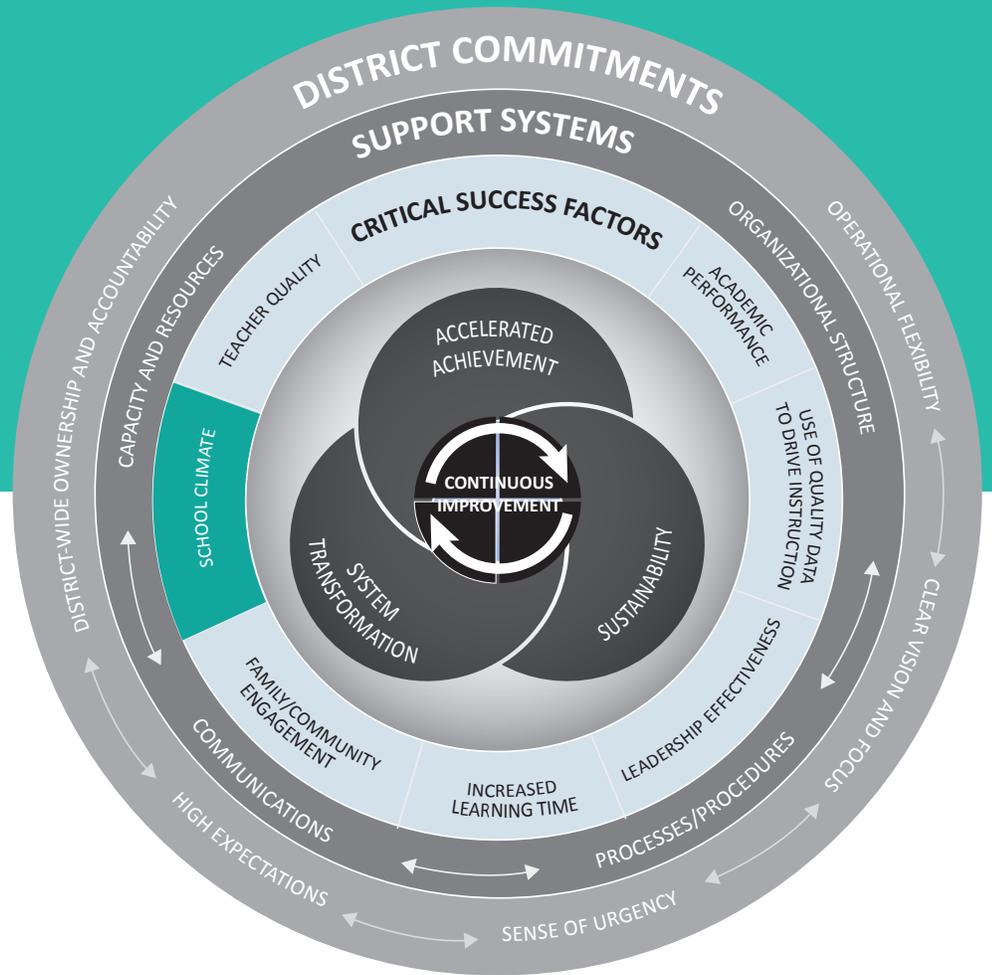


CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTOR (CSF) PLANNING GUIDE

SCHOOL CLIMATE



CSF PLANNING GUIDES ARE INTENDED TO

- Present supporting research that strengthens your knowledge and understanding of the CSF.
- Provide examples of processes and/or strategies to support your implementation of the Texas Accountability and Intervention Strategies (TAIS) framework to strengthen the CSFs on your campus.
- Assist with strategies to determine your strengths and weaknesses for each CSF.
- Identify specific next steps to implement on your campus.

BEFORE GETTING STARTED

- If you are working as a group, designate someone to take notes during the discussions to collect ideas and thoughts for your next steps.
- Assign an individual to lead the action plan for school climate.
- Use the activities in the Next Steps section to gather data, identify problems, and determine root causes.

AFTER REVIEWING THIS GUIDE, RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING

- What new knowledge do I have about this CSF and how does this information influence my thinking?
- In what ways are the practices at my district/school aligned with strengthening this CSF?
- What do we want to improve, and what plan of action is needed to improve?

