Spotlight Practice

School Climate
for Learning

What Do We Mean When We Talk
About Positive School Climate?

ALAMEDA COUNTY SCHOOL-BASED BEHAVIORAL HEALTH INITIATIVE

A MULTI-DEPARTMENTAL COLLABORATION WITHIN HEALTH CARE SERVICES AGENCY

The School-Based Behavioral Health Initiative was launched in 2009 to create a shared model for building and financing school-based behavioral health systems across Alameda County. The School-Based Behavioral Health Initiative brings together two divisions within the Alameda County Health Care Services Agency: Behavioral Health Care Services and the Center for Healthy Schools and Communities. Thank you to the Initiative Leadership Team, and the many providers, schools, school districts, and young people who engage in this critical work every day, and have contributed to the development of Alameda County's School-Based Behavioral Health Model and Spotlight Practices.

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Cover: Berkeley High School, Berkeley, CA. Photo: Mai Downs

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> "Teachers cannot teach and students cannot learn if either are tired, sick, hungry, distracted, scared, or absent. Successful teaching and learning cannot occur unless basic environmental supports and opportunities are in place to create positive school climates that meet the developmental needs of teachers and students."
>
> – Sara Truebridge and Sean Slade [1]

Introduction

Talking about behavioral health in terms of a positive school climate requires a major shift in our perspective of the behavioral health field. It is a shift from reactive toward proactive. It is a shift from illness toward wellness, and it is a shift from working with a small percentage of students who have serious issues toward working with the entire school community. Yet, it is a necessary shift.

During the school year, students typically spend at least six hours a day in school. This represents a major portion of their early lives. It is in this environment that their futures can be made or broken. Schools can be part of the solution – or they can be part of the problem.

Children and youth attend school for academic learning and social-emotional development. Schools that are run-down and have high rates of bullying and physical fights, low teacher retention, and high rates of absenteeism create barriers for learning and may even activate behavioral problems that escalate over time. Creating a positive school climate is a powerful means to break down these educational and behavioral barriers and ensure that every student's right to an education, to high achievement, and to well-being is honored.

Behavioral health problems affect a significant number of children and youth currently attending our schools. In the course of a year, about 20% of young people in the U.S. experience symptoms of a behavioral health problem, and when including the results of trauma, these numbers are even higher. Studies show that between 28% and 69% of the general population has experienced at least one traumatic childhood event [2], and the rates for young people living in low-income, urban communities of color can reach a staggering 70%-100%. [3] In Alameda County in

particular, the number one cause of death for young people between the ages of 1–24 is homicide, and, as in the rest of the country, those homicide victims are more often than not youth of color. [4]

This prevalence of both behavioral health symptoms and the more specific effects of trauma can have a profound impact on young peoples lives, interfering with their ability to perform normal developmental tasks, such as engaging in school work, establishing healthy interpersonal relationships, and transitioning to adulthood. They also can have profound disciplinary consequences, as students who have experienced trauma are suspended and expelled at twice the rate of other students [5], and 75% of high school students diagnosed with an "emotional disturbance" have been suspended or expelled at least once.[6] Given the significant number of students struggling with these

issues and the grave consequences of their struggles going unrecognized and untreated, it is vital that schools have programs in place to support students' behavioral health if they are to successfully educate all students.

In the past, our response to behavioral health challenges has been to provide therapy and counseling almost exclusively to students who experienced behavioral challenges. While such services are important, and sometimes necessary, they do not represent the full continuum of behavioral health supports needed in a school. By focusing on the few children and youth who are in serious trouble, we are being reactive rather than proactive. Significant attention must be given to the promotion of positive social-emotional development to prevent the onset of problems. Supporting a positive school climate is proactive, addresses needs early, and promotes behavioral health for the entire school

population.

A full continuum of behavioral health supports in a school is administered at three levels (Figure 1). At the base level, support is focused on school environments that foster healthy social-emotional development for all students by creating a positive school climate. At this level, all students are supported every day through a climate that fosters safety, caring relationships, high expectations, and opportunities for meaningful participation. The entire school team is supported and working in concert to provide an ongoing positive environment. Research has shown that such a model has had a positive and direct effect on the lives of students, teachers, staff, and communities.


