

# School environment affects teacher expectations of their students

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The school environment in which teachers work is related to their expectations of students, according to a new study by researchers at the University of Montreal. "It is known that low teacher expectations are negatively associated with student achievement and school effectiveness. While we know that expectations are primarily determined by the specific characteristics of teachers, we have shown that the school environment also plays a determining role," says lead author of the study, Marie-Christine Brault, a post-doctoral researcher at the university's Institut de recherche en santé publique de l'Université de Montréal (IRSPUM).

To measure the impact of [school](#) environment in determining these expectations, the researchers conducted a multilevel analysis using data from 2,666 teachers in 71 secondary schools in Quebec. The data came from the evaluation of the implementation of New Approaches, New Strategy Intervention Strategy, implemented between 2002 and 2008 by Québec's ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS). The data were collected by Michel Janosz, also of the IRSPUM, through the Socio-Educational Environment Questionnaire, that looked specifically at the characteristics of the [school environment](#).

From these data, the researchers were able to distinguish between two levels of variables, belonging to either the teacher (perception of "school climate", gender, age, courses taught) or the school: its academic, socio-economic, and ethnic composition, and the way the entire school community perceived the "school climate." The "school climate" reflects

school priorities in terms of learning, good education and academic success of [students](#), and promotion of a stimulating and graduation-oriented environment.

The socioeconomic and ethnic composition of students in the school, as well as the school academic composition defined by student drop-out rates, academic delays, poor student scores on logical reasoning scales, and the number of students designated as being in difficulty according to criteria set by the Ministry of Education, all play a role in determining expectations. However school academic composition is the most influential. "Between the students' backgrounds and the school's academic composition, the latter seems to play the most influential role in determining expectations. These finding only confirm the importance of prior [student achievement](#) in teacher expectations," says Brault. "It should be noted, however, that the schools in our sample were fairly homogenous socioeconomically and that few of them had a high rate of students from ethnic minorities." The findings also show that school climate, whether perceived by teachers or by the entire school population (students, teachers, administration), is critical. A positive school climate is associated positively with teacher expectations. Finally, the results indicate that school composition also indirectly affects expectations: academic difficulties and ethnic background of students influence school climate and therefore, indirectly, teacher expectations.

"Our study confirms the important role of the school environment in determining teacher expectations, which are essential for effective education. To promote positive expectations among teachers, a better understanding of what determines these expectations would seem essential. This is the main purpose of our study. To this end, our findings suggest that by intervening in the educational climate of schools, in particular, by ensuring that all teachers are committed to the success of their students, and by enhancing the value placed by the school community on academic effort and learning, teacher expectations can

improve," Brault explained.

**More information:** The article Effects of school composition and school climate on teacher expectations of students: A multilevel analysis was published in the journal *Teaching and Teacher Education* on September 19, 2014 (online publication).

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