

INTEGRATING SCHOOL CLIMATE: MENTAL HEALTH PROMOTION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

NASP Annual Convention
February 2024
New Orleans, LA

The logo for SIMPLE features the word "SIMPLE" in a bold, green, sans-serif font. The letter "I" is replaced by a yellow pencil with a black eraser and a grey lead tip pointing downwards.

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AGENDA

- Introductions and Learning Objectives
- Overview of Project SIMPLE
- Findings from Pilot Year: Mental Health Screening and School Climate Associations
- Implications for school climate and inclusion of students with disabilities

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RAISE YOUR HAND/ MOVE YOUR BODY / SHOUT OUT IF YOU ARE...

- A school psychologist working in schools
- Employed in a high school
- Employed in a primary setting
- Have a partially implemented MTSS
- Have fully implemented MTSS
- Working in higher education (e.g., trainer of school psychologists)
- Are a graduate student in school psychology or related field
- Working at school district level across multiple schools
- Working at the state (or federal) level across multiple districts
- Community provider or agency working in schools

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PRESENTERS FOR TODAY: WHO WE ARE



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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Participants of this session will:

1. Describe intersectional approaches for addressing school climate and mental health risk in students with disabilities
2. Identify associations between school climate perceptions and mental health for students with disabilities
3. Develop skills and strategies to support mental health promotion and school climate prevention for students with disabilities

YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH AS A PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE

- Mental health conditions affect 59% of youth at some point, and 22% with severe impairment (Merikangas et al., 2010)
- Less than half of youth with mental health conditions receive treatment (Costello et al., 2014)
- COVID-19 exacerbated existing problems with mental health care system (Office of the Surgeon General, 2021)
 - Rates of anxiety and depression doubled
 - Increase in ER visits for suicidal ideation/behaviors

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SCHOOL-WIDE INCLUSIVE MENTAL HEALTH
PROMOTION FOR LEARNING AND COORDINATED
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



Office of Special Education Programs
U.S. Department of Education

James Sinclair, PhD
Research Associate, PI

Geovanna Rodriguez, PhD
Assistant Professor, Co – PI

Katherine Bromley, PhD
Research Associate, Co-PI

Susan Stadelman, MS
PhD Candidate, Project Coordinator

**TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND
DISSEMINATION TO IMPROVE SERVICES
AND RESULTS FOR CHILDREN WITH
DISABILITIES PROGRAM –**

*Model Demonstration Projects to Enhance
Social, Emotional, and Mental Health
Services and Supports for Middle or High
School Youth with and at Risk for Disabilities*

(CFDA 84.326M, Absolute Priority 2)

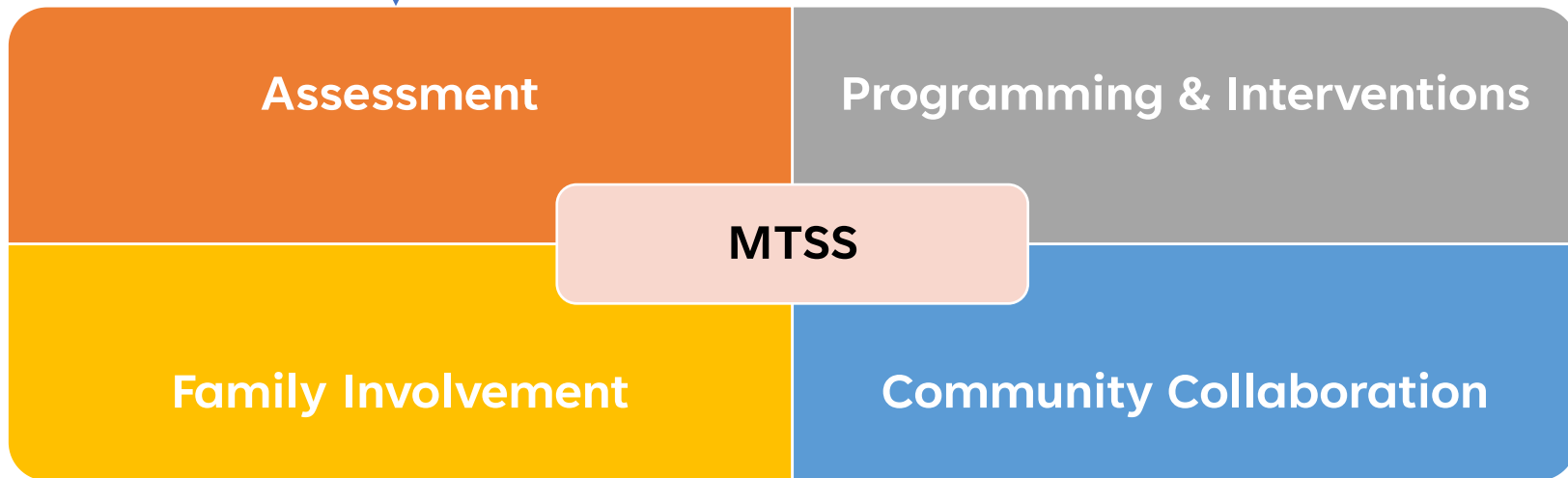
2021 – 2026 - 3 awards



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SCHOOL-WIDE INCLUSIVE MENTAL HEALTH
PROMOTION FOR LEARNING AND COORDINATED
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Major Aim: To collaboratively build a multi-tiered system of mental health service delivery within Special Education Programs in high schools across four key components areas

