



THE POWER OF STORYTELLING:

Harnessing the CCSC Audio Gallery for Professional Learning

The California Center for School Climate (CCSC) Audio Gallery highlights stories of public schools committed to serving the whole-person needs of their communities with practices rooted in equity. This brief offers educators and education leaders ideas for how to draw on audiocasts featured in the CCSC Audio Gallery to design and facilitate professional learning opportunities related to school climate domains, such as Safety and Wellness, Belonging and Connections, and Environment.¹



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Meet the CCSC Audio Gallery

The CCSC Audio Gallery highlights real-world examples of how schools across the state nurture positive and affirming school climates. Each audiocast is brief (approximately 15–25 minutes long) and includes promising, evidence-based resources and a discussion guide to help educators adapt what they hear to their local contexts.

Each audiocast offers context about the featured schools, districts, and counties and includes conversations with community members about their successful school climate initiatives and programs. The audiocasts emphasize the process behind the program (including the structures and mindsets) and share the impact of the community's school climate work through an asset frame, which focuses on strengths and lessons learned rather than what's missing.

Using the CCSC Audio Gallery in Professional Learning Settings

Educators and education leaders know how important it is for people to feel a sense of well-being and belonging in their schools and communities. But with many competing priorities and several different ways of approaching the cultivation of a positive school climate, educators can struggle to find a way forward.

By offering snapshots of specific school climate strategies, the CCSC Audio Gallery shows educators what is possible by harnessing the power of storytelling as a tool for teaching and learning. The stories featured in each audiocast help bridge the gap between theory and practice by inspiring listeners to:




- reflect on the extent to which a strategy or approach might work in their own community,
- celebrate what they are already doing well,
- see a school climate challenge from a new angle, or
- explore what they might not have considered before.

Educators and education leaders tasked with developing and facilitating professional learning for their colleagues at the school, district, and county levels might consider embedding the audiocasts in their design. These audiocasts can be particularly useful for educators and education leaders in the following situations:

- Your school or district is looking for new ways to cultivate a positive school climate.
- Students have indicated the need for safer and more supportive learning environments.
- Your school or district is preparing to adopt a new school climate–related policy, practice, or other structure.
- Your colleagues are interested in learning from other schools and districts about what has worked for them.
- Your school or district is working on exploring or implementing practices related to one of the elements of school climate illustrated in the CCSC School Climate Domains.

10 Ways to Use Audiocasts in Professional Learning Contexts

The following are 10 ideas for using the audiocasts as fodder for professional learning. Each strategy has icons to designate whether it's a good fit for specific audiences:

-  **individuals** to do on their own
-  **small groups** that meet regularly (e.g., professional learning communities, communities of practice, or critical friends groups)
-  **large groups** that meet periodically (e.g., all-staff meetings, department meetings)

1. Explore the accompanying materials.

Each audiocast includes a selection of key resources in addition to a brief with supplementary content, research, and questions to consider as you listen. Instead of just listening to an audiocast and moving on, use the audiocast as a jumping-off point to explore the accompanying materials on your own and to share what you find with colleagues.

2. Engage in solo reflection.

Each audiocast makes for a great listen on a walk, in the car, or while doing chores around the house. Listen to one in the background and then engage in solo reflection on these simple questions:

- What is inspiring about this story?
- What questions does this story spark for you?
- What new wonderings do you have for your own role?
- How might this audiocast connect to what is possible in your own context?
- What specific actions might you take next?

3. Participate in a guided reflective conversation.

Select an audiocast to listen to with a colleague or small group of colleagues. After listening, host a facilitated reflective conversation using the following steps, which are adapted from the University of Edinburgh's Reflection Toolkit, [What? So what? Now what?](#)

Figure 1. *What? So What? Now What?* Reflection Tool

STEP 1: What? Reflect on the experience of listening to the audiocast.	STEP 2: So what? Reflect on why and how the audiocast connects with your work.	STEP 3: Now what? Reflect on what action steps you might take next.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What was it like to listen to the audiocast? • What feelings did the audiocast evoke in you? • What school climate approach, initiative, and/or program did the audiocast describe? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does this audiocast teach you about school climate and safe and supportive learning environments? • What other information and research might you want to seek next? • What did listening to this audiocast help you understand about your own context? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you want to learn more about, and with whom do you want to talk? • What action steps might listening to this audiocast inspire in you? • What do you need to consider as you think about next steps?

