

How-to Guide

6 Steps to a Positive School Climate & Culture



The culture of a school can have a profound impact on student learning and academic achievement.



A school with a struggling or negative culture may experience increases in behavior referrals and decreases in school attendance.

This, in turn, takes away from students' instructional time, which can lead to declines in academic achievement. To turn things around, school leaders and teachers may launch initiatives to track student behaviors on Excel spreadsheets or to reward positive behaviors with incentives like school "dollars" ... but something just isn't adding up.

In schools of all shapes and sizes, **it's not uncommon for culture to be the elephant in the room that goes untouched.** Even with the most talented, dedicated teachers and school leaders, culture can be difficult to change. One major reason for this is that the right tools simply weren't available.

UNTIL NOW.

This guide will walk you through the key steps necessary to turn around or improve your school's culture, and transform it into one that is consistently positive and measurable.

6 Steps to a Positive School Climate & Culture

Take a look through the next few pages to discover the **6 STEPS** to creating a positive, measurable school climate & culture.

- 1** Collect and Analyze Your Data
- 2** Establish a Culture Leadership Team
- 3** Conduct a Culture Needs Assessment
- 4** Develop Your Positive Culture Plan
- 5** Establish an Always-On System to Monitor Culture
- 6** Use Data for Long-Term Success

BEYOND THESE STEPS, YOU WILL FIND TIP SHEETS AND HELPFUL HINTS YOU CAN USE ALONG THE WAY.

STEP 1

Collect & Analyze Your Data



DATA IS ESSENTIAL

With the right mindset, you'll be able to use it to establish clear goals to help you reinvigorate your school culture.

Can you see behind the classroom door?

To truly grasp the state of your school culture (within a single school or the entire district), **data needs to be at the center of all your decision-making.** It may not be tidy yet, but you already have mountains of data that will help you identify the core challenges your school leaders and teachers may be facing in regard to behavior.

SO, LET'S TALK ABOUT HOW TO GET STARTED ANALYZING CULTURE USING DATA.

In this example, we'll use the data you have to make a direct correlation between your school culture and students' academic performance.

- First, collect all of the behavioral data your school already has. This may include data such as positive rewards, scholar dollars, referrals, time out of the classroom, suspensions and anything else teachers may be tracking.
- Second, calculate and analyze the number of minutes your students are missing annually due to behavioral infractions:

$$\text{NUMBER OF INFRACTIONS} \times \text{MINUTES PER INFRACTION} = \text{TOTAL MINUTES OF INSTRUCTION MISSED}$$

You should see that there is a direct correlation between the number of infractions, total minutes missed, and how your school is performing academically.

When you look at your school data in this way, it's easy to see how student behavior can affect student performance. **The good news is that you now have data that makes this problem tangible – and manageable.**

Lowery Elementary

Case Study Highlight

Dawn Love, principal of Lowery Elementary in Donaldsonville, La., struggled with her students' lack of improvement in academics.

Each year, she saw more behavioral infractions, along with a decrease in student performance.

To understand her data more clearly, Dawn utilized the formula:

$$\text{NUMBER OF INFRACTIONS} \times \text{MINUTES PER INFRACTION} = \text{TOTAL MINUTES OF INSTRUCTION MISSED}$$

25,395

**TOTAL MINUTES MISSED
BEFORE POSITIVE CHANGE**

When teachers began using a system to reward students with points for positive behaviors each day, **they saw behavioral infractions decrease significantly, which created a big shift in the school culture.**

First, she collected the data she had available and found that her school had over 1,900 infractions during the 2012-2013 school year. By talking to her teachers she found that over 1,600 of those infractions occurred in the classroom – and that number equated to 25,395 total minutes of instruction missed. Her teachers told her that many of the infractions were a result of willful disobedience, threats to authority and disturbances in the school.

By analyzing the behavior data in this way, Dawn knew that to increase student performance she had to decrease the number of infractions, so students were spending more time in the classroom rather than in the principal's office.

To achieve this, Dawn implemented an Instructional Management Solution (IMS) to support the school's Response to Intervention (RTI) programs for academics and behavior, and to allow teachers to track student data in real time.

[READ THE FULL CASE STUDY](#) 

STEP 2

Establish a Culture Leadership Team and a Mission Statement

Tackling a culture problem on your own would be difficult, but fortunately you don't have to be a lone ranger!

After you identify the areas that need improvement, pull together a Culture Leadership Team.

