# The Link Between School Climate and Student Success: Findings from CSEE's Ohio School Climate Survey

## in this issue

## in brief

**CSEE celebrated** its 11th Annual Summer Institute on July 8-10th 2008! Educators, researchers, practitioners, parents, and state-level leaders gathered from around the country to participate in this exceptional three-day training. To learn more about the events and to hear testimonials from attendees, visit: www.csee.net/summerinstitute

**Bronx SAT Prep Program Launch** – This year CSEE is teaming up with local organizations to offer a special SAT Prep Program through which we'll provide free tutoring and support for Bronx-are high school students through stress relief kits, test prep packets and more. To become a participating sponsor, please contact Sandra Rodriguez at srodriguez@csee.net.

Last fall, CSEE worked with the Ohio Department of Education to develop and administer a student school climate survey in over 60 middle and high schools across the state. The survey measures student perceptions of ten critical aspects of school life, including: safety, the quality of relationships, support for teaching and learning, social and civic learning, school engagement/connectedness, and physical surroundings. Each school received a comprehensive report outlining their particular strengths and needs, providing State and District leaders with concrete data to help them allocate resources effectively and develop appropriate support programs.

Overall, survey results underscore the important role school climate plays in supporting the quality of school life. Key findings include:

- **A strong relationship between school climate ratings and school performance**—schools with higher climate ratings also have better test scores and graduation rates.

- This relationship is even stronger for high poverty schools, which suggests that especially in very challenging circumstances, a more **positive climate can help foster better student outcomes**.

- For high schools, **stronger graduation rates are even more closely tied to higher climate ratings**, pointing to the importance of a supportive school environment for persistence, and ultimate success.

While ratings tend to decline overall from middle to high school, attention to social and civic learning declines more distinctly at higher grade levels. By high school, the emphasis is often more exclusively on subject-based academics, but schools may want to consider how they can continue to reinforce the development of pro-social skills and attitudes that support healthy decision-making, non-violent conflict resolution, and cooperative behavior for older students. Results also illustrate the differences in how individual students experience school, which highlights the importance for schools to hear *all* voices. For example, climate ratings are consistently lower for boys and students of color. However, the experience of different racial groups in schools also changes depending on whether they are a smaller minority or larger representative group in the school.

This work represents the beginning of a much larger effort at CSEE, and the survey will be used for future research to better understand the role of climate in school, what contributes to a more positive climate and how it, in turn, may help promote greater student success. For educators, the survey should provide a means to systematically address needs and develop a safer and more supportive environment for all. In the end, our findings continue to underline the importance of school climate and the value of hearing from all members in the community to inform future improvement efforts.

To learn more about how CSEE can help your school assess and improve its climate for learning, visit: www.csee.net/climate/csciassessment or email Darlene Faster at dfaster@csee.net.

CREATING A CLIMATE FOR LEARNING

## dear friends,

**W**elcome back to another exciting school year! We are delighted to bring you this issue of School Climate Matters, which we've packed full of resources, tips, and key research updates designed to help you start the year off with the best framework and supports for your students.

Recent research in the field underscores the importance of promoting positive school climates:

- ASCD Executive Director, Dr. Gene Carter writes about the importance of school climate assessment and improvement in his July 2008 column in *Education Week*. Read the full piece on CSEE's homepage at: www.csee.net.

- The International Journal of Adolescent Medicine and Health recently reported that adolescent bullies face a 14-fold risk of health problems from drugs, alcohol, risky behavior and early death than their victims. Visit www.csee.net to learn how you can reduce bullying in your school.

- A new report issued by the US DOE's Partnerships in Character Education: "State Pilot Projects, 1995–2001, Lessons Learned" highlights the factors that influence effective character education. You can download the full PDF at: http://www.ed.gov/programs/charactered/lessons.pdf

At CSEE, we are committed to providing the services and supports that will help you pinpoint and improve issues that impede upon students' healthy development. In this issue, you will find a feature article on creating supportive rules and norms from CSEE's Education Director, Rhia Hamilton. Terry Pickeral, the Executive Director of the National Center for Learning and Citizenship (NCLC) at the Education Commission of the States (ECS) shares his essential strategies and steps for advancing your school's policy agenda. Finally, you will find a useful article on how to tap critical funding sources to promote your school climate improvement efforts, and key resources for assessing your school's learning environment.

