

School Climate Improvement Action Guide for Community Partners

Improving school climate takes time and commitment from a variety of people in a variety of roles. This document outlines how community partners can support school climate improvements. Organizations and individuals can partner with schools in many different ways—from delivering or coordinating direct services to students and families inside or outside the school, to offering students opportunities to participate in activities such as afterschool programming or internships, to working with schools to provide space for events or donations. Although most of the action steps within this document can be completed by all community partners, some action steps can be done only by individuals or organizations that deliver direct services (e.g., mental health supports and physical health interventions) to students and families, but not by others. In those cases, action steps are marked with an asterisk (*).

Understand the Importance of School Climate

Students learn best when they are in an environment in which they feel safe, supported, challenged, and accepted. Research shows that when schools and districts¹ focus on improving school climate, students are more likely to engage in the curriculum, develop positive relationships, and demonstrate positive behaviors.

Strengthening school climate can help a school:

- ✓ **Boost** student achievement and close achievement gaps,
- ✓ **Improve** relationships between students and staff,
- ✓ **Decrease** teacher turnover and increase teacher satisfaction,
- ✓ **Improve** behavior both inside and outside the classroom,
- ✓ **Increase** students' sense of connection to school,
- ✓ **Lower** dropout rates, and
- ✓ **Improve** school safety and student morale.

Of course, improving school climate is not something that happens overnight. It is not a “project” that you can do once and then move on. Rather, improving school climate is an ongoing process, one that takes time and requires the support of everyone in the school community, including community partners.

¹ This document provides strategies applicable to public schools and districts, including charter authorizers, charter management organizations, education management organizations, individual charter schools, and charter local educational agencies.



Participate in Planning for School Climate Improvements

Planning for school climate improvement provides the foundation to ensure that a school's efforts are targeted to meet its needs. Community partners have a key role to play in planning for school climate improvements because they interact with students and their families in various ways and can take concrete steps to improve school climate.

What Are the Key Things to Do?

- Consider how your agency or organization is aligned with the goals of the schools in your community or that you work with and identify what systems you have in common.
- Write up a document outlining how your organization can be involved in the school climate improvement process and what you think you can offer (e.g., help with outreach and education, data collection, intervention identification, and implementation).
- Ask members of the school climate team how you can be involved in the planning efforts. If you are committed to this work and believe you can dedicate time and energy to planning, identifying strategies, collecting data, and sharing information with your colleagues and stakeholders, you may want to request membership on the school climate team or offer to support their work as needed.
- Share information about your organization's expertise and services and how your organization might contribute to school climate improvements.

What Does This Look Like When You Do the Work Well?

- Thinking about how your work aligns with the school's goals.
- Sharing your hopes and expectations with the leaders and listening to theirs to determine where there is alignment.
- Asking questions and offering to help.
- Sharing your organization's expertise and services—looking for opportunities and connections that support the direction the school or district is going.
- Being patient but persistent.

What Do You Want to Avoid? What Are Potential Pitfalls?

- Assuming your expertise or input is not needed.
- Getting frustrated if you are not immediately engaged in the process. The school climate team may not know how to best include you or your organization at the beginning, so be patient.
- Walking away or disengaging if you do not feel you have enough of a role.

Questions You Can Ask School Leadership and School Climate Team Members About Planning School Climate Improvements

- Can my organization be represented in the planning process?
- How can my organization help with planning for the school climate improvement process?
- What services and systems do you (staff, students, families) need that my organization can contribute?



Engage Stakeholders in School Climate Improvements

For school climate improvements to be successful, everyone with an interest in the school needs to be informed and involved. People who feel engaged are more likely to partake in the school climate improvement process as planned versus those who feel disconnected or do not understand its purpose. As a community partner, you are both a key stakeholder and able to help the school connect with other key groups, particularly families and students.

What Are the Key Things to Do?

