



school climate matters

CENTER FOR SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL EDUCATION NEWSLETTER

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CSEE Takes a Stand on School Climate Policy in Washington, D.C.

In December 2007, CSEE President, Jonathan Cohen, Ph.D. was invited to participate in the DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education's (OSSE) Policy Forum on "Establishing School Climate for Academic Success." This event brought together educators, politicians, researchers, and experts for a series of small group meetings and a larger symposium focused on how to create effective policies that will help improve the climate for learning in D.C. schools.

Dr. Cohen's presentation, **Evaluating and Improving School Climate: A strategy that promotes student learning, and safe, civil and democratic school communities**, reviewed important school cli-

mate research and offered specific strategies on how to engage various stakeholders in the process of school climate reform. The presentation detailed a series of recommendations for policy makers, educational practitioners, researchers, and nonprofit organizations that work with K-12 school systems, based on CSEE's extensive experience in the field. For a copy of Dr. Cohen's full presentation, please email newsletter@csee.net and write "DC policy" in the subject line.

CSEE's contribution to this event is part of a larger effort to bring school climate issues to the forefront of educational policy reform. CSEE is committed to help advance this important discus-

sion and plans to play a pivotal role in outlining key recommendations and areas of need to make school climate a priority at the state and national level. This effort is being collaboratively led by CSEE, the National Center for Learning and Citizenship (NCLC) at the Education Commission of the States and members of the National School Climate Council.

School Climate Matters will keep readers up-to-date on the policies and practices that are in development, and we welcome your thoughts on this significant issue.

C R E A T I N G A C L I M A T E F O R L E A R N I N G

message from the president



dear friends,

Happy New Year and welcome back to the School Climate Matters newsletter! At CSEE, we began 2008 with a renewed commitment to promoting a safe and supportive climate for learning in schools nationwide, and hope you will do the same in your communities.

As we look forward to the year ahead, there are many reasons to get excited about the work and research being done on behalf of school climate improvement, and School Climate Matters highlights some of the most relevant news and resources for you.

This issue features key efforts in the field – from the recent research study that underscores the value of social-emotional learning programs in promoting student achievement to one educator’s story of implementing an effective SEL program at her charter school in D.C. In addition, CSEE would like to share some truly impressive news on our own work:

- To date, the **Ohio Student School Climate Survey** has been administered to more than **27,000 high school and middle school students across the state**. The results from this survey will be used to inform future improvement efforts and research from this project will support the development of a statewide survey!
- In 2007, the **Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI)** was administered to **20,000 students, 2,000 parents, and 3,000 school personnel** in elementary, middle, and high schools across the country. This work continues to grow in 2008 as more districts and consortiums of schools make school climate assessment a priority in their education plans.

- **CSEE has conducted more than 150 professional development workshops** with school leaders, teachers, and teams of educators on topics ranging from Classroom Management and Conflict Resolution to Infusing SEL-Concepts into the Curriculum and Breaking the Bully-Victim-Bystander Cycle. This work has reached schools, after-school programs, districts, and social service agencies throughout the tri-state area.

The theme for this issue of School Climate Matters is building effective Parent-School partnerships, a topic that is a clear concern for many school communities. Inside, you will find useful guidelines for enhancing collaboration and a list of proven resources to help you build your own successful community outreach strategy.

We are working to build our community as well! As part of our feature article, we are requesting that readers share their own experiences and effective initiatives for improving parent-school partnerships. Please take a moment to share your voice at newsletter@csee.net. We will include best practices and lessons learned for all readers in the next issue of School Climate Matters.

Thank you for your continued interest and support.
All the best for a positive and productive 2008

Jonathan Cohen, Ph.D.
President and Co-Founder
Center for Social and Emotional Education

csee online

Get Connected with CSEE—Show Your Support Online!

CSEE Joins Facebook!



Become a member of CSEE’s group to receive up-to-date resources and share your voice on important school climate issues! Search for the “Center for Social and Emotional Education: from your Facebook account or go to: <http://rutgers.facebook.com/group.php?gid=6468747638>

Support CSEE every time you shop or search online!



