

# CALIFORNIA **SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE SCHOOLS**

## 2014/15 Statewide Evaluation Results Final Year Findings

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## Final Statewide Evaluation Results

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### Executive Summary

**Introduction** - In October 2010, California became one of eleven states selected by the U.S. Department of Education (ED) to receive a four-year Safe and Supportive Schools (S3) grant. The grant supports statewide measurement of conditions for learning (known also as school climate), as well as targeted programmatic interventions to improve those conditions in comprehensive high schools (grades 9-12) with the greatest need. In particular, this initiative was designed to help address disruptive behaviors in school—such as bullying, harassment and violence, and substance use on campus—and promote safe, caring, engaging, and healthy school environments that foster learning and well being among both students and staff. California funded 58 high schools. Duerr Evaluation Resources led the evaluation effort in partnership with WestEd and the California Department of Education (CDE). An evaluation model was developed for the 2012-2014 years drawing from the existing California School Climate, Health, and Learning Survey (Cal-SCHLS) system, a team-developed School Climate Index (SCI), and a formative evaluation model which included evaluation site visits to every school in the spring of 2012, 2013, and 2014. The Executive Summary of the 2014 evaluation report is included in the appendix of this report. The full report can be accessed at the following web site:

[http://californias3.wested.org/resources/S3FinalEvalReport\\_2013-14.pdf](http://californias3.wested.org/resources/S3FinalEvalReport_2013-14.pdf).

With the delayed implementation of the S3 program in California, most districts did not have the full three years to implement their S3 work plan. To ensure full program implementation, the U.S. Department of Education granted a carryover request to allow districts to finish up their incomplete tasks in their approved work plan in 2015-16. Although adequate funding was not available to continue the full four-year evaluation, there was enough to duplicate the telephone survey approach utilized in 2012 and 2013. Each school with remaining funds (51) was asked to submit a list of ten or more staff and parents who had involvement with the S3 program. Forty-seven sent lists comprising 437 individuals. The S3 Evaluation Team completed telephone interviews with 319 individuals for a 73 percent response rate. The goal of the 2015 study was to determine the extent to which the schools with remaining S3 funding were still implementing programs, what problems they solved and continued to face, and to gauge their plans for sustaining the program in the next school year.

The study findings demonstrate that most schools continued to operate their S3 programs into the 2014-15 year at nearly the same levels as in prior years. Seventy-four percent of the S3 Coordinators and principals said their program is still operating at 80-100 percent since last year when they had full funding. The evidence strongly suggests that:

- Data from the 2014 Evaluation Report demonstrated that the schools had made the most progress in improving Violence, Victimization, and Substance Use (VVS) elements of school

climate, and made much less progress addressing the the Supports and Engagement (SE) school climate elements. The early success among S3 sites in VVS was supported by qualitative findings that suggested the VVS program components were easier to address because they involved changing the behavior of fewer school staff members. This year, the large majority of S3 schools reported that improving SE was their primary focus and where they felt they were currently having the greatest impact. Many of the comments indicated that large numbers of staff were participating in the program. SE promoting programs such as Breaking Down the Walls and Challenge Day were often cited as positive influences on the schools that paved the way for caring relationships.

- The schools' approaches for at-risk students, which the evaluation showed started very slowly in the first two years, has clearly progressed to what are now generally strong systems that includes identification and services addressing both behavioral issues as well as school adjustment concerns, and include a wide array of services. Link Crew was by far the most adopted program addressing at-risk students.
- Nearly all sites made policy and rule changes, most commonly in the area of discipline but also addressing being tardy and bullying. These new approaches delay or avoid out of school suspension and instead focus on remediation and in some cases restorative justice approaches.
- Family support was identified as a weak area in the past evaluations. Staff members in 2015 felt the schools had still only made modest progress in this area, but parents reported high levels of satisfaction, describing increased communication, positive exchanges with staff, and high levels of trust.
- Exploring the key factors identified by implementation research, the evaluation provided updates to findings from the previous evaluations. S3 Coordinators, principals, and district leaders were all described by staff and parents as showing enthusiastic leadership in promoting school climate. Comparable data from 2013 demonstrated that principals' enthusiasm has risen markedly. Schools almost uniformly maintained the high levels of communication described in the past evaluation reports, utilizing many varied strategies to inform and encourage staff, students and parents. One of three staff members surveyed had received school climate related training this year (even in the environment of receding funding) and rated it even higher than in the past.
- CDE had emphasized the use of data by schools sites to guide their programs and motivate staff and students. This year's findings suggest that the use of data, especially Cal-SCHLS survey data, remains below expectations with only about one-half of the survey respondents recalling data dissemination.
- Challenges to program implementation continued to test the schools, but in many cases evidence was present that some roadblocks had been overcome. Lack of wide staff assent to the goals and activities needed to build a better school climate was a problem identified by many schools in prior evaluations of S3. This year, very few staff felt this was still an issue. Only one in five respondents felt "competing priorities" were a challenge this year, a lower rate than in the

past. Another past barrier for many schools were district administrative hurdles; again, this year, relatively few participants still viewed this as a concern.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that most sites either maintained or even improved their programs and services in the 2014/15 school year. There were many descriptions of the ways that S3 program elements had already been integrated into the fabric of the school culture. Still, S3 funding will disappear entirely in the 2015/16 school year. While some elements such as revised policies and rules can continue at no or low cost, other strategies—even those currently integrated in the schools—will require funding to continue. Survey results indicated that most schools have investigated many possibilities to support their programs in the coming years. They have leveraged assistance from community agencies and convinced their districts to provide some ongoing funding and services. By far the greatest prospect, however, is the new school LCFF/LCAP (Local Control Funding Formula/Local Control and Accountability Plan) that essentially requires that some school funding be directed to school climate. The study suggested that many districts understood this requirement, and in some cases were already enthusiastic about the promotion of school climate prior to this new funding arrangement. Taking these various sustainability approaches together, this study provides strong evidence to indicate that many if not most of the school S3 programs will continue in full or partial form as they move into the 2015/16 school year. The evidence also shows that there are now many enthusiastic school climate “Idea Champions” who may work hard to maintain the emphasis on these new approaches.

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## 2014/15 Statewide Evaluation Results

### INTRODUCTION

In October 2010, California became one of eleven states selected by the U.S. Department of Education (ED) to receive a four-year Safe and Supportive Schools (S3) grant. The grant supports statewide measurement of conditions for learning (known also as school climate), as well as targeted programmatic interventions to improve those conditions in comprehensive high schools (grades 9-12) with the greatest need. In particular, this initiative was designed to help address disruptive behaviors in school—such as bullying, harassment and violence, and substance use on campus—and promote safe, caring, engaging, and healthy school environments that foster learning and well being among both students and staff. California funded 58 high schools.

Duerr Evaluation Resources led the evaluation effort in partnership with WestEd and the California Department of Education (CDE). An evaluation model was developed drawing from several sources but most heavily from the existing California School Climate, Health, and Learning Survey (Cal-SCHLS) system, which includes school-level surveys of students, staff, and parents. The evaluation team developed a School Climate Index (SCI) to assess changes in climate among funded schools. The SCI is a state normed scale describing several factors that are known to influence learning success in schools. Additionally, several key individual questions from Cal-SCHLS addressed progress on program objectives and expected outcomes. The evaluation team also developed a formative evaluation model designed to (1) determine what the school is doing and plans to do in relation to its specific program plan, (2) address research-based best practice management factors and Request For Application (RFA) requirements, and (3) identify technical assistance needs. The plan included evaluation site visits to every school in the spring of 2012, 2013, and 2014 that included interviews with key staff, focus group interviews, and a review of program activity progress conducted by one dozen Technical Assistance Specialists (TASs). Data from these visits was supplemented in 2012 and 2013 with a telephone interview with additional staff and parents. The results of this four-year evaluation effort are summarized in the Appendix of this document. The full report can be accessed at the following web site:

[http://californias3.wested.org/resources/S3FinalEvalReport\\_2013-14.pdf](http://californias3.wested.org/resources/S3FinalEvalReport_2013-14.pdf).<sup>1</sup>

Although the S3 program was designed to end after the 2013-14 school year, 51 of the 58 schools had remaining funds that they wished to carry-over into 2014-15. The United States Department of Education granted a waiver to allow unspent funds to be used, extending the grant to June 2015. The

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<sup>1</sup> Duerr Evaluation Resources and WestEd; *California Safe and Supportive Schools 2013/14 Statewide Evaluation Results, Final Year Findings*. September, 2014; California Department of Education.

average funding per site was \$87,500, about the same as they expended in the prior year. Some state carry-over funds, along with unspent evaluation funds from prior years, were used to conduct a telephone survey in the 2014/15 year. The goal of the 2015 study was to determine the extent to which the schools with remaining S3 funding were still implementing programs, what problems they solved and continued to face, and to gauge their plans for sustaining the program in the next school year.

