

# School Climate

## Why Is It Important?

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**Solutions**  
*to the Dropout Crisis*

# Overview

1. Conditions for learning and school climate reform: Policy and practice trends
2. School climate research: Implications for student learning, graduation rates, and healthy development
3. Where do we need to go and why?
4. School climate improvement models, implementation strategies, resources, and tools



# Conditions for Learning and School Climate Reform: Policy and Practice trends

- A 100 year tradition
- *Definitions:* Climate, Culture, Conditions for Learning and Supportive Learning Environments
- *School Climate Assessment:* A data-driven process that recognizes the student, parents, school personnel and community voice.
- A school improvement strategy that *mobilizes the “whole village”* to support safe, supportive, engaging, helpfully challenging and joyful schools and social, emotional and civic learning
- School climate refers to the quality and character of school life. School climate reflects patterns of people’s experiences of school life and reflects:
  - ✓ norms,
  - ✓ goals,
  - ✓ values,
  - ✓ interpersonal relationships,
  - ✓ teaching and learning,
  - ✓ leadership practices, and
  - ✓ organizational structures\*.

\* National School Climate Council, 2007



# A Positive and Sustained School Climate

An environment that fosters positive youth development and learning necessary for a productive, contributive and satisfying life. This climate includes:

- Norms, values and expectations that support people feeling socially, mentally and physically safe.
- People are engaged and respected.
- Students, families and educators work together to develop, live, and contribute to a shared school vision.
- Educators model and nurture an attitude that emphasizes the benefits of, and satisfaction from learning.
- Each person contributes to the operation of the school and the care of the physical environment\*.

\* National School Climate Council, 2007



# School Climate Dimensions\*

## Safety

- Rules and norms
- Sense of physical safety
- Sense of social-emotional safety

## Relationships

- Respect for diversity
- Social support – adults
- Social support – students
- School connectedness/engagement
- Professional relations

## Teaching and Learning

- Support for learning
- Social emotional and civic learning
- Leadership

## External environment

- Physical surroundings

\* National School Climate Council, 2007



# Policy and Practice Trends

- NCLB: “Supportive Learning Environments” (like “character education”) recognized by not measured.
- Growing interest in school climate reform! Today (2011), 32 states have a school climate policy or state supports in place (up from 27 in 2007). But, only 3 states are required to provide technical assistance and only 8 states provide funding\*
- National School Climate Standards: Benchmarks to promote effective teaching, learning and comprehensive school improvement\*\*
- US DOE’s *Safe and Supportive Schools* (S3) program: Strengths and limitations
  - ✓ Measurement practices
  - ✓ School climate improvement trends

\* Cohen, et. al. (2009); Piscatelli, J & Lee, C. (2011); \*\* National School Climate Council, 2009



# School Climate Standards

1. The school community has a shared vision and plan for promoting, enhancing and sustaining a positive school climate.
2. The school community sets policies specifically promoting (a) the development and sustainability of social, emotional, ethical, civic and intellectual skills, knowledge, dispositions and engagement, and (b) a comprehensive system to address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage students who have become disengaged.



# School Climate Standards

3. The school community's practices are identified, prioritized and supported to (a) promote the learning and positive social, emotional, ethical and civic development of students, (b) enhance engagement in teaching, learning, and school-wide activities; (c) address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage those who have become disengaged; and (d) develop and sustain an appropriate operational infrastructure and capacity building mechanisms for meeting this standard.



# School Climate Standards

4. The school community creates an environment where all members are welcomed, supported, and feel safe in school: socially, emotionally, intellectually and physically.
5. The school community develops meaningful and engaging practices, activities and norms that promote social and civic responsibilities and a commitment to social justice.



