

School Environment

A positive, supportive school environment promotes healthy student development and learning and includes norms, values, and expectations that support individuals socially, emotionally, and physically.¹ The National School Climate Center (NSCC), the Center for Social and Emotional Education (CSEE), and the National Center for Learning and Citizenship (NCLC) highlight the following broad characteristics of a positive school climate:²

Norms, values, and expectations that make people feel socially, emotionally, and physically safe.

People are engaged and respected.





Students, families, and educators work together to develop, live, and contribute to a shared school vision.

Educators model and nurture attitudes that emphasize the benefits and satisfaction gained from learning.

Each person contributes to the operations of the school and the care of the physical environment.

Four essential dimensions of school climate include safety, teaching and learning, interpersonal relationships, and the institutional environment (Figure A).³

Figure A: Dimensions of School Climate

 SAFETY	 TEACHING AND LEARNING	 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS	 INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rules and norms Sense of physical security Sense of social-emotional security 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support for learning Social and civic learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respect for diversity Social support (adults) Social support (students) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School connectedness and engagement Physical surroundings

Source: National School Climate Center⁴

Principals should incorporate school climate components into their mission, vision, and belief statements to communicate a schoolwide focus that promotes a positive school environment.⁵ These statements can comprise priorities such as student safety and belonging, a caring environment, civic development, and student engagement and empowerment, which also support a positive school culture.⁶ While a mission statement describes the school's purpose, a vision statement establishes the school's goals.⁷ Together, a vision and mission statement can improve a shared understanding among stakeholders. Accordingly, school leaders should incorporate foundations of school climate to develop shared support.⁸

Click [here](#) to view Griswold Public Schools (VT) position statement on school climate.

Schools can also display visual reminders of their mission and vision statements in relation to school culture around the school.⁹ For example, Metea Valley High School (IL) created the Metea LIFE statement, which represents an acronym for the school's mission and belief statement to "Live with Integrity, Inspire a Passion for Learning, Foster Positive Relationships, and Expect Equity and Excellence for All."¹⁰ Metea Valley High School displays the LIFE statement throughout school facilities (e.g., on stair risers and classroom posters) to serve as a constant reminder of the school's values.¹¹

The Virginia Department of Education provides school leaders with a Culture and Climate Tool that includes strategies for supporting a positive school environment and promoting family and community engagement.

The following subsections examine research-based strategies for supporting a positive school climate, as included in the Virginia Department of Education's (VDOE) Toolkit.

Support Positive Student-Teacher Relationships

A positive school climate comprises positive, caring relationships between school staff and students.¹² Positive relationships enable students to feel supported and cared about in school.¹³ Accordingly, "teachers who foster positive relationships with their students create classroom environments more conducive to learning and meet students' developmental, emotional and academic needs."¹⁴ Positive relationships benefit students, educators, and the school community, as strong relationships can improve students' academic and social development, engagement, achievement, resilience to respond to trauma, and feelings of safety and acceptance.¹⁵

Educators can build positive relationships with students by creating personal connections and showing an authentic interest in students' lives, showing they care for students' well-being and success, communicating that they truly believe that all students can succeed, demonstrating mutual respect, and setting high expectations while supporting students to meet those expectations.¹⁶ To show students that they care, educators and school administrators should get to know their students and learn about their cultures and learning styles.¹⁷ Teachers who effectively establish strong, supportive connections with students recognize that they must earn students' trust and respect through their actions, and build trust by listening to and learning about their students.¹⁸ Figure B below offers additional strategies for developing positive relationships with students.

Figure B: Strategies for Developing Caring Relationships with Students

Listen to your students and demonstrate empathy.	Work to understand lines of similarity and difference that exist between yourself and your students.	Act as an ally to students.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to your students and seek to understand their concerns. Seek out student feedback, and try to incorporate this feedback into your teaching. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflect on the implications of your own identity markers (race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity) and the ways in which they are similar to (or different from) those of your students. • Strive to create a classroom space where each student feels that his/her identities are honored and respected. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge and validate your students' experiences. • Seek to understand the personal and societal challenges they are up against. • Work with students to combat different forms of oppression they may face.

