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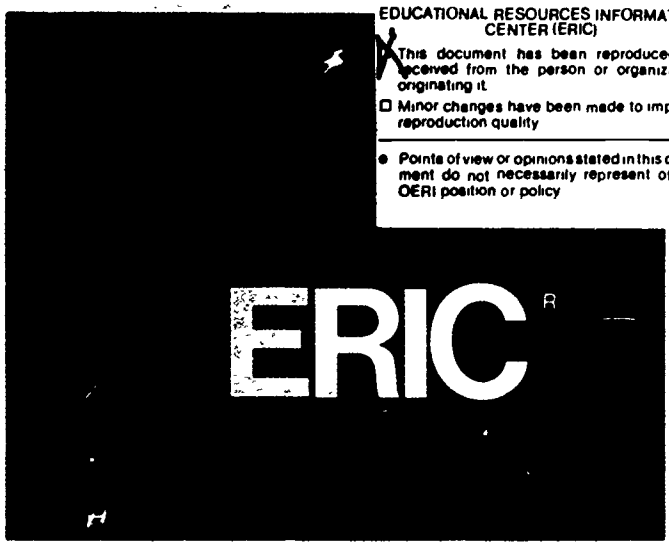
ABSTRACT

In this annotated bibliography of 12 publications on school climate are 3 entries that suggest specific ways to improve the school climate and 1 that outlines leadership techniques for principals. Ways to assess school climate are covered by a review of assessment instruments, a discussion of the measurement issues, a description of major assessment tests, and an approach to using assessments. The remaining annotations include a model of school environment, the role of external influences on school climate, an overview of the variables that comprise school climate, and a review of the research on the topic. (MLF)



Number 93, March 1988

The Best of ERIC presents annotations of ERIC literature on important topics in educational management.

The selections are intended to give educators easy access to the most significant and useful information available from ERIC. Because of space limitations, the items listed should be viewed as representative, rather than exhaustive, of literature meeting those criteria.

Materials were selected for inclusion from the ERIC catalogs *Resources in Education (RIE)* and *Current Index to Journals in Education (CIJE)*.

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Improving School Climate

1 **Anderson, Carolyn S.** "The Search for School Climate: A Review of the Research." *Review of Educational Research* 52, 3 (Fall 1982): 368-420. EJ 273 690.

This comprehensive and well-organized review is an ideal starting point for administrators who seek a lucid, orderly assessment of the key issues, controversies, and findings of the school climate literature.

Anderson begins by reviewing the rationale for the concept of school climate and the controversies over its validity and desirability as a focus for research. She first traces the methodologies used in the search for school climate to earlier organizational environment studies in business, college, and classroom settings. Then she lists the major instruments for measuring school climate, along with their antecedents and derivatives. The debate about school climate is related to differences among researchers in theory base, variables (and their hypothesized interrelationships), unit of measurement choices, and validity of subjective and qualitative data.

Despite these differences, certain common conclusions about school climate do emerge from the literature—recurrent variables that are perceived (by participants or outsiders) to be a part of school climate and that are consistently associated with positive outcomes. These variables most consistently correlated with a good school climate and high student achievement are those pertaining to rapport between administrators and teachers. Also important are staff participation in decision-making, good communication (characterized by trust, respect, and care), and strong administrative leadership in instruction.

2 **Arter, Judith A.** *Assessing School and Classroom Climate: A Consumer's Guide*. Portland, Oregon: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, April 1987. 83 pages. ED number not yet assigned.

Intended to assist educators in evaluating their school and classroom climates, this guide reviews and describes the major tests and surveys that can be used to assess climate. To make the reviews more understandable, Arter defines educational climate terms and discusses some of the issues surrounding school climate assessment.

School climate improvement, the guide assumes, is a continuous, long-range process that is inseparable in practice from improvement of other factors associated with school effectiveness: leadership, quality of instruction, parent involvement, the use of data for decision-making, and an environment conducive to learning. Accordingly, Arter first categorizes the instruments selected for review according to the psychosocial and physical characteristics they measure. Arter also tells how to select a climate assessment instrument and then lists researchers and research projects, books and articles, and training materials.

