

Minimum Time Required: 60 minutes

Slide #2: Non-Negotiables

In a small group, consider the following situation: A student has just arrived at school for the day – typical student, typical day. Working from the provided set of non-negotiables, describe your interaction.

- ▶▶ Responses will vary, there may be some confusion.
- ▶▶ If you are strictly following this list, the overall tone of the interaction is negative.
- ▶▶ For some students, this provides a “to do” list – if it’s on the list of rules it’s something to try and get away with or bend.
- ▶▶ There is no room for relationships in this list.

Slide #3: Mapping the Territory

Those who research around school climate/culture disagree about climate and culture being identical concepts or if they are different. For our purposes here, we are going to make a distinction between the two (see below, slide # 7 notes).

Slide #4: Climate / Culture Model

Consider this graphic. As a large group ask for any observations or thoughts. Mention that there are many other kinds of relationships than are written in the center circle, but it was space alone that keeps them from being included. There may be comments about the direction of the arrows. There can be disagreement, but bottom line we believe that it is the climate (relationships) that determine the culture (values, norms, standards, etc.) and not the reverse. Don’t be “hard line” about this. The point is to have thought and reflection and dialogue to get people thinking about these concepts.

Slide #5: Climate / Culture Learning Task

In a small group, consider the Climate / Culture Model. What stands out to you in the model? What do you agree with? What do you question?

Slide #6: Jerome Freiberg Quote

This quote is very revealing in that unless targeted focus is paid to “the way business is conducted” within any school building, it is often a neglected area that impacts and impedes optimal student outcomes/learning.

Slide #7: All About the Quality of Relationships

Culture and climate are often taken to be the same concept. They are not synonymous and, importantly, should be distinguished so that improvement in this wide arena can be achieved.

School Culture

The culture of a school can be defined in two related, albeit distinct ways: as descriptive goals or as positive goals. In both cases, the “culture” of a school is about the wide standards and norms that embrace what the school stands for. So, in the first meaning, a school culture is what is *descriptive* of the school. In other words, when a school community member (student, parent/guardian, faculty/staff member) *describes* what is distinctive of the school, how others might see it or what is characteristic, this would be to understand the school culture *as it is*. For example, it was widely reported in the days after the Columbine High School shooting tragedy, the school supported a “jock” culture, which meant, “sports ruled!” In the words of teachers at Columbine immediately after the rampage, this was confirmed with the additional description of the school as hosting a “culture of homophobia.” This is definitely a *description* and few, if any, would argue that this is what the culture of this or any school *ought* to be. This leads to the second way in which school culture can be articulated.

In the second meaning of the term ‘school culture’, description is not relevant. Instead, the mission or vision of the school is what matters. School culture is not about what the school *is*, but rather *what the school is striving to become*. In twenty-first century

[public] schools, in virtually every school district and school, there is an articulated school mission: a lofty set of goals toward which the district and school is aspiring. In this second meaning of culture, what the school *ought* to be is central. The mission/vision should set the tone for what the school or district hopes *will be* the description and should be working toward becoming reality for each and every school community member.

Most, if not all, schools experience a gap (and often a substantial one) between the *descriptive* sense of school culture and the second sense of school culture as *goal*. The vehicle that is used to close the gap between these two meanings of culture (working toward arriving at the second or *mission* sense) is school *climate*.

School Climate

Simply defined, climate boils down to the nature of the interrelationships among the people in the school community physically, emotionally and intellectually; ***how the people within the school community treat one another*** (adult to adult interactions, adult and student interactions and student to student interactions) through their actions, verbal and non-verbal exchanges, tone of voice and the use or abuse of inherent power advantages. And, having a positive school climate (one where everyone treats one another appropriately) is the ultimate remedy for bullying. And, far too often, “[s]chool climate is ‘much like the air we breathe’ – it tends to go unnoticed until something is seriously wrong.”(Jerome Freiberg, 1998) Climate is the “engine” that functions to close the school culture gap. When school community members treat one another appropriately and with respect, it is possible to have the description of the school culture actually be synonymous with the stated school mission (vision).

Slide #8: Levels of School Climate

What is school climate?

There are four distinct, interwoven, and equally important levels of school climate. All need to be understood and managed if improvement is to be achieved and *respectful* climates are to be realized. These four levels are:

- ▶▶ Personal level of school climate

- ▶▶ Small school group level of school climate
- ▶▶ Wider school level of school climate
- ▶▶ Community level of school climate

Level 1: Personal level of school climate

This level involves both adults and children. It focuses on the way in which individuals interact with one another; how they communicate (verbally and nonverbally). This level includes how individuals solve problems: appropriately, with rational kindness and respect, or inappropriately, by yelling and/or throwing objects for example. There is also the concern with body language, tone of voice, and any other aspects that impact the individual interactions with one another. This may very well be the most difficult level to impact in terms of positive change because it is all about habitual patterns of personal interactions. For the youngest children, up until about the age of 9, changing developing habits is relatively easy, since modeling alone has a significant impact on their behavior. The older the child or adult is, the harder it becomes to alter how individuals treat one another and how they communicate. This is true because changing habits for whom well established patterns have been set becomes an exercise in changing *beliefs* about how one ought to interact with another because having such ideas are the foundation for changing *behaviors*. Modeling is still extremely important as children mature, but modeling alone is insufficient to change behavior. For adults, who are the primary and most critical role models in school, it is important to “hold the mirror up” to yourself and take stock of what and how their modeling is contributing, or not, to positive development.