A young adult working in the restorative justice field recalled a day from his childhood growing up in West Oakland. He remembered spending time with his friends doing things he was not supposed to be doing. On a day he was supposed to be in school, he watched a friend get jumped. He felt there was nothing he could do. He ran. Later that night he heard that his friend was in the hospital but he couldn't find out anything more. Holding onto the events of the previous day, he went to school.

He was not paying attention and, after repeated attempts by the teacher to get him to engage in the class, he snapped at the teacher and did everything he could to restrain himself physically. Sitting in the principal's office he recalled wanting to tell someone, almost anyone, what was going on, but he was never asked and the underlying issue never surfaced. He was given a series of detentions or a short suspension – he doesn't remember. He only remembers that no one seemed to care about what he was going through.

– Alameda County Stories
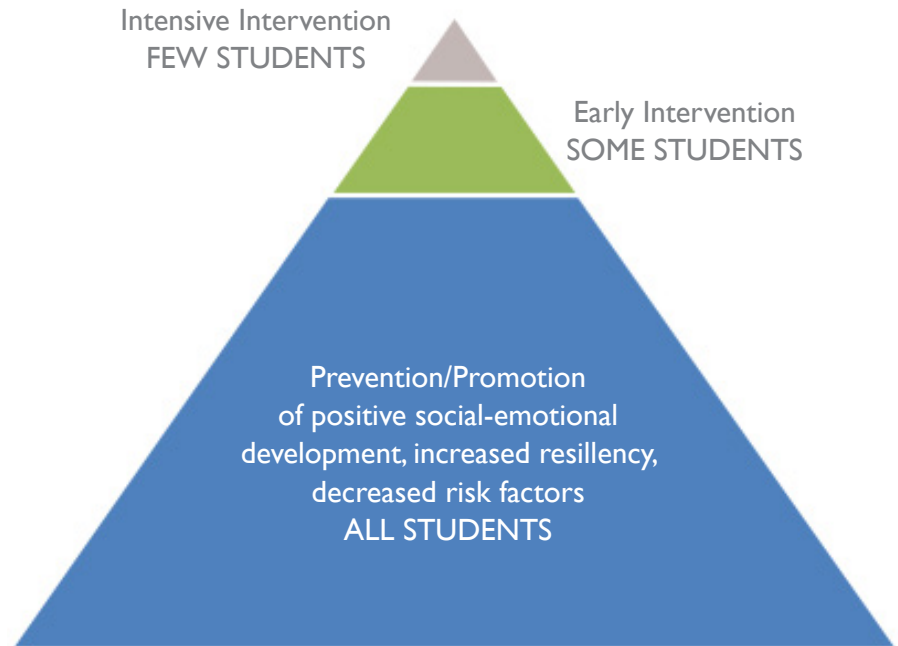
What Do We Mean When We Talk About Positive School Climate?

The fundamentals of a positive school climate are characteristics of family, school, and community environments that elicit and foster the natural ability of children and youth to learn and develop. There are four general factors that appear to alter – or even reverse – potentially negative outcomes and enable individuals to transform adversity and learn and grow despite risk.

They are:

1. Positive physical environment
2. Caring relationships
3. High expectations
4. Opportunities for meaningful participation

Positive Physical Environment

The environments in which we live have a tremendous impact on who we are and how we develop as human beings. We often talk about how a student's home or community environment is, or is not, supportive of their learning. When a student appears stressed, we may falsely assume that "something is going on at home." The truth of the matter might well be that something is going on at school.

Figure 1. Continuum of Support

Intensive Intervention
FEW STUDENTS

Early Intervention
SOME STUDENTS

Prevention/Promotion
of positive social-emotional
development, increased resiliency,
decreased risk factors
ALL STUDENTS

Positive school climates are physically and psychologically safe environments that enhance creativity, cooperative behavior, exploration, and positive risk-taking. A positive school climate begins with buildings and grounds that children and youth identify as places conducive to learning. The feeling of connectedness, an integral part of a positive school climate, is nurtured in safe classrooms and safe schools.

