



# school climate matters

CENTER FOR SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL EDUCATION NEWSLETTER

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## in brief

**Bully Bust 2009** is CSEE's back-to-school bullying awareness campaign designed to help students "Stand Up" to bullying in (and out) of school. Find out how your school can get involved on Pg. 6.

**Congratulations to Palmetto Priority Schools in South Carolina** for successfully completing school climate measurement through the CSCI, and for taking an active role in improving the climate for learning in your district

**CSEE President Jonathan is the keynote speaker** at Caring Adults/Caring Environments, a special one-day conference (Fordham University, June) devoted to discussing what works in schools and beyond. For resources and more information, email us at [newsletter@csee.net](mailto:newsletter@csee.net).



## Making School Climate a District-Wide Priority: A Dedicated Team in Pennsylvania Gets to Work

**W**e all know that creating and implementing school improvement plans is hard work, but we also know that the positive impact is well worth the effort. The challenges can be even greater at the district-level, and yet as one district in Pennsylvania shows, the rewards of a collaborative improvement process can make all the difference in creating lasting success.

For the past year, CSEE has been working with the Hatboro-Horsham District to help them measure and improve their climate for learning. The district knew that the first step to improvement was to get a clear understanding of their particular strengths and potential areas of need based on feedback from the entire school community. To fulfill this goal, all seven schools in the district (including five elementary schools,

one middle school, and one high school) administered the Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI) to their students, staff, and parents in the spring of 2008. The findings from this research-based needs assessment have formed a valuable baseline to support a unified, strategic process for improvement going forward.

In order to deepen their understanding of the data, a representative group of administrators from the district attended CSEE's three-day Summer Institute last July and began working with their findings as a team for the first time. Overall, each of the schools found a number of core strengths—including clear and fair rules and norms, high community collaboration, and a positive view of leadership—which are essential to maintain as the teams moved forward with plans for improvement.

# message from the president



dear friends,

As we near the end of another school year, the focus often shifts from the rush of daily in-school activities to more direct attention on long-term planning and goals. This process of action planning is actually one of the most critical efforts any school can undertake to ensure their future success—and it also happens to be one of the most challenging steps for many schools.

In our experience working with schools across the country, we've learned a lot about what it takes to create truly effective action planning. In this issue, we've compiled some of the most valuable lessons learned and asked educators and experts to share their best practices with you! Look inside for great tips on overcoming common barriers to planning and gaining necessary buy-in, creative solutions that schools have implemented to address areas of need, and valuable resources on how to measure your school climate and make the right choices for sustained improvement.

As always, we hope you find this issue to be valuable and look forward to hearing your thoughts! Please email us at: [newsletter@csee.net](mailto:newsletter@csee.net) with comments or questions and share what your school is doing to create a positive, healthy, and engaged climate for learning. Don't forget to register for our **12th Annual Summer Institute** (info. on p. 7)—we look forward to seeing you there!

Best wishes for a safe, fun and productive summer,

**Jonathan Cohen, Ph.D.**

President and Co-Founder  
Center for Social and Emotional Education

They also found very similar potential areas of need across the district, which centered on the following three categories:

- **Respect for diversity between students and from students to adults,**
- **Social-emotional safety (which includes verbal harassment and bullying),**
- **and lower ratings for Social-Emotional & Civic Learning by students and parents.**

The administrative team left the institute energized and eager to keep the work going. They incorporated the CSCI findings into current discussions with school-level action planning teams, and began brainstorming ways these findings could help improve their current efforts. One elementary school used the data and community feedback to create a Cafeteria Task Force, which looked at more effective ways to manage lunchtime so they could give their 1000+ student body adequate time to eat and promote a more organized process during lunch and between classes. Working directly from their CSCI results, another elementary school launched an "Acceptance Day" to promote respect for diversity ([see box at right](#)).

To continue the great work these teams began, CSEE led individual teams of educators and administrators at each school through an intensive two-day series of workshops in the spring of 2009 to help schools prioritize future initiatives based on CSCI findings and create targeted action plans for sustained improvement. In May, all teams completed the second session of this training series and came away with a clear vision on how to implement a district-wide plan for enhancing social-emotional learning and safety. As one administrator noted, "Having these follow-up sessions keeps the work at the individual buildings meaningful, relevant, and alive. An elementary school teacher noted, "This process reinforced that our school is headed in the right direction. We are energized and ready to go."