Phase 1: Pilot Year



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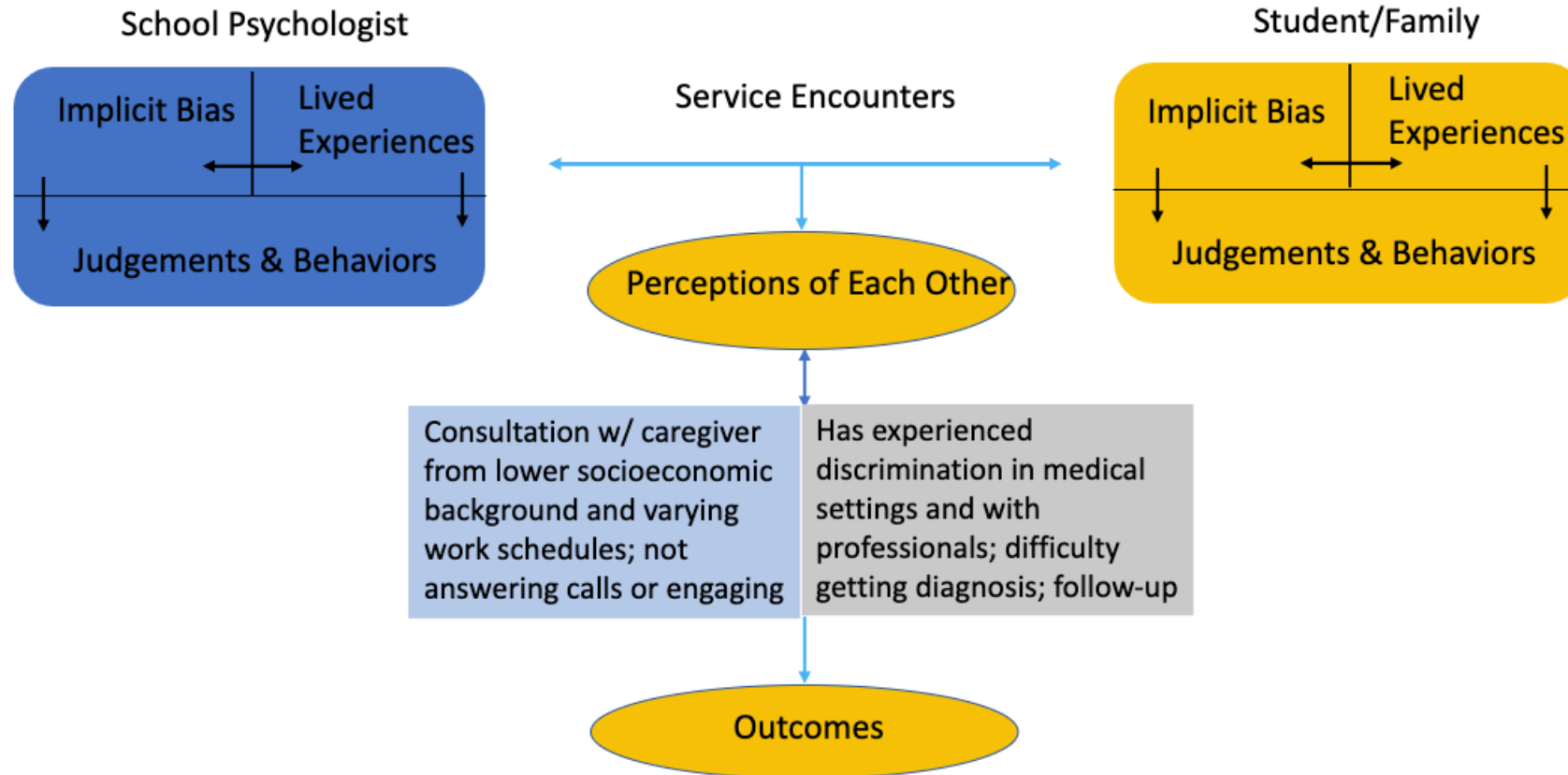
INTERSECTIONAL APPROACHES TO COLLABORATION WITH FAMILIES AND PROFESSIONALS

How can you use your cultural and lived experiences of power and privilege to connect with, build trust, and collaborate effectively with families and communities we serve?

- Seeing school collaboration as a cultural opportunity rather than a point of cultural disconnect
 - Important pillar in multicultural orientations in which an individual's **beliefs, values**, or other aspects of the **individual's cultural identity** or **disability identity** could be explored.
- Cultural humility helps us reduce bias and identify and understand aspects of **our identity** that intersect with **experiences of disability, power, and privilege**

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EXAMINING ROLE OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST IN DIRECT SERVICE ENCOUNTERS WITH FAMILIES/TEAMS



Adapted from: Conceptual model of the influence of implicit bias of illness control

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WITHIN MTSS WHERE DO WE
SEE STUDENTS WITH
DISABILITIES BEING
SUPPORTED?

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THINK-PAIR-SHARE

- What are the main obstacles for high school implementation of school-based mental health MTSS right now in your context for the general population of students?
 - If you're not at a high school, think about your current setting.
- How about students with disabilities in special education?

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COMMON OBSTACLES REPORTED

- Lack of leadership teams District level & Building level
- Staff turnover in vulnerable populations
- Teacher buy-in
- Different models and approaches to mental health services in schools
- Specialized roles within the district
- Staff and student wellness

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School Context:

- 3 suburban high schools in Oregon (two comprehensive high schools, one alternative setting)
- Focused on special education and students with disabilities
- No previous systematic implementation of mental health screening or programming for students with disabilities



A CASE FOR INTEGRATING SCHOOL CLIMATE ASSESSMENT AS PART OF UNIVERSAL SCREENING

- School climate is an important systemic variable associated with many desirable academic, behavior, and social-emotional outcomes
- Positive perceptions of school climate are linked to student wellness (e.g., internalizing mental health challenges)
- Students with disabilities are found to report more negative perceptions of school climate when compared to students without disabilities (e.g., EBD)
 - Limited research has examined the intersection of student well-being and school climate across the spectrum of disabilities

CURRENT STUDY: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

While research has investigated linkages between school climate and mental health more generally, very little research has focused on the experiences of high school students with disabilities, much less on how perceptions of climate and student identity influence psychological well-being.

Research Question 1 : What are the associations between students' perceptions of school climate and domains of psychological well-being across two time points?

Research Question 2: Do student characteristics (e.g., race/ethnicity, grade, gender identification, and sexual orientation) influence school climate and mental health outcomes?

