



ADVANCING WELLNESS and RESILIENCE in EDUCATION

Information Brief

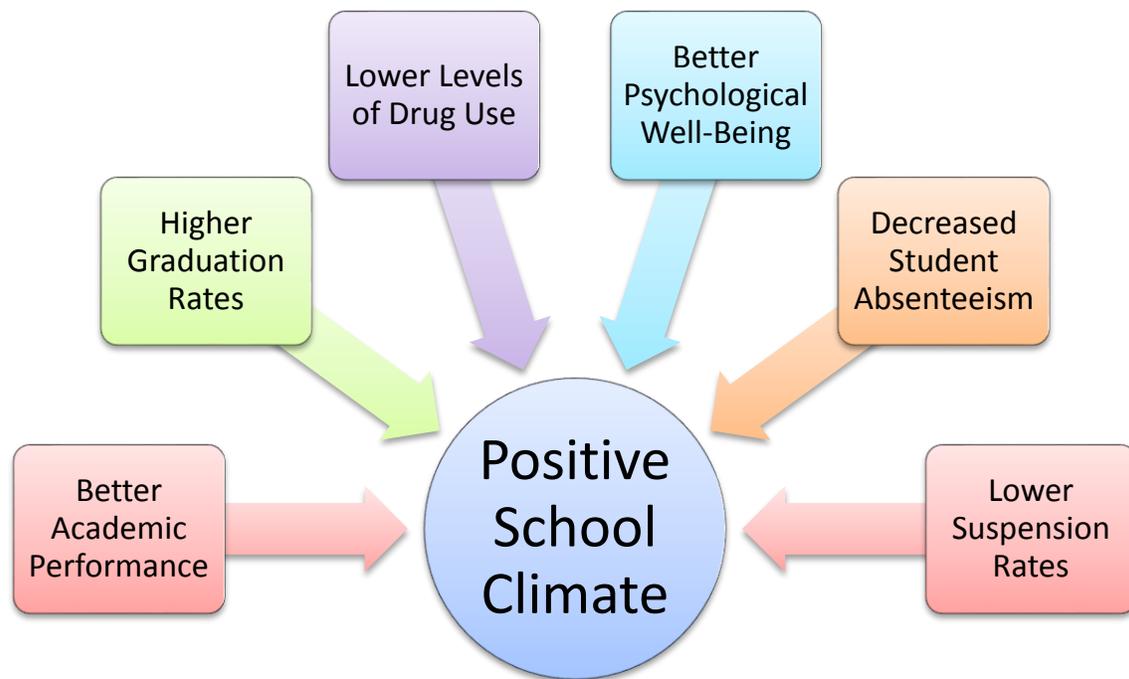
School Climate

WHAT IS SCHOOL CLIMATE?

The National School Climate Center defines school climate as the “quality” and “character” of school life. More specifically, this multidimensional construct encompasses the values and beliefs that are shared within the school. These shared ideas subsequently influence the interactions between students and school personnel and establish the norms and behaviors that are expected within the school.⁴

WHY IS SCHOOL CLIMATE IMPORTANT?

Research suggests school climate significantly affects students’ mental and physical health, as well as academic engagement and success. Positive school climates are associated with a variety of positive outcomes.⁵ Some of these outcomes are depicted in the figure below:



Thus, a positive climate within a school will benefit each student and facilitate optimal development and learning.

HOW CAN YOU ASSESS SCHOOL CLIMATE?

Given the positive outcomes associated with a positive school climate, it is important to know how to assess this construct in order to address any issues that might exist. Often, school climate is evaluated along four dimensions, which include safety, relationships, teaching and learning, and the external environment.⁴ There are several ways to assess school climate, including the newly released U.S. Department of Education School Climate Surveys (EDSCLS; see <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/edscls>). A recent and thorough compendium of school climate assessments is also available here: <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/topic-research/school-climate-measurement/school-climate-survey-compendium>. However, in this brief we will focus on just one way to assess school climate within the PBISApps site using a set of surveys created by the Georgia State Department of Education. This set consists of several surveys that can be completed by several different

informants to gain a comprehensive assessment of your school's climate.²

First, the **Georgia Elementary School Climate Survey** is a survey instrument developed for elementary students in grades 3 through 5. They are asked a variety of questions (i.e., "I like school", "I feel safe at school") that are used to identify school climate issues.

Second, the **Georgia Brief School Climate Inventory** is a short survey measure for students of all grade levels to complete. The survey asks 9 questions that measure student perceptions of school climate along three dimensions. These three dimensions include *teaching and learning* (i.e., "I feel successful at school"), *relationships* (i.e., "I know an adult at school that I can talk with if I need help"), and *safety* (i.e., "School is a place at which I feel safe"). The survey's short length allows for ongoing administration of the survey in order to monitor how students' perceptions of school climate change over time.

Third, the **Georgia School Personnel Survey** is an instrument designed for teachers, school administrators, and certified staff members to complete. The survey specifically assesses areas including *staff connectedness* (i.e., "I feel supported by other teachers at my school"), *structure for learning* (i.e., "Teachers at my school frequently recognize students for good behavior"), *school safety* (i.e., "I feel safe at my school"), *physical environment* (i.e., "My school building is well maintained"), *peer and adult relations* (i.e., "Students at my school would help another student who was being bullied"), and *parent involvement* (i.e., "Parents at this school frequently attend school activities"). These survey responses also identify any school climate issues through the perceptions of school personnel.

