

# The History and Development of the Inviting School Survey: 1995-2012



Citation

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## Abstract

*In recent years, research has shown that school climate is one of the most important contributors to student achievement, success, and psychological well-being. In order to make informed decisions regarding school development, it is paramount for a school administrator to aware of perceived school experience (school climate) of the major stakeholders in the school, namely students, administrators, teachers, parents, and the wider community. The Inviting School Survey-Revised (ISS-R) purports to meet this need. Since 1995 the use of the ISS-R has grown from a few to over 10,000 participants (over 100 schools) in Asia, North America, Africa, and Australia. The following article outlines the history and development of the ISS-R from 1995 to 2012.*

Current research has shown that school climate is one of the most important contributors to student achievement, success, and psychological well-being (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009; Fan, Williams, & Corkin, 2011; Steyn, 2007; Zullig, Koopman, Patton, & Ubbes, 2010). School climate also heavily influences healthy development as well as effective risk prevention, positive youth development, and increased teacher and student retention (Cohen et al., 2009; Huebner & Diener, 2008).

Essentially, school climate reflects the perceptions of the social, emotional, and academic experiences of school life by students, administrators, teachers, parents, support staff, and the wider community. School climate reflects a personal evaluation of the school (Cohen, 2006; Freiberg, 1999).

School administrators wanting to gather such perceptions from the school community, need reliable and valid instruments that measure school climate. The *Inviting School Survey-Revised (ISS-R)*, grounded on Invitational Theory and Practice, seeks to meet this need.

*Invitational Theory and Practice is a model designed to create, sustain, and enhance human environments that cordially summon people to realize their potential in all areas of worthwhile human endeavor (Purkey & Novak, 2008). It seeks to explain the nature of signal systems that summon forth the realization of human potential, and to identify and change those forces that defeat and destroy potential.* Invitational Theory and Practice supports and encourages inviting practices in all areas of school functioning. The ultimate goal of the model is to assist in the development of the individual student's potential in the intellectual, psychological, social, moral, and physical realms. An environment that is both human and humane is

best for realizing this potential (Novak, Rocca, & DiBase, 2006; Novak, 1992, 2002; Purkey & Schmidt, 1987).

There are five factors that Invitational Theory and Practice addresses, the five powerful "P's" that make up any school: People, Places, Policies, Programs, and Processes (refer to Figure 1).

Application of the "P's" in the context of schools climate it is analogous to how the starfish conquers oysters.

...While one arm of the starfish pulls, the others rest.

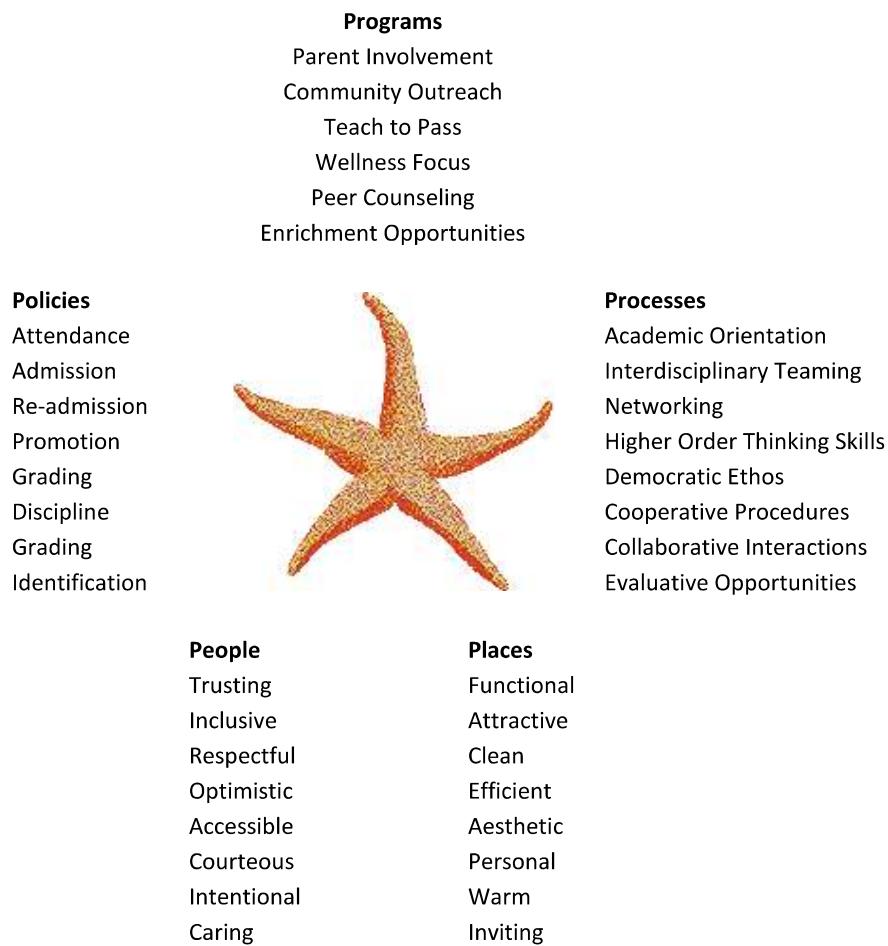
The single oyster muscle, while incredibly powerful, gets no rest. Irresistibly and inevitably, the oyster shell opens and the starfish has its meal. Steady and continuous pressure from a number of points can overcome the biggest muscles of oysters (Purkey & Novak, 2008, pp 19-20).

