In August 2012, the NSCC Research Team collaborated with Winston Preparatory Schools (WPS), independent schools that provide an individualized education to students with learning disabilities (LD), to explore factors that potentially promote or hinder the success of young adults with learning disabilities. This two year project involved interviewing graduates between 2002 and 2008 about their experiences post-graduation. IRB approval for this research was received from Fordham University.

Out of 148 eligible graduates, 36 individuals who ranged in age from 23 to 30 years old participated in this study. The study employed mixed research methods to examine the academic, social, and psychological postsecondary experiences. Data was collected from participants’ school records, in-depth personal interviews and questionnaires. The participants’ academic achievement was assessed based on two time periods: (i) 9th grade or first year attending WPS high school, and (ii) 12th grade. Each participant was then interviewed about their educational achievement, employment status, familial relationships, and life satisfaction. The data collection process was made possible by the Winston Preparatory School research team, who worked diligently to receive the necessary data from past graduates. The expertise in working with students with learning disabilities was invaluable for preparing the NSCC research team to conduct interviews.

After quantifying the responses to the interview questions, the team calculated the mean scores for each participant. The average of all these scores was calculated. Those that scored above this mean were categorized as successful (N=16) and those that scored below as unsuccessful (N=20) at the third time period (5 to 10 years out of high school). The quantitative data was used to explore whether participants with certain characteristic were more or less likely to fall into the successful or unsuccessful category. Participants coded as unsuccessful gave an overall lower rating of their: college experience, successfulness, happiness, mental health, relationship with father, relationship with siblings and positive expectation for the future. The participants who were coded as unsuccessful had fewer jobs and had a much harder time making friends.

A qualitative data analysis was run to identify the specific characteristics that seemed to influence the participants’ quality of life, in terms of happiness, healthiness and success. Most of the successful participants possessed these qualities: positive coping strategies, hopefulness, seeking academic help, positive perspective on learning disabilities, job satisfaction, confidence to handle life’s challenges, and had clear goals for their career and personal life. Based on findings from this study, schools serving students with learning disabilities should promote optimism, emotional coping strategies and planning for the future.

Our hope for future studies in this area includes a replication of this work with a group of graduates without a learning disability, a group of graduates with learning disabilities at a public school, a larger sample of participants, and the participation of older individuals. This work would further clarify the relationships between strong social support, positive outlook and emotional stability and successful outcomes. As support for developing curriculum, further research on how to effectively teach these skills to young adults with learning disabilities would be helpful to understanding how to impact long-term success.
With the end of the school year comes the opportunity to celebrate the successes and learn from the challenges of the past year. In particular, the past months have presented uplifting moments.

Last month, the Justice Center’s Council of State Governments issued the School Discipline Consensus Report, which highlighted the best thinking in the field on how to move from punitive-based, zero tolerance policies to more supportive practices for students in schools. Building on the January Guidelines released by the Federal DOE and DOJ, this important report integrates innovative strategies from the fields of education, health, law enforcement, and juvenile justice. As the report notes, “Leaders in these diverse systems agree that local and state governments must not only help schools reduce the number of students suspended, expelled, and arrested, but must also provide conditions for learning wherein all students feel safe, welcome, and supported. The central thesis of this comprehensive report is that achieving these objectives requires the combination of a positive school climate, tiered levels of behavioral interventions, and a partnership between education, police, and court officials that is dedicated to preventing youth arrests or referrals to the juvenile justice system for minor school-based offenses.” As a contributor to this report, we look forward to supporting schools and districts nationwide in actualizing the recommendations made within it to support the development of more effective school climates nationwide.

As we move into the slower pace of summer, we are also given time to reflect on one critical piece contributing to positive school climates: partnerships. Engaging students, school community members and families all help to stimulate change and improve outcomes. These partnerships come in many forms—from the oath schools make as a whole to provide a safe and encouraging environment to the classroom pacts promising an atmosphere of respect and understanding.

Developing partnerships is an ongoing effort and requires a solid vision and a broad range of perspectives. With this issue of School Climate Matters, we bring you the highlights of our growing partnerships and the lasting benefits of these meaningful two-way relationships.

- In our featured spotlight on page 3 learn about our latest partnership with two education social networks, Share My Lesson and Edmodo. These free and flexible platforms are creating innovative ways to communicate in real-time using data-driven technology to assess student and educator needs. Read on for ways you can effectively adapt both networks to your classroom.

