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A Survey of Student and Teacher Perceptions Relationships and Relevancy

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to analyze the opinions and perceptions of secondary students and teachers on the topics of relationships and relevance. The research includes findings that answer the questions, “*What are the overall perceptions of student to teacher relevance and relationships among secondary students and teachers?*” and “*Is there a difference of perception of student to teacher relevance and relationships between secondary students and teachers?*” The research was conducted using an anonymous survey distributed through *We Teach and We Learn Surveys* to teachers and students at a Midwestern high school. The findings were analyzed through Microsoft Excel and A Statistical Program (ASP) software utilizing t-testing. Findings indicate that there is a difference of opinion between high school students and high school teachers in some areas concerning the level of student-teacher relationships. Further training in the concept of relationship building and serving in support roles is warranted. Additionally, the district may want to consider the implementation of some pilot projects with teachers willing to examine and participate in the practice of how to best build teacher –student relationships and increase relevancy within the classroom.

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INTRODUCTION

Background, Issues and Concerns

A suburban school district located in the Midwest, hereafter referred to as NKC, has for the last four years focused on its instructional strategies, its various forms of assessments, and its standards and level of rigor and relevance (CCSS). In 2009 NKC adopted the Understanding by design model, which is based on learning by design and starting with an end in mind. This model focused on Big Ideas, which served as those identifiable ideas that were seen as significant categories within each specified course. Within this model two aspects were to be labeled as the Enduring Understandings; what they wanted the students to walk away with, and the Essential questions; open ended questions that would lead to higher level thinking and various creations all reached in different ways, but with the same concepts or understanding as their peers.

As of 2011 NKC has changed tracks and began to adapt to the Common Core State Standards (the state of Missouri will mandate these standards within the next two years for all of its school districts). Within these standards the focus is on recognizing at what levels of Rigor and Relevance a teacher is teaching and a student is learning, while building student to teacher relationships. It is with these various instructional models that we have yet to examine, that which has not changed, the student's perception of relevant schoolwork and teacher and student relationships. School districts such as NKC will continue to work with developing educational models, however a student's perception of a teachers' genuine concern and for them as a person can significantly affect students equity within their education. Without this significant information we are serving clients (students) how we feel they will best benefit as opposed to asking them what works for

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them and how we can aid in their success? This project will involve a set of surveys, that will provide both teacher and student feedback on student to teacher relationships and course relevancy.

The analysis of results will identify secondary students' and teachers perceptions of teacher to student relationships and what gaps exist between those two groups. The analysis of results will also demonstrate where the largest disconnect is between students and teachers.

Practice under Investigation

The practice under investigation is how best to utilize student and teacher perceptions of student to teacher relationship indicators and relevancy.

School Policy to Be Informed by the Study

This study will inform NKC's Instructional Policy concerning Student/Staff Relations. The district uses this policy as a means to ensure the safety of students and staff alike. This policy maintains a sense of professionalism regarding appropriate teacher –student relationships. Teachers are to create a conducive atmosphere to learning and be consistent in and fair when applying discipline and the maintenance of both physical and emotional boundaries. The information from this, such research will highlight and inform how to better guide teachers and students, while instructing them, and checking for progression in the area of strong and positive teacher-student relationships. This study will aid in potential improvement of teacher-student relationships, established relevancy, and potentially academic, behavioral, and social performance.

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Conceptual Underpinnings

The American Psychological Association (APA) discusses the impact of teacher support on students' academics and retention rates. The limitation within this study focused on such things as the level of teacher support and engaging activities and instruction. The article focused on why the teacher-student relationship matters and provides valid examples and scenarios. In conclusion the article discusses how teacher support affects a student's classroom, academic, and social performance. In theory, teacher support would result in higher student achievement. As students are more willing to work with an individual teacher based on the bonds and relationship they have built. As a direct result of positive established teacher support, student retention rates would in theory increase. Student who have strong relationships with their teachers use this as a reason to attend those classes.

Statement of the Problem.

There is a lack of knowledge about the best way to establish strong teacher to student rapport without knowing what both groups perceive to be most valuable information to know and to share.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to obtain information based on current high school, students' and teachers' perceptions of school wide relationships and relevance. These results will be compared to additional information gathered from the perceptions of students and teachers from the 2012-2013 *We Teach* and *We Learn* district surveys.

