

# Helping Kids Succeed – Alaskan Style!

## Practical Suggestions for Building Assets in Your Child

### Asset # 5- Caring School Climate

#### To Build Asset #5 Parents and Extended Family Can . . .

1. Let teachers know you value and support them. Their care and concern for students will increase as a result of feeling valued. - Northway
2. Keep in touch with teachers and administrators. If concern arises, talk with them to work on it. - Whittier
3. Check in with your children frequently about their feelings about school. - Fairbanks
4. Encourage children to share with others, for instance sleds, ice skates, books, or toys. - Akiachak
5. Help out with assemblies and other events the school or PTA sponsors that help make it a caring, warm place for students. - Wrangell
6. Spend time at the school, and visit with students and staff as you go about your activities there. - Gakona
7. Volunteer in the schools, and get involved with students in a positive way, whether or not you have children there. - Barrow

#### Traditional Ways to Promote Asset #5

Recognize and honor cultural differences.

- *Shishmaref*

Invite Elders or local residents into the school to teach the cultural history. - *Copper Center*

Have Elders perform traditional ceremonies in the school. - *Pilot Station*

#### Simple Ways to Help Kids

*Three things that parents and extended family can do:*

1. Learn the school song together.
2. Set goals with them, believe in them, and answer their questions.
3. Notice their growth and changes. Respect their choices.

*Youth will care how much their teachers know, only after they know how much their teachers care.*

#### Asset #5 — Caring School Climate

School provides a caring, encouraging environment.

24% of youth surveyed by Search Institute have this asset in their lives.\*

\*Based on Search Institute surveys of almost 100,000 6th to 12th grade youth throughout the United States

#### What are Assets?

Assets are 40 key building blocks to help kids succeed. Like a dream catcher, assets are the supporting threads in a young person's life that can keep away harm and invite goodness.

## Words of Wisdom:

Each year, I have the privilege of visiting dozens of Alaskan schools. I have found each one to have a unique mood and climate. Some schools feel formal, some feel happy, some feel spirited; while others feel tired. I often wonder what gives a school its "feel." Does the feeling begin as one approaches the school building? Is it the grounds, the design of the building, the front entrance, and the signs on the door that convey the mood of a school? Is it the greetings from students and staff, the bulletin boards, the lighting, the sound level, the upkeep of the building, or the colors, sounds, smells, that convey a spirit of a school?

I have visited schools that come in all shapes, sizes, and designs. I see schools that have been painted in a rainbow of colors, filled with an array of noises, and ranged from spotlessly clean to having that "lived in look." What I have noticed is that the one thing that distinguishes a warm and friendly school climate from one that is cold and prickly are the attitudes and behaviors of the adults in the building. If the custodian, grounds keeper, food service professional, parent volunteer, counselor, teacher, and principal are warm, the climate will be warm, supportive, and nurturing for the kids and teens.

*Derek Peterson*

## Research

Surprisingly, teachers are infrequently mentioned when adolescents are asked to list important sources of support (Scales & Gibbons, 1996). However, the influence a teacher and the school environment has upon a youth are clear and consistent in numerous studies. A caring or supportive teacher is one who has high expectations for students' success, is considered fair in dealing with a variety of students, is friendly and approachable, and shows care and concern about the student as a person. These teachers create a climate in which students feel respected and valued, and have a psychological sense of membership or belonging in the school (Goodenow, 1993a, 1993b). Teachers who are controlling and punitive have students who are less satisfied with school and less committed to their class work (Lunenborg & Schmidt, 1989).

A profound research finding is that high-achieving young people, moving from elementary school to junior high school, are likely to drop dramatically in their motivation and school performance if they also go from having teachers who believe in themselves to teachers who are less confident (Eccles, Lord, et al., 1997).

This newsletter and other asset resources are produced by the  
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