BullyBust Launches the NEW Upstander Alliance Resources!

NSCC’s BullyBust campaign provides free supports to schools nationwide to help students and adults take a stand against bullying and create a positive community of upstanders—people who recognize when bullying occurs—and act to make it right. Building off the great success of the “Stand Up to Bullying” WICKED-themed Student Supplement and Educator Guide in 2010, BullyBust is proud to announce a new resource for the 2011-12 school year: the Upstander Alliance, which empowers youth with the tools and resources they need to powerfully engage their peers in the effort to prevent bullying in their schools. By joining the Upstander Alliance, schools will have access to:

- Detailed Toolkits for students and adult moderators on how to start and sustain a successful youth team dedicated to raising awareness and putting an end to bullying for good.
- Guidelines for Team Projects: Each team will be encouraged to create their own student-led initiatives to help address the issue of bullying with their entire community.
- Opportunities to connect with other Aliances across the country to share their stories.
- Messages of support from youth leaders, experts, and celebrities who will encourage teams throughout the school year on the Upstander Central forum.

As part of the Upstander Alliance, BullyBust will be launching an exciting “For Good” video contest sponsored by the hit Broadway show, WICKED to be announced later this fall. Alliance school-based teams will be encouraged to submit their best video showing how they are helping to put an end to bullying for good. The winning school will be awarded with a special visit from select cast members of the show!

“The BullyBust Partner School Program was a huge success!!!! Our kids are now reporting the “Upstanders” of the school instead of the bullies! The reports of bullying have gone down over half of the reports from last year! I am so impressed with this program that I am going into the community with it. The teachers are so happy that we began this program. Thank you!”
—CAROL LITTLE, School Counselor, Weiner, AR

JOIN THE MOVEMENT TODAY!
Register as an Upstander Alliance at: www.bullybust.org/upstander
As we settle into a new school year, NSCC is focused on continuing to provide the concrete, research-based tools you need to help you and your students succeed. From the leading research in the field, we know that school climate is just as critical to true, long-lasting achievement as test scores and academics, and our work is dedicated to helping schools meet the needs of the whole child. In this issue of School Climate Matters, we are thrilled to share some exciting materials to support that goal, and create safer, more supportive, helpfully challenging, and inclusive schools.

Ensuring a strong foundation for school climate reform is the first step toward improvement, and this issue includes a detailed outline of essential supports from Research and Evaluation Specialist, Carol Nixon (p. 4-5). Youth engagement and education reform expert, Terry Pickeral, outlines proactive ways to engage youth as partners in the process of school climate improvement to ensure long-lasting success (p.3). Now is an exciting time for education policy, and this issue continues our On the Hill series (p.6) with National School Climate Council Advisory member, Linda McKay’s up-to-date guidelines on how to influence your congressional leaders to make decisions that matter most to you.

We are also proud to announce the launch of our newest supports as part of our national BullyBust campaign, which provides FREE bully prevention resources to schools nationwide. The Upstander Alliance is BullyBust’s latest resource (p.1), and will support teams of youth working with adult moderators to engage their entire community in an effort to prevent bullying. Schools across the country are seeing the benefits of this work, and we are so excited to share these supports with you. Join the movement today at: www.bullybust.org/upstander.

As always, we want to hear from you. Please share your stories, best practices, challenges, and expertise with us at: newsletter@schoolclimate.org.

Best wishes for a productive, positive, and inspiring fall,

Jonathan Cohen, Ph.D., President and Co-Founder
National School Climate Center

NSCC Invites You to Be A Little WICKED—for Good!

Please join us on November 7, 2011 for an evening of cocktails, delicious hors d’oeuvres, a fabulous silent auction and a private performance from the cast of WICKED. The event will take place from 6:30-8:30 PM at the beautiful Twenty Four Fifth (24 Fifth Avenue at 9th Street).

The silent auction will feature some great items, including: sports tickets, theater tickets, designer merchandise, certificates to the hottest restaurants in NY and amazing trips, including a luxury cruise for 2 along the Mediterranean valued at $20,000!

