Renaissance

Non-Academic Factors that Impact Student Learning

Addressing barriers to student success with 9 attitudinal factors

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PASS®

Introduction

Research shows that students' social and emotional behaviors and attitudes toward school and academics play a crucial role in their ability to learn and succeed in school and their overall wellbeing. To accelerate learning and equitably improve outcomes, educators must be equipped to take a whole child approach, addressing non-academic barriers to student achievement.

So, what are these non-academic factors that educators should be on the lookout for? And how can they impact learning and academic success across pre-K–grade 12?

Pupil Attitudes to Self and School (PASS) Survey has identified nine attitudinal factors found to influence academic success and student wellbeing. These factors provide educators with insights into how students feel about their school experience and about themselves as learners.

To help educators better understand the influence of these factors, they're grouped into three areas:

1. Connectedness

2. Self-efficacy

3. Motivation

On the following pages, we'll discuss each of these critical areas in more detail, along with the individual factors that schools and districts should assess in each area to gauge students' wellbeing.

Connectedness factors

What?

School connectedness reflects students' belief that peers and adults in their school support, value, and care about their learning, academic progress, and wellbeing. Connectedness also addresses students' feelings toward their immediate social context, including interactions with peers and their developmental environment.

Why?

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), connectedness is key to successful learning and teaching. When students feel connected and have a sense of belonging in their school community, they are more likely to succeed academically. Research shows that school connectedness leads to higher grades, better test scores, improved school attendance, and higher graduation rates (Niehaus, Rudasill, & Rakes, 2012).

Connectedness also contributes to students' health and wellbeing. When students experience school connectedness, they tend to have more positive feelings toward school, which includes:

- Liking school more
- Believing teachers care about them and their learning
- Having more friends and social relationships at school

PASS connectedness factors

To assess connectedness, PASS surveys students on three key factors:

1 Feelings about school

Feelings about school measures a student's feelings of inclusion in, or alienation from, the school community. This factor considers whether students enjoy being in the school environment and whether they find school to be a friendly, inviting, and safe place.

Low scores on this factor can indicate that students feel disconnected from school, lack a sense of belonging, and feel socially excluded, finding it difficult to make friends at school. At the broader level, low scores can signal a poor school climate and bullying.	High scores can indicate that students take pride in their school community and culture and feel included, valued, and acknowledged by their peers and educators.

2 Attitudes to teachers

Attitudes to teachers measures students' perceptions of the relationships they have with adults at school. A comprehensive review of educational research, analysing 46 studies, found that strong teacher-student relationships were associated in both the short and long term with improvements on measures schools care about, including:

- Higher student academic engagement, attendance, and grades
- Fewer disruptive behaviors and suspensions
- Lower school dropout rates

These effects were strong even after controlling for differences in students' individual, family, and school backgrounds (Sparks, 2019).

Low scores on this factor can indicate that students lack trust in adults at school, feel disconnected from and misunderstood by teachers, and think that school rules are designed to cause personal suffering or punishment.

High scores can indicate that students feel comfortable and supported by adults, respect and admire teachers as role models, and believe that teachers have their best interests in mind.

3 Attitudes to attendance

Attitudes to attendance measures a student's perception of the importance of attending school daily. This factor has been shown to be highly correlated with an individual's attendance record.

Research during the development of PASS showed an extraordinarily high correlation of 0.91—where 1 would be the highest—between students' apprehensions regarding attendance, as revealed by the measure, and their actual future absence. This research indicates the potential predictiveness of student attitudes toward attendance.

Over the last 30 years, extensive research has also documented the correlation between attendance and academic outcomes. Poor attendance, such as unexcused or excused absences, suspensions, and tardiness, results in student underachievement. Students with poor attendance typically demonstrate:

- Lower reading ability by the end of second grade
- Failing grades in entire subjects by sixth grade
- Increased dropout rates by high school

The reasons for absenteeism—namely aversions and disengagement—can often relate to the student's attitudes to themselves as a learner and their school. Therefore, proactively monitoring these attitudes gives insight into the reasons why students do not want to attend school or cannot attend school—and can therefore reduce the risk of truancy by supporting students before they fall off track.

Low scores on this factor can indicate the likelihood of students truanting or developing poor attendance now or in the future.

High scores can indicate that students believe in the value of education and the importance of regular school attendance.

Self-efficacy factors

What?

Self-efficacy reflects students' belief in their ability to complete tasks and reach their goals. It encompasses students' confidence in themselves as learners and their resilience when facing obstacles within the curriculum and outside of it.

