Student and Staff Perceptions of School-Based Support

Services in Mid-Atlantic Comprehensive High Schools

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to gain more information about the perceptions of high school students and staff regarding support services offered in the school. This study was descriptive in nature and used questions from a self-report, web-based survey to gain insight into participants' perceptions. There were differences both between the student and staff groups and within the staff group of participants. It would be beneficial to continue to study student and staff perceptions concerning the support services available at their schools in order to maximize the use of these resources.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Currently, high schools have the mission of producing 21st century learners, productive citizens, and healthy individuals. In addition to rigorous academic standards, schools also focus on overall youth development and wellbeing. In order to develop successful students, high schools embrace the concept of focusing on various aspects of student development and providing services to enhance student success. Research suggests that school-based support services can be beneficial in helping students become better learners and healthier individuals.

With much information available regarding promising practices and interventions, high schools are able to be effective in the delivery of services to students. Social, emotional, and behavioral supports are being recognized as being as important as academic interventions. High schools may offer organizational and study skills interventions, conflict resolution, peer supports, substance abuse services, health/wellness promotion, bullying prevention, health services, and counseling. Although there is a wide range of services offered and a variety of service providers, these services are not always optimally utilized.

Often high school students are oblivious to what services and supports are available to them through the school. Because these services can have a profound effect on student achievement and wellbeing, it is important that students are aware of what is being offered. There are many resources that contribute to providing school-based support services and it is in the best interest of students, staff, parents, and the community that students access these resources.

Statement of the Problem/ Research Question

What are the perceptions of high school students and staff members regarding school-based support services in comprehensive Mid-Atlantic High Schools?

Operational Definitions

School-based support services as defined in the study, are those that include school-wide, targeted, or individual services provided by the school during the school day to support social, emotional, and/or behavioral health.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This review of the literature explores the importance of addressing social, emotional, and behavioral health in schools. These services can be integrated into the curriculum or provided independently to students in need. Because educators seek to develop productive citizens and healthy individuals in addition to providing content knowledge, the school environment is an appropriate setting to address mental health needs.

Section one of this review will define and address the need for support services in schools. Section two will review current practices for providing support services in schools. Section three highlights some suggested strategies to increase students' use of school-based support services. The focus of section three will also be on increasing student awareness of school-based supports.

Defining School-Based Support Services

School-based support services address a variety of developmental issues including academic, behavioral, social, emotional, or health concerns. The type, delivery model, length of service, service providers, and target audience for school-based support services likely differ from school to school.

The Need for Support Services in Schools

Prevalence of Social, Emotional, Behavioral Health Issues in Schools

Healthy development can be a challenge for students of all ages, with adolescence being a particularly vulnerable time. Adolescents experience great physical, emotional, social, and intellectual changes. Since students spend about one-third of their waking hours in the school environment, it is no surprise that schools serve students beyond the capacity of academic

instruction. Students develop friendships, pursue hobbies and recreational activities, and explore

careers through the context of schools. The majority of students are able to achieve normal

developmental milestones (De Wit, Karoija, Rye & Shain, 2011).

However, according to the Surgeon General's report on mental health (2000), "10% of

youth will suffer from mental illnesses significant enough to impact social and emotional

functioning" (Trussell, 2008, p. 194). In addition, almost half of all diagnosed mental disorders

emerge by age 14 and the use of substances reaches its peak in people ages 12-25 (Crockett,

2012). Considering the size of school populations, the number of students who may be affected

by these issues is significant. For the sake of students experiencing developmental difficulties,

as well as for the overall functioning of the school environment, schools must address these

issues.

Impact on Learning

The importance of the school environment cannot be overlooked. Educators agree that

learning takes place in context. Students must be available and able to learn and be motivated to

learn. Being successful in school requires self-regulation, meta-cognition, social skills, time

management, and self-discipline as well as many other skills. The development of these skills

allows students to be successful in the school environment. In addition to these skills, students

should feel safe, welcome, and valued at school.

Health and mental health issues can affect students' attendance, school participation,

work completion, academic achievement, and school completion (Basch, 2011). Students with

mental or behavioral health issues may miss instructional time, have difficulty forming

relationships with staff or peers, and may not be able to access the content being taught in

school. Social, emotional, and behavioral problems lead to a variety of obstacles both in and out of school.

Impact on Society

Social, emotional, or behavioral difficulties have a broad impact for those affected. Mental and behavioral health issues impact physical health, learning, employment, and relationships. The Global Burden of Disease (World Health Organization) reports "without significant focus, mental health problems will become one of the five most common causes of morbidity, mortality, and disability among children worldwide" (Trussell, 2008, p. 194).

Although social, emotional, and behavioral problems in youth may be significant, they are largely preventable (Crepau-Hobson, 2004). Prevention and early intervention are the most cost-effective strategies for health promotion. "A healthy individual can contribute more to a society and not only make massive contributions, but also save resources which would otherwise be spent in the management of unhealthy individuals" (Kalra, Christodoulou, Jenkins, Tsipas, Christodoulou, Lecic-Tosevski, Mezzich & Bhugra, 2012, p. 82).

Service Delivery in Schools

Providing support services in the school building can be beneficial in many ways. Many believe that this is a less expensive, more easily accessible, and more socially acceptable means of accessing services (Crepeau-Hobson, 2004). Because students are expected to be in school for over 30 hours a week, it makes sense to offer developmentally appropriate support services in the school setting. Academic achievement, quality of life, and overall health and wellbeing of students can be positively impacted through school based support services (De Wit et al., 2011).

Researchers agree that students experiencing social, emotional, or behavioral health issues may not always access help through community resources for a variety of reasons.

Schools can be an optimal place for service delivery because they can service large numbers of students, can provide services ranging from prevention to treatment, and are able to monitor and intervene at all age levels (Crockett, 2012; De Wit et al., 2011). Peers and staff members can model appropriate and healthy behaviors and act as a strong support system for students in need (Wilson, Deane, Marshall & Dalley, 2008).

Review of Current Practices

Current best practices for school-based support services include: having a coordinated program that fits the needs of the school, having a continuum of services available to students, and having the input of a variety of stakeholders for program evaluation and improvement. Different service delivery models seem to be the aspect that has been most thoroughly explored in the literature.

The literature on school-based support services describes a continuum of services with universal prevention, targeted intervention and support, and school-based treatment (Crockett, 2012; Kalra et al., 2012).

Universal supports are those that encourage healthy development, are available to all students, and foster protective factors that enhance youth resiliency. The universal approach focuses not only on strengthening the individual student, but also on creating an environment that is supportive to all. A school with a strong sense of community, student connectedness, high expectations along with adequate supports, and one that is student-centered goes a long way in promoting positive youth development. Rowling (2009) argues that a supportive school environment can be more effective than building the skills of individual students.

Early intervention occurs in schools through screening, teacher referrals, or other services that are embedded in the curriculum. Early interventions are often implemented by school

support staff to help particularly vulnerable groups of students or those just beginning to experience difficulties.

"School-based treatment is delivered to students who have a diagnosed disorder and may take the form of crisis intervention, case management, counseling, and/or behavior modification. These services may be delivered in a coordinated manor between the school and community and general practitioners" (Crockett, 2012, p. 55).

One of the challenges to providing school-based support services is that although these services may be present in the school, students may be unaware of or unwilling to access these services.

Strategies to Increase Student Awareness of School-based Support Services

The Message

Students are aware that the school institution is a place for learning new information and academic material. Still, students do not always recognize that it is also a place to gain life skills, address social or interpersonal concerns, address emotional or behavioral issues, and become connected to other resources. Schools' messages about the importance of health and well-being should be as transparent as the message about the importance of academic coursework.

The climate of the school should be one where wellness is promoted, but also should support students in recognizing their own needs and seeking help. The fear of being judged for seeking services for social or emotional concerns can deter people from pursuing help (Vogel, Wade & Hackler, 2007). An approach to limiting this barrier is to create a culture of openness and one where students are willing and able to find the resources they need.

In order for students to get the help they need, they have to know where to go. Often, those who deliver direct health services (counselors, social workers, psychologists, nurses) are the ones promoting their services and disseminating health-promoting information. But, being that students spend most of their time in the classroom, health/mental health providers in schools will need the help of teachers to spread important information. "Schools require a climate where seeking health is supported and promoted across educational opportunities and settings" (Wilson et al., 2008, p. 1267).

