The 16th Annual Summer Institute is an event you won’t want to miss! This 3-day event brings together educators, district and state leaders, researchers, policymakers and parents from across the nation to support the development of school climate improvement plans that promote safe, caring and supportive schools. This year, an optional 4th day event on July 12th, Creating a School Climate that Engages the Gifts and Talents of Students with Learning Disabilities, is also available.

• Hear research and best practices in prosocial education from leading education experts
• Learn strategies to engage and mobilize entire school communities
• Develop action plans that support evidence-based bully prevention and school climate improvement efforts

In addition, NSCC is thrilled to announce participants will also have the option of applying for the School Climate Leadership Certificate Program. This certification is an advanced educational credential that complements, but does not replace, a state’s teacher/administrator license. The program aims to support the efforts of school climate improvement leaders to advance social, emotional, and civic learning, academic achievement, and positive youth development. Email certification@schoolclimate.org to learn more about the Certificate Program.

REGISTER TODAY!
Save $45 off regular rates when you register by April 15th.
For more information about all Summer Institute offerings and to view a full brochure, visit www.schoolclimate.org/programs
Dear Friends,

Spring is finally arriving here on the East Coast, and along with longer days and warmer weather comes renewed energy to help us make the most of these last few months of school. Now is the perfect time to take stock of the school climate we have been co-creating – intentionally or not – with our students, fellow educators, and community throughout the year. This issue of School Climate Matters shares expert voices, school profiles, and new resources to help you assess and improve your climate effectively.

Last month, NSCC released 11 new School Climate Practice Briefs from leading experts in the field on topics ranging from dropout and bully prevention to cultivating leadership and youth development. You can learn more about these briefs below. On page 3, you will find an inspiring profile of a committed community in Hagerstown, IN that has made school climate improvement a top priority. Through the use of the CSCI, they created a detailed profile of their strengths and needs, and are now working to develop targeted action plans focused on sustained improvement. On page 4, Shawn Healy from the McCormick Foundation underscores the link between school climate and civic learning, and outlines essential strategies that support civic education. Finally, on page 6, learn how Valley Stream School District on Long Island is empowering youth to prevent bullying and promote upstander behavior.

At NSCC, we are in full planning mode for our 16th Annual Summer Institute in NYC, a three-day intensive learning experience that brings together educators, policymakers, and experts for the latest in school climate practice and research. Building on our learning and work with colleagues from the Character Education Partnership and Harvard’s School of Education, this summer we are highlighting how ethical-moral learning is an essential aspect of effective school climate reform and prosocial educational efforts. We hope to see you all there for this exciting event! Download the brochure now at www.schoolclimate.org/si. As always, we want to hear from YOU – please share your feedback, questions, and ideas for topics in future issues at newsletter@schoolclimate.org.

All the best for a positive and productive spring,

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

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Climate change

NSCC Releases School Climate Practices for Implementation & Sustainability: Latest Strategies From Top Experts

The National School Climate Center (NSCC) announces the release of 11 School Climate Practice Briefs for Implementation and Sustainability, which provide educators and policymakers with practical, up-to-date guidance on school climate through the lens of essential educational issues such as dropout prevention, bullying, equity, and leadership. These briefs present the latest in research and best practice for effective school climate reform from experts at leading organizations including Harvard Graduate School of Education, the National Dropout Prevention Center, Special Olympics Project UNIFY, among other top tier contributors.

Research shows that school climate, the quality and character of a school, leads to increased student achievement, positive social-emotional development, lower student suspensions, greater sense of safety, increased social trust among students and adults, reduced bullying and higher teacher retention. The 11 issues selected to be included in this set of Practice Briefs are based on NSCC’s work with the entire academic community—teachers, staff, school-based mental health professionals, students and parents—to improve the climate for learning.

The School Climate Practices for Implementation & Sustainability are vital tools that will aid policymakers and education leaders in creating and sustaining positive, safe, equitable and engaging school climates. They will also assist teachers to incorporate quality practices leading to positive student development. To view the complete briefs, visit www.schoolclimate.org/publications/practice-briefs.php.
People are Important Here!" This statement is echoed throughout our community and is an attitude we weave into every corner of our school hallways. As students returned for the 2012-2013 academic year, countless projects and initiatives flooded the calendar. Balancing the key objectives for the school year with the motivations of students, staff, and parents is a difficult and challenging task. This year, at the very forefront of our “to do list” sat an effort devoted to school climate improvement.

Today, the nation is growing accustomed to the phrase “school climate.” A positive school climate touches every sense of the school experience—from excitement felt by a curriculum recognizing student interests and needs to the sense of camaraderie felt by supportive friends at the lunch table. This positivity is integral to boosting the academic, social-emotional and civic success of our students. As educators, we take an unspoken oath each time we step into a classroom to advocate for our students and take an unspoken oath each time we step into a classroom to advocate for our students and take an unspoken oath each time we step into a classroom to advocate for our students and take an unspoken oath each time we step into a classroom to advocate for our students and take an unspoken oath each time we step into a classroom to advocate for our students.

