

Day 2

A Closer Look at Connectedness

“I think what we are really talking about is an entire school structure. There are things that can be done in the classroom and in the playing fields with each other, but you are really talking about the entire way that the school interacts with each other . . . It starts at the top with the way the administrators treat the teachers. It is giving teachers a voice in the school and students a voice in the classroom. School is the culture of youth. It is the place kids live in, and they need to be heard. Their complaints need to be heard, and they need to be able to shape the environment that they are in. It is not only good policy but it is tremendously important for kids developmentally because it gives them a sense that they have an ability to make an impact. Young people need positive reinforcement. In elementary school, it's the 'happy-gram' that goes home. The note that says you did terrifically today. That's what all of us want.”

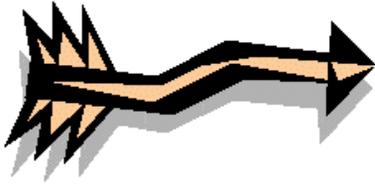


- Robert Blum, professor and chair, Department of Population and Family Health Sciences, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

Today, we look at the components of connectedness. We will flesh out each one with examples from research and schools to help you gain a better understanding of connectedness and how you can take steps to increase it in your schools.



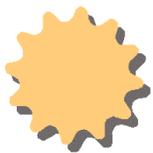
In 2003, a group of researchers, government officials and representatives from the health and educational fields came together at an invitational conference at the Wingspread Conference Center in Racine, Wisconsin. The conference's goal was to identify the latest knowledge about school connectedness and to synthesize a set of core principles to guide schools. Conference organizers commissioned six papers on school connectedness. They also consulted with federal and non-governmental agencies that are working to improve education in the United States. Based on the evidence presented in the papers and the small-group discussions, participants wrote a statement called “The Wingspread Declaration on School Connectedness.”



The Wingspread Declaration on School Connectedness outlines “the most effective strategies for increasing the likelihood that students will be connected to school. Those strategies are:

- ◆ [Ensuring that every student feels close to at least one supportive adult at school.](#)
- ◆ [Implementing high standards and expectations and providing academic support to all students.](#)
- ◆ [Applying fair and consistent disciplinary policies that are collectively agreed upon and fairly enforced.](#)
- ◆ [Creating trusting relationships among students, teachers, staff, administrators, and families.](#)
- ◆ [Hiring and supporting capable teachers skilled in content, teaching techniques, and classroom management to meet each learner's needs.](#)
- ◆ [Fostering high parent/family expectations for school performance and school completion.”](#)

We will take a closer look at each of these elements of fostering connectedness in schools.



Ensuring that every student feels close to at least one supportive adult at school

When Bernice Fedestin transferred from a small private school to a large public school in Boston, she had a tough time. Bernice, now 17, was used to challenging classes and personal attention at her small school. The teachers took an interest in her, and the school felt like a community.

At the school in Boston, things felt different.

"The teachers didn't stand out for me," Bernice says. "It's something that's hard to articulate, but you can feel it. The teachers at the other school were more like a family. There was a stronger connection. I felt like the teachers demanded more of me at that school. That challenged me more. They made me want to do work. The connection at this school just wasn't there. It doesn't have to be a relationship where I talk about my personal life, but a connection where I could go and talk to some teachers."

A single caring adult can make a big difference in a student's life. As coordinators, you have probably already seen that difference both in your relationships with students and as an observer in your schools. Research backs up the importance of caring adults in a student's life. According to Robert Blum, one of the key researchers on school connectedness, the relationship between students and school staff is at the center of school connectedness.



Unfortunately, not all students feel connected to a teacher or other adult at school. These students might be the quieter ones, or have behavior issues that make it harder for adults to connect with them. Yet these are the students who are often the most in need of being connected to a caring adult. To make sure that every student does feel close to at least one supportive adult, some schools have engaged in what is sometimes called "silent mentoring," according to Michael E. Kerosky, supervisor of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, Anchorage School District, Anchorage, Alaska.

What "silent mentoring" means is that teachers meet in a room with a list of all of the students posted on a wall. Teachers are given stickies and asked to place one next to each student they have a relationship with. Once everyone is finished, it will be clear which students have no connection with an adult in the school - they will have no stickies next to their names. Those are typically the students with behavior and other problems, Kerosky says. Next, teachers sign up to silently build a relationship with those students. The students will never know that they have been picked out by teachers; otherwise they may feel like they are being targeted, Kerosky says.

"The teachers just do it quietly and silently over time," Kerosky says. "Sure enough, the students' behavior improves."

Do you think that every student in your schools feels close to at least one supportive adult at school?

Yes

No

Current Results

Teacher Finds Simple Ways to Connect with Students

“Carrie Melville, a math teacher at Dimond High School in Anchorage, learned about youth asset building at a conference. She left the event excited to see her students again and was eager to apply what she'd learned: “I didn't even need Spring Break, it was weird!” she laughed. She was looking forward to using some simple relationship-building techniques that have the power to make an individual feel connected and valued.

Melville made a point of calling students by name, making direct eye contact, and talking with them about their lives. Several students were failing her classes, but two weeks after implementing this personal, caring approach, Melville observed in them academic improvements and increased efforts to connect with peers and adults.”

Source: Safe and Drug-Free Schools, Anchorage School District. (in press). *Helping Kids Succeed-Anchorage School District Style*. Anchorage, AK: Author.

Proponents of this approach say that it is vital that students never see the initial lists of connected and unconnected students. They also say that it is critical to hold a debriefing session immediately after this activity to make a plan to address a school's challenges around connectedness. It can be a good idea to include other school staff in this exercise, such as custodians, cafeteria workers, secretaries and paraprofessionals. These staff are rarely asked for their input or help. Asking them to take responsibility for mentoring some students could increase their own connectedness to the school.

Responsibility Increases Connection

“Principal Paul Wieneke at Abbott Loop Elementary School in Anchorage, Alaska recognized that students often show a better demeanor and increased confidence when they are given emotional support and responsibilities. Because of that, students who are receiving this [silent] mentoring are often given tasks to accomplish. One student was assigned to help in classrooms and to supervise a project by a group of younger students. The principal noticed a marked difference after the student took on those responsibilities.

‘He just shines because he knows he's connected,’ Wieneke said.”

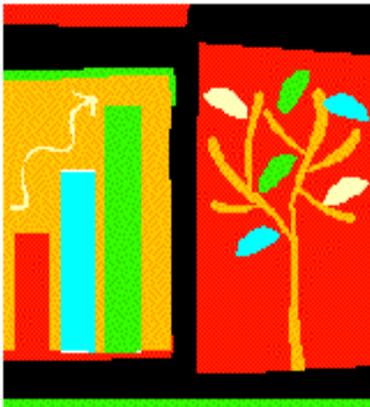
Source: Safe and Drug-Free Schools, Anchorage School District. (in press). *Helping Kids Succeed-Anchorage School District Style*. Anchorage, AK: Author.

Click [here](#) for an activity for a faculty meeting on connectedness



Implementing high standards and expectations and providing academic support to all students.

Students, like most people, tend to rise to the expectations others have of them. According to *Engaging Schools: Fostering High School Students Motivation to Learn*, many studies show that students achieve high levels of performance in schools that have high standards and expectations for student learning. What's more, students want those high expectations.



In a telephone survey of 1,000 randomly selected high school students, 66 percent stated that they would learn more if their teachers “would challenge students to constantly do better and learn more.” Just 33 percent reported that their teachers did this. The *Engaging Schools* report goes on to state that an even higher proportion of African American students (79 percent compared to 63 percent of white students) stated that they would learn more if their teachers challenged them more.

But it isn't enough to have high expectations if those expectations are not accompanied by caring support from teachers and others. If students are not given the support - or "scaffolding," as one researcher has called it - they can fail to meet those expectations and become frustrated and more, rather than less, connected to school.

Click [here](#) for "Ten Strategies for Teachers That Foster Connection to School"

Engaging Schools: High Academic Standards

The National Academy of Sciences identified four principles of engaging schools: high academic standards, personalization, relevance, and flexibility. To promote high academic standards, teachers use two strategies to hold students accountable for work completion and performance:

- Avoiding placing students in tracks (e.g., vocational and college tracks)
- Teaching the same core curriculum to all students

Educators and researchers note that students need work that is challenging but also achievable. If the work is too easy, students will become bored. If it's too difficult, they will not develop confidence in their abilities. Much of this task falls to teachers, who are faced with the challenge of meeting the different needs and abilities of their students.

