

**Implementation of a Climate Committee: How It Relates  
to Positive School Culture**

**ACTION RESEARCH**

**EDUCATION 5291**

**IRIS KRAMER-CLARKE**

**JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY/MALASPINA**

**UNIVERSITY COLLEGE**

**Master of Education: Rural Education**

**ABSTRACT:**

“Teaching practices, diversity, and the relationships among administrators, teachers, parents, and students contribute to school climate. Although the two terms are somewhat interchangeable, school climate refers mostly to the school's effects on students, while school culture refers more to the way teachers and other staff members work together.”

From *The Language of Learning: A Guide to Education Terms*, by J. L. McBrien and R. S. Brandt, 1997, p. 89, Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Action research is a professional tool that continuously facilitates and refines improvement and serves as a catalyst for further development, reflection and or renewal. Lawrence Stenhouse once stated that “It is teachers who, in the end, will change the world of the school by understanding it” (cited in Rudduck, 1988)

One of the goals of my research project is aimed at helping me become a reflective practitioner at Oceanview Middle School and to learn how I can facilitate positive change among students and staff in various aspects.

The questions that guided my research efforts were:

Why are a large percentage of students at Oceanview Middle School not happy with being at school and feel that teachers don't care about them?

- School Climate and Bullying Surveys indicate 45% of students are somewhat unhappy about being at school.
- Ministry Survey indicates that 52% of students feel they are not cared about by staff at Oceanview.
- Ministry Survey indicates that 77% of students do not like school.

By sharing this data it establishes a foundation for building an integrated systems approach that will bring central "players" to the table; it is hoped to empower students and staff to make change.

**If a Climate Committee is formed can this committee contribute to the school culture and influence school satisfaction?**

**I will need to explore:**

- ❖ What are the determinants of students' satisfaction within the school?
- ❖ What are the determinants of student dissatisfaction within the school?
- ❖ What elements of change do they want to happen?
- ❖ What will they have to do to bring about desired change?
- ❖ Will the change affect students' level of satisfaction?
- ❖ Will the committee see the counselor's role in a different perspective?
- ❖ What will teachers need to do in order for students to feel they are cared about?

Many local factors contribute to the creation of a culture and climate of safety. These factors include: the leadership of the school principal; "empowered buy-in" of student groups; connections to teachers. To work effectively, school climates that create relationships of respect and connection between adults and students must be accepted and understood from "the top down" as integral to the success of the learning experience.

It is the expectation that the staff at Oceanview value and promote a positive and safe educational environment where all are treated equitably and fairly. Our staff integrates several positive personal growth traits into all lessons taught. Some of these are self-discipline, self-control, and wise decision-making.

Another aspect of our present school climate is clear consistent communication within our school and with all community. Communication is promoted through the following venues: school newsletter, daily staff bulletins, school student council, Parent Advisory Group, staff meetings.

I present the Climate Committee updates at staff meetings. This is viewed by staff as being inclusive in any decisions or considerations the Climate Committee has tabled. Staff members actively participate when I ask them for feedback and their responses are most often very helpful.

Tagiuri (1968) defined climate as the total environmental quality within an organization. Accordingly, his dimensions of environment includes its ecology (the physical and material components), its milieu (the social dimension of people), its social system (the patterned relationships in the organization), and its culture (the belief systems, values cognitive structures, and meanings). Anderson (1982) argues that Tagiuri's system is preferable to others because "it reflects the growing consensus of many climate researchers that school climate includes the total environmental quality within a given school building" (P .369).

There are a plethora of definitions around this broad term of school climate and even if one can agree on a conceptualization of climate and its definition it continues to be redefined as a result of its significant influences on educational outcomes.

Thus, for our purposes, Tagiuri's definition will be used. We shall consider school climate to be multi-dimensional and a relatively enduring quality of the internal environment of the school that: (a) is experienced by the members (students, teachers, administrators, support staff (b) impacts their behavior, and (c) can be described in terms of the values, norms and beliefs of a particular set of attributes of the school.

School climate research may be divided into academic climate and social climate. The latter often referred to as the 'cultural dimension' includes the social climate norms, processes, and structures which indirectly impact on student learning by making the school's activities important to students. This is the area of my interest which I will focus on.

Professional growth for the staff is highly valued. Staff members attend staff development activities, within our school and at professional conferences, to increase instructional skills and to stay current with educational standards and assessments. Each year the staff decide on professional goals and this year one of the three goals addressed is:

- ❖ To foster a positive, connected school climate.

Some of the indicators for this goal will be 10% fewer referrals to the office, less vandalism, a climate survey will indicate 15% improvement in how students feel about being at school and a 15% improvement in how students feel about staff caring for them at Oceanview.

Oceanview Middle School is a modern looking building situated on a hill overlooking the ocean and town of Powell River, British Columbia. The school was built in the 1970's and was specially designed by an architect who wanted to capture the essence of the west coast influence into the building. The building has one Common area encircled by classrooms at various levels. This Commons area is the centre of the school and is regarded as the meeting place for students, parents and staff. Students can sit on elevated theatre style carpeted seats. Classrooms branch out from the Commons up and down and around. Students who need to get to the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> level walk out to an open area that has a covered roof. This area has a rock garden with small trees. Aesthetically there are many beautiful areas around the campus.

Straight through from the Commons one can access the large gym which again is connected to the outdoors by a covered roof. The gym also houses the band room and the change rooms. The entire playground area can be accessed through the entrance breezeway to the gym and the playground has some climbing apparatus and a number of picnic tables. There is a large grassy field toward the north end which is used for playing ball and various other sports.

The front entrance of the school is surrounded by a variety of smaller trees and shrubs and a grouping of benches are staggered on the lawn facing the ocean. This is one of the few unobstructed 'ocean views' you can get at this school as many of the windows are high and in a sitting position you are unable to see the ocean. Currently we house approximately 425 students and 20 teaching staff and 10 support staff. Half of the school population lives within walking distance and the other half are bused to school. We have a Principal and a Vice-Principal.

Our students come from as far north as Lund and as far south as Saltery Bay. We have a small population of First Nations students from the Sliammon Band and we offer Sliammon as a language course in addition to the French language. We also have approximately fifteen international students with the majority of students coming from Mexico and Korea.

Oceanview, as any school has a number of Special Needs students who are integrated into the regular stream but receive additional educational services. A Behavior Classroom has been established where students can attend if they have major difficulties coping in the regular classroom environment. A large percentage of students do well at Oceanview Middle School and throughout the school learning is supported by providing a variety of positive supports. There are two half-time counselors, of which I am one.

As a counselor of this age group, I am a strong believer that students who have an opportunity to voice what they believe in and what they want will take more ownership for their learning as well as show a greater affiliation to the school.

By organizing a Student Climate Committee we are establishing youth participation in decision-making. As members of the school community, the behavior and decisions of teachers and staff affect the school's climate and the decisions students are likely to make. If a teacher decides to take time to connect and listen to student concerns and ideas, students hopefully, are more likely to approach and connect with them.

It is anticipated that the School Climate Committee's objective and final outcome will be to help students and teachers gain knowledge and skills that support pro-social decisions and make the environment not only conducive to learning but also making the atmosphere enjoyable and fun place to be.

What children learn about themselves in school through interactions is equally important as the academic knowledge they receive. School climate, if positive can provide an enriching environment, both for personal growth and academic success.

A student in each division (grade seven and eight) was asked to volunteer or was encouraged by the classroom teacher to be representative of that class. Meetings are held on Friday's twice a month (during common class time) which increases the importance to this committee to students. The Committee discusses school climate improvement activities and projects. Climate Committee members report back to their classroom and act as the voice of their class at our meetings.

