School Climate and Student Learning:
Thinking Outside the Box

Tuesday, May 7
3:30 – 4:30 pm
School Climate and Student Learning: Thinking Outside the Box

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Today’s Agenda

• The link between youth well-being and learning

• Reconceptualizing “school environment”
  • Relationship to youth well-being outcomes

• Example: outdoor play, green space exposure, and improved mental health

• Concluding thoughts
Youth Well-Being and Learning

Youth well-being and learning (in particular, being motivated and ready to learn) are inextricably linked.

Basch, 2011;
Lewallen, et al 2015;
Rajan, Roberts, Guerra, Pirsch, & Morrell, 2017
A few examples

- “Educationally relevant health disparities”:
  - Access to wholesome breakfast and lunch;
  - Comprehensive vision, hearing, and oral health screenings;
  - Access to and daily opportunities for physical activity;
  - Classroom and/or school-wide efforts that promote a safe, supportive, and thriving climate.

Basch, 2011
Can a school’s environment help address these disparities by shaping a student’s ability to learn effectively and also improving their quality of health?
How do K-12 schools in NYC currently operationalize “environment”?

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<th>Sustainability Goals</th>
<th>Facilities/Structural Issues</th>
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School Environment

• While the physical environment of a school and its classrooms are so important, there are other elements of school climate (which acknowledge the social and emotional aspects of learning and child development) that must also be integrated into conversations and efforts on a school’s physical environment.

• Indeed, a significant and growing body of research has confirmed the relationship between a positive school climate and improved mental and emotional well-being among youth, reduced rates of engagement in various risk behaviors, and improved academic outcomes.

Galanti, et al., 2016
Townsend, et al., 2017
Rajan, Namdar, & Ruggles, 2015
Positive School Climate Indicators

• Positive student-teacher relationships;

• Students who feel safe at school, not only in their classrooms but also in non-classroom areas (cafeteria, hallways, playgrounds, and on their way to and from school);

• Teachers who are supported via the provision of adequate materials and resources, in-classroom teaching assistance, and regular professional development, in addition to a safe physical classroom environment;

• Access to green spaces on and off-campus
What do we mean by “school climate”?

“[School climate refers to the] norms, values, and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally, and physically safe.” (National School Climate Council, 2007)

This can be – and often is – reflected in a school’s physical space as well.
How do these efforts improve the well-being of our students?

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References: NYC Department of Education Sustainability Report, 2014
Green Space, Outdoor Play, and Mental Health

• Research confirms there is a significant association between proximity to green spaces and improved mental well-being of children.

• Outdoor play and green environments can impact mental health and improve school climate.

References: McCormick, 2017; Piccininni, et al 2018
Imagine a learning environment that is...

- **Playful**
  - Filled with opportunities for play, experimenting with ideas, materials, norms, relationships, practices

- **Positive**
  - Shared vision of respect and engagement; Emphasis is placed on collective sense of safety and care.

- **Sustainable**
  - Increases access to green spaces on and off-campus (school gardens; participation in school programming efforts that take place in a neighboring park; outdoor education opportunities; views of greenery from a classroom window)

- **Health Promoting**
  - Promotes outdoor play; advocates for more recess time; takes advantage of green spaces to facilitate new teaching opportunities

Vasudevan, 2018; Piccininni, et al 2018
Questions/Thoughts?

- Sonali Rajan (sr2345@tc.columbia.edu)
People have different opinions about the impact of sustainability efforts on schools. We are interested in your perspective.

To what extent do you think that sustainability efforts affect each of the following?

Source: DOE-TC Research Partnership, Fall 2017 Sustainability Plan
To what extent do you think that sustainability efforts affect each of the following?

- School environmental impact: 97% get better, 3% get worse
- Student civic engagement: 95% get better, 4% get worse
- Students' health and wellness: 89% get better, 10% get worse
- Teachers' health and wellness: 84% get better, 15% get worse
- Career readiness: 76% get better, 24% get worse
- Quality of teaching and learning: 70% get better, 29% get worse, 1% get worse
- Bullying and harassment: 52% get better, 47% get worse, 1% get worse
- Standardized tests scores: 47% get better, 53% get worse
To what extent do you think that sustainability efforts affect each of the following?

- The perceived impact of school sustainability effort is not associated with the Coordinator’s position (e.g., teachers, Assistant Principals, and others), years as Sustainability Coordinator, and years at school.
Paul Clarke
CPE 2
To thrive we must survive.
Shakira Provasoli
PS 333
Questions?
THANK YOU

Please visit
www.tc.columbia.edu/sustainability