Boosting Success for 21st Century Learners Webinar Series

Assessing and Enhancing School Climate and Culture

This webinar provides participants with an overview of research concerning school climate and connectedness, tools to assess current school climate, and resources to create and maintain a positive school climate.

Disclaimer

The Mid-Atlantic Equity Center is committed to the sharing of information regarding issues of equity in education. The contents of this practitioner brief were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. However, these contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the federal government.
Assessing and Enhancing School Climate and Culture

Tuesday, September 25, 2012
1:30 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. (Eastern Time)

mid-atlantic equity consortium, inc.
The Mid-Atlantic Equity Center

Housekeeping Notes

Question and Answer Opportunities

Online Evaluation

Recording of Session and Slides

Please type in the following for each participant at your location:

- Name
- Title
- Organizational affiliation
Mid-Atlantic Equity Center

The Center is one of ten equity assistance centers funded by the U.S. Department of Education under Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Center provides technical assistance and training services FREE of charge to school districts in the areas of:

- Race
- Gender
- National origin/English language learners
Assessing and Enhancing School Climate and Culture

Michelle Nutter
Safe and Supportive Schools Manager
Pennsylvania Center for Safe Schools

Why Address Climate/Culture?

Failure to address school culture only produces unintended discrepancies between school improvement efforts and intended outcomes for student achievement.

Sarason (1982)
What is Climate?

- Quality and character of school life
- Students’, parents’ and school personnel’s experience
- Norms, goals and values
- Interpersonal relationships
- Teaching and learning practices
- Organizational structures

Dimensions of School Climate

- Physical Dimension
- Social Dimension
- Academic Dimension
The Components of Climate

- Environmental
- Structural
- Safety
- Teaching and learning
- Relationships
- Sense of school community
- Morale
- Peer norms
- Home-school-community partnerships
- Learning community

Research Says

Four essential areas of school climate focus:

- Safety
- Relationships
- Teaching and learning
- Institutional environment
Safety
- Social
- Emotional
- Intellectual
- Physical

Relationships
- Self
- Peers
- Adults
Teaching and Learning

- Teacher support
- Cooperative learning
- Civic learning
- Service learning

Instructional Environment

- Classroom layout
- Student supervision
- School tone
- Connection to community
Climate versus Culture

Climate
- The emotional atmosphere of the school.
- Also described as atmosphere, tone, feeling, setting or milieu.
- “How it feels to be here.”

Climate versus Culture Cont.

Culture
- Shared norms, values, beliefs and goals which result in agreed upon processes and procedures that produce consistency in practice.
- “How we do things here.”
School Culture and Fairness

- Academic opportunity
- Extracurricular opportunity
- Application of rules
- Disciplinary measures

![Diagram showing the intersection of Climate, Safety, and Connectedness]

Climate

Safety

Connectedness
School Connectedness

How do students feel about attending school?

Also known as:
- School bonding
- School climate
- Teacher support
- Student engagement
  (Blum, 2005)

Why School Connectedness is Important

Research shows that disconnected students have increased risk of negative outcomes, including:
- Higher dropout rates
- Higher unemployment rates
- Reduced lifelong earnings
- Higher crime rates
Measuring Connectedness

Factors that impact climate/connectedness:
- Academic engagement
- Belonging
- Discipline/fairness
- Extracurricular activities
- Likes school
- Student voice
- Peer relations
- Safety and teacher support

Climate and Culture Surveys

- Radon
- Carbon Monoxide

- Bullying
- Racial discord
Climate and Culture Assessments

Considerations:
- Technology
- Cost
- Time
Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS)

www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/yrbs/index.htm

School Climate Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Agree Strongly</th>
<th>Disagree Strongly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students get along well.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students choose to interact primarily with people like themselves.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students in my school know how to report harassment, bullying and racial abuse to school officials.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students in my school would feel comfortable reporting harassment, bullying and racial abuse to school officials.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers in my school actively work to create a safe and welcoming environment for every student.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every student in my school feels like he or she belongs here.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My school creates opportunities for students to get to know each other.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At my school, adults and students listen to each other.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I look forward to coming to this school in the morning.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

True or False?

