

# Improving School Climate

*Improving School Climate* provides evidence-based and practical strategies for cultivating a healthy school environment, while also avoiding behavior problems.

The book is packed with strategies centered on key components and conditions for a positive school climate, such as positive teacher-student relationships, positive student-student relationships (including absence of bullying), supportive home-school relationships, student engagement, effective classroom management and school discipline, school safety, and student self-discipline.

This text is an important inclusion for educators and school psychologists who prefer a structured, evidence-based, and practical approach for improving school climate, while also promoting students' academic achievements, preventing behavior problems, and fostering students' social and emotional competencies.

**George G. Bear, PhD**, is a professor of school psychology at the University of Delaware. He has published over 100 book chapters and articles in peer-reviewed journals, and 8 books. As a member of four editorial boards of leading journals in school psychology, he has frequently reviewed articles on school climate. He worked as a school psychologist and school administrator and continues to serve as a consultant to the state's School-Wide Positive Behavior Supports and school climate initiatives, including Delaware's School Climate Transformation Grant.



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# Improving School Climate

Practical Strategies to Reduce Behavior  
Problems and Promote Social and  
Emotional Learning

George G. Bear

First published 2020  
by Routledge  
52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017

and by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa  
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*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Names: Bear, George G., author.

Title: Improving school climate : practical strategies  
to reduce behavior problems and promote social and emotional  
learning / George G. Bear.

Description: New York : Routledge, 2020. | Includes bibliographical  
references and index. |

Identifiers: LCCN 2019052656 (print) | LCCN 2019052657 (ebook) |  
ISBN 9780815346388 (hardback) | ISBN 9780815346401  
(paperback) | ISBN 9781351170482 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: School environment. | Teacher-student relationships. |  
Classroom management. | Educational psychology. | Social learning.

Classification: LCC LC210 .B42 2020 (print) | LCC LC210  
(ebook) | DDC 371.102/4—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019052656>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019052657>

ISBN: 978-0-815-34638-8 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-0-815-34640-1 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-351-17048-2 (ebk)

Typeset in Sabon  
by Swales & Willis, Exeter, Devon, UK

*Dedicated to*

Debby Boyer, Sarah Hearn, and Linda Smith

Without their support, collaboration, and commitment to improving school climate in Delaware this book would never have been written.



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# PREFACE

When schools in Delaware first began implementing Schoolwide Positive Behavioral Supports and Interventions (SWPBIS) almost 20 years ago it quickly became evident to some of us working with that project that a reduction in office disciplinary referrals (ODRs) and suspensions and an increase in the distribution of tokens to students for good behavior did not necessarily indicate a positive school climate. Undoubtedly, reduced ODRs and suspensions and greater positive reinforcement of desired behavior were certainly needed in many schools. But, we soon recognized that there was much more to improving school climate than simply telling teachers to quit sending kids to the office for minor behavior problems and having them disseminate tokens for good behavior. Although those two indicators provided objective data that were easy to count, neither one informed schools if students actually improved in their behavior, or more importantly viewed their schools favorably. Did it matter much if a school had low ODRs and teachers distributed a lot of tokens if students thought that teachers were uncaring, if students did not get along with one another, if bullying was common, if students were not engaged, if students were not taught social and emotional skills, or if students and staff felt unsafe?

Supported by a wealth of research, as presented throughout this book, we thought that student perceptions in areas of school climate were more important than ODRs and other sources of data that schools were then using to gauge school improvement and to determine if their school was “positive.” We observed a great need for valid and practical tools to assess important dimensions of school climate. We also observed the need for positive interventions and supports that went beyond the frequent and systematic use of positive reinforcement, especially distributing tokens for good behavior. The need for additional evidence-based strategies and interventions for developing social and emotional competence was evident in many schools, especially those where school climate was poor.

In response to those observations, over the past 15 years colleagues and I working at the University of Delaware’s Center for Disabilities (CDS; and more specifically the SWPBIS and school climate projects) and with the Delaware Department of Education have developed and validated tools that assess multiple aspects of school climate and related constructs. They include the assessment of how students, teachers/staff, and/or parents perceive teacher-student

relationships, student-student-relationships, student engagement, school safety, bullying, students' social and emotional competence, and teachers' use of techniques to prevent and correct behavior problems and to develop social and emotional competences.

This work has been supported with ongoing funding from the Delaware Department of Education and more recently with funding from a five-year School Climate Transformation Grant from the U.S. Department of Education. This grant has allowed us to focus not only on assessing school climate, but also on helping schools link assessment results to evidence-based practices for improving school climate. This book emanated from much of that work, but greatly expands on it by providing a strong theoretical and research foundation for improving school climate and by presenting educators with a wider range of evidence-based and practical interventions for improving school climate while simultaneously preventing and reducing behavior problems and fostering students' social, emotional, moral, and academic development. The strategies and interventions are grounded in an authoritative approach to classroom management, school discipline, and school climate that emphasizes the critical importance of social-emotional support and structure. The approach integrates strategies and interventions commonly found in the SWPBIS and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) initiatives, while drawing from the strengths of each of those approaches and addressing its weaknesses. As seen throughout this book, such a comprehensive and integrative approach characterizes the most effective classroom teachers and schools.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge and thank the many individuals I have worked with in efforts to improve school climate in Delaware schools, each of whom contributed to this book in one way or another. Primary among them are my two principal collaborators for over 15 years at CDS (and the best bosses one can have): Debby Boyer, PBS Co-Project Director, and Sarah Hearn, PBS Project Coordinator. Of equal importance in the success of Delaware's school climate improvement efforts has been the support of Linda Smith (PBS Co-Project Director) and Mary Ann Mieczkowski (Director of Exceptional Children Resources) at the Delaware Department of Education.

I also would like to thank Megan Pell (Instructional Coach at CDS) and multiple doctoral students, past and present, who helped develop school climate assessment tools and intervention training modules, and consistently created a wonderful climate to work: Jessica Slaughter, Lindsey Mantz, Chunyan Yang, and Angela Soltys (Harris). Their time, creative energy, and wonderful dispositions have been greatly appreciated. Special thanks also go to the graduate research assistants in our educational specialist program in school psychology who spent hours and hours searching and carefully citing and editing references for the book: Natali Munoz and Fiona Lachman.

Finally, for their caring, listening, and other emotional support while writing this book I thank my wife (and exemplar of the authoritative approach to classroom management and parenting), Patti Bear, and our always attentive and loving two-year old golden retriever, Winnie the Pooh. Winnie was next to me in writing almost every word. I wish she could read what we wrote together.

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## CHAPTER 1

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# SCHOOL CLIMATE

## An Albatross, Unicorn, or Phoenix?

In a comprehensive and classic review of the literature on school climate almost 40 years ago, Anderson (1982) posed a question that resonates today: Is school climate best viewed as an albatross, a unicorn, or a phoenix? As an albatross, school climate would be viewed as something undesirable—as “a burden” to policymakers “who need information on mechanisms that can be easily manipulated to affect student outputs” (p. 371). School climate, especially when viewed at that time by many as an unidimensional construct, failed to provide much guidance for school improvement. As a unicorn, however, school climate would be viewed by policymakers as something desired, yet unattainable, as something “to be hoped for and dreamt about but one which can never be found” (p. 371). If viewed as either an albatross or unicorn, it would be best for researchers to avoid school climate. This was because of unclear and inconsistent definitions and the lack of theoretical conceptualizations, measures, and guiding theories; difficulties with statistical analyses; and little research demonstrating the value of school climate and the effort for improvement. Researchers would be better off focusing on classroom effects on student behavior since they had been shown to be much greater than school level effects—a finding that is still true today (e.g., Bierman et al., 2007).

