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# The School Climate **SOLUTION**

Creating a Culture of Excellence  
from the Classroom  
to the Staff Room



.....**Jonathan C. Erwin**

The  
**School Climate**  
**SOLUTION**

Creating a Culture of Excellence  
from the Classroom  
to the Staff Room

Jonathan C. Erwin

free spirit  
PUBLISHING®



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## Dedication

This book is dedicated to my loving children,  
Nathan David Erwin and Laena Maryn Erwin.

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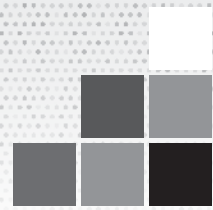
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# Introduction



Beginning this book with an analogy may belie its practical nature. But as a former middle and high school English teacher, I love analogies. And actually, analogies are very practical: They are a wonderful teaching tool, helping people see clearly that which otherwise may be obscure.

Here's the analogy: Educating students is like growing a garden.

Imagine an empty lot, one that we want to transform into a lush flower garden. As those responsible for this garden, we might begin by hiring a well-respected landscape architect to create a design for it, just as in education we spend billions paying teams of experts to create federal, state, and local curricula. Once we have our design, we might then hire a knowledgeable landscaper to plant, fertilize, water, weed, and nurture our new garden. Similarly, in schools we hire the best teaching candidates, expecting them to use the most effective instructional and classroom management practices available, resulting in our students learning and growing to their potential.

In time, we will evaluate our garden in terms of how we originally envisioned it. Based on our evaluation, we may need to make adjustments—moving a plant into a sunnier spot, watering more or less frequently, and so on. In schools, educators use a wide variety of assessments to evaluate our students' learning: formal, informal, formative, summative, standardized, teacher-created, and more. As in the gardening scenario, the results of the assessment may call for adjustments or improvements. In such cases, we may reexamine and revise our curriculum, our instructional

or classroom management practices, and/or the assessment tool, hoping for better scores on the next assessment.

Common sense would tell us that these three elements—planning (curriculum development), planting and nurturing (instructing and managing), and assessing and adjusting—would be everything we need to create a beautiful garden or educate our students.

There is a fourth element, however, which seems so obvious that we may not even consider it: the climate in which we attempt to grow our garden. For example, if a landscape architect from the American Southwest doesn't consider the climate of a garden planted in a southern Quebec province—many of the flowers and fruit trees he plants won't survive the harsh winters. His design will fail. No amount of tending will make a difference.

Similarly, if we don't attend to the climate in which our students are "planted," we, as educators, will also fail—no matter how well-designed the curriculum or how effective the teaching is.

Of course, some plants can thrive in a wide variety of climates, just like many students can learn and thrive in almost any learning environment. However, many plants thrive only within a limited range of temperature, rainfall, and other climate factors, and many students require specific school climate conditions in order to reach their "growing" or learning potential.

If we don't consider the climate in which our students and educators are striving to meet education standards, we are doomed to repeat the

pattern of examining and revising our curriculum, instruction, and/or the assessments while continuing to achieve the same unsatisfactory results. Doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results: Isn't that the definition of insanity?

Here is where the garden analogy breaks down: We can't control the physical climate in which we garden. It's impossible to turn an arctic tundra into the tropics. However, we *can* have a profound positive impact on the climate in which we educate our children. Through intentionally focusing on improving and maintaining a positive school climate, we can create a learning environment in which all students can thrive.

This book shows you how.

## Why School Climate Matters in an Era of Standards and Assessments

Educational policies in the United States and Canada, and those in many other countries throughout the world, seem to focus on one main goal: global economic competition. In the United States, especially, education seems to be driven by the economic and political objective to be number one to an extent not seen since the Cold War—particularly since the Sputnik launch in 1957 and the subsequent emphasis on science and mathematics. Today, however, more is involved. Nations are concerned with attaining or maintaining their economic status in a highly globalized, complex, dynamic, volatile, and ever-shrinking world.

This drive to be first in the global marketplace has had a profound effect on educational policy and practices over the years. The call to “Raise the standards!” has been the battle cry since the 1980s, with educators in the United States now grappling with more demanding student learning standards (such as Common Core State Standards, or CCSS). We have been introduced to dozens of learning and teaching models, from Madeline C. Hunter's elements of instruction to collaborative learning to brain-based learning to differentiated

instruction to response to intervention (RTI)—and on and on.

Likewise, educators have learned about many assessment models, including authentic assessment; curriculum-based assessment; and mastery, competence, or proficiency-based education. And, of course, today's educators are well aware of assessments designed to evaluate how students and teachers are performing in terms of meeting the CCSS. Even with the passing of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), with its intent to diminish excessive use of testing, the focus remains on testing and accountability that impacts educators and students every day.

## The Impact of Current Trends on Administrators and Educators

For educators, federal and state mandates and the focus on achievement test scores can be overwhelming. Administrators are concerned with finding dollars in the budget to comply with the ever-increasing unfunded state and federal mandates. They express frustration with the number of teacher observations required while continuing to effectively address the daily crises, parent communication, stacks of paperwork, student discipline, and other responsibilities piled high on their professional plates. The bottom line is stress for most, *distress* for many.

Being under this kind of pressure and scrutiny is too much for many teachers, who are choosing to leave the profession. New teacher retention has reached what some call a crisis. The stresses of teaching, and subsequently of high teacher turnover, take a tremendous toll: first, on those thousands of young people who have invested money and time toward achieving a teaching degree that they are not likely to use; second, on already inadequate school district budgets in terms of taxpayer dollars spent on advertising, hiring, and training new teachers; third, and most importantly, on students who are assigned to novice teachers or long-term substitutes. The students in these classrooms often lose a sense of continuity and the benefits of learning from seasoned professionals.

## The Impact of Current Trends on Students

Kids come to school stressed. An American Psychological Association survey reported that adolescents are, on average, at least as stressed as the adults around them, sometimes more.<sup>1</sup> During the school year, their stress level increases significantly.

It isn't hard to understand why. The pressure and distress that administrators and teachers feel can trickle down to students. As more time is focused on mathematics and English language arts, less time is dedicated to art, music, history, science, STEM, physical education, experiential learning, team-building activities, and play. Many students' homework load can interfere with important free time at home and sometimes with family plans and activities, creating more stress. Test preparation often results in sedentary learning—students working independently at their desks on reading, writing, and computation—with little opportunity to talk or exercise.

The tests themselves, of course, are stressful. But more stressful is the anticipation of them. Children lose sleep and many teachers regularly “stress” the importance of these assessments and spend class time on little else but test preparation.

