

We always like to recognize all of the staff who support the work of SEAC. Starting off with our colleagues from the Department of Education our program officers are Dr. Tracey Scott, Bryan Keohane, and Liz Lembo. Again, I'm Jarle Crocker Project Director. I'm joined this afternoon by my co project director from the American Institutes for Research,

Sarah Frazelle, and you'll meet other staff from both Westat and AIR as your breakout facilitators this afternoon. But with that, I want to turn it over to my colleague, Megan Gildin, to get it started. Megan, take it away. Great. Thank you so much, Jarle, and welcome everyone. My name is Megan Gildin. I'll be taking you through this webinar today.

And again, this learning series, we will be exploring school wide strategies for supporting attendance and how SEAs can support LEAs with implementation. Throughout the course of the series, we'll dive deeper into two school wide strategies. So in session one, which we had last week, that you can see the recording if you did not get a chance to attend, we discussed adapting messaging to address emerging attendance challenges.

We discussed two emerging misconceptions. First, the value of school and in-person attendance. And second, navigating health related challenges, things like mental health, as well as physical health, understanding when you're feeling those cold and flu symptoms, when do you come to school, when do you stay home?

We also discussed the importance of addressing these challenges with a positive mindset and in partnership with families. So in session two today, we will cover fostering a positive school climate and supporting connectedness, which can help support and addressing those emerging misconceptions we talked about last week.

Now, next week in session three, we will apply what we learned in the first two sessions through a peer exchange. So during this exchange, SEA and LEA teams will have an opportunity to share a challenge or a problem of practice and receive feedback from their peers related to adapting messaging, positive school climate, or other proactive strategies.

So we will share in the chat a link to a sign-up sheet for the next session. And I'll just take you through it really quickly. A big thank you to those of you who have already signed up. You may notice we've added a few additional columns to give us some information. So sometime before session three next week, if

you could connect with your teams and think about what challenge you might like to bring to our peer exchange next week, and add it into our table here.

So you'll add your SEA or LEA name, a point of contact, the number of team members you have, and it is absolutely okay if you are a team of one. This really just helps us pair and group folks for next Tuesday. And then a quick summary of what the challenger problem of practice is that you want to discuss.

That way, we can make sure that we're pairing folks intentionally. We also added this column at the end that says I can help. So, as you're writing in your challenge, if you happen to have time to peruse other challenges folks have shared, if you see something that you think, oh, I've done this well, or I have something that I can suggest for them.

Feel free to add your name into that last column. And that's basically sharing with us, hey, I'm happy to connect with this person to discuss more, either through the peer exchange or afterwards. So, again. If you have a chance to fill in the sign-up sheet before our session next Tuesday, we will use this

to make sure that we are grouping folks as intentionally as possible during the peer exchange. Alright, so throughout this series, our objective really is to understand the role of proactive school wide strategies in supporting attendance. And as I mentioned today, we'll focus on applying strategies for fostering positive school climate.

With that, our agenda for today includes a presentation from Greta Colombi, who is the director of the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, or NCSSLE, and she'll cover fostering positive school climate. NCSSLE is a federally funded TA center similar to SEAC, and we shared the website in the chat to learn more.

After Greta's presentation, we'll have time in breakout groups to be able to share strategies and ideas related to our local context. And then we'll come back together at the end to share key takeaways and close out the session for today. And we'll talk a little bit more about the peer exchange at the end as well.

So without further ado, let me pass it over to Greta, who we are thrilled to have with us today to talk about school climate and connectedness.

Excellent. Good afternoon. Good day, everyone. My name is Greta Colombi, as Megan just mentioned, and I'm super pleased to be with you.

All right. So during this presentation, I am planning to answer five key questions for you. The first is why is school climate important for attendance? The second is to ensure that we're all on the same page and explore what exactly is school climate. Next, as a part of the SEAC learning series, and because we want to be sure the connection is clear, I'm going to answer the question of how is connectedness related to school climate.

Then we will dig into a key question for today. What does it take to foster school climate and connectedness? And that also includes improving. So providing some how-to's. And then finally, as we wrap up, what resources could SEAs use to help their LEAs and schools? So how about we jump in? So the first, again, is why is school climate important for attendance?

