

# Study finds links between school climate, teacher turnover, and student achievement in NYC

25 March 2016, by Rachel Harrison

Teacher turnover decreased and academic achievement increased in New York City middle schools that improved their learning environment, finds a new report from the Research Alliance for New York City Schools at NYU.

"In recent years, researchers and policymakers have focused much of their attention on measuring and improving teacher effectiveness. However, teachers do not work in a vacuum; their school's climate can either enhance or undermine their ability to succeed with students," said Matthew A. Kraft, assistant professor of education and economics at Brown University and the report's lead author.

Each year, New York City parents, teachers, and students in grades 6 through 12 take the Department of Education's School Survey. The survey aims to help school and district leaders understand how members of the school community perceive each school's learning environment.

In this study, the researchers looked at teacher responses to the School Survey, as well as student test scores, human resources data, and school administrative records for 278 public [middle schools](#) between 2008 and 2012. The researchers identified four distinct and potentially malleable dimensions of middle schools' organizational environments: leadership and professional development, high academic expectations for students, teacher relationships and collaboration, and school safety and order. They then examined how changes in these four dimensions over time were related to changes in [teacher turnover](#) and [student achievement](#).

"Using annual school survey data allowed us to explore, for the first time, how changes in the quality of individual school climates were linked to

corresponding changes in teacher turnover and student achievement over several years," said Kraft.

The researchers found robust relationships between increases in all four dimensions of school climate and decreases in teacher turnover, suggesting that improving the environment in which teachers work could play an important role in reducing turnover. The average turnover rate in New York City middle schools is 15 percent.

They also found evidence that improving school climate may help promote gains in students' [academic achievement](#). Improvements in two dimensions – school safety and academic expectations – predicted faster growth in students' math test scores.

"We need to learn much more about how to help schools improve along these dimensions," said James Kemple, executive director of the Research Alliance for New York City Schools. "Changing the overall practices and culture of a school is complicated. But these findings offer persuasive evidence that raising student achievement and turning around schools will demand organizational solutions, in addition to the development of individual teachers."

The aspects of school climate highlighted in this study are featured prominently in New York City's current approach to school improvement. During the 2014-2015 [school](#) year, the Research Alliance helped the Department of Education develop its "Framework for Great Schools," which tapped existing research to outline specific organizational capacities that seem to be important for improving student outcomes. The Research Alliance also helped the Department of Education revamp its School Survey to capture better, more consistent

information about these core capacities.

**More information:** Schools As Organizations:  
Examining School Climate, Teacher Turnover, and  
Student Achievement in NYC.

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Provided by New York University

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