We are building our community as well! Please take a moment to share your experience on creating effective norms and rules in your school community (see page 4 & 5). We will share best practices and lessons learned in the next issue. Thank you for your continued interest and support!

All the best for a positive and productive school year,

*Jonathan Cohen*

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

# promoting safe & civil schools

Cecile Wren,
CSEE Consultant

## Nassau BOCES and CSEE Summer Institute

**T**his July, CSEE partnered with Nassau BOCES and the New York State Student Support Services in co-sponsoring the First Annual Summer Institute in Nassau County, Promoting Safe and Civil Schools. This three day institute was designed to create a framework for positive youth development and student achievement in K-12 education.

The institute provided many opportunities for attendees to translate theory into practice, including participation in workshops on: Creating a Code of Student Conduct, The Bully- Victim-Witness Cycle, Meaningful Stakeholder Involvement, and Planning for Safe, Civil and Supportive Schools. All workshops were highly interactive and included brainstorming, think-pair-share activities, and collegial work groups to create an atmosphere of trust and respect among team members.

Teams of administrators and teachers worked together to create action plans that were customized to meet the needs of their school community and culture. This design allowed school teams to re-examine, re-think and re-align their present practices and procedures to better meet the diverse needs of their particular student populations. As one attendee noted, "The presenters showed how the school, parents, and students as a whole can contribute to a positive learning environment." Another attendee commented, "The sessions were very inspiring and will help with my relationships with my family." Closure was brought to the days' events by having participants reflect on past accomplishments, current strengths, and ways to build bridges to future goals.

Participants are very excited about implementing their action plans and continuing their learning as part of two follow-up days of professional development with CSEE's faculty later in the school year. This will enable administrators and teachers to create a professional network throughout Nassau County and will provide ongoing support for exploring, collaborating, and coordinating programs with professionals throughout their districts as well as with neighboring districts.

# Policy and Practice: Why Educators Need to Care

Terry Pickeral
*Executive Director, NCLC / ECS*



School climate advocates encourage practitioners to establish and sustain environments most conducive to effective teaching and learning. To accomplish this goal, practitioners need to do more than implement the right strategies in their schools. They need to work together to make school climate an essential element of our education system, and this requires a focus on policy.

So how does a practitioner contribute to ensuring policies are developed that encourage, support and reward quality school climates?

1. A clear, succinct statement of the issue or problem you are trying to resolve

2. A set of definitions that concisely define the key terms used in addressing the issue

3. A quick statement of the issue's importance; i.e., why should a policymaker care?

4. A context section, both on the "big picture" surrounding your issue and your specific state policy context

5. A brief overview of research and data that gives focus and concreteness to the issue

6. Links or references to the most relevant Web sites or documents

7. Contact information, i.e., how does a policymaker get in touch with you?

These steps may appear simple and intuitive, but they are critically important to establish a policy agenda and achieve your goal to secure policy support for quality school climates. It is also important to realize that the steps above are the first stage to success and that they are more positively considered when the following conditions are met.

1. Accurate assessment of the problem situation, and the public and political will to address the problem;

2. Recognition and understanding of the issues by a critical mass of the public and policymakers;

3. Committed leadership in the form of an influential person or small group within the state;

4. Appropriate repertoire of policy recommendations geared to the specific social, political and economic context;

5. Strong support from key stakeholder groups for specific policy options;

6. Communication strategy that develops strong public awareness; and

7. Accurate information and frank assessment of policy options and proposals during the policy and implementation process.