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**Figure 1.** Starfish analogy (Purkey & Novak, 2008)

Purkey and Novak contextualized the ‘Starfish analogy’ to the school setting by stating:

“ focusing on the five powerful “P’s that make up every school, educators can apply steady and persistent pressure to overcome the biggest challenges” like the actions of a starfish, steady and continuous pressure from a number of points can work to overcome the toughest school challenges (2008, p. 19).

Ideally, the five factors identified in Invitational Theory and Practice should be so intentionally inviting as to create a world in which each individual is cordially summoned to develop intellectually, emotionally, socially, physically, and morally (Purkey & Novak, 2008). Identifying and measuring the five factors is the purpose of the Inviting School Survey-Revised. The basic idea behind the ISS-R is that everything counts in a student’s education, from the overall physical

facility to the way each individual child is treated in each individual classroom. In addition to helping assess the invitational quality of schools, the ISS-R can also assist school personnel in identifying weaknesses in the system that could be corrected.

The original Inviting School Survey (ISS) was designed to assess the total school climate and the five environmental factors as outlined by Invitational theory and Practice: People, Places, Policies, Programs, and Processes (Purkey & Novak, 1996, 2008; Purkey & Schmidt, 1990) with People being the most critical single factor. People consist not only of the individuals interacting together on a daily basis to operate a school but also, they work together in all areas to fulfill the mission of the school. This mission includes policy-making, program development, and long-range planning both in the areas of physical space usage (places) and usage of mental and emotional resources

(curricula, counseling, policy concerning visitors, etc.). It also determines how all these different plans and policies will be implemented.

### **History of the Inviting School Survey**

The ISS was a product of the Invitational Theory and Practice; a model developed by William W. Purkey and colleagues (Purkey, 1978; Purkey & Stanley, 1991; Purkey & Novak, 1996; Purkey & Schmidt, 1987, 1990, 1996) and was developed to determine which specific parts of schools affect the total gestalt of particular schools under examination. Observations, discussions, and surveys were used to collect information in order to develop items for the ISS. The discussions were of critical importance to gain the insights of those people closest to the school situation. Such people included school officials and faculty (principals, counselors, and teachers), parents, students, and researchers. Aspects of schools that could impact the learning and personal growth environment were delineated and then formulated into behaviorally anchored questions that assess the invitational climate of the school.

