



### FACTSHEET

# Creating school belonging

**School belonging is “the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment”**

**Goodenow and Grady (1993)**

A sense of school belonging makes students feel welcomed, accepted, and valued within their school community. It fosters feelings of connection and attachment to the school environment, school staff and peers.

When students feel a sense of belonging, they feel confident to be themselves, are more likely to engage actively in their learning, collaborate with peers, and seek support when needed.

This sense of connectedness to the school community enhances emotional resilience, reduces feelings of isolation and fosters positive relationships with teachers and peers.

Students who feel a sense of belonging to their school have higher attendance rates and a positive attitude towards learning, which includes increased motivation, resilience, effort and interest in their learning, leading to increased school enjoyment and higher academic outcomes.

School belonging contributes to the development of social skills, empathy, and understanding, as students learn to value and respect diverse perspectives within their school community.

Ultimately, creating an inclusive environment where every student feels valued, respected and accepted as themselves not only improves academic outcomes but also enhances their school experience and nurtures personal growth, including social and emotional skills.

Schools have a unique opportunity to create belonging due to the significant amount of time students spend at school during their formative years. Within the school environment, school staff have the opportunity to foster a sense of belonging by intentionally cultivating inclusive spaces where every student feels valued, respected, and supported.

Schools offer various avenues for connection, including academic, extracurricular, and social activities, allowing students to explore their interests and form meaningful connections with like-minded peers.

Schools provide a valuable platform for developing student belonging, but it is also important for schools to provide opportunities for school staff and the wider community to participate in activities that foster a sense of belonging.

**Practical strategies for increasing whole-school and community belonging are provided on pages 2-5.**

## Strategies to increase school belonging include:

### Encourage positive relationships between teachers and students

- The school to provide teachers the time to be available for student personal support.
- The school to provide opportunities for teachers to get to know and understand their students.
- Encourage relationship building and feedback re relationships and rapport.
- Teachers to demonstrate fair and equitable practices in the classroom at all times.
- Teachers model respectful behaviours towards each other and students.
- Class expectations developed in collaboration with students.
- Teachers create student-led groups that provide opportunities for student voices or representation.
- School staff to run clubs such as breakfast club, chess club, STEM club to allow opportunities for students to get to know them (see the list of student clubs and groups below).
- Ensure teachers are using inclusive language consistently.

### Encourage a positive whole-school peer culture of belonging

- Enable multiple opportunities for students to connect - Offer extracurricular activities such as clubs, that can operate during break times and before and after school (see the list of student clubs and groups below).
- Provide school sanctioned activities that foster social connectedness and school bonding (e.g. sports days, House activities). Encourage students to engage in these activities and ensure staff and parents model participatory behaviours.
- Create a peer support network to enable students to be academically supportive of each other.
- Ensure expectations for inclusion and kindness are taught from Term 1 each year
- Promote the school's approach and commitment to fostering an environment that creates a sense of belonging.
- Ensure strength-based teaching is delivered to students at all times.
- Implement and use a Buddy Bench system.

## Encourage academic motivation and engagement through belonging

- Teachers to encourage students to have high expectations of their academic ability.
- Teachers utilise flexible teaching methods.
- Learning activities are varied and reflect different learning styles.
- Teachers to outline benefits and purpose of learning activities as outlined (Success Criteria and Learning Intentions).
- Learning activities and content relate to real world experiences.
- Encourage goal-setting behaviours and outline the benefits of achieving goals.
- Teachers to ensure learning is student-directed and strength-based.
- Skills relating to self-regulation are taught and used regularly.

## Mental health promotion and proactivity

- The school to implement health promotion activities and interventions using a whole-school approach (including Act Belong Commit, Mind Matters and Be You).
- Ensure staff are provided adequate training on mental wellbeing and mental health prevention.
- Develop a student and/or staff wellbeing committee to provide mentally healthy activities that promote belonging and school connectedness.
- Encourage help-seeking behaviours across the school - highlight key staff members to seek personal support where needed (chaplain, counsellor, etc.)
- School leadership are responsive to the mental health and wellbeing needs of students and staff.

## Include belonging and mental wellbeing in school policies

- Develop and apply practices/policies related to student safety, discipline and fairness.
- Ensure the school has up-to-date bullying prevention policies.
- Seek input from students, staff, parents and community to develop policies.
- Ensure policies are communicated, understood and implemented consistently.
- Develop school policies that focus on staff wellbeing/connectedness to school.

## Encourage personal empowerment in mental wellbeing

- Educate and empower students to understand their role in fostering their own sense of school belonging (see [Act Belong Commit classroom belonging activities](#)).
- Facilitate activities that encourage students to identify key strengths and provide opportunities to utilise strengths within classroom and school activities.
- Teach students about the benefits of having a positive mindset.
- Utilise the Growth Mindset throughout the whole-school and in the classroom to promote positive mindsets.
- Encourage goal-setting related to mental wellbeing.
- Encourage mindfulness, including [breathing](#) and [gratitude practices](#).

## Staff belonging strategies

- Leadership to provide opportunities to build positive staff culture through regular activities or events.
- Weekly staff activities (such as morning yoga, run club, book club, baking club, etc.)
- Leadership to provide team-building activities, in addition to school planning and review days.
- Encourage [staff shout outs](#) and read them out at weekly or fortnightly meetings.
- Colleagues and leadership to write [thank you notes](#) to express appreciation for school staff.
- Encourage [random acts of kindness](#) between staff; such as making each other coffees, thank you notes etc.
- Give staff the opportunity to complete the [Act Belong Commit Mental Wellbeing Quiz](#).
- Leadership to regularly check-in with staff to find out how they are going and if they need any additional support.

## Staff professional development

- Schools to provide teachers the opportunity for professional development through mentoring programs that are aimed at fostering student belonging.
- Ensure teachers receive professional development on inclusive language and inclusive practices, including strength-based teaching.

## Encourage family and community involvement

- Provide opportunities for families to be involved in meaningful ways e.g. family events, parent-led committees, open nights and parent education.
- Promote strong communications between staff and families through newsletters, information nights and email correspondence.
- Encourage families to feel comfortable approaching school staff, including their child's teacher and the school's admin staff.
- Disseminate information to parents that specifically provides information and strategies for supporting their child's learning and sense of belonging to the school.
- Offer courses and information nights that promote ways to foster positive parent/carer-child relationships and positive communication skills.
- Provide opportunities to connect with the school community, such as community events and activities (markets, cultural celebrations, Mental Health Week, Harmony Day, Neighbour Day, Seniors Week etc.)

## Provide opportunities for students to join clubs and groups

An important and effective strategy is to have clubs available based on student interest before/after school or during break times. Providing a space for students to attend a club about something they are passionate about can lead to feelings of safety, purpose and belonging and can also promote connections between like-minded students.

It's important to involve students in the process of setting up and managing clubs. This can improve their sense of empowerment and help them feel a sense of ownership and pride over the club. Provide mentoring opportunities to build student capacity to lead and manage clubs. Allowing students to choose the club types is important to ensure all students are catered for.

### Clubs can include (but are certainly not limited to):

Anime club	Drama club	Lego club	Reading club	Student event committee
Art/craft clubs	Enviroclub	LGBTQIA+ community club	Robotics club	Student wellbeing group
Breakfast club	Film club	Maths club	Run club	Walk/ride to school team
Bush wardens	Garden club	Multicultural club	School Council	Yoga club
Chess club	History club	Music club	Social club	
Cooking club	IT club	Poetry club	STEM club	
Debate club	Language club			