School Characteristics, School Climate, & Student Outcomes: What’s the connection?

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Jonathan Martin, Director, K12 Professional Development
Objectives

• Understand how school climate measures are constructed from student survey responses

• Understand how school climate varies by school characteristics, and how it impacts outcomes

• Learn some evidence-based strategies for improving school climate
Strengthening Climate for Better Outcomes

What are the key strategies?
1. Involve Family and Community
2. Build Faculty Trust and Collaboration
3. Provide SEL: Social Emotional Learning
4. Focus on Equity
5. Revisit Student Discipline
6. Tap Student Voice and Leadership
Background: National Context

- Greater focus on Social & Emotional Learning (SEL)
- ESSA’s inclusion of school climate measures
- Anti-bullying campaigns
- Catastrophic school violence
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Context</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Characteristics (Fixed)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Climate (Fixable?)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Size</td>
<td>- Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Poverty Level</td>
<td>- Safety</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| - Racial Minority % | *Emotional safety ✓*
| - Locale (Urban, Rural, etc.) | *Physical safety ✓ ✓*
| - Grade Level | *Connectedness ✓ ✓*
| - Transition Year | *Respect ✓*
| *Connectedness ✓ ✓* | *Engagement ✓*
| *Challenge ✓* |  |
Background: ACT Engage

- Self-report instrument, 4th-grade reading level
- Measures students’ perceptions of themselves, their families’ commitment to education, school-related factors, and important behavioral data
- 106 items form 10 scales
- Predicts academic success and high school graduation

- Replaced by ACT Tessera
ACT Tessera

Grit

Teamwork

Resilience

Curiosity

Leadership

School Climate

CONTINUOUSLY IMPROVE

Professional Development

TEACH AND INTEGRATE

ACT Tessera Teacher Playbook

ASSESS

ACT® Tessera

Next Generation Social and Emotional Learning Assessment System

REPORT
## Background: ACT Engage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Scales</th>
<th>Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>• Academic Discipline</td>
<td>• I turn in my assignments on time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Commitment to School</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Optimism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Engagement</td>
<td>• Family Attitude toward Education</td>
<td>• Adults at my school understand my point of view.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Family Involvement</td>
<td>• I feel safe at school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Relationships w/ School Personnel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• School Safety Climate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Regulation</td>
<td>• Managing Feelings</td>
<td>• I would walk away if someone wanted to fight me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Thinking Before Acting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Orderly Conduct</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Study Sample

• N=462 public schools
  – Must have assessed majority of students

• N=121,595 students
  – High school graduates of 2015 through 2023
  – 54% White, 29% Hispanic, 8% African American
  – Mostly from Midwest (42%) and South (48%)
  – Even split across grades 6-9
School Climate Measures

- Strong Disagreement
- Slight Disagreement
- Slight Agreement
- Strong Agreement

School Safety Climate Score

%
School Climate Measures

[Graph showing distribution of School Safety Climate Scores]
School Climate Measures

School group explains:
24% of variation in **Safety**
School Climate Measures

School group explains:
8% of variation in *Relationships*
Research Question #1

- School Characteristics
- School Climate
- Student SEL (e.g., Motivation)
- Outcome (e.g., Suspension)
Do school characteristics predict school climate?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>School climate measure</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>change in school percentile rank</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td></td>
<td>-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty level</td>
<td>-5</td>
<td></td>
<td>-17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority %</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locale</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade level</td>
<td>+41 grade 6</td>
<td>+37 grade 6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>+29 grade 7</td>
<td>+29 grade 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>+21 grade 8</td>
<td>+21 grade 8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition year</td>
<td>+14</td>
<td>+13</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Do school characteristics predict school climate?
Research Question #2

- School Characteristics
- School Climate
- Student SEL (e.g., Motivation)
- Outcome (e.g., Suspension)
Does school context predict student SEL?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School context</th>
<th>Student SEL Domain</th>
<th>Motivation</th>
<th>Social engagement</th>
<th>Self-regulation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Size</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>+&lt;1</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty level</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority %</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade level</td>
<td>+6 grade 6</td>
<td>+7 grade 6</td>
<td>-2 grade 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>+3 grade 7</td>
<td>+5 grade 7</td>
<td>-2 grade 8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>+2 grade 8</td>
<td>+2 grade 8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>+4</td>
<td>+8</td>
<td>+5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Question #3

School Characteristics → School Climate → Student SEL (e.g., Motivation) → Outcome (e.g., Suspension)
## Does school climate predict outcomes?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Climate Measure</th>
<th>Poor grades</th>
<th>Test scores</th>
<th>Suspension</th>
<th>Absences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Relationships</em></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>+3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Safety</em></td>
<td>-8</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>-11</td>
<td>-8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Study Takeaways

• Considerable variation across schools in Safety (less variation in Relationships)

• School climate predicted by:
  – School Poverty (especially Safety)
  – Grade Level

• Safety more predictive (than Relationships) of student SEL and outcomes
School Climate

1. Overview

2. Using Your School Climate Scores

3. Strategies for Improving School Climate
   - Promoting a School-Wide Commitment
   - Addressing Adult Climate
   - Focusing on Equity
   - Elevating Student Voice and Leadership
   - Strengthening Social and Emotional Skills
   - Emphasizing Relationships
   - Providing Equitable, Educational, and Restorative Discipline
   - Involving Families and Communities

4. References
   - References
Strengthening Climate for Better Outcomes

What are the key strategies?

1. Involve Family and Community
2. Build Faculty Trust and Collaboration
3. Provide SEL: Social Emotional Learning
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6. Tap Student Voice and Leadership
Involve Family and Community

• Maintain open communication channels with parents and families.

• Host events that foster family involvement in their student’s schooling.

• Be alert to, and seek to avoid/minimize, strategies or practices that may be in opposition to any cultural values or beliefs families may hold.
Build Faculty Trust & Collaboration

• Have teachers and other staff members participate in decision making.

• Ensure teachers feel supported by their principal, grade team leads, and one another.

• Establish teams, working groups, and other collaborative initiatives in which teachers can plan, work, and revise approaches together.
Provide SEL to all Students

• Provide SEL to all students, in all three MTSS (Multi-Tiered System of Support) tiers

• Implement explicit instruction in understanding and applying social-emotional skills/competencies

• Ensure opportunities to practice these skills/competencies embedded into academic instruction.
Focus on Equity

• Diversify faculty and administration

• Leverage student, family, and community assets

• Audit school equity and inclusion using data, of course
Examining Subgroup Differences

Female Safety Average vs. Male Safety Average

- Females higher
- Males higher
Revisit Student Discipline

• Recognize discipline as instruction.

• Explore, adapt, and implement restorative justice procedures.

• Collect and use data about discipline inequities.
Tap Student Voice & Leadership

• Genuinely respect and heed student input and perception data. Demonstrate responsiveness.

• Empower and respect student leadership.

• Ask students to generate, review, and help implement strategies for key challenges.
Stay tuned for more school climate research from ACT!

Fall 2018 survey of >25,000 ACT-tested students

- School safety
- Attitudes about teachers/staff carrying guns
- School safety practices
Relating school context to measures of psychosocial factors for students in grades 6 through 9

Jeff Allen, Jason D. Way*, Alex Casillas
Climate Improvement Strategies references


Zinsser, K. M., Christensen, C. G., & Torres, L. (2016). She’s supporting them; who’s supporting her? Preschool center-level social-emotional supports and teacher well-being
Thank you!

• Questions

• Contacts
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