



# Cultivating a Positive School Climate

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## Fifth in a Series

### 12 Dimensions of School Climate

Last month this newsletter noted the dimension of Institutional Environment and Social Media as a measure of school climate. Attentiveness to the perceptions of your school within the greater community can be as important as what is on your walls, and how these perceptions are influenced by social media is worthy of conversation. Media literacy can be helpful for all adults and students.

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.

#### Processes of School Improvement

We might all agree that planning for any good outcome must begin with the end in mind. So if we are to look at school improvement, begin with a vision of what your school can become. This is a dynamic process, because people move in and out of positions within schools and parishes. Many times the leadership changes, and the vision may change as well. Make your vision one that can withstand these types of changes by having a team approach that allows for cross-training of skills and competencies.

Trends in education change, too. Technology has created a faster pace due to rapid advancements in products and their capabilities. Our 21<sup>st</sup> century schools must look, feel, and perform differently than they have in the past. The future of Catholic education depends on advanced thinking and performance.

We need a vision, an assessment of what is in place, then a set of goals and objectives that will get your school moving in the direction of that vision. Experts from outside your school will be invaluable resources in helping to identify the specific action steps because they can provide a broader perspective and knowledge beyond the local community. For this reason, stakeholders are essential. These will be people who value your school and have varied roles

in the greater community. Reviewing, evaluating, and setting annual smaller goals along the road to the vision require fair and honest soul-searching and reflection that can produce the desired outcomes.

While you might have the best, most highly rated school, at the end of the day, learning is truly about relationships. This is the greatest asset in any school. The winning combination is a child ready and eager to learn, sitting with a ready and eager educator. They can change the world.

The relationship between school climate and school improvement is inextricably linked. A multi-year study in Chicago schools found that schools with high levels of relational trust are more likely to make changes in student achievement (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). The study cites, in particular, overall social relationships among all members of the school community. When everyone is invested in this goal, everyone wins.

A 2010 analysis of Chicago public schools by Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, detailed common factors leading to substantial improvement in reading and math over a seven year period in 100 schools when compared to 100 other schools that did not improve. A comprehensive set of practices and a set of school-community conditions were responsible for promoting such improvement. They discovered that four systems interact in ways that support or undermine school improvement efforts:

1. Professional capacity: Teacher's knowledge and skills, support for teacher learning and school-based learning communities
2. Order, safety and norms: In the study, these are labeled as the "school learning climate"
3. Parent-school-community ties: Families got involved
4. Instructional guidance: Curriculum alignment and the nature of academic demands

Most importantly, these authors emphasize that relational trust is the "glue" or the essential element that coordinates and supports these four processes, which are essential to effective school climate improvement. Even in the poorest areas, the extra attention to these four systems yielded dramatic improvement (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010).

## Parents and Pastors

### Measuring Climate Beyond School

Processes of School Improvement can be a dimension of school climate that has meaning for our churches and homes. Lessons learned from school can be transferred to home and community life.

#### *Improvement*

If you were to create a vision for your family, begin with what is in place and invite all members of the family to participate (taking age into consideration, of course). What criteria will you use in creating the vision? Consider what your outcomes will be, based on how you think your family can reflect overall well-being socially, emotionally, spiritually, and physically.

Search Institute ([www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org)) is a great resource for parents and communities to find information on health and well-being for families. Their recommended resource with practical advice is [parentfurthur.com](http://parentfurthur.com). This is a research-based approach that offers solid information about areas in which families can create and maintain a vision for healthy relationships at home.

There is nothing more important within family life than the quality of relationships. Nurturing relationships with God and with one another models what the Holy Family represents. This is no easy task in today's society! Here are five areas families can work on to strengthen relationships:

1. *Express Care*: Cooperation with chores and expressions of kindness are important. Show affection for one another, and practice good manners, beginning with "please," "thank you," "I'm sorry," and "I forgive you" (advice from Pope Francis).
2. *Challenge Growth*: Encourage reading time at home, and use time together to deepen knowledge of what children are learning at school. Teaching skills for independent living fosters maturity in every way.
3. *Provide Support*: Balance support with responsibility so that failure is also acceptable. Helping children learn resiliency from failure and mistakes is the best support a parent can give. Help your children navigate the ups and downs of life while helping them develop a moral compass and a foundation of faith.
4. *Share Power*: Whenever possible, give children a voice in decisions that directly affect them, but they should never doubt that you are the parent, and your word is final when it comes to important decisions.
5. *Expand Possibilities*: Helping children see themselves in their futures happens as families share hobbies, play games together, and engage in meaningful conversations and service activities that promote Catholic Social Teaching.

## MT-170 Paul VI Course

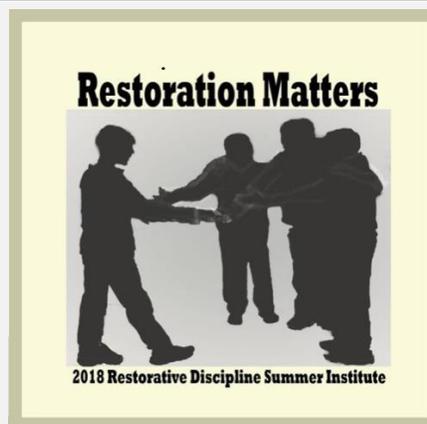


Begins Monday, February 12, 2018  
St. Patrick School – Wentzville  
701 Church Street  
3:30-6:00 p.m.

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

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

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



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