

Transforming **SCHOOL CLIMATE** and **LEARNING**

BEYOND BULLYING AND COMPLIANCE

BILL PREBLE RICK GORDON

Foreword by Raymond J. McNulty



Contents

Foreword	vii
<i>Raymond J. McNulty</i>	
Acknowledgments	ix
About the Authors	xi
Introduction: Bringing Our Schools Into Balance	1
Beyond Bullying, Beyond Compliance	2
Getting Beyond Piecemeal Problem Solving	3
The Rationale for This Book: School Climate as a Key to School Safety, Student Motivation, and Academic Achievement	5
Guideposts for School Leaders: Administrators, Teachers, <i>and</i> Students	7
Balancing Leadership Roles and Voices	7
Organization of the Book	8
Why Read This Book?	9
Students and Teachers as Partners in Transforming School Climate	10
1. School Climate: The Heart and Soul of a School	11
Making Meaningful Improvement in Schools	11
Why Is School Climate Important?	12
School Climate and Effective Schools	14
Essential School Climate Factors	15
We All Want Respectful Schools	16
What Teachers and Students Mean by Respect	18
Beeper Studies: Our Original Research on Respectful Schools	18
The Respect Continuum: A Practical Theory of Respect	21
The Disrespect Side of the Continuum	21
The Respect Side of the Continuum	22
How Schools Use the Respect Continuum	24

Initial Success in One District	24
Looking Beyond Stopping Misbehavior	25
Conclusion	29
Book Study Questions	30
2. The SafeMeasures Process: A Student-Led, Collaborative Action Research Process	31
Sarason’s Research on School Change	32
Balancing Adult and Student Leadership	32
The SafeMeasures Process: An Overview	34
Bandura’s Research on Self-Efficacy	35
Looking Deeply at Collaborative Action Research	37
Emancipatory Research	38
Conclusion	41
Book Study Questions	41
3. Stage One: Everyone Is a Leader: Empowering Students and Teachers	43
The Dignity of Expertise	44
Getting Started	44
Administrative Support Is Essential	47
The Adult Design Team: Membership and Roles	48
National School Climate Standards as a Guide to Action	50
Selecting a Diverse Team of Student Leaders	52
Challenges to Choosing a Diverse Team of Student Leaders	55
Conclusion	57
Simple Summary: Stage One	58
Book Study Questions	58
4. Stage Two: Including All Voices: School Climate Data Collection	59
The Importance of Data	59
What Gets Measured Is What Gets Done	60
Some Potential Problems With School Data Collection	61
What and How to Measure	62
What to Do With Data	63
When Students Become School Climate Researchers	64
The Power of Qualitative Data	65
The Value of Quantitative Data	67
Conclusion	71
Simple Summary: Stage Two	71
Book Study Questions	71
5. Stage Three: Thinking Together: Data Analysis and Goal Setting	73
Internal or External Locus of Control: Whose Responsibility?	75

Cognitive Dissonance: Wrestling With Data to Construct Meaning	76
No Fault, No Blame	77
Words or Numbers? Analyzing Data With Students	78
Using Quantitative Data Effectively	80
Goal Setting With Student Leaders	82
Why Students Lead the Way: Student and Teacher	
Data Analysis and Goal Setting	84
Faculty Data Analysis and Goal Setting	86
The Work of Goal-Based Action Teams	87
Conclusion	90
Simple Summary: Stage Three	90
Book Study Questions	91
6. Stage Four: Making Change Happen: Action Planning and Project Development	93
Action Planning: Where Change Begins	94
No One Best System	95
School Climate Action Teams: Working Effectively	
With Colleagues	96
Action Planning Steps	97
Using the Respect Continuum as a Guide to Action	101
Moving Toward the Positive	102
Respectful Teaching	102
Balanced Leadership: Adults and Students	
Joining Forces for Change	104
Conclusion	106
Simple Summary: Stage Four	107
Book Study Questions	108
7. Stage Four Specifics: Action Projects to Promote Respectful Teaching and Learning	109
Changing School Climate Through Respectful Teaching	110
Engagement Strategies That Work	111
Providing Students With Choices	113
Authentic, Applied, Real-World Learning	114
Altering the Schedule to Provide	
Learning Opportunities	119
Conclusion	124
Simple Summary: Stage Four Specifics	124
Book Study Questions	125
8. Stage Five: Moving Forward Together: Sustainability and Continuous Improvement	127
Change Is a Process, Not an Event	128
Key Elements of Sustainable Change	129
Closing the Gaps	130