In my colleague interview we discussed the problem of students and teachers. It has been our experience that if students don't have a sense of affiliation to the school it is usually because they aren't connected to an adult. If students don't feel linked they don't try hard and their marks fall and everything else spirals downward. . If a teacher puts up an invisible wall (often without realizing it) the student reacts by not caring. A teacher and student who are connected inevitably communicate with each other and a mutual bond is created.

Actually the more I thought about it, I realized just how critical good communication has to be. If we communicate how we are feeling or what our thoughts are, we are being open and breaking down barriers. So, in essence the climate committee can serve as a facilitator of communication to break down any barriers. A school climate in which students connect to each other and to adults promotes a safer and secure educational environment for everyone.

I believe schools which provide good school climates “raise the bar” on educational expectations which, in turn, keep students engaged and learning at higher levels and amplifying motivation. Of course this doesn’t happen overnight and takes a bit of work.

**I asked my colleague what significant factors that will need to be addressed if I you are going to make a difference in this area?**

“First off, we as the adults will need to connect and bond with the committee so that they feel a sense of involvement with this committee and we need to offer opportunities for them to connect with other members. We have already given them a sense of importance by pulling them out of class time for the meetings. They must have a vision and a desire to make change.

We don’t want students who constantly criticize, but we want students who criticize proactively because they want to do something to make a change. We don’t want fence sitters and students who run the system down. We want open minds and risk takers who are willing to take the time to evaluate a system that needs improvement. It is also so important that students visually realize that their voice has been heard whether it be physical change or anything that indicates some sort of change. We also need to have the administration on board as this all pertains to a school focusing on changing the perception students have of school and staff. If you have your principal behind you, it can be far smoother sailing.” *(Interview with my counseling partner T. Marciniak)*

**Then I asked my colleague whether through all this, if we had a priority pie how should that look?”**

“The first priority would be to connect with the class representatives. We would use them as problem solving groups. The student council in our school is the fun committee but after the fun the problem’s are still there such as litter, ugly entrance, kids still can’t wear hats etc.

Secondly, we would focus on a number of priorities important to creating an inviting environment (which should be defined by the climate committee).

Following that we will identify the elements that are necessary for this environment to happen and provide opportunities that contribute to a respectful supportive relationship among students and staff.

Once the variables are decided, we will begin to initiate some visible changes to that environment and monitor the change.

Ultimately, trust will be established. Once the teachers see that students are making positive changes to the school environment they will hopefully notice positive changes in the classroom. The school belongs to everyone...we have shared ownership and are all stakeholders.

This research will be particularly interesting with the new reconfiguration of the school which will change the school to an eight and nine grade level. We keep the same students for another year which will be to our advantage because the expectations and norms will have been established. We most likely will have some growing pains again, but by using the climate committee for a lot of input and consultation we will again embark on another change in our district.” (*interview with my counseling partner T. Marciniak*)

Multiple sources of information (triangulation) will be used to observe, collect and take account of situations from various angles, perspectives and sources which will then be compared to and contrasted to validate my findings. For me this action research will be, to reflect on process and outcome and implement possible change. This qualitative research will focus on naturalistic investigations. Writing in my log will provide me with opportunities for reflection and feelings. By using surveys, physical audits and communicating with students on a regular basis I will be able to obtain my information.

At the first meeting, October 31, 2003 the students of this new committee decided that their role was to make Oceanview Middle School a great school to learn in and hopefully change some of the negative feelings about school. Ultimately it was decided that would like increase a more positive climate between staff and students.

We decided that in order to increase a more positive climate we would need to use a five step procedure and developed a plan accordingly:

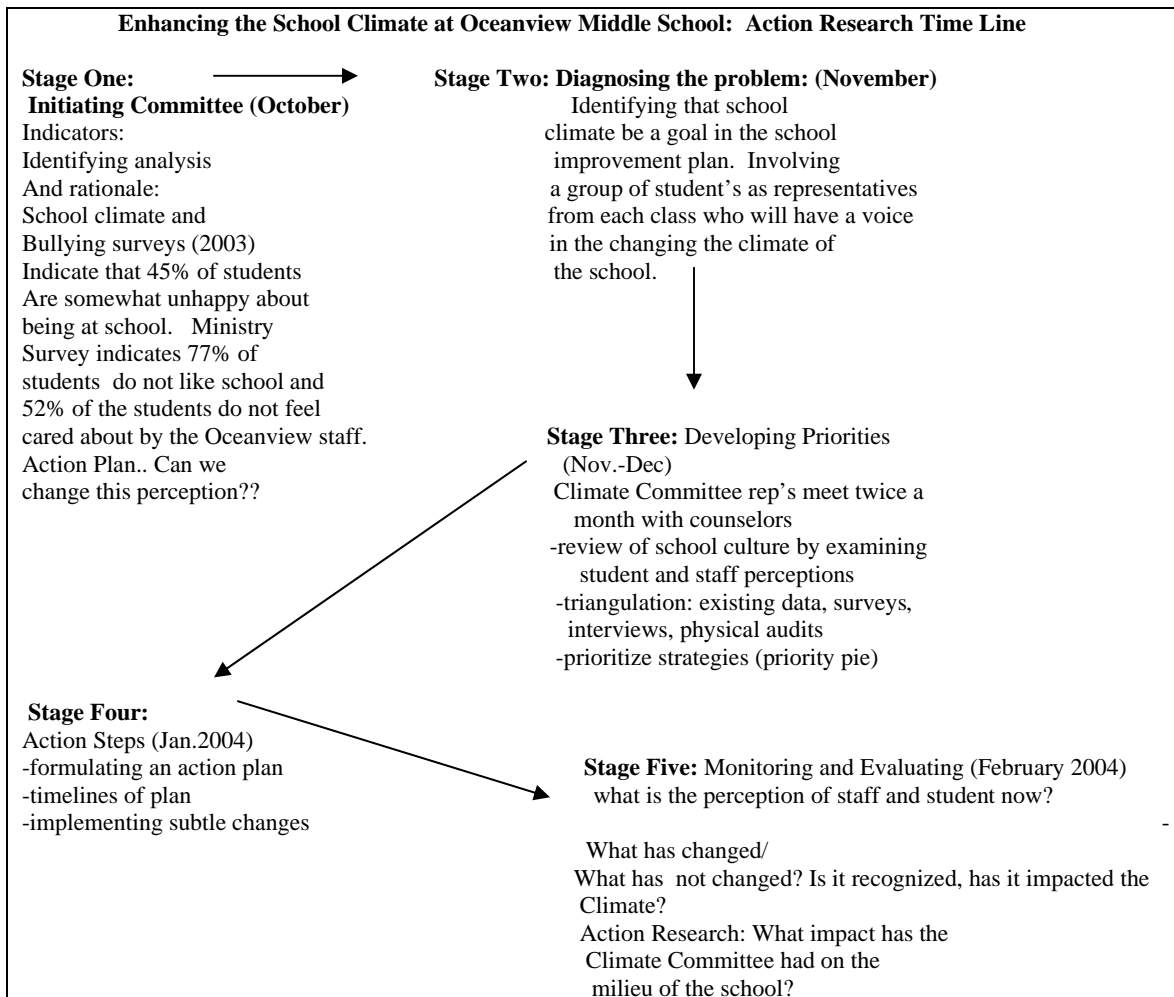
Stage 1- Initiating the Program: purpose (problem formulation) and rationale

Stage 2-Diagnosing and Assessing (data-collection)

Stage 3-Developing Strategies (data-analysis)

Stage 4-Implementation: noticeable changes seen (reporting of results)

Stage 5- Monitoring/Evaluating Outcomes :(action planning: readdressing the original problem and improving school climate)



### **Stage 1 - Initiating the Program**

At this first stage climate committee members recognize that the climate of the school can be enhanced. This is based on intuition, brainstorming, discussions around the indicators that the climate of the school is not as good as it should be. Climate improvement also arises because the members genuinely feel that their school can be a better place.

