

Building Interconnectedness:

A Study of High Schoolers and Their Expectations for Their Schools

Abstract

The primary purpose of this study was to discern what schools can do to build interconnectedness. Interconnectedness is a term used to describe the amount of support students feel, the safety of the school environment, and the effectiveness of communication between teachers and students. This study was also intended to evaluate the amount of interconnectedness at Tottenville High School. Participants were drawn from Tottenville High School's student and staff population. First, students and teachers were surveyed to determine the level of interconnectedness at Tottenville and the areas in which it is weak and strong. Afterwards, selected students were interviewed about their high school experiences and any suggestions they have to improve Tottenville. Surveys revealed that students trust friends, but not classmates, that they sometimes feel supported by teachers, but do not believe the administration has their best interests in mind. While many teachers mostly believe that they should attempt to help students develop positively in and out of the classroom, many are unwilling to spend more time working, and some feel they need more training. Interviewed students mostly bolstered survey data, but had few practical suggestions. This may be because they have never seen an environment with high interconnectedness, and do not know how to replicate it. They were articulate when voicing concerns, and these concerns illustrate specific problems in Tottenville. This study was more effective at revealing problems with interconnectedness than solutions.

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Since I began teaching at Tottenville High School in the fall of 2007, I have been comparing it to my alma mater, St. Benedict's Prep, and it has often suffered in comparison. While Tottenville has many disadvantages beyond the control of anyone in the building, most notably size, there is one huge problem I have observed which can be remedied. Tottenville students often seem disconnected from each other and the school at large. This is not to say that they dislike the school, or have no friends, but they do not feel any great loyalty to the school, and many do not feel that they have any great support network.

Many Tottenville students seem apathetic at best and selfish at worst. Even those who are ambitious feel that they are alone, that they are able to succeed at Tottenville based on their own efforts and talents, but that they do not necessarily have any help. Many Tottenville students slip through the cracks, graduating without ever realizing their full potential. Even the most successful students must deal with enemies in the building, as Tottenville students compete with each other rather than offering support. Students are loyal to their friends, and often little else. The least ambitious value friendship above all else, the most ambitious like their friends, and oppose everyone else.

Furthermore, though there are about 4,000 students in the school, the same few seem to achieve the most. Many students use drugs, some during the school day. Everyone in the building knows that students sneak out into the woods next door to the school during their lunch periods to smoke. Most seem to see this as the problem of the individual students. School security may try to stop the students, but few people view student drug use as a school problem. When I began to look into some of the problems at Tottenville, the word that came up most frequently in my

research was interconnectedness. Interconnectedness is the notion that students should be part of a larger community, where they feel that fellow students, staff, and the community at large support them. Schools with high interconnectedness have lower rates of substance abuse, lower risk of student suicide, and high student achievement. While other factors may influence some of these issues, school atmosphere has a huge impact on students, and schools can do more to control this than anything else.

While I am not focusing on all aspects of interconnectedness in my research, it is a multidisciplinary field, and a full understanding of interconnectedness requires knowledge of sociology, biology, and developmental psychology. The study of interconnectedness emerged from studies of developmental psychology. Researchers became interested in studying marginalized students, especially the poor (Jessor, 1993). Studies showing the similarities and differences between poor and wealthy/middle class adolescents, as well as white and minority adolescents, gave a more complete understanding of adolescent development (Jessor, 1993) and can be used to alleviate social problems as well as aid adolescent growth in schools. Developmental psychology, influenced by Bronfenbrenner's social contexts, is also interested in the effects of external factors, such as schools, peers, and churches on adolescent development (Jessor, 1993). While Bronfenbrenner was more interested in family development (Bronfenbrenner, 1986), his overlapping social contexts inspired studies of schools, especially studies of the role of schools in adolescent development. One of the goals of developmental psychologists was righting wrongs and helping at-risk students succeed (Jessor, 1993).

Obviously, school atmosphere is a major issue. In America, especially cities, schools have focused on cutting back on violence, so students feel safe learning (LeBlanc, Swisher, Vitaro and Tremblay, 2008; Rubinson 2002; Marin, Brown and Child, 2008; Axelman, 2006; American

Psychologist, 2008¹). Bullying, gangs, and disruptive students are obvious problems, and students struggle to perform in schools where these things are allowed to happen. When students feel unsafe at school, they are unable to learn, so schools have attempted to make schools feel safer. Worse, studies have shown that students who feel unsafe are more likely to drop out of school or transfer (Ainley, 2006; American Psychologist, 2008).

Unfortunately, it is extremely difficult to define a safe school. Verbal bullying, and social ostracizing are equally large problems, and students who face these types of harassment have just as many problems reaching their potential as those who face more obvious threats. Ainsley's study showed that bullied students were more likely to drop out, regardless of academic ability (Ainley, 2006). Schools have enough trouble keeping the weaker students in the building. They cannot afford to lose the strong ones due to bullying. While the definitions of bullying and unsafe schools have been expanded (Young, Hardy, Hamilton, Biernesser, Sun, and Niebergall, 2009; Marin et al, 2008; Barboza, Schiemberg, Oehmke, Korzeniewski, Post, and Heraux, 2009), and schools try new interventions when schools feel unsafe (Young et al, 2009; LeBlanc et al, 2008; Rubinson 2002; Marin et al, 2008,), recent studies show that bullying still remains a huge problem.

Even students who feel safe are often frustrated by their schools. They feel alone and unsupported, and they do not perform as well in school as those who feel safer. Many schools have large numbers of frustrated students. These students have high potential, but fail to reach it. Studies have shown that many of these students drop out, abuse drugs, or attempt suicide (Axelman, 2006; Beattie, 2007; LaRusso, Romer, and Selman, 2008). Axelman studies public high schools in Chicago, which attempted to enforce many rules in order to make students feel safer. Through his interviews, he discovered that even the best students were frustrated by the

¹ No authors given.

rules. Many even felt that the school was discriminating against them by enforcing dress codes. As opposed to feeling safer, these students felt they were being harassed, and were therefore less likely to attend school. Furthermore, the rules did nothing to prevent dangerous behavior, as students who were active in gangs found new ways to show their colors, without violating the school dress code. Beattie researched a school located in a Canadian city, full of at risk students, most of whom had dropped out of traditional schools due to frustration. They thrived in an environment with fewer rules, but a more carefully enforced honor code. By contrasting common school practices with a new model in which teachers offer more support to change school culture, LaRusso, Romer and Selman (2008) were able to show that schools students need to feel respected in order to perform well, and that many students, especially minorities, do not feel respected in their schools. By increasing respect, schools can hope to become less frustrating places for students, and therefore keep their students in the building and learning as much as possible.

While frustration is a serious problem, many students feel unsafe as well as disrespected. Many schools have attempted to make students feel safer by penalizing all rule breakers. Zero tolerance policies were created to improve schools, but often failed to take into account severity of offense, mitigating circumstances, and context of offense (American Psychologist, 2008). American Psychologist analyzed many schools with zero-tolerance policies, and saw many disenfranchised students, who felt harassed by unreasonable rules or, more often, unreasonable consequences for rule breaking. Even if zero-tolerance policies had the desired effect, which they often did not, they also frustrated innocent students. Even the best-intentioned decisions, such as dress codes in a Chicago school created to minimize gang colors often end up disenfranchising the wrong students. Even as gang colors are hidden, innocent students are insulted by faculty,

and feel alienated by the adults who are supposed to be helping them (Axelman, 2006). Therefore, schools are disenfranchising students whom they are supposed to be helping, and these students are less likely to perform to their ability. Furthermore, studies of school environment have demonstrated that schools which create a positive, mutually respectful culture have more students develop positive qualities (academic success, maturity, social graces), and fewer instances of violence and bullying than schools with simply attempt to enforce rules (LaRusso et al, 2008; Marin et al, 2008; Beattie, 2007). LaRusso, Romer and Selman showed that students feel frustrated and disrespected when rules are over-enforced. Marin, Brown, and Child's study focused on one suburban middle school's interventions with a group of bullies. While the school used seemingly effective and fair methods to deal with the problem, the bullies simply became more subtle, until the victim transferred. The authors suggest that schools need to make students not want to bully, rather than simply responding when bullying happens, but have no idea how to do this. Another portion of their study, which focused on schools as a whole rather than individual students showed that high schools with civically involved students had less bullying and higher academic achievement. They are not sure how to encourage civic involvement, just as they are not sure how to make students not want to bully, but their research shows a connection between the community and the individual student's behavior and achievement. Beattie's school's honor code appeared to be working, but this was a small, alternative school, and its methods may not be applicable to larger, traditional institutions. These diverse studies show that school location and race and socio-economic status of students do not have the same effect as school environment. If schools are able to create a respectful environment, which cannot be done by simply creating and enforcing rules, their students will be more likely to succeed.

