in this issue:

• From the Field: Ensuring Safe and Supportive Schools in Minnesota P. 3
• Schools in Action: Case Study–School Climate Improvement Efforts in Minnesota P. 4-5
• Research in Action: Navigating Social Media in Schools P. 7

in brief

Your supporters are getting ready to send their kids back to school. Remind them to do their back-to-school shopping at smile.amazon.com and Amazon will donate to National School Climate Center. Support us when you shop for back-to-school items. #StartWithaSmile.

Take part in the Excellence and Ethics International Narnian Virtues character education project, based on the much-loved Chronicles of Narnia by C.S. Lewis and funded by a grant from the John Templeton Foundation. See below for links to a letter of invitation and application. Interested in receiving this free curriculum and taking part in the next, 3-year phase of the project? Click here to learn more.


Check out this GREAT comprehensive guide on funding streams for school climate under ESSA created by FUTURES Without Violence.

Building Capacity Among Schools’ Leadership Teams

By Jordyan Mueller, Digital Content and Communications Associate

Sustainable school climate efforts require having a team of people that is committed to continuous improvement. For teams to be successful, this means having strong relationships among leadership members as well as a strategic eye for the future.

As part of the National School Climate Center’s (NSCC) growing development of useful school climate tools, the School Leadership Team Readiness Tool is one of the first in the field to spur discussions about building-level leadership around key dimensions that contribute to a successful and sustainable improvement process.

The Readiness Tool (http://www.schoolclimate.org/climate/assessments.php) was designed to spark meaningful dialogue within the team itself around their ability to build capacity to further support the school’s goals and long-term improvement efforts. This short 10 minute self-survey is completed by each member of the leadership team. Results from the survey guide reflection on six essential domains, ranging from trust and collaboration to the allocation of resources. This helps teams better understand the dynamics of their group and can help teams start to capitalize on their strengths to resolve specific needs.

NSCC recommends that leadership team members complete the Readiness Tool twice each school year, typically in the Fall (September/October) and Spring (March/April), based on positive feedback from school leadership teams in Minnesota surrounding the utility of the tool as both a marker of current status and an informal benchmark for progress. Doing so helps the leadership team make timely adjustments to processes that can have a meaningful impact on their capacity and effectiveness within the school year. Positive feedback from the Readiness Tool has spurred NSCC to begin the process of creating a data-driven, evidence-based method of assessing readiness in all schools in the near future.

TO LEARN MORE about how you can take the Readiness Facilitation Tool with your team today, contact Shannon McCarthy at smccarthy@schoolclimate.org.
Dear Friends,

We hope the summer has been restful. In our current political and social climate, it is more important than ever that we work as adults to foster the authentically supportive communities we want our students to experience, and model the kind, empathetic, and upstander behavior all individuals deserve. At the recent Federal Bullying Prevention Summit, adult bullying of students came up as a recurring issue in panels and discussions, especially as it relates to marginalized groups (i.e. students with disabilities, LGBTQ, Muslim and others). At NSCC, we work with educators and administrators across the country to create truly inclusive school climates. This issue highlights some critical work being done in this area. We will continue to share our best practices to support your engagement and understanding of this important issue.

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

1. Craig Wethington, Director of the School Safety and Technical Assistance Center, MN, reflects on the partnership with the Minnesota Department of Education and NSCC in building capacity through the School Climate Improvement Certification program with regional education consultant leaders in Minnesota. (p3)
2. A case study of school climate improvement efforts in Kelliher School (MN) that has fully implemented PBIS (p4-5)
3. An overview of Social Media as measured in the Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI). (p7)

As always, please be in touch and share with us at newsletter@schoolclimate.org how your school or district is addressing school climate improvement.

Best wishes,

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

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.
The Minnesota Safe and Supportive Schools Act, which was signed into law in April 2014, strengthened bullying prevention and intervention efforts in Minnesota schools. The law provides local school districts with the guidance, support, and flexibility needed to: adopt clear and enforceable school policies, create a positive school climate, use social emotional learning to prevent bullying and ensure that all students can learn in a safe and supportive environment.

The law also established the School Safety Technical Assistance Center (Center) within the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE). While the department had a long history of providing support to districts on bullying prevention, the new law allowed MDE to establish a Center with dedicated staff to bolster the department’s bullying prevention and intervention efforts.

