



Office of the State
Superintendent of Education



OSSE SCHOOL CLIMATE

Enhancement Microgrant

LEARNING BRIEF



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), in partnership with Education Forward DC (Ed Forward DC) and Flamboyan Foundation, provided DC schools participating in the 2023-24 OSSE School Climate and Culture Advisory Cohort an opportunity to apply for the OSSE School Climate Enhancement Microgrant. The Advisory Cohort consisted of 16 local education agencies (LEAs), which included 160 schools. These LEAs committed to participating in the 2023-24 School Climate Survey prior to the citywide administration and provided valuable feedback to OSSE. Schools within the cohort had the opportunity to apply for the microgrant to build the school's capacity to utilize and respond to the spring 2024 School Culture and Climate survey results.

Specifically, select Advisory Cohort DC public and public charter schools received up to \$10,000 to:

- Support school staff in understanding, reflecting, and acting on data.
- Develop and launch engagement opportunities with specific stakeholders (teachers, students, and caregivers) in response to survey trends and patterns.
- Develop and implement interventions, resources, and/or systems responding to survey trends and patterns.

This brief outlines how the awarded schools used the funds to support and enhance their initiatives. Specifically, it highlights the goals and strategies of awarded microgrant schools; identifies key insights; and provides recommendations to all DC LEAs administering the 2025 DC Survey About Your School (DC SAYS). Notably, while many schools have reported measurable impacts, some schools were still in the process of implementing their programs when this report was written. Therefore, this report is a snapshot of insights based on available data and ongoing efforts.

BACKGROUND

PURPOSE

The OSSE School Climate Enhancement Microgrant aimed to empower schools to leverage survey data by:

- Equipping staff to analyze and act on survey findings.
- Engaging stakeholders (students, caregivers, and staff) to co-design climate solutions.
- Developing resources and interventions to improve equity, Social Emotional Learning (SEL), and family engagement.

TIMELINE

June 18, 2024: Microgrant application opened.



July 9, 2024: Microgrant application closed.



July 19, 2024: Schools notified of awards.



Sept. 23, 2024: A mid-cycle pulse check survey was administered to assess progress.



Nov. 13–27, 2024: Closeout surveys and interviews were used to assess progress.



Dec. 6, 2024: Participating schools shared lessons learned with OSSE and other awardees.



MICROGRANT APPLICATION



Raymond Elementary School



Columbia Heights Education Campus

School climate survey data is designed to provide LEAs with a critical tool to bolster the District's school and community support and to inform the public with data displayed on the DC School Report Card. OSSE partnered with Panorama Education to design, administer, and report on the School Climate Survey. For the pilot implementation, OSSE invited all DC LEAs to participate in the Advisory Cohort to give feedback on the 2024 School Climate Survey, design, implementation, and support.

Between June 18, 2024, and July 9, 2024, OSSE received 69 applications for this microgrant from schools representing 11 DC LEAs. All schools that submitted applications were active members of the 2023-24 Advisory Cohort within District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) or a public charter school (PCS) LEA.

OSSE reviewed and scored each application against a rubric, which included priority points for high schools, bilingual schools, Montessori schools, adult schools, and schools serving a large percentage of economically disadvantaged students to ensure OSSE had participation from schools that reflected the unique and varied educational landscape in DC. The final scores resulted in the rank order, and the top-ranked schools received the award.

SCHOOL OVERVIEW

The table below highlights the 19 microgrant schools, the school ward, school type, and focus population for the microgrant.

