

IMPROVING SCHOOL CLIMATE: ADULT RESPONSIBILITY & ROLE MODELING

Minimum Time Required: 45 minutes

NOTE: There is a great deal of content in this particular “chunk.” Not every word under each slide below needs to be memorized, but it needs to be understood by the facilitator so that the essence of the content can be communicated and honor the research.

Slide #2

Read aloud the quote by Haim Ginott – the words have more impact when they are read aloud as opposed to silently. Ask for any reactions and process what is shared.

Slide #3

Tell the group they will be viewing a short video clip and to pay particular attention to the role the teacher has in creating the climate for the students. Explain that the adults seen are the children grown up (filmed at a reunion where they watched the film of themselves as children.)

Process any reactions to the video clip. While we could not morally repeat the experiment the teacher completed, we can learn much from watching the clip. The teacher had a tremendous influence on how the students interacted with each other. Once the students were given permission by the adult to treat each other in a negative way, they did so. The climate was created by the adult.

Slide #4

Allow a moment for the group to reread and reflect on the quote.

Slide #5: Student Success Learning Task

In a small group, sort the provided cards – does the practice listed contribute to student success: Yes or No.

- ▶▶ Provide each group with a set of “Adult Actions” cards. There are 8 cards in the set - do not tell them how many cards are correct.
- ▶▶ Allow time for the groups to discuss and sort the cards. Once the groups have completed the task, process the task together as a large group.
- ▶▶ Without telling the group where the cards go, facilitate a dialogue and find consensus. All of the cards should be in the “Yes” group. If they are not, question the group to guide them in seeing the impact of each card.
- ▶▶ Once consensus has been reached, switch to the next slide. (slide #6) Use the visual to emphasize the impact of adult behavior on student success.
- ▶▶ Question – “Which areas represented on the cards do educators typically get the most training in?” Schools typically provide training in differentiated instruction and effective teaching strategies, but often the other areas are left for teachers to figure out on their own.

Slide #6: Adult Actions and Reactions Determine Student Outcomes

As mentioned, used this slide as a large group visual to process the previous learning task.

Slide #7: Theory of Holistic Accountability

The theory of holistic accountability centers on the notion that adult actions/interactions impact and in essence determine student outcomes. All of the adult actions and interactions should be above reproach and honor the CT Code of Professional Responsibility/NEA Code of Ethics. Often such adult behavior is assumed to be in place and happening. Such assumptions cannot be taken for granted. Direct attention and intervention is required to insure that adults are acting appropriately and are the kind of impeccable role models that students require for optimal learning/student outcomes.

Slide #8: Administrator's Most Difficult Task

If not the most difficult task that administrators have, it has to be among the most difficult. When **adults** are being inappropriate with colleagues, parents/guardians or students, these behaviors must ultimately be confronted, if school climate improvement is sought after in a meaningful way. Administrators must confront inappropriate words, actions, non-verbal interactions as well as any abuses of power including, but not limited to unfair or biased treatment. Far too often, the difficulty of engaging in this kind of confrontation is merely avoided rather than accomplished. It is to this task that we now turn.

Slide #9: The Elephant in the Room

One of, if not the most difficult tasks for administrators to deal with directly is approaching adults in the school (teachers, paraprofessionals, bus drivers, office staff, etc.) who are not treating other adults or students appropriately. Adults set the tone, environment, and guide how instruction and behavior is managed. Lesson plans in hard copy do not reveal how the lesson is conducted.

Slide #10: The Elephant

(Just a nice image)

Slide #11: Comer & Littky (two long standing experts)

Reflect for yourselves:

Whether **ALL** your students feel that they have a significant relationship with a school-based adult; and on:

What percentages of the students you know are fully engaged, experience success, and love learning....

Slide #12: Success for Students in School

The bottom line:

Keeping in mind that perception is reality, how might our students perceive us?

It is essential to remember that the single most important factor determining student perception of success is their belief regarding whether or not their teacher(s) like him/her. Success is not about grades; rather it is about feeling that the student is supported and making progress. A student could be literally failing academically and feel successful in the class because the student perceives the teacher likes him/her. Honestly, it is not humanly possible to like each and every student; some students are “hard to like.” However, it is important that each student *believes* that the teacher likes him/her. We must be “academy award winning actors/actresses.” If it is truly impossible to play this role, it would be better to have that student removed from that teacher’s class, because this is such an important factor. The research behind this quote is cited in The Little Book of Restorative Discipline.