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Research Question(s)

RQ 1: What are the overall perceptions of student to teacher relevance and relationships among secondary students and teachers?

RQ 2: Is there a difference of perception of student to teacher relevance and relationships between secondary students and teachers?

Null Hypothesis(es)

Ho; There is no difference of perception of student to teacher relevance and relationships between secondary students and teachers.

Anticipated Benefits of the Study

The result of this study will inform administration, teachers, and students about the gaps within student and teacher perceptions of feedback and relationships. With this the NKCS D will be better to establish how relationships affect student success (use of CCSS). Further, the results gathered based upon the perceptions the students and teachers from the 2011-2012 school years, will help inform administration and educators how CCSS and teacher efforts will close those gaps for the following school year. Finally, this information will provide guidance to administration and teachers as to the level of various types of feedback such as: questioning, care, and guidance and how they can create strong teacher to student relationships experience.

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Definition of Terms

Secondary Students: High school students ranging from grades 9th through 12th

Secondary Teachers: High School teachers from both core and encore content

Perceptions: The students personal thoughts and beliefs provided via survey

Classroom Feedback/ communication: critique; information about how the student's present state (of learning and Performance) relates to these goals and standards

Feedback will directly align with Relationships: see definition for Rapport

CCSS: Common Core State Standards

Rapport: Relation; connection, especially harmonious or sympathetic relation: a teacher trying to establish close rapport with students

Relevancy: That which connects the taught material to the students and how they can use it or understand that material within their lives. A real world connection of material learned.

Summary

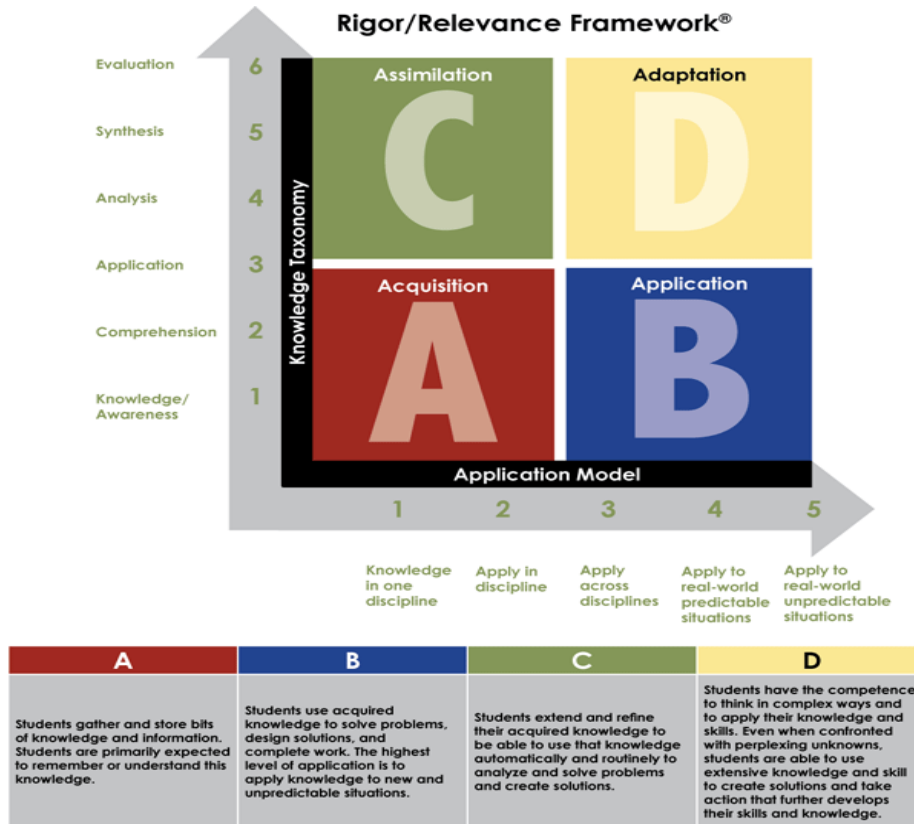
NKC is a suburban district in the Midwest with Four High schools, each with their own resulting relationship gaps. Within the district the provided teacher/ student feedback on relationship standings is a crucial measurement of student understanding, learning, and performance. The results of this feedback will provide us with the perceptions of students and teachers both at the high school level. This information will result in the validity of what teacher verse students' perceptions are of their educational equity. The