Teachers, however, do not have to be alone in this important work. Rachel Carson School in inner-city Chicago serves a population of low-income, mostly Latino students. In 1991, only 11 percent of the students were on level for reading and only 14 percent were on level for math, according to Ann Tysiak, assistant principal at Rachel Carson. Children not only struggled with academics, but with social issues as well, Tysiak says. School officials were clear that they needed to stress high standards and give students and their families the support they needed.

"If you lower your expectations, that's as high as they will go," Tysiak says. "If they are not exposed to a high level of curriculum, they'll never learn. You also need to provide the support. If we didn't, we'd still have the statistics [we started out with]."

School officials did not assume that every child who was struggling needed special education. Instead, they hired an interventionist who works with teachers who have children who are having difficulty keeping up in class. Through classroom observations and meetings, the interventionist determines the child's needs. For example, the student might need homework help with special tutoring, or academic interventions that the specialist can suggest to the teacher.



Often the interventionist will engage the parents in helping, such as finding a place at home where the child can do homework, and deciding who will read to the child. The careful attention to each child's needs is paying off. Today, 57 percent of the students are on level for reading and 72 percent are on level for math.



Connecting Students in Vocational Technology and Business Classes

Students who are enrolled in voc-tech or business courses can feel like they are on a “lesser” track than other students. But it does not have to be that way. Robert Blum cites a high school in Brooklyn that has taken its business classes and enhanced them to meet the needs of the students. In addition to the class itself, the school has a “dress for success” program. There is a clothing drive among the teachers to donate clothes. They give the clothing to the school store, where students who are taking business classes can choose clothes and learn how to dress for interviews. Teachers have also gone around the local neighborhoods and recruited local business owners to teach the students how to interview for a job.

“You now have a business class with technical skills with a whole wrap-around set of events,” Blum says. “All of a sudden, you have something dynamic and exciting.”



Applying fair and consistent disciplinary policies that are collectively agreed upon and fairly enforced.

In well-managed classrooms, students and teachers discuss and agree on disciplinary policies at the beginning of the school year, Blum says. Classrooms will typically have three or four rules that are posted so that students and teachers can easily remember them and refer to them. When the rules are broken, teachers and students discuss what happened and come to resolution, rather than simply sending students to the principal's office. It is also critical that the rules are equitably enforced (for example, exceptions are not made for star athletes).

“The classroom is a community,” Blum says. “You can't pretend that something bad didn't happen.”

At Ridgewood Middle School in Arnold, Missouri, teachers and students sign “social contracts,” according to Kristen Pelster, assistant principal. These social contracts give students a voice in how their class is run. It is a different approach from having students come in at the beginning of a school year and be presented with a series of rules by the teacher, says Pelster. Instead, students sit around a circle and a teacher asks them three questions:

- How would you like to be treated?
- How do you think I would like you to treat me?
- How would you like us to treat each other?

With that information, the students decide what they should do if those needs are not met. They write a social contract and place it on the wall so that it is visible.

“It makes it our classroom and not the teacher saying, ‘It’s my classroom and this is how it’s going to be,’” Pelster says. “The teacher can say the social contract is being broken. A kid can bring up an issue.”



According to an article by Clea McNeely and colleagues in the *Journal of School Health* (2004), the Add Health study found that when schools have harsh or punitive discipline policies, students feel less connected to school. However, it was unclear whether the more restrictive school policies are a response to a high number of disconnected students and their behavior problems, or whether punitive discipline policies alienate students from school.

“Still, this finding is relevant to the current discussion of zero-tolerance discipline policies,” the authors write. “Zero-tolerance policies, which mandate harsh punishment (usually expulsion) for the first occurrence of an infraction, seek to make schools safer. Yet, students in schools with harsh discipline policies report feeling less safe at school than do students in schools with more moderate policies.”

As it is probably difficult to feel connected to a harsh parent who has unbending rules and severe consequences for breaking those rules, it is likely difficult for students to feel connected to a school with punitive disciplinary policies. What's more, students who are forced to leave school, either through suspension, expulsion, or being sent to an alternative school, are not likely to increase their connectedness to or engagement with school. Other approaches address discipline problems but do so by preventing problem behavior from occurring or escalating.

