



Building Healthy Communities

Measuring School Climate in Southwest Merced /East Merced County

October 2014



CHILDREN NOW

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Introduction

On July 1, 2013, Governor Jerry Brown signed into law the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), the most comprehensive reform to California's school funding system in 40 years. Under LCFF, every district must develop a Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP). The LCAP is a three-year plan which is updated annually and includes measurable goals for student outcomes corresponding to eight priority areas.

School climate is one of the eight priority areas that must be addressed within each district's LCAP. While there is no single definition of school climate, measures of school climate can include "(a) order, safety, and discipline; (b) academic supports; (c) personal and social relationships; (d) maintenance of school facilities; and (e) school connectedness."¹

Research has shown that students who attend schools with a more positive school climate do better academically.² One proven way of improving school climate is to reduce suspensions and expulsions. Effective alternatives to punitive discipline strategies include Restorative Justice (RJ) and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) models. At their core, these models encourage respect and strengthen relationships while also holding students accountable for their actions. Implementing such alternative approaches to school discipline can lead to lower suspension and expulsion rates and improve school climate, attendance, and student achievement.³



In contrast, punitive school discipline practices negatively impact children. For example, students who have been expelled or suspended are six times more likely to repeat a grade, five times more likely to drop out of high school, and three times more likely to have contact with the juvenile justice system within one year of the original incident.⁴

Schools can suspend or expel students for a number of reasons. "Willful defiance" – intentional disobedience of or disrespect toward an adult or authority figure – is one of the reasons schools cite when suspending or expelling students. When students are suspended or expelled for willful defiance, they miss out on valuable instruction time for minor offenses that can include behaviors such as eye rolling, coming to class late, or talking back to a teacher.⁵ And instead of reducing disruptive behaviors, punitive discipline often exacerbates student misconduct.

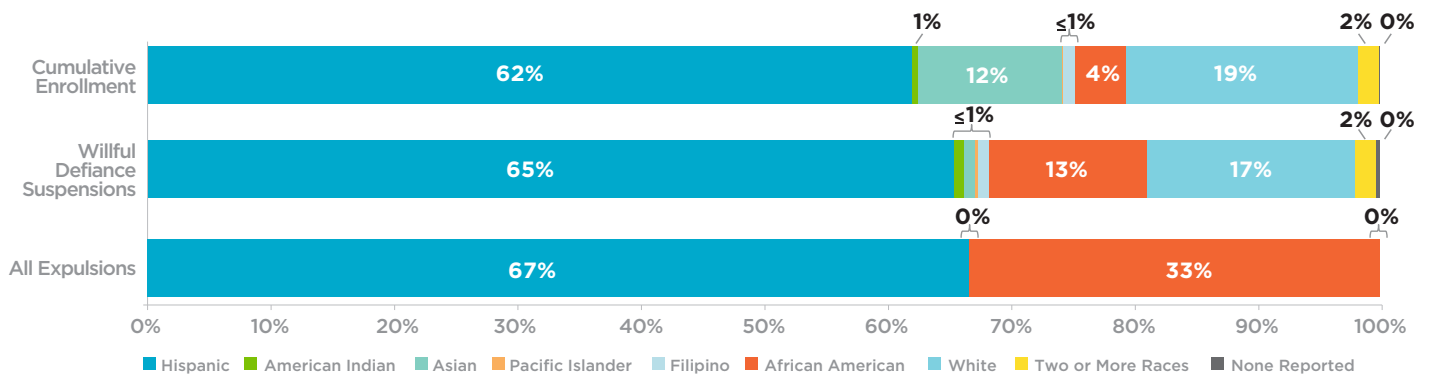
Punitive school discipline policies also disproportionately affect historically disadvantaged students. Evidence indicates that English language learners, students with disabilities, and African American students are suspended and expelled at higher rates than other students. In fact, African American students can be up to three times more likely to be suspended than their peers.⁶

Under the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), districts and communities are coming together to foster educational gains among low-income students, English language learners and foster youth. To support local engagement within Merced, the following analysis uses school discipline and survey data to measure school climate. More specifically, the analysis focuses on measuring school climate among high schools that are part of Southwest Merced/East Merced County Building Healthy Communities (BHC), The California Endowment’s ten-year plan to support healthier communities.⁷ To better understand the relative performance of high schools within the BHC, state- and district-level data is also provided.