## METHODOLOGY

Although adequate funding was not available to continue the full four-year evaluation, there was enough to duplicate the telephone survey approach utilized in 2012 and 2013. The formative evaluation plan sought to interview about 7-8 individuals at each school site who had first-hand knowledge of program function. The phone survey of staff was largely focused on perceptions and activities that the Request for Application identified as critical to the program. Other questions focused on best practice factors identified in the research related to effective program implementation. The survey ended with questions about efforts completed and still in process to sustain the program into the next school year and beyond.

Each of the 51 schools with carry-over funding was asked to prepare a phone survey list to include individuals with the following roles. A single individual could not be selected to fill more than one of these roles. Forty-seven schools sent lists with a total of 437 names.

- The S3 Coordinator (some schools had two S3 Coordinators)
- Two school or other district employees who have a role in delivering project services
- Two non-district individuals who have a role in delivering project services. These might be employees of another public agency (county mental health, COE, etc.), employees of a non-profit, or volunteers.
- Other school staff
- One person who has a role in modifying and/or managing the school's system for the identification of high-risk youth.
- One or more members of the school climate team
- Up to three Parents (not counting school climate team members)

A separate survey was developed for the parents, focused largely on parent perceptions of school climate and especially how the school communicated and served parents. The call lists included 339 staff and 98 parents. Attempts were made to schedule all surveys using email, which with multiple contacts resulted in 1,328 emails sent. A total of 636 individual phone calls were made, with 317 resulting in a reschedule, no answer during a survey-scheduled time, or to ask for a survey time from individuals who had not replied to the multiple emails. With this intensive calling strategy, 319 surveys were completed for a response rate of 73 percent, matching the average response rate of the 2012 and 2013 phone surveys. There were 68 parent respondents and 251 staff respondents. No school had fewer than four respondents and the average school had seven.

Of the 251 staff survey interviewees, 90 percent had an assignment or role in the S3 Program this year. Of course, those respondents with no role still had valid perceptions of program operations and in fact



the instructions for the selection of individuals to survey asked that everyone have been in a position to comment on the program. Some staff survey interviewees had dual roles, such as cases where the principal or assistant principal was also the S3 Coordinator.

The composition of the respondents closely mirrored the survey list request. That is, no one category was overrepresented. Under the heading “Other school staff”, several district-level staff names were provided and were interviewed. These included school peace officers, truancy coordinators, a few who had responsibility for budget oversight, and a liaison for a district that had several funded S3 schools. Also interviewed were community agency staff that provided services for the projects such as counseling, training, gang intervention prevention, drug and alcohol programs, tutoring, or guest presentations.

## **FINDINGS**

### **School Climate Improvement Approaches**

Prior evaluation reports for California’s S3 program described in detail the types of programs and approaches being adopted to promote school climate. These generally fell under four primary categories:

1. Programs and services for general population students,
2. Identification of and assistance to at-risk students,
3. Changes to school policies and rules, and
4. Expanded efforts to involve families more strongly in school life.

Each of these four approaches was addressed in the current telephone survey and the results are presented below.

### **Approaches for General Population Students**

All S3 funded schools adopted approaches that addressed two primary aspects of climate: what the California S3 program defines as (a) Supports and Engagement, which includes school connectedness, high expectations, opportunities for meaningful participation, and caring relationships, as well as (b) Violence, Victimization, and Substance Use, which for the survey purposes also included equitable discipline. This year, all staff survey interviewees were asked what programmatic elements for general population students they felt had resulted in a positive school climate. They were presented a list of elements that were aligned with either program aspect “a” or “b” above. Their most common responses are shown in the table below. (Respondents could pick more than one element.)

Table 1

## Staff Identified Elements of a Positive School Climate

Element	% Yes
School connectedness and caring relationships	89%
Lowered aggression, violence, harassment and bullying	56%
Lower substance use	37%
Equitable discipline	28%
High expectations of students	18%

School connectedness<sup>2</sup> and caring relationships were considered by far the most important school climate elements. In open-ended descriptions many respondents noted that school connectedness fosters a sense of belonging and safety that empowers students to achieve academically. They often cited the “low connectedness” home lives of many of their students, which they view as contributing to poor behavior and low academic success. Many respondents noted that caring student/staff relationships helped students address their problems. School connectedness advancing programs such as Breaking Down the Walls or Challenge Day were cited as positive influences on the schools that paved the way for caring relationships. The following is a sampling of representative comments that illustrate the choice of this element:

*“Students feel connected to adults on campus; they are supported academically, socially and emotionally.”<sup>3</sup>*

*“It’s about... meeting student needs emotionally and physically.”*

*“Creating connections increases relationships with staff, students and teachers. They’re cared for and for who they are, not just their test scores.”*

*“The connection between peers, staff and faculty and fostering meaningful relationships and intervention are important so they have the connection to others and school.”*

*“Relationships that students and staff have built due to S3 are important, because that allows learning to happen.”*

This, plus other findings discussed later in this report suggest that adult S3 participants were very focused on making improvements in school connectedness. The quotes above and others clearly indicated that many different staff members were involved in building climate through relationships,

<sup>2</sup> School connectedness is the belief held by students that adults and peers in the school care about students’ learning and about their social and emotional health.

<sup>3</sup> All comments shown as quotes are drawn from the interviewers’ written capture of respondent comments. They should not be considered exact quotes, but interviewers were trained and have prior experience expressing the important essence of each respondent’s comments with fidelity.

connections, and caring. It was clear that they believed they were still moving forward in improving connectedness and thus school climate.

Addressing aggression, violence, harassment and bullying was identified by about half of the staff as key to improving school climate. Many staff noted that these issues had been significantly reduced after several years of S3 funding. The comments below represent most of the staff survey interviewees:

*“The students need to feel that it is safe and not be threatened by bullying...that includes cyber or any type of bullying. They need to feel safe and welcome.”*

*“A secure campus where students feel safe from outside threats and from intimidation, threats, and bullying from other students is important.”*

*“It seems like students feel more safe and feel they could go to adults on campus.”*

*“The No Bullying policy is enforced. Intervening with students before big problems arise is important.”*

Although respondents thought school connectedness approaches were more important to school climate than a focus on reducing violence, bullying and substance use, the outcome findings of the 2014 Evaluation Report demonstrate that in fact their larger success was in the latter category. The 2014 Evaluation Report noted:

*“For the combined schools as a group, nearly all of the gains made on the School Climate Index (SCI)<sup>4</sup> were on the reduced Violence, Victimization and Substance Use subscale... Many schools demonstrated significant school-wide changes to school discipline policies and systems, where anti-bullying programs were in wide adoption and where restorative justice was a strong focus... At the same time, improvements were not recorded [for the combined schools as a group] for the Supports and Engagement subscale [major elements of which are school connectedness and caring relationships]. School climate research suggests that... building school connectedness requires changed behaviors on the part of the large majority of adults on high school campuses where students generally have direct contact with at least six and often more adults each day. This evaluation demonstrated that very few funded schools adopted approaches that reached or intensively involved the broader school staff or large numbers of parents.”*

It should be noted that although the S3 schools as a group had little measured success with the scale that included school connectedness, about one-fourth of the schools (largely those who had high levels of measured implementation effectiveness) individually made gains in this area. The qualitative findings from the 2015 staff survey suggests that most staff at all schools still see making changes in school connectedness as a primary goal and expressed the importance of making the improvements necessary to be successful.

### Approaches for At-Risk Students

The second category of required program approaches were those focused on at-risk students, defined as those students with a lower likelihood of having academic success. The first year evaluation (2011/12) demonstrated that prior to S3 funding, all of the funded schools had some sort of existing system for

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<sup>4</sup> The SCI is a state normed scale describing several factors that are known to influence learning success in schools. Scores were calculated for all S3 schools in 2010 and again in 2014.

identifying and referring students with behavioral issues, but few had systems that identified other students at risk for academic failure. The 2014 evaluation demonstrated that under S3, nearly all schools had developed more expansive referral systems that included identifying and serving many other types of at-risk students.

The 2015 survey respondents were emphatic that their at-risk referral systems in 2015 were still operating effectively and smoothly, and described how they had provided an explicit focus on assuring that at-risk students became involved in S3 program opportunities. Instead of using only suspension to address problem behaviors as typically happened in the past, a much wider array of students were being referred to on-campus and community based programs designed to get them back on track. Comments such as these below were very common:

*"The infrastructure gets stronger so each student can find a pathway before graduating."*

*"We were so overwhelmed in the past; now there's a clockwork system."*

*"Our system has many referrals and high intensity assessment; there's an array of resources, support, and services so we can craft specific service plans."*

These new S3 at-risk referral systems also offered new opportunities for students with behavioral issues. The usual discipline issues identified by respondents were substance abuse, bullying, uncontrolled anger expression, violent behavior, and general social disturbance in the classroom and on school grounds. Every respondent who addressed these issues said S3 had resulted in improvements (which, as noted on the previous page, is a correct assessment as of the 2014 measurement):

*"Discipline issues are going down."*

*"Student behavior has improved."*

*"S3 helped by reducing behaviors that interfere with the education progress to make a positive school climate. There's been increased attendance and reduced behavior difficulties."*

*"The attendance rate has improved and discipline referrals are lower due to S3."*

*"S3 allows us to direct students with drug/alcohol issues who are usually suspended or expelled into a program or counseling."*

*"Many of these students stated it (the S3 intervention) saved them."*

The other major category of at-risk students, noted by two-thirds of responding staff, described programs available for at-risk students classified due to problems such as bullying victimization, social isolation, challenging home situations, and others. Staff described programs and approaches that sought to connect students to the wider student body and into programs where they interacted with highly caring adults. About ten percent of interviewees cited peer programs as beneficial to at-risk students. Link Crew (a program connecting freshmen with upper classmen to ease the middle to high school transition) was the most commonly identified program in use. Positive comments describing the power of the resulting outcomes were nearly universal among the respondents:

*"S3 gives us another tool to help those in trouble. It's another person, set of eyes, and set of data to give us more information on students and how to help them."*

*"S3 has markedly helped at-risk students. They are now connected to school."*

*“It’s created a sense of connectedness and engagement. At-risk students have a place with someone who cares about them and notices when they’re not here. People are meeting with them and keeping them connected and encouraging them to be connected.”*

*“S3 helps at-risk students connect to school and feel that they have a safer environment and feel they belong because they have consistent expectations. It helps them to organize their world and improve academically.”*

*“There’s an array of resources, support, and services for them. I don’t know what would happen to these students without S3.”*

These interview results express two critical elements. First, that they are fully aware that their referral systems have to address not just students with behavioral issues but a much wider range of at-risk students; and second, that the interventions available need to focus on strong school engagement and personal connections. Past evaluations showed that attention to building effective at-risk student support started slowly in S3 programs, but that they were functioning strongly by 2014. Data from this last interview cycle demonstrates that the S3 schools continue to support and in some cases expand their at-risk support programs.

### **Approaches Related to Policy and Rules**

School discipline policies are the documents and resulting actions that govern schools. They address many aspects of school life, but are most closely associated with preventing and intervening with behaviors that interfere with effective school life. These behaviors most typically relate to harassment, violence, bullying, theft, and many others. Findings from the previous S3 evaluations demonstrated that nearly all S3 schools had made changes to their policies and rules due to S3. Most common of these changes were a shift to more progressive discipline approaches which frequently relegates out-of-school suspension to a sanction of last resort and replaces it with other alternatives including restorative justice practices, counseling, in-house suspension, and others.

Related to these discipline policy changes were efforts to establish rules that created positive reinforcement for desirable behaviors. These approaches generally relied on developing systems to identify and reward students engaging in behaviors that contribute to a positive school climate.

This year, both parents and staff were asked questions about policies and rules. About two-thirds of both staff and parents interviewed reported changes in school rules or policies over the past four years that they believed was a result of the S3 program. Of the one-third who were unaware of any changes in school policies or rules as a result of S3 over the past four years, one-half of those (16% of respondents) said that new rules or policies were pending for possible adoption next year. The following table displays the most common rule and policy changes reported based on an open-end question.

Table 2  
Changes in School Policies/Rules as a Result of S3

Changes	Percent
<b>Discipline</b>	<b>63%</b>
<i>Suspension alternatives</i>	38%
<i>Referrals to service</i>	12%
<i>Restorative Justice</i>	11%
<b>Behavior</b>	<b>25%</b>
<b>New tardy approaches</b>	<b>25%</b>
<b>Bullying ID and prevention</b>	<b>18%</b>

About two-thirds of respondents noted discipline changes due to S3, although about 85 percent of the S3 Coordinators said their school had made changes, which is probably the more reliable source. Those findings were very consistent with the findings from 2013 when a similar question to S3 Coordinators was posed. One of the changes in suspension policies were to on-campus suspensions vs. off-campus combined with a new emphasis on changing the behaviors that caused the suspension rather than just meting out punishment. The other, less common discipline changes were referring to services instead of punishment and the adoption of restorative justice approaches. The following comments were representative of those who described the discipline changes:

*"We don't suspend as much anymore. There is a system of steps with students now. It's more spelled out and clear now. It's helped the discipline process."*

*"We looked at the system and instead of suspending right away, we have more tolerance now; we go above and beyond to help the child."*

*"We help students make better choices and decisions; it's not as punitive. We're not suspending for the same things as before like 'under the influence'. Now there's drug counseling and looking at the root cause."*

*"We have on-campus intervention: instead of suspending, students are sent to On Campus Interviewing and the teacher works with them to build character and handle issues."*

*"Students in fights go to peer mediation instead of straight to suspension, depending on the severity of the situation."*

*"Students are allowed to stay in school and work on their issues that would have gotten them suspended under the old rules."*

The obvious common theme above is the new emphasis on identifying the cause of misbehavior and making attempts to avoid the problem again. Teachers frequently were trained in positive behavior reinforcement, and they often learned to connect with their students and understand that they need to provide support until students transformed their behaviors. Almost one-quarter of respondents

described the use of Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS) prevention approaches in concert with the discipline policy changes. The following comments are representative of those made by interviewees regarding changes in policies or rules dealing with behaviors:

*“By having one school voice we were consistent in expectations and observing and responding to positive or negative issues around those expectations.”*

*“PBIS curbs referrals, expulsions, and suspensions. Rather than sending them home, students work to curb the negative attitude or behavior before lashing out and getting suspended or expelled. It’s made a huge dent in expulsions and suspensions. Students understand it and it’s transparent.”*

*“Staff better understand the reasons behind the behaviors and can work to support the underlying issues to support the students.”*

A quarter of the respondents reported new tardy policies. Tardy Sweeps were mentioned most often as the new change. Changes to bullying policies were noted by 18 percent of interviewees. Changes included anti-bullying civility contracts, disciplinary action for bullying, documentation, and plans of action or administrative changes in procedures for investigating and responding to bullying. The following comments are representative:

*“We’ve made changes on bullying, including cyber bullying. It is taken more seriously and we’ve brought light to it. It’s viewed as dangerous as it is.”*

*“Students know exactly what bullying is and isn’t.”*

*“Staff have altered interactions with students to prevent bullying”*

As noted, the findings in the current year are very similar to those from 2013 when data on rules and policies were last collected. Perhaps the most important factor in this is that schools have found the changed rules and policies to be so effective (as described in the quotes above) that no one reported moving back to the more punitive models used in the past.

### **Approaches to Family Involvement**

Parent engagement was described in the funding language as consisting of opportunities for meaningful family involvement at schools, as well as the development of strategies to help families feel welcome and supported at school. The 2014 evaluation report described the success across all S3 schools to engage families as “very modest” and eight of the 58 schools reported that they had made almost no efforts to enhance family treatment by staff. More than one half the schools in 2014 described the great difficulties they had in attempting to engage parents and families.

The 2015 telephone survey asked staff respondents to rate the extent to which the S3 program had improved parent engagement in school life. The results are shown in Table 3 on the following page.