Finally, the **Georgia Parent School Climate Survey** is an instrument designed for parents to complete. The survey specifically assesses areas including *teaching and learning* (i.e., "Teachers at my student's school have high standards for achievement"), *school safety* (i.e., "My student feels safe at school"), *interpersonal relationships* (i.e., "I feel comfortable talking to teachers at my student's school"), *institutional environment* (i.e., "My student's school building is well maintained"), and *parent involvement* (i.e., "I am involved in the decision making process at my student's school"). Parental responses on these items further help identify climate issues within the school.

HOW CAN YOU ACCESS THESE INSTRUMENTS?

Please refer to the School Climate Survey Suite manual at www.pbisapps.org to access paper versions of the Georgia Elementary School Climate Survey and the Georgia Brief School Climate Inventory, which are referred to as the School Climate Survey: Elementary and School Climate Survey: Middle/High, respectively. In addition to providing copies of these two surveys, this manual also offers information regarding the purpose of these surveys, makes recommendations for administration and interpretation, and provides notification/opt-out forms for guardians and sample administration scripts. If you prefer to administer these surveys online, please contact your State Support Team (SST) PBIS coordinator for access. If you are not sure who your PBIS coordinator is, please reach out to your PBIS contact person for your local SST (see <http://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/School-Improvement/State-Support-Teams/SST-Contact-Directory-2015-2016-MASTER.pdf.aspx> for a list of contacts). The other surveys can be accessed through the Georgia Department of Education.²

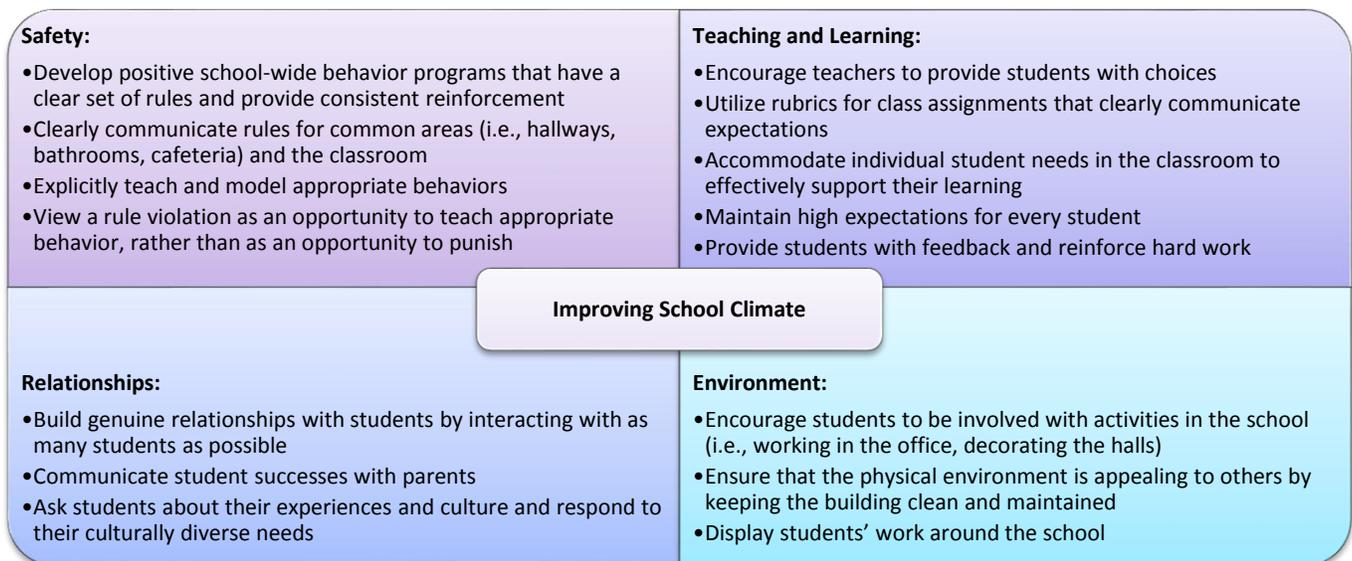
HOW CAN THE RESULTS BE USEFUL?

Results from the school climate assessments can be interpreted in conjunction with PBIS data in order to formulate a more comprehensive and representative picture of your school and clarify areas for improvement.

Specifically, it is recommended that you evaluate students', teachers', and parents' perceptions of the school climate while also considering problems relating to ODRs, suspension and expulsion rates, achievement, and disproportionality. By evaluating these different sources of data together, you will have a much better understanding of the specific nature and scope of potential school climate needs and how to most effectively address them.

HOW CAN YOU IMPROVE SCHOOL CLIMATE?

With a better understanding of the school climate needs in your school, it is important to take steps to address them. Again, school climate encompasses 4 areas (i.e. safety, teaching and learning, relationships, and environment). Thus, it is important to take actions that target the specific area(s) that your school needs to improve upon. The following are some suggestions for each area^{1, 3, 6}:



REFERENCES

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6. U.S. Department of Education, *Guiding Principles: A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline*, Washington, D.C., 2014.

This brief was developed [in part] under grant number CFDA 93.243 from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The views, policies, and opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of SAMHSA or HHS.

We also would like to acknowledge the Ohio Department of Education for their support of this work. Prepared by Katelyn Palmer & Amity Noltemeyer, Miami University