



School Climate Practices for Implementation and Sustainability

Teri Dary and Terry Pickeral

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SCHOOL CLIMATE PRACTICE BRIEFS FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

Preface

The National School Climate Center (NSCC) School Climate Practice Briefs for Implementation and Sustainability present the latest in research and best practice for effective school climate reform from leading experts. The 11 issues selected to be included in this set of Practice Briefs are based on NSCC's decade-long work with the entire academic community—teachers, staff, school-based mental health professionals, students and parents—to improve a climate for learning. NSCC translates research into practice by establishing meaningful and relevant guidelines, programs and services that support a model for whole school improvement with a focus on school climate.

School climate refers to the quality and character of school life. School climate is based on patterns of students', parents' and school personnel's experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures.

A sustainable, positive school climate fosters youth development and learning necessary for a productive, contributing and satisfying life in a democratic society. NSCC suggests that there are four major areas to organize school climate improvement: **safety, relationships, teaching and learning**, and **the external environment**.

We encourage readers to review all of the School Climate Practice Briefs for Implementation and Sustainability to understand the comprehensive nature of school climate. The Briefs are organized to provide the reader with a foundation on school climate standards, research, and measurement and analysis followed by demonstrations of the alignment of school climate with critical education issues. Each Brief provides an overview of the topic followed by specific practices individuals, schools and communities can take to ensure school climate is a critical component of school practices, responsibilities and accountability.

School Climate Practice Briefs for Implementation and Sustainability Overview

Standards: This Brief demonstrates how 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. It also provides 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 five standards (including 16 indicators) by which school climate efforts and their outcomes will be measured. Suggested practices include:

- Raise awareness and support around the Standards.
- Ensure the 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.

Research: This Brief demonstrates that school climate matters. Research shows that sustained positive school climate is associated with positive child and youth development, effective risk prevention and health promotion efforts, student learning and academic achievement, increased student graduation rates, and teacher retention. A set of corresponding practices encourage (1) school climate efforts to be built on existing research and (2) schools to collect and analyze their school's data to establish a baseline and measure enhancements:

- Engage all stakeholders as active participants and agents of change.
- Focus on long-term programming, impacts, infrastructure and support.
- Create school networks to share best practices and discuss challenges.
- Engage students at all stages of the process to build capacity and sustain reform efforts.
- Create and share tools and information with teachers, administrators, staff and parents.
- Establish a school climate policy agenda to support quality practices built on research.

Measurement and Analysis: This Brief focuses on the essential step of assessing school climate improvement to gain a clear understanding of each school's particular strengths and potential areas of need through an iterative, data-driven process of feedback from the entire community – students, parents/guardians, school personnel, and ideally, members of the wider community. This data then becomes a springboard for a collaborative, community-wide process of improving the school climate, and creating targeted action plans and sustained efforts focused on the areas that will most benefit the school. The Brief offers a number of essential factors to consider when determining the assessment tool that best fits a particular school's needs:

- Select research-based tools that match the local context.
- Be intentional about planning for and preparing stakeholders to engage in school climate improvement efforts.
- Engage all stakeholders in co-leading and co-learning.
- Integrate school climate improvement efforts with current initiatives.
- Communicate results in meaningful ways that resonate with varying audiences.

Youth Development: This Brief focuses on the need to consistently and deliberately support students to be engaged as co-leaders and co-learners as an essential requirement for successful school climate improvement. As with all school climate efforts, starting from an assets-based

approach is vital in promoting youth development. Too often, our schools are reduced to exploring what students don't know rather than exploring and celebrating those areas where there are true gifts, talents, skills, that can be activated for the benefit of all. Suggested practices include:

- Frame your work with youth at the center of all decisions.
- Start with an assets-based approach.
- Prepare youth for meaningful roles.
- Value the perspective of youth and allow them to contribute in the decision making process.
- Work to create the leaders of today, not as a preparation for the future.
- Engage youth in addressing equity issues and celebrating diversity.

Shared Leadership: This Brief defines shared leadership as teachers, staff, parents, students and principals collaborating to solve problems. Working together to create an engaging school climate that accelerates student learning is *common sense*. Where shared leadership exists with youth and adults working collaboratively, there is a student-focused school. Shared leadership means a shift from the formal leader to a shared leadership model resulting in shared power and decision-making. Instead of a single individual leading to success, other individuals, who are partners or group members, are invited to share the responsibility for leadership and develop a positive school climate. Suggested practices include:

- Set clear parameters to create balanced power and establish leadership as a partnership.
- Engage all stakeholders in working together toward a shared purpose.
- Ensure all participants share responsibility and accountability.
- Recognize and embrace diverse perspectives in the group.
- Teach and value inner strength in all participants in shared leadership.

Moral and Social Development: This Brief suggests that school leaders and staff foster caring and respectful behavior by attending to moral and social development. They see it as part of their daily work to inspire students to be caring and respectful people, to help students manage social relationships and navigate difficult ethical situations, and to guide students to think more clearly about justice and become committed to it. Moreover, they do so in ways that are ongoing and long-term. These adults listen to students' perspectives and connect key moral values to these perspectives. They steadily model, teach, and reinforce prosocial values and skills so that these values are more likely to become part of a student's identity. And they expand students' moral awareness by helping them consider other students and adults (e.g., the custodian or school secretary) who may have been invisible to them. The degree to which this happens depends in large part on whether all school adults, not just teachers and administrators, but secretaries, lunch staff, sports coaches, and other staff, commit to the importance of moral and social development and establish norms and guidelines for interacting with students. Suggested practices include:

- Make positive teacher-student relationships a priority.
- Expect school staff to model moral, ethical, and prosocial behavior.
- Provide opportunities for students to develop and practice skills like empathy, compassion, and conflict resolution.
- Mobilize students to take a leadership role.

- Use discipline strategies that are not simply punitive.
- Conduct regular assessments of school values and climate.

Inclusion: This Brief focuses on inclusion as a set of best practices and shared values that meaningfully support the diversity that each person brings to the school. Inclusion is more than equitable access, but the mutual expectation that all students are encouraged and engaged in school activities to his or her fullest potential. Inclusion ensures students with disabilities are provided with the supports necessary for their growth and development, learning collaboratively with their peers rather than in a separate sphere. Each individual has unique experiences, valuable talents and insightful perspectives about the world, which can enrich the quality of the school experience for all stakeholders. This multiplicity of talent and interest generates an inquisitive model of learning and sharing between each member in the community, thus advancing school as “a home” rather than “a place.” Suggested practices include:

- Expand efforts to include social and physical inclusion.
- Engage youth in establishing social norms.
- Embrace the talents and abilities of all students.
- Use instructional strategies that engage students in building academic, civic, social, and career skills.
- Create leadership opportunities for all students.
- Engage students with diverse perspectives and abilities in creating a positive school climate.

Equity: This Brief focuses on equity as intrinsic to all aspects of school climate work. It is not a separate issue. From this perspective, the National School Climate Council definition could be modified to describe an “equitable school climate” as referring to “The quality and character of school life that fosters children’s, youth’s, and families’ *full access to:* (1) Appropriately supported, high expectations for learning and achievement; (2) Emotionally and physically safe, healthy learning environments; (3) Caring relationships with peers and adults; (4) Participation that meaningfully enhances academic, social-emotional, civic, and moral development. An equitable school climate responds to the wide range of cultural norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, leadership practices, and organizational structures within the broader community. Suggested practices include:

- Encourage reflective practice and build cultural awareness in students and adults.
- Increase understanding of diverse cultures.
- Keep diverse schools physically and emotionally safe.
- Make high expectations culturally responsive.
- Design multiple pathways to meaningful participation.
- Demonstrate caring by knowing students’ unique emotional needs.

Dropout Prevention: This Brief demonstrates that developing and sustaining high-quality school climates is deeply tied to strategies emerging from dropout prevention research and work. This research conducted across several decades has revealed not only the at-risk factors most often associated with students who drop out, but also a broad range of strategies that, in combination, go a long way toward meeting the needs of students, particularly those at risk of dropping out. Interestingly enough, many of these strategies link tightly to the significant factors

in positive school climates including connectedness, engagement, empowerment, and self-efficacy. Suggested practices include:

- Address risk factors in the context of positive school climate.
- Create conditions that support engagement of students and parents.
- Participate in a continuing systemic process of evaluating goals and objectives as they impact a diverse group of learners.
- Start early by engaging families and students, starting with early childhood education.
- Provide unique learning opportunities to meet the needs of all learners.
- Use engaging instructional strategies.

Bully Prevention: This Brief expresses that school climate is at its core about healthy, positive and connected relationships. In a real and concrete way, the ultimate remedy for bullying, no matter how it is defined, is to create school climates that are not supportive of any kind of mean-spirited behaviors, including but not limited to bullying and harassment. Expectations for behavior of both students and adults reflect the foundational belief that every member of the community is honored and valued, and deserving of the respect of others. Consequently, true bullying prevention is identical to school climate improvement. Suggested practices include:

- Ensure leadership supports comprehensive efforts.
- Engage all stakeholders, from assessment of issues to implementation of strategies.
- Create and sustain systemic strategies designed to promote a safe, supportive prosocially-informed climate of social responsibility.
- Integrate and sustain quality teaching and learning.
- Focus on one-on-one/relational practices.

Adult Learning: This brief focuses on how a school's climate supports or undermines educators' capacity to be adult learners, which in turn has an important impact on their capacity to promote student learning and achievement. In fact, school climate has a powerful effect on teacher retention rates and research underscores and supports the notion that a collaborative school climate and collegial adult climate focused on the well-being and growth of all children provides an essential foundation for effective teaching and supportive learning environments. Suggested practices include:

- Shared leadership provides the optimal foundation for successful professional improvement efforts.
- Engage the entire adult school community in creating a shared vision.
- Promote professional development through effective policies and supports.
- Consider developing professional learning communities.
- Use available resources to address identified needs.

Summary

These School Climate Briefs for Implementation and Sustainability focus on both the “what?” - what are the foundational standards, research and measurements of school climate; and the “so what?” - what practices individuals, schools and communities can employ to measure and improve school climate for maximum impacts.

We encourage a review of the entire set of Briefs as they demonstrate how school climate aligns with current opportunities and challenges schools face to ensure quality, safe, equitable and engaging environments for students and adults.

As a set, the Briefs advance school climate as a critical component of education reform and complement existing National School Climate Center resources that can be found at: <http://www.schoolclimate.org/publications/practice-briefs.php>.

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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.

February 2013

By Patricia A. Ciccone and Jo Ann Freiberg

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 prosocial 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*.¹ 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.²

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 climate³. 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.

¹ 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>.

² 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>.

³ 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.⁴

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.

