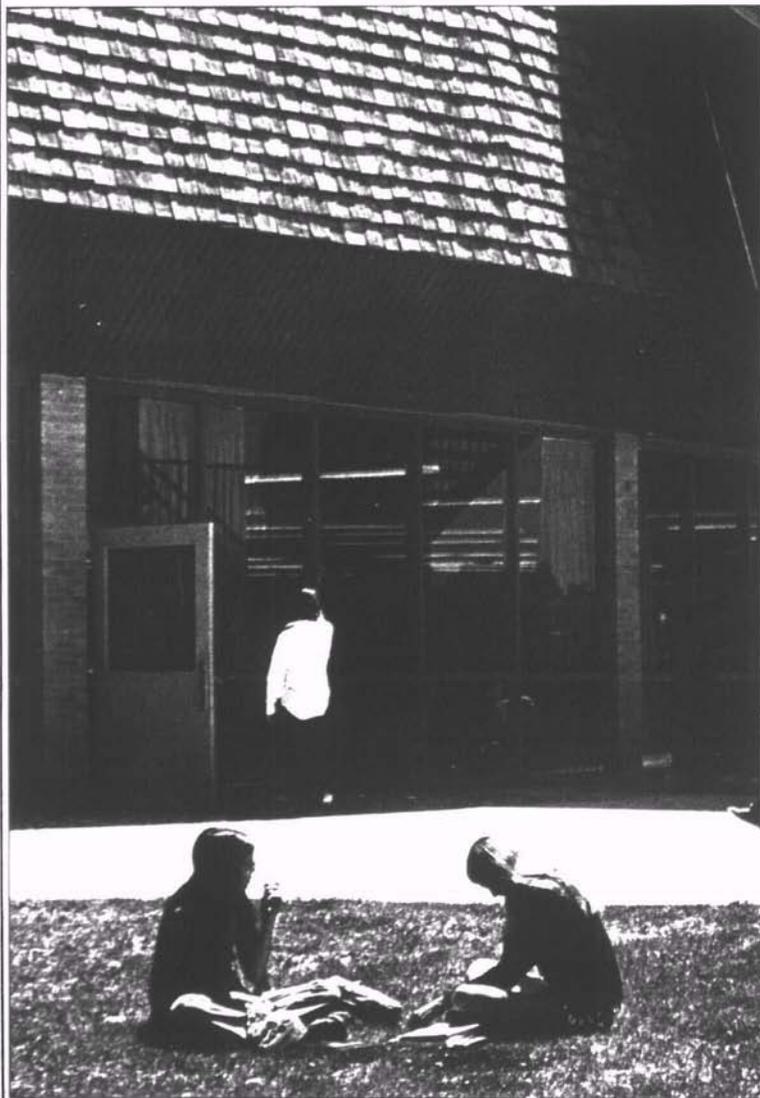


Auditing School Climate

School climate involves more than staff morale. It's the interaction between satisfaction and productivity for everyone in the school.



A subtle but important element to be considered in taking stock of a school is its climate. Although knowledge is still limited about the effects of differing educational environments (Moos, 1979), there is wide agreement about the policy implications of what is already known. Consistent findings for schools in the United States and in other nations (Rutter and others, 1979; Moos, 1979; Kelley, 1980; Lezotte and others, 1980) support a conclusion drawn by Moos:

Educational settings can and do make a difference in students' lives. This difference can be for better or for worse. Students, teachers, parents, and principals are correct in assuming that their choices and policies matter and that the educational settings they select and create have varied impacts.

A common assumption has been that school administrators should focus their efforts to improve climate on improving staff morale (Lezotte and others, 1980). The extension of this assumption is that improved staff morale will lead to improved staff productivity, which in turn will lead to improved student morale and achievement and, ultimately, improved perceptions of the school by parents and patrons. While this assumed relationship between satisfaction (morale) and productivity (achievement) is seductive, research has consistently shown that it is neither predictive nor causal (ERIC, 1978; Walberg, 1979; Moos, 1979; Kelley, 1980; Lezotte and others, 1980).

