

Healthy School Culture and Climate: Key to Improved Attendance and Discipline Data

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Inclusive Welcome

What conditions must exist for students and staff to be their best every day?



Culture and Climate

School Culture

- **Shared core:** shared beliefs, values, norms, and experiences
- **The identity:** “How we do things here.”
- **Tempo:** develops over time
- **Impact:** influences decisions

School Climate

- **Daily reality:** daily experiences of students, staff and families
- **The feeling:** “How it feels to be here.”
- **Tempo:** can change more quickly
- **Impact:** influences behavior and engagement

Characteristics of Strong Culture & Climate

School Culture	School Climate
Shared mission and vision	Students feel physically and emotionally safe
High expectations for all	Positive relationships among students and adults
Collaborative staff	Inclusive and welcoming environment
Continuous improvement	Respectful classrooms
Equity-focused decision making	Student voice is valued
Family partnerships	Strong sense of belonging
Trust and transparency	Consistent behavioral expectations

Why School Culture and Climate Matter

For Students

- increased academic achievement and engagement
- improved attendance and reduced chronic absenteeism
- greater sense of belonging and connectedness
- reduced bullying and violence
- lower rates of suspension, expulsion, and exclusionary discipline
- improved mental health and resilience

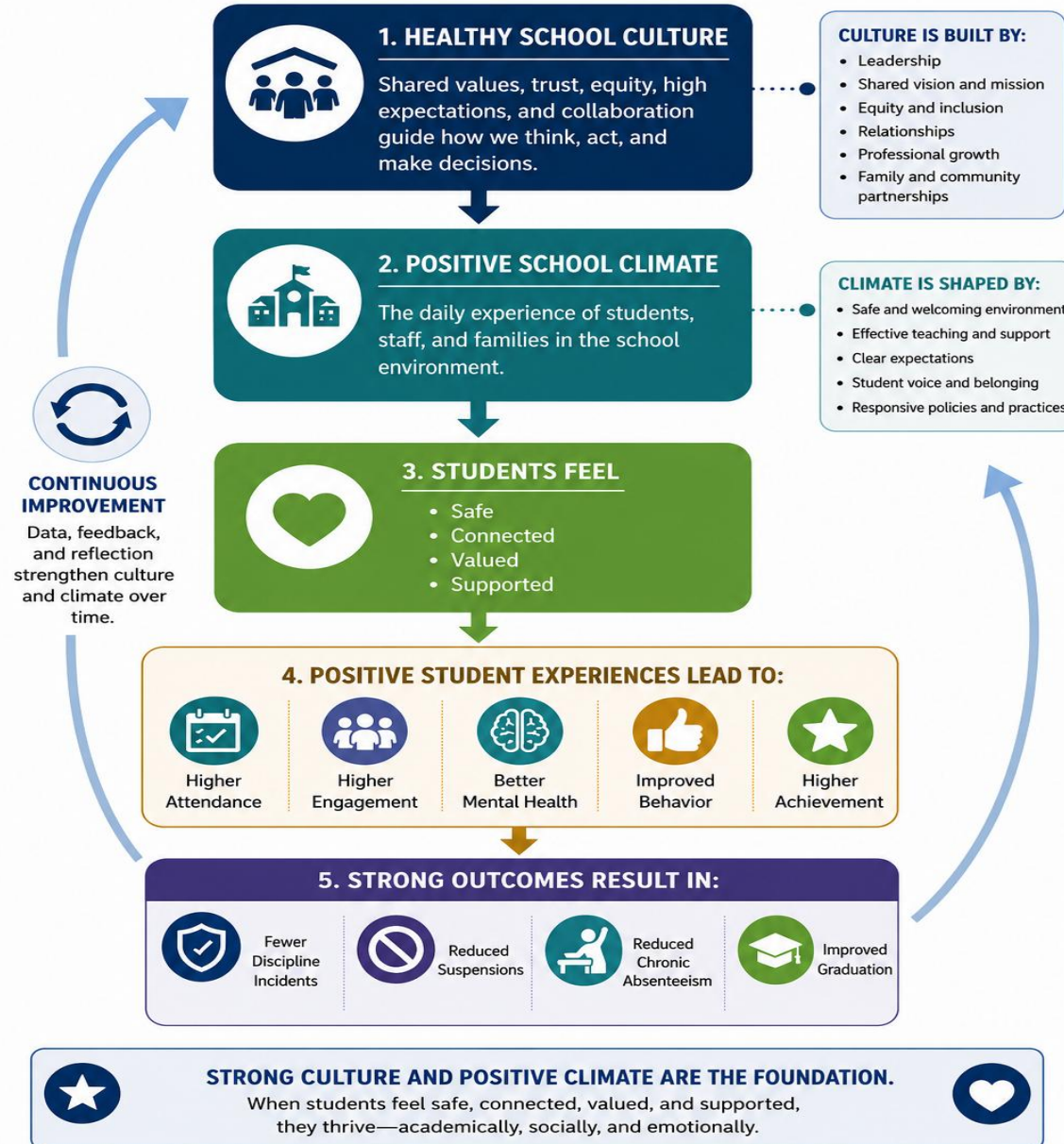
For Educators

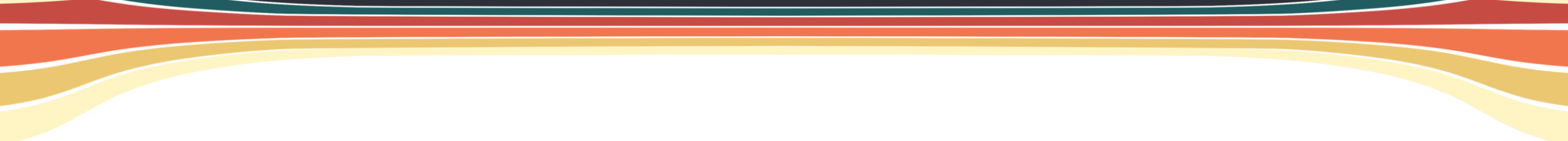
- increased job satisfaction and morale
- improved teacher retention
- stronger collaboration among staff
- reduced burnout
- greater confidence in supporting diverse student needs

For Families and Communities

- stronger family-school partnerships
- increased trust and communication
- greater community engagement
- improved student outcomes through shared responsibility

A systems view of how healthy school culture and positive climate drive results for students and schools.





Research and Data Review

The Impact of Exclusionary Discipline on Student Outcomes and School Climate

Evidence is clear: Exclusionary discipline harms students, schools, and communities.



OVERVIEW

National research shows that over-reliance on exclusionary discipline—such as out-of-school suspension and expulsion—is linked to poorer academic outcomes, weakened school climate, and greater involvement in the juvenile and criminal justice systems.

“

Safe, supportive, and inclusive schools that build relationships and address student needs lead to better outcomes for all.

”

THE BIG PICTURE

Exclusionary discipline pulls students out of learning and pushes them toward negative life outcomes.



Lower Achievement
Lower grades and academic performance



Higher Dropout Rates
Greater risk of not completing high school



