LEARNING ENVIRONMENT SURVEY (LES) THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This report information provides a user-friendly compilation of the theoretical framework research that set the stage for the development of the survey domains and constructs. It also provides the end-user direction on the importance of the items, what the indicators tell, and evidence-based suggestions for what can be done with the information.

SCHOOL CLIMATE

Overall School Climate

Why is this Important?
A growing body of research shows that a positive school climate – the quality and character of school life - can enhance student well-being and academic achievement. Understanding that a positive school climate is the result of several factors and practices, the collection and analysis of student perceptions, concerns, and needs data can help educators focus on academic and program activities that affect the school climate.[1-2]

What does this indicator tell us?
The Department of Education and the Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools, along with national education advocates, centers and organizations, are setting new standards and benchmarks to promote effective learning environments and school improvement. Items in this section can offer information to asses the overall learning environment in a school or district compared to these national benchmarks.

What can be done?
According to educational researchers, a positive school climate encourages student development and learning that will lead to a productive and satisfying life.[3-5] For students, a healthy school climate should include: 1) values, norms and expectations that support a student feeling socially, emotionally and physically safe; 2) students who are engaged and respected; 3) students who work together with faculty and families to create a shared school vision; 4) teachers who model benefits and satisfaction that can be gained from learning; and 5) a caring school community that contributes to the care of the operations and physical environment of the school.[3]

References articles
1. Berry B, Fuller E. *Cultivate Learning Environments to Accelerate Recruitment and Retention: A Report on Mississippi Teacher Working Conditions*. Hillsborough, NC: Center for Teaching Quality. 2008.
2. Berry B, Fuller E. *Final Report on the 2007 Clark County School District Teaching and Learning Conditions Survey*. Hillsborough, NC: Center for Teaching Quality. 2007.
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Items to report in this section
My school is a good place for me to learn.
I feel like I am part of this school.
My teachers liked their job of teaching students.
Teachers make all students feel like they belong at school.

Teacher and Student Respect
Why is this important?
While there is still relatively little research on the importance of trust, respect, and caring, a growing body of research strongly suggests that these characteristics of relationships among administrators, teachers, parents, and students are critical factors in improving schools.

What does this indicator tell us?
Researchers have found that positive teacher-student relationships improve student outcomes[1,2] – particularly relationships characterized by caring, trust and respect between teachers and students.[3]

What can be done?
Responses to items from the Teacher and Student Respect section of the Learning Environment Survey reveal perceptions about how students view their relationships with teachers. This information can help school administrators determine whether positive relationships are being built that, in turn, can enhance teacher effectiveness and student learning in their schools.

Reference articles
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Items to report in this section
  I trust my teachers.
  Students treat teachers in my school with respect.
  Parents treat teachers in my school with respect.
  Teachers treat one another with respect in my school.
  Teachers treat students with respect.

Student Discipline
Why is this Important?
Classroom disruptions and antisocial behavior of students interfere with learning and school administration. The time taken away from teaching and focused, instead, on student discipline also contributes to teacher stress.[1-2]
What does this indicator tell us?
Discipline issues that are not addressed effectively on the school campus can contribute to poor student, school and community outcomes.[3]
What can be done?
Two research-supported and universal approaches to school discipline are schoolwide positive behavioral supports and social-emotional learning strategies.[1,4,5]
References articles
1. Osher D, Bear G, Sprague J, Doyle W. How we can improve school discipline. Educational Researcher. 2010;39(1):48-58.
2. Kendziora K, Osher D. *Starting to Turn Schools Around: The Academic Outcomesof the Safe Schools, Successful Students Initiative*. Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research. 2009.
3. Conoley JC, Goldstein AP. *School Violence Intervention: A Practical Handbook* (2nd ed.). New York: Guilford. 2004.
4. Sugai G, Horner R H, Gresham F. Behaviorally effective environments. In MR Shinn, HM Walker & G Stoner (eds.). *Interventions for Academic and Behavior Problems II: Preventive and Remedial Approaches.* Bethesda, MD: National Association for School Psychologists. 2002.

