School Climate Reform: Effective Policies and Practices

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I. **School climate**:
- ❖ "Climate", "culture", "supportive learning environments" and "conditions for learning" – similar and/or different?
- ❖ Definitions:
  - ✓ *School climate*: The quality and character of school life: based on patterns of student, parent and school personnel's' beliefs, expectations, norms, relationships, teaching, learning, leadership practices and the environment (National School Climate Council, 2007)
  - ✓ A *positive and sustainable school climate*:
  - ✓ An *effective school climate improvement process*: an intentional, strategic, collaborative, transparent, and coordinated effort to strengthen school learning environments. Democratically informed decision-making constitutes an essential foundation for the school climate improvement process.
- ❖ PBIS and School Climate: Similar and/or different[1]?
  - ✓ *How are they similar*: They are both (i) school wide efforts; (ii) focused on supporting positive change; (iii) support student learning; (iv) support student-family-school personnel and community partnerships; (v) data driven; (vi) appreciate that adult behavior and "adult modeling" matters; and, (vii) focused on advancing policies and procedures that support effective practice.
  - ✓ *How are they different*?
    - (1) Different goals! PBIS – to "*prevent the development of problem behaviors and maximize academic success for all students.*" Vs. to support students, parents/guardians, school personnel and even community members learning and working together in a democratically informed manner to foster safe, supportive, engaging and flourishing schools that support school – and life – success.
    - (2) Different data sets: PBIS - limited disciplinary related data (e.g. disciplinary referral, suspensions, expulsion rates vs. student, parent/guardian, school personnel and even community members perception of how safe the school is (e.g. rules and norms as well as how safe people feel socially and physically), relationship patterns (e.g. respect for diversity, social support), teaching and learning (e.g. support for learning and prosocial education) as well as the environment.
    - (3) The model: PBIS is based on a behaviorally informed model is focused on students' problems and –- in many ways – extrinsic motivation. School climate reform supports the development of intrinsic motivation through engaging community members to be co-learners and co-leaders in the improvement process.
    - (4) Top down (PBIS) vs. bottom up (school climate reform):
    - (5) Adult learning, PLC's and adult modeling (a component of PBIS; a major focus for SC reform):

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[1] Cohen, J. (2014). School Climate Policy and Practice Trends: A Paradox. A Commentary. *Teachers College Record*, Date Published: February 21, 2014   http://www.tcrecord.org ID Number: 17445, Date Accessed: 2/23/2014 7:33:18 AM

(6) Using data as a "hammer" vs. a "flashlight" - PBIS's policy efforts focus on supporting the design and implementation of effective interventions to change student behavior. School climate reform on the other hand is focused on supporting policies that shape systems – the school community – and using data as a "flashlight," not a "hammer."

III. **Five Essential Processes to Promote Positive School Climate**
- ❖ *Educational Leadership* (Appendix D)
  - ✓ Principal leadership: on the power and challenges of transparent, democratically informed leadership
  - ✓ Student leadership: www.schoolclimate.org/bullybust/upstander

- ❖ *Engaging the whole school community*: Roadmaps? Metrics?

- ❖ *Assessment*:
  i) *Readiness* assessments: All schools are 'ready' and every school presents with its own set of strengths and needs (www.schoolclimate.org/climate/assessments.php)
  ii) *Comprehensive* school climate assessment: Recognizing student, parent/guardian assessment as an engagement strategy as well as an improvement index and 'snapshot' of the school. (See Appendix D - *Independent reviews of school climate surveys* below)
  iii) *Process* or "end of stage" assessments: On the value and importance of learning from the continuous process of improvement (www.schoolclimate.org/climate/assessments.php)
  iv) Community *Scales* and furthering meaningful *School-Community Partnerships*: A practical and meaningful strategy that supports community members/leaders understanding and furthering the schools improvement goals (www.schoolclimate.org/climate/community-scale.php)

- ❖ *Policies*: (see policy guidelines and Appendix C Below)

- ❖ *Practice*:
  (i) School wide or systemic interventions
  - ✓ Road Maps, benchmarks, guidelines and tools:
    - • CASEL: www.casel.org/guide
    - • Character Education Partnership: www.character.org/more-resources/11-principles/
    - • National School Climate Center: www.schoolclimate.org/climate/process.php
  - ✓ Beginning to proficient: Understanding and addressing the tasks/challenges that shape an effective process of (i) planning and preparation, (ii) evaluation, (iii) understanding evaluation findings and action planning, (iv) action planning, (v) beginning anew. (Appendix F)

  (ii) Teaching and learning: Promote prosocial education (e.g., character education, social-emotional learning, and mental health promotion efforts): (a) being a living example, (b) via classroom management strategies; (c) via a number of pedagogic strategies (e.g., cooperate learning (Johnson & Johnson, 2009), service learning (Kaye, 2010), and, moral dilemma discussions (Berkowitz, 1981); and, (d) actual prosocial curriculum (Brown et al., 2012).