Justice System Involvement
Increased involvement in juvenile and criminal justice systems



KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS



EXCLUSIONARY DISCIPLINE NEGATIVELY IMPACTS STUDENT SUCCESS.

Suspension is associated with lower achievement, higher dropout rates, and greater involvement in the juvenile and criminal justice systems.

Students who are suspended graduate at an estimated rate of:

68%
Suspended Students

vs.

80%
Non-Suspended Students

Source: Research and Development (RAND), 2018



EXCESSIVE EXCLUSIONARY DISCIPLINE HARMS THE WHOLE CLASSROOM.

Excessive exclusionary discipline reduces classroom engagement and cohesion and increases the likelihood of grade retention, school dropout, and juvenile justice involvement.

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, 2019



DISCIPLINE DISPARITIES PERSIST ACROSS STUDENT GROUPS.

- Students of color and students with disabilities experience disproportionate rates of discipline.
- More than 1.6 million students attend schools with law enforcement officers but no school counselor.

Source: U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2019



POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS IMPROVE STUDENT OUTCOMES.

Positive teacher-student relationships are associated with:



Improved Engagement



Better Attendance



Higher Academic Achievement



Reduced Disruptive Behavior



Fewer Suspensions



Lower Dropout Rates

Source: Legislative Education Study Committee, 2024

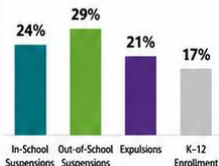


2020–2021 CIVIL RIGHTS DATA COLLECTION* | STUDENT DISCIPLINE AND SCHOOL CLIMATE IN U.S. PUBLIC SCHOOLS



STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES EXPERIENCE HIGHER RATES OF DISCIPLINE

Students with disabilities represented 17% of K–12 enrollment but accounted for:



BLACK BOYS FACE DISPROPORTIONATE DISCIPLINE

Black boys were nearly **TWICE AS LIKELY** as White boys to receive an out-of-school suspension or expulsion.



vs.



BLACK GIRLS FACE DISPROPORTIONATE DISCIPLINE

Black girls were nearly **TWICE AS LIKELY** as White girls to receive an in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, or expulsion.



vs.



Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. (2024). 2020–2021 Civil Rights Data Collection: Student Discipline and School Climate in U.S. Public Schools.

* Data reflect the 2020–2021 school year.



WHAT SCHOOLS CAN DO



Build positive teacher-student relationships and a culture of belonging.



Implement schoolwide PBIS and evidence-based behavior supports.



Use restorative practices to repair harm and strengthen relationships.



Invest in school counselors, social workers, and mental health supports.



Use data to monitor discipline disparities and guide continuous improvement.



WHEN WE CHANGE THE WAY WE DISCIPLINE, WE CHANGE THE FUTURE.

Students thrive in schools that teach, support, and believe in them.