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

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SCHOOL CLIMATE RESEARCH

February 2013
By Amrit Thapa

Research highlights the following promising strategies for school climate improvement efforts:

1. Engage all stakeholders as active participants and agents of change.
2. Focus on long-term programming, impacts, infrastructure and support.
3. Create school networks to share best practices and discuss challenges.
4. Engage students at all stages of the process to build capacity and sustain reform efforts.
5. Create and share tools and information with teachers, administrators, staff and parents.
6. Establish a school climate policy agenda to support quality practices built on research.

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 prosocial 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 Research

As early as a century ago educational reformers had recognized that the distinctive culture of a school affects the life and learning of its students (Perry, 1908; Dewey, 1916). However, the rise of systematic empirical study of school climate grew out of industrial/organizational research coupled with the observation that school-specific processes accounted for a great deal of variation in student achievement (Anderson, 1982; Kreft, 1993). Since then the research in school climate has been expanding systematically, and many countries are showing a keen interest in this field.

There is empirical evidence being documented on various aspects of school climate in several languages (for a summary, see Benbenisty & Astor, 2005; Cohen et al., 2009 in English; Debarbieux, 1996 in French; and Del Rey, Ortega & Feria, 2009 in Spanish).

The research on school climate overlaps with several fields, including social, emotional, intellectual, and physical safety; positive youth development, mental health, and healthy relationships; school connectedness and engagement; academic achievement; social, emotional, and civic learning; teacher retention; and effective school reform. Further, it must be understood that both the effects of school climate and the conditions that give rise to them are deeply interconnected, growing out of the shared experience of a dynamic ecological system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Ma, Phelps, Lerner, & Lerner, 2009). In general, the research on school climate can be categorized on four or five essential areas of school climate: Safety, Relationships, Teaching and Learning, Institutional Environment, and the School Improvement Process (Cohen et al., 2009; Thapa, Cohen, Guffey & Higgins-D'Alessandro, in press).

The rising interest and attention in school climate reform efforts in recent years is due to the following three factors (Thapa et al., in press). First, there is a growing body of empirical research that supports the notion that context matters: group trends, for example, norms, expectations, and belief systems shape individual experience and learning as well as influence all levels of relationships. Second, there is an increasing awareness that school climate reform supports effective violence prevention in general and bullying prevention efforts in particular. As a result, local, state, and federal interest in school climate reform as an effective, data driven and evidence-based process is emerging. Third, research-based prosocial educational

efforts are being given tremendous attention in recent years. These efforts include character education, social emotional learning, mental health promotion efforts, service learning and civic engagement, and others (for a compendium of the wide-range of interventions, see Brown, Corrigan, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2012). Moreover, school climate reform is a process that necessarily focuses on and supports students, parents/guardians, and educators in considering how effective current prosocial educational efforts are and how we can strengthen these instructional and intervention efforts.

Nevertheless, it must be noted that there are a number of limitations that influence current school climate research findings, concerned with definitions, models, and experimental methodologies. For example, comprehensive reviews by both Anderson (1982) and Freiberg (1999) highlighted that defining school climate was complicated by the fact that practitioners and researchers used a wide range of school climate definitions and models that were often more implicit than explicit in nature. Naturally, how we define school climate has implications for what we measure. There is not a national or international consensus about how to define "school climate," a "positive and sustained school climate," or the "school climate process" and the dimensions that need to be regularly measured in school climate research and improvement efforts. To some extent, this has stymied and continues to stymie the advancement of school climate research so necessary to inform school improvement efforts. In addition, it hampers the development of the field in general and measurement practices in particular.

School climate matters. Sustained positive school climate is associated with positive child and youth development, effective risk

prevention and health promotion efforts, student learning and academic achievement, increased student graduation rates, and teacher retention. There seems to be an abundant literature on school climate from different parts of the world that document a positive school climate having a powerful influence on the motivation to learn (Eccles et al., 1993), mitigating the negative impact of the socioeconomic context on academic success (Astor, Benbenisty, & Estrada, 2009), contributing to less aggression, violence and sexual harassment (Attar-Schwartz, 2009; Gregory, Cornell, Fan, Sheras, Shih, & Huang, 2010; Karcher, 2002), and acting as a protective factor for the learning and positive life development of young people (Ortega, Sanchez, Ortega Rivera, & Viejo, 2011). Furthermore, it is found that quality of the school climate contributes to academic outcomes as well as the personal development and well-being of pupils (Haahr, Nielsen, Hansen, & Jakobsen, 2005; OECD, 2009).

Strategies to Guide Effective Practice

Following are some school climate practices and recommendations that can be implemented to effectively use the research summary and advance school climate research. These practices have evolved from the lessons learned and challenges identified during the recent School Climate Improvement Project (SCIP) in Queens, New York.

- Engage all members of the school community, including teachers, students, parents, administrators as active participants and agents for successful school climate improvement implementation.
- Focus on long-term programming, impacts, infrastructure and support to ensure school climate reform is sustainable.
- Create school networks to share best practices and provide a forum to discuss

challenges openly and honestly. While a number of schools feel isolated in their school climate reform efforts, networking ensures that schools continue to learn from each other to improve teaching, learning, and overall leadership activities.

- Engage students at all stages of the school cycle improvement process to build capacity and sustain reform efforts. This includes students as action researchers to collect and analyze school climate data.
- Create and share tools and information for teachers, administrators, staff and parents to promote a positive school climate.
- Establish a school climate policy agenda to support quality practices built on research.

Summary

School Climate research is clearly evolving. The field demands rigorous and empirically sound research that focuses on relating specific aspects and activities of interventions to changes in specific components of school climate. We also need empirical evidence based on sound research techniques on how both interventions and climate affect specific socio-moral, emotional, civic, and cognitive development and the teaching and learning of both students and teachers. Understanding the interactions of these processes in the contexts of interventions will enable schools to successfully adapt interventions that have been shown to promote one or more of these positive outcomes. We need to translate these researches into smarter educational policies to transform low performing schools to better schools and to enhance the quality of lives of our students. The research in school climate points out the need for the individuals, educators in every school community and policy makers to work hand-in-hand to achieve these essential goals. Six effective practices are offered to support school climate integration and sustainability.

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SCHOOL CLIMATE MEASUREMENT AND ANALYSIS

February 2013

By Darlene FASTER and Daisy Lopez

Schools can effectively assess and analyze school climate efforts through the following promising strategies:

7. Select research-based tools that match the local context.
8. Be intentional about planning for and preparing stakeholders to engage in school climate improvement efforts.
9. Engage all stakeholders in co-leading and co-learning.
10. Integrate school climate improvement efforts with current initiatives.
11. Communicate results in meaningful ways that resonate with varying audiences.

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 prosocial 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 rate.

School Climate Measurement and Analysis

Extensive research supports that a healthy school climate is essential to positive student development, and directly links to other key indicators for success, such as academic achievement, graduation rates, effective risk prevention, and teacher retention (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Cohen & Geier, 2010; Thapa, Cohen, Higgins & Guffey, 2012). When children feel safe, supported, and engaged they are better able to learn and are more fully equipped with the skills they need to succeed in school and beyond.

Today, school climate assessment has become an increasingly important and valued aspect of district, state, and federal policy. Recognizing that effective school climate improvement efforts are grounded in valid and reliable data, the Federal Department of

Education launched the Safe and Supportive Schools grant in 2010 to provide 11 states with federal assistance that supports the development of rigorous school climate measurement systems. States like Connecticut and Georgia have strong legislation and practice efforts in place that focus explicitly on school climate reform⁵. These efforts have helped to make school climate, including effective and valid/reliable assessment, a clear priority within our education system nationwide.

An essential step to school climate improvement is gaining a clear understanding of each school's particular strengths and potential areas of need through an iterative, data-driven process of feedback from the entire community – students, parents/ guardians, school personnel, and ideally the wider community members. This data then becomes a springboard for a collaborative, community-wide process of improving the school climate, and creating targeted action plans and sustained efforts focused on the areas that will most benefit the school. Choosing an effective school climate instrument can be challenging. However, there are a number of essential factors to consider when determining the assessment tool that best fits a particular school's needs:

- **A strong research-base** – An effective school climate assessment tool will have well established reliability and validity, with additional external confirmation of its strength through third-party evaluators and research studies.
- **Vigorously field-tested** – It is essential that the assessment tool has a strong track record across multiple settings, have a long-standing history, and have undergone a

process of refinement and revision to keep the tool current with the latest research in the field.

- **Measures core populations** – School climate assessment tools ideally assess all stakeholder groups, in order to fully represent a comprehensive profile of each school's particular climate. The core stakeholder groups include students, parents/ guardians, all school personnel (administrators, educators, certified and non-certified staff), and potentially the wider community, if possible.
- **Easy to administer** – It is ideal to have a tool that is easy to administer, offers multiple options for distribution (i.e. paper and online), and takes approximately 15-20 minutes to complete for most populations to achieve the highest possible response rates.
- **Additional features** – It is important to consider the needs of your particular community when choosing a school climate assessment tool. For instance, does the tool come in the predominant languages used by your parent and/or student populations? Is it possible to customize aspects of the tool to measure particular sub-groups that are significant to your community? What type of reporting is provided, and how quickly will it be provided to you? Exploring these types of questions with your leadership team prior to choosing a tool can help ensure that the school climate assessment process provides beneficial data that supports a process of lasting, whole-school improvement.
- **Supports** - School leaders often benefit from having resources available to guide them in this work. Guidelines and tools are useful to assist in understanding how to use school climate data to set in motion effective improvement efforts. Recent independent evaluations of school climate measures have also noted the most reliable and valid tools

⁵ See NSCC's Policy Database for a full listing of the latest school climate and bully prevention legislation in each state nationwide:

<http://www.schoolclimate.org/climate/database.php>.

in the field based on a number of criteria.

You can find these summaries at:

- In 2011, the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments compiled a compendium of student, family, and staff surveys to assist educators and education agencies in locating a valid and reliable needs assessment that suits their needs. The full listing of surveys can be found at: <http://safesupportiveschools.ed.gov/index.php?id=133>.
- In a 2010 study of 102 school climate surveys, only three met the *American Psychobiological Association* criteria for being reliable and valid. NSCC's Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI) was one of these three. The review can be found at: <http://gradworks.umi.com/33/88/3388261.html>.
- In a 2011 study of 73 middle school measures, ten were identified and recommended as being reliable, valid and aligned with SEL research. The CSCI was the only school climate measure recommended.⁶
- In a 2012 study of 125 school climate measures as possible tools to gauge Principal performance, the CSCI was one of only three comprehensive (student, parents and educator) measures recommended.⁷

⁶ Haggerty, Kevin P., Elgin, Jenna, Woolley, Andrew (2011). *Social-emotional learning assessment measures for middle school youth*. Report commissioned by the Raikes Foundation, (pp 1-59). Seattle: Social Development Research Group.

