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Caring for Your Students: Simple Strategies for Connection and Well-Being

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Caring for Your Students: Simple Strategies for Connection and Well-Being

November 9, 2023 by hbohano@gmail.com — 0 Comments



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I have a question for you. How do you want to be remembered by your students? What words would they use to describe you?

Kind? Thoughtful? Helpful?

Please take a moment to think of one word you would like your students to use about you.

Whatever keyword you decide, you are going to face challenges to reach that goal.

For example, according to one study

- Mental health issues were the leading cause of disability and poor life outcomes for students ([Perou et al., 2013](#))

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- Students faced economic hardships, hunger, and abuse (CDC, 2022).
- 25% experienced depression.
- 20% experienced anxiety (Racine et al., 2021).

Most Secondary Teachers Are Not Therapists

It may seem overwhelming to try to address these student needs. I realize that most secondary teachers are not therapists.

While more intensive intervention is needed, these basic strategies can help students feel more connected.

Student Connections Matter



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According to a report from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention

- Secondary students who felt more connected to people at school had better mental health (CDC, 2022)

[Lauren Collins and Timothy Landrum \(2022\)](#) detailed five strategies for making connections

- **Use Positive Door Greetings** (e.g., standing at the door, individual greetings)
- **Behavioral Momentum: Make High-Probability Requests First** (e.g., “will you help me pass out these papers?” – high chance students will respond, followed by “ok, open your books to page 10” – lower chance students will respond).
- **Provide Instructional Choice** (e.g., “will you help me pass out these papers?” – high chance students will respond, followed by “ok, open your books to page 10” – lower chance students will respond).
- **Give Opportunities to Respond** (e.g., “fist to five, show me on your hands how much you agree with this statement).
- **Provide Behavior-Specific Praise** (e.g., great job starting the assignment with your group).

How Do You Like to Be Treated?

What are your first interactions with staff each day? Does anyone greet you when you arrive? Does anyone ask how you are doing? If these steps make you feel more connected to your school, they will also benefit your students.

I have written about this before ([link](#)), and I also like this study by [Rebecca McHugh and colleagues](#) (2013). They asked students what they do and do not like about teacher interactions.

Do:

- **Ask how the day is going.**
- **Provide explicit instruction for assignments.**
- **Ask if students need help and give feedback!**

Here is a quote from a student interview in the study, “*Teachers are just interested in your learning... Some teachers will just call to you and tell you, “Hey, do your work.” But they’ll never ask you, “Oh, what’s wrong? Are you feeling all right? Do you need something?”*”

Don’t:

- **Ask detailed questions** (e.g., how’s your boyfriend?).
- **Hand out work without explicit instruction** to prepare students to work independently (e.g., passing out work without teaching, modeling, and guided practice).

Again, these simple steps could make a difference for your students.

Try Technology

HANK BOHANON

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You can also use technology to check in with your students. I use a strategy from the Center for Innovation, Design, and Digital Learning (CIDDL) at the University of Kansas in my college classes. With Pair Deck from Google Slides, students can drag and drop a pin on a cat picture that best represents their mood. You can see an example on their website ([link](#)). These data allow me to see

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Additional Resources

Edutopia has a wonderful post on ways to connect with students if their background differs from yours ([link](#)).

I also like the Ohio Department of Education guide on supporting student wellness ([link](#)). It includes low-cost strategies in terms of time and effort but should have a wide impact. In particular, I valued their guide on ways teachers can express care for their students ([link](#)).

I would love to learn more from you about ways you enhance your students' well-being. Please leave a comment below with your ideas and suggestions!

Also, I am intentionally keeping this blog a little shorter with a more bulleted list format. I would love to hear your thoughts if this was useful to you. Thanks again for taking the time to make it this far in the post!!

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