

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?

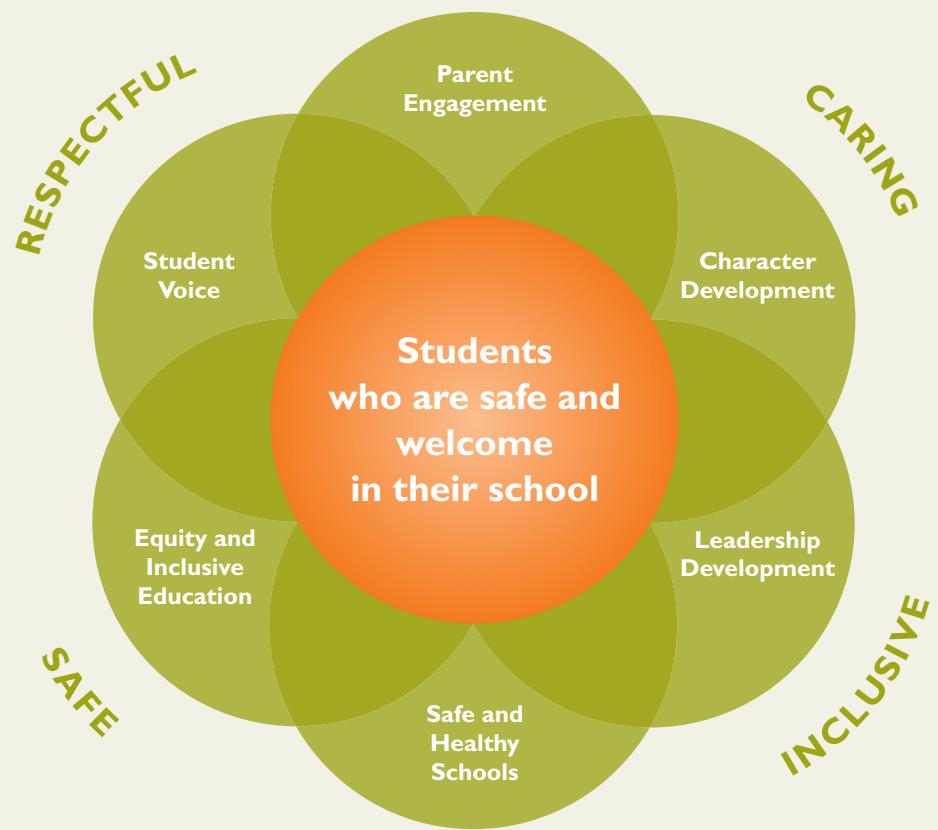
Schools are required to conduct anonymous school climate surveys of their students every two years and to share the survey results with their safe schools teams. This requirement is outlined in Policy/Program Memorandum No. 145, *Progressive Discipline and Promoting Positive Student Behaviour*, available 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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Guidelines for use

- ◆ Think of the following as a menu of options for your school to consider.
- ◆ The activities and practices described here may need to be tailored to your school environment.