In honor of our wonderful partnership with WICKED the Musical, a couple of cast mates will be performing one of the big hits from the show—“For Good.”

This is guaranteed to be a terrific and hugely successful event raising both awareness and funds for NSCC. We hope you can join us!

For more information, please contact Alison Dichter at adichter@schoolclimate.org or 212-707-8799 ext. 11.
This year, taking my grandson to school during his first week of first grade allowed me to make the following observations: how excited he was to go to school, to the point of insisting we left the house early; how fast he ran up the stairs to enter the school; and how positively the teachers welcomed him and his fellow students to the school day.

As I think about that school’s climate, its quality and character, I believe the focus on every student being valued ensured that they felt part of something inherently good.

Oh, how I hope my grandson and all students entering first grade this year have similar experiences and feelings throughout their next 12 years of formal schooling.

I believe the members of the Class of 2024 will achieve their aspirations if they experience positive, safe, engaging and inclusive school climates. Aspiration is the strong desire to achieve something high or great; and have we ever seen a first grade student not want to achieve at high levels?

The challenge my grandson and other youth will face is captured by John W. Gardner “The hallmark of our age is the tension between aspirations and sluggish institutions. So how do we assist schools to ensure a school climate that encourages each student to have high aspirations and builds their knowledge, skills and dispositions to achieve them?

My colleague Anderson Williams, Tennessee College Access and Success Network, has developed a Continuum of Youth Involvement that I believe provides direction to schools to create a school climate that encourages the best of every student.

The four-category Continuum of Youth Involvement demonstrates the progression schools can integrate to effectively engage students so that they experience quality opportunities throughout their formal schooling to understand and learn how to participate, give voice, lead and engage to achieve their aspirations.

The following describes the roles and responsibilities for youth across the Continuum of Youth Involvement:

**Participation:** Youth are involved in the “doing” of the activity, but not in the planning, development and reflection.

**Voice:** Youth are part of conversations regarding planning and implementing an idea. Their input is considered, but they may or may not have an official “vote.”

**Leadership:** Youth are involved at all levels of idea or project development and have formal and informal leadership roles in the progress.

**Engagement:** Youth are the primary drivers of the work from conceptualization to implementation and reflection. Youth “own” and understand the work deeply.

We cannot allow our youth to lose their aspirations and excitement for learning; we must create and sustain school climates that understand the Continuum of Youth Involvement and we must ensure schools assist students to be competent to move from participation to engagement throughout their K-12 education.

I am eager to see my grandson run into high school his senior year at the same speed he runs into first grade; and engaging school climate will greatly enhance that expectation.

---

**Practical Ways Adults Can Easily & Effectively Engage Youth:**

**Articulate and believe in the value of youth:** School leaders and teachers accurately share with all stakeholders the value youth bring to the school and how teaching and learning strategies such as service-learning demonstrate their value to the community.

**Build meaningful relationships with others** to advance accessibility, opportunity, and empowerment for the youth community. School leaders, staff and teachers engage students with different abilities in leadership opportunities in the school and the community demonstrating that all students are capable of being leaders.

**Understand how youth communicate & collaborate with each other:** Teachers ask youth to identify the most effective community and collaboration strategies at the beginning of the school year and reflect throughout the year so that these strategies can be implemented, improved and sustained throughout the school’s climate.

**Identify and promote to others the gifts, skills, and assets of every young person:** School leaders, teachers and community members understand and promote the fact that all youth have gifts and skills by focusing on the specific talents youth demonstrate and employing them in their classroom, school and community.

**Assess their own professional development needs** to be best prepared to encourage and support inclusive youth leadership. School leaders and teachers incorporate youth engagement knowledge and skill enhancement into their professional development as they learn content, pedagogy and partnership strategies.

