



Comprehensive School Health: An Approach for Building Positive Social Environments

What is a Positive Social Environment?

The social environment of a school reflects the quality and character of school life (National School Climate Center, 2014). It consists of norms, goals, values, teaching and learning practices, health and wellness, and organizational structures.

The social environment is shaped by the relationships between and among students, staff, parents and the community.

A positive school environment exists when all stakeholders feel welcome, connected, valued, safe and accepted.

Why we need a Positive Social Environment

A growing body of studies find that a positive social environment increases students' academic outcomes. Positive relationships between teachers and students and among students increase the psychological well-being of students and decrease absenteeism, suspensions, substance abuse, and bullying. Generally, establishing a positive social environment can benefit students, teachers, administrators, parents and the community as a whole and is key to achieving a brighter future for students.



Creating a Positive Social Environment

Creating a positive social environment is one of Alberta's three priority areas to address wellness using a comprehensive school health (CSH) approach. This summary report presents some findings relating to creating a positive social environment from Wellness Fund projects that have worked to create a health promoting school environments using CSH approach. Five indicators are used to measure positive social environment at schools:

- Value of school outcomes
- Students' positive sense of belonging
- Advocacy at school
- Relevance of class-room instruction
- Not being bullied



Data

350 schools that received district/school wellness implementation grants during 2010-2014 were part of the analysis. These schools represent 29 of the 61 (48%) of Alberta’s public, separate and francophone school jurisdictions. The data relating to positive social environment was obtained from the *Tell Them From Me* (TTFM) survey. Based on the time of collection of TTFM data and receiving wellness implementation grants, the schools were categorised into three groups: pre-funded, actively-funded and post-funded. The five indicators mentioned above were compared across these three groups of schools using advanced statistical methods.

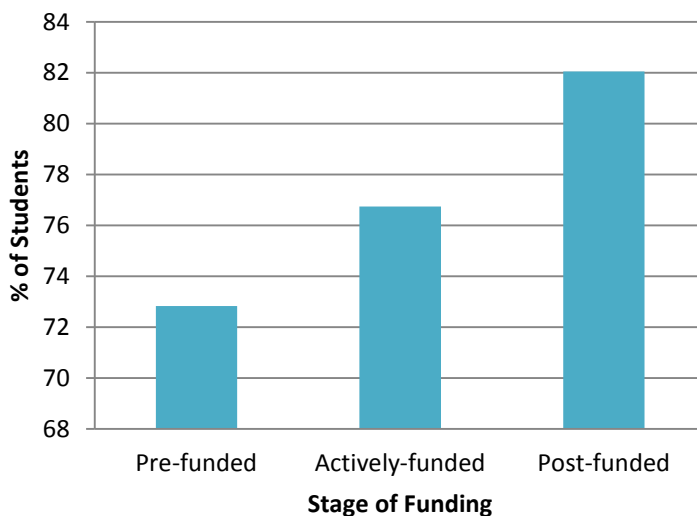
- **Pre-funded schools:** Schools that have completed TTFM survey before receiving wellness implementation funding.
- **Actively-funded schools:** Schools that completed TTFM survey at least 6 months after wellness implementation funding and before funding support ended.
- **Post-funded schools:** Schools that completed TTFM survey after wellness implementation funding support ended.

Results

Significant differences in the indicators of a positive school environment were found among the three categories of schools.

1. Rapidly discernible impacts

- **Value of School Outcomes**

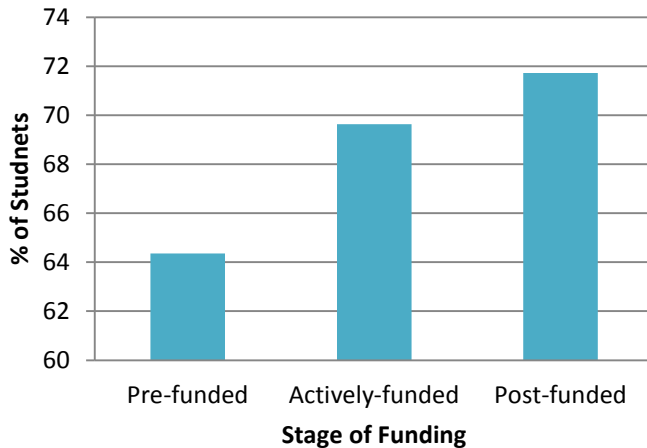


How it is measured: Percentage of students who believe that education will benefit them personally and economically, and have a strong bearing on their future

Results: The percentage of students who value school outcomes is higher among the schools that are in the actively-funded stage (76.74%) and post-funded stage (82.04%) than the ones in the pre-funded stage (72.82%).