Slide #13: Saving “At Risk” Children

The single most important factor in helping children who are “at risk” in *any way* is the presence in their life of at least one caring adult/mentor...

And, when children who were anticipated to fail (end up engaging in substance abuse, risky sexual behaviors, hurt themselves or others, drop out of school, end up in the juvenile justice system, etc.) come back and let us know that somehow they managed to “beat the odds” and not become a statistic, and we ask how they were able to achieve success, they will inevitably share that there was a special adult in their lives who would not let them fail, supported them when they needed it most and was truly “there” for them. Further questioning will uncover that **More often than not, that caring adult is a teacher or mentor and not a family member...**

Slide #14: Adults: Mentors, Not Friends

Children do not need adults to be friends – they need them to be adults. Adults must guide and mentor students, they must teach them the skills they need to grow into successful adults and provide them with safe, supported opportunities to try these skills out.

Slide #15: Connections Among Children and Adults in School

While we in CT are well above the national average, our numbers are still not high enough. EVERY young person should have an adult in school they can talk to – EVERY child. If we do nothing else to improve our school climate, we must do this.

Slide #16: “Perception is Reality”

Having an adult that is a caring advocate is a high leverage aspect in determining a students’ success. Nationally, only about a quarter to a fifth of students so identify such an adult. In CT because of the targeted attention toward this over the past generation, it may be twice this high, but still leaves at least half of any student population that does not perceive he/she has such an adult in school. Importantly, no matter how much adults think that they are making these kind of connections and relationships, the bottom line is that it is the students’ perception that matters. Students will not seek out an adult if they don’t perceive that it will be productive, helpful, or safe.

Slide #17: Success for Students in School

I think we’ve seen this before... this is SO important, it requires a second look.

Slide #18: The Standard for the Treatment of Others

While the Golden Rule is a great place to start, it is not enough. The Platinum Rule is much better for honoring individuals for who they are – “Treat others the way they wish you would treat them.”

Slide #19: Horton

Another elephant...Horton. Remember what Horton said in Horton Hears a Who – “A person’s a person no matter how small.” We all matter.

Slide #20: Ethical Teaching Methods

As educators, we need to honor the Golden / Platinum Rule consistently in all that we do, with every person we interact with, in all settings.

Slide #21: Student Success II Learning Task

In a small group, prioritize the practices: which contributes most to student success to which contributes least to student success.

- ▶▶ There is no “Right” or “Wrong” order for this task.
- ▶▶ Discussion in the small groups should lead to the conclusion that they are all important and will provide an opportunity to consider the impact of each one individually.
- ▶▶ Allow enough time for groups to come to an order and then process the results. Groups will most likely have different orders for the cards.
- ▶▶ The take away – everything we do as adults contributes to student success. We have a responsibility as adult role models to consider the impact of every action we take.

Slide #22: The Model Revisited

Have participants reflect on this model in light of the cards they just discussed and sorted.

Slide #23: The Responsibility of the Adults in the School

It may or may not be our specific job responsibility as adults to provide supervision, support and guidance for students, but it is our responsibility to manage the issues and seek solutions to issues that move beyond our strict job description not just within our classroom but during their entire school experience.

Every student is our student. Every space is ours to provide direct attention to. As adults we have power, and as Spidey said – “With great power comes great responsibility.”

Slide #24: Who Are the Adults?

When we say “Adults” – we mean ALL adults. Not just administrators. Not just certified staff. Every adult within our school community plays a part in creating a safe & respectful school community. We are all role models. We have obligations to connect with students and foster positive relationships.

Slide #25: Adult Modeling

When we sign on the dotted line to become an educator, we become a role model. The question is not, “Do you want to be a role model, yes or no?”. The question is, “What kind of role model do you want to be?”

Remember, we are role models when we interact with children, we are also role models when we interact with other adults. We are role models for our students. We are role models for other adults in everything that we do.