Not only do student support providers need to advertise what types of services they offer, they also need to stimulate understanding of the process. By describing how services are delivered and what the process might look like, it demystifies the process and may eliminate some of the uncertainty experienced by students (Vogel & Armstrong, 2010). Vogel and Armstrong also assert "counselors need to reach beyond the traditional methods of service provision to access individuals who are in need of services but are also the most reluctant to seek them" (p. 394).

The Medium

"Increased awareness of the importance of the role of the social network in the help seeking process is a clear implication of our findings" (Vogel & Armstrong, 2010, p. 394). These authors' findings suggest that an individual's social support network (friends and family) can have a major impact on one's use or non-use of support services. Therefore, school staff cannot be the sole promoters of school-based support services and other resources.

By tapping in to students' natural support networks, service providers can indirectly influence students' awareness of resources and supports available. "It would be beneficial for counselors to become involved in outreach and other educational programs geared toward the

friends and families of students to increase the support being offered to students who are

engaged in help-seeking behaviors for their psychological, academic, or career-related distress"

(Vogel & Armstrong, 2010, p. 394).

Wilson et al. (2008) agree that by educating other individuals who are involved with

students (coaches, community leaders, etc.), they may indirectly receive helpful information,

referrals, encouragement, and access to services. "Individuals may also be more likely to seek

counseling services after being linked with other sources of positive support. It may also be

important to frame counseling in a way that helps not only the individual but also those around

them to see counseling in a positive manor" (Vogel & Armstrong, 2010, p. 394).

The Majority

Teachers make up the majority of school staff. They are often the initial point of contact

and have the most face time with students. It is important to empower teachers when attempting

to make any school-wide change. Although much of the pressure on teachers is to increase

academic achievement, many teachers are also concerned with the social, emotional, and

behavioral wellbeing of students. Teachers understand that students' social, emotional, and

behavioral health impacts learning and overall development. It seems that teachers are interested

in promoting healthy development and in being part of the support process for students needing

help. Yet, teachers will need more support in terms of professional development and learning in

order to be able to provide the support that is required (Kidger, Gunnell, Biddle, Campbell, &

Donovan, 2010).

Teachers receive professional development in content area knowledge, assessment

measures, and instructional techniques. However, it seems that teachers feel under-prepared to

deal with the social, emotional, and behavioral concerns that students bring to the classroom.

Several studies indicate that teachers feel a need for more information regarding student mental health and social/emotional well-being. Teacher needs include: guidelines for the role of the teacher in providing student support, information on the process of referring to other mental health professionals, more information about resources available to students, and more information on youth mental health issues (Alisic, 2012).

In any school-based change process the teachers are core change agents. Not only teaching staff, but all relevant partners in a health-promoting school process need to be integrated in a professional development and learning process. Professional development and learning can thus be seen to constitute a core base for building organizational capacity for change and ensure a whole school approach. Such capacity has been found to be core for developing necessary understanding, motivation and skills for the implementation of the health promoting school approach as well as generating a general attitude and competence for undertaking organizational change. (Oddrun & Rowling, 2011, p. 370)

It seems that educators may need to change the way in which information is being disseminated to both staff and students. Consideration of who the target audience is, how often information about services and resources is shared, and who disseminates the information should occur.

Summary

School-based support services are a necessary part of the educational environment. When students utilize them, these services can positively influence academic, social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes. The needs, values, and attitudes of students must be addressed and student input must be part of the solution for increasing student awareness of school-based

supports. Students must be given the opportunity to give insights into advancing the efforts in

promoting school-based support services.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

The purpose of this descriptive study is to better understand the perceptions of students and staff in regard to the support services that are available within a typical comprehensive high school in the Mid-Atlantic area. These services include school-wide, group, or individual services provided by the school during the school day to support social, emotional, and/or behavioral health. Students and staff were each administered a subscale of the *School Climate Survey* developed by Johns Hopkins University. The survey is a self-report that students and staff can access from the school.

Participants

Participants in this survey included both students and staff of two high schools in the Mid-Atlantic area. A total of 879 students and 153 staff members responded. All staff in each of the two school buildings were encouraged to participate in the survey in an attempt to get similar numbers of students from each grade level. The survey was administered to students using a total of 47 classrooms. There were 244 students in 9th grade, 201 students in the 10th grade, 177 students in the 11th grade, and 166 students in grade 12. Within the student group, 179 student participants were African-American, 37 were Asian, 81 students were Hispanic, 15 were Native American/American Indian, 76 self-identified as Other, and 400 were White. Disaggregated by gender, 400 students were female and 389 of the students were male.

Among the faculty, 87 of the staff participants were general education teachers, while 16 of the staff served as special educators, 11 staff members were student support service providers and the remaining participants serve in the capacity of administration, office staff, or paraprofessionals. Forty three staff members reported serving in their current role for 1-3 years.

A total of 59 staff members worked in their role for 4-8 years, and 58 staff members have worked in their current position for 9 or more years. In looking at staff mobility, 66 members of the staff have worked in their current school for 1-3 years, 62 staff have worked in their current school for 4-8 years, and 31 staff have worked in their current school for 9 or more years. 10 staff participants were African-American, 2 were Asian, 3 students were Hispanic, 2 were Native American, 14 were self-identified as "Other", and 138 were White. A total of 98 staff members were female, while 62 were male.

Instrument

The instrument used in this study was a subscale of the *School Climate Survey* developed by Johns Hopkins University. The survey developers reviewed literature related to school climate and previously validated measures of school climate and safety. The subscale items used in this study were directly related to the researcher's topic of interest. The instrument consisted of nine Likert scale questions relating to student perceptions of support services and resources and nine Likert scale questions relating to staff perceptions of supports offered through the school. Both sections consisted of four-response Likert scale items. The survey was web-based and accessible during the months of March through May.

Procedure

Survey administration was conducted electronically and began on March 15, 2013. In February, an email to the school principals was disseminated, including instructions on the process for administering student and staff surveys, as well as the parent consent form. An email describing the purpose of the study, containing a survey password and survey instructions, and the survey web address were sent to the staff once the online survey became available. Teachers

were notified that the survey was anonymous and voluntary and were encouraged to take the survey before May 1st.

In February, school administrators selected 25 classrooms (7 ninth grade classes and 6 classes each in grades 10, 11 and 12) to take the survey. The purpose of the survey was explained to students in those classes and students were given a passive consent letter to be taken home and shared with parents. Information about the survey was also posted on the school web page.

Teachers of the classes selected to participate in the survey were given a script in which they described the goals of the survey that the survey was voluntary and anonymous, and that parents may contact the school if they prefer their child not take the survey.

All respondents were asked to complete the online electronic survey between the dates of March 15 and May 1, 2013. Not all participants answered all questions. The average length of time for survey completion was 20 minutes. Data was exported from the online system to a Microsoft Excel document for analysis.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This study was designed to examine the perceptions of students and staff in regard to the support services that are available within a typical comprehensive high school in the Mid-Atlantic area. Both students and staff were asked about their degree of agreement with statements regarding social-emotional, behavioral, or other/miscellaneous support services in their school.

A total of 153 staff members participated in the study, including 108 teachers (general education and special education) and 11 support staff. The participants of this study were staff and students of comprehensive high schools in the Mid-Atlantic area. A total of two high schools were included in the study. There are approximately 162 general education and special education teachers employed by the Mid-Atlantic high schools and approximately 15 support staff (school psychologists, school social workers, and school counselors). Roughly 67% of the teachers employed in the two school buildings participated in the study. About 73% of the support staff participated. The staff at these two high schools is made up of approximately 25% of the staff with 1-3 years of experience, 37% of staff who have between 4-8 years of experience and about 38% of staff who have 9 or more years of experience. It is the opinion of the researcher that participants of the survey are a representative sample of the larger staff population at these schools.

Seven hundred and eighty-eight students participated by initiating the web-based survey. Each high school participating in the study has about 1200 students enrolled. About 33% of the students enrolled participated in the survey. About 27% of the students enrolled in the two high schools are ninth graders, about 25% are in 10th grade, 25% are 11th graders, and about 22% are

in grade 12. Among survey participants, 31% were in grade 9, 25% from grade 10, 22% from grade 11, and 21% from grade 12.

