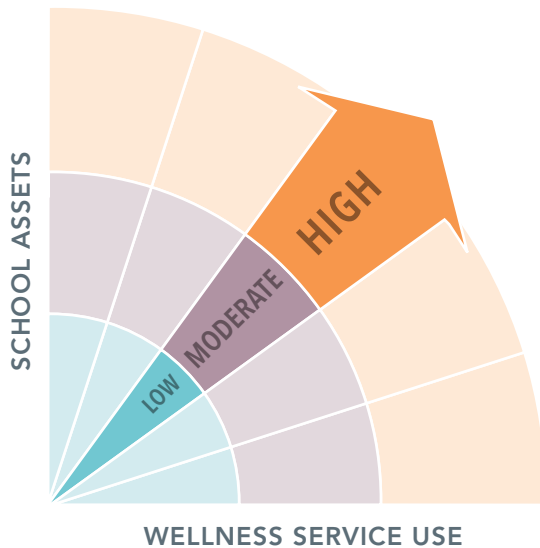


research snapshot

Our Impact on School-Based Youth Development Assets

Figure 1. Wellness Participation = Improved Assets



Our research offers solid evidence that participation in Wellness services significantly increases youth development assets in the school environment—assets that are directly linked to improved attendance and academic success.

Summary

The San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) is one of California's top performing urban school districts. However, a significant number of students do not feel a strong sense of connection to their school, their teachers, or other adults in the school community. Students who do not experience these "positive youth development assets" in the school environment are more likely than their more connected peers to skip school, engage in risk behavior such as substance use, and receive poor grades.

While our evaluation efforts over the past 13 years have provided promising indications that Wellness Centers provide a group of caring adults, effective services, and meaningful supports that help build the connection between students and staff, we are now gathering more rigorous scientific evidence that back up our initial conclusions.

Wellness Initiative research recently conducted in partnership with University of California at Berkeley's School of Social Welfare, the University of Denver's School of Social Work and the Initiative's evaluators at ETR demonstrate the positive and significant impact of service utilization on improved youth development assets in the school environment. The study shows that the biggest effects were found among our more vulnerable youth.

"Whenever I come into the Wellness Center I feel safe and calm in an environment where I know people care about me. It's like a house and we are all family."

—SFUSD High School Student

Core funding for the Wellness Initiative comes from the City of San Francisco's Children's Fund and the Public Education Enrichment Fund (PEEF) of the San Francisco Unified School District.

Suggested citation: Shields, J.P., Stone, S., & Blankenbaker, S. L. (2013). *San Francisco Wellness Initiative Research Snapshot: Our impact on school-based youth development assets*. San Francisco, CA: San Francisco Wellness Initiative.

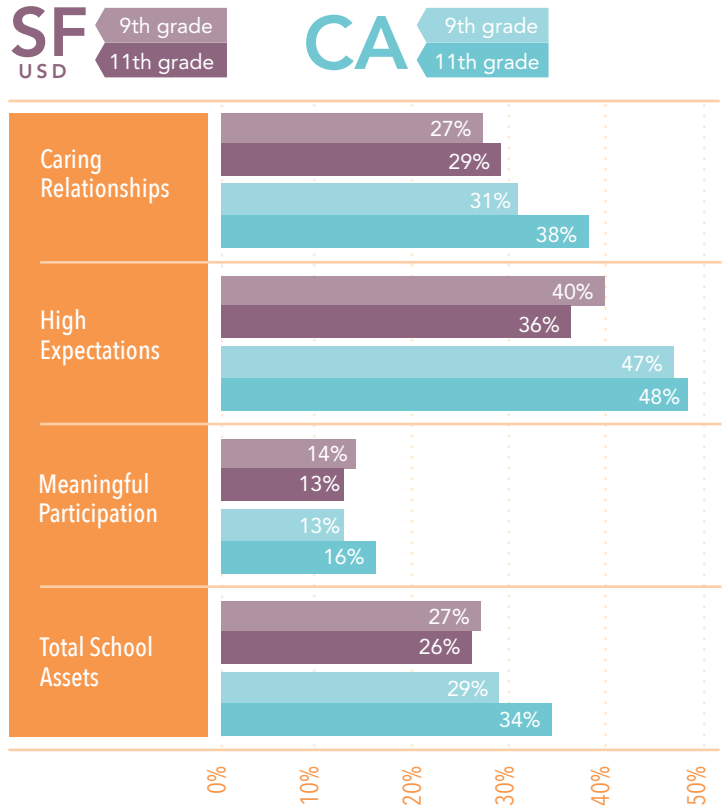
Context

Why Youth Development Assets Matter: Youth development assets in the school environment can be defined as the characteristics of a school environment that help students grow up to be healthy and successful. In the context of the Wellness Initiative, these assets are those characteristics of SFUSD high schools that help our students feel that:

- adults at school really care about them;
- adults hold high expectations for their success; and
- students have opportunities to meaningfully participate in the school environment.

