

Nevada School Climate/Social Emotional Learning Survey

New School Climate Standards for 2023



■ The Nevada School Climate/Social Emotional Learning Survey

Since 2015, the Nevada Department of Education (NDE) has partnered with the American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) to conduct the **Nevada School Climate/Social Emotional Learning (NV-SCSEL) student survey**. The main goal of the survey is to learn about student perceptions concerning school climate and their own social/emotional competencies. To this end, the survey measures the following¹:

- Two aspects of engagement: Cultural and Linguistic Competence and Relationships
- Two aspects of safety: Emotional Safety and Physical Safety

In 2021, the survey was expanded to include school staff experiences of school climate for both engagement and safety. These constructs from the NV-SCSEL surveys are a subset of the [U.S. Department of Education's School Climate Surveys \(EDSCLS\)](#) and use the same scale scores, which range from 100 (low) to 500 (high).

■ Existing Survey Favorability Benchmarks

In 2017, the U.S. Department of Education employed a psychometric benchmarking study to identify the EDSCLS cut points at which school climate ratings move from responses of “strongly disagree” and “disagree” (least favorable) to “agree” (favorable) or “strongly agree” (most favorable) and categorized the scale scores into three favorability levels:

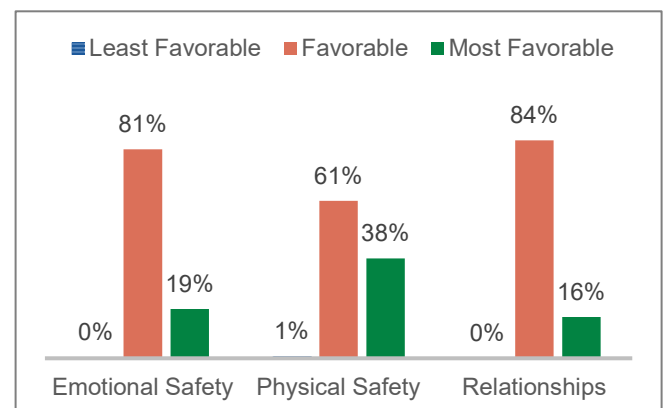
- Least favorable (scale scores below 300)
- Favorable (scale scores between 300 and 400)
- Most favorable (scale scores between 401 and 500)

Between 2017 and 2023, these favorability benchmarks were included on NV-SCSEL school reports to assist users in categorizing and interpreting the scale scores and enable direct comparisons between topic areas. To that extent, these benchmarks have been useful for schools when setting school-climate-related improvement priorities.

■ Need for New Criterion-Based Survey Standards

A limitation to the existing favorability benchmarks is that they provide schools with only a high-level view of survey-taker responses in terms of the scale response options provided (i.e., did respondents generally agree or disagree with the items in that topic?). Although helpful, this information does not tell schools whether the general response level for a given topic is where it should be for ensuring positive school climate. That is, the benchmarks cannot answer the question, “Is my school’s scale score for this topic sufficient to meet expert-established standards for best practice?” Simply, the benchmarks are not criterion based and, therefore, cannot tell stakeholders whether their scale score in an aspect of school climate is high enough based on knowledge and research on positive school climate. Also, as shown in **Exhibit 1**, most schools are considered “favorable” in most of the topics because the scale scores appear concentrated in the favorable range, further limiting the utility of the data.

Exhibit 1. Distribution of Schools Statewide in Existing Favorability Benchmarks (Student Survey, Fall 2022)



¹ The NV-SCSEL survey also measures five aspects of social and emotional competence (SEC): self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision making; however, these topics are not scaled and were not included in the standard setting. NDE has developed content-driven SEC standards that are aligned with the SEC concepts on the NV-SCSEL survey.

