

Policy and Practice: Why Educators Need to Care

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School climate advocates encourage practitioners to establish and sustain environments most conducive to effective teaching and learning. To accomplish this goal, practitioners need to do more than implement the right strategies in their schools. They need to work together to make school climate an essential element of our education system, and this requires a focus on policy.

So how does a practitioner contribute to ensuring policies are developed that encourage, support and reward quality school climates?

1. A clear, succinct statement of the issue or problem you are trying to resolve
2. A set of definitions that concisely define the key terms used in addressing the issue
3. A quick statement of the issue's importance; i.e., why should a policymaker care?
4. A context section, both on the "big picture" surrounding your issue and your specific state policy context
5. A brief overview of research and data that gives focus and concreteness to the issue
6. Links or references to the most relevant Web sites or documents
7. Contact information, i.e., how does a policymaker get in touch with you?

These steps may appear simple and intuitive, but they are critically important to establish a policy agenda and achieve your goal to secure policy support for quality school climates. It is also important to realize that the steps above are the first stage to success and that they are more positively considered when the following conditions are met.

1. Accurate assessment of the problem situation, and the public and political will to address the problem;
2. Recognition and understanding of the issues by a critical mass of the public and policymakers;
3. Committed leadership in the form of an influential person or small group within the state;
4. Appropriate repertoire of policy recommendations geared to the specific social, political and economic context;
5. Strong support from key stakeholder groups for specific policy options;
6. Communication strategy that develops strong public awareness; and
7. Accurate information and frank assessment of policy options and proposals during the policy and implementation process.

To learn more and read a series of recommendations for policymakers, practice leaders, and teacher educators, read the School Climate Challenge

(http://www.csee.net/climate/aboutcsee/school_climate_challenge.pdf)

Advancing a policy agenda is a complex task, but necessary to ensure sustainability of quality school climates. Remember that policy is "the process of deciding who gets what, when, where and how." And if we want school climate to be an essential element of school and accountability systems we must ensure there are supportive policies that encourage, support and reward it.

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