School Climate: Improving Discipline, Safety and Learning

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www.community-matters.org
Community Matters Mission

“To wake up the courage of students and adults to create schools that are safe, welcoming and inclusive.”
Administrators are held accountable for…

- Attendance
- Achievement
- Behavior & Discipline

AND…

- Bullying and Cyberbullying Laws
- School Climate Improvement
Adhere to Cyber-Bullying Regulations

Improve Test Scores

Create Greater Safety

Improve Graduation Rates

Implement SEL & PBIS

Increase School Climate

Increase Attendance

Enhance Security

Implement Common Core Standards

Decrease Suspensions

OVERWHELM!
School Safety: The Changing Landscape

• School Shootings (1995 – 99)
• Violence, Bullying (2000 – 09)
The Pillars of School Safety

Security

Outside-In Approach
The “Outside-In” Approach

• Security-Focused
• Adult-Driven
• Punitive Policies
• Control-Oriented
The High Cost & Ineffectiveness of the “Outside-In” Approach

• 2000 - 2010: More than $10 billion expended on school security equipment.
  

• No measurable evidence that heightened security or zero tolerance policies significantly reduces school violence.
  
  Source: Skiba, Russell, University of Indiana (2002)

• Suspensions & expulsions have increased, and are costly and ineffective in changing behavior.
School Safety: The Changing Landscape

- School Shootings (1995 – 99)
- Violence / Bullying (2000 – 09)

(2009 – present)

Cyber-Bullying
Relational Aggression
Indifference
Living in a Disconnected World

"We are living in an unprecedented social experiment. We have systematically changed the patterns and connections that have characterized human life as long as there has been human life."

Wachtel, Dreaming of a New Reality
Intolerance & Incivility

It’s not your typical playground thug anymore…

Younger
Meaner
More Pervasive
Harder to Identify

24/7 On & Off Campus

Other’s Pain as “Entertainment”
More Accepted as Normal
Unintended Consequences for Education

- Students struggle to focus and learn
- Academic achievement decreases
- Excessive staff time is spent on discipline
- Suspension and drop out rates go up
- Teacher & staff morale drops; turnover increases
Unintended Consequences for School Budgets

• Dollars Expended on Security
• More Suspensions & Expulsions
• Reduction in Attendance = Lost Revenue
• Higher Insurance Premiums & Lawsuits
What We Know

We can’t stop prejudice, racism and personal grudges with metal detectors and cameras.

We can’t legislate kids into being peacemakers.

We can’t punish students into being kind and compassionate.
“The principal objective of school violence-reduction strategies should be to create cultures and climates of safety, respect and emotional support.”

U.S. Secret Service and Department of Education
The Pillars of School Safety

Security

Climate

Outside-In Approach

Inside-Out Approach
Balancing the “Outside-In” with the “Inside-Out” Approach

- Security-Focused <-> Relationship-Focused
- Adult-Driven <-> Student-Centered
- Punitive Policies <-> Formative / Restorative Policies
- Control-Oriented <-> Changing Social Norms
The Importance of School Climate

Successfully implementing & institutionalizing an “inside-out” approach requires a commitment to school climate
What is “Climate”? 

• It’s our inner-barometer of safety & belonging
• It’s based on our ‘gut’ feeling
• Everyone can feel it
• It influences how we behave and whether or not we choose to engage

And we can consciously influence it…
Linking School Safety to Academic Achievement

Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs

- Physical needs
- Safety (physical & emotional)
- Belonging
- Self-esteem
- Self actualization (achievement)
Positive School Climate
Characteristics

• Strong relationships among and between students and staff

• Discipline using formative / restorative consequences

• Engagement, recognition and leadership opportunities for students in a wide variety of activities
Positive School Climate Impact

• Increases student retention & academic achievement
  • Renews focus on teaching & learning

• Decreases bullying & other antisocial behaviors
  • Engenders trust & sense of safety
Guiding Principles, Laws, & Funding
Dear Colleague Letter
January 8, 2014

Guidance letter prepared by U.S. Department of Justice (Civil Rights Division) and U.S. Department of Education (Office for Civil Rights) describing how schools can meet their obligations under federal law to administer student discipline without discriminating on the basis of race, color, or national origin.
Guiding Principles (U.S. DOE)

1. Engage in deliberate efforts to create positive school climates.

2. Prioritize use of evidence-based prevention strategies, such as tiered supports.

3. Promote social and emotional learning.

4. Provide regular training and supports to all school personnel.

5. Collaborate with local agencies and other stakeholders.

6. Ensure that any school-based law enforcement officers’ roles focus on improving school safety and reducing inappropriate referrals to law enforcement.

