SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL CLIMATE

DESTINATION
HEALTHY SCHOOLS
SUCCESSFUL STUDENTS

Social and Emotional Climate is one of the ten components represented in the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child model. The social and emotional climate in schools should be comfortable, safe, and nurturing. It is essential for students' academic achievement and for employees' health and well-being. Research overwhelmingly shows that a positive social and emotional climate 1) contributes to a higher level of school connectedness (feeling of belonging and being cared for at school), 2) positively impacts academic achievement (improved attendance, fewer suspensions/expulsions, and increased graduation rates), 3) influences social and emotional development (increased pro-social behavior), 4) affects student engagement in school activities and relationships with other students, staff, family, and community (better attitude towards school), 5) promotes growth and development (improved prospects for employment), and 6) deters students from engaging in risky behaviors (reduced substance abuse).

Social and Emotional School Climate refers to the psychosocial aspects of students' educational experience that influence their social and emotional development. The social and emotional climate of a school can impact student engagement in school activities; relationships with other students, staff, family, and community; and academic performance. A positive social and emotional school climate is conducive to effective teaching and learning. Such climates promote health, growth, and development by providing a safe and supportive learning environment.

~ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Research shows that Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) programming that supports implementation of the Emotional and Social Wellness standards within the Colorado Comprehensive Health and Physical Education Standards consists of skills that can be learned. Significant positive gains in a school's social and emotional climate are made when classroom teachers trained in SEL are the primary implementers and the programs meet S.A.F.E. criteria.

- **S**equenced set of activities is used to develop SEL skills.
- **A**ctive forms of learning are used such as role-plays and behavioral rehearsal that provide students with opportunities to practice SEL skills.
- **F**ocus attention on SEL, with at least eight sessions devoted to SEL skill development.
- **E**xplicitly target particular SEL skills for development with skills identified in learning objectives.

A whole child approach, which ensures each student is healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged, sets the standard for comprehensive, sustainable school improvement and provides for long-term student success.

SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL CLIMATE

Ways the **WHOLE SCHOOL, WHOLE COMMUNITY, WHOLE CHILD** components can support social & emotional climate in your school

1 HEALTH EDUCATION

- Implement Colorado's Comprehensive Health and Physical Education Standards, which include Emotional and Social Wellness, and Prevention and Risk Management standards
- Provide social and emotional competency instruction (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness relationship skills, and responsible decision-making).
- Communicate expectations for learning and behavior to students

2 PHYSICAL EDUCATION & PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

- Use instructional strategies that support the needs of a diverse student population
- Implement lessons with non-elimination games
- Supervise students at all times (e.g., before and after school activities and during recess) to ensure physical and psychological safety

3 NUTRITION ENVIRONMENT & SERVICES

- Create a pleasant, friendly, and supportive cafeteria environment
- Enforce rules for safe behavior in the cafeteria (e.g., no throwing food or utensils)
- Prohibit giving students food as a reward and withholding food as punishment

4 HEALTH SERVICES

- Partner with counseling staff to organize a Mental Health First Aid training for staff
- Establish a confidential reporting system with counseling staff, that allows students to report victimization and records details of bullying incidents
- Recognize signs and symptoms of students who are in danger of hurting themselves or others, and know when to seek help for suicidal thoughts

5 COUNSELING, PSYCHOLOGICAL & SOCIAL SERVICES

- Implement a referral system for students in need with emotional issues
- Generate awareness about the positive effects of school behavioral health services
- Provide leadership for creating positive psychosocial environments
- Partner to implement a mental health awareness campaign with health services to decrease the negative stigma surrounding mental health

6 SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL CLIMATE

- Coordinate appropriate staff members (health teacher, school nurse, counselor, etc.) to implement Social Emotional Learning (SEL) programming that meet S.A.F.E. criteria
- Create safe, caring, well-managed, and participatory learning environments that are respectful of diversity and cultural differences
- Establish a climate that prevents harassment, bullying, and violence

7 PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- Ensure all areas of the school have sufficient lighting
- Seal off secluded areas so that students, staff, and visitors feel more secure on school grounds
- Implement appropriate practices to prevent excessive noise levels

8 EMPLOYEE WELLNESS

- Model healthy social and emotional behaviors for students
- Plan well-being activities to improve employee morale and enthusiasm
- Provide stress-management programs and counseling for emotional disorders such as anxiety and depression

9 FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

- Communicate clear expectations for learning and behavior to students, and share those expectations with families and encourage family members to reinforce them at home
- Ask family members for their perception of the school climate (e.g., via a survey)
- Volunteer to design and decorate areas of the school to make them welcoming to students, staff, and visitors

10 COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

- Build trust and collaboration with community mental health providers
- Use referral mechanisms that effectively link students to treatment and intervention services in the community
- Seek out community service projects to engage students in service learning

SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL CLIMATE

Maintaining Administrator Support for Social & Emotional Climate in the School

Use the Colorado Framework for School Behavioral Health Services to focus on prevention, early intervention, and intervention for students' social, emotional, and behavioral health needs. (This framework uses a Multi-Tiered System of Supports, which combines Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports with Response to Intervention so all students receive a layered continuum of supports.)

