in this issue

• Equity Issues in Discipline and School Improvement Conference Debrief, P. 2
• Legal Matters: Disproportionate Discipline Practices, P. 3
• Expert Spotlight: No Magic Remedy for School Climate Improvement, P. 4–5
• From the Field: Finding Demetra’s Voice, P. 6–7

in brief

March 12–13, 2015 — NSCC’s Dr. Jonathan Cohen will deliver a keynote at the fifth annual convening of the Illinois Civic Mission Coalition (ICMC). Convening participants will focus on strengthening proven civic learning programs and practices, including developing attendees’ capacity for policy advocacy at the state and local levels. Register at https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/ZRC99FH.

March 23–25, 2015 — Share My Lesson is launching its free two-day Ideas and Innovations virtual conference of professional learning this March. Register and gain classroom and school-wide practices across a number of topics. Visit www.sharemylesson.com/conference for a full schedule and list of presenters.

March 27, 2015 — NSCC’s Dr. Jonathan Cohen will participate in a panel at the International Society for Adolescent Psychiatry and Psychology Conference. This date will address major topics of interest to adolescent mental health professionals including cultural issues, social media, substance abuse, eating disorders, depression, etc. For details and registration, visit http://adolescent-psychiatry.org.

Join Us for NSCC’s 18th Annual Summer Institute

School Climate Leadership: Policy, Practice, and Leadership Development

June 25–26th, 2015 at the Winston Preparatory School, NYC

In partnership with International Institute for Restorative Practices

This 2-day event is designed to provide individuals and school teams with the knowledge and resources to develop an effective school climate improvement action plan. Attendees will learn about school climate research findings, how to address challenging obstacles, and the essential tasks shaping each stage of school improvement planning.

Summer Institute attendees will work collaboratively to question:

• What are we currently doing in our school communities?
• How can we build on past and current efforts to support our improvement goals?
• What specific goals can be used as benchmarks to measure our progress?

Register now to:

• Attend workshops facilitated by a variety of expert voices
• Collaborate and connect with a network of educators and school improvement teams
• Gain valuable resources such as NSCC’s Readiness Assessments to guide your practice

All participants will be given two month access to NSCC’s interactive, on-demand learning site School Climate Resource Center (SCRC scrc.schoolclimate.org) following the Institute.

REGISTER TODAY! View a full brochure and submit your interest for the Summer Institute at http://www.schoolclimate.org/programs/si.php
With the winter season soon ending, NSCC is preparing for an eventful spring and summer. Our 18th Annual Summer Institute in NYC leads the excitement with our two-day event scheduled for June 25-26th. As always, we look forward to the opportunity to connect with you. This year, we are focusing on School Climate Leadership: Policy, Practice, and Leadership Development. We hope you will consider joining us to network with fellow colleagues, gain insight from expert voices, and collaborate to develop school improvement action plans. Learn more about our workshops and presenters by visiting: www.schoolclimate.org/programs/si.php.

The rest of this issue is focused on topics touching every corner of school climate improvement. On page 2, we highlight the recent Equity Issues in Discipline and School Climate Improvement: Policy and Best Practices conference co-sponsored by NSCC with Randy Ross, NSCC Senior Consultant and Jessica Savage, NSCC Policy & Legal Director speaking on topics of school climate, equity, and discipline. Our Legal Matters column (page 3) complements themes presented during this one-day professional development event with thorough coverage of a recent Dear Colleague Letter defining disproportionality in discipline practices. Our featured expert spotlight (page 4) visits Joseph Hattrick, principal of Riverbend Preparatory as he defines practical steps to evaluate school climate needs and proposed actions to unify a school community. Finally, on page 6, a thoughtful piece by Marcy L. Peake, TRiO Future Educator Success Program Director expands on our BullyBust: Promoting a Community of Upstanders campaign to show how one student in this program found her voice after attending a performance of our longtime and dedicated partner, Wicked The Musical.

Thank you for your ongoing support and for the time spent with our latest release. We hope you find this issue of School Climate Matters useful in your work. Please stay in touch and remember to share your feedback and ideas for future issues at newsletter@schoolclimate.org.

