SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE: A SCAN OF POLICY AND PRACTICE

A Useful Overview of the School Climate and Culture Literature for Those Who Want to Make an Impact

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The Alliance for Education Solutions (AES) is a hybrid 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that develops staff and funds initiatives that seek to improve educational outcomes for generations of young people in core urban areas.

AES is fully committed to a "strengths-based approach" to educational improvement; we have over twenty years of hands-on experience and research-based knowledge that support the efficacy of this approach.

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Introduction

In early 2010, the Alliance for Educational Solutions (AES) embarked on the Climate for Growth Initiative at a large, urban, low-performing high school in California. The Initiative's purpose was to assist the school in building a strong and vibrant school culture and climate to increase the academic and social success of every school student.

To assist this effort, the AES commissioned Dr. Kristi Lee of Seattle University's College of Education to conduct a "policy and practice scan" of school climate and culture, including a review of the professional literature. The AES requested that Dr. Lee specifically answer the following questions:

- To what degree is there awareness and consensus building around the importance of school climate and culture?
- Are other schools moving from talk to action in improving school climate and culture? How explicit are these commitments?
- What have efforts to improve school climate and culture looked like in other schools?
- How have school climate and culture improvement efforts and progress been measured?
- How have other schools involved students in efforts to improve school climate and culture?

The research reveals a growing body of literature addressing all aspects of school climate and culture, reflecting the growing national attention to this dimension of school organization. It also reflects a considerable amount of organizing around the issue of school culture. However, there is very little in the literature about engaging students in improvement efforts.

Although it was commissioned for a specific project, we are making the report available to a wider audience as we believe it is a useful resource in learning about and promoting school climate and culture. AES especially hopes that it will prove helpful in efforts to engage and include students in improving school climate and culture.

Awareness and Consensus on the Importance of School Climate and Culture

To what degree is there awareness and consensus building around the importance of school climate and culture? Based on the research conducted by this author, there appears to be a solid and growing level of awareness and consensus building around the importance of school climate and culture. This is evidenced by three main areas: 1) the number of professional publications of theoretical and research pieces relating to school climate; 2) the efforts at organizing around school climate (the creation of organizations focused on school climate); and 3) the

acknowledgement and recognition of the importance of school climate for our kids at federal, state, and local levels. Each of these areas will be described in detail below.

Professional Publications of Theoretical and Research Pieces Relating to School Climate

There is a large and growing body of publications that address all aspects of school climate and culture. These publications are divided into two types: (1) theoretical publications that define constructs, and (2) research studies that investigate school climate. Examining publications of both types can provide an understanding of the current level of conceptual development of school climate.

Theoretical publications that define constructs: There are several definitions of school climate found in the literature base. The term *school climate* is a broad one that encompasses many aspects of a school environment. A comprehensive definition of school climate has been put forth by Cohen, McCabe, Michelli and Pickeral (2009). These authors stated that school climate "refers to the quality and character of school life. School climate is based on patterns of people's experiences of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures" (p. 180). School climate "has always been, and continues to be, essential to a school's success in educating its children and preparing them for a life beyond its corridors" (Noonan, 2004, p. 61).

Four main constructs of school climate have been identified in the literature. They are (1) safety, (2) teaching and learning, (3) relationships, and (4) environmental-structural (Cohen et al., 2009). A variety of school improvement initiatives fall under these four constructs, including character education, bullying prevention, social and emotional learning, and professional development efforts. It appears that the concept of school climate could be considered an umbrella under which are many avenues to improving a school's environment.

Research studies investigating school climate: In addition to a growing number of theoretical publications focusing on school climate, there are hundreds of published articles describing research studies investigating aspects of school climate. It is clear that school climate as an area of research has grown quickly in the last two decades. In this time period, "researchers and educators have increasingly recognized the importance of K-12 school climate" (Center for Social and Emotional Education [CSEE], 2010, p.1). According to the CSEE (2010), there has been a notable rise in the systematic study of school climate and school effectiveness. This increase in research and study attest to the recognition of school climate as having significant impact on the student experience (2010).

The illustrated impact of a positive school climate from research is profound and varied. While several specific studies will be reviewed below, positive school climate has been shown to result in the following: higher student engagement in school work, higher sense of student competence, reduced achievement inequities, the promotion of skills, knowledge, and dispositions for 21st century learning and life, higher academic achievement in all groups, risk prevention, and increased teacher retention, among others (Special Olympics, n.d.; CSEE and National Center for Learning and Citizenship [NCLC], n.d.). Overall, positive school climate promotes positive development among youth and supports their learning, and "what is clear is that school climate matters" (Cohen et al., 2009, p. 187).

Seeking to develop an understanding of the impact of school climate seems to have grown out of the recognized need for "whole-school reform" (Ross and Lowther, 2003, p. 216) instead of working on isolated pieces of the school experience and environment (i.e. curriculum). School climate is an encompassing term, and an encompassing approach to improving it is has been called for in the literature (2003). Ross and Lowther (2003) stated there are over 300 models of school reform that were funded by the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program by Congress in 1998. Some of these models will be discussed later in this document.

There appears to be a strong consensus in the literature about the great importance and impact of positive school climate, and in addition, school leaders also appear to be very interested in school climate as an area of focus. One study of school leaders by CSEE found that "over 90% of school leaders interviewed indicated that school climate was an area of interest and focus. In fact 82% stated that school climate was an "extremely important" or "very important" topic" (Cohen et al., 2006, p. 196).

Overall, finding from research studies are strikingly in support of a positive school climate being correlated positive experiences and attributes for students. While the purpose of this paper is not to do an extensive review of studies investigating school climate, some studies are particularly relevant in understanding the current status of research on school climate and are described below.

Through a partnership between the Ohio Department of Education and CSEE, a school climate survey was developed and administered to over 70 middle and high schools with over 25,000 student respondents ("Link Between School Climate," 2010). The following findings resulted from the study:

- A strong relationship was found between school climate and school performance. Schools with higher graduation rates and better test scores also had higher climate ratings.

- The relationship between school climate ratings and school performance was even stronger for schools with high rates of impoverished students. This suggests that even in very difficult circumstances, a positive school climate positively impacts student achievement.

- In high schools, graduation rates were stronger with higher school climate ratings. Thus, a positive school environment supports persistence in completing school (2010).

As a result of this study, the Ohio Department of Education developed a comprehensive set of school climate guidelines that include specific benchmarks to guide school districts and leaders (2010).

Another study by Ruus, Veisson, Leino, Ots, Pallas, Sarv and Veisson (2007) was conducted as a route to obtain information about and prevent school drop-out and repeating grades. School climate questionnaires were administered to 7^{th}, 9^{th}, and 12^{th} grade students with the final sample of 3,838 students from 65 different schools. Participants completed surveys focused on a variety of areas including students' academic coping skills, students' evaluation of their own well-being at school, students' perceptions of school climate, and background factors. Overall, it was determined that "it is very important for students that the school emphasizes not only academic achievement, but also humane values, such as caring, self-improvement, security,

and good interpersonal relations" (p. 928). The following specific conclusions were drawn from the data analyses:

- Academic success and prosocial behaviors have a strong positive correlation with positive student coping skills and with students' psychological and physiological well-being.

- Higher academic achievement and prosocial behavior are more likely when students are optimistic about their academic future.

- School climate influences students' sense of school-related optimism. Positive relationships with teachers are especially important in this area.

- In addition to an emphasis on academic achievement, a positive school climate recognizes the importance of 'soft values' such as dignity, equity, and support from others.

Limitations to the study include missing information about response rate and limited information about the instruments used in collecting data. It is unclear whether the final number of surveys completed represents and adequate response rate to draw valid conclusions from the data. In addition, the article lacked information about the design of the some of the school climate instruments used and whether they have been show to be reliable and valid measures. Despite these limitations, this study shows that the school institution, along with students and families, is responsible for creating an environment where students are optimistic, are psychologically and physiologically well, and are given challenging tasks that facilitate self-improvement. This leads to greater academic success. There are many "means under the control of the school which can create conditions to improve students' academic success" (p. 927). Finally, the authors conclude that should be recognized and accepted that "school climate is to a great degree under the control of its pedagogical staff" (p.932).

The potential link between aspects of the school environment and student life satisfaction was examined in a study by Suldo, Shaffer and Riley (2008). Researchers collected data from 321 high school students in a southeastern city on a variety of constructs, including global life satisfaction, personal academic beliefs, attachment to school, school climate, and academic achievement. With the exception of using grade point average as a way to indicate academic achievement, all of the constructs were measured using instruments with established reliability and validity. Parent permission to complete the measures was required and the overall response rate was 31%; the authors stated this is a typical response rate in school-based research requiring parent permission forms. Path analysis was used to attempt to validate a model of the relationships between behavioral, social, and cognitive contexts of school and student life satisfaction. The results of the study showed significant relationships between aspects of school environment and climate and student life satisfaction. The following conclusions were drawn:

- Positive relationships with teachers impacts students; students who perceived more support from teachers had higher levels of life satisfaction.

