## SECTION 7 – HEALTHY SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Definition

A healthy school environment includes the physical and aesthetic surroundings and the psychosocial climate and culture of the school. Factors that influence the physical environment include the school building and the area surrounding it, biological or chemical agents, and physical conditions such as temperature, noise and lighting. The psychological environment includes the physical, emotional and social conditions that affect the well-being of students and staff (CDC, 2005).

For ease in understanding, this section is divided into two components that together comprise an overall and comprehensive healthy school environment: (1) social emotional school environment and (2) physical school environment. Each section will be discussed separately.
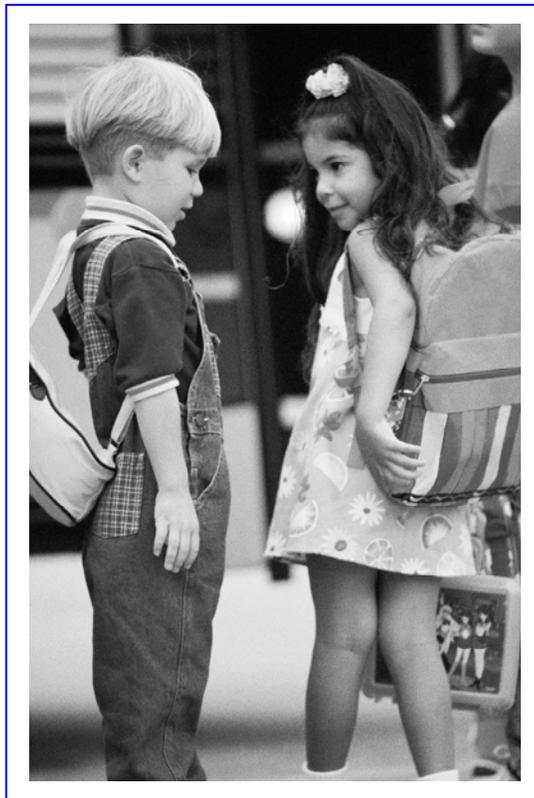
Component 1: Social Emotional School Environment

Definition

The term "school climate" is often used to refer to the emotional and social aspects of school environment. A measure of the quality of school climate is students' feelings of safety and connectedness to their school. In a positive and healthy school climate students feel close to people at school, are happy to be there, feel a part of the school, believe teachers treat them fairly, and feel personally safe while at school. Safety includes physical, emotional, and intellectual considerations. Intellectual safety is a subset of emotional safety and refers to students' comfort when they take intellectual risks at school, such as asking questions, making comments, joining groups, and choosing to study difficult topics.

Rationale

Students who attend schools with a positive, respectful climate are able to focus on learning and realize their academic, interpersonal and athletic potential (U.S. Department of Education, 1999). Such schools have clearly, explicitly communicated policies and procedures that set clear boundaries for respectful, nonviolent treatment of school community members and support an environment that is free of negative and harmful physical, social, emotional and intellectual language and actions. When students perceive they have a stake in their school community, negative anti-social and risky behaviors tend to decrease and participation in school community programs and projects, including academic activities, tends to increase.

School climate is critically linked to risk prevention and health promotion (NASBE, 1994). A positive, respectful school climate provides a solid foundation for supporting students' academic achievement and development of positive attitudes and behaviors. Students who are connected to school (i.e., feel safe, perceive themselves to be treated fairly by adults, are happy to be in school, feel they are a part of the school community, and feel close to people at school) experience less distress and engage in fewer risk-taking behaviors (Blum, 2002, 2005). Students with high levels of school connectedness demonstrate lower levels of violence and report more factors that protect them from engaging in risky sexual and substance abuse behaviors. Teachers report that students with a commitment to school have high self-esteem. The school social-emotional climate is predictive of mothers' reports of their school-age children's substance abuse and psychiatric issues. A strong relationship exists between school climate and student self-concept, student absenteeism, and suspension rates. Students who feel safe, cared for, appropriately supported, and sensitively encouraged to learn in challenging and meaningful ways experience increased academic achievement.

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School climate research suggests that positive interpersonal relationships and optimal learning opportunities can increase achievement levels and reduce high-risk behavior for students in all demographic environments. According to Megan L. Marshall of the Center for Research on School Safety, School Climate, and Classroom Management (2002), "research on school climate in high-risk urban environments indicates that a positive, supportive, and culturally conscious school climate can significantly shape the degree of academic success experienced by urban students. Furthermore, researchers have found that positive school climate perceptions are protective factors for boys and may supply high-risk students with a supportive learning environment yielding healthy development, as well as preventing antisocial behavior."

A positive school climate results in positive outcomes for school personnel as well. Characteristics of school climate, especially trust, respect, mutual obligation and concern for others' welfare, can have powerful effects on educators' and learners' interpersonal relationships (Center for Social and Emotional Education, 2005). Safe, collaborative learning communities where students feel safe and supported report increased teacher morale, job satisfaction, and retention. The interaction of various characteristics of school and classroom climate can create a fabric of support that enables all members of the school community not only to learn but also to teach at optimum levels (Freiberg, 1998). Conversely, a negative school climate interferes with learning and development.

