

# Where We Teach

THE CUBE SURVEY OF URBAN SCHOOL CLIMATE

A PROJECT OF THE URBAN STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT TASK FORCE

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**Communications Guidelines**

COUNCIL OF URBAN BOARDS OF EDUCATION • NATIONAL SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION

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# Communications Guidelines for the CUBE Survey of Urban School Climate

**“Where We Teach”  
March 2007**

**T**hese guidelines were prepared to help school leaders talk with school staff, students, communities, and media about the survey report, “Where We Teach.” This survey is one of the largest ever to be undertaken to ascertain how teachers and building administrators feel about their urban school environments.

Whether your school district participated in the survey or not, the survey results could be used by your community’s reporters who may want to localize the findings about your teachers’ and administrators’ perceptions of school climate. This could be an excellent opportunity to share any initiatives that you may be undertaking to improve the climate in your schools as well as engage your community around the areas that need improvement.

## About the Survey

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**Participants:** Approximately 4,700 teachers and 267 building principals and assistant principals from 12 urban school districts in 10 states

**Study publisher:** The National School Boards Association’s Council of Urban Boards of Education (CUBE)

**Principal investigator:** The survey instrument was developed and research carried out by Dr. Brian Perkins, professor and chair of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Southern Connecticut State University and president of the New Haven, Conn., Board of Education. Dr. Perkins also serves as the CUBE chairperson and is a member of the NSBA board of directors.

### Survey facts:

- All school districts that are members of the National School Boards Association’s Council of Urban Boards of Education (CUBE) were invited to participate in this school climate study. As a result, 12 school districts signed on as survey participants and surveys were distributed in the following districts:
  - ◆ Albany Public Schools, Albany, N.Y.
  - ◆ Baltimore County Public Schools, Baltimore, Md.
  - ◆ Cartwright School District #83, Phoenix, Ariz.
  - ◆ Chicago Public Schools, Chicago, Ill.
  - ◆ Isaac School District, Phoenix, Ariz.
  - ◆ Lincoln Public Schools, Lincoln, Neb.
  - ◆ Mobile Public Schools, Mobile, Ala.
  - ◆ New Haven Public Schools, New Haven, Conn.
  - ◆ San Francisco Unified School District, San Francisco, Calif.
  - ◆ Wyandanch Public Schools, Wyandanch, N.Y.
  - ◆ Youngstown Public Schools, Youngstown, Ohio
  - ◆ Ysleta School District, El Paso, Texas
- Results for the participating individual school districts were computed and sent directly to their superintendents. The report, “Where We Teach,” does not contain individual school district results. Those results will be left up to the individual school districts to share with their communities. However, survey results from individual districts are subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).
- Teacher and administrator responses were analyzed as groups and were also examined by gender and ethnicity within each group. They indicated their perceptions in eight areas:
  - ◆ Bullying;
  - ◆ Expectations of success;
  - ◆ Influence of race;
  - ◆ Professional climate;
  - ◆ Professional development;
  - ◆ Parental involvement;
  - ◆ Safety; and
  - ◆ Trust, respect, and ethos of caring.

## Public Rollout of the Survey Report

### Tuesday, March 20, 2007

Media advisory distributed to the national, education, and association press announcing the news conference. A link to the PDF of the executive summary and full report, “Where We Teach” e-mailed to reporters. All information regarding the report is embargoed until March 27.

### Friday, March 23, 2007

PDFs of the executive summary and full report, “Where We Teach” and accompanying Communications Guidelines e-mailed to key individuals including all CUBE members; communication directors and research directors of the CUBE districts that participated in the survey; NSBA board of directors; and NSBA state executives and state communication directors

**Tuesday, March 27, 2007**

Official release of “Where We Teach” at news conference at the National Press Club, Washington, D.C. Participants will be:

- Anne Bryant, NSBA Executive Director
- Brian Perkins, Principal Investigator and CUBE Chairman
- Lily Eskelsen, Secretary-Treasurer, National Education Association
- John Mitchell, Director, Educational Issues, American Federation of Teachers
- Cheryl Riggins, Associate Executive Director, National Association of Elementary School Principals
- Judith Richardson, Associate Director of School Improvement, National Association of Secondary School Principals

