

THINK ABOUT THE LINK

WHOLE CHILD



ACADEMIC • SOCIAL • EMOTIONAL • PHYSICAL • BEHAVIORAL



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.⁴⁶ A positive social and emotional climate can reduce stress, increase academic achievement, and foster positive attitudes toward self and others² - 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.⁹



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+.¹⁰ 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).⁴⁴ 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.^{1, 12, 44} 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.⁴⁴ 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.⁴⁴ 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.³⁰



V1. WSCC Brief: *Social & Emotional Climate* was created by the UConn Collaboratory on School and Child Health. Copyright © 2018 by the University of Connecticut.

All rights reserved. Permission granted to photocopy for personal and educational use as long as the names of the creators and the full copyright notice are included in all copies.

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.²⁰ 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.¹⁵ 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,^{3, 41} sexual risk behaviors,³ decreased violence,³ and lower rates of delinquency and suicide.³

Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Outcomes

Research shows that supportive school and classroom climates can positively impact student social, emotional, and behavioral health.³³ 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.^{13, 38} 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.²⁷ Also, fostering school connectedness through student participation in extracurricular activities has shown to decrease problem behaviors³⁸ as well as increase positive student-adult interactions in the school.³⁶ In addition, a positive and healthy school climate has been connected to a decrease in internalizing symptoms such as anxiety and depression.⁴¹

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.^{25, 31, 34} Specifically, an association has been established between positive school climate and grade point average, standardized test scores, reading levels, academic writing, and school adjustment.⁸ 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.²⁵ Fostering these examples of school connectedness can serve as a powerful predictor of academic outcomes for students.²⁵



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 groups²⁶; school connectedness may also serve as a protective factor against emotional distress, anxiety, depressive symptoms, and substance use.⁴⁷
- 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.^{6, 48}

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.⁴⁸
- 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).^{21, 24, 39, 45} Implementation of positive behavior support strategies is associated with reductions in office discipline referrals, suspensions and expulsions and improved student behavior across grade levels.^{7, 19}
- 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.^{23, 49} Research supports the use of anti-bullying programs, although more work is needed to clearly identify the common components of effective programs.^{17, 22}
- Current recommendations include using whole school, multi-tiered approaches,⁴ as well as strategies such as increasing student supervision throughout the school environment,^{4, 43} developing classroom and school-wide rules related to bullying,⁴³ promoting use of bystander interventions,³⁷ and sustaining multi-component interventions (as opposed to a one-time assembly or presentation related to bullying).⁵

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,¹⁴ academic achievement,⁴⁰ and dropout prevention.³²
- Strategies used to increase student engagement include student involvement in school-based organizations, such sport teams or gay straight alliances,^{18, 28} while also creating opportunities for academic engagement such as increased opportunities to respond during instruction.²⁹

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.^{16, 35, 42}
- 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.¹¹

*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
<https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/Navigating-Social-and-Emotional-Learning-from-the-Inside-Out.pdf>

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 2017 guide includes information on how to efficiently integrate initiatives, programs, and practice 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
<https://www.schoolclimate.org/themes/schoolclimate/assets/pdf/practice/sc-brief-moral-social.pdf>

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.



