



SEL Helps Valued Outcomes to Happen: A Series of Examples...

Building a Positive School Climate to Help Students Feel Welcome!

When you walk into a school building you can usually tell, within a few minutes, something about the school climate. When there is a positive school climate, learning is more likely to happen. This is because one of the most important facets of that positive school climate is the relationships among and between adults and students, students and adults, students and students, and adults and adults. These relationships are built on mutual respect. Adults can model this by doing some very simple things including greeting students by name as they enter the building or their classrooms, or when they see each other in the hallways. Calling students by name (and getting the proper pronunciations) is a simple act telling students that they matter and that the adults care about them as individuals. Taking the time to learn more about one's students can make a huge difference in how they feel about being in class and this is an unquestionable support for learning.

One of the most significant factors in student success happens when the student forms a positive relationship with an inspiring teacher. Once this relationship is formed, the student will want to learn from that positive adult role model. Without that connection, teaching and learning may not happen. These relationships have a positive effect on academic achievement as well as serving to diminish classroom behavioral problems as well as risky behaviors. These relationships are also important among the adults in the school. While there is no doubt that the students are watching adult behaviors and we know that students may or may not listen to what the adults have to say, it is clear that they take note of how the adults behave toward both their students and their colleagues. These rather simplistic acts go a long way toward developing a positive culture and climate in the classroom and in the school.

Furthermore, giving students a voice in school matters also shows them that their thoughts are important. One example would be to have students help create classroom rules. When the students feel invested in those rules and routines, they are much more likely to follow them. It is surprising what a positive contribution students can make when they are given a voice and that voice is honored by the adults in the school. As you start the school year, remember that the personal touch is important in building positive relationships with students and the benefits will be well worth the effort involved.

This information sheet was provided by SEL4NJ, the Social-Emotional Learning Alliance of NJ, a voluntary, grass-roots organization working with schools and communities to promote social-emotional and character development and supportive, engaging, inclusive, equitable classroom and school environments for learning. Prepared by William H. Trusheim, SEL4NJ Trustee and President, NJASECD. You can reach us at info@sel4nj.org and join at www.SEL4NJ.org.