SCHOOL CLIMATE IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES

The strategies outlined below represent a convergence of research and practice that occurred simultaneously through the School Climate Transformation Design Collaborative, a group of thirteen school districts created to inform Colorado's school climate approach, and a literature review conducted by Colorado State University's Prevention Research Center to identify the best practices for a positive school climate.

CULTIVATE A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT*

Create a welcoming school environment that is positive, consistent and predictable, with explicit expectations, and where all students, staff, families, and community partners are active participants in improving outcomes

SUPPORT ALL ASPECTS OF SAFETY

Create a school environment that supports all aspects of safety including physical, social, emotional, identity, and academic safety. Prioritize practices to prevent and address harassment and bullying

FOSTER POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Build positive, respectful, and trusting relationships between all school stakeholders. Ensure students feel safe and supported by adults in the building through meaningful engagement around their life experiences and interests

UTILIZE A WHOLE CHILD APPROACH

Attend to the needs of the Whole Child by focusing on the comprehensive and interconnected needs of students. Ensure that each child is healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged.

IMPLEMENT DATA-DRIVEN DECISION-MAKING

Assess and analyze perceptions of school climate with students, staff, and families. Utilize academic and non-academic data to drive decisions, and adopt a teams-based approach in examining multiple sources of data

APPLY AN EQUITY LENS

Consider equity in all decision-making by examining disparities in disaggregated data and intentionally designing programs and policies for those at the margins. Ensure culturally and linguistically responsive education practices and regularly engage in discussions on bias

INTEGRATE PREVENTION**

Ensure prevention strategies to meet the social, emotional, and mental health needs of students are integrated throughout the school day and partner with community providers to connect students to additional supports.

UTILIZE A SYSTEMS APPROACH

Ensure that a commitment to a positive school climate is evident in the mission and vision, strategic plans, communications, and accountability measures of your school to ensure integration and alignment

PRIORITIZE STAFF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Develop the mindsets and skillsets of all staff through quality professional development and coaching on the factors that most contribute to a positive school climate

*Positive Behavioral Intervention Supports (PBIS) is a program that can support schools in creating supportive learning environments.
**Prevention efforts in schools focus on all students and include social emotional instruction throughout the school day, restorative/inclusionary discipline practices, universal approaches to identify students in need (e.g., universal screenings), and practices that are trauma informed.

THEORY OF ACTION

IF YOUR SCHOOL IS	THIS COULD LOOK LIKE	THEN YOU COULD SEE
CULTIVATING A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT	• Engaging students, staff, and families in important decision-making processes • Identifying relevant community resources and develop partnerships to better serve students' needs • Offering opportunities for the school community to provide feedback on programs, systems, and policies • Creating consistent and predictable environments where expectations are explicit so that the whole school community knows how to be successful	• Increased sense of belonging • Improved student-teacher relationships, interactions • Reduced rates of student and staff absenteeism • Increased school connectedness • Improved sense of agency among teachers • Higher rates of academic achievement
SUPPORTING ALL ASPECTS OF SAFETY	• Training staff and students on an anonymous reporting system for all types of safety concerns (e.g., Safe2Tell) and have a process for following up • Ensuring students feel safe to express emotions, express their unique identities, and are encouraged to take academic risks to further their learning • Implementing clear school bullying and harassment polices and recognize and celebrate students when they are engaging in successful behaviors	• Improved perceptions of school climate and safety • Reduced chances of violence • Increased sense of belonging • Higher rates of academic achievement
FOSTERING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS	• Ensuring every student has a meaningful connection to at least one trusted adult in school that is not dependent on academic performance • Creating opportunities for administrators to intentionally and postiively engage with students outside of school discipline measures	• Improved social skills, empathy, school connectedness • Higher rates of academic achievement
UTILIZING A WHOLE CHILD APPROACH	• Creating a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) that collectively address the physical, mental, social, and academic needs of all students • Developing and implement inclusionary discipline policies that reinforce and shape positive behaviors	• Improved student well-being • Improved psychological wellbeing • Improved social, emotional, physical functioning • Improved personal and interpersonal skills • Higher rates of academic achievement
IMPLEMENTING DATA-DRIVEN DECISION-MAKING	• Administering climate surveys to students, staff, and families and review survey data with a multi-disciplinary school team • Using an action planning process and a multi-disciplinary team to determine strategies to address data-identified needs	• Improved school engagement, perceived school value • Higher rates of academic achievement

