

Our Impact on Student Achievement and School Success

Summary

Most San Francisco high school students are doing well in school, but some of our students face challenges attending school regularly, performing well on standardized tests, and meeting graduation requirements. It is critical that students who are struggling at school receive psychosocial supports in addition to the academic supports traditionally provided by our schools.

Annually, our school-based Wellness Centers serve more than 7,000 students and provide the very services and supports called for by a growing body of research that links students' well-being and sense of school connectedness to their academic success.

Quantitative and qualitative data from our years of evaluation research indicate that as a result of participating in Wellness services students come to school more often, do better in school, and develop positive relationships with caring adults at school—relationships that ultimately promote academic achievement.



"I know for a fact that many students would have dropped out if not for the help they got from Wellness."

—SFUSD High School Teacher

81%

said they were coming to school more often.



We surveyed over 500 students who were participating in individual counseling:*

Nearly **70%** said they were doing better in school.



What The Data Are Saying

San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) is one of the top performing urban public school districts in California and has recently celebrated meaningful improvements in attendance, reductions in dropouts, and increased graduation rates. Despite these successes, many students continue to struggle. A significant number of high school students do not attend school regularly or dropout altogether, and some students do not graduate on time or at all.

In the 2010–2011 school year, nearly 2,000 high school students (about 12%) were absent on ten or more days—totaling 61,222 missed school days. At some schools, the proportion of students who were absent for 20 or more days—so called “chronically absent” students—was as high as 11%.¹ In the same year, nearly 600 high school students dropped out of school altogether.²

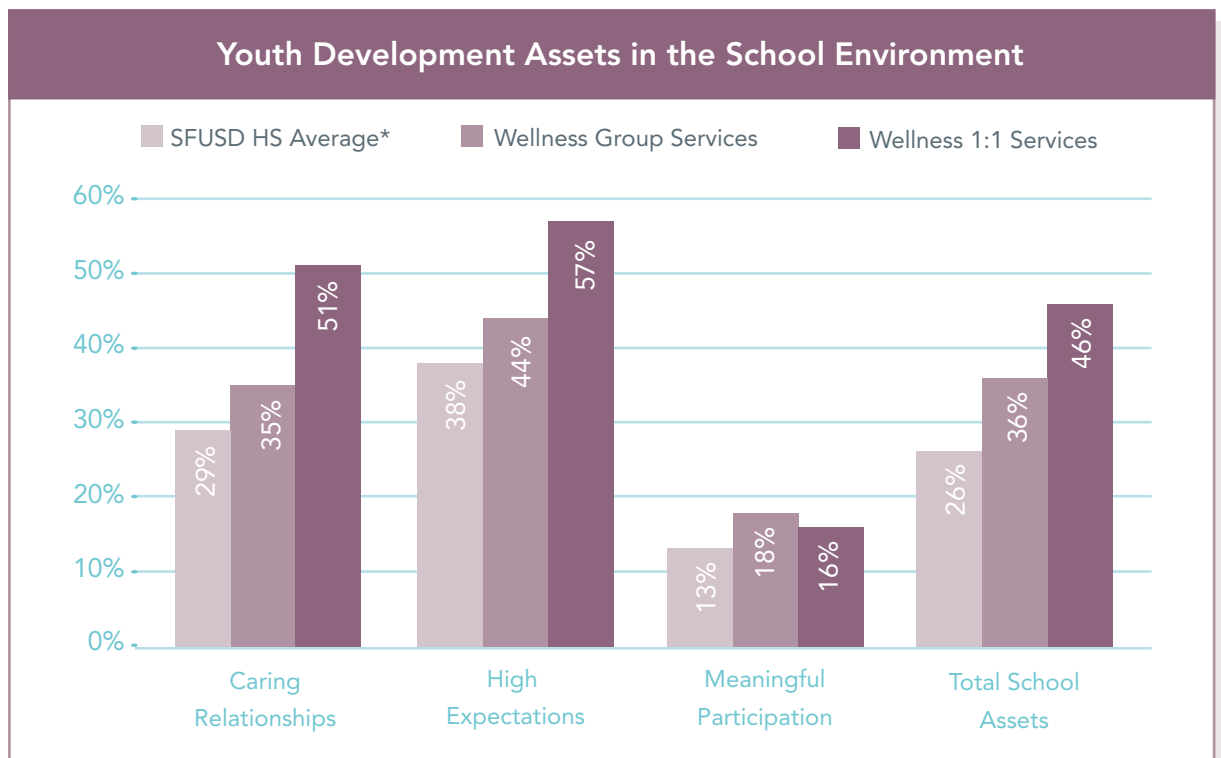
Looking at graduation rates, cohort data for the 2010–2011 school year show that 18% of students did not graduate after four years of high school. Graduation rates also varied by

race/ethnicity and other student characteristics. For example, 32% of Latino students, 36% of African-American students, and about 30% of our English Language Learners (ELL) did not graduate on time.²

