Making the Case for the Importance of School Climate and its Measurement

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Safe and Supportive Schools Technical Assistance Center

The Safe and Supportive Schools Technical Assistance Center

- Funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools

- Provides training and support to states, including 11 Safe and Supportive Schools grantees and other state administrators; administrators of districts and schools; teachers; support staff at schools; communities and families; and students

- Goal is to improve our schools' conditions for learning through measurement and program implementation, so that all students have the opportunity to realize academic success in safe and supportive environments.

Webinar Objectives

Participants will learn about:

- School climate frameworks, including the Safe and Supportive Schools Model

- Ways in which school climate impacts the academic and developmental outcomes of students

- Characteristics of good school climate surveys

- Strategies for communicating the importance of school climate to different stakeholders, and gaining stakeholder buy-in for climate measurement and programming

3

School Climate Frameworks

- Historically, researchers, practitioners, and policymakers have framed and measured many aspects of school climate <u>separately</u>, only capturing parts of school climate

Student Behavior

Personal characteristics of school members

Relationships within the school

School Climate

School structure or organization

School Culture

Citations: [32]

4

School Climate Frameworks

- Researchers and practitioners agree that school climate is a broad concept and should at least include several aspects:

Interpersonal relationships	**Institutional environment**
Teaching and learning	**School safety**

Citations: [8,30,32]

School Climate Frameworks

- Research and Practice-Based Frameworks
  - The National School Climate Council Definition of Climate
  - The *Conditions for Learning* Model
  - National School Climate Center *12 Dimensions of School Climate*
  - Cohen's 10 factor climate model
  - Search Institute's *Creating a Great Place to Learn* Model
- Policy Framework
  - Safe and Supportive Schools Model of School Climate

Citations: [32, 45-49]

Safe and Supportive Schools Model of Climate

Safe and Supportive Schools Model

Engagement

Safety

Environment

Relationships

Respect for Diversity

School Participation

Emotional Safety

Physical Safety

Substance Use

Physical Environment

Academic Environment

Wellness

Disciplinary Environment

Citation: [49]

School Climate Frameworks

- Safe and Supportive Schools Model was developed to encourage comprehensive approaches to measuring and improving climate
- However, practice and research-based frameworks may also inform strategies to improving climate
  - There is much overlap between the frameworks
  - However, different frameworks have different areas of coverage, which can lead to different action plans
  - As an example of a research-based framework informing climate improvement approaches, let's examine Cohen's 10 Factor Model

Turning Frameworks into Action

Cohen's 10 Factor Model

Safety

Teaching and Learning

Relationships

Environment

Physical safety

Quality of Instruction

Respect for Diversity

Environmental Adequacy

Socio-emotional safety

Social, Emotional, and Ethical Skills and Education

School Community & Collaboration

School Participation

Professional Development

Morale

Leadership

9

Climate Improvement Strategies – Cohen's 11 Factor Model

- Smaller school/class size
- Emphasis on students "taking ownership" of school
  - Creating better school community
  - Collective responsibility for school cleanliness and safety
- Social-emotional safety through social-emotional learning programs
- Stronger security measures and multi-tiered disciplinary policies
- Professional development
- Policies to improve teacher morale and collaboration
- Improve community partnerships with school – programs for parents to get involved with school, offering social services

Impacts That Matter

Let's examine the role that school climate plays in creating safe and supportive schools and in promoting student success in school and in life

School Experiences Which Contribute to a Healthy School Climate and Academic Achievement

