



MMSD Student Climate Survey Results – District 2016

Key Findings

1. MMSD students rated *Teaching & Learning* highest among the five dimensions of school climate with 78% positive responses.
2. Students' percent positive responses decreased in three of the five dimensions of school climate (*Relationships*, *Safety* and *Institutional Environment*) between 2015 and 2016.
3. With the exception of Advanced Learners, there was little variance in the percent of positive responses across dimensions or specific questions by student groups.
4. Elementary students' responses were more positive across all dimensions and questions compared to secondary students.
5. Among open-ended comments, students most often described *Relationships* as both the greatest strength and the greatest challenge of their school.

Background

Since 2015, MMSD has surveyed parents, staff, and students each spring to measure climate in the district. The data gathered from these surveys informs the district's work around [Strategic Framework Goal #3: Every student, family, and employee experiences a positive school and district climate](#) and *Priority Area V: Accountability and School Support Systems*. The MMSD Student Climate Survey focuses on five research-based dimensions of school climate: 1) Relationships; 2) Teaching & Learning; 3) Safety; 4) School Improvement; and, 5) Institutional Environment.

Within the student survey, questions are intentionally aligned to district initiatives and priorities, including the *Strategic Framework*, *Behavior Education Plan* and the *Great Teaching Matters Framework*. Schools use climate survey data to drive their school improvement actions, including setting goals for their 2016-17 [School Improvement Plans](#).

This report focuses on the 2015-16 district results for students; similar reports are available for the parent and staff surveys. For more information on MMSD Climate Surveys and to view detailed results – including interactive [scorecards](#) and [comparisons](#) across years – visit the [climate survey website](#).

Data and Methods

MMSD administered the student climate survey between February 8 and 26, 2016. RPEO staff emailed links to the electronic survey, in English, Hmong and Spanish, to students in grades 3 through 12. School staff coordinated the completion of the survey during class time.

A total of 14,783 students responded to the confidential survey for a response rate of 78%, compared to 61% in 2015. Participation increased greatly in 2016 as a result of secondary school staff's efforts to include all students in the survey. Students' responses included their student IDs so survey results could be disaggregated demographically. Students' demographics are displayed in Table I below:



| Table 1: Demographics | Student Survey | District Overall |
|--------------------------|----------------|------------------|
| African American | 16% | 18% |
| Asian | 10% | 9% |
| Hispanic/Latino | 20% | 20% |
| Multiracial | 8% | 9% |
| White | 46% | 43% |
| Low Income | 45% | 50% |
| English Language Learner | 26% | 27% |
| Special Education | 12% | 14% |
| Advanced Learner | 18% | 15% |
| Elementary (grades 3-5) | 35% | 24% |
| Middle | 31% | 21% |
| High | 34% | 30% |

In all but a few groups, respondents closely resemble the demographics of the district's overall enrollment. Elementary and middle school students responded at higher rates than high school students and low-income students responded at lower rates than higher-income students.

On the closed-ended questions, we calculated response distributions (i.e., the range of responses) and percent positive responses. Percent positive aligns to the way MMSD reports metrics on other *Strategic Framework* goals, such as reading proficiency, high school graduation and challenging and well-rounded curriculum. We consider a response to be positive when it expresses agreement or strong agreement with a positive statement, and disagreement or strong disagreement with a negative statement. On the [student scorecard](#), response distributions show the percentage of responses from very negative to very positive for each closed-ended question. For negatively worded questions, such as those pertaining to students experiencing bullying or harassment, "strongly disagree" corresponds with "very positive." Each question on the survey aligns to a dimension of school climate and a percent positive response was also calculated for each dimension.

We analyzed results and selected findings for this report based on a variety of factors. First, we reviewed percent positive responses, looking for differences of four percentage points or greater among respondent groups at the dimension and question levels. Then, we reviewed results based on groups of interest related to district initiatives and priorities. We also identified questions of interest based on district priorities, connections to school improvement and district goals or accountability. Among the groups, dimensions, and/or questions that stood out, we selected specific items to highlight based on interest and impact.

