# **Research and Resources on Promoting Positive**

# **School Climates to Improve Student Outcomes**

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## **Background:**

School climate refers to the quality and character of school life. It is based on the patterns of students', parents' and school personnel's experience of school life.

School climate can promote or get in the way of meaningful student learning.A positive school climate is one that fosters youth development and learning. It is characterized by:

* School norms, values and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally and physically safe.
* People being engaged and respected.
* Students, families and educators working together to develop, live and contribute to a shared school vision.
* Educators who model and nurture attitudes that emphasize the benefits and satisfaction gained from learning.
* Each person contributing to the operations of the school and the care of the physical environment.
* Open communication between parents and teachers.

*“Over the past two decades, research studies from a range of historically disparate fields such as school reform, risk prevention, health promotion, moral education, character education, mental health, and social-emotional learning have identified research-based school improvement guidelines that converge predictable to promote safe, caring, responsive, and participatory school.” [[1]](#endnote-1)*

## **Promoting Positive School Climate:**

Schools using a **social and emotional learning (SEL)** framework promote positive school climates by fostering an overall climate of inclusion, warmth, and respect. **Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS)** promotes positive school climates by helping educators structure the school environment and provide students with positive reinforcement (see [PBIS link](http://www.pbis.org/)). **Restorative practices** help create safe learning environments by building a sense of community, resolving conflict and repairing harm caused by student behavior.

## **Student Outcomes Associated with Positive School Climate:[[2]](#endnote-2)**

The following outcomes increased:

* Motivation to learn;
* Academic achievement;
* Attendance;
* Self-esteem; and
* Resiliency.

The following outcomes decreased:

* Absenteeism;
* Disciplinary referrals;
* Mental health concerns (e.g. anxiety, depressive symptoms, suicide ideation)
* Engagement in sexual behavior; and
* Drug use.

## **Support for Promoting Positive School Climates:**

* The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2009) recommends school climate reform as a data-driven strategy that promotes healthy relationships, school connectedness, and dropout prevention.
* The Institute for Educational Sciences includes school climate as a sound strategy for dropout prevention (Dynarski et al., 2008).
* The U.S. Department of Education (2007) has invested in the Safe and Supportive Schools grant program to support statewide school climate measurement and the study of school climate improvement efforts.
* A growing number of State Departments of Education are focusing on school climate reform as an essential component of school improvement and/or bully prevention.

## **Resources:**

### **Texas**

**Texas Behavior Support – Region 4 Education Service Center**

[Texas Behavior Support Link](http://www.txbehaviorsupport.org/)

The **Texas Behavior Support (TBS) Network** works to create a system of PBIS for students with disabilities and all students attending Texas public schools. Although the original focus of TBS was to support the behavior needs of students with disabilities, it quickly became evident in examining the newly expanding PBIS model that in order to address the needs of children in special education, prevention interventions had to be implemented for all students. Therefore, the TBS Network adopted PBIS as its philosophical foundation and supports all three tiers of the model, including school-wide and classroom.

The **Texas Behavior Support Initiative (TBSI)** is a state-level training designed to provide foundational knowledge for the use of positive behavior interventions and supports for all students, including those with disabilities. The training meets legislative requirements related to procedures for the use of restraint and time-out, and also provides a framework for sharing a wide range of foundation-level behavior strategies and prevention-based school-wide, classroom, and individual interventions.

**The Institute for Restorative Justice and Restorative Dialogue (IRJRD)**

[Institute for Restorative Justice and Restorative Dialogue Link](https://irjrd.org/)

The University of Texas at Austin’s Institute for Restorative Justice and Restorative Dialogue offers resources to help schools implement restorative discipline practices, a prevention-oriented approach to resolve school conflict such as bullying, truancy and disruptive behavior.

**A Model Comprehensive, Developmental Guidance and Counseling Program for Texas Schools**

[Texas Counseling Association Link](https://www.txca.org/tca/default.asp)

Texas Education Code Sec. 33.005 requires school counselors to plan, implement and evaluate a developmental guidance and counseling program. This guide was developed to serve as a model for high quality comprehensive, developmental school guidance and counseling programs and is designed to help students acquire age-appropriate knowledge and skills which are associated with positive school climates, such as self-confidence development; motivation to achieve; decision-making; interpersonal effectiveness; communication skills; cross-cultural effectiveness; and responsible behavior.

