

# SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

## INDICATOR #31 School Connectedness Rate

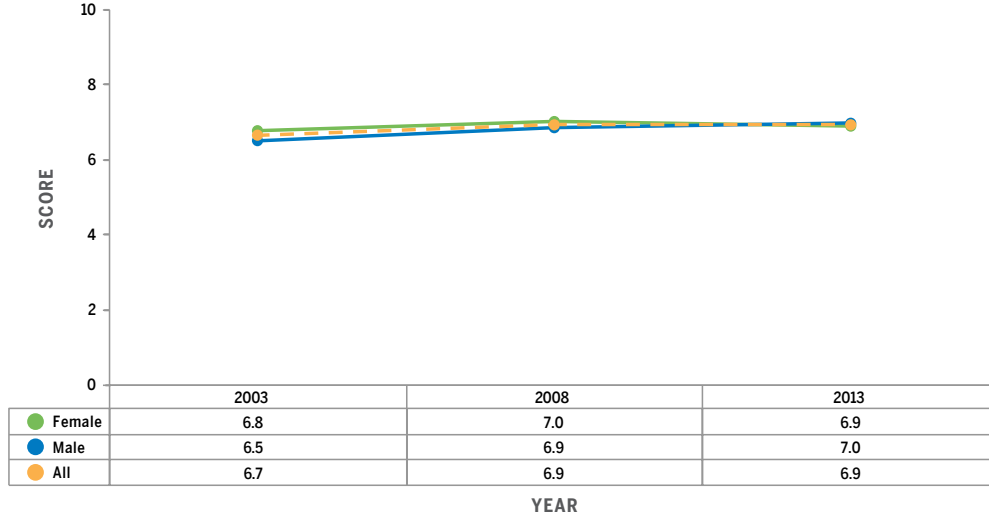
### DEFINITION

**INDICATOR #31** — Percentage of BC students in grades 7–12 who report a high level of school connectedness, as determined by the BC Adolescent Health Survey “School Connectedness” scale.

### KEY MESSAGES

- ▶ **School connectedness** is a general term used to describe a sense of belonging, where students feel they are a part of the school. Students who feel connected to their school are characterized as feeling happy, liking school, feeling engaged and safe, and feeling accepted and valued. They also participate in school activities, feel that teachers are fair and care about them, and have good relationships with other students.<sup>1,2</sup>
- ▶ Studies have found that school connectedness is associated with lower levels of adolescent emotional distress, suicide, violence, and substance use (such as alcohol, cigarettes, and marijuana), and is also associated with later onset of sexual activity.<sup>1,3</sup>
- ▶ School connectedness has had a consistent relationship with positive academic and health outcomes, even for sub-populations of youth who experience other challenges. For example, although lesbian, gay, and bisexual students report lower levels of school connectedness compared to their heterosexual peers, when they have high levels of school connectedness, they are less likely to have substance use problems.<sup>4,5</sup>
- ▶ Similarly, youth in government care struggle to stay in school and have higher levels of health challenges overall; however, BC youth in government care with higher levels of school connectedness report better physical and mental health, are less likely to engage in health-compromising behaviours, and are more likely to have post-secondary education plans.<sup>6</sup>
- ▶ In the BC Adolescent Health Survey and the figures presented for this indicator, school connectedness is measured on a scale composed of three items: students feel they are part of their school, are happy at their school, and feel safe at school. The score presented reflects the mean of these three items, and ranges from 0 to 10, with a higher score indicating a greater sense of school connectedness.
- ▶ Figure 31.1 shows that between 2003 and 2013, the mean scores of school connectedness among students improved, particularly from 2003 to 2008.
- ▶ While there was only modest improvement in the scores of school belonging, even small improvements across an entire population are meaningful, since it takes improvement over a large number of young people in most schools to create a noticeable change. Figure 31.1 also reveals that in 2003, male students in grades 7–12 reported a lower level of school connectedness than their female counterparts; however, in 2013, the score for males surpassed that of females.

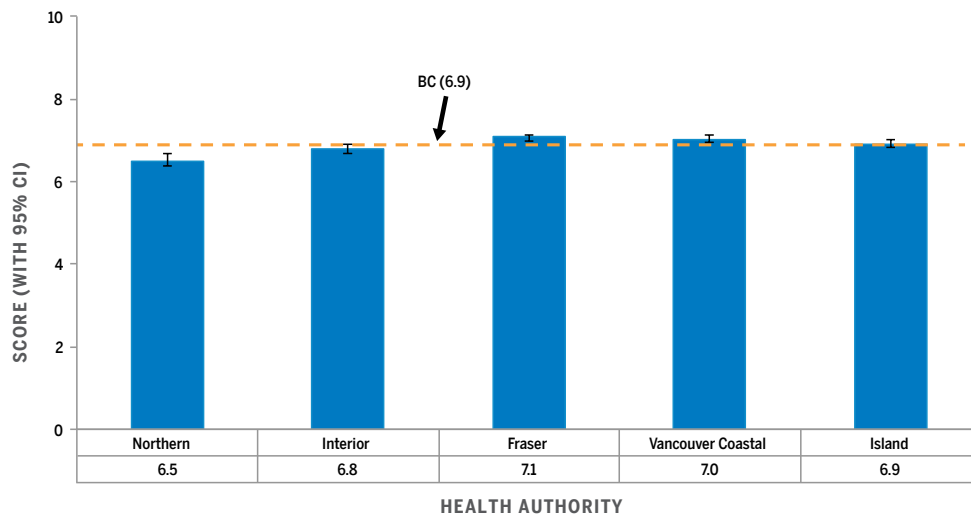
**FIG 31.1** School Connectedness Score for Students in Grades 7-12, BC, 2003, 2008, and 2013