# School Climate Research

In a growing body of empirical research over the last thirty years, correlational and experimental findings have shown that positive school climate is associated with and/or predictive of\*:

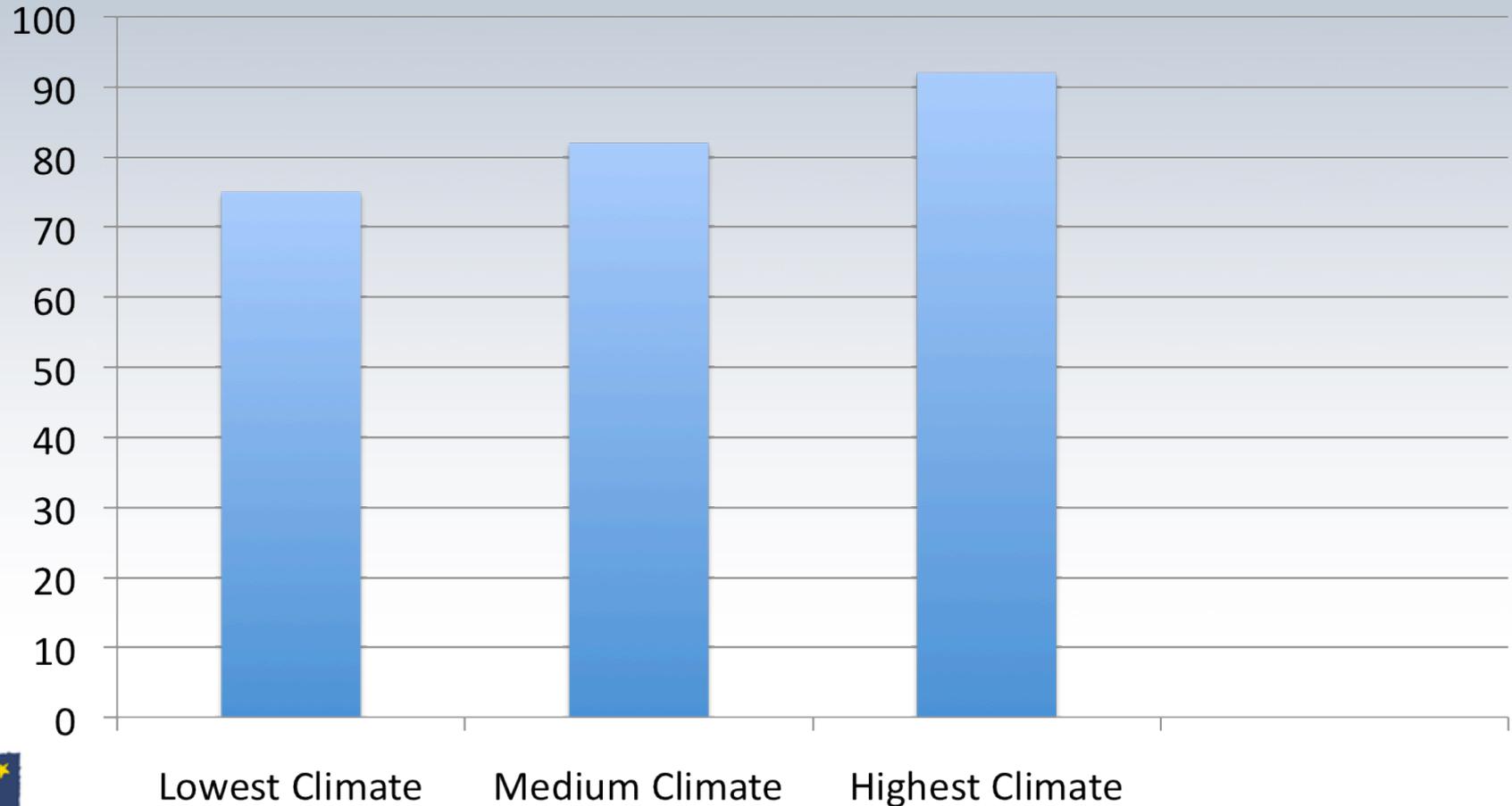
- Increased academic achievement;
- Increased graduation rates\*\*;
- Decrease in disciplinary rates;
- Increased effectiveness of risk prevention and health promotion efforts;
- Increased teacher retention rates.