Best wishes,

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

School Climate Conference Debrief

The National School Climate Center recently co-sponsored a one-day professional development conference: Equity Issues in Discipline and School Climate Improvement: Policy & Best Practices. The conference was held on December 12, 2014 at the Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE). School Climate Consulting Services (schoolclimate-consulting.org) organized the conference and the Social Emotional Learning Alliance of Massachusetts (SEL4MASS.org) also co-sponsored.

Demonstrating the strong interest among educators to review and improve discipline practices, 120 people attended, representing more than 30 school districts and organizations from five states.

Gretchen Brion-Meisels, Lecturer at HGSE and Conference Faculty Sponsor, began the day with welcoming remarks. Saba Bireda, Esq., Senior Counsel to the Assistant Secretary in the Office for Civil Rights, provided a well-defined description of federal requirements for schools to address disproportionality in discipline. For detailed information, see the “Legal Matters” article on page 3 of this issue.

Three other speakers focused on connections of school climate, equity, and discipline:

• “Equity-Centered School Climate Improvement:” (Randy Ross, NSCC Senior Consultant)
• “How is Discriminatory Discipline a Key Civil Rights Issue for Schools?” (Jessica Savage, NSCC Policy & Legal Director)
• “Discipline and Equity-Centered School Climate Best-Practices” (Randy Ross and Elizabeth AVant, Psychologist in the Providence Public Schools and Chair of the National Association of School Psychologists’ Multicultural Affairs Committee).

Partner with NSCC in Your Region . . .

If you are interested in NSCC leading a conference similar to this one in your state or region, please contact jonathancohen@schoolclimate.org or jsavage@schoolclimate.org.
One year ago—in January 2014—the US-DOE’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR) and the Department of Justice’s Civil Rights Division together issued a remarkable set of requirements and guidelines for reducing the well-documented problem of racial disproportionality in PK-12 suspensions and expulsions. As part of this federal initiative, OCR released a detailed Dear Colleague Letter defining why schools may be investigated for disproportionate and disparate discipline practices. Nearly two decades of research have confirmed how widespread these practices are. More recently, they have been shown to foster the “school-to-prison pipeline.”

How can you decide what this research and the new federal guidelines mean for you as an educator already juggling multiple responsibilities and community pressures, including perhaps new state discipline guidelines?

School districts should adhere to 3 Guiding Principles:

1. Focus on prevention and creating positive school climates
2. Develop clear, appropriate, and consistent expectations and consequences to address problem behavior
3. Ensure fair, equitable, and continuous improvement

Most important is that exclusionary discipline practices are potentially a civil rights issue. Thus, all schools are required to learn about and abide by the new OCR requirements, whatever their local or state regulations may be. The new federal guidelines, however, provide a wealth of information to support schools in doing so.

A few key points: Students of color, students with disabilities, and LGBTQ youth are significantly more likely to be suspended or expelled. African American female students are six times more likely to be suspended than white females. Students who are suspended are more likely to fall behind in their coursework, repeat a grade, show decreased academic achievement and standardized test scores, become disengaged and drop-out of school, and/or become involved in the court system. In fact, students who are suspended for discretionary (more subjective) violations are nearly three times more likely to have contact with the juvenile justice system the following year. Research shows that being incarcerated as a juvenile dramatically increases the likelihood of being incarcerated as an adult. Hence, the connection between racially disproportionate, exclusionary school discipline and the school-to-prison pipeline.

What are some critical strategies to deal with this problem?

The new federal guidelines emphasize the connection between improving school climate and school discipline. According to the guidelines, school districts should adhere to three Guiding Principles: (1) Focus on prevention and creating positive school climates, (2) develop clear, appropriate, and consistent expectations and consequences to address problem behavior, and (3) ensure fair, equitable, and continuous improvement.