**Take time to celebrate success** in both meaningful and fun ways. Teachers ask students to identify, design and implement celebrations in ways that most effectively express their progress, success and development.
There is an extensive and accumulating body of evidence that school climate and its dimensions have significant influences on key student behavioral and educational outcomes, including attendance, engagement, achievement, behavior, and socio-emotional adjustment (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Cohen & Geier, 2010; Gregory & Weinstein, 2004; Wang & Holcombe, 2010; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). School climate also influences teacher turnover, instructional time and effectiveness, as well as the success of school improvement and reform efforts (Allensworth, Ponisciak, & Mazzeo, 2009; Lindahl, 2006). In fact, Chicago Consortium researchers identified five essential supports for school improvement including a student-centered learning climate, school leadership, parent-community ties, professional capacity of the faculty and staff, and ambitious instruction (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010). They found that elementary schools that demonstrated strengths in these areas were ten times more likely than others to show significant gains in reading and math. Additionally, in an effort to narrow the research to practice gap, a practice guide on dropout prevention disseminated by the U.S. Department of Education recommended that schools intentionally address school climate. Specifically, the guide suggested that schools (1) implement comprehensive interventions to strengthen students’ social, emotional and behavioral skills; and (2) create personalizing learning environments with a positive school climate that increases student engagement and learning (Dynarski et al., 2008). Finally, last year the U.S. Department of Education awarded nearly 40 million dollars to 11 states to measure school climate and intervene in schools demonstrating the greatest needs.

In light of these developments, the need to build capacity in schools to effectively assess and improve school climate has never been greater. It is essential that we document and support schools’ use of best practices. Through our research and evaluation projects in middle and high schools, there appear to be a number of key “essential supports” in effective, “healthy” school climate improvement initiatives.

**Schools need to declare an overarching framework and process at the outset.** Building a plane in mid-flight rarely works. Similarly, schools need to articulate a vision, intended outcomes, and an improvement process at the outset. Too often, without an overarching framework, school personnel and other stakeholders lose sight of the purpose of the school climate survey, especially when already overwhelmed by a plethora of other assessments. One principal observed that through “data dives” her school has a “... history of having some really good discussions but that don’t result in system change” and what is needed is a “deliberate vehicle” for information gathering, decision making, funding, technical assistance, and continuation. It is critical that this overarching framework scaffold the various intervention responses to the schools’ demonstrated needs. Without a framework, programs become “shiny things” but don’t really serve the students in greatest need.

**Everyone is responsible for positive school climate.** The schools we have observed with more effective school improvement efforts involve all stakeholders, including school personnel, students, parents, and community members. While it is important to designate a person as accountable for school climate improvement, some administrators explicitly state that everyone is responsible.
Schools have effectively engaged all teachers through a variety of ways such as using data-driven coaching to curb discipline referrals and improve classroom management as well as establishing advisories engaging all teachers and students. Some schools have found ways to meaningfully engage students after the survey, for example, in further understanding the identified problem (e.g., bullying), implications, and possible solutions. Other schools rely on the structure of advisory to obtain youth voice. We’ve observed that engaging students and parents is often difficult and time consuming; yet, in the long-run, it can pay dividends. One teacher described visiting the homes of all his students in the first two weeks of school. While it was time consuming and often made him uncomfortable, he asserted that it resulted in the best year of his teaching career. Through this practice, he established relationships and trust with parents, which further contributed to increased student engagement. Finally, involving the community is greatly beneficial in promoting student engagement as well as gaining material resources and important services for students, ranging from youth development to mental health services. One principal described her school’s efforts to organize community members and have them volunteer in and around the school. The objective is to develop more positive school-and achievement-oriented norms so that neighbors and community members hold students accountable for achievement in addition to their teachers. Research has demonstrated that an overarching framework that encourages and structures community engagement results in improved student outcomes (Nation et al., 2010).