So much for the proverbial carefree childhood; today's kids are stressed! And many—those who set almost impossible goals for themselves, or who struggle because of economic, family, social, emotional, or learning challenges—are *distressed*! More students than ever report having issues with anxiety, depression, and anger.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, not all students are distressed. The majority of students can deal with the stress and seem reasonably able to manage their emotions and behavior. But many of these kids, if you ask them, will tell you that school is not on their top 10 lists of places to be.

## The Default Climate

Due to all these pressures, the current climate of many schools is in what I call the default mode.

<sup>1</sup>American Psychological Association, 2014.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

The default climate is often characterized by stress, anger, mistrust, fear, resentment, boredom, and us-vs.-them thinking (state vs. district; teachers vs. administrators; central office vs. site-based leaders; teachers vs. students; parents vs. school officials). Worse, many people experience feelings of powerlessness or helplessness. When people feel helpless and out-of-control, they tend to exert as much control over things (and other people) as they can. This often leads to controlling behaviors such as blaming, complaining, criticizing, threatening, bullying, labeling, name-calling, punishing, and bribing (rewarding to achieve compliance). These behaviors tend to erode relationships, trust, and a sense of shared purpose and increase a sense of isolation and fear.

Who wants to, or even can, work or learn in this kind of default climate? It's no wonder that research connects the characteristics of the default climate with increased meanness and bullying, lower graduation and attendance rates, and—critically—compromised learning and achievement.

## Every School Can Do Better

Perhaps you don't recognize your school in these grim descriptions. Maybe your school is doing okay, or even pretty well, in terms of climate and achievement. Or maybe you're a teacher looking to create a more positive classroom environment without the benefit of a whole-school approach. The truth is, every school—and every classroom, team, club, or group—can improve its climate, and thus its achievement.

## Components of Positive School Climate

So what makes a positive school climate? According to the National School Climate Center's “School Climate Research Summary,” virtually all researchers suggest five essential areas of focus: safety, relationships, teaching and learning, the institutional environment, and school climate, the processes of school improvement.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Thapa, A., et al., 2012.

### Safety

A positive school climate is one in which everyone feels a sense of physical and emotional safety. It is one free of threats, violence, meanness, bullying, and relational aggression. Students and adults are encouraged to take risks without fear of embarrassment or being labeled a failure. Additionally, there is a sense of order in the school and classroom, characterized by predictable, consistent procedures, routines, and fair, consistent discipline.

### Relationships

All stakeholders in the school community—parents, teachers, students, school leaders, and support staff—share a sense of acceptance, mutual respect, and shared core values such as empathy. Roles and responsibilities are clear, social support is available, and rather than a strict social hierarchy, there is a sense of positive interdependence as all stakeholders work toward a common mission.

### Teaching and Learning

In a positive school climate, the emphasis is on student engagement. Students understand the usefulness of the information and skills they are required to learn and are taught in ways that actively engage them. Additionally, social-emotional learning is integrated into the core curriculum.

### The Institutional Environment

The physical structure of the school is safe, clean, uncluttered, and aesthetically pleasing. All people have adequate resources (textbooks, technology, space, and so on) to do their jobs. The hallways and classrooms are designed to provide students and adults with a warm, friendly, inviting atmosphere.

### School Climate, the Process of School Improvement

Studies suggest that the most effective school improvement programs are those that are incorporated directly into the curriculum and addressed by the school community as a whole. When we treat school improvement with the same intensity and gravity as academic subjects, climate improves.

### Student Voice

The National School Climate Center does not mention student voice, but in my work with

schools, empowering students and providing them with a voice in improving their school is vital to climate improvement. Just as most businesses and corporations invite customer feedback to improve their products and services, providing our “customers”—the students—with opportunities to have a voice in their educational experience can have a significant impact on school climate, particularly in terms of adult-student relationships.

In fact, listening to students may be the most effective way for educators to show that they care about students. Research on teacher-student relationships links greater opportunity for students to have a voice with a greater likelihood for positive relationships. That can lead to greater academic success.<sup>4</sup> Students feel more connected to their school when they are given opportunities to participate in processes such as the making of rules and organizing of school events.

## The School Climate Solution

By placing an emphasis on developing a positive school climate, we can make significant strides toward addressing some of the most important concerns in education today:

- Reducing discipline issues including meanness and bullying
- Increasing the graduation and attendance rates
- Improving student learning and achievement

### Reducing Discipline Issues Including Meanness and Bullying

Bullying has been and continues to be an enduring issue in schools everywhere. The Youth Voice Project ([www.youthvoiceproject.com](http://www.youthvoiceproject.com)) surveyed over 13,000 students in grades 5–12 from schools all over the United States. Their findings:<sup>5</sup>

- 1 in 4 students reported being excluded or emotionally hurt by another student on a regular basis.

<sup>4</sup>Barile, J.P., et al., 2012.

<sup>5</sup>Davis, S., & Nixon, C., 2010.

- 1 in 10 students reported being physically victimized on a regular basis.
- 48 percent reported being regularly exposed (as victim or witness) to relational aggression (seeing or hearing rumor-spreading, exclusion, or students working together to be mean to someone).
- 54 percent reported being regularly exposed to name-calling or threatening comments.

Yet, despite the media coverage and public attention that bullying receives, despite the anti-bullying and anti-discrimination school legislation enacted in many states, and despite the hundreds of anti-bullying programs being used, what schools are currently doing still does not seem to be enough.

Improving school climate can help. One of the most important aspects of creating a positive school environment involves building positive relationships. The degree to which students feel accepted and connected at school has a profound impact on reducing meanness and bullying. Research shows that students' sense of connectedness is a powerful predictor of and/or is associated with:

- preventing school violence
- reducing conduct problems
- reducing aggression and violence

And while it's important to base school improvement initiatives on research, it's also common sense that if students like and accept each other, they're far less likely to engage in mean, aggressive, or violent behavior.

## Increasing Graduation and Attendance Rates

Dropout rates in the United States continue to be problematic. In 2012, there was an 81 percent U.S. national graduation rate, below that of most developed countries.

In an article entitled "Understanding Why Students Drop Out of High School, According to Their Own Reports,"<sup>6</sup> the researchers examined seven studies conducted over the last 50 years on the reasons students cited for dropping out of high school. The reasons for dropping out fell into three categories: 1) Push Factors involve "adverse

situations within the school environment," 2) Pull Factors involve factors within the student that divert him from attending to school, things like financial worries, family problems, pregnancy, marriage, out-of-school employment, and 3) Falling Out Factors, which occur when a student does not show significant academic progress in schoolwork and becomes apathetic or even disillusioned with school and eventually leaves.

The authors conclude that, while in the past pull factors were most prevalent, the most recent studies find that push factors are most frequently cited by students. The reasons students reported for dropping out frequently included:

- not liking school
- not getting along with teachers
- not feeling like they belong, or not getting along with other students
- fearing for their safety
- feeling unable to satisfy academic requirements

These factors all relate to school climate. We, as educators, may not be able to directly influence what the authors call pull factors, but we can be deliberate about creating a school climate and culture that addresses push factors.