Table 1

Response Rate of Survey Participants (Staff)

Staff Participants	Number of Respondents	(Approx.) Percent of Total Respondents
Role Name		
Administrators	4	2.6
General Educators	93	60.8
Office Staff	5	3.2
Other	11	7.2
Paraprofessionals	14	9.2
Special Educators	15	9.8
Student Services	11	7.2
Years in Role		
1-3 years	41	26.8
4-8 years	57	37.3
9 or more years	55	35.9
Years at School		
1-3 years	64	41.8
4-8 years	59	38.6
9 or more years	30	19.6
Race		
Asian/Pacific Islander	2	1.3
Black/African American	10	6.5
Hispanic/Latino	3	1.9
Native American	2	1.3
Hawaiian Islander	0	0
Other	5	3.3
White	131	85.6
Gender		
Female	92	60
Male	61	40

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Table 2

Response Rates of Survey Participants (Students)

Student Participants	Number of Respondents	(Approximate) Percent of Total Respondents
Grade		
Grade 9	244	31
Grade 10	201	25
Grade 11	177	22
Grade 12	166	21
Race		
Asian	37	4.7
Black/African American	179	23
Hispanic/Latino	81	10
Native American	16	2
Hawaiian Islander	7	0.8
Other	69	9
White	400	51
Gender		
Female	400	50.6
Male	389	49.3

Social-Emotional Supports

When asked to respond regarding social-emotional support services, students and staff each answered three questions about social-emotional supports in the school. Students were asked to what degree they agreed/disagreed with the following statements: *"Teachers at this school help students with their problems" (Figure 1); "The school has programs that address violence/ conflict between students" (Figure 2); "There is someone at school who I can talk to about personal problems" (Figure 3).*

To gain an understanding of staff perceptions about the availability of social-emotional supports for students in their school, teachers were asked to respond to the following: *"The adults at this school feel responsible for students' social and emotional development" (Figure 1); "The school has programs that address violence/ conflict between students" (Figure 2); "This school has programs/services to help students with suspected emotional or behavioral problems (Figure 3).*
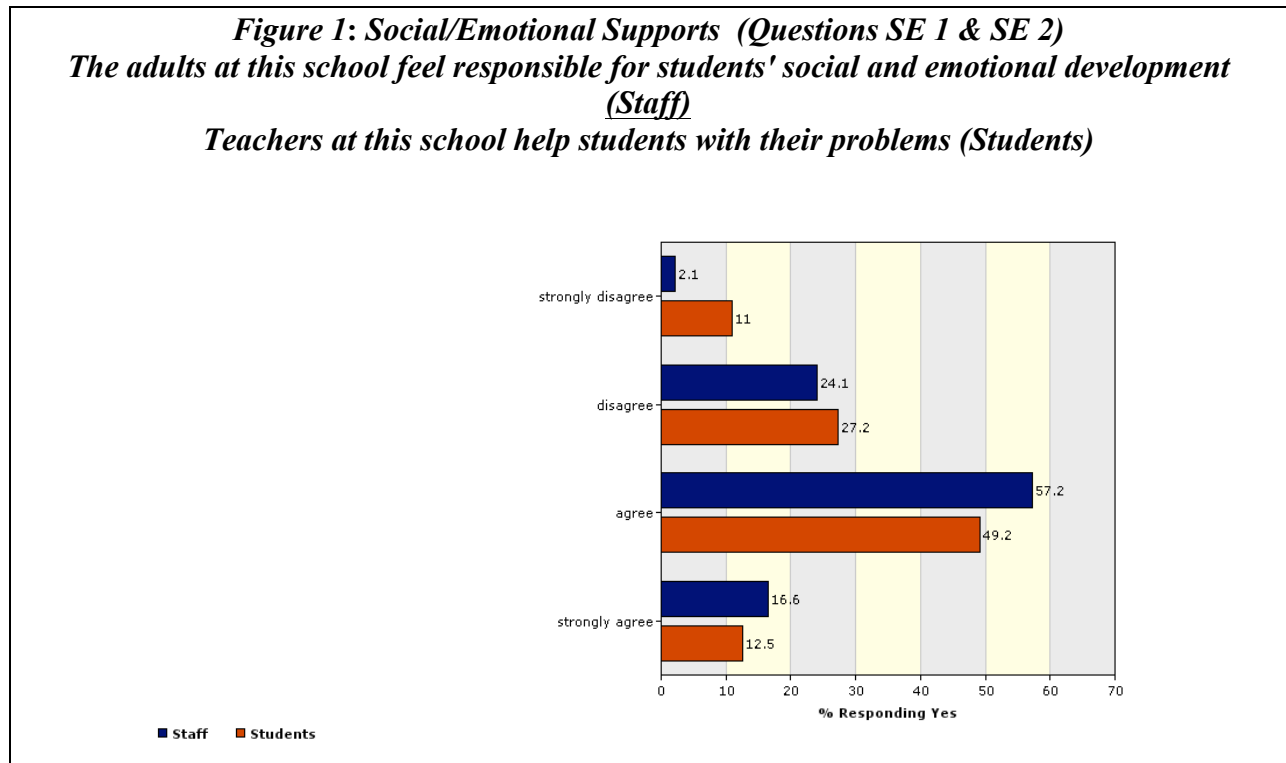
Figure 1: Social/Emotional Supports (Questions SE 1 & SE 2)
The adults at this school feel responsible for students' social and emotional development (Staff)
Teachers at this school help students with their problems (Students)

Table 3

Participant Responses Questions SE 1 and SE 2

	Number of Staff	Percent of Total Staff Respondents	Number of Students	Percent of Total Student Respondents
Strongly Agree	24	16.6	98	12.5
Agree	82	57.2	385	49.2
Disagree	35	24.1	213	27.2
Strongly Disagree	3	2.1	86	11

The percent of staff that agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "*the adults at this school feel responsible for students' social and emotional development*" was 74%. In response to the same question, "*The adults at this school feel responsible for students' social and emotional development", 75%* of the teachers agreed or strongly agreed that *"Adults at this school feel responsible for students' social and emotional development" (Appendix A).* Eighty percent of the support staff agreed or strongly agreed with the same statement. Seventy-three percent of staff of 1-3 years agreed or strongly agreed *"Adults at this school feel responsible for students' social and emotional development".* Sixty-eight percent of those staff of 4-8 years agreed or strongly agreed. Eighty-six percent of those staff of 9 or more years agreed or strongly agreed.

The percent of students who agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "*Teachers at this school help students with their problems*" was 63%. About the same (62%) percent of ninth graders agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Of the 12th graders, 64% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

Figure 2: *Social/Emotional Supports (Question SE 3)*
The school has programs that address violence/ conflict between students (Students and Staff)
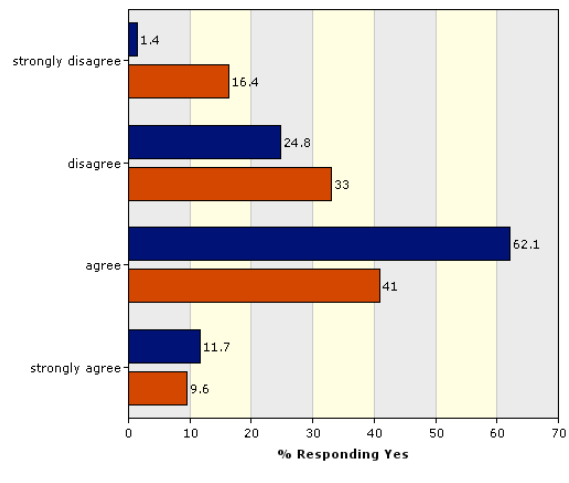
Table 4

Participant Responses for Question SE 3

	Number of Staff	Percent of Total Staff Respondents	Number of Students	Percent of Total Student Respondents
Strongly Agree	17	11.7	75	9.6
Agree	90	62.1	320	41
Disagree	35	24.8	260	33
Strongly Disagree	2	1.4	128	16.4