SCHOOL NAME	WARD	SCHOOL TYPE	FOCUS POPULATION
Academy of Hope Adult PCS	5, 8	Charter School, Adult Education School	Students
Brookland Middle School	5	DCPS, Middle School	Students
Capital City PCS – High School	4	Charter School, High School	Teachers/Staff
Cardozo Education Campus	1	DCPS, Middle and High School	Students
Columbia Heights Education Campus	1	DCPS, Middle and High School	Students
District of Columbia International PCS	4	Charter School, Bilingual Middle, and High School focused on Spanish, French, and Chinese	Teachers/Staff
Friendship Online PCS	Virtual	Charter School, Virtual Elementary School	Teachers/Staff and Students
Friendship PCS – Collegiate Academy HS	7	Charter School, High School	Teachers/Staff and Students
Friendship PCS – Technology Preparatory Academy HS	8	Charter School, High School	Teachers/Staff and Students
John Lewis Elementary School	4	DCPS, Elementary School	Students
Lorraine H. Whitlock Elementary School	7	DCPS, Elementary School	Caregivers
Maya Angelou Academy at YSC	5	Charter School, Middle, and High School	Teachers/Staff
Maya Angelou PCS High School	7	Charter School, High School	Teachers/Staff and Caregivers
McKinley Technology High School	5	DCPS, High School	Students
Powell Bilingual Elementary School	4	DCPS, Bilingual Elementary School focused on Spanish and English	Students
Raymond Elementary School	4	DCPS, Elementary School	Students and Caregivers
Sela PCS	4	Public Charter School, Elementary Bilingual School focused on Hebrew and English	Teachers/Staff
Stanton Elementary School	8	DCPS, Elementary School	Teachers/Staff and Caregivers
Washington Yu Ying PCS	5	Public Charter School, Elementary Bilingual School focused on Chinese and English	Caregivers

MICROGRANT ACTIVITIES

Every participating school used the 2024 School Climate Survey results to create the goals and objectives that guided their activities. Schools received up to \$10,000 to implement initiatives informed by data from the 2024 School Climate Survey. The table below displays the exact amount received by each school. The funding was strategically allocated across various initiatives to improve school climate, SEL, family engagement, and equity.

SCHOOL NAME	AWARD AMOUNT
Academy of Hope Adult PCS	\$5,000
Brookland MS	\$10,000
Capital City PCS – HS	\$5,170
Cardozo EC	\$10,000
Columbia Heights EC	\$3,000
District of Columbia International PCS	\$10,000
Friendship Online PCS	\$10,000
Friendship PCS – Collegiate Academy HS	\$10,000
Friendship PCS – Technology Preparatory Academy HS	\$10,000
John Lewis ES	\$10,000
Lorraine H. Whitlock ES	\$9,750
Maya Angelou Academy at Youth Services Center (DYRS)	\$4,050
Maya Angelou PCS HS	\$4,050
McKinley Technology HS	\$5,000
Powell Bilingual ES	\$3,890
Raymond ES	\$10,000
Sela PCS	\$8,903
Stanton ES	\$10,000
Washington Yu Ying PCS	\$10,000

One of the strengths of the microgrant was its flexibility, allowing school leaders to respond to emergent needs and adapt their plans. The participating schools focused on the following activities:

- 1. Data-driven continuous improvement:** Establishing regular feedback loops, measurable goals, and tools (such as dashboards) to ensure strategies remain relevant and responsive to evolving needs.
 - **Cardozo EC** and **District of Columbia International PCS** integrated actions from the School Climate Survey into their strategic plan to help ensure leadership buy-in and support all stakeholders in actively using data to track progress toward these objectives.
 - **Academy of Hope Adult PCS** developed a follow-up end-of-course survey to measure continuous progress on two targeted metrics: safety and mental wellness.
 - **Capital City PCS – HS, Academy of Hope Adult PCS, Friendship PCS – Collegiate Academy HS, Maya Angelou PCS HS, and Maya Angelou Academy at YSC** collaborated with consultants to analyze and implement findings.
 - **District of Columbia International PCS** is developing a data dashboard to further investigate data trends for students who answered less favorably on the Belonging section of the survey.
 - **Maya Angelou PCS HS** and **Maya Angelou Academy at YSC** connected their student information system to other school-wide systems to ensure data triangulation and assess to students' holistic needs.
 - **Powell ES** and **Washington Yu Ying PCS** conducted caregiver and student focus groups to examine persistent data gaps more deeply.

2. Targeted programs that address an immediate need: Addressing disparities for specific student populations based on data insights to create a more inclusive environment where all students and families feel valued and connected.

