

# Student-teacher-relationships in early and middle childhood: Still an enigma



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**SEARCH**  
FAMILY AUTISM RESOURCE CENTER  
SUPPORT, EDUCATION, ADVOCACY, RESOURCES, COMMUNITY, HOPE

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## What do we know about typically developing students and the student-teacher relationship?

- In kindergarten and 1st grade, predictive of children's behavioral, academic, and social adjustment
- Positive school-related outcomes such as academic performance, sociability, and behaviors
- Success at school both immediately and long-term
- Support from teachers relates to classroom achievement and functioning
- High levels of emotional support from teachers can result in the highest academic achievement

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## What do we know about intellectual disability (ID) and the student-teacher relationship?

- Students with intellectual disability have significantly poorer STRs than typically developing (TD) peers
- Earlier behavior problems, self-regulation, and social skills predict the quality of the STR
- Overtime, STR's are more stable for TD students than ID students
- Students with ID report greater dissatisfaction with teachers and poorer bonds with school than TD peers
- Conduct problems are higher for students reporting teacher dissatisfaction and alienation

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## Measure of STR Quality



- The *Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS; Pianta, 2001)*, 28 items rated on a 5-point scale.
- Produces a **Total** score and 3 subscales:
  - **Conflict** (12 items) e.g. "This child and I always seem to be struggling with each other."
  - **Closeness** (11 items) e.g. "I share an affectionate, warm relationship with this child."
  - **Dependency** (5 items) e.g. "This child asks for my help when he/she really does not need help."

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## STRS Norms

Based on the Total Normative Sample of 1,535 students aged 4-8 years (Mean age = 5) (Pianta, 2001)

| %ile range | STRS Total score |
|------------|------------------|
| 0 %ile     | 28               |
| 25 %ile    | 104              |
| 50 %ile    | 117              |
| 75 %ile    | 125              |
| 99+ %ile   | 140              |

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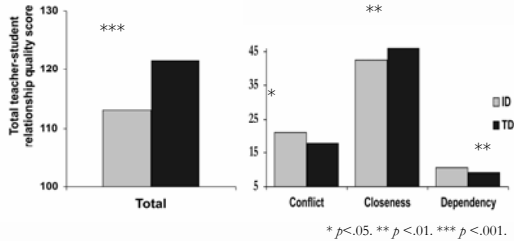
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Do children with ID have poorer STRs than typically-developing children?



\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Eisenhower, A.S., Baker, B.L., & Blacher, J. (2007). Early student-teacher relationships of children with and without intellectual disability: Contributions of behavioral, social, and self-regulatory competence. *Journal of School Psychology, 45*, 363-383.

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Does ID totally account for differences in the STR?

- The ID/TD difference is fully accounted for (mediated) by child behavior problems and social skills. Children with more behavior problems, and/or poorer social skills, have poorer relationships with their teachers.
- At subsequent ages, the relationship between disability and STR continues to be accounted for by child behavior problems and social skills.

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Student-teacher relationship total score, by status group

Student-Teacher Relationship Total

Child age in years

Blacher, J., Baker, B. L., & Eisenhower, A. S. (2009). Stability of student-teacher relationships across the early school years for children with and without intellectual disability. *American Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, 114*, 322-339.

Status  $F = 12.92$   $p = .001$   
 Time  $F = 3.58$   $p = .06$   
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## The Importance of Autism and the STR

- Autism prevalence
- Public school determination
- Associated behavior and social deficits may make STR problematic




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## STRS Total by Diagnosis

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Are there significant differences between public and non-public schools on ratings of the STR?

*Public and Non-Public Group Differences on the STR*

| Variable    | Public School |              | Statistic              |
|-------------|---------------|--------------|------------------------|
|             | (n = 49)      | (n = 28)     |                        |
| Total Score | 108.23(12.19) | 101.5(12.28) | $F(1, 74) = 6.63^*$    |
| Conflict    | 23.12(7.19)   | 27.52(8.91)  | $t(88) = -2.55^*$      |
| Closeness   | 40.48(1.01)   | 35.30(1.36)  | $F(1, 73) = 9.46^{**}$ |
| Dependency  | 10.77(.464)   | 10.26(.645)  | $F(1, 78) = .242$      |

\*p = .05, \*\*p < .01

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Across settings (GE/MM, autism-only, non-public), are there significant differences in the STR?

STRS Total Score and Subscales Among the Educational Settings

|             | Educational Placement             |                                       |                                     |
|-------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
|             | GE/MM                             | Autism-Only                           | Non-Public School                   |
| Total Score | 113.21 <sub>a</sub> [106.25, 120] | 106.66 <sub>ab</sub> [103.06, 110.25] | 100.36 <sub>b</sub> [95.87, 104.86] |
| Conflict    | 19.00 <sub>a</sub> [14.92, 23.08] | 24.47 <sub>ab</sub> [22.14, 26.79]    | 27.52 <sub>b</sub> [24.86, 30.17]   |
| Closeness   | 42.61 <sub>a</sub> [37.98, 47.25] | 39.45 <sub>b</sub> [37.43, 42.26]     | 35.29 <sub>b</sub> [32.57, 38.00]   |

Note. Higher STRS total score indicate higher quality STRs. Higher conflict scores indicate more STR conflict. Higher closeness scores indicate more STR closeness. Higher dependency scores indicate more STR dependency. Means that do not share subscripts differ at  $p < .05$  in the Tukey honestly significant difference comparison. Numbers in brackets are 95% confidence intervals of the means.

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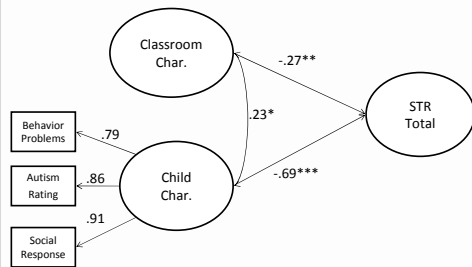
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Significant Paths in Teacher-Rated Path Model Predicting the Overall Student-Teacher-Relationship



\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

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### Future Research on the STR and Autism

- Investigate variables specific to educational settings that impact the STR
- Classroom observations to supplement self-report measures
- Comparison of STR between groups differing in disability and mental health status
- Contribution of STR to child-teacher dynamics




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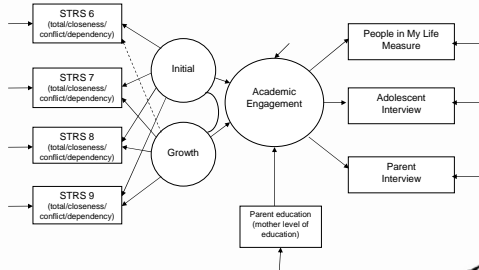
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## Student-Teacher Relationships in Early Elementary School and Impact on Later Academic Engagement



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