- On page 4, Darlene Faster, NSCC’s COO, outlines the incredible four-year collaboration with Iowa Department of Education made possible through funding from the Safe and Supportive Schools. Among other impressive developments, findings from the Iowa Youth Survey: Conditions for Learning assessment revealed increases in the domains Safety, Engagement, and Environment across 43 participating schools.

- On page 6, our ongoing partnership with Wayne RESA, a partner in the Michigan Department of Education Statewide System of Support, makes use of our 5-Stage Improvement model to drive continuous change. Hear from Dr. Velicia Humes, Wayne RESA Climate and Culture Improvement Specialist, as she facilitates a Classroom Triggers workshop using materials from NSCC’s professional development learning platform, School Climate Resource Center (scrc.schoolclimate.org).

These pieces are just a few of many examples of the unity shown by school community members. Please stay connected to us throughout the summer for news and updates. As always, your thoughts and feedback make us a stronger and better organization. Please share your comments and stories with us at newsletter@schoolclimate.org.

Wishing you a restful and relaxing summer,

Jonathan Cohen, Ph.D., President and Co-Founder
National School Climate Center
Students at Van Meter Community School, a K-12 school outside of Des Moines, Iowa are actively listening to a chapter read aloud followed by an online discussion. This practice, highlighted in Edmodo's Blog—http://blog.edmodo.com—isn’t your typical school experience. In homes and schools around the world, students are tapping away on social media networks like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram narrating every moment for friends and family.

Now, as social media goes to school, we see a shift in culture where students, staff and parents are using social communities as a learning tool to connect and collaborate. With the use of these tools, schools have greater opportunity to support different learning styles and explore ways to accommodate and challenge students.

This year, NSCC has partnered with Edmodo and Share My Lesson to create a one-stop hub for key social-emotional and bully prevention resources. Educators far and beyond have the ability to readily access materials for classroom or school-wide lessons.

Edmodo, referred to as the “Facebook for Schools”, is a social network offering a way for teachers to easily assess students and share ideas. It provides an organized location to create and share educational videos and materials, and provides a forum to facilitate classroom discussions. Edmodo has also worked to build a better professional development model where educators can connect one-on-one or in teacher-only groups focused on specific subject areas.

Share My Lesson, a platform for teachers, by teachers, pledges members can download and share user-generated resources without charge. Educators face challenges reaching quality and effective teaching resources. With Share My Lesson, this barrier is eliminated as an unspoken oath exists to share only tested and successful practices. Share My Lesson continues to keep pace by linking history with modern lesson plans. In December, it partnered with Weinstein Company and offered the chance to see Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom to selected educators who downloaded Common Core aligned lessons and broadened classroom discussions using exclusive movie clips.

share your voice!
Partnerships come in many forms and summer is the ideal time to rethink and revamp how you communicate with your students. How will you be using social learning communities this coming fall?
Share with us at newsletter@schoolclimate.org.
School Climate Makes a Difference In Iowa State: Links to Attendance, Graduation and More!
By Darlene Faster, NSCC COO and Director of Communications

The National School Climate Center (NSCC) has been a proud partner with the Iowa Department of Education to develop and implement a new school climate survey for the State integrating core components of NSCC’s own valid and reliable Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI) with the State’s Iowa Youth Survey (IYS). Iowa was one of 11 States awarded Federal funding for the Safe and Supportive Schools grant in 2010, and contracted with NSCC to provide detailed survey design and data analysis support throughout the four-year project. The Safe and Supportive Schools competition was launched to provide states with federal assistance aimed at the development of rigorous measurement systems to assess individual school climates and promote focused programmatic interventions for the most challenged schools. As former Assistant Deputy Secretary of Safe and Drug-Free Schools in the US Department of Education, Kevin Jennings noted at the time of the release, “We are committed to supporting State efforts to foster a safe learning environment that promotes success for our nation’s youth because we know that, without it, the safety, well-being, and future potential of our young people is at risk. Those efforts must begin with reliable data, and the goal of the Safe and Supportive Schools grant is to help States secure and utilize such data.”

Over the course of the four-year collaboration, the 43 participating high schools assessed their student, personnel, and parent populations each spring using the newly-developed Iowa Youth Survey: Conditions for Learning to garner critical feedback on seven dimensions related to the Safety, Engagement, and Environment within their schools. They also collected information on five additional areas related to school climate, and tracked essential school-level data including graduation, attendance, dropout rates, and suspensions/expulsions each year. In addition to the data components, each school worked hard to create and sustain leadership teams that authentically engage youth voice, develop implementation plans to address areas of need highlighted by the data, and move their plans for improvement forward with fidelity. It has been truly rewarding to watch the teams thrive over the years, and their experience is proof that an intentional focus on school climate improvement does make a meaningful difference!