Protection

- Connection
- Safety
- Positive Relationships With Adults And Peers
- Caring Interactions
- Academic Challenges
- Academic Support
- Academic Engagement
- Positive Role Modeling
- Social Emotional Learning
- Positive Behavioral Supports
- Access to Needed Services And Supports
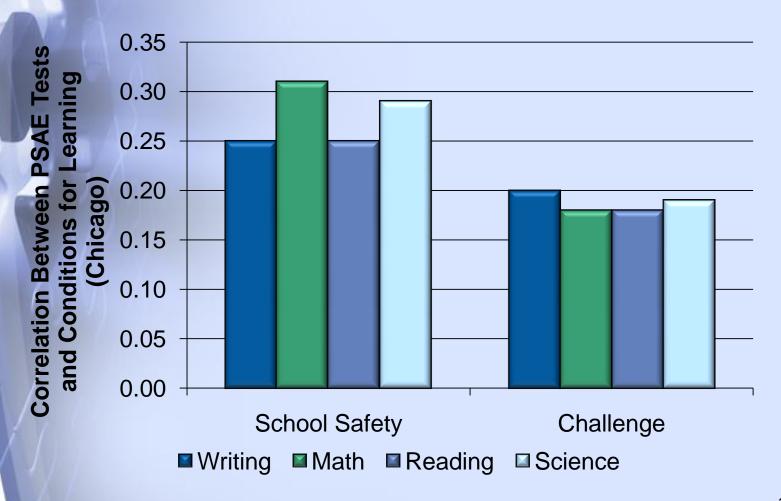
Citations: [1,2,4,7,12,15,17,22,25,27,28,33,34,35,37]

12

School Experiences Which Contribute to Poor School Climate and Low Academic Achievement

Risk

- Lack of connection
- Danger
- Teasing, Bullying, Gangs
- Negative Relationships With Adults And Peers
- Uncaring interactions
- Low expectations
- Academic disengagement
- Academic frustration
- Poor role models
- School-driven Mobility
- Reactive punitive approaches to discipline

Citations: [1,2,4,7,12,15,17,22,25,27,28,33,34,35,37]

13

Benefits of Improved School Climate

- Improved test scores
- Improved graduation rates
- Improved school safety
- Improved student attendance
- Reduced drop-out rate
- Improved working environment (student-teacher and peer relationships)
- Higher rates of teacher satisfaction

Citations: 2,3,5,6,13,19,20,21,23,24,25,29,33,35,37,38,41

Safety, Academic Challenge, and Statewide Test Performance in Chicago

Conditions for Learning: Key Aspects of School Climate Which Support Enhanced School Academic Outcomes

Students are safe

- **Physically safe**
- **Emotionally and socially safe**
- **Treated fairly and equitably**
- **Avoid risky behaviors**
- **School is safe and orderly**

Students are supported

- **Meaningful connection to adults**
- **Strong bonds to school**
- **Positive peer relationships**
- **Effective and available support**

Students are challenged

- **High expectations**
- **Strong personal motivation**
- **School is connected to life goals**
- **Rigorous academic opportunities**

Students are socially capable

- **Emotionally intelligent and culturally competent**
- **Responsible and persistent**
- **Cooperative team players**
- **Contribute to school community**

Citations: [10,11,14,18,36,39,43]

Illustrative Standard of Excellence for a Safe and Respectful School

- Students feel physically safe in their classes, in the hallways and bathrooms, and outside around the school.

- They feel emotionally safe because students treat each other with respect, get along well together, and look out for each other.

What Aspects of School Climate Predict Healthy Development?

- Physical and emotional safety
- Opportunities for social and emotional learning
- Caring teacher-student relationships
- Participation in school
  - Attendance
  - Participation in class
  - Participating in extra-curricular activities
- Consistent, restorative discipline

Citations: 9,26,31,35,40,42

18

Measuring School Climate

- In order to improve school climate, we must first be able to measure school climate!

- What do we mean when we say that we are measuring school climate?

- School climate is multi-faceted – incident counts, suspension counts, attendance rates and statewide Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) results do not tell the whole story.