- A higher level of parent involvement in school is positively correlated with higher student life satisfaction levels.

- School satisfaction was shown to have a positive correlation with higher levels of life satisfaction; this is important because students who are satisfied with their school life are more likely to have prosocial behaviors in the classroom.

- Students who felt more attached to their schools were more likely to have higher levels of global life satisfaction. Students with higher levels of school attachment also had higher grade point averages.

- Personal academic beliefs of students had the strongest positive relationship with life satisfaction. This speaks to the importance of fostering a sense of self-efficacy, motivation to achieve in school, and the ability to self-regulate academic tasks in students (2008).

Corroborating data from parents and teachers could have strengthened the examination of the constructs of the study. Despite this limitation, the results of this study offer an important understanding between students' experiences in school and their global sense of well-being. Greater student life satisfaction is related to greater prosocial behaviors and thus supports the importance of considering students' quality of life along side academic achievement.

Worrell and Hale (2001) examined a sense of hope in the future and school climate as impacts on school dropouts and school graduates. Ninety-seven high school students who had been identified as at-risk participated in the study which was conducted in a small, urban school district in the San Francisco Bay area. The participants were evenly categorized into four groups: those who had dropped out in the two years before the data was collected (retrospective analysis), those who had graduated in the two years before the data was collected (retrospective analysis), those who dropped out in the two years after the data was collected (prospective analysis), and those who graduated in the two years after the data was collected (prospective analysis). Researchers examined how dropouts and graduates from continuation high schools compared in risk and protective factors, as well as a sense of hope for the future. Data was collected on student risk factors, including behavioral, social-emotional, and familial-demographic components, as well as protective factors, including scholastic competence and student self-concept. Student perceptions of school climate were measured by the Instructional Climate Inventory (Braskamp and Maehr, 1998) which focuses on school level and classroom level climate. Finally, data was collected on students' sense of hope for their future college attendance, ability to gain good employment, general life outcome.

The data analysis showed that graduates and dropouts from the two years prior to the data collected (retrospective analysis) varied on their number of risk and protective factors as well as hope for the future.

- Students who dropped out had greater number of risk factors than graduates, with the meaningful predictors of dropping out being attending classes and meaningful engagement with the curriculum

- Students who graduated had more protective factors, including hopeful beliefs in the importance of college and a perception of a positive school climate

- These findings were the result of self-report hindsight on the part of participants and should be viewed with caution for this reason

Graduates and dropouts from the two years after the data collection (prospective analysis) did not differ on risk factors. These two groups did not view school climate differently at the time of the data collection and the presence of a sense of hope for the future at the time of data collection differentiated these two groups.

Limitations to the study included relatively small sample sizes for each group (24 individuals in each cell for analysis) and the lack of information about the reliability and validity of the measure of hope for the future. However, the results of this study suggests that creating a school environment that cultivates hope in the future may offer a protective factor for at-risk students and may increase rates of graduation for this population.

This is just a small sample of the many studies that have demonstrated the impact of positive school climate on student development and well-being. The sheer number of publications on school climate is a powerful indicator of the consensus on the importance of this concept.

Organizing Around School Climate: The Creation of Organizations Focused on School Climate

Another indicator of the growing awareness of the importance of school climate is the amount of organizing around the issue of school climate. In the last few decades, several organizations, centers, and groups have been established that focus on issues related to school climate. These organizations range from national level councils, to university research and policy centers, to private educational consulting firms.

National Level Councils and Organizations

Numerous national organizations are now in existence whose primary foci are improving various aspects of school climate in K-12 education. A list of major organizations with brief descriptions follows:

- *National School Climate Center* (formerly the Center for Social and Emotional Education); www.schoolclimate.org
  Goal/Mission: "promote positive and sustained school climate: a safe, supportive environment the nurtures social and emotional, ethical, and academic skills" ("About Us," para. 1)
  Organizational offerings and services for research:
  - Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI), a valid and reliable measure of school climate. Described more in depth below.
  - School Climate Briefs: Published periodically; summarizes recent school climate research (most recent edition available at http://www.schoolclimate.org/climate/documents/SCBrief_v1n1_Jan2010.pdf)

  Organizational offerings and services for professional development:
  - On-site school climate staff development workshops, keynote addresses on measuring and improving school climate, promoting safe schools, teaching and learning, and promoting healthy relationships in school (comprehensive list available at http://www.schoolclimate.org/programs/pd-workshops.php)

- Summer Institutes offering advanced training in promoting safe, healthy, engaged, and democratic K-12 communities (see http://www.schoolclimate.org/programs/si.php)

Organizational offerings and services for school leaders and policy makers:

- School Climate Implementation Road Map guides and supports school and community leadership teams in the process of measuring and improving school climate. This is described in detail below.
- School Climate Guide for District Policymakers and Educational Leaders assists in beginning to develop or improving upon sound policy and practice for positive school climate (available at http://www.schoolclimate.org/climate/districtguide.php)

Organizational offerings and services for consultation:

- Have worked with a wide range of schools to help with implementation, maintenance, and improvement of school climate (see http://www.schoolclimate.org/programs/consultation.php)

❖ *National School Climate Council;* http://www.schoolclimate.org/about/council.php

Background: Formed in 2007 by the Education Commission of the States and the National School Climate Center

Goal/Mission: narrow the gap between school climate research and school climate policy, practice, and teacher education in order to promote and support healthy student development and learning

The Council is a "freestanding, non-partisan group of policy and practice leaders . . . involved with a range of educational, policy, collaborative, and advocacy efforts" (http://www.schoolclimate.org/about/council.php, para 3).

Organizational offerings:

- The School Climate Challenge: Narrowing the Gap between School Climate Research and School Climate Policy, Practice Guidelines and Teacher Education Policy. A publication that revealed unjust gaps between school climate research and practice (available at http://www.schoolclimate.org/climate/documents/school-climate-challenge.pdf)
- National School Climate Standards: a set of standards and indicators for positive school climate. Described in detail below.

❖ *Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning*, www.casel.org

Goal/Mission: To promote children's success in school and life, to establish social and emotional learning as an essential part of education

Organization offerings and services for research

- Database of publications, including research studies, on benefits of social and emotional learning (see http://casel.org/research/publications/)
- Compendium of social and emotional learning assessment measures (see http://casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/Compendium_SELTools.pdf)
- CASEL State Scan: a nation-wide review of state educational standards related to social and emotional learning from preschool to high school. Results by state are available at http://casel.org/research/sel-in-your-state/
- List of recommended tools for measuring school climate (see http://casel.org/in-schools/assessment/school-climate/ for list)

Organizational offerings and services for professional development (see http://casel.org/in-schools/professional-development/)

- Training programs for school teams in all aspects of SEL programs in schools
- Generally work at the district level instead of individual school level
- These services are often funded by state departments of education or district offices

Organization offerings and services for educational leaders

- Safe and Sound: An Educational Leader's Guide to Evidence-Based SEL programs. A guide that reviews 80 SEL programs currently in use (available at http://casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/1A_Safe__Sound.pdf)
- Numerous other publications that can serve as guides to SEL creation, implementation, improvement, and measurement at school and district levels (see http://casel.org/in-schools/implementation/)

Organizational offerings and services for advocacy and policy

- Guidance on policy change at a state and national level (see http://casel.org/policy-advocacy/)

❖ *Character Education Partnerships*; www.character.org

Background: A national umbrella organization that is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization coalition committed to fostering effective character education in schools

Goal/Mission: Quality character education in all schools, building a nation of ethical citizens who pursue excellence in all areas of their lives (see http://www.character.org/visionmission)

Organizational offerings and services for research

- List of publications, including research studies, that have focused on different aspects of character education (see http://www.character.org/reports)

Organizational offerings and services for professional development

- Focus on preparing educators and school leaders to create safe, healthy schools that promote healthy growth and development
- Customized based on school needs (see http://www.character.org/profdevelopment)
- National Forum on Character Education: Annual national conference focused on character development

Organizational offerings and services for educational leaders

- The Eleven Principles Sourcebook: a resource guide to assist in comprehensive integration of character education throughout a school (see http://www.character.org/elevenprinciples)

University Centers

In addition to national organizations focused on improving school climate, several universities have research and policy centers investigating this issue. Below is a list of a few:

❖ *The Alliance for the Study of School Climate at California State University, Los Angeles*; http://www.calstatela.edu/centers/schoolclimate/

Goal/Mission: help schools improve the quality of their climate through research resources and consultation services.