If you use Yahoo to search online, switch to GoodSearch (powered through Yahoo) and CSEE will receive a donation for every page you browse. It’s

that simple. To learn more and make GoodSearch your main browser, visit www.goodsearch.com and pick CSEE in the “Who do you search for?” box.

Shop Till You Drop with iGive!



Create an account at www.igive.com and select “Center for Social and Emotional Education” as your cause. Every time you shop online go to the IGIVE website, log in and SHOP! There 683 stores—everything from Bloomingdale’s to Zappos. You get the same prices as from the direct sites but a percentage of your purchases are donated to CSEE.

EDUCATORS IN ACTION: Improving School Climate As A Building Block for A Successful School-Wide SEL Initiative

Vanessa A. Camilleri, MA, MT-BC, LCAT

Social/Emotional Learning Specialist, The Arts & Technology Academy, Public Charter School, Washington, DC

The Challenge

The Arts & Technology Academy, Public Charter School's (ATA) mission proudly states that it will help each child "...develop a strong moral foundation...". How is this accomplished? Until about two years ago, the answer was "purely by accident." Serving a predominantly "at-risk" population in an urban Washington D.C. neighborhood, Arts & Technology students are faced with daily environmental and domestic stressors such as violence and poverty, which often lead to behaviors and states of mind that prevent our students from learning. Coupled with rising incidents of violence in schools, an emphasis on testing nationwide, and increased demands on educators, the administration at Arts & Technology felt strongly that a balance needed to be struck in order to address the many non-academic needs of its students and staff.

Setting the Stage for Change

To address these concerns, the Arts & Technology leadership team selected social/emotional learning as one of its four school-wide, non-negotiable initiatives for the 2006-2007 school year. With a primary focus on student achievement, the school launched an intentional and systematic social/emotional learning (SEL) initiative in July 2006 that continues in full swing to this day.

This initiative is grounded in the understanding that a commitment to social/emotional learning improves academic achievement by developing a positive school culture, encouraging increased attachment to the school, improving behavior in and out of school, increasing attendance, and improving teacher morale and retention.

Our commitment to this school-wide effort is realized through concrete initiatives centered around five core principles-PRIDE (Perseverance, Respect, Integrity, Discipline and Enthusiasm). Methods include:

- Monthly Social Emotional Learning themes
- Distribution of ROC STARS (for those who Respect Our Community)
- The ATA Way (school-wide expectations for behaviors)

- Opportunities for recognition
- A positive language campaign
- The Responsive Classroom approach to teaching and learning (primarily Morning Meeting and Hopes & Dreams).

These coordinated efforts have become part of our way of being at Arts & Technology and are impacting the culture of the school. The results are evident in the use of positive language by teachers during parent-teacher conferences, the implementation of team-building activities at the beginning of staff meetings, steady improvement of student attendance, and a reduction in suspension rates.

It has been widely reported that when a school provides a safe and orderly environment, students and staff perform better; when we feel part of a strong community, we become more active participants; and when we feel acknowledged and cared about, we are more open to learning.

Creating a Profile of the School

While such internal school data is important, we believed it was important to evaluate the initiative in a more comprehensive and objective manner. The nature of social emotional learning competence can be highly subjective and is often based on anecdotal material. A solution was found with the **Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI)**, a whole-school needs assessment that provides a concrete analysis of dimensions that are often difficult to capture such as "respect for diversity", "morale" and "social-emotional safety". The CSCI was particularly appealing because of its scope, and the fact that it provided not only numerical analysis, but also specific action planning support. At the end of the Social Emotional Learning initiative's first year, all 4-6th graders and staff completed this survey.

The breadth of the data presented in the resulting CSCI report and its accessible format were impressive. In addition, the responsiveness of CSEE staff in

assisting us to tease out valuable information from the report was important as our committee tackled the next step: action planning!

Turning the Results into Action

The Social Emotional Learning committee has 15 members—including administrators, upper and lower school teachers, 2 instructional assistants, counselors, special education teachers and an arts team member. This motivated group came together to discuss the results of the CSCI, and were broken into four teams to more closely analyze the report findings. Through small and large group discussions, a list of high priority dimensions was created. In an attempt to narrow down the focus, each person voted for the top two areas that they felt were most pressing for the school to address. No clear top choice emerged from this informal vote, and this is when the true discussion began!