This section presents policy recommendations, policy rationale, implementation strategies and resources for social emotional school environment.

Policy Recommendations

Policy recommendations for social emotional school environment address the following 15 areas:

1.1. *Connectedness with a caring, responsible adult.* Opportunities shall be created for students to feel attached to at least one caring, responsible adult at school.

1.2. *Clear polices and procedures.* Anti-bullying policies and procedures shall be clearly articulated and fairly managed with consistent follow-through.

1.3. *Consistent intervention.* All members of the school community shall recognize acts of name-calling, teasing, exclusion, taunting, threatening, harassment and other bullying behaviors, and intervene immediately when they occur.

1.4. *Administrative leadership.* School administrators shall provide visible, vocal and consistent leadership for respectful behavior.

1.5. *Adult codes of conduct.* Faculty, staff and administrators shall adhere to state and national professional codes of conduct.

1.6. *Family involvement.* Parent, guardian and family involvement in the school shall be strongly supported.

1.7. *Preventing peer cruelty.* Efforts to prevent peer cruelty shall be fully in place.

1.8. *Academic programs.* All students shall have challenging and appropriate academic programs.

1.9. *School size.* The school student population shall not exceed 1,200.

1.10. *Professional development.* All school staff shall receive significant professional development in violence prevention, i.e., conflict resolution, peer mediation, bullying prevention, school climate improvement, social-emotional learning, and character education.

1.11. *School climate committee.* Every school shall have a standing committee responsible for school climate improvement initiatives.

1.12. *School climate assessment.* Every school shall conduct a detailed school climate assessment and create a site-based improvement plan based on assessment findings.

1.13. *School mission statement.* School mission statements shall include provisions for a healthy emotional environment.

1.14. *Supervision.* Schools shall provide adequate, appropriate supervision in all areas of the school.

1.15. *Title IX coordinator.* Title IX coordinators shall be the official contact persons for students who feel they are objects of peer or adult cruelty.

Policy Rationale and Implementation Strategies

> **1.1.** *Connectedness with a caring, responsible adult.* Opportunities shall be created for students to feel attached to at least one caring, responsible adult at school.

Making sure every child perceives that he or she has an adult champion at school is one of the most important academic and social supports a child in school can have. A special connection with an adult means that the student feels entirely comfortable seeking out that adult to share information, concerns, worries, achievements and problems about personal or school matters. Although friendships with adults at school generally differ from relationships with peers, students who have a special connection with an adult feel that someone will help them when necessary, keep conversations confidential as appropriate, and be caring, concerned and compassionate. Students trust that these adults will never make them feel disrespected for making mistakes, sharing emotions freely, or being vulnerable in other ways. In other words, students with these relationships feel emotionally and physically safe and supported when with the adult and feel no reservations about sharing their feelings. A special connection with an adult can mean the difference between academic and social success and failure. Implementation strategies include:
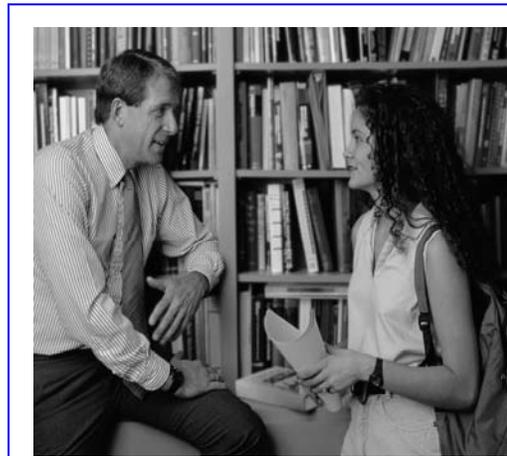
- ✧ Create advisory groups to meet regularly with faculty or staff mentors who follow the students throughout their tenure at the school.

- ✧ Pair students with a specific adult at school who will make daily contacts and have conversations.

- ✧ Target students who identify as not having a significant adult in school for specific outreach to work toward creating such a relationship.

> **1.2.** *Clear polices and procedures.* Anti-bullying policies and procedures shall be clearly articulated and fairly managed with consistent follow-through.

Connecticut has had a statewide anti-bullying law since July 2002 (CGS 10-222d). All of the state's public school districts have created district policies as the law directs. However, policies are ineffective unless all relevant constituents (i.e., family members, students, faculty, staff, board members) have a clear understanding of policy components, and policy enforcement is fair and consistent. Policies and procedures require legal scrutiny and practical, ethical evaluation.

Implementation strategies include:

- ✧ Develop a clear, commonly understood definition of peer cruelty or bullying that is embraced by all school community members and stakeholders.

✧ Clearly communicate in oral, print and electronic form that respect is the school's cultural norm and no form of physical, emotional or intellectual peer cruelty will be tolerated.

✧ Work toward consensus throughout the school to ensure that students, faculty, staff and school community visitors (parents, community members) maintain and enforce common expectations predictably, consistently and immediately.

✧ Frame clear, fair, developmentally appropriate intervention strategies that include disciplinary actions that are restorative and educative rather than merely punitive.