Among staff, 74% agreed or strongly agreed *"The school has programs that address violence/ conflict between students".* Almost 51% of students agreed or strongly agreed with the same statement. Of the 101 teacher respondents, 71% agreed or strongly agreed that "*The school has programs that address violence/ conflict between students".* One hundred percent of the support staff agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Among staff of 1-3 years in their building, 78% agreed or strongly agreed. Of staff with 4-8 years in their school, 70% agreed or

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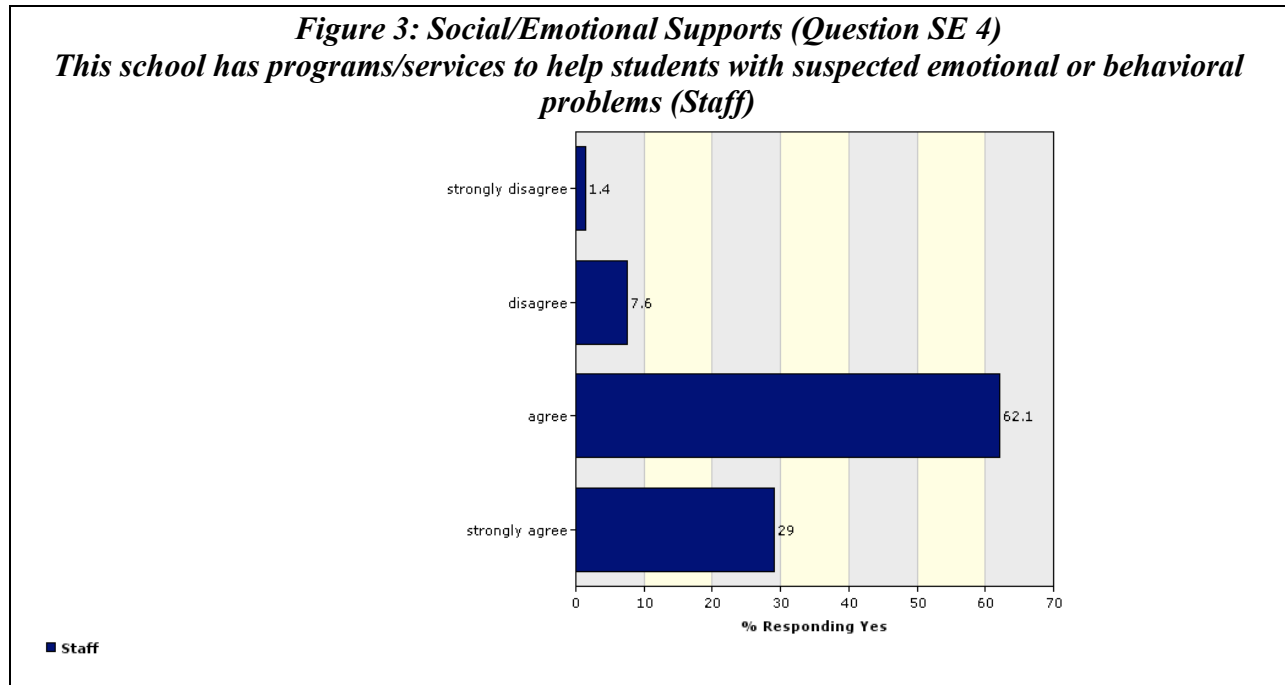strongly agreed. Staff with 9 or more years in the building responded with 82% having agreed or strongly agreed.

Figure 3: Social/Emotional Supports (Question SE 4)
This school has programs/services to help students with suspected emotional or behavioral problems (Staff)

Table 5

Participant Responses for Question SE 4

	Number of Staff	Percent of Total Staff Respondents
Strongly Agree	42	29
Agree	89	62.1
Disagree	11	7.6
Strongly Disagree	2	1.4

In response to the prompt: *"This school has programs/services to help students with suspected emotional or behavioral problems"*, 91% of staff agreed or strongly agreed.   Ninety percent of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that the school has programs/services to help

students with suspected emotional or behavioral problems. One hundred percent of support staff

agreed or strongly agreed. Ninety-two percent of staff with 1-3 years in their school agreed or

strongly agreed. Eighty-eight percent of staff with 4-8 years and ninety-six percent of staff with
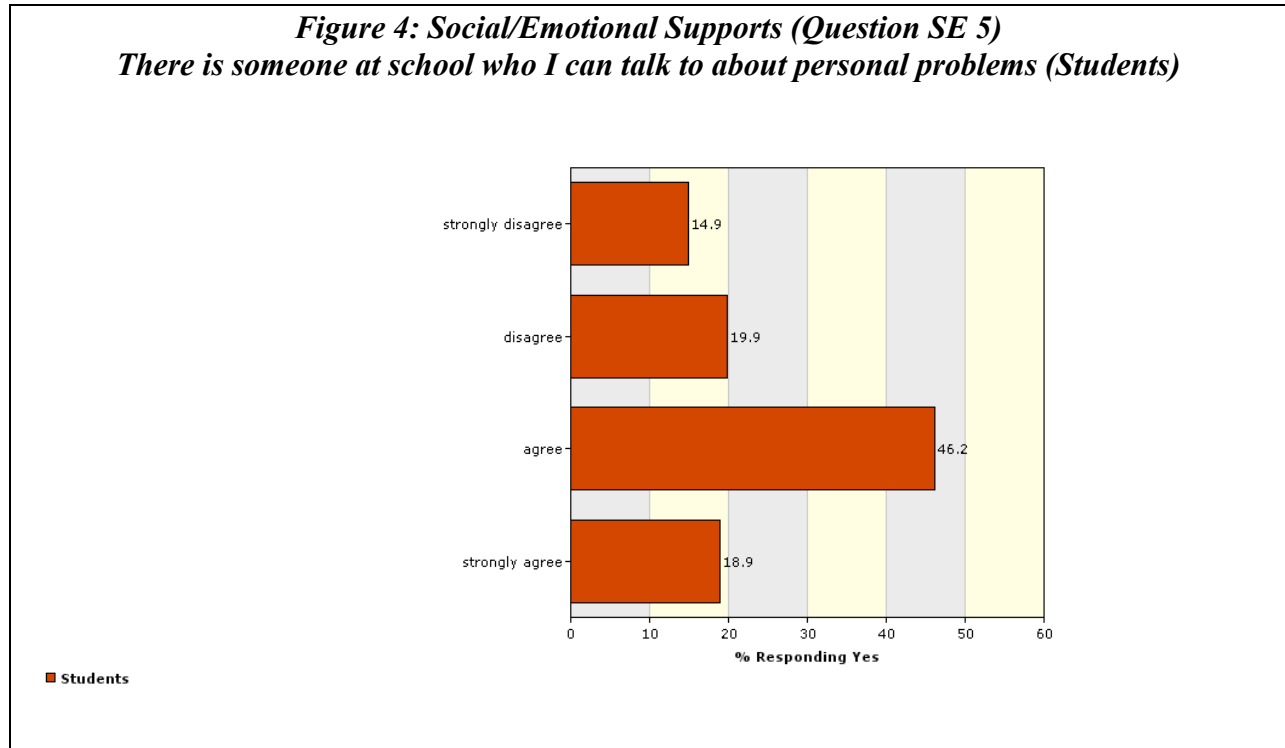
9 or more years agreed or strongly agreed.

Figure 4: Social/Emotional Supports (Question SE 5)
There is someone at school who I can talk to about personal problems (Students)

Table 6

Participant Responses for Question SE 5

	Number of Students	Percent of Total Students
Strongly Agree	148	18.9
Agree	362	46.2
Disagree	156	19.9
Strongly Disagree	117	14.9
	783	

Responding to the prompt: *"There is someone at school who I can talk to about personal problems",* 65% of students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Sixty-three percent of ninth graders and sixty-five percent of 12th graders agreed or strongly agreed with the prompt.

In examining the responses of students and staff regarding various aspects of social-emotional supports in their school building, an average of 80% of staff agreed or strongly agreed that with survey questions relating to social-emotional support services. In comparison an average of 59% of students agreed or strongly agreed with the questions about social-emotional support services.

