Community Matters

Empowering Youth

Transforming Communities

Provider of:

- Consulting

- Strategic Planning

- Presentations

- Trainings

- Programs

"Young people are uniquely equipped to change the world because they dream. They choose not to accept what is, but to imagine what might be."
–Desmond Tutu, *Our Time Now: Young People Changing the World*

Who We Are

Community Matters is recognized as an innovative and thought-leading organization committed to improving the social-emotional climate of our nation's schools and communities.

Founded in 1996, Community Matters (CM) has evolved from its earliest focus on youth development and bullying prevention to become a widely respected consulting, training and presenting organization. CM provides programs and services for educational, youth-serving and governmental entities.

During the past two decades, Community Matters has worked with more than 1,000 schools, agencies and organizations across 30 states, Puerto Rico, Guam and Canada. Our work has been featured in numerous media outlets, and we have presented to audiences at the local, state, regional and national levels.

As a 501(c)3 nonprofit headquartered in Sonoma County, California, CM derives its funding from a variety of public and private sources, including:

- Corporate partnerships and underwriting
- Private foundations
- Government grants
- Donors and service organizations
- Fee for services

Our Mission

"To collaborate with schools and communities in creating safe and inclusive environments where all youth and adults thrive."

The Community Matters Difference

Principles - We understand that it is not possible to legislate civility or punish young people into being tolerant. So we focus on the fundamental determinants affecting the school climate: the staff and students and their relationships with each other, the families and the broader community, and the discipline policies and practices.

Process - We build sustainable relationships with those we serve, our 'partners.' We listen, ask questions, assess their efforts and provide recommendations. We design and deliver a variety of programs and services, equipping everyone involved with the knowledge, tools and resources to:

- Make measurable and sustainable changes
- Collect and report quantifiable results

Results - Our programs and services improve the overall school climate. They reduce bullying and violence, positively affecting attendance as well as academic achievement, and help young people develop into capable, connected and contributing members of society.

Media Coverage

Today Show, CNN, TV news in major cities, NPR and multiple radio and print coverage pieces

Presentations

National School Boards Association, National Association of Secondary Principals and more. Executive Director Rick Phillips was also a featured speaker at the Clinton School of Public Service.

Publications

Book: Safe School Ambassadors, Jossey Bass 2008
National Report: Ten Years After Columbine: A Report Card on School Violence Prevention

Awards and Recognition

James Irvine Foundation finalist for innovation and leadership award, Congressional resolutions, Huffington Post award

The Challenges Facing Our Schools and Communities

As recent events have demonstrated, bullying, cyber-bullying and other forms of mistreatment continue to permeate our schools.

The Problem: Did You know?

- Each year, some 900,000 youth report being cyber-bullied.[1]
- 50% of high school students bullied someone in the past year.[2]
- 90% of elementary students have been bullied by their peers.[3]

These dangerous behaviors are occurring at younger ages and are more pervasive and therefore more challenging for adults to identify.

Worse, the growing indifference and increase in bystander behavior has had the unintended consequence of 'normalizing' incivility and intolerance.

The Outside-In Approach to School Safety

Since 1999, our nation has invested more than $10 billion in school safety and climate improvement measures. The vast majority of those dollars have been expended on an 'Outside-In Approach,' which relies heavily on the power and authority of adults to keep the school safe. This approach places primary importance on controlling student behavior through measures like security personnel, cameras, metal detectors and zero tolerance rules and policies.

In spite of this enormous investment, and the fact that nearly all 50 states have passed anti-bullying laws, too many students in too many schools still experience high levels of bullying, harassment and cyber-bullying.

The Costs: Did You know?

- Every day, more than 160,000 students stay home from school because they are afraid to attend.[4]
- Bullied children are 6 times more likely to have suicidal thoughts.[5]
- National suspension/expulsion rates nearly doubled since the 1970s.[6]

Why the Outside-In Approach Isn't Working

In its 2009 landmark publication, "Ten Years After Columbine: A Report Card on School Violence-Prevention," Community Matters summarized data from national surveys and studies. Bottom line: the Outside-In Approach has not achieved the desired results.