And basically, when I think about the importance of school climate for attendance, I think back to a great brief the Attendance Works and my fellow colleagues at the American Institutes for Research developed not too long ago which was discussed during the last session. And namely, it basically talks about how positive conditions for learning allow students to be engaged and attend school regularly.

So when building those conditions for learning to improve attendance, that team really demonstrates how the four conditions for learning, whether it's physical and emotional health and safety, belonging, connection and support, academic challenge and engagement, and adult and student well-being have one critical piece in common that supports attendance.

And that those are relationships.

So today we're talking about school climate. So what do conditions for learning have to do with that? Well, school climate describes the school conditions that influence student learning. And we know that by making school climate improvements, we can help build belongingness and connectedness. So let's go to our next question.

And that is, what exactly is school climate? Just to make sure again, that we are all on the same page.

So over time, experts have explored how to define it. One of the most common models used to define school climate today for preeminent national experts, including Doctors Catherine Bradshaw, Jonathan Cohen, Dorothy Espelage and Maury Nation is the U S Department of Education Safe, Supportive Schools Model.

So this model, which you see now reflects how members of a school community experience school, including interpersonal relationships, teacher and other staff practices and organizational relationships, excuse me, arrangements. School climate includes factors that serve as conditions for learning, as I mentioned before, and the model is framed by three domains or pillars, as we like to call them at NCSSE, engagement, safety, and environment.

And within each of those, we have a set of topics. So I'm just going to walk through them really quickly at a high level. Engagement, is when we're talking about multifaceted topic that really is characterized by behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement. And safety is defined as schools and school related activities where students are safe from violence, bullying, and harassment, and the influence of substance use.

An environment is broadly characterized by its facilities, classroom practices, school-based health supports, and disciplinary policies and practices. It really sets the stage for those external factors that affect students. But since we're talking about connectedness, let's look just a little bit more deeply at engagement.

And so engagement really is speaking to three major things. It's talking about having an awareness of one's own cultural identity and an understanding about differences and the ability to learn and build on the varying cultural and community norms of students and their families. Having positive connections between students, adults, and peers that foster positive social interaction and establish a nurturing environment of trust and support in schools.

And then it also includes students, staff, and families participating in school events and governance, as well as the inclusion of community at large in community in school activities. So, that is a lot. So, in short, what we really want you to take away is that school climate is all about how students learn best when they are in environments in which they feel safe, supported, challenged, and accepted.

So, the way that students, families, teachers, and other school staff experience the school climate affects their student attendance, learning, and achievement. Students who learn in positive learning environments that are safe, supportive, and engaging are more likely to improve academically, participate more fully in this classroom, and develop skills that will help them to be successful in school and in life.

And students who experience positive school climates are less likely to participate in disruptive behavior, have issues with attendance like absenteeism and truancy, drop out, be suspended, display aggressive behavior, and engage in violence. I think it's also important to note which we included here the ways in which teachers experience the climate of the school is also related to their levels of stress and burnout.

Teacher turnover is lower and teacher satisfaction is higher in schools with positive school climate.

All right. So now that we know what school climate is, how is belonging and connectedness related to school climate?

Well, as I mentioned a moment ago, engagement includes relationships and is a key component of school climate. So in looking at the engagement in school climate research, one can see that there's a relationship between the two, despite the tautological kinds of challenges. But simply put, when thinking about the connection between engagement and school climate, it can be useful to think of the school climate as a three-legged stool.

On one hand, A school can't have a positive school climate without engagement, and on the other, you can't just focus on engagement and expect to have a positive school climate. That said, often school climate efforts are launched in response to engagement concerns and can be addressed.

So finally, just thinking about this connection to school climate and connectedness you'll see here a great quote by the CDC talking about school connectedness, and I'm just going to give you a moment to read it.

And I think the two big things that you'll see in this quote that are important to note is first about connectedness is about caring. It includes that sense of being cared for, being supported, and belonging at school. So that's the first. And then the second thing that you'll notice that is really important to share is the important role of schools in being able to support this connectedness.

All right, so now what does it take to improve school climate and connectedness? Let's start with improving school climate. So given the breadth of school climate, improving school climate really involves working towards four main goals. The first is really understanding how students, staff and families perceive their school climate.

