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School Climate Survey (2025–26)
Student, Teacher and Staff, and Parent Responses

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Key Findings

- The school climate survey was administered to teachers, students, and parents in spring 2026.
- School climate perceptions were generally positive across stakeholder groups.
- Teachers reported highly positive perceptions of supportive school administration, including clear expectations, communication, recognition, and meaningful feedback, while elementary school students reported the strongest overall student climate perceptions.
- Parents and guardians also reported positive perceptions of school engagement, school cleanliness, and the overall quality of their child's education.
- Perceptions of physical safety were moderately positive, although high school students reported comparatively lower safety perceptions than other stakeholder groups and grade levels.
- Most students across all grade levels reported positive peer experiences and freedom from bullying-related behaviors during the school year, although some bullying-related behaviors were reported by students across grade levels.
- Respondents disagreed that serious safety risks and behavioral disruptions were frequent problems, indicating school safety perception ratings were generally positive, supportive, and conducive to learning.

Program Overview

The Tennessee Department of Education defines school climate as a critical condition for student learning, emphasizing that students are more likely to succeed academically when they feel safe, connected, respected, and supported within their schools (Tennessee

Memphis-Shelby County Schools offers educational and employment opportunities without regard to race, color, religion, sex, creed, age, disability, national origin, or genetic information.

Department of Education, n.d.). Recognizing the importance of a positive school climate, Memphis-Shelby County Schools (MSCS) conducts an annual School Climate Survey to gather evidence-based insights into perceptions of stakeholders' engagement, school safety, relationships, and learning environments. These findings help inform continuous improvement efforts aimed at strengthening learning environments and supporting student success in the District. Consistent year-to-year administration of surveys allows the district to evaluate progress toward maintaining positive, supportive, and inclusive learning environments for all students.

For 2025–26 school year, the School Climate Survey was administered during January–March 2026 to students, staff, and parents across the District. The Tennessee State School Climate Survey framework measures three major domains of school climate: School Engagement, School Safety, and School Environment. These domains assess the perceptions of relationships, engagement, safety, discipline, and the overall school environment. The survey was made available in both English and Spanish to promote equitable participation among families and students from diverse backgrounds.

This report flows into the following three sections. The first section describes the survey data and methodology, including the survey measures, rating scales, analytical approach, and respondent participation. The second section presents findings across the three school climate domains and summarizes the perceptions of students, teachers and staff, and parents. Finally, the report concludes with recommendations intended to support continuous improvement of school climate across Memphis-Shelby County Schools. A summary of overall domain findings across stakeholder groups is provided in Appendix A for quick reference.

Data and Methodology

The 2025–26 Tennessee School Climate Survey was administered districtwide across MSCS from January to March 2026. Separate survey instruments were administered to students, teachers and staff, and parents using an online survey platform. Prior parental consent was obtained through both online and paper consent forms for applicable students (aged <18 years old) before survey administration, consistent with Tennessee Department of Education survey administration procedures, applicable state laws, and district requirements.

The survey measured perceptions across three primary domains: School Engagement, School Safety, and School Environment. Responses were collected primarily using five-point Likert-type scales ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). For selected problem-focused items (e.g., safety concerns and behavioral disruptions), response scales

were reverse coded. The inclusion of reverse coding ensures that higher mean scores consistently reflect more positive perceptions and fewer reported concerns. For simplest interpretation, higher mean scores across all survey measures indicate more favorable perceptions of school climate and fewer perceived problems.

Additional frequency-based items assessed student experiences related to bullying and school safety concerns. These items were summarized using percentages, including the proportion of students who reported never experiencing bullying-related behaviors as well as those who reported experiencing bullying-related behaviors during the school year. Survey data were analyzed descriptively using response frequencies, percentages, and mean scores to summarize stakeholder perceptions across schools and stakeholder groups.

Survey Participation and Respondent Characteristics

A total of 5,617 students, parents, and teachers and staff participated in the School Climate Survey. Among the respondents, 1,834 elementary school students, 1,181 middle school students, 880 high school students, 899 teachers and staff members, and 823 parents responded in their specific survey. Student respondents represented grades 3–12 and diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. Approximately 63% identified as African American, 21% as Hispanic, 12% as White, and 4% students selected other races.

Among teachers and staff respondents who provided gender information, approximately 80% identified as female and 20% as male. Most respondents were teachers (87.9%); the rest were the para-professional, instructional aides, student support, and other staff. Among teachers and staff, the majority identified as African American (67.8%) or White (27.8%).

Parent respondents represented diverse family backgrounds across the District. Approximately 59% identified as Black or African American, 14% as Hispanic or Latino, 11% as White, and 16% as other racial or ethnic groups. Most respondents were biological or adoptive parents (86.4%). 9% were grandparents and the rest included stepparents, and other guardians.