Source: Guiding Principles, A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline, U.S Department of Education
Now Is The Time (NITT)

The President’s plan to protect our children and communities by reducing gun violence

Contains 4 education related strategies:

• Ensuring comprehensive emergency management plans are in place at every school
• Creating safe and positive climate at schools across the county
• Making sure students and young adults get treatment for mental health issues
• Ensuring schools are safe

(Source: Esquith, Director of Office of Safe and Healthy Students, US Department of Education CEP Safety Summit, Oct. 2013)
“Now Is The Time”: Grants Awarded

• U.S. DOE awarded more than $70 million to 130 grantees in 38 states

• 4 new grant programs to make our schools safer, reduce gun violence, and increase mental health services
  – School Climate Transformation Grants to School Districts
  – School Climate Transformation Grants to States
  – Project Prevent Grants to School Districts
  – School Emergency Management Grants
Whole School Climate Framework
Unintended Consequences:
- Confusion
- Overwhelm
- Frustration
- Resistance
The Five Determinants of Whole School Climate

- Organization
- Community
- Staff
- Families
- Students

School Climate
What organizations can do...

- Leadership
- Policies
  - Asset-based
  - Balanced
  - Implemented fairly
- Governance
  - Inclusive decision-making
  - Open communication
- Personnel Management
- Allocate/Re-allocate Resources
Why Change Initiatives Fail

Research indicates, “that 70% of change initiatives fail because of 3 critical reasons:

1. People leading the change process announce the change and consider that is sufficient for having implemented

2. Peoples concerns are not surfaced or heard

3. Those expected to change are not actively involved in the change process.”

(Source: Zigarmiet al: Blanchard, 2006) and (Blood and Thorsborne, 2006)
What’s Working, What’s Not, What’s Missing?

• A review and analysis of:
  – Policies and procedures
  – Current programs and services
  – Discipline data

• Strategies:
  – Interviews with key stakeholders
  – Surveys (conduct or review) with students, parents, and staff
Policy Considerations
Zero-Tolerance vs. Restorative Practices

• Current national trend
• Why is there a shift in philosophy
  – Outcomes
  – Civil rights
  – Educational Guiding Principals
• What can be done instead
The Impact of Zero Tolerance

- Full-time law enforcement and security guards at public HS tripled (1996-97 to 2007-08)
- 40% increase of secondary students suspended per year (1972-72 to 2009-10)
- Disproportionately affected youth of color and students with special education needs
- No evidence that suspensions & expulsions reduced classroom disruptions
- Out of school suspensions:
  - Can severely disrupt a student’s academic progress with lasting negative consequences
  - Are associated with subsequent involvement in juvenile justice system

Restorative Practices

“Is a social science that studies how to build social capital and achieve social discipline through participatory learning and decision-making.

The use of restorative practices helps to:

– reduce crime, violence and bullying
– improve human behavior
– strengthen civil society
– provide effective leadership
– restore relationships
– repair harm”

Restorative Principles

1. Relationships are central to building community
2. Equity of voice
3. High expectations with high support
4. Address misbehavior and harm in a way that strengthens relationships
5. Focus on harm done rather than only rule-breaking
6. Collaborative problem solving
7. Enhance accountability and responsibility, and empower growth
Restorative Circles in School

• Community Building (Proactive)
  – Build positive connections
  – Create agreements
  – Creates dialogue
  – Allows participants to be present, seen and heard

• Responsive Circles (Response to Harms)
  – Harms are discussed/hold difficult dialogues
  – Agree upon pathways to make things right

VIDEO RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

PBS News Hour: Colorado high school replaces punishment with 'talking circles'
The Staff Determinant of Whole School Climate

School Climate

Organization

Community

Staff

Families

Students
What school staff can do…

With adults
• Model respectful relationships
• Use effective communication

With students
• Build relationships
  – Engage
  – Communicate
  – Support
• Notice mistreatment
  – Five types
• Intervene effectively
  – Connecting before correcting
1. School connectedness was found to be the strongest protector against substance use, school absenteeism, early sexual initiation, violence, and risk of unintentional injury.

