

School Climate: Creating a Context for Positive Behavior Change

2012 PBIS Launch



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Our Focus

- What is school climate and why should we care?
- How does school climate impact student performance, staff effectiveness & change initiatives?
- How do we create a psychology of success on our campus?

What is School Climate?



The climate of a school is the **immediate feel or tone** that is felt or experienced on a **day-to-day** basis by students, staff, and community. School climate may be **one of the most important ingredients of a successful instructional program**. School climate can be immediately impacted because of its moment-to-moment nature.

(Eller and Eller, 2009, p.3)

School Culture

The Glue that Holds the School Together



School culture is a broader term than “climate” and provides a more accurate way to help school leaders better understand the dynamics of human behavior.

Culture is expressed in the school’s own unwritten rules and traditions, norms and expectations that seem to permeate everything:

The way people act & think, how they dress, what they talk about or avoid talking about, whether they seek out colleagues for help or don’t, and how teachers feel about their work and their students.

(Shaping School Culture. Deal and Peterson, 1999, p 2-3)

Culture: the “stories we tell ourselves.”

Jennifer James

Stories...
tell who we are and what we do.
can be used to shape a new culture.



What stories are told about your school by students, staff, parents, and community?

Positive School Climate

- Norms, values, expectations making students and adults socially, emotionally, intellectually and physically safe.
- All school community members are engaged and respected.
- Students, families, and educators work together to achieve shared school vision.

Cohen and Elias, 2011

Positive School Climate (2)

- Educators model and nurture an attitude emphasizing the benefits of and satisfaction from learning.
- Each person contributes to school operations and the care of the physical environment.
- Visitors to the school feel welcomed.

Cohen and Elias, 2011



Strong, positive cultures are places with a shared sense of what is important, a shared ethos of caring and concern, and a shared commitment to helping students learn...

Ken Peterson and Terence Deal, "How Leaders Influence the Culture of Schools." Educational Leadership, Wash D.C.: ASCD.

The Context of Learning



IV-D

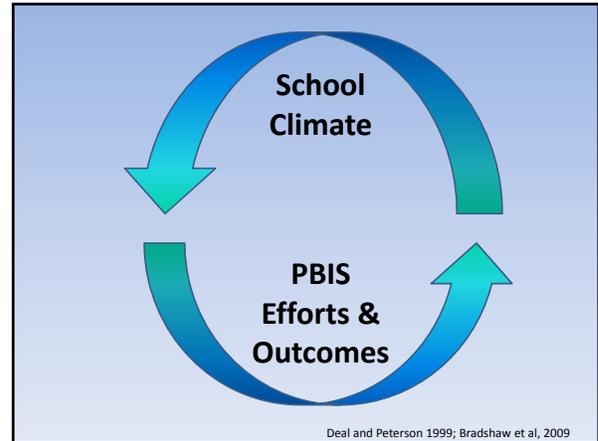
School climate is like the air we breathe: you don't really notice it until it becomes toxic.

-H. Jerome Freiburg



If the basic school structure is dysfunctional, its capacity to promote desired goals is limited.

Fullan 2003



School Improvement & School Climate
A Multi-year Chicago Study (Byrk 2010)

Four systems interact:

- Professional capacity
- School learning climate (order, safety, norms)
- Parent-school-community ties
- Instructional guidance

RELATIONAL TRUST is the glue that coordinates and supports these processes.

Impacts of School Climate on Staff

Ability to make change	Successful implementation of programs	Relationships and trust
Emotional exhaustion	Attrition and retention	Feelings of accomplishment
Commitment to profession	Depersonalization	Teachers' efficacy--belief they can positively affect student learning