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Items to report in this section

Do you get into trouble at school?
To what degree do the following interfere with instruction at your school:
Bullying (verbal, physical, emotional).
Cyber bullying.
Student absences
Fights and other violence.
My principal enforces school rules and backs up my teacher when needed.

School Safety
Why is this important?
Creating a safe school environment is critical for ensuring students' healthy development and academic growth.[1,2]

What does this indicator tell us?
Preventing violence, whether it takes the form of bullying, fights or other acts, is important to developing safety in all corners of the school building and its campus. In recent years, the US Department of Education reports that school violence has decreased significantly.[3] Yet, a needs assessment that identifies what is happening at a school should be the first step in developing programs to address safety concerns.[2]

What can be done?
According to Furlong et al, safe schools develop with purposeful planning and organization through a school safety team. Administrators and educators should consider organizing a safety team of stakeholders who can conduct systematic assessments, create a comprehensive plan, train school staff and target peer victimization such as bullying that pervasively appears at most of our nation's schools.[2]

Reference articles
1.   Resnick MD, Bearman PS, Blume RW et al. Protecting adolescents from harm. Findings from the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health. *JAMA.* 1997;278(19):823-32.
2.   Furlong MJ, Felix ED, Sharkey JD, Larson J. Preventing school violence: a plan for safe an engaging schools. In Jimerson SR, Furlong MJ (eds): *Handbook of School Violence and School Safety: From Research to Practice.* 2006. Mahwah, New Jersey; Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
3.   DeVoe JF, Peter K, Kaufman P, Miller A, Noonan M, Snyder TD, Baum K. *Indicators of School Crime and Safety. 2004*. (NCES 2005-002/NCJ 205290). Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office. 2005.
4.
Items reported in this section
New Scale
 IN MY SCHOOL I FEEL SAFE:
 In the classroom
 In the cafeteria (lunchroom)
 In the halls
 In the bathroom
 In the gym
 On the school bus
 At school events (ballgames, etc.)
 On the playground
 In the parking lot

STUDENT - TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS AT SCHOOL
Why is this Important?
Adult support, belonging to a positive peer group and having a positive school environment are among the factors that increase a student's connectedness to school.[1]

What does this indicator tell us?
Students who do not feel their teachers care about them say that their peers are abusive to them or indicate that teachers' relationships with one another are not positive. They are also less likely to attend school regularly, stay in school until graduation, or have high grades and test scores.[2-5]

What can be done?
The following strategies can help create positive, trusting and caring relationships:
- Provide opportunities for students of all levels to interact, develop friendships, and engage in teamwork.[3,6,7]
- Create opportunities for students to communicate, work, and partner with adults, such as service learning activities and internships.[8]
- Have principals, teachers, and other school staff commit to and model respectful behavior toward each other.[9, 10, 11]
- Encourage staff to build stronger relationships with students who are experiencing academic challenges or social problems, such as bullying.[12]

Reference articles
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4. Rosenfeld LB, Richman JM, Bowen GL. Low social support among at-risk adolescents. *Social Work in Education.* 1998;20:245-260.
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9. Greenberg MT, Kusche CA, Cook ET, Quamma JP. Promoting emotional competence in school-aged children: the effects of the PATHS curriculum. *Development and Psychopathology.* 1995;7:117–136.
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12 .Education Development Center. School Connectedness and Meaningful Student Participation. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education; 2008.

Items to report in this section
  Teacher-to-Student Relationships
    At least one adult in my school really cares about me.
    I can talk to teachers openly and freely about my concerns.
    I can go to a teacher to get help solving problems at home or school.

I have a healthy relationship with at least one adult at my school.
I know that my teachers care about me.
Teachers care about students in this school.
  Teacher Collaboration
Teachers help one another when one of them is feeling overwhelmed.
Our teachers work together to plan classroom activities.
Teachers help make decisions about school policies and activities.

