Five Ways to Build Relationships That Foster Positive Culture

By: Kim Gulbrandson, PhD, Research and Evaluation Coordinator; Emilie O'Connor & Stephanie Skolasinski, PBIS Technical Assistance Coordinators

Positive culture, a key system feature of an equitable multi-level system of supports, creates a collective sense of purpose and commitment to nurture and ensure the well-being, sense of belonging, safety, and success of every learner.

One action school psychologists, teachers, and school staff can take to create a positive culture and cultivate conditions for student achievement is to develop trusting relationships with students that foster a sense of belonging within the school community.

Five Explicit Strategies for Building Rapport with Students

1. **2 X 10** - Spend two minutes a day for 10 consecutive school days with a student to establish a deeper relationship. **In practice:** Talk to the student about a topic she is interested in and unrelated to the academic or behavioral pressures she may be experiencing in school.

2. **3 H's** - Stand by the front door of the school, office, lunch room, or classroom and greet every student. Ask them to choose their greeting for the day - handshake, high five, or hello. **In practice:** See how 5th-grade teacher, Barry White, Jr. greets each student with his or her own personal handshake each day.

3. **Notes of Appreciation** - Think of students who you do not know well, or who may not feel like they belong in the school, classroom, or group. Write positive notes of appreciation (e.g. Thank you for always helping others by___). **In practice:** Be ready by creating the notes ahead of time and share them with the student(s) when they seem to need it most, or when you observe their behavior is starting to escalate.

4. **Suggestions/Comment Box** - Have a comment or suggestions box by the office, classroom, or your desk where students can share their thoughts in writing. **In practice:** Review the comments once, or twice a week, and respond to them by following up with the individual student; or make a change based on the anonymous feedback.

5. **Trust Generators** - Try one of Zaretta Hammond's trust generators such as 'similarity of interests.' **In practice:** A Wisconsin teacher shared, "When a new student started talking about Pokémon, I showed him my Pokémon Go account. It's a great way to walk-n-talk with him and get to know him better."

Quote from the Classroom

"Challenging students are often the hardest to build relationships with, but can pay the most dividends in terms of respect. You build relationships with them as you do any students: Asking questions, sharing your life, and common interests. Rapport with students is the foundation on which classroom behavior management is built; it must come first," shared by a Wisconsin School Psychologist.