The Conclusion

Schools will not become safer without a change in direction, priorities and allocation of resources.
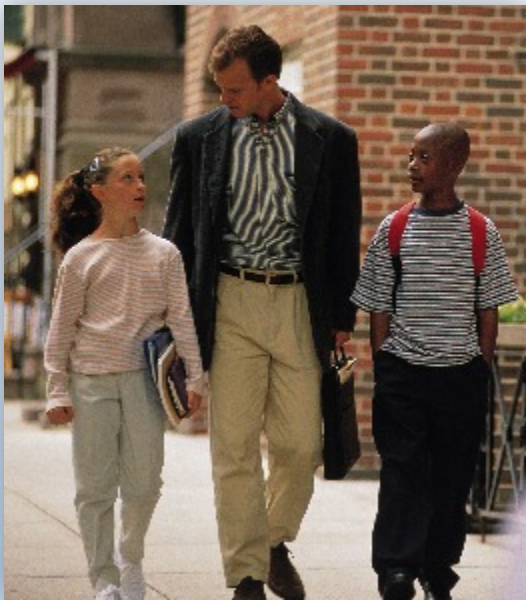
The data shows that the key to creating safer schools–as well as increasing attendance, achievement and graduation rates–is to adopt a new approach: an 'Inside-Out Approach.'

The Outside-In Approach

Characterized by:

- Security
- Adult-Driven
- Punitive Policies
- Controlling Behavior

(1) U.S. Department of Education, Bullying Prevention Summit, August 11, 2010. (2) Josephson Institute of Ethics: 2010 Report Card. (3) Tarshis & Huffman, Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics, 2007, 28, 125-132. (4) National Association of Secondary School Principals, in Barbara Coloroso, The Bully, The Bullied, and the Bystander, 50. (5) Winsper, et al, Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2012, 51:3, 271-282. (6) Losen, D. (2011). Discipline Policies, Successful Schools, and Racial Justice. National Education Policy Center.

An Inside-Out Approach: A Solution that Works

"The principal objective of school violence-reduction strategies should be to create cultures and climates of safety, respect, and emotional support within educational institutions." [7]
–U.S. Secret Service and Department of Education

"Bullying interventions need to change the conditions in the social environment that permit bullying to occur." [8]
–Dr. Dorothy L. Espelage, bullying researcher

The Inside-Out Approach

Characterized by:

- Relationships
- Student-Centered
- Formative and Restorative Policies
- Social Norms Change

What is an Inside-Out Approach?

An Inside-Out Approach focuses on the interpersonal dynamics among the people in the school as the fundamental way to improve safety and climate. It is based on years of research, development and testing, and consists of four core elements:

1. **Relationships -** creating opportunities for students, staff, parents, families and the broader community to know one another, to build trust and mutual respect, and to maintain open channels of communication.

2. **Student-Centered -** empowering young people by involving them in real problem-solving, decision-making and implementing solutions.

3. **Formative and Restorative Policies -** utilizing practices–like peer courts and community service–that help students learn from their mistakes and make amends to those they've wronged, in order to improve future behavior.

4. **Social Norms Change -** guiding and changing behavior not through rules and policies but through social norms, which are largely established *and can be changed* by students.

Positively Impacting School Climate

When leaders commit to the Inside-Out Approach, the result is a more positive school climate. Students experience a sense of safety, have healthy adult and peer relationships, feel respected and empowered, and are more likely to succeed academically and socially.

To successfully implement and institutionalize the Inside-Out Approach requires a commitment to utilizing school climate as the foundation–the 'bricks and mortar'–for building a safe, thriving and high-performing school.

(7) R. Fein et al, Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and to Creating Safe School Climates (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Safe and Drug-free Schools Program and U.S. Secret Service, National Threat Assessment Center, 2004), 5-6,
(8) Espelage, D. L. (2004). An Ecological Perspective to School-Based Bullying Prevention. The Prevention Researcher, 11(3), 3-6.

The Importance of School Climate

The climate of a school is the visceral, almost palpable, 'sense' of safety and belonging that people experience on site. It can be described as warm or cool, safe or unsafe. Though there is no single, formal definition, scholars seem to agree that the climate is the sum total of attitudes and behaviors elicited by the:

- School's policies, practices and physical environment.

- Staff interactions with peers and students.

