



STAYING CONNECTED TO YOUR SCHOOL COMMUNITY





For teachers, job satisfaction stems not only from the pleasure of seeing our students succeed, but also from the feeling of being surrounded by colleagues who share similar interests.

The classroom is a dynamic social environment. Our interactions with students and colleagues help us to build a sense of community which can boost our emotional and professional well-being. No matter what your classroom looks like this year, it's important to take steps to stay connected to your fellow educators.

In this article, we will talk about the importance of staying connected with your school community. We will also talk about strategies for maintaining connections that are important to educators—with students, parents, and other educators.

Why Is Staying Connected Important?

Humans are innately social creatures. Most of us need some level of social interaction, whether that's at home or in the workplace. The experience of loneliness is specific to each individual—some people find solitude energizing while others find it difficult (Forbes, 1996).

Benefits of having strong connections with others include (Seppala, 2017):

- Decreased depression and anxiety
- Higher self-esteem
- Greater ability to trust others
- Improved ability to deal with setbacks
- Improved immune system (House et al, 1988).

What about teachers? Teaching is an inherently emotional profession, and it comes with its ups and downs. Maintaining social connections can be one way to provide a bulwark against feelings of burnout and stress (Manno, n.d.).

Furthermore, there are professional benefits for teachers who feel like they belong to a strong school community. With healthy connections, teachers are better able to bounce back from tough days. They feel more satisfied at work and thus are able to give their all to each lesson, ultimately benefiting students' learning, too.



Tips For Staying Connected

The following tips can help you reap the benefits of fostering school community connections.

STAYING CONNECTED TO OTHER TEACHERS

Creating a community amongst your colleagues can help to relieve work-related stress and lead to lifelong connections.

- Send out an email or leave a handwritten note for colleagues with a simple message saying you are thinking about them.
- Offer to help a colleague, such as a newer teacher who may need assistance with materials.
- Bring together teachers who share a common interest by organizing a Zoom call or place to meet outside of school. For example, reach out to colleagues who teach the same subject as you, or who share a love of a certain type of book or film.





STAYING CONNECTED TO STUDENTS

We know that students learn best when they feel that they belong and are valued in an inclusive, supportive classroom. Keep this in mind as you strategize ways for connecting with students.

- Use Morning Meeting at the beginning of the school day to give students a chance to share something about themselves and greet each other (Center for Responsive Schools, n.d.).
- Teach students how to name their emotions, and give them space during the school day to talk or write about how they are feeling.
- Volunteer to chaperone an after-school club or activity and engage students in conversation about their interests.

STAYING CONNECTED TO PARENTS

Forming strong relationships with parents is an important part of giving students the support they need. Building a bridge between home and school that is centered on trust and respect paves the way for students to thrive.

- Enthusiasm is contagious. Reach out to parents to say that you are excited to work with their children and that you remain dedicated to a successful school year.
- Send regular emails or give a call to parents to update them on upcoming assignments and to ask how they feel about their child's progress.
- Practice active listening when speaking with parents so that they feel heard and appreciated when voicing concerns or asking questions.

Having a strong school community can help us to bounce back from those tough days, to have energy for classes, and to feel more inspired when designing lessons. Staying connected takes time and effort, but benefits teachers and students alike.



References

Center for Responsive Schools. (n.d.). Principles & practices. Responsive Classroom. <https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/about/principles-practices/>

Forbes, A. (1996). Loneliness. *British Medical Journal*, 313(7053), 352–354. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29732534>

House, J. S., Landis, K. R., & Umberson, D. (1988). Social relationships and health. *Science*, 241(4865), 540–45.

Manno, M. (n.d.). The warning signs of teacher burnout. TeachThought. <https://www.teachthought.com/critical-thinking/the-warning-signs-of-teacher-burnout/>

Seppala, E. (2014, May 8). Connectedness & health: The science of social connection. Stanford Medicine: The Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education. <http://ccare.stanford.edu/uncategorized/connectedness-health-the-science-of-social-connection-infographic/>