



# SCHOOL CLIMATE AND THE NATIONAL SCHOOL CLIMATE STANDARDS

Schools can be successful in their school climate improvement efforts through the following promising strategies:

1. Raise awareness and support around the Standards.
2. Ensure the Board of Education formally adopts the Standards.
3. Plan and conduct school climate training for all school community members.
4. Research, develop/source and implement school climate assessments.
5. Create and implement school climate improvement action plans.

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## **Overview**

School climate reform, an evidence-based strategy, supports K-12 students, school personnel, parents/guardians and community members learning and working together to promote pro-social education. Done well, these efforts will result in even safer, more supportive, engaging, helpfully challenging and harmonious schools. The U.S. Department of Education, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, the Institute for Educational Sciences, President Obama's Bully Prevention Partnership, the US Departments of Justice and Education's School Discipline Consensus project, a growing number of State Departments of Education and foreign educational ministries support and/or endorse school climate renewal as a strategy to increase student learning and achievement, enhance school connectedness, reduce high school dropout rates, prevent bullying and other forms of violence, and enhance teacher retention rates.

## **School Climate and Youth Development**

Increasingly, more and more areas of educational practice are being guided by sets of national standards for content, leadership, professional ethics, family-school partnerships, and school accreditation, among others. Similarly, there is growing appreciation that standards are needed to effectively measure improvement in school climate. The increased national attention on school climate flags both the need to improve schools using measurable outcomes and the need to prepare all students to address the myriad of challenges they face in the 21st century.

Given that all efforts to improve schools, writ large, benefit from being based on well-developed sets of standards and indicators, leaders from across the country collaborated to develop *National School Climate Standards*.<sup>1</sup> Over a three-year period this set of five Standards and their indicators and sub-indicators were developed by consensus, and embraced by experts and leaders throughout the country. The effort was led by The National School Climate Center in collaboration with the National School Climate Council and the contribution of many other groups and individual experts.<sup>2</sup>

The *National School Climate Standards* provide a research-based framework and benchmark criteria for educational leaders (School Boards, State Departments of Education, Superintendents, Principals and After School leaders) to support and assess district and school efforts to enhance and be accountable for school climate<sup>3</sup>. They also provide guidance for professional preparation and continuing education, personally and systemically.

As with most standards, the National School Climate Standards do not recommend or detail specific assessment, curriculum, leadership, professional development, and related systemically informed programs, curricula, or services. Each state and/or school community must consider how best to translate these

standards into practice in ways that build on past experiences, values, strengths, priorities, and contextual needs of the local school community. There are the five standards (including 16 indicators) by which school climate efforts and their outcomes will be measured:

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.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A in the National School Climate Standards for details about how these standards were developed. Available online at: <http://www.schoolclimate.org/climate/documents/school-climate-standards-csee.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix A for the list of contributors (pp. 9 – 17 of the Standards document). Available online at: <http://www.schoolclimate.org/climate/documents/school-climate-standards-csee.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> National School Climate Standards: Benchmarks to Promote Effective Teaching, Learning and Comprehensive School Improvement, 2010.

## Strategies to Guide Effective Practice

There are a number of strategies that assist with successful implementation of the National School Climate Standards. Schools will find their efforts are most effective when following the School Climate Improvement Model:

- Raise awareness and support around the Standards.
- Board of Education formally adopts the Standards.
- Plan and conduct school climate training for all school community members.
- Research, develop/source and implement school climate assessments.
- Create and implement school climate improvement action plans.

It is also important to be aware of, and plan strategies to address, the common barriers to adoption and implementation:

- Lack of full understanding about the Standards and their relevance to specific district and school needs.
- Failure to have a clear message that all future overall school and district improvement must be based on the Standards.
- Failure to cultivate public support and include all school community stakeholders.
- Failure to engage school leaders fully and solicit excitement and support.
- Insufficient resources to support training and assessment.
- Expecting immediate/short term results; must be a long term commitment.

## Summary

Relevant empirical research coupled with best practice in all areas targeted for educational improvement benefit from having common standards that can guide sound practice and prioritize and lay out essential elements toward

which to strive and be held accountable. School climate improvement is no different from other school improvement efforts in this regard. Having national standards for school climate provides a vision and framework for creating and sustaining positive school climates, and thus allows teaching, learning, positive youth development and civic engagement to flourish. In the current national context of concern around “school safety and security,” it is imperative that this balanced approach and full understanding of school climate be promoted.<sup>4</sup>

The National School Climate Standards provide the framework for that balanced approach. School climate cannot be a priority *after* there is a focus on academics, or *after* there are changes in school security, etc. School climate includes academics; school climate includes security. School climate provides the essential context within which effective educational practices flourish.

Effectiveness of school climate efforts can and should be assessed. Educators must be held accountable for the quality of school climate, and the National School Climate Standards set the framework and benchmarks for doing so, focusing on the full range of “school life,” that when of high quality, is proven to support increased student achievement and graduation rates, positive youth outcomes, meaningful family engagement and high educator satisfaction and retention.

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<sup>4</sup> See Connecticut School Shooting Position Paper: <http://yvpc.sph.umich.edu/connecticut-school-shooting-position-statement>.

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