DISABILITY CATEGORIES REPRESENTED AMONG OUR STUDENTS

Students with an **existing IEP** were eligible for screening unless their caregivers or youth opted out of participation

IDEA Disability Category	(N= 179)
Autism	11.7% (21)
Deaf and Hard of Hearing	1.1% (2)
Emotional Behavior Disability	2.2% (4)
Intellectual Disability	6.1% (11)
Other Health Impairment	17.3% (31)
Specific Learning Disability	50.3% (90)
Speech Language Impairment	1.1% (2)
Missing	10.1% (18)
Percent Inclusion (> 80%)	76.0%

9th- 36.3% (65)
10th- 24.0% (43)
11th- 21.2% (38)
12th- 17.9% (32)

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ADDITIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS OF OUR STUDENTS

Racial/Ethnic Makeup	(N= 179)
American Indian or Alaska Native	5.6% (10)
Asian or Asian American	0.6% (1)
Black or African American	5.0% (9)
Middle Eastern or North African	1.7% (3)
White	52.5% (94)
Latine	33.5% (60)
Multiple	7.8% (14)
Other	13.4% (24)
Prefer Not to Answer	10.1% (18)
Missing	4.5% (8)

ELL status- 18.4%
Low SES*- 52.5%
Percent of Days Attended= 81.9%
Mean GPA= 2.44 (SD = 0.84)

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METHODS: PROCEDURE

- Data was collected from two participating high schools during pilot year of implementation (2022-2023 AY)
 - Mental health screening was conducted during two time-points– **Time 1 (January-February)** and **Time 2 (May-June)**
- The research team worked with high school teams and special education case managers to identify blocks of time during instruction to administer the survey. Screening were conducted in-person during student advisory periods and took between 10-12 minutes to complete.
 - School teams were given options of evidence-based screeners that were validated for use with students with disabilities and selected screeners based on contextual fit with their student population and needs.

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MEASURES

- **Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale (BERS; Epstein, Pierce, & Lambert, 2020)**- A strengths-based rating scale designed to measure behavioral and emotional functioning of youth (52 items)
 - **Interpersonal Strength:** Student's ability to control their emotions or behaviors in social situations
 - **Family Involvement:** Student's participation in and relationship with family
 - **Intrapersonal Strength:** Broad sense of a student's outlook on their competence and accomplishments
 - **School Functioning:** Student's competence in school and classroom tasks
 - **Affective Strength:** Student's ability to accept affection from others and express feelings toward others
- **Georgia Brief School Climate Inventory (GaBSCI; White et al., 2014)**- A 9-item measure of student perceptions of school climate including the extent to which students feel supported by their school.

ASSOCIATIONS AMONG STUDY VARIABLES

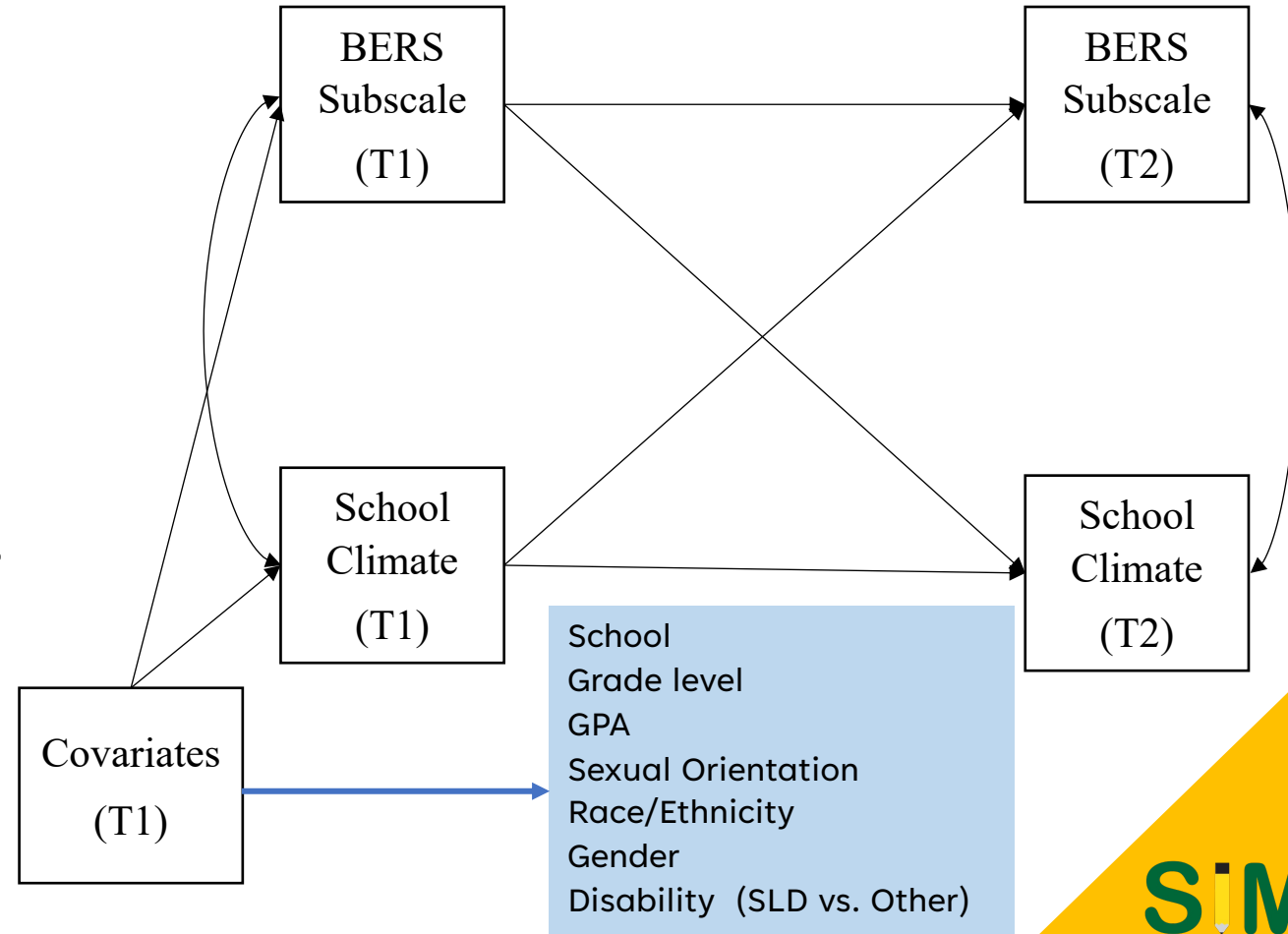
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Interpersonal Strengths T1	-											
2. Interpersonal Strengths T2	0.62	-										
3. Family Involvement T1	0.49	0.29 ^b	-									
4. Family Involvement T2	0.23 ^a	0.55	0.56	-								
5. Intrapersonal Strengths T1	0.48	0.27 ^a	0.60	0.37	-							
6. Intrapersonal Strengths T2	0.40	0.65	0.45	0.65	0.52	-						
7. School Functioning T1	0.43	0.17 ^{ns}	0.44	0.22 ^a	0.38	0.27 ^a	-					
8. School Functioning T2	0.33 ^b	0.53	0.33 ^b	0.58	0.18 ^{ns}	0.59	0.59	-				
9. Affective Strengths T1	0.49	0.21 ^a	0.48	0.24 ^a	0.65	0.32	0.38	0.21 ^a	-			
10. Affective Strengths T2	0.38	0.57	0.36	0.55	0.44	0.71	0.28 ^b	0.45	0.47	-		
11. School Climate T1	0.41	0.26 ^a	0.50	0.33 ^b	0.38	0.23 ^a	0.49	0.38	0.40	0.22 ^a	-	
12. School Climate T2	0.24 ^a	0.47	0.28 ^b	0.49	0.17 ^{ns}	0.42	0.26 ^a	0.52	0.19 ^{ns}	0.41	0.65	-