Findings and Results

School Engagement

Student Responses

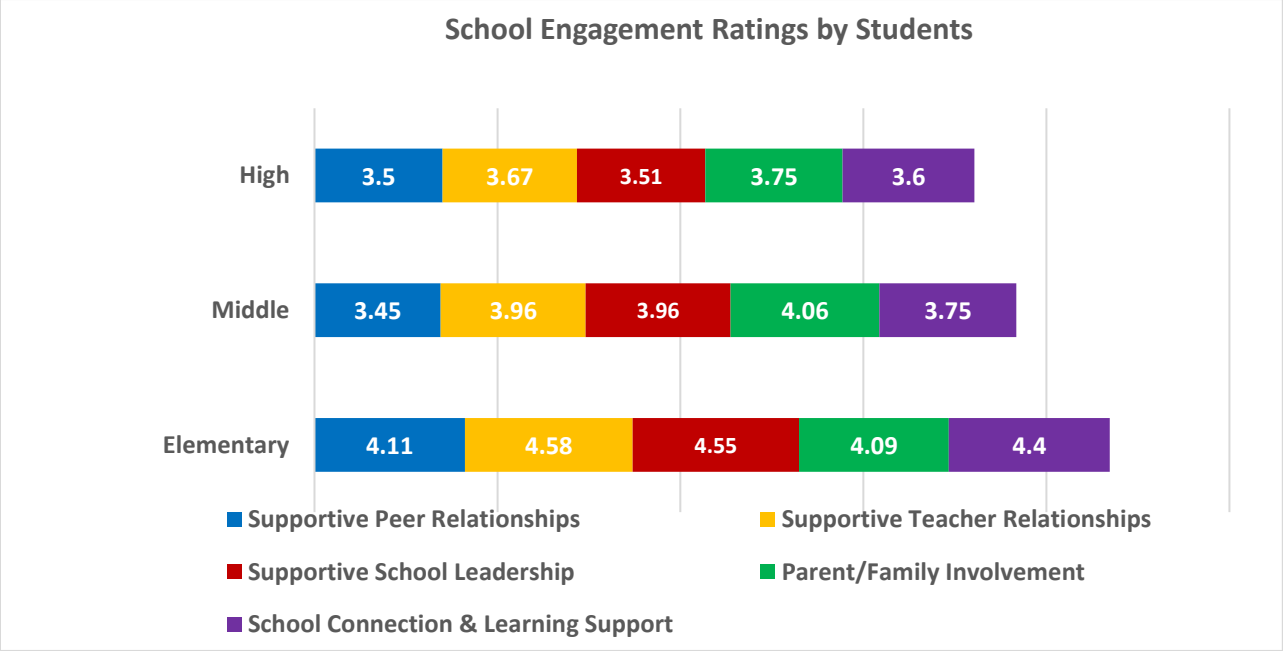
School engagement measures students' perceptions of supportive relationships with peers, teachers, and school leaders, parental involvement, and school connectedness and learning support. School engagement perceptions were positive across all school levels,

with elementary school students reporting the most positive perceptions (4.35), followed by middle school students (3.84) and high school students (3.61). These overall scores represent aggregated domain ratings across multiple school engagement components (Overall domain ratings are summarized in Appendix A).

Elementary school students reported the most positive perceptions across all school engagement components. As shown in Figure 1, elementary students reported particularly strong relationships with teachers (4.58), supportive school leadership (4.55), and school connectedness and learning support (4.40).

Middle school students also reported generally positive perceptions across engagement components. Similarly, although positive, high school students reported comparatively lower ratings, particularly in areas related to school connectedness and personalized relationships with adults at school. Despite these differences, students across all school levels reported positive perceptions of teacher support, school leadership, and learning support, suggesting generally favorable engagement experiences throughout the District.

Figure 1. Average Student School Engagement Ratings by School Level

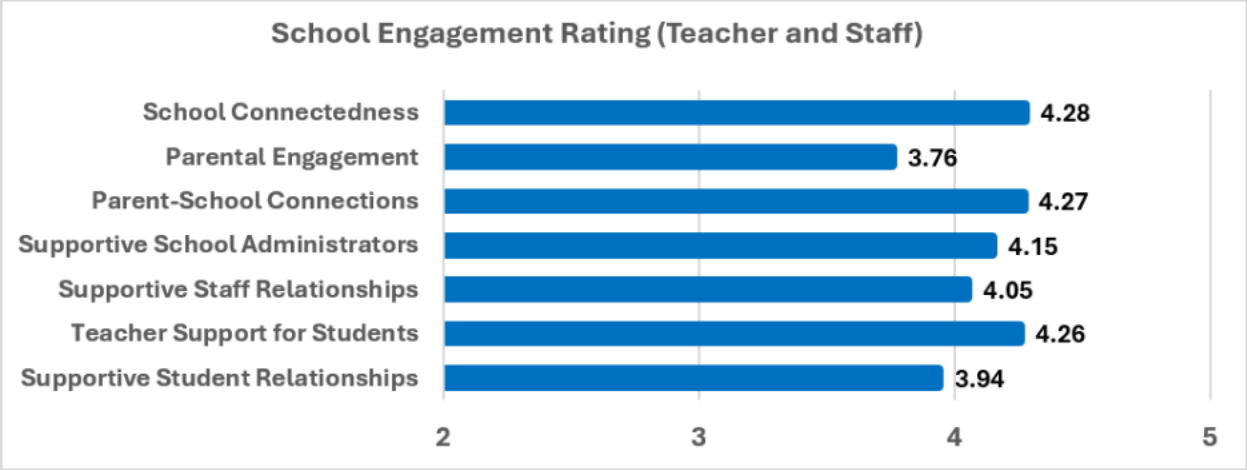


Teacher and Staff Responses

School engagement among teachers and staff measures perceptions of supportive relationships, school connectedness, leadership support, teacher support for students, parent-school connections, and parental engagement. Teachers and staff reported highly positive perceptions of school engagement (4.10), reflecting positive perceptions across multiple engagement components (Appendix A).