- Many existing state-level surveys only measure some facets of climate

- If existing measures of climate do not meet the following goals, it may be in need of additional investment and improvement:

Measuring School Climate

- Measures of school climate should:
  - Encompass multiple aspects of school climate
  - Be able to be processed quickly enough to share before the end of the school year
  - Be collected through valid and reliable instruments with good psychometrics
  - Be collected from multiple respondents
  - Be collected so that subgroups can be examined
  - Be collected using multiple instruments, such as
    - Incident data
    - Attendance data
    - YRBS
    - School climate surveys

Climate Measurement Instruments Should be Able to Facilitate:

Monitoring

Evaluation

Resource Allocation

Transparency

Citation: [49]

Measurement Goals

Monitoring

Citation: [49]

Measurement Goals

Evaluation

Citation: [49]

Measurement Goals

Resource Allocation

Measurement Goals

Transparency

Citation: [49]

Next Steps

- In order to create sustainable changes in school climate, you must get buy-in from various stakeholder groups. How do you convince groups to buy in?

  – Provide stakeholders with the message of why school climate is so vital to student outcomes

  – Provide stakeholders with a framework for collaboration in which there is 1) a clear plan of action to improve climate, and 2) their voices will be heard during the planning and implementation processes

Strategies for Communicating the Importance of School Climate

- Allow input from the intended audience on the best mode of communication

- Generally use non-technical language whenever possible

- Provide concise, accurate information – brief word documents or power points

Messages to LEAs and School Boards

- Better climate = higher test scores!

- Better climate = higher grad rates, more satisfied teachers, lower turnover rates, and improved school safety

- Why is measuring climate necessary?
  - Data can identify needs and inform future interventions
  - Data can document improvements and successes
  - Data can identify subgroups who perceive that school climate is poor
  - Data can identify areas where students, staff, and parents view climate differently

28

Messages to LEAs and School Boards

- Beginning the discussion with this group - modes of communication
  - Face to face meetings are best – presentation at conferences, board meetings or one on one meetings
  - Providing opportunities to discuss results with this group is important
  - E-mails or phone calls much less effective

Messages to School Administrators and Teachers

- Teachers can play an active role in improving school climate
- Better climate = well-behaved students, less stressful work environment, better test scores
- Why is measuring climate necessary?
  - Existing measures are incomplete
  - What gets measured gets done! Measuring climate is necessary to identify issues and improve school climate
  - Creates opportunities to discuss climate issues

Messages to School Administrators and Teachers

- Modes of Communication
  - Face to face meetings whenever possible – staff meetings or one on one meetings with principals or other administration.
  - Buy-in from administrators is key for buy-in at school level. Administrators can then champion this effort to teachers in many ways.
  - E-mails or school message boards can get out message on the importance of climate.
  - Professional development on improving climate

31

Messages to Parents

- Better climate = safer school, better performance, improved wellness, less risk behavior, better social-emotional skills – in other words, a better, safer school and a better, safer child

- Parents can play an active role in improving climate – school climate is linked to home environment

- Parent surveys provide a way for parents to give feedback on school climate and areas needing improvement

Messages to Parents

- Modes of Communication
  - School website
  - Parent-teacher conferences
  - Back to school night
  - School newsletters
  - PTA meetings
  - Social (online) media – Facebook, Twitter, Wikis, YouTube Channel, Podcasts, etc.

Responding to Pushback

- Potential areas of pushback for measuring climate/climate surveys
  - Cost
  - Privacy concerns
  - Impact on classroom time
  - Measures of school climate and safety already exist
  - Buy-in of teachers and students (just seems like one more test and one more type of accountability)

Responding to Pushback

- Suggestions for responding to pushback
- Cost
  - The results of the survey will help determine the most efficient ways to allocate future resources and determine which programs are working, or are needed, so it saves $$ in the long run
  - There are several surveys available on the Safe and Supportive Schools Grantee website that are publically available or available through the survey developer – many of which are affordable
  - Many scoring options as well to maximize affordability

Responding to Pushback

- Privacy concerns
  - Data that are collected will be secure and students will not be asked for information that could allow them to be identified
  - Completed surveys will be collected in classrooms by students, single person at school responsible for distributing and processing surveys – teachers won't see completed surveys
  - Hard copies of the surveys will be destroyed after processing
  - Data will be reported at the school level, not at the individual level
  - School-level data will not be reported for subgroups with X or fewer students

Responding to Pushback

- Impact on classroom time
  - Surveys should not take more than a single class period or single faculty meeting to complete

- Measures of school climate already exist
  - As we've seen, existing measures of school climate may be inadequate for several reasons – validity, coverage of climate, etc.

