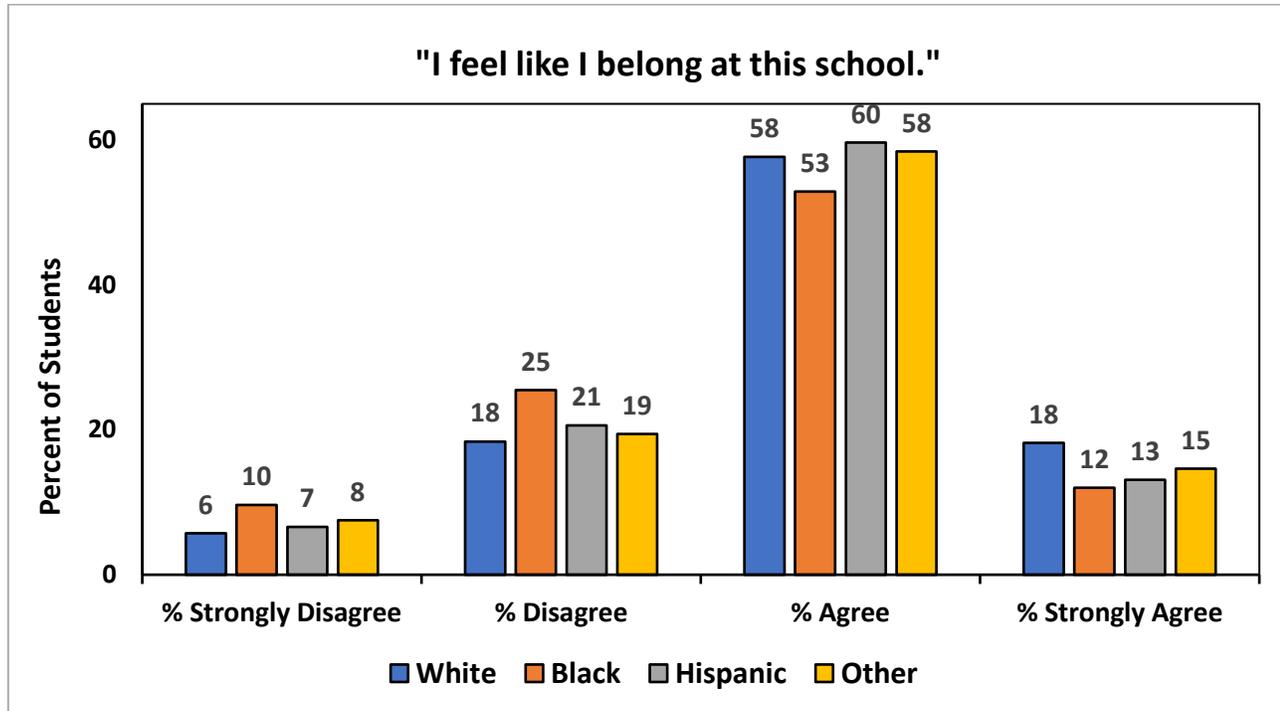


Practical Findings from the Virginia School Climate Survey

Students' Perceptions of Belonging at School

The Virginia Secondary School Climate Survey conducted in the winter of 2020 asked students whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement "I feel like I belong at this school." The survey was completed by 106,865 students in grades 9 through 12 from 299 public high schools. Statewide, most students agreed or strongly agreed (73%) that they feel like they belong at their school, but 35% of Black students, 28% of Hispanic students, and 27% of Other race students did not feel like they belong, compared to 24% of White students.



Note. The sample included students self-reporting as White (46%), Black (18%), Hispanic (of any race, 19%), or Other (17%, including Asian, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, two or more races, and other race students). Additional breakdowns available in the full technical report.

Practical Suggestions. Schools should review their student perspectives in the individual reports sent to each high school and division. Staff could meet with students to understand their concerns about belonging at school. School authorities should hire and retain a racially/ethnically diverse team to provide support for all students, and in particular work to increase the sense of belonging among Black and Hispanic students. Helping these students feel supported at school may lead to reductions in disciplinary actions and improve academic achievement. The US Department of Education's [National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments](#) has relevant resources on school discipline and school climate. The [American Psychological Association](#), the [National Association of School Psychologists](#), the [American School Counselors Association](#), and the [School Social Work Association of America](#) all have guidelines and training for increasing cultural competence for serving racially/ethnically diverse children and families in schools.

Study Overview. The Virginia Secondary School Climate Survey was administered in the winter of 2020 as part of the annual School Safety Audit (§ 22.1-279.8.A) by the Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety (VCSCS) in the Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS), in cooperation with the Virginia Department of Education. This project was supported by grant #NIJ 2017-CK-BX-007 awarded to the University of Virginia by the National Institute of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and recommendations expressed in this report are those of the researchers at the Youth Violence Project of the University of Virginia and do not necessarily reflect those of the U.S. Department of Justice or the Center for School and Campus Safety at the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services. More detailed analyses are available from the Virginia Youth Violence Project: <http://youthviolence.edschool.virginia.edu>.