\* Cohen, McCabe, Michelli & Pickeral, (2009); \*\* Werblow, (2010)



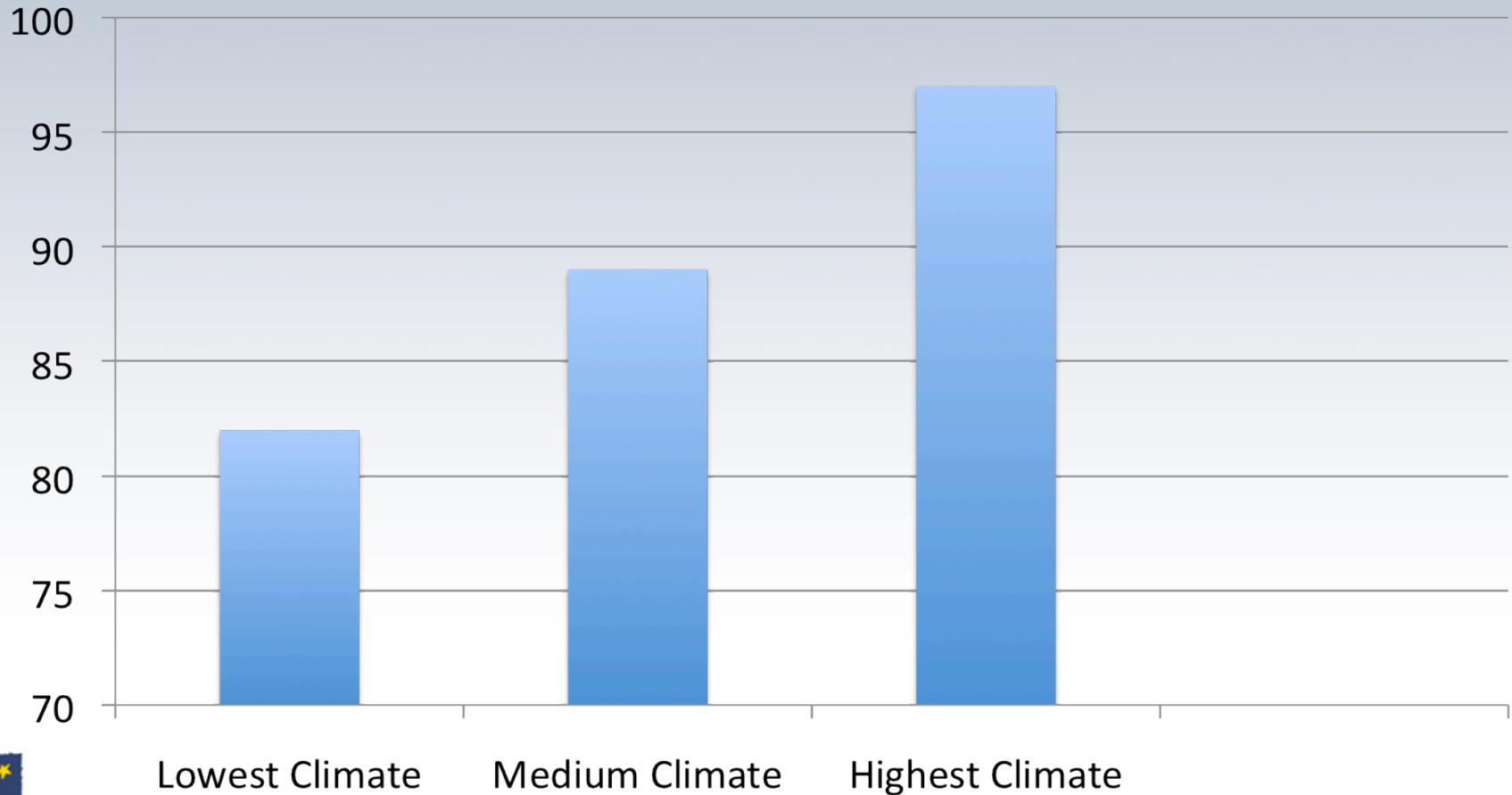
# School Climate & Performance Index Score