Find staff members who are motivated and believe in your mission to turn around your school(s)' culture. This team will help you lead the charge to motivate the staff and ensure the success of your positive school culture plan (Step 4).

It's important to note that culture can be fragile without the right foundation.

Work with your Leadership Team to **develop mission and vision statements**. These statements will act as the guiding principles for your school(s). Moving forward, the mission statement in particular will help you prioritize your goals and identify the success measures you'll use to track your progress.



Macario Garcia Elementary

Case Study Highlight

At Macario Garcia Elementary in Houston Independent School District in Texas, Principal Aaron Dominguez believes that a school's culture is the foundation for effective teaching and learning.

TO BUILD A STRONG FOUNDATION, CREATE THE RIGHT MINDSET AND ACHIEVE BUY-IN SCHOOLWIDE, HE RECOMMENDS THAT SCHOOL LEADERS:

1

Equip teachers with the right tools and supports so they can succeed.

2

Make sure that teachers understand they are supported by leadership, who will work with them to do whatever it takes to help them continue to get better and better at teaching.

3

Make certain that every staff member understands they are there to support the teachers, since teachers are the ones making sure students achieve success each and every day.

STEP 3

Conduct a Culture Needs Assessment

Once you've assembled your Culture Leadership Team, it's time to rally your teachers!

Gaining teacher support is a vital part of building a positive school culture.

The best way to gain faculty support is to gain deep insight into where and how your teachers need help.

Start with a survey. **A culture survey will give you a clear understanding of your staff's readiness to commit to creating a positive school culture.** What's more, a survey will allow your teachers to provide feedback at a time that's convenient for them.

WHICH TOPICS SHOULD YOU INCLUDE IN YOUR FACT-FINDING SURVEY? HERE ARE A FEW IDEAS:

- The types of behavioral data teachers are currently tracking
- The tools or methods they are using to track that data
- The struggles they face in the classroom
- The urgent state of school culture
- Their openness to changing the school culture

Once you have this information, your entire school should be ready to work together to devise a plan to create a measurable, positive and sustainable school culture!

STEP 4

Develop Your Positive Culture Plan



TIP:

Check out this list of [25 Free or Inexpensive Rewards to Improve Student Behavior in Your School](#)

Now that you've put together your leadership team, heard from your teachers, and used data to peek at the root of your school(s)' behavior problems, the next step is to develop an action plan. Where should you start?

With trackable and quantifiable goals!

Set goals that are quantifiable. You want to be able to measure progress every step of the way!

Your Culture Leadership Team should pick out goals that align with **trackable behaviors** so it's easy to pull together progress reports and regular check-ins.

Here are some sample goals to get you started:

- Improved positivity ratio (see next page)
- Increase in number of rewards given for positive behaviors
- Decrease in number of negative student behaviors
- Decrease in a specific type of infraction or referral

Create a time-based plan that includes key milestones to reach your goals.

Depending upon your goals, milestones could occur every day, week, month, quarter or semester. You will want to set them often enough so you know if you need to re-evaluate your plan, but far enough apart **so you have the data you need to gauge the degree of success achieved.**

For example, if your goal is to improve the positivity ratio (see sidebar) by the end of the school year, you may set a milestone to increase the ratio by a factor of 1 at the end of each marking period.

Finally, it takes teamwork.

Work together as a school or district to **establish clear and shared language on how positive and negative behaviors will be managed.** This way, everyone – from administrators and faculty to students and parents – will be on board to support a new school culture!

Now that you have a Positive Culture Plan in place, there will be no more guessing as to what you need to do to reach your goals.

HELPFUL HINTS:

It's okay to start small! Schools find it most successful to pick one success measure they want to track. Once you have your staff on board and you know what works for your school, add more success measures you want to track.

Post expectations in classrooms and throughout the school so students clearly understand which behaviors are positive and negative.



Track your school's positivity ratio.

Negative behaviors tend to “stick” longer with students and it takes a lot of positive reinforcement to get a child back on track. **Use the positivity ratio to help ensure you are providing enough positive reinforcement.**

A great starting goal would be 3 positive reinforcements for every 1 negative behavior to reduce the impact of the negative behavior on a child's mind and attitude.

STEP 5

Establish an Always-On System to Monitor Culture

Now that you've created a clear action plan with data-driven goals and milestones, it's time to figure out how you're going to collect, track, and report on the data points that make up your plan.

Managing behavior data would be nearly impossible in real time if you tried to track it using paper and/or Excel spreadsheets.