As shown in Figure 2, the most positive ratings were observed for school connectedness (4.28), parent-school connections (4.27), and teacher support for students (4.26). Teachers and Staff also reported positive perceptions of supportive school leadership (4.15), supportive staff relationships (4.05), and supportive student relationships (3.94). These findings suggest that teachers and staff generally felt valued, connected, and supported within their schools and were committed to fostering positive learning environments. Parental engagement received the comparatively lowest rating (3.76). Although perceptions remained positive, the findings suggest opportunities to further strengthen family involvement in school activities, student learning, and school-home partnerships (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Average School Engagement Ratings Reported by Teachers and Staff

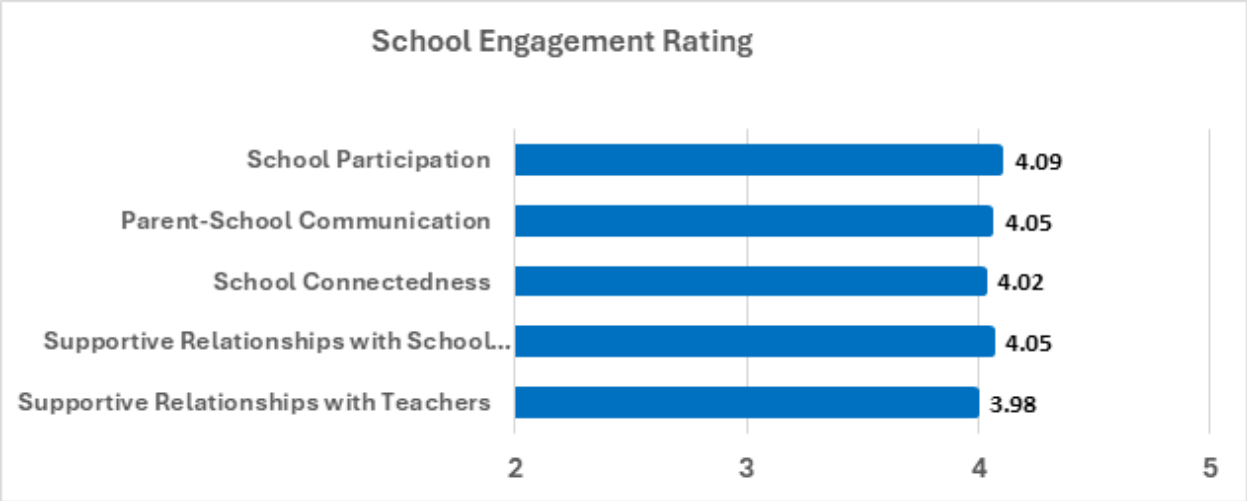


Parent Responses

School engagement among parents and families measures perceptions of school participation, supportive relationships with teachers, communication and connections with schools, and involvement in their child's education. Parents and families reported positive perceptions of school engagement (4.04), reflecting favorable perceptions across multiple engagement components (Appendix A).

As shown in Figure 3, school participation received the highest rating (4.09), suggesting that parents felt welcomed and encouraged to be involved in school activities. Parents also reported positive perceptions of communication with schools, relationships with teachers and administrators, and opportunities to stay connected with their child's education. Supportive relationships with teachers received the comparatively lowest rating (3.98). Although perceptions remained positive overall, the findings suggest opportunities to further strengthen communication, responsiveness to parent concerns, and family-school partnerships (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Average School Engagement Ratings by Parents



In sum, school engagement findings suggest positive perceptions across stakeholder groups. However, student engagement tended to decline at higher grade levels. These findings highlight the importance of continuing efforts to strengthen student connectedness through mentorship opportunities, advisory support, regular student check-ins, and meaningful family-school partnerships. Consistent with these findings, Holt et al. (2008) found that a school-based adult mentoring intervention helped reduce declines in school engagement, teacher support, school belonging, and disciplinary outcomes among at-risk high school students. The study used a randomized design and was conducted among urban minority adolescents, making its findings particularly relevant to the context of MSCS.

Furthermore, the findings align with national research from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The research conducted an analysis of the 2021 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), a nationally representative sample of 17,232 U.S. high school students (9-12 graders). This research found that school connectedness tended to decline across grade levels, particularly among older students (Wilkins et al., 2023). The research supports the idea that stronger student connectedness is associated with lower safety risks and fewer negative behaviors. In the following section, detailed findings related to school safety perceptions across stakeholder groups are discussed.

School Safety

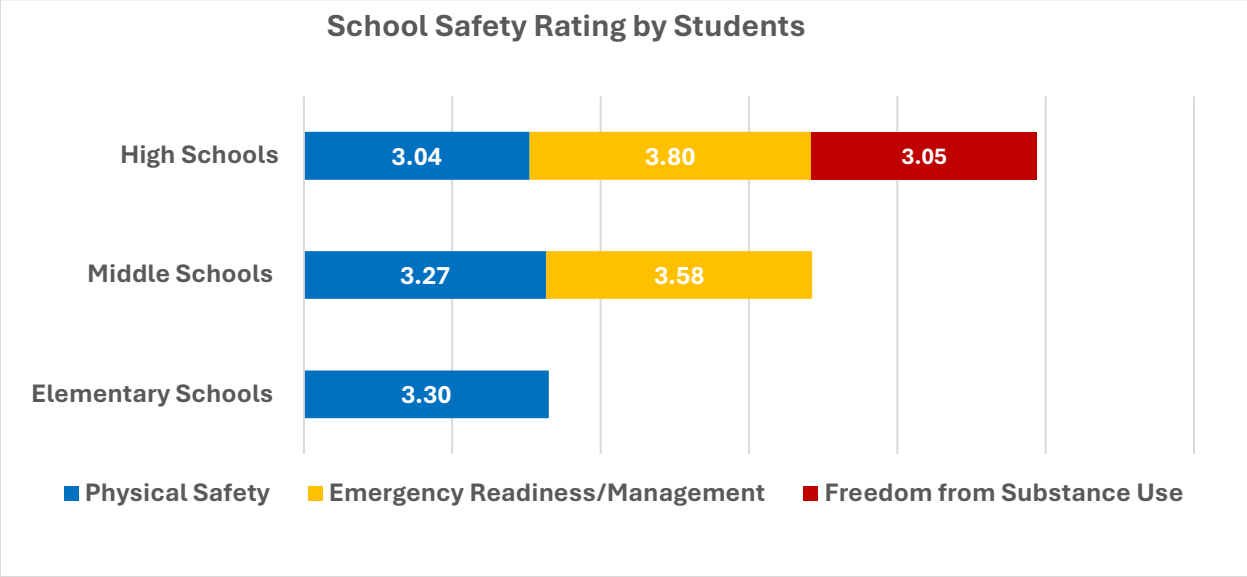
Student Responses

School safety measures students' perceptions of physical safety, emergency readiness and management, freedom from bullying-related behaviors, acceptance of differences, and freedom from substance use. Student perceptions of school safety were positive across