Furthermore, studies have shown that adolescents require autonomy to develop properly (Axelman, 2006; American Psychologist, 2008; Marin et al, 2008). In Axelman's school, even those students who continued to show up despite their frustration and anger with school policies were not given the opportunity to fully develop, and were therefore poorly prepared for adulthood. The students studies by American Psychologist had a thorough understanding of specific rules, but did not understand the reasoning behind those rules. Zero tolerance policies by nature take away student autonomy. Even the schools that do create safe environments with zero-tolerance policies hinder students' development. The students may feel safe, but they are still unlikely to reach their full potential because their natural development is restricted.

Rather than penalizing students who make mistakes, more effective schools focus on helping students to develop properly so that they are less likely to bully (Young et al, 2009; Marin et al, 2008). Young, Hard, Hamilton, Biernesser, Sun and Niebergall studied a diverse student middle school, and discovered that mandated anti-bullying rules did not change much, but teachers working anti-bullying themes into daily lessons helped make gradual changes. These changes helped students to develop positive peer bonds, while feeling supported by staff. Stewart's study of African American high school students showed that students who feel those types of connections and are allowed some input into their own educations, and view their education in the context of their communities are less likely to bully others, abuse drugs and attempt suicide (Stewart, 2007). While Stewart's research showed that neighborhoods can influence students' behavior and performance, schools have more of an effect, and the most effective ones created supportive connections while developing autonomy. Various studies, including Ainley's extensive study of Australian schools, Opdenakker and Van Damme's comparison of smaller and larger British schools, Beattie's analysis of a small, alternative

Canadian high school, and Marin, Brown, and Child's study of schools across America, have also shown that students from schools that allow students to develop in this way perform better on comparable tests than their peers from schools that do not foster student development (Ainley, 2006; Opdenakker and Van Damme, 2007; Beattie, 2007; Marin et al, 2008). They have concluded that students from these more supportive schools are also more likely to mature into productive, mature adults, who are active and helpful in their communities. Ainley has already seen some tangible evidence in Australia. Furthermore, if teachers and staff focus on adolescent development, they are more likely to catch warning signs quickly, which is helpful in proactively dealing with potential problems, as well as preventing suicide and drug abuse. Students who are more active in school are less likely to abuse drugs and behave aggressively. Active teachers catch problem behaviors faster, and increased communication helps schools keep problem behaviors from escalating, no matter what specific rules are in place (Young et al, 2009). Studies showed that schools with high collaboration and communication had better behaved students and less substance abuse (Rubinson 2002; Collaboration for Academics and Substance Abuse, 2008²). Furthermore, schools that increased collaboration and communication were able to decrease existing problems (Rubinson, 2002). Unfortunately, Rubinson was unable to explain how to improve these factors, especially in a large building. Furthermore, collaboration and communication may improve interventions, but they do not necessarily prevent problems from developing at all, or create the systemic change that researchers such as Ainley and Beattie encourage.

Barboza, Schiamberg, Oehmke, Korzeniewski, Post, & Heraux 's study of the contexts of bullying showed that peer relationships are a key factor in development, and that positive peer relations are a key component of healthy development, but that students with negative peer

² No authors given.

relations are more likely to bully. (Barboza et al, 2009). Stewart's study showed that schools that fostered positive peer relations boasted healthier development and higher academic achievement than schools that did not, even in similar neighborhoods (Stewart, 2007). Brand, Felner, Seitsinger, Burns, and Bolton quantified personal growth and reported that schools with positive environments, a major component of which was positive peer relationships, had higher personal growth scores, as well as higher test scores (Brand, Felner, Seitsinger, Burns, and Bolton, 2008). Other studies also reiterated the importance of positive peer relationships to healthy development (LeBlanc et al, 2008; Marin et al, 2008). Schools that attempt to enforce anti-bullying rules from the top down inevitably fail (Young et al, 2009). At one school teachers enforced rules to stop bullies, but the bullies adapted, abusing their victim in subtle ways, which teachers and administration could not see, but which still scarred the victim until he transferred (Marin et al, 2008). Students who report negative peer pressure are more likely to use drugs and struggle in school (LaRusso et al, 2008), while positive peer pressure is extraordinarily beneficial to students. Multiple studies, of many students, in many countries and neighborhoods agree that schools that holistically build student relationships, that focus on helping students mature while developing close bonds are extremely successful at stopping bullying and have better adjusted, higher performing students (Stewart, 2007; LaRusso et al, 2008; Ainley, 2006; Young et al, 2009; Brand et al, 2008; Opdenakker et al, 2007; Beattie, 2007; American Psychologist, 2008; Marin et al, 2008). Schools that focus on specific rules, meanwhile, fail to prevent bullying, but alienate even those students who would not have bullied in the first place (see above).

Some countries, such as Australia, have attempted to force schools to foster interconnectedness rather than penalizing offenses (Ainley, 2006). Many of the most successful schools around the world already do this (Ainley, 2006; Beattie, 2007). Many schools do not

understand exactly how they have created interconnectedness, however. Furthermore, many of the schools that have been most successful at creating interconnectedness have been smaller ones (see above). Therefore, there are few practical applications of studies of those schools for larger schools. Large schools may be able to make broad conclusions based on the results of researchers such as Beattie, but do not have specific interventions from those studies. Furthermore, most studies have focused on the importance of interconnectedness. Therefore, they have analyzed which schools have high levels of interconnectedness and the effects of interconnectedness on students, but have rarely taken the next step and analyzed how successful schools created interconnectedness. While some studies have made broad suggestions on creating interconnectedness (American Psychologist, 2008; Beattie, 2007; Brand et al, 2008; LaRusso et al, 2008; Opdenakker, 2007; Stewart, 2007; Young et al, 2009), they do not give specific strategies. It is simple to see that schools have high interconnectedness, but difficult to see how they have done this. Smaller schools tend to have higher interconnectedness (Opdenakker, 2007; Beattie, 2007), but since schools are not shrinking any time soon, especially in New York, this knowledge is not particularly helpful to urban educators hoping to develop interconnectedness.

Interconnectedness is particularly important when one considers the importance schools have on students' development. Schools serve most students, and sometimes schools end up responsible for students' mental health, especially because schools are one of the few places where nearly all adolescents end up. The Collaborative for Academics and Substance Abuse argues that it is the responsibility of schools to monitor students' mental health (Collaborative for Academics and Substance Abuse, 2008), while LaRusso, Romer and Selman have shown that schools that take an active interest in students' mental health have lower instances of drug use,

and that all schools, whether or not they want to, have a huge effect on the mental health of their students (LaRusso et al, 2008). Even in safe schools, individual students may be at risk due to external issues, or personal problems. Students who require more help are more likely to receive it in schools with high interconnectedness. They have a large safety net of peers and teachers, and studies, either anecdotal or comparative, suggest that students at schools with higher interconnectedness are less likely to slip through the cracks (Beattie, 2007; Marin et al, 2008; Rubinson, 2002; LeBlanc et al, 2008; Brand et al, 2008). Schools that focus on interconnectedness are most likely to help the students who are most at risk.

