



# NEWSLETTER

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## Latest News from the Director



As the new school year begins, I find myself thinking about the mental-health challenges that too many of our youth are facing, and that are evident in the large increases in chronic absenteeism seen all over the country since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Many stories have been written about harms to youth mental health—from pandemic-related isolation, from social media, and from addiction to screens—but less attention has been paid to the ways that schools themselves sometimes contribute to students' mental-health challenges. I had to start wondering about that when I saw the results of our new study of changes in school climate over the last few years in a small sample

of Pennsylvania schools (more below). To our surprise, both students and teachers agreed that school climate improved during the year of hybrid and remote instruction (2020/21), before reverting to lower levels when full in-person instruction resumed the next year. More specifically, students perceived better social-emotional wellness in the year of remote and hybrid instruction than before or after. Although it is possible that this finding was a fluke, a couple of other studies,<sup>1,2</sup> both national in scope, suggest that it might be real: they found that bullying (in person and online) increased when school buildings reopened, and that youth suicide rates likewise increased. Collectively, these three studies suggest that there is considerable room for improvement in making schools fully welcoming and supportive. I hope that all of our youth find safety and support as they return to school this fall.

**Brian Gill**  
Director, REL Mid-Atlantic

<sup>1</sup> Vaillancourt, T., Brittain, H., Krygsman, A., Farrell, A. H., Landon, S., & Pepler, D. (2021). School bullying before and during COVID-19: Results from a population-based randomized design. *Aggressive Behavior*, 47(5), 557–569.

<sup>2</sup> Hansen, B., Sabia, J. J., & Schaller, J. (2022). In-person schooling and youth suicide: Evidence from school calendars and pandemic school closures (No. w30795). National Bureau of Economic Research. <https://www.nber.org/papers/w30795>

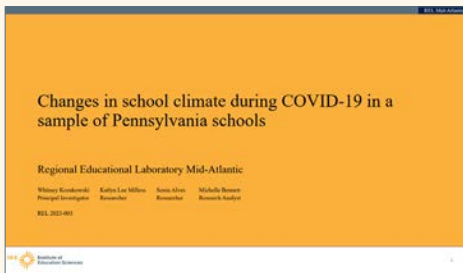
# Surprising Results in a New REL Mid-Atlantic School Climate Study

A new study from our [partnership](#) with the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) assessed how school climate changed during the pandemic in a sample of Pennsylvania schools. Working with PDE's Office for Save Schools, we used data from the state's voluntary school climate survey and found that both students and teachers reported more positive perceptions of school climate during the year of hybrid and remote learning (2020/21). Learn more:



## Some schools saw their climate improve during remote and hybrid instruction. What should we make of that?

Is it possible that students reported a more positive school climate because they experienced less bullying and extreme stress compared to when they were in the building? REL staff expand on the study findings in this new [blog post](#) and offer considerations for educators and policymakers.



## Changes in school climate during COVID-19 in a sample of Pennsylvania schools

Get the [full study report](#) and learn more about REL Mid-Atlantic's partnership with PDE, the specific research questions examined, and more detailed findings.

### Get the highlights!

Key findings from the study and brief information on the school climate survey domains are presented in this [supplemental fact sheet](#).

## Collaborative REL Resources

All ten RELs work together to conceptualize and design comprehensive products that leverage the collective research and evidence generated across all programs. Here are four of the most recent products from our collaborative efforts:

- [Developing Strong Foundational Literacy Skills in Children—It Takes All of Us!](#)  
An infographic framework that provides links to resources on foundational literacy for communities, state and district leaders, families and caregivers, and teachers and school leaders.
- [Outcomes, Impacts, and Processes: A Framework for Understanding School Performance](#)  
A general framework for organizing the various ways to measure school performance that can help states and districts implement improved measurement strategies for both diagnostic and accountability purposes.
- [What is Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy?](#)  
Key elements, considerations, and practice examples that are broadly applicable to schools and districts implementing or seeking to implement culturally sustaining pedagogy.
- [Leveraging Technology for Student Success](#)  
A framework designed to assist district leaders in making informed decisions around the adoption and effective use of technology in their schools.

## Out and About



### Discussing Teacher Diversity at the NCES STATS-DC Data Conference

REL staff and partners from the New Jersey Department of Education, Jackie Peng, Saroja Warner, and Eli Trenado (left to right), connected with state and local education agencies at last month's NCES STATS-DC Data Conference. Using insights from our partnership, they shared data collection strategies for districts looking to build a more diverse educator workforce. Presentation materials are available on the [REL website](#).

### Sharing How to Use Bayesian Stabilization to Reconcile Accuracy and Equity in School Accountability at the 2023 Society for Research on Education Effectiveness (SREE) Conference

REL team member Lauren Forrow is attending this week's SREE event to share a [REL Mid-Atlantic report](#), using data provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. This report demonstrates how Bayesian stabilization allows more students to be included in subgroup accountability measures—consistent with a commitment to equity—and reduces the risks of misidentifying schools for improvement.

## Connect with Us



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