Behavioral Supports

To gauge the perceptions of students and staff regarding behavioral supports in the school, participants were asked several questions. Students were asked to report the degree to which they agree/disagree with the following: *"There are clear rules about student behavior" (Figure 5); "Students are rewarded for positive behavior" (Figure 6); Everyone knows what the school rules are" (Figure 8).* Staff was asked the following: *"Rules and expectations for students' behavior are clearly communicated" (Figure 7); "Students are rewarded for positive behavior" (Figure 6); "There is an orderly atmosphere for learning" (Figure 7).*

Figure 5: Behavioral Supports (BEH 1)
Rules and expectations for students' behavior are clearly communicated (Staff)
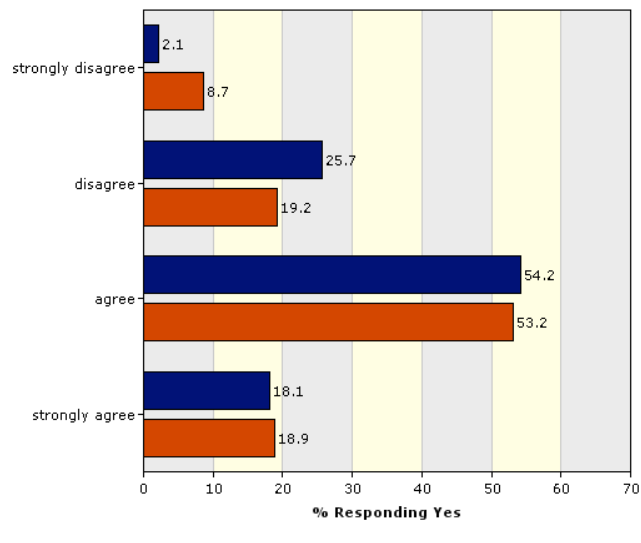***There are clear rules about student behavior (Students)***

Table 7

Participant Responses for Question BEH 1

	Number of Staff	Percent of Total Staff Respondents	Number of Students	Percent of Total Student Respondents
Strongly Agree	26	18.1	149	18.9
Agree	78	54.2	420	53.2
Disagree	37	25.7	152	19.2
Strongly Disagree	3	2.1	68	8.7

The percent of staff that agreed or strongly agreed that "*Rules and expectations for students' behavior are clearly communicated"* was 72%.   Sixty-six percent of teachers and 90% of support staff agreed or strongly agreed that "*Rules and expectations for students' behavior are clearly communicated".* Sixty-six percent of staff with 1-3 years at their current school agreed

or strongly agreed. Seventy-three percent of staff with 4-8 years at their school and 82% of staff with 9 or more years at their school agreed or strongly agreed with the question.

Similar to what the staff expressed, 72% of student participants agreed or strongly agreed *"There are clear rules about student behavior".* Seventy-one percent of 9th graders and 71% of 12th graders agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

Figure 6: Behavioral Supports (BEH 2)
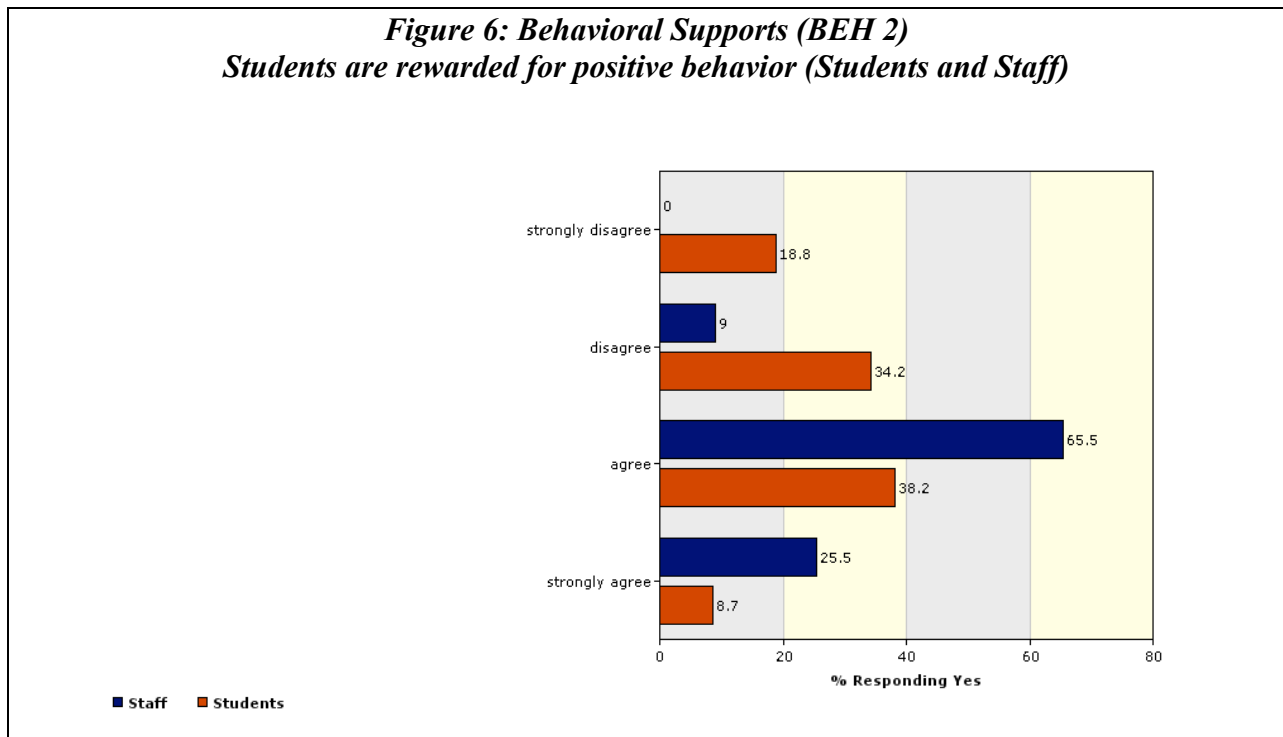*Students are rewarded for positive behavior (Students and Staff)*

Table 8

Participant Responses for Question BEH 2

	Number of Staff	Percent of Total Staff Respondents	Number of Students	Percent of Total Student Respondents
Strongly Agree	37	25.5	69	8.7
Agree	94	65.5	301	38.2
Disagree	13	9	270	34.2
Strongly Disagree	0	0.0	148	18.8

Ninety-one percent of staff agreed or strongly agreed that *"Students are rewarded for positive behavior".* Of the teacher participants, 93% agreed or strongly agreed *"Students are rewarded for positive behavior".* Of support staff participants, 100% agreed with the statement. Those staff with 1-3 years at their current school responded with 89% having agreed or strongly agreed. Eighty-nine percent of staff with 4-8 years in their school and 97% of staff with 9 or more years experience agreed or strongly agreed.

Responding to the same question, 47% of students agreed or strongly agreed. Interestingly, no staff strongly disagreed with the statement, but 19% of students strongly disagreed. Half (50%) of the 9th graders agreed or strongly agreed that students are rewarded for positive behavior, while 43% of 12th graders agreed or strongly agreed.

Figure 7: Behavioral Supports (BEH 3)
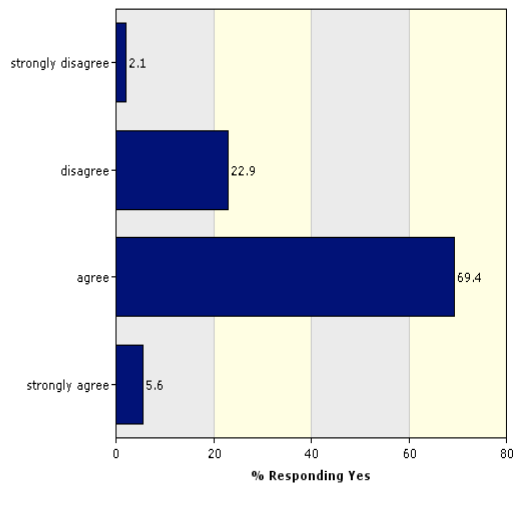*There is an orderly environment for learning (Staff)*

Table 9

Participant Responses for Question BEH 3

	Number of Staff	Percent of Total Staff Respondents
Strongly Agree	8	5.6
Agree	99	69.4
Disagree	33	22.9
Strongly Disagree	3	2.1

Of staff who responded to the prompt: "*There is an orderly environment for learning*", 75% agreed or strongly agreed. Of the teacher participants, 73% agreed or strongly agreed. Among support staff, 88% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Sixty-nine percent of staff with 1-3 years in their school agreed or strongly agreed; 73% of staff with 4-8 years in their school agreed or strongly agreed. Ninety percent of staff with 9 or more years experience agreed or strongly agreed.

