

Healthy Schools are Effective Schools

A resource package for improved
School Climate

Module 2

How Can We Make Sense of Our
School Climate Data?



*Every
child,
every
opportunity*



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This module looks at the types of data available to schools.

It highlights how staff engagement is an essential step in building trust and confidence in the process of conducting the survey and understanding a school's climate.

Working together to analyse and develop meaning from school climate data provides an opportunity to improve the workplace for everyone.

The module also provides a guide for interpreting other sources of data such as staff opinion, parent opinion and attitudes to school survey results.

This module will help you to understand:

- The role of school climate data.
- The importance of building a shared understanding of the data.
- The impact of emotions.
- How to approach the interpretation of your data.

Developing an understanding of the staff opinion survey and the implications for school climate with staff is an important first step to establishing more positive working relationships. For further details about the survey refer to Staff, Student & Parent Surveys.



Using school climate data

To improve your school's climate you need to understand how staff feel about their workplace.

The data from sources such as the Staff Opinion Survey are an opportunity to examine your school's climate and discuss the results and their meaning with the school's staff.

What school climate data is available?

The key source of data for understanding school climate is the Staff Opinion Survey. However, information from sources such as the Student Attitudes to School Survey, the Parent Opinion Survey, the Leadership Module Report, staff absenteeism incident reports and worker's compensation can also be used to help build the picture of what is happening in the school. Input from the elected Health and Safety Representative/s can form an important source of information.

Encouraging staff to engage with the data

Staff will have many questions about the data. Providing the opportunity to explore these questions through activities that allow for reflection and clarification is an important first step.

This initial engagement with the data can give staff an opportunity to:

- Create a sense of meaning and ownership of the data
- Develop a focus on improvement rather than a climate of blame
- Build confidence in understanding the data
- Test understandings held about the school and its practices.

Many schools focus on supporting ownership through activities that allow staff to explore the data, reflect on their reactions and develop consensus over what the data means.

These activities help to build confidence in the data and how it will be used in the school.

When establishing these activities make sure that:

- Activities focus on engaging all staff.
- There is a shared understanding about the purpose of each activity and what staff will be required to do.
- Adequate time is made available for reflection and the development of common understandings.
- There are opportunities for collaboration - teamwork and building consensus.
- Different viewpoints are recognised.

Using multiple sources of evidence

School climate data can be further complemented using less formal approaches to collect information from within a school. Possible strategies to gather opinions about the school include using surveys, facilitating discussion groups, seeking anecdotal evidence from peers and regional colleagues or engaging an external consultant.

Support for schools is available from a region-based or external facilitator to assist in analysing data and developing effective strategies to address issues. DEECD Regional Offices can advise on the process for accessing a facilitator.

Conclusions reached using multiple sources of evidence are likely to be more robust and convincing.

Through these practices staff can generate an understanding of what the data means to them in the context of their workplace. Then staff can begin to offer options on how people can work together to improve their place of work.

Managing the initial reaction

Initial responses to viewing the data for the first time can be diverse.

When results show little improvement after the implementation of improvement strategies or particular efforts by the leadership team, a sense of disappointment and frustration can be inevitable.

Gaining some perspective on these feelings is important before attempting to work through then data with staff.

Consider...

- Putting the results into the context of your school and what has happened over the year,
- Looking for reasons that explain the results rather than excuses.
- Managing your own expectations about change. Remember, change takes time and is unlikely to progress evenly.
- Taking a 'broad brush' approach that focuses on the bigger picture rather than on specific details.

NOTE: The Employee Health Unit and the Regional Office provide services designed to assist schools work through the process of improving school climate.

Assistance in managing reactions may be sought from DEECD's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) which also has a telephone advisory service, Manager Assist, for principals and workplace managers.

The EAP contact number is 1800 337 068.

See Appendices 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 for activities that may assist schools successfully engage staff.



Staff engagement activities – some tips from schools

Schools have used these activities to generate discussion and explore the data.

- Thinking Hats Page 7
- Balloons and Weights Page 8
- Six Whys Page 9
- Affinity Diagram Page 10

These activities are explained further on in this module.

Tips for healthy discussions

When facilitating staff discussions consider the following:

Do

- Use active listening skills and take staff opinion seriously.
- Take a neutral and non-judgemental stance.
- Recognise emotions and assist in clarifying the reasons behind these feelings.
- Make the goal of an improved workplace for all clear.
- Encourage participants to identify solutions.
- Show concern and a willingness to assist.
- Make sure participants are actively involved in brainstorming ideas and decision making.
- Encourage participants to evaluate their own suggested solutions.
- Encourage further questions.

