

Project 100,000 in 1933 days

Educating Children in a SOCIALLY TOXIC Environment

What does it mean to be a child today? Are we doing enough to protect our children—to grant them the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness?

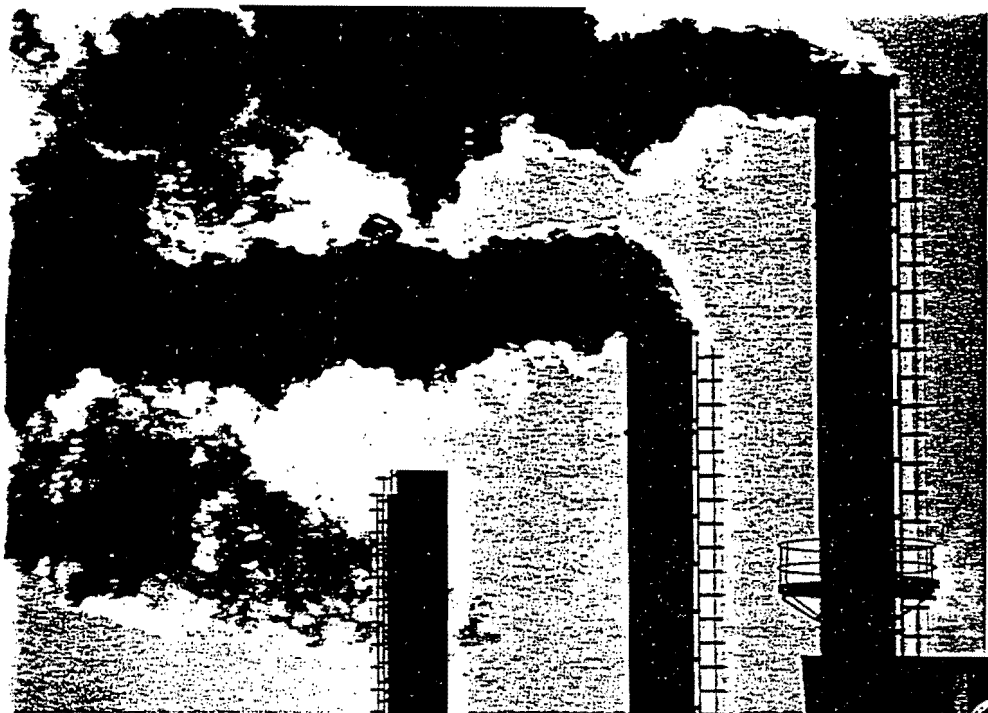
James Garbarino

When I was in high school, I wrote an opinion column for the school newspaper. One month I criticized the fraternities at my school, an act that led many of my peers to become angry at me. As a result, late one night a car pulled up and dumped garbage on the lawn of our house: I was the victim of a drive-by littering.

I often think about that incident when I visit schools and communities. How would that incident play itself out if I were an adolescent today? What might well happen is that I would become the victim of a drive-by shooting. Things have changed.

Some of this difference between then and now simply reflects today's greater awareness of problems. When I was in high school, kids certainly were using drugs and alcohol. Girls did get pregnant. Child abuse did exist. But for the most part, we didn't know about it. With the benefit of hindsight, I realize that, as kids, we were shielded from knowing some of these things by adults who thought we would be better off not knowing. Some of the change is





The social world of children has become poisonous to their development.

© Jeremy Walker / Tony Stone Images

therefore a change in awareness all around.

But the change we are observing is more complex than a combination of greater awareness and better reporting. For instance, Fordham University's Institute for Social Policy produces an *Index of Social Health for the United States*, based on 16 measures, including infant mortality, teenage suicide, dropout rates, drug abuse, homicide, food stamp use, unemployment, traffic deaths, and poverty among the elderly. The Index ranges between 0 and 100 (with 100 being the best). From 1970 to 1992, the Index showed a decline from 74 to 41 (Miringoff 1994). This means that the overall well-being of our society decreased significantly.

Kids today *are* in trouble, more trouble than kids were when I was growing up. Evidence of this is found in research on emotional and behavioral problems among American children. The most compelling study of this change (Achenbach and Howell 1993) used a tool called *The Child Behavior Checklist*. This assessment instrument is widely used in research in many countries. Parents (or other adults who know the child well) indicate the presence (or absence) and intensity of each of 118 specific behaviors or feelings in words such as "can't sit still, restless, or hyperactive," "lying or cheating," "feels worthless or infe-

rior," "cruelty, bullying, or meanness to others," and "nervous, high-strung, or tense."

In 1976, 10 percent of all children studied were judged to be doing so poorly that they could be *candidates* for therapy (even though only a third of these kids actually received such therapy). By 1989, 18 percent of the children were doing badly enough in their behavior and development to warrant needing therapy (and about half were getting it).

Achenbach and Howell's data certainly conform to the observations of teachers and other professionals who work with children. In the past few years, I have had occasion to ask those who have worked with children professionally for 30 years or more what they have observed. They overwhelmingly agree that more and more children are in greater and greater trouble.

Why do greater numbers of our children display signs of serious problems? I believe that children are most vulnerable to the negative influence of an



© David Leach / Tony Stone Images

increasingly socially toxic environment. Unless we do something about it now, the situation for children will only continue to deteriorate.

What Is a Socially Toxic Environment?

What I mean by the term *socially toxic environment* is that the social world of children, the social context in which they grow up, has become poisonous

to their development—just as toxic substances in the environment threaten human well-being and survival. The nature of physical toxicity is a matter for public policy and private concern. For example, we now know that the increasing rates of cancer throughout the 20th century result at least in part from the buildup of toxic substances in the air, the water, and the soil. We know that air quality is a major problem in many places, so much so that in some cities, just breathing “normally” is a threat to your health.

A (Recent) Historical Perspective

Social life is more risky now than it was just 40 years ago; the level of social and cultural poison is higher. How is the environment for kids more socially toxic now than it was when I was a child? For one thing, no kid ever died from a drive-by fist fight, but the proliferation of guns among growing numbers of adolescent peer groups means that conflict and confrontation that once were settled with fists now can lead to shooting. The littering I

today and the threat of venereal disease during my youth, and it is striking to hear teenagers routinely asking potential partners to take an AIDS test before initiating sexual intimacy. More generally, children and youth today must contend with a constant stream of messages that undermine their sense of security. If it isn't the threat of kidnaping, it's the high probability of parental divorce. If it isn't weapons at school, it's contemplating a future with dim employment opportunities.

Children's Vulnerability.

Beyond the immediate threats to children, many other issues are subtle, yet equally serious. High on the list is the departure of adults from the lives of kids—and some studies report a 50 percent decrease over the past 30 years in the amount of time parents are spending with kids in constructive activities. The lack of adult supervision and time spent doing constructive, cooperative activities compounds the effects of other negative influences in the social environment for kids. Kids “home alone” are more vulnerable to every cultural poison they encounter than are children backed up by adults.

Although everyone is vulnerable to toxicity in the social environment, children (like the elderly) are the most vulnerable—just as when airborne pollution gets really bad, it is the children (and our elders) with asthma or other respiratory conditions who show the effects first and with greatest intensity. And who are the children who will show the effects of social toxicity most dramatically? They are the children who already have accumulated the most developmental risk factors.

I can acknowledge and celebrate progress in some aspects of American life (for example, the decline of the most blatant forms of racism and sexism) and yet still maintain that the concept of social toxicity explains a great deal of what troubles us about children and youth growing up in the



What are the social equivalents to lead and smoke in the air, PCBs in the water, and pesticides in the food chain? I think some social equivalents include violence, poverty, and other economic pressures on parents and their children. They include disruption of family relationships and other trauma, despair, depression, paranoia, nastiness, and alienation—all contaminants that demoralize families and communities. These are the forces in the land that contaminate the environment of children and youth. These are the elements of social toxicity.

At stake is the essence of childhood as a protected time and place in the human life cycle.

experienced in 1963 was radically different from the threat faced today by a teen who angers his or her peers.

Kids today are bombarded with messages about the potentially lethal consequences of sex. There is no comparison between the threat of AIDS

1990s. At stake is the essence of childhood as a protected time and place in the human life cycle.

Imagine living in a city plagued by cholera. In this city, the challenge to parents to keep kids healthy would be overwhelming. Yes, the most competent parents and those with the most resources would have more success delivering drinkable water to their children than would other parents. But even these "successful" parents would sometimes fail. Would we blame them, or point the finger at the community's failed water purification system? In a socially toxic environment, the same principle holds.

To fully understand what is happening to our children, we need a view of what childhood *ought to be*. What does it mean to be a child? What are the rights of children?

Children's Rights

A *global* consensus about the meaning of childhood is emerging, as seen in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Cohen and Naimark 1991). This document represents an international effort to define what it should mean to be a child, based on what middle-class societies have learned about children and child development. The United States stands among a handful of renegade countries that have not ratified the U.N. Convention.

The Convention proposes that to be a child is to be shielded from the direct demands of adult economic, political, and sexual forces. It proclaims that childhood is a protected niche in the social environment, a special time and place in the human life cycle, having a special claim on the community. Regardless of their economic value, children have a right to receive support from their families and communities. They have a right to be shielded from war and violence, to lead a life free from adult sexuality, and to have a positive identity.

The U.N. Convention tells us that children need not pay their own way

and earn their keep. They have a human right to be cared for. Typically, families want to provide this support and, as a rule, will do so if possible. But when families cannot provide for their children, the U.N. Convention says that society should pick up the tab. This deeply held principle gives moral force to ongoing efforts to eliminate exploitive labor and poverty from the lives of children. And specific articles in the document testify to this impetus to offer every child what middle-class families offer to their chil-

To be a child is to be shielded from the direct demands of adult economic, political, and sexual forces.

dren. We should bear this in mind in the United States, where we see a high and growing rate of poverty among children.

Children and economics. At present, about one in five of all U.S. children, and two in five among children age 6 and under, live below the officially defined poverty line. By historical and global standards, this may seem a relatively small number—in many countries of the world, the figure is more like 65 percent. But when contrasted with the affluence of our society and the success of other modern societies in protecting children from poverty, the U.S. data represent a telling statistical accusation, particularly if we factor in the finding that among modern societies, the United States has the biggest gap between rich and poor. Whereas in Sweden the top 10 percent of families make two times what the bottom 10 percent earn, for the United States the difference is a factor of six times (and for Canada, four times) (Rainwater and Smeeding 1995).

But the economic foundations of

childhood go beyond protection from poverty. The idea of childhood as a protected niche implies that children are not direct participants in the cash economy. Any work they do should be guided by their parents and should serve educational and developmental purposes. We can celebrate the strides that have been made in many countries in protecting children from work-force participation. Dramatically reducing child labor was an important accomplishment in creating childhood in the United States; around the world, it remains a hot issue. But the economic rights of children go beyond being protected from adult work.

The child also has a right to be protected from the excesses of the consumer economy. In this view, the child's consumer purchases are to be kept separate and sheltered from commercial advertising that exploits the cognitive, emotional, and social limitations of children. The fact that children are often *not* so shielded is a violation of their rights. Turn on a television set during the children's hours before and after school, on weekends, and in the early evening, and you can see for yourself where our society stands on this matter. Children are commercial targets. Walk around any shopping mall, and you can see today's parents trying to cope with the fruits of this commercial exploitation of childhood. You may well be one of these parents.

Children and government. In addition to advocating for the economic protections of children, the U.N. Convention discusses political rights of children. The most important of these is to stand in a privileged position with respect to government. Children cannot vote, are not legally accountable (except in special circumstances when they can be tried in adult courts for especially violent offenses), and are not expected to be used by competing political forces in society. And yet government has obligations toward children. They are to receive special protection in case of war and commu-

nity violence. Children are off limits during times of war and entitled to special rehabilitation if they are affected adversely.

Children are to be protected from violence in general. The U.N. Convention prohibits the execution of minors. It urges that parents and teachers adopt a nonviolent approach to discipline. More and more middle-class adults around the world have come to

reminded me of this change. The only difference between the styles for boys and girls, on the one hand, and adults, on the other, is size. Children were certainly subjected to sexual abuse before the change in clothing took place. But the change shows how we are failing to recognize childhood as a special time that is very different from adulthood. Dressing children like adults sends a message.

The lack of adult supervision compounds the effects of other negative influences in the social environment for kids.

acknowledge that "children are not for hitting." As a result of this growing awareness, many schools ban corporal punishment, and parents seek alternatives to spanking and beating children. Child development research and human rights go hand in hand here.

Imagine telling children they must earn their dinner or their parents' interest on the basis of their accomplishments—*what* they do. No. Children are to eat and have the regard of their parents because of the fact of their relationship, *who* they are. Governments must protect these rights.

Children and sex. Besides being economically privileged and politically protected, children are supposed to be off limits to adult sexuality. They are not sex objects. Their interests, their attitudes, and their bodies are off limits.

In modern Western societies, this principle used to be reinforced by the distinctly different clothing worn by children. Only about 50 years ago, boys wore short pants until adolescence as a symbol of their childhood status. Girls waited until adolescence for makeup and stockings. Today, even young children wear clothing undifferentiated from that worn by teenagers and grownups. Visiting the children's section of a department store recently

To be sure, children are physical, even sensual creatures. But they are not sexual unless corrupted by adults (or adolescents). Although some kids are more physical than others, children generally respond well to physical affection. It's more than that, really. Children *need* physical affection to thrive emotionally, so much so that kids who are deprived of this affection are put in jeopardy. Ironically, these children may even be at greater risk of being sexually abused by predatory adults who exploit this unmet need seductively. As David Finkelhor (1979) makes clear in his analysis of sexual abuse, children are not in a position, developmentally or socially, to give informed consent for sexual involvements.

They lack the cognitive and emotional equipment to figure out the consequences. Also, they lack the independent status necessary to decide freely. In any interaction between a child and an adult, there is the presumption of adult authority. When children are involved, there can be no liaison between consenting persons. Children cannot say "no" with sufficient authority and awareness. Therefore, they are prohibited from saying "yes" (just as adults are prohibited from asking).

Human Rights of Children

The key to detoxifying the social environment and to strengthening children to resist it lies in a human rights perspective on child development. We need to focus positively on what children need to thrive; we must channel our efforts into realizing that vision. This is the fundamental purpose for government as laid out in the Declaration of Independence. Recall that after listing the fundamental, unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, the Declaration states "that to secure these rights governments are instituted." That's the foundation for educating children in a socially toxic environment. ■

References

- Achenbach, T., and C. Howell. (1993). "Are American Children's Problems Getting Worse? A Thirteen-Year Comparison." *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 32, 6: 1145-1154.
- Cohen, C., and H. Naimark. (1991). "United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: Individual Rights Concepts and Their Significance for Social Scientists." *American Psychologist* 46: 60-65.
- Finkelhor, D. (1979). *Sexually Victimized Children*. New York: Free Press.
- Miringoff, M. (1994). *Monitoring the Social Well-Being of the Nation: The Index of Social Health*. Tarrytown, N.Y.: Fordham Institute for Social Policy.
- Rainwater, L., and T. Smeeding. (Fall/Winter 1995). "U.S. Doing Poorly." *News and Issues of the National Center for Children in Poverty* 5, 3: 4-5.

Copyright © 1997 by James Garbarino.

James Garbarino is Director of the Family Life Development Center and Professor of Human Development and Family Studies at Cornell University, College of Human Ecology, G-20 MVR, Ithaca, NY 14853-4401 (e-mail: jg38@cornell.edu). This article is adapted from his book *Raising Children in a Socially Toxic Environment* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1995).

SSP Administration Manual

APPENDIX A

SSP Profile Measures

SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT PROFILE MEASURES

(Student Evaluation of Situation)

NOTE: Item number references are for the paper copy of the SSP.

Neighborhood

Neighborhood Satisfaction (Q21a, c-g): Assesses the degree of cohesion, encouragement, and support that students perceive in their neighborhood. Items include the interest neighboring adults show in the behavior of young people in the neighborhood, available activities, network support between neighbors, and the respondent's happiness with the neighborhood are examples. Six items define this sub-scale, and students are asked to "agree" or "disagree" with each item. Positive responses are counted to produce a summary score ranging from 0 to 6.

Peer Culture (Q22a-g): Determines the likelihood that youth living in the neighborhood who are about the same age as the respondent will avoid negative behaviors and interactions (e.g., get in trouble with the police, use drugs, join a gang, drink alcoholic beverages) and engage in prosocial outcomes (e.g., graduate from high school, make good grades in school). Seven items define this sub-scale, and students respond to each statement as "likely" or "unlikely." Positive responses are counted to create a summary score ranging from 0 to 7.

Neighborhood Safety (Q23a-1): Measures student perceptions regarding the safety in their neighborhood. It asks about specific incidents of violence and illegal activity that have occurred within the last 30 days in students' neighborhood (e.g., "you heard gunshots," "someone tried to sell you illegal drugs," "a person was murdered," "a fight broke out between two gangs"). Students respond either "no" or "yes" to 12 items, with "no" being the positive response. A count score ranges from 0 (unsafe) to 12 (safe).

School

School Satisfaction (Q37a-d, f): The five items on this scale assess student perceptions of the general academic and social climate at school. Example items include "I enjoy going to this school," "I am getting a good education at this school," "Student needs come first at this school," and "Every student is important at this school." Students respond to each item as either "true" or "false." "True" responses are summed to create a scale ranging from 0 (negative working conditions) to 5 (positive working conditions).

Teacher Support (Q39a-d, f-i): Students respond either "true" or "false" to a series of eight statements that describe various feelings about teachers at their school (e.g., "I get along well with my teachers," "My teachers care whether or not I come to school," "I receive a lot of encouragement from my teachers," "My teachers understand racial and cultural differences"). All statements are worded in a positive direction, and "true" response are summed to create a scale ranging from 0 to 8.

School Safety (Q45d, f-n): This summary scale captures student perceptions of the school's climate for learning and positive social interaction. Ten problem behaviors at school are listed and students respond to each as either "A Big Problem," "A Slight Problem," or "Not a Problem." Example items include students fights among students, student use of illegal drugs, students carrying weapons, and racial tension. Responses are coded to range from negative to positive and summary scores range from 10 (low safety) to 30 (high safety).

Friends

Peer Satisfaction (Q48a-e): Perceived friend satisfaction is measured by five items that examined various aspects of peer support: loyalty in times of trouble, ability to talk over problems together, support for attempting new and different activities, responsiveness to feelings, and spending time together. A true/false response dichotomy is used with the number of "true" responses counted to form a summary index. Scores range from 0 (low) to 5 (high).

Peer Acceptance (Q53a-c, e-k, m, n): The relative standing of students in their peer group, their ability to be themselves, and to resist pressure from peers is assessed by 12 items that described various aspects of peer relations (e.g., "I am afraid to do things my friends won't approve of," "I find it difficult to be myself when I am with my friends," "I wish my friends would show me more respect"). Each item is evaluated on a three-point response continuum: "A Lot Like Me," "A Little Like Me," "Not Like Me." Scores may range from a low of 12 to a high of 36.

Family

Family Satisfaction (Q56a-e): Perceived family satisfaction is measured by five items that examined various aspects of family support: loyalty in times of trouble, ability to talk over problems together, support for attempting new and different activities, responsiveness to feelings, and spending time together. A "true"/"false" response dichotomy is used, with the number of "true" responses counted to form a summary index. Scores range from 0 (low) to 5 (high).

Family Integration (Q57a-g): This seven-item summary scale assesses the feelings of emotional connection and bonding among members of the student's family (those who reside with the student). Example items include "Support one another during times," "Give each other plenty of time and attention," "Do things together," and "Work together to solve problems." Each item is rated on a three-point response continuum: "A Lot Like Us," "A Little Like Us," and "Not Like Us." Scale scores range from 7 to 21, with higher scores indicating a more cohesive family interaction.

Parent Support (Q63d, f, h, j, o-r): This eight-item summary scale asks about specific supportive parental behaviors occurring in the past 30 days. Behaviors such as "provided you with loving support," "made you feel appreciated," and "spent free time with you" are examples. A three-point response continuum is provided, including "Never," "Sometimes," and "Often." Summary scores range from 8 to 24 with higher scores indicating a more positive response.

INDIVIDUAL ADAPTATION PROFILE MEASURES

Support

Social Support (Q92a-h): This summary scale assesses students' general level of social support by asking if there are people the student can turn to at least weekly who listen, express appreciation, comfort, talk about feelings, and help with concrete needs. A dichotomous "no"/"yes" response choice is provided. "Yes" responses are counted to give a score with an empirical range of 0 to 8, with higher scores indicating higher levels of perceived support.

Home Academic Climate (Q65a-f): Six items are used to define a summary scale that reflects the degree to which parents show an interest in the student's courses at school and plans for the future. Students are asked whether they have discussed during the past 30 days such issues as things they have studied in class with any adults who live in their home. Positive responses are counted to create a summary score ranging from 0 to 6.

Parent Education Monitoring (Q66a-d, f, g): Six items define this summary scale that assesses the extent to which adults in the student's home have had contact with the student's school during the past 30 days and provided the student with structure and encouragement to do well at school. Sample items include "Attended a meeting at school on your behalf," "Checked on whether you did your homework," "Encouraged you to do well in school," and "Limited the amount of time you could spend watching TV." A dichotomous "yes"/"no" response choice is provided and affirmative responses are counted to yield a summary score ranging from 0 to 6.

Self-Confidence

Self-Esteem (Q83a-h): This eight-item scale measures a student's sense of self-worth. Statements relating to feelings of failure, self-respect, self-satisfaction, and recognition of one's own positive qualities are answered on a three-point scale: "A Lot Like Me," "A Little Like Me," and "Not Like Me." Responses are recoded to range from negative to positive, and a summary score is created that ranges from 8 to 24.

School Coherence (Q36a-i): A nine-item scale is used to assess the degree to which students find events at school comprehensible, meaningful, and manageable. Example items include "I find school fun and exciting," "I look forward to learning new things at school," and "I am able to overcome difficulties at school." Each item is rated on a three-point continuum from "A Lot Like Me" to "Not Like Me." A summary score from 9 to 27 is created, ranging from low to high sense of coherence.

School Influence (Q40a-e): Students' perception of their influence over events at school is measured by this five-item summary scale. Feeling validated for ideas in class, ability to get the attention of the teacher in class, and being able to get help from a teacher when needed are example items. Students respond to each item as either "Difficult" or "Easy," and the number of "Easy" responses are counted to create a summary score from 0 to 5.

School Behavior

Attendance (Q31a-e): Five items are used to determine the attendance behavior of students over the past 7 days. Items include cutting at least one class, cutting the entire school day, and missing school because of sickness. Students respond either "No" or "Yes," and no responses are counted to create a response continuum ranging from poor attendance (0) to good attendance (5).

Trouble Avoidance (Q32a, c, d, e): Students are asked to respond to four items that assess how often during the past 30 days they got into trouble at school or failed to turn in their schoolwork. Items include being sent out of class for misbehavior, fighting with another student, and being suspended or expelled from school. Students respond either 1 (Never), 2 (Once or Twice), or 3 (More than Twice). Responses are recoded to range from negative to positive and a summary score is created ranging from 4 to 12.