School Climate as Measured by Suspensions and Expulsions

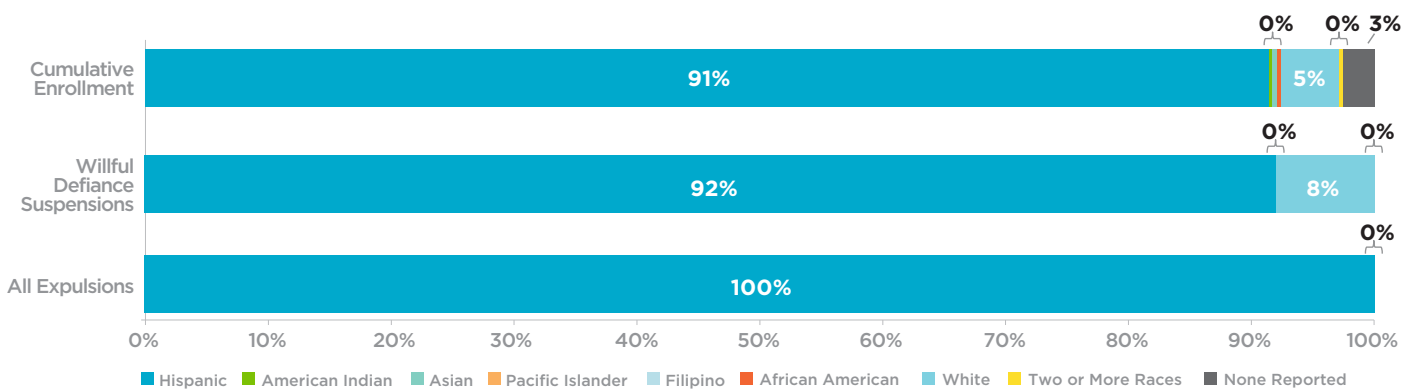
Merced Union High School District 2012-13 | Understanding Racial Differences in School Discipline

Relative to their enrollment, African American students in Merced Union High School District were more likely to be suspended for “willful defiance” than their peers. Specifically, African Americans made up 4% of district enrollment but they accounted for 13% of all “willful defiance” suspensions and 33% of expulsions.⁸



Le Grand Union High School District 2012-13 | Understanding Racial Differences in School Discipline

As shown below, Hispanic students in Le Grand Union High School District were more likely to be negatively impacted by punitive school discipline policies. While Hispanic students made up 91% of district enrollment, they accounted for 100% of all expulsions.⁹



Comparing Merced and California | Suspension and Expulsion Rates for 2011-12 and 2012-13

The school discipline data below indicate that suspensions have decreased across California and Merced Union High School District, but they have increased within Le Grand Union High School District and Merced County Office of Education. And while Merced County Office of Education and California have seen no change in expulsions, the expulsion rate has increased for Le Grand Union High School District and decreased for Merced Union High School District.¹⁰ For more detailed data, including enrollment numbers and the number of students suspended and expelled, see Appendix A.

..... **Students Suspended or Expelled in Merced and California**

District and State	Suspension Rates			Expulsion Rates		
	2011-12	2012-13	Change	2011-12	2012-13	Change
Le Grand Union High School District	7.2	7.9	▲	0.3	0.4	▲
Merced County Office of Education	20.6	23.6	▲	0.0	0.0	-
Merced Union High School District	19.1	9.7	▼	0.4	0.1	▼
California	5.7	5.1	▼	0.1	0.1	-

Rates measure the number of students suspended or expelled for every 100 students

Comparing High Schools by Involvement in the Southwest Merced/East Merced County Building Healthy Communities (BHC) | Suspension and Expulsion Rates for 2011-12 and 2012-13

The data below indicate that students attending high schools that are part of Southwest Merced/East Merced County BHC were less likely to be suspended and just as likely to be expelled as students attending non BHC high schools. Three of the eight high schools that are part of the BHC experienced an increase in suspensions, while the remaining high schools experienced a decrease. Additionally, one BHC high school, Granada High School, experienced an increase in student expulsions. Three high schools experienced a decrease in student expulsions and the remaining BHC high schools had zero students expelled in 2011-12 and 2012-13.¹¹ For more detailed data, including enrollment numbers and the number of students suspended and expelled, see Appendix A.

