Creating a Positive School Climate through Empowered Communities: A Framework for Bullying Prevention

A school cannot be successful if a school is not safe.

A safe school is physically and emotionally safe for all students.

The US Department of Education and the California Department of Education create policies, establish mandates, and distribute resources to ensure that every child attends a successful school where students can leave each grade prepared for their future. Experts agree that a positive school climate is integral to a school's success, as students who feel physically and emotionally safe at school better reach academic milestones.

Current policies focus on the physical safety of students, but few policies provide guidance on creating the necessary environment for emotional safety. In recent months the emotional safety of students has been brought to the forefront of a national debate by highly-publicized instances of pervasive and extreme student bullying.

The School Climate Consortium believes that by fostering a positive school climate schools can ensure the physical and emotional safety of their students and effectively stop the pervasive bullying in today's schools. The Consortium has developed the **Empowered Communities Model** to help communities create safe, bully-free schools.

The **Empowered Communities Model** is founded on the principle that a positive school climate is the foundation for safer, healthier, successful schools. This model brings together three stakeholder groups – the school staff, the student body, and community organizations – to implement best practices with proven results.
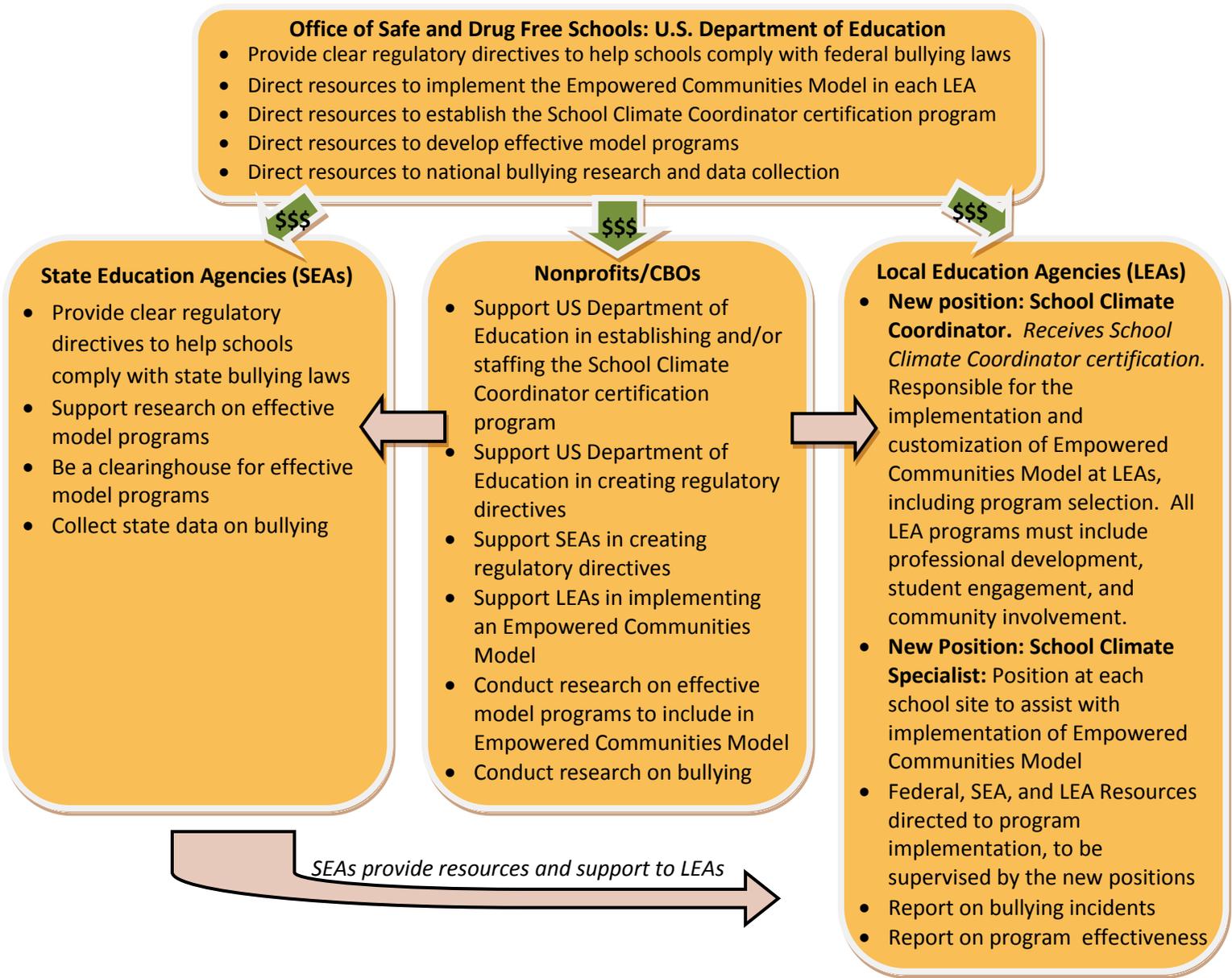
- **The school staff:** Teachers, administrators, school boards, classified and certified union employees, and other school personnel are empowered to build positive relationships with students, trained to recognize and respond to bullying, and equipped with skills to intervene effectively.