Now in its final year, the trends across the 25 participating funded schools for the four years show some exciting preliminary findings:

- Schools demonstrated a consistent increase in participation rates for the survey across all populations, indicating that consistent measurement does support greater community engagement over time.
- By year 2014, students, school personnel, and parents in the funded schools reported increases in the domains of Safety, Engagement, and Environment across all seven constructs measured.
- Graduation rates increased two percentage points across all schools during the life of the grant, resulting in more than an 86% rate overall. Attendance rates also increased.
- Dropout rates decreased by one percentage point across all schools during the life of the grant, resulting in a 3.3% dropout rate overall. Suspensions/Expulsions also decreased steadily during this period.

We look forward to sharing more detailed information about the progress made in Iowa in the coming months.
All 21 high schools in Iowa’s Safe and Supportive Initiative have implemented Youth Leadership Teams (YLTs). YLTs consist of 5-7 students representing the student population and adult sponsors. They are tasked with learning about the school climate data and meet regularly with school staff as well as their peers to unpack what the data mean. Once they understand the data, students develop plans and are empowered to make recommendations that will result in positive change for their schools. YLTs have had discussions with the Lieutenant Governor and have been spokespersons to the local media. They are key representatives for promoting the purpose and value of the annual survey to their community, and their recommendations have led to such concrete efforts as changes in cell phone policies and late-start scheduling, as well as the creation of anonymous reporting stations for unsafe behavior within the school via a campaign called Locker178.

One particularly ambitious initiative involved the creation of a Water Bottle Refilling Station at Winfield Mt. Union High School. In response to low scores in the Environment section of the survey as well as staff and student feedback on a student-developed follow-up survey, the YLT created a plan to reduce waste within their school by installing Refilling Stations to limit the number of discarded water bottles throughout the school. As the YLT proposal notes, “Students and staff report that hallways, teacher’s classrooms, the schoolyard, and gymnasium tend to be littered with discarded water bottles. Janitorial staff agrees that much of the schools trash is made up of disposable water bottles." 100% of their student population showed a commitment to using refilling stations, and a similar percentage voiced the importance of a Reduce, Reuse, Recycle initiative within the school. The students compiled data on recommended daily water intake, brain research, and the Healthy Kids Act to show support for their campaign, and outlined the long-term benefits of consistent engagement with the Refill Stations. The YLT also committed to a consistent assessment of usage and education to the student body on the value of this new resource. Their closing argument said it best:

“The Youth Leadership Team hopes that through effective marketing and education of students regarding Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, they will not only minimize trash at school, but also impact student thinking outside of the school building and beyond their years at WMU. We feel that these stations will improve our school’s physical environment, our staff and student well being, as well as enhance student learning.”

Based on their data, additional follow-up and persuasive arguments, the school approved the installation of the Water Bottle Refilling Stations this spring! We’ll be tracking their progress with usage in the year to come. Kudos to the WMU Youth Leadership Team for their hard work and smart planning!
This fall, NSCC was thrilled to partner with Wayne County School Achievement Services (Wayne RESA), a partner in the Michigan Department of Education Statewide System of Support (SSoS) on its climate and culture reform initiatives. This multi-phase improvement effort is focused on defining areas of strength and challenge to guide informed decision-making and also making full use of NSCC's 5-Stage Improvement Process to achieve a sustainable improvement effort. Working with the leadership team and key building stakeholders, NSCC administered the Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI) to nearly 8,000 Wayne County students. The second and ongoing phase will respond to the strengths and challenges revealed by CSCI findings with thorough review of findings and an array of coaching sessions to prioritize goals and plan for next steps.

Using NSCC’s Improvement Process, schools have been introduced to the core guidelines of implementing an improvement plan— from ensuring adequate resources are available to establishing a “no fault” framework that promotes a culture of trust. NSCC continues to work collaboratively with the leadership and building teams this summer to evaluate their assessment findings and prioritize goals for the next phase of action planning.

Below, Dr. Velicia Humes, Climate and Culture Improvement Specialist at Wayne RESA, revisits a session, Classroom Triggers, recently conducted with 36 Wayne County Schools. The session emphasized the importance of school personnel, specifically teachers and administrators, modeling the social and emotional behaviors expected from students.

The topic provided a great opportunity to emphasize two important elements of school climate: teaching and learning and interpersonal relationships. The session was designed to help session participants understand the importance of having positive social and emotional behavior when teaching these competencies to students. Students no longer accept the old adage of, “Do as I say, not as I do!” How teachers, administrators and others manage their emotions provides a foundation of expected behaviors for students.