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Note. All correlations are significant at $< .001$ unless otherwise indicated. ^a $p < .05$, ^b $p < .01$, ^{ns} $p > .05$.

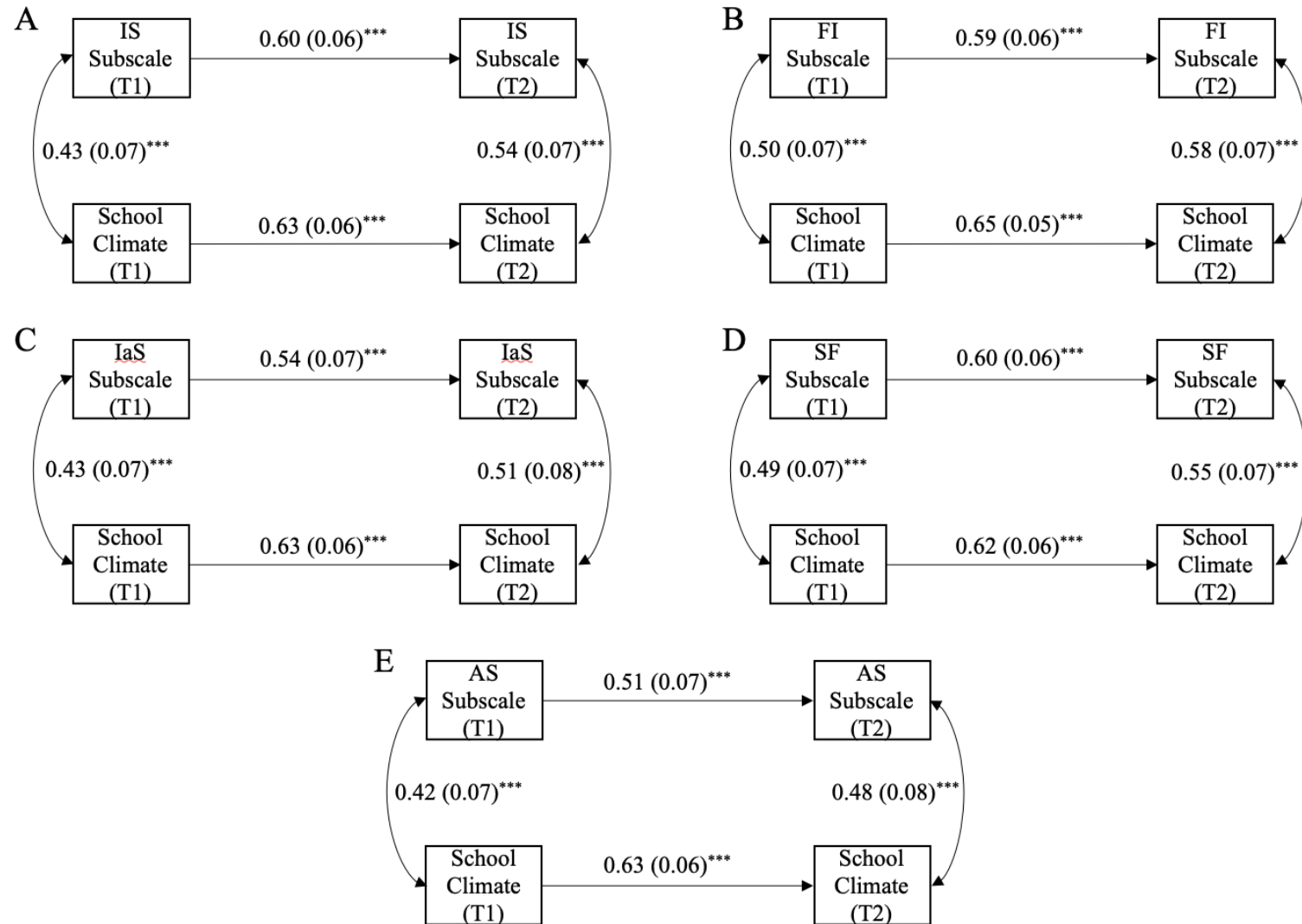
PROPOSED CROSS-LAGGED MODEL

- Allowed us to explore time-ordered associations between psychological well-being and school climate
- Control for correlations within Time 1 and Time 2 assessments and autoregressive effects



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FINAL PATH MODELS: STANDARDIZED ESTIMATES



A: Interpersonal Strength (IS)
 B: Family Involvement (FI)
 C: Intrapersonal Strength (IaS)
 D: School Functioning (SF)
 E: Affective Strength (AS)

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

- No evidence of bidirectionality between school climate and domains of psychological well-being; however, perceptions of school climate might serve as a proxy for identifying students with behavioral mental health needs
 - Stability within and between constructs across school year
- Given the winter and spring data collection points, the shorter screening window may not have given us extra information
 - Future research is needed to identify optimal screening windows and time in between assessments to infer causal relations between school climate and student well-being

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LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY...

