

Fact Sheet #2 - Performance Standard 2: School Climate

SCHOOL CLIMATE

The leader promotes the success of all students by developing, advocating, and sustaining an academically rigorous, positive, and safe school climate for all stakeholders.

What does *school climate* mean?

In general terms, school climate refers to the “social and working relationships of staff and administrators.”¹ When you enter the school’s front office, how does it feel? As you walk down the halls, what behaviors do you notice? What is the energy level of teachers and students in classrooms? Does the school community work as a team? All of these questions relate to school climate. These and many other factors affect the climate in a school.

School climate affects everyone in the school community. Enlisting the support of all stakeholders is an important first step on the road to establishing and maintaining a positive climate. Since school climate influences student outcomes, staff satisfaction, and overall school morale, leaders should identify and implement practices that foster a positive climate.

What does research say about school climate?

The Leader’s Role. School climate and student performance are linked. A positive school climate focused on student learning is correlated to student achievement.² Successful schools have a school climate that is significantly more positive than their less successful counterparts.³ Since leaders play a pivotal role in fostering and sustaining school climate, it behooves them to concentrate effort in this area.⁴ To maintain a positive school climate, leaders should:

- Enlist the assistance of school community members (students, parents, staff, and community members) in helping to create a safe and positive learning environment.⁵

- Model respect and high expectations for all community members.⁶
- Share decision-making to maintain high school morale.⁷
- Maintain a current crisis and conflict action plan and implement it as necessary.⁸
- Cultivate a positive learning environment by using knowledge of the school community (social, cultural, leadership, and political dynamics).⁹

The Stakeholder’s Role. Stakeholder involvement in school success is well-documented. Kythreotis and Pashiartis note that positive parent-school relations are one of 10 factors in successful school leadership.¹⁰ Building professional relationships between school leaders and staff is one of the critical leader responsibilities cited by Marzano and colleagues in a meta-analysis of school leadership research.¹¹ Parent and community outreach is identified by Cotton as an essential trait of effective leaders.¹² Effective leaders build positive relations between the parent and the school, build professional relationships with the staff, and provide outreach to parents and the greater community.

The research surrounding leader and stakeholder involvement in school climate indicates the following:

- Leaders possess the authority, power, and position to impact school climate.¹³
- A positive relationship that exists between school climate and leadership affects overall school effectiveness.¹⁴
- Fundamentally important to establishing and maintaining school success is the

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importance of stakeholder involvement and relationship building.¹⁵

Trust. Trust is a precursor to success in any relationship—be it organizational or individual. If members of a school community are distrustful of others’ motives and actions, that community will most certainly fail. Moreover, anxiety, isolation, and estrangement are correlated with the absence of trust.¹⁶ The effective school leader leads from a position of trust—modeled and fostered daily in the school environment.¹⁷ Leaders desiring a trustful environment can cultivate one by sharing information, power, and decision-making with teachers.¹⁸

Everyone in the organization benefits when trust abounds. Schools with high levels of trust are more open to new ideas, more likely to reach out to the community, and commit to organizational goals.¹⁹ Teachers demonstrate greater professionalism when leaders evidence trust and when they adopt a professional rather than a bureaucratic orientation.²⁰ Students are the recipients of higher levels of teacher trust when trust is a prevailing culture trait within a school faculty.²¹

Multiple studies indicate that increased collaboration, improved academic productivity, and risk-tolerant climates are positively associated with trust in schools.²² As is evidenced by the research base, trust between members of a school community benefits all members.

Shared Leadership. As the role of the principal has evolved from being primarily managerial to both managerial and instructional, duties and responsibilities have increased. In order to meet the demands of the job it is increasingly necessary to share leadership. Paradoxically, when leaders give power away they oftentimes become more powerful.²³ This enables them to narrow their focus and concentration to factors that contribute directly to school effectiveness.

Shared leadership has been defined as “multiple sources of guidance and direction, following the contours of expertise in an organization, made coherent through a common culture.”²⁴ In essence, shared leadership results in the creation of multiple leaders within a school. It affects leaders and stakeholders in different ways.