STUDENTS AND LEARNING
Student Engagement
Why is this Important?
A recent review of the literature by Fredricks et al reveals that student engagement behaviors are complex, incorporating the ideas of behavioral, emotional and cognitive engagement.[1] Behavioral engagement draws on the idea of participation, including involvement in academic and social or extracurricular activities. Emotional engagement encompasses positive and negative reactions to teachers, classmates, academics, and school activites. Cognitive engagement draws on the idea of investment, incorporating thoughtfulness and willingness to exert the effort necessary to learn. All forms of student engagement are seen as a means to increase student motivation and achievement and decrease alienation.[1]

What does this indicator tell us?
Researchers also use the term, school connectedness, to define the belief by students that adults and peers in the school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals. School connectedness is important because students are more likely to engage in healthy behaviors and succeed academically when they feel connected to school.[2] For both boys and girls, a lack of school connectedness has been associated with substance use, school absenteeism, early sexual initiation, violence, and risk of unintentional injury (e.g., drinking and driving, not wearing seat belts).[3] Researchers have also found a strong relationship between school connectedness and educational outcomes, including school attendance,[4] staying in school longer,[5] and higher grades and classroom test scores.[6,7] In turn, students who do well academically are less likely to engage in risky behaviors.[8,9]

What can be done?
Examples of research-based approaches adopted by schools to promote student engagement include: positive adult relationships, summer transition programs, contextual learning, after-school programs and internships, connections to employers and work, and truancy reduction efforts.[10] Advocates of school engagement efforts focus on three elements: 1) attendance-strategies to reduce absences and overcome problems linked to student mobility; 2) attachment-establishing positive connections among schools, communities, youth and their families; and 3) achievement-ensuring that students have the tools, credits and resources to complete courses and graduate from high school.[11]

Responses to items from the Student Engagement and Achievement sections of the Learning Environment Survey provide students' perceptions of the level of student engagement, school connectedness and academic achievement. This is one source of information that building- and district level educators can use to evaluate current programs or plan new programs designed to encourage student engagement/connectedness and achievement.

References articles
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10. Philadelphia Youth Network. *Promoting School Engagement for Struggling Students. Research Summary*. March 2009.

11. National Center for School Engagement. *21 Ways to Engage Students in School.* 2007.

Items to report in this section

Do you take part in school sports teams?

Do you take part in school activities such as band, clubs, etc.?

Students have lots of chances to help decide things like class activities and rules.

Most kids don't care about their school grades.

Students at my school care about learning.

Students come to school prepared to learn.

My best friends would rather be somewhere else than in school.

Students at my school have pride in our school.

Thinking back over the past year in school, how often did you:

Enjoy being in school?

Hate being in school?

Try to do your best work in school?

Facilities and Resources

Why is this Important?

Facilities matter. The physical and emotional health of students and teachers depend on the quality of the physical location, which makes establishing safe, healthy buildings essential.[1] Comfortable temperatures also affect student achievement.[1] Emerging research related to classroom lighting shows that it boosts the morale of teachers and students, reduces off-task behavior and improves test scores.[1] Noise levels greatly affect teacher and student performance and cause dissatisfaction.[1] Schools that are associated with less external noise are positively associated with higher student achievement compared to schools that are in noisier environments. Researchers have also found that class size affects student achievement.[2] Results from the notable STAR project in Tennessee have been tested over time and indicate that students in smaller classes vs those in larger classes are more likely to behave better and have better academic achievement.[3]

What does this indicator tell us?

Without adequate facilities and resources, it is extremely difficult to serve large numbers of children with complex needs.[4] Out-dated and dilapidated facilities hinder both the teaching and learning experience in a classroom.[4]

What can be done?

Educators and administrators who make decisions about school facilities will affect the daily performance of the teachers and students who use them. These decisions should be based on budget, available technology, experience with "what works," and the changing needs of the times.[5] Improving the quality of school facilities can

be an expensive undertaking. However, the effects of facility improvement on teacher retention are equal to or greater than those derived from increased costs related to salaries.[6]

References articles
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6. McElroy E. Teacher to teacher: Teachers want what students need. *Teaching PreK.* 2005;8:35(7):6.

Items to report in this section
New scale
  My school is clean and kept in good condition.
  We have plenty of textbooks and other supplies for our lessons.
  My class sizes are too large for me to learn well.