A critical first step is to collect and examine your own school and district discipline data, disaggregated by race/ethnicity, gender, and disability status. Reviewing your discipline and code of conduct policies to identify systemic issues that may lead to disproportionality is also an important early step. Also, reviewing and possibly re-negotiating your memorandum of agreement with law enforcement is a closely related action step. In revising such policies and agreements, incorporating language to reinforce the importance of school climate improvement is essential. Research-based approaches, including culturally responsive social-emotional learning programs and restorative practices, should be considered. The School Discipline Consensus Report provides detailed information on these various steps.

Students of color, students with disabilities, and LGBTQ youth are significantly more likely to be suspended or expelled. African American female students are six times more likely to be suspended than white females.

Some widely used approaches have been shown to reduce overall disciplinary suspensions and expulsions. However, reducing such disciplinary outcomes does not necessarily reduce racial and other forms of disproportionality.

If you are interested in technical assistance and/or professional development on the topics raised in this article, please contact us directly at ross@schoolclimate.org and jsavage@schoolclimate.org.
It is common knowledge that a positive school climate has a strong association with student achievement. While schools across the United States search for the curriculum to close achievement gaps or highly qualified staff to breathe life into lessons; the climate of the school is often overlooked.

Though we know school climate is critical to student success, how to create a positive school climate is quite ambiguous.

In 2012, I was asked to assume the leadership role at a K-6 charter school. Student enrollment was declining and staff turnover was increasing. Trust from the local community was declining. There was a perception bullying behavior was prevalent and student safety was fleeting from school reviews and staff interviews. Transforming the climate was my initial goal. It would require both my leadership and social work skills—a partnership that, in my opinion, is essential in school leadership.

To truly understand the current climate of the school, I surveyed the staff using an in-house tool, analyzed online reviews and school-wide data, interviewed parents, students and staff, and spent more time interacting with these members each day. This holistic view of the school provided a framework for which to establish a baseline and determine goals.

It had become clear that the school was focused on what they were doing (as many schools do) and not on how they were doing it. Equally clear was the importance for all stakeholders to regain trust in the leadership of the school.

To truly understand the current climate of the school, I surveyed the staff using an in-house tool, analyzed online reviews and school-wide data, interviewed parents, students and staff, and spent more time interacting with these members each day. This holistic view of the school provided a framework for which to establish a baseline and determine goals. It had become clear that the school was focused on what they were doing (as many schools do) and not on how they were doing it. Equally clear was the importance for all stakeholders to regain trust in the leadership of the school.

Based on these observations, the school established the following goals: 1) increase community credibility through community awareness and parent satisfaction, 2) improve student safety through positive behavior and higher expectations, and 3) demonstrate strong leadership and stability. It is important to note that while these are not identified as “makers of climate”, if achieved, they would produce the conditions to which school climate could improve.

Our goals—much like school improvement goals—dictated our action steps. There is often not one factor that contributes to positive outcomes. To address our goals, the school achieved the following:

- **Riverbend Prep has become a strong and noticeable presence within the community.** It was necessary to reach out to the community in a meaningful way. Through partnerships, hosting events and getting involved, the school became a trusted partner within the community. It also became my aim to meet with each family over the course of the school year with the simple goal of establishing a positive relationship with each.

- **We established a commitment to communicate and become active partners in education.** It is critical to be an organization of great integrity with a reputation for honoring commitments to have a trusting partnership with stakeholders. Additionally, knowing and caring about your families must be the heart of your school. We have heard it before and it is true; a child/family does not care how much you know until they know how much you care.

- **Through shared leadership, we developed a standard of conduct to which all staff, students, and parents would be equally expected to adhere.** These expectations became our cultural norms. They were the focus of every conversation.
As a school leader, nothing is more invigorating than to see all of the collective efforts of a team manifest in positive results. Through the systematic and specific steps taken, the efforts that first year produced remarkable results. Students and families felt safe and cared for as represented in a 95% re-enrollment rate and 25% enrollment increase. Staff members felt part of a team making a tremendous difference in the lives of students. Finally, parents and the larger community felt valued and embraced Riverbend as an educational partner.