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school will take this information and use it to create an environment where they will feel, “Miss School, Miss out.” If the students have individuals they can relate to they will be more likely to meet the teacher half way and the teacher to also meet the student. The idea of creating bonds also creates relevancy and with these two pieces being met students are more willing to attempt more rigorous tasks.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Common Core State standards have a emphasis on teaching to both its two models; that of Knowledge and of Application. Within these two models exist various levels of rigor and relevance. These are categorized by quadrants as show in the image below.



Rigor and Relevance PowerPoint by Jim Miles

These models are linked with both literacy and technology standards, better known as NEXT Generation Standards. However, if a student does not have a good relationship or rapport with their teacher often students become dis-interested and disengaged. Students often feel as though their teachers have little to no interest in them as people, in their lives, or in their troubles and struggles. However according to the American Psychological Association (APA) (2012), “If a student feels a personal connection to a

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teacher, experiences frequent communication with a teacher, and receives more guidance and praise than criticism from the teacher, then the student is likely to become more trustful of that teacher, show more engagement in the academic content presented, display better classroom behavior, and achieve at higher levels academically. Positive teacher-student relationships draw students into the process of learning and promote their desire to learn (given that the content material of the class is engaging and age appropriate).” (p.30)

The idea of relationships seems easy enough, yet we found that teachers and students both struggle to make these connects, as often this indicates vulnerability and room for disappointment.

However, if one tries to weigh the pros and cons of teacher to students relationships one can easily see that there is evidence of lowered behavior issues, general classroom conflict, while promoting academic performance and social skills. As reported by Birch and Ladd (1997), student feedback indicated the liking of school more and experiencing less loneliness if they had healthy teacher to student relationships. Many factors affect a students’ performance both academically, socially, and how they feel individually.

According to the American Psychological Association, “Teachers who experience close relationships with students reported that their students were less likely to avoid school, appeared more self-directed, more cooperative, and more engaged in learning” (Birch & Ladd, 1997, pp. 61-79). “Teachers who use more learner-centered practices (i.e., practices that show sensitivity to individual differences among students, include students in the decision-making, and acknowledge students’ developmental, personal and

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relational needs) produced greater motivation in their students than those who used fewer of such practices” (Perry & Weinstein, 1998, p 177-194).

Research continues to show that teachers who work to create both social and emotionally positive learning environments show patterns of academic impact. This impact effects how a child regulates their behavior, how a teachers’ care and support can negate a child’s inability to self-regulate (APA, 2012).

In a study conducted by Texas A&M, Lambert (2012) focused on 784 at risk students starting in kindergarten in 2000 and 2001. They followed these students throughout elementary and beyond. Originally they were merely observing grade retention of achievement and social aspects of students’ achievement. They found that the student typically stayed within their ranks. Professors then studied the effects of a supportive teacher verses that of conflict or rejection. The following was stated within the article, “The findings reveal that when children have a supportive relationship with their teacher, one where they feel a sense of acceptance and security, they are more likely to work hard in school, follow rules and persist when they get stuck on problems. The children are also more likely to perceive themselves as more academically capable.” (Lambert, 2012, p.30) Based on this study success starts with the teacher and flows down to the students.

According to the above-mentioned study, Hughes (2001) states “...the research implicates the need for greater attention to be focused on supporting teachers’ abilities to create positive social and emotional learning environments.” (p.289-301). This demonstrates the direct links between teacher-student relationships and a feeling of accomplishment and success for teachers and increased academic and emotional success for the students.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

The research gathered is comparative in nature. The students surveyed consist of different groups of students varying from 9th to 12th graders. The high school teachers will also vary in content. The two differing groups will serve as determining factors that a relationship exists. There is significance to gathering student and teacher perceptions for the increases of student application, teacher and student equity in valuable teaching and learning setting, increased respect and overall retention and success for both parties.