Instead of an albatross or unicorn, Anderson (1982) suggested that more optimistic educators and researchers might view school climate as a phoenix, as something desired and possible—“born of the ashes of past school effects research” (p. 372). But as a phoenix, school climate would need to be conceptualized not as a unidimensional, or singular, construct but as a multidimensional construct consisting of a combination of interrelated school characteristics shown to determine student learning and behavior, and ones that schools could successfully target for change. Those characteristics would be schoolwide, beyond the individual and classroom levels, reflecting the overall school environment. For a phoenix to arise, the greatest challenge to researchers was to address major shortcomings of earlier research on school climate. This called for (a) more clear and consistent definitions, conceptualizations, and measures of school climate; (b) theoretical frameworks to guide school climate research and practice, including how it is conceptualized and measured; (c) psychometrically sound measures of school climate; and (d) empirical research identifying domains or dimensions of school climate that schools could target for improvement to help achieve educationally important outcomes.

## **Rising of a Phoenix**

At the time of Anderson's (1982) review of the literature, it is likely that a greater number of researchers and policymakers viewed school climate as an albatross or unicorn than a phoenix, as during that period school climate received little attention in educational research and practice. More recently, however, a phoenix has arisen, largely due to the great strides researchers and policymakers have made in addressing the major shortcomings of earlier research, as listed above. This is reflected in a rapidly growing body of research on school climate, as seen throughout this book, and in school climate being a focus of schoolwide programs for improving academic achievement, preventing behavior problems, and promoting social and emotional well-being. Those programs include universal-level social and emotional learning (SEL) programs that target the development of a wide range of social and emotional competencies, such as self-management, social awareness, and responsible decision-making (see Chapter 4); School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS), which tend to focus more on the direct teaching and reinforcement of specific and desired student behaviors for improving school climate (Sailor, Dunlap, Sugai & Horner, 2009); and programs that are directed toward more specific problems or concerns, such as bullying (Swearer & Hymel, 2015) and on school violence and safety (Borum, Cornell, Modzeleski, & Jimerson, 2010).

Recognition of the importance of school climate also is seen in the following actions taken and funding and resources provided by the United States Department of Education (U.S. DOE):

- The Every Student Succeeds Act requiring that schools use a minimum of four accountability indicators, with one such indicator being school quality, which may consist of “school climate and safety” (see [www.ed.gov/essa](http://www.ed.gov/essa)).
- Beginning in 2014 and continuing annually, the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education providing states and local education agencies with School Climate Transformation Grants to improve (and assess) school climate.
- Developing the web-based ED School Climate Survey (EDSCLS; U.S. DOE, Office of Safe and Healthy Schools, 2019a) for states and schools to assess students' perceptions of school climate in middle and high school, examine national data, and receive scores in real time.
- Developing a compendium of school climate measures for schools to draw from (see <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/topic-research/school-climate-measurement/school-climate-survey-compendium>).
- Creating and disseminating school climate materials and resources to schools, including a *Quick Guide on Making School Climate Improvements* (U.S. DOE, Office of Safe and Healthy Students, 2016) and the *Parent and Educator Guide to School Climate Resources* (U.S. DOE, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2019). These documents explain the concept of school climate, offer suggestions for improving school climate, and provide parents and educators with additional school climate resources.

## How School Climate is Commonly Defined, Conceptualized, and Measured

How school climate is defined, conceptualized, and measured varies greatly in research, policy, and practice. Definitions of school climate differ in abstractness and the extent to which they recognize multiple domains and dimensions of school climate, and which ones are included and excluded. For example, among popular definitions appearing in the literature, Haynes, Emmons, and Ben-Avie (1997) defined school climate in rather general and abstract terms, with a specific focus on interpersonal relationships, or interactions, that influence children. That is, they defined school climate as “the quality and consistency of interpersonal interactions within the school community that influence children’s cognitive, social, and psychological development” (p. 322). Placing greater emphasis on school safety, Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, and Pickeral (2009) defined school climate as “the quality and character of school life” that includes “norms, values, and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally, and physically safe” (p. 182).

In fairness to both of these teams of researchers, whereas their definitions were largely unidimensional, they conceptualized and measured school climate as a multi-dimensional construct. The School Climate Scale developed by Haynes, Emmons, and colleagues (Emmons, Haynes, & Comer, 2002; Haynes, Emmons, & Comer, 1994) includes the following six subscales: Student Interpersonal Relations, Student-Teacher Relations, Parent Involvement, Order and Discipline, Fairness, and Sharing of Resources. Likewise, Cohen et al. (2009), together with the National School Climate Council and the National School Climate Center (NSCC), conceptualized school climate as consisting of four major domains: relationships, safety, teaching and learning, and institutional environment. The NSCC (2019) also recently added leadership and professional relations and social media as additional domains of school climate (assessed on the teacher survey), although it is unclear why these two were added. The measure of school climate developed by the NSCC, the Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (NSCC, 2019b), includes 13 subscales: Rules and Norms, Sense of Physical Security, Sense of Social-Emotional Security, Support for Learning, Social and Civic Learning, Respect for Diversity, Social Support-Adults, Social Support-Students, School Connectedness/Engagement, Physical Surroundings, Social Media, Leadership, and Professional Relationships.

More recently, the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments (2019) defined school climate as: “a broad, multifaceted concept that involves many aspects of the student’s educational experience” while noting that a positive school climate is “the product of a school’s attention to fostering safety; promoting a supportive academic, disciplinary, and physical environment; and encouraging and maintaining respectful, trusting, and caring relationships throughout the school community no matter the setting—from Pre-K/Elementary School to higher education.”

In its *Parent and Educator Guide to School Climate Resources* (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2019), and drawing from a description of school climate by the National Center on

#### 4 School Climate

Safe and Supportive Learning Environments, the U.S. DOE recently characterized school climate as follows:

School climate reflects how members of the school community experience the school, including interpersonal relationships, teacher and other staff practices, and organizational arrangements. School climate includes factors that serve as conditions for learning and that support physical and emotional safety, connection and support, and engagement. ... A positive school climate reflects attention to fostering social and physical safety, providing support that enables students and staff to realize high behavioral and academic standards as well as encouraging and maintaining respectful, trusting, and caring relationships throughout the school community.

(p. 2)

This description emphasizes three general domains of school climate: connectedness and support (or relationships), safety, and engagement. These three domains also are found in the U.S. DOE's Safe and Supportive School Model of School Climate developed by a national panel of researchers and other experts on school climate for the U.S. DOE. That model was developed to guide schools in identifying key areas for creating "safe and supportive climates in their schools" (National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, 2019). It now serves as the framework for the web-based ED School Climate Survey (EDSCLS; U.S. DOE, Office of Safe and Healthy Students, 2019), which is used by states, local education agencies, and schools to assess school climate. However, instead of calling categories connectedness and support, safety, and engagement, the three main categories are called engagement, safety, and environment. As shown in Figure 1.1, the model includes 13 domains subsumed under these three categories.