Click [here](#) for key components of successful schoolwide prevention programs

An overarching component in effective discipline policies is in making sure that schools feel like warm and supportive places to be for students.

According to David Osher and his colleagues, “Adults' respectful, caring demeanor toward students set an example that students emulate. Because adults in these school cultures are committed to developing the potential of each student, they approach difficulties with a problem-solving, solution-driven orientation. This caring attitude was shared by students.”

When discipline problems occur, effective schools have early intervention policies and procedures in place. School staff see these problems as early warning signs that students need additional support. They provide that support without labeling the students or removing them from regular classrooms.

School Staff Use Relationships to Solve Discipline Problems

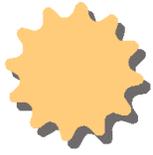
“Tampa's Cleveland Elementary School, 97% of whose students are eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch, provides an example of a relational response,” Osher and his colleagues write in *The Best Approach to Safety is to Fix Schools and Support Children and Staff*.

“Cleveland's principal stands outside the school each morning, greets parents as they drop off their children and welcomes each student by name as they enter the school. When she notices that a student looks troubled, she or another staff member who knows the child talks to the student, looks into problems, and then discusses it with the parents. School staff walk many of the children home to the nearby housing project where they talk to the parents as they drop off the students . . . This relational perspective enables schools to handle discipline problems in an effective and positive manner. At Oakhurst Elementary, rather than suspending a student, the principal will often drive the child home and sit down and talk with the parent. Often, staff and families develop solutions that involve collaborating to reward the student for incremental improvements.

. . . Westerly [Rhode Island] schools employ creative alternatives to suspension, which build upon the strengths' of students, for example, having an older student tutor a younger student.”

Source: Osher, D., Sandler, S., & Nelson, C. (Winter, 2001). *The Best Approach to Safety is to Fix Schools and Support Children and Staff*, *New Directions in Youth Development*, 92, 127-154.

Even with intensive intervention, some students may still act out. Model schools identified by experts use interventions to help students learn from their actions, take responsibility, make amends, and change their behavior, according to Osher. At the same time, the student stays identified with the school community and its caring norms and expectations.



Creating trusting relationships among students, teachers, staff, administrators, and families.

Cossitt Elementary School in La Grange, Illinois, began implementing the comprehensive Caring School Community project in 1996. The project calls for principals, teachers, administrators, students, and families to make some significant changes in the way they view education. For teachers, one of the biggest shifts is to incorporate more collaborative ways of learning into their teaching, in part so that students feel more connected to their school. Or as principal Mary Tavegia puts it, “A lot of this was teachers learning to give up control to kids. It’s a huge shift in thinking.”



If teachers were going to have to learn a more collaborative way of interacting with students, then Tavegia would have to model that collaboration to her teachers.

“If you want a collaborative classroom, then you better have a collaborative staff meeting,” she says. “You have to give them a chance to participate and voice their opinions . . . At workshops I try to keep my mouth shut and let teachers be the leaders.”

Tavegia also makes it a point to write handwritten notes to all 70 staff members at her school twice a year - the teachers, paraprofessionals, secretaries, cafeteria workers, and custodians. She writes the first note within the first two weeks of school. Each note mentions something specific the staff member has done to help the school, including challenges they have dealt with. Tavegia also lets them know that they can come see her with any concerns. She hopes that her notes and the way she treats the staff will filter down to the way that the staff interact with the students, including writing similar notes to the students.

In the Anchorage School District, Safe and Drug-Free Schools Supervisor Michael Kerosky says, “We tell principals to feed the staff so they don’t eat the kids. If the staff feels important and

challenged and gets constructive feedback, they will respond the same way kids will when teachers treat them that way.”

One way that the Anchorage School District has fed the teachers and other school staff is by creating book clubs for them. At Taku Elementary school, the staff book club includes teachers' aides, noon duty monitors, teachers, the family school service coordinator, and the counselor. Among the topics they have discussed is brain research and youth development.

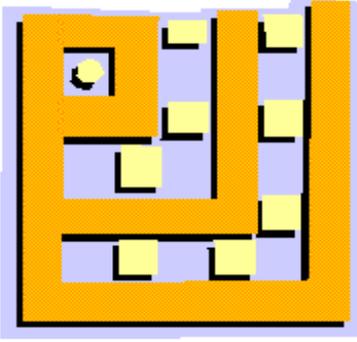
“A lot of teachers tend to be former nerds,” Kerosky says. “That's why they go into school. Teachers love to read. A book club is a great way for teachers to meet as a group and build a community. They get to know each other as human beings instead of ships passing in the hall. Then they develop these relationships for staff so they don't feel so alone and isolated.”