⁷ Clifford, M., Menon, R. Condon, C & Hornung (2012). *Measuring School Climate for Gauging Principal Performance: A Review of the Validity and Reliability of Publicly Accessible Measures*. American Institute for Research.

Strategies to Guide Effective Practice

Data can be incredibly useful for assessing student needs, increasing educator effectiveness and improving stakeholder relationships. Not surprisingly, school climate data is also only as useful as the process dedicated to interpreting and communicating results. Creating a strong foundation for this work with a collaborative leadership team will support meaningful engagement from the pre-survey administration period to the post-survey evaluation period.

Here are some essential points to keep in mind:

- **Focus on buy-in:** All survey participants should be aware of the purpose and value of the survey prior to administration, so that the school will receive authentic data to help drive decisions that will benefit the entire school community. When school climate data is used as a “flashlight” and not a “hammer,” stakeholders will be more fully engaged, and the findings will be more useful for long-term improvement. School leaders also need to consider key preparation and planning issues before administration, such as: how representative their leadership team is, and to what extent stakeholders work and learn in a culture of blame or distrust as opposed to a more collaborative problem solving culture. For instance, are parents/guardians, students and personnel present to lend their unique perspectives? Differing viewpoints can create powerful discussions, and builds a transparent culture where members feel valued, trusted and engaged in the school community.
- **Reach all stakeholders:** It is important to engage all stakeholders in the process of “shedding light” on the collective work that is to be done. Students, parents/guardians, school personnel and ideally community members can and need to be co-learners and co-leaders (under the direction of the principal) for school reform efforts to be

successful. For example, before moving forward with outreach, determine any potential obstacles to engaging a particular group (or sub-group), and formulate plans for reaching out to them directly. This will create an opportunity for new levels of engagement, and set the tone for the type of collaboration the school will encourage once the action-planning phase begins.

- **Integrate data with existing work:** Building on past efforts and being intentional about integrating any new plans with current efforts will provide the best foundation for lasting success. This avoids inconsistencies in mission and focuses the team and community to ensure any proposals are directly connected to school-wide impact. Specifically, how do we use our current strengths and challenges to focus future planning? How do we connect feedback with our current school data (suspension rates, incidents reports, etc.) to make informed decisions? Goals discussed in this manner prevent leadership teams from working in an isolated environment, and ensure the complete profile of a school environment is focused towards learning and growth.
- **Communicate results effectively:** Surveys will produce findings that will speak to each population group differently. Breaking information into an easy to comprehend manner while addressing the diverse goals/issues of each population will likely increase future engagement. All groups should feel they have the necessary information and background to respond to results and have an organized and consistent way to present ideas. An open forum for communication also provides the opportunity for leadership teams to present a realistic mapping for next steps and discussion of appropriate and timely benchmarks.

Summary

Effective school climate assessment is an essential part of the ongoing improvement process that drives school reform. Engaging the entire community in a collaborative dialogue to understand the particular strengths and needs of a school and develop targeted action plans from this data can be truly transformative. Through an intentional and iterative data-driven process, schools will be able to direct their resources in the most beneficial ways, and will have a better mechanism for benchmarking for improvement over time. District, State, and Federal policy continue to underscore the value of quality school climate assessment. Its influence on the development of healthy, positive learning environments will likely continue to grow in the years ahead due to strong research support for school climate as an important component of student success.

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SCHOOL CLIMATE AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Schools can engage youth as co-leaders and co-learners through the following promising strategies:

12. Frame your work with youth at the center of all decisions.
13. Start with an assets-based approach.
14. Prepare youth for meaningful roles.
15. Value the perspective of youth and allow them to contribute in the decision making process.
16. Work to create the leaders of today, not as a preparation for the future.
17. Engage youth in addressing equity issues and celebrating diversity.

February 2013
By Richard Cardillo

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 prosocial 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

Consistently and deliberately supporting students to be engaged as co-leaders and co-learners is an essential requirement for successful school climate improvement efforts. It is a trite truism to envelope our school climate reform efforts with the phrase "it's all about the kids". As we examine our existing policies and procedures, are we able to truly state that students played a significant role in **shaping** the integral parts of determining what we want our school to be? All too frequently, the norm has been to initiate and implement first, and to inform students and ask for input after the fact. If we are truly committed to supporting

students in developing intellectual, social, emotional, and civic capacities, it behooves us to include them substantively in all school climate improvement efforts from their inception. One might even contend that the success of school climate improvement efforts depends on it.

There is a perception (and arguably an unfounded fear) on the part of some that providing students with the skills, knowledge and dispositions to be effective and true partners in school climate efforts is running the risk of “giving away the prison to the inmates”. Even the metaphor of school as a punishing place sets us up to relegate the role of students to passive (if not completely insignificant) participants in their educational process. Relegating the role of student to “consumer” of a product that we create is, indeed, an imprisoning model. Effective youth development demands that we listen, learn, engage, and empower youth in meaningful ways.

As with all school climate efforts, starting from an assets-based approach is vital in promoting youth development. Too often, our schools are reduced to exploring what students don't know rather than exploring and celebrating those areas where there are true gifts, talents, skills, that can be activated for the benefit of all. Strong concentration on standardized test scores turns our school communities into “ranking factories”. And, inevitably, there are always those who excel and always those who fall behind. If we use as our fundamental question to youth: “How smart are you?” we set ourselves up to concentrate on what is lacking or what is deficient. Instead, if we approach all youth development efforts with the more exploratory and asset-based question: “How are you smart?” we open up to myriad possibilities for student engagement, growth, participation and success.

There is a plethora of data dealing with

graduation rates, attendance, disciplinary issues and college-ready levels that points to a tremendous “disconnect” of students from schools. For too many, school is a place where they don't feel engaged, challenged, connected, and listened to. In a very real way, students don't readily see a relationship to their school experience and the “real world”. They do not have a sense of purpose and do not feel as if they can make any difference in their school experiences (for either themselves or for others).

Leaders willing and able to tap the wealth of knowledge and skill sets of everyone in the school are on their way to developing an engaging school climate. The school becomes a place where (1) students learn more and are connected to the adults in the schools; (2) adults in the school collaborate and create a sense of belonging through shared responsibility; and (3) inclusiveness is both a vision and practice to ensure everyone is engaged. Shared leadership recognizes that not just a person in a formal leadership position has leadership capabilities, but also the quiet or reserved colleague that provides a research summary on evidence-based instructional practices; the lead custodian who makes sure things are ready to go for the assembly, notices a student's sense of school, and finds a place for a student with an interest in facilities; the student who comes up with a plan for addressing bullying in the hallway; or the outgoing team member that develops and leads activities so students are engaged and valued in the school. The skilled principal nurtures and capitalizes on the leadership in everyone in the school community – making them better as a team than as individuals.

It is almost counter-intuitive that we often fail to engage the largest constituency of our schools, our students, in the process of improving our school communities and our broader communities. Study after study has shown the

incredibly powerful results that derive from engaging students as action-researchers, utilizing service-learning as a tool to make school more effective and more connected, and promoting student voice in all policy and practice decisions.

Strategies to Guide Effective Practice

Anderson Williams has been at the forefront of youth development efforts. His model of understanding the continuum of youth involvement informs our exploration of how to systematically and practically adjust our management models to move from decision makers for to active participants with youth. He reminds us that the challenge we might have in moving along this continuum of youth involvement is changing the way we approach our work and make our decisions. How do we effectively instruct and model to students the crucial progression from participation to voice to leadership and, ultimately, to true engagement?

Williams challenges us to first explore the impediments to changing the *status quo* of how we relate to youth. Undoubtedly, there will be a need to re-structure our pedagogy, our “standard operating procedures” of school life to be effective in our efforts. He then promotes coming to a common understanding of practical ways we can work in youth-adult teams to most effectively promote youth development, engagement and voice. Among his tips for adults to successfully engage youth that are particularly relevant to school climate efforts are:

- Prepare youth to be facilitators and co-facilitators and work to make sure youth are the first to speak.
- Ensure and articulate the youth input and its impact.
- Don't assume that you know more or have more valuable knowledge than the youth.
- Come willing and ready to listen and learn.

A number of other strategies form the core for engaging youth in meaningful ways as you work to create a school climate that supports youth development:

- Co-creating the environment with youth.
- Frame your work in terms of young people, with students at the center of all decisions.
- Incorporate reflection to stimulate learning and action.
- Engage students in equity issues and the celebration of diversity within the school community and the community at large.
- Use protocols to help student process information and guide interaction.
- Approach youth development work with an eye toward creating the leaders of today, not simply as a preparation for the future.

We know that one of the primary goals of educating our youth is to develop in them the critical skills (minds) for 21st century success. Study after study has shown the tremendous efficacy of directly involving students in this work. The more a student experiences engagement in their educational process, the more likely it is that this student will meet with the attainment of critical skills for civic engagement both now and in the future.

Summary

When we focus deliberate and sustained efforts to improve school climate through youth development, we are ensuring a strong and stable foundation from which to scaffold all future school climate reform efforts. Schools are complex and complicated places. The students with whom we are fortunate to collaborate as co-learners and co-teachers are as well. We need to consciously engage them in our work, not as an afterthought but as a fundamental part of the initial process to transform our schools into the places we want them to be.

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SCHOOL CLIMATE AND SHARED LEADERSHIP

February 2013

By William Hughes and Terry Pickeral

School leaders can build broad engagement through the following promising shared leadership strategies:

18. Set clear parameters to create balanced power and establish leadership as a partnership.
19. Engage all stakeholders in working together toward a shared purpose.
20. Ensure all participants share responsibility and accountability.
21. Recognize and embrace diverse perspectives in the group.
22. Teach and value inner strength in all participants in shared leadership.

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 prosocial 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 Shared Leadership

A positive school climate improves student achievement and a sense of belonging. This year, more than ever, school leaders need efficient, low-cost and effective ways to boost school achievement. We know that important factors in a positive school climate are also significant mediators of learning: empowerment, authentic, engagement, self-efficacy, and motivation. Being intentional in our practices and co-leading on a positive school climate is a strategy that pays off long term for youth, faculty and school districts – with stronger student achievement within a productive, safe learning environment – a good return on investment of human and financial resources.

In order for safe, equitable, engaging and high-quality school climates to become the norm in American schools, schools must encourage, support and reward shared leadership. Shared Leadership is when teachers, staff, parents, students and principals collaborate to solve problems. Working together to create an engaging school climate that accelerates student learning is *common sense*. Where shared leadership exists with youth and adults working collaboratively, there is a student-focused school. Shared leadership means a shift from the formal leader to a shared leadership model resulting in shared power and decision-making. Instead of a single individual leading to success, other individuals, who are partners or group members, are invited to share the responsibility for leadership and develop a positive school climate.

