Social Responsibility and Connectedness
Links among Social Responsibility, Social and Emotional Learning, and Belonging

Social Responsibility

The term socially responsible behaviour highlights the importance of internalization… taking over the values and attitudes of society as one's own so that socially acceptable behaviour is motivated not by anticipation of external consequences but by intrinsic or internal factors…
Grusec & Goodnow

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

SEL is the process of acquiring the competencies to:
- **Recognize and manage emotions,**
- **Develop caring and concern for others,**
- **Establish positive relationships,**
- **Make responsible decisions, and handle challenging situations effectively.**

What do students like best about their teachers?

"I can go to her when I am upset and have a problem."

"Makes me feel confident in myself."

"She makes me forget all the bad stuff in my life."

"Teaches me what is friendly and fair."

"Encourages me to do my best."

"Cares about my education."

What we know

Vancouver public schools are at the forefront of a global movement towards educating "the whole child" – fostering students' social responsibility and social and emotional development and well-being alongside promoting their academic achievement. In 1997, British Columbia was the first place in North America to adopt social responsibility as one of its core performance standards, of equal importance to reading, writing, and numeracy.

Since 2001, the Social Responsibility and Diversity Staff at the Vancouver School District and Dr. Kim Schonert-Reichl and her graduate students from the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia have been partners in conducting research on identifying best practices in elementary schools for promoting students' social and emotional competence, social responsibility, and school motivation. These are just a few of the key findings from that research.

4 Key Findings

1. Dramatic changes occur between grade 4 and grade 7 in students' social and emotional well-being, social responsibility, and motivation.
2. Children's school experiences differ by grade level and gender.
3. The majority of children identify at least one significant school adult; and they can easily describe what makes that adult important to them.
4. Those students with one or more adults at school whom they identify as important to them have higher social responsibility and better school adjustment than those students who say that there are no adults at their school who are important to them.

Figure 1. Self-reported Social Responsibility across Gender and Grade Level

Generally, girls are more concerned with social responsibility than boys. Yet among both boys and girls, social responsibility tends to decrease as children reach the intermediate grades. Evidence across multiple local studies, however, indicates that prevention programs can significantly ameliorate this trend.[1]
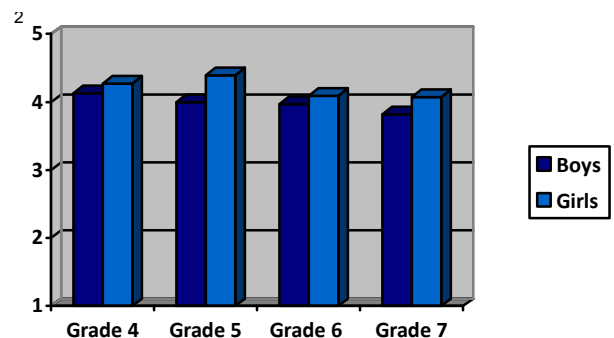
How do we foster social responsibility?

Empathy, Perspective-taking, Prosocial Goals, and Social Responsibility Goals were all found to be positively (and statistically significantly) related to students'

- ✓ **Classroom Autonomy** ("a voice in the classroom")
- ✓ **Classroom Supportiveness** ("feeling supported by peers and teachers in the classroom")
- ✓ **School Belonging** ("feeling connected to the larger school community")

[1] Baseline data obtained from the United Way study (Schonert-Reichl, 2007), and evaluations of the Roots of Empathy (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2009) and Second Step (Grossman et al., 1997) programs have shown that aggression increases and prosocial behaviour decreases over the course of the school year. These studies have also shown that prevention programs can successfully ameliorate this trend.

Protective factors for students

Individual assets
- **Positive peer group**
- **Problem solving skills**
- **Communication skills**
- **Positive conflict resolution skills**
- **Positive sense of self**
- **Takes responsibility for own behaviours**
- **Empathy and sensitivity towards others**

Family assets
- **Positive adult role models**
- **Positive communication within the family**
- **Parental involvement in child's life**
- **Clear rules and consequences within the family**
- **Time with family**

School assets
- **Connectedness to school**
- **Supportive school environment**
- **Participation in after school activities**
- **Effective involvement in the school**
- **Relationship with one significant adult**

Community assets
- **Connectedness to community**
- **Positive and clear community norms and values**
- **Effective prevention policies**

Advice from the experts

Students in Grades 4-7 express what they like about school...

