



Quarterly Newsletter

JANUARY 2013

ISSUE 2

First Order of Business...



(Names are included on page 3)

This past month has been a challenge for the nation in the wake of the devastating tragedy in Connecticut, but especially so for those of us in the education community. We sincerely hope that the return to school ran smoothly for you, as we all process and grieve in our own way.

In this quarter's newsletter, we wanted to address the issue of school safety in the way we know best- research. On page 2, we have a contribution from our School Safety Research Analyst about Arizona's Safe and

Supportive Schools (S3) grant.

We know with the New Year comes a very busy time in the school year- AZELLA testing is in full swing and AIMS testing is right around the corner.

We are busy in R&E as well, working very hard to ensure that we are ready for the accountability season while continuing our working on various research projects, evaluations, and reports. We have been presenting at many forums in an effort to keep you all apprised of existing and any new information pertaining to the A-F letter Grades and Arizona's Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Flexibility Request (also known as the Conditional Waiver). We appreciate the feedback you have given us during these presentations because it is your input that drives conversations about how schools should be held accountable and in turn helps to create an ambitious and achievable accountability system.

In our discussions with school and district leaders across the state, many questions have

arisen about some of the items for accountability that we proposed in our ESEA Flexibility Request, such as student growth targets, and the items upon which our approval was conditional. We are currently in discussions with the U.S. Department of Education and plan to present to the State Board of Education soon on how or when to incorporate student growth targets, 95% tested into our state and federal accountability system, and the increase weight of graduation rates. When we have confirmation on any of these items from our conditional waiver approval, we will be sure to send out a memo to update you in the field.

In continuing efforts to be as transparent as possible, we want to periodically give you updates on our progress on accountability changes and other research projects that may directly relate to Arizona's schools. We hope that you find this newsletter informative in that regard.

All the Best,

*Dr. Carrie L. Giovannone
Deputy Associate Superintendent of Research & Evaluation*

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

[R&E Homepage](#)

ACCOUNTABILITY UPDATES

R&E is working with the State Board of Education to modify and improve the existing A-F Letter Grade models. Details on the State Board approved changes will be provided in the Accountability Workshops in Spring 2013 and in memos. You can find all currently available information on the A-F Letter Grade models [here](#).



Dr. Yovhane L. Metcalfe has joined ADE as the Director of Accountability. She received her PhD in Education Research and Evaluation from Virginia

Commonwealth University. With

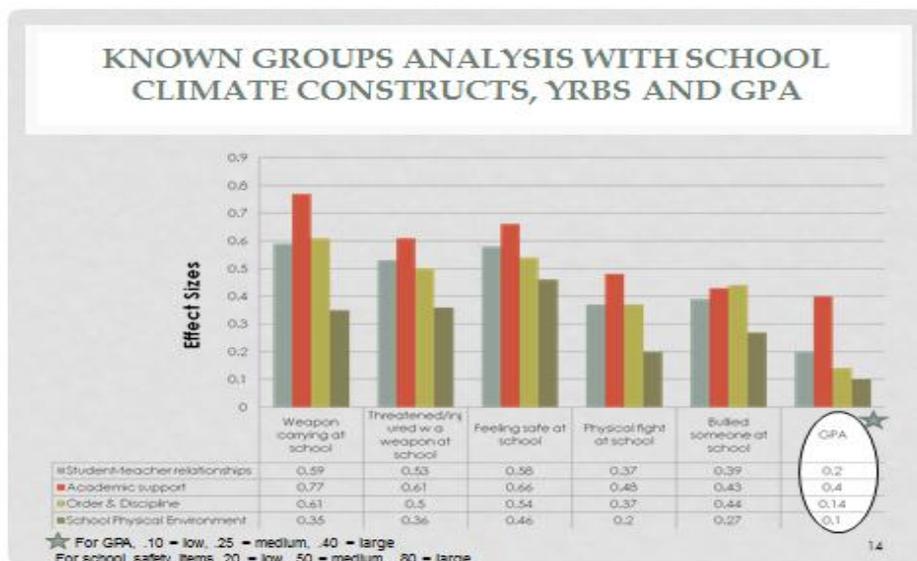
specialization in quantitative measurement, her research interests also include standardized test development and educational program evaluation. Her primary responsibility involves promoting the fairness and precision of the A-F accountability system.

