

# School Climate Resources for the K-12 Community

## Create a positive school climate where students feel safe, supported, and welcome.

School climate is a broad, multifaceted concept that involves many aspects of a student's educational experience. It describes school conditions that influence student learning and comprises issues such as the school environment, safety, and engagement among members of the school community. A positive school climate characterizes a school that effectively attends to the academic, social, emotional, behavioral, and mental health needs of its students.



A positive school climate can have profound impacts on student success, safety, and well-being. Research shows that when schools and districts focus on promoting a positive school climate, students are more likely to develop trusting relationships with their peers, teachers, and others in the school community; demonstrate positive behaviors; and achieve better academic outcomes. In the absence of a positive school climate, a student may feel disconnected, disregard consequences, and engage in bullying or other destructive or violent behaviors.

**Schools can take proactive measures to assess their current climate and determine where investments can be made** to improve student engagement, school safety, and the learning environment. School climate improvement is the strategic effort undertaken by a school to achieve a positive school climate by considering its practices, systems, and structure. The measurement of school climate provides educators with necessary data to identify school needs, set goals, and track progress toward improvement.

### Making school climate improvements involves five sets of activities:

- 1 Planning
- 2 Engaging stakeholders
- 3 Collecting, analyzing, and reporting school climate data
- 4 Identifying and implementing interventions
- 5 Monitoring and evaluation

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# Strategies to Create a Positive School Climate

While schools and districts should develop and implement strategies based on their local circumstances and the results of their individual school climate improvement efforts, school leaders, educators, and staff can consider the following overarching actions to foster a positive school climate:



## Create a safe school community

For students to learn, they need to feel and be safe. This includes both physical and emotional safety, as well as school settings and activities where students are protected from violence, bullying or cyberbullying, harassment, or substance abuse. A safe school is closely linked to improved student and school outcomes and allows students to fully engage in learning without the fear or impact of health and safety concerns.

Teachers, school administrators, parents, and others in the school community can take a range of actions to create a safe school environment. This includes incorporating physical safety systems and elements that deter or reduce violence, as well as programs on youth substance use prevention. School leaders and educators can also establish and enforce rules that clearly describe how students are expected to treat each other, monitor bullying ‘hot spots’ in and around the school building, and promote respectful, inclusive, and well-managed classrooms. Additional actions can include the integration of social-emotional learning programs, which can have positive impacts on a student’s ability to manage stress, build healthy relationships, and resolve conflict.

## Enable a supportive academic, disciplinary, and physical environment

Appropriate facilities, well-managed classrooms, available school-based health supports, and a clear, fair disciplinary policy are all environment factors that can contribute to a positive school climate. A positive academic environment is characterized by high-quality instruction, achievement-oriented behavior, student-centered approaches, and academic supports that address the diverse and unique needs of students.

A well-maintained and safe physical environment helps create a place where students can learn, pursue academic achievement, and demonstrate prosocial behaviors. Facilities in good condition, including cleanliness, high indoor air quality, and appropriate heating and cooling, are not only conducive to instruction and learning, but essential for student and staff overall health and well-being. Schools can also promote the mental health of all students by providing access to the proper services and resources. These supports can reduce mental, emotional, and behavioral difficulties and lead to better outcomes for students at risk.

A positive school climate also includes preventing and eliminating discrimination in the administration of student discipline. Successful school environments ensure the fair administration of student discipline policies in ways that treat students with dignity and respect, and may include restorative approaches that seek to build healthy relationships and stronger forms of community to prevent potential conflicts or address misconduct.



## Foster strong school connections and relationships

Trusting and caring relationships can set a strong foundation for shaping a positive school climate where students believe adults and peers within the school community care about their learning and respect them as individuals. Students who feel connected at school are significantly less likely to experience physical and mental health risks or engage in substance use, violence, and bullying.

To build school connectedness, teachers and school staff can create well-managed classrooms that incorporate positive behavior management strategies. These strategies can include establishing rules, routines, and expectations; reinforcing positive behavior; and including opportunities for active student participation. Furthermore, schools can adopt inclusivity policies, promote cultural competence, and provide positive youth development programs and staff training to support diverse student populations. Additionally, the involvement of families in schools can bolster positive student outcomes, including student achievement, better parent-teacher and teacher-student relationships, and an overall improved school environment.