✧ Design carefully articulated anti-bullying policies that include not only the consequences of peer cruelty but also procedures for thoughtful, fair reporting, investigation, due process and appeal.

✧ Create anti-bullying policies that direct schools not only to intervene when bullying occurs but also to institute prevention efforts focusing on improvement of overall school climate, the ultimate remedy for bullying.

✧ Send copies of policies and procedures home to be read and signed.

✧ Post policies and procedures on the school district website.

> **1.3.** *Consistent intervention.* All members of the school community shall recognize acts of name-calling, teasing, exclusion, taunting, threatening, harassment and other bullying behaviors, and intervene immediately when they occur.

Research indicates that remedying bullying requires the creation and maintenance of a school climate that intervenes unconditionally the first time an unkind act occurs. Bullying is far less likely to continue when all members of the school community recognize and work to eliminate any form of meanness before it becomes habitual. Preventing the development of a pattern is far superior to waiting for true bullying to emerge.

"Any act of aggression by peers [or adults] that compromises the safety of the person being targeted for that aggression in any way has a tremendous and long-lasting negative impact on a student [or adult]. . . . Fun is only fun if everybody involved agrees it's fun. Even without malicious intent, if it hurts, if it's mean, if it excludes, if it frightens, it will impact a [person's] sense of safety," (Bluestein 2001).

Implementation strategies include:

✧ Create zero-tolerance attitudes among all school administrators, faculty and staff for any form of peer cruelty.

✧ Involve all school community stakeholders (students, faculty, staff, parents, guardians, community members) in an ongoing dialogue to establish a culture of respect within the school context.

✧ Communicate simple, direct, and appropriate comments for responding to students who perform unacceptable acts of peer cruelty (e.g., "that's not appropriate," "language, please," "you know better," "ouch!," "not acceptable," "we don't do that here").

> **1.4.** *Administrative leadership.* School administrators shall provide visible, vocal, and consistent leadership for respectful behavior.

Leadership matters. Delegation of authority for maintaining a positive, respectful school climate to others communicates that administrators do not believe that this concern warrants committed leadership. School administrators should be constantly vigilant and model respectful behavior throughout the school. The school should demonstrate constant reminders of what respect looks, feels, and sounds like. Respect includes courtesy in words and deeds; reference to individuals in school by the names they wish to be called; engagement in true listening; opportunities to discuss important or difficult matters; demonstration of compassion for others; fair and appropriate treatment of others; honesty, forthrightness, trustworthiness, understanding and acceptance of differences; recognition that adults as well as students make mistakes; and honest apologies for transgressions. Schools where administrators assume responsibility for such leadership are reported to be much more physically, emotionally and intellectually safe than schools where administrators do not.

Implementation strategies include:

   ✧ School administrators, faculty and staff greet students as they get off the bus and enter the school and classrooms, and throughout the day.

   ✧ School administrators, faculty and staff supervise the hallways during passing periods and in all public areas in the school where students gather (e.g., cafeteria, locker rooms, playgrounds, playing fields, parking lots).

   ✧ Include in all methods of communication to students, parents and guardians frequent consistent, explicit messages that respectful behavior is expected (newsletters, website, electronic messages, letters home, course/school expectations).

   ✧ Ensure constant visible modeling of respectful behaviors by everyone in the school, especially building administrators.
   ✧ Continually remind everyone in the school of what respect looks, feels and sounds like.

> **1.5.** *Adult codes of conduct.* Faculty, staff and administrators shall adhere to state and national professional codes of conduct.

Although the Connecticut anti-bullying law does not address adults bullying colleagues and students, the Connecticut Codes of Responsibility for Administrators and for Teachers and the National Education Association's Code of Ethics clearly outline moral responsibility for ethical conduct toward others. All adults in schools should not only be familiar with the content of these documents but also carefully adhere to them. (See "Preamble to the Code of Ethics of the National Education Association" on Page 154.)

Implementation strategies include:

   ✧ Give all administrators, faculty and staff copies of relevant codes of professional conduct annually.

◇ Ensure that all administrators, faculty and staff read, review and discuss the contents of the codes of professional conduct on a regular basis.

◇ Ensure that all administrators, faculty and staff recognize and understand the importance of role-modeling for students and colleagues.

◇ Create and implement procedures for dealing with violations of professional codes of conduct by adults in school.

Preamble to the Code of Ethics of the National Education Association

The educator, believing in the worth and dignity of each human being, recognizes the supreme importance of the pursuit of truth, devotion to excellence, and the nurture of the democratic principles. Essential to these goals is the protection of freedom to learn and to teach and the guarantee of equal educational opportunity for all. The educator accepts the responsibility to adhere to the highest ethical standards.

The educator recognizes the magnitude of the responsibility inherent in the teaching process. The desire for the respect and confidence of one's colleagues, of students, of parents, and of the members of the community provides the incentive to attain and maintain the highest possible degree of ethical conduct. The Code of Ethics of the Education Profession indicates the aspiration of all educators and provides standards by which to judge conduct.

