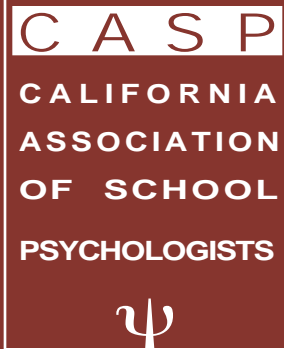


2003 Volume 8



The

California

School

Psychologist

Includes a Special Topic Section:
**School Engagement,
Youth Development, and
School Success**

The California School Psychologist

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The California School Psychologist

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The California School Psychologist Provides Valuable Information Regarding School Engagement, Youth Development, and School Success

Shane R. Jimerson
University of California, Santa Barbara

This volume of *The California School Psychologist* provides valuable information to enhance our understanding of the importance of school engagement in promoting youth development and school success. These articles inform contemporary professional practice in the field of school psychology, and also contribute to the foundation and future direction of research in the field of school psychology. Articles from previous volumes of *The California School Psychologist* are available on-line at www.education.ucsb.edu/school-psychology.

This volume includes the “special topic section” on “School Engagement, Youth Development, and School Success.” The Center for School-Based Youth Development at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) is sponsoring this special topic section of *The California School Psychologist*. Resources for this effort were made possible through a *Gevirtz Graduate School of Education - Funds for Excellence Grant* from Don and Marilyn Gevirtz. It is the mission of the UCSB Center for School-Based Youth Development to enhance school engagement for all students through strength-based assessment and targeted interventions designed to promote social and cognitive competence. This mission will be facilitated through research and development and by increasing the cadre of educators who are knowledgeable about and support a comprehensive and coordinated approach to student support services. Drs. Furlong, Jimerson, Morrison, and Cosden are the UCSB faculty collaborating to establish the Center for School-Based Youth Development. For additional information about the Center, you may visit their website at www.education.ucsb.edu/school-psychology.

The confluence of available literature suggests that school engagement, youth development, and school success are intertwined. Research indicates that school engagement is an important influence on developmental trajectories and educational success (e.g., school dropout, violence prevention, and promoting the well being of students). Amidst an era emphasizing “standards and accountability” in education it is important to recognize the interplay between socio-emotional, behavioral, and cognitive development as they influence academic success and learning. Promoting the social and cognitive competence of all students is essential in facilitating the academic success of students in schools. This issue of *The California School Psychologist* journal provides information addressing four broad areas of scholarship: a) an overview of conceptual considerations regarding “school engagement” and a synthesis of available literature, b) empirical investigation and analyses related to “school engagement,” c) practical application of this research, emphasizing the implications and strategies for practitioners, and d) an emphasis on incorporating this information into preparing future professionals.

This volume of *The California School Psychologist* offers numerous articles that address important aspects of school engagement, youth development, and school success, including; a review of definitions and measures, lessons learned about facilitating student engagement, an exploration of meaningful participation and caring relationships at school, a factor analysis of school bonding and related constructs, an introduction and overview of “student alienation syndrome” and implications for school violence, an investigation of Latino upper elementary students’ perceptions of school belonging, and an overview of a conceptual framework emphasizing the multiple contexts of school engagement. Additional articles in this volume address other important topics, including; an exploration of digit naming speed among students with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and a review of research regarding absenteeism and implications for school psychologists.

The first article (Jimerson, Campos, & Greif, 2003) provides a review of definitions and measures to explore the construct of school engagement. This article addresses key questions such as, ‘What is school engagement, school bonding, and school attachment, and how are they measured?’ This synthesis of available literature is valuable in providing a basic understanding of school engagement, school bonding, and other related terms (e.g., school attachment, school commitment). This article delineates items used in previous research addressing school engagement and then classifies previous measures into five contexts: a) academic performance, b) classroom behavior, c) extracurricular involvement, d) interpersonal relationships, and e) school community. Based on their review of the extant literature, the authors suggest that school engagement is a multifaceted construct that includes affective, behavioral, and cognitive dimensions. The authors also highlight that conceptualizing school engagement as a multifaceted construct has implications for both research and practice.

The second article (Sinclair, Christenson, Lehr, & Reschly-Anderson, 2003) offers insights and lessons learned from several years of applied research focusing on student engagement, dropout prevention, and school completion. The authors begin with a summary of the theoretical constructs that guided the development of Check & Connect and describe the multiple applications of this targeted intervention. Roles of the key intervention personnel are delineated and seven core elements of the model are highlighted with particular emphasis on the importance of “persistence plus,” relationship building and individualized intervention. Based on their experiences with the implementation studies of the intervention, the authors also discuss numerous practical considerations for effective implementation. The insights offered may help educational professionals implement effective programs to positively influence the educational trajectory of youth for whom school completion is likely to be difficult.

