

Message from the Executive Director: “Weather” or Not

Greetings School Counselors, Social Workers and SAPIS Counselors:

This issue of Counselor Connections focuses on the topic of School Climate and Culture. One time when I used that terminology, the person with whom I was speaking thought that I was referring to the temperature of school buildings and the level of ethnic and racial diversity therein. Easy enough of a misunderstanding; however, it truly is a term specific to schools to describe their sense, feel, and tone, as well as the belief systems and common practices that shape their respective educational and social environments. If we accept this definition of “school climate” to refer to a school’s temperature or its “weather” system, I would ask ‘whether/weather’ or not the school(s) in question has/have:

- ▶ Both a guidance counselor and a social worker;
- ▶ Counselors and social workers who are utilized to the maximum extent of their professional training and expertise;
- ▶ Students who feel they have access to their guidance counselor and social worker;
- ▶ School counselors and social workers who are involved in team meetings and decision-making conversations, especially those related to social-emotional learning, behavior, and emotional safety;
- ▶ Counselors and social workers who are working to create and support Gender Sexuality Alliances (GSAs) in their schools;
- ▶ Counselors and social workers who contact parents, unaccompanied minors, ELLs, and LGBTQ students and advocate on their behalf;
- ▶ Counselors and social workers who work closely with their parent coordinators to assist with parent needs and concerns;
- ▶ Social workers and counselors who serve as advocates rather than disciplinarians;

- ▶ Counselors and social workers who introduce ideas, programs, and initiatives to administrators.

Some New York City schools have already begun to think and act seriously about their “weather/whether” systems. For example, earlier this year, the DOE’s LGBTQ Community Advisory Committee, led by teacher/moderator, Michelle Eisenberg, welcomed members of the GSA program from the Academy of Young Writers (AYW). Student members expressed the importance of having a school culture and climate that does not tolerate LGBTQ harassment; all AYW teachers and staff members indicated that they are on board with “Safe Space” stickers outside their doors and making themselves available to LGBTQ students as well as others who have difficulty understanding and accepting those who are different from themselves.

With that said, we are interested to hear about what you are doing in your schools. Please send us your stories, and ask yourself how you can affect the weather in your building... whether or not anyone else has asked you to do so.

Jaye Murray, LCSW
Executive Director



Students from the Academy of Young Writers and Teacher/Moderator Michelle Eisenberg meet with the NYC DOE LGBTQ Advisory Group.

Message from the Senior Director of School Culture and Climate

Dear School Counselors, Social Workers and SAPIS Counselors:

As a product of New York City public schools, I experienced firsthand the impact a school's culture and climate has on a child. Today, I am Senior Director of School Culture and Climate for New York City, and having served as a teacher, assistant principal, and principal for the past twenty years, I am committed to facilitating safe and nurturing environments for every child. In my current role, my goals are to do away with racial and special needs disparities in suspensions, reduce the overall need for suspensions, and end bullying and harassment. While my goals are lofty, they are attainable; we can all agree every child deserves a safe space in which to develop and learn.

The culture and climate within each school are determined by the values, beliefs, and behaviors of all members of the community. School climate has a tremendous effect on students' academic achievement and overall well-being. Positive school environments do not happen by accident, as they are the deliberate implementation and practice of social norms.

One of our primary foci in the Office of Safety and Youth Development (OSYD) is training educators in methods that promote positive school culture and climate. Our efforts work to eliminate all forms of discrimination and intolerance. I encourage you and other members of your school community to register for one or more of the professional development opportunities offered by OSYD. With your action, we can create schools that are free of all types of discrimination and harassment. As you know, the journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.

Another significant initiative is to strengthen [Transgender Student Guidelines](#) in the Dignity for All Students Act (DASA) and the Title IX legislation. Strengthening DASA is integral to upholding the rights of all students. With all members working together in the interest of each individual child, we can dispose of all systemic inequities. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said it best: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." Let us all remain steadfast in our resolve as we work to build safe and welcoming schools for all of our students.

