

# When Providing School Climate Data, Researchers and Districts Should Also Provide Supports for Data-informed Decision Making

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**Correction 1/5/2021:** We've updated this brief to correct errors that misstated findings from [Walking a fine line: School climate surveys in state ESSA plans](#).

The correct number of states that included measures of school climate as their SQSS indicator or incorporated measures of school climate for quality improvement purposes is 13—not 16. Additionally, the correct number of states that indicated plans to pilot and/or incorporate measures of school climate is three plus the District of Columbia—not 13.

## Introduction

School decision makers have access to a broad and growing range of data that can inform decisions about how to best support students and improve schools. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) arguably shaped our current data culture by emphasizing assessment-based accountability, “scientifically based research,” and evidence of “effectiveness.” This law ushered in a new norm of data-informed decision making that focused largely on assessment, instructional practice, and teacher quality, but has since broadened to include other aspects of educational policy and practice. With the passage of the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), states were required to add a fifth indicator on “School Quality or Student Success” (SQSS) to their school accountability systems. An analysis of submitted ESSA state plans found that 13 states included measures of school climate as their SQSS indicator or incorporated measures of school climate for quality improvement purposes. In addition, three states and the District of Columbia indicated plans to pilot and/or incorporate measures of school climate in the future,<sup>1</sup> signaling a growing recognition of school climate assessment and improvement to support the whole child.

As an increasing number of states consider including school climate measurement as an indicator within their ESSA plans, and more districts move toward implementing district-wide school climate surveys, it is critical to equip schools with the tools they need to productively engage with school climate data. This brief presents advice to other researchers or school districts providing school climate data to ensure that schools are best able to use those data.

## Project Overview

From 2016 to 2020, Child Trends partnered with a group of public schools and public charter schools in Washington, DC to implement the “Improving School Climate in DC” project (ISC-DC). ISC-DC was supported by a grant from the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) under the Comprehensive School Safety Initiative (CSSI). Participating schools implemented Safe School Certification (SSC), a technical assistance and certification model consisting of eight key elements (leadership, data, buy-in, policies, student engagement, family and community engagement, training, and programs). SSC is designed to build on schools’ existing school climate work and develop their capacity to make data-informed decisions about programs and policies. View the full SSC toolkit [here](#).

*This project was supported by Award No. 2015-CK-BX-0016, awarded by the National Institute of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Justice.*

All ISC-DC schools had the opportunity to participate in four years of school climate survey data collection using the U.S. Department of Education School Climate Survey tools (ED-SCLS),<sup>2</sup> and to receive annual detailed data reports based on their survey results. An additional two schools that were not part of the evaluation—and that did not implement SSC—also participated in school climate survey data collection and received a detailed data report.

Child Trends developed and provided schools with school climate data reports designed to contextualize and explain the data (see Appendix A for an example data report). The reports did this in several ways:

1. The reports presented aggregate survey results for each individual school—based on data from all students who participated in the survey—as well as differences by grade level, gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity, when at least 10 students were identified in any given group to protect student privacy.
2. In the first year of the project, the reports compared each school's climate scores to the scores of other ISC-DC schools, identifying strengths and areas of growth relative to other schools.
3. After the first year of the project, the reports compared each school's climate scores to its own scores from prior years, highlighting change over time—and, if applicable, the climate domains in which the school had consistently scored low or consistently shown gaps between groups of students. Reports also provided benchmarks for scores as defined by the U.S. Department of Education.
4. Finally, the reports included brief narrative summaries of key findings, in addition to data tables and figures. These summaries were followed by action-oriented recommendations based on identified differences between groups and/or climate domains in which the school scored low relative to other schools or other climate domains.

Child Trends evaluated implementation<sup>3</sup> and outcomes associated with SSC.<sup>4</sup> As part of the implementation evaluation, we conducted semi-structured interviews with school points of contact and technical assistance specialists working with a subset of schools to understand their perspectives on implementation. These interviews, combined with informal feedback from schools, shed light on how schools reacted to, interpreted, and used the school climate data provided in the data reports.

## Strategies to Help Schools Use School Climate Data

Across four years of collecting and sharing school climate data with participating schools, our research team identified five strategies that researchers, school districts, or others providing data to schools can use to ensure that schools are able to use those data for decision making.

1. **Report data in a timely manner and in a format that supports data interpretation.** Data reports should be timely and go beyond summary statistics to present detailed, disaggregated, and contextualized findings that address the information needs of school decision makers.<sup>5,6,7,8</sup> In the ISC-DC project, many school leaders mentioned that they were originally drawn to the project because of its focus on data. In fact, some schools had been actively looking for ways to become more data-driven. Moreover, of the framework's eight elements, the data element was the most consistently implemented across schools. Even schools that never succeeded in assembling a core leadership

*"It's been really nice to have the data synthesized and summarized, with just, 'Hey, these are some key points that we noticed.' Without necessarily, you know, giving an opinion. But at the same time, with the resources available, 'Maybe explore this further, this area. Or this little data point.' I think that was really helpful. Because when I see the whole spreadsheet, it's like, 'Wow, there's just lots of numbers and arrows pointing up and down.' And getting it in a different language, so to speak, that was helpful."*

–School point of contact

team for the project still participated in survey data collection year after year. We found that delays in receiving the data report during the first year of the project led some school teams to dismiss survey results as outdated. We also learned, during the first year of the project, that school teams valued receiving data in a way that allowed them to readily identify their school's strengths and challenges and track progress over time, but that they did not value the ability to compare their school climate data with those of other schools in the project. We incorporated this feedback beginning in the second year of the project and received positive feedback from school points of contact about the subsequent analysis included in the data reports.

**2. Provide data-focused consultation or technical assistance, along with training on data interpretation and data-informed decision making.**

Given competing priorities and limited time and resources, it is important to help school leaders gain the capacity to understand, compare, and make use of a wide variety of data sources.<sup>9,10,11,12</sup> School leaders in the ISC-DC project often had to juggle multiple demands on their time. This made it difficult for them to dedicate the necessary time to the project, including the time to review data reports and use the survey data for decision making. The task of reviewing the data was sometimes delegated to staff with more time available but with limited data interpretation and analysis capacity and/or knowledge of the school context. Technical assistance specialists reported that school climate data were most readily used for decision making by school leaders who were already comfortable with reading and analyzing data. Moreover, when school teams found time to engage with technical assistants in a guided discussion of the data, they were able to hone their data interpretation skills and more strategically use school climate data for decision making.

*"I saw [some of] them thinking about their data a little bit differently ... not just their [school climate survey] data, but also other data that they collect, and just kind of going through the process of asking why they collect it and what are some of the potential uses. What information can they actually glean from [it] ... I think that sometimes there's too much to digest, but I saw them developing the beginnings of a sense of data literacy ... a little bit more critical thinking around understanding that more information isn't always better."*

**–Technical assistance specialist**

**3. Build buy-in for data use by ensuring that data are high-quality and reflect the needs of the school community.**

Working with school leaders in advance of data collection can help them understand the potential value of school climate data and build the sort of buy-in that can make a difference in whether schools use the data. When school leaders communicate the value of the data to the school community, their demonstrated support can improve response rates. This is critical because low response rates can lead members of the school community to question the validity of the data. In the ISC-DC project, technical assistance specialists noted that some school teams did not trust survey results when response rates were low or when they had concerns about the representativeness of survey respondents.

*"One of the areas where we had trouble initially was in parent [survey] responses. And last year we were much more successful ... It came with the shared leadership on the core leadership team, of teachers reaching out, telling their students what we were doing, why we needed help from their parents, sending messages to parents, talking to parents, asking them to complete the survey, telling them why it was important, how it was going to help us ..."*

**–School point of contact**

**4. Engage multiple stakeholders in the review of data.** Encourage schools to engage diverse perspectives; this is critical for making sense of school climate data.<sup>13</sup> Students, teachers, school-based mental health professionals, and parents are often able to contribute pertinent information that can help contextualize results—for instance, by sharing personal insights or bringing to light other data sources that help explain why a certain score is high or low. This dialogue can lead to a more robust understanding of what the data mean for a school and how to best address the issues identified within the data. It also helps guard against bias—such as the tendency to rationalize or dismiss findings that do not align with one’s expectations—and builds data capacity among stakeholders. In the ISC-DC project, schools varied in the extent to which, and the ways in which, they used the survey data for decision making. At some schools, reviews of the school climate data led to meaningful conversations with various stakeholder groups. These conversations, in turn, elicited additional context for the data and helped engage a broad range of perspectives on best addressing the needs identified in the report.

*“I think having that diverse stakeholder group contribute to that shared work around school climate is so important ... I learned so much from learning how to have better conversations with students around school climate and what it means, and what the school climate data mean ... I believe that the knowledge about using data that we learned together will carry over [into the future] ... [Before this project], we were looking at school climate data, but we weren't looking at it with the same shared leadership perspective and approach. Were we using data? Yes, we were using data ... [but] we learned how to have a better conversation about the data that was more inclusive, and open, and resulted in some specific action steps to help make improvements.”*

**–School point of contact**

**5. Emphasize the utility of school climate data for improvement, rather than for accountability.**

Recognize that, historically, data have been used in punitive ways and be clear about the purpose of school climate data to promote continuous improvements. Help school decision makers reflect about their data-related hopes, fears, and expectations to minimize bias when reviewing data and increase the likelihood that data are used for school improvement. In an era of high-stakes assessments of student and staff performance, school leaders may be wary of school climate data.<sup>14</sup> In the ISC-DC project, technical assistance specialists observed that many school leaders and teams displayed an initial distrust or discomfort with data, stemming from past experiences in which data were used in ways that were punitive toward schools, school leaders, and educators. For instance, a number of high schools in Washington, DC have been labeled as failing—and administrators have felt that their jobs were at risk—when high percentages of students did not meet grade-level performance indicators on standardized assessments such as the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) test. Stressing the value of school climate data for improvement, rather than for accountability, can help attenuate negative past experiences with data and increase data use, as can investing in the lessons outlined above—presenting data in easy-to-understand formats, building the capacity of school leaders to interpret and use school climate data, building buy-in, and engaging multiple stakeholders.

*“People turn off to data or are afraid of it because it’s become used as a weapon.”*

**–Technical assistance specialist**

# Appendix A. Sample School Climate Data Report

# SY YEAR-YEAR School Climate Report for SCHOOL NAME

## Background

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In MONTH of YEAR, N students and N instructional staff from SCHOOL NAME responded to the U.S. Department of Education’s School Climate Survey (ED-SCLS) administered by the DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education as part of the *Improving School Climate in DC* project (ISC-DC). School climate, the general quality and positivity of a school’s atmosphere, is important to measure as it can influence students’ feelings of safety and their abilities to learn.

The ED-SCLS is a measure of school climate across 13 topic areas, which are summarized into three domains: *engagement*, *safety*, and *environment*. *Engagement* is defined as “strong relationships between students, teachers, families, and schools, and strong connections between schools and the broader community;” *safety* is defined as students’ safety “from violence, bullying, harassment, and substance use” at school and school-related events; and *environment* is defined as “appropriate facilities, well-managed classrooms, available school-based health supports, and a clear, fair disciplinary policy” at the school.<sup>1</sup>

For students, the ED-SCLS assesses 12 topic areas and produces scales for 11 of these topic areas.<sup>2</sup> *Figure 1* illustrates how the 12 topic areas are organized within the three domains of the ED-SCLS. You can find more information about each domain and topic area in *Appendix I*.

In this report, we focus on the responses of the students at SCHOOL NAME. These students were in [7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades OR 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades] at the time of the assessment. N other DC schools with [7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> OR 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>] grade students participated in the ED-SCLS as part of ISC-DC. In this report, we compare SCHOOL NAME’s scores to scores from these other N schools.

