

THE WHY AND HOW OF A POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE

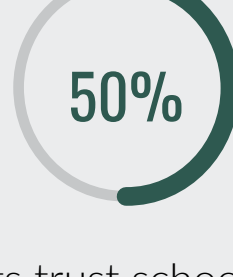
With the 2021-2022 school year underway, developing and maintaining a positive school climate have never been more imperative. By focusing on the social-emotional well-being and mental health of students and staff, districts can better foster feelings of safety, connection, engagement, and, ultimately, success.

Recognizing the importance of school climate, the federal government recently designated social-emotional learning (SEL) support as a qualifying expenditure for schools receiving Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds. Still, achieving a positive climate is challenging, especially with fluctuating learning environments and resource inequities. Here are some data, tips, and best practices to consider when pursuing a better school climate in your K-12 district.

THE EVOLVING STATE OF SCHOOL CLIMATES

The upheaval of the past year brought with it a broad array of teaching and learning disruptions from its onset in March 2020 and throughout the 2020-2021 school year. Students around the U.S. experienced negative impacts on academics, equitable access to resources, and their social-emotional well-being.

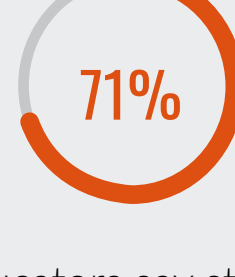
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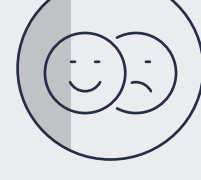
of parents trust schools to keep their students safe and healthy with fully in-person learning



Nearly 1/3 of parents say their students have made less academic progress than in the past



of educators say student morale is lower than before the pandemic



Nearly 1/3 of educators said their schools provided inadequate social and emotional support

Sources listed below.

4 REASONS IT'S CRITICAL TO FOSTER A POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE

During times of crisis—such as the COVID-19 pandemic—students face a greater risk for negative emotional responses that can interfere with both their learning and their daily lives. But even under normal circumstances, school climate should remain a top priority for K-12 districts. Here's why:



1.

Negative school climates typically result in worse outcomes for students and educators.



2.

Research shows a positive school climate can improve academic achievement.



3.

Positive school climates also produce greater social-emotional outcomes for students.



4.

Educators experience more significant long-term benefits.

WHAT DOES A POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE LOOK LIKE?

Experts find many common traits and outcomes among schools with positive climates. Those factors generally fall into four distinct categories.

COMMON TRAITS

ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT	SCHOOL/BUILDING ENVIRONMENT	STAKEHOLDER INCLUSIVENESS	SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive perceptions of the instructional climate, attitudes towards learning, and engagement Agreement that schools provide enough resources and instruction to support all students' academic, social, and emotional outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive emotional climate, including student feelings of belonging and school pride Better safety outcomes, including less violence or theft, safer learning spaces, and safety at school-sponsored events Well-maintained physical environment, such as clean bathrooms and common spaces, appropriate temperature and lighting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responsive, engaging, transparent and effective district communications with community members and parents Positive stakeholder perceptions of school or district leadership and personnel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive relationships and frequent interaction between students and others Fair enforcement of school rules Positive relationships and professional development opportunities for staff members Low incidence of bullying and harassment

5 WAYS TO IMPROVE SCHOOL CLIMATE

Leaders should begin by developing a framework for continuously improving school climate as part of their strategic plans. Here are a few tips for getting started:

- Assess your current state.**
Develop a core planning team and vision to assess current practices and stakeholder perceptions through data collection. Allow time and resources for community involvement and partnership development.
- Engage your stakeholders.**
District and school leaders should seek to engage student, parent, and community stakeholders to increase support and encourage diverse viewpoints.
- Collect and review school climate data on a consistent basis.**
Recurrent and accurate assessments of school climate can inform strategic decision-making, accountability measures, and future initiatives.
- Select and implement appropriate school climate interventions.**
After reviewing current interventions and their effectiveness, district and school leaders should consider new or additional interventions based on student needs and best practices.
- Monitor and evaluate your school climate improvement efforts.**
District leaders should monitor and review school climate progress through additional stakeholder input, identifying KPIs and reviewing process and outcome data, and make changes where necessary.

GETTING STARTED: CONDUCTING A SCHOOL CLIMATE SURVEY

One of the first—and most critical—steps to achieving a positive school climate is gathering feedback from students, parents, educators, and other stakeholders to assess the current state and to identify areas for improvement. To get you started, the following items are examples of questions a district should include in a survey.

SAMPLE SURVEY

Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements pertaining to your school's climate.

	COMPLETELY DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	NEITHER AGREE AND DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	COMPLETELY AGREE	UNSURE/ NO OPINION
SCHOOL AND FACILITIES ENVIRONMENT						
My students feel connected with their school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel safe going to and from school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My school/building follows guidelines to protect students' and staff's physical health.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT						
The school provides a well-rounded curriculum.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teachers want students to succeed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Most students at my school enjoy learning.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The school offers quality extracurricular (e.g., sports, clubs) activities for students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The school (or district) provides enough resources for English language learners.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Schools develop students' ability to empathize with others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT						
Students at the school are friends with students from diverse backgrounds.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adults at the school consistently enforce school rules.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My school/building provides enough professional development opportunities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students/I have not been verbally harassed by students at schools.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
STAKEHOLDER INCLUSIVENESS						
The district is transparent with community members about district decision-making.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff members at my child's school make parents feel welcome.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Administrators at the school are in tune with teachers' and students' concerns.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The district retains high-quality teachers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Sources: U.S. Department of Education, Education Week, National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, Review of Educational Research, Journal of Educational Psychology, National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments.

Find out how you can create a more positive and productive school climate