

ideas for parents

Easy Ways to Build Assets for and with Your Child

FAST FACTS

ASSET #5: Caring School Climate

Youth are more likely to grow up healthy when their school provides a caring, encouraging environment.

29%
of youth surveyed by Search Institute have this asset in their lives.*

What Are Assets?

Assets are 40 values, experiences, and qualities that help kids succeed. "Caring school climate" is one of six support assets.

* Based on Search Institute surveys of 217,277 6th- to 12th-grade youth throughout the United States during the 1999-2000 school year.

School Climate: What's the Forecast?

Most people like the weather to be warm and sunny, and most students like their school climate to be the same. According to Quest International, an educator training organization, "School climate is the feel of a school—the mood and atmosphere you sense the moment you enter a school building." You want a climate that promotes learning. A cold, dreary school climate isn't one your son or daughter would want to be in for very long.

What causes a school to have a warm, positive climate? A lot depends on how people interact.

When your son or daughter comes into contact with a lot of different people during the day, that affects the school's climate. It may start out with the way the bus driver treats your child, or the way other students interact with her or him. Then there could be an interaction with a school secretary, counselor, teacher, coach, cook, custodian, and so on. The way people feel about the school will affect how they treat each other, and vice versa.

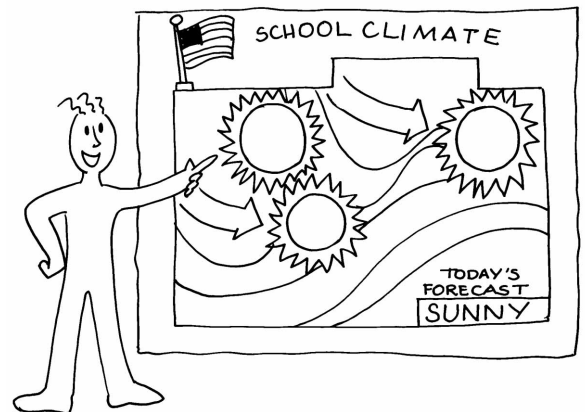
One person's attitude can make a significant difference. At one school in Minneapolis, Minnesota, everybody could count on the school secretary. She always had a smile on her



Time to Advocate

Three ways to improve the climate at your child's school:

1. **Learn as much as you can about your child's school, the policies, the politics, and the general mood.**
2. **Get involved with a parent-teacher organization. Create a spirit of cooperation. Teachers, administrators, volunteers, and parents all want the best for kids.**
3. **Talk with your child about her or his thoughts and feelings about the school. Encourage your child to share those opinions with others through student government, a letter to the school newspaper, or simply talking to a teacher or administrator.**



face and knew everyone by name. In fact, students often stopped by to see her because she always helped them feel so valued and cared for. When she retired, she received over 1,000 flowers one from each student.

That school rarely had a rainy day in its climate.

talk together

Questions to discuss with your child:

- If you were to compare your school's atmosphere to the weather, how would you describe it most of the time?
- What do you think causes your school's climate to get better at times? Worse?
- How do you think our family could improve your school's climate?

Changing Climate through Caring



How can your child help warm up the climate in her or his school? One way is for your child to do her or his part to help others feel cared about and supported. Following are several ideas he or she can try:

- Learn the names of as many students as possible. Whenever you see them, whether in school or in the community, smile and greet them by name.
- Reach out to students who seem isolated or lonely—those who don't seem to belong to any groups or cliques. Be their friend.
- Stick up for students who are bullied by others.
- Make an effort to get to know your teachers.
- Get involved in programs that build assets.

Making School a Positive Place



The most important factor in a caring school climate is a positive learning environment in which all students feel challenged and supported to succeed, and develop caring relationships with teachers.

How can you make a difference? Try some of these suggestions for helping teachers do their job:

- Help your child get off to a good start each day. Give her or him a hug before leaving. Say how proud you are of her or him.
- Give your child healthy snacks and lunch to take to school.
- Have a family discussion each week on a topic that comes out of your child's experiences or assignments at school.
- Be partners with your child's teachers and keep in touch regularly.

Quick Tip:
Make a difference.
Volunteer in your
child's school
today.

More Help for Parents

To encourage your school to have an asset-building climate, we recommend **Great Places to Learn** by Neal Starkman, Peter C. Scales, and Clay Roberts. (Published by Search Institute, www.search-institute.org; 800-888-7828.)

FINAL WORD

**"A positive school climate needs to be nurtured; it doesn't happen automatically."
—Quest International**

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