

PROMOTING A POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE: A Resource for Schools

About This Resource

This resource was developed to help schools and their safe and accepting schools teams foster and maintain a positive school climate.

A positive learning and teaching environment is essential for student achievement and well-being. Research shows 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, included and supported (Safe Schools Action Team, *Shaping a Culture of Respect in Our Schools: Promoting Safe and Healthy Relationships* [Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 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. It has invested in initiatives in equity and inclusive education, character development, student engagement, safe and accepting schools, healthy schools, parent engagement, community partnerships and leadership. Collectively, these initiatives have helped to create the conditions needed for a respectful, safe, inclusive and accepting learning environment.

Safe and accepting schools teams are a key element in creating a positive school climate. Using a whole school approach, they bring together members of the school community – the adults in the school, students, parents/guardians and members of the community – to work towards this common goal.

This whole school approach engages the school community in putting prevention and intervention strategies in place at all levels – at the level of the individual, the classroom, the school and the board. Success requires an ongoing, comprehensive and collaborative effort on the part of everyone involved.

What is a “positive school climate”?

School climate may be defined as:

“the learning environment and relationships found within a school and school community. A positive school climate exists when all members of the school community feel safe, included, and accepted, and actively promote positive behaviours and interactions. Principles of equity and inclusive education are embedded in the learning environment to support a positive school climate and a culture of mutual respect. A positive school climate is a crucial component of the prevention of inappropriate behaviour.”

Policy/Program Memorandum No. 145, “Progressive Discipline and Promoting Positive Student Behaviour” (December 5, 2012)

As leaders, educators play an important role in modelling positive, inclusive and respectful language and behaviour in schools and classrooms. To help develop and sustain a positive school climate, boards and schools should actively promote and support behaviours that reflect their board’s code of conduct, equity and inclusive education policy and character development initiatives. They should also invite members of the broader community to become involved in this effort as part of the school community.

What are the characteristics of a positive school climate?

When a positive school climate exists:

- students, staff members and parents feel – and *are* – safe, included and accepted;
- all members of the school community demonstrate respect, fairness and kindness in their interactions, and build healthy relationships that are free from discrimination and harassment;
- students are encouraged and given support to be positive leaders and role models in their school community – for example, by speaking up about issues such as bullying;
- students, the principal, staff members, parents and community members engage in open and ongoing dialogue. All partners are actively engaged;
- principles of equity and inclusive education and strategies for students and staff related to bullying prevention and intervention and awareness-raising are reinforced across the curriculum;
- the learning environment, instructional materials, and teaching and assessment strategies reflect the diversity of all learners;
- every student is inspired and given support to succeed in an environment of high expectations.

How can schools and their safe and accepting schools teams use this resource?

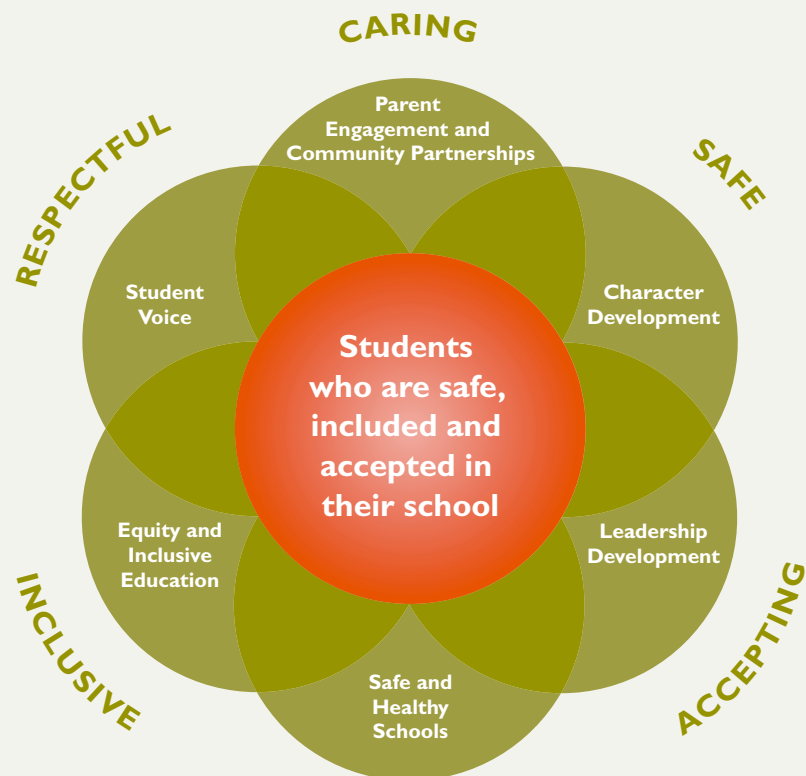
A whole school approach is informed by evidence, starting with the data gathered through the school climate survey. All schools are required to conduct anonymous school climate surveys of their students, staff and parents at least once every two years and to share the survey results with their safe and accepting schools teams. This requirement is outlined in Policy/Program Memorandum No. 145, “Progressive Discipline and Promoting Positive Student Behaviour”, available at <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/extra/eng/ppm/ppm.html>.

The results of the school climate surveys can help inform the continuing development and improvement of school and board policies, practices and initiatives, including **equity and inclusive education policies** and **bullying prevention and intervention plans**. This resource provides practical ideas for safe and accepting schools teams to consider as they address new and ongoing challenges with respect to improving school climate. It offers new ideas and strategies that teams can adapt as they continue to nurture a learning environment that enables all students to thrive.

This resource is intended to support schools' ongoing efforts to promote a positive school climate. These efforts will allow every student, parent, staff and community partner to feel safe, welcome and accepted in schools across the province.

This resource also supports and complements the work schools are doing in a number of other areas. It brings together ideas from various initiatives that schools are involved in, as the following diagram illustrates.

Promoting a Positive School Climate in Ontario Schools



Building healthy relationships among all members of the school community

Guiding Principles

- Everyone has a role to play in building a positive school climate. Success depends on a whole school approach that includes the active involvement of school leaders, staff members, students, parents/guardians and community members who are committed to a shared vision of a safe, inclusive and accepting school community.
- Building a positive school climate requires a focus on developing healthy relationships throughout the school community among students and 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, and in all school and board operations, 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.

The ministry will update this resource periodically to share new ideas and effective practices with schools across the province. Visit the ministry's website at www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/climate.html for details on how to submit your own ideas. They may be included in the next edition of this resource.

The ministry website offers a variety of resources about safe, inclusive and accepting schools to support student achievement and well-being.

For more information on:

- bullying prevention
- Ontario's code of conduct
- progressive discipline
- the Accepting Schools Act (Bill 13), 2012
- the Comprehensive Action Plan for Accepting Schools
- the Safe Schools Strategy and related policy/program memoranda
- the Comprehensive Mental Health and Addictions Strategy

visit Ontario.ca/acceptingschools.

Find more information on Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy at www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/equity.html.

Find more information on the Parent Engagement Policy and related resources at www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/getinvolved.html.

Information for parents on topics such as bullying prevention, progressive discipline, suspension and expulsion, and requirements for responding to and reporting on incidents are also available on the ministry's website, at www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/safeKit.html.

Other Resources:

Supporting Bias-Free Progressive Discipline in Schools: A Resource Guide for School and System Leaders, at www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/discipline.html.

The Institute for Education Leadership (IEL) has a toolkit to support school and system leaders in developing a whole school approach to bullying prevention. To learn more, visit: www.safeacceptingschools.ca.

The Promoting Relationships & Eliminating Violence Network (PREVNet) has resources for teens, parents and educators, at www.prevnet.ca/.

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