NEA BULLY FREE
SCHOOL CLIMATE SUMMIT
Conference Proceedings

Prepared for the National Education Association

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose of the Conference

The purpose of the NEA Bully Free School Climate Summit was to bring together researchers, policy makers, practitioners, and other key education stakeholders who share the National Education Association’s (NEA) commitment to keeping students safe and supported. Specifically, the Summit focused on the critical role that a positive school climate plays in the prevention of bullying and the promotion of positive youth development. The goals of the Summit were threefold: (1) Pinpoint the various components of school climate and their relevance to youth violence and bullying prevention, (2) discuss ways to measure school climate, and (3) provide concrete ways to improve school climate through school-wide programs and interventions.

Conference Details

The NEA Bully Free School Climate Summit was held on October 8, 2013 at the National Education Association, 1201 16th Street NW, Robert H. Chanin Auditorium, Washington, DC 20036. The event was hosted by the NEA’s Human and Civil Rights Department and co-facilitated by Dr. Catherine Bradshaw of the Johns Hopkins Center for the Prevention of Youth Violence.

Conference Panelists

- Catherine Bradshaw, Ph.D., Johns Hopkins Center for the Prevention of Youth Violence, and the University of Virginia
- Christina Jordan, Sheppard Pratt Health System, Maryland Safe and Supportive Schools Project
- Stephen Leff, Ph.D., Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia
- Jonathan Cohen, Ph.D., National School Climate Center, and Columbia University
- Michael Ford, Ed.D., Maryland State Department of Education
- George Sugai, Ph.D., University of Connecticut, and the National Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports (PBIS)
- Brent Robins, Safe School Certification Program
- Virginia Dolan, Ed.D., Anne Arundel County Public Schools
Summary of the Panels

Panel 1: What is school climate and why is it important?

✓ School climate is defined as the “norms, values, and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally and physically safe” (National School Climate Council, 2007, p.4). It is a multi-dimensional construct that captures students’, educators’, and parents’ behavior and emotional connection to the school. It is a necessary but not sufficient condition for learning.

✓ There is a bi-directional relationship between school climate and positive student behavior, such that both factors affect each other.

✓ Connectedness is a critical element of school climate for both students and educators. For example, educators are more likely to intervene in bullying situations when they feel connected to their school environment. Similarly, students are less likely to engage in bullying behavior when they feel close with members of the school community.

✓ A great challenge is broadening the current focus on academic standards and academic outcomes to include conditions for learning; such conditions can be improved through enhanced school climate and reduced bullying.

✓ Collecting data on school climate regularly from multiple stakeholders can inform the change process. Multi-disciplinary, school-based teams are critical to data collection and data-based decision-making.

Panel 2: How is school climate measured?

✓ School climate reform is a continuous cycle which requires a sustained focus.

✓ It is important to measure school climate from both the student and educator perspectives; collecting data from parents is also helpful. These different perspectives can be contrasted to identify points of connection and disconnect. Sharing the data with multiple stakeholders is also essential to the change process.

✓ Principals play a critical leadership role in creating a positive school climate and the school improvement process overall, but everyone within the school community is part of the change process.

✓ Several reliable and valid instruments have been developed for measuring school climate. Most are self-report and include scales with multiple items assessing various dimensions, such as safety, engagement, and the environment. As a result, surveys require an investment in time and resources to administer.

✓ Online survey systems are an efficient method for collecting data from different audiences and can be used to facilitate a data-based, decision-making process. Graphical displays of data, benchmarks and other tools can be used to direct attention to areas of strength and need.

✓ School climate data should be “used as a flashlight rather than a hammer” to support learning, engagement, and improvement efforts. Rather than using school-wide data for accountability purposes, schools are encouraged to think more broadly about how effective climates may foster engagement and collaboration within the school. School climate data should help “ignite” the change process and initiate a conversation within the school.
Panel 3: How do we improve school climate?

- Schools are not able to implement evidence-based prevention programs (even when funding is available) until the structures are in place to guide the implementation and sustainability process. Schools need: (a) inter-departmental teams, (b) strong communication, and (c) strong leadership to be successful at improving school climate.

- Several aspects of school leadership (e.g., support, resource allocation) contribute to student learning and school climate improvement. Simultaneously, school conditions, educators, and classroom conditions impact school leadership and student learning.

- Positive Behaviors Interventions & Support (PBIS) is a research-based framework for developing and integrating the data, systems, and practices associated with improving school climate and behavior problems (e.g., bullying, truancy); such improvements can enhance student learning.

- Any approach to school climate improvement needs to be culturally valid, equitable, and relevant.

Conclusions and Implications

- There is a growing body of research linking a positive school climate with a range of positive outcomes for youth, including reduced involvement in bullying, improved academic performance, enhanced student engagement, and increased high school completion. As a result, school climate is an important target for school improvement efforts.

- There is no quick solution for improving school climate; any effort will need to be systemic and sustained.

- Principal leadership is essential to the success of any school climate improvement initiative.

- School staff and leaders need professional development and resources on the importance of school climate and effective ways of improving and sustaining a positive school climate.

- Regular assessment of school climate is critical in any school improvement effort.

- Multi-disciplinary teams (including educators, school psychologists, counselors, educational support professionals, and principals), are needed: a) to regularly review data on school climate and related indicators of student behavioral, academic, and mental health concerns, and b) to develop plans for creating culturally appropriate conditions for student learning.

- An immediate focus on federal policies related to school climate, student safety, and bullying will help increase attention to these issues in schools.
SUMMARY OF PANELS

Background

Given the high rates of bullying in the US (Swearer et al., 2010), it is not surprising that National Education Association (NEA) members consistently identify bullying as a chief concern in their work with students and a barrier to student learning. The NEA has a long history of bullying prevention efforts, including the Bullying and Sexual Harassment Prevention/Intervention Program and the “Bully Free: It Starts with Me” national campaign. The NEA also conducted a series of national surveys of the NEA membership related to bullying and school climate. These initiatives have resulted in a number of research briefs, tip sheets, and other resources for NEA members.

There has been a more recent interest in expanding the NEA’s focus to also address the related concern of school climate. In response to these emerging needs, the Bully Free School Climate Summit was held by the NEA in October 2013. Summit attendees included national leaders in bullying prevention and school climate research, practitioners, and partnering agencies and organizations, who all came together with the goal of helping the NEA focus attention on expanding the national dialogue on bullying prevention. With three million members nationwide, the NEA is in an ideal position to address the critical issues of school climate and bullying.

The current report summarizes key findings and recommendations from the School Climate Summit. The overall aim of the summit was to provide some recommendations with regard to the next phase of bullying prevention and school climate work through the NEA and partnering agencies. Specific goals of the conference included: (1) Pinpointing the various components of school climate and their relevance to youth violence and bullying prevention; (2) discussing ways to measure school climate; and (3) providing concrete ways to improve school climate through school-wide programs and interventions.

Summary of Panel 1: What Is School Climate And Why Is It Important?

The first panel summarized research regarding the connection between school climate and bullying, and their related links to other educational concerns, such as student safety and school engagement. Following a series of opening remarks by the NEA leadership, the conference co-facilitator Dr. Catherine Bradshaw from the Johns Hopkins Center for the Prevention of Youth Violence and University of Virginia’s Curry School of Education, began her presentation by reviewing a series of definitions of school climate.

One of the most widely cited definitions of a positive school climate was put forth by the National School Climate Council to include the “norms, values, and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally and physically safe” (2007, p.4). This definition highlights the role of a positive school climate as promoting “conditions for learning,” which create opportunities for students to engage in academic content and for educators to fulfill their roles as academic leaders, rather than being distracted by discipline problems. A positive school climate also refers to the shared vision, a sense of respect, and engagement across the educational system. Other definitions highlight the importance of the collective sense of safety and care for the school’s physical environment, and strong interpersonal relationships between students, families, teachers, education support professionals, and administrators.
There is a growing body of research documenting the link between a positive school climate and less student discipline problems (Thapa et al., 2013) and aggressive and violent behavior (Gregory et al., 2010). Schools with a positive school climate also tend to have fewer instances of bullying (Bradshaw et al., 2009) and harassment (Attar-Schwartz, 2009). A positive school climate has been associated with higher student academic motivation and engagement (Eccles et al., 1993) and elevated psychological well-being (Shochet et al., 2006).