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# Resources

SchoolSafety.gov features a range of resources schools and districts can use to support school climate initiatives. These include:

## Guides, Reports, and Practice Briefs

- [Guiding Principles for Creating Safe, Inclusive, Supportive, and Fair School Climates](#): This resource provides guidance on how to maintain safe, inclusive, supportive, and fair learning environments for students and school staff and includes specific recommendations for evidence-based practices to give students what they need to learn and grow. This resource is paired with four fact sheets related to unique audiences that describe best practices and approaches to help support and respond to students' social, emotional, behavioral, and academic needs: [school and district leaders](#), [student and teacher support teams](#), [educators and school-based staff](#), and [families](#).
- [Introduction to Restorative Practices: An Equitable Approach](#): This guide provides an overview of the restorative practices approach and offers recommendations and resources to help schools adopt equity-based restorative practices to build relationships and resolve conflict.
- [Parent and Educator Guide to School Climate Resources](#): This guide provides general information about the concept of school climate improvement and suggestions for leading an effective school climate improvement effort.
- [Strategies for De-escalating Student Behavior in the Classroom](#): This practice brief provides practical, research-based strategies educators can use to de-escalate challenging student behavior in the classroom.

## Resources, Trainings, and Tools

- [Creating a Safe and Respectful Environment in Our Nation's Classrooms](#): This training is designed to support classroom teachers, other educators, and support personnel to reduce instances of bullying behavior and to build a supportive classroom climate in which bullying is less likely to occur.
- [Preventing and Responding to Bias and Hate Incidents in K-12 Educational Settings: A Toolkit for School and Community Leaders](#): This toolkit provides school and community leaders with information and strategies to create safe and inclusive learning environments free of harassment and discrimination. It includes best practices to facilitate difficult conversations and equip schools to prepare for, mitigate, and respond to bias and hate incidents.
- [School Climate Improvement Resource Package](#): This package includes a variety of items to meet a range of needs among schools and districts interested in improving school climate, including a reference manual, action guides, data resources, and online modules.
- [School Climate Surveys](#): These adaptable surveys and associated web-based platform allows states, local districts, and schools to collect and act on reliable, nationally-validated school climate data in real-time.

## Websites and Technical Assistance Centers

- [Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports](#): This organization helps schools, districts, and states build a multi-tiered approach to social, emotional, and behavioral support that can improve school climate, safety, and academic outcomes for students, including students with disabilities and students from underrepresented groups.
- [National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments](#): This organization offers information and technical assistance to states, districts, schools, and communities focused on improving school climate and conditions for learning.
- [School Climate and Student Discipline Resources](#): This webpage provides tools, data, and resources to help schools meet students' social, emotional, behavioral, and mental health needs; understand and comply with Federal laws, including laws that prohibit discrimination; and find information and resources for promoting welcoming and safe schools.
- [School Connectedness Helps Students Thrive](#): This webpage describes school connectedness, the benefits of school connectedness, and the ways schools can take action to promote school connectedness.



Learn more and find additional school climate resources on [SchoolSafety.gov](#).

**Sources:** [Parent and Educator Guide to School Climate Resources](#) | [Guiding Principles for Creating Safe, Inclusive, Supportive, and Fair School Climates](#) | [Relationships First: Creating Connections that Help Young People Thrive](#) | [School Connectedness Helps Students Thrive](#) | [School Connectedness: What Can Schools Do?](#) | [Classroom Management](#) | [Components of the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child](#) | [Creating a Healthy and Supportive School Environment](#) | [National School Mental Health Best Practices: Implementation Guidance Modules for States, Districts, and Schools](#) | [Understanding the Importance of Creating Positive School Climates to Support Students Facing Adversity and Trauma](#) | [Creating and Sustaining Discipline Policies That Support Students' Social, Emotional, Behavioral, and Academic Well-Being and Success: Strategies for School and District Leaders](#) | [School Climate Measurement](#) | [Social Emotional Learning at a Glance](#) | National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments: [Safety Topics](#) and [Environment Topics](#) | [Impact of Family Engagement](#)



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