Grades (Q27, Q28, Q30): Three items are combined to assess students' academic performance. This first item asks students to report the kind of grades that they made on their most recent report card. Responses are recoded to range from 1 (Mostly D's and F's) to 5 (Mostly A's and B's). The second item asks students to report the number of D's and F's that they made on their most recent report card, recoded from 1 (None) to 4 (Three or More). The last item asks students to compare their grades to other students in their classes with responses recoded from 1 (Worse than Most) to 3 (Better than Most). These items were combined to form a summary scale that ranges from 3 to 12, with higher scores indicating higher academic performance.

General Well-Being

Physical Health (Q77c-g, i-k): Students are asked to indicate how many days over the last 7 days they have experienced a range of problems or difficulties, such as, loss of appetite, trouble going to sleep, upset stomach/stomach ache, headache, nausea or vomiting, and trouble with nerves. Students are given three response choices: 1 (None), 2 (1-2 Days), 3 (3 or more Days). These health indicators yield a summary scale that ranges from a low of 8 to a high of 24. Higher responses indicate better physical health during the index period.

Happiness (Q84a-d,g,h): A summary scale of six items taps into students' general feelings of well-being. Feelings such as successful, pleased with self, sad, and lonely are listed. Students are asked to indicate how often during the past 7 days they have experienced that feeling: 1 (Never), 2 (Sometimes), 3 (Often). Responses are all coded from negative to positive and summed to create a scale ranging from 6 to 18.

Adjustment (Q87, Q88, Q89): Three items are used to create a count scale for assessing the overall adjustment of students. The first item asks whether the student has seriously thought about running away from home during the past 30 days. The second inquires about whether the student has felt at times during the past 30 days that no one cared about him/her. The third item asks if, in the past 30 days, the student at times felt lost or confused. Responses are recoded to range from 0 (poor adjustment) to 3 (good adjustment).

**Contextual Risks, Social Capital, and Internal Assets Among
Communities In Schools Participants:
Comparisons to the National School Success Profile**



Gary L. Bowen, Ph.D., ACSW

Jack M. Richman, Ph.D.

Natasha Bowen, M.S.W.

Mimi V. Chapman, M.S.W.

Jordan Institute for Families

School of Social Work

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

May 1997

Note: The School Success Profile was developed by Dr. Gary L. Bowen and Dr. Jack M. Richman, School of Social Work, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 301 Pittsboro Street, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3550. Project efforts by Dr. Bowen and Dr. Richman have been sponsored by the Knight Foundation in Miami, Florida and the BellSouth Foundation in Atlanta, Georgia and developed in cooperation with Communities In Schools of North Carolina. Grateful appreciation is expressed to Linda Harrill, Director, Communities In Schools of North Carolina, for her consultation and encouragement in developing the SSP. Appreciation is also expressed to Ann Brewster and Kim Sprunck who provided consultation on a earlier draft of this report.

Executive Summary

Using data obtained with the School Success Profile from 665 middle and high school Communities In School participants and 2,099 middle and high school students from a national representative sample, this report introduces three measures for a comparative analysis of these two student groups: contextual risks, social capital, and internal assets. The development of these measures are informed by the ecological-interactional-developmental perspective and are anchored in the literature on adolescent adjustment and school performance.

CIS students are more likely than students in the national sample to be from racial/ethnic minority groups, to be in middle school, to live in single-parent households, to live with a parent who has not completed high school, and to participate in the free or reduced price lunch program. The school performance, attendance, and behavior of CIS students is lower than their counterparts in the national sample; however, the findings show that most CIS students are trying, in spite of the social environmental risks, to attend school, behave properly, and perform academically.

CIS students experience higher levels of contextual risks than students in the national sample. Neighborhood characteristics and TV exposure contribute to the differences. The levels of social capital available to students and perceptions of internal assets do not differ significantly for the CIS and national samples. Yet, for both groups, the percent of maximum possible average only 61% for social capital and less than 60% for internal assets.

For both samples, school performance declines as contextual risks increase. On the other hand, increases in social capital and internal assets are accompanied in both groups by better school performance and behavior. The data also indicate that as contextual risks increase, levels of social capital and internal assets decrease.

Overall, the analysis reveals that students who participate in CIS are distinguished primarily from their national counterparts by the risks that they face in their social environment. These contextual situations and conditions place them at greater risk of school failure. American youth in general need more safety and stability in their environments, greater interpersonal support from adults, and more guidance and support to develop healthy bodies, minds, and relationships. Addressing both contextual risks and social capital deficits is likely to be the most effective intervention strategy for promoting better academic performance, school behavior, and attendance among middle and high school youth, according to the data. For some students, however, risk factors related to safety and security may need to be given priority in defining intervention strategies.

Because of the restricted nature of the CIS sample and differences in the demographic profiles of the CIS and national samples, caution is recommended in drawing inferences from the comparative analysis. The pool of CIS participants will continue to increase and will become more representative as the use of the School Success Profile expands throughout the CIS network of sites. The present analysis suggests the potential of the SSP to describe students selected for CIS program participation and to inform the process by which intervention priorities are defined for these participants.

Contents

	Page
Introduction	4
Definitions and Measures	5
Contextual Risks	5
Assets	5
Social Capital	6
Internal Assets	6
The School Success Profile	7
Method	7
The CIS Sample	7
The National Sample	8
Sample Profiles	9
School Performance Outcomes	10
Contextual Risks Index	11
Contextual Risks and Demographic Profile	12
Contextual Risks and School Performance	13
Social Capital Index	14
Contextual Risks by the Number of Social Capital Indicators	15
Social Capital and Demographic Profile	16
Social Capital and School Performance	17
Internal Assets	19
Internal Assets by the Number of Contextual Risks	20
Internal Assets by the Number of Social Capital Assets	21
Internal Assets and Demographic Profile	22
Internal Assets and School Performance	23
School Performance by Contextual Risks, Social Capital Assets, and Internal Assets	24
Appendices	26
Appendix A. Contextual Risks	27
Appendix B. Social Capital Index	28
Appendix C. Internal Assets	29
Tables	30

Contextual Risks, Social Capital, and Internal Assets Among Communities In Schools Participants: Comparisons to the National School Success Profile

*"Getting started, keeping going, getting started again -- in art and in life, it seems to me
this is the essential rhythm not only of achievement but of survival, the ground of
convinced action, the basis of self-esteem and the guarantee of credibility in your lives,
credibility to yourselves as well as to others."*

Poet Seamus Heaney (May 12, 1996)

Introduction

This report examines the contextual risks, social capital, and internal assets of 665 middle and high school student in North Carolina and Florida who had been identified as "at risk" of school failure by school officials. These "at risk" students were all participants in the Communities In Schools Program (CIS), which is the largest U.S. public-private partnership in the nation for promoting school success, with programs in more than 261 communities across 28 states. Data collection involved the use of the School Success Profile (SSP), which was developed by Dr. Gary Bowen and Dr. Jack Richman.¹ The contextual risks, social capital, and internal assets of these students are compared to a nationally representative sample of 2099 students who completed The National School Success Profile (NSSP).²

Measures are proposed for assessing the concepts of contextual risks, social capital, and internal assets, which provide a framework for the comparative analysis. The development of these measures was informed by the ecological-interactional-developmental perspective that anchors the SSP. They are grounded in the empirical literature on school success and school failure.³

These summary measures were used in the analysis to examine a set of interrelated research questions. First, do students who have been identified by school officials as "at risk" of school failure differ in terms of contextual risks, social capital, and internal assets from a nationally representative sample of public school students? Second, to what extent do the levels of contextual risks, social capital, and internal assets vary by the demographic profile of students? Third, to what extent is the school performance of students related to the indexes of contextual risks, social capital and internal assets? An important question from the social science literature involves the degree to which social capital and internal assets operate as protective factors in buffering the relationship between contextual risks and school performance outcomes. Therefore, the last question is explored using both descriptive and more advanced statistics.

This report has a number of potential implications for community practice with middle and high school students. First, it may inform the way in which students are currently identified to participate in special "at risk" programs. If few differences appear in the

¹Bowen, G. L., & Richman, J. M. (1995). School success profile. Chapel Hill, NC: Jordan Institute for Families, School of Social Work, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

²Louis Harris and Associates, Inc. (1997). School success profile. New York, New York.

³Richman, J. M., & Bowen, G. L. (1997). School failure: An ecological-interactional-developmental perspective. In M. W. Fraser (Ed.), Risk and resilience in childhood: An ecological perspective (pp. 95-116). Washington, DC: NASW Press.

profiles of the two groups of students, the currently model of targeting specific students for intervention may be challenged. Whole school models that target every student as at potential risk of school failure may be more realistic. In addition, the results will provide valuable information about current status of adolescents across the United States. These results have important implications for monitoring and addressing adolescent well-being through policy and program planning.

Definitions and Measures

Contextual Risks

Contextual risks include situations and conditions in the social environment of children that decrease their chances for positive life experiences and increase their chances for adverse developmental outcomes. Informed by James Garbarino's concept of social toxicity and Richard Lerner's model of developmental contextualism, the contextual risks index comprises twenty indicators reflecting social factors that youth may face in their neighborhood, school, peer relationships, and family (see Appendix A).^{4 5} These risks relate directly to the second and third levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs: (a) safety and security needs, and (b) social and affiliative needs.⁶

Each risk indicator has demonstrated good discriminate validity in prior analyses of either personal adjustment, school success, or both. A summary score was created by counting the number of reported risks. This index ranged from 0 to 20 with higher numbers representing more risk factors. For some analyses, the index was converted to a percentage score by dividing the number of reported risks by the total possible number of risks (20). For other analyses, index scores were converted into categories of risk based on the number of reported risks. Students who reported 0 to 2 risk factors were in the low risk category; students with 3 to 5 risk factors were in the moderate risk category; and students with 6 to 20 risk factors were in the high risk category.

Assets

Assets are "the positive counterparts of risk" (p. 6).⁷ While risk factors are predictive of negative outcomes, assets increase the likelihood of positive outcomes. According to Jane Gilgun, assets that are actively used in the face of risk are protective factors.⁸ Assets may promote development and goal attainment directly, while protective factors buffer or compensate for the negative effects of environmental risks. Two sources of assets are discussed below: those that reside within the social relationships in which children are embedded and those that are internal to children.

⁴Garbarino, J. (1995). Raising children in a socially toxic environment. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, Inc.

⁵Lerner, R. M. (1995). America's youth in crisis: Challenges and options for programs and policies. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

⁶Maslow, A. (1954). Motivation and personality. New York: Harper & Row.

⁷Masten, A. S. (1994). Resilience in individual development: Successful adaptation despite risk and adversity. In M. C. Wang & E. W. Gordon (Eds.), Educational resilience in inner-city America: Challenges and prospects (pp. 3-23). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

⁸Gilgun, J. F. (1996). Human development and adversity in ecological perspective, Part I: A conceptual framework. Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Human Services, 77, 395-402.

Social Capital

Social capital, as defined by James Coleman, exists for children within and outside of the family.⁹ In the family, social capital refers to the quality of family relationships and the time and attention parents give to children. Social capital outside the family includes two aspects. First, it includes the opportunities and support that youth receive from institutions and adults in their community. Second, it consists of the relationships that parents have with adults and institutions in the community that have linkages to the developing child. These mesosystem linkages, as described by Urie Bronfenbrenner,¹⁰ provide the developing children with greater consistency of expectations and experiences across settings. Social capital may operate as assets or protective factors in helping youth manage life demands and achieve their goals and ambitions.

Fifteen indicators define the social capital index (see Appendix B). These indicators capture eight sources of social capital within and outside the family: neighborhood, neighbor-parent connection, school, family, parent, parent-friend connection, parent-school connection, and help support. Because of the important role that parents play in the life and development of children, parents and their links to other sources of social capital were a central focus in the development of the social capital index. The nature and operation of these social relationships and ties are hypothesized to provide youth with opportunity and social support.