- List of recent school climate research (see http://www.calstatela.edu/centers/schoolclimate/research/#assc_research)

- Developed the School Climate Assessment Instruments, (see http://www.calstatela.edu/centers/schoolclimate/assessment/), described in detail below
- Customized professional development and training for school change process (see http://www.calstatela.edu/centers/schoolclimate/services/services.html)

❖ *The Center for Research in School Safety, School Climate, and Classroom Management at Georgia State University*; http://education.gsu.edu/schoolsafety/
Goal/Mission: coordinate and support scholarly efforts to gain a fuller understanding of the causal factors and preventative interventions affecting school safety, school climate, and classroom management.
- Information on and access to recent research and publications related to school safety, climate and classroom management (see http://education.gsu.edu/schoolsafety/2302.html)
- Listing of related organizational websites (see http://education.gsu.edu/schoolsafety/2882.html)

❖ *Michigan State University*; http://outreach.msu.edu/bpbriefs/issues/brief31.pdf
- Best Practices Brief: School Climate and Learning, a publication describing school culture and climate with information on assessing school climate. Available at http://outreach.msu.edu/bpbriefs/issues/brief31.pdf

❖ *The Education Alliance at Brown University*;
http://www.alliance.brown.edu/ae_dlearner_isc.php
Goal/Mission: promotes educational change to provide all students with equitable opportunities to succeed. Particular advocacy for groups who have had limited access to quality education
- Provide assistance and consultation in the school reform process to state and district level leaders and continuing education for educators
- Design and conduct educationally related research including program evaluation

Private Educational Consultation Firms

There are a host of private educational consulting firms. These are companies that provide consulting, training, research, and evaluation services to individual school, school districts, state departments of education, the Unites Stated Department of Education, and even departments of education in other countries. Here is a list of seven with links to their websites:

1. Cascade Educational Consultants: http://cascadeeducationalconsultants.com/
2. The Edventure Group: www.theedventuregroup.org
3. MPR Associates, Inc.: www.mprinc.com
4. JMH Consulting: www.jmhconsulting.com
5. Education First Consulting: www.educationfirstconsulting.com
6. Educators for Social Responsibility: www.ersnational.org
7. Total Educational Systems Support: www.tesscg.com

Acknowledgement and Recognition of the Importance of School Climate at Federal, State, and Local Levels

One way to determine the perceived level of importance of school climate is to determine who is talking about it and with what level of seriousness. How high up in our educational system does this discussion reach? Another indicator of the perceived importance of school climate is whether there is support for improvement efforts beyond just talk, including financial support. Where funds flow is an important indicator of what is valued.

Federal

The discussion about the importance of a positive and healthy school climate has risen all the way to the federal level. It appears that there not only verbal, but also financial support for school climate change efforts. The United States Department of Education Information Resources Management Strategy Plan for fiscal year 2010-2014 has an explicit focus on school climate improvement. This Plan seeks to reach the goal of improving student achievement by intentionally seeking to bring all students to grade level in reading and mathematics by 2014. This goal can be in part achieved through seeking to promote safe, disciplined, and drug-free learning environments by identifying and distributing information about the most effective practices that create a safe, disciplined, and drug-free school climate (2010) (see http://www2.ed.gov/about/reports/annual/ocio/irmstratplan2010.pdf).

Federal Funding Sources

There are explicit commitments from the federal government to improve the climate in our nation's schools through funding change efforts. Arnie Duncan has proposed "a $245 million increase over 2010 for a total of $1.8 billion dollars to improve school climate, student health, student safety, parental engagement, and community involvement" (para. 10) (see http://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/secretary-arne-duncans-testimony-house-appropriations-committee-presidents-proposals-2). This commitment to improve school climate will be funded through a variety of sources. Several at the national level are described below:

- *21st Century Community Learning Centers*: fedgov.grant

  "This program supports the creation of community learning centers that provide academic enrichment opportunities during non-school hours for children, particularly students who attend high-poverty and low-performing schools. The program helps students meet state and local student standards in core academic subjects, such as reading and math; offers students a broad array of enrichment activities that can complement their regular academic programs; and offers literacy and other educational services to the families of participating children." (see http://www2.ed.gov/programs/21stcclc/index.html)

- *School Improvement Grants*:

  "In conjunction with Title I funds for school improvement reserved under section 1003(a) of the ESEA, School Improvement Grants under section 1003(g) of the ESEA are used to improve student achievement in Title I schools identified for improvement, corrective

action, or restructuring so as to enable those schools to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) and exit improvement status. The Department of Education Appropriations Act, 2010, provided $546 million for School Improvement Grants in fiscal year (FY) 2010. In addition, the U.S. Department of Education (Department) estimates that, collectively, States have carried over approximately $825 million in FY 2009 SIG funds that will be combined with FY 2010 SIG funds, for a total of nearly $1.4 billion that will be awarded by States as part of their FY 2010 SIG competitions." (see http://www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/index.html)

❖ *Investing in Innovation Funds*:

The Investing in Innovation Fund, established under section 14007 of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), provides funding to support (1) local educational agencies (LEAs), and (2) nonprofit organizations in partnership with (a) one or more LEAs or (b) a consortium of schools. The purpose of this program is to provide competitive grants to applicants with a record of improving student achievement and attainment in order to expand the implementation of, and investment in, innovative practices that are demonstrated to have an impact on improving student achievement or student growth, closing achievement gaps, decreasing dropout rates, increasing high school graduation rates, or increasing college enrollment and completion rates. These grants will (1) allow eligible entities to expand and develop innovative practices that can serve as models of best practices, (2) allow eligible entities to work in partnership with the private sector and the philanthropic community, and (3) identify and document best practices that can be shared and taken to scale based on demonstrated success. (see http://www2.ed.gov/programs/innovation/index.html)

❖ *Promise Neighborhoods*:

Promise Neighborhoods, established under the legislative authority of the Fund for the Improvement of Education Program (FIE), provides funding to support eligible entities, including (1) nonprofit organizations, which may include faith-based nonprofit organizations, and (2) institutions of higher education. The program is intended to significantly improve the educational and developmental outcomes of all children in our most distressed communities, including rural and tribal communities, and to transform those communities by:

- supporting efforts to improve child outcomes and ensure that the outcomes are communicated and analyzed on an ongoing basis by leaders and members of the community;
- identifying and increasing the capacity of eligible entities that are focused on achieving results and building a college-going culture in the neighborhood;
- building a continuum of academic programs and family and community supports, from the cradle through college to career, with a strong school or schools at the center;
- integrating programs and breaking down agency "silos" so that solutions are implemented effectively and efficiently across agencies;

- supporting the efforts of eligible entities, working with local governments, to build the infrastructure of policies, practices, systems, and resources needed to sustain and "scale up" proven, effective solutions across the broader region beyond the initial neighborhood; and
- learning about the overall impact of Promise Neighborhoods and about the relationship between particular strategies in Promise Neighborhoods and student outcomes, including a rigorous evaluation of the program.

The Department believes that to effectively improve the outcomes for children in distressed communities, schools, academic programs, and family and community supports must include the following core features:

- The capacity to collect, analyze, and use data to evaluate the success of their efforts.
- Close integration so that time and resource gaps that contribute to children missing academic and developmental milestones do not occur.
- A leader and an organization that can engage the community and are accountable for results.
- A "place-based" approach, which leverages investments by focusing resources in targeted places, drawing on the compounding effect of well-coordinated actions.

The Promise Neighborhoods program will award one-year grants to support the development of a plan to implement a Promise Neighborhood that includes the core features described above. At the conclusion of the planning grant period, grantees should have a feasible plan to implement a continuum of solutions that will significantly improve results for children in the community being served.

In subsequent years, contingent on the availability of funds, the Department intends to conduct competitions for implementation grants, as well as competitions for new planning grants. While all eligible entities will be able to apply for implementation grants, eligible entities that have effectively carried out the planning activities described in the Notice Inviting Applications, whether independently or with a Promise Neighborhoods planning grant, are likely to be well positioned with the plan, commitments, data, and demonstrated organizational leadership and capacity necessary to develop a quality application for an implementation grant. (See http://www2.ed.gov/programs/promiseneighborhoods/index.html)

❖ *Race to the Top Funds:*

Through Race to the Top, we are asking States to advance reforms around four specific areas:

- Adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy;
- Building data systems that measure student growth and success, and inform teachers and principals about how they can improve instruction;
- Recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially where they are needed most; and
- Turning around our lowest-achieving schools

> Awards in Race to the Top will go to States that are leading the way with ambitious yet achievable plans for implementing coherent, compelling, and comprehensive education reform. Race to the Top winners will help trail-blaze effective reforms and provide examples for States and local school districts throughout the country to follow as they too are hard at work on reforms that can transform our schools for decades to come. The grant process for this historic $4 billion program has been strengthened to ensure maximum integrity and transparency. (See http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/index.html)

State of California

In 2010, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell recognized the great importance of school climate as a tool for closing the achievement gap (see http://www.cde.ca.gov/nr/ne/yr10/yr10rel16.asp). In an effort to help schools improve their school climates, he made a new resource available called *The Workbook for Improving School Climate & Closing the Achievement Gap*. This resource is intended to guide schools in closing the achievement gap in racial minority groups, special education students, and children of migrant families. The *Workbook* is included in this document in Appendix A.

