

PROMOTING A POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE

A Resource for Schools

About this resource

This resource has been developed to help schools create and maintain a positive school climate.

A positive learning and teaching environment is essential if students are to succeed in school. Research shows that there is a direct link between students' success and the school environment in which learning takes place. Students are more motivated to do well and to realize their full potential in schools that have a positive school climate, where they feel safe and supported (Safe Schools Action Team, *Shaping a Culture of Respect in Our Schools: Promoting Safe and Healthy Relationships*, 2008, p. 1).

The Ministry of Education has three core priorities for education in Ontario:

1. High levels of student achievement
2. Reduced gaps in student achievement
3. Increased public confidence in publicly funded education.

The ministry has focused on putting supporting conditions in place to help achieve these priorities. Initiatives in areas such as character development, student engagement, safe and healthy schools, parent engagement and leadership together create the conditions needed for a respectful, safe, caring and inclusive learning environment.

Safe schools teams are a key element in creating a positive school climate, because they bring together school staff, parents, students and the community on a team that works together towards this common goal.

What is “school climate”?

School climate may be defined as:

... the sum total of all of the personal relationships within a school. When these relationships are founded in mutual acceptance and inclusion, and modelled by all, a culture of respect becomes the norm.

Safe Schools Action Team, *Safe Schools Policy and Practice: An Agenda for Action, 2006*, p. 6

To help achieve a positive school climate, boards and schools should actively promote and support positive behaviours, in keeping with their character development initiatives. They should also involve parents and members of the broader, diverse community in the school.

What are the characteristics of a positive school climate?

When a positive school climate exists,

- students, parents and staff members feel safe, comfortable and accepted
- healthy and respectful relationships are promoted among all members of the school community
- students are encouraged to be leaders and positive role models – for example, by speaking up about issues such as bullying
- parents and community members are actively engaged
- positive behaviour is reinforced and students are given opportunities to develop relationships that are free of racism, discrimination and harassing behaviour
- there is a culture of high expectations in which the improvement of learning outcomes for all students is emphasized
- all cultures are respected and valued.

How can schools and safe schools teams use this resource?

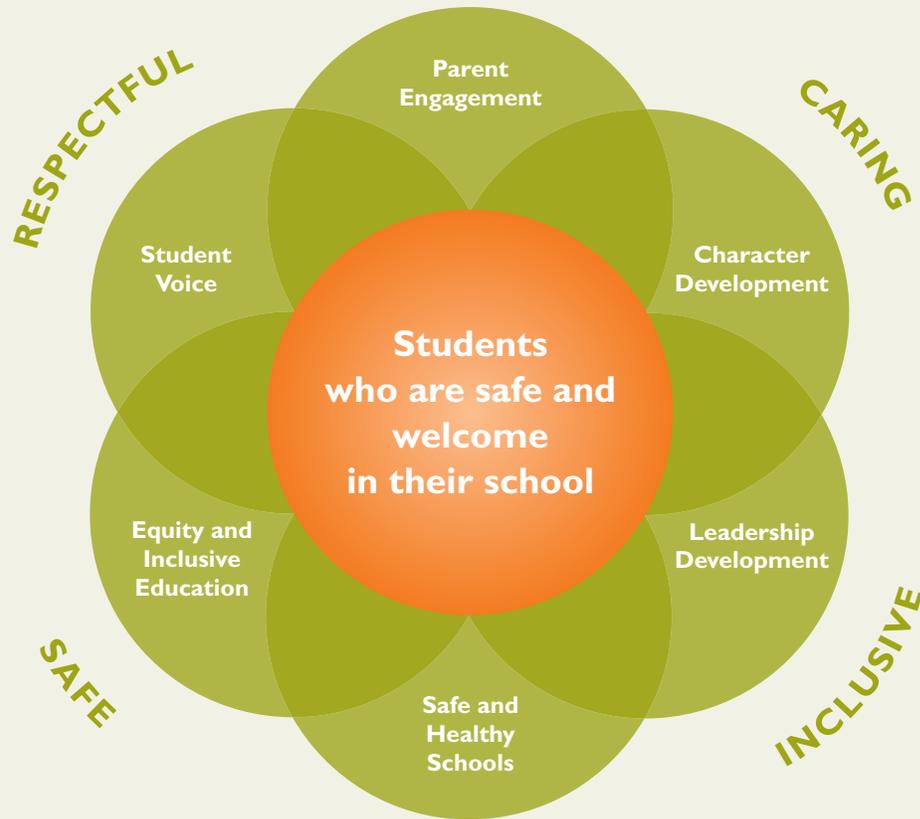
Schools are required to conduct anonymous school climate surveys of their students every two years and to share the survey results with their safe schools teams. This requirement is outlined in Policy/Program Memorandum No. 145, *Progressive Discipline and Promoting Positive Student Behaviour*, available at www.edu.gov.on.ca/extra/eng/ppm/145.html.

The results of the school climate surveys may identify challenges for some schools. This resource provides practical ideas for safe schools teams to consider in addressing some of those challenges and in developing and maintaining the kind of climate in which students can thrive.

Some schools may already be involved in the kinds of activities and practices described here. Other schools may discover new ideas that can work for them. This resource is intended to support schools' efforts to promote a positive school climate that will allow every student, parent and staff member to feel safe and welcome in schools across the province.

Promoting a positive school climate in Ontario schools

This resource supports and complements the work schools are doing in numerous areas. It brings together ideas from various initiatives that schools are already involved in, as shown in the diagram.



Developing healthy and respectful relationships among all members of the school community

Guiding principles

- Everyone has a role to play in building a welcoming, positive and inclusive school climate. Success depends on the active involvement of school leaders, staff members, students, parents/guardians and community members who are committed to a shared, well-developed vision of a safe, caring and supportive school community.
- Building a positive school climate requires a focus on developing healthy and respectful relationships throughout the school community – among students, among adults and between adults and students.
- Building a positive school climate means embedding the principles of equity and inclusive education in all aspects of the learning environment to support the well-being and achievement of all students.
- No single solution can guarantee the creation and maintenance of a positive school climate. Success requires an ongoing, comprehensive and collaborative effort on the part of everyone involved.

Learn more about how to create a positive school climate

The ministry plans to update this resource regularly to provide new ideas and share effective practices with schools across the province. Visit the ministry's website at www.ontario.ca/safeschools for details on how to submit your own ideas. These may be included in the next edition of this resource.

The ministry website offers a variety of materials about safe schools.

For more information on:

- bullying prevention
- Ontario's code of conduct
- progressive discipline
- new requirements for responding and reporting to serious incidents
- other safe schools topics.

visit www.ontario.ca/safeschools.

For more information on healthy schools, visit www.ontario.ca/healthyschools.

For more information on character development, visit www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/character.html.

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