## Improving Student Learning and Achievement

From my perspective, district administrators, school leaders, and teachers are working as hard as they can and in many districts are doing so in the face of significant budget cuts, which often result in staff and program cuts, larger class sizes, and fewer resources. To meet standards, many schools have extended the school day and/or year and cut back on music, art, library, and physical education classes to make more time for reading and math instruction. Some have gone so far as to eliminate recess in elementary grades.

Educators are doing all this to raise achievement. But there is a better way. A large and growing number of studies show a strong link between school climate and academic achievement. Through an extensive analysis of educational, social, and cognitive psychology, researchers have found that school climate is one of four variables

<sup>6</sup> Doll, J.J., et al, 2013.

(including student engagement, learning strategies, and socio-familial influences) directly linked to academic achievement at the K–12 level.<sup>7</sup> Another study linked higher scores on standardized tests with healthy learning environments.<sup>8</sup>

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has conducted a meta-analysis of research on the benefits of social-emotional learning. That meta-analysis—which is a core element of this book—shows that schools that included SEL as part of the universal curriculum, among other important outcomes, students’ achievement scores increased by an average of 11 percentile points.<sup>9</sup>

### Benefits of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

CASEL reports that students who attend schools that integrate SEL into the curriculum:

- demonstrate improved social and emotional skills
- report improved attitudes toward teachers, other students, and school in general
- demonstrate more pro-social behavior
- experience a sense of connectedness, acceptance, respect, and mutual trust

The implications of the research are clear: Being intentional about creating and maintaining a positive school climate can have a profound and positive impact on student learning and achievement.

### Additional Benefits

A positive school climate is also associated with other important benefits. Studies have shown that approximately 30 percent of high school students engage in multiple high-risk behaviors (such as substance use, sex, violence, depression, attempted suicide) that interfere with school performance and jeopardize their potential for life success.<sup>10</sup> The National School Climate Center reports that positive and sustained

<sup>7</sup> Lee, J., and Shute, V.J., 2010.

<sup>8</sup> MacNeil, A.J., et al, 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Durlak, J.A., et al, 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Dryfoos, J.G., 1997; and Eaton, D.K., et al, 2008.

school climate is associated with and/or predictive of not only effective risk prevention and health promotion efforts,<sup>11</sup> but also positive youth development and student motivation to learn.<sup>12</sup>

And importantly, while the emphasis so far has been on how positive school climate benefits students, it is also shown to have positive benefits for teachers. Research shows that it improves teacher practice and leads to higher job satisfaction.<sup>13</sup>

So, in summary, a positive school climate helps improve achievement and improves the happiness of students and educators—that’s you.

## About *The School Climate Solution*

### Who This Book Is For

*The School Climate Solution* is designed for anyone in a school or district who has the desire to create a positive working and learning environment in their school(s) or classroom(s)—an environment that will inspire and sustain members of the school community as they work together toward the common goal of professional and academic success for all. This book is most effective when used as the basis for a whole-school approach to climate improvement involving all stakeholders, led by a climate improvement team composed of administrators, teachers, student support staff (social worker, counselor), parents, and student representatives. However, it contains valuable insights and practical strategies for all these readers, even if they are not part of a school-wide climate program. You can use ideas and strategies in this book to improve the climate and culture of an individual classroom, a sports team, a musical organization, the cast of a play, or any extracurricular club or organization.

Some of the initiatives and practices explained in this book are school-wide in scope. Some are designed for specific settings—the classroom, the principal’s office, various meetings, discipline settings, and so on. Many of the approaches and structures can be used by all community members (the process for positive change, for example, on

<sup>11</sup> Cohen, J., and Geist, V.K., 2010.

<sup>12</sup> Eccles, J.S., et al, 1993; and Goodenow, C., and Grady, K.E., 1993.

<sup>13</sup> Cohen, J., and Geist, V.K., 2010.



pages 167–177). Others are designed for specific roles, such as school leaders, teachers, school counselors, coaches, club advisors, and parent-teacher organization leaders. No matter your role, it can be helpful to read all these sections.

Most of the strategies in *The School Climate Solution* work in elementary, middle, and high school settings, but some are specific to particular developmental levels. While the majority of the classroom strategies are designed primarily for students in third grade and above, many can be used just as explained or modified to be used with students as young as kindergarten. See pages 9–10 for a detailed explanation of the structure of the book, which can help you focus on the chapters most relevant to you.

## A Note on Audience and Style

To avoid confusion, and to provide consistency in point of view, I have written this book with all educators in mind as the audience. When addressing a more specific audience (classroom teachers or school principals, for example), that audience is clearly identified, as is the developmental level the strategies are designed for.

When referring to people, I have used plural pronouns whenever possible. When unable to avoid single third-person references, I alternate between *he/his* and *she/her*.

In short, whether you are a school superintendent seeking ways of improving the graduation rate; a school principal hoping to improve academic achievement; a school counselor wanting to decrease bullying behavior; a coach looking to improve team cohesion; a PTO member trying to improve the sense of emotional safety at school; or a teacher seeking to create a better learning environment in the classroom, this book is for you!

## How to Use This Book

*The School Climate Solution* is designed to be practical and flexible. It can be used as a school-wide manual for climate improvement, implementing

strategies and processes in a chapter-by-chapter process. It might also be used as a reference to help expand a climate improvement initiative already in place, implementing, for example, the student leadership chapter or the touchstone process. (Read about the touchstone starting on page 34.)

Many of the activities are intended for a school-wide setting, but many can be used in (or modified for) an individual classroom, where a teacher might use this book as a grab bag of strategies to build and sustain a positive classroom environment. Central office and school leaders may want to use some of the strategies with their staff to improve relationships, reduce stress, and improve communication. (Adult interactions in schools can have a significant impact on climate.) See Chapter 1: Getting Started for more information about approaching your climate solution.

However you choose to use this book, you will soon find that the process of creating a more human and more humane learning and working environment for everyone is a joyful experience.

## The Story Behind the School Climate Solution

During my preservice training to become a secondary English teacher, the courses I took provided me with a solid foundation in English literature, a rich array of instructional strategies, and a fairly traditional approach to behavior management. I don't recall even hearing the terms *school climate* or *classroom climate*.

In my first year as a teacher, working mostly with seventh- and eighth-grade students, I did my best to implement all that I'd learned in undergraduate school. I even tried not to smile until Thanksgiving, as the old teaching adage suggests, but caught myself smiling as soon as the first student came in my classroom. At that moment, I remember thinking, "Maybe I'm not cut out for this profession. I want to smile and I want my students to like me, not just respect my authority."

