

PROMOTING A POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE: A Resource for Schools

Guidelines for Use

- Think of the following as a menu of options for your school to consider.
- You are encouraged to adapt the activities and practices below to your school environment.
- Take a whole school approach. Emphasize that everyone has a role to play in creating safe, inclusive and accepting schools.

Elements Contributing to a Positive School Climate	School-Level Activities/Practices	Classroom-Level Activities/Practices	Student-Level Activities/Practices
<p>Student Voice</p> <p>Schools give students the opportunity to provide input on matters related to their learning and school environment. They recognize and respond to their diverse student populations. Schools consider whose voices, among the students, are being heard and whose are not being heard. They give students various opportunities to lead and/or contribute to school activities. Schools take diverse student perspectives into account in decision-making processes, and encourage students to be involved at all levels, as part of a whole school approach.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage students to apply for a Ministry of Education “SpeakUp” project grant. Have students create an action team to report to educators on the outcome of their project. (See www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/students/speakup/projects.html.) • Invite former students who were able to overcome past challenges in their lives to share their personal stories at a school assembly. • Engage students as partners in conversations about their own learning and about the school’s learning environment. Ask for their ideas about how best to support their achievement and well-being, to inform school improvement planning. • Showcase students’ unique strengths, talents and interests through student-led assemblies, talent shows or musical events. • Support student councils in conducting surveys of students to find out what issues are important to them. Use strategies developed by students to address the identified issues. • Support diverse student-led clubs and teams, such as intramural sports teams; student theatre, music, and equity groups; and activities that foster healthy relationships by building awareness, understanding and respect among all students. • Establish procedures that enable students to safely report incidents of discrimination, harassment and bullying. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post a list of appropriate volunteer opportunities available in the school, in the community, or internationally. Include opportunities available both during the school year and during school breaks. • Set up peer-mentoring programs, such as “buddy” programs. For example, an older student could provide reading assistance to a younger student; a senior student could help with a Grade 9 student’s transition to secondary school; a current student could help a newcomer become familiar with the school. • Encourage students to participate in creating their own learning environments. For example, engage students as partners in researching current learning theories or educational approaches and have them share their findings with teachers. • Support students’ active engagement in their learning by using relevant, authentic and inclusive classroom materials and curriculum resources that reflect diverse communities and experiences (e.g., Aboriginal experiences, Black history). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide team-building learning opportunities for students interested in supporting their peers either collectively, as a school-wide support group, or individually, as peer helpers or tutors. • Train student leaders to help other students engage in a range of activities (e.g., physical, environmental, social justice) during breaks, both to keep them engaged and to promote positive relationships and team building. • Engage students in activities that support character development and citizenship. • Provide opportunities for all students to develop their leadership potential – for example, by rotating classroom duties or by creating SpeakUp Councils. • Encourage students with a diverse range of perspectives to volunteer to be teacher helpers or to apply to become members of the Minister’s Student Advisory Council (MSAC). (See www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/students/speakup/msac.html.)
<p>Parent Engagement</p> <p>Schools recognize and support parents* as partners in their children’s learning at home and at school.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster and sustain a positive, welcoming school climate in which all parent perspectives are encouraged, valued and heard. • Create a welcoming environment and invite parents to participate in school events, such as sports days, field trips, career days, concerts, celebrations and school assemblies. • Review and expand ongoing communication and outreach strategies to support learning at home and at school. • Work towards including parents from diverse communities on all school committees, including school councils. • Support new students and families as they become part of the school community by providing an orientation package, including information about community resources, in multiple languages. • Provide parents with a choice of ways in which they can participate, from joining the school council or participating in planning parent information evenings to taking part in a parent-in-class day, sharing knowledge of experiences or helping with the production of sets for the school play. • Hold information sessions for parents. Consider venues in the community, such as the public library, a meeting room in an apartment building, the local community centre, a cultural centre, an Aboriginal Friendship Centre, or a Parenting and Family Literacy Centre, to reach as many parents as possible. Consider using translators and approaching leaders from diverse communities to help create and maintain a welcoming, positive and caring school climate. • Encourage the School Council to apply for a Ministry of Education Parents Reaching Out (PRO) grant, which can help parents identify and address barriers to parent engagement at their school. (See http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/faqRegion.html.) • Share information about tools and supports available to support parent engagement at home and at school. • Use results from parent surveys to inform school policy and practices. • Create a parent-information centre or bulletin board in the school, or a school website, that features information in multiple-languages about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – student achievement and well-being; – issues that affect children and youth, such as healthy relationships, mental health and well-being, peer pressure, bullying prevention and healthy eating; and – community resources available to assist students and their families. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate with parents on a regular basis by various means, including phone and email, to keep them informed about their child’s well-being and progress in learning, and any additional support that the child might need. • Provide parents with tip sheets and suggestions on how they can support their child’s learning and well-being. • Invite parents to volunteer in the classroom as reading mentors, math coaches, or storytellers. • Create a “parent-buddy” program to assist parents who are new to the school or to Ontario’s education system. • Find ways to show appreciation of all parents’ efforts to support their children’s learning. • Hold teacher-parent-student discussions to develop shared high expectations and review students’ learning goals and their progress towards achieving the goals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide support for students to talk with their parents about what is happening at school (e.g., activities, programs, what they are learning, their goals). • Foster ongoing student-parent-teacher communication through activities such as student-led conferences.
<p>Community Partnerships</p> <p>Schools engage diverse community groups to work with the school in a mutually beneficial way, as part of a whole school approach, to support students and/or parents.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enlist members of the community (e.g., local artisans or shop owners, seniors, experts in different fields) or community groups to participate in school activities (e.g., breakfast or snack programs, mentoring or buddy initiatives). • Host a school “open house” for community members at which students can present and talk about their work. • Encourage the school to participate in a variety of community activities and events. • Provide seniors with a special pass for admission to school events such as concerts and plays. • Reach out to diverse community partners, using strategies designed to welcome and engage them in the life of the school. • Build a sense of community by encouraging parents from diverse backgrounds (e.g., diverse ethnicities, abilities, faiths) to share their stories, histories and experiences in school and in life. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create opportunities in the classroom for students to “give back” to the local or international community – for example, by planning a food or book drive or donating items built in woodworking class to a developing country. • Promote opportunities for students taking art courses to decorate the store windows of local retail businesses. • Arrange for the local public health unit to visit classrooms during the school year to discuss topics such as healthy eating and physical activity. • Invite local police officers to the school to discuss bullying prevention and intervention and/or safe Internet use. • Invite individuals from diverse community groups to visit the classroom to share their life and work experiences. Engage students in exploring the contributions these individuals have made to Canada and the factors that have shaped their roles in our society. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite positive role models from the community to form a support group for students that can help them with issues relevant to their lives (e.g., issues related to self-esteem, body image, healthy relationships, at-risk behaviours, life skills). • Arrange for students to participate in community or regional leadership-development opportunities (e.g., a Model United Nations), life skills training, or sports camp.
<p>Learning Environment</p> <p>Schools provide students with a wide range of opportunities and ways to learn and to practise and demonstrate their learning. Students learn about the diversity of their world and come to understand the importance of learning and of being responsible global citizens.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide relevant opportunities for students and staff to learn about diverse histories, cultures and perspectives – for example, about Aboriginal traditions and treaty histories and about women’s contributions to science and technology. • Use curriculum materials, displays, and print and electronic resources that reflect the diversity of the student population. Students should be able to recognize themselves in their learning materials and resources. • Ask students to think of ways to creatively incorporate the school’s Monthly Character Traits (e.g., May – integrity; June – resilience) into their learning environment. For example, have them design a screensaver promoting that month’s trait. • Reinforce, acknowledge and celebrate positive student behaviour – for example, by presenting certificates at a school assembly or by including “good news” stories in the school newsletter. • Provide ongoing learning opportunities to explore bias and discrimination as well as the impact of the experience of exclusion – and of inclusion – on student achievement and well-being. • Review and analyse the results of school climate surveys and other data to inform school and classroom practice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote a culture of high expectations for all students. • Differentiate instruction and assessment to meet the individual learning needs of all students. • Recognize and discuss qualities such as respect, social responsibility, empathy, honesty, and fairness across the curriculum. Draw attention to