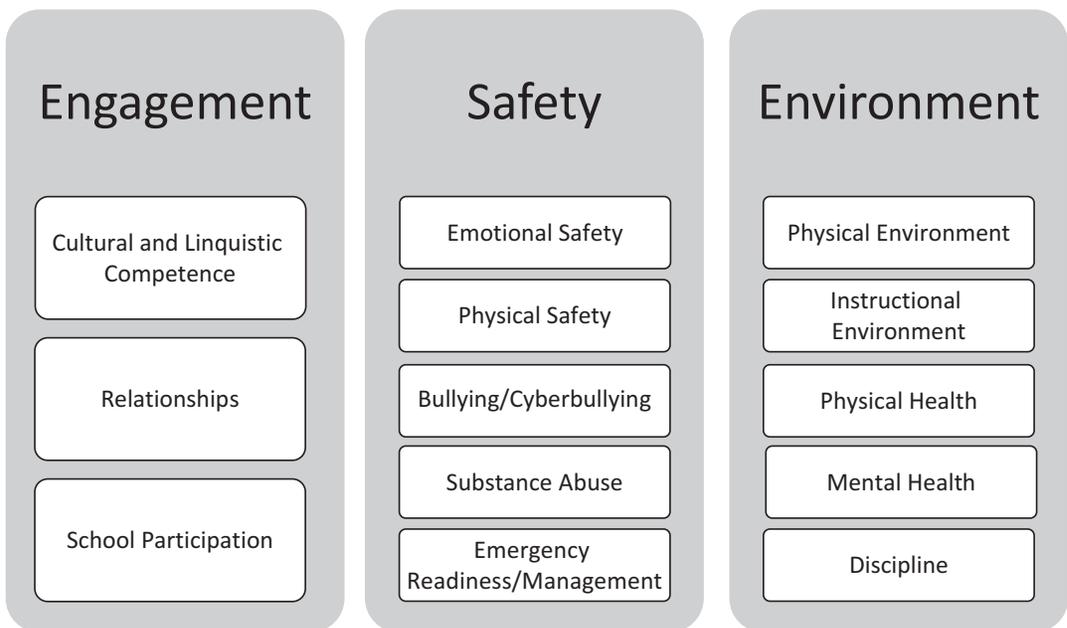


Figure 1.1 U.S. Department of Education's Model of School Climate

It is unclear how these domains and their contents originated, and why the contents were assigned to the given categories. For example, it is perplexing that the category of engagement includes relationships and school participation but excludes other elements of engagement commonly recognized among researchers, particularly cognitive and behavioral engagement. Instructional environment, which might be viewed as encompassing those two forms of engagement, is grouped under the category of environment which seems to consist of a hodgepodge of school environmental characteristics (i.e., physical environment, instructional environment, discipline) and other factors that are typically viewed by researchers as *outcomes* of those and other characteristics of school climate (i.e., mental health, physical health). It also is unclear why substance abuse is viewed as a distinct dimension of school climate (might one also include weapons?) and why there is a need to include five separate dimensions of safety (which are likely closely correlated, and unlikely distinct).

Perhaps most baffling is why the three categories for assessing school climate (engagement, safety, environment) differ from the three categories of school climate recognized elsewhere by the U.S. DOE as constituting school climate—connectedness and support, safety, and engagement. As discussed later, the latter three categories represent the three domains most widely recognized by researchers as representing the construct of school climate. Unfortunately, no supporting research is currently given in the technical manual (or on the government websites) to justify the inclusion of these three domains and what they comprise.

## Common Domains of School Climate

As seen in the 13 subscales of the National Center for School Climate’s Comprehensive School Climate Inventory and the 13 domains of school climate assessed in the U.S. DOE’s Safe and Supportive School Model of School Climate (2019), measures and conceptualizations of school climate are often quite broad and vary greatly in what they include. Cornell and Huang (2019) note that such broad conceptual models and measures of school climate

have the virtue of being comprehensive but may risk overinclusiveness and lose meaningfulness. If every aspect of a school is part of its climate, then it is not clear what the concept means and how it can be related to other important school characteristics.

(p. 159)

They further comment that “The school’s climate should be distinguishable from other elements of the school environment, such as the condition of the building, the quality of its teachers, its curriculum, or the demographics of its students. Otherwise, the term *school climate* means little more than ‘the school’” (p. 159).

Fortunately, reviews of the research literature have identified a small number of domains, typically four or five, that are common across measures of school climate. Zullig, Koopman, Patton, and Ubbes (2010) identified five domains: (1) social relationships (teacher-student and student-student); (2) order, safety, and discipline; (3) academic outcomes; (4) school facilities; and (5) school connectedness (e.g., liking of school). Note that the domain of school connectedness

is often included on other measures under the domain of relationships or community; thus, one might argue that the review identified four, not five, domains.

In their review of measures of school climate, Ramelow, Currie, and Felder-Puig (2015) found that of the four domains of school climate identified by Cohen et al. (2009) (i.e., relationships, safety, teaching and learning, and institutional environment) the domains of relationships and safety (which included rules and expectations) were most often found on measures of school climate, whereas the domain of teaching and learning and the domain of environmental-structural were found the least. Interestingly, they found no measure that included all four domains.

In a more comprehensive review of the research literature, which included 297 empirical studies, Wang and Degol (2016) concluded that school climate was best conceptualized as comprised of four broad domains: community, safety, academic, and institutional environment. Within those four domains they further identified 13 more specific dimensions, with the community domain consisting of quality of relationships (teacher-student and teacher-staff), connectedness (i.e., sense of belonging), respect for diversity (including fairness and autonomy), and partnership (i.e., parent involvement); the safety domain consisting of social/emotional safety (including lack of bullying), discipline and order (including fairness and clarity of school rules), and physical safety; the academic domain consisting of teaching and learning, professional development, and administrative leadership; and the institutional environment consisting of structural organization (e.g., class size, school size, ability grouping) and availability of resources (i.e., supplies, materials, equipment). The authors cited research linking each of the four domains to valued academic, behavioral, and psychological and social outcomes for students, while recognizing that the research base is stronger for the academic and community domains than for the safety and institutional environment domains. They also found that few measures included the institutional environment domain.

In sum, although there is no one commonly recognized definition of school climate and reviews of the literature find that measures of school climate vary greatly in their composition, there is growing consensus among researchers that school climate includes four broad domains: (1) interpersonal relationships (also referred to as social support, connectedness, and community); (2) safety, order, and discipline (also referred to as structure); (3) engagement (also referred to as academics or teaching and learning); and (4) institutional environment (also called school facilities, environmental-structural). Reviews conclude, however, that the fourth domain is seldom found on measures of school climate, and when found it varies greatly as to what aspects of the institutional environment are assessed.

Several other conclusions are commonly shared by reviewers of the literature (Anderson, 1982; Cornell & Huang, 2019; Ramelow et al., 2015; Wang & Degol, 2016)—conclusions that should guide the development, or a school's choice, of school climate measures. First, very few measures have been guided by a theoretical framework. Models and measures of school climate vary greatly in the number and type of domains or dimensions included, and it is often unclear theoretically why some school characteristics or domains are included or excluded and how those included are related to one another and to valued educational and student outcomes. Second, many measures also lack sufficient evidence of validity

and reliability. This includes the frequent lack of empirical evidence supporting how the measure is conceptualized and documenting that its various dimensions are not measuring one and the same thing (e.g., demonstrating via factor analysis that respect for diversity is not the same as positive student-student relationships, or that emotional safety and mental health are not the same).