As we talked about the importance of each dimension—from Morale to Respect for Diversity and Social-Emotional Safety to the Physical Environment—it became obvious that these areas are all intricately related. We engaged in a heated "chicken or egg" debate as to which dimension should be tackled first. Was there a clear sequence that we should follow? In truth, the factors of school climate are more circular in nature and therefore harder to prioritize. However, looking at the dimensions in terms of their definitions helped us understand what the data was really measuring in our school. From this perspective, Respect for Diversity emerged as a clear area of need for both students and staff and became our top priority.

The CSCI data was instrumental in helping us accomplish our goal of identifying a priority area for action. Our next steps are to review the associated data for Respect for Diversity and define how the findings for this dimension connect with our knowledge and experiences within the school. After this is done, we will identify core problem areas, develop a targeted action plan, and, most importantly, put that plan to work!

Vanessa Camilleri is the author of *Healing the Inner City Child: Creative Arts Therapies With At-Risk Youth* (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2007). To contact Vanessa regarding her school's efforts to promote social/emotional learning, email newsletter@csee.net.

To learn more about how CSEE can help your school assess and improve its climate for learning, visit www.csee.net/csciasessment or email newsletter@csee.net.



CSEE president, Jonathan Cohen, and New York City school parent, Liz Curtis



CSEE Board member, Cornelius Marx and Raymond Palmer, Bronx Youth Development Officer and Former Principal of FDNY H.S.

Building a Bridge for More Effective Parent-School Partnerships

Last month, CSEE led a forum on Parent-School Collaborations for the Development of the Whole Child. This event was the first in what we hope will be a series of informal gatherings to explore best practices for effective parent-school communication. Parents from New York City-area public and independent schools had the opportunity to meet and network with school teachers and staff, Department of Education administrators, academic researchers, and members of CSEE's staff and board to discuss how to begin and sustain collaborative partnerships in schools.

CSEE would like to thank all attendees for their honesty and openness in sharing their experiences with the group, and Dena Wallerson, CSEE's Director of Education, for moderating the discussion. We would especially like to thank Board Member, Kathryn Weil for her generosity in hosting this beneficial event. It prompted an invigorating and inspiring dialogue that we hope will spark future conversations on what is clearly a vital piece to building a positive school climate.

Based on the group discussion, below are some suggested strategies for increasing parent engagement in your school community. See the Resource List on page 6 for additional supports and recommendations.

1. Make it easy for parents to participate!— Anticipate and resolve potential barriers in advance. Offer transportation options to and from meetings, serve food/snacks for parents and their children at events, and recruit volunteers to help provide childcare services on-site. All of these ideas take parent's busy schedules and competing priorities into account.

2. Locate some meetings and activities off-site!— A fresh and upbeat location can help spark new interest in traditionally low-attendance events. Make sure the site is easily accessible by public transportation, or provide transportation for parents.

3. Offer classes and workshops for parents based on their interests!— These offerings build parent engagement and their investment in the school as a resource, not only for children but also for adults. Popular classes include English proficiency, internet/ Microsoft lessons, resume/ career support, or a trade/skill class. Once parents are coming to the school for these classes, you can utilize this relationship as an opportunity to connect on issues involving their children.

4. Offer opportunities for the community to “cross-pollinate”!— Invite parents to school events and activities that intentionally “cross-pollinate” them across age, race, gender, etc. to expand their social networks, foster cultural understanding, and give them opportunities to learn from people of differing perspectives and experiences about schooling for their children.

5. Be creative with event scheduling!— Consider rotating meeting times or providing weekend and off-hour options to fit more parents' schedules.

research matters

Research Shows Social-Emotional/Character Education Programs Enhance Student Achievement!



Once again, research proves what educators and parents have long known—focusing on the positive development of students’ social and emotional skills and ethical dispositions is a critical piece to students’ overall success. **The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)** recently released an analysis of 207 studies of school-based programs designed to promote children’s social and emotional skills development. The findings confirm that academic achievement improves along with social and emotional benefits for students who take part in these programs. As the *Education Week* article published on December 19th notes,

“Across the board, the researchers found, the programs did what they were supposed to do: After the lessons, the students in the experimental groups were better behaved, more positive, and less anxious than their control group peers. The program students had also, apparently, gotten smarter, as measured by their grades and test scores.”