**Monday, April 16, 2007**

11:15 a.m. (PT) — News briefing for reporters covering NSBA’s Annual Conference in San Francisco

12:30 p.m. (PT) — Live online discussion on NSBA’s daily blog, BoardBuzz (<http://boardbuzz.nsba.org/>)

## Overall Key Message Points on “Where We Teach”

- While not representative of all urban districts (since the results represent only those districts that self-selected to administer the survey), this report nonetheless can be *an important starting point for discussion* among school board members, superintendents, principals, teachers, students, parents, and the community at large about school climate.
- Some *areas school districts may want to explore* are highlighted by the survey. They are:
  - ◆ The degree to which students are being bullied;
  - ◆ Why teachers feel significantly less optimistic about the potential of student success in a community college or university than do administrators;
  - ◆ Why administrators express more confidence in students’ ability to perform on standardized tests than do teachers;
  - ◆ Why significant numbers of teachers and administrators hold the view that students in their schools are not motivated to learn; and
  - ◆ Why significant numbers of teachers and administrators believe that students will be successful in their schools because of their race.
- The issues that the survey has uncovered *are not just school-based issues*. They often reflect the issues that communities and families are wrestling with. Every member of the community is a role model for children. And thus the responsibility for improving school climate extends beyond the schoolhouse doors into the community.
- A safe and welcoming learning *climate is a prerequisite to high student achievement*. This is an opportunity to elaborate on your own district’s steps to understand and assess your school climate as well as policies that can lead to improvements.

## What Will the National and Local Media Likely Focus On?

There is much good news in the survey report about how teachers and administrators feel about their schools. Your school district, whether or not it participated in the survey, will likely have an excellent opportunity to discuss school climate issues when the media focuses its attention on this national study. Local reporters often take a national education story and try to localize it by finding out what's happening in your school district on that particular subject.

School board members and superintendents should seize this leadership opportunity by working closely with the district's communications director to craft clear and consistent messages about the district's school climate initiatives.

Because the media tends to focus on reporting the negative aspects of stories rather than highlighting the positive, your district should be ready to balance the story with some positive points about policies, programs, and other initiatives in your district designed to improve school climate.

The report delves into eight areas. Under each area, there are some likely headlines that reporters may glean from the report:

- **Bullying continues to be a major issue in urban schools.** Approximately three-quarters of teachers and administrators agree that they are able to discourage bullying, but a majority agree that children are being bullied once a month in schools and classrooms.
- **A significant number of teachers have low student expectations.** Nearly a quarter of teachers surveyed agreed that most students at their school would not be successful at a community college or university. Only 7 percent of administrators, on the other hand, agreed with this statement. Likewise, nearly 29 percent of teachers agreed that students at their school are not motivated to learn, while nearly 16 percent of administrators agreed.
- **Teachers and building administrators judge students differently.** In another measure of student expectations, 77 percent of teachers agreed that students at their school are capable of high achievement on standardized exams, while nearly 95 percent of administrators agreed with the same statement.
- **Student race still influences expectations and success.** Over half of teachers disagree that students will be successful in their school based on race. However, three-quarters of teachers disagree that racial barriers to educational and economic opportunity no longer exist in the U.S.
- **There is a disconnect between teacher and administrator perceptions around the issue of professional judgment.** Eighty-six percent of administrators feel that teachers at their school exercise good professional judgment while only 76 percent of teachers believe that administrators at their school trust their judgment.
- **A gap exists between teacher and administrator perceptions of parent involvement.** While 81 percent of administrators agree that parents support their school and activities, only 57 percent of teachers agree with that perception.
- **Safety perceptions about school also differ between teachers and administrators.** While nearly 94 percent of administrators agree that their school is a safe place in which to work, only 82 percent of teachers agree with that statement.
- **Racial differences among teachers were seen in whether students trust them.** Eighty-four percent of Hispanic teachers agree that students trust teachers, compared to only 67 percent of Black teachers.

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## Working with Your Media and Community

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Here are some tips for school districts that participated in the CUBE Urban School Climate Survey, “Where We Teach.”