Each social capital indicator has demonstrated good discriminate validity in prior analyses of either personal adjustment, school success, or both. Scores for each social capital indicator were divided into low and high categories. A summary social capital score was created by counting the number of social capital assets with high codes. This index ranges from 0 to 15. As with the measure of contextual risks, the social capital index was converted to either a percentage or categorical variable for purposes of some analyses. The number of high social capital indicators present for a given youth or group was converted to a percentage by dividing the number of high indicators reported by the total number of indicators ($n = 15$). This results in a score that ranges from 0% to 100%. The measure of social capital was collapsed into three groups for analysis based on the number of indicators present. Students who reported 0-7 indicators were in the low social capital category; students with 8 to 11 indicators were in the moderate social capital category; and students with between 12 to 15 indicators were in the high social capital category.

Internal Assets

Internal assets are those resources that reside within the individual. Resulting from the dual influences of nature and nurture, these assets reflect the value and belief systems of children about themselves and about the level of control they exert over events in their lives. Such value and belief systems inform the way in which children approach and react to events and situations in their environment.

Twenty indicators define the internal assets index (see Appendix C). Each asset has demonstrated good discriminate validity in prior analyses of either personal adjustment, school success, or both. Scores for each asset were divided into low/high categories. A summary score was created by counting the number of internal assets with high codes.

⁹Coleman, J. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American Journal of Sociology*, 94, S94-S120.

¹⁰Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

From some analyses, the index was converted to a percentage score by dividing the number of assets by the total possible number of assets ($n=20$). This results in a score that ranges from 0% to 100%. In other analyses, index scores were converted into categories of assets based on the number of reported assets. Students who reported 0 to 9 assets were in the low asset category; students with 10 to 13 assets in the moderate asset category; and students with 14-20 assets were in the high asset category.

The School Success Profile

The School Success Profile is a paper-and-pencil survey instrument used to profile student participants in the Communities In Schools program. The SSP is designed to (a) describe students selected for program participation; (b) inform the process by which each student is provided with a comprehensive program of academic services, social services, and employment and life skills training; (c) monitor changes in program participants over time; (d) provide information for developing effective and responsive programs; and (e) increase accountability to major stakeholders. The purpose of the SSP is to increase the accountability of local CIS initiatives to their key stakeholders, including the school systems in which they operate, their advisory boards and sponsors, and to the student participants themselves.

Informed by an ecological perspective, the SSP assesses student participants in the contexts of their neighborhood, school, friends, and family. It is designed for use with middle school and high school age students (10-18 years of age). Each student who completes the SSP receives an individualized summary report that includes two profiles: (1) The Social Environment Profile, which includes 11 subdimensions and (2) The Individual Adaptation Profile, which includes 12 subdimensions.

Items and scales on the SSP were informed by an extensive review of literature on school success and existing instruments that yield valid and reliable information. CIS staff at the national, state, and local levels and student focus groups provided critical feedback on specific items and response formats. UNC researchers also consulted national education, adolescent development, and social work experts for input regarding questionnaire design and program outcome assessment. The SSP is truly the result of many partnerships among CIS staff and stakeholders at many levels. This collaborative process continues through ongoing feedback solicited from individuals involved in all aspects of the SSP administrative process.

Method

The CIS Sample

The data for "at risk" students were collected during the 1995-1996 academic year from 665 CIS students across 21 middle and high schools in North Carolina and Florida. These schools were participating in a larger evaluation of the SSP and its consequences as an assessment tool on the school performance outcomes of CIS students. Although student demographic profiles varied (see Table 1), a large proportion of students came from economically disadvantaged neighborhoods and homes. In part, this profile reflects the communities from which CIS identifies schools for program implementation. The student profile also reflects the demography of students most vulnerable to school failure.

Student respondents ranged in age from 10 to 20 years old. The majority (61%) were middle school students (6th-8th grade), and they were nearly evenly split by gender: females (49%) and males (51%). Most student respondents reported their racial/ethnic identity as either African-American/Black (53%) or white (38%). Nearly two-fifths

(38%) of the respondents lived in a family with one parent. More than one-half of the students (59%) were receiving free or reduced price lunches at school, a proxy indicator of poverty status.

The National Sample

Louis Harris and Associates, Inc. conducted the national study of middle and high school students between October 31 and February 15, 1997. Yielding a nationally representative sample of 2099 public school students in grades 6 to 12, the Harris methodology involved a stratified two-stage sampling design. From the population of public middle and high schools in the United States, a sample of 102 schools was selected. From these schools, a representative sample of students were selected to complete the SSP.

Harris implemented special procedures that are part of its scholastic methodology to help ensure a representative student sample across the nation, including replacement procedures for schools and/or students who elected or who were unable to participate. The sample design was specified to ensure adequate representation of students by gender, race/ethnicity, size of place, and region. A two-stage weighting procedure was used to ensure a representative sample. Based on a sample of 2,000 students and a survey percentage result at 50% (maximum variability), the estimates for 95 out of 100 cases are +/- 2%. Table 1 provides a demographic profile comparison of students in the national sample with those in the CIS sample.

Sample Profiles

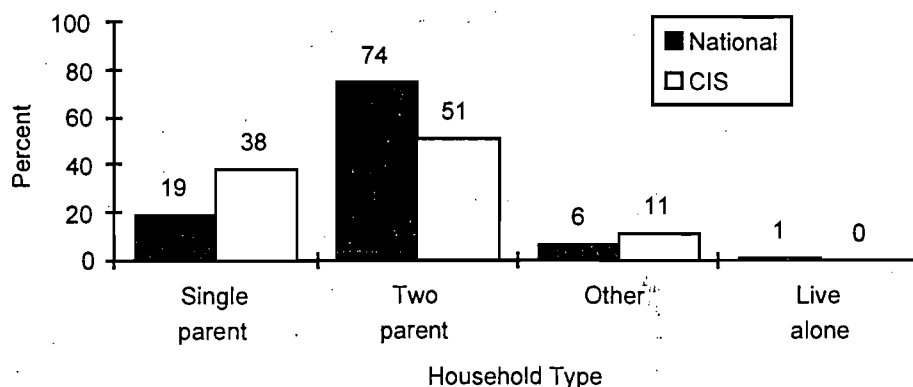
Key Findings:

- A higher proportion of CIS students than students in the national sample:
 - report a racial/ethnic minority group identification (62% versus 37%)
 - live in a single parent household (38% versus 19%) (see Figure 1)
 - live with a parent or stepparent who had not finished high school (mother/stepmother, 32% versus 19%; (father/stepfather, 30% versus 19%)
 - receive free or reduced price lunch at school (59% versus 28%)
 - attend middle school rather than high school (61% versus 45%) (see Table 1).

Implications:

- CIS is successfully targeting students whose background characteristics place them at greater risk of school failure.
- Because of differences in their profiles, caution should be used in comparing CIS students to students in the national sample

Figure 1. Household Type



School Performance Outcomes

Key Findings:

- Most CIS students received mostly B's and C's or better on their last report card (61%); most had never repeated a grade (55%); most had not been expelled or suspended from school in the past 30 days (86%); and the parents of most had not received a warning about attendance, grades or behavior during the past 30 days (66%) (see Table 2).
- A higher proportion of CIS students than student in the national sample reported lower grades; more D's and F's on their last reported card; more grades repeated in school; one or more warnings received by their parents/guardians because on their attendance, grades, or behavior at school; a suspension or expulsion during the past 30 days; and days missed from school because of sickness during the last 7 days (see Figures 2 and 3).

Implications:

- Most CIS students are trying, in spite of the risks they face, to attend school, behave properly, and perform academically.
- As evidenced by their self reports about school performance, these results suggest that CIS is reaching students who are at greater risk of school failure.

Figure 2. Number of D's or F's
on the Most Recent Report Card

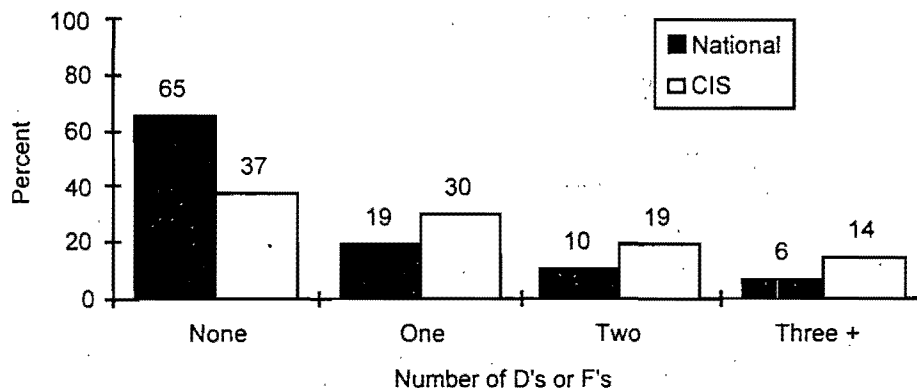
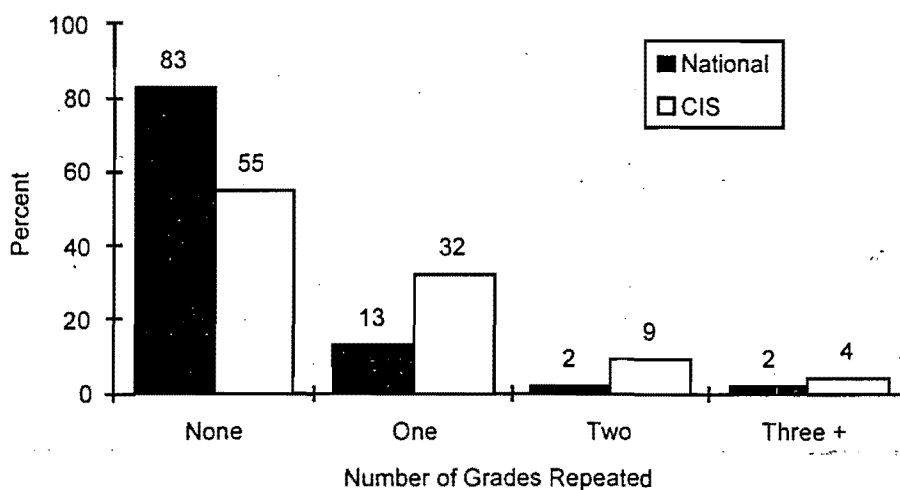


Figure 3. Number of Grades Repeated in School



Contextual Risks Index

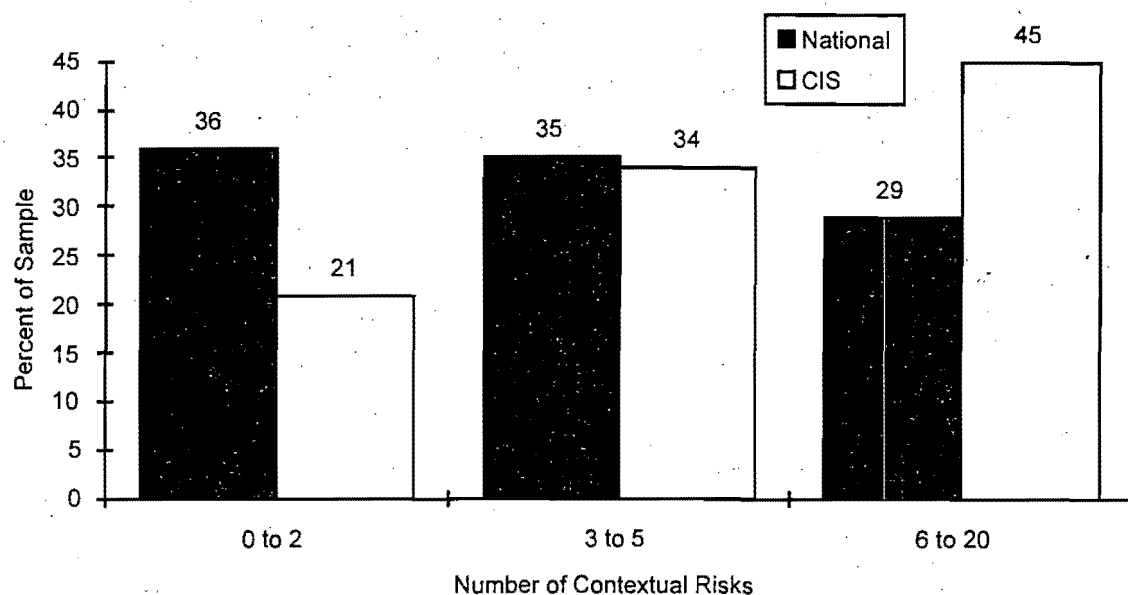
Key Findings:

