Safe Communities ~ Safe Schools

FACT SHEET

FS-SC23   June 2010

School Climate

Over the past few decades there has been a growing body of research which supports the importance of a healthy school climate in promoting academic achievement, risk prevention and health promotion. Establishing a positive school climate is an essential element of a safe school plan.

What is School Climate?

In 2007 the National School Climate Council developed the following definition that synthesizes current thinking and research about 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."

What Aspects of School Life Does School Climate Encompass?

- Safety (e.g. physical and social-emotional safety, rules and norms)
- Relationships (e.g. school connectedness, engagement, support and respect for diversity)
- Teaching and learning (e.g. social and civic learning and supportive teaching practices)
- Institutional environment (e.g. physical surroundings)

What is a Healthy School Climate?

A healthy school climate consists of the following features:

- Norms, values and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally and physically safe
- People who are engaged and respected
- Students, families and educators who work together to attain a shared vision of the school
- Educators who model and nurture attitudes that emphasize the benefits and satisfaction gained from learning
- A population who all contribute to the school operations and care of the physical environment

What are the Results of a Positive, Sustained School Climate?

- Positive youth development
- Effective risk prevention
- Health promotion
- Student learning and academic achievement
- Increased student graduation rates
- Teacher retention

What Aspects of a Healthy School Climate Affect Academic Achievement?

Many correlational studies indicate that school climate is directly related to academic achievement (higher test scores and graduation rates) and that students perform better academically in an environment that:

- Promotes cooperative learning, group cohesion, respect and mutual trust
- Encourages classroom participation
- Improves student-teacher relationships
- Supports collaboration
- Creates real life learning experiences
- Enhances how educators feel about being in school and how they teach

What Can Schools Do to Improve School Climate?

School climate improvement is a continuous process of:

- Planning and preparing for the next phase of the improvement process
- Evaluating the climate using scientifically sound survey instruments which involve students, school personnel and parents and which assess safety, relationships, teaching, learning and the environment
- Understanding the evaluation findings and creating an action plan
- Implementing the action plan (elements of school climate are typically targeted in evidence-based prevention programs)
- Monitoring and evaluate results
- Beginning the cycle anew

Research shows that school climate has a significant effect on many aspects of school life.   School climate improvement as part of a comprehensive plan to prevent school violence and problem behaviors, as well as to promote health and academic achievement, produces an environment that enhances the learning and teaching experience of the whole school community.

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