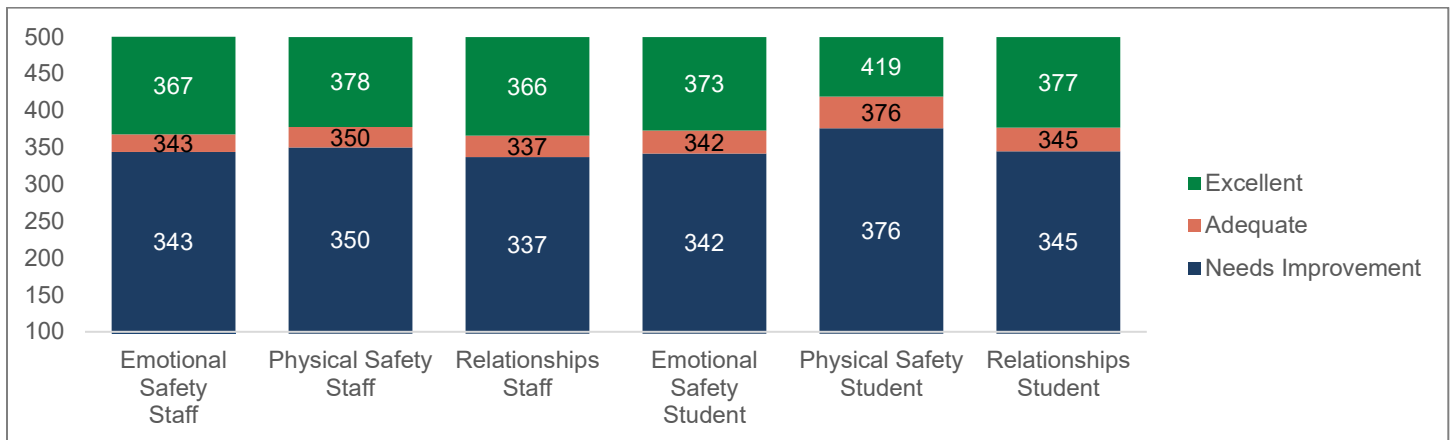
New Criterion-Based Survey Standards

To address this need, in 2023, NDE and AIR undertook a standard-setting process to develop **Nevada’s Standards for School Climate**. Standard setting is a psychometric method historically used in standardized testing to determine cut points for academic levels of proficiency. This process is becoming more widely used in survey research. Standard setting helps survey developers ensure that survey results are both (a) categorized and driven by deep knowledge about the content of the survey (in this case, specific aspects of school climate) rather than survey response options and (b) highly meaningful to a wide audience of stakeholders with varying levels of data proficiency.

To establish the standards, NDE and AIR engaged a panel of nine school climate experts (56% from Nevada). Each expert was asked to provide content-driven thresholds for each NV-SCSEL survey item that best represent a learning environment that **Needs Improvement**, is **Adequate**, and is **Excellent** (i.e., the new standards categories). Experts did this independently, with the pooled results presented back to the panel as a group. The group discussed the ratings and then re-rated the items (also independently). Based on this second round of ratings, AIR conducted psychometric analyses during summer and fall 2023 to determine the cut scores for each topic area corresponding to each level of performance.

This process resulted in a set of cut scores for the new school climate standards, as shown in **Exhibit 2**. These cut scores enhance the meaning of the scale scores by providing additional context for data interpretation; schools can now use the cut scores to determine whether their school’s climate **Needs Improvement**, is **Adequate**, or is **Excellent** based on expert review of the content of the survey. These scores will help schools to not only identify improvement priorities but also see exactly where their school falls relative to expert-identified standards for school climate.

Exhibit 2. New Cut Points for Criterion-Based Standards for NV-SCSEL Staff and Student Surveys in Emotional Safety, Physical Safety, and Relationships



Note. Minimum score values for Adequate and Excellent appear in the chart. Cut scores for cultural and linguistic competence will be available in 2024 and will incorporate a revised survey item from the fall 2023 NV-SCSEL survey administration. The existing favorability benchmarks remain the same, with thresholds of 300 and 400 for favorable and most favorable, respectively.

As shown in **Exhibit 2**, the range of scores that compose the Adequate category of the new standards is relatively small compared with the range of scores that comprise the Needs Improvement and Excellent categories. However, as shown in **Exhibit 3**, these standards result in more variation in the school distribution compared with the benchmarks, further increasing the utility of the data by providing a more nuanced understanding of a school’s climate.

Future Use of the New Standards

Because the new criterion-based standards provide survey stakeholders with richer, more actionable information for interpreting the survey results, the new standards will replace the old favorability benchmarks. Survey reports will therefore begin incorporating the new standards in the 2023–24 school year to help schools identify areas where they need improvement, are adequate, or are excellent in terms of school climate (as perceived by the survey respondents).

Exhibit 3. Distribution of Schools Statewide in the New Standards (Student Survey, Fall 2022)