- **John Lewis ES, Lorraine H. Whitlock ES, and Powell ES** provided structured opportunities during the school day to strengthen teacher-student relationships and foster a supportive learning environment.
- **Stanton ES** increased the visibility of the mental health team, prioritized safety, and mental wellness activities schoolwide. The team started the Building the Capacity of Our Community series and provided parents and staff with the tools and knowledge to support students' emotional and mental well-being.
- **Friendship Online PCS and McKinley Technology HS** created engagement opportunities to strengthen relationships between students, teachers, and caregivers.
- **Cardozo EC, Columbia Heights EC, John Lewis ES, Friendship PCS - Technology Preparatory Academy HS, and Stanton ES** created student celebrations and wellness incentives, including rewards for attendance, academic achievements, and behavior.
- **Friendship PCS - Technology Preparatory Academy HS'** lead teachers attended and are preparing to conduct train-the-trainer workshops based on a professional learning institute, where they observed classes and participated in dynamic workshops that taught them how to ignite a passion for learning, provide meaningful support, encourage academic excellence, foster authentic relationships, and ensure a climate and culture where all students and staff thrive.
- **McKinley Technology HS** pivoted from its original plan to provide one-on-one support and build relationships between students and teachers, and instead partnered with a vendor in response to an unexpected surge of physical altercations involving female students. This shift toward a conflict resolution program also aimed to reduce additional workload on staff.

- **Raymond ES** created engagement opportunities for an influx of new students and caregivers as a neighboring school is being renovated.
- 3. Equity-centered activities:** Addressing school culture and climate disparities to foster inclusivity across all demographics.
- **Powell ES** started student groups due to caregiver and student feedback.
 - **John Lewis ES, Powell ES, and Raymond ES** created culturally relevant programs for families.
 - **Washington Yu Ying PCS** partnered with a vendor to build capacity for staff and caregivers to develop an equity vision statement and build an infrastructure to ensure equity work is sustained. The school also worked with an organization that hosted a series of Equity Salons with various stakeholders to foster conversations around equity, belonging, and engagement.
- 4. SEL Implementation and Integration:** Introducing a new SEL curriculum or SEL program to create shared understanding and excitement among staff.
- **Sela PCS** replaced its outdated SEL curriculum with a new curriculum and training to increase student engagement in response to teacher feedback.
 - **Stanton ES** purchased a new SEL program to reduce disruptive behaviors, with a particular focus on students in need of targeted behavioral interventions.
 - **Columbia Heights EC, John Lewis ES, and Lorraine H. Whitlock ES** integrated SEL programming into daily school activities with routines such as *Strong Start* greetings and regular mindfulness exercises.
 - **Maya Angelou Academy at YSC** started adult SEL training to help adults in the facility maintain emotional regulation. Additionally, leadership started promoting self-care for all adults, aiming to enhance their ability to create an enriching learning environment for the students in the temporary secure detention facility.



SCHOOL REFLECTIONS AND BEST PRACTICES FOR DC SAYS IMPLEMENTATION

The participating schools developed actionable goals for the 2024-25 school year based on the data from their 2023-24 survey results. Most schools (15) had previously administered the 2024 School Climate Survey. Below is the guidance microgrant schools shared for other DC schools administering the DC SAYS for the first time in spring 2025.

Preparation and Planning

- **Create a Survey Team:** Establish a cross-departmental team that reviews the survey questions in advance, develops survey administration procedures, and designs results-based action.
- **Define Purpose:** Communicate the purpose of the survey to students, staff, and caregivers, emphasizing the value of their feedback and how it will be used.
- **Survey Rollout:** Schedule specific days and times for students and staff to take the survey. Set up an area for parents to take the survey. Ensure all stakeholders (parents, students, and caregivers) know the schedule and location in advance.
- **Access Codes:** Prepare a detailed plan for disseminating access codes, especially if using hard copies, as this process may take longer than anticipated.

Implementation

- **Support Participation:** Incentivize survey completion for all stakeholders by sharing and celebrating daily completion rates.
- **Clarify for Students:** Help students understand the questions by providing examples and support, particularly for younger students or those with reading and comprehension challenges.
- **Create a Positive Environment:** Capitalize on teachers with strong classroom management skills to oversee survey administration sessions and minimize distractions to ensure students are focused.

Post Survey Data Use

- **Disaggregate Data:** Use disaggregated data to gain insights across all grade levels, demographics, and gender to identify disparities.
- **Strategic Planning:** Leverage the results to create a holistic plan that fosters a sense of belonging and improves the school climate.
- **Communicate Findings:** Share insights and action plans with all stakeholders (staff, parents, and students) to build trust and encourage ongoing engagement.



