Use Real Data to Develop Well-Being Interventions in High-Achieving Schools

Suniya S. Luthar, Ph.D.
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Programmatic Research on High Achieving Schools

- Origins in Connecticut in the 1990s at Yale University, subsequently in New York at Columbia University’s Teachers College, expanded across the country

- Continued peer-reviewed research, based on collaborative work

- Grounded in personal insights:
  Twenty plus years as a mother in a HAS community
Learning Objectives – Based on Cutting-Edge Research

• Understand psychological challenges experienced by students in high-achieving schools.

• Learn how to prioritize intervention goals
  • How can you gather data that will meaningfully inform programs?

• Explore practices and strategies to promote student connectedness to their school environment.
What does it mean for a school to be “doing well?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School-Year</th>
<th>SAT vs. norms</th>
<th>Anx-depressed x Norms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>%ile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SW-Ind-15</td>
<td>1450</td>
<td>97&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;%</td>
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<tr>
<td>MW-Ind-16</td>
<td>1280</td>
<td>84&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;%</td>
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<tr>
<td>MW-Ind-17</td>
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<td>NW-Pub2-16</td>
<td>1320</td>
<td>88&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;%</td>
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<td>NE-Bdg2-17</td>
<td>1410</td>
<td>95&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;%</td>
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<td>NE-Pub4-17</td>
<td>1280</td>
<td>84&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;%</td>
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<tr>
<td>NE-Bdg1-17</td>
<td>1330</td>
<td>89&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;%</td>
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<td>NE-Bdg1-18</td>
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<td>MW-Ind-18</td>
<td>1280</td>
<td>84&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;%</td>
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<tr>
<td>NE-Ind-3-18</td>
<td>1340</td>
<td>91&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt;%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

On average, HAS students rates of Clinically Significant Anxious-depressed symptoms are 7 x national norms.
The Perils Of Pushing Kids Too Hard, And How Parents Can Learn To Back Off

The Atlantic
China Builds the Next Hollywood
Donald Trump and the Myth of the Front Runner

The Silicon Valley Suicides
Who are they, who are they killing themselves, and why?
By Hanna Rosin

Why Are More American Teenagers Than Ever Suffering From Severe Anxiety?

Parents, therapists and schools are struggling to figure out whether helping anxious teenagers means protecting them or pushing them to face their fears.

Feeling Suicidal, Students Turned to Their College. They Were Told to Go Home.

Harrison Fowler is part of a class-action lawsuit against Stanford.
Michael Starghill Jr. for The New York Times
To improve student well-being, we must have actionable, science-based data

Critical components:

Content Area (s)

- Are you gathering data on areas that are most critical among students in your own school?

Basis in Research

- Are you using methods and measures that have been vetted through scientific peer-review?
Content areas: Assessing Well-being

We must focus on domains that clearly need attention, and will significantly affect students well beyond high school.

How do you define “doing well” in your school?
• SAT scores?
• Grades?
• Sports / Club trophies and awards?
Content Areas: What drives wellbeing?

- Hours of homework?
- Hours of sleep?
- Grit?
- Growth Mindset?
- Motivation?
- Liking school?
- Semester / Trimester system?
- Mindfulness?

Resilience rests fundamentally on relationships
We must strengthen critical relationships, via data-driven solutions

Within each category, data must identify major sources of support, and of perceived unkindness, to inform programs.
How should we determine that surveys are scientifically valid?

• “Measures” of depression, anxiety, etc. should not be treated as valid or reliable unless…
  • They are based in rigorous, systematic research
  • Have been published in a peer-reviewed journal

• **Depression**: Beck Depression Inventory, Revised Children’s Manifest Anxiety Scale, BASC, Hamilton Depression Scale, Youth Self Report

• **Substance use**: Monitoring the Future

• **Relationships**: Parent Adolescent Relationship Questionnaire, Adolescent Attachment Questionnaire, Network of Relationships Inventory

https://www.apa.org/pubs/databases/psycinfo
## Authentic Connections’ Survey Instruments, refined over 20 years

### Well-Being Index

- **Single score** to provide a snapshot into students’ levels of well-being
- Captures common areas of concern in high-achieving contexts
- Designed to be taken in 10 minutes
- Helps identify top areas needing attention: Comparisons with similar schools

Offered to schools, **free of charge**, this Spring

### High Achieving Schools Survey

- Findings inform a *customized report* with the top 2-3 specific recommendations to implement change
- Feasible and pragmatic interventions
- **Collaborative conversations** with key stakeholders – parents, educators, & students -- to maximize beneficial change

Currently running pilot with 8 member schools
Data collection and analysis should not be a one size fits all approach

*Each school is unique*

Examiner findings from a Boarding school in the Northeast
This dashboard shows levels of student symptoms relative to national norms. The top graph shows symptoms across the entire school, while the lower two graphs display symptoms by gender and grade. Filters will change the entire dashboard.

