THE BIG PICTURE

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) explicitly recognizes the strong relationship between positive school climate and student learning and success. A strong system of comprehensive social, emotional, and behavioral supports is as important as effective teaching to creating the conditions for learning required to help students achieve their academic potential. School psychologists play a critical role in creating these safe and supportive learning environments. They are essential partners with teachers, administrators, families, and other relevant stakeholders in working to ensure that schools implement comprehensive, evidence-based initiatives to improve school climate. In particular, school psychologists should ensure that school leaders understand their relevant skills, such as those related to needs assessment, mental and behavioral health, violence prevention, discipline, cultural responsiveness, and school–home–community collaboration.

SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE SCHOOL CLIMATES

ESSA recognizes the importance of school safety and school climate data in measuring school success. States must include data related to school climate and safety in annual school report cards, and such data could be included in the state’s accountability system. Furthermore, states and LEAs can use various ESSA funding streams (e.g., Title I, II, and IV) to engage in the following activities that promote positive school climate:

- Implement positive behavior interventions and supports and other multitiered systems of support.
- Implement effective discipline policies and practices.
- Support physical and psychological safety, including improving crisis prevention, intervention, and response efforts.
- Address the comprehensive social, emotional, mental, and behavioral health and wellness of all students.
- Provide professional development for all school staff to improve capacity to support positive school climate.

School climate is the result of many factors, but it can be summed up as how engaged students are by their teachers, how welcomed they are by their peers, and how invested their family is in helping them achieve their best. School psychologists have specialized training and expertise to help schools implement evidence based practices that support the following key factors that comprise school climate:

- Culturally competent practices
- Meaningful home–school collaboration
- Policies and practices that support all students, including LGBTQ students
- School connectedness
- Physical and psychological safety
- Positive discipline
- Academic, social, emotional, mental, and behavioral supports for all students
KEY MESSAGES

As states and districts develop efforts to ensure safe and supportive schools, school psychologists should share the specific ways that they can help schools implement evidence-based, culturally responsive practices to improve school climate and student success.

- Schools that set clear academic and behavioral expectations, then teach, model, and reinforce those expectations, create a system where students can be more successful in school. School psychologists can help develop and implement positive behavior interventions and supports that apply behavioral principles to school-wide settings to increase positive outcomes for students.

- Positive school climate is enhanced when schools establish discipline practices that prevent conflict by proactively building relationships and a sense of community (e.g., restorative practices). School psychologists can work with administrators to develop these systems and offer support to individual students and groups of students.

- Students who feel connected have a trusting relationship with at least one adult in school are more likely to attend school, give their best effort, and achieve. School psychologists can help foster trusting relationships among students and staff.

- School psychologists have unique expertise to help develop and implement school-wide initiatives such as restorative practices, social–emotional learning, and mindfulness, all of which are effective approaches for fostering relationships, school connectedness, and building safe communities.

- Embracing all students is critical to creating a culture conducive for learning. Intentionally acknowledging differences among students, and teaching the importance of acceptance can lower barriers to academic learning. School psychologists can offer professional development and support teacher and staff efforts to infuse culturally competent practices into school-wide and classroom-based school improvement efforts.

- Fostering a sense of community can be critical to increasing the overall climate of the school. Inviting parents and other stakeholders into school and informing them of best practices that are happening helps reinforce the critical role that schools play in our communities. School psychologists have specific training in effective models of consultation and collaboration that can facilitate improved engagement among the home, school, and community.

- Comprehensive and coordinated learning and mental health supports directly contribute to more positive school climate and increased academic achievement. School psychologists have unique training that allows them to deliver these services within the context of learning, and in support of the mission of schools.

- School psychologists have expertise to help develop and integrate school-wide programming to foster school climate, prevent violence, and balance physical and psychological safety.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Engaging as early as possible with the key stakeholders most relevant to designing accountability is critical. Although specifics in each school district and state will vary, these stakeholders are likely to include:

- State chief school officers
- State/local school boards
- State governors and legislators
- District superintendents

Additional details and contact information can be found at www.nasponline.org/essa/key-contacts.pdf

RELEVANT RESOURCES

Resources related to ESSA and school psychological services are available on the NASP website (http://www.nasponline.org/essa). These resources include:

- Topic-specific ESSA fact sheets
- ESSA/MTSS/NASP Practice Model Crosswalk
- Resources and guidance from the U.S. Department of Education
- Information about specific funding sources in ESSA