After this excellent introduction, the main body of the guide consists of an appendix containing the individual reviews of educational climate assessment instruments. These reviews are grouped as follows: (1) classroom climate instruments; (2) school climate instruments; (3) other educational climate instruments; (4) higher education climate instruments; (5) naturalistic, case study, and observational approaches; and (6) classroom interaction analysis. Other appendices provide a summary table of instrument characteristics, a reference list of organizations and climate research reviews, and a checklist for selecting a measure of educational climate.

3 **Coppedge, Floyd L., and Lois Exendine.** "Improving School Climate by Expanding the Dimensions of Reinforcement." *NASSP Bulletin* 71, 497 (March 1987): 102-10. EJ 352 259.

School climate improvement, according to the authors of this article, begins at the classroom level; healthy classroom environments are the crucial components of a healthy school climate.

School and classroom climates can best be improved, say Coppedge and Exendine, by implementing behavioral reinforcement strategies at the classroom level. Rather than relying on the conventional, simplistic strategies of verbal and written praise for students, teachers should strive to create a classroom climate that in itself is reinforcing. This environment should involve all students, provide intrinsic rather than extrinsic rewards, and promote active learning in a stimulating, scholarly atmosphere.

In such an environment, students can receive positive reinforcement from (1) a rich and stimulating curriculum, (2) teaching methods that allow students to actively assimilate and use new information, (3) a firm but humane system of classroom management that rewards good behavior as well as curbing disruption, (4) human relations skills that emphasize mutual respect, and (5) consistent, supportive evaluation that provides useful feedback to students without stigmatizing them.

Establishing such a supportive environment is not easy, the authors acknowledge, but principals can help by providing teacher supervision and inservice training to encourage these kinds of reinforcement practices in classrooms. The resulting enhancement of classroom climates will carry over to the school as a whole.

4 **Donaldson, Gordon A., Jr., and Theodore Coladarci.** *Using School Climate Assessments: An Approach to Collaborative School Improvement.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Washington, DC, April 20-24, 1987. 10 pages. ED 286 277

School climate studies necessarily rely on subjective data—the perceptions of various school constituencies about the school in which they work. Donaldson and Coladarci have seized upon this inherent subjectivity to develop a recursive school improvement model based on collaborative self-assessment. The authors' intervention in four rural Maine school districts had three objectives: (1) to make school members aware of the importance and utility of systematic data collection; (2) to help school members see their perceptions of school life as significant sources of data about school life; and (3) to help school members understand the complex ways in which their views, if consciously changed, can interact with other members' views and attitudes to change the quality of school life for everyone.

First, school staff were consulted to determine aspects of school climate they regarded as most problematic; on the basis of this, a locally specific set of school climate instruments was developed for the district, which administered these surveys to teachers, students, and parents, analyzed the results, and prepared a report. Next, school staff members were convened to review the results. The consultants showed them how to approach the data, looking for themes, contradictions, and possible policy implications. Thereafter, school members met to discuss findings and to devise a plan of action for climate improvement.

From this project in which researchers assisted four school districts, three "lessons" were learned. First, staff and citizens are more receptive to survey results when they have had a hand in developing the instruments. Second, most were eager to read and discuss their own school climate assessments; motivation was not a problem. Third, the staff development that results from the process itself may produce greater climate improvement than the specific action strategies that the program produced.

5 **Duttweiler, Patricia C.** "A Practical School-Based Method for Improving the School Learning Climate." *Spectrum* 4, 3 (Summer 1986). 19-22. EJ 341 143.

This article describes the Learning Climate Improvement Process designed by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) to be used by local schools in identifying aspects of their school learning climate in need of improvement. The program uses a format that involves all members of the school community in addressing the perceived problems.

The Learning Climate Inventory, an instrument designed by SEDL, is first used to gather and measure the perceptions of a school's climate held by administrators, teachers, other school staff, students, and parents. The inventory consists of items derived from research on effective schools that focus on the following areas: (1) collaborative problem-solving and decision-making, (2) instructional leadership, (3) high expectations for students, (4) developing a safe and orderly environment, (5) curriculum and instructional practices, (6) monitoring school progress, and (7) involving parents and the community.