Session participants were asked to complete the Adult Personal Conflict Style Inventory, a short survey indicating your preferred method of dealing with conflict, prior to attending the session. Statement such as “I devote more attention to making sure others understand the logic and benefits of my position than I do to pleasing them” and “I set aside my own preferences and become more concerned with keeping the relationship comfortable” facilitated the discussion of how personal traits and tendencies promote or hinder positive classroom relationships. The inventory was also used to identify positive ways to manage those instances that ‘trigger’ an emotional response. In many instances, participants acknowledged small gestures such as maintaining eye contact and an open body posture, setting aside cooling time for emotions to settle, and using active listening techniques to confirm they have accurately heard what students are communicating, supporting an environment of mutual respect and understanding. Participants were encouraged, through exercises and role-playing, to use these practices as teachable moments in hopes that students would mimic the positive social engagement both inside and outside of the classroom.

Participants enjoyed the interaction and realized how important their discussions were to actualizing social, emotional, and civic learning goals in their schools. All of the materials used to design the session were available via the School Climate Resource Center (SCRC) at www.scrc.schoolclimate.org. Not only did the participants have fun, they were anxious to implement what they had learned.
Dear Colleague Letters
www.schoolclimate.org/programs/ocr-overview.php
A recent Office for Civil Rights’ Dear Colleague Letter concerning charter schools and two new guidance documents on sexual harassment/violence are now up on our website: http://www.schoolclimate.org/programs/ocr-overview.php. In the next issue of School Climate Matters, we will discuss the recent DCL on civil rights issues and charter schools.

Public Accountability for Charter Schools
A brief published from the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University that provides recommendations of Governance and Transparency, Equitable Access, School Climate, and Facilities for charter schools. Though set for charters in New York City, this report can be read as a policy model for other charters that look to improve its schools as a whole while keeping true to the sector.

5 Critical Conditions That Encourage School Improvement
www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2014/04/18/29zavadsky.h33.html
Heather Zavadsky discusses a district-wide approach in creating an innovative and quality driven system to “prepare students to be productive 21st-century citizens.” She includes an example of a district in Houston that incorporates the elements that encourage school improvement.

Share My Lesson (SML): For Teachers, By Teachers
www.sharemylesson.com
Free teaching resources digital platform giving K-12 educators the opportunity to collaborate and share learning resources. Officially launched in June 2012 and developed in partnership by the AFT and Britain’s TES Connect, SML currently boasts more than 500,000 registered users and over 300,000 resources. Resources range across all grade levels and subjects, including mental and social-emotional health. Join this network of educators for downloadable lesson plans, activities, and resources.

Edmodo: The Facebook of Education
www.wired.com/2014/06/edmodo
www.edmodo.com
Edmodo is an educational social networking site offering educators the opportunity to connect with students in a different learning environment and explore different formats of social media. In The Next Big Thing You Missed: A Social Network that Could Truly Transform Our Schools, Edmodo is described as a “simple, intuitive way for teachers and students to connect within the classroom in much the same way they were increasingly connecting with friends beyond it—on social networks like Facebook.”

Teaching Channel
www.teachingchannel.org
Teaching Channel is a professional video learning resource capturing effective K-12 teaching practices. Their video library offers information on a wide range of subjects as well as the Common Core State Standards and material for teachers to use in their own classrooms.

Building Supportive Relationships in Afterschool
www.sp2.upenn.edu/ostrc/doclibrary/documents/BuildingSupportiveRelationshipsinAfterschool.pdf
This SEDL newsletter focuses on afterschool programs that enrich relationships among personnel, students, their families, and the community around them. Planning for programs outside of school hours can benefit school climate in the long run by engaging activities that promote social and civic learning and more time with students and parents. SEDL shares five insights on how to build supportive relationships.

California School Taps Community to Engage Students
www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2014/06/05/34community.h33.html
EdWeek showcases an inspiring California high school where students get involved in their community, while staff learns to build on students’ circumstances. The school makes an effort to do more than “school work” and reaches out to their community to put their learning into practice and create a framework for tying culture into curriculum.

What Makes a School Effective?
www.education.com/reference/article/Ref_What_Makes_School/
When planning for an effective learning environment, Education.com makes suggestions on making a positive impact on students regardless of race or socioeconomic status. The articles touches upon creating a safe and organized place, setting high expectations for students, leadership, stating a clear mission, monitoring progress, providing learning opportunities, and building a partnership with families.
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