

# The Equity Movement

## IMPLEMENTING THE SCHOOL CLIMATE BILL OF RIGHTS

**June 2014**

**"Once a social change has begun  
it cannot be reversed. You cannot  
un-educate the person who has  
learned to read. You cannot  
humiliate the person who feels  
pride. You cannot oppress the  
people who are not afraid anymore."**

**CESAR CHAVEZ, *Labor Leader***

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WRITING



# Letter

## TO OUR BOYS OF COLOR

This paper is inspired by, and written for, you. In fact, it began with you. Our students have been leading a social justice movement in the Los Angeles Unified School District over the past decades. Your movement—which is our movement—has focused on highlighting the problem of racial injustice in our schools. The sad and sobering truth is that we are failing to graduate more than four out of every 10 black and brown boys.

As a result of our students' advocacy, LAUSD has led the nation in passing a groundbreaking School Climate Bill of Rights in 2013. Today, we are at a critical inflection point. We have the opportunity to make your bill of rights a vehicle for eradicating racial injustice in our schools.

In the spring of 2014, our team of 13 educators from across Los Angeles took on the mighty task of proposing recommendations to implement the School Climate Bill of Rights. We began by examining data on the achievement gap in LAUSD. We had tough conversations about institutional racism, gender divides, poverty and pedagogy. We came together, across lines of difference, to challenge and learn from each other and to have an open and, at times, painful conversation about the intersection of race, gender, power and privilege in our lives, careers and classrooms. We looked at local and national data and mined our collective experiences as teachers. We polled hundreds of our colleagues and interviewed you—our students—using these perspectives to further inform our thinking and writing. Many of our ideas became stronger and more inclusive because of what we learned from their and your input. Our journey led us to a clear conclusion—to be silent on school climate is to be silent on racial and educational injustice.

As your teachers, we have a duty and opportunity to elevate, celebrate and promote achievement among all our students. Rooted in our sense of responsibility and belief in you, our work on this policy issue focuses on students most negatively impacted by the status quo in public education—our boys of color who are most likely to receive suspensions instead of diplomas. We believe that if we improve our education system—including our very own classrooms—for those who need it most, we will create a more equitable system for all of our students.

In this struggle with you and for you,

The E4E-Los Angeles 2014 Teacher Policy Team on School Climate

**We are at a critical inflection point. We have the opportunity to make your bill of rights a vehicle for eradicating racial injustice in our schools.**

# STATE TOOLS

**INVEST IN DATA**

**INVEST IN RECOGNIZING EXCELLENCE**

# DISTRICT TOOLS

**GIVE SCHOOLS A SCHOOL CLIMATE FLASHLIGHT**

**INVEST IN CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY**

**INVEST IN RESTORATIVE JUSTICE**

# SCHOOL TOOLS

**REIMAGINE MISSION STATEMENTS AS ACTION STATEMENTS**

**DEVELOP A SCHOOL-BASED ACTION PLAN**

**DEVELOP SCHOOL CLIMATE LEADERSHIP ROLES FOR TEACHERS**

Improving school climate is a whole-team effort; and it cannot be a topdown mandate. When students cry out, as they have in Los Angeles, for higher-quality school climates, all levels of our education system must respond with the support, funding, information and accountability these efforts require.

# STATE TOOLS

INVEST IN DATA

INVEST IN RECOGNIZING EXCELLENCE

# State Solutions

## EMPOWERING DISTRICTS WITH INFORMATION AND BEST PRACTICES

### THE CURRENT PROBLEM

Boys of color being pushed out of our public schools is not a problem isolated to Los Angeles. In California, 16.8% of Latino males and 22.4% of African-American males dropped out in 2013, compared to 9% of white males.<sup>1</sup> In the last few years, California state leaders have taken on this issue and passed important legislation to reduce zero-tolerance policies and citations for youth—two factors shown to reduce dropouts for students of color.<sup>2</sup> But with the passage of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), the zeitgeist for state policy in California has finally moved from setting mandates to empowering local districts. LCFF gives more money to districts with higher numbers of low-income, English Language Learner and foster youth and then allows local districts to make their own decisions about where and how dollars are spent, as long as they benefit those students.

But while local autonomy and decision making is critical, the state's role should not be reduced to a mere checkbook. LCFF provides a unique moment for the state to empower districts with information and best practices to make smart local decisions about funding and policy. The state provided eight "priority areas" for expenditures, one of which is school climate. Only state leaders can look at data from all of California to provide a stronger analysis across districts, as well as lift up models of excellence in school climate policies and practices.

The recommendations in this section ask the state to streamline and aggregate its vast data to hold districts accountable, identify common challenges and highlight those schools whose data is particularly impressive.