On the open-ended questions, we analyzed results to tie them to specific dimensions using a multi-step process in NVivo, a software program designed for qualitative analysis. The approach relied on coding, a way of organizing and sorting qualitative data that involves assigning labels, or codes, to each comment or response, which makes it easier to draw themes from and summarize the data. We began with a provisional code list (i.e., a predetermined set of codes) that consisted of the dimensions from the climate survey. First we performed preliminary coding, by manually coding a subset of comments into the dimension they best represented. We then searched the comments for key words identified from survey questions pertaining to each dimension, along with other synonyms and antonyms to these words, and coded those comments accordingly. Next, we used the Autocode feature of NVivo, which is a program function that uses an algorithm to automatically code comments based on existing coding patterns, to code additional comments. Finally, we assigned the comments not captured in the previous steps to an Other category, as they did not directly or explicitly relate to any specific climate dimension in the climate survey. This Other category was scanned and more coding was manually performed if appropriate. The findings presented in this report are the result of this exhaustive multi-step process.

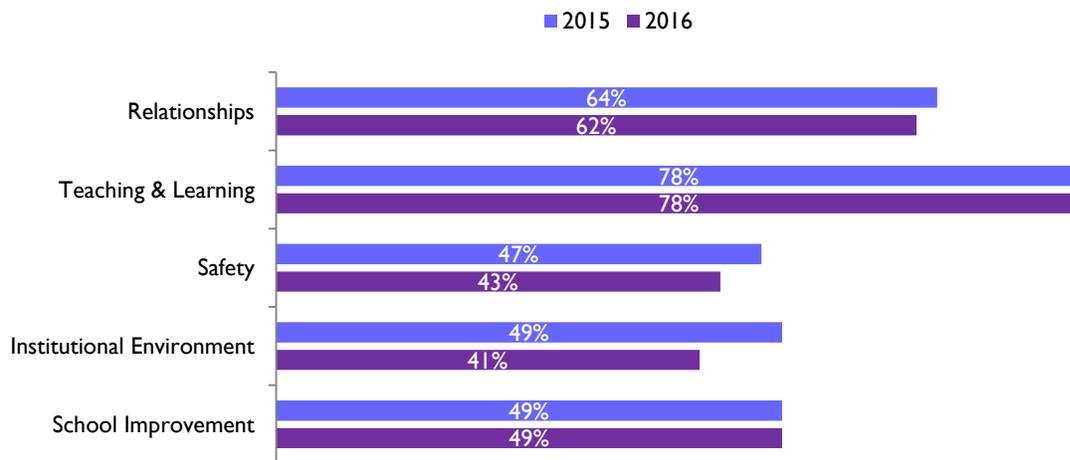


Findings: Closed-Ended Responses

Overall and Year-to-Year

Students rated *Teaching & Learning* highest among the five dimensions of school climate with 78% positive responses to questions overall, followed by *Relationships* with 62%. They rated *Institutional Environment* the lowest with 41% positive responses.

Figure 1: Students' Percent Positive Response by Dimension of School Climate



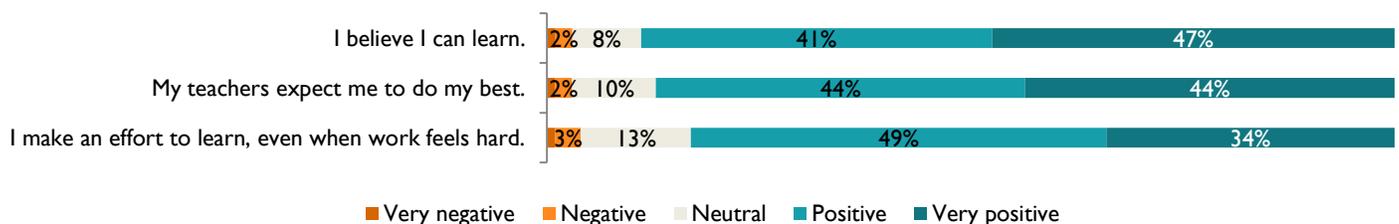
Students' percent positive responses decreased in three of the five dimensions of school climate and remained unchanged in the remaining two dimensions between 2015 and 2016. The dimension that showed the largest decrease was *Institutional Environment*, 41%, compared to 49% in 2015. The decreases across dimensions are explained, in part, by significant increases in participation among middle and high school students, compared to last year. Generally, students in middle and high school tended to respond more negatively to all questions than elementary students. This increase in participation among secondary students may have contributed to lower results in general, rather than representing substantial year-to-year change.