Results of this inventory are then presented to the assembled members of the school community, who identify those aspects of the learning climate that were perceived as satisfactory and those in need of improvement. Members of the school community decide how many of these aspects can be reasonably addressed in a school improvement program and then form committees to develop an action plan for each identified problem. The action plan should clearly identify the problem, set specific goals and a timeline for reaching those goals, and establish evaluation procedures for determining when each goal has been reached.

6 **Freiberg, H. Jerome, and Stephanie Knight.** "External Influences on School Climate." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Washington, DC, April 20-24, 1987. 19 pages. ED 286 275.

In response to recent mandates for educational reform and resulting pressure from taxpayers, many states and school districts have adopted career ladders, master teacher programs, and other "pay for performance" approaches, in hopes of encouraging competent people to remain in teaching. According to Freiberg and Knight, however, such competitive reward systems are likely to reduce cooperation and mutual support among teachers and thus increase their isolation in the classroom. Instead of competitive salary scales, teachers need incentives to improve their classroom performance and to cooperate in achieving this goal.

The authors describe the efforts of one rural school district in southeastern Texas to develop and implement a nonmonetary professional incentive program with the goal of encouraging cooperation and communication among teachers. Based on a survey of teachers' preferences, the plan offered a series of grants for special collaborative projects, summer institutes, and conferences or workshops.

As a followup, 151 teachers from this district were administered a questionnaire in April 1985 and April 1986, respectively. The questionnaire consisted of a Likert-type scale addressing six dimensions of school climate: leadership qualities of the principal, teacher-peer relations, parent-teacher relations, student-teacher interpersonal relations, student-teacher instructionally related interactions, and school building and facilities. Additional scales sought to determine how teachers viewed the effects of a recently enacted statewide career ladder program on school climate.

Although teachers were vehemently opposed to the state career ladder program, its effects on school climate in this district were negligible. The authors speculate that the professional incentive program acted as a buffer to the adverse effects of the Texas Career Ladder by improving teachers' rapport with their principal and with their students. The implication, say Freiberg and Knight, is that school districts can offset the alienating effects of state career ladder programs by setting up their own incentives for cooperation.

7 **Furtwengler, Willis J.** "Reaching Success through Involvement—Implementation Strategy for Creating and Maintaining Effective Schools." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, April 17, 1986. 13 pages. ED 274 085.

Furtwengler analyzes the theoretical bases and practical applications of an educational change strategy, Reaching Success through Involvement (RSI), which has yielded promising results in making schools more effective. The model has been implemented in fourteen schools (in five states) for the past eight years, and it has recently been adopted by Tennessee to be implemented in ten more schools.

According to the theory behind RSI, educational organizations are dynamic social systems, and a strong learning culture can be created by purposeful changes in social agreements among mem-

bers of the systems. Students are viewed as members of the organization, rather than clients, and should therefore participate in changing the culture and climate of the school.

The RSI strategy proceeds according to eleven steps. These include formation of a teachers' planning council and a student leadership group, collection and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data about school culture and learning productivity, establishment of task forces to address specific problems, and documentation of progress throughout the year.

A data analysis instrument, "The School Report Card," is used to provide ratings for three components of school productivity (academic achievement, socialized behavior, and public image), six components of school culture (structure and order, social acceptance, mission and vision, academic emphasis, and problem-solving); and school climate.

Both the qualitative and quantitative data from the study support the conclusion that the RSI strategy of student involvement is a promising way to solve many problems in schools.