During the initiating stage the Climate Committee need to ask questions such as:

**What is happening in our school and why?**

**What do we want to happen?**

**What do we need to do to bring about the desired change?**

Awareness can come through discussion and debate at meetings. Awareness can also come to the entire student population about the role of Climate Committee members and how they will best serve the student population. Climate Committee members will continuously need to advocate their roles by reporting back to their homerooms following each meeting. They will also be highlighted and recognized at particular school wide assemblies.

During Stage I we plan for action, not reaction. Visible support from the principal is a necessary element. The planting of seeds is crucial. This is the stage for building commitment.

During this initial meeting, team building and getting-to-know-you activities were initiated by my counseling partner and me. The students were a positive, energetic and interested group. The character and energy of the students made the connection easier because the students were all very committed to being on the committee.

As we move into Stage Two the Climate Committee were asked to brainstorm with their classmates any changes that could inevitably occur in our school and bring these ideas to the next meeting. An appropriate quote for this stage is one by Henry Van Dyke: "IT TAKES ALL OF US...for the woods would be very silent if no birds sang except the best."

## **STAGE TWO: DIAGNOSING/ASSESSING THE PROBLEM**

Climate Committee members met for the second time two weeks later and offered feedback into some concerns voiced to them by their classmates. They felt that something more definitive needed to be done as many students were just spouting off and being unrealistic in some instances.

Here are their results conducted the week of November 3, 2003 which gave us an idea of student thinking at this time.

Suggestions from students to their climate committee representative that would improve Oceanview Middle School:

- Better dictionaries and texts
- Better gym equipment
- Locks on change room doors
- Showers that work
- Cheaper canteen food
- Longer PA/FA classes
- Mirrors in the downstairs washroom
- Slushie machine
- Air fresheners in washrooms
- Better heating/loud heaters
- More garbage cans
- Better toilet paper
- More dances
- Computers in each classroom
- Smaller class sizes
- More after school sports
- Bigger lockers
- Access to computer lab more frequently
- Swings on play grounds

- More fun assemblies
- Hockey court
- Hats
- Discman's
- 1 class a month to be in charge of litter pick-up
- more adventure activities
- doors on bathroom stalls
- new PA/FA courses/poor selections and want groups to be mixed up
- better music in the commons
- remove all carpets in the School
- be able to stand in the Commons area
- football team
- clock by the student phone
- more vending machines
- longer time between classes
- shorter day, start early and leave early like JP Dallos
- better books in the classroom
- paint nice colors in the washrooms
- too many pop machines
- replace with hot drinks such as tea, coffee, hot chocolate, soup
- need a big clock in commons
- more bleachers in the gym
- Art as a fine art subject!!!
- allow drinks in classrooms
- new ping pong table
- more choices in canteen
- sick room very uncomfortable
- need to have a change machine in the School
- free lunch once a month (pizza) for the class who takes care of garbage etc.
- medals at the year end award assembly like JPD used to have
- More spirit days
- More field trips
- microwave in the commons
- Access to lockers all the time
- No restrictions to the upstairs at lunchtime
- Need murals on the walls
- Pizza too expensive would like to see \$1.50 max. per slice...poor choices

We discussed and decided that a formal survey would be more definitive in order for students to prioritize their choices with serious thought.

There are many different techniques suitable for helping the stakeholders identify their needs, some of which are brainstorming, survey of opinions, and interviews. Several forms for assessment using both quantitative (e.g., climate questionnaires) and qualitative (e.g., interview) approaches will occur. By taking students and staff ideas and culminating the ideas it is anticipated that making change can occur.

The questions for the survey were generated from the students. Quantitative methods of research such as a pre (baseline) survey to students will be administered using fixed alternatives such as 'yes/no' responses to make tabulation easier. By administering closed item surveys, the reliability is greater and we can achieve a greater uniformity of measurement. Yes/no surveys are also easier for students to respond to.

We talked about how the students would distribute the survey. I expressed to the committee how they should present the survey and that if any students didn't answer seriously to discard the survey. Students were also instructed not to discuss their answers with other students. See Appendix A.

The Climate Committee representatives were also in charge of tabulating the results and returning them to me by a certain date. All except one student who was ill returned the forms to me on time. This was also a measure that determined how driven and dedicated these students were to the Climate Committee. The positive outcome confirmed that these students were reliable and committed to making changes.

Results of this formal survey:

**QUALITY OF LIFE AT OCEANVIEW MIDDLE SCHOOL**

Out of **152 grades 7 students surveyed** the following students indicated “yes” to:

Liked the school in general 67%

Liked the teachers 74%

**Liked the kids who attend this school 91%**

Liked the classes 61%

Liked the rules that are currently in place 58%

Liked to respect the school property 46%

**Liked the activities offered 88%**

**Liked that it is a good place to make friends 90%**

Liked the school spirit 72%

**Liked to do well academically 88%**

**Liked the school facility (gym, commons etc.) 95%**

**Liked the rewards (Kool cards, Limo etc.) 90%**

**Liked the canteen food 95%**

**The best things (10 or more responses):**

**Commons, Vending Machines, Friends**

**Other 4-9 responses:** PA/FA, dances,

Many students indicated they **liked school** because of the friends they had.

What needs to improve: washrooms, less litter, better electives

Many students complained about too much homework, the work was hard and boring

**QUALITY OF LIFE AT OCEANVIEW MIDDLE SCHOOL Grade 8 2003:**

Out of **178 grades 8 students surveyed** the following students indicated “yes” to:

Liked the school in general 44%

Liked the teachers 78%

**Liked the kids who attend this school 98%**

Liked the classes 47%

Liked the rules that are currently in place 42%

Liked to respect the school property 32%

**Liked the activities offered 76%**

**Liked that it is a good place to make friends 83%**

Liked the school spirit 60%

**Liked to do well academically 89%**

**Liked the school facility (gym, commons etc.) 83%**

**Liked the rewards (Kool cards, Limo etc.) 73%**

**Liked the canteen food 80%**

**The best things (10 or more responses):**

**Friends, commons, gym**

**Other 4-9 responses:** canteen, people,  
girls, teachers, food.

Many students indicated they **liked**  
**school** because of their friends.

Some students said they learn a lot and it gives them something in life. Some students felt that school helps them with their problems. Some students indicated the teachers were nice and it was fun and made them happy

**What needs to improve?**

**(10 or more responses);**

Less bullying, less drug abuse, ugly washrooms, less litter, better electives

*\*\*at the time of survey 5 students had just been suspended for possession of drugs, and or association for being around the drug offenders. This is uncharacteristic of grade 8 students as there have never been any drug offences in prior years to this group of students.*

**Other 4-9 responses:** litter, cost of pizza, PDA's (personal displays of affection) should be allowed, dress code needs to be more lax

Many students complained that they didn't like school because it was too boring. Some students just don't like being here and school just 'sucks'. Some students felt school was just too much work and a waste of time. Their response is often typical of this adolescent middle age group.

Murphy et al (1985) claims that "effective schools maintain a safe and orderly environment for learning" (P.368). In my survey with the students at grade seven, 46% of the students felt that many students were bullies. At the grade eight level, 68% of the students felt that many students were bullies.

The scores indicate that there is far too much bullying or what is perceived to be bullying happening. A proactive approach and continued education for problem solving must continue to address bullying behavior. Climates that teach conflict resolution, peer mediation, active listening, and other non-violent ways to solve problems are proactive. These statistics will need to be shared with staff so there can be greater vigilance and education in this area.

Research clearly shows that students will commit few violent acts when they feel supported, respected and liked. Students' needs include structure, safety and strong relationships. A positive school climate has been consistently found to be effective in the reduction of bullying (Olweus, 1993). A positive school climate should be strongly emphasized.

