Transforming School Climate

Creating Safe, Caring and Engaging Schools

COLORADO LEGACY Foundation

1. Empowering Students to Be Change Agents

2. Creating a Community of Upstanding Allies

3. Facilitating Adult Practice Change: Professional Development and Policy

4. Using Data to Drive Decisions

Creating Safe, Caring and Engaging Schools

There is no question that school culture is a critical factor in school success. These strategies help shape and transform school culture into an environment that helps students feel connected and attached to school, have a positve self concept and feel motivated to learn.

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Transforming School Climate

Creating Safe, Caring and Engaging Schools

School climate refers to patterns of people's experiences of school life; it reflects the norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching, learning and leadership practices, as well as the organizational structure that comprise school life.[1] There is no question that school culture is a critical factor in school success. For nearly two decades, a growing body of research describes the link between positive school climate and student absenteeism, suspension, feeling connected and attached to school, student self-esteem, positive self-concept and motivation to learn. A school's culture, in short, either promotes or undermines student learning.

Although a tremendous amount of time and energy has been spent in bullying prevention as a primary strategy to create positive school climate and reduce violence, the truth is that rates of bullying have remained relatively flat for twenty years.[2] What research shows is more effective in transforming school-wide culture, as well as reducing bullying and peer victimization, are those strategies aimed at getting to the heart of how students feel –their sense of safety, belonging, connectedness and confidence-in combination with effective response to social, emotional and mental health needs and strong skill building. In other words, to transform school culture you must create a community of care, evidenced by students with strong skills to persevere, resolve conflict, manage emotions, engage in pro-social activities, engage with peers, partner with adults and cope with disappointment, anxiety and other stressors involved in their lives.

Of course, student feelings and skills must be mirrored, reinforced, built and nurtured not only by other peers but by all adults in the building. Many educators mistakenly believe that while it is nice to have healthy students who feel good about school and an environment that is a pleasure to work and learn in, it is a luxury afforded time only when academic achievement goals are being reached. In other words, attending to the "affective" side of the educational equation is secondary to the "cognitive" side. This could not be further from the truth. In fact, the two are inextricably bound up together.

Evidence from multiple fields indicates that the social and emotional health of students—their behaviors, skills, attitudes and beliefs—shape their intention to learn as well as their ability to learn. Often called "non-cognitive" factors in the educational literature[3], an unfortunate labeling that has contributed to our continued separation of the affective and cognitive dimensions of learning, these factors have an impact on:

LINKS:

National School Climate Standards ▷

CASEL-The Missing Piece ▷

CLF's Best Practice Guide on Social Emotional and Mental Health ▷

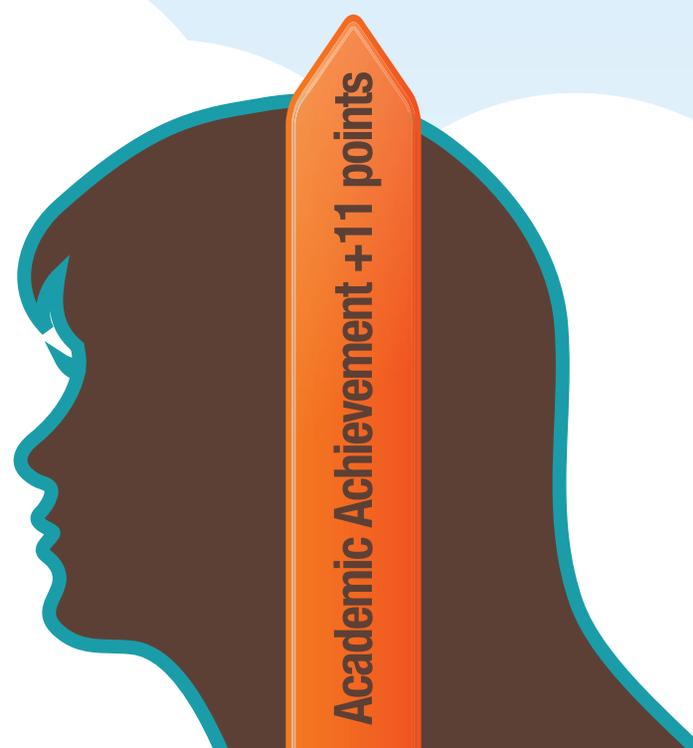Univ of Chicago meta analysis of Non Cognitive Factors ▷

