WHAT DO WE MEAN?

*Social and Emotional Climate* refers to the psychosocial aspects of student experiences. A positive school climate for both students and staff reflects attention to fostering psychological, social, and physical safety, providing support to reach academic potential and behavioral standards, and maintaining respectful, trusting, and caring relationships throughout the school community. A positive social and emotional climate can reduce stress, increase academic achievement, and foster positive attitudes toward self and others and also is conducive to effective teaching and learning practices. Further, a positive school climate supports students’ general health and development by ensuring a safe and supportive learning environment for all.

A positive social and emotional climate is important for all students, but efforts aimed at school connectedness are especially important for those who may be at higher risk of social isolation or peer rejection, such as students with disabilities or students identifying as LGBTQ+. A supportive social and emotional climate considers the diversity of student experiences and serves the unique needs of those students through programs that promote school connectedness. Schools are encouraged to address prevention efforts by implementing and disseminating social and emotional climate goals and policies (e.g., school discipline). Additionally, clear and consistent rules and expectations, as well as providing opportunities for students to take on leadership roles, and fostering positive relationships with students, can promote a healthy school climate and positively influence student behavior. Federal guidelines around school climate efforts recommend that schools use social and emotional learning to promote self-awareness, resilience, and self-management, all of which contribute to positive behavior at school. Schools can also collaborate with community, such as local resources agencies to help in identifying needs, pooling resources, or assisting in opportunities for professional development, to further facilitate positive social and emotional climate. Overall, a safe and supportive school climate is made possible when evidence-based practices are properly implemented, resulting in improved student success, clear academic and behavioral expectations, student connectedness, culturally-inclusive learning, and a general sense of community among students and staff.
WHY IS IT RELEVANT TO CHILD OUTCOMES?

Physical Health Outcomes
Social and emotional climate has been associated with physical health outcomes for students. A healthy social and emotional climate can provide students with education involving proper nutrition, dietary habits, and physical activity. Acquiring knowledge in these health-related areas can improve physical health outcomes in a variety of ways. Previous research has documented a relationship between positive school climate and decreased substance use, as well as reduced engagement in risk taking behaviors. Specifically, a positive social and emotional climate that fosters school connectedness has been associated with positive physical health outcomes such as decreases in drug and alcohol use, sexual risk behaviors, decreased violence, and lower rates of delinquency and suicide.

Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Outcomes
Research shows that supportive school and classroom climates can positively impact student social, emotional, and behavioral health. Specifically, a social and emotional climate that encourages independence, supports shared decision-making and responsibilities among students and staff, maintains high behavioral expectations, and fosters supportive teacher-student relationships has been shown to result in lower engagement in problem behaviors (e.g., alcohol and drug use, bullying/fighting, carrying a weapon at school, gang membership, and suicide) for high school students. Teachers play a role in encouraging prosocial behaviors - a strong link has been found between proper classroom management and positive student-to-student interactions, such as caring and respectful behaviors. Also, fostering school connectedness through student participation in extracurricular activities has shown to decrease problem behaviors as well as increase positive student-adult interactions in the school. In addition, a positive and healthy school climate has been connected to a decrease in internalizing symptoms such as anxiety and depression.

Academic Outcomes
A positive social and emotional climate can benefit student academic outcomes in a variety of ways. Research has demonstrated that when school districts focus their attention directly on improving school climate, the likelihood that students engage with the curriculum and succeed academically increases. Specifically, an association has been established between positive school climate and grade point average, standardized test scores, reading levels, academic writing, and school adjustment. An indirect relationship exists between students who report feeling more involved in their school through decision-making processes or close student-teacher and student-student relationships and academic outcomes. Fostering these examples of school connectedness can serve as a powerful predictor of academic outcomes for students.
SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL CLIMATE: EVIDENCE IN ACTION

The strategies provided here summarize a review of available evidence and best practice recommendations in this domain.* Strategies are grouped by anticipated resource demand for implementation (e.g., funding, time, physical space, training, materials).

### Level 1 Strategies: Low resource demand

#### Promote positive relationships between students and staff
- School connectedness promotes positive educational and health outcomes for students through fostering supportive relationships with adults and positive peer groups; school connectedness may also serve as a protective factor against emotional distress, anxiety, depressive symptoms, and substance use.
- Schools can work to promote positive relationships and school connectedness by ensuring that students have a connection or relationship with at least one adult (teacher, coach, or other staff) in the building.

#### Collect, review, and respond to school climate data
- Available data sources—such as responses to school climate surveys, office discipline referrals, use of exclusionary disciplinary practices, evaluations of classroom management strategies—can be used to continuously monitor and improve school climate and culture.
- School leadership teams can implement a plan to review available school climate data and create an action plan to respond to identified areas of need.

