No significant learning occurs without significant relationships.

Dr. James Comer
Comer School Development & Yale University
School Connectedness

School connection is the belief by students that adults in the school care about their learning and about them as individuals. Students are more likely to succeed when they feel connected to school.

Robert Blum, MD, MPH, PhD
School Connectedness: Improving Students’ Lives
School Connectedness

- I feel close to people at this school
- I am happy to be at this school
- I feel like I am part of this school
- The teachers at this school treat students fairly
- I feel safe in this school
School Connectedness

Critical requirements for feeling connected include high academic rigor and expectations coupled with support for learning, positive adult-student relationships, and physical and emotional safety.

Robert Blum, MD, MPH, PhD

School Connectedness: Improving Students’ Lives
National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health

- Since 1994
- 134 schools, nationwide
  - Public: 82.7%
  - School Size: 42 to 5,422 (642 avg.)
  - Class Size: 10 to 39 (23 avg.)
  - Rural: 18.6%
  - Suburban: 59.6%
  - Urban: 21.8%
- 71,515 students
National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health

Strong scientific evidence demonstrates that increased student connection to school:

- decreases absenteeism, fighting, bullying and vandalism in school
- decreases rates of substance abuse, emotional distress, violence/anti-social behavior, and pregnancy
- promotes educational motivation, classroom engagement, academic performance, school attendance and completion rates
Other Research Findings Related to School Connection

- When school connectedness is low, transition to regular smoking is more rapid
- High teacher support is associated with higher interest in math
- Connection is strongly related to GPA for both boys and girls
- High school attachment is associated with less initiation of violence
- Lack of attachment to school is associated with increased risk of unemployment after high school
Factors Associated with School Connectedness

- **School size mattered**
  ...classroom size did not

- **School type is not associated with connectedness**
  ...public, private, parochial

- **Location of school is not associated with connectedness**
  ...urban, suburban, rural
Factors Associated with School Connectedness

- Grade retention especially when associated with school transfer
- Student perception of teacher support
- School safety/less classroom disturbance
- Justice (fairness) in school
- Positive classroom management
- Less punitive disciplinary policies
- Schools < 900 students
- **A positive school climate** (single strongest factor)
Positive School Climate

Includes:

- Emphasis on academic achievement;
- Positive relationships between students and teachers;
- Respect for all members of the school community;
- Fair and consistent discipline policies;
- Attention to physical safety;
- Family and community involvement.

School Connectedness: Improving Students’ Lives
School Climate Defined

- School climate reflects the physical and psychological aspects of the school that are more susceptible to change and that provide the preconditions necessary for teaching and learning to take place.
- It’s evident in the feelings and attitudes about a school expressed by students, teachers, staff and parents—the way students and staff “feel” about being at school each day.

*University-Community Partnerships, Michigan State University*
School Climate Defined

- School climate refers to the quality and character of school life.
- It is based on patterns of students’, parents’ and school personnel’s experience of school life
- A school’s climate reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices and organizational structures

National School Climate Council
Why is School Climate Important?

- Associated with fewer behavioral and emotional problems for students
- Can significantly impact the extent of academic success experienced by urban students
- Serves as particularly protective factor for boys and high-risk students
- Increases achievement for students in all demographic environments
- Is associated with job satisfaction for personnel
- Facilitates smooth transitions between schools
Elements of School Climate

- A **physical environment** that is welcoming and conducive to learning
- A **social environment** that promotes communication and interaction
- An **affective environment** that promotes a sense of belonging and self-esteem
- An **academic environment** that promotes learning and self-fulfillment
- A **moral environment** that promotes values, ethical behavior, and character building

*Adapted from University-Community Partnerships, Michigan State University*
5 Pt. Whole Child Action Agenda

- **HEALTHY**
  - Each student enters school healthy; learns about and practices a healthy lifestyle

- **SAFE AND SECURE**
  - Each student learns in an intellectually challenging environment that is physically & emotionally safe.

- **ENGAGED**
  - Each student is actively engaged in learning and is connected to the school and broader community.
Whole Child Action Agenda (cont’d)

◆ SUPPORTED
  ◆ Each student has access to personalized learning and to qualified, caring adults.

◆ CHALLENGED ACADEMICALLY
  ◆ Each graduate is prepared for success in college or further study and for employment in a global environment.
Intervention Strategies

- Provide a safe environment for staff and students
- Increased parent and community involvement
- Character education, the promotion of fundamental moral values in children (e.g. character development curricula)
- Violence-prevention and conflict-resolution-curricula
- Peer mediation
- Prevention of acts of bullying (Peterson & Skiba, 2001)
- Teachers & principals treat students fairly, equally and with respect
- Personalization through adopt-a-kid programs e.g. honoring most-improved students, and block scheduling (Shore, 1995)
Other methodologies

- Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)
- Response to Intervention (Rti)
- Adventures in Peacemaking - elementary, middle & parents (e.g. peaceable being)
- Project Adventure – elementary, middle
- Restorative Justice – middle and high
- SECURRe- life skills curricula
- RULER - emotionally literate schools (therulerapproach.org)
- Alliance for the Study of School Climate, Charter College of Education, CSULA
Resources

Cartoons available at:

- http://www.andertoons.com/search-cartoons/school/
- http://www.glasbergen.com/education-cartoons/
- http://www.gocomics.com/frazz/?ref=comics