(2006-07, Ohio DOE (2008) and the NSCC/CSEE)



# School Climate & Graduation Rates

(2006-07, Ohio DOE (2008) and the NSCC/CSEE)



# Strengths and Limitations of Current School Climate Research

- School climate matters!
- Supporting school connectedness\*
- Aligned with understanding about effective “drivers” of school improvement for all children and “at risk” K-12 students\*\*:
  - (i) Promoting the intrinsic motivation of students and adults to learn and work together;
  - (ii) Engaging students and educators;
  - (iii) Inspire collective and collaborative team work;
  - (iv) Affecting all educators and students.

But,

- Lack of common definitions, metrics, improvement models and implementation strategies

\* CDC, (2009); Cohen, et. al. (2009); Osterman,( 2000). \*\* Bryk, et. al. (2002 & 2010);Comer, (2005); Fullan, (2011); Mourshed, Chijioke & Barber,(2010); Tucker, (2011)



# Why school climate reform is most important for students who are “at risk” for dropping out of school

- Recognizing the social, emotional, ethical, and civic as well as intellectual needs and aspects of learning and teaching
- Promoting student engagement and leadership
- Promoting intrinsic motivation to learn and work together to create a safer, more supportive, engaging, helpfully challenging and harmonious school community
- It does take the whole village! School climate reform as a comprehensive engagement strategy
- Inspiring collective or team work: students and adults learning and teaching together



# Where do we need to go?

## Recognizing and mobilizing the whole village to support the whole child

- Many models and implementation strategies: more often implicit than explicit
- More experimental as well as ethnographic research that studies the process of:
  - ✓ “Igniting” the process of learning and working together: Promoting the intrinsic motivation of everyone in the community
  - ✓ Formative assessments: Where are we now? And, what can and do we need to focus on now?
  - ✓ Promoting more collaborative and trusting adult relations
  - ✓ Understanding and engaging in the tasks and challenges that shape the school climate improvement process
  - ✓ Capacity building: Engaging educators and parent leaders in Professional Learning Communities and continuous learning.



Cohen, 2007; Cohen & Pickeral, 2009

\* Devine &

# School Climate Improvement Models, Implementation Strategies, Resources, and Tools

The National School Climate Center school climate improvement model and implementation strategy\*: Integrating research and best practices from school reform, social emotional learning, character education, community schools, risk prevention and health/mental health promotion efforts:

## School climate improvement model

- ✓ A five-stage school climate improvement process: Tasks and challenges

## Implementation strategy

- ✓ Roles and responsibilities
- ✓ Formative assessments and “igniting” the process of students, parents, school personnel and community members learning and working together
- ✓ Capacity building

\* Cohen, (2006); Cohen & Pickeral, (2009); Devine & Cohen, (2007);



# A Five-Stage School Climate Improvement Process (Cont.)



# The Five Stage School Climate Improvement Process

## Tasks and Challenges

- 1) Planning for the next phase of improvement
  - Creating a representative leadership team
  - Fostering buy in: Understandings, vision, vocabulary and engagement!
  - Leadership Commitment & Dedicated Planning Team
  - Moving from blame/distrust to a more “no fault”/trusting culture
  - Celebrating success and building on past efforts
  - Community Engagement/Outreach
- 2) School climate assessment/evaluation
  - Measurement Process
  - Interpretation of Results



# The Five Stage School Climate Improvement Process (Cont.)

- 3) Understanding findings and action planning
  - Understanding and Digging Deeper
  - Prioritizing goals
  - Researching instructional and/or school wide improvement programmatic efforts
  - Action Planning: Benchmarks & Timelines
- 4) Implementing the action plan: Instructional & school-wide
- 5) Beginning the cycle anew



# An Implementation Strategy

- Roles and responsibilities
- Readiness and formative assessments
- Face-to-face Professional Development
- Promoting capacity building from “day one” of the process: Study groups and mobilizing teachers motivation to learn
- Engagement



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