The *Workbook* is a companion to data collected in two state wide studies: (1) the California School Climate Survey, which is an "important component of a comprehensive, coordinated effort by the California Department of Education to help schools foster positive learning and teaching environments that promote academic achievement and youth well-being. The survey helps identify fundamental learning barriers and assess the need for learning and teaching supports" (Wested, 2011, para. 1); and (2) the California Healthy Kids Survey which "enables districts and schools to compare both student and staff data" (para. 1). The survey is supported by a wide range of technical assistance, guides, and trainings for administering the survey and using the data (see http://cscs.wested.org/about).

These measurement and guidance tools have the potential to be extremely helpful in understanding the both current school climate and student health and wellness challenges in the state of California, and in determining an improvement process for specific schools.

Local: Sacramento City School District

The recognition of the importance of school climate is also occurring at the level of the Sacramento School District. In July of 2006, Superintendent M. Magdalena Carrillo Mejia stated "We are beginning to see early signs that the redesign effort is beginning to bear fruit. Those signs include greater 9th grade retention, better school climate and more students passing the exit exam on their first attempt as sophomores. Our students are also benefiting from an increase of career and technical preparation classes that tie the classroom to future careers and jobs. We also have more community partners engaged as mentors and, providing internships and other resources for our students and schools" (para. 8) (see http://www.scusd.edu/Superintendent/Pages/SuperintendentsMessageJul2006.aspx).

The current Strategic Plan (2010-2014) addresses many aspects of school climate, including equity in learning across all racial and ability groups, family and community

engagement in schools, and putting children's interest first in considering decisions and program design. This document can be found in Appendix B.

At the high school in focus, one short section of their yearly accountability report focuses on a "climate for learning" but seems to not be a comprehensive examination of school climate. Whether or not the school has an intentional, focused, and collaboratively agreed upon definition and process for school climate improvement in unclear (see http://sacramentocity.schoolwisepress.com/home/site.aspx?entity=20392&year=2010&locale=en-US).

Moving from Talk to Action in Improving School Climate and Culture

Are other schools moving from talk to action in improving school climate and culture? How explicit are these commitments? The short answer to this question is yes, other schools appear to be moving into action to improve school climate. There are two main sources of evidence of this movement: state level data and studies of individual schools engaged in climate change efforts. These two areas will be described below.

State Level Data

One way to determine whether other schools are moving from talk to action is to determine the scope of school climate improvement efforts. How widespread is this movement across the country? How many state-level departments of education are engaged in school climate change efforts? A study by Cohen et al. (2009) begins to answer that question. The researchers conducted a systematic policy scan of all fifty state departments of education to determine whether and how states had school climate written into state level policies around 1) recognizing and defining school climate, 2) measurement of school climate, 3) existence of climate-related leadership at the state level, 4) inclusion of school climate in general accountability systems, and 5) whether climate-related technical assistance was part of the state's educational accountability system. Overall, they determined that "a growing number of states and district leaders are considering sound methods of . . . improving school climate" (Cohen, et al., 2009, p. 20/28). Specific findings in each of the five areas listed above were reported.

1) School climate recognized and defined: Only six states had clear definitions of school climate that included subjective experiences of school climate and specific characteristics that could be put into practice through program goals or measurements. This could be perhaps because of a lack of a widely agreed upon definition of school climate.

2) Measurement of school climate: Several states had school climate measurement methods such as informal checklists and surveys or criterion-referenced assessments. However, only one state used a measurement tool that had been show through research to be both reliable and valid. There are many valid and reliable measurement tools (see answer to question 4); the broad use of untested measurement tools is distressing.

3) Climate-related leadership at state level: Only nine states had state-level positions explicitly dedicated to state school climate issues, efforts and policies. Fifteen states

included school climate indicators in the standards for their school leaders. This area is underdeveloped.

4) Inclusion of school climate in accountability systems: Twenty two states included indicators of school climate into their accountability standards including quality and improvement standards. However, the incorporation of school climate indicators varied widely among states and was done at different depths.

5) Availability of technical assistance to support school climate improvements: Very little information was available in this area. Some state policies did discuss linking technical assistance to individual schools for whom school climate was problematic as evidenced by data from school climate measurement efforts. However, without the use of reliable and valid measurements, how can accurate data on school climate really be determined? (Cohen, et al., 2009)

While there is some progress across the country in state level recognition of the important of school climate and its inclusion in state level policies, much progress still needs to be made to have comprehensive, explicit commitments to improving school climate from the state level.

Studies of Individual Schools

The answer to the second part of Question 2—*How explicit are these commitments*?—comes, in part, by examining the comprehensiveness of school climate improvement efforts. There are many studies reporting how individual schools and school districts have engaged in school climate change efforts. This is more evidence that individual schools are moving from talk to action on school climate. While there are likely hundreds of articles describing various approaches to and models of school climate improvement, eight studies are reviewed here in order to determine the comprehensiveness of various school climate efforts. They will be described briefly here and described in greater detail in answer to Research Question 3 (What have efforts to improve school climate and culture looked like in other schools?). Overall, schools varied greatly comprehensiveness of school climate improvement methods, programs, and plans interventions. They tended to fall into two categories, 1) focusing on a few components of the school environment, processes, or relationships, or 2) whole school reform programs

Some schools focused on specific areas of the school with the goal of improving the overall school climate. Examples these included facilitating a better working relationship between teachers and administrators (Rhodes, Camic, Milburn, & Lowe, 2009), starting a meditation and mentoring program between middle school children and college students (Cassinerio and Lane-Garon, 2006), changing principal leadership styles to change school climate (Pepper and Thomas, 2000), and adding a school nurse and a school social worker to the school staff (Anderson, Thomas, Moore and Kool, 2008). These will be described in detail in Research Question 4 (How have school climate and culture improvement efforts and progress been measured?).

There are many whole-school reform models described in the literature (Ross and Lowther, 2003). Four examples reviewed include the Talent Development Model with Career Academies (McPartland, Balfanz, Jordan and Legters, 1998), Project ACHIEVE (Kilian, Fish

and Maniago, 2006), Comer School Development Program (Emmons, Efimba and Hagopian, 1998), and Co-nect School Reform Design (Ross and Lowther, 2003). These will be described in detail in Research Question 4.

While schools can engage in improving components of the school or in whole school reform, Ross and Lowther (2003) write that "reforms done piecemeal, one isolated program as a time, were not likely to bring about positive change" (p. 216). Whole school reform models appear to be more powerful in making the level of changes needed in Hiram Johnson High School.

Current Efforts to Improve School Culture and Climate

What have efforts to improve school climate and culture looked like in other schools? Efforts at improving school climate span a continuum of addressing individual pieces of a school environment to recreating the entire system upon which a school functions. This section will describe eight different models that schools have employed to improve school climate. These range from individual aspects of a school to whole-school reform efforts. After the various specific models are described, more general methods, tools and directions for engaging in school climate change efforts will be described.

School Climate Change through Individual Aspects of a School Environment

Several studies in the school climate literature describe school climate change efforts that sought to modify one or two aspects of the school environment. These varied widely and touched on nearly every aspect of a school. Four of these change efforts are described in detail here.

- **Improving Middle School Climate through Teacher-Centered Change** (Rhodes, Camic, Milburn and Lowe, 2009)

What type of school? Public school

What age group of kids? Middle school and junior high

What was the planning stage like? During the first three months of the Teacher Empowerment Project, teachers, administrators, and university researchers engaged in a series of roundtable discussions and faculty meetings designed to identify issues and problems at their school. Researchers did not enter the planning stage with preconceived ideas about what needed to be changed; instead they worked to facilitate dialogue and decision making with teachers and administrators. This resulted in different interventions at each school that were relevant for that school.

What stakeholder groups were involved? Teachers, administrators, and university researchers.

Who lead the process? The process was a collaborative effort between teachers, administrators, and researchers. However, the emphasis was on teachers leading the change processes.

What exactly was done? This study engaged three middle schools in the Teacher Empowerment Project. At each school teachers, administrators, and university researchers worked

collaboratively to determine the issues and problems in need of addressing. Problems were prioritized and interventions aimed at addressing the high priority problems were developed by Teacher Working Groups. Teacher Working Groups, consisting of 4 to 22 members, developed and then presented plans to improve the identified issues. Upon approval from school administrators for the improvement plans, teachers implemented the plans. During this study, 32 proposals for school improvement were designed across the three experimental schools. Researchers assisted in improvement plan development and implementation, including offering guidance for research designs so meaningful data could be collected from the process.

Examples of improvement projects included increasing teacher involvement in after school activities, integrating arts into the curriculum, bullying prevention, creating dialogue between parents and teachers, and a wellness plan for teachers.

