# Dr. Janet Rosenzweig's
# Checklist for
# *Assessing the Sexual Climate in a School*

**1. Is the school's physical environment welcoming and conducive to learning**?

If using the restroom or moving between classes feels leaves a child breathless with anxiety, the school climate is out of balance. Graffiti of any kind, and certainly sexually suggestive graffiti must be removed immediately.

**2. What are the school's policies and track record around bullying and sexual harassment?**

Formal policies mean little unless administered and implemented by the committed people with both skills and emotional intelligence. If you attend a school event and hear an administrator making jokes at the expense of staff or otherwise insulting they,  take that as a warning signal that this environment tolerates bullying. If the staff work in an environment that disrespects or humiliates them, it is much more likely that they will respond

The school district should be offering in-service training for all faculty and staff periodically to ensure that they are aware of the policy and their responsibility to carry it out. Some schools also offer workshops for students; if taught by a sensitive teacher who understands how very important this is, it can be a great learning experience. If, however, the school assigns teaching the workshop to the wise-cracking guy who smirks as he says " I wish someone would sexually harass me a little bit" we know that the climate in this school only allows for lip service to the policy.

**3. What is the school's policy and track record regarding teacher-student contact**?

- Are student allowed to address faculty and staff by first names?
- Are there clear rules for both actual and virtual out of school contact between student and faculty/staff?

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[1] *Information on school climate adapted from: Tableman, Betty; Herron, Adrienne. 2004. School Climate and Learning. Best Practice Briefs Number 31, University-Community Partnerships @ Michigan State University*

A healthy sexual climate encourages interaction between students and faculty with age-appropriate boundaries. Use of first names between teachers and students requires careful consideration. In most schools it implies an artificial familiarity inconsistent with the roles.

Clear formal rules on out of school interaction between staff and students should exist and be enforced. This includes both actual interaction and virtual interaction like E-mail, texting, and connecting on social networking sites. This is particularly important since sexual climate can erode gradually and the impersonal nature of virtual communication makes it easier to slip across boundaries.

## 4)  Are administrators consistently visible on campus?

While administrators are responsible for everything from budgets to bathrooms, they MUST get out of their office, walk the halls and make periodic, friendly, and  unannounced visits to classrooms.

## 5) What is the policy on dress code and how is it enforced?

Butt cleavage, breast cleavage, midriffs and suggestive slogans on clothing are not conducive to learning.  It is perfectly natural for kids to push boundaries and show up to school wearing something that bends -- if not actually breaks -- the rules. School staff should react firmly and without embarrassing or humiliating the student.

## 6) How are sexuality related issues handled in the classroom?

To be sexually safe and healthy, we expect that academically appropriate language about sexual issues will be used in context in art, literature, health, biology, social studies or other classes.

Sexual issues permeate the arts and it is disingenuous to pretend they don't. Sexual violence is a theme in many historical events and sexual discrimination permeates history. Can the teachers discuss this in context? Is open discussion encouraged?

*In my concept of an ideal world, students would come to school with a clear understanding of their family's particular set of values and beliefs around sexuality. School classes would provide the opportunity to add solid information on anatomy, physiology, psychosexual development and other related areas. Parents would read what their children are reading and have family discussions about the content. Facts and opinions would be clearly labeled as such and differences in opinions could be debated with mutual respect.*

What would it take to make that happen in your family and community?