Recommended principles and practices are available at http://www.nea.org/aboutnea/code.html.

1.6. *Family involvement.* Parent, guardian and family involvement in the school shall be strongly supported.

Parents and guardians are a child's and the school's best ally. Adults in a child's world outside school care deeply about the child's academic achievement, safety and social development. Although those adults may not have the expertise of classroom teachers, they are experts in the lives of their children. For children to succeed at every level, all adults in their world must work collaboratively together on their behalf. The official inclusion of the parental and guardian voice on relevant school committees as well as informal inclusion in all communications (e.g., phone calls, e-mails, conferences, newsletters) is a central feature of a positive school climate. Parents and guardians must perceive the school as a place that welcomes their voices and their presence. When families are interested, engaged and supportive of school-initiated efforts, school-to- home collaboration and student success are far more likely.

Implementation strategies include:

◇ Be welcoming to parents, guardians and other family members with clear signage on the school's exterior.

◇ Invite parents, guardians and other family members to participate in school activities.

✧ Welcome and include parental input and feedback in appropriate arenas (e.g., extracurricular offerings, homework quantity and content, student satisfaction, health and wellness, communication with school personnel).

✧ Inform parents and guardians about academic course offerings and invite them to make recommendations for their children.

✧ Encourage an active and engaged parent organization that supports the school and is in turn supported by it. (For additional information, see Section 8, School-Family-Community Partnerships.)

1.7. *Preventing peer cruelty.* Efforts to prevent peer cruelty shall be fully in place.

The Connecticut anti-bullying statute does not include bullying *prevention*. However, to achieve the law's intent of making students physically, emotionally and intellectually safe by creating and maintaining safe, healthy environments, prevention efforts must be central to school-based efforts. Virtually all forms of peer cruelty begin with low-level incidents of mean-spirited words and actions. Properly conceived prevention efforts can intervene with such actions before they escalate and become systemic.

Implementation strategies include:

✧ Require schoolwide violence prevention training and education.

✧ Incorporate school climate improvement goals into school wellness and school improvement plans.

✧ Ensure that anti-bullying policies and procedures reflect the intent of the law.

✧ Organize peer and student leadership programs and provide ongoing training.

✧ Develop targeted efforts to build trust among students and adults in school to encourage student disclosure of complaints, issues or concerns.

1.8. *Academic programs.* All students shall have challenging and appropriate academic programs.

Schools support connectedness by offering students diverse classroom and extra-curricular opportunities to develop personal relationships and a sense of belonging. Students who are academically challenged in keeping with their individual capabilities are more likely to feel successful and be engaged in learning. Students who are bored with their classes or have too many study halls or free periods are more likely to not only engage in appropriate activities but also to exert little effort. Challenging, exciting learning opportunities contribute significantly to feelings of connectedness. Boredom and lack of challenge are primary reasons for students dropping out of school before graduation. Striking a balance between academic challenge and overextension of expectations and requirements is of critical importance.

Implementation strategies include:

✧ Offer rigorous, developmentally appropriate academic courses at all levels.

✧ Encourage faculty and staff to use academic lessons (e.g., literature, history, science) to connect to and reinforce respectful, ethical treatment of others.

✧ Give students multiple opportunities for thoughtful, public discussion and reflection of real-life themes and concerns during academic classes and in extra-curricular settings.

✧ Provide all students with social skills training and education on conflict resolution, anger management, problem solving, appropriate communication strategies, positive relationships, and listening skills.

1.9.   *School size.* The school student population shall not exceed 1,200.

Research clearly demonstrates that, when the size of the student body exceeds 1,200, a positive school climate is far less likely. Many schools in Connecticut, including many primary and elementary schools, far surpass this threshold. Although reducing the total number may be logistically impossible, creating the feeling of a smaller school is possible. Schools with large student populations should explore options for organizing students in safe, smaller, learning-friendly schools within schools.

Implementation strategies include:

✧ Create houses or teams in which students learn and develop relationships apart from the larger school population.

✧ Organize family-sized advisory groups led by adults who are regularly in school (e.g., administrators; faculty and staff; office, cafeteria and custodial staff.)

✧ Offer regularly a variety of activity-oriented groups during school hours (e.g., theater, music, chess, crafts, science, robotics).

1.10. *Professional development.* All school staff shall receive significant professional development in violence prevention, i.e., conflict resolution, peer mediation, bullying prevention, school climate improvement, social-emotional learning, and character education.

Section 10-145a(d) of the Connecticut General Statutes recommends that "any candidate in a program of teacher preparation leading to a professional certification shall be encouraged to complete a school violence prevention and conflict resolution component of such a program." School personnel without appropriate knowledge, understanding and skills should not be responsible for keeping students safe. Violence prevention and school climate improvement are complex, multidimensional issues requiring everyone's concerted attention. When all staff members have opportunities to learn about and practice violence prevention skills, the achievement of a safe, healthy school environment is more likely. The best violence prevention efforts occur outside the curriculum and focus on creating positive and meaningful relationships for all members of the school community—among adults, between adults and students, and among students. Many exemplary, promising science-based programs are available for classroom use.