Third, a major purpose of assessing school climate should be to guide school improvement efforts. As such, school climate measures should focus on those aspects of school climate that are most malleable, and ones that researchers have shown can readily and effectively be targeted for improvement. As noted by Cornell and Huang (2019):

A useful conception of school climate should provide a model of how features of school climate interact with one another, how school climate relates to independent student and school outcomes, and, most important, how school personnel can take action to improve school climate and generate more favorable outcomes for their students. Favorable outcomes should include both academic and nonacademic benefits, such as higher academic achievement and employment, healthy social-emotional adjustment, and development of good citizenship and character reflecting individual responsibility and respect for others.

(p. 162)

## Proposed Definition and Theoretical Framework

Avoiding the common mistake of defining school climate too abstractly or too broadly, in this book school climate refers to four interrelated and malleable characteristics of a school that foster students' academic achievements and their social and emotional development:

- *social and emotional support*, as seen in caring and respectful interpersonal relationships and responsiveness to students' basic psychological needs
- *structure*, as seen as high behavioral expectations, fair disciplinary practices, and an orderly and safe learning environment
- *student engagement*, as seen in students being emotionally, cognitively, and behaviorally engaged in school
- *safety*, as evidenced by students and teachers/staff feeling safe (which includes the absence of bullying)

As shown previously, these four domains are commonly found in models and popular measures of school climate. More so than other domains found in the literature, they also are more consistently shown to be related to two of the foremost aims of education: academic achievement and social and emotional development or competence of students. As illustrated in Figure 1.2, the four domains are interrelated, influencing one another in a dynamic and bidirectional fashion. Although interrelated, the four domains are conceptually distinct, as supported in a number of research studies on measures of school climate that included factors corresponding to the four domains. Studies tend to report moderate correlations between the factors, which indicate that they tap

into a similar global construct (i.e., school climate). Yet, as revealed in results of confirmatory factor analyses, the four domains and dimensions within them are conceptually distinct (e.g., Bear, Gaskins, Blank, & Chen, 2011; Bear et al., 2019; Brand, Felner, Shim, Seitsinger, & Dumas, 2003). In practice, examples of viewing the domains as closely related but separate would include the recognition that although both high social-emotional support and structure characterize the most effective teachers and schools, it is not uncommon to find a teacher or school lacking in one of those two domains. This is often seen in teachers and schools with an authoritarian, or zero-tolerance, approach to school discipline that emphasizes structure, using harsh practices, while neglecting social-emotional support (Bear, 2010). Viewing the domains as interrelated yet distinct also would include the understanding that while social and emotional support and structure largely determine student engagement, they do not ensure it, as many other factors, including individual child, peer, and home factors, greatly influence the extent to which students are emotionally, cognitively, or behaviorally engaged in school.

Although the framework focuses on the school, or students in aggregate, it also applies to individual students. It recognizes that at both the school and individual levels the effects between the four domains are multidirectional, and that those effects, separately or combined, also influence academic achievement and social and emotional development in a bidirectional manner. For example, just as social-emotional support and structure influence engagement and perceptions of safety, so too can engagement and perceptions of safety influence social-emotional support and structure. This is seen in a lack of student engagement harming interpersonal relationships and influencing a teacher's responsiveness to a student's psychological needs. Likewise, a bidirectional relation exists between student engagement and the valued outcomes of academic achievement and social and emotional development. For example, student engagement largely determines academic achievement at the school and individual student levels, but so is student engagement influenced by beliefs, values, and competencies of students at the school and individual student levels.

The framework is not intended to include all factors that are viewed as parts of school climate or are known to influence academic achievement and students' social and emotional development. Thus, demographic factors (e.g., gender, race, socioeconomic status, urban vs rural, school size), the physical environment of the school, administrative leadership and organization, the mental health and training of teachers and staff, and factors outside of the school are deliberately excluded. This is to avoid the mistake, as warned by Cornell and Huang (2019), of construing school climate so broadly that it loses meaningfulness. Those factors also are excluded, however, because they are difficult to change (e.g., demographic factors, factors outside of school), their relation to valued outcomes is debatable or minimal (physical environment of the school), or they constitute factors that few school climate intervention teams that examine school climate data would care or be qualified to address (e.g., administrative leadership, the mental health of teachers and staff).

The theoretical framework for conceptualizing school climate as consisting primarily of social and emotional support, structure, student engagement, and safety emanates from research and current theories of human development, as discussed in the following three sections, that support the importance of each

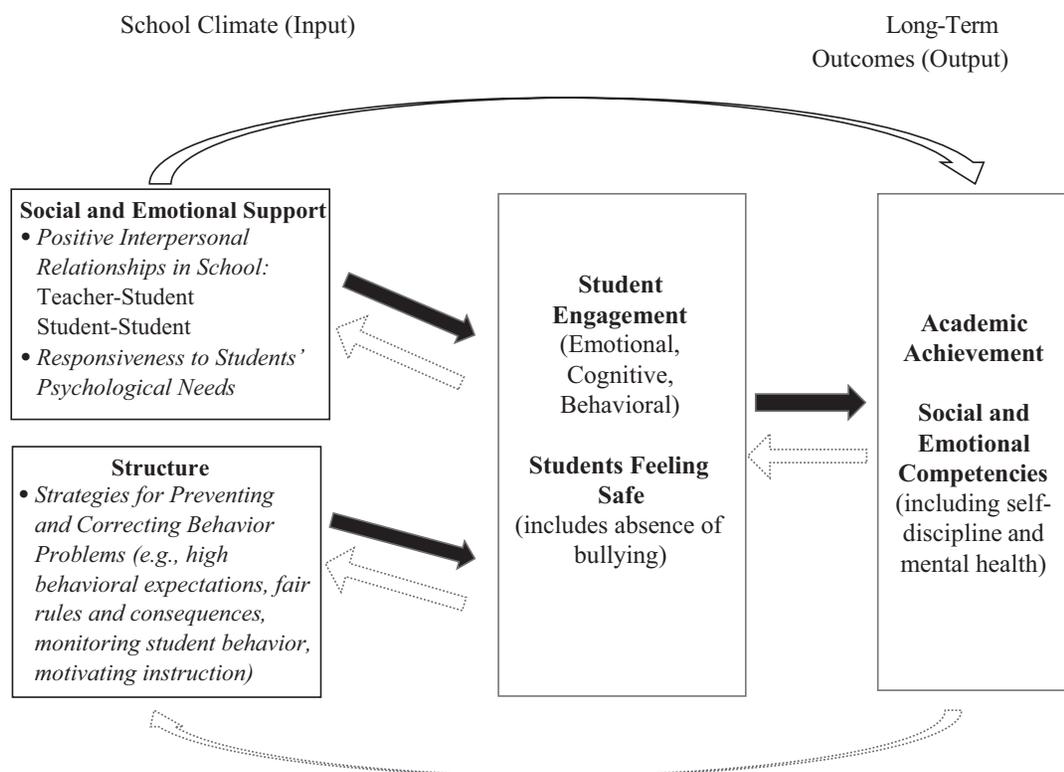


Figure 1.2 Conceptual Framework of School Climate

domain in academic achievement and social and emotional development. In the first section, each of the four domains is described and research is summarized that links it with students' academic achievement and social and emotional development. Next, the authoritative approach to parenting, classroom management, and school discipline is discussed and applied to school climate. Supported by research and theory, this approach serves as a foundation for the framework and its emphasis on social-emotional support and structure. It also forms the basis of many practices recommended throughout the book for improving school climate, including practices for preventing and correcting behavior problems and developing social and emotional competencies. Finally, developmental theories supporting the framework are presented.

