

## Students' Sense of Belonging: What the Research Says

By [Evie Blad](#) — June 20, 2017 2 min read



Getty

- 
- 
- 

Students pick up signals from their schools and peers about whether or not they belong, perceptions that can affect their success both inside and outside the classroom, a growing body of research finds. Here's a sample of research findings.

How does a sense of belonging change student discipline?

When students sense that their teachers respect them, [they trust them more and, consequently, misbehave less](#), Stanford researchers found.

In a 2016 study, the researchers found that students whose teachers participated in training about the importance of empathy in the classroom were half as likely to be suspended by the end of the school year than students whose teachers had not participated.

See Also



### [Student Well-Being](#)[Kindergarten Play Makes a Comeback, and Boys Benefit](#)

The experiment had stronger effects for students—largely black and Latino boys—who had been suspended in the previous year.

What happens when students see unfairness at school?

Students [who perceive inconsistent treatment](#) for their racial or ethnic group may respond with defiance and misbehavior, researchers found in a study published in February.

Researchers from the University of Texas, Yale University, and Stanford University surveyed middle school students about trust and fairness at school. They found black and white students had similar responses on the trust survey at the start of 6th grade, but a “trust gap” developed by the spring of 7th grade, when black students’ average score dropped to its lowest point in middle school.

A lack of trust in school correlated with higher subsequent discipline rates and a lower likelihood of later enrollment in a four-year university.

How does belonging affect academic engagement?

Students who are underrepresented in a school setting or who are part of a group that is subject to negative stereotypes may respond differently to failure or criticism from a teacher, psychologists say.

Those students may see such experiences as confirmation that they are less capable than their peers. Schools can counteract those effects by discussing how to learn from failure and by [encouraging teachers to be “warm demanders”](#) who set high expectations for students and encourage their potential, psychologists say.

Researchers from Stanford University have found that students whose teachers attached a note to the first draft of their essays that said, “I’m giving you these comments because I have very high expectations and I know that you can reach them,” were more likely to revise that essay than students in a control group who received a note that said, “I’m giving you these comments so that you’ll have feedback on your paper.” And the effects were stronger for black students.

How does a “cultural mismatch” affect students?

Students who come from cultural backgrounds that emphasize interdependence and community may struggle in environments that view success as an individual endeavor, studies have concluded.

In a 2012 study, researchers from universities including Northwestern University, the University of Washington, and Stanford found that first-generation college students from largely working-class backgrounds [performed better academically](#) after participating in an exercise that emphasized the value of community at their college or university.



[Evie Blad](#)

follow

[Senior Staff Writer](#), [Education Week](#)