CASEL presented these findings at a December 2007 national forum in New York on social and emotional learning, and is scheduled to publish the full report in early 2008.

You can learn more about this important work on the CASEL website at: www.casel.org.

To read the full *Education Week* article, visit:
<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2007/12/19/16social.h27.html>

- 6. Implement programs that help parents and children process anger constructively**—Anger is often used as a mask for feelings of hurt and can erode effective communication efforts. Non-violent ways of resolving differences should be modeled and practiced throughout the school community.
- 7. Encourage resource sharing**—Utilize meetings as an opportunity to share knowledge and make new connections. Be the first person to reach out to a parent or student in need and they will someday reciprocate the favor.
- 8. Send reliable, timely communications to parents and school staff**—Give ample notification for important matters and make sure you follow-up on any outstanding issues with them directly.
- 9. Make lasting connections**— If you have made a positive connection with a student or parent, find ways to be a resource and continue sharing even after the school year ends. This type of outreach ensures more effective engagement for years to come.
- 10. Make your school a multi-service site**— As a school community, think about what programs and services adults and children need—from medical support to housing education—and solicit the surrounding community leaders for funding to support and sustain these programs.

Share Your Experience!

Do you have a parent-school program or idea that has made a real difference in your school community? We want to hear from you! Please send your thoughts to newsletter@csee.net and we will share reader views and suggestions in the next issue of *School Climate Matters*.



Effective parent-school partnerships are a key part of any community-building efforts. Below are a list of recommended resources you can access to get more information on research, support materials, and proven strategies. We welcome your suggestions for additions to this list! Please email us at:

newsletter@csee.net.

Books

School-Family Partnerships for Children's Success

Patrikakou, E. N., Weissberg, R. P., Redding, S. & Walberg, H. J., (Eds.) (2005)
Teachers College Press, New York, NY

Parents and Learning

Sam Redding, 2000
International Academy of Education,
Educational Practices Series. New York, NY
[http://www.ibe.unesco.org/publications/
EducationalPracticesSeriesPdf/prac02e.pdf](http://www.ibe.unesco.org/publications/EducationalPracticesSeriesPdf/prac02e.pdf)

School, Family, and Community Partnerships

Epstein, J. L. (2002)
Corwin Press, Thousand Oaks, CA

Articles

"Parent Engagement as a Reform Strategy"

Hollyce C. Giles
ERIC Digest (article)
<http://www.ericdigests.org/1998-3/reform.html>

Websites

Center for Mental Health in Schools

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/homework.htm>

National PTA

www.pta.org/

National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education

<http://www.ncpie.org/DevelopingPartnerships/>

Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships

<http://www.csos.jhu.edu/P2000/center.htm>

From the The North Central Regional Laboratory:

[http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues
envrnmnt/famncomm/pa400.htm](http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/envrnmnt/famncomm/pa400.htm)

The Knowledge Loom: Educators Sharing and Learning Together

<http://knowledgeloom.org/>

Bridges4Kids: Building Partnerships Between Families, Schools and Communities

A national non-profit parent organization providing a comprehensive system of information and referral for parents and professionals working with children from birth through transition to adult life

<http://www.bridges4kids.org/Links.html>

Best Practices & Programs

Parent Engagement Electronic Toolkit.

A booklet of resources, policies and policies that support parent engagement.

[http://www.michigan.gov/documents/Parent_
Involvement_Part_1_12-16-04_111426_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/Parent_Involvement_Part_1_12-16-04_111426_7.pdf)

Parent Leadership Training Institute (Connecticut)

A 20 week course for parent leaders to become better advocates for their children.

<http://www.cga.ct.gov/coc/plti.htm>

For more information about guidelines that support helpful school-family partnerships, visit www.csee.net.

csee news



We're Moving!