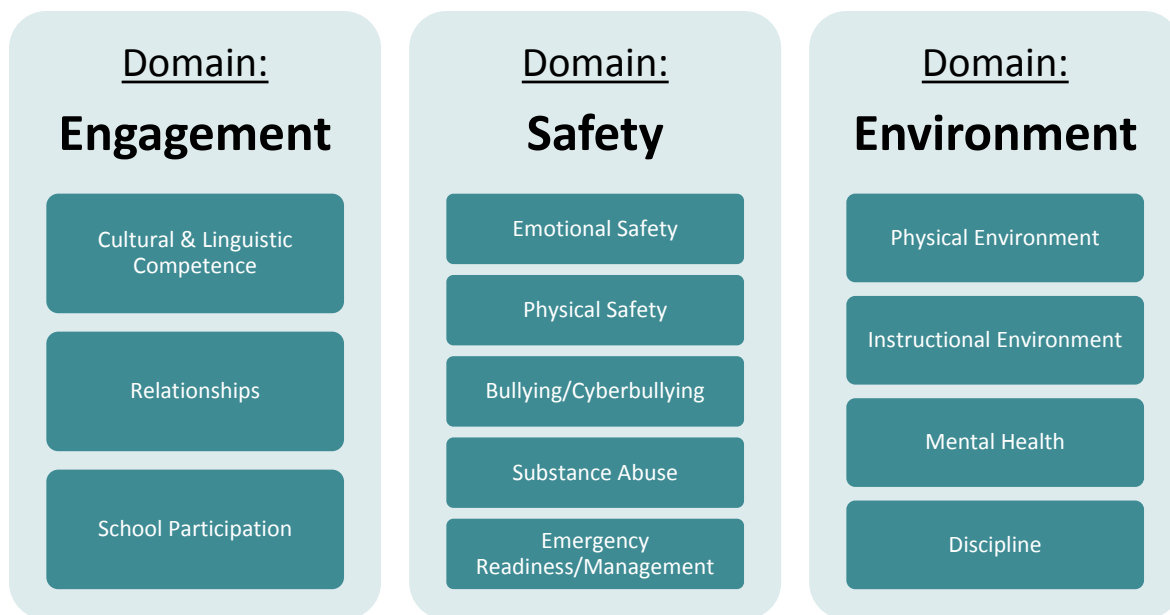
Instructional staff completed nine additional items regarding individual and school commitment to improving school climate in order to assess buy-in. Staff were asked, on a scale of 1-4, whether they strongly disagreed, disagreed, agreed, or strongly agreed to each of the nine statements. Answers to these items were then averaged to create a scale for staff buy-in. Staff whose average score was 2.5 or higher are considered to be “bought in” to working on improving school climate.

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<sup>1</sup> Definitions of engagement, safety, and environment are from the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments: <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/school-climate>

<sup>2</sup> The student survey for the ED-SCLS did not ask students about Physical Health in the environment domain; only instructional staff and non-instructional staff were asked about students’ Physical Health. The student survey for the ED-SCLS included two items for the Emergency Readiness/Management (ERM) topic area in the safety domain, but these items do not form a scale and were not factored in the overall safety score.





**Figure 1:** The U.S. Department of Education’s School Climate Survey produces scale scores for three domains and 11 topic areas for students. No scale score is produced for Emergency Readiness/Management, and responses to these items are not used to create the Safety domain scale score.

## Highlights

- We compared SCHOOL NAME to N other DC schools that used the ED-SCLS to assess [7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> OR 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>] grade students’ perceptions of school climate. For each measure of school climate, we divided the schools into thirds<sup>3</sup> based on students’ responses. Schools in the **top third** were considered to have the **most positive perceptions** of climate, whereas scores in the **bottom third** were considered to have the **least positive perceptions** of climate.
- Compared with these N schools, students in SCHOOL NAME had some of the most positive perceptions of school climate in the **engagement** domain. Additionally, students had some of the most positive perceptions of school climate in six topic areas: (1) engagement with regard to **cultural and linguistic competence**, (2) engagement with regard to **school participation**, (3) safety with regard to **emotional safety**, (4) safety with regard to **physical safety**, (5) environment with regard to **mental health**, and (6) environment with regard to **discipline**.
- Students attending SCHOOL NAME had some of the least positive perceptions of school climate in one topic area: environment with regard to **physical environment**.
- SCHOOL NAME’ student perceptions of school climate varied according to student demographics. For example, male students’ perceptions were more positive than those of female students for **all three domains**. These differences were small: XX points in the **engagement** domain, XX points in the **safety** domain, and XX points in the **environment** domain,

<sup>3</sup> [IF N IS NOT DIVISIBLE BY 3] Because N schools cannot be evenly divided into thirds, the bottom third had N schools, whereas the middle and top thirds had N students each.



on a scale from 100 to 500. There were even greater differences between genders when comparing perceptions on different topic areas. For example, in the **relationships** topic area within the engagement domain, male students' perceptions were more positive than female students' perceptions by XX points.

- We recommend that schools focus their efforts on subgroups that lag at least 20 points behind other groups, though school administrators may decide that a smaller gap in a particular area is important and worthy of intervention. While disparities are important to address, remember that this is just one measure of school climate. Ultimately, administrators must decide which gaps warrant attention within the context of their schools.
- XX percent of the N instructional staff at SCHOOL NAME who responded to the staff buy-in items “bought in” to the idea of working to improve school climate.

## Recommendations

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In this section, we provide action-oriented recommendations for SCHOOL NAME based on student data. Remember that SCHOOL NAME could begin the journey toward improving school climate in a number of ways; our recommendations are provided only as potential starting points.

- **Focus on the physical environment.**
  - **Identify strategies that SCHOOL NAME can employ to improve the physical environment at school.** As we described above, students at SCHOOL NAME had some of the least positive perceptions of the physical environment, compared with students at N other DC schools. We recommend that SCHOOL NAME begin improving school climate with a focus on the physical environment.
  - Use the National Center on Safe and Supportive Learning Environments' (NCSSLE) [Data Interpretation Guide for Physical Environment](#) to learn more about the ED-SCLS physical environment scale, and to discover interventions that might be helpful for students' perceptions of the physical environment at SCHOOL NAME.
- **Focus on improving students' feelings of safety related to bullying/cyberbullying.**
  - **Identify strategies that SCHOOL NAME can employ to improve all students' perceptions of safety related to bullying/cyberbullying.** Within the safety domain, students' perceptions were least positive in the bullying and cyberbullying topic area. Efforts by SCHOOL NAME to improve perceptions related to safety could begin with a focus on bullying and cyberbullying.
  - Female students' perceptions of bullying/cyberbullying in the school were XX points lower than male students' perceptions, on a scale that ranged from 100 to 500. When identifying strategies related to bullying and cyberbullying, it could be beneficial to examine strategies that can address these issues specifically for female students.
  - Use the National Center on Safe and Supportive Learning Environments' (NCSSLE) [Data Interpretation Guide for Bullying/Cyberbullying](#) to learn more about the ED-SCLS



bullying/cyberbullying scale, and to discover interventions that might be helpful for improving support related to bullying and cyberbullying.

- **Focus on relationships.**
  - **Identify strategies that SCHOOL NAME can employ to improve all students' relationships with adults and peers.** Within the engagement domain, students at SCHOOL NAME perceived relationships the least positively. Efforts to improve school engagement could begin with a focus on students' relationships.
  - **Focus on X<sup>th</sup> grade students' relationships.** Compared with students in Y<sup>th</sup> grade, X<sup>th</sup> grade students reported less positive perceptions of support related to relationships – XX points lower on a scale from 100 to 500. While students in X<sup>th</sup> grade tended to be less positive than X<sup>th</sup> grade students in most aspects of school climate, this was one of the largest gaps and would be a good place to start in terms of improving school climate for younger students.
  - Use NCSSLE's [Data Interpretation Guide for Relationships](#) to learn more about the ED-SCLS relationships scale, and to discover interventions that might be helpful for improving students' relationships.
- **Explore other resources from NCSSLE.**
  - NCSSLE provides a number of resources to help schools interpret and put to use their ED-SCLS results with the [School Climate Data Interpretation Resources](#). These include discussion guides for each of the topic areas within the three ED-SCLS domains.

# Summary of Results for SCHOOL NAME

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## How does SCHOOL NAME compare to other schools?

For every domain and topic area of the ED-SCLS, we divided the N schools participating in the Improving School Climate in D.C. project and which collected data for [7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> OR 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>] grade students into thirds based on their scale scores (see the text box for an explanation of scale scores). For all domains and topic areas, higher scores indicate a more positive school climate.

Figure 2 illustrates how SCHOOL NAME compares on each of the ED-SCLS domains and topic areas. For example, SCHOOL NAME' student ratings of engagement with regard to **cultural and linguistic competence** were in the top third across all N schools.

Appendix I contains a list of the ED-SCLS survey items for each topic area. Appendix II shows how often students at SCHOOL NAME selected each response option for each survey item.

## What is going well for students at SCHOOL NAME?

Students at SCHOOL NAME had some of the most positive perceptions the climate in the **engagement** domain and in six topic areas: **cultural and linguistic competence** (engagement), **school participation** (engagement), **emotional safety** (safety), **physical safety** (safety), **mental health** (environment), and **discipline** (environment).

For example, in the topic area of **school participation** (engagement), nearly [APPROXIMATE PROPORTION]students either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that “I have lots of chances to be part of class discussions or activities” (XX percent). In the topic area of **physical safety** (safety), XX percent of students disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that “I sometimes stay home because I don't feel safe at this school.” Additionally, in the topic area of **discipline** (environment), more than [APPROXIMATE PROPORTION] students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that “Adults working at this school help students develop strategies to understand and control their feelings and actions” (XX percent).

## What areas could use some improvement for students at SCHOOL NAME?

In comparison to other ISC-DC schools, students at SCHOOL NAME had some of the least positive perceptions in the topic area of **physical environment** (environment). For example, about

### What is a Scale Score?

We describe your school's scores in each domain and topic area in terms of *scale scores*. A scale score is a way to summarize multiple survey items that are related to different aspects of a domain or topic area.

Scale scores are similar to SAT scores, in that scale scores don't have much meaning on their own. Instead, scale scores are most meaningful when they are compared to scores from other schools, or to scores from other students within the school.

On the ED-SCLS, scale scores range from 100 – 500. Higher scores are better.

[APPROXIMATE PROPORTION] students disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that “The bathrooms in this school are clean” (XX percent), and more than [APPROXIMATE PROPORTION] disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that “The temperature in this school is comfortable all year round” (XX percent).

## How do students’ perceptions of school climate vary within SCHOOL NAME?

Within SCHOOL NAME, groups of students experience the school climate differently. This section describes differences based on gender, race/ethnicity, grade, and student sexual orientation. See the text box for more information about how we interpreted the size of gaps in scale scores.<sup>4</sup>

For detailed results, *Figures 3 – 16* show the scale scores for every domain and topic area. For example, *Figure 3* shows that the average **engagement** score was XX for males and XX for females—a [small/moderate/large] gap.

### Group differences: Small, medium, or large?

- **Small gap:** The difference between groups is less than 20 points
- **Moderate gap:** The difference between groups is between 20-49 points.
- **Large gap:** The difference between groups is 50 points or more.

### Are there gender differences?

Compared to female students, male students had more positive perceptions across all domains and topic areas. These differences ranged from small to moderate. The greatest differences were for the topic areas of **physical environment** (environment), **mental health** (environment), and **relationships** (engagement).

### Are there racial or ethnic differences?

We compared all racial/ethnic groups for which at least 10 students responded to the ED-SCLS. At SCHOOL NAME, students from two different racial/ethnic groups had enough responses to be included in comparisons: (a) non-Hispanic black students, and (b) students of two or more races.

Compared with students of two or more races, non-Hispanic black students tended to have more positive perceptions of school climate. Non-Hispanic blacks viewed school climate more positively in all three domains (**engagement**, **safety**, and **environment**) and in nine topic areas: **relationships** (engagement), **school participation** (engagement), **emotional safety** (safety), **physical safety** (safety), **substance abuse** (safety), **physical environment** (environment), **instructional environment** (environment), **mental health** (environment), and **discipline** (environment). Differences ranged from small to moderate. The greatest differences were in the topic areas of **physical environment**

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<sup>4</sup> Our definitions of gap size are based on Cohen’s *d*, which describes the size of differences between two groups in terms of standard deviation units. Every domain and topic area in the ED-SCLS is designed to have a standard deviation of 100 points. If we find a gap of 20 points between two groups of students, that is 20 percent of the standard deviation, which is a small effect. If we find a gap that is 50 percent of the standard deviation, that’s a much larger difference. Importantly, these definitions are just rules of thumb. School administrators may decide that even a small difference is important and worthy of intervention.

