SCHOOL CLIMATE QUESTIONNAIRE

This simple one-page questionnaire can be used to uncover differences in teacher and student perceptions, as an activity to open professional development programs related to school climate and safety, or as part of larger school-climate assessments that also include interviews, focus groups and other tools. It also can be adapted for use with parents.

Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Students in our school get along well.</td>
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<td>b. Students choose to interact primarily with people most like themselves.</td>
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<td>c. Students in my school know how to report harassment or racial abuse to school officials.</td>
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<td>d. Students in my school would feel comfortable reporting harassment or racial abuse to school officials.</td>
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<td>e. Teachers in my school actively work to create a safe and welcoming environment for every student.</td>
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<td>f. Every student in my school feels like he or she belongs here.</td>
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<td>g. My school creates opportunities for students to get to know each other.</td>
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<td>h. At my school, teachers, administrators, staff, students and parents listen to each other.</td>
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<td>i. I look forward to coming to this school in the morning.</td>
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</table>

In the last three months …

1. I've seen biased vandalism or graffiti at school. true false
2. I've heard a student use a slur, epithet or other derogatory put-down. true false
3. I've heard a student tease or ridicule another student. true false
4. I've heard a teacher or other adult in the school make disparaging remarks about a particular group of students. true false
5. I've seen — and analyzed — our school's safety data and reports. true false
6. I've had a conversation with someone about our school's climate. true false

Adapted from Responding to Hate at School (http://www.tolerance.org/rthas/index.jsp), Mix It Up (http://www.mixitup.org) and the U.S. Department of Education’s “Creating a Safe and Connected School Climate” (http://www.scusd.edu/safe_schools/Docs_PDFs/Creating%20Safe%20Schools.pdf)

A project of the Southern Poverty Law Center

www.tolerance.org/jena
Six Lessons from Jena every school and educator should take to heart

BY JENNIFER HOLLADAY

Don’t ignore obvious signs of trouble
In Jena, a black student approached a vice-principal and asked, “Can we sit under that tree?” On campus, it was known as the “White Tree” — a place where white students historically gathered. The principal said people could sit wherever they liked. It was an unspoken response, yet one that overlooked the core issue: Why did students feel like they needed to ask for permission? What did the very question reveal about the school’s racial climate?

Examine your school’s climate
You may think your school is “no Jena High” — but do you know for sure? Are there divisions you aren’t aware of?

In a survey conducted in 2005 by Teaching Tolerance, the National Education Association and the Civil Rights Project, the vast majority of teachers nationally and their schools were largely free of racial or ethnic tensions. Students, however, paint a very different picture. One in four report being victimized in racial or ethnic incidents in a typical school year, and race and ethnicity aren’t the only lines of division, either. Seventy percent of female students say they’ve been physically harassed.*

Take bias incidents seriously
After a few black students sat under the “White Tree,” three white students hung nooses from it. Jena’s white school superintendent, Roy Breithaupt, later told The New York Times, “Adolescents play pranks. I don’t think it was a threat against anybody.”

In truth, the hanging of nooses was no youthful prank; it was a bias incident connoting racial lynchings. As Caspella Bailey, whose son Robert is among the Jena Six, told Britain’s The Times, the act “meant the KKK, it meant … ‘We’re going to kill you, we’re gonna’ hang you’ all your life.”

By their very nature, bias incidents intend to demean or instill fear in those targeted, and schools must address them quickly, consistently and effectively.

Provide forums for meaningful discussion
When bias incidents occur, schools must open lines of communication, not shut down debate.

In Jena: A few black students gathered around the “White Tree” to protest the school’s response to the noose-hanging. The principal called a school assembly and told students it was time to put the incident behind them. Students were initially shocked with attempted second-degree murder and conspiracy, the sixth was charged as a juvenile.

Advocates at the Southern Poverty Law Center and elsewhere, thus recognizing clearly that violence is never an acceptable solution to racial tensions, argue that schools never support pedagogies that encourage violence and that race and ethnicity are not the only lines of communication, not shut down debate. In Jena: The school’s main academic building is also gone, destroyed by an arson that has raised questions about a possible link to the racial discord. The school’s main academic building is also gone, destroyed by an arson that has raised questions about a possible link to the racial discord. The school’s main academic building is also gone, destroyed by an arson that has raised questions about a possible link to the racial discord.

In highly charged bias incidents, schools should hold forums for educators, students, parents and community members and issue regular updates about the incident, describing what happened, why the incident was unacceptable and how the school has responded. Education officials need to think about ways the school, students, parents and community work together to resolve the underlying problems.

Use bias incidents as teachable moments
Ask teachers to set aside class time to allow students to reflect on what has happened. Because students can influence peer behavior, ask them to write down suggestions for preventing further incidents and promote respect and to discuss their suggestions as a small group.

Because bias incidents often involve the use of bigoted speech (slurs or epithets), conduct lessons to empower students to make respectful language choices.

Bridge divisions in the school — and the community
Organize school-wide events to help students cross the boundaries that may divide them and learn about respectful behavior. Teaching Tolerance’s Mix It Up program (www.mixitup.org) and No-Name-Calling Week (Jan. 21-25, 2008, www.nonamecallingweek.org) are excellent initiatives with which to start.

Schools don’t exist in isolation, however. If tensions exist in a school, they probably exist in the larger community. Work through other programs in your area to diffuse racial tensions, like those offered by the Study Circles Roundtable, a non-profit to prevent or diffuse racial conflicts, the Community Relations Service (http://www.usdoj.gov/crs/), the Civil Rights Division at the Department of Justice or the American Legion, Straight Education Network (www.straighteduction.org) or other social programs like those offered by the Study Circles Roundtable, a non-profit to prevent or diffuse racial conflicts, the Community Relations Service (http://www.usdoj.gov/crs/), the Civil Rights Division at the Department of Justice or the American Legion, Straight Education Network (www.straighteduction.org).

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Six Lessons from Jena Online (Free)
www.tolerance.org/jena

Find five lesson plans and activities to help difficult conversations, promote respectful language choices among students and teach about the Jena Six.

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The Racially Respectful School ($23.95)
http://www.tolerance.org/products/103006

A 160-page research-based report, this book provides tips for identifying bias-inducing and hate crimes and model response protocols. Available in English and Spanish, print copies are available for free as part of educational training programs.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

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AGREE STRONGLY                  DISAGREE STRONGLY

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1 2 3 4 5
b. Students choose to interact primarily with people most like themselves.  
1 2 3 4 5
c. Students in my school know how to report harassment or racial abuse to school officials.  
1 2 3 4 5
d. Students in my school would feel comfortable reporting harassment or racial abuse to school officials.  
1 2 3 4 5
e. Teachers in my school actively work to create a safe and welcoming environment for every student.  
1 2 3 4 5
f. Every student in my school feels like he or she belongs here.  
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g. My school creates opportunities for students to get to know each other.  
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h. At my school, teachers, administrators, staff, students and parents listen to one another.  
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