Previously, on the Ministry Satisfaction Survey, students felt their teachers didn't care about them. Our student survey asked the question of whether the students liked their teachers. It was anticipated if the results were favorable, we would share this with the teachers to facilitate positive feelings among teachers and students. As it turned out, the results showed improvement.

The principal asked me to help promote morale of staff (we are beginning talks about what our new re-configuration will look like and some staff will be leaving in June) so at the staff meeting I presented a quick summary of the survey.

The scores had changed from the past satisfaction survey and I informed them that the student/teacher perceptions had changed favorably. The following is the hand out I circulated to the staff:

**TEACHERS!!!!** Students at Oceanview Middle School have through a survey indicated that they like the teachers...YOU!!! In grade 7, 74% of students like their teachers and in grade 8, 78% like their teachers. This is great news!!!

We have become increasingly aware that emotions can affect the learning climate. Students learn more effectively when they feel safe, cared for, and validated.

Providing that type of environment is an important part of what teachers must do. We can continue to accomplish that by:

- Taking time to make curriculum relevant to our students.
- Focusing on important areas of contention and ignoring unessential conflicts.
- Bending the rules from time to time so the students know we are human.
- Doing all we can to support their learning until they are mature or interested enough to take on some of those responsibilities themselves.
- Speaking encouragement into their lives on a daily basis.

Areas we need to work on are getting kids to like school. In grade 8, only 44% of students really like school. Some of the reasons for not liking it were they found it too boring and there was way too much work. In grade 7, 67% of students liked school but they found they had too much homework and the work was too hard.

Overall, students do not have an affiliation/connection/attachment with our school in the sense of respecting property and taking care of the ground i.e. litter. We will be working on this.

In grade 7, 89% students would like to do well academically and in grade 8, 88%. That tells us, they are kids with ambition and drive. This is an excellent score!!!!

Thank you for your continued support and passion.... Iris

The presentation was well received. I also handed out information for teachers on what caring behaviors looked like and how to make your classroom fun. It felt like this information was very timely as teachers were feeling the crunch of writing report cards and needed a positive perk.

A self-reflection survey to be completed by teachers was my next phase of gathering information. The data consisted of fifteen items using a Likert-type scale with four response categories (from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree"). Examples of items from survey include:

"My classroom is friendly, but business like."

"Student and staff morale is high."

"I treat students fairly (i.e. I don't play favorites/punish the entire class for the actions of a few."

Perhaps the strength of an instrument like this, as pointed out by Hoy and Miskel (1982), is that it allows another view of the school climate, one that focuses on teacher-student relations. See Appendix B and C.

Fifteen teachers completed the survey in the area of seeing yourself as a teacher/climate leader and how they perceive the climate at Oceanview Middle School.

### **How do you see yourself as Teacher Climate Leader?**

**Results: 15/15 teachers are very positive climate leaders. These teachers received scores above 45**

Some of the highlights of this survey indicated that:

- 10/15 teachers strongly agreed to have a friendly relationship with students.
- 5/15 teachers agreed to have a friendly relationship with students.

Overall the scores demonstrated that the majority of teachers surveyed have established routines, behavior expectations and maintain realistic standards for their students and are very positive teacher/climate leaders.

Subsequently the Climate Leader survey was followed by the:

**Oceanview Middle School Climate Survey:**

**Overall, 12/15 teacher's scores were below 45, indicating the school climate at Oceanview isn't as high as it could be.**

- 14/15 teachers indicated that they agreed student and staff morale is high.
- 1/15 teachers indicated that student and staff morale is not high.

*(Student morale also seems to be a function of student perceptions that teachers care (Brookover et al., 1979). Research indicates that when teachers take a genuine interest in students as individuals, climate and academic performance appears to be better.)*

- 5/15 teachers strongly agreed that the staff is friendly and care about their students as individuals
- 10/15 teachers agreed that the staff is friendly and care about their students as individuals
- 8/15 teachers felt we have many discipline problems.
- 7/15 teachers agreed we have few discipline problems
- **15/15 teachers agreed that vandalism is a problem in our school.**
- 5/15 teachers didn't feel student achievement was high.
- 10/15 teachers agreed that student achievement was high.
- 6/15 teachers disagreed that students have a sense of ownership and pride in the school.
- 9/15 teachers agreed that students have a sense of ownership and pride in the school.

- 6/15 teachers agreed that students and staff willingly participate in extra-curricular activities.
- 9/15 teachers disagreed that students and staff willingly participate in extra-curricular activities.

In my research I noticed that successful schools ensure that a variety of class and school-wide activities are planned in which students can participate. Such activities help to promote fun in a more unstructured environment.

Whether the activities are a student-staff volleyball game, or a staff, student and parent breakfast event, all serve to tie the school into a closely knit community. The school climate can only be strengthened by such activities. Good student-teacher relationships are important attributes of schools with good climate. Wynne (1980) indicated the importance of good relationships and extra-curricular activities as contributing to a school's coherence. Shared activities by staff and students encourage students to accept the school norms (Rutter et al., 1979).

In the research by Brown (1995), she found that 'caring ness' was identified by students as the most important quality of a teacher/counselor. Students who perceive their teachers as persons who care about them can help increase student engagement in the school. In a study by Firestone and Rosenblum (1988) they found that when teachers demonstrate respect, high expectations and support for students, students respond to them in positive ways. In the same way, teachers' commitment is influenced by the response they get from students. From this, I also hope to see a commitment from the members of the Climate Committee who will see me, the counselor/teacher as an empathic listener, problem solver and advocate for students in the Oceanview Middle School community.

In addition, my role as counselor/teacher will also be to assist and communicate to staff what 'caring behaviors' are necessary for the creation of a caring/learning community. The relationships between students and teachers and students and their peers can facilitate or impede change. When teachers are interested in students and demonstrate respect for them, a community of caring is nurtured.

Historically it has been proven that a school climate in which students connect to each other and to adults is one that promotes a safe and secure educational environment which ultimately creates a positive school climate.

### **STAGE THREE: DEVELOPING PRIORITIES/STRATEGIES:**

In this stage we will select a number of manageable activities. Too many activities could result in loss of effort and eventually dropping of the project. It is also a time for reflection and research about school culture and how we can make positive and noticeable changes.

A positive school climate exists in a school when there is collaboration, mutual trust, caring, collaboration and support. Having such a positive climate influences the effectiveness of a school. Students in a school with a positive school climate are more likely to cooperate, respect the property, share a set of essential values, be involved in many aspects of the school and achieve better than students who are in a less desirable school climate.

Student satisfaction according to (Abbey and Andrews, 1986) is linked to the construct of quality of life. The personal characteristics of students such as sociability and positive values regarding academic achievement and social characteristics of peers, family and school environments reflect student satisfaction. The responses and attitudes toward these personal characteristics contribute to the global quality of life among young people. If students are not satisfied with school they will more likely feel alienated and find arenas where they can rebel against authority. These students will often turn to groups of peers exploring problem behaviors like substance abuse. The social networks within the school and classroom might encourage the display of desired pro social behavior or they might just as readily support antisocial behavior. On the other hand, students satisfied with school, their teachers and their academic achievement will have a positive view of the school and school climate.

Only 1% of our student population has had first time drug offences this year. Our academic honor roll, principal's honor roll and good workers awards are recognized at the each reporting period. Each month "Good Workers" are recognized at an assembly. It is the philosophy of the school that all students will have been recognized at least once in some manner throughout the year. Names of recognized students are published in the school newsletter each month and the principal writes personal letters of congratulations to students and their parents for academic success.