This is typically assessed through administering school climate surveys and then facilitating follow up focus groups or interviews or we're really just engaging with your students and staff and non-instructional staff and basic and families really looking at that data and understanding what it really means.

So that really feeds into that second one and engaging students and staff. So that is not just when you're looking at the data, but ideally all along the process of thinking about your school climate, using your data to looking at the data with your students, staff and families. But it's also thinking about the solutions

with your students, staff, and families, and evaluating and monitoring your work with your students, staff, and families. So it really is ideally something that you're engaging with folks over, over time, not just at one moment. Another big focus is thinking about and making school safe for all. And then creating an environment for student and staff success. And to do that school climate improvements really rely on a systemic approach for organizing those efforts into three tiers. So at tier one thinking about universal interventions for all students that are proactive and preventative to really support the school climate. Tier two, thinking about targeted interventions for groups of students who are exposed or at risk. And then thinking at tier three the individualized interventions for a few students who are really needing more intensive supports.

We hear a lot more that folks will be focusing more on tiers two and three, and it's really critical to really focus on that foundational tier one. So that's just something to keep in mind.

So improving school climate involves establishing, maintaining and approving those tiered supports in three ways. So after you collect your data and you're really using that data and engaging with your staff and students and families, you can think about where you can make improvements via policy and system change.

This is often at the district level. And then you can think about improvements via school wide practices and strategies. But then you can also think about it in terms of making improvements within classroom practice.

So that sounds like a lot. I know educators are having so much that they're balancing. So I think one of the big questions that we hear a lot is it actually doable? Like, although it most certainly does take time, I think that there are two things that we want you to remember. First, it is doable.

You're probably already doing something already to improve your school climate. So you're not really starting from ground zero. So for example, I bet much of you are already implementing things that you see here on this screen. You're, usually there's a variety of interventions that can support the social, emotional, and behavioral well-being of students.

And I think, you know, some of you may question, is this one more thing? Do we really need to do this? And especially now, since there's so much going on and given what we know about school climate, it really is something that we should be focusing on based on the research and what we see on the ground.

School climate is foundational to these initiatives. Making school climate improvements is actually a critical part of the system that supports these other initiatives, whichever you may be implementing. Whether it is any of the ones you see here, like multi-tiered systems of support, or trauma sensitive schools, or other common frameworks and approaches.

And given the current challenges we see, it's critical to improve these school climate foundations, now, to support overall success.

I think the other when thinking about this question of whether it's doable, we know that it is easier said than done, but compared to other things, working on the school climate, it is relatively inexpensive. It often is more about changing the way you do your work one step at a time. So let's dig in now to think about the resources that can help you to do just that.

So NCSSLE developed a suite of resources as part of our School Climate Improvement Resource Package, or what we lovingly call as the SCIRP. It was released in 2016 with major components updated almost annually since. The SCIRP was informed by both the latest research at the time, as well as the experiences of states, districts and schools that had worked on making school climate improvements in terms of the range of approaches they took their lessons learned and their successes.

In particular, NCSSLE worked with 11 state education agencies over five years. The whole package is organized by five sets of activities we saw as critical to school climate improvements, and they're not, they're nothing surprising, I would say, right, that there's, it's really important to plan for school climate improvements.

It's really important to engage stakeholders or constituents in school climate improvements. It's really critical to collect and report school climate data. It's

really important to use that data to choose and implement school climate improved interventions. Which could include strategies as well as evidence-based programs, and then monitoring and evaluating your school climate improvements.

So, the SCIRP includes 32 resources in all that aims to help school district and school leaders analyze and understand local school climate survey data and provide practical advice and information to support implementation and sustainability of those efforts. So when you go onto that main page, there is also a tool that can help you fine tune what resources would be, which SCIRP resources would be best for you.

It's basically a simple five question quiz. And then from there, it will actually provide that list of resources, a smaller list of resources for you. Now we've been talking about school climate. I really want to talk about connectedness as well. And if you're not already aware, the CDC has done a lot of great work in this area.

They have developed a connectedness microsite, and Latrell just popped that into the chat right now. And basically, they looked at a range of research literature, and they narrowed down a set of strategies teachers can take to manage their classroom in a way that can help students feel more connected.

