

# Family and Community Engagement in Creating Positive School Climates

Summit on School Engagement

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# Welcome!

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# Agenda Topics

- Defining school engagement and identifying roles in fostering positive school climates
- School Engagement Research
- Emerging strategies and best practices that foster engagement in schools
- Characteristics of a welcoming school climate (Caring Community)

**School Engagement**  
is the foundation of  
academic success and a  
positive school climate.

It is a **process** of events and **opportunities** that leads to students having the skills and confidence to cope with life's struggles and feel safe in the school environment.

*- Creating Caring Communities*

# Family & Community Engagement

**Families take an active role in nurturing and educating their children, and are connected to the school and community in meaningful ways**



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# Family & Community Engagement

**School staff and volunteers** create a welcoming environment, actively engage family members, and partner with community members.

**Community members** understand the primary goals of the school/district and work with schools to plan and implement effective strategies to attain goals.

- *National Center for School Engagement*

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# School Engagement

- Belief not a program
- Process not a product
- We all play a role, not the role of one group



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# School Engagement Research

Studies show that relationships, resources and school climate play a significant role in school engagement.

# Consistent Themes Cited in the Research

- Students sense of belonging
- Being part of the school
- Whether or not students like school
- Level of teacher supportiveness and caring
- Presence of a good friend in school
- Fair and effective discipline
- Participation in extracurricular activities
- Feeling safe

*Taken from Literature Review by  
Heather Libby (2004)  
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# *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts*

- Findings from focus groups/interviews with over 400 people who dropped out of school.
- Why did they dropped out of school?
  - lack of connection to the school environment
  - perception that school is boring
  - feeling unmotivated
  - academic challenges
  - weight of real world events

- Respondents also identified what could be done to improve school completion
  - Opportunities for real-world learning (internships, service learning, etc.) to make classroom more relevant
  - Better teachers who keep classes interesting
  - Smaller classes with more individual instruction
  - Better communication between parents & school. Parents make sure their children go to school every day
  - Increase supervision at school: ensure students attend classes

*Taken from research by J. Bridgeland, J Dilulio Jr, and K Morison and funded by Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (2006)*

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# *Involving Parents of At-Risk Youth*

Factors that foster involvement and engagement:

- **Strong, Mutually Respectful Relationships**
  - Good relationships between school/families are critical to student success
  - If at least one person at the school is connected with the family, the parents were engaged, satisfied and felt heard
  - Good relationships are built on mutual respect, built early and are based on a caring, welcoming environments
- **Question Assumptions and Negative Labels**
  - Parents need help in letting go of past experiences that may be influencing their child's current school experience
  - Schools need to let go of the students' past and give students a second chance

# *Involving Parents of At-Risk Youth*

- Good Communication between School and Home
  - Early communication about issues before problems escalate
  - Finding a balance between communicating “good” and “bad” news is important
  - Mutual initiation of communication through weekly reports, emails and phone calls
- Welcoming Climate for Students in Transition
  - Parents needs to know that schools care about their child’s success no matter what challenges they are facing
  - Start transition process early to cover all bases in making sure at-risk students have a positive transition
  - Connect parents and students to community resources

# *Involving Parents of At-Risk Youth*

- Suggested Strategies and Support
  - Parents suggested parenting workshops, classes and informal self-help groups.
  - Families need community resources to help with basics and school supplies
  - Schools should have fun events that parents can coordinate or simply attend.
  - Childcare, food, translation services, weekend scheduling and assistance with transportation help engage parents in attending school events and activities

*Based on interviews/focus groups with 60 parents, program staff and educators conducted by the National Center for School Engagement (2008)*