For the leader, it lightens the load and provides support. For the stakeholder, it highlights the important role that everyone has in guiding and directing the school community toward the vision and goals. When decision-making becomes a team effort, the leader is more fully able to act as diagnostician and facilitator—identifying issues and resources necessary to address the issues.²⁵ With this structure, the leader does not relinquish responsibility; rather he/she promotes others, encourages shared decision-making, and builds relationships.²⁶ All of this contributes to a positive school climate.

The research surrounding school climate and shared leadership includes these findings:

- In effective schools, leaders distribute administrative tasks and create multiple leaders.²⁷
- Shared leadership has a positive effect on school improvement and reading achievement.²⁸
- Shared leadership has a positive effect on school improvement and math achievement.²⁹

Sample Performance Indicators for the Professional Knowledge of Leaders

- Incorporates knowledge of the social, cultural, leadership, and political dynamics of the school community to cultivate a positive academic learning environment.
- Consistently models and collaboratively promotes high expectations, mutual respect, concern, and empathy for students, staff,

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parents, and community.

- Utilizes shared decision-making to build relationships with all stakeholders and maintain positive school morale.
- Maintains a collegial environment and supports the staff through the stages of the change process.
- Develops and/or implements a Safe School plan that manages crisis situations in an effective and timely manner.
- Involves students, staff, parents, and the community to create and sustain a positive, safe, and healthy learning environment, which reflects state, district, and local school rules, policies, and procedures.
- Develops and/or implements best practices in school-wide behavior management that are effective within the school community.
- Communicates behavior management expectations regarding behavior to students, teachers, and parents.

¹ Stronge, J. H., Richard, H. B., & Catano, N. (2008). *Qualities of Effective Principals*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

² Hallinger, P., Bickman, L., & Davis, K. (1996). School context, principal leadership, and student reading achievement. *The Elementary School Journal*, 96(5), 527-549; Hoy, W., & Hannum, J. (1997). Middle school climate: An empirical assessment of organizational health and student achievement. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 33(3) 290-311; McLaughlin, M. W. (1990). Embracing contraries: Implementing and sustaining teacher evaluation. In J. Millman and L. Darling-Hammond (Eds.), *The new handbook of teacher evaluation: Assessing elementary and secondary school teachers* (pp. 403-415). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

³ Lindahl, R. (2009). School climate differences between high-performing and low-performing schools that serve high-poverty populations, *NCPEA Education Leadership Review*, 10(1). Retrieved from <http://cnx.org/content/m19508/latest/?collection=col10630/latest>.

⁴ Johnson Jr., J. F., & Uline, C. L. (2005). Preparing educational leaders to close achievement gaps. *Theory Into Practice*, 44(1), 45-52. doi:10.1207/s15430421 tip 4401_7; Quinn, J. C., Akey, T. M., Rappaport, S., Willner, C. J., & Manpower Demonstration Research Corp., N. Y. (2007). Instructional leadership, teaching quality and student achievement: Suggestive evidence from three urban school districts. *MDRC*, Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

⁵ Cotton, K. (2003). *Principals and student achievement: What the research says*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

⁶ Cotton, 2003; Harris, S. L., & Lowery, L. (2002). A view from the classroom. *Educational Leadership*, 59(8), 64-65.

⁷ Fink, E., & Resnick, L. B. (2001). Developing principals as instructional leaders. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 82(8), 598-606; Leithwood, K. A., & Riehl, C. (2003). *What do we already know about successful school leadership?* Washington, DC: AERA Division A Task Force on Developing Educational Leadership.

⁸ United States Department of Education (2006, fall). *Lessons learned from school crises and emergencies*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/27/fa/ec.pdf.

⁹ Kearney, W., & Herrington, D. (2010). High performing principals in historically low-performing minority-serving schools: A glimpse into the success of 90/90/90 Schools in South Central Texas. *National Forum of Applied Educational Research Journal*, 24(1/2), 63-72. Retrieved from EBSCOhost;

Piltch, B., & Fredericks, R. (2005, January/February). A principal's guide to school politics. *Principal*, 84(3), 10-14.