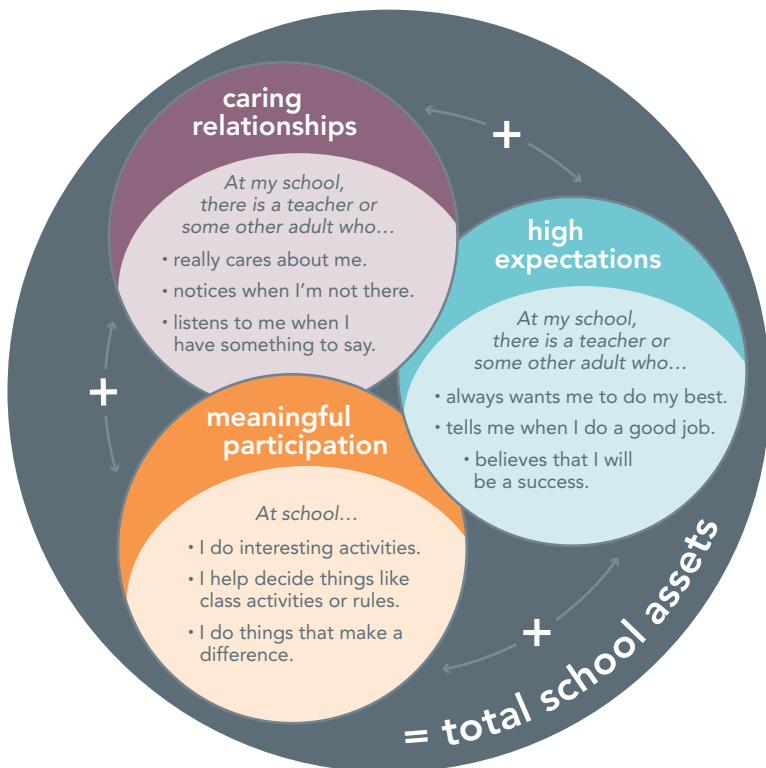
These factors have been shown to promote positive socio-emotional and academic performance outcomes. [1, 2, 4-6] However, SFUSD high school students score generally lower than the California average in these important assets (Figure 2). Our previous evaluation work consistently found positive correlations between Wellness service use and assets. A next step was to see if these positive relationships held up when we carefully controlled for differences between students who used or did not use Wellness services.

Figure 2. 2011 SFUSD & California School Assets Scores
% Reporting High Levels of Assets



Synopsis of Our Research Study

Figure 3. Assets in the School Environment [3]



The study's **PURPOSE** was to examine the relationship between the use of Wellness services and two key outcomes—(1) caring relationships with Wellness staff members and (2) youth development assets in the overall school community (Figure 3). The study was conducted by a collaborative partnership between the Wellness Initiative's evaluation agency (ETR) and faculty of the University of California at Berkeley's School of Social Welfare and the University of Denver's School of Social Work.[7]

Study **METHODS** included the use of student-reported data from a customized version of the California Healthy Kids Survey administered to 8,466 students across 15 high schools in the Spring of 2009. Propensity scoring methods were used to create groups of students who were statistically identical on all key characteristics except for whether they used or did not use Wellness services. These methods are among the most scientifically-rigorous statistical procedures available when randomized clinical trials are not ethically possible.

RESULTS show positive relationships between service utilization and outcomes, particularly among students who used Wellness Center services ten or more times during the school year.

The researchers' **CONCLUSIONS** are that the Wellness Centers provide a key mechanism to improve school-based youth development assets—the very assets that are linked to reduced student risk behaviors, improved well-being, and positive school outcomes. [1-5]

For more information about the study, please visit the website of the Journal of Adolescent Health:
[http://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X\(13\)00311-X/abstract](http://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X(13)00311-X/abstract)

Key Findings

The study, published in the highly regarded *Journal of Adolescent Health*, is one of the first to examine the relationship between use of school-based health and wellness services and youth development assets in the school environment—**characteristics of the school environment that are directly linked to improved attendance and academic success**. Key findings include:

1 Compared to students who do not participate in Wellness services, students who use any Wellness services report statistically-significant increases in school assets—even those who visit just one or two times (Figure 4).

2 Students who visit their Wellness Center more frequently report higher assets (Figure 4).

3 The students who participate in services most frequently have the highest risk factors, report the highest school assets scores, and experience the strongest caring relationships with adults in the Wellness Centers (Figure 5).

