



OVERVIEW

To succeed in school now and in the workplace later, our youth needs to be equipped with social and emotional skills. Not unlike algebra and geography, these skills have to be learned and schools need the tools to teach them in a positive setting – often referred to as culture and climate.



A positive school culture and climate provides the foundation for learning and prepares youth to navigate life's challenges. When students are learning in a positive environment, they do their best work and shine. They are happy to be there, feel safe, and are connected to one another and the wider community.

BUILDING A POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE

Creating a healthy school culture takes commitment, action, and time – along with the right resources. The School Culture and Climate Initiative, a partnership of **United Way Youth Empowerment Alliance** and the **College of Saint Elizabeth Center for Human and Social Development**, provides the resources for schools to improve their culture and climate in a systemic, intentional, and sustainable way. Our unique approach was named a 2014 **Promising Practice** by the **Character Education Partnership**.

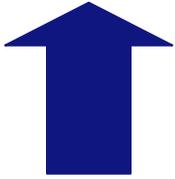
When schools join the Initiative, they embark on a three-year process tailored to their needs. We help them better understand and strengthen their current culture and climate. Through a variety of exercises and school-wide assessments, we support schools as they develop and implement improvement plans. The result is a school community where children can thrive emotionally, socially, physically, and academically.

Throughout the process, schools will –

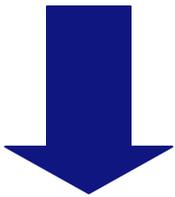
- Assess perceptions of culture and climate from the perspectives of faculty, staff, students, and parents
- Develop a set of core values that are shared by the entire school community
- Receive expert support and guidance from trained professionals to analyze the results of their culture and climate surveys
- Engage faculty and staff teams in a structured process to improve school climate based on their particular needs
- Receive training on strategies for family members and the school community to promote student social emotional skill development
- Address school culture and climate issues as mandated by the New Jersey Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act

WHY CULTURE AND CLIMATE IS SO IMPORTANT

Research shows that a school with a positive culture and climate – and a focus on social and emotional learning – is linked to student gains and reduced risks. It is critical that this work is intentional, comprehensive, and continuous.



- Increase in social and emotional skills
- Improved attitudes about self, others, and school
- Positive classroom behavior
- 11 percentile-point gains on standardized achievement tests



- Conduct problems decrease
- Aggressive behavior decreases
- Violence decreases
- Emotional distress decreases

Sources: CASEL – Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning

Durlak, J.A., Weissberg, R.P., Dymnicki, A.B., Taylor, R.D., & Schellinger, K. (2011). The Impact of Enhancing Students' Social and Emotional Learning: A Meta-Analysis of School-Based Universal Interventions. Child Development.

The impact reaches far beyond school years. By developing social and emotional skills now, youth will also have many of the skills needed to be employable, successful adults. Improved prospects for our kids to obtain and maintain higher paying jobs is one of United Way of Northern New Jersey's long-term strategies to reduce the number of **ALICE™** (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) families in our region.

WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

For participating schools, a successful three-year process results in:

- A school environment where students feel safe and supported
- District-wide shared values and goals
- A curriculum that is appropriate for students and helps them develop social and emotional skills
- Increased student academic achievement
- Reduced disciplinary infractions, aggressive behavior, and emotional distress
- Increased student feelings of belonging and connection with the school
- Increased school engagement among students, staff, parents, and the wider community
- Increased school pride felt by students, staff, parents, and the wider community



Our impact is great. We are working in many schools throughout northern New Jersey, reaching thousands of students.

To learn more, visit: UnitedWayNNJ.org/YouthEmpowermentAlliance

For questions, email Liz.Warner@UnitedWayNNJ.org or call **973.993.1160, x107**.