

**School Connectedness Elementary Survey**  
**Sudbury Public Schools**  
**January 2010**  
**Interpretations by Stan Davis**

1167 students in grades 3-5 completed a survey based on bullying prevention research and on the Wingspread summary of research on school connectedness. The Wingspread declaration (<http://www.jhsph.edu/wingspread/Septemberissue.pdf>), a 2003 compilation of a wide range of research about schools, states:

“Students are more likely to succeed when they feel connected to school. School connection is the belief by students that adults in the school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals. Critical requirements for feeling connected include students’ experiencing:

- High academic expectations and rigor coupled with support for learning
- Positive adult-student relationships
- Safety: both physical and emotional

Increasing the number of students connected to school is likely to impact critical accountability measures, such as:

- Academic performance
- Incidents of fighting, bullying, or vandalism
- Absenteeism
- School completion rates

Strong scientific evidence demonstrates increased student connection to school promotes:

- Educational motivation
- Classroom engagement
- Improved school attendance

These three factors in turn increase academic achievement. The findings apply across racial, ethnic, and income groups. Likewise, strong evidence exists that a student who feels connected to school is less likely to exhibit:

- Disruptive behavior
- School violence
- Substance and tobacco use
- Emotional distress
- Early age of first sex

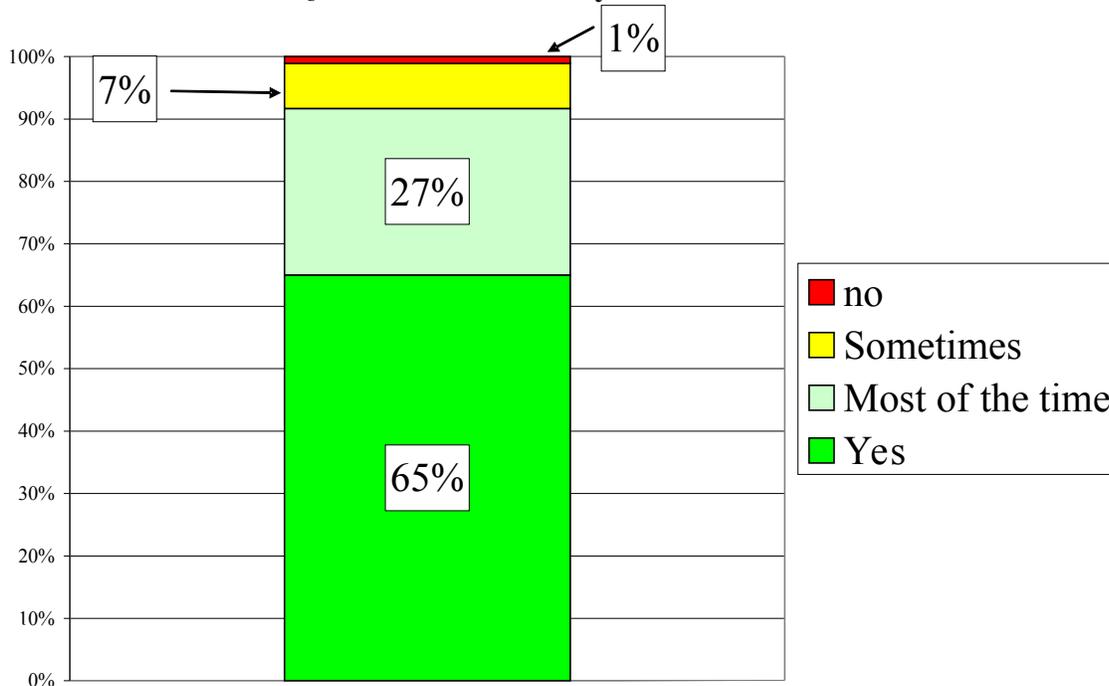
Based on current research evidence, the most effective strategies for increasing the likelihood that students will be connected to school include:

- Implementing high standards and expectations, and providing academic support to all students
- **Applying fair and consistent disciplinary policies that are collectively agreed upon and fairly enforced**
- **Creating trusting relationships among students, teachers, staff, administrators, and families**
- Hiring and supporting capable teachers skilled in content, teaching techniques, and classroom management to meet each learner’s needs
- Fostering high parent/family expectations for school performance and school completion
- **Ensuring that every student feels close to at least one supportive adult at school”**  
(emphasis added, in bold text, to identify the elements focused on by this survey)

### Indicators of connectedness and emotional safety systemwide:

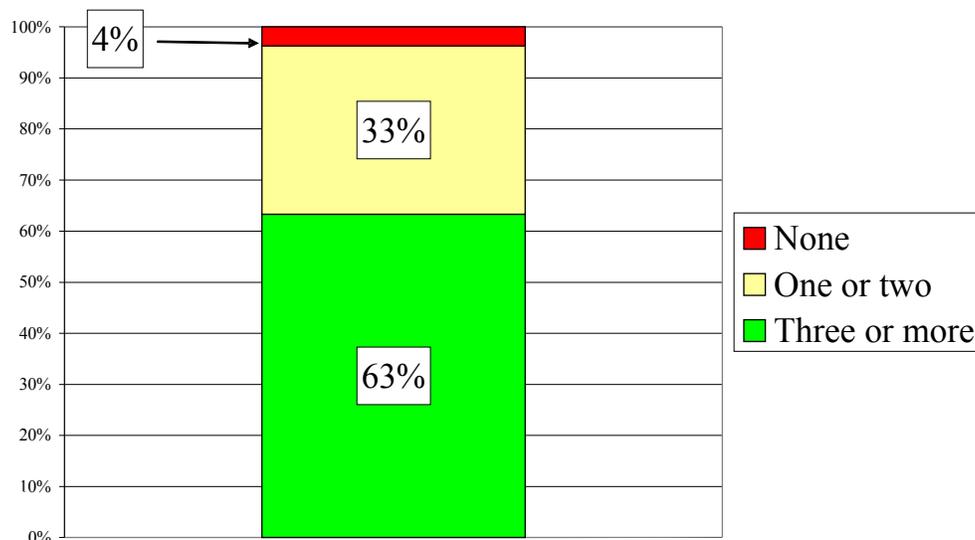
A very large majority of students report feeling welcomed by adults at these schools. Though this may seem a natural or expected state of affairs in an Elementary School, many Elementary School students do not report a sense of being welcomed at this high level. This level of welcome is a tribute to staff and administrators' efforts to connect with, greet, and maintain positive interactions with all youth.

#### Do you feel welcomed by adults at school?



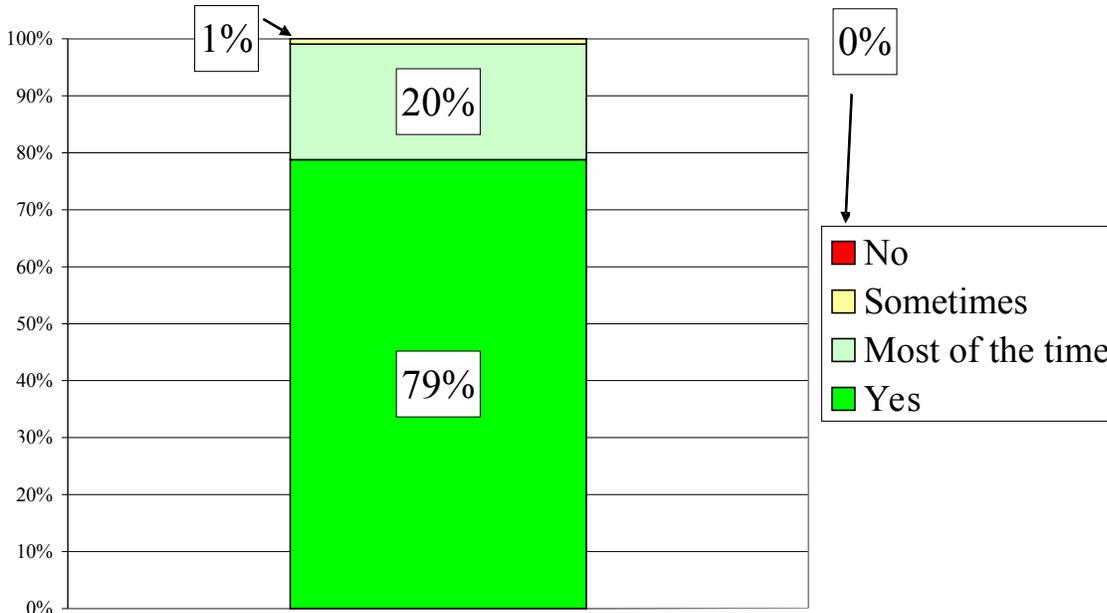
As described in the Wingspread declaration, it is important that every student feel close to at least one adult at school. 96% of Sudbury elementary students report having a positive relationship with at least one adult at school; 4% of Sudbury elementary students report that they have a positive relationship with no adult. The 32% of students with positive relationships with one or two adults may be less securely connected with school than those with positive relationships with three or more.