Elements Contributing to a Positive School Climate	School-Level Activities/Practices	Classroom-Level Activities/Practices	Student-Level Activities/Practices
<p>Student Voice Schools give students the opportunity to provide input on matters related to their learning and school environment. Students are given various opportunities to lead and/or contribute to school activities. Student perspectives are taken into account in the decision-making process, and students are encouraged to be involved at all levels.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Encourage students to apply for a Ministry of Education "SpeakUp" project grant. Have students create an action team to report to educators on the outcome of their project. www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/students/speakup/projects.html ◆ Invite former students who were able to overcome past challenges in their lives to share their personal stories at a school assembly. ◆ Engage students as partners in conversations about their own learning and about the school's learning environment. Solicit their ideas about school improvement planning. ◆ Showcase students' unique strengths, talents and interests through student-led assemblies, talent shows or musical events. ◆ Support student councils in conducting surveys of students to find out what issues are important to them. Use strategies developed by students to address the identified issues. ◆ Support a variety of student-led clubs and teams, such as intramural sports teams, student theatre and music groups and student equity committees. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Post a list of appropriate volunteer opportunities available in the school, in the community or internationally. Include opportunities available both during the school year and in the summer. ◆ Set up peer-mentoring programs, such as "buddy" programs. For example, an older student could provide reading assistance to a younger student; a senior student could help with a Grade 9 student's transition to secondary school; a current student could help a newcomer become familiar with the school. ◆ Encourage students to participate in creating their own learning environments. For example, engage students as partners in researching current learning theories or educational approaches and have them share their findings with teachers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Provide team-building training for students interested in supporting their peers, either collectively, as a school-wide peer support group or individually, as peer helpers or tutors. ◆ Train student leaders to lead other students in physical activities during breaks, both to keep them engaged and to promote positive relationships and team building. ◆ Provide opportunities for all students to develop their leadership potential – for example, by rotating classroom duties or by creating SpeakUp Councils. ◆ Encourage students with a range of perspectives to volunteer to be teacher helpers or to apply to become members of the Minister's Student Advisory Council (MSAC). www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/students/speakup/msac.html
<p>Parent Engagement Schools provide parents* with opportunities to learn about, support and actively engage in their children's experience at school.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Encourage the school council to apply for a Parents Reaching Out (PRO) grant, designed to help parents become more involved at their child's school. www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/reaching.html ◆ Hold information sessions for parents in venues in the community, such as the public library, a meeting room in an apartment building, the local community centre, a place of worship, an Aboriginal friendship centre or a Parenting and Family Literacy Centre, to reach as many parents as possible. Consider using translators and approaching leaders from diverse communities to help deliver school messages. ◆ Invite parents to participate in school celebrations and events, such as sports days, field trips, musical events and school assemblies. ◆ Support new students and families as they become part of the school community by providing an orientation package, including information about community resources, in multiple languages. ◆ Provide parents with a choice of ways in which they can participate – for example, by taking part in a parent-in-class day, helping with the production of sets for the school play or helping to organize a school picnic. ◆ Work towards including representation of diverse parent groups on all school committees, including school councils. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Communicate with parents by various means, including telephone and email, to keep them informed about student learning. For example, contact the parents of a student who was facing challenges in learning to report that the student is making improvements. ◆ Provide parents with tip sheets and suggestions on how they can support their child's learning. ◆ Invite parents to volunteer in the classroom as reading mentors, math coaches or storytellers. ◆ Create a "parent-buddy" program to help parents of newcomers to the school navigate the school system. ◆ Find ways to show appreciation of all parents' efforts to support their children's learning. ◆ Hold teacher-parent-student discussions to go over students' learning goals and their progress towards achieving the goals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Establish convenient channels of communication to make parents feel comfortable with contacting teachers or other staff members if their child is struggling or dealing with other problems at school. ◆ Create a parent-information centre or bulletin board in the school featuring materials about student well-being and information about community resources that are available to assist students and their families. ◆ Create a parent centre in the school library where parents access material on issues that may affect their children, such as healthy relationships, mental health and well-being, peer pressure and healthy eating. Try to provide materials in multiple languages.
<p>Community Partnerships Schools engage community groups to work with the school in a mutually beneficial way to support students and/or parents.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Enlist community members or groups to participate in school activities such as breakfast or snack programs. ◆ Host a school "open house" for community members at which students can present and talk about their work. ◆ Encourage the school to participate in community activities such as charity events. ◆ Provide seniors with a special pass that provides free admission to school events such as concerts and plays. ◆ Implement strategies designed to engage diverse community partners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Promote opportunities for students taking art courses to decorate the store windows of local retail businesses. ◆ Create opportunities in the classroom for students to "give back" to the local or international community – for example, by donating items built in a woodworking class to a developing country or by planning a food or book drive. ◆ Arrange for the local public health unit to visit classrooms throughout the school year to discuss topics such as healthy eating and physical activity. ◆ Invite local police officers to the school to discuss bullying or safe Internet use. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Engage positive role models from the community to form a support group for girls that can help them with issues related to self-esteem, body image, healthy relationships and other areas of concern. ◆ Engage positive role models from the community to form a support group for boys that can help them with issues related to self-esteem, at-risk behaviours, life skills and other areas of concern. ◆ Arrange for students to participate in community or regional leadership-development opportunities such as a Model United Nations, life skills training or sports camp.