Brain research tells us that, in order to engage higher order thinking skills and creativity, a child must feel safe. The hiring of more police officers and security guards, installing sophisticated weapon detection and student surveillance devices, and toughening punishments for children who misbehave often only further marginalize youth that are "different" – making them feel even less safe. Real safety comes from building an inclusive school community in which diversity is honored and all students are welcomed into the circle.

Caring Relationships

Once children and youth feel safe and the physical barriers to learning have been addressed, they need to feel that teachers and staff see them as individuals with unique skills and insights. The quality of caring relationships at work in a school is both a characteristic of a positive school climate and the aspect most associated with positive academic, behavioral, developmental, and health outcomes. [9] Students who feel cared for by their teachers are more connected to their school, attend school more regularly, and are far less likely to be involved in all health risk behaviors including alcohol, drug use, and violence. [10]

Ex-gang member Tito sums up the message of School Climate: "Kids can walk around trouble, if there is some place to walk to, and someone to walk with."

– Milbrey McLaughlin [7]

Minority youth who have survived poverty, poor schools, and discrimination to become successful adults have had caring relationships with adults. These adults have held positive and high expectations for the youth to succeed in life.[11] Research shows that effective high-expectation messages must convey that adults in the school believe students can and will succeed, that they won't give up on them but will encourage and help them to do their best, nurturing each youth's unique strengths and pathways to success.[12]

Loving support and high expectations need to be accompanied by firm guidance, clear boundaries, and structures that create safety, predictability, and an atmosphere in which students feel in control and confident about their ability to succeed in future educational endeavors.[13]

High Expectations

High expectation messages refer to the consistent communication of direct and indirect messages that the young person can and will succeed. These messages are at the core of caring relationships and reflect the adult's (and friend's) belief in the youth's innate ability to learn. The message – "you can make it. You have everything it takes to achieve your dreams. I'll be there to support you" – is a pivotal protective factor in the family, school, and/or community environments of youth who have overcome challenging life circumstances.

When middle school students in a study were asked to write down things that adults do to show they care, they responded that they felt cared for when adults:

• Show respect by listening
• Recognize their individual differences
• Have realistic expectations for achievement
• Give encouragement and feedback

Caring relations and high expectations appear to work in concert. Hanson, Austin, and Lee-Bayha[14] found that California student test scores (SAT-9) improved over a one-year period in relation to the level to which students reported caring relationships and high expectations at school. Psychometric analyses[15] and student focus groups conducted by WestEd[16] point to one factor underlying this relationship: students perceive supportive high expectations as indications that teachers care about them. The goal of high expectations is to allow for the freedom and exploration necessary to develop autonomy, identity, and self-control. This approach is individual-based and strengths-focused.

Opportunities for Meaningful Participation

Positive outcomes result when youth are given the chance to belong to a group, to have responsibilities, to be involved in relevant, engaging, and respected activities, to have a voice and choice, to make decisions, to plan, and to assume ownership and leadership. Schools become safe havens for students to develop cognitively, socially, emotionally, physically, and spiritually when they enforce rules fairly and equitably, provide varied opportunities to succeed, and give students a decision-making voice and opportunities to work with and be helpful to others. In the words of one student, "school was my church, it was my religion. It was a constant, the only thing that I could count on every day…. I would not be here if it was not for school."[17]

Research finds that youth grow and mature when they are given the opportunity to give back their gift – to be of service to other people, to nuture their community and world. Providing young people with opportunities for meaningful participation is a natural outcome of schools and classrooms that convey high expectations.

