



NATIONAL  
ASSOCIATION OF  
SCHOOL  
PSYCHOLOGISTS

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

## *Selected Research*

### **Barriers to Safe, Supportive Conditions for Learning**

#### Violent Crime

- Students age 12–18 years were victims of 629,800 nonfatal, violent crimes at school in 2008<sup>1</sup>.
- In 2009, 11% of students in grades 9–12 reported they had been in a physical fight on school property at least one time during the previous 12 months<sup>2</sup>.
- 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 are largely attributed to students feeling unsafe<sup>3</sup>.

#### Bullying

- In 2007, 10% of students age 12–18 years reported that someone at school had used hate-related words against them, and 35% had seen hate-related graffiti at school<sup>4</sup>.
- About 28% of students age 12–18 years reported they were bullied at school in the 2008–09 school year, and about 6% reported they were cyber-bullied anywhere<sup>5</sup>.
- In a 2009 survey, 85% of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students reported being verbally harassed, 40% reported being physically harassed, and 19% reported being physically assaulted at school in the past year because of their sexual orientation<sup>6</sup>.
- A study of 7,000 ninth-grade students and nearly 3,000 teachers revealed that the bullying climate of schools can negatively influence achievement on standardized tests<sup>7</sup>.

#### Sexual Assault and Harassment

- Among sexually active adolescent girls in grades 9–12, more than 31% report having experienced physical or sexual violence from dating partners<sup>8</sup>.
- 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<sup>9</sup>.
- 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<sup>10</sup>.
- School climate has emerged as a major variable in mitigating the negative effects of sexual harassment among adolescent students<sup>11</sup>.

#### Student Perceptions of School Safety

- In 2007, 5.5% 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<sup>12</sup>.

- More than 61% of students reported in 2009 that they felt unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation and nearly 40% felt unsafe because of their gender expression<sup>13</sup>.
- Nearly 11% of students age 12–18 years who were bullied at school during the 2008–09 school year reported being afraid that someone would attack or harm them at school or on the way to or from school, compared to less than 2% of students who were not bullied<sup>14</sup>.

### **Aspects of Safe, Supportive Conditions for Learning: Programs, Personnel, Partnerships, and Positive Outcomes**

#### Social and Emotional Development

- A meta-analysis of 153 studies involving more than 270,000 K–12 students documented that school-based social-emotional development programs yield significant positive effects on students' social-emotional competencies, academic performance on achievement tests and grades, and attitudes toward school, while reducing conduct and internalizing problems<sup>15</sup>.
- 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<sup>16</sup>.
- 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<sup>17</sup>.

#### School Climate and Bonding to School

- Longitudinal research has demonstrated that interventions that promote students' bonding to school contribute to positive outcomes in terms of academic performance and social competence, while reducing tobacco, alcohol, and drug use; criminal involvement; gang membership; and school dropout<sup>18</sup>.
- Evidence suggests that early disengagement from school increases the risk of high school dropout<sup>19</sup>, and exemplary prevention programs address this risk factor through life skills development, family strengthening, academic support, and behavioral interventions<sup>20</sup>.
- Changing a school's climate and connectedness for the better is associated with significant increases in student performance in reading, writing, and mathematics, regardless of whether a school starts with high or low school climate and connectedness or high or low achievement scores<sup>21,22</sup>.

#### Positive Behavior Support

- Whole-school interventions using positive behavior support have been shown to decrease behavior problems while improving academic performance, as measured by standardized tests in reading and mathematics<sup>23</sup>.
- Zero tolerance policies are not as effective as generally thought in reducing violence and promoting learning; in fact, they can actually increase bad behaviors and dropout rates among middle and secondary school students<sup>24</sup>.

#### Need for Qualified Personnel to Provide Student Support Services

- Empirical evidence demonstrates that services provided by school psychologists can have a significant, positive impact on students' academic achievement<sup>25</sup>.
- School counseling practices have been shown to improve students' social skills, particularly among those who are at risk<sup>26</sup>, and school social work services have been shown to be cost-effective in reducing problem behaviors and school exclusion<sup>27</sup>.

- School psychologists work with teachers and administrators to collect and analyze data on risk and protective factors related to student outcomes<sup>28</sup>, and there is evidence that addressing these factors in schools promotes children’s well-being and resilience<sup>29</sup>.
- 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<sup>30</sup>.
- Adequate and sustained funding is a necessary condition for effective implementation of programs, and adoption of appropriate policies is important for institutionalizing new procedures and practices<sup>31</sup>.
- More support personnel are needed to address attrition from the profession by teachers, who cite the issues that support personnel are trained to address in their reasons for leaving: Among teachers who leave the profession, a significant percentage cite student discipline problems<sup>32</sup>, lack of student motivation<sup>33</sup>, and issues with workplace conditions or the administration<sup>34</sup> as reasons for their dissatisfaction and decision to leave.

### Cost–Benefit Analysis

- 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<sup>35</sup>.
- A longitudinal study found participation in a school-based, early childhood program that provides educational and family-support services for low-income children ages 3–9 years to be associated with a wide range of positive outcomes on general well-being into adulthood. These include higher rates of school completion; higher levels of educational attainment; and lower rates of felony arrests, convictions, incarceration, and depressive symptoms<sup>36</sup>.
- 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<sup>37</sup>.

### Endnotes

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