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in brief
Character Education Partnership’s 19th Annual Conference, D.C., November 1-4
NSCC’s President, Jonathan Cohen, will present multiple workshops on school climate reform at CEP’s Conference in D.C., including a presentation on comprehensive bully prevention. Learn more and sign up at www.character.org/conference.

NSCC to present at the 9th Annual IBPA Conference, Kansas City, November 4-6th
NSCC’s COO, Darlene Faster, will be presenting a workshop on translating bullying prevention and school climate policy into practice at this year’s International Bully Prevention Conference in Kansas City. This event brings together leaders across the globe to address this critical issue. Learn more and register at www.stopbullyingworld.org.

Bully Prevention Workshop at College of New Rochelle, October 9th in NY
NSCC’s Director of Education, Richard Cardillo, will present “Developing Empathy among Witnesses to Bullying: Turning Bystanders into Upstanders,” an interactive workshop for students, parents, educators, administrators, and community members from 7-8:30pm.
For more information, contact Dr. Amy Meyers: (914) 654-5853, ameyers@cnr.edu.

Latest Research on School Climate Improvement in Queens, NY

In 2009-10, NSCC entered into a three-year partnership with the NYC Department of Education-Office of School & Youth Development (OSYD) to implement a School Climate Improvement Project with a cluster of schools in Queens, NY. The project began with seven elementary/middle schools, and continued with four schools in the 2011-12 academic year. The aims of the project were to: i) Comprehensively assess school climate; ii) Engage the school community in identifying their unique strengths and needs; iii) Provide strategies, resources, and support to assist educators in the improvement process, and; iv) Evaluate the process and outcomes of the intervention as well as identify areas for continued growth.

NSCC’s Education Director, Richard Cardillo and staff worked closely with schools to design a program that would be a model for whole school improvement with a focus on school climate. Key activities to support this model included: professional development training, coaching, and onsite support, and consultation for all staff. In addition, peer mediation was offered to a number of students participating in the project. Researchers from NSCC and Fordham University evaluated the effectiveness of NSCC’s program efforts, and analyzed data from pre and post teacher and student surveys, classroom observations and semi-structured interviews, drawing the following conclusions:

1. In a very short period of time, results indicated that there was improvement in school climate at all schools due to NSCC’s school climate efforts.
2. In general, principals (or administrative staff) and teachers reported positive improvements in their schools, and expressed interest in more sustained work with NSCC.
3. Teachers and staff expressed a desire to increase engagement at the administrative level to better implement school climate practices, while students attributed the climate of their school to be dependent on teacher behaviors.
4. Results indicated a positive improvement in attendance rates and student performance during the time period this study was conducted.

The report highlights a series of recommendations to increase and improve school climate measures, including:

1. Whole School Improvement: In order for program intervention to be successful, it is necessary that all members of the school community, including teachers, students, parents, administrators be involved as active participants and agents.
2. Co-Training for Administrators and Teachers: It is recommended that professional development sessions target both teachers and administrators simultaneously, which would have the potential to improve communication and build trust between administrators and teachers.
3. Long-Term and Sustainable Programming: While short-term interventions on school climate initiatives are essential to the foundation for school climate reform, more long-term and sustainable funding and programming are necessary to achieve long-term and permanent change.
4. Creation of Peer Networks of Schools: It is recommended that future efforts consider the creation of school networks to share best practices and provide a forum to discuss challenges openly and honestly.
5. Student-Centered Initiatives: One of the key goals of NSCC’s efforts involves the notion of student-centered initiatives which harness the power of students, and fully engage them in school climate improvement efforts to build capacity and sustain reform efforts.
6. Parental Engagement: NSCC’s program intervention actively promotes the use of effective mechanisms that engage parents in addressing school climate issues, and their child’s learning and development.

For more information on this evaluation study, contact: athapa@schoolclimate.org.
As a new school year begins, we know how important it is to set the tone for positive school climate through our interactions at the individual, classroom, and community level. This issue of School Climate Matters focuses on a critical aspect of school climate success: cultivating respect for diversity, and being living examples of respect and inclusion each day. It is our charge as educators who support student development to be models of the types of behavior we want our youth to embody.

In our lead article (pages 4-5), veteran educators Linda and Steven Brion-Meisels share essential tips on how to cultivate a community focused on positive school climate through a celebration of diversity. On page 3, we are delighted to announce the growth of our BullyBust Upstander Alliance supports to aid schools in creating communities where bullying is no longer tolerated, and we all are socially responsible for how others are treated. Join the movement, and access a host of free resources to support your prevention efforts at: www.bullybust.org/upstander. Youth leader and StuVoice creator, Clem Coulston, shares concrete ways to effectively engage youth in improvement efforts (page 6) based on his work with Special Olympics Project UNIFY and others over the years. We are delighted to have Congressman Bobby Scott’s perspective on the Youth PROMISE Act for this issue’s On the Hill feature (page 7). As always, we share the latest in school climate research and improvement, and highlight success stories from schools across the country.

