Five Interconnected Dimensions Of School Climate:
What Does The Research Say?
A Gist List

Safety

Feeling safe (socially, emotionally, physically and intellectually) in school powerfully **promotes student learning and healthy development** (Devine & Cohen, 2007).

Schools in which rules are effectively enforced (i.e. better discipline management) have **lower rates of student victimization and student delinquency** (Gottfredson, et al., 2005).

The U.S. Secret Service and Dept. of Justice studies cite positive school climate as an important factor in **reducing school shootings and school violence**. (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Cornell, 2003; Peterson, Larson & Skiba, 2002).

Teaching and Learning

A positive school climate promotes **cooperative learning, group cohesion, respect and mutual trust.** These particular aspects have been shown to **directly improve the learning environment** (Ghaith, 2003; Kerr et al., 2004; Finnan, et al., 2003).

A series of correlational studies have shown that school climate is **directly related to academic achievement** (Brand et al, 2003; Brookover et al., 1977; Brookover, 1978; Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Freiberg, 1999; Good & Weinstein, 1986; Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 1989; Griffith, 1995; Ma & Klinger, 2000; MacNeil, Prater & Busch, 2009; Madaus, et al., 1980; Rutter, 1983; Rutter et al., 1979; Shipman, 1981; Stewart, 2008; Fleming et al., 2005).

Teaching **evidence-based social and emotional skill-based curriculum** can improve achievement test scores by as much as **11-17 percentile points** (Payton et al., 2008; Durlak et al., 2010).

School climate influences the lives of educators and teacher retention. **School climate enhances or minimizes emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and feelings of low personal accomplishment as well as attrition** (Grayson & Alvarez, 2008; Miller et al., 1999).

A positive school climate is associated with the development of **teachers' beliefs that they can positively affect student learning** (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993).

When teachers feel supported by both the principal and their peers, teachers are **more committed to their profession** (Singh & Billingsley, 1998).

"Downshifting" of the brain occurs when students **feel bored, threatened, or stressed** affecting higher order thinking and learning (Wolfe, 2001; Sousa, 2006).

There is an important link between school climate and a **student's motivation to learn** (Comer, J. 1984; Eccles et.al. 1993; Goodenow & Grady, 1993).

Relationships

Students' **connectedness to school** (the belief by students that adults and peers in the school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals) is a powerful **predictor** and is associated with adolescent health and academic outcomes, violence prevention, and student satisfaction and conduct problems. (McNeely, Nonnemaker, & Blum, 2002; Whitlock, 2006; Ruus et al., 2007; Resnick et al., 1997; Karcher, 2002a, 2002b, Skiba et al., 2004; Loukas, Suzuki, & Horton, 2006).

School connectedness is a **protective factor** against risky sexual, violence and drug use behaviors (Catalano, Haggerty, Oesterie, Fleming & Hawkins, 2004; Kirby, 2001).

A series of studies revealed that a positive school climate is correlated with **decreased student absenteeism** in middle school and high school and with **lower rates of student suspension** in high school (deJung & Duckworth, 1986; Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 1989 Purkey & Smith 1983; Reid, 1982; Rumberger, 1987, Sommer, 1985; Wu, Pink, Crain, & Moles, 1982).

School climate has been shown to affect middle school students' **self-esteem**, mitigate the negative effects of self-criticism and affect a wide range of **emotional and mental health outcomes** (Hoge, et al., 1990; Kuperminic, et al., 2001; Kuperminic, et al., 1997; Payton et al., 2008; Shochet, et al., 2006; Way et al, 2007).

Safe, caring, participatory and responsive school climates tend to foster a **greater attachment to school** and provide the optimal foundation for social, emotional and academic learning for middle school and high school students (Blum, et al., 2002; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Lee, et al., 1999; Osterman, 2000; Wentzel, 1997).

Students who find **strong social and emotional support** in their schools are much more likely to be **successful academically** (Cohen, 2006).

Institutional Environment

Smaller schools are positively correlated to school connectedness (McNelly et al., 2002).

Students **felt unsafe in unsupervised areas** of the school building (Astor et al., 2001).

Environmental variables (such as classroom layout, activity schedules and student-teacher interactions) can **influence student behaviors and feelings of safety** (Conroy & Fox, 1994; Van Acker, Grant, & Henry, 1996).

School Improvement

School climate is an important factor in the **successful implementation of school reform programs** (Bulach & Malone, 1994; Delar, 1998; Gittelsohn et al., 2003; Gregory et al., 2007).

Schools with **high relational trust** (good social relationships among members of the school community) are more **likely to make changes** that improve student achievement (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

positive supportive relationships are particularly important for newcomer immigrant students to bridge the gap between home and school cultures and provide important feelings of safety and opportunities for success in the school setting (Baker, 1999; Rumberger, 2004; Wang, Haertel, & Wahlberg, 1994).

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