Classroom Management Approaches to Support School Connectedness
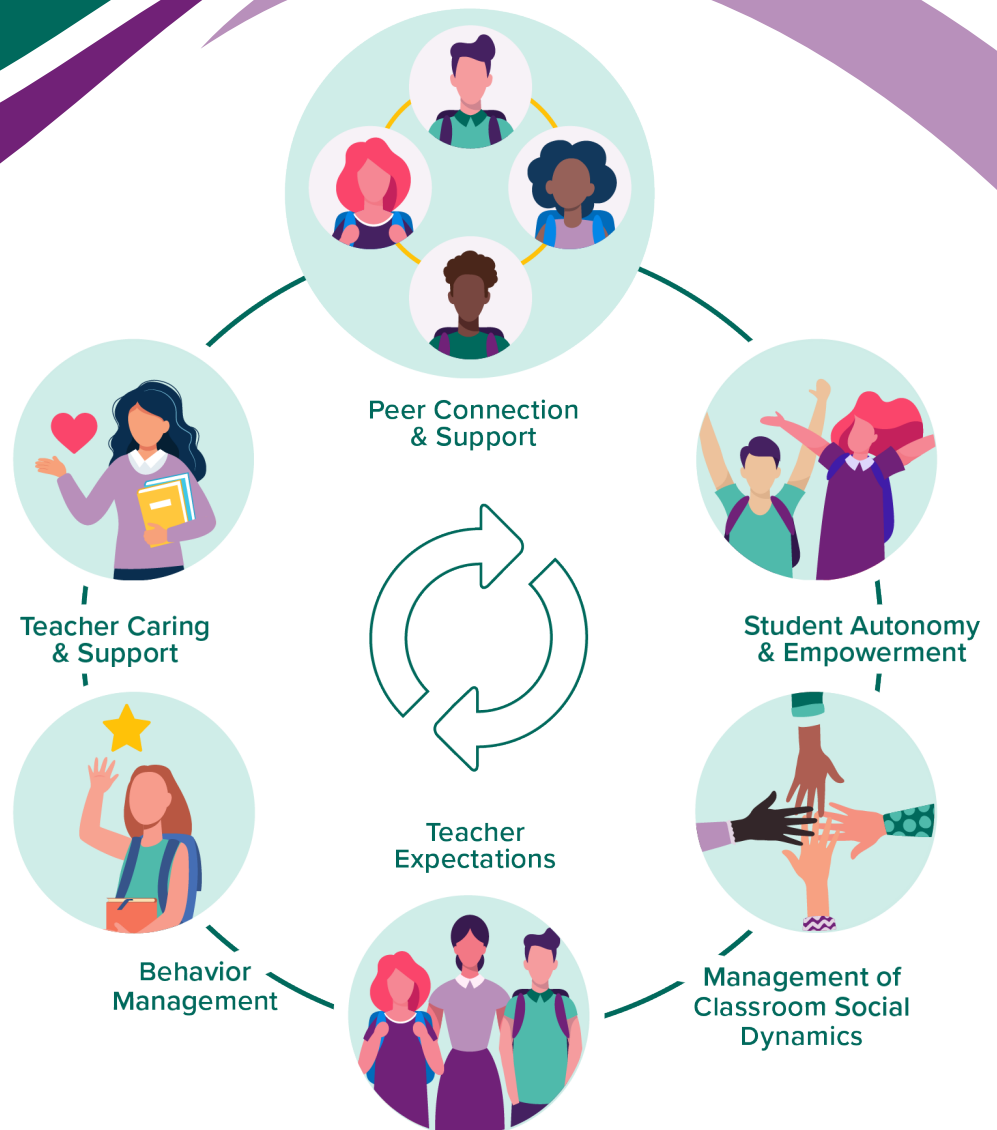
Peer Connection and Support

School connectedness is the belief held by students that adults and peers in the school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals. Students who feel connected and engaged at school are less likely to report risky behaviors (such as early sexual initiation, substance use, violence, and suicide) and have more positive academic outcomes.[1-6]

Classroom management is the process that teachers and schools use to create positive classroom environments in face-to-face or virtual learning modes. Classroom management includes teacher- and student-led actions to support academic and social-emotional learning among all students.[7] Well-managed classrooms that incorporate positive behavior management strategies are one way that teachers and other school staff can build school connectedness.[8]

Which classroom management approaches and skills increase connectedness?