Source: Sanford Inspire Program¹⁹

Notably, school leaders and educators must keep equity, diversity, and inclusion in mind when prioritizing relationships, and recognize that black students, LGBTQ students, and immigrant students are less likely to feel comfortable in school, according to principal and educator perceptions.²⁰

Enable High Expectations for Students with Support

A positive school culture includes high expectations that *all* students can succeed. School leaders should support a culture where educators challenge students with rigorous instruction and demand that students work hard and persist for academic success.²¹ A culture of high expectations can positively impact student self-esteem and confidence, intrinsic motivation, and academic achievement.²²

"In a culture of high expectations, the role of the principal is to remove barriers to success. An effective principal understands the importance of high expectations and is committed to working collaboratively with their staff to make needed changes."

– Education Partnerships, Inc.²³

The concept of "warm demand" situates high expectations for student performance within a caring and supportive approach.²⁴ Thus, the insistence that students work hard is rooted in care rather than compliance.²⁵ Warm demanders also respect students' cultures, and use aspects of students' experiences, home cultures, and interests when teaching. This cultural responsiveness integrates with an insistence on high academic achievement and positive behavior.²⁶ Figure C below presents strategies for using a warm demand approach for setting high expectations.

Figure C: Warm Demand Strategies for Setting High Expectations

Set rigorous learning objectives based on high expectations for student achievement

- Consult multiple sources (standardized assessments, district benchmarks, exemplary student work) to conceptualize rigor in your content area.
- "Plan backwards" so that units and lessons help students develop the knowledge and skills that will open doors of opportunity.

Combine "high help" with "high perfectionism"

- Use your words and actions to show students that you welcome their questions, are willing to help them when they make mistakes, and will make sure they understand the material.
- At the same time, constantly press students to improve the quality and accuracy of their work.
- Use assessment data to give feedback on progress, and push students toward higher levels of mastery

Plan engaging lessons that are relevant to the lives and aspirations of your students

- Constantly ask yourself questions like:
- Why do my students need to learn this?
- How can I link this content to their experiences, concerns, and aspirations?
- How will this knowledge help?

Teach and reinforce the mindsets that students will need for long-term academic success

- Identify habits and mindsets needed for your students' academic success: effort, perseverance, study skills, organization, etc.
- Teach and model these skills, and discuss them explicitly with students.

Source: Sanford Inspire Program²⁷

Additional practices for setting high expectations for student success include:²⁸

- Set expectations grounded in clear purpose and reason;
- Demand high expectations unapologetically;
- Ground high expectations in the reality of students' material conditions, history, and needs, but in a way that makes no excuses for them to be successful learners (i.e., hold students accountable regardless);
- Regularly cultivate the culture to achieve so that it becomes the norm;
- Focus on creating opportunities to give access to learning versus excluding students;
- During inquiry-based or constructivist instruction, build a strong foundation of the expectations surrounding discipline (i.e., what does it look like to be disciplined towards the learning?)
- Believe that you must cultivate EXCELLENCE through being a) persistent, b) consistent, c) knowledgeable, d) "hungry," e) innovative, f) creative; and
- Cultivate the firm belief, desire, and commitment to NOT let students be illiterate in the subject matter.

However, a positive climate not only sets high expectations for student achievement but provides the supports and tools to help students succeed.²⁹ Thus, school leaders and educators should go

beyond insisting that students succeed by "work[ing] tirelessly to create the conditions necessary for student success, including showing them how to succeed."³⁰

One strategy for providing the infrastructure to support students in achieving high expectations is by offering extended learning opportunities (ELOs). ELOs support students by providing organized learning environments beyond students' regular school hours.³¹ Schools can offer extended learning by lengthening the school day and adding either before- or after- school programming, implementing robust summer or weekend learning programs, and extending the school year.³² High-quality ELOs can improve student achievement, teacher-student relationships, positive attitudes towards school, social-emotional skills, and attendance.³³

Specific formatting and structure of extended-learning programs vary according to specific school needs and context. To determine whether a school is ready to develop, implement, and run an extended-learning program, principals should consider the questions in Figure D, below.

Figure D: Reflection Questions for Extended Learning Program Planning

What are your objectives for the program?