### POLICY ROLES FOR STATES

- Investing in infrastructure for collecting data on school climate and disaggregating it by race, ethnicity and gender in user-friendly reports in order to facilitate better decision making at the district and school level
- Holding districts accountable for working to close consistent and systemic gaps for particular groups of students
- Providing funding for start-up pilot programs to address issues in school climate, in order to spur further innovation and incubate new models
- Lifting up school climate best practices through grant programs, in order to recognize successful programs and inspire others to utilize them

“The conversations we really need to have can only start when we’re open and transparent about our data—the good, the bad and the ugly.”

**Steven Almazan**, *Fourth and fifth grade, Special Education, New Open World Academy*

## INVEST IN DATA

### WHAT THIS TOOL DOES

California leads the nation in alternative discipline policies.<sup>3</sup> Schools across the state are piloting and scaling innovative, student-focused policies that are seeing great results for kids and particularly for students of color.<sup>4</sup> After pushing the state to adopt these new policies in place of harmful “zero tolerance” policies of the past, coalitions like Fixing School Discipline or Dignity in Schools have done great work collecting and distributing these resources.

But as the state passes important legislation to take ineffective and potentially harmful tools off the table, they must invest in the tools schools need to meet the important goals of better school climates for all students.

The state already has examples of these kinds of tools through its Safe and Supportive Schools (S3) grant program, which provided dollars for schools that proposed innovative plans or expansions on current practices to improve school climate. The grantees’ information is collected in the S3 database.

The state is in the position to build exponentially on these

data-sharing efforts by investing in the tools districts and schools need to replicate improved outcomes for students. California should expand its S3 database to include more schools and make it searchable by demographic information. Making data searchable by school size, level or type would help school leaders more efficiently narrow their focus on the examples and tools that are most relevant to them and their context. Sixty-nine percent of teachers polled highlighted this strategy as “Absolutely Essential” or “Important.”<sup>5</sup>

Currently, the database includes School Climate Report Cards only for the schools that applied for that specific grant program and is only searchable by school name or location. Instead, the database should include all schools and districts seeing a marked improvement in school climate measures and be searchable by school size, demographics and level. This information could be collected in a streamlined fashion through district Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAPs) and could be made easier at the school level through the School Climate Report Card (*see page 7 for more information*). So for example, a school leader of a large high school could search for other large high schools that also have 80% or more low-income students, 60% or more Latino students and 30% or more African-American students.

The state is in the position to build exponentially on these data-sharing efforts by investing in the tools districts and schools need to replicate improved outcomes for students.





When she finds other schools that have these same traits but also have extremely low out-of-class referral rates for students of color, she can get in contact with her fellow school leader to learn more about their successful strategies.

State leaders at the California Department of Education could utilize the work of the Data Quality Campaign (DQC) to assess their data quality. DQC recommends data be longitudinal (follows students over time), actionable (timely and user friendly) and contextual (presented as part of a larger picture).<sup>6</sup>

#### MEASURING SUCCESS

The single biggest measure of success for this database would be to ensure regular and ongoing use and responsiveness to the searching needs of users. For instance, Google uses the frequency of visits, feedback from users and common search terms to improve the order of search results and provide users with a better experience. In the same way, the state could track the kind of information that is frequently accessed and where users tend to encounter problems or log off the site. The state could also provide follow-up training to district leaders, who can turnkey to school leaders and staff, on how to use the database and provide feedback.

#### CAVEATS AND CONSIDERATIONS

- The data in this database will only be useful if it is current and representative. However, schools and districts are already responsible for a massive amount of data collection and reporting. Therefore, it's imperative these reports be thoroughly integrated into other reports already going to the state or the district.

- Ultimately, of course, the state would be responsible for compiling and uploading this data, which is both a time investment and a financial investment. However, once the database is created, the costs for updating information would decrease significantly.

## INVEST IN RECOGNIZING EXCELLENCE

#### WHAT THIS TOOL DOES

Schools that effectively improve school climate for boys of color frequently require significant resources and energy beyond the standard responsibilities of providing an excellent education. These schools should be recognized for their success and given a platform for sharing their best practices. The state should create a recognition program for school climate.

The program could be modeled after the federal “Blue Ribbon” or Title I Distinguished School program. In this program, schools apply for the designation with a portfolio of evidence to designate them as either a High Performing School or a High Growth School. The designation gives the designated schools a financial award but, more importantly, gives them a platform to share their achievements and teach others their best practices. In the same way, schools receiving this School Climate Blue Ribbon (either Exemplary High Performing or Exemplary Improving) would receive a financial award and be asked to attend statewide and national conferences and panels to spread their expertise. In addition, School Climate Blue Ribbon schools would be highlighted in the state database and on local School Climate Report Cards.

The School Climate Blue Ribbon award would look specifically at outcomes for boys of color, as they historically have been negatively impacted by school climate policies. Given that this population of students has been underserved for so long, having this be its own award, instead of including this as an element of the larger Blue Ribbon Program, could highlight the practices that directly lead to success for this population of students. In addition, School Climate Blue Ribbon winners can use their financial awards to innovate approaches to improving outcomes for all student groups, particularly boys of color. This focus on continued improvement will provide an ever-more solid base of research for the wider network of schools seeking to learn from their best practices.

