

Developing a Positive School Climate

About School Climate

A positive school climate is vital in creating responsive, effective schools. School climate—the school's mood and atmosphere—affects the way people treat one another, the appearance of the building, student discipline, even the conversation in the facilitators' lounge. The school climate component of Lions Quest can extend the positive impact of the programs to the entire school.

Establishing a School Climate Team or Committee

The initial focus of the School Climate Team or Committee might be the skills and practices of the Lions Quest programs. Then, as administrators, students, parents, and community members work together, the team will soon be seen as a positive force for a schoolwide caring, healthy, and safe environment for students and staff. Responsibilities of the School Climate Team or Committee include the following:

- Provide leadership for the school climate component of Lions Quest programs.
- Help plan and coordinate schoolwide events.
- Involve other family members and community members in school events.

Members of the School Climate Team or Committee

The School Climate Team or Committee needs about ten members, including the following:

- parents
- students
- administrators
- facilitators and counselors
- support staff
- community representatives, such as Lions Club members

The team will include people who have not been trained for Lions Quest programs but who are interested in the programs. People who have concerns about the programs should also be invited to join. Their lack of support may simply stem from unfamiliarity with the programs. Team members should have high credibility among their peers, represent the ethnic makeup of the community, and be balanced in gender and age.

Organizing the School Climate Team's or Committee's First Meeting

The first meeting of the School Climate Team or Committee needs to create an atmosphere of warmth, trust, and purpose. Following is a sample agenda:

- Get to know each other. For example, ask each member to introduce him or herself and share a favorite school-related memory.
- Discuss the goals, components, and features of the Lions Quest programs.

Key Characteristics of Effective School Climates

The Task Force on Defining a Disciplined Environment Conducive to Learning, part of the National Educational Goals Panel (1995), identified the following key characteristics of effective school environments:

1. Clear discipline standards are provided that are firmly, fairly, and consistently enforced.
2. Staff express high performance expectations and demonstrate commitment to the academic success of all students.
3. The development of personal responsibility [and] social and emotional competence are promoted among all students and staff.
4. Opportunities and incentives exist for all students and staff to become actively and continuously engaged in the learning process.
5. Reinforcement and recognition are given for students' and staff efforts in the pursuit of learning.
6. Staff show concern and support for their students' intellectual and personal development.
7. Families and the larger community are successfully engaged in the work of the school and the education of their children.
8. The physical environment is safe, well-maintained, and welcoming.

- Explain how the team’s work will encourage positive social behaviors, build positive feelings about the school, and, as a result, create a better environment for learning.
- Discuss possible contributions by team members and their expectations of what the team can achieve.

Remember that the key to success will be to involve as many people as possible in active, meaningful ways. The work needs to be shared so that ownership belongs not only to the School Climate Team or Committee but also to everyone in the school. Many schools have found the key to the successful implementation is involving the principal on the School Climate Team or Committee.

Specific Steps Toward Positive Change

The following suggestions will help the School Climate Team or Committee get started:

1. Review the school’s basic mission statement. If it does not reflect a belief that all students can be successful and are important as individuals, work with the appropriate staff members to revise it.
2. Complete a School Climate Survey showing the strengths of your learning environment and areas to target for improvement. The profile can guide the staff in setting goals. (See p. 50 for an example of a School Climate Survey.)
3. Link the identified needs with unit themes so the team can choose and begin planning one or more schoolwide event. In many instances, the event can be tied to the service-learning project or school activities such as an annual talent show or fun fair. Before choosing a schoolwide activity, consider the following questions:
 - Is the activity consistent with the goals of the school and the district?
 - In what ways will the activity encourage students to practice positive social behaviors?
 - In what ways will the event bring together students, staff, parents, and other community members?
 - How feasible is the activity, given the time and resources available?
4. After the event, evaluate what’s been accomplished. Gather feedback by surveying students, staff, parents, and community members.