

# Youth Voice Project

*The Youth Voice Project asks students about their level of school connectedness, frequency of relationally, verbally, and physically aggressive behaviors they have seen and experienced, and the effectiveness of different strategies used to address the aggressive behaviors.*

*Stan Davis & Charisse Nixon*

## Youth Voice Project

Spring 2010

From the Wingspread Declaration

*“Students are more likely to succeed when they feel connected to school. School connection is the belief by students that adults in the school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals. The critical requirements for feeling connected include students' experiencing*

*\* High academic expectations and rigor coupled with support for learning,*

*\* Positive adult/student relationships,*

*\* Physical and emotional safety.*

*Increasing the number of students connected to school is likely to influence critical accountability measures, such as*

*\* Academic performance, incidence of fighting, bullying, or vandalism, absenteeism, & school completion rates.*

*Strong scientific evidence demonstrates that increased student connection to school promotes motivation, classroom engagement, improved school attendance.*

*The most effective strategies for increasing the likelihood that students will be connected to school include...*

*\* Applying fair and consistent disciplinary policies that are collectively agreed upon and fairly enforced,*

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

The Youth Voice Project is based in part on a summary of research on school connectedness called the Wingspread Declaration, created by a group of education leaders in 2004 (<http://www.jhsph.edu/wingspread/Septemberissue.pdf>).

This report outlines preliminary findings from all participating schools in the project.



← The Youth Voice Project asks students about their levels of (1) **school connectedness**, (2) **peer victimization** (bystanders & targets), and (3) **staff responsiveness**. This report includes 13,177 students in grades 5-12 from 32 schools in all parts of the U.S.

## Youth Voice Project - National Data set

### School Connectedness

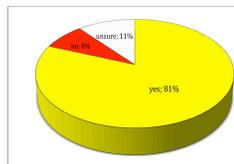
**(1) “I feel like I am part of this school.”**

Results show that the *majority* (81%) of students felt part of their school.

**Grade level effects? Yes!**

Students in elementary school felt more a part of their school than MS and HS students.

**Gender effects** were also found- Females reported more connection to school than males.

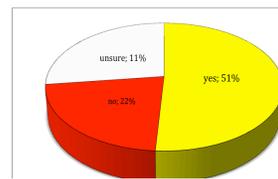


**Differences in reduced/free lunches? Yes!** Students receiving reduced or free lunches felt less connected to school.



**(2) “I feel close to an adult at school.”**

Results show that 51% of the students felt close to an adult at school.



**Grade level effects? Yes!**

Elementary students felt the most close to adults at school, while HS students felt the least close.

**Gender effects? Yes!**

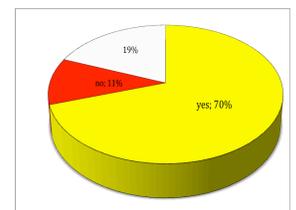
Females reported feeling closer to adults at schools.

**Differences in reduced/free lunches? Yes!** Students receiving reduced or free lunches felt *less connected* to an adult at school.

**(3) “I feel valued and respected at school.”**

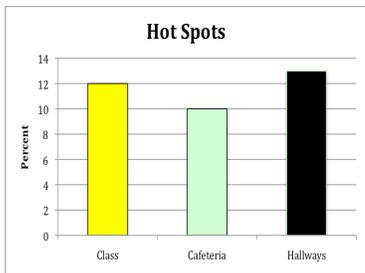
Results show that 70% of students felt valued and respected at school, while 30% were unsure or did *not* feel valued and respected at school.

**Gender Effects? No!**



**Grade level effects** were only found for females, with MS girls feeling the *most* valued and respected at school. Grade level differences were not found for males.

**Differences in reduced/free lunches? Yes!** Students receiving reduced or free lunches felt *less valued and respected* at school.



**Grade level effects?** No! Across all three school levels, the **hallways, classrooms, and cafeteria** were all identified as ‘hot spots.’

### Why focus on the *Bystander*?

Recent work (see Janosz et al., 2008) suggests that considering bystanders is as important as studying targets for the following reasons:

- ★ **Witnessing** aggression has been identified as a public health issue.
- ★ **Witnessing** aggression is a **STRONGER** risk factor of adolescent adjustment than actual victimization.
- ★ **Witnessing** aggression can promote feelings of powerlessness and fear - which can further result in avoidance behavior.

### Targets

#### Summary of Target Data Direct Peer Victimization

Results revealed that ~ **1 in 4 students** reported being excluded or emotionally hurt by another student on a regular basis. Approximately **1 in 10 students** reported being physically victimized on a regular basis.



## Frequency of Peer Victimization

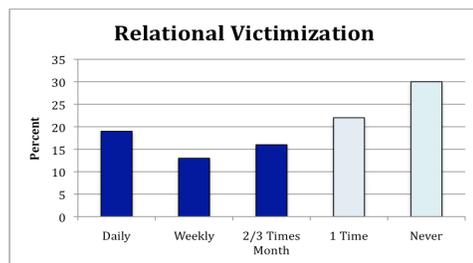
This next section looks at various forms of peer victimization (relational, verbal & physical) from two different perspectives; (1) **Bystander**: “How often did you see/hear the victimization?” and (2) **Target**: “How often did it happen to you?” Both perspectives are important in predicting student adjustment.

### Bystanders

#### Relational Aggression (RA)

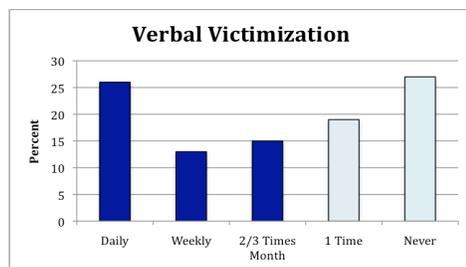
**Students were asked...** “How often did you see or hear rumor-spreading, exclusion, or students working together to be mean to someone?”

**Regular exposure** ~ Refers to students’ reports of victimization of at least 2 to 3 times a month or more (similar to Olweus’s work).



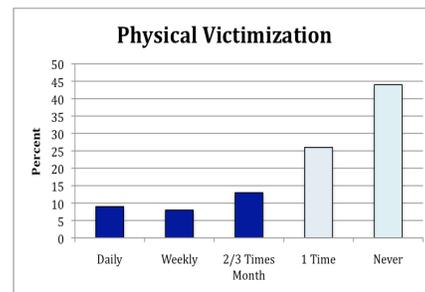
**48% of students were regularly exposed to RA**

“How often do you see/hear name calling or threatening comments?”



**54% of students were regularly exposed to VA**

“How often did you see hitting/kicking?”



**30% of students were regularly exposed to PA**

### Staff Responsiveness

Students’ perception of adult responsiveness is an important process variable reflecting school climate.

Students who reported that others’ actions were having a moderate to severe impact on them were asked what helps them when people at school hurt them or make them feel unsafe.

**Question:** “What happened when you told an adult at school?” Did things get better? Worse? Or no change?

#### Elementary School (5<sup>th</sup> grade)

- ~ 46% did *not* tell an adult at school.
- ~ 17% told an adult and nothing changed.
- ~ 11% told an adult at school and things got worse
- ~ 26% told an adult at school and things got better.

	MS	HS
Did <i>not</i> tell an adult at school	68%	76%
Told an adult at school – no change	8%	8%
Told an adult at school – got worse	12%	9%
Told an adult at school – got better	12%	7%

MS – Middle School (6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade)

HS – High School (9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade)