CALL TO ACTION

Develop a working understanding of the CSF:

- Organize an instructional leadership team meeting.
- To understand the team's current understanding of this CSF, ask team members what they know about it and record their responses.
- Read this guide using a jigsaw or other text discussion protocol.
- Respond to questions or discussion prompts listed throughout the guide.
- Determine how you want to initiate learning more about the CSF in relation to the TAIS framework. For instance, you could assign team members to read and facilitate the discussions for the different sections of this guide.
- Utilize the TAIS Guidance Documents at www.tcdss.net as a resource. They include details and specifics for the process.

SCHOOL CLIMATE

The Texas Accountability Intervention System (TAIS) framework for school improvement identifies school climate as one of the seven CSFs and summarizes it this way:

The connection between school climate and student achievement has been well established in research. Focusing on the development of a campus's climate as a learning environment is fundamental to improved teacher morale and student achievement, and formally assessing and addressing school climate is essential to any school's effort toward successful reform, achievement, and making a difference for underprivileged student groups.^{1,2} Indicators of a positive school climate and welcoming learning environment are increased attendance and reduced discipline referrals. Increased attendance in extracurricular activities is another sign that students feel supported by an affirming school climate.³

This planning resource addresses school climate in these six sections:

- What is school climate?
- Why does school climate matter?
- How do you measure school climate?
- How do you improve school climate?
- Reflection
- Next steps

SECTION 1 WHAT IS SCHOOL CLIMATE?

When considering school climate, it is fundamental to understand the distinction between an organization's climate and its culture, and the differences in how each affects the behavior of teachers and students as well as other stakeholders in the school or district. This resource guide refers to behaviors on a campus; however, everything contained within could be applied at the district level.

A Best Practice brief by Michigan State University differentiates the two concepts:

School Climate reflects the physical and psychological aspects of the school that are more susceptible to change and that provide the preconditions necessary for teaching and learning to take place.

School Culture reflects the shared ideas—assumptions, values, and beliefs—that give an organization its identity and standard for expected behaviors.⁴

This table from Gruenter offers specific examples:

CLIMATE	CULTURE
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Monday versus Friday• Attitude or mood of the group• Provides a state of mind• Flexible, easy to change• Based on perceptions• Feel it when you come in the door• Is all around us• The way we feel around here• First step in improvement• It's in your head	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gives Mondays permission to be miserable• Personality of the group• Provides a (limited) way of thinking• Takes many years to evolve• Based on values and beliefs• Members cannot feel it• Is part of us• The way we do things around here• Determines if improvement is possible• It's in your head⁵

One important difference stands out: School climate reflects how stakeholders feel about their school at any given period, while school culture reflects why stakeholders have those feelings.

Stover says, “An unresolved problem with bullies can have a detrimental effect on a school’s climate. But why does the bullying exist? Are children not being taught to respect one another? Are teachers unresponsive to complaints, thus emboldening bullies and discouraging victims from speaking up? Asking such questions—digging deeper into attitudes and behavior (the culture)—may be the only way to achieve real change.”⁶

The way the staff, students, parents, and community feel about the school determines the school climate. Their ingrained attitudes about the school determine the school culture.

The National School Climate Center identified the following essential determinants of school climate:

- Safety (rules and norms, physical safety, social-emotional safety)
- Relationships (respect for diversity, school connectedness/ engagement, social support, leadership)
- Teaching and learning (social, emotional, ethical and civic learning; support for academic learning; support for professional relationships)
- Institutional environment (physical surroundings)⁷

SECTION 2

WHY DOES SCHOOL CLIMATE MATTER?

To turn around low-performing schools, districts often invest in extensive professional development, tutoring, outside consultants, and new programs to improve academic performance. But research shows school climate may be “the best predictor of whether a school will have high achievement.”⁸ Improved student learning, teacher retention, and other school success factors have been linked to a positive climate. The U.S. Department of Education and other national and state organizations have endorsed improving school climate as a tactic to increase student learning and achievement, enhance school connectedness, reduce dropout rates, prevent bullying and other forms of violence, and enhance teacher retention.⁹ Ciccone and Freibeg report that when schools improve climate, they also improve student achievement, graduation rates, family engagement, and educator satisfaction and retention.¹⁰

SECTION 3

HOW DO YOU MEASURE SCHOOL CLIMATE?

