

Protective Factors: Connecting students, families, schools, and communities

School Health Profiles, 2016

Increasing the number of protective factors youth experience has a significant impact on health behaviors and educational outcomes. Protective factors can reduce or eliminate behaviors such as early initiation of substance use, violence, and dropping out of school.¹ They help youth develop resiliency and their ability to overcome adversity, leading to higher levels of academic achievement and physical and emotional development, allowing them to thrive into young adulthood and beyond.

Connecting students, families, schools, and communities: What schools are doing

Protective factors emerge from all aspects of the environment from individual factors to family support, and connections with caring adults in the community.² An essential role of schools is to help integrate family, school, and community efforts by providing safe and supportive environments, increasing school-community connectedness and parent engagement.¹⁻⁴ The School Health Profiles helps monitor the school environment, family engagement, and community involvement.

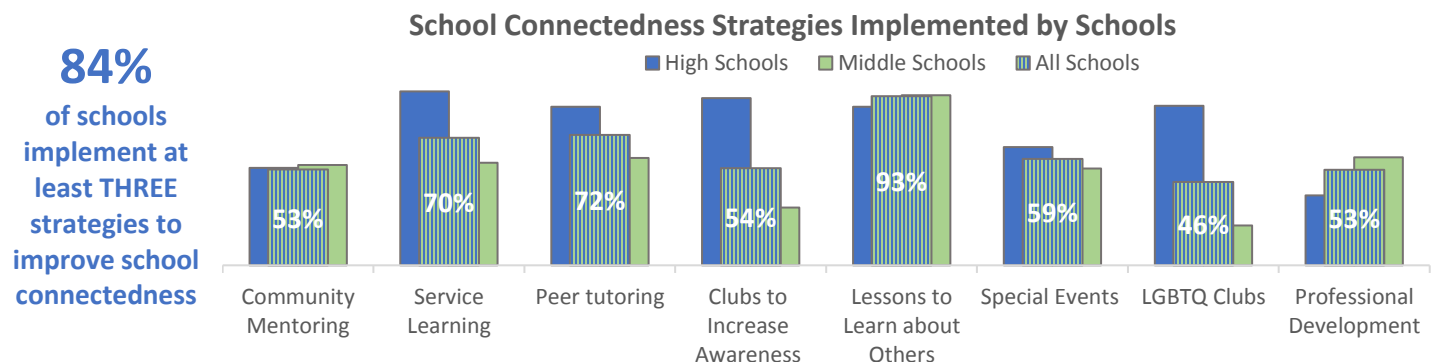
School & Community Connectedness

Connectedness is the belief that students, regardless of their race, ethnic group, sexual orientation, or level of family income, believe that the adults and peers in their school and community care about their learning as well as about them as individuals.³ It implies having a sense of place, respect, and belonging, as well as feeling like a valued member of the school and community.

Nearly
two-thirds
of students believe their teachers really care and give them a lot of encouragement
2015 VT YRBS

In 2016, more than eight out of ten Vermont middle and high schools (84%) implemented at least three strategies during the past two years to improve school connectedness such as providing students with opportunities to be involved in in service learning projects, mentoring programs, or peer tutoring as well as providing clubs or activities that give students opportunities to learn about people different from them. In addition, schools also provide teachers with professional development opportunities on classroom management techniques to help increase school connectedness.

Overall, high schools were significantly more likely than middle school to implement at least three school connectedness strategies (95% vs 77%, respectively). However, middle schools were more likely than high schools to implement specific strategies such as providing teachers with professional development on classroom management techniques and teaching lessons in class where students could learn about people different from them.