... Students Suspended or Expelled in Southwest Merced/East Merced County BHC High Schools ...

High Schools That Are Part of the BHC	Suspension Rates			Expulsion Rates		
	2011-12	2012-13	Change	2011-12	2012-13	Change
Buhach Colony High School	11.7	7.4	▼	0.0	0.0	-
Golden Valley High School	28.5	7.9	▼	0.9	0.0	▼
Granada High School	25.8	26.3	▲	0.0	3.5	▲
Le Grand High School	4.6	5.7	▲	0.4	0.0	▼
Merced High School	9.5	9.0	▼	0.5	0.2	▼
Sequoia High School	60.8	40.3	▼	0.0	0.0	-
Valley Community High School	23.4	26.1	▲	0.0	0.0	-
Yosemite Continuation High School	27.4	23.3	▼	0.0	0.0	-
BHC High Schools Cumulative	18.2	11.5	▼	0.4	0.1	▼

Rates measure the number of students suspended or expelled for every 100 students enrolled

..... Students Suspended or Expelled in Other Merced High Schools

High Schools That Are Not Part of the BHC	Suspension Rates			Expulsion Rates		
	2011-12	2012-13	Change	2011-12	2012-13	Change
Atwater High School	23.3	8.6	▼	0.3	0.2	▼
Floyd A. Schelby High School	0.0	0.0	-	0.0	0.0	-
Independence Alternative High School	0.2	0.7	▲	0.0	0.0	-

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Students Suspended or Expelled in Other Merced High Schools (cont.)

High Schools That Are Not Part of the BHC	Suspension Rates			Expulsion Rates		
	2011-12	2012-13	Change	2011-12	2012-13	Change
Livingston High School	17.7	8.4	▼	0.0	0.0	-
Merced County Juvenile Hall/Community High School	7.5	23.5	▲	0.0	0.0	-
Merced County Special Education High School	0.6	0.8	▲	0.0	0.0	-
Merced Scholars Charter High School	0.0	0.0	-	0.0	0.0	-
Valley Atwater Community Day High School	46.3	47.6	▲	0.0	0.0	-
Valley Los Baños Community Day High School	41.2	42.3	▲	0.0	0.0	-

Rates measure the number of students suspended or expelled for every 100 students enrolled

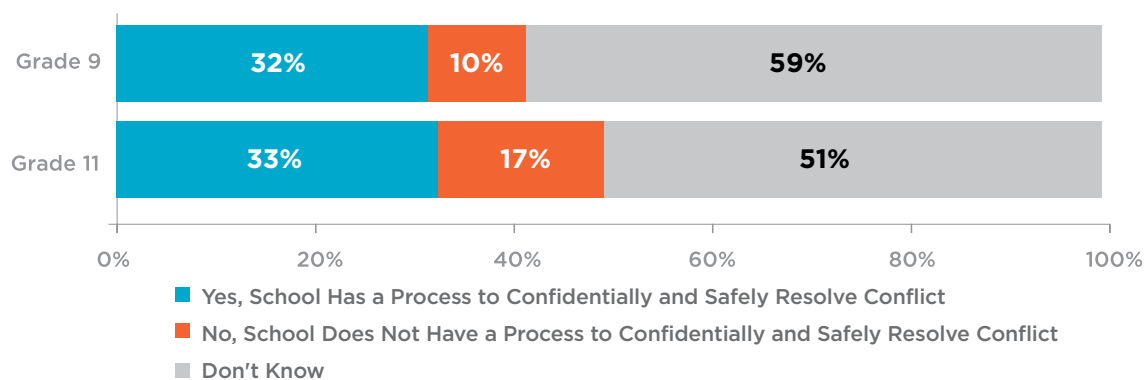
School Climate as Measured by Local Survey Data

Under LCFF, districts are allowed to use locally determined data, including survey data, to measure school climate. Data from the California School Climate, Health, and Learning Survey (Cal-SCHLS) System,¹² a data tool developed by WestEd for the California Department of Education,¹³ is used to measure the school climate among high schools that are part of Southwest Merced/East Merced County BHC. Specifically, the data below reflects the views of students and staff from Granada, Le Grand, Golden Valley, and Merced High Schools. For more information on survey administration within Southwest Merced/East Merced County BHC, please see Appendix B.