Research by Connolly, Hatchette and McMaster (1998) examined how parental, student and teacher attitudes toward school influence the success and transition of adolescents. This Canadian study is relevant to the age group of students I am currently working with. The researchers found a correlation with the environment provided by teachers as an indicator to student success. They also found that student attitudes can also affect academic achievement i.e. positive self-esteem and self-confidence. Schools where parents and teachers are supportive of each other and have close relationships acquire more of a community atmosphere (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988).

A positive attitude toward school is the most important factor when it comes to school success. Connolly, Hatchette and McMaster (1998) also confirmed that pubertal development did not influence children's attitudes or their perceptions of teacher support. Puberty is, however, an influence on a decline in self-esteem and there is often a negative shift in parents' attitudes thus, creating parent/teen conflicts. Self-esteem can be very fragile for this age group of students and adults need to be indulgent of the highs and lows of their adolescent emotional roller coaster.

Many studies implicate the importance of creating school environments which foster positive attitudes toward school. In addition, positive family attitudes and strong teacher support are other important influences in school success, to creating a positive school climate.

Schools with positive school climates have teachers and others who are seen as warm and caring, and have educational policies that foster educational and personal development, and recognize students' efforts and accomplishments (Purkey & Schmidt, 1996). School counselors can improve the climate of schools by advocating for the promotion of the personal and educational development of students. This can be done for example, by in-service training to foster and promote positive interpersonal relationships among students and staff.

Communicating with staff in the staff room and supporting teachers with suggestions for individual student needs creates an atmosphere of collegiality and trust between the counselor and teachers.

Counselors can also draw from a vast array of interventions that will help students increase their academic achievement (Brown, 1999). Other interventions employed by counselors are the formation of groups that address issues such as achievement motivation, and personal success strategies such as friendship making skills, anger management. The article summarizes that counselors have multitasks of increasing student achievement but this all interrelates to the challenge of working to improve school climate.

From the research, it became apparent to me that counselors can have an effect on improving the nature of the achievement climate in their schools and most likely on the social climate. I began looking forward to indicators that would confirm this to my own personal situation.

Some indicators were students dropping in to my office, climate committee members going out of their way to say hello to me and many students coming up to me to offer me suggestions for change.

More students requested to see the counselor for problem solving and I began to meet with students whom I was unfamiliar with in the past.

Through this journey I also began to investigate more about the evolution and characteristics of a middle school environment and how it relates to school climate. Gruhn and Douglass (1947) proposed and described six major functions: integration, exploration, guidance, differentiation, socialization, and articulation. These functions today remain as a foundational framework for defining an effective middle level school.

Consensus definitions of key characteristics or elements of 'true' middle schools emerged in 1982 by the National Middle School Association (NMSA) and of the ten essential elements, positive school climate was included in the definition of a middle school. In conjunction with this, a further report in 1989, *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* released in New York presented eight major recommendations to improve and address the education of these young adolescents. The recommendations encouraged schools to try to staff middle grade educators who are experts at teaching this particular age group of adolescents in order that there is an understanding adult who can be an advocate and provide guidance and connection towards this age group. Many of our present teachers enjoy working with this age group and have chosen middle school as their preference for teaching.

Developmentally responsive middle schools must take into account all that is known about young adolescents and the cultural context in which they live. Characteristics that responsive middle schools exhibit are: programs that foster health, wellness and safety, and comprehensive guidance and support services which verifies that school is not just about teaching but that adolescents need programs that provide for peer discussion and personal attention.

This leads me to advocate even more for the importance of establishing and maintaining a school climate committee which can provide an avenue for expression. Student involvement in making decisions needs to be prevalent or students will remain indifferent to their school.

The National Middle School Association in their in their document called: *This We Believe: Developmentally Responsive Middle Schools* (1995) makes this vital statement:

"The importance of achieving developmentally responsive middle level schools cannot be overemphasized. The nature of the educational programs young adolescents experience during this formative period of life will, in large measure, determine the future for all of us". (p. 33).

At our November 14 Climate Committee meeting we conducted a physical school audit by breaking up into two groups (one for grade 7 and one for grade 8) and looked at the physical environment of the school with a critical eye.

Here are the results noted:

**Commons Area:**

No clock by the electronic board in the Commons and no clock by the student phone  
 Lighting inadequate  
 Messy areas....possibly create a small café like area  
 Put the junk machine where the juice machine is, and put juice/water machine in gym

**Canteen Area:**

Dark  
 Recommend 'happy murals'

**Gym Breezeway/Hallway:**

Change rooms need to be redone  
 Get higher bleachers so everyone can sit  
 Girls change room needs latches on change room cubicles  
 Get junk machine out and replace with drink machine  
 Move archery curtain to side of gym

**Playground:**

Is the equipment age appropriate?  
 Need a hockey court/area for skateboarding

**School entrance:**

Very foreboding  
 Need murals

Add some planters with shrubs

**Hallways**

Paint chipped

Very stark and cold

**Breezeway to 300/400 levels**

Potential for a nice area with benches, why is not utilized

Potted plants/picnic table

**Washrooms:**

Missing door on the upstairs girls cubicle

Smelly, dark and ugly

Generally schools exhibiting a positive ethos are clean and tidy. They not only exhibit much student work, but one also finds many pictures, plants, posters and icons that help depict the school ethos. Our school could use a face lift in this area.

The students at Oceanview have identified some doable changes that could contribute to a more ‘user-friendly’ environment. With all the information at hand, it has become apparent that we need to develop a mission for the School Climate Committee.

THEREFORE.....

- The students of Oceanview Middle School would like to articulate what physical changes they would like changed so that the school will be a nicer place to learn in—therefore---**by giving students an opportunity to voice to a Climate Committee this will empower them and give them a sense of affiliation to the school**

- The students of Oceanview Middle School would like to foster a climate of mutual respect and caring among the staff—therefore---**we will keep the staff informed of how students are feeling and include them in decision making and I will provide the staff with some tools to build positive relationships with their students. Staff will hopefully, begin to see more ‘engaged’ learners as perspectives change**

- The students of Oceanview Middle School will realize that their viewpoints have been taken seriously by observing indicators of change---therefore---**Climate Committee members will speak at assemblies about their goals and doable changes will occur with accolade given to the Climate Committee which will foster empowerment within the committee**

- The effects of the Climate Committee will have a positive impact on the overall school environment---therefore--- **by using a variety of tools to measure i.e. before and after survey and by noticing subtle changes in the areas of vandalism/litter, less discipline referrals and the general milieu of the school will be some indicators that this committee has been effective.**

**Rationale:** A positive school climate exists in a school when there is collaboration, mutual trust, caring, collaboration and support. Having such a positive climate influences the effectiveness of a school. Students in a school with a positive school climate are more likely to cooperate, respect the property, share a set of essential values, be involved in many aspects of the school and achieve better than students who are in a less desirable school climate. By establishing a Climate Committee it will be an opportunity for reflection, evaluation and revitalization. The ultimate goal for me will be to research how effectively this committee has impacted and affected change. The ingredients for this recipe would be: ensuring students have a voice, feeling that they can make changes, feeling they belong and that others can see that the change is happening.

**Many researchers have identified factors that influence school climate here are just a few that indicate how significant a positive school environment can be:**

(1) School climate attributes have an influence on psychological processes and achievement (Moos, 1976; Fraser, 1981);

(2) The climate attributes are alterable (Moos, 1979; Brookover et al., 1978; Wynne, 1980);

(3) The perceptions of the participants in the school setting are the basis for change of the climate (Trickett, 1978; Fraser, 1981).

School climate is clearly multi-dimensional and influences many stakeholders. From this information climate improvement is to be fostered, encouraged and nurtured.