Don't

- Discount the comments of participants.
- Attempt to justify the situation.
- Let a single 'voice' dominate.
- Dismiss suggested solutions.
- Focus on individuals. Work towards a group view.
- Move into rights and wrongs.
- Impose solutions.
- Try to direct the outcome.
- Take the issues personally.

Dealing with emotions

It is common for staff to express concerns or feelings about an issue in an emotional way while analysing their Staff Opinion Survey results.

These feelings could be positive such as excitement, energy and enthusiasm or they could be negative such as frustration, tension, and anxiety.

How these emotions are experienced by individuals and teams can be significantly influenced by the general school climate and the processes through which these feelings are managed.

Potentially principals may also have concerns after reflecting on leadership related data. This is not uncommon. Module 3 details how schools can collaboratively develop action plans designed to address issues raised by the data.

What if there is a limited response to completing the Staff Opinion Survey?

Engaging staff in analysing data may be more difficult where there has been a low response rate to the Staff Opinion Survey.

In this situation it is important not to imply blame or fault but to work on building trust in the process. Where possible the data should still be used as the basis for initiating discussion on school climate.

Anonymity and confidentiality should be assured at all times.

Here are some questions that could help begin these discussions:

- Do staff understand why schools participate in the Staff Opinion Survey and the type of information it collects?
- Was the Staff Opinion Survey promoted effectively and were staff provided with adequate opportunities to complete the survey?
- Could a facilitator (regional or consultant) help begin the discussion?
- Could dialogue be started by collecting some of the school's own data and comparing it with the results of the Staff Opinion Survey?
- What strategies could be put in place to improve participation?

Responses to these types of questions may help indicate a way forward and identify some 'quick wins' to build staff engagement.

Model for analysing staff opinion, parent opinion and attitudes to school survey results: using the interpretation examples

The School Performance Data Unit has developed a model for analysing Staff Opinion Survey data.

This model allows schools to systematically review their data using:

- Five guiding questions,
- The Handy Guide to the Staff Opinion Survey, and
- School interpretation examples.

The five guiding questions for understanding school organisational health

Using data from the Staff Opinion Survey, Student Attitudes to School Survey and the Parent Opinion Survey, the five guiding questions below will help a school develop an overview of what's happening in their school climate.

Use the Handy Guide to the Staff Opinion Survey and the School Interpretation Examples to assist in guiding this process.

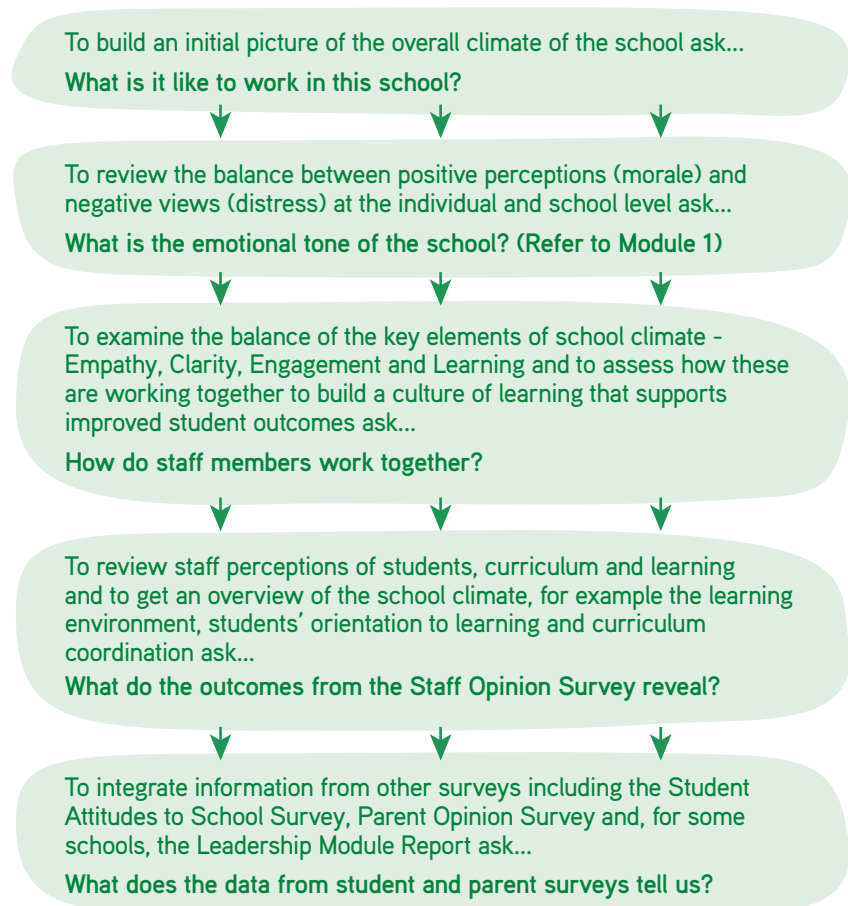


Figure 1: Focus of the guiding questions



The Handy Guide to the Staff Opinion Survey

The Handy Guide to the Staff Opinion Survey will help with answering the guiding questions.