- Students' motivation to learn and to attend school

- Their understanding of whether education is something they can do or even should do

- The relevance of what they see and hear to their life experience and future ambitions

- Their feelings about themselves as smart or capable

- The extent to which they feel people at school care about them, respect them and trust them

- Their experiences in school with student bullying and victimization

- Their sense of belonging to their school community or feeling marginalized, isolated, different, and unwelcome

Research demonstrates that these factors have a direct impact on increasing academic achievement, with a 2011 study showing that evidence-based instruction in social and emotional learning boosts academic achievement by, on average, 11 points on standardized tests.[4] Social emotional learning, with its attention to safety, connection and support; challenge and engagement; and a school culture in which most individuals can productively manage and control their emotions improves the conditions for learning that appear to be equally important to teaching and to child/youth development, especially for kids in poverty or who experience other factors that place them at risk[5].

SEE THE COLORADO CONTEXT ▶

1. Ross & A'Vant, "How Does Improving School Climate Support Student Achievement?" Brown University, 2010
2. Dorothy Espelage, "Realistic Strategies for Bully Prevention & Promoting Positive School Climate," Keynote Address, Colorado Bullying Prevention Institute, April 2013.
3. Farrington, C.A., Roderick, M., Allensworth, E., Nagaoka. J., Keyes, T.S., Johnson, D.W., & Beechum, N.O. (2012). Teaching adolescents to become learners. The role of noncognitive factors in shaping school performance: A critical literature review. Chicago: University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research.
4. Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, and Schellinger (2011)
5. Osher et al. (2007); Osher, Sidana, and Kelly (2008)
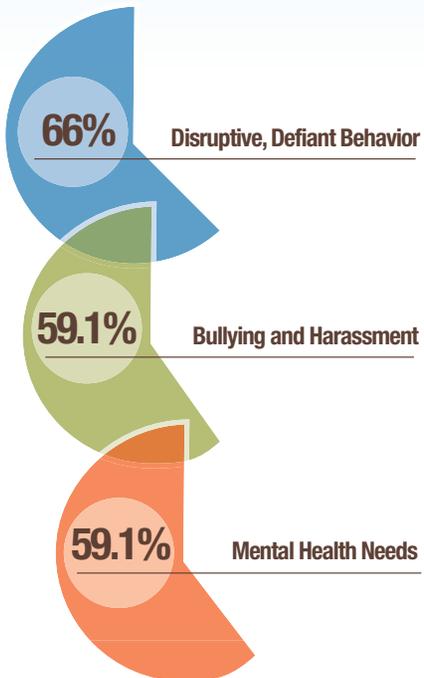
Academic Achievement +11 points

"... a 2011 study showing that evidence-based instruction in social and emotional learning boosts academic achievement by, on average, 11 points on standardized tests."

Why Now?
The Colorado Context

Addressing the three highest needs for assistance

66% Disruptive, Defiant Behavior

59.1% Bullying and Harassment

59.1% Mental Health Needs

- According to a statewide survey administered in the 2009-2010 school year by the Colorado School Safety Resource Center, school administrators and behavioral health professionals indicated that three highest needs for assistance were addressing students' disruptive, defiant behavior (66%); bullying and harassment (59.1%); and mental health needs (59.1%). Similarly, 55% of survey respondents indicated classroom management strategies as the highest or very highest need, with 60% saying that effective mental health services was a high or very high priority need for addressing the problem behaviors of students statewide

- Colorado's Achievement Plan for Kids, or CAP4K, (2008). SB 08-212 called for the revision of P-12 standards and assessments, mandating that all local education providers adopt the new or updated standards in all content areas. Local education providers also need to adopt curriculum to ensure that all students master all standards adopted by the state. Finally, they need to adopt assessments to demonstrate student growth in all content areas.

As a result of this legislation, for the first time ever, Colorado has adopted new social emotional learning standards, referred to as Emotional and Social Wellness (ESW) standards, as part of the Comprehensive Health Education Academic Content Standards. Mastery of the ESW standards means that graduates will be able to "utilize knowledge and skills to enhance mental, emotional, and social well-being" and "exhibit responsible personal and social behavior that respects self and others." These concepts and skills are essential to ensuring graduates are "able to demonstrate postsecondary and workforce readiness prior to or upon attaining a high school diploma."