Table 3  
The Extent that the S3 Program  
Improved Parent Engagement in School Life: Staff Responses

Rating	%
To a Very Large Extent	12%
To a Large Extent	22%
To a Moderate Extent	37%
To a Small Extent	19%
To a Very Small Extent	10%

About one-third (34%) of staff survey interviewees reported that parent engagement in school life improved with the S3 program to a “large” or “very large” extent. Slightly more (37%) said it improved to a “moderate” extent, and the remainder (29%) reported it improved “to a very small” or “small” extent. These findings from the school perspective indicate that most schools have continued in 2015 to have difficulty finding effective ways to involve parents.

The parents interviewed this year answered several questions about their experiences on campus. Parents were asked to provide a “yes” or “no” answer to a list of strategies (based on previous years’ responses) that may have been utilized by their schools to involve parents in school activities. Their responses follow.

Table 4  
Strategies Used by Schools to Involve Parents in School Activities

Strategy	% Yes
Increased level and frequency of communication from the school	93%
More outreach to parents	93%
More opportunities for parents to volunteer	81%
More parent education classes	78%
A parent liaison to support parent involvement	72%
More parent nights	72%
A Family Resource Center	63%
Other ways	84%



Nearly all parents (93%) reported that the most common strategies used by the schools to involve them in school activities were increasing the level and frequency of communication and more outreach. Most parents (81%) said there were more opportunities to volunteer at school; more parent education classes (78%); a parent liaison (72%); and more parent nights (72%). Almost two-thirds (63%) reported a Family Resource Center. Other unspecified ways to involve parents in school activities were noted by 84 percent of the parents interviewed.

Parent survey interviewees were read a list of examples of how most staff members treat them on campus. Between 96 and 99 percent of parents said “most staff make me feel welcome,” “were friendly,” “were respectful,” “had positive attitudes,” and “greeted me.” Ninety-four percent of parents said staff “offered assistance” to them. Parent survey interviewees were then asked to describe in their own words how school staff members generally treat them when they go on campus. The following comments were typical of nearly all the parents interviewed:

*“I feel welcomed and at home. They go out of their way to get the information you need. There’s been a great increase in the last three years.”*

*“They are very kind. There is more communication and more respect now.”*

*“I’m treated well. They are welcoming and acknowledge I’m there. They take time if I have an issue and listen. They take care of things if needed.”*

*“They are very friendly, welcoming and happy I’m there.”*

Parents were asked in both the 2013 and 2015 “How do staff respond to your comments and input?” The distribution of fixed-response answers is shown below.

Table 5  
Ratings of How Open Staff Are to Parents’ Comments and Input

Rating	%	%
	2015	2013
Extremely open to my comments and input	26%	29%
Very open to my comments and input	49%	56%
Moderately open to my comments and input	24%	14%
Slightly or not open to my comments and input	1%	1%

The response options were not statistically different between the years, with about three-fourths of parents saying staff were either “extremely” or “very” open with their comments and input.

Parents were asked in both the 2013 (funding year two) and in the current year, “How would you describe changes in how the school tries to involve parents in school activities over the past several years?” The distribution of fixed-response answers is shown on the following table.

Table 6  
Schools' Level of Effort to Involve Parents in School Activities

Level of Effort	% Yes	% Yes
	2015	2013
Dramatic increase in efforts to involve parents	50%	32%
Some increase in efforts to involve parents	47%	53%
Little increase in efforts to involve parents	3%	15%

The number of parents answering “dramatic increase” increased from 32 percent in 2013 to 50 percent in 2015, a significant improvement. Conversely, those answering “little increase” dropped from 15 percent in 2013 to only three percent currently.

Parents were asked to respond to the question, “Which one of the following responses best summarizes how the school works to build trust with parents?” They were provided a scale from “extremely” effective to “not at all effective.” The percentage of parents answering “slightly” or “not at all effective” dropped from ten percent in 2013 to one percent in 2015, demonstrating an improvement in trust over two years.

Table 7  
Schools' Effectiveness in Building Trust Among Parents

Rating	%	%
	2015	2013
Extremely Effective	12%	11%
Very Effective	62%	45%
Moderately Effective	25%	34%
Slightly Effective	1%	8%
Not at all Effective	0%	2%

Parents were then asked a follow-up question about trust: “How has this school built trust among parents?” The most common response offered by about 65 percent of parents was that the schools have more frequent communication, including emails, calls, newsletters, etc. Parents said these strategies kept them apprised of what was going on at school as well as if there were issues or problems with their children. The following comments provide examples of the parents’ positive comments:

*"They take all parent feedback into serious consideration and respond with swift follow-up in regards to concerns expressed, whether it's one-on-one, with students and a teacher or full-on community forums."*

*"The administration, especially the principal, has been very good the last two years: more open with communication and putting things in laymen's terms. He explains with clarity and wants parents to understand. More and more trust is being built."*

*"It's very effective. They always let us know what's happening at school, positive and negative. They offer us services that are available and if we have questions or concerns to call them."*

*"The school is concerned about the child's best interest and wants us as partners."*

*"They are always in contact with parents. If I have questions or concerns, they respond quickly. They are always supportive of things that are going on with my child or what I'm involved in."*

About 10 percent of parents felt more trusting of the school because they have seen improvements in school safety or have seen more programs/activities at the school to engage/support students. Another 10 percent of parents note the new activities for parents under S3:

*"They are inviting us to everything including more classes, are more involved with the students, and have more family nights. Reaching out has brought us closer."*

*"There are invitations to attend parent classes to understand what students' needs are. They bring in teachers and students to be better and help parents be better parents."*

*"The school offers enough activities for parents to get involved if they want to, including key workshops regarding visions that parents have for the school in general. The school takes action when parents say they are concerned about something."*

Parents were then asked how their schools could get more parents involved in school activities. The most common responses were even better communication, more activities for parents including fun nights, fundraisers, and a coffee hour with the principal, barbeques and classes for parents. Almost one-fourth of the parents interviewed felt the school was doing all it could to get more parent involvement. A few of the more explicit comments follow:

*"It's always a challenge, especially in high school, because kids are more independent. Parents are not as routinely connected to school as when the students were younger."*

*"Continue to reach out to the non-English speaking community. Take meetings to community meeting rooms in their neighborhoods."*

*"They offer educational events, such as what to expect in high school and how to deal with issues like teens pushing away from you."*

*"It's important to send a broader message through personal contact to unengaged parents (it's always the same group) at points of contact like sport events and Back to School Night. Make PERSONAL contact. Electronic and phone contact are not that great."*

*"Explore other ways to reach non English speakers."*

*"Have parent volunteers talk to others about how they can help and get involved. Having a presence is good to create sense of community and opening up participation to all."*

The findings from the various parent questions stand in great contrast to the views of the staff on the topic of parent involvement. While the staff generally felt little progress had been made with families in the past two years, the parents noted a fairly large improvement in family engagement in school activities, with 18 percent more parents saying there had been "dramatic improvements" and the

number saying there was “little increase in efforts to involve parents” dropping from 15 to 3 percent in the past two years. This and other information from the parents strongly suggests that the S3 schools have been more successful with family engagement in the past two years than they had realized.

### Current Levels of Program Implementation

Given the reality of lower S3 funding in most schools in 2015, S3 Coordinators and school administrators were asked what percentage of their S3 Program they thought was still functioning in 2014-15. Almost four-fifths of respondents said that 80 to 100 percent of their S3 program was still functioning in 2014-15. About 11 percent thought less than one-half of their S3 program was still in place. See Table 8, next page.

Table 8  
Level of S3 Program Functioning in 2014-15

Percentage of Program	%
100 percent	43%
80 percent	36%
60 percent	10%
40 percent	5%
20 percent	4%
Less than 20%	2%

When asked in an open-end question what specific program elements were the “most important” of those retained this year, the most frequent answer (over 30%) was counseling and other helping interventions. Nearly as common was adult-student (30%) or peer (15%) mentoring, with two-thirds of these respondents naming the program Link Crew.