How long was the intervention? 5 years

How was it measured? Three schools engaged in the Teacher Empowerment Project; two schools served as comparison groups. Data was collected for four years following the initial planning and implementation year. Both qualitative and quantitative data was collected from teachers, students, administrators, and parents.

Quantitative measurements used included the Organizational Health Inventory for Middle Schools (for teachers) and the Perceived School Climate Scale (for students).

While the authors noted that interviews and focus groups were conducted with teachers, students, administrators, and parents, none of the qualitative data was reported in the article.

What was the outcome of the measurements? The Teacher Empowerment Project intervention successfully engaged teachers in the change process and improved teacher perception of the school environment. Statistically significant improvements were made in teacher perception of administrative health, and of principal support. Statistically significant results were also reported in improvement of indicator for students. For five indicators of school performance (teacher support, commitment, student decision-making, innovation, and positive practices), treatment schools were significantly higher than control schools.

What changes were made based on the outcome measures? This is somewhat unclear. After the research project and attending grant had ended, many of the activities and costs associated with the Teacher Working Groups initiatives were assumed by the school district. This indicates continued support of the initiated change processes. Whether the schools continued to use this model, or whether the model was scaled up to other schools is unclear.

How was it funded? The research project and interventions begun by the Teacher Working Groups appear to have been funded by an external grant, although the source and the parameters of the grant were not discussed in the article. The grant covered some of the costs that were associated with individual interventions designed by the Teacher Working Groups.

Recommendations based on this study: Collaborative efforts increase buy in and ultimate success of change efforts. Customizing improvement efforts for individual schools is likely going to result in a better outcome than attempting to implement a predetermined plan that is not created for the individual school. Teacher-led improvement efforts can significantly improve

school climate both for teachers and students. Teachers should be considered a critical stakeholder in the change process. This means administrators will need to develop more of a bottom-up leadership style as opposed to a top-down style.

- **Changing School Climate One Mediator at a Time: Year-One Analysis of a School-Based Mediation Program (Cassinerio & Lane-Garon, 2006).**

What type of school? Urban public school

What age group of kids? Middle school

What was the planning stage like? University partners conducted a survey of school staff to determine school climate goals. Because of a felt need to increase the school's sense of safety and friendliness, stakeholders decided a conflict resolution program at the school would improve the school environment. A team including teachers, university mentors, and project coordinators worked to establish a peer mediation program. Neither students at the school nor university students were involved in the planning stage.

What stakeholder groups were involved? Teachers, administrators, university partners, university students, school students.

Who lead the process? A collaborative team of school staff and university partners.

What exactly was done? Twenty-nine school students were trained in the Mediator Mentor methods. Twenty student teachers from the partner university taught the curriculum to middle school students. The training session was 10 hours broken into two, five hour days. One day was at the university and one was at the school. The lessons were derived from two curricula including *Building a Peaceful Community* (Lane-Garon, Nelsen and McWhirter, 1997) and *Community Boards of San Francisco's School Initiative Mediator Training* (San Francisco Community Boards, 1999). University students continued to volunteer at the school (through a service learning experience) with a focus on the Mediator Mentoring program.

How long was the intervention? This study reported data from the end of first year of the intervention, although it appeared the intervention would be continuing into successive years.

How was it measured? University researchers measured differences in students who were in the Mediator Mentors program and a control group of students who were not. Researchers conducted pre and post test measures on a series of variables, including empathy and perspective taking, perceptions of school climate, and conflict positive and negative behaviors.

What was the outcome of the measurements? Results indicated significant gains in empathy and perspective taking, significant gains in perceptions of school climate, and a significant increase in positive conflict strategies in the Mediator Mentor students. The method for measuring school climate was not reported and is unclear.

What changes were made based on the outcome measures? The positive results provided grounds for an argument to train more students in the Mediator Mentor program, as well as adding more components to the intervention such as parent education groups around conflict mediation. Whether or not this actually occurred is unclear and not reported in the study's article.

How was it funded? This is also unclear in the article. The university students' involvement in the Mediator Mentors program was unpaid volunteer work and was connected to university service learning. Whether or how university faculty might have been compensated for their work on the program was not stated.

Recommendations based on this study: The Mediator Mentor program seems to have promise in creating a more positive school climate for those who participate in the training program. This would be worth consideration including in a school climate improvement effort.

- **Making a Change: The Effects of the Leadership Role on School Climate** (Pepper and Thomas, 2002)

What type of school? Urban, low income with approximately 400 students

What age group of kids? Kindergarten through fifth grade

What was the planning stage like? The principal of the school spent time engaging in personal reflection and study on different leadership styles. The conclusion of the reflection and research was that a dramatic change in leadership style was needed to improve the school environment. The planning included personal preparation for the change in leadership style on the part of the school principal. It does not appear that the principal discussed the change with any other school stakeholders.

What stakeholder groups were involved? Affected groups included school staff, students, and parents.

Who lead the process? The principal and eventually other teachers who espoused the lead management concepts put forth by Glasser (1992).

What exactly was done? The primary intervention was a dramatic change in the leadership style espoused by the principal. After much reflection on the increasing low staff morale, low achievement, and high levels of student discipline problems, the principal decided an intentional shift from an authoritarian style to one that followed Glasser's (1992) concepts of lead management and positive learning environments.

How long was the intervention? It appears the change process took about three years.

How was it measured? Changes in student problem behavior, staff turnover and improvements, standardized testing scores were examined.

What was the outcome of the measurements? Over the four year time period described in the study, there was a 20% reduction in disciplinary action against students. Standardized test scores increased 3%, and many teachers moved on to leadership positions themselves.

What changes were made based on the outcome measures? There was no formal measurement of school climate. However, as a result of the positive leadership style, some teachers in the school adopted lead management principles that improved their classrooms as well.

How was it funded? It does not appear that there was any funding that prompted this change or that sustained it. The principal reported receiving some professional development on lead management, but it is unclear how this was supported financially.

Recommendations based on this study: A positive, collaborative leadership style can positively impact relationships within a school, student behavior, and student achievement. Promoting positive leadership both within the administration of a school and also within the classroom may be a route to better school climate.

Improvements in school climate associated with enhanced health and welfare services for students (Anderson, Thomas, Moore and 2008).

What type of school? Low socioeconomic, high minority students in New Zealand

What age group of kids? High school

What was the planning stage like? This is unclear in the article. It appears that the decision to engage in the intervention came from the highest levels of educational policy making—the government of New Zealand. It was unclear if or how individual schools engaged in discussions about planning.

What stakeholder groups were involved? School nurses, school social workers, Ministry of Education.

Who lead the process? The leadership behind the intervention appears to have come from the Ministry of Education (federal) level. There was no discussion in the article of how individual schools were engaged in the intervention process outside describing the duties of the school nurses and social workers.

What exactly was done? The focus was on meeting basic health and welfare needs of students while also improving academic outcomes and school climate. School nurses and school social workers were placed in nine schools to co-locate health, social, and educational services for young people within the schools. Social workers provided services such as individual casework, working with students and families to address students' behavioral and relationship issues, or with family budgeting issues. The school social worker was not confined to the school and would do work in the community collaborating with other agencies and families to increase student attendance and forge bonds between schools, families, and communities. Some of the social workers ran psychosocial groups on self-esteem, social skills, or sexual health of students. The school nurses provided basic health services, although these services were not described in depth.

How long was the intervention? The pilot stage of this initiative, which was reported in this study, was three years.

How was it measured? Students' perceptions of school climate outcomes were measured by a 25-item questionnaire that was a modified version of one used by the New Zealand Ministry of Education. School staff members' perceptions of school climate were measured by qualitative semi-structured interviews and the School Level Environment Questionnaire (Fisher and Fraser, 1991).

What was the outcome of the measurements? Results of the data collection indicated significant improvements in staff members' perceptions of school climate as a result of the intervention, when compared with a control group of schools. While student perception of school climate increased on some of the subscales of the student school climate measure (Satisfaction with School, Support for Achievement, and Support for Ethnic Diversity), there was no significant difference in overall school climate scores for students.

What changes were made based on the outcome measures? This was not addressed in the research article. Overall, the pilot project of including school social workers and nurses on the school staff was deemed a success, but it was unclear if intervention would continue.

How was it funded? The new school nurse and social worker positions were funded through the Healthy Community Schools Initiative from the Ministry of Education in New Zealand.

Recommendations based on this study: Providing for students' basic social and health needs appears to create a better school climate for school staff members as well as increasing some aspects of student school climate perceptions. Incorporating this role into schools could help improve the overall experience and environment of a school.

- **The School Transformed: The Case of Norman S. Weir** (Emmons, Efimba and Hagopian, 1998)

What type of school? Urban, low income, highly diverse school.

What age group of kids? Grades 1 through 8.