#### **STAGE FOUR: ACTION STEPS/IMPLEMENTATION**

During this stage adjustments may need to be made. Time lines may need to be readjusted to fit with the school activities. This is the best part for the committee, students are seeing change, Climate Committee members are given recognition for change and student voices are heard. Change must be meaningful to students' reality and it must be emphasized that this is not just a passing novelty.

Patience, support, and feedback are important in this phase. Follow-up on the progress at regular schedules also ensures that something will be done.

In my journal I noted that I am feeling more connected to the group and value that these kids are taking this committee so seriously. I wrote an article in the school newsletter for parents announcing this committee and recognizing the students who were part of it. All Climate Committee members were introduced at a recent assembly and the Principal makes a point of highlighting any changes the committee has made to the school.

“Just before school was out I had several girls approach me to join the committee and was eager to share some great ideas. I will talk to Toni to see if we cannot add a few keen students.” (*Excerpt from my journal*) We now have two additional members who would like to be active on the committee.

The November 28<sup>th</sup> assembly was one of the best assemblies for promoting school spirit. Each assembly is put on by a grade 8 homeroom. This particular teacher in the presenting homeroom is very aware of the efforts of the climate committee and she had the good workers recognized by having them come up, shoot a ball into the basketball hoop and if they scored they got a pencil, if they didn't score, they got a sticker.

Music played and the atmosphere was bustling with anticipation! The vice-principal had a group of grade seven students come to the front and show the school a new dance, but only on the condition that the teachers join during the second half of the song. Not many teachers looked thrilled to be 'performing' in front of the student population so Toni and I initiated the dance, afterwards, the rest of the staff joined in and like the Piped Piper, the students followed. It was a perfect example of teachers showing students they could have fun with them. That is so important and I think the more we do that, the more connected we will all feel. The comments I heard were: "That was so much fun", "We should do that again", and "Did you see Mr. Nelson dance?!" and so on.

"I am thinking more on the lines of how this committee is impacting my relationship with students. So far I am noticing the committee members are greeting me and I notice them more frequently. There is an unspeakable bond happening. More students are coming up to me and asking if they can help with painting murals and making the school look better. I am constantly 'thinking' about ways this committee can start making a bigger impact." (*Journal entry: December 2, 2003*)

We found an extra clock and put it by the school telephone. This was a request from several students when we surveyed them. I put a sticker on the clock: **Making a Difference: School Climate Committee Project.**

This was one of our first 'visible' changes.

I came across this quote while I was reading for my research on 'climate of schools'.

**“Built into action research is the proviso that, if as a teacher I am dissatisfied with what is already going on, I will have the confidence and resolution to attempt to change it. I will not be content with the status quo...”**

*Jean McNiff, Action Research, Principles and Practice, McNiff, 1988, 50*

This quote was very appropriate, as you read my journal entry:

“This week has been quite hectic at school. Wednesday is my full day of counseling at Oceanview and I decided to get the school looking like Christmas because it appeared teachers were just too busy to dabble in anything extra at this time. Students and staff were clearly not feeling the spirit of the season yet.” (*December, 2003*)

Last year we had purchased many lights for the Christmas concert so we had the essentials for making the Commons looking like Christmas. Several Climate Committee students worked all morning to make the area festive and they certainly achieved that. These students are committed students have a real sense of affiliation to the school. They enjoyed making the school look more celebratory. Teachers were delighted and the feeling of Christmas was prevalent.

At our December 12<sup>th</sup> meeting my counseling partner and I decided to focus our meeting on how to thank the adults in the building for their dedicated work. We were both feeling that teachers were feeling tired, overworked and in need of a rest. The teachers at Oceanview Middle School are dedicated and hardworking and in need of some positive strokes and accolades.

After feasting on donuts (food is an amazing reward), the students broke off into groups for brainstorming. The whole group came to a consensus that they would be acknowledging all staff at the next assembly with an 'Appreciation Certificate'.

We decided to mention individual contributions staff make such as those who spend their lunch time in the gym doing intramurals, having clubs, running sport teams, chaperoning for dances etc.

The students often refer back to the way things were at JP Dallos (where I used to be counselor and Leadership Coordinator); they had siblings that attended that school and used to hear about the activities. They wanted to have the traditional ‘candy gram’ messages again this year. Students can purchase a card with a candy cane for just 25 cents, write a message inside the card and their message will be delivered to the person they are sending it to.

This called for some fast work, since the following week was our last week of school before the holidays. I advised the students that I would support the idea only if they took on the responsibility for organizing this event. I feel that when the students want to do something really bad, the adults need to step back and let them go ahead and do it. This also gives them a sense of accomplishment and contribution to the school.

I began to thinking about the need for the kids to have tradition and rituals. The Candy Grams have gone back to the Dallos days and their siblings were part of it and they remembered and thought to bring it back. This is all connected to ‘traditions’ which are a part of the history of school and tie people to its cultural roots. People usually value tradition and it gives them a sense of security and it gives meaning and importance to that group of people. This is a perfect example of tradition. Tradition is also the Christmas concert, decorating the Commons and Christmas class parties, school musical and dances. Traditions need to be preserved as they provide a sense of connection and bonding.

In the weeks following, the Climate Committee members were in the limelight as they sold the Candy Gram Messages. The two girls responsible for the set-up came to me and organized everything. They prepared the schedule for the lunch time booth sittings and posters to remind students to buy their messages. It was great to see how seriously they took their jobs.

It was also a good opportunity for me to have some fun with the girls and connect with them in an informal manner. Another group of students took a couple of hours decorating the Certificates of Appreciation with fancy ribbons to make them look attractive in time for the assembly.

On December 19, 2003 we had our assembly and two members of the Climate Committee opened the assembly with the appreciation to teachers and support staff. My counselor partner had a great idea flavored with a sense of humor. We would give the certificates out and then present the principal with the numbers of a lottery ticket worth 10 million dollars. The girls would say the certificates are given in appreciation because all the teachers would be leaving in January as result of winning the lottery. This was well received and enjoyed by the students. The teachers were elated to think of the possibility!

It was a great assembly and the girls who ran the assembly let it be known that that this committee makes a difference at Oceanview Middle School. At the end of their part at the assembly the girls thanked their Climate Committee leaders for our leadership. The candy gram messages were delivered to all students at the end of the day.

During that particular assembly students who were high achievers by making honor roll and students with exceptional work habits were recognized. Researchers have indicated time and time again that there is a high correlation between school climate and academic success and that these communal events bind and shape unwritten cultural values. This year we had a very high percentage of honor roll, principal honor roll and work habits honor roll. Approximately 25% of students were recognized for academic excellence.

Manning & Saddelmire, 1996) conclude aspects of school climate, including, trust, mutual obligation, and concern for other's welfare can have powerful effects on educators' and learners' interpersonal relationships as well as learners' academic achievement and overall school progress." (p. 41).

Another change that occurred as a result of the Climate Committee was the installation of the door on one of the girls' bathroom stalls. We put up our "Making a Difference" sticker. Many girls commented that they were pleased about this change.

After the Christmas break, several Climate Committee students came up to me frequently to ask when the next meeting for the Climate Committee would be. A couple of the students popped into my office to say hello and a number of the students on the committee chatted up some ideas to me outside while I was on duty. I sensed a real connection to many of the climate committee students.

At our January 16 meeting, we discussed the new logo contest rules which our members were to relay to with their homerooms. Since our school is going to reconfigure to grade 8/9 our thoughts are of a new image, a new logo, something that defines this new configuration. The deadline for this project was to be the end of January.

In regard to the reconfiguration, the group was concerned about what the new rules would be for next year. They felt that that since the school was more like a junior high school; some changes should be reflective of this.

Topics they discussed were: school dance time changes from 6-9 to 7-11. Open campus was a huge request as the students felt that they should be able to hop on the city transit to get to go to 7-11 or Subway at lunch. Hats and the use of Discmans were also discussed as a priority. We decided that input from the principal was needed and we would invite her to one of our future meetings.