Nonetheless, I forged ahead with my instruction and the traditional approach to behavior management, which included clear, simple rules, incentives for positive behavior, and consequences for breaking the rules.

The results were also fairly traditional: a bell curve in terms of student performance and (as in

most middle school classrooms) fairly regular disruptions and discipline incidents. I was frustrated. Like many beginning teachers, I pictured a classroom of well-behaved, motivated learners who all succeeded academically. What frustrated me the most was that I didn't know what else to do.

The next summer, a professional development opportunity changed my approach to teaching, and as a result it transformed my classroom and my life. It was a four-day training in William Glasser's Choice Theory and Quality Schools, an approach that emphasizes positive relationships and intrinsic motivation. Gaining an understanding of what motivates all human behavior enabled me to apply Glasser's ideas to my own classroom. What resulted was a classroom climate characterized by a sense of order (sometimes noisy, yet productive), positive relationships with and among my students, and significantly better learning and student performance. In addition, it was a lot more fun and professionally satisfying.

Because of my success, I was given the opportunity to share Glasser's ideas with my colleagues, which eventually led to a professional development position at our local Board of Cooperative Educational Services. Since then, I have had the opportunity to travel all over North America as well as to Australia, Europe, and South America teaching both the concepts and specific strategies that transformed my classroom, passing on to others the ability to create a classroom and school climate of success for all. One such experience, described as follows, was well-researched and documented.

For three years, I worked as director of training and curriculum for Smart Character Choices (SCC), a character education program in Michigan developed by CS Partners, a charter school management company funded by a grant provided under the federal Safe and Drug-Free Schools Act. During the three-year initiative, my colleague Diane Vance and I implemented the strategies explained in this book with four demographically diverse schools in Michigan:

**The Dearborn Academy**, a K–8 charter school just outside Detroit whose student population was made up of 85 percent Arabic children (many recent immigrants from Iraq and Lebanon), 10 percent African-American children, and 5 percent other ethnicities, with a high poverty rate (94 percent free and reduced lunch).

**The Chatfield School**, a predominantly Caucasian (92 percent), middle class K–8 school in the small city of Lapeer.

**Randels Elementary**, a K–6 public school in the economically challenged city of Flint with 53 percent of its students receiving free or reduced lunch. Its population was 50 percent African American, 42 percent Caucasian, and 8 percent other ethnicities.

**Creative Technologies Academy**, a predominantly Caucasian (97 percent) rural K–12 charter school in Cedar Springs, about 20 miles outside of Grand Rapids.

The SCC initiative was investigated by a team of researchers from the University of Minnesota. This research was focused on the impact of the program on student behavior, student attitudes toward school, and parent perceptions of the schools. It compared the differences in pro-social behavior and attitudes among eight randomly selected schools—the four schools implementing the SCC initiative and four schools that did not. The research showed that in the schools that went through the SCC program, “students reported better attitudes toward school, themselves, and others, and that parents reported being more satisfied with their children's schools.”<sup>14</sup>

Besides these positive outcomes, two schools involved in the initiative received additional recognition. In the third year of the program, the Chatfield School won the Michigan State School of Character Award and a national Character Education Partnership “Promising Practices” designation. The same year, Randels Elementary School was featured on ABC News for a service learning initiative it began during our program, raising over \$6,000 for Habitat for Humanity.

Additionally, the SCC initiative negated typical predictors of behavior problems: poverty and high class size. Whereas the control group showed significant correlations between those predictors and problem behaviors, there was no similar relationship between the two in the SCC schools.<sup>15</sup> Lastly, the University of Minnesota researchers stated that the approach we used in the SCC initiative—the approach contained in this book—has a proven record of effectiveness in urban, suburban, and rural schools and has shown to level the playing

<sup>14</sup> Szadokierski, I., et al, 2010.

<sup>15</sup> Parker, D.C., et al, 2010.



field for schools with high poverty rates and/or high class sizes.

## An Overview of This Book

**Chapter 1. Getting Started.** Chapter 1 will help you make your own school climate plan. It contains guidelines for whole-school as well as smaller initiatives. After that chapter, the book is divided into three parts:

- Part 1. Setting the Foundation: Safety and Relationships
- Part 2. Essential Tools: Teaching Social-Emotional Skills
- Part 3. Optimal Conditions: Creating a Needs-Satisfying Environment

Each chapter introduces a new concept along with guidelines for introducing it to your students (and, at times, other staff) and provides community meetings and activities to help reinforce the material. Every activity begins with guidelines to help you adjust it to different audiences (including very young students) as well as the time, materials, and prep work required. Most of the activities can be done in less than a typical class period (usually about 20 minutes) without much, if any, prep and require no materials beyond what you are likely to have in your classroom. Some activities include handouts. These are noted in the materials list and thumbnails of the handouts can be found at the end of each chapter. The handouts are included in the digital content for this book and can be downloaded and printed out. See page viii for download instructions. You will need to print out copies of the handouts before the sessions. Some of the handouts can be modified before printing to personalize them to your situation.

### Part 1 Setting the Foundation: Safety and Relationships

This section provides important beginning steps to creating or improving a positive school

environment by focusing on providing a sense of physical and emotional safety and a sense of community.

**Chapter 2. The Community Meeting.** This chapter explains the community meeting, a protocol designed to be used by principals, teachers, coaches, club advisors, parent-teacher organization officers—anyone who works with or supervises others. The community meeting creates a safe, structured approach to improving group communication and building a sense of community.

**Chapter 3. The School Touchstone.** One important way to engage the school community in clarifying a shared vision is by creating a school touchstone: a word, phrase, statement, or image that represents the school's core values. This chapter is intended for school leaders or leadership teams as a guide to facilitating the touchstone development process with their school community, although teachers and other leaders might consider creating a classroom, team, or club touchstone, as well.

**Chapter 4. Bringing the Touchstone Values to Life.** Once a school touchstone has been established, the strategies in this chapter help school leaders, school counselors, teachers, coaches, and club advisors bring it to life by integrating it into the school, classroom, or team culture.

**Chapter 5. Integrating the Touchstone Values into the Academic Curriculum.** Intended particularly for classroom teachers, this chapter provides ideas, model lessons, and resources for integrating the touchstone values into the academic curriculum in ways that satisfy the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).

**Chapter 6. Inspiring Student Leadership.** This chapter explains how to select, train, and provide opportunities for students to lead and serve the school community in ways that can have a profound positive impact on the school.

### Part 2 Essential Tools: Teaching Social-Emotional Skills

This section provides school leaders, counselors, teachers, coaches, and others with specific games,

activities, and discussions that teach adults and students the most essential social and emotional skills not only for creating a positive school climate, but also for improving academic, professional, and personal success. Each of the chapters works off the metaphor of the “behavioral car,” which makes understanding social and emotional skills more accessible to students of all ages. Additionally, each chapter provides specific suggestions for student performance tasks that help integrate SEL into the core curriculum in ways that satisfy the CCSS, particularly in English language arts. Additional resources are also listed at the end of each chapter.