To learn more and read a series of recommendations for policymakers, practice leaders, and teacher educators, read the School Climate Challenge (http://www.csee.net/climate/aboutcsee/school_climate_challenge.pdf)

Advancing a policy agenda is a complex task, but necessary to ensure sustainability of quality school climates. Remember that policy is "the process of deciding who gets what, when, where and how." And if we want school climate to be an essential element of school and accountability systems we must ensure there are supportive policies that encourage, support and reward it.

**Terry Pickeral** is the Executive Director of the National Center for Learning and Citizenship (NCLC) at the Education Commission of the States (ECS) and provides leadership in: education policy; state and district leadership to sustain quality citizenship education, school climate and service-learning. Pickeral focuses on state and district policies and their impact on schools and student achievement.
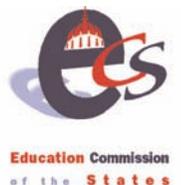
# Establishing Healthy Norms to Build Collaborative Relationships

## Rhia Hamilton, CSEE's Director of Education



At the beginning of each school year, teachers across the nation inform their students of his or her class rules. Some teachers instruct their students to sign contracts developed by the school, district, or teacher pledging them to follow a laundry list of rules. Other teachers strive to democratize the process by infusing social and emotional learning goals into the development of classroom rules. The customs, habits and expectations that govern how groups do things are commonly referred to as group norms. Meaningfully involving students in the process of establishing group norms affirms their sense of belonging, and sends our kids the message that: we care about your goals; your perspective is valuable; and you have a say in what we do here.

I recently experienced the importance of collaborative rule making and the establishment of group norms during a professional development session with adult learners. As part of an opening activity, I invited the adults to consider: what norms would help to optimize your learning and what rules would help to make this learning environment feel safe? After a brief deliberation in their table groups, I invited the adults to share their norms for the whole group to consider. A few of the norms that the adults adopted were:

1. **Begin and end on time**
2. **Bring positive energy**
3. **Agree to disagree**
4. **Follow the agenda**
5. **Validate each other**

A rich discussion ensued when one representative from a small group suggested adding a rule to make eye contact when other workshop participants address the group.

Immediately hands shot up all around the room. One participant responded, "When others speak they have my full attention. I just like to doodle to help my mind stay focused. Just because I am not looking at you doesn't mean that you don't have my full attention." Another staff member added, "I'm a multi-tasker. I am listening attentively to everything that you are saying but I also am attending to my stack of paper work. I do this all the time." Further, he added, "I can look at you but my mind can be a million miles away." Then another workshop participant shared his story about the contradiction in cultural norms. He had one parent who was African American and believed that children show respect by looking directly at elders. In contrast, his Latino parent perceived children's eye contact as impudent and would say, "Don't look at me when I'm speaking to you."

At first, I was in agreement with the group that preferred eye contact. I had noticed a staff member in the back of the room work through a stack of papers during my presentation and felt devalued as a workshop presenter. But hearing his explanation helped me to understand that he did not intend to disrespect me. The group then discussed different cultural norms surrounding eye contact and came to the conclusion that for them, eye contact is more important in a one-on-one setting than in a large group. Near the end of our group discussion, the participant who had suggested the eye contact rule said, "For me, I like direct eye contact because I think that you are listening but you may not be listening. You may be completely zoned out so I think what I really want is for you to actively listen." Based on this awareness, we

## share your experience!

How do you ensure that norms are an effective part of your school community; in the classroom, with parents, or for your faculty?

# 8 Steps for Creating Supportive Rules with Students:

decided to make the core need, to "actively listen." one of our group norms for the session.

My experience facilitating the group norms activity with the adults highlighted the need to meaningfully involve all learners in the establishment of rules. If the adults had just passively accepted my list of rules we would not have explored the different ways that the adults feel respected or their preferences concerning eye contact. Later in the workshop, a pair conversed while the rest of the group was engaged in a question and answer session with another facilitator. One of the workshop participants turned to the noisy pair, and said, "We agreed to actively listen." The pair immediately ended their conversation and I smiled in my heart.