SOURCES

- ¹American Institutes for Research (2017). *The intersection of school climate and social and emotional development*. Retrieved from <https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/downloads/report/Intersection-School-Climate-and-Social-and-Emotional-Development-February-2017.pdf>
- ²Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development & Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2014). *Whole school, whole community, whole child: a collaborative approach to learning and health*. Retrieved from <http://www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/siteASCD/publications/wholechild/wsc-a-collaborative-approach.pdf>
- ³Aspy, C., Vesely, S., Oman, R., Tolma, E., Rodine, S., Marshall, L., & Fluhr, J. (2012). School-related assets and youth risk behaviors: Alcohol consumption and sexual activity. *Journal of School Health, 82*, 3-10.
- ⁴Bradshaw, C. (2013). Preventing bullying through Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS): A multitiered approach to prevention and integration. *Theory Into Practice, 52*, 288-295.
- ⁵Bradshaw, C. (2015). Translating research to practice in bullying prevention. *American Psychologist, 70*(4), 322-332.
- ⁶Bridgeland, J., Dilulio, J., & Burke Morison, K. (2006). *The silent epidemic: Perspectives of high school dropouts*. Washington. <<http://www.civicerprises.net/pdfs/thesilentepidemic-06.pdf>>
- ⁷Childs, K., Kincaid, D., George, H., & Gage, N. (2015). The relationship between school-wide implementation and supports and student discipline outcomes. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions, 18*, 89-99.
- ⁸Caldarella, P., Shatzer, R., Gray, K., Young, K., & Young, E. (2011). The effects of school-wide positive behavior support on middle school climate and student outcomes. *RMLE Online, 35*, 1-14.
- ⁹Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2015). *Components of the whole school, whole community, whole child (WSCC)*. Georgia: Author.
- ¹⁰Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2009). *Fostering school connectedness: Improving student health and academic achievement*. Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/pdf/connect-edness_teachers.pdf
- ¹¹Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) (n.d.). *Core SEL competencies*. Retrieved from <https://casel.org/core-competencies/>
- ¹²Connecticut State Department of Education. (2016). *Multi-tiered system of support (MTSS): Connecting school climate, behavior supports and academic success*. Retrieved from https://www.cga.ct.gov/ed/tfs/20160829_School%20Climate%20Task%20Force/20161222/MTSS%20School%20Climate%20Final.pdf
- ¹³Cornell, D., & Huang, F. (2016). Authoritative school climate and high school student risk behavior: A cross-sectional multi-level analysis of student self-reports. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 45*, 2246-2259.
- ¹⁴Cornell, D., Shukla, K., & Konold, T. (2016). Authoritative school climate and student academic engagement, grades, and aspirations in middle and high schools. *AERA Open, 2*.
- ¹⁵Denny, S., Robinson, E., Utter, J., Fleming, T., Grant, S., Milfont, T., Crengle, S., Ameratunga, S., & Clark, T. (2011). Do schools influence student risk-taking behaviors and emotional health symptoms? *Journal of Adolescent Health, 48*, 259-267.
- ¹⁶Durlak, J., Weissberg, R., Dymnicki, A., Taylor, R., & Schellinger, K. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development, 82*, 405-432.
- ¹⁷Evans, C., Fraser, M., & Cotter, K. (2014). The effectiveness of school-based bullying prevention programs: A systematic review. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 19*, 532-544.
- ¹⁸Farb, A., & Matjasko, J. (2012). Recent advances in research on school-based extracurricular activities and adolescent development. *Developmental Review, 32*, 1-48.
- ¹⁹Freeman, J., Simonsen, B., McCoach, D. B., Sugai, G., Lombardi, A., & Horner, R. (2016). Relationship between school-wide positive behavior interventions and supports and academic, attendance, and behavior outcomes in high schools. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions, 18*, 41-51.
- ²⁰Gilstad-Hayden, K., Carroll-Scott, A., Rosenthal, L., Peters, S., McCaslin, C., & Ickovics, J. (2014). Positive school climate is associated with lower body mass index percentile among urban preadolescents. *Journal of School Health, 84*, 502-506.
- ²¹Horner, R., & Sugai, H. (2015). School-wide PBIS: An example of applied behavior analysis implemented at a scale of social importance. *Behavior Analysis in Practice, 8*(1), 80-85.
- ²²Jiménez-Barbero, J., Ruiz-Hernández, J., Llor-Zaragoza, L., Pérez-García, M., & Llor-Esteban, B. (2016). Effectiveness of anti-bullying school programs: A meta-analysis. *Children and Youth Services Review, 61*, 165-175.
- ²³Klomek, A., Sourander, A., & Elonheimo, H. (2015). Bullying by peers in childhood and effects on psychopathology, suicidality, and criminality in adulthood. *The Lancet Psychiatry, 2*, 930-941.
- ²⁴Koon, D. (2013). *Exclusionary school discipline: An issue brief and review of the literature*. Retrieved from https://www.law.berkeley.edu/files/BMOC_Exclusionary_School_Discipline_Final.pdf
- ²⁵Kutsyruba, B., Klinger, D., & Hussain, A. (2015). Relationships among school climate, school safety, and student achievement and well-being: A review of the literature. *Review of Education, 3*, 103-135.
- ²⁶Lemkin, A., Kistin, C., Cabral, H., Aschengrau, A., & Bair-Merritt, M. (2017). School connectedness and high school graduation among maltreated youth. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 75*, 130-138.
- ²⁷Martinez, A., McMahon, S., Coker, C., & Keys, C. (2016). Teacher behavioral practices: Relations to



student risk behaviors, learning barriers, and school climate. *Psychology in the Schools*, 53, 817-830.

²⁸Marx, R., & Kettrey, H. (2016). Gay-straight alliances are associated with lower levels of school-based victimization of LGBTQ+ youth: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 45, 1269-1282.

²⁹Nagro, S., Hooks, S., Fraser, D., & Cornelius, K. (2016). Whole-group response strategies to promote student engagement in inclusive classrooms. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 48, 243-249.

