

Chalkboard's K-12 Action Plan

#13: CREATE SAFE AND RESPECTFUL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Goal: Create safe and respectful learning environments for all students and teachers.

Recommendations: The State Board of Education should direct school districts to expand existing standards on student conduct and discipline to include standards for civility and to implement a civility plan. Every parent and every child should understand and agree to these rules.

Success Measurement: On National Assessment of Educational Progress background surveys, Oregon school officials should report low rates of classroom misbehavior and physical conflict in schools.

Concept: Standards for civility will help support school climates where everyone on the school grounds (students, teachers, parents, volunteers) are treated with respect. This type of school climate is also conducive to learning and teaching values of respect and civility. Civility policies can accomplish three things: 1) they foster a safe learning environment, 2) they provide models for problem solving and appropriate civic discourse, and 3) they mitigate violent interactions in schools.

The State Board of Education will direct school districts to develop standards and commitments to foster civil interactions between everyone in the school community—students, teachers, administrators, non-teaching staff, parents, volunteers and other school visitors. Each local board of education will conduct public hearings to help define the standards for civility for its own district schools. Boards should actively seek out student and community member input in this process. Standards should apply to use of language, dress and interactions between all parties in the school community. Such policies could have voluntary and mandatory components. All school districts should implement civility policies and report the resulting standards to the State Board of Education and Oregon Department of Education (ODE).

Public Opinion: According to Chalkboard's statewide public opinion poll, some of the highest ratings recorded were for statements about values: 77 percent of Oregonians gave high marks to, "helping students develop good values," and 78 percent favored "helping students develop strong work ethics." Chalkboard's Citizen Feedback Guide survey asked respondents about school district's adopting a policy requiring each school building to have a written plan to increase civility and create a more positive learning atmosphere. Oregonians rated this choice 4.1 on a scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Supportive Research: Chalkboard is interested in whether civil discourse can work as a strategy to promote higher levels of student engagement in school and academic contexts. While measures of school effectiveness consider a number of factors—graduation rates, the types of courses students complete, performance on large-scale tests, and the relative quality of students' postgraduate options—most measures of school quality also attempt to factor in how well the school promotes a safe learning environment. Most states gather data on student disciplinary referrals as well as suspension and expulsion rates as part of their accountability programs.

Researchers associate certain school characteristics with discipline problems, especially in terms of rules: they are unclear or inconsistently enforced; students do not believe they are important; teachers and administrators are not clear about how to interpret and enforce them. Schools also have discipline issues if teachers and administrators do not cooperate and ignore student misbehavior, or if there are inactive administrators, or teachers with punitive attitudes. Large schools or schools with inadequate teaching resources more likely fit the profile as well. Research shows that schools with effective behavior management typically have clear rules that are communicated with all members of the school community, a climate where students are treated as individuals, and highly visible principals who actively monitor problem areas and who communicate clearly with students and staff.

In 2000, when asked to identify the most important school safety topics for staff development, principals identified behavior management systems, primary in-school prevention programs, dealing with inappropriate behavior, training on emergency procedures, and academics. The majority of principals identified a lack of resources as the most significant barrier they faced (56 percent). Principals were also significantly concerned with instances of bullying, mean-spirited teasing and harassment at their schools. Nationally, almost 40 percent of secondary school students report that bullying, mean-spirited teasing and harassment have a negative effect on academic achievement, school attendance and relationships with peers.

(Please visit the "Download Center" section of www.chalkboardproject.org to see source data: Citizen Public Opinion Statewide Poll: Highlights of Key Findings; Citizen Feedback Guide Survey Results; and ECONW Report: Condition of K-12 Education in Oregon, pp. ii, 2-7 to 2-8, 2-11 to 2-12; Improving Quality & Strengthening Accountability in Oregon's Schools: Full Report, Ch. 8, pp. 8-7, 8-9 to 8-13.)