The National School Climate Center (NCSS) has identified five standards to measure school climate and efforts to improve it:

1. The school community has a shared vision and plan for promoting, enhancing, and sustaining a positive school climate.
2. The school community sets policies specifically promoting (a) the development and sustainability of social, emotional, ethical, civic, and intellectual skills, knowledge, dispositions, and engagement; and (b) a comprehensive system to address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage students who have become disengaged.
3. The school community’s practices are identified, prioritized, and supported to (a) promote the learning and positive social, emotional, ethical, and civic development of students; (b) enhance engagement in teaching, learning, and school-wide activities; (c) address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage those who have become disengaged; and (d) develop and sustain an appropriate operational infrastructure and capacity-building mechanisms for meeting this standard.

4. The school community creates an environment where all members are welcomed, supported, and feel safe in school: socially, emotionally, intellectually, and physically.
5. The school community develops meaningful engaging practices, activities, and norms that promote social and civic responsibilities and a commitment to social justice.¹¹

CALL TO ACTION

Discuss the NSCC standards. List and record the elements that are present in your school.

To improve school climate, one must measure the current baseline climate. When you do, you can expect to find that teachers and students perceive school climate differently. For example, one study found that teachers focused on classroom-level factors, such as student disruptive behaviors, whereas students were focused on school-level factors, such as relationships with teachers, principal turnover, and student mobility.¹²

Often when school climate is measured, the data are not directly addressed. But when they are, the results can inform a focused plan that will lead to improved climate that aids in an overall school improvement effort.

As already discussed, school climate is multi-faceted, so assessing school climate requires multiple measurements. Osher and Boccantuso say the process for measuring school climate should do the following:

1. Encompass multiple aspects of school climate, including but not limited to safety; teaching and learning; and perceptions of staff, students, and stakeholders.
2. Ensure valid and reliable instruments for collecting data representing various student groups.
3. Utilize numerous instruments to collect data, including teacher and student attendance, climate surveys, incident reports, teacher retention, and teacher exit surveys.
4. Provide for multiple respondents.
5. Allow for a timely process to share results with the school community.¹³

A Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI) can be used as a data collection instrument to inform the data analysis and needs assessment phase of the continuous improvement process and as a pre/post measure

of change over time. This survey aligns with the NSCC five-stage school climate improvement process, and includes a community scale that extends the student, parent/guardian, and school personnel scales. The survey also aligns with the TAIS continuous improvement process as a tool for conducting a data analysis to identify problems and a needs assessment to determine root causes. The data collected from the survey will determine your strengths and areas in need of improvement and help you define your annual goal. The survey overview identifies 12 dimensions of school climate that should be measured:

DIMENSION	MAJOR INDICATORS (measured on the survey)
<p>Safety</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rules and Norms 2. Sense of Physical Safety 3. Sense of Social-Emotional Security 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Clearly communicated rules about physical violence; clearly communicated rules about verbal abuse, harassment, and teasing; clear and consistent enforcement and norms for adult intervention. 2. Sense that students and adults feel safe from physical harm in the school. 3. Sense that students feel safe from verbal abuse, teasing, and exclusion.
<p>Teaching and Learning</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Support for Learning 5. Social and Civic Learning 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Use of supportive teaching practices, such as encouragement and constructive feedback; varied opportunities to demonstrate knowledge and skills; support for risk-taking and independent thinking; an atmosphere conducive to dialog and questioning; academic challenge; and individual attention. 5. Support for the development of social and civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions including effective listening, conflict resolution, self-reflection and emotional regulation, empathy, personal responsibility, and ethical decision making.