The application for the School Climate Blue Ribbon designation would include things such as data on school climate measures for students of color, community and parent input, and student surveys, as well as evidence of youth empowerment, community partnerships, teacher-leadership in school climate, and teacher training and support. All application materials should be rooted in showing improved outcomes for boys of color.

#### MEASURING SUCCESS

The School Climate Blue Ribbon designation will only be meaningful if the application materials are clear, consistent and available to the public. Template materials should be published, as well as the applications of the schools that successfully received the designation.

To keep the award meaningful, schools should be required to reapply every few years to ensure they are continuing to improve or perform at a high level. This will both allow schools to go through the important and useful work of a self-assessment, while also maintaining the fidelity of the designation.

#### CAVEATS AND CONSIDERATIONS

- This award should not lessen focus on academic improvement for all students, particularly boys of color. The application should include evidence of improved academic outcomes, as research shows improved school climate does lead to improved student achievement.<sup>7</sup> At Garfield High School here in Los Angeles, concentrated efforts to improve school climate resulted in a drop from over 600 suspensions in 2007 to only one in 2011.<sup>8</sup> In the same four years, Garfield's Academic Performance Index (API) score grew 115 points on a 1,000-point scale.
- Applications should also utilize existing data systems (School Climate Report Card reporting or Local Control Accountability Plan reporting) to gather evidence on their progress.



# DISTRICT TOOLS

GIVE SCHOOLS A SCHOOL CLIMATE FLASHLIGHT

INVEST IN CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY

INVEST IN RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

# District Solutions

EMPOWERING SCHOOLS WITH INFORMATION, STRUCTURES AND PRACTICES

## THE CURRENT PROBLEM

School districts set the goals and priorities that drive individual school-site decisions and planning. Districts such as Oakland, San Francisco and Baltimore have developed visions for climate across schools by establishing clear priorities in their budgets and developing aligned policies. This strong framework sets their schools up for greater success.<sup>9</sup>

Districts such as Los Angeles Unified are simply too large to provide one-size-fits-all solutions to hundreds of diverse schools. That said, large districts benefit from an “economy of scale” that can enable them to gather, analyze and distribute data around measures of school climate. In fact, LAUSD has already made huge strides in collecting school climate data and disaggregating that data for male students of color. Unfortunately, this data tends to hide in back pages of the website and is difficult for school leaders, teachers, parents and students to consistently access and understand.

This section contains tools the district can utilize to empower schools with clear goals, transparent and useful data analysis, and exemplar models and best practices.

## THE POLICY LEVERS FOR DISTRICTS

- Collecting data and generating user-friendly reports on school climate data
- Auditing school climate data to ensure fidelity

- Creating a budget that supports these priorities and enables schools' flexibility in meeting set goals
- Using school climate data to set ambitious goals, especially in areas of discrepancy for boys of color
- Gathering and distributing best practices in building a stronger school climate, particularly for boys of color, across schools

## GIVE SCHOOLS A SCHOOL CLIMATE FLASHLIGHT

### WHAT THIS TOOL DOES

LAUSD already collects massive amounts of data on school climate. To make this data more integrated and usable, the district should revise the current school report card to include disaggregated school climate data (i.e., suspension, expulsion, citation rates, etc., disaggregated by race/ethnicity, gender, ELL and/or disability) in a parent-friendly format. In addition to the current year's data, the previous year's data and comparisons to district averages should be reported on the report card as well.

"I've been skeptical of my district for a long time. But the School Climate Bill of Rights opens up new opportunities for better conversations and better outcomes for our kids."

**Mindy Friedman**, Sixth grade, Math and Science, Northridge Middle School

Many districts have effectively analyzed and published data to track and push forward school climate improvement efforts. For example, Baltimore City Schools was able to better analyze its student data when it merged its student-tracking systems for attendance and discipline incidents. In doing so, it was able to provide principals with more detailed, comprehensive reports to help them identify trends and look for root causes<sup>10</sup> and be better able to communicate areas for growth and celebration. When parents and communities are equipped with meaningful data, they become more powerful advocates for their children and our schools. Teachers, too, want the opportunity to learn more about their schools—74% of teachers polled highlighted this strategy as “Absolutely Essential” or “Important.”<sup>11</sup>

#### MEASURING SUCCESS

While this tool alone will not improve school climate, it is a critical precursor to identifying gaps and targeting interventions at the school level. With this clear progress report on hand, school leaders, families and communities can evaluate where a school is successful in supporting students and where it needs to make improvements. Trends in particular groups, including boys of color, can be closely followed, and the district can monitor the impact of school-level interventions. Additionally, the report card could include a “checklist” of proven interventions and indicate which the school has in place—noting, for example, if there is a Restorative Justice counselor on campus or an active student council.