Alaska: Engagement Through Attention-Highlighting Students

“Principal Jeanne Fischer connects with Mirror Lake Middle School students through efforts that highlight them as individuals and help to bridge the gap between pupil and authority figure. Ms. Fischer announces student birthdays every day and delivers cards and snappy pencils to the celebrated students. She also builds rapport with students and lessens their intimidation of her as the principal by taking snapshots in the halls and at special events. She posts the photos throughout the school as a kind of continuous 'yearbook' of school activities.

Student talents are also highlighted at Mirror Lake. Ms. Fischer frames student artwork and hangs the pieces in the school halls for students and visitors to admire. One student saw her artwork hung on the wall and was overheard remarking to her friend, “That's mine! I must be a really good artist!”

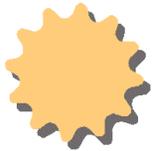
Source: Safe and Drug-Free Schools, Anchorage School District. (in press). *Helping Kids Succeed - Anchorage School District Style*. Anchorage, AK: Author.



At Rachel Carson Elementary School in Chicago, school administrators have worked to create trust among parents by meeting some of their most pressing needs. The school serves a largely Latino population for whom English is a second language. Several years ago, the school had a high absenteeism rate.

Administrators learned that often parents were pulling out their children to translate for them for medical and other appointments. In response, school administrators provided a social worker to help parents make medical appointments and find translators. There is now a bank at the school that parents use, and the school has bussed mothers to mammogram appointments.

In addition, Rachel Carson holds monthly parent meetings that more than 100 parents attend. The meetings address concerns of the parents, such as how to maintain their authority over their children in the midst of omnipresent gangs in the neighborhood. Meetings have also addressed how parents can approach teachers. In addition, teachers call parents at the beginning of each school year and introduce themselves so that the first contact a parent has with a teacher is positive. School administrators also work closely to accommodate parents who, for example, might like a particular teacher and want a younger child to have that teacher.

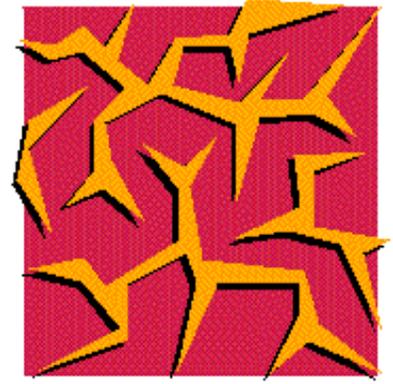


Hiring and supporting capable teachers skilled in content, teaching techniques, and classroom management to meet each learner's needs.

When Kathleen Mayer took over as principal of Rachel Carson in 1991, she inherited a school in chaos.

"We had discipline problems, little time on task, and most of the time with children on the bench [in the principal's office]," Mayer says. "We had students from different gangs, and the whole day was, 'Who stole my stuff? Who carved in my desk?' It was torture for everybody."

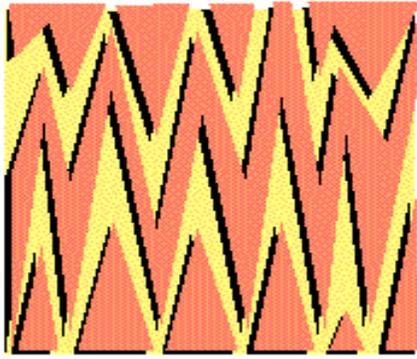
Mayer wanted to restore some order and teaching to the school, which was not going to happen if students were constantly running in the halls and being sent out of the classroom. But to make matters more complicated, some teachers felt like it was not worth it to try to teach children who were only in the classroom for 40 minutes - if they were there at all.



Mayer encouraged those teachers to leave, and eventually they did. She says that she was fortunate because the school population doubled, and she had to hire many new teachers. It was her chance to find teachers who agreed with her philosophy. Those teachers in turn sat on the hiring committees of new teachers who believed that children were capable of learning and self-discipline.

