

FAQs
Frequently Asked Questions about the
School Climate and Bullying Prevention Survey
available from Spectrum Diversity, LLC
Dr. Paula C. Rodríguez Rust

Why would a school want to administer a school climate survey? Aren't there easier ways to assess climate, like examining disciplinary records, anonymous "bullying reporting boxes," or having discussion groups with students? There are other types of data that can be used to assess climate, but anonymous student surveys are the one method designed to collect the information that you need the most, that is, information about the hidden issues that students are afraid to report and that are not already known to school personnel. You need to hear from the student body at large. You need to hear from students representing all segments of your student body. Most importantly, you need to hear from the students who would *not* choose to speak up, who suffer in silence and don't receive disciplinary attention, who would not volunteer to participate in focus groups or other assessment activities, and/or who are too hurt, afraid, or disaffected to drop a note in the "bully box." These are your most at risk students, and an anonymous survey of the student body provides these students with a safe way to let you know what they know—*before* you find out in other ways.

What are the benefits of conducting a school climate survey like the School Climate and Bullying Prevention Survey (SCBPS) available from Spectrum Diversity LLC? See the handout, "General Information about School Climate Surveys" for more information. Some benefits include:

- *Assessment and Documentation*; assess program effectiveness (in compliance with ABR) & produce evidence of yearly progress.
- *Compliance*; collect information useful in NJ DOE self-assessment rubric
- *Maximize program effectiveness*; identify areas of need, risk, and concern, as well as areas of strength
- *HIB Prevention*; identify issues before they produce HIB incidents, by assessing aspects of school climate with evidence-based relevance to bullying prevention.
- *Efficient use of resources*; findings provide practical guidance so that limited resources can be directed toward areas of greatest need and impact.
- *Engagement*; Involvement of students, staff, and parents in anti-bullying program development, as required under ABR.
- *Raise awareness & motivate*; communicate to students, staff, and parents, that the school takes bullying seriously and values their opinions and input.

How is the School Climate and Bullying Prevention Survey (SCBPS) administered? The survey is electronic, and available online. Your school will receive one or more unique url addresses for your survey that will enable your students, staff, and parents to complete the survey online. These url addresses are specific to your school; your survey is customized to your school or district, and your survey data are kept in a dataset dedicated to your district and separate from all other schools and districts.

How do students access the SCBPS? Students can complete the survey using computers, laptops, ipads, or any other device capable of supporting a full web browser. The student survey is designed to be done during school hours, and takes approximately one class period for students to complete. Some schools have sufficient electronic devices to allow all students to participate in the survey simultaneously, e.g., during an extended homeroom period, and other schools administer the survey by cycling groups of students (e.g., all English classes) through a computer lab. Ideally, all students should

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participate in the survey within a day of each other, to minimize students' influence on each others' answers, but in larger schools with less electronic equipment, it might take up to a week to cycle all students through a computer lab. Although a school or district could provide the survey link to students and ask students to complete the survey on their own time, Spectrum Diversity strongly discourages this as it results in a very low response rate and a high probability that important issues will not be reflected in the survey findings.¹

Is there a survey for staff members and parents also? Yes, the SCBPS includes surveys for staff members and parents also, which are designed to work in conjunction with the student survey to provide your school/district with an integrated view of your school climate from all three perspectives.

Is the SCBPS available in any other languages? The SCBPS for students and parents is available in both English and Spanish. The Staff survey is available only in English.

What percentage of students should we survey? Although larger schools could achieve *statistically* accurate findings by taking a scientifically drawn sample of the student body, the SCBPS is intended to be a "whole population" survey. This is because the SCBPS is designed to give you the information you need to address hidden problems, and this information is qualitative as well as quantitative. If you draw a sample, you might detect only those problems that are prevalent enough to rise above a certain margin of error. The SCBPS is not only designed to give you statistical estimates; it also includes open-ended questions designed to allow students to inform you of rare but serious situations. If there is a student in your school who is in serious trouble, you would not want the few students who can tell you what the problem is to be randomly excluded from a "sample." Samples are appropriate for certain types of surveys, such as political polls, but for other types of surveys, e.g., the US Census and school climate surveys, a "whole population" survey can be more useful.

What grades are surveyed? The electronic SCBPS is for grades 2-12. There is a paper-and-pencil survey for students in K-1, but this is an experimental survey that has been requested by some districts and is not considered part of the SCBPS proper. The electronic survey includes four different age-graded questionnaires; separate online questionnaires are provided for grades 2-3, grades 4-6, grades 7-8, and grades 9-12. Each questionnaire focuses on the issues that are relevant and age-appropriate for each grade level, while also collecting information that is comparable to the information collected at other grade levels, so that age- and cohort-related trends can be detected, especially after the survey is administered annually for two or more years.