Now, here’s the tough part. There is no magic “school climate” remedy that works for every school. In fact, every school is different and has its own unique challenges and strengths. Fortunately, I had a broad range of previous experiences and training that supported this school climate overhaul.

The tools I used throughout this process CAN be used at every school, small or large, private or public. These tools are:

• **Be intentional.** It is typically not the case that accidents will provide positive results. Plans are a common practice in school leadership and they should be developed and implemented thoughtfully.

• **Walk the talk.** It is not enough to tell the team to get out in the community and get involved or to sit down and get to know your students and parents. The leader of the school must be willing to do the same.

• **Communicate and listen.** The most effective tool for analysis is to listen and clarify. This can be through conversation or direct/indirect observations or surveys.

• **Be present and positive.** If you are the school leader, this is your home away from home. Make sure people see you, can talk to you, and feel welcome in your home.

I truly believe a positive school climate is something attainable at every school. Imagine the tremendous impact schools could have on our communities if we made school climate the focus. We truly could change the world and ensure a bright future for our children.

**Establish the following goals:**
1. Increase community credibility through community awareness and parent satisfaction,
2. Improve student safety through positive behavior and higher expectations, and
3. Demonstrate strong leadership and stability.

**The tools I used throughout this process CAN be used at every school, small or large, private or public. These tools are:**

• **Be intentional.** It is typically not the case that accidents will provide positive results. Plans are a common practice in school leadership and they should be developed and implemented thoughtfully.

• **Walk the talk.** It is not enough to tell the team to get out in the community and get involved or to sit down and get to know your students and parents. The leader of the school must be willing to do the same.

• **Communicate and listen.** The most effective tool for analysis is to listen and clarify. This can be through conversation or direct/indirect observations or surveys.

• **Be present and positive.** If you are the school leader, this is your home away from home. Make sure people see you, can talk to you, and feel welcome in your home.

Joseph Hattrick has served the educational field for sixteen years, ten of which in leadership and is currently the principal at a small school in Arizona. He also has been a teacher, school social worker, marketing manager and child therapist. Joseph currently has his Masters in Social work, Post-Masters in Educational Administration and is completing his Doctorate in Organizational Leadership. Joseph enjoys consulting and speaking on a variety of topics such as school climate, marketing, classroom management and leadership. He can be reached at joseph.hattrick@gmail.com.
Meeting Demetra

Demetra’s life obstacles are not evident when you first meet her. You notice a vivacious, mature, interested, and engaging young lady encouraging a welcoming and safe school environment for all. I first met Demetra last year through the anti-bullying/anti-oppression collaboration between Delton Kellogg Middle School (DKMS) and Western Michigan University’s TRiO Future Educator Success Program (FESP). This collaboration was established to create and develop an inclusive middle school culture for all students, staff and visitors in a rural school district. Delton is a small and primarily white farming community that has very few families of color. The TRiO Program additionally creates experiential learning opportunities to expose teacher preparation students to the joys and challenges of working with children. This multi-age and multi-racial group of administrators and students committed to anti-bullying formed a collaboration that has been mutually beneficial for all involved!

Demetra immediately stood out as a leader and young person with insights beyond her years.

The philosophy of TRiO FESP is “everyone teaches and everyone learns” and this is also one of the guiding principles in our DKMS group. Demetra immediately stood out as a leader and young person with insights beyond her years. One early lesson involved the student group perception on the current school environment. The conversation reached school uniforms (which they do not have) and the majority of the group groaned at the idea. Demetra shared her thoughts based on her experiences of attending a school that required uniforms. She said, “Uniforms are helpful to the kids and families who do not have extra money because kids can go to school and look like everyone else and not be teased.” When she made this simple and profound statement, her peers suddenly stopped groaning and began to see another point of view.

Demetra has attended many schools, having moved several times. At times, her housing situation was unstable. Rather than using these experiences as excuses to distance herself, she has managed to use them to strengthen her resolve. She very openly shares that getting to this stage has been a process not without its bumps and bruises. With that, she always mentions the adults who were a stable and consistent presence.