The guide is based on the Staff Opinion Survey and provides a detailed explanation of the four key elements of school climate - Empathy, Clarity, Engaging and Learning (Figure 2).

These elements and their components are described in more detail to assist discussion about possible patterns in the data based on the Staff Opinion Survey road map.

School interpretation examples

A number of interpretation examples have been developed to further assist schools to understand the process of analysis.

Profiles for a number of schools were developed using their data. The Data Outcomes and Evaluation Unit carried out the analysis and each school verified their result while Insight SRC confirmed the general accuracy of the interpretation.

Use the examples to develop an understanding of the process of analysis in building an interpretation for your school.

Please note: Examples focus on the process of interpretation and provide only a general picture of the school. For individual schools the data analysis process will be enhanced by their knowledge of the school's context and specific circumstances.

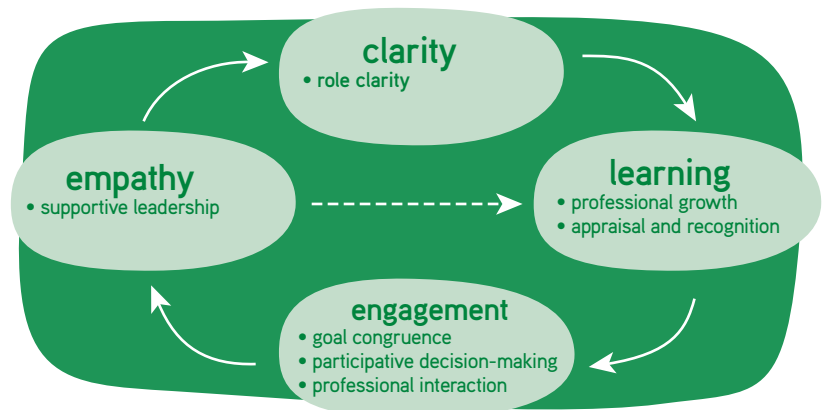


Figure 2: Four key elements of school climate (Based on Hart, 2000)

Appendix

No 1 - De Bono Six Thinking Hats

The six thinking hats can be used to generate a range of different perspectives about issues.

Example

One school used the six thinking hats approach to engage staff with the Staff Opinion Survey data.

Staff sat at six tables - each group represented one of the thinking hats. Participants were then asked to develop a response to the data based on the perspective of their allocated 'hat' and report to the group. This allowed for a broader discussion with the whole school on school climate.

The six thinking hats and their perspectives are:



white hat

Focus on the objective, figures and facts.



red hat

Focus on feelings.



black hat

Focus on the negative feelings and blockers.



yellow hat

Focus on hope and positive thinking.



green hat

Focus on creativity and new ideas.



blue hat

Focus on control and organisation of the thinking process, including the use of the other hats.

Follow up ideas for continuing the discussion:

1. Swap hats and compare the differences in ideas.
2. Identify the main themes across the hat groups and rank their importance.