#### How many adults at our school do you have a positive relationship with??



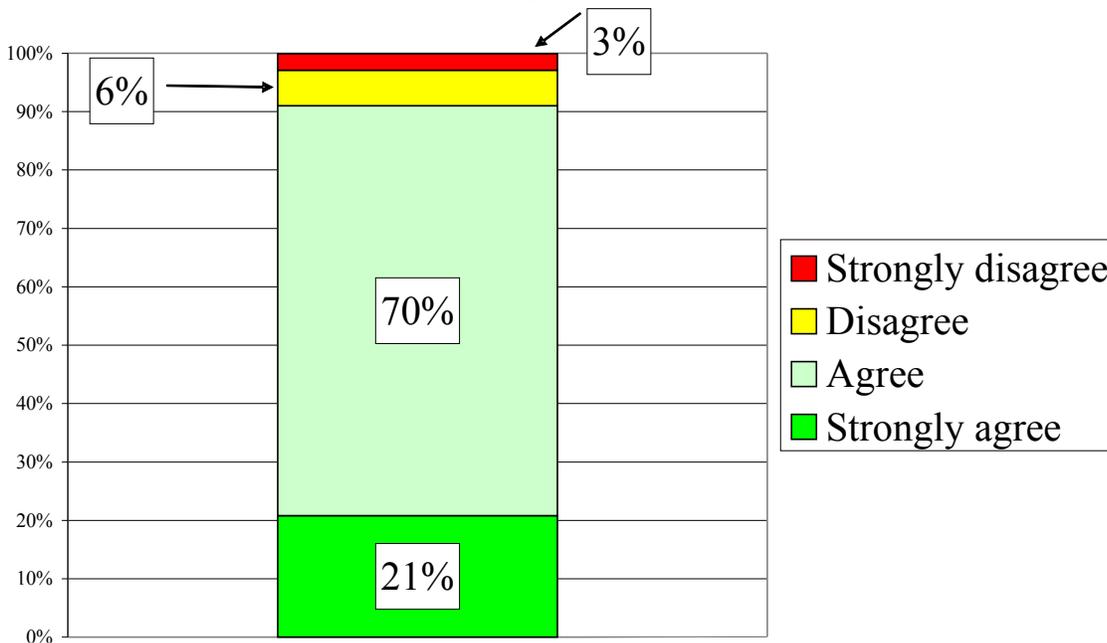
Staff members surveyed report a positive assessment of their colleagues' staff-student interaction:

**Staff perceptions of staff-student feeling tone Elementary Schools**  
**Do Staff members maintain positive emotional tone with students?**  
212 staff responding winter 2009-2010

