

The Interface of School Climate and School Connectedness and Relationships with Aggression and Victimization

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Children's experiences in school are fundamental to their successful transition into adulthood. In school, children negotiate and renegotiate their relationships, self-image, and independence. They cultivate interpersonal skills, discover and refine strengths, and struggle with vulnerabilities. As such, schools must provide a safe environment for children to develop academically, relationally, emotionally, and behaviorally.

Various studies have examined how the educational and social climate of a school can enhance or impair student development and achievement. Researchers have discovered common characteristics in schools where students report a positive school climate. School characteristics include an emphasis on academic achievement, positive relationships among students and teachers, respect for all members of the school community, fair and consistent discipline policies, attention to safety issues, and family and community involvement.¹⁻³ Concurrently, a nearly distinct body of research has examined the correlates and effects of student connectedness to school. The research revealed consistent positive developmental patterns among students with a high degree of school connectedness, including improved academic achievement, reduced delinquency rates, and decreased rates of health-compromising behavior.⁴⁻⁷

How do school connectedness and school climate work together to influence students? Can the relationship between connectedness and climate reveal information about the interaction of social context and the individual? School connectedness generally includes the sense of attachment and commitment a student feels as a result of perceived caring from teachers and peers.⁸ School attachment is often one of several indices included when measuring school climate. Further, comparisons of research on climate and connectedness reveal coinciding external associations and dimensions of school climate highly correlated with connectedness.

This paper summarizes analyses of data from the Safe Communities-Safe Schools initiative, comparing effects of connectedness and climate on measures of aggression and victimization. Subsequently, findings will be assessed within the research on school climate and connectedness.

BACKGROUND OF THE SAFE COMMUNITIES-SAFE SCHOOLS INITIATIVE

In fall 1999, the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence (CSPV) at the University of Colorado at Boulder, created the Safe Communities-Safe Schools Initiative (SCSS). After the tragedy at Columbine High School in

Littleton, Colo., in which two students killed 12 schoolmates and one teacher, Colorado professional education associations sought to create a safe school model to decrease schools' vulnerability to future violent attacks, along with reducing student victimization. In collaboration with state education associations, the Colorado Attorney General's Office, and the Colorado Trust, the Center created the SCSS model for school violence prevention. The model, based in part on Comer's School Development model, focuses on creating an overall school climate where students feel safe and valued by adults and each other, and supported in their learning and development.⁹ The Comer model fosters prosocial bonds among students, teachers, and parents. Similarly, the SCSS model includes a universal intervention aimed at improving school climate by developing positive relationships among all school community members. The specific intervention program appropriate for each school is determined by a baseline assessment and, thereafter, evaluated through annual assessments. The needs of one school may call for life skills training for students, while a bullying prevention program may best serve another school. The SCSS model emphasizes the need to implement appropriate programs that have been proven effective through rigorous evaluation. Though not discussed in this paper, the SCSS model also includes a prevention component for at-risk students and a crisis response component.

Beginning in fall 2000, the SCSS model was implemented in 32 schools; five schools served as comparisons. Comparison sites were matched based on comparability of urban or rural location, school size, percent of minority students, and socioeconomic characteristics of the area served by the school.

METHODS

In this paper, nine middle schools and 10 high schools are included in the analyses (13 elementary schools were excluded). As part of the SCSS model's annual schoolwide assessment, a sample of students was surveyed at each school. Baseline surveys were administered during the 2000-2001 school year to 1,177 middle school students and 1,117 high school students. The first follow-up survey, conducted in 2001-2002, was administered to 1,357 middle school students and 970 high school students. These findings represent cross-sectional analyses of the 2001-2002 middle school and high school aggregate of 2,327 students.

The SCSS surveys included questions related to student perceptions of school discipline policies, relationships with teachers and peers, physical condition of campus, presence of gangs, attitudes toward school, victimization and perpetration of bullying, attitudes toward use of aggression, self-reported academic performance, and problem behavior. The survey was intended to gauge school climate, the prevalence of interpersonal physical and relational aggression among students, and risk and protective factors for delinquency.

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Measurement of Aggression and Victimization

Effects of school climate and school connectedness on two measures of perpetration (physical aggression and relational aggression), and one victimization were analyzed. The Perpetration of Physical Aggression scale included six items, and the Perpetration of Relational Aggression scale included five items (scale ranges = 0 to 6 and 0 to 5, respectively, with a higher score reflecting more aggression). Items in both scales indicated a self-reported aggressive behavior. Seven self-report indicators comprised a scale measuring Victim of Aggression (range = 0 to 7, with a higher score indicating more victimization). Each of the three aggression scales is a sum, rather than a mean of items, because the items are dichotomous (yes or no).

