Transforming School Climate:
A School Climate Improvement Model, Implementation Strategy and Tools to Support the Process

Public schools face a daunting but essential challenge: to insure that that every child has access to a quality school experience that supports their capacity to learn and develop in healthy ways. Over the last three decades, research has shown that school environment and climate is a major contributor to student achievement and success. Therefore, the National School Climate Center (formerly, the Center for Social And Emotion Education) has designed and implemented a School Climate Reform process that includes three components: (i) a school climate improvement model, (ii) an implementation strategy and (iii) a set of policy resources and practice tools designed to support capacity building and sustainable school climate reform. This model, strategy and tools grow out of our work with schools, districts, and State Departments of Education as well as the work and experience of the National School Climate Council (www.schoolclimate.org/about/council.php).

The goal of this school climate reform process is to support coordinated prosocial education, risk prevention and health-mental health efforts that promote positive youth development, student achievement and the "whole village" learning and working together to support the whole child.

I. The School Climate Improvement Model: The *School Climate Improvement Model* (SCIM) is a data-informed, five-stage school improvement process that engages students, parents and school personnel in addressing a series of research-based tasks and challenges that define the democratically informed process of (1) planning and preparation for the next phase of school improvement; (2) assessing school climate; (3) engaging all members of the school community in understanding the evaluation findings and action planning; (4) implementing the action plan; and, (5) beginning the cycle anew. Each of these stages is characterized by a series of tasks and challenges for which implementing schools build capacity during an initial period of project support for SCIM implementation. Appendix A outlines the tasks and challenges that define each of the five stags of the process. (For information about how each task is research-based, please write to Jonthancohen@schoolcliamte.org).

The *School Climate Implementation Road Map* (see below) and, in an overlapping manner, the *School Climate Resource Center* are resources that will support educators, school-based mental health professionals and parents/guardians understanding how to address and master these tasks and challenges.

II. Implementation Strategy: There are several aspects that define our suggested implementation strategy:
- ❖ <u>Roles and responsibilities</u>: Successful implementation efforts are grounded in clear and specific understandings that leads to a formal agreement and a signed contract that delineates roles and responsibilities for district leaders (from Central office and school boards), district level instructional leaders, building leaders, classroom leaders, parent leaders and the outside professional development staff. (For detailed information about our suggested roles and responsibilities, please write to jonathancohen@schoolcliamte.org.)
- ❖ <u>Assessing readiness for the school climate improvement process</u>: We have developed a school climate reform readiness index that builds on a number of past measures of readiness

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and focuses on the six tasks that shape the first stage of the school climate improvement process: planning and preparation. We are beginning to pilot this tool now.

❖ Promoting capacity building from 'day one' of the process: We are developing a School Climate Resource Center (SCRC). For details about the SCRC, see below under "Tools". One of the core resource here will be a growing number of learning modules that have been designed to support local groups of educators, administrators, parents/guardians and school based mental health professional working together in *study groups* to learn about a given aspect of the school climate reform process and/or social, emotional and civic learning. In addition, the SCRC includes a social network designed to support educators being "teachers and learners" together: understanding challenges and sharing best practices.

❖ Face to face Professional Development: Professional development (PD) needs will vary depending on existing expertise within the school and/or the district. In general, we recommend that school climate improvement efforts begin with a two-day institute for leadership teams from the schools involved. If a group of local consultants will be involved with this effort and have not developed expertise in school climate reform and social, emotional and civic education, we recommend an initial three day institute for this group of facilitators/consultants.

On a building level, we recommend that for the first two years, a professional development expert in this area spend roughly three days a month in each school. When a district and/or a cluster of schools are working together we recommend intermittent cluster meetings for: (i) school climate coordinators; (ii) principals; and, (iii) superintendents as well annual "tuning and planning" meetings to learn about and respond to "lessons learned".

III. Tools That Support School Climate Reform: This school climate reform process is distinctive in both the demonstrated impact of the support materials and the inclusive democratic process through which these resources are applied to unique local needs. Our Center and the National School Climate Council have developed the following policy, measurement and school improvement tools to support the school climate model and implementation process:

• *National School Climate Standards*: *Benchmarks to promote effective teaching, learning and Comprehensive school improvement* (www.schoolclimate.org/climate/standards.php) Our Center and the National School Climate Council developed School Climate Standards to Support schools, districts, and states in effectively aligning education policy with practice. The school climate improvement model is designed to support K-12 schools in actualizing these standards. Over the next six months, we will develop a series of district as well as state level "examples of school climate policies" that districts and/or states may adopt or adapt.

• *The School Climate Guide for District Policymakers and Educational Leaders* –This guide is designed to support superintendents and school board leaders in understanding how important and possible it is to measure and improve school climate. (To download this Guide see: www.schoolclimate.org/climate/process.php). The National School Board Association has endorsed this Guide.