The most significant benefit of this process has been the increased collaboration across all schools in the district, which has strengthened current initiatives and created a more integrated plan for improvement. To continue their diversity efforts, the middle school is partnering with the Anti-Defamation League, and building off lessons learned from the high school tolerance planning team. Next fall, the high school team is implementing their own version of the "Acceptance Day" begun at the elementary level this year, and the entire elementary team has pulled together to formulate a common language and cohesive curriculum to build SEL skills for all students.

## Promoting Respect for Diversity with "Acceptance Day"

Responding to a need highlighted by CSCI findings, **Crooked Billet Elementary School** launched "Acceptance Day," a diversity awareness event promoting student, parent, and educator's engagement in this key aspect of school life. This year's focus was increasing acceptance and awareness of students with disabilities. The day included student-led puppet plays with diversity themes, a "unity train" with informational stations about disability supports, and children from the district sharing their personal experiences. Visit the blog to view a video from the event: <http://blogs.csee.net>.

*CSEE sends heartfelt congratulations to the entire Hatboro team of parents, educators and students for their hard work and unwavering commitment to school climate improvement! School Climate Matters will keep readers posted on Hatboro-Horsham District's progress as they work to create a more positive and supportive learning environment.*

# The Arts and Technology Academy, PCS: The Importance of School Climate and Social Emotional Learning

**T**he Arts & Technology Academy (ATA) is an elementary public charter school located in an urban Washington DC neighborhood, serving a predominantly “at-risk” population. Troubling demographic concerns coupled with rising incidents of violence in schools, an emphasis on testing nationwide, and increased demands on educators combine to make the conditions for individual student success nearly insurmountable. The administration here at ATA chose to acknowledge and address these barriers to achievement and to consider the many non-academic needs of its students and staff in a systematic manner. To do this, we launched a comprehensive school-wide social/emotional learning (SEL) initiative in 2006.

In order for our initiative to be thoughtful and purposeful, we needed more targeted direction in the form of hard data (see *the Resource Corner for details*). To that end, we have administered the Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI) for the past two years at the end of the school year. The substantial and focused results allowed us to create a targeted action plan.

Our CSCI results made evident that “respect” was the dimension that was ranked the lowest by both students and staff. Through our data analysis and focus groups we identified 4 root causes of disrespect in our building. Below are these root causes and some initiatives that are helping us improve respect at ATA, as well as other areas of school climate:

## 1. Cultural Exposure

Through our **Penpal Project**, we exposed ATA students to other cultures by pairing them up with students from area schools as well as schools overseas. We provided younger students with a guiding template and monthly topics to help them appreciate and learn about one another’s differences. The outcomes of the project were

appreciation of different cultures, appreciation of diversity and visibly improved writing skills.

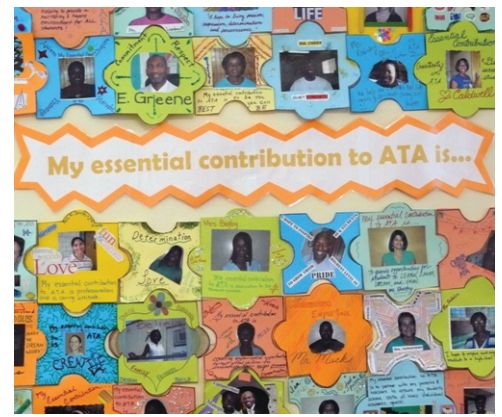
Our **Summer Postcard Drive** also helped improve exposure to other cultures. Over the summer, we provided students, families and community members with mailing labels and asked them to mail postcards back to the school from wherever they spent their vacation. In the fall, we displayed the postcards on a large world map in a lobby and celebrated the collection of postcards from around the US and overseas. Through the project, students were able to learn about each other and their teachers, learn about different places (near and far) and become aware of the possibilities beyond school walls.

## 2. Student Self-Esteem

Another area preventing respect is low student self-esteem. One way we sought to raise self-esteem was by creating our **Wall of PRIDE**. Our school motto is **PRIDE—Perseverance, Respect, Integrity, Discipline, and Enthusiasm**—so we recognized students who best exemplified these characteristics. Each month, teachers nominated a student based on established criteria, and we displayed their photograph and teacher quote on the wall. As a result, students were inspired to work diligently to make the wall, and student behavior became aligned with PRIDE expectations.