The issue can be confusing because authors have not agreed on a common definition of school climate. Some researchers have focused mainly on productivity or on achievement (Brookover and Lezotte, 1977; Madaus and others, 1979; Rutter and others, 1979; Lezotte and others, 1980). A second group of authors, including most practitioners, have sought to equate climate and morale (Fox and others, 1973; Howard, 1980; Miller, 1981).

Yet a third group of researchers has adopted a definition parallel to

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that used in research about other social organizations. For the most part, this definition has been based on the work of Murray and his associates (1938). It is this definition of school climate—the interaction between satisfaction and productivity for groups and individuals who live and work in school environments—that is used here.

Planning an Audit of School Climate

A comprehensive plan for auditing climate should consist of a series of separate but related plans for describing the climate of the school. The process suggested here is for auditing the climate of a building, although the same steps could be taken for auditing other organizational levels, such as individual classrooms, a school district, a teaching team in an elementary school, or a department in a secondary school.

The first task is to select or develop an acceptable definition of school climate to be used in planning an audit. Plans should consider both *satisfaction* (morale, feelings, "tone," or happiness) and *productivity* (attainment, achievement, and task accomplishment). It is important to make sure that all legitimate audiences understand the definition and accept it as an expression of their expectations for school environments.

A second task is to identify the major audiences who have an interest in or right to know about the outcomes of the school environment. For a school building or attendance area, these audiences include students, faculty and staff, and parents or patrons (Kelley, 1980).

Figure 1 is a matrix of a basic plan for studying school climate in a building environment. It illustrates the interface of each major audience and each climate dimension and provides a framework for the set of plans that need to be designed. A five-step planning model is listed in each of the six cells of the matrix:

1. Establish the *purposes* (goals, aims) for a particular audience and specific climate dimension, for example, student productivity. These purposes are long range and relatively permanent.

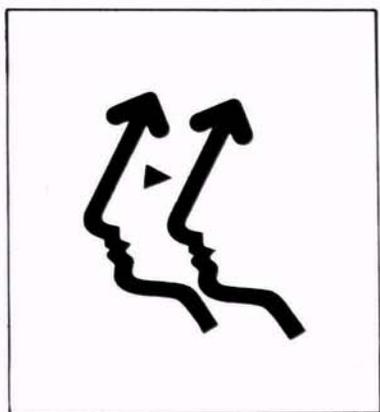
2. Formulate the *indicators* (criteria, standards for assessment) to monitor the degree to which the purposes are being met. These indicators

are also long range and relatively permanent.

3. Prepare a *status* report describing the degree to which the indicators show the purposes are or are not being met. On occasion, the status report will need to include the statement that data are not available to permit decisions about how well purposes are being met. Such a statement is necessary when data collection methods have not yet been selected or used in the setting for continuous monitoring of climate outcomes. An annual status report is recommended.

4. Examination of the status report should lead planners to the identification of *objectives* to be met during the next annual cycle. These objectives refer to actual activities to be conducted, including implementation of intervention strategies, development of assessment procedures or tools, organization of data record-keeping and retrieval systems, and so forth. Objectives should be reviewed on an annual basis and judgments made about whether they have been completed or should be continued, eliminated, or replaced.

5. Develop a detailed *plan* designed to carry out activities related to the objectives. This plan would include attention to resources that are available and needed, a timeline for conducting activities, and identification of who is to be responsible for each activity. It would also in-



clude standards for evaluating the activities. An extended three- to five-year plan can be helpful in establishing intent, not only for planners but for other audiences within the environment as well. If multiyear plans are established, annual review and preparation of an annual status report are still recommended.

As an example of such a plan, Figure 2 illustrates the steps in auditing student productivity at Anywhere High School. Student productivity (or achievement) has been selected because it is a domain of continuing interest to parents and patrons, to school administrators and curriculum workers, and to students themselves.

Highlights From Research

Since the mid-1970s, a considerable body of research findings about

Figure 1. Six Plans Within a Comprehensive Plan for Assessment and Development of School Climate in a Building.