What Students are Saying...

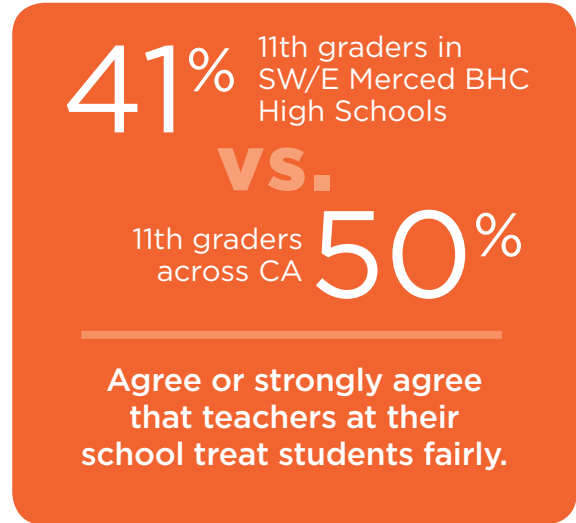
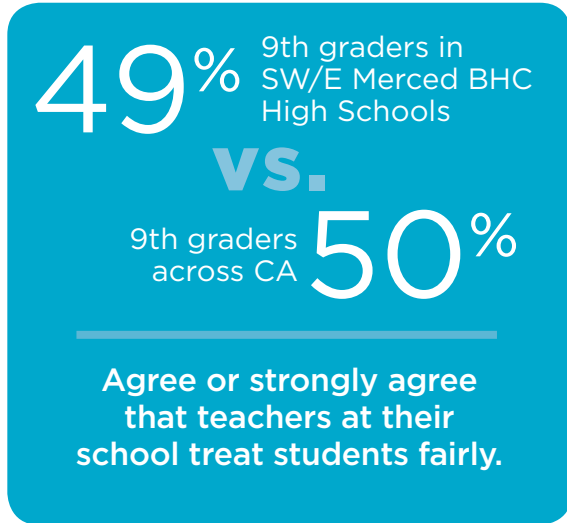
Awareness of School Conflict Policies

More than half of the students attending high schools that are part of Southwest Merced/East Merced County BHC didn't know if their school had a way to resolve interpersonal conflicts. Moreover, roughly one in three 9th and 11th graders reported that their school provided alternatives to punitive school discipline policies.¹⁴



Perceptions of Fair Treatment of Students

Compared to students across California, students attending BHC high schools were less likely to believe that students were treated fairly by teachers.¹⁵

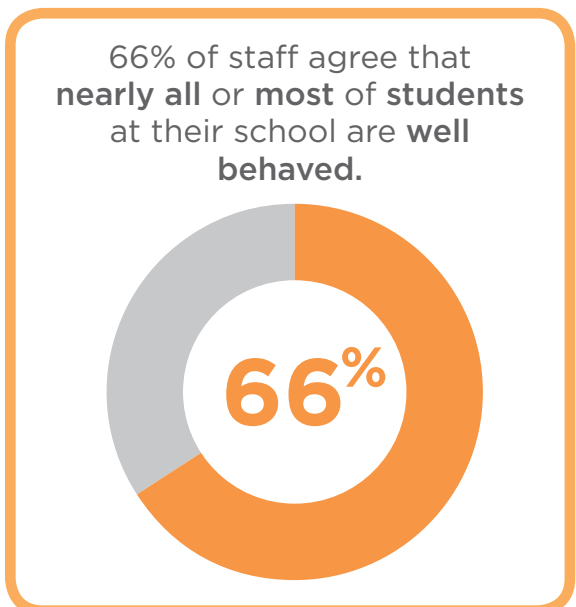
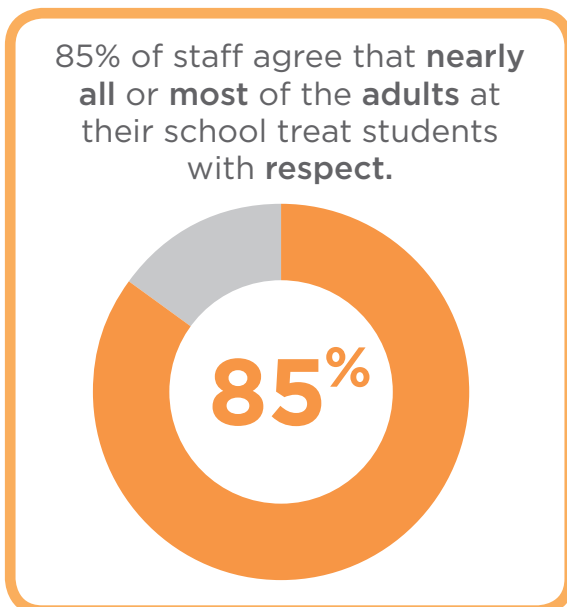