school levels. School safety ratings were 3.30 for elementary schools, 3.43 for middle schools, and 3.29 for high schools (Appendix A).

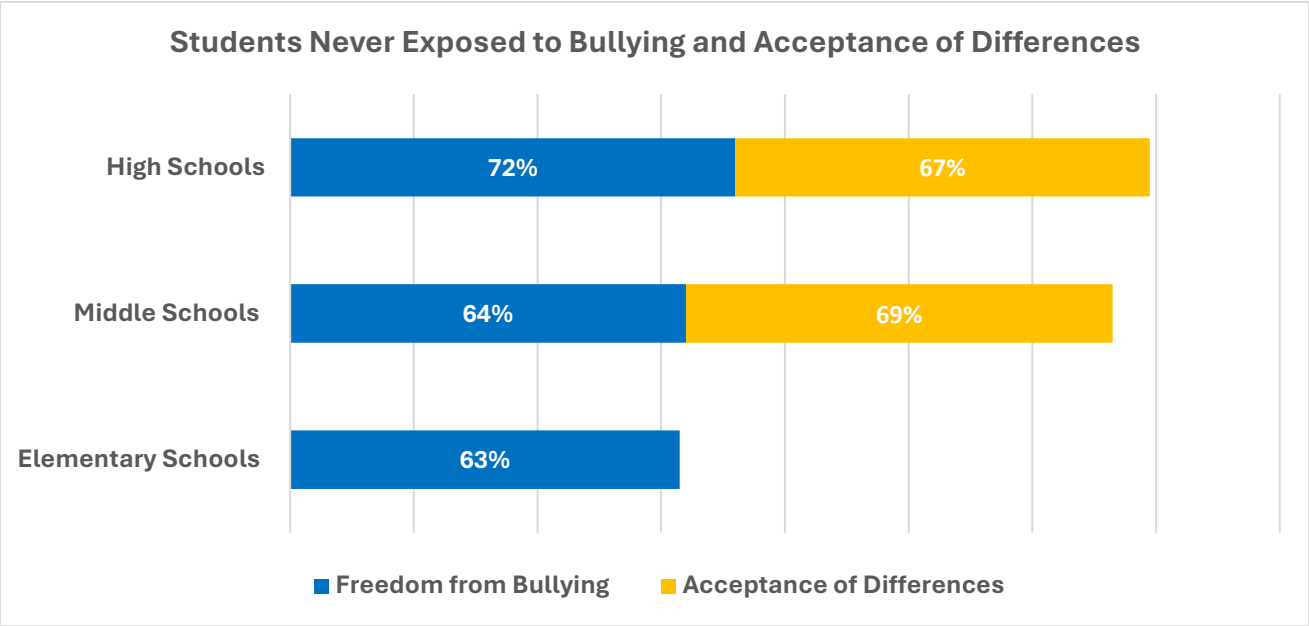
As shown in Figure 4, elementary students reported positive perceptions of physical safety (3.30), while middle school (3.27) and high school students (3.04) reported somewhat lower positive perceptions. Middle and high school students also reported positive perceptions of emergency readiness and management, while high school students reported moderately positive perceptions related to freedom from substance use (3.05). It is important to note that not all survey subsections were administered across all grade levels. Therefore, results are presented only for the grade levels in which each subsection was included, and comparisons across school levels should be made only where the same measure was administered.

Figure 4. Average Student School Safety Perceptions by School Level



Most students reported positive peer experiences and freedom from bullying-related behaviors during the school year 2025–26. Approximately 63% of elementary school students, 64% of middle school students, and 72% of high school students reported that they had not experienced bullying-related behaviors at all during the school year. Students also reported positive perceptions regarding acceptance of differences, with 69% of middle school students and 67% of high school students indicating positive perceptions in this area (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Average Student Perceptions of Peer Experiences, Bullying Prevention, and Acceptance of Differences



Teacher and Staff Responses

The school safety domain for teachers and staff includes perceptions of emergency preparedness, school safety risks, and behavioral disruptions that may affect teaching and learning. Teachers and staff reported positive perceptions of school safety and emergency preparedness. Teachers and staff expressed strong confidence in school emergency readiness and management (4.34), including safety procedures and emergency planning (Figures 6 and 7).