### Program Integration

One of the assumptions of program funding was that school climate program elements would become integrated into overall school operations. Surveyed staff were asked whether they were aware of efforts to integrate S3 into other school reform or improvement efforts. Over half (60%) of staff survey interviewees reported that this had happened (some respondents said they were not in a position to know). When asked to describe this integration, interviewees most often cited how PBIS (20%) and Link Crew (17%) were integrated into their efforts:

*“The S3 Coordinator is part of PBIS and it’s integrated together. It spreads into other areas.”*

*“PBIS and S3 are integrated: PBIS has taken over things since the money has dried up with S3.”*

*“With Link Crew, we have trained the teachers, so even if they’re not paid they can include it in part of their teaching styles.”*

*“S3 helped programs we had like Link Crew. Without S3, we couldn't train. We wouldn't have seen the increases like we did. Link Crew was almost nonexistent before S3.”*

*“PLUS and Link Crew have been integrated. Now they will be ongoing programs after they were started with S3. They will be part of our culture from now on.”*

About ten percent of staff survey interviewees made more general statements such as, “S3 is a part of our school culture now.” About the same percentage reported that certain programs brought on specifically for S3 “are being supported by the district now.” Integrating S3 with LCFF/LCAP plans was also reported. A few respondents said they were aware that S3 was integrated into the schools LCAP school climate goals.

Other specific integrations were cited less commonly (7-9 percent each). Restorative justice practices were integrated to “support students and provide appropriate supports.” S3 was included in WASC accreditation plans. The on-campus activities implemented as a result of S3 “provided opportunities for students to participate in events.” It was noted that “S3 enhanced the after school program.”

Interventions were also cited as being integrated with S3; these included academic, gang, substance abuse, etc. Counseling was also mentioned: “We didn't have resources for counseling support before S3.”

Although there were no common single examples of integration, it was clear from the 2015 results that the schools have found a range of creative ways to integrate their S3 program components into ongoing school structure.

### **Factors Influencing Effective Program Implementation**

The four-year evaluation of the California S3 program has been guided by an approach that measures not just school climate approaches, but also the related “best practice” factors that implementation science shows contribute to program success. These factors were largely identified from the recent work “Implementation Research: A Synthesis of the Literature” by Fixen et al, (2005)<sup>5</sup> and formed the basis of many of the past and current interview questions. The evaluation logic was that the exploration of these factors could help explain why programs were working effectively or not. Several of these factors were also discussed to varying degrees in the California request for funding application. These factors, such as leadership support, communication, and effective training are explored for the 2015 survey respondents below.

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<sup>5</sup> Fixen, D., Naoom, S., Blase, K., Friedman, R., & Wallace, F. (2005). Implementation Research: A Synthesis of the Literature. Tampa, FL: University of South Florida, Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute, The National Implementation Research Network (FMHI Publication #231).

## Leadership Support

Research by Rogers (1983)<sup>6</sup> on implementation science identified several elements that are critical to effective program execution. One of these factors is leadership support. Rogers describes leaders who see new programs to fruition as “Idea Champions.” Champions’ primary outward behavior is enthusiasm engendered through these behaviors:

- ☐ Is a primary advocate for the importance of the project
- ☐ Works with individuals to overcome resistance
- ☐ Works to solve problems with the program
- ☐ Strives to “infect” others through their enthusiasm for the program (

As a way to measure leadership support, this year’s staff interviewees were asked to rate the enthusiasm for S3 of the S3 Coordinator, the school principal, and the district superintendent. The results for these S3 Coordinator ratings are shown on Table 9, following.

Table 9  
Staff Perspective of S3 Coordinators’ Level of Enthusiasm  
in Promoting School Climate

Rating	%
Extremely Enthusiastic	66%
Very Enthusiastic	29%
Moderately Enthusiastic	5%
Slightly Enthusiastic	0%
Not at all Enthusiastic	0%

Nearly all staff survey interviewees (95%) considered their S3 Coordinators “extremely” or “very” enthusiastic about promoting school climate. Although this question was not included in the 2014 evaluation, other data from that report indicated similar enthusiasm, which has clearly been retained into this final S3 program year. Many staff survey interviewees used words such as “Great!;” “Amazing!;” “Awesome!;” “Phenomenal!;” “Top Notch!;” and “A real Idea Champion!”<sup>7</sup> to describe their S3 Coordinators. The most common ways in which S3 expressed their enthusiasm follow, with accompanying quotes that are representative.

About one-fourth of respondents specifically noted the Coordinator’s interactions with students:

*“Relating to students to make positive changes.”*

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<sup>6</sup> Rogers, E. M. (1983). *Diffusion of Innovations* (4 ed.). New York: The Free Press.

*“Engages with as many students as possible and lets them know they have at least one person to feel safe with.”*

About 20 percent noted that the Coordinator was known to work very hard, often including putting in extra time:

*“The Coordinator prioritized this grant and made time and worked extra hours to implement this grant.”*

*“Often willing to go above and beyond what students need for help and support. Goes to any lengths to be sure they're supported.”*

Another 20 percent of staff discussed the Coordinator’s high level of communication, including check-ins, updates, written and general talk about S3:

*“Communicates by reaching out, seeking information with calls, sending written information, and inviting people to events and celebrations.”*

*“Talks about S3 a lot. It’s an everyday thing here.”*

*“Talking to parents, fellow teachers, peers, and community organizations.”*

*“Has addressed us at every staff meeting for the past three years.”*

Many additional comments described other support provided:

*“Gives teachers time to implement, and provides expertise.”*

*“Always there to help with situations. Celebrates young people and who they are.”*

*“Very supportive and does everything and goes everywhere to make sure things happen and people are on board and just gets the work done.”*

A similar question with the same answer scale was posed to both staff and parents about the enthusiasm of the school principal. The findings are shown on the following table compared to the same question posed on the 2013 staff phone survey.

Table 10  
Staff and Parents’ Perspective of School Principals’ Level of Enthusiasm  
In Promoting School Climate

Rating	%	%
	2015	2013*
Extremely Enthusiastic	54%	31%
Very Enthusiastic	36%	46%
Moderately Enthusiastic	7%	19%
Slightly Enthusiastic	3%	3%
Not at all Enthusiastic	<1%	1%

Not only were the results for the current year much stronger than in 2013 (the second year of school funding), but also the ratings are now very close to the high ratings given to the S3 Coordinators, with 90 percent of respondents describing the principals as extremely or very enthusiastic.

Respondents were asked to describe how the principal's enthusiasm was expressed. The most common answer was "being supportive" of S3 (45%). Principals "want the programs to continue" and "to make school climate better" and "to be accessible to students." About 25 percent of the interviewees volunteered that principals attended or led S3 meetings and worked to integrate S3 with other school programs. Some of the descriptions included comments such as "the principal is excited to talk about it" and "they talk a lot about it." Others stated that principals communicated their desire to improve school climate or to change school culture. There were descriptions of principals supporting S3 through one-on-one contact with staff and students and by assuring school was a safe environment. Staff members at several schools offered that their principal was far and away the primary driver of S3, even over effective and hard working S3 Coordinators.

The findings above regarding the S3 Coordinators and school principals powerfully indicate that the ratings are as strong or stronger in this current, fourth year of program implementation (again remembering that nearly all schools were operating on somewhat reduced funding in this carry-over budget year). These results lend encouragement to the question of how the programs will fare when outside funding ceases, with these results suggesting that program support is growing, not diminishing.

S3 funding is ending in 2015 and program survival will depend partly on finding funding and support for the continuation of program activities. Since some of this support may need to come from the school district, or through the flexibility that districts allow schools to internally support school climate activities, a question was added this year to assess the district superintendent's enthusiasm and support of school climate. Some respondents described instead the enthusiasm of a different district leader who they felt had more direct influence to impact the school's program. The findings are shown in the following table.

Table 11  
Staff Perspective of District Leaders' Level of Enthusiasm  
for School Climate

Rating	%
Extremely Enthusiastic	49%
Very Enthusiastic	39%
Moderately Enthusiastic	8%
Slightly Enthusiastic	3%
Not at all Enthusiastic	1%



About 80 percent of the staff interviewed felt they had enough insight to answer the question. Of these, almost 90 percent considered their district leaders “extremely” or “very” enthusiastic about promoting school climate. The most common way in which this enthusiasm was expressed included writing about school climate in newsletters or emails, or by speaking at meetings, gatherings, in one-on-one contact. About 23 percent of respondents said that district leaders attended or directly supported school S3-related activities.