- We did not measure multi-informant perceptions of school climate, which could be quite important to assess school functioning
- Students did not answer questions about school organization or factors related to the institutional environment (e.g., physical resources, school safety, instructional spaces)
 - Previous research has indicated this domain may be difficult for students to accurately report on (Wang & Degol, 2016)
- No comparison group and limited sample sizes within groups

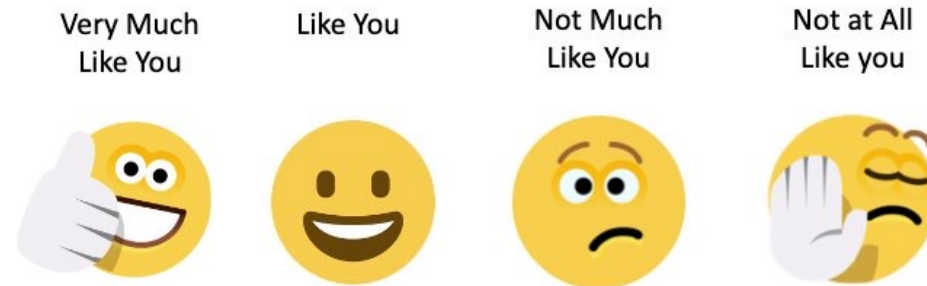
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Considerations Moving Forward with Screening

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CONSIDERATIONS WITH SCREENING...

- Electronic screening using Google forms (efficient, easy data analysis)
- Use of visual supports
- Different methods of accessibility (especially for students with more intensive support needs)
- Reading items verbatim or chunking screening into smaller sessions (advisory periods allowed more flexibility)
- Alternative response options (e.g., “Prefer not to answer”)
- Parent notification and opt-out process established in advance of screenings to secure passive consent



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CONSIDERATIONS WITH BERS

Items related to...

Familial involvement

- Some students may not have siblings
- Home structures may look different for some students

Religion

- Some students may not identify with a religion

Physical or emotional contact with others

- Some students may not enjoy physical touch
- Some students may be more selective with whom they interact

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QUESTIONS WE ASK TEAMS TO PROMOTE EQUITABLE SCREENING PRACTICES

- Is equity the main driver behind your team's implementation? How is your team centering equity in universal screening efforts?
- Has your team engaged stakeholder input (e.g., student, family, community voice) on screening priorities and needs?
- What are the cultural backgrounds and needs of your students and how can you select measures that culturally match with your student populations needs/beliefs?
- If your team uses this measure, will ALL students be able to access it? Does this measure come in multiple languages? Are there different options and modalities available for participating? If not, how will we plan for translation? How will we plan for universal accessibility?
- **Are there other questions that you all ask when you keep equity in mind?**

Implications for School Climate and Inclusion of Students with Disabilities

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SCHOOL CLIMATE

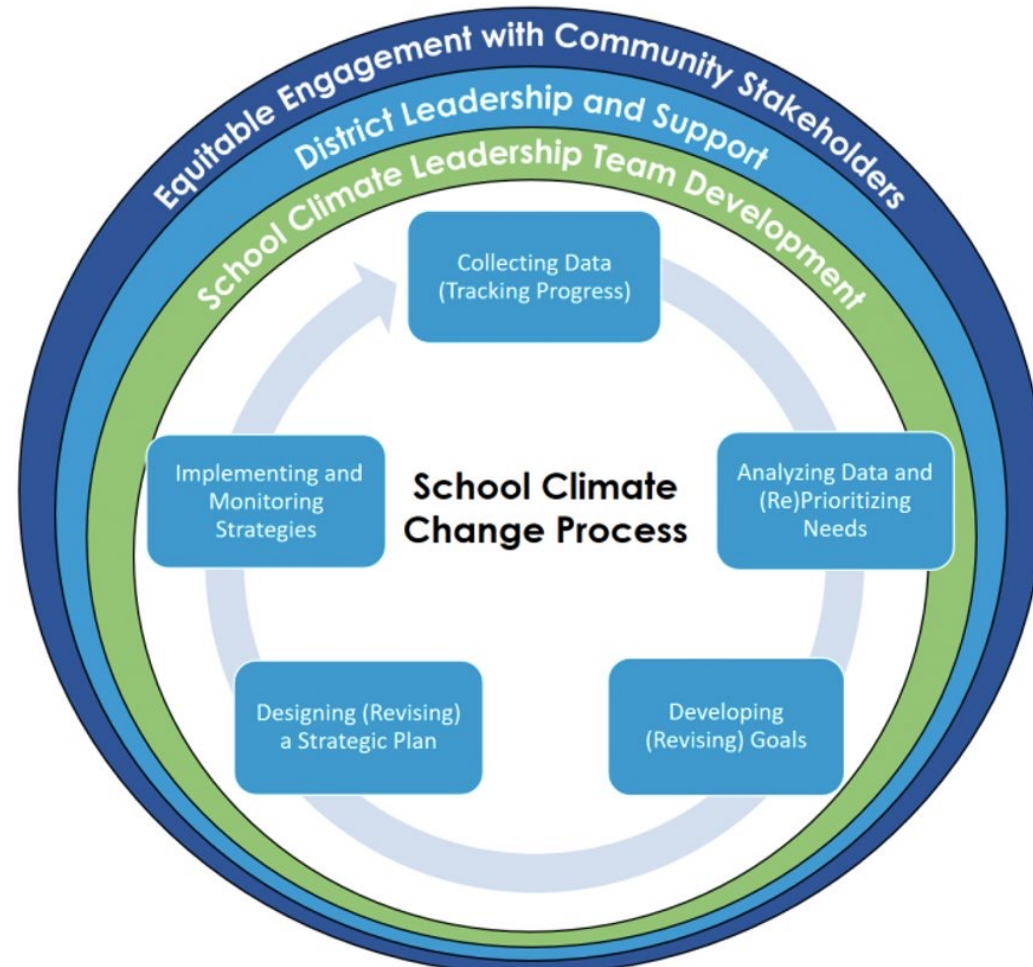


National School Climate Center:

<https://schoolclimate.org/services/measuring-school-climate-csci/>

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SCHOOL CLIMATE CHANGE PROCESS... ALSO INVOLVES TEAMING AND RESOURCE ALLOCATION!



