Building Safe, Engaging, and Equitable Schools

There are no quick fixes or easy solutions to respond to the tragedies that have occurred in schools across the country—but there are evidence-based ways to change school environments so that students and teachers feel safer. Safe and supportive schools create positive climates where students have strong social and emotional skills, feel physically and emotionally secure, are connected to and supported by their teachers, and consistently remain challenged and engaged in learning.

Furthermore, research has shown that students and teachers perform better when their schools focus on student self-discipline, not external punishment; promote healthy behaviors instead of suppressing unhealthy ones; prevent problematic behavior rather than focus on punishment; build connections to students rather than removing students from the school community; and coordinate services systematically, not adding them piecemeal.

Drawing on extensive expertise in both research and technical assistance, the American Institutes for Research (AIR) offers a wide array of resources on school climate, culture, and safety.

At www.air.org/safe-engaging-schools, you will find:

- **Ten Key Ideas for Social and Emotional Learning and School Climate**

  Healthy schools and supportive school environments provide connection, support, engagement, and physical and emotional safety, as well as access to social networks and resources for students. This brief, which evolved from a larger project funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, outlines the central principles needed to support students in an equitable, collaborative, and healthy environment.

- **School Climate Quick Guide**

  This Quick Guide provides district and school leaders, teachers, school staff, and other members of the school community with information about how to initiate, implement, and sustain school climate improvements. This guide will help you plan; engage stakeholders; collect, analyze, and report school climate data; identify and implement interventions; and monitor and evaluate your progress. This resource comes from a project funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Healthy Students.

- **Trauma-Sensitive Schools Toolkit**

  Commissioned by the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault, AIR developed a collection of guides and online training for college campus health staff caring for students who have

experienced sexual assault and other trauma. According to AIR vice president David Osher, "Ensuring campus health center staff—from receptionists to clinicians—use trauma-sensitive approaches is key to providing the best care for students who have gone through sexual abuse and other traumatic events. If they don't, these students can be re-traumatized or take longer to recover."

The resources above are just a sampling of the tools offered by AIR. Discover more tools and supports at the following centers managed by AIR:

- The U.S. Department of Education's **National Center on Safe and Supportive Learning Environments (NCSSLE)** provides a range of resources and expertise on emotional and physical safety, bullying, cyberbullying, substance use prevention, crisis response, and building trauma-sensitive schools. AIR has developed several guides and training products to support stakeholders in building and promoting safe and supportive learning environments. Visit the center at https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov.

- **The National Resource Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention (NRC)**, funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), offers a range of resources and information on selecting, developing, and implementing programs that prevent youth violence and promote school safety and positive mental health. At the Center, you will find the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Framework Implementation Toolkit, which offers a three-phased approach—planning, implementing, and sustaining—to help school and community teams create safer and healthier environments. Find the center at www.healthysafechildren.org.
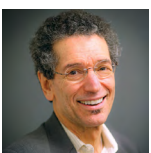
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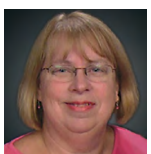Specializes in education, afterschool and expanded learning, and STEM.

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About American Institutes for Research

Established in 1946, American Institutes for Research (AIR) is an independent, nonpartisan, not-for-profit organization that conducts behavioral and social science research on important social issues and delivers technical assistance, both domestically and internationally, in the areas of education, health, and workforce productivity.

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