
School Connectedness: Improving Students' Lives

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<http://cecp.air.org/download/MCMonographFINAL.pdf>
<http://allaboutkids.umn.edu/presskit/monograph.pdf>

School Connectedness is

“...the belief by students that adults in the
school care about their learning and about
them as individuals.

Students are more likely to succeed when they
feel connected to school.”

Prior research

from **The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health** has shown a **strong** association between **school connectedness** and every **risk behavior** studied.

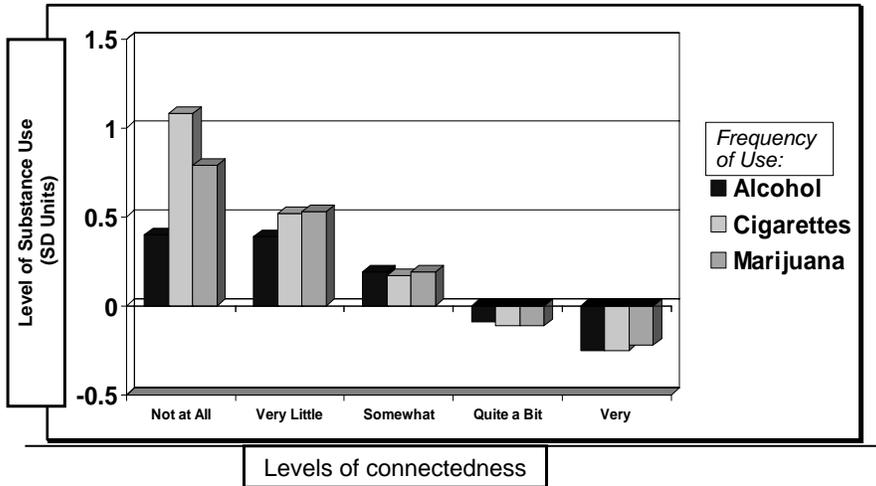
Methods

The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health:

- A stratified random sample of 80 high schools with primary feeder schools
 - N=134 schools (127 participated in school survey)
 - N=71,515 students in 7th through 12th grade
 - N=127 school administrator surveys
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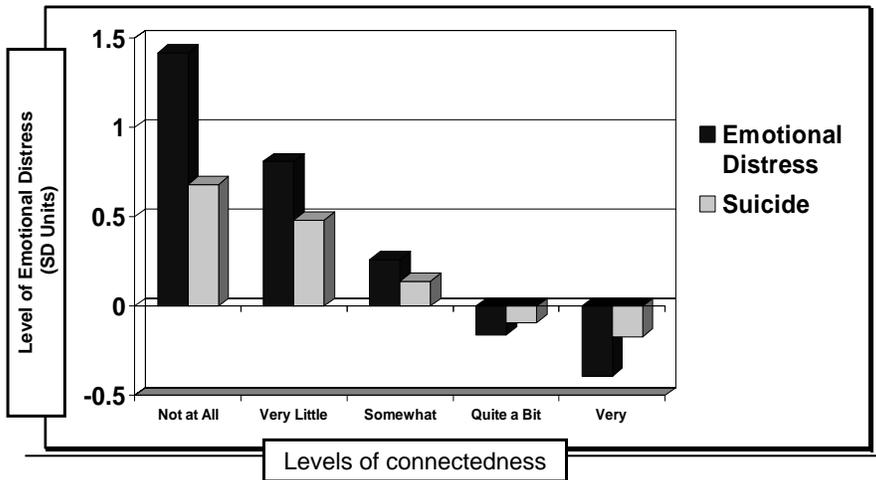
Substance Use

