

Creating a Positive/Pro-Social School Climate

School climate is the quality of school life based on student, family and staff experiences of the school environment. It reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures.

School climate is affected by all aspects of a school, including learning opportunities, extracurricular and expanded learning opportunities, assessments, etc. To address school climate, consider the physical and emotional safety of students, families, and staff; the development of and attention to interpersonal relationships; school discipline policy and practice; and student and family engagement — especially as these conditions or experiences differ among groups.

The following pages outline some of the strategies that address school climate:

- ⇒ Behavior Support & Discipline Practices
- ⇒ Social and Emotional Learning
- ⇒ Addressing Bullying and Harassment

Highlighted Resources

Teachers Unite's
"Growing Fairness Toolkit"



The Growing Fairness Toolkit is over 250 (and growing!) pages of original reflections, protocols, lesson plans, and so much more, written by teachers and students in schools across the city that are working to create restorative and inclusive school communities. The Toolkit is a resource created alongside the Growing Fairness documentary and workshops. Organized by school, it includes relevant information for readers to best understand the climate in which the tools were developed.

Find it at teachersunite.toolkits

Ask the Experts

- ✓ [Guiding Principles: A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline](#) (US ED)
- ✓ [National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments—Resources](#)
- ✓ [School Climate and Bullying Prevention](#) (National School Climate Center)
- ✓ [2015 National School Climate Survey: LGBTQ Students Experience Pervasive Harassment and Discrimination, But School-Based Supports Can Make a Difference](#) (GLSEN)



Keep in Mind

Programs and policies that support students' well-being can and should apply to adults as well. Supporting healthy staff, families, and partners is essential.

Spotlight on Baltimore "School Climate Walk"



Baltimore City Public Schools developed a "[school climate walk](#)" assessment that includes physical environment, student and staff behavior, and classroom environment. This assessment is intended to be filled out in a single day via direct observation.

Behavior Support and Discipline Practices

What to Learn from Your State's ESSA Plan

States must describe, under Title I, how they will support LEAs and schools to improve “school conditions for student learning” through reducing the overuse of discipline that removes students from classrooms, and the use of behavioral interventions that compromise student health and safety.⁵

Guidance for School Improvement

Exclusionary or “zero-tolerance” discipline practices (e.g. suspension/expulsion, restraint and seclusion) have a significant negative impact on academic outcomes for students. Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports (PBIS) strategies, restorative practices, and other inclusive discipline practices are evidence-based strategies that lead to better learning outcomes for all students, particularly for those struggling the most. Under IDEA, PBIS is a recommended consideration for addressing the needs for students with disabilities and promoting inclusive leadership.

LEAs and schools should consider implementing a behavior framework that is preventive, multi-tiered, and culturally responsive, and be transparent about discipline data and decision-making about their discipline practices.⁶ Additionally, disproportionality in the use of harmful discipline strategies between students of color and their white peers, or for students with disabilities must be addressed. Behavioral support is explicitly listed under Title I as an allowable use of funds to support students.

Reducing Policing in Schools

The presence of policing in schools contributes to the School-to-Prison Pipeline. Given that all disciplinary changes must be systemic, reducing the unequal and harmful effects of law enforcement as a disciplinary tool includes: ending or reducing the regular presence of law enforcement in schools, creating safe schools through positive safety and discipline measures, and restricting the role of law enforcement that are called in to schools to ensure that students’ rights to education and dignity are protected, including their constitutional rights to counsel and due process. Check out the Dignity in School Campaign’s Resource Guide on Counselors not Cops and the National Association of School Psychologists’ A Framework for Safe and Successful Schools for more.

Find Support for this Strategy in ESSA

TITLE I, PART A: Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Educational Agencies

TITLE II PART A: Supporting Effective Instruction

TITLE IV, PART B: 21st Century Community Learning Centers

5. <http://civilrightsdocs.info/pdf/education/School-Discipline-Provisions-in-the-Every-Student-Succeeds-Act.pdf>

6. <https://www.pbis.org/common/cms/files/pbisresources/MTSS-B-Equity%20FINAL.pdf5>



Keep in Mind

Changes in discipline practices must include family engagement and professional development to ensure that the program is comprehensively used and implemented with fidelity to the evidence-based practice.