What was the planning stage like? The school described in this study was one of the four lowest achieving schools in its school district. Because of this, it was offered the opportunity and the resources to restructure the school in order to increase student achievement. A team of university partners from Columbia University Teachers College presented five different whole-school reform designs to a team of parents, school staff, and community members from this school. The team decided upon the Comer School Development Program (Comer, Haynes, Joyner and Ben-Avie, 1996). School staff and parents were trained in this program model and were organized into three different planning and steering committees (the School Planning and Management Team, the Student and Staff Support Team, and the Parent Team). This model is a highly collaborative model with broad representation from stakeholder groups and shared ownership over decision making. Seven committees were developed to guide all the aspects of the school environment (School Climate Committee, Grants Committee, Parent Committee, Staff Development Committee, Public Relations Committee, Fund-Raising Committee, and the Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Committee). Each member of the school staff was on a committee and every committee had a member who was a parent.

What stakeholder groups were involved? School staff including administration and teachers, parents, community members, students, university partners.

Who lead the process? This was a collaborative process, but was conducted through the leadership of the school principal. The university partners from Columbia served as facilitators, mentors, guides, and consultants.

What exactly was done? The leadership, planning, and processes in the school were completely redesigned around the Team and Committee concepts.

How long was the intervention? The School Development Program was rolled out over three years, with modifications to the process made along the way to improve the program's functioning and success.

How was it measured? No quantitative measures of school climate were taken. The success of the intervention was determined by increased levels of student achievement, qualitative data from teachers and students, and the increased level of parental involvement.

What was the outcome of the measurements? Overall, students made huge gains in reading and math levels during the three year time period. In reading, the school went from having no students rated at the highest level of reading competency to 45.5% of students testing into the highest reading level on state level achievement tests. In math, the school went from having no students testing into the highest levels of math competency to 18.2% reaching the highest levels of math on state math achievement tests.

While systematic qualitative data was not collected and reported, there was anecdotal evidence in the article about the increased school climate for both students and teachers at the school. Teachers reported that students engaged in their education at higher levels, that the school felt safe and caring, and that teachers had developed high expectations for the students, despite challenging life circumstances. Students reported higher self-esteem and self-efficacy in school. They reported feeling safer and more engaged.

What changes were made based on the outcome measures? While not described in detail, it appears that there was a constant process of monitoring the progress with modifications made as needed throughout the change process. As a result of student feedback, students became more involved in the planning and change process. Students started a student council and began to be represented on committees.

How was it funded? The intervention was funded through the State of New Jersey Department of Education. The opportunity was given to this school because of its low achievement status.

Recommendations based on this study: The Student Development Program was comprehensive while flexible enough to address the particular challenges facing the school. The whole-school reform approach seems to be more capable of making sweeping reforms in school climate.

- **Making Schools Safe: A Systems-Wide School Intervention to Increase Student Prosocial Behaviors and Enhance School Climate** (Kilian, Fish, and Maniago, 2006)

What type of school? Suburban low income, highly diverse elementary school adjacent to a large urban area. Identified for intervention because of high rates of problem behavior.

What age group of kids? Third through sixth grade.

What was the planning stage like? Increases in disciplinary problems, suspension, and bullying behavior in the two years prior to the implementation prompted the change process. The Safe Schools Committee was established to determine solutions to these problems and to create a more positive school climate. This committee was made up of mental health professionals, general and special educators, and administrators and was tasked with deciding on a school-wide reform program that focused on school safety and climate. The committee reviewed several programs and decided on the Project ACHIEVE Social Skills Program (Knoff, 2000).

What stakeholder groups were involved in the planning? School staff, including teachers and administrators, and mental health professionals.

Who lead the process? The Safe Schools Committee which was made up of mental health professionals, general and special educators, and administrators.

What exactly was done? The Project ACHIEVE Social Skills Program is a cognitive-behavioral program whose purpose is to teach children how to manage their own behavior. Twenty skills are taught in four different areas: prerequisite skills, interpersonal skills, problem-solving skills, and conflict resolution skills. A five step process is taught to school children to help them learn to verbalize and implement the skills:

1. Stop and Think
2. Are you going to make a Good Choice or a Bad Choice?
3. What are your Choices or Steps?
4. Do it!
5. Good job!

Teaching the skills and the five step "Stop and Think" process is guided by a training manual. The implementation of the safe school intervention occurred in six stages: organization, training, implementation, reinforcement, data collection, and outcomes. School staff who would implement, reinforce, or support the intervention were trained in the model, including teachers, administrators, mental health professionals, parents, aids, bus drivers, custodians, lunchroom and office staff. During the intervention stage, the social skills were taught in individual classrooms and in school assemblies. Students role-played the skills, and watched older students implementing the skills. Reinforcement occurred through the intervention and included giving tangible reinforcement (pencils, food, etc.) and verbal reinforcement for students who made good choices.

How long was the intervention? The entire process occurred over two to three years, including the planning and organization stage.

How was it measured? Data was collected before and after the intervention. Qualitative and quantitative data was collected focusing on school climate, school attitudes, student conduct, interpersonal interactions, conflict resolution, and academic progress. Quantitative data included behavior checklists, surveys, discipline referrals, and other data points. There was no specific measure of school climate that was identified; instead measurement of school climate seems to have occurred within other surveys that were developed by the researchers. No data was presented on reliability or validity of school climate measurements.

What was the outcome of the measurements? There were several positive changes in the school as a result of the intervention. They included consistent decreases in undesirable student behavior demonstrated by lower numbers of suspensions, trips to the administrations offices, and decreased bullying incidents. While the quantitative data failed to show any changes in school climate, qualitative data indicated that there were changes in attitudes toward school climate. The research stated they believed the changes in school climate were "sufficiently substantial" (p. 26). Standardized test scores improved in the school over the time of the intervention as well.

What changes were made based on the outcome measures? This was not addressed in the article. It was not made clear if use of the ACHIEVE program would continue after the initial intervention period.

How was it funded? Funding was provided by the Stated Education Department. It was not clear why the grant was given to this school, but likely had to do with its low achievement status.

Recommendations based on this study: Focusing on social skills and interpersonal interactions can serve to improve a host of school issues, including problematic behavior, and school climate. This important element should be considered when designing a school change process. It was considered important that ALL school personnel were included in training and provided support for the ACHIEVE concepts.

- **Improving Climate and Achievement in a Troubled Urban High School Through the Talent Development Model** (McPartland, Balfanz, Jordan and Legters, 1998)

What type of school? Large, nonselective urban school in Baltimore with overall low socioeconomic status students and two-thirds minority students.

What age group of kids? Ninth through 12th graders.

What was the planning stage like? The planning phase of the whole-school reform process lasted a year and included many of the school staff. The staff was approached by a team from Johns Hopkins and Howard University's Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk with the goal of implementing the Talent Development Model with Career-Focused Academies in the High School. The school welcomed the opportunity and spent a year in training, planning, and preparation for the implementation of the plan.

What stakeholder groups were involved? School staff including teachers and administrators. Staff from Johns Hopkins and Howard University. It was unclear how parents, students, or community members were involved in the planning and implementation process.

Who lead the process? A team made up of a new school principal and other school leaders and staff from the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at risk mostly lead the change process. School staff members were also engaged in discussions about the serious problems facing the school and possible solutions.

What exactly was done? The large school was divided into smaller, self-contained units where students and teachers could develop relationships and where there would be more control over student behavior. Each of the smaller units, called Career Academies, had specific foci related to occupational goals after high school. These included arts and humanities, business and finance, sports studies and health/wellness, transportation and engineering technology. Each Academy had a separate entrance, its own principal and leadership team, and its own designated color and signage. In addition, there was an after school program, called the Twilight School, for students who had serious discipline problems or who were come from the criminal justice system. The purpose of this school was to help students catch up on missed credits. A special unit was developed for ninth grade students called the Ninth-Grade Success Academy. Set groups of teachers taught smaller groups of students so real relationships could be established. The Success Academy had its own section of the building with a separate entrance.

How long was the intervention? The planning and implementation stages lasted four to five years. The process was still being refined while the article was written.

How was it measured? Researchers used both qualitative and quantitative measures to determine the outcomes of the change process. Qualitative measures included interviews of faculty, staff, and students. Quantitative data included information about attendance, test scores, and survey data from students and teachers. School climate was measured using a survey, which seemed to be developed by the school. No information on reliability or validity was presented in the article.

What was the outcome of the measurements? Qualitative data showed a positive increase in student and teacher perceptions of the school. Rules were deemed to be fair and were generally followed by the students, students and teachers felt safer and more engaged, and there was a new sense of pride in the school and in the Career Academies. Quantitative data collection showed marked improvements in school attendance, student promotion rates, scores on standardized state tests, and overall school performance. The researchers stated “perhaps the most dramatic evidence of improvements at the school come from survey results about the school climate. . .” (p. 353). There were marked improvements in teachers’ perceptions of student problematic behavior, in student motivation, and in relationships between teachers and students. Student school climate surveys showed string perceptions of improvements in the school because of the introduction of the Talent Development program.