Figure 8: Behavioral Supports (BEH 4)
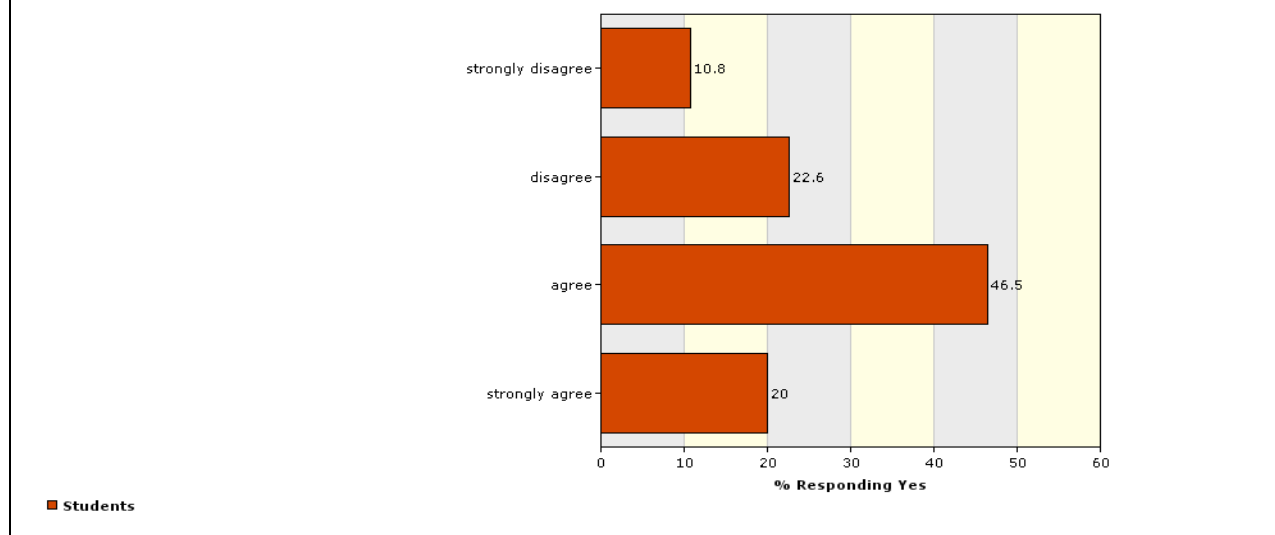***Everyone knows what the school rules are (Students)***

Table 10

Participant Responses for Question BEH 4

	Number of Students	Percent of Total Students
Strongly Agree	158	20
Agree	367	46.5
Disagree	178	22.6
Strongly Disagree	86	10.8

Students responded to the prompt: "*Everyone knows what the school rules are",* 67% agreed or strongly agreed. Sixty-four percent of 9th graders and 74% of 12th graders agreed or strongly agreed.

In reference to behavioral supports in general, an average of approximately 80% of staff tended to agree or strongly agree with the prompts about behavioral supports. An average of 62% of students tended to agree or strongly with the cluster of items about behavioral supports.

Miscellaneous Supports

In addition to social-emotional and behavioral supports, participants were surveyed about other support services offered through the school. Students were asked: *"This school provides adequate health services for students" (Figure 9); "Students who need help for their problems are able to get it through school" (Figure 11); "Have you ever used the Health Center at your school?" (Figure 13).* Staff were asked: *"This school provides adequate health services for students" (Figure 9); "This school has programs that address substance use among students" (Figure 12);" This school has programs/services to help students with suspected learning problems" (Figure 10).*

Figure 9: Miscellaneous Services (MS 1)
This school provides adequate health services for students (Students and Staff)
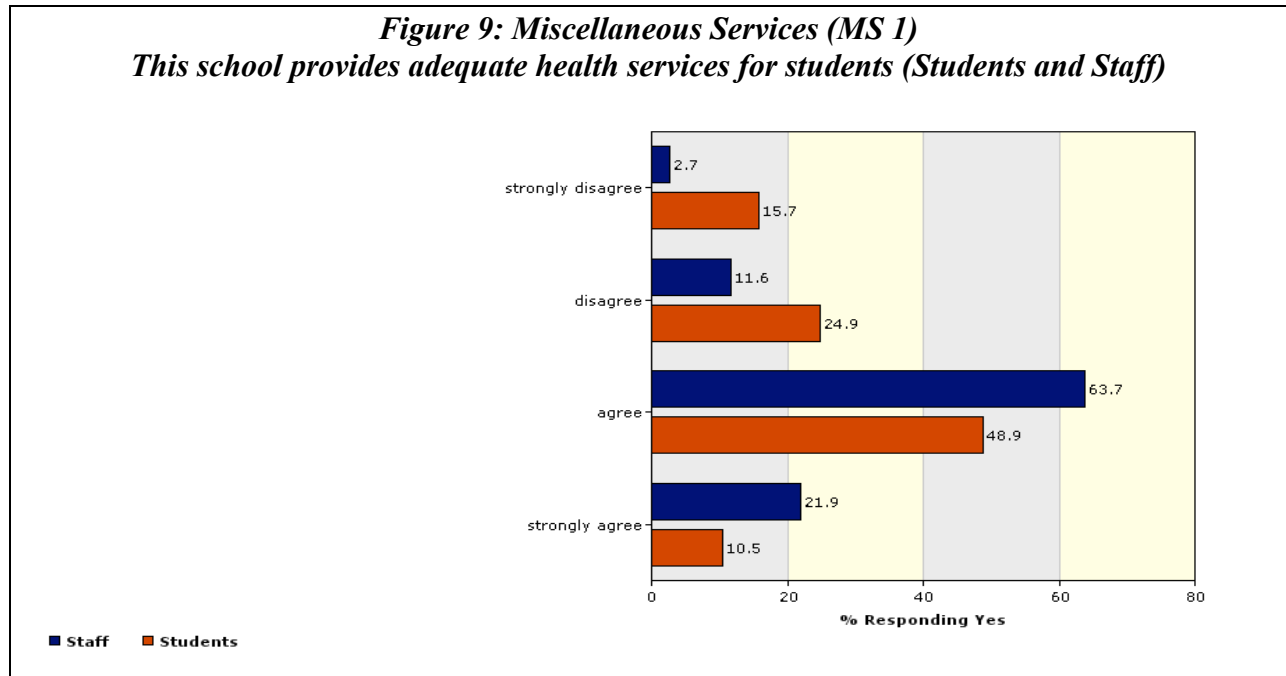
Table 11

Participant Responses for Question MS 1

	Number of Staff	Percent of Total Staff Respondents	Number of students	Percent of Total Student Respondents
Strongly Agree	32	21.9	82	10.5
Agree	92	63.7	383	48.9
Disagree	17	11.6	195	24.9
Strongly Disagree	4	2.7	123	15.7

Both students and staff were asked to respond to "*This school provides adequate health services for students"*. The percentage of staff that agreed or strongly agreed with the statement was 86%. Teacher participants responded with 83% having agreed or strongly agreed. One hundred percent of support staff agreed or strongly agreed. Staff who had been at their school for 1-3 years, responded with 83% having agreed or strongly agreed with the prompt. Eighty-six percent of staff of 4-4 years and 90% of staff of 9 or more years in their school agreed or strongly agreed.

Students who agreed or strongly agreed made up 60% of student respondents. Among 9th graders, 67% agreed or strongly agreed and 59% of 12th graders agreed or strongly agreed.