Measurement of School Climate and Connectedness

The SCSS survey included seven scales commonly thought of as dimensions of school climate: Feelings and Attitudes Toward School, Knowledge and Fairness of Discipline Policies, Student-Teacher Relationships, Student-Peer Relationships, Respect for Authority, Presence of Gangs, and Condition of Campus (scale ranges = 1 to 4, with a higher score indicating more of the specific characteristic measured). The Student-Peer Relationships scale was not reliable in the aggregate, and was dropped.

Factor analysis indicated four of the remaining scales loaded (except Presence of Gangs and Condition of Campus.) on a single-component solution (Eigen value = 2.867, % of variance 47.78). The four scales were summed to create a single scale measuring student's Perception of School Climate (Cronbach's alpha = .8067, scale range = 1 to 16, with 16 indicating optimal school climate). Perception of School Climate values were averaged for each school. The within-school mean of the Perception of School Climate was assigned to all students in each school thereby creating a school level measure of school climate.

The School Connectedness scale represents an average of seven items: 1) I like school. 2) I look forward to going to school. 3) My teachers tell me when I do a good job. 4) My teachers listen when I have something to say. 5) I have a teacher who really cares about me. 6) All students who break the rules at this school are treated the same, no matter who they are. 7) When someone breaks the rules, teachers and administrators always take appropriate action (scale range = 1 to 4, 4 = optimal connectedness, Cronbach's alpha = .7358). Some items used in measuring school connectedness also were used in subscales that comprised the measure of school climate. This would be problematic if the individual subscales or the individual-level Perceptions of School Climate scale were included in the analyses. However, given the manner in which the items

Table 1
Comparison of Regression Models for Perpetration of Physical Aggression

	Model #1 ¹			Model #2 ²		
	b	beta	Significance	b	beta	Significance
% Non-White Students	.982	.133	.000	.978	.123	.00
School Size	.000	-.093	.000	.000	-.106	.0000
School Performance Score	.012	.111	.000	.005	.047	.024
School Connectedness				-.881	-.344	.000

¹ - R² = 0.3%; ² - R² = 1.4%

² - Adds school connectedness to Model #1 of demographic variables.
Change in R² from Model #1 to Model #2 = 1.14%; p = .000; N = 2,327

Table 2
Comparison of Regression Models for Perpetration of Relational Aggression

	Model #1 ¹			Model #2 ²			Model #3 ³		
	b	beta	Significance	b	beta	Significance	b	beta	Significance
% Non-White Students	.357	.054	.017	.286	.043	.058	.372	.056	0.10
School Size	-3.89E-05	-.012	.602	-9.722E-05	-.030	.209	-7.03981E-05	-.023	.305
School Performance Score	.003	.031	.159	-.003	-.034	.281	-.002	-.017	.434
School Climate	X	X	X	-.181	-.090	.003	X	X	X
School Connectedness	X	X	X	X	X	X	-.600	-.263	.000

* Model #3 adds school connectedness to Model #1.

¹ - R² = 0.3%

² - R² = 0.7%; change in R² from Model #1 0.4%, p = .003.

³ - R² = 7.0%; change in R² from model #1 6.7%, p = .000.

were used in the measure of school climate, having been averaged and aggregated to the school level, the overlap does not create a serious methodological issue.

Analyses also include three school-level demographic variables: percent of non-White students in the school, school size, and a school performance score (a measure of the academic environment of each school assigned by the Colorado Department of Education).

Statistical Analysis

Three regression models estimated contribution of each independent variable in predicting aggression and victimization while controlling for the effects of three school-level demographic variables. Three regression models were conducted for each dependent variable. Model one used only demographic variables as independent predictors. Model two in each comparison included the school climate scale in addition to demographic variables. Model three in the comparisons of regression included the school connectedness scale with demographic variables.

RESULTS

Relationship Between Aggressive Victimization with School Climate/Connectedness

The first set of tables compares the relationship of Model 1 with Model 2. The model of physical aggression on the demographic variables and school climate is not significant and is not presented here. Neither of the two models presented explains a substantial amount of the variability in physical aggression ($R^2 = .3\%$ and 1.4% , respectively). However, the 1.14% change in the explained variance from Model 1 to Model 2, though small, is statistically significant ($p = .000$).