## 3. Parent Engagement

To help engage parents, we developed a **Family Scavenger Hunt** which was distributed right before spring break, wherein we motivated families to visit at least 6 pre-selected places (in the neighborhood, in the city, on the internet) in a packet and answer some questions about each place. Everyone who completed the packet was entered in a drawing to win a prize.



## 4. Staff Relationships

To provide opportunities for staff members to share, get to know each other and acknowledge one another, we created monthly **Speak Out Boards** for kudos, thank yous, sharing thoughts that tie in to monthly school themes, sharing favorite books, etc. In addition, every year the staff share their personalities through the **Staff Mural**. This year the theme was “my essential contribution to ATA”. Each staff member decorated a puzzle piece containing their qualities and strengths and the mural was displayed in the lobby.

Thanks in part to our comprehensive SEL initiative and focused initiatives born from school climate assessment, in the past two years we have seen the following changes: a decrease in student behavior referrals and suspensions, substantial gains on state tests and overall student achievement, improvements in staff and student attendance and morale, and a decrease in teacher turn-over.

**Vanessa A. Camilleri**, MA, MT-BC, LCAT, is the Social/Emotional Learning Specialist at The Arts & Tech Academy, Public Charter School, DC. To learn more about ATA initiatives, and experiences with school climate measurement, visit CSEE’s blog at <http://blogs.csee.net>.



## Developing & Implementing Sustainable Action Plans

Kim McLaughlin, *Executive Director, NYS Student Support Services Center*

Most schools have several plans or ideas for how they will work to reach their goals, whether they are solely academic or focused more comprehensively on supportive learning environments (rigorous academics, positive school climate, and strong social supports and learning). Often plans are developed by one or more school staff and carried out with just the staff necessary to reaching the goal. These plans can be effective for completing certain activities and reaching some goals.

What is less common is visioning, sustainable planning, goal setting, research-based implementation, assessment, and continuous improvement based on data that is driven by the meaningful involvement of critical stakeholders. These components are more likely to breed sustainable supportive cultures and learning environments in school communities.

The following steps have been very helpful to many school communities in planning and implementing supportive learning environments. First off, before **“Jumping into Action”**:

### **1. Secure Administrative Support and Involvement**

As with all change, it is critical to have administrative support and involvement in the process. It is also essential to understand that it is a journey and a process, not a destination, and that it takes days, months and years to institutionalize.

### **2. Build Community and Leadership**

Building, empowering, supporting and truly listening to a diverse stakeholder team is next. Representatives from all affected groups (students, parents, administration,

staff, community) need to become part of the team. Developing and strictly adhering to mutually respectful shared norms, an agreed upon communication process, and shared decision-making processes assist with modeling and building trust and capacity amongst team members. decision-making processes assist with modeling and building trust and capacity amongst team members.

### **2. Secure a skilled facilitator/ coach to guide the process**

A facilitator experienced in cognitive coaching and school, community, parent and student collaboration and engagement is very helpful to teams with a goal of supportive learning environment planning and implementation.

### **3. Focus on strengths and “what is or has been working and going well” versus deficits and “what is wrong and needs to be fixed”**

This is the cornerstone of a supportive process. Following *Appreciative Inquiry (AI)\** principles and processes has been very successful for many schools.

### **4. Gather, Analyze, Explore and Make Meaning Out of Data**

It is important for teams to gather data from multiple sources and to collaboratively make meaning of the data to gain a clear picture. Academic data as well as school climate, student support, school and student health, attendance, discipline and safety data can be gathered and explored. Encouraging multiple stakeholders to make meaning of the various data together provides opportunities to see the data through different lenses and perspectives.



Now, you are ready to **“Develop and Implement Sustainable Action Plans”**

### 1. Develop SMART Goals

Align your goal and action plans with your school’s mission and vision, and develop them based on **SMART** criteria: **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**ealistic and **T**ime-Driven. Describe what you want to achieve rather than what you do not want. An example goal a NYS school is working towards is: **By June 2010, our school district will collaboratively develop, translate, model, support, implement, celebrate and assess a safe and positive social and emotional positive school climate.** This goal directly connects to their school’s mission and vision.

