

# Interpreting Mental Health School Climate Survey Data

## Introduction

This *Discussion Guide* provides suggestions to help you use your school climate data to make meaningful interpretations about the topic of Mental Health within your state, district, or school, taking into account the viewpoints of the people who took the survey in your state, district, or school (i.e., students, instructional staff, noninstructional staff, parents/guardians).<sup>1</sup> It accompanies the School Climate Improvement Resource Package (SCIRP) [Data Interpretation Guide](#), which contains information, support, and resources to help you interpret and use your survey results, using the U.S. Department of Education (ED) School Climate Surveys (EDSCLS) [model](#) of school climate domains and topic areas as a framework. We encourage you to read the full [Data Interpretation Guide](#), another source within the SCIRP, before using this *Discussion Guide* so that you have a better understanding of the model and types of results you will see.

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This document is intended for use by EDSCLS users as well as users of other school climate surveys, which often include a topic area similar in composition to the Mental Health topic area in the EDSCLS. Directions specific to EDSCLS users are denoted in this guide with the EDSCLS logo (right).

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This guide, along with the [Data Interpretation Guide](#), can help you to derive meaning from your state's, district's, or school's Mental Health results, which you can use to identify areas for improvement.<sup>2,3</sup> In the following sections, you will find:


- A definition of mental health as it relates to school climate
- Guiding questions to help you think through your Mental Health data from a multi-tiered perspective—universal and targeted (Click on the [Data Interpretation Guide](#) and the [Reference Manual](#) to find additional information on multi-tiered approaches.)
- Guiding questions organized by data types (Mental Health scale scores and item-level Mental Health data):
  - Initial and deeper guiding questions about mental health for **districts** ([Appendix A](#))
  - Initial and deeper guiding questions about mental health for **schools** ([Appendix B](#))

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<sup>1</sup> This document provides strategies applicable to public schools and districts, including charter authorizers, charter management organizations, education management organizations, individual charter schools, and charter local educational agencies.

<sup>2</sup> Information in this *Discussion Guide* is pertinent to EDSCLS pilot sites as well as those administering the EDSCLS before fall 2017, at which time benchmark data are slated to be available in the web-based platform. This guide will be updated accordingly after the release of benchmark data.

<sup>3</sup> States that host the EDSCLS can use the same suggestions as given here for districts; states will also be able to compare data across their districts, as well as across their schools.

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- A link to a [Mental Health webpage](#) that includes resources on interventions that districts and schools can implement immediately to address specific areas of need as well as longer term resources for improving mental health
  - Additional guiding questions for those wishing to use average (mean) Mental Health values:
    - Initial and deeper guiding questions about mental health for **districts** using average (mean) Mental Health values ([Appendix C](#))
    - Initial and deeper guiding questions about mental health for **schools** using average (mean) Mental Health values ([Appendix D](#))

Schools and districts are also required to report information about school climate, including mental health, pursuant to ED’s Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC). Information collected by the EDSCLS or other similar surveys may help schools and districts prepare their responses to the CRDC survey. More information about the CRDC can be found at [ocrdata.ed.gov](http://ocrdata.ed.gov).

## What Is Mental Health?

For the purposes of interpreting data, we have defined *mental health* as the emotional and psychological well-being of individuals that promotes healthy development and functioning and increases the capacity of individuals to live productive lives while striving to reach their full potential. A major aspect of the school environment includes promoting the mental health of all students, and the provision of programs and services to address those needs.

You can find a brief overview on mental health as it relates to school climate [here](#).

## Guidance for Districts and Schools

### 1. Examining Mental Health Data Overall: Focus on a Universal Approach

You can use your Mental Health scale scores and average (mean) Mental Health values to focus on a universal approach to improving mental health. [Scale scores](#) (described in the *Data Interpretation Guide*) are the premier way that the EDSCLS as well as many other school climate surveys measure school climate. A scale score, which combines multiple survey items related to different aspects of a topic area such as Mental Health, is a more robust measure than attempting to measure that topic by asking about it with a single item.

After you have these data for your district’s or school’s students and staff, and you have read the [Data Interpretation Guide](#), you can use initial guiding questions in Appendix A (for districts) and in Appendix B (for schools) to help make meaningful interpretations of your results.



If you are a **district**, click on [Appendix A](#) to go to initial guiding questions for overall scale scores.



If you are a **school**, click on [Appendix B](#) to go to initial guiding questions for overall scale scores.

[Average \(mean\) topic area values](#) (see “Appendix C. Average (Mean) Topic Area Values” in the *Data Interpretation Guide*) also can be used to focus on a universal approach to improving mental health. As described in the *Data Interpretation Guide*, average (mean) topic area values can be used to gauge how favorably respondents perceive the topic.<sup>4</sup>



If you are a **district**, click on [Appendix C](#) to go to initial guiding questions for overall average (mean) Mental Health values.



If you are a **school**, click on [Appendix D](#) to go to initial guiding questions for overall average (mean) Mental Health values.

## 2. Examining Mental Health Data Across Student and Staff Respondent Characteristics: Focus on a Targeted Approach

Mental Health scale scores broken out by respondent characteristics provide a richer set of data and a way to see how perceptions of mental health differ across subgroups of students and staff.