Dignity and Respect	131
The Best People Working on the Problem	131
Socially Based and Action-Oriented Change	131
Enhance, Extend, and Empower	132
Make a Multiyear Commitment	134
Formative Assessment: A Critical Part of the Process	135
Aligning School Climate and Learning:	
Demonstrate a Balanced Approach	136
Guideposts for Sustainability	138
Conclusion	142
Simple Summary: Stage Five	143
Book Study Questions	143
9. The Road Ahead: Transforming School Climate and Learning	145
When Will the Time Be Right?	145
Continued Resistance, Growing Hope	146
School Climate As a Coherent Framework	
for Understanding Schools	147
Implications for School Leaders, Teachers, and Students	148
Conclusion	149
Book Study Questions	150
List of Appendices	
Appendix A: From Violence to Empowerment:	
A Respect Continuum	151
Appendix B: Sample School Climate Data Summary	153
Appendix C: Example of Student Goals and Evidence of Need:	
Elementary School Data (Grades 3-6)	157
References	161
Index	165

Introduction

Bringing Our Schools Into Balance

Good teachers understand that when students feel stressed, threatened, angry, or unsafe, they are less likely to learn. Every new teacher learns the importance of meeting basic human needs for safety and belonging (Maslow, 1968). Teachers who are familiar with the latest research on the dynamics of the brain know that clarity of academic thinking can be impeded when we are under emotional stress or duress (Jensen, 2008a).

This book aims to make a research-based case for the importance of school climate, not only to support the social and emotional well-being of students, but because we believe the only way to achieve and sustain strong academic results is through the interaction between positive school climate and learning.

Schools are not always the safest, most respectful places, especially for any child who may appear to be remotely “different.” For many students, school can be a mean, lonely, irrelevant, even dangerous place. As many as 73 percent of all students report being directly or indirectly exposed to bullies in school (Rivers, Poteat, Noret, & Ashurts, 2009). Perhaps this is why the recent attention to the problem of bullying is resonating so widely and powerfully through our culture. Most of us have either experienced it personally or we’ve seen it happening all too frequently to friends or family members.

For the past decade or more, since the school shootings at Columbine, issues of school safety have been front and center in schools and communities across the country. Safety plans, lockdown drills, and evacuation plans have been created and we have seen firsthand how these school safety plans can be effective tools for saving lives. But no school safety plan alone will ensure that a school is completely physically and emotionally safe. A school without guns is a fine goal, but it is not necessarily a safe school nor a learning school.

BEYOND BULLYING, BEYOND COMPLIANCE

The tragedy and injustice of bullying is finally becoming clear to educators, parents, school officials, and state leaders. While new anti-bullying laws, better school policies, and zero-tolerance disciplinary models may be a welcome attempt to ensure that adults begin to more fully address the suffering, humiliation, and social isolation imposed by bullies, in our view, they will not solve these complex problems. We know that all too often such new initiatives in our schools amount to little more than window dressing that fails to address deeper, more systemic problems. Despite all the media attention being paid to bullying, the problem facing schools today is not simply a problem of bad kids (e.g., bullies). Rather, the fundamental issue in schools relates to the overall school climate that encompasses not just bullying and student discipline but the whole relationship of students and adults to school and learning.

The issue of bullying is a symptom of larger social, emotional, and systemic educational problems. When educators aim to make their schools safer, more respectful places, it often follows a focus on achieving higher levels of “student compliance.” The underlying belief seems to be, “If those darned kids just did what they were told [by adults] then everything would be okay!”

In the chapters that follow, we will challenge this assumption that safer, more respectful schools are simply places with more rules, harsher penalties for violators, fewer behavior problems, and where kids do just as they are told. Of course, rules are important. But we will show how schools that empower students and partner with them to define, assess, and implement what we refer to as *respectful teaching and school practices* are those that achieve real results for school climate and learning.

School climate is the combined result of the

- Quality of the relationships (both adult and student) within a school
- School's overarching vision, goals, and mission
- Systems of support for students, teachers, and parents that enable the school to achieve its mission
- Roles available to and played by students, teachers, and school leaders
- Opportunities for active, meaningful engagement as learners, leaders, and citizens within the school and community
- Extent to which there is respect, tolerance, fairness, equity, and social justice at every level of the school's culture

The quality of a school's climate goes far beyond "getting the kids to behave" and "comply" with adult demands. In schools that have a positive climate, there is a purposeful vision and systemic mission to link positive school climate and learning. Teachers and students are partners in creating a school culture that values each individual, engages all in learning, and actively supports the success of every member of the community. The school values and promotes civic engagement and service to the larger community. Everyone—adults and students—is an active agent of fairness, social justice, and change. Schools that recognize the limits of compliance and include their students in the process of school improvement are a special brand of schools.

GETTING BEYOND PIECEMEAL PROBLEM SOLVING

There is no doubting the good intentions to improve schools—bullying and harassment prevention programs, school security officers, video cameras in school buses, test preparation programs, diversity training, dropout prevention, lunchroom monitors, curriculum mapping, reading specialists, curriculum consultants . . . There is no shortage of problems in schools (or any place where hundreds or thousands of people are put together day after day, year after year). And for every problem, schools offer a well-intended solution usually involving some new program, policy, or staff position. But like the carnival game of Whac-A-Mole, when a problem is pushed down in one place, a new problem seems to jump up somewhere else.