CURRENT RESEARCH

The Arizona Department of Education (ADE) partners with several researchers around the country. These serve as symbiotic relationships and assist in enhancing the knowledge and importance of issues pertinent to the agency. One of the most recent partnerships has been between the School Safety and Prevention Unit and school climate researcher Dr. Keith Zullig at West Virginia University.

As part of emerging federal priorities to improve conditions for learning in public schools, the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) was awarded a competitive Safe and Supportive Schools (S3) Grant. The purpose of S3 is to improve conditions for learning through improved measurement systems to assess safety and other conditions for learning, use of research-based practices, and adequate resources. In this, the unit sought to develop a measurement system that included a valid and reliable survey instrument to gather comprehensive data for schools to assess student risk behaviors, safety and climate and in turn implement research based programs and interventions that address problems identified by their data.

Items were adopted from four of Zullig et al. (2010)¹ school climate constructs, namely: Positive Student-Teacher Relationships, Academic Support, Order and Discipline and School Physical Environment. Several prevalence and perception of risk behavior questions



were also included from the Centers of Disease Controls' valid and reliable Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) tool.

21,082 students in 14 partnering school districts were surveyed as part of the grant requirements. Besides providing school climate reports to the schools, the data was used to (i) further validate School Climate Tool and (ii) to assess the School Climate Tool against established school safety items from the YRBS.

Findings for these four School Climate constructs were consistent with previous research. Reliability, as measured by the Cronbach's alpha were high, and factor loadings for each of the items ranged from .45 to .92 suggesting that the items were highly saturated in each latent construct. Positive Student-Teacher Relationships accounted for the most variance in the model and was also highly inter-correlated with the other three school climate measures. This is not a surprising finding given that research suggests the classroom teacher is the most important figure in shaping student learning, followed closely by the school principal². The results from the known-groups validity analyses with the

YRBS school safety items suggest predictable and practically important relationships among the school climate constructs and the YRBS school safety and GPA items. Of particular importance are the rather strong relationships observed between Academic Support, student-teacher relationships and the majority of the school safety items and GPA. Students who perceived more positive student-teacher relationships, academic support, order and discipline were less likely to report carrying a weapon, threatening or injuring someone with a weapon, report being bullied or bullying someone, stealing or damaging property at school and reporting lower grades (see graph).

Besides assisting in validating the School Climate Tool for the ADE, this partnership helped to extend the preliminary study by demonstrating the relationships among the explored School Climate Constructs and established school safety items from the YRBS and a measure of self-reported GPA. The combined findings underscore the importance of social aspects of school life and the power of interpersonal relationships between teachers and students.

For more information on Arizona's S3 Grant please click [here](#).

¹ Zullig KJ, Koopman TM, Patton JM, et al. (2010). School climate: Historical review, instrument development, and school assessment. *J Psychoeduc Assess*. 2010;28:139-152.

² Wallace Foundation. *Leadership for learning: Making the connections among state, district and school policies and practices*. New York: Wallace Foundation; 2006

ELL UPDATES

R&E has posted a description of the English Language Learner (ELL) point criteria for the FY 2013 A-F Letter Grades on our website. The description is posted [here](#) under Information for Technical Users.

Please read this description carefully in order to be sure that you have every possible chance to receive your ELL points for your A-F Letter Grade.

R&E has also posted a list of students included in your school's 95% tested on AZELLA criteria for the ELL points.

The list is posted in the AZ LEARNS/Adequate Yearly Progress application of the Common Logon.

Please contact Hildie Cohen at Hildie.Cohen@azed.gov for questions.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Spring 2013

- Research and Evaluation is working with schools and LEAs to update self-reported information that appears in the School Report Cards. Questions regarding this application can be sent to ReportCards@azed.gov.
- Accountability Workshops will be held in the spring – be on the lookout for the email announcement that will contain registration information for these events.

USEFUL LINKS

A-F Letter Grades are available [here](#).

ESEA Flexibility Request details are [here](#).

R&E Customer Survey Results are located [here](#).

You can find a comprehensive step-by-step guide to our Common Logon application [here](#).



From left to right: Dr. Carrie L. Giovannone, Dr. Nick Bishop, Catherine Osborn, Dr. Rebecca Bolnick, M.H. Jayanthi, Forster Okoli, Nadia Ghani, Dr. Xiaoyuan Tan, Dr. Yating Tang, Hildie Cohen, Aleks Kadjevic

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