

## **II. Systemic or school-wide, coordinated efforts designed to create a climate for learning**

What is this? Safe and civil schools evidence norms, values and patterns of behavior that support people feeling safe, cared for, “connected” and engaged in learning and teaching together. As detailed below, there are a number of key systemic processes that further – or inhibit – schools developing a climate for learning.

Why is it important? The norms, values and patterns of behavior in schools promote and/or undermine students feeling safe, engaged, respected and able or not. Positive, sustained school climate is strongly associated with and predictive of effective risk prevention and health promotion efforts as well as caring, connected, responsible school communities.

### Common barriers:

- ✓ School leaders are focused on raising reading and math scores
- ✓ School leaders do not know what steps to consider taking to create authentic learning communities that can develop a shared vision and work together to actualize this vision
- ✓ Distrust and a culture of “blame”
- ✓ Academic, risk prevention and health promotion efforts are not coordinated
- ✓ Professional development is short term and fragmented
- ✓ Teachers do not have ongoing opportunities to learn from one another
- ✓ The school has not established effective systems to identify “at risk” students
- ✓ Schools that are too large
- ✓ Educators do not appreciate that it is essential that every student feel “connected” to at least one caring and responsible adult at school
- ✓ Teachers do not feel supported by administration for disciplinary referrals
- ✓ Educators do not take responsibly for enforcing rules consistently and fairly
- ✓ Educators do not have input into the schools disciplinary policy
- ✓ Parents and families are disconnected to school
- ✓ Inadequate mental health services and/or mental health professionals who wait for “problems” rather than being actively involved with primary prevention.
- ✓ Educators, parents and school-based mental health professionals are not effective patterns working and learning together to (1) recognize students who may be “at risk”; (2) addressing student needs; and, (3) thinking and working together to promote healthy students and healthy schools.

### Key learning that staff needs to understand and be able to do:

#### Learning objectives

- To consider the importance of the school climate coordinator (who may have any number of titles).
- To learn about how to use school climate assessment as a strategy to build community, develop SEE action plans and implement them with fidelity.
- To learn about and develop systems to support educator-parent and mental health professional partnerships.
- Learning about strategies to review and further develop positive social norms that support caring and responsible behavior.

- Learning about systems and frameworks that support identifying barriers to learning and addressing them.
- Developing strategies to insure that risk prevention, health promotion as well as teaching and learning is coordinated in your school.
- Promoting helpful school-home partnerships.
- To understand and be able to foster school-wide upstander behavior and inclinations.
- Develop leadership skills used for the development and functioning of SEE teams in school and district environments.

Tasks that need to be considered to actualize this process:

*Reflecting and raising awareness about:*

- ✓ To reflect on what kind of system your school is? How do you think about the school as a system?
- ✓ Do you treat other staff as you would like to be treated?
- ✓ Are your interactions with students calm and respectful? Are you modeling respect?

*Critically evaluating resources and making recommendations about:*

- ✓ Considering what are the essential personal characteristic as well as organizational support systems that further effective school climate improvement coordinator efforts. (Note, the person in this role may have any number of titles (e.g. assistant principal, mental health professional, ‘safe and drug free’ school counselor. In the Toledo Public Schools for example, this role is designated as the “SEL Teacher Facilitator.”)
- ✓ Systems designed to insure the coordination of risk prevention, health promotion and educational efforts that foster a shared vision and vocabulary, assessments, and planning.
- ✓ School-family-community support and “partnership” systems.
- ✓ Professional development (PD) efforts that aim to support educators understanding how to recognize and helpfully address “at risk” students. This includes PD that supports (1) educators, parents and mental health professionals being meaningful partnerships; and, (2) educators (and parents) understanding that student behavior is a “signal” and that “mis behavior” reflects problems.
- ✓ Systems designed to identify barriers to learning and school-community assets to contribute to addressing those barriers.
- ✓ Professional development efforts that aim to support educators being active and positive role models for students.
- ✓ Social emotional leaning, character education and risk prevention/health promotion curriculum that have been shown to be effective.
- ✓ How diversity, in-group and out-group behavior are recognized, talked about and responded to in the academic (e.g. social studies; language arts) and non-academic aspects of school life.
- ✓ How rules/regulations are communicated and enforced.
- ✓ School norms, values and rules designed to promote even more positive socials relationships (e.g. code of conducts; annual or semi annual reviews of the schools code of conduct; “prizes” which reflect what is recognized and honored).

- ✓ *Note:* measuring school climate is a systemic strategy that is detailed below in section IV- *Evaluation*.

*Skill building:*

- ✓ Adult SEE/Conflict resolution and related (e.g. reflective, empathic and communication related) skills that support effective adult-adult and adult-student collaboration.

Indicators that a school is successfully focusing on this goal and related methods: There are several indicators of success in this area. First, that a respected member of the school staff has been authorized to coordinate these school wide efforts with adequate time and support to carry out meaningful work in this area. Second, the school has developed a representative leadership team that works in a collaborative and transparent manner. Third, school climate assessment findings reveal that – over time – people in school are feeling safer, more connected to school and engaged in the process of learning and teaching. And, fourth, data like suspensions, absences, and academic performance are also meaningful indicators here.

How to measure it – Recommendations: School climate survey findings. Whether there is a school climate coordinator (who may have any number of titles).

Additional Resources: We have listed some resources in the text above. Here are additional resources that may be helpful. Please let us know what other resources you have found helpful and would like us to share with other educators ([jonathancohen@csee.net](mailto:jonathancohen@csee.net))

*Web/web sites:*

- Blueprints, University of Colorado ([www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/](http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/))
- CASEL ([www.casel.org](http://www.casel.org))
- Center for Mental Health in Schools, UCLA: <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>
- Center for Social and Emotional Education: [www.csee.net](http://www.csee.net)
- Character Education Partnership ([www.character.org/](http://www.character.org/))
- Character Education and Civic Engagement Technical Assistance Center ([www.CETAC.org](http://www.CETAC.org));
- Facing History and Ourselves: [www.facinghistory.org/](http://www.facinghistory.org/)
- Search Institute: [www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org)

*Books and papers:*

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Cohen, J. (2006). Social, emotional, ethical and academic education: Creating a climate for learning, participation in democracy and well-being. *Harvard Educational Review*, Vol. 76, No. 2, Summer, pg 201-237.

Cohen, J., Shapiro, L., & Fisher, M. (2006). Finding the Heart of Your School: Using School Climate Data to Create a Climate for Learning. *Principal Leadership* (The journal of the National Association of Secondary School Principals), Vol. 7, 4, pages 26-32.

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Cohen, J. & Sandy, S. (2006). On the social, emotional and academic education of children: Theories, goals, methods and assessments. In *Educating People to Be Emotionally Intelligent*. Ed. By R. Bar-On, J. G. Maree & M. J. Elias. Johannesburg, South Africa: Heinemann Publishers. (pg. 69 – 84)

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