Audiences In School Environments	Climate Dimensions	
	Satisfaction	Productivity
Students	Purposes Indicators Status Objectives Plan	Purposes Indicators Status Objectives Plan
Faculty and Staff	Purposes Indicators Status Objectives Plan	Purposes Indicators Status Objectives Plan
Patrons	Purposes Indicators Status Objectives Plan	Purposes Indicators Status Objectives Plan

Figure 2. Sample Plan for Conducting an Audit of Student Productivity at Anywhere High School.

Purposes

Anywhere High School has identified three goals for student productivity:

1. Student achievement will be at reasonable levels of attainment, taking into consideration the instruction provided and the abilities of the students.
2. Intensive involvement in and achievement by students in school and community activities have been shown to be the most consistent predictor of life success for an individual, as reported in studies conducted by the American College Testing Service and the College Entrance Examination Board (Jennings and Nathan, 1977; Joekel, 1978). Therefore, students at Anywhere High School will demonstrate frequent and intense involvement in either or both school and community activities, including work experiences.
3. While school attendance does not guarantee high levels of achievement, students are unlikely to achieve the intended outcomes of schooling if they are not in attendance. All students at Anywhere High School will attend school regularly.

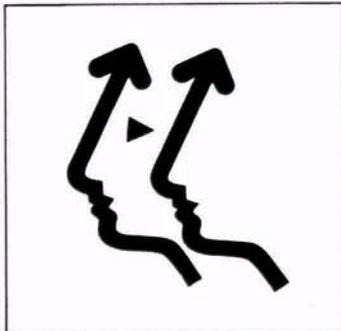
Indicators

Four indicators have been established to monitor the degree to which these goals are being met:

1. Student performance on achievement and aptitude tests that are keyed to curricular content will show, for classroom or grade level groups, an average achievement: aptitude ratio of 1.00 or higher.
2. Eighty percent of all students enrolled in any classroom or grade level group will demonstrate, on achievement and aptitude tests keyed to curricular content, an average achievement: aptitude ratio of 1.00 or higher.
3. Records of the intensity of involvement and achievement in school or community activities, including work experiences, will be at levels for any given year equal to or better than (a) levels attained during the preceding three years at Anywhere High School; (b) levels attained by students enrolled in other high schools comparable to Anywhere High School; and (c) levels attained by students enrolled in other high schools in the state and nation.
4. Records of student attendance, within school and within classroom settings, will be at levels equal to or better than (a) levels attained during the preceding three years at Anywhere High School; (b) levels attained by students enrolled in other high schools comparable to Anywhere High School; and (c) levels attained by students enrolled in other high schools in the state and nation.

Status

In reviewing the status of purposes and the available data for the 1980-81



school year, Anywhere High School found that:

1. Achievement and teacher-made tests used to measure student performance and tests used to measure student aptitude had not been validated as being congruent with one another or congruent with curriculum content. Thus, existing data sources did not permit the computation of an achievement: aptitude ratio for Anywhere High School.
2. Records of student involvement in school-based activities existed but had not been organized to provide baseline data about either intensity or levels of achievement. Records of student involvement in out-of-school activities, including work experiences, were fragmentary and had not been maintained as one of the types of data collected about students. In addition, data for comparable schools or for other schools in the state and nation had not been obtained or reviewed by planners at Anywhere High School.
3. Data on student attendance at school and in specific classrooms, were available. In addition, data for the past three years were available for Anywhere High School, for comparable schools, and for schools in the state and nation. Review of these data showed that student attendance at Anywhere High School for the 1980-1981 school year

was equal to or better than levels shown for any of the bases of comparison used.