The emerging research demonstrating the positive influence of school climate on student and educator behavior prompted the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) to create a School Climate Model. Their model includes three inter-related domains: student engagement (e.g., relationships, respect for diversity, and school participation), safety (e.g., social-emotional safety, physical safety, substance use), and the school environment (e.g., physical environment, academic environment, wellness, and disciplinary environment).

Dr. Bradshaw and her colleagues have further “unpacked” the School Climate Model as part of Maryland’s Safe and Supportive Schools (MDS3) Project, which is funded by the USDOE. Specifically, Bradshaw et al. (in press) found that engagement can be further broken down into student connections to educators and their peers, as well as parent engagement with the school. Likewise, perceptions of safety were further explored as it related to specific forms of at-risk behaviors, including bullying, aggressive behaviors, and alcohol and drug use.

The second presentation was by Ms. Christina Jordan and built upon the USDOE’s School Climate Model used in the MDS3 Project. In her role as a MDS3 School Climate Specialist, Ms. Jordan collects data on the various aspects of school climate and utilizes it to help “tell a story” for schools. By providing schools with an overall picture of their functioning across engagement, safety, and environmental domains, administrators are better able to identify areas of concern, and determine what changes are feasible based on the school’s current functioning. These data are then used to guide the program implementation process and subsequent staff trainings to make school-wide improvements.

Ms. Jordan emphasized the importance of collecting data from students, staff, and parents to get an accurate picture of the school’s functioning. For example, “Youth Ambassadors” were recruited to attend monthly school climate meetings as part of their service learning hours. Likewise, education support professionals (ESPs), such as bus drivers, cafeteria workers, and paraprofessionals, were encouraged to participate in both the monthly meetings and implementation of evidence-based programs. By utilizing the resources already present in the school, the project has been able to help schools build capacity for systems change and, ideally, sustain their efforts.

A third panelist, Ms. Kristen Harper from the USDOE was scheduled to present, but due to the federal government shutdown, she was unable to attend the conference. As a result, no materials from her presentation are provided; however, it was anticipated that she would discuss the USDOE’s School Climate Model, which she played a critical role in developing. Therefore, Dr. Bradshaw reviewed this model on her behalf. (See Appendix A for an image of USDOE’s model.)

Summary of Panel 2: How Is School Climate Measured?

The second panel highlighted the complexities of measuring school climate for the purposes of educational research and practice. The session started with community-based participatory research.
being conducted by Dr. Stephen Leff and his colleagues at the Violence Prevention Initiative at the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia. Dr. Leff encourages educators to think critically about how they are measuring school climate. Are the measures capturing the overall school climate (e.g., “How safe do you feel at this school?”) or is the school climate assessment setting-specific (e.g., classroom, hallways, playground)? Both of these aspects of climate provide rich data that can inform school-based interventions.

For instance, the Playground and Lunchroom Climate Questionnaire (Leff et al., 2003) can provide information on structured playground activities as well as staff’s ability to collaborate and monitor student behavior in a less structured environment. In contrast, measures of overall school climate can tap into the mission and vision of the school, as well as the relationships between students, school staff, parents, and administrators. Dr. Leff also touched on some of the bullying-related work he has been leading on relational aggression among urban youth. He finds issues related to school climate to be central to nearly all school-based, as well as community-based, youth violence prevention efforts. His presentation also highlighted the importance of university and community partnerships in advancing both research and prevention programming.

Dr. Jonathan Cohen from the National School Climate Center and Columbia University similarly acknowledged the difficulties of measuring school climate, given its multi-dimensional and bi-directional nature. Much of this stems from a lack of consistency within the education field about how best to define “school climate” through the eyes of a student, teacher, education support professional, administrator, and/or parent. Furthermore, educators should also determine how to effectively utilize school climate data to inform educational practices. Dr. Cohen urged the audience to “use data as a flashlight rather than a hammer” to support learning, engagement, and improvement efforts. Rather than using school-wide data for accountability purposes targeting individuals (e.g., student academic scores, teacher evaluations), schools are encouraged to think more broadly about how effective climates may foster engagement and collaboration within the school.

Ideally, school climate data can help “ignite” the change process and start—or re-start—a conversation within the school. In line with this thinking, school climate assessment should be considered an on-going and continuous process, not a one-time event. Dr. Cohen further emphasized the availability of a number of publicly available school climate measures, which can be used by schools to identify needs and monitor program impacts. He also highlighted the importance of social and emotional learning programs that promote competencies in youth and, in turn, improve the school environment.

A similar “call to action” regarding the importance of employing school climate assessments was made by Dr. Michael Ford from the Maryland State Department of Education. He argued that when schools think about how to measure and address bullying, educators should broaden their prevention lens to include school climate. By thinking more globally, schools can implement programs which alter the school climate, help reduce a myriad of problem behaviors, and increase the likelihood of pro-social actions within the school community. Dr. Ford suggested that one of the key factors fostering successful school climate reform is engagement across stakeholders. For instance, schools should engage students as “co-learners and co-leaders” in school-wide programmatic efforts. This can be done through student surveys, educator-led student focus groups, class discussions, and reinforcement of positive student behaviors.
Parental engagement is another essential component of school climate measurement and reform. Dr. Ford noted the high volume of calls he receives at the Maryland State Department of Education from parents with concerns about bullying and the climate at their children’s school. He encourages caregivers to participate in school climate surveys, school-wide meetings and events, and help shape short-term and long-term goals for the school. Lastly, educator engagement, not only in the curriculum but also in their students’ lives, is critical for positive change to occur. All members of the panel acknowledged that school climate assessment and reform is a collaborative undertaking, which goes beyond the individual school and requires support from local, district, state, and national stakeholders.

Summary of Panel 3: How Do We Improve School Climate?

The last panel provided practical ways educators can improve the overall climate of the school and promote school-wide change. Dr. George Sugai of the University of Connecticut and the National Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) focused on how PBIS can lay the groundwork for positive school reform and bullying prevention. Dr. Sugai noted that school climate is a mixture of relationships within the school community, behavioral norms within the classroom, administrative leadership, as well as the physical conditions of the school. PBIS is a school-wide, multi-tiered framework addressing each of these domains; thereby, offering educators and researchers a guide for examining the overall climate of the school. This is accomplished through the use of a common language (e.g., school-wide behavioral expectations) and a focus on positive behaviors exhibited by students and staff. PBIS provides a framework for school staff to recognize good behavior while teaching and modeling important social skills, both of which are critical to positive school climate. It also utilizes data-based, decision-making and continual progress monitoring to help make decisions about evidence-based interventions at the individual, classroom, and school levels. Dr. Sugai also summarized research demonstrating the impact of PBIS on a range of student behavioral and school climate outcomes. He also emphasized that there are no quick or easy solutions and that the change process requires an investment of time, leadership, and resources. He also cautioned that PBIS is not the panacea for all problems that affect youth, but there is a growing evidence-base for the PBIS framework, both in schools and in community settings, which is often referred to more broadly as multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS).

The next two panel presentations summarized specific school climate improvement strategies used in two states, Iowa and Maryland. First, Mr. Brent Robins, Director of the Safe School Certification Program, spoke about a school climate initiative being implemented in Iowa. He described how, in 2007, Iowa passed the “Safe Schools Law,” which is a comprehensive policy protecting school-aged youth from student bullying and harassment in school. As a means of improving the implementation of the law, several non-profit organizations and state agencies combined to create the Safe School Certification Program.

In order for schools to be certified as “safe,” they must uphold both the “letter of the law” (e.g., anti-bullying policies, data collection and reporting, non-discrimination policy) and the “spirit of the law” (e.g., use of evidence-based bullying interventions, youth violence prevention, development, family/community engagement). Iowa is one of the first among only a handful of states implementing a state-wide comprehensive safe schools policy focused
on school violence and its subsequent impact on students’ academic achievement and the climate of the school.

