



## UNDERSTANDING STUDENTS' SENSE OF SAFETY AT SCHOOL

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### Abstract

A large body of research indicates that wellbeing is vital for students' success at school and in life. Students' sense of feeling safe at school is considered to be important for improving students' mental and emotional wellbeing. Fostering a sense of safety is positively associated with student achievement affecting their resilience in turn.

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the following questions:

- a. How positive are New Zealand students in their sense of feeling safe at school?
- b. Are there any differences in students' sense of feeling safe at school by year level, gender, and school decile (a proxy for SES)?
- c. To what extent are students' sense of belonging at school related to their attitude and confidence to learn in Mathematics?

The National Monitoring Study of Student Achievement (NMSSA) is a sample based national project designed to assess and understand student achievement across the *New Zealand Curriculum* at Year 4 and Year 8 in English-medium state and in state-integrated schools. In 2018, the focus areas were Mathematics and Social Studies. In order to understand factors that influence achievement, NMSSA collects data from students about their attitude and confidence to learn in each curriculum area. To explore student wellbeing, NMSSA collected data in 2018 about students' sense of feeling safe at school.

Item Response Theory (Rasch) was employed to construct measurement scales. Multilevel Modelling (MLM) was conducted to investigate students' sense of feeling safe at school in relation to attitude and confidence scale scores in mathematics and some other background variables including year level, gender, and school decile.

Most students reported feeling safe at school. Most of the discrepancies in students' sense of feeling safe lied within schools (among students) rather than between schools. Association between feeling safe at school and school decile was not statistically significant. Year 4 students and girls demonstrated significantly higher levels of feeling safe at school than did Year 8s and boys. Relationships between feeling safe at school and attitude & confidence scale scores were positive and statistically significant.

**Keywords:** Attitude, Confidence, Sense of Feeling Safe at School.