(environment), **school participation** (engagement), **emotional safety** (safety), and **mental health** (environment).

In contrast, non-Hispanic students of two or more races had more positive perceptions of **cultural and linguistic competence** (engagement) and **bullying/cyberbullying** (safety), compared with non-Hispanic black students. These differences were small—just XX to XX points.

### Are there grade-level differences?

Compared with students in X<sup>th</sup> grade, students in X<sup>th</sup> grade tended to have more positive perceptions of school climate. Students in X<sup>th</sup> grade reported more positive perceptions for all three domains (**engagement**, **safety**, and **environment**) as well as eight topic areas: **relationships** (engagement), **school participation** (engagement), **emotional safety** (safety), **physical safety** (safety), **substance abuse** (safety), **physical environment** (environment), **instructional environment** (environment), and **discipline** (environment). These differences ranged from small to moderate. The greatest differences were in the topic areas of **relationships** (engagement) and **school participation** (engagement).

In contrast, students in X<sup>th</sup> grade reported more positive perceptions in the topic areas of **cultural and linguistic competence** (engagement), **bullying/cyberbullying** (safety), and **mental health** (environment). These were all small differences.

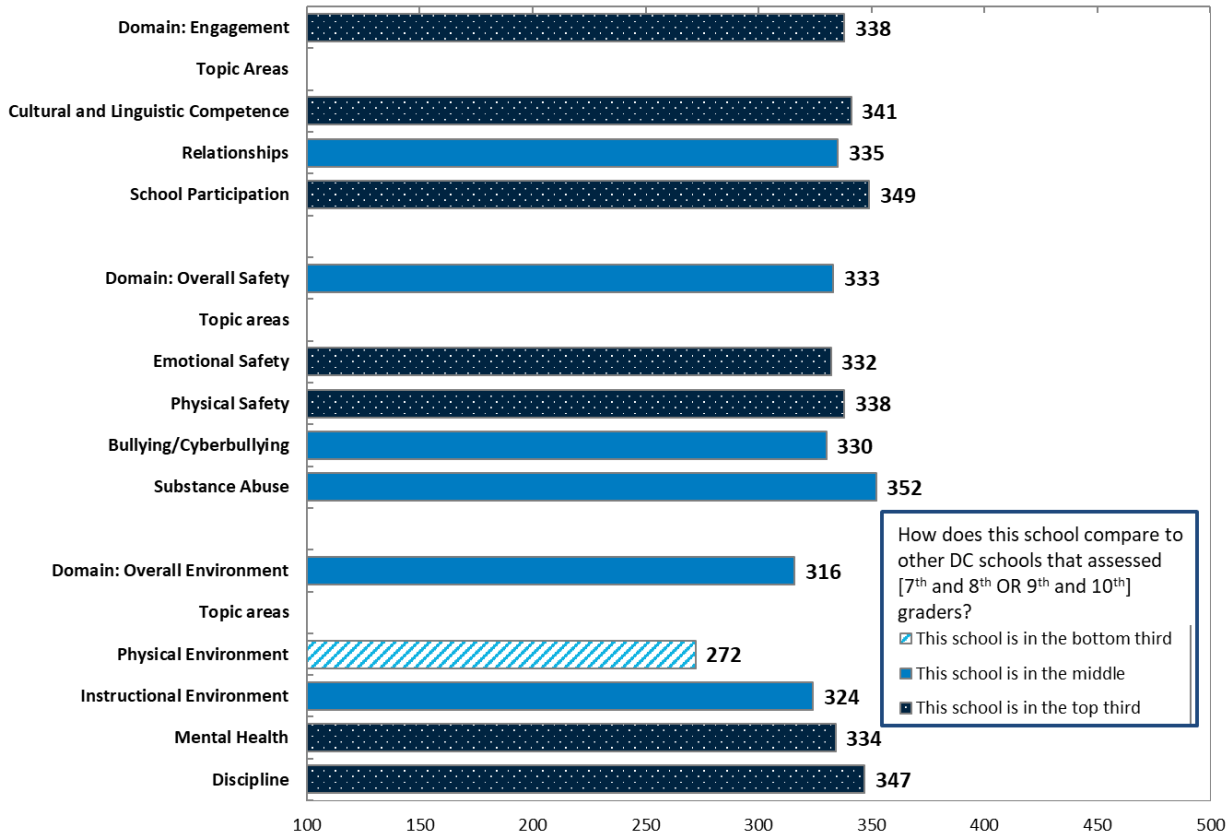
### Are there differences among sexual orientations?

Compared with students who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, questioning, or another sexual orientation, students who are straight reported more positive perceptions of school climate in the **engagement** and **safety** domains, as well as the topic areas of **relationships** (engagement), **school participation** (engagement), **emotional safety** (safety), **bullying/cyberbullying** (safety), **substance abuse** (safety), and **mental health** (environment). These differences were small, with the largest difference in the topic area of **emotional safety** (safety).

Students who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, questioning, or another sexual orientation reported more positive perceptions in the **environment** domain and the topic areas of **physical safety** (safety), **physical environment** (environment), **instructional environment** (environment), and **discipline** (environment). These differences were small, with the largest difference in the topic area of **physical environment** (environment).

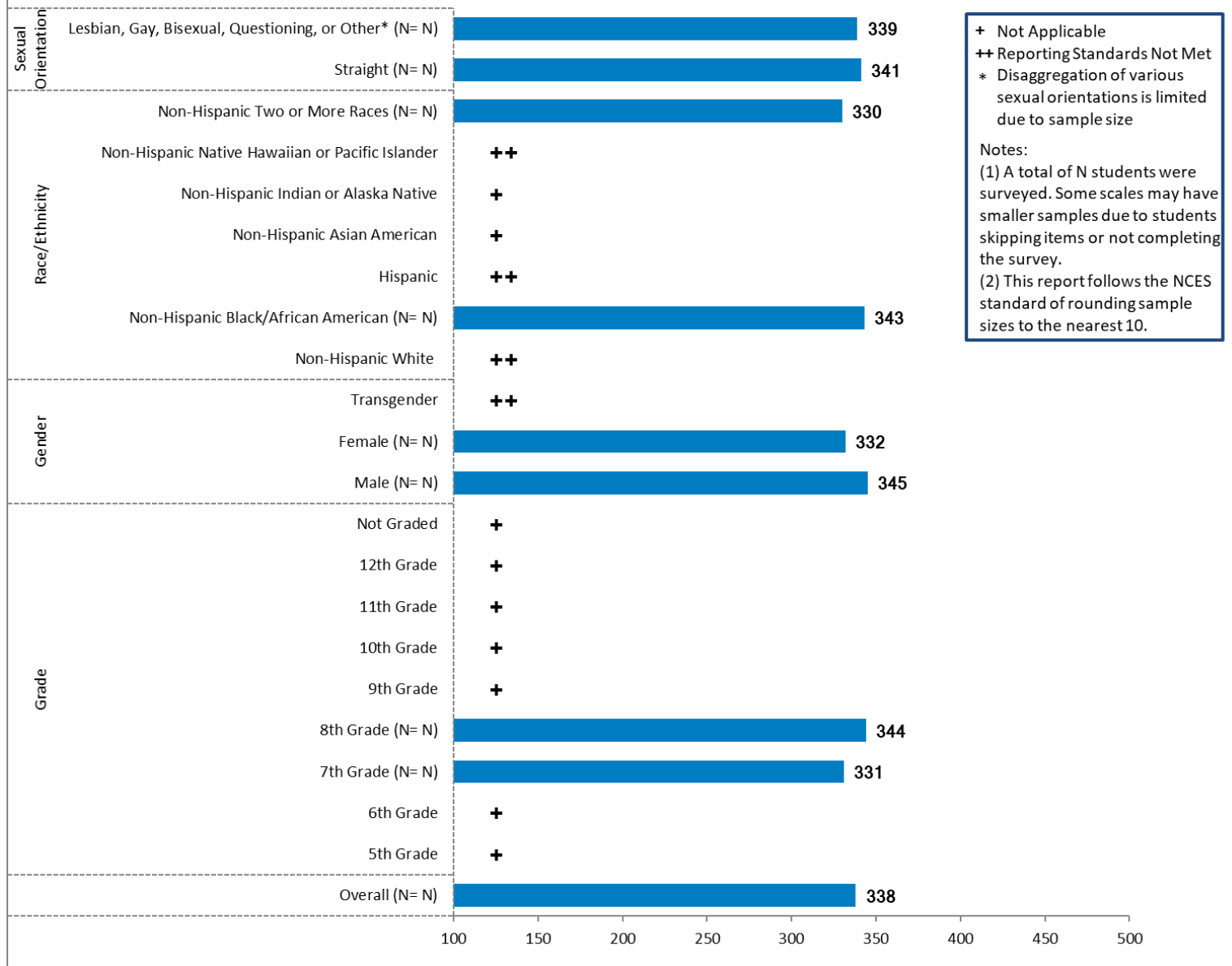
# Figures: Student Perceptions of School Climate at SCHOOL NAME

**Figure 2. School Climate Survey Results: [7th and 8th OR 9th and 10th] Graders**

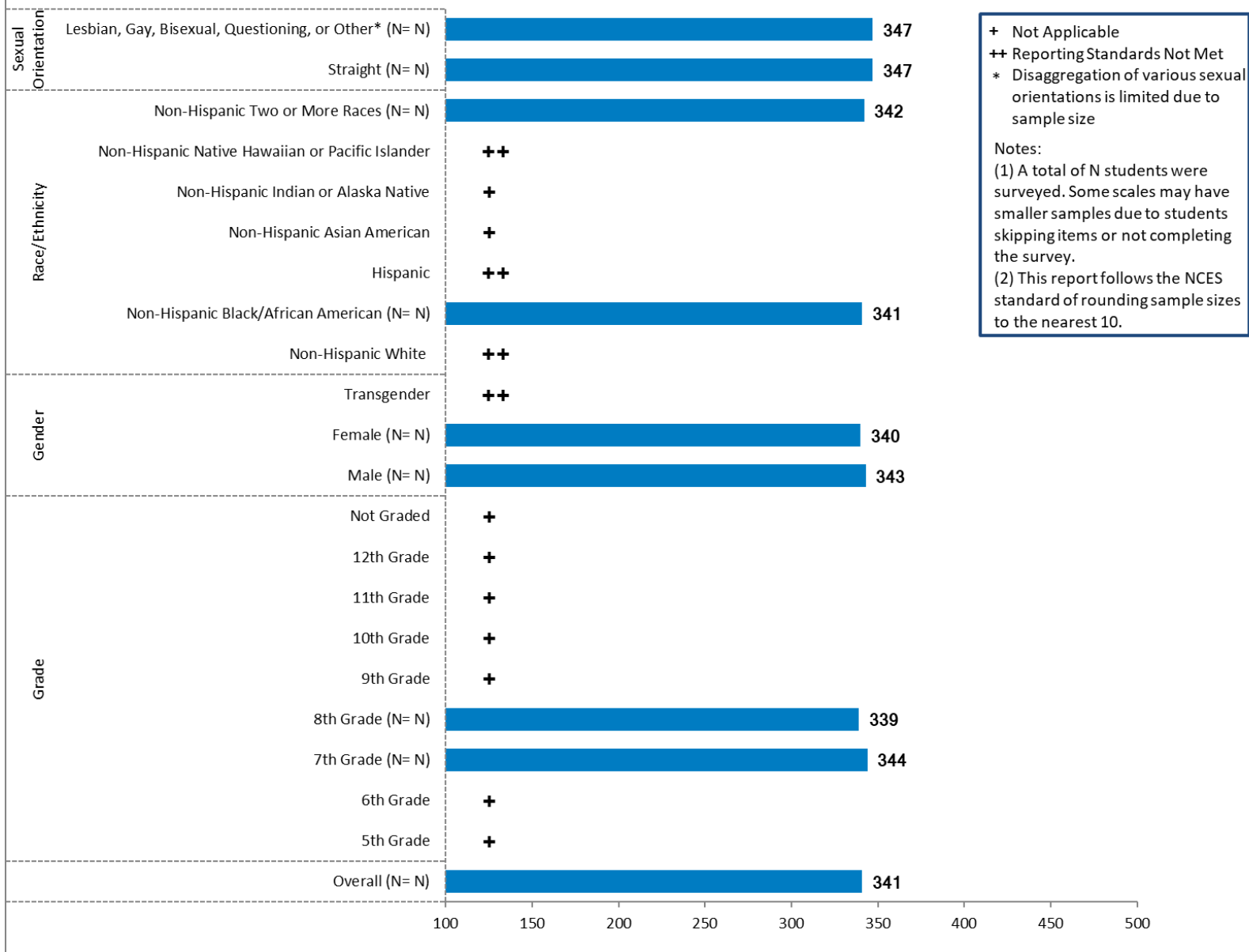


**Notes:**  
 (1) We compare average scores from 7th and 8th graders in this school to average scores from 7th and 8th graders in N other DC schools.  
 (2) A total of N [7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> OR 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>] graders were surveyed. Completion rates vary by scale, from XX% (Discipline) to XX% (Cultural and Linguistic Competence).  
 (3) This report follows the NCES standard of rounding sample sizes to the nearest 10.

