

# School climate reform and violence prevention policy and practice trends:

## Latin American, U.S. and the European Union

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**National School Climate Center**  
*Educating Minds and Hearts...Because the Three Rs are Not Enough*

# Overview & Goals

To consider:

1. Understandings about school violence prevention and school climate reform efforts in the European Union (EU), Latin and North America
2. Policy and practice trends.
3. Possible 'next steps' that build on your current policy, research and/or practice efforts

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# Assumptions:

## The foundation for effective school climate improvement and violence prevention efforts

- (i) Intentional prosocial instruction and systemic efforts that ***address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students*** learn (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2002; Christenson, Reschly, & Wylie, 2012; National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2009)
- (ii) Improvement efforts must be focused primarily ***on universal and proactive (preventative) strategies*** and practices that are ***comprehensive, rather than primarily being focused on reactive targeted interventions*** efforts (Cohen, 2006; Fullan, 2011; Morgan, et.al., 2014; Mourshed, Chijioke, & Barber, 2010).
- (iii) School improvement is ***a continuous process*** that requires ongoing review by school leadership and members of the whole school community. This on-going review process should use social, emotional, civic, as well as academic quantitative and qualitative data from multiple **SOURCES** (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009; Twemlow & Sacco, 2013).

# Assumptions (cont.)

The following three sets of essential goals and related practices shape effective prosocial educational improvement efforts:

- (I) Systemically or **school-wide** informed goals and processes that promote physically, emotionally and intellectually safe, supportive and engaging climates for learning and teaching for all students;
- (II) **Instructional** efforts that are culturally responsive and designed to imbed social, emotional and civic learning into instruction as an integral component of academic experiences; and,
- (III) Goals and processes that promote significant and meaningful, connected **relationships** especially between and among all students and faculty/staff.

(National School Climate Council, 2015)

**School climate improvement is a process that is aligned with and supports all of these assumptions**

# Understanding School Climate

- **In the U.S.** an explicit focus and goal for school leaders since 1908 (Perry, 1908)

## Definitions/Understandings

- “School climate”

“The quality and character of school life. Based on patterns of norms, expectations, values, relationships, teaching/learning/leadership practices and organizational structures.” (National School Climate Council, 2007)

“ A broad, multifaceted concept that involves many aspects of the *student’s* educational experience.” (U.S. Safe & Supportive Learning TA Center: <http://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/school-climate>)

- “Climate”, “Culture”, “Supportive learning environments” and/or “Conditions for Learning”

# Understanding School Climate (cont.)

## In the European Union (EU):

- Professor Eric Debarbieux (1996), France: Similar to National School Climate Council with a greater appreciation of larger neighborhood
- Fernandez Diaz (1994), Spain
- D.S. Finlasyon (1973), England
- Michael Rutter (1983), England: set of shared values, attitudes, behaviors that make the school ethos and contribute to its climate
- *Towards a European anti-bullying policy and appreciation that effective bully prevention is effective school climate reform.*
- Legislation at the national level: France, UK, Sweden, Italy, Denmark

# Understanding School Climate (cont.)

## In Latin America:

- The perspective of school climate was recognized by UNESCO 's 2008 SERCE report: *Second Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study - Student achievement in Latin America and the Caribbean*

School climate: *the single most important variable shaping student performance*

# Understanding a Positive School Climate

## Definitions/Understandings

- ***U.S. Safe & Supportive Learning TA Center:***
  - Safe
  - Supportive academic, disciplinary and physical environment
  - Respective and caring relationships
- ***National School Climate Council:***
  - Fostering positive youth development
  - Norms and values support feelings of safety
  - Respect and engagement
  - Shared school vision
  - Educators model a love for learning
  - All community members contribute to care of physical environment

# Understanding the School Climate Improvement Process

- *An intentional, strategic, collaborative, data-driven, transparent, and democratically informed process*
- *Three essential questions:*
  - 1) What kind of school do we want *ours* to be?
  - 2) What are *our* current strengths, needs and weaknesses?
  - 3) Given the gap between our vision and our current reality, what school-wide and/or instructional and/or relational goals do we want to focus on now?
- *Goal setting:* On the importance of delineating strategic goals, drivers/strategies designed to actualize our goal, and metrics to support learning!