<p>Interpersonal Relationships</p> <p>6. Respect for Diversity</p> <p>7. Social Support–Adults</p> <p>8. Social Support–Students</p>	<p>6. Mutual respect for individual differences (e.g., gender, race, culture etc.) at all levels of the school–student–student, adult–student, and adult–adult–and overall norms for tolerance.</p> <p>7. Pattern of supportive and caring adult relationships for students, including high expectations for students’ success, willingness to listen to students and to get to know them as individuals, and personal concern for students’ problems.</p> <p>8. Pattern of supportive peer relationships for students, including friendships for socializing, for problems, for academic help, and for new students.</p>
<p>Institutional Environment</p> <p>9. School Connectedness/Engagement</p> <p>10. Physical Surroundings</p>	<p>9. Positive identification with the school and norms for broad participation in school life for students, staff, and families.</p> <p>10. Cleanliness, order, and appeal of facilities and adequate resources and materials.</p>
<p>Staff Only</p> <p>11. Leadership</p> <p>12. Professional Relationships</p>	<p>11. Administration that creates and communicates a clear vision, and is accessible to and supportive of school staff and staff development.</p> <p>12. Positive attitudes and relationships among school staff that support effectively working and learning together.¹⁴</p>

The Texas Center for District and School Support (TCDSS) provides resources through the regional education service centers to help schools gather data to measure multiple dimensions of school climate.

SECTION 4

HOW DO YOU IMPROVE SCHOOL CLIMATE?

Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, and Easton identify the following factors fundamental to improving school climate. Also noted are other CSFs that align with the TAIS improvement process:

1. Professional capacity (e.g., teachers' knowledge and skills; support for teacher learning; and school-based learning communities-Critical Success Factor-Improve Teacher Quality)
2. School learning climate (e.g., order, safety, and norms—see chart below)
3. Parent, school, and community ties (Critical Success Factor-Increase Parent and Community Involvement)
4. Instructional guidance (e.g., curriculum alignment and the nature of academic demands-Critical Success Factor-Improve Academic Performance)¹⁵

In addition, key aspects that facilitate improved climate were identified by Osher and Boccanfuso for the U.S. Department of Education:¹⁶

STUDENTS ARE SAFE	STUDENTS ARE SUPPORTED	STUDENTS ARE CHALLENGED	STUDENTS ARE SOCIALLY CAPABLE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physically safe • Emotionally and socially safe • Treated fairly and equitably • Avoid risky behaviors • School is safe and orderly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meaningful connection to adults • Strong bonds to school • Positive peer relationships • Effective and available support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High expectations • Strong personal motivation • School is connected to life goals • Rigorous academic opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotionally intelligent and culturally competent • Responsible and persistent • Cooperative team players • Contribute to school community

These findings identify trust among staff, students, and all other stakeholders as the glue, or vital ingredient, to create a climate conducive to continuous school improvement. Schools with high trust are more likely to improve student achievement.¹⁷ Trust grows over time through the day-to-day interactions of the people in the organization. It is based on social respect arising from the ongoing conversations in the school community. For example, genuinely listening to one another, responding to concerns with actions, and respecting disagreements are all essential activities for building trust. Ongoing communication promotes a sense that all participants/stakeholders are connected to each other and to the larger organization.¹⁸

Using climate to refer to social conditions has inadvertently implied that the social environment of the school, like environmental conditions, cannot be changed by the efforts of the educators. Research, however, refutes this notion and suggests that climate is improved when schools implement systems that address their social organization and instructional practices. Wagner and Kegan assert that leadership is the most powerful influence on school climate.¹⁹

The cyclical process of preparation, evaluation, action planning, implementation, and reevaluation assumes reflection at each step and mirrors the TAIS Continuous Improvement Process. It is also key to communicate to stakeholders why school climate is so vital to student outcomes.

Creating a framework for collaboration and stakeholder involvement in the improvement process is essential to creating a sustainable change in school climate. The following preview for implementing the process was retrieved from the NSCC website, www.schoolclimate.org. The headings in bold reflect the TAIS terminology for the stages encompassed in the NSCC process.

DATA ANALYSIS

Stage One: Preparation and Planning

- Forming a representative school climate improvement leadership team and establishing ground rules collaboratively (gather a representative group from the school or district and include parents and students)
- Building support and fostering buy-in for the school climate improvement process (communicate the process and updates to all stakeholders)
- Establishing a no-fault framework and promoting a culture of trust (review last paragraph in this resource section, “What is School Climate,” and utilize the reference for further information)
- Ensuring your team has adequate resources to support the process (determine what resources are needed, such as time to meet, materials for communication distribution, or skills to access free materials from the National School Climate Center as well as other sites)