**Figure 3. Engagement Scale Scores, Overall and by Gender, Grade, Race/Ethnicity, and Sexual Orientation: MONTH YEAR**



**Figure 4. Cultural and Linguistic Competence Scale Scores, Overall and by Gender, Grade, Race/Ethnicity, and Sexual Orientation: MONTH YEAR**

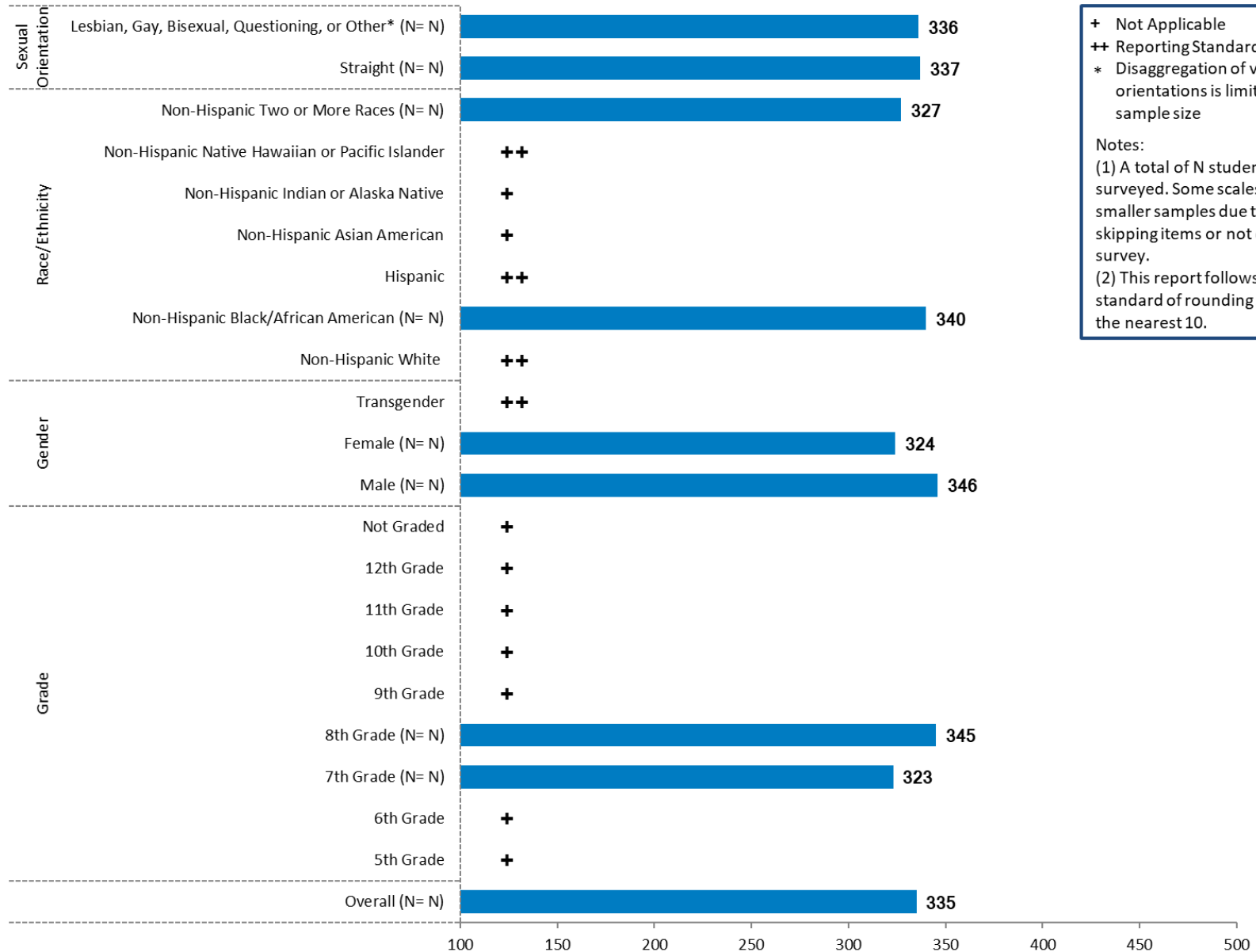


+ Not Applicable  
 ++ Reporting Standards Not Met  
 \* Disaggregation of various sexual orientations is limited due to sample size

Notes:  
 (1) A total of N students were surveyed. Some scales may have smaller samples due to students skipping items or not completing the survey.  
 (2) This report follows the NCES standard of rounding sample sizes to the nearest 10.



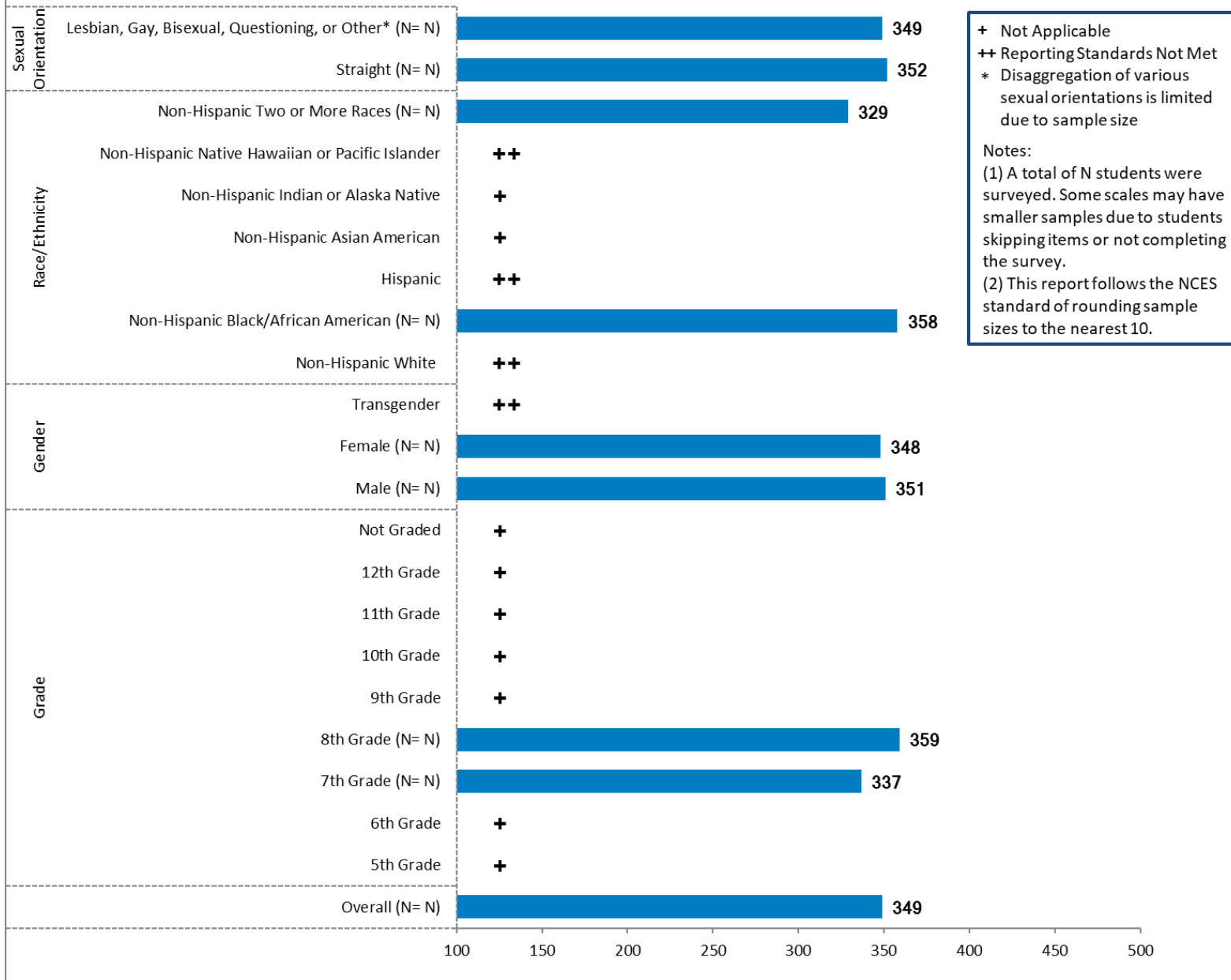
**Figure 5. Relationships Scale Scores, Overall and by Gender, Grade, Race/Ethnicity, and Sexual Orientation: MONTH YEAR**



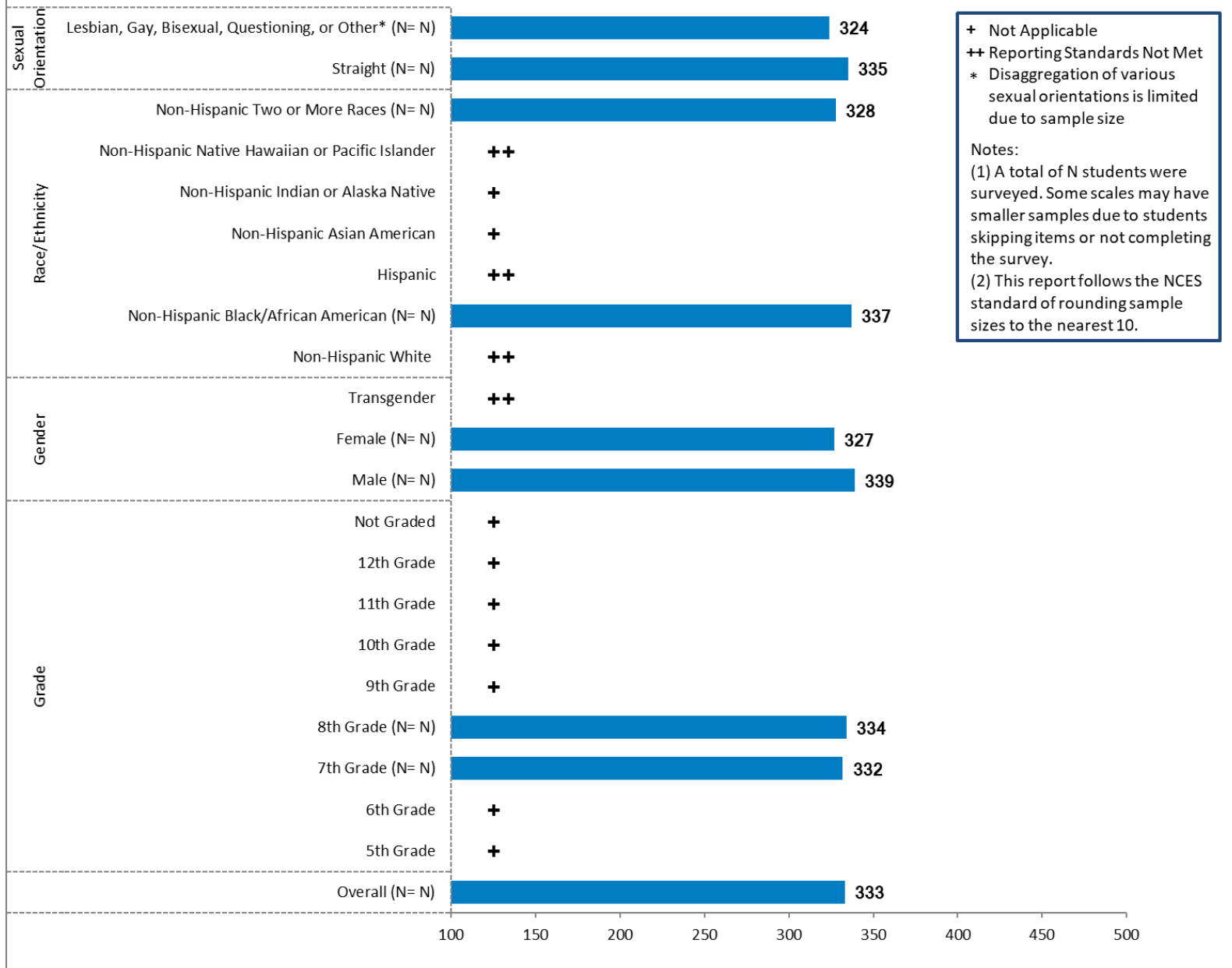
+ Not Applicable  
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 \* Disaggregation of various sexual orientations is limited due to sample size

Notes:  
 (1) A total of N students were surveyed. Some scales may have smaller samples due to students skipping items or not completing the survey.  
 (2) This report follows the NCES standard of rounding sample sizes to the nearest 10.