The Center’s goal is to help schools promote positive school climates and improve student academic achievement. Experts are increasingly recognizing positive school climate as a key to improving school success and reducing bullying, harassment and excessive disciplinary problems. The Center helps schools and communities develop and implement comprehensive, sustainable school climate improvement by:

- Providing training and professional development to districts, schools, and community partners to support comprehensive, district-wide school climate improvement.
- Providing technical assistance to districts, schools, parents, and community partners to implement effective positive school climate policies and practices.
- Developing materials and sharing information about effective programs, tools, and resources that support districts and schools in implementing positive school climate improvement initiatives.
- Establishing and strengthening partnerships between education agencies/organizations, parents, students, public health agencies, and community organizations in which decisions and responsibilities for implementing the Safe and Supportive Schools Act are shared.

School Climate Improvement Certification Program

While the Center was established to provide support to schools in addressing bullying concerns, under current law, the Center will cease operations in June 2019 unless the law is amended. Recognizing this, one of the Center’s priorities is building the capacity of others outside the Center who can provide technical assistance to schools on implementing effective positive school climate improvement policies and practices. An example of this capacity-building work is when the Center partnered with the National School Climate Center (NSCC) to pilot their School Climate Improvement Certification program with regional education consultant leaders in Minnesota.

The School Climate Improvement Certification Program is an intensive, 18-month training on school climate improvement processes. The training is designed to increase the capacity of participants to help districts and charter schools create positive, safe, caring and supportive school climates that promote the academic and social emotional learning competencies of students.

The individuals who completed the program will serve as School Climate Improvement Leaders in Minnesota. Training these education leaders expanded the Center’s capacity to provide direct support to school districts and charter schools in improving their school climate. It also helped meet the statutory requirements of the Safe and Supportive Schools Act.

Twenty staff members from the Minnesota Service Cooperative’s nine regional educational service agencies, leaders from the Red Wing and St. James school districts and three Center staff members completed the certification program. The participants worked directly with 30 schools to measure school climate and develop plans to improve school climate in their schools.

Each participant in the pilot program wrote case studies to document the process of and learning from their efforts to assist schools in their improvement process.

Ensuring Safe and Supportive Schools in Minnesota

By Craig Wethington, Director of the School Safety and Technical Assistance Center
Case Study: School Climate Improvement Efforts in Minnesota

By Jake Seuntjens, Education Services Director

Tim Lutz had just finished presenting Kelliher School’s Hope Survey Data at the 2010 Minnesota PBIS Conference, citing the impact of their school climate improvement efforts to help students succeed in school. Kelliher’s coordinated efforts, programming, and prevailing teacher attitudes of support for students, were a stark contrast to the school in which I had worked. With a lump in my throat and tears welling in my eyes, I looked around the room. There wasn’t a dry-eyed educator to be found. I turned to the teacher sitting next to me and I told her, “I want to work there.”

Kelliher is a small K-12 school located in Northwestern Minnesota with a population of approximately 250 students. It is located east of the Red Lake Federal Reservation. Kelliher’s demographics are made up of 53% White and 47% American Indian students. 80% of the students in Kelliher receive free and reduced lunch and 20% of the students receive special education services.

The Red Lake Reservation School Shooting in 2005 brought many students to Kelliher. It was the largest mass homicide in Minnesota’s history and left 10 people dead inside the school and 2 others dead outside of the school. After this tragedy, many parents felt that their children were no longer safe at Red Lake and sent them to school at Kelliher. Since then, Kelliher has fully implemented PBIS and continues to place a premium on school climate improvement efforts. They recognize that while PBIS is a great program, it does not address the full picture of school climate. Kelliher was poised to identify areas in the broader scope of school climate that they could improve upon.

The project began with the National School Climate Center’s (NSCC) Readiness Assessment, taken among the leadership team. The team’s responses were fairly close to consensus in the different areas of the assessment. The team then administered the National School Climate Center’s (NSCC) Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI). One of the biggest concerns in administering the CSCI was getting parents to complete the survey. Kelliher’s strategy was to have computers set up during school conferences and to provide parents incentives in the form of $5 Target gift cards upon completion of the survey. Despite these efforts, the parent survey turnout was still low, but it provided them enough parent responses to generate some actionable data on the perceptions of school climate.