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SCHOOL EXPERIENCES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO A HEALTHY SCHOOL CLIMATE AND ACADEMIC OUTCOMES

Protective Factors

- ❖ Connections
- ❖ Safety
- ❖ Positive relationships with adults and peers
- ❖ Caring interactions
- ❖ Academic support
- ❖ Academic engagement
- ❖ Positive role modeling
- ❖ Access to needed services and supports
- ❖ Social Emotional Learning
- ❖ Positive Behavioral Supports

Risk Factors

- ❖ Lack of connection
- ❖ Lack of safety
- ❖ Teasing, bullying, gang involvement
- ❖ Negative relationships with adults and peers
- ❖ Uncaring interactions
- ❖ Academic disengagement
- ❖ Academic frustration
- ❖ School-driven mobility
- ❖ Reactive punitive approaches
- ❖ Substance use and delinquency

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- Many protective factors, few risk factors?
- Some protective factors, some risk factors?
- Few protective factors, many risk factors?
- We're all over the place!

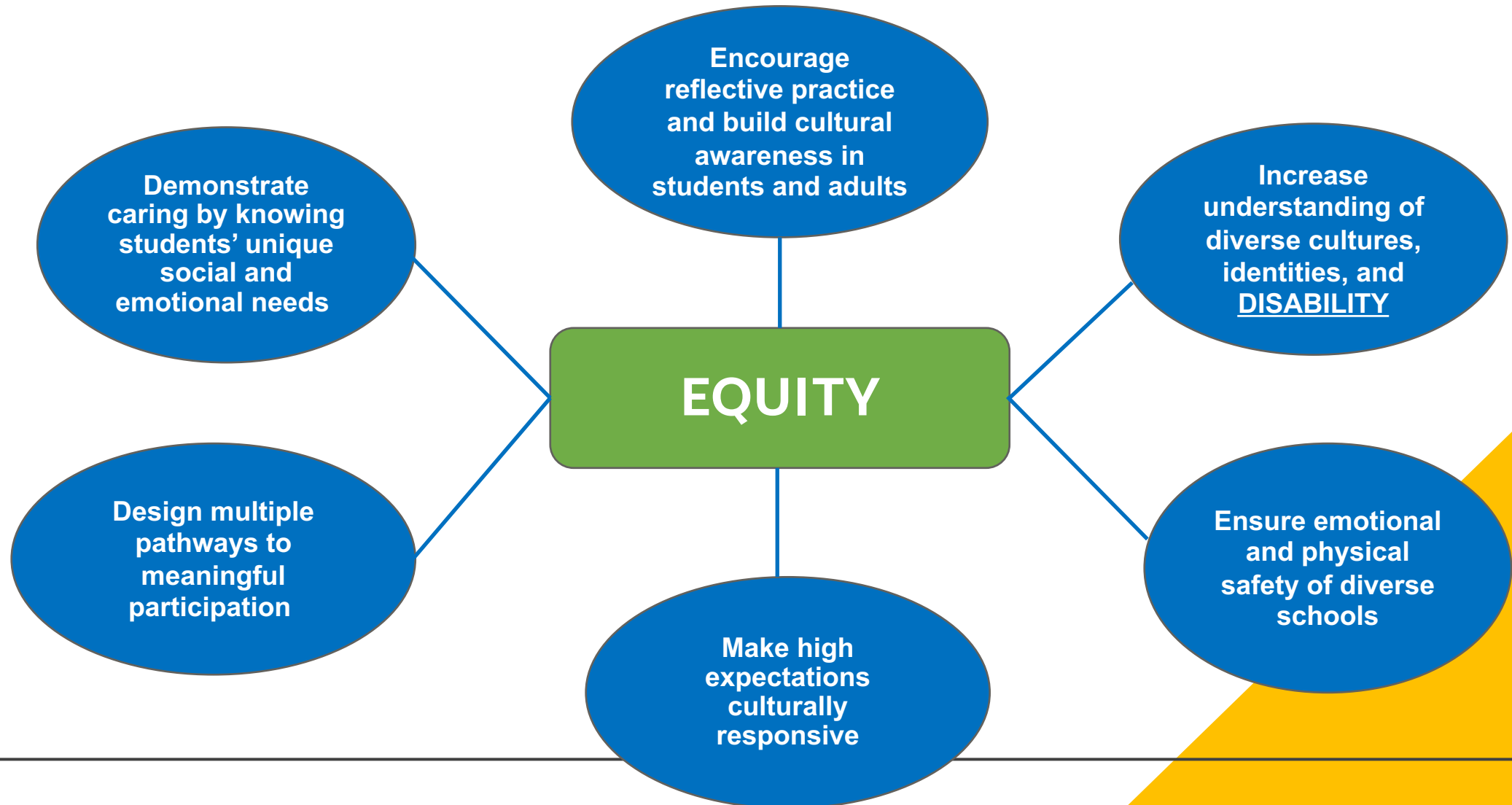


Link: <https://www.menti.com/bljk26cxv5af>

Access Code: **97 70 009**

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SCHOOL CLIMATE AND EQUITY



STRATEGIES FOR ADVANCING INCLUSION FOR AND WITH STUDENTS

- Moving past the sole model of physical inclusion and engaging in the development of social inclusion which requires commitment and engagement of all the members of the school community.
 - Students are the ones who have the power to alter the school climate in either a negative or positive way, based upon their perception
- Both school climate and inclusion build on each other to lead to a school and community that ensures every single student feels seen, heard, and valued
 - Encourage each class to create a list of shared values, thereby identifying, implementing and celebrating a culture of value for each member in the community

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An **equitable school culture** responds to the wide range of cultural norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, leadership practices, and organizational structures within the broader community.