### 2. Review and Select Best Practice Strategies, Practices and Programs to Achieve Your Goals

Although we choose all programs and strategies with the best of intentions, not all yield the results we identified in our SMART Goal. Review the research on what works and look closely at how the strategies or programs were implemented to achieve the results. Select a best practice that fits with your school and will have success and action plan to implement it the way it is most effective.

### 3. Develop SMART Action Steps to achieve the SMART goal

How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time! Action steps

are bite-sized, sequenced, action steps that break down each component of the goal into achievable pieces. An accompanying action plan includes clear objectives for each of the components of the goal and measurable steps with timelines and persons leading or responsible for completing the research-supported steps and actions to actually achieve the intended outcomes. The goal exemplified above has objectives and multiple research-based action steps for developing the positive expectations for a supportive school climate for the district, objectives and multiple action steps for translating the expectations in all environments and settings in all the schools in the district, objectives and multiple action steps for modeling and supporting the positive expectations, etc).

### 4. Implement the Action Plan, and Meet Regularly as a Team to Monitor, Assess and Adjust Your Actions, when needed, to Achieve Your Goal

### 5. Share Your Progress and Learnings Regularly with the Team and All Stakeholders in the School Community and Regularly Celebrate Individual, Team and School Successes

Sometimes we get so caught up in the “work” that we forget to share and acknowledge small (and even large) successes. This is an important part of the process—it keeps everyone engaged, supported and on task.

Five schools in New York State have been engaged in implementing this process for three years through the NYS Supportive Learning Environment Institute. We hope our process and learnings may be helpful to your school community as you work to develop and implement sustainable action plans.

\* *The Principles of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) (Positive, Constructionist, Simultaneity, Anticipatory and Poetic)*



**Kim McLaughlin** is Executive Director of the NYS Student Support Services Center which leads a statewide Supportive Learning Environment Institute, and is a featured workshop facilitator at this year’s 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Summer Institute (page 7). Kim will draw on research and theory to help participants with action planning and implementation, and understanding how to identify a wide range of bullying-related behavior, intervention strategies, and bystander supports.

## resource corner

Explore these useful articles, recently published books and web resources to learn more about action planning for improvement. If you'd like to share related resources, please email us at [newsletter@schoolclimate.org](mailto:newsletter@schoolclimate.org).

### On the Web

#### Resource Mapping and Management to Address Barriers to Learning: An Intervention for System Change

(UCLA Center, Mental Health in Schools Program and Policy Analysis)

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/resourcemapping/resourcemappingandmanagement.pdf>

#### Steps and Tools to Guide Planning and Implementation of a Comprehensive System to Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching

(UCLA Center, Mental Health in Schools Program and Policy Analysis)

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/stepsandtoolstoguideplanning.pdf>

#### TOOLKIT - Rebuilding Student Supports into a Comprehensive System for Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching

(UCLA Center, Mental Health in Schools Program and Policy Analysis)

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm>

#### Creating Leadership Teams

(NSBA)

<http://www.nsba.org/sbot/toolkit/leadteams.html#df>

#### School Board of Tomorrow List Serve

(NSBA)

<http://www.nsba.org/sbot/sbotreg2.html>

### Books & Articles

Cohen, J., Shapiro, L, & Fisher, M. (2006). *Finding the Heart of Your School: Using School Climate Data to Create a Climate for Learning. Principal Leadership* (The journal of the National Association of Secondary School Principals), Vol. 7, 4, pages 26-32.

Novick, B., Kress, J.S, Elias, M.J. (2002). *Building Learning Communities with Character: How to Integrate Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.



Each year  
**1 in every 4**  
children is bullied  
in our schools.

#### Make a real difference today.

Donate now to the School Climate Counts Fund. 100% of your gift will go directly to help a school in need measure their climate for learning. For every \$2 donation, you will help one child's voice be heard.

#### Learn more:

[www.SchoolClimate.org/SchoolClimateCounts](http://www.SchoolClimate.org/SchoolClimateCounts)



### Schools in Action

<http://blogs.csee.net>

Visit **CSEE's blog** to read about schools and districts making important strides in school climate improvement.

### Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI)

[www.schoolclimate.org/index.php/programs/csci](http://www.schoolclimate.org/index.php/programs/csci)

The foundation for effective action planning is school data. Measure your climate for learning this fall and take the first step toward smart action planning. The **CSCI** provides you with a 360° profile of your school across safety, teaching and learning, relationships and the environment. When your school takes the **CSCI**, you also gain access to a secure school portal stocked with school climate supports to guide you through the improvement process.

share your  
experience

What school climate  
initiatives do you  
have in place?

Email [newsletter@csee.net](mailto:newsletter@csee.net) so we can share this information with other schools dedicated to a positive school climate in our next newsletter.

## The Brown Rudnick Charitable Foundation

The Brown Rudnick Charitable Foundation Corp., a nonprofit tax-exempt entity established by attorneys from Brown Rudnick Berlack Israels LLP, has announced that it will renew its Community Grants Program! This program subsidizes small projects designed to improve inner-city education in Boston, Hartford, Providence, New York, or Washington, D.C., within the coming year. In keeping with the foundation's 2008 focus, proposals aimed at helping to reduce public school absenteeism and drop-out rates are of particular interest.

The proposed recipient must be a nonprofit organization or tax-exempt organization (e.g., a public school) that is willing to accept the grant and use it in the required manner. The foundation will generally consider grant applications monthly and award grants in an amount totaling up to \$2,000 in a given month.

Visit [www.brownrudnickcenter.com/foundation/communitygrant.asp](http://www.brownrudnickcenter.com/foundation/communitygrant.asp) for complete program information and grant application instructions



## get involved

### Stand Up to Bullying with Bully Bust 2009!

**Bully Bust 2009** is CSEE's bullying awareness campaign designed to empower students to "stand up" to bullying and become part of the solution to end harmful verbal harassment, teasing and violence in school. The campaign starts with students, educators, and parents signing the STAND UP PLEDGE, so visit [www.bullybust.org](http://www.bullybust.org) today to make your voice count and access practical anti-bullying supports.

#### Special Back-to-School Program & YouTube.com Video Contest

This year, make a school-wide commitment to end bullying by joining CSEE's exciting student-led awareness campaign. When your school participates, you'll receive free resources and provide a unique opportunity for your students to participate in a nationwide YouTube "Stand Up" Video contest. Groups of students will be invited to create short video messages sharing stories, tips and supportive messages about preventing school bullying. The best video will win a full day anti-bullying symposium for your entire school, featuring expert speakers and takeaway resources for the community. For more information contact Darlene Faster at [dfaster@csee.net](mailto:dfaster@csee.net).



**Sammi Hanratty**, teen actress and face of American Girl's Anti-Bully Doll, stands up to bullying and shows her support with the exclusive Bully Bust t-shirt, created by celebrity designer, Stacy Morgenstern Igel for her Boy Meets Girl brand. Get the shirt at [www.bullybust.org](http://www.bullybust.org); all proceeds benefit CSEE's anti-bully work with schools.

last chance  
to register!

### 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Summer Institute

July 7-9, 2009

Fordham University  
155 West 60th Street, NY, NY 10023

*Comprehensive School  
Climate Reform and Bully  
Prevention: Promoting Healthy  
and Democratic K-12 School  
Communities*

It's the last chance to register for this year's 12th annual Summer Institute! Registration closes **6/12**, so register now to take advantage of this year's expert workshops, networking sessions and practical resources.

#### 3-Day Institute Includes:

- \* Workshops \* Networking \*
- \* Sessions and Discussions \*
  - \* Bully Prevention \*
- \* School Climate Improvement \*
  - Community Building \*
- \* Crisis Preparedness Planning \*
- Infusing SEL into the Curriculum \*
- \* Student Engagement \*

#### REGISTER NOW AT:

[www.schoolclimate.org/programs](http://www.schoolclimate.org/programs)

"I thoroughly enjoyed the conference and the opportunity to engage in team-building dialogue.

The facilitators were superb, each of whom offered concrete strategies for making a difference for our students."

—Ray Palmer,

Senior Youth Development Manager  
Office of School and Youth Development

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**CSEE:**

Creating a Climate for Learning!

Visit us on the web!  
[www.schoolclimatematters.org](http://www.schoolclimatematters.org)

**CSEE 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, CSEE 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.

**CSEE's vision** is that all children will develop the essential social, emotional, and intellectual skills to become healthy and productive citizens.

**CSEE'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.

**CSEE achieves this through:**

- *Advocacy and policy*
- *Measurement and research*
- *Educational services*