Figure 6. School Safety Ratings by Teachers and Staff

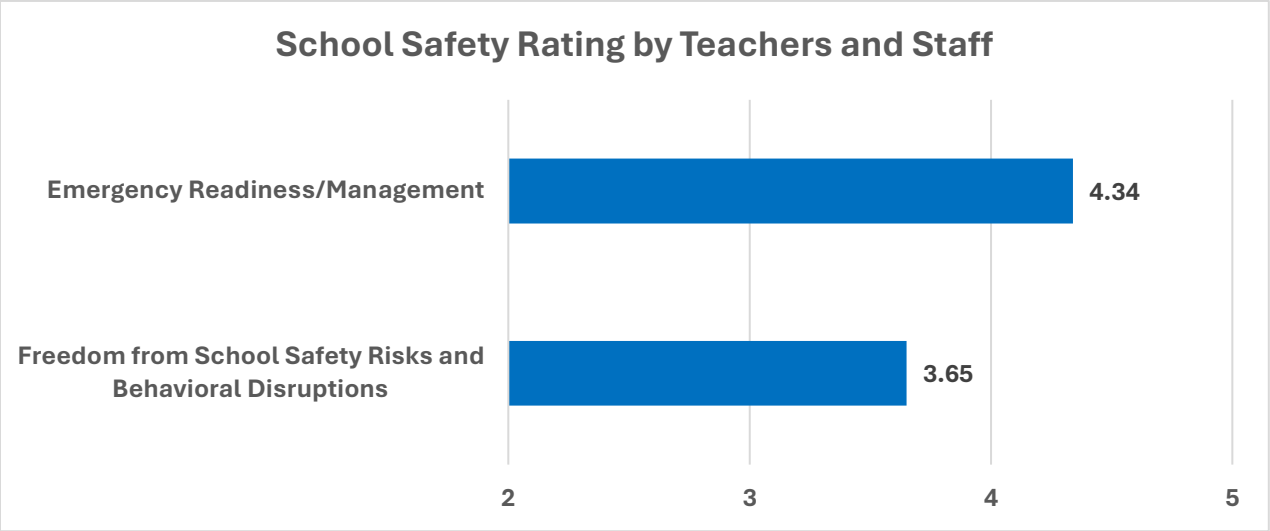
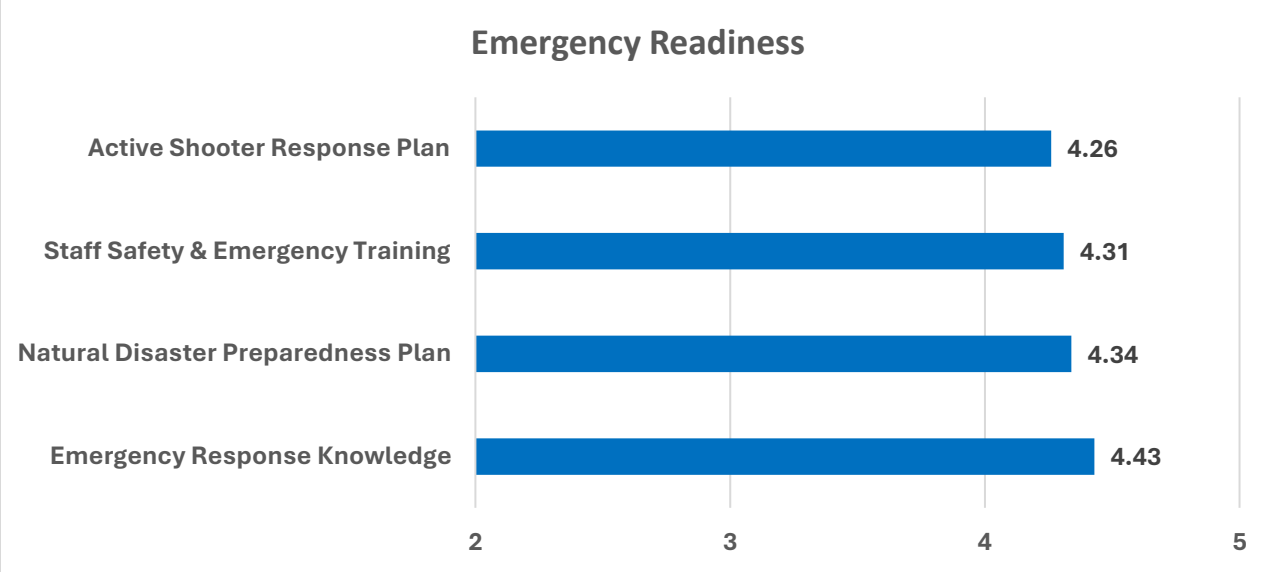
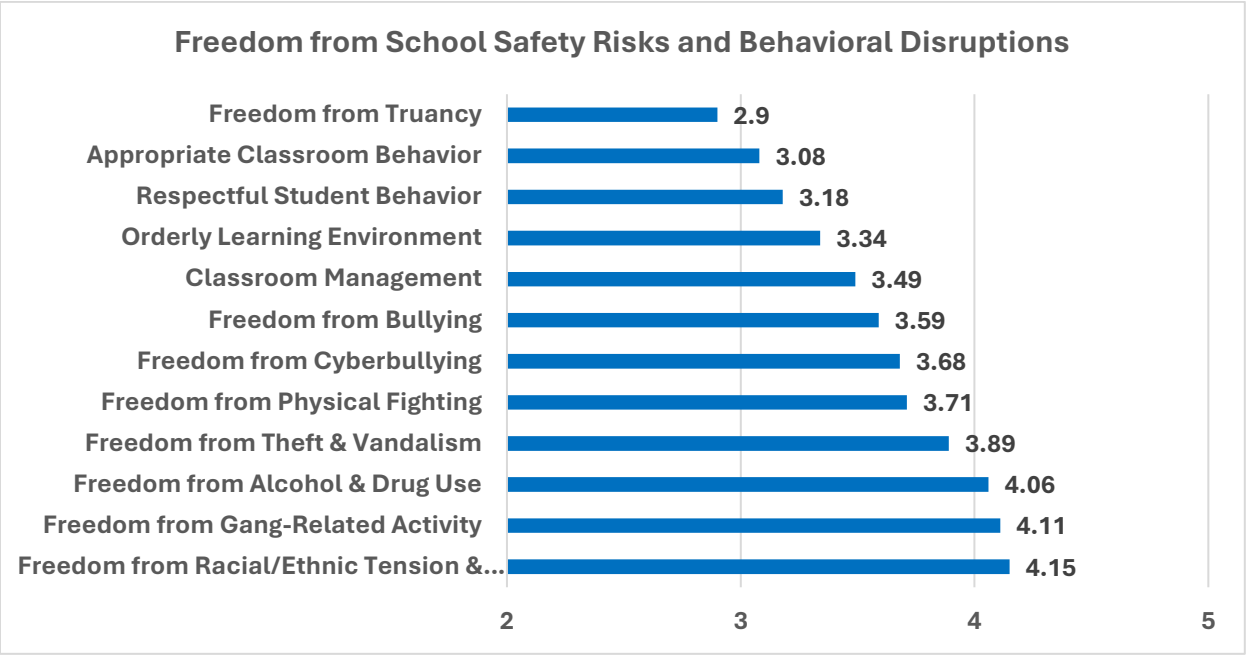