# Growing Interest

**School climate research:** Higher academic achievement;  
Healthy relationships; Increased social responsibility;  
Increased teacher retention

## **Growing interest:**

- Recognizing and measuring *the **social, emotional and civic*** as well as intellectual/cognitive aspects of student learning and school life
- An *engagement strategy* that potentially mobilizes the whole village to support the whole child
- Recognizing and supporting *adult learning and **Professional Learning Communities (PLC's)/Network Improvement Communities (NICs)***
- **Coordinating** educational, risk prevention and health/mental health promotion efforts

(Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009; Thapa, Cohen, Higgins-D'Alessandro & Guffey, 2013; Cohen & Thapa, in preparation; Cowan, Vaillancourt, Rosen, & Pollitt, 2013)

# U.S. School Climate Policy Trends

***School climate:*** School climate improvement efforts have been endorsed or supported as the most effective prevention strategy for (1) bully-victim-bystander behavior, and (2) high school dropouts by:

- U.S. federal agencies
- State Departments of Education
- Districts

## ***Challenges:***

- Competing definitions/conceptualizations
- Accountability systems that challenge a continuous model of learning
- Confusion about “what to do and how to do it?”

# Three Tiered Behavioral Systems (e.g. PBIS) and/or School Climate Reform?

## PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports)

## School Climate Reform

### Similarities

1. School wide effort
2. Supporting positive change
3. Supporting student learning
4. Supporting student-family-educator and community partnerships
5. Data driven
6. Appreciate that adult behavior and “adult modeling” matters
7. Focused on advancing policies and procedures that support effective practice.

### Differences

1. Goals
2. Different data sets
3. Behaviorally informed model that is focused on student problems vs. a intrinsically grounded motivational model focused on school wide, instructional and one-on-one coordinated efforts
4. Adult driven vs. community driven
5. School Climate Reform – grounded in adult learning & PLC's

# Latin American School Climate Policy Trends

## “Laws on School Violence” Fever:

- i) Mexico (various States), Peru, Chile
- i) Non-academic, non-professionally oriented: Politicians talking common (non-)sense!
- i) These *laws tend to establish punishments* for schools that do not respond to acts of bullying and school violence, thereby reinforcing “punitive educational environments”

# Latin American Policy Trends (cont.)

School climate / Convivencia escolar measurement as indicators of a country's educational quality

- i) Growing interest - educational ministries
- ii) Part of academic, quality-with-equity argument: UNESCO SERCE's (2008) Latin American comparative report showed that, after controlling for SES, school climate was the highest predictor of academic achievement. Next report due 2015.
- iii) Challenges:
  - Measure for accountability vs. measure for improving school quality
  - How to integrate and coordinate educational, risk prevention and health/mental health promotion efforts

# European Union (EU) Policy Trends

- Great variations according to the education systems
- Growing interest in school climate/systemic approaches and inter-agency partnerships at both local and national levels.
- Growing appreciation that we need to integrate educational and mental health informed improvement efforts
- Development of observatories, tools and guidelines (free access).
- Towards Europe 2020
  - i) More systematic monitoring
  - ii) Improving well-being to improve achievement
  - iii) Improving individual support.
  - iv) Incentive on staff training/adult learning.

# Policy Trends: Summary

- **Growing interest** in school improvement/violence prevention efforts that (i) recognize the prosocial aspects of learning and school life and (ii) support the ‘whole village’ learning and working together to create safer, more supportive, engaging and healthy climates for learning

- **Challenges**

- ✓ Focus on student cognitive learning
- ✓ Not supporting a continuous process of learning and improvement: At odds with implementation science!
- ✓ Top down efforts

# Practice Trends

## Growing interest in promoting school climate improvement practices:

- *Metrics*: Readiness, Process, Comprehensive and Community
- *Road Maps*: Understanding the *tasks and challenges* that shape an effective planning, evaluation, action planning, implementation and beginning anew phases
- Aligning school climate improvement with *implementation science*
- *Leadership development*

