

**Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Center for Community of Caring:
Transforming Schools the Caring Way
School Culture and Climate Activity**

What is School Culture?

School culture refers to the deep structure of values and beliefs of the school that often go unvoiced and assumed. The Community of Caring program makes these values explicit by engaging key stakeholders (e.g., school personnel, students, families) in conversations about caring, respect, responsibility, trust, and family - the five core values of Community of Caring. These critical dialogues allow the creation of a shared set of norms regarding how the school will ensure that the pedagogy, practices, and policies of the school are all consistent with its underlying value system.

The evidence of your school's culture and the tools you can intentionally use to change your school culture include the following.

Rituals and Ceremonies

Your school can intentionally use ceremonies and rituals as opportunities to explicitly reinforce progress and improvement around the five core values.

Example of how your school can use **rituals and ceremonies** in the classroom, on the bus, on the playground, in the curriculum, in the hallways, in assemblies and so on to explicitly reinforce progress and improvement around the five core values.

Heroes and Heroines

Identifying and showcasing teachers, school personnel, and students who promote the five core values is another way to nurture the development of shared values and positively impact your school culture.

Example of how your school can use **heroes and heroines** in the classroom, on the bus, on the playground, in the curriculum, in the hallways, in assemblies and so on to nurture the development of your school's shared values.

Stories and Tales

School personnel can tell stories highlighting teachers, staff and students who live out the five core values as a means to reinforce the five core values to help newcomers know what the expectations are.

© Eunice Kennedy Shriver Nation Center for Community of Caring - 2011

University of Utah

For more information contact Penny Keith, Professional Development Director

pkeith@communityofcaring.org

Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Center for Community of Caring: *Transforming Schools the Caring Way*

Example of how your school can use **stories and tales** in the classroom, on the bus, on the playground, in the curriculum, in the hallways, in assemblies and so on to help newcomers know what to expect at your school.

Rewards and Reinforcements

By recognizing both school personnel and students as they make progress in embodying the five core values, school personnel can actively shape the culture of their school.

Example of how your school can use **rewards and reinforcements** in the classroom, on the bus, on the playground, in the curriculum, in the hallways, in assemblies and so on to encourage students to embody the five core values.

How Does School Culture Create School Climate?

As a Community of Caring school, you have and will continue to articulate a shared vision of the five core values to intentionally transform your school's culture.

Articulating a shared vision and intentionally using the four tools to bring your school culture in alignment with the five core values ensures that these values will be embedded in the ways in which your school is organized and operates. These aspects are commonly referred to as school climate.

What is School Climate?

School climate is the everyday feeling of the members of your school building. It encompasses the physical, social, affective, and academic aspects of what is experienced by your school's members.

Physical Environment

The physical environment of your school considers how your school building and elements of the school building affect how its members feel about the school. Schools where the physical environment is aesthetically pleasing send a message that the environment is cared for, the public spaces and classrooms are welcoming, and the work of the students is valued.

Example of what your school could do to the **physical environment** to improve your school climate.

© Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Center for Community of Caring - 2011

University of Utah

For more information contact Penny Keith, Professional Development Director

pkeith@communityofcaring.org

Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Center for Community of Caring: *Transforming Schools the Caring Way*

Social Environment

The social aspect of school climate is related to how connected your students, teachers, administrators, and families feel. Schools with a welcoming social environment provide introduction and orientation for new students, teachers, administrators, and families to enable them to become part of the school. They encourage cross-age group interactions that feature the creation of relationships along with academically-focused activities.

Example of what your school could do to the **social environment** to improve your school climate.

Affective Environment

The affective environment of your school is defined as how your members feel about your school. It encompasses the ways in which your members are treated every day, as well as the attention that is paid to the specific needs of the students and families that your school serves. Policies are such that families are welcome, but necessary measures are in place to ensure that students and school staff are safe. Teachers welcome students into the classroom and students greet other students, not just their close friends.

Example of what your school could do to the **affective environment** to improve your school climate.

Academic Environment

The academic climate of your school includes how your school attempts to meet the needs of all of its learners; how all students are included in the academic mission of the school; and how the school attempts to address the students' needs for a challenging and rewarding academic program.

Example of what your school could do to the **academic environment** to improve your school climate.

Research demonstrates that a positive school climate supports prosocial youth development and academic achievement. It also supports teacher retention, which in turn promotes student achievement.

© Eunice Kennedy Shriver Nation Center for Community of Caring - 2011

University of Utah

For more information contact Penny Keith, Professional Development Director

pkeith@communityofcaring.org