



Benefits of a positive school climate:

Motivation

Belonging

Engagement in Learning

Resilience

Kindness

Positive Outlook

SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

Children's school experiences are an important predictor of their personal well-being and academic success (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2017). When children have positive experiences at school, they are more likely to feel they belong within their school, feel more motivated and engaged in class, and achieve higher academic performance (Wang & Degol, 2016). The MDI asks children about their academic strengths (academic self-concept) and how confident and engaged they are in school. It also asks how they view their school climate and whether they feel that they belong at school. Additionally, the MDI for children in grades 6, 7, and 8 includes questions about motivation and future goals. Children's responses can help adults understand what types of experiences children are having within their schools. Their responses can guide educators to provide a safe, caring, and supportive environment in which all children can thrive.

research

GENERAL RESEARCH ON SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

- A healthy school climate promotes healthy development and reduces stress that can be a barrier to learning. Children who attend schools that are focused on developing all aspects of the child (academic, social, and emotional) feel more positive about school, achieve at higher levels, are more likely to graduate, and are more likely to succeed in college (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018).
- Feelings of school belonging are associated with more positive views of learning, better academic motivation and competence, higher self-esteem, and greater happiness. Children who feel they belong at school are less likely to be late or absent and more likely to complete high school. They also show lower emotional distress and fewer negative behaviours, such as bullying (Allen et al., 2018).
- Children's perception of kindness within a school is an indicator of a positive school climate. Students who see kind behaviours in students, teachers, and staff are more likely to describe their class environments as being supportive places to learn (Binfet, Gadermann, & Schonert-Reichl, 2015).
- Higher reports of peer victimization, such as bullying and social exclusion, are linked to higher levels of depression and anxiety, whereas feeling connected to one's peers is linked to lower depression and anxiety (Guhn et al., 2013).
- 50 years of research has demonstrated that social and emotional learning (SEL) programs positively impact academic learning (Corcoran et al., 2018).



SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

AT HOME

- Ask your child to describe the qualities of their school that support their well-being and develop a sense of community. Then discuss with your child ways to build positive relationships with their teachers, peers, and other people within the school community.
- Help children recognize that making mistakes is an important part of learning. Have a conversation regarding what they can learn from difficult experiences. Doing so may help them develop a growth mindset, which can help them persevere in the face of challenges and boost their academic competence (Sarrasin et al., 2018).
- Practice prosocial behaviour yourself and encourage it in your child – when you value kind and helpful behaviour, your child is likely to value it as well (Döring et al., 2017).
- Check in with your child’s teacher and school on a regular basis. Let them know that you are invested in the school community. If available, volunteer for school functions. Positive involvement from parents and guardians in school contributes to a positive learning climate (Park et al., 2017).

IN COMMUNITY

- Ask children how they want to contribute to their community. Every child has something to offer others and can gain a sense of competence, belonging, and mastery when they are able to make an impact in an area they care about. Children who contribute to their community are also more likely to be accepted by peers (Fuligni, 2019).
- Create an action plan in collaboration with your local school to support the needs of your community. Identify the areas that your community organization can address to help support greater community connection and the development of a positive community climate (Fuligni, 2019).
- After-school program and activity staff should receive training in how to cultivate positive relationships with children and create a positive peer climate. Doing so can promote social and emotional skills and prosocial behaviour among children (Hurd & Deutsch, 2017).

AT SCHOOL

- Universal Design for Learning (UDL) helps teachers meet students’ individual needs to promote an inclusive school environment. UDL can provide students with a sense of academic competence and success at school. Professional development in UDL supports teachers in meeting the learning needs of a wider range of students than traditional one-size-fits-all curricula (Capp, 2017).
- Children learn best when they feel safe and supported at school and have skills to manage stress (Darling-Hammond et al., 2018). Evidence-based social and emotional learning (SEL) programs help build a positive school climate while teaching valuable stress management skills.
- Be aware of the “hidden” messages your school environment may be providing children about the school climate. Is the school trophy case the first thing you see when you walk in the school door? What message does this send to students? What changes could you make to the school environment that indicates everyone is welcome and valued? (Schonert-Reichl, 2019).

For more resources and ideas on how to use MDI data to catalyze action, visit discovermdi.ca.

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