Remind

Building Positive Teacher-Student Relationships in Schools and Districts

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Positive relationships between teachers and students are crucial to learning. When educators get to know their students as individuals, they create a proven foundation for academic and personal growth.

To make sure every student has access to the people and support that can help them thrive, schools and districts are best positioned to enable widespread connections in their communities—including providing clear guidance on teacher-student relationships.

However, this often takes the form of policies and rules about what teachers and staff should avoid, rather than resources and practices they can use to build and maintain positive relationships with their students.

In this guide, you'll find an overview of **outcomes** associated with positive teacher-student relationships, **common barriers** that may need to be addressed, and **actionable strategies** for building strong relationships in schools and districts.

What do positive teacher-student relationships look like?

A positive teacher-student relationship strikes a healthy balance between personal and professional. On a personal level, educators can show regard for how students are doing academically, emotionally, and socially, including demonstrating empathy and concern.

At the same time, it's imperative to maintain clear boundaries to avoid creating inappropriate expectations.

The types of interactions that help build positive relationships between teachers and students can vary widely. These are only a few possible examples:

An English teacher learns one of their students earned the first-chair flute position in band. The teacher sends a quick message to the student: "That's so awesome! Congratulations!"

A fourth-grader experiences bullying and approaches a teacher they trust. The student describes a few incidents while the teacher listens empathetically. The teacher also reassures the student that they are likable and deserving of respect.

An art teacher attends a chess competition or football game and cheers for their students and chats with other students in the audience.

A math teacher notices that one of their students is having trouble applying concepts in assignments. The teacher encourages the student to message them after school with any questions about homework problems.

Benefits of positive relationships between teachers and students

Research shows that establishing strong teacher-student relationships can make a significant impact on several aspects of a child's learning experience.

Academic outcomes

Some of the most significant benefits of teacher-student relationships include academic improvement and growth.

Students with closer relationships with educators tend to exhibit higher levels of achievement.

When teachers connect with learners, they help keep students engaged in the learning process. In one study, kindergarteners who had more positive relationships with their teachers exhibited better performance in early skills.

In another study, students who receive more emotional support in math classes tend to be more engaged with the material, understand it better, and enjoy it more. They also find it easier to tackle math problems and help other students.
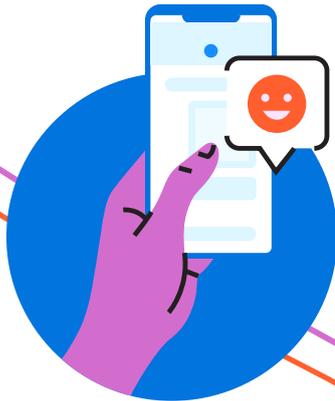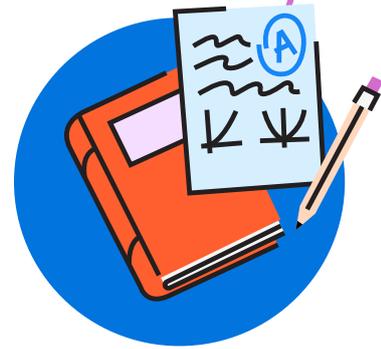
Engagement and motivation

Positive relationships are also shown to increase student motivation, making it less likely for students to miss school and more willing to be cooperative, engaged, and self-directed. Increased motivation can also come from teachers using learner-oriented approaches, which display acknowledgment and sensitivity to individual differences and developmental and emotional needs.