In both models predicting physical aggression, each independent variable showed significant predictive ability. School size, while statistically significant, had negligible explanatory power ($b = .000$). School performance scores indicated a significant and low predictive ability ($b = .012$ and $.005$, respectively). Percent of minority students in a school was found to have a strong and significant relationship to aggression that varied minimally from Model 1 ($b = .982$, $p = .000$) to Model 2 ($b = .978$, $p = .000$). School connectedness negatively related to physical aggression,

and of all independent variables, demonstrated the strongest predictive ability ($b = -.344$ in Model 2; $p = .000$).

Perpetration of Relational Aggression. The variance in relational aggression explained by the three demographic variables alone is not significant ($R^2 = 0.3\%$, $p = .077$). When school climate was added to the demographic variables (Model 2), the model produces a significant, albeit minute, increase of 0.4% in the explained variance of relational aggression ($p = .013$). By comparison, the addition of school connectedness to the three demographic variables (Model 3) substantially improved the variance explained by 6.7% ($p = .000$). Overall, neither the model including school climate nor the model including school connectedness offered a significant amount of explained variability in the perpetration of relational aggression (change in R -squared = $.7\%$ and 7% , respectively).

Neither school size nor school performance scores significantly predicted relational aggression. Percent of minority students, however, again, demonstrated a significant, moderate predictive ability in the model of demographic variables alone ($b = .357$, $p = .02$) and in the model including school connectedness ($b = .372$, $p = .01$). In Model 2, school climate is inversely related to relational aggression ($b = -.181$, $p = .003$), indicating that as climate improves relational aggression decreases. Likewise, in Model 3, as connectedness improves, relational aggression decreases ($b = -.600$, $p = .000$).

Victimization and School Climate. Table 3 explores the relationship between victimization on school climate. As with previous analyses, the first model, included only the demographic variables and found all three variables were significant the percent of minority students ($b = .955$, $p = .000$), school size ($b = -.001$, $p = .000$), and school performance score ($b = -.007$, $p = .033$). When school climate was included in Model 2, school performance was no longer significant. With the addition of school climate, a small but significant change occurred in R -squared of 0.3% ($p = .013$). Contrary to expected outcomes, however, the relationship was positive ($b = .237$, $p = .013$) suggesting that victimization continues to increase as school climate improves. In Model 2, percent of non-White students and school size contributed significant predictive ability ($b = 1.043$, $p = .000$ and $b = -.001$, $p = .000$).

Table 3
Comparison of Regression Models for Victimization

	Model #1 ¹			Model #2 ²			Model #3 ³		
	b	beta	Significance	b	beta	Significance	b	beta	Significance
% Non-White Students	.971	.091	.000	1.043	.098	.000	.971	.091	.000
School Size	-.001	-.160	.000	-.001	-.142	.000	-.001	-.165	.000
School Performance Score	-.007	-.047	.032	.001	.006	.846	-.012	-.076	.001
School Climate	X	X	X	.237	.073	.013	X	X	X
School Connectedness	X	X	X	X	X	X	-.576	-.158	.000

¹ - $R^2 = 0.3\%$

² - $R^2 = 0.7\%$; change in R^2 from Model #1 0.4% , $p = .003$.

³ - $R^2 = 7.0\%$; change in R^2 from model #1 6.7% , $p = .000$.

In Model 3, school connectedness was related inversely to victimization, and the change created by its addition to the demographic variables produced a small but significant change of 2.4% ($p = .000$; school connectedness $b = -.576$, $p = .000$). All indicator variables in Model 3 were significantly predictive of victimization ($p = .001$).

Comparisons of the three models predicting physical aggression, relational aggression and victimization, suggest that the contributions of school climate and school connectedness are partially independent. However, school connectedness demonstrated a stronger and more consistent contribution than climate to reducing both aggression and victimization.

How School Climate and Connectedness Interact

A second set of analyses offered a preliminary investigation of the ways school climate and connectedness work in tandem in predicting levels of aggression and victimization among students. For these analyses, SCSS schools were assigned a value for school climate, indicating a positive climate, (above the mean for all schools), or negative climate (equal to or below the mean for all schools). In addition, students in each school were assigned a value for their school connectedness: high connectedness was above the mean for all students in the sample, while low connectedness was equal to or below the connectedness mean of students in the entire SCSS sample. Finally, perpetration of physical aggression, perpetration of relational aggression, and victimization were dichotomized into of high or low values based on where responses fell in relationship to the mean (Table 4).