**Chapter 7. Introducing Social-Emotional Learning to Your Students.** This chapter offers a research-based rationale for integrating SEL into the curriculum and introduces the behavioral car. It explains specific ways of teaching important foundational concepts and connecting these concepts to the academic curriculum.

**Chapter 8. The Five Basic Human Needs: The Fuel for the Car.** This chapter explains the Five Basic Human Needs that drive all human behavior and provides activities that help people understand what motivates them and others, so they can gain insight into their own behavior and develop acceptance of others.

**Chapter 9. Understanding Emotions in Ourselves and Others: The Lights on the Dashboard.** This chapter provides engaging ways of helping people accurately identify emotions in themselves, a first step in self-regulation. It also provides activities that help people learn to identify emotions in others, so that they can be more sensitive in their social interactions.

**Chapter 10. Self-Regulation: The Four Wheels of the Car.** This chapter, one of the most important in the book, provides resources to teach an essential skill for students and adults: self-regulation—the ability to control impulses, manage anger and stress, and regulate emotions in ourselves. It includes mini-lessons, activities, community meetings, and other resources.

## Part 3

### Optimal Conditions: Creating a Needs- Satisfying Environment

When people work and learn in an environment designed to meet the Five Basic Human Needs, they behave more responsibly and perform at higher levels. The chapters in Part 3 provide strategies that leaders of both adults and students can employ to create the conditions for such an environment.

**Chapter 11. Addressing the Needs for Emotional Safety and Connectedness.** This chapter provides specific strategies for creating a physically and emotionally safe environment and building trusting relationships.

**Chapter 12. Addressing the Needs for Power, Freedom, and Fun.** As people feel an increased sense of safety and connectedness, they can be provided with a greater voice in decisions that affect them (power); more choices and autonomy (freedom); and more opportunities to play and have fun. This chapter provides strategies and structures you can use to create a climate where people are empowered, liberated, and joyful.

**Chapter 13. A Social-Emotional Approach to Behavior Management.** No matter how positive a school climate is, adults and students will, at times, break rules, behave irresponsibly, and come into conflict. This chapter provides approaches to behavior management and discipline that keep relationships and the school and classroom environment intact.

While attaining the ideal learning and working climate in a school takes time and effort, the journey itself can be inspiring. I wish you the best as you begin the important work of developing and sustaining a school climate, one which brings out the best in everyone, students and adults alike. I would love to hear about your experiences with the school-wide climate solution—your success, challenges, and ideas. Please write to me in care of Free Spirit Publishing at [help4kids@freespirit.com](mailto:help4kids@freespirit.com).

All the best to you,

**Jonathan Erwin**

# Getting Started



You may be a principal or other administrator starting from scratch—perhaps you’ve been charged with reducing violence, increasing attendance, or improving achievement at your school. If so, *The School Climate Solution* provides a thorough and effective program. Share this book with your staff and communicate with them regularly about progress. This chapter provides a roadmap for working with staff and students throughout the school year. Or maybe you’re already using an anti-bullying or social-emotional program in your school; if so, the ideas and activities in this book can be a great complement, easily integrated into what you’re already doing. Reading this chapter will help you figure out which aspects of the book to introduce at your school. Guidelines for a whole-school approach begin on this page.

If you’re a teacher, coach, club advisor, counselor, or other leader looking for ways to build community in your smaller groups, feel free to pick and choose aspects from this book that make sense for your situation. Suggestions for where to begin and what to include are provided in this chapter. Go to page 15 for guidelines on individual use.

Whatever your situation, I recommend you make the climate solution your own. While my recommendations are based on my years of experience in improving school climate and culture, the way you implement in your situation may need to be modified because of your school’s unique resources, opportunities, and challenges. Every successful school climate initiative eventually takes on its own unique personality, which is one of the

best aspects of the climate improvement process. It shows that a school has taken ownership of the process and has a compelling shared vision.

As you read these recommendations for beginning and sustaining the climate improvement process, you will find that there are many opportunities to make it your own, while still maintaining the integrity of the general program.

## The Whole-School Climate Initiative

As the leader of the climate improvement initiative, whether you are a school administrator, faculty member, or school counselor who has been delegated the responsibility of leading the process, it is critical to involve—right from the beginning—various stakeholders in the school community: staff, faculty, students, administrators, and parents. If students and other members of the community see the initiative as a program driven from the top down, it is unlikely to succeed. On the other hand, if you are able to garner grassroots support from the beginning, the initiative is likely to catch on like wildfire.

One of the most effective ways to establish support is by creating a Climate Improvement Team (CIT).

## Create a Climate Improvement Team (CIT)

A CIT is made up of a diverse group of people who represent different stakeholder groups: faculty, administrators, counselors, staff, parents, and students. Members of this team will serve as representatives of their groups and communicate with them, both to advise and make decisions in the implementation of the initiative and to champion the effort. The CIT will meet early on—ideally in the summer before school begins—to help get your initiative off the ground as smoothly as possible and continue to meet throughout the year to keep everyone informed of what’s working and what can work better.

Although it’s important all these subgroups in the school community are represented, keep the size of the CIT manageable. Even in a large school, more than 25 team members is too many, making scheduling and decision-making cumbersome and slow. Three to four representatives from each stakeholder group is ideal, making the size of the team between 16 and 21 members. In smaller schools, it may not be practical or necessary to include as many representatives from each subgroup, so the CIT may be even smaller.

During the summer, as the school year approaches, send an email or letter to every member of the school community explaining your school climate initiative, describing the CIT, and inviting anyone who is interested to apply to be on the CIT. Writing to the entire school community helps ensure that faculty members, staff, and students see membership on the CIT as open to all, not as an elitist group or the principal’s inner circle. This helps prevent complaining and blaming behavior later on in the process.

Your letter to adults and older students might look something like my sample (see the thumbnail on page 18). (Feel free to modify this reproducible handout for your letter.)

In addition to sending this general invitation to the school community, you may want to personally invite individuals who you know have an interest in school climate and who you believe would be a positive asset to the initiative.

To reach students, send an email or hand out a letter to secondary students and copy parents.

Because of the time commitment required to be on the CIT (and the shorter attention spans of younger kids), I recommend limiting elementary kids’ participation to fifth graders and up. To contact them, consider having teachers make an announcement in class and send home notes to parents. See the thumbnail on page 18 for an example of a note that could go home to students’ families. Here are a few other suggestions for establishing your CIT.