Scale scores are produced for EDSCLS users for the following subgroups.<sup>5</sup>

- Student scale scores per topic area can be examined by:
  - Gender,
  - Race/ethnicity, and
  - Grade.
- Staff (instructional and noninstructional) scale scores per topic area can be examined by:
  - Gender and
  - Race/ethnicity.

*Note:* In the event of a possible disclosure risk that would allow a respondent or small subgroup of respondents to be identified (e.g., if there is only one Asian teacher in the school), the EDSCLS platform will suppress the results for that subgroup (i.e., results for that subgroup will not be shown). (To understand how a small subgroup perceives school climate, see the [Reference Manual](#) for tips on conducting interviews and focus groups.)

Examining student and staff perceptions of mental health in your district or school by respondent characteristics can be extremely useful, not only in understanding the areas of strength and weakness in your school environment, but also in targeting interventions. For example, if perceptions of mental health differ by student characteristics (gender, race/ethnicity, grade), this will help you highlight areas of targeted need.



**WHAT ABOUT EXAMINING SURVEY RESULTS BY PARENT/GUARDIAN CHARACTERISTICS?**

Because of the brevity of the parent/guardian survey, the EDSCLS was not designed to produce scale scores or average (mean) Mental Health values for parents; however, parent results can be examined at the item level, which is discussed in the section [Digging Deeper Into the Data by Using Item-Level Data](#).

<sup>4</sup> Average (mean) topic area values are not directly available from the EDSCLS platform but can be calculated from raw survey data. See [Appendix C](#) in the *Data Interpretation Guide* for information about calculating, using, and interpreting average (mean) topic area values.

<sup>5</sup> Note that the EDSCLS platform does not produce crossed demographics (e.g., Asian females). Users can obtain crossed demographics analytically by downloading the raw data file.

Supports should be designed to improve school climate for the students who are most in need regardless of the subgroup(s) to which they belong. Targeting supports based on need as opposed to membership in a subgroup will support compliance with relevant civil rights laws.



If you are a **district**, click on [Appendix A](#) to go to initial guiding questions for scale scores **by respondent characteristics**.



If you are a **school**, click on [Appendix B](#) to go to initial guiding questions scale scores **by respondent characteristics**.

[Average \(mean\) topic area](#) values also can be used to focus on a targeted approach to improving mental health needs.



If you are a **district**, click on [Appendix C](#) to go to initial guiding questions for overall average (mean) Mental Health values **by respondent characteristics**.



If you are a **school**, click on [Appendix D](#) to go to initial guiding questions for overall average (mean) Mental Health values **by respondent characteristics**.

### 3. Digging Deeper Into the Data by Using Item-Level Data: Focus on a Targeted Approach

After you have examined your scale scores (and average [mean] Mental Health values, if you wish to use them), looking at item-level data may help you to dig deeper to target specific areas or issues. (See page 8 in the *Data Interpretation Guide* to learn more about examining [item-level data](#).) Item-level results often can provide districts and schools with concrete information on mental health that may be more actionable, warranting more immediate implementation of interventions included in the [Mental Health webpage](#), as well as planning and preparation for longer term interventions and strategies.



Sites using the EDSCLS receive percentage distributions and item averages (means) for each item in the survey that is included in the Mental Health scale produced by the platform as

well as any important Mental Health items that are not in the scale but have been kept on the survey as stand-alone items. For pilot sites, they are included in your District or School Report PDF and are marked for you.

These guiding questions include suggestions for examining item-level data about how:

- A Mental Health item is perceived by individual respondent groups;
- A Mental Health item is perceived across respondent groups, but only for items *worded exactly the same way* for each group (called *comparable items*); and
- Mental Health items organized by content (called an *item content group*) are perceived across respondents.



#### WHAT ABOUT USING ITEM-LEVEL DATA TO EXAMINE PARENTS'/GUARDIANS' PERCEPTIONS?

**Yes!** As noted earlier, the EDSCLS parent data do not include Mental Health scale scores or average (mean) Mental Health values; however, parent/guardian item-level data can be used to consider how parents perceive specific areas of mental health.

These types of guiding questions are detailed here.

### A. Examining Mental Health Items Within a Respondent Group

You can compare individual Mental Health items with each other within an individual respondent group (students, instructional staff, noninstructional staff, or parents/guardians). Comparing items in this way may provide districts and schools with concrete examples of mental health that may be more actionable, warranting more immediate implementation of interventions included in the [Mental Health webpage](#), as well as planning and preparation for longer term interventions and strategies.

However, we strongly encourage you *not* to focus excessively on a single item rather than the more robust construct (topic area) of which it is a part. If you focus change efforts solely on behaviors and attitudes as defined by specific items, you may run the risk of a form of unintentional “teaching to the test” in which you are able to show growth with respect to specific items even though perceptions of the underlying topic area have not changed.



When comparing the averages (means) of individual items, it is important to make sure that you are comparing “apples to apples.” Sometimes a high average (mean) item value represents a positive perception, and sometimes a high average (mean) item value represents a negative perception, depending on how the item response options of 1–4 are valenced, or directed. If you want to compare item averages (means) of items, go to the *Data Interpretation Guide* section on [item valence and reverse-coding](#) to access important information you will need before comparing them.<sup>6</sup>



For sites using the EDSCLS, negatively valenced items are marked for you in the EDSCLS platform, the District or School Report PDF (for pilot sites), and in [Table 1](#).