- A higher proportion of CIS participants than students in the national sample reported experiencing 19 of the 20 contextual risks (see Appendix A).
- CIS students were significantly more likely (a 10 percentage point difference or more) than the national sample to report risks related to neighborhood safety (feeling unsafe, high incidence of crime and violence) and transience.
- CIS students were also significantly more likely to watch more than 4 hours of TV on school nights (43% versus 30%).
- On average, CIS students reported more risk factors than students in the national sample (5.5 versus 4.2).
- As seen in Figure 4, CIS students were much more likely than the national comparison group to be in the high risk group with 6 or more risk factors (45% versus 29%). CIS students were much less likely to be in the low risk group with 2 or fewer risks (21% versus 36%).

Implications:

- Compared to the national sample, CIS students face more conditions and situations in their social environment that place them at risk of low adjustment and school failure.
- While reducing the number of risk factors encountered by students by targeting any risk factor with the potential for change, specific targets that may be appropriate for many CIS students are neighborhood-level characteristics and students' time use.

Figure 4. Percent of Students in Contextual Risks Groups



Contextual Risks and Demographic Profile

Key Findings:

- While the percentage of contextual risks (out of the maximum possible) was consistently higher for CIS students than students in the national sample, non-whites, students in households with nine or more residents, students who lived alone, and students who received free or reduced price lunches tended to face a higher percentage of risks in both samples (see Table 3).
- The highest percentage of risks was faced by students who lived alone (72%).
- Students living with both parents had a lower percentage of risks than others in each of the samples.
- Both CIS students and students in the national sample who received free or reduced priced lunches reported more contextual risks.

Implications:

- Students with certain profile characteristics are more likely than students without those profile characteristics to face situations and conditions in their social environment that place them at risk of low adjustment and school failure.

Contextual Risks and School Performance

Key Findings:

- For both CIS students and students in the national Sample, the findings are unequivocal: lower school performance and increases in problem behavior at school parallel increases in contextual risks (see Table 4, Figure 5, and Figure 6).

Implications:

- Improvements in school performance and behavior are likely to parallel interventions that work to decrease the level of contextual risks that students experience in their social environment.

Figure 5. Percent of Contextual Risks by Number of D's and F's on Most Recent Report Card

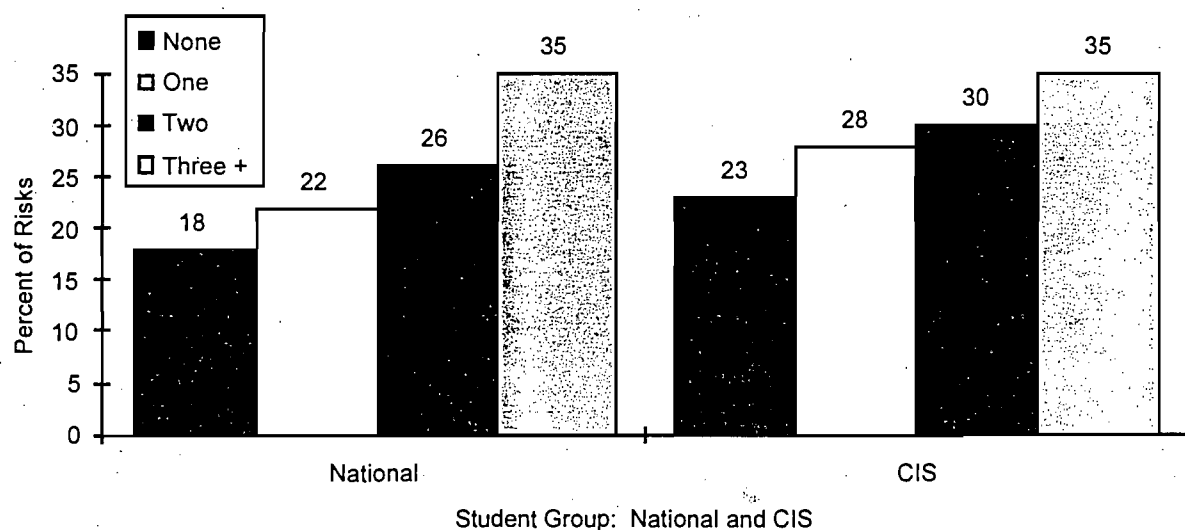
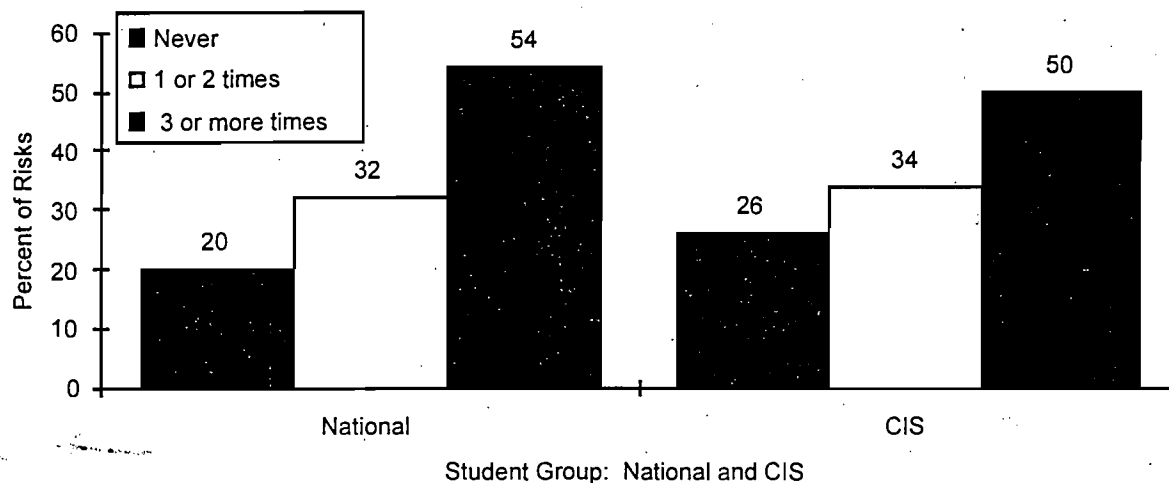


Figure 6. Percent of Contextual Risks by Number of Times Suspended or Expelled from School During Past 30 Days



Social Capital Index

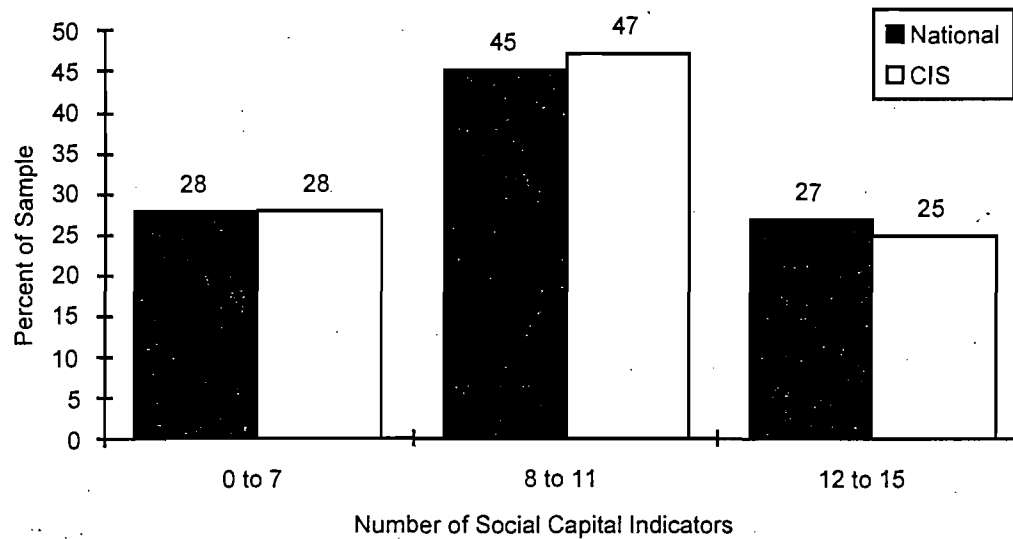
Key Findings

- Few remarkable differences (10% difference or greater) were found in the proportion of CIS students and students in the national sample who reported having each of the 15 indicators of social capital (see Appendix B).
- Similar percentages of CIS and national students had low levels of social capital (0 to 7 indicators), moderate levels of social capital (8 to 11 indicators), and high levels of social capital (12 to 15 indicators) (see Figure 7).
- On average, both CIS students and students in the national sample reported having 61% of the total number of social capital indicators.

Implications:

- The present results challenge the assumption that students at risk of school failure have fewer social connections than other students and are less likely to have people who encourage them to do well at school.
- It is also possible to conclude from these data that all children need more and stronger social connections. In other words, it is not that CIS students are doing well; it is that the national sample is also suffering from depleted social relationships.

Figure 7. Proportion of CIS and National Sample by Number of Social Capital Indicators



Contextual Risks by the Number of Social Capital Indicators

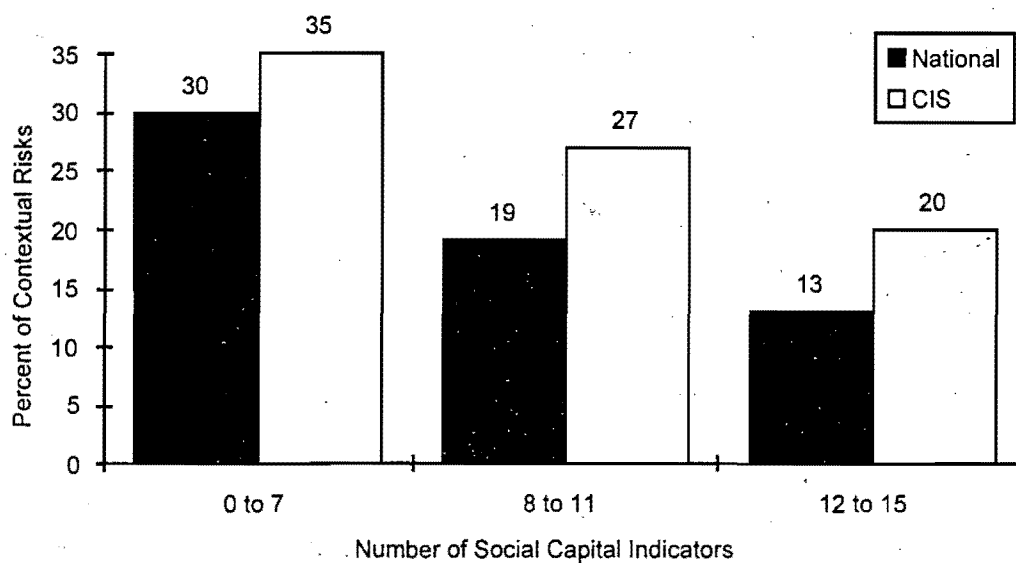
Key Findings

- For both groups of students, as the number of high social capital indicators increases, the percent of contextual risks decreases (see Figure 8).