Maryland offers another example of a state committed to helping schools create positive school climates through state-wide initiatives. Dr. Virginia Dolan, Coordinator of Positive Behavioral Support and Interventions (PBIS) in Anne Arundel County Public Schools, described how the county is moving away from a “reactive, punitive, exclusionary approach” to student discipline and focusing on “proactive, positive, and supportive” strategies. To do this, Anne Arundel County selects evidence-based programs that fit within a multi-tiered framework (e.g., PBIS, Check & Connect, Expanded School Mental Health), so they meet the needs of all students and not just a select few. However, in order to achieve program success and sustainability, Dr. Dolan stated that commitment and strong partnerships are essential.

Before implementing evidence-based practices, schools need to have strong leadership from both administration and educators, school-wide buy-in for such programs, inter-departmental teams (e.g., Student Support Teams), and communication across stakeholders. Dr. Dolan encourages schools to develop a strategic plan outlining future goals and data collection, as this will help sustain district efforts even when faced with challenges such as turnover, burnout, and changes in funding. She also summarized some of the work the district is doing to address the achievement gap, particularly between White and African American students. Cultural proficiency training and data-based decision-making are central elements of the Anne Arundel County’s district-wide scale-up of PBIS to address school climate and improve student achievement in a culturally relevant way.

Group Discussion: Recommendations and Call to Action

After the three panel presentations, a group discussion occurred to address the following three questions: 1) Where do we go from here? 2) what are some next steps for the field and NEA? and 3) what partnerships are needed to advance this work? The additional comments and suggestions made by conference participants are summarized below.

✓ Participants confirmed research findings such as the following. When educators feel supported by their administration, they report higher levels of commitment and more collegiality (Singh & Billingsley, 1998). Similarly, when educators openly communicate with one another, feel supported by their peers and by administration, and establish strong student-educator relationships: these, in turn, translate into better student academic and behavioral outcomes (Brown & Medway, 2007).

✓ School climate improvement efforts also have the potential of increasing job satisfaction and educator retention; thus, they are an important target for the NEA, USDOE, and related organizations.

✓ To meet future goals, schools need to answer questions like, “What is our vision? What do we want our school to look like? Feel like?” In addition, schools must assess their current reality (funding, leadership, cultural composition of student body) and examine any gaps in their expectations. Schools should develop a clear logic model showing how students from all cultural and ability groups will benefit from these decisions and the resulting interventions.
As noted by Dr. Sugai: “We have this passion to help schools in trouble, but we throw more mandates on them as opposed to help.” Schools are often overwhelmed by district mandates that do not focus on school climate. He urged leaders, policymakers, and superintendents to help tackle the “to-do” list by identifying no more than 3 priorities to focus on and complete. Data-driven, multi-tiered technical assistance is needed to enhance the program implementation process.

There was a continued interest in the focus on bullying. The group noted that student bullying is a collective act that involves multiple members of the school community. Thus, the school climate reform process aligns well with bullying prevention efforts.

There was a strong interest in collaboration among multiple stakeholders to address bullying and the broader issue of school climate. Several participants encouraged discussion among educators, administrators, district boards, and the community to help bridge the communication gap. Oftentimes, community connections can be found through education support professionals, who are more likely to live in the community served by the school than teachers. However, it is important that all educators are informed and are able to explain what a positive school climate is and why it is important in order to increase school-wide buy-in.

Dr. Cohen cited several policy trends specific to school climate. These include a growing interest in alternatives to No Child Left Behind (NCLB) accountability systems and anti-bullying state laws. More states and districts are adopting or adapting the National School Climate Standards to address these policy issues.

Dr. Sugai discussed the overlap between school climate reform efforts and PBIS, as both are designed to support student learning, and are focused on changing adult behavior and advancing policies and procedures to enhance student outcomes. However, school climate reform models have the broader goal of promoting social, emotional, and academic learning and supporting students, parents, and the community in creating flourishing schools.

Dr. Leff encouraged attendees to identify key educator leaders at the school as a means for sustaining school-wide efforts. Utilizing a “train the trainers” model, schools can create long-lasting programmatic effects.

There was also discussion of the relevance of student mental health concerns in relation to bullying and perceptions of school climate. Specifically, there is increased awareness of trauma-informed approaches to preventing behavioral problems and promoting positive student outcomes. While these approaches may extend beyond typical school climate programming, they are particularly relevant in urban areas with at-risk youth, and in communities affected by trauma. A number of school psychologists were present at the summit and emphasized the importance of multi-disciplinary teams to address school climate, bullying, and related mental health concerns.
CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Overarching Themes

There was an overall appreciation for the broader focus of the summit, the NEA’s focus on school climate, and fitting other concerns, such as bullying, within that frame. There was also great interest in collaboration across partners to address these inter-related concerns. Both of these issues have significant policy implications and relevance. Cultural factors play an important role in any school climate improvement effort. The relationships between various stakeholders must be a central focus; this includes themes around connectedness. There was some question regarding the definition of a positive school climate and the extent to which schools need to buy in to research-based definitions or develop a local meaning. There was also interest in efficiency and encouraging schools “not to reinvent the wheel,” but rather to leverage existing resources, such as valid measures of school climate and data-driven frameworks for decision-making, such as PBIS.

Youth Focused Work

There was a clear interest in encouraging a youth voice and youth involvement in the school climate improvement process, particularly among middle and high school students. This requires relationship building, including promotion of connectedness and positive relationships between staff and students. Trauma-informed approaches and emerging mental health needs should also be considered. Schools need to tailor supports to meet the needs of the youth, the local context, and/or the culture of the community. Cultural factors should be considered during all phases of the process, including assessment, data sharing, and culturally-relevant interventions.

Staff Development

There was agreement that multiple professional development materials on school climate are needed. For example, pre-service and in-service training models for educators are needed to increase their awareness of the link between school climate, bullying, and student outcomes. It is clear, however, that there are no quick and easy solutions. More specifically, these complex issues cannot simply be addressed through a day-long professional development event. Rather, ongoing coaching and team-based work are critical to extend and reinforce any professional development. Professional development is also needed to increase awareness of the relevance of cultural factors and to promote cultural proficiency. There may also be professional needs that are unique to education support professionals and/or teachers and/or administrators. Professional development is also needed about the process for forming and participating in multi-disciplinary teams, and the use of data. This is also a good venue for focused conversations about what the school climate looks like. Bullying and school climate are located at the intersection of emotional, cognitive, academic concerns; professional development is needed to address these issues from multiple perspectives.

Measures and Research

The final key theme focused on the fact that, while the available research linking a positive school climate and student outcomes (e.g., reduced bullying, improved academic performance, high school completion) is compelling, most is correlational rather than causal. Stronger research designs are needed to determine a causal link between these factors. It is also clear that there are several existing measures
of school climate, although there are some concerns about burden, resources, cost, etc., to administer such surveys. One way of framing the conversation around assessment of school climate is conceptualizing the measurement as a “conditions for learning assessment.” Schools are most convinced of school climate data when it comes from their school. Therefore, we need to find efficient methods and increase buy-in so administrators will invest in quality school climate assessment systems. On-line data collection systems hold great promise for bridging this gap. As noted above, schools will need additional professional development on data use in order to optimize their investment in any data collection effort.

**Next Steps**

It is important to help advance effective policies related to student safety, school climate, and bullying. The NEA and its partnering organizations should continue to play a key role in advocating for these types of policies. It was also suggested that the NEA continue to elaborate on their existing “Bully Free: It Starts With Me” national campaign by addressing the related aspect of school climate. This slight augmentation would not distract from the current campaign: rather, it would enhance it.

The NEA also has a history of developing and providing access to high quality tools and resources for its members, and educators more broadly. For example, tools and assessments could be developed or made available regarding schools’ readiness for change and program implementation, models for team development, and school climate measures. The NEA may consider developing and making available an official research-based NEA school climate measure, which is based in large part on the bullying and school climate survey which has been approved for use and administered by the NEA’s Research department.