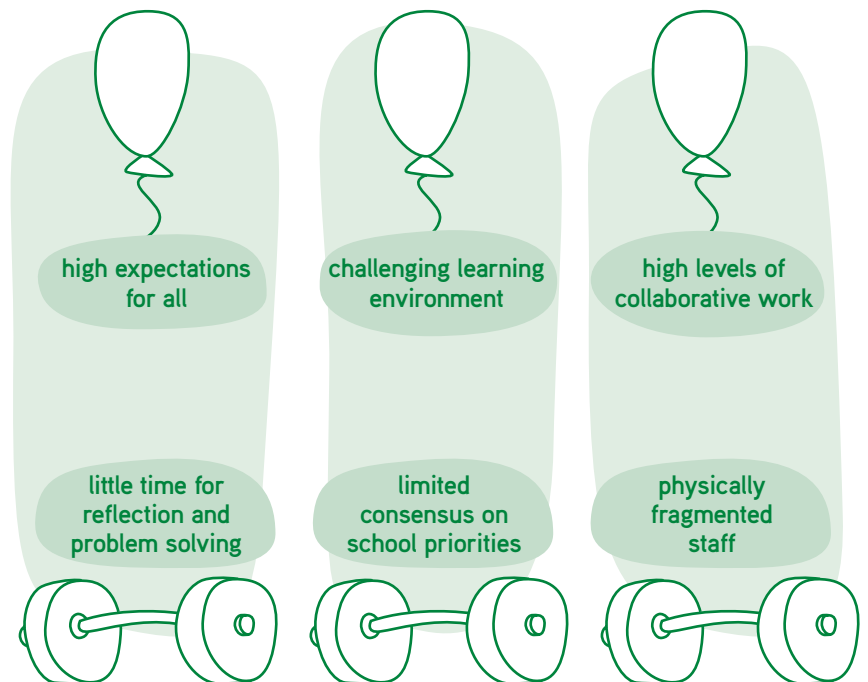
No 2 - Balloons and Weights

The Balloons and Weights activity facilitates discussion around the aspirations and 'blockers' to change or understanding.

Example

In one school the Balloons and Weights activity was used to build initial engagement with the Staff Opinion Survey data.

Staff worked in small groups to identify what they aspire to for the school (the balloons) and those things that they consider are likely to hold them back (the weights).



Follow up ideas for continuing the discussion:

1. Assess the school's commitment to the areas identified in the balloons.
2. Discuss what 'weights' are linked to either personal or systems change.

No 3 - The Five Whys

This activity involves asking five 'why' questions to challenge thinking and develop new perspectives. The questions can also be used to 'funnel' the discussion to develop a core understanding of an issue or situation

Example

To develop a deeper level of dialogue and more effective use of their data one school used the following 'why' questions to generate debate:

- Why are we looking at this data?
- Why is it important to understand what the data is saying about the school?
- Why are we improving in some areas but not others?
- Why do we have blockages?
- Why is it important to take action?

This was later followed by a more in-depth analysis of the data and the identification of key issues.

1 Why...?

2 Why...?

3 Why...?

4 Why...?

5 Why...?

Follow up ideas for continuing the discussion:

1. Identify specific issues and ask groups to develop their own 'five whys'.
2. Change the focus of the discussion through the use of 'what-if' questions.

No 4 - Affinity Diagram

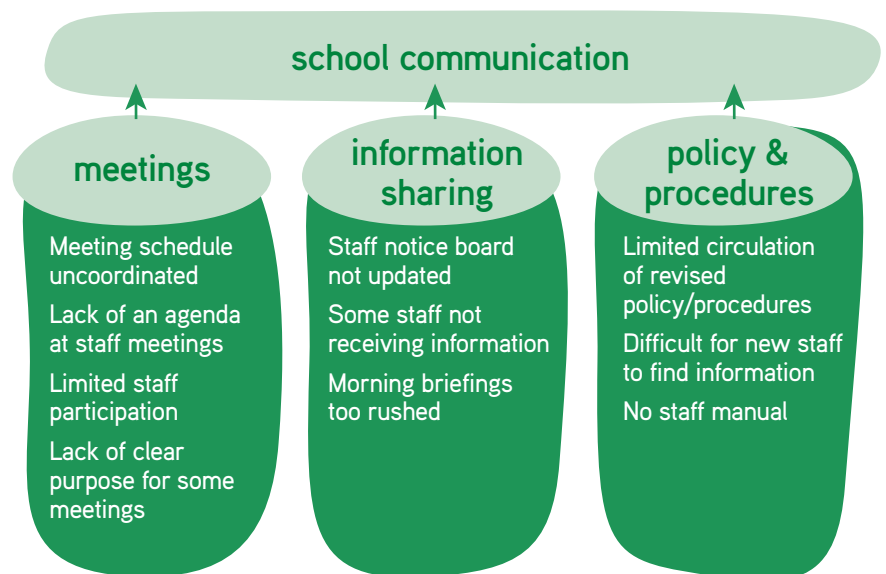
An affinity diagram is a way to organise a large number of ideas, opinions or issues into major themes to help build group consensus.

At the start of the activity the group is asked to generate ideas about an issue and record each item on a card. In the second step, the cards are sorted into groups. This is usually done in silence.

At the final stage the groupings are discussed and changes made if a consensus is reached about the move. Then the groupings of cards are named. These results can then be used for further discussion or planning.

Example

An affinity diagram developed in one school around one issue related to school climate is shown below. This was used as a basis for discussion to identify improvement strategies.



Follow up ideas for continuing the discussion:

1. Rank the importance of the named groups in influencing the central issue.
2. Identify where there could be 'quick wins' in taking action on the issues listed on the cards for each group.

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Further Resources

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