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Werner and Smith's study, covering more than 40 years, found that the most frequently encountered positive role model in the lives of resilient children outside the family circle was a favorite teacher who was not just an instructor but also a confidante and positive model for personal identification.[8]

One Alameda County teacher who devotes the first 10 to 15 minutes of each class to check in with students using a circle format reported that she was uncomfortable doing this at first. She did not like eating up potential instruction time to check in with students. Prior to doing this, she estimated that she was really only teaching 20 minutes out of her 50-minute classes. She began to implement a check-in circle at the beginning of each class. She found the check-in allowed students to prepare to learn, grounded them, and allowed her and other students to be more sensitive to student needs. The opportunity for students to be better understood by their teacher led to students working more efficiently with fewer disruptions and improved the quality of their work. Initially concerned about the time it would take away from instruction, she realized that she did not have enough time to not open the class in that way.

— Alameda County Stories

Participating in decisions about the present and future is a fundamental human need, closely tied to the need to have power over one's life. Several educational reformers believe that ignoring this need — not only among children, but also among families, teachers, and other school staff — makes schools alienating places.[18] Sarasonww states it simply: "when one has no stake in the way things are, when one's needs are provided no forum, when one sees oneself as the object of unilateral actions, it takes no particular wisdom to suggest that one would rather be elsewhere." [19]

The challenge for schools is to engage all children's innate desires and abilities to learn by providing them with opportunities to participate in meaningful activities and roles. This is especially critical for students of color whose families and communities have been systematically excluded from fully participating in the social, economic, and political life of this country. Infusing opportunities for children to participate in the life of the classroom and school doesn't require a special program. It encourages teachers to adopt an educational stance that motivates and guides the student through the learning process. Asking questions that encourage critical, reflective thinking (including those around current social problems), making learning more hands-on, involving students in curriculum planning, using participatory evaluation strategies, letting students create the "classroom constitution" (Sarason's term for agreements governing classroom interaction), and employing approaches like cooperative learning, peer helping, cross-age mentoring, and community service all give students opportunities for meaningful participation. Such strategies bond young people to their school community and promote all the traits of resiliency: social competence, problem-solving, autonomy, and — especially critical to urban youth — a sense of a bright future. [20]

Furthermore, in the 1979 seminal school-effectiveness research, Rutter and his colleagues identified active student participation in all sorts of things that went on in the school as one of the characteristics of schools with low levels of school failure and delinquency. They concluded that students in these effective schools were treated as responsible people and they reacted accordingly. [21]

"Having high expectations assumes that one size never fits all."

— Bonnie Benard, *A Perspective on Resilience*

The Process for Creating a Positive School Climate

All aspects of a positive school climate necessitate that teachers and staff act as a team and actively engage students, parents, and other members of the school community. Creating a human environment that connects disparate elements into a community cannot be the work of a few - it is the work of everyone. The research on the transformative power of school-based teams on school reform is clear. Reforms or policies that are created, implemented, monitored, and revised by a natural network of school staff are more effective, sustained, and supported than the reforms or policies delivered by a single individual. [22]

The work of a school climate team is beneficial for students and adults. In a three-year longitudinal study, Michael Rutter and his colleagues found that students achieved at higher levels

and had fewer behavioral problems in schools where adults worked together to plan curriculums, to set school rules, and to support and encourage each other. [23]

Building the Case for a School Climate Team

Creating a school climate team begins with dialogue. Those motivated to transform or improve school climate should begin by engaging in conversations with faculty, staff, students, and parents to gain everyone's input. Key points of discussion include: "what do faculty, students, staff, and parents think of the current school climate? Would they characterize it as positive? Why or why not? What do they think needs to be done to improve school climate?" These topics build the case for forming a school climate team.

Forming a School Climate Team

The process of an ongoing school climate dialogue sets the stage for school climate teams to be formed in an organic way. In some cases, the team that is developed is an independent team that focuses solely on obligations specific to school climate. However, because schools frequently have formal teams already in place to address a variety of issues, it may be appropriate to launch the school climate work within the structure of an existing team.

For example, the California Education Code requires every public school to create a school safety committee responsible for the development of a comprehensive school safety plan that is submitted and updated annually. This committee is charged with creating a plan that assesses and addresses the level of school safety, the quality of student-student and adult-student relationships, and the learning environment. [24] The school and district are responsible for implementation of that plan. Schools may want to start the dialogue within the school safety committee. Through discussion, the members of the committee may reach out to additional members of the community for input. The school safety committee could serve as the school climate team or the committee could serve as the starting point for forming a team that would include a broader group.

