

### **Report: Support educators to improve school climate**

School climate is frequently associated with student outcome. However, educators in historically low-performing schools may need support to make drastic changes to school climate, even with additional federal funds and flexibility.

Schools that serve large populations of minority and low-income students are more likely to employ teachers with little classroom teaching experience. In addition, many low-income and minority students attend schools that lack counselors, access to high-level academic courses, Advanced Placement courses, and early education, according to the [U.S. Education Department's Civil Rights Data Collection](#). Only about half of high schools offer calculus and about 89 percent offer algebra 1.

The lack of higher-level academic courses and a large number of new teachers can create opportunity gaps, in addition to achievement gaps, for low-income and minority students.

Several federal grant programs address issues of opportunity and achievement gaps. Strategies to improve school climate are included in [School Improvement Grants](#) and for low-performing schools in [ESEA flexibility](#) states. Newly proposed SIG requirements would expand the four intervention models, including the addition of the whole-school reform strategies, which are often associated with making drastic changes to all areas of a school, including school climate and culture.

Teachers play a key role in creating a positive, safe, inclusive, and supportive school climate by providing academic support, developing student-teacher relationships, and creating a safe learning environment, according to [Climate Change: Improving School Climate by Supporting Great Teaching](#), a new report from the [Alliance for Excellent Education](#). A positive school climate can have a wide-ranging impact on students, according to the report, from promoting learning and academic success, to better attendance and less disruptive classrooms.

More effective and experienced educators often seek better-paying and more supportive school environments, according to the report. Leaders should seek strategies to encourage effective teachers to enter low-performing schools and those serving large populations of at-risk students.

If your school or district is looking to improve school climate, consider the following best practices identified in the report to give educators tools to meet the needs of their students.

- **Support cultural competence.** Educators' cultural competence and their often subjective perceptions can impact school climate. The authors of the report recommend creating opportunities for educators to develop their awareness of their own cultural identity and explore their views of cultural differences. This can be done through pre-service and in-service training.
- **Recruit diversity.** Many educators recognize the benefit of a more diverse teacher population, one that reflects the diversity of students. Initiatives in states like South Carolina and Illinois recruit, support, and retain highly trained educators from diverse backgrounds.
- **Support professional learning.** Professional learning and development is often superficial and disconnected from real classroom challenges so leaders should aim to improve ongoing professional development. Some states, including Iowa, are making efforts to link professional development to career growth while New Hampshire differentiates its professional learning based on unique needs of all employees, from administrators and teachers, to paraeducators and educational interpreters.
- **Develop evaluation systems to improve student learning.** The report indicates educator evaluation systems should foster professional growth and learning by measuring practices that produce desirable student outcomes and encourage teachers to hone their skills. Some evaluation systems do not always serve the needs of students, according to the report. Measures of evaluation systems should include evidence of classroom practices; student learning as a significant factor; and professional practices, including the teacher's contribution to the school community or student survey feedback.
- **Address teaching and learning conditions.** Some states, including North Carolina and Kentucky, established standards for teaching and learning conditions to promote student achievement and to foster a positive school climate. Standards could include time to collaborate, school safety, and class size.

In addition, some states are making efforts to better prepare educators for the classrooms by increasing entry requirements and requiring incoming teachers to pass performance-based assessments before entering classrooms.

The report also indicates that resource disparities impact how schools are staffed and it's important to address "teaching quality gap," the inequitable distribution of effective and experienced educators. Schools serving students with the greatest needs should have resources to build the "capacity of a diverse, highly skilled, and sustainable teaching force," according to the report.

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**October 22, 2014**

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