- Opportunities for student engagement and leadership.

- Beliefs and attitudes students bring to the school from their families and the community.

Climate influences individual behavior and performance …and more importantly, WE influence the climate.

What Determines School Climate?

School climate is affected by five primary determinants:

1. Organization - The vision and leadership of educational leaders and their commitment to using school climate as the guiding principle for planning and decision-making, the policies they enact and the processes for determining and enforcing them, the lines of communication and access to authority, and opportunities to participate in decision-making.

2. Staff - The ways school staff relate to each other and to students; their classroom management and discipline practices, and the priority they place on being hall-friendly asset builders who demonstrate care for students' well-being.

3. Students - The degree to which students are engaged in leadership opportunities and the ways students relate to one another and to adults in authority. Seeing and treating students as contributors and not consumers goes a long way in gaining their involvement and their commitment to speak up and resolve conflicts peacefully.

4. Families - The values, beliefs, and practices that are instilled and reinforced in children by parents and other relatives, especially regarding how to behave with adults in authority and how to resolve differences with others peers, and also what value is placed on education, tolerance, communication and nonviolence.

5. Community - The values, beliefs, and practices that are evident outside the walls of school and home, particularly the value a community places on its children and youth, how its members treat youth when they encounter them in their neighborhoods, and how they invest time and resources to support youth development.

Determinants and Leverage Value

All five of these determinants have a different 'leverage value' or capacity to influence the climate. Some are more direct and immediate, while others require more time, funding and emphasis in order to have the maximum impact.

Whole School Climate Framework: Inside-Out Solutions

Community Matters has developed a framework for improving school climate that is based on the five determinants and is aligned with emerging national school climate standards.

This Whole School Climate Framework is a cost-effective and integrated approach that provides educational leaders with a clear and sustainable blueprint for accomplishing the outcomes that schools are mandated to achieve.

The framework supports leaders in prioritizing and coordinating their efforts in a comprehensive and synergistic manner that leads to maximum success.

Programs and Services

The programs and services listed beneath each determinant are modular, providing the flexibility to address each school's specific culture, needs and goals. They can be implemented in phases over time in a coordinated way that doesn't overwhelm, gains support and buy-in and leads to sustainable change.

1. Organization

We help organizations develop a deeper understanding of the vital role that school climate plays in achieving educational outcomes and a plan to achieve them. We provide customized:

- **Assessment and Diagnosis -** includes a needs assessment and School Climate Loss and Cost Analysis, and identifies gaps in policy, practice, programs and services.

- **Leadership Development -** training and resources for administrators to lead school climate improvement efforts, so they can develop a clear and shared vision, review and align policies and practices, and implement best-practice strategies.

- **Policy Analysis -** a review of policies and practices, which includes recommendations for improvement and alignment with national standards and best practices.

- **Planning and Program Development -** co-create a comprehensive school climate improvement plan, including additions and/or changes to existing programs and services for students and staff, and tools for evaluation.

The Five Determinants of School Climate

2. Staff

We help schools and other educational organizations engage, empower, and equip their staff–certificated, classified and administrative–to reduce bullying, build a positive climate and promote educational excellence:

- **School Climate Training -** helps staff members understand the importance of school climate, its connection to educational outcomes, and what they can do to improve it, including:
    - Building supportive relationships with students
    - Noticing the pervasive forms of bullying and mistreatment
    - Intervening effectively using relational, not positional power

- **Diversity Training -** prepares educational leaders to assess and improve policies and practices to ensure compliance with legal requirements as well as equal access and fair treatment for LGBTQ students.

"The workshop yesterday was awesome! Your presenter's knowledgeable, organized and passionate delivery captivated our faculty. His compassion for children was evident, as was his interest in helping teachers in creating an emotionally safe learning environment. Even the veteran teachers were enthused about the day!"

–Rita Feild, Counselor, Palmer Trinity School, FL

3. Students

We help schools engage, empower and equip students to work in partnership with adults to create and maintain a positive climate.

- **Safe School Ambassadors (SSA) -** a research-based and field-tested program that engages the socially influential leaders of a school's diverse cliques. SSA equips them with effective non-violent communication and intervention skills they can use with their peers to prevent, stop or report bullying, violence or other forms of mistreatment.

