

Location	Essex Junction, VT
School Type	Vocational
School Size	Small (~ 300 students and parents, 85 staff members)
Demographics	Diverse (9% Hispanic, 62% African-American, 3% Asian and 17% Caucasian)

Center for Technology, Essex (CTE):

CTE, located in Essex Junction, VT and one of three member school districts of **Chittenden Central Supervisory Union (CCSU)**, provides comprehensive technical programs and career exploration for its students with a mission promising opportunities to advance student creativity, leadership and achievement.



In October 2012, in partnership with two other CCSU districts, Center for Technology, Essex participated in the **Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI)**. Over 400 responses from students, staff and parents revealed positive results across several areas of Safety, Teaching & Learning, School Connectedness and Leadership. Social-Emotional Security was found to be the one overall outlier for all population groups. Students, staff and parents consistently perceived this dimension as challenging. The item-by-item section of the CSCI final report provided very specific information on how each group responded to the individual CSCI survey items. For students, one statement-**I have seen other students insulted, teased, harassed or otherwise verbally abused more than once by other students in this school**-gathered high agreed and neutral responses. Another pertinent statement-**Most students in my school act in a way that is sensitive to the feelings of other students**-gathered a majority of neutral responses. Clearly the CTE administration needed further background about the experiences driving this feedback. CSCI Coordinator and CTE Assistant Director, Carolyn Dickinson, in collaboration with CTE Director, Assistant Director, Director of Guidance, and Teacher & Student Council Advisor, developed a student focused method to address the school climate survey data and gain more understanding of Social-Emotional Security perceptions.

Student Focus Forum

On January 30th, 2013 12 students and 3 staff members gathered for a full-day Student Focus Forum. The purpose was two-fold 1) Convey the importance of student involvement and influence in driving school climate improvement 2) Define CSCI SES findings to guide action planning and practice

Students were first oriented to the school climate data and then paired with a fellow classmate. In paired groups, students engaged in four rounds of appreciative interviews and focused on the topic of “A Welcoming and Safe Environment at CTE” to think and talk about times and places in life they’ve felt safe from verbal abuse, teasing and exclusions. From these experiences, the groups would identify

“I realized that I had matured and was acting more like an adult.”
– Student from Focus Forum

common themes and behaviors to develop action steps of how they can work together to emulate the same safe and respectful environment at CTE.

They started with these four focus areas:

Focus 1-Safety and Acceptance

Recall a time when you witnessed, created, or experienced a strong feeling of safety in your life and describe what made this a safe situation and any positive benefits you gained from that experience.

Think about an experience when you didn't feel safe but an adult intervened. Describe the actions taken by the adult to move things in a more positive direction and describe how this experience changed how you or others interacted with each other.

Focus 2-Realizations about Safety and Acceptance

Come together to share highlights of Focus 1 stories. Each student, as he or she is listening, creates a summary of 1) Behaviors that helped people feel safe 2) Ways safety influenced how people felt

From this, each student thinks of three wishes they would grant to make CTE a more safe and inviting environment.

Focus 3-Brainstorming Change and Sharing Ideas

In an ideal situation, the wishes of each student are in action at CTE. What rules exist and how are they communicated? How do students and adults respond when others are feeling unsafe or mistreated? How do people interact with each other? Each group takes 30 minutes to create a 2-3 minute presentation showing the group vision for making CTE a place of safety and support from the moment you enter until the moment you leave for the day.

Focus 4-Smallest Steps and Boldest Actions

The Student Focus Forum named a number of creative ideas ranging from the smallest steps: teachers greeting students at the door or posting positive student messages in the hallways to the bolder and more exciting ambitions: reduce social conflicts by coordinating a meet and greet day to have students from different groups learning about their common experiences

One major finding: Students want to know more about each other and the adults in the building but don't always know the way to do so. This desire is noted by the wish list put together by students hoping for more one-on-one opportunities with students and teachers.

The work is ongoing at CTE. Next steps include facilitating a collaborative meeting between the Student Council and School Climate Focus Team to use the ideas presented by students to begin planning. To encourage continued engagement, a Parent Focus Forum opportunity is also in the works.

To learn more about how your school can benefit from the CSCI, visit:
www.schoolclimate.org/programs/csci.php. [*School Climate Dimension Definitions](#)