Interconnectedness has the potential to be a great equalizer in education. Students who felt high school attachment and school commitment, had positive interactions with peers, and productive parent child discussions performed better academically and had fewer psychological problems (Stewart, 2007). Meanwhile, school involvement, parental school involvement and *socioeconomic status*³ had a low effect on achievement and psychological problems (Stewart, 2007). Put simply, no matter where schools are, no matter how involved parents are, schools that are able to make students feel connected to their schools and encourage positive peer interaction have higher academic achievement and healthier students (Stewart, 2007; Marin et al, 2008; Beattie, 2007).

Purpose

While current research has done an excellent job illustrating the importance of interconnectedness, there is little information on how to build it. Articles encourage schools to encourage effective student to student and student to teacher communication, but do not explain how schools have done this (or failed to do it). I plan to use my research to begin to alleviate this problem. I did not have the time or resources to study effective interventions, but I was able to

³ Italics mine.

students about their interactions with teachers and peers. Through my surveys, I was also able to see which areas Tottenville was strong in, and which needed improvement. I found out from students some types of positive interactions, and where students feel they have been failed.

Through speaking to teachers, I was able to see areas in which students and teachers disagreed about building atmosphere. In the study conducted by Brand et al, 2008, students and teachers disagreed about the atmosphere of their school. I would like to see if this is a common problem, if students and teachers in my school seem to work in a different building, because I feel this would decrease any sense of community. There was enough data to suggest that students and teachers were not on the same page, but not enough to make any strong conclusions.

Many of the past studies have either focused on teachers and administrators, or simply analyzed schools. Very few researchers (Beattie, 2007 is an exception) dedicated much time to speaking to students. The focus of my research will be the students. Interconnectedness by nature is student centered. It is not forced from the top down, but is developed at every level. I hope that by speaking to students I will develop a better understanding of what they expect from their schools. In that way, I hope to be able to make suggestions to schools about how to encourage interconnectedness. Through my research, I hope to answer the question “how can high schools build interconnectedness for their students”.

Method

My sample came from Tottenville High School. I surveyed and interviewed students and teachers. I used surveys to analyze the level of interconnectedness at Tottenville, as well as which areas of interconnectedness are strong and which are weak. Next, I surveyed teachers to find out how willing they are to spend time fostering interconnectedness, and whether they feel

they are able to positively affect students through personal interactions. Lastly, and most importantly, I interviewed a few students to discover some strategies schools and teachers can use to develop interconnectedness.

After obtaining consent from the Principal, I will be surveyed⁴ 44 Tottenville High School students. I was limited to the students in my Latin classes. I chose to interview second year Latin students, because they are older and have a better knowledge of Tottenville than their younger peers. Latin students are in the Tottenville High School Classics Institute, an elite honors program, and, while they are treated better than their classmates in general education, they also have higher expectations for their school and are therefore more likely to complain when things do not go well for them. They are also under a tremendous amount of pressure to succeed, and are highly competitive.

I also surveyed teachers. After obtaining consent from the principal, I placed surveys⁵ in the mailboxes of each faculty member. I do only received 24 surveys back, which is problematic, as there are over 200 teachers at Tottenville. My sample may have been flawed, because more dedicated teachers are more likely to take the time to complete a survey, but I do not have the clout to force teachers to spend their time completing a survey, and I do not expect anyone else in the building to pressure my peers into completing them either. Despite this limitation, my survey at least gave me some idea about teachers' attitudes about their roles in their students' lives and the amount of interconnectedness currently at Tottenville. It also allowed me to compare student and teacher perceptions about the building in which they work.

Finally, I interviewed four seniors. I personally selected students whom I know and trust. I asked them a series of open ended questions about their experience at Tottenville⁶, their

4 See appendix a for survey.

5 See appendix b for survey.

6 See appendix c for interview questions.

perceptions of interconnectedness in the building now, and their ideas to improve interconnectedness. While they may not speak for the entire student body, by selecting these students myself, I ensured that I received thoughtful and honest answers for the most important part of my research.

Results

The greatest weakness in my surveys is the scope. Due to difficulty in obtaining consent, I was forced to start collecting data much later than I wanted to, and I was not able to survey as many students as I would have liked. As I said earlier, I was limited to my honors students, so I can only guess the feelings of the general (or special education) population at Tottenville. Furthermore, very few teachers (24 out of over 200) returned the surveys. I was not expecting a huge number of returns, but this seems like a hopelessly small number. Therefore, all teacher data and the conclusions I draw from it must be taken with a grain of salt. I am not sure how to improve teacher participation, but I would certainly need to in order to draw any firm conclusions about interconnectedness from the faculty.

Part 1: Student surveys

Having collected data from students, a vast majority of whom are white (39 of 44, with two East Asian students, one Middle Eastern, one black, and one Hispanic) and female (36 of 44), I divided said data into sections. Questions 1, 5, 8 and 16 dealt with relationships with friends⁷. Questions 2, 3, 4, 10, 11, 12, 17 and 18 dealt with relationships between classmates⁸. Questions 6, 7 and 13 dealt with perception of teachers⁹. Questions 14 and 15 dealt with

⁷ Appendix D.

⁸ Appendix E.

⁹ Appendix F.

perceptions of administration¹⁰. Finally, questions 9, 19 and 20 dealt with overall feelings of trust and support¹¹.

The most positive responses came in the friend section. On all four questions, more than 80% of students felt confident that their relationships were positive. They trust their friends, and believe that their friends care about them. While this is an area Tottenville seems to be performing well in, it is debatable that Tottenville can take any credit for it. While I should have asked when students formed friendships, I know from casual observations that many of these relationships developed before the students even walked into the building. Therefore, these relationships may have been strong before students started high school, and Tottenville's only contribution was not weakening them.

Classmate data is more important, as Tottenville has some control of interactions between classmates in the building, while friends spend a large amount of their time together elsewhere. Unfortunately, classmate data was less positive. Students were rarely overtly negative about their classmates, but did not feel confident in their trust. Many students answered agree with reservations or disagree with reservations to questions 3, 4, 11 and 17. Many students believed to some extent that their friends would rather be the best than see their peers succeed, and while most agreed that they would rather help their classmates than outperform them, few answered this question with much confidence. These students are competitive and aware of it, and believe that their classmates are more interested in outperforming them than helping them. It is entirely possible that this competitiveness comes from the school itself. If it does, the school needs to figure out a way to foster cooperation rather than competition, because right now, the competitive attitudes of the students diminishes their ability to trust their classmates and

¹⁰ Appendix G.

¹¹ Appendix H.

willingness to help them. Unfortunately, I did not think to ask students what makes them so competitive, so I do not know if the school is creating the problem, or simply doing a poor job of dealing with it. A future project could study the nature of competition in schools and how to stop it. Past research has shown that excessive competitiveness is bad for students, and Tottenville students are certainly competitive.

Bullying is a more serious problem than competition, and, while most (83.3%) of the students surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that they would never bully another student and most (68.2%) agreed that they had not been bullied, 45.5% could not answer with confidence, stating that they either agreed with reservations, or disagreed with reservations, that they had been bullied in the past. Once again, this indicates a lack of trust in the building. If students cannot answer with complete and total confidence that they have never been bullied, then they do not completely trust their classmates, and do not have necessary support networks in school. Furthermore, only 9.1% of students agree or strongly agree that students at their school rarely *pick on* each other rather than *bully* each other. Even if bullying in the worst sense is not going on at Tottenville, the high percentage of students who believe their classmates pick on each other again reveals a problem building positive peer relationships. Since schools with high interconnectedness have high levels of positive peer relationships, this is a serious shortcoming at Tottenville.

