

Connections Screening

What is it?

The Connections Screening was developed by the Burrillville (RI) High School RTI/Problem-Solving Team to be used as a universal screening tool in the social-emotional domain. Information about personal connections within the school building is collected from students and faculty/staff each fall. The data collected from these surveys is used to assess the overall school climate and identify potentially at-risk students.

Why is it important to examine school connectedness?

There is extensive research about the importance of school connectedness, particularly for adolescents. For example, student and teacher connections are considered essential for success in secondary schools (Van Ryzin, 2010) and important for the overall social health of the school and for developing a positive context for learning (Doll, 2010). In addition, the CDC (2009) notes that students who feel connected to school are:

- More likely to attend school regularly, stay in school longer, and have higher grades and test scores.
- Less likely to smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol, or have sexual intercourse.
- Less likely to carry weapons, become involved in violence, or be injured from dangerous activities such as drinking and driving or not wearing seatbelts.
- Less likely to have emotional problems, suffer from eating disorders, or experience suicidal thoughts or attempts.

What is the purpose of the Connections Screening?

The purpose of the Connections Screening is to help identify potentially at-risk students in the social-emotional area by examining students' perceptions of connectedness with adults and peers in school. The data obtained from this screening can be used in schools initially to identify a target group of students who may need social-emotional intervention. In addition, Connections Screening data can be used in other ways to help students (e.g., help in choosing which adult might be best to approach a student who has started having difficulties; help in identifying peers who may be impacted by a serious situation, etc.).

What are the benefits of the Connections Screening?

The Connections Screening will help identify students who may be at social-emotional risk and offer insight into the designing of interventions for these students. The Connections screening will also help schools assess current school climate. When conducted annually, longitudinal Connections data can be collected that will help a school assess climate over time.

References

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2009). *School Connectedness: Strategies for Increasing Protective Factors among Youth*. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Doll, B. (2010). Positive School Climate: Strong Interpersonal Relationships and Ongoing Support for Students' Self-regulation Create a Positive Context for Learning. *Principal Leadership*, December, 12-16.

Van Ryzin, M. (2010). Secondary School Advisors as Mentors and Secondary Attachment Figures. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 38(2), 131-154.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the time commitment involved in the Connections Project?

- For building-level RTI/Problem-Solving Teams, it is a year-long process, divided into five phases. The actual survey administration, however, takes about 10 minutes to complete. Advisors simply read a provided instruction sheet to their students and then allow them to complete the survey. The Connections survey is administered during advisory in the fall (end of first quarter).

What does the role of a survey administrator (typically an advisor) entail?

- Reading the provided instructions for survey administration.
- Ensuring all surveys are placed in the envelope upon completion and selecting a student to bring the envelope to the main office.
- Completing your own survey (while the students work on their own survey).

How will the information gathered from the Connections Survey be used?

- The information gathered is used to help identify potentially at-risk students in the social-emotional area by examining students' perceptions of connectedness with adults and peers in the school. All the data is coded numerically so that no teacher names are seen in the data spreadsheet.

Can the survey results be used in educator evaluations?

- No! The purpose of the Connections Survey is to examine school wide data and identify an at-risk group of students. The goal of the survey is to support students and ensure that *they* feel connected to adults or peers in the school. Individual teachers are not looked at to see how many students list them as connections.

How is confidentiality ensured?

- All paper surveys are submitted by way of a sealed envelope in advisories. Advisors do not look at the completed surveys, and a student designated by the teacher is responsible for bringing the envelope to the collection box. Once all the surveys are collected, they are locked in a file cabinet. The information from the surveys is then entered into a de-identified spreadsheet (all data is coded numerically).
- Online surveys are completed by students on a device. The information is automatically exported to a spreadsheet through google, and all data is coded numerically.

How does the Connections Project relate to PBIS?

- Like PBIS, the Connections project takes a proactive approach to helping improve the lives of students. Involvement in this project may also help a school create a more positive school culture/environment.

How many schools currently participate in the Connections Project?

- Currently, 6 schools are participating in the Connections Project. These schools include both middle and high schools.

Who do I contact if I would like to join this project?

- The Connections screening was started at Burrillville (RI) High School in 2010 and has expanded into other school districts over the past years. For more information about this project, please contact Kim Pristawa, School Psychologist at pristawak@bsd-ri.net.