Regardless of whether the school climate team is newly formed or part of an existing body, it should include: the principal or appropriate vice principal, classroom teachers, key support staff (such as a mental health practitioner, a resource specialist, a guidance counselor, or a school nurse), parents, and students. The strong support and participation of the principal is critical to any school climate improvement effort.

Gathering Data on the School Climate

Knowing where to start the dialogue within a team can be a challenge. Frequently, team members have very different ideas about the climate and needs of the school. In this regard, data is a key tool for use in assessing school climate and determining needs and areas of focus.

The team should begin by determining which data sources they currently have available that allude to the current state of the school environment, and which data they may have to collect themselves. Examples of data that schools tend to have available include student surveys (such as the California Health Kids Survey, see http://chks. wested.org), parent surveys, suspension/expulsion records, disciplinary referrals, incidents on the school yard, and participation of parents in critical school activities such as back-to-school night. If existing sources are insufficient, the committee may choose to collect additional data on their own. These might include surveys

(for example, from staff, students, and/or parents), observations, or interviews of key informants. As the data is collected, the team examines, evaluates, and discusses its implications. What does the data show about the overall climate of the school? Are there components of school climate that need more attention than others?

Through ongoing dialogue within the group and with the larger school community, the team selects areas of focus. These might include such things as building positive student-student and student-adult relationships, developing positive and high expectations in regard to academics and behavior, making teaching and learning more meaningful, adding safety procedures, and beautifying the school grounds.

Making a Plan to Address the School Climate

Once the team has determined the areas of focus, they should then research potential strategies or programs that address these areas (some examples are described below), identify the strategies of the programs they will be implementing, and create

a plan for implementation. Questions the team might consider in completing the implementation plan are:

- What support do we need?
- Who will provide it?
- Who will be the point person?
- What are potential challenges and how will we overcome them?
- How will we involve the entire school community?
- When will we start?
- How will we monitor progress?

Implementing the School Climate Plan and Sustaining the Dialogue

Creating a school environment that promotes the healthy social-emotional development of all students and prevents behavioral health problems requires focus and a sustained effort. As strategies are implemented, the team monitors implementation, engages in ongoing dialogue with teachers, staff, students and parents, informs and seeks feedback from the school community, utilizes data sources to evaluate outcomes, and works with the school community to improve the system.

Approaches to Developing a Positive School Climate

Many schools in our community have benefited from specific approaches toward creating a positive school climate. These approaches have been used in combination or on their own and have resulted in improving the behavioral climate for all students. A few of these approaches include: Trauma-Informed Schools, Positive Behavioral Supports, and Restorative Justice. These are discussed in this section.

Trauma-Informed Schools

As mentioned earlier, trauma impacts a large percentage of people in our society, including thousands of young people living in Alameda County. This trauma can have a devastating effect on a student's ability to learn. Besides interfering with essential cognitive processes such as concentration, memory and language abilities [25], it can lock the brain in a state of "fight, flight or freeze" in which a student may vie for authority with a teacher, or stare listlessly out the window instead of listening to the lesson. [26] In addition to its impact on academic success, these trauma symptoms are frequently misunderstood by the school community and treated as discipline issues, leading to an extremely high likelihood of suspension and expulsion for students who have experienced trauma. [27] And since students of color living with the effects of poverty and systemic racism are frequently affected by trauma at a higher rate than white students, this punishment of symptoms contributes to the school-to-prison pipeline, in which one in three African American and one in six Latino boys born in 2001 are at risk of imprisonment during their lifetime. [28]

In order to create a school climate that is healthy for all students, we clearly must develop ways of supporting those who have experienced trauma. The Massachusetts Advocates for Children, one of the groups leading the movement toward trauma-informed schools, has distilled years of research and experience into a "flexible framework." There are six different elements that schools can use in order to create an environment that is supportive and healthy for these students. The elements are as follows:

- Staff training
- Academic instruction for traumatized children
- Nonacademic strategies
- School policies, procedures, and protocols
- School-wide infrastructure and culture
- Linking with mental health professionals

Many of these elements are directly related to general school climate work, but with specific attention to students who have experienced trauma. Staff training initially involves helping all adults in the school community understand the prevalence and impact of trauma on students, and then supports school staff in developing strategies that help traumatized students feel safe both inside of the classroom (for example, creating a special place for students to "cool off" within the classroom and developing a plan for transitions between activities) and outside of the classroom (for example, building supportive relationships and promoting positive afterschool activities).

