



# The Importance of a Safe and Supportive School Climate

## Improving Schools and Academic Achievement



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# The Challenge

- How do we ensure that all students are motivated, ready, and able to learn?
- What works to turn around low-performing schools?
- What works to keep students in school?

***A Safe and Supportive School  
Climate Makes A Difference***



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# The Problem

- Most school reform focuses on curriculum, instruction, and governance. However necessary, this is often not **sufficient**.
- Too often, there is an absence of a systematic focus on climate and the context in which learning occurs.
  - How and why youth learn
  - The health and psychosocial barriers to learning that students face
- Without a positive school climate, students will not benefit from improvements in curriculum and instruction, and reform efforts will fall short. In addition, they'll often elect to avoid school.



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# What is a Positive School Climate?

- Engages students in learning, staff in teaching, and parents in their children's education.
- Provides a sense of school connectedness and shared values.
- Strives to address all learning barriers: focused on well-being and the whole child.
- Encourages students, staff, and parents to work together and support one another in implementing a shared vision:
  - Between staff and students.
  - Among staff and students.
  - Between school and parents.



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# How Does it Affect Achievement?

- “... all research...finds a positive correlation between better school climate and increased student learning and achievement” (Jones et al. 2008).
- School climate directly influences the cognitive as well as psychosocial development of students, promoting greater school connectedness, and engagement.
- School climate indirectly influences achievement through its effect on teacher performance and retention, and by improving parent involvement.



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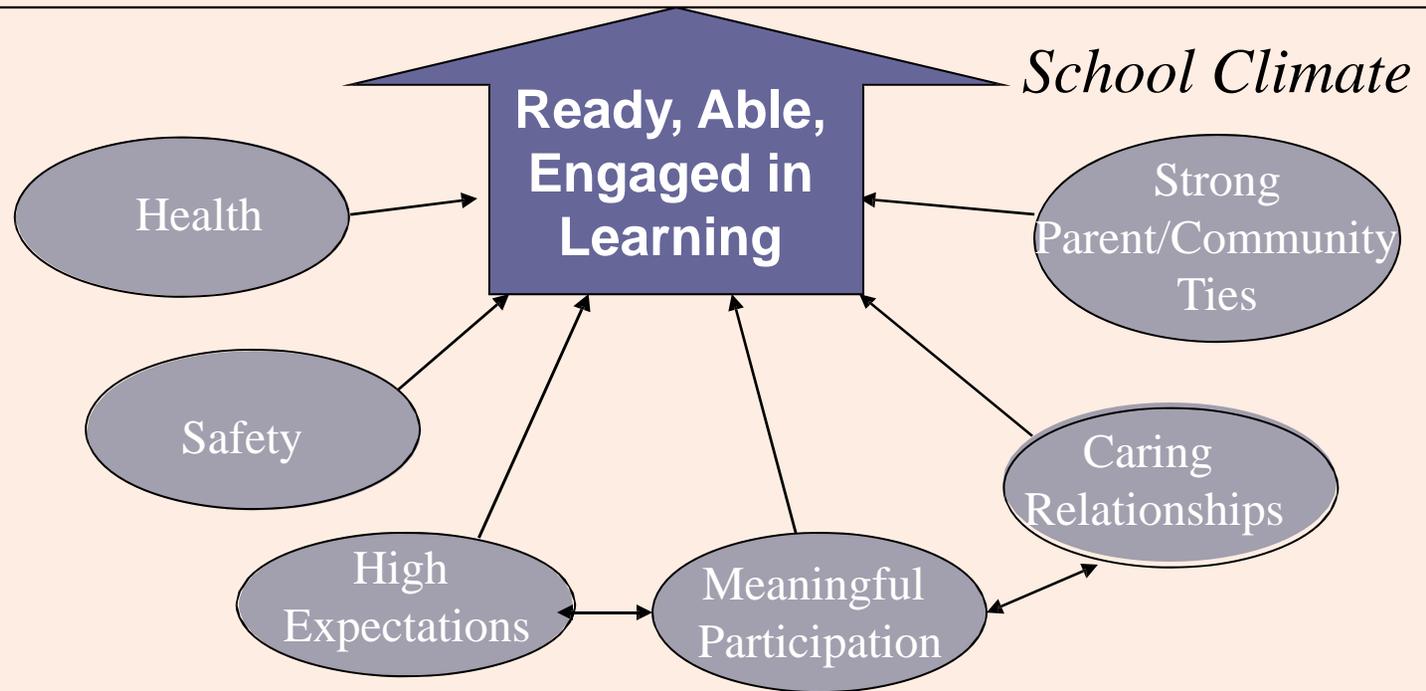
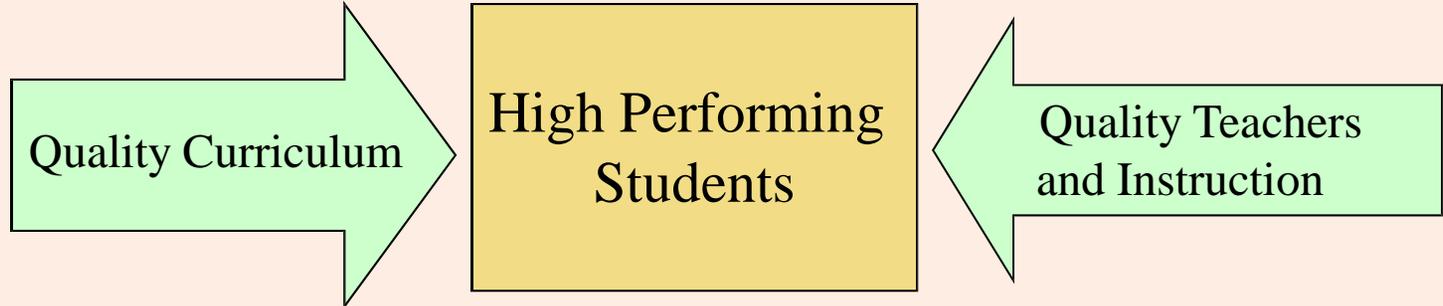
# What is School Climate?

- School climate refers to the learning conditions and quality of the school environment as it relates to:
  - Norms, goals, and values
  - Attitudes and behaviors
  - Interpersonal relationships
  - Social interactions
  - Instructional practices
  - Leadership and supports
  - Physical setting, organizational practices, and structures
  - School climate sets the tone for all learning and teaching in the school environment.



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**A School Climate Model for School Success**



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# The Safety/Bullying Challenge

- Both physical and **psychological** (social-emotional) safety are basic conditions for learning.
- Concerns over safety and harassment adversely affect school attendance, ability to concentrate on learning, and performance:
  - Causes emotional (anxiety, stress) and physical distress.
- Thirty-seven percent of California secondary students report some harassment in the past year.
  - About half, more than once
  - Affects witnesses as well as victims.



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# The Teacher Challenge

- Twenty-two percent of new teachers in California quit within four years.
- School climate is one of the most important factors in determining whether teachers stay or leave.
- Workplace conditions and supports: relationships/collegiality, expectations, participation, and decision-making
- A positive climate for students enables teachers to focus on teaching and be more effective.
- If teachers don't feel positive toward school, students won't.

See K. Futernick (2007). *A possible dream : Retaining California teachers so all students learn.*



# A Positive School Climate Matters... A Lot.

School climate may indeed be the too-often-overlooked critical component that impacts all school reform and efforts to close the achievement and opportunity gaps in schools.

Studies have clearly shown that schools with a positive school climate have higher academic achievement (Cohen, 2009; Schindler 2010; NSCC 2012).

A positive school climate makes the difference in so many ways!