## Social and Emotional Support

This domain incorporates two closely related dimensions: interpersonal relationships (teacher-student and student-student) and responsiveness to students' basic psychological needs of relatedness, competence, and autonomy.

**Interpersonal relationships.** In school this refers to how students, teachers, and staff relate to one another. It is widely recognized as a critical component of school climate, as seen previously in all reviews of the literature identifying it as such. As reviewed in Chapter 2 on teacher-student relationships, a wealth of research

shows students' perceptions of their teachers as caring, respectful, supportive, and accepting are associated with multiple positive outcomes, including greater academic engagement and achievement (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004), greater prosocial behaviors (Luckner & Pianta, 2011; Obsuth et al., 2017), and fewer antisocial and aggressive behaviors (Obsuth et al., 2017). When such perceptions exist, students are more willing to cooperate with school rules and adult expectations out of respect and a desire to maintain the positive teacher-student relationship rather than fear of punishment or promise of rewards (Wentzel, 1997, 2006). Likewise, as reviewed in Chapter 3, a number of positive outcomes are associated with supportive student-student relationships. They include less acting out, aggression, and delinquent behaviors (Brand et al., 2003; Demaray & Malecki, 2002; Sturaro, van Lier, Cuijpers, & Koot, 2011), and fewer internalizing problems, such as loneliness, low self-esteem, depression, and suicide (Brand et al., 2003; Spilt, van Lier, Leflot, Onghena, & Colpin, 2014). When poor peer relationships exist, students are at much greater risk for low academic achievement (Buhs, Ladd, & Herald, 2006; Perdue, Manzeske, & Estell, 2009), avoiding school (Buhs et al., 2006), and not completing school (French & Conrad, 2003). Bullying also is much more likely to occur in classes and schools where peer support, respect, and acceptance are lacking (Jenkins & Demaray, 2012; Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009). Furthermore, as with teacher-student relationships, when students view student-student relationships as caring and supportive, students are more likely to stand up against bullies, and bystanders are more likely to intervene (Rigby & Johnson, 2006; Saarento, Kärnä, Hodges, & Salmivalli, 2013).

**Responsiveness.** Support from teachers and peers entails not only social support in meeting the need for relatedness, but additional forms of support (referred to as responsiveness) are necessary to meet additional needs in areas of social and emotional development, especially those of autonomy and competence. Positive interpersonal relationships certainly help meet those two needs, but they are not sufficient. For example, students might feel that others accept, respect, and care about them but nevertheless fail to experience a sense of autonomy and competence. Autonomy refers to one's belief that he or she chooses, controls, and determines his or her own behavior. Competence refers to feeling successful in areas that one values, which among students typically include interpersonal relations, academics, and behavioral conduct (Harter, 2006). Positive self-worth, or self-esteem, and motivation require that individuals experience a healthy balance of social support (or relatedness), autonomy, and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

An emphasis on responsiveness to students' developmental needs, which extends beyond responsiveness to the need for relatedness, is supported by the classic work on parenting by Baumrind (1971, 2013). As discussed later in this chapter, Baumrind found that what she labeled *responsiveness*, and when combined with *demandingness* (similar to what is referred to as structure in school climate), characterizes the most effective style of parenting. As described by Baumrind (2013, p.26): "*Responsiveness* refers to parents' emotional warmth and supportive actions that are attuned to children's vulnerabilities, cognitions, and inputs and are supportive of children's individual needs and plans."

Warmth and caring are certainly part of social and emotional support but are insufficient for meeting children's psychological needs. Social and emotional support requires more deliberate and direct actions, within the context of supportive relationships, that teach and promote competencies of social, emotional, and moral development, such as social perspective-taking, empathy, and responsible decision-making. Actions for developing those competencies are the focus of Chapter 4. That chapter includes research linking social and emotional competence to highly valued outcomes which include student engagement, academic achievement, prosocial behavior, and mental health.

## Structure

Structure, or what Baumrind (2013) called *demandingness*, refers to adults presenting clear and high behavioral and academic expectations; providing necessary supervision and monitoring of student behavior; and having fair rules, while enforcing them consistently and fairly. When correcting misbehavior, persuasion, guidance, and reasoning is preferred over punishment and external control, but the latter are used when needed. In the context of school, structure includes teaching that is motivating and promotes student engagement and academic achievement. Research shows that such preventive and corrective actions, especially when combined with responsiveness, characterize not only the most effective parents (Baumrind, 2013), but also the most effective teachers and schools (Arum, 2003; Bear, 2005, 2015; Brophy, 1996). Students' perceptions of clear and fair behavioral expectations, rules, and consequences are associated with greater prosocial behavior (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, & Leaf, 2012), greater student engagement and academic achievement (Benner, Graham, & Mistry, 2008; Welsh, 2000, 2003), and fewer behavior problems and disruptive behavior (Arum, 2003; Bradshaw et al., 2012; Gottfredson, Gottfredson, Payne, & Gottfredson, 2005; Welsh, 2000, 2003), including bullying and peer victimization (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Waasdorp, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2012).

## Engagement

As discussed in Chapter 7, student engagement refers to the extent to which students value and are involved in academic and social activities in school (Li & Lerner, 2013; Reeve, 2013). Student engagement exists in three forms: emotional, behavioral, and cognitive (Fredricks et al., 2004; Lee & Shute, 2010; Reschly & Christenson, 2013). In general, emotional engagement refers to students' positive and negative affective reactions and feelings toward school, behavioral engagement to behaviors that indicate that students follow school rules and are actively involved in academic and other school-related activities, and cognitive engagement to the desire and willingness among students to exert their best effort toward learning (Fredricks et al., 2004; Lee & Shute, 2010). As reviewed in Chapter 7, a wealth of research shows that social-emotional support and structure foster student engagement (e.g., Cornell, Shukla, & Konold, 2016) and that student engagement leads to greater academic achievement and fewer behavior problems (Baroody, Rimm-Kaufman, Larsen, & Curby, 2016; Wang & Eccles, 2012a) as well as overall social-emotional well-being (Osterman, 2000).

## **Feelings of Safety**

Feelings of safety are closely related to behavioral, cognitive, and emotional engagement, and especially the latter. Emotional engagement entails liking and enjoying school. It is difficult to imagine a student feeling unsafe but liking and enjoying school. However, feeling safe does not ensure student engagement, as many students feel safe but are lacking in cognitive, behavioral, and emotional engagement. Thus, safety and engagement are viewed in the framework as two separate yet interrelated constructs.

Feeling safe, or emotional safety, also is viewed as separate from physical safety. Physical safety generally refers to actions, including structure-based practices, taken by schools with the intention of increasing the actual safety of students. The effectiveness of those actions is typically measured by indicators assessing violent and criminal activities (and often with little concern about emotional safety). As discussed in Chapter 9 on safety, many actions taken by schools with the intent to ensure physical safety do not enhance students' perceptions of safety. Indeed, as discussed in that chapter, too often safety measures have the opposite effect, leading students to experience greater anxiety and fear about their safety, to feel less safe, and to dislike school. This is seen in a zero tolerance approach to school discipline that emphasizes suspensions and the pervasive use of security measures such as school resource officers, cameras, and metal detectors (especially when not needed, such as in schools with no history of violence). As discussed and recommended in Chapter 9, it is a combination of practices associated with social-emotional support and structure that lead to both greater physical and emotional safety.