Mental well-being and social skills

Academic performance isn't the only aspect that improves with positive teacher-student relationships: student mental health and social competencies benefit, too. For instance, kindergartners who experience closer connections with their teachers tend to feel less lonely and more likely to enjoy school. They also develop abilities to get along with others that carry over into middle school and beyond.
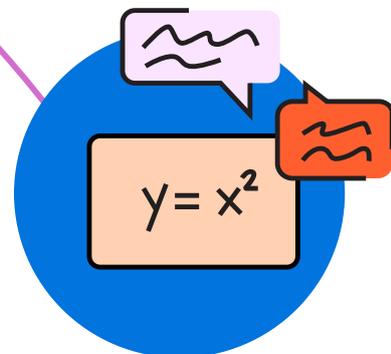
Addressing potential barriers to building teacher-student relationships

There are a number of potential barriers that can affect teachers' ability to connect with their students, some of which may need to be addressed at the school and district levels.

Cultural and language barriers

Students from marginalized and underserved populations tend to have weaker relationships with their teachers. Research suggests that some of these students may have previously interacted with teachers with culture-based biases; others may have limited access to academic resources.

Teachers can be mindful of these barriers by understanding potential biases that might affect their interactions with students. It's also important to know the languages students and their families feel most comfortable communicating in and provide translation as needed, whether through a communication tool or translator on staff.

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Access to technology and student engagement

At home, some students may not have access to the technology that their teachers use to stay in touch. 15% of Americans don't own a smartphone, while 23% don't have broadband internet service at home. Additionally, racial minorities and groups with less education or income are less likely to have smartphones or home internet access.

If students aren't engaging with teacher communication—if they don't respond to email outreach, for example, or they're consistently missing messages sent through a class portal or app—it can be helpful to evaluate the technology tools and communication channels being used to make sure they're both accessible and relevant.

Mental health challenges and learning differences

Educators may find it difficult to establish connections with students who are struggling with their mental health or have communication challenges due to disabilities. Being familiar with student accommodations can help teachers tailor their approach to each learner—for instance, recognizing which students might benefit from additional outreach and support outside the classroom.

In some cases, students may need services and support beyond what a classroom teacher can provide. Teachers should be aware of these circumstances and be encouraged to seek support from administrators and district-level services when necessary.

Strategies for facilitating positive teacher-student relationships

Building strong connections with students requires time, patience, and skill. The following strategies can help support the process by creating the conditions for positive relationships to thrive.

Create a setting that promotes a sense of safety

Creating an environment for students that promotes a sense of safety helps them learn the material, advance their social skills, and meet their emotional needs.

In a classroom setting, this includes respecting and appreciating individual differences. If a student is uncomfortable asking for help in class or expressing their feelings in a public setting, for instance, having the ability to communicate separately may encourage them to reach out to their teacher with their problems and needs.

Encourage two-way communication

Two-way communication gives teachers the ability to build positive student relationships beyond the classroom.

While these should be individual interactions, rather than group announcements, conversations don't need to be lengthy or time-consuming. In fact, keeping messages brief and simple can help reduce confusion and reinforce boundaries.

If teachers need ideas for outreach, positive emotional expression can go a long way. Expressing sincere emotions—like joy, pride, and congratulations—can help strengthen relationships and invite engagement.

Maintain appropriate boundaries

Finally, building positive relationships with students is only possible when teachers set and maintain professional boundaries. This means avoiding treating students like friends or confidants, including discussing topics that aren't appropriate in a school setting; it also means avoiding special treatment, like favoring some students over others or accepting costly gifts.

Visibility and oversight also help teachers to keep relationships professional. In person, this includes meeting with students in places where others can see them, like a classroom, library, or lunchroom. Outside of the classroom, using school- and district-approved communication platforms, rather than personal email accounts and phone numbers, allows teachers to document conversations and limit them to appropriate hours of the day.

Build positive teacher-student relationships with Remind

Like all interpersonal relationships, building positive teacher-student relationships takes time, care, and ongoing communication—but their impact on academic and developmental outcomes can change the trajectory of students' lives.

As the leading communication platform in education, Remind is designed to facilitate strong relationships between teachers, students, and families. Mobile-first messaging gives teachers a direct line to their students without sharing personal contact information, while administrator oversight helps protect everyone in a school or district community.

Find out more about Remind solutions for schools and districts here.

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