


School Boards and School Climate:

Where are we now and where do we need to go?

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School Climate

Definition*:
School Climate

School climate refers to the character and quality of school life.

It is based on patterns of people's experience of school life and reflects*:

- norms, goals, values
- interpersonal relationships
- teaching, learning
- leadership practices
- organizational structures.



* National School Climate Council (see Appendix A)

Goals

- Consider how K-12 districts and school boards measure and work to improve school climate now
- Consider how school boards, district leaders & states can measure and improve school climate to promote:
 - ✓ Student Learning, Achievement and 21st Century Learning Skills
 - ✓ Positive Youth Development
 - ✓ Authentic learning communities and school connectedness/engagement
 - ✓ An accountability system that recognizes the social and civic dimensions of learning & school life

What Does a Positive School Climate Look Like?

A sustainable, positive school climate fosters youth development and learning necessary for a productive, contributing and satisfying life in a democratic society*

* National School Climate Council (see Appendix A)

Think about . . .

Your experience right now?

Your experience as a student?

Your vision of a 'great' school?

School Climate Matter
 A 100 year-old Educational Tradition

What Does a Positive School Climate Look Like?

- This climate includes **norms, values** and **expectations** that support people feeling socially, emotionally and physically safe
- People are engaged and respected
- Students, families and educators work together to develop, live and contribute to a shared school vision
- Educators model and nurture an attitude that emphasizes the benefits and satisfaction from learning
- Each person contributes to the operations of the school and the care of the physical environment*

* National School Climate Council (see Appendix A)

School Climate: Key Dimensions

- 1) **Safety:** Rules & Norms, Physical Security, Social-Emotional Security
- 2) **Relationships:** Respect for Diversity, Social Support – Adults, Social Support - Students
- 3) **Teaching and learning:** Support for Learning, Social and Civic Learning, Professional Development, Leadership
- 4) **Environmental:** School Connectedness/Engagement, Physical Surroundings

School Climate: Where are we now? (cont.)

Relationships:

- ✓ **Less than 50%** of students believe their teachers care about them as individuals*
- ✓ **Less than 50%** feel that they have a teacher who they can talk to if they have a problem*
- ✓ **2 out of 3** students believe that students do not respect one another*
- ✓ **20% of students** feel that they are never recognized for their accomplishments*
- ✓ **Roughly 1 in 3** students feel that school is not preparing them for the future*
- ✓ **As students move from middle to high school, all of the problems noted above are exacerbated***

(*Quaglia Institute, 2008)

School Climate: Where are we now?

- **Most district and building leaders appreciate the importance of school climate**
- **NSBA has taken a national leadership role in recognizing and beginning to measure school climate**
- **Yet, there is a serious gap between research, policy and practice guidelines:**
 - ✓ Not measured with reliable and valid tools
 - ✓ We do not use school climate findings to support safe schools, student learning, positive youth development and school improvement efforts

School Climate: Where are we now? (cont.)

- **School-home-community partnerships:**
 - ✓ Essential, but a serious challenge!
- **Learning and teaching:**
 - ✓ The American paradox – the best and the worst

School Climate: Where are we now? (cont.)

Safety:

- ✓ Lethal shootings – bystander data (Pollack et al, 2008)
- ✓ Bully-victim-witness behavior (Devine & Cohen, 2007)
- ✓ Roughly 1 in 3 students feel that school is unsafe*
- ✓ One in three students do not feel comfortable asking questions in class
- ✓ Zero tolerance policies and practices have an extensive 20 year history, yet there is scant evidence of efficacy (APA, 2008)

(*Quaglia Institute, 2008)

School Climate Research

- I. Academic Achievement :**
Positive school climate is strongly correlated with and, to some extent, predictive of **high quality teaching and student academic achievement**
- 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. Individual Experience :**
A positive school climate affect student's **self-esteem and self-concept** in positive ways
- IV. Teacher Retention:**
Positive school climate is associated with **greater teacher retention**

For a summary of empirical school climate research, see: www.cseae.net/climate/schoolclimate/ & Cohen, McCabe, Michelli & Pickeral, 2009.