Highlights Within Dimensions:

Teaching & Learning

Within *Teaching & Learning*, questions measuring students' perceptions of their own abilities and teachers' expectations received the most positive responses. Eighty-eight percent (88%) of students believe they can learn. Eighty-eight percent (88%) of students agreed their teachers expect them to do their best and 83% agreed they make an effort to learn, even when work feels hard, compared to 78% positive responses to all questions within *Teaching & Learning*. These findings are significant as they support MMSD's implementation of *Great Teaching Framework Practice #1: Set high and clear expectations for all students*.

Figure 2

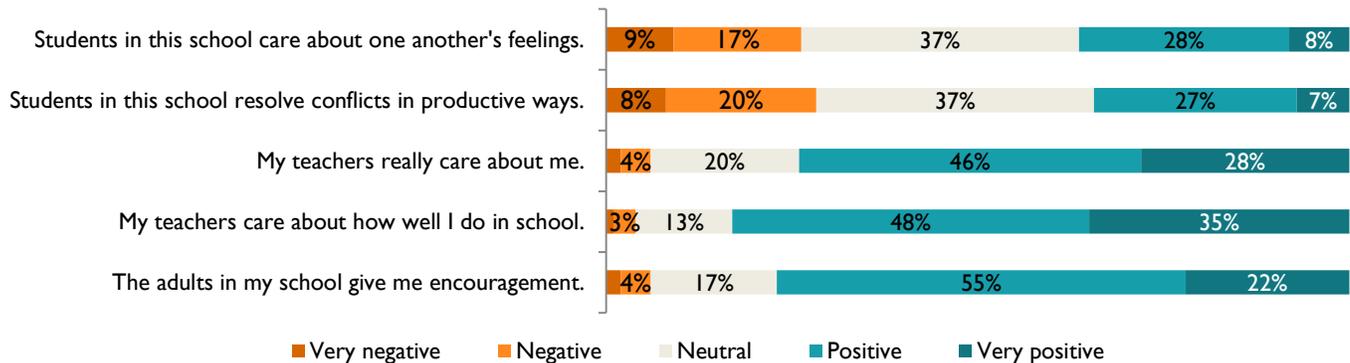




Relationships

Students rated *Relationships* second highest among the dimensions, with 62% positive responses to questions overall. Within the *Relationship* dimension, students' responses varied greatly with respect to student-to-student relationships and student-to-teacher relationships. Students rated questions on student-to-student relationships the least positively which may have implications for schools' focus areas with their School Improvement Plans. Only 36% of students agree that *students care about one another's feelings* and 34% agree that *students resolve conflicts in productive ways*. Conversely, students rated questions on student-to-teacher relationships much more positively. Seventy-four percent (74%) of students agreed their *teachers really care about them* and 83% agreed *teachers care about how well they do in school*, while 77% agreed *adults in their school give them encouragement*.

