



# Cultivating a Positive School Climate

ARCHDIOCESE OF ST. LOUIS  
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## Fourth in a Series

### 12 Dimensions of School Climate

Last month this newsletter noted the dimension of Teaching & Learning as a measure of school climate. This included providing support for both teachers and students, intentionally working to create emotionally safe schools.

The *School Climate Research Summary: August 2012*, addresses 12 dimensions of school climate, which are divided into five essential areas of focus: Safety, Relationships, Teaching & Learning, Institutional Environment, and School Climate, the Processes of School Improvement. These categories contribute to an overall experience associated with outcomes.

#### **Institutional Environment & Social Media**

Here are some questions that can invite good conversation within a faculty meeting or a focus group:

- What is the perception of your school within the greater community?
- What evidence would you have by walking the halls that your school is a warm and welcoming environment? Is there evidence that it is a dynamic learning environment?
- What does the digital footprint of your supporters, and your adversaries, communicate about your school?
- Is there strong support and participation in scheduled events?
- Do you have committed volunteers to help with planning and extra tasks in the building?
- Clean and orderly buildings are inviting – how does your school measure up?

#### **Institutional Environment**

Thoughtful planning and a comprehensive strategy with regard to your institutional environment can also include your use of social media as a promotional and interactive tool. Having a focus group of parents, staff, students and people from the greater community can help in exploring the current impression of your school, and deciding where to begin in communicating the good news you want to share.

As you reflect on your environment, imagine you are a guest coming into your building for the first time, and take an honest look at the parking lot, entrance, and hallways. Does your office staff treat visitors as welcomed guests? Even at the peak times of activity, everyone should feel welcome. When walking the halls, are people greeted with friendly exchanges, acknowledging one another? This is a simple way for students to experience a sense of belonging at school. Staff, too, must feel respected and acknowledged. These are a few strategies that cost nothing, but add value in creating a caring environment that extends beyond the school day when other activities involve participation from families.

Do the walls show interesting student work? Is Catholic identity visible? Taking pride in accomplishments and sharing our faith are signs of belonging that can have a long lasting impact on the entire learning community.

#### **Social Media**

More than ever, social media influences public opinion and life decisions about big and small matters. This is also true of decisions related to Catholic schools. Having a dynamic website with up-to-date information that attracts viewers is becoming more important in order to have an online gathering space to draw attention to scheduled events and important information about your school. Unfortunately, a few disgruntled parents can also post unfavorable information about your school on Facebook and create significant harm to the reputation of your school. We must make every effort to use social media to showcase learning in action, dynamic teaching, happy students, and family engagement.

In addition, set expectations for responsible use of social media regarding anyone in the school community. Agreements about handling conflicts face-to-face enables staff to engage in conversations that focus on solutions, rather than in one-sided online monologues or tirades. Schools should make every effort to protect students *and adults* from online harm and cyberbullying.

## Parents and Pastors

### Measuring Climate Beyond School

Using the measures of Institutional Environment and Social Media at school, can we apply these dimensions in our churches and homes?

#### *Environment*

How welcoming is your home environment? When you walk in, what do you experience? Looking at the arrangement of furniture, cleanliness and order, and even what hangs on the walls can send a message to your family and your visitors. Simple throw pillows on a couch can add color and comfort while a few inviting toys make your home seem child-friendly.

The most important part of your home environment is the quality of the relationships. Is your home friendly? Do family and visitors feel welcomed when they arrive? Acknowledging one another and exchanging kind remarks can be a true comfort at the end of a long day. Be sure to encourage your family to show affection for one another.

Making time to organize chores so everyone shares the responsibility of cleaning and keeping order also brings a sense of shared pride. If children can help to prepare for dinner and finish schoolwork before busy parents arrive home from work, everyone can contribute to a pleasant environment. Family meetings to plan ahead and prepare for upcoming events will add to a sense of order. Children who share in household decisions will take more responsibility with a cooperative spirit.

#### *Social Media*

Careful monitoring and shared agreements between parents and children are essential. What time will all cell phones be stored for the night? What are the online expectations, and what happens when they are not met? Look for good resources, and use real stories to discuss what is and is not appropriate. Two website resources for parents: *Netsmartz* and *Common Sense Media*.

Be sure to discuss concerns about after-school social media use. Research shows that the most problematic time of the day for inappropriate behaviors is between 3:00 and 6:00 p.m. When children are home alone after a stressful day at school and parents are still at work, unsupervised time can be troublesome. Know where your children are, and who is in your home at all times when you are not there. This communicates that you care about your child and his/her companions.

## MT-170 Paul VI Course



Begins Monday, February 12, 2018

St. Patrick School – Wentzville

701 Church Street

3:30-6:00 p.m.

**This is a lab class that will not meet weekly, but will have weekly assignments**

Phone (636) 332-9913

Contact Mary Beier, [mbeier@archstl.org](mailto:mbeier@archstl.org)

For questions about the schedule, contact Lynne [lynnelang@archstl.org](mailto:lynnelang@archstl.org)

### *Mark Your Calendars*

## ***Restoration Matters***

6<sup>th</sup> Annual

Restorative Discipline

Summer Institute

*June 12-14, 2018*

*Cardinal Rigali Center*

Registration opens

January 8

*Early registration pricing option*