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TAKING THE HUMAN RIGHTS TEMPERATURE OF YOUR SCHOOL

David Shiman and Kristi Rudelius-Palmer welcome you to translate and/or adapt the activity to your specific communities. We have adapted this activity for use in other settings, including the workplace, communities of faith, and neighborhoods. I would like to post this activity in different languages and be able to share ways this activity is being used throughout the world.

Please [send the Human Rights Resource Center](#) your new translations or adaptations with your comments on how effective this tool was as a part of your training or educational program.

Thanks in advance for your input!

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[**Take the interactive questionnaire online!**](#)

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Overview:

Participants evaluate their school's human rights climate using criteria derived from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The subsequent discussion builds towards identifying areas of particular concern and developing an action plan to begin addressing them.

Objectives:

- To assess human rights conditions within the school community
- To reflect critically on forces at work within the school that affect the human rights climate
- To develop an action plan to improve the human rights situation within the school

Grade Level: 7-12; administrators, parent and teachers as well

Time: 1-2 hours (survey only)

Materials: TAKING THE HUMAN RIGHTS TEMPERATURE QUESTIONNAIRE (attached); copies of the UDHR (reference only)

Procedures:

1. Have participants evaluate their school's human rights climate, i.e. take its "temperature," by completing the survey questionnaire below. It might be appropriate to have participants conduct research into school conditions, using the survey items below, prior to completing the instrument or prior to developing an action plan.

2. Prepare for class discussion by creating a 1-4 rating scale on a chalkboard or newsprint. Then have participants call out responses to each item.

IMPORTANT: Participants might not wish to make their own responses public. Consider collecting the questionnaires and redistributing them so that participant anonymity can be assured.

3. Discuss the findings from the survey, drawing on the following questions to move from analysis and evaluation to the development of an action plan.

a. In which areas does your school appear to be adhering to or promoting human rights principles?

b. In which areas do there seem to be human rights problems? Which of these are of particular concern to you? Elaborate on the areas of concern, providing examples and identifying patterns in human rights violations.

c. How do you explain the existence of such problematic conditions?

* Do they have race/ethnicity, class, gender, disability, age, or sexual orientation dimensions?

* Are the issues related to participation in decision-making(who is included and who isn't)?

* Who benefits and who loses/suffers as a result of the existing human rights violations?

* Other explanations to consider?

d. Have you or any of your fellow community contributed in any way to the construction and perpetuation of the existing climate? (e.g. by acting in certain ways. by not acting in certain ways---ignoring abuses or not reporting incidents)

e. Were those completing the questionnaire representative of the population of the school? Would you expect different results from a different group of people? In what ways might another group's responses differ and why? Should these differences be of any concern to you and to the school community? When determining which human rights concerns need to be addressed and how to address them, how can you be certain to take into account the perspectives and experiences of different people?

f. What needs to be done to improve the human rights climate in your school? What action(s) can you and your group take to create a more

humane and just environment where human rights values are promoted and human rights behaviors practiced?

4. Review questionnaire item #25, stressing the importance of assuming responsibility and acting. Then, as a group brainstorm possible actions the group might take to improve the human rights situation? Decide on a short list of options for action. Thoroughly debate and discuss the short list before any decision regarding actions to be taken.

5. Based on the group discussion, choose items for action, and develop an action plan, identifying goals, strategies, and responsibilities.

TAKING THE HUMAN RIGHTS TEMPERATURE OF YOUR SCHOOL

INTRODUCTION

The questions below are adapted from the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). (The relevant UDHR articles are included parenthetically in each statement.) Some of these issues correlate more directly to the UDHR than others. All of these questions are related to the fundamental human right to education found in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration. It asserts:

Everyone has the right to education... Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

When discrimination is mentioned in the questionnaire below, it refers to a wide range of conditions: race, ethnicity/culture, sex, physical/intellectual capacities, friendship associations, age, culture, disability, social class/financial status, physical appearance, sexual orientation, life style choices, nationality, and living space. This is a much more expansive list than that found in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights but is more helpful in assessing the human rights temperature in your school community.