About one in seven respondents said district leaders had already supported district-wide school climate programs or policies. Examples of these included policy changes regarding discipline, including implementation of restorative justice approaches. They also described the institution of the PBIS or PLUS programs. A few districts had emphasized to schools that the district was taking very seriously the requirement under the new Local Control Funding Formula plans to promote and fund school climate approaches. Combined with the very positive descriptions of school S3 Coordinators and principals, these data about district support indicate promising support for school climate approaches moving forward.

### Communicating About School Climate

All S3 grant sites were responsible for communicating the school climate message to all stakeholders. Both staff and parent survey interviewees were asked if they had read or heard any messages at school regarding improving school climate. All parents and all but a very few staff respondents noted that they had seen these school climate promotion messages. These results, which were similar to the 2014 staff findings, indicate that most schools promoted school climate in messages that parents and staff clearly remembered seeing.

In addition, staff survey interviewees were read a list of strategies for delivering positive school climate messages and asked to indicate which had been used at their school site. Their responses are displayed in the following table.

**Table 12**  
**Staff Reports of Strategies Used to Deliver Positive School Climate Messages**

Strategy	% Yes
Posters, electronic message boards, etc.	94%
Written documents to staff: newsletters, emails, policies, etc.	92%
Verbal reminders to staff at meetings or gatherings	92%
PA announcements to students and staff	85%
Information going home to parents	81%
Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)	9%
School Website	8%

The use of posters and displays, written documents, and verbal reminders were nearly universal. Over four-fifths of schools utilized the public address system and communication going home to parents. Digital social media and websites were cited by fewer than ten percent of schools as strategies for school climate promotion. This finding could be viewed as surprising given the almost universal focus by young people on social media and other internet-driven platforms, and may represent a largely untapped resource for future school climate program communication.

Parent survey interviewees were asked about the following school climate messaging strategies. Their responses are displayed in the next table.

**Table 13**  
**Parents' Recollection of School Climate Messaging**

Strategy	% Yes
Did you hear school administrators or staff discuss school safety and school climate at meetings or gatherings?	91%
Did you receive letters, newsletters, emails, or other written messages about school climate?	87%
Have you seen messages about school climate on banners, murals, signs, posters, digital message boards, etc., at the school?	81%

Nearly all parents interviewed (91%) heard school administrators or staff discuss school safety and school climate at meetings or gatherings. Nearly as many (87%) received letters, newsletters, emails, or other written messages about school climate. Slightly fewer (81%) had seen messages about school climate on banners, murals, signs, posters, digital message boards, etc., at the school.

Both parents and staff were asked to describe the content of the school climate messages they had heard or seen. The most common message topics were anti-bullying and harassment prevention messages. Parents often recalled hearing or seeing content related to the availability of programs to help students (86 percent), closely followed by how students/parents can access services (85 percent). These were also noted by staff but in somewhat smaller numbers. About one in ten staff members also mentioned communications about positive behavior interventions for students.

Staff respondents were also asked to compare the frequency and intensity of school climate messaging from last year to this year. Almost two-thirds (62%) of those who had been at the site both years reported more messaging this year than last year.

All of these results suggest that a multi-method approach to school climate messaging was adopted by most schools, with most respondents listing at least four different messaging methods. The more unusual approaches were the use of social media and school websites. This finding, combined with the other data on school climate messaging, suggests that climate improvement communication efforts continue to expand even in this lower-funded fourth program year.

### **Training and Technical Assistance for School Climate Enhancement**

Training is defined by Fixen, et al, as a process through which school staff members or community members receive information and instruction in how to engage in new behaviors. Staff survey interviewees were asked if they had personally received any training related to the S3 program in 2014-15. Thirty-seven percent said they had received training; a remarkable finding given the diminishing funding as the programs move to become integral with other school programs and self-sustaining. Teachers were the least likely staff members in the survey sample to have received training. Nearly all the S3 Coordinators and over one-half of the school leaders had been trained in a program or strategy.

The trainings attended were grouped into the following broad topics, from most frequently mentioned to least:

- Regional meetings/conferences/webinars
- Student Counseling
- Student Behavior Intervention
- Student Discipline/Justice
- Peer-to-peer Assistance
- Positive School Culture

One-half of the respondents said they had received more than one full day of training, and another 40 percent received 4-8 hours. Staff members were asked to rate the value of the training they received on scale in the following table, which also contains the 2013 responses. Ninety percent of those who attended trainings rated them “extremely” or “very” valuable, ratings that were very similar to the 2013 results. See table 14, following.

Table 14  
Staff Perception of the Value of Training They Received

Rating	%	%
	2015	2013
Extremely Valuable	57%	39%
Very Valuable	33%	45%
Moderately Valuable	8%	13%
Slightly Valuable	1%	2%
Not at all valuable	1%	1%

About one-third of the respondents made further comments regarding the training. The following comments are representative:

*“The biggest issue with S3 is there are a lot of other programs and how to incorporate it into the overall structure at school, and I received useful information to do that.”*

*“Single School Culture and PBIS were other learning tools I could use. I will apply it to my practice.”*

*“It’s hugely important that schools understand Challenge Day and Restorative Justice and how to implement them and how it creates a more positive school climate and culture.”*

*“Logistically, the S3 paperwork, how to complete it, etc., was very valuable.”*

*“The training was useful for new staff and administrators.”*

*“I use what I learned every day.”*

*“It was very real and informative and we could use it immediately on return.”*

*“The day after, I was using some techniques and got an email from a colleague and she was using them also. The thread had four attendees using what they learned.”*

About 20 percent of the staff survey interviewees appreciated the opportunity to form relationships and collaborate with attendees from their own or other sites. Some comments follow:

*“It helped us form relationships with other schools and PCs that are doing the same thing.”*

*“We were able to collaborate well.”*

*“It was very important because we get to participate with other PCs in our region and take some of their ideas to use. We share what’s working. We get to speak on what we’re doing and if it’s working or not. We get lots of ideas and programs to implement.”*

*“The collaboration with other colleagues outside of our district is very valuable.”*

*“It’s useful time to build relationships and trust among various members of our staff from clerical to para-professionals, administrators, etc. It helped people feel they were part of a team or family and thereby relate better to kids from feeling like they belonged.”*

In addition to the individual training each school or district provided, CDE provided a variety of technical assistance (TA) services available to each school. These included a S3 web site, webinars, conferences and regional meetings, and the assignment of a TA Specialist to provide personalized services, including site visits. Staff survey interviewees were asked if they had been part of any meetings or calls provided by their S3 TA Specialist in 2014-15, and 27 percent had received such assistance. They were asked to characterize the value of services they received using a scale of “extremely” valuable to “not at all valuable.” Their ratings are displayed in the following table.

Table 15  
Ratings of S3 Technical Assistance

Rating	%
Extremely Valuable	44%
Very Valuable	34%
Moderately Valuable	16%
Slightly Valuable	6%
Not at all Valuable	0%

The large majority (78%) of staff survey interviewees rated the technical assistance they received “extremely” or “very” valuable, and very few found it of slight value. When asked how these TA services could have been enhanced, over two-thirds (68%) could offer no suggestions for improvement. Some of the most common responses were:

*“None...did a great job.”*

*“None...responsive and helpful.”*

The most common suggestion to enhance services of the S3 Technical Assistance Specialists was made by three S3 Coordinators, who would have liked more meetings or site visits this year.

Sixty-one percent of the Coordinators interviewed attended a CDE-sponsored regional meeting in fall 2014. Almost two-thirds (64%) of those who attended the meeting rated the meeting’s value to their programs as “extremely” or “very” valuable, but 24 percent rated it “moderately” or “slightly valuable.”

CDE developed a S3 website for both program TA and public use ([californiaS3.wested.org](http://californiaS3.wested.org)). Forty-four percent of the staff survey interviewees reported using the site, with an average of seven visits. When asked about the value of the site, 60 percent said it was “extremely” or “very valuable”, 28 percent said “moderate”, and 12 percent said it was only “slightly” or “not at all valuable”.

In summary, a large number of staff respondents have continued to receive S3-related local training which they rated very highly. They also found CDE’s continuing TA assistance in 2015 helpful, with the direct work of the TA Specialists rated higher than the regional meetings or the S3 website.