We want to hear from you! Please share your stories, feedback, and ideas with us at newsletter@schoolclimate.org. This is your resource, and we value your input on how we can make it most useful for you.

Best wishes,

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

NSCC’s 2012 School Climate Research Summary Released

The School Climate Research Summary: August 2012 is the third issue of the School Climate Brief series published by NSCC. It is a comprehensive review of literature in the field of school climate research, which includes 194 citations representing the latest experimental, correlational, and descriptive studies. To access this important resource, visit www.schoolclimate.org/briefs.

Save the Date! Join us for NSCC’s Benefit: Share! Create! Unite! on October 22nd in NYC!

NSC’s annual fundraising event will take place at Midtown Lofts (267 5th Ave, New York, NY) on October 22, 2012. The evening will kick off with cocktails, hors d’oeuvres, a silent auction and an inspirational talk by Lee Hirsch, Director of the documentary “Bully”. Later in the evening, DJ Mikey Palms, co-owner of the groundbreaking Brooklyn music club, Southpaw, and host of the popular Chances with Wolves radio show, brings his larger-than-life personality and eclectic musical taste to treat the ears, and move the feet of those lucky enough to be within earshot. General admission tickets are $250 and tickets for the dance party only, beginning at 9pm, are only $60! To buy tickets, go to our website schoolclimate.org or contact Amy Berg (Aberg@schoolclimate.org or 212-707-8799) for more information.
In honor of National Bullying Prevention Month, NSCC invites schools nationwide to join our national movement by becoming an Upstander Alliance Partner School (www.bullybust.org) through our BullyBust campaign.

Upstander Alliances support youth and adults working together as partners to create communities of upstanders, who actively prevent bullying, recognize when mean or cruel behavior is taking place, and safely act to make it right. More than 2000 schools across the country have become part of our network, and are utilizing the free resources, activities, and tools available on our site to create more positive school climates.

**Spotlight on Howard County:**
This fall, Howard County School Board Member Brian Meshkin and his wife, Catherine, have joined with Yahoo!, the National School Climate Center, and others to launch One-Howard-County: a new initiative aimed at reducing cyberbullying and avoiding other digital dangers among youth and adults in the community. As part of this initiative, all of the middle and high schools in the district are creating Upstander Alliances, to inspire upstanders against cyberbullying and other digital dangers among youth and adults. BullyBust is honored to be part of this important initiative, and looks forward to celebrating the great work this district accomplishes! You can learn more about One Howard County at www.brianmeshkin.com/one-howard-county.

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**NSCC would like to extend a special thanks to our partners:**

**WICKED THE BROADWAY MUSICAL**
A long-standing partner of the BullyBust campaign, WICKED’s message of standing up for what is right and understanding the meaning of true friendships continues to inspire fans around the globe. Schools can use the “Stand Up to Bullying” Student and Educator guides on the site to deepen their bully prevention efforts. These toolkits mix the powerful themes from the show with real-world examples in the news to help students and adults raise awareness and prevent bullying. Access them at www.bullybust.org/partner. And get your WICKED-designed, limited-edition DEFY GRAVITY pin to raise awareness for the cause. For every pin sold, BullyBust receives $2.00. Visit www.wickedthemusicalstore.com and search “BullyBust”.

**ARTIST MIKE TOMPKINS**
An incredible artist, Mike Tompkin’s has become a sensation for creating unique A Capella music. His cover of Katy Perry’s “Teenage Dream”/Bruno Mars “Just The Way You Are” shot to over 2 million views in under a month. As a victim of bullying himself through elementary school, Mike is a true advocate for BullyBust’s efforts to provide education to kids and parents on how to deal effectively with harmful teasing and harassment. Last spring, Mike wrote and self-produced the song “Stand Up” to empower young people to overcome challenges tied with bullying. BullyBust receives 100% of the proceeds for every iTunes download of this powerful song. You can learn more about Mike and join his network at www.mike-tompkins.com.

**SATYA JEWELRY**
Satya Jewelry is more than just an accessories line; it’s jewelry with meaning. Each and every piece is created to empower and inspire the wearer with sacred symbols and semiprecious stones. A portion of every sale is donated to The Satya Foundation, which has raised over $1 million for children’s charities throughout the world. Get your limited-edition “For Good” necklace, and 50% of the proceeds will go to BullyBust. Visit www.satayajewelry.com and search “BullyBust”.

Get started by creating an Upstander Alliance Team at your school today!
Find free tools to help with this effort at www.bullybust.org/upstander

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Communities Working Together to End Bullying!

