19 School belonging policy

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How to use this policy

School belonging as a concept is unique to school environments and is influenced by a range of factors including school climate, cultural processes, broader societal issues, and historical/current events. A policy on school belonging enables school communities to develop collaborative engagement with staff, students, and families. School networks also have a significant role to play in helping create the conditions for belonging. This policy is structured to allow users to adapt it in a manner that serves the local, immediate demands of their contexts. Policies are most effective when they are known and implemented by the people who are their intended audience. For a policy on school belonging, it is recommended that effort is invested into ensuring that key stakeholders (e.g., students, parents, school staff, and community members) have a sense of agency and voice, and a role in shaping the policy content. The process of refining the school belonging policy in this way will be as important as the policy itself. School leaders should ensure that policies are embedded in day-to-day practices by using them in practical and tangible ways. A policy on school belonging could be incorporated into school rules, displayed as a poster in a classroom, or printed in the student diary. School belonging should be an explicit school value. Gray et al. (2018) recommend that schools develop *teams* to review existing policies and practices within a school to ensure that all methods within a school facilitate belonging for students and do not unintentionally ostracise or exclude specific individuals or groups.

[To adapt and use this policy, delete or modify the text as indicated]

[INSERT name of school] Student belonging policy

Rationale

School belonging—or a sense of psychological membership at school—represents the extent to which students feel accepted, respected, included, and supported in their school environment (Goodenow, 1993). When students have a sense of school belonging, they feel confident that they *fit in* and feel

safe at school (Riley, 2017). A sense of school belonging is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that is influenced by many factors and variables within a school setting, including individual differences (Allen et al., 2018a). Yet it is important to keep in mind that policies can promote or hinder the extent to which all students—regardless of their background, ability status, gender identity, racial identity, or sexual orientation—have opportunities to belong at school.

School belonging has been found to be an essential component for student wellbeing, academic outcomes, and physical health (Allen et al., 2018a; Arslan, 2018; Arslan et al., 2020; Abdollahi, 2020) and should be valued and prioritised in schools (Allen et al., 2018b). It is estimated that approximately 1 in 3 students does not feel a sense of belonging to school (OECD, 2019). Therefore, to address this issue a student's sense of school belonging should be valued and nurtured within school settings (Allen, 2020a).

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to outline the shared responsibility of belonging for the whole school community inclusive of parents, staff, teachers, students, and school leadership. Every individual within a school community can help create a climate of belonging.

Scope

This policy includes the role that students, teachers, staff, school leaders, and parents play in promoting a sense of belonging for others in the **[INSERT name of school]** community.

[INSERT specific roles and responsibilities of individuals or teams within the school who may be managing a whole school approach to school belonging].

Policy statement

School management

[INSERT name of school] is committed to providing consistent and structured opportunities for students to build positive relationships with each other, their teachers, their parents, and staff at our school. Teachers at our school *know* their students and seek feedback from their students about their relationship, rapport, and level of engagement. Through school-wide events, assessments, and programming, we provide both time and space for teachers to build relationships with their students (Shochet et al., 2011; Waters et al., 2010).

School leadership (e.g., principals/administrators) create formal structures to consult students on school policy decisions and build their sense of agency. Their voices are represented in policy-making decisions (in the form of a diverse student advisory committee comprised of students from various

socioeconomic backgrounds, linguistic backgrounds, ethnic backgrounds, performance levels, and (dis)ability statuses).

Efforts are made at **[INSERT name of school]** to ensure continuity of care for students during their time at school (Garcia-Reid et al., 2005; Whitlock, 2006).

Our school endeavours to employ teachers who are not only skilled in content areas but also culturally competent and sensitive to students' social and emotional needs (Battistich et al., 1996; Whitlock, 2006).