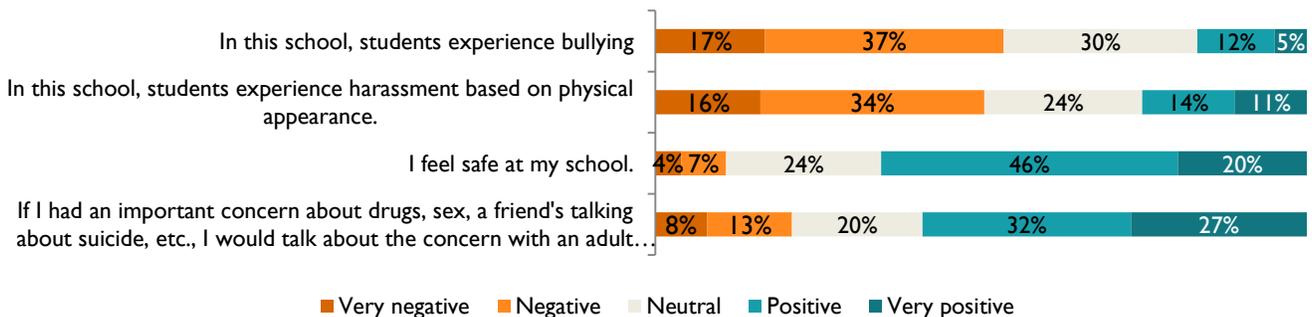
Figure 3



Safety

The dimension of *Safety* had 43% positive responses, compared to 47% the prior year. Among questions within the dimension of *Safety*, relatively few students, 17%, disagreed *students experience bullying* and 25% disagreed *students experience harassment based on physical appearance*. However, the majority of students, 66%, agreed *they feel safe at their schools* and 59% agreed *they would talk to an adult at school if they had an important concern (about drugs, sex, a friend's talking about suicide)*.

Figure 4



Highlights Among Student Groups:

Advanced learners had the most positive responses in the dimensions of *Teaching & Learning*, *Safety* and *Institutional Environment*, between five and seven percentage points higher, compared to students overall. Within *Teaching & Learning* questions, 82% of advanced learners agree they *participate in classroom discussions*, compared to 72% of students overall and 83% of advanced learners *use teacher feedback to improve their work*, compared to 76% overall.



Conversely, special education students had the least positive responses within the dimension of *Teaching & Learning*, 72%, compared to 78% of students overall. Far fewer special education students *participate in classroom discussions*, 61%, compared to 72% of students overall and only 66% *use teacher feedback to improve their work*, compared to 76% overall. These findings may have implications as staff engage in the *reflect and adjust* cycle around *Great Teaching Framework Practice #2: Acknowledge all students*, specifically as it applies to creating equitable opportunities for successful participation in class activities.

There was less variance in the percent of positive responses across dimensions among the remaining student groups. As an example, African American students rated *Relationships* lower, 58%, compared to 62% of students overall, while ELL students rated *Relationships* higher, 66%, but these differences between groups are very small relative to differences within groups across dimensions. Responses by student group are shown in Table 2 that follows:

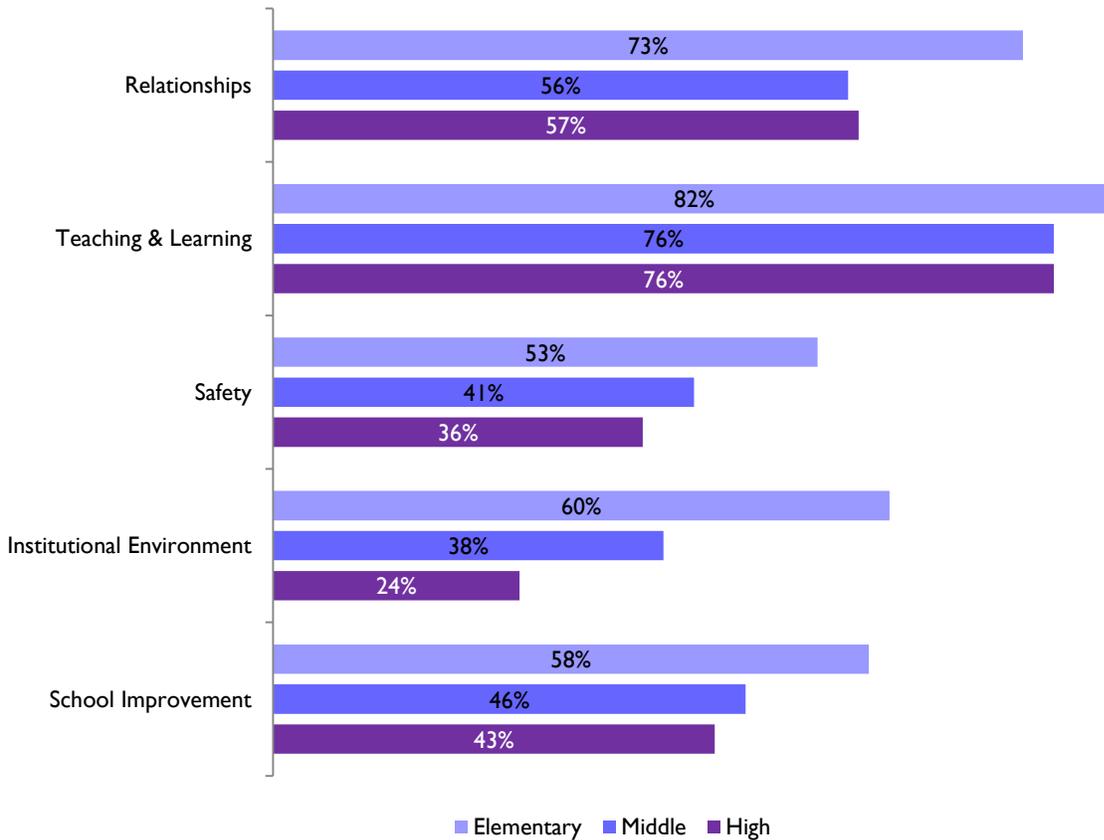
| Table 2: Students' Groups Percent Positive Response by Dimension | Relationships | Teaching & Learning | Safety | Institutional Environment | School Improvement |
|--|---------------|---------------------------|------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| African American | 58% | 75% | 42% | 38% | 51% |
| Asian | 65% | 80% | 42% | 45% | 55% |
| Hispanic/Latino | 64% | 76% | 45% | 45% | 51% |
| Multiracial | 60% | 77% | 42% | 41% | 49% |
| White | 62% | 80% | 43% | 38% | 46% |
| Female | 62% | 79% | 41% | 41% | 49% |
| Low Income | 62% | 75% | 42% | 43% | 52% |
| English Language Learner | 66% | 78% | 45% | 47% | 54% |
| Special Education | 62% | 72% | 44% | 44% | 51% |
| Advanced Learner | 65% | 83% | 50% | 48% | 51% |
| Students Overall | 62% | 78% | 43% | 41% | 49% |

Highlights Across School Levels:

Elementary students' responses were more positive across all dimensions and questions compared to secondary students. Across all student levels, *Teaching & Learning* received the highest rating, with 82% positive or very positive responses among elementary students and 76% positive for both middle and high school students. The dimension that decreased most in positive responses across student levels was *Institutional Environment*, dropping 36 percentage points between elementary, 60%, and high school, 24%.



Figure 5: Students' Percent Positive Responses by Dimension & Level



When examining questions within the *Relationships* dimension, middle school students rated questions on student-to-student relationships the least positively. Only 27% of middle school students agree that *students care about one another's feelings*, compared to 74% of elementary and 57% of high school students. Similarly, 24% of middle school students agree that *students resolve conflicts in productive ways*, compared to 50% of elementary and 26% of high school students. A smaller percentage of middle school students *look forward to seeing the adults at their schools*, 47%, compared to 73% of elementary and 49% of high school students.

Findings: Open-Ended Responses

We report the findings from student responses to the open-ended questions below. For more details about the dimensions, the percent of coded comments in each dimension, and example quotes coded into each dimension, see the Appendix. Our two open-ended questions, which we used to organize our analysis, were:

1. What do you feel is your/this school's greatest strength?
2. What do you feel is your/this school's greatest challenge?