- Include union and parent-teacher organization leaders. They will add credibility and a sense of cohesion to the initiative.
- Personally invite leaders among the custodial, food service, and transportation staff.
- Include a variety of grade-level teachers and at least one school counselor, social worker, or school psychologist.
- In secondary schools, choose students from a variety of grade levels, based on recommendations from their counselors or teachers. Ideally these are students who are both liked and respected by their peers and who are on solid ground academically. It is also important to choose students who are comfortable voicing their opinions at team meetings and making presentations to their peers, faculty, and parents.

## Hold Your First CIT Meeting

Hold your first CIT meeting just before school begins or within the first week or two. The purpose of the meeting is to build relationships among team members, clarify roles among the various stakeholder groups involved, and clarify what is involved in the process.

After welcoming and having team members introduce themselves, lead a group discussion around the following talking points and questions:

- We’re here to improve our school climate. What, in your mind, is a positive school climate?
- What motivated you to be a member of this team?
- How would it benefit staff to achieve a more positive school climate? Students? Parents?

I recommend that you follow this discussion with the PDF presentation included in the digital content of this book. The presentation gives a brief overview of how positive climate results in better student and staff attitudes toward work and school, improved attendance, fewer behavior problems, and higher achievement. It also gives an overview of what makes a school climate positive and how the activities in *The School Climate Solution* can help achieve that climate.

You may want to take extra time with the slides that discuss community meetings, which are an important foundation of the initiative that teachers in particular will need to know how to conduct.

After the presentation is finished and you have answered any questions raised, go through the following timeline for the year (this is also summarized as a chart on page 15 and provided in the PDF presentation), setting dates for meetings and giving jobs to team members.

## Schedule Your School Year

The following steps are described with minor detail to provide a rough overview of the school year and help you make decisions about what steps to cut or modify. They will also help you set up dates for your school year and assign roles to members of the CIT. Information and guidelines for all the parts of the school climate solution are covered in detail in the other chapters of this book.

Scheduling times suggested are deliberately general; you'll want to establish a more precise schedule based on your own situation. On page 15, you'll find a timeline that provides a snapshot of the year.

## Recruit and Begin Working with Student Leadership Team (SLT)

Since students make up the majority of the school community, it is only logical to involve them as early as possible.

Chapter 6 explains in detail how to recruit, train, and employ student leaders as powerful agents of positive change in the climate improvement initiative. Ideally, student leaders are recruited in the spring and begin their training in August or early to mid-September, shortly after the first CIT meeting.

## Present School Climate Initiative to All Staff

Within the first month of school, the CIT hosts a meeting for all faculty and staff to present the school climate initiative you're undertaking. The CIT may use the PDF presentation if desired. The goal is to make sure everyone understands and is on board with the plan. **Important:** At this meeting, pass out the "Faculty and Staff School Climate Survey" (see the thumbnail on page 18) to everyone present and collect the completed surveys by the end of the meeting.

## Present Climate Initiative to Students

Shortly after the all-staff meeting about the school climate plan, teachers will hold community meetings in their classrooms to discuss school climate with their students. See page 23 for guidelines for this meeting. Teachers ask students about the kind of climate they would like at school, discuss the benefits of a positive school environment, and provide a brief overview of the climate improvement process. **Important:** Pass out the "Student Climate Survey" (see the thumbnail on page 19) to students and collect completed surveys at the end of the meeting.

## Analyze and Present Survey Results

After the surveys have been collected from both groups, compile the results. Assign a point value of 1 for every answer of "Strongly Disagree," 2 points for "Disagree," 3 points for "Neither," 4 points for "Agree," and 5 points for "Strongly Agree." (You may want to ask for a faculty volunteer to do this.) Keeping the adult and student surveys separate, calculate the average response for every question. Create a slide or handout that summarizes the findings, and present them at your next CIT meeting. You will also want to present the results to your entire faculty and staff.

In both meetings, explain that the purpose of this is not to assign blame or invite excuses. It is simply a reflection of the current perceptions of students and staff. It is always interesting to note any discrepancies between staff perceptions and those of students. Any item receiving an average

under 3.5 is worth examining. Discussion might follow, listening to suggestions about addressing the most pressing items immediately.

At the CIT meeting, you may also want to use the survey results to help shape the topics for future community meetings and activities in classrooms. You may also use this information as the basis for creating goals for the year, one of them being the development of the school-wide touchstone. Review the importance of the touchstone (see Chapter 3).

### **Begin the Touchstone Process**

Working together, your school community will determine which values it holds highest—the values you want to guide the behavior and interactions in your school. The beginning of this process involves each of the stakeholder groups meeting separately to brainstorm values and narrow their lists to a manageable size. See Chapter 3.

As you discuss this at your initial CIT meeting, you may want to set dates for these meetings and direct the CIT members from each stakeholder group to communicate with its group about the meeting. You will probably want to host the student meeting yourself, but you'll need to enlist plenty of help. See page 36.

Try to begin this process by late October or so.

### **CIT Meets to Finalize Touchstone**

Shortly after touchstone stakeholder meetings are completed, the CIT takes the lists from those meetings and works to establish a final touchstone and determine how to present it.

### **Hold an Assembly to Unveil the Touchstone**

This is a fun celebration for all members of the school community, so be sure to invite everyone. Consider making it an evening meeting so more parents can attend. It should be held before winter break.

### **Teachers Begin Teaching SEL in Class**

It's a good idea to start SEL (social-emotional learning) lessons for students as early in the year

as possible, but with the touchstone process also competing for limited time, you may not be able to begin these until right before or after winter break. It all depends on how much of a priority you're able to make them. It's also up to you how stringent you want to be regarding which SEL topics and activities you require teachers to conduct. You may require emphasis on certain topics based on the survey results from earlier in the school year, or you may simply direct teachers to work their way through Part 2 (beginning on page 84) on their own.

If you're in a secondary school, you will have to determine which classes will do SEL activities. It's often best to do SEL in advisory, homeroom, ELA, social studies, or health classes.

SEL lessons continue through the end of the school year. See the chapters in Part 2. You may want to schedule the activities you want teachers to do so that they can plan ahead to make time for them—and so that you can make sure everything is covered that you want covered. It's up to you to decide how precisely you want to schedule things from the beginning, and how tightly you want to control teachers' lessons.

### **End-of-Year Climate Survey/Data Collection**

Toward the end of the school year, conduct climate surveys for both adult and student populations, and aggregate the data. Members of the CIT and SLT compare these results with the results from the beginning of the year, looking for areas of success and ongoing challenges. Using this book as a reference, make plans for your second year.

### **Summer SEL Training for Teachers**

Consider holding a two- or three-day summer training on SEL for teachers to personally experience the SEL activities that they will integrate into their curriculum. This will give them the rationale and skills they need to begin implementing SEL in the classrooms.