Objectives

From the review of the status report, planners at Anywhere High School established three major objectives for completion during the 1981-1982 school year:

1. To review standardized tests as well as services available from commercial distributors of tests to develop a testing program (a) compatible with curricular content, (b) that would provide achievement and aptitude data valid for computation of an achievement: aptitude ratio, and (c) have face validity with parents, patrons, and faculty. As a part of the plan for review of the testing program, inservice will be provided to faculty to further develop skills in test construction and in the use of evaluation measures.
2. To develop and implement a recordkeeping system for maintenance of records about student involvement and achievement in school-based and out-of-school activities, including work experiences, and to use this system to report baseline data for the 1981-1982 school year in the annual status report.
3. To develop a plan for a computer-based management information system, appropriate for use on mini-computers in the building, to permit storage and retrieval of data necessary for monitoring indicators of student productivity.

Plan

Following completion of the first four planning steps in Figure 1, the principal and the Faculty Advisory Board prepared a plan for the activities to be completed during the 1980-81 school year. This plan, reviewed with the Community Advisory Committee, was approved. After its approval, copies were distributed to all faculty and to parents and placed in public agencies in the attendance area served by Anywhere High School.

Detailed suggestions for assessing school climate are found in:

Improving School Climate. A staff development kit prepared by Eugene Howard with three sound filmstrips, two miniaudits, and complete directions. 1980. \$95 for ASCD members, \$125 for nonmembers. Available from:

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
225 North Washington Street
Alexandria, VA 22314

or in

Kelley, Edgar A. *Improving School Climate*. 1980. \$4.00 prepaid from National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1904 Association Drive, Reston, VA 22901.

school climate has developed. From these findings, some general principles that should guide planners for school climate assessment and development can be identified:

1. When two or more environments in which an individual functions are incongruent in expectations, the developmental effects of one environment often will cancel the developmental effects of the other environment; on the other hand, when differing environments hold similar expectations for the individual, the combined developmental impact is measurable and significant (Moos, 1979). For school environments, the implications of these findings are clear: schools must honor, whenever possible, the expectations the home holds for the student (Brandt, 1979).

2. Differences between schools as social institutions is the primary determinant of differences in outcomes attained by students. These differences are more important than student aptitude or socioeconomic status of students' homes (Moos, 1979; Rutter and others, 1979; Lezotte and others, 1980). In short, concerns about student productivity in a school environment should lead to an investigation of that environment and efforts to improve the conditions experienced by students rather than to expressions of futility that blame conditions existing in the home or community for poor performance by students.

3. When student outcomes are the focal point of climate assessment or development, the most appropriate unit for data analysis is the classroom. Analysis of data by classroom rather than by school building accounts for an average of 40 percent of the variation in the levels of student achievement attained in differing educational environments (Madaus and others, 1979). The power of the classroom teacher, through setting expectations and monitoring student performance, should not be underestimated in planning for climate development and assessment.

4. Strong leadership by the principal is an important factor in improving school climate (Brookover and Lezotte, 1977; Lezotte and others, 1980; Kelley, 1980). The principal, by setting and monitoring expectations for the faculty, is the mediating influence for what happens in

the school-community environment. More than half of what happens in a building, for better or for worse, can be directly traced to the actions or inaction of the building principal, if the principal has been in the building for three years or longer (Kelley, 1980).

Based on studies of a number of school environments, Brookover and Lezotte (1977) described schools with high and low levels of student productivity. Schools with high levels of student outcomes have faculties who accept the basic objectives of the school, state high expectations for students and then help students meet those expectations, and accept accountability for achieving stated goals. In contrast (Lezotte, 1980) are schools with low levels of student productivity; these schools are characterized by "complacency and acceptance of things as they are: no one 'rocks the boat,' and there is an apparent unwillingness to attend to problems which might upset the calm or the good staff relations" (pp. 51-52).

Summary

We do not yet know all that we might wish to know about how to assess and improve school climate. We do know, however, that schools can make a difference in what happens to the people who work and study in school environments. We know, too, that focusing on any single climate dimension, such as satisfaction, or any particular audience, such as teachers, is a less than adequate approach to the design and implementation of school environments committed to the welfare of all participants.

To audit school climate requires sound planning that is comprehensive in scope and includes subplans that speak to the purposes of school environments for major audiences and for the climate dimensions of human satisfaction and human productivity. To do less is to be less professional than we can be or can become. ■

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