We thought this would be such a great opportunity to allow these young people to see that the world is much bigger than what they currently experience. Through the messages in Wicked, they would forever have a visual optic reminding them of the work we had done all year. Needless to say, we felt like we won the lottery when our proposal was selected. The students were excited and dressed up for the show. Nothing prepared us for the mesmerized looks from our students once the show began! I particularly observed Demetra because of her love of music. She was captivated by the messages, music, costumes, and cast unlike anyone I have ever seen.

Students from the Western Michigan University (WMU) College of Education and Human Development’s TRiO Future Educator Success Program spent a semester creating and facilitating an anti-bullying/anti-oppression curriculum for 20 middle school students at Delton Kellogg Middle School in Delton, MI. Students enjoyed a safe space that encouraged reflection and allowed teacher education candidates the opportunity to connect with students. Through the partnership between NSCC’s BullyBust campaign and Wicked, these middle school students were awarded tickets to see Wicked at the Miller Auditorium in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Read below as Marcy Peake speaks about Demetra, one student in the program that used this partnership to rally together her classmates and overcome one of her biggest fears.

Profile: Finding Demetra’s Voice

By Marcy L. Peake, Director, TRiO Future Educator Success Program, Western Michigan University

Students from the Western Michigan University (WMU) College of Education and Human Development’s TRiO Future Educator Success Program spent a semester creating and facilitating an anti-bullying/anti-oppression curriculum for 20 middle school students at Delton Kellogg Middle School in Delton, MI. Students enjoyed a safe space that encouraged reflection and allowed teacher education candidates the opportunity to connect with students. Through the partnership between NSCC’s BullyBust campaign and Wicked, these middle school students were awarded tickets to see Wicked at the Miller Auditorium in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Read below as Marcy Peake speaks about Demetra, one student in the program that used this partnership to rally together her classmates and overcome one of her biggest fears.

Meeting Demetra

Demetra’s life obstacles are not evident when you first meet her. You notice a vivacious, mature, interested, and engaging young lady encouraging a welcoming and safe school environment for all. I first met Demetra last year through the anti-bullying/anti-oppression collaboration between Delton Kellogg Middle School (DKMS) and Western Michigan University’s TRiO Future Educator Success Program (FESP). This collaboration was established to create and develop an inclusive middle school culture for all students, staff and visitors in a rural school district. Delton is a small and primarily white farming community that has very few families of color. The TRiO Program additionally creates experiential learning opportunities to expose teacher preparation students to the joys and challenges of working with children. This multi-age and multi-racial group of administrators and students committed to anti-bullying formed a collaboration that has been mutually beneficial for all involved!

Demetra immediately stood out as a leader and young person with insights beyond her years.

The philosophy of TRiO FESP is “everyone teaches and everyone learns” and this is also one of the guiding principles in our DKMS group. Demetra immediately stood out as a leader and young person with insights beyond her years. One early lesson involved the student group perception on the current school environment. The conversation reached school uniforms (which they do not have) and the majority of the group groaned at the idea. Demetra shared her thoughts based on her experiences of attending a school that required uniforms. She said, “Uniforms are helpful to the kids and families who do not have extra money because kids can go to school and look like everyone else and not be teased.” When she made this simple and profound statement, her peers suddenly stopped groaning and began to see another point of view.

Demetra has attended many schools, having moved several times. At times, her housing situation was unstable. Rather than using these experiences as excuses to distance herself, she has managed to use them to strengthen her resolve. She very openly shares that getting to this stage has been a process not without its bumps and bruises. With that, she always mentions the adults who were a stable and consistent presence.

We thought this would be such a great opportunity to allow these young people to see that the world is much bigger than what they currently experience.

Being WICKED!

