

PARENTS MAKE A Difference

Helping our teens by learning from the 2017
Youth Risk Behavior Survey of CESA 3 students

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Connecting Teens to Communities

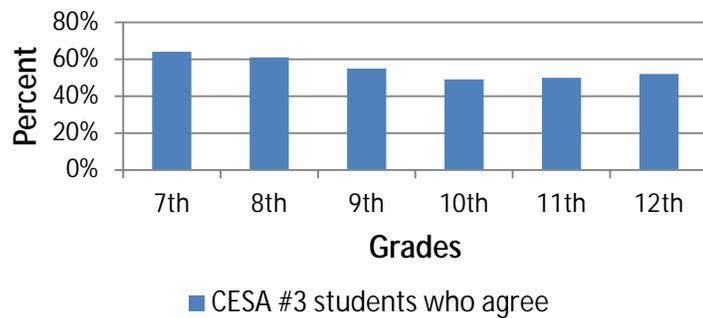
Connectedness...*a sense of place, respect, and belonging that comes from feeling like you are a valued member of a school and/or community.*¹

Young people want to be connected to their community. However, they often find themselves with no influence as a voter, an officer, or on any decision making bodies. Young people do not feel as if they have much say in their communities and government. They don't feel like their opinions matter.

Is that true for students in southwest Wisconsin?

In the 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) through the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, we asked 5,952 students from 25 school districts in CESA #3 about being connected in the community.

In your community, do you feel like you matter to people?



Although the majority of CESA #3 middle and high school students agree that they feel like they matter to people in their community (57%), more than 4 in 10 students (43%) disagreed with the question. Lack of participation and meaningful tasks can lead young people to be apathetic towards their communities or worse, act out against it. As students move from middle to high school, their need to do something with meaning and purpose beyond themselves increases. Seniors in high school are teetering on the edge of adulthood – they understand roles and rights, they are aware of policies and practices that affect their lives, they may be frustrated about lack of meaningful ways to contribute, and they may feel powerless to effect change.

87%

Youth need a minimum of 5 important adults to feel connected to school and 7 or more to feel connected to community.¹ A young person who has connections to adults in addition to his or her parents is learning to communicate with more people in different ways for advice and information. According to YRBS, 87% of middle and high schoolers in southwest Wisconsin have one or more adults besides their parents from whom they feel comfortable seeking help if they had an important question affecting their life.

Connected-Rich and Connected-Poor Youth

Adults and schools tend to select highly capable youth – the “connected-rich” for opportunities. This tendency widens the gap between connected-rich and connected-poor leading to negative outcomes for the youth and society as a whole. After doing the activity below, adults can consider or discuss challenges and opportunities to reach all youth.

Using a single sheet of paper for every youth, write their name on top. Ask all adults who interact with the youth to draw a star under each name that they feel connected to. It will quickly become apparent which youth are connected-rich and which are connected-poor.¹

Special needs youth should also be connected as much as other youth and need to be represented in all kinds of community projects. These youth may need more hands-on projects. His/her involvement will benefit other youth and the community.

PARENTS and ADULTS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

- See young people – let them know they are ‘visible’. Recognize teens by name. Shake their hand and look them in the eye. Most adults have absolutely no idea how powerful these simple interactions can be!
- Notice when teens are nervous or in need of an adult to listen.
- Give teens opportunities to try out new skills with limited barriers.
- Actively consider young people’s opinions and share power! Many community and government organizations are not set up to involve young people (adults set the agenda, time of day when youth cannot attend, etc.).
- Hold teens to high expectations. Expect them to be there and take part.
- Actively recruit connected-poor youth for involvement in school and community opportunities.

REMEMBER, the more connected youth feel in school, the more likely they are to feel connected to their community.¹

SOURCES:

1. Places to Be and Places To Belong – Youth Connectedness in School and Community, Janis Whitlock, ACT for Youth Upstate Center for Excellence, Cornell University

Getting Teens Involved in Community Activities, www.healthyfamiliesbc.ca

Youth Sense of Community; Voice and Power in Community Contexts, Journal of Community Psychology, August 2007

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