Students who feel connected to school are less likely to use substances



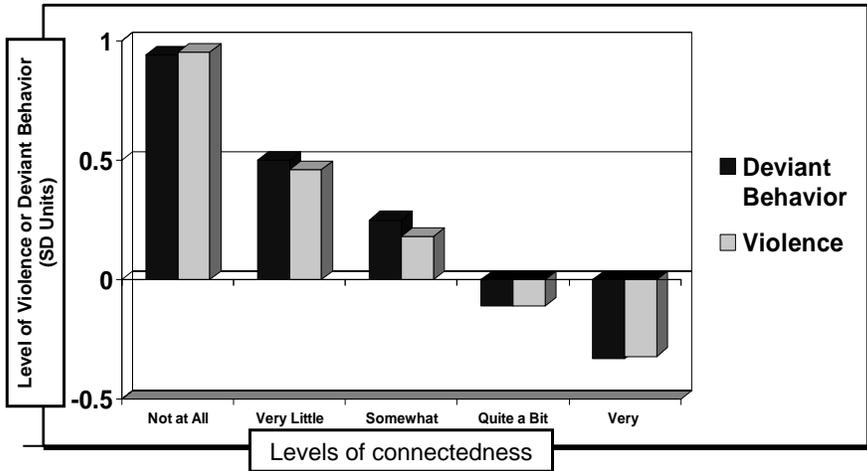
Emotional Distress

Students who feel connected to school experience less emotional distress



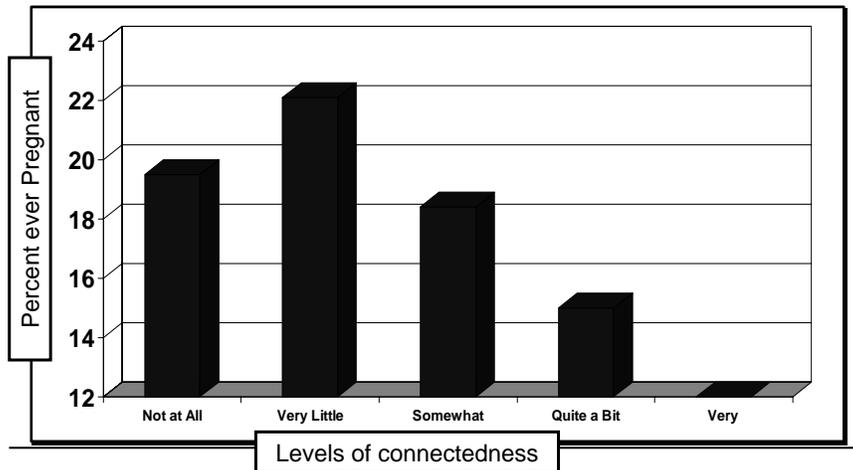
Violence or Deviant Behavior

Students who feel connected to school
engage in less violent or deviant behavior



Pregnancy

Students who feel connected to school
are less likely to become pregnant



Results

Factors Associated with School Connectedness

THE SCHOOL

- School size mattered (optimal: under 600)
 - Classroom size did not
 - School type is not associated with connectedness
 - public, private, or parochial
 - Location is not associated with connectedness
 - urban, suburban, rural
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Results

Factors Associated with School Connectedness

SCHOOL POLICIES

- No single school policy was associated with connectedness....
 - A climate of harsh discipline is associated with lower school connectedness
 - The directionality of the relationship cannot be deduced from the present study
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Results

Factors Associated with School Connectedness

TEACHERS

- Teacher experience was not associated with connectedness.
 - Having a master's degree was not associated with connectedness.
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Critical requirements for feeling connected include:

- high academic rigor and expectations, coupled with:
 - support for learning,
 - positive adult-student relationships, and
 - physical and emotional safety.
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Relationship to academic performance:

“Strong scientific evidence demonstrates that increased student connection to school....

- Decreases:
 - Absenteeism
 - Fighting
 - Bullying
 - Vandalism
 - While promoting:
 - Educational motivation
 - Classroom engagement
 - Academic performance
 - School attendance
 - Completion rates”
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Qualities that influence students’ positive attachment to school:

- Having a sense of belonging and being a part of a school
(see “Students As Allies in Improving Their Schools”-October 2004)
 - Liking school
 - Perceiving that teachers are supportive and caring
 - Having good friends within the school
 - Being engaged in their own current and future academic progress
 - Believing that discipline is fair and effective
 - Participating in extracurricular activities
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Shouldn't we just focus on content instruction?

