



ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN SCHOOL CONNECTEDNESS AND STUDENTS' ACADEMIC EXPECTATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Improving school connectedness has been identified as a means to attain improved academic achievement, which includes decreased truancy, higher grades and test scores, increased high school completion and enthusiasm to pursue higher education.

"School connectedness is about creating a school community where everyone feels safe, seen, heard, supported, significant and cared for," (BC School Based Mental Health Coalition, 2013).

The Wellness Fund supports district and school projects, through grants and facilitated support, to promote strong healthy relationships among the entire school community; this includes students, staff, families and the wider community.

This summary report presents significant statistical associations between school connectedness and students' academic expectations for the future. The data for the analysis was obtained from *Tell Them from Me (TTFM)*, representing approximately 800 schools from 28 districts across the province over a five year period (2009-2014). *Tell Them from Me (TTFM)* is a powerful evaluation instrument that uses student perception data to provide a unique school narrative and to inform school practice.



MEASUREMENTS

SCHOOL CONNECTEDNESS

POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

The percentage of students with positive relationships (having close friends, talking and listening to friends, getting along with others)

POSITIVE SENSE OF BELONGING

The percentage of students who feel accepted and valued by their peers and others at their school

ACADEMIC EXPECTATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

EXPECTATION TO FINISH HIGH SCHOOL

The percentage of students who plan to finish high school

EXPECTATION TO GO TO A COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY

The percentage of students who plan to go to a college or university after high school

"Graduation from high school retains considerable value since it increases options for post-secondary education. Further, graduates from high school who decide to enter the work force immediately will, on average, find more job opportunities than those who have not graduated," (Fraser Institute, 2013).



RESULTS

Results show significant positive correlations between the measures of school connectedness and students' academic expectations for the future (Figure 1 to Figure 4). Each data point plotted in these figures represents a school. When the percentage of students with a positive sense of belonging and positive relationships increases, the percentage of students who plan to finish high school and/or go to a college or university also increases.