In schools with positive climates, students with low connectedness were more aggressive than their highly connected counterparts. A significant number of low-connected students (46%) in positive school climates had high rates of physical aggression. Similarly, a significantly high percentage of these students (59%) demonstrated high rates of relational aggression. Conversely, among highly connected students in positive climate schools, only 20% indicated high levels of physical aggression, and only 40% indicated high levels of relational aggression. These results are significantly lower than would be expected if no relationship existed among connectedness and aggression.

In schools with negative climates, low-connected students were significantly more likely to demonstrate high levels of aggression; 39% of low-connected students indicated high levels of physical aggression, and 56% indicated high levels of relational aggression. Among their highly connected schoolmates, significantly low numbers demonstrated high levels of aggression, despite a negative climate (physical aggression = 17% and relational aggression = 46%). Thus, regardless of climate, strong connectedness yields protective qualities. Distributions for physical aggression and relational aggression in both positive and negative school climates were statistically significant (all p values $< .002$). However, phi statistics for distribution within each climate indicated a weak relationship between connectedness and physical aggression (positive climate $\phi = -.273$, $p = .000$; negative climate $\phi = -.249$, $p = .000$) and connectedness and relational aggression (positive climate $\phi = -.181$, $p = .000$; negative climate $\phi = -.100$, $p = .000$).

Highly connected students, in positive and negative

climates, were more likely to experience low levels of victimization. In positive school climates, 64% of highly connected students indicated low levels of victimization. In negative climates, 73% of highly connected students experienced low levels of victimization. These represent significantly higher proportions than would be expected if no relationship among connectedness, climate, and aggression existed. Although chi square statistics for distributions were significant ($p < .001$ for positive and negative climates), the relationship between connectedness and victimization in both types of climate was weak (positive climate $\phi = -.136$, $p = .000$; negative climate $\phi = -.103$, $p < .001$).

In these analyses, the distribution of students suggests strong school connectedness has a protective effect independent of school climate. Although the relationship between connectedness and aggression or victimization was not strong, these results indicate highly connected students, in both positive and negative school climates, are less likely to be perpetrators and less likely to be victims when compared to their schoolmates who experience low connectedness.

Do Differences in School Climate Alter School Connectedness?

The first two sets of analyses indicate a student's connectedness to school is predictive of aggression and victimization beyond the influence of the overall school climate. However, these analyses do not fully account for the interactive relationship between climate and connectedness. The final set of analyses determined if variations in school climate affect the protective influence of school connectedness on aggression and victimization: Does school connectedness have a protective effect beyond the climate in which it exists?

Intraclass correlations (ICC) determined if greater variation occurred among the 19 schools in the sample or within each school. Perpetration of Relational Aggression (ICC = .011, S.E. = .007) and Victimization (ICC = .05, S.E. = .022) (but not physical aggression) were significantly correlated with schools.

First, two dummy variables were created for school climate. In the first, one equals a negative school climate, (the lower one-third of the sample distribution of school climate), and zero equals an average or better climate. In the second dummy variable, one indicates a positive school climate (the upper one-third of the school climate distribution), and zero equals an average or poorer climate. Schools were categorized by climate, which was positive, average, or negative. Next, the school connectedness variable was centered using its mean to create a constant value representing the average student in terms of connectedness (mean = 2.84). Finally, two interaction terms were created for connectedness and climate, in which the centered connectedness variable was multiplied by each dummy climate variable.

Regression analyses were conducted with the three dependent variables: Perpetration of Physical Aggression, Perpetration of Relational Aggression, and Victimization. Independent variables included the school connectedness variable, the climate variables described previously, and the two interaction terms. The three school demographic variables, percent of minority students, size of school, and school performance scores, also were entered (Table 5).

In the regression models, the constant is an estimate of the dependent variables, aggression or victimization, indicated by a student in a school in a moderate climate, when all other independent variables are equal to zero. Results indicated a student with average connectedness attending a school with a moderate climate would be less likely to be physically aggressive controlling for all other independent variables ($b = -.874, p = .001$) (Table 5). However, moving the same student with average connectedness from a moderate climate to a positive climate substantially increased rather than decreased the likelihood of physical aggression, as indicated by a relatively large slope of 1.304 ($p = .002$). Percent of minority students in a school was the only other variable that significantly predicted physical aggression by a student in a school with a moderate climate and the effect was slight ($b = .007, p = .005$). The R-squared indicated that in combination these two variables explain 15% of the variance in physical aggression. ($p = .001$).