Fortunately, there are tools out there that will help you track and analyze your behavioral data in real time!

The system you choose should assemble clear, visually appealing insights and dashboards that are immediately actionable.

Here are “must haves” you should look for in a behavior tracking system:

EASY DATA-TRACKING

Instead of spending time filling out referral forms, find a system that allows for easy tracking of the data. Even better, look for a system that allows you to input behaviors on a mobile or tablet device so you can track behaviors on-the-go.

BEHAVIOR INPUT SETTINGS

Find a system that has a one-click behavior tracking function or easy behavior input settings. The goal is to not increase the burden on your teachers, but to make classroom management easier.

REAL-TIME DATA

Tracking real-time data is also critical. Why? It may sound cliché but data is power. Real-time data gives teachers and administrators the ability to see student behaviors as they are occurring. This is beneficial because your teachers and administrators can work together to quickly and easily identify where to intervene and how to best prepare for each student, every day.

REWARD SYSTEMS

Reward systems are an easy way to create a positive environment within your school. Look for a system with built-in reward mechanisms — such as student paychecks, leaderboards or school dollars — to help you create positive changes in students’ behavior.

[Here is a list of reward ideas](#) you can utilize in your own school or district. 

STEP 6

Use Data for Long-Term Success

Great job—you're almost at the finish line!

Now that you have a system in place that provides real-time, actionable insights you will be fully prepared to continuously monitor your school's progress toward your goals.

At this point, you may be wondering, "What do I do after we reach our milestones and goals?" Now is a great time to do another staff survey! With the help of the Culture Leadership Team, **work with your staff and teachers** to evaluate what aspects of the plan worked well, what can be improved, how to maintain the success achieved, and what new milestones and success measures the school wants to track next.

With a focus on real-time behavioral data, you should begin to see fewer disruptions in the classroom, fewer disciplinary incidents, and a consistently improving school culture. And, student achievement will likely be an added benefit!

In well-managed classrooms – with positive student-teacher interactions
and an environment where students feel safe, connected and engaged –

EFFECTIVE TEACHING & LEARNING CAN THRIVE.



Teacher & Staff Success Tips

Teachers play a key role in ensuring the system you've implemented will work.

HERE ARE A FEW HELPFUL TIPS TO CREATE THE FOUNDATION FOR A SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION:

Set up regular talks with administrators and teachers about the data they are using to make decisions. You can even add this focus to your Professional Learning Communities.



Get your staff on board with your Positive Culture Plan by talking with them about specific expectations for sharing and inputting the data into the system. **Many schools find it effective to input behavioral data throughout the day.** In doing so, you'll always be aware when positive and negative behaviors are occurring, so you can intervene early and prevent bigger problems later.



Create transparency between administrators and staff by **using the data you gather to create a clear "state of the school culture."** Your teachers will appreciate being kept in the loop!





Quick Facts

A 2012 survey on the types of school cultures that bolster student learning found that at schools with strong instructional cultures the average student proficiency rates were 21 percentage points higher in math and 14 percentage points higher in reading compared to schools with weak instructional cultures in the same district or charter sector.
(Kickboard Research Brief)

A study of 643 students in 37 secondary school classrooms indicated that three domains of teacher-student interaction (emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support) were predictive of higher student test scores at the end of the year.
(Kickboard Research Brief)

One year after the implementation of a positive school culture program, Dawn Love, principal at Lowery Elementary, saw a 29% reduction in behavioral infractions.
(Lowery Elementary School, La. Case Study-Kickboard)

At Carpentersville Middle School, after implementing Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS), office disciplinary referrals fell by 64% from 2005 to 2007. During the same period, the number of students that met or exceeded standards for 8th grade increased by 12.3% in reading and 44% in math.
(Fact Sheet: Creating Positive School Discipline)

Schools that employ system-wide interventions for problem behavior prevention indicate reductions in office discipline referrals of 20-60%.
(Positive Behavioral Support: Information for Educators)

Schools that implement system-wide interventions also report increased time engaged in academic activities and improved academic performance.
(Positive Behavioral Support: Information for Educators)



Kickboard is dedicated to helping you see behind the classroom door with a data-driven, 360-degree view of the 'whole child'.

By combining powerful instructional management technology with supportive professional development and coaching, Kickboard schools are better equipped to support a dynamic learning environment where students are driven by academics, supported with intervention, and inspired by a positive school culture.