Resources
Appendix A
Information about school climate as well as bully prevention policies and laws
• State Database: Policies/Laws for school climate & bully prevention www.schoolclimate.org/climate/database.php
• Bellizio, D. (2012). December 2012 Policy Update: School Climate and Bully Prevention Trends State-by-State

Assessment. *School Climate Brief,* Number 6, 2012 (www.schoolclimate.org/climate/documents/policy/sc-brief-v6.pdf)

Appendix B
Information about the history and related understandings

• Brown, P.M., Corrigan, M.W., & Higgins-D'Alessandro, A. (Eds) (2012). *The Handbook of Prosocial Education.* New York: Rowman & Littlefield

• Bryk, A. S., Sebring, P. B., Allensworth, E., Luppescu, S., & Easton, J. Q. (2010). *Organizing schools for improvement: Lessons from Chicago*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

• Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2009). *School connectedness: Strategies for increasing protective factors among youth*. Retrieved from http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/AdolescentHealth/pdf/connectedness.pdf

• Cohen, J. (2012). Measuring and improving school climate: A pro-social strategy that recognizes, educates and supports the whole child and the whole school community. *The Handbook of* Prosocial *Education*. Edited by P.M. Brown, M.W Corrigian and A. Higgins-D'Alessandro. Rowman & Littlefield

• Cohen, J. (2014). School Climate Policy and Practice Trends: A Paradox. A Commentary. *Teachers College Record*, Date Published: February 21, 2014 http://www.tcrecord.org ID Number: 17445, Date Accessed: 2/23/2014 7:33:18 AM

• Dary, T. & Pickeral, T. (ed) (2013). *School Climate Practices for Implementation and Sustainability*. A School Climate Practice Brief, Number 1, NY: National School Climate Center. www.schoolclimate.org/publications/practice-briefs.php

• National School Climate Council (2007). *The School Climate Challenge: Narrowing the gap between school climate research and school climate policy, practice guidelines and teacher education policy*. On: http://www.schoolclimate.org/publications/policy-briefs.php (Leading author)

• National School Climate Council (2009). *National School Climate Standards: Benchmarks to promote effective teaching, learning and comprehensive school improvemen*t. National School Climate Center (www.schoolclimate.org/climate/standards.php)

ᵃ National School Climate Council (2012). *The School Climate Improvement Process: Essential Elements*. *School Climate Brief*, No. 4. Available online at: http://www.schoolclimate.org/climate/schoolclimatebriefs.php

Information about current research findings

• Cohen, J., McCabe, E.M, Michelli, N.M & Pickeral, T. (2009). School Climate: Research, Policy, Teacher Education and Practice. *Teachers College Record,* Volume 111: Issue 1: pp. 180-213. (Available on: www.tcrecord.org/Content.asp?ContentId=15220)

• Thapa, A., Cohen, J., Higgins-D'Alessandro & Guffey, S. (2013). A review of school climate research. *Review of Educational Research,* 83,2, doi:10.3102/0034654313483907 (http://rer.sagepub.com/content/early/2013/04/18/0034654313483907.full.pdf+html?ijkey=lPFDtiKJJYWkE&keytype=ref&siteid=sprer) Available on: http://www.schoolclimate.org/climate/research.php

Appendix C
Policy recommendations for developing effective school climate policy:

For further information and/or technical assistance: contact Jessica Savage, Esq.– NSCC Legal & Policy Director at jsavage@schoolclimate.org or (212) 707-8799, extension 27

Appendix D
Independent reviews of school climate surveys

• Clifford, M., Menon, R, Gangi, T., & Condon, C. & Hornung, K, (2012) *Measuring School Climate for Gauging Principal Performance: A Review of the Validity and Reliability of Publicly Accessible Measures*. American Institute of Research, www.air.org

• Gangi, T.A. (2009). *School climate and faculty relationships: Choosing an effective assessment measure*. Doctoral Dissertation, School Psychology Program, St. John's University, New York.

• Haggerty, K., Elgin, J. & Woolley, A. (2010). *Social-Emotional Learning Assessment Measures for Middle School Youth*. Social development Research Group, University of Washington. Supported by the Raikes Foundation. July 30, 2010\

Appendix E
Information about school climate leadership development
• Education Leadership Coalition on School Climate (2012). *National School Climate Leadership Certification – Supporting Individuals, Teams, and Schools to Lead and Achieve School Climate Reform* (first edition). New York, New York. www.schoolclimate.org/programs/certification.php
• National School Climate Center (2012). *School climate resource center*: scrc.schoolclimate.org

Appendix F – An example of levels of proficiency
(From the NSCC Readiness Assessment)
1.3 Reflecting on core values in order to create the shared vision

Nothing in place (0): No school climate efforts are being considered at this time.

Getting started (1): The school is embarking on a school climate improvement process without a clear sense of the end goals and what type of community they want to develop.

Partially in place (2): School leaders understand core values within small groups. But, it is unclear to what extent others in the school community really understand and/or agree with these values and vision. There are not clear plans to "reach out" to all school community members.

Mostly in place (3): There is a genuine commitment to engage educators and parents /guardians in a collaborative process of learning about the schools strengths, weaknesses, challenges, barriers and needs as a basis for creating a shared vision. Goals are developed to understand and then disseminate the shared vision.

Fully in place (4): School leaders practice individual and collegial reflection on their ethical practices and core values. The team actively looks for and takes advantage of opportunities to create, refine, and promote the shared vision; and assess their plans and actions in relation to it. Students, staff, parents and community members are integral and valued members of this process.

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