Helpful strategies and measurement options:
Actualizing the National School Climate Standards

An Introduction

There is growing appreciation that school climate matters. School climate is based on the patterns of people's experiences of school life; it reflects the norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching, learning and leadership practices, and organizational structures that comprise school life. The increased attention to school climate reflects both the concern for improving schools and the imperative for preparing students to address the myriad of challenges they will face in the 21st Century[1].

This resource – *Helpful Strategies and Measurement Options* – is a companion to the National School Climate Standards (www.schoolclimate.org/climate/standards.php). The five school climate standards present a vision and framework for a positive and sustainable school climate. They complement national standards for Content, Leadership, and Professional Development and the Parent Teacher Association's National Standards for Family-School Partnerships Standards.

> **1. The school community has a shared vision and plan for promoting, enhancing and sustaining a positive school climate.**
>
> **2. The school community sets policies specifically promoting (a) the development and sustainability of social, emotional, ethical, civic and intellectual skills, knowledge and dispositions and (b) a comprehensive system to address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage students who have become disengaged.**
>
> **3. The school community's practices are identified, supported and prioritized to (a) promote the learning and positive social, emotional, ethical and civic development of students, (b) enhance engagement in teaching, learning, and school-wide activities; (c) address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage those who have become disengaged; and (d) develop and sustain an appropriate operational infrastructure and capacity building mechanisms for meeting this standard.**
>
> **4. The school community creates an environment where all members are welcomed, supported, and feel safe in school: socially, emotionally, and physically.**
>
> **5. The school community develops meaningful and engaging practices, activities and norms that promote social and civic responsibilities and a commitment to social justice.**

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[1] For a recent summary of school climate research, see Cohen, et. al. 2009 and/or our Centers School Climate Research Summary: www.schoolclimate.org/climate/research.php

This resource is focused on the sixteen indicators that detail what each of these five Standards means for day-to-day goal setting, policy development and instructional as well as wider school improvement practice.

The National School Climate Center recommends that the strategies outlined below will be most helpful when they are considered within the context of the comprehensive, five-stage school climate improvement process:
  (i)   preparation and planning for the next phase of school improvement;
  (ii) evaluation;
  (iii) understanding evaluation findings, engagement and action planning;
  (iv) implementing the action plan; and,
  (v)   re-evaluation and beginning the cycle anew.
Each of these stages is characterized by a series of tasks and challenges (see Appendix A). Measuring and improving your schools climate in a systematic and comprehensive manner will support your school community actualizing the School Climate Standards.

We suggest that it will be less helpful initially to focus on a given indicator, consider how to address and measure it outside of the wider context. Engaging in this strategy could inadvertently lead to short term and fragmented efforts. Perhaps the most common phenomena that undermine any school reform are fragmented, short-term efforts. Instead, it is essential at the outset that you use the five-stage school climate improvement process as a guide to determining what are your priorities and where you should begin.

More and more, measurement is driving educational practice. We recommend that it is initially most helpful way to assess school climate with a comprehensive survey that has been developed in a scientifically sound manner and recognizes the "voices" of students, parents or guardians as well as school personnel. This provides a comprehensive understanding of your schools strengths, needs and weaknesses and positions school leaders to mobilize the "whole village" to learn and work together to create an even more positive and sustained school climate. We hope that the strategies, measurement options and related research support will aid your school's efforts to bring students, parents and guardians, school personnel and community leaders to learn and work together to create a safe, supportive and healthy climate for learning that engages all of our children and those that work with and love them.

For information about how this resource was developed, please see Appendix B. We envision this document as the first of a number of editions. We welcome your criticisms as well as suggestions about how to make this an even more useful resource for educators, youth leaders, parents and guardians as well as community leaders[2].

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[2] Please do write to us at standards@schoolclimate.org with any and all suggestions and constructive criticisms. Thank you!