Figure 4. Dose-Response Relationship between Wellness Service Use and Increased Assets

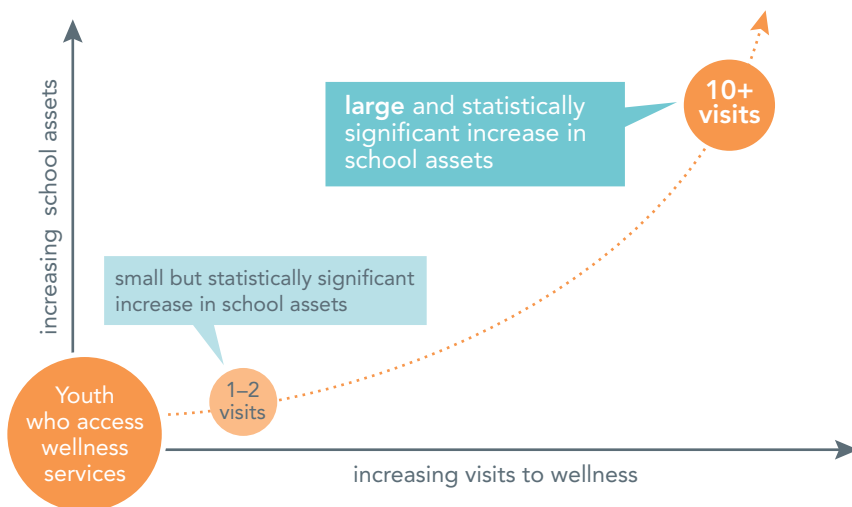
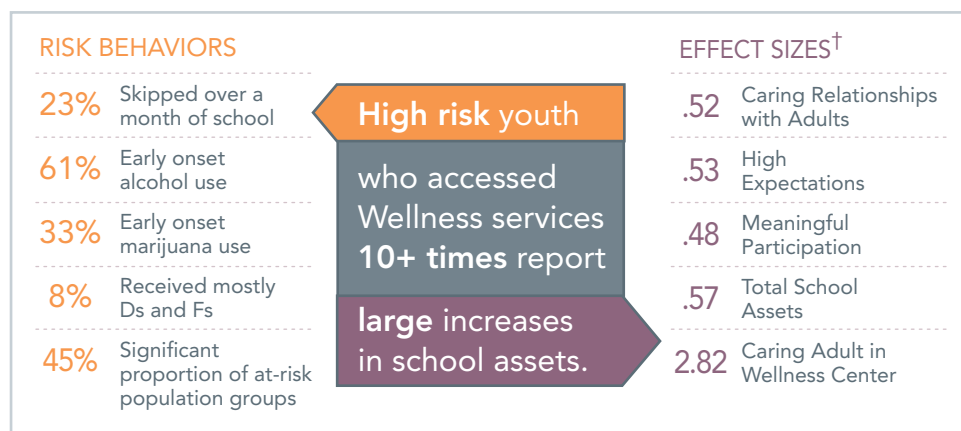


Figure 5. Effect of Wellness Service Use on Youth Development Assets in the School Environment



[†] Results compared to students with matched risk profiles who did not use Wellness services. Effect sizes are statistically significant at $p < .001$.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Our Wellness Centers are positively impacting the assets of all students served and having the largest impact on high risk students—the very students who may need the most support to succeed in school.

References

- Blum RW, Libbey HP. Special issue on school connectedness: Strengthening health and education outcomes for teenagers. *Journal of School Health* 2004;74:231e99.
- Catalano RF, Oesterle S, Fleming CB, Hawkins JD. The importance of bonding to school for healthy development: Findings from the Social Development Research Group. *Journal of School Health* 2004;74:252e61.
- Hanson, T. L., & Kim, J. O. (2007). *Measuring resilience and youth development: the psychometric properties of the Healthy Kids Survey. (Issues & Answers Report, REL 2007–No. 034)*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory West. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs>
- Jenson JM, Alter CE, Nicotera N, et al. *Risk, resilience, and positive youth development: Developing effective community programs for at-risk youth: Lessons from the Denver Bridge Project*. New York: Oxford University Press;2013.
- Kia-Keating M, Dowdy E, Morgan MI, Noam GG. Protecting and promoting: An integrative conceptual model for healthy development of adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Health* 2011;48:220e8.
- Kidger J, Araya R, Donovan J, David Gunnell D. The effect of the school environment on the emotional health of adolescents: A systematic review. *Pediatrics* 2012;129:1e25.
- Stone, S., Whitaker, K., Anyon, Y, & Shields, J. P. (2013) The relationship between use of school-based health centers and student-reported school assets. *Journal of Adolescent Health*. Published online July 10, 2013. DOI: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2013.05.011.