- Celebrating successes and building on past efforts (identify data collection timeline and appropriate celebrations; use the TAIS quarterly report dates for celebrations and make any needed adjustments)
- Reflecting on the work (at each leadership team meeting, review and analyze progress data)

Stage Two: Analysis

- Systematically evaluating the school's strengths and weaknesses with any number of school climate as well as other potential measurement tools
- Understanding the evaluation findings
- Developing problem statements that concisely articulate the findings identified through the data analysis

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

- Identifying root causes of the problems identified
- Digging into the findings to understand the areas of consensus and discrepancy in order to promote learning and engagement
- Developing plans to share evaluation findings with the school community
- Reflecting on Stage Two work

IMPROVEMENT PLANNING

Stage Three: Understanding the Findings, Increasing Engagement, and Developing an Action Plan

- Researching best practices and evidence-based instructional and systemic programs and efforts
- Prioritizing goals
- Developing an action plan
- Reflecting on the work

IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

Stage Four: Implementing the Action Plan

- Coordinating evidence-based pedagogic and systemic efforts designed to (a) promote students' social, emotional, and civic as well as intellectual competencies; and (b) improve the school climate by working toward a safe, caring, participatory, and responsive school community
- Increasing learning by both adults and students as climate improves
- Reflecting on Stage Four work

Stage Five: Reevaluation and Development of the Next Phase

- Reevaluating the school’s strengths and challenges
- Discovering what has changed and how
- Discovering what has helped and hindered the school climate improvement process
- Revising plans to improve the school climate (monthly and quarterly progress reviews)
- Reflecting on Stage Five work

SECTION 5 REFLECTION

Research has supported the vital role that school climate plays in improving student learning. Reviews of more than 700 studies reveal the connection between school climate and learning. When the school climate data shows improvement, student progress on statewide academic testing also improves.^{20, 21} If research informs the work that we do, then next steps for increasing school climate should be addressed. What gets in the way? Is it our own “knowing and doing” gap?

SECTION 6 NEXT STEPS CALL TO ACTION

Assemble a representative committee to review the following:

1. Review the current processes in place to lead the effort to improve school climate.
 - a. Determine what processes are effective and ineffective.
 - b. Determine what processes need to be added.
2. Review the process for defining and communicating core values and expectations to students, staff, family, and community members.
 - a. Determine what processes are effective and ineffective.
 - b. Determine what processes need to be added.
3. Review how the campus monitors whether classroom management strategies are linked to a positive and proactive school-wide behavioral support system.
 - a. Determine what processes are effective and ineffective.
 - b. Determine what processes need to be added.
4. What evidence reveals that your campus understands and promotes social-emotional learning?
5. What systems are in place to provide support for staff in building relationships and connections to families and the community?

MAKING CONNECTIONS TO OTHER CSFS

- Improve Academic Performance
- Increase the Use of Quality Data to Drive Instruction
- Increase Leadership Effectiveness
- Increase Family and Community Involvement
- Increase Learning Time
- **Improve School Climate**
- Increase Teacher Quality

As you review each of the CSF resource guides, notice how they intermingle, interact, and blend together. When the organization improves school climate, other factors are involved: data is used to determine climate; parent and community engagement plays a role; and the school climate influences learning time, teacher quality, and leadership effectiveness. These factors are critical to improving academic performance. Discuss other examples that show how each factor impacts the others. For example, how might improving school climate increase teacher quality?

NOTES

Page numbers corresponding to the citations are forthcoming

1. Keith Nomura, "Learning to Lead," *Thrust for Educational Leadership* 29, no. 1 (September-October 1999): 18-20.
2. California P-16 Council, *Closing the Achievement Gap* (Sacramento: California Department of Education, 2008).
3. Peter C. Scales, and Nancy Leffert, *Developmental Assets: A Synthesis of the Scientific Research on Adolescent Development* (Minneapolis: Search Institute, 1999).
4. Michigan State University, "School Climate and Learning," *Best Practice Briefs* (December 2004, no. 31), <http://outreach.msu.edu/bpbriefs/issues/brief31.pdf>.
5. Steve Gruenter, "School Culture, School Climate: They Are Not the Same Thing" *Principal* (March/April 2008), <http://www.naesp.org/resources/2/Principal/2008/M-Ap56.pdf>, 58.
6. Del Stover, "Climate and Culture: Why your Board Should Pay Attention to the Attitudes of Students and Staff," *American School Board Journal* (December 2005): 30-32.