- Offer to help the school engage other community partners, families, and students. As a community partner, and perhaps a service provider, you are likely to have a different relationship with families than the school. Use that relationship to share information with them about the school climate improvement process, ask questions, listen to their feedback, and share information without violating privacy.
- Share what you learn about what families and students need with the school. As an outsider, you may have insight into what aspects of the school climate need improving, either from your own observations or from what you have heard from families and students.
- Help the school connect with other community organizations that may be interested in working with the school to offer services or support families. Use your influence and networks to broker relationships that can help the school better meet the needs of families and students.

What Does This Look Like When You Do the Work Well?

- Offering your perspective, expertise, and help.
- Asking families and students you work with what they think needs to be improved about the school's climate and helping orient them to the school climate improvement process.
- Reinforcing what the school is trying to do by sharing school materials and key messages with families and other community organizations.
- Connecting other community organizations to the school and making efforts to prevent duplication by helping to coordinate available community resources with the school climate improvement process.

What Do You Want to Avoid? What Are Potential Pitfalls?

- Assuming your help is not needed and failing to share your perspective on what the school needs.
- Bad-mouthing the school to families when you are asking them what they think could be improved about the school's climate.
- Giving families or students misinformation or telling them things that are different from what they might hear from the school.
- Failing to use your influence to make key connections for the school.



Questions You Can Ask School Leadership and School Climate Team Members About Engaging Stakeholders

- What questions would you like me to ask families about school climate?
- What information do you need about students and families that I can share in a way that will not violate student and family privacy?
- What information can I share with families about the school climate improvement process?
- What services do you need or are you hoping community partners can provide?

Support the Collection and Use of Reliable and Valid School Climate Data

Collecting and using school climate data is essential to the school climate improvement process. Community partners can help provide the school with data throughout the school climate improvement process. They often are a convenient and comfortable place for students and families to gather and have informal discussions. In addition, partners that work with schools to provide services to students and their families can help collect data from them. All community partners can complete surveys and/or participate in focus groups about their own experiences. These data can help tell you what is working and where you can make improvements.

What Are the Key Things to Do?

- Offer to host focus groups with families in your community location. It may be more comfortable for families than meeting in the school.
- Support data collection in your school-based services, if you offer them, or at community events. For example, afterschool providers in the school building could collect student surveys during program time so that the school does not have to use instructional time for that purpose; alternatively, staff could come to sporting events or family gatherings equipped with technology (e.g., tablets) to capture family surveys on the go.*
- Provide data you have about enrollment, attendance, and climate in the school-based services you provide. The school may be able to learn from your data about where students are taking advantage of services and what gaps exist.*
- Answer surveys or participate in interviews and focus groups if requested to share your input about what aspects of school climate need improving and what services and supports your organization can provide.



What Does This Look Like When You Do the Work Well?

- Making your facilities available for data collection, especially family school climate survey administration and focus groups.
- Offering to help collect data from families and students.
- Sharing your data—you collect important data and there are ways to share it without compromising student and family privacy.
- Being responsive when asked for feedback.

What Do You Want to Avoid? What Are Potential Pitfalls?

- Forgetting how important your facility and staff are to helping families and students feel comfortable.
- Getting caught up in your own services and supports and forgetting the big picture of overall school climate improvement.
- Keeping your data to yourself and/or ignoring requests for feedback or input.

Questions You Can Ask School Leadership and School Climate Team Members About Supporting Data Collection and Use

- How can I support the school in its data collection? Talk to students? Talk to families? Provide a space for focus groups or survey administration?
- What information or data can I share about my program or service that might be helpful?

Help Choose and Implement School Climate Interventions

Choosing the right intervention(s) is an important part of school climate improvements. The intervention does not have to be a program, although choosing an evidence-based program is one option. Interventions also can be strategies, activities, policies, or services. There is no single “right” type of intervention. The important thing is whether it matches the needs of the school, as identified by climate data collection; the school’s readiness to implement it; and how it is implemented (i.e., this is not an “activity” but a process of changing how things get done). Community partners that work directly with students and families should be involved in the selection and implementation of school climate interventions, particularly if their agencies can offer specific activities. All community partners can provide feedback about what is working or not working based on their interactions with students and families.

What Are the Key Things to Do?