- **Language**—*What is the attitude towards students' native languages or students who speak a different language?*
- **Discipline**—*Do you notice disproportionality? Are students treated fairly?*
- **Community/peers**—*Is it safe? Do you feel like students are connected? What types of outreach programs are available? Do you students have diverse friend groups?*
- **Curriculum/Classroom Practice**—*Do students struggle with academic work? Is the work/curriculum biased or linguistically sensitive? What are resources like? Teacher relationships with students?*
- **Staffing**—*Does the school staff reflect the cultural diversity of the student population? Are there teachers/staff that speak the language of students and families?*
- **Families**—*Level of parental involvement? What are attitudes toward family involvement? What does outreach look like?*
- **Cultural acceptance**—*Do students feel affirmed in their cultural attitudes, beliefs, values, and norms? Or do they feel like a “cultural other”*

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RETURNING TO THINK-PAIR-SHARE

- What are the main obstacles for high school implementation of MTSS right now in your context for the general population of students?
- How about students with disabilities in special education?
- What are some possible solutions to these obstacles? Any successes you want to share?

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Thank you!!



To all our students,
school teams, and
school personnel
that support the
implementation of
this project



Our undergraduate
students, graduate
students, and
research associates
in the *Research in
Adolescence,
Diversity, and
Disabilities* lab



Office of Special
Education
Programs

blogs.uoregon.edu/simple

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Additional Resources and Tips for Future Reference

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NATIONAL SCHOOL CLIMATE STANDARDS

- **The National School Climate Standards** provide a research-based framework and benchmark criteria for educational leaders to support and assess district and school efforts to enhance and be accountable for school climate
 - Don't recommend or detail specific assessment, curriculum, leadership, professional development, and related systemically informed programs, curricula, or services
 - Each state and/or school community must consider how best to translate these standards into practice in ways that build on past experiences, values, strengths, priorities, and contextual needs of the local school community

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NATIONAL 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 becomes disengaged.
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 re-engage those are becoming disengaged; and (d) develop and sustain an appropriate operational infrastructure and capacity to building mechanisms for meeting this standard.

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NATIONAL 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.

- **Having national standards for school climate provides a vision and framework for creating and sustaining positive school climates, especially in the current national context around “school safety and security” (e.g., school shootings)**

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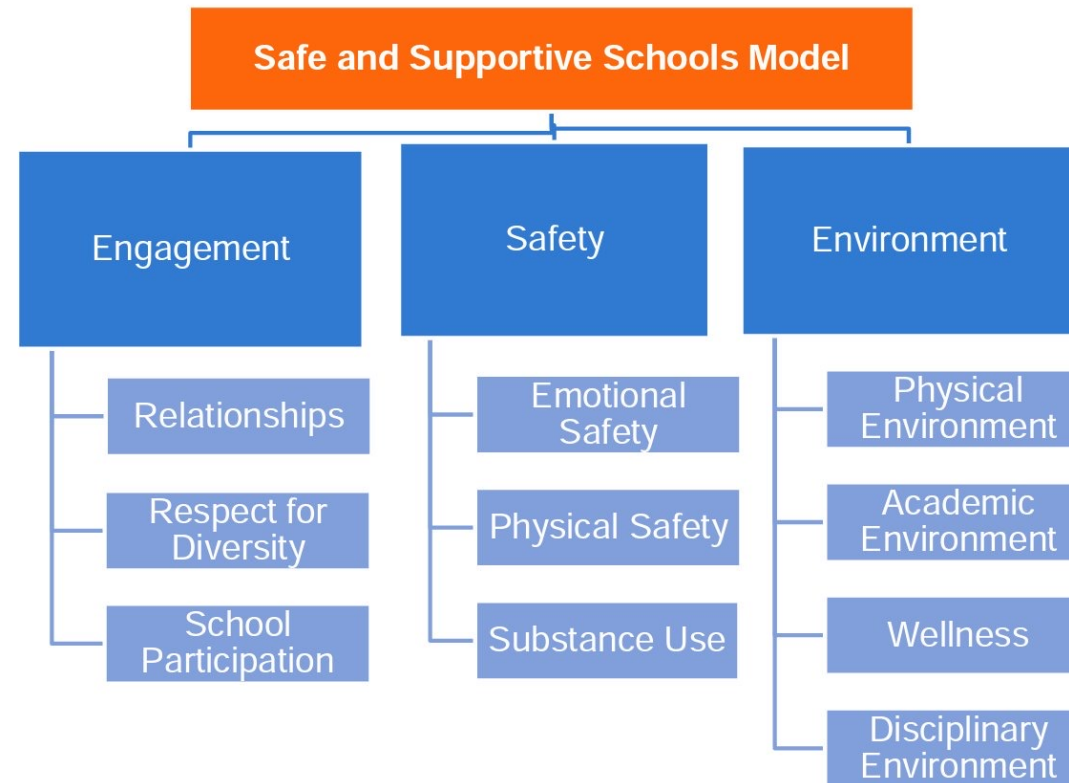
PROMOTING POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE

- Raise awareness and support around the Standards
- Board of Education and districts adopt the Standards
- Plan and conduct school climate training for all school community members
- Research, develop/source and implement school climate assessments
- Create and implement school climate improvement plans



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SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE SCHOOLS MODEL (ESSA)



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EXAMPLE OF AN ACTIONABLE SCHOOL CLIMATE FRAMEWORK

Engagement

- Relationships:

- **How Measured:** Ask students and teachers about whether or not their relationships with students and teachers are caring.
- **How one intervenes:** Ensure teachers know students' names and interests and that each student is connected with and supported by a caring adult.

- Respect for Diversity:

- **How Measured:** Ask parents whether or not they feel the school welcomes families that are similar to them; ask students whether they have experienced disrespect from adults due to their race, ethnicity, or culture.
- **How one intervenes:** Promulgate cultural competence standards; employ social emotional learning curricula that focuses on community building addresses the importance of valuing and addressing diversity.

- School Participation:

- **How Measured:** Ask students whether they participate in extracurricular activities.
- **How one intervenes:** Ensure all students are invited and can participate in extracurricular activities.

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EXAMPLE OF AN ACTIONABLE SCHOOL CLIMATE FRAMEWORK

Safety

- Social and Emotional Safety:

- **How Measured:** Ask students how often they were made fun of, called names, or insulted at school.
- **How one intervenes:** Employ Social and Emotional Learning Curricula that includes a focus on community building and empathy.

- Physical Safety:

- **How Measured:** Ask students how safe they feel traveling between home and school.
- **How one intervenes:** Work with community groups and public agencies to create safe pathways to school.