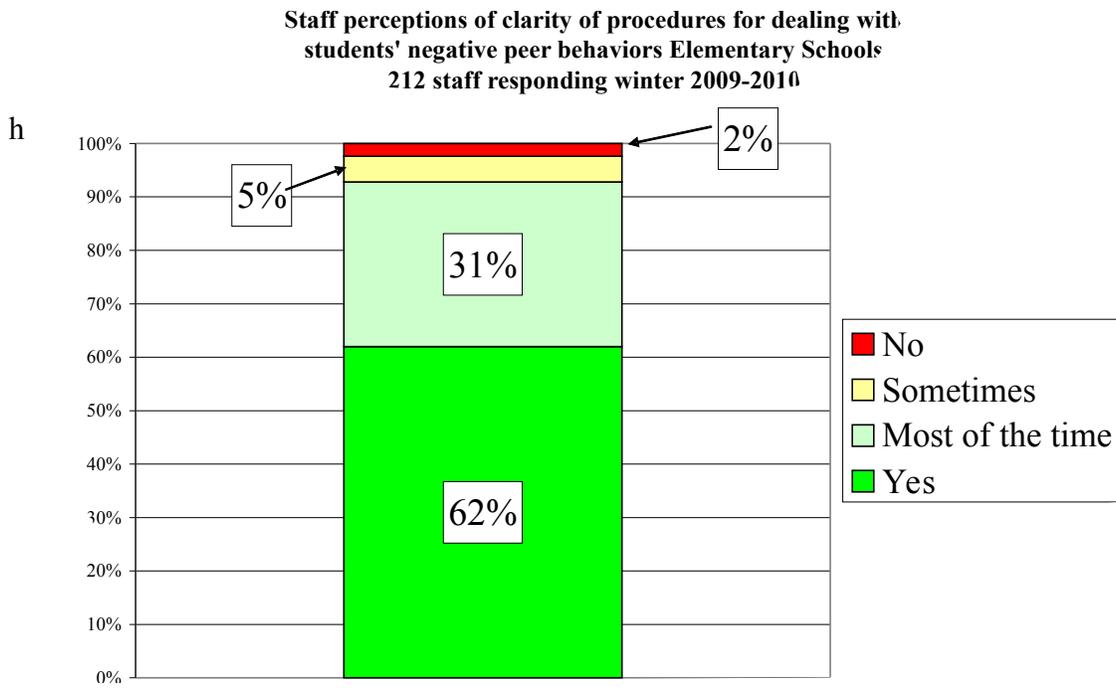
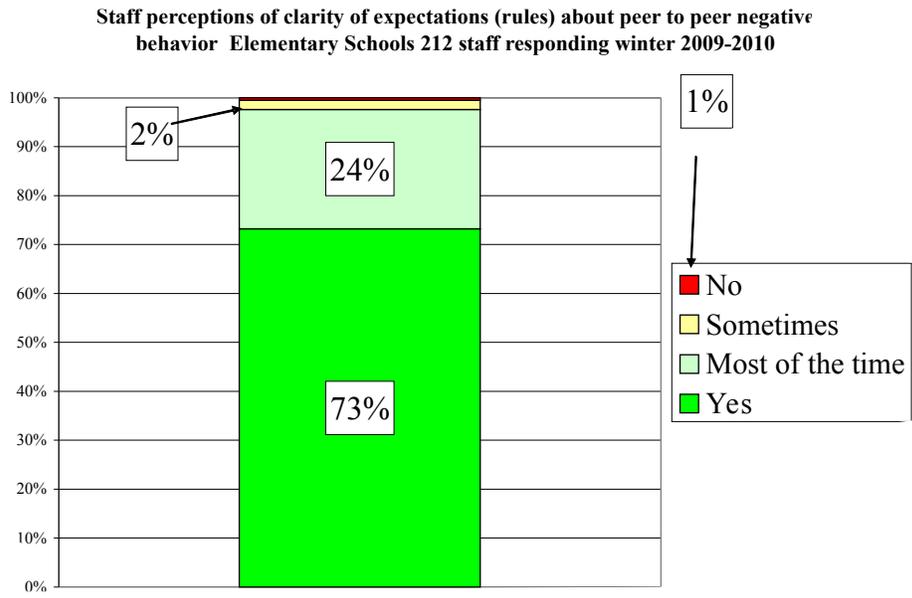


Another key element of school connectedness and safety is a fair, consistent discipline system. More than 90% of students surveyed said they agree or strongly agree that the school discipline system is fair. This is a very positive indicator of staff efforts to maintain consistent supervision, treat different students consistently, and use helpful rather than punitive interventions when behavior is a problem.