“There are those who believe that schools should focus only on the acquisition of knowledge or that we expect too much from schools.

However, current research across disciplines shows that non-academic aspects of school are also significant contributors to both school and student success”

Research-based strategies for increasing student connectedness:

- Implement high standards and expectations, and provide academic support to all students
- Apply fair and consistent disciplinary policies that are collectively agreed upon and fairly enforced (authoritative, not authoritarian)
- Create trusting relationships among students, teachers, staff, administrators and families
- Hire and support capable teachers who are skilled in content, teaching techniques and classroom management to meet each learner's needs
- Foster high parent/family expectations for school performance and school completion
- Ensure that every student feels close to at least one supportive adult at school

Influences on school connectedness:

- Individuals: students and school staff
 - Environment: school climate and school bonding
 - Culture: social needs and school learning priorities
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Individuals:

“Students who perceive their teachers and school administrators as creating a caring, well-structured learning environment in which expectations are high, clear and fair are more likely to be connected to school.”

The importance of teachers

- Teacher support is essential in guiding students toward positive, productive behaviors.
- Effective teachers use proactive management strategies
- Effective teachers use interactive and experiential teaching methods that are oriented to explicit learning objectives

Evidence-based strategies for individuals:

- Student participation in cross-age and peer-led tutoring
- Peer counseling/support
- Cooperative/collaborative learning that pairs stronger and weaker students
- Participate in new-student orientation programs, buddy programs and welcome programs (e.g., **Link Crew**, **WEB**)
- Parent and community members:
 - Mentors
 - Community service
 - Parent training opportunities
 - Develop ongoing relationships with corporations and universities
 - Provide opportunities for service learning

Environment/Climate

“Schools have a responsibility to provide students with a safe environment in which to develop academically, emotionally and behaviorally, while at the same time developing relationships with others.”

What makes a school engaging?

- Provide students with choices and opportunities to engage around their interests.
 - National Academy of Sciences--Four Principles of Engaging Schools:
 - High standards
 - Personalization
 - Relevance
 - Flexibility
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Administrators can:

- ***Be committed to authoritative rather than authoritarian leadership.***
- ***Adopt school rules and policies that are fair and equitably applied.***
- ***Provide a clear academic mission.***
- ***Create an orderly school environment.***
- ***Use a school social climate assessment tool.***
- ***Promote high academic standards and expectations.***
- ***Develop school-wide community service projects.***
- ***Ensure that every student in the school has an adult assigned to know and “watch out” for that student.***
- ***Create small learning environments***
- ***Ensure that parents are well informed.***
- ***Foster team teaching.***

Teachers can:

- ***Establish high academic expectations.***
- ***Provide consistent classroom management***
- ***Strengthen parent-teacher relationships.***
- ***Encourage cooperative learning***
- ***Use behavioral and cognitive-behavioral educational techniques.***
- ***Rely on peer-assisted teaching.***
- ***Create democratic classrooms.***
- ***Develop identified jobs for all students***
- ***Share positive reports of student behavior and achievement with parents.***
- ***Develop routines and rituals for the class.***

Best Practices: improving parent-school relations

- **Create a supportive home environment.**
 - **Improve communication.**
 - **Recruit volunteers.**
 - **Promote home learning.**
 - **Include parents in school decision-making.**
 - **Collaborate with the community.**
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School Culture

An individual school's culture represents a balance of priorities between social needs and learning. While learning might be the priority of teachers, students have many other reasons to come to school. For some, socializing, sports and extracurricular activities are at least as important as learning. Likewise, being athletic, funny, friendly, outgoing, attractive and popular are more important achievements for some students than being "smart" or getting good grades.

Educating the Whole Child

The prevailing question before us is not about what children need to succeed. The research is clear. They need supportive environments that nurture their social, emotional, physical, moral, civic, and cognitive development. Instead, the question becomes, who bears responsibility for creating this environment?

Educating the whole child requires the whole community.

ASCD Education Update, "Message from the Director: Supporting the Whole Child",

Gene R. Carter- December 2006 | Volume 48 | Number 12