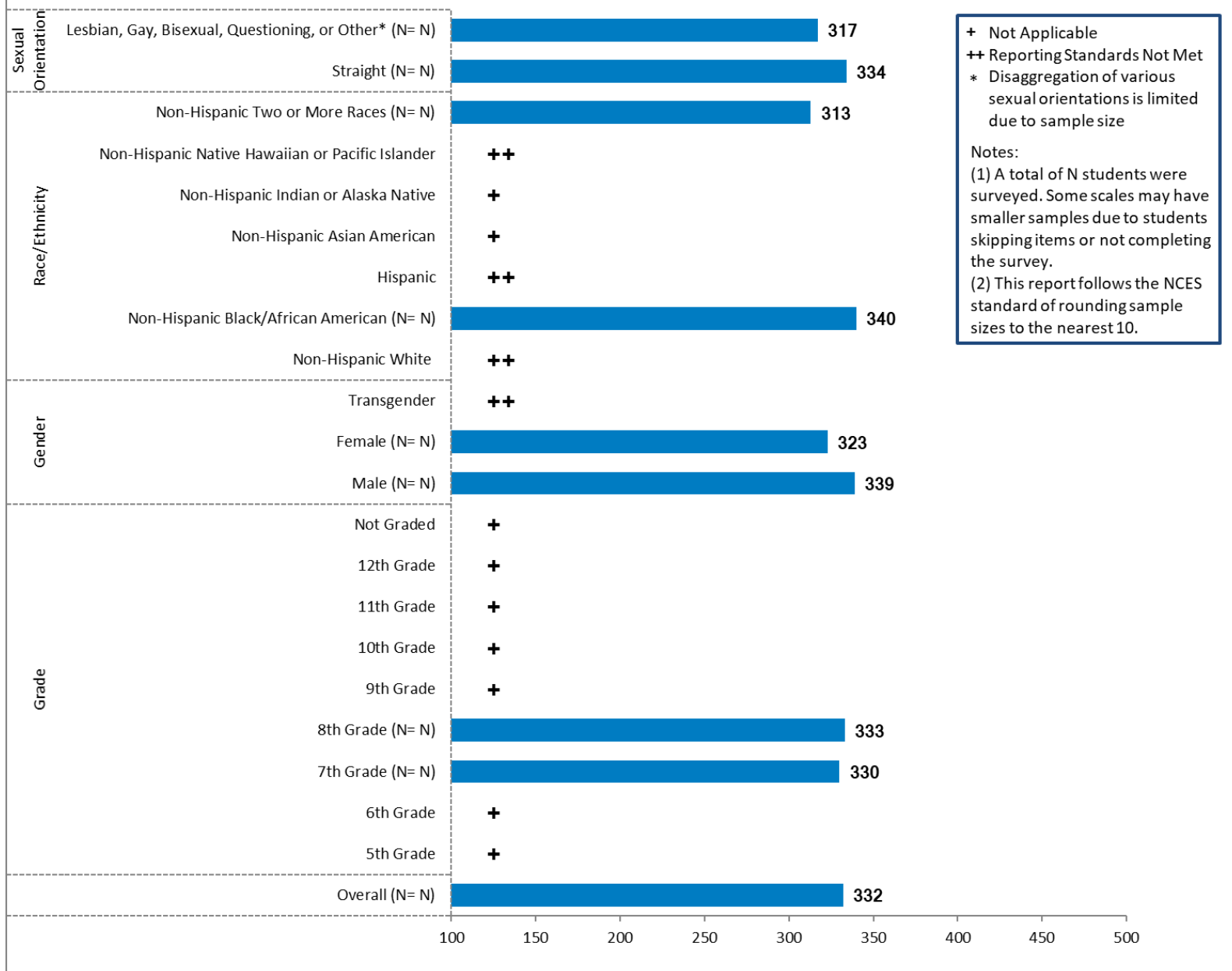
**Figure 6. School Participation Scale Scores, Overall and by Gender, Grade, Rce/Ethnicity, and Sexual Orientation: MONTH YEAR**



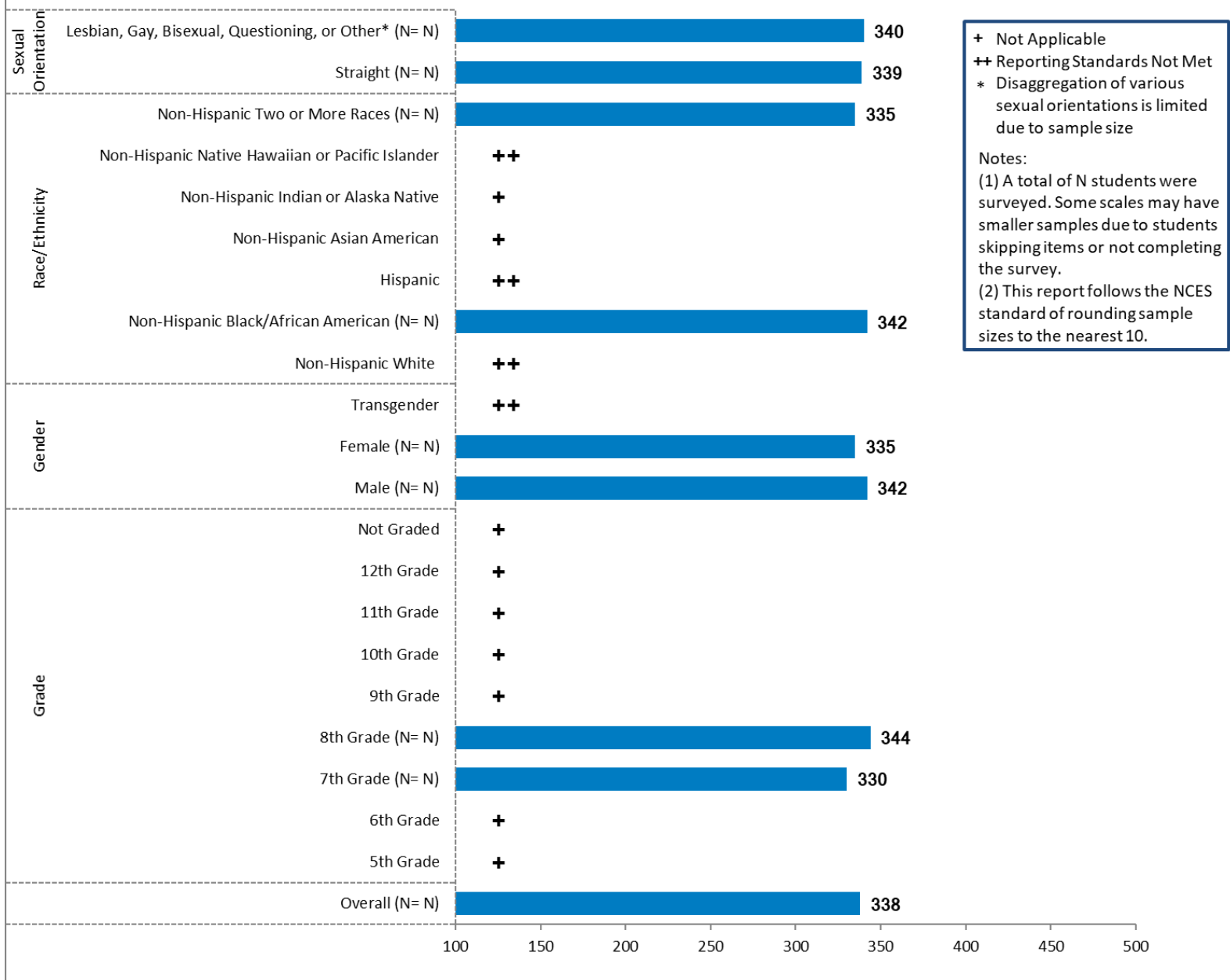
**Figure 7. Safety Scale Scores, Overall and by Gender, Grade, Race/Ethnicity, and Sexual Orientation: MONTH YEAR**



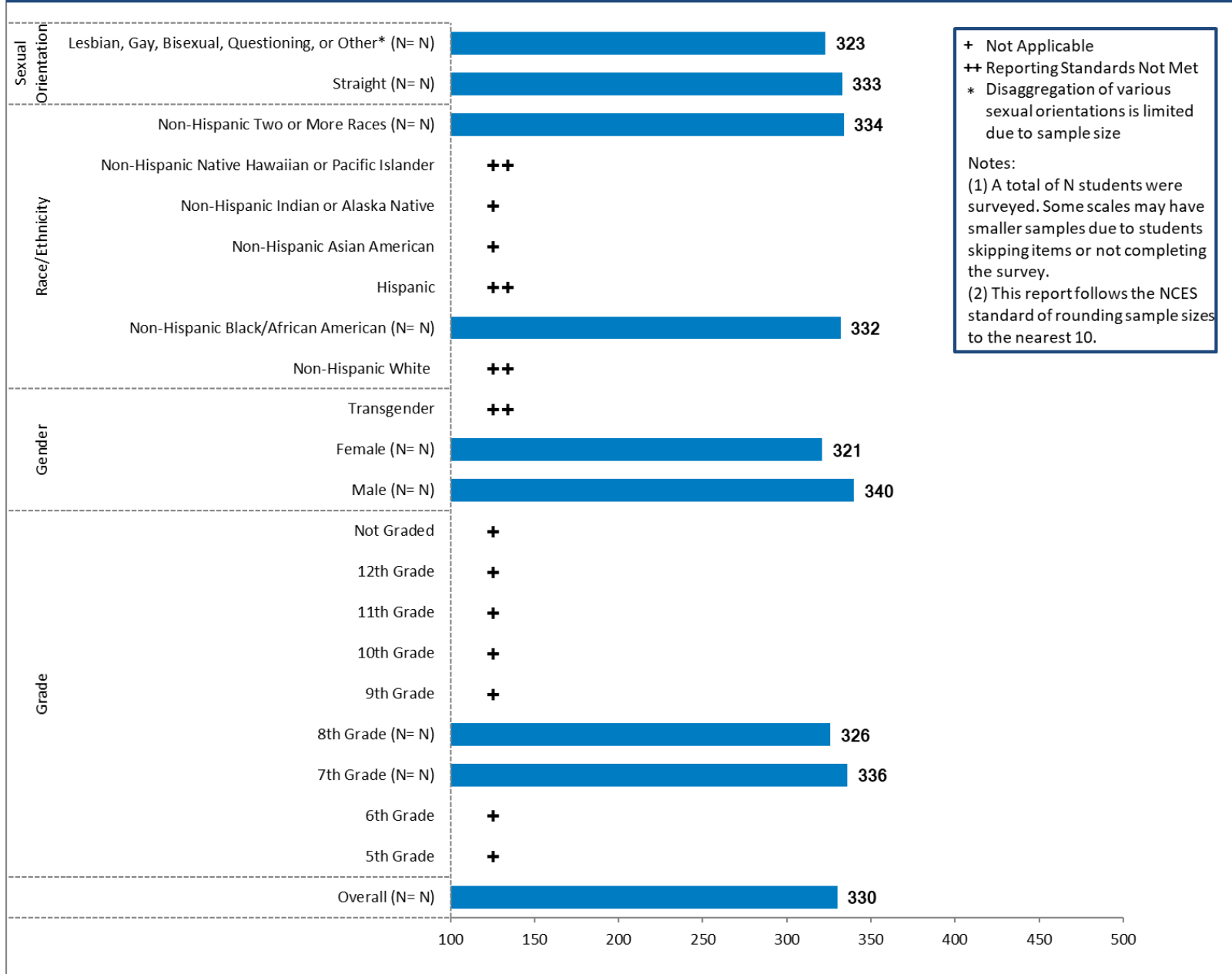
**Figure 8. Emotional Safety Scale Scores, Overall and by Gender, Grade, Race/Ethnicity, and Sexual Orientation: MONTH YEAR**