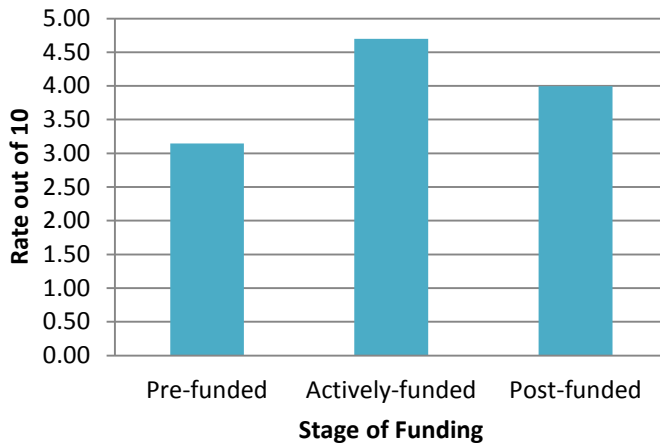
• **Positive Sense of Belonging**



How it is measured: The percentage of students who feel accepted and valued by their peers and others at their school.

Results: The percentage of students with a positive sense of belonging is greater among the schools that are in the actively-funded stage (69.63 %) and post-funded stage (71.72%) than those are in the pre-funded stage (64.36%).

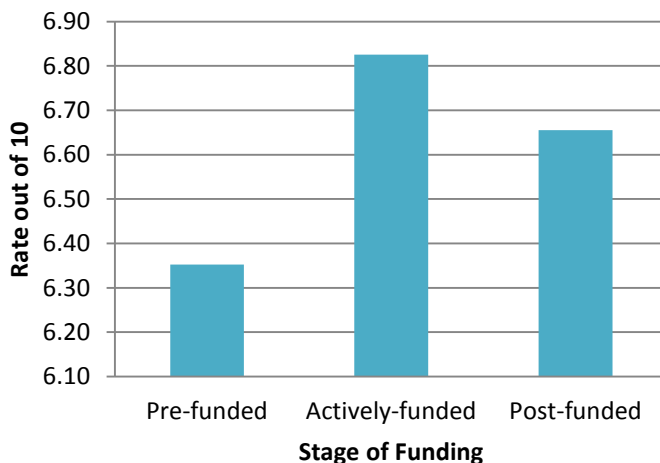
• **Advocacy at School**



How it is measured: Students feel they have someone at school who consistently provides encouragement and can be turned to for advice (rated out of 10)

Results: Students of the schools that are in the actively-funded stage and post-funded stage have rated advocacy at their school higher (4.70 and 3.99 respectively) relative to the students of the schools that are in the pre-funded stage (3.15).

• **Relevance of Classroom Instruction**



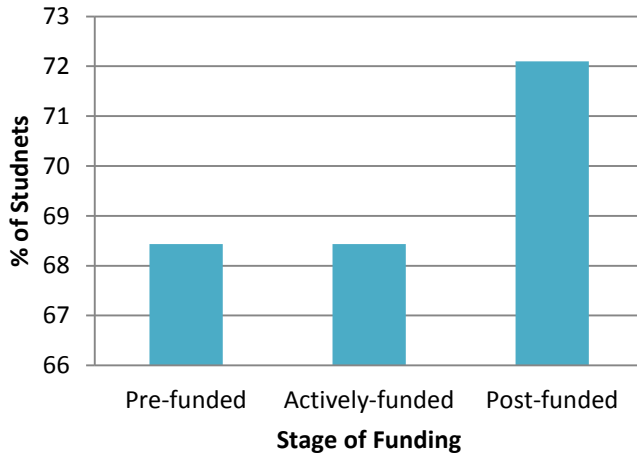
How it is measured: Students who find classroom instruction relevant to their everyday lives (rated out of 10)

Results: Students of the schools that are in the actively-funded stage and post-funded stage have rated relevance of classroom instruction higher (6.83 and 6.66 respectively) relative to the students of the schools that are in the pre-funded stage (6.35).



2. Impacts which may take a relatively longer time to emerge

- **Not being bullied**



How it is measured: Percentage of students who are not subjected to physical, social, or verbal bullying, or are not bullied over the internet.

Results: The percentage of students who are not subjected to bullying is higher among the schools that are in the post-funded stage (72.10%) than the ones in the pre-funded and actively-funded stage (68.43%).

The Wellness Fund is committed to supporting school communities to develop a positive school environment using a comprehensive school health approach.

Results clearly indicate that projects funded by the Wellness Fund have been able to create positive school environments which support improvements to students' learning and academic outcomes.



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