## **Academic Achievement and Social and Emotional Development as the Primary Aims of Education**

As reflected in the last panel of the framework presented in Figure 1.2, school climate, consisting of four domains, is associated with two highly valued educational outcomes commonly targeted in school improvement efforts: academic achievement and social and emotional development (or competence). Academic achievement, as typically assessed by standardized tests, is fairly self-explanatory and thus will not be discussed here. As mentioned previously, and documented throughout this book, ample research shows that social-emotional support and structure determine student engagement, which in turn, determines academic achievement. Because the category of social and emotional development is less clear and more encompassing, it requires greater attention.

In the framework, social and emotional competence is used as a general term that refers to knowledge, beliefs, values, and behaviors associated with self-discipline and mental health (or emotional well-being). In education the term is often used interchangeably with self-discipline, civic responsibility, and mental health. As used in this book, social and emotional development subsumes the five social and emotional learning (SEL) competencies recognized by the Collaboration for Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL; see [www.casel.org](http://www.casel.org)). Those five competencies underlie self-discipline. For centuries, educators have viewed self-discipline as critical to American democracy grounded in individual rights and self-governance (Bear, 2005; McClellan, 1999). In support of self-discipline

as a primary aim of education, a 2000 Gallup poll found that the general public believed that the most important purpose of public education is “to prepare students to be responsible citizens” (Rose & Gallup, 2000). Self-discipline refers to students regulating their own behavior with minimal adult monitoring and control (Bear, 2005, 2010). It includes a moral component—more than positive social relationships or getting along with others. That is, it entails knowing what’s right, desiring to do what is right, and doing what is right (Bear, 2005; Rest, 1983). This includes inhibiting or regulating antisocial, disrespectful, harmful behavior and assuming responsibility for one’s actions. But, it also includes exhibiting prosocial behaviors such as helping, respecting, and caring about others (Bear, 2005). Adding the moral component highlights that self-discipline and civic responsibility should not be driven by self-centered or hedonistic moral reasoning based on external rewards or fear of punishment but instead on understanding the impact of one’s behavior on others (individually and collectively), the anticipation of feelings of guilt, and an appreciation of rules, laws, property rights, and moral principles of trust, respect, and honesty.

In the framework, social and emotional competence includes mental health. Mental health consists of the absence of mental or behavioral disorders; the presence of subjective well-being, or happiness and life satisfaction; and the ability to cope with adversity (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2009). Consistent with self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017), as discussed later in this chapter, mental health requires that students’ psychological needs of relatedness, competence, and autonomy be met. Indeed, mental health is largely defined by individuals interacting positively with others and feeling a sense of belongingness or connectedness with others, feeling competent in areas of importance in their lives, and experiencing a sense of autonomy.

Students’ social and emotional competence, or mental health, is positively related to their academic achievement, although the association tends to be small (O’Connor, Cloney, Dvalsvig, & Goldfeld, 2019). Both variables are influenced by multiple factors in students’ lives and school climate is among them. As illustrated in Figure 1.2, social-emotional support and structure influence academic achievement and social and emotional competence directly and indirectly through their impact on engagement and feelings of safety. Supported by longitudinal studies examining relations between domains of school climate and valued outcomes (e.g., Jiang, Huebner, & Siddall, 2013; Wang & Eccles, 2012a), the framework also recognizes that the relations are bidirectional but with the influences of the four domains of school climate on academic achievement being stronger than that of academic achievement and social and emotional competence on school climate.

### **Authoritative Approach to Parenting, Classroom Management, and School Discipline Applied to School Climate**

An emphasis on social and emotional support, and particularly responsiveness, and on structure, follows from the classic work on parenting by Diana Baumrind (1971) first published over half a decade ago. Baumrind identified three styles of parenting and the behaviors of children associated with each style. Since then a wealth of research has supported and extended her findings (see Baumrind, 2013 for review). The three styles are *authoritative*, *authoritarian*, and *permissive*.

A fourth style, *uninvolved* or *neglectful*, was identified later by researchers, but is not included here since it pertains very little to school climate and school discipline. Baumrind found that what largely differentiates the three styles is the extent to which each style is characterized by a combination of responsiveness and demandingness. The least effective styles of parenting are authoritarian and permissive, with authoritarian parents being high in demandingness but low in responsiveness, and permissive parents being high in permissiveness and low in demandingness. Authoritative parents are high in both qualities. Compared to children of permissive and authoritarian parents, children of authoritative parents have greater academic achievement, and exhibit more prosocial behaviors and fewer antisocial behaviors (Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987; Steinberg, Elmen, & Mounts, 1989).

As noted previously, and discussed further in Chapters 5 and 6, research in the areas of classroom management and school discipline have consistently supported an authoritative approach (Bear, 2015). Authoritative teachers and staff strive to build and maintain positive and supportive relationships with students, between students, and between the home and school. Additional and deliberate actions are taken to be responsive to students' needs, which include developing social and emotional competencies that underlie self-discipline.

Authoritative adults expect students to exhibit self-discipline, and they *demand* appropriate behavior. They understand that social-emotional support and structure are intertwined and dependent on one another, and that a healthy balance of the two is required for effective classroom management and school discipline. They recognize that when students perceive teacher-student and student-relationships favorably, they are much more motivated to follow rules and to internalize the prosocial values and norms that schools aim to communicate (Hughes, 2002; Wentzel, 2002). Authoritative adults also recognize that when structure is lacking, as seen in low behavioral expectations and unfair rules and consequences, students tend to have little respect for their teachers (McKnight, Graybeal, Yarbrow, & Graybeal, 2016).

Responsiveness and demandingness (or structure) refer not only to environmental conditions that foster self-discipline but also to student-centered strategies that parents and educators use to develop children's social and emotional competencies. For example, whereas demandingness includes structures such as high expectations, fair rules, and monitoring student behavior, another key component is *confrontative control*. Confrontative control is not to be confused with coercive control. As noted by Baumrind (2013, p. 19), "Confrontative control is demanding, firm, and goal-directed, whereas coercive control is intrusive, manipulative, punitive, autonomy undermining, and restrictive (Patterson, 1982)." Whereas confrontative control is intended to bring about willing compliance, coercive control brings about grudging compliance and at times outright disobedience. Confrontative control challenges ways of thinking and emotions, as well as the lack of thinking and emotions, associated with antisocial behavior such as blaming others and making excuses, acting impulsively or in anger, failing to apply skills in one's repertoire, and not accepting responsibility for one's actions. It is intended to help develop thought patterns and emotions that inhibit antisocial behavior and promote prosocial behavior, in hopes that they will be applied in the future. Although students are encouraged to express their own opinions and actively participate in decision-making, and autonomy is highly

valued, harmful actions are never accepted. Instead, they are always challenged, and sanctions are imposed when students fail to act in a morally responsible manner (Morris, Cui, & Steinberg, 2013).

## Authoritative Approach Applied to School Climate

Applied to a model of school climate, an emphasis on responsiveness and demandingness was seen in Stockard and Mayberry's (1992) theoretical framework of school climate. However, Stockard and Mayberry did not draw from or base their framework on Baumrind's research. They conducted a comprehensive review of the sociological, psychological, and economic theories and research of organizations, which included the effective schools and school climate literatures. Based on their review, they concluded that school climate is best conceptualized as consisting of two broad dimensions: *social action* and *social order*. Social action is similar to responsiveness, or social support, in authoritative discipline theory, with its emphasis on the everyday social interactions among teachers, staff, and students (i.e., the presence of caring, understanding, concern, and respect). Social order is similar to demandingness, or structure, with its primary goal being to curtail behavior problems and promote safety.

