

# Climate change in Dover

When Melody Headen started at [Dover High School](#) four years ago, her teachers were quick to send her to the office for disrupting class. Oftentimes this meant she would end up meeting with Nyia McCants, the school's positive behavior support leader.

Today, McCants says she only sees Melody in the hallway. "Helping her to be in a positive environment where she could thrive was most important. You can see from her attitude that she's comfortable here."

McCants attributes much of the improvement in Melody's behavior, and the overall climate at Dover High, to the intensive professional development and technical assistance staff there received from the [Delaware Positive Behavior Support \(DE-PBS\) Project](#). In that same four-year period, Dover High has seen a more than 60-percent decrease in office discipline referrals, a nearly 80-percent drop in in-school suspension rates, and steady improvement across school climate indicators such as student engagement and teacher-student relations. The school also addressed concerns regarding its disproportionate rates of suspension and expulsion for students with disabilities.

A five-year, \$2.3 million award from the U.S. Department of Education's [School Climate Transformation Grant Program](#) to the [Delaware Department of Education](#) in October 2014 allowed the DE-PBS Project, a collaboration between DDOE and CDS, to increase its support of schools with climate needs such as Dover High, says program manager [Sarah Hearn](#).

Today, 140 schools receive DE-PBS services. The focus is on facilitating "a shift away from punitive discipline toward preventive behavior strategies," says project coach [Megan Pell](#).

Through Dover High's collaboration with DE-PBS, McCants says "teachers are more willing to sit down and talk with a student [who's having behavior difficulties] and engage in more preventive classroom-based interventions."

Melody agrees. "The teachers have actually started listening and trying to understand us more," she says. "We've gained a line of respect for each other."



Melody Headen (left) and Nyia McCants at their preferred meeting spot: the school hallway.