"There is diversity of after school activities."
"There are lots of kids in the school to hang out with."
"There are lots of funny teachers."
"Lots of people who care about me."
"You can learn a lot."

Know the ABC's of Social Responsibility

Classrooms that best fulfill students' psychological needs are those that allow them opportunities for:

Autonomy **B**elonging **C**ompetence*

*Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior. New York: Plenum.

Figure 2. Perceived Classroom Environment of Students and Teachers

Overall, teachers overestimated how well their classroom environments met their students' needs for autonomy, classroom support, and school belonging.
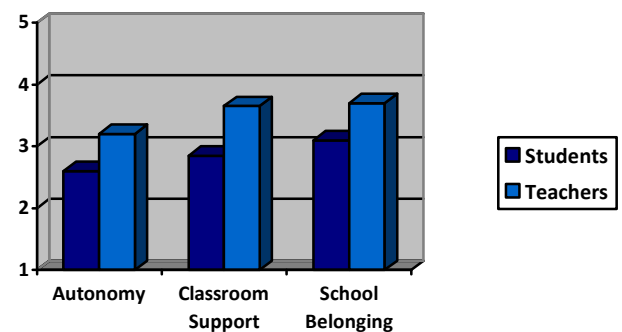

Figure 3. Impact of the Number of Significant Adults on Students' School Adjustment

Previous research has linked significant adults to fostering resilience in children and adolescents.

Students in Grades 3-7 who reported having significant adults in their lives felt more confident in their abilities in school, and scored higher on measures of prosocial behaviour and social responsibility. Having the support of only one adult was enough to make a difference. Confidence increased with the number of significant adults they could think of.
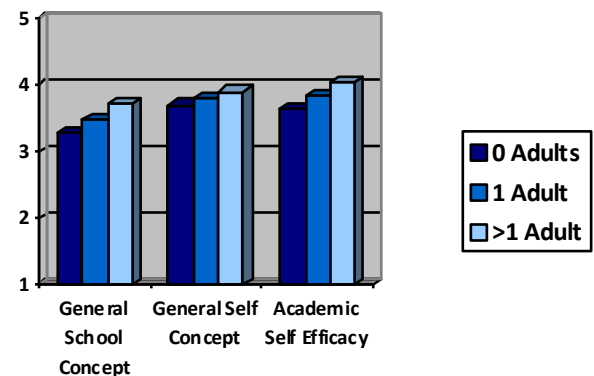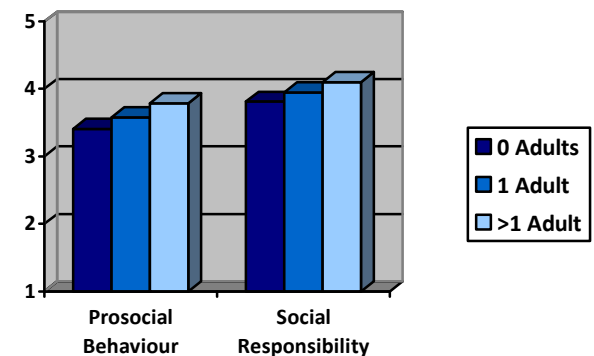

Figure 4. Impact of the Number of Significant Adults on Students' Social Adjustment

"…the research evidence is astoundingly clear – fostering students' social emotional skills not only helps them to develop the skills necessary for success in schools, such skills assist them to become more caring, responsible, and concerned citizens."
– Kimberly Schonert-Reichl, PhD

[2] Scores presented are averages out of 5, with higher scores indicating more desirable outcomes (e.g., greater social responsibility (Figure 1), more positive perceptions of classroom environment (Figure 2), more positive self-concept and greater self-efficacy (Figure 3), and better social adjustment (Figure 4).