

How School Climate Perceptions Vary by Race and Ethnicity of Staff*

Previous research based on analyses of the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) has shown that not only is there an academic achievement gap between African American and Latino students and their White and Asian counterparts, there is also a racial and ethnic group gap in students' access to school developmental supports and safe school environments.¹ African American and Latino students are less likely to report caring relationships with adults at school, exposure to high expectations messages, and opportunities for meaningful participation at school than White and Asian students. They are also less likely to report that they feel safe at school and are more likely to be victimized by violence. These findings suggest that there is a racial/ethnic gap in exposure to school climate factors conducive to learning.

This factsheet examines a different question. Instead of examining the student racial/ethnic gap, we examine the staff racial/ethnic gap. We report on how staff perceptions of school climate vary by staff race/ethnicity. The results are based on an analysis of data from the *California School Climate Survey* (CSCS) for staff collected between 2008 and 2010 from a total of 93,659 school staff from 670 districts and 4,844 schools (3,033 elementary and 1,779 secondary schools). The CSCS gathers staff perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of their school environments as measured by 84 questions covering ten areas of school climate indicators.

The findings and analyses presented in this report are

organized according to the race/ethnicity of participating staff, with four major groups:

- African American, representing 4% of the sample
- Asian/Pacific Islander, representing 6% of the sample
- Latino/Hispanic, representing 15% of the sample
- White, representing 68% of the sample

When interpreting the results presented in this factsheet and drawing possible conclusions about the data, it is very important to bear in mind three factors.

- For the most part, African American and Latino/Hispanic staff tended to work in schools with fewer resources, lower academic performance, and higher numbers of students eligible for free and reduced-price meals (see Figure 1).
- African American and to some extent Latino staff were less likely than Whites and Asians to be teachers, and were more likely to be other certificated and classified staff.
- And, third, although staff of all races/ethnicities are found in all types of schools, the highest percentage of African American staff work in predominantly African American schools; the highest percentage of Asian/Pacific Islander staff generally work in predominantly Asian/Pacific Islander schools; the highest percentage of White staff tend to work in predominantly White

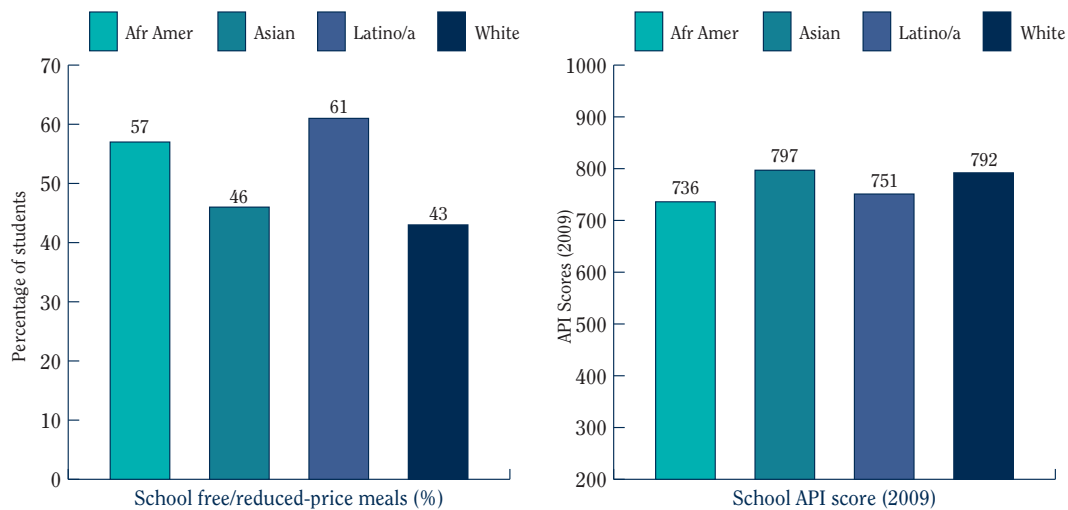
*This document was produced by WestEd for the California Department of Education's Closing the Achievement Gap project.

schools; and the highest percentage of Latino staff generally work in predominantly Latino schools.

Taken together, these factors suggest that staff race/ethnic differences in reports of school climate are likely due to differences in the types of schools African American, Asian, Latino, and Whites are employed in, as well as differences in work roles within schools.

Islander, White, and Latino/Hispanic staff were apparent with regards to the learning and working environments of their schools, staff collegiality, severity of student problems at school, school discipline practices, and the availability of learning support services. We describe some of the differences that were apparent below.²

Figure 1. School Characteristics by staff race/ethnicity



Findings

Perceptions of school climate varied by the race/ethnicity of staff. Detailed tables presenting these findings can be found in *California School Climate Survey, State-wide Results, 2008–10. Variations by the race/ethnicity of school staff* (<http://chks.wested.org/reports>). The figures included in this factsheet provide a sampling of some of the findings that support the trends reported below, organized around four of the school climate areas assessed: the learning environment; developmental supports provided at the school; cultural sensitivity, respect, and equity; and availability of school services to students.