TEACHER INVOLVEMENT
Why is this Important?
Learning environments with low teacher stress, high classroom organization, a safe, organized, and caring culture are related to high student motivation and learning.[1] At the same time, students' beliefs about their abilities are shaped by the way they perceive that the adults in their lives care about them and are involved in their lives.[2] Students need to feel that adults care about them as individuals as well as about their academic achievement.[3-4]

What does this indicator tell us?
Children and adolescents who feel supported by important adults in their lives are more likely to be engaged in school and learning.[5] In addition, student encouragement develops students' inner resources and provides them with courage to make positive choices.[6] Schools based on encouragement attempt to develop social interest, a tendency for people to unite themselves with other human beings and to accomplish their tasks in cooperation with others.[6]

What can be done?
To increase students' sense of belonging and school success, smaller schools may encourage more personal relationships among students and staff and allow for personalized learning.[7-9] Schools can form schools-within-a-school or create multidisciplinary teams of teachers in which a small number of teachers know each student and can ensure that every student has an identified advisor.[10]

Reference articles
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Items reported in this section

Student Encouragement

One or more of my teachers encourages me to achieve more than I ever thought I could.

My teachers tell me that I will be successful in the future.

My teachers notice when I am doing a good job and let me know about it.

Teachers talk to students like me about going to college.

Teachers encourage students to stay in school.

Teachers in our school tell me that it's OK to have my feelings.

Student Support

Students have lots of chances to talk with a teacher one-on-one.

Teachers allow students to say what they really think about school.

Teachers help students cope with stress.

STUDENTS AT HOME AND IN THE COMMUNITY

Why is this important?

Positive youth development theories emphasize the importance of school, family and community in promoting the developmental competencies that young people need to become productive members of society. [1,2] Studies have found youth who are engaged in the community are more likely to thrive.[3,4] And, other studies have found healthy student outcomes were more apparent when a strong family-school partnership was emphasized.[5]

What does this indicator tell us?

Researchers agree that the social environments that affect youth have an impact on a student's long-term success. Data from Students at Home and in the Community section of the Learning Environment Survey can suggest the types of change that need to occur at the individual, family and community levels.

What can be done?

Educators and administrators should support youth development programs that assure that each student has a sustained relationship with at least one committed adult[2] and encourage students to be actively involved in community and family life.[3]

References articles

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2. Lerner RM, Lerner JV, Almerigi JB, et al. Positive youth development, participation in community youth development programs, and community contributions of fifth-grade adolescents: findings from the first wave of the 4-H study of positive youth development. *J of Early Adolesc.* 2005;25:17-71.
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4. Sherrod L, Flanagan C, Youniss J. (guest eds.) Growing into citizenship: Multiple pathways and diverse influence [Special Issue]. *Applied Developmental Science*, *6.* 2002; 264–272.

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Items to report in this section
Community Activities
    Do you take part in community activities such as scouts, recreational teams, youth clubs, etc.?

    Do you attend church, synagogue, etc.?
Discipline and Rules at Home
    Do your parents set clear rules for you?
    Do your parents punish you when you break the rules?
Trouble in the Community
    Have you been in trouble with the police?
    Do you take part in gang activities?

STUDENT ALCOHOL, TOBACCO AND OTHER DRUG USE
Why is this important?
Illegal drug use continues to be a persistent problem facing the youth of America. While efforts to improve child and adolescent health have focused on health risk behaviors, research suggests that increasing protective factors and reducing risk factors in a community may be more successful in improving student health and educational outcomes.[1]

What does this indicator tell us?
An adolescent who uses intoxicants is not only at high risk of becoming drug dependent but is also at an increased risk of dropping out of school, getting involved in crime, attempting suicide, or becoming involved in an assortment of unacceptable behaviors. Studies have found that schools whose students perceived that they had caring, supportive interpersonal relationships and had influence in the classroom reported significantly lower average student drug use and delinquency.[2,3]

What can be done?
The prevention of adolescent drug and alcohol use and related behaviors is most likely to occur when students feel connected to their community and have been provided tools to avoid harmful behaviors. Successful outcomes have been found not only when a sense of community is fostered but also when educators, parents and others teach youth refusal and resistance skills, including how to recognize social influences to engage in problem behaviors, identify consequences of problem behaviors, generate and suggest alternatives, and invite peers to join in those alternative activities.[4-5]

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5. Ellickson PL, Bell RM, McGuigan K. Preventing adolescent drug use: long-term results of a junior high program. *Am J Public Health.* 1993;83(6):856–861.

