

In a recent post, we talked about the importance of [relationships between students](#) as a way to improve both behavior and academics. In his article published in [Education Week](#), Robert Kuhl looks at two other internal school relationships that contribute to a positive learning environment. We will explore those here along with strategies for building these important types of relationships.



Adult and Student Relationships

Relationships between adults and students within a school setting are vital for success. When relationships are positive, there is mutual respect and trust. This often leads to less misbehavior and easier correction when needed, along with increased academic performance.

A powerful tool adults can use to build these types of relationships is empathy. Empathy can be used to show students you care about them and their success, leading to stronger relationships. Using empathy statements when correcting behavior makes it a conversation, not a confrontation.

Here are some simple statements that can be used to show empathy to students:

- It sounds like you are...
- I understand that it can be difficult...
- It looks like this is tough for you...
- I get that you have a lot going on right now...

Students cannot reach their full potential unless their teachers and others in the school encourage them through words and actions. Strengthen your student-teacher relationships with these general strategies:

- Use a pleasant voice tone – it's important to stay calm when addressing students, even in chaotic situations.
- Call on everyone in the room equitably – teachers should make sure that they are not showing favoritism to certain students.
- Show concern – concern is often shown when a student suffers a personal injury or experiences a traumatic life event, but showing concern can also include showing an interest in a student's achievement and outside activities.
- Communicate respect – make eye contact with students, answer questions pleasantly, use appropriate humor and show pleasant facial expressions.

Adult and Adult Relationships

A positive school culture is not all about the students; in fact it starts with the adults in the building. Positive adult relationships encourage sharing of ideas and collaboration along with creating a support system within the school. Use these strategies to improve the adult relationships in your school:

- Implement sharing time during staff meetings – the relationships among staff in a school help to define that school's culture. Create a positive culture among staff by allowing the first 5 minutes of any staff meeting to serve as a special time to inform each other about POSITIVE activities, achievements and

successes staff members have accomplished since the last meeting. These positive *shout outs* help to build morale throughout the building and give staff new ideas to try.

- Encourage staff collaboration – staff collaboration gives everyone a voice and an opportunity to express opinions. When staff work together to create school-wide procedures, expectations and consequences everyone will feel as if they have made a contribution and had a voice in school decisions. It is also important for adults to problem solve some situations together, acknowledging that everyone brings something worthwhile to the table and it is an excellent way to gain different perspectives.

Creating a strong school community, built on healthy relationships provides a foundation for learning and success. Implement these strategies to ensure that students and staff are working together towards common goals, supporting each other along the way.