What School Staff are Saying...

Perceptions of Teacher and Student Behavior

While less than half of the students in Southwest Merced/East Merced County BHC high schools believe that teachers treat students fairly, more than four out of five staff report that adults treat students with respect.¹⁶ And, more than three out of five of the staff at Southwest Merced/East Merced County BHC high schools thought their students were well behaved.¹⁷

..... Southwest Merced/East Merced County BHC High Schools



Appendix A: Supplementary Suspension and Expulsion Data

District and State	Total Students					
	2011-2012			2012-2013		
	Enrolled	Suspended	Expelled	Enrolled	Suspended	Expelled
Le Grand Union High School District	572	41	2	559	44	2
Merced Union High School District	10,905	2,087	45	10,668	1,034	9
Merced County Office of Education	2,674	552	0	2,254	533	2
California	6,420,737	366,629	9,553	6,497,851	329,370	8,266

BHC High School-Level Data	Total Students					
	2011-2012			2012-2013		
	Enrolled	Suspended	Expelled	Enrolled	Suspended	Expelled
Buhach Colony High School	1,979	231	0	1,942	143	0
Golden Valley High School	2,341	667	22	2,323	183	1
Granada High School	62	16	0	57	15	2
Le Grand High School	541	25	2	511	29	0
Merced High School	3,056	289	16	2,959	266	5
Sequoia High School	263	160	0	233	94	0
Valley Community High School	1,153	270	0	914	239	0
Yosemite Continuation High School	522	143	0	507	118	0
BHC High Schools Cumulative	9,917	1,801	40	9,446	1,087	8

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Non-BHC High School- Level Data	Total Students					
	2011-2012			2012-2013		
	Enrolled	Suspended	Expelled	Enrolled	Suspended	Expelled
Atwater High School	2,005	468	7	1,927	165	3
Floyd A. Schelby High School	58	0	0	59	0	0
Independence Alternative High School	414	1	0	274	2	0
Livingston High School	1,217	215	0	1,178	99	0
Merced County Juvenile Hall/ Community High School	428	32	0	379	89	0
Merced County Special Education High School	696	4	0	594	5	0
Merced Scholars Charter High School	121	0	0	111	0	0
Valley Atwater Community Day High School	283	131	0	250	119	0
Valley Los Baños Community Day High School	342	141	0	293	124	0

Appendix B: CAL-SCHL Survey Participation Among Del Norte BHC High Schools

District	School Name	Student Survey	Staff Survey
LGUHSD	Granada High School	✓	✓
LGUHSD	Le Grand High School	✓	✓
MUHSD	Golden Valley High School	✓	✓
MUHSD	Merced High School	✓	✓
MUHSD	Buhach Colony High School		
MUHSD	Sequoia High School		
MUHSD	Yosemite High School (Continuation)		
MCOE	Valley Community		
Total Surveyed		1,874 Students	184 Staff