Implications:

- Students who face high contextual risk in the context of low social capital may be particularly vulnerable to negative outcomes.
- Because a dearth of social capital tends to be accompanied by higher levels of contextual risks, interventions must address social environment risks in addition to students' social relationships. Risks related to safety and security may need to take priority in interventions.

Figure 8. Percent of Contextual Risks by Number of Social Capital Indicators



Social Capital and Demographic Profile

Key Findings

- In general, few patterns emerged in the data when the number of social capital indicators were examined by the demographic profile of CIS students and students in the national sample.
- Students in large households (9 or more) reported the least social capital, while students in two parent families reported the most (see Table 5).

Implications:

- Students with background markers that place them at risk of school failure may not experience any fewer social capital indicators than students with background markers that are associated with more socioeconomic advantage.

Social Capital and School Performance

Key Findings:

- For both CIS students and students in the national Sample, the findings are unequivocal: increases in school performance and behavior parallel increases in the percent of social capital indicators (see Table 6, Figure 9, and Figure 10).

Implications:

- Interventions that focus on increasing the social capital of students are likely to pay dividends in better school performance and behavior.
- Yet, strategies that focus simultaneously on increasing social capital and decreasing contextual risks are likely have the most positive effect.

Figure 9. Percent of Social Capital Indicators by Number of D's and F's on Most Recent Report Card

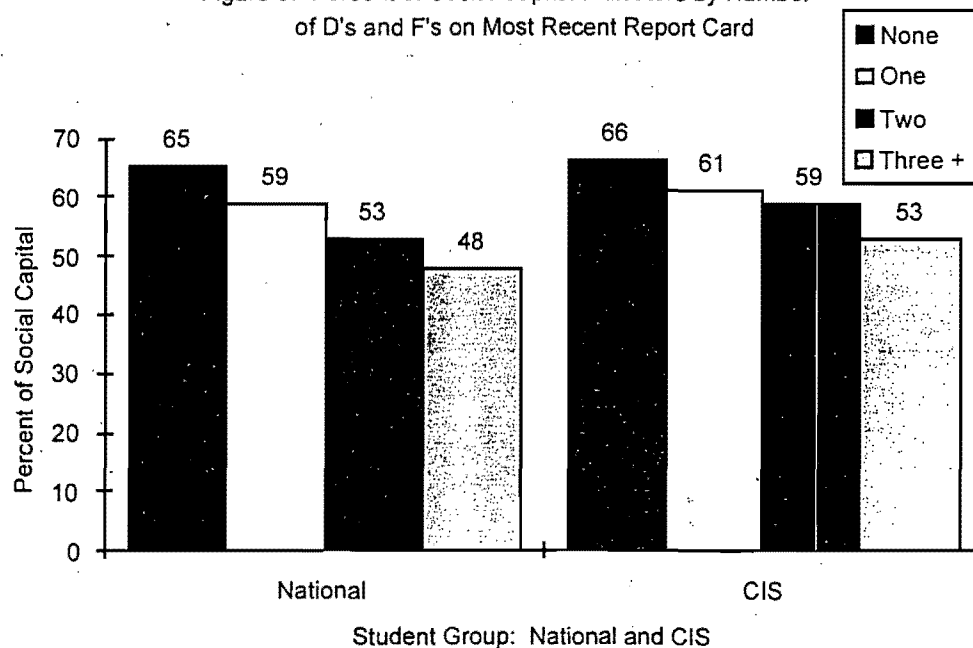
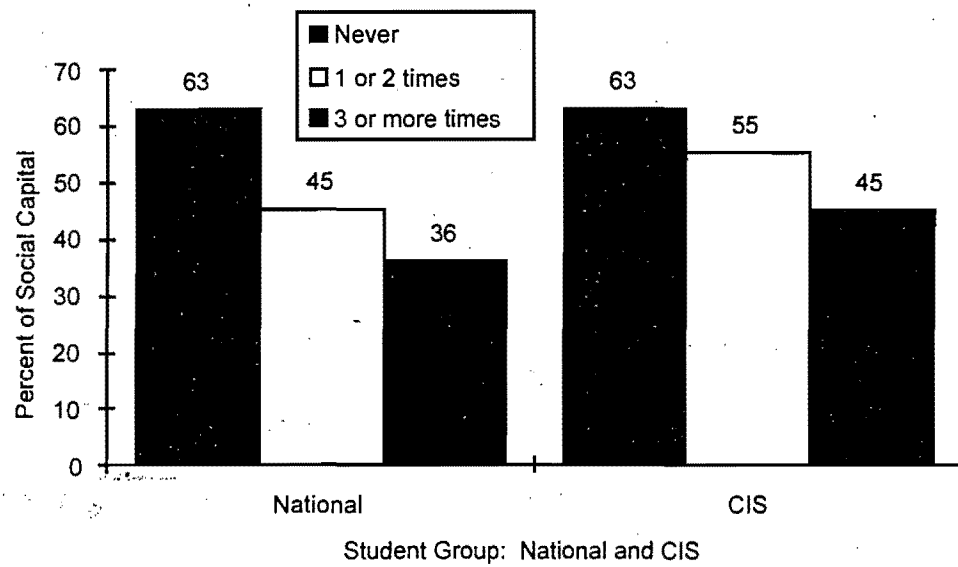


Figure 10. Percent of Social Capital Indicators by Number of Times Suspended or Expelled during the Past 30 Days



Internal Assets

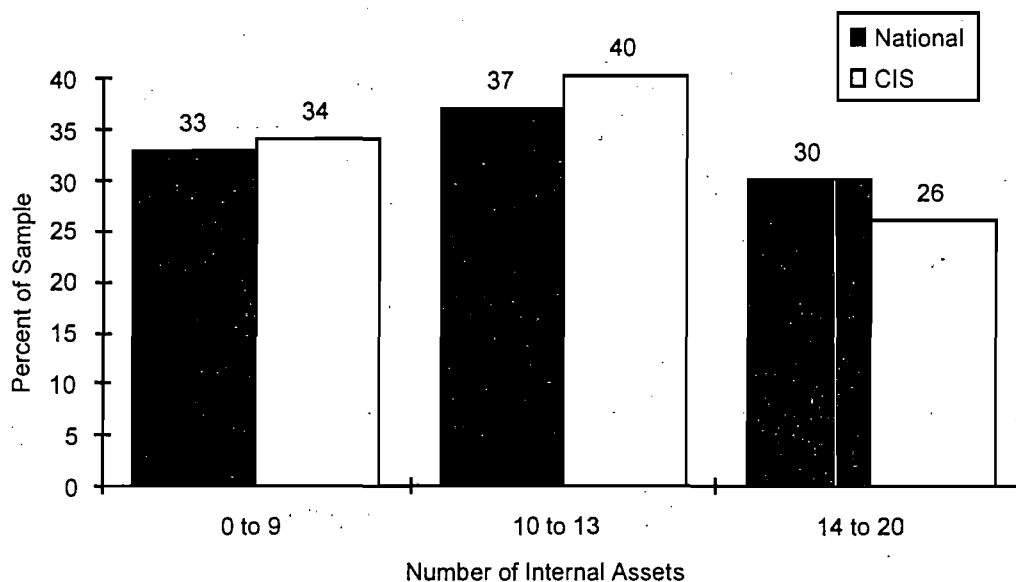
Key Findings:

- Students in the national sample were more likely than those in the national sample to:
 - take part in school activities outside of classwork (60% versus 49%)
 - spend one or more hours studying on school nights (44% versus 32%)
 - feel accepted by friends and able to resist negative peer pressure (51% versus 40%) (see Appendix C).
- CIS students were more likely than those in the national sample to:
 - find education an exciting and meaningful experience (57% versus 41%)
 - report being happy with the way they look (66% versus 51%)
- The CIS and national samples reported similar perceptions (less than 10% difference) of assets related to physical well-being, mental health, and self-esteem and control in the school environment.
- Fewer than half of the students in each group felt school was very helpful in preparing them for life after high school, said they were likely to turn to another when faced with major problems, and felt able to overcome difficulties at school.
- Similar percentages of CIS students and national students were in the low, moderate, and high categories for the number of internal assets possessed (see Figure 11).
- On average, students in the national sample reported 57% of the total number of internal assets; CIS students reported 55% of total internal assets.

Implications:

- While students in the CIS and national samples had similar overall levels of internal assets, the findings indicate that after-school activities and studying could be promoted among CIS students. The quality of friendships and ability to resist negative peer pressure were also revealed as important targets.
- The findings indicate that middle and high school students in general may lack understanding of the importance of schooling for future success, a sense of control in school situations, and an appreciation for the role of social support in problem-solving.
- Overall, the values and beliefs that CIS students have about themselves and their social environment do not differ from other students and are strengths that can be used in interventions.

Figure 11. Proportion of CIS and National Sample by Number of Internal Assets



Internal Assets by the Number of Contextual Risks

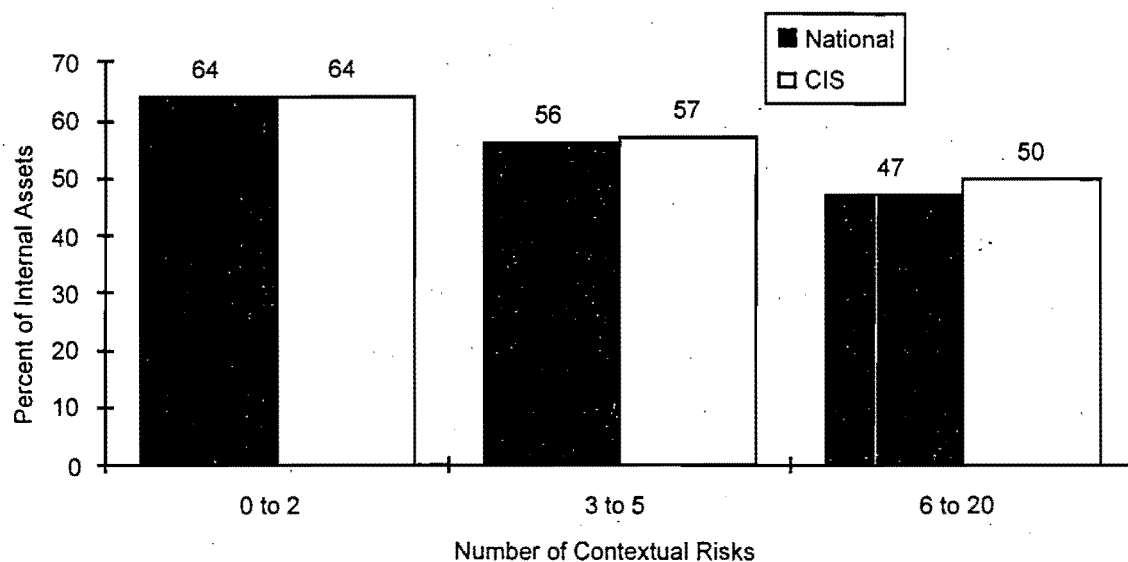
Key Findings:

- As the number of contextual risks increases, the proportion of internal assets reported by CIS students and students in the national sample decreases (see Figure 12).

Implications:

- Without changes in the social environment of students to reduce the level of contextual risks, students may face difficulties in developing a value and belief system that is associated with good personal adjustment and school success.

