KEEPING SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS CONNECTED TO SCHOOL WHEN SCHOOLING IS REMOTE

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WHAT IS SCHOOL CONNECTEDNESS AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Especially for adolescents?
SCHOOL CONNECTEDNESS IS...

- **Believing** you are welcomed, wanted, cared about, and needed in your school
- **Knowing** that you are known, able to find peers with similar interests, outlooks and experiences, able to help others, and feel that school policies are fair, supportive, and just
- **When school is a place you want to be**
FEELING CONNECTED TO SCHOOL IS VITAL TO ADOLESCENT HEALTH, WELL-BEING, AND EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

• It improves mental health
• It reduces drug and alcohol use, as well as teenage pregnancy
• It increases middle and high school grades, high school graduation, and college enrollment rates
WHAT MAKES A STUDENT FEEL CONNECTED TO SCHOOL?
STUDENTS WHO FEEL CONNECTED TO SCHOOL...

• **Have an adult in school**, who they believe knows about them and cares about them as an individual

• **Have a group of peers** they interact with and feel affinity with as a group
  – i.e. sports teams, theater crews, clubs, identity groups, circle of friends
STUDENTS WHO FEEL CONNECTED TO SCHOOL...

• **Engage in activities helping others**, either directly (e.g. tutoring, food banks etc.) or indirectly (e.g. environmental or social justice efforts)

• **Believe school is a welcoming place** to be
  – i.e. positive and supportive school climate
WHAT IS THE POTENTIAL IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON SCHOOL CONNECTEDNESS?
WHEN SCHOOLING BECOMES REMOTE, ESPECIALLY SUDDENLY, SCHOOL CONNECTEDNESS IS AT RISK

• Students are cut off from the face-to-face contact and the minor daily interactions that build connectedness
• Initially, adult focus will be elsewhere – on how to deliver instruction remotely

E-LEARNING

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WHEN SCHOOLING BECOMES REMOTE, ESPECIALLY SUDDENLY, SCHOOL CONNECTEDNESS IS AT RISK (cont’d)

• Teachers, administrators, and counselors will need to teach their students and support their families. This may reduce the energy, focus, and time available to support school connectedness

• It could become an out of sight, out of mind problem
WHAT CAN SCHOOL STAFF, PARENTS, AND COMMUNITIES DO TO BUILD SCHOOL CONNECTEDNESS WHEN SCHOOLING IS REMOTE DURING COVID-19?
Getting the Logistics In Place to Maintain Connections

• Is the phone number on record for each student up to date?
• Can students be provided school e-mail addresses?
• How can students be contacted, phone, text, email, social media, computer?
• If it is not known how to contact a student, is there a friend who would know?
FIND WAYS TO BUILD/MAINTAIN THE FOUR DRIVERS OF SCHOOL CONNECTEDNESS

• Students feel known and cared about as a person by a school staff member or person who works in the school
• Students interact with other students with shared interests and/or affiliations
• Students engage in activities they believe helps other people
• Students believe their school, even when virtual and remote, is a welcoming place
STUDENTS FEEL THAT SOMEONE FROM THE SCHOOL KNOWS AND CARES ABOUT THEM AS A PERSON

• **Maintain existing ties**
  – keep club and sports team structures intact, even as just a means for coaches and club leaders to check in on students

• **Ask teachers to reach out** to students with whom they have existing connections, provide time in a teacher’s workday for them to do this
STUDENTS FEEL THAT SOMEONE FROM THE SCHOOL KNOWS AND CARES ABOUT THEM AS A PERSON (cont’d)

• **Establish New Ties** - Use google docs and/or other digital tools, to have teachers in each grade identify students who may not have a strong connection to an adult in the school, and then identify an adult to reach out to the student

• **To create new possibilities** for connections, have both students and teachers, share hobbies or interests, that they are engaging in from their homes
  – Connect students and teachers with similar hobbies and interests
STUDENTS INTERACT WITH OTHER STUDENTS WITH SHARED INTERESTS OR AFFILIATIONS

- **Maintain existing student group structures**
  - sports teams, student government, model UN, debate team, drama club, 4-H club, robotics, chess, LGBTQ groups, etc.
  - Have club advisors engage the students in figuring out how to maintain student group activities remotely

- **Create new affinity groups or student partnerships linked to activities that can be done remotely**
  - online multi-player environments, radio plays prepared via conference calls, public speaking point-counter-point video presentations, team puzzle tournaments, etc.
STUDENTS ENGAGED IN ACTIVITIES THAT HELP OTHERS

• Set up peer coursework and homework “hotlines”
  – Ask students which subjects and age of children they feel comfortable helping
  – Have an adult from the school organize groups of tutors in their grade/subject

• Ask students to think of activities that help others, that can be accomplished with many individual efforts

• Have students use social media platforms to collectively promote social actions relevant to their community
SCHOOL IS A WELCOMING PLACE

• **Try to anticipate** and then address concerns students might have about how remote schooling might impact school activities or outcomes they care about

• **Create mechanisms** for students to provide voice and feedback on how best to conduct instruction remotely

• **Find alternative ways** of conducting or experiencing important school activities
ACT WITH EMPATHY, PRACTICE SELF-CARE, BRING ATTENTION TO IMPORTANT NEEDS, EVEN IF THEY MAY NOT SEEM LIKE IMMEDIATE CONCERNS

- Everyone is under stress, feeling isolated, and uncertain about their future
- Under conditions of stress and scarcity, humans focus on immediate needs – instruction, and can set aside acting on things that remain important to longer term success – school connectedness
ACT WITH EMPATHY, PRACTICE SELF-CARE, BRING ATTENTION TO IMPORTANT NEEDS, EVEN IF THEY MAY NOT SEEM LIKE IMMEDIATE CONCERNS (cont’d)

• To help our students through these times, we need to make sure we maintain the energy, focus, and hope to do both

• Making sure all students, especially the most vulnerable, remain connected to school, even when school is remote, is important
REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

- CDC School Connectedness Homepage
  https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/school_connectedness.htm

- School Connectedness: Strategies for Increasing Protective Factors Among Youth

- Why is School Connectedness So Important?
  https://www.childinthecity.org/2018/12/19/why-is-school-connectedness-so-important/?gdpr=accept