The district should also continuously monitor parent and community feedback on the report card to ensure the data is clear, parent friendly and timely.

#### CAVEATS AND CONSIDERATIONS

- Since the report card is meant to inspire action, it should not be entirely neutral about results. Measures of school climate that are particularly poor should be marked as “failing” and should trigger the requirement of an action plan (see page 14 for more information on the school-based action plan).

### INVEST IN CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY

#### WHAT THIS TOOL DOES

All too often, we focus on ameliorating the symptoms of a poor school climate without getting to the root causes of what may be driving students of color out of the classroom. When students feel disconnected and disengaged, they are more likely to act out, and teachers are more likely to use discipline policies that limit their learning time, such as suspensions. Knowing students’ cultural norms and frames of reference and leveraging them in the classroom

When parents and communities are equipped with meaningful data, they become more powerful advocates for their children and our schools.

**Knowing students' cultural norms and frames of reference and leveraging them in the classroom makes "learning more relevant and effective."<sup>12</sup>**

makes "learning more relevant and effective."<sup>12</sup> With that in mind, the district should invest in providing training for and measuring the implementation of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. Here, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy is defined as practices that acknowledge students' culture and its relevance in the world. It is pedagogy that empowers students and works to "eradicate racial and ethnic inequalities in education opportunities."<sup>13</sup> Eighty percent of teachers polled highlighted this strategy as "Absolutely Essential" or "Important."<sup>14</sup>

#### AN INVESTMENT IN CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY SHOULD COME IN THREE PHASES

In the first phase, the district will use the School Climate Bill of Rights to define what the outcomes of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy should be. For example, the district could set goals around in-school suspension rates, out-of-class referrals and other classroom-level measures, including student achievement. This phase is vital for information gathering and sharing. The district should use this opportunity to learn from experts in the community and in our schools about what in the School Climate Bill of Rights is related to larger systems and policies, and what elements would better be captured as a measure of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. This phase also keeps the concept of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy from becoming an ambiguous, philosophical idea rather than an implementable course of action with specific goals and strategies.

In the second phase, the district will create professional development around Culturally Responsive Pedagogy that includes classes, observations and connections with a mentor teacher. For more on what this professional development might entail and how completion could be judged, please see our colleagues' recommendations from this year, "Pay It Forward: A Rational Proposal for Teacher Compensation."<sup>25</sup> This phase is vital for building teacher buy-in and ensuring consistent, high-quality implementation.

Third and finally, the district should expand the framework for the teacher evaluation system, the Teacher Growth and Development Cycle (TGDC), to explicitly integrate Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. This phase can only come after the district has offered a clear definition of success and sufficient training to staff members.

#### MEASURING SUCCESS

As the district works to define what the most relevant outcome measures of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy might be, they should highlight these data points on both LAUSD's internal data system, MyData, and in its external School Report Cards.

At its core, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy requires teachers to be more mindful of the roles privilege, class, race and gender play in our approach to teaching and classroom management. For instance, a teacher who is employing Culturally Responsive Pedagogy is thinking about the selection of texts and approaches to instruction that engage and challenge all students, particularly boys of color. This teacher is also aware of achievement and discipline trends—that fall along certain racial or gender lines—that may be happening in her classroom.



Once the TGDC has been expanded to include Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, the results could be used in making decisions around which teachers take on leadership roles in this area (*see page 15 for more information on teacher leadership roles*).

#### CAVEATS AND CONSIDERATIONS

- There are leaders in our schools and in academia who have been working on Culturally Responsive Pedagogy for decades. This initiative should leverage those experts to think through the most relevant measures and to develop professional development going forward.

### INVEST IN RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

#### WHAT THIS TOOL DOES

Coalitions of students, parents and community advocates have successfully pushed the state and district to adopt new policies that encourage reducing citations and give administrators flexibility in place of often harmful “zero tolerance” policies, which in the past often forced them to suspend or expel students automatically, without considering individual circumstances. As a piece of this important shift in discipline policies and mindsets, Los Angeles Unified has promised to use “Restorative Justice practices in all schools by 2020.” “Restorative Justice” (RJ) is an alternative discipline model that focuses on restoring the community when some form of wrongdoing or injustice has occurred. This model emphasizes root causes for behavior and potential solutions rather than ineffective punishment that often results in a child being removed from instructional settings.