**Elementary student survey:**  
**Do you think discipline at school is fair ?**

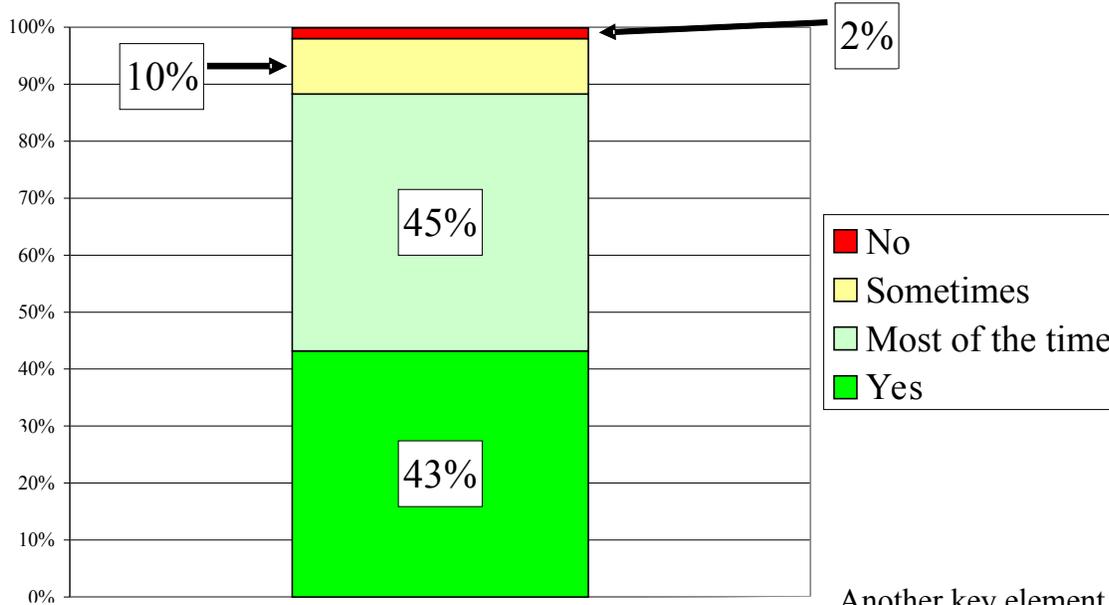


Fairness and consistency of discipline in schools is based on clear staff agreements about which student actions are not allowed and what is to be done about those actions. Having worked with schools all over the United States, in Canada, and in Africa, I know that reaching these agreements take significant staff and administrative effort and collaboration over time. Echoing what students said in surveys, Elementary Staff surveyed said there is a high level of clarity about expectations and (to a slightly lower degree) about procedures to be used.