¹⁰ Kyrtheotis, A., & Pashiardis, P., & Kyriakides, L. (2010). The influence of school leadership styles and culture on students' achievement in Cyprus primary schools. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 48(2), 218-240; Marzano, R., Waters, T., & McNulty, B. A. (2005). *School leadership that works: From research to results*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development; Aurora, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning.

¹¹ Marzano et al., 2005.

¹² Cotton, 2003.

¹³ Kelley, R. C., Thornton, B., & Daugherty, R. (2005). Relationships between measures and school climate. *Education*, 126(1), 17-25. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

¹⁴ Hoy, & Hannum, 1997; Lindahl, 2009; Marzano et al., 2005.

¹⁵ Cotton, 2003; Kythreotis, & Pashiardis, 1998a; Marzano et al., 2005.

¹⁶ Daly, A. J. (2009). Rigid response in an age of accountability: The potential of leadership and trust. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 45(2), 168-216. Retrieved from EBSCOhost; Tschannen-Moran, M. (2004). *Trust matters: Leadership for successful schools*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

¹⁷ Tschannen-Moran, M. (2009). Fostering teacher professionalism in schools: The role of leadership orientation and trust. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 45(2), 217-247. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

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¹⁸ Tschannen-Moran, 2004.

¹⁹ Bryk, A. S., & Schneider, B. (2002). *Trust in schools: A core resource for school improvement*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

²⁰ Tschannen-Moran, 2009.

²¹ Tschannen-Moran, 2009.

²² Bryk, & Schneider, 2002; Hoy, W. K., & Tschannen-Moran, M. (1999). Five faces of trust: An empirical confirmation in urban elementary schools. *Journal of School Leadership*, 9(3), 184-208; Tschannen-Moran, M., & Hoy, W. K. (2000). A multidisciplinary analysis of the nature, meaning, and measurement of trust. *Review of Educational Research*, 70(4), 547. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

²³ Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (2002). *The leadership challenge* (3rd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

²⁴ Harris, A. (2005). Leading or misleading? Distributed leadership and school improvement. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 37(3), 255-65.

²⁵ Portin, B., Schneider, P., DeArmond, M., & Gundlach, L. (2003, September). *Making sense of leading schools: A study of the school principalship*. Seattle, WA: Center on Reinventing Public Education.

²⁶ Cotton, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005.

²⁷ Portin et al., 2003; Spillane, J. P., Halverson, R., & Diamond, J. B. (2001, April). Investigating school leadership practices: A distributed perspective. *Educational Researcher*, 30(3), 23-27.

²⁸ Hallinger, P., & Heck, R. H. (2010). Leadership for learning: Does collaborative leadership make a difference in school improvement?. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 38(6), 654-678. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

²⁹ Heck, R. H., & Hallinger, P. (2009). Assessing the contribution of distributed leadership to school improvement and growth in math achievement. *American Educational Research Journal*, 46(3), 659-689. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

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**Leader Self-Assessment Checklist
Performance Standard 2: School Climate**

| Quality | | Level IV | Level III | Level II | Level I |
|---|---|----------|-----------|----------|---------|
| Fostering and Sustaining Climate | Cultivates a positive environment focused on student learning. | | | | |
| | Models respect and high expectations for all community members. | | | | |
| | Shares decision making to maintain high morale in the school. | | | | |
| | Maintains a current crisis and conflict action plan and implements it as necessary. | | | | |
| | Fosters and sustains a positive school climate by seeking assistance from community members. | | | | |
| Building Relationships | Builds professional relationships between school leaders and staff. | | | | |
| | Builds positive relations between parents and the school. | | | | |
| | Provides outreach to parents and the greater community. | | | | |
| Developing Trust | Cultivates a trusting environment by sharing information, power, and decision-making with teachers. | | | | |
| | Remains open and amenable to new ideas from all members of the school community. | | | | |
| | Reaches out to the larger community to build and sustain trust. | | | | |
| Sharing Leadership | Develops multiple leaders within the school. | | | | |
| | Distributes administrative tasks among school faculty. | | | | |
| | Facilitates shared decision making between staff members. | | | | |
| | Regularly reviews school programs. | | | | |