The Impact of Exclusionary Discipline

State Level Discipline Data

EOY 2025

- % of students with discipline incidents: 6.02%
- % of students with discipline removals: 5.55%
- Of incidents:
 - 51.54% result in Out of School Suspension (OSS)
 - 32.59% result in In School Suspension (ISS)
 - 0.13% Expulsion
 - 0.11% Modified Expulsion
- Average OSS duration 2.94 days
- Average ISS duration 2.61 days
- 35,013 instructional days impacted by ISS
- 62,515 instructional days impacted by OSS

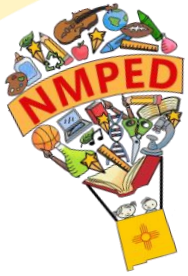
State Level Data

- Students receiving special education services are nearly **2x more likely** to be involved in disciplinary incidents and receive an out-of-school suspension.
- Students experiencing homelessness are nearly **2x more likely** to be involved in disciplinary incidents and receive an out-of-school suspension.

State Level Data

Other Data Points to Note

- Gender
 - Of total incidents, 69.13% involve male students compared to 30.86% which involve female students
- Race and Ethnicity
 - Black or African American, Hispanic, and Multi-Race students have a risk ratios greater than 1, meaning they are more likely to be involved in a discipline incident compared to other race/ethnicity subgroups



Attendance Data

Annual State, Districts and Schools Attendance Report - New Mexico
Public Education Department (NMPED)

Root Causes of Chronic Absence

Barriers

- Chronic and acute illness
- Family responsibilities or home situation
- Trauma
- Poor transportation
- Housing and food insecurity
- Inequitable access to needed services
- System involvement
- Lack of predictable schedules for learning
- Lack of access to tech
- Community violence

Aversion

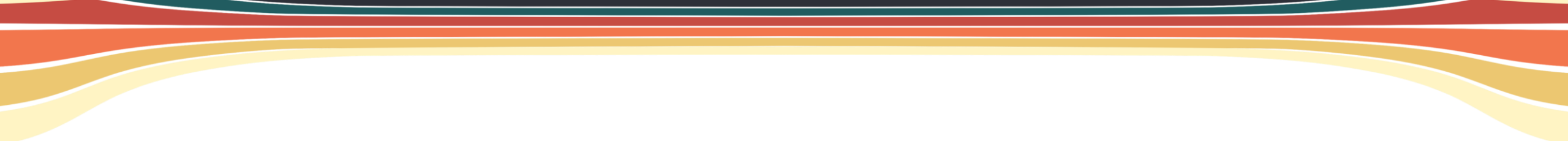
- Struggling academically and/or behaviorally
- Unwelcoming school climate
- Social and peer challenges
- Anxiety
- Biased disciplinary and suspension practices
- Undiagnosed disability / accommodations
- Caregivers with negative educational experiences

Disengagement

- Lack of challenging, culturally responsive instruction
- Boredom and lack of engagement
- No meaningful relationships to school adults
- Lack of enrichment opportunities
- Lack of academic & behavioral support
- Failure to earn credits
- Work conflicts in high school

Misconceptions

- Absences are only a problem if unexcused
- Missing 2 days per month doesn't affect learning
- Lose track and underestimate total absences
- Assume students must stay home for any symptom
- Attendance only matters in older grades
- Suspensions don't count as absences



The Role of the School Board in Improving School Culture and Climate

Key Areas of Board Governance



**Vision &
Priority Setting**



**Policy Adoption &
Governance Frameworks**



**Performance
Monitoring**



**Resource Allocation
& Budget Approval**



**Superintendent
Oversight**



**Public Trust &
Community Engagement**

Vision and Priority Setting

- Has the Board established a clear vision that culture and climate is a District priority?
- Where do culture and climate fit into district and school vision?
- How is that vision reflected in goals, communications, and accountability structures?



[School Culture and Climate – NASBE – National Association of State Boards of Education](#)

Policies That Support Positive School Culture and Climate

Positive Behavior Frameworks

- Multi-Layered System of Supports
- Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)
- Universal behavior expectations
- Layered behavioral supports

Social Emotional Learning

- Schoolwide SEL
- Staff well-being
- Instructional practices
- Student behavior and discipline
- Mental and behavioral health
- Sense of Belonging

Student Voice Policies

- Advisory councils
- Climate surveys
- Leadership opportunities
- Shared decision-making

Policies That Support Positive School Culture and Climate

Equity & Inclusion Policies

- Anti-discrimination
- Anti-bullying
- Inclusive instructional practices
- Culturally responsive education
- Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Attendance & Engagement

- Early intervention systems
- Attendance teams
- Family outreach
- Root cause analysis before punitive responses

Family Engagement

- Two-way communication
- Family participation in school improvement
- Community partnerships
- Language access

Performance Monitoring

Leading vs Lagging Indicators

Leading Indicators

- School connectedness
- Attendance
- Student engagement
- Staff Climate
- Positive behavior acknowledgements
- Family engagement

Lagging Indicators

- Suspensions
- Expulsions
- Discipline referrals
- Dropouts
- Achievement
- Graduation

Governance Questions

- How connected do students feel?
- Which schools have the strongest climates?
- Are students experiencing belonging?
- Which groups experience discipline differently?
- Are universal supports implemented consistent
- How do we know staff feel supported?
- What leading indicators should we monitor?



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Thank You

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