

## Creating School Cultures that Support Academic Achievement for English Language Learners

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## Understanding the Context

- How the political backlash against immigrants affects students and parents
- How the current recession will affect the dropout rate and college attendance
- What educators can do to serve as advocates for students and families that lack power and influence

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## I. School Culture Affects Learning

- Defined: Beliefs, attitudes, norms, expectations and assumptions that guide actions
  - Ethos - the character, customs, habits that distinguish a school/community
- Sarason's Axiom: If you attempt to implement reforms but fail to change the culture of a school, nothing will change
- What are some indicators of a school's culture that are at odds with efforts to promote academic excellence?

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### Signs of an Unhealthy School Culture:

- Staff take no responsibility for student achievement
  - Blame students and parents for low performance
- Teaching and learning are disconnected - teachers take no responsibility for student's learning and achievement
- School lacks a coherent strategy for delivering instruction
  - ESL and bilingual classes are used to track students and limit access to college prep courses
- Staff are unwilling to collaborate, and ELL teachers are marginalized

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### Other Signs

#### Discipline Practices Contribute to Student Failure

- School rules and procedures are at odds with educational goals
- Discipline is punitive and not rooted in values
  - Over-reliance on suspension and other forms of exclusion

#### Relations with parents are strained.

- Little or no involvement from Latino and immigrant parents
- School staff are unable to communicate effectively with parents about their role in supporting students

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### Normative patterns among students influence patterns of achievement

- Pervasive anti-intellectualism - students perceive a conflict between being popular vs. being smart
- High degree of alienation and disconnection between adults and students
- Prevalence of stereotypes related to race, class, gender and academic achievement- "stereotype threats" are unchallenged
- Disruption and defiance from students is common
  - Absence of moral authority among adults
  - Gangs are pervasive and influential

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### Diagnosing School/District Culture

- How would you characterize the culture/ethos of your school/district?
  - Relations between teachers and admin., students and teachers, teachers and teachers, parents and school
- How would you characterize the morale of your staff?
- What aspects of your school/district need to be changed in order to create a healthier culture?

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### II. Toward a Theory of Change: What We're Up Against

#### History of perceiving race and intelligence as linked

- Genetic theories of intelligence - Bell Curve, Jensen, Lawrence Summers, etc.
- Cultural Theories of intelligence - Ogbu and McWhorter
  - Based on myth of white success and racist stereotypes
  - Static view of culture - Latinos don't value learning
  - Limited understanding of schools - why do some schools produce high achievement for Latino students?

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### Challenges Facing Latino Students:

- High drop-out rates due to school failure and pressure to work
- Poverty and family pressures impact achievement
  - Latinos have the highest incidence of poverty in US
  - Many immigrant families are trans-national
- Lack of Latinos among school personnel, lack of cultural competence among staff
- External pressures: gangs, teen pregnancy

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### Latino males at particular risk

- Females are outperforming males throughout the country
- Latino males at greater risk:
  - More likely to be suspended or expelled
  - More likely to drop-out
  - More likely to be placed in special education
  - More likely to be missing from honors, gifted and advanced placement
  - More likely to be under-represented among school personnel (except as custodians, security guards and disciplinarians)

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### III. Characteristics of Successful Schools for Latino Students

- School develops the capacity to meet student needs
  - Literacy in content areas
- Latino Culture is affirmed and incorporated into the curriculum
  - Students are encouraged to become bilingual and bi-cultural
  - Code Switching is taught explicitly
- School develops early intervention systems to prevent student failure
- Staff develops cultural competence to work with students and parents
- Clear and explicit focus on preparing students for the future
- Partnerships with external agencies are developed to meet non-academic needs

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### Latino student success is contingent upon:

- Cultivation of attitudes and habits that promote academic achievement
  - Confidence and competence
  - Self discipline, self motivation
  - Organizational and study skills
- Strong relationships between students and school (extra curricular activities)
- Students learn to apply knowledge to address challenges in the social environment

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## Effective Practices

- Build strong connections between at-risk child and caring adults
  - Pro-active mentoring
  - In-school suspension
  - Regular follow up
- Focus on empowering youth by:
  - Providing empowerment and leadership opportunities
  - Building character and sense of social responsibility
- Include efforts to engage child's family in efforts to support
  - Joint counseling
  - Case work with social workers
  - Goal - Empower family to understand their rights and to take responsibility

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## Problem Solving Activity

You have been asked to serve on an intervention team that will help Chavez Elementary, a struggling school. Chavez has many discipline problems, low test scores, large numbers of special ed students (30%) and ESL students (70%). The school has been targeted for intervention because it has had very low test scores for many years. The school also has high staff turnover, (it has had four principals in three years), very little parental involvement and low staff morale.

- What are the first three steps you will encourage the team to take? Tier I strategies.
- How will you address the staff issues/concerns?
- How will you communicate with district leadership about the school? What will you ask for?

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## Group Discussion

- How are students engaged in the process of creating a healthy school culture? How could they be included?
- How are you engaging parents and community-based youth advocates in responding to the needs of students?

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### III. How Cultures Change

- Civil rights movement - ordinary heroes
- Women's movement - making it personal
- Anti-smoking campaigns - asserting the rights of non-smokers
- Key Ingredients:
  - Core group of activists/leaders
  - Strategic allies
  - Vision, goal of the change desired
  - Campaign to win hearts and minds

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### Developing Your Theory of Change

- Map out a theory of change
  - What is your vision?
  - What short, medium and long term steps need to be taken to realize your vision?
  - What resources, support and allies do you need to achieve your vision?

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### IV. Addressing school culture as part of a broader reform strategy

- Focus on students' peer culture - engage students through extra curricular activities
- Show students how academic knowledge can be applied in the real world on issues they care about
- Set high standards - Provide access to rigorous courses and support to succeed
  - Eliminate the track to "no-where"
- Encourage teachers to serve as advocates, counselors, and coaches who demystify success

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### Other Changes that Can Support Higher Levels of Achievement

- Develop early intervention systems - identify kids early who are truant and not working
- Develop partnerships with community based organizations - case management and social work, immigrant services, health and social services
- Increase access to counseling for students
  - Help students to set future goals early
- Hire individuals from diverse backgrounds in professional roles
  - Mentors, role models, moral authority, bridge builders

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### Cultivating Agency:

Influencing the choices that are made by students

- Educate students about their history and culture
- Provide opportunities for students to become involved in community service and leadership
  - Utilize community-centered problem-posing curriculum
- Channel the energy, don't crush it
  - Sports, music, art
- Listen: provide students with opportunities to have input on what is happening in their schools

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