

Interventions to Promote School Climate



Module Focus

- Provide a definition of school climate and why school climate is important in dropout prevention
- Define and discuss 12 dimensions of school climate
- Provide some individual and team based strategies for improving school climate
- Provide additional resources to enhance knowledge about and measurement of school climate



Educators have recognized
the importance of school
climate for a hundred years.

An Introduction: The Importance of School Climate

Over the last two decades, there has been a growing appreciation that school climate, the quality, and character of school life, fosters – or undermines – children’s development, learning, and achievement.

Research confirms what teachers and parents have claimed for decades:

A safe and supportive school environment, in which students have positive social relationships and are respected, engaged in their work, and feel competent, matters.

What is School Climate and Why is it Important?

- School climate refers to the quality and character of school life as it relates to norms and values, interpersonal relations and social interactions, and organizational processes and structures.
- School climate sets the tone for all the learning and teaching done in the school environment and, as research proves, it is predictive of students' ability to learn and develop in healthy ways.
- Further, research proves that a positive school climate directly impacts important indicators of success such as increased teacher retention, lower dropout rates, decreased incidences of violence, and higher student achievement.

The Center For Social and Emotional Education

A Positive School Climate

- Increases the holding power of our classrooms
- Increases the holding power of our hallways
- Increases the holding power of our schools, universally
- Increases the holding power of our communities
- Assists in increasing the school completion rates for students with disabilities!





Positive school climate
powerfully affects student
motivation to learn.

Universally Students Must ...

- Feel physically safe
- Feel social and emotional security
- Believe they are supported in their learning and goals (both short & long term)
- Believe their social and civic learning and activities are imported and supported
- Believe they are respected, trusted, and connected to the adults and the learning environment



Within the Classroom Students Must ...

- Feel welcome
- Be disciplined and not punished
- Be encouraged to contribute ideas for resolving problems
- Be offered choices
- Be taught replacement behaviors
- Be disciplined and taught how to self manage their behavior
- Taught social skills



School
connectedness
is a powerful
predictor of
adolescent health
and academic
outcomes.



Why measure school climate?

Measuring your school climate is the first step toward **improving** your school climate.



Measuring School Climate

- Importance of understanding perceptions of school experience through the eyes of:
 - Students
 - Teachers
 - Parents
- Issues of safety and social relationships
- Conducive environment for working/learning (often times a therapeutic milieu)
- Experiences in the classroom
- Example survey findings in Baltimore



Measuring school climate and using these findings to build community and further learning and positive youth development will — literally — make a difference for the future of America: our children.

According to the Research

In an overlapping manner, positive school climate promotes cooperative learning, group cohesion, respect, and mutual trust.

Sources:

G. Ghaith, “The relationship between forms of instruction, achievement and perceptions of classroom climate,” *Educational Researcher*, vol. 45, no. 1, 2003 pp. 83-93.

D. Kerr, E. Ireland, J. Lopes, et al., *Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study: Second Annual Report: First longitudinal Study*, England: National Foundation for Educational Research, 2004, pp. 1-154.

C. Finnan, K. Schnepel and L. Anderson, “Powerful learning environments: The critical link between school and classroom cultures,” *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, vol. 8, no. 4, 2003, pp. 391-418.

According to the Research

When students, in partnership with educators and parents, work to improve school climate they promote essential learning skills (e.g., creativity and innovation skills, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, communication and collaborative skills) as well as life and career skills (e.g., flexibility and adaptability, initiative, social and cross-culture skills, productivity and accountability, leadership and responsibility) that provide the foundation for 21st century learning.

(Partnership for 21st Century Skills, *Learning for the 21st century: A report and mile guide for 21st century skills*, 2002, www.21stcenturyskills.org, accessed November 10, 2007; Partnership for 21st Century Skills, *Beyond the Three R's: Voter Attitudes toward 21st Century Skills*, 2007, www.21stcenturyskills.org, accessed November 10, 2007.)



Practice leaders — building and district leaders — must become aware of scientifically sound ways they can measure and improve school climate.

