

# Higher suspension rates are linked to feeling less 'connected' at school

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Adolescents attending schools with high suspension rates reported lower levels of feeling "connected" at school, according to a recent study by the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research. Previous research has

shown that feeling "connected" at school and volunteering relate to a positive school climate. Researchers also found that connectedness and volunteerism varied by race and income.

The study used 2015 to 2017 California Health Interview Survey data from adolescents ages 12 to 17 and suspension rates from the California Department of Education.

"School connectedness" is defined as the feeling that adults at [school](#) care about students and their education. The study found that lower levels of school connectedness were associated with lower attendance at schools. Lower levels of connectedness were also linked to lower rates of volunteerism and more sick days. Latino teens and teens from [low-income families](#) reported lower levels of school connectedness, had lower rates of volunteerism, and were more likely to attend a school with high suspension rates.

"Teens attending schools with high suspension rates say they feel less connected to their schools and fewer of them participate in volunteer activities," said Susan Babey, senior research scientist at the [health policy research](#) center and lead author of the study. "Our research showed teens who feel more connected to school report fewer sick days and feel their schools are safe."

Some key findings from the study are:

- 53 percent of teens attending schools with low suspension rates report high levels of school connectedness, compared to 44 percent of teens attending schools with high suspension rates
- 51 percent of teens attending schools with low suspension rates volunteered in the past year, compared to 34 percent of teens at schools with high [suspension](#) rates
- 46 percent of Latino teens indicate high levels of school

connectedness, compared to 64 percent of white teens. Latino teens were also less likely than white teens to have volunteered in the past year (34 percent versus 66 percent)

- 48 percent of teens from low-income families report high levels of connectedness, compared to 62 percent from higher income families
- 53 percent of teens with high levels of school connectedness volunteered in the past year compared to 40 percent of those with low levels of connectedness

Based on these findings and previous research, the authors propose strategies to increase school connectedness and participation in civic activities, particularly for low-income youth and youth of color.

"We recommend providing opportunities that allow students, families, school staff and communities to work together to improve the school climate," said Joelle Wolstein, center research scientist and co-author of the study.

"For example, we would encourage schools to move away from exclusionary discipline practices such as out-of-school suspensions in favor of restorative justice practices such as community service to restore a harm that was done or peer mediation to resolve conflict," she said.

"Schools can expand learning beyond the classroom by encouraging and connecting youth to opportunities to support and improve their communities," said Dr. Robert Ross, president and CEO of The California Endowment. "Not only does this strengthen their connection to their communities, each other and their teachers, but it also helps build healthy school environments."

**More information:** School Discipline Practices Associated with

Adolescent School Connectedness and Engagement.  
[healthpolicy.ucla.edu/publicat ... tail.aspx?PubID=1843](https://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/publicat...tail.aspx?PubID=1843)

Provided by University of California, Los Angeles

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