



Adolescent Social Relationships Project

Spring 2023 Update

Update on Brock University research at the Holy Cross Family of Schools

Thank you to all of the students, parents, staff, and board members who have offered us a tremendous amount of support for our research! Here is a brief update on what we've done and what's next.

What did we do this year?

We brought our tablets to Grade 8 classes at St. Alfred, Our Lady of Fatima, Canadian Martyrs, Assumption, and St. Michael, along with all Grade 9-12 classes at Holy Cross, so that students could complete surveys in November and May.

This year we collected data from over 600 students in the Holy Cross family of schools with approximately 90% of students participating in the study. Thank you for your support! This level of participation gives us much more confidence that we are adequately capturing the social relationships of the teens in our study.

We will be returning for two more rounds of data collection next year for students in Holy Cross. We want to welcome the Grade 8s coming to Holy Cross and wish the very best to the Grade 12s who are graduating from Holy Cross!

We also welcomed Dr.'s Naomi Andrews, Ann Farrell, and Natalie Spadafora to our team, alongside myself (Dr. Tony Volk), Dr. Andrew Dane, and Dr. Wendy Craig (Queen's University). We have a growing team of 10 graduate and undergraduate students working on the project this year. Thus, we're increasing our capacity to collect, analyze, understand, and talk about the important information we're getting from our teen participants.

What are the benefits for students and schools?

We have given participating schools a combined total of over \$10 000 in funding to thank them for their participation. Students, parents, and staff have all been tremendously helpful and supportive, so this is one way for us to repay that cooperative spirit.

In addition, we gave out over \$6 000 in prizes in both the Fall and the Spring (for a total of over \$12 000) to specifically thank the students who give us the 45-60 minutes required to fill out our questionnaires. Without your honest and in-depth answers, this study would not be possible. Thus, we really appreciate your participation! We will be giving out a similar number of prizes next year, so we really hope to see most of you again in our study.

What have we learned so far?

This was a critical year for our study as we were able to return to schools after the pandemic. With that in mind, we were able to compare a number of different kinds of behavior from before to after the pandemic to see if anything had changed.

- ◆ The good news is that friendships and mental health were stable from the Fall of 2019 to the Fall of 2022. This is excellent news for our teens and demonstrates how resilient they were as a group. While we know that some students had challenges in these areas before and/or after the pandemic, the overall picture is generally positive after the doom and gloom of the pandemic.
- ◆ A more neutral finding is that bullying levels also remained stable from Fall 2019 to Fall 2022. Other researchers saw a drop in bullying when the pandemic hit. But it seems that was probably due to fewer social interactions in general, so once students returned to normal socialization levels, so did bullying levels. That's one reason why it's important for us to do this kind of research so we can understand the factors that might help reduce bullying over time.
- ◆ We did observe a drop in the levels of classroom civility from Fall 2019 to Fall 2022. Classroom civility consists of small things like waiting your turn to talk, not packing up books early, being polite to others in the class, etc. While these may seem like small items, our data show that being uncivil can lead to

more severe antisocial behavior with time. Thus, this is a concern that we have been focusing on. Our best guess at the moment is that recent episodes of online learning and school disruptions may have made some teens forget about the right way to behave in a school setting. We will certainly be keeping an eye on this in next year's data to see if this is just a post-COVID blip or if it's something worth greater focus.

◆ Our ongoing data continue to show that helping others, cooperating, being loyal and trustworthy, and showing leadership skills, can lead to positive outcomes like being well-liked, respected, and developing strong friendships. These results give us confidence that unwanted behavior like bullying may be reduced by promoting prosocial skills and leadership abilities.

Where can you get more information?

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about our study and our findings, we are happy to hear from you! Please feel free to contact Tony Volk at tvolk@brocku.ca. We cannot discuss individual data as they are confidential, but we are happy to talk about general themes. We can also say with confidence that the staff at the schools we visited are both motivated and informed to talk about positive teen social behavior and development.

We will be updating our website – www.brocku.ca/brave – with details of the study throughout the summer. You can also see a list of the many research publications that are related to this study, as well as get a sense of the student theses that are associated with this work. On top of that, the information from this study has helped inform our discussions in several media appearances over the last few months. Some of the more notable include:

A [St. Catharines Standard article](#) on fighting in local schools.

TV appearances on CTV, Global, and City TV for [Pink Shirt Anti-Bullying Day](#).

A one-hour interview with popular YouTube channel Modern Wisdom on [understand the evolution of bullying](#).