## Using Data to Support School Climate Enhancement

The CDE had emphasized the importance of using data to support S3 in both the application and as a central part of the TA provided. The S3 schools had access to several local data sources, including student, staff, and parent surveys that were part of CDE's Cal-SCHLS system, as well as a school-level School Climate Report Card (SCRC) developed for the project.<sup>8</sup>

Staff survey interviewees were asked if they had seen the most recent SCRC in the current school year. Fifty-nine percent said they had. When asked about seeing Cal-SCHLS survey data, about 60 percent of staff had seen it this year. Parents were asked a similar question, but it asked about seeing either the SCRC or Cal-SCHLS surveys; 53 percent of the parents answered affirmatively. These findings are in accord with the 2014 findings in which only about one-half of schools had distributed these two data sources to parents or to the broader school community, suggesting that this year has not seen an increased emphasis on sharing these important school climate data sources.

However, of the staff survey interviewees who had seen the SCRC, almost 80 percent recalled important information or findings from it (parents were not asked to recall this detail). Staff survey interviewees most commonly (30%) recalled growth in all areas of their SCRC, and another 10 percent recalled improvement in only some areas of the SCRC. About one-quarter recalled school connectedness information (about half recalled improvements in this area and about half recalled that no gains were made). Almost 20 percent recalled information related to caring relationships; slightly less than half recalled increased figures and the remainder recalled a decrease. About 13 percent recalled information related to discipline. These findings strongly suggest that the staff who did see the SCRC were able to recall important details, demonstrating the power of data utilization.

## Challenges to Program Implementation

In the past evaluations of S3, several principal challenges to implementation were identified:

- Lack of staff commitment to the principles and programs of S3 (staff "buy-in")
- Finding time to implement S3 activities
- Competing priorities
- Barriers caused by the school district

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<sup>8</sup> See the 2014 S3 Evaluation Report for a more thorough discussion of Cal-SCHLS and the SCRC.

This year, staff survey interviewees were asked to what extent these challenges interfered with the S3 programs on a scale from “a very large extent” to “a very small extent”. Their responses are displayed in the following tables.

Table 16  
The Extent that Lack of Staff Buy-In Interfered with S3 Programs and Strategies  
Staff Perspective

Rating	%
To a Very Large Extent	5%
To a Large Extent	8%
To a Moderate Extent	25%
To a Small Extent	33%
To a Very Small Extent	29%

In 2013, over 60 percent of sites reported (in a somewhat different question) that some staff members were reluctant to participate in the S3 program. This year, only 13 percent of staff survey interviewees reported that lack of staff buy-in interfered to a “very large” or “large” extent. These current findings, combined with other data in this report, strongly suggest that many sites were able to overcome staff resistance by 2015.

The 2013 California S3 evaluation concluded that a substantial number of staff members charged with delivering S3 services found it challenging because of their other responsibilities.

Table 17  
Staff Survey Interviewees’ Difficulty in Finding Time for S3 Direct Services

Rating	%	%
	2015	2013
Extremely Challenging	13%	4%
Very Challenging	11%	16%
Moderately Challenging	34%	42%
Slightly Challenging	19%	20%
Not at all Challenging	23%	18%

2015 staff interviewees who reported they delivered direct S3 services were asked about the extent to which it was challenging to find the time to do so, and this is contrasted with the 2013 data in Table 17.

As in 2013, most of the 2015 staff survey interviewees found it “moderately” to “extremely” challenging to find time to deliver direct S3 services. The ratings were not statistically significantly different between 2015 and 2013. This demonstrates that this challenge was not overcome even in the fourth year of program operations.

Competing priorities was also noted as a challenge to S3 implementation in past evaluations. Schools face testing, accreditation, common core implementation pressures. In addition, the last two years have seen the advent of the new state-mandated local planning and accountability requirements. Staff were asked to what extent all these competing priorities interfered with the S3 program in 2015. See table 18, following.

Table 18  
Extent that Competing Priorities Interfered with S3

Rating	%
To a Very Large Extent	7%
To a Large Extent	13%
To a Moderate Extent	27%
To a Small Extent	27%
To a Very Small Extent	26%

Only one in five respondents said the competing priorities interfered with S3 to a “large” or “very large extent.” Although a single analogous question was not available from prior year evaluation results, the reports from the prior years made clear that competing priorities were a larger barrier to program success than suggested by the 2015 findings, indicating that progress has been made in this area.

S3 Coordinators were asked, “To what extent do you think barriers at the district level interfered with the S3 Program?” They were provided a scale from “very large” to “very small” extent. The large majority (81%) responded district staff interfered to a “small” or “very small” extent. As with competing priorities, this past barrier seem to now be a problem for only a small handful of the schools.

S3 Coordinators were also asked to rate the extent to which staff/administrator turnover or reductions affected the S3 Programs, using the same scale as above. Over half (56%) reported that their programs were affected to a “small” or “very small” extent. About one-third (34%) reported that their programs were affected by staff or administrator turnover and reductions to a “very large” or “large” extent.

Staff survey interviewees were asked if there were other challenges than those above. About 70 percent said there were no others. The following challenges were each listed by three or four staff members:

- Lack of administrator support



- Lack of resources
- Inadequate staffing
- District bureaucracy
- Sustainability

### Program Sustainability

In 2014, only about 40 percent of the schools reported that they felt they could sustain their full S3 program in 2015 with carryover funding, while most of the rest expected to run an abbreviated program with only about one-half their 2014 S3 activities. The current evaluation demonstrated that the schools did much better than this, with three-fourths of the schools running 80-100 percent of their S3 program.

The S3 program arrived at a fortuitous time in California because a new strategy for funding schools was implemented called the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). This new law requires the creation of locally developed school expenditure and specifically mentions school climate as one of eight core strategies that must be addressed. In 2014, 85 percent of the S3 administrators reported that they were aware of district efforts to address school climate in their LCAP. The 2015 survey data from administrators indicated that, of those with that knowledge, 65 percent said some S3 activities were going to be covered in their local 2016 LCAP. For the 2015 year, about 55 percent of respondents said the district had provided some funding for the continuation of S3 activities.

Staff survey interviewees were asked, “Has the district office increased its encouragement to schools [including yours] to adopt school climate approaches over the past two years or so?” The responses of those with that knowledge are displayed in the next table.

Table 19  
Level of Encouragement from District Offices  
to Adopt School Climate Approaches in the Past Two Years

Rating	%
Some increase	20%
Moderate increase	30%
Considerable increase	29%
Extensive increase	12%
No increase	6%
District office never encouraged schools to adopt school climate approaches	3%

Almost half (41%) reported an “extensive” or “considerable” increase in encouragement from district offices to adopt school climate approaches in the past two years or so. Half said there was “some” or a “moderate” increase in encouragement.

*“The district articulates a general feeling of support for S3.”*

*“The district is supporting to change the environment and make it safe.”*

*“I just see total support from the district office. They never shy away...just totally committed.”*

*“The district encourages approaches to keep students in school, engaged, and to find out why they are late or don't go to school.”*

*“We're encouraged to keep trying with students...to keep going with school climate, to put positive messages out to students, to keep trying to improve them and to get them involved.”*

Additionally, about 20 percent of staff survey interviewees specifically mentioned “district-wide” adoption of some school climate approaches (e.g., PBIS, RTI or in-school suspension); “a big push” for student involvement and engagement academically and a connectedness to school; that districts “want to make sure schools are safe and positive”; or that adopting approaches are a “focus” or “priority.”

More specific ways in which district offices provide encouragement to adopt school climate approaches are through meetings and programs (18% each). S3 “is always a subject during...meetings” and district personnel “seem supportive during meetings.” They “coordinate meetings;” “have meetings to promote school climate;” and “at meetings they have ideas for us to adopt.” Regarding programs, “they provide us resources and help us establish programs;” “tell schools to run certain programs and follow through;” “allow certain programs to come in that have an impact on school culture and positive school climate;” and “support any programs we've asked to do.”

About 23 percent of staff survey interviewees cited generally more communication from districts about adopting school climate approaches in the last few years. There has been “lots of talk” about it: “the importance of school climate;” “about approaches being ongoing to support kids;” and of “different ways to improve campuses.” There has been more communication about school climate approaches in emails, newsletters and on websites. Also, more information about approaches, including the dissemination of materials, has increased in recent years.

Other ways in which districts have encouraged school climate approaches (mentioned by about 5-10 percent each of staff survey interviewees) are:

- PBIS implementation district-wide (10%)
- Parent/community outreach (9%)
- Funding various strategies (e.g., guest speakers, programs, counselors) (9%)
- Trainings/professional development (8%)
- Creating district positions to deal with school climate (8%)
- Being more visible on campus (6%)
- Providing various resources (6%)
- LCAP priorities (5%)

Staff survey interviewees were also asked, “Have you identified any other sources of funding to sustain your S3 program? This would include services provided free of charge by outside agencies.” Of those

with that knowledge, 73 percent said they had; 28 percent said they had not. The funding source most often cited (33%) was community agencies/organizations that provided services free of charge to the school. These included services for counseling; alcohol and drug abuse; mental health; basic needs; violence prevention; after-school programming; or anti-bullying. Other funding sources commonly cited by staff survey interviewees were Title I (16%); school organizations/clubs such as PTSA, Boosters, Link Crew or PLUS (13 percent); and grants such as ASSETS (11%). Slightly less than ten percent each of interviewees cited LCAP or their district as funding sources.

## Conclusions

Although the 2013/14 evaluation demonstrated that schools made their strongest improvements in the areas of Violence, Victimization and Substance use, they reported this year that their primary efforts were in the areas of Supports and Engagement. Approaches for at-risk students improved steadily into the current year and are now generally strong systems that include identification and services addressing both behavioral issues and school adjustment concerns. Nearly all sites made policy and rule changes, most commonly in approaches to delay or avoid out of school suspension and instead focus on remediation and in some cases restorative justice approaches. While family support was identified as a weak area in the past evaluations, staff members this year reported that they had still only made modest progress in this area. Still, parents reported high levels of satisfaction in 2015, describing increased communication, positive exchanges with staff, and high levels of trust. Challenges to program implementation continued to test the schools, but in many cases evidence was present that some roadblocks had been overcome. Taken together, these findings demonstrate that most sites either maintained or even improved their programs and services in the 2014/15 school year.

Across all S3 schools, it became clear that making major changes to school culture takes time to accomplish. Building school climate is a complex endeavor that requires alterations not just in policies and programs, but also more importantly in the manner that individuals interact. This starts with school staff, where the evaluation revealed that many staff members were initially hesitant to embrace these changes and adopt a new behavioral paradigm. Although schools made progress, this barrier had not fully overcome in the fourth program year. Conversely, nearly all schools had enthusiastic “Idea Champions” who worked during the funding period to engage and motivate other staff members. Including the carry-over funding year of 2014-15, these schools had about four years to build their program, and the evaluation data establishes the clear need for three to four years of funding and support for these types of programs to achieve an acceptable level of success.

Of course, S3 funding will disappear entirely in the 2015/16 school year. Some elements such as revised policies and rules can continue at no cost. Other climate promotion approaches can also be implemented with little funding, such as those described in the Climate Connection Toolkit<sup>9</sup>. But a complete, multi-strategy climate change approach clearly requires some level of financial support and/or resource leveraging. The evaluation results indicate that most schools have investigated many possibilities to continue their programs in the coming years. Most had also leveraged assistance from

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.wested.org/resources/climate-connection-toolkit-low-and-no-cost-activities-for-cultivating-a-supportive-school-climate/>

community agencies and/or convinced their districts to provide some ongoing funding and services. By far the greatest prospect for school climate promotion in California, however, is the new school funding and local planning approach that requires some proportion of school funding to be directed to school climate. This study verified that many districts understood and were pursuing this new opportunity to support their S3 programs. Taking these various sustainability approaches together, this study provides strong evidence to indicate that many if not most of the school S3 programs will continue in full or partial form as they move into the 2015/16 school year.

These evaluation findings are in some ways remarkable because they demonstrate that even in some of the state's most challenged schools--where measured school climate was among the lowest of all 1,325 California high schools--a relatively small amount of funding combined with effective technical assistance can be expected to lead to meaningfully improved school climate in most schools.

The quote below from a staff member in an S3 school conveys the excitement and passion some individuals have developed for school climate due to the S3 program:

*"S3 has totally changed this school. We are where riots happened! Now our attendance is #1 in the district and we have the highest pass rate on the California High School Exit Examination. It's the only school on Fridays where you see a sea of students wearing t-shirts of our school colors. It's been a total transformation since I've been here! "*

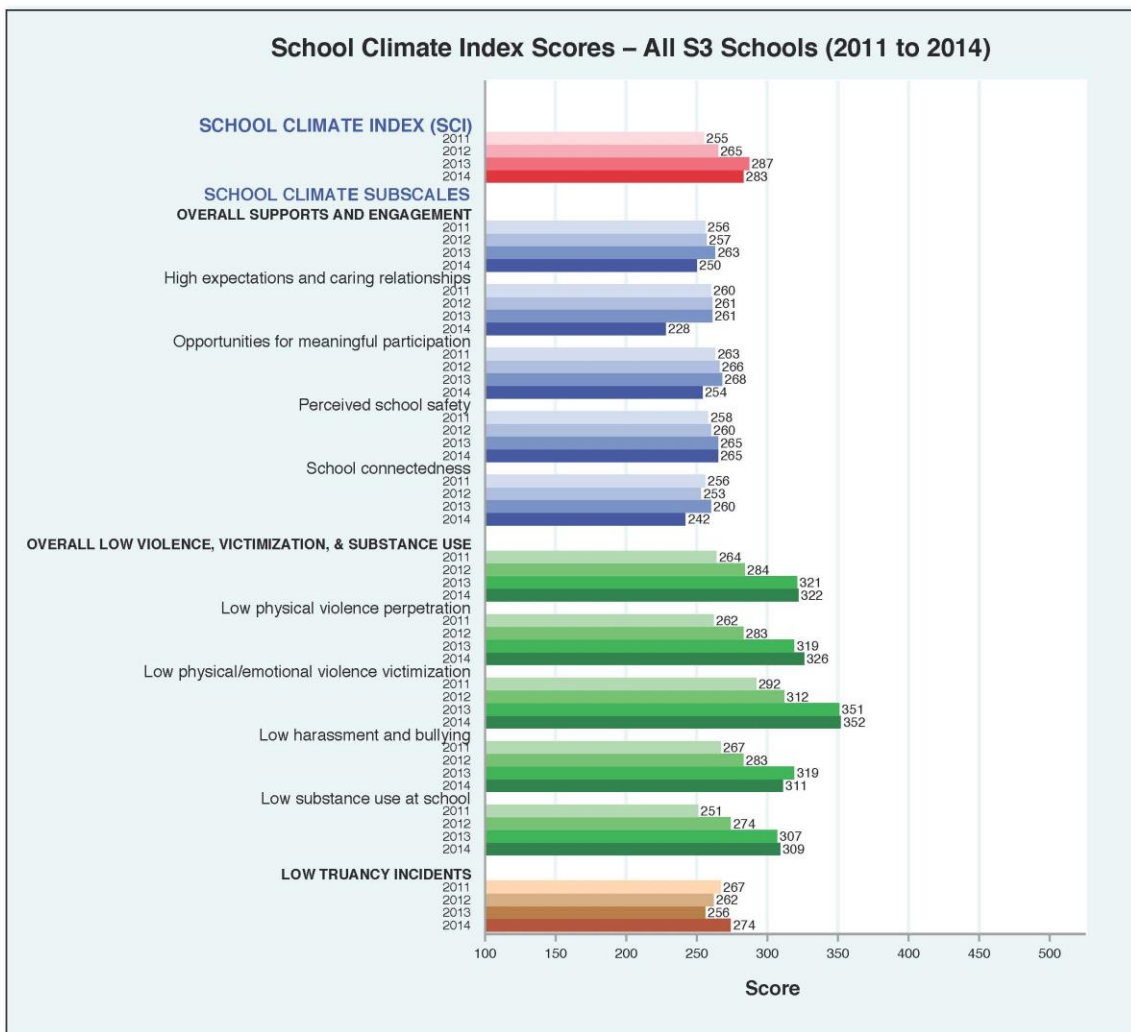
## State School Climate Report Card—Spring 2014

California Safe and Supportive (S3) High Schools

Date Prepared: 25 Nov 2014

### School Climate Index (SCI)

	2011	2012	2013	2014	Change
SCI Score	255	265	287	283	+28
SCI State Percentile	21	31	45	42	+21



Note: High values correspond to more positive school climates.