

# Indicators of School Quality: School Connectedness

## What is school connectedness?

School connectedness has been defined as the belief by students that adults in the school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals. This is influenced by their peers as well as by adults in the school community. School connectedness is akin to social bonding. When students feel connected to school, they are able to develop positive relationships with adults, increase involvement in positive behaviors, avoid behaviors that harm their health and buffer the effects of risky environments such as violence or drug use at home. The ability of teachers and staff to connect with students, with each other and with families contributes to student well-being, engagement and academic achievement. School connectedness intersects with school climate in that without a warm and welcoming school climate, students are not likely to feel connected to others. School connectedness ultimately reinforces a positive school climate.

## Why is school connectedness important?

Students are more likely to engage in healthy behaviors and succeed academically when they feel connected to school. Students who have a sense belonging and identification feel connected to their school community and want to participate, qualities that support school completion and help prevent dropout.<sup>1</sup> The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health looked at the impact of protective factors on adolescent health and well-being among more than 36,000 students in grades 7-12. The study found that family, school and individual factors such as school connectedness, parent-family connectedness and high parental expectations for academic achievement were protective against a range of adverse behaviors. School connectedness was found to be the strongest protective factor for both boys and girls to decrease substance use, school absenteeism, early sexual initiation, violence and risk of unintentional injury (e.g., drinking and driving, not wearing seat belts). In this same study, school connectedness was second in importance, after family connectedness, as a protective factor against emotional distress, disordered eating and suicidal ideation and attempts.<sup>2</sup>

## How is school connectedness measured and how has this school quality measure been used to date?

The primary way in which school connectedness is measured is through student surveys. Questions to measure school connectedness include asking students to share whether or not they feel part of their school, whether or not they feel safe at school, whether or not they feel they are

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<sup>1</sup> Reschly, A., & Christenson, S. L. (2006). School completion. In G. G. Bear & K. M. Minke (Eds.), *Children's needs III: Development, prevention, and intervention* (pp. 103–113). Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *School Connectedness: Strategies for Increasing Protective Factors Among Youth*. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2014. <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/protective/pdf/connectedness.pdf>

treated fairly by school staff and administrators and whether or not they are happy to be at school. Questions regarding school connectedness are often integrated into school climate surveys.

A number of states currently include measures of school connectedness on student surveys, including statewide school climate surveys. For example, Alaska’s “School Climate and Connectedness” survey includes a question regarding whether or not students feel that there is an adult in the school who cares about them. Connecticut administers a statewide school connectedness survey.

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