Items to report in this section
Frequency of Use
Effect of ATOD
Age of First Use

Perceived Harmful Effects of ATOD
Parents' Feelings Toward ATOD Use
Place of Use
Time of Use

OTHER STUDENT BEHAVIORS

Why is this Important?
Research shows a strong relationship between school connectedness and educational outcomes. Violence and absenteeism can disrupt the learning process and have a negative effect on students, the school itself, and the broader community. [1, 2]

What does this indicator tell us?
High levels of student violence, bullying, and absenteeism suggest a low level of school connectedness on the part of students. Parents, teachers, and administrators expect schools to be safe havens of learning. Acts of violence can disrupt the learning process and have a negative effect on students, the school itself, and the broader community.[2] Additionally, research shows that truancy also correlates with drug use and with daytime burglary.[3]

What can be done?
Studies show universal, school-based prevention programs and improved classroom management practices can reduce rates of aggression, violent behavior among students, and absenteeism.[4] Interventions that involve the family, especially those that start early, can have substantial, long-term effects in reducing violent behavior.[5] School efforts to improve the overall environment and to reduce negative outcomes have included improved classroom management practices, promoting cooperative learning techniques, teacher/staffing practices, student monitoring and supervision, and reducing bullying by involving parents/caregivers.[6]

Reference articles
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5. Dahlberg LL, Butchart A. State of the science: violence prevention efforts in developing and developed countries. *Intl J Injury Control and Safety Promotion.* 2005;12(2):93–104.
6. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Best practices of youth violence prevention: a sourcebook for community action (rev). Atlanta (GA): Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control; 2002.

Items to report in this section

Violence
   WHILE AT SCHOOL HAVE YOU (Past Year):
   Carried a handgun?
   Threatened to hurt a student by hitting, slapping or kicking?
   Hurt a student by hitting, slapping or kicking?
   Had a student threaten to hit, slap or kick you?
   Been afraid a student may hurt you?
   Been hurt by a student who hit, slapped or kicked you?
Bullying

This year at school, how many times have:

You been left out of things on purpose by other students, excluded from their group of friends, or completely ignored?

You been called mean names, been made fun of, or been teased in a hurtful way?

Other students told lies or spread false rumors about you?

Other students threatened or forced you to do things you did not want to do?

Other students used the Internet or a cell phone to threaten or embarrass you by posting mean messages or photos of you?

Absenteeism and Suspension

Have you skipped school without your parents' permission in the past year?

Have you changed schools (including changing from elementary to middle or middle to high school) in the past year?

In the past year, have you received an out-of-school suspension?

In the past year, have you received an in-school suspension?

During the LAST FOUR WEEKS, how many whole days have you missed because you skipped or "cut"?

STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH
Why is this Important?
Studies show that student connectedness to school was second in importance, after connectedness to family, as a protective factor against emotional distress, disordered eating, and suicidal ideation and attempts.[1-3]

What does this indicator tell us?
Scores that reveal signs of emotional problems or depression suggest that schools may want to build school communities that allow students to develop emotionally, socially, and mentally, as well as academically. In such school communities, caring, committed adults engage students in learning, foster mutual respect and caring, and meet the personal learning needs of each student. [1, 4, 5]

What can be done?
To address student mental and emotional health concerns, schools can provide opportunities in at least three areas: 1) Teachers could receive professional development on ways to organize and structure the classroom to promote a positive environment;[6] 2) students could be taught the academic, emotional, and social skills necessary to be actively engaged in school as well as participate in opportunities to identify and label their feelings, express their feelings, and assess the intensity of their feelings; [6, 7] and 3) parents could receive training to increase their own skills and competence in areas that will help them be more involved in their children's school life.[8]

Reference articles

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Items to report in this section
  Emotional Problems
    Have you thought about committing suicide?
    My emotions cause problems in my life at school.
  Mental Health Index 5
    How much of the time during the past month, have you:
    Been a very nervous person?
    Have you felt downhearted and blue?
    Felt so down in the dumps that nothing could cheer you up?
    Been a happy person?
    Felt calm and peaceful?