



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Department of Education

February 1, 2013

TO: Division Superintendents

FROM: Patricia I. Wright, Superintendent of Public Instruction

SUBJECT: Virginia Secondary School Climate Survey

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide background information about a new component of the annual school safety audit that school divisions are required to submit to the Virginia Center for School Safety (VCSS), according to §22.1-279.8.B of the Code. The Virginia Center for School Safety (VCSS) has included a survey of school climate for reports prepared for the 2012-2013 school year and future years on a biennial basis. The survey will measure student and teacher perceptions of school rules and discipline, teacher-student relationships, student engagement in school, and the extent of bullying and teasing at school. Please view the introductory video from the Secretary of Public Safety and Secretary of Education on the survey Web site at <http://www.dcjs.virginia.gov/vcss/audit/student/>.

The school climate survey will be used as a new tool for schools to monitor and improve school climate in order to maintain a safe and orderly school environment conducive to learning. The survey will be conducted in grades seven and eight in the spring of 2013 and then every second year thereafter (2015, 2017, and so forth). The survey will be conducted in grades 9-12 in the spring of 2014 and then every second year thereafter (2016, 2018, and so forth). Schools will receive a detailed report of survey results for each grade level and will be able to compare their results to regional and state averages. Technical information on survey results and interpretation will be made available with the assistance of researchers from the University of Virginia.

In 2013, the survey will be conducted in each school that has regular education programs for students in grades seven and eight. This includes all middle schools, as well as combined schools that include grades seven or eight. Each eligible school will administer the school climate survey to its students and teachers for those grades.

Schools should invite all seventh and eighth grade teachers to complete the survey. Schools will have two options for the student survey: (1) they may survey all students in grades seven and eight, or (2) they may randomly select 25 students for each grade. Schools choosing the first option should offer the survey to all eligible students and achieve a participation rate of at least 80 percent, exclusive of students who are not able to complete the survey due to handicapping conditions or language barrier. Schools choosing the second option must follow a random number procedure to select at least 25 students in each grade to complete the survey. Alternates will also be randomly selected so that at least 25 students in each grade complete the survey.

The survey is anonymous; participants will not give their names on the survey, and it will not be possible to match survey answers to participant identities.

Student and teacher participation is voluntary. Parents of students identified for participation in the survey will be advised by letter of the survey and offered the option of declining to participate. Teachers will be offered the

same option.

The survey will be administered online at school. Each school may choose a 3-week period between March 1 and May 1 to complete the survey.

Written instructions for random sampling and survey administration, and additional information about the survey will be made available on the Web site for the Virginia Center for School Safety at <http://www.dcjs.virginia.gov/vcss/>. Questions may be directed to Donna Michaelis, manager of the VCSS at 804-371-6506, or via e-mail at donna.michaelis@dcjs.virginia.gov.

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