The third article (Jennings, 2003) explores meaningful participation and caring relationships as contexts for school engagement. The author emphasizes the connections between models of school engagement, psychological needs, and strength-based assets. This article also includes the findings from a study examining the association between school environment factors (i.e., caring relationships and meaningful participation) and academic performance among seventh-grade students using the California Healthy Kids Survey that is being implemented in many schools across the state. The results of this study indicate that moderate levels of meaningful participation and caring peer relationships were each associated with academic achievement. The author suggests that home and school support warrant further consideration in future research examining school engagement.

The fourth article (O’Farrell & Morrison, 2003) reports the results of a statistical factor analysis exploring school bonding among students in grades four, five, and six. Recognizing that previous researchers have measured constructs such as school bonding, school engagement, school attachment, and school connectedness using similar items, the authors used selected items from such surveys to

examine the unique and shared aspects of these factors. The results indicate considerable overlap among measures of the various constructs investigated and also revealed a five-factor model. The authors highlight that this study is an important step in understanding how these constructs are interrelated, and discuss the implications for future research and practice.

The fifth article (Hyman, Cohen, & Mahon, 2003) provides an overview of a theoretical construct - Student Alienation Syndrome - and offers a paradigm for understanding the relation between school trauma and school violence. Highlighting that some children are victimized by peers and others at school, the authors emphasize that such unrecognized abuse may cause pervasive emotional, social, and academic problems. This article includes a description of the Student Alienation Trauma Survey (SATS) and the My Worst Experience Scale (MWES) and the authors suggest that these measures are psychometrically sound instruments to assess symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Student Alienation Syndrome (SAS) in children who have been victimized at school. An overview of a comprehensive treatment model for children with PTSD/SAS is also provided.

The sixth article (Morrison, Cosden, O'Farrell, & Campos, 2003) examines changes in Latino and Latina students' perceptions of school belonging between grades four and six. Using information from both students and teachers at the beginning and end of each academic year, the results indicated that there was a decrease in school belonging among English Language Learner, however, this was not evidenced among English proficient classmates. The results also indicated that perceptions of school belonging among students in fourth grade was associated with teacher evaluations, whereas, sixth-grade students' perceptions of school belonging was associated by peer self-concept. The authors highlight the importance of understanding the dynamics of school belonging when implementing prevention and intervention programs in the school context.

The seventh article (Furlong, Whipple, St. Jean, Simenthal, Soliz, & Punthuna, 2003) presents a brief overview of the school engagement literature and offers a conceptual framework emphasizing the multiple contexts of school engagement. This article also includes a discussion of psychological, educational, and developmental perspectives as related to school engagement. The authors propose four main contexts of school-based engagement, a) the students, b) peers, c) classroom, and d) the school environment. The authors also posit that all youth may benefit from school engagement, and suggest that the proposed framework may facilitate efforts to promote positive student outcomes.

The eighth article (Brock & Christo, 2003) examines digit naming speed performance among children with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). This study compared students with ADHD with matched peers without ADHD in grades four, five, and six. Students in both groups demonstrated similar word identification and word attack test scores. In contrast to prior research, children with ADHD were significantly slower at identifying numbers, compared to the children without ADHD. The authors review the methodological differences between the previously published research and the current study, highlighting that none of the previous studies included a matched pair design. In addition, prior research included children with various classification procedures and subtypes of ADHD, whereas the current study included children with inattentive symptoms, and excluded those with primarily hyperactive-impulsive symptoms. The authors also discuss implications for both practice and future research.

The ninth article (Goldstein, Little, & Akin-Little, 2003) reviews the literature on student absenteeism and discusses the role of school psychologists in addressing this salient problem. The authors highlight that poor student attendance is a pervasive problem that had numerous deleterious effects on the individual, the school, and society in general. The authors summarize existing literature and explore mediating factors, and then provide a review of interventions for improving student attendance at

school. Noting that punitive responses may be counter-productive in addressing absenteeism, the authors encourage school psychologists to work with administrators to develop proactive responses to decrease absenteeism. Considering the significance of problems associated with student absenteeism, this area warrants further attention from both researchers and practitioners.

The articles in this volume both individually and collectively provide an abundance of information that may be used by educational professionals working with children, families, and colleagues to enhance the academic success and promote positive developmental trajectories of youth. The convergence across the articles addressing school engagement is particularly noteworthy, for instance, each acknowledges the multifaceted nature of the construct and articulates the importance of facilitating school environments (e.g., relationships with peers and teachers, classrooms, activities and experiences) to enhance students' sense of belonging and active engagement. Each of the authors also emphasizes the dynamic and reciprocal influence between school engagement and academic success. This collection of articles warrants serious consideration by researchers, practitioners, and those involved with developing policies and legislation. *The California School Psychologist* provides valuable information regarding school engagement, youth development, and school success.

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