Do we have to continue using the same survey every year? No, but it is recommended, and most districts using the SCBPS do continue to use the survey annually. The first year you use the SCBPS, you will receive all the assessment information that the survey is designed to provide; this is your "baseline" survey. If you use the survey again the following year, in addition to receiving updated assessment information, your new findings will be compared to the findings of the previous year to produce information regarding the success of your intervening efforts to address bullying. This "follow-up" information can be extremely valuable if you ever have a need to document that your anti-bullying efforts are having an impact on your school climate. Using the survey annually provides you with long-term information about age- and cohort-related patterns in your school or district.

¹ If a district chooses to ask students to complete the survey on their own time, Spectrum Diversity will provide only the statistical results in raw tabulated form to the district. In other words, no report will be written based on such data, because Spectrum Diversity cannot stand behind the quality of any findings or interpretations based on surveys with extremely low response rates.

Is Active Parental Consent Required? The SCBPS is designed to avoid the requirement for active parental consent, but each district is responsible for determining whether or not to administer the survey with active parental consent. For example, unlike many other school climate surveys, the SCBPS does not include questions that assess student mental health (questions about emotional states are used instead), questions about whether the student has violated any policies or regulations (e.g., no questions asking if the student her/himself has ever bullied anyone else, and students under grade 7 are not asked if they have a social networking page), and no questions are asked about students' relationships with their parents. There are the types of questions in some school climate surveys that can trigger the active parental consent requirement.

If your school or district can conduct the survey without requiring active parental consent, the data you obtain will be more accurate and useful. Active parental consent decreases response rates substantially. In any survey, a lowered response rate introduces the potential for response bias (findings that are not as accurate or precise as otherwise). In fact, research indicates that, in school climate surveys, this bias is not only potential, it is *predictable*; the bias introduced into school climate surveys by lowered response rates caused by active parental consent is documented by research conducted by Spectrum Diversity LLC. When the response rate is decreased by the requirement for active parental consent, the *students who are most at risk, have the most negative experiences at school, and experience the most mistreatment by peers, are least likely to participate in the survey*, which means that active parental consent requirements can prevent you from obtaining some of the information you need to detect hidden issues in your school.

Does the SCBPS Measure the Prevalence of Bullying in Our School? Yes, carefully. Primarily, this survey measures those factors that contribute to a school climate that either encourages or discourages bullying. The survey also includes measures of the prevalence of certain behaviors that might constitute bullying, but these questions ask about specific behaviors rather than using the word "bullying," because (1) this approach is methodologically more sound, (2) produces information of greater practical use, and (3) because it might not be helpful to receive findings that indicate that a certain percentage of your students have been "bullied." Instead, the information collected is much more detailed and focused on specific practical program implications than a general measure of "bullying" prevalence would be. For example, the SCBPS will tell you how often your students hear their peers make derogatory remarks about identifiable groups, what percentage of your students have been socially excluded by others, etc., so that you can focus limited resources on those areas of greatest risk.

When should the survey be done? A survey can be done at any time of the school year, but the best time is in the early spring (March-May). In September and October, the school year is still new and some dynamics have not yet developed, so a survey done at that time might miss the types of situations that arise later in the year. The SCBPS, like many other surveys, asks questions about students' experiences "during this school year" or "over the past year;" you will collect maximum information about issues that need to be addressed if you conduct the survey toward the end of the school year. Plan ahead to avoid conflicts with testing schedules, and if you do a follow-up survey the next year, it should be done at the same time of year as the first survey was done so that the results are comparable.

How long does the survey take? The SCBPS is designed to take no more than one class period, at each grade level.

Where are the data collected? The SCBPS is hosted by Survey Monkey, and each district's data are collected in a unique dataset that is not linked to any other dataset, and contains no identifying student information. The account is owned by Spectrum Diversity, LLC, and no other entity has access to the datasets. There is **no** connection between the SCBPS and any State of New Jersey agency or department.

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What is required of our school staff; do our school staff have to upload the questions electronically, enter the data, or analyze the data? No. The SCBPS is designed to minimize the need for staff time and effort. The SCBPS is already online, and the data are collected electronically. School staff members do not have to upload the survey, key in the data, create a dataset, calculate percentages or indices, or analyze the data. Spectrum Diversity LLC analyzes the data and produces a customized report for each district that includes findings for the district as a whole, and each school in the district. The report identifies specific areas of strength and concern, and age- and cohort-related patterns, and provides recommendations based on the findings. The only tasks for school personnel are determining whether to use active or passive parental consent, following any district procedures for obtaining administrative and parental consent for the survey, and arranging for students to have access to the survey during the school day. Spectrum Diversity LLC provides sample letters to parents, and instructions for teachers or other staff members who will be supervising students as they complete the survey.