A principal should not work in isolation. Successful schools require the substantial engagement of those who make it a community. Roland Barth wrote, “*Teachers have extraordinary leadership capabilities, and their leadership is a major untapped resource for improving our nation's schools*” (Barth, 1990). When teachers are included throughout the decision-making process, they are more likely to implement and sustain change with fidelity to quality practice. For example, when teachers, students, staff and parents are included in deciding what the behavioral expectations and interventions will be school-wide, they are more likely to ensure that they are consistently used in classrooms, hallways and schoolyards effectively.

Leaders willing and able to tap the wealth of knowledge and skill sets of everyone in the school develop an engaging school climate. The school becomes a place where (1) students learn more and are connected to the adults in the schools; (2) adults in the school collaborate and create a sense of belonging through shared

responsibility; and (3) inclusiveness is both a vision and practice to ensure everyone is engaged. Shared leadership recognizes that not just a person in a formal leadership position has leadership capabilities, but also the quiet or reserved colleague that provides a research summary on evidence-based instructional practices; the lead custodian who makes sure things are ready to go for the assembly, notices a student’s sense of school, and finds a place for a student with an interest in facilities; the student who comes up with a plan for addressing bullying in the hallway; or the outgoing team member that develops and leads activities so students are engaged and valued in the school. The skilled principal nurtures and capitalizes on the leadership in everyone in the school community – making them better as a team than as individuals.

Strategies to Guide Effective Practice

The following five strategies lead to and sustain shared leadership in schools and address some of the challenges school leaders, teachers, students and community members may experience co-creating positive school climates.

1. Think Partnership

A balance of power is the platform for shared leadership. Shared leadership is a partnership. Teachers, staff, parents and students are equal partners. Creating this balance of power is probably one of the hardest aspects in shared leadership. Effective school leaders know this, and they set clear parameters so the authority of the leaders is real, empower all members of the group, and ensure what is developed or decided in the work team is carried out. They model a positive school climate in their words, actions and beliefs, beginning with the climate they maintain between administration and school staff.

2. Ensure Shared Purpose

Shared Leadership requires a shared purpose or goal, in this case, an engaging school climate. Each school member, with their own divergent opinions, must understand that the prize at the end of the year is strong student learning in a positive school climate. Teachers, staff, parents and students use different strategies to contribute to a school's climate, but through shared leadership these divergent pathways share a sense of purpose and focus. More can be accomplished when education stakeholders work together toward a shared purpose rather than working on their own agenda. This also requires education stakeholders to share strategies and outcomes of quality school climate with their peers and constituents.

3. Commit to Shared Responsibilities

Shared leadership works when all the participants share responsibility and accountability for the work of the partnership. Each person in the partnership must take an active role and be accountable for effectively completing their individual responsibilities. Empowering teachers, staff, students and parents to work and collaborate towards a common goal makes them aware of their responsibilities and the important role each one of them plays in the work. Shared leadership requires hard workers willing to do their part to build an engaging school climate from decision-making to implementation and monitoring progress.

4. Build Respect and Responsibility

Shared leadership means respect and responsibility to consider different and new ideas and strategies. Each person in the school brings with them experiences, skills and ideas that are valuable to co-create a quality school climate. The partnership must recognize and embrace the differences in the group. Collaboration and networking linked to respect

and shared leadership build a strong, cohesive team that can work well together to accomplish a goal.

5. Honor Grit Leaders

Teachers, staff, parents, students and principals need grit, especially those who believe in shared leadership. Sharing leadership requires courage and resolve. Teaching inner strength - what our parents called "grit" - and valuing those character traits as much as we do academic ability is key. Paul Tough (2012) makes the case that resilience, perseverance and optimism (among other non-cognitive traits), are as necessary for academic success, or in the case of shared leadership, persistence for students and adults facing tough challenges, such as poverty or a lack of strong cognitive skills. Shared leadership requires each of us to have moral and performance character. Moral character is about ethical traits such as honesty, generosity and chastity. Performance character refers to traits that enhance personal effectiveness: self-control, persistence, grit, and optimism. Grit ensures shared leadership is a partnership with vitality and spirit, weaving youth and adults and their relationships into a school climate that makes students run **to** school rather than leave it as fast as they can. Shared leadership gives them the strength, leadership skills and belief in collaboration to handle the adversity that comes to us all.

Summary

Teachers, staff, students, parents and principals working together are a powerful leadership lever. Systemic problems or a troubled school climate are usually too big and too numerous for one person to address and change alone. Schools need to recognize and develop leadership among many different kinds of individuals representing all education stakeholders to effectively model and develop a school climate that engages adults and students in a shared mission that improves

student development.

Shared leadership can come from principals who empower teachers to become leaders and from teachers who collectively take responsibility for the well being of the school (Barth, 1990). What we have found is shared leadership that engages staff, parents, and students becomes a force multiplier in school climate work. Just as we have high expectations that all students can learn, principals must have high expectations that students, parents, teachers and staff can lead. If all education stakeholders are to effectively lead together, then there must be a substantial change made in the ways we think and feel about our personal and shared leadership responsibilities in the school. These collaborations can create schools that effectively engage and meet the needs of all students. If we do not empower one another to become leaders, we are missing out on a great opportunity to improve our schools, our students, and our community.

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SCHOOL CLIMATE AND MORAL AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

February 2013

By Richard Weissbourd, Suzanne M. Bouffard,
and Stephanie M. Jones

Schools can effectively address moral and social development through the following promising strategies:

23. Make positive teacher-student relationships a priority.
24. Expect school staff to model moral, ethical, and prosocial behavior.
25. Provide opportunities for students to develop and practice skills like empathy, compassion, and conflict resolution.
26. Mobilize students to take a leadership role.
27. Use discipline strategies that are not simply punitive.
28. Conduct regular assessments of school values and climate.

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 prosocial 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 Moral and Social Development

At the heart of positive school climate are strong relationships. When you walk into a school with positive climate, you see students and staff who are caring, respectful, and committed to their communities, both their immediate communities (e.g., school and neighborhood) and the broader world. You don't just see posters proclaiming these values – in these schools, these values live and breathe. People are more likely to greet one another in the hallways, offer to help one another, take pride in one another's successes. In these schools adults don't just ignore students making derogatory remarks in the hallways. These practices become part of the fabric of the school, permeating day to day

interactions and instructional practices. School leaders and staff foster caring and respectful behavior by attending to moral and social development. In other words, they see it as part of their daily work to inspire students to be caring and respectful people, to help students manage social relationships and navigate difficult ethical situations, and to guide students to think more clearly about justice and become committed to it. Moreover, they do so in ways that are ongoing and long-term. They listen to students' perspectives and connect key moral values to these perspectives. They steadily model, teach, and reinforce prosocial values and skills so that these values are more likely to become part of a student's identity. They expand students' moral awareness by helping them consider other students and adults (e.g., the custodian or school secretary) who may have been invisible to them. The degree to which this happens depends in large part on whether all school adults, not just teachers and administrators but secretaries, lunch staff, sports coaches, and other staff, commit to the importance of moral and social development and establish norms and guidelines for interacting with students.

Strategies to Guide Effective Practice

There are things all schools can do to ensure that values of caring and respect live and breathe in the building, closing the gap between school rhetoric and reality. Here are six strategies that can make a significant difference:

1) Make positive teacher-student relationships a priority. Teachers' relationships with students are fundamental to moral and social development. Children and teens learn moral values from adults they respect. And when they feel cared about and respected, students are more likely to develop key emotional and social capacities (Baker, 2006; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Rimm-Kaufman, & Hamre, 2010). They may also be more receptive to supports and activities designed to develop those skills. Teachers usually believe that they have positive

relationships with their students, but few take regular opportunities to truly reflect on those relationships, to assess students' perceptions of them, and how they might be enhanced. Teacher-student relationships will improve in schools that expect and provide more opportunities for teachers to be intentional about their relationships with students and committed to growing them over time.

One way to begin is to ask teachers questions such as these: What do you think it's like to be a student at this school? How do you think your students view you – do they trust you, do they feel respected by you? This kind of exercise can be particularly powerful when teachers have the opportunity to consider each of their students individually. This allows them to identify how their behavior may vary with different students and where they might focus their relationship-building efforts. Building on activities like these, schools can use professional development systems that have recently been developed to assess student-teacher relationships and provide individualized coaching about how to improve them.⁸

Another strategy is to ensure that every student has a relationship with at least one school adult. Some schools do this by assigning all students an advisor (usually a teacher or counselor) who will meet with them regularly over a multi-year period to discuss both academic and non-academic issues. Other schools do "relationship mapping," in which school staff work together to identify which students do and do not have a relationship with one or more adults. The goal is to identify students who are not connected to any staff and choose staff members to reach out to those students.⁹

⁸ One example is the My Teaching Partner system. More information is available at: <http://curry.virginia.edu/research/centers/castl/mtp>.

⁹ To read about one school's approach, see Walser, N. (2006). "R" is for resilience. *Harvard Education Letter*, 22(5).

2) Expect school staff to model moral, ethical, and prosocial behavior. Children and teens internalize moral values and behaviors, as well as strong social skills, when they see them modeled by adults they respect. Teachers and other staff are models for students, whether they realize it or not. They don't choose *whether* they are influencing students' moral and social development but they can choose *how* they do so.

School adults can model positive moral and social skills in a range of ways. These include simple everyday actions, like praising admirable qualities and achievements in those who are not often recognized, treating all students fairly and taking an interest in all of them (even those who may be seen as "difficult"), dealing with frustration or anger in productive ways, and encouraging students to reach out to others who are often excluded. They also include more complex actions, such as alerting students to injustice in the world around them and discussing how to remedy it, making time in busy schedules for students who need to talk about personal issues, and discussing with students how they have navigated a difficult ethical situation in their own lives.

To be positive role models, staff need to commit to the ongoing development of their own moral and social capacities. Many adults don't see themselves as moral and social works in progress. They see their qualities as set in stone—they don't think about becoming more fair or generous or better able to learn from multiple perspectives. But moral and social development occur across the lifespan and adults' active engagement in their own moral development can influence students.¹⁰ Similarly, all adults can and should continually develop their social and emotional skills over time (such

¹⁰ For more information, see Weissbourd, R. (2012). Promoting moral development in schools. *Harvard Education Letter*, 28(1).

as maintaining calm under stress; Jones & Bouffard, 2012).