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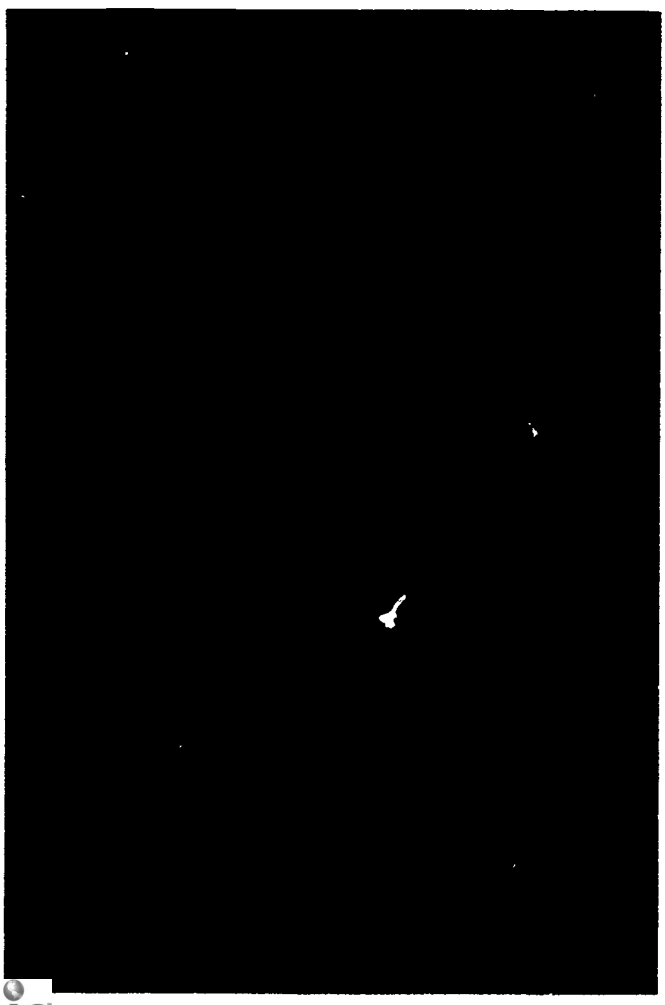
8 **Gottfredson, Denise C., and others.** *School Climate Assessment Instruments: A Review.* Baltimore, Maryland: Center for Social Organization of Schools, The Johns Hopkins University, July 1986. 255 pages. ED 278 702.

The recent wave of enthusiasm for school improvement has resulted in unprecedented demand from school districts for practical assessment tools, resulting in an array of instruments with unexamined psychometric properties, formats, and reporting procedures. Gottfredson and colleagues review seventy school effectiveness instruments from twenty-two school improvement projects around the country. They present indepth reviews of twenty of the best instruments (in terms of sound psychometric development). The instruments are mostly surveys but do include some interview formats, and all grade levels are covered.



In these reviews, *climate* is broadly defined to include all school characteristics associated with the effective schools literature. Some components of these instruments, however, would also fall into narrower, psychosocial definitions of climate. Review criteria include the school characteristics assessed, ease of use, and the reliability and validity of the various scales included in each assessment instrument.

Based on their research, the authors single out a small group of instruments as having the most promise for yielding reliable and valid measures of important school characteristics. Among assessments relying on teachers and other adult school staff, the authors commend the Connecticut State Department of Education School Effectiveness Questionnaire and Interview.

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9 **Keefe, James W., and others.** "School Climate: Clear Definitions and a Model for a Larger Setting." *NASSP Bulletin* 69, 484 (November 1985): 70-77. EJ 326 631.

This article sets forth a model of the school environment developed by NASSP's Task Force on Effective School Climate. This interactive model of the school environment encompasses a wide range of inputs and outputs to the process of school improvement. At the broadest level, the model takes into account the larger cultural setting in which education occurs by considering societal ideologies and actual structures of dominance (for instance, the predominant influence of socioeconomic status). Keefe and his colleagues next consider three areas of influence on school climate at the district/community level: (1) local beliefs, attitudes and values; (2) organizational characteristics (including the physical environment, the formal organization, and the personal relationships and behavioral norms); and (3) characteristics of groups and individuals, including socioeconomic status, racial makeup and location, along with expectations of school personnel, job performance of staff and administrators, job satisfaction, and parent and community satisfaction and support. Outcomes of schooling are defined in terms of student satisfaction and productivity.

School climate, then, is conceived of as the mediating variable between such inputs and student outcomes. Defined as the "relatively enduring pattern of shared perceptions about the characteristics of an organization and its members," the climate of a school is influenced by both the organizational and cultural inputs on one hand, and the student outcomes on the other. At the same time, climate has a reciprocal shaping influence on organizational characteristics, teacher satisfaction, and performance, and also on student satisfaction and achievement.