Professional development modules on school climate could be added to the existing NEA Bullying and Sexual Harassment Prevention/Intervention Program training curriculum and used in future professional development sessions by the NEA training cadre. Other professional development topics could include the process for defining mission and vision related to school climate; consideration of context of schools; meeting the needs of LGBTQ youth within the broader school climate context; strategies for promoting school connectedness; activities for engaging youth and promoting a youth voice; and the relevance of mental health concerns, tailored interventions, and the trauma-informed approach. Professional development and training materials could be developed for various audiences, including teachers, ESPs, students, and administrators.

**Conclusions**

- There is a growing body of research linking a positive school climate with a range of positive outcomes for youth, including reduced involvement in bullying, improved academic performance, enhanced student engagement, and increased high school completion. As a result, school climate is an important target for school improvement efforts.
- There is no one quick solution for improving school climate, as any effort will need to be systemic and sustained.
- Principal leadership is essential to the success of any school climate improvement initiative.
- School staff and leaders need professional development and resources on the importance of school climate and effective ways of improving and sustaining a positive school climate.
- Regular assessment of school climate is critical in any school improvement effort.
Multi-disciplinary teams (including educators, school psychologists, counselors, educational support professionals, and principals), are needed: a) to regularly review data on school climate and related indicators of student behavioral, academic, and mental health concerns, and b) to develop plans for improving conditions for student learning.

An immediate focus on federal policies related to school climate, student safety, and bullying will help increase attention to these issues in schools.

**Recommendations**

1. Provide additional training materials to teachers, ESPs, and principals on strategies to improve school climate. One option is to expand upon the existing Bully Free campaign to also address issues related to school climate. This could occur through additional stand-alone modules and/or modules to be included within the existing NEA Bullying and Sexual Harassment Prevention and Intervention training program.

2. Identify school climate survey instruments that are valid and reliable and recommended for use in schools. The NEA could consider developing an NEA approved school climate measure for staff and students, which could be made available for free to schools to improve school climate efforts.

3. Identify evidence-based programs and approaches to school climate improvement, and provide information on how to access these program materials. A number of evidence-based practices aimed at enhancing school climate and reducing bullying were raised at the Summit (e.g., PBIS, Check and Connect, Student Support Teams). Schools can implement these programs within a framework similar to those adopted in other states, such as Maryland’s MDS3 Project and Iowa’s Safe School Certification Program.

4. Encourage districts to provide more training on school climate and bullying prevention, especially to principals. Schools are often searching for professional development workshops that address a variety of educator needs. The NEA is well suited to collaborate with school districts and/or local education associations to develop a professional development series focused on bullying and positive school climate.

5. Connect with other partner organizations to promote the broader message regarding the role of a positive school climate in improving outcomes for students and the school environment. Given the multi-dimensional nature of school climate, many members of the school community may have difficulty understanding the importance of climate as it relates to the functioning of the school and student outcomes. The NEA, as well as national leaders in the field, should continue to promote the need to measure, discuss, and implement programs addressing positive school climate change.

6. Support policies that improve school climate, increase school safety, and reduce involvement in bullying. As seen in the school safety policies and laws in Iowa and Maryland, comprehensive statewide policies regarding youth violence prevention can positively influence school climate and student academic and behavioral outcomes.

7. Consider student mental health issues (particularly those related to trauma...
exposure), as well as school context, and student and community culture, when developing preventive interventions to address bullying and the link with school climate. The NEA and educational researchers are encouraged to explore the correlation between school climate and student mental health outcomes. By identifying salient contextual factors, such as class size, a school’s physical conditions, and community cultures, educators are better able to develop and implement effective school climate programs.

Focus prevention efforts on school climate and connectedness. Research indicates an important link between connectedness and bullying. Therefore, increasing feelings of school connectedness among and between students, staff, and parents may reduce rates of bullying in schools and increase the likelihood that individuals will intervene when bullying does occur. In its training initiatives, the NEA should continue to address school climate and connectedness, and suggest concrete strategies to improve connectedness among and between all school stakeholders.
SELECTED REFERENCES


LIST OF APPENDICES

• Appendix A: School Climate Brief
• Appendix B: Conference Agenda
• Appendix C: Summit Participants
• Appendix D: Slides from Summit
What is School Climate?

The National School Climate Council (2007) defines school climate as “norms, values, and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally and physically safe” (p.4). School climate is a product of the interpersonal relationships among students, families, teachers, support staff, and administrators. Positive school climate is fostered through a shared vision of respect and engagement across the educational system. Emphasis is also placed on the collective sense of safety and care for the school’s physical environment. A related concept is school culture, which refers to the “unwritten rules and expectations” among the school staff (Gruenert, 2008).

Although there is no universally agreed upon set of core domains or features, the National School Climate Center identifies five elements of school climate: (1) safety (e.g., rules and norms, physical security, social-emotional security); (2) teaching and learning (e.g., support for learning, social and civic learning); (3) interpersonal relationships (e.g., respect for diversity, social support from adults, social support from peers); (4) institutional environment (e.g., school connectedness, engagement, physical surroundings); and (5) staff relationships (e.g., leadership, professional relationships). Similarly, the U.S. Department of Education’s Safe and Supportive Schools model of school climate (see Figure) includes three inter-related domains or features of student engagement (e.g., relationships, respect for diversity, and school participation), safety (e.g., social-emotional safety, physical safety, substance use), and the school environment (e.g., physical environment, academic environment, wellness, and disciplinary environment) (also see Bradshaw et al., in press).

Why is School Climate Important?

A positive school climate is recognized as an important target for school reform and improving behavioral, academic, and mental health outcomes for students (Thapa et al., 2012). Specifically, schools with positive climates tend to have less student discipline problems (Thapa et al., 2013) and aggressive and violent behavior (Gregory et al., 2010), and fewer high school suspensions (Lee et al., 2011). Research has also shown associations between school climate and lower levels of alcohol and drug use (LaRusso et al., 2008), bullying (Meyer-Adams & Conner, 2008; Bradshaw et al., 2009), and harassment (Attar-Schwartz, 2009). In addition to reducing students’ exposure to risk factors, school climate can promote positive youth development. For example, a favorable school climate has been linked with higher student academic motivation and engagement (Eccles et al., 1993), as well as elevated psychological well-being (Ruets et al., 2007; Shocet et al., 2006). Not surprisingly, schools promoting engaging learning environments tend to have fewer student absences (Gottfredson et al., 2005) and improvements in academic achievement across grade levels (Brand et al., 2003; Stewart, 2008).

A positive school climate also has benefits for teachers and education support professionals (Bradshaw, Waasdorp et al., 2010). Research shows that when educators feel supported by their administration, they report higher levels of commitment and more collegiality (Singh & Billingsley,
1998). Likewise, schools where educators openly communicate with one another, feel supported by their peers and administration, and establish strong student-educator relationships tend to have better student academic and behavioral outcomes (Brown & Medway, 2007). School climate efforts also have the potential of increasing job satisfaction and teacher retention, which is a major concern given the high rate of turnover in the field of education (Boe et al., 2008; Kaiser, 2011).

**How is School Climate Measured?**

Given the importance of positive school climate for students and educators, it is essential for schools to monitor school climate on a regular basis. Several tools have been developed to assess student, parent, and educator perspectives on school climate. The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments has created an online compendium of research-based school climate measures, including surveys to be completed by students, parents, and educators. One such measure included in the collection is the *California Healthy Kids Survey*, which assesses school connectedness, opportunities for meaningful participation, and perceptions of safety across elementary, middle, and high school. The *Comprehensive School Climate Inventory* also measures multiple elements, including an orderly school environment, parent/community involvement, collaboration within the school, and instructional practices. Other assessments, such as the *Communities That Care Youth Survey*, gather data on school, community, family, and peer risk and protective factors related to perceptions of school climate. There have been relatively few observational tools developed to measure school climate, although measures of school engagement and student-educator interactions may tap into aspects of school climate (Pianta et al., 2008).

**When assessing school climate, educators should consider the following key factors:**

- **Chose a reliable and valid assessment.** School climate has multiple features (e.g., safety, interpersonal relationships, physical environment); thus, survey instruments should reflect the multi-dimensional nature of the school's culture. Schools should aim for a survey that addresses the emotional, physical, and behavioral aspects of school climate.