### **National**

**CASEL Guide to Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programs**

[CASEL Link](https://casel.org/guide/)

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

Guide provides a systematic framework for evaluating the quality of social and emotional programs and applies this framework to identify and rate well-designed, evidence-based SEL programs with potential for broad dissemination to schools across the United States. The Guide also shares best-practice guidelines for district and school teams on how to select and implement SEL programs.

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) - School Connectedness Resources**

* Fact Sheet: For School Districts and School Administrators – [Fact Sheet Link](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/pdf/connectedness_administrators.pdf)
* Fact Sheet: For Teachers and Other School Staff – [Fact Sheet Link](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/pdf/connectedness_teachers.pdf)
* Fact Sheet: For Parents and Families – [Fact Sheet Link](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/pdf/connectedness_parents.pdf)
* School Connectedness: Strategies for Increasing Protective Factors Among Youth – [School Connectedness Link](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/pdf/connectedness.pdf)
* Fostering School Connectedness: Staff Development Program Facilitator's Guide – [Fostering School Connectedness Link](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/pdf/connectedness_facilitator_guide.pdf)

**ASCD's Whole Child Initiative**

[ASCD Link](http://www.ascd.org/research-a-topic/school-culture-and-climate-resources.aspx)

The ASCD's Whole Child initiative includes resources to help schools and communities promote a school climate and culture, including articles, videos, webinars, and access to experts. The Whole Child approach is an effort to transition from a focus on narrowly defined academic achievement to one that promotes the long-term development and success of all children.

**The Search Institute – 40 Developmental Assets**

[The Search Institute Link](https://www.search-institute.org/)

The Search Institute provides research, resources, and expertise to organizations, schools, and community coalitions address critical issues in education and youth development. The institutes’ [framework of Developmental Assets](http://www.search-institute.org/content/40-developmental-assets-adolescents-ages-12-18) identifies a set of skills, experiences, relationships, and behaviors that enable young people to develop into successful and contributing adults. The more Developmental Assets young people acquire, the better their chances of succeeding in school and becoming happy, healthy, and contributing members of their communities and society.

**National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments**

[National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments Link](https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/)

The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments (NCSSLE) is funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Safe and Healthy Students to help address factors that affect the conditions for learning, such as bullying, harassment, violence, and substance abuse. Training and technical assistance resources are available by Education Level (Pre-K/Elementary; Middle/High; Higher Education) and by Roles (State Administrators; School/District Administrators; Teachers; School Support Staff; Families; and Communities). Topics include School Climate; Engagement; Safety; and Environment.

**The National School Climate Center (NSCC)**

[NSCC Link](https://www.schoolclimate.org/)

The National School Climate Council works with the academic community—teacher, staff, school-based mental health professionals, students and parents—to improve a climate for learning. It translates research into practice by establishing meaningful and relevant guidelines, programs and services that support a model for whole school improvement with a focus on school climate.

## **National School Climate Standards:**

[National School Climate Standards Link](https://www.schoolclimate.org/themes/schoolclimate/assets/pdf/policy/school-climate-standards.pdf)

The national School Climate Standards provide a research-based framework and benchmark criteria for local and state educational leaders to support and assess district and school efforts to enhance and be accountable for school climate. The framework is comprised of five standards and a set of indicators and sub-indicators that support the school community:

1. Developing a **shared vision** and plan for promoting, enhancing and sustaining a positive school climate.
2. Developing **policies** that promote social, emotional ethical, civic and intellectual learning as well as systems that address barriers to learning.
3. Promoting **practices** that promote the learning and positive social, emotional, ethical and civic development of students and student engagement as well as addressing barriers to learning.
4. Creating an environment where all members are **welcomed, supported, and feel safe** in school: socially, emotionally, intellectually and physically.
5. Developing meaningful and engaging practices, activities and norms that **promote social and civic responsibilities and a commitment to social justice.**
1. Amrit Thapa, Jonathan Cohen, Shawn Guffey, and Ann Higgins-D’Alessandro. (2013) “A Review of School Climate Research**”** *Review of Educational Research.* [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Amrit Thapa, Jonathan Cohen, Shawn Guffey, and Ann Higgins-D’Alessandro. (2013) “A Review of School Climate Research**”** *Review of Educational Research;* See also Hatzenbuehler, M. L., Birkett, M., Van Wagenen, A., & Meyer, I. H. (2014). Protective School Climates and Reduced Risk for Suicide Ideation in Sexual Minority Youths. American Journal of Public Health, 104(2), 279–286. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)