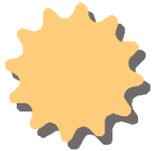
Good teachers need support once they are hired. Kristen Pelster had a similar problem with some teachers at Ridgewood Middle School who believed that the population of children could not learn or behave. At an initial faculty meeting, Pelster and the principal laid out their vision for the school. They said it would be hard work and that they would expect a lot from the teachers. If the teachers did not agree with the vision or the expectations, they should leave, Pelster recalls saying. A lot of the teachers did leave the school. With new teachers on board who shared the school's philosophy, Pelster and her colleagues began providing professional development to support them. For example, the school's social contracts mentioned earlier depend on effective classroom meetings to work. But most teachers have no training in running classroom meetings. The school has brought in trainers on running effective class meetings. Eric Schaps from the Developmental Studies Center, which spearheaded the Caring School Community project, said that professional development is essential if teachers are going to be able to help students feel more connected to their school.

"Many, if not most, teachers need professional development in order to run effective class meetings," Schaps says. "Teachers need group management skills that they may or may not have. When they put kids in a circle and open up potentially sensitive opportunities for kids to talk about their problems, they need facilitation skills. How do you really listen to kids? How do you move it along and get to the right level of depth? Many teachers lack the skills to help kids stop and reflect on what they learned. This is such an important learning approach, and a lot of teachers never learned that and don't do it and need the help. "



According to Schaps, teachers need both instructional materials and professional development to implement changes. They cannot make changes simply with new materials or a professional development class. What's more, staff development needs to be ongoing, have continuity, and provide opportunities for practice and getting back together to improve and learn from one another.

In the Anchorage School District in Alaska, Title I teachers have a program in which small groups of teachers observe other teachers recognized for their literacy instruction skills. The groups observe the teacher experts six times throughout the year, two days at a time. At the end of each day, participants meet with a facilitator and the teacher experts to discuss aspects of teaching. Another opportunity is a one-month teacher exchange program where a “learner” teacher applies to be matched with a more experienced host. The learner teacher works alongside the host teacher for two weeks. Then the host joins the learner's classroom to help integrate the new learning into the classroom. One participant described it as “the best professional development possible.”



Fostering high parent/family expectations for school performance and school completion.

Parents are key allies in a school's efforts to increase students' connection to school. Studies indicate that the quality of the relationship between home and school is connected to a student's improved achievement and behavior. The Search Institute has found that when parents are engaged in their children's schooling, those children tend to have a higher commitment to education and fewer problems in school, including with high-risk behaviors.

Click [here](#) for more information on the importance of parental support

But it can be difficult to connect parents with school, especially those who had difficulty in school themselves. For them, school is likely an aversive place, Blum says. School staff need to find ways to reach out to all parents, and to these parents in particular.

Kathleen Mayer, the principal of Rachel Carson Elementary School, faced some daunting obstacles in gaining parents' support when she became principal. The school had a reputation as a chaotic, disorganized place with low test scores. Many parents did not want to send their children there. What's more, the school had begun mandatory summer school sessions, and many of the parents, who were from Mexico, pulled their children from school to come with them to visit their homeland.



As we mentioned earlier, parents also often took children out of school to accompany them to medical and other appointments where they needed help with translation. The school social worker helped arrange medical appointments and translation services. School staff also helped with a variety of other problems that parents faced.

Mayer, who speaks Spanish, says that she will often talk to parents about what is going on in their lives.

"We had to get families comfortable in telling us about their problems," Mayer says. "Before Christmas, a mother came in crying who I didn't know real well. She had just gotten a bill from the hospital and had a hard time understanding it. The father had left his job because of illness, and they were cutting off the medical coverage. The mother had health issues. We have a partnership with a well-to-do school. They give us food coupons and book bags full of things that kids need. We try to do it discreetly. I asked her if she wanted some things for Christmas. She said yes, and I told her to call when she was ready to pick it up so that the kids wouldn't see it."

Mayer and her colleagues began meeting with parents and emphasizing the importance of attendance for their children's education. They also learned about the parents' needs and began to meet some of them. The school began offering English as a Second Language and GED courses for the parents. Watching their parents attend school is an important message and model for the children, Mayer says. It also reinforces to the parents the importance of school. The school started holding orientation meetings by grade level so that the parents do not have to choose between grades.