We created a culture of collaboration by involving staff, students, and families in regular planning, data review, learning sessions, and events.

- Lorraine H. Whitlock ES

LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The OSSE School Climate Enhancement Microgrant provided participating schools with several lessons highlighting the importance of adaptability, data-driven decision-making, stakeholder inclusion, and professional development in creating meaningful, sustainable changes within school communities. These strategies offer valuable insights for other schools within DC looking to strengthen their culture and achieve long-term success in enhancing both academic and social outcomes. Holistically, learnings and recommendations from the microgrants can be grouped into the following recommendations:

1. Prioritize School Climate

- Align the school climate initiatives with the school's strategic plan, ensuring it is central to all school initiatives.
- Actively promote, model, and maintain a positive school culture by fostering an environment where all students, staff, and caregivers feel valued, respected, and supported.

2. Budget

- Dedicate resources and set a well-defined budget for SEL initiatives.
- Align activities with school-wide goals and remain flexible with budgets to account for unexpected changes.

3. Stakeholder Engagement

- Use family-focused events and multiple engagement channels (in-person, virtual, email, etc.) to increase participation and strengthen school-community ties.
- Ensure that events reflect cultural diversity and promote inclusivity to increase engagement.
- Involve caregivers, students, and staff early in planning and decision-making.

4. Equity and Inclusivity

- Equity should be central to all initiatives to ensure a supportive environment for all stakeholders.
- Design initiatives that specifically address gaps identified through data, focusing on supporting historically marginalized groups.
- Prioritize inclusivity by making programs accessible to all families, including those in need of language accommodations.

The microgrant funds have supported a more intentional focus on equity within our community and a collaborative approach to achieving it.

- Washington Yu Ying PCS

5. Planning and Timing

- Start planning early (e.g., in the summer) to align initiatives with the academic year and avoid delays.
- Plan initiatives well in advance with realistic timelines and build flexibility to adapt to unforeseen challenges.

6. Flexibility and Adaptability

- Plan for flexibility in logistics, budgeting, and timelines to adapt to changing circumstances (e.g., using non-perishable snacks instead of catering).
- Be proactive in developing alternative plans and adjust strategies as needed to meet evolving needs.

7. Professional Development (PD)

- Provide ongoing PD focused on data literacy to help staff understand and act on school climate data.
- Invest in culturally responsive PD for all staff to understand how to respond to areas of opportunity across indicators given their unique school context.

Staff learned how to utilize the School Climate Data Reports to inform school culture initiatives.

- Capital City PCS - High School

8. Data-Driven Decision-Making

- Leverage School Climate Survey data to identify community needs, shape initiatives, and track progress.
- Ensure data guides program design, decision-making, and action.
- Engage stakeholders in analyzing data to ensure initiatives are aligned with those needs.

9. Monitoring and Measuring Success

- Track the success of initiatives through continuous feedback and event attendance.
- Use regular surveys and other feedback tools to monitor the effectiveness of initiatives and adjust as needed.