To provide after-school care for working parents? To offer additional enrichment activities, such as art and music? To broaden students' learning opportunities and improve academic achievement?

Whom will your program serve?

All students? Students in need of extra assistance? Children of working parents?

How will you structure your program?

Will you offer programming every school day? On weekends? Only during the summer? For how long?

How will you evaluate the program's effectiveness?

How will you integrate your program into your school's vision and mission?

How will you sell it to your staff? To students? To parents and community members?

Source: National Association for Elementary School Principals Afterschool & Summer Learning³⁴

Use Data to Promote Student Choice

As part of a supportive learning environment, principals should encourage educators to use student data to offer students choice in their learning.³⁵ Data from frequent, formative assessments can enable differentiated instruction and choice in both instructional forms and methods for students to demonstrate their learning. Formative assessment and differentiated instruction help promote student choice, as teachers must be familiar with their students' needs, strengths, and interests to provide options.³⁶ Student choice and relevancy are intrinsically related to student motivation, and thus increasing relevancy and student choice can motivate students to engage in learning.³⁷ Providing students with choice also creates a student-centered learning environment.³⁸ Accordingly, teachers should ask students about their interests, considering how these topics fit into the curriculum, and connecting instruction to students' interests.³⁹

Family and Community Engagement

Essential components of family and community engagement promoted by the VDOE's toolkit for principals include communicating student learning to families, providing parents with resources, involving stakeholders in decision-making, and engaging community partner support.

Communicate Student Learning to Families

School leaders and educators should proactively reach out to parents to communicate students' progress in school, what students are learning, and to set student goals. Research finds that proactive communication with parents and students about learning increases student engagement as measured by homework completion and classroom behavior.⁴⁰ Notably, when communicating about current assignments, school staff should avoid jargon and share how assignments contribute to learning goals.⁴¹

Providing parents with information on what students are currently learning and the types of learning activities they participate in can further enable parent engagement and make learning more relevant and meaningful. By providing context and content, parents can ask students appropriate questions and better engage with their child about what they are currently learning.⁴² The information that teachers communicate to parents should enable them to ask their child the following questions:⁴³

Tell me about (i.e., the order of operations, the book report draft that is due tomorrow, etc.)

Show me (i.e., the story you have to read tonight, the book chapter that you are going to be tested on this Friday, etc.)

Teach me (i.e., multiplication tables, Spanish, etc.)

One method for communicating classroom happenings with parents is through a short, weekly online classroom newsletter. Parents are more likely to read a weekly classroom newsletter with content relevant to their child's learning than a monthly newsletter from the school or district. Educators can use the newsletter to share the standards that week's lessons address, subject areas, sample class activities, and activities that parents can do at home to reinforce learning. Educators can also include space for parents to share the results of the activity and send the newsletter back.⁴⁴

Provide Parents with Resources to Support Learning

Schools can support at-home engagement by providing families with enriching, educational resources to take home. While research shows that students benefit academically from having educational resources and activities at home that parents and students can engage in together, many families, especially low-income families, may not have access to these resources. Schools should consider providing all or select families with a variety of educational resources, such as game packets or activities from a lending-library. As providing all families with take-home enriching resources may not be financially possible, schools should also encourage families to discuss the importance of homework, school work, and grades with their children.⁴⁵

Schools can also offer parent education programs and resources to engage parents in supporting their child's learning. For example, schools can offer workshops on how parents can create supportive learning environments, how to prepare for statewide or other standardized exams, and strategies for providing homework help. The Global Family Research Project (GFRP, formerly the Harvard Family Research Project) recommends providing professional development trainings and workshops that encourage parents to set high expectations and share strategies for supporting student success.⁴⁶ For example, the GFRP highlights Federal Way Public Schools in Washington, which offers workshops developed by the district and a parent committee that increases parents' capacity for advocating for their child's success, helps parents develop a support plan for

communicating with teachers and counselors, and shows parents how to take leadership roles in their child's school and district.⁴⁷

To ensure that workshops are accessible to all families, districts should schedule them for times when families are typically available (e.g., in the evenings or on weekends).⁴⁸ Additionally, in a report on engaging minority families, the National Education Association and Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund recommend:⁴⁹

- Providing specific strategies for parents to monitor their child's academics and identifying ways to help their child with homework;
- Providing training to develop parents' leadership skills so they can engage more fully in their child's school governance; and
- Developing parent trainers that can help recruit and inform other parents.

