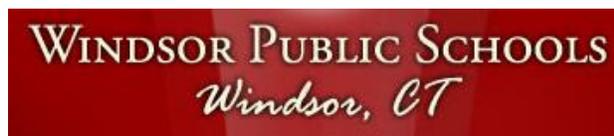


Location	Windsor, CT
District Type	Elementary, Middle and High School Public Schools
District Size	Large (Approximately 3,000 students and parents and 650 staff members)
Demographics	32% students qualify for free or reduced priced lunch

Windsor Public Schools (WPS): Making School Climate Count

Setting the Stage

Windsor Public Schools is a Connecticut district serving approximately 3,000 PreK-12 students. WPS began collaborating with NSCC to find a comprehensive method to measure the school



climate of its four elementary schools, one middle school and one high school. With Technology Teacher Leader, Katrina Palazzolo, co-leading the effort, the Windsor District Climate Committee first administered the [Comprehensive School Climate Inventory](#) (CSCI) in April 2012.

NSCC's Stage 1 of the [5-Stage School Climate Improvement Process](#), **Preparation and Planning**, calls for fostering "buy in" and building a foundation of trust and support from all participating school members. The District Climate Committee and CSCI Coordinators appointed to manage survey administration committed to this calling with the intention of rallying enthusiasm and interest.

Digging Deeper

Survey results by building were soon tabulated after a 4-6 survey window period. Overall, findings indicated students, staff and parents felt an overlapping perception regarding sense of social-emotional security. This was seen as a core challenge with many reporting experiencing and/or observing insulting, teasing and harassing behavior. Unfortunately, low parent engagement prevented deep analysis of results. **All schools, with the exception of one outlier elementary school reaching 18% participation, gathered an average of 6% parent response. At least 30-40% parent participation per school is advised to validate findings.** To develop targeted action plans and interventions, more feedback was needed to either confirm current trends or provide new insight from additional responses.

WPS returned May 2013 to continue its collection of school climate data. They reassessed their engagement approach to garner more responses and shifted their focus to two main Stage 1 principles: learning from past efforts and ensuring adequate resources to support the process. WPS started a district-wide assessment of past challenges and the factors contributing to low parent engagement. **With discussion they found two major causes: lack of connection between survey participation and intended long-term outcomes and lack of parental knowledge about day-to-day occurrences.** The committee responded with a mix of new planning steps.

Every Voice Counts

To address the disconnect between participation and outcome, WPS scheduled **survey follow up meetings and presented initial findings by school and, at times, by grade**. Actual data and expressed concern over low parent engagement solidified the intent behind the survey and the promise that this was just the first step of a much larger district-wide school improvement plan. There would be continuing opportunities to impact the effort but parent involvement was much needed during this beginning stage. Understanding some would not be able to participate because of lack of knowledge about the school environment, **WPS urged parents to view the survey and note what questions, if any, they could not answer. If they couldn't participate, they could still attend post survey meetings to learn more about the findings and speak with school leaders about next steps.**

Better logistical planning and incentives also played a role. Each school also **focused their survey dates around parent-teacher conferences** using students as ambassadors to facilitate the process and encourage parents to participate. **Passive survey announcements of e-blasts/letters home and auto calls were expanded to the use of Power Announcement**, a portal used to inform students and parents of grade postings and attendance records. To send a message of appreciation for all voices, **WPS also offered a Spanish language survey version**; this extra consideration alone contributed 64 parent surveys across the district. Finally, **a coupon for raffle entry was added to the confirmation page of each completed survey providing an incentive and immediate thank you for completing the assessment.** The dedication to parent engagement proved successful across all schools. In particular, the assessment produced 73% response at two elementary schools and increased participation by more than 4x at the middle school level.

Lessons Learned

Any meaningful relationship consists of two-way communication and a pro-active approach to remedy hesitations. Preparation and Planning has become a year-round effort and parents are continuously thinking about school improvement planning and ways they can support one or more goals. Today, WPS is thinking about partnership meetings to involve parents in ongoing discussions about fostering student achievement and supporting positive school climate. The thorough discussion of challenges set the groundwork for better understanding of parent needs and the open dialogue they craved is now connected to a much deeper focus.

For more information about engaging school climate populations and strategies to guide effective practice, see NSCC's Practice Brief: [School Climate Measurement and Analysis](#)