

NEW FROM THE OFFICE OF RESEARCH • APRIL

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The West Virginia School Climate Index

Validity and Associations With Academic Outcome Measures

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The term *school climate* refers to the character and quality of school life. The validity of a new index designed to measure school climate—the *WV School Climate Index*—was tested in this study, and it was used to show the impact of school climate in West Virginia schools.

Validity of the index. The Index was developed in alignment with a model for school climate measurement put forth by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Safe and Healthy Students. The Index was tested based on the assumptions that a valid measure should (a) differentiate between favorable and unfavorable climate conditions and (b) based on other research, be correlated with and predictive of academic outcomes. Evidence of the Index's ability to differentiate climate conditions was provided by School Climate Specialists working in intervention schools, who reported that the Index reflected conditions they had observed. Further, statistically significant differences in Index scores were found between intervention and nonintervention schools. **The Index also was shown to correlate at moderate to moderately strong levels with school-level proficiency rates in four content areas and median growth percentiles for mathematics and reading/language arts (RLA)—accounting for noteworthy proportions of variation in these measures.**

Demonstrated relationship of school climate with student outcomes. Factors such as high poverty rates, large proportion of students with disabilities, larger school size, and certain grade-span configurations of schools are associated with poorer academic outcomes. Even when these conditions were present, this study showed the positive effect of school climate remained strong for four of six academic outcome measures tested. School climate was the most influential predictor in the social studies proficiency and mathematics growth percentile regression models, and was the second and third most influential predictor for RLA proficiency and growth percentile. Further, **the study showed positive school climate substantially moderated the effect of poverty as well as the other factors included in the model.** For social studies proficiency and mathematics growth percentile, the effects of poverty were entirely moderated by school climate. With all measures considered together, positive school climate lessened the cumulative negative impact of poverty, disability rate, school size, and grade-span configuration from 6% to 100%.

Conclusions. Schools have virtually no control of the demographic characteristics of the students and communities they serve, and decisions about school size and grade-span configuration reside at much higher political and administrative levels. **The results reported in this study suggest that by addressing a factor that is within their sphere of influence—improving school climate—schools may substantially diminish the unfavorable effects of matters over which they have little control.** Accordingly, schools should focus their improvement efforts on the needs of their students and staff as they relate to school climate. The WV School Climate Index can help schools identify areas of needed improvement and measure their progress.

Learn more. For more information about the WV School Climate Index, contact Dr. Andy Whisman, Coordinator, Office of Research (swhisman@access.k12.wv.us), or download the full report, [The West Virginia School Climate Index: Validity and Associations With Academic Outcome Measures](#), available at the following URL: http://wvde.state.wv.us/research/whats_new.html.