Originally, the ISS was a 100-item, Likert scale, hand-scored instrument that was utilized by few schools (Purkey & Fuller, 1995). Since there was no systematic collection of data, no psychometrics, such as norms, reliability, and validity indices, supporting the instrument were collected or published. However, in 2004 a detailed psychometric study of the original 100-item ISS, was undertaken by Smith and Bernard (Smith & Bernard, 2004). One of the aims of the study was to determine whether the 100-item instrument could be shortened without compromising its psychometric properties. Utilizing Rasch measurement modeling (Rasch, 1980; Bond & Fox, 2001), the focus of the item analysis was to identify misfitting items in sequential calibrations, remove the identified item(s) and repeat the computations. The ‘infit mean square statistic’ was used as a criterion to develop for uni-dimensionality and to investigate whether the subgroups of items hang together, which is also a check of validity. The results of this study and further analyses, such as factor and reliability analyses, have shown that reducing the present 100-item ISS to 50 items did not compromise its reliability significantly (Smith & Bernard, 2004). A shorter version of the ISS, the Inviting School Survey-Revised (ISS-R) lends itself to be used more often by schools to assess their culture as perceived by the major stakeholders: students, teachers, parents, and administrators.

Like the ISS, the ISS-R is designed for use by everyone in the school, including students (ages 8 and above), parents, teachers, school administrators, support staff, and volunteers. By choosing to have the ISS-R completed by several groups,

it is possible to disaggregate the resulting data for comparison purposes, for example, comparing student survey results with those of teachers, parents, or administrators.

Invitational Education supports and encourages inviting practices in all areas of school functioning. The ultimate goal of the model and the ISS-R is to assist in the development of the individual student's potential in the intellectual, psychological, social, moral, and physical realms. An environment that is both human and humane is best for realizing this potential (Novak, Rocca, & DiBase, 2006; Novak, 1992, 2002; Purkey & Schmidt, 1987).

### **Description of the Inviting School Survey-Revised**

The ISS-R (Smith, 2005) is a behaviorally-anchored 50 item scale. It is based upon the tenets of Invitational Theory and Practice, and is designed to empirically identify areas in a school that are inviting and disinverting. Invitational Theory and Practice is strongly grounded on well-established psychological paradigms such as Perceptual Psychology (Combs, 1962; Combs, Richards, & Richards, 1976), Cognitive-Behavior (Ellis, 1962, 1970; Meichenbaum, 1974, 1977), and Self-Concept (Jourard, 1968; Purkey, 1970, 2000; Rogers, 1969). The overriding perspective of Invitational Theory and Practice is that beliefs have a direct and powerful influence on behavior.

The ISS-R (Appendix A), based on the theoretically five-factor model (refer to Figure 1) is comprised of 50 items: 1. People (16 items), 2. Program (7 items), 3. Process (8 items), 4. Policy (7 items), 5. Place (12 items). Placed together on a 50-item Likert scale, the Inviting School Survey (ISS-R) presents a global picture of life in school as inviting or disinverting.

### **People**

Although all parts of a school are vital to its operation, from the standpoint of the invitational model, people are the most important part. People create and maintain the invitational climate. It is important in a school to know how the people who make up a school community are contributing to or detracting from human existence and development. The invitational model requires unconditional respect for all people. The ISS-R identifies the extent to which respect is manifested in the school environment. Respect is defined as the caring and appropriate behaviors that people exhibit towards themselves and others. It is the quality of life reflected in the places they create and inhabit, by the policies and programs they establish and support, and through the processes employed to sustain their organization and environment.

## **Places**

When seeking to change an environment, the physical setting is normally the first aspect to investigate. Any part of the physical environment that is unpleasant, unattractive, confusing, littered, grimy, dusty, or dingy is disinverting. The ISS-R assists in identifying factors that can be altered, adjusted, or improved to create a more inviting physical place. Creating a pleasant physical environment is a major way that professionals demonstrate their concern for the people they seek to serve.

## **Programs**

As in the other factors, programs can be helpful or harmful to individuals and groups. Some programs are not inviting because they focus on narrow goals and neglect the wide scope of human concerns (for example, tracking or labeling students). People are not labels, and programs that label individuals can have negative effects. The ISS-R can assist in determining the inviting nature of school programs and in delineating programs that should be altered. The goal is to enhance the personal and professional growth and development of everyone in the school.