- Measures to Reduce the Frequency of Bullying in Schools Act (2011). SB 11-1254 made significant changes to the Safe Schools Act, including to the definition of bullying. In addition to requiring school districts to update policies to include cyber-bullying, the new law provides protections for students protected under civil rights codes. It also creates an opportunity to promote the ESW standards as universal prevention for bullying by equipping all students to effectively manage their emotions and social relationships, including conflicts and bullying.

- Colorado's Great Teachers and Leaders Act (2010). SB 10-191 set in motion Colorado's first ever educator evaluation and support system. All educators will be held accountable for student growth as well as meeting or exceeding five additional quality standards. One of the quality standards for teachers focuses on creating a safe, inclusive, and effective learning environment for all students. Thus, teachers will begin in school year 2013-14 to be evaluated to some degree on how they are supporting emotional and social wellness development in their students, as well as how they are fostering an environment conducive to learning.

SEE THE STRATEGIES ▶

LINKS

CLF's What Every District Should Know About 1254 ▶

Colorado's Emotional Social Wellness Standards ▶

The Work on the Ground: Four Best-Practice Strategies

Evidence-based programs and practice has become as familiar a part of the educational vocabulary as RTI or positive behavior support. But just as it is important to invest in evidence-based practice, it is also critical to invest in practice-based evidence. At the Colorado Legacy Foundation, we incentivize work happening in schools that has a promising foundation based in research. In this way, we incubate innovation on its way to becoming evidence-based practice. We believe that practice change is slow, hard work and comes with its share of things that do not work along with things that do. The secret is in recognizing those things that are showing promise, scaling them up and continuing to make them stronger.   Without this investment in new and promising ideas, we would have little incentive to try new things, instead relying on boxed curricula or purchased programs.

Our grantees working to create safe, engaging, and inclusive school cultures are our guide to what really works in practice in Colorado. That work, taken collectively, represents four core transformational strategies.

Empowering Students To Be Change Agents ▷

Creating a Community of Upstanding Allies ▷

Facilitating Adult Practice Change: Professional Development and Policy ▷

Using Data to Drive Decisions ▷

1. Empowering Students To Be Change Agents

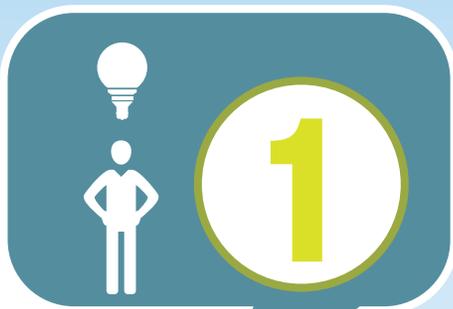**2.** Creating a Community of Upstanding Allies

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Empowering Students to be Change Agents

There is a growing body of evidence that student-led change movements are powerful. While it is important to create policies and rules that govern student and adult behavior, doing that alone has not been effective in creating cultures in which everyone invests and owns those norms. Instead, empower students to lead the effort: identifying challenge spots, developing school-wide messaging and serving as the most powerful educators in a school building.

At Poudre High School (Fort Collins) and Rangeview High School (Aurora) students teach other students important lessons in diversity, equity and social-emotional skills that not only create a more inclusive climate but impact academic achievement as well. Both schools are seeing positive change on school climate indicators and in student behavior, as well as reduced "F" rates for 9th grade students, lower drop-out rates and higher graduation rates. These lessons are researched, practiced, taught, de-briefed and continually improved as the bulk of a credit-bearing class within the regular curriculum, taken as an elective by the diverse students who apply and are chosen to be trained as peer teachers.
To read more about PHS and RHS, click here. To see the work in action, watch the videos below.