³⁰National Association of School Psychologists, *ESSA school climate for school psychologists*, Bethesda, MD, 2016. Retrieved from http://www.nasponline.org/Documents/Research%20and%20Policy/ESSA/ESSA_School_Climate_Members.pdf

³¹National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments. (2011). Making the case for the importance of school climate and its measurement [Webinar]. Washington, DC. Retrieved from: <http://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/events/webinar/making-case-importance-school-climate-and-its-measurement>

³²Neely, S., & Vaquera, E. (2017). Making it count: Breadth and intensity of extracurricular engagement and high school dropout. *Sociological Perspectives*, 60, 1039-1062.

³³O'Brennan, L., Bradshaw, M., & Furlong, C. (2014). Influence of classroom and school climate on teacher perceptions of student problem behavior. *School Mental Health*, 6, 125-136.

³⁴Osher, D., Kendziora, K., & Chinen, M. (2008). Student connection research: Final narrative report to the Spencer Foundation. Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research. Retrieved from http://www.air.org/expertise/index/?fa=viewContent&content_id=383

³⁵Payton, J., Weissberg, R., Durlak, J., Dymnicki, A., Taylor, R., Schellinger, K., & Pachan, M. (2008). *The positive impact of social and emotional learning for kindergarten to eighth-grade students: Findings from three scientific reviews*. Chicago, IL: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning

³⁶Pickeral, T., Evans, L., Hughes, W. & Hutchison, D. (2009). *School climate guide for district policymakers and educational leaders*. New York, NY: Center for Social and Emotional Education.

³⁷Polanin, J., Espelage, D., & Pigott, T. (2012). A meta-analysis of school-based bullying prevention programs' effects on bystander intervention behavior. *School*

Psychology Review, 41(1), 47-65.

³⁸Reaves, S., McMahon, S., Duffy, S., & Ruiz, L. (2018). The test of time: A meta-analytic review of the relation between school climate and problem behavior. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 39, 100-108.

³⁹Reinke, W., Herman, K., & Stormont, M. (2013). Classroom-level positive behavior supports in schools implementing SW-PBIS: Identifying areas for enhancement. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 15, 39-50.

⁴⁰Reyes, M., Brackett, M., Rivers, S., White, M., & Salovey, P. (2012). Classroom emotional climate, student engagement, and academic achievement. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 104, 700-712.

⁴¹Stalker, K., Wu, Q., Evans, C., & Smokowski, P. (2018). The impact of the positive action program on substance use, aggression, and psychological functioning: Is school climate a mechanism of change? *Children and Youth Services Review*, 84, 143-151.

⁴²Taylor, R., Oberle, E., Durlak, J., & Weissberg, R. (2017). Promoting positive youth development through school-based social and emotional learning interventions: A meta-analysis of follow-up effects. *Child Development*, 88, 1156-1171.

⁴³Ttofi, M., & Farrington, D. (2011). Effectiveness of school-based programs to reduce bullying: A systematic and meta-analytic review. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, 7, 27-56.

⁴⁴U.S. Department of Education (2014). *Guiding principles: A resource guide for improving school climate and discipline*, Washington, D.C.

⁴⁵U.S. Department of Education (2012). *Restraint and seclusion: Resource document*, Washington, D.C.

⁴⁶U.S. Department of Education (2016). Office of Safe and Healthy Students. *Quick guide on making school climate improvements*. Washington, D.C.

⁴⁷Wilkinson-Lee, A., Zhang, M., Nuno, Q., & Wilhelm, V. (2011). Adolescent emotional distress: The role of family obligations and school connectedness. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 40, 221-230.

⁴⁸Weissbourd, R., Bouffard, S., & Jones, S. (2013). School climate, moral and social development. In Dary, T. & Pickeral, T. (ed) (2013). *School Climate: Practices for Implementation and Sustainability. A School Climate Practice Brief, Number 1*, New York, NY: National School Climate Center.

⁴⁹Wolke, D., & Lereya, S. (2015). Long-term effects of bullying. *Archives of Disease in Childhood*, 100, 879-885.

To cite this brief: Cascio, A., Koriakin, T. A., Auerbach, E. & Chafouleas, S. M. (2018, September). *WSCC brief: Behavioral supports*. Available from <https://csch.uconn.edu/wpcontent/uploads/sites/2206/2018/09/Social-Climate.pdf>.

Acknowledgements: We thank Drs. Maurice J. Elias and Ann Higgins-D'Alessandro for their feedback in developing this brief.