Kenyatte Reid

Senior Director of School Culture and Climate



SPREAD THE POSITIVITY

By scanning this QR Code, you can receive [positive affirmations](#) from the Office of Guidance and School Counseling. Share the QR code with your students to help inspire them with positive messages.

Elementary Schools: Counselors Empowering All Students

By [Diana Hayes](#)

Senior Administrator for Elementary Schools
Office of Guidance and School Counseling

Counselors are in an ideal position to be advocates for a diverse student population. In addition to offering direct counseling services for students, counselors must also focus on how to work successfully with diverse families and communities. School counselors can provide cultural leadership by creating welcoming environments and by fostering home-school-community partnerships. English Language Learners (ELLs), students with special needs, and LGBTQ students are representative of a diverse school community.

English Language Learners

Counselors can help ELLs adjust to their new environments and overcome certain barriers by:

- ▶ Pairing ELLs with other students who speak their language. This rapport may help to lessen ELL students' feelings of isolation;
- ▶ Learning a few words in students' native languages (e.g., hello, good morning, welcome);
- ▶ Being aware of the differences between a school's mainstream culture(s) and other cultures;
- ▶ Not making stereotypical assumptions about cultural groups based on prior knowledge;
- ▶ Helping to provide translators at parent meetings.

Students with Special Needs

Counselors provide individualized support to meet the needs of students with disabilities by:

- ▶ Providing support for students with special needs in the classroom, and with their peers;
- ▶ Promoting strong interpersonal skills and positive self-image;
- ▶ Assisting teachers of students with special needs in their classrooms.

Support for LGBTQ Students

School counselors can be positive catalysts to foster

unconditional acceptance of all students. Some of the strategies that counselors could utilize include:

- ▶ Making connections with RFA liaisons to create a tone of acceptance for all;
- ▶ Speaking with administrators to ensure that gender inclusive language is used throughout the day, while being mindful of letters that go home containing specific assumptions about families (e.g., "Dear Parents/Guardian" instead of, "Dear Mom and Dad");
- ▶ Helping to create safe climates that support safe and respectful dialogue;
- ▶ Connecting with the Gay, Lesbian, & Straight Education Network ([GLSEN](#)) to help create student clubs such as GSA (Gender Sexuality Alliance);
- ▶ Providing pamphlets, posters, and resource guides to support students and families.

A place for counselors to begin this vital work would be to help their colleagues and students appreciate diversity by providing information and clarifying any assumptions and misconceptions. A specific place to begin would be to discuss and correct any student who uses the word "gay" as an insult. Schools need to encourage more affirming and inclusive language, and bullying and harassment policies must be enforced each time verbal and physical harassment occurs.

Celebrate Diversity

Counselors can celebrate diversity through schoolwide activities on a smaller scale, such as classroom lessons on diversity or collaborating with teachers to organize cultural celebrations. Counselors should also make sure that their offices represent the diverse populations of their students. Offices could have visuals which include puppets, posters, and books that are representative of various cultures and lifestyles.

Have examples of your own that you would like to share? Please provide details about your efforts to celebrate diversity by submitting your "guidance success stories" to guidance@schools.nyc.gov.

Reference:

- ◆ Davis, T.E. (2015). *Exploring School Counseling: Professional Practices*

Middle Schools: Using School Climate Surveys to Mitigate Student Barriers

By [Zuri Jackson-Woods](#)

Senior Administrator for Middle Schools,
Office of Guidance and School Counseling

"We don't know when our name came into being or how some distant ancestor acquired it. We don't understand our name at all, we don't know its history, and yet we bear it with exalted fidelity, we merge with it, we like it, we are ridiculously proud of it, as if we had thought it up ourselves in a moment of brilliant inspiration."