Leadership is critically important. Given the intense pressure of high stakes accountability, very little happens in schools that is not supported by their principals. We’ve noted that effective school improvement programs exist in schools with principals who explicitly “bless” an intentional focus on school climate. While often these principals exude a whole child, ecological approach to education, they do not need to be, and often are not, experts in school climate reform. Yet, these principals communicate a clear vision and a sense of urgency to do whatever it takes “...to create a sense of hope and mutual respect...” for the students and provide “...an environment that they can count on in order to succeed.” Moreover, principals in schools with successful school climate efforts empower a designated person to lead the effort, engage a broad leadership team, and also hold the broader community collectively responsible for student outcomes.

In sum, recent school reform research has validated the importance of school climate and has called for school climate improvement efforts. Our research suggests that some of the essential ingredients necessary in broader school reform (e.g., Bryk et al., 2010) enable effective school climate improvement. However, we also have observed that schools most often lack the capacity to initiate and sustain effective school climate improvement without professional development and ongoing technical assistance. Thus, our challenge is to embed school climate improvement as a necessary component of overall school reform such that systems have dedicated resources and are held accountable for ensuring positive learning environments.

Carol Nixon, Ph.D. is a Senior Research and Evaluation Specialist at Edvantia, Inc. She has 20 years of experience in applied research and evaluation across diverse education and social services settings. Currently her work focuses on comprehensive school reform; school climate improvement; student social, emotional, and physical health; and science, technology, engineering and math education.
As Congress returns from summer recess it faces a mountain of unfinished business in all areas related to federal spending—especially how to cut the federal deficit! For those of us who care about federal policy and funding that supports creating positive school climates through social, emotional and character development, our advocacy efforts must remain a priority.

At the writing of this article the three key areas of education advocacy efforts are the FY 2012 Appropriations Bill, reauthorization of the Elementary & Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and the work of the newly appointed Congressional Deficit Reduction Panel. Each effort is at a different place, but they all share a need for the public to educate our elected officials on what support for school climate means for our schools, and why it is essential for federal policy and dollars to be approved and allocated.

**Advocacy Steps for Federal 2012 Appropriations Bill**

Congress has yet to finalize the appropriations bill for the 2012 federal budget, which expires on September 30th and determines how much money will be allocated for federal programs. At this point, both the Senate and House have indicated that they will mark up the 2012 Appropriations Bill in September. This step will inform us if funding was allocated for Successful, Safe and Healthy Students and specifically the Safe and Supportive Schools funding. The next step would be for members of the Senate and House Conferencing Committees to meet and come to an agreement on funding amounts, before they can vote on the bill. If one seeks to eliminate funding for a program that the other group has deemed a priority, the process is hampered, which is why your voice on the importance of school climate is so crucial now.

A critical goal to accomplish in the appropriations bill is to maintain funding support for the Successful, Safe and Healthy Students programs, ideally at the administration’s requested level of $365 million. This funding supports the Safe & Supportive Schools grant program, which is the only grant that explicitly focuses on school climate, social/emotional and character development within the guidelines. Most of all, it is critical to keep the line item for this funding in place, since it will be very hard in reauthorization of ESEA to reinstate support for a program area if funding is eliminated this year.

If the Senate has recommended funding for these program areas, contact your elected representatives and thank them for continued support. Ask if there is any further information they need to maintain support through the conferencing process. This is especially true for members of the Senate Appropriations Committee. To find out members of this committee go to www.senate.gov. If it has not been funded, then it is still important to contact your elected representative and ask “How can we change this?” and “What steps do we need to take?”

House of Representative Advocacy Steps would be the same as above. Again, the key is to focus on members of the House Appropriations Committee. To learn who the members are of this committee go to www.house.gov.

For both the Senate and the House state why this funding is critical for the federal government to provide for schools. Always stress how it directly relates to increasing student learning, academic achievement, and skills for effective teaching.

