Indicator Explanation

DOMAIN	EFFECTIVE PRACTICE	INDICATOR
Leadership	Prioritize improvement and communicate its urgency	1A.2 School leaders provide clear communication of schoolwide expectations regarding academics, behavior, social and emotional, and physical health of students.

Successfully improving a school requires members of the school community to be intensely focused on student learning, work together to shift the school's culture to incorporate higher academic expectations for all students, and make significant and concerted efforts to fulfill these expectations (Center on School Turnaround, 2017, 2018; Herman et al., 2008; Louis et al., 2010). The entire school must embrace these high expectations, which in turn contribute to creating a positive school climate that embraces improvement and academic success (Center on School Turnaround 2017, 2018). School climate reform is increasingly being viewed as a worthwhile and valuable data-driven school improvement strategy that promotes safer and more supportive schools (Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013). The school community must implement research-based strategies and practices to improve the school's culture and climate so that children develop and learn in a positive, culturally relevant, and safe learning-focused environment that helps them identify and pursue their educational goals.

Thapa et al. (2013) cite the National School Climate Council's description of positive school climate:

A sustainable, positive school climate fosters youth development and learning necessary for a productive, contributive, and satisfying life in a democratic society. This climate includes norms, values, and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally, and physically safe. People are engaged and respected. Students, families and educators work together to develop, live, and contribute to a shared school vision. Educators model and nurture an attitude that emphasizes the benefits of, and satisfaction from, learning. Each person contributes to the operations of the school as well as the care of the physical environment. (p. 358)

Research shows that school climate is important to address within school improvement (Marzano, 2003; Tschannen-Moran, Parish, & Dipaola, 2006), and "positive school and classroom climates mitigate the negative effect of poor SES background on academic achievement" (Berkowitz, Moore, Astor, & Benbenishty, 2016, p. 453). Sustained positive climate is associated with effective youth risk prevention and health promotion efforts, youth development and social and emotional learning (Devaney & Berg, 2016), positive academic achievement (Tschannen-Moran et al., 2006) student behavior (Espelage, Polanin, & Low, 2014), increased graduation rates, and better rates of teacher retention (Thapa et al., 2013).

Leadership within the school community is paramount for creating a positive school climate that can enhance the likelihood of substantial school improvement (Bryk, 2010), and assessing school climate regularly is a key task for leadership teams (Redding et al., 2011; Wang & Degol, 2015).

The Center on School Turnaround suggests three key practices to shift a school's culture and climate:

1. Build a strong community focused intensely on student learning: School leaders must "embody, model, and overtly talk about the values driving the enterprise...and keep everyone focused on the pivotal urgency of improving student learning" (p.3). Each person with the school community

(including parents and students) must come together to discuss and reflect on how they can, whatever their role, contribute to a school culture where students are empowered to focus on their learning.

2. Solicit and act upon stakeholder input: School teams will want to assess school climate to gain understanding of strengths and challenges that will guide improvement efforts. School leadership teams will want to look for climate surveys that have been proven to reliably and validly measure school climate from the perspectives of all stakeholders. Climate surveys should be used in conjunction with other indicators such as discipline incidence reports to get a comprehensive picture of the school's climate and determine appropriate interventions, as well as focus groups or interviews to follow up on areas on concern identified by the survey (e.g., bully, discipline data, etc.; NCSSLE, 2016).

3. Engage students and families in pursuing education goals: Schools must promote an atmosphere of hope and high expectations that encourages all stakeholders. Aspirational school cultures give students "opportunities to set goals, apply learning strategies, and track their own progress towards mastery [to] become confident, independent learners" (p. 5). Teachers create trusting and respectful relationships with their students and their families and connect students' goals to what they are learning.

Resources

Berkowitz, R., Moore, H., Astor, R. A., & Benbenishty, R. (2016). Research synthesis of the links between socioeconomic background, inequality, school climate, and academic achievement. *Review of Educational Research, 87*(2), 425–469.

Bryk, A. S. (2010). Organizing schools for improvement. *Phi Delta Kappan, 91*(7), 23–30.

Center on School Turnaround. (2017). Four domains for rapid school improvement: A systems framework. WestEd.

The Center on School Turnaround (2018). *Shifting school culture to spark rapid improvement: A quick start guide for principals and their teams*. WestEd.

Devaney, E., & Berg, J. (2016, October). *Creating healthy schools: Ten key ideas for the social and emotional learning and school climate community*. http://www.air.org/sites/default/files/downloads/report/Ten-Key-Ideas-for-Social-Emotional-Learning-School-Climate-October-2016.pdf

Espelage, D. L., Polanin, J. R., & Low, S. K. (2014). Teachers and staff perceptions of school environment as predictors of student aggression, victimization, and willingness to intervene in bullying situations. *Sch. Psychol. Q. 29*, 287.

Herman, R., Dawson, P., Dee, T., Green, J., Maynard, R., Redding, S., & Darwin, M. (2008). *Turning around chronically low-performing schools* [IES Practice Guide] (NCEE 2008-4020). National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/PracticeGuide/Turnaround_pg_04181.pdf

Louis, K. S., Leithwood, K., Wahlstrom, K. L., Anderson, S. E., Michlin, M., & Mascall, B. (2010). *Learning from leadership: Investigating the links to improved student learning*. Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement/University of Minnesota.

Marzano, R. J. (2003). *What works in schools: Translating research into action*. Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development.

National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments. (2016, March). *Quick guide on making school climate improvements*. U.S. Department of Education. https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/sites/default/files/NCSSLE_SCIRP_Quick-Guides508gdc.pdf

Redding, S., Murphy, M., & Sheley, P. (2011). *Handbook on family and community engagement*. Information Age. http://www.schoolcommunitynetowrk.org/downloads/FACEHandbook.pdf

Thapa, A., Cohen, J., Guffy, S., & Higgens-D'Alessandro, A. (2013). A review of school climate research. *Review of Educational Research, 83*(3), 357–385.

Tschannen-Moran, M., Parish, J., & Dipaola, M. (2006). School climate: The interplay between interpersonal relationships and student achievement. *Journal of School Leadership, 16*, 386–415.

Wang, M.-T., & Degol, J. L. (2015). School climate: A review of the construct, measurement, and impact on student outcomes. *Educational Psychology Review, 28*, 315–352.