School Boards and School Climate: Where are we now and where do we need to go?

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National School Boards Association
Washington, DC, January 31, 2009

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

School Climate

Definition*:
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)
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?

- 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.)

- Safety:
  - Lethal shootings – bystander data (Polack 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)

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

- **Relationships**:
  - Less that 50% of students believe their teachers care about them as individuals*
  - Less that 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*

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 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

*Quaglia Institute, 2008

For a summary of empirical school climate research, see www.csee.net/climate/schoolclimate/
School Climate and Performance Index Score

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

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School Climate and Graduation Rate

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)

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Measurement: One step in a process of continuous learning and School Climate Improvement

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

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*S National School Climate Council (see Appendix A)
### 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

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

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

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

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)
Prior Knowledge of Potential

Round robin working

Prioritizing values and/or skills

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(2) Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Being able to play an instrument</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Being able to dance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Being able to know yourself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Being able to understand and work with numbers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Being able to read a map</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Being able to read a book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Being able to “read” and “connect” with someone else</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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.

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 Ballistreri, 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 Cirone, County Superintendent, Santa Barbara CA
- Jonathan Cohen, Center for Social and Emotional Education, NYC, Co-chair
- James P. Comer, Yale University
- Lou Ann Evans, St. Louis Public Schools, St. Louis
- Arnold F. Fege, Public Education Network, Washington, DC
- Ann Fester, Director, National Network for Educational Renewal, Seattle, WA
- J. Martin Hill, Mississippi Department of Education, Jackson, MS
- Gary Horna, University of Maryland
- William H. Hughes, Greenwich School District, Greenwich, CT
- Nicholas Micheli, 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
- Marie J. Schwartz, Character Education Partnership, Washington, DC
- Margaret Jo Shepherd, Teachers College, Columbia University, NYC
- Linda Taylor, School Mental Health Project, UCLA
- Paul Varling, State of Hawaii

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

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 cutting: 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.

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

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 actualize 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?

Acknowledgments

• Terry Pickeral, National Center for Learning and Citizenship, Education Commission of the States
• Lou Ann Evans and other members of the National School Climate Council
• CSEE’s Staff and Board of Trustees
• Elizabeth Partoyan and members of this panel

Resources (cont.)

Books and Papers


Appendix A: National School Climate Council: 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Friendship</th>
<th>Being Beautiful</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Long life</td>
<td>Peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riches</td>
<td>Wisdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popularity</td>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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.