As adults, we all have fond memories of times when we felt especially safe in school (and perhaps not so fond memories of moments we felt unsafe), when we truly felt connected to a caring adult (or frighteningly alone), when we were especially engaged in a meaningful learning activity (or perhaps the times we were not). These are the most vivid school memories that we all share: good and/or bad. So, it is not at all surprising that these kinds of experiences have a strong influence on the learning and development of each of our children.

However, school climate is larger than any one child’s experience. School climate refers to the quality and character of school life. School climate is based on patterns of students’, parents’ and school personnel’s experience of school life and reflects the norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures of a school community. Peer-reviewed educational research has consistently demonstrated that a positive school climate is associated with academic achievement, risk prevention and positive growth and development for children. A sustainable, positive school climate fosters the growth and learning our children will need to become productive, contributing and happy members of a democratic society.

As a part of my entry into the Woodford community as the new Head of School, I am conducting a comprehensive assessment of school climate, including major spheres of school life such as safety, relationships, teaching and learning, and the school environment as well as larger organizational patterns. This survey, and the activities with which we will follow up, were synthesized from research conducted by the National School Climate Center in the United States, and patterned on the Endicott Research Center ‘School Performance Survey’, which was designed in consultation with heads of schools and educational leaders to help school leadership and governance teams understand the underlying characteristics of their school and more thoroughly examine the strengths and issues unique to their specific local context.

The results of this survey will help our community identify areas of relative strength from which we can grow together, as well as our relative weaknesses and opportunities for improvement, by collecting the opinions of parents, teachers and students. With this input from the entire community, I and my senior leadership team, together with the Woodford Board, will be better equipped to set priorities as we plan for both the near- and long-term improvement of our school and programs. By conducting this survey annually, it promises to become an even more powerful tool, allowing us to measure and track our progress as we work together to create an evermore safe, supportive, engaging, challenging and joyful international school here in Honiara.

Please set aside 15-20 minutes from your busy schedule to participate in this important survey. The survey will window will remain open from today through 4:00pm on Friday, February 26th. Meanwhile, children in Year 4 through PSSC will be surveyed within the context of the school day, and Woodford personnel will also be surveyed anonymously. An ‘Executive Summary’ of the complete results will be presented in my report to the Woodford community on March 15, at the Annual General Meeting.

The ‘Parent Survey’ can be accessed through a link on the school web page at www.wis.edu.sb. You can also go directly to the survey at http://goo.gl/forms/XeZCy70qTI. The parent survey must be completed in one sitting, and responses are only captured once the full survey is completed. Both parents in a family are encouraged to take the survey. Computers are available in the Woodford Administration Building for parents to use, and we can provide technical or language assistance to ensure all segments of our community are represented. Thank you for participating in this important activity!

In learning,

Dwight Mott, Head of School