The measure of average connectedness was the only variable that contributed to predicting relational aggression (Table 6). The effect of average connectedness decreased the likelihood of relational aggression when the effects of all other independent variables are equal to zero ($b = -.607, p = .001$). The full model accounted for 7% of the explained variance.

In the final regression analysis, the full model predicted only 4% of the explained variance. Average connectedness decreased a student's likelihood of being victimized in a school with a moderate climate when other factors were controlled. Both percent of minority students and school size significantly contributed to the prediction of victimization, however, the effects of both were extremely small ($b = -.009, p = .01$ and $b = .001, p = .001$, respectively).

In summary, climate and connectedness independently predicted physical aggression (Tables 5-7). These results suggest one cannot assume that as school climate improves aggression or victimization will decline. Given the small R-

squares, neither climate nor connectedness alone or in combination with the demographic factors (school size and percent of minority students) explains much of the victimization or the physical or relational aggression experienced by students. Clearly, other factors are important behavioral influences.

DISCUSSION

Previous research suggests student perceptions and experiences of school climate affect academic, emotional, and behavioral development. In schools with warm and welcoming positive climates, and where students feel safe from harm and humiliation, students experience greater attachment and commitment.¹⁰ School climate, positive or negative, affects their sense of safety and risk for delinquency.¹ Furthermore, a negative school climate increases risks for serious violent offending.¹¹

Often the informal social norms that exist in the school

Table 6
Perpetration of Relational Aggression
on School Connectedness

	b	beta	Significance
(Constant)	1.515		.000
Average Connectedness	-.607	-.271	.000
Good School Climate Dummy Variable	.602	.197	.119
Bad School Climate Dummy Variable	-.261	-.095	.431
Connectedness* Good Climate	-.163	-.167	.202
Connectedness* Bad Climate	.123	.125	.293
% Minority	-.001	-.014	.562
School Size	2.40E-05	.006	.789

* R squared = 7%, $p = .001$

Table 5
Perpetration of Physical Aggression
on School Connectedness

	b	beta	Significance
(Constant)	.967		.000
Average Connectedness	-.874	-.347	.000
Positive School Climate Dummy Variable	1.304	.385	.002
Negative School Climate Dummy Variable	-.154	-.050	.667
Connectedness* Positive Climate	-.301	-.279	.028
Connectedness* Negative Climate	.070	.064	.579
% Minority	.007	.064	.005
School Size	-5.42E-05	-.013	.571

* R squared = 14.6%, $p = .001$

Table 7
Victimization on School Connectedness

	b	beta	Significance
(Constant)	2.389		.000
Average Connectedness	-.684	-.191	.000
Good School Climate Dummy Variable	.423	.087	.498
Bad School Climate Dummy Variable	-.347	-.079	.517
Connectedness* Good Climate	.047	.030	.821
Connectedness* Bad Climate	.109	.070	.561
% Minority	-.009	-.061	.010
School Size	.000	-.084	.001

* R squared = 4%, $p = .001$

social context exacerbate behavior problems, such as bullying and victimization.^{1,12-14} In research with a sample of 2,200 boys from 87 different high schools, Felson and colleagues found that individual schools had unique group cultures where approval for use of aggression was collectively determined.¹⁵ In the Felson et al study,¹⁵ the degree to which each school's culture condoned aggression varied, and was inversely correlated with the degree to which students valued academic achievement. The values and attitudes particular to a school's climate can support or discourage problematic behavior or pro-social behavior.¹⁶

Turning to school connectedness, one defines it as the degree to which a student experiences a sense of caring and closeness to teachers and the overall school environment.⁷ The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health)⁷ as well as other surveys^{7,17} measured school connectedness by asking students to respond to statements such as: 1) I feel close to people at this school; 2) I am happy to be at this school; 3) I feel like I am a part of this school; 4) The teachers at this school treat students fairly; and 5) I feel safe in my school. Each statement reflects an important and unique dimension of connectedness and social bonding.

In a study examining social factors that predict delinquency, Erikson and colleagues enumerated the process through which social bonds reduce delinquency.¹⁸ Though the term connectedness was not used in that study, connectedness is closely akin to social bonding. Among the types of bonds studied, a strong commitment to education significantly decreased adolescent delinquent behavior. Path analysis revealed educational commitment works indirectly through two intermediary variables, namely decreasing associations with delinquent peers and decreasing susceptibility to negative influences. The effects of the two mediating variables support differential association perspectives and social control perspectives, respectively, in explaining behavior and reducing delinquency. In addition, analysis demonstrated that teacher attachment also has a small but direct effect on delinquency reduction.

