



New York State  
EDUCATION DEPARTMENT  
Knowledge > Skill > Opportunity

# School Climate Inquiry Team Guidebook



## Overview

All Comprehensive Support and Improvement schools will be required to implement a Participatory Budgeting Process **or provide opportunities for parent and student engagement, annually**, in a manner prescribed by the New York State Commissioner of Education.

One of the approved alternatives to Participatory Budgeting is establishing a School Climate Survey Inquiry Team.

## School Climate Inquiry Team Requirements

- The School Climate Inquiry Team will investigate parent and student responses on the school climate survey.
- The team will meet at three different times during the year.
- The team must have a designated team leader who is not the principal.
- All teams will consist of student and parent members.
- Teams should have six to twelve members.
- Team members should include students and parents that have not been involved in school decision-making entities in the past.

## Goals of School Climate Survey Inquiry Team

- Empowers students and parents through agency and representation
- Encourages open dialogue between diverse groups
- Cultivates a more positive learning environment
- Aligns change with specific needs identified in survey data

## Identifying a Team Leader

- The School Climate Survey Inquiry Team should be led by a staff member other than the principal.
- This person should be a trusted member of the school community.
- The team leader will be responsible for:
  - Advancing discussions
  - Avoiding finger pointing
  - Distinguishing thoughts that are isolated to one person versus a trend that may be more common through other groups.
  - Generating a summary report with team findings and recommendations
  - Sharing with principal the ideas and conclusions from the team

## Conducting Meetings

### Meeting Objectives

- The goal of School Climate Survey Inquiry Team meetings is to learn more about WHY students and parents responded the way they did in the climate survey.
- The team should begin by discussing specific questions that received low responses and asking the members of the team their thoughts as to why their peers may have responded in such a manner.

### Introduction

- Acknowledge that a summary will be provided but names will not be shared.
- Share that the school chose this option because it was interested in your opinion.
- Share the team norms (i.e., timing the meeting agenda items, may need to move onto another area to keep the meeting focused).

### During the meeting

- Stay away from finger pointing
- Avoid using staff, student, or parent names in order to assess if the opinions are from a larger experience of the school.

- At various intervals, ask the group if what was shared is their experience through a show of hands (up or down). This can be helpful if someone is sharing something specific to them to determine if this is prevalent.

### Post Meeting

- Thank everyone for their time.
- Remind participants that the outcomes will be put into a summary for the principal.
- Principal and Team Leader meet to discuss three questions to learn about from students and three questions to learn about from parents.

## School Climate Survey Meeting Process

### First Meeting

- Identify 5-6 questions to inquire about in advance
- Read the question and the response to the team members
- Ask two questions:
  1. Why might students/parents might be feeling this way? (5 minutes)
  2. What are some ideas of things the school can do for students/parents to not feel this way? (5 minutes)
- Allow for no more than 10 minutes of discussion for each question.

### Second Meeting

- Return back to the questions investigated previously
- Ask three prompts:
  1. Since we last met do you feel like parents/students' feelings about (survey question) have improved? (5 minutes)
  2. What have you noticed about (survey question topic) since we last met? (5 minutes)
  3. What else can the school do around (survey question topic)? (5 minutes)
- Allow for no more than 15 minutes of discussion for each question.

### Third Meeting

- Return back to the questions investigated previously

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- Ask three prompts:
  1. Since we last met do you feel like parents/students' feelings about (survey question) have improved? (5 minutes)
  2. What have you noticed about (survey question topic) since we last met? (5 minutes)
  3. What else can the school do around (survey question topic)? (5 minutes)
- Allow for no more than 15 minutes of discussion for each question.

## Summary Report Template

At the conclusion of each School Climate Survey Inquiry Team meeting, the Team Leader shall compose a summary report that is provided to the principal. Below is a sample report.

School	
Team Leader	
Question Discussed	Insights about this question

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

**1. *If a school staff member is selected as team leader, will he/she be paid per-diem for this additional role?***

It is the discretion of the school/district to determine how this position will be categorized (paid or unpaid). Each district handles its personnel operations differently, and districts should follow their local collective bargaining agreements. Funding has been allocated to districts for each CSI school to support school improvement efforts, which can include supporting the School Climate Survey Inquiry Team.

**2. *How often does the principal need to meet with the School Climate Survey Inquiry Team?***

The principal will not directly interface with the enter team, but will instead connect with the team leader. The principal and team leader will meet initially to discuss the questions that will guide the team’s focus. The principal will receive a summary at the end of each team meeting, so he/she understands what the team concluded, and the ideas generated to address the areas discussed. The summary report will share the perspective of students and parents and inform whether the school is moving in the direction intended.

School leaders are expected to receive a final summary report from the team that should be used to inform the action plans for the next school year’s SCEP.

**3. *What happens if members drop out in the middle of the school year? Is it possible to add members in the middle of the year?***

The principal and team leader can decide how to proceed. In some instances, the team may proceed without replacing the team member, while in others, the principal and team leader may opt to add a new member. Such additions are permissible.

**4. *Can an Assistant Principal serve as the team leader?***

This would be strongly discouraged. Placing an individual with decision-making authority in the team lead position may impact the ability of students and parents to speak candidly about their perceptions.