



SCHOOL CLIMATE DROPOUT PREVENTION AND RE-ENGAGEMENT SERVICES

WHAT IS SCHOOL CLIMATE?

The National School Climate Center has defined school climate as the quality of school life experienced by students, caregivers, school personnel, and others interacting with the school environment. A positive school climate, then, is one where the school attends to each of the following: (a) fostering safety; (b) promoting a supportive academic, disciplinary, and physical environment; and (c) encouraging and maintaining respectful, trusting, and caring relationships throughout the school community. Additionally, organizational structures such as student body socioeconomic status (SES), retention of staff, racial and ethnic diversity of staff and students, and community support may influence climate. School climate can be thought of as the life and character of the school, thus, seeking opportunities to create or sustain a positive school climate is foundational to continuous improvement efforts.

WHY FOCUS ON SCHOOL CLIMATE?

For each educational stakeholder, the school's climate will influence feelings of safety, as well as feeling welcomed and connected to the school. Therefore, the aim is a healthy school climate, which can be characterized as one that fosters effective partnering practices among families, students, and staff. School climates that encourage prosocial skills will lead to positive youth development, learning, and academic achievement, with improved outcomes for all students.

On the other hand, students who have a poor perception of their school's climate may be at increased risk of dropping out. For example, if students perceive the climate in their school as one that accepts or ignores negative behaviors like classroom disruptions, bullying, relational aggression, academic cheating, and school failure, then those behaviors may actually increase and become more pervasive over time. This increase in unwanted and undesired behavior could decrease instructional time for students and opportunities for them to learn. The lack of school-wide commitment to shaping a positive school climate would then impact individual students' commitment to the school community. Developing a framework of positive behavioral supports should include: defining expected behaviors, teaching those expectations to staff, students, and families, and reinforcing students to follow those expectations.

WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY?

A school's climate has a strong influence over students and staff. Assessing the school's climate and working to increase positivity and collaborative efforts is

Colorado School Climate Facts and Figures

Data from the Healthy Kids Colorado Survey, a biennial survey collecting data from an average of 38,000 Colorado youth from 190 randomly selected middle and high schools statewide, shows the following findings related to school climate

Feeling engaged and connected to school can protect youth from unhealthy decisions.

Colorado youth surveyed, indicated as slight decrease in participation in extracurricular activities since 2015.

Youth reporting they have been bullied electronically in the past 12 months has remained steady hovering around 15% since 2013

Colorado youth reporting they had been in a fight in the last 12 months has decreased since 2015.

Nearly 4,000 Colorado youth reported they had attempted suicide in the past 12 months during the 2016-2017 school year.



essential for institutional change from a systems perspective. Shaping and influencing a school's culture and climate can and should be intentional. (Elbot & Fulton, 2005). In addition, educating staff, students and families on how to respond to students who have experienced traumatic stress will aid in improved feelings of connectedness and belonging for vulnerable students.

What Action Can Be Taken?

Effective school practices that benefit educational stakeholders and could contribute to reduce dropout rates should include the development *and* implementation of the following:

- A “whole child” approach which focuses on students’ social and emotional well-being, academic progress, and overall development and success.
- A breakfast program as students who eat breakfast at school attend an average of one and a half more days of school every year. When offered in the classroom, breakfast can be an opportunity to bond with teachers and get students ready for their day.
- A tiered and prevention-based framework like PBIS that approaches students from a strength-based perspective, teaches students how to be successful, and celebrates their accomplishments with clear benchmarks for attaining student success.
- Mechanisms by which students can connect to strong adult and peer relationships through mentoring programs and partnering with social service agencies
- Incentives and recognition programs for students and schools when there is improvement in attendance to positively impact school climate.
- Strategies designed to catch students up, such as: Self-paced catch-up courses, project-based learning, differentiated flexible school schedules, job training embedded as part of the academic program.
- Policies and practices that promote personalized learning environments and opportunities for individualized instruction such as tutoring, case management, and small classes focused on building close staff-student relationships.

School Climate References and Materials:

[Dropout Prevention Best Practice Guide References](#)

[Dropout Prevention Resources](#)

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/dropoutprevention/schoolclimateandculturalproficiency>