School Climate

Conceptualizing School Climate:

- ✓ Organization and Composition
- ✓ Effects on Student Learning

School Climate: Organization and Composition

- Values
- Norms
- Beliefs
- Sentiments
- Practices
- Social Interactions

School Climate: Organization and Composition

- Atmosphere
- Culture
- Environment
- Morale
- School Morale
- School Ethos

School Climate: Organization and Composition

- Community
- Democracy
- Ethic of Caring
- Students' attachment to school and their academic and behavioral/social achievement are contingent on first satisfying teachers' and students' social and personal needs

Organized Schools Should Share a Common Mission ...

- Adults must believe, act, and set high expectations for all students based on their abilities and not their disabilities
- Students ask that adults act upon these beliefs and follow through
- Make certain students feel supported and are aware that you believe in them

Organized Schools Should Share a Common Mission ...

- Staff and students interact outside the classroom
- Teachers see themselves as responsible for students' total development and success [in partnership with families], not just for the transmission of lessons
- Teachers share responsibility for students' academic success, often exchanging information and coordinating efforts between classrooms and across grades

Effects of School Climate on Engagement and Learning

- Shared value system that pervades the school and derives from a shared history
- Common agenda for school members involving coursework, activities, rituals, and traditions that function as a unifying factor
- Ethic of caring that permeates relations among students and staff and between staff and students

What are the essential dimensions of school climate?

- Extensive research outlines 12 dimensions that most comprehensively color and shape our perception of school climate
 - These dimensions are divided into four major categories of safety, teaching and learning, interpersonal relationships and the institutional environment

Dimensions of School Climate

Safety

Rules and Norms: Clearly communicated rules about physical violence and verbal abuse and clear, consistent enforcement

Physical Safety: Sense that students and adults feel safe from physical harm in the school

Social and emotional security: Sense that students feel safe from verbal abuse, teasing, and exclusion

Teaching and Learning

Support for learning: Supportive teaching practices such as constructive feedback and encouragement for positive risk taking, academic challenge, individual attention, and opportunities to demonstrate knowledge and skills in a variety of ways

Social and civic learning: Support for the development of social and civic knowledge and skills, including effective listening, conflict resolution, reflection and responsibility, and ethical decision making

Dimensions of School Climate

Interpersonal
Relationships

Respect for diversity: Mutual respect for individual differences at all levels of the school – student-student, adult-students, and adult-adult

Social support – adults: Collaborative and trusting relationships among adults and adult support for students in terms of high expectations for success, willingness to listen, and personal concern

Social support – students: Network of peer relationships for academic and personal support

Teaching and
Learning

School connectedness/engagement: Positive identification with the school, a sense of belonging, and norms for broad participation in school life for students and families

Physical surroundings: Cleanliness, order, and appeal of facilities and adequate resources and materials

Student Strategies

Targeted Group, Classroom, or Individual Student

- Model positive, engaging, and rewarding relationships with their peers
- Facilitate positive interactions with other staff members
- Communicate that every day of attendance counts! You want to see their face; acknowledge their presence

Student Strategies

- Consider environmental, instructional, and behavioral systems within classrooms
- Both universally and within the classroom, students are more likely to feel welcomed and engaged when there is a sense of order
 - Strategy: Schools draft a clear statement of purpose that focuses on both academic and social outcomes for all students and include staff's roles

Team Strategies

- School teams develop a clearly defined set of expectations (expected behaviors)
- School teams develop procedures for teaching expected behavior; educators subsequently receive training on a variety of strategies to teach social skills
- School teams develop procedures for encouraging expected and school-appropriate behavior

Team Strategies cont.

- School teams develop procedures for discouraging problem behavior
 - Specifically, teams should review current discipline policies to (a) provide clear definitions of infractions; (b) determine which behaviors should be managed in the classroom and which should be sent to the office; and (c) develop data decision rules to ensure appropriate strategies are used with repeat offenders
- School teams develop procedures for record keeping and decision making
 - In addition to developing formative and summative data-collective systems, school teams should be taught to make informed decisions based on data patterns

School Climate In Review

- Characteristics at the school level that are not drawn from student performance
- Daily experience indicates that the environment in which one operates influences an individual's ability and willingness to engage, perform, and succeed

...too often, school climate
improvement efforts are
fragmented and short-lived...



For Additional Information:

Contact

Shelly Stalnaker

shestaln@k12.wv.us

Pat Homberg Executive Director

phomberg@k12.wv.us

Susan Beck Assistant Director

sbeck@k12.wv.us

Debra L. Harless Coordinator

dlharless@k12.wv.us