NSCC’s 17th Annual Summer Institute
July 8-10, 2014
School Climate Renewal and the Common Core:
Promoting Social, Emotional, and Intellectual Learning
The Winston Preparatory School, NYC

The Common Core State Standards provide a clear definition of cognitive skills needed by students to become successful 21st century citizens. However, they shed little focus on the additional social, emotional, and civic skills necessary to develop students into well-rounded individuals.

This 3-day event is a prime opportunity for K-12 school, district, state, family, and community leaders to learn from research based guidelines and leading education experts to successfully integrate Common Core Standards with school improvement and prosocial efforts.

Attendees will learn about a school climate improvement model highlighting practical school and community-wide tools, best practices supporting bully/harassment prevention, case studies from other districts and states spearheading school climate reform efforts, readiness assessments defining critical steps to develop effective improvement plans, and more.

Connect and collaborate to enhance your current practice of building safer and more supportive learning environments.

NSCC’s 2nd Annual Policy Institute
July 7, 2014
The Winston Preparatory School, NYC

The one-day Policy Institute will precede NSCC’s 17th Annual Summer Institute and support district and school board, State Department of Education leaders, and legislative advocates to critically analyze their school’s current policy efforts and its alignment with a comprehensive school climate policy.

Attendees will garner guidelines, case studies, and research summaries to support advocacy efforts and to support development of their respective school climate policies.

Connect and collaborate to be proactive against the challenges inhibiting the social, emotional, and civic success of our students.

Register Today!
Visit www.schoolclimate.org/register to view brochures and submit your interest for the Summer Institute and/or Policy Institute.
Early bird special for the Summer Institute expires May 15th!

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Dear Friends,

Spring has finally arrived and many of us are overjoyed to see the long winter left behind. With the warmer temperatures comes an exciting time for our nation as developments at the district, state, and federal level define priorities to put our students first. Last month, President Obama released the 2015 proposed budget for the federal government, which outlines increases for the “Now is the Time” initiative for early intervention and mental health awareness. A critical amount of funding ($130 million) is sought for a number of priorities, including training teachers, coaches, school counselors and others in mental health best practices to better serve students and young adults. In Minnesota and Massachusetts, a wave of passed or updated anti-bullying legislation pushes for solid school anti-bullying policies and support guidelines to increase the social-emotional security of our young people.

School climate is an evolving field. These are just a few of many changes indicating that legislative focus is shifting more and more towards ensuring student success, safety, and achievement. In this issue, we celebrate these changes and the growth of school climate reform.

On page 2, Westbrook, CT announces the passing of the nation’s first comprehensive School Climate Policy. In addition, we are continuing the launch of our Legal Matters column on page 3, which provides an overview of the U.S DOE’s Office for Civil Rights “Dear Colleague Letters,” covering issues such as retaliation, bullying/harassment, and sexual violence. On page 6, we turn to Bothell High School to learn from an upstander hero working collaboratively with a Climate and Culture committee to promote a school environment of acceptance and respect.

In support of school and community leaders leading the charge for school climate improvement, we are especially pleased to announce our 17th Annual Summer Institute in NYC. This three-day, intensive training brings together educators, researchers, policy-makers, and is a prime opportunity to connect with leading experts and gain the resources to begin school improvement planning. This summer, our theme, School Climate Renewal and the Common Core, will investigate the need for social, emotional and civic skills lessons to truly develop academically and emotionally ready students.

We are honored to have Kristin Fink, faculty member at Utah State University, as our keynote speaker. As a noted character education specialist, she provides insight on page 4 of her experience honoring the whole child through prosocial efforts.

In addition to our Summer Institute, NSCC is also hosting its 2nd Annual Policy Institute. Last summer, our inaugural Policy Institute focused on advancing school climate policies at the district and school levels. This July, we are expanding on its success and look forward to welcoming state and legislative advocates as we revisit this theme. Please visit www.schoolclimate.org/register today to learn more and register for these exciting events!

As always, please stay in touch and share with us how your school or district is addressing school climate improvement. We look forward to hearing your thoughts and feedback at info@schoolclimate.org.