- **The student body**: Students in all grade levels are empowered to work with peers and school staff to foster a positive school climate, respond 'on the spot' with effective action, and report bullying incidents to appropriate adults.

- **Community organizations**: Families, youth serving organizations, community members, local governments, NGOs, CBOs, faith based organizations, businesses, and law enforcement agencies are empowered to recognize and respond to bullying, engage with schools to continue programs outside the classroom, and inform effective policies for individual communities. The community supports these initiatives philosophically and financially to create a true partnership with the school.

When instituted at a school, the Empowered Communities Model serves as a framework on which other programs are built. In an Empowered Communities school, a range of bullying prevention models will be effective and the school is encouraged to customize a program that is best for its unique Communities.

The State and Federal government can nurture the creation of these Empowered Communities with support programs and incentives to promote the Empowered Communities Model.

School Climate Consortium: Policy for the Empowered Communities Model

We propose federal policy that would provide regulatory directives and distribute resources to foster the Empowered Communities Model. The diagram below demonstrates how funding and support would flow and the responsibilities of each agency.

Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools: U.S. Department of Education
- Provide clear regulatory directives to help schools comply with federal bullying laws
- Direct resources to implement the Empowered Communities Model in each LEA
- Direct resources to establish the School Climate Coordinator certification program
- Direct resources to develop effective model programs
- Direct resources to national bullying research and data collection

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State Education Agencies (SEAs)
- Provide clear regulatory directives to help schools comply with state bullying laws
- Support research on effective model programs
- Be a clearinghouse for effective model programs
- Collect state data on bullying

Nonprofits/CBOs
- Support US Department of Education in establishing and/or staffing the School Climate Coordinator certification program
- Support US Department of Education in creating regulatory directives
- Support SEAs in creating regulatory directives
- Support LEAs in implementing an Empowered Communities Model
- Conduct research on effective model programs to include in Empowered Communities Model
- Conduct research on bullying

Local Education Agencies (LEAs)
- **New position: School Climate Coordinator.** *Receives School Climate Coordinator certification.* Responsible for the implementation and customization of Empowered Communities Model at LEAs, including program selection. All LEA programs must include professional development, student engagement, and community involvement.
- **New Position: School Climate Specialist:** Position at each school site to assist with implementation of Empowered Communities Model
- Federal, SEA, and LEA Resources directed to program implementation, to be supervised by the new positions
- Report on bullying incidents
- Report on program effectiveness

SEAs provide resources and support to LEAs

The SCC model policy combines the Department's state-driven regulatory platform with a personnel system modeled on successful federal programs.

- Federal support through grants or formula funds to establish a School Climate Coordinator certification program, similar to the School Resource Officer program. LEAs would receive resources to send a new or existing staff person to a certification program to become the School Climate Coordinator, who would be responsible for implementing the Empowered Communities Model in each LEA. This would begin as an incentive program and, once piloted and refined, transition to a LEA requirement.

- SEA collection of model programs provides for a centralized clearinghouse to support LEAs in developing and implementing an effective program.

- Outside support through CBOs allows districts to pull in experts and leverages private resources.

- Mandated research creates a feedback loop within the system whereby programs can improve.