- Participate on the school climate team that is identifying and selecting interventions.*
- Clearly outline what services you can offer, what capacity your organization currently has, and what you would expect in terms of funding to be able to implement the services.*
- Share a list of services and supports your organization provides and how they align with school climate improvement interventions. Talk with the school about concrete activities and supports you can provide as part of the school climate initiative.*
- Consider how to better coordinate and not duplicate effort with other organizations.*



What Does This Look Like When You Do the Work Well?

- Getting involved with the team that selects improvement strategies.
- Identifying where your services align with the school's goals and selected strategies.
- Identifying concrete tasks your organization can take on.
- Being clear about the resources (financial, staff, systems) you will need and can contribute to implement services.
- Sharing information about the interventions with your constituents, including families of students, in partnership with the school climate team. It is important to consistently communicate what the interventions will involve.

What Do You Want to Avoid? What Are Potential Pitfalls?

- Skipping the selection process and then saying you do not like or support the intervention that was chosen.
- Offering to help without identifying specifically how your services align with the selected improvement strategies.
- Being vague or overstating your organization's capacity.
- Waiting to talk about finances and who is funding which services—this can lead to confusion and frustration.
- Sharing information about chosen interventions without touching base with the school climate team.

Questions You Can Ask School Leadership and School Climate Team Members About Choosing and Implementing School Climate Interventions

- What are the school's primary goals with the climate initiative?
- What services is the school seeking to fill with a community partner?
- How can my organization support those goals or provide those services?
- How can I communicate about the interventions to constituents—what they are, where they will take place, for whom they are intended, and how they will be implemented and impact students and school climate?

Support Ongoing Monitoring and Evaluation of School Climate Improvements

Monitoring and evaluation provide evidence of how well you and your colleagues are implementing school climate improvements and the impact those efforts have on schools and students in your community. Community partners, especially those providing school-based services or helping with the implementation of chosen interventions, play an important role in ongoing assessment, monitoring, and improvement.



What Are the Key Things to Do?

- Keep track of things you notice about efforts to improve school climate throughout the implementation process so that you can provide the school climate team with concrete suggestions for change when the time arrives to consider and share improvements.*
- Participate in all surveys, assessments, and evaluation activities as requested by the school or district. This may include completing satisfaction surveys or talking with the planning team about what you felt did or did not work well during implementation.
- Share any information or data you have on students, school climate, and the selected interventions in a way that does not violate privacy.*
- Attend meetings where data are shared and listen for opportunities to make changes to the school climate improvement process based on the data.
- Share your feedback about changes you see in the school since implementation of the intervention and supports.

What Does This Look Like When You Do the Work Well?

- Providing honest, constructive feedback in a timely manner.
- Helping collect data and share related information you may have about students and families without violating privacy.
- Attending meetings or planning sessions to learn about the evaluation results and reflecting on the data to change how you implement the intervention based on the results of evaluation activities.
- Reflecting on data in partnership with school staff and identifying areas for improvement in your own strategies as well as for the school as a whole.

What Do You Want to Avoid? What Are Potential Pitfalls?

- Forgetting to write down and track your thoughts during implementation—this can lead to incomplete or inaccurate feedback when it is time to share your thoughts with the school climate team.
- Disengaging or assuming your contributions and feedback are not important.
- Forgetting to share your own data that can support overall improvement efforts.
- Forgetting that your organization offers only one component of the school climate effort and many other pieces of information need to be incorporated into the evaluation.

Questions You Can Ask School Leadership and School Climate Team Members About Monitoring and Evaluating School Climate Improvements

- What does the school climate team consider success? How will you know you succeeded?
- How can the school use data about my program or services to learn more about the overall climate improvements? How can I improve my services for the future?
- What information does the school need from our organization?
- What information can I provide about my services and students?



School Climate Improvement Resource Package

This action guide is one of many resources within the School Climate Improvement Resource Package (SCIRP), a suite of manageable, action-oriented, and evidence-based resources that States, districts, and schools can use to make school climate improvements. The SCIRP was developed by the U.S. Department of Education with the support of the [National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments](#).

For more information about the SCIRP, go to <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/scirp/about>.