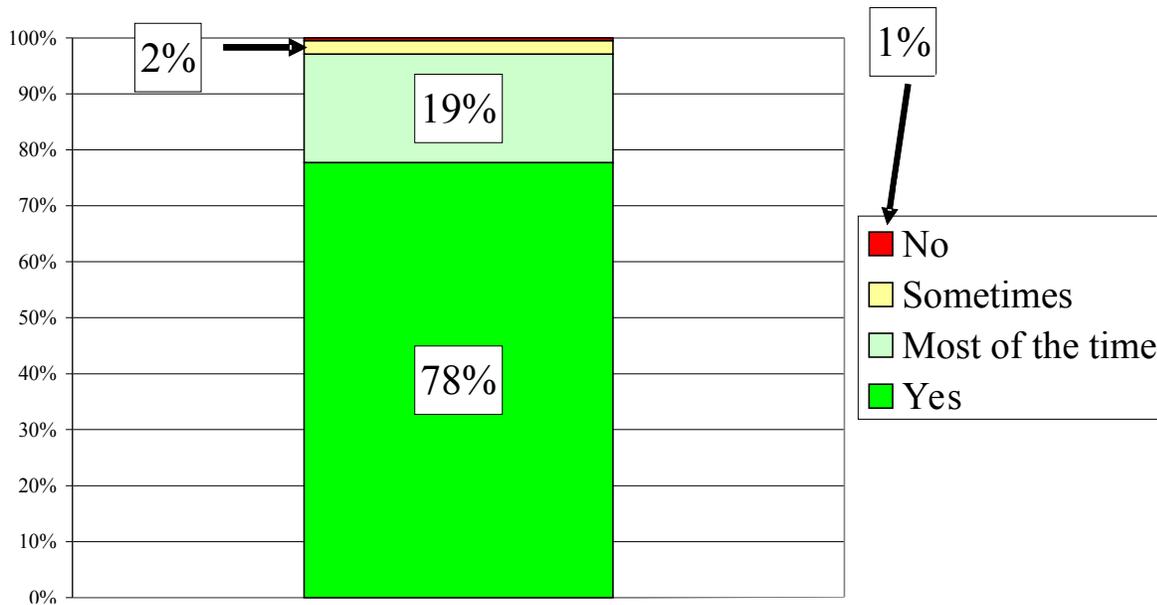
Consistent staff follow through is based on clarity of expectations, clarity of procedures, and staff buy-in and is a difficult element to achieve in schools because of the complexity of student behavior and the many other responsibilities educators have. Fewer staff answer this question: "Yes" than for the previous questions, indicating some room for growth in this area.

**Staff perceptions Elementary Schools**  
**Are staff consistent in dealing with negative student behavior toward peers?**  
 212 staff responding winter 2009-2010



Another key element of discipline effectiveness is consistent follow through by administrators. More than 75% of staff report that administrators follow through consistently.

**Staff perceptions Elementary Schools**  
**Are administrators consistent in dealing with negative student behavior toward other students?**  
 212 staff responding winter 2009-2010



75% of students who reported that peers hit them, threatened them, called them names, or stopped them from having friends said they told an adult. This level of seeking help from adults is a positive indicator of student-staff connectedness and trust. Even more significant is students' reports of the extent to which telling an adult led to things getting better for them. In the national Youth Voice Project survey of more than 10,000 students in grades 5-12 which I am conducting with Dr. Charisse Nixon, students report that telling an adult in their schools leads to things getting better only slightly more often than it leads to things getting worse. The national ratio is 1.4:1. Yet Sudbury elementary students report that telling an adult is four times as likely to lead to things getting better as it is to lead to things getting worse. (4:1). This is an important and positive measure of the responsiveness of Sudbury elementary staff and administration.

### **Frequency of negative peer behaviors**

In the past month, 27% of all students reported being called mean names once a week or more. 11% said they were hit or threatened once a week or more. 10% said students tried to stop them from having friends in some way or spread rumors about them.