To address and review how the Climate Committee was feeling about their role on this committee, I had the students complete a survey which I designed.

The results were:

14/14 liked being on the climate committee

14/14 felt that they were contributing to positive changes

14/14 felt this committee was important

14/14 has noticed some positive changes in our school since this committee has been formed  
10/14 felt they thought students are also noticing some positive changes  
7/14 has other students seek them out for ideas for change.  
14/14 likes to come to the meetings during school time

Some changes the committee felt were are priority: fixing up the entrance of the school. Longer dances, more fun assemblies, future open campus and being able to wear hats and theft issues were identified.

January 25 I hung another new big clock in the Commons area which many students on the last survey had requested to be another important necessity. The Committee was excited about this and they reminded me to acknowledge the clock as part of a Climate Committee project with a sticker “Making a Difference: A project by the Climate Committee”.

In my journal notation I had written: “I am really feeling even more connected to the members of the Climate Committee. There is an open friendliness and recognition that wasn’t there before. I am amazed at how excited the members get when they see changes happening.” (*January 9, 2004*)

As part of an educational component to our January staff meeting I was asked by the principal to speak at the staff meeting on the progress of the Climate Committee and in addition present a mini refresher lesson on “Reacting to Student Behavior”. I presented the staff with a simple A,B,C formula.

Along with this I handed out material that provided them sample scenarios for certain situations and advocated for them to be particularly vigilant to the antecedents of student behavior before reacting. In closing I gave them a sheet entitled ‘100 ways to say very good’.

The response to this information session was very favorable and perhaps very timely as many teachers personally thanked me or emailed me about how useful they found the presentation and how good it was to get a gentle nudge about responding in alternate ways to student behavior.

### **Stage 5 - Monitoring/Evaluating the Outcomes**

The implementation of this committee has taken place, changes are occurring. Informal monitoring is useful for fine-tuning.

#### **Key findings:**

**In general, the majority of students and teachers perceive each other in favorable terms:**

- Nearly two thirds 76% of students surveyed felt that they liked their teachers
- Fifteen out fifteen teachers surveyed agreed that the staff is friendly and care about their students as individuals

**Teachers surveyed at Oceanview Middle School identify themselves as positive climate leaders by scoring 45+:**

- 15/15 teacher are positive climate leaders

**Most students felt a strong sense of school connectedness based on the number of friends they had and the relationships with other students who attend the school:**

- 90% of student surveyed said they liked their friends at Oceanview and it was a good place to cultivate friendships

**Most students surveyed at Oceanview like to do well academically:**

- 89% of students like to see academic success

**Most students surveyed at Oceanview like the rewards they receive:**

- 82% of students enjoy receiving “Kool Kards”, Limo for lunch

**Physical changes that were addressed as priority needs by the students to the Climate Committee and that have now changed:**

- A new clock is now located by the student telephone
- A new clock is now by in the Commons area.
- A new door has been installed in the upper girls’ washroom.
- The commons area is much neater and orderly
- New lighting has been ordered
- A new logo will be painted around the front entrance of the school

**Factors that significantly influenced this research:**

- Support of the principal, teachers and support staff and the fact that my counseling partner had the same beliefs and energy to organize the Climate Committee.

**Some of the many successful symbolic aspects our school has in place are:**

1. School wide recognition assemblies are monthly and are student organized.
2. Year end awards ceremonies are held.
3. We have a school logo, school colors.
4. Opportunities for field trips are scheduled.
5. Students receive recognition for homework, discipline, citizenship, work habits.
6. School policies in regard to student safety are enforced and well known
7. Teachers have homework web sites to communicate homework to students.
8. Teachers communicate with parents.

9. The school uses a student-led conference with parents twice a year.
10. The school offers opportunities for parents to meet with teachers.
11. The school offers a Student Council/School Climate Committee
12. The student council offer a variety of fun activities
13. The school has a Parent Advisory Group which is active.
14. The school has a family barbeque at the beginning of the year to get acquainted.
15. The school has promotional clothing, i.e. hoodies.
16. The school holds sporting events and informal teacher/student competitions/
17. The school celebrates student and staff birthdays.
18. Student work is displayed around the school.
19. The staff holds 'get togethers'.
20. Teachers run tutorial clubs at lunch time to help students' complete work.
21. The entire school participates in an annual school musical.
22. The school offers help through counseling services to students.
23. All students are educated about Bullying and Harassment.
24. Teachers are upgrading through professional development.
25. Students and staff have opportunities for rewards i.e. Limo rides, draws
26. Students' positive behavior is recognized with Kool Kard draws.
27. Students have opportunities to watch other students perform in band concerts.
28. Students have opportunities to watch professional guest performers.
29. Students can participate in an annual school wide reading contest.
30. Students can learn various skills through their elective programs.
31. Students have many opportunities to learn in a variety of ways
32. Students can participate in intramurals.
33. Students get 20 minutes of personal reading a day structured in their time table.
34. Students participate in out-of-town activities.
35. Students enter music festival competitions.

I am sure I may have missed a few other opportunities, but thirty five is truly a positive sign of a good school climate.

**Various Aspects of Oceanview Middle School that are in Need of Improvement:**

**Willingness for staff and students to participate in extra curricular activities is not high:**

- 12/15 teachers surveyed agreed that willingness to participate is not high
- 82% of students surveyed were happy with the extra curricular activities offered but don't necessarily always participate in them
- 66% of students surveyed liked the school spirit at Oceanview which includes the spirit theme days

**Most students and staff surveyed felt that respect of school property and vandalism was of great concern:**

- 39% of students respect school property
- 61% of students do not respect the school property
- 15/15 teachers survey agreed that vandalism is a problem in our school

**Bullying is frequent at Oceanview Middle School:**

- 57% of students felt that bullying was prevalent at Oceanview Middle School

**Physically, there needs to be a more inviting entrance and colorful murals.**

- 100% of the Climate Committee felt the physical attractiveness of the school needed improvement.

**Implications:**

My participation in this research has helped me look at how important it is for schools to examine their school climate. Student perceptions and experiences in school are all related to their self-esteem, self-perception and healthy behaviors. Students, who like school, feel cared about by their teachers and are in a clean, comfortable environment will be more connected to their school and they will be more successful. Students will become more mindful of litter and respecting school property as their sense of affiliation grows.

Students who represent other students by being on a Climate Committee and who have the impetus to change what is identified as something that needs to be changed or added, will help make the school progressive and stimulating.

Schools that become cognizant of the culture/climate aspects affecting the student population will have more positive educational and psychological outcomes.

To address negative behavioral norms, our school makes anti-bullying/drug education programs mandatory. Inappropriate school wide behavior and individual inappropriate behavior is addressed by the administration.

The school logo has been decided, it has the words Oceanview written so that waves of blue outline the word. Two students in grade seven were the winners of this contest. The principal of the school will order large sheets of plywood so that students can paint the logo to be affixed to the front entrance. The Climate Committee has asked teachers to take a large piece of plywood and create a mural with their class. The Committee would also like to encourage the Sliammon language class to paint mural depicting aspects of their culture which is so unique to our community.

My role as the school counselor does have an effect on improving the achievement and social climate of the school. I am connected to more students and I am approached more frequently by students and staff that see me as an avenue for getting change happening.

Collegial relationships facilitate change because change involves learning to do something new, and interaction is the primary basis for social learning. New meanings, new behaviors, new skills, and new beliefs depend significantly on whether teachers are working as isolated individuals (Goodlad, 1984; Sarason, 1982) or are exchanging ideas, support, and positive feelings about their work (Fullan, 1991). Deal and Kennedy (1982) reinforce the idea that those interested in change must be aware that peer group consensus will be the major influence on acceptance or willingness to change. People will change more readily as a result of a desire to have personal ties with others. By being on the Climate Committee I have found another *niche* in my career as a counselor which has enriched my career.