--Milan Kundera, *Immortality*

This quote from the novel, *Immortality*, by Milan Kundera, reminds me of the powerful effects that social-emotional supports play in creating positive school climates. The excerpt reminds me of my fourth grade teacher, Ms. Marilyn Reid, who was and still is my "Shero." Ms. Reid was beyond nurturing and inspiring, as I knew that she cared unequivocally about my classmates and I while truly believing that our futures really mattered. I remember feeling invisible at my school until I met Ms. Reid, who pronounced my name, "Zuri," correctly from the start. She was the only person among my entire school's staff members who took the time to notice me. Thanks to Ms. Reid, I finally felt acknowledged and accepted at my school.

How do the actions of teachers like Ms. Reid contribute towards the development of positive school environments? Students might feel misunderstood or marginalized when school staff members mispronounce their names; ultimately, there is a big difference between "seeing" and "noticing." With this example in mind, what can middle school counselors do to help foster positive school climates in their schools?

Top 5 Online Tools for Pronunciation Practice

Counselors should take time to learn exactly how to pronounce their students' names as well as words in students' native languages. A number of online tools are available that provide users with the correct pronunciation of names and words in several languages:

- ◆ [Inogolo](#)
- ◆ [Howjsay.com](#)
- ◆ [Pronounce Names](#)

Create a Survey

Counselors can develop confidential school climate surveys for students that measure important social and emotional goals for their school and students. The surveys should include questions about student-teacher relationships, self-efficacy, perseverance, growth mindset, social awareness, feelings towards receiving mandated counseling, etc. Once surveys have been completed and returned, counselors should use PowerPoint, Prezi, or Haiku Deck to share survey data with their schools' administration. This data will serve as an "aha" moment, as it will help school staff members make a connection between students' states of mind and their academic success. More importantly, this data should be used to implement systemic school supports that can help mitigate obstacles or pre-conceived notions identified by our students.

Survey Purpose (Pro-Social Outturns)

The benefits to administering student surveys include:

- ▶ Offering the establishment of a judicious response system that can help identify students who perceive that they are experiencing social-emotional concerns;
- ▶ Providing first-hand insights into our students' perceptions, especially those receiving counseling and other special services (special education and general education);
- ▶ Approximating the proportion of covert, social-emotional, at-risk students that remain unidentified (10% of your total student population);
- ▶ Delivering measures of "school climate" to use for systemic planning purposes.

Utilize Restorative Circles

Restorative circles provide a great forum for parents/guardians to release stress and get some of their challenges off their chest while receiving support from other parents/guardians. Often, parents/guardians work long and late hours just to make ends meet; many have returned to school later in life to create better lives for themselves and their families. However, due to these additional responsibilities and obligations, many of our students have to fend for themselves until their parents return home from work/school. Many parents often express guilt and sadness for their extended time away from home, as they feel that they are not as present for their child as much as they would like.

High Schools: Cultural Competence is Key

By [Margarita Suero-Durán](#), Ed. D.
Senior Administrator for High Schools,
Office of Guidance and School Counseling

During Therapeutic Crisis Intervention for Schools (TCIS) training sessions, participants learn that they are the most valuable tools adults have to provide support to students not only during crises, but throughout day-to-day interactions.

Essential Ingredients

To continually support students, we understand that:

- ▶ Relationships are at the heart of establishing a positive culture and climate;
- ▶ When we acknowledge and celebrate students' cultural heritage, their sense of self-worth and belonging is enhanced;
- ▶ We need to help students meet their basic needs and provide countless opportunities for positive interactions in open, consistent, and caring ways;
- ▶ Students see the way we interact with their peers and other adults, and they learn from the ways we solve problems and manage daily tasks;
- ▶ We need to be aware of our personal preferences and biases while understanding how they affect our interactions and interventions with students;
- ▶ Cultural competence starts with understanding our own worldview as well as our students' worldview (Residential Child Care Project,

Cornell University p. 14).

Self-Reflective Prompts

The following self-reflective prompts, adapted from a tool found in the SAMSHA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) resource, *Improving Cultural Competence*, exemplify the myriad of self-learning activities that can help us continually strengthen our cultural competence.

Within the past six months, how often have you...

