School Climate: #ConnectTheDots Brief

The Role of School Connectedness

“School climate has been called the fourth leg of school success” (Doll, 2010) and school connectedness is an integral factor in a positive school climate. 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 involves actual and perceived relationships that create a sense of community, safety, and security amongst adults and students within a building. School connectedness intersects with school climate in that without a warm and welcoming school climate, students are not likely to feel connected to others and, conversely, school connectedness ultimately reinforces a positive school climate (Abbott, O'Donnell, Hawkins, Kosterman, & Catalano, 1998).

A Few Brief Research Facts

- Increasing student engagement and sense of community in the school reduces problem behaviors, increases associations with prosocial peers, and improves academic performance (Battistich, Schaps, & Wilson, 2004).
- Interventions that foster students' engagement in school have been shown to reduce high school dropout. (Reschly & Christenson, 2006)
- Interventions to increase students' bonding to school promote academic success by reducing barriers to learning. (Catalano, Haggerty, Oesterle, Fleming, & Hawkins, 2004).

What Can Be Done to Enhance School Connectedness

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2014) identifies the following strategies school personnel can employ to enhance school connectedness:

- Create environments that engender trust and that convey a genuine sense of caring amongst the faculty, staff, students, and families.
- Forge family-school partnerships that empower families to be actively involved in their children's academic and school lives.
- Provide students with the academic, social, emotional, and behavioral skills they will need to be engaged in the schooling process.
- Value the cultural ways of being students bring with them and work to provide culturally competent instruction to optimize their potential for success in the classroom.
- Provide teachers and staff with the necessary professional development intended to augment their self-efficacy in connecting with students and families and in meeting the educational needs of all students.

The Role of the School Psychologist

School psychologists, as school-employed mental health professionals with specialized training in learning, instruction, educational and family systems, and child development, are integral members of the school community. They provide services that not only foster positive school climate, they bring expertise in building and enhancing the relationships that lead to greater school connectedness: adult to adult, adult to student, student to student, school to family, and school to community. School psychologists employ evidence-informed practices and interventions that can lead to greater self-efficacy in administrators, teachers, students, and families that enhance collaboration and involvement.
Related Resources

Connecting Students to Schools to Support Their Emotional Well-Being and Academic Success – Communiqué

School Psychology Awareness: Making Connections – Activities to enhance school connectedness from School Psychology Awareness Week 2011

School Connectedness: Improving Students’ Lives – Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice

Helping Your Children Feel Connected at School: Information for Parents and Families (pdf) – Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

References


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