3) Provide opportunities for students to develop and practice skills like empathy, compassion, and conflict resolution. In order to make caring and respect reflexive behaviors, students need more than discussions about why they matter. They also need opportunities to practice the skills and to plan for how to use them in daily life. Well-designed social and emotional learning (SEL) programs can include role plays, skills practice, training in routines students can use (such as a three-step process for navigating social conflicts), and other opportunities.¹¹ It's important to choose an evidence-based program because too many programs simply don't work (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, et al., 2011).

Programs are not the only way to build these values and skills, however. There are many ways, for example, to help students develop moral awareness, including empathy for those who are different from them. One strategy is for teachers or other staff to conduct a circle of concern exercise during an advisory period, class council meeting, or writing exercise in an academic class. In this exercise, an adult asks students to identify who they care about at school outside of their friend group. They help students notice who is in and outside of their circle of concern and pose questions like these: Is a new student, a student who is a loner, or the bus driver outside their circle of concern? Why? How could this be hurtful to those people and to the community? The adult then asks students to consider how their circle might be expanded. Who could they reach out to and how? How would this change the school community for the better? The adult might also ask them to make a pledge to reach

¹¹ For more information and an example, see Aber, J. L., Brown, J. L., Jones, S., & Roderick, T. (2010). SEL: The history of a research-practice partnership. In *Better: Evidence-based Education, Special Issue on Social-Emotional Learning* (pp. 14-15). Institute for Effective Education, University of York, Heslington, York, UK.

out to one new person each week and have another discussion or writing assignment the following week about the impact of that action. It's important to repeat this exercise several times a year and to regularly reinforce and reflect on new skills that are learned as students expand their circle of concern.

Another activity teachers can lead is a semester or year-long project in which students explore the importance of empathy, caring, and positive community building. The project can include readings, writing assignments, and a culminating project, such as a community research project (e.g., making a video about a community member or group that has been invisible to the students or a community-building effort such as a campaign to end sexist or homophobic language in the school).

4) Mobilize students to take a leadership role

Students are powerful agents of change. They have the most wisdom about how the social dynamics of their schools work and the most leverage with their peers. They can and should take leadership for making their schools caring and respectful places. Middle and high schools can create volunteer committees to generate ideas and implement solutions. It's important to recruit a diverse range of students, including trusted, socially prominent students. This committee should generate ideas and to help implement solutions. Your formal student council could also make positive school culture for all students its main goal.

5) Use discipline strategies that are not simply punitive. Enforcing the school's commitment to moral values and positive social interactions is a critical part of maintaining a positive school climate. Students should be held accountable for their actions and for their responsibility to the school community. But too often, well-meaning staff respond to violations of school values and policies with "zero tolerance" policies that don't work (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008), or

with other forms of discipline that punish without teaching. Violations of school values and policies can provide opportunities for everyone, from students to teachers to administrators, to reflect on why the incident occurred and what should be done differently next time. This means including formative consequences that are both constructive and instructive (such as writing a letter to the person that was harmed by the incident) as well as staff discussion about potential student and community needs that should be addressed.¹²

6) Conduct regular assessments of school values and climate. Just as staff need information about how students are progressing academically, they need to understand where the school and its students stand when it comes to moral values, norms of kindness and respect, relationships, and commitment to meeting all students' social and emotional needs. Student surveys on these topics are vital. Students, after all, are those with the most wisdom about their social environments. **The Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI)** is a nationally-recognized school climate survey that provides an in-depth profile of your school community's particular strengths and needs.¹³ With the CSCI, you can quickly and accurately assess student, parent, and school personnel perceptions, and get the detailed information you need to make *informed decisions* for lasting improvement. Schools should collect data, for example, about whether and where students feel emotionally and physically safe and unsafe, whether there are adults they can consult if they feel harassed or isolated, and whether they view the school community as caring about them and others. With this information, staff are better informed to allocate resources accordingly and make changes where necessary. It's important to

¹² For tips on using formative consequences effectively, see http://www.ed.gov.nl.ca/edu/k12/bullying/formative_consequences_teachers.pdf.

¹³ www.schoolclimate.org/programs/csci.php.

conduct such assessments on a regular basis (e.g., twice a year) to measure change. It's also important for school staff to hold themselves accountable for making progress by sharing the results with students, staff, and parents.

Summary

While schools are certainly not the only place where students develop moral and social capacities, they are one of the most important settings, in part because they are rich with opportunities for discussion and interaction. School adults can and do play a vital role in these interactions. Their success depends in large part on their capacity for self-reflection, their commitment to making caring and respect priorities, and their ability to mobilize the moral energy and wisdom of students. With these capacities, adults can create the kind of school communities and climate that inspire students to be caring day to day and to imagine and work to create a better and more just world.

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SCHOOL CLIMATE AND INCLUSION

February 2013

By Clement Coulston and Kaitlyn Smith

Schools can co-create more inclusive school communities through the following promising strategies:

29. Expand efforts to include social and physical inclusion.
30. Engage youth in establishing social norms.
31. Embrace the talents and abilities of all students.
32. Use instructional strategies that engage students in building academic, civic, social, and career skills.
33. Create leadership opportunities for all students.
34. Engage students with diverse perspectives and abilities in creating a positive school climate.

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 prosocial 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 rate.

School Climate and Inclusion

School climate is the holistic context of the life, vigor and quality of the social connectedness, physical elements, and supportive practices that nurture inclusion and safeness. In order to invest in school climate, one must analyze how his or her individual actions and behaviors contribute to the collective feeling of the school. Students, educators, support staff, families and the community are all key affiliations in co-creating an engaging and inclusive school climate.

Inclusion is a set of best practices and shared values that meaningfully support the diversity that each person brings to the school. Inclusion is more than equitable access, but the mutual

expectati
on that

all students are encouraged and engaged in
school activities to his or her fullest potential.

Inclusion ensures students with disabilities are provided with the supports necessary for their growth and development, learning collaboratively with their peers, than in a separate sphere.

Each individual has unique experiences, valuable talents and insightful perspectives about the world, which can enrich the quality of the school experience for all stakeholders. This multiplicity of talent and interest generates an inquisitive model of learning and sharing between each member in the community, thus advancing school as “a home” rather than “a place.”

At the center of Inclusion is the notion that diversity is an ever-growing phenomenon that evokes a need for the community to cultivate global citizenship in today’s students.

Recent shifts in the speed and global reach of information and communication technologies, an increasingly interdependent global economy, challenges in human rights and social justice, and the impact of international tragedies and emergencies have, for example, created tensions and conditions that require more integrated, worldwide response (Evans, 2013).

In considering the necessity for inclusion, one can surmise that the diversity in thought, opinion, culture, religion, and beliefs constitute many differences that can sometimes conflict with the views of others. However, as students pursue their own personal academic, social and emotional growth, the school environment can support the development of his or her own self-concept. Through this, each person can identify and articulate his or her social justice concerns, thereby augmenting one’s knowledge about the world. By the virtue of inclusion, we are able to celebrate and respect the many variances that

embellish a thirst for learning.

Social Inclusion is built on the philosophy that each of us has a desire to be socially and emotionally connected with the school. A school that is physically inclusive does not alone constitute a wholly inclusive environment. The tangible and sometimes instantaneous change that can be seen through adopting physical inclusive practices can complicate the understanding of social inclusion. Implementing physical inclusion is not unsubstantial, but this can sometimes falsely signal our completion of instituting inclusion. It is equally important for a school to ensure that inclusion happens on all levels of interaction - between students, between adults, and between students and adults. Inclusion must be the expected practice in the very way the school functions.

The intersection between school climate and inclusion can be difficult to distinguish, since these two key ideals rely on each other to produce the greatest impact. To help one conceptualize the unifying bond between them, the questions posed below can be asked to craft a current and future vision of the school community.

Strategies to Guide Effective Practice

When advocating for inclusion, the first undertaking is advancing structural solutions like adapting the physical environment to meet the needs of students’ with mobility challenges. This adaptation is needed, as being able to access all parts of the school just like any other student, is not only the right thing to do, it is a basic human right. When these adaptations are neglected, ignored or even uncared for, this can stimulate an exclusionary perception on the inherent value of all who are in the community.

Even though physical changes result in equitable access, we must move our practice beyond the

physical environment in order to support an inclusive environment that embraces and celebrates the abilities, perspectives, and contributions each individual makes to the school community.

Questions to Consider for School Climate and Inclusion:

1. Identify the possible inequities of the physical modifications that are needed for individuals with physical mobility needs. Are those areas as clean, welcoming and valued, as the other parts of the school (i.e. are they given equal attention)?
2. Does each student, teacher and support staff feel invested in creating a safe and positive learning environment?
3. Are all students provided with equal opportunities to share their talents, strengths and interests with the learning community? Are these unique abilities and skills celebrated and incorporated into the school life?
4. Are student boards or committees, comprised of students representing the diversity in the school population (i.e. students receiving special education services)?
5. Do students have access to all the various courses offered in the school, to the greatest extent possible (with accommodations in place to support students' ability to participate)?
6. Are all extra-curricular activities and sporting opportunities open and welcoming to students of differing athletic ability and possible physical limitations?

*Strategies for Advancing Inclusion **For and With** Students:*

1. Moving past the sole model of physical inclusion, and engaging in the development of social inclusion requires commitment and engagement of all the members of the school community. Vital groups that can be

often forgotten or disavowed from contributing are students. Students are the ones who have the power to alter the school climate in either a negative or positive way, based upon their perception of what a school climate should feel like. Students hold the power to make it either socially acceptable or unacceptable to unite with their fellow classmates who have differences.

2. Recognize that without a positive school climate, inclusion will be hard to obtain. Both school climate and inclusion build off of each other to lead to a school and community that ensures every single student feels valued. If a school has a negative school climate due to factors brought on by students (such as bullying), reaching a socially inclusive status will be a daunting task if the students are not accepting of each other.
3. Encourage each class to create a list of social norms, thereby identifying, implementing and celebrating a culture of value for each member in the community.
4. As adults, ask each student to identify what he or she does well or likes to do. Support the student in identifying ways he or she can share those talents with the community. For example, each person can trace their hand on a large piece of paper, with their talents written or drawn. This display of "We are a Community, each with Talents to Share!" will remind all about the assets that the diversity of the school involves.
5. Support teaching and learning strategies that actively engage students to acquire and enhance academic, civic, social and career knowledge and skills such as the Get Into It curriculum offered by Special Olympics Project UNIFY®.
6. Create leadership opportunities for students of all ability and talent to engage in a meaningful role to teach and lead the

community rather than focusing on the typical ways one can lead through public speaking or writing. Broaden the thinking to utilizing shared leadership, where each persons' interest and passion is meshed into one, creating a unique blend of ideas, concepts and thoughts.

7. Provide opportunities for students with diverse abilities and perspectives to impact the school climate. Special Olympics Project UNIFY offers a wealth of resources for schools as they activate young people to develop school communities where all young people are agents of change.
8. Implement a school climate assessment that includes students as respondents to create a baseline of the schools' current social inclusive climate and strategies to improve the schools' climate.

