



School Climate & Culture - Facilitation Guide -



Introduction

The **School Climate and Culture in the Middle Grades** learning package starts by helping us to understand the definition and dimensions of school culture in the middle grades, including how school climate is associated with student achievement and experiences. In the video, we explore key dimensions of school climate and culture in the middle grades, including:

- Beliefs, values, and norms
- Relationships and social interactions
- Safety and environmental characteristics

We hope you'll learn more about why school climate and culture is critical for young adolescents as we consider developmental needs such as identity developmental, the importance of belonging, and developmental relationships.



Key Takeaways

What we know:

You can think of school climate as the “personality” of a school - the shared beliefs, values, and norms within a school shape interactions between students and adults and set the parameters of acceptable behavior and norms. While the school climate is relatively stable, it can be changed. Everyone at the school affects the climate and is affected by it. Everyone has a role to play in shaping the climate, particularly adults in a school. Key dimensions of school climate include:

- Beliefs, values, and norms
 - Research tells us that: Teachers should have high standards, a commitment to student success, and mastery goal structures (Goddard et al., 2000; Hoy et al., 2006; Wang & Eccles, 2013).
 - We can apply this research to our schools by providing opportunities for training and reflection for school staff.
- Relationships and social interactions
 - Research tells us that: Positive teacher-student relationships, fair treatment, and positive intergroup interactions are important ingredients for promoting a positive school climate (Byrd, 2017; Mattison & Aber, 2007; Patrick et al., 2007).
 - We can apply this research to our schools by promoting socio-emotional learning for students and staff and enforcing guidelines for appropriate, non-biased behavior.
- Safety and environmental characteristics
 - Research tells us that: School resources must be used efficiently and equitably. Crowding should be reduced by creating space and opportunities for meaningful peer-to-peer and student-to-teacher interactions (Hanushek, 1997; Simons et al., 2010).
 - We can apply this research to our schools by using data to identify and eliminate bias in discipline and resource availability.

Current challenges:

There can be differences in school climate depending on someone’s social identity. Minority students will view the climate differently from the majority, so beware of aggregating or averaging responses. Additionally, don’t assume that these differences in school climate are located “within” the student. Instead, it is important to recognize that they actually reflect these students’ real experiences in the school.

What this learning series package focuses on:

- Understanding the definition of and dimensions of school climate — We can talk about school climate using three key dimensions: beliefs, values, and norms; relationships and social interactions; safety and environmental characteristics.
- Describing how school climate is associated with student achievement — This is important to discuss because school climate can affect students’ academic success, psychosocial development, and their well-being.
- Appreciating the teachers’ role in supporting a positive climate — Positive student-teacher relationships are key. That said, teachers need to also receive support within the three dimensions of school climate in order to promote a positive school climate.



Reflection Questions

1. Think about your most positive moments in your middle school experience. What dimension of school climate most influenced those moments?
2. What are the most positive moments you share with your students now? How do aspects of beliefs, values, and norms; relationships and social interactions; and safety and environmental characteristics shape those moments?
3. Think about specific children in your classroom. How would they describe the climate of your classroom? Of your school?
4. Think about children from a minority background in your classroom. How are their experiences of the climate different from majority students?
5. Complete the Social Identity Wheel in the Resource Guide. What aspects of your social identity (race/ethnicity, gender, religion, etc.) influence your perception of the school climate and your interactions with students?
6. What major changes have occurred in terms of the school climate of your school recently?
7. What aspects of your school's climate do you think need the most attention?
8. Identify a SMART goal for your classroom in each climate dimension.