Provide school climate and culture professional development opportunities to staff that support a positive social and emotional climate

Encourage staff to praise positive student behavior to students and their parents, and to take timely action to solve problems reported by students and their parents

Ways to Engage Students

- Foster pro-social behavior by engaging students in activities such as peer tutoring, classroom chores, service learning, and teacher assistance

- Establish a student-led club that aims to create a safe and welcoming school environment for all youth, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity (e.g., gay/straight alliances)

- Hold school-wide activities that give students opportunities to learn about diverse cultures and experiences
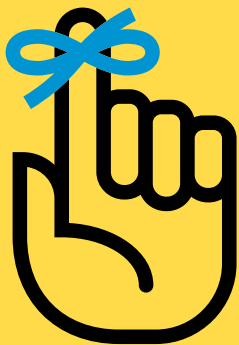
✔ Don't try to take on everything at once!

✔ The focus of the School Health Improvement Plan should be on the health needs/highest priorities identified through the assessment (School Health Index, Smart Source, or a School Climate Survey).

✔ Get input from other individuals in your school on how to best address your school's social and emotional climate needs.

✔ Meet regularly with your school health team and monitor School Health Improvement Plan implementation progress.

✔ A final consideration: If you shared the School Health Improvement Plan with someone unfamiliar with it, would they understand the purpose, SMART objective, and action steps necessary to achieve the objective? Would they understand what the school health team is trying to accomplish? If not, add more details!

Writing a SMART School Health Improvement Plan (SHIP)

Sample SMART Objective

By May 15, 20XX, Green Elementary will identify and implement a social and emotional learning program for grades K-5 as recommended by The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) Guide.

By May 15, 20XX, Orange High School will conduct a six-month pilot referral process for students at risk for social, emotional, and mental health concerns.

SMARTness

To ensure your SHIP is SMART, be sure it includes:

- ❏ A SMART objective based on the priority identified from a school health assessment tool
- ❏ Action steps that are clear, complete, and in chronological order
- ❏ Action steps on data collection, team and grant responsibilities, and sustainability efforts
- ❏ A realistic budget aligned with the SMART objective
- ❏ Shared responsibility among all team members

For more information on School Health Improvement Plans, refer to the Destination http://tinyurl.com/orq4pyu

SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL CLIMATE

Social & Emotional Climate: Implement a social emotional learning program aligned with the Colorado Comprehensive Health and Physical Education Standards

Suggested action steps for your School Health Improvement Plan:

- Engage diverse stakeholders in the program adoption process to identify shared priorities
- Use the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) Guide to identify evidence-based programs based on research and best practice
- Consider local contextual factors (e.g., student characteristics) when gathering information in order to make the most effective decisions about which program to implement
- Review program descriptions of all proposed programs.
- Assess the cultural sensitivity and linguistic responsiveness of the program
- Contact (and visit schools if possible) using the program you are considering
- After program selection, develop strategies to support implementation, such as time and staff to implement program
- Plan for staff to receive professional development on the identified social and emotional learning program
- Align program with the Emotional and Social Wellness standards in the Colorado Comprehensive Health and Physical Education Standards
- Identify at least three kinds of on-site support: observation and feedback to teachers by program staff, meetings where teachers can discuss challenges and successes with colleagues who are more experienced with the program, and peer coaching by experienced teachers
- Implement identified social and emotional learning program and use S.A.F.E. criteria
- Evaluate SEL program implementation after six months, one year, etc.

Social & Emotional Climate: Create a safe, supportive, and welcoming school environment

Suggested action steps for your School Health Improvement Plan:

- Identify a school climate survey to use for students, staff, and parents (there are different surveys for elementary, middle, and high school students, staff, and parents)
- Distribute survey to all students during class time
- Encourage all staff and parents to complete the school climate survey
- Compile and summarize results
- Discuss results at a school health team meeting
- Identify priorities from all surveys that are important and feasible to implement
- As appropriate, solicit feedback from students, staff and parents on proposed priorities and implementation plans
- Based on feedback, announce the identified priorities and implementation plans to all students, staff, and parents
- Implement identified priorities
- Track appropriate data (e.g., # of behavioral referrals and # of parental concerns)
- Get feedback from students, staff, and parents on implementation progress
- Discuss feedback at a School Health Team meeting and identify next steps
- Plan to distribute same climate survey(s) one year after initial data collection
- Share successes, progress, and outcomes of program (e.g., newsletter, success stories, video)

BEST PRACTICES

Resources

- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**
  http://tinyurl.com/z5nxjmm
- **Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)**
  http://www.casel.org
- **Colorado Crisis Services**
  www.coloradocrisisservices.org

- **Colorado Department of Education**
  http://tinyurl.com/zzhjgte
- **Colorado Education Initiative**
  http://tinyurl.com/h66wksm
- **Colorado Framework for School Behavioral Health Services**
  http://tinyurl.com/jymabu6

- **Colorado School Safety Resource Center**
  https://www.colorado.gov/cssrc
- **Youth Mental Health First Aid**
  http://tinyurl.com/3jlgah7