THEORY OF ACTION

IF YOUR SCHOOL IS	THIS COULD LOOK LIKE	THEN YOU COULD SEE
APPLYING AN EQUITY LENS	• Ensuring your school's Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS) addresses the needs of your most vulnerable or underserved students through culturally and linguistically responsive practices and an intentional dismantling of bias and discrimination • Looking for disparities in school climate data according to race, gender, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, etc. and develop plans to address these disparities	• Improved emotional awareness, knowledge • Increased prosocial behaviors • Improved social emotional competence • Higher rates of academic achievement
INTEGRATING PREVENTION	• Building staff's understanding on the importance of prevention as part of the universal/Tier 1 support • Implementing universal or Tier 1 programs to meet the social, emotional, physical, and mental health needs of students • Integrating social emotional learning school-wide in policies, student supports, everyday learning, and school structure • Assessing existing prevention strategies to ensure they are relevant and consistent with current best practice recommendations	• Early identification and response to student needs • Reduced learning anxiety • Reduced dropout rates • Reduced disciplinary infractions • Reduced unwanted behavior • Higher rates of academic achievement
UTILIZING A SYSTEMS APPROACH	• Using existing multidisciplinary school teams (e.g., MTSS, PBIS) to participate in a strategic planning process that updates school visions, policies, and communications to support a positive school climate • Integrating school climate measures and strategies into you Unified Improvement Plans and monitor progress on a continuous basis • Ensuring integration and alignment of initiatives into a layered continuum that matches supports to student needs	• Improved school engagement, perceived school value • Improved academic engagement • Higher rates of academic achievement
PRIORITIZING STAFF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT	• Training educators to build their mindsets and abilities to support and address the social and emotional needs of students and themselves • Ensuring coaching supports and ongoing technical assistance to avoid "one-and-done" trainings by providing opportunities to follow-up, apply what was learned, and practice skills	• Increased feelings of connectedness to school/school engagement • Improved teacher practice through collaboration and dialogue • Increased teacher retention • Higher rates of academic achievement

COLORADO Department of Education

PREVENTION RESEARCH CENTER COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