Involve Stakeholders in Decision-Making

School leaders should engage stakeholders by providing them with opportunities to participate in the school's decision-making processes. Indeed, involving stakeholders in decision-making not only improves engagement, but research indicates that stakeholders are more likely to support school goals and efforts if they perceive that the school takes their input into the decision-making process into consideration.⁵⁰ By engaging school, family, and community stakeholders in decision-making processes, school leaders increase stakeholder awareness of the process, build stronger relationships with those involved, and identify different perspectives and solutions to problems.⁵¹ Strategies to build a school culture of collaborative decision-making include:⁵²

Creating a requirement that school and district leaders solicit and incorporate teachers' professional expertise and parent, student, and community input into all decisions;

Specifying required timelines, resources, and accountability structures for gathering meaningful community input;

Offering district and school leaders training on best engagement practices;

Developing a representative oversight body to solicit teachers' professional judgments and the community's ideas, concerns, shared values, and vision for the district; and

Using surveys and multiple, accessible meetings to gather family and community input.

Schools can engage stakeholders in decision-making through the following strategies.

Figure E: Strategies for Engaging Stakeholders in Decision-Making

- Require school and district leaders to solicit and incorporate teachers' professional expertise as well as parent, student, and community input into decisions.
- Specify the required timelines, financial and nonfinancial resources, and accountability structures for meaningful community engagement.
- Offer school, district, and state leaders training on authentic community engagement and models of best engagement practices at the federal, state, and district levels.
- At the school level, develop a representative oversight body that can solicit teachers' professional judgments and the community's ideas, concerns, and shared values and vision about what they want their schools to look like.
- Use parent surveys and hold multiple, accessible meetings (i.e., meetings held at times and locations that parents can attend and that provide free childcare and simultaneous translations) for community input.
- At the district level, establish an advisory committee for stakeholders from multiple school sites to share experience and wisdom on school turnaround.

Source: National Education Association⁵³

School leaders should consider factors such as time, interest, experience, importance, and the need to gain buy-in when determining which stakeholders to involve in decisions (Figure F). Additionally, school leaders should consider involving stakeholders who have a stake in the decision, have expertise to contribute to the decision, and can be trusted to make decisions in the school's best interests.⁵⁴

Figure F: Factors to Consider when Determining Stakeholder Involvement in Decision-Making

Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Urgency may require the leader to make his or her own decision without consulting others. Participative decisions, especially collaborative decisions, require more time than a decision made alone. If important decisions are at stake, the leader must schedule more time for involvement.
Staff Interest in the Decision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Individuals have a "zone of indifference" in which they simply accept and are apathetic towards the leader's decision. In these cases, the leader would not benefit from trying to gain participation or collaboration. At higher levels of interest, however, more participation or collaboration is appropriate. Leaders who desire more collaboration must generate interest in the decision.
Staff Expertise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Followers who have very low levels of expertise accept the decisions of leaders. Staff members who have higher levels of expertise require either participation or collaboration to arrive at successful decisions. The leader who desires collaboration must raise levels of expertise to successfully involve subordinates.
Importance or Need for a High-Quality Decision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Some decisions are much more important and carry significant consequences. This is usually the case for instruction and learning, whether directly or indirectly. For important questions that demand high-quality decisions, collaboration is the best model. If the decision is relatively unimportant, then the leader should simply make the decision.
Degree of Need for Buy-In or Support for the Decision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Many decisions in schools need staff support for successful implementation and results. A collaborative model often increases buy-in and support.

Source: Education World⁵⁵

Principals can involve families in decision-making by providing families with opportunities to serve on school leadership committees, such as school improvement planning teams, budgetary committees, policy council, PTA advisory, and curriculum support committees.⁵⁶ Notably, community meetings must be accessible and have flexible schedules (i.e., meetings held at various times and locations, providing free childcare) to provide families with opportunities to attend. Additionally, schools should aim to have parent representation on committees that reflects the composition of the student body. To accomplish this, schools should specifically reach out to parents who are unrepresented on committees. In their Family Engagement Framework, the California Department of Education (CDE) recommends that schools "reach out to and support parents who are economically disadvantaged, have limited English, are migrants, or have children with disabilities to serve on committees."⁵⁷

Alternatively, principals can use the following strategies and considerations for involving teachers in decision-making:⁵⁸

- The opportunity to share in formulating policies is an important factor in the morale of teachers and their enthusiasm for the school.
- Participation in decision making is positively related to the individual teacher's satisfaction with the profession of teaching.