Figure 12. Percent of Internal Assets by the Number of Contextual Risks



Internal Assets by the Number of Social Capital Assets

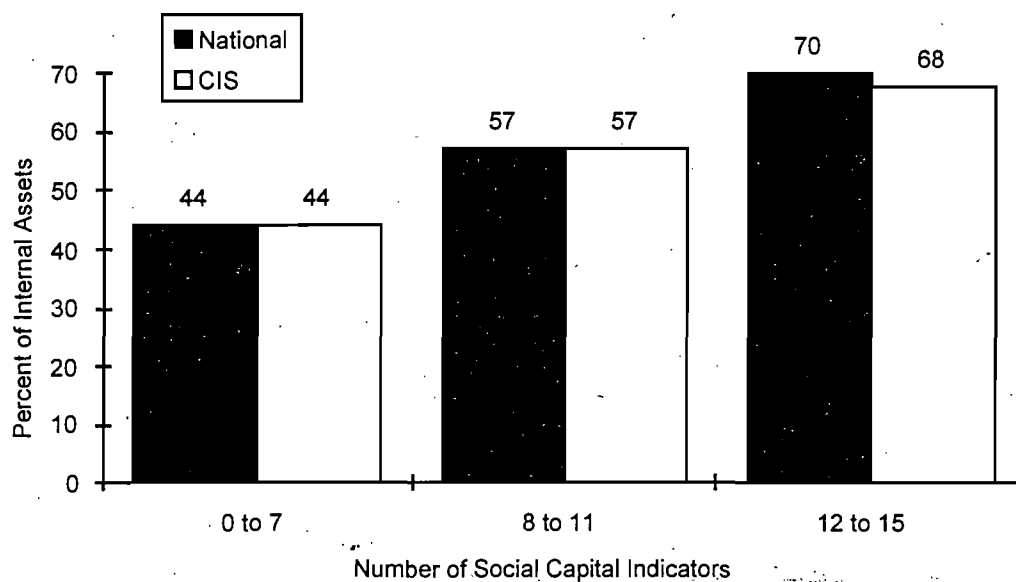
Key Findings:

- The proportion of internal assets that CIS students and students in the national sample report increases significantly as the number of social capital indicators increases (see Figure 13).

Implications:

- Interventions that focus on increasing the level of support and encouragement that students receive from significant adults in their environment are likely to support the development of a value and belief structure that is conducive to personal adjustment and school success.

Figure 13. Percent of Internal Assets by Number of Social Capital Indicators



Internal Assets and Demographic Profile

Key Points:

- Overall, the proportion of internal assets varied little across the various demographic profile characteristics of students (see Table 7).
- The proportion of internal assets for different demographic groups varied little between the CIS and national samples.

Implications:

- Demographic profile characteristics may not be good markers for identifying students who may evidence values and beliefs that are associated with poor adjustment and low school performance.

Internal Assets and School Performance

Key Points:

- The findings for CIS students and students in the national sample show a similar pattern: students who perform better in school and behave more appropriately report a higher proportion of internal assets (see Table 8, Figure 14, and Figure 15).

Implications:

- Unlike contextual risks and social capital that are external to the student and thus are more likely to influence school performance than be influenced, it is likely that internal assets and school performance work in a reciprocal manner, each benefiting the other.
- Targeting the many internal assets that are manipulable (e.g., physical and psychological health, school meaningfulness, responses to peer pressure) should promote improved school performance and behavior.

Figure 14. Percent of Internal Assets by Number of D's and F's on Most Recent Report Card

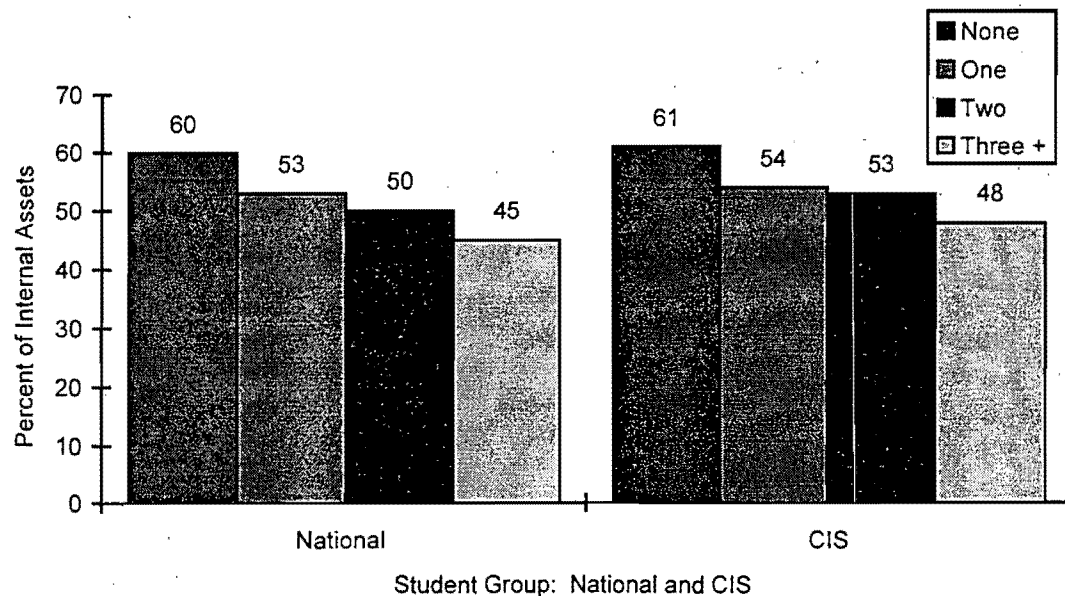
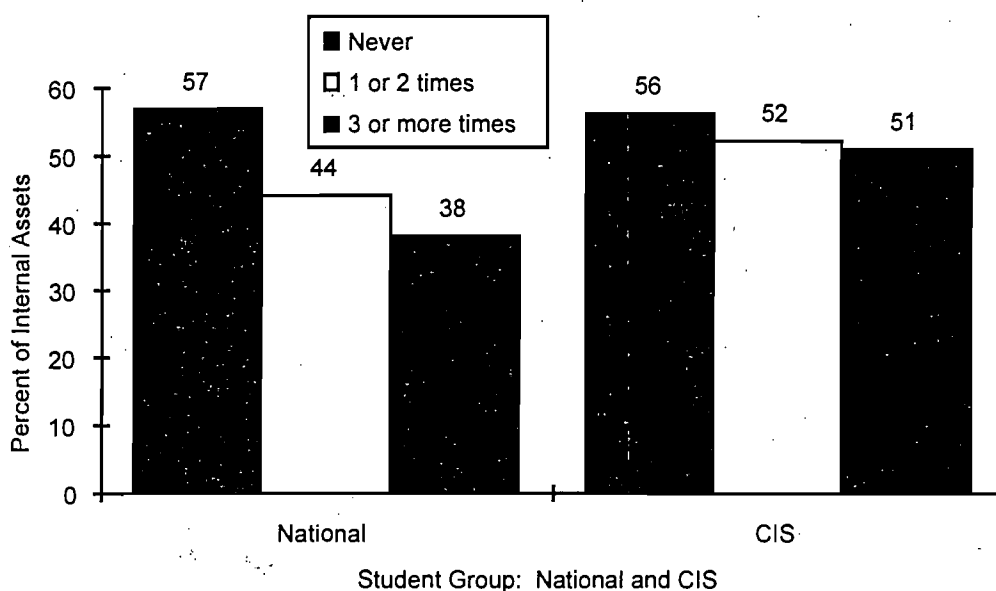


Figure 15. Percent of Internal Assets by Number of Times Suspended or Expelled during the Past 30 Days



School Performance by Contextual Risks, Social Capital Assets, and Internal Assets

Two models have informed the study of the role that risk and protective factors play in influencing dependent outcomes, such as school performance: the compensatory model and the immunity model. The compensatory model assumes that both risk and protective factors will have a direct but opposite effect on dependent outcomes. Risk factors will detract from positive outcomes; protective factors (assets) will promote positive outcomes. Like the compensatory model, the immunity model assumes that risk factors will detract from positive outcomes. Yet, it assumes that protective factors only play a role in influencing outcomes in the face of risk. Protective factors buffer the consequences of risk factors on dependent outcomes. In situations of low risk, it is assumed that protective factors will have little effect. In situations of high risk, it is assumed that protective factors will have a significant effect.

Five indicators of academic performance from the national data were used to test the operation of a compensatory versus an immunity model: grades on the most recent report card; number of D's and F's on the most recent report card; number of grades repeated in school; the degree to which students have avoided problem behavior at school during the last 30 days, and attendance over the last 7 days. When the indicators of academic performance were examined in the context of categories of contextual risks (0-2, 3-5, 6-20), social capital assets (0-7, 8-11, 12-15), and internal assets (0-9, 10-13, 14-20) the results supported the operation of a compensatory model. Of the six analyses, only one provided support for the immunity model. At high levels of contextual risks (6-20), increases in the level of social capital buffered the negative effect of contextual risks on attendance. As a consequence, the models were re-examined by using multiple regression procedures, which allow specification of the full range of the independent variables. Models were examined both for students in the national sample and for CIS students.

The results were generally consistent across the two respondent groups. Overall, the number of contextual risks was the best predictor of school performance outcomes for both groups. This was particularly the case for the two behavior variables, avoidance of problem behavior and attendance, variables which are strongly related to school performance outcomes in the literature. As expected, the greater the number of contextual risks, the less the avoidance of problem behavior and the poorer the attendance at school. In all cases where significant effects were found, the greater the number of contextual risks, the poorer the school performance indicator; the greater the number of social capital and internal assets, the more positive the school performance indicator.

In summary, these findings suggest that interventions that focus on reducing the level of contextual risks in the lives of students may have the greatest effect in promoting their outcomes at school. This is not to say that a focus on building the level of social capital and internal assets in the lives of students is not important. Yet, like Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, higher level needs such as needs for belonging, connection, and social support may not become motivating until lower order needs such as the needs for safety and security have been satisfied. Students who face danger and peril in their social environment may be mesmerized into inaction. A strategy that focusing on reducing contextual risks and building assets simultaneously is likely to have the most benefit for student performance in the long run.

