With the passage of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), states and districts have an invaluable opportunity to prioritize school climate as a central component of their strategic improvement efforts. Research has long shown the significant correlation between positive school climates and other key indicators of school success including: higher attendance and graduation rates, lower suspension/expulsion rates, academic achievement, deeper student engagement, and stronger teacher retention.

Building off of our extensive learning and collaboration with State Departments of Education, regional education leaders, and schools and districts nationwide, NSCC is thrilled to announce the release of our most exciting resource to-date: The School Climate Resource Center (SCRC).

The SCRC is an interactive, digital platform designed to support education leaders and their school communities build their capacity and expertise to effectively implement a positive school climate. This unique platform features:

- **Online Learning Center** that guides schools teams through the primary steps of improvement: School Climate Implementation Road Map, Resources, Best Practices, Interactive Assessments, Expert Voices videos, and additional learning modules.
- **SCRC Connect** builds pathways for real-time communication and planning with your team and educators across the country.
- **My Surveys** gives you access to essential measurement tools, including a unique Leadership Team Readiness Assessment to ensure success.
- **My Dashboard** allows you to organize all of your tools, resources, metrics, and survey reports in one space.

The SCRC will greatly enhance the effectiveness of school teams to lead and track their school climate improvement efforts, and put knowledge-building, benchmarking, and data-based decision making directly into their hands.

Contact Darlene Faster (dfaster@schoolclimate.org) to get early access to this resource for the 2016-17 school year! Annual licenses are available for your school team. District and network discounts apply.
With the end of the school year coming to a close comes the opportunity to reflect on the successes and challenges of the past year. We are excited to announce the launch of our School Climate Resource Center, an interactive, digital platform designed to support educators through the school climate improvement process. Through ESSA, school climate is now highlighted as a primary non-academic focus area to measure and track as part of the essential equation for school success. NSCC has more than two decades of experience supporting thousands of schools nationwide through an effective school climate improvement process. As a critical thought leader, we have defined core school climate standards, developed a comprehensive suite of valid and reliable measurement tools, and crafted process guidelines tied to a field-tested improvement model. This work ensures that NSCC provides the highest level of support to our schools in building the capacity and leadership expertise to sustain positive school climates long-term.

With this issue of School Climate Matters, we’re excited to bring you these thoughts and perspectives:

• Richard Cardillo, NSCC’s Education Director, taught a graduate seminar to 24 graduate students who will be receiving their Masters degree in Social, Emotional, and Creative Education. (p3)

• An overview of NSCC’s Community Scale and how it was rolled out in St. James High School Minnesota highlighting key take aways (p4-5)

• Capitol Region Education Council (CREC), a Regional Education Service Center in Hartford, Connecticut operates 18 inter-district magnet schools and prioritizes school climate. We want to hear from you! Please let us know your feedback and ideas for future issues at newsletter@schoolclimate.org.

Thank you for being an important part of this community.

Wishing you a restful summer,

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

NSCC Launches Partnership with Pennsylvania Department of Education

NSCC has begun a powerful collaboration with the Pennsylvania State Department of Education (PDE) with the goal of promoting capacity building and sustainability for school climate improvement efforts statewide. This project begins just as NSCC completes its first year and a half engaging in a similar project with the Minnesota State Department of Education and their network of regional leaders (more on best practices from that exciting collaboration in our next newsletter!).

The collaboration, known as the Pennsylvania School Climate Leadership Initiative, is under the auspices of PDE’s Office of Safe Schools. NSCC will be working directly with thirty-one School Climate Regional Coordinators (SCRCs), who are regional representatives and members of the state’s Intermediate Units (IUs) that service all schools across the state. The SCRCs will receive intensive coaching from NSCC’s highly-qualified coaching staff over the course of a 15-month period to support the SCRCs in leading effective school climate improvement efforts in a cohort of partner schools. Each SCRC will complete a series of requirements to achieve School Climate Leadership Certification by project-end. In the course of the year, these SCRCs will each identify two schools who will be accompanied through a school climate improvement process. Through the use of NSCC’s online resource center, the schools (with the guidance of both NSCC and the regional SCRCs), will assess their leadership team’s capacity to successfully guide this work (through the use of NSCC’s Readiness Assessment), utilize data to create targeted action plans, track benchmarks, and implement effective systems to promote and sustain a positive school climate. We are excited to begin this partnership and share the learning and best practices that come out of the process with all of you!
For the third year, NSCC has been an influential and meaningful collaborator with the University of Cantabria in the northern city of Santander, Spain. Richard Cardillo, our Director of Education, taught a graduate seminar to 24 graduate students who will be receiving their master’s degree in Social, Emotional, and Creative Education. All students in the class have already completed their one year of student teaching and are now poised to receive their teaching certificates and have been teaching at both elementary and secondary schools throughout Spain.