Levels of serious Anxious-Depressed Symptoms are > 7x norms
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Hovering over Anxious-Depressed for each gender shows more detailed information: Which group(s) are particularly troubled?
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These graphs show the percentage of students showing clinically significant levels of symptoms. Boxes are colored relative to their distance from national norms (2%). Boxes colored GRAY are close to national norms; boxes colored ORANGE are ≥3x norms; boxes colored RED are ≥6x norms.
Relative impact of School Climate variables

(Discrete Parent, Peer, and Pressure variables are examined, similarly, for relative impact)
The three most influential school-based variables, in *this particular community*. 

Most important School Climate dimensions (Year: 2019)
"If you felt troubled about a personal or family problem, which adult at school, if any, would you confide in?"
Hovering over “School Counselor / therapist” will show us the percentage of students confiding in that adult.

- In this school, boys are not utilizing school counselors nearly as much as girls.
This graph shows the adults that students confide in. Commonly chosen adults have larger bubbles. Hovering over the "Chosen Adult" will show a breakdown of the students who confide in this adult.
Further examining the student groups that confide in “Nobody”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage Who Confide in “Nobody” (School Code: NE-Bdg1-19)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Native American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biracial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian/White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A high percentage of students is shown in **RED** and a low percentage of students is shown in **GRAY**.

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Benefits based on collaborative initiatives, following HAS Survey

- Midwest independent day school, BR, was surveyed in 2016
- Onsite presentations of impartial, scientific data; discussions with all stakeholders
- Following year (2017) BR school reassessed; decreases in all symptom areas.

MW - Reduced rates of clinically significant symptoms

Anxious
Depressed
Withdrawn
Depressed
Somatic
Problems
Rule Breaking
Aggressive
Behavior
Internalizing
Externalizing

MW16 (N=686) MW17 (N=729) National Norm
Case Study: Wilton High School

Prioritizing interventions through rigorous analyses:
• School’s perceived intolerance of bullying
• Alienation from teachers
• Caring Adult / Teacher
• Parent / Community involvement
  • School Emotional Engagement
  • Confiding in Adults (help-seeking)
  • Respectful School Climate
  • School Leadership
  • School Diversity
  • Teacher Academic Support
  • Adults’ Achievement Expectations
  • Sleep
  • AP/IB Courses
  • Extracurricular Time Use

Areas of concern were all focused around relationships
Resilience rests, fundamentally, on relationships

- “I feel seen & loved for the person I am, at my core”
- This is true for children – and for those who tend them

- Educators must foster their own well-being
  - "First-responders" to highly stressed youth; risks for own stress, burnout

- Perceived caring adults
  - Each child should be able to say, “There’s at least one adult whom I can go to, if troubled”

- Minimize all forms of unkindness
  - Students to each other; adults to each other; adults to students
  - “Bad is stronger than good"
Summary: Take home messages for clinicians and educators

• In High Achieving Schools, the psychological health of students must be prioritized every bit as much as their stellar academic credentials

• Through rigorous data, determine the top 3-4 priorities within a particular school:
  • Particular domains of students’ adjustment / symptoms
  • Major aspects of relationships and school climate

• Collaboratively, involving stakeholders and researchers, determine evidence-based steps toward addressing these

• If sophisticated data collection and analyses methods are not available, continue to focus on what is at the core of resilience – strong, supportive relationships
Thank you for this opportunity

Look for Nina to get the Well-Being Index Free Trial, at your school

Renee Benoit
Director of AC Groups Research

Ashley Ebbert
Director of HAS Research

Nina Kumar
Vice President, Operations

Suniya Luthar
Founder, Executive Director

Alex Ingram
AC Groups Facilitator + Researcher
Visit our website to learn more

bit.ly/aconnections