

## ...what happens when students feel unsafe?



Numerous studies show that a feeling of not being safe in school is disruptive to the learning process. External factors such as family chaos, dysfunction and abuse, neighborhood crime, homelessness, poverty, and racism can have a devastating effect on students' emotional well-being. Student concerns about victimization through threats, bullying, harassment, or social isolation in school also induce stress. These stressors negatively impact efficient learning. For example, it is more difficult for students to concentrate and focus their attention when they are anxious about their personal and emotional safety. Anxiety and depression are associated with memory problems and retention-recall deficits. Students who experience anxiety and depression are challenged to engage and bond with school. School bonding has been shown to protect students

against later negative outcomes. Teaching and learning under the disruptive influence of these factors is a daunting challenge in many of today's schools.

Analysis of well-performing schools serving students experiencing high levels of stress shows that their overarching emphasis is on creating healthy, safe and supportive classrooms as well as for the school as a whole. These schools tend to focus on the following strategies:

- Maximizing supervision and monitoring of student activities
- Providing adequate supervision in low traffic areas of the school.
- Creating and consistently reinforcing a positive school climate.
- Fostering caring relationships between school staff and students and among students
- Assigning trusted mentors to especially vulnerable students
- Maintaining high performance expectations for all students
- Open and transparent communication about school challenges and problems



Research clearly shows that positive student-staff relationships can counter the negative effects of student stressors. Positive teacher-student relationships communicate support, acceptance and caring to students managing emotional trauma and concerns about safety. They also encourage students to communicate their safety concerns.



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