Ann Tysiak, assistant principal at Rachel Carson, says that the school also holds classes for students and parents to help them prepare for state tests. The parents were able to see what kind

of work their children need to do to prepare for the tests and how they can help them get ready, such as providing a workplace at home for homework.

How Schools Can Help Parents Create a Home Environment That Is Supportive of Education

Schools can provide:

-  Workshops, videos, and phone messages on parenting and child rearing at each age/grade level
-  Parent education, GED prep and family literacy classes, and college credit
-  Family support programs to help with nutrition and health services
-  Home visits at key school transition points

Source: Robert Blum, professor and chair, Department of Population and Family Health Sciences, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

Click [here](#) for tips on how schools can communicate effectively with parents



Today we examined the components of creating school connectedness, along with examples of each component. Tomorrow we will look at what every school can do to increase connectedness, from universal interventions to early and intensive interventions.



Click [here](#) to print a PDF of today's materials.



Discussion Questions

Please think about the questions below and share your responses, comments, and/or any questions about today's material in the [Discussion Area](#) .

- ◆ Bernice Fedestin felt disconnected when she transferred to a large public high school. What are some things that coordinators could do to help Bernice feel more connected to school?
- ◆ High expectations are important for students, but so is support in meeting those expectations. What are some approaches that your schools have taken to provide that support to students? If your schools are not providing that support, what are some of your ideas for doing so?
- ◆ Would you describe your schools' disciplinary policies as fair and consistent? If so, what makes them that way? If not, what are some ways to make them more fair and consistent?
- ◆ We looked at some ideas for creating trusting relationships among students, teachers, staff, administrators, and families. What are some other ways to create these trusting relationships?
- ◆ Have you had success in involving parents in your school? What have you done? What worked?

This completes today's work.

Please visit the [Discussion Area](#) to share your responses to the discussion questions!

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Faculty Meeting on School Connectedness

Teachers are key participants in creating and nurturing school connectedness. Asking for their thoughts and suggestions about school connectedness can help them feel invested in improving the school's climate and students' engagement. Here are some suggestions for conducting a faculty meeting on connectedness:

- ◆ Provide a brief overview of the research on and the theory of connectedness. Include the key findings on student health and academic outcomes.
- ◆ Ask the faculty to fill out a brief survey on connectedness. Here are some questions you might want to ask with responses ranging from 1 (indicating strongly agree) to 5 (indicating strongly disagree):
 - Each student is connected with at least one caring adult at school.
 - Teachers treat one another with respect.
 - Teachers know about their students' lives outside of school.
 - Student discipline practices and policies are fair.
 - The school environment is safe for students and teachers.
 - Teachers value what students have to say.
 - You might also ask them to describe key obstacles they face in building relationships with students, for example:
 - Using teaching time for classroom management
 - External circumstances that affect students (e.g., financial, social, family)
 - Not having enough time to get to know students as individuals
 - Differing ethnic, cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds
 - Other (explain)
- ◆ Have the questions written on the board or on a flip chart. Ask faculty for their responses to each question and to elaborate on those responses. In discussion, point out how their responses are linked to connectedness. For example, if a teacher says that the discipline policies are not consistent, talk about how that affects connectedness.
- ◆ Ask them what areas of connectedness they think need to be addressed.
- ◆ If they need ideas, give them examples from this course, including “silent mentoring” and cooperative discipline practices.
- ◆ Make an action plan and assign teachers to follow through.



Collect the responses.



Make plans to follow up in future faculty meeting.

Source: Susan Parker (Web course writer), Ann Nargi (high school teacher), and www.whatkidscando.org

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Ten Strategies That Foster Connection to School For Teachers

1. Help students get to know one another's (and your) strengths.
2. Involve students in planning, problem solving, identifying issues, and assessing curriculum in the classroom.
3. Promote cooperation over competition. Post everyone's best work. Offer opportunities for the class to work together to help everyone achieve their level of excellence.
4. Build a strong relationship with each student.
5. Convey attentiveness to students and excitement about learning through nonverbal gestures.
6. Involve all students in chores and responsibilities around the classroom.
7. Integrate concepts of discipline and respect for classmates throughout instruction.
8. Give students more say in what they will learn.
9. Involve students in developing the criteria by which their work will be assessed, and provide guidelines so that they clearly understand what is expected of them.
10. Use first person plural (we, us, let's) when presenting classroom activities.

