The 15th Annual Summer Institute is an event you won’t want to miss! Each year we bring together educators, district and state leaders, researchers, policy-makers and parents from across the nation to support the development of school climate improvement plans that promote safe, caring and civil schools. During the 3-day event, you will participate in engaging workshops and valuable networking sessions with your peers and your respected strands. The Institute will provide research-based school climate and instructional guidelines, and resources for school teams and individuals to reflect on and enhance their current practice. This year we are excited to announce our optional 4th day post-Institute workshop! Each day will provide you and your team with practical strategies and up-to-date knowledge needed to create a safe and supportive environment for learning.

REGISTER TODAY!
www.schoolclimate.org/programs/si.php
You can also view the full brochure to learn more and hear voices from past events.
Dear Friends,

Our team at NSCC is in the midst of a very busy and exciting Spring focused on important advancements in our school climate work. We are delighted to bring you this latest issue of School Climate Matters, which highlights our biggest projects and shares key resources to help you end this school year on a high note—by turning youth into experts (See Students Taking Ownership on pages 4-5), engaging your community in bully prevention efforts (See Upstanders In Action on page 7), and understanding how you can capitalize on the latest activity in Washington (See On the Hill on page 7).

School climate has increasingly become a more prominent focus of education reform due to the Federal Government’s heightened commitment to promoting the non-academic aspects of school life that are just as critical to ensuring our students’ success as reading, math, and science. NSCC has been at the forefront of this conversation since our inception and we are deeply inspired by the efforts now being undertaken by schools, districts and States across the nation to make school climate improvement the priority it deserves to be. In our Research in Action piece below, we note the latest on our exciting Federally-funded Safe and Supportive Schools project with the State of Iowa, and on page 3, we highlight our ongoing collaboration with a network of schools in Queens, NY funded by the NYC Department of Education. These projects bring to light the core, unique supports NSCC provides to schools and districts nationwide in order to create the safest and most supportive environments for our children and the adults who help them achieve.

We are especially enthused to announce that registration is now open for our 15th Annual Summer Institute, which brings together educators, researchers, policy-makers, and community members from across the country for a three-day, intensive training on the latest school climate news and resources. Please visit www.schoolclimate.org/si today to learn more about this exceptional opportunity and reserve your space. We look forward to learning with you this summer in NYC!

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

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

NSCC Continues Federally-Funded Partnership with Iowa State

By Darlene Faster, Chief Operating Officer, Director of Communications at The National School Climate Center

Now in its second year, NSCC is thrilled to be partnering with the Iowa Department of Education on the Safe and Supportive Schools Project, which provides 11 states with federal assistance to support the development of rigorous measurement systems. This is an impressive and ambitious project that utilizes NSCC’s long-standing, effective work in the area of school climate reform to address this critical issue at the state-level.

Last year, 60 Iowa high schools were invited to participate in this landmark four-year project, and 47 schools accepted the opportunity. Working with the leadership team and key stakeholder representatives at the state, NSCC administered the survey last spring to all participating schools, and worked collaboratively to determine the Index Score that defines the overall conditions for learning at each school. This Index will be used to determine the level of intervention and support needed to ensure all of Iowa’s schools are moving toward optimal conditions for learning each year. In the fall of 2011, NSCC worked with the Iowa team to provide 47 schools with comprehensive, customized reports outlining their core findings from the data. School-level leadership teams have been working with these reports to define their particular strengths and needs, and shape their plans for improvement. This spring, NSCC continued the exciting work with Iowa to develop and implement a new valid and reliable school climate assessment tool—the Iowa Youth Survey: Conditions for Learning—to students, parents, and staff at core funded sites. Reports will be provided to all participating schools before the end of this school year, and will enable sites to build on their current action plans with two years’ worth of extensive findings.

NSCC is honored to be part of this significant effort to make school climate a clear priority within our education system, and looks forward to continuing this important partnership role in shaping the systems and supports that will be most valuable to the Iowa State Department of Education and its school communities.
It is an honor and a privilege to enter our third and final year collaborating with a cluster of five NYCDOE schools in Queens, New York. Throughout the course of the School Climate Improvement Project (SCIP), we were able to build sustainable systems that will carry on long into ensuing years. With a keen eye towards training “teacher leaders”, each of the schools is poised to carry on with the five stage school climate improvement model and train others in the school to join in these vitally important efforts.

This year, we are primarily focused on two very important endeavors. Firstly, we are implementing a five part faculty training series to highlight the important aspects of school climate improvement on a practical level. And, secondly, we are committed to promoting student voice by creating a student-led Upstander Alliance in each of the five schools. Both projects are progressing well at all five schools.

