

# SDDFS NOTES

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February 2002

**Special points of interest:**

- School Climate is the general tone or prevailing attitude within the school.
- A single school culture is about agreeing on how things are done.
- Risk and Protective factors help determine both the culture and climate of a school.

**Inside this issue:**

<i>School Climate overview</i>	1
<i>How to create a Single School Culture</i>	1
<i>Building a Healthy School Culture</i>	3
<i>Risk and Protective Factors</i>	6
<i>Programs that Work</i>	7
<i>Trainings and Workshops</i>	11
<i>Resources</i>	13

## What Is School Climate?

School Climate is the general tone or prevailing attitude within the school. The term describes not only the physical attributes of a school, but implies its “culture” as well -- the way business is carried out in the school. Climate includes the level of orderliness of the school, the degree of satisfaction experienced within its organizational structure, and the amount of productivity that is possible within its organizational framework. It is affected by how well students, faculty, other

staff members, and the community interact and what approaches they use to solve their campus problems. Climate reflects whether students feel they belong at the school and how campus rules are determined, expressed, understood, and enforced.

To differentiate a bit more between climate and culture, climate is regarded as a narrower subject than culture. Climate is the term used to describe



people's shared perceptions of the school; whereas culture embraces not only how people feel about their school, but the assumptions, values, and beliefs that give the school its identity and its standards of behavior.

See Overview, Page 2.

## Creating a Single School Culture

School violence is not a problem of schools alone, and since students are the primary victims as well as the perpetrators of school violence, their participation in the es-

tablishment of a single school culture is critical to the success of any effort to curb school violence or to enhance academic success in schools.

Perhaps the

most important aspect of culture is that “meaning” is shared by all members of the school community. “A single school culture really says, This is how

See Single, Page 4.

## School Climate, an Overview



### CLIMATE CONTROL

#### What Does "Climate" Mean in Relation to Schools?

Climate refers to the emotional atmosphere that we generate around us. We can strive to create a school wide climate that is based on ethical principles that are modeled, taught, coached, encouraged and delegated.

Continued from Page 1

ior.

In short school culture includes climate, but school climate does not encompass every aspect of school culture. Part of the problem is the practical application of the term "culture." Unlike "climate," culture is historic and internalized, thus more difficult to calculate or predict. However, this does not mean that it cannot be changed. Or that a new entity cannot arise out of what already exists.

In the post-September 11, 2001 world, where even opening the mail can be a life endangering event, parents hope that when they send their children to school, they are sending them to a secure environment, one in which they will be motivated and energized. The last thing parents want on their children's minds is the feeling of terror when at school.

In order to meet the challenges offered by our present situation, administrators, teachers, students, and parents are making school a safer place in which to teach and learn by recreating their school's climate. The process begins by conducting an internal evaluation of the current climate in the school. This effort must identify the school's needs and concerns, examine the underlying causes of student disorder, seek corrective measures, and establish priorities for improvements.

The more people involved in

an evaluation -- teachers, students, staff, parents, and community members -- the more informative it will be. Also, by including a variety of people during the evaluation the process gains legitimacy.

When the climate is positive the goal of school then is to maintain that positive atmosphere and to build upon it by encouraging suggestions from staff, faculty, and students and implementing those ideas into which stakeholders can invest themselves and their belief systems. Researchers have shown that problem-solving and decision-making steps that involve students, teachers and staff members whenever practical may reduce or prevent discipline and crime in schools. When everyone participates in policy-setting procedures it creates a sense of ownership within the school and makes everyone involved responsible for maintaining order.

"When a school confronts major problems, more comprehensive steps are needed to reverse the situation. A successful strategy is to augment the representation of the support team [principals, teachers, students, and staff] by including district administrators, parents and community representatives. Law enforcers and social service personnel can be called in for consultation," according to the National School Safety Center's, "School Safety Check Book."

## What Affects School Climate? A Student Perspective

There are other contributing factors to creating a healthy school climate that students are aware of and actively participate in such as knowing that they are free to be themselves. In a healthy school environment, students are also free from harassment, know that adults care for them, understand and respect individual differences and appreciate the value of having rules that are ethically and consistently enforced. Other factors include:

**School Involvement:** The extent to which students participate and enjoy classes and extracurricular activities at school.

**Student Relationships:** The way students relate to one another, and the ease they feel in making friends and dealing with new people.

**Teacher Support:** The amount of help and concern that teachers direct toward students; whether teachers talk openly, trust students and are interested in their ideas and feelings.

**Physical Environment:** The way students feel about the school buildings themselves and the atmosphere they create.

**Conflict Resolution:** Whether students are clear about their rights and responsibilities, how conflicts are resolved and whether rules are consistently enforced.

**Participation in decision-making:** The extent to which students, administrators and teachers share responsibility for decisions about school improvement.

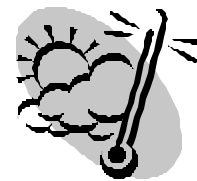
**Curriculum:** The extent to which students feel that what is taught in classes meets their needs.

**Counseling Services:** Whether or not students feel counselors are accessible and able to help with personal problems, job and career information, and concerns about drugs, alcohol or sex.

**Recreation Alternatives:** Whether students are satisfied with existing activities and teachers' support of these activities; whether new activities are needed.

**Personal Stress:** The extent to which students feel they are under pressure and the resources they have to cope with it.

Source: Sherrin Bennett, *Something More Than Survival: A student initiated process for School Climate Improvement*. Lafayette, California: Center for Human Development, 1978.<sup>5</sup>



**CLIMATE  
CONTROL**

### What Does "Culture" Mean In Relation to Schools?

It means the way we do things around here and is shaped by beliefs that are defined and supported through daily practice.

## Seven Steps to Building a Healthy School Culture

The following Seven Steps can help to unlock the door to a campus where all youth and adults can feel welcomed, respected, understood, and safe. A campus where students and staff pursue educational excellence with passion and commitment.

1. Create School-Community Partnerships to address the issue of violence in the schools.

- Make everyone a key stakeholder
- Articulate a common vision
- Explore ways of working together to bring the vision to fruition
- Make and carry out specific action plans
- Report what's working and what's not

Meet on a regular basis with an expert facilitator at initial partnership meetings to ensure they're productive and that partners remain enthusiastic and their actions produce results.



2. Create School Safety teams that are comprised of students, staff, teachers, administrators and law enforcement. When students, who are both victim and perpetrators of most violent crimes at schools, are stakeholders and help create the rules they are less likely to break them. The challenge will be sustaining youth involvement in the absence of a crisis.

See Seven Steps, Page 5

## A Single School Culture Requires Sharing Power

Continued from Page 1

we all agree to do it, this is what we expect, this is how we enforce it," said Alison Adler, Director of the Safe Schools Program in Palm Beach County, ("Teachers Take Charge," Education Week, Oct. 31, 2001). "When rules and enforcement are sporadic, we antagonize students. When teachers all work together and they're all on the same page . . . it's less likely kids will act out."

Creating a single school culture may require principals to share power and may mean that teachers have to step up and assume greater responsibilities, which means more risk on their

part. Since "culture" describes the norms, values, beliefs, traditions, rituals, ceremonies, and myths translated by a particular group of people, the values expressed in lesson plans and classroom teaching, the way the principal runs staff meetings, and the decorations displayed in the hallways are all integral parts of school culture.

Academic achievement and athletics, for example, are traditional activities that parents, students, faculty, and staff can all rally around. However, in today's schools many students feel disengaged and isolated from these traditionally "cultural" events.

New opportunities for

engagement must be created. Creating these new opportunities within the context of creating a single school culture is no small feat, however. It requires a comprehensive, community-wide effort coordinated by a school-community partnership that includes law enforcement, faith groups, businesses, government, seniors, community and youth organizations, and students, teachers, administrators and parents.

Building a shared understanding of culture and assuring and acknowledging that everyone understands the shared meaning is just the first step in creating a single school culture.

## Seven Steps

Continued from Page 4

3. **Create School Ambassadors.** Organize and train a team of students who are committed to notice hotshots and then cool them off. By creating peer-helping programs like new-student buddy systems and conflict mediation, schools become less institutionalized for students and even the least engaged students can become stakeholders.

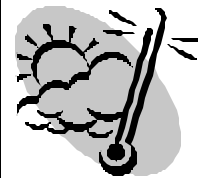
4. **Create Tolerance and Diversity Activities.** Decreasing the tension between the cliques and interest groups on a campus requires that tolerance and respect be an integral part of the school culture. By infusing the entire school with ongoing activities that promote dialogue, understanding, tolerance, and respect for differences, the school culture can be improved.

5. **Create Opportunities for the Least Engaged Youth.** Create opportunities for these students to be mentors, tutors, to learn a skill or start a business, to serve those in need or to build a skateboard park or ropes course. The key is to seek to understand them through honest dialogue, and work with them in partnership to achieve common goals.

6. **More Teacher and Staff Training.** From teachers and administrators to bus drivers and custodial workers, every adult has the opportunity to notice students who are disengaged, hurting or otherwise in need and then offer to intervene. Every member of the staff must have the skills to identify, reach out to and connect with students, and when necessary, the ability to direct them to the appropriate resources.

7. **More Parental Involvement.** Since parents significantly influence students' opinions, values, and interaction skills, parental understanding and support is essential for any successful school safety plan and creating a healthy school culture. The school must find ways to connect with parents, especially those not actively involved in their school's education. One suggestion is to initiate parent dialogue nights in homes to discuss safety, tolerance and other issues co-hosted by a parent, student and a school-community partnership.

**Source:** Community-matters.org, "Seven Keys."



**CLIMATE  
CONTROL**

### How Do We Build A Safe School?

Safety depends on addressing the "Five P's"

- Physical Safety
- Psychological Safety
- Policies and Practices
- Programs
- Partnerships

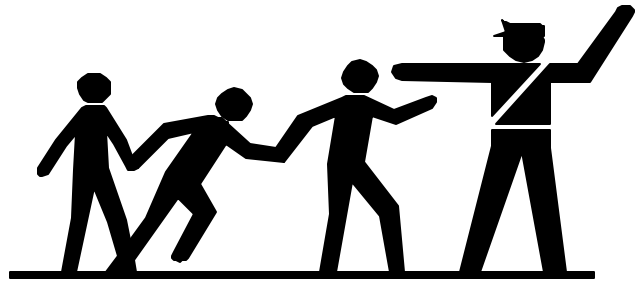
By addressing each area, we can enhance our strengths and bolster areas that need attention.

# Risk and Protective Factors

The Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP) defines risk factors as "attributes or environmental characteristics that have been shown to be statistically associated with increased risk for [violent behaviors] alcohol and other drug abuse."

Protective factors are "environmental factors that facilitate the development of youth who do not get involved in the life-compromising problems of school failure such as drugs, and so on."

According to the 1996 National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) persons between the ages of 12 and 15 and between 16 and 19 have higher rates of violent crime and victimization than those 25 and older. Persons ages 12 to 19 were twice as likely as those 25 to 34 and 3 times as likely as those ages 35 to 49 to be victims of violent crimes. They also have a victimization rate signifi-



cantly higher than any other group.

The statistics reveal that those who live in the city have higher victimization rate than those in the suburbs. And with the exception of robbery and rape/sexual assault, those who live in the suburbs have a higher victimization rate than those who live in rural areas.

- 77 percent of the victims were male

See Risk, Page 9

## Some Risk and Protective Factors

**RISK FACTORS INCLUDE:**

Community:

- Extreme economic deprivation
- Low neighborhood attachment and community disorganization
- Community laws and norms favorable toward

drug use, firearms, alcohol, tobacco and other drugs

Family:

- Family history of problem behavior -- substance abuse, teen pregnancy, school dropout
- Alcoholism
- Parental drug use

Individual:

- Early use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs (ATOD)
- Alienation and rebelliousness
- Friends who use ATOD

School:

- Early anti-social behaviors
- Lack of academic success
- Lack of clear discipline policies

**PROTECTIVE FACTORS INCLUDE:**

Community:

- Low unemployment
- Stability of residents
- Community laws and norms discouraging ATOD use

- Structured and nurturing family
- Parents promote learning

Individual and Peer:

- Positive outlook
- Adaptability and flexibility
- Tolerance of people and situations

School:

- Schools that encourage and reward academic success and intellectual curiosity
- Ability to bond with school in a socially-valued sense
- Pro-social interaction with school peers

Family:

- Family has clear behavior guidelines and high expectations



## Programs That Work

### H.O.S.T. ing a Healthy School Climate

Like many parents, Valerie Adams was concerned about school violence. Mrs. Adams has been a member of the Hillsborough School District Violence Prevention Committee since it began in 1998. She and another parent, Paulette Crawford, who was a member of the committee at that time, realized in this capacity, that the safety concerns of students were not being heard clearly. Administrators and parents must remember that students are their eyes and ears at school. Listening to student concerns and acting upon them will help to improve the safety level at any school.

"Who knows better what's going on at the grass roots level in our schools than our children," said Mrs. Adams. "I felt sure if we listened to them and respected what they had to say about what concerned them at their schools, we could find solutions to the problems that plagued them on a day to day

basis and concerned us as parents regarding their safety."

With approval from the school district, Mrs. Adams organized a daylong student summit in February 2000 named H.O.S.T. (Hear Our Students Talk). An all day event attended by two students from every middle and high school in the county, the summit provided

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**"There's been an overall improvement in student behavior because they know that we are listening to them"**  
**- Valerie Adams.**

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students with a means to voice their safety concerns and to suggest their own solutions. School administrators, law enforcement personnel and elected officials attended in the afternoon to touch base as a community and to listen to the concerns these young people were expressing. The beauty of the activity was that the opportunity was created by parent volunteerism and that students were given the opportunity to

provide input.

There have now been three H.O.S.T. summits, one during each of the last three school years. Another is planned for the fall of 2002. The encouraging news is that the Hillsborough County School District has adopted many of the students' suggestions. There are now more peer mediation programs, better advertising of those programs and of the student tip line. Important safety numbers have been included in student handbooks, which now include stricter, more consistent consequences for breaking rules.

"There has been an overall improvement in student behavior because they know that we are listening to them," said Adams, a member of the state Partnership for School Safety and Security. "And if students make a suggestion, we know the school district will act on it."

When students, parents, and school officials collaborate, the entire system wins.

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### Making the Commitment to Building Character

Pinellas County Schools has created a positive climate in its schools through "Commitment to Character," also known as C2C, the district model for character education. The goal of the program is to create a climate of respect in the school, thereby reducing the number of suspensions for defi-

ance and fighting. Rather than using a prescribed curriculum, the Commitment to Character model provides a menu of strategies that are infused throughout the regular school curriculum with an intentional, conscious focus. The program uses a common language, takes advantage of "teachable moments," encour-

ages service learning, and uses teacher and student modeling of positive behaviors in order to educate students in the core traits of respect, responsibility, honesty and self-motivation.

In addition, conflict resolution skills and peer mediation are taught under the umbrella of



## Programs That Work

### **The School Safety Program — Washington, D.C.**

The main component of the School Safety Program, a program of the Police Executive Research Forum in Washington, D.C., is a curriculum integrated into a social studies course that trains students to be problem solvers, engages students in solving their school's problems, identifies problem students through reviews by teachers and police, and sponsors regular meetings among school teachers, school administrators, and the police. An evaluation found a 50 percent reduction in incidents requiring calls to the police (mainly assault-related behaviors) at an intervention school, but only a small reduction at a comparison school. In addition, threats to teachers decreased 17 percent. You can order curriculum #830 *Crime in the Schools* by Dennis J. Kenney and T. Stuart Watson, 1998.

Want more information about this program? Contact: The Police Executive Research Forum at (202) 466-7826.

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### **Aggression Replacement Training (ART) — Syracuse, NY**

ART, a program of the Center for Research on Aggression at Syracuse University in Syracuse, NY, is a program for aggressive adolescents and young children that are administered by teachers or school counselors. The program seeks to enhance interpersonal skill competence, self-mediated ability to control anger, and a youth's concern for the rights and needs of others. Participating youth typically attend three one-hour long sessions for ten weeks during which they learn Skill-streaming, Anger Control Training, and Moral Reasoning Training. ART has been found to decrease anger levels in response to minor anger-provoking situations and increasing pro-social skills and social skills knowledge. The most statistically impressive results were found in decreased re-arrest rates with participating gang members.

Want more information about this program? Contact: The Center for Research and Aggression, Clemson University, (315) 443-9641.

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### **Bullying Prevention Program — Clemson, SC**

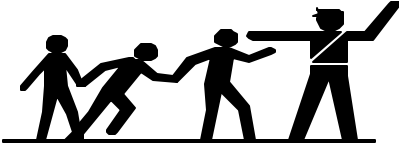
The Bullying Prevention Program, a program of the Institute on Family and Neighborhood Life at Clemson University in Clemson, SC, is a universal intervention for the reduction and prevention of bully/victim problems. The main arena for the program is the school, and school staff have the primary responsibility for the introduction and implementation of the program.

Program targets are students in elementary, middle, and junior high schools. All students within a school participate in most aspects of the program. Additional individual interventions are targeted at students who are identified as bullies or victims of bullying.

The Bullying Prevention Program has been shown to result in: a substantial reduction in children's reports of bullying and victimization; a significant reduction in students' reports of general antisocial behavior such as vandalism, fighting, theft and truancy; and significant improvements in the "social climate" of the class, as reflected in students' reports of improved order and discipline, more positive social relationships, and a more positive attitude toward schoolwork and school.

Want more information about this program? Contact: The Institute on Family & Neighborhood Life, Clemson University, (864) 656-6320

## Assessing the Risks



Continued from Page 6

- 13 percent of the victims were under the age of 18
- Whites and Blacks each made up 48 percent of murder victims
- Firearms were the weapons used in about 7 or every 10 murders
- In the south, the murder rate is 9 per 100,000 persons
- In metropolitan areas, the murder rate is 8.1 per 100,000 persons
- In smaller cities and rural counties the rate is 4.7
- Violence is defined as any act including verbal, visual or physical, intended to demean, harm or infringe about another's civil rights. Physicians, scientists, researchers, educators, sociologists and social reformers have identified key risk factors in youth violence:
  - Physiological risk factors -- high levels of non-adrenaline may exacerbate violent behavior
  - Socioeconomic risk factors -- domestic violence, poverty, substance abuse, broken homes, two-income families, single-parent families, lack of parental involvement, peer pressure, presence

- of outsiders at school
- Availability of handguns
- Membership in gangs
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Violence in the media

Studies, however have shown that behaviors like a positive temperament, high academic achievement, a positive school experience, high self-esteem, structure in the environment and at least one good relationship with a parent reduces the risk of violent behavior. It's important to note that identifying risk and protective factors are merely tools to indicate the potential for and solution of problems.

Positive relationships between students and those people who support them, and hold high expectations for them, parents, family, pro-social peers, teachers and the community, are strong indicators that the students will not engage in violent or anti-social behavior.

By identifying risk and protective factors, protective factors can be put into place to help positively change the climate of schools.

In schools where a greater number of protective factors exist, an environment is created that is warm, responsive, and focused on students' success and safety.



### CLIMATE CONTROL

What Does "Efficacy" Mean?

It's a belief system that empowers staff and students.

- "I can be influential in my world"
- "Smart is not something you are . . .it's something you become through hard work."



## Programs That Work

### The Model for Character Education

Continued from Page 7

commitment and caring. Once a climate of respect has been achieved, conflict resolution and peer mediation programs can be successfully established. Aligning these programs in the school promotes a climate that allows for highest student achievement in a safe learning environment.

Schools that have provided training for the entire staff and have implemented C2C school wide, report a positive effect on total school climate and a reduction of classroom disruption. Data gathered from the Pinellas County Suspension Reports and C2C program surveys indicate that the program has had a positive effect on the reduction of suspensions.

The accompanying table illustrates a reduction in suspensions for classroom disruption and defiance as a result of classroom and school wide implementation of Commitment to Character.

#### Suspensions in Targeted Elementary Schools

School	# in 1999	# in 2000	% of decrease
Blanton	41	34	17
Clearview	22	2	91
Sandy Lane	14	2	87
Tyrone	50	15	70

**The goal of the program is to create a climate of respect in the school, thereby reducing the number of suspensions for**

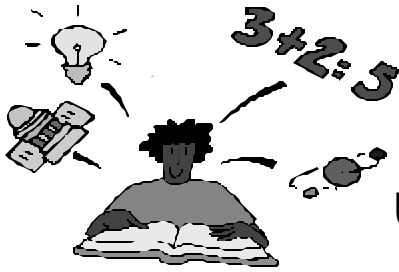
In addition, community partners are adopting the C2C traits in their programs with schools. Recently the Tampa Bay Devil Rays and the Fox Sports Network signed on as community partners with a project called "Reading is Cool." Tampa Bay Devil Rays players read character education stories to students at Campbell Park Elementary School. Fox Net taped the session and produced videotapes for all 83 elementary schools. The Devil Rays and Fox Sports Net also provided bookmarks for all students, and every classroom teacher received posters promoting respect, responsibility, honesty and motivation. "We hope someday that C2C will not only be a school program, but a community model for creating a climate of respect," stated Linda Jones, Supervisor for Pinellas County's Safe and Drug Free Schools program.



What Does "Resiliency" Mean?

It's the ability to bounce back from life's inevitable stressors. Resilient people are able to overcome their risk factors by developing protective factors of social competency, problem-solving ability, a sense of autonomy and hope for the future.

The National School Safety Center has a gang assessment tool available for school district use. Call: (805) 373-9977. Or visit their website: [www.nssc1.org/index.htm](http://www.nssc1.org/index.htm)



## Update on Trainings and Workshops

### February

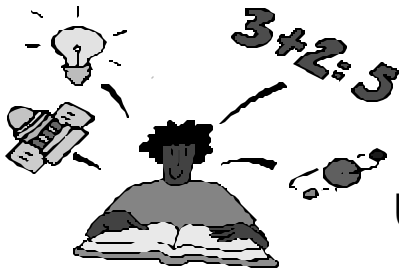
- 22      **Solution Based Counseling**  
Dade County. Susan Bridges-Tomkins, Director. For more information contact the Dade County Safe and Drug Free Schools Coordinator, (305) 995-7330.

### March

- 18-20      **Safe and Drug-Free Schools Grant writing and Technical Assistance Workshop.** (For SDFS Coordinators)  
Panama City. Florida Department of Education & The Florida Institute of Education's Safe, Disciplined, & Drug-Free Schools Project. For more information call Tonya Scarborough, (850) 922-9056.

### April

- 4      **Cultural Diversity** (High School)  
Lake County. Betty Stevens-Coney, Trainer. For more information contact the Lake County Safe and Drug-Free Schools Coordinator (352) 343- 3531.
- 7-10      **1<sup>st</sup> International Youth Leaders Conference**  
Orlando. Youth Crime Watch of America. For more information visit [www.ycwa.org](http://www.ycwa.org)
- 10-12      **Safe and Drug-Free Schools Grant writing and Technical Assistance Workshop** (for SDFS coordinators).  
Orlando. Florida Department of Education & The Florida Institute of Education's Safe, Disciplined, & Drug-Free Schools Project. For more information call Tonya Scarborough, (850) 922-9056.
- 17-20      **Cultural Diversity.**  
Alachua County. Betty Stevens-Coney, Trainer. For more information, contact the Alachua County Safe and Drug-Free Schools Coordinator at (352) 955-7140.



## Update on Trainings and Workshops

Continued from Page 11

### April

- 11-14      **14<sup>th</sup> Annual National Student Assistance Conference.**  
Dallas, TX. For more information visit the National Association for Student Assistance Professionals website at <http://www.nasap.org>.

### May

- 22-25      **17th Annual National Preventing Crime in the Black Community Conference.**  
Atlanta, GA. For more information visit <http://victims.firn.edu/pcbc>.

### June

- 10-13      **National Youth Gang Symposium**  
Orlando. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention.  
For more information visit [www.gangsymposium.org](http://www.gangsymposium.org).

### July

- 8-12      **Third Annual National Conference on School Safety**  
Orlando. National Institute for Community and School Based Policing. For more information visit [www.nicsp.com](http://www.nicsp.com).





## Your Staff — We're Here To Help

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## Footnotes

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>School Climate and School Safety (1998), Literature Review, University of Florida.

<sup>5</sup> School Safety Checkbook. Ronald D. Stephens, Editor. National School Safety Center, Pepperdine University, Malibu, CA, 1990.

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<sup>6</sup>Stephen Stolp, Stuart C. Smith, "Transforming School Culture." 1995 pg. 12, ERIC/CEM

<sup>7</sup>Community-Matters.org, "Safe Schools."

<sup>8</sup>Stolp, Stuart, Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Telephone interview with Valerie Adams, November 18, 2001.

<sup>10</sup> Submission by Linda Jones of Pinellas County Safe and Drug Free Schools, December 7, 2001.

<sup>11</sup> Florida Safe and Drug Free Schools Project website: [www.unf.edu/dept/fie/sdfs](http://www.unf.edu/dept/fie/sdfs).

<sup>12</sup>SERVE and CSAP's discussions of Risk and Protective Factors in several publications

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## ENDNOTES

The members of the SDDFS staff, as well as the staff of the Safe Schools Office at the Department of Education, stand ready to provide support through training and technical assistance to schools and school districts. Please encourage educators to take advantage of our services. For additional information on these resources or to find out how to access these resources, please contact Patricia Elton at (850) 414-0236 (SunCom 994-0236) or by email at [elton\\_p@popmail.firn.edu](mailto:elton_p@popmail.firn.edu).

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The Department of Education, through the Bureau of Equity, Safety and School Support, funds the Florida Institute of Education's (FIE's) Safe and Drug-Free Schools Project. FIE is an institute of the University of North Florida. The Safe and Drug-Free Schools Project offers technical assistance and support in the development and implementation of drug use and violence prevention strategies. For more information, contact the FIE/SDFS Project.

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