



Micro Workshop 1 *School Climate*

This micro-workshop is designed to help a school staff think about school climate as it relates to the physical structure of the school building. The Luann cartoon can be used to stimulate thinking and promote discussion at the beginning of the workshop. This cartoon focuses on feelings of alienation that can occur in large high schools. Use a force field Analysis to evaluate and prioritize the group's suggestions.

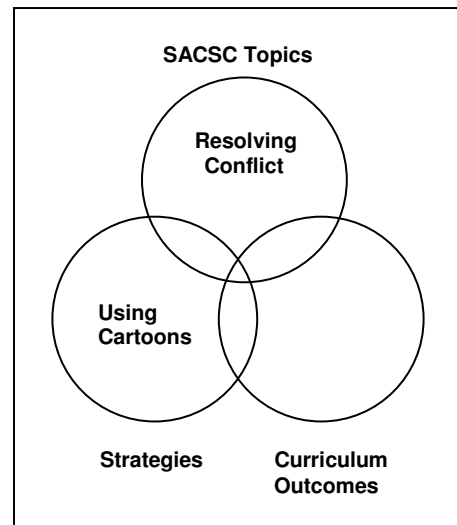
Research indicates that learning is less likely to occur when students feel threatened, alienated and intimidated. Teachers only see 4 to 10 percent of the bullying, harassment and intimidation behaviours that occur in schools because most of these behaviours occur in secluded areas of the school. When school staff are not aware of incidents of violence or are unable to deal with them, these behaviours escalate. Students who are victims do not achieve their academic potential nor do they find their high school experience socially rewarding.

The most effective ways to reduce violence and misbehaviour is to create a school climate that fosters respect and responsibility through adult role modeling, integrating violence-prevention principles into curriculum and using teaching strategies that promote pro-social skill development. However, there are some measures that can be taken to reduce incidents that ultimately do occur in most high schools despite our best efforts.

Obviously teachers or students cannot change the physical structure of the school building, but there are ways to reduce the potential for violence, alienation and related problems. These include

- > finding alternative ways for staff to supervise,
- > creating more “safe” areas and comfortable spaces,
- > promoting safe and caring school and district discipline policies
- > encouraging students to monitor each other's behaviour, and
- > inviting local police or RCMP to discuss methods to make the school safer.

Sometimes schools adopt extreme measures such as security cameras and passes, random searches, video surveillance and sniffer dogs. Few schools require these measures. Sometimes it is tempting to adopt these measures when incidents of violence are increasing and where traditional methods of maintaining order appear to be failing. It is best not to adopt such measures as a knee-jerk reaction to violence. Always consider the question—will these measures create a learning environment that promotes a feeling of safety and improve interactions and relationships within the school? It is important to discuss the implications and effects of these



types of measures prior to purchasing expensive technology and outside expertise. Take time to thoroughly discuss costs, human resources and the overall effect of technological solutions.

Examine the School Environment

It is important to solicit input from all of the groups who work in the school, so that concerns and problems relating to the school building can be addressed. This session works most effectively if it includes students or student representatives from all levels, groups and streams. Be mindful of the importance of having a genuine representation of all students, especially if everyone cannot be involved.

Use a four-step process to do this.

Step 1: Stimulate discussion and interest

Use the Luann cartoon to initiate interest and discuss the issue of school size and its effect on students.

Step 2: Identify the issues

Be specific. Identify safety and security issues within the school.

Step 3: Evaluate alternatives

Work together to make changes based on specific staff and student concerns.