School Climate and Performance Index Score

Climate Level	Average Performance Index Score
Lowest Climate	~82
Medium Climate	~88
Highest Climate	~95

Source: NCEM, CDE, 2005-07

Highlight:

- Climate relates positively with the performance index

Measuring school climate

Suggested Method of Assessing School Climate*:

Scientifically-developed and comprehensive measures:

- Reliable and valid
- Recognizing student, parent and school personnel “voice”
- Assessing all of the dimensions that color and shape school climate: safety, relationships, teaching and learning and the environment

* National School Climate Council (see Appendix A)

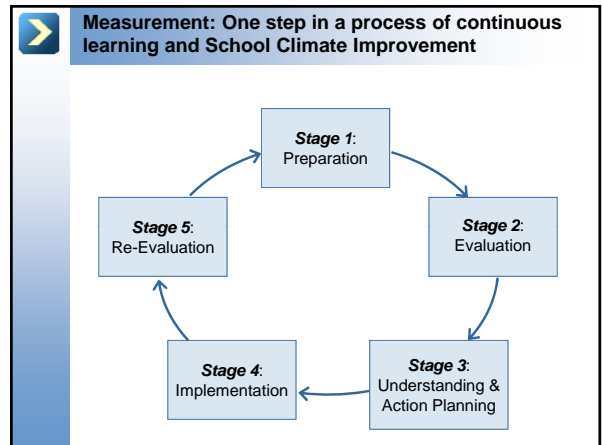
School Climate and Graduation Rate

Climate Level	Average Graduation Rate
Lowest Climate	~78%
Medium Climate	~82%
Highest Climate	~88%

Source: FMR, CDE, 2005-08

Highlight:

- Climate scores for high schools have a direct relationship with graduation rates



Measuring school climate

Options:

- Available school data: attendance & suspension/disciplinary rates
- Focus groups
- Surveys: comprehensive or single focus
- Observational methods
- Interviews
- “Town hall” discussions
- Study circles
- Participatory action research (with students)

The Stages & Process of School Climate Improvement

- Common barriers and challenges
- Tasks and responsibilities
- Tools and resources that support school teams (1) understanding current strengths/needs; (2) options for next steps; (3) “tracking” systems.
- Indicators for success: Appreciating the process as well as outcomes

> A socially unjust “gap”

Today, there is a glaring gap between school climate research on the one hand and school climate policy, practice and teacher education on the other hand.

To close this socially unjust gap, consider the following:

- **Six policy recommendations**
- **Six practice recommendations**

> School Climate Policy (cont.)

National School Climate Standards: (preliminary draft – being developed by the National School Climate Council in partnership with many other practice/policy leaders)

1. The school has a shared vision and plan for positive and sustained school climate.
2. Defined practices provide high quality support for and engagement in teaching, learning, and positive youth development, and ensuring equity of opportunity.
3. The school intentionally promotes the development of social, emotional ethical and civic as well as intellectual skills and dispositions, and also addresses barriers to learning and teaching.
4. People feel welcome, supported, and safe in schools socially, emotionally and physically.
5. Students and staff demonstrate social and civic responsibility and a commitment to social justice.

**> School Climate Policy:
Six Policy Recommendations - Where we need to go**

1. Define school climate in ways that are aligned with recent research (understanding – goals – methods)
2. Recommend that schools routinely evaluate school climate comprehensively: Recognizing student, parent and school personnel “voice” as well as all of the major dimensions (e.g., safety, relationships, teaching and learning and the environment) that shape school climate
3. Consider adopting or adapting *National School Climate Standards* for your state and/or district

**> School Climate Practice:
Six Practice Recommendations**

1. Learn about the range of comprehensive school climate assessment tools that have been developed in scientifically sound ways, encourage and support their use.
2. Learn about the range of ways these evaluation findings can be used to build community in general, promote student-parent/guardian and community participation in particular, and create evidence based instructional and systemic action plans.
3. Create a network of schools and communities committed to evaluating and measuring school climate to develop “centers of excellence” others can learn from.