- ▶ Talked to a colleague about a cultural issue?
- ▶ Sought guidance about a cultural issue that arose within the school setting?
- ▶ Attended a professional learning opportunity focusing on multicultural competency?
- ▶ Participated in a cultural event?
- ▶ Engaged in an event in which most people were from backgrounds different than your own?
- ▶ Reflected on your own cultural identity and how it affects your work with students, families, and colleagues?

What activities have helped you develop cultural competence? Consider sharing with us by emailing Margarita Suero-Durán, Ed.D. at msuerod@schools.nyc.gov.

References:

- ◆ Residential Child Care Project, Cornell University (2012). Therapeutic Crisis Intervention for Schools Workbook, First Edition.
- ◆ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. [Improving Cultural Competence. Treatment Improvement Protocol](#) (TIP) Series No. 59. HHS Publication No. (SMA) 14-4849. Rockville, MD:

STAY INFORMED!

For comprehensive school counseling resources,
please visit the Guidance Portal at: schools.nyc.gov/Teachers/



Student Name: _____

Self-Regulation vs. Self-Advocacy Activity

Self-regulation and **self-advocacy** are important life skills, which are acquired through social-emotional learning.

- ◆ **Self-regulation** can be defined as the ability to control oneself or calm oneself in a stressful or frustrating situation.
- ◆ **Self-advocacy** can be defined as the action of representing oneself or one's views or interests.

Discussion Question:

- ▶ What is the difference between self-regulation and self-advocacy?
- ▶ How can using these two life skills help to support your success?

For the following scenarios, please indicate whether you think you should respond with self-regulation or self-advocacy.

1. _____ (HOME) Your younger sibling takes a dollar from your savings.
2. _____ (HOME) Your parent tells you to turn off the television because it is time to go to bed.
3. _____ (SCHOOL) Your teacher asks you to stop talking to your classmate during a mini-lesson.
4. _____ (SCHOOL) Your teacher assigns some extra homework because the class has been unfocused and has been talking too much. You have been quiet throughout the class.
5. _____ (SCHOOL) You think your teacher has marked your exam incorrectly.
6. _____ (SCHOOL) Your classmate calls you a name that is disrespectful.
7. _____ (SCHOOL) You witness your classmate is experiencing cyber-bullying by another classmate on social media.
8. _____ (SCHOOL) Your classmate takes your snack.
9. _____ (COMMUNITY) You purchase a store item and notice that the cashier has overcharged you by 20 cents.
10. _____ (COMMUNITY) Someone looks at you with an angry look as you pass by on the street.

This activity meets [American School Counselor Association \(ASCA\) National Standards for Students:](#)

- ◆ **PS:A1 Acquire Self-knowledge** (PS:A1.8 Understand the need for self-control and how to practice it.)

This activity also meets [ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success:](#)

- ◆ **Category 2: Behavior Standards** (Social Skills: 8. Demonstrate advocacy skills and ability to assert self, when necessary.)

Developed by Michael Battista, Senior Administrator, NYC DOE Office of Guidance and School Counseling.

UPDATES FROM THE OFFICE OF STUDENT ENROLLMENT

Dear School Counselors:

Thank you for all your hard work this fall in guiding students and families to complete their middle school and high school applications! With over 160,000 students participating in middle school and high school admissions this year, your support has been instrumental to students' success.

This period between the application and offer processes is a great time to lay the groundwork for the next admissions cycle. Here are some simple steps to begin preparing your school community:

- ▶ **Have conversations with fourth grade students about middle school, and seventh grade students about high school.** Inform students about the application process that will take place in the fall. Ask students what they want to be when they grow up, and share examples of programs that connect with their interests and career goals.
- ▶ **Have fourth and seventh graders talk to the experts: fifth and eighth grade students.** Facilitate discussions between the grades to help the lower grade students understand what goes into looking for in a high school. Help the fifth and eighth grade students to think about and share how they went about researching schools for their applications. They have just had the real experience and will help their peers start thinking about their own transitions.
- ▶ **Remind students that their fourth grade and seventh grade attendance, State exams, and course grades are evaluated by some schools during admissions.** It can be helpful to remind students there is still plenty of time left in the school year to raise grades and improve attendance records.
- ▶ **Plan for directory distribution and family support later this school year.** Think about how you will engage your full school community regarding the admissions processes. Select dates in late May and throughout June to meet with students and families so they can explore school options over the summer.
- ▶ **Create an admissions resource space.** Let students and families know that information about admissions can be found at designated bulletin board(s), table(s), or office(s). Update materials in these spaces as the application timeline progresses.