What changes were made based on the outcome measures? While the school made big improvements, there was a focus on continuing the upward trajectory. The school hoped to continue to improve school attendance, instructional reforms, and student achievement over the next years. After determining the best ways to implement the Talent Development program, the Johns Hopkins teams hoped to scale up the program in other schools.

***How was it funded*?** It appears that the funding for the intervention was connected to the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk, which is federally funded. No further information on funding sources was identified.

Recommendations based on this study: The division of the school into small, self-contained units seems to have had a significant impact on improving discipline problems, establishing better relationships between students and teachers, and pride in the school. This is a unique feature of this school change program and should be considered as an option.

- **Impacts of the Co-nect School Reform Design on Classroom Instruction, School Climate, and Student Achievement in Inner-City Schools** (Ross and Lowther, 2003)

What type of school? Five large urban schools with high numbers of students on free and reduced lunch and high numbers of minority students.

What age group of kids? High school.

What was the planning stage like? The school district mandated that all schools adopt a restructuring model of school reform. However, it is unclear who was involved in making the decision to use the Co-nect design. There was no discussion in the article about the planning stage of the change process.

What stakeholder groups were involved? This was also somewhat unclear. Who was involved in the planning and decision making process was not reported in the article. Clearly teachers and administrators were involved in implementation, and it appears there was a staff member from the Co-nect designers who helped in each school to implement the design. How that position was funded was unclear.

Who lead the process? This was unclear. School administration must have been involved, but their role was not described.

What exactly was done? Co-nect is a model that implements systemic whole-school reform processes focused on improving student achievement through the restructuring of the school climate and environment. It includes professional development for school staff, connections with other Co-nect schools, and assistance with curriculum resources. Organizational restructuring is the goal while seeking to build community relationships and making positive classroom level changes. There are five main benchmarks including shared accountability for results, project-based learning, comprehensive assessment for continuous improvement, team-based school organization, and sensible use of technology.

How long was the intervention? The Co-nect program was implemented over a two year time frame.

How was it measured? School climate was measured using the School Climate Inventory which measures seven dimensions linked with effective school climates. This instrument is described in more detail in the next section. Measures of teaching strategies, use of technology, and student achievement were also used.

What was the outcome of the measurements? The Co-nect model appears to have created a more positive school climate. There were significant gains in six of the seven dimensions of school climate, with the strongest gains in the area of improved relationships between students,

teachers, parents, and the community. As a result of the Co-nect program, teaching strategies became more active rather than passive. Teachers used more problem-based learning and cooperative learning. Co-nect classrooms used significantly more technology for teaching and learning. This included "meaningful usage" of computers to facilitate learning. Student achievement data was mixed, with three schools making significant improvement and two schools not showing improvements in state-mandated test scores.

What changes were made based on the outcome measures? Surprisingly, the authors reported that at the time of publication of the article, a new school superintendent decided that all schools in the district should cease using school reform models. Therefore, the use of Co-nect was cancelled.

How was it funded? There was no discussion in the article about how the Co-nect model implementation was funded.

Recommendations based on this study: The focus on problem based learning and increasing the use of technology seemed to be unique features of this model. These approaches seem to better prepare students for the real world they will encounter after leaving school and should be considered for inclusion in a school reform process.

Creation of Directions, Tools, and Methods for Improving School Climate

Beyond individual change processes, there is a host of directions, tools, and methods for improving school climate for stakeholders across the spectrum from individual teachers to the educational leaders and beyond. These include National School Climate Standards, rubrics for the school climate change processes, and the development of specific steps school can go through to improve their school climates. These will each be described in detail.

■ National School Climate Standards

The National School Climate Council (*n.d.*), an organization described above, has developed the National School Climate Standards. This document provides research based frameworks and benchmarks to promote effective teaching, learning, and comprehensive school improvement. The standards "establish a baseline of conditions for a learning environment for each child in a way that often is left to chance" that shows "what is possible when we educate the whole child" ("National," 2010, p. 3).

Five primary standards support effective school climate improvement. Consistent with national standards for content, leadership, and professional development as well as the Parent Teacher Association's National Standards, they present a "vision and a framework for positive and sustainable school climate" ("National," 2010, p. 3). Their use can provide enhance school efforts to enhance and to be accountable for school climate change. Specific details of school climate change plans are not given; the readers of the Standards must translate them into practice as deemed most appropriate for their group of stakeholders. The five primary standards are:

1. The school community has a shared vision and plan for promoting, enhancing, and sustaining a positive school climate

2. The school community sets policies specifically promoting (a) the development and sustainability of social, emotional, ethical, civic, and intellectual skills, knowledge, dispositions, and engagement, and (b) a comprehensive system to address barriers the learning and teaching and to reengage students who have become disengaged.

3. The school community's practices are identified, prioritized, and supported to (a) promote the learning and positive social, emotional, ethical and civic development of students, (b) enhance engagement in teaching, learning, and school-wide activities; (c) address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage those who have become disengaged; and (d) develop and sustain an appropriate operational infrastructure and capacity building mechanisms for meeting this standard.

4. The school community creates an environment where all members are welcomed, supported, and feel safe in school: socially, emotionally, intellectually, and physically.

5. The school community develops meaningful and engaging practices, activities and norms that promote social and civic responsibilities and a commitment to social justice (2010).

Each standard has sixteen indicators and thirty sub-indicators that delineate essentials in supporting student learning, growth, and development. While not listed here because of space limitations, the Standards can be found in Appendix C.

- **Rubric for School Climate Improvement teams.**

Developed by Jo Ann Freiberg (*n.d.*) the Improving School Climate Team Rubric can assist school climate change teams identify their progress in and commitment to the process of change. Eight components are identified as essential pieces to the change process. These components along with guiding statements are:

1. Shared Mission: Is it evident that all member of the school community are committed to physical, emotional and intellectual safety of the learners?

2. Shared Vision: Do participants share a vision of what a positive school climate looks, feels and sounds like?

3. Shared Values: How must participants act toward one another in order to advance the vision?

4. Shared Goals: Have priorities been identified?

5. Collaborative Culture in the School-Based Teams: Do team members work together and feel safe to take professional risks?

6. Continuous Improvement: Is there a clear understanding that school climate improvement is an ongoing organic process integral to wider school improvement?

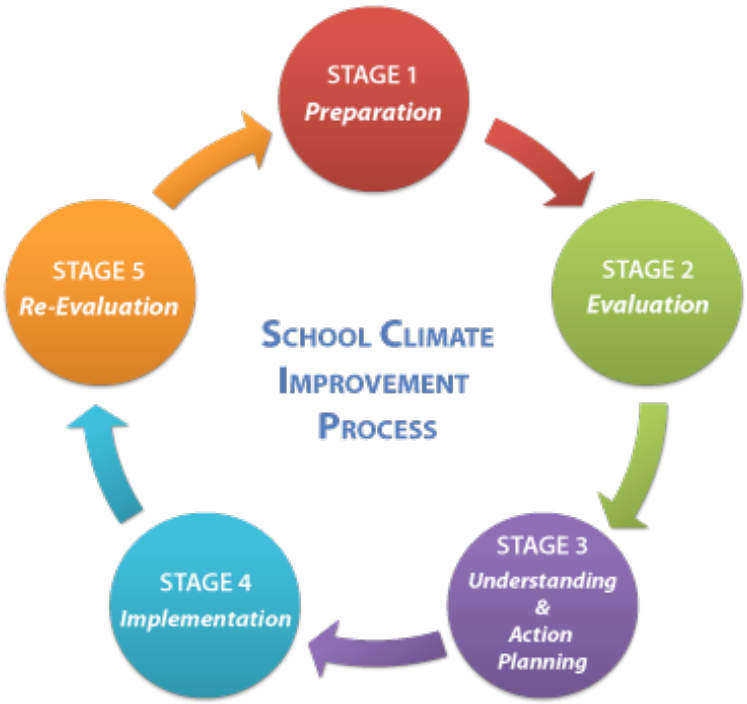
7. Family/Community Partnerships: Are all stakeholders' interests represented and reflected in school climate improvement efforts?

8. Impact on Results: Is progress monitoring inherent in the school climate improvement process?

Each of these eight components can be rated along four developmental stages of school climate improvement, which are identified as Pre-Awareness, Awareness, Emergent, and Maintenance (Freiberg, *n.d.*). A matrix describes the four developmental stages across the eight components in Appendix D.

■ Roadmap for school climate change

In addition to the Standards, and the Rubric, there are several different models for guiding the school climate change process. A clear, succinct, and descriptive model comes from the National School Climate Center. A model for continuous improvement with its five stages is detailed in the diagram and text below right.