I have learned that an important step in developing a healthy learning community is slowing down my rush to impart content to listen to the perspective of students. Group norms give us permission to help manage our own behavior and hold others in the group accountable to maintaining a healthy learning environment.

**Rhia Hamilton** is the Director of Education for the Center for Social and Emotional Education. She is an experienced high school social studies teacher, curriculum developer, and school leader. Ms. Hamilton is currently an advanced doctoral candidate in School District Leadership at Teachers College, Columbia University from which she received an Ed.M. in Public School Leadership.

1. **Invite students to reflect** on their hopes and dreams for the class. Take time out at the beginning of the school year to give students an opportunity to think about and share their core values for the class.

2. **Invite students to collaboratively brainstorm** rules that meet their collective hopes and dreams. Allow the students to work in groups or as a class to define rules that embody the communal class values.

3. **Frame the rules in the positive.**
Wording the rules in the positive focuses students on the "right" behaviors and, more importantly, helps avoid unintentionally triggering negative behaviors by suggesting what "not" to do.

4. **Condense the list to a few global rules.**
A few key rules can be much more powerful than a host of "do's" or "don'ts." Help the students think through what rules are most important to the classroom culture they want to create.

5. **Celebrate, share, and display the rules.**
Make the rules a centerpiece to the educational environment and honor them with student-created drawings, slogans, or other works that represent each one. Make the collaborative rules a part of your contract with students. Invite students and their families to sign the pledge.

6. **Refer to the rules to hold students accountable.**
Utilize disruptive or positive in-class experiences as teachable moments to reinforce the rules that apply.

7. **Encourage students to hold the community accountable to the rules.**
Provide opportunity for students to hold each other accountable for the rules in respectful ways. You can do this through in-class discussions, hand signals that indicate when a rule is broken, or by infusing SEL-lessons regarding specific rules into a few lessons a month.

8. **Revisit the rules periodically.**
Over time, some rules may become obsolete, while new ones might rise to importance. It is important to revisit the rules occasionally, so that the right ones can be reinforced and others can be revised or deleted when they are no longer useful.

Adapted from Kathryn Brady, Mary Beth Forton, Deborah Porter, & Chip Woods, (2003). *Rules in School*. Greenfield: MA, Northeast Foundation for Children.

**We want to hear from you.** Please send your comments to: newsletter@csee.net.

# resource corner




Support
www.change.org/csee
CSEE Online!

Establishing effective SEL informed group norms is an important foundational cornerstone for healthy and caring school communities. Below are a list of recommended resources you can access to gain more information on research, support material and proven strategies. We welcome your suggestions for addition to this list! Please email us at: **newsletter@csee.net**.

## Articles

**Constructing a Community**
Bafumo, M.E. (2006)
*Teaching Pre K–8* 37 no. 1 10, 12

**Building Classroom Discipline, 7th Edition**
Charles, C. (2002)
Allyn and Bacon, Boston

**Walking the democratic talk: introduction to a special issue on collaborative rule-making as preparation for democratic citizenship**
Effrat, A. and Schimmel, D.M. (2003)
*American Secondary Education* 31 no. 3, 3-15

**Guiding principles for fostering productive disciplinary engagement: explaining an emergent argument in a community of learners classroom**
Engle, R. A. and Conant, F. R. (2002)
*Cognition and Instruction* v. 20 no. 4, 399-483

**Building classroom relationships**
Marzano, R.J. and Marzano, J.S. (2003)
*Educational Leadership* 61 no. 1, 6-70

**Fostering emotional intelligence in the classroom and school:  strategies from the child development project**
Dasho, S. Lewis, C. Watson, M. (2001)

*Caring Clasrooms/Intelligent Schools:
The Social Emotional Education of Young Children*
pp. 87-107, J. Cohen (Ed.)