## Timeline for the First Year of Whole-School Climate Improvement

<b>Spring</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>↓ Recruit Climate Improvement Team (CIT)</li> <li>↓ Recruit Student Leadership Team (SLT)</li> </ul>
<b>Late summer</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>↓ Hold first CIT meeting</li> <li>↓ Collect data such as absentee rate and behavior referrals</li> <li>↓ Hold first SLT meeting</li> </ul>
<b>Early fall</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>↓ Present climate initiative to all staff; administer climate survey to staff</li> <li>↓ Present climate initiative to students; administer climate survey to students</li> <li>↓ Analyze and present survey results</li> </ul>
<b>Fall</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>↓ Begin touchstone process (separate faculty, staff, and student meetings to determine shared values)</li> </ul>
<b>Early winter</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>↓ Teachers begin teaching SEL in classes</li> </ul>
<b>Winter</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>↓ CIT and SLT meet to finalize touchstone and determine how it will be presented</li> <li>↓ Hold assembly/celebration to unveil the touchstone</li> </ul>
<b>Spring</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>↓ Administer end-of-year climate survey</li> <li>↓ Begin planning for second year</li> </ul>
<b>Summer</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>↓ SEL training for teachers</li> </ul>

## Other Things to Keep in Mind

The chapters in Part 3, *Creating a Needs-Satisfying Environment*, provide extensive guidelines for classroom and behavior management. As the leader of the school climate solution, it's up to you whether you require teachers to read these chapters and/or adopt their lessons. Read these chapters well before school begins and make a plan for your approach. You may want to weave information and lessons from them into your monthly CIT meetings.

## The Smaller-Scale Climate Solution

If you aren't part of a whole-school climate initiative, your goal in reading this book may be to create and sustain a positive climate within your classroom, sports team, extracurricular club, musical cast, or other small group. This section provides guidelines for getting started. (I use the term *teacher* throughout this section, but if you are a coach or other leader, that word refers to you, too.)

## Communicate and Garner Support

For these smaller efforts, the community of stakeholders is smaller than it is for a whole-school initiative, but you'll still want to communicate your plans with your school leaders and parents. Your principal will most likely be interested in what you are doing and the results. Keep her informed along the way; she may want to share what you're doing as she coaches other teachers. Parents will most likely be happy to hear you care about providing their children with a safe, connected, engaged learning environment. Sending home a regular parent newsletter or dedicating part of the classroom website to "climate news" will help parents keep up on the process.

A letter to families at the beginning of the year is a good idea. I've provided a sample in the digital content for this book (see the thumbnail on page 18). Feel free to use or modify this reproducible handout for your letter.

These efforts will pay off by helping you gain the support of your administration and your students' families.

## Prioritize and Schedule Your Initiative

Read this book and choose what elements you want to use. With fewer stakeholders and a smaller community compared to a school-wide effort, you are free to pick and choose the elements of this book that are most appropriate for your situation, and you have the flexibility to make changes quickly if something isn't working. It's not necessary to plan every meeting and activity for the whole year, though it's a good idea to have a general plan. The general outline provided on this page can be used as a model.

I strongly recommend that you implement the elements of Part 1, Setting the Foundation, in your classroom. Introduce community meetings as early as your first day together, and use them throughout the school year. If you're teaching younger students, you may want to hold one meeting every day or three times a week. For older students, especially if you only have them for 50 minutes a day, once every week or two is sufficient. Begin working on a class touchstone in those early community meetings.

If you're not planning to use all the chapters of Part 2, Teaching Social-Emotional Skills, it's best to focus on the material in the first chapter or two, leaving off later chapters which may not stand up well without the foundation of the earlier material. Use the timeline model on this page to plan your approach.

The chapters in Part 3 provide extensive guidelines for classroom and behavior management. Reading these chapters before the school year begins will give you plenty of good ideas for running a more positive classroom and allow you plenty of time to prepare to institute them. Any classroom norms, rules, and procedures should be in place on day one.

## Timeline for Classroom Climate Development

<b>First day of school</b>	↓ Begin community meetings
<b>Early fall</b>	↓ Discuss climate initiative with class; communicate about it with your principal and with families  ↓ Begin working on the class touchstone
<b>Early winter</b>	↓ Finalize touchstone and determine how it will be presented
<b>Winter</b>	↓ Begin teaching SEL in class  ↓ Hold celebration to unveil touchstone
<b>Spring</b>	↓ Hold end-of-year community celebration

## Final Thoughts About Getting Started

As you think about setting up your unique approach to school climate change and what your school year will look like, here are a few important things to keep in mind.

### Commit to Ongoing Evaluation

Throughout the climate improvement initiative, it is essential to continuously evaluate the effectiveness of the process. Use concrete quantitative data (climate survey, grades, attendance, and so on), but also use any information you can gather from what educators might call *informal formative assessment*. At CIT meetings, part of the meeting



should include time to share anecdotes and information that might help the initiative. For example, a teacher on the team might have overheard students talking excitedly about the social-emotional learning that's happening in ELA. Or someone on the team might have had a conversation with a staff member who criticized the initiative as coming from “them” (the administration).

With anecdotal as well as quantitative data at its disposal, the CIT can evaluate progress and, if necessary, make adjustments or change behavior in some way. This evaluation process is called the Process for Positive Change (PPC) (see pages 167–177). In brief, PPC involves the team discussing the following questions:

- What do we want? What is our goal?
- What are we currently doing to achieve that goal?
- Is what we are doing working? What's working and what's not?
- What is our plan moving forward?

Ongoing evaluation not only allows you to make adjustments and see better climate results, it also helps establish and sustain universal support for the initiative through the first year.

## Keep Up Regular Communication

All members of the CIT and SLT have the responsibility to communicate accurate information to the groups they represent: Parent members to the parent-teacher organization; teacher members to the faculty; students to a designated number of classrooms, and so on. Use group email, social media, a dedicated website, or an old-fashioned newsletter to keep school community members informed.

This ongoing communication is a great way to obtain the anecdotal feedback about how people perceive the climate initiative. It also serves to keep the topic at top of mind so community members are thinking and talking about it. This can only help the effectiveness of the program.

## Celebrate Success

By the end of the year, if you have followed the processes described in this book and conducted at least most of the activities, you will see positive results. In my experience, the most salient improvements the first year are related to climate survey results, behavior referrals, bullying, attendance, and student grades. These improvements, even if they don't achieve the goals you set at the beginning of the year, show that the school community is doing something right and is moving in the desired direction. (One of my favorite sayings is, “Better is better!”) It's wise even before the end of the year to mark your successes. Communicate improvements with the entire school community. Share anecdotes and qualitative evidence with students.

Many schools and classrooms will have some kind of end-of-year field trip, field day, picnic, or other event to celebrate progress made during the year. Use this as a way to celebrate ways that people in your community developed friendships, respected differences, and achieved and grew as learners and as people. You might hold an end-of-year community meeting focusing on those topics and challenging students to continue to learn, read, and grow their bodies, minds, and hearts over the summer. I encourage you to give students a voice in creating a celebration that is both fun and meaningful to them.