The independent variable would be the Teacher/Learners and the dependent variables are the answers to the questions.

Study Group Description

The subjects for this study included students from one of the suburban high schools in the NKC school district. The surveys will be collected based on the culmination of the 2011-2012 school year(s)- These surveys will both be studied and compared resulting in evidence of the true benefits of student to teacher relationships and lesson relevancy. The student demographics for Oak Park High School during the 2010-2011 school year is as follows: a total enrollment of 1,351; within tis enrollment 39.1% utilized their option of Free and Reduced Lunch (FTE). The student body consisted of the following populations: 2.60% Asian, 9.60% Black, 10.10% Hispanic, 1.20% Indian, and 73.30% White. According to the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Oak Park High Schools 2010-2011 School Report Card indicates that both Communication Arts and Mathematics AYP were not met.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

A district climate survey served as the research design. The alpha level was set at 0.25 for all tests with this research. The independent variable was the relationships of teachers to students and vice versa perceived by teachers and students. The survey will measure the results of several dependent variables. Tests run will include t- testing. Survey found in Appendix A.

Statistical Analysis Methods

Statistical Package (ASP) software was used to complete the statistical calculations in this study. Additionally, Microsoft Excel was used to compile some totals used in the research.

FINDINGS

| Relationship questions: Indica | T in agreement | L in agreement |
|--|----------------|----------------|
| TQ3./LQ3 Bullying is a problem at this school | 38% | 39% |
| TQ31./LQ47 Awareness of my students' interests outside of school. | 87% | 37% |
| TQ47. /LQ17 Outside interests and goals. | 75% | 44.00% |
| TQ51./ LQ22. Conversations about academic problems and concerns with me/ my student. | 87% | 66.00% |
| | t=teacher | l=learner |

We Teach and We Learn Survey excerpts

Figure 1: Relationship questions for teachers/students (learners)

The above chart includes the initial questions in short provided to the teachers and learners. You will see the teacher data results listed in correspondence to the learners perceptions to the provided questions. These questions varied slightly by directing teachers to answer from their perspective and based on their personal experiences and the students answering based on what they saw and experienced in the 2011-2012 school year. The percentages tend to be significantly higher for the teachers, indicating that the

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teachers found the teacher-student support to be greater than what their students found it to be.

Teacher and Learner Survey results for questions pertaining to teacher-student relationships and taught relevancy.

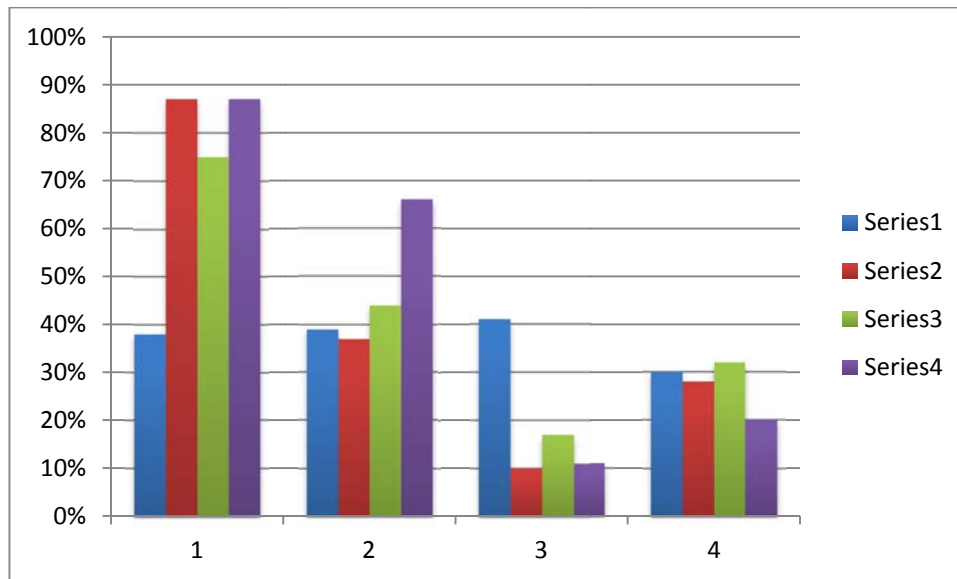


Figure 2: Blue indicates Teachers in total agreement, Red students in full agreement, green teachers undecided and purple students undecided.