7. National School Climate Center, last modified 2014. <http://www.schoolclimate.org>.
8. Stover, "Climate and Culture," 30-32.
9. National School Climate Center.
10. Patricia A. Ciccone and Jo Ann Freibeg, "School Climate and the National School Climate Standards," National School Climate Center (February 2013), <http://www.schoolclimate.org/publications/documents/sc-brief-standards.pdf>.
11. National School Climate Center.
12. Amirit Thapa et al., "School Climate Research Summary," *National School Climate Center School Climate Research Brief*, no. 3 (August 2012).
13. David Osher and Chris Boccanduso. "Making the Case for the Importance of School Climate and Its Measurement," last modified 2011, www.safesupportiveschools.ed.gov/reader.php?upload=/20110303_PresentationFinal21011SSSTASchoolClimateWebinarpublic.pdf.
14. National School Climate Center
15. Anthony Bryk et al., *Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).
16. Osher and Boccanduso, "Making the Case."
17. Bryk et al., *Organizing Schools*.
18. Ibid.
19. Tony Wagner et al., *Change Leadership: A Practical Guide to Transforming Our Schools* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005).
20. Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), "Social and Emotional Learning and Student Benefits: Research Implications for the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Core Elements" (2008), www.casel.org/downloads/EDC_CASELSELResearchBrief.pdf.

21. Debra Viadero, "Social-Skills Programs Found to Yield Gains in Academic Subjects." *Education Week*, 27 no. 16 (December 2007): 1, 15.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bryk, Anthony, Penny Bender Sebring, Elaine Allensworth, Stuart Luppescu, and John Q. Easton. *Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.

California P-16 Council. *Closing the Achievement Gap*. Sacramento: California Department of Education, 2008.

Cicccone, Patricia A. and Jo Ann Freibeg. "School Climate and the National School Climate Standards." National School Climate Center. February 2013. <http://www.schoolclimate.org/publications/documents/sc-brief-standards.pdf>, 1-4.

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). "Social and Emotional Learning and Student Benefits: Research Implications for the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Core Elements" (2008), www.casel.org/downloads/EDC_CASELSELResearchBrief.pdf.

Gruenter, Steve. "School Culture, School Climate: They Are Not the Same Thing." *Principal* (March/April 2008). <http://www.naesp.org/resources/2/Principal/2008/M-Ap56.pdf>, 56-59.

Michigan State University. "School Climate and Learning." *Best Practice Briefs*. December 2004, no. 31. <http://outreach.msu.edu/bpbriefs/issues/brief31.pdf>, 1-10.

National School Climate Center. Last modified 2014. <http://www.schoolclimate.org>.

Nomura, Keith. "Learning to Lead." *Thrust for Educational Leadership* 29, no. 1 (September-October 1999): 18-20.

Osher, David and Chris Boccanduso. "Making the Case for the Importance of School Climate and Its Measurement." Last modified 2011, www.safesupportiveschools.ed.gov/reader.php?upload=/20110303_PresentationFinal21011SSSTA_SchoolClimateWebinarpublic.pdf, 1-54.

- Scales, Peter C. and Nancy Leffert. *Developmental Assets: A Synthesis of the Scientific Research on Adolescent Development*. Minneapolis: Search Institute, 1999.
- Stover, Del. "Climate and Culture: Why your Board Should Pay Attention to the Attitudes of Students and Staff." *American School Board Journal* (December 2005): 30-32.
- Thapa, Amirit, Jonathan Cohen, Ann Higgins-D'Alessandro, and Shawn Guffey. "School Climate Research Summary." *National School Climate Center School Climate Research Brief*, no. 3 (August 2012): 1-21.
- Viadero, Debra. "Social-Skills Programs Found to Yield Gains in Academic Subjects." *Education Week*, 27 no. 16 (December 2007): 1-15.
- Wagner, Tony, Robert Kegan, Lisa Lahey, Richard W. Lemons, Jude Garnier, Deborah Helsing, Annie Howell, and Harriette Thurber Rasmussen. *Change Leadership: A Practical Guide to Transforming Our Schools*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005.