At Roosevelt High School in East Los Angeles, a school that has taken the lead on implementing RJ, students gather every day for an RJ Circle. The students, under the guidance of an experienced RJ Coordinator, lay out group norms and talk together about issues that are harming their community, even when that “issue” may be an element in their own behavior. These circles also include “victims” of the students’ behavior, which may include fellow students and their families. The students engage directly with one another and share how the behavior was harmful, any underlying root causes of the behavior and solutions for what both sides can and will do to “restore” the community. From 2011 to 2013, Roosevelt has gone from students losing 231 instructional days to suspension to losing only 59.<sup>15</sup>

The district should invest more widely in RJ by hiring RJ Coordinators for every school with disproportionate rates of suspension for students of color, students with disabilities and English Language Learners, as defined in the School Climate Bill of Rights. Sixty-four percent of teachers polled highlighted this strategy as “Absolutely Essential” or “Important.”<sup>16</sup>

By putting an RJ Coordinator at each school with disproportionate rates of suspension, citation, expulsion or other measures of school climate, the district would work toward that goal faster, with a concentration of resources for the students most adversely impacted by current school discipline models.

**“When I am in the Restorative Justice circle, I get to hear what other students’ struggles are and I know that I’m not alone—it makes me feel more confident.”**

**Roosevelt High School student<sup>18</sup>, age 17**

Paying for all of these positions is not a small investment, but Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) dollars could easily be put toward RJ Coordinators. These positions align with the state priority around school climate and would be concentrated on the students with the most need.

The RJ Coordinator could also undertake facilitating other kinds of “restorative justice” that may already be in place at the school site but not part of the formal program, such as student councils or student courts.

#### MEASURING SUCCESS

While there are many excellent examples of Restorative Justice in individual schools and small districts,<sup>17</sup> scaling up an effort like this in a district like LAUSD will create a key opportunity to learn more about best practices to replicate. The district should partner with local community organizations and universities to study how RJ is being implemented across sites and what practices most consistently produce the best results. For example, the researchers could look for schools that are seeing not only drops in suspension and expulsion rates for male African-American and Latino students but also fewer overall incidents occurring and fewer out-of-classroom referrals.

#### CAVEATS AND CONSIDERATIONS

- Making this shift in discipline philosophy and practice will require strong commitment among school leadership, a robust induction into this new model and ongoing training for staff.
- The district can create a cabinet position for school climate that would communicate these initiatives as a permanent and priority component of the district’s success strategy.
- LAUSD has already created positions for RJ Coordinators that work on the district level. These leadership positions can support schools by sharing data and best practices and leading trainings for staff at priority schools.

**By putting an RJ Coordinator at each school with disproportionate rates of suspension, citation, expulsion or other measures of school climate, the district would work toward school climate goals faster.**

# School Solutions

## EMPOWER PRACTITIONERS TO OWN SCHOOL CLIMATE PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES

### THE CURRENT PROBLEM

Ultimately, the power of school climate policy implementation rests in the hands of those who work and learn in our schools—school leaders, staff and the school community. As such, the role of our schools is to develop, adapt and implement policies that meet the needs of their unique students and staff. Individual schools across LAUSD are taking inspiring steps to improve their school climate and drive down rates of suspension for boys of color, but the real test will be how our schools provide opportunities for youth to proactively shape their classrooms and schools. After all, a great classroom isn't merely one where students aren't being "kicked out" but a place where students are actively engaged, empowered to help drive their learning and collaborating with their peers.

Unfortunately, not every school is seeing the same success. Suspension rates have decreased dramatically across LAUSD; however, African-American boys are still being suspended at over four times the rate of their white peers.<sup>19</sup> More schools need to learn from the leaders who are addressing this discrepancy. This section outlines steps schools can take without waiting for district action and ways schools can turn district and state policy into action.

### THE POLICY LEVERS FOR SCHOOLS

- Implementing or adapting proven school climate strategies that best fit the needs of their students to meet goals set by the district, state or federal government
- Putting these strategies into action through protocols and schoolwide practices such as positive schoolwide behavior programs, youth leadership councils, school site committees and student government associations
- Generating buy-in for new initiatives among the on-the-ground actors, such as students, parents, teachers and other staff members

**"If we don't make these changes happen in our schools, they will never happen. Nobody else can make us implement these ideas well—our whole school community has to want it and do it together."**

**Araceli Morfin**, *Special Education Bridge Coordinator, Roosevelt High School*



## REIMAGINE MISSION STATEMENTS AS ACTION STATEMENTS

### WHAT THIS TOOL DOES

Mission statements have the potential to be powerful tools for setting priorities and shaping values and practice. When set collectively by a community, they tend to be implemented more faithfully and consistently.<sup>20</sup> Schools should align their mission statements with the School Climate Bill of Rights. The new budget dollars provide an excellent opportunity to engage in this conversation, particularly because one of the eight priorities for these funds is improving school climate. With this expressed priority, school mission statements may need to be revisited, revised and operationalized to meet specific goals within the School Climate Bill of Rights. More than an exercise in copy writing, revising a school's mission is an opportunity to plan for the integration of that mission in long-term goals as well as daily operations and protocols.

