



## Climate and Culture Capstone: School Culture Advocacy through Educator-Driven Leadership

**Number of Credits: 3\***

**Course Instructors:** Miriam Woods and Jordan Mix

**PREREQUISITE REQUIREMENTS:** Enrolling in this course requires the completion of several prerequisite requirements to become a Certified School Culture Advocate through Safe Schools Academy. Details on those prerequisite requirements can be found at [www.safeschoolsacademy.org/sca-certification-requirements](http://www.safeschoolsacademy.org/sca-certification-requirements).

**Course Description:** There is a growing appreciation to improve the quality of students' entire K12 educational experience, from norms, values, relationships, teaching and learning, civic and social engagement, safety, and overall wellness. This holistic understanding of student life in schools is referred to as *school climate and culture*. According to the National School Climate Center, positive school climate and culture reduces student absenteeism and dropout rates while increase academic achievement and overall wellness. However, improving districtwide school climate and culture is challenging, as there are a myriad of factors and barriers that prevent students from feeling safe, supported, and welcomed in classrooms and schools.

The purpose of this course is to provide research-based best practices for building a positive school climate and culture. Completing the coursework will provide participants with the necessary tools to create welcoming spaces for underrepresented populations, engage students in civic and social dialogue, and ensure that all students feel safe and supported in school. Participants will analyze school climate and culture through a variety of perspectives, understand the unique needs of individual districts, and identify the systems and structures that prevent all students from succeeding. Participants will learn how to improve school culture through the cultivation of effective stakeholder partnerships, purposeful professional development, and modelling advocacy to student leaders and fellow educators.

Participants will integrate learning from prerequisite courses to highlight the barriers in developing a positive school climate and culture, and they will synthesize strategies for overcoming these challenges. At the end of the course, participants will be required to develop a Capstone Project to implement their new understandings in their classrooms, schools, and districts.

**Learning Objectives:** Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Identify best practices for creating safe and supportive learning environments, integrating civic and social dialogue in the classroom, and welcoming students from underrepresented and marginalized student populations
- Describe how stakeholder partnerships with students, teachers, and community members can foster positive school climate and culture
- Evaluate the needs of rural, suburban, and urban districts in the development of a positive school climate and culture
- Strategize how effective professional development can be a change agent to address classroom-level, building-level, and district-level advocacy
- Develop an implementation plan which identifies a key need and addresses how it will positively-impact the school's climate and culture

**Resources:** No texts are required to purchase in order to complete this course

The mission of Iowa Safe Schools is to provide safe, supportive and nurturing learning environments for all students. Staff of the Iowa Safe Schools are experts in the fields of bullying prevention and intervention, developing positive school climate, and advocating for underrepresented and marginalized populations. GSAs are shown to be a best practice for increasing awareness of discriminatory school policies, reducing bullying, reducing deaths by suicide, and ensuring students feel safe and support in their schools and communities.

National School Climate Center (n.d.). National School Climate Standards: Benchmarks to Promote Effective Teaching, Learning and Comprehensive School Improvement. New York, NY.

*Compiled by the National School Climate Council, a subsidiary of the National School Climate Center in New York, these research-based standards outline a core framework comprised of five standards which support effective school climate improvement efforts. This outlines the ways schools can promote, enhance, and sustain a positive school climate.*

Agarwal-Rangnath, R. (2013). Social Studies, Literacy, and Social Justice in the Common Core Classroom: A Guide for Teachers. ISBN: 9780807754085.

*This book provides a framework (grades 3-8) to help educators literacy and social students for social studies. This text frames the lessons with the Language Arts Common Core Standards while also making it applicable for the daily realities of the classroom. Each chapter explains how teachers can restructure, reshape, and work with mandated curriculum materials to teach from a critical perspective. The book also discusses how to meet Common Core Standards by teaching language arts and social studies as complementary subjects.*

Kosciw, J. G., Greytak, E. A., Zongrone, A. D., Clark, C. M., & Truong, N. L. (2018). *The 2017 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth in our nation's schools.* New York: GLSEN.

*This report focuses on the experiences of LGBTQ youth in schools, including the extent of the challenges that they face at school and the school-based resources that support LGBTQ students' well-being. The survey has consistently indicated that specific school-based supports are related to a safer and more inclusive school climate, including: supportive educators, LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum, inclusive and supportive policies, and supportive student clubs, such as Gay-Straight Alliances or Gender and Sexuality Alliances (GSAs).*

**\*Course Requirements:** To receive full credit for the course, participants must complete ALL assignments and respond to specific questions outlined in each assignment. Failure to complete all assignments will result in a disqualification in the course and a failing grade.