Educational researchers have shown that students who are not actively engaged in their school are at high risk of negative school outcomes such as truancy and dropping out.³ Research has also identified specific attributes of the school environment that can support academic success—including: school safety⁴; positive relationships between youth and adults at school;^{5,6} and students’ sense of connectedness to their school community.⁷ For example, youth who report they have caring relationships with adults at school, who are motivated by the high expectations of school personnel, and who have opportunities to participate in shaping their school community have higher reading, language and math scores compared to students with lower levels of these protective assets.⁸

What Students Are Saying*

Students who participated in Wellness Group and Individual services report higher levels of key assets than the district’s high school average. These youth development assets in the school environment include caring relationships, meaningful participation and high expectations.



Data Sources: *California Healthy Kids Survey SFUSD Spring 2011 (n=5,670); Wellness Group Satisfaction Survey (ETR) Spring 2010 (n=914), Wellness Individual Student Satisfaction Survey (ETR) Spring 2010 (n=580).

Wellness Program Services Support Student Achievement

Our Wellness Centers provide services and supports called for by a growing body of research—services that strengthen positive relationships between youth and adults at school and deepen students' sense of connectedness to their school community.

While the Wellness Centers provide all students with a wide array of services and supports that help them stay in school and actively engaged in their academic and social activities, our data show that we are reaching students who may be at highest risk of low academic achievement.

For example, in 2010–11, the fifteen Wellness Centers served 62% of all Latino students and 76% of all African-American students at those schools—students who may be at disproportionately high risk for negative school outcomes. That same year, 48% of students served came from our city's most vulnerable neighborhoods, including Bayview/Hunters Point (14%), Ingleside/Excelsior (14%), Mission (10%), and Visitacion Valley (10%). Providing effective services and supports to these students is essential to continuing our District's recent improvements in increasing regular attendance, reducing school dropout, and improving graduation rates.

WELLNESS CENTERS

provide services and supports that improve students'...

HEALTH & WELL-BEING,

which helps students develop a stronger sense of...

SCHOOL CONNECTEDNESS,

which is essential to improving students'...

**ACADEMIC
ACHIEVEMENT and
SCHOOL SUCCESS**

"Without the Wellness Center, I probably wouldn't come to school as often."

— SFUSD High School Student

What School Staff Are Saying

In 2011, we surveyed over 700 teachers, and 72% told us they had referred at least one student to their Wellness Center that school year. Among these teachers...

96% reported understanding that students' academic success is linked to their emotional and physical health.

79% reported improvements in the behavior of students they referred to the Wellness Center, such as improved attention in class/at school, improved classroom/school behavior, or greater motivation to learn.

75% reported improvements in the academic performance of students they referred to the Wellness Center, such as improved quality of student school work, improved grades, or improved attendance.

¹San Francisco Unified School District Information Technology Department (SFUSD-IT). *Students with Chronic Absences and Habitual Absences, School Year 2010–2011*. Generated 08/18/2012.

²California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS). *Cohort Outcome Report by Race/Ethnicity*, Generated 12/6/2012. Data as of 02/22/2012.

³Rumberger, R. & Lim, S.A. (2008) *Why students drop out of school: A review of 25 years of research*. California Dropout Research Project. University of California Santa Barbara.

⁴Cornell, D.G. and M.J. Mayer, *Why Do School Order and Safety Matter?* *Educational Researcher*, 2010. 39(1): p. 7–15.

⁵Ryan, A.M., & Patrick, H., *The classroom social environment and changes in adolescents' motivation and engagement during middle school*. *American Educational Research Journal*, 2001. 38: p. 437–460.

⁶Masten, A., J. Herbers, et al. (2008). "Promoting Competence and Resilience in the School Context." *Professional School Counseling* 12(2): 76–84.

⁷Wilson, D., *The Interface of School Climate and School Connectedness and Relationships with Aggression and Victimization*. *Journal of School Health*, 2004. 74(7): p. 293–299.

⁸Hanson, T. (2011). *Academic Performance and school well-being*. Paper prepared for the California Education Supports Project. Los Alamitos: WestEd.