This common and never-ending strategy of identifying individual problems to solve one at a time, exerting our best efforts as wise and experienced adults, hasn't, as yet, eradicated problems in schools. In fact, our concerted efforts to raise test scores may be exacerbating other problems—narrowing the curriculum, sapping the joy of learning, ignoring developmental needs, lessening time for physical activity, pushing out struggling students, raising stress levels for teachers and students, and instead of valuing the whole child, students can be reduced to mere test results as part of subgroups on the big NCLB scorecard.

This approach to using "expert" (read adult) knowledge to try to solve school problems ignores the basics of what we know about human nature and the change process. Endless experience supports the age-old wisdom, you can lead a horse to water but you can't make it drink—reform imposed from above rarely sticks. Our deepest educational thinkers—such as Michael Fullan, Seymour Sarason, and John Goodlad—marshal a lifetime of research showing the futility of top-down reform. Change does not happen from the outside; change is not something that can be imposed on people. In human institutions such as schools, lasting and meaningful

change must come from within the school, employing the primary resource schools have—the energy, ideas, expertise, and goodwill of every individual in the school community.

Our experience as educators and our research with schools has demonstrated the power of positive school climate to simultaneously improve school safety and academic achievement. In fact, the case we wish to make is that the only way to sustain improvement in academic achievement is to improve school climate and culture for faculty and students in the school. Unless students feel safe at school, feel a sense of belonging, and feel valued in the learning process, it is unlikely we will see students perform anywhere close to their potential. For too long, schools have separated issues related to academic results from those tied to school violence, student relations, and respect. We have found, in our work with schools throughout the nation, that these issues are inextricably linked—improve respect in schools and learning improves. Without respectful and safe schools, the learning environment is compromised.

As schools wrestle with pressing issues of improving academic performance while also trying to stop bullying and other ways students mistreat each other, why does anyone need a book on school climate? Certainly there is an urgent need to respond to egregious and dangerous student behavior to assure every child is physically safe. But if all we do about bullying is develop more stringent policies, exert more adult authority, and increase consequences for misbehavior, it is not only unlikely there will be a substantive decrease in school violence, but we may worsen other problems. By framing problem solving under the unifying umbrella of school climate, schools can address immediate problems while elevating the overall health of the school and developing organizational capacity to continue the ongoing work of school improvement.

Our studies show that adults and students often share similar desires for their school. They can clearly understand the things that are working well and the things that aren't. The way we see it, in many cases, teachers and students are the real experts on the school experience—they know all too well what does and doesn't work in their schools. They have dreams (and all too fleeting moments of experience) of what really does work to promote learning for every child. While understanding research and “best practices” can help, what matters is the ability of local teachers, leaders, parents, community members, and students to articulate and name their problems and the solutions that they then embrace.

This book aims to make a research-based case for the importance of school climate, not only to support the social and emotional well-being of students but—and this is the most essential argument of the book—also because we believe the only way to achieve and sustain strong academic results is through the interaction between positive school climate, student

engagement, respectful caring relationships, empowerment, and learning. We believe that this book will help school leaders make the powerful and important connection between improving school climate and improving the quality of teaching and learning in a school.

THE RATIONALE FOR THIS BOOK: SCHOOL CLIMATE AS A KEY TO SCHOOL SAFETY, STUDENT MOTIVATION, AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

The idea that we can somehow ignore the social and emotional aspects of schooling is just plain silly. Yet, this is precisely what many schools have done for nearly a decade under No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and during similar periods of our history in public education. We are convinced that the time is now ripe for refocusing our attention on school climate, safety, and respect and the important effects that these have on students' personal, intellectual, social, and civic development.

We welcome the fact that educational leaders and teachers are beginning to adopt a more balanced perspective about the things that truly matter in education. There is increasing interest in unifying what we know about human dignity, freedom, happiness, and leadership in complex systems like schools with what we know about the conditions in which human beings thrive and grow.

This is not some recycled "touchy-feely" school reform agenda. Its roots can be found deep within the humanistic traditions of our culture and are tied directly to the compelling new research on human development, the brain, and what we now understand about how people learn.

We think school climate is like the air we breathe or the soil in which we plant a seed to grow. Both the air and the soil provide something that is essential to growth and to life. Learning cannot be achieved in the midst of a hostile, threatening environment. As Jerome Freiberg (1999), an eminent researcher in the field of school climate research, says, "Much like the air we breathe, school climate is ignored until it becomes foul" (p. 1). We are all too familiar with the results of toxic school environments. School shootings such as Columbine (U.S. Secret Service, 2002) and the more recent tragedies at South Hadley and Virginia Tech can all be linked to the impact of bullying and an alienating school environment.

In recent years, forty-four states have adopted tough new anti-bullying laws in response to the increased recognition of this problem in schools. We know from conversations with Kevin Jennings, assistant deputy secretary for Safe and Drug-Free Schools for the U.S. Department of Education, that the Title IV program formerly dedicated to "safe and drug-free schools" has been reframed to focus on evaluating and improving school climate. Under the new safe schools model, all schools will soon be asked