Figure 7. Average Emergency Readiness Ratings by Teachers and Staff



Teachers and staff generally disagreed that serious safety risks, gang activity, substance use, racial tension, and property damage were frequent problems in schools. However, classroom disruptions, truancy, student behavior, and classroom noise emerged as areas of concern. These findings highlight the importance of continuing supportive discipline practices, behavioral supports, and positive classroom management strategies across schools (Figure 8).

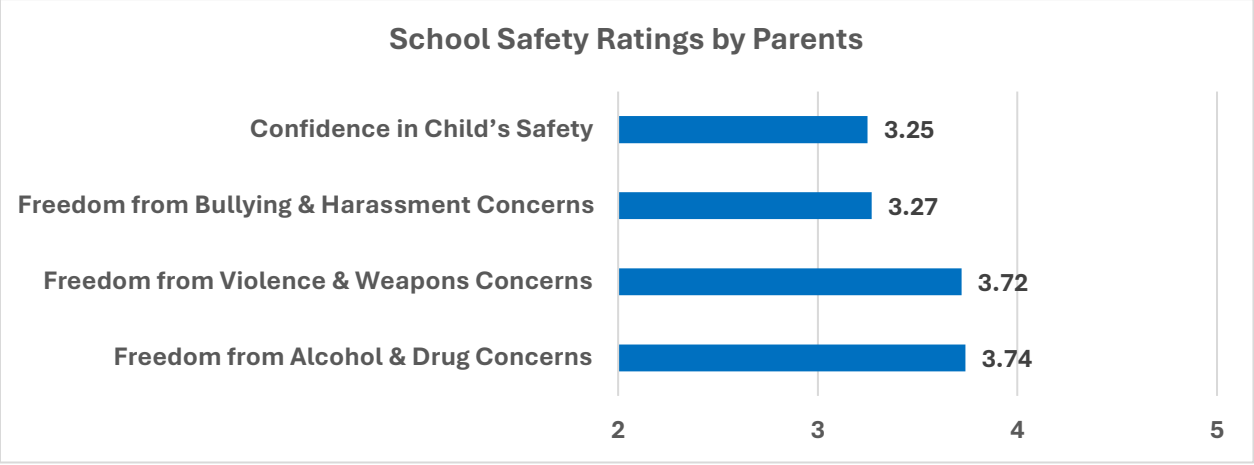
Figure 8. Average Freedom from School Safety Risks and Behavioral Disruptions Ratings by Teachers and Staff



Parent Responses

Parents reported moderate to positive perceptions of school safety. They expressed relatively positive perceptions regarding student violence and substance use concerns. (See Figure 9 below). Data indicate that parents have comparatively lower perceptions related to bullying and concerns about their child's safety during school and school-sponsored activities than teachers and staff. These findings indicate that, although parents viewed schools as safe, opportunities remain to further strengthen safety efforts and family confidence in school safety measures.

Figure 9. Average School Safety Ratings by Parents



Although school safety perceptions were moderately positive, findings suggest that school safety remains an area for continued attention and improvement. While respondents did not perceive serious safety risks as frequent problems, the findings suggest that schools are not entirely free from safety concerns. These ratings indicate opportunities to further strengthen safety measures, emotional safety, bullying prevention efforts, and supportive school relationships across schools.

National data from the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), based on a nationwide survey of public schools, suggest that bullying remains one of the most commonly reported school safety concerns in middle and high schools in the United States (Diliberti et al., 2017). In addition to safety, the overall school environment plays a significant role in shaping students' experiences and perceptions of school.