- **Stage One: Preparation and Planning**
  - Forming a representative school climate improvement leadership team and establishing ground rules collaboratively.
  - Building support and fostering "Buy In" for the school climate improvement process.
  - Establishing a "no fault" framework and promoting a culture of trust.
  - Ensuring your team has adequate resources to support the process.
  - Celebrating successes and building on past efforts.
  - Reflecting on Stage One work.

- **Stage Two: Evaluation**
  - Systematically evaluating the school's strengths, needs and weaknesses with any number of school climate as well as other potential measurement tools.
  - Developing plans to share evaluation findings with the school community.
  - Reflecting on our Stage Two work.

- **Stage Three: Understanding the Findings, Engagement & Developing an Action Plan**
  - Understanding the evaluation findings.
  - Digging into the findings to understand areas of consensus and discrepancy in order to promote learning and engagement.
  - Prioritizing Goals.

- Researching best practices and evidence-based instructional and systemic programs and efforts.
- Developing an action plan.
- Reflecting on Stage Three work.

➢ **Stage Four: Implementing the Action Plan**
- Coordinating evidence-based pedagogic and systemic efforts designed to (a) promote students' social, emotional and civic as well as intellectual competencies; and (b) improve the school climate by working toward a safe, caring, participatory and responsive school community.
- The instructional and/or school-wide efforts are instituted with fidelity, monitored and there is an ongoing attempt to learn from successes and challenges.
- The adults who teach and learn with students work to further their own social, emotional and civic learning.
- Reflecting on Stage Four work.

➢ **Stage Five: Reevaluation and Development of the Next Phase**
- Reevaluating the school's strengths and challenges.
- Discovering what has changed and how.
- Discovering what has most helped and hindered further the school climate improvement process.
- Revising plans to improve the school climate.
- Reflecting on Stage Five work.

[Taken from http://www.schoolclimate.org/climate/stages_tasks_challenges.php]

Measuring School Climate and Culture Improvement Efforts

How have school climate and culture improvement efforts and progress been measured? The last two decades have seen a great increase in the number and type of school climate assessment tools. These are essential in the beginning of the school climate change process to determine the current state or the baseline of school climate in a school, district, or state. Assessment is also an essential piece in the continuous improvement of school climate and in determining the impact of intervention efforts. Many different tools have been developed across the stakeholder spectrum. There are several ways researchers and schools have measured school climate. They include qualitative data collection, and quantitative data collection in the form of surveys and formal assessment. Qualitative methods for studying school climate vary widely and are focused on individual schools and that school's issues and challenges. Because of this variance in qualitative methodology, this report will not review qualitative methods for assessing school climate. Additionally, many individual schools and researchers have created their own school climate surveys to use in their specific school contexts. When these were noted in the literature, typically very little information about them was given. Statistics on reliability and validity were most often absent from the description of the surveys. For these reasons, individual school surveys will also not be discussed in this report.

There are many formal assessments that have been shown to be reliable and valid measures of school climate. Nine such assessments will be described in this report.

- ***The Instructional Climate Inventory*** (Braskamp and Maehr, 1988, cited in Worrell and Hale, 2001)

This instrument is a measure of perceived school climate. It consists of 20 items that use a 5-point Likert scale. Items are focused on both the school and the classroom. The result of the test is a unitary factor which has been found to discriminate between schools.

- ***The School Climate Survey-High School*** (Haynes, Emmons and Ben-Avie, 2001, cited in Suldo, Shaffer and Riley, 2008; Koth, Bradshaw and Leaf, 2008)

This instrument has 42 items that measures students' feeling and perceptions of their school. The items fall into six dimensions: Order and discipline, student interpersonal relations, student-teacher relations, parental involvement, sharing of resources, and school building. An internal consistency statistic is reported to be .70 for each scale and factor analyses have supported the construct validity of the dimensions.

- ***The Perceived School Climate Scale*** (Center for Prevention Research and Development, cited in Rhoads, Camic, Milburn and Lowe, 2009)

This instrument is reported to be widely used and well-validated. It assesses dimensions of school climate that have consistency been related to student adjustment. The dimensions are teacher support, consistency and clarity of rules and expectations, student commitment and achievement orientation, negative peer interactions, positive peer interactions, disciplinary harshness, student decision-making, instructional innovation and relevance, support for cultural pluralism, and safety problems. A 5-point Likert scale is used for student responses to questions.

- ***The School Climate Inventory*** (Butler and Albert, 1991, cited in Ross & Lowther, 2003)

The purpose of this inventory is to determine the impact of school change processes and efforts. The seven dimensions on the inventory are reportedly to be logically and empirically linked to factors that improve effectiveness of school climates. These dimensions are order, leadership, environment, involvement, instruction, expectations, and collaboration. The Cronbach's alpha for the seven dimensions range from .73 to .84. Using a 5-point Likert scale, students answer 49 questions which result in scores on each of the seven scales.

- ***My Class Inventory*** (Fraser, 1982, cited in Loukas, Suzuki and Horton, 2006)

This inventory assesses student perceptions and perceived school climate as determined by their view of classroom friction, cohesion, competition, and overall satisfaction with classes. The short form consists of four 5-item subscale of these dimensions. Adequate internal consistency reliability was reported at between .57 and .70 for the subscales. Students respond to items using a 5-point Likert scale.

- ***High Performance Learning Community Assessments*** (as cited in Cohen, McCabe, Mitchelli and Pickeral, 2009)

This instrument measures administrators' and teachers' perceptions of eight dimensions that ensure success for all students. These dimensions are to empower decision making at all levels, to reengage families in the education of their students, to connect schools with communities, to foster health and safety, to create small, to personalized communities for learning, to develop

well-prepared teachers, to implement deep, to integrated standards-based instruction, and to maintain emphasis on literacy and numeracy. The instrument takes 120 minutes for administrators to complete and 75 minutes for teachers and has been found to be a scientifically sound instrument for measuring school climate.

- ***The Comprehensive School Climate Inventory*** (National School Climate Center, cited in Cohen, McCabe, Michelli and Pickeral, 2009)

This instrument is a 15-20 minute survey that measures four major areas of school climate including safety, teaching and learning, interpersonal relationships, and instructional environment. It can be administered on or off line, and in various languages. It has been shown to be a valid and reliable tool to measure school climate. Reports of the test give process and programmatic recommendations for the individual school. The test is linked to the National School Climate Center, which will provide support for administering the test and interpreting the results.

- ***The California School Climate and Safety Survey*** (Furlong, Morrison and Boles, 1991, cited in Furlong, Greif, Bates, Whipple, Jiminez and Morrison, 2005)

This instrument was specifically designed to measure general school campus climate and safety. As a self-report measure, students respond to 102 items that break down into scales of perceptions of school climate, global safety and security, social support, social desirability, school violence victimization, and a hostile attitude index. The psychometric properties of the test were reported to be suitable for use within schools.

- ***School Climate Assessment Instruments*** (Alliance for Study of School Climate)

Instead of this being one measurement, it is a series of measurements that are for students, teachers, parents, and administrators to take. There are specific test forms for students and for school stakeholders. The tests measure eight factors of school climate including physical appearance, faculty relations, student interactions, leadership and decision making, discipline and management environment, learning, instruction and assessment, attitude and culture, and community relations. Studies have established sound reliability and validity for the measures.

Involving Students in Improving School Climate and Culture

How have other schools involved students in efforts to improve school climate and culture?
Unfortunately, there is a paucity of discussion about including students in school climate change efforts in the literature. Student voices are sometimes heard through their responses to formal and informal school climate assessment processes (qualitative and quantitative), however it is not always the case that students will even be assessed in a school climate change effort. This is surprising since the assumed goal of improving school climate is creating a safer, more engaged environment where students can learn better. The opinion of those very students is often left out of the discussion.

While there is very little in the school climate literature about engaging students in improvement efforts, Koth, Bradshaw and Leaf (2008) state that there has been increased interest about students' perceptions of school climate among educators, policymakers, and administrators in recent years. This is very encouraging in the effort to improve school climate because

recognizing and honoring student voice can broaden and deepen the understanding of school climate. According to Cohen, Shapiro and Fisher (2006), sometimes students, teachers, and administrators are in agreement about the type and severity of school climate problems. Importantly, however, sometimes students have a very different perspective about school climate. Since students are the ultimate stakeholders of the educational system, it only makes sense to include their voices in all stages of the school climate improvement processes. The degree to which *all* stakeholders are involved and have a voice in the school climate change process will likely determine the success of those change efforts (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli and Pickeral, 2009).

One article discussed ways students were involved in school climate change processes. Students became interested in getting involved in the changes happening in their school, so they initiated a student council. As the council strengthened, it placed student members on all of the committees that were in charge of change processes. The council allowed students to have a stronger voice in what was happening in the school, and they were behind a decision to purchase new gym equipment in the school (Emmons, Efimba and Hagopian, 1998).

The incorporation of student voice in school climate improvement is an extremely underdeveloped area. Much work needs to be done to articulate successful ways of incorporating students as important stakeholders in school climate improvement.

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