

SCHOOL CLIMATE REFORM OVERVIEW: WHAT IS IT? HOW DOES IT SUPPORT SAFE, RESPONSIBLE, ENGAGING AND FLOURISHING SCHOOLS? AND, WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?

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National School Climate Center:

Educating minds and hearts ... Because the three R's are not enough;

Teachers College, Columbia University

Plenary

NEW YORK CITY LEADERSHIP SUMMIT ON SCHOOL-JUSTICE PARTNERSHIPS:
KEEPING KIDS IN SCHOOL AND OUT OF COURT

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GOALS

- ❖ **A shared vision:** Feeling safe, supported, engaged and flourishing
- ❖ **Effective prevention and health promotion efforts:** What does this mean?
- ❖ **School climate reform:**
 - What is it?
 - Why is it important? Research findings
- ❖ **Barriers?**
- ❖ **What can you do?**

WHAT DO WE WANT FOR OUR CHILDREN AND OUR FUTURE?

- ❖ Feeling safe, supported, engaged & flourishing
- ❖ The foundation for democracy: Developing social, emotional & civic as well as intellectual competencies that support an engaged citizenry
- ❖ That the “whole village” supports the “whole child” as well as the educators who work with our children

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT RESEARCH: HELPFUL AND LESS HELPFUL “DRIVERS” OF CHANGE*

Unhelpful *Primary Drivers*:

- 1) Accountability systems that use data as a “hammer” rather than a “flashlight”
- 2) Primary focus on the individual teacher and/or administrator
- 3) Technology
- 4) Specific “evidence-based” programs

Helpful *Primary Drivers*

- 1) Fostering the intrinsic motivation of students, parents and school personnel: “igniting” the process
- 2) Engaging students & educators in a continuous process of social-emotional & civic as well as intellectual learning
- 3) Inspiring team work and a collaborative problem solving process
- 4) Affecting the whole community

* Bryk, et. al. 2002 & 2010; Fullan, 2011; Mourshed, Chijioke & Barber, 2010; Tucker 2011.

SCHOOL CLIMATE: WHAT IS IT?

- ❖ Creating a Climate for Learning: Foundational!
- ❖ How are you feeling right now? What is the quality and character of your 'climate' right now? How safe? Supported? Engaged? Connected to others?
- ❖ A growing topic of educational concern for over 100 years.

SCHOOL CLIMATE MATTERS

- ❖ **A paradox!**
- ❖ **Growing recognition and support from:**
 - Federal agencies: US DOE, Justice, CDC, SAMPSA and IES
 - State DOEs
 - Districts: from Westbrook, Connecticut to Chicago
- ❖ **Great need for practice and policy guidelines**

SCHOOL CLIMATE IMPROVEMENT PROCESS

Under the leadership of the Principals, supporting students, parents/guardians, school personnel and community members:

- 1) Developing a shared vision about our school
- 2) Understanding/evaluating current strengths and needs
- 3) Developing goals: Systemic, instructional and other wise
- 4) Implementing them
- 5) Learning from experience and revising goals

SCHOOL CLIMATE RESEARCH

- I. **Individual Experience:** Promoting a positive school climate effects students' self-esteem and self-concept.
- II. **Risk Prevention and Health Promotion:** Effective risk prevention and health promotion efforts are positively correlated with safe, caring, participatory and responsive school climate settings.
- III. **Academic Achievement:** Student academic achievement is strongly correlated to a safe, caring and responsive school climate setting. Positive reinforcement and attentiveness improves student performance.
- IV. **Teacher Retention:** Positive school climate is associated with greater teacher retention.

(For a summary of this research, see: Thapa, Cohen, Guffey & Higgins-D'Alessandro (2013). A Review of School Climate Research, *Review of Educational Research*, DOI: 10.3102/0034654313483907.)