- **Share the news.** If you haven’t done so already, this is the right time to make sure the results of your individual school climate survey have been shared with key internal and external groups. Internal groups include teachers, central office and building administrators, school-based support teams, and other employees. External groups include students, parents, elected officials, media, chamber of commerce officials, faith-based groups, and civic organizations. Be prepared to discuss the results and why they are important. The sample news release at the end of these guidelines can get you started in crafting your own.
- **Celebrate your successes.** This is an excellent opportunity to celebrate the good news you have gleaned from your district’s survey. Emphasize those areas in which your district is excelling. Highlight the programs that are working in your district. Share the credit with students, teachers, building administrators, building staff, parents, PTAs, and others.
- **Prepare to address areas needing improvement.** The results of your school district’s climate survey likely revealed some areas that need addressing. There’s no need to be defensive. Your district has taken a proactive approach to finding what areas need addressing through the climate survey. Continue that proactive stance by bringing the critical players together to shape a plan of action to address those areas.
- **Set aside some special time with your local reporters** to meet with key school board members and the superintendent to review and digest your district’s survey results. School safety and school climate are topics that can become sensationalized in the media. Make sure your reporters understand the district’s priorities in addressing areas that might be of concern.
- **When talking to reporters, tell the truth.** You probably won’t have the answers to all the questions you are posed. It’s fine to say that you don’t know and will share the answer, once you find out. When faced with a sticky issue, tell the truth and in the same breath tell them what you are doing to fix the problem. Reporters will find the truth by talking to students, staff members, school resource officers, and others to get to the bottom of the story. You don’t want to be placed in a position of covering up anything. Once you lose your credibility, you may have lost a chance of bringing everyone together to solve the problem.

### Other Communications Tips Worth Considering

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- Develop one standard powerpoint presentation for use by the superintendent, board members, central office staff, building principals, and others to share your district’s results to key audiences.
- Hold a town hall or community forum on school safety and school climate.
- Involve a cross section of community representatives, not just as participants, but also as a steering committee to plan the discussion. Consider collaborating with the mayor’s office, city council, or chamber of commerce in sponsoring and promoting the town hall.
- Hold a series of small forums or study circles to facilitate a deliberative dialogue among community members.
- Conduct focus groups with staff and community on school safety and juvenile violence.
- Form a blue ribbon task force to survey the community, study options, and present a plan of action.

## Additional Resources on School Safety and School Climate

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- American School Counselors Association, 1101 King Street, Suite 625, Alexandria, VA 22314; (703) 683-2722; [www.schoolcounselor.org](http://www.schoolcounselor.org)
- The Character Education Partnership, 918 16th St., NW, Suite 501, Washington, DC 20006; (202) 296-7743; [www.character.org](http://www.character.org)
- National Association of School Psychologists, 4340 East West Highway, Suite 402, Bethesda, MD 20814; (301) 657-0270; [www.nasponline.org](http://www.nasponline.org)
- National School Safety Center, 4165 Thousand Oaks Blvd., Suite 290, Westlake, Village, CA 91362; (805) 373-9977; [www.schoolsafety.us](http://www.schoolsafety.us)
- National Crime Prevention Council, 1700 K Street, NW, 2nd Floor, Washington, D.C. 20006-3817; (202) 466-6272; [www.ncpc.org](http://www.ncpc.org)
- The Center for the Study of School Climate; (888) 264-3106; [www.schoolclimatesurvey.com](http://www.schoolclimatesurvey.com)

## Additional Resources on Community Engagement

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- Annenberg Institute for School Reform, Brown University, Box 1985, Providence, RI 02912; (401) 863-7990; [www.annenberginstitute.org](http://www.annenberginstitute.org)
- The Kettering Foundation, 200 Commons Road Dayton, OH 45459-2799; (937) 434-7300; [www.kettering.org](http://www.kettering.org)
- National School Boards Association, 1680 Duke Street, Alexandria, VA 22314; (703) 838-6737; [www.nsba.org](http://www.nsba.org)
- National School Public Relations Association, 15948 Derwood Road, Rockville, MD 20855; (301) 519-0496; [www.nspr.org](http://www.nspr.org)
- Public Education Network, 601 Thirteenth Street, N.W., Suite 710 South, Washington, DC 20005-3808; (202) 628-7460; [www.publiceducation.org](http://www.publiceducation.org)