I did not expect to see the discrepancy between friends and classmates. I assumed that if students had positive relationships with friends, they would have positive relationships with all peers. Instead, Tottenville seems to have small groups of close friends who trust each other, despite the fact that there is a small amount of trust in the building. This is dangerous, because many students need a large network of support, and instead seem to rely on a small circle of

people. Tottenville (and other schools like it) should look into ways of building supportive relationships rather than competitive ones. While it seems that there is no need for Tottenville to enforce anti-bullying rules, it does not have the holistic, positive attitude that the most interconnected schools studied have.

When asked about their teachers, students again tended to answer with reservations. While 86.4% of students agreed that their teachers care about them outside of class, 22.7% only agreed with reservations. Furthermore, 40.9% only agreed with reservations when asked if they would feel comfortable speaking to a teacher if they had a problem. Students should be able to trust their teachers with complete and total confidence, and many definitely do not. While different students react to teachers in different ways, the school can and should do more to ensure that students trust their teachers without reservations.

Part of the problem is that students question teachers' ability to effectively notice problems. 43.2% of students surveyed agreed with reservations that teachers do not notice when students are picking on each other, and another 11.4% agreed or strongly agreed. This is a disturbingly high number. I should have done more research on this aspect of the school. I do not know if this number was inflated because most of the problem behavior happens outside of the classroom (where deans and security rule) and teachers simply do not see it, or if students feel that teachers are oblivious to a problem in front of their eyes. Furthermore, I did not specify how many teachers. If students feel that one or two of their teachers do not notice students picking on each other, that is much less of a problem than if a vast majority of teachers do not notice. While this data suggests a problem, its scope is unknown, and it is impossible to analyze exactly what the problem is without further research.

The biggest concern about the data on teachers is that my sample was honors students. Good students are more likely to have positive relationships with teachers, as they are usually better behaved and more interested in academics. These relationships are necessary because honors students spend more time in school due to the nature of their classes. They need to be able to turn to people in the building. I would expect general education students to have less faith in their teachers, and am concerned about the honors students who are not confident in their teachers.

While students were not sure how they felt about their teachers, there was no question how they feel about the administration: they do not trust it. Only 18.2% agree or agree strongly that the administration is aware of their concerns, while even fewer, 11.4%, agree or strongly agree that the administration bases its decisions on student input. This is an area in which perception and reality are different. Administrators are concerned about students, and based staff development this year on information from student surveys last year. That said, in terms of interconnectedness, perception is reality. If students do not feel supported, they do not receive the benefits of interconnectedness. Many students would greatly benefit if they believed that adults in the building were aware of their needs and listening to them, but few believe that they are. Much of this is unavoidable in a school with around 4,000 students, but Tottenville clearly needs to improve somehow.

Questions 9, 19 and 20 dealt with trust. I wanted to know if students had anyone outside of their families whom they felt they could trust. This is especially important for students whose families do not offer them the necessary support, and is the reason interconnectedness needs to exist. If schools are interconnected, even the most at risk students can improve. In an ideal school, students have multiple people to turn to. I asked if students felt they had *one* person.

Tottenville did not inspire much confidence. When asked if they felt alone when things went wrong for them, 25% agreed with reservations, and another 29.5% disagreed with reservations. Considering the ambiguity of this question, students with positive family relationships would have disagreed as well as those with positive peer or teacher relationships. Therefore, it is incredibly problematic that so many students were not sure if they could trust anyone. Furthermore, when the issue was narrowed to school, and students were asked to respond to the prompt “when I have a problem I have people at school that I trust to help me,” only 59.1 agreed, or strongly agreed. While this is not terrible, too few students feel confident in their school.

Interestingly, most students (72.8%) disagreed or strongly disagreed when asked “if I cannot talk to my parents about a problem, I do not know who to turn to.” I cannot figure out why there is such a large discrepancy between two similar questions, or why the question that should have inspired more negative responses inspired more positive ones, but this issue casts some amount of doubt onto this section of the survey. A question I would like to ask in the future is “where do you turn for help when you have a problem,” as that would clarify whether students trust the school or turn to outside sources for help. While these questions suggest that Tottenville students do not feel sufficiently confident in the school, especially when they have problems, more research is needed to state this fact with any confidence.

Part II: Teacher surveys

Teacher surveys were sorted into five groups. Questions 1, 7 and 15 dealt with teachers’ comfort level with students¹². Questions 2, 5, 6, 8 and 9 dealt with perceptions of duty – whether they felt the need to teach more than simply the basic content of their classes¹³. Questions 3 and 4 focused on bullying¹⁴. This was an area I could have improved upon. I only asked teachers

12 Appendix I.

13 Appendix J.

14 Appendix K.

questions about bullying, while I asked students about both bullying and picking on. Therefore, I have less data than I would like from teachers. In general, I should have asked teachers more questions. While I was more interested in a student centered project, by focusing too little on teachers, I gave myself less material for comparison than I would have liked. Questions 10, 11 and 12 dealt with training¹⁵. Questions 13 and 14 dealt with how much effort teachers were willing to put into their work and how much work they felt they were doing¹⁶. The greatest limitation of my teacher survey is the section I left out: administration. I did not realize how strongly the students would feel about the administration, and therefore did not think it was important to ask the teachers. As it turned out, this was a key issue, and one about which I know too little. While some questions relate to the administration, I should have asked a few explicit questions about teacher-administrator relationship. One surprise was the lack of correlation between age or experience and answers to survey questions. I expected younger teachers to be more interested in helping students, and older ones less likely to spend more time working, but many old teachers said that they would work more, and many younger teachers felt they were only responsible for class content. Background questions did not prove to be important.

Teachers viewed their relationships with students as positive. Most enjoy spending time with students. They also believe that their students trust them – 79.2% agreed or strongly agreed that their students were comfortable speaking to them about problems and 75.0% agreed or strongly agreed that their students trust them for advice. This seems positive, until considering that only 38.6% of students surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that they trust their teachers when they need to discuss problems. It is possible that teachers base their positive perceptions on a small number of students. Further research could be done to ascertain the reason for this

15 Appendix L.

16 Appendix M.

discrepancy. In any case, teachers feel that their students trust them even when their students do not. This must change if students are to seek the support they often need.

Although teachers enjoy the time they spend with their students and believe that their students trust them, too few believe that it is their duty to help students develop into responsible adults. While certain countries such as Australia (Ainley, 2006) mandate that schools help students develop into responsible citizens, America (and New York) do not. Therefore, while many teachers believe that they are responsible for teaching more than basic class content, and attempt to be accessible to students, only 50.0% agree or strongly agree that the school is responsible for helping the students develop into responsible adults, and only 39.1% agree or strongly agree that the school is responsible for the mental health and well being of the students. Therefore, those students who need additional support from the schools due to problems at home face teachers who do not believe it is their job to deal with these issues. Widespread change is necessary if this issue is to be resolved, which it must be if New York City schools (Tottenville included) are to have a high level of interconnectedness.

While my questions were flawed (see above), my surveys revealed a discrepancy between teacher perception of bullying and student perception, as only 16.7% of teachers agree that students in their class are victims of bullying. This may be because bullying is happening in the halls, and teachers are not concerned with that, but either way, students are noticing more bullying than teachers. I cannot make strong conclusions about this because of my research, but I should have asked more questions about bullying, including expanding the research to include picking on, and asking questions about the halls versus the classroom. More troubling is the high number of teachers (29.2%) who either agreed or strongly agreed that they are powerless to stop bullying in the building. If bullying is to be stopped, the culture of the school must change to

make it less desirable to bully, and teachers have a huge effect on the culture of the school. If teachers feel they are powerless to stop bullying, they will not put in the effort necessary for wide changes, which means that bullying will continue. Even if the administration attempts to create rules to eliminate bullying, this will have little effect if the teachers are not dedicated to creating a better environment¹⁷.

