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September 8, 2010

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Teachers on School Climate: It Really Matters

WALLINGFORD, CT.— U.S. teachers have an important message to share about the quest to improve student achievement. They nearly all agree about one thing: positive school climate makes a difference.

In an informal survey conducted by EducationWorld.com, nearly 99 percent of teachers said school climate has a significant impact on student achievement. About two thirds said school climate has a positive impact on achievement.

“That’s an extraordinary level of agreement and a very encouraging finding,” said Dr. Bruce Braciszewski, an expert on innovative education and executive director of the Classroom of the Future Foundation. “We too have observed that when school climate allows innovation and creativity to flourish, all of a sudden you see those student performance indicators turn around in significant ways.”

Education World general manager Rich Datz hopes people will listen to what teachers are saying in the survey. “Teachers are the experts on school climate and culture,” he said. “In working with the thousands of teachers who share resources on our site, we have come to deeply respect their expertise. We want to give teachers a greater voice by surveying them on key issues and posting the results.” Teachers can participate by signing up for the site’s weekly [newsletter](#).

Survey results will appear on the Education World [survey results page](#).

School Climate Survey Results

Many teachers are satisfied with key aspects of school climate, the physical and social environment where teaching and learning take place:

- Nearly 75 percent said their principals always or often involve the staff in decision making.
- More than 70 percent are working on a set of common goals.
- Nearly 70 percent have most of the instructional tools needed to do their jobs.
- About 75 percent work in schools that are in good repair.
- Around 71 percent said technology has enhanced teaching and learning.
- Nearly 90 percent say their school encourages parental involvement.



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However, a sizeable group of teachers gave low marks in several areas:

- Nearly a quarter of those surveyed said that their school's climate is unfocused or chaotic. About 3 percent said the climate is "downright scary."
- More than 30 percent lack the instructional tools to do their jobs.
- About 29 percent don't see much impact from the use of technology, or rarely use it.
- About 40 percent say staff morale could use a boost

Teaching today is said to be more difficult than it used to be. So teachers were asked to choose a factor that is most responsible. The top reason: children coming to school unprepared or undisciplined. A close second: being asked to do "too much with too little."

The school climate questions struck a sensitive nerve for a teacher who helped build an impressive record for her school. Last year the climate at her school changed dramatically for the worse after the arrival of an inexperienced principal who ignored teacher input. "The current expectations of government, challenges of the economy and diminished levels of support have all worked together to overwhelm some teachers," the teacher explained. "To get a great school climate that fosters learning, teachers need the freedom to meet the culturally diverse needs of their student population without their hands being tied by bureaucracy at any level.

"Everyone involved in the education process needs to feel that their voice is heard and their experience appreciated," she added. "Teachers understand the shortage of resources and are willing to work with less if they have to, as long as the expectations are fair."

The 2010 school climate survey was distributed to educators via Education World® newsletters. Survey participants represent a cross-section of elementary, middle and high schools in urban, suburban and rural areas, with the highest level of participation by elementary school teachers in urban and suburban areas.

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