The next steps for Kelliher were for Su
perintendent Tim Lutz to share the data with the stakeholders. The team began investigating ways in which they could better support student's Social and Emotional Security and also ways to address the negative impacts of Social Media on their school climate. The team began looking for specific programs, keeping sustainability in mind, and training that would address the Social and Emotional Security aspect of school climate. They also identified that the people resources to address this area were potentially tight; in a small school such as Kelliher, staff hold many roles and wear many hats, so to speak. An identified area of priority was teachers reinforcing positive, pro-social behavior in their classroom. This would work in conjunction with the current character education program in which teachers would be asked to reinforce students’ pro-social behavior and name the specific character trait it reveals. As with any initiative that is fully implemented, refreshers are needed from time to time to continue to reinforce and strengthen practices. They decided that refining effective existing programs and making them work synergistically would be a good next step to take as they were unable to make a major commitment to a new program or training course.

Personally, as I have gone through this coaching process with Kelliher my attitude has shifted as I have seen the numerous efforts that are taking place in Kelliher that fall under the umbrella of school climate. When we began this project I saw it as a simple, straight-forward process of using the data, identifying areas that needed to be improved, and planning to address those areas. However, with a school like Kelliher that has a good grasp on school climate initiatives and where staff place a premium on those efforts, it is much less simple to go from “good” to “great.” School climate work is much less prescribed than I once thought. I have realized that this is due to the unique makeup of individual schools. All schools should be using best practices in research around school climate, and should be striving towards a common goal, but how they get there can and should look very different from school to school. Throughout our program, we have described school climate as the plate—and just like the plate holds the food that feeds us, we can have a variety of options that satiate our hunger.

To read the entire case study, please click here.

REFERENCES: RED LAKE SHOOTING
School Climate and Equity
Equity is an important facet of school climate improvement. Equity is cohesive and should not be separate from other school improvement efforts. In this Practice Brief you will find strategies to support and guide effective practices to foster equitable school climates.

The Random Acts of Kindness Foundation
www.randomactsofkindness.org/lesson-planspilot-program
Building and sustaining positive classroom environments is a critical part of 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.

Teaching Tolerance
http://www.tolerance.org/lesson/our-private-idaho
This classroom resource will allow students to consider the history of their community and how to effectively gather information to understand the different viewpoints of others.
Since 2013, the National School Climate Center (NSCC) has been collecting data and analyzing norms across the 12 dimensions of the Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI). Analyzing year to year norms helps schools interpret their CSCI findings and allows educators and administrators to make data-driven decisions when creating and developing action plans. In September 2015, NSCC launched a 13th dimension “Social Media” across all schools. This dimension measures the sense that students feel safe from physical harm, verbal abuse/teasing, gossip, and exclusion when online and while using electronic devices (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, text messaging, posting a photo/video, etc.). It is a way to gauge student, staff, and parent perceptions, as well as understand how these three groups can proactively work together to navigate the landscape of social media.

NSCC started collecting data on Social Media in 2013. This is the first year Social Media norms have been collected across 253 schools capturing the voices of 13,552 students, 1907 staff, and 2,480 parents. We’ve found that staff consistently rate this dimension lower than students and parents, while students overall have a more positive perception. Students report using social media in a positive and supportive way with their peers (i.e. kindness) while staff report more instances of online harassment. The biggest gap in perception is between staff at the high school level (with a median score of 3.00) and staff at the elementary school level (with a median score of 3.40). Overall, we are learning that having an open conversation will foster better social media experiences and perceptions. The more we empower youth to do what is right on social media, the better long-term outcome we will all see.

Navigating Social Media

By Amanda Weitzel, Senior School Support Coordinator

BullyBust launched the Upstander Alliance to empower youth in the effort to prevent harmful harassment, teasing, bullying, and cyberbullying across our schools today. We know that students can positively change the way we communicate with the right tools and supports.

The Upstander Alliance provides free resources to help student teams, in collaboration with adult moderators at the school, create targeted community-wide engagement projects focused on preventing bullying and raising awareness. Through the Alliance, team members will have access to detailed tools for creating and sustaining their group, opportunities to connect with artists, experts, and youth leaders who are making a difference, and will also be able to share their experiences with other Alliances across the country.

For more information, visit www.bullymbust.org/upstander/
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