**Figure 9. Physical Safety Scale Scores, Overall and by Gender, Grade, Race/Ethnicity, and Sexual Orientation: MONTH YEAR**



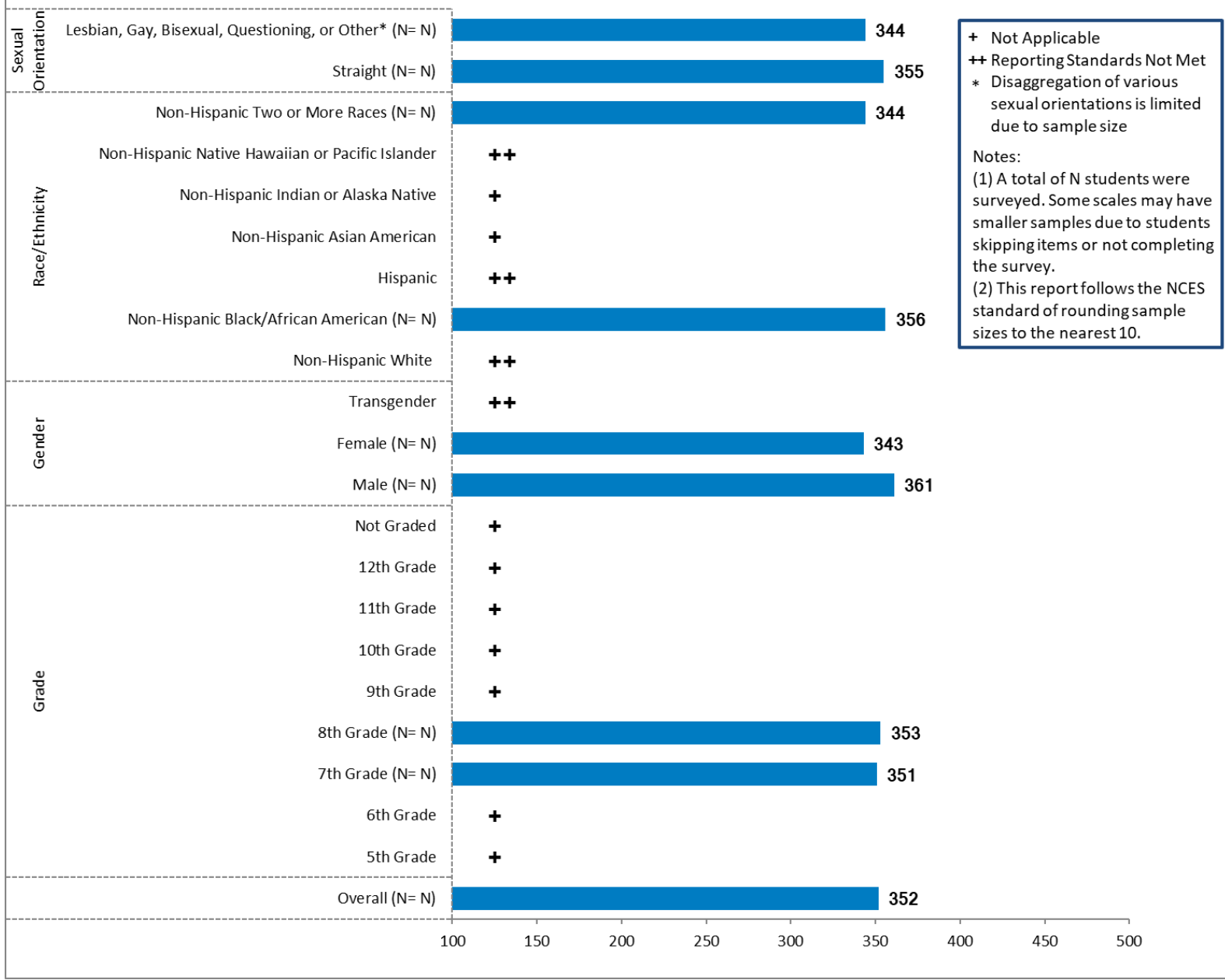
**Figure 10. Bullying/Cyberbullying Scale Scores, Overall and by Gender, Grade, Race/Ethnicity, and Sexual Orientation: MONTH YEAR**



+ Not Applicable  
 ++ Reporting Standards Not Met  
 \* Disaggregation of various sexual orientations is limited due to sample size

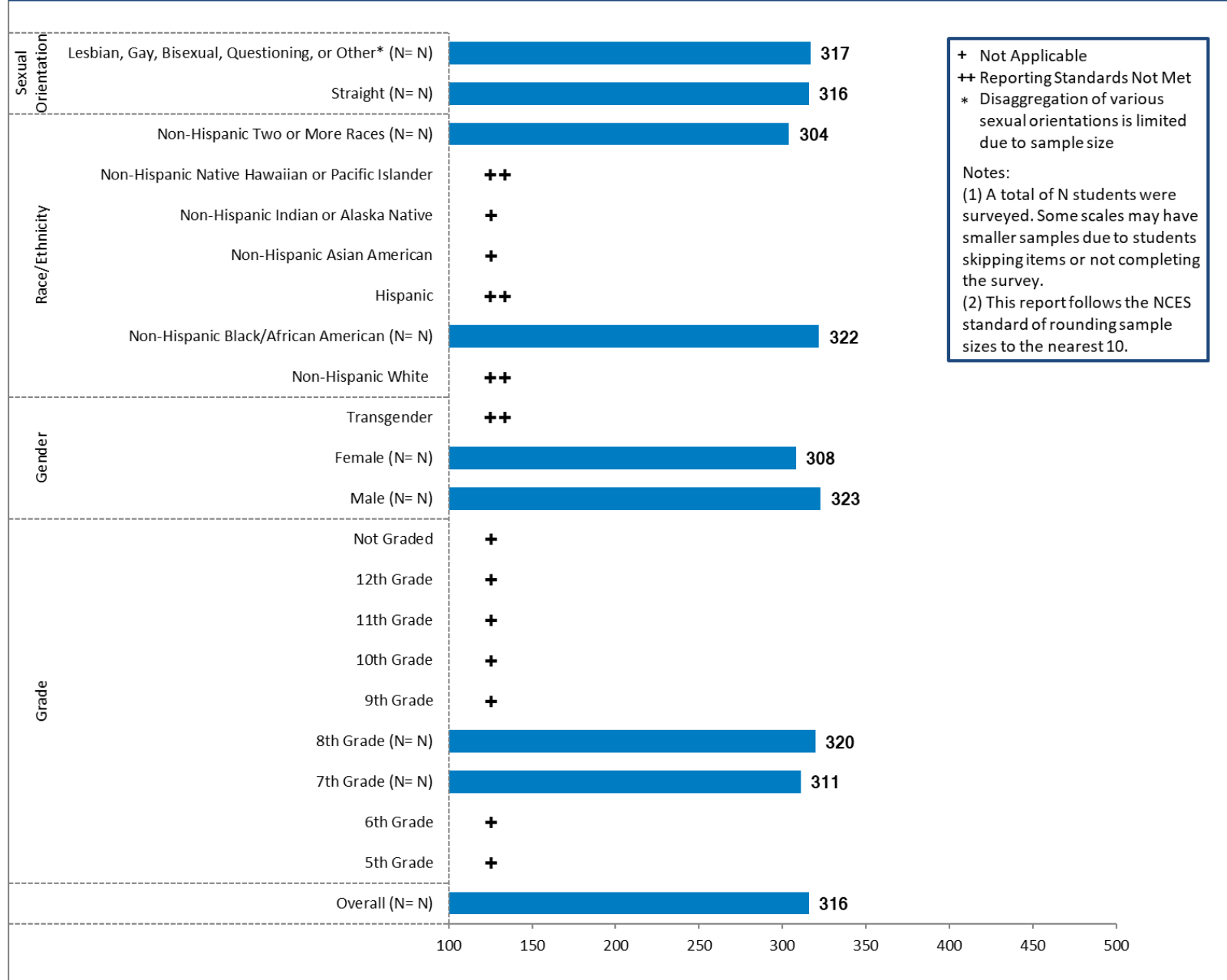
Notes:  
 (1) A total of N students were surveyed. Some scales may have smaller samples due to students skipping items or not completing the survey.  
 (2) This report follows the NCES standard of rounding sample sizes to the nearest 10.

**Figure 11. Substance Abuse Scale Scores, Overall and by Gender, Grade, Race/Ethnicity, and Sexual Orientation: MONTH YEAR**





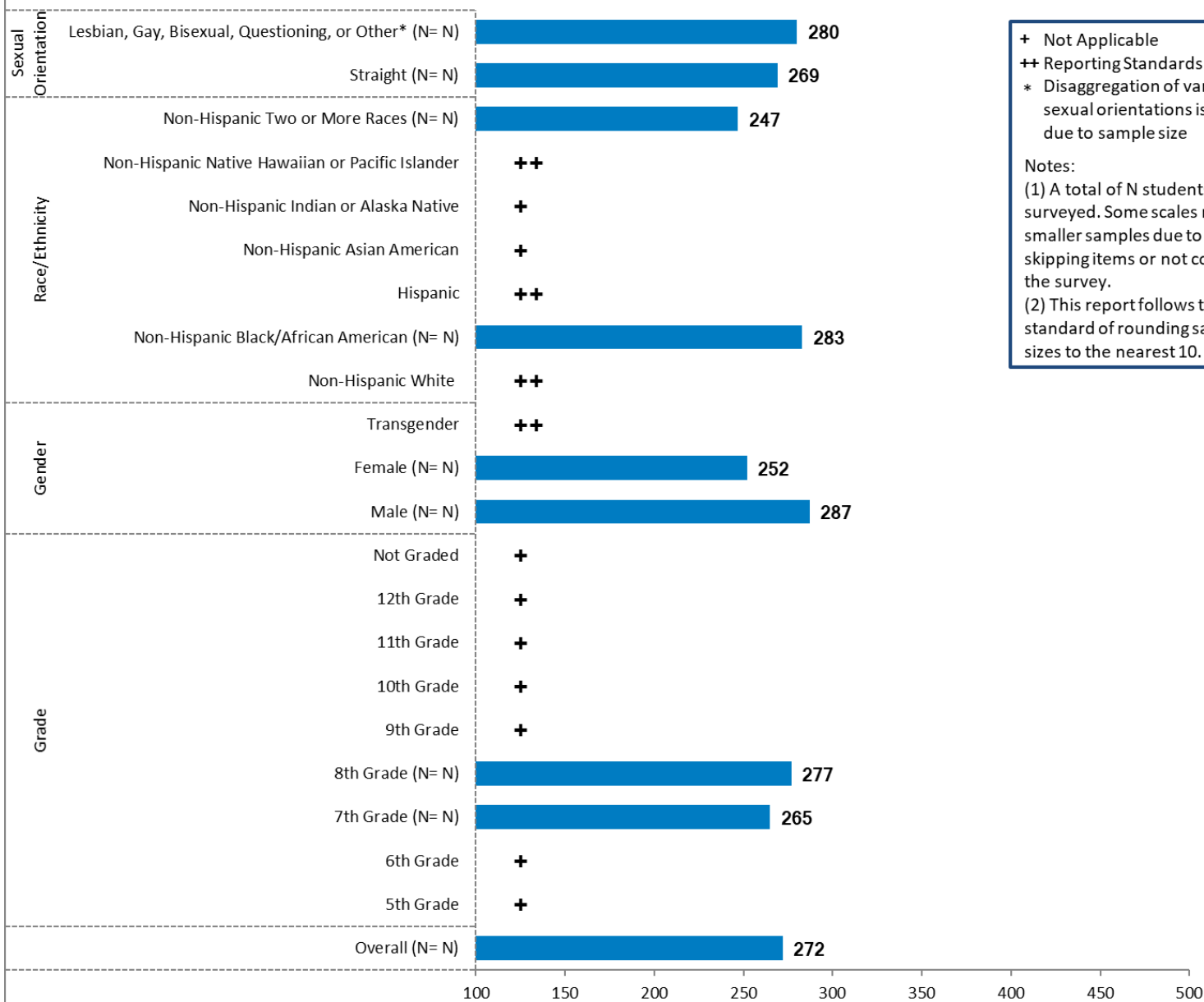
**Figure 12. Environment Scale Scores, Overall and by Gender, Grade, Race/Ethnicity, and Sexual Orientation: MONTH YEAR**



+ Not Applicable  
 ++ Reporting Standards Not Met  
 \* Disaggregation of various sexual orientations is limited due to sample size

Notes:  
 (1) A total of N students were surveyed. Some scales may have smaller samples due to students skipping items or not completing the survey.  
 (2) This report follows the NCES standard of rounding sample sizes to the nearest 10.