The faculty training series is extremely hands-on and provides teachers with real tools to start using right away in their classroom. This 5-session training series is designed to:

- offer practical and ready-to-use techniques for classroom instruction that reflects best practices of school climate improvement efforts.
- provide a sustainable model for continuous improvement over time in a classroom and in a school community.
- train lead teachers in techniques and strategies to “turnkey” school climate improvement efforts to the other members of the staff and faculty.
- harness the power of students and engage them in school climate improvement efforts.
- offer strategies and systems for effective and democratic classroom management and school-wide discipline procedures that reflect school climate improvement efforts.
- heighten awareness concerning equity issues as they pertain to the allocation of resources, power/privilege dynamics, staff collaboration and parental involvement.
- introduce the notion of professional learning communities to enhance systemic change that can last over time.

Each participant has agreed to take part as active learners and active teachers as well in this process.

Each of the five sessions will be designed to offer consistently practical and readily “usable” materials and resources. Most of the sessions involve experiential learning, high levels of participation and substantial amounts of group work. There are suggested readings and resources shared well in advance of each session. Additionally, there are detailed learning objectives and agendas for each session. The general themes and content of each session is as follows:

**I. Session One:** School Climate 101

**II. Session Two:** The Fundamentals of Classroom Preparation and Classroom Management With a Focus on School Climate Improvement.

**III. Session Three:** Classroom Level and School Level Interventions (Part 2) to Foster School Climate Improvement.

**IV. Session Four:** Student Engagement, Student Leadership & Service Learning

**V. Session Five:** Looking Ahead: Systemic Change for Long-Lasting Effects & Starting the Process Anew.

It is our hope that the SCIP Model that was so very successful in Queens can be implemented in other areas as well.

Richard Cardillo is the Education Director of the NSCC. Rich has over two decades of experience as a classroom teacher, rural community organizer, public spokesperson, founder and administrator for social emotional learning/character education programs, senior member of community-based organizations, fundraiser, college teacher in Perú and developer of community service learning programs. He is a native of New York, fluent in both Spanish and American Sign Language, and brings an entrepreneurial spirit and vision to his work. He is the past New York Regional Director of Peace Games, Director of Client Services at God’s Love We Deliver in New York and has been a classroom teacher in elementary, middle and high school. Richard received his Masters Degree from Columbia University.
What does it take to get really good at something?” Talking seriously with young people about that fundamental question can transform how we all—teachers, school leaders, and students themselves—think about school. That’s because the question is really about youth taking ownership of their own learning. And the dialogue that results unlocks the door to student motivation and engagement with challenging work.

For the book *Fires in the Mind*, a project of the nonprofit organization What Kids Can Do (WKCD), I started by asking over 200 teenagers to tell me about things that they were already very good at. (Everyone had something, typically from life outside of school.) I asked the kids to describe how they developed those strengths—whether it was playing guitar, making videos, or taking care of family responsibilities.

Together, we analyzed their stories of “getting good.” How did they first get interested? What kept them going when things got hard? Who did they look up to, and ask for help? From their answers, we began to derive a common language about what the path to excellence demanded, no matter what the field. As these youth talked about their collaboration, critique, revision, and persistence, for example, we found those same qualities described by scientific researchers into the development of expertise. (See sidebar: “The Habits of Experts”)

**Finding the Balance**

That conversation changed the balance between the adults and the youth in the room. By creating a mutual understanding and respect for real accomplishment, it put us all on the same playing field, as fellow learners. And while that shift may feel risky at times, it can serve schools very well. It supports our working together across various roles, to identify what conditions help students engage as willingly with school subjects as they do in the pursuits they choose outside school.

For example, a culture of curiosity and exploration and choice can support young people as they risk making mistakes in the interest of stretching themselves to do or understand something. Likewise, by differentiating tasks to match each student’s reach, teachers greatly increase the learner’s willingness to try. Instead of being rushed along to “cover” the next thing, kids receive the time and support to get good at what they’re doing.

Many of the conditions that underlie student engagement involve listening to young people themselves, and coming to know more about their individual strengths and struggles. This might mean building regular time into the school schedule for students to check in with an adult adviser. Or it could involve a curricular norm that has students routinely reflect on the work they are doing and plan for their next steps.

**Connecting Across the Roles**

Steps like these involve people who play any number of roles: administrators, teachers, students, families, community members, educational researchers, policymakers. Each part affects the success of the whole—yet so often our signals get crossed. What would it take to bring the players together across the barriers that separate us?

In my work at WKCD this past year, I’ve sought to clarify and synthesize three key bodies of information on the issue of student engagement:

1) what we hear from young people,
2) what we hear from teachers, and
3) what we hear from researchers into the science of learning.