Essential Stakeholders

- ✓ Students and families, including students with disabilities, English learners, system-involved youth, chronically absent students, students in the foster system or who are experiencing homelessness, students affected by trauma, and others
- ✓ Disability rights advocates
- ✓ Discipline or school climate experts (e.g. Center for Restorative Process; PBIS)
- ✓ Educators and educator trainers (e.g. Teachers Unite)
- ✓ Youth development organizations and out-of-school time providers
- ✓ Alternative education programs
- ✓ Law enforcement
- ✓ Civil Rights organizations and community-based organizations (CBOs) that promote the social and emotional welfare of young children and families, including national and local advocates (e.g. Healthy Schools Campaign)

Ask the Experts

- ✓ [Aligning and Integrating Family Engagement in Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports \(PBIS\)](#) (Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports)
- ✓ [ESSA Resources](#) (Dignity in Schools Campaign)
- ✓ [Educational Exclusion: Drop Out, Push Out, and the School-to-Prison Pipeline among LGBTQ Youth](#) (GLSEN)
- ✓ [Stopping School Pushout for: Girls of Color](#) (National Women’s Law Center)

Spotlight on New York, NY: Implementing Restorative Practices



During the 2013-2014 school year, NYC schools reported more than 53,000 suspensions and Black students, less than one third of the student population, were given more than half of the suspensions citywide, and students with disabilities, 12 percent of the student body, were given 30 percent of the suspensions. Four schools in New York City committed to ending these disparities and began to engage with stakeholders to transform their school climates.

Read more about their practices and results in the Case Study: [Building Safe, Supportive and Restorative School Communities in New York City](#) (Teachers Unite).

Spotlight on Oakland Unified School District, CA Restorative Justice in Schools

OUSD began to implement Restorative Justice (RJ) practices in schools in 2011. Since then, the RJ program in OUSD has successfully helped to decrease suspensions by half across the district. In addition to in-school tools for students, the RJ program in OUSD has trained over 1000 staff in restorative practices, including law enforcement.

Learn more about the project at www.ousd.org/restorativejustice. Watch a video to hear from teachers and students at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RdKhcQrLD1w>. Read the guide to implementation: <http://rjoyoakland.org/wp-content/uploads/OUSTRJOY-Implementation-Guide.pdf>

Creating a Positive/Pro-Social School Climate: Social and Emotional Learning

What to Learn from Your State's ESSA Plan

ESSA requires states to look beyond test scores in their accountability systems, and to incorporate other factors that play into student success, such as social and emotional learning (SEL) and school climate. Use of these non-academic factors provide LEAs with an opportunity to look beyond instructional activities and address other issues facing students. Learn more about the indicators your state has chosen, including why, and how those indicators might change over time.

Guidance for School Improvement

Social and emotional learning (SEL) includes all strategies designed to support understanding and management of emotions, including goal-setting, collaborative work, empathy, positive relationship-building, and responsible decision-making.

While SEL is often an integrated part of district and school frameworks for learning, discrete programs or strategies to promote SEL include:

- school climate improvement efforts,
- access to comprehensive mental and behavioral health,
- nutrition and physical health access,
- positive behavioral supports, and professional development for leaders on cultural competencies (e.g. racial healing, language, public systems and services and their impact).

Additionally, schools that collect data around these strategies and their outcomes can embed research-based best practices into their curriculum and professional development for their school-based staff.

Professional Development

Title II, Part A allows for more investment to attract, train and retain school leaders. As LEAs examine district and school policies related to developing practices that support positive social, emotional and academic growth, they should also identify ways to incorporate these practices into school leader professional development. Title II, Part B also contains competitive grant programs that can be used to embed school leadership practices that facilitate SEL skills like self-management, social awareness and conflict resolution.

Find Support for this Strategy in ESSA

TITLE I, PART A: Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Educational Agencies
TITLE II PART A: Supporting Effective Instruction
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Highlighted Resource CASEL Program Guides for Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programs



The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has developed five SEL “Competency Clusters”:

- Self-awareness
- Self-management
- Social awareness
- Relationship skills
- Responsible decision-making

Read the CASEL Program Guides at casel.org/guide.

Essential Stakeholders

- ✓ Students and families, including students with disabilities, English learners, system-involved youth, chronically absent students, students in the foster system or who are experiencing homelessness, students affected by trauma, and others.
- ✓ Educators and educator trainers (e.g. Teachers Unite)
- ✓ Youth development organizations and out-of-school time providers
- ✓ Alternative education programs
- ✓ Law enforcement
- ✓ Civil rights organizations and community-based organizations (CBOs) that promote the social and emotional welfare of young children and families
- ✓ National and local advocates (e.g. Healthy Schools Campaign, CASEL)

Ask the Experts

- ✓ [Navigating Social and Emotional Learning from the Inside Out: Looking Inside and Across 25 Leading SEL Programs: A Practical Resource for Schools and OST Providers](#) (Wallace Foundation)
- ✓ [SEL in Districts](#) (CASEL)
- ✓ [Social and Emotional Learning Under ESSA](#) (NIEER)

Spotlight on Colorado SEL & Data



Colorado has worked with partners and stakeholders to develop a suite of resources for school leaders, teachers, and families to support understanding about SEL and social skills, including specific metrics for gathering data and disaggregating according to student subgroups.

