Students tend to affiliate with peers who have similar academic characteristics and academic achievement (Ryan, 2004; Shin & Ryan, 2014). Students without friends have lower levels of academic achievement and more academic distress (Wentzel, Barry, & Caldwell, 2004). The presence of just one close friendship appears to lessen the adverse effects of extensive peer rejection (Parker & Asher, 1993). Students report being more engaged in school when their close friend is loyal and supportive (Berndt & Keefe, 1995). This engagement affects their academic performance, as students who are more engaged tend to have higher GPAs and educational ambitions than those who are less engaged (Wang & Peck, 2013).

Current Study
This study examines the predictive factors of the quality of close friendships and degree of engagement on high school students’ academic achievement.

Methods
Participants:
• 155 students at three Midwestern high schools responded.

Abstract
The impact of close friendships and student engagement on academic achievement is particularly important in high school, as students are on the verge of entering the adult world. This study examines how the quality of high school students’ close friendships and their engagement predict their academic achievement. School psychologists and educators can utilize this information to advocate for practices that encourage the development of close friendships and to implement methods shown to increase student engagement.

Literature Review
• Students tend to affiliate with peers who have similar academic characteristics and academic achievement (Ryan, 2004; Shin & Ryan, 2014).
• Students without friends have lower levels of academic achievement and more academic distress (Wentzel, Barry, & Caldwell, 2004).
• The presence of just one close friendship appears to lessen the adverse effects of extensive peer rejection (Parker & Asher, 1993).
• Students report being more engaged in school when their close friend is loyal and supportive (Berndt & Keefe, 1995).
• This engagement affects their academic performance, as students who are more engaged tend to have higher GPAs and educational ambitions than those who are less engaged (Wang & Peck, 2013).

Demographics:
- Gender
  - Male: 43%
  - Female: 56%
  - Other: 1%
- Grade
  - 9th: 27%
  - 10th: 26%
  - 11th: 26%
  - 12th: 6%

Methods (continued)

Results
Finally, we ran additional multiple linear regression analyses predicting GPA from CFSR and SEI Total for each group. We again found that SEI Total was a significant predictor of GPA, but CFSR was not, for all groups.

Qualitative Data

How closest friend helps performance:
- Getting into college:
  - Percentage: 13.5%
- Participation in extracurricular activities:
  - Percentage: 11.6%
- Interestng classes:
  - Percentage: 10.9%
- What discourages interest in school:
  - Uninteresting classes:
    - Percentage: 19.3%
  - The effort/time it takes:
    - Percentage: 15.2%
  - Homework:
    - Percentage: 14.0%

Discussion
• Qualitative data also revealed the majority of participants believed their closest friend helps them with the work associated with school or by emotionally bolstering them. Half of the participants reported their friend does not negatively impact their academic performance.

Implications for school psychologists:
• School psychologists should work with other staff to provide students with an understanding of how their efforts in high school will pay off in the future to increase student engagement.
• To assist high school students in obtaining an additional source of support, school psychologists should encourage the use of classroom strategies shown to help students develop friendships in high school.

Selected References


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