CDC researchers reviewed scientific papers on classroom management and identified six classroom management approaches that promote student connectedness and engagement. Strategies to support these approaches were identified through a structured review of web-based practice resources. Peer Connection and support is one of these approaches.

Peer Connection & Support

Teacher Caring & Support

Student Autonomy & Empowerment

Teacher Expectations

Behavior Management

Management of Classroom Social Dynamics

Peer Connection and Support. Students who report feeling connected to, supported by, and respected by their peers demonstrate higher levels of engagement in school[9-11] and report feeling more connected to their school.[12] Students reported higher levels of school connectedness when they and their peers:

1 Got to know each other well in classes.

2 Were interested in getting to know other students.

3 Enjoy doing things with each other in school activities.

4 Enjoy working together on projects in classes.[12]

Peer Connection and Support

These skills can help foster strong connections among students.

Skill	Example Strategies
Providing opportunities for students to learn more about one another	Set up time in class for informal discussions among students.[13] Incorporate activities such as "Think, Pair, Share" (students think about a question or discussion topic, discuss it with a peer, and report back to the larger group) that enable students to ask and learn about one another.[13,14] In virtual settings, consider setting up message boards that enable students to connect with one another more informally during class at a dedicated time, or asynchronously (outside of class time).[13]
Providing opportunities for students to interact with one another in fun ways	Keep whole-group lessons or teacher-led instruction short (e.g., between 10-20 minutes at a time) and use the time to prepare students for more hands-on activities.[15] For virtual learning settings, create an online space for students to come together socially. For example, consider opening synchronous sessions 10 minutes early for students to connect informally, or create an online "student lounge" discussion board.[16]

Skill	Example Strategies
Providing opportunities for students to work together on assignments	Assign a collaborative class project to be completed either in-person or virtually. Assign different sections of the project to small groups of students to collaborate and complete together.[17] In virtual classrooms, use virtual learning platforms to set up smaller group lessons or "break-out rooms" so students can collaborate together in small groups.[18] Consider assigning students or asking for volunteers to be leaders in each breakout room to keep the group on task. Circulate among breakout groups to monitor and provide support.[19] Consider using technology platforms that enable students to collaborate on assignments and activities with students outside of their immediate community. Providing students with the opportunity to collaborate with "e-pals" on assignments can help expand their social networks and expose them to voices and perspectives they would not otherwise encounter.[20]
Promoting expectations that students help one another if a peer doesn't understand something	Ask students to write down an answer to a question (submitted as an "exit ticket" via white boards or paper during face-to-face instruction, or through "chat" features during virtual instruction). Then, group students in teams to discuss their answers (each team should have at least one student with a firm understanding of the solution or answer). This empowers students to help each other and gives them varied perspectives on possible alternative answers.[21]
Promoting expectations that students respect and listen to one another	Set clear and explicit expectations that all students' backgrounds (e.g., racial/ ethnic, cultural, national), identities (e.g., sexual orientation, gender identity), and abilities and interests are respected and honored in the classroom. These expectations can be integrated into class guidelines, rules, or agreements.[22] Model respect for students' backgrounds and identities and consider seeking out resources and professional development opportunities for strengthening your own skills around promoting diversity and inclusion in the classroom.[23] Consider classroom activities that provide students with opportunities to practice and improve listening and communication skills. For example, using the spider web discussion model (see Tools & Templates below), all students in the class respond to a teacher-guided question at the start of class. After students listen to all responses, they then engage in a broader discussion. The teacher listens and draws lines on a sheet of paper tracking the flow of the conversation from student to student, resulting in a web of lines that reflect the conversation pattern. At the end of the discussion, the teacher shares the drawing, and encourages students to reflect on the experience and how to have collaborative, inclusive conversations (e.g., asking students what they learned about who talked, who listened, and who built on the ideas of others).[24]

Tools and Templates

- Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD). The Best Class You Never Taught: How Spider WebDiscussion Can Turn Students into Learning Leaders.

- Edutopia. 8 Strategies to Improve Participation in Your Virtual Classroom.

- Edutopia. A Better Breakout Room Experience for Students.

- Edutopia. Culturally Responsive Teaching.

- Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA). Classroom Techniques: Formative Assessment Idea Number 2 - Exit Tickets.

- Responsive Classroom. The First 10 Days of Responsive Advisory Meetings: Purposeful and Engaging Plans in Response to COVID-19.

Reflection Notes

How do I currently do this?
What could I do to improve?

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