



## Student Connectedness

### Tool Kit #7

**School connectedness refers to the belief by students that adults in the school care about their learning and about them as individuals.**

– West Virginia Expanded School Mental Health Steering Team, 2017

Student connectedness is associated with improved academic performance; reduced bullying; reduced fighting; absenteeism; and higher graduation rates.<sup>1</sup> Schools should implement formal policies and practices to assess and strengthen school connectedness, student voice and student protective factors.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention identifies six strategies<sup>2</sup> that teachers, administrators, other school staff, and parents can implement to increase the extent students feel connected to school, creating an environment that facilitates healthy development.

#### Six Strategies for Student Connectedness

1. Create decision-making processes that facilitate student, family, and community engagement, academic achievement, and staff empowerment.
2. Provide education and opportunities for families to be actively involved in their children's academic and school life.
3. Provide students with the academic, emotional, and social skills necessary to be actively engaged in school.
4. Use effective classroom management and teaching methods to foster a positive learning environment.
5. Provide professional development and support for teachers and other school staff to enable them to meet the diverse cognitive, emotional, and social needs of children and adolescents.
6. Create trusting and caring relationships that promote open communication among administrators, teachers, staff, students, families, and communities.

Programs that build and strengthen assets - such as mentoring, after school programs, and service learning - contribute to increased positive feelings of connectedness. After-school programs are also successful in reducing problem behaviors (e.g., aggression, noncompliance, conduct problems) and drug use. See The Impact of After School Programs<sup>3</sup> and The ABCs of School Based Mentoring review of the research and resources.

### References

- <sup>1</sup> Journal of School Health, September, 2004.
- <sup>2</sup> [http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/school\\_connectedness.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/school_connectedness.htm)
- <sup>3</sup> The Impact of After-School Programs that Promote Personal and Social Skills: <http://www.casel.org/the-impact-of-after-school-programs-that-promote-personal-and-social-skills-2007/>
- <sup>4</sup> The ABCs of School Based Mentoring: <http://educationnorthwest.org/sites/default/files/abcs.pdf>

### Expanded school mental health (ESMH) is

a multi-tiered system of support where schools and strategic community partners work together to enhance student mental health in schools. It is a framework that:

- includes the full continuum of prevention; early intervention and treatment;
- serves all students;
- builds upon core programs/services being provided by schools
- emphasizes shared responsibility between schools, mental health providers and other community partners

## Student Connectedness

### West Virginia Policy Resources

- Adolescent Health Initiative Regional Coordinators: <http://www.wvdhhr.org/ahi/>
- Common Ground Speaker Series <http://wvde.state.wv.us/common-ground/speaker-series.html>
- It Does Matter <http://wvde.state.wv.us/it-does-matter/>  
Student Tools to Combat Bullying
- It's my Move <http://www.itsmymove.org/>
- West Virginia Statewide After-School Network: for information about funding and development of after school programs: <http://wvsan.ext.wvu.edu/>
- WV Student Voice <http://wvde.state.wv.us/voice/>

- Search Institute: several resources related to assessment and asset building for schools, communities, adults, sports, churches: <http://www.search-institute.org/>
- Search Institute—Assets Survey for students: [http://www.searchinstitute.org/free\\_downloads/Asset%20Checklist.pdf](http://www.searchinstitute.org/free_downloads/Asset%20Checklist.pdf)
- 40 Developmental Assets for Adolescents <http://www.search-institute.org/content/40-developmental-assets-adolescents-ages-12-18>
- Sound Out—Promoting the Student Voice in School: <http://www.soundout.org/>

### General Resources

- Assessment Tools: Character Education Partnership: <http://www.character.org/more-resources/assessment-tools/>
- CDC Connectedness Strategy Guide for Increasing Protective Factors <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/pdf/connectedness.pdf>
- Fact Sheets on Fostering School Connectedness For teachers and other school staff: [http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/pdf/connectedness\\_teachers.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/pdf/connectedness_teachers.pdf)
- For parents and families: [http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/pdf/connectedness\\_parents.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/pdf/connectedness_parents.pdf)
- For school districts and administrators: [http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/pdf/connectedness\\_administrators.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/pdf/connectedness_administrators.pdf)
- National Center for Dropout Prevention <http://dropoutprevention.org/>
- National Center for School Engagement: School Policies That Engage Students and Families: <http://www.schoolengagement.org/>
- School as a Caring Community Profile Survey: <http://www2.cortland.edu/dotAsset/289182.pdf>

The purpose of this series of information briefs is to provide a common framework and recommendations to assist schools and community mental health providers to more effectively develop a comprehensive approach to school mental health that is consistent with current West Virginia Department of Education policies and best practices.



These recommendations and resources have been reviewed and approved by West Virginia's Expanded School Mental Health Steering Team. For more information contact [info@schoolmentalhealthwv.org](mailto:info@schoolmentalhealthwv.org)

Leadership for the West Virginia School Mental Health initiative is a shared commitment. This toolkit was prepared by:

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