### B. Comparing Mental Health Items Across Respondent Groups *if Worded Exactly the Same Way*

Item frequencies and averages (means) can be examined across respondent groups, *but only if the items are worded exactly the same way*. This is especially helpful in cases where differences between groups or subgroups of respondents were found in the Mental Health scale scores (or average [mean] values, if applicable). For example, both instructional staff and noninstructional staff are presented with the item “This school provides the materials, resources, and training necessary for me to support students’ social or emotional needs.” Because the survey items are identical, you can compare the responses of instructional staff to the responses of noninstructional staff.

### C. Considering Mental Health Item Content Groups

Although looking at scale scores and items in the survey is important in examining and interpreting your data, it may be overwhelming to examine all of the items at once, and you may want to look at them in chunks or groups by substantive content. You are free to use groups of items of similar substantive content that are important to your district or school. We provide examples from the EDSCLS in [Table 1](#), although similar groupings may be found in other school climate surveys.

<sup>6</sup> Note that all of the items in Mental Health are positively valenced; therefore, item averages (means) within this topic area can be compared directly.



Table 1 displays items included in the EDSCLS Mental Health scale from all respondent groups as well as any important stand-alone items that have been retained. In the table, we suggest the following areas of focus using the Mental Health items in the EDSCLS: Social and Emotional Education; Social and Emotional Connections; and Student Mental Health Needs.

**Table 1. Item Content Groupings for the Mental Health Topic Area**

**Social and Emotional Education**

Instructional staff	This school places a priority on helping students with their social, emotional, and behavioral problems.
Instructional staff	This school provides quality counseling or other services to help students with social or emotional needs.
Instructional staff	This school provides the materials, resources, and training necessary for me to support students' social or emotional needs.
Noninstructional staff	This school provides quality counseling or other services to help students with social or emotional needs.
Noninstructional staff	This school provides the materials, resources, and training necessary for me to support students' social or emotional needs.
Parents	This school provides high-quality services to help students with social or emotional needs.
Parents	This school has enough programs that develop students' social and emotional skills (e.g., self-control, problem solving, or getting along with others)

**Social and Emotional Connections**

Student	Students at this school stop and think before doing anything when they get angry.
Student	Students at this school try to work out their disagreements with other students by talking to them.
Student	My teachers really care about me.
Student	I can talk to a teacher or other adult at this school about something that is bothering me.
Student	I can talk to my teachers about problems I am having in class.

**Student Mental Health Needs**

Instructional staff	This school places a priority on teaching students strategies to manage their stress levels.
Instructional staff	This school places a priority on addressing students' mental health needs.
Noninstructional staff	This school places a priority on addressing students' mental health needs.
Noninstructional staff	This school places a priority on teaching students strategies to manage their stress levels.

These content areas provide an example of how you can examine Mental Health items in a meaningful way across respondent groups. Identifying differences in the perceptions of different respondent groups within the same block of items may be especially helpful in targeting action items for improvement.<sup>7</sup>

For example, at least one question on each survey (i.e., students, instructional staff, noninstructional staff, and parent) asks respondents about social or emotional education, as follows:

<sup>7</sup> Note that these groupings are different from those for scale scores or average (mean) topic area values, which were derived analytically. The groupings in Table 1 are based on items with similar substantive content or areas of focus that may prove more actionable for districts and schools.



Instructional staff	This school places a priority on helping students with their social, emotional, and behavioral problems.
Instructional staff	This school provides quality counseling or other services to help students with social or emotional needs.
Instructional staff	This school provides the materials, resources, and training necessary for me to support students' social or emotional needs.
Noninstructional staff	This school provides quality counseling or other services to help students with social or emotional needs.
Noninstructional staff	This school provides the materials, resources, and training necessary for me to support students' social or emotional needs.
Parents	This school provides high-quality services to help students with social or emotional needs.
Parents	This school has enough programs that develop students' social and emotional skills (e.g., self-control, problem solving, or getting along with others).

Looking at these items in tandem may provide you with more in-depth information on whether your district or school needs to place more emphasis on social and emotional education. If you find that responses on the Social and Emotional Education item grouping are not as you would like (or if you find a discrepancy between the perceptions of students and other respondents), you may want to think about the following question:

**?** **What can my district or school do to provide a greater focus on social and emotional education at school?**

Similarly, there are survey items that group together as Student Mental Health needs. Looking at the results for this item content group may help you gauge how well your Mental Health efforts are being practiced. If you find that responses are not as favorable as you would like (or if you find a discrepancy among the perceptions of different respondent groups), consider the following:

**?** **What can my district or school do to better ensure that our mental health efforts are addressing the needs of students, staff, and parents?**

**What policies and procedures are currently in place in my school to address mental health? What new policies and procedures need to be implemented? Which policies and procedures should we consider modifying or eliminating? What are our state requirements in this area? [What are our obligations under federal civil rights laws in this area?](#)**

*Note:* In all cases, you must comply with your obligations under federal civil rights laws and any applicable state requirements.