Summary

The cross-braiding partnership between school climate and inclusion can support the cultivation of communities with mutual respect, understanding, and equity for each other. Through authentically engaging all students as co-creators for inclusive communities, the benefits are both physically perceived through equitable access and socially felt, by feeling a valued member of the community. Focusing on the worth of diversity and ways to celebrate the talents each person contributes, capitalizes on the norm that everyone has a place in the community to learn, grow, and share.

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SCHOOL CLIMATE AND EQUITY

February 2013
By Randy Ross

Schools can create more equitable communities through the following promising strategies:

35. Encourage reflective practice and build cultural awareness in students and adults.
36. Increase understanding of diverse cultures.
37. Keep diverse schools physically and emotionally safe.
38. Make high expectations culturally responsive.
39. Design multiple pathways to meaningful participation.
40. Demonstrate caring by knowing students' unique emotional

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 prosocial 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 Equity

Equity is intrinsic to all aspects of school climate work. It is not a separate issue. From this perspective, the National School Climate Council definition could be modified to describe an "equitable school climate" as referring to "The quality and character of school life that fosters children's, youth's, and families' *full access to*: (1) Appropriately supported, high expectations for learning and achievement; (2) Emotionally and physically safe, healthy learning environments; (3) Caring relationships with peers and adults; (4) Participation that meaningfully enhances academic, social-emotional, civic, and moral development. An equitable school climate responds to the wide range of cultural norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, leadership practices, and organizational structures within the broader community.

Self- **knowledge/reflection:** All work on equity

concerns begins with one's own self-reflection. Most of us grow up within cultural "bubbles" of race, ethnicity, class, ability, gender, sexual orientation, and first language. These "bubbles" create worldviews. Sometimes the experiences of where we live, socialize, emigrate, go to work or school help us see that others may have very different worldviews from ours. For educators, unbroken "bubbles" are particularly troublesome. Our worldview becomes a paradigm that too often typecasts different as deficient. This is especially clear when we consider students with intellectual or other disabilities. We carry with us value systems, expectations, and unrecognized stereotypes of our worldview into our work with children and families, seeing their deficits rather than their strengths. Becoming aware of our "bubbles" and breaking out of them can happen through high quality "diversity training" (Lee, StirFry Seminars), reading books to challenge our deepest assumptions (see References for suggestions), or simply being open to noticing subtle thoughts and behaviors rooted in unacknowledged stereotypes (Harvard, Project Implicit).

Broad knowledge using a framework of cultural awareness: We need a framework to understand how we experience the complex interconnections of various "bubbles" within which we all live. One particularly useful framework for understanding equity in school climate identifies three levels of cultural awareness: overt, covert, and subtle (Kalyanour & Harry, 2012). Seeing and appreciating differences in external elements such as dress, food, and holidays is an example of *overt* cultural awareness. At the *covert* level, aspects of "invisible culture" (such as relationship patterns, concepts of time, individual vs. collective goals, etc.), are most important. At the *subtle* level, we do the deepest work in examining how our values, educational practices and expectations are

rooted in unexamined assumptions and institutional structures. For example, we see survey data as fundamental to our school climate improvement process, but for some students, such as a Somalian refugee with little or no prior formal schooling, the opportunity to share stories (as in a focus group) might be a more culturally responsive methodology.

Specific knowledge of the different cultural experiences of our students and families:

Culturally responsive education requires some knowledge of the specific cultures of the students and families in the school community. This knowledge must go beyond "heroes and holidays" in the designated "months." This means that the formal curriculum (studying the civil rights movement in Social Studies or reading *House on Mango Street* in Language Arts) should be as inclusive as possible so students can "see themselves." Equally important is the hidden curriculum of classroom management, school rules, and interaction/communication styles: student groupings, teacher wait-time, praise, physical contact, pictures and posters reflecting students' identities, etc. Making the effort to know students both culturally **and** as individuals is fundamental. We must see them as they are, not as they are different than the normative reference point of Euro-American, middle class students.

Strategies to Guide Effective Practice

While many strategies support fostering equitable school climates, we must identify the broad categories that form the foundation of such climates:

- **Keep diverse schools emotionally & physically safe:** When students experience a safe, supportive school climate, they are more able to achieve academically and become responsible, caring citizens. School violence, especially bullying, has received significant attention in the past decade.

Bullying is usually conflated with peer-to-peer discriminatory harassment, defined by federal civil rights laws as covering harassment based on race, color, religion, national origin, disability, sex, and sexual orientation (or “gender-based harassment”). These laws have more requirements than do most state bullying laws to prevent “hostile environments.” Reducing a racially or sexually hostile environment means not only improving the district’s incident reporting process, but also educating students and staff about bias and stereotypes. Knowing and implementing these requirements is a critical strategy for schools to sustain an emotionally and physically safe climate for all students (US Department of Education, 2010).

- ***Make high expectations culturally responsive:*** Stereotyped low expectations of many students (such as those whose first language is other than English, who have special needs, are of color, female, or from families in poverty), are rampant in our schools. Educators often mask these low expectations as “being kind.” In fact, they are the opposite and derive from a deficit model. Clearly expecting all students to work hard and therefore be able to succeed is a step toward culturally responsive high expectations. Making teaching and learning needs congruent may mean differentiating curriculum content and/or pedagogy. For example, scaffolding for English learners requires understanding their prior experience, which may differ from students whose background is similar to the teacher’s (Trumbull & Pacheco, 2005; Nieto & Bode, 2011).
- ***Design multiple pathways to meaningful participation:*** When the participation of all members of the school community is valued, we create multiple pathways with options meeting varying interests, schedules, financial

resources, language needs, etc. Older students often seek extra-curricular activities, such as students of color associations or gay-straight alliances, that reflect their developing racial, ethnic, and gender identities. Culturally and linguistically diverse families wishing to participate in school events or meetings may require childcare, translators, or flexible timing. Many parents from other countries believe that teachers are responsible for what goes on at school and they are responsible for home.

This is not a “lack of engagement, as is often misinterpreted.” It is a different way of seeing engagement than we have come to believe in the past few decades. For school climate teams to be truly inclusive of a diverse community, planning with attention to such varying needs is critical.

- ***Demonstrate caring by knowing students’ unique emotional needs:*** Building equitable, caring relationships requires awareness of students’ cultural experiences. Finding school to be an emotionally supportive home, however different than one’s actual home, increases students’ sense of belonging, connectedness, and hence academic engagement. This is especially true for immigrant and refugee students, as well as many African American, Asian and Latino/a students who are born here. Like others, these students seek warm but firm relationships with adults. Finding the right balance of warm and caring with firm discipline and high academic expectations is difficult for many white, middle class educators, yet this is the vast majority of those leading our increasingly diverse classrooms and schools (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Valenzuela, 1999). It is important to remember that many students and families from diverse backgrounds have experienced serious trauma in their countries of origin or

in their communities here. Learning about how trauma impacts brain development is another significant strategy to build caring relationships based on students' unique emotional needs.

Summary

In 2011, for the first time, more than 50% of the babies born in the U.S. were not white. Yet 83% of current teachers are white. The rapid demographic changes in the U.S. demand that we address school climate from an equity perspective, challenging ourselves to reach beyond the limits of our experience, our own “bubbles,” to make school a welcoming, engaging place for all young people to learn and grow into caring, responsible citizens. This is not just a demographic imperative. It is a moral imperative. We say that we must have high expectations for students, but do we have high enough expectations for ourselves, as educators? How well are we preparing ourselves to understand the equity needs of this diverse population? One pre-service course or annual in-service workshop on diversity hardly touches the depth and complexity of change required of us individually and collectively. By integrating equity in all dimensions of school climate work exemplified by the range of Practice Briefs in this series, we will help to foster equitable school climates.

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SCHOOL CLIMATE AND DROPOUT PREVENTION

Schools can support effective dropout prevention through the following promising strategies:

41. Address risk factors in the context of positive school climate.
42. Create conditions that support engagement of students and parents.
43. Participate in a continuing systemic process of evaluating goals and objectives as they impact a diverse group of learners.
44. Start early by engaging families and students, starting with early childhood education.
45. Provide unique learning opportunities to meet the needs of all learners.

February 2013

By Marty Duckenfield and Beth Reynolds

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 prosocial 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 Dropout Prevention

A positive school climate improves student achievement and a sense of belonging. This year, more than ever, school leaders need efficient, low-cost, and effective ways to boost school achievement. We know that important factors in a positive school climate are also significant mediators of learning: empowerment, authentic engagement, self-efficacy, and motivation. Being intentional in our practices and co-leading on nurturing a positive school climate is a strategy that pays off long term for youth, faculty, and school districts with stronger student achievement within a productive, safe learning environment—a good return on the investment of human and financial resources.

Developing and sustaining high-quality school climates is deeply tied to strategies emerging from dropout prevention research and work. This research conducted across several decades has revealed not only the at-risk factors most often associated with students who drop out, but also a broad range of strategies that, in combination, go a long way toward meeting the needs of students, particularly those at risk of dropping out. Interestingly enough, many of these strategies link tightly to the significant factors in positive school climates including connectedness, engagement, empowerment, and self-efficacy.

What are these risk factors that need to be addressed whenever possible to help ensure success for all students? The research-based risk factors for dropping out clearly show that there is no single cause, and therefore there is no single solution. Researchers have found that dropping out of school stems from a wide variety of factors in four areas or domains: individual, family, school, and community. According to Hammond, Linton, Smink, and Drew (2007), the research showed that in the individual domain, certain risk factors could be positively impacted by appropriate solutions. For example, students who are disengaged with school—evidenced by poor attendance, lack of effort, low educational expectations, low commitment to school, and lack of participation in extracurricular activities—are more likely to drop out. Yet, these are risk factors that can be addressed in the context of a positive school climate where, for example, the adults in the school collaborate and create a sense of belonging and where students are connected to the adults and are made to feel included and valued. Another risk factor—parenthood—can be impacted by the adults in the school by creating conditions to support the student parents, such as providing flexible hours and schedules, assistance with child care as well as through connections with or assignments to caring adults. Findings pertaining to the family domain risk factor—high family mobility, low

education level of parents, family disruption, low contact with school, low educational expectations, and lack of conversations about school—and effective counter strategies also revealed a strong connection to positive school climate. The impact of a supportive school climate and appropriate interventions can be huge.

By reviewing the effective strategies for dropout prevention advocated by the National Dropout Prevention Center and adapted by many states as a framework for dropout prevention, those who promote a positive school climate will find they have established a fertile support system for successful implementation of these strategies.