As a network of schools and later, as a school district in the country, we have our areas for growth. School climate improvement is a complex process that will continue for months and in some instances, for years. Like any school district in the country, we have our areas for growth, and our school district also has great strengths. We look forward to continuing our work of building a collaborative community and leveraging our great strengths to serve our students and our larger community.

To begin, an open invitation was extended to all parents who wished to participate and become part of the climate study group. To create a comprehensive and unified front to school improvement, the unique views from several perspectives were needed. To date, Nettle Creek is fortunate to have at least three parent representatives for each school at our tables.

Next, a coordinated effort was sought to engage responses for our survey. Being mindful of our short timeline and need for low-cost and highly effective methods, again, the thoughts from the climate study group became necessary to our success. Presence at our holiday program, community forum meetings, churches, local clubs, leagues, highly popular basketball games and partnerships with bus drivers to deliver survey requests to parents, increased the respect of our mission. Our presence was felt throughout the community and an in-person “call to action” from our group and extended partners presented the opportunity to address any misconceptions and connect with individual school community members. As a result, 30% of our Jr.-Sr. parent population and over 50% of our elementary parent population met our request.

The addition of an open survey question targeted our discussions to main themes appearing throughout responses. We asked: If there is one thing Hagerstown Jr.-Sr. High School/Hagerstown Elementary School could do to improve, what would it be? The response was overwhelming. Based on their thoughtful and extensive feedback, staff and parents clearly felt this was a safe and open forum to push forward their thoughts. A multitude of feedback ranging from the usefulness of our parent portal, preference for communication methods, suggestions for parental involvement in the classroom, need for greater definition of our bullying policy and greater discussion of concrete ways students may join efforts with staff members to become upstanders, are all valid points and provide us with starting points for action.

This spring we are moving forward with our analysis in order to create our action plan for growth. School climate improvement is a complex process that will continue for months and in some instances, for years. Like any school district in the country, we have our areas for growth, and our school district also has great strengths. We look forward to continuing our work of building a collaborative community and leveraging our great strengths to serve our students and our larger community.

—William Doering
A healthy climate is central to a school’s civic mission. Too often, lessons about democracy in the formal curriculum are undermined by authoritarian tactics in the hallways, cafeteria, and the very classrooms they are delivered. In order to prepare young people for their roles as citizens in our democracy, schools must practice it in classrooms and corridors alike and constant attention to and nurturing of a healthy school climate is the best path to this end.

The National School Climate Center (NSCC) points to popular interest in invigorating schools’ civic mission, but laments, “...few educators are prepared to engage their students in educational experiences that foster the knowledge, skills, and dispositions young people need to become active and contributing citizens.”

Fostering a healthy school climate is a great place to start.

The Illinois Democracy Schools Initiative takes students’ preparation for civic life seriously. Reflective of the common elements necessary for sustained, school-wide commitments to civic learning detailed in the 2010 No Excuses report of the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, Illinois Democracy Schools live their civic mission. School leaders emphasize civic learning during hiring and staff development, and proven civic learning practices like service-learning and simulations of democratic processes are woven throughout the formal curriculum. Democracy Schools build reciprocal relationships with their surrounding communities, and create a school climate that models and nurtures civic disposition.

The No Excuses report details four indicators of a healthy school climate that supports students’ civic learning.

To begin, schools must offer a clean, welcoming environment with visual reminders of its civic mission. This may take the form of publicly displayed school mission statements, or hallways and classrooms decorated with work reflective of teachers’ and students’ civic engagement.

Metea Valley High School in Aurora, displays its mission statement “proudly and prominently” throughout the building. It centers on the acronym LIFE, which breaks down as follows: “Live with integrity, Inspire passion for learning, Foster positive relationships, and Expect equity and excellence for all.” Each student is able to recite and explain the meaning of LIFE, where positive behaviors are expected, and active participation in the school community encouraged.

Next, teachers and administration should serve as role models of civically engaged citizens. This is achieved through their positive daily interactions with students, and also by modeling and sharing examples of their own civic engagement.

Terri Hanrahan, Principal at Glenbard South High School in Glen Ellyn, led her school’s successful application for Democra-
School Strategies for Engaging and Promoting Civic Learning

Use this set of guidelines to promote civic learning throughout your school community.

1. **Offer a clean and visually welcoming environment.** Use visuals to remind students of the positive behaviors expected and highlight ways they may become active, rather than passive, members of the school community.

2. **Keep the communication channels open.** Students emulate the behaviors seen around them and value being heard. Channel negative energy into positive action by providing students with multiple outlets to express themselves in an honest, respectful and open fashion.

3. **Keep civic minded lessons and values on the forefront.** School policies and practices should support an orientation to service. Civic learning programs build confidence, show the power youth have to transform their communities and provide a foundation for students to feel part of a larger society.

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Shawn Healy, the Robert R. McCormick Foundation Civics Program’s civic learning and engagement scholar, plays a key role in the Civics Program’s work in the areas of advocacy and public policy, serving as a chair of the Illinois Civic Mission Coalition, and leading the state’s Democracy Schools Initiative.