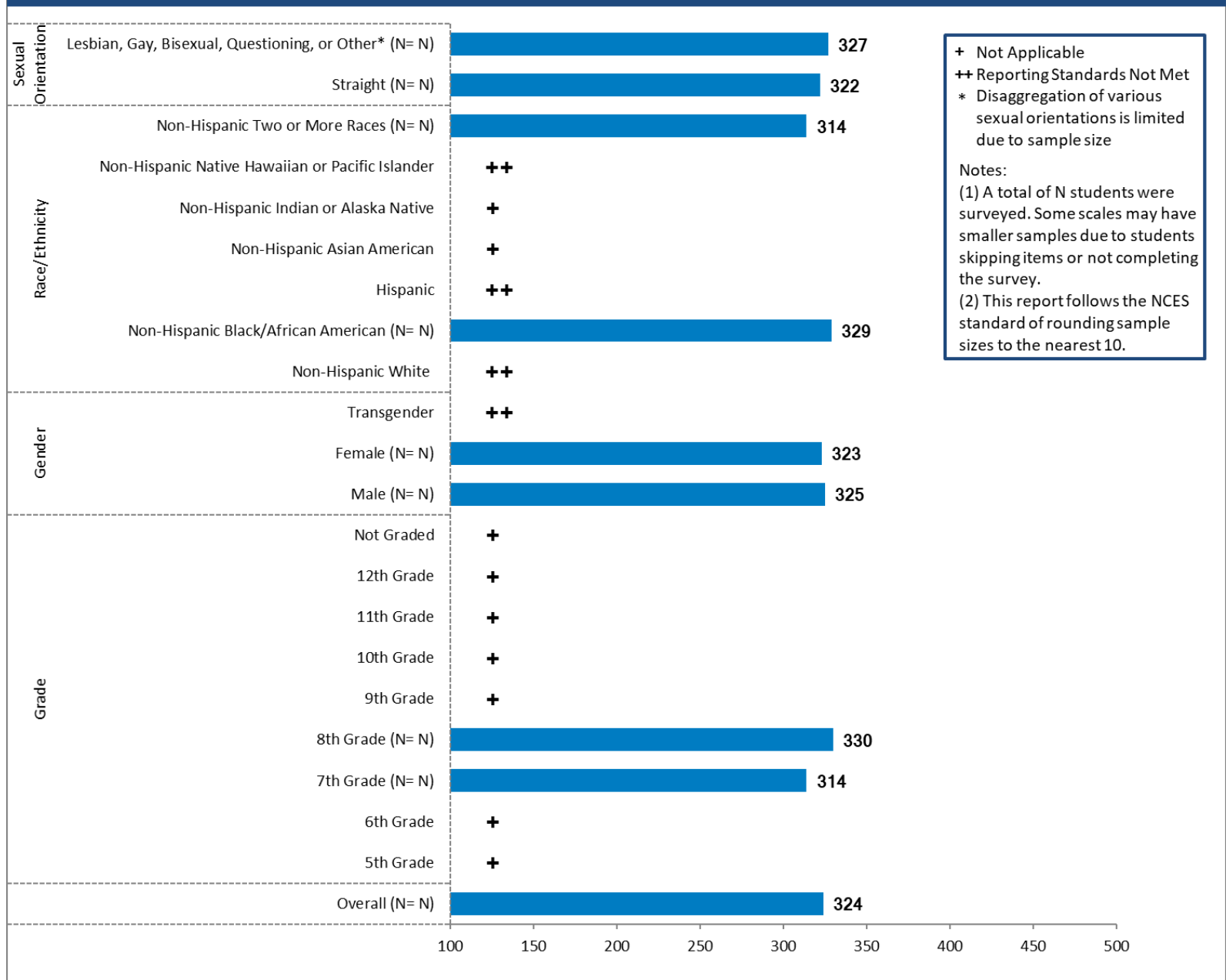
**Figure 13. Physical Environment Scale Scores, Overall and by Gender, Grade, Race/Ethnicity, and Sexual Orientation: MONTH YEAR**



+ Not Applicable  
 ++ Reporting Standards Not Met  
 \* Disaggregation of various sexual orientations is limited due to sample size

Notes:  
 (1) A total of N students were surveyed. Some scales may have smaller samples due to students skipping items or not completing the survey.  
 (2) This report follows the NCES standard of rounding sample sizes to the nearest 10.

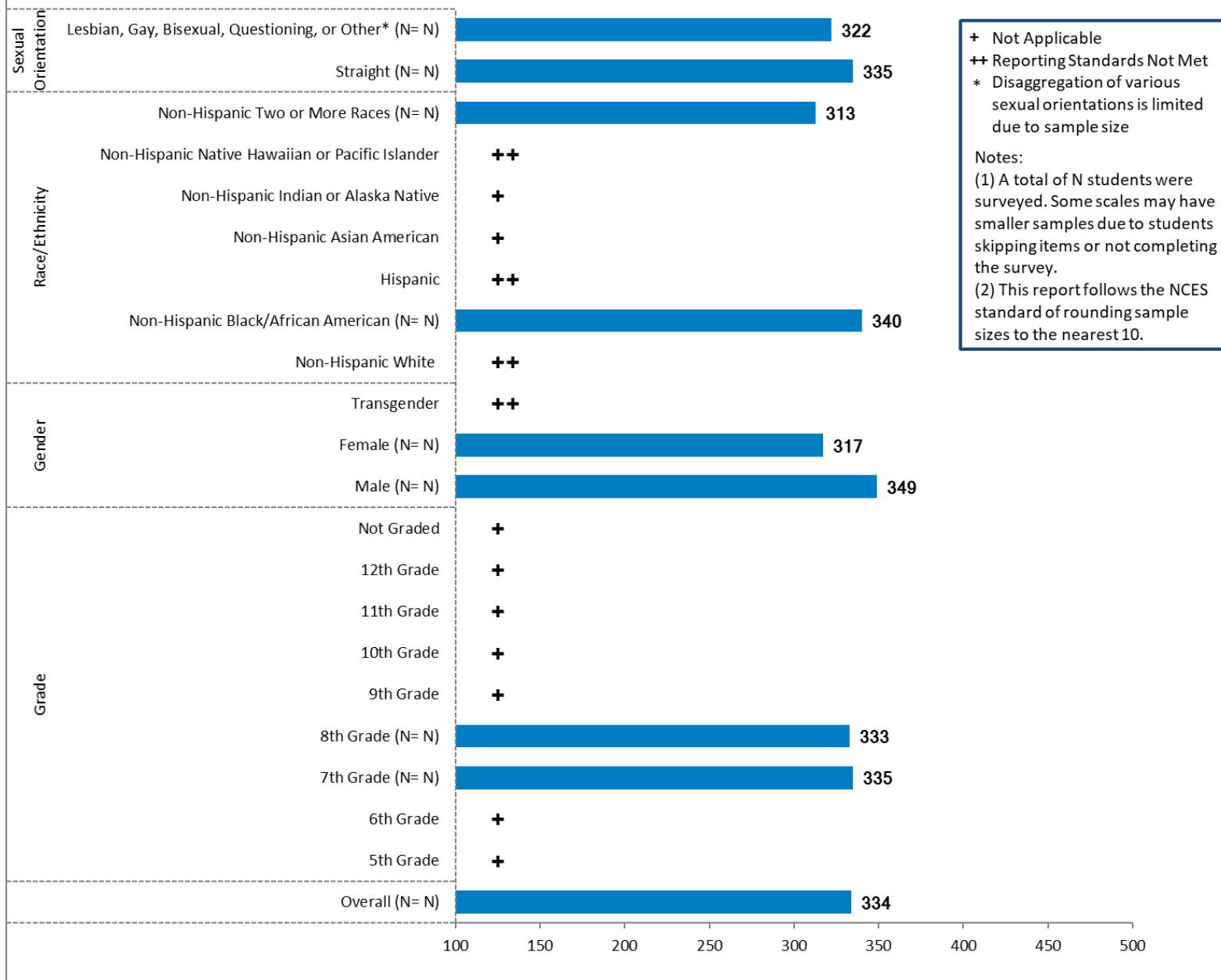
**Figure 14. Instructional Environment Scale Scores, Overall and by Gender, Grade, Race/Ethnicity, and Sexual Orientation: MONTH YEAR**



+ Not Applicable  
 ++ Reporting Standards Not Met  
 \* Disaggregation of various sexual orientations is limited due to sample size

Notes:  
 (1) A total of N students were surveyed. Some scales may have smaller samples due to students skipping items or not completing the survey.  
 (2) This report follows the NCES standard of rounding sample sizes to the nearest 10.

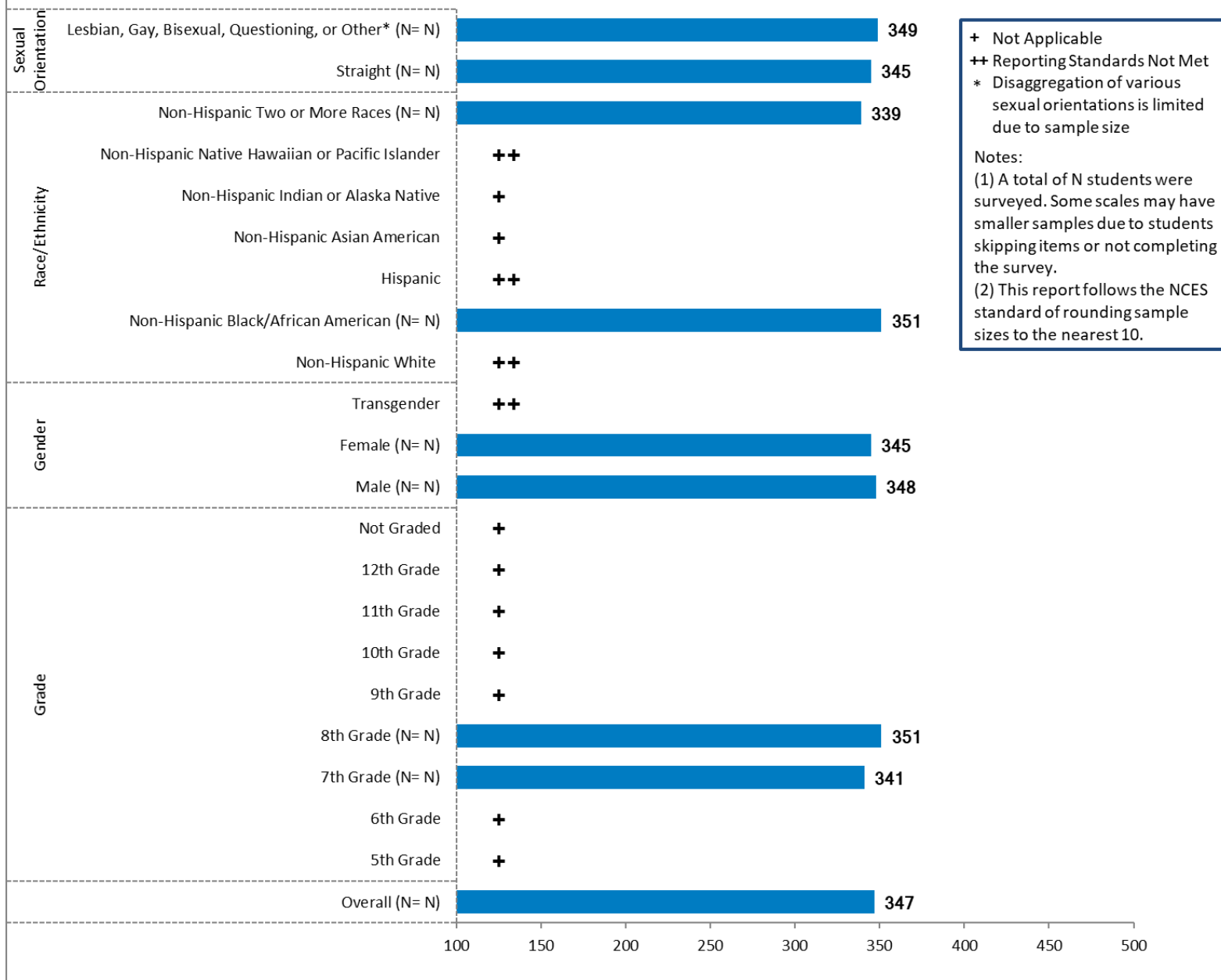
**Figure 15. Mental Health Scale Scores, Overall and by Gender, Grade, Race/Ethnicity, and Sexual Orientation: MONTH YEAR**