• *School Climate Implementation Road Map: Promoting Democratically Informed School Communities and the Continuous Process of School Climate Improvement*. This Road Map is organized around a series of tasks and challenges that define each of the five stages of the school climate improvement process. The Road Map includes information, guidelines and most importantly, tools designed to support school leaders and community members addressing these tasks and challenges. (To learn more about this Road Map, see: www.schoolclimate.org/climate/process.php)

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• *The School Climate Resource Center* (SCRC): A web-based portal designed to support capacity building and sustainable school climate reform. A beta version of the SCRC will be launched in May and the site will officially launch on September 1, 2011. The SCRC is an interactive, web-based portal designed to support capacity building and sustainable school climate improvement efforts. The SCRC will include:

- ✓ *A School Climate Implementation Road Map*: Information about the tasks and challenges that shape the improvement process as well as guidelines and tools (protocals or learning activities) designed to support teams addressing these tasks;
- ✓ *Learning modules*: Modules designed to support local study groups of educators understanding and being able to address the tasks that shape the improvement process as well as how to further pro-social instructional efforts;
- ✓ *Social forum*: A forum designed to support school personnel and parents learning from one another about common barriers and best practices;
- ✓ *School climate standards:* A section about the standards and a growing number of measurer options and evidence-based strategies designed to actualize the indicators that define the five national school climate standards.
- ✓ *General information about school climate:* Summaries of research, policy, measurement tools and practice guidelines.

• *Comprehensive School Climate Inventory* (CSCI) – *Comprehensive School Climate Inventory* (CSCI) – The CSCI is one of the most recognized and comprehensive school climate measures today that assesses to what extent students', parents' and school personnel feel safe, "connected' and engaged in school life. Developed over nine years of research and field-testing, the CSCI is a scientifically sound survey tool that thousands of schools, districts, networks of schools and several State Departments of Education (Ohio and Iowa) have used. A recent comparative study of 102 school climate surveys revealed that the CSCI was one of only three that met the American Psychological Associations criteria for being a reliable and valid school climate survey (http://gradworks.umi.com/33/88/3388261.html). And, a recent 2011 independent evaluation by Social Development Research Group (University of Washington) of 72 (i) social emotional learning measures and (ii) school climate surveys for middle schools reported that ten met their criteria for being reliable and valid. The CSCI was one of these ten measures and the only school climate measure that was recommended. The U.S. Department of Education's Safe and Supportive Schools Technical Assistance Center also recognizes the CSCI as a reliable and valid measurement tool. The CSCI is yoked to a web-based portal system that supports school teams to effectively administer the survey, and use the resulting data as a springboard for school improvement efforts. (www.schoolclimate.org/programs/csci.php).

• *Breaking the Bully-Victim-Bystander Tool Kit: Creating a climate for safety and responsibility* – The single most common school climate findings that we have discovered in our work with thousands of schools is that although the adults believe that social and physical safety is a "mild" and sometimes "moderately severe problem," students consistently rate this a "severe problem." As a result, we have synthesized research from a number of research-based prevention efforts (e.g. Olweus; Slaby; and, Twemlow) and developed a school climate improvement framework and six step implication process that can be integrated into schools existing risk prevention and health promotion efforts. This framework is a robust school-wide effort to prevent bully-victim behavior and promote learning that supports "upstander" behavior. It is organized around a series of modules that support school leaders and school communities in understanding what a school looks like that has developed this programmatic effort; a series of team building exercises that build trust and collaborative working relationships: the foundation for effective school improvement efforts; a six step implementation process; and, scores of activities that support sustainability. (To learn more about this Road Map, see:

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www.schoolclimate.org/climate/process.php.) A core dimension of this effort focuses on student engagement and leadership: our BullyBust program.

• *BulllyBust*: This is a nationwide bully prevention awareness and advocacy campaign designed to reduce bullying in our schools and support students leading efforts to transform the school culture of bystanders to a culture of upstanders: socially responsible students and adults who recognize and respond appropriately to mean and cruel behavior. Over 1000 schools have become members of local "upstander alliances". www.schoolclimate.org/BulllyBust/

• *National School Climate Council*: Our work is informed and often carried out in partnership with members of the National School Climate Council: A group of policy and practice leaders commited to narrowing the gap between school climate research, policy and practice (www.schoolclimate.org/climate/council.php)

Additional and related publications:
Cohen, J. (2006). Social, Eemotional, Eethical and Aacademic Eeducation: Creating a Cclimate for Llearning, Pparticipation in Ddemocracy and Wwell-Bbeing. *Harvard Educational Review*, Vol. 76, No. 2, Summer, pg 201-237. (www.hepg.org/her/abstract/8)

Cohen, J., Shapiro, L, & Fisher, M. (2006). Finding the Heart of Your School: Using School Climate Data to Create a Climate for Learning. *Principal Leadership*, Vol. 7, 4, pages 26-32.