Demetra has always shared her love of music and singing, even sharing a very special necklace that was given to her by her grandfather, who is also a lover of music. When we realized the opportunity to win tickets to Wicked through BullyBust, Demetra was a primary reason for the excitement behind the opportunity. She, like many of the other DKMS students, had never been to a college campus or to a Broadway production. We thought this would be such a great opportunity to allow these young people to see that the world is much bigger than what they currently experience. Through the messages in Wicked, they would forever have a visual optic reminding them of the work we had done all year. Needless to say, we felt like we won the lottery when our proposal was selected. The students were excited and dressed up for the show. Nothing prepared us for the mesmerized looks from our students once the show began! I particularly observed Demetra because of her love of music. She was captivated by the messages, music, costumes, and cast unlike anyone I have ever seen.
I only wished at that moment that the cast, crew, producers of Wicked, and the BullyBust staff could see what I was seeing – it would make every struggle of putting on this show worth it.

If one ever doubts the value of the arts or giving a young person a chance to experience life in a new way, meeting Demetra will change that doubt.

“Because I Knew You”

A few weeks after the show, I was invited to attend the Delton Kellogg Board of Education meeting. Our collaboration with BullyBust and Miller Auditorium was presented. When I arrived, Demetra was there and had practiced “Because I Knew You” to sing at the meeting. She was nervous and sat with me in the audience. She shared that she was not sure if she could do it and had never performed in front of so many strangers. The room was packed with families, students, and board trustees. I told her that speaking at any board meeting, let alone singing at one, takes tremendous courage.

She performed and did an excellent job. This is not an easy song to sing, but she was gifted with natural pure talent. When she finished, Demetra confirmed what I had already witnessed at the Wicked performance when she said, “I really did it!” She continued, “I decided after going to Wicked that I am going to go to college and be in theater.” Hearing her say it and confirming that she believed she could do it was a moment like no other. To observers, she has the ability to become whatever she wants to become, but she did not have this sense of certainty and entitlement to voice her destiny until she saw the Wicked performance and then performed at the board meeting. If one ever doubts the value of the arts or giving a young person a chance to experience life in a new way, meeting Demetra will change that doubt.

What is TRiO FESP? The TRiO Future Educator Success Program (FESP) is designed to help eligible students excel at Western Michigan University and in their K-12 teaching careers. Funded by a $220,000 annual grant from the U.S. Department of Education, the program is housed in the Office of Admissions and Advising. The Future Educator Success Program will partner with the College of Education and Human Development faculty and K-12 educational professionals to enrich students’ Western Michigan University experience and prepare them to fulfill their aspirations of becoming K-12 educators.

The BullyBust and Wicked partnership is just one highlight from our national prevention campaign. Gain free resources and tools for your school community to reduce bullying and support student leadership. Start an Upstander Alliance Team at your school today! www.bullybust.org/upstander.

(resource corner)

(CSCI) Comprehensive School Climate Inventory Case Studies
NSCC has launched a new corner to our website-Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI) Case Studies. Read on to learn from educators using data to drive change in the areas of social-emotional security, parent/family engagement, and more.

8 Bully Prevention Tips for Mindful Parents E-Blast
http://conta.cc/1MFvkFO
To support our BullyBust: Promoting a Community of Upstanders campaign partner schools and community members, NSCC delivers a monthly e-blast of research, best practices, materials, and announcements from the field to spark ideas and assist efforts. If you missed it, read our February e-blast: 8 Bully Prevention Tips for Mindful Parents. To learn more about BullyBust, visit www.bullybust.org.

Attorney General’s Report On Children Exposed to Violence
http://1.usa.gov/1JzXaer
Educators cannot reduce the impact of exposure to violence on children without the right supports in place. The Attorney General’s National Task Force on Children Exposed to Violence has released a final report and recommendations to help school personnel learn specific ways to help children exposed to violence. Tips cover understanding what children experience when they are exposed to violence and how to be vigilant of signs of possible exposure.

School Improvement Grants: A Progress Report
http://bit.ly/1vYSDGQ
A detailed new study by the Council of great City Schools—School Improvement Grants: Progress Report from America’s Great City Schools—reveals urban schools have made significant strides with the support of funding through School Improvement Grants. Several features encouraging success include a coordinated plan at the district level to turn around the lowest-performing schools and a clear vision for school improvement communicated from principals to students, school personnel, and the community.
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