- Teachers prefer principals who involve them in decision making.
- Top-down initiatives often fail because they are not accepted by those who need to implement changes.
- Teachers neither expect nor want to be involved in every decision; in fact, too much involvement can be as detrimental as too little.
- The roles and functions of both teachers and administrators in decision-making need to be varied according to the nature of the problem.

Engage Community Partner Support

Community partnerships establish a mutually beneficial relationship between a school and a community organization or business and can provide human resources, services, or financial contributions.⁵⁹ Community partnerships provide schools and students with multiple benefits, such as increased learning opportunities, positive examples, guidance, increases social capital, and networking opportunities. Some community partnerships can also increase student access to physical health, mental health, and social services.⁶⁰

Schools can partner with a wide variety of community organizations, such as **local businesses, colleges and universities, faith-based organizations, libraries, police and fire departments, and community groups.** Figure G below highlights additional sample community partners, while Figure H presents a few specific examples of community partnerships.

Figure G: Sample Community Partners

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| ▪ Businesses community | ▪ Early childhood education providers | ▪ Parent-teacher organizations and educator groups |
| ▪ Higher education institutions | ▪ Afterschool and tutoring programs | ▪ Local residents/taxpayers |
| ▪ Faith-based organizations | ▪ Cultural/arts organizations | ▪ Elected officials and local/state government agencies |
| ▪ Health and human/social services organizations | ▪ Other non-profit/civic organizations | ▪ Advocacy groups |
| ▪ Youth development organizations | ▪ Research organizations | ▪ Media outlets |
| | ▪ Charitable foundations | |

Source: Great Schools Partnership and Partners for Each and Every Child⁶¹

Figure H: Community Partnership Examples

- The principal of a school works with a local library and other neighborhood organizations to create an anti-gang initiative in order to provide tighter security and special buses to ensure the safety of the students; after establishing this contact, the principal is invited to speak at the opening of the library's new computer facility;
- Local police officers offer to provide student and teacher training in conflict resolution to four schools in the community; now, when a conflict arises on the school playground, designated students work with both parties to discover amicable solutions to the problem;
- In cooperation with a local hospital, two high schools develop school-based health clinics; one of these now has an infant and child development center, while the other has a WIC and a counseling center;
- A large corporation decides to honor four local students with outstanding attendance records by awarding them \$500 scholarships to be used for higher education, and next year the corporation plans to give a special award to the student with the most impressive community involvement record; and
- Students at an elementary school are matched with local businesses for summer internships, which enable the businesses to tap into the skills of local youth and give the students a place to earn some money outside of school.

Source: Ohio Department of Education⁶²

When identifying community partners, school leaders should first assess the values they are looking for and the type of organizations with whom they want to partner.⁶³ Schools should choose community partners who are a good "fit" with the school and who have values that align with the school's vision.⁶⁴ While not all organizations have the same mission as the school, they may share

similar values such as supporting the community. Additionally, ensuring that partners understand the school's strengths and needs helps define expectations for the partner and the school.⁶⁵ Schools should identify and select organizations that meet their needs and are familiar with the local community population.⁶⁶

At the beginning of a partnership, the school and community organization should work together to establish each party's roles and responsibilities. Accordingly, "school staff and community partners should learn one another's various roles and responsibilities so that they can communicate effectively about their services and any students they may share."⁶⁷ Similarly, school leaders and representatives from the community partner should plan their goals and actions for the partnership together.⁶⁸ The Coalition for Community Schools and the National Association of School Psychologists developed nine elements that contribute to successful school-community partnerships, as demonstrated in Figure I below. Schools should consider these elements before developing necessary supports to ensure successful, sustaining community partnerships.