Cohen, J., Pickeral, T., & McCloskey, M. (2008). The Cchallenge of Aassessing Sschool Cclimate. [Online article]. *Educational Leadership*, 66 (4). (Available on: www.ascd.org/publications/educational_leadership/dec08/vol66/num04/toc.aspx)
• Reprinted in *The Educational Digest* (2009), April 2009, Vol. 74, No 8, pages 45-48 (www.eddigest.com)
• Reprinted in the *Marshall Memo*, a newsletter distributed to 18,000 school leaders (www.marshallmemo.com).
• Reprinted by the Pennsylvania Department of Education and the Governor's Institute, June 2009.

Cohen, J,. McCabe, E.M, Michelli, N.M & Pickeral, T. (2009). School Climate: Research, Policy, Teacher Education and Practice. *Teachers College Record,* Volume 111: Issue 1: pp. 180-213. (Available on: http://www.tcrecord.org/Content.asp?ContentId=15220)

Cohen, J., Pickeral, T., & Levine, P. (2010). The Foundation for Democracy: Social, Eemotional, Eethical, Ccognitive Sskills and Ddispositions in K-12 Sschools. *Inter-American Journal of Education for Democracy*, Vol. 3. No. 1, pg. 74-97 (http://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/ried/)

Cohen, J. (2010). The Nnew Sstandards of Learning. *Principal Leadership*, Vol. 10, No. 1, pages 28-32

National School Climate Council (2007). *The School Climate Challenge: Narrowing the gap between school climate research and school climate policy, practice guidelines and teacher education polic*y. On: www.schoolclimate.org/climate/policy.php/

Appendix A
The School Climate Improvement Process:

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**Research support and information about best practices that support the tasks/challenges
that define each of the five SC Improvement stages**
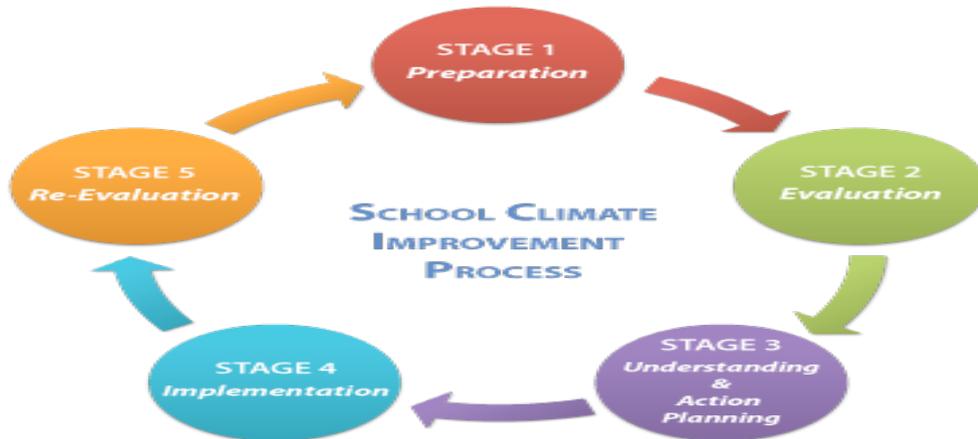
Tasks and Challenges That Shape the Five Stage School Climate Improvement Process

Stage One: Preparation and Planning
• Forming a representative SC improvement leadership team and establishing ground rules collaboratively.
• Building support and fostering "Buy In" for the school climate improvement process.
• Establishing a "no fault" framework and promoting a culture of trust.
• Ensuring your team has adequate resources to support the process.
• Celebrating successes and building on past efforts
• Reflecting on Stage One work

Stage Two: Evaluation
• Systematically evaluating the school's strengths, needs and weaknesses with any number of school climate as
well as other potential measurement tools
• Developing plans to share evaluation findings with the school community
• Reflecting on our Stage Two work

Stage Three: Understanding the findings, Engagement & developing an action plan
• Understanding the evaluation findings
• Digging into the findings to understand areas of consensus and discrepancy in order to promote learning and
engagement.
• Prioritizing Goals
• Researching best practices and evidence-based instructional and systemic programs and efforts
• Developing an action plan
• Reflecting on Stage Three work

Stage Four: Implementing the Action Plan
• Coordinating evidence-based pedagogic and systemic efforts designed to (a) promote students' social,
emotional and civic as well as intellectual competencies; and (b) improve the school climate by working toward
a safe, caring, participatory and responsive school community.
• The instructional and/or school-wide efforts are instituted with fidelity, monitored and there is an ongoing
attempt to learn from successes and challenges.

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• The adults who teach and learn with students work to further their own social, emotional and civic learning.
• Reflecting on Stage Four work.

Stage Five: Reevaluation and Development of the Next Phase
• Reevaluating the school's strengths and challenges:
• Discovering what has changed and how.
• Discovering what has most helped and hindered further the school climate improvement process:
• Revising plans to improve the school climate.
• Reflecting on Stage Five work

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