**Other Course Information:**

### Getting Started

- After registering for the course, you will be sent an email with the website address, password and course key you need to access your online course, along with login instructions.
- Access each assignment through the course home page. All assignments will be submitted through the Moodle platform on each respective assignment page.
- Please save a backup copy of all course assignments and completed work.

## Participation

- You are not required to be present (i.e. online) specific days or times. You will work at your own pace. The course is structured in 9 Weekly Units, however all assignments will not be due until the final day of the course.
- All responses will be posted online. Large documents, files, photographs or PowerPoint presentations may be attached as part of your response by using the “Submit A File” option.
- You may work collaboratively and submit similar responses on all assignments except for quizzes which must be done individually.

## INTASC Standards that are addressed in this course:

- 2. The teacher understands how children learn and develop, and can provide learning opportunities that support their intellectual, social and personal development.
- 3. The teacher understands how students differ in their approaches to learning and creates instructional opportunities that are adapted to diverse learners.
- 4. The teacher understands and uses a variety of instructional strategies to encourage students’ development of critical thinking, problem solving and performance skills.
- 5. The teacher uses an understanding of individual and group motivation and behavior to create a learning environment that encourages positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation.
- 6. The teacher uses knowledge of effective verbal, nonverbal, and media communication techniques to foster active inquiry, collaboration, and supportive interaction in the classroom.
- 7. The teacher plans instruction based upon knowledge of subject matter, students, the community, and curriculum goals.
- 9. The teacher is a reflective practitioner who continually evaluates the effects of his/her choices and actions on others (students, parents, and other professional in the learning community) and who actively seeks out opportunities to grow professionally.
- 10. The teacher fosters relationships with school colleagues, parents, and agencies in the larger community to support students’ learning and well-being.

## Check the Iowa Teaching Standards that are addressed in this course:

X	1. Enhance Student Achievement		5. Monitoring Student Learning
	2. Content Knowledge	X	6. Classroom Management
X	3. Planning and Preparation	X	7. Professional Growth
X	4. Instructional Strategies	X	8. Professional Responsibilities

**Assignment Checklist:**

<b>Topic/Activity</b>	<b>In Class</b>	<b>Out of Class</b>
<b>Getting to Know the Class; Additional Readings:</b> Take the time to get to know the class layout, read over the Help section, and review any other materials present in the class to get started. Take your time!		3 hrs
<b><u>Week 1 – Introduction to School Climate and Culture</u></b>		
<b>Discussion: Introductions:</b> In this module, participants will introduce themselves and explain why they want to become a school culture advocate in a discussion post. They will also take time to meet their classmates.	1 hour	3 hours
<b>Discussion: What Is School Climate and Culture:</b> In this lesson, participants will learn about what school climate and culture is and the key considerations when educators seek to improve the overall climate and culture of their school district. Participants will derive their own definition for school climate and culture, and in a discussion post, they will reflect on how that definition applies to their school districts.	1 hour	4 hours
<b>Discussion: Evaluating School Climate and Culture:</b> In this lesson, participants will analyze the various ways educators analyze the current climate and culture of their classrooms, schools, and districts. Participants will evaluate the climate and culture of their district and share their findings in a discussion post.	1 hour	4 hours
<b><u>Week 2 – The Foundation of Positive School Climate and Culture</u></b>		
<b>Discussion: Safety, Supports and Wellness:</b> In this lesson, participants will reflect on the ways their district is ensuring the safety, support, and wellness of their students. Participants will also analyze the barriers students experience in accessing these resources, and in a discussion post, participants devise potential solutions to these barriers.	2 hours	3 hours
<b>Discussion: Diversity and Inclusion:</b> In this lesson, participants will reflect on the ways their district welcomes and includes students from diverse and underrepresented backgrounds. In a discussion post, they will analyze the barriers that may exist for students from underrepresented backgrounds and in a discussion post, they will discuss best practices for alleviating these barriers.	2 hours	3 hours
<b>Discussion: Civic and Social Engagement:</b> In this lesson, participants will reflect on their district’s curriculum and how it engages students in civil discourse and inclusive curriculum. In a discussion post, participants will reflect on specific strategies they can implement into their curriculum to amplify student voices and model civic and social leadership.	2 hours	3 hours
<b><u>Week 3 – Climate, Culture, and Privilege</u></b>		
<b>Discussion: Privilege in Your Community –</b> In this lesson, participants will identify systems of privilege and reflect on how it manifests in their community. In a discussion post, participants will share their experiences.	2 hours	4 hours
<b>Discussion: Privilege in Your School –</b> In this lesson, participants will identify a systems of privilege and reflect on how it manifests in their school. In a discussion post, participants will share their experiences.	2 hours	4 hours
<b><u>Week 4 – Every District &amp; Every School</u></b>		
<b>The Current Climate and Culture of Rural Districts -</b> In this lesson, participants will reflect on the key issues affecting the school climate and culture in rural school districts. Participants will reflect on these issues in a discussion post.	2 hours	3 hours
<b>The Current Climate and Culture of Suburban Districts -</b> In this lesson, participants will reflect on the key issues affecting the school climate and culture in suburban school districts. Participants will reflect on these issues in a discussion post.	2 hours	3 hours
<b>Current Issues in Urban Districts -</b> In this lesson, participants will reflect on the key issues affecting the school climate and culture in urban school districts. In a discussion post, participants will reflect on the intersecting issues existing between rural, suburban, and	2 hours	3 hours

urban districts. They will reflect on how we can ensure that every district is fostering a positive school climate and culture.		
<b><u>Week 5 – Creating Effective Stakeholder Partnerships:</u></b>		
<b>Discussion: Effective Partnerships between Educators and Parents:</b> In this lesson, participants will reflect on the strengths and challenges associated with creating collaborative relationships between teachers and parents. Participants will discuss the best practices they see utilized in their districts.	1.5 hours	3.5 hours
<b>Effective Partnerships between Teachers and Administrators:</b> In this lesson, participants will analyze best practices for garnering administrative support in adopting new school climate and culture initiatives. In a discussion post, participants will reflect on the	1.5 hours	3.5 hours
<b>Effective Partnerships between Schools and Community Organizations:</b> In this lesson, participants will examine several examples of collaborative partnerships between schools and community organizations. Participants will discuss, in a post, the opportunities they see for school-community partnerships.	1.5 hours	3.5 hours
<b><u>Week 6 – Multi-Level School Climate and Culture Reform:</u></b>		
<b>Discussion: Implementing Classroom-Level Culture Change:</b> In this lesson, participants will reflect on the ways they can maximize student engagement and effectively alter the climate and culture of their classroom. They will highlight the best practices they plan on implementing in a discussion post.	1.5 hours	3.5 hours
<b>Discussion: Implementing Building-Level Culture Change:</b> In this lesson, participants will reflect on the current climate and culture of their school building. In a discussion post, they will identify the needs they see in their building and the potential strategies they can implement to achieve those goals.	1.5 hours	3.5 hours
<b>Discussion: Implementing District-Level Culture Change:</b> In this lesson, participants will listen to the perspectives of educators who have implemented districtwide change to their climate and culture. In a discussion post, participants will identify potential barriers and challenges they see in creating that level of change, and they will highlight potential ways to overcome them.	1.5 hours	3.5 hours
<b><u>Week 7 – Advocacy 101: How to Engage Your Staff and Students:</u></b>		
<b>Discussion: Advocacy and Modeling for Colleagues:</b> Participants will examine strategies how teacher leadership can help propel effective climate and culture. In a discussion post, educators will examine the roles and responsibilities of mentors and instructional coaches and how these individuals can be leaders of change.	2 hours	4 hours
<b>Discussion: Advocacy through Developing Student Leaders:</b> Participants will examine the power of grassroots change in climate and culture through student leadership initiatives. In a discussion post, they will outline the current ways their school district current develops student leaders, and they will strategize how they can develop student leaders to propel positive school climate and culture initiatives.	2 hours	4 hours
<b><u>Week 8 – Professional Development as a Change Agent</u></b>		
<b>Discussion: The Components of Effective Professional Development:</b> In this module, participants will reflect on professional development they have experienced in the past and describe the aspects that made it both effective and ineffective. In a discussion post, participants will describe what professional development that would effectively impact a school’s climate and culture would look like.	2 hour	2.5 hours
<b>Discussion: Adult Learning Theory:</b> In this module, participants will develop a theoretical understanding of how adults learn. They will compare and contrast several frameworks for adult learning, and in a discussion post, they will reflect on how their experiences as a K12 educator can translate into an adult learning environment.	2 hour	2.5 hours
<b>Discussion: Developing and Implementing Effective Professional Development:</b> In this module, participants will learn how to develop and implement professional development.	2 hour	2.5 hours

In a discussion, participants will reflect on professional development they would like to see in their district and devise a plan for implementing it.		
<b>Evaluating Effective Professional Development:</b> In this module, participants will learn how districts measure the effectiveness of staff professional development. In a discussion post, participants will use these methods to evaluate a professional development experience.	2 hours	2.5 hours
<b>Week 9 – The Power of School Culture Advocacy</b>		
<b>Discussion: The Barriers in Bringing Change and Reform:</b> Trying to bring change to your school district can often be met with resistance. In this lesson, participants will reflect on the barriers and challenges that may arise as you are trying to foster changes in your school’s climate and culture.	1 hour	5 hours
<b>Discussion: Becoming A School Culture Advocate:</b> In this module, participants will reflect over the entire course and describe why becoming a school culture advocate is important for them. They will describe the ways they feel they can develop that provides safety and support for all students, engages students in social and civil dialogue, and empowers student diversity and inclusion.	1 hour	2 hours
<b>Discussion: Capstone Project:</b> Participants will outline a project that they want to implement to bring effective climate and culture change into their schools.	3 hour	6 hours
<b>TOTAL:</b>	45 hours	90 hours

**Coursework:** Participants can earn up to 200 points total for the course. The following table depicts the breakdown of points possible for the required coursework

Activity	Points
25 Discussion Posts (5 Points Each)	125
Final Implementation Plan/Paper	75
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>

**Grading Scale – Graduate Credit**

100-90% (200 - 180 points)	A
89-80% (179 – 160 points)	B
79-70% (159 - 140 points)	C
69-60% (139 - 120 points)	D
59%-Below (<120 points)	F

**Grading Scale - License Renewal Credit**

100-80% (200 - 160 points)	P
79%-Below (<160 points)	NP

**Student Requirements** Students are required to:

- Participate in **ALL** discussion forums and quizzes
- Complete a final implementation plan

**Americans with Disabilities Act:** If you are a student with a disability and require any auxiliary aids, services, or other accommodations for this class, please see the instructor to discuss your accommodation needs.

**Statement of Plagiarism:** Academic dishonesty results in failure of this course. Give credit where credit is due. Use the APA Publication Manual to cite references when needed. Not crediting ideas or words of others is unacceptable scholarship as is submitting work that was done for a previous course or that is not your own origin in design or completion. Submit original assignments. Do not submit work for this course that you have done for other courses.

## Grading Rubrics for Individual Activities

**25 Discussions (125 points possible)** Discussion Forums are asynchronous ways to engage in class discussions. They require you to submit an answer to a question and respond to the posts of other peers. Because they are an integral part of sharing strategies, analyzing research, and sharing ideas, discussion forums in this course comprise a significant percentage of your final grade. It's highly recommended that you read and respond to more than the required two peer postings because greater participation will facilitate a greater depth of understanding. Additionally, it's important to make posts in a timely manner to benefit from peer responses.

<b>Grading Rubric for Discussion Forums</b>		
		<b>Points</b>
<b>Critical Thinking</b>	Makes connections to the other content and real-life that are supported by reference(s) and example(s)	1
	Offers new ideas, connections, or applications	1
	Expresses and justifies personal opinion	1
<b>Assignment Specific Criteria</b>	Addresses all parts of the assignment, cites sources	1
<b>Participation (Responses to at least 2 peer posts)</b>	Responds to other posts (when available)	1
<b>Total Points Possible</b>		5

## Final Assignment (75 points possible)

The final assignment is a critical part of this course. Participants must complete a two-page final assignment. The paper is meant to be a reflection as well as a chance to state what you will use going forward. The rubric below will be used to grade the final assignment, but additional details will be provided within the course.

<b>Grading Rubric for Implementation Plan</b>		
		<b>Points</b>
<b>Critical Thinking</b>	Highlights any new knowledge gained as a result of course.	15
	Offers new ideas, connections, or applications	15
	Expresses and justifies personal opinion	9
	Discusses Overall Implications	6
<b>Assignment Specific Criteria</b>	Addresses all parts of the assignment, cites sources	6
<b>Mechanics</b>	Writing is clear, well developed, and organized, No or few grammar and spelling errors	6
<b>Implementation</b>	Clearly states ideas to use in the future	6
	States resources to be used	6
	Is realistic in their approach – understands limitations may exist	6
<b>Total Points Possible</b>		75