Safe Communities ~ Safe Schools

FACT SHEET

FS-SC04   2000

What is a Safe School?

A positive school climate is necessary in developing a safe school.

Research shows that schools with a positive and welcoming school climate increases the likelihood that students succeed academically while protecting them from engaging in high risk behaviors like substance abuse, teen pregnancy, and violence. A positive school climate encourages behaviors with clear consequences for violating rules as well as rewards for meeting expectations. School climate can be understood as the frequency and quality of interactions among and between staff, students, parents, and the community throughout the entire school community.

In a positive school climate, the caring attitude of the school is clearly visible and is reflected by widespread participation in all areas of the school. According to the National School Safety Center (1990), a student's perspective of the school climate is affected by the following:

- **Student involvement:** The degree to which students are involved in and enjoy classes and extracurricular activities at school.
- **Student relationships:** The level of comfort students feel in relating to one another and the ease with which they make new friends.
- **Teacher support:** The amount of help and care that teachers direct toward students.
- **Physical environment:** The extent to which the school building reflects the caring attitude of the school, the school buildings are clean, well cared for, supervised, and safe.
- **Conflict resolution:** Whether students are clear about the rules and feel that conflicts are resolved fairly and rules are consistently enforced.
- **Participation in decision-making:** The extent to which students, administrators, and teachers share in making decisions about school improvement.
- **Curriculum:** The extent to which students feel that what is taught in classes meets their needs.
- **Counseling services**: Whether students feel counselors are accessible and able to help with personal problems, job, and career information, and concerns about drugs, alcohol, and sex.
- **Recreation alternatives**: Whether students are satisfied with existing recreational activities and teachers' support of these activities.
- **Personal stress:** The amount of pressure students feel they are under and the resources they have to cope with it.

A safe school is also prepared for emergencies, provides opportunities for students in before- and after-school activities, and has effective school–community partnerships.

While a safe school has a positive, warm, and welcoming school climate, there is more to a safe school than a good school climate. A safe school is also a school that is prepared for emergencies, provides opportunities and guidance for students before and after school with programs and activities at school and/or in the community, and involves the whole community in anticipating and preventing school problems. A safe school requires balancing physical security with a nurturing school climate, as well as developing effective school – community partnerships.

Schools can use the five components of the Safe Communities ~ Safe Schools model—convene a safe school planning team, conduct a school site assessment, develop strategies and implement violence prevention programs based on need, establish a social support team, and develop a crisis plan—to guide safe school planning. In addition, here are some things that school personnel can do to create a protective school climate (University of Arizona):

- Consistently recognize students and adults for participating in cooperative and philanthropic activities.
- Brainstorm with students, faculty/staff, and parents some simple changes that could make the school a more enjoyable place to be.
- Establish and support a school norm that does not tolerate any form of verbal and nonverbal bullying by adults or students.

Discipline

- State rules positively to tell students what to do instead of what not to do.
- Express the expectation that all students can and will be successful.
- Focus on giving students concrete rewards and acknowledgment for abiding by the rules of conduct, rather than focusing primarily on misbehavior.

Building community and parent relationships

- Contact parents when students do something well.
- Enlist involved parents in getting other parents to participate in the school's culture.
- Examine how parents and community members are involved in your school and if there are ways to increase that involvement.

Building a safe school means involving the whole community in a collaborative effort to create a nurturing environment, prepare for emergencies, provide activities before and after school, and increase community involvement in the school. So ask the students, staff, parents, and community what can be done to make your school a safer place. Get creative and have fun!

References:

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