All the best for a safe and supportive spring,

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

Westbrook, CT Passes Groundbreaking School Climate Policy

The National School Climate Center is pleased to announce that the Board of Education for the school district of Westbrook, Connecticut recently passed (what we believe to be) the Nation’s first comprehensive School Climate Policy. The Policy was a collaborative effort of NSCC, Patricia Ciccone (Superintendent of the Westbrook Public School District), Jo Ann Freiberg (Education Consultant, School Climate, Bullying and Character Education) and others.

The Policy is guided by the fundamental belief that each and every school community member should be treated with dignity, should have the opportunity to learn, work, interact and socialize in physically, emotionally and intellectually safe, respectful and positive school environments, which support high quality relationships.

The Policy sets forth the framework for an effective and democratically informed school climate improvement process and is based on the five National School Climate Standards.

Thank you, Westbrook Board of Education, for modeling a forward-thinking and innovative approach to creating a positive, supportive learning community.
Just since late 2010, the U.S. DOE’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR) has issued nearly a dozen “Dear Colleague Letters” (DCLs) addressing “discriminatory conduct” in K-12 schools. These guidance documents, some released in collaboration with the Department of Justice (DOJ), cover issues such as retaliation, bullying/harassment, sexual violence, and inclusion of students with disabilities in athletics. Schools are obligated to comply with the DCLs’ requirements, along with state and federal regulations.

School districts are required to “take proactive measures to prevent” discriminatory conduct. Generally, “proactive measures” require systemic changes frequently identified by school climate needs assessments, which often include surveys and/or focus groups. OCR considers improving school climate a critical strategy for reducing and preventing discriminatory harassment and discriminatory discipline.

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Definitions:
Sexual harassment is “unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature.”

Gender-based harassment may include students who are or are perceived to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT).

Sexual violence is “physical sexual acts perpetrated against a person’s will or where a person is incapable of giving consent due to the victim’s use of drugs or alcohol...[or] due to an intellectual or other disability.”

Hostile environment and school climate are interconnected in the lives of students: Reducing hostile environment (as OCR requires) is often the same as improving school climate, at least for the group(s) targeted by discriminatory conduct.

School’s Obligations:
If a school knows or reasonably should know about student-on-student harassment that creates a hostile environment, Title IX requires the school take immediate action to eliminate the harassment, prevent its recurrence, and address its effects.

Schools are required at minimum to:
- Publish and disseminate a Notice of Nondiscrimination
- Adopt and publish Grievance Procedures
- Designate a Title IX Coordinator

Visit www.schoolclimate.org/programs/ocr-overview.php for further explanation of such requirements and prevention strategies. Or email Jessica Savage (jsavage@schoolclimate.org) or Randy Ross (rross@schoolclimate.org) for more information.

In this and future Legal Matters columns, we offer a brief analysis of specific DCLs and their relationship to school climate improvement.
I remember my first day in the classroom as if it was yesterday, though it was over forty years ago. I even remember the unique smells the school’s hallways and my own little classroom had—something between chalk dust, school lunches and teeming masses of adolescent humanity. I was filled with enthusiasm to inspire my students with the broad, deep, purposeful and meaningful liberal arts education I had received through my own public school, parochial and state university education, and I was very young—21!

From Teacher-Developed Curriculum Maps to State Standards

I developed my own curriculum maps, as all teachers did back in the day, because there weren’t any standards to guide us, other than the methods courses we had taken in college. Perhaps that grounding immersed us in deep reflection about what was most important to teach and prepared us better than just being handed a set of ready-made standards to teach. Education should be about that which matters most to the passing on of civilization at its best—and that it has many purposes. I believe that key to the success of Common Core Standards implementation is a curriculum grounded in values, because everything that happens in any school, in every classroom, in every hallway and cafeteria, should be about developing the whole child. A curriculum grounded in values supports students experiencing quality relationships and friendships. It allows them to explore an academic curriculum that helps them grapple with significant moral issues. The broader curriculum develops character, civic, social and emotional learning in our young people, and helps them create flourishing lives for themselves. Education at its best is about helping students cultivate the skills and dispositions necessary to be excellent students, lifelong learners, productive workers, and contributing citizens.