1. School connectedness was second in importance, after family connectedness, in protecting adolescents from emotional distress, eating disorders, and suicidal ideation and attempts.

(Source: CDC)
Stars Project
Build Relationships

– Be a “hall friendly” adult

– Use effective communication skills

  • Ask, ask, tell

  • Active listening

  • I-messages/Affective statements

– Be an asset building adult
Recognize Mistreatment

- **Exclusion** - target feels... **LEFT OUT**
- **Put-downs** - target feels... **HURT** (emotionally)
- **Intimidation** - target feels... **THREATENED**
- **Unwanted physical contact** - target feels... **VIOLATED**
- **Acts Against Campus** - affect... **EVERYONE**

* **Cyberbullying** - *can include most of the above*
Intervention Skills and Activity

Connect to Correct

1. Connect
2. Share data
3. Ask for information
4. Show empathy (agreement)
5. Name the issue
6. State possible consequences
7. Engage in problem-solving
8. Offer to help
The Student Determinant of Whole School Climate
Leveraging the Power & Potential of Students

• See, hear and know things adults don’t

  (In 88% of bullying incidents, peers are present)

• Can effectively intervene in ways adults can’t

• First to arrive on the scene of mistreatment

• Set the tone and social norms on campus
Fights
Weapons
Gangs
Physical bullying

Unwanted contact
Relational aggression
Exclusion
Put-downs
Rumors
Cyberbullying
Harassment

Reactive
Catch
Discipline
Suspend
Expel

Pro-active
Prevent
Intervene
De-escalate
The Dynamic of Bullying & Other Mistreatment

Targets

Aggressors

Bystanders = 85%

The Passive Majority
Why Don’t Bystanders Get Involved?

Fear of retaliation

Afraid they’ll make things worse

Worry about losing social status

Belief that adults won’t listen

Don’t know what to do or say
Safe School Ambassadors®

A research-based, field-tested program to engage, equip and empower student bystanders to reduce bullying and other forms of mistreatment.
“Alpha” Students

Cliques

Diverse Student Leaders

- Socially-influential / Others follow their lead & model their behaviors
- Loyal / Have a tendency to speak up on behalf of others within their clique
- Outgoing by nature / Highly verbal
Identifying the “Alpha” Leaders

Student and Adult Surveys
Safe School Ambassadors® Training

- Two Days
- On- or Off-Site
- 30 to 40 Diverse Student Leaders
- 4 to 8 Adults
Six Skills for Ambassadors

• Balancing
• Supporting
• Reasoning

• Distracting
• Directing
• Getting Help
Ambassador in Action

Video: De Monte Smith
Ongoing Support & Supervision: *Family Group Meetings*

- Regularly-Scheduled
- Connect & Inspire
- Deepen Skills
- Practice
- Debrief Experiences
- Collect Data
Safe School Ambassadors® Are Active

A minimum of
2 “Actions” per week
x 40 Ambassadors =
80 Actions per week

34 Weeks x 80 Ambassador Actions =
More than 2,700 Actions per school year
### SSA Impact Over Time

**Healdsburg Junior High Discipline Data**

**Safe School Ambassadors 2005-2013**

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Safe School Ambassadors®
Are Effective

A two year study by two different universities found statistically significant evidence of positive impact:

**Suspension rates were 33% lower than prior to SSA implementation** while suspension rates at demographically matched non-SSA control schools increased 10% in the same period.


Based on this study, the Safe School Ambassadors® Program is now listed in SAMHSA’s National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices

Whole School Climate Framework
The Pillars of School Safety

Security

Outside-In Approach

Climate

Inside-Out Approach

Reaction

Prevention
View Our Programs & Services Guide at:
http://community-matters.org/programs-and-services/program-services-guide

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