Endnotes

1. Voight, Adam, Gregory Austin and Thomas Hanson, "A Climate for Academic Success: How School Climate Distinguishes Schools That Are Beating the Achievement Odds" 2013. WestEd: San Francisco, http://www.wested.org/online_pubs/hd-13-10.pdf, accessed April 2014.
2. *IBID.*
3. Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, "Improving School Climate Through *Race to the Top*," accessed September 2013. Human Impact Partners, "Health Impact Assessment of School Discipline Policies: A Health Impact Assessment of Exclusionary School Discipline, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, and Restorative Justice Policies in Three California School Districts." 2012, accessed August 2013.
4. Losen, Daniel J., Tia Martinez, and Jon Gillespie. "Suspended Education in California." 2012. Center for Civil Rights Remedies. The Civil Rights Project at University of California, Los Angeles. Accessed April 2014. This was found to be true for students who served suspensions off school grounds (out-of-school).
5. Willful Defiance as defined by Education Code Section 48900 (k): "A pupil shall not be suspended from school or recommended for expulsion, unless the superintendent of the school district or the principal of the school in which the pupil is enrolled determines that the pupil has committed an act as defined pursuant to any of subdivisions (a) to (r), inclusive:...(k) Disrupted school activities or otherwise willfully defied the valid authority of supervisors, teachers, administrators, school officials, or other school personnel engaged in the performance of their duties." *Cal. Educ. Code §48900(k)*, accessed April 2014.
6. Losen, Daniel J., Tia Martinez, and Jon Gillespie. "Suspended Education in California." 2012. Center for Civil Rights Remedies. The Civil Rights Project at University of California, Los Angeles. Accessed April 2014.
7. To learn more about The California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities (BHC) initiative go to: <http://www.bhconnect.org>.
8. All district-level discipline and enrollment data was pulled for 2012-13 using the 'Expulsion, Suspension, and Truancy' subject option on the California Department of Education, *California Department of Education: Data Quest*. <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/cb/dataquest.asp>, accessed April 2014. Cumulative Enrollment, suspension data and expulsion data were pulled from the Suspension, Expulsion, and Truancy Rates report. Willful Defiance suspension data was pulled from the 48900(k) Defiance Suspension and Expulsion report.
9. *IBID.*
10. All discipline data was pulled using the 'Expulsion, Suspension, and Truancy' subject option on the California Department of Education, *California Department of Education: Data Quest*. <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/cb/dataquest.asp>, accessed April 2014. Suspension and expulsion rates were pulled from the Suspension, Expulsion, and Truancy Rates reports for the state, school districts and individual schools.
11. All school-level discipline and enrollment data was pulled for 2011-12 and 2012-13 using the 'Expulsion, Suspension, and Truancy' subject option on the California Department of Education, *California Department of Education: Data Quest*. <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/cb/dataquest.asp>, accessed April 2014. Cumulative Enrollment, suspension data and expulsion data were pulled from the Suspension, Expulsion, and Truancy Rates report.
12. WestEd, *California School Climate, Health and Learning Survey System: Welcome to the Cal-SCHLS System website*, <http://cal-schls.wested.org>, accessed April 2014.
13. At the high school level, the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) surveys a sample of 9th and 11th graders on a wide range of learning and health-related indicators that collect data on student attitudes, behaviors and experiences. WestEd, *California School Climate, Health and Learning Survey System: Welcome to the Cal-SCHLS System website*, <http://cal-schls.wested.org>, accessed April 2014.
14. WestEd Health & Human Development Program for The California Endowment, *California Healthy Kids Survey: Merced Report, 2011-2012, Table G35*. Survey question states, "If there is a conflict at your school between two students, or between a student and a teacher, in which one person feels harmed, does your school have a process to confidentially and safely resolve the conflict (such as restorative justice)?"
15. WestEd Health & Human Development Program for The California Endowment, *California Healthy Kids Survey: Southwest Merced/East Merced Main Report, 2011-2012, Table A3.10*. WestEd Health & Human Development Program for The California Endowment, *California Healthy Kids Survey: Student Well-Being in California, 2011-13, Statewide Results*. Students were presented with the statement, "Teachers at this school treat students fairly," and responded via the following scale – Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree Nor Disagree, Agree, or Strongly Agree.
16. WestEd Health & Human Development Program for The California Endowment, *California School Climate Survey: Southwest Merced/East Merced Main Report, 2011-2012, Table T4.4*. Staff were asked "How many adults at this school treat every student with respect?" and responded via the following scale – Nearly All, Most, Some, Few or Almost None.
17. WestEd Health & Human Development Program for The California Endowment, *California School Climate Survey: Southwest Merced/East Merced Main Report, 2011-2012, Table T5.5*. Staff were asked "Based on your experience, how many students at this school are well-behaved?" and responded via the following scale - Nearly All, Most, Some, Few or Almost None.