## **Policies**

Policies refer to guidelines, rules, procedures, codes, directives, and so forth that regulate the ongoing functions of the school. This includes discipline, promotion, attendance, and other policies. It is not the policy itself as much as what the policy communicates that is vital to the invitational model (i.e., trust or distrust, respect or disrespect, optimism or pessimism, intentionality or unintentionality). Policies reveal the perceptual orientations of the policy-makers. The ISS-R is designed to point out areas where schools might move away from "rule fixation" to personal responsibility.

## **Processes**

The ISS-R assesses the processes undertaken by a school. Process represents not only the content of what is offered, but also the context. The context of the invitational model is that there is always time for caring, civility, politeness, ethical behavior, and courtesy. Any school that operates under a situation where the processes are negative (lack of concern, rudeness, insults, authoritarianism, dictatorial) is likely to achieve poor results in the areas of academics and human development. Process is the factor that indicates how the school is operating, the manner in which the people are acting, rather than what is being done. Examples might be a democratic style of leadership, a cooperative spirit in the teaching/learning process, and interdisciplinary teaming among faculty.

## **Rationale**

Smith (2005) revised the original 100-item instrument to become a 50-item, on-line, computer-scored instrument, the Inviting School Survey-Revised (ISS-R). The ISS-R provides school communities with a user-friendly, theoretical-grounded, empirical-based instrument that assists in evaluating schools for future development, as the ISS-R identifies areas of strength and weakness in a school's climate.

Following its revision, the ISS-R has been utilized Australia, New Zealand, North America, Asia, and Africa. In 2006, 18 schools (596) participants completed the ISS-R. In 2010, as a result of the huge increase in use of the ISS-R, particularly in Hong Kong and mainland China, to the ISS-R was adapted and translated into Traditional Chinese (Smith, 2011).

The ISS-R is meant to be used in the following ways:

1. To assess how administrators, teachers, pupils, parents, and the community perceive their school.
2. To identify areas of strength or weakness in a school's climate.
3. To compare school climate of one school with other schools.
4. To compare and contrast the perceptions of various groups within the school regarding the emotional climate of the institution.
5. To use as a pre-post measure by educators who are implementing a plan to improve or transform their total school.
6. To assist in identifying schools that are eligible to receive the Inviting School Award, presented by the International Alliance for Invitational Education. The purpose of the Inviting School Award program is to recognize schools, districts, and universities throughout the world who exhibit the philosophy of Invitational Education. Awards are presented at the bi-annual World Conference.
7. To assist in identifying schools that are eligible to receive the Paula Helen Stanley Fidelity Award, presented by the International Alliance for Invitational Education. This award recognizes global schools that for two years in a row have kept the spirit and practice of Invitational Theory and Practice alive and well in their schools.

## **Future Directions**

While there is limited research on the concurrent and predictive validity of the ISS-R, face and content validity

certainly exist. The instrument's items represent and measure major school climate factors as judged by experts and practitioners in the field of Invitational Education. The validity and reliability of the ISS-R have been shown to be statistically significant (Smith, 2011, 2005).

Graphical descriptive statistics, means, correlations, and alpha coefficients can be found in the ISS-R Manual ([http://www.invitationaleducation.net/Invitational%20School%20Survey-Revised/2012\\_ISSR\\_MANUAL.pdf](http://www.invitationaleducation.net/Invitational%20School%20Survey-Revised/2012_ISSR_MANUAL.pdf)). These statistics are based on ISS-R participants between the years 2005-2010. During this period of time, 6,038 participants from 78 schools (32 schools from USA, 46 international schools) completed the ISS-R (some schools participated more than once during this time period). As of 2012, over

10,000 participants have completed the ISS-R from over 100 schools.

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the psychometrics of the ISS-R, further research is required. In particular, there is a need to examine the stability and factorial structure of the instrument across age, gender, country, and other school-environment demographics.

In summary, the ISS-R is a valuable and informative instrument for use by schools in assessing school climate (invitational qualities). It is a constructive descriptive-purpose instrument that is grounded in theory, user-friendly, supplements other types of evaluations (e.g., focus groups, interviews, document analysis), and can be used in pre-post analyses of intervention programs.