One of the reasons teachers feel hopeless is lack of training. While most teachers agree that they know how to help students when they have problems, few are confident. 41.7% agreed with reservations when asked “when my students have problems, I know how to help them” and another 12.6% disagreed. Teachers need effective training if they are to deal with students’ problems outside of their subject areas, and only 50.0% disagreed and strongly disagreed that they had not received enough training to help students deal with problems that do not relate to their subject areas. If interconnectedness is to be encouraged, more teachers need to be willing to deal with issues outside of the classroom (Beattie, 2007), but if that is going to happen, they must be confident in their ability to do this, and right now, too few are.

While many of the issues raised by the teacher survey cannot be fixed without widespread changes in philosophy and training, one can. Too few teachers are willing to work harder to help their students. While the teachers in Beattie’s study (2007) were more than willing to spend extra time at work, only 58.3% of Tottenville teachers agreed or strongly agreed that they would spend more time working if they thought it would help the students, even though only 29.2% agreed or strongly agreed that they work too much already. If interconnectedness is going to be built, teachers need to work more, both to offer support to students in times of need and to change the culture of the school so that students feel closer to each other and to the school at large. If teachers are not interested in making this change, things will stay the same, even if the

¹⁷ See Review of Literature.

entire DOE or the administration of Totteville decide to make interconnectedness more of a focal point.

Discussion

I used past research as a starting point, and had no interest in contradicting it. Another way to approach this study would have been to analyze whether interconnectedness matters as much as others say it does, or attempt to find out new areas which could affect perceptions of interconnectedness. Instead, I sought to find out the level of interconnectedness at Tottenville within the established framework, and to discover how to improve interconnectedness in general.

My survey did raise two important issues which my research did not: the difference between friends and classmates. Future research could focus more intently on these areas. In my opinion, schools cannot take much credit for positive relationships between friends, and the time I spent studying friend relationships is less important than I thought previously. I would like to spend more time on classmate relationships, which is a departure from past studies, which focused more on extremes (close friendships vs. bullying) than on the middle ground (casual acquaintances and picking on). I believe that the relationships between acquaintances can play a major role in student development, and schools can do more to ensure that these relationships are positive. Furthermore, my research revealed that students view their friends and classmates differently, which forces researchers to focus more on classmates.

Secondly, there was often a large discrepancy between teachers' and students' opinions of the same issue. Because much of the past research was centered on the teachers, there was not enough student data to contradict their perceptions. It is important for schools to see where students and teachers disagree on similar issues because that is the only way for them to improve. If teachers believe that they are doing something right, they will not attempt to change

it. Similarly, if students do not have confidence in their teachers, they will not encourage them to change. Effective communication is key to improvement, and the discrepancy between student and teacher answers suggests that it is lacking at Tottenville, and it is likely many other schools as well.

Interview Questions

I interviewed four students. Unfortunately, all were female honors students, because most of my students are female. Because I wanted to be sure to interview students whom I trusted, my sample was limited. I am confident that their answers are honest and thoughtful, however. A future survey should include a wider range of students to give a better idea of all of the perspectives in the school. Still, these interviews help to clarify some of the issues raised in the survey while drawing attention to past research. All students are currently seniors.

1) When you had a problem outside of the classroom, did you feel comfortable speaking to anyone in the building? Why or why not? If yes, what about that person made you trust them?

Of the four students interviewed, one reported having no problems aside from minor confusion about grades. Of the other three, two reported only trusting one teacher, and the third claimed to trust several teachers, but clarified the type of teachers she trusted, saying “When a teacher allows his or herself to open up to the students, sharing their experiences and their wisdom (about life, not how to pass an AP exam), students are more inclined to feel closer to them. A student can confide in someone who seems to be interested in what the kids around him/her are going through, and doesn’t make the students seem like a nuisance, which, unfortunately, many teachers do. Some are...nice...but they just don’t put in enough effort to get involved or don’t actually care – they’re merely in the building to do their job and nothing more.” This draws attention to a few key issues.

First, it is important that teachers are willing to be open with students and take an interest in their lives. This is problematic, since too many teachers believe that the only knowledge they need to impart is related to their subject area. In other words, while students feel that they need teachers to give them external life lessons, teachers feel that it is not their responsibility. If teachers do not take the time to teach students life lessons, the school is unable to create the holistic changes suggested by researchers (LaRusso et al, 2008; Marin et al, 2008; Beattie, 2007).

Secondly, teachers need to dedicate more time to their students. This student noticed the same trend I found through my surveys: that too many teachers are unwilling to spend more time helping their students. On a more positive note, all of the students I interviewed had at least one teacher that they trusted, however, if Tottenville is going to be a truly safe place, where students don't become frustrated by the learning environment. While I was unable to research drug abuse and depression, the research of Axelman, Beattie, and LaRusso et al suggests that both probably run high in the building, because students are clearly frustrated with the support they receive from some of their teachers. Positive experiences help, but even the student who reported being supported by several teachers complained later about other staff members harassing her.

2) What type of support have you received from your friends throughout your time at Tottenville? In what situations would you trust your friends?

Answers to this question mostly supported my survey data. Students trust their friends, but do not trust classmates. Two students reported trusting only one friend, but trusting that person with nearly everything, and constantly receiving support. Two of four students explicitly complained about other classmates while responding to this question. One reported being betrayed by someone she thought was a friend (though her best friend was extremely supportive during this time). Another mentioned that “support also comes in the form of alienation … towards others.” She later explained that Tottenville is very “cliquish” and that students are

fiercely loyal to their own cliques, but vicious toward others. This partially explains the high amount of mistrust and competitiveness I found in my surveys.

One student felt less trusting of her friends, saying “I’m open to everyone with my feelings and emotions, but it’s a risk. Despite the support my friends may give me over time, *it’s a universally known fact you cannot depend on anyone but yourself, especially in a school environment.* I’ve been there for my friends, and they’ve been there for me, but that in no way means that they’re going to be there forever, or even over the span of one grade” (italics mine). That this student feels that the school environment contributes to mistrust is problematic. No one had any ideas to improve this trend (see below), but interconnected schools create trust, and at least one student feels that schools do the opposite. Her response proves that she did not experience the benefits of interconnectedness. In fact, she chooses to deal with problems by herself.

3) How does the school influence your relationships with your peers?

All students agree that they see the same people regularly, and that it is a blessing and a curse. One reported “my classes are made up of the same people for the whole 4 years at Tottenville, and it makes it a lot easier to be friends with these people then to be enemies,” but another claimed “The school influences my relationship with my peers because at times it makes me feel lucky that I am friends with the people I chose to be friends with and at times it makes me feel annoyed at people who are annoying and rude to the others around them. So, it’s a mix because Tottenville High School lacks a lot of respect from the students.” They agreed that, while it would be easier to get along with everyone, that is not a realistic goal. While one student claimed “school influences my relationship with my peers by exposure. Since, I see my peers nearly daily, I often talk with them. This leads to quickly knowing a great deal about my peers

and often, we can help one another with tutoring if one person is stronger in one subject than another,” suggesting that common experiences are beneficial, I would argue that spending so much time with the same people often causes more harm than good. Students are more likely to notice problematic behaviors when they see each other all the time. Furthermore, spending too much time with the same people, in the same classes, can lead to competitiveness, which was one of the bigger problems raised in my survey.

I was not expecting students to comment on seeing the same people while answering this question, but three of four wrote their answers entirely on this issue. Clearly, scheduling contributes to school environment quite a bit. Future studies could certainly look into scheduling policies that increase positive relations (shared experiences, common ground) while eliminating negative ones (annoyance and competitiveness).

