

REL Southwest Ask A REL Response

Educator Effectiveness

February 2019

Question:

What is the influence of students having trusting relationships with adults at school on student outcomes?

Response:

Thank you for the question you submitted to our REL Reference Desk. We have prepared the following memo with research references to help answer your question. For each reference, we provide an abstract, excerpt, or summary written by the study's author or publisher. Following an established Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Southwest research protocol, we conducted a search for research reports as well as descriptive study articles on the relationship between students' adult relationships at school and student outcomes.

We have not evaluated the quality of references and the resources provided in this response. We offer them only for your reference. Also, we searched the references in the response from the most commonly used resources of research, but they are not comprehensive, and other relevant references and resources may exist. References provided are listed in alphabetical order, not necessarily in order of relevance. We do not include sources that are not freely available to the requestor.

Research References

Davis, H. A. (2006). Exploring the Contexts of Relationship Quality between Middle School Students and Teachers. *Elementary School Journal*, 106(3), 193–224. Retrieved from https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/501483#metadata_info_tab_contents

From the abstract: “The purpose of this article is to introduce a framework for understanding relationship quality between middle school students and their teachers. The framework draws on findings from 3 literatures (motivation, attachment, and sociocultural) and from analyses of a year-long case study in a rural middle school. I begin with a brief overview of the framework and identify constructs from the literature incorporated into the framework. I describe the design and methods employed to explore student-teacher relationship quality and its effect on student motivation and achievement. Synthesizing across survey data from 905 students and 25 teachers, interview data

collected from 6 students and 6 teachers, and journal data from 28 teachers, I elaborate on 4 contexts I believe exert a press on teacher-student dyadic relationship quality. These include the context of the student, the teacher, the peers, and the interpersonal culture of the classroom and school. Finally, I explore the implications of the framework for practice, policy, and future research.”

Note: This article can be read online for free, after signing up with a valid email address at the link provided. At this site, six articles per month can be read for free.

Kiefer, S. M., Alley, K. M., & Ellerbrock, C. R. (2015). Teacher and peer support for young adolescents’ motivation, engagement, and school belonging. *RMLE Online: Research in Middle Level Education*, 38(8). <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1074877>

From the ERIC abstract: “The purpose of this sequential explanatory mixed methods study was to investigate teacher and peer support for young adolescents’ academic motivation, classroom engagement, and school belonging within one large, urban, ethnically diverse middle school. In the initial quantitative phase, associations among aspects of teacher support (autonomy, structure, and involvement), peer support (academic and emotional), and adjustment (motivation, engagement, and belonging) were examined using student surveys (N = 209, 61% females). In the follow-up qualitative phase, participants elaborated on the ways teachers and peers support young adolescents’ adjustment during individual interviews (N = 18 students, 5 teachers, and 1 administrator). Results indicate teacher and peer support are academic and social in nature and have unique implications for supporting motivation, engagement, and belonging in middle school. By utilizing a mixed methods design and adopting a multidimensional perspective of classroom-based support, our findings provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of teacher and peer support on student adjustment. An implication for educators is for them to understand the ways teacher and peer support may help meet young adolescents’ needs and promote their academic motivation, classroom engagement, and school belonging. Findings may inform middle level educational research and practice, especially in urban, ethnically diverse middle level schools.”

Juvonen, J. (2007). Reforming middle schools: Focus on continuity, social connectedness, and engagement. *Educational Psychologist*, 42(4), 197–208. Retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254303483>

From the abstract: “This article provides a brief historical context and analysis of current middle school reform efforts to promote student engagement by facilitating social relationships. International comparisons of perceived social climate are presented to assess whether sense of belonging and support are lacking in American schools. Research documenting associations between student engagement and relationships with teachers and fellow students, in turn, sheds light on when and why social connectedness matters. The article concludes with discussion of future reform goals and alternative strategies to foster student engagement by making middle grades more socially supportive.”

Kiefer, S. M., Ellerbrock, C., & Alley, K. (2014). The role of responsive teacher practices in supporting academic motivation at the middle level. *RMLE Online: Research in Middle Level Education*, 38(1). <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1039613>

From the ERIC abstract: “The purpose of this descriptive qualitative study was to investigate the ways teachers support young adolescents’ academic motivation in one large, urban, ethnically diverse middle school. Data included individual interviews of 24 participants (18 students, 5 teachers, and 1 middle school assistant principal). Findings suggested that the following may support student academic motivation: teacher-student relationships, teacher expectations, and instructional practices responsive to students’ basic and developmental needs. Further, the potential for educators to meet students’ needs and support their motivation may be maximized when such expectations and instructional practices are implemented within the context of high-quality teacher-student relationships. Drawing on the perspectives of both students and educators, these findings extend current research on academic motivation at the middle level by capturing the complexity of the phenomenon. An implication for educators is to understand the ways all three practices may help foster an environment responsive to students’ needs and support motivation. Findings inform middle level educational research and practice, especially in urban, ethnically diverse middle schools.”