<p>Learning Environment Schools provide students with a wide range of opportunities and ways to learn and to practise and demonstrate their learning. Students learn about the diversity of their world and come to understand the importance of learning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Provide relevant opportunities for students and staff to learn about diverse histories, cultures and perspectives – for example, about Aboriginal traditions and treaty histories and about women's contributions to science and technology. ◆ Ensure that curriculum materials, displays and print and electronic resources reflect the diversity and the individual needs and interests of the student population. Students should always be able to recognize themselves in their learning materials and resources. ◆ Ask students to think of ways to creatively incorporate the school's Monthly Character Traits (e.g., May – integrity; June – resilience) into their learning environment. For example, have them design a screensaver for use on the school's computers promoting that month's trait. ◆ Reinforce, acknowledge and celebrate positive student behaviour – for example, by presenting certificates at a school assembly or by including "good news" stories in the school newsletter. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Promote a culture of high expectations for all students. ◆ Differentiate instruction and assessment to meet the individual learning needs of all students. ◆ Recognize and discuss qualities such as respect, social responsibility, empathy, honesty and fairness where relevant in all areas of the curriculum, and draw attention to their significance in creating safe and healthy schools. ◆ Teach positive social skills through modelling and role play. Practise positive behaviour and give positive feedback when a student behaves well. ◆ Rotate classroom duties among all students throughout the year. Allow students to suggest leadership roles they would like to take on. ◆ Take advantage of "teachable moments" to address immediate relationship issues that may arise among students. ◆ Develop classroom rules collaboratively with students at the beginning of the school year. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Establish classroom routines, such as daily check-in, to benefit students who require support. ◆ Provide opportunities for secondary school students to explore career options – for example, by inviting speakers or having students visit workplaces – early in the school year.
<p>Social-Emotional Environment Schools promote fairness, equity, respect for all and a sense of belonging and connectedness. They create a safe and caring environment for all.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Put in place a whole-school bullying prevention program. Teach all students to oppose bullying and discrimination by helping them develop the confidence to make their own decisions and the courage to stand up for what they believe is right. Empower students to take responsibility for their actions, including their choices as bystanders. ◆ Participate in campaigns such as Pink Shirt Day and Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week (third week of November) to show that bullying will not be tolerated in the school. ◆ Support student-led presentations, including concerts and plays, that address bullying, homophobia and racism and that promote inclusiveness. ◆ Host assemblies to recognize positive student behaviour and celebrate student successes. ◆ Build an understanding of mental illness and help reduce the stigma attached to it by posting information and posters about emotional and social well-being throughout the school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Promote belonging and connectedness in the classroom through "getting to know you" activities (teacher-to-student and peer-to-peer). ◆ Promote positive relationship building through peer mediation, conflict resolution and restorative practices. ◆ Teach skills such as meditation, yoga and t'ai chi to help students reduce stress. Encourage students to notice when they are experiencing learning as fun. ◆ Encourage students to demonstrate behaviour that promotes emotional well-being among their classmates. Ask them to notice any improvement in their own sense of well-being as a result. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Support students who are involved in unhealthy relationships or who have been victims of bullying, by providing information about agencies that can help them. ◆ Provide students with tools to help them gain insight into building self-esteem and healthy body image – for example, provide self-esteem surveys or worksheets as well as opportunities for discussion. ◆ Develop supportive relationships with students, spending time with them individually when possible. ◆ Establish behavioural contracts that have built-in rewards for students with behavioural issues.
<p>Physical Environment The school environment, inside and outside the building, is welcoming and makes the school a safe place that is conducive to learning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Organize school-led community clean-up and beautification days. ◆ Support the school's eco-club to create a school/community garden with flowers, vegetables and native plants. ◆ Hang a welcome banner produced by students at the front entrance of the school. ◆ Hold a zero-waste lunch challenge in the school. ◆ Regularly communicate and practise lockdown and evacuation procedures, as well as fire drill procedures. ◆ Provide tip sheets to all staff members suggesting ways to make the school more welcoming and more conducive to learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Set up and organize the classroom in a way that promotes collaborative learning, student engagement in learning and principles of inclusive education. ◆ Display the work of all students in the classroom. ◆ Ensure that classroom displays reflect the diversity of the student population and the population of the province. Students should always be able to recognize themselves in their learning environment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Have a group of students act as environmental ambassadors at the school, promoting the school's recycling and composting programs and educating other students about ways they can make the school "greener." ◆ Provide tip sheets to students about ways of making the school more welcoming and conducive to learning.

* In this document, parents is used to refer to parent(s) and guardian(s).