Research Summaries

Safe, Supportive Conditions for Learning: Making Connections for Student Success

Aspects of Safe, Supportive Conditions for Learning

Social and Emotional Development

- Research has documented that school-based, social and emotional learning programs yield significant positive effects on students' academic performance on achievement tests and grades, while reducing conduct and internalizing problems.[1,2]

- Students who participate in school-based, social and emotional learning programs show significant improvement in social and emotional skills, caring attitudes, and positive social behaviors, and a decline in disruptive behavior and emotional distress.[3]

- Interventions that strengthen students' social, emotional, and decision-making skills also positively impact their academic achievement, both in terms of higher standardized test scores and better grades.[4]

School Climate and Bonding to School

- A major review of research published between 2000 and 2015 found that a more positive school climate is related to improved academic achievement and makes an especially positive contribution to academic achievement among students with poor socioeconomic backgrounds.[5]

- Positive school climates that promote students' bonding to school help improve students' academic performance[6] and future orientation,[7] moderate the impact of their emotional distress,[8] and reduce rates of chronic absence,[9] while reducing antisocial behavior, gambling, and heavy drinking.[10]

- Research has shown that students in high schools with an authoritative school climate (those characterized by strict but fair discipline and supportive teachers) report lower levels of alcohol and marijuana use, bullying, fighting, weapons at school, suicidal thoughts and behavior[11] and school dropout.[12]

Positive Behavior Support

- Research with 10,000 middle school students supports a connection among school-wide positive behavior support and improvement in school climate and reductions in student misbehavior.[13]

- Whole-school interventions in high schools using positive behavior support have been shown to increase attendance rates and decrease behavior problems.[14]

- Improvements in school-wide positive behavior supports in elementary schools have been shown to be related to improvements in students' perceptions of school safety and in the proportion of students exceeding standards in reading.[15]

- Zero tolerance policies are not generally effective in reducing violence or promoting learning and can actually increase bad behaviors and dropout rates among middle and secondary school students.[16]

Early Childhood Interventions
- The Seattle Social Development Project, an intervention for teachers, parents, and students in grades 1–6, has been estimated to provide measured benefits of $9,837 per student in averted long-term social problems, after subtracting the costs of the program.[17]

- A longitudinal study found participation in a school-based, early childhood program for low-income children ages 3–9 years to be associated with higher rates of school completion; greater educational attainment; and lower rates of felony arrests, convictions, incarceration, and depressive symptoms.[18]

- The Child-Parent Centers program in Chicago Public Schools, an early education program that provides intensive instruction in reading and math for children from low-income families, generates an estimated $4 to $11 of economic benefits over a child's lifetime for every program dollar spent.[19]

Student Support Services Provided by Qualified Personnel
- School psychologists collect and analyze data on risk and protective factors related to student outcomes,[20] and addressing these factors in schools has been shown to promote children's well-being and resilience.[21]

- Empirical evidence demonstrates that services provided by school psychologists can have a significant, positive impact on students' academic achievement.[22]

- Data from nearly 500 studies indicate that the impact of promotion and prevention interventions is at least two to three times higher when programs are carefully implemented by qualified personnel who have expert knowledge of the relevant issues being addressed.[23]

- A meta-analysis of social and emotional learning interventions delivered by school personnel and non-school personnel revealed that programs delivered by school personnel were effective in twice as many outcome categories as those delivered by non-school personnel. Notably, student academic performance improved significantly only when school personnel conducted the intervention.[24]

Barriers to Safe, Supportive Conditions for Learning

Violent Crime
- In a national survey in 2014–2015, 6.0% of students in grades 9–12 reported having been threatened or injured with a weapon, such as a gun, knife, or club, on school property and 22.6% reported having been in a physical fight on school property one or more times in the prior 12 months.[25]

- Students ages 12–18 years were victims of 749,400 nonfatal, violent crimes at school in 2016.[26]

- Witnessing or experiencing school violence diminishes student well-being and motivation, and leads to increased risk of aggression, school avoidance, and dislike of school. Truancy and decreased school engagement resulting from school violence can largely be attributed to students feeling unsafe.[27]

Bullying
- In 2015, about 97% of students ages 12–18 years reported that someone at school had used hate-related words against them, and 27% had seen hate-related graffiti at school.[28]

- About 21% of students ages 12–18 years reported they were bullied at school in the 2014–15 school year, and about 7% reported they were cyber-bullied in 2013.[29]

- In a 2014–15 survey, 85% of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) students reported being verbally harassed, 27% reported being physically harassed, and nearly 13% reported being physically assaulted at school in the past year because of their sexual orientation.[30]

- A meta-analysis of 33 studies with more than 29,000 participants revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between bullying victimization and difficulties in academic functioning.[31]

Sexual Assault and Harassment
- In a 2014–15 national survey, 6.7% of students reported that they had at least once in their lives been physically forced to have sexual intercourse when they did not want to, and 9.6% of those who had dated someone in the previous 12 months reported that they had been hit, slammed into something, or injured with an object or weapon during that time.[32]

- In a nationally representative survey of students in grades 7–12, 48% reported that they had experienced some form of sexual harassment in the 2010–11 school year.[33]

- Sexual harassment among middle and high school students is associated with decreased mental health, physical health, self-esteem, and increased substance use and trauma symptoms.[34]

School Security Measures
- The use of security cameras, metal detectors, and guards is becoming ubiquitous in public schools, despite the absence of clear evidence of their effectiveness in preventing school violence[35] and the fact that their presence has been shown to increase levels of fear among students.[36]

- Surveillance cameras in schools may have the effect of simply moving misbehavior to places in schools or outside of schools that lack surveillance, and analysis of their use reveals how they may work to corrode educational environments in several important ways, such as implicitly labeling students under surveillance as untrustworthy.[37]

Student Perceptions of School Safety
- In 2014 and 2015, 5.6% of high school students reported that they missed at least one day of school in the previous month because they felt unsafe at school or on their way to or from school.[38]

- Nearly 58% of a sample of LGBTQ students reported in a 2015 survey that they felt unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation, and more than 43% felt unsafe because of their gender expression.[39]

- Students who are bullied at school are four times more likely to report the existence of violent victimizations in their school compared to the reports of all students in the school.[40]

- Research suggests that disorder is minimized and students feel more secure in schools that focus on clearly communicating school rules and the consequences for breaking them,[41,42] as opposed to schools that focus on stringent security measures.[43]

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