TOGETHER, WE ARE STANDING STRONG AGAINST BULLYING . . . . FOR GOOD!
Diversity is a resource and responsibility. Our classrooms are full of diversity, though much of it is hidden, and high-stakes testing often steals time and attention from the resources that are right in front of us. Our students’ identities offer the potential to broaden perspectives, connect with the world in new ways, learn new languages and customs, share and welcome stories, strengthen geography skills, respect human rights, and learn to live well in a complex, interdependent world. Welcoming, supporting and celebrating diversity are also core responsibilities for educators in the 21st century—though many of us are under-prepared to do this well.

We often pay attention to external markers, but hidden diversities are also resources and challenges and we need to include them: gender identity, family constellations, social class, social-psychological challenges, intellectual abilities, even histories of pain, loss or abuse. These diverse experiences contribute to our students’ identities, and they often are sources of courage and resilience. Though some hidden diversities bring pain and must be handled gently, they also bring strength and deserve celebration.

Diversity is a challenge and an opportunity. Diverse classrooms create conflict, but conflict can help us learn. Language, cultural norms and practices, stereotypes, racism, classism, homophobia, anti-immigrant fears and the universal desire to be part of the in-crowd can all make classroom life more complex and challenging. In a competitive culture that emphasizes “better than” as a measure of success, everything from skin tone to food preferences to clothes can become competitive markers. But these challenges, connected to differences, are opportunities—to teach and use conflict resolution and transformation skills, strengthen empathy, explore the hidden harm done by this kind of competition, heal and strengthen the community, and improve school climate. One way to frame our work on bully-prevention and other classroom problems is to explore the ways in which diversity has been an excuse for exclusion, and at the same time is the key to changing destructive patterns. What follows are some ideas to help build community so we can welcome, support and celebrate diversity.

Start with the self and appreciate others. Welcoming diversity means welcoming our own color, culture, class and character into the classroom context. Then we can welcome others, in a real and authentic way. Building a diverse community means welcoming the identities of our students and their fami-
lies. It means understanding our own identities in relationship to our communities and the world in general; seeing ourselves as resources rather than deficits, so we can appreciate what others contribute; and confronting institutional barriers that prevent individuals from celebrating self.

**Beyond the pot luck: change systems.** Although multicultural events are a good start, and important rituals, they are not enough—especially for older students. Supporting diversity means changing our structures as well as our snacks, seeing families as resources rather than problems, building diversity into every aspect of our content and pedagogy, sharing power, and opening our own minds and hearts. Some districts have made real progress in this area; for example, the Cambridge Public Schools has a Welcoming Diversity office that works with health educators to promote these approaches and programs. What we measure often shapes school climate, so one challenge is to find ways to measure diversity—and our efforts to support it.

**Integrate classroom activities.** We build community through democratic, inclusionary and power-sharing strategies. Depending on our students’ age/grade, strategies can include cultural sharing, morning circles, classroom meetings, cooperative discipline, restorative justice, peer mediation, cooperative games, peacemaking corners, and the inclusion of families as teachers. Curricula can help: lessons on diversity, cooperation and peacemaking can be supplements to integrated curricula in English Language Arts, social studies, science, math, the arts and community service learning. Children’s and young adult books (many with accompanying classroom lessons) are important resources; for older students, current events and history provide powerful opportunities to explore the promise and challenge of diversity in areas like race, gender identity, immigration, special education and human rights. Finally, discipline policies and strategies can support diversity—by supporting “Upstanders” who will stand up to exclusionary behavior, and by using discipline as an opportunity to teach rather than punish.

**Find and work with allies.** Changing systems means that we need allies, because we can’t do this alone: colleagues to support and challenge us, administrators who model and extend this work into the school’s climate, family and community members who bring in new resources. Seeking and supporting allies extends the circle of diversity. But at the center of these circles are our students; they teach us how to embrace diversity, and our calling is to work with them to build safe, healthy and inclusive communities.

*Linda and Steven Brion Meisels* have worked in schools for more than 40 years as teachers, administrators, university faculty, trainers and evaluators. They are founding members of the Center for Peaceable Schools and Communities; they have written jointly, taught and led courses and training programs at Lesley University, American University, Los Andes University (in Colombia) and through Seeds of Peace in the West Bank area of Israel/Palestine. They see their joint work as a contribution to creating a peaceable and equitable future for all children—including their daughters and grand-daughter.

These ideas come from our colleagues, Patti DeRosa and Ulric Johnson (*The 10 C’s: A Model of Diversity Awareness and Social Change*, The Brown Papers, VI:5, spring 2002), who define “color” as those aspects of our identity that we can’t change – including skin tone, eye color, height, body type, etc. See also DeRosa,”Diversity Training: In Search of Anti-Racism” in Peacework, April 1994; Brion-Meisels, Brion-Meisels and Hoffman, “Creating and Sustaining Peaceable School Communities,” Harvard Educational Review, 77:3, Fall, 2007.