4. Host a listening group.

Convene an ongoing group committed to exploring school climate practices through the CCSC Audio Gallery. Like a book group, each gathering can have a rotating facilitator who selects an audiocast for discussion. The facilitator can use the discussion questions in the accompanying brief or write their own to fit the group. Make sure to bring snacks!

5. Facilitate a jigsaw discussion.

Select four audiocasts that are worthy of exploration and discussion for a [jigsaw discussion](#) in small groups:

1. Invite staff members to count off by four, and then have them group up according to their number. In these “expert groups,” participants will listen to and reflect on their assigned audiocast.
2. After this initial discussion, invite participants in each expert group to select a letter from the following: A, B, C, and D. The expert groups will then split up and create new groups with the other participants who have the same letter as them. In these “jigsaw groups,” each participant takes a turn sharing their knowledge and understanding of their assigned audiocast with their three peers who each listened to one of the remaining audiocasts.
3. Participants will then join their original expert group again to share what they learned and what their jigsaw discussions illuminated about their assigned audiocast.
4. Finally, bring everyone back together as a large group at the end to discuss what new insights emerged about school climate and culture after learning from four different examples.

6. Pay attention to data.

Each audiocast includes different examples of data that staff at the site collected to understand the school climate problem, help shape a solution, or assess the new initiative or program. As you listen to a particular audiocast, note the different sources of data mentioned. If you have time, repeat this process with another episode or two and reflect on the following questions:

- What role did the data play for the storytellers and for their community?
- What do you notice about their data and/or data collection?
- What other data might they want to collect next?

Then, consider what you have learned and what you might like to try at your own site. Read [10 Tips to Collect Street Data](#) for additional ideas.

7. Identify your school’s story.

Instead of simply listening to the CCSC Audio Gallery, put yourself in the storyteller’s seat:

- If you were to share a story about your school’s positive school climate approaches, what would you want to share?
- Whose voices would you want to feature?
- What data would you want to include?

If you don't yet have something that you would be excited and proud to share in an audiocast, then identify the story you aspire to tell in the future about your school. Let this future vision be part of what inspires you and your team to take action toward creating safe and supportive schools. If you want to share your story with the larger community, reach out to the CCSC team to talk about being featured or identify someone who can help you record your story in a different format.

8. Use a thinking routine.

Explore Harvard University's [Thinking Routine Toolbox](#) for sets of questions to deepen your understanding of and explore the different perspectives in each audiocast. The thinking routines are useful for groups of all sizes. Some especially good fits for a professional learning conversation are [Compass Points](#); [Connect, Extend, Challenge](#); [The 4 C's](#); [Values, Identities, Actions](#); [Think, Puzzle, Explore](#); and [Word-Phrase-Sentence](#). Teachers may even be inspired to use the thinking routines with their students.

9. Use a text-based protocol.

Each audiocast can also serve as a written text by making use of the interactive transcript available with each episode. Design a professional learning experience around a text-based protocol from the [National School Reform Faculty](#). Some ideas are below:

- Select quotes from a selected audiocast that is a good fit for your staff and try out a [Block Party](#).
- Listen to an audiocast together, then engage in one of the following text protocols that encourage inclusive, focused discussion: [Four "A"s](#), [Save the Last Word for ME](#), [Three Levels of Text Protocol](#), or [The Final Word](#).

10. Apply a systems-thinking lens.

Each of the audiocasts describes a school climate strategy or approach that happened because the right mix of structures, relationships, and mental models were in place. A systems-thinking lens can help illuminate what makes this sort of large-scale transformation possible. Because systems cannot change unless the conditions that hold a problem in place shift, the following six different conditions of systems change, as described in [The Water of Systems Change](#), are important to keep in mind when you explore implementing a new program, initiative, or strategy:

- **Policies:** Institutional and organizational rules, regulations, and priorities that guide actions
- **Practices:** Activities targeted at improving social and environmental progress
- **Resource Flows:** How money, people, knowledge, and other assets are allocated and distributed
- **Relationships and Connections:** Quality of connections and communication occurring among actors in the system
- **Power Dynamics:** The distribution of decision-making power, authority, and influence among individuals and organizations
- **Mental Models:** Deeply held beliefs and assumptions that influence how we think and behave

Select an audiocast you are particularly interested in learning from and engage in the following exercise:

1. Listen to the audiocast again. This time, pay attention to when you hear individuals discuss the six conditions of systems change. List the examples that you identify of each of the six conditions.
2. After engaging in this exercise, take stock of what you notice by answering the reflection questions:
 - Which conditions were in place that allowed for the approach or strategy to take root as described in the audiocast? What stands out?
 - Now, turn the lens on your own site. When you use a systems-thinking lens to consider your site and what might be impeding progress toward your own approach or strategy, which of the conditions are in place? Which are not? Why might that be?
 - What new questions do you have now? Where and from whom might you seek out answers to these questions?