Check out their resources at colorado.gov/pacific/cssrc/social-emotional-learning.

Spotlight on the CORE Districts, CA: Schools and Districts Support SEL

Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE) recently visited middle schools in the CORE districts to learn about the ways educators advance students' social-emotional learning.

Learn about their results in their Facts at a Glance document: [Enacting Social-Emotional Learning: Practices and Supports in CORE Districts and Schools](#).

Addressing Bullying and Harassment

What to Learn from Your State's ESSA Plan

In their State ESSA Plans, states must describe, under Title I, how they will support LEAs and schools to improve “school conditions for student learning” through reducing instances of harassment and bullying.⁷

Guidance for School Improvement

Bullying includes student-on-student harassment on the basis of sex, race, national origin, sexual orientation and gender identity, and disability, as well as any unwanted, aggressive behavior among children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. Increasingly, cyberbullying (bullying online, such as through social media) is also a consideration for schools.⁸

Addressing school climate as a school improvement strategy is the main research-based strategy for reducing incidences of bullying and harassment.⁹ Addressing bullying in this way can include: engagement of families, staff and students about the reality and effects of bullying and cyberbullying; introducing opportunities for students to be involved in special interest groups, hobbies, clubs, or teams; setting up open lines of safe reporting and communication; and training parents, staff, and leaders to model and be able to talk about kindness and appropriate responses when bullying does occur (e.g. implementing restorative practices).

LEA and school leaders can play an important role in addressing bullying, student mental health, and suicide prevention, and will need to work across disciplines and partner with departments of health and health professionals, social services for families and young people (e.g. Medicaid), and rely on the expertise and experience of social workers, school counselors, special education educators, and those closest to students (parents and families, peers) for a complete picture of students' needs and how to support them.

Consider working with outside services like Teenline or Lifeline, or local suicide prevention organizations (e.g. Arizona's La Frontera-EMPACT), working to grow and support school-based students groups (e.g. Gay-Straight Alliance for LGBT Youth) and mentoring programs, and partnering with outside organizations that provide safe spaces for young people (e.g. Big Brothers Big Sisters, faith-based youth groups). Remember, too, that supporting staff and families around their own mental health is an important step toward better supporting students, which your school's social worker can and should support.

Find Support for this Strategy in ESSA

TITLE I, PART A: Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Educational Agencies

TITLE IV, PART A: Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants

TITLE IV, PART B: 21st Century Community Learning Centers

7. <http://civilrightsdocs.info/pdf/education/School-Discipline-Provisions-in-the-Every-Student-Succeeds-Act.pdf>

8. <https://www.meganmeierfoundation.org/cyberbullying-social-media.html>

9. <https://www.stopbullying.gov/prevention/at-school/build-safe-environment/index.html>

Essential Stakeholders

- ✓ Students and families, including students with disabilities, English learners, system-involved youth, chronically absent students, students in the foster system or who are experiencing homelessness, students affected by trauma, and others.
- ✓ Educators and educator trainers (e.g. Teachers Unite)
- ✓ Youth development organizations and out-of-school time providers
- ✓ Social media experts
- ✓ Anti-bullying campaign experts
- ✓ Civil rights organizations and community-based organizations (CBOs) that promote the social and emotional welfare of young children and families, including national and local advocates (e.g. Healthy Schools Campaign)

Ask the Experts

- ✓ [School Climate and Bullying Prevention](#) (National School Climate Center)
- ✓ [Stop Bullying—Prevention Resources](#)
- ✓ [Ending Institutionalized Bullying In Our Schools](#) (Desis Rising Up and Moving)

Spotlight on Washington Partnership for Suicide Prevention



The Washington Department of Health works with [Forefront Suicide Prevention in Schools \(FIS\)](#) in high schools across the state. FIS is a three-year program designed to transform school and community culture around suicide. This three-year program begins with building a leadership team at the school site with parents, students, teachers, counselors, and school leaders. These leaders then take the messages back to their own communities (e.g. parent-parent training).