In their comments, students most often described aspects of *Relationships* as the greatest strength of their school, tending to comment on the strength of their school's diversity, connections between staff and peers, inclusivity, and a strong sense of community. Slightly less often, they discussed strengths related to *Teaching & Learning*. That *Relationships* and *Teaching & Learning* appeared the most often in student comments related to the strength of their school supports the closed-ended response findings, where these same two dimensions received the highest percent



positive responses from students. Within racial/ethnic groups, African American student comments focused more on *Teaching & Learning* and less on *Relationships* relative to their peers.

Although students most often referenced the strength of *Relationships*, students also most often criticized them as their school's greatest challenge in their comments. Students perceived disrespect, fighting, and poor treatment of others as examples of challenges facing their school. To a lesser degree, students commented on challenges related to *Safety* and *Teaching & Learning*, which appeared a similar amount in comments, followed by *Institutional Environment*. With the exception of *Relationships* and *Teaching & Learning*, these results support the findings from the closed-ended responses – *Safety* and *Institutional Environment* received the lowest percent positive rating of the dimensions this year, and they also appeared in many of the comments students contributed regarding challenges facing their schools. That *Relationships* and *Teaching & Learning* represented both the greatest strengths and greatest challenges suggests that students may have very different experiences with different aspects of their particular school. Further, that both dimensions received the two highest percent positive responses in the closed-ended response findings, but also often appeared in comments about school challenges suggests that the language students use to describe their experiences may not be directly aligned with the questions in the survey. Within racial/ethnic groups, African American students commented about challenging *Relationships* more than their peers, and they did not comment on challenges related to *Safety* as much as their peers.



Appendix: Open-Ended Comment Coding Scheme

Below is Table 3 depicting the percentage of coded comments applied to each dimension of climate across the comments students left regarding the strengths and challenges facing their schools. There is also a column of example comments coded into each dimension. Percentages may not total to 100% because comments could be coded into multiple dimensions.

| Table 3: Students' Reported Strengths and Challenges | | |
|--|---------------------|---|
| Strengths | | |
| Dimension | % of Coded Comments | Example Quotes |
| Relationships | 32% | "the diversity" "community" "a connection between teachers and students" "inclusion between people" "friendship" "respect" |
| Teaching & Learning | 23% | "academics" "a wide variety of classes" "how many opportunities and activities are available for students" "teaching" |
| Safety | 3% | "I can feel safe in school" "not a lot of bullying" "having good security" "controlling extreme behavior issues" "providing a safe environment to learn" |
| Institutional Environment | 1% | "keeping the school clean" "technology" "small size" |
| School Improvement | 1% | "making decisions together" "including everyone's opinion in a decision" "the teachers trying to empower students" |
| Other | 45% | "I don't know" "teachers" "nothing" "pride" "the staff gives you help and support when you ask for it" "staff is great"; Nonsensical responses |
| Challenges | | |
| Dimension | % of Coded Comments | Example Quotes |
| Relationships | 23% | "fighting" "treating each other better" "respect of the teachers/students" "acceptance" "diversity" "treating all people fairly" "equality" |
| Safety | 17% | "bullying" "drugs" "bad behavior" "security of personal belongings" "discipline" "discipline" "giving the same punishments to everyone" |
| Teaching & Learning | 16% | "achievement gap" "students not caring about school" "academics" "keeping students engaged" "to have all the kids learn" "homework" "the teaching" "learning" |
| Institutional Environment | 12% | "cleanliness" "funding" "maintaining facilities" "the dirty bathrooms" "not a lot of doors or walls and the bathrooms and some classrooms are in bad shape" "it does not always have enough space, some rooms do not have real walls" |
| School Improvement | 1% | "letting the students have a say" "having students involved with decisions" "giving students a voice" |
| Other | 42% | "I don't know" "everything" "not applicable" "nothing" "not sure" "school lunch" ; Nonsensical responses |