HELPFUL RESOURCES FOR
LOCAL CONTROL & ACCOUNTABILITY PLANS
& SCHOOL SAFETY PLANS

On August 30, Superintendent Tom Torlakson and the Secretary of the California Health and Human Services Agency, Diana Dooley, issued a joint letter to district and county office superintendents, and charter school administrators, urging their continued participation in the California Health Kids Survey (CHKS) and summarizing the many reasons why this is important, particularly in regard to fostering positive school climates and improving student academic success, health, and well–being. Described here are how the CHKS — along with its companion school staff and parent surveys that together comprise the *California School Climate, Health, and Learning Survey System* (Cal–SCHLS) — are an invaluable re-source to California schools for developing, monitoring, and evaluating their Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) and comprehensive School Safety Plan, as required by state legislation.

The Cal–SCHLS suite of student, staff, and parent surveys is an extremely cost–effective, simple, reliable, and high–quality way to comprehensively assess student/school needs related to these requirements and obtain data to guide efforts to address those needs. Changes in the CHKS made this year have shortened the Core Module and made the survey an even more valuable tool for improving school climate.[1] Cal–SCHLS helps schools fulfill California's legislative mandates as well as the legislation's spirit and intent.

Local Control and Accountability Plan

Recently enacted Assembly Bill 97 (Article 4.5, Section 52060) requires that school districts develop an annual LCAP that includes annual goals to meet eight state priorities (as well as the district's identified local priorities). Cal–SCHLS data are particularly helpful in regard to five of these state priorities: *improving academic achievement, school climate, pupil engagement, parent involvement, and Common Core State Standards implementation*.

The data system can also help meet the requirement (Section 52052{a}{2}) to improve achievement among numerically significant (N=30) pupil subgroups, including ethnic, socioeconomically disadvantaged, pupils with disability, and foster youth subgroups.

Improving Academic Achievement

The Cal–SCHLS System provides comprehensive data to help determine how well schools are doing in fostering the condi-tions and supports needed to improve academic achievement among all students. Numerous reports have demonstrated how the system's indicators are linked to improvements in test scores, classroom grades, truancy, and school connected-ness (see chks.wested.org/using_results and californiaS3.wested.org/tools).

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1   The CHKS secondary school survey has a modular format. For use of this state–subsidized system, CDE requires all districts administer the Core Module in grades 7, 9, and 11. A series of supplementary modules are also available that a district can add to the survey, includ-ing a new School Climate Module, to better meet its data needs. A customized module of a district's own questions can also be added (additional cost applies). For more information about Cal–SCHLS start by visiting the website: cal-schls.wested.org.

School Climate

The school climate priority calls for measuring school climate through surveys of pupils, parents, and teachers on the sense of safety and school connectedness — in other words, through Cal–SCHLS.[2] The primary purpose of the Cal–SCHLS system is to assess school climate, including safety and school connectedness. Its suite of student, staff, and parent surveys enables each group's experiences and perceptions to be compared. The California Healthy Kids Survey's (CHKS) core module alone provides data on nearly all domains of school climate, including:

» Perceived school safety, violence, and bullying (see the following discussion regarding the School Safety Plan);

» A validated five–item School Connectedness Scale used to report the percentage of students who are categorized as high, moderate, or low in school connectedness;[3] and

» Three fundamental student developmental supports (caring adult relationships, high expectation messages, and opportunities for meaningful participation) that have consistently been linked to positive school climates and academic, behavioral, and health outcomes among students.

In addition, for 2013–14, a supplementary School Climate module has been expanded to provide additional data on school academic supports, discipline and order; supports for social and emotional learning; bullying prevention and positive peer relationships; respect for diversity; and the quality of the physical environment.

As Superintendent Torlakson proclaimed in his August 30th letter: "This data is essential for understanding the school climate and guiding school improvement decision–making." To learn more about how to use Cal–SCHLS to assess and understand school climate, download the survey content guidebook, *Making Sense of School Climate,* at californiaS3.wested. org/tools.

Pupil Engagement

Cal–SCHLS data are invaluable for providing insight into the level of student engagement, the barriers that exist to it, and whether the schools have in place the conditions that foster it and higher attendance and graduation. For example, the CHKS Core includes questions that assess:

» Frequency of truancy;

» Reasons why school was missed in the past 30 days;

» Student learning engagement and academic mindset, as measured by a four–item Inventory of Student Motivation; and

» Frequency of substance use in school—an indicator of both heavy substance use and school disengagement.

Parent Involvement

The parent involvement priority includes (1) school district efforts to seek parent input in making decisions for the school district and each individual school; and (2) how the school district will promote parental participation in programs for un-

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2   The legislation also mentions suspension and expulsion rates as school climate indicators.