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10 **Kelley, Edgar A.** *Improving School Climate: Leadership Techniques for Principals.* Reston, Virginia: National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1980. 76 pages. ED 202 120

Although it was published eight years ago, this little book is still a concise and illuminating resource for those who seek a clear grasp of the concepts and procedures involved in assessing and improving the climate of a school. Because people act according to the expectations that others hold for their behavior, the central theme of the book is that effective schools are characterized by (1) a shared belief that high levels of learning and achievement are possible for all students, and (2) teachers who are strongly committed to high expectations for students, and who accept responsibility for achieving stated goals.

Building on this premise, Kelley first discusses the process of assessing the current climate of a school, then he recommends a

list of assessment tools selected for their theoretical validity, reliability, and feasibility. Next, he provides an orderly twenty-two step procedure to facilitate planning for climate development. The following two chapters are devoted to leadership for climate improvement and the role of the principal in establishing and maintaining a productive climate. In the latter part of the book, he provides suggestions for improving climate at the classroom level, and, finally, for improving the climate of home-school relations.

Kelley's advice for principals is particularly valuable, since "the principal, more than any other individual, is responsible for a school's climate." He concludes that the principal's major role in exercising leadership for climate improvement is "to provide the staff with the information, the expectations, the support, and the supervision so that the staff is able to serve as mediators and transmitters of the principal's expectations." In the process, principals must continuously guard against feelings of complacency or self-validating futility.

11 **O'Neal, Donna H., and others.** *Improving School Climate. Monographs in Education.* Athens, Georgia. Bureau of Educational Services, University of Georgia, Spring 1987. 72 pages. ED 282 335.

School climate is such a complex phenomenon that it is hard for a principal to know where to start in assessing the climate of a school or in taking steps to improve it. O'Neal and her colleagues have therefore provided this practical overview of the key variables that comprise school climate, along with two instruments to assess current levels of climate—at the building and school system levels, respectively—and a step-by-step process for climate improvement.

Based on a thorough review of the research, the authors identify several variables common to schools that have a good climate. The first, and most important, is strong administrative leadership, manifested through regular inservice training, clear formulation of school policies and procedures, formal and informal observation of classroom instruction, administrator visibility, and a school-wide emphasis on academic achievement. Other essential characteristics include a safe and well-ordered learning environment, focus on instruction, high expectations, quality classroom instruction with effective monitoring of student progress, high morale, and good home-school relations.

The authors then present concise and practical tips for fostering each of these attributes. For example, "high morale can be displayed by (a) listening to staff ideas and creating opportunities for staff to express ideas, and (b) establishing school-wide goals and programs through staff input and participation."

The remainder of the monograph is devoted to specific strategies for assessing and improving school climate. First, the authors explain how to administer and score two instruments: a Diagnostic Inventory for School Climate (DISC) and a companion Diagnostic Inventory for School System Climate (DISSC). Then they propose a detailed seven-stage process model for climate improvement. First, O'Neal and her colleagues recommend that a "climate improvement team" comprised of administrators, teachers, students, and parents be appointed to plan, direct, and evaluate an improvement plan. This team then assesses areas in need of improvement, determines goals, develops and implements the plan, evaluates its progress, and uses the results to revise and reinstitute the plan in a cyclical process.

12 **Stockard, Jean.** *Measures of School Climate: Needed Improvements Suggested by a Review of the Organizational Literature.* Eugene, Oregon: Center for Educational Policy and Management, College of Education, University of Oregon, December 1985. 17 pages. ED 267 498.

This monograph is a selective critical review of school and organizational climate literature. Stockard's primary purposes are, first, to identify measurement issues that should be taken into account by researchers who use the notion of school climate, and, second, to identify specific concerns that future researchers need to address—concerns that have been glossed over or neglected. The strength of this paper lies in its recognition from the outset of the arbitrary and metaphorical nature of the "climate" construct, and of the consequent need for careful inquiry into the validity and reliability of the criteria adopted for measuring whatever combination of attributes we choose to call "climate."

The first section is a brief review of typical school climate studies that illustrate some of the measurement issues. Two approaches to measuring school climate depend on school members' perceptions of their environment. In contrast, a third set of measures uses outside observers to assess the climate of the school with either rigorous quantitative observations or qualitative, subjective assessments. In the second section, Stockard broadens her focus to address conceptual distinctions and research issues raised in the more fully developed literature on organizational climate—issues that may be helpful to those studying school climate.

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