REFERENCES

- Abel, N. R., Oliver, B. M., Keller, T. J., McAulay, A., & Piatek, L. (2015). Using student success skills to address ASCA behavior standards in grades K-3. Professional School Counseling, 19(1), 116-124. doi:10.5330/1096-2409-19.1.116
- Baroody, A. E., Rimm-Kaufman, S. E., Larsen, R. A., & Curby, T. W. (2014). The link between responsive classroom training and student-teacher relationship quality in the fifth grade: A study of fidelity of implementation. School Psychology Review, 43(1), 69-85.
- Boorn, C., Dunn, P.H., & Page, C. (2010). Growing a nurturing classroom. Emotional & Behavioural Difficulties, 15(4), 311-321.
- Cefai, C., Ferrario, E., Cavioni, V., Carter, A., & Grech, T. (2014). Circle time for social and emotional learning in primary school. Pastoral Care in Education, 32(2), 116-130. doi:10.1080/02643944.2013.861506
- Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence (2018). Top 10 Recommendations for school safety (Issue Brief). University of Colorado Boulder. https://cspv.colorado.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Top-10-Recommendations-for-School-Safety.pdf
- Cohen, J., McCabe, E. M., Michelli, N. M., & Pickeral, T. (2009). School climate: Research, policy, practice, and teacher education. Teachers College Record, 111(1), 180-213.
- Doikou-Avlidou, M., & Dadatsi, K. (2013). Enhancing social integration of immigrant pupils at risk for social, emotional and/or behavioural difficulties: The outcomes of a small-scale social-emotional learning programme. Emotional & Behavioural Difficulties, 18(1), 3-23. doi:10.1080/13632752.2012.675137
- Domino, M. (2013). Measuring the impact of an alternative approach to school bullying. Journal of School Health, 83(6), 430-437.
- Domitrovich, C. E., Cortes, R. C., & Greenberg, M. T. (2007). Improving young children's social and emotional competence: A randomized trial of the preschool 'PATHS' curriculum. The Journal of Primary Prevention, 28(2), 67-91. doi:10.1007/s10935-007-0081-0
- Durlak, J. A. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. Child Development, 82(1), 405-432. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01564.x
- Eliot, M., Cornell, D., Gregory, A., & Fan, X. (2010). Supportive school climate and student willingness to seek help for bullying and threats of violence. Journal of School Psychology, 48(6), 533-553. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2010.07.001
- Filella, G., Cabello, E., Pérez-Escoda, N., & Ros-Morente, A. (2016). Evaluation of the emotional education program "Happy 8-12" for the assertive resolution of conflicts among peers. Electronic Journal of Research in Educational Psychology, 14(3), 582-601.
- Flay, B. R., & Allred, C. G. (2003). Long-term effects of the Positive Action® Program. American Journal of Health Behavior, 27(6), 75.
- Gibson, J. E., Werner, S. S., & Sweeney, A. (2015). Evaluating an abbreviated version of the paths curriculum implemented by school mental health clinicians. Psychology in the Schools, 52(6), 549-561.
- Graves, S. L., Jr., Herndon-Sobalvarro, A., Nichols, K., Aston, C., Ryan, A., Blefari, A., Schutte, K., Schachner, A., Vicoria, L., & Prier, D. (2017). Examining the effectiveness of a culturally adapted social-emotional intervention for African American males in an urban setting. School Psychology Quarterly, 32(1), 62-74. doi: 10.1037/spq0000145
- Hall, B. W., & Bacon, T. P. (2005). Building a foundation against violence: Impact of a school-based prevention program on elementary students. Journal of School Violence, 4(4), 63-83.
- Holsen, I., Smith, B. H., & Frey, K. S. (2008). Outcomes of the social competence program "second step" in Norwegian elementary schools. School Psychology International, 29(1), 71-88.
- Hughes, C., & Cline, T. (2015). An evaluation of the preschool PATHS curriculum on the development of preschool children. Educational Psychology in Practice, 31(1), 73-85. doi: 10.1080/02667363.2014.988327
- Huppert, F. A., & Johnson, D. M. (2010). A controlled trial of mindfulness training in schools: The importance of practice for an impact on well-being. Journal of Positive Psychology, 5(4), 264-274. doi:10.1080/17439761003794148
- Izard, C., King, K. A., Trentacosta, C. J., Morgan, J. K., Laurenceau, J.-P., Krauthamer-Ewing, E. S., & Finlon, K. J. (2008). Accelerating the development of emotion competence in Head Start children: Effects on adaptive and maladaptive behavior. Development & Psychopathology, 20(1), 369-397. doi: 10.1017/S0954579408000175