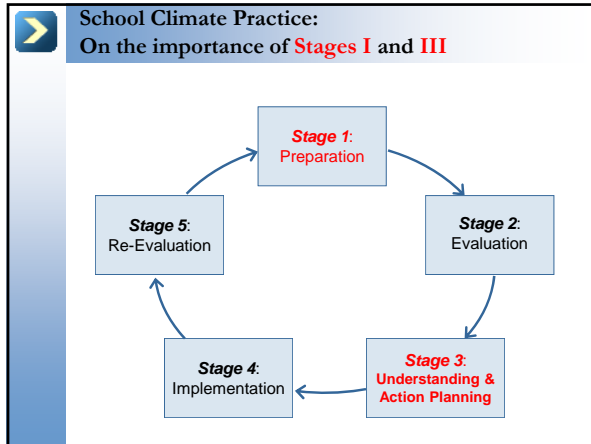
> Six Policy Recommendations (cont.)

4. Use school climate assessment as a measure of accountability
5. Encourage teacher preparation programs that give teachers and administrators the tools to evaluate classroom and school climate and take steps to use these findings to promote a climate for learning in our schools
6. Increase research on the evaluation and improvement of school climate

**> School Climate Practice:
Six Practice Recommendations (cont.)**

4. Consider joining learning forums where we can be teachers and learners together regarding common barriers and solutions to school climate improvement efforts.
5. Contribute to ongoing research that will support continuing efforts to learn about and discover challenges, solutions and best practices:
 - School-based action research
 - University-district partnerships
6. Contribute to the development of case studies that illustrate the complexity of school climate improvement efforts.

(From National School Climate Council, 2007)



The School Communities Vision/Dream

- ❖ What do you want most of our children to know and to be able to do when they graduate from high school?
- ❖ How can we best recognize, measure and support the development of these skills, knowledge and dispositions?

(see Appendix B for protocols that school boards can use to think and learn about these issues)

**School Climate Practice:
On the importance of Stages I and III (cont.):**

Stage I:

- ✓ Create a representative leadership team
- ✓ Recognize and celebrate past work
- ✓ Authorize a person to be the ‘school climate coordinator’ to support coordinated and effective administration, learning and teaching: measuring & improving climate
- ✓ Work to establish a “no fault” framework: the foundation for trust and collaboration

Resources

Online

- School Climate Matters - CSEE's quarterly e-newsletter covering school climate issues, best practices & trends, funding opportunities nationwide
www.csee.net/newsletter
- The School Climate Challenge: A White Paper presented by the NSCC – Download at www.csee.net

**School Climate Practice:
On the importance of Stages I and III (cont.):**

Stage III:

- ✓ Understand the findings: consensus and discrepancies
- ✓ “Dig deeper” – Further learning and engagement
- ✓ Prioritize goals
- ✓ Research evidence-based instructional and school-wide implementation options
- ✓ Action planning

Resources

Books and Papers

- American Psychological Association (2003). Presidential task force on prevention, promoting strength, resilience, and health in young people. *American Psychologist*, 58, (6-7) pg 425-490.
- American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008). Are Zero Tolerance Policies Effective in Schools?. *American Psychologist*, 63, (9) pg 852-862.
- Cohen, J., McCabe, L., Michelli, N.M & Pickeral, T. (2009). School Climate: Research, Policy, Teacher Education and Practice. *Teachers College Record*, Vol 11, 1, pg. 180-213.
- Cohen, J. & Pickeral, T. (2007). Measuring and Improving School Climate: A Commentary. *Education Week*, April, 18, 2007, Vol. 26, No. 33, pages 29-30.
- Devine, J & Cohen, J. (2007). *Making Your School Safe: Strategies to Protect Children and Promote Learning*. N.Y.: Teachers College Press
- Freiberg, H. J. (Ed.) (1999). *School climate: Measuring, improving and sustaining healthy learning environments*. Philadelphia, PA: Falmer Press.

Resources (cont.)