In general, Asian/Pacific Islander, White, and Latino/Hispanic staff had similar perceptions of most of the areas of school climate examined, while African American staff consistently reported that their schools had poorer school climates. Few differences between Asian/Pacific

Figure 2. Perceptions of positive learning environment by staff race/ethnicity

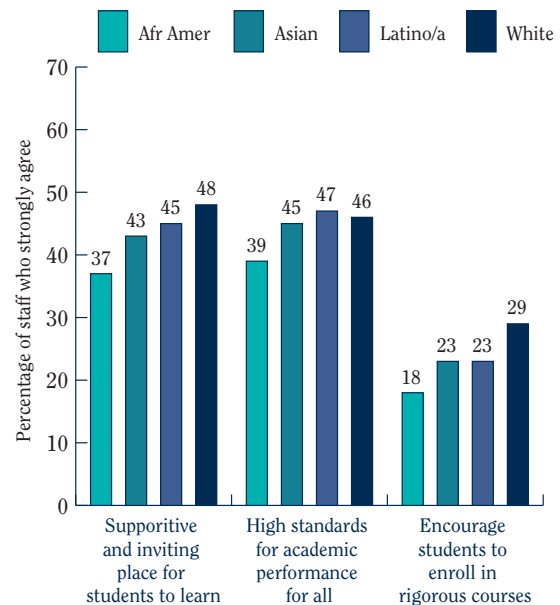
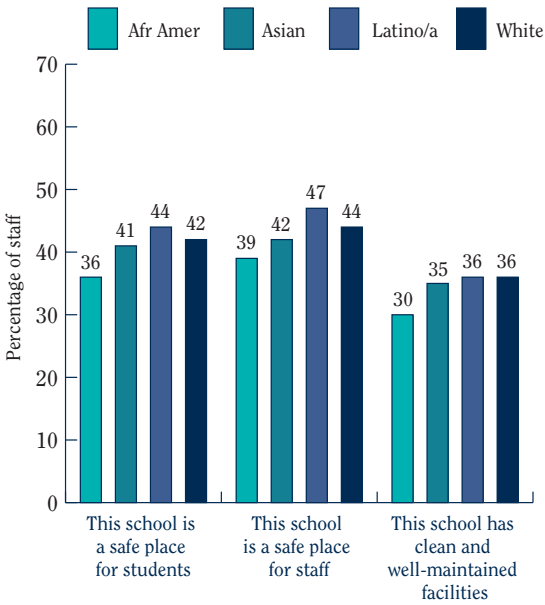


Figure 3. Perceptions of school safety and facilities by staff race/ethnicity



White Staff. White staff members were more likely than other staff to report that their schools have high levels of caring relationships between staff and students and that the school provides student opportunities for meaningful participation (see Figure 4). White staff and Asian/Pacific Islander staff reported the highest level of expectations for students, and were more likely than other staff to perceive that their schools show respectful, equitable, and culturally sensitive treatment of students. White staff reported the lowest need for professional development.

Asians/Pacific Islander Staff. Asians/Pacific Islanders reported substantially higher percentages than other staff for staff collegiality and sense of mission; and professional development needs.

Latino/Hispanic Staff. With the exception of their reports of very positive and safe learning and work environments, Latino/Hispanic staff generally reported levels of school climate indicators that were in the mid-range, between the reports of Whites and Asians/Pacific Islanders and African Americans.

African American Staff. The general pattern for responses from African American staff revealed they were less likely than others to report that the school provides a positive learning and working environment, that it is safe

and supportive for students, that relations among staff are collegial, and that students come to school ready to learn. African American staff were also less likely than other staff to report that the school fosters an appreciation of student diversity, emphasizes showing respect for all students' cultural beliefs and practices, treats all students fairly, and treats all students with respect.