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## Appendix A: The *Inviting School Survey-Revised (ISS-R)*

**IAIE International Alliance for Invitational Education**



Optimism      Trust      Respect      Care      Intentionality

### Invitational School Survey-Revised (ISS-R)

Thank you for your participation in this activity. It is very much appreciated!

We are interested in your opinions on a range of issues regarding your school. Your individual responses will be kept **strictly** confidential.

Name of your school: Locke

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Please select the appropriate response

Are you a:     Student     Counselor     Administrator  
                Parent     Teacher     Other

Gender:     Male     Female

If you are a student how old are you?

8     9     10     11     12     13     14     15     16     17     18     19     20     N/A

**Directions:** The purpose of this survey is to determine what you think about your school.

Following are a series of statements concerning your school. Please use the six-point response scale and select how much you agree or disagree for each item. **Select "N/A" only if the question does not apply to your school?**

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A
1. Student discipline is approached from a positive standpoint.	<input type="radio"/>					
2. Everyone is encouraged to participate in athletic (sports) programs.	<input type="radio"/>					
3. The principal involves everyone in the decision-making process.	<input type="radio"/>					
4. Furniture is pleasant and comfortable.	<input type="radio"/>					
5. Teachers are willing to help students who have special problems.	<input type="radio"/>					
6. Teachers in this school show respect for students.	<input type="radio"/>					
7. Grades are assigned by means of fair and comprehensive assessment of work and effort.	<input type="radio"/>					
8. The air smells fresh in this school.	<input type="radio"/>					
9. Teachers are easy to talk with.	<input type="radio"/>					
10. There is a wellness (health) program in this school.	<input type="radio"/>					

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A
11. Students have the opportunity to talk to one another during class activities.	<input type="radio"/>					
12. Teachers take the time to talk with students about students' out-of-class activities.	<input type="radio"/>					
13. The school grounds are clean and well-maintained.	<input type="radio"/>					
14. All telephone calls to this school are answered promptly and politely.	<input type="radio"/>					
15. Teachers are generally prepared for class.	<input type="radio"/>					
16. The restrooms in this school are clean and properly maintained.	<input type="radio"/>					
17. School programs involve out of school experience.	<input type="radio"/>					
18. Teachers exhibit a sense of humor.	<input type="radio"/>					
19. School policy encourages freedom of expression by everyone..	<input type="radio"/>					
20. The principal's office is attractive.	<input type="radio"/>					

<b>Statements</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>N/A</b>
21. People in this school are polite to one another.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				
22. Everyone arrives on time for school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				
23. Good health practices are encouraged in this school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				
24. Teachers work to encourage students' self-confidence.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				
25. Bulletin boards are attractive and up-to-date.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				
26. The messages and notes sent home are positive.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				
27. The principal treats people as though they are responsible.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				
28. Space is available for students independent study.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				
29. People often feel welcome when they enter the school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				
30. Students work cooperatively with each other.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				
<b>Statements</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>N/A</b>
31. Interruptions to classroom academic activities are kept to a minimum.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				
32. Fire alarm instructions are well posted and seem reasonable.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				
33. People in this school want to be here.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				
34. A high percentage of students pass in this school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				
35. Many people in this school are involved in making decisions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				
36. Many in this school try to stop vandalism when they see it happening.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				
37. Classrooms offer a variety of furniture arrangements.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				
38. The school sponsors extracurricular activities apart from sports.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				
39. Teachers appear to enjoy life.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				
40. Clocks and water fountains are in good repair.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				
<b>Statements</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>N/A</b>
41. School buses wait for late students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				
42. School pride is evident among students.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				
43. Daily attendance by students and staff is high.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				
44. There are comfortable chairs for visitors.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				
45. Teachers share out-of-class experiences with students.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				
46. Mini courses are available to students.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				
47. The grading practices in this school are fair.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				
48. Teachers spend time after school with those who need extra help.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				
49. The lighting in this school is more than adequate.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				
50. Classes get started quickly.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				