Richard teaches this rigorous course entirely in Spanish and incorporates essential readings, practicums, observations, case studies, and one-on-one coaching. During the course of the seminar, the class learned the essentials of school climate improvement efforts, how to make a plan for a school to follow to keep school climate front and center in their work, and how to manage their classrooms with these concepts in mind. The class was very “hands on” and the students (and Richard!) reveled in “learning by doing.”

While in Spain, Richard was also invited to give a public lecture to over 300 attendees on the topic of “Educating the Whole Child: How to Initiate School Climate Improvement Efforts.” This lecture was sponsored by the renowned Botín Foundation and was the kickoff to their national week of academic service learning with secondary school student and teacher representatives from around the country. Particularly gratifying was seeing so many former students from Richard’s two previous graduate seminars in the audience with their present students!
It takes a community to raise a child. Particularly in small rural communities, the school is the center focus of community life. If the trust and relationship between the community and the school is strained it takes its toll on the school system and ultimately on the youth.

In 2016, St. James, a small rural community in southern Minnesota found itself with six failed bonds, deteriorating buildings, and a financial need to upgrade infrastructure such as science labs and technology. The schools chose to take the Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI) in the fall of 2015. The sixth–twelfth grade students, parents, and staff indicated that the lowest point on the CSCI was Sense of Physical Security. The district’s school leadership recognized the need to reach out and rebuild relationships within the community and passed the seventh referendum building proposal in the fall of 2015. This proposal was to add on to and remodel current buildings. The passage of the bond left frayed relationships between the school and various community sectors.

Community Scale
The Community Assessment strategic process was chosen by the school leadership as a way to listen, seek to understand and work together for better partnerships. For the St. James community it was a natural next step after the CSCI. The Community Scale uses youth leadership to provide opportunities to engage the community and is a powerful way to build bridges and relationships.

If it takes a village to raise a child, the relationship of that village with the school is of central importance.

Setting Goals & Mapping the Community
One of the first steps in using the Community Assessment was defining your community and identifying sectors that represent the community, including members from the agriculture business sector to community of faith, elected officials and many more. Obtaining feedback from groups that are the school champions, as well as those with past or current concerns is important. Next, benchmarking was set to reach at least ten people in each sector with an overall goal of reaching two hundred and fifty community members.

Reaching Out to the Community
After the sectors were determined, a cross section of staff invited a minimum of ten people from each sector to the school to hear a short presentation about the project and to take the survey. We focused on using existing assets and structures of the community to reach members, such as inviting adults to support the youth and serve as community connectors, reaching out to members who are within their networks or using a local newspaper. These community connectors attended the meeting at school and were asked to get additional participation from people with whom they regularly interact within the St. James community. In addition, the local paper did a front page story about the process with an invitation to participate.

Prioritizing School Climate in Minnesota
It Takes a Community!

schools in action
Administering the Survey

Two community meetings were held at the school with youth facilitating the meeting and assisting as needed with the on-line version. Over fifty people attended these initial meetings at school.

In order to increase the survey’s ease of use, several versions were available; electronic, as well as paper versions and additional support were provided to be inclusive of members. In this case, St. James had to accommodate those who only spoke Spanish to be sure their voices were heard with interpreters used to support participation. In surveying senior citizens, large print surveys would have been helpful.

Divided we all lose; together we can do great things.

Relationships are important, so personally connecting with people and getting them to complete the survey was about meeting them in convenient settings. After this first outreach to bring community into the school, the survey was then taken out to the community. Locations such as the cafeteria at the local manufacturing plant or monthly meetings of community groups helped to make the survey easy to take. The group participation model helped to increase the numbers of surveys completed. Feedback from NSCC regarding participation rates in each sector group helped to determine which groups of people needed personal contact and phone calls to reach the target number of responses from each sector.

The goal for the Community Scale was to have at least ten responses for each sector group, with a final total of at least two hundred and fifty responses. St. James not only met, but exceeded their target number of responses due to their outreach approach: using different mediums to reach out to the community and building relationships with community members at convenient times and in convenient settings.

If it takes a village to raise a child, the relationship of that village with the school is of central importance. Sector mapping the community to get strategic feedback particularly on potential problem areas is a great first step. The process of listening to the community, valuing their opinion, and inviting them to partner with the school helps to build positive relationships. This reaps many rewards as communities seek to give their youth the best possible education.

Divided we all lose; together we can do great things.

Key Tips for Successfully Engaging Your Community:

• **Build relationships** with community members at convenient times and in convenient settings. Think about your hardest to reach groups and be creative with your modes of connection to make it easiest for them to engage.

• **Strategize your outreach and engagement** going into the project to make your roll-out successful; St. James High School invited community connections into the school, attended community meetings, and personally called people who were underrepresented.

• **Listening/valuing** community members’ opinions and feedback is a great first step in building relationships.

Assess Your School Community’s Climate!