# U.S. Practice Trends

- An intentional, strategic, collaborative, transparent, data-driven and democratically informed process that engages the “whole village” to support the “whole child”
  - 1) What kind of school do we want ours to be?
  - 2) What are our current strengths and needs?
  - 3) Given our vision and current reality, what are the most important strategic goals for us to work on together?
- Alignment with *Implementation Science* (Bryk, et. al. 2015; Blasé, et. al. 2013; Fixen, et. al, 2005; Fullan,, 2011)
- What school leaders say? School climate matters! But, challenges and confusion

# U.S. Practice Trends: Metrics

- 1) **School Climate *Readiness Assessments***: All schools are ready! But schools – like people – are never perfect. On the importance of understanding current strengths and needs to support planning and improvement.
- 2) ***Comprehensive surveys***: Recognizing student, parent/guardian and school personnel voice.
  - ✓ Trends: Understanding and using these findings (i) as an engagement strategy and (ii) to shape school improvement planning
- 3) ***Community Scales***: Recognizing community member/ leader “voice” and furthering school community partnerships
- 4) ***Process Assessments***:
  - ✓ End of stage assessments: What did we do? How did we do it?
  - ✓ Building level: Strategic goal setting – Strategies/drivers - measurement:

# U.S. Practice Trends: Road Map

School leaders need and want “road maps” that delineate research-based tasks/benchmarks that support an effective improvement process:

- Character.org (formerly the Character Education Partnership) *11 Principles of Effective Character Education*
- CASEL’s *Advancing SEL in Educational Settings*
- National School Climate Centers *School Climate Implementation Road Map: Promoting Democratically Informed School Communities and the Continuous Process of School Climate Improvement*
- UCLA Center for Mental Health: *Promoting mental health in schools*
- National Center for Community Schools: *A guide for building community schools*

# The School Climate Improvement Process



# Leadership Development: In the U.S.

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- School Climate Leadership Certificate program

# E.U. Practice Trends

- Taking a child protection systems approach:
  - ✓ How can the actors involved promote and support multi-disciplinary cooperation to design preventative approaches to bullying and cyberbullying?
  - ✓ How can the EU contribute to facilitating and enhancing dialogue and contacts among stakeholders?

(8TH EUROPEAN FORUM ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD  
(BRUSSELS, 17 AND 18 DECEMBER 2013))

# South American Practice Trends



- Growing interest

# Practice Trends: A summary

- Significant growing interest
  - ✓ *Metrics*: A major focus for regional and state/federal leaders
  - ✓ *Too “top down”*: Less appreciation for the process and importance of igniting the intrinsic motivation of students, parents and school personnel
  - ✓ Growing wish to learn more about “what to do?” and “how to do it?”

# Policy Leaders: Recommendations

- Define school climate in ways that are aligned with recent research.
- Recommend that schools routinely and comprehensively evaluate school climate.
- Adopt or adapt school climate standards.
- Use school climate assessment as a measure of accountability: Using data as a “flashlight” rather than a “hammer” (i.e., supporting a continuous model of learning and development!)
- Ensure credential options maintain high-quality school climate related standards for educators, etc.
- Encourage teacher preparation programs to focus on understandings, guidelines and tools related to school climate.
- Increase research on school climate.

# Practice leaders: Recommendations

- Learn about scientifically sound school climate assessment tools
- Learn about evaluation can further engagement as well as learning and improvement.
- Consider creating network of schools/communities:  
Network Improvement Communities/PLCs
- Contribute to ongoing action research that will support continuing efforts in the field to learn about best practices.
- Contribute to the development of case studies that illustrate the complexity of school climate improvement efforts.

# Research leaders: Recommendations

- *Definitions*: Consider using the US National School Climate Council's definitions of "school climate", a "positive school climate" and an "effective school climate improvement process"
- *Metrics*: (i) Consider school climate surveys that evaluate safety, relationships, teaching and learning and the environment as well as (ii) readiness and process measures
- *Multilevel models/hierarchical linear models*: Complex systems!
- Support *practitioner/research partnerships* that illuminate (i) strategic goal settings, (ii) understandings about improvement strategies and 'drivers' and (iii) metrics
- Support *Network Improvement Communities*

# THANK YOU!

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