

Title: Cloudy? Rainy? Sunny? or Foggy? How is the Weather in Your School?

Abstract: This paper will discuss the importance of school climate and how focusing and bettering your school climate can help better your school. Practical steps will be provided for different stakeholders in the Islamic School system in order to identify and implement a better school climate.

Proposal: Research has stated that outside of teaching and instruction the second most important factor of success within school is the climate and culture of a school. Islamic Schools throughout the United States have been the product of a variety of backgrounds and cultures. As a result, schools have drastically differing cultures and climates. Unfortunately, many schools misunderstand and incorrectly associate being extremely focused with overbearing climates. Students and staff alike suffer from this misconstrued perspective.

Many times schools try to weather the storm by being passive and remaining patient. However, research shows that taking the necessary plans by being proactive and not waiting for such weather to become further exasperated can reduce major damage to the overall school. Along with examining research and the perspectives of various scholars, this presentation will also focus on providing individual opportunities and advice on building a stronger school culture and climate with:

1. Principals
2. Parents
3. Students
4. Community/District Outreach
5. Board Members

Principals

The first and foremost area to improve in order to have a positive school climate is you, the principal. There needs to be a time for you to reflect on your leadership style and how that affects the school. Let us reflect on what type of leadership style we have:

1. Coercive Style: "Do what I tell you"
 - a. The Coercive Style demands immediate compliance
 - b. This style works best in a crisis to kick-start a turnaround and/or with problem employees
 - c. Style is least conducive to positive Climate
2. Authoritative "Come with me"
 - a. The Authoritative mobilizes people toward a vision
 - b. The style works best when changes require a new vision or when a clear direction is needed
 - c. Style is most conducive to positive Climate
3. Affiliative "People come first"
 - a. The Affiliative creates harmony and builds bonds
 - b. This style works best to heal rifts in a team or to motivate people during a stressful circumstance
 - c. Style is conducive to Climate
4. Democratic "What do you think?"
 - a. Democratic forges consensus through participation
 - b. This style works best to build buy-in or consensus or to get input from valuable employees
 - c. Style is conducive to Climate
5. Pacesetting "Do as I tell you"
 - a. Pacesetting sets high standards for performance
 - b. This style works best to get quick results from a highly motivated and competent team

- c. Style is not conducive to positive Climate
6. Coaching “Try this”
 - a. Coaching develops people for the future
 - b. This style works best to help an employee improve performance or develop long term strengths
 - c. Style is conducive to Climate

Source: Leadership that Gets Result by Daniel Goldman: Harvard Business Review

Even more important than what was previously discussed is, as a leader, Emotional Intelligence Primer:

Emotional Intelligence is the ability to manage ourselves and our relationship effectively consisting of four fundamental capabilities self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and social skills

1. Self Awareness:

- a. Emotional Self Awareness
- b. Accurate Self-Assessment
- c. Self-Confidence

2. Self Management:

- a. Self-Control
- b. Trustworthiness
- c. Conscientiousness
- d. Adaptability
- e. Achievement orientation
- f. Imitative

3. Social Awareness:

- a. Empathy

- b. Organization awareness
 - c. Service Orientation
4. Social Skills
- a. Visionary leadership
 - b. Influence
 - c. Developing others
 - d. Communicating
 - e. Change catalyst
 - f. Conflict management
 - g. Building bonds
 - h. Teamwork and collaboration

In the book *Organizing Schools for Improvement: Five Essential Supports for Reform* (2010), the teacher remains in school with stronger:

- 1. Leadership
 - a. Leadership opportunities for teachers
 - b. Principal Advisory Committee
 - c. Open line of communicating
 - d. Trust factor
- 2. Parent-Community Ties
 - a. PTA
 - b. Businesses for funds and resources
 - c. Programs for parents
- 3. Professional Capacity
 - a. Opportunities for improving their skills and moving up
- 4. Student-Centered Learning Climate
- 5. Instructional Guidance
 - a. Constructive feedback
 - b. Support and resources for teachers
- 6. You have many teachers say things like this
 - a. Positive feedback

- b. Promoting teacher leadership
- c. Accommodating and encouraging different philosophy
- d. Voice to be heard, open line of communication, positive feedback and constructive criticism, promoting teacher leadership and initiatives, accommodating and encouraging different philosophy/on same page with student issue

Teachers

Teachers continue to be the heart and foundation of the school. In order to promote positive School Climate, teacher input, ideas, and participation is integral. In his book Instructional Rounds, Richard Elmore has expressed that the underlying success of the school relies heavily on teacher instruction. When evaluating our progress we have to ask ourselves:

1. Do your teachers have a voice in curriculum development?
2. Do teachers have the opportunity for professional and educational growth?
3. Do teachers have representation in the administration and Board?
4. Are teachers given constructive feedback regarding their instruction?
5. Does your school have a process for teacher concerns and grievances to be voiced?
6. Do your teachers have the opportunity to “climb the professional ladder” in house?
7. Does the school give teachers the opportunity and freedom to think “outside the box” and maintain classroom autonomy?
8. Does the School recognize teachers for personal achievements?
9. Does the School have team-building exercises for the staff?
10. Does the School have end the year Teacher Emmy's? (voted by the teachers)