We also encourage you to think about what you encountered this past fall as students completed their applications. What practices were successful? What challenges did you face? What new practices will your school community use to support current fourth grade and/or seventh grade students through this process?

As our team prepares for the 2016-2017 middle school and high school admissions processes, we are eager to learn about successful practices in your schools and hear your ideas on how we can support your work. Please share your suggestions and insights with us by emailing MSEnrollment@schools.nyc.gov or HSEnrollment@schools.nyc.gov.

As always, we are grateful to have you as partners in ensuring that students and families throughout the five boroughs make informed choices about their futures.

Amy Basile
Executive Director of High School Admissions
Office of Student Enrollment

Sara McPhee
Senior Director of Middle School Admissions
Office of Student Enrollment

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE OFFICE OF ACADEMIC POLICY AND SYSTEMS

In New York City, academic policies set by the City and New York State govern the way schools structure academic programs in grades K–12, promote students to the next grade level, and graduate students who are prepared for college and careers. The DOE’s academic policy [Intranet page](#) contains helpful resources that school counselors can use for students’ academic planning. For all questions about this content, please contact your [Academic Policy & Systems lead](#). If your school has created exemplary practices around credit recovery, please let your lead know so we can learn more about your work!

Policy Review: Credit Recovery

When a student fails a course, credit recovery may be one of many strategies they can use to get back on track towards graduation. However, rather than repeating entire courses they failed, credit recovery is a tool for select students who attended most of the course and mastered most of the content. For these students, retaking the entire course would not be appropriate; instead they would benefit most from intensive instruction in one or more specific, targeted areas determined by their teachers.

There are very specific policies around which students are eligible to make up a course through credit recovery. Please refer to the [Credit Recovery FAQ](#) for additional guidance. After reading the FAQ, test your knowledge by answering the following questions in the scenario below:

Scenario: A student earned a 63 in the last semester of a two-term Algebra I sequence. He was managing to pass the course until the final two weeks, when he missed some class time and struggled with some of the concepts. He meets with the teacher, who suggests that, rather than retake the entire course, credit recovery might be an appropriate option for this student.

1. Why did the teacher suggest that the student undergo credit recovery, as opposed to repeating the course again for make-up credit?
2. What are the teacher’s next steps?
3. How much of the original course did the student have

to attend to be eligible for credit recovery?

4. At most, how many core credits can the student earn through credit recovery?
5. What is the timeline for completing credit recovery?
6. How must this course be scheduled in STARS?

Reflect On Your Own Practices

- ▶ How does your school practice credit recovery?
- ▶ How does your school identify eligible students?
- ▶ What is your school-based panel’s process for signing off on credit recovery? How often does the panel convene?
- ▶ Are students who are taking credit recovery courses scheduled for the course in STARS with the subject-certified teacher who grades the student’s work and supervises the course?
- ▶ Where and how do you save the course make-up forms in case they are ever requested?
- ▶ How are the original failing grade and the new grade reconciled according to the school’s grading policy?

Answers: [1.] Credit recovery is intended for students who have already attended most of the course and learned most of the content, but need additional time and instruction to master the content. This student only needs to make up a particular portion of the course. **Repeating an entire course is not credit recovery.** [2.] Before meeting with the school-based panel to approve the course, the teacher should discuss the amount of work the student needs to demonstrate that he has mastered the content. The teacher should also create the learning scope and content for the make-up Algebra I work. This student will also need to pass the Algebra I Regents exam to earn credit. [3.] The student must have attended 2/3 of the original course to be eligible for credit recovery. [4.] Students may earn no more than 3 core credits through credit recovery. [5.] Students must complete credit recovery within 2 terms of failing the original course. [6.] The student should be scheduled for a course in STARS with R in the seventh character and with the original teacher or one who is subject-certified.



