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According to Search Institute's Profiles of Student Life: Attitude and Behaviors 2006 survey to almost 150,000 6th -12th graders in 202 communities across the United States **29% of students feel that their school has a caring school climate. 71% did not.**

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“When students feel connected to their school, their teachers and to their peers - academic performance improves. Improve school climate by building strong connections and your school's performance will improve.” **Mark Scharenbroich**

Top performing schools have a culture with:

- 1) Great leadership that balances love and boundaries.
- 2) A collaborative staff dedicated to continual improvement and “what if” thinking.
- 3) Students who feel a strong connection with their school community.
- 4) Celebrations of academic performance on a continual basis.

Building Connection to Improve School Climate.

If you moved to a new city and visited three high schools for 30 minutes each, how would you select a school for your own children to attend? What would you look for?

1. The “Hi” test: Say hello to students in the hallway. How do the students respond to you?
2. How many adults in the school walk by a visitor and how many of the them greet you or ask if you need assistance?
3. Does the entry have a “Wow” element? Are core values evident?
4. Are pictures of academic champions as prominent as athletic champions? Has the school conducted an academic pep rally in addition to athletic pep rallies?
5. Do any academic, athletic or artistic teams make it to state competitions throughout the year? Is there a great balance in performance and recognition to academics, athletics and the arts? Success in one area helps to foster success across the board.
6. Is the cafeteria a student centered gathering spot or does it remind you of the movie set from Shawshank Redemption? Is the food quality Good, Bad or Ugly?
7. Is the media center welcoming? Are there any sofas, decorative plants, artwork -does it have a comfortable atmosphere or is it institutional?

8. Does the school have a strong identity with the mascot and school colors? Are the school colors and mascot obvious, within two minutes of walking into the school or only if you walk into the gym?
9. Are more students wearing school related clothing, school colors, letter jackets, class rings than Hooter T-shirts.
10. Do you see anything innovative: A climbing wall; unique academic offerings; a biology room filled with animals; foreign language classroom full of artifacts; or an art gallery? Have educators from a different school district toured this school because of its great innovations?
11. Is the school student centered: Murals on the walls; Student artwork throughout the school; quotes on walls; photos of students on display?
12. Are the student bathrooms a place that adults would use?
13. Is the staff room welcoming, warm and professional or does it look like a Jiffy Lube waiting room. (no offense to Jiffy Lube...)
14. Are there symbols, celebrations and traditions that add to a rich culture. Is the very first day of school or the last day of school celebrated with special events?
15. Is community service a point of pride: largest can food drive, blood drive, fund raiser - in the area?
16. Can you find "Heroes in the Hallways" pictures of Einstein, Mother Theresa or Martin Luther King, Jr. Pictures of Alumni Hall of Fame members, current staff members or student leaders?
17. Can staff members articulate: the graduation rate, the number of AP or honors classes offered? Is the percent of students taking accelerated classes, especially students of color - increasing?
18. Do you witness administrators and staff members picking up paper and trash on the floors in the hallways?
19. Ask students, "What's this school really good at? What are we known for?" How will they answer? Will they only cite athletic achievements or will they cite a number of achievements across the board?
20. Do you see parent volunteers in the school?
21. Does the student government membership reflect the diverse population in the school?
22. Has the band or choir taken a trip out of state to perform? Do any language classes travel to a different country during the summer? Do any academic, vocational or service clubs compete on a regional or state level?
23. Are the dots connected? If you placed a number of random dots on a sheet of paper, then labeled all of the dots with each dot representing a segment of the school community - would you see lines connecting the different dots? Are a wide range of people positively interacting?