  The Results: A recent program evaluation showed that, when implemented as designed, the SSA program reduced suspensions by 33%. This contrasts with control schools, where suspensions increased by 10% during the same time period.

- **Stand Up / Speak Up Assembly -** a high-energy event that delivers a compelling message to all students: bullying is not OK, and silence isn't, either. The experience unites and empowers students to speak up when they see bullying and violence among their peers. It introduces youth-friendly language and skills that students can use to safely and effectively defuse, de-escalate and stop bullying behavior.

- **Connect and Respect -** a one-day program for smaller school communities that strengthens relationships, increases tolerance and improves overall climate.

- **Youth Forum -** a one-day event that initiates dialogue and builds bridges of understanding among diverse student leaders.

"Safe School Ambassadors is a proven approach to decreasing violence in schools through youth empowerment. It is the only sane solution for ensuring security in our society."

–Deepak Chopra, world renowned author and speaker

4. Families

We help schools engage and educate parents in how to protect their children and all young people from bullying, harassment and cyber-bullying.

- **Parent Workshop -** helps parents understand bullying and cyber-bullying, improve their communication skills and develop stronger relationships with their children. This workshop also helps parents understand how to intervene when they see bullying and to work effectively with school staff.

- **Diversion Course -** as an alternative to costly suspension or school reassignment, this course provides parents–together with children–tools and skills to help students change behavior patterns and get back on the right track toward school success and graduation.

5. Community

We help communities bring together all the stakeholder groups responsible for raising, educating and protecting children and youth. We also provide facilitation, presentations and trainings for a range of community and governmental organizations.

- **Safer Schools Symposium -** a one-day event designed to build consensus and collaboration among youth-serving organizations and to develop an effective plan for creating safer schools.

"Everyone left the Symposium with the connections, resolve and plans to make our schools safer and more supportive… I was particularly impressed with Community Matters' follow-up and support after the event."

–Vicki L. Barber, Superintendent, El Dorado County Office of Education, CA

Return on Investment

Investing in a climate-based, Inside-Out Approach returns significant, tangible and practical results. For example:

Fewer Alternative Education Placements (AEPs)

The Clear Creek Independent School District (TX) implemented the Safe School Ambassadors program in all of its secondary schools, and over two years experienced:

- 37% reduction in mandatory disciplinary AEPs
- $255,000 average annual cost reduction

> "I had the opportunity to observe the (Safe School Ambassador) training we funded, and I was very impressed! The students were involved and excited to make a difference in bullying and other issues on campus. Community Matters is a wonderful resource."
>
> **–Amanda Quiralte, Member Services Coordinator North Bay Schools Insurance Authority, CA**

Reduced Suspensions, Increased Attendance, and Improved Academic Achievement

Over a five-year period, the Petaluma City School District (CA) adopted and implemented an Inside-Out Approach. They replaced school resource officers with student and family support specialists, replaced punitive disciplinary policies with formative ones, provided extensive training and support for staff and invested in engaging and empowering students to be contributors. While more than doubling its population of Limited English Proficiency students, the district experienced:

- 34% fewer suspensions, and 28.5% fewer suspension days
- 2% increase in attendance, resulting in $950,000 more revenue annually
- 11% performance improvement on state standardized tests

A Call to Courage and Action

In the face of decreasing budgets and increasing challenges, our children and youth need us more than ever. We cannot let the economic and political conditions distract us from our commitment to our children. They are watching, and it is up to each of us to stand up and to speak up. Young people need us to be courageous, to believe that we can make a difference and to believe the same about them.

The research and results speak for themselves. It is time for bold and decisive action–to move forward in partnership to implement solutions.

Imagine this Future for Your Schools

Imagine... a school and a community where young people are valued as contributors and not consumers, where they acquire the skills and opportunities to be leaders, change agents, and peace-makers. Envision a school where the staff is invested in building caring relationships with students and working with them as allies.

When we have met today's challenges, we will have empowered a generation of young people who have the courage and competence to stand up and speak up when they see intolerance and injustice. We will have passed the torch to a new generation of young leaders who are prepared to prosper, problem solve and peacefully coexist in a diverse, changing and complex world.

Community Matters