# Appendix A: Guiding Questions for Districts

You can use the guiding questions in this appendix to help use your data to focus on universal and targeted approaches to address mental health needs. In this appendix, you will find::

- Initial guiding questions (scale scores);
- Deeper guiding questions (overall);
- Deeper guiding questions (focused on interventions); and
- Other questions to consider.

## Initial Guiding Questions (GQs): District Scale Scores

Scale scores are the premier way that the EDSCLS as well as many other school climate surveys measure school climate. A scale score, which combines multiple survey items related to different aspects of a topic area, is a more robust measure than just attempting to measure the topic by asking about it with a single item. For more information on scale scores, please see the [Data Interpretation Guide](#).

### A Universal Approach

GQ1. What does our **student** Mental Health scale score tell us about how students perceive mental health in our district?

For example, you can examine:

- How do the student Mental Health scale scores compare across schools in our district?
- How does our district's student Mental Health scale score compare with our state's score (if available)?
- How does our district's student Mental Health scale score compare with our district's student scores on other topic areas within the Environment domain—is it relatively low or high, or in the middle?

GQ2. What does our **instructional staff** Mental Health scale score tell us about how these staff perceive mental health in our district?

For example, you can examine:

- How do the instructional staff Mental Health scale scores compare across schools in our district?
- How does our district's instructional staff Mental Health scale score compare with our state's score (if available)?




Using scale scores, you can compare topic areas within the same respondent group (students, instructional staff, noninstructional staff) or within the same domain (Safety, Environment, and Engagement). These comparisons will help you make meaningful interpretations of the scale scores.

For more information, please see [Appendix A](#) in the *Data Interpretation Guide* for scale score interpretation do's and don'ts.

For EDSCLS users, consider using the [EDSCLS Data Analysis Worksheet](#) to guide your analysis and interpretation of scale scores.



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- How does our district’s instructional staff scale score compare with our district’s instructional staff scores on other topic areas within the Environment domain—is it relatively low or high, or in the middle?
- 

GQ3. What does our **noninstructional staff** Mental Health scale score tell us about how these staff perceive mental health in our district?

For example, you can examine:


- How do the noninstructional staff Mental Health scale scores compare across schools in our district?
  - How does our district’s noninstructional staff Mental Health scale score compare with our state’s score (if available)?
  - How does our district’s noninstructional staff scale score compare with our district’s noninstructional staff scores on other topic areas within the Environment domain—is it relatively low or high, or in the middle?
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### A Targeted Approach

GQ4. What do the district Mental Health scale scores **by respondent characteristics** tell us about how different subgroups perceive mental health in our district?

For example, you can examine:

- How do the perceptions of mental health compare across various subgroups of students (e.g., White students versus Asian students)?
  - How do the perceptions of mental health compare across various subgroups of instructional staff (e.g., Black or African-American staff versus Asian staff)?
  - How do the perceptions of mental health compare across various subgroups of noninstructional staff (e.g., males versus females)?
-



Now that you have considered these questions, what would you like to do next? You can:

- Click on [item-level data](#) to see how item-level results can help provide you with concrete examples of mental health needs that may be more immediately actionable.

Taking a deeper look within a single respondent group using will allow for a more thorough picture of that group's perceptions. You also can:

- Click on [deeper guiding questions](#) to help you to put all your data (survey, administrative, and qualitative) into context.
- Click on [Mental Health](#) to go to a webpage with suggestions for interventions that can be implemented immediately as well as longer term strategies and interventions.

Examining the deeper guiding questions will help you more thoroughly put your data into context and use them moving forward, whereas the webpage will provide suggestions on strategies and interventions that may be implemented immediately.

If you have calculated average (mean) Mental Health values, you also can:

- Click on [average \(mean\) Mental Health values](#) to look at Mental Health values across respondent groups.


## Deeper Guiding Questions About Data for Districts

### A Universal Approach

- DGQ1. Are there other district-level databases that can give us additional information about what is going on **across stakeholders in the district** and what actions to take (e.g., administrative data such as incident data, attendance/truancy data, graduation rates, office discipline referrals and disciplinary actions, as well as other data such as Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System survey data, if available)? (Click on the [Reference Manual](#) for more information on aligning indicators.)
- Do they show the same picture of school climate as your district school climate survey data?
  - What additional information do these data give us?
  - How can we use these data to help us understand universal mental health needs in our district?
- DGQ2. Based on our overall Mental Health scale score, should we consider mental health needs a priority for improvement in our district?

### A Targeted Approach

- DGQ3. Are there other district-level databases that can tell us more about **subgroups of students or staff** who need support in mental health (e.g., administrative data such as incident data, attendance/truancy data, graduation rates, office discipline referrals and disciplinary actions, as well as other data such as Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System survey data, if available)?
- Do they show the same picture of school climate as your district school climate survey data for these subgroups?
  - What additional information do these data give us?
  - How can we use these data to help us understand targeted mental health needs in our district?

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- DGQ4. If we are using a three-tiered system of support in our district, what do these data tell us about our use of resources within that system? Are our practices and programs addressing the needs identified by our data and our practices and programs addressing the needs identified by these data?
- a. What are our district's Tier 1 resource distribution needs? Tier 2 needs? Tier 3 needs?
- DGQ5. Based on our scale scores **by respondent characteristics**, should we consider mental health needs for certain subgroups of students and staff a priority for improvement in our district?

### Other Questions to Consider

- DGQ6. How can we drill down to further understand what students and other stakeholders think about mental health needs in our district (e.g., convene focus groups of students, staff, parents/guardians; conduct student fishbowls and facilitated discussion sessions)?
- DGQ7. Based on our answers to these questions, what conversations do we need to have about using our resources, and with whom should we have them?

## Deeper Guiding Questions About Interventions<sup>8</sup> for Districts

### A Universal Approach


- DGQ8. What interventions pertaining to mental health are currently in place in our district and how can we best evaluate whether these interventions are working?
- DGQ9. How can we ensure that these mental health interventions are implemented with fidelity?
- DGQ10. How do we know which interventions are effective?
- a. How can we best evaluate whether these interventions are working?

### A Targeted Approach

- DGQ11. If we are using a three-tiered system of support in our district, what interventions pertaining to mental health have been shown to work that should be continued or expanded at each tier?
- DGQ12. What interventions pertaining to mental health have been shown to work in other districts, per tier, and what are the conditions under which they work?
- DGQ13. What resources do we need to improve mental health for our students, per tier, in our district?
- DGQ14. Which subgroups of respondents have been found to be in need of targeted support?
- DGQ15. What interventions pertaining to mental health have worked or are working and should be continued or extended for students at higher levels of risk in our district?

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<sup>8</sup> Click on the [Reference Manual](#) for more information about interventions such as best practices, strategies, and programs; multi-tiered systems of support; and fidelity of implementation.



DGQ16. What new interventions pertaining to mental health can be introduced and implemented that will either provide new support or complement what is already being done at each tier?

a. Why do we think these interventions would be more effective than current or past efforts?

DGQ17. How can we sustain (institutionalize) tiered support for improving conditions pertinent to mental health in our district?

### Other Questions to Consider

DGQ18. How can we best fold training for implementing mental health interventions into professional development efforts?

a. Which training efforts have been successful or unsuccessful in the past?

b. Why were some efforts more successful than others?

Now that you have considered these questions, what would you like to do next? You can:

- Click on [item-level data](#) to see how item-level results can help provide you with concrete examples of the instructional environment that may be more immediately actionable.
- Click on [Instructional Environment](#) to go to a webpage with suggestions for interventions that can be implemented immediately as well as longer term strategies and interventions.

If you have calculated average (mean) Instructional Environment values, you also can:

- Click on [average \(mean\) Mental Health values](#) to look at Instructional Environment values across respondent groups.

# Appendix B: Guiding Questions for Schools

You can use the guiding questions in this appendix to help you use your data to focus on universal and targeted approaches to mental health needs. In this appendix, you will find:

- Initial guiding questions (scale scores);
- Deeper guiding questions (overall);
- Deeper guiding questions (focused on interventions); and
- Other questions to consider.

## Initial Guiding Questions: School Scale Scores

Scale scores are the premier way that the EDSCLS as well as many other school climate surveys measure school climate. A scale score, which combines multiple survey items related to different aspects of a topic area, is a more robust measure than attempting to measure the topic by asking about it with a single item. For more information on scale scores, please see the [Data Interpretation Guide](#).

### A Universal Approach

GQ1: What does our **student** Mental Health scale score tell us about how students perceive mental health in our school?

For example, you can examine:

- How does our school's student Mental Health scale score compare to our district's student Mental Health scale score (if available)?
- How does our school's student Mental Health scale score compare with our state's student score (if available)?
- How does our school's student Mental Health scale score compare with our school's student scores on other topic areas within the Environment domain—is it relatively low or high, or in the middle?

GQ2: What does our **instructional staff** Mental Health scale score tell us about how these staff perceive Mental Health in our school?

For example, you can examine:


- How does our school's instructional staff Mental Health scale score compare with our district's score (if available)?
- How does our school's instructional staff Mental Health scale score compare with our state's score (if available)?



Using scale scores, you can compare topic areas within the same respondent group (students, instructional staff, noninstructional staff) or within the same domain (Safety, Environment, and Engagement). These comparisons will help you make meaningful interpretations of the scale scores.

For more information, please see [Appendix B](#) in the *Data Interpretation Guide* for scale score interpretation do's and don'ts.

For EDSCLS users, consider using the [EDSCLS Data Analysis Worksheet](#) to guide your analysis and interpretation of scale scores.

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- How does our school's instructional staff scale score compare with our school's instructional staff scores on other topic areas within the Environment domain—is it relatively low or high, or in the middle?
- 

GQ3. What does our **noninstructional staff** Mental Health scale score tell us about how staff perceive mental health in our school?

For example, you can examine:


- How does our school's noninstructional staff Mental Health scale score compare with our district's score (if available)?
  - How does our school's noninstructional staff Mental Health scale score compare with our state's score (if available)?
  - How does our school's noninstructional staff Mental Health scale score compare with our school's noninstructional staff scores on other topic areas within the Environment domain—is it relatively low or high, or in the middle?
- 

### A Targeted Approach

GQ4. What do the school Mental Health scale scores **by respondent characteristics** tell us about how each subgroup perceives Mental Health in our school?