10. Celebrating Progress

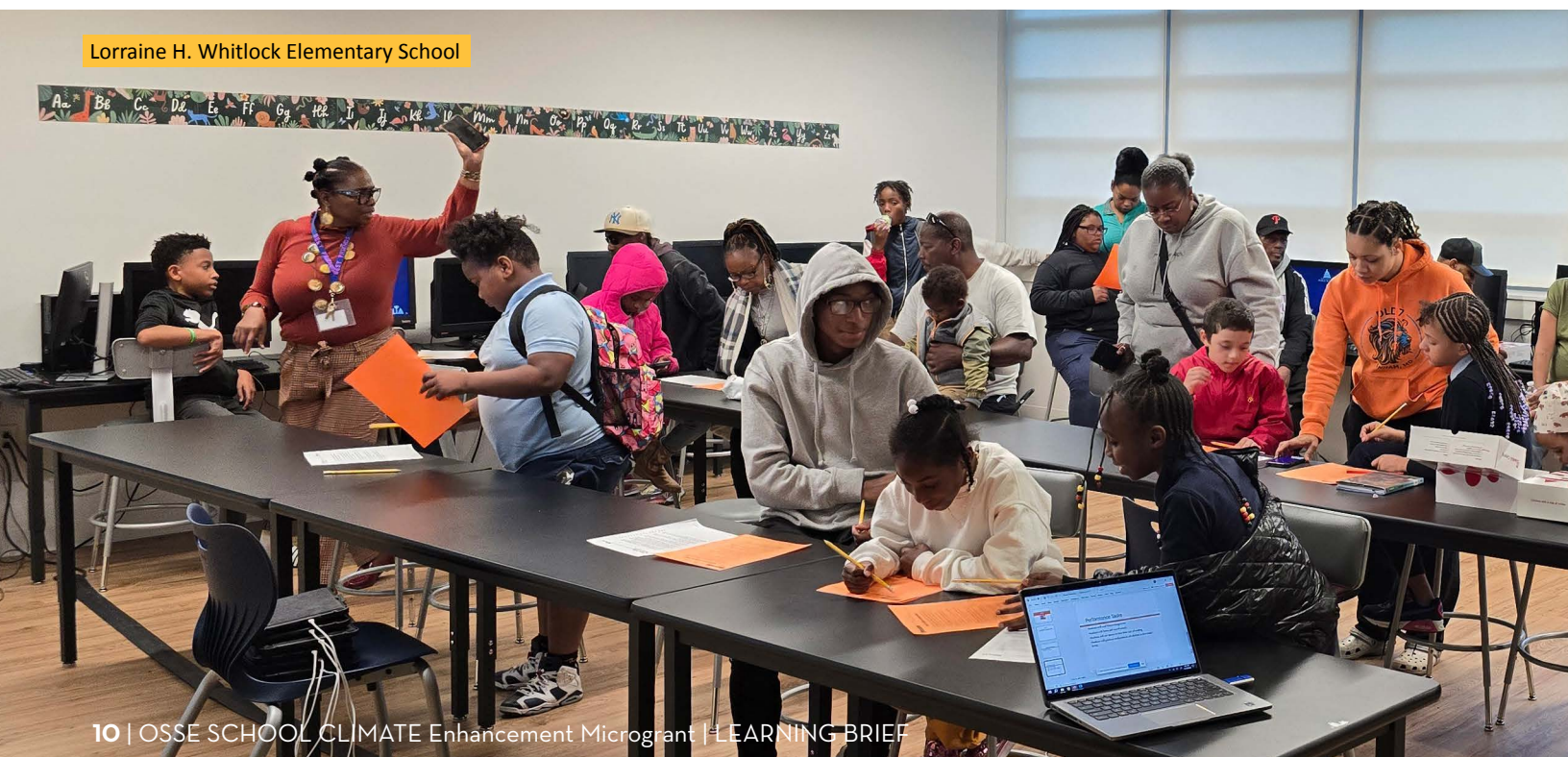
- Regularly recognize and celebrate even small wins to sustain enthusiasm and support for initiatives.
- Celebrate progress to help build a positive school culture and keep stakeholders motivated.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the OSSE School Climate Enhancement Microgrant provided valuable insights into how targeted, data-informed interventions can address school climate and equity. Careful attention to the results of the School Climate Survey allowed school leaders to identify opportunities to improve school climate. In response to those insights, schools developed follow-up surveys on safety and wellness and collaborated with consultants to analyze data trends and develop targeted initiatives. Initiatives focused on strengthening teacher-student relationships, increasing mental health support, and offering community-building programs. Equity-centered activities, such as student community groups and culturally relevant programs, fostered inclusivity, while new SEL curricula addressed students' emotional needs.

This spring, all schools across the district will implement the DC SAYS and participating microgrant schools may be able to see evidence of impacts from their microgrant projects. While it can be challenging to determine the precise impacts of specific initiatives conversations with school leaders suggest confidence that the microgrant allowed them to prioritize and influence school climate. The microgrant's short duration and the self-reported insights suggest that ongoing efforts are necessary to bolster impact. Sustained and universal application of the School Climate Survey may make it possible, over time, to evaluate and understand the necessary components of successful efforts to improve school climate. Scaling these initiatives citywide could offer more supportive environments for students and families, but making these efforts a priority by ensuring there is a budget for sustainability and a school-wide plan will be crucial for long-term success. OSSE looks forward to leveraging these lessons learned for the DC SAYS in the spring of 2025.

Lorraine H. Whitlock Elementary School





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