The above chart depicts the differences between teacher and student perceptions on where each places the teacher-student relationships within Oak Park High School. It was observed that the teacher believed they had many more relationships and knew their students than the students indicated. This huge gap has led to concern and will be tracked through the similar lines of survey questions over the next five years. The scores above illustrate the percentages of teacher-learner agreement percentages of relationship status versus the teacher-student relevancy taught within the classroom; agreement percentages. Both areas of relationships and relevancy showed a significant need for

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improvement and maybe serving as negative impacts on the 2011-2012 school years' academic performance, behavioral reports, and retention levels.

| Source | Mean | S ² | Mean D | t-Test | df | p-value |
|-------------------|-------|----------------|--------|--------|----|---------|
| Relationships (1) | 71.75 | 538.25 | | | | |
| Relevance(2) | 93.17 | 21.77 | -21.42 | -2.26 | 8 | 0.05 |

Note: Significant when $p = < 0.10$.

As shown in Table 1, a significant difference as the p -value = 0.05 which is less than the 0.10. The relevance t -Test = -2.26 and had a Mean D = -21.42. The mean scores were found between teacher relationships and teacher relevancy. The null hypothesis was rejected. There is a significant difference. This difference indicates that the teacher perceptions on teacher to student relationships were marked drastically higher than what eh students indicated their perception of the teacher-student relationships to be. Again this was echoed in the teacher's perceptions of their content having high relevancy verses what he students deemed the relevancy levels to me placed at. The DF is 8 for teacher relevance.

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| Table 2 | | | | | | |
|---|-------|----------------|--------|--------|----|---------|
| <i>t-Test Analysis Results for Learners perceptions on RR</i> | | | | | | |
| Source | Mean | S ² | Mean D | t-Test | df | p-value |
| Relationships (1) | 46.5 | 177.67 | | | | |
| Relevance(2) | 61.83 | 36.57 | -21.42 | -2.51 | 8 | 0.04 |

As shown in Table 2, a significant difference (t -Test = 2.51; p -value = 0.04, Mean D = -- 21.42) in mean scores was found between the learners' perceptions of relationships and relevance. The null hypothesis was rejected. Students (relationships Mean =46.5) recorded a significantly higher mean score on the relevance questions on the *We Learn Survey* (Relevance Mean = 61.83), when compared to the criterion p -value of 0.10. These findings suggest that the new teaching strategy, instruction, and standards should adopt more teacher-student relationship building and coaching.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The null hypothesis stated that there is no significant reason to recognize students' and teachers' perceptions of relationships and relevance. The results of this study indicate that there are areas of significant difference of opinion between teachers and students. There is a significant difference of opinion concerning whether teachers are establishing meaningful relationships with their students and the relevancy with school and real world connects foster. Teachers feel that they know their students, likes, dislikes, involvement and problems. The responses to the questions are affected by the difference in opinion of what a meaningful teacher-student relationship should look like and include. This area warrants further study to understand why teacher and student perceptions have such a large gap.

By contrast, students responded the opposite of the teachers. All students ranging from 9th to 12th grade felt that their teachers were out of touch with them. They felt that they did not know who they were as people and had little interest in who they are, what they liked or disliked and about their problems. As with the teachers, this area warrants further study to examine why students feel disconnected from their teachers and what affects that has on their performances.

“The definition of crazy is always doing the same thing...and expecting change.”(Albert Einstein)

There appears to be a lack of understanding of what a meaningful teacher-student relationship is and the relevancy it establishes. Teacher perceptions of feeling on the successful end of relationship building and student perceptions feeling as though their

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teachers have no idea who they are as people; display an unsuccessful teacher-student relationship for the 2011-2012 student and teacher body. According to the survey results; the gap that exists between the student and teacher perceptions warrants further investigation into continued support, training, and guidance from the district. These efforts could potentially alter the entire makeup of the high schools climate and performance.