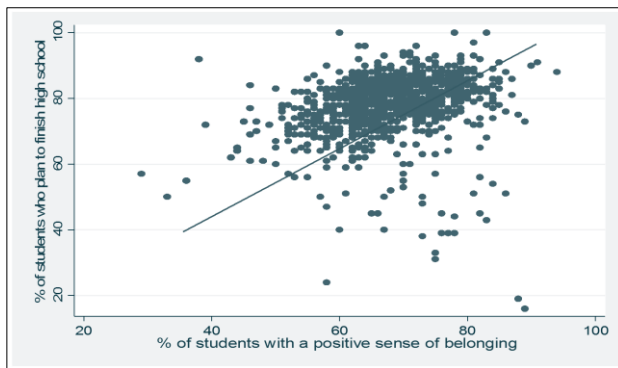


Figure 1: Sense of Belonging vs High School Completion

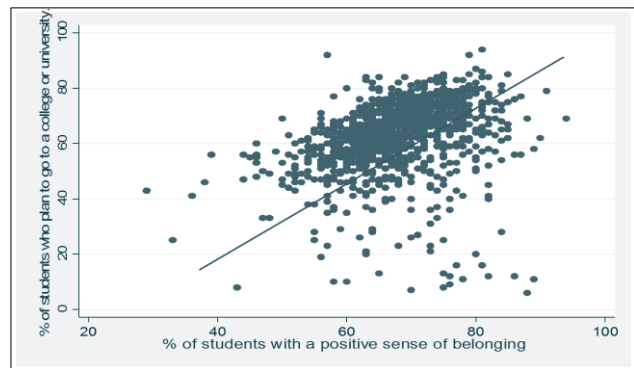


Figure 2: Sense of Belonging vs Pursuing Higher Education

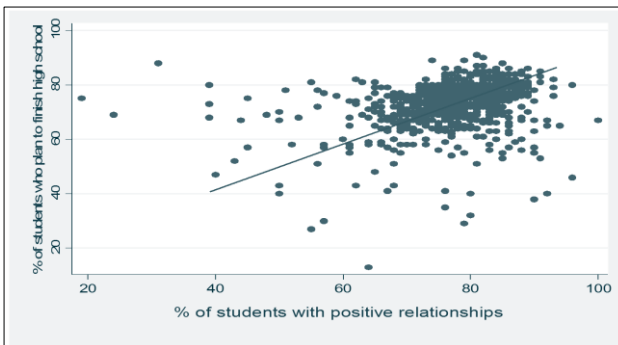


Figure 3: Positive Relationships vs High School Completion

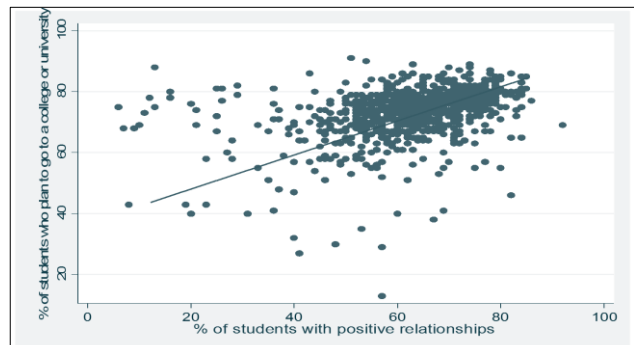


Figure 4: Positive Relationships vs Pursuing Higher Education

"Research tells us that mental health development and social emotional learning are not secondary to academic achievement—something to fit in when we have time. They are foundational to academic achievement and to nurturing healthy individuals who can navigate life's challenges and make positive contributions to our communities," (Carney, P., 2015.)



CONNECTING AT SCHOOL AND SOCIAL EMOTIONAL SKILLS

We often overlook the importance of connectedness to focus on academic achievements. However, statistical data shows that academic and life-long successes are directly correlated to feelings of connectedness. When students are connected to their school community they feel that they are cared for, not only as students, but as individuals. This feeling of connectedness is achieved through the development of positive relationships and a positive sense of belonging in the school community. In order to support this, schools need to encourage social emotional learning.

"A classroom in which all members have SEL skills creates an environment that allows both teachers and students to flourish socially, emotionally, and academically," (Carney, P., 2015).

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL CORE COMPETENCIES¹

SELF-AWARENESS

The ability to accurately recognize one's emotions and thoughts, and their influence on behaviour

SELF-MANAGEMENT

The ability to regulate one's emotions, thoughts and behaviours effectively in different situations

SOCIAL AWARENESS

The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to understand social and ethical norms for behaviour, and to recognize family, school, and community resources and support

RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups

RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING

The ability to make constructive and respectful choices about personal behaviour and social interactions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, social norms, the realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and the well-being of self and others

¹ Carney, P. (2015) *Well Aware: Developing Resilient, Active, and Flourishing Students*. Toronto. Pearson Canada Inc.



STRATEGIES TO INCREASE CONNECTEDNESS WITH STUDENTS

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) programs engage students as active partners in creating a classroom atmosphere where caring, responsibility, trust, and commitment to learning can thrive.

- Make a mindful effort to learn each student's name and one fact about them
- Post a gratitude board in class where each student contributes a positive quote that means something to them
- Post a strength board in your classroom; have other students fill in key attributes of fellow students
- Showcase students' work throughout the classroom (art, photography, writing)
- Make it part of the daily class time routine to incorporate regular brain and body movement breaks
- Provide students with choices when learning subject areas (journaling, reading, role playing, music, videos, data interpretation, group discussion)
- Teach, model and support social emotional learning skills throughout school day
- Model and act in ways that promote positive behaviours and relationships among children and youth
- Use appropriate tone, actions, facial expressions and body language
- Do not misuse power to respond to behaviours
- Empathize with the perspective of others from diverse backgrounds and cultures
- Establish and maintain positive relationships with diverse individuals and groups
- Accurately assess one's strengths and limitations, and possess a well-grounded sense of confidence and optimism
- Manage stress, control impulses, motivate oneself, and set and work towards achieving personal and academic goals
- Communicate clearly, listen actively, cooperate, resist inappropriate social pressure, negotiate conflict constructively, and seek and offer help when needed

Please refer to page 7 for our "Getting to Know You" tool, which can be used as an easy in-class activity to support positive relationships and feelings of belonging.



CONCLUSION

When students feel connected to their school community they have higher levels of emotional well-being, engagement, and empowerment. Positive relationships and connectedness with peers, family and teachers are important to students so they feel school is important, that they belong, and that they can be successful.

Promoting positive relationships starts with adults, who are responsible for creating inclusive learning environments for all students to feel connected. Children and youth need to be taught social emotional skills in an environment which models positive relationships. It is important for school administrators and staff to develop and implement both instructional (building specific relationship skills in advisory) and environmental (creating a culture of wellness through caring relationships) strategies to improve school connectedness and positive relationships. This will encourage students, including those who are feeling disengaged and disconnected from their learning, to continue education, even after finishing high school.

"More and more staff are voicing the need and want to make wellness a priority for their students and themselves. We have seen colleagues make the connection between academic achievement and one's well-being," – A district project



FOR MORE INFORMATION:

WELLNESSFUND.UALBERTA.CA



GETTING TO KNOW YOU

Your Full Name _____

What you would like to be called _____

Your Birthday _____

1. What do you most look forward to when you wake up in the morning and why?

2. How do you like to spend your free time and why?

3. What do you feel are your strengths—in school and away from school?

4. What are your three most important goals (school or life-related) you would like to accomplish by the end of the term? Why are they important to you?