CCSC School Climate Domains and Suggested Audiocasts

To help educators and education leaders select which audiocast to use in professional learning contexts, the CCSC Audio Gallery has been mapped to the [School Climate Domains and Subdomains](#).

Figure 2. School Climate Domains and Subdomains

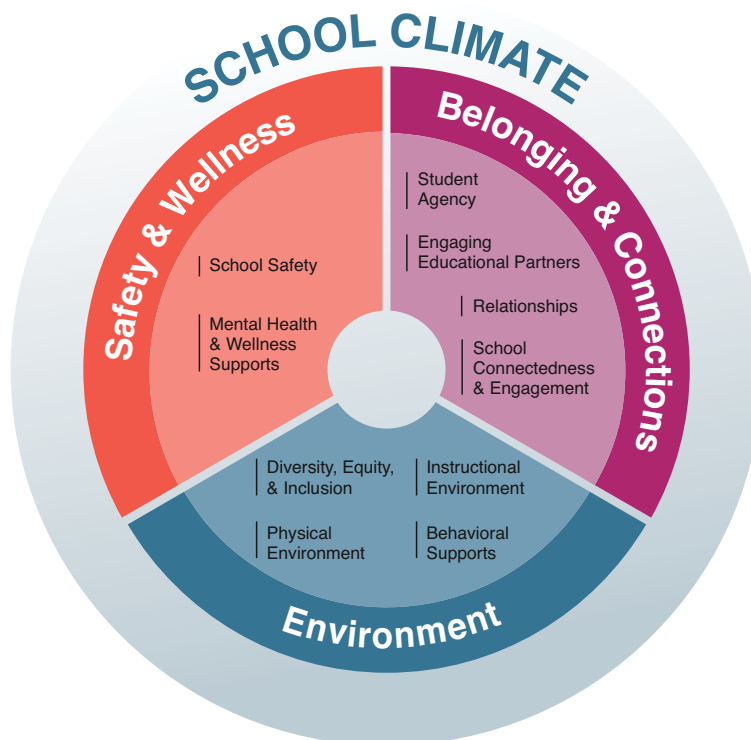


Table 1. School Climate Domains Across CCSC Audiocasts

Audiocast Titles	School Safety	Mental Health & Wellness Supports	Student Agency	Engaging Educational Partners	Relationships	School Connectedness & Engagement	DEI	Physical Environment	Instructional Environments	Behavioral Supports
EnCompass Academy				•	•	•	•		•	
Paradise USD	•	•		•	•	•		•		•
Pajaro Valley USD				•	•					•
Shasta COE			•	•	•	•	•		•	
Horace Mann MS	•				•	•			•	•
Santa Clara COE		•	•	•			•	•		•
CCSC Youth Advisory Team: Meaningful youth engagement to guide school climate	•	•	•		•	•	•			
CCSC Youth Advisory Team: Youth perspectives on school safety	•	•	•		•	•	•	•		•
Hayward USD			•		•	•	•		•	
Castle Park MS		•		•	•	•				
Educator Series, Part 1: Prioritizing Schoolwide SEL for Staff and Student Well-Being		•		•	•	•				
Educator Series, Part 2: The Power of Culturally Responsive, Student-Centered Learning Environments			•		•		•		•	
Educator Series, Part 3: Creating a Collaborative Classroom Culture			•		•	•			•	
Los Angeles USD	•	•		•				•		•
Oakland USD		•		•	•	•	•		•	•
Humboldt Independent Practice Association		•	•	•	•	•	•			•

Note. The bullets in this table indicate which subdomains are covered in each audiocast.

References

¹ Magby, N., & Cerna, R. (2023). *Understanding school climate: An overview of school climate domains*. WestEd.