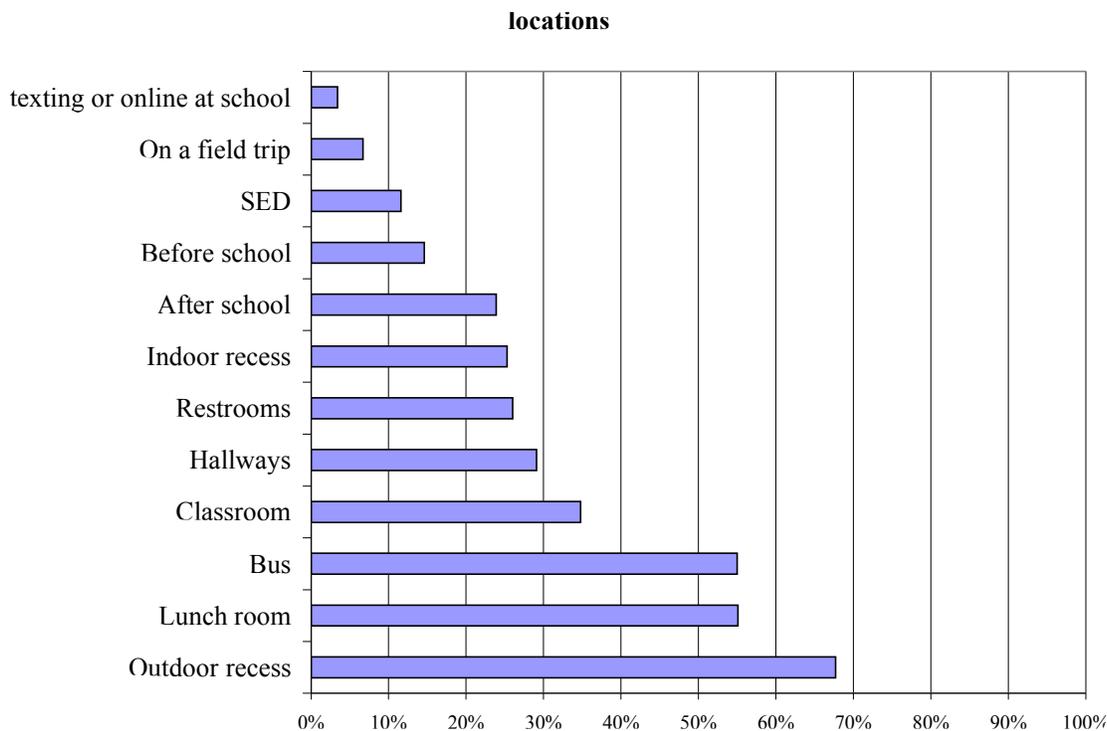
### **Observation of specific negative behaviors:**

This list summarizes students' ratings of the frequency with which they observed different negative peer behaviors. Overall, negative behaviors were seen much less frequently by Sudbury elementary students than by those at other schools I have surveyed. In most schools there are six or more behaviors- some quite serious- rated over 2.5. These are mean ratings, for which 4= daily, 3= 2 or 3 times a week, 2= weekly, and 1= once in a month.

- 2.6 Cutting other students in line
- 1.4 Negative facial expressions (eye rolling, sticking out tongue)
- 1.3 Talking negatively behind someone's back
- 1.3 Namecalling of other students (you're mean, you're no good at sports, stupid)
- 1.2 Use of language like: that's retarded or that's so gay
- 1.1 Pushing/Shoving/Slapping/Running into other students roughly
- 1.1 Negative or rude gestures
- 1.1 Starting or spreading rumors (true or false)
- 1.1 Exclusion: stopping someone from having friends or participating in an activity.
- 1.0 Choosing not to be someone's friend
- 1.0 Taking things that belong to other students
- 0.9 Namecalling based on ability, either intelligence or athletic
- 0.8 Namecalling based upon body shape or size
- 0.8 Punching, Kicking, or Jabbing
- 0.7 Namecalling based on gender (whether you are a boy or a girl)
- 0.7 Threatening to leave someone out of a group or activity
- 0.7 Swearing at someone
- 0.7 Namecalling based on disability
- 0.7 Namecalling based on what someone has or doesn't have (big house, smaller home, video games, laptop)
- 0.7 Threatening to hurt someone or to break something
- 0.5 Touching, kicking, or grabbing private parts of other students' bodies
- 0.3 Namecalling based on the color of your skin or your religious beliefs

### Locations:

These were the locations identified by students where they observed negative peer actions. It is important to learn what is being done in locations where little negative peer behavior is reported so techniques used there can be generalized to other areas.