That each student had some complaints about peer relations suggests that the school could do more. Stewart discovered that some schools had created positive peer interactions, even with problematic students. Tottenville does not seem to have done that. I was hoping that this question would yield tangible suggestions, or concerns, but students did not seem to think teachers or administration were to blame, rather overexposure to certain people. While this is certainly an issue which can be addressed, Stewart’s study suggests that the school could do more. Unfortunately, I was unable to discover what.

4) How can the school help students relate to each other positively?

Currently, Tottenville has a peer mediation room in an attempt to encourage positive peer relations. One student said “school can promote students to interact positively by offering mediating services and trying to make sure ‘bullying, does not take place,’ but another articulated a common problem when she said “I mean, there’s a peer mediation room and who

really goes to that? People are just too set on their own opinions and will clash at what is morally correct and what is wrong.” She is not the only person who feels that people cannot change.

Another student answered “Despite how pessimistic that may sound, the students of our school are way too stubborn to be helped. It’s in our nature to gather with those that are similar to us and work against those who are not, which is why we laugh at the guidos and judge the “weirdos” in our head or in whispers to the friend walking by us. Our generation is far from positive, and it’ll take legitimate genetic reconstruction to help all of us get along. Realistically, some people just aren’t meant to be friends.”

While it is unrealistic to expect students to be friends, it should be reasonable to expect the school to encourage civility and trust. Based on my data, the school is falling short. The pessimism expressed by many of these students is indicative of a greater problem. Students are so used to negative peer relationships, they do not believe they can be fixed. The one piece of advice I received in response to this question was the suggestion that the school “giv[e] students more open-minded classes to try and prevent prejudice and discrimination.” This ties in to research (Stewart, 2007; LaRusso et al, 2008; Ainley, 2006; Young et al, 2009; Brand et al, 2008; Opdenakker et al, 2007; Beattie, 2007; American Psychologist, 2008; Marin et al, 2008) which suggests that repeatedly working to improve peer relations from the ground up is more effective than enforcing rules.

5) During your time at Tottenville have you been supported by teachers? Administration? How can the school improve relationships between students and teachers and students and administrators?

I received a wide range of answers to this question. While one student felt that she has “been supported by administrators and teachers. The school really doesn’t have anything to improve on in that situation.” Another was mostly positive, but added that she had little contact with administration and that “administrators and teachers should make themselves accessible to

students by offering email addresses or other ways of contacting them and dedicating some free time in their schedules for students.” Improving communication would be a simple way to make students feel more supported, even if teachers are unwilling to spend more time.

The negative responses were more problematic. One student said “Honestly, during my time at Tottenville, I’ve only been supported by three teachers. I don’t think the school can improve relationships, I think it’s up to the teachers themselves. The school just pressures the teachers to get kids to pass the regents which basically makes teachers teach to a test. However, the teachers that have supported me, don’t teach to a test. They make you actually think and they make you relate what you’re learning to the outside world.” I would be interested to see how much pressure teachers feel about their students passing the regents. If teachers are under too much pressure about tests, they are failing their students in key ways. Even if it is not the fault of the administration, teachers should be focusing at least some of their time on the outside world, and according to at least one student, too few do.

Another student was more negative. While she admitted that “The majority of [her teachers] care and would love to see [her] classmates and [her] succeed,” she was also livid about the abuses she suffered from some staff. She said “There are way too many people in the school who are intimidating to students whom they shouldn’t be intimidating to. I’ve had several experiences where I’d be stopped in the hall and given the 5th degree and 21 questions for absolutely no reason, when I’m just a nice kid who’s trying to run to the bathroom as a result of the consumption of two water bottles a period before. Or how about those vending machines? WHERE IS A GIRL TO GET FOOD IF SHE DIDN’T BRING ANY FROM HOME? The cafeteria, of course. But wait, I don’t have a lunch period and why would Lorenzo ever let me in to buy a bag of chips...? The rules in our school are absurd, and the harshness of how they are

enforced is even more absurd. I respect that all rules should be followed, but there are certain situations in which you have to stop being a Nazi and grow a heart. Our administration sucks. Learn efficiency and social skills, n00bs [sic] ...oh, and how to care better." These complaints sound like those of the students Stewart studied, and suggest that too many people at Tottenville are concerned with enforcing zero-tolerance policies (American Psychologist, 2008), which are alienating students rather than making them feel safer. While the student admitted that most people in the building did not treat her this way, she was still angry, still feels unsupported, and studies would suggest that her development has been restricted by these problematic people. It is the school's responsibility to address this problem.

6) How can the school offer more support to students, especially when they have problems?

The one suggestion students made in response to this question was improve communication. One felt that too few students know about counseling service to seek them, another thought that the school psychologist and guidance counselor do not trust each other enough. Strong support *networks* are a key feature of interconnectedness. While Tottenville students feel that individuals support them, the network needs work. Poor communication allows students to fall through the cracks, and students are less likely to trust staff if they do not believe that staff members trust each other. Improving communication in a school as large as Tottenville is a difficult undertaking, but a necessary one.

I was hoping for more suggestions here, but if students have never experienced the type of support they need, they would not know how to create it. A follow up project could be interviewing students in a school with high interconnectedness about what their schools do to support them, then comparing results with those found in this survey. As it is, I now have some idea how students feel about Tottenville, and I believe that Tottenville can improve in certain

areas, but I would still like to know more about what Tottenville and other schools like it can actually do to make these improvements.

Conclusion

When I began this undertaking, I hoped to discover student perspectives on interconnectedness. I also hoped to understand how students feel about Tottenville High School. Finally, I hoped to discover what students want their schools to do better in order to build student support. The most useful and interesting discovery I made was the discrepancy between friends and classmates. Schools somehow need to encourage civility and support between all students, even if they are not friends. Tottenville is hindered by the competitiveness of the students and the prevalence of cliques. Dealing with these problems requires a change in school culture. If the school is willing to spend time teaching students about the world, and about positive relationships, they may be able to improve student relationships. If this is going to happen, teachers need to be willing to spend more time working. Many need more effective training.

While students were somewhat positive about Tottenville, few were enthusiastic. Students should be able to say with confidence that they feel supported at school, and too few did. Interview data suggests that some teachers do an excellent job making students feel supported, some are terrible, and many fall in between. Furthermore, most students were negative about the administration. Some of these problems arise because Tottenville is a huge school. It is difficult for anyone to receive enough personal attention in a building with 4,000 students, and that is what Tottenville is expected to do.

I was hoping that this project would allow me to discover specific interventions larger schools can attempt to build interconnectedness, and I am not sure that I did. It seems that Tottenville is guilty of attempting to use zero tolerance policies, when change in culture is

necessary. Some students feel that peer mediation is a step in the right direction, some do not, but either way, it is not enough. A few teachers, students, and administrators working to improve the atmosphere of the school is not enough. Everyone needs to be on the same page. I am still not sure how to get everyone on the same page, or exactly what will happen once they are there. Had I been working at a school with high interconnectedness, I would be able to ask what worked, but, based on my research, Tottenville is not there yet, and students are not sure how it could improve.

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Appendix A: Student survey

Directions: Please fill out the background section and circle the number which best describes your opinion on each question. All answers will be confidential and anonymous. Please return survey to me.

Background information

Age____.

Grade_____.

Gender_____.

Average_____.

Scale: 1 – Strongly agree 2- Agree 3- Agree with reservations 4- Disagree with reservations
5- Disagree 6 – Strongly disagree

1) My friends will drop what they are doing to help me if I have a problem.

Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly disagree

2) My classmates will help me if I am confused in school.

Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly disagree

3) My classmates would rather be the best than see everyone succeed.

Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly disagree

4) I would rather help my classmates than outperform them.

Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly disagree

5) If I have a problem, I trust my friends for support.

Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly disagree

6) My teachers care about me outside of the classroom.

Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly disagree

7) When I need to discuss my problems, I feel comfortable talking to my teachers.

Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly disagree

8) When I need to discuss my problems, I cannot turn to my friends.

Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly disagree

9) I feel alone when things go wrong for me.

Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly disagree

10) I would never bully another student.

Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly disagree

11) I have been bullied in the past.

Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly disagree

12) Students at my school rarely pick on each other.

Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly disagree

13) The teachers in my school do not notice when students are picking on each other.

Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly disagree

14) I feel that school administration is aware of my concerns.

Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly disagree

15) School administrators base their decisions on student input.

Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly disagree

16) My relationships with my friends have grown stronger throughout my time in high school.

Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly disagree

17) I have grown apart from my classmates in high school.

Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly disagree

18) I am not close to many of my classmates.

Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly disagree

19) If I cannot talk to my parents about a problem, I do not know who to turn to.

Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly disagree

20) When I have a problem, I have people at school that I trust to help me.

Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly disagree

Appendix B: Teacher Survey

Directions: Please fill out the background section and circle the number which best describes your opinion on each question. All answers will be confidential and anonymous. Please return survey to my (Kane) mailbox. Thank you for your assistance.

Background information:

Age _____.

Years teaching _____.

Years at current school _____.

Years in New York City _____.

Gender _____.

Grades taught _____.

Average class size _____.

Survey questions

Scale: 1 – Strongly agree 2- Agree 3- Agree with reservations 4- Disagree with reservations
5- Disagree 6 – Strongly disagree

1) If my students have a problem, they feel comfortable speaking to me.

Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly disagree

2) I am only responsible for teaching my students the content of my class.

Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly disagree

3) Students in my class are victims of bullying.

Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly disagree

4) I cannot stop bullying in the building.

Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly disagree

5) I go out of my way to be accessible to students.

Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly disagree

6) It is the responsibility of the school to help students develop into responsible adults.

Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly disagree

7) My students trust me for advice.

Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly disagree

8) It is the parents' job to help their children with crises – not mine.

Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly disagree

9) The school is responsible for the mental health and well being of the students.

Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly disagree

10) Sometimes I feel powerless to help students.

Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly disagree

11) When my students have problems, I know how to help them.

Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly disagree

12) I have not received enough training to help students deal with problems that do not relate to my subject area.

Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly disagree

13) I work too many hours already.

Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly disagree

14) I would spend more time working if I thought it would benefit the students.

Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly disagree

15) I enjoy the time I spend with my students.

Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly disagree

Appendix C: Interview Questions

- 1) When you had a problem outside of the classroom, did you feel comfortable speaking to anyone in the building? Why or why not? If yes, what about that person made you trust them?
- 2) What type of support have you received from your friends throughout your time at Tottenville? In what situations would you trust your friends?
- 3) How does the school influence your relationships with your peers?
- 4) How can the school help students relate to each other positively?
- 5) During your time at Tottenville have you been supported by teachers? Administration?
- 6) How can the school offer more support to students, especially when they have problems?

Appendix D: Student responses (friends)

For this and all survey data:

sa means strongly agree

a means agree

ar means agree with reservations

dr means disagree with reservations

d means disagree

sd means strongly disagree

My friends will drop what they are doing to help me if I have a problem.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	sa	11	23.9	25.0	25.0
	a	25	54.3	56.8	81.8
	ar	5	10.9	11.4	93.2
	dr	2	4.3	4.5	97.7
	sd	1	2.2	2.3	100.0
	Total	44	95.7	100.0	
Missing	System	2	4.3		
	Total	46	100.0		

If I have a problem, I trust my friends for support.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	sa	22	47.8	50.0	50.0
	a	15	32.6	34.1	84.1
	ar	5	10.9	11.4	95.5
	dr	1	2.2	2.3	97.7
	sd	1	2.2	2.3	100.0
	Total	44	95.7	100.0	
Missing	System	2	4.3		
	Total	46	100.0		

When I need to discuss my problems, I cannot turn to my friends.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	ar	1	2.2	2.3	2.3
	dr	5	10.9	11.4	13.6
	d	13	28.3	29.5	43.2
	sd	25	54.3	56.8	100.0
	Total	44	95.7	100.0	
Missing	System	2	4.3		
Total		46	100.0		

My relationships with my friends have grown stronger throughout my time in high school.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	sa	25	54.3	59.5	59.5
	a	11	23.9	26.2	85.7
	ar	3	6.5	7.1	92.9
	dr	1	2.2	2.4	95.2
	d	2	4.3	4.8	100.0
	Total	42	91.3	100.0	
Missing	System	4	8.7		
Total		46	100.0		

Appendix E: Student responses (classmates)

My classmates will help me if I am confused in school.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	sa	13	28.3	29.5	29.5
	a	20	43.5	45.5	75.0
	ar	8	17.4	18.2	93.2
	dr	1	2.2	2.3	95.5
	d	2	4.3	4.5	100.0
	Total	44	95.7	100.0	
Missing	System	2	4.3		
Total		46	100.0		

My classmates would rather be the best than see everyone succeed.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	sa	10	21.7	22.7	22.7
	a	13	28.3	29.5	52.3
	ar	7	15.2	15.9	68.2
	dr	11	23.9	25.0	93.2
	d	2	4.3	4.5	97.7
	sd	1	2.2	2.3	100.0
Total		44	95.7	100.0	
Missing	System	2	4.3		
Total		46	100.0		

I would rather help my classmates than outperform them.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	sa	7	15.2	16.3	16.3
	a	11	23.9	25.6	41.9
	ar	19	41.3	44.2	86.0
	dr	4	8.7	9.3	95.3
	d	2	4.3	4.7	100.0
	Total	43	93.5	100.0	
Missing	System	3	6.5		
Total		46	100.0		

I would never bully another student.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	sa	27	58.7	64.3	64.3
	a	8	17.4	19.0	83.3
	ar	1	2.2	2.4	85.7
	dr	4	8.7	9.5	95.2
	d	1	2.2	2.4	97.6
	sd	1	2.2	2.4	100.0
	Total	42	91.3	100.0	
	Missing	System	4	8.7	
Total		46	100.0		

I have been bullied in the past.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	sa	4	8.7	9.1	9.1
	a	5	10.9	11.4	20.5
	ar	5	10.9	11.4	31.8
	dr	15	32.6	34.1	65.9
	d	7	15.2	15.9	81.8
	sd	8	17.4	18.2	100.0
	Total	44	95.7	100.0	
	Missing	System	2	4.3	
Total		46	100.0		

Students at my school rarely pick on each other.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	sa	1	2.2	2.3	2.3
	a	3	6.5	6.8	9.1
	ar	7	15.2	15.9	25.0
	dr	10	21.7	22.7	47.7
	d	10	21.7	22.7	70.5
	sd	13	28.3	29.5	100.0
	Total	44	95.7	100.0	
	Missing	System	2	4.3	
Total		46	100.0		

I have grown apart from my classmates in high school.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	a	5	10.9	11.4	11.4
	ar	5	10.9	11.4	22.7
	dr	10	21.7	22.7	45.5
	d	12	26.1	27.3	72.7
	sd	12	26.1	27.3	100.0
	Total	44	95.7	100.0	
Missing	System	2	4.3		
	Total	46	100.0		

I am not close to many of my classmates.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	sa	1	2.2	2.3	2.3
	a	5	10.9	11.4	13.6
	ar	6	13.0	13.6	27.3
	dr	7	15.2	15.9	43.2
	d	15	32.6	34.1	77.3
	sd	10	21.7	22.7	100.0
Missing	Total	44	95.7	100.0	
	System	2	4.3		
	Total	46	100.0		

Appendix F: Student responses (teachers)