### Level 2 Strategies: Moderate resource demand

#### Utilize positive, proactive behavior strategies
- Positive behavior support strategies that create school-wide environments that reinforce appropriate behavior should be utilized more frequently than exclusionary practices (e.g., removals from class, in and out of school suspensions). Implementation of positive behavior support strategies is associated with reductions in office discipline referrals, suspensions and expulsions and improved student behavior across grade levels.
- Schools can implement proactive, positive school-wide behavior support strategies, such as the use of clear and positively stated classroom expectations, explicit teaching of expectations, reinforcement of appropriate student behavior, and consistent responses to inappropriate behavior.

#### Implement bullying and harassment prevention and intervention
- Bullying and harassment are associated with negative outcomes (e.g., mental health risk, substance use, physical illness), which may persist through adulthood. Research supports the use of anti-bullying programs, although more work is needed to clearly identify the common components of effective programs.
- Current recommendations include using whole school, multi-tiered approaches as well as strategies such as increasing student supervision throughout the school environment, developing classroom and school-wide rules related to bullying, promoting use of bystander interventions, and sustaining multi-component interventions (as opposed to a one-time assembly or presentation related to bullying).

### Level 3 Strategies: High resource demand

#### Expand student engagement opportunities
- An essential component of school climate is the engagement and inclusion of all students; student engagement is associated with graduation rates, academic achievement, and dropout prevention.
- Strategies used to increase student engagement include student involvement in school-based organizations, such as sport teams or gay straight alliances, while also creating opportunities for academic engagement such as increased opportunities to respond during instruction.

#### Promote social and emotional learning (SEL) strategies
- Implementation of social and emotional learning (SEL) with all students is associated with improved outcomes, including improvements in SEL skills, behavior, and academic performance.
- Schools can implement SEL core competencies (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making) with existing curricula, encourage adults in the school to model SEL competencies, and communicate regularly with families about SEL.

*For more information about the systematic review process we used to identify evidence-based practices, please refer to our overview brief which can be found here.*
**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

*Navigating SEL From the Inside Out*
Harvard Graduate School of Education
This 2017 document provides a review of 25 different elementary level social emotional learning (SEL) program with a comparison of competencies addressed and instructional strategies used.

*Measure and Improve the Climate for Learning in Schools*
National School Climate Center (NCSS)
https://www.schoolclimate.org
The unique resources provided by NSCC includes extensive research focused on school climate, as well as resources around bully prevention and educational services that help improve school climate overall.

*Measuring School Climate: A Toolkit for Districts and Schools*
The Colorado Education Initiative
https://www.coloradoedinitiative.org/resources/measuring-school-climate-toolkit-districts-schools/
This 2012 document provides guidelines for measuring school climate, discusses assessing readiness, which sources of data to use to monitor climate, and how to communicate results.

*PBIS Technical Guide for Alignment of Initiatives, Programs, and Practices in School Districts*
Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)
https://www.pbis.org/training/technical-guide
This 2018 guide includes recommendations on how to efficiently integrate initiatives, programs, and practices across school and district levels while maintaining implementation fidelity and effective student outcomes.

*Publications and Resources on School and Campus Health*
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
https://www.samhsa.gov/school-campus-health/publications-resources
This website includes sources, as of June 2018, related to school and campus health including evidence-based and best practices, behavioral health services and treatment, and other external resources.

*Safe and Welcoming Schools: A Video Series*
The Colorado Education Initiative
https://www.coloradoedinitiative.org/safe-welcoming-schools-video-series/
A video series discussing how to create safe and welcoming environments at school for all students as well as anti-bullying measures, like creating clubs (e.g., gay-straight alliances) in order to foster safety for students.

*SEL Resource Library*
Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)
https://casel.org/resources/
This webpage includes a collection of resources related to the foundations and importance of SEL and how to implement SEL programming in schools.

*School Climate and Moral and Social Development*
National School Climate Center
This document was developed in 2012 and provides practical suggestions for how to use data to improve school climate and using social emotional learning to improve school climate and school outcomes.

*Teaching Social and Emotional Competencies within a PBIS framework*
PBIS
https://www.pbis.org/Common/Cms/files/pbisresources/TeachingSocialEmotionalCompetenciesWithinAPBISFramework.pdf
This 2018 guide includes recommendations on how to adjust the PBIS framework to support instruction of social-emotional competencies for students.


Martinez, A., Mcmahon, S., Coker, C., & Keys, C. (2016). Teacher behavioral practices: Relations to...


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