- **Assess annually.** School climate should be assessed on an annual basis; thus, surveys should be easy to administer.

- **Survey across perspectives.** In order to get a comprehensive view of the school, multiple perspectives need to be assessed. Students, families, teachers, administrators, and education support professionals should be involved in the school climate assessment.

- **Communicate findings.** An often overlooked, but critical step in the assessment process is sharing the results with the school community. School-wide presentations, community discussions, PTA meeting presentations, and classroom discussions will help gain buy-in for school climate initiatives and future planning.

- **Take action.** A core reason for collecting data on school climate is to use it to guide decision-making related to the selection of evidence-based approaches for improving school climate and, more broadly, for informing school improvement efforts which match the school’s unique needs.

- **Repeat.** Re-assess the school climate annually, celebrate improvements, and plan for the next phase of school climate enhancements.

**How Can Schools Improve Climate?**

Once a school has measured the school climate and identified areas for improvement (e.g., increased supervision in hallways, professional developments on cultural diversity), educators need to consider ways to change the school norms, values, and expectations. Integrated and multi-tiered models are often the most effective approaches (Greenberg et al., 2001; O’Connell et al., 2009). Although there is no one-size-fits-all program, there are common features of evidence-based practices related to school climate enhancement.

- **Multi-tiered framework.** Although the use of a single, targeted program may change specific problem behaviors in the school (e.g., bullying), there is growing interest in the use of multi-component approaches which provide a continuum of programs and support services in order to both target behavior problems and address the broader social ecology of the school.

- **Communication across partners.** Research indicates that prevention programs are not only more effective, but are more likely to be sustained over time if the entire school community (students, staff, administrators) contributes to developing the program (Greenberg et al., 2003; Rigby, 2007).
Assess school climate from multiple perspectives. Parents, students, and staff often differ in their perceptions of the school climate (Bradshaw et al., 2009; Waasdorp et al., 2011). While some may debate which perspective is more accurate, it is important to understand multiple viewpoints on school climate, including areas of convergence and divergence.

Data-based decision making. In order to effectively address the emotional and behavioral needs of a school, several different types of data need to be utilized. These data include, but are not limited to: student, parent and staff surveys, discipline data (e.g., office discipline referrals, suspensions), school-wide observational data, as well as school demographics (e.g., enrollment, student mobility). This information can inform decisions about implementation of universal, selective, and targeted prevention programs.

Evidence-based Approaches to School Climate Improvement

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS; Sugai & Horner, 2006) is a three-tiered prevention strategy that focuses on the prevention of student behavior problems and promotes a positive, collaborative school environment. School staff work together to create a school-wide program that clearly articulates positive behavioral expectations, recognizes when students and educators meet those expectations, and encourages data-based decision-making by staff and administrators. Schools implementing PBIS have documented significant decreases in discipline problems (e.g., bullying, aggressive behaviors, suspensions, office discipline referrals), enhanced school climate, reduced need for counseling and special education services, and improved academic outcomes and prosocial behavior (Bradshaw et al., 2010; 2012; Horner et al., 2009).

Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (Olweus et al., 2007) is a school-wide evidence-based program designed to reduce and prevent bullying and improve school climate. The tiered program is implemented across all school contexts and includes school-wide components, classroom activities (e.g., class rules against bullying, class meetings), and targeted interventions for individuals identified as bullies or victims. It also includes activities aimed at increasing community involvement by parents, mental health workers, and others. Previous studies of the Olweus program have demonstrated significant reductions in students’ reports of bullying and general antisocial behaviors (e.g., fighting, vandalism, theft, and truancy), as well as improvements in schools’ social climate (Limber et al., 2004; Olweus, 2005).

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL; CASEL, 2013) is a framework for developing social and emotional competencies in children based on the understanding that learning is maximized in the context of supportive relationships and engaging educational settings. SEL programs are implemented school-wide (i.e., preschool through high school) and can improve the sense of the school as a caring, supportive environment. For example, the Caring School Community Program and Responsive Classroom are both SEL programs that have been shown to improve student and staff perceptions of the school climate and increase positive behavior and academic performance (CASEL, 2013).

Resources
National School Climate Center: schoolclimate.org
National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments: safesupportiveschools.ed.gov/
National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments’ School Climate Survey Compendium: safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/topic-research/school-climate-measurement

References


BULLY FREE SUMMIT

DATE: October 8, 2013, 9:00 am – 4:00 pm

THEME: School Climate: Its Critical Role in Bullying Prevention

LOCATION: National Education Association
1201 16th Street NW, Robert H. Chanin Auditorium, side A
Washington, DC 20036

PURPOSE: To bring together researchers, policy makers, practitioners, and other key education stakeholders, who share NEA's commitment to keeping students safe, to discuss and frame the critical role that school climate plays in the prevention of bullying.

GOALS: To hear from selected panelists who will provide concise background information on and engage participants in a discussion on three topics:
What is School Climate? How do you measure School Climate? How do you improve School Climate?
To obtain recommendations for how participants and our allies can advance the national dialogue on and commitment to school climate.

SCHEDULE:

8:00-9:00 am  Breakfast for Summit Panelists and Invitees
9:00-10:00 am  Welcome and Introductions
   Dennis Van Roekel, President, NEA
   Catherine Bradshaw, PhD, Johns Hopkins University, Facilitator
10:00-11:00 am  Panel 1: What is School Climate and Why is it Important?
   Kristen Harper, Special Assistant for School Climate and Special Populations US Department of Education, Washington, DC
   Catherine Bradshaw, PhD, Deputy Director, John Hopkins Center for the Prevention of Youth Violence
   Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD
   University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA
   Christina Jordan, School Climate Specialist
   Maryland Safe and Supportive Schools, Baltimore, MD
   A facilitated discussion will follow.
11:00-11:15 am  Break
11:15-12:15 pm  Panel 2: How do you Measure School Climate?

Stephen Leff, Ph. D, Associate Professor of Clinical Psychology in Pediatrics, Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA

Jonathan Cohen, Ph.D. President
National School Climate Center, New York, NY

Michael L. Ford, Ed.D, Behavior Specialist
Maryland State Department of Education, Baltimore, MD

A facilitated discussion will follow.

12:15-1:30 pm  Lunch provided

1:30-2:30 pm  Panel 3: How do you Improve School Climate?

George Sugai, Ph.D., Professor & Carole J. Neag Endowed Chair
University of Connecticut School of Education, Storrs, CT

Brent Robins, Director, Safe School Certification Program
Des Moines, IA

Virginia L. Dolan, Ed.D., Coordinator of Behavioral Support and Interventions
Anne Arundel County Public Schools, Annapolis, MD

A facilitated discussion will follow.

2:30-2:45 am  Break

2:45-3:45 pm  Facilitated Group Discussion: RecommendationsACall To Action.
Where do we go from here? Next steps for the Field and NEA.

3:30-4:00 pm  Closing Remarks

Catherine Bradshaw, Joann Sebastian Morris
NEA BULLY FREE SUMMIT ON SCHOOL CLIMATE
OCTOBER 8, 2013
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Member Services and Outreach
Council of Chief State School Officers

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National Association of School Psychologists

Lara S. Kaufman, JD.
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National Women’s Law Center

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American Association of University Women
Jeff Sherrill  
Associate Director for the National Association of Student Councils  
National Association of Secondary School Principals

Erin Thwaites  
Programs and Partnerships Specialist  
National Parent Teacher Association

Kisha L. Webster, Director  
Education and Community Engagement  
Welcoming Schools – Human Rights Campaign Foundation

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School Climate:
Its Critical Role in Bullying Prevention
October 8, 2013
Purpose
Bring together researchers, policy makers, practitioners, and other key education stakeholders, who share NEA’s commitment to keeping students safe.
Discuss and frame the critical role that school climate plays in the prevention of bullying.

Goals
Engage participants in a discussion of:
What is school climate and why is it important?
How do you measure school climate?
How do you improve school climate?
Make recommendations for how to advance the national dialogue on and commitment to school climate.
Panel 1: What Is School Climate and Why Is It Important?

