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School Connectedness

What does the evidence say?

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BC SCHOOL CENTRED MENTAL HEALTH COALITION | BCSCMHC

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Why Should We Care about School Connectedness?

The presence of caring relationships in schools — the heart of school connectedness — is increasingly recognized as a vital component of successful schools. The research is strong and consistent; students who feel connected to school do better academically and are healthier.

Impact on Learning

- Research has found correlations between school connectedness and four academic outcomes: attendance, dropout rates, self-reported grades and perceived academic competence. (McNeely, 2013) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011) (Blum, 2005) (Monahan, 2010).
- When students feel supported by adults at school, they feel more motivated to engage in class, do their homework, and are more likely to value school. (McNeely, 2013), (Blum, 2005).
- The BC Adolescent Health Surveys (2008 and 2013) confirmed that students who report higher school connectedness are more likely to expect to continue their education beyond high school (Smith A. S., 2014), (Smith, Poon, Stewart, Hoogeveen, Saewyc, & the McCreary Centre Society, 2011).

> ***School Connectedness** is about creating a school community where everyone feels safe, seen, heard, supported, significant, and cared for.*
>
> *- BC School Centred Mental Health Coalition*

Impact on Health and Wellbeing

- A recent UBC study found that, for 4th grade students in Vancouver, school support was more important than family support as a predictor of their emotional wellbeing (Oberle, Schonert-Reichl, Guhn, Zumbo, & Hertzman, 2014).
- The more connected youth feel to school, the more likely they are to report good or excellent health as well as higher self-esteem, and the less likely they are to have considered suicide (Smith, Poon, Stewart, Hoogeveen, Saewyc, & the McCreary Centre Society, 2011).Students who feel connected to school report fewer depressive symptoms in late adolescence (Monahan, 2010), (Rasic, Langille, Kisely, Flowerdew, & Cobbett, 2012)(McKay, 2009). For females in nearly every vulnerable group, school connectedness is an even stronger protective factor than family connectedness for good or excellent health (Smith, Poon, Stewart, Hoogeveen, Saewyc, & the McCreary Centre Society, 2011).
- There is strong evidence that students who feel connected to school are less likely to exhibit:
    - disruptive behavior (Monahan, 2010) (Loukas, Roalson, & Herrera, 2010);
    - violence (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011);
    - substance and tobacco use (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011);
    - emotional distress (Monahan, 2010), (McKay, 2009);
    - early sexual initiation (Blum, 2005), (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011).
- The impact of school connectedness can be long lasting. Longitudinal studies have provided strong evidence that school connectedness can have a positive effect reaching into young adulthood, resulting in lower rates of substance use, better mental health and higher school completion rates (Monahan, 2010).
- School connectedness is also a protective factor for early adolescent conduct problems, and has been found to compensate for poor quality family relationships (Loukas, Roalson, & Herrera, 2010).

> *Next to family nurturing, school connectedness is the most important protective factor in a young person's life.*
>
> *- Dan Reist, Centre for Addictions Research of BC*

Strategies for Improving School Connectedness

There is not a single "right way" to create a greater sense of connectedness within a school. BC schools are successfully increasing connectedness by implementing a variety of approaches that help students feel valued, included, respected, and cared about. The following strategies have been validated through research to contribute to school connectedness.

- Create trusting and caring relationships that promote open communication among administrators, teachers, staff, students, families, and communities (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009) (Blum, 2005) .
- School Leadership establishes structures and decision-making processes that facilitate student, family, and community engagement, academic achievement, and staff empowerment (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009).
- Apply fair and consistent disciplinary policies that are collectively agreed upon and fairly enforced (Blum, 2005), (Daly, Buchanan, Dasch, Eichen, & Lenhart, 2010).
- Support teachers' and other school staff professional learning to meet the diverse cognitive, emotional, and social needs of children and adolescents (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009), (Daly, Buchanan, Dasch, Eichen, & Lenhart, 2010).
- Implement high standards and expectations and providing academic support to all students; (Blum, 2005), (Monahan, 2010).
- Provide education and opportunities to enable families to be actively involved in their children's academic and school life (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009).
- Foster high parent/family expectations for school performance and school completion (Blum, 2005), (Monahan, 2010).
- Create small-sized learning environments (Monahan, 2010).
- Provide social supports during times of academic change and transition (Joint Consortium for School Health, 2013).
- Provide school- and community-based extra-curricular activities (Daly, Buchanan, Dasch, Eichen, & Lenhart, 2010) (Anderson-Butcher, 2010).
- Learning is social: Provide students with emotional and social skills necessary to be actively engaged in school (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009)
- Use effective teaching and learning methods & classroom management techniques to foster positive learning environments (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011).
- Ensure that course content is relevant to the lives of students (Monahan, 2010).
- Provide experiential, hands-on learning opportunities; mentorship programs; service learning and community service projects (Monahan, 2010).
- Ensure that every student feels close to at least one supportive adult at school (Blum, 2005) (Monahan, 2010).

> *Students feel supported and cared for when school staff dedicating their time, interest, attention and emotional support to them.*
>
> *- CDC*

Let's Make a Difference

Let's work together to increase connectedness in BC schools; to create schools where:

- every child and adolescent feels that the adults in the school community care about them as individuals and about their learning and;
- every young person is challenged to reach his or her potential.

For more information on School Connectedness visit www.healthyschoolsbc.ca/schoolconnectedness.

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