By marking and celebrating improvements—and by establishing new goals and a plan to move forward—you will most likely sustain the initiative for the following year. You will have the opportunity to make even more progress.

Let's get started!



# Printable Forms

## Letter Inviting Participants to Climate Improvement Team

Dear [Parents, Students, Staff Members, Teachers, etc.]:

Research shows that a positive school climate leads to improvements in everything from attendance and graduation rates to student learning and achievement. That kind of climate is based on safety and order, positive relationships, and engaging teaching and learning. To achieve that at [School Name], we will begin a school climate improvement initiative this school year, and I would like to invite you to be involved in the process.

I am creating a Climate Improvement Team (CIP) made up of representatives from different parts of our school community: teachers, staff, parents, students, and administrators. Your involvement would require attendance at our first meeting, a full day on [date and time], as well as shorter monthly meetings throughout the year. You will also be asked to communicate regularly with other [parents, students, staff, etc.]. Monthly meetings will be held on [recurring day and time] starting [date]. All meetings will be held in [room number] at the school.

If you are interested in participating in this exciting opportunity, please email me at [email address] by [date]. Because interest in membership may be very high, and in order to end up with a team of optimum size, I am limiting the number of [parent, student, teacher, staff] representatives to [three or four]. I will select members from the pool of applicants to create a team that is as diverse and representative as possible.

Thank you for your interest in helping make [school name] the best school we can be for your child.

Sincerely,  
[your name]  
[your phone number]  
[your email address]

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## Letter Informing Families of Student Involvement on CIT

Dear Parent or Guardian:

Research shows that a positive school climate leads to improvements in everything from attendance and graduation rates to student learning and achievement. That kind of climate is based on safety and order, positive relationships, and engaging teaching and learning. To achieve that at [School Name], we will begin a school climate improvement initiative this school year, and your student is invited to be involved in the process.

If selected, your child would be part of a team made up of representatives from different parts of our school community: teachers, staff, parents, students, and administrators. His or her involvement would require attendance at our first meeting, a full day on [date and time], as well as shorter monthly meetings throughout the year. He or she will also be asked to communicate regularly with other students to get input and feedback about the initiative. Monthly meetings will be held on [recurring day and time] starting [date]. All meetings will be held in [room number] at the school.

If your child is interested in participating in this exciting opportunity and you give permission, please email me at [email address] by [date]. Because interest in membership may be very high, and in order to end up with a team of optimum size, the number of student representatives will be limited to [three or four]. Members will be selected from the pool of applicants to create a team that is as diverse and representative as possible.

Thank you for your interest in helping make [school name] the best school we can be for your child.

Sincerely,  
[your name]  
[your phone number]  
[your email address]

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## Faculty and Staff School Climate Survey

Before you begin, please read the following information:

- You are being asked to complete this survey as part of an effort to understand how students and other members of the school community (teachers, staff, and so on) feel about the current school climate.
- Read the statements carefully and base your answers on your thoughts and feelings about your personal experience at school.
- This survey is completely anonymous. No one will know how you responded, so please be honest.
- There are no right or wrong answers. We want to gather information about how people feel while they are here in school.

**Directions:** Mark an X in the column that corresponds with how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I always feel physically safe at school.					
2. While at school or at school functions, I rarely see students insulting, teasing, harassing, or otherwise verbally abusing others.					
3. Adults at school treat students as if they care about them as individuals.					
4. School leaders encourage and support collaboration among teachers.					
5. Discipline referrals are handled fairly and effectively by administration.					
6. Most staff in this school are generous about helping others with instructional or management issues.					
7. This school encourages staff to get involved in extracurricular activities.					
8. In general, students at my school treat one another with kindness. No one seems to go out of their way to treat other students badly.					

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*Faculty and Staff School Climate Survey continued*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
9. Students at my school accept one another's differences (race, culture, gender, appearance).					
10. There is clear and effective two-way communication between administrators and staff.					
11. Adults in my school treat all students fairly.					
12. I feel as if I have a voice in matters that concern me in school.					
13. I do NOT see fights or physical altercations between students at school.					
14. In school, I teach more than academics, I teach students about things like perseverance, self-control, self-regulation, and collaboration.					
15. The administration at this school is fair in the way it allocates resources.					

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### Student School Climate Survey

Before you begin, please read the following information:

- You are being asked to complete this survey as part of an effort to understand how students and other members of the school community (teachers, staff, administrators) feel about the current school climate.
- Read the statements carefully and answer based on your thoughts and feelings about your personal experience at school.
- This survey is completely anonymous. No one will know how you responded, so please be honest.
- There are no right or wrong answers. We want to gather information about how people feel while they are here in school.

**Directions:** Mark an X in the column that corresponds with how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I feel physically safe at school.					
2. While at school or at school functions, I am not insulted, teased, harassed, or otherwise verbally abused.					
3. Adults in my school treat students as if they care about them.					
4. My school has clear rules against physically hurting other people (hitting, pushing, kicking).					
5. I have at least one friend at school I can talk to if I have a problem.					
6. Adults seem to like one another and work well together in my school.					
7. There is at least one adult at school that I can trust and talk to if I have a problem.					
8. In general, students at my school treat one another with kindness. No one seems to go out of their way to treat other students badly.					

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*Faculty and Staff School Climate Survey continued*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
9. Students at my school accept one another's differences (race, culture, gender, appearance).					
10. My teachers have high academic expectations.					
11. Adults in my school treat all students fairly.					
12. I am encouraged to take part in extracurricular school activities.					
13. I feel a sense of pride in my school (school spirit).					
14. In school, I am learning more than academics like math and ELA—I also am learning how to be a good person.					
15. In my school, we learn and discuss ways to control ourselves—our thoughts, actions, and emotions.					

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### Letter to Families About Classroom Climate Initiative

Dear Parent or Guardian:

I am looking forward to getting to know your child this year. In the interest of creating the best learning environment for my students, I am going to be conducting activities throughout the year that are intended to create a positive classroom climate, one in which there is a sense of physical and emotional safety, positive relationships, and engaging teaching and learning. Research has shown that a positive climate not only improves students' attitudes toward school, but also improves learning and achievement.

Some direct instructional time will be sacrificed to intentionally creating a positive climate. Students will work together to develop a classroom touchstone and class constitution, and they will participate in regular community meetings and social-emotional learning activities. The problem-solving, interpersonal, and self-control skills children will learn through these activities will serve them well not only in school, but later in life.

If you have any questions or concerns about my classroom climate initiative, please call or email me.

Sincerely,  
 [your name]  
 [your phone number]  
 [your email address]

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