MOBILIZING THE “WHOLE VILLAGE” TO SUPPORT THE “WHOLE CHILD”

- A shared understanding and goal.....but rarely practiced!
- *Promising Neighborhoods* informed projects and Community or “full service” schools
- PBIS and/or school climate reform: Similar and/or different?
- School climate reform: A continuous process of collaborative learning and improvement

THE SCHOOL CLIMATE IMPROVEMENT PROCESS: A DEMOCRATICALLY INFORMED CONTINUOUS PROCESS OF LEARNING AND IMPROVEMENT



SCHOOL CLIMATE MEASUREMENT

- ❖ Today: Measurement practices focus on cognitive learning
- ❖ School climate measurement: Recognizing the social, emotional and civic as well as intellectual and engage the whole community
- ❖ Recommended: School climate surveys that are:
 - Reliable and valid
 - Recognize student, parent/guardians, school personnel and community “voice”
 - Can be completed in under 20 minutes
 - Linked to realistic systemic and instructional improvement plans

POLICY TRENDS)

- ❖ **National School Climate Standards: Benchmarks to promote effective teaching, learning and comprehensive school improvement** (Appendix A)
(www.schoolclimate.org/climate/standards.php)
- Five Standards that support school communities addressing three essential questions:
 - (1) What kind of school do you want yours to be?
 - (2) Given this vision, what policies, rules and supports do we need?
 - (3) What practices – educational, risk prevention and health-mental health promotion – do we need to actualize our “vision” and polices?

SCHOOL CLIMATE PRACTICE TRENDS

- ❖ **Measurement trends:** Utilization of school climate measurement to compliment and extend current accountability measures
- ❖ **Practically, what to do when?**
 - Growing interest!
 - Confusion about what to do when: Implementation road maps (Appendix A)
- ❖ **Common Core and/or School Climate and/or PBIS?**

BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

- ❖ Concern about and exclusive focus on the cognitive aspects of learning and teaching: NCLB and the Common Core
- ❖ School leaders who are:
 - Reactive (rather than pro-active);
 - Anxious about being attacked; and/or
 - Not sure what to focus on to support an effective school climate improvement process.

WHAT CAN YOU DO? POLICY EFFORTS THAT SUPPORT THE WHOLE CHILD AND THE WHOLE VILLAGE

- 1) Understand recent school climate research findings.
- 2) Consider adopting or adapting the National School Climate Council's definitions for school climate and an effective school climate improvement process.
- 3) Create standards for school climate assessment and school reform efforts that support a continuous process of school wide and instructional improvement efforts.
- 4) Support social, emotional, ethical/character and civic as well as intellectual aspects of learning for students and adults, and do so in a manner that recognizes and embraces the diverse needs and perspectives of all learners.
- 5) Measure school climate comprehensively in ways that recognize student, parent, school personnel and community "voice" – with scientifically sound surveys and use findings to shape school-wide and instructional improvement efforts.

WHAT CAN YOU DO? (CONT.)

- 6) Use school climate assessment as a measure of school system performance to inform school, district, and statewide decision-making and policy development.
- 7) Support students as well as parents and school personnel reviewing and amending current codes of conduct so that they function more as learning supports rather than as punishment.
- 8) Ensure that pre and in-service educator efforts are aligned with high-quality school climate and prosocial educational (e.g. social emotional learning and character education) related standards for educators.
- 9) Address barriers to learning and teaching (e.g., student and school readiness; safety; sense of belonging and connectedness; and collaboration) and re-engage those who have become disengaged; and, ensure that an appropriate operational infrastructure and capacity building mechanisms for meeting school climate standards are developed and sustained.

THANK YOU!

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APPENDIX A

THE NATIONAL SCHOOL CLIMATE STANDARDS*

1. The school community has a shared vision and plan for promoting, enhancing and sustaining a positive school climate.
2. The school community sets policies specifically promoting (a) the development and sustainability of social, emotional, ethical, civic and intellectual skills, knowledge, dispositions and engagement, and (b) a comprehensive system to address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage students who have become disengaged.
3. The school community's practices are identified, prioritized and supported to (a) promote the learning and positive social, emotional, ethical and civic development of students, (b) enhance engagement in teaching, learning, and school-wide activities; (c) address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage those who have become disengaged; and (d) develop and sustain an appropriate operational infrastructure and capacity building mechanisms for meeting this standard.
4. The school community creates an environment where all members are welcomed, supported, and feel safe in school: socially, emotionally, intellectually and physically.
5. The school community develops meaningful and engaging practices, activities and norms that promote social and civic responsibilities and a commitment to social justice.

**National School Climate Council, 2009*