+ Not Applicable  
 ++ Reporting Standards Not Met  
 \* Disaggregation of various sexual orientations is limited due to sample size

Notes:  
 (1) A total of N students were surveyed. Some scales may have smaller samples due to students skipping items or not completing the survey.  
 (2) This report follows the NCES standard of rounding sample sizes to the nearest 10.

**Figure 16. Discipline Scale Scores, Overall and by Gender, Grade, Race/Ethnicity, and Sexual Orientation: MONTH YEAR**



# Appendix I: Definitions of ED-SCLS Domains and Topic Areas for Student Reports

## Domain: Engagement

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The Engagement domain on the ED-SCLS constitutes three topic areas: cultural and linguistic competence, relationships, and school participation.

### Topic Area: Cultural and Linguistic Competence

Definition: “A set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system or agency or among professionals and that enable that system, agency, or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations.”<sup>5</sup>

The ED-SCLS Student Survey assesses Cultural and Linguistic Competence with the following statements, all measured on a scale from one (strongly disagree) to four (strongly agree):

- All students are treated the same, regardless of whether their parents are rich or poor.
- Boys and girls are treated equally well.
- This school provides instructional materials (e.g., textbooks, handouts) that reflect my cultural background, ethnicity, and identity.
- Adults working at this school treat all students respectfully.
- People of different cultural backgrounds, races, or ethnicities get along well at this school.

### Topic Area: Relationships

Definition: “Positive connections among students, adults, and peers in the school setting that foster positive social interaction and establish a nurturing environment of trust and support.”<sup>6</sup>

The ED-SCLS Student Survey assesses Relationships with the following statements, all measured on a scale from one (strongly disagree) to four (strongly agree):

- Teachers understand my problems.
- Teachers are available when I need to talk with them.
- It is easy to talk with teachers at this school.
- My teachers care about me.

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<sup>5</sup> American Institutes for Research. (2017). *Cultural & Linguistic Competence*. Retrieved from <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/topic-research/engagement/cultural-linguistic-competence>

<sup>6</sup> American Institutes for Research. (2017). *Relationships*. Retrieved from <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/topic-research/engagement/relationships>

- At this school, there is a teacher or some other adult who students can go to if they need help because of sexual assault or dating violence.
- My teachers make me feel good about myself.
- Students respect one another.
- Students like one another.
- If I am absent, there is a teacher or some other adult at school that will notice my absence.

### Topic Area: School participation

Definition: “Strong connections among students, staff, and family that facilitate participation in school activities and governance, as well as the inclusion of the community at large in school activities.”<sup>7</sup>

The ED-SCLS Student Survey assesses School Participation with the following statements, all measured on a scale from one (strongly disagree) to four (strongly agree):

- I regularly attend school-sponsored events, such as school dances, sporting events, student performances, or other school activities.
- I regularly participate in extra-curricular activities offered through this school, such as, school clubs or organizations, musical groups, sports teams, student government, or any other extra-curricular activities.
- At this school, students have lots of chances to help decide things like class activities and rules.
- There are lots of chances for students at this school to get involved in sports, clubs, and other school activities outside of class.
- I have lots of chances to be part of class discussions or activities.

## Domain: Overall Safety

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The Safety domain on the ED-SCLS constitutes five topic areas: emotional safety, physical safety, bullying, substance abuse, and emergency readiness and management. Although the Emergency Readiness and Management topic area is not used in any scale score calculations, it is described below.

### Topic Area: Emotional Safety

Definition: “An experience in which one feels safe to express emotions, security, and confidence to take risks and feels challenged and excited to try something new.”<sup>8</sup>

The ED-SCLS Student Survey assesses Emotional Safety with the following statements, all measured on a scale from one (strongly disagree) to four (strongly agree):

- I feel like I belong.

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<sup>7</sup> American Institutes for Research. (2017). *School Participation*. Retrieved from <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/topic-research/engagement/school-participation>

<sup>8</sup> American Institutes for Research. (2017). *Emotional Safety*. Retrieved from <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/topic-research/safety/emotional-safety>



- Students at this school get along well with each other.
- At this school, students talk about the importance of understanding their own feelings and the feelings of others.
- At this school, students work on listening to others to understand what they are trying to say.
- I am happy to be at this school.
- I feel like I am part of this school.
- I feel socially accepted.

### Topic Area: Physical Safety

Definition: “The protection of all stakeholders, including families, caregivers, students, school staff, and the community, from violence, theft, and exposure to weapons and threats in order to establish a secure learning environment.”<sup>9</sup>

The ED-SCLS Student Survey assesses Physical Safety with the following statements, all measured on a scale from one (strongly disagree) to four (strongly agree):

- I feel safe at this school.
- I feel safe going to and from this school.
- I sometimes stay home because I don’t feel safe at this school.
- Students at this school carry guns or knives to school.
- Students at this school threaten to hurt other students.
- Students at this school steal money, electronics, or other valuable things while at school.
- Students at this school damage or destroy other students' property.
- Students at this school fight a lot.

### Topic Area: Bullying/Cyberbullying

Definition: “*Bullying* refers to a form of unwanted, aggressive behavior among school-age children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance and that is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. *Cyberbullying* refers to bullying using electronic devices, such as cell phones, computers, and tablets, or other communication tools, including social media sites, text messages, chat rooms, and websites.”<sup>10</sup>

The ED-SCLS Student Survey assesses Bullying/Cyberbullying with the following statements, all measured on a scale from one (strongly disagree) to four (strongly agree):

- Students at this school are teased or picked on about their race or ethnicity.
- Students at this school are teased or picked on about their cultural background or religion.
- Students at this school are teased or picked on about their physical or mental disability.
- Students at this school are teased or picked on about their real or perceived sexual orientation.

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<sup>9</sup> American Institutes for Research. (2017). *Physical Safety*. Retrieved from <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/topic-research/safety/physical-safety>

<sup>10</sup> American Institutes for Research. (2017). *Bullying/Cyberbullying*. Retrieved from <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/topic-research/safety/bullyingcyberbullying>

- Students at this school are often bullied.
- Students at this school try to stop bullying.
- Students often spread mean rumors or lies about others at this school on the internet (i.e., Facebook™, email, and instant message).

### Topic Area: Substance Abuse

Definition: “A harmful pattern of use of alcohol, tobacco products, and illicit drugs; this includes the presence of substance use and trade within school and campus environments and during school-related activities.”<sup>11</sup>

The ED-SCLS Student Survey assesses Substance Abuse with the following statements, all measured on a scale from one (strongly disagree) to four (strongly agree):

- Students use/try alcohol or drugs while at school or school-sponsored events.
- It is easy for students to use/try alcohol or drugs at school or school-sponsored events without getting caught.
- Students at this school think it is okay to smoke one or more packs of cigarettes a day.
- Students at this school think it is okay to get drunk.
- Students at this school think it is okay to try drugs.

### Topic Area: Emergency Readiness and Management

Definition: “No matter the age--from Pre-K/Elementary School to higher education-- communities and families expect schools and learning institutions to ensure their children and youth are safe in the face of an emergency, including violence, crime, natural disasters, epidemics, and accidents. It is critical for schools/institutions of higher education and communities to work together to develop plans that can be effectively implemented in the event of an emergency.”

The ED-SCLS Student Survey assesses Emergency Readiness and Management with the following statements, all measured on a scale from one (strongly disagree) to four (strongly agree):

- Students know what to do if there is an emergency, natural disaster (tornado, flood) or a dangerous situation (e.g. violent person on campus) during the school day.
- If students hear about a threat to school or student safety, they would report it to someone in authority.

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<sup>11</sup> American Institutes for Research. (2017). *Substance Abuse*. Retrieved from <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/topic-research/safety/substance-abuse>

## Domain: Overall Environment

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The Environment domain on the ED-SCLS constitutes five topic areas: physical environment, instructional environment, physical health, mental health, and discipline. The ED-SCLS does not create a scale for the Physical Health topic area for student reports, so it is not described below.

### Topic Area: Physical Environment

Definition: “The level of upkeep, ambient noise, lighting, indoor air quality, or thermal comfort of the school’s physical building and its location within the community.”<sup>12</sup>

The ED-SCLS Student Survey assesses Physical Environment with the following statements, all measured on a scale from one (strongly disagree) to four (strongly agree):

- The bathrooms in this school are clean.
- The temperature in this school is comfortable all year round.
- The school grounds are kept clean.
- I think that students are proud of how this school looks on the outside.
- Broken things at this school get fixed quickly.

### Topic Area: Instructional Environment

Definition: “The instructional, behavioral, and personal aspects of the classroom experience.”<sup>13</sup>

The ED-SCLS Student Survey assesses Instructional Environment with the following statements, all measured on a scale from one (strongly disagree) to four (strongly agree):

- My teachers praise me when I work hard in school.
- My teachers give me individual attention when I need it.
- My teachers often connect what I am learning to life outside the classroom.
- The things I’m learning in school are important to me.
- My teachers expect me to do my best all the time.

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<sup>12</sup> American Institutes for Research. (2017). *Physical Environment*. Retrieved from <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/topic-research/environment/physical-environment>

<sup>13</sup> American Institutes for Research. (2017). *Physical Environment*. Retrieved from <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/topic-research/environment/instructional-environment>

## Topic Area: Mental Health

Definition: “The emotional and psychological well-being of individuals that promotes healthy development and functioning and increases the capacity of individuals to live productive lives while striving to reach their full potential.”<sup>14</sup>

The ED-SCLS Student Survey assesses Mental Health with the following statements, all measured on a scale from one (strongly disagree) to four (strongly agree):

- My teachers really care about me.
- I can talk to my teachers about problems I am having in class.
- I can talk to a teacher or other adult at this school about something that is bothering me.
- Students at this school stop and think before doing anything when they get angry.
- Students at this school try to work out their disagreements with other students by talking to them.

## Topic Area: Discipline

Definition: “Referring to the rules and strategies applied in school to manage student behavior and practices used to encourage self-discipline.”<sup>15</sup>

The ED-SCLS Student Survey assesses Discipline with the following statements, all measured on a scale from one (strongly disagree) to four (strongly agree):

- My teachers make it clear to me when I have misbehaved in class.
- Adults working at this school reward students for positive behavior.
- Adults working at this school help students develop strategies to understand and control their feelings and actions.
- School rules are applied equally to all students.
- Discipline is fair.

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<sup>14</sup> American Institutes for Research (2017). *Mental Health*. Retrieved from <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/topic-research/environment/mental-health>

<sup>15</sup> American Institutes for Research (2017). *Discipline*. Retrieved from <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/topic-research/environment/discipline>

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