Having clear and carefully developed school policies, procedures, and protocols around trauma demonstrates to

We were in a situation at our school where we had made some academic progress over a few years, but our growth was beginning to level out. A lot of teachers were burnt out by the intense effort, while also dealing with a lot of fights, bullying, and students with behavior problems. We had a high number of suspensions. A small group of us began to talk about how we might work together to make things better. A couple of us went to a workshop on Positive Behavioral Supports (PBS) one spring, and thought this might help our school. We began discussions with the principal and other staff. Some people were excited about it while some others thought it sounded like one more thing they would have to do.

We spent half a year talking formally and informally as a staff about improving the school climate. Then the district offered a half-day workshop on PBS and we sent a team that included our principal. We shared what we learned in the workshop with the rest of the teachers. We agreed that we did not have a lot of very basic behavioral support elements in place. We didn't even have a set of basic school rules. If we didn't know what to do to make things better, how could we expect the students to know! The team that went to that workshop became the school climate team. They got some additional training and began designing what our PBS system would look like. We got a lot of feedback from the staff.

Our group was becoming focused. We agreed on the following basic set of rules that reflected the kind of culture we all wanted to be a part of – be safe, be respectful, be responsible, be an ally. We talked as a staff about what each of these simple rules meant. Then we went about teaching the kids. We showed them what these rules looked like in class, on the school yard, in the halls, in the bathrooms. We did classroom presentations and assemblies. Our mental health counselors worked with groups of kids. Kids made signs and we posted them all over school. We sent information home to parents. At back-to-school night, parents saw signs posted all over the school. You could ask any kid in the school what the school rules were and they could tell you.

We honored kids for their positive behavior. We distributed and handed out "tiger tickets" that they could exchange for small gifts when we saw them doing something great. We acknowledged kids publicly and regularly for their efforts and gave their parents the positive feedback. We made a huge effort to keep the majority of our interactions with students positive. When there was a problem with a student or a group of students, we dealt with it in dialogue. Even when disciplinary action was warranted, we continued to support the student. After a while, students who struggled were far more likely to be sent to the counseling office for support than sent to the vice principal for discipline.

Within a year, behavior in our school had improved a great deal and we continue to improve. The amount of time we spend dealing with discipline issues is far less, and when problems arise we have supports for students rather than just punishments. Suspensions have been significantly reduced and this year we saw some impressive academic gains. Working here is a lot of fun.

 – Alameda County Stories

students that adults can approach even difficult situations in a calm, collaborative way, which may be especially helpful for students who have experience with chaotic or disorganized adult responses. Policies around discipline also need to be evaluated in light of what we know about the impacts of trauma. For example, zero tolerance policies may exclude traumatized children from their school community when they need that community the most. Instead, the school, including mental health professionals, can work to support growth and learning for these students while still holding them accountable for their actions.

In addition to these factors, in order to create a school-wide infrastructure and culture that is healthy and supportive for students who have experienced trauma, we can turn to other school climate work that has shown to be effective in school environments. Two of these approaches, Positive Behavioral Supports and Restorative Justice, are described in the following sections.

