Ten Essential Elements for Improving School Climate

1. Data Driven: Assessment and Action Planning

- Conduct school-wide needs and resource assessments.

- Examine how structures, processes, systems must be changed to reduce resistance to change.

- Assess skills, perceptions, and needs of students, staff, and parents (Cal-SCHLS).

- Use data as roadmap to guide action planning and decision-making in which evidence-based programs and strategies are implemented that address identified needs.

- Monitor progress.

2. School wide Commitment to Common Culture

- Changing culture requires commitment from all stakeholders and lots of hard work.

- Begin with addressing the belief system.

- Foster common norms, expectations, and beliefs focused around school climate principles.

- Efforts need to be school wide and integrated into school improvement.

- If all staff aren't "on board," the process is undermined.

- School climate promotion strategies need to become habits of mind, the way to do business daily.

- Once done, provide stability and sustainability when staff and administrators change.

For more school climate resources, check out the S3 website at
http://californias3.wested.org

3. Principal Leadership

- Ensure change can happen.

- Hold staff accountable for fostering and modeling positive behavior and conditions.

- Develop and articulate a shared vision.

- Train teachers and staff to implement effective strategies and programs through professional development.

- Build learning environments that are healthy and engaging.

- Improve classroom management practices.

4. Stakeholder Involvement

- Promotes caring, fosters meaningful participation, ownership, and buy-in.

- Benefits action planning and decision-making.

- Benefits data (higher survey participation).

- Benefits meaningful student participation in school planning, rules, and decisions.

Also…

- Involve all school stakeholders in the process—students, staff, and parents.

- Ask students what will improve the school (S3 Student Listening Circle).

Ten Essential Elements for Improving School Climate

5. Address Staff Climate & Culture

- Creating positive learning conditions for students begins with positive working conditions for staff.

- If staff morale is low, staff don't feel supported by and connected to school, turnover is high, and quality instruction can't be provided.

- Climate factors (relationships/ collegiality, expectations, participation/decision-making) are among the most important in whether teachers stay or leave.

6. Prioritize Needs

- Begin by using data to identify a few key problems that will make the most difference if fixed.

- Many school climate strategies are low cost, can be quickly and easily implemented, and can result in early visible improvements.

- Demonstrate change is possible.

- Work collaboratively to create change.

- Rally staff around school improvement efforts; overcome resistance and inertia.

- If the tone and conditions are set, long-term improvements are more likely.

7. Relationships and Rigor are Key!

- Relationships are the keystone for all other aspects of classroom management (Marzano & Marzano 2003).

- The most important factor in school climate is school connectedness (McNeely 2005).

- Most effective when informal, not formalized as in special Advisory classes (McClure et al. 2008).

- Protective factors don't totally eliminate risk factors.

- Most effective outcomes occur when relationships are combined with academic rigor and high expectations.

- Student perceptions of adult caring and high expectations are linked.

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8. Multi-Tiered Support System (MTSS): The IOM/Public Health/PBIS Model

- Implement a multi-tiered system of supports that provide universal supports for all students.

- Build a process for identifying high-risk groups and individuals that need special attention and intervention efforts.

- Implement a systematic 3-tiered pyramidal approach that provides:

  - Universal supports for all students, including the three developmental factors.

  - Targeted interventions and referrals for services for high-risk youth, working in collaboration with community agencies

9. District Support

- Essential to long-term, sustainable success, including ensuring continuity when school staff change.

- Communicates the importance of a positive school climate through district policies, standards, and guidelines.

- Organizationally embed school climate in the school improvement office — Don't marginalize.

- Provide financial support (budget priority).

- Require or encourage data collection and monitoring.

- Provide professional development.

- Incentivize or reward schools with positive climates (e.g., certificates or recognition program).

10. Implement Single School Culture