School Environment

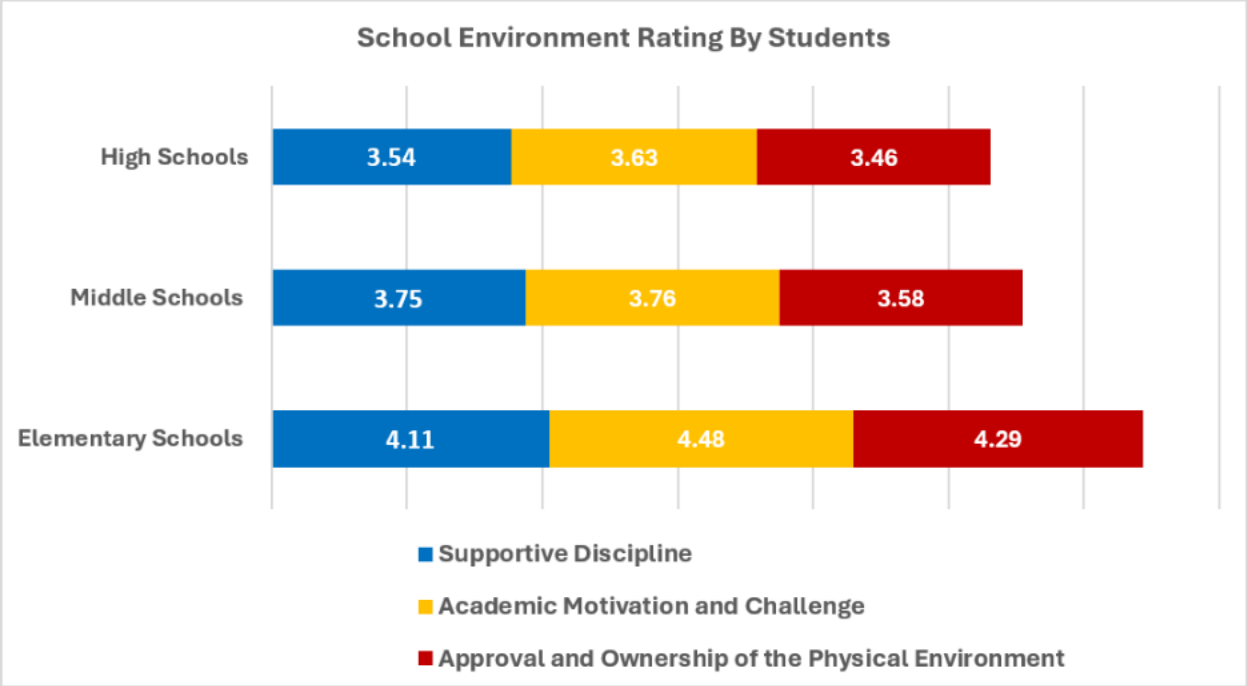
The school environment domain includes perceptions of discipline practices, academic motivation and challenge, and the physical school environment. Students reported positive perceptions across all school environment components. Elementary school students reported the most positive perceptions (4.29), followed by middle school students (3.70) and high school students (3.54). Please see Appendix A.

Student Responses

Academic motivation and challenge received the highest ratings across all school levels, including elementary (4.48), middle (3.76), and high school students (3.63). These findings suggest students hold positive perceptions of academic expectations, encouragement, and learning opportunities (Figure 10).

Supportive discipline, as well as approval and ownership of the physical environment, also received positive ratings across school levels. However, positive perceptions tended to decline at higher grade levels. These findings suggest opportunities to continue strengthening supportive learning environments, student engagement, and positive school climate practices, particularly in secondary schools (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Average School Environment Rating by School Levels

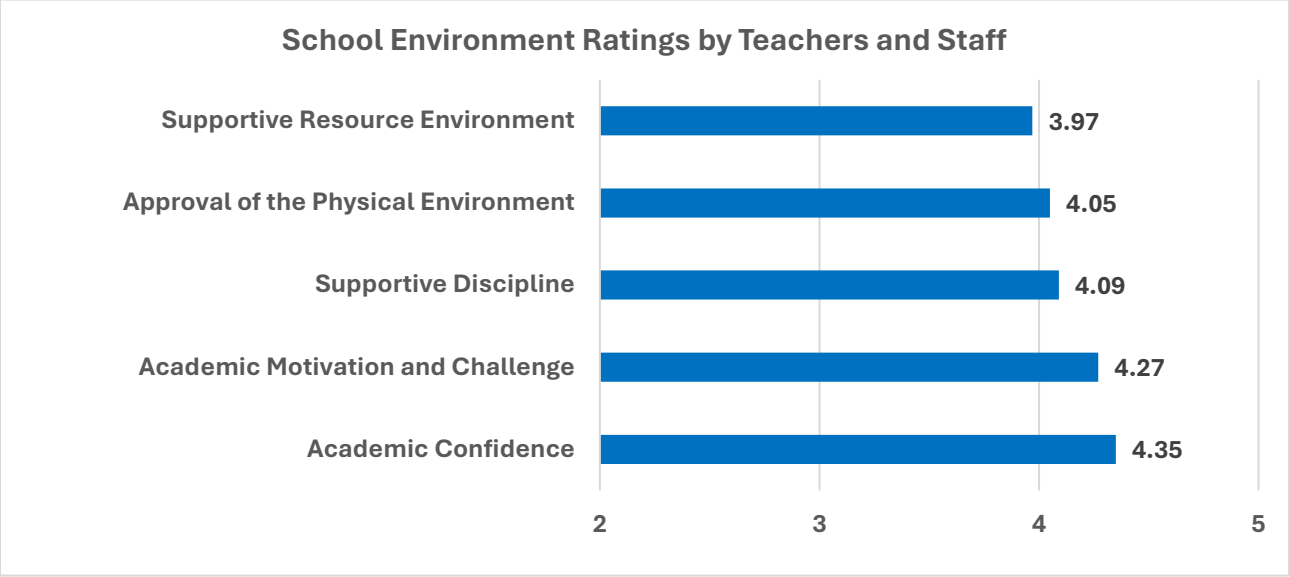


Teacher and Staff Responses

Teachers and staff reported highly positive perceptions of the school environment (4.15) (Appendix A). The most positive ratings were observed in academic confidence (4.35). It suggests strong beliefs by teachers and staff that students can succeed, high expectations for learning, and a commitment to preparing students for the future. Teachers and staff also reported positive perceptions of academic motivation and challenge (4.27) and supportive discipline (4.09), suggesting confidence in maintaining learning-focused environments that encourage student success (Figure 11).

They further reported positive perceptions of the physical environment (4.05) and supportive resource environments (3.97), a domain that includes academic interventions, support for students with disabilities, campus safety, and professional development opportunities. These findings suggest that teachers and staff view schools as supportive environments that promote student learning, growth, and well-being.