Source: Blum, R.W., McNeely, C.A., Rinehart, P.M. (2002). *The Untapped Power of Schools to Improve the Health of Teens*. Minneapolis, MN: Center for Adolescent Health and Development, University of Minnesota.

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Components of a Successful Prevention Program

In *Safe, Drug-Free, and Effective Schools for ALL Students: What Works!*, the authors outline the components of a successful prevention program:

“The success of schoolwide prevention programs hinged on the following components (Mayer, 1995; Nelson, Carr, & Smith, 1998; Osher, 1996; Osher & Hanley, forthcoming; Reid, 1993; Sugai & Horner, in press):

- ◆ Clearly defined behavioral expectations
- ◆ Consistent implementation of discipline procedures and well-defined and consistently-delivered consequences for behavior
- ◆ Teaching of appropriate behavior to staff and students
- ◆ Support for staff and students in achieving high behavioral and academic standards
- ◆ Ongoing monitoring and dissemination of data collected to all staff
- ◆ Positive recognition and public acknowledgment of appropriate behavior
- ◆ Options that allow teachers to continue instruction when behavior problems occur and crisis intervention plans for dangerous behavior
- ◆ Engaging student-centered instruction
- ◆ Collaboration between regular and special educators and links to other school reform efforts
- ◆ Collaboration with family, community, and service providers
- ◆ Leadership that is committed to serving all students

The programs and schools visited created environments where students and staff felt a sense of caring, respect, and predictability. They created schools that were (in the words of a Lane County teacher from a school with a prevention orientation) 'safe and predictable for kids who know what to expect: that they'll be treated with dignity no matter what happens, [and] that staff won't give up on them.' Focus group discussions revealed that students and staff also felt as though they could ask for help without being fearful of judgment.”

Source: Quinn, M. M., Osher, D., Hoffman, C. C., & Hanley, T. V. (1998). *Safe, drug-free, and effective schools for ALL students: What works!* Washington, DC: Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice, American Institutes for Research.

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The Importance of Parental Support in School Connectedness

According to the Search Institute, parental support is vital in building a student's connectedness to school. The Search Institute reports that research found that "family or parent involvement has a significant impact on students' well-being and success in school [in the following ways]:

- ❖ **Increased commitment to education.** When parents are involved in school, students tend to have higher levels of commitment to their own education. A recent analysis of parent involvement by Search Institute for the General Mills Foundation found that 6th-12th grade students with involved parents tend to be more motivated in school and more committed to continuing education beyond high school.
- ❖ **Reduced school problems.** Similarly, a Child Trends report found that 6th-12th grade students whose parents are highly involved in their education are less likely to experience various problems at school (*Running in Place: How American Families Are Faring in a Changing Economy and an Individualistic Society*, 1994). For example, 26 percent of students with highly involved parents are in the bottom half of their class, compared to 56 of those whose parents are minimally involved. And 11 percent of youth with highly involved parents have repeated a grade, compared to 25 percent of those whose parents are minimally involved. Indeed, some research suggests that parent involvement is a more powerful predictor of student behavior than family income.
- ❖ **Reduced high-risk behaviors.** The Search Institute analysis found that problem behaviors, such as alcohol use, violence, and anti-social behavior, decrease as parent involvement increases.
- ❖ **Increased after-school involvement.** Parent involvement is a strong predictor of levels of involvement in extracurricular and non-school activities, Child Trends reports. Overall, 42 percent of youth with low-involvement parents are involved in non-school activities, such as scouting, religious youth groups, or non-school sports, compared to 79 percent of youth with high-involvement parents."

Source: www.search-institute.org

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How Schools Can Communicate Effectively with Parents

- ◆ Hold school conferences at least annually.
- ◆ Provide bilingual interpreters to assist non-English-speaking families at school conferences.
- ◆ Send student work home in weekly or monthly folders.
- ◆ Require parents and students to pick up report cards together.
- ◆ Develop regular communication with parents about school activities (e.g., through newsletters).
- ◆ Create mechanisms for parents to share important aspects of their culture, their needs, and expectations for their children.
- ◆ Ensure that all parents get all information.

Source: Robert Blum, professor and chair, Department of Population and Family Health Sciences, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

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