Although studies of school climate in general support Stockard and Mayberry's school climate framework, very few have focused specifically on social action and social order as conceptualized in the framework. Exceptions, however, are several studies conducted by Griffith (1995, 1997) which found that elementary school students' perceptions of social action and social order, and particularly the former, were related to their self-reports of academic performance and satisfaction.

Only recently has the authoritative discipline approach been applied more specifically to school climate, with social support and structure recognized as its two primary components, as found on the Delaware School Climate Survey-Student (DSCS-S) Bear et al., 2011, Bear et al., 2019) and the Authoritative School Climate Scale (Cornell, 2015). On both measures, structure is quite similar to Baumrind's demandingness. However, social support differs from Baumrind's responsiveness in placing almost exclusive emphasis on interpersonal relations while not recognizing other ways in which adults are responsive to the social and emotional needs of students.

When applied to school climate, an authoritative school climate has been found to be associated with the following:

- fewer behavior problems (Bear et al., 2011; Wang, Selman, Dishion, & Stormshak, 2010)
- fewer school suspensions from school (Bear et al., 2011, 2019; Gregory, Cornell, & Fan, 2011; Huang & Cornell, 2018)
- less bullying and bullying victimization (Cornell, Shukla, & Konold, 2015; Gregory et al., 2010)
- less student aggression toward teachers (Berg & Cornell, 2016; Gregory, Cornell, & Fan, 2012)
- less risk behavior, including weapon carrying and substance use (Cornell & Huang, 2016)

- less truancy and dropping out (Pellerin, 2005)
- greater engagement (Cornell et al., 2016; Lee, 2012)
- greater academic achievement (Bear et al., 2011; Gregory et al., 2010; Konold et al., 2014; Lee, 2012)

## **Theoretical Support for the Framework in This Book**

Although it is well established that school climate, irrespective of how it is defined or conceptualized, is related to the academic achievement and social and emotional adjustment of students, the processes that account for the effects of school climate are much less clear. This includes how social support and structure foster engagement and feelings of safety and, in turn, academic achievement and social and emotional adjustment. Five theories, models, and frameworks in educational, social, and developmental psychology provide explanation and have guided much of the research related to school climate: the bioecological model, social control theory, attachment theory, social cognitive theory, and self-determination theory. Each is discussed briefly below.

***Bioecological Model, or Ecological Systems Theory, of Human Development.*** The most popular theory or model for explaining the impact of school climate on student behavior has been Bronfenbrenner's model or theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). Calling it an ecological systems theory of human development earlier in his career, and with a primary focus on environmental and social factors influencing behavior, Bronfenbrenner later labelled it a bioecological model in greater recognition of the important role of individual influences on behavior as well as on one's environment. As noted by Wang and Degol (2016) in their review of the measures of school climate, Bronfenbrenner's model is "one of the theoretical pillars of school climate research" (p. 319).

Bronfenbrenner first developed his ecological systems theory of human development to explain how poverty and other environmental factors influenced children's development (and the need for early intervention programs such as Head Start). At the core of the theory is that human behavior is influenced by the dynamic interaction of multiple environmental, societal, and individual factors. The factors operate and interact at different systemic levels, ranging from the home, community, and society to the more immediate school or classroom environment (i.e., the microsystem). Factors influence one another in an ongoing, dynamic, bidirectional or multidirectional, and contextual-specific fashion. The theory recognizes that whereas multiple systems of the environment influence how students think, feel, and act, students also influence their environments. Applied to school climate, the theory would posit that support and structure are among multiple factors that determine if students are academically engaged and if prosocial or antisocial behavior is more prevalent, but also would recognize that student engagement and behavior influence support and structure. For example, when students are engaged and self-discipline is evident, less structure is needed and the social support of peers and adults is often more readily provided.

The model clearly recognizes that multiple distal and proximal factors influence student behavior. Within the context of school climate, emphasis is placed

on social relationships (e.g., a student's relationship with the teacher, peers, and family) and on values and norms that influence how students think and act (Swearer & Hymel, 2015).

**Social Control Theory.** The bioecological model and social control theory share many of the same tenets, with an emphasis on multiple environmental determinants of behavior. They differ, however, in that the bioecological model was intended to be a more general theory of human development, whereas the latter was intended to explain delinquent acts. Hirschi's (1969) social control theory emphasizes the influence of social bonds, which are of four types: attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. Individuals are most likely to break social norms and commit delinquent acts when one or more of those social bonds are lacking or are broken. For example, when relationships are close and supportive (i.e., the social bond of attachment to others, and school, exists), students are more likely to internalize values and moral codes shared by teachers and classmates. They also more willingly refrain from harmful and deviant behavior because they want to maintain the bond of attachment with others. Similarly, when students feel committed and actively involved, or engaged, in school activities, they are less likely to exhibit delinquent behaviors. The same applies to students believing that rules are fair and feeling committed to following them: Under those conditions students are more likely to exhibit normative behavior and to inhibit delinquent behaviors.

**Attachment Theory.** Another theory that emphasizes the importance of relationships and social-emotional support in deterring behavior problems and fostering engagement and psychological well-being is attachment theory (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1969). According to this theory, it is through their early interactions with caregivers that children create *internal working models of attachment*. Those working models determine how children relate to others in the future, feelings of safety, and the degree to which behavior is independent/autonomous or dependent on others. Whereas secure attachments foster close and trusting relationships with others, feelings of safety, independent/autonomous behavior, and positive self-esteem, insecure attachments lead to the opposite and thus are associated with multiple negative social, emotional, and academic outcomes, including delinquency (Fearon, Bakermans-Kranenburg, van IJzendoorn, Lapsley, & Roisman, 2010).

Although attachment theory has most commonly been applied to parenting, and especially parenting during infancy and early childhood, it also applies to teacher-student relationships and students of all ages (Pianta, 1999). When teacher-student relationships are positive, or secure, the psychological needs of students are likely to be met, as students can count on their teachers providing necessary social and emotional support. For example, students are more inclined to talk to their teachers when they have problems, such as when being bullied (Eliot, Cornell, Gregory, & Fan, 2010). Additionally, when relationships are positive and students feel secure, they experience less stress and greater self-confidence, self-efficacy, and engagement in learning and are less likely to violate existing norms (Ahnert, Harwardt-Heinecke, Kappler, Eckstein-Madry, & Milatz, 2012).

**Social cognitive Theory.** As with the theories discussed above, and applied to school climate, social cognitive theory emphasizes the dynamic and reciprocal interaction of the student (including the student's cognitions and emotions), the environment, and behavior. However, it provides greater guidance as to the self-regulatory thought processes (and to a lesser extent emotions) of students that programs might address for promoting prosocial behavior and a positive school climate. Among the additional contributions of social cognitive theory to explaining how school climate influences student behavior (and vice versa) is recognition of the influences of internal and external reinforcement, observational learning and modeling, and self-regulatory systems, especially goals and expectations, self-efficacy (i.e., one's competence in successfully performing a behavior), and mechanisms of moral disengagement. Mechanisms of moral disengagement, as discussed in Chapter 4, are unique to cognitive-behavior theory, and help explain why students often commit immoral acts, such as bullying, lying, stealing, and cheating, despite being taught and knowing why they are wrong.