Strategies to Guide Effective Practice

The NDPC has identified 15 Effective Strategies that lie at the heart of solving the dropout problem. They have been grouped into four major clusters: School and Community Perspective; Early Interventions; Basic Core Strategies; and Making the Most of Instruction. We offer an overview of each of the four major clusters and corresponding school climate practices.

1. School and Community Perspective

This cluster of strategies provides the supportive environment and infrastructure in which a positive school climate is able to thrive. Through *systemic renewal*, schools participate in a continuing process of evaluating goals and objectives related to school policies, practices, and organizational structures as they impact a diverse group of learners. Building on this school-based climate, expanding to a *school-community collaboration* enables all groups in a community to provide collective support to the school and strengthens the caring supportive environment. Providing *safe learning environments*, including all daily experiences, at all grade levels, and a comprehensive violence prevention plan will enhance positive social

attitudes and effective interpersonal skills in all students.

School leaders need to (1) ensure all education stakeholders know that school climate is a system-wide effort that engages all students equitably; (2) engage community partners as contributors to the school's climate; and (3) ensure the school's climate provides a safe and nurturing environment for students and adults to feel connected to the school.

2. Early Interventions

This cluster of strategies recognizes that families, schools, and communities can never start too early in positive development of their young people, and that involving parents in the process is extraordinarily important. Research consistently finds that *family engagement* has a direct, positive effect on children's achievement and is the most accurate predictor of a student's success in school. A school climate that supports that engagement is vital. This engagement should be begun in the earliest days through *early childhood education*, including birth-to-five interventions. This empowers parents to see that providing a child additional enrichment can enhance brain development and they can play an important role in that. A natural role for family members is to enhance *early literacy development* by helping to improve children's reading and writing skills, a necessary foundation for effective learning in all other subjects.

School leaders should effectively communicate with all education stakeholders that a safe, nurturing and engaging school climate in the earliest school grades is necessary to build student resiliency and competencies. In addition, family and community members should be encouraged to contribute to their school's climate and to early literacy programs.

3. Basic Core Strategies

With the awareness that traditional school models do not meet all the needs of young people, this cluster of strategies emphasizes

unique learning opportunities for all students. For example, *mentoring/tutoring* can offer important new relationships that provide a context for learning and growing in positive ways. *Alternative schooling* offers supportive environments that allow potential dropouts a variety of options that can lead to graduation, with programs paying special attention to the student's individual social needs and academic requirements for a high school diploma. *After-school opportunities* offer experiences that are especially important for students at risk of school failure because these programs fill the afternoon and summer "gap time" with constructive and engaging activities that offer further connections to school.

Finally, *service-learning* gives students engaging learning experiences in their schools and communities through applying knowledge and skills to solve real-world problems. This strategy promotes meaningful rigorous learning, personal and social growth, career development, and civic responsibility, making it an integral part of school climate reform initiatives. While service-learning is an instructional methodology that increases teacher effectiveness, it is also a core strategy for increasing student engagement that addresses the dropout problem.

School leaders should engage all education stakeholders in developing and sustaining a school climate that recognizes the diverse learning styles of students. Stakeholders develop corresponding school structures and teaching and learning strategies that assist students in acquiring and enhancing content knowledge and skills and dispositions.

4. Making the Most of Instruction

This cluster focuses on instruction, and instruction that respects students by engaging them in the learning experience is an important component of school climate. Lack of engagement in their academic classes is one of the reasons students give for their dissatisfaction with school. With targeted *professional*

development, teachers who work with youth at high risk of academic failure need an avenue by which they can continue to develop skills, techniques, and learn about innovative strategies to improve their instructional methods. *Active learning*, as its name implies, embraces teaching and learning strategies that engage and involve students in the learning process. More so every day, *educational technology* offers some of the best opportunities for delivering instruction to engage students in authentic learning, addressing multiple intelligences, and adapting to students' learning styles. It also contributes to *individualized instruction*, which allows for flexibility in teaching methods and motivational strategies to consider individual differences. And the final strategy, *career and technology education (CTE)*, with preparation for post-secondary or career and supported by a related guidance program, is essential for all students to see relevance in their studies to their future.

School leaders provide quality professional development to teachers and other school staff to increase their active teaching knowledge and skills as well as how to contribute to a corresponding school climate. In addition, school leaders ensure that the school's climate supports active learning and education technology with a focus on career education so that students understand the relevance of education to their current and future lives.

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This School Climate Practice Brief is one of 11 briefs presenting the latest in research and best practice for effective school climate reform from leading experts. All School Climate Practice Briefs for Implementation and Sustainability can be found at <http://www.schoolclimate.org/publications/practice-briefs.php>

Summary

The proven practices of dropout prevention are most effective when all are employed collectively throughout the school and district wide, at all grade levels. Essential to their successful implementation is a positive school climate, which applies across all four clusters. This comprehensive approach impacts all students, both those identified at risk, and those one might not identify as such. When targeted strategies are implemented for those students who do have the greater needs, it is necessary that the overall school environment be one that is supportive of each of these strategies for them to succeed in their goals.

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SCHOOL CLIMATE AND BULLYING PREVENTION

February 2013

By Jonathan Cohen and Jo Ann Freiberg

Schools can implement effective bully prevention efforts through the following promising strategies:

47. Ensure leadership supports comprehensive efforts.
48. Engage all stakeholders, from assessment of issues to implementation of strategies.
49. Create and sustain systemic strategies designed to promote a safe, supportive prosocially-informed climate of social responsibility.
50. Integrate and sustain quality teaching and learning.
51. Focus on one-on-one/ relational practices.

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 prosocial 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 Effective Bully Prevention Efforts¹⁴

Bully-victim-bystander and/or perpetrator¹⁵-target-witness behavior is a widespread public health problem that undermines all children's ability to develop in healthy ways and compromises learning (U.S.

¹⁴ This brief grows out of work that we have detailed in the past resources: Devine & Cohen, 2007; Eyman & Cohen, 2009; Cohen, in press; Cohen, Espelage, Twemlow & Berkowitz (submitted for publication consideration) and Freiberg, 2010; Upstander Alliance/BullyBust: www.schoolclimate.org/bullybust/upstander.

¹⁵ Defining and hence, understanding "bully" and "victim" behavior is complicated and challenging (Freiberg, 2010). Scholars sometimes define "bullying" as (i) intentional acts that are carried out by a person or group (ii) who has more power than the target of this behavior. However, educators "on the ground" often have difficulty discerning intent and/or power relationships. Every one of the 49 state anti-bullying laws has a unique definition of bullying. "Bullying," no matter how it is defined, is about inappropriate behaviors (words and deeds). We use the terms bully and perpetrator as well as "victim" and "target" interchangeably. And, we suggest it is most helpful to talk about "mean, cruel and/or bullying behaviors."

Department of Education and Human Services, 2012). A generation's worth of media coverage of suicides and rampage shootings claim that they, in part, were caused by "bullying," and have influenced forty-nine (49) states in America to pass anti-bullying laws. shootings claim that they – in part – were caused by "bullying," and have influenced forty-nine (49) states in America to pass anti-bullying laws. Many of these statutes mandate the implementation of reactive interventions and promising or effective "bullying prevention" programs be implemented (Piscatelli & Lee, 2011). In addition to the goal of protecting all students from physical and emotional harm, school leaders (e.g., principals, superintendents, and school board members) are painfully aware that if they have not implemented "effective" bullying prevention and intervention strategies they leave themselves open to litigation and lawsuits.

School climate is at its core about healthy, positive and connected relationships. In a real and concrete way, the ultimate remedy for bullying, no matter how it is defined, is to create school climates that are not supportive of any kind of mean-spirited behaviors, including but not limited to bullying and harassment. Consequently, true bullying prevention is identical to school climate improvement.

Today, most PK – 12 schools', districts', and states' so-called bullying prevention efforts are devoted to implementing short term instructional lessons and/or programs that have minimal or no positive effect on truly preventing bullying (for a recent review of the research in this area, see Cohen, Espelage, Twemlow, Berkowitz and Comer, submitted for publication). If the focus of bullying prevention programs and strategies are separate and apart or different from

school climate improvement efforts, then it is not surprising that mean-spirited behaviors including but not limited to bullying and harassment continue.

The U.S. Department of Education and Human Services (2012) has begun to outline research-based guidelines pertaining to diminishing bullying. However, these guidelines do not provide detailed and practical guidelines about how to develop concrete and effective bullying prevention efforts, per se (Cohen, in press).

This brief summarizes research and best practices that do effectively prevent any kind of mean-spirited behaviors including but not limited to bullying and harassment which is identical to promoting safe, supportive, engaging and healthy school communities.

What are the essential elements¹⁶ of a school climate informed effort to prevent mean, cruel and/or bullying behaviors?

Educational leadership: District and building leaders need to fully endorse and lead any and all effective school reform efforts, including school climate improvement. These leaders need to publically and authentically support comprehensive efforts not only to prevent mean, cruel, and/or bullying behaviors but also commit to create and maintain safe, supportive, respectful, and engaging climates for learning and development.

Engaging the whole school community: Students, parents/guardians, school personnel and, community members/leaders – need to be co-learners and co-leaders in effective school climate improvement efforts. A lack of engagement is one of the most common reasons

¹⁶ Detailed research-based support for these five elements can be found in Cohen, Espelage, Twemlow, Berkowitz & Comer (submitted for publication consideration).

why so many school reform efforts fail (Fullan, 2011; Mourshed, Chijioke, & Barber, 2010).

Assessment: Assessment is important not only as an engagement strategy but also to establish “baselines” to gauge progress over time. There are three levels of assessment that are helpful to consider:

1. *Readiness assessments* that support school leaders understanding how ready or not they are to embark on a school wide reform effort to prevent mean, cruel and/or bullying and promote a climate for learning;
2. Comprehensive school climate assessments (for recent independent reviews of school climate measures, see: Clifford, Condon, & Hornung, 2012; Gangi, 2010; Haggerty, Elgin, Woolley, 2011); and,
3. More *targeted bully-victim-witness assessments* via student led participatory action research and/or other surveys.

Policies, laws, rules and supports: Today, there are 49 States that have developed anti-bully laws (Piscatelli & Lee, 2012). Legally and psychosocially there is a powerful bully prevention trend that “blames” the bully and tends to focus on punishment as a solution. Roughly, a third of these 49 State laws are focused on identifying and punishing the bully. Eighteen states have laws that allow victims to seek legal remedies for bullying, either from schools that do not act or from the bullies themselves. Nine states require administrators to report bullying to police. These kinds of “zero tolerance” policies and laws are unhelpful to reduce mean, cruel and/or bullying behaviors (American Psychological Association, 2006; Fowler, 2011).

