

supports that enable most students to achieve high standards. Significant reforms will be needed to motivate all students to be sufficiently engaged in their schoolwork to meet more demanding expectations.<sup>1</sup>

### IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Although learning involves cognitive processes that take place within and between the individuals, motivation to learn depends on a student's involvement in a web of social relationships. The likelihood that students will be motivated and engaged in learning is increased to the extent that their teachers, family, and friends, as well as others who shape the instructional process, effectively support their purposeful involvement in learning (Cohen and Ball, 1999). Thus the focus on motivation and engagement calls attention to the interface between the learner and the social context in which learning takes place.

The notion that the personal value of our lives is determined largely by the social relations that take place in the communities to which we belong reflects a classic Aristotelian perspective on human nature (Lee, Bryk, and Smith, 1993; see also MacIntyre, 1981; Newmann and Oliver, 1967). It is also a perspective that is very much consistent with the views of John Dewey. For Dewey, building an engaging school community is not just a strategy to improve academic outcomes; it is essential to education itself (see Lee et al., 1993, p. 226).

It is not coincidental that many of the qualities associated with engaging schools also have been found to foster healthy youth development (Eccles et al., 1993; Institute of Medicine, 1997; McNeely, Nonnemaker, and Blum, 2002; National Research Council, 2002a; Rosenfeld, Richman, and Bowen, 2000) and to confer resilience to individuals who otherwise might be at risk for adverse psychological and social outcomes (Berand, 1992; Connell, Spencer, and Aber, 1994; Finn and Rock, 1997; Jessor et al., 1998; Rutter, 1985). High schools, like other programs for youth, promote positive development in adolescents by addressing their needs for safety, love and belonging, respect, power, and accomplishment. They do this by establishing caring relationships with adults, maintaining positive

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<sup>1</sup>“High standards” is not defined in this volume as being able to pass a high-stakes test, such as an exam required for a high school diploma, although that might be one indicator of the standards of achievement that students are achieving. By “high standards” we mean that high school graduates should have mastered the skills they need to succeed in a postsecondary academic education program. Expectations for students on the path to meeting this ultimate standard need to be individualized, so that all students are challenged by their instructional program.