High Standards for a 21st Global Society, But Not A Curriculum Grounded in Values

The Common Core isn’t about laying out a deeper curriculum grounded in values that will...
fully develop the whole child. It doesn’t even pretend to do that. It is a very concise set of standards that identify critical skills important for the 21st century such as the ability to collaborate with others or develop compelling arguments based on evidence. These are incredibly important goals of education, but they are incomplete. The Common Core doesn’t mandate the topics or knowledge that are most important for our young people to grapple. It is an opportunity for teachers to improve their teaching and practice by engaging their students in learning activities that model the skills of the Common Core itself. In other words, students learn the skills embedded in the Common Core because their learning activities are also rooted in practicing those skills. So students would have many opportunities to collaborate together, to read, write and discuss carefully selected literary and informational texts that reflect what real people, and well-educated people, read in the world today.

An Optimal School Climate Supporting Young People

The Common Core Standards are also not taught in a vacuum. They are taught in a context of a broader curriculum and school climate that includes the rules and norms of the school, students’ sense of physical and emotional safety, their experience of caring relationships, and the support for learning that they receive. If the school climate is optimal, students will thrive. But perhaps more importantly, if they are part of a caring school community with adults who interact with them in ways that demonstrate respect for the worth of every person in the building, young people will learn even greater lessons about what it means to be fully human across all their domains of development. Such a school climate, which makes deep connections for students to the academic curriculum they are exploring, married with high expectations and caring relationships can truly help young people become ready to take on the challenges of the 21st century and beyond.

Education at its best is about helping students cultivate the skills and dispositions necessary to be excellent students, lifelong learners, productive workers, and contributing citizens.
Shared Language of Respect and Acceptance at Bothell HS

By Daisy Lopez, NSCC Marketing and School Support Manager

Climate and Culture Committee

I was probably a little gullible," reflected Marissa, 15, an 11th grader from Bothell, a small city nestled in the Seattle metropolitan area. She speaks with a confidence and maturity that has grown with time about her bullying experiences. For Marissa, it was verbal bullying and gossip in junior high that made an impact. She began to notice the not-so-subtle signs as time passed: the back-handed compliments, the sarcastic text messages, the name calling. One particular incident stands out. Befriending classmates from her elementary school, she confided her deepest thoughts about everything: family issues, insecurities, and embarrassing moments. She felt at ease sharing such personal information.

Soon, whispers she heard in the hallways confirmed her fear. Word had traveled and everyone, even those she had never met, knew about Marissa’s vulnerabilities. Marissa was embarrassed and ashamed. The anxiety was overpowering and she had difficulty concentrating. The whispers lingered throughout the year. She says, “I felt betrayed and silly that I had trusted the wrong group. I’m not sure what I did to deserve this.”

Over 3.2 million students are bullied each year. At times it is dismissed as a typical part of youth development. In reality, the impact can be devastating and disruptive to student mental health and academic performance. For Marissa, the negativity impacted relationships and the ability to connect with others in a meaningful way. Even the average activities of a teen were now off limits to her. “I don’t have a Facebook page…I can’t control how words will spread so there’s too much worry about gossip,” she says.

At Bothell High School, a 10-12th grade school of about 1,800 students, the blue and black school colors dressing the halls and the admiration for its Cougar mascot are the labels of most standard high schools across the nation. Inside, the school climate needed a facelift. Marissa was just one example of an environment suffering from social-emotional insecurity. This wasn’t a situation of denial either. From the incoming students to the administrators who have spent 20+ years at Bothell High School, it was clear climate and culture improvement should be a focus.

The answer came in the form of the Climate and Culture committee, a committee of administrators, students, staff and parents who came together every six weeks to toss around ideas to improve the positivity in the school. They eventually branched out into five committees. Marissa and 12 other students were part of the anti-bullying committee. For the students’ part, there was a promise to be leaders and stand up against bullying. Wendy Wands, Bothell High School Campus Supervisor and anti-bullying committee leader, developed a curriculum for elementary school students, but needed inspiration to translate that message to high school students. It was an “aha” moment, a real moment of clarity where the puzzle pieces came together after flipping through an EdWeek magazine. Reading an article about bully prevention, the term “upstanders” caught her eye. Wendy knew the meaning, but hadn’t thought of integrating it into a school-wide plan for bully prevention. She set to work searching for activities and resources, slowly building an outline of what she hoped would be a successful outreach effort to students. She thought, “It’s amazing; such a simple concept, but so powerful in its meaning.”