Figure 10: Miscellaneous Services (MS 2)
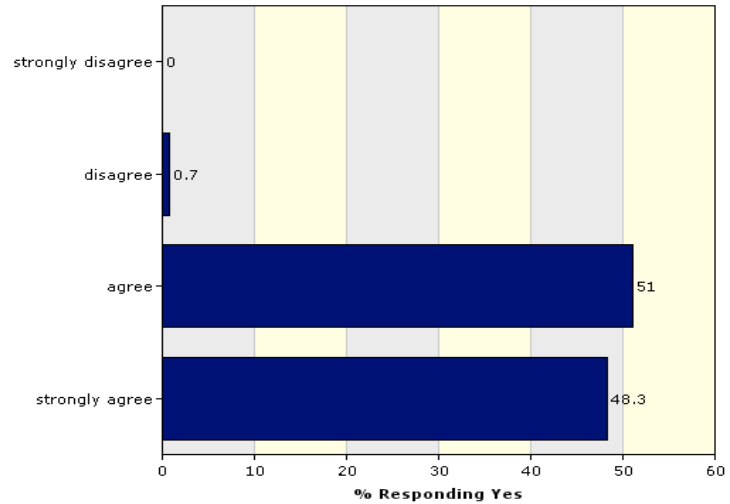*This school has programs/services to help students with suspected learning problems (Staff)*

Table 12

Participant Responses to Question MS 2

	Number of Staff	Percent of Total Staff Respondents
Strongly Agree	70	48.3
Agree	73	51
Disagree	1	0.7
Strongly Disagree	0	0.0

Almost all staff members (99%) agreed or strongly agreed that there are programs/services to help students with suspected learning disabilities. Ninety-eight percent of teachers with 1-3 years in their school agreed or strongly agreed; 100% of students with 4-8 years and 100% of teachers with 9 or more years experience agreed or strongly agreed.

Figure 11: Miscellaneous Services (MS 3)
Students who need help for their problems are able to get it through school (Students)
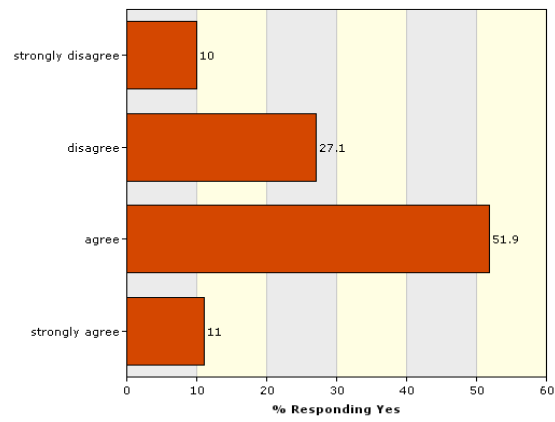
Table 13

Participant Responses for Question MS 3

	Number of Students	Percent of Total Student Respondents
Strongly Agree	86	11
Agree	407	51.9
Disagree	212	27.1
Strongly Disagree	78	10

Sixty-three percent of students agreed or strongly agreed that students who need help are able to get it through school. Sixty-two percent of 9th graders and 64% of 12th graders agreed or strongly agreed.

Figure 12: Miscellaneous Services (MS 4)
This school has programs that address substance use among students (Staff)
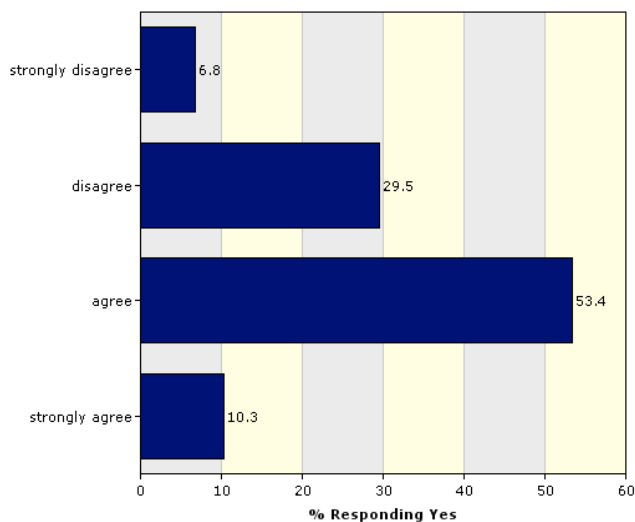
Table 14

Participant Responses for Question MS 4

	Number of Staff	Percent of Total Staff Respondents
Strongly Agree	15	10.3
Agree	77	53.4
Disagree	43	29.5
Strongly Disagree	10	6.8

Staff were asked to what extent they agree that "*This school has programs that address substance use among students",* 64% of staff agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Among the teacher respondents, 75% agreed or strongly agreed that the school has programs that address substance use among students. Half (50%) of the support staff agreed or strongly agreed. Fifty-six percent of staff of 1-3 years, 64% of staff who with 4-8 years, and 76% of staff with 9 or more years at their school agreed/strongly agreed.

Figure 13: Miscellaneous Services (MS 5)
Have you ever used the Health Center at your current school for information or services?
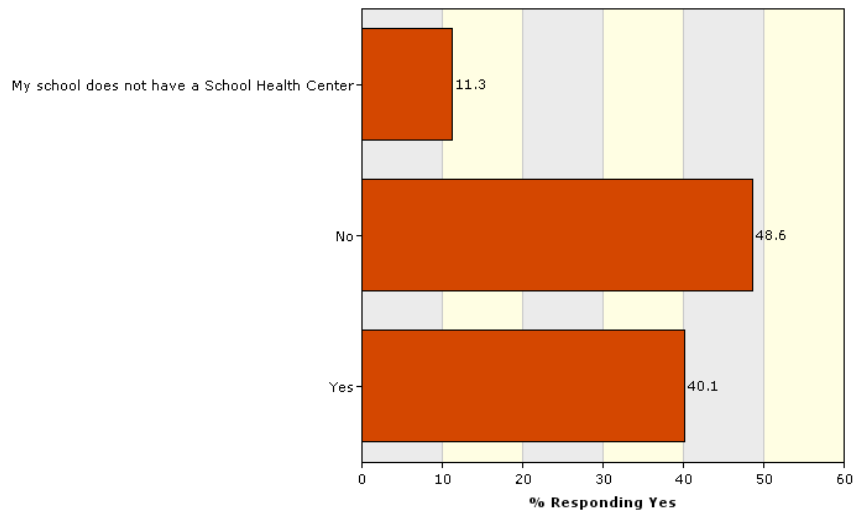
Table 15

Participant Responses for Question MS 5

	Number of Students	**Percent of Total Student Respondents**
Yes	314	40.1
No	381	48.6
My school does not have a School Health Center	89	11.3

Students were asked "*Have you ever used the Health Center at your current school for information or services*". Forty percent of students responded that they have used the health center for information or services. Of the remaining students, 49% of students responded that they have not used their school health center. Some participants (12%) responded that their school does not have a health center. Thirty-eight percent of ninth graders reported using the health center and 36% of 12th graders.

When responding to the cluster of items pertaining to miscellaneous services, an average of 83% of staff tended to agree or strongly agree with the questions regarding miscellaneous supports. In response to their cluster of items related to miscellaneous services, 54% of students tended to agree or strongly agree with the prompts.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study was designed to examine the perceptions of students and staff in regard to the support services that are available within a typical comprehensive high school in the Mid-Atlantic area. The school environment is designed to support students' academic, social, and emotional development. Along with the many resources devoted to instruction, schools do devote money, time, and effort toward offering social, emotional and behavioral support services through the school. Because schools do not have endless resources, it is important that the resources that are available are promoted and utilized effectively.

However, too often students are not aware of the services that are available through the school. Sometimes even staff members are not fully aware of what services are offered to students. Especially in large schools (high schools in particular), things can become so departmentalized that the communication between the entire staff is limited. Some information, including information about available resources, service, and supports, may be overlooked.

Information regarding available support services and details about how they can be accessed by students should be mentioned to both students and staff several times throughout the school year. This type of information can be quickly forgotten, and in order to be appropriately promoted and utilized, both students and staff should be reminded of what services are available, how they can be accessed, and what they involve. The impact that support services can have on students' academic achievement and overall wel-being is significant and should not be overlooked.

Limitations

There were several limitations in the study, including those related to internal and external validity. One threat to internal validity was the instrument itself. The survey is a self-report instrument and inherently may be flawed by participant responses. The format, sequencing of questions, and the wording used in the survey may also have influenced participant responses. In addition, the survey was only provided in English and no accommodations for speakers of other languages or those with reading difficulties were made. Therefore, participants may have misinterpreted some of the questions or responses. Thirty percent of the staff that began the survey did not complete it. Ten percent of student participants did not complete the survey. Participant mortality may limit the validity of the study.