the significance of those qualities in creating safe, inclusive and accepting schools. • Rotate classroom duties among all students throughout the year. Encourage students to take on a variety of leadership roles. • Teach positive social skills through modelling and role play. Practise positive behaviour, and give positive feedback when a student behaves well. • Take advantage of “teachable moments” to promptly address issues that may arise in interactions between students or in student relationships. • Create a shared positive learning environment by developing classroom routines and expectations collaboratively with students at the beginning of the school year. Revisit these with students throughout the year, and adjust them as needed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create opportunities for students to model the values and principles of equity and inclusive education to foster respectful interactions and caring and supportive relationships. • Establish classroom routines, such as a daily check-in, to benefit students who require support. • Provide opportunities for secondary school students to explore career options – for example, by inviting speakers or having students visit workplaces – early in the school year.
<p>Social-Emotional Environment</p> <p>Schools promote fairness, equity, respect for all and a sense of belonging and connectedness. They create a safe, inclusive and accepting environment to support the achievement and well-being of all students.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put in place a whole-school bullying prevention and intervention program. Teach all students to identify and address bullying and discrimination by helping them develop the confidence to make their own decisions and the courage to stand up for what they believe is right. Empower students to take responsibility for their actions. This includes thinking about their choices and decisions as bystanders. • Participate in events such as Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week (the week beginning the third Sunday in November), the National Day against Homophobia, and International Women’s Day, to show that discrimination, harassment and bullying will not be tolerated in the school. • Support student-led presentations and activities that promote understanding and build awareness, respect and inclusiveness among all students around issues such as bullying, homophobia, sex/gender violence and racism. • Host assemblies to recognize positive student behaviour and celebrate student successes. • Build an understanding of mental illness, and help reduce the stigma attached to it, by posting information about emotional and social well-being (e.g., posters, information sheets) throughout the school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote belonging and connectedness in the classroom through “getting to know you” activities (teacher-to-student, staff-to-student and student-to-student). • Promote positive relationship building through peer mediation, conflict resolution and restorative practices. • Teach skills such as meditation, yoga and tai-chi to help students reduce stress. Encourage students to notice when they are experiencing learning as fun. • Encourage students to demonstrate respectful, empathetic behaviour that promotes emotional well-being among their classmates. Ask them to notice any improvement in their own sense of well-being as a result. • Integrate learning opportunities across the curriculum to teach students about building caring, supportive and healthy relationships. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support students who are involved in unhealthy relationships or who have been victims of bullying by providing information about agencies that can help them. • Provide students with tools to help them gain insight into building self-esteem, healthy body image and resiliency (e.g., through discussion, surveys, resources). • Develop supportive relationships with students, spending time with them individually when possible. • Establish behaviour management plans that have built-in rewards for students with behavioural issues.
<p>Physical Environment</p> <p>The school environment, inside and outside the building, is welcoming and makes the school a safe, inclusive and accepting place that is conducive to learning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use data from the school climate survey to identify and address issues such as bullying and to support a positive school climate. • Provide tip sheets to all staff members suggesting ways to make the school safe, inclusive and accepting in order to support student learning. • Take an “equity walk” through the school, to determine – through observation, questions, and discussion – whether it reflects diversity and offers a welcoming environment for all members of the school community. • Organize school-led community clean-up and beautification days. • Support the school’s eco-club to create a school/community garden with flowers, vegetables and native plants. • Hang a welcome banner, produced by students in multiple languages, at the front entrance of the school. • Hold a zero-waste lunch challenge in the school. • Regularly communicate and practise lockdown and evacuation procedures, as well as fire drill procedures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up and organize the classroom in a way that promotes collaborative learning, student engagement in learning and principles of inclusive education. • Display the work of all students in the classroom. • Ensure that classroom displays reflect the diversity of the student population and the population of the province. Students should be able to recognize themselves in their learning environment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a group of students act as environmental ambassadors at the school, promoting the school’s recycling and composting programs and educating other students about ways they can make the school “greener”. • Provide – or have students develop – tip sheets for students with ideas on how to make the school safe, inclusive and accepting in order to support student learning.

*In this document, parents is used to refer to parent(s) and guardian(s).