**Advocacy Pointers for Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA) Reauthorization**

At this point the House and Senate are approaching reauthorization of ESEA very differently. The House is considering at least three bills this fall aimed at reworking targeted pieces of ESEA while the Senate is committed to bringing forth one comprehensive bill to consider. To accomplish this, Senator Tom Harkin,(D –Iowa), the chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, and Senator Mike Enzi, (R-WY), the ranking member, have been meeting regularly to consider comprehensive legislation. Key advocacy needed here is to ask your elected officials to support language being included in reauthorization from Senator Harkin’s Bill entitled Successful, Safe and Healthy Students Act of 2011. In addition ask for language to be included that supports states to create and adopt accountability standards and measurements that systematically evaluate staff, student and parent perceptions of school climate. Last but not least ask that states have the flexibility to use their Title I and Title II funds in support of this work if they deem it important.

On the House side requests for reauthorization are at a very different place. To date their main interest has been to propose elimination of specific grant programs and to give states more flexibility in how they spend their federal education money. One proposal has been to eliminate more than 40 programs in the Education Department deemed wasteful or duplicated. Programs proposed to be eliminated that would align with our goals are the Safe
and Drug-Free Schools and Communities State Grants and Character Education. The House rationale for elimination is that these programs duplicate the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program. However, this grant program is only for after school resources and in no way accomplishes support of implementing a school wide process.

What YOU Can Do:

The number one step with House members is to educate them on school districts’ restrictions to spend 21st Century Funding for afterschool resources, which does not overlap with the programs they propose to cut. The second step is to establish justification on why it is essential to have federal support for Successful, Safe and Healthy Students funding, through your experience, stories, and current research.

Deficit Reduction Panel Takes Number One Spot to Watch

A new added challenge to getting things done in congress is waiting on the recommendations of the Deficit Reduction Panel, nicknamed the “supercommittee”. This new congressional panel, comprised of twelve members equally divided between the house and the Senate, was created as part of a deal to raise the federal debt ceiling and is tasked with identifying $1.5 trillion in spending reductions over the next decade. If no deal is reached, however, $1.2 trillion in across-the-board cuts will be triggered beginning in 2013 with the amount being evenly divided across government agencies. The panel’s recommendations, due in November, will no doubt have a dramatic impact on federal spending, including education.

The 64,000 thousand dollar question is will congress proceed with bringing forth a bill to reauthorize ESEA and the FY20-12 Appropriations Bill in the coming months or will nothing be brought forth until the panel makes their recommendation?

The answer is unknown at this point. What is known is people united in advocacy around an issue do make a difference. In the words of anthropologist Margaret Mead:

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

Linda McKay has been a leader in the field of character education for more than 20 years. She has worked with schools, parents, students, businesses and foundations across the country. Until 2009, she served as a senior advisor for character education in the U.S. Dept. of Education’s Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools. There she led efforts to conduct rigorous evaluations of federal grants related to creating positive school climates, social emotional learning and character education in schools. Linda was a founding and current board member of the Character Education Partnership (Washington, DC) and a National School Climate Council Advisory Member. She now works as a national advocate for social and emotional learning and character education in America’s schools.

resource corner

Articles


Websites


Measure Your School Climate:

NSCC offers our Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI), a nationally-recognized school climate survey that provides an in-depth profile of your school community’s particular strengths and needs, so your school can target initiatives where they are needed most. Also announcing, our CSCI Community Scale—The new community-focused survey will aim to recognize the “voice” of community members and leaders and complement the current three versions of the CSCI that look at student, parent/guardian, and school personnel. To learn more about next steps in assessing your school & communities climate please visit: www.schoolclimate.org/programs/csci.php.
NSCC 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, NSCC 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.

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

NSCC’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.

NSCC achieves this through:
- Advocacy and policy
- Measurement and research
- Educational services

TO CONTRIBUTE TO NSCC, PLEASE CONTACT OUR DEVELOPMENT OFFICE:

National School Climate Center
Development Office
545 8th Avenue, #930
New York, NY 10018
Phone: 212-707-8799 ext.11
Fax: 212-957-6616
E-mail: adichter@schoolclimate.org

Visit us on the web!
www.schoolclimate.org