing to collaborate with the Louisiana Department of Education to further develop this proposal, provide a research basis for each initiative, and encourage school psychologists to promote positive change by providing direct and/or indirect services as well as system consultation, to support the state's school climate needs and the mental health of Louisiana's children.