



**School Culture &  
Climate Initiative**

# School Mental Health Summit

Rutgers University, New Brunswick NJ  
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Supporting, Connecting and Empowering Schools

# Introductions

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# The School Culture and Climate Initiative

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## School Culture and Climate Initiative

- School Climate Assessment and Improvement Process (3 year)
- School Support Networks (5 counties)
- Professional Development Workshops
- School Climate Lab
- Academy for Social-emotional Learning in Schools
- SEL4NJ

# The Big Question

How do we create  
school  
environments that  
set-up all kids for  
success in  
school and life?



# The RWJF Grant

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## Mental Health Supports for Students Impacted by Superstorm Sandy

- 2014-2019
- 19 schools in northern New Jersey
  - 10 elementary
  - 2 K-8
  - 5 middle schools
  - 2 high schools
- 8,814 students and 800 staff

# The Details

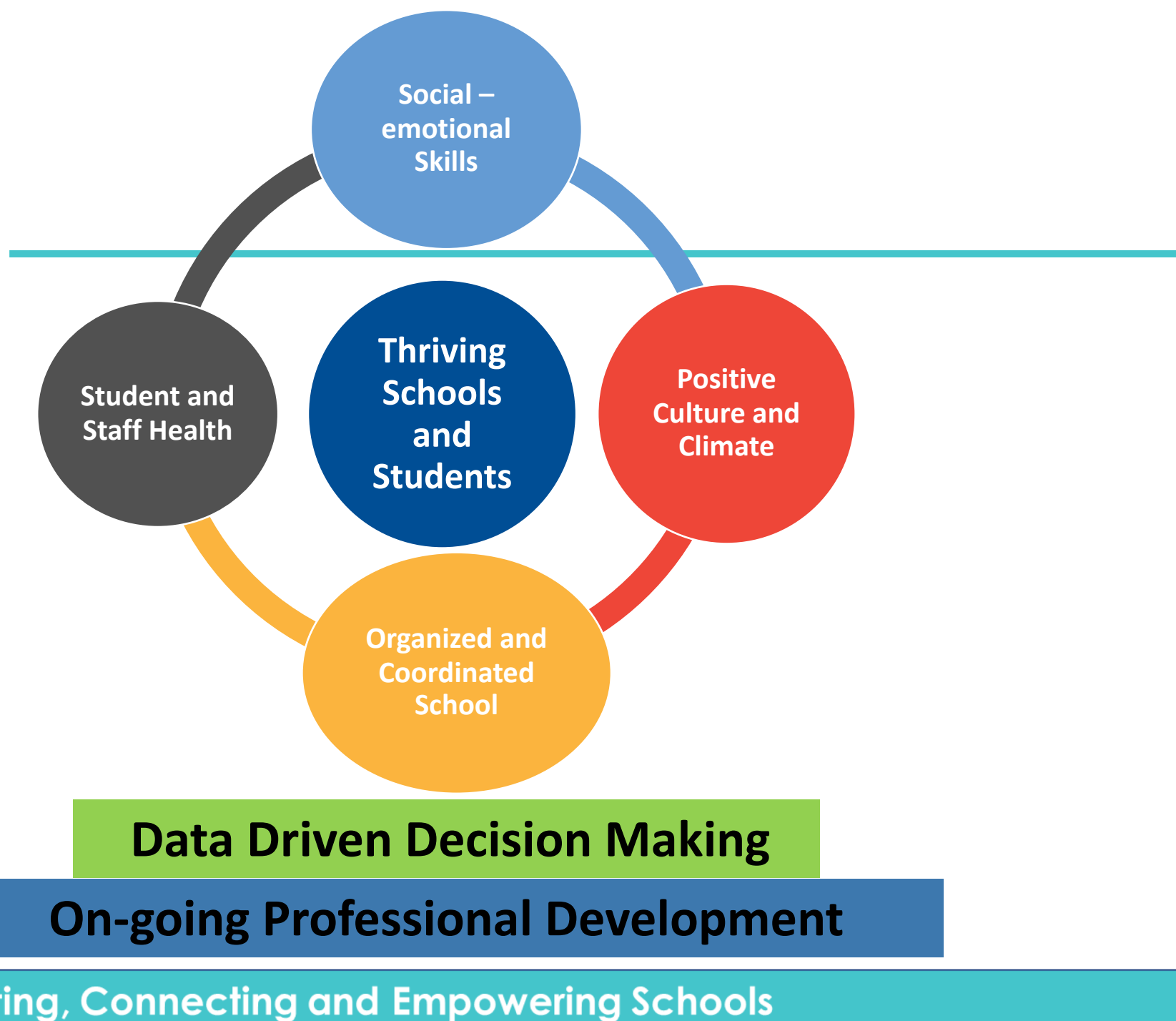
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- 3 Year School Climate Assessment and Improvement Process (SCAIP)
- Positive Coping Skills workshops (6 week) for all students
- Positive Coping Skills training for staff (train the trainer)
- Mental health small group sessions for students (1 hour per week for 8 weeks)
- Mental Health First Aid Training for staff and community members

# Guiding Principles

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- One-offs are not all that effective
- Our approach needed to be a combination of prevention and intervention
- Focus on effective implementation and sustainability
- Coordination is key



# School Climate Assessment and Improvement Process

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- Based on the work of Maurice Elias, Ph.D. – Rutgers University, Developing Safe and Civil Schools Project (DSACS 2005-2009). DSACS process implemented in 260 schools in New Jersey between 2005-2009.
- Since then the *Initiative* has worked with 90+ schools throughout northern New Jersey
- Has been nationally recognized for the coordinated support offered to schools

# School Climate Assessment and Improvement Process

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This process enables schools to:

- **Assess perceptions** of school climate by faculty, staff, and students (and sometimes parents)
- Receive **support and guidance** from trained professionals
- **Plan and implement a process** to improve **school climate** using proven tools and strategies
- **Plan and implement strategies** designed to promote **students' social-emotional skills** leading to success in school and in life

# Small Groups

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- Issues included: depression, coping with stress and anxiety; dealing with divorce, grief and loss; social/communication skills; anger management; emotion regulation; conflict resolution; impulse control; self-esteem; social problem solving; and friendship/relationship issues.
- Provided a total of 134 in-school support groups. The groups ranged in size from 2 - 13 students

# Challenges

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- Changes in school leadership and school staff
- School schedules
- Parental approval
- Recruitment for Mental Health First Aid training

## Lessons/ Advice

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- Always think about sustainability
- Buy-in from administration and others in school community
- Planning up-front and with sub-contractors
- School networks
- Flexibility

# Questions?