By fostering an ongoing dialogue across those roles, our “Fires in the Mind project” came up with a language that meant something to us all. We could begin to describe the conditions in which students engage with challenges that matter, believe they can succeed at them, and stick with it until they do. (See sidebar: “The 12 Building Blocks of Motivation and Mastery”)

---

**Students Taking Ownership of Challenge: A Common Language Toward a Common Goal**

By Kathleen Cushman
Putting those conditions in place presents an equal challenge for adults and for students. But once we can receive each other’s signals, we all feel the satisfaction of making progress toward a common goal. Drawing youth, educators, and researchers together in this way reconnects the work of school with the curiosity, companionship, eagerness, and satisfaction of exploring the world as kids do outside of school. It puts us on the same team—with an equal stake in making it the strongest team we can.

Kathleen Cushman is an educator and writer who has specialized in the lives and learning of youth for over two decades. In 2001 she co-founded What Kids Can Do (WKCD) with Barbara Cervone. Her work there has resulted in nine book collaborations with students, most recently Fires in the Mind: What Kids Can Tell Us About Motivation and Mastery (Jossey-Bass, 2010). On a WKCD blog of the same name, she facilitates a national conversation about adolescent motivation and mastery, and she regularly consults and presents on that topic to groups of educators around the country.

12 Building Blocks of Motivation & Mastery

What do students need in order to want to take on a challenging task? What helps them stick with a learning challenge until they master it? WKCD’s collaborative Fires in the Mind project drew on input from teachers, students, and learning scientists to identify the following elements that support the work of learning.

- A reason to care
- Fun, play, surprise
- A culture of curiosity
- A positive environment for risk-taking
- Exploring ideas from different angles
- Manageable challenges
- Ways to learn from each other
- Guided practice
- Timely reinforcement
- Teaching others what you know
- A chance to reflect
- A plan for next steps

Copyright © 2012 by What Kids Can Do, Inc.

The Habits of Experts

In the Practice Project that led to Fires in the Mind, students compared their own process of “getting good at something” to that of highly accomplished adults they interviewed. Across the board, they concluded, the following habits show up in the “expert process”:

- Experts ask good questions.
- Experts break problems into parts.
- Experts look for patterns.
- Experts rely on evidence.
- Experts consider other perspectives.
- Experts follow hunches.
- Experts use familiar ideas in new ways.
- Experts collaborate.
- Experts welcome critique.
- Experts revise repeatedly.
- Experts persist.
- Experts seek out new challenges.
- Experts know their own best work styles.

Advocacy for Spring 2012: Think Outside the Box
By Linda McCay

As spring arrives in the Capitol consistent news on the education front is the Senate and House continue to struggle with joining together to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and it looks very unlikely this will happen this year. Also consistent from the House and the Senate is the message for the federal government to return decision-making authority back to the state and local education officials, take away burdensome requirements, let states and local districts decide how they should spend their federal dollars.

Along with this is the need and strong support to reduce the federal budget. This makes the funding of new programs almost impossible. This makes advocacy for specific programs areas such as social, emotional and character development and or improving school culture much more challenging. Especially having funding specifically allocated for these program areas. But this does not mean one should not try to find a way to accomplish this. In fact sometimes thinking in new ways about support can bring more effective ways than before. As we approach the spring session for the 112th Congress I think there are some opportunities that support this thinking to learn about and advocate for.

One the Senate side there is the Successful, Safe & Healthy Students Act of 2011 (S-919)
The purpose of this bill is to authorize grant programs to states to develop and implement comprehensive programs and strategies that foster positive conditions for learning. Although the language of the bill does not specifically reference improving school climate it does state prevention of violence and harassment and promotion of safe and supportive schools. The definition for positive conditions for learning has specific language related to social, emotional and character development.

On the House side a bill has been introduced to amend ESEA entitled Positive Behavior for Safe & Effective Schools (HR 3165). The purpose of this bill is to allow State education agencies, local education agencies and schools to increase implementation of school-wide positive behavior supports. The bill does not specify a specific program but a process. Specific language related to the importance of school climate can be found in Section 5: Teacher & Principal Preparation to Improve School Climate

In both of these examples they are not bills that have School Climate in their title. Yet in my opinion the only way to meet the proposed requirements would be to developed and implement a process to create a positive school climate based on clear interventions and assessment.

