

Building Intentional Connections

Ideas and suggestions gathered at CATCA and CEATCA

Research has demonstrated a “strong relationship between school connectedness and educational outcomes, including school attendance, staying in school longer, and higher grades and classroom test scores. In turn, students who do well academically are less likely to engage in risky behaviors” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *School Connectedness: Strategies for Increasing Protective Factors Among Youth*. Atlanta, GA: 2009)

Ideas for Building Intentional Staff to Student Connections:

- Identify a “go to” adult for each student
- Staff members greet students as they enter the school (at the beginning of the day and after recess)
- Recognition Tree: catch students doing something good and add a leaf with their name and the act on the tree
- Staff vs Student intramurals
- “Connections” or “Teacher Advisor” (High School)/ House System (Junior High): each staff member is assigned a number of students each year who they welcome, mentor, audit grades, support course selection (this support is provided to the student for each year they are in the school). Ideally, the staff member also gets to know the parents/ guardians
- Terrific Kid awards, Star Students: principal or teacher phones home to acknowledge the award
- Invite parents and students to the school before first day of classes (for new students to the school)
- “Soft starts”: spend time at the start of the day connecting before teaching
- Family groups: students placed into cross-graded groupings for a single year or for all the years they are in that school with the same adult leader(s)
- Each lunch with the students
- Fish out of water activity: names of all students are listed and teachers are invited to add a check mark beside the names of student with whom they have a connection. Students that are not marked are assigned a teacher who will work towards building a relationship
- Include articles written by students in the school newsletter
- Encourage ALL staff to facilitate a student club (students lead, staff mentor)

- Encourage staff members to coach a sport
- Be creative with CTS credits to engage students in meaningful learning
- Staff vs student contests (sports, lip sync, baking... be creative)
- Principal has “walk and talks” with students that get sent to the office
- Good news phone calls to celebrate something great about each student

Ideas for Building Intentional Student to Staff Connections:

- Use a letter writing assignment as an opportunity for students to write a thank you letter to a cherished teacher or staff member
- Foods Class cooks breakfast / lunch for staff
- Students apply to be helpers / assistants for staff members
- With permission and supervision, students call the homes of staff members to thank them for their contributions
- Card writing campaign to thank staff members for their positive impact in the school
- Bucket filling campaign: students write short messages of gratitude for staff members. Messages can be written on hearts or slips of paper and placed in an actual bucket
- Students plan and lead activities for staff members
- Students lead intramurals
- Students host staff – student competitions (sports, cooking, lip sync, etc.)
- Recognition Tree: students catch staff doing something good and add a leaf with their name and the act on the tree
- Students greet staff members at the start of the day

Ideas for Building Intentional Student to Student Connections:

- Students greet / welcome students to school in the morning
- Student ambassadors – tour new students (and staff) to the building
- Kind Kid Club (students deliver kind messages– let the students be creative in how they can build a kindness movement in the school)
- Friendly competitions (“minute to win it” challenges) during lunch break
- Students lead assemblies
- Leadership option classes at the junior high level
- Send student teams to student leadership conferences (ASLIC, JSLIC, AASCA, CASCA, HASS)
- Cross graded buddies (for reading, intramurals, etc.)
- Create cross graded families or houses instead of home rooms (very effective in junior and senior high grades)
- Cross grade teams for intramurals
- Peer mediation team that assists with recess supervision
- Grads wear their “cap & gown” and parade through their local elementary school
- Each fall, older grades host a welcome reception for new students to the school
- Start the school year with activities that allow students to share a bit about themselves (icebreakers: <https://positiveclassroomrelationships.weebly.com/icebreakers.html>) and that build a sense of team (<https://www.weareteachers.com/team-building-games-and-activities/and-activities/>)
- Incorporate *meaningful* group work into your lesson plans
- Have smaller “home” or “base” groups and encourage students to share notes, study together and work collaboratively on projects

Students are your biggest resource – engage them in peer led activities.

Ideas for Building Intentional School - Home Connections:

- Host an Open House for incoming students and their parents in the spring; use the Open House as an opportunity to showcase and share student work
- Student Ambassadors welcome new students and parents at the start of the school year
- Offer meaningful ways for parents to donate their time / talents
- Post reminders / daily announcements on your school’s Facebook page
- Encourage teachers to build a system for connecting with parents (e.g. via student agenda in younger grades)
- Invite students (supported by parents) to complete a “get to know you” questionnaire before the start of the school year
- As a classroom teacher, ensure that you have parent contact information
- Create a telephone fan-out and use it to invite parents to be part of Parent Council
- Through parent council, invite all parents to support staff appreciation activities (Christmas card campaign, staff breakfast, provide supper for P / T interview nights, etc.)
- Invite Parent Council to have a booth / table set up during P / T Interviews

School connectedness is increasingly recognized as a vital component of successful schools. School culture is improved when staff members are cohesive and collaborative.

Ideas for Building Intentional Connections between Staff:

- Celebrate birthdays
- Organize a social committee
- Create a “Sunshine Crew” (to coordinate supports such as meals re: births, bereavements, medical leaves, return to work, etc.)
- Decorate the staff room / staff washrooms
- Host / coordinate staff activity nights before PD days
- Invest in team jerseys or shirts
- Lunch club: create a system where members take turns providing a meal or part of a meal
- Host a salad potluck (everyone brings 1 salad item to create a salad bar)
- Soup for the soul (take turns bringing soup for the staff)
- Staff work-outs
- Early morning coffee gathering club
- Encourage “support staff appreciation”
- High 5 Challenge (how many “high 5’s” can you get?)
- Guess the favorite song: staff submit a favorite song, play songs over the intercom at lunch and invite staff and students to guess whose favorite song it is... be sure to dance!
- Guess who! Invite staff to bring in a baby / toddler picture and guess who is who
- Staff dress up: invite staff to wear a specific color or type of clothing to school and see if the students notice.
- Gratitude Bouquets to start staff meetings (offer specific thank you’s)
- Eat breakfast / drink coffee together before school
- Staff trivia game (collect trivia about each staff member and create a Q & A activity from it)
- On-site scavenger hunts
- Go for lunch / supper while at Teachers Convention

Ideas for Building Intentional Staff Connections for Administrators:

- Organize / host / support a retreat to start the year
- Purchase a “good” coffee maker for the staff room
- Ensure wellness related activities are a part of your staff meeting agendas
- Request input then strategically shuffle supervision teams so that staff members have time to spend with closer colleagues and new colleagues
- Coordinate prep periods so staff members have time to plan / work together
- Partner new teachers with a strong mentor
- Learn and understand how staff like to be appreciated (everyone is different)
- Build teacher teams where everyone has an opportunity to learn and grow together
- Bring in a massage therapist for a PD Day
- Good news phone calls to a spouse or significant other (maybe a parent) when a staff member goes “above & beyond”
- Watch and discuss the videos “**Know Your Why**” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ytFB8TrkTo>) and “**The Power of Relationships in the Lives of Youth**” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NPW3ko6GoNE>)

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

Margaret Mead