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When we imagine the kind of experience we hope our children will have in school, we hope it will be positive and nurturing. One that inspires their dreams and prepares them for the challenges they will face in the future. Unfortunately, bullying is a growing issue interfering with the positive environment many students could be and should be experiencing. On the upside, schools across the nation are now joining together to share resources, lessons and success stories of how they are combating bullying in their school communities. In this issue, we introduce you to Clear Stream Avenue School (ES), a Valley Stream, NY school showing there are limitless ways to approach prevention efforts. For them, collaborative sharing and creative created a solid and doable approach to bullying prevention efforts.

Q. What led you to create this upstander program?

Our program was created to continue an existing anti-bullying effort within the school building. Our 6th grade teacher, Rich Mansfield, spearheaded the “Upstander Initiative.” It began this past summer when a committee was created to review our Second Step curriculum to determine if additional resources were needed to comply with the Dignity Act legislation. This committee gathered resources to supplement Second Step with a focus on anti-bullying, tolerance, harassment and cyberbullying. When the school year began, Rich and I met again and decided to create a Dignity Act committee to further these efforts. Last year, we adopted several “books of the month” such as One by Kathryn Otoshi and Those Shoes by Maribeth Boelts, to focus on the lessons of tolerance, acceptance and upstander traits. This year we decided to broaden our reach and began brainstorming ideas to get students involved.

Q. Engaging students to become leaders is often the most difficult part of starting an anti-bullying initiative. How did you go about approaching and reaching out to students?

As a school we did not adopt a formal Upstander Program but chose to pool resources from several avenues to teach students about bullying. Through our discussions and research, we decided to focus on students becoming upstanders. Many students didn’t understand what defined bullying behavior and we felt this was an important first step to speaking to the issue. We pushed the characteristics of an upstander, the importance of being an upstander and the role an upstander plays in bullying incidents. We wanted to show them the different roles played in a bullying situation, how they could respond to those situations and the different ways they could support one another.

Q. How are you day-to-day or month-to-month engaging students to keep the upstander message alive? Are you facing any obstacles?

The message is kept alive by teachers reinforcing students in the classroom. Small reminders and addressing on-the-spot issues that have occurred during the day keeps the energy going. Additionally, students are peer nominated weekly for demonstrating above and beyond upstander behavior within the school building or during recess. We ordered t-shirts, created nomination slips and presented the idea to all students by assembly. These nominations are placed in a box in our main office and on Friday, our principal selects a student. The student is announced over our PA system during morning announcements and given an Upstander t-shirt to wear. At the end of the year, a celebration will be held to honor all our upstanders.

Q. What feedback are you getting from students?

The students are really excited and proud to wear their t-shirts. We found a fun way for them to share a positive message, increase awareness and connect with one another. Every student loves recognition and when we can spotlight their positive behavior, it really makes a difference. We aren’t just rewarding students for being role models. We’re helping them understand the value behind rejecting rumors, gossip, hurtful teasing, etc. We’re really excited and listening to students. This could go anywhere and that’s the hopeful part.

Be part of the mission to reduce bullying!

Start an Upstander Alliance Team at your school today! Find free tools to support this effort at: www.bullybust.org/upstander.
The National School Climate Center (NSCC) is honored to announce it has been awarded a $3,000 grant by Cristo Rey New York High School’s Learning by Giving Club to be used towards BullyBust, NSCC’s nationwide bully prevention awareness effort launched in 2009. The Learning by Giving Club, a student-run initiative, awards funding to nonprofit organizations that address bullying, depression, and suicide. Their mission speaks directly to the core of NSCC’s bully prevention work. They proudly state, “We aim to promote equality among youth in our community by helping them manage their lives and build courage in facing bullying. Our goal is to decrease the occurrence of depression and suicide and help create a bully-free environment for our peers.”

The final decision to select NSCC is a huge contribution of support for BullyBust and its program resources. In particular, funds will be used towards the Upstander Alliance, a nationwide movement of educators, students, and community members working to create community-wide projects focused on raising awareness and preventing bullying behavior. The grant will support countless students to realize their fullest potential and provide school communities with the tools and resources to build safe, supportive and engaged learning environments.

A school-wide commitment to end bullying can reduce the problem by up to 50%. The entire NSCC team is overwhelmed and thankful for the support by the Cristo Rey Learning by Giving Club community to help continue this mission. They have made a tremendous commitment to upstander behavior!

Lessons Learned . . .

Through evaluations and discussions, Learning by Giving realized a few lessons we hope all youth and communities will remember:

• Bullying doesn’t just affect the person bullied; entire families and communities can be affected by just one incident.

• There are ways of dealing with bullying; you don’t have to do it alone.

• Bully prevention starts with one person!

resources

Books

(Geared towards elementary school education)

One
Kathryn Otoshi
KO Kids Books, 2008
A lesson of accepting one another and how one person and one voice can make all the difference.

Those Shoes
Maribeth Boelts
Candlewick Press, 2007
A thought-provoking story teaching valuable lessons that having it all isn’t necessary. Boelts blends the disappointments from teasing and embarrassment with lessons of how a true friend behaves.
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