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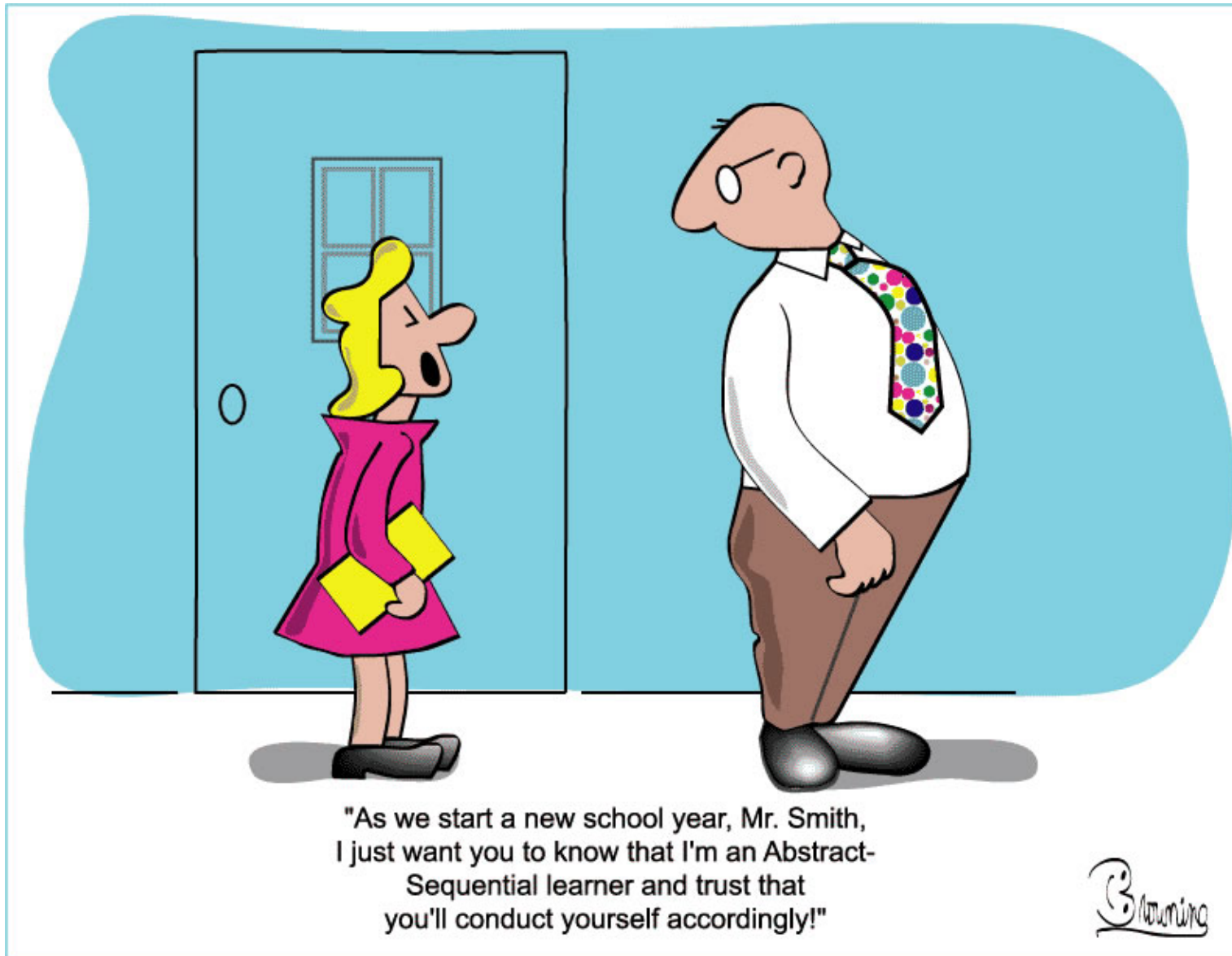
# Emerging Strategies and Practices that Facilitate School Engagement

- Mission Statement:
  - Clear Expectations
  - Everyone on Board
  - Explore personal values and beliefs
    - Students
    - Staff
    - Community



# Operating Principles

- Teaching vs. Punishing
- Empowering vs. Controlling
- Proactive vs. Reactive
- Student Centered vs. Adult/teacher centered
- Respect/responsibility vs. Fear/punishment



"As we start a new school year, Mr. Smith,  
I just want you to know that I'm an Abstract-  
Sequential learner and trust that  
you'll conduct yourself accordingly!"

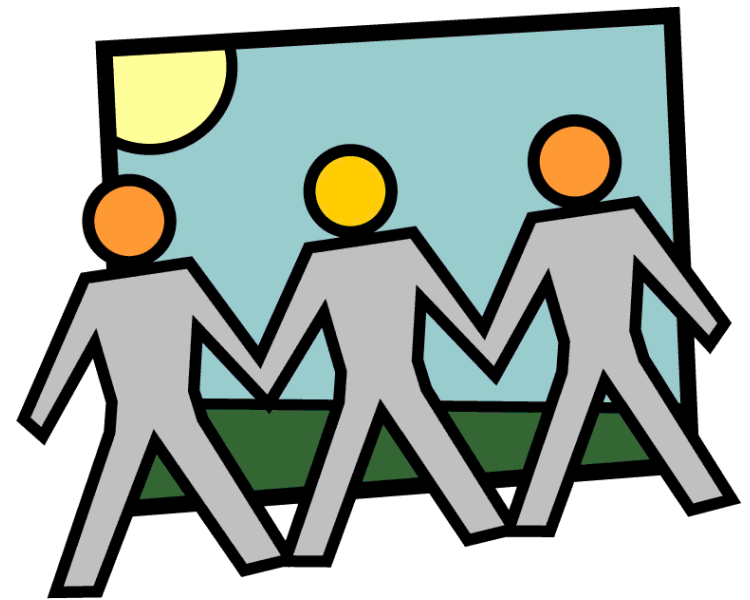
*Browning*

# Creating a Welcoming School Climate

- Educate staff, students and community about goals
- Use data to monitor progress
- Acknowledge individuals as part of the community
- Celebrate progress made toward goals

# Opportunities for School Engagement

- Admissions
- Parents
- New students
- Activities and Athletics
- Arts
- Academics



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# Opportunities for School Engagement (Cont.)

- Attendance
- Transitions- Elementary to middle to high School
- Discipline-Driven by Mission
- Peer Relations/student Engagement/  
Developing Caring communities

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The extent to which schools and communities create stable, caring, engaging and welcoming environments is the extent to which all our children will thrive.

- *School Connectedness: Improving the Lives of Students*, Dr. Robert Blum

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- Blum, Robert. *School Connectedness: Improving Student Lives*. John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. Baltimore, MD, 2005.
  - Libby, Heather. *Measuring Students' Relationships to School: Attachment, Bonding, Connectedness, and Engagement*. *Journal of School Health* 2004, Vol 74, No. 7, pp 274 283.
  - Bridgeland, J., Dilulio Jr, J. and Morison, K. *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts*. Report by Civic Enterprise in association with Peter D. Hart Research Associates for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2006.
  - H. MacGilivray and G. Mann. *Involving Parents of At-Risk Youth in School*. Study by the National Center for School Engagement for the Colorado Dept. of Education, 2008.