The results should provide a general sense of the school's climate in light of principles found in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Obviously more questions are needed and follow-up questioning during the discussion will enrich the assessment. These questions can help to identify specific areas of concern that need to be addressed.

TAKING THE HUMAN RIGHTS TEMPERATURE OF YOUR SCHOOL: THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Directions: Take the human rights temperature of your school. Read each

statement and assess how accurately it describes your school community in the blank next to it. (Keep in mind all members of your school: students, teachers, administrators, staff.) At the end, total up your score to determine your overall assessment score for your school.

RATING SCALE

1 - no/never

2 - rarely

3 - often

4 - yes/always

____ 1. My school is a place where students are safe and secure. (Art. 3 & 5)

____ 2. All students receive equal information and encouragement about academic and career opportunities. (Art. 2)

____ 3. Members of the school community are not discriminated against because of their life style choices, such as manner of dress, associating with certain people, and non-school activities. (Art. 2 & 16)

____ 4. My school provides equal access, resources, activities, and scheduling accommodations for all individuals. (Art. 2 & 7)

____ 5. Members of my school community will oppose discriminatory or demeaning actions, materials, or slurs in the school. (Art. 2, 3, 7, 28, & 29)

____ 6. When someone demeans or violates the rights of another person, the violator is helped to learn how to change his/her behavior. (Art. 26)

____ 7. Members of my school community care about my full human as well as academic development and try to help me when I am in need. (Art. 3, 22, 26 & 29)

____ 8. When conflicts arise, we try to resolve them through non- violent and collaborative ways. (Art. 3, 28)

____ 9. Institutional policies and procedures are implemented when complaints of harassment or discrimination are submitted. (Art. 3 & 7)

____ 10. In matters related to discipline (including suspension and expulsion), all persons are assured of fair, impartial treatment in the determination of guilt and assignment of punishment. (Art. 6, 7, 8, 9 & 10)

____ 11. No one in our school is subjected to degrading treatment or punishment. (Art. 5)

____ 12. Someone accused of wrong doing is presumed innocent until

proven guilty. (Art. 11)

____ 13. My personal space and possessions are respected. (Art. 12 & 17)

____ 14. My school community welcomes students, teachers, administrators, and staff from diverse backgrounds and cultures, including people not born in the USA. (Art. 2, 6,13, 14 & 15)

____ 15. I have the liberty to express my beliefs and ideas (political, religious, cultural, or other) without fear of discrimination.(Art. 19)

____ 16. Members of my school can produce and disseminate publications without fear of censorship or punishment. (Art. 19)

____ 17. Diverse voices and perspectives (e.g. gender, race/ethnicity, ideological) are represented in courses, textbooks, assemblies, libraries, and classroom instruction. (Art. 2, 19, & 27)

____ 18. I have the opportunity to express my culture through music, art, and literary form. (Art. 19, 27 & 28)

____ 19. Members of my school have the opportunity to participate (individually and through associations) in democratic decision-making processes to develop school policies and rules. (Art. 20, 21, & 23)

____ 20. Members of my school have the right to form associations within the school to advocate for their rights or the rights of others. (Art. 19, 20, & 23)

____ 21. Members of my school encourage each other to learn about societal and global problems related to justice, ecology, poverty, and peace. (Preamble & Art. 26 & 29)

____ 22. Members of my school encourage each other to organize and take action to address societal and global problems related to justice, ecology, poverty, and peace. (Preamble & Art. 20 & 29)

____ 23. Members of my school community are able to take adequate rest/recess time during the school day and work reasonable hours under fair work conditions. (Art. 23 & 24)

____ 24. Employees in my school are paid enough to have a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being (including housing, food, necessary social services and security from unemployment, sickness and old age) of themselves and their families. (Art. 22 & 25)

____ 25. I take responsibility in my school to ensure other individuals do not discriminate and that they behave in ways that promote the safety and well being of my school community. (Art. 1 & 29)

TEMPERATURE POSSIBLE = 100 HUMAN RIGHTS DEGREES

YOUR SCHOOL'S TEMPERATURE _____

Created by:

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