Climate does make a difference and we must continuously work on this task. It is a collaborative, problem-solving and group process that cannot be done by one person alone. It requires the attention of staff, students, parents and the school principal. The rewards of such an effort are immense and totally satisfying. If school climate is positive it can provide an enriching environment both for personal growth and academic success.

### **Next Steps:**

With the new reconfiguration of Oceanview Middle School to grade eight and nine from grades seven to eight, we will need to do some reframing as students will have different expectations. The new grade nine students will want to have some elements of freedom that is currently being experienced by the grade nine students at the other high school campus. With this in the horizon, a continued positive and supportive school climate will be needed in order for this transition to be smooth for all students and staff. The Climate Committee's input and representation from the school population will be critical to the many impending changes of the new school.

### **Key issues of the school culture in grade reconfiguration that will need to be considered next by the Representatives of the Climate Committee:**

- ❖ The social atmosphere of the school: do students like school? Is it fun?
- ❖ Student/teacher relationships: have expectations changed, new teachers?
- ❖ School governance practices (e.g. new school rules, perception of fairness to school rules) Do most students agree to the rules?
- ❖ The style of curriculum delivery which is favored by the school (e.g. teams of classes, divisions, specific distinctions between grade 9 and 8).
- ❖ What expectations do students have for age appropriate activities?
- ❖ With the advent of an older age group, will bullying tendencies decline?
- ❖ Will substance abuse issues rise with the age groups?
- ❖ Will the school climate be different than it was when we were grade 7 and 8
- ❖ Will advisory time built into the timetable foster a caring relationship between the staff member and the group of students?
- ❖ How will we address the issues of theft and vandalism?

Through this action research I have learned to be more introspective about the concept of school climate and how it relates to the ethos of the school. I have as Sagor (2000) would say become a "reflective practitioner" in my learning process.

As the leader of the Climate Committee I had an image about how this committee would affect the school culture. Peter Senge (1990) noted, “At any one point there will be a particular image of the future that is predominant, but that image will evolve.” I had an image of how my relationships with students might be further enhanced because of the opportunities for establishing an informal connection. I had an image that the milieu would be friendlier, happier and there would be more respect to the school property. I had an image that if teachers would be more empathetic, open to student opinion and frequently displayed caring behaviors, students would in turn begin to feel more connected to school and their teachers.

I knew that this committee was not a static phenomenon; I needed to be open and adapt my vision to any new challenges as we encountered them. In other words, I had to be flexible for the lows and highs of this committee. The success of this committee is in part successful because the vision was shared collaboratively by its members, my counseling partner, my administrator and by and large, the staff.

There is no single element that can create a positive school climate; it is a coherent vision of many elements and many dynamics that provides the framework for a positive school culture. When the school community works together to provide this framework by being collaborative, a team process and a vision is created. Through this action research, I became an active teacher in the process of learning. I developed an active voice as I represented this committee at staff meetings and I became as enthusiastic and excited as the students when we implemented changes and discussed future ideas. I felt the students were gaining trust in me and their candidness and sense of humor complimented my own personality making our meetings something I always looked forward to.

Positive school climate does make a difference! It is a never ending process because the players are constantly changing which in turn alters and continuously affects the climate....we must continue to be passionate, understand, assess and combine our collaborative-interactive learning to sustain the absolute best positive school membership for all.

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**APPENDIXES**

## APPENDIX A

**Quality of School Life at Oceanview Survey:** This survey is anonymous..no names please!!!

Answer Yes or No      Check one: \_\_\_\_girl    \_\_\_\_boy

1. I like school.      Yes      no
2. I like my teachers    yes      no
3. I like the kids      yes      no
4. I find most classes interesting    yes      no
5. The school rules are fair      yes      no
6. Students take care of the school property    yes      no
7. Students enjoy the extra curricular school activities    yes      no
8. This school is a good place to make friends    yes      no
9. There is good school spirit      yes      no
10. I like to do well in School    yes      no
11. I like the school facility (commons, gym, classrooms)    yes      no
12. This school has a lot of students who bully    yes      no
13. This school has a lot of students who use drugs    yes      no
14. I like the rewards (Kool card, limo for lunch)      yes      no
15. The canteen has good food.      Yes      no

The best thing about Oceanview is: \_\_\_\_\_

What needs to improve/change is: \_\_\_\_\_

Why I like or do not like school: \_\_\_\_\_

*Thank you from the climate committee of Oceanview Middle School.*

**APPENDIX B***(Staff questionnaire for school climate)***HOW DO YOU SEE YOURSELF AS A TEACHER/CLIMATE LEADER:****Please rate by using this scale from 1 to 4 at the end of each question.**

1= strongly disagree

2= disagree

3= agree

4= strongly agree

1. I treat students fairly (i.e. I don't play favorite/punish the entire class for the actions of a few. \_\_\_\_\_

2. I operate on the assumption that the student want to do the right thing.  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. I use positive reinforcement instead of punishment.  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. I have a friendly relationship with my students.  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. I know my students and their parents as individuals.  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. Students are aware of my classroom work and behavior expectations.  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. My established routines for such activities as collecting materials and papers functions smoothly. \_\_\_\_\_

8. I use preventative discipline—that is, I attempt to recognize and identify problems before they develop. \_\_\_\_\_

9. I regularly monitor my students' performance. \_\_\_\_\_

10. My classroom is friendly, but business like. \_\_\_\_\_

11. I insist on all students maintaining high standards in their work and their behavior, my standards are

realistic for the age group. \_\_\_\_\_

12. I vary instructional techniques so that students are not assigned the same tasks. \_\_\_\_\_

13. The work I assign is perceived as useful and meaningful by my students. \_\_\_\_\_

14. I am well prepared to teach my students. \_\_\_\_\_

15. I individualize assignments e.g. all students are not assigned the same tasks. \_\_\_\_\_

If your scores average 45+ you are probably a very positive climate leader. If your score is below 35 you may wish to further analyze how what you do affects the attitudes of your students.

Adapted from Eugene Howard, Classroom Control Index, School Discipline Desk Book, 1978.

## APPENDIX C

### **HOW DO YOU PERCEIVE THE OCEANVIEW CLIMATE?**

#### **Staff questionnaire:**

1. Our school has few discipline problems. \_\_\_\_\_
2. Vandalism is not a problem in our school. \_\_\_\_\_
3. Attendance appears good at this school. \_\_\_\_\_
4. Student and staff morale is high. \_\_\_\_\_
5. Student achievement is high. \_\_\_\_\_
6. Students feel a sense of ownership and pride in this school. \_\_\_\_\_
7. Staff and students in our school trust one another and work well together for the benefit of the school. \_\_\_\_\_
8. Our schools various social groups/activity leaders respect one another and work well together for the benefit of the school. \_\_\_\_\_
9. Our students and staff frequently participate in problem-solving and school improvement activities. \_\_\_\_\_
10. Students and staff willingly participate in extra-curricular activities. \_\_\_\_\_
11. The threat level in our school is low (i.e. people are not afraid of being treated disrespectfully, becoming failures or being physically harmed) \_\_\_\_\_
12. Staff members utilize a variety of instructional techniques so that students with varying learning styles can benefit. \_\_\_\_\_
13. The staff is friendly, and cares about their students as individuals. \_\_\_\_\_
14. The school has a clearly stated mission statement that is known by all participants. \_\_\_\_\_
15. The parents are supportive of what the school is doing and willingly provides assistance when required. \_\_\_\_\_

If your score is 45 or more you perceive that your school has a positive climate.

Adapted from Eugene Howard, Classroom Control Index, School Discipline Desk Book, 1978.