Location	Large, Urban (Washington, DC)
School Type	Elementary Charter School
School Size	Small (602 Students)
Demographics	Low-Diversity/High Needs (100% Black/Non-Hispanic; 91% Qualify for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch)

NSCC is privileged to learn from educators in the field dedicated to school climate improvement. In this piece we hear directly from Vanessa Camilleri, former Social-Emotional Learning Specialist for Arts and Technology Academy (ATA) outlining simple, yet, concrete ways to engage and unite a community around action plans and efforts.

The Arts and Technology Academy

(ATA) is a PK-5 Washington, DC-based charter school, serving a largely "at-risk" population. When we began measuring school climate, some of our challenges included community violence and poverty, coupled with rising incidents of in-school violence, and increasing demands on educators. We started a school-wide social-emotional learning (SEL) initiative in the fall of 2006, and made the annual collection of valid and reliable data a core aspect of our work.

Measuring Success

Since the spring of 2007, we've administered a community-wide school climate survey, the Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI), each year to students, parents, and school personnel. The survey results indicated that both teachers and students felt that respect for diversity was the least well-developed aspect of our school's climate. **Digging deeper, we pointed to four major causes of disrespect: lack of cultural exposure, low student self-esteem, low parental engagement, and poor staff relationships.** We formed a committee (teachers, parents, administration and support staff) and developed targeted action plans based on the survey's findings.

Our Action Plans: Making Strides for Lasting Improvement

Based on the survey's findings, the committee created initiatives specifically tailored to each issue, and engaged the whole school through their efforts. Here are some examples: To address the lack of cultural exposure, our school created a **Pen-Pal Project**; we connected our students to students of other cultures locally and overseas. Parent engagement was increased through our **Family Scavenger Hunt**; students and their families spent time learning about their community and sharing experiences. We created

Speak Out Boards that highlight kudos, thank yous and specific thoughts each month. And we created the **Essential Contribution Boards**, celebrating the unique strengths of each and every staff member.

Outcomes to Write Home About

It took a lot of careful planning, comprehensive evaluation, and implementation of targeted initiatives, but now our school reports substantial gains on state tests and overall student achievement, improvements in staff and student attendance and morale, an increase in teacher retention rates, and a decrease in student misbehavior referrals and suspensions! We found the surveying process so helpful that decided to administer the CSCI at the end of each year, and now we track the progress of specific initiatives, as well as the needs of students, parents, and staff over time. We've made surveying a part of our culture, and all members of the community know that *their* voices help shape the direction of the school.

To learn more about how your school can benefit from the CSCI, visit: www.schoolclimate.org/programs/csci.php.