CSEE has a new home!
Starting February 1, 2008
you can find us at:

**1841 Broadway, Suite 1212
New York, NY 10023**

Please update your contact lists to reflect this address change. As always, you can contact us by phone at: (212) 707-8799 or by email at: newsletter@csee.net. Log onto www.csee.net for the most up-to-date news on our programs and services.

your voice matters

Your input is valuable to us! We'd love to hear your thoughts about our newsletter and welcome your suggestions for future issues as well.

Thank you for your interest in **School Climate Matters**. With your input, we hope to continue to be a valuable resource on school climate issues.

Please send your feedback and suggestions to:
newsletter@csee.net.

announcements

Register Now for CSEE's 11th Annual Summer Institute in NYC: July 8-10th!

Promoting Safe and Civil K-12 Schools: Creating the Foundation for Positive Youth Development and Student Achievement

New York Society for Ethical Culture: 2 West 64th Street at Central Park West

CSEE is pleased to announce our 11th annual Summer Institute from July 8-10th in New York City! This three-day intensive event for school teams and individuals will focus on promoting safe and civil K-12 schools. Through engaging workshops, expert presentations, and networking sessions, participants will:

- Learn how to support a continuous process of measuring and improving school climate in ways that promote academic achievement, student and parent engagement, and effective risk prevention/health promotion efforts.
- Connect with and learn from local and national leaders in the character education, social emotional learning, school climate, risk prevention and health promotion fields on the latest research, policy and practices.

- Receive supports on classroom based strategies and activities that further develop students' core social, emotional, ethical and intellectual competencies.
- Learn about systemic strategies and crisis preparedness plans that foster a climate for learning and safety.
- Begin developing action plans that build on your school's strengths, needs and goals.

Learn more about this exciting opportunity, read what others have said about past Institutes, and sign up to receive updated information on the 2008 event at: www.csee.net/si2008

get involved!

"A Little Night Magic"—A Lot of Fun!



CSEE's annual fundraiser, *A Little Night Magic*, held this past November was a great success thanks to a fantastic showing of supporters, board members and staff! The night kicked off in style at

the beautiful Manhattan home of CSEE Board Member Susie Case. The event raised over \$67,000, which will be used to continue CSEE's mission to create safe and supportive learning environments in schools across the country.

The evening included a magician who performed magic tricks to guests' delight, beautiful music and a silent auction. Top auction items included a lavish cruise to Sicily, tickets to some of Broadway's hottest shows, and a number of exciting internships including Deutsche Bank, Battery Park City Park Conservancy, Time for Kids Magazine, and Sky Bridge Capital LLC.

It's not too late for you to join in the fun! Log onto www.MissionFish.com to bid on exciting items available from CSEE—including a second breathtaking Sicily cruise, one-of-a-kind artwork, and a personal tour of the American Stock Exchange! Visit the site regularly to see an updated list of auction items. All of the proceeds will support CSEE's efforts to promote a positive school climate in our nation's schools.

**Center for Social and
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Development Office
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New York, NY 10023
RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



Center for Social and Emotional Education
CSEE

**TO CONTRIBUTE TO CSEE,
PLEASE CONTACT OUR
DEVELOPMENT OFFICE:**

Center for Social and
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Development Office
1841 Broadway, Suite 1212
New York, NY 10023

Phone: 212-707-8799 ext. 11
Fax: 212-957-6616
E-mail: srodriguez@csee.net

Sandra J. Rodriguez,
Development Director
Creating a Climate for Learning!

Visit us on the web!
WWW.CSEE.NET

CSEE is an organization that helps schools integrate crucial social and emotional learning with academic instruction to enhance student performance, prevent drop outs, reduce violence, and development healthy and positively engaged adults.

For more than a decade CSEE has worked together with the entire academic community - teacher, staff, school-based mental health professional, students and parents - to improve total school climate.

We continue to help translate research into practice by establishing meaningful and relevant guidelines, programs and services that support a model for whole school improvement with a focus on school climate.

CSEE's vision is that all children will develop the essential social, emotional and intellectual skills to become healthy and productive citizens.

CSEE's mission is to measure and improve the climate for learning in schools to help children realize their fullest potential as individuals and as engaged members of society.

CSEE achieves this through:

- *Advocacy and policy*
- *Measurement and research*
- *Educational services*