3   Factsheet #5 of the Safe and Supportive Schools Project summarizes a recent analysis showing that the level of connectedness among California students, as measured by this scale, is positively associated with API scores and differentiates between high– and low–performing schools (download at californiaS3.wested.org/tools).

duplicated pupils and individuals with exceptional needs. The surveys provide data on varying aspects of parent involvement, including:

» The staff and parent survey assess how welcoming the school is to parents.

» The parent survey asks a range of questions about the scope and nature of their involvement.

» The parent survey is a parent involvement activity, demonstrating that parents' voices are important and provide the school with data to improve outreach efforts.

Common Core Implementation

Cal–SCHLS provides data to help determine whether a school fosters the supports, conditions, and specific competencies that will support implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and help students succeed in meeting them. The CHKS assesses many of the "soft skills" that research has increasingly shown students need to successfully acquire the content knowledge and skills to meet the CCSS. The standards require "high–order skills" and address critical thinking, communication skills, problem solving, and persistence. The rigor, depth of knowledge, and performance tasks required for success suggest that educators must foster the school climate conditions that support students' development of many competencies that undergird academic attainment. Scales on the CHKS Resilience and Youth Development Module and the Social Emotional Health Module assess self–efficacy, self–awareness, collaboration and cooperation, problem solving, goals and aspirations, persistence, emotional regulation, and optimism, among other competences.

Addressing Vulnerable Subgroup Needs

In addition, the Education Code (Section 52052{a}{2}) requires API improvement for numerically significant (N=30) pupil subgroups, including ethnic, socioeconomically disadvantaged, pupils with disability, and foster youth. Cal–SCHLS can assist in this effort by providing reports disaggregating data related to respondent subgroups, as well as shedding light on their needs and how well schools are meeting those needs, particularly among those most vulnerable, as Supt. Torlakson has noted. Diving more deeply into the data, analyses can be performed on how different Cal–SCHLS indicators relate to academic outcomes among these groups (e.g., self–reported grades, truancy, connectedness). The CHKS demographic questions ask students to identify their race/ethnicity, parental education (a surrogate for socioeconomic status), parental/foster care status, and sexual orientation. Harassment questions include disability as a reason, so districts can analyze data for this subgroup.

Comprehensive School Safety Plan

Education Code Section 32280 requires schools to develop "a comprehensive school safety plan that addresses the safety concerns identified through a systematic planning process." A major focus of the Cal–SCHLS System is providing data to assess safety–related student behavior and experiences as well as school conditions, policies, and services. Cal–SCHLS provides the data to determine student needs, guide programmatic decision–making and safety plan development, and monitor success in meeting goals.

» The CHKS assesses how safe students feel at school, violence and crime perpetration (including weapons possession), and bullying and other forms of physical and verbal victimization they experience.

» The staff survey provides comparison data on staff experiences and the school response.

In this regard, the California State Auditor recently assessed the implementation of school safety and nondiscrimination laws and programs. The report noted that the local education organizations that they looked at "did not always maximize their use of available data, such as…California Healthy Kids Survey data, to determine the effectiveness of their efforts."

Technical Assistance

As part of CDE's California Safe and Supportive Schools Project, WestEd developed a School Climate Action Planning Process to help schools in understanding and using survey results; identifying needs; determining strategies, practices, and policies to meet those needs; and evaluating those efforts as part of a comprehensive school improvement process. For more information about how this process can be used to guide development and implementation of the LCAP or School Safety Plan, email: YouthDevelopment@wested.org.

Specific Cal–SCHLS Questions that Address LCAP Priorities

The following describes the specific items or scales from the *California School Climate, Healthy, and Learning Surveys* (Cal–SCHLS)[4] that most directly have value for measuring need and progress in meeting the priorities of the Local Control and Accountability Plan.[5] The very purpose and focus of this suite of student, staff, and parent surveys is to provide data that can be used to create the conditions for that will engage and support all three groups in the process of ensuring all youth succeed in school, career, and life. The core value of Cal–SCHLS is that it provides the data needed to achieve the over–arching purpose and spirit of the LCAP. Table 1 provides a summary of all the school climate domains and variables measured by the surveys.

Priority: School Climate, Sense of Safety[6]

Student:

» *I feel safe in my school* (level of agreement).

» *How safe do you feel when you are at school?* (very safe to very unsafe)

Staff:

» *The school Is a safe place for students* (level of agreement).

» *The school Is a safe place for staff* (level of agreement).

Parent:

» *This school is a safe place for my child* (level of agreement).

Priority: School Climate, Safety of Environment

Student: Safety, Violence, and Victimization Scale. This 22–item scale, used as part of calculating a School Climate Index for the California Safe and Supportive Schools, reflects how safe the school is (versus perceived safety). It incorporates data on level of violence perpetration, being physical or emotionally victimized, frequency and reasons for being bullied/harassed, and use of alcohol and drugs at school.

