STUDENT SUCCESS SYSTEMS:
STRONG SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Definition

High-quality student success systems build upon and strengthen supportive relationships. Four types of supportive relationships provide the foundation for student and school success—school adults and students, students and students, school adults and school adults, and school adults and parents/caregivers. These relationships depend on a school culture of belonging where everyone feels validated, accepted, affirmed, and treated fairly.

Reflect on Relationships

The relationships that support effective student success systems occur across district and school teams and structures. What these relationships look like are unique to the contexts of school communities. Putting relationships at the center prompts meeting students where they are, and opens doors for parents, caregivers, and families to become essential members of the school community. Connected relationships are multi-dimensional and grounded in four types of supportive relationships (school adults and students, students and students, school adults and school adults, and school adults and parents/caregivers).

HIGH-QUALITY STUDENT SUCCESS SYSTEMS ARE:

- transformative,
- inclusive,
- fueled by strong relationships,
- guided by improvement science, and
- shaped by student-centered mindsets

Student success systems provide schools with a unified system that integrates, extends, and increases the capacity of existing student support efforts, including early warning, on-track, and multi-tiered support systems.

Reflect on Relationships

What do supportive relationships look like?

Supportive and positive relationships exist continuously and consistently across various types of relationships. Look for supportive relationship between:

Student to student

For example- Students are provided opportunities to collaborate in class and in extracurriculars that collectively enable all students to participate in peer-based activities

School adult to families

For example- We have structures – e.g., design thinking sessions/charrettes/ conversation cafes' – that enable co-creation and two way communication

Strong, Supportive Relationships

School adult to student

For example- Structures that provide time, place, and opportunities for students and teachers to form supportive relationships, e.g., advisories, houses, interest inventories, working together on pro-social activities, clubs, etc.

School adult to school adult

For example- there are structures for staff to meet, collaborate, design and develop plans for student success

What are these supportive relationships in a culture of belonging where everyone feels validated, accepted, affirmed, and treated fairly?