Implementation strategies include:

✧ Ensure that all school administrators and staff learn conflict resolution skills.

✧ Train school staff to incorporate violence prevention into peer mediation and student assistance teams.

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✧ Provide bullying prevention education and training to all school administrators, faculty and staff; after-school workers; cafeteria, custodial and office staff; bus drivers; and extracurricular coaching and athletic staff.

✧ Educate school administrators, faculty and staff; after-school workers; cafeteria, custodial and office staff; bus drivers; and extracurricular coaching and athletic staff about the importance of listening to complaints and concerns, taking them seriously, and not ignoring or dismissing reports by students or parents and guardians.

✧ Provide school climate improvement education and training to all administrators, faculty and staff; after-school workers; cafeteria, custodial and office staff; bus drivers; and extracurricular coaching and athletic staff.

✧ Inform administrators, faculty and staff about social-emotional learning.

✧ Provide adequate education and training for proper implementation of character education programs.

1.11. *School climate committee.* Every school shall have a standing committee responsible for school climate improvement initiatives.

Every school has numerous committees. School-based curriculum committees, health and wellness committees, diversity committees, personnel committees and others have been fixtures in most schools for a long time. A safe, healthy school environment, which is a prerequisite for academic achievement, also merits a standing committee. Incorporating these responsibilities into an existing school wellness or diversity committee, or linking with existing committees, may be practical (See Chapter 2, Fostering Collaboration and Establishing Local Practices). If not, the creation of a standalone school climate committee that conducts surveys, develops a school climate improvement plan, and monitors and reports on this work may be necessary. Ongoing, targeted attention by a designated committee ensures attention to school climate issues.

Implementation strategies include:

✧ Determine whether an existing or newly created committee will assume responsibility for school climate improvement.

✧ Charge the committee with responsibility for school climate improvement to monitor activities, conduct surveys, analyze data, and create school climate improvement action plan(s).

> **1.12.** *School climate assessment.* Every school shall conduct a detailed school climate assessment and create a site-based improvement plan based on assessment findings.

Maintaining a healthy, safe learning environment should be as data-driven as academic achievement. Dozens of survey tools, many at no cost, are available to gather data such as identifying students who lack a significant adult with whom to connect; safe and unsafe physical areas; and how students, parents, guardians, faculty and staff perceive physical, emotional and intellectual safety (The Comprehensive School Climate Inventory, Dorn, 2005). Such data are necessary to support school climate and safety improvement plans.

Implementation strategies include:

- ✧ Thoroughly assess the school physical plant to determine which areas require more targeted supervision.

- ✧ Survey students, parents and faculty and staff for perceptions of social, emotional and intellectual comfort and safety.

- ✧ Survey students to determine whether they have a significant, positive relationship with at least one adult in school.

- ✧ Assign responsibility for overseeing data collection and using the findings to create an action plan to the standing committee that manages school climate and safety improvement efforts.

> **1.13.** *School mission statement.* School mission statements shall include provisions for a healthy emotional environment.

Elementary schools have consistently attended to social-emotional learning. Middle schools similarly recommend that social and emotional concerns be central to school goals (National Middle School Association, 2003). High school accreditation requires the inclusion and documentation of social, emotional and civic aspects of education (New England Association of Schools and Colleges NEASC: http://www.alliance.brown.edu/pubs/neasc/std1.shtml). The explicit inclusion of this key element in the stated mission of the school acknowledges the significance of creating a safe, healthy environment as a precondition for optimal learning.

Implementation strategies include:

- ✧ Ensure that the school board and administrators review and revise district and school mission statement(s) to include explicit statements in support of a physically, emotionally and intellectually safe and healthy school environment.

> **1.14.** *Supervision.* Schools shall provide adequate, appropriate supervision in all areas of the school.

Negligent privacy occurs when students act without supervision or surveillance, "when those who supervise and monitor children do not remain vigilant and unwittingly provide the opportunity for victimization. Negligent privacy can occur on a playground filled with second graders, in a crowded high school cafeteria, during a youth group camping trip, or even 10 feet away from a teacher in a classroom. Simply put, negligent privacy occurs when adults are not paying close attention to children under their care" (Dorn, 2005). When the typical ratio of students to adults in school is 10:1, technological equipment may be needed to ensure student safety.

Implementation strategies include:

◇ Use video surveillance to augment human supervision. All cameras must be in working order and positioned to capture all angles in the area.

◇ Empower peer leaders to work with adults in school to take responsibility for watching, monitoring and reporting for instances when school safety is compromised.

> **1.15.** *Title IX coordinator.* Title IX coordinators shall be the official contact persons for students who feel they are objects of peer or adult cruelty.