Figure I: Elements of Effective School-Community Partnerships

ELEMENT	DESCRIPTION
A leadership team comprised of school and community stakeholders	Engage the school principal, specialized instructional support personnel, parents, families, students, and community leaders in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of school–community partnerships.
Assets and needs assessment to address student health and wellness, and a framework for results	Community partnerships should enhance existing school-based service delivery models and help fill in the resource and service gaps based on the needs of the school. Schools and community partners should then mutually establish a framework for results with specific short- and long-term goals based on the needs identified in the assessment.
A designated person located at the school to lead the coordination of school–community partnerships	Coordinators help maintain partnerships with community agencies and facilitate effective communication and collaboration among the leadership team, specialized instructional support personnel, service providers, school personnel, parents, families, and members of the community.
Clear expectations and shared accountability for the school and community partners	Delineation of roles and responsibilities for school personnel and community providers enhances efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery while ensuring that the needs of the school are being met.
High-quality health and wellness services that leverage school and community resources	Specialized instructional support personnel and community service providers each have knowledge and skills critical to improving student and school outcomes. Leveraging the resources already available in the school and community settings improves effectiveness of school–community partnerships.
Ongoing comprehensive professional development for all school leaders, staff, and community partners	Continuous, high-quality professional development is important to ensure effective partnerships. Regular meetings with all stakeholders participating (school staff and community partners) should occur to ensure that they continue to build relationships and trust, develop a common vocabulary, and learn the same content and best practices around school–community partnerships.
A detailed plan for long-term sustainability	Successful partnerships plan for sustainability from the beginning. Develop a plan to maintain your community partnerships across multiple school and fiscal years. Try to create a diversified funding stream to support service delivery work from multiple funders.
Regular evaluation of effectiveness through a variety of measures	Partners are chosen based on data that highlight their fit with the current needs of the school and community. It is equally important that appropriate data are used to evaluate the effectiveness of the partnership.
Communication plan to share progress and challenges	It is important to share the successes and challenges of each school–community partnership to highlight what is working and ways to overcome challenges to educate others hoping to improve school community partnerships.

Source: Coalition for Community Schools and the National Association of School Psychologists⁶⁹



Community Partner Spotlight

Albert Lea Area Schools (Minnesota) partners with a variety of community organizations to help support students and families during the COVID-19 pandemic. The district's community partners help meet health, hunger, and childcare needs for district stakeholders. For example:⁷⁰

Freeborn County Public Health answers staff, student, and family calls and emails with questions about the COVID-19 pandemic 24/7.

The Family Y serves as a distribution location for meals, helps working families with childcare, and provides homework support.

United Way provides a variety of supports, including food distribution.

Mayo Clinic Health Systems support direct employees and families with COVID-19 testing and questions.

Gathering Stakeholder Perceptions

Gathering stakeholder perceptions and feedback is critical to promoting and improving a positive school climate and family engagement.⁷¹ According to National School Climate Center, "a comprehensive assessment of school climate includes major spheres of school life such as safety, relationships, teaching and learning, and the environment, as well as larger organizational patterns (e.g., from fragmented to shared; healthy or unhealthy)."⁷² Figure J offers strategies and actions to avoid when disseminating information about school climate initiatives and for obtaining stakeholder input about school climate.

Figure J: Strategies for Communicating Key Messaging and Obtaining Stakeholder Input

	What Does This Look Like When You Do the Work Well?	What Do You Want to Avoid? What Are Potential Pitfalls?
DISSEMINATE KEY MESSAGING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication activities help people understand the importance of school climate and that it is possible to assess and improve it. Messaging includes the importance and value of participation for each stakeholder group (e.g., creating a school environment that is more welcoming to families). Core planning team uses multiple communication strategies to disseminate information effectively (e.g., newsletters, websites, forums). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are few communication activities that focus on the importance of school climate and how to improve it. Communication activities are not tailored to the interests of all stakeholders (e.g., messaging is the same for all stakeholders). The core planning team uses only one communication technique, if any, to reach stakeholders (e.g., passing out one newsletter that describes the school climate efforts).
OBTAIN STAKEHOLDER INPUT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholders provide input and feedback in multiple ways (e.g., at forums and through surveys). Stakeholders help refine efforts. Stakeholders actively contribute to developing a plan for engaging stakeholders during data collection and developing and implementing interventions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not all stakeholder groups have opportunities to provide feedback. Stakeholders provide their input, but their input is not considered in the overall efforts. Stakeholders do not participate in planning ways to engage community members in school climate efforts.