**Notes:** "School connectedness" score reflects the mean score of three items: youth feeling they are a part of their school, being happy to be at their school, and feeling safe at school. The score ranges from zero to ten, with a higher score indicating a greater sense of school belonging. The differences between years were statistically significant for females and males. See Appendix B for more information about this data source.

**Source:** McCreary Centre Society, BC Adolescent Health Survey, 2003, 2008, 2013. Prepared by the Surveillance and Epidemiology Team, BC Office of the Provincial Health Officer, 2016.

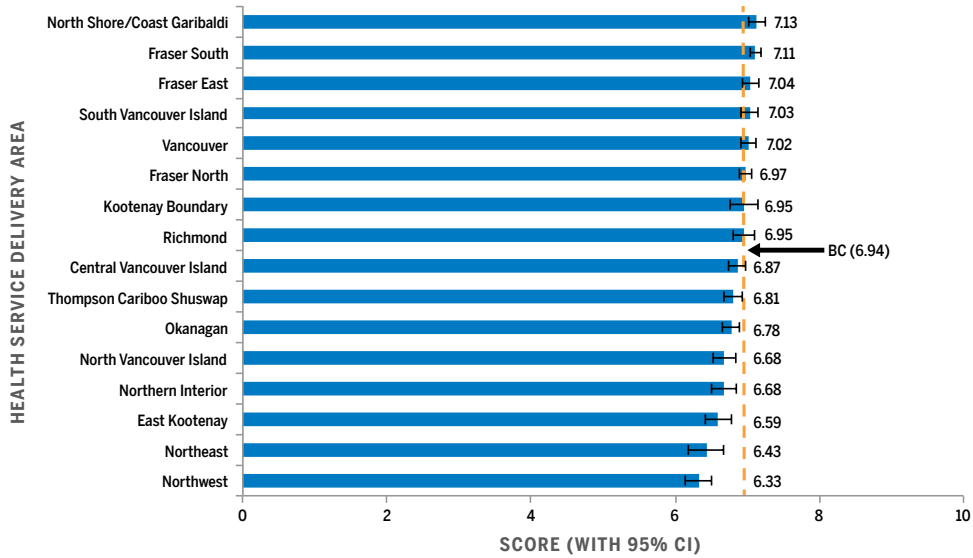
**FIG 31.2** School Connectedness Score for Students in Grades 7-12, by Health Authority, BC, 2013



**Notes:** "School connectedness" score reflects the mean score of three items: youth feeling they are a part of their school, being happy to be at their school, and feeling safe at school. The score ranges from zero to ten, with a higher score indicating a greater sense of school belonging. Health authority is based on the location of the school. See Appendix B for more information about this data source.

**Source:** McCreary Centre Society, BC Adolescent Health Survey, 2013. Prepared by the Surveillance and Epidemiology Team, BC Office of the Provincial Health Officer, 2016.

**FIG 31.3** School Connectedness Score for Students in Grades 7-12, by Health Service Delivery Area, BC, 2013



**Notes:** "School connectedness" score reflects the mean score of three items: youth feeling they are a part of their school, being happy to be at their school, and feeling safe at school. The score ranges from zero to ten, with a higher score indicating a greater sense of school belonging. Health service delivery area is based on the location of the school. See Appendix B for more information about this data source.

**Source:** McCreary Centre Society, BC Adolescent Health Survey, 2013. Prepared by the Surveillance and Epidemiology Team, BC Office of the Provincial Health Officer, 2016.

## REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> Saewyc E, Tonkin R. Surveying adolescents: focusing on positive development. *Paediatr Child Health*. 2008 Jan;13(1):43-7.
- <sup>2</sup> MacKay L. School connectedness: it matters to student health. *Visions: BC's Mental Health and Addictions Journal*, 2009;5(2):18-9.
- <sup>3</sup> Resnick MD, Bearman PS, Blum RW, Bauman KE, Harris KM, Jones J, et al. Protecting adolescents from harm—findings from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. *JAMA*. 1997 Sep 10;278(10):823-32.
- <sup>4</sup> Saewyc EM, Homma Y, Skay CL, Bearinger L, Resnick M, Reis E. Protective factors in the lives of bisexual adolescents in North America. *Am J Public Health*. 2009 January;99(1):110-17.
- <sup>5</sup> Poon C, Saewyc E, Chen W. Enacted stigma, problem substance use, and protective factors among Asian sexual minority youth in British Columbia. *Can J Commun Ment Health*. 2011;30(2):47-64.
- <sup>6</sup> Smith A, Stewart D, Poon C, Saewyc E, McCreary Centre Society. *Fostering potential: the lives of BC youth with government care experience*. Vancouver, BC: McCreary Centre Society; 2011.