Legally, every school district in Connecticut must have at least one Title IX coordinator. District Title IX coordinators are expected to receive training in "protected class" (racial, sexual) harassment and to be the contact person for reporting incidents. Title IX coordinators have a legal and moral duty to take reports seriously, report them appropriately, and manage the investigative process. Nonprotected class harassment, i.e., harassment other than racial or sexual, has no such official champion. Consequently, nonprotected class bullying behaviors in schools are treated quite differently, depending on how individual school districts decide to manage reports and investigations. Response to nonprotected class bullying ranges from having no official pathway for reporting and case management to the same treatment as protected-class reports. Nonprotected class cruelty needs be receive attention consistent with Title IX allegations throughout the state. If a school aims to maintain physical, emotional and intellectual safety, all forms of cruelty, whether perpetrated by peers or adults, must receive equally serious responses. Assigning responsibility for nonprotected class cruelty to the district Title IX coordinator would be a huge step in that direction.

Implementation strategies include:

◇ Provide all Title IX Coordinators with professional development (education and training) in bullying prevention and school climate improvement.

◇ Give Title IX Coordinators official responsibility for managing nonprotected class bullying related allegations.

◇ Schedule regular opportunities for Title IX Coordinators to inform school community (adults and students) about their presence and their roles and responsibilities.

Legislation Pertaining to School Social Emotional Environment

Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-222d. Policy on bullying behavior. Each local and regional board of education shall develop a policy, for use on and after February 1, 2003, to address the existence of bullying in its schools. Such policy shall: (1) Enable students to anonymously report acts of bullying to teachers and school administrators and require students to be notified annually of the process by which they may make such reports, (2) enable the parents or guardians of students to file written reports of suspected bullying, (3) require teachers and other school staff who witness acts of bullying or receive student reports of bullying to notify school administrators, (4) require school administrators to investigate any written reports filed pursuant to subdivision (2) of this section and to review any anonymous reports, (5) include an intervention strategy for school staff to deal with bullying, (6) provide for the inclusion of language in student codes of conduct concerning bullying, (7) require the parents or guardians of students who commit any verified acts of bullying and the parents or guardians of students against whom such acts were directed to be notified, (8) require each school to maintain a list of the number of verified acts of bullying in such school and make such list available for public inspection, and (9) direct the development of case-by-case interventions for addressing repeated incidents of bullying against a single individual or recurrently perpetrated bullying incidents by the same individual that may include both counseling and discipline. The notification required pursuant to subdivision (7) of this section shall include a description of the response of school staff to such acts and any consequences that may result from the commission of further acts of bullying. For purposes of this section, "bullying" means any overt acts by a student or a group of students directed against another student with the intent to ridicule, harass, humiliate or intimidate the other student while on school grounds, at a school-sponsored activity or on a school bus, which acts are repeated against the same student over time. Such policies may include provisions addressing bullying outside of the school setting if it has a direct and negative impact on a student's academic performance or safety in school. http://www.cga.ct.gov/2007/pub/Chap170.htm#Sec10-222d.htm

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Resources

Anti-Defamation League: http://www.adl.org/

Center for Social and Emotional Education: http://www.csee.net/

Character Education Partnership: http://www.character.org/

Connecticut State Department of Education Coordinated School Health Partnerships: http://www.ct.gov/sde/healthyconneCTions

Education Development Center, Health and Human Development Programs: http://www.hhd.org/

Instructional Support Services, Inc.: http://www.janebluestein.com/

Peace Education Foundation: http://www.peace-ed.org/

Peaceful Playgrounds: http://www.peacefulplaygrounds.com

Protecting Students from Harassment and Hate Crime: http://www.ed.gov/offices/OCR/archives/Harassment/index.html

Southern Poverty Law Center: http://www.tolerance.org/

The Respectful School: How Educators and Students Can Conquer Hate and Harassment, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2003.

U.S. Department of Human Resources: http://www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/index.asp

U.S. Department of Education: http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/osep/gtss.html

U.S. Department of Justice: http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov

Component 2: Physical School Environment

Definition

The physical school environment includes physical and aesthetic surroundings of the school buildings. Factors influencing the physical environment include the school building (its age and architecture) and its surroundings; biological or chemical agents that are detrimental to health; and physical conditions such as temperature, noise and lighting (Marx, Wooley, & Northrop, 1998).

Rationale

A healthy physical school environment promotes learning, productivity, comfort, good health and safety for students and staff in the following ways (State of Maine, 2002):

- ✧ Protects health and safety
- ✧ Provides a safe and comfortable place to work and study
- ✧ Minimizes distractions and hazards to students, staff, and visitors
- ✧ Provides information to staff and students on possible risks to health and safety
- ✧ Trains and instructs staff and students regarding safe practices
- ✧ Provides safety equipment and specific training when hazards cannot be eliminated

Maintaining a healthy school environment ensures that the physical setting for education (school sites, buildings, transportation and equipment) is of high quality, meets at least minimum standards and guidelines, does not interfere with the education process, and supports teaching and learning.

PHYSICAL SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

This section presents policy recommendations, policy rationale, implementation strategies and resources for physical school environment.

Policy Recommendations

Policies and programs for physical school environment address the following five areas:

2.1. ***Exposure to indoor and outdoor allergens.*** School staff shall work to prevent exposure to both indoor and outdoor allergens through comprehensive air quality and pesticide programs within the framework of existing codes and standards.

2.2. ***Safety committees.*** Districts and schools shall have active cross-organizational safety committees that ensure that programs and policies comply with workplace and public facilities safety rules and regulations, and that maintenance and repair policies are in place.