- Seems like one more test
  - This is where it is important to stress the link between climate and outcomes
  - Provides <u>context</u> for school academic performance and demonstrates focus points where schools can improve performance through improving climate

Potential Areas of Collaboration with Stakeholders

- Providing stakeholders with a framework for collaboration and involving them in the climate improvement process is essential to creating a sustainable change in climate

- Putting together a comprehensive climate improvement plan involving stakeholders
  - Create climate improvement team led by an administrator, including teachers, social workers/psychologists, district staff, parent leaders and community partners/ providers
  - Assign a school climate coach

Citations: [50]

First Steps of Collaboration

- Once momentum to collaborate with stakeholders is established, how do you start creating an improvement plan?
  - Adopt a comprehensive vision for the collaborative
  - Writing a "brief" to clarify the vision
  - Establishing a steering committee to move the initiative forward and monitor process
  - Starting a process for translating the vision into policy
  - Developing a 5 year strategic plan
  - Moving the strategic plan to implementation

Citations: [52]

Putting it all Together

- Key points
  - The Safe and Supportive Schools Model of school climate is a policy-based framework that incorporates aspects of climate that experts generally agree should be included when defining and measuring climate
  - Research has demonstrated a clear, strong link between school climate and both academic and developmental student outcomes
  - In order to improve school climate and evaluate the effectiveness of school climate interventions, it is important that we have strong measures of climate

Putting it all Together

- Key points (continued)
  - Measures of school climate should be able to monitor and evaluate climate, inform resource allocation, and allow for a transparent climate measurement process
  - Communication that is tailored to the interests and needs of stakeholders is essential in order to:
    - Effectively promote and implement climate measurement instruments and interventions
    - Build sustainable mechanisms for change

School Climate Resources

- Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osdfs/index.html

- Stop Bullying Now http://www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/adults/default.aspx

- Safe and Support Schools Technical Assistance Center
  email sssta@air.org

Upcoming Webinars

- **Establishing Supportive Relationships between Teachers, Staff, Students and Families**
  February 16, 2011   4:00 pm − 5:30 pm ET
  February 17, 2011   11:00 am − 12:30 pm ET

- **Survey Management**
  March 2, 2011   4:00 pm − 5:30 pm ET
  March 3, 2011   11:00 pm − 12:30 pm ET

- **Bullying Prevention**
  March 16, 2011   4:00 pm − 5:30 pm ET
  March 17, 2011   11:00 am − 12:30 pm ET

- **Survey Development**
  March 30, 2011   4:00 pm − 5:30 pm ET
  March 31, 2011   11:00 pm − 12:30 pm ET

Upcoming Webinars

- **Addressing Risk Behavior through Positive Youth Development Strategies**
  April 13, 2011   **4:00 pm − 5:30 pm ET**
  April 14, 2011   **11:00 − 12:30 pm ET**

- **Survey Administration**
  April 27, 2011   **4:00 pm − 5:30 pm ET**
  April 28, 2011   **11:00 am − 12:30 pm ET**

- **School Based Climate Teams (Part 1)**
  May 11, 2011   **4:00 pm − 5:30 pm ET**
  May 12, 2011   **11:00 − 12:30 pm ET**

- **Analysis of Survey Data**
  May 25, 2011   **4:00 pm − 5:30 pm ET**
  May 26, 2011   **11:00 − 12:30 pm ET**

Contact Us

- For more information about the resources presented on the Webinar or if you would like additional resources, please email sssta@air.org or call

  1-800-258-8413.

Thank you for your time today. You will now be directed to a short evaluation of today's Webinar.

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