

Staff Development Modules

A flexible approach to harnessing the power of staff to improve school climate

For a variety of reasons, most schools have not effectively tapped the power of staff members to create and maintain a positive school climate. However, the good news is that a relatively small effort in this area can produce significant gains:

- less time spent by teachers and administrators on student behavior and discipline issues
- increased student motivation and learning
- improved staff morale

At the heart of this approach is empowering and equipping teams of district and/or school staff to deliver a series of Modules (experiential lessons) that help a school staff acquire the knowledge and sharpen the skills they need to translate their commitment to positive school climate into effective action, in their classrooms, in the hallways and common areas, and in the staff room. District and/or site “Climate Teams” can *choose which Modules would be most valuable*, and can deliver them in large or small-group meetings of 1-6 hours.

- in-service training: full- or part-day, for entire district or single site
- staff meetings
- department meetings or smaller “house” groups

Knowledge vs. Skill

Many staff members *have* the skills for building positive relationships with students, or creating cohesive classroom communities, but don’t *use* those skills for any number of reasons, including:

- They feel pressure to do other things with their limited number of instructional minutes (e.g. meet state or district academic standards, cover material that will be on standardized tests, etc.
- They don’t see (or have forgotten) the value or benefits of doing those things.
- They feel that doing so would be “out of fashion,” passé, or otherwise inconsistent with what their colleagues are doing.

Experience has shown us that increasing their knowledge of the value or benefit of using those skills, coupled with an organizational shift in priorities, can produce very positive results.

Furthermore, when knowledgeable people are empowered to work together to address an issue, innovative and effective solutions are born. So, Modules include both knowledge and skill components.

Module Content and Benefits

The Modules are continually being updated and refined, and new ones are added as needs arise. The current list includes:

The Scope and Costs of Student Mistreatment. Helps staff increase their knowledge of the many forms of student mistreatment so they can better identify and respond to problem situations. Exploration of costs helps solidify commitment to action.

Creating and Maintaining a Positive Staff Culture. This session introduces research and allows participants to collectively define the elements of a positive staff culture. Staff then establish “agreements” for acceptable behavior, and learn proven communication and problem-solving tools that will help them honor and monitor those agreements.

Tapping the Power of Student-Adult Relationships. This session provides staff members with a new lens for seeing their interactions with students, and helps them uncover new opportunities for building positive relationships with students in and out of the classroom, which increases students’ connectedness to school and supports a positive school climate.

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Breaking the Ice. This module provides a very useful foundation for helping staff members build relationships with students within and outside of the customary classroom or club-oriented settings. It includes two practical skills:

- Greeting - How to “break the ice” and begin to connect with students you see (in class, in the hall, and elsewhere) but don’t yet have a relationship with;
- Open Ended Questions - a basic communication tool that helps to deepen conversations and strengthen relationships;
- Ask, Ask, Tell - This simple formula is surprisingly effective when used in conversations with students, and helps make the exchange less of an interrogation and more like a mutually satisfying exchange, one they might even want to repeat with you...

Challenging Stereotypes, Biases, and Prejudices. This session helps staff members identify, acknowledge, and understand how we all label and categorize people, and then make assumptions about their character based on initial perceptions. It then helps staff members move beyond some of those biases and prejudices they have toward certain groups of people, which clears the way for developing more open and authentic relationships with students, and allows staff to be more effective in meeting their educational needs.

Persuasion Power. The eight steps of this module will help staff members work with students in potentially volatile situations, gaining both information and compliance.

Receiving Reports: Handling Student Disclosures Effectively. While all staff are “mandated reporters” and have likely had some training in the basics of handling information, this module builds on that base to identify some of the main reasons students withhold information, and what can be done to remove those barriers. It addresses issues of confidentiality and trust, and will help that staff members handle information in a timely yet sensitive way that does not break the bonds of trust they have worked so hard to establish.

Starting and Sustaining Safe School Ambassadors. Essential for schools that have or want to establish Safe School Ambassadors programs for harnessing the power of students to reduce peer mistreatment and improve school climate. This module covers the core elements of the SSA model, what Ambassadors actually DO, and the roles that need to be filled by staff in order to start and sustain the program. Can include Ambassadors if the program exists on campus.

Training of Trainers – School Climate Improvement Modules

To provide districts with the maximum flexibility without reducing the quality or impact of the staff development process, Community Matters had developed a training of trainers that equips district and school site staff with the knowledge and resources to conduct the Modules for their colleagues.

- Time: Two (2) full school days of 7 hours each.
- Participants: 3-4 staff members from each school. We recommend a mix of teachers and administrators, plus District staff who can oversee and support this initiative.
- Materials: While not a “scripted program,” each Module includes a trainer’s guide with information to present, recommended “slides” for PowerPoint, overhead or flipchart, instructions for activities, and discussion/debriefing questions. Each also includes handouts and worksheets for participants.
- Format: interactive discussions in large and small groups, skill practice via role plays.

For more information, or to discuss how this approach might be of value to your school or district, please contact Community Matters.