Level 2: Small school group level of school climate

This second level describes how people behave within classrooms, teams, social development groups, friendship circles, extracurricular activity groups, etc. In general, the most positive school climate occurs at this level. The reasons this is the case have to do with fairly clear understandings about how people interact and treat one another in the group setting. High standards and expectations are generally articulated more clearly for this level than for any other. In other words, adults (teachers, supervisors, coaches, leaders, etc.), lay out the boundaries and rules for how people should treat

and interact with one another with a clarity that is often missing at other levels. Many classrooms do (and should) create class social contracts to establish boundaries. This is evidenced, for example, by the number of “behavior referrals” that are sent to the office for infractions during the school day or detentions or children held in from recess, etc. Although there are instances of misbehavior that do occur in the classroom, school administrators will confirm that the fewest number of problems happen in the small group settings than in other school environments. This is the case because of the more clearly outlined high standards of behavior and treatment as well as holding individuals accountable to follow the rules. The real problems generally occur at the third level.

Level 3: Wider school level of school climate

This level represents the wider school environment which includes all of the places in the school where there tends to be a ratio of fewer adults in supervisory roles to the number of children in those same areas: playgrounds, buses, cafeterias, bathrooms, playing fields, parking lots, hallways, stairwells, and so on. What tends to happen in these areas is that the same high standards and expectations of appropriate treatment among individuals is not nearly as clearly articulated or enforced as they are in the classroom and other small group settings and consequently, this is the level in which the *most* disciplinary action is taken for behavior infractions occur. There are a number of obvious reasons for this. First, typically in average school settings, school communities are comprised of about 90% children and 10% adults. In level three settings, children tend to far out number the adults around them and it is much easier for them to engage in inappropriate and/or disrespectful behaviors without being seen. In a classroom or small group setting (level two), the ratio is more commonly far higher and in a self-contained area, so that it is far less likely that children will have an opportunity to “get away with” misbehavior. More importantly, however, is the fact that it is generally far less common for on-going and time consuming stress be placed on reminding children that the same high standards and expectations for appropriate and respectful behavior that are present in level two settings must move seamlessly into the level three settings. And, without this relentless attention, children will commonly act in ways that they would not even consider in the classroom. Children must be reminded at every opportunity to treat one another no differently and respectful than they are

expected to do in level two environments. Additionally, because there tend to be fewer adult eyes in level three settings, students should be encouraged and supported to monitor themselves and when necessary, share with adults (telling) instances of misbehavior. When this happens, adults must listen to this information seriously, leaving aside any accompanying tone of voice and not assume that it is always “tattling.”

Level 4: Community level of school climate

At this final level, a number of aspects of appropriate treatment and behavior are included. One aspect has to do with how welcoming is the school to people who do not spend most of their time there. When parents or any other constituent enter the school building during the day, how are they greeted? Is the first thing they come in contact with a welcoming sign and/or person, or do they immediately see an impolite directive to go directly to the office and sign in? It is not only possible, but preferable to *welcome* community members into the school and *invite* them to sign in. This sense of feeling welcomed should extend to every inch of the school. Another aspect of this last level pertains to how the individuals in the school, adults and children, treat others once they move beyond school property into community settings. There should be no difference. In other words, children and adults should treat one another with the same high standards that are expected within the school when they are moving and interacting in the community at large. So, whether a person is in school playing on the playground or in recreational settings playing soccer or softball, the rules and expectations are the same. This fourth level also involves what is now known as “family engagement” and “governance councils.” There is a great deal of growth in attention to climate at this level that has yet to be realized.

Slide #9: Non-Negotiables Round Two

In a small group, consider the same situation previously presented – a student has just arrived at school for the day, typical student, typical day.

How does our current list of non-negotiables influence our interactions?

How does the second list of non-negotiables influence the first list?

- ▶▶ The second list puts the relationship before the rule, it provides a reason for the rule that exists.
- ▶▶ The second list is meant to be created and processed together – the discussion provides the foundation for a stronger relationship and more buy-in.
- ▶▶ None of the rules on the first list are negated by the second list – in fact, they are more likely to be followed.
- ▶▶ It is almost impossible to start with the first list and move to the second list. It is much. Much more likely to have a positive climate if you start with the second list – the first list will naturally follow.
- ▶▶ The group often notices that the first set only pertains to the students, but the second set pertains to everyone, adults included.

Slide #10: Climate / Culture Model Revisited

Our first list of non-negotiables can be found imbedded in the outer circle (school culture), our second list is imbedded in the inner circle (school climate). Climate is all about relationships.