Figure 4. Perceptions of developmental supports by staff race/ethnicity

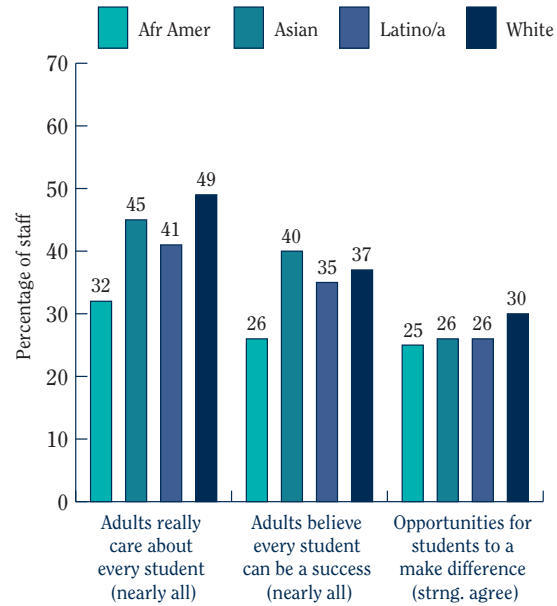
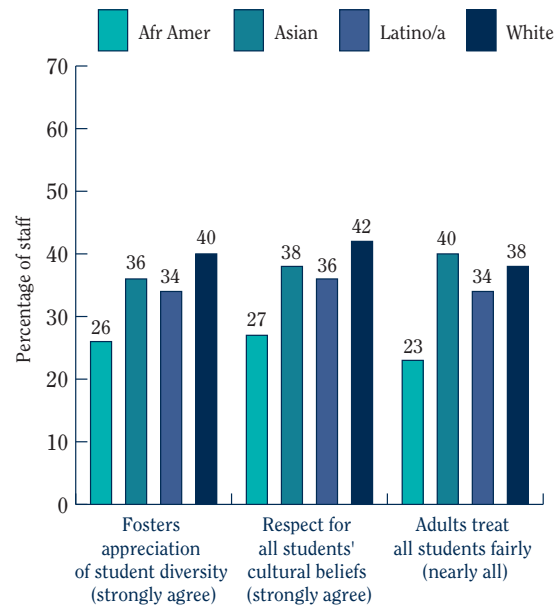
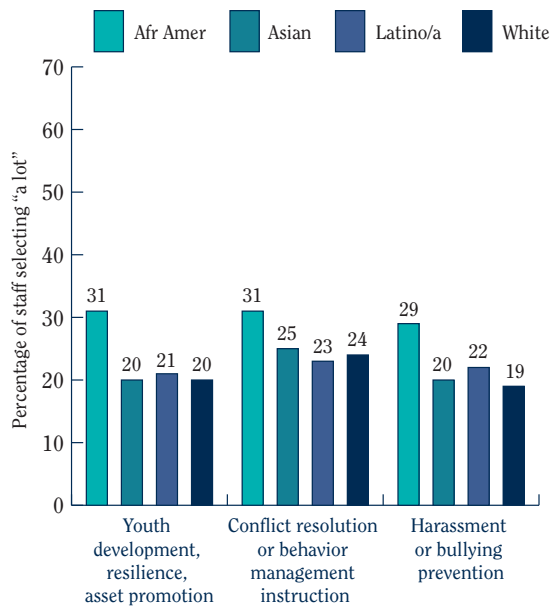


Figure 5. Perceptions of cultural sensitivity, respect, and equity by staff race/ethnicity



Although African American staff reported that their schools generally exhibit poorer school climates than other staff, they were more likely than staff in other racial/ethnic groups to report that the school provides needed school services to students, including youth development, conflict resolution, and harassment and bullying prevention services (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Perceptions of availability of student support services by staff race/ethnicity



Summary

White and, to some extent, Asian/Pacific Islander staff members are more likely than other staff to report that their schools provide a positive, supportive, and safe learning environment for students; and that the students that they serve come to school ready to learn. Conversely, African American staff are less likely than others to report that the school provides a positive learning and working environment, that it is safe and supportive for students, that relations among staff are collegial, and that students come to school ready to learn. African American staff are also less likely than other staff to report that the school fosters an appreciation of student diversity, emphasizes showing respect for all students' cultural beliefs and practices, treats all students fairly, and treats all students with respect. Latino/Hispanic staff generally report levels

of school climate that are in the mid-range between the reports of Whites and Asian/Pacific Islanders and those of African Americans.

What accounts for these racial/ethnic group differences in staff perceptions? Although staff of all races and ethnicities are found in all types of schools, our analyses indicate that African American and Latino/Hispanic staff tend to be concentrated in schools serving students with fewer economic resources, lower academic performance, and substantially larger numbers of African American and Latino/Hispanic students. Previous analyses of CHKS student data and CSCS staff data have shown that such schools exhibit poorer school climates than other schools. It is thus likely these race/ethnic differences in staff reports of school climate are due to differences in the types of schools African American, Asian, Latino, and Whites are employed in. Supportive of the link between these perceptions of staff by race/ethnicity and the characteristics of the students in their schools, very similar results were found in an analysis of CSCS staff data based on the predominant racial/ethnic characteristics of the student enrollment in schools, as reported in CSCS Factsheet #2.

Suggested citation: Austin, G., De Long-Cotty, B., Hanson, T. (2012). *How school climate perceptions vary by the race and ethnicity of staff. CSCS Factsheet #1.* Los Alamitos: WestEd Health and Human Development Program for the California Department of Education. Available from http://chks.wested.org/using_results/publications

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Endnotes

1 Austin, G., Nakamoto, J., and Bailey, J. (2010). *Racial/ethnic differences in school performance, engagement, safety, and supports. CHKS Factsheet #9.* Los Alamitos, CA: WestEd. Developed by WestEd for the California Department of Education. Available from http://chks.wested.org/using_results/publications

2 Detailed tables presenting all the findings can be found in WestEd. (2012). *California School Climate Survey, Statewide Results, 2008–2010: Variations by the race/ethnicity of school staff.* Los Alamitos, CA: Health and Human Development Program for the California Department of Education. Available from <http://chks.wested.org/reports>. The full report also provides data from staff that identified themselves as American Indian/Alaskan Native and Other or Mixed Ethnicity. Results for these two groups tended to be similar to those of African American staff.