[INSERT name of school] ensures that teachers have access to professional development that encompasses improving student-teacher relationships and ways to foster positive, safe, and fair classroom environments that build on the strengths and assets that students bring into the classroom (Allen et al., 2011; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

[INSERT name of school] has strategies in place to evaluate, build, or strengthen a teacher's sense of belonging to school (e.g., teacher mentoring programs, induction programs for new staff) (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

[INSERT name of school] implements programs, interventions, and/or classroom-based curriculum that teaches social, emotional, and cultural competencies to students (Allen et al., 2017; Frydenberg, 2009; Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010).

[INSERT name of school] has a comprehensive and tiered approach to preventing, identifying, and managing mental health concerns (Waters et al., 2010; Wilkinson-Lee et al., 2011; Roche & Kuperminc, 2012).

Teachers

Staff at **[INSERT name of school]** acknowledge that a positive student-teacher relationship is one of the most effective ways to build a student's sense of school belonging (Allen et al., 2018a).

Teachers at **[INSERT name of school]** are encouraged to provide personal support, affirmation, and inspiration for learning, as well as academic support to students (Shochet et al., 2011; Waters et al., 2010).

Teachers at **[INSERT name of school]** demonstrate fair and consistent restorative justice approaches to issues of school discipline (Sakiz, 2012).

Teachers at **[INSERT name of school]** provide students with opportunities for personal agency over their learning (Wentzel, 1998; Ryzin et al., 2009).

Teachers make regular (positive) contact with parents for proactive and positive communication (Allen et al., 2020; Reschly et al., 2008).

Teachers actively emphasise the value of what students are learning for uplifting their communities, honouring their ancestral heritage, and combating issues of social justice and social inequality in school and society.

Teachers are supported by administrators in recognising and responding to the way larger societal, systemic, and structural inequalities are impacting historically marginalised students in their schools.

Teachers actively build upon the knowledge systems, experiences, and perspectives that students bring as assets into the classroom and school.

Teachers ensure that students understand the importance and purpose of what students are learning (Walker, 2012; Battistich et al., 1996; Whitlock, 2006).

Students

[INSERT name of school] encourages students to support each other academically as well as personally (e.g., peer mentor programs, study clubs, homework group) (Reschly et al., 2008; Ryzin et al., 2009).

[INSERT name of school] has an induction procedure for new students and transition programs at key transition points for students (Ryzin et al., 2009).

All students at **[INSERT name of school]** are expected to be inclusive, respectful, and affirming toward each other (Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Reschly et al., 2008).

Students are encouraged to have high personal expectations and goals around their learning and social wellbeing, with assurance that teachers will support them in reaching these high standards (Heaven et al., 2002; Klem & Connell, 2004; Guthrie & Davis, 2003; Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2006).

At **[INSERT name of school]** all students are encouraged to use their personal strengths (Proctor et al., 2011) and are made aware that they all have a role to play in contributing to a culture of belonging at their school (Allen, 2020b).

Parents

Parents of **[INSERT name of school]** are encouraged to be involved in school life in meaningful ways (Reschly et al., 2008).

[INSERT name of school] provides multiple communication channels for parents that consider their needs and preferences (Reschly et al., 2008).

The school seeks feedback from parents about their overall satisfaction with the **[INSERT name of school]** and communication from teachers and school leaders more generally (Reschly et al., 2008).

[INSERT name of school] aims to make parents feel welcomed when they are at school.

Educational opportunities for parents that enhance their connectedness and belonging with the school and their children are available throughout the year (Kelly et al., 2012; Stoddard et al., 2011; Waters et al., 2010).

Rating of evidence base

Figure 19.1. School Belonging Rating of Evidence.

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[INSERT RELEVANT STAFF MEMBERS]

Related policy and documents

[INSERT RELEVANT POLICY AND DOCUMENTS]
Inclusion policy
Wellbeing policy
Safety policy
Counselling policy
Anti-bullying and discrimination policy
Staff belonging policy

Date of ratification

This policy was ratified on the [INSERT DATE].

Date of review

This policy will be reviewed by [INSERT DATE].

Recommended reading

- Allen, K. A. (2020). *Psychology of belonging*. Routledge.
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