Threats to external validity relate to the population sample of the study. While there were over 900 participants in the study, both high schools were from the same school district in the Mid-Atlantic area. Furthermore, both schools were from the same region of the district and are likely not able to be generalized to the entire school district, nor the entire state or Mid-Atlantic area. Additionally, 25 classrooms in each school were selected to participate based on grade level and convenience. This method of sampling may increase threats to external validity.

Practical and Theoretical Implications

Results of the study demonstrate that there are indeed differences between what students and staff believe about the school-based support services offered in their high school. In looking at student and staff beliefs regarding social-emotional supports, an

average of 80% of staff and 59% of students believed that there are social-emotional supports in place at the school. The biggest difference among responses was between the support staff's agreement (100%) and the 12th graders agreement (48%) that "*The school has programs to deal with violence/conflict between students*". Within the staff respondents, there was the greatest range between the support staff (100% agreement), and teachers with 4-8 years at their current school (70%) in response to the same question "*The school has programs to deal with violence/conflict between students*".

Regarding behavioral supports, generally, 80% of staff agreed that there are clear behavioral supports in place at the school, while 62% of students agreed. The largest difference in responses was between support staff responses (100% agreement) that "*Students are rewarded for positive behavior*" and 12 graders' responses (43% agreement) to the same question. Within the staff responses, there was the greatest range in response to the question "*There are clear rules about student behavior*"; ninety percent of support staff agreed, while only 66% of teachers who had been at their school for 1-3 years agree.

There was slightly more difference in responses regarding miscellaneous services. Eighty three percent of the staff generally agreed that there are miscellaneous services available. Forty four percent of student respondents agreed that there are miscellaneous supports available through the school. The biggest difference in responses between the student and staff respondents was in response to the question "*The school provides adequate health services for students*". One hundred percent of support staff agreed, while 59% of 12th graders agreed with the same statement. Within the staff respondents, the greatest difference in their responses was between teachers who had been at their school for 9 or more years and the support staff. Seventy-six percent of teachers of 9 or more years at the school

agreed that "*This school has programs that address substance use among students*", while 50% of the support staff agreed with the same statement.

These results can guide our practices as educators by prompting some discussion and further review at the school level. It appears that there are breakdowns in communication occurring both among the staff, and between students and staff in raising awareness about the supports and services that are available through the school. Further investigation into those survey questions with the greatest amount of agreement among staff ("*This school has programs/services to help student with suspected learning problems*") and the greatest amount of agreement between students and staff ("*The adults at this school feel responsible for students' social and emotional development"; "Teachers at this school help students with their problems*") can be used to guide best practices in delivering information effectively.

Connections to Previous Research

There was little evidence of similar descriptive research regarding both student and staff perceptions of school-based support services. Available in the literature were publications pertaining to the importance of offering support services in schools, descriptions of ideal service delivery models for school-based supports, and evaluations of potential programs/interventions designed to support students' social, emotional, and behavioral health.

A study published in 2010 included suggestions from staff interviewees about ways to increase staff awareness of emotional health and well-being supports: "emotional health is something we want more if in terms of whole staff training …we feel we want more whole staff awareness of it so they all know where they fit into the big picture" (Kidger et al., 2010,

p. 927). This supports the claim that all staff in the building are not always aware of the supports that are available, and the process for accessing these services. A 2009 publication reviewed students' experiences of mental health support in the higher education environment. Quinn et al. (2009) reported "[a] barrier to seeking help was that students admitted they often had little idea of how to access services" (412). "Almost all students felt that there was a need to get information about the Counseling service and the Disability Service across in a more accessible way than at present" (413). Other suggestions included awareness raising and providing information in an accessible format.

Implications for Future Research

Future researches likely would need to replicate the study and perhaps use a larger sample size. If possible, random sampling would be preferred. A future research study could include examining the perceptions of additional subgroups of both students and staff. All grade levels (as opposed to only ninth and twelfth graders could be included). Age, ethnicity, and grade point averages (as reported by students) could also be examined in relation to participant perceptions. Future research could also include parent responses in addition to students and staff.

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Table A1

Question	Participants	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Social-Emotional Supports (SE 1): Adults feel responsible for students' well-being	Staff Role				
	Teachers	16	59	23	2
	Support Staff	2	6	2	0
Social Emotional Supports (SE 2): Teachers in this school help students with their problems	Student Grade				
	Grade 9	36	106	71	30
	Grade 12	19	87	42	18
Social Emotional Supports (SE 3): The school has programs to deal with violence/conflict between students	Staff Role				
	Teachers	14	58	28	1
	Support Staff	1	9	0	0
	Years at School				
	1-3 Years	8	37	13	
	4-8 Years	5	34	16	1
	9 + Years	4	19	5	0
Social Emotional Supports (SE 4): The school offers social emotional support services to student	Staff Role				
	Teachers	31	69	10	1
	Support Staff	6	4	0	0
	Years at School				
	1-3 Years	17	37	4	1
	4-8 Years	11	39	6	1
	9 + Years	14	13	1	0
Social Emotional Supports (SE 5): There is someone I can talk to about personal problems	Student Grade				
	Grade 9	47	104	53	34
	Grade 12	26	83	32	26

Question	Participants	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Behavioral Supports (BEH 1): There are clear rules about student behavior	Staff Role				
	Teachers	23	46	32	3
	Support Staff	1	8	1	0
	Years at School				
	1-3 Years	7	32	19	1
	4-8 Years	12	29	13	2
	9 + Years	6	17	5	0
	Student Grade				
	Grade 9	55	117	50	19
	Grade 12	24	94	33	15
Behavioral Supports (BEH 2): Students are rewarded for positive behavior	Staff Role				
	Teachers	27	66	7	0
	Support Staff	0	10	0	0
	Years at School				
	1-3 Years	17	36	6	0
	4-8 Years	11	39	6	0
	9 + Years	8	20	1	0
	Student Grade				
	Grade 9	19	101	75	46
	Grade 12	17	55	70	24
Behavioral Supports (BEH 3): There is an orderly environment for learning	Staff Role				
	Teachers	5	68	25	2
	Support Staff	1	7	1	0
	Years at School				
	1-3 Years	4	37	16	2
	4-8 Years	2	39	14	1
	9 + Years	1	24	3	0
Behavioral Supports (BEH 4): Everyone knows what the school rules are	Student Grade				
	Grade 9	52	103	62	26
	Grade 12	35	88	26	17

Question	Participants	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Miscellaneous Supports (MS 1): The school provides adequate health services for students	Staff Role				
	Teachers	25	59	13	4
	Support Staff	3	7	0	0
	Years at School				
	1-3 Years	11	38	7	3
	4-8 Years	14	35	7	1
	9 + Years	7	19	3	0
	Student Grade				
	Grade 9	25	133	40	40
	Grade 12	17	81	45	23
Miscellaneous Supports (MS 2): This school has programs/ services to help students with suspected learning problems	Staff Role				
	Teachers	54	46	0	1
	Support Staff	7	3	0	0
	Years at School				
	1-3 Years	26	32	1	0
	4-8 Years	26	31	0	0
	9 + Years	17	11	0	0
Miscellaneous Supports (MS 3): Students who need help with their problems are able to get it through school	Student Grade				
	Grade 9	30	117	70	21
	Grade 12	17	90	39	21
Miscellaneous Supports (MS 4): This school has programs that address substance use among students	Staff Role				
	Teachers	12	54	29	7
	Support Staff	1	4	4	1
	Years at School				
	1-3Years	5	28	24	2
	4-8 Years	6	30	14	6
	9 + Years	3	19	5	2
Miscellaneous Supports (MS 5): Have you ever used the Health Center at your current school for information or services		**Yes**	**No**	**My School does not have a health Center**	
	Student Grade				
	Grade 9	90	123	25	
	Grade 12	56	87	23	

Table B1

Cronbach's Alpha for those Survey Items That were Across Different Sample Groups to Determine Their Degree of Similarity	
Survey Question	**Cronbach's Alpha**
This school has programs/services to help students with suspected emotional or behavioral problem (Staff)	.731
There is someone at school who I can talk to about personal problems (Students)	
There is an orderly environment for learning (staff)	.776
Everyone knows what the school rules are (students)	
This school has programs/services to help students with suspected learning problems (Staff)	.560
Students who need help for their problems are able to get it through school (Students)	