POUDRE HIGH SCHOOL

SEEING IS BELIEVING

RANGEVIEW HIGH SCHOOL

SEEING IS BELIEVING

Rangeview Diversity Day Agenda ▷

Rangeview Pledge of Respect ▷

CLF's Student Engagement Video ▷

Students Mentoring Students Curriculum, Poudre High School ▷

SMS Curriculum Supplement – Leadership Skills ▷

2

Creating an Upstanding Community of Allies

Tremendous energy has been spent trying to reduce or eliminate bullying in schools. The strategies that are the most effective focus on changing bystander behavior and teaching both students and adults how to stand up for others effectively. This shift from bystanders to "Upstanders" creates the community of care that is required to transform school culture. In Colorado, the students bullied the most are those who do not conform to gender stereotypes, are perceived to be gay, lesbian, bi-sexual or transgender, students who suffer a social-emotional disability and those who are overweight. Extra efforts must be made to ensure that students stand up for these students as well as all students. Research is clear that creating clubs and student alliances make these students feel safer in school and transmit a powerful message that all students deserve a safe, welcoming and equitable learning environment.

MANHATTAN MIDDLE SCHOOL
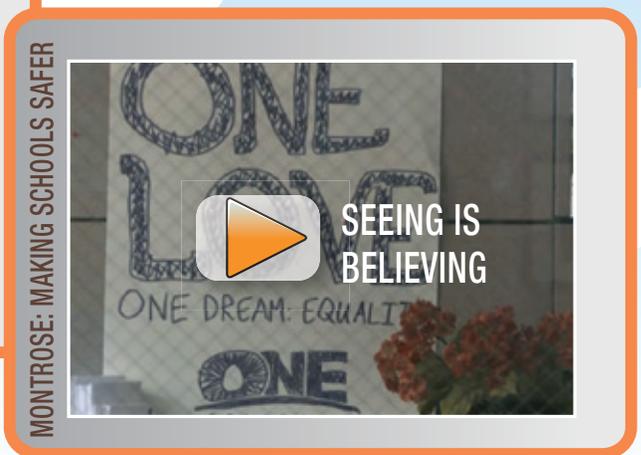
SEEING IS BELIEVING

There is great work happening on the ground in Colorado. At Manhattan Middle School in Boulder, what started as a small group of students who wanted to be Allies to other students has now blossomed into a curricular phenomenon, growing from just 12 students two years ago to over 100 student Allies today. Wearing their "Allies" t-shirts and buttons, student allies receive regular training on what it means to be an upstander and practice the skills they need to routinely stand up for others and against bullying, harassment, put-downs or social exclusion if they see it happening. To see Manhattan in action, watch the video above.

READ MORE ▶

"This shift from bystanders to "Upstanders" creates the community of care that is required to transform school culture."

HOW TO START A GSA

SEEING IS BELIEVING

MONTROSE: MAKING SCHOOLS SAFER

ONE LOVE
ONE DREAM. EQUALIT
ONE

SEEING IS BELIEVING

In Denver Public Schools, serving a particularly large and diverse student population, a push to create high quality and sustainable Gay-Straight Alliances (GSA) across the district has resulted in 24 GSAs, some boasting over 100 members. These safe spaces for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) students and their allies has been shown to increase feelings of safety and community within schools, driving the culture and climate to be more affirming to all students who are different. To see how a student in Montrose started a GSA and to learn how to start one in your school, watch the videos above.

Likewise in Center, Colorado, students led a social norming campaign called 'Be a Buddy, Not a Bully' that involved posters, buttons, pledges, a logo contest, weekly discussions about bullying, peer teaching, events such as a Stand for Change Day and culminated in a Walk Against Bullying involving over 150 students who walked alongside their parents and community members. Below are some tools they used to get a social norming campaign started.

STAND FOR A CHANGE DAY
CENTER COLORADO

I Pledge to:
Be a Buddy, not a Bully;
and to Speak Up Against Bullying.

Be a Buddy   Not a Bully

CREATE YOUR OWN SOCIAL NORMING CAMPAIGN

Speak Up Against Bullying!

9 out of 10 Center Students agree there is <u>never</u> a time when it is all right to Bully, tease or make fun of someone.

BE A BUDDY NOT A BULLY

So, Why does it happen?

Bullying has a negative affect on mental and emotional health. Stand up against Bullying to maintain a safe school atmosphere! To get help, talk to your school's counselor.

THE CHOICE IS YOUR
Are you being a bully; and don't even know it?
Bullying Consists of:
Name calling
Pushing, shoving, hitting
Spreading rumors
Making fun of people for things they can't change like:
Religion
Family
Race
Gender

Speak Up Against Bullying!
For help, find a teacher, counselor or principal at your school!