For example, you can examine:

- How do the perceptions of mental health compare across various subgroups of students (e.g., White students versus Asian students)?
  - How do the perceptions of mental health compare across various subgroups of instructional staff (e.g., Black or African-American staff versus Asian staff)?
  - How do the perceptions of mental health compare across various subgroups of noninstructional staff (e.g., males versus females)?
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Now that you have considered these questions, what would you like to do next? You can:

- Click on [item-level data](#) to see how item-level results can help provide you with concrete examples of mental health that may be more immediately actionable.

Taking a deeper look within a single respondent group will allow for a more thorough picture of that group's perceptions.

You also can:

- Click on [deeper guiding questions](#) to help you to put all your data (survey, administrative, and qualitative) into context.
- Click on [Mental Health](#) to go to a webpage with suggestions for interventions that can be implemented immediately as well as longer term strategies and interventions.

Examining the deeper guiding questions will help you more thoroughly put your data into context and use them moving forward, whereas the webpage will provide recommendations on strategies and interventions that may be implemented immediately.

If you have calculated average (mean) Mental Health values, you also can:

- Click on [average \(mean\) Mental Health values](#) to look at Mental Health values across respondent groups.


## Deeper Guiding Questions About Data for Schools

### A Universal Approach

- DGQ1. Are there school-level databases that can give us additional information about what is going on **across stakeholders in the school** and what actions to take (e.g., administrative data such as incident data, attendance/truancy data, graduation rates, office discipline referrals and disciplinary actions, as well as other data such as Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System survey data, if available)? (Click on the [Reference Manual](#) for more information on aligning indicators.)
- Do they show the same picture of school climate as your school's school climate survey data?
  - What additional information do these data give us?
  - How can we use these data to help us understand universal mental health needs in our school?
- DGQ2. Based on our overall Mental Health scale score, should we consider mental health a priority for improvement in our school?

### A Targeted Approach

- DGQ3. Are there other school-level databases that can tell us more about **subgroups of students or staff** needing support in mental health (e.g., administrative data such as incident data, attendance/truancy data, graduation rates, office discipline referrals and disciplinary actions, as well as other data such as Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System survey data, if available)?
- Do they show the same picture of school climate as your school's school climate survey data?
  - What additional information do these data give us?
  - How can we use these data to help us understand targeted mental health needs in our school?

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- DGQ4. If we are using a three-tiered system of support in our school, what do these data tell us about our use of resources within that system? Are our practices and programs addressing the needs identified by our data?
- a. What are our school's Tier 1 resource distribution needs? Tier 2 needs? Tier 3 needs?
- DGQ5. Based on our scale scores **by respondent characteristics**, should we consider mental health for certain subgroups of students and staff a priority for improvement in our school?

### Other Questions to Consider

- DGQ6. How can we drill down to further understand what students and other stakeholders think about mental health needs in our school (e.g., convene focus groups of students, staff, parents/guardians; conduct student fishbowls and facilitated discussion sessions).
- DGQ7. Based on our answers to these questions, what conversations do we need to have about using our resources, and with whom should we have them?

## Deeper Guiding Questions About Interventions<sup>9</sup> for Schools

### A Universal Approach

- DGQ8. What interventions pertaining to mental health are currently in place in our school, and how can we best evaluate whether these interventions are working?
- DGQ9. How can we ensure that these mental health interventions are implemented with fidelity?
- DGQ10. How do we know which interventions are effective?
- a. How can we best evaluate whether these interventions are working?


### A Targeted Approach

- DGQ11. If we are using a three-tiered system of support in our school, what interventions pertaining to mental health have been shown to work that should be continued or expanded at each tier?
- DGQ12. What interventions pertaining to mental health have been shown to work in other schools, per tier, and what are the conditions under which they work?
- DGQ13. What resources do we need to address mental health needs for our students, per tier, in our school?
- DGQ14. Which subgroups of respondents have been found to be in need of targeted support?
- DGQ15. What interventions pertaining to mental health have worked or are working for students in our school at higher levels of risk that should be continued or expanded?

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<sup>9</sup> Click on the [Reference Manual](#) for more information about interventions such as best practices, strategies, and programs; multi-tiered systems of support; and fidelity of implementation.





DGQ16. What new interventions pertaining to mental health can be introduced and implemented that will either provide new support or complement what is already being done at each tier?

a. Why do we think these interventions would be more effective than current or past efforts?

DGQ17. How can we sustain (institutionalize) tier support for improving conditions pertinent to Mental Health in our school?

### Other Questions to Consider

DGQ18. How can we best fold training for implementing mental health interventions into professional development efforts?

a. Which training efforts have been successful or unsuccessful in the past?

b. Why were some efforts more successful than others?

Now that you have considered these questions, what would you like to do next? You can:

- Click on [item-level data](#) to see how item-level results can help provide you with concrete examples of mental health that may be more immediately actionable.
- Click on [Mental Health](#) to go to a webpage with suggestions for interventions that can be implemented immediately as well as longer term strategies and interventions.

If you have calculated average (mean) Mental Health values, you also can:

- Click on [average \(mean\) Mental Health values](#) to look at Mental Health values across respondent groups.