2.3. ***ADA compliance.*** Facilities shall comply with requirements of the American Disabilities Act (ADA).

2.4. ***Policies and practices.*** The school district shall formalize operating, maintenance and capital replacement policies and practices that all staff and administration support and follow.

2.5. ***Transportation.*** Transportation shall be an essential service that is managed in accordance with all state and federal regulations and guidelines.

Policy Rationale and Implementation Strategies

> **2.1.** ***Exposure to indoor and outdoor allergens.*** School staff shall work to prevent exposure to both indoor and outdoor allergens through comprehensive air quality and pesticide programs within the framework of existing codes and standards.

Schools need to attend to strategies to reduce exposure to allergic triggers both in school and on school grounds. Preventing life-threatening reactions and keeping students and staff free of symptoms will enhance their ability to participate in academic functions, such as teaching and learning.

Implementation strategies include:

✧ Implement indoor and outdoor air quality programs, such as Tools for Schools, that minimize exposure to allergens and irritants (http://www.epa.gov/iaq/schools/).

✧ Monitor and report conditions that might be related to indoor air quality, including conditions such as:

- Health-related complaints, e.g., respiratory problems, sore or scratchy throat, skin rash, eye irritation, headache
- Drowsiness
- Evidence of water intrusion into the building
- Odors
- High energy consumption
- Construction or renovation activities

✧ Enforce integrated pest management programs that adhere to pesticide application statutes and regulations and limit application during school hours.

✧ Enforce anti-idling laws to prevent unnecessary exposure to exhaust and other gaseous fumes.

> **2.2.** *Safety committees.* Districts and schools shall have active cross-organizational safety committees that ensure that programs and policies comply with workplace and public facilities safety rules and regulations, and that maintenance and repair policies are in place.

Safety committees can serve as the lead in ensuring that the proper policies and procedures are in place to promote a healthy physical environment for staff and students. Such a committee or committees would include representatives from the various employees or departments that have direct responsibility for the safety of the building. These committees can avert significant problems by addressing health and safety issues in a proactive manner.

Implementation strategies for *safety committees* include:

◇ Establish multidisciplinary safety committees at district and school levels. These committees may be a subcommittee of a larger school health committee, such as the school health council or the wellness team (see Chapter 2, Fostering Collaboration and Establishing Local Practices).

◇ Communicate safety policies to staff, students and families through venues such as written publications, e.g., parent handbooks, staff orientation packets and newsletters.

◇ Develop and implement policies that address student safety on school-sponsored and out-of-school trips, e.g., bus safety, appropriate staff to student ratios, and actions to address student health concerns.

Implementation strategies to address *safety on school property* include:

◇ Provide for safe movement of motorized vehicles, non-motorized vehicles, and pedestrian traffic on school property through established and well-marked plans.

◇ Inform and train all staff and students on specific Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) safety policies and procedures applicable to all areas of work and school including, but not limited to:
  • blood-borne pathogens
  • body mechanics
  • fire safety
  • hazard communication (including chemical safety)
  • emergency response planning
  • egress procedures
  • physical environment standards
  • safety and security
  • other state and federal safety standards as indicated by a comprehensive safety assessment

◇ Comply with local and state policies that address design and specifications for new schools and construction and renovation. (See "Legislation Pertaining to Physical School Environment" on Page 169 for specific references.)

◇ Apply construction and renovation procedures that eliminate or minimize workers' and occupants' exposure to environmental hazards and comply with environmental protection guidelines for air quality and school design.

✧ Ensure the availability of the following:
- Attractive, safe, and clean facilities
- Student bathrooms equipped with running water, soap, paper towels, and
- toilet paper at all times
- Buildings, grounds, and play areas and equipment that are in good repair
- Approved soft surfaces beneath all playground equipment
- Supervised school grounds and play areas before and after school, during recesses and at lunchtime

Implementation strategies to address *classroom safety and student conduct* include:

✧ Enforce safe and drug-free school policies, including prohibition of tobacco, alcohol and other substances at school, at school-sponsored events, and on school property; and banning of firearms and other deadly weapons from the school grounds.

✧ Provide safety education for students.

✧ Ensure safe practices and supervision in science and shop classes, art courses, culinary classes, and vocational education classes to prevent serious injuries to staff and students from exposure to dangerous chemicals or unsafe equipment.

✧ Limit exposure to live animals in regular education classes to prevent animal bites, allergic reactions and infection.

✧ Institute security programs that include access, signage, clearly marked emergency equipment, and evacuation and lockdown plans.

Implementation strategies for *disaster preparedness* include:

✧ Establish safety plans for crisis and other emergency situations, such as terrorism, natural disasters, and student and staff injuries.

> 2.3. *ADA Compliance.* Facilities shall comply with requirements of the American Disabilities Act (ADA).

Access to all facilities for students and staff with disabilities is necessary to be in compliance with ADA and other federal laws. These laws enhance safety for people with disabilities, prevent injury, and promote an environment that supports diversity and inclusion for all. Access includes attention to the building and the grounds as well as school transportation. This access also extends to all activities and events such as graduation, school plays, sporting events, and board of education meetings.

