



# National School Climate Center

*Educating Minds and Hearts, because the 3 Rs Are Not Enough*

## Clayton School District Case Study

The School District of Clayton is a public school district located in Clayton, MO comprised of an early childhood center, three elementary schools, one middle school and one high school serving about 2,500 students. Dr. Milena Garganigo is the face of school climate leadership in her community. As the former assistant principal of Wydown Middle School, she spearheaded a school climate assessment using the Comprehensive School Climate Inventory Survey (CSCI). Now, as the assistant superintendent of teaching and learning for the School District of Clayton, Dr. Garganigo is once again leading the efforts to improve school climate at a district level. Noting successes and challenges from her old post, Dr. Garganigo has collected a portfolio of “learnings” to rally a district of school community members around the 5-stage improvement process of school climate to once again begin administering the CSCI.

### Making Meaning of School Climate Data

The Wydown Middle School climate assessment, originally done in 2009, revealed all student and personnel grades regarded Social-Emotional Security\* as an issue. Leading the list of challenges were trends of bullying behavior, exclusion and insensitivity for the feelings of others. More than a semester was set aside to dig deeper into the comprehensive data. From that, an advisory program connecting 10 students per teacher was developed. Staff members would follow students year-to-year to build a connected community and gain knowledge of how students were growing and changing over time. Sharing experiences across grade level during regular sessions supported the program. Wydown also created a school-wide initiative of service projects. With a family fun night and school carnival, they raised enough to grant two wishes for their chosen organization, The Make a Wish Foundation.

Group birthday celebrations, sitting together at lunch and after school trips all enforced an environment where deliberate connections were being made. The work at Wydown continues with the foundation Dr. Garganigo has started.

### Building the Foundation for Sustained Improvement

With Dr. Garganigo’s transition to district leadership at Clayton, a school climate push began with three elementary schools. This time, Garganigo was able to take assessment to a larger scale by contemplating her style of leadership. She had logged past experiences and gained insight into the impact a school assessment could make on the entire community. She imagined transitioning from being the central point person for school climate to now becoming a facilitator and mentor to others who would be taking the ropes of leadership Dr. Garganigo centered herself as the liaison; going from building to building to Location Clayton, MO School Type Elementary and Middle Schools Demographics (Entire District) 66% Caucasian, 19% African-American, 11% Asian, 4% Other “It’s never too early to teach lessons of empathy and responsibility.” – Dr. Milena Garganigo inform school leaders about the benefit of assessment and providing guidance for next steps. She says, “We want to be able to analyze district-wide data to pilot larger initiatives that will trickle from one school to the next. To be able to track progress, successes and challenges using longitudinal data is the ultimate purpose.”

## Shared Leadership

Dr. Garganigo assumes the role of both teacher and collaborator. She says, “We needed to make a commitment to this and make climate improvement a part of every school day. We had professional development days to brainstorm ideas and develop a protocol for analysis of data.” Her style of introducing assessment included several leading questions with leadership teams: What do you see? What do you make of it? What connections do you see with what you’re observing in the school building? What else are we surprised or wondering about? Principals and leaderships are paving their own way with support. Individual sessions with principals to dig deeper into results allows for time to connect. She notes, “If there’s discomfort with the data or there are sensitive areas to speak to, I’m available to co-facilitate a meeting and help support best ways we can start sharing these findings with our entire school community... Assuming roles and dividing tasks is central to our work here.” Dr. Garganigo’s work with her leadership team is ongoing. We look forward to supporting her leadership efforts as Clayton continues its school climate improvement work.

To learn more about how your school can benefit from the CSCI, visit: [www.schoolclimate.org/programs/csci.php](http://www.schoolclimate.org/programs/csci.php).  
\*School Climate Dimension Definitions