# Appendix C: Additional Guiding Questions: District Average (Mean) Mental Health Values

You can use the guiding questions in this appendix to help you use your data to focus on universal and targeted approaches to addressing mental health needs. In this appendix, you will find:

- Additional guiding questions (average [mean] Mental Health values)

Average (mean) Mental Health values (on a scale of 1–4) can help you see how favorably respondents perceive the topic area. Click on the [Data Interpretation Guide](#) to go to more information on average (mean) Mental Health values and an explanation of the scale of 1–4.

## A Universal Approach

GQ1. What does our **student** average (mean) Mental Health value tell us about how students perceive mental health in our district?

For example, you can think about these comparisons:

Comparing across respondent groups:

- How does our student average (mean) Mental Health value compare with the average (mean) Mental Health value for instructional staff in our district? For noninstructional staff in our district?

Comparing across topic areas:

- How does our student average (mean) Mental Health value compare with the student average (mean) value of other topic areas of interest within and outside of the Environment domain?

GQ2. What does our **instructional staff** average (mean) Mental Health value tell us how these staff perceive Mental Health in our district?

For example, you can think about these comparisons:

Comparing across respondent groups:

- How does our instructional staff average (mean) Mental Health value compare with the average (mean) Mental Health value for noninstructional staff in our district? For students in our district?


Comparing across topic areas:

- How does our instructional staff average (mean) Mental Health value compare with the instructional staff average (mean) value of other topic areas of interest within and outside of the Environment domain?



Using average (mean) Mental Health values, you can compare the perceptions of students and staff within and outside of the Environment domain. These comparisons will help you make meaningful interpretations of the average (mean) Mental Health values.

See [Appendix C](#) in the *Data Interpretation Guide* for more information on interpreting average (mean) topic area values and do's and don'ts for EDSCLS users.



GQ3. What does our **noninstructional staff** average (mean) Mental Health value tell us about how staff perceive mental health in our district?

For example, you can think about these comparisons:

Comparing across respondent groups:

- How does our noninstructional staff average (mean) Mental Health value compare with the average (mean) Mental Health value for instructional staff in our district? For students in our district?

Comparing across topic areas:

- How does our noninstructional staff average (mean) Mental Health value compare with the noninstructional staff average (mean) value of other topic areas of interest within and outside of the Environment domain?
- 

### A Targeted Approach

GQ4. What do our average (mean) Mental Health values **by respondent characteristics** tell us about how **students** perceive mental health in our district?

For example, you can think about these comparisons:

Comparing across topic areas:

- How does the average (mean) Mental Health value for certain subgroups of students (e.g., female students) compare with that subgroup's average (mean) values on other topic areas within the Environment domain (e.g., female student average [mean] values on physical health)?

Comparing across respondent subgroups:

- How does the average (mean) Mental Health value for certain student subgroups (e.g., female students) compare with that subgroup of instructional staff and noninstructional staff (i.e., female instructional staff and female noninstructional staff)?
- 

GQ5. What do our average (mean) Mental Health values **by respondent characteristics** tell us about how **instructional staff** perceive mental health in our district?


For example, you can think about these comparisons:

Comparing across topic areas:

- How does the average (mean) Mental Health value for certain subgroups of instructional staff (e.g., Asian instructional staff) compare with that subgroup's average (mean) values on other topic areas within the Environment domain (e.g., Asian instructional staff average [mean] values on the instructional environment)?

Comparing across respondent subgroups:

- How does the average (mean) Mental Health value for certain instructional staff subgroups (e.g., Black or African-American instructional staff) compare with that subgroup of



noninstructional staff and students (i.e., Black or African-American students and Black or African-American noninstructional staff)?

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GQ6. What do our average (mean) Mental Health values **by respondent characteristics** tell us about how **noninstructional staff** perceive mental health in our school?

For example, you can think about these comparisons:

Comparing across topic areas:

- How does the average (mean) Mental Health value for certain subgroups of noninstructional staff (e.g., male noninstructional staff) compare with that subgroup's average (mean) values on other topic areas within the Environment domain (e.g., male noninstructional staff average (mean) values on the instructional environment)?

Comparing across respondent subgroups:

- How does the average (mean) Mental Health value for certain noninstructional subgroups (e.g., Asian noninstructional staff) compare with that subgroup of instructional staff and students (i.e., Asian students and Asian instructional staff)?
- 

Now that you have considered these questions, what would you like to do next? You can:

- Click on [item-level data](#) to see how item-level results can help provide you with concrete examples of mental health that may be more immediately actionable.
- Click on [deeper guiding questions](#) to help you to put all your data (survey, administrative, and qualitative) into context.
- Click on [Mental Health](#) to go to a webpage with suggestions for interventions that can be implemented immediately as well as longer term strategies and interventions.

Examining the deeper guiding questions will help you more thoroughly put your data into context and use them moving forward, whereas the webpage will provide suggestions for strategies and interventions that may be implemented immediately.

# Appendix D: Additional Guiding Questions: School Average (Mean) Mental Health Values

You can use the guiding questions in this appendix to help you use your data to focus on universal and targeted approaches to addressing mental health needs. In this appendix, you will find:

- Additional guiding questions (average [mean] Mental Health values)

Average (mean) Mental Health values (on a scale of 1–4) can help you see how favorably respondents perceive the topic area. Click on the [Data Interpretation Guide](#) to go to more information on average (mean) Mental Health values and an explanation of the scale of 1–4.