Source: National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments⁷³

To gain a comprehensive view of school climate and its various aspects, the Colorado Education Initiative (CEI), an education-focused nonprofit that collaborates with the Colorado Department of Education and school districts across the state, recommends that schools use multiple gauges to measure school climate when possible.⁷⁴ For example, Figure K outlines the various potential measures of school climate identified by the CEI and other experts.

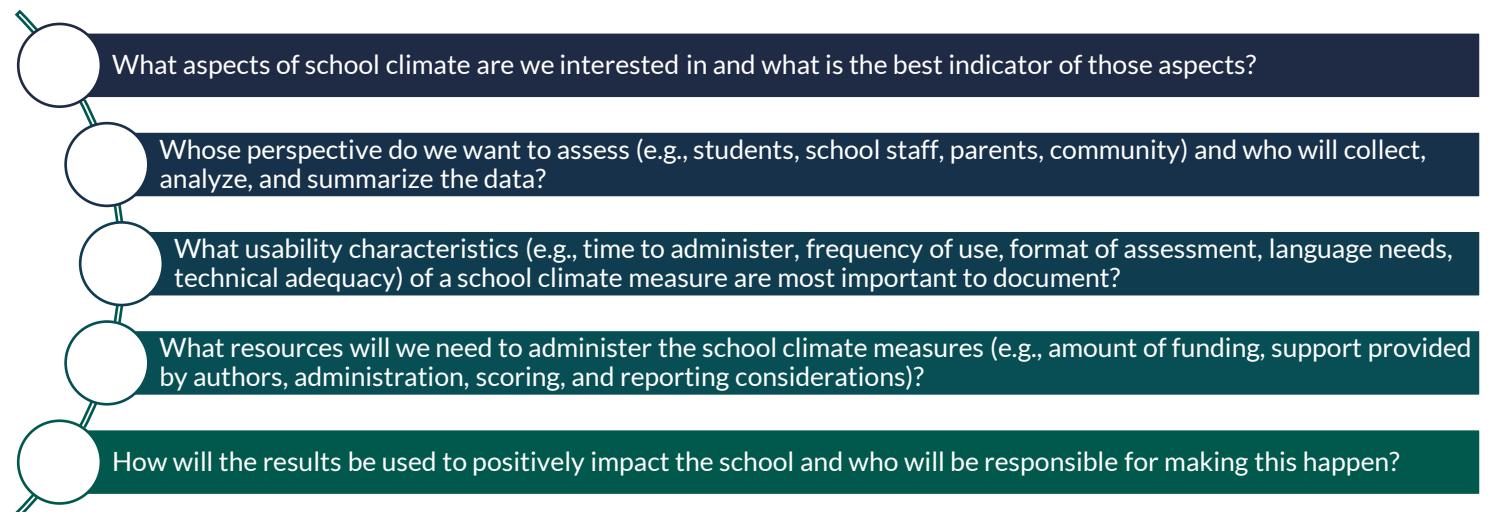
Figure K: Sample Measures of School Climate

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus groups Observational methods Interviews Town hall discussions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Study circles Participatory action research Hot-spot mapping to determine frequency and location of incidences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student, staff, and family surveys Incidence data (e.g., Schoolwide Information System (SWIS) or Infinite Campus (IC) data)
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Source: Colorado Education Initiative and Educational Leadership⁷⁵

Climate surveys serve as an important method for school and district leaders to collect student, staff, parent, and community perceptions of school climate and family and community engagement.⁷⁶⁷⁷ Schools administer climate surveys in both pencil-and-paper and electronic formats, and may include administrators and other school staff in addition to students, parents, and teachers.⁷⁸ When searching for a tool to measure school climate, the CEME recommends that school counselors and/or other school leadership consider the following questions listed in Figure L.

