

Informed Consent

My name is _____ and I am with the American Institutes for Research (AIR). AIR is providing support to Maine Schools for Excellence (MSFE) as part of the Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF), an initiative, supported by the US Department of Education, aimed at improving student outcomes by improving teacher and principal effectiveness.

We are asking you to participate in a discussion group today/tonight so we can learn more about how families think about school climate. The session will run for approximately **45 minutes**, and you'll be asked to share your thoughts and perceptions about the **climate** of the school your child attends. When we speak of school climate we think about: - *teaching and learning, safety, the school environment and also the relationships within and outside the school community.*

Your participation today is entirely **voluntary**. If you decide not to participate in this focus group, it will not negatively affect you, or your child, in any way. If you decide to participate and then change your mind, you may leave at any time. Also, you can decide not to answer a particular question and still participate in the rest of the focus group.

There are no risks to participation beyond those encountered in ordinary life. Sharing your thoughts with us will help us improve schools throughout Maine.

We will not share your individual responses with the teachers, the principal or any of the staff related to the school. **Your responses are completely confidential.** We ask that you don't share what others say in the focus group today with anyone else outside this room. Any findings that use the information you share with us will be reported in the aggregate and will not include your name or any other identifying information.

[Not to be read as part of a script, but this information must be made available to participants at some point] If you have any questions about AIR's work with Maine Schools for Excellence, you may contact Dana Chambers at dchambers@air.org. For questions about *your rights* as a participant in this research, please contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at IRBChair@air.org or toll free at 1-800-634-0797.

Introduction

Thank you very much for giving of your time and agreeing to participate in this focus group today. (after consent is given to participate)

Maine Schools for Excellence (MSFE) is embarking on an annual measurement of school climate and culture reflecting the perceptions of students, school staff and you the parents/guardians. Parents' attitudes and perceptions about their children's school matter; family engagement and involvement in student learning matter.

MSFE's vision is to enhance the learning process for all students. Research indicates that a positive school climate is directly related to higher student achievement, lower dropout rates and lower instances of disruptive behavior. Setting the right conditions for learning and building strong relationships with parents and the community all contribute to positive school climate; this focus group today is part of the process to gather your views and perceptions on key aspects of the climate and culture of the school community that your child is part of.

Classrooms teachers and leaders within MSFE are being assessed against some rigorous standards which measures all aspects of their practice. We have a handout today which details those standards relating specifically to school climate.

Improving school climate is a continuous process of learning and improvement. Based on the annual measurement of school climate, school leaders can make informed decisions about the school to improve the climate and make the school an even safer, more supportive, engaging place for students to achieve their potential.

MSFE and the school principal are aware that this focus group is being conducted.

Any questions before we begin?

We want to focus on two keys areas today: the *social* climate and the *academic* climate of the school. When we think of *social* climate we are thinking mainly of the physical school environment, safety and relationships. When we refer to *academic* climate, we are thinking of the conditions in the school which promote critical thinking and high academic expectations.

Social Climate

1. What are the things that make your child/children enjoy going to school?
2. Strong relationships are at the heart of positive school climate. How does the school create an environment (friendly, respectful and inviting) where families feel there is open communication and interaction about their child's learning and development?
 - How does the school promote the importance of family involvement?
3. To what extent do you think that the school honors the diversity of children's background?
4. In what ways do your child/children feel safe at school (physically/emotionally)?
5. Positive teacher-student relationships are a priority for positive school climate. How do you think your children get along with their teachers overall? Is there mutual respect? Do you think that the teachers and staff show that they really care about your child? How does the staff demonstrate respect for students?
6. Students tend to reflect behaviors of adults they respect. To what extent does school staff set high moral and social standards?
7. What about the social climate among peers at this school? Do you think the culture among students here reflects appropriate values and priorities? Do you think your child will grow socially in the ways you want for him or her?

Academic Climate

8. To what extent does school staff engage with parents/caregivers in your child's/children's learning? How often do they communicate with you? Is it usually about good things or bad things?

9. How engaging are the daily lessons for your child/children? Are they bored at school, or are there topics they are excited about?
10. If your child has needed any additional supports, how open has the school been to providing these? Do they ask for your input about how your child learns best?