**Self-determination Theory.** As noted earlier in this chapter, self-determination theory emphasizes the importance of meeting three basic psychological needs for children to be motivated and engaged in learning and to be socially and emotionally adjusted. Those needs are relatedness, confidence, and autonomy. In school, each of those needs is met in the context of supportive teacher-student and student-student relationships. It is interactions with teachers and peers that largely determine not only if students experience a sense of belonging, or relatedness, but also feelings of competence and autonomy. Structure also is important, however, as students are unlikely to feel competent and experience a sense of autonomy, irrespective of supportive relationships, in schools that emphasize external control of behavior, especially with harsh punitive practices, and fail to develop students' social and emotional competencies.

Positive school climates help meet students' psychological needs by promoting higher self-esteem, self-confidence, and satisfaction with school (Croninger & Lee, 2001; Demaray & Malecki, 2002; Jiang et al., 2013; Spilt et al., 2014), as well as greater academic engagement and achievement (Danielsen, Wiium, Wilhelmsen, & Wold, 2010; Wentzel, Barry, & Caldwell, 2004). These student characteristics have been shown to serve as major protective factors in bullying and bullying victimization (Zych, Farrington, & Ttofi, 2018).

Closely associated with self-determination theory is stage-environment fit theory (Eccles & Midgley, 1989). It too recognizes the critical importance of the environment (e.g., school) meeting the psychological needs of students, especially during the transition from elementary to middle school. Students are academically motivated and engaged when the school environment fits their psychological needs, which includes the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Zimmer-Gembeck, Chipuer, Hanisch, Creed, & McGregor, 2006).

In sum, the five theories above explain the dynamic and reciprocal effects between school climate and student behavior while highlighting multiple influencing factors at the school level that are malleable and align with the four domains of school climate emphasized in the model presented in this chapter. Whereas each theory helps explain how support, structure, engagement, and safety influence academic achievement and social, emotional, and moral development, they

vary in the attention given to each domain and the mechanisms of influence. For example, attachment theory, self-determination theory, and social control theory place great emphasis on the importance of interpersonal relationships and responsiveness (i.e., the social and emotional support domain). In addition to the social and emotional domain, social control theory also emphasizes the critical role of student engagement, whereas self-determination theory and social-cognitive theory, which are more cognitively-based, emphasize that actions within the domains of structure, engagement, and safety are necessary to help meet students' psychological needs. Bioecological theory, the more general of the five theories, supports the importance of each of the four domains, recognizing that multiple factors at multiple system levels influence school climate and student behavior.

Although emphasized more so in bioecological and social-cognitive theories than the other two theories, each of the five theories share the view that multiple environmental factors influence student behavior, but it is how students perceive those environmental factors, rather than objective reality per se, that matters the most. This applies to school climate and each of its four domains and to the impact of school climate on the academic achievement and social, emotional, and moral development. For example, a school might document actions based on objective criteria or subjective opinion that it believes show that teachers and staff are caring, supportive, and responsive to students' needs; that rules and expectations are clear; that the curriculum is motivating and challenging (based on claims of teachers); and that the school is safe (as seen in security measures being in place, or by suspending students who are viewed as threatening school safety). But if students fail to *perceive* those actions the same way and view the school climate unfavorably then it is the students' perceptions rather than what is reported by the school that will best predict student academic achievement and student behavior. Because students' perceptions of school climate are the best predictors of their behavior, most studies, about 90%, use student surveys to measure school climate (Wang & Degol, 2016).

## Conclusion and Implications for Practice

In this chapter it was argued that instead of viewing school climate as an albattross or unicorn, it should be viewed as a phoenix—with school climate demonstrating new life and promise. Its regeneration has been fanned by a wealth of new measures and research documenting that school climate is related to multiple valued outcomes, including students' academic achievement, behavior, and mental health, and by major initiatives of the U.S. Department of Education to encourage schools to target school climate in school improvement efforts. How long it will be before the phoenix returns again to its ashes will likely be determined by the effectiveness of those efforts. For those efforts to succeed, educators need more consistent definitions, conceptual frameworks or models, and measures of school climate, grounded in research and theory, to guide the implementation of practical and effective interventions. This chapter offered a definition and conceptual framework of school climate, grounded in research and theory, for that purpose. Measures that align with the definition and conceptual framework and are designed to help schools identify their school climate strengths and needs are the focus of Chapter 10.

The conceptual framework focuses on malleable characteristics of schools, including mechanisms and practices for change, that have been shown to lead to greater academic achievement and social-emotional competencies, including fewer behavior problems and the mental health of students. School characteristics are subsumed under four domains of school climate: social-emotional support, structure, engagement, and safety. Throughout the remaining chapters, evidence-based strategies and interventions within each of those domains are presented for improving school climate. The chapters align roughly with the four domains, although the strategies and interventions focus on improvements within the given domain (e.g., improving teacher-student relations). It should be understood that those improvements help achieve the longer-term aims of academic achievement and social-emotional competencies. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 address the domain of social-emotional support, with Chapter 2 presenting recommendations for improving teacher-student relationships, Chapter 3 for improving student-student relationships, and Chapter 4 for developing social, emotional, and moral competencies that underlie self-discipline.

Aligning with the domain of structure, teacher-centered strategies and interventions of classroom management and schoolwide discipline are presented in Chapter 5 and 6. Whereas Chapter 5 focuses on preventing behavior problems, Chapter 6 focuses on correcting behavior problems (while simultaneously helping develop self-discipline). As emphasized in those chapters, and consistent with the authoritative approach to classroom management and school discipline, the strategies and interventions recommended in those chapters should always be used in combination with those presented for the domain of social-emotional support. The domain of engagement is the subject of Chapter 7, where additional evidence-based strategies and interventions are recommended for improving students' emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagement. They are in addition to the recommendations presented in the previous chapters that also certainly improve engagement (e.g., supportive teacher-student relationships, teaching social and emotional skills, and effective classroom management). The domain of safety is the subject of Chapter 9, in which issues of safety are discussed (e.g., how safe are schools, what are the advantages and limitations of such safety measures as suspensions, cameras, and school resource officers) and recommendations for improving school safety are presented. A particular aspect of safety, bullying, is the focus of Chapter 8, in which recommendations for preventing and responding to bullying (beyond those presented in previous chapters) are presented. Finally, as noted earlier, Chapter 10 presents measures of school climate, with a focus on the Delaware School Surveys, that align with each of the four domains of school climate and dimensions. In that chapter, guidance is provided on how to use school climate data to guide efforts to improve school climate.

# NOTES

## Chapter 5

1. Positive behavior support, or PBS, became positive behavior support and intervention, or PBIS, after the Public Broadcasting System warned of lawsuits for infringing on their use of the acronym PBS).
2. These recommendations are adapted from Bear, 2010 and Bear et al., 2019, and are elaborated on in those sources.

## Chapter 10

- 1 Although scoring and detailed reports are not available to non-Delaware schools from the Delaware Department of Education, those schools may complete the surveys via an App that scores and reports the data. The App is available from [www.mosaic-network.com/Covitality](http://www.mosaic-network.com/Covitality)
- 2 The Delaware Department of Education plans to field test items designed to assess self-awareness in Spring 2020.

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