Connections

Research has shown that a child’s sense of connection to even one adult within their school dramatically increases the likelihood that the student will graduate. A student who feels connected to their teachers and peers is more likely to regularly attend school and more likely to put forth effort in their classes in order to maintain positive relationships with their teachers. It should, therefore, be a major priority of every school to ensure all students experience a sense of connectedness.

Teacher Connections
To help reinforce and build teacher connections, consider the following examples:

Teacher Mentors is a strategy where certain students are assigned to a teacher who will meet with them and check in with them periodically.

“Responsive Classroom” Teacher Language focuses on how a teacher phrases things like their instructions, redirections, feedback, etc. in order to create a positive environment. It focuses on the three Rs: Reinforce, Remind, and Redirect.

Teacher Modeling where a teacher models the same lessons and activities they expect their students to complete and shows them their own thought process through a “think-aloud” helps build the connection between teacher and student. Teacher modeling can also take the form of sharing personal stories, which can be very beneficial when we are expecting our students to open up and share their experiences.

Host School-Wide Activities
Play is important for kids. And when schools have intramural games set up where the teachers get involved and play against or alongside their students, it can help the students feel more comfortable with the adults in their schools. Examples could include hosting a basketball shooting contest, a friendly game of kickball, etc.

Student of the Week/Month can be awarded to students on a regular basis. It is a good way to acknowledge a student’s effort and can make them feel more connected to their teachers.

Peer Connections
What can we do to help ensure that our students feel connected to one another?

Advisory Program is a class period, where a group of students are with a dedicated staff member who leads them through activities that often focus on building relationships with their peers. Lots of sharing and collaborative activities take place.

Peer Mentors are similar to teacher mentors, but this strategy pairs a student up with another student—usually a student from a higher grade level with whom they can periodically check in. This can help students feel more connected with others within their school.

Grouped Desk Arrangements along with regular collaborative learning activities, allow students a chance to work with each other and have small-group discussions. This creates a strong sense of connection with peers—rather than isolating them in rows and discouraging interaction.

Student Council allows students the sense of being part of the decision-making within their school. This helps bridge a connection between school faculty and the students. Additionally, students involved with Student Council interact with and advocate for the student body, take on leadership roles, and serve as great examples for their peers.

Student Newscast / Announcements allow students to help deliver and discuss the goings-on within the school. This can be much more effective than traditional faculty-delivered announcements, and it also really helps students feel a sense of connection and buy-in with school events.

Family Connections
How can a school help a student’s sense of connection with family members at home?

Family Invites to events like Awards Ceremonies and Pep-Rallies allow students to see their families and their peers’ families being an active part of their school and social lives.

PTO / PTA volunteering at events and coming into the school building gives parents the opportunity to feel more connected to their child’s school and also allows the student’s to sense that parents are a major part of education.