

## Evidence Review: What do we know about School Climate?



This document is a brief summary of a recent “integrative review” of research on school climate. Unlike a systematic review or a meta-analysis, an integrative review does not combine data from a number of studies in order to reach conclusions. Instead the integrative review attempts to pull-together and summarize qualitative knowledge about a broad topic area.

### School Climate

Extensive research shows that school climate has a profound impact on students’ mental and physical health. In middle school students, positive school climate affects students’ self-esteem, mitigates the negative effects of self-criticism, and has wide-ranging effects on emotional and mental health outcomes.

Positive school climate is also related to the reduced frequency of high school student’s substance use and mental health problems, to reduced absenteeism in middle school and high school, and to lower rates of student suspension and other disciplinary measures.

Research from many countries around the world shows a positive correlation between positive school climate and motivation to learn, reducing violence and aggression, reducing harassment, and reducing the negative impact of socio-economic disadvantage on student achievement.

### Components of School Climate

There are a number of different components that are often considered as key factors in school climate. This review examined more than 200 published articles to develop a list of five key components of school climate.



### ***Why does this matter?***

- ⇒ ***School climate has an important effect on student achievement and student mental health***
- ⇒ ***There are a number of different components that make up what we call school climate.***
- ⇒ ***These key components include:***
  - ***School safety***
  - ***Relationships that are inclusive and equitable***
  - ***Teaching and Learning***
  - ***Institutional environment***
  - ***School improvement***



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# What do we know about School Climate?

## **School Safety**

Feeling safe – socially, emotionally, intellectually and physically – is a fundamental human need. Feeling safe in a school promotes student learning and healthy development. However, there is great deal of research that has shown that many students do not feel physically and emotionally safe in schools. This is largely a result of breakdowns in interpersonal and contextual factors that define a school's climate.

In schools without supportive norms, structures, and relationships, students are more likely to experience violence, victimization, and punitive disciplinary actions, often accompanied by high levels of absenteeism and reduced academic achievement.

## **Relationships**

One of the most important aspects of relationships in schools is how connected people feel to one another. Research has shown that in schools where students perceive a better structured school, fair discipline policies, and more positive student-teacher relationships, the probability and frequency of behaviour problems is lower.

As well, when students perceived teacher-student support and student-student support, these perceptions were positively associated with self-esteem and grade point average and negatively associated with depressive symptoms. If a teacher-student relationship is negative and conflictual in kindergarten, it is more likely that the student will have behavioural and academic problems in later grades.

Teachers work environment, peer relationships, and feelings of inclusion and respect are also important aspects of school climate. Positive adult relationships form a critical foundation for positive school climate.

## **Teaching and Learning**

Research supports the notion that a positive school climate promotes students' abilities to learn. Conversely, a school that has clearly defined norms, goals, and values for teaching and learning, will promote a positive school climate.

A positive school climate promotes cooperative learning, group cohesion, respect, and mutual trust. These particular aspects have been shown to directly improve the learning environment. A series of correlational studies have shown that school climate is directly related to academic achievement.

## **Institutional Environment**

Institutional Environment includes both the school connectedness/engagement with the community in which the school is sited, as well as the physical layout and surroundings of schools, their condition, and their resources and supplies.

School connectedness has been defined as "the belief by students that adults and peers in the school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals". School connectedness is seen as a powerful predictor of adolescent outcomes for both academic achievement and health outcomes.

There is a growing body of research that illuminates how environmental variables, such as classroom layout, activity schedules, and student-teacher interactions can influence student behaviour. The quality of school facilities has been found to affect student achievement through school climate.

## **School Improvement Process**

School climate is an important factor in the successful implementation of school improvement programs, and teacher's perceptions of school climate influence their ability to implement school-based character and development programs. Recent research has found that schools with high relational trust, such as good social relationships among members of the school community, are more likely to make changes that improve student achievement.

*This brief summary was prepared from:*

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*Please see the original document for full details. In the case of any disagreement between this summary and the original document, the original document should be seen as authoritative.*