How Does the School/District Receive the Results of the Survey? A report is prepared for each school or district. The report includes the complete statistical findings, separately for each school in a district, including tabulated data comparing findings across all grade levels. The report also includes written interpretations of all findings, identification of age- and cohort-related patterns, identification of areas of risk and areas of strength, and recommendations for anti-bullying programming based on the findings. An introductory chapter includes complete methodological information about the survey and a “primer” on statistical analysis and interpretation. Depending on the size of the district, reports generally range from 75-125 pages long, plus appendices.

Who has used this survey? The names of districts utilizing Spectrum Diversity LLC services, including professional development, parent education, student assemblies, consulting services, and surveys, are kept confidential as a matter of policy. District names are only provided as references with specific permission from the district for each occurrence. Dr Rodriguez Rust has provided over 200 workshops for educators, parents, students, and other audiences, reaching an estimated 10,000 New Jersey educators in PD trainings, more than 7,000 students in assemblies, and approximately 2,000 parents in educational presentations. The survey is a standard aspect of Spectrum Diversity LLC consulting services and has been utilized in a wide range of educational institutions, including entire districts and individual schools, and including large districts with multiple high schools, regional high schools, and K-8 districts, as well as urban, township, suburban, and rural schools. Spectrum Diversity LLC partnered with the Rutgers Bullying Prevention Institute to provide the SCBPS to districts participating in the BPI program.

Who designed this survey? Dr. Paula Rodriguez Rust, owner of Spectrum Diversity, LLC, is a former tenured professor of Sociology. She relinquished tenure to establish Spectrum Diversity LLC. She has conducted international survey research, lectured internationally, taught survey research methodology and statistical analysis at the college level, and provides continuing education for social workers through the Rutgers School of Social Work. She is the founder of the Alliance for Comprehensive and Effective Strategies (ACES) for Bullying Prevention, is a member of the Expert Advisory Group of the NJ Coalition for Bullying Awareness and Prevention, and has provided professional development training for organizations including the New Jersey State Bar Foundation (NJSBF), the NJ Association of School Resource Officers (NJASRO), the New Jersey Psychiatric Association (NJPA), the NJ Human Relations Council (HRC), Kean University, the NJ Department of Corrections (NJ DOC), and the Division of Child Protection and Permanency (DCP&P, formerly DYFS) in the Department of Children and Families (DCF).

Will we be able to use the same survey next year? Yes. Most schools and districts utilizing the SCBPS administer the survey for at least two years, because conducting the survey during a second year provides valuable evidence of program success and yearly progress. Many districts continue to use the survey annually to assess progress, identify newly emerging issues, document anti-bullying efforts, and facilitate compliance with NJ anti-bullying laws (ABR).

What Materials Do We Receive in Order to Conduct this Survey? The survey itself is electronic. The school or district will receive written instructions for the teachers or other staff members who will be supervising students as they complete the survey. In addition, special written instructions are provided for those who will be supervising students in grades 2-3. Spectrum Diversity LLC also provides sample parent permission letters, and preview copies of the questionnaire to be used to allow parents to view the survey prior to providing consent. Dr. Rodriguez Rust also provides individualized instructions to each district, through email correspondence, as the needs and questions of each district are unique.

Can we see the survey before deciding to use it? The questionnaire is proprietary; there is no public access to the survey. However, when a school or district contacts Spectrum Diversity to inquire about the survey, they can be provided with a url for use in previewing the survey. This url cannot be used for data collection. Questions from the SCBPS may not be used by any other provider, in any other survey, or by any school in any survey not designed by Spectrum Diversity LLC or its owner, Dr. Paula C. Rodríguez Rust.

How much does the survey cost? I (Dr. Rodríguez Rust) am primarily a researcher with a concern for helping schools become safer for students, not a businessperson. I am doing something I am passionate about, but I do have to cover expenses to permit myself to continue to work with schools to address bullying. The student survey consists of four questionnaires, for grades 2-3, 4-6, 7-8, and 9-12. The cost of questionnaire preparation and access is \$300 for the first questionnaire, and \$150 for each additional questionnaire, which totals \$750 for a preK-12 district. If a school or district wants raw tabulated output, this fee would be the only cost for the student survey. However, most districts prefer to receive a report that includes analysis, interpretation, and programmatic recommendations. Data analysis and interpretation, including a report that includes findings for the district as a whole as well as each individual school within the district, is \$325/school. If a district conducts staff and parent surveys in conjunction with a student survey, including a full report based on the student survey, then the total fee for the staff and parent surveys is \$500. This includes a report based on the staff survey which is an “add on” to the student survey report, and the findings of the parent survey are provided in raw tabulated form only. Discounts will be considered on a case-by-case basis for schools/districts with particularly limited resources and demonstrated sincerity in achieving the goal of safe schools for all students. Discounts are also available for districts that utilize additional Spectrum Diversity LLC services in addition to the SCBPS, including professional development training, parent education, and student assemblies. See www.spectrumdiversity.org for more information.

How do we get started? Contact Dr. Paula Rodríguez Rust at the phone number or email address given below to ask questions or express interest in using the SCBPS in your school or district.

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