The CSCI Community Scale is a new community-focused survey that aims to recognize the “voice” of community members and leaders and complements the CSCI which measures student, parent/guardian, as well as school personnel’s unique perceptions regarding their school community’s climate. To learn more about next steps to assess your school community’s climate, please visit [www.schoolclimate.org/programs/csci.php](http://www.schoolclimate.org/programs/csci.php).
School Climate Takes Center Stage in the CREC Magnet Schools in Connecticut

By Elaina Brachman and Adam Johnson

Our goal at the CREC Magnet Schools is to ensure that the climate and culture within each of our schools serves to bring our student communities together to foster a robust environment for learning. The Capitol Region Education Council (CREC) is a Regional Education Service Center in Hartford, Connecticut. In addition to providing services to schools and school districts throughout the region, CREC operates 18 inter-district magnet schools which draw students from towns throughout the Greater Hartford area. Altogether we serve just over 8000 students in grades Pre-K through 12. With school desegregation as our ultimate goal, helping our students build strong connections with one another is inherent to the mission of our magnet school district.

The uniqueness of our district’s schools is both what makes us exceptional while also posing distinct challenges. Each of our 18 schools have different themes such as the Arts, Aerospace and Engineering, and Global and International Studies, in addition to having different grade structures including PreK-5, 6-8, and 6-12. There are schools that occupy multiple campuses and schools that moved into their permanent building this year after being in temporary locations for a number of years. A one size fits all approach to anything from reading curriculum to social-emotional learning programming is not reasonable, and we therefore had to come up with a way to ensure that all of our schools - independent of their unique qualities - were deliberately addressing how to impact culture and climate within their school.

After taking the CSCI for several years, our goal in planning for the 2015-16 school year at the CREC magnet schools has been to reimagine and inject new energy into our focus on school culture and climate as a way to create powerful learning environments. As the Directors of Elementary and Secondary Education this goal became a primary function of our roles. We believed it was imperative that building administrators take the lead and facilitate this work for their school community with our support as district collaborators and supervisors. One of the strategies we used was to empower our assistant principals as the leaders of culture and climate initiatives within their buildings. We provided them with focused professional development to support their facilitation of school-based culture and climate initiatives. These included Positive Behavior and Intervention Supports, restorative practices, social-emotional learning programming, School Culture & Climate Committees, and the implementation of NSCC’s Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI) for all stakeholders. Monthly meetings with the assistant principals revisited topics and provided on-going support to aide them in their leadership of initiatives to promote their school’s culture and climate. Additionally, there were opportunities for their culture and climate teams to work collaboratively during district sessions facilitated by both of us, as well as other professional development providers.

This year, we especially had high hopes that growth would be demonstrated across our district. We were pleased that our schools
We believed it was imperative that building administrators take the lead and facilitate this work for their school community with our support as district collaborators and supervisors.

took this work seriously. Many schools saw drastic increases in the number of parents who took the survey and reached high completion rates of 60-70% from their parent populations! Getting to that level of engagement took a lot of planning and intentional focus on the part of our school teams, and shows how important they viewed this work overall. It also sends the important message to our communities that we care what you think, and want you to be partners with us in this process. We were also excited to build our employees’ capacity to understand, interpret, and use the data for strategic improvement planning for the future. In May, we invited staff members from the NSCC to plan and facilitate a full-day workshop with our assistant principals and core staff, which provided a protracted opportunity to review the data, identify trends and patterns, and plan for the future.

Now that this school year is winding down, we are proud of the organizational culture and systems we have put in place. For us and the staff with whom we work, this year has truly been about focusing on school climate as a means of establishing and enhancing strong environments for learning. We showed a lot of improvement for the future, and the conversations about school climate have evolved to a new level of sophistication across all of our schools.

Elaina Brachman, Director of Elementary Education, and Adam Johnson, Director of Secondary Education are a part of the CREC Magnet School Leadership Team and have partnered with NSCC as they continue working with CREC’s elementary and secondary magnet schools.

resource corner

Service Learning Helping Teens Benefit Through Giving  
www.rootsofaction.com/helping-teens-get-the-most-from-summer-service-learning/  
Youth should continue learning during the summer. Service learning, an organized program combining instruction with service in the community, gives kids the opportunity to link classroom lessons to real world situations. Read more for suggestions of how to guide the summer interests of your teen.

The Random Acts of Kindness Foundation  
www.randomactsofkindness.org/lesson-planspilot-program  
Building and sustaining positive classroom environments is a critical part of any school climate improvement. Plan your fall curriculum using a new series of lesson plans and activities developed by The Random Acts of Kindness Foundation to teach kindness in the classroom.

Breaking the Bully-Victim-Passive Bystander Tool Kit  
www.schoolclimate.org/climate/toolkit.php  
This toolkit is designed to support school leadership teams and school community members prevent bully behavior and promote upstander behavior in K-12 schools. Eyman, W. & Cohen, J. (2009). New York, NY: Center for Social and Emotional Education.

Action Research Meets Summer Reading  
www.pbs.org/teachers/librarymedia/aasl/gordon.pdf  
A true story of how action research affected the reading program at one Massachusetts high school. Rethink summer reading with this thoughtful guide encouraging students to read and write year-round.

Measure Your School Climate

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 your school can target initiatives where they are needed most.
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