Positive Behavioral Supports

Positive Behavioral Supports (PBS) (Figure 2) have been shown to have short and long-term beneficial effects on attachment to school and academic achievement. PBS decreases aggression, drug use, and crime. It promotes student reports of positive reinforcement and positive referrals, decreases discipline referrals, and increases academic learning time. To date, evaluation and research studies have focused on the impact of PBS on the improvement of social and academic outcomes for all students. Through a three-tiered prevention model [29], PBS utilizes effective strategies to create environments that support and encourage success for both teacher and student behavior. [30] As shown in Figure 2, work at the primary tier involves creating positive, predictable environments for all students at all times of the day by teaching expected, appropriate, positive behavior to all students, modeling appropriate behavior, leading students through practice in specific settings,

and testing their knowledge. Work for fewer students and the second tier involves giving additional support to at-risk students. Work at the third tier, to a small group, consists of providing intensive support to students who fail to respond at the primary and secondary levels.

Restorative Justice [31]

Restorative Justice is a philosophy and an approach to discipline that moves away from punishment and toward "restoring" a sense of harmony and well-being for all those affected by a hurtful act. It provides families, schools, and communities a way to ensure accountability, while at the same time breaking the cycle of retribution and "unlearning" violence. It is based on the belief that children and youth are resilient and capable of solving problems, rather than being a problem that adults must fix. It focuses not on retribution but on reconnecting severed relationships and re-empowering individuals by holding them responsible. This approach acknowledges that, when a person does harm, it affects the person they hurt, the community, and themselves. When using restorative measures, an attempt is made to repair the harm caused by one person to another and to the community so that order and well-being are restored for everyone. Restorative justice measures in schools can take many forms.
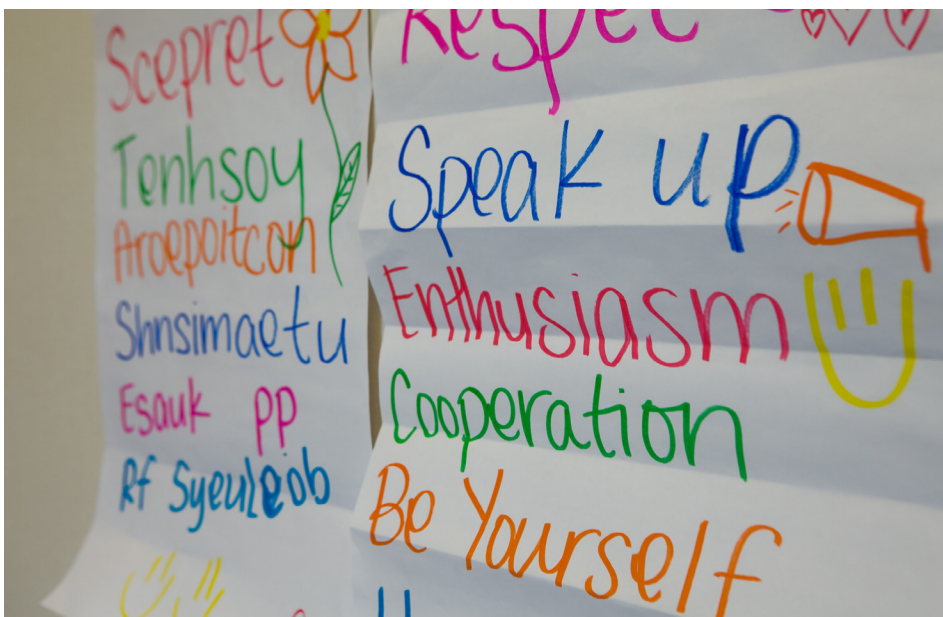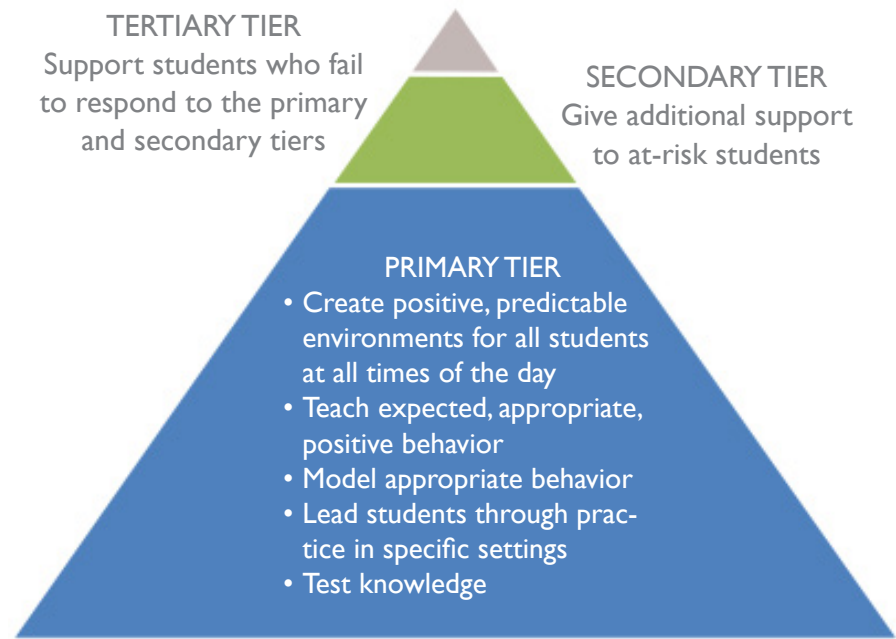
They can include:

- Teen courts, in which youth become the judges, jurors, prosecutors, and defense attorneys
- Peer and staff mediation or peace-making circles, which create a respectful group space. These are replacing the "Behavioral Hearing Panels" in Vallejo for students who have been suspended for victimizing others
- Classroom constitutions, in which students participate in establishing the rules for the class based on the democratic principles of rights and responsibilities
- Conflict resolution programs
- Family group conferencing, which brings students and their family members together to meet with the person harmed

Restorative Justice and Positive Behavior Supports (PBS) are sometimes blended to provide a more comprehensive approach to developing a student's personality, talents, and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential. PBS aims to prevent conflict and behavior problems by teaching and reinforcing appropriate social behavior, creating a positive school climate, providing early support to at-risk students, and providing individualized intervention to high-risk students.

Restorative practices involve students and the entire school community in a process to repair the harm resulting from conflicts through peer juries, community circles, and other processes.

Figure 2. Positive Behavioral Supports

TERTIARY TIER
Support students who fail to respond to the primary and secondary tiers

SECONDARY TIER
Give additional support to at-risk students

PRIMARY TIER
- Create positive, predictable environments for all students at all times of the day
- Teach expected, appropriate, positive behavior
- Model appropriate behavior
- Lead students through practice in specific settings
- Test knowledge

Conclusion

Talking about behavioral health in terms of a positive school climate requires a major shift in our perspective toward its application. It is a shift from reactive to proactive. It is a shift from the concept of working with a small percentage of students who have serious issues to putting the great percentage of our resources into creating an environment that is conducive to learning – a positive physical environment with caring relationships, high expectations, and opportunities for meaningful participation.

The process of creating a positive school climate is one that requires that teachers and staff act as a team and actively engage students, parents, and the community. This process begins with dialogue on a school-by-school basis, forming teams, and implementing a plan.

We have seen results from this approach across the country and in our own school systems in Alameda County.

Positive school climates have a major impact on children's lives and transform institutions into communities. When we honor the innate ability of each student to learn, and work in teams to support our teachers, we nurture everyone's physical, intellectual, and psychological well-being and create a human environment where all can succeed. We believe that their success will revitalize the community, the culture, and the society we all share.

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About Us

The profound and persistent health and educational inequities in this country require innovative and collaborative solutions. Far too many communities suffer from poor outcomes due to an absence of supports and resources, or "opportunity structures," that enable children and families to thrive, such as quality schools, accessible health care, and economic opportunity. It is the leadership charge of the public sector to address these inequities by carefully targeting resources and supporting the voices of young people and their families. The Center for Healthy Schools and Communities is part of Alameda County Health Care Services Agency's answer to that charge – working across sectors to build School Health Initiatives that ensure all youth graduate from high school healthy and ready for college and careers.

School Health Works

CHSC's School Health Works website offers resources and tools for health and education leaders to build school health initiatives that transform public systems and support all children to thrive.