To help the school do this in a way that is meaningful and not compliance oriented, the district could provide sample templates for high-quality mission statements and examples of how high-performing schools integrate their mission across all operations. The writing process should include diverse stakeholders and be grounded in a deep dive into the school's data. When schools engage in this mission-setting and aligning process, the entire community becomes engaged in making sure the mission becomes a reality. At an alternative high school in Fort Collins, Colorado, a similar mission-focused effort saw a decrease in dropout rates from over 40% to under 10%.<sup>21</sup> In actuality, the high school didn't change the words of their mission at all; instead, they came together as a community to do an inventory of their systems to better align to their vision.

As this school learned, part of what makes a mission more than a statement of words is a commitment to implementing that mission in a meaningful and ongoing way. Schools should set up a committee of students, parents, teachers and administrators to monitor and evaluate how schools are implementing and "living" their mission.

### MEASURING SUCCESS

Schools should be asked to include their mission statement in both the School Report Card and on their website, along with links to learn about how the goals and systems and protocols connect to the mission.

Student, parent and teacher surveys should include questions about the mission to help measure if the mission statement is understood, integrated and impactful.

## BEFORE + AFTER

Example Average Mission Statement:

School X is committed to giving all students the opportunity to reach their full academic and personal potential. To achieve this goal, we work to...

1. Ensure collaboration
2. Make all students feel welcomed and rewarded
3. Provide a safe and welcoming environment for students, family and staff
4. Create a strong leadership team that values all stakeholders
5. Ensure all teachers have access to high-quality professional development

Example School Climate Bill of Rights-aligned Mission Statement:

School X is committed to providing a high-quality school environment for ALL students so that they can reach their full academic and personal potential. To achieve this goal, we...

1. Provide data monthly to parents, families, students and teachers on our academic growth and school climate measures to drive our conversations and collaboration as a community
2. Encourage student voice and empowerment through youth clubs, councils and courts
3. Use Restorative Justice practices to create a welcoming and safe environment for all students
4. Open our monthly leadership meetings to parents, students and teachers who wish to participate and provide feedback
5. Have teachers lead professional development with our staff grounded in student data



#### CAVEATS AND CONSIDERATIONS

- Mission revision should involve the engagement of all stakeholders who will be implementing and “living” the mission daily—teachers, principals, support staff, students, parents, etc.
- Schools should benchmark and learn from high-performing peers who have strong school missions, climate and outcomes.
- Schools should seize mission revision as an opportunity to take stock of their communications, daily protocols and procedures to fully integrate their missions across all platforms and avenues that affect school climate.

#### DEVELOP A SCHOOL-BASED ACTION PLAN

##### WHAT THIS TOOL DOES

As the school climate report card expands and adapts to better capture both the impressions of the school’s stakeholders as well as hard data realities, it is important that the issues highlighted by the report card have a clear next step attached. The district should require schools with metrics marked as “failing” on the School Report Card to develop an action plan to address disproportionate rates of suspension, expulsion and/or citation. The action plan should include data-driven professional development, a plan to invest in teacher leaders on school climate and plans for empowering youth on that campus. Sixty-five percent of teachers polled identified this strategy as “Absolutely Essential” or “Important.”<sup>22</sup>

School-generated plans—particularly those that involve diverse school

**School-generated plans—particularly those that involve diverse school stakeholders—can often raise the level of support and buy-in needed to ensure strong implementation.**

stakeholders—can often raise the level of support and buy-in needed to ensure strong implementation. For instance, in 2011, 58 California high schools received Safe and Supportive Schools (S3) grants from the state. The grant required a team of teachers, administrators, schools and parents to use data to collaboratively create a detailed action plan to improve school climate with research-based practices. After two years, 86% of these schools improved school climate by an average of 30 points on the School Climate Index (SCI) and these same schools raised student achievement an average of 15 points on the Academic Performance Index (API).<sup>23</sup>

Using the goals of the School Climate Bill of Rights, the templates for the action plans could be created by the district along with the goals for improvement. Schools would then be empowered to set their own plans for how to reach those goals. In this way, buy-in would be greater and the school could leverage its strengths more strategically, as well as reflect and strategize around its weaknesses.

The new Discipline Foundation Policy in LAUSD works toward this goal by tasking administrators with developing plans. By empowering school leadership teams instead to collaboratively create action plans, the plans will inherently generate more buy-in, while also maintaining the high expectations we should hold for every school, and for how the district is serving boys of color. In addition, the policy can be strengthened by pairing it with templates and strong examples from other schools.

## MEASURING SUCCESS

Schools are already held accountable for the school climate goals laid out in the action plan and put out publicly in the School Report Card through the monthly reporting requirement. If the action plan is not enacted or not successful, funding should not be lowered, but the district should then intervene with its own plan. “Improving school climate” is a big and often abstract goal to set and measure, so key interim measures and benchmarks must be in place to ensure constant growth along the way.