My teachers care about me outside of the classroom.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	sa	9	19.6	20.5	20.5
	a	19	41.3	43.2	63.6
	ar	10	21.7	22.7	86.4
	dr	4	8.7	9.1	95.5
	d	2	4.3	4.5	100.0
	Total	44	95.7	100.0	
Missing	System	2	4.3		
Total		46	100.0		

When I need to discuss my problems, I feel comfortable talking to my teachers.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	sa	5	10.9	11.4	11.4
	a	12	26.1	27.3	38.6
	ar	18	39.1	40.9	79.5
	dr	3	6.5	6.8	86.4
	d	5	10.9	11.4	97.7
	sd	1	2.2	2.3	100.0
Total		44	95.7	100.0	
Missing	System	2	4.3		
Total		46	100.0		

The teachers in my school do not notice when students are picking on each other.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	sa	1	2.2	2.3	2.3
	a	4	8.7	9.1	11.4
	ar	19	41.3	43.2	54.5
	dr	8	17.4	18.2	72.7
	d	11	23.9	25.0	97.7
	sd	1	2.2	2.3	100.0
Total		44	95.7	100.0	
Missing	System	2	4.3		
Total		46	100.0		

Appendix G: Student responses (administration)

I feel that school administration is aware of my concerns.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	sa	2	4.3	4.5	4.5
	a	6	13.0	13.6	18.2
	ar	11	23.9	25.0	43.2
	dr	8	17.4	18.2	61.4
	d	10	21.7	22.7	84.1
	sd	7	15.2	15.9	
	Total	44	95.7	100.0	
Missing	System	2	4.3		
Total		46	100.0		

School administrators base their decisions on student input.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	sa	1	2.2	2.3	2.3
	a	4	8.7	9.1	11.4
	ar	13	28.3	29.5	40.9
	dr	15	32.6	34.1	75.0
	d	7	15.2	15.9	90.9
	sd	4	8.7	9.1	
	Total	44	95.7	100.0	
Missing	System	2	4.3		
Total		46	100.0		

Appendix H: Student responses (overall trust and support)

I feel alone when things go wrong for me.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	sa	1	2.2	2.3	2.3
	a	2	4.3	4.5	6.8
	ar	11	23.9	25.0	31.8
	dr	13	28.3	29.5	61.4
	d	8	17.4	18.2	79.5
	sd	9	19.6	20.5	
	Total	44	95.7	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	2	4.3		
Total		46	100.0		

If I cannot talk to my parents about a problem, I do not know who to turn to.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	sa	1	2.2	2.3	2.3
	a	2	4.3	4.5	6.8
	ar	4	8.7	9.1	15.9
	dr	5	10.9	11.4	27.3
	d	12	26.1	27.3	54.5
	sd	20	43.5	45.5	
	Total	44	95.7	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	2	4.3		
Total		46	100.0		

When I have a problem, I have people at school that I trust to help me.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	sa	15	32.6	34.1	34.1
	a	11	23.9	25.0	59.1
	ar	8	17.4	18.2	77.3
	dr	6	13.0	13.6	90.9
	d	4	8.7	9.1	
	Total	44	95.7	100.0	100.0
	System	2	4.3		
Total		46	100.0		

Appendix I: Teacher responses (student comfort)

If my students have a problem, they feel comfortable speaking to me.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	SA	9	37.5	37.5	37.5
	a	10	41.7	41.7	79.2
	ar	3	12.5	12.5	91.7
	dr	1	4.2	4.2	95.8
	sd	1	4.2	4.2	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

My students trust me for advice.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	sa	10	41.7	41.7	41.7
	a	8	33.3	33.3	75.0
	ar	4	16.7	16.7	91.7
	dr	1	4.2	4.2	95.8
	sd	1	4.2	4.2	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

I enjoy the time I spend with my students.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	sa	16	66.7	69.6	69.6
	a	5	20.8	21.7	91.3
	ar	1	4.2	4.3	95.7
	sd	1	4.2	4.3	100.0
	Total	23	95.8	100.0	
Missing	System	1	4.2		
	Total	24	100.0		

Appendix J: Teacher responses (duty)

I am only responsible for teaching my students the content of my class.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	sa	3	12.5	12.5	12.5
	a	1	4.2	4.2	16.7
	ar	3	12.5	12.5	29.2
	dr	3	12.5	12.5	41.7
	d	5	20.8	20.8	62.5
	sd	9	37.5	37.5	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

I got out of my way to be accessible to students.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	sa	15	62.5	62.5	62.5
	a	5	20.8	20.8	83.3
	ar	3	12.5	12.5	95.8
	sd	1	4.2	4.2	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

It is the responsibility of the school to help students develop into responsible adults.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	sa	7	29.2	29.2	29.2
	a	5	20.8	20.8	50.0
	ar	7	29.2	29.2	79.2
	dr	2	8.3	8.3	87.5
	d	1	4.2	4.2	91.7
	sd	2	8.3	8.3	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

The school is responsible for the mental health and well being of the students.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	sa	3	12.5	13.0	13.0
	a	6	25.0	26.1	39.1
	ar	6	25.0	26.1	65.2
	dr	4	16.7	17.4	82.6
	d	2	8.3	8.7	91.3
	sd	2	8.3	8.7	100.0
	Total	23	95.8	100.0	
Missing	System	1	4.2		
	Total	24	100.0		

It is the parents' job to help their children with crises -- not mine.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	sa	3	12.5	12.5	12.5
	a	1	4.2	4.2	16.7
	ar	6	25.0	25.0	41.7
	dr	3	12.5	12.5	54.2
	d	7	29.2	29.2	83.3
	sd	4	16.7	16.7	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Appendix K: Teacher responses (bullying)

Students in my class are victims of bullying.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	a	4	16.7	16.7	16.7
	ar	8	33.3	33.3	50.0
	dr	1	4.2	4.2	54.2
	d	4	16.7	16.7	70.8
	sd	7	29.2	29.2	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

I cannot stop bullying in the building.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	sa	3	12.5	12.5	12.5
	a	4	16.7	16.7	29.2
	ar	4	16.7	16.7	45.8
	dr	3	12.5	12.5	58.3
	d	7	29.2	29.2	87.5
	sd	3	12.5	12.5	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Appendix L: Teacher responses (training)

Sometimes I feel powerless to help students.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	sa	3	12.5	12.5	12.5
	a	5	20.8	20.8	33.3
	ar	8	33.3	33.3	66.7
	dr	2	8.3	8.3	75.0
	d	3	12.5	12.5	87.5
	sd	3	12.5	12.5	
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	100.0

When my students have problems, I know how to help them.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	sa	3	12.5	12.5	12.5
	a	8	33.3	33.3	45.8
	ar	10	41.7	41.7	87.5
	dr	1	4.2	4.2	91.7
	d	1	4.2	4.2	95.8
	sd	1	4.2	4.2	
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	100.0

I have not received enough training to help students deal with problems that do not relate to my subject area.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	sa	4	16.7	16.7	16.7
	a	3	12.5	12.5	29.2
	ar	4	16.7	16.7	45.8
	dr	1	4.2	4.2	50.0
	d	10	41.7	41.7	91.7
	sd	2	8.3	8.3	
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	100.0

Appendix M: Teacher responses (time)

I work too many hours already.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	sa	5	20.8	20.8	20.8
	a	2	8.3	8.3	29.2
	ar	5	20.8	20.8	50.0
	dr	3	12.5	12.5	62.5
	d	5	20.8	20.8	83.3
	sd	4	16.7	16.7	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

I would spend more time working if I thought it would benefit the students.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	sa	8	33.3	33.3	33.3
	a	6	25.0	25.0	58.3
	ar	2	8.3	8.3	66.7
	dr	2	8.3	8.3	75.0
	d	6	25.0	25.0	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	