FEATURED PROFESSIONAL ARTICLE

Spotlighted by Margarita Suero-Durán, Ed.D.,
Senior Administrator, Office of Guidance and School Counseling

Ray, S. L., Lambie, G., & Curry, J. (2007). [Building caring schools: Implications for professional school counselors](#).
Journal of School Counseling, 5(14).

It is well known that, “students who feel connected and are involved in a caring school climate during their educational process are more successful in the academic and behavioral realms.” (p.5) While developing, implementing, and maintaining positive school environments is everyone’s business, school counselors are uniquely positioned to bring a holistic approach while collaborating with multiple stakeholders in this endeavor.

In addition to serving as role models for honesty, integrity, trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship (p.5), professional school counselors promote caring school climates by:

- ▶ Conducting and facilitating training for students, staff, and family members;
- ▶ Minimizing barriers to student learning;
- ▶ Collaborating and consulting;
- ▶ Engaging families;
- ▶ Coordinating mentoring opportunities;
- ▶ Assisting with program assessment and evaluation;
- ▶ Promoting and facilitating mediation and peer mediation;
- ▶ Advocating for students at the micro and macro levels.

How have you incorporated these recommended strategies? What additional efforts have helped you positively affect a caring school culture and climate in your school community? Please consider sharing your successes by emailing Margarita Suero-Durán, Ed.D. at msuerod@schools.nyc.gov.

DID YOU KNOW?

Developing culturally responsive schools is at the heart of creating positive climates. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) position statement on *The School Counselor and Cultural Diversity* outlines specific ways school counselors can enhance their culturally responsive services, including:

- ▶ Exploring their own personal beliefs, attitudes and knowledge about working with diverse student populations.
- ▶ Ensuring each student has access to a comprehensive school counseling program that advocates for all students in diverse cultural groups.
- ▶ Continually enhancing their own competence while increasing their school personnel’s cultural awareness, knowledge, and skills.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE OFFICE OF POSTSECONDARY READINESS

Financial Aid Awareness Month

February marks the beginning of Student Financial Aid Awareness Month. This citywide awareness [campaign](#) seeks to inform students and families about the various types of college financial aid opportunities that are available while encouraging them to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid ([FAFSA](#)). FAFSA is the first step in obtaining federal and state grants and scholarships, federal work-study funding, and low-cost federal loans. Numerous research [studies](#) have shown that students who complete the FAFSA are more than twice as likely to enroll in college as their peers who do not complete the FAFSA. However, each year nearly \$50 million in [Pell Grant awards](#) go untapped by NYC students who would be eligible if they filled out their FAFSA forms. To help our students complete these important forms, the DOE will deliver copies of the [How-to Guide for High School Students on FAFSA \(and the Adults Who Help Them\)](#), updated for 2016 financial aid season, to all of your graduating seniors by February 12.

For questions and more information about this initiative, contact Sugeni Pérez-Sadler at sperezsadler@schools.nyc.gov.

Share Your Guidance Success Story

Do you have a guidance success story that you would like to share with your colleagues?

Please email submissions to guidance@schools.nyc.gov.

A success story could feature:

- ▶ An individual student who made a significant turnaround or achieved his or her fullest potential thanks to the efforts of a school-based counselor;
- ▶ A schoolwide guidance intervention that was noteworthy in its effectiveness on impacting student attendance, behavior, and/or course marks (the A, B, Cs);
- ▶ An impactful group counseling activity or guidance lesson that students enjoyed.

School-based counselors, social workers, and SAPIS counselors whose submissions are published will be invited to a special lunch with Chief Executive Officer Lois Herrera, Office of Safety and Youth Development, at the end of the school year.



For questions or comments, please email: guidance@schools.nyc.gov.