Kristen Harper  
US Department of Education

Catherine Bradshaw, Ph.D.  
John Hopkins Center for the Prevention of Youth Violence & University of Virginia

Christina Jordan, M.Ed.  
Maryland Safe and Supportive Schools

Panel 2: How Do You Measure School Climate?

Stephen Leff, Ph.D.  
Children's Hospital of Philadelphia

Jonathan Cohen, Ph.D.  
National School Climate Center

Michael Ford, Ed.D.  
Maryland State Department of Education
Panel 3: How Do You Improve School Climate?

• George Sugai, Ph.D.
  – University of Connecticut & National TA Center on PBIS
• Brent Robins
  – Safe School Certification Program
• Virginia Dolan, Ed.D.
  – Anne Arundel County Public Schools, MD
What is school climate and why is it important?

Catherine Bradshaw, Ph.D., & Lindsey O’Brennan, Ph.D.

Johns Hopkins Center for the Prevention of Youth Violence (CDC)
Johns Hopkins Center for Prevention & Early Intervention (NIMH)

October 2013 NEA
ebradsha@jhsp.h.edu

What is school climate?

- norms, values, and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally and physically safe (National School Climate Council, 2007, p.4)
- product of the interpersonal relationships between students, families, teachers, support staff, and administrators (e.g., connectedness)
- fostered through a shared vision of respect and engagement across the educational system
- emphasis on the collective sense of safety and care for the school’s physical environment
- necessary but not sufficient condition for learning
School Climate and Student Outcomes

Disruptive and aggressive behaviors are the most common reasons for office referrals and suspensions (Irvin et al., 2006; Pas, Bradshaw, & Mitchell, 2011; Walker et al., 1996).

Bullying and other behavior problems create conditions that negatively impact the school and learning (Bradshaw et al., 2009; Jimerson et al., 2000; Swearer et al., 2010).

Discipline problems contribute to teacher and staff burnout and turnover (Pas, Bradshaw, & Hershfeldt, 2011).

Particular concern in middle & high schools (Bradshaw et al., 2007)
- Relatively few evidence-based programs (Greenberg et al., 2001)

USDOE’s School Climate Model

School Climate

Engagement
- Relationships
- Respect for Diversity
- School Participation

Safety
- Emotional Safety
- Physical Safety
- Substance Use

Environment
- Physical Environment
- Academic Environment
- Wellness
- Disciplinary Environment

School Climate Model, Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools.
Links between Climate and Student Behavior

less student discipline problems (Cohen & Geier, 2010) and aggressive and violent behavior (Gregory et al., 2010), and fewer high school suspensions (Lee et al., 2011) and absences (Gottfredson et al., 2005) lower levels of alcohol and drug use (LaRusso et al., 2008), bullying (Meyer-Adams & Conner, 2008; Bradshaw et al., 2009), and harassment (Attar-Schwartz, 2009) higher student academic motivation and engagement (Eccles et al., 1993), elevated psychological well-being (Ruus et al., 2007; Shochet et al., 2006) and academic achievement (Brand et al., 2003; Stewart, 2008)
What do we need to know and do to advance the field?

Is school climate the cause or consequence of academic success and thriving behavior?

How do we tease apart the behavioral and perceptual indicators?

Collect better data on causal impact of interventions on school climate

Importance for Educators

When educators feel supported by their administration, they report higher levels of commitment and more collegiality (Singh & Billingsley, 1998)

Where educators openly communicate with one another, feel supported by their peers and administration, and establish strong student-educator relationships tend to have better student academic and behavioral outcomes (Brown & Medway, 2007)

School climate efforts also have the potential of increasing job satisfaction and teacher retention

Links between Climate and Student Behavior

Less student discipline problems (Cohen & Geier, 2010) and aggressive and violent behavior (Gregory et al., 2010), and fewer high school suspensions (Lee et al., 2011) and absences (Gottfredson et al., 2005)

Lower levels of alcohol and drug use (LaRusso et al., 2008), bullying (Meyer-Adams & Conner, 2008; Bradshaw et al., 2009), and harassment (Attar-Schwartz, 2009)

Higher student academic motivation and engagement (Eccles et al., 1993), elevated psychological well-being (Ruus et al., 2007; Shochet et al., 2006) and academic achievement (Brand et al., 2003; Stewart, 2008)
Using School Climate Data for School Improvement

Fitting the missing piece

Christina Jordan, M.Ed
School Climate Specialist
Sheppard Pratt Health System, MD

School Climate Data: An Eye-Opener

• Student perception data on a large scale:
  – What adults don’t see; how students are feeling; community issues; staff/student relations; peer relations; inclusiveness; services available

• Staff and parent perceptions
  – Similarities/differences between groups and within groups

• Validate or inform
### Telling the Story

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<th>Climate Survey Data</th>
<th>Site Visit Data</th>
<th>SET (School-wide Evaluation Tool) Data</th>
<th>ISSET (Individual Student Systems Eval. Tool) Data</th>
<th>School Data (Attendance rates, graduation rates, discipline referrals)</th>
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### Action Planning

- **Capacity**
  - Are majority of staff in agreement with addressing concerns?
  - Are there additional stakeholders who need to be involved?
  - What is the priority in the school, district, state?

- **Data**
  - What data points do you want to be impacted?
  - Do data indicate school-wide, targeted, or individualized interventions?
  - How will intervention be monitored for effectiveness?

- **Intervention**
  - What is the desired outcome? Are there evidence-based programs to address needs of school?
  - Are there guidelines for selecting target populations?
  - Is there skills-based training for staff for professional development?
  - Is there opportunity for modifications of the intervention?

- **Implementation**
  - What changes may be required for staff to collaborate, examine data, and problem-solve?
  - What obstacles may arise?
  - How will we support staff in implementation?
  - What other initiatives could be integrated to support the focus of the new intervention?
Program Evaluation and Celebrations

Supporting Staff Behavior

Supporting Student Behavior

Supporting Decision Making

OUTCOMES

SYSTEMS

DATA

PRACTICES

Considerations & Measurement of School Climate

Stephen S. Leff, Ph.D.

Presentation to the National Education Association

Requests for reprints: Stephen S. Leff; Co-Director of the Violence Prevention Initiative at The Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, Dept. of Psychology, Rm. 1480 at 3535 Market, 3405 Civic Center Blvd.; Philadelphia, PA 19104; e-mail: leff@email.chop.edu

School Climate: Questions for Consideration

1. Setting Level vs. Overall School Climate?
   - Playground & Lunchroom, Hallways, Classrooms

2. Who Should Provide Measurements?
   - Students, Teachers, Parents, Administrators, Behavioral Coders

3. Can we Trust the Data?
   - Consider school safety indicators when not reported in a systematic fashion (e.g., serious incident reports, nursing reports of injuries).

4. Are the Measures Sensitive to Treatment Effects?
Playground-Lunchroom Climate

Past research has focused on:
Screening, identifying, & monitoring progress of individual at-risk youth
Playground equipment & safety
Identifying target behaviors through bullying prevention (adult supervision; organized activities)

Playground and Lunchroom Climate Questionnaire (Leff et al., 2003)
Structure for Activities & Monitoring (10 items)
   Organized games on the playground; Enough staff to monitor
Staff Collaboration (9 items)
   Recess staff work well together/as a team; Enforce rules

Classroom Climate

Much of past research focused on:
Individual student academic functioning or behavior

Teacher-Student Relationship Scale (Pianta et al., 2005)
Aggregating individual student’s aggression scores

Observation Methods
Classroom Climate Assessment Tool (C-CAT; Leff et al., 2011)
   Based on MOOSES (Tapp et al., 1995) & ASKER system (Tapp & Fiel, 1991)
   Domain 1: Disruptive behavior & compliance
   Domain 2: Classroom responsiveness
   Teacher Responsiveness Ratio: Praise/Reprimands

Classroom Assessment Scoring (CLASS; Pianta et al., 2008)
   Domain 1: Emotional Support
   Domain 2: Classroom Organization
   Domain 3: Instructional Support
Other Aspects of Climate

Measurement of Problems in Hallways & Other High Risk School Contexts
   Student Interaction In Specific Settings (SISS; Cushing & Horner, 2003)
   School-wide observation system providing data on negative behaviors across unstructured school settings
   Data collection at individual child level that can provide estimates of overall school climate

Additional Important Aspects
   Principal characteristics/vision/mission
   Relationships between parents, school, administrators, teachers, and students

Future Considerations in School Climate

   Utilization of Newer Technology & Social Media
   Renewed Focus on Bystanders & Empowerment
   Recognition & Measurement of the Role of School Administrators
   Engagement of Teacher Champions
   Promotion of Indices that are Simpler, More Feasible, and Scalable
SCHOOL CLIMATE MEASUREMENT:
USING DATA AS A ‘FLASHLIGHT’ RATHER THAN A “HAMMER” TO SUPPORT LEARNING, ENGAGEMENT AND IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS

Jonathan Cohen, Ph.D.
National School Climate Center:
Educating minds and hearts Because the three R’s are not enough (www.schoolclimate.org);
Teachers College, Columbia University
jonathancohen@schoolclimate.org

National Educational Association Bully Free Summit
1201 16th Street NW, Chanin Auditorium, Washington, DC - October 8, 2013

SCHOOL CLIMATE MEASUREMENT

❖ Readiness Assessments

❖ Comprehensive School Climate Surveys: Recognizing student, parent/guardian and school personnel voice

❖ Process or “end of stage” assessments that support the continuous process of improvement

❖ Community Assessment – Promoting school-community partnerships
THE SCHOOL CLIMATE IMPROVEMENT PROCESS:
A DEMOCRATICALLY INFORMED CONTINUOUS PROCESS OF 
LEARNING AND IMPROVEMENT

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT RESEARCH:
HELPFUL AND LESS HELPFUL “DRIVERS” OF CHANGE*

Unhelpful Primary Drivers:
1) Accountability systems that use data as a “hammer” rather than a “flashlight”
2) Primary focus on the individual teacher and/or administrator
3) Technology
4) Specific “evidence-based” programs

Helpful Primary Drivers
1) Fostering the intrinsic motivation of students, parents and school personnel: “igniting” the process
2) Engaging students & educators in a continuous process of social-emotional & civic as well as intellectual learning
3) Inspiring team work and a collaborative problem solving process
4) Affecting the whole community

*Bryk, et. al. 2002 & 2010; Fuller, 2011; Moursil, Srijaka & Barber, 2010; Tucker, 2011.
TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

❖ Policy trends and challenges
❖ Common Core and/or School Climate and/or PBIS?
❖ Practice trends and challenges

*Measurement and improvement efforts*: Utilization of school climate measurement to compliment and extend current accountability measures

*Practically, what to do when?*
❖ Growing interest!
❖ Confusion about what to do when
School Climate: Its Critical Role in Bullying Prevention.
Why School Climate is important to Students and Staff!

Michael L. Ford, Ed.D.
Behavior Specialist
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Maryland State Department of Education
October/2013

Suicide Note

By now, it's over. If you are reading this, my mission is complete. Your children who have ridiculed me, who have chosen not to accept me, who have treated me like I am not worth their time are dead.

Surely you will try to blame it on the clothes I wear, the music I listen to, or the way I choose to present myself, but no. Do not hide behind my choices, You need to face the fact that this comes as a result of YOUR CHOICES.

Parents and teachers, you fucked up. You have taught these kids to not accept what is different. YOU ARE IN THE WRONG. I have taken their lives and my own—but it was your doing. Let this Massacre be on your shoulders until the day you die!

Eric Harris, Columbine
## School Climate & Culture
- Is a multidimensional construct that includes physical, social, and academic dimensions.

### Positive School Climate & Culture
- Where the emphasis and **ownership of responsible behavior** is consistent with the school’s goals and applies to all (staff, students, parents, visitors, etc.)
- A positive school climate exists when: **all students feel comfortable, wanted, valued, accepted, and secure in an environment where they can interact with caring people they trust.**

## Student Development (tips)
- All involved need to be co-learners and co-leaders.
- Rewarding positive behavior rather than punishing poor behavior will give children seeking attention an incentive to behave well.
- Teachers should encourage students to provide feedback on their management of the class/school. This will show the students that they are listened to, and they should be encouraged to speak freely.
- A lack of consistent engagement is one of the most common reasons why so many school reform efforts fail.
Parental Engagement (tips)

- Invite parents to participate in school celebrations and events, such as sports days, field trips, musical events and school assemblies.
- Provide parents with tip sheets and suggestions on how they can support their child’s learning.
- Find ways to show appreciation of all parents efforts to support their children’s learning.
- Hold teacher-parent-student discussions to go over students’ learning & social goals and their progress towards achieving the goals.

Staff Development (tips)

- Leave your Junk at home.
- Spend quality time with your most challenging students.
- Don’t be afraid of making mistakes.
- Share your Power-Classroom responsibility.
- Don’t wait on your system to provide what you need.
- Ask Students to keep you in the know.
Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports for All Students

George Sugai
University of Connecticut
Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports
Center on Behavioral Education & Research

8 October 2013
National Education Association
Washington DC

www.pbis.org  www.cber.org

School violence
Under-achievement
Suspension & expulsions
Disability
Disproportionality & Equity
Restraint & seclusion

Bullying
School completion & dropping out
Delinquency
Substance use
School Climate

NOT Equal

Problem Context
### ABA Theory of Action & Logic Model

#### Student Behavior
- Aggression
- Bullying behavior
- Non-compliance
- Insubordination
- Social withdrawal
- Truancy
- Law/norm violations
- Substance use
- Weapon possession
- Harassment
- Self-injury

#### Adult Behavior
- Office referral
- In school detention
- Out of school suspension
- Probation & parole
- Arrests & incarceration
- Restraint & seclusion
- Mental health referral

#### Outcomes
- Disproportionality
- Dropping out
- School failure
- Mental illness
- School-to-prison pipeline
- Achievement gap
- Unemployment
- Delinquency

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#### Setting Conditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk</th>
<th>Student Behavior</th>
<th>Adult Behavior</th>
<th>Student Outcome</th>
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<td>Office referral</td>
<td>Disproportionality</td>
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<td>Bullying behavior</td>
<td>In school detention</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Self-injury</td>
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#### School Climate

**Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports**
School Leadership & Contributing Factors on Student Learning


Why PBIS?
Increased problem awareness

More emphasis on prevention

More curriculum development & research

Greater focus on all students

Good “things” about bullying efforts

Labeling kids

Under-emphasis on improvement of context

Limited assessment of context

“Bullying” Concerns

Non-data based intervention decisions

Generic intervention responses

Over-emphasis on student responsibility for change

Limited examination of mechanism
Preventing Violent Behavior

Positive predictable school-wide climate

High rates academic & social success

Preventing Violent Behavior

Positive active supervision & reinforcement

Positive adult role models

Formal social skills instruction

Multi-component, multi-year school-family-community effort

High rates academic & social success

Preventing Violent Behavior

Positive active supervision & reinforcement

Positive adult role models

Formal social skills instruction

Multi-component, multi-year school-family-community effort

Coordinated Social Emotional & Learning (Greenberg et al., 2003)
Center for Study & Prevention of Violence (2006)
White House Conference on School Violence (2006)
What is PBIS?

PBIS is about:
- Establish positive school climate
- Continuum of support for all students
- Maximizing academic success
- Adults modeling expected behavior
- Explicitly teaching important social skills
- Regularly recognizing good behavior
PBIS (aka SWPBS) is

Framework for enhancing adoption & implementation of

Continuum of evidence-based interventions to achieve

Academically & behaviorally important outcomes for

All students

IMPLEMENTATION W/ FIDELITY

CONTINUOUS PROGRESS MONITORING

CONTINUUM OF EVIDENCE-BASED INTERVENTIONS

CONTENT EXPERTISE & FLUENCY

UNIVERSAL SCREENING

PBIS Aka Rti/MTSS

DATA-BASED DECISION MAKING & PROBLEM SOLVING

TEAM-BASED IMPLEMENTATION
Schools are diverse, interesting, & multicultural!