Through relationships teachers can foster will provide students with a safe environment where they want to be, where they are more willing to do the rigorous work and help the teachers to know what is relevant to their students by better knowing their students. Students will feel they can be open and honest. They will know that they have support and guidance from caring teachers. Relationship building is the foundation for creating a healthy learning environment and success for teachers and students alike.

The school district may want to consider an in-depth study of teacher-student relationships. This could be done by annually conducting teacher-student surveys on including relationship-based questions. Teacher leaders could then be taught theories such as Love and Logic and be trained in other supportive techniques and strategies. These teachers could then lead training sessions for other faculty members during professional development times. If the district does utilize the importance of teacher-student relationships and their affects on whole building performance, they may want first to ask for volunteers who all colleagues to sit in and observe positive interactions and observe new techniques, theories and strategies in action. Next, they will want to train the teachers who will be volunteering to use their classroom for observations. For

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the practice to be utilized best, the schools will want to insure that teachers have the time to collaborate and plan. If each of these steps are not followed, there likely will continue to be differences of opinions between teachers and students.

Finally, a study concerning all relationship dynamics in the high school should be examined and how those relationship affects trickle down to the students. This study could ask what one expects from another each rank with in the school building in order to feel that one is treated equally and held accountable for their efforts of relationship building. Analysis of the results should compare answers from administration, teachers, and students.

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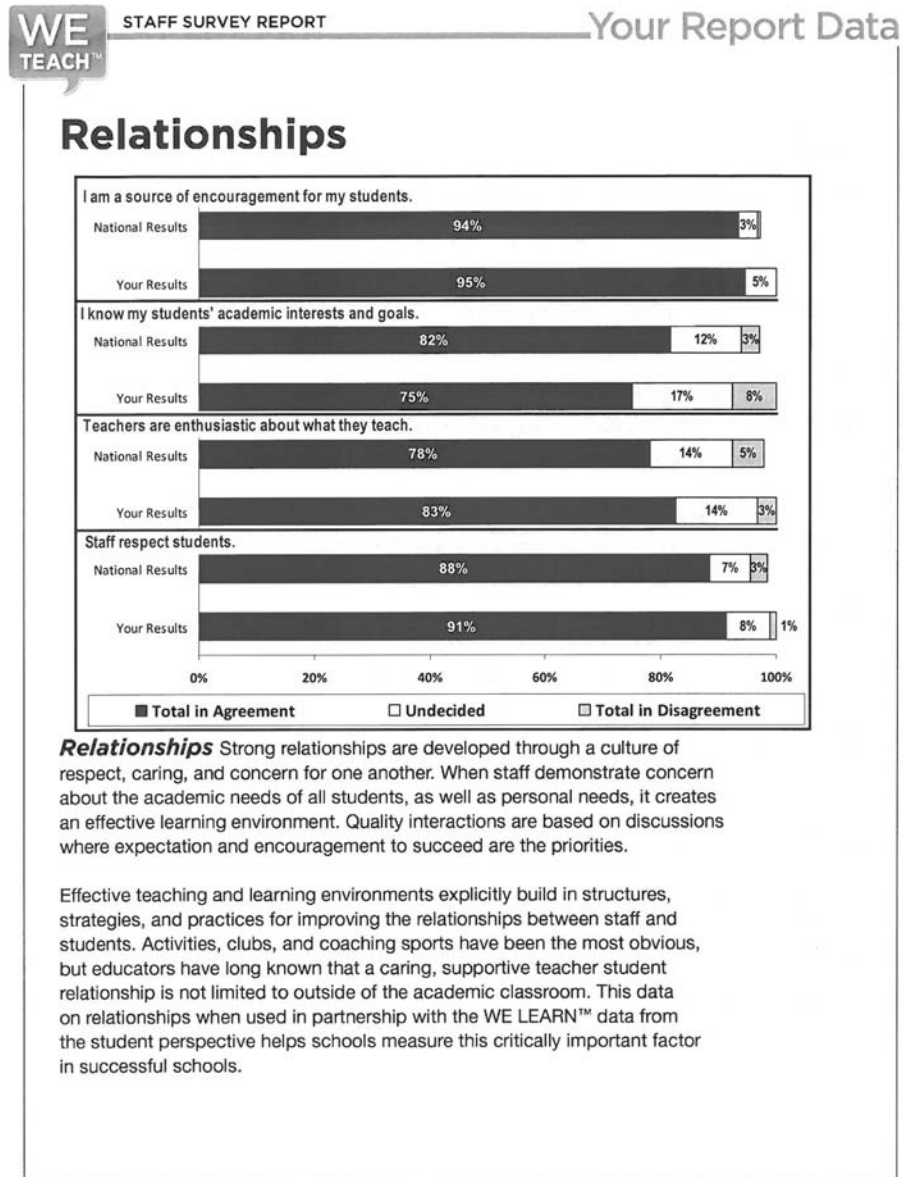
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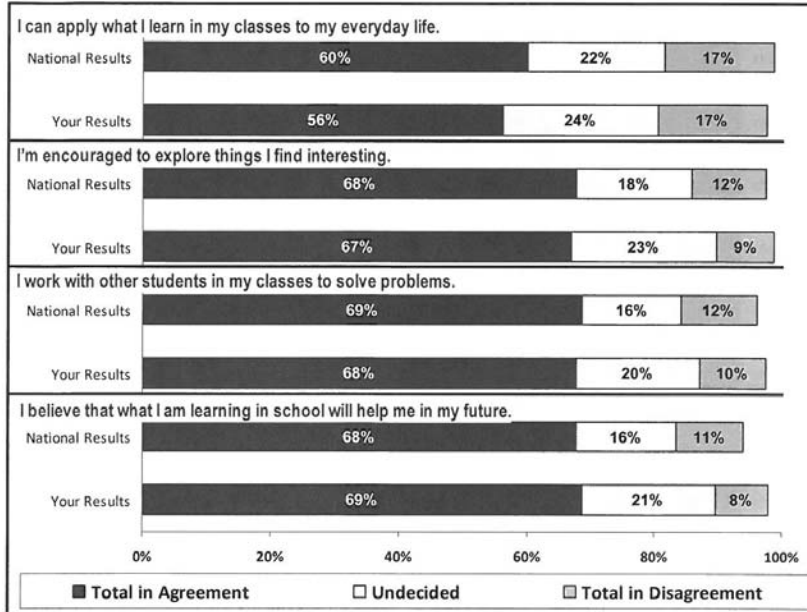
Appendix A.