Priority: School Climate, Safety of Environment, Bullying

Student:

» *During the past 12 months, how many times on school property were you harassed or bullied for any of the following reasons?* (Any of six reasons reported, plus other reason)

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4   Cal–SCHLS consists of three inter–related, comparable surveys: the California Healthy Kids Survey for students (CHKS); California School Climate Survey for staff (CSCS); and California School Parent Survey (CSPS). It is identified as a model by the US Dept of Education in its blueprint for ESEA Reauthorization.

5   The student questions listed below are derived from the secondary version of the survey. Similar questions are on the elementary version for grades 5–6. This instrument is currently being revised to align its content related to school indicators with those of the secondary survey.

6   The two perceived safety items factor strongly with the School Connectedness Scale in a psychometric analysis of middle school data. The combined scale was the strongest indicator differentiating schools on climate and API scores.

Staff:

» *How much of a problem at school is harassment or bullying?* (level of severity)

Parent:

» *Based on your experience, how much of a problem at this school is harassment or bullying among students?* (level of severity)

Priority: School Climate, School Connectedness (reported as % high, moderate, slow)

Student: School Connectedness Scale (level of agreement)

» *I feel close to people in this school.*

» *I am happy to be at this school.*

» *I feel like I am part of this school.*

» *The teachers at this school treat students fairly.*

» *I feel safe in my school.*

Priority: Pupil Engagement, Learning Motivation

Student:

» *Students at this school are motivated to learn* (level of agreement).

» Student Motivation Scale (level of agreement)

- *I try hard to make sure that I am good at my schoolwork.*
- *I try hard at school because I am interested in my work.*
- *I work hard to try to understand new things at school.*
- *I am always trying to do better in my schoolwork.*

Staff:

» *Based on your experience, how many students at this school are motivated to learn?* (none to a lot)

Parent:

» *This school motivates students to learn* (level of agreement).

Priority: Pupil Engagement, Truancy and Absenteeism

Student:

» *During the past 12 months, about how many times did you skip school or cut classes?*

» *In the past 30 days, did you miss school for any of the following reasons? Illness (feeling physically sick), including problems with breathing or your teeth; Felt very sad, hopeless, anxious, stressed, or angry; Didn't get enough sleep; Didn't feel safe at school; Had to work; Had to take care of or help a family member or friends; Wanted to spent time with friends out of school; Alcohol or drug use; Was behind in schoolwork or weren't prepared for a test or class assignment; Bored with or uninterested in school; Was suspended; Other Reason.*

Staff:

» *How much of a problem at this school is cutting classes or being truant?*

Priority: Pupil Engagement, Absenteeism

Student:

» *In the past 30 days, did you miss school for any of the following reasons? Illness (feeling physically sick), including problems with breathing or your teeth; Felt very sad, hopeless, anxious, stressed, or angry; Didn't get enough sleep; Didn't feel safe at school; Had to work; Had to take care of or help a family member or friends; Wanted to spent time with friends out of school; Alcohol or drug use; Was behind in schoolwork or weren't prepared for a test or class assignment; Bored with or uninterested in school; Was suspended; Other Reason.*

Staff:

» *How much of a problem at this school is cutting classes or being truant?* (level of severity)

Priority: Academic Achievement

Student: (supplemental school climate module)

» *This school promotes academic success for <u>all</u> students.*

Staff:

» *This school promotes academic success for <u>all</u> students.*

Parent: (level of agreement)

» *This school promotes academic success for <u>all</u> students.*

Priority: Parent Involvement

Staff: (level of agreement)

» *This school is welcoming to and facilitates parent involvement.*

» *This school encourages parents to be active participants in educating their children.*

Parent: (level of agreement)

» *This school allows input and welcomes parents' contributions.*

» *This school keeps me well–informed about school activities.*

» *This school keeps me well–informed about my child's progress in school.*

» *This school encourages me to be an active partner with the school in educating my child.*

» *This school promptly responds to my phone calls, messages, or emails.*

» *Actively seeks the input of parents before making important decisions.*

Table 1. Major School–related Domains and Constructs Assessed by Cal–SCHLS

VARIABLES ASSESSED ACROSS SURVEYS

- » School connectedness and learning engagement/motivation
- » Student performance (grades) and attendance (truancy, reasons for absences)
- » Academic rigor and norms — High expectations.
- » Relationships between and among students/staff.
- » Meaningful participation and decision–making.
- » Perceived safety & order.
- » Violence & victimization (bullying).
- » Substance use and availability at school
- » Parent involvement
- » Supports, services, and policies to address needs of students and staff.

SUPPLEMENTAL CHKS SCHOOL CLIMATE MODULE

- » Academic mindset (motivation, perseverance)
- » Teacher and other supports for learning
- » Discipline and order
- » Positive peer relationships (anti–bullying)
- » Social–emotional and behavioral supports
- » Respect for diversity
- » Physical environment