Helpful policies and district level supports as well as related codes of conduct need to: (1) enhance the whole school community learning and working together to understand their shared vision for what kind of school they most want and then working to develop rules, supports, and standards (e.g., laws and/or policies) and educational practices (e.g., school wide improvement efforts, instructional and one-one-one practices) that support this vision (e.g., National School Climate Council, 2009); (2) be aligned with research-based findings about what really helps to reduce mean, cruel and/or bullying behaviors (outlined below).

Strategies to Guide Effective Practice

Building on the four processes noted above, there are three essential aspects of day to day practice that support effective bully prevention efforts and school climate reform: school wide improvement practices; pedagogy; and, one-one-one/relational practices.

1. *Creating and sustaining a school wide or systemic strategies* designed to promote a safe, supportive prosocially-informed climate of social responsibility where students and adults alike think about “what’s the right thing to do?” in caring and thoughtful ways. There are a wide range of systemic issues that shape school life including explicit and implicit norms; measurement practices; codes of conduct; goals; values; patterns of interpersonal relations; teaching and learning practices; leadership styles, disciplinary practices and includes all school leaders and school staff/support.
2. *Integrating and sustaining quality teaching and learning:* There are four

ways that educators can advance teaching and learning about bully-victim-witness dynamics in particular and promote prosocial education (e.g., character education, social, emotional learning and mental health promotion efforts) in general: (a) being a helpful living example/role model, (b) via classroom management strategies; (c) via a number of pedagogic strategies (e.g. cooperative learning; conflict resolution; service-learning; and, moral dilemma discussions); and, (d) actual prosocial curriculum. Hopefully, engaging students in meaningful ways colors and shapes all instructional efforts.

3. *Focus on one-on-one/relational practices*: There are three important aspects of one-on-one and related relational practices that are important for school leaders to consider. First, how will you support educators understanding about how to respond to a perpetrator – target situation in the moment as well as afterwards? Secondly, how can and will school leaders support more effective educator-parent-mental health partnerships that promote the recognition of students who chronically “fall into” the role of perpetrator and/or target? And, finally how we greet and treat one another.

Summary

The single most common school climate findings that our Center (and others) have discovered in our work with tens of thousands of schools across America is that students report feeling significantly unsafe

in schools. And, educators and parents have not known this! Bully-victim-witness behavior is one of the most common and important interpersonal processes that contribute to these findings. Today, most bully prevention efforts are grounded in targeted programs and/or short-term curriculum that have minimal, if any, impact on bully-victim-bystander behavior.

In this brief we have summarized how effective bully prevention efforts are essentially comprehensive school climate reform efforts that engage students, parents/guardians, school personnel and ideally community members to be co-learners and co-leaders in understanding what the communities “vision” for an ideal school is; understanding the gap between this vision and current school life; and, working together – systematically, instructionally and in one-on-one relationships – to create an even safer, more supportive, engaging and flourishing school.

These efforts not only have profound and positive implication for truly effective bully prevention efforts. They also overlap with improvement efforts that focus on equity and harassment. Too often people in schools tolerate the subtle (and not so subtle) forms of mean-spirited, cruel behaviors that sometimes manifest as bias and prejudice. These civil rights matters can overlap with bullying but is a separate and fundamentally important dynamic.

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SCHOOL CLIMATE AND ADULT LEARNING

February 2013

By Jonathan Cohen and Philip Brown

Schools can support and nurture effective adult learning through the following promising strategies:

52. Shared leadership provides the optimal foundation for successful professional improvement efforts.
53. Engage the entire adult school community in creating a shared vision.
54. Promote professional development through effective policies and supports.
55. Consider developing professional learning communities.
56. Use available resources to address identified needs.

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 prosocial 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 Adult Learning

First, this brief summarizes research about the inter-relationship between positive school climate and adult learning as well as a summary of helpful and research-based adult learning strategies. Second, this brief examines a series of strategies that schools can consider that support adult learning in ways that promote student learning and achievement as well as positive and sustained school climates.

School Climate and Adult Learning: The school's climate supports or undermines educators' capacity to be adult learners, which in turn has an important impact on their capacity to promote student learning and achievement. In fact, school climate has a powerful effect on teacher retention rates (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009). Research also underscores and supports the notion

that a collaborative school climate and collegial adult climate focused on the well-being and growth of all children provides an essential foundation for effective teaching and supportive learning environments (Cohen, et al. 2009).

The school climate improvement process – by definition – is an intentional, strategic, collaborative, transparent process of educators (and other school personnel), students, parent/guardians and even community members learning and working together to promote prosocial learning and safer, more supportive, engaging and democratically informed schools. Adult learning is an explicit and foundational component of the school climate improvement process (National School Climate Council, 2012).

Adult learning provides an essential foundation for effective teaching and teacher retention. We know that successful building leaders influence student achievement through two important pathways: (i) supporting and helping to develop teachers; and, (ii) setting directions for the school through the development of shared goals (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe & Meyerson, 2005). To develop the competencies that educators need to promote K-12 students' healthy development, capacity to learn and achieve, they must be vital, ongoing adult social, emotional and civic learners themselves. In fact, educators – and parents – are always teaching social, emotional and civic lessons through their behaviors and interactions: intentionally, consciously, systematically and helpfully - or not!

Professional development, school climate and adult learning: Over the last decade, research has underscored what many educators have long known: one shot or “drive by” PD workshops that are developed by building or district leaders are not helpful (Stein, Smith & Silver, 1999). Professional development (PD) research has begun to reach a consensus about the *content*, *context* and *design* of high quality professional

development (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Hawley & Valii, 1999). We have learned, for example that:

- Helpful PD is designed based on active participation by educators in identifying their needs and in establishing job-embedded PD plans that meet those needs through collaboration, assessment, observation and reflection rather than abstract discussions (Killion & Roy, 2009).
- A healthy school climate is necessary for collaborative, job-embedded PD to be successful. Healthy school cultures that nurture a professional, collegial climate for teachers correlate strongly with increased student motivation and with teacher productivity and satisfaction (Deal & Peterson, 2009, Marzano, 2003).
- The context of PD work also matters: PD is more effective when schools develop an intentional plan that is a coherent, ongoing part of the school's reform efforts, rather than being an isolated, one-shot workshop (Killion & Roy, 2009).

Strategies to Guide Effective Practice

1. Principal Leadership: The principal can and needs to explicitly and actively encourage educators to identify, pursue and share their own adult learning objectives. Successful professional learning communities (PLCs) will require a shift in the traditional leadership role from leader-centered (top-down) to shared leadership. Principals need to lead from the center rather than the top.

Principals can and need to also understand and support fellow educators in addressing to what extent they are working, teaching and learning within a climate of blame and/or distrust vs. a more trusting, collaborative problem solving “no fault” framework that provides the optimal foundation for learning and school reform efforts.

2. Engaging the whole community of educators and related school personnel: School leaders need to consider how to facilitate the development of a shared vision of what it means to be a vital and ongoing educator/ learner/ teacher. This process provides the foundation and ability for educators to make it an explicit and agreed upon social norm that we are all invested in being ongoing learners as well as teachers.

3. Policies and supports for professional development: Districts develop policies and supports that explicitly value and promote a model of adult learning that fosters collaboration and job-embedded PD that is focused on student development as well as effective student instruction.

- PD that focuses on student learning and supports teachers developing and experimenting with instructional skills to teach specific kinds of content has a very strong and positive impact on practice (Blank, de las Atlas, & Smith, 2007; Wenglingksy, 2000).
- Adult, active learning that includes “hands-on” work such as project-based learning or action research focused on identified instructional issues or student needs supports meaningful and helpful PD work.
- Effective PD must also consider *how* teachers learn: active learning opportunities allow teachers to transform their teaching and not simply add a new strategy on top of the old (Snow-Renner & Laure, 2005). Teaching practices and student learning are most likely to be transformed by PD that is sustained, coherent and intensive, rather than episodic, fragmented and a one-shot experience (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). In fact, PD that lasted 14 or fewer hours showed no effects on adult learning. And, the largest effects were for

PD efforts that were between 30 and 100 hours spread out over six to twelve months (Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss & Shapley, 2007).

4. Professional Learning Communities (PLC's): With the support of building leadership, educators need to consider developing PLC's. In PLC's, educators learn and work together, engaging in open and honest conversations and practice that is focused on effective instructional practices. Teachers learn from each other: learning, trying out and reflecting. PLC's need supportive leadership, mutual respect, a commitment to learning, and a climate that supports risk taking, innovation and a “no blame” climate. Building such a truly collaborative culture requires attention to the following foundational factors:

- *Setting, describing and modeling expected norms and practices:* Establishing core ethical and performance values with associated behaviors for all members of the school community sets expectations that can reinforce positive assets and transform negative aspects of school culture (Lickona & Davidson, 2005, Brown & Saporin-Day, 2008).
- *Building trust:* Trust, respect, and collegial interaction among teachers and administrators can make or break school reform efforts because change efforts involve risk, and a sense of safety is necessary to look at issues clearly and experiment with new practices (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Westbrook & Hord, 2000).
- *Empowering teacher leadership:* School leaders need to solicit and use teachers' insights and input if meaningful collaboration is to happen. Creating a listening atmosphere promotes a culture of shared leadership and collective learning. Tokenism leads to loss of trust and resistance to change (Killion & Roy, 2009).

Japanese Lesson Plans (Lewis, 2002; Hurd & Lewis, 2011) as well as Critical Friends Groups (Dunne, Nave, & Lewis, 2001) are two wonderful models that support this work.

- *Centering on student development:* Focusing on the development of the whole child and remembering to ask, "Is it better for kids?" rather than being consumed by test scores, personality clashes, and comparisons with other schools sets the conditions for collaboration and learning communities which impact child well-being and performance (Westbrook & Hord, 2000; McCloskey, 2011).

5. Study groups and individual adult learning:

Educators and school-based mental health professionals need to consider what they want and need to learn more about to support their own learning. Study group guidelines and materials, for example, in the School Climate Resource Center (<http://scrc.schoolclimate.org>) and/or Critical Friends groups are two examples of resources and frameworks that can powerfully support meaningful adult learning that will not only enhance educators' ability to support student learning, prosocial education and positive school climates, but their own inclination to continue to be an engaged teacher/learner!

Summary

Meaningful adult learning supports educators being even more effective teachers to K-12 students. And, an effective school climate improvement process – by definition – supports educators considering what they want and need to learn more about to effectively educate students and support safe, supportive, engaging and flourishing classrooms and schools. In this brief, we have summarized research about the inter-relationship between positive school climate and adult learning as well as a summary of helpful and research-based adult learning

strategies. This research informed the series of strategies that classrooms and schools can consider that support adult learning in ways that promote student learning and achievement as well as positive and sustained school climates.

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