Our students’ identities offer the potential to broaden perspectives, connect with the world in new ways, learn new languages and customs, share and welcome stories, strengthen geography skills, respect human rights, and learn to live well in a complex, interdependent world.

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**share your voice**

We want to hear from YOU! Share your best practices with us at newsletter@schoolclimate.org and we’ll include your feedback in an upcoming issue of *School Climate Matters*.
Making Student Voice Count

By Clement Coulston, StuVoice Organizer and Youth Leader for Social Justice

Take a minute to consider the following three questions:

1. In your opinion, what makes for a great education?
2. What is diversity and how do you see it in schools?
3. What teaching characteristics are most conducive to learning?

From those questions, you may have reflected on some of your own personal experiences, or you could have thought of ideas colleagues have shared with you. I would like to now ask, Did you consider asking students these questions?

As a reader, who may be a student, teacher, educational professional, parent or a community member; we all have a common goal of educating, empowering and engaging students to be not the leaders of tomorrow, but of today. Through this vision, which can come in many ways, there is one missing link. That is, the Student Voice.

The questions listed in the first paragraph were some of the many bi-weekly topics students throughout the world discussed through Social Media like Twitter.

These conversations are are the foundation for ensuring student voice is heard, valued, and included in addressing the educational challenges we face every day. This foundation has been supported by an over-arching belief in school climate, where all members of the school community co-create environments of respect for diversity and support for exploration.

Students want to be heard. Students desire to be agents of change. Let’s work together as co-equals in developing positive school climate!

Student Voice is a movement for students, by students, connecting the organizers of tomorrow, giving them a voice today. Check out stuvoice.org to read blog posts, learn about past Twitter Chats and participate in future initiatives! Join us on Twitter Every Monday at 8:30 PM EDT using the hash-tag #StuVoice.
A merica has become a reactive nation. For example, prior to the passage of the Affordable Care Act, we did not offer health care, we provided sick care. The same is true for how we approach juvenile crime prevention. Instead of offering prevention and early intervention programs for at-risk youth, we wait for them to make a mistake and then provide them a one-way passage into the juvenile justice system while elected officials use simpleminded rhetoric to debate just how draconian their penalties should be.

The U.S. currently locks up a higher proportion of its population than any other country by far, a rate the Pew Center on the States has concluded is counterproductive and wastes taxpayer money. This is the wrong way to go about raising our next generation. There are better alternatives—proactive, evidence-based and cost-effective strategies. We need to invest in a comprehensive approach that will help youth get and stay on the right track to success in order to break what experts at the Children’s Defense Fund are calling the “Cradle to Prison Pipeline” and instead create a “Cradle to College and Career Pipeline.”

One essential element to this comprehensive approach must be positive school discipline policies. Evidence shows that successful schools utilize evidence-based and scientifically valid practices for improving behavior and creating a school climate that is more conducive to learning such as school-wide positive behavior supports.

Another essential element of this comprehensive approach must be the use of evidence-based early prevention and intervention programs—such as teen pregnancy prevention, pre-natal care, new parent training, nurse home visits, Head Start and other early childhood education programs, quality education, after-school programs, tutoring and mentoring programs, summer recreation and jobs, college access initiatives, and job-training programs—that work cost-effectively to reduce crime. These types of programs also save money in the long run that would otherwise be spent on law enforcement, building and maintaining prisons and social welfare programs.

“It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.”
—FREDERICK DOUGLAS

That’s why I introduced the Youth Prison Reduction through Opportunities, Mentoring, Intervention, Support, and Education Act, or Youth PROMISE Act (H.R. 2721). The Youth PROMISE Act implements the advice we have heard over the past several years from experts across the political spectrum concerning evidence and research-based strategies to reduce gang violence and crime. If passed, the Youth PROMISE Act will authorize funding for use by communities to implement evidenced-based prevention and intervention programs. The legislation does not mandate specific programs; it leaves those decisions up to local communities. Communities will also be required to identify the financial savings that will result from using these evidence-based activities and re-capture and reinvest a portion of those savings in order to continue the programs beyond the initial federal funding with the long term goal of self-sustainment. In this time of budgetary constraint, the Youth PROMISE Act is a wise investment. Ultimately, the Youth PROMISE Act will prevent crime while also saving lives, saving communities and saving money.

Frederick Douglass stated: “It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.” That statement rings as true today as it did when he first said it. It is up to the public to change the political discourse. Hold your elected officials accountable. Your voices are needed now more than ever so that students in our next generation will be more likely to receive a college degree than serve time in prison.
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