3 Facilitating Adult Practice Change: Professional Development and Policy

School climate change is not something that only involves students and student behavior. In fact, adults are powerful members of the school community and their interaction with students is the foundation of teaching and learning. All adults must be empowered, encouraged and sometimes required to change their practice in ways that drive the creation of trusting relationships between adults and students and between adults in all positions within the school community. Ongoing and meaningful professional development, along with best-practice policy execution, make it substantially more likely that adults will examine their practice and feel empowered to change.

CHERRY CREEK SCHOOL DISTRICT

SEEING IS BELIEVING

In Cherry Creek School District, integrated, regular and innovative professional development for adults across the school community about bullying, harassment, on-the-spot interventions, equity, positive coaching, relationship building and positive behavior supports is a priority, institutionalized through district policy that requires it to occur. Bus drivers are empowered to create warm, affirming climates on their buses and have created their own specialized program to do so—R.I.D.E. Positive Coaching is reinforced daily and school staff regularly practice how to "Interrupt-Follow-Up" when they see or hear mean, cruel, bullying or harassing behavior. To see policies and tools that can assist in professional development efforts, click the links on the next page. To see Cherry Creek in action, watch the video above.

READ MORE ▶

Comprehensive Anti-Bullying Policy: Denver Public Schools

In May, 2013, Denver Public Schools passed a new comprehensive anti-bullying policy which sets clear expectations for student behavior and reinforces that any harassing, threatening, or bullying behavior toward any student is unacceptable. This includes any disrespectful or hurtful comments made toward a student that disparage the student's race, color, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

The new bullying policy also includes a commitment to create a DPS-wide bullying-prevention program that focuses on:

- training staff and students in taking proactive steps to ensure considerate behavior;

- implementing procedures for immediate intervention, investigation, and confrontation of students engaged in bullying behavior;

- fostering a productive partnership with parents and community members in order to help maintain a bully-free environment;

- supporting victims of bullying through individual and peer counseling;

- and recognizing and rewarding supportive, caring behaviors of students toward one another.

The full policy is available in the Links sidebar.

LINKS

Bullying policies that include professional development and positive supports for students:

Cherry Creek School District (CCSD) ▷

Denver Public Schools ▷

CCSD Bullying Prevention Staff Training ▷

On the Spot Responses to Bullying, CCSD ▷
On the Spot Responses to Bullying Supplement, CCSD ▷

CCSD RIDE PPT ▷

Manhattan Middle Teacher Survey
"How Equitable is My Teaching Practice?" ▷

4

Using Data to Drive Decisions

It is increasingly clear that effective interventions and meaningful change occur when aligned to the specific needs and challenges of a particular school or district. Not only must there be a solid understanding of what is needed, there must be collective interest in responding to the needs identified in ways that seem promising to achieve the most impact. This culture of collecting data and using that data to drive decision making is the hallmark of transformational practice. Collecting data from teachers, students, administrators and parents about their perceptions of school culture is an essential element. While the most common approach is to administer an annual School Climate Survey, it is critical to discuss with a team whether the survey you use or are considering is aligned to what you want to know and the way in which you intend to use the data. In addition, students can be incredibly beneficial partners in this process and create student-level buy-in to make these efforts particularly meaningful to their peers as well as adults across the school community.

PROJECT VOYCE

SEEING IS BELIEVING

Located in Denver, Project VOYCE is a student-led organization that works in schools to identify non-traditional students who are emerging leaders and to work with school administrators to build authentic youth-adult partnerships, particularly around school climate change and the collection of data. Project VOYCE students work with other students to effectively message across the school just how important climate survey data is and how serious it should be taken. In addition, they work to build trust and break down resistance from teachers about students evaluating the teaching they experience in the classroom. In fact, teachers are routinely surprised at how constructive and valuable student feedback on their teaching can be. To see the work in action, watch the video above. The new Measuring School Climate Toolkit and other tools you can use to begin collecting meaningful data on school climate are located in the Links sidebar.

LINKS

CLF's Measuring School Climate Toolkit ▷

CSSRC Positive School Climate Action Plan Template ▷