So within this microsite, they dedicate, um, they, they're dedicated to support schools and improving school connectedness, and they provide lots of great information. In particular, they lay out six evidence-based strategies and two promising practices that educators can use to improve connectedness. I won't go through each one, one by one, but let's take a look at two, the ones that really focus on the foundational relational supports that often come in tandem with school climate.

So the first I'll talk about is for the teaching, caring and support. So research tells us that students who believe their teachers or believe their teachers build strong, positive relationships with them and show that they care about them report feeling higher levels of connectedness to school and their peers.

And teacher caring and support has also been associated with improved student engagement in both math and reading. So CDC presents seven ways that teachers can show their care and support. They can show students that teachers and school staff care about them as people and are interested in their well-being, and they can do that via regular check-ins.



They can also invite students to share information about themselves and how they would like to be called. They can demonstrate a willingness to provide extra help to students when they need it. They can ensure students feel like they're being treated fairly. They can find ways to include topics that students want to talk about.

They can listen and be responsive to students' ideas and input. They can create opportunities for positive interactions with students, and they can also practice restorative communication when harm to a relationship with a student occurs due to a conflict, misunderstanding, or a negative interaction. So that's that one.

Another one that I want to talk about that is closely related to school climate is the peer connection and support. And research also tells us that students who report feeling connected to, supported by, and respected by their peers demonstrate higher levels of engagement at school, and they also report feeling more connected to their school.

So the CDC lists out five ways educators can allow for peer connection and support, and that includes providing opportunities for students to learn more about each other, providing opportunities for students to interact with one another in fun ways. Providing opportunities for students to work together on assignments.

No, we know this one can be tricky to do well, so assigning or getting a volunteer to take a lead and then circulating among the groups to monitor and provide support can be helpful. They can also promote expectations that students help each other out. If one of their classmates doesn't understand something or needs help, and they can promote expectations that students respect and listen to one another.

So within this CDC microsite, there are tons of details like this that can really help, especially if there's an area looking at your data or in talking with students or in talking with teachers, you know that there's a particular area that you're really wanting to focus, you can get more specifics from this microsite.

NCSSLE also has other resources that we wanted to make sure to share with you. First, we host lessons from the field webinar series, and we had two great webinars that really are very focused on this topic. So we had one focused on creating welcoming school environments and another on strategies for supporting full student participation.

What's really great about these webinars is that we feature through panel discussion both practitioners as well as the voice of young people. So it can be really powerful, especially as you're working with your teams to think about improving connectedness and welcoming and full participation really just to hear what young people have to say and practitioners like yourselves.

Also, another key part is in order to have a strong school climate and to encourage connectedness and student well-being, it's really important for staff to be doing well. So you can consider staff well-being improvements to ultimately support your young people as well. And we have what we call the Working Well Resource Directory.

That includes a set of about 75 resources that are aligned with seven different evidence-based approaches for supporting staff well-being. One aspect is self-care, but the vast majority are really thinking about organizational and systems improvements that can help support staff well-being.

And then we also have our Working Well podcast. Within it, we talk with a superintendent, a principal, a teacher, a school psychologist and others about what staff well-being means to them and how they have been actively engaged in making staff well-being a priority for their community. So we hope that you enjoy those podcasts and they might be helpful to you.

And with that, I just want to thank you for listening to me today. And I am also happy just in case you'd like to learn more about NCSSE. I know at the top, we had included our link to our website, but here again is our website, and you can also follow us on social media as we are always sharing lots of great new resources both NCSSE and the field at large and hope that they might be helpful to you.

So thank you so much.

All right. Thank you so much, Greta. Really has me thinking about how interconnected school climate efforts and attendance efforts really are. And that will really give you all some time now in breakout discussions to dig in more into this. So in a moment we'll put you into breakout rooms, and in those rooms you'll discuss full connectedness in your communities your school climate efforts and any challenges or needs that you may have.

We'll put a few Padlets in the chat that we'll use to take some notes that we can add in some additional ideas. And we'll have about 20 minutes in breakout groups, and then we'll come back together to share some key takeaways and

close out doing some planning for our session next Tuesday. So we will see you all back here in the main room.

There'll be a facilitator to guide the discussion for you, and we'll see you back in about 20 minutes. All right, welcome back everyone. I see folks are starting to trickle in. We'll give everyone some time to come back as we're waiting for folks to come, have your start thinking about what you might want to share

in the chat or if you can raise your hand, we'll call on folks to share a strategy or key takeaway from your group discussions.