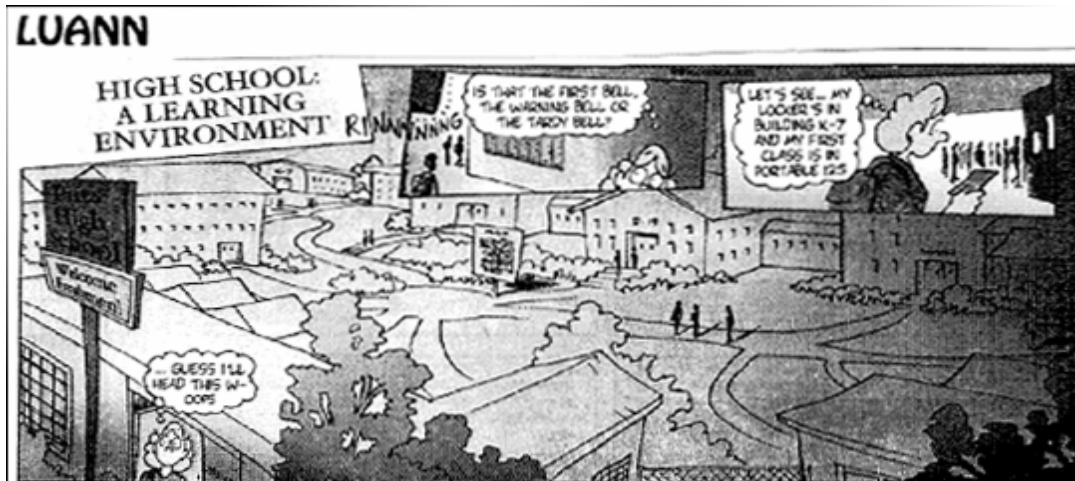
Step 4: Prioritize and implement changes

Make changes that are most likely to improve learning conditions.

By involving all of the groups in your school in this activity, it is possible to identify important issues related to violence and violence prevention, empower students and staff to make changes and assist teachers in creating a better learning environment. Use the following descriptions to begin the process of examining of your school building.

Step 1: Stimulate discussion and interest

Study this cartoon and answer or discuss the following questions.



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1. What is the main point of this cartoon?
2. Did you experience similar thoughts when you first came to your high school as a student? What were your concerns or feelings about the school?
3. From a student's perspective list the advantages of a large school. Be specific.
4. From a student's perspective list the disadvantages of a large school. Be specific.

Step 2: Identify the issues

In small, homogeneous groups comprising just teachers, students or administrators, attempt to identify specific issues related to bullying and harassment in your school. These questions could also be distributed to all students and staff in the form of a survey. Determine the feasibility of either of these methods to elicit student and staff responses. Remember the main point of this activity is to determine the extent of problems and where they occur in the school.

1. Do you feel safe in the school? If so, why? If not, explain.

2. a) Do you think that harassment, teasing, bullying and intimidation occur in the school?

b) To what extent do you think students in your school experience these? Use the continuum below to answer this question.

a little _____ a lot

3. What places in the school are problems most likely to occur? (Include a map a map of the school and ask students to circle areas where bullying, harassment or intimidation usually occur.) Why?

4. What areas of the school are these problems least likely to occur? Why?

5. If you were in charge of reducing bullying, intimidation and violence in the school, what changes would you make?

Step 3: Evaluate Alternatives

1. Use a **Force Field Analysis** to determine the feasibility of making changes. Make suggestions in the far left column and discuss the factors that help and hinder implementation of each suggestion. A large sheet of chart paper with ideas supplied by a small group works best for this activity.

Suggestions	Factors that help	Factors that hinder

Step 4: Prioritize and implement changes

Prioritize your choices from most to least feasible after completing the Force Field Analysis. Work on the most feasible and important changes first. Determine a way to measure changes that have a positive effect.

Reflections

What new insights did our staff have regarding perceptions of violence related to the school building?

* Continue to think about ways you can implement strategies to decrease the presence of threats and violence in your teaching.

Support Resources

- › Supporting a Safe and Caring School: Common Attributes
- › Volunteer Mentorship Programs: K to 12
- › Class Meetings for Safe and Caring Schools
- › Principal's Best
- › Expecting Respect - Peer Education Project: A school-based learning model
- › Variety of booklets on bullying for students, teachers and parents

Order these resources by contacting Alberta Learning's resources Centre (LRC) for a list of all resources and an order form (<http://lrc.learning.gov.ab.ca>) or contact the LRC by e-mail (www.lrc.edc.gov.ab.ca) or telephone (427 5775 in Edmonton, or 310-0000 and ask for the LRC elsewhere in Alberta) or fax (780) 422-9750.