- Substance Use:

- **How Measured:** Ask students whether they have used a variety of substances.
- **How one intervenes:** Employ evidenced based substance abuse prevention curricula.



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EXAMPLE OF AN ACTIONABLE SCHOOL CLIMATE FRAMEWORK

Environment

- **Physical Environment:**
 - **How Measured:** Ask students and staff whether the lavatories are safe and clean.
 - **How one intervenes:** Identify why they are not clean, and work with facilities to create a clean environment.
- **Academic Environment:**
 - **How Measured:** Ask students whether teachers provide feedback on their assignments that helps them improve their work and whether teachers think all students can do challenging work.
 - **How one intervenes:** Provide Professional Development to teachers.
- **Wellness:**
 - **How Measured:** Ask students if they eat salty snack food at school.
 - **How one intervenes:** Work with students and the appropriate administrators to find and make available attractive and healthy snack food.
- **Disciplinary Environment:**
 - **How Measured:** Ask students if students at the school are comfortable sharing ideas about rules and policies.
 - **How one intervenes:** Develop opportunities for student voice in the development of class norms.

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BEST PRACTICES FOR SCHOOL CLIMATE ASSESSMENT

Positive school climate is related to student well-being and academic success (e.g., attendance, achievement, retention, graduation rates, and reduced referrals)

- Develop a clear plan for how data will be collected, stored, analyzed and shared
- Assess multiple dimensions of school climate, including student engagement, student-staff/student-student/staff-staff relationships, school safety, and learning environment
- Obtain input from a variety of groups, including students, caregivers, instructional staff, noninstructional staff, and administrators
- Assess school climate using more than one modality for input (e.g., surveys, interviews, focus groups, school administrative data)
- Allow anonymous input on surveys and other data collection methods
- Align the data collected with school vision of school climate and improvement strategies
- Select evidence-based tools (check out national center resources!)

<https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/topic-research/school-climate-measurement>

The logo for SIMPLE (Safe and Supportive Learning) is located in the bottom right corner. It features the word "SIMPLE" in a bold, green, sans-serif font. The letter "I" is stylized with a small white pencil tip pointing upwards from its center. The logo is set against a yellow triangular background that points towards the bottom right corner of the slide.

MEASURING SCHOOL CLIMATE SHOULD:

- Encompass multiple aspects of school climate
- Be able to be processed quickly enough to shared before the end of the school year
- Be collected...
 - through valid and reliable instruments with good psychometrics
 - so that subgroups can be examined
 - using multiple instruments, such as
 - Incident data, suspension counts
 - Attendance data
 - Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)
 - School climate surveys
- Be actionable and practical to administer
- Include measures that are understood to have a direct impact on academics



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WHEN ENGAGING DIVERSE IDENTITIES IN PRACTICE: USING THE ADDRESSING FRAMEWORK

- Example: How is power and privilege organized within the family?
- **A**ge and generational influences: Do caregivers have a large age difference that contributes to power differential? Are there intergenerational influences?
- **D**evelopmental or other **D**isability: Is power held or withheld on the basis of disability?
- **R**eligion and spiritual orientation: Do religious beliefs dictate that some members have more authority? Views on support seeking?
- **E**thnic and racial identity: Who holds the dominant cultural identity in bicultural or multicultural couples and families? Are there acculturational differences? Are there differences in status related to skin color or other physical or ethnic characteristics? How does this influence their approach/avoidance patterns with schools?



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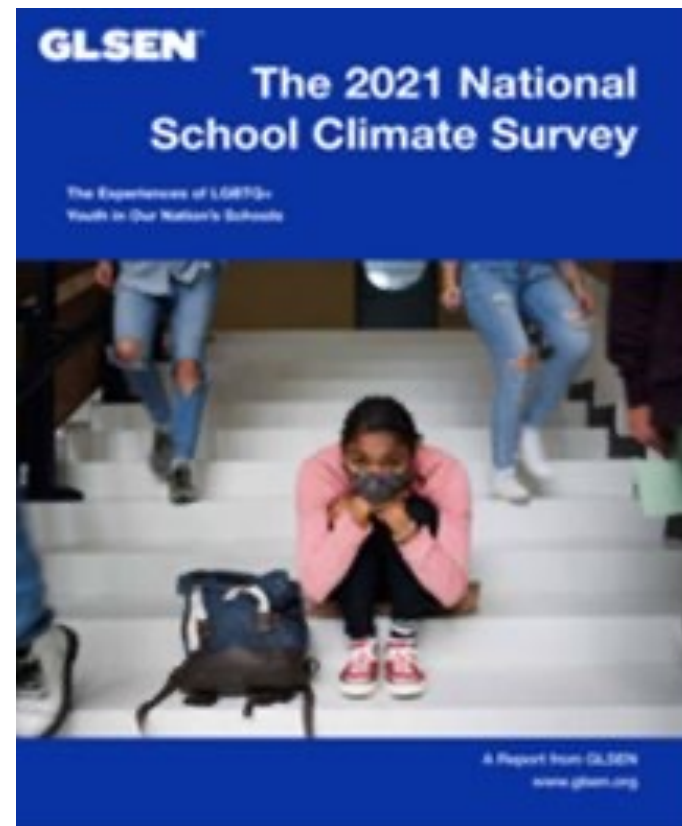
WHEN ENGAGING DIVERSE IDENTITIES IN PRACTICE: USING THE ADDRESSING FRAMEWORK

- **S**ocioeconomic status: Who makes the money or holds the highest status by income, education, or occupation?
- **S**exual orientation: Does one family member receive less social support or status on the basis of sexual orientation? Have they experienced discrimination?
- **I**ndigenous heritage: Does one family member hold greater authority or status related to a stronger Native heritage (e.g., both parents are Native vs. one Native parent and one non-Native parent)
- **N**ational origin: Who is a citizen or holds a work visa? Who speaks the dominant language more fluently?
- **G**ender: Is power based on gender identity

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HELPFUL RESOURCES:

- Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network: <https://mhttcnetwork.org>
- National School Climate Center: <https://schoolclimate.org/>
- GLSEN: <http://glsen.org>
- <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/about>
- <https://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/programs/safe-supportive/bullying>
- <https://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/programs/safe-supportive/school-connectedness>



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