School connectedness or particular dimensions of it have been shown to effect academic achievement. For example, high school drop outs report not having a strong interest or sense of belonging in school.^{4,19} When asked why they left school, one-third cited not liking school.^{4,19} Poor relationships with teachers was another common reason.¹⁹ Both factors are associated with or thought of as dimensions of school connectedness. Weak connectedness also was associated with increased health risks that effectively detract from students' ability to focus on learning and to optimize achievement.⁵

Finn and Rock identified factors that predict academic success and resiliency for students at risk for school dropout or poor performance.²⁰ According to Finn and Rock, preparedness for and participation in class, avoidance of disruptive behavior, attendance, and timeliness predicted academic success. These behavioral indicators are also measures of school connectedness. Academically at-risk students who actively engaged in school performed far better academically than their non-engaged peers controlling for other factors such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, and family context. Finn and Rock suggested future studies endeavor to understand the mechanisms that foster academic engagement behaviors, specifically supportive teachers

and school and classroom organization, factors that impact students' connectedness.

From analysis of the Add Health Study, Blum and colleagues were able to specify school level characteristics that influence school connectedness,⁵ which were corroborated later by Hawkins and colleagues.²¹ They found that school size affects students' connectedness. Students in schools with enrollments between 300-900 students were more likely to feel connected to school and to each other than students in larger schools. Though classroom size has no effect, students who report being in organized and well-managed classrooms where they feel supported and respected, indicated a greater degree of school connectedness.²² Conversely, students in schools that exercise overly strict rules and harsh discipline policies generally experience lower connectedness.

Social networks also influence connectedness. The larger a student's network of friends, the stronger his/her connection will be to school. Racially integrated networks also positively affect connectedness. Students who report having friends of different races exhibit stronger connectedness. Ironically, students in more highly racially integrated schools generally indicate fewer racially integrated social networks. Finally, research has determined no association between school connectedness and typical demographic variables, such as race, age, and family.

Many school-level variables that affect connectedness are associated with school climate or are often considered dimensions of climate and included in its measurement. As such, in schools where students express a strong sense of connectedness, they generally report a positive school climate.⁵ This is not to say that all students in schools with a positive climate will feel connected, or that a positive climate is an absolute precondition to connectedness. While school climate appears to be an antecedent of school connectedness, prior to the present analysis there has been very little research exploring this relationship.

CONCLUSIONS

This analysis demonstrated that even a positive school climate does not always reduce the likelihood of perpetration of aggression and victimization. Likewise, a negative school climate does not necessarily increase that risk. Despite variations in climate, the amount of connectedness experienced by the average student appears to consistently contribute to predicting his likelihood of aggression and victimization.

Social pathologies, such as bullying and victimization, are complex behaviors. Strong student connectedness and healthy school climates are only pieces of the solution to these problems. Nonetheless, understanding the processes and mechanisms through which they operate advances efforts to reduce delinquency and to improve schools' ability to educate students. Future research should focus on these processes and mechanisms, as well as contextual determinants of connectedness and climate. Moreover, further investigation is critical in order to design and implement effective delinquency and school failure interventions.

Students have the right to an educational experience in which they feel valued and respected, where teachers and peers clearly and actively support their development and learning and where they are free from fear, threats and harm. Ensuring this experience for all students should be

the ultimate goal of all school initiatives.

Measuring and studying school climate and school connectedness is a difficult task. It is nonetheless crucial in informing students, parents and school professionals as to their efforts in creating an optimal learning environment for students. Students actively avoid school contexts in which they find an unpleasant climate or to which they feel out of place.³ On the other hand, when students, teachers and staff and parents collectively and consciously decide to improve a school environment, successful climate change is possible. It is our hope that the discussion started in this paper will lead to insight, research and interdisciplinary agreement that will inform research, and, in turn, will enhance school climate and promote efforts to develop stronger school connectedness for all students. ■

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79th



ASHA School Health Conference



October 19 - 22, 2005
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Physical activity and adolescent obesity will take center stage at the **79th Annual ASHA School Health Conference**.

- ★ **Connect** with school nurses, health educators, counselors, physicians and others.
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- ★ Share your experiences and **discover** creative school and community health programs.
- ★ Take home the most **current information** on teaching and caring for kids.

Program applications and more conference information will be available in October. For updates, go to the ASHA web site: www.ashaweb.org or contact ASHA at 7263 State Route 43 / P.O. Box 708, Kent, OH 44240; 800/445-2742; mbramsi@ashaweb.org.

Make plans to attend!