Appendices

Appendix A. Contextual Risks

	National %	CIS %
Safety and Security		
1. Youth feel unsafe in their neighborhood.	13	24
2. Youth live in a neighborhood with a high incidence of crime and violence.	31	45
3. Youth are often or sometimes afraid that someone will hurt or bother them on the way to or from school.	27	34
4. Youth are often or sometimes afraid that someone will hurt or bother them at school.	30	34
5. During the past 30 days, youth knew someone who carried a weapon to school, such as a gun, knife, or club.	21	23
6. Youth attend a school with high disruption, crime, and violence.	22	26
7. During the past 30 days, someone attacked or threatened the youth with a weapon, such as a gun, knife, or club.	07	10
8. Youth report that people move in and out of their neighborhood a lot.	15	32
9. Youth have moved two or more times in the last year.	08	17
10. Youth do not always have a way to get home if they stay for after-school activities.	32	38
Social and Affiliative		
11. Youth are unhappy with the neighborhood in which they live.	20	28
12. Youth live in a neighborhood where young people about their age are likely to break the law and get into trouble with the police.	41	44
13. Youth view young people in the neighborhood as unlikely to graduate from high school.	14	26
14. Youth feel that every student is <u>not considered</u> important at the school they attend.	33	24
15. Youth report that they have friends who often get into trouble.	17	23
16. Youth are a member of a school or neighborhood gang.	07	09
17. Youth report the death of a close friend in the last year.	23	30
18. Youth report that they often have disagreements with the adults in their home about the adults' behavior.	13	19
19. Youth have a brother or sister who dropped out of school before graduating.	12	20
20. During the past 30 days, youth watched television more than 4 hours on average each school night (Sunday-Thursday).	30	43
(Mean number of contextual risks)	(4.2)	(5.5)
(Percent of Maximum)	(21)	(28)

Appendix B. Social Capital Index

	National %	CIS %
Neighborhood		
1. Youth perceive their neighbors as interested in their welfare and willing to help them if they have a problem.	60	59
Neighbor-Parent Connection		
2. Youth believe that if they did something wrong, adults in the neighborhood who knew about it would probably tell the adults that they live with.	70	73
School		
3. Youth report that they are getting a good education at the school they are attending.	84	85
4. Youth perceive teachers at their school as supportive and caring about them.	59	60
Family		
5. Youth describe the relationship between the adults in their home as good.	70	66
6. Youth report that members of their family feel a sense of emotional connection and bonding with one another.	48	50
Parent		
7. Youth report that the adults in their home provide them with loving support and encouragement.	53	57
Parent-Friend Connection		
8. Youth report that the adults in their home know most of their friends.	76	70
9. Youth report that the adults in their home know most of the parents of their friends.	52	47
Parent-School Connection		
10. Youth report that if they needed one or more adults with whom they live to come to school, they would come.	79	73
11. Youth report that an adult is available for them to contact when they return home from school.	67	63
12. Youth perceive that it is important to the adults in their home that they do well in school.	85	83
13. Youth are encouraged by the adults in their home to do well in school.	84	87
14. Youth report that the adults in their home show an interest in their courses, experiences and activities at school and ask them about their plans for the future.	51	58
Help Network		
15. Youth report that people are available when they need help and support.	55	55
(Mean Number of Social Capital Factors)	(9.2)	(9.2)
(Percent of Maximum)	(61)	(61)

Appendix C: Internal Assets

	National %	CIS %
<u>Educational Investment</u>		
1. Youth take part in school activities that are not part of classwork.	60	49
2. Youth spend one or more hours on average studying or doing homework each school night.	44	32
3. Youth find education an exciting and meaningful experience.	41	57
4. Youth feel that school is very helpful in preparing them for what they want to do after high school.	39	48
5. Youth want to go to college in the year after they graduate from high school.	75	67
<u>Physical Well-Being</u>		
6. Youth describe their health as either very good or excellent.	55	54
7. Youth have no medical condition or disability that keeps them from attending school regularly.	92	87
8. Youth report good physical health over the last seven days.	55	60
9. Youth exercised or played sports at least 3 of the last seven days.	63	58
10. Youth generally feel well-rested.	58	61
<u>Mental health</u>		
11. Youth report high psychological well-being.	48	50
12. Youth are very likely to turn to another when they face major personal or family problems.	32	34
13. Youth are helpful to others at school.	71	71
<u>Confidence and Self-Esteem</u>		
14. Youth are happy with the way they look.	51	66
15. Youth report positive feelings about self.	52	48
16. Youth feel that they are able to overcome difficulties at school.	49	41
17. Youth feel a sense of influence and control over events in the school environment.	52	55
<u>Peer Relationships</u>		
18. Youth report no difficulty in making new friends.	63	65
19. Youth report that they are part of a group of friends at school who hang out together.	80	72
20. Youth feel accepted by their friends and able to resist negative peer pressure	51	40
(Mean Number of Internal Assets)	(11.3)	(11.1)
(Percent of Maximum)	(57)	(55)

Tables

Table 1. Sample Profiles from National and CIS Surveys

Characteristic	National (n = 2099) %	CIS (n = 665) %
Gender		
Female	51	49
Male	49	51
Race/Ethnicity		
Native American or Alaskan Native	03	01
Asian or Pacific Islander	04	01
Black/African-American	14	53
Hispanic/Latino	09	02
White	63	38
Multiracial	04	03
Other	03	02
Grade		
Middle School (6th - 8th grade)	45	61
High School (9th - 12th grade)	55	39
Household Type		
Live in a family with one parent	19	38
Live in a family with two parents	74	51
Live in another type of family situation	06	11
Live alone	01	00
Number People Living in Home		
1-2 people	05	11
3-4 people	50	50
5-6 people	35	30
7-8 people	08	07
9 or more people	02	02
High School Graduate: Mother		
Does not live with me	05	09
Lives with me but did not graduate from high school	19	32
Lives with me and did graduate from high school	76	59
High School Graduate: Father		
Does not live with me	13	25
Lives with me but did not graduate from high school	19	30
Lives with me and did graduate from high school	68	45
Receives Free or Reduced Price Lunches at School		
No	72	41
Yes	28	59

Table 2. School Performance Outcomes for the National and CIS Samples

School Performance Outcome	National %	CIS %
Grades on Most Recent Report Card		
Mostly A's and B's	54	28
Mostly B's and C's	25	33
Mostly C's	07	11
Mostly C's and D's	10	19
Mostly D's and F's	04	09
Number D's or F's on Most Recent Report Card		
None	65	37
One	19	30
Two	10	19
Three or More	06	14
Number Grades Repeated in School		
No Grades	83	55
One Grade	13	32
Two Grades	02	09
Three or More Grades	02	04
Cut school for the entire day at least once over the last seven days.		
No	94	94
Yes	06	06
Parent(s)/Guardian(s) Received a Warning about Student's Attendance, Grades, or Behavior during the Past 30 days		
Never	77	66
Once or Twice	19	26
More than Twice	04	08
Suspended or Expelled from School during the Past 30 days.		
Never	95	86
Once or Twice	03	11
More than Twice	02	03
Number of Days Missed From School Because to Sick to Attend Over the Last 7 Days		
None	79	71
1 - 2 Days	17	22
3 or More Days	04	07

Table 3. Percent of Contextual Risks by Demographic Indicators

Characteristic	National %	CIS %
Gender		
Female	20	29
Male	22	27
Race/Ethnicity		
Black/African-American	27	30
White	18	24
Other	24	29
Grade		
Middle School	20	27
High School	22	28
Total Number of People Living in Household		
1-2	25	27
3-4	20	29
5-6	20	26
7-8	24	25
9 or more People	32	30
Household Type		
Live in a family with one parent	25	30
Live in a family with two parents	19	25
Live in another type of family situation	25	32
Live alone	72	*
Receives Free or Reduced Price Lunches at School		
No	19	25
Yes	25	29

Table 4. Percent of Contextual Risks by School Outcomes

School Performance Outcome	National %	CIS %
Grades on Most Recent Report Card		
Mostly A's and B's	17	24
Most B's and C's	23	26
Mostly C's	24	30
Mostly C's and D's	27	32
Mostly D's and F's	38	34
Number D's or F's on Most Recent Report Card		
None	18	23
One	22	28
Two	26	30
Three or More	35	35
Number Grades Repeated in School		
No Grades	19	25
One Grade	26	29
Two Grades	30	33
Three or More Grades	36	37
Cut the entire school day over the last 7 days.		
No	20	27
Yes	38	40
Parent(s)/Guardian(s) Received a Warning about Student's Attendance, Grades, or Behavior during the Past 30 days		
Never	18	25
Once or Twice	27	31
More than Twice	38	40
Suspended or Expelled from School during the Past 30 days.		
Never	20	26
Once or Twice	32	34
More than Twice	54	50
Number of Days Missed From School Because to Sick to Attend Over the Last 7 Days		
None	19	26
1 - 2 Days	24	28
3 or More Days	34	38

Table 5. Percent of Social Capital by Demographic Indicators

Characteristic	National %	CIS %
Gender		
Female	64	62
Male	59	61
Race/Ethnicity		
Black/African-American	61	61
White	63	63
Other	57	59
Grade		
Middle School	63	64
High School	60	58
Total Number of People Living in Household		
1-2	58	59
3-4	62	61
5-6	62	63
7-8	59	66
9 or more People	46	53
Household Type		
Live in a family with one parent	57	60
Live in a family with two parents	64	63
Live in another type of family situation	55	57
Live alone	10	*
Receives Free or Reduced Price Lunches at School		
No	63	60
Yes	59	62

Table 6. Percent of Social Capital by School Performance Outcomes.

School Performance Outcome	National %	CIS %
Grades on Most Recent Report Card		
Mostly A's and B's	67	67
Most B's and C's	58	63
Mostly C's	55	61
Mostly C's and D's	51	54
Mostly D's and F's	43	55
Number D's or F's on Most Recent Report Card		
None	65	66
One	59	61
Two	53	59
Three or More	48	53
Number Grades Repeated in School		
No Grades	63	64
One Grade	57	59
Two Grades	58	53
Three or More Grades	47	60
Cut school for the entire day at least once over the last seven days.		
No	63	62
Yes	39	46
Parent(s)/Guardian(s) Received a Warning about Student's Attendance, Grades, or Behavior during the Past 30 days		
Never	64	64
Once or Twice	56	57
More than Twice	43	51
Suspended or Expelled from School during the Past 30 days.		
Never	63	63
Once or Twice	45	55
More than Twice	36	45
Number of Days Missed From School Because to Sick to Attend Over the Last 7 Days		
None	63	62
1 - 2 Days	59	62
3 or More Days	50	52

Table 7. Percent of Internal Assets by Demographic Indicators

Characteristic	National %	CIS %
Gender		
Female	56	55
Male	57	56
Race/Ethnicity		
Black/African-American	60	57
White	56	54
Other	55	53
Grade		
Middle School	57	57
High School	56	54
Total Number of People Living in Household		
1-2	57	54
3-4	56	55
5-6	58	57
7-8	55	59
9 or more People	48	55
Household Type		
Live in a family with one parent	55	56
Live in a family with two parents	57	56
Live in another type of family situation	54	51
Live alone	24	*
Receives Free or Reduced Price Lunches at School		
No	57	54
Yes	55	56

Table 8. Percent of Internal Assets by School Performance Outcomes

School Performance Outcome	National %	CIS %
Grades on Most Recent Report Card		
Mostly A's and B's	62	62
Most B's and C's	52	56
Mostly C's	51	54
Mostly C's and D's	48	50
Mostly D's and F's	40	46
Number D's or F's on Most Recent Report Card		
None	60	61
One	53	54
Two	50	53
Three or More	45	48
Number Grades Repeated in School		
No Grades	58	59
One Grade	52	52
Two Grades	49	50
Three or More Grades	43	47
Cut school for the entire day at least once over the last seven days.		
No	57	56
Yes	44	47
Parent(s)/Guardian(s) Received a Warning about Student's Attendance, Grades, or Behavior during the Past 30 days		
Never	58	58
Once or Twice	51	51
More than Twice	43	47
Suspended or Expelled from School during the Past 30 days.		
Never	57	56
Once or Twice	44	52
More than Twice	38	51
Number of Days Missed From School Because to Sick to Attend Over the Last 7 Days		
None	58	58
1 - 2 Days	51	52
3 or More Days	46	43

Table 9. School Performance Outcomes Regressed on Contextual Risks, Social Capital, and Internal Assets

School Performance Outcome	Beta			R ²
	Risks	Social Capital	Internal Assets	
Grades on Most Recent Report Card (A's - F's)				
National	.18	-.13	-.17	.15
CIS	.12	.NS	-.21	.10
Number D's or F's on Most Recent Report Card (None to 3 or More)				
National	.19	-.11	.10	.10
CIS	.18	-.18	.NS	.10
Number Grades Repeated in School (0 to 3+)				
National	.19	.NS	-.09	.05
CIS	.12	.NS	-.16	.06
Avoidance of Problem Behavior During Last 30 Days (No to Yes)				
National	-.37	.09	.NS	.19
CIS	-.35	.NS	.NS	.16
Attendance--Last Seven Days (Poor to Good)				
National	-.31	.09	.09	.16
CIS	-.21	.13	.13	.14

Note: NS = Not Significant