## A Universal Approach

GQ1. What does our **student** average (mean) Mental Health value tell us about how students perceive mental health in our school?

For example, you can think about these comparisons:

Comparing across respondent groups:

- How does our student average (mean) Mental Health value compare with the average (mean) Mental Health value for instructional staff in our school? For noninstructional staff in our school?

Comparing across topic areas:

- How does our student average (mean) Mental Health value compare with the student average (mean) value of other topic areas of interest within and outside of the Environment domain?

GQ2. What does our **instructional staff** Mental Health average (mean) value tell us about how these staff perceive mental health in our school?

For example, you can think about these comparisons:

Comparing across respondent groups:

- How does our instructional staff average (mean) Mental Health value compare with the average (mean) Mental Health value for noninstructional staff in our school? For students in our school?


Comparing across topic areas:

- How does our instructional staff average (mean) Mental Health value compare with the instructional staff average (mean) value of other topic areas of interest within and outside of the Environment domain?



Using average (mean) Mental Health values, you can compare the perceptions of students and staff within and outside of the Environment domain. These comparisons will help you make meaningful interpretations of the average (mean) Mental Health values.

See [Appendix C](#) in the *Data Interpretation Guide* for more information on interpreting average (mean) topic area values and do's and don'ts for EDSCLS users.



GQ3. What does our **noninstructional staff** average (mean) Mental Health values tell us about how staff perceive mental health in our school?

For example, you can think about these comparisons:

Comparing across respondent groups:

- How does our noninstructional staff average (mean) Mental Health value compare with the average (mean) Mental Health value for instructional staff in our school? For students in our school?

Comparing across topic areas:

- How does our noninstructional staff average (mean) Mental Health value compare with the noninstructional staff average (mean) value of other topic areas of interest within and outside of the Environment domain?
- 

### A Targeted Approach

GQ4. What do our average (mean) Mental Health values **by respondent characteristics** tell us about how students perceive mental health in our school?

For example, you can think about these comparisons:

Comparing across topic areas:

- How does the average (mean) Mental Health value for certain subgroups of students (e.g., female students) compare with that subgroup's average (mean) values on other topic areas within the Environment domain (e.g., female student average [mean] values on the instructional environment)?

Comparing across respondent subgroups:

- How does the average (mean) Mental Health value for certain student subgroups (e.g., female students) compare with that subgroup of instructional staff and noninstructional staff (i.e., female instructional staff and female noninstructional staff)?
- 

GQ5. What do our average (mean) Mental Health values **by respondent characteristics** tell us about how **instructional staff** perceive mental health in our school?


For example, you can think about these comparisons:

Comparing across topic areas:

- How does the average (mean) Mental Health value for certain subgroups of instructional staff (e.g., Asian instructional staff) compare with that subgroup's average (mean) values on other topic areas within the Environment domain (e.g., Asian instructional staff average [mean] values on Instructional Environment)?

Comparing across respondent subgroups:

- How does the average (mean) Mental Health value for certain instructional staff subgroups (e.g., Black or African-American instructional staff) compare with that subgroup of



noninstructional staff and students (i.e., Black or African-American students and Black or African-American noninstructional staff)?

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GQ6. What do our average (mean) Mental Health values **by respondent characteristics** tell us about how **noninstructional staff** perceive mental health in our school?

For example, you can think about these comparisons:

Comparing across topic areas:

- How does the average (mean) Mental Health value for certain subgroups of noninstructional staff (e.g., male noninstructional staff) compare with that subgroup's average (mean) values on other topic areas within the Environment domain (e.g., male noninstructional staff average [mean] values on Instructional Environment)?

Comparing across respondent subgroups:

- How does the average (mean) Mental Health value for certain noninstructional subgroups (e.g., Asian noninstructional staff) compare with that subgroup of instructional staff and students (i.e., Asian students and Asian instructional staff)?
- 

Now that you have considered these questions, what would you like to do next? You can:

- Click on [item-level data](#) to see how item-level results can help provide you with concrete examples of mental health that may be more immediately actionable.
- Click on [deeper guiding questions](#) to help you to put all your data (survey, administrative, and qualitative) into context.
- Click on [Mental Health](#) to go to a webpage with suggestions for interventions that can be implemented immediately as well as longer term strategies and interventions.

Examining the deeper guiding questions will help you more thoroughly put your data into context and use them moving forward, whereas the webpage will provide suggestions for strategies and interventions that may be implemented immediately.

## Disclaimer

This *Interpreting Mental Health Topic Area Discussion Guide* was designed and written under the U.S. Department of Education (Department) Contract Number EDESE12O0035 by American Institutes for Research, the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments (NCSSLE). Rita Foy Moss served as the contracting officer's representative (COR) for the NCSSLE technical assistance center. This document contains resource materials that are provided for the user's convenience. The inclusion of these materials is not intended to reflect their importance, nor is it intended to endorse any views expressed, or products or services offered. These materials may contain the views and recommendations of various subject matter experts as well as hypertext links, contact addresses, and websites to information created and maintained by other public and private organizations. The opinions expressed in any of these materials do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of the Department. The Department does not control or guarantee the accuracy, relevance, timeliness, or completeness of any outside information included in these materials.

January 2017

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