- Kendziora, K., & Osher, D. (2016). Promoting children's and adolescents' social and emotional development: District adaptations of a theory of action. Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology, 45(6), 797-811. doi:10.1080/15374416.2016.1197834
- Lemberger, M. E., & Clemens, E. V. (2012). Connectedness and self-regulation as constructs of the Student Success Skills Program in inner-city African American elementary school students. Journal of Counseling & Development, 90(4), 450-458. doi:10.1002/j.1556-6676.2012.00056.x
- Loukas, A. (2007). What is school climate? National Association of Elementary School Principals: Leadership Compass, 5(1).
- Low, S., Cook, C., Smolkowski, K., & Buntain-Ricklefs, J. (2015). Promoting social-emotional competence: An evaluation of the elementary version of Second Step. Journal of School Psychology, 53(6), 463-477. doi:10.1016/j.jsp.2015.09.002
- Low, S., Cook, C. R., Smolkowski, K., & Buntain-Ricklefs, J. (2015). Promoting social–emotional competence: An evaluation of the elementary version of Second Step®. Journal of School Psychology, 53(6), 463-477. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2015.09.002
- Low, S., Frey, K. S., & Brockman, C. J. (2010). Gossip on the playground: Changes associated with universal intervention, retaliation beliefs, and supportive friends. School Psychology Review, 39(4), 536-551.
- Low, S., & Van Ryzin, M. (2014). The moderating effects of school climate on bullying prevention efforts. School Psychology Quarterly, 29(3), 306-319. Mariani, M., Webb, L., Villares, E., & Brigman, G. (2015). Effect of participation in student success skills on prosocial and bullying behavior. Professional Counselor, 5(3), 341-353.
- Myles-Pallister, J. D., Hassan, S., Rooney, R. M., & Kane, R. T. (2014). The efficacy of the enhanced Aussie Optimism Positive Thinking Skills Program in improving social and emotional learning in middle childhood. Frontiers in Psychology, 5.
- Novak, M., Mihic, J., Basic, J., & Nix, R. L. (2017). PATHS in Croatia: A school-based randomised-controlled trial of a social and emotional learning curriculum. International Journal of Psychology, 52(2), 87-95. doi:10.1002/ijop.12262
- Patton, G. C., Glover, S., Bond, L., Butler, H., Godfrey, C., Pietro, G. D., & Bowes, G. (2000). The Gatehouse Project: A systematic approach to mental health promotion in secondary schools. Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry, 34(4), 586-593.
- Raimundo, R., Marques-Pinto, A., & Lima, M. L. (2013). The effects of a social–emotional learning program on elementary school children: The role of pupils' characteristics. Psychology in the Schools, 50(2), 165-180. doi: 10.1002/pits.21667
- Ramstetter, C. L., Murray, R., & Garner, A. S. (2010). The crucial role of recess in schools. Journal of School Health, 80(11), 517-526. doi:10.1111/j.1746-1561.2010.00537.x
- Read, K., Aldridge, J., Ala'i, K., Fraser, B., & Fozdar, F. (2015). Creating a climate in which students can flourish: A whole school intercultural approach. International Journal of Whole Schooling, 11(2), 29-44.
- Rivers, S., Brackett, M., Reyes, M., Elbertson, N., & Salovey, P. (2013). Improving the social and emotional climate of classrooms: A clustered randomized controlled trial testing the RULER approach. Prevention Science, 14(1), 7 87. doi: 10.1007/s11121-012-0305-2
- Rowe, H. L., & Trickett, E. J. (2017). Student diversity representation and reporting in universal school-based social and emotional learning programs: Implications for generalizability. Educational Psychology Review. doi:10.1007/s10648 017-9425-3
- Ryan, A., Graves, S., Jr., Sobalvarro, A., Nichols, K., Schutte, K., Aston, C., & Griffin, A. (2016). An evaluation of strong kids in an urban African American female sample: The need for gender-specific and culturally focused interventions. School Psychology Forum, 10(2), 157-164.
- Taylor, R. D., Oberle, E., Durlak, J. S., & Weissberg, R. P. (2017). Promoting positive youth development through school based social and emotional learning interventions: A meta-analysis of follow-up effects. Child Development, 88(4), 1156-1171.
- Wang, H., Chu, J., Loyalka, P., Xin, T., Shi, Y., Qu, Q., & Yang, C. (2016). Can social–emotional learning reduce school dropout in developing countries? Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 35(4), 818-847. doi:10.1002/pam.21915

FOR ADDITIONAL RESOURCES, GO TO
WWW.CDE.STATE.CO.US/SCHOOLCLIMATE

COLORADO
Department of Education

PREVENTION RESEARCH CENTER
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY