**IOWA SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE SCHOOLS INDEX**

A wealth of school climate research exists regarding risk and protective factors for children and youth. Results are clear – ignoring school safety; student, staff and parent engagement and connectedness to school; and the environment within which all school activities and interactions occur leads to significant deficits in school climate support systems. Even *with significant investments in curriculum and instruction, Iowa’s trend lines for reading and math are essentially flat and achievement gaps for poor, minority, disabled, and English Language Learners are not closing. Therefore* it is essential to identify measures that provide critical data on indicators of school climate that either promote conditions for learning or remediate barriers to learning. Nationally, policy is supportive of state measurement systems for conditions for learning that are equally as robust as those linked to student academic achievement in core content areas. As achievement across the country begins to hit a ceiling, educators and policy-makers are starting to understand the clear link between academic achievement and students’ strong connection and engagement to learning that is maximized within a safe and supportive environment – an environment that includes not only students, but parents as well as all school personnel.

Iowa Safe and Supportive Schools (IS3) is the first step in understanding optimal conditions for learning and leveraging resources toward maximum benefit for students, their families and the school personnel who support them. Supported by the U.S. Department of Education at nearly $14 million dollars over four years, IS3 is charged with three major goals:

1. Support statewide measurement of conditions for learning through valid and reliable measures of school safety, engagement and environment across high school students (9-12), school staff, and parents;

2. Establish an index that defines threshold criteria to identify schools that have/lack optimal conditions for learning, and

3. Implement targeted programmatic interventions in order to help schools improve conditions for learning.

The statewide measurement of conditions for learning in the areas of safety, engagement and environment will be obtained by adapting the Iowa Youth Survey. To accomplish this, 60 schools were randomly selected and invited to implement the survey of conditions for learning adapted from the Iowa Youth Survey, as well as implement the Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI).

Developed by the National School Climate Center (NSCC), the CSCI is a nationally recognized, valid and reliable measure of school climate across safety, engagement and environment, implemented with students, parents and all school staff. Forty-seven of the 60 randomly selected schools accepted the invitation to participate and implemented the surveys in Spring 2011. The index, which Iowa has named the Iowa Safe and Supportive Schools Index (IS3 Index), includes student results of the IYS and CSCI, as well as other identified data elements. Parent and school staff results will be incorporated into the Index subsequent to grant completion.

The IS3 Index is an indicator (or reflection) of the health of a school’s optimal conditions for learning in the areas of safety, engagement and environment. The IS3 Index was used to determine which schools would receive IS3 grant funding over the next three years to improve the overall health of their school’s conditions for learning. The Index will be continually monitored to inform the selection and evaluation of programmatic interventions, and final outcomes of Iowa’s work.

**IS3 Index**

The IS3 Index must determine the overall conditions for learning within a school based on variables that are within the educational system’s ability to change. For example, a school may change the physical environment to one that is more welcoming and inviting to students, parents and staff; a school may change policies or procedures to support student engagement and learning; a school may institute a program to provide more support for students. However, an educational system is not able to change community demographics or the social-economic status of families served. Therefore such data were not considered in the Index. Data were obtained, cleaned, and analyses run to determine appropriate thresholds for each data element included in the final Index. Student survey results only were included in the Index; future indices will incorporate parent and staff results subsequent to the completion of the grant. Index ranges were based after the Learning Supports framework structured around Response to Intervention. This is a three-tiered model (green, yellow and red) representing Universal, Targeted and Intensive levels of support as shown in Appendix D. The IS3 Index model includes four tiers of Universal (green), Targeted (yellow), Targeted-to-Intensive (orange) and Intensive (red).

The IS3 Index was applied to all 47 partner schools. All schools with an IS3 Index of 16 or below were automatically selected to receive funding from IS3 for the remaining 3 years of the grant, regardless of the number of schools within a district. All schools with an IS3 Index from 17 to 22 were included for the remaining three years with the exception of districts where multiple schools were partners. In these cases, the school with the lowest IS3 Index was selected to continue. Two schools in one district received the same Index; in this case, the school that had the lowest survey participation rates – an indicator of high need across conditions for learning – was selected to continue. The IS3 Index range is provided in Table 1.

### *Table 1.* IS3 Index Range and Description

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| --- | --- |
| **Index Range** | **Description** |
| **30-36** | Schools with an IS3 Index in this range are creating healthy school climates with optimal conditions for learning in the areas of safety, engagement, and environment. There still may be room for improvement. |
| **23-29** | Schools with an IS3 Index in this range need some targeted support to improve the health of the school climate and to create favorable conditions for learning in the areas of safety, engagement and environment. |
| **17-22** | Schools with an IS3 Index in this range need intensive to targeted support to improve the health of the school climate and to create favorable conditions for learning in the areas of safety, engagement and environment. |
| **0-16** | Schools with an IS3 Index in this range need intensive support to improve the health of the school climate and to create favorable conditions for learning in the areas of safety, engagement and environment. |

# What is the IS3 Index comprised of?

The IS3 Index is comprised of three domains, each of which measures part of a school’s overall conditions for learning: **Safety**, **Engagement** and **Environment**. Within each domain, there are data elements. For example, the Safety Domain includes three data elements: Physical Safety, Emotional Safety and Suspensions/Expulsions for Fighting or Violent Behavior without Physical Injury. Each data element is assigned points from zero (0) to three (3), where zero indicates intensive need and three indicates optimal conditions for learning. The sum of the points for the data elements provides the total points for each domain; the sum across domains provides the total points for the IS3 Index. Figure 3 illustrates the IS3 Index, comprised of the 3 domains and 12 data elements.

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| --- |
| **IS3 INDEX**  An Indicator (or reflection) of the health of a school’s optimal conditions for learning in the areas of safety, engagement and environment.  **Total Points Possible: 36** |

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Domains  Definitions |  | **SAFETY**  Physical and social-emotional safety of the students in the educational system.  **Total Points Possible: 9** |  | **ENGAGEMENT**  Relationships, respect for diversity and school participation across the educational system.  **Total Points Possible: 18** |  | **ENVIRONMENT**  Physical structure, resources available and discipline environment in the educational system.  **Total Points Possible: 9** |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  | Physical Safety |  | Diversity |  | Expectations |
| Survey Construct Data Elements |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  | Emotional Safety |  | Student-Student |  | Physical Environment |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  | Adult-Student |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| School Incident Data Elements |  |  |  | Graduation |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  | S/E Violence or Fighting |  | Dropout |  | Suspension/Exp Total |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  | Attendance |  |  |

### *Figure 1.* IS3 Index, Domains and Constructs.

**How are IS3 Index points allocated?**

Point allocations per data element are awarded to schools based on set thresholds, which are outlined in the Learning Supports Framework (Appendix E). The Learning Supports Framework is a research based framework that delineates the necessary supports required for all children to be successful. Below is a graphic and summary of the various levels of supports needed in order for all children to be successful. You will see these levels (and percentages) reflected in the established Index thresholds in Table 4.

Using this Learning Supports Framework, Index points for each data element are awarded as follows:

* 3 = data indicates a healthy school
* 2 = data indicates some targeted support needed
* 1 = data indicates intensive to targeted support needed
* 0 = data indicates intensive support is needed

**EXAMPLE.** In the construct *suspensions/expulsions*, no more than 5% of a school population should be suspended or expelled throughout the year (see Appendix D: *Definition List* for calculation of suspension/expulsion). If a school is suspending and/or expelling 20% or more of the school population, the primary behavior management plan for that school is to suspend and/or expel students rather than to provide targeted supports for students. Therefore thresholds were set at:

* Percent suspension/expulsion of less than 5% = 3
* Percent suspension/expulsion of 5%-12.49% = 2
* Percent suspension/expulsion of 12.5%-19.99% = 1
* Percent suspension/expulsion at 20% or more = 0

Each construct and threshold criteria included in the index is provided in Table 2. IS3 Data Element Thresholds.

### *Table 2.* IS3 Data Element Thresholds

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Index**  **Point(s)** | **Survey Constructs**  **(Weighted Mean)** | **Attendance & Graduation** | **Dropout\*** | **S/E Violent-Fighting & S/E Total** |
| **3** | =3.25 | =95% | =1.25% | <5% |
| **2** | 3.0 – 3.24 | 87.5 – 94.99% | 1.26 – 1.5% | 5 – 12.49% |
| **1** | 2.75 – 2.99 | 80 – 87.49% | 1.51 – 1.75% | 12.5 – 19.99% |
| **0** | <2.75 | <80% | >1.75% | =20% |

**\*Dropout** is determined using an annual calculation; multiplying the dropout annual percentage by 4 provides a 4-year reflection of dropout rate (e.g., 1.25 x 4 = 5%) which is inversely related to Iowa’s 4-year cohort graduation rate.

**Index Data Element Definitions**

Table 3 below outlines the broad definition of the data elements across the three domains of **Safety**, **Engagement**, and **Environment**.

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| *Table 3*. Broad Definition of Data Elements[[1]](#footnote-1) | | |
| Data Element | | **Broad Definition** |
| *Safety Domain* | | |
| Survey Constructs | Physical Safety | The extent to which students are safe from physical harm while on school property. |
| Emotional Safety | The extent to which students feel safe from verbal abuse, teasing, and exclusion. |
| School Incident | Suspensions & Expulsions without Physical Injury | The percentage of 9-12th grade students who received at least one suspension or expulsion for fighting or violent behavior without injury during a given school year. |
| *Engagement Domain* | | |
| Survey Constructs | Diversity Engagement | The extent to which students and adults demonstrate respect for each other’s differences (i.e. appearance, culture, gender, race, learning differences, sexual orientation, etc.). |
| Adult-Student Engagement | The extent to which adults demonstrate care for students, respect for students, and acknowledgement of students’ work |
| Student-Student Engagement | The extent to which students demonstrate care for, respect for, and collaboration with one another. |
| School Incident | Graduation Rate | The percentage of 12th grade students who graduate during a given school year. |
| Dropout Rate | The percentage of 9-12th grade students who drop out of school during a given school year. |
| Attendance Rate—  Grades 9 to 12 | The percentage of school days that 9-12th grade students are present at school during a given school year. |
| *Environment Domain* | | |
| Survey Constructs | Expectations/Boundaries Environment | The extent to which clear rules are delineated and enforced. |
| Physical Environment | The extent to which the school facilities are adequate, clean, and up to date. |
| School Incident | Suspensions & Expulsions | The percentage of 9-12th grade students who received at least one suspension or expulsion during a given school year. |

1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)