Figure L: Considerations for Choosing a School Climate Measure



Source: Center for Educational Measurement and Evaluation⁷⁹

Furthermore, based on our extensive experience designing and administering school climate surveys, Hanover recommends that schools employ the following survey design standards when developing climate surveys.

Figure M: Best Practices for Effective Survey Design

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Present matrix questions (e.g., Likert scales going from strongly disagree to strongly agree) from negative to positive. Randomize questions when multiple options are present to decrease "order-effects," which is common for questions of a similar structure. Balance Likert scales, for this survey, we primarily utilized three, four, and five-point scales. Use "N/A" or "Don't know" options when the question is either not relevant or the respondent is unsure. These are often consolidated because there is not an analytical reason to separate these results. Moreover, extending the scale (i.e., separating
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“N/A” and “Don’t know” as two different options) may encourage respondents to select more “positive” responses due to the relative physical position of the extended scale.







- **Keep open-ended comments to a minimum.** Respondents start providing redundant answers when faced with more than two or three open-ended responses.
- **Use skip logic** to ensure that respondents only answer questions pertinent to them.
- **Avoid too many or too few questions in a single page.** You may view these aesthetic aspects of the survey once the survey has been programmed into the online platform.
- Avoid questions with the following characteristics:
 - **Avoid double-barreled questions** (e.g., asking two question at once).
 - **Avoid leading questions.** For example, asking “Many staff members indicate that district buildings are clean. Is your building clean?” may lead a respondent to indicate that their building is clean regardless of their objective opinion. Asking leading questions makes respondents susceptible to social desirability. That is, respondents might then answer questions based on the question wording and not their objective opinion.
 - **Avoid subjective language** for survey questions to ensure that all respondents will interpret the survey item the same way.










Source: Hanover Research and World Bank Publications⁸⁰

Supplemental Resources

The following resources provide additional information on effective strategies and procedures for principals to promote a positive school climate and family and community engagement beyond that already included in this info-brief.

Figure N: Resources on Data Analysis and Assessment

RESOURCE	PUBLISHER	SHORTENED URL	QR CODE
School Environment			
“National School Climate Standards” ⁸¹	National School Climate Council	https://qrgo.page.link/RafXz	
“Quick Guide on Making School Climate Improvements” ⁸²	National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments	https://qrgo.page.link/V5XfE	
“Reference Manual on Making School Climate Improvements” ⁸³	National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments	https://qrgo.page.link/76Qd1	
“Becoming a Warm Demander” ⁸⁴	<i>Educational Leadership</i>	https://qrgo.page.link/hV3g6	
“Positive and Caring Relationships with Teachers are Critical to Student Success” ⁸⁵	Education Northwest	https://qrgo.page.link/1qgTg	
“Educating the Whole Child: Improving School Climate to Support Student Success” ⁸⁶	Learning Policy Institute	https://qrgo.page.link/xvb3g	

RESOURCE	PUBLISHER	SHORTENED URL	QR CODE
"Creating a Culture of High Expectations, Student Motivation and Instructional Support in Schools and Classrooms" ⁸⁷	Southern Regional Education Board	https://qr.go.page.link/HBLa2	
"Using Student Achievement Data to Support Instructional Decision Making" ⁸⁸	Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education	https://qr.go.page.link/mKuFM	
Family and Community Engagement			
"REAL Family Engagement" ⁸⁹	Flamboyant Foundation	https://qr.go.page.link/mbuKX	
"Handbook on Family and Community Engagement" ⁹⁰	Academic Development Institute	https://qr.go.page.link/hoxCb	
"Getting Started with REAL Family Engagement During Distance Learning" ⁹¹	Flamboyant Foundation	https://qr.go.page.link/9N18n	
"Engaging with Families during COVID-19 Distance Learning" ⁹²	Minnesota Department of Education	https://qr.go.page.link/JCW2V	
"Establish Community Schools and Wraparound Supports" ⁹³	Learning Policy Institute	https://qr.go.page.link/z635k	
"Designing Community Partnerships to Expand Student Learning" ⁹⁴	The Colorado Education Initiative	https://qr.go.page.link/jz51b	
"Innovative Examples of Community Involvement in Schools" ⁹⁵	Digital Promise	https://qr.go.page.link/LpjTG	

Source: QR Code Generator⁹⁶

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