Teacher Survey Results





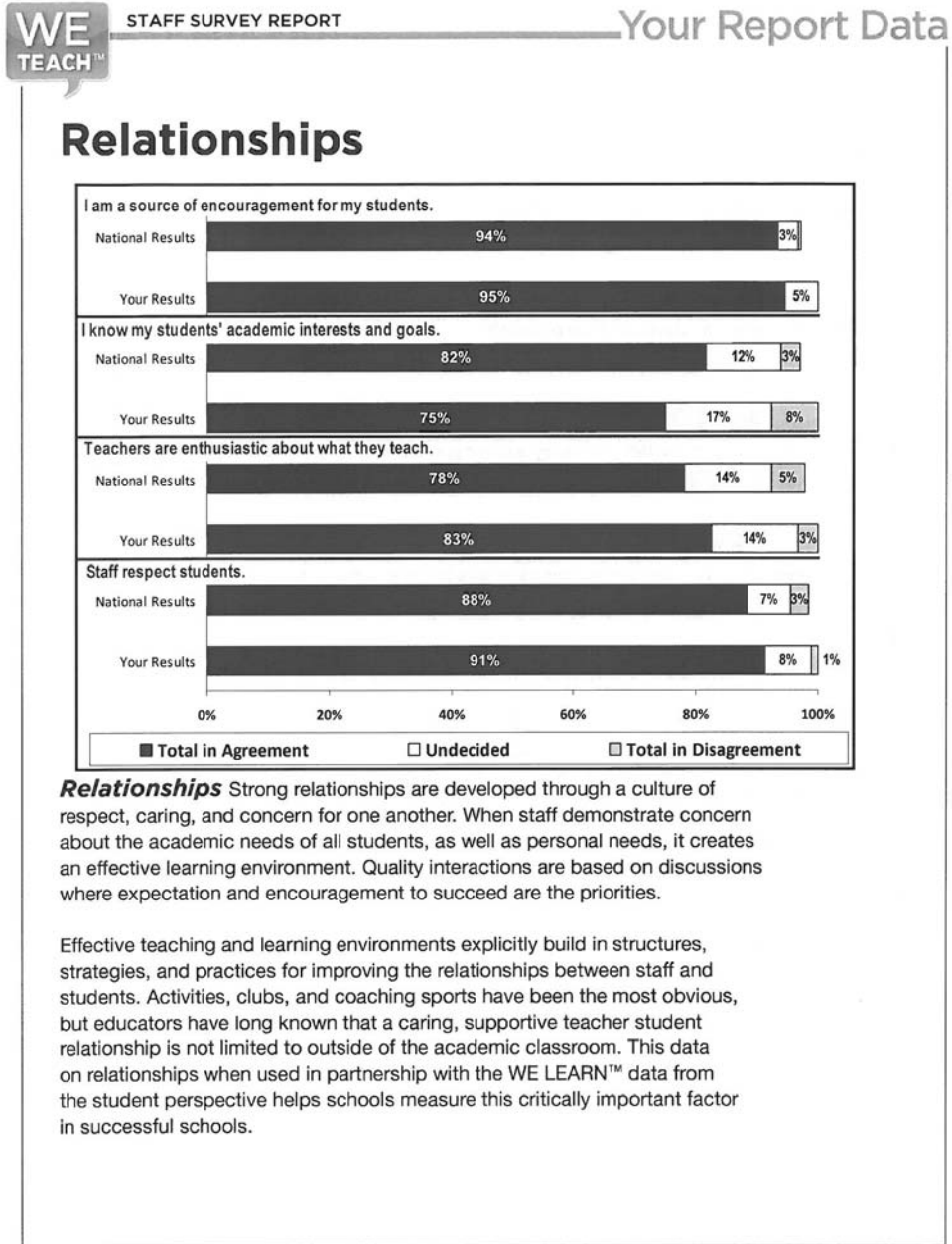
Relevance



Relevance enables students to connect what they are learning to their experience. Instruction that is interdisciplinary and real-world relevant engages students in learning by providing a context and impetus for making meaning. Relevance can vary depending on the culture of a school and its students. Relevance makes rigor possible for many students.

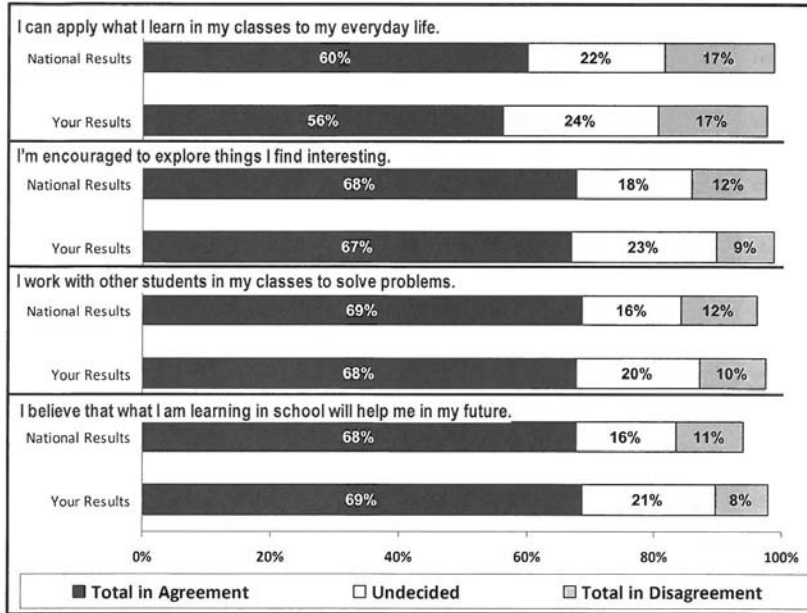
Yet relevance is more than simply asking students if they can relate to a topic being covered. Teachers make learning relevant by building on prior knowledge, using tools that engage a student's curiosity, and adapting curriculum to include personal skill development. Effective planning and instruction create opportunities for students to expand the learning beyond the classroom and apply understanding to the world in which they live.

Student Survey Results





Relevance



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