Her group watched the movie “Bully” while on school break and browsed online videos about upstander behavior. They found NSCC’s Upstander video section (part of NSCC’s BullyBust: Promoting a Community of Upstanders campaign) and bookmarked it as a classroom resource every student would be able to relate to.

Together, they brainstormed and proposed an assembly: an open forum for dialogue where students’ guard would be down and honest conversation could take place. The administration agreed and the planning began. That April, the assembly started with the song “Beautiful” by Christina Aguilera and continued with the poem video “To This Day.” A panel of six teens was also seated at the front prepared to speak about their own experiences with bullying. Marissa was one of these students.

In a packed auditorium, all eyes settled on Marissa. “It was a surreal moment, knowing I put myself out there. I felt the pressure, but the response was incredible,” she says. People
were listening. They weren’t only listening, they were absorbing. They listened as she described the emotional and mental degradation of bullying and the sadness and, at times, the humiliation she felt at being the center of hurtful jokes and comments. She also spoke about the rumors and past issues her former friends had chosen to spread throughout the school. If others were curious, she would be the one to break her silence and speak honestly.

Everyone could relate to something. The nerves were obvious as each of the six students took turns speaking. One by one, they participated and voiced their “secrets.” They ended the assembly with every student signing a banner “Everything starts with one: I am an UPSTANDER.”

Marissa wasn’t the only person who found it overwhelming. Seated in the auditorium’s last row, one student made her way to the front and approached Wendy after the assembly. She was battling an eating disorder and didn’t want to do it alone anymore. She had kept her secret for too long, and, after hearing Marissa’s story, realized she had an outlet to express her fears and felt at peace knowing others had issues and she wasn’t alone.

**Now What?**

No longer feeling anxious and embarrassed, Marissa felt courageous and knew the assembly was the start of a new chapter. Students were still talking about the assembly and this time it wasn’t to gossip about faults. There was unity in the building.

The work continues. For those on the committee leaving for college, there’s a promise to return and mentor incoming students. For those staying, Upstander has become a shared language and a common culture. A new initiative called Link Crew stems from the positive reaction to the assembly. Link Crew aims to connect incoming freshman and junior students and introduce new students to norms of high school with the support and guidance of upper classmen. With the leadership of Wendy and Marissa, the hope is to merge Link Crew with the Upstanders group. She’s hopeful when describing the future. She says, “This is giving me back some of that confidence, to be part of something that’s bigger than me. Slowly, I’m beginning to see I didn’t deserve to be treated the way I did, but it did make me stronger.”

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.

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**resource corner**

**NSCC’s 17th Annual Summer Institute** will present a range of ways K-12 educators can complement Common Core State Standards with social-emotional learning lessons to advance school improvement and prosocial goals. Below are a variety of resources supporting educators, students, and parents achieve this ambition.

**Integrating Common Core and Character Education: Why It Is Essential and How It Can Be Done**


A white paper from Character Education Partnership illustrating how school community stakeholders can collaborate to integrate standards of the Common Core with character building. Highlights include a Pennsylvania middle school case study demonstrating the planning and strategies used to support both Common Core and prosocial learning.

**How Are Social Emotional Learning and the Common Core Connected?**


An interview with Kristie Fink and Karen Geller as they discuss the Common Core as an initiative that unifies social-emotional and character development for the success of students.

**How to Integrate Social-Emotional Learning into Common Core**


A walk-through of the Common Core State Standards examines how Common Core Math and English Language Arts Standards align with the many social-emotional lessons students need to succeed.

**5 Keys to Social and Emotional Learning Success**

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DqNn9qWoO1M#t=212](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DqNn9qWoO1M#t=212)

This six-minute Edutopia video describes five social-emotional learning skills and competencies needed for student success and effective ways adults in this classroom are modeling these skills. Edutopia stresses social-emotional learning is not separate from academic learning and is effective in engaging students to learn practices needed for the Common Core State Standards and the Next Generation Science Standards.

**Hillsborough Art Classes Adopt Common Core Approach**


Piece describes how Common Core can be brought into classrooms outside of Math and English Language Arts. As an example, a photography class is followed. The class incorporates learning beyond typical academics; for example, digging deeper to find emotional meaning behind an art piece.
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