Implementation strategies include:

✧ Periodically review compliance with all ADA provisions, such as access and reasonable accommodations, including renovation projects.

✧ Consider children's height and other dimensions when designing or purchasing facilities such as drinking fountains, toilet stalls, lavatories, sinks, seats and tables. Other considerations include accessible routes to buildings and other spaces, ground surfaces, pick-up and drop-off sites, all floors in multiple-story buildings, and parking spaces.

✧ Adhere to ADA requirements for all programs open to parents and the public, such as graduation exercises, school drama events, sporting events and board of education meetings.

> **2.4.** *Policies and Practices.* The school district shall formalize operating, maintenance and capital replacement policies and practices that all staff and administration support and follow.

Policies and procedures that establish a comprehensive preventive maintenance program will help school districts avoid premature deterioration of school buildings, their operations and school grounds. In addition to avoidance of premature deterioration, comprehensive maintenance programs protect the health and safety the students, staff and school community.

Implementation strategies include:

✧ Establish policies and procedures for handling, use and storage of hazardous materials, including exposure to bodily fluids and access to material safety data sheets (MSDS).

✧ Require comprehensive preventive maintenance procedures for buildings, equipment and grounds, including consideration of weather-related problems such as rain and snow.

✧ Ensure timely repair of school facilities.

✧ Develop and implement capital improvement policies and procedures that include a replacement schedule, budgetary allotments and analysis of program needs, technology and age of equipment.

> **2.5.** *Transportation.* Transportation shall be an essential service that is managed in accordance with all state and federal regulations and guidelines.

A transportation plan provides a process for schools to determine transportation safety and the needs of students. Compliance with the district plan is designed to optimize safety to protect both drivers and students. These plans address transportation in and outside the regular school day such as field trips and other out-of-district trips, emergencies procedures, loading and unloading procedures, and procedures for children with special needs.

Implementation strategies include:

✧ Conduct vehicle inspections that comply with state and federal regulations and guidelines (including special education requirements).

✧ Adhere to anti-idling laws.

✧ Ensure that drivers meet state licensing, physical, skill and knowledge requirements.

✧ Conduct bus safety drills for students and staff, as required by state regulations.

✧ Institute a review system (including tracking and analysis) for indicators of problem areas such as crash statistics, driver grievances, complaints and fleet age and appearance.
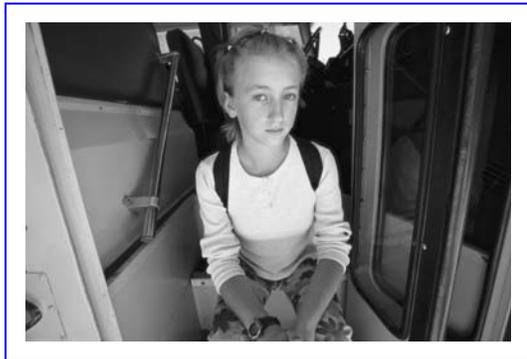
Legislation Pertaining to Physical School Environment

The following sections of the Connecticut General Statutes are available at
http://www.cga.ct.gov/2007/pub/Title10.htm:

Section 10-217c. Definitions. As used in sections 10-217d to 10-217g, inclusive.

Section 10-217d. Warning labels.

Section 10-217e. Purchase of art or craft materials by local or regional school districts.

Section 10-217f. Availability of lists of carcinogenic substances, potential human carcinogens and certain toxic substances.

Section 10-217g. Exemptions.

Section 10-231a Pesticide application at schools: Definitions

Section 10-231b. Pesticide applications at schools: Authorized applicators.

Section 10-231c. Pesticide applications at schools without an integrated pest management plan.

Section 10-231d. Pesticide applications at schools with an integrated pest management plan.

Section 10-231e. Maintenance of heating, ventilation and air conditioning system.

Section 10-231f. Indoor air quality committee.

Section 10-291. Approval of plans and site. Expense limit.

PHYSICAL SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

References

Marx, E., Wooley, S.F., & Northrop, D. (1989). *Health is academic: A guide to coordinated school health programs*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Taras, H.; Duncan, P.; Luckenbill, D.; Robinson, J; Wheeler, L.; Wooley,S. (eds.).(2005) *Health, Mental Health, and Safety Guidelines for Schools*. Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics.

State of Maine. (2002). *Guidelines for coordinating school health programs*. Augusta, ME: State Department of Education and State Department of Human Services. http://www.mainecshp.com/. Retrieved on January 22, 2007.

Resources

Americans with Disabilities Act. U.S. Department of Justice: http://www.ada.gov and *U.S. Department of Transportation:* http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov

Connecticut State Department of Education Coordinated School Health Partnerships: http://www.ct.gov/sde/healthyconneCTions

Health, Mental Health, and Safety Guidelines for Schools, American Academy of Pediatrics, 2004

Tools for Schools Program: http://www.epa.gov/iaq/schools/

U.S. Department of Environmental Protection Agency: http://www.epa.gov/