## Reality Check: Statistics on School Crime and Safety

According to *Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2005*, by the National Center for Education Statistics:

- Middle schools were more likely than elementary and high schools to report racial tensions, bullying, verbal abuse of teachers, and disorder in classrooms.
- Seven percent of students ages 12-18 reported that they had been bullied at school during the last six months.
- As students get older, bullying seems to decrease. For example, 14 percent of 6th graders, 7 percent of 9th graders, and 2 percent of 12th graders reported that they had been bullied at school.
- Fighting is on the decline in high school: 16 percent of high schools reported being in a physical fight on school property in 1993 compared to 13 percent in 2003.
- Carrying weapons is on the decline as well. Between 1993 and 2003, the percentage of students in grades 9-12 who reported carrying a weapon at school declined from 12 to 6 percent.

For more information on this report or others from the National Center for Education Statistics, visit <http://nces.ed.gov> or call 1-877-433-7827.

Interested in administering the CUBE Urban School Climate Survey in your district?  
Contact Dr. Brian Perkins at [briankperkins@doctor.com](mailto:briankperkins@doctor.com) or (888) 264-3106.

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Thanks to the National School Public Relations Association for resources used in preparing these guidelines.



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## SAMPLE NEWS RELEASE FOR SCHOOL DISTRICTS TO USE

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For Immediate Release

### **Teachers, Principals Have High Expectations and Respect for Students According to National Survey of Urban School Districts**

Washington, D.C. – March 27, 2007 — A majority of urban teachers and building administrators hold high expectations for students and care whether students are successful, according to a national survey of urban school climate conducted by the National School Boards Association’s Council of Urban Boards of Education.

However, the survey also found that nearly one-third of teachers and nearly 16 percent of administrators agree that students at their schools are not motivated to learn. Nearly one-quarter of teachers also agree that most students at their school would not be successful at a community college or university. On the other hand, only 7 percent of principals and assistant principals agree with that statement.

The survey report, “Where We Teach,” outlines findings from 12 urban school districts in 10 states, including [ADD YOUR DISTRICT HERE IF PARTICIPATED].

“This is an important study since research shows that school climate—the impressions, beliefs, and expectations about a school as a learning environment—plays a critical role in the academic development of the student, and administrators and teachers strongly influence that impression,” said Anne L. Bryant, NSBA executive director. “This report serves as an important starting point for discussion among school board members, superintendents, teachers, students, parents, and the community about the climate in our schools and the resulting impact on our students.”

In [YOUR DISTRICT], approximately {XXXXXX} teachers and administrators responded to the survey. [ADD LOCAL RESULTS AND LOCAL QUOTE].

The survey’s findings are grouped under eight areas: bullying; expectations of success; influence of race; professional climate; professional development; parental involvement; safety; and trust, respect, and ethos of caring.

Among the major findings is that while most teachers and administrators in the survey believe they can deter bullying in their schools, the majority believe that bullying still goes on at least once a month. Also, the survey revealed that student race still influences expectations and success. Over half of teachers disagree that students will be successful in their school based on race. However, three-quarters of teachers disagree that racial barriers to educational and economic opportunity no longer exist in the U.S.

And while parent involvement is known to be one of the indicators of success for students, teachers and administrators differ in their perceptions of parent involvement. While 81 percent of administrators agree that parents support their school and activities, only 57 percent of teachers agree with that perception.

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“The results from this survey are intended to be used to start conversations in our urban communities about how we can improve our school climate,” said Brian Perkins, the study’s principal investigator and chair of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Southern Connecticut State University. “Because our urban schools enroll almost 25 percent of this nation’s public schoolchildren, this dialogue is imperative to the future of our country.”

[ADD ANY OF YOUR DISTRICT’S INITIATIVES OR PROGRAMS TO IMPROVE SCHOOL CLIMATE]

“Where We Teach” is the second school climate survey conducted by the National School Boards Association’s Council of Urban Boards of Education. It comes on the heels of last year’s survey, “Where We Learn,” which looked at the perceptions of 32,000 urban school students. The executive summary of the report, “Where We Teach,” can be found at [www.nsba.org](http://www.nsba.org).