Parents

Parents are a key factor of how the climate can be in your school. The overall conclusion reached from A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family and Community Connection on Student Achievement is that there is a direct relationship between positive family involvement and improved student-academic achievement. This relationship holds true across families of all economic, racial/ethnic, and educational backgrounds, as well as for students at all ages, including:

1. Higher grades and test scores

2. Increased enrollment in higher level programs
3. Earn more high school credit
4. Promote higher, more challenging goals
5. Better adaptation to school and attend more regularly
6. Better social skills and behavior
7. Higher graduation and matriculation rate

The following are some things to keep in mind when building a stronger, positive culture with parents:

1. Have teacher representative in the PTA/PTO
2. Have administration regularly (preferably twice a month) with PTA/PTO representative
3. Have parent be involved in activities or afterschool programs
4. Have parents help in some of the decision-making processes (school name, lunch menu, etc.)
5. Have a clear method to receive suggestions and ideas for the school
6. Keep several methods of communication (email, phone message, newsletter, website, etc.) open
7. Emphasize student safety through clear, detailed, procedures for all emergency situations
8. Have challenging curriculum and motivated teachers
9. Have an end of the year evaluation

Another aspect of how the school is perceived by parents is in the book *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family, School Partnership* by Anne Henderson and Karen Mapp (2007), where they had divided school into four kinds:

1. Fortress Schools
2. Come-if-we call Schools
3. Open-Door Schools

4. Partnership Schools

Students

If you asked many students what are a few important aspects for a positive school here are a few things they had said

- a. Safety kids need to feel safe and not feel they are bullied and seen/treated as an outcast.
- b. Second are the academics. More important than curriculum is that the teachers you have are self-motivated and caring about students and willing to go the extra mile to help a child.
- c. Afterschool activities. For many students the most important thing about school is not the amazing classes but the social aspect of hanging with friends and getting to express their individuality.
Does your school have various programs that relate to the intellectual, physical, social, and emotional aspects of students.
- d. Facilities: What students see is important of how they feel. Are the classrooms equipped with items that enhance learning? Does the school have a lunch room, playground, gymnasium, computer lab, and science lab? Are the hallways and classrooms clean? Are there evaluations of your facilities? Is there an avenue for feedback for your facilities?

Community/District Outreach

What do Islamic School have to inculcate in the students is the importance of looking at not themselves but also the community they live in. Does your school:

1. Promote community service outside the school walls?
2. Do the students have a chance to be involved in community civic engagements?
3. Do students write articles to local newspapers and politicians?
4. Does the school have partnership with local schools to work on community projects and discuss shared values?
5. Does the school give students the opportunity to compete in academic and athletic competition outside the Muslim community?

6. Does the school give the opportunity to local businesses to market themselves and partner to have a win/win situation?
7. Does the school invite local officials and civil leaders to present, inform, and volunteer at the school?
8. Does the school work with the school district to be a resource for grant/academic/policy/school related situations?
9. Is your school a resource/reference to other local schools for religious/cultural concerns?

Board Members

The area where much cloudy and stormy weather lies is the relationship between the Board and administration or Board and parents

1. Does the Board have a detail chain of command flow chart for all the teachers and parents?
2. Do teachers have a method to voice their concern?
3. Do parents have a method to voice their concern?
4. Does the Principal have a vote in the Board?
5. Is there a parent representative on the Board?
6. Are there specific by-laws or policies on what the board roles are with the school?
7. Is there a method for grievance?
8. Are their terms for the Board Members?
9. Are teachers able to vote for a teacher representative to be a member on the Board?

Habeeb Quadri is the Principal of the MCC Full Time School in Morton Grove, IL. He has a Bachelor in Teaching of History and a Masters in School Administration. He currently is a part-time staff member and facilitator at Harvard University Graduate School of Education – Principals' Center, where he is also continuing his post-graduate education and currently has accumulated more than 250 clock hours of instruction and

part-time staff in the summers. In addition to his teaching and administrative experience in public and private schools, Habeeb has delivered dozens of lectures throughout the United States, Canada and abroad on Islam, society, and social problems confronting Muslim youth and the community at large for the last fifteen years.

Additionally, Habeeb maintains an active interest in education consulting. He has started his own educational consulting company called High Quality Educational Consulting. Mr. Quadri has conducted workshops for weekend and full-time Islamic schools, public schools and universities around the world, delivering insightful presentations on such topics as classroom management, motivational techniques for students and faculty, curriculum development, Muslim sensitivity training and overall educational administration. Habeeb also is a member of the DePaul University, College of Education Dean Advisory Board for the last three years and is a National Advisor for MYNA (Muslim Youth of North America).

He has currently co-authored a few books entitled the War within Our Hearts: Struggles of the Muslim Youth, Thank God it is Jumuah, Parenting, Who Said it Was Easy and was the religious and cultural consultant for the children book Under the Ramadan Moon by Sylvia Whitman. Habeeb also has two other books projects in the works regarding Advice of Luqman to his Son (Wisdom of the Wise: Advice of Luqman) and marriage for young couples.