Books and Papers

- National School Climate Council (2007). *The School Climate Challenge: Narrowing the Gap Between School Climate Research and School Climate Policy, Practice Guidelines and Teacher Education Policy* - a White Paper of the National School Climate Center, Center for Social and Emotional Education and the National Center for Learning and Citizenship, Education Commission of the States (at www.csee.net)
- Pollack, W.S, Modzeleski, W, & Rooney, G. (2008). *Prior Knowledge of Potential School-Based Violence: Information students learn may prevent a targeted attack*. U.S. Secrete Service & US Department of Education (at www.secretservice.gov)
- Quaglia Institute for Student Aspirations (2008). *My Voice © Student Report 2008* (at www.qisa.org)

Appendix B: Protocols that School Boards can use to support learning that is grounded in your community (cont.):

How can we best recognize, measure and support the development of these skills, knowledge and dispositions?

- 1) Individual "visioning"** – think of an ideal school climate that supports student learning an positive youth development?
- 2) Round robin:** ask each person for one attribute and build a collective list
- 3) Collective culling:** divide the group and ask groups to reduce the list by 1/3
- 4) Final listing:** combine the two lists
- 5) In triads,** compare the National School Climate Council's definition of a positive and sustained school climate to the list that has emerged.

Next steps:

- Given the list of the list of characteristics that you have developed that define an ideal school climate, consider **(a)** in what ways your school district is actively and intentionally working to actulize these goals; and, **(b)** how are these goals not recognized, measured and focused on in meaningful and sustained ways.
- What "next steps" makes sense to you to focus on and why?

Appendix A: National School Climate Council: Working to narrow the gap between research, policy, and practice

- Howard Adelman**, Center for Mental Health in Schools, UCLA
- Janice E. Arnold-Jones**, House District 24, New Mexico
- Victor Battistich**, University of Missouri
- Martin Blank**, Director for the Coalition for Community Schools
- Cathryn Berger Kaye**, International Education Consultants
- Marvin Berkowitz**, University of Missouri, St. Louis
- Samuel Chaltain**, Five Freedoms Project, Washington, DC
- William Crone**, County Superintendent, Santa Barbara CA
- Jonathan Cohen**, Center for Social and Emotional Education, NYC; *Co-chair*
- James P. Comer**, Yale Univeristy
- Lou Ann Evans**, State College Area School District, PA
- Arnold F. Fege**, Public Education Network, Washington, DC
- Ann Foster**, Director, National Network for Educational Renewal, Seattle, WA
- J. Martez Hill**, Mississippi Department of Education, Jackson, MS
- Gary Homana**, University of Maryland
- William H. Hughes**, Greendale School District, Wisconsin
- Nicholas Michelli**, Doctoral Program in Urban Education, City University of NY
- Terry Pickeral**, National Center for Learning and Citizenship, Education Commission of the States, Denver, Colorado, *Co-chair*
- Mary Lou Rush**, Center for Students, Families and Communities, Ohio State Department of Education
- Merle J. Schwartz**, Character Education Partnership, Washington, DC
- Margaret Jo Shepherd**, Teachers College, Columbia University, NYC
- Linda Taylor**, School Mental Health Project, UCLA
- Paul Vierling**, State of Hawaii

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Appendix B: Protocols that School Boards can use to support learning that is grounded in your community.

What do you want most of our children to know and to be able to do when they graduate from high school?

Prioritizing values and/or skills



* Show the group the following eight values or eight skills. Ask people to think about what are the three most important values or skills. For the values-related question, it is interesting (and powerful) to then ask people to consider what values the media promotes.

(1) Values	
Friendship	Being Beautiful
Long life	Peace
Riches	Wisdom
Popularity	Family

(2) Skills

- Being able to play an instrument
- Being able to dance
- Being able to know yourself
- Being able to understand and work with numbers
- Being able to read a map
- Being able to read a book
- Being able to "read" and "connect" with someone else

(3) Critically assess how current standards and accountability systems are and/or are not aligned with what the community most wants students to know and "be" when they graduate.

Thank You!

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