Megan, did you call on us? Sure. Yeah, go ahead. Okay. I was with Boris and we, you know, spent time on different strategies and how we're getting community partners involved getting those learning communities within our schools so, they're not so big, making sure we're inclusive. And also looking at that MTSS model and how we're utilizing MTSS and really the need also for a variety of strategies for all of our students.

Okay, team 13, is there anything I left out?

I think that was great and I'll I think we'll share a few resources from your team in a second. Thanks, Nikki. Hey, I think go

ahead Andrea. I think 1 thing that we talked about specifically was in that connectedness and belonging in our school communities that the staff turnover and shortage is impacting the connectedness that teachers may have and then also the connectedness or lack of connectedness to substitutes and again, just that turnover.

But then also in need of that, some of the resources that we feel that we need are definitely how do we help teachers feel safe at school? How do we help teachers with their mental health and with the retention rates so that we can impact the school culture at large? And so that's important for us.

And then working together through the cohorts or different groups of people across different co-curricular activities and then groups across the state to help with like social-emotional learning and different things like that. So that would be a great way to collaborate. And I know there's some states that are doing that.

Absolutely. Team anything else team. That teacher well-being and educator well being piece is so important. And I appreciate that you brought up collaboration. We talked in our group, you know, the accountability team may

be collecting the data, but then a different team is implementing school climate efforts.

So how do we build those bridges across departments and across teams so that we can work more collaboratively in connecting these efforts?

Anything else? Oh, shout out to Guam who has been in here since four in the morning. Yes, absolutely. A commitment. We appreciate you. Looks like a lot of gratitude in the chat. So I'm going to take that to mean that we had fantastic conversations. I encourage you to continue to add into the Padlets or peruse the Padlets.

You may find some new ideas in there as well and feel free to add your own. So we'll get this all wrapped up so we can get you out of here on time. First, we love feedback from you all. We try to make sure that each session is better than the last. So there's a quick feedback form that we're placing in the chat.

You know, will take 2 minutes to fill in. You can probably do it while we're wrapping up. So if you could give us some feedback on today's session, that would be greatly appreciated. All right. So, coming up, we have a few things. Next Tuesday is our final session. And as we talked about in the beginning, this will be a peer exchange.

So essentially, we'll all come together and then we'll get in breakout groups where you'll be with two or three other teams, or we might have some topic area groups, just depending on what the challenges are looking like that you share. And in these groups, you'll have an opportunity to share a challenge or problem of practice and be able to get some feedback from your peers and some strategies.

So you'll see again in the chat, we have our signup sheet. And the signup sheet, if you've already filled it in last time, there are some additional details that we need from you. So again, just adding in your SEA or LEA, a point of contact, the number of team members you have, and your challenge that will help us with identifying groupings for next week.

And we're also sharing in the chat template or a guide, which is an optional tool. You're not required to do this, but if you click the link, it'll instruct you to make a copy. And it just provides some simple questions that you might want to consider as you're identifying your challenge. And then towards the end, it has after the peer exchange has just a simple action planning tool for you all to consider.

Again, not a required tool, but they're just to be useful. Also to help you on Friday, we have an optional office hours. So this office hours is dedicated if you are struggling to figure out what is this challenge that I want to bring next Tuesday. So really it's just that support for identifying your challenge.

If you're wanting support for addressing your challenge or a particular topic and you want that one on one support, please email either Taneco or Sarah. Their emails are on the screen. We do offer some one on one TA and support, so that is available to you as well. We appreciate you taking your time today and joining us and conversing with your peers.

As a follow up, we'll email a copy of the final slides and the resources that were shared from today. As I mentioned, the padlets will stay open, so you're welcome to refer back to those at any point. And then to learn more about SEAC and the work that we do and to access our tools, feel free to check out the SEAC website.

The link is in the chat there as well. All right, so that's it for today. We appreciate you all. And hope to see you next week, which will be I'm sure wonderful discussion and brainstorming and building on all the positivity and gratitude that I'm seeing coming through the chat from our discussion today.

So, again, thank you all and have a wonderful rest of your Tuesday.