Culturally Equitable Academic & Social Behavior Expectations

Culturally Knowledgeable Teachers

Culturally Relevant & Effective Instruction

Culturally Valid Information for Decisions

Vincent, Randall, Cartledge, Tobin, & Swain-Bradway 2011; Sugai, O’Keeffe, & Fallon, 2012ab
Primary Prevention: School-/Classroom-Wide Systems for All Students, Staff, & Settings

Secondary Prevention: Specialized Group Systems for Students with At-Risk Behavior

Tertiary Prevention: Specialized Individualized Systems for Students with High-Risk Behavior

CONTINUUM OF SCHOOL-WIDE INSTRUCTIONAL & POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORT

- ALL ~80% of Students
- SOME ~15%
- FEW ~5%

Responsiveness to Intervention

**Academic Systems**
- Universal Interventions: All students, Preventive, proactive
- Targeted Group Interventions: Some students (at-risk), High efficiency, Rapid response
- Intensive, Individual Interventions: Individual Students, Assessment-based, High Intensity

**Behavioral Systems**
- Universal Interventions: All settings, all students, Preventive, proactive
- Targeted Group Interventions: Some students (at-risk), High efficiency, Rapid response
- Intensive, Individual Interventions: Individual Students, Assessment-based, Intense, durable procedures

Circa 1996

All: Baker, 2005 JPBI; Eber, 2012

80-90% 80-90% 5-10% 5-10% 1-5% 1-5%
- Reduced major disciplinary infractions
- Improvement in aggressive behavior, concentration, prosocial behavior, & emotional regulation
- Improvements in academic achievement
- Enhanced perception of organizational health & safety
- Reductions in teacher reported bullying behavior & peer rejection
- Improved school climate
<table>
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<th>PRACTICE</th>
<th>EFFECTIVE</th>
<th>NOT EFFECTIVE</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Effective</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not Effective</td>
<td>![Red Circle]</td>
<td>![Red Circle]</td>
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</table>

Fixsen & Blase, 2009

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**Basic Logic**

**Cultural/Context Considerations**

**Maximum Student Outcomes**

SYSTEMS, DATA, PRACTICES

Implementation Fidelity

Start w/ effective, efficient, & relevant, doable

Prepare & support implementation

Training + Coaching + Evaluation

Improve “Fit”
School Climate/Culture & Bullying

- Strength-based, person-centered, prevention-based approaches
- Whole school, multi-tiered systems
- Tiered technical assistance, professional development
- Integrated policy & support: ESE, JJD, MH, OT/PT, SW/SchPsy/Coun, Sup/SB, Law, SpEd, Nurs, etc.
- Differentiated, individualized, data-supported technical assistance

*Improving adoption, implementation, & impact of “IT” on student benefit.*
Big Idea for IT

What's the smallest, most effective, doable, most sustainable IT that can have the biggest, most durable, most relevant effect on achieving and maintaining the most important outcome.
Creating Safer Schools in Iowa

Safe School Certification Program

Program Overview
Brent Robins, Director

Why Certify Schools as Safe?

Goal of Schools: Student academic achievement
School climate ↔ Academic achievement

Deliberate efforts to improve the climate are necessary.

Shindler, J. Exploring school climate - student achievement connection: and making sense of why the first precedes the second. Alliance for the Study of School Climate.
Safe School Certification Program (SSCP)

Safe School Certification Program

**Letter of the Law**
- Policy Audit
- 16 Requirements

**Spirit of the Law**
- Best Practices Audit
- 8 Elements

What Is a Safe School?

Foundation: 2007 Iowa Safe Schools Law

16 Requirements

**Letter of the Law**
- Anti-Bullying/Anti-Harassment Policy (1-12)
- Data collection & reporting (13-15)
- Non-discrimination policy (16)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>8 Additional Elements</th>
<th>Spirit of the Law</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Programs</td>
<td>Student Engagement</td>
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<td>Buy-In</td>
<td>Enforcement</td>
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<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Family/Community</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engagement</td>
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</table>
## Improving Schools Climate through PBIS in Anne Arundel County Public Schools

**Virginia Dolan, Ed.D., NCSP**  
Coordinator of Behavioral Support & Interventions

### PBIS Decision Making Rooms
- Alternative Centers of Education (ACE) Programs
- Boys & Girls Club
- Bridges Community Development Center
- Alternative One Program
- Summer School
- Check and Connect

### Targeted
- Monarch Academy Public Charter School
- Monarch Global Academy Public Charter School K-8
- Collaborative Decision-Making (CDM)
- Check in, Check-out, Check and Connect
- CAT Centers Exploratory Programs
- Evening Middle Schools
- J. Albert Adams Academy
- Twilight Schools
- Dual Credit/Dual Enrollment
- Job Corps
- Teen Parent Program
- Middle College High School at Sojourner Douglas College
- Evening High Schools
- Eliminate Virtual Learning Community
- Mary E. Moss Academy
- Phoenix Academy
- MDS3
- Early College High School

### Universal
- Learning Labs
- Project Target, PBIS+, MDS 3, Double Check
- Behavior Support Teams
- Universal Learning Labs
- Monarch Academy Public Charter School
- Maryland Demonstration System 3 (MDS3)
- Early College High School
- Services provided by Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Villa Maria Health Systems, and the Children’s Guild, etc.
For 2011-2012, AACPS saved 533 days of instruction and 711 days of administrative time.

Using 35 minutes of instruction lost/gained and 45 minutes of administrative time lost/gained.
Two Year Reductions

<table>
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<tr>
<th>School Type</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>AA/Black</th>
<th>White</th>
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<td>-59%</td>
<td>-46%</td>
<td>26652</td>
<td>19067</td>
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</table>

The Increase in the percentage of students scoring MSA proficient or advanced was greater for **PBIS students** than for **non PBIS students**.
Lessons Learned

Need to understand multi-component, multi-tiered logic, prevention approach upfront

Lessons Learned

Continually refreshing
- New Leadership
- New Staff
- New teacher training
Lessons Learned

Use teachers in leadership roles

Increase visibility in the district, media, community
Lessons Learned

Align

Multi-tiered systems of support logic

District initiatives

Lessons Learned

Implement PBIS

Begin to show improvement

No magic, quick solution
Discussion Groups:
1: What Is School Climate and Why Is It Important?

2: How Do You Measure School Climate?

3: How Do You Improve School Climate?

Discussion Topics
Where do we go from here?
What are some next steps for the field and NEA?
What partnerships are needed to advance this work?
Discussion Points

Data to guide process

How do you want to define school climate?
- Conditions for learning vs. school culture
- Need operational definition
- Need more case studies and sharing of research

Identify applied measures
- Asking students about student-teacher interactions: can they identify 1 adult they have a relationship with?
- Asking peer groups to identify areas to improve school climate (bullying, teasing, interactions)
- Observing teacher interactive and nonverbal behavior

Need data regarding support staff
- Materials, training, case studies including ESPs in school climate
- ESPs: food service, admin., skilled trades, bus drivers

Student Voice
- Let them identify issues and what are the student-generated solutions
- Encourage ownership and student action

Discussion Points Cont.

LGBT youth
- Enumerated Anti-bullying policy
- Visibly supportive adults
- Student clubs
- Inclusive curriculum
- Engaging in conversation
- Pass Safe Schools Improvement Act

Giving teachers skills to have those touchy conversations

Matching programs to the needs of schools
- Cost efficiency
- What level of intensity do programs need?
- Providing education and consultation on programs
- Implement programs as intended

Trauma informed interventions
- Recognize students’ trauma and provide teacher training related to PTSD and continuum of supports

Students coming to school with lots of baggage: recognize and understand impact
Discussion Points Cont.

Professional Development on School Climate
- Supporting people to think about why school climate is important
- Assess readiness and articulate mission and goals
- Discuss troubling moments in classrooms, schools open discussion about practices and data
- Spend more time putting together a team and encourage skill building in real time (hallways, classes, buses)
- Review data on student perceptions
- Follow up PD with coaching
- Encourage venting, but also a solution focused discussion
- Use of the miracle question to identify what positive school climate would look, sound, feel like

District-level climate, community/neighborhood climate, out-of-school providers
- What type of training and resources available?
- Start looking at 4 domains of culture and create culturally relevant data and training
- Reach out to colleagues