

## **The Importance of Georgia’s School Climate Star Rating and the Inclusion of School Discipline Data**

Parents, teachers, and students thrive in a school where they feel safe, supported, and encouraged to do their best. A school community’s norms, values, expectations, and even the architecture all contribute to that feeling. Together, they create the school’s climate. Student success in school, high teacher retention and satisfaction rates, and low student suspension numbers are all driven, in part, by school climate. Healthy school climates increase teacher retention, decrease discipline problems and incidents of violence, increase student achievement in learning, and improve interpersonal relationship skills.

Students perform better academically in schools with positive climates<sup>1</sup> and have higher graduation rates.<sup>2</sup> Students in these schools have better attendance and social emotional and life skills.

This year, Senate Bill 42 sparked an important conversation about how communities can learn about the climate in their schools and its impact on students. As initially introduced, the bill would have removed certain discipline information from the Georgia’s School Climate Star Rating, which rates school climate in Georgia’s public schools. As public testimony about the bill demonstrated, students, parents, and communities increasingly understand the importance of positive school climate and want to have reliable information about the climate in their schools. Fortunately, the bill as amended by the Georgia House of Representatives (at the time of writing of this blog post) leaves the School Climate Star Rating intact.

### **Georgia Is a National Leader in School Climate**

Georgia’s investment in school climate reform has been a success. In Georgia, the state Department of Education and more than 1,400 schools (over 64% statewide) have embraced a productive educational climate framework called Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (“PBIS”). The PBIS framework establishes a school-wide commitment to an approach that is premised on the need to teach students expected behavior, to positively reinforce good behavior, and to use critical discipline data to assess and manage the school’s approach to student discipline. Adopting school climate reform has driven the state’s impressive improvements in school discipline.

Since 2008, school suspension rates have decreased by more than 34% statewide. As a result, tens of thousands of additional children stay in school learning each year. Improved discipline has also contributed to the state’s significant reduction in rates of juvenile justice involvement.

The School Climate Star Rating, a Georgia developed and validated metric, has been a key part of the state’s success. The rating provides schools and communities with a straightforward rating as to whether the school maintains the supportive and safe environment necessary for student success.

Because school climate helps school communities examine the school culture, norms, practices, and policies, it has the potential to be a powerful means of helping schools become more equitable for Black and Brown students, LGBTQ students, students with disabilities, and students experiencing poverty. Continued investment in engaging PBIS and other supports to build positive school climates at all schools in Georgia will ensure all Georgia children thrive. What’s good for Georgia’s children is good for Georgia.

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<sup>1</sup> Thapa, Amrit, Jonathan Cohen, Shawn Guffey, and Ann Higgins-D’Alessandro. 2013. “A Review of School Climate Research.” *Review of Educational Research* 83(3): 357-385.

<sup>2</sup> Amity L. Noltemeyer and Rose Marie Ward, 2015. “Relationship Between School Suspension and Student Outcomes: A Meta-Analysis.” *School Psychology Review* 44(2): 224-240.

## **For More Information on School Climate and the School Climate Star Rating**

Georgia Appleseed [School Climate Matters](#)

Georgia Appleseed [School Discipline Dashboard](#)

[GaDOE Explains How School Climate Rating Is Calculated](#)

[GaDOE School Climate Rating info](#)

Georgia Appleseed is a founding member of the Georgia Education Climate Coalition (“GECC”), a public-private partnership of state agencies, nonprofits, foundations, mental health providers and others, established in 2015. The GECC seeks to inform the education stakeholder community about the importance of educational climate in the K-12 system as well as in early learning settings. The GECC will also be a partner in efforts to address critical issues of equity in school discipline.

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