### Students' thoughts about reporting negative peer behaviors to adults:

This list represents the number of students who believe that peers should tell adults for each behavior. These percentages are strikingly larger than at most schools and, I believe, represent the high level of trust and connection identified by Sudbury Elementary students. Your students seem to differentiate well between different behaviors in terms of telling adults.

- 89% Touching, kicking, or grabbing private parts of other students' bodies
- 87% Punching, Kicking, or Jabbing
- 86% Swearing at someone
- 82% Pushing/Shoving/Slapping/Running into other students roughly
- 82% Threatening to hurt someone or to break something
- 70% Namecalling based on the color of your skin or your religious beliefs
- 67% Namecalling based on disability
- 66% Use of language like: that's retarded or that's so gay
- 62% Taking things that belong to other students
- 56% Namecalling of other students (you're mean, you're no good at sports, stupid)
- 56% Namecalling based upon body shape or size
- 56% Starting or spreading rumors (true or false)
- 55% Exclusion: stopping someone from having friends or participating in an activity.
- 53% Namecalling based on ability, either intelligence or athletic
- 52% Talking negatively behind someone's back
- 52% Threatening to leave someone out of a group or activity
- 48% Negative or rude gestures
- 46% Namecalling based on gender (whether you are a boy or a girl)

- 38% Namecalling based on what someone has or doesn't have (big house, smaller home, video games, laptop)
- 35% Choosing not to be someone's friend
- 31% Negative facial expressions (eye rolling, sticking out tongue)
- 25% Cutting other students in line

### **Differences by student characteristics:**

#### **Gender**

\*Females are slightly more likely to report feeling welcomed to school by adults and slightly less likely to report feeling welcomed to school by peers. Significantly more female students than male students report that discipline is fair (5% no vs 11% no), though large majorities of both groups report fairness.

\*Among students identifying themselves as male or female, twice as many males said they had **no** positive relationships with staff as females (4% vs. 2%). Among students who said they prefer not to answer this question, 14% said they have positive relationships with no staff.

\*For students who said they told staff about peer mistreatment, the ratio between “things got better” and “things got worse” was 3.6:1 for males and 5.2:1 for females.

\*20% of males reported that they were called mean names at least once a week, as compared to 9% of females.

\*7% of males said they were hit or threatened once a week or more, as compared to 2% of females

\*4% of males said they were excluded once a week or more, as compared to 3% of females

#### **Learning center**

\*Students who get help from the learning center identify feeling slightly more welcomed by staff than students who do not attend the learning center and slightly less welcomed by peers than to students not attending the learning center.

\*Students who get help from the learning center describe discipline at school as fair slightly more than do students not attending the learning center.

\*Twice as many students who get help from the learning center identify having no positive relationships with staff as students not attending the learning center (6% vs 3%)

For students who said they told staff about peer mistreatment, the ratio between “things got better” and “things got worse” was 3.6:1 for students attending the learning center and 4.7:1 for those who do not.

\*There are no significant differences between youth who attend the learning center and others in how often they reported negative peer behavior toward themselves.

#### **Summary**

- The data from this student and faculty survey indicates that the Sudbury Elementary schools are doing an exemplary job in two areas: connectedness with students and responsiveness to student reports of mistreatment. There are indications that young people getting learning center or speech services are more likely to be disconnected from staff and peers than those not getting these services. They are also less likely to report a positive outcome when telling adults about a peer issue than do their peers not getting this help. Both these patterns also hold true for males as compared to females. Even for these groups showing less connection and less responsiveness, the schools compare well to other schools- and these differences should be addressed.
- Most students describe discipline as fair, though males are less likely to say this than are females.
- Staff report a relative strength in connectedness and positive feeling tone and are somewhat less likely to report consistency in working with negative peer behaviors.
- There are small inter-school differences in data, described in separate Excel reports
- Overall students report lower levels of moderate to serious negative peer behaviors compared to other schools I have worked with, and more willingness to tell adults when negative behaviors are observed than in many schools. This willingness to tell adults speaks well of the extent to which students trust adults to respond well to reports.

