



Strategies to Support a Positive School Climate

Sense of Belonging

Sense of belonging pertains to students' feelings of being accepted and valued by others. At school, sense of belonging refers to the extent to which students identify with and value schooling outcomes and participate in academic and non-academic activities (Willms, 2003). It reflects "the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment" (Goodenow, 1993a, p. 80).



Why is it important?

- A sense of belonging is a basic human necessity (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).
- When students do not feel they belong at school they tend to reject school values, withdraw from school activities, and become alienated or disaffected (Finn, 1989).
- Sense of belonging has a strong influence on students' academic motivation (Goodenow, 1993b).
- Students who have a strong sense of belonging tend to be happier, have greater interest in school activities, and are more confident (Osterman, 2000; Furrer & Skinner, 2003).

In Practice

School leaders can support a sense of belonging through preventative actions aimed at establishing a strong bond with the school for all students.



What can schools do?

School staff should strive to cultivate a culture where every student feels valued, accepted by their peers, and cared for by their teachers and other adults in the school.

School personnel can bolster perceptions of belonging among students by doing the following:

- Develop a plan for inclusion, like an IEP, for vulnerable and at-risk students.
- Continually reinforce the theme of inclusion with activities and events and recognise student and staff efforts that support inclusion.
- Ensure all students have an ally on school staff who can advocate for them.
- Provide opportunities for all students to get involved in structured extracurricular activities at the school.
- Initiate a survey to capture student voice and inform school leadership of areas for improvement, for instance the TTFM Survey.



In the Classroom

Teachers can establish a sense of community and camaraderie in the classroom through the following actions:

- Facilitate an inclusive classroom culture where individual differences are accepted, and all students feel equally understood and supported.
- Provide daily opportunities to practise relationship building skills through small group activities and student-led discussions in regularly shuffled groups.
- Adopt student-specific strategies for welcoming new students and regularly check-in with those at-risk to ensure that they are adequately supported.
- Cultivate a sense of community by working alongside students to create classroom norms that unify the group towards a common set of rules and expectations.

References

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