If a school fails to submit an action plan, that portion of the school-controlled LCFF funding would stay with the district to enact their own action plan for the school. The district could draw on the best practices that are driving huge improvements in school climates in other schools to guide their approach to interventions.

## CAVEATS AND CONSIDERATIONS

- The action plan should communicate the urgency and opportunity of transforming school culture as opposed to being communicated as a punitive measure.
- The district should leverage teacher leaders and community leaders on the ground to generate buy-in and encourage a view of the plan as a transformational opportunity.
- Transparency and use of data will be especially important to ensure all stakeholders are on the same page about when schools have control over decisions, and when the district will be stepping in.

## DEVELOP SCHOOL CLIMATE LEADERSHIP ROLES FOR TEACHERS

### WHAT THIS TOOL DOES

A key way to invest in lasting change is to invest in those who can lead that change. Schools should develop leadership roles for teachers that relate to improving school climate. Examples of these might include PD leaders, data analysts, Restorative Justice teacher leaders to assist and learn from the RJ Coordinators, or parent and community liaisons.

“Teachers are why I feel safe at my school. They help us, and they always care. Even if there are bullies, we have really good teachers who will talk to us and help us.”

**Student at Wilshire Park Elementary, Age 10**

The district is already in the process of building out its teacher leadership opportunities, many of which were recommended by the 2013 E4E-Los Angeles Teacher Policy Team on Career Pathways.<sup>24</sup> While these academic-focused roles are exciting and important, there should be additional roles or responsibilities that are aligned to the School Climate Bill of Rights.

Schools can individually determine the leadership roles they need on their campuses and direct dollars and support on the kinds of positions that will most benefit their own students. For example, high schools may find more need for multiple data leads to tackle dropout rates and predictors in ninth grade and in later years. Elementary schools may find they need more parent liaisons.

There is also tremendous opportunity to engage the community to lift school climates. Teacher-leaders could be helpful in bridging the gap between community efforts and school-based efforts, such as action plans and Restorative Justice programs.

#### MEASURING SUCCESS

Separate from their teaching practice evaluations, schools should evaluate school climate leaders on the basis of improvements and success in measures of school climate, particularly for boys of color. For more information on E4E teacher recommendations on teacher leadership roles,

see “Pay It Forward: A Rational Proposal for Teacher Compensation.”<sup>25</sup>

A school’s action plan could include specific goals for teacher leader roles they would like to create and fill, as well as goals for what that teacher-leader will accomplish.

Eventually, the school report card could report out whether or not the school has some of these roles filled.

#### CAVEATS AND CONSIDERATIONS

- Schools need to have flexibility to fill these leadership roles with internal or external candidates
- Schools and the district should measure the impact these leadership roles have on school climate to inform decisions about scaling or expanding these positions.

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## EMPOWERING STUDENTS AS FUTURE LEADERS

A great school climate is more than one where students do not get pushed out. It is a place where all students are empowered to thrive and grow into informed and active citizens, inclusive of their unique identities. These are some ways we can proactively empower our youth.

- Create a student advisory committee for the California Department of Education, the Governor's office or the Senate Education or House Education committees.
- Give student leaders a meaningful role in advising members of the LAUSD Board.
- Create a Restorative Justice student advisory board to continuously improve the program.
- Note on the School Report Card what types of youth empowerment opportunities schools offer.
- Highlight students who are seeing success, particularly boys of color, in the school website, award ceremonies and parent communications.
- Create a Student Court System in high schools or a Student Council system for elementary schools to allow youth to be an active part of the school-climate-building process rather than a victim of it.
- Put students on the committee to redefine the mission, set up a student committee to be the "Keepers of the Mission" and hold the school accountable if the mission is not being operationalized.
- Make student surveys a piece of the school and school staff evaluations.

## BENEFITS OF IMPLEMENTING THESE SCHOOL CLIMATE STRATEGIES

THE STATE will ultimately save money on expensive dropout recovery programs and work rehabilitation programs, as more students graduate from high school.

THE DISTRICT will be able to save time and money by streamlining their data reporting to parents, community and state and county agencies.

SCHOOL LEADERS will be able to quickly and easily analyze their own data to find gaps and leverage teacher and student leaders to create solutions.

FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES will be able to engage in data-based conversations about their child's school climate to push for necessary changes and also celebrate their school if and when they see major improvements.

TEACHERS will have the opportunity to actively shape the culture of their schools beyond the four walls of their classroom and get the training they need to ensure they are reaching every child.

**“Education is the most  
powerful weapon which you  
can use to change the world.”**

**NELSON MANDELA,**  
*President of South Africa and  
Nobel Peace Prize Winner*

# Conclusion

As teachers, we believe passionately in the constitutional right of every child, regardless of race, gender or zipcode, to a high-quality education. We also know that our students are watching and learning from our leadership. In violating this right for some of our children, we have fallen short for all of our future citizens. Our students are watching—let them be a witness to actions that show that fulfilling the constitutional right of every student is fulfilling the promise of public education.