Even though ESEA might not be reauthorized this year the time is now to work with elected official’s offices to insure language related to school climate, social emotional and character developed is included—where ever a place can be found—in the bill. This means for those of us who care about advocating for federal support in these areas we need to:

- Take time to read and understand the two examples of proposed legislation in this article
- Call elected officials to see if they know about them and support these bills. In the end members of the House and Senate have to agree on the same language and funding support.
- Be ready with real life examples and results from schools to support the importance and in turn give them justification to support.
- Ask how to work with staff to maintain inclusion of language in ESEA in support of improving school climate, social emotional and character development.
- Find out if there are other bills they know of that might have or could include language in support of the importance. In other words challenge them to join with you to think outside the box of ways for support connected to the priorities that will be funded like teacher effectiveness, teacher and principal preparation, or effective school reform.

There is no doubt the time involved could be intensive, the road sometimes not quite as clear but if you succeed the end result so important for the students and educators in our schools.

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. From 2003 through 2009, she served as a senior advisor for character education in the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools. There she led the Department’s 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.
BullyBust: Promoting a Community of Upstanders

As you all know, our BullyBust 2012 campaign is in full swing! This year we launched our Upstander Alliance student and moderator tool kits, which are being used by over 1600 partner schools. This is the first year BullyBust has reached out directly to youth to empower them in the effort to prevent harmful harassment, teasing, bullying, and cyber-bullying across our schools today. We already know that students can positively change the way we communicate with the right tools and supports. Through the Alliance, team members have had access to detailed resources for creating and sustaining their group. Through our Upstander Central each team has had opportunity to connect with artists, such as the actors of the Broadway musical WICKED, experts, and BullyBust’s youth ambassadors who are making a difference. Students will also be able to share their experiences with other alliance teams across the country.

We are thrilled to announce that BullyBust has partnered up with the Broadway musical WICKED again! Last year’s “Defying Gravity” essay contest was a HUGE success. WICKED and BullyBust were honored to invite the entire 7th grade class of Natalie Dahl (a finalist) to see WICKED on Broadway and participate in a bully prevention workshop presented by Wicked. This year, WICKED and BullyBust could be coming to your school! On January 1st 2012 we launched our “For Good” video contest, which inspires youth to use the internet and technology For Good. The objective of this activity is for students to create a powerful message about how they are working with their entire school community to make a difference and take a stand to bullying. We are empowering youth to become part of the Upstander Movement nationwide, and show how their community is standing strong against bullying . . . for good! We already have some great submissions, and there are many more to come. The deadline for submissions is April 6th, 2012, so check out our supports on the For Good Video Contest page (add hyperlink) and get involved! The winning school will not only receive a $500.00 grant from BullyBust to support the continuation of their Upstander Alliance efforts, but also a special visit from select cast members of WICKED and other exciting prizes! The winning school’s video will be showcased on BullyBust.org, WickedtheMusical.com, Facebook Safety, SchoolTube.com, and in linked publications as well as through all organizations’ social networking platforms.

BullyBust is looking forward to announcing the winners of the “For Good” video contest in April 2012. Please check out www.bullybust.org/upstander to see how you and your school can create an Upstander Alliance in your community!

Resource Corner

Books

Kathleen Cushman, Fires in the Mind Jossey-Bass, 2010

Websites

Fires In the Mind: What Kids Can Tell Us About Motivation and Mastery
www.firesinthemind.org

Starting with the things they already knew and could do well, the young contributors to Fires in the Mind analyzed the process that all learners go through when they take up new things and work toward mastery.

What Kids Can Do
www.whatkidscando.org

A national nonprofit focusing on the power of what young people can accomplish when given the opportunities and supports they need.

Successful, Safe, and Healthy Students Act of 2011 (S.919)
www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/112/s919

A bill to authorize grant programs to ensure successful, safe, and healthy students.

Youth on Board
www.youthonboard.org

Delivers direct programming, plays an active role in local, regional, and national policy debates related to youth voice in decision making.

The Forum for Youth Investment
www.forumfyi.org

A nonprofit, nonpartisan “action tank” dedicated to helping communities and the nation make sure all young people are “Ready by 21”: ready for college, work and life.

NSCC’s School Climate Improvement Plan (SCIP) Model

SCIP is grounded in a five-stage improvement process. The SCIP Model focuses on training and resources on infusing school climate improvement as well as social, emotional and civic learning practices into already existing frameworks to better guarantee sustainability and continuity. For more information regarding the launch of SCIP contact rcardillo@schoolclimate.org.

Measuring Your School Climate with the CSCI NEW! “COMMUNITY SCALE”

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 you can target initiatives where they are needed most. For more details, visit www.schoolclimate.org/programs/csci.php. NSCC is proud to announce its newest addition to its school climate survey, the Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI). 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. To learn more about this exciting new scale, please contact nrudewicz@schoolclimate.org.
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