Lee, J.-S. (2012). The effects of the teacher-student relationship and academic press on student engagement and academic performance. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 53(1), 330–340. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/19215111/The_effects_of_the_teacher_student_relationship_and_academic_press_on_student_engagement_and_academic_performance

From the abstract: “This study examined relationships between students’ perceptions of the school social environment and student outcomes, using U.S. data from the Program for International Student Assessment 2000 (OECD, 2000). The sample comprised 3748 fifteen-year-old 9th and 10th graders from 147 schools. The two-dimensional approach of parenting typology was here applied to the school environment. The results partially supported the advantage of authoritative schools with high levels of both demandingness (academic press) and responsiveness (the teacher-student relationship). Supportive teacher-student relationships and academic press were significantly related to behavioral and emotional student engagement whereas only the teacher-student relationship was a significant predictor of reading performance. The effects of the teacher-student relationship on student outcomes were not contingent on academic press of the school.”

Padilla, A. & Hipolito-Delgado, C. P. (2016). Empowering Chicana/o and Latina/o high school students: A guide for school counselors. *Professional School Counseling*, 19(1), 176–187. <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/51b3/b066a0f6ec08f4ee486677d1f5c76f8913be.pdf>

From the abstract: “A qualitative research study was conducted with 15 school counselors to identify the strategies they used to empower Chicana/o and Latina/o high school students. The findings of this study revealed that participants facilitated student empowerment by developing personal relationships with students, involving alumni,

building sociocultural awareness, and encouraging social action. Based on these findings, school counselors who seek to empower students are called to develop positive relationships, identify role models, and encourage community engagement.”

Patrick, H., Ryan, A. M., & Kaplan, A. (2007). Early adolescents’ perceptions of the classroom social environment, motivational beliefs, and engagement. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 99*(1), 83–98. Retrieved from <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.524.4650&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

From the abstract: “This research examined whether 5th-grade students’ (N = 602) perceptions of the classroom social environment (teacher support, promotion of mutual respect, promotion of task-related interaction, student support) were related to their engagement in the classroom (self-regulation and task-related interaction) and whether those relations were mediated by personal motivational beliefs (mastery goals, academic and social efficacy). Teacher support, promotion of interaction, and student support were related to both types of engagement, and those relations were fully or partially mediated by motivational beliefs. Relations with promoting mutual respect were not significant.”

Ruzek, E. A., Hafen, C. A., Allen, J. P., Gregory, A., Mikami, A. Y., & Pianta, R. C. (2016). How teacher emotional support motivates students: The mediating roles of perceived peer relatedness, autonomy support, and competence. *Learning and Instruction 42*, 95–103. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED565373>

From the ERIC abstract: Multilevel mediation analyses test whether students’ mid-year reports of classroom experiences of autonomy, relatedness with peers, and competence mediate associations between early in the school year emotionally-supportive teacher-student interactions (independently observed) and student-reported academic year changes in mastery motivation and behavioral engagement. When teachers were observed to be more emotionally-supportive in the beginning of the school year, adolescents reported academic year increases in their behavioral engagement and mastery motivation. Mid-year student reports indicated that in emotionally-supportive classrooms, adolescents experienced more developmentally-appropriate opportunities to exercise autonomy in their day-to-day activities and had more positive relationships with their peers. Analyses of the indirect effects of teacher emotional support on students' engagement and motivation indicated significant mediating effects of autonomy and peer relatedness experiences, but not competence beliefs, in this sample of 960 students (ages 11-17) in the classrooms of 68 middle and high school teachers in 12 U.S. schools.

Methods

Keywords and Search Strings

The following keywords and search strings were used to search the reference databases and other sources:

- “students” AND “trust” AND “relation*” AND “achievement”

- “trust” AND “adults” AND “achievement”
- “trust” AND “achievement”
- “youth-adult relationships” AND “trust”
- The impact of trust
- Student-adult relationships
- Trust culture
- Relational trust
- Resilience and trust
- Positive student relationships
- Positive relationships
- Caring relationships
- Student belonging
- (“Teacher Support”) AND (“Motivation” OR “Engagement” OR “School Belonging”)
- Teacher-student relationships
- Student-teacher relationships

Databases and Resources

We searched [ERIC](#) for relevant, peer-reviewed research references. ERIC is a free online library of more than 1.7 million citations of education research sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES). Additionally, we searched the [What Works Clearinghouse](#).

Reference Search and Selection Criteria

When we were searching and reviewing resources, we considered the following criteria:

- *Date of the publication:* References and resources published from 2003 to present, were included in the search and review.
- *Search priorities of reference sources:* Search priority is given to study reports, briefs, and other documents that are published and/or reviewed by IES and other federal or federally funded organizations, academic databases, including ERIC, EBSCO databases, JSTOR database, PsychInfo, PsychArticle, and Google Scholar.
- *Methodology:* The following methodological priorities/considerations were given in the review and selection of the references: (a) study types—randomized control trials, quasi-experiments, correlational studies, descriptive data analyses, literature reviews, mixed methods analyses, and so forth; (b) target population, samples (representativeness of the target population, sample size, volunteered or randomly selected, and so forth), study duration, and so forth; and (c) limitations, generalizability of the findings and conclusions, and so forth.

This memorandum is one in a series of quick-turnaround responses to specific questions posed by stakeholders in the Southwest Region (Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas), which

is served by the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Southwest at AIR. This memorandum was prepared by REL Southwest under a contract with the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences (IES), Contract ED-IES-91990018C0002, administered by AIR. Its content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.