# Teacher Policy Team Process and Methodology

## IDENTIFYING E4E'S POLICY FOCUS

E4E held more than 20 focus groups with roughly 160 teachers who serve our district schools and polled over 250 E4E members to identify the most important and impactful policy issues. School Climate policies emerged as one of two most important and impactful issues in our polling during the 2013-2014 school year.

## REVIEWING RESEARCH

We met for six weeks to review research on different national attempts to improve school climate as well as local strategies being proposed or piloted by Partnership for Los Angeles Schools, LA's Promise, Los Angeles Education Partnership, LAUSD and local charter networks. Additionally, we hosted conversations with leaders from Public Counsel, Community Coalition, Inner City Struggle and other local and national experts. Perhaps most important, we learned from interviews with our students who have led the School Climate and Student Bill of Rights movement in Los Angeles.

## CONDUCTING LOCAL RESEARCH

Our Policy Team conducted over 120 peer and administrator interviews, and interviewed dozens of our students, to gather critical stakeholder feedback. We also conducted a survey of over 300 E4E-LA members and nonmembers to understand the most essential strategies for improving school climate. The polling data pushed our Teacher Policy Team to revise and rework policy recommendations to meet key needs and concerns among our peers. Where there was less than 75% teacher support for our initial policy ideas, our Teacher Policy Team reexamined and reworked our recommendations to address key concerns.



# Notes

<sup>1</sup> <http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest>.

<sup>2</sup> “Black, brown and over-policed in L.A. schools,” The Labor/Community Strategy Center, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> “Zero Tolerance, Reconsidered.” The New York Times 5 Jan. 2014, sec. The Opinion Pages: n. pag. Print.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.cde.ca.gov/nr/ne/yr14/yr14rel11.asp>.

<sup>5</sup> Educators 4 Excellence, “Policy Recommendation Poll.” Teacher Survey. April 2014. n=340.

<sup>6</sup> “Data for action 2012: Focus on people to change data culture,” Data Quality Campaign, 2012.

<sup>7</sup> National School Climate Council, “National school climate standards”; Alliance for the Study of School Climate, “Exploring the school climate—student achievement connection”; AERA, “A review of school climate research.”

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.fixschooldiscipline.org/toolkit/community/garfield/>.

<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.fixschooldiscipline.org> for in-depth case studies on each of these districts.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.fixschooldiscipline.org/toolkit/educators/baltimore/>.

<sup>11</sup> Educators 4 Excellence. “Policy Recommendation Poll.” Teacher Survey. April 2014. n=340.

<sup>12</sup> Gay, “Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research and practice,” Columbia Teachers College Press, 2000.

<sup>13</sup> Howard, “Why race and culture matter in schools: Closing the achievement gap in America’s classrooms,” Columbia Teachers College Press, 2010.

<sup>14</sup> Educators 4 Excellence. “Policy Recommendation Poll.” Teacher Survey. April 2014. n=340.

<sup>15</sup> Franklin, “Restorative justice in three partnership schools: Transforming school culture and discipline through respect, relationships and responsibilities,” Mental Health Advocacy Services and the Partnership for Los Angeles Schools, 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Educators 4 Excellence. “Policy Recommendation Poll.” Teacher Survey. April 2014. n=340.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, San Francisco Unified or Oakland Unified.

<sup>18</sup> Interviews with over 50 students across 10 schools, conducted by E4E-LA Teacher Policy Team Members, March 2014.

<sup>19</sup> <http://schoolinfosheet.lausd.net/budgetreports/disciplinereports.jsp>.

<sup>20</sup> Karami, “Business strategy, environment analysis, and company performance: The evidence from the UK electronic industry,” International Business and Economic Research Conference, 2001.

<sup>21</sup> Lamperes, “Empowering at-risk students to succeed,” Education Leadership, 1994.

<sup>22</sup> “Educators 4 Excellence. “Policy Recommendation Poll.” Teacher Survey. April 2014. n=340.

<sup>23</sup> “Improving school climate and academic achievement in California,” WestEd, 2013.

<sup>24</sup> “STEP: Supporting teachers as empowered leaders,” Educators 4 Excellence, 2013.

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.educators4excellence.org/teacher-policy-teams/2014-issues-and-papers/la-differentiated-compensation>.

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**For far too long,** education policy has been created without a critical voice at the table—the voice of classroom teachers.

Educators 4 Excellence (E4E), a teacher-led organization, is changing this dynamic by placing the voices of teachers at the forefront of the conversations that shape our classrooms and careers.

E4E has a quickly growing national network of educators united by our Declaration of Teachers' Principles and Beliefs. E4E members can learn about education policy and research, network with like-minded peers and policymakers, and take action by advocating for teacher-created policies that lift student achievement and the teaching profession.

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