Why?

Self-efficacy has been found to have a far more significant influence on academic achievement than a student's actual ability because it influences their:

- Cognition
- Motivation
- Emotions
- Use of learning strategies

Low self-efficacy results in task avoidance, lowered aspirations, and poor commitment toward goal realization, leading to lower academic outcomes—even if children are academically capable (Bandura, 1993; Caprara et al., 2008; Komarraju & Nadler, 2012).

PASS self-efficacy factors

To assess self-efficacy, PASS surveys students on these key factors:

4 Perceived learning capability

Perceived learning capability measures how capable students feel about their abilities in the present moment. This factor offers a snapshot of whether students find the everyday aspects of learning enjoyable, positive, and attainable. If left unaddressed, a low perceived learning capability could lead to learners developing low self-efficacy across many subject areas and school in general (i.e., low self-regard).

Low scores on this factor can indicate that students cannot find joy or satisfaction in any of the school day's tasks, feel overwhelmed by meeting the current demands of school, and experience stress and fear when their abilities are measured, such as during a test.

High scores can indicate that students not only find joy and satisfaction in learning, but they also enjoy teacher feedback and feel eager to demonstrate their abilities, even in testing environments.

5 Self-regard as a learner

Self-regard as a learner measures students' self-esteem and long-term perception of their ability to achieve academically. This factor can be closely correlated with a child's actual academic achievement.

Low scores on this factor can indicate that a student has a solidified belief in their inadequacy as a learner, resulting in feelings of failure as a student and viewing this state as permanent, feelings of helplessness about their skills, and an inability to identify any personal strengths.

High scores can indicate that students feel capable of learning and improvement, have a robust sense of wellbeing and self-determinism, and know where their personal strengths lie.

6 Preparedness for learning

Preparedness for learning measures how effective students feel regarding their self-regulation and learning skills, such as study skills, attentiveness, concentration, and emotional responses to learning demands. Students who struggle with preparedness for learning can experience behavioral difficulties in the classroom. Students who do not know how to learn effectively often engage in disruptions to avoid the pain of attempting tasks at which they feel inept.

Low scores on this factor can indicate that students lack an understanding of how they learn best and learning strategies more generally, which can cause frustration in completing tasks. They can also find it challenging to manage their time and feel stress during testing/exams.

High scores can indicate students who plan, organise, self-instruct, self-monitor, and self-evaluate at various stages of the learning process, setting goals and regulating their emotions in high-pressure situations.

7 Confidence in learning

Confidence in learning measures a student's ability to persevere when faced with challenges. This factor focuses on students' perseverance, grit, and resilience, as well as whether they have a growth mindset.

Low scores on this factor can indicate that students feel nervous to try something new, doubt their ability to achieve challenging goals, and perceive each setback as a personal failure and another reason they are likely to fail.

High scores can indicate that students regard failure as an opportunity to learn, believe that intelligence and skills can be acquired through effort and practice, and enjoy being challenged and love the feeling of personal growth.

Motivation factors

What?

Motivation is a condition that activates and sustains behavior toward a goal. For schools, motivation encompasses both:

1. Short-term motivation, including students' level of engagement in daily school material.
2. Long-term motivation, including the level to which students feel driven to meet long-term goals related to the school curriculum.

Students' levels of motivation are reflected in their engagement and contribution to the learning environment.

Why?

Motivation is a critical factor in learning and academic achievement in both informal and formal learning environments. For example, children who are motivated tend to be engaged, persist longer, have better learning outcomes, and perform better than other children on standardised achievement tests (Pintrich, 2003).

Highly motivated students are usually actively and spontaneously involved in activities and find the process of learning enjoyable without expecting any external rewards (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). This underscores the importance of understanding and addressing motivation in learning.

A clear relationship between motivation and self-efficacy exists. Positive efficacy beliefs result in increased motivation to achieve goals. At the same time, an engaging and motivating learning environment with support for student goals can positively influence students' self-efficacy beliefs.

PASS motivation factors

To assess motivation, PASS surveys students on these key factors:

8 General work ethic

General work ethic measures students' broad motivation to succeed in school and life. This factor considers feelings of purpose and direction while specifically examining whether students feel school will help them personally to improve their lives now and in the future.

Low scores on this factor can indicate that students feel they have little choice or autonomy in setting goals and that the expectations placed upon them at school are unrealistic and/or irrelevant.