## Books

***Rules in School***
Kathryn Brady, Mary Beth Forton,
Deborah Porter, & Chip Woods, (2003)
Greenfield: MA, Northeast Foundation for Children

***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**

***School, Family, and Community Partnerships***
Epstein, J. L. (2002)
Corwin Press, Thousand Oaks, CA

## Website

**Responsive Classroom**
Northeast Foundation for Children
71 Montague City Rd.
Greenfield, MA 01301
(800) 360-6332
**www.responsiveclassroom.org**

## your voice matters

**What norms and values do you promote in your classroom?** Tell us which social norms you and your students follow and we'll share  highlights in the next issue! Email your insight to newsletter@csee.net.

## Web Survey
### How are we doing?

We'd love your feedback on our website.
Visit us at **www.csee.net** for a quick survey.

# Supporting Climate Improvement with Government Funds

Applying for government funds can be very time consuming and complicated, but the rewards can make it worth the effort. Below you will find some tips for researching and applying for government funds as well as a list of the most popular government grants to help improve the climate for learning in your school

## Researching federal, state, and local government funding opportunities

**Tip 1:** Check your local and state department of education websites. Most will have a "grants" section that lists upcoming grant opportunities. Smaller city or state departments may even have the contact name of someone in this department.

**Tip 2:** If you can find a contact person, make sure you give him/her a call. Have a list of specific questions to ask about funding. Most importantly, ask if there is an e-list you can get on to receive e-mail alerts for funding opportunities.

**Tip 3:** Ask if the department offers any training sessions for filling out grant proposals. Most states offer training sessions to individual schools applying for entitled funds like Title I under the "No Child Left Behind" Act (NCLB).

## Helpful government websites

1. www.grants.gov: Sign up for e-mail alerts, search open requests for proposals, visit related sites like NCLB.
2. www.k12grants.org/Grants/state.htm: This site will help organize your state funding research.
3. www.ed.gov/news/newsletters/edinfo/index.html: EDInfo provides 1-2 email messages a week describing federal teaching and learning resources and ED funding opportunities. You can subscribe to EDInfo through an online form or by following the directions on their website.

Some of the most popular grants available to support school climate reform at the state and local district level are:

## No Child Left Behind – Entitled funds through the U.S. Dept. of Education

- **Title I:** Local schools and districts apply for Title I grants through their state department of education
- **Title IV Part A – 21st Century Schools** funds efforts and resources to foster a safe and drug-free learning environment that supports student academic achievement
- **Title V – Innovative Programs** support local education reform consistent with state efforts and implementation of promising educational reform and school improvement programs

## Other government grants

- **Teacher Quality Research** grants are available from the US Department of Education and provide national leadership in expanding fundamental knowledge and understanding of education from early childhood education through post-secondary study
- **Safe Schools** – Healthy Students grants support Local Education Agencies in the development of community-wide approaches to creating safe and drug-free schools and to promote safety and discipline
- **Partnerships in Character Education Project Program (CEP)** grants are available from the Character Education Partnership (http://www.character.org) to help support innovative approaches for preparing new teachers to integrate sound character development into their classroom work

*TIP:* Don't be afraid to pick up the phone and ask questions. Generally, federal, state and local program officers are happy to answer your questions.

CSEE often works with schools that are seeking grant support as a lead applicant or collaborator in the proposal, and is committed to providing guidance and resources to help improve your school's climate for learning. You can send any additional questions about your grantwriting efforts by email to: newsletter@csee.net and include "grantwriting" in the subject line.

We will be featuring a grant opportunity in each upcoming issue of *School Climate Matters*. This issue we would like to highlight the **Brown Rudnick Charitable Foundation**. Grants of up to $2,000 each will support small projects that aim to improve inner-city education and is open to individuals involved in inner-city education, such as teachers, principals, or members of parent-teacher organizations, and are located in one of the following cities: Boston, MA; Hartford, CT; New York, NY; or Providence, R.I. Please visit the foundation website for more information at: http://www.brownrudnickcenter.com/foundation/communitygrant.asp.

Center for Social and Emotional Education

# CSEE

**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 develop 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*