

Wise Ways

All school personnel actively model and foster a positive school environment where students feel valued and are challenged to be engaged and grow cognitively. (CL4)

Evidence Review:

Having a school vision for a learning environment that is emotionally safe and conducive to learning is the focus which keeps the work targeted. It is the “touchstone from which all other actions flow. It is the yardstick for questions and a reference point for conversations” (Lambert, 2003). A clear vision keeps schools from making decisions which are inconsistent with what has been identified as necessary for an optimum learning environment.

A safe and orderly environment conducive to learning has been addressed as critical to academic achievement. Ron Edmonds referred to the need for a “safe and orderly atmosphere conducive to learning”. Daniel Levine and Lawrence Lezotte, in their work on effective schools called for “a productive climate and culture” (Marzano, 2003).

In 2007, The National School Climate Center (NSCC), The Center for Social and Emotional Education (CSEE), The National Center for Learning and Citizenship (NCLC) at Education Commission of the States (ECS) published a white paper, *The School Climate Challenge* in which they make the case that research has found that a positive school climate promotes student achievement and positive youth development. A positive school climate includes norms, values and expectations that support people feeling emotionally and physically safe. A school climate that is positive, caring, supportive, respectful of all learners, with high expectations for all students to learn, affects students motivation to learn.

Marzano (2003) believes that a safe and orderly learning environment is critical to ensuring effective schools, and if schools do not pay attention to this factor they risk undermining all other efforts of school improvement. He outlines action steps that help achieve a safe and orderly environment. The focus is primarily on establishing rules and procedures with appropriate consequences for violations, and establishing a program that teaches self-discipline and responsibility to all students. While this is critically important, other aspects of the school environment are also important to school achievement. Four of these aspects are: a physical environment that is welcoming and conducive to learning; a social environment that promotes communication and interaction; an affective environment that promotes a sense of belonging and self-esteem; and an academic environment that promotes learning and self-fulfillment (Best Practice Brief: School Climate and Learning, University-Community Partnerships @Michigan State University, 2004). These broader factors promote collaboration, positive relationships, and a sense of community which have a positive impact on student learning.

References and Sources:

Lambert, Leadership Capacity for Lasting School Improvement, 2003

Marzano, What Works in Schools: Translating Research into Action, 2003

The School Climate Challenge, National School Climate Center (NSCC), 2007

Best Practice Brief: School Climate and Learning, University –Community Partnerships @Michigan State University, 2004

Evidence Review:

Teachers who are supportive (i.e., show care and concern for their students’ well being and learning) and emotionally well regulated are able to provide students with a safe and caring learning environment that is conducive to students’ social, emotional, behavioral, and academic development. When teachers exhibit negative affect and have poor relationships with their students, feelings of alienation and disengagement are likely to occur. When students experience these negative feelings and disengage, they are at greater risk of developing antisocial behaviors, delinquency, and academic failure (U.S. Department of Education, 1998).

Source- The Prosocial Classroom: Teacher Social and Emotional Competence in Relation to Student and Academic Outcomes

Reference and Other Resource:

U.S. Department of Education. (1998). *A guide to safe schools: Early warning timely response*. Washington, DC: Author.

Evidence Review:

Teachers who promote students' feelings of competence, autonomy and relatedness have students with higher levels of emotional, behavioral, and cognitive engagement. Students who have feelings of competence believe that they can determine their success, can understand what it takes to do well, and that they can in fact succeed. Feelings of competence have been associated with both behavioral and emotional engagement in elementary and middle schools (Connell et al., 1994; Rudolph et al., 2001; Skinner et al., 1990). Studies have also shown that when teachers create respectful and socially supportive environments, press students for understanding and support autonomy, students are more likely to use learning strategies and have higher behavioral engagement and affect (Stipek, 2002; Turner, Meyer, Cox, Logan, DiCintio, & Thomas, 1998)

Source- School Engagement: Potential of the Concept, State of the Evidence

References and Other Resources:

- Connell, J.P., Spencer, M.B., & Aber, J.L. (1994). Educational risk and resilience in African-American youth: Context, self, action, and outcomes in school. *Child Development*, 65, 493-506.
- Rudolph, K.D., Lambert, S.F., Clark, A.G., Kurlakowsky, K.D. (2001). Negotiating the transition to middle school: The role of self-regulatory processes. *Child Development*, 72, 929-946.
- Skinner, E.A., Wellborn, J.G., & Connell, J.P. (1990). What it takes to do well in school and whether I've got it: The role of perceived control in children's engagement and school achievement. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 82, 22-32.
- Stipek, D. (2001). Good instruction is motivating. In A. Wigfield & J. Eccles (Eds.), *Development of achievement motivation*. San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Turner, J.C., Meyer, D.K., Cox, K.E., Logan, C., DiCintio, M., & Thomas, C.T. (1998). Creating contexts for involvement in mathematics. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 90, 730-745.

Examples:

A study by "Blumenfeld and Meece (1988) found that students in science classes in Grades 4-6 who were assigned complex hands-on tasks reported higher cognitive engagement and motivation to learn when teachers provided instructional support and pressed students for understanding." Other studies also demonstrated that authentic and challenging tasks are associated with higher behavioral, emotional and cognitive engagement. Helme and Clarke (2001) found when students work with peers on novel tasks that have personal meaning, cognitive engagement is more likely to occur. "In two separate studies, suburban elementary school students whose teachers offered more choices—about which literacy tasks to perform and when and where to perform them—worked more strategically and persisted longer in the face of difficulty, thus manifesting two aspects of cognitive engagement (Turner, 1995; Perry, 1998)."

Source- School Engagement: Potential of the Concept, State of the Evidence

References and Other Resources:

- Blumenfeld, P.C., & Meece, J.L. (1988). Task factors, teacher behavior, and students' involvement and use of learning strategies in science. *Elementary School Journal*, 88, 235-250.
- Helme, S., & Clark, D. (2001). Identifying cognitive engagement in the mathematics classroom. *Mathematics Education Research Journal*, 13, 133-153.
- Perry, N. (1998). Young children's self-regulated learning and contexts that support it. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 90, 715-729.
- Turner, J.C. (1995). The influence of classroom contexts on young children's motivation for literacy. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 30, 410-441.

Evidence Review:

A growing body of research indicates that students are more motivated, efficient, and achieve more when they are working on goals they themselves have set than they do when working on goals set by others (p. 104).

Source- Hom, H.L., Jr., and M.D. Murphy. (1983). Low achiever's performance: The positive impact of a self-directed goal. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 11, 275-285.

Evidence Review:

When teachers help students think about the strategies they use in reaching the goals they have set (i.e., planning what is to be done, monitoring their own progress, and evaluating the results of those strategies), students take more control of their own thought and feeling processes (Barell, 1985). "When students realize that their thoughts control their actions..., they can positively affect their own beliefs, motivations, and academic performance (McCombs, 1991)."

Source- Critical Issue: Working Toward Student Self-Direction and Personal Efficacy as Educational Goals (Learning Point Associates)

References and Other Resources:

Barell, J. (1985). You ask the wrong questions! *Educational Leadership*, 42(8), 18-23.

McCombs, B. (1991). *Metacognition and motivation in higher level thinking*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL.