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Center for Law & Justice

Student Attendance and School Climate Committees:  
Updated Resources for Success

A new Georgia law requires that every county's Superior Court create a committee to improve school climate, student attendance, and school safety.<sup>1</sup> This resource page provides information about these committees and provides tools to help the committees comply with this new requirement.

### **Student Attendance and School Climate Committees**

Each county's Student Attendance and School Climate (SASC) committee must include representatives from certain county agencies and programs.<sup>2</sup> The Superior Court Chief Judge creates the committee if one does not already exist.

SASC committee members work together and with other officials, agencies, and programs to:

- Reduce the number of unexcused absences from school;
- Increase the percentage of students present to take state-mandated tests; and
- Improve School Climate.

### **What Is School Climate?**

A school's climate is the overall quality and character of school life.<sup>3</sup> In a positive school climate, students and adults:

- Feel socially, emotionally, and physically safe;
- Engage with each other and respect each other;
- Share a vision for the school and work together to make it happen—each person contributes to the operations of the school and the care of its physical environment; and
- Model and nurture attitudes that emphasize the benefits and satisfaction gained from learning.

### **Why School Climate?**

Georgia schools that improve their school climate are safer, have lower discipline incidents, and higher graduation rates. Already, over 50% of Georgia's schools use school climate programs such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). You can find out more about PBIS at <http://gadoe.org/pbis>.

### **How Do SASC Committees Support Positive School Climate?**

The law requires that SASC committees **review** county court and school practices, and **recommend** reforms that:

- Improve student achievement scores, student and teacher morale, community support, and student and teacher attendance, and
- Decrease student suspensions, expulsions, dropouts, and other negative aspects of the total school environment.

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<sup>1</sup> OCGA § 20-2-690.2. Prior to 2018, Superior Courts had to establish committees to improve student attendance. This year's law added school climate to that requirement.

<sup>2</sup> See OCGA § 20-2-690.2 for a list of required committee members, including the superior court chief judge and a juvenile court judge, law enforcement, school officials, and others.

<sup>3</sup> See National School Climate Center, *What is School Climate?*, available at <https://www.schoolclimate.org>. Watch this 17 minute video on School Climate by Georgia DOE Deputy Superintendent Garry McGiboney: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bCID1KEOaz0>

## How Can the Committee Get Started?

### First, Review School Practices and Assess the Current Climate.

SASC committee members and other community members can provide important information about each school's climate. In addition, SASC Committees should review data from these sources:

- **School Climate Star Ratings** – The Georgia Department of Education provides these at <http://www.gadoe.org/Georgia-Insights/Pages/School-Climate-Star-Rating.aspx>
  - For more insight, considering reviewing results of the **Georgia Student Health Survey 2.0** for each school at <http://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Curriculum-and-Instruction/GSHS-II/Pages/GSHS-Results.aspx> GSHS 2.0 is used as part of the calculation of the School Climate Star Ratings.
- **Out of School Suspension Rates** – Georgia Appleseed Center for Law and Justice publishes these at <https://gaappleseed.org/initiatives/toolkit/suspension-rate>.
- **Student Achievement K-12 Student Discipline Dashboard** – The Governor's office provides suspension, expulsion, and other relevant information at <https://public.gosa.ga.gov/noauth/extensions/DisciplineDASHV1/DisciplineDASHV1.html>.
- **Other Data Collected by Your School District.**

### Second, Ask the Right Questions & Recommend Reforms

What is your county already doing to improve school climate? Ask SASC committee members about your county's:

- School climate plans and techniques (including, PBIS or social emotional learning)
- School safety plans
- Academic and behavioral interventions
- Mental health or trauma services for children.

Ask your colleagues in other counties the same questions. Clayton, Bibb, Fulton, and Chatham and other counties have developed innovative school climate programs that meet their local needs.<sup>4</sup> They have resources that they can share. In addition, Georgia Appleseed can provide you with information about various models and methods to improve school climate. Contact us at [info@gaappleseed.org](mailto:info@gaappleseed.org) or visit us at <https://gaappleseed.org>.

Then, develop the recommendations that work for your county, and put them into **action!**

Learn more at [www.GaAppleseed.org](http://www.GaAppleseed.org), or [www.gadoe.org](http://www.gadoe.org)

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<sup>4</sup> E.g., see Clayton's pathways guide at [http://www.ncjfcj.org/sites/default/files/NCJFCJ\\_SchoolPathwaysGuide\\_Final2.pdf](http://www.ncjfcj.org/sites/default/files/NCJFCJ_SchoolPathwaysGuide_Final2.pdf), Bibb's school justice partnership at <http://www.maconbibb.us/school-justice-partnership-signed/>, and Chatham's multi-agency resource center at <https://www.savannahnow.com/news/20180514/city-county-collaborate-to-divert-savannahs-youth-from-criminal-justice-system>.