Figure 11. School Environment Rating by Teachers and Staff

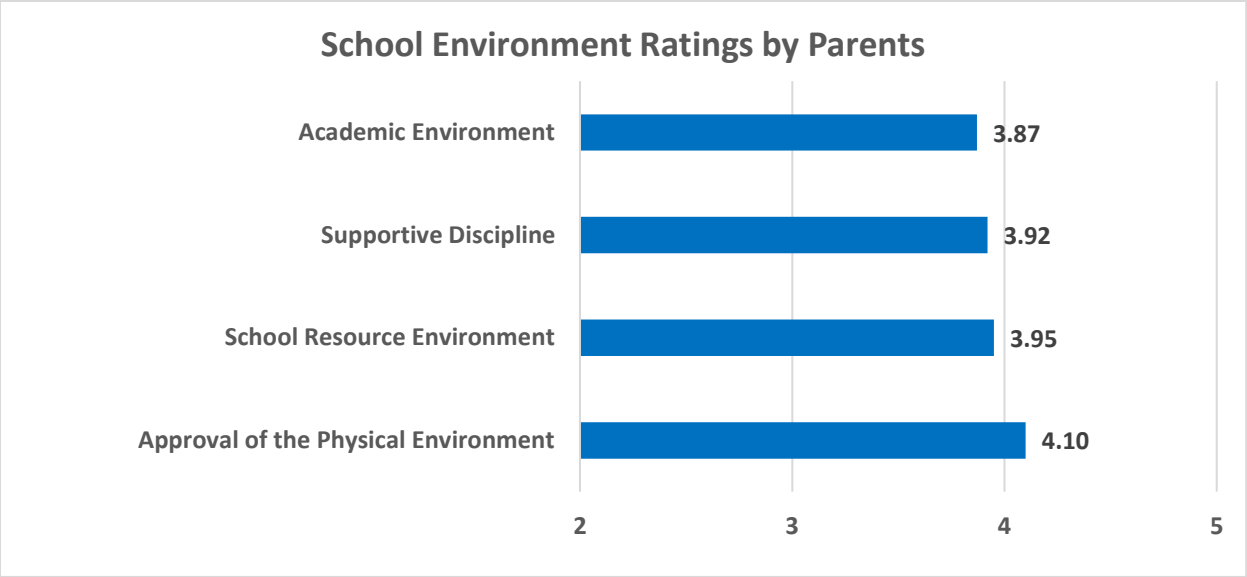


Parent Responses

Parents also reported positive perceptions of the school environment (3.96) (Appendix A). Families reported favorable perceptions regarding supportive discipline (3.92), school resources (3.95), and academic environment (3.87). Approval of the physical environment received the highest parent ratings (4.10), particularly regarding school cleanliness and maintenance (Figure 12).

These findings suggest that parents viewed schools as supportive, well-maintained, and academically focused learning environments. Opportunities remain to continue strengthening family engagement, communication, and support for student success, particularly at the middle and high school levels.

Figure 12. Average School Environment Rating by Parents



The above-described findings suggest that stakeholders view schools as supportive environments for teaching and learning. While perceptions were generally positive, opportunities remain to strengthen student experiences and learning environments, particularly at the middle and high school levels. Prior research suggests that positive and well-maintained school environments foster supportive learning conditions and a positive school climate, which are associated with improved student outcomes (Uline & Tschannen-Moran, 2008).

Conclusion and Recommendation

Findings from the 2025–2026 School Climate Survey suggest that school climate perceptions across MSCS were positive among students, teachers and staff, and parents. Stakeholders reported positive perceptions of school engagement, environment, and safety. Elementary school respondents reported the most positive perceptions across climate domains, while middle and high school respondents reported comparatively lower, but still generally positive, perceptions.

Teachers and staff expressed strong confidence in academic expectations, supportive learning environments, and emergency preparedness. Parents reported positive perceptions regarding school communication, physical environments, and overall school quality. Students also reported positive relationships with peers and adults, as well as favorable perceptions of their learning environments.

At the same time, the findings highlight opportunities for continued growth. Differences in perceptions across grade levels, moderate safety concerns, and variation in engagement

and school environment ratings suggest areas where additional attention may further strengthen school climate.

In this context, the following recommendations are intended to build upon existing strengths and support continuous improvement efforts across MSCS.

- Strengthen student connectedness at middle and high school levels through advisory periods, mentorship opportunities, and regular student check-ins. Research suggests that school connectedness initiatives enhance student engagement and positive school climate outcomes (Holt et al., 2008).
- Continue supporting school safety and climate initiatives through prevention-focused strategies, restorative practices, and student support services to strengthen student and family confidence in school safety efforts.
- Expand family engagement opportunities, particularly at middle and high school levels, by increasing accessible communication and school-community partnerships.
- Support positive classroom learning environments by strengthening classroom management, supportive discipline practices, and student engagement strategies to address classroom disruptions and truancy concerns.
- Maintain and expand existing strengths in supportive teacher-student relationships, school leadership communication, and academically supportive learning environments across schools.

References

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Appendix

Overview of Findings

Group	School Engagement (Mean)	School Safety (Mean)	Freedom From Bullying (Percent) *	School Environment (Mean)
Elementary School	4.35	3.30	63%	4.29
Middle School	3.84	3.43	64%	3.70
High School	3.61	3.29	72%	3.54
Teachers and Staff	4.10	3.99	NA **	4.15
Parents	4.04	3.49	NA **	3.96

*% of students were never exposed to bullying in the last school year.

**NA = measure not included in the survey for that stakeholder group.

Note: Overall domain means represent aggregated scores across multiple subscales within each climate domain. Specific subscale findings (e.g., Physical Safety, Emergency Readiness, Supportive Discipline) are presented and discussed within the corresponding report sections.