

Jenna Hewitt King
Senate Education Committee
Testimony Delivered in support of Senate Bill 699
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Good morning, Chair Leyva and senators. My name is Jenna Hewitt King and my pronouns are she/her/hers. I am an English teacher at Amador Valley High School in Pleasanton Unified School District in Senator Glazer's district, and a Teach Plus California Policy Fellow.

School climate is something I've thought a lot about, especially working in a district whose demographics are growing more diverse every year. This year especially, students have expressed feeling less connected to school than ever before. I've tried hard to mitigate the impacts of remote learning by building community and checking in on my students' well-being, but the work of school climate cannot be done only by individual teachers. And as I've transitioned back to a partial in-person model, the pressure to do this work feels heavier.

This school year I was invited to serve on a district committee that looks at the areas in which the state has determined there are inequitable experiences. Based on my district's indicators, we have set goals to respond to the disproportionate number of Black students being disciplined and of Hispanic/Latinx students being placed in Special Education programs. This process has already brought to light how impactful statewide indicators like these can be.

On the other hand, my district has not done this same intentional work in response to school climate data. Our recent but pre-pandemic California Healthy Schools Survey data shows that the amount of students in our district that felt a sense of "school connectedness" has dropped since 2018 an average of 5% across grade levels. Notably, that percentage difference rises to a 13% drop for Hispanic/Latinx students and a 29% drop for Black students. Our district's school climate data also show similar patterns when looking at school safety.

We know that the impacts of the pandemic and the national reckoning with our racist systems have exacerbated a lot of inequities between our students, particularly impacting youth of color and especially at segregated schools. As a teacher, I'm worried not just about this Spring, but about what the next couple of years of healing looks like in our schools.

SB 699 would make clear that school climate is a priority on equal footing with other indicators, like academic achievement and discipline data. The committee I am serving on this year has been a great model for what these systems of accountability could look like, and I would like to see more support in responding to school climate with the same attention.

I urge you to pass SB 699 to ensure that statewide indicators for school climate be a part of the California Dashboard. Our students deserve to feel confident that the policies and systems in place are supporting programs to enhance and maintain safe and affirming environments for all.