Family & Parent Engagement

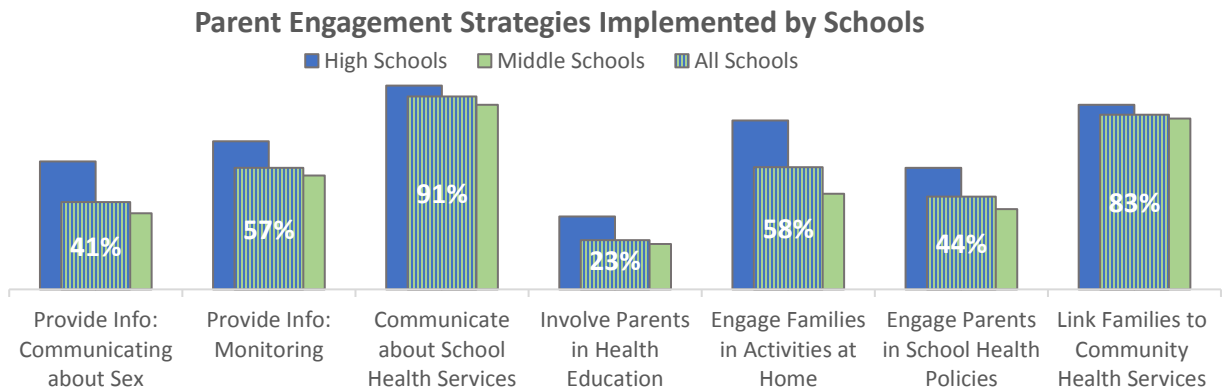
Parent-teen relationships play an important role in adolescents social and emotional development. Positive relationships such as those characterized by low conflict, high levels of support, and open communication reduce the likelihood that youth will engage in unhealthy behaviors such as tobacco, alcohol, and other drug and increases mental, social, and emotional well-being as well as academic success.⁴ Parental monitoring (e.g., knowing friends and daily activities, establishing routines, setting limits), being present (e.g., having family meals, involved in activities), modeling healthy behaviors, and creating a healthy home environment are linked positive outcomes, lasting well into adulthood.^{2,4}

Parent engagement in schools is defined as parents and school staff working together to support and improve the learning, development, and health of children and adolescents.³ The shared relationship between schools and parents cuts across and reinforces children’s health and learning in multiple settings—at home, in school, in out-of-school programs, and in the community. It ensures that parents are committed to actively supporting their children’s and adolescents’ learning and development.

More than **3 out of 4** students talk to their parents about school *at least one time per week*
2015 VT YRBS

To facilitate family and parent engagement, schools can implement strategies such as providing parents and families with information about monitoring and communicating with their child, linking families to school health services and programs, involving parents as school volunteers in the creation and delivery of health education activities and services and engaging parents and students in health education activities at home. In 2016, 54% of all schools (78% of HS and 45% of MS) implemented at least four strategies aimed at improving parent engagement. High schools were significantly more likely than middle schools to employ all family engagement strategies. Specific strategies are shown below.

54%
of all schools implement at least **FOUR** parent engagement strategies



Connecting students, families, schools, and communities: Why does it matter?

Families, schools, and communities serve as key protective factors which can diminish the effects of risk factors and enhance positive development including academic success. Adolescents who feel connected to their school have better academic and health outcomes such as being more likely to graduate, have better grades, and are less likely to exhibit disruptive behavior, experiments with illegal substances, or consider suicide.¹⁻⁴

Compared to students who feel no connectedness or less connected to their school and community, students who are more connected* are significantly:

less likely to:

- use alcohol, marijuana, or cigarettes before age 13†
- drink alcohol or use marijuana
- skip school because they felt unsafe at school
- make a plan or attempt suicide
- ever have sexual intercourse

more likely to:

- participate in afterschool activities†
- have higher grades†
- have plans to complete a post HS program†

VT YRBS, 2015

* asked only among high school students

*agree or strongly agree that teachers care and motivate them, that they matter to those in their community and who regularly talk to their parents

Want to Know More about Academic Achievement and Risk Behaviors?

Check out the Vermont data brief on [Substance Abuse and Academic Grades](#) or additional national reports by the CDC on [Health-Related Behaviors and Academic Achievement Among U.S. High School Students](#).

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For past data briefs, statewide and local reports: please see the YRBS website at: <http://healthvermont.gov/research/yrbs.aspx>

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/protective/index.htm>

² <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/positive-youth-development>

³ https://www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/protective/school_connectedness.htm

⁴ <https://childtrends-ciw49tixgw5lbab.stackpathdns.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/2014-52FamilyEnvironmentRB.pdf>