High scores can indicate that students enjoy school and find meaning in the daily tasks of learning, see their school as a place to help them develop purpose and meet goals, and see a future for themselves.

9 Response to curriculum demands

Response to curriculum demands measures school-based motivation. This factor is crucial because it evaluates how motivated a student feels to undertake and complete tasks set within the curriculum, including whether they feel in control of their performance and are engaged in learning.
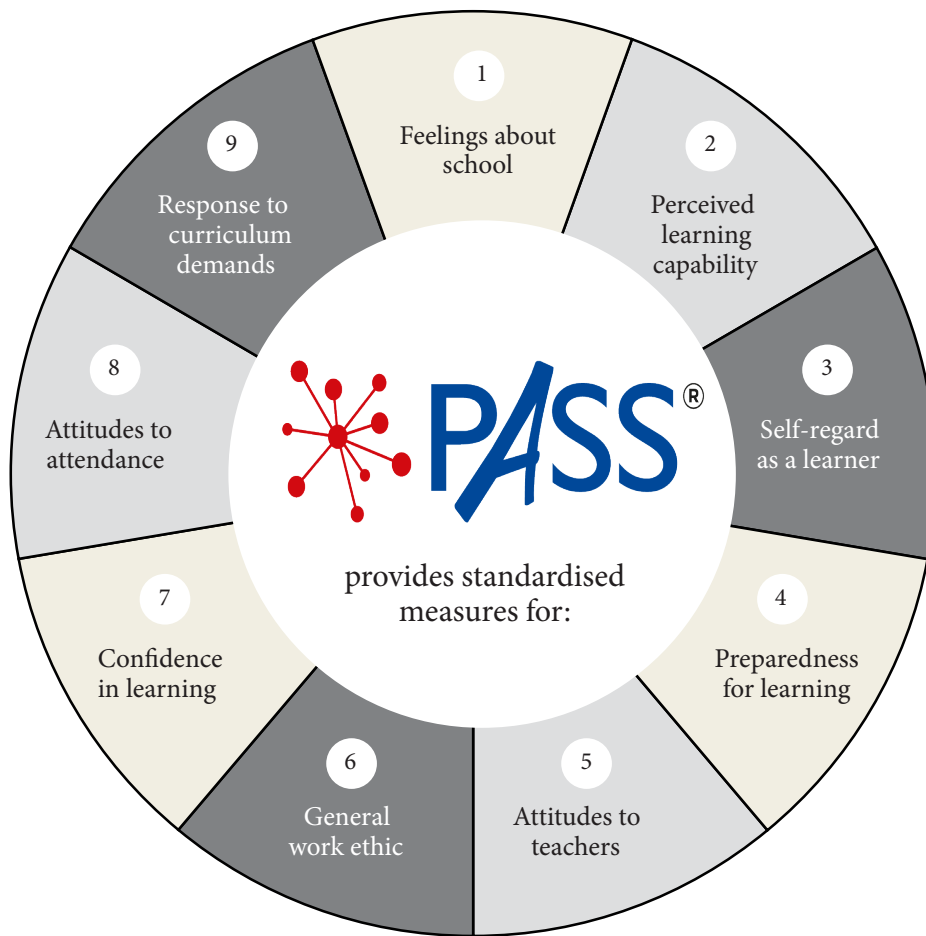
Low scores on this factor can indicate that students don't see "the point" of achieving their learning goals or how it benefits them. They feel unsuccessful in achieving learning goals and are bored and disengaged from the learning environment.

High scores can indicate students' desire to do well in school, their active engagement in the learning environment, and their eagerness to learn, as well as their confidence in overcoming any curriculum challenges.

Conclusion:
The importance of assessing these 9 factors

PASS provides standardised measures for:

1. Feelings about school
2. Perceived learning capability
3. Self-regard as a learner
4. Preparedness for learning
5. Attitudes to teachers
6. General work ethic
7. Confidence in learning
8. Attitudes to attendance
9. Response to curriculum demands

Understanding the nine factors enables educators to gain insight into their students' mindsets. Specifically, PASS can be used to:

- Uncover non-academic barriers to student achievement
- Identify students' thoughts and feelings about themselves as learners and their school
- Strengthen MTSS plans and interventions with whole child data

While each of the factors addresses a distinct aspect of student attitudes, it is helpful to consider them grouped by relationship and area: connectedness, self-efficacy, and motivation. Often, you can learn more about students when observing data trends or discrepancies within factor groups.

To learn more about PASS Survey and request a personalised demo for your team, please reach out.

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