1. I’ve seen biased vandalism or graffiti at school.
2. I’ve heard a student use a slur, epithet or other derogatory put-down.
3. I’ve heard a student tease or ridicule another student.
4. I’ve heard a teacher or other adult in the school make disparaging remarks about a particular group of students.
5. I’m sure — and analyzed — our school’s safety data and reports.
6. I’ve had a conversation with someone about our school’s climate.

HOW TO USE THIS QUESTIONNAIRE
- A tool to diagnose differences in perceptions between teachers and students
- An opportunity to improve school climate/character and safety
- An integral part of a broader school climate assessment that also includes focus group interviews, focus groups, and other tools
- For more information, visit www.tolerance.org and www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/yrbs/index.htm

American School Climate Survey (2.5)

1. I feel safe at my school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

2. An adult in my family (or someone that is taking care of me) visits my school often.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

3. I enjoy learning at my school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

4. Students at my school fight a lot.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

5. I will continue my education at a community college or university.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

6. Students at my school trust the teachers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

7. Teachers are able to stop someone from being a bully.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Accessed 9/24/12 from http://schoolclimatesurvey.com/surveys.html

Goals of Climate/Culture Assessment

Assess where we are right now:
- Surveys
- Focus groups

Maintain strengths:
- Bring positive practices into awareness
- Sustain focus
Goals of Climate/Culture Assessment

Address areas that could be improved:
- Adult relations with each other
- Adult relations with students
- Student relations with each other
- Student relations with adults

What Can Be Done?

According to Blum (2005), three characteristics help students feel connected to school:
- High academic standards with strong teacher support
- A positive and respectful teacher/student environment
- A physically and emotionally safe school environment
The three “Rs”

Old School
- Reading
- Writing
- Arithmetic

New School
- Rigor
- Relevance
- Relationship

Characteristics of a School That Is Safe and Responsive to All Students

- Focus on academic achievement
- Involve families in meaningful ways
- Develop links to the community
- Emphasize positive relationships among students and staff
Characteristics of a School That Is Safe and Responsive to All Students

Cont.

- Discuss safety issues openly
- Treat students with equal respect
- Create ways for students to share their concerns
- Help children feel safe expressing their feelings

- Have in place a system for referring children who are suspected of being abused or neglected.
- Offer extended day programs for children.
- Promote good citizenship and character.
Characteristics of a School That Is Safe and Responsive to All Students

Cont.

- Identify problems and assess progress toward solutions.
- Support students in making the transition to adult life and the workplace.

Source: U.S. Department of Education

Create a School Climate that Supports Diversity

- Make expectations clear.
- Monitor the environment and document all incidents.
- Identify student and parent concerns.
- Train staff to prevent and address harassment.
- Develop curriculum and teaching methods.
- Create student activity and mediation programs.
- Appoint a compliance coordinator.
Mix It Up At Lunch Day

www.tolerance.org/mix-it-up/get-started

Teaching Tolerance

- Understanding the Influence of Race
- The Common Beliefs Survey
- Primer on Culturally Relevant Pedagogy
- The School Survey
- Case-Based Course Modules

www.tolerance.org/tdsi
S.P.I.R.I.T.

- To encourage open, candid sharing of ideas.
- To maintain some direction and focus of discussions.
- To verify and document accurate input.
- To facilitate comfortable involvement of all participants.
- To assess the level of commitment to ideas.

Bottom Line
Remember the Power of Teachers

“As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child’s life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration.”

“I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated and a child humanized or dehumanized.”

—Haim Ginott

Contact

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 CENTER FOR SAFE SCHOOLS
Boosting Success for 21st Century Learners Webinar Series  
Friday, October 26, 2012  
9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

Understanding the Needs of Sexual Minority and Gender Non-Conforming Youth

- The needs of sexual minority and non-conforming youth in our schools
- Creating policies and school environments that reduce bullying and harassment of students
- Effective programs in creating climates of tolerance and acceptance

Presenters
- Lynne Muller, Race to the Top Student Services Specialist, Maryland State Department of Education
- Nora Cartland, Senior Educational Equity Specialist, The Mid-Atlantic Equity Center

SAVE THE DATE!
Tuesday, May 7, 2013  
8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

New Location
The Conference Center  
at the Maritime Institute  
692 Maritime Boulevard  
Linthicum Heights, MD 21090
For more information, visit our new website at:

www.maec.org

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Mid-Atlantic Equity Center