Impacts of School Climate on Students

Motivation to learn

Learning & academic achievement

Group cohesion

Respect and mutual trust

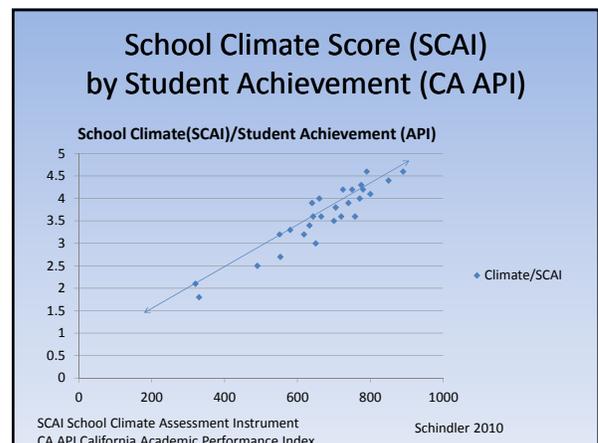
Victimization & delinquency

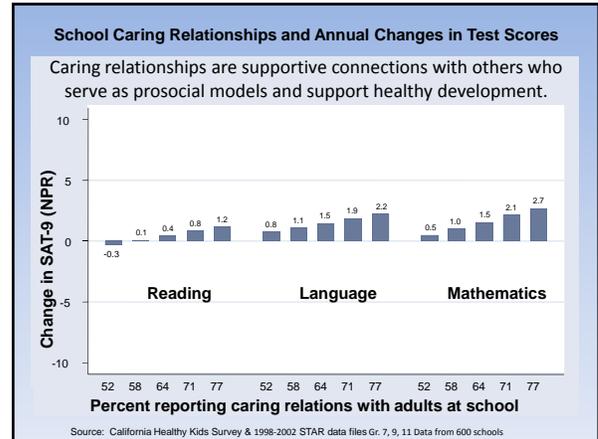
Feelings of safety & threat

Feelings of connectedness and attachment to school

Absenteeism & suspension

Emotional & mental health



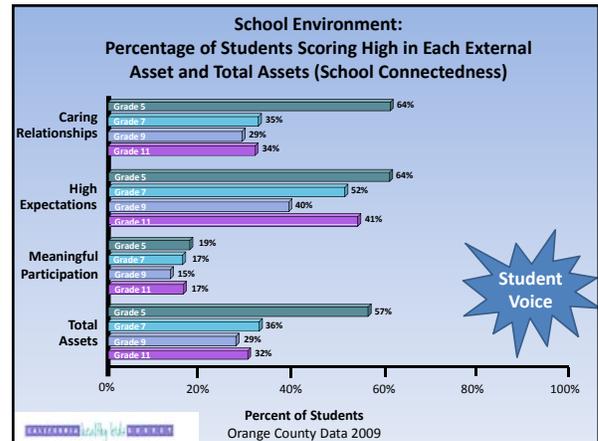


3 Protective Factors

What factors impacted the success of high-poverty “turnaround schools”?

1. Caring relationships
2. High expectation messages
3. Opportunities for meaningful participation and contribution

CA Dept of Education, 2009 21



Academic performance is strongly linked to whether students’ basic developmental needs are met—needs such as health, security, respect, and love.

When students basic developmental needs are met they feel more connected to school.

R and D Alert, A publication of WestEd, 2003, Vol. 5, No. 2

Students Who Experience School Connectedness...

- ◆ Feel they belong and are respected
- ◆ Like school and feel engaged in learning
- ◆ Believe teachers care about them and their learning
- ◆ Feel safe

Robert Blum (2005) Educational Leadership

Students Who Experience School Connectedness...

- ◆ Have Friends at School
- ◆ Believe That Education Matters
- ◆ Believe That Discipline Is Fair
- ◆ Have Opportunities to Participate in Extra Curricular Activities
- ◆ Have a Voice in School Decisions

Robert Blum (2005) *Educational Leadership*

Cultural Perspectives on School Climate

To improve school climate, school leaders and researchers need a complete understanding of what a positive school climate would look and feel like for students who strongly identify with particular cultures.

A Study of OC Adolescents

A study of middle school students found that for Hispanic-Latino students their personal relationships with teachers emerged as more important than adult modeling of positive behaviors-- opposite from the preference of White and Asian students.

(Schneider & Duran 2011)

Student Voice



Ask the Students

**What do students say about their school?
What do they say about their learning?**

Valuable data for reflection and action.

Ask Students, Listen, & Act

- How do you know when an adult at school cares about you? What do they say and do?
- How do you know when an adult believes in you? What do they say or do?
- What would make school more fun and interesting for you and your friends? What would you like to do?
- What kinds of decisions would you like to make in your classrooms and about your school?
- What kinds of things do you do or could you do at school that would make a difference? What would help others? What would improve your school?
- Is there anything else you need from the adults in your school to help you achieve your goals and dreams?

Bernard, 2008

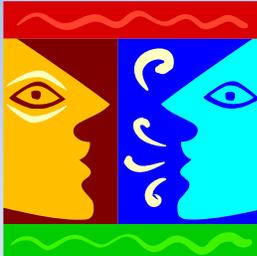
Student Voice



Fishbowl Focus Group

Guidelines are available for conducting this dialogue.

Say Something



Core of a Sound and Healthy School Climate

Psychology of Achievement	
Success Psychology	Failure Psychology
Internal locus of control	External locus of control
Belonging and acceptance	Alienation and worthlessness
Mastery (growth) orientation	Helpless (fixed) orientation

Mindset: The New Psychology of Success by Dweck, 2006; Shindler, 2010

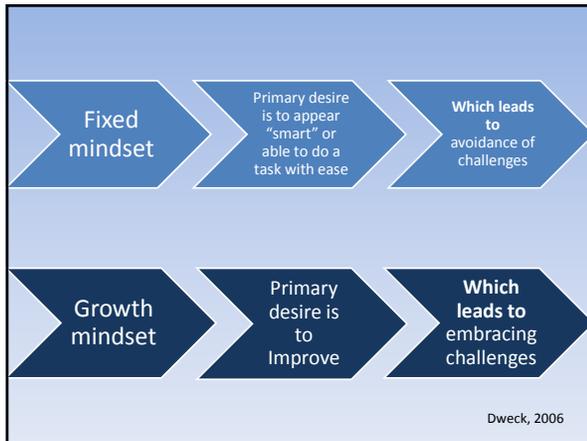
Success Psychology
Fixed vs. Growth Orientation

A mindset is the expectations we process about ourselves and others that guide our behavior.

A fixed mindset is a belief that intelligence is “fixed.”

A “growth” mindset is a belief that intelligence is malleable and one’s potential can be developed.

Dweck, 2006



- | Fixed Mindset | Growth Mindset |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Must look smart and talented at all costs Smart individuals shouldn't have to work as hard Being smart means school should come easy Can't show mistakes or weakness Effort is a negative Criticism is rejected Setbacks may lead to helplessness or blame | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have a desire to learn Hard work brings success Effort is key to learning Embrace mistakes so that I can grow Pays attention to feedback Setbacks are temporary and can lead to improvement |

- ### Approach to Obstacles
- | Fixed Mindset | Growth Mindset |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give up easily Blame others or outside factors when they fail as a method to maintain self-esteem, which is tied to belief of innate ability | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Persist in the face of setbacks See failure as an opportunity to learn Enjoy the process, not just the outcome |
- Dweck, 2006

- ### Response to Criticism
- | Fixed Mindset | Growth Mindset |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ignore criticism Take criticism as an insult, since believe skill or ability is stable and an essential feature of self, rather than something that can change | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learn from criticism Do not take criticism personally, since the criticism is of the skill that can be improved with appropriate feedback and practice |
- Dweck, 2006

Praise to Avoid

“You did that so quickly, you are really smart!”

“This is easier for you than for most children, I’m really proud of you.”

“You are a natural at _____.”

“You are really smart (creative, athletic).”

Dweck, 2006

Promoting a Growth Mindset

Praise and Encouragement

“It is great to see how excited you are about learning something new.”

“It is impressive that even though ballet was not fun for you at first, you stuck with it until you got to do more interesting and challenging things.”

“That homework was so long and involved, I really admire the way you concentrated and finished it.”

“You put so much thought into that essay. It really makes me understand Shakespeare in a new way.”

Dweck, 2006

Encouragement to Give Focus on the Process

“You worked really hard on that math assignment. You took on a challenge and learned when things were difficult for you.”

“Remember when you started first grade and you could only write in capital letters? After working all year, you have learned how to write with lower case letters.”

Dweck, 2006

Promoting a Growth Mindset

Encourage Self Evaluation: Assessing Process Not Just Product

- Promotes reflection
- Reduces stress
- Promotes a growth mindset

- What part do you like best? (vs. you did so well on that)
- Tell me about that.
- What might you do next?
- What was your understanding?
- What do you think?

Messages for our Students



Dweck, 2006

“I am going to teach” you, not “I’m going to judge your talent.”

Set high standards, with the expectation and belief that the student (with hard work) can reach them.

“There are no shortcuts, there is no magic here.”

Tell children the truth and give them the tools to close any gaps.



Practice and Demonstrate a Growth Mindset

Regularly talk about things you have learned or challenges you are facing- even as a parent!

Emphasize how challenges and setbacks resulted in improvements.

Tell stories of your childhood and challenges you overcame with hard work.

Practice problem solving strategies.

Dweck, 2006



A Few Questions to Ask about Your School

- Does our school provide a warm, friendly, and safe learning environment?
- Are there order and discipline?
- Are the interpersonal relationships between teachers and students respectful?
- Are there clear expectations for behavior as well as high expectations for learning?
- Does our school have a psychology of success and promote a growth mindset?

National Assn. of School Psychologists, April 2009; Dweck, 2006



What about our school climate do we want to pay attention to as we begin to implement PBIS?

What school climate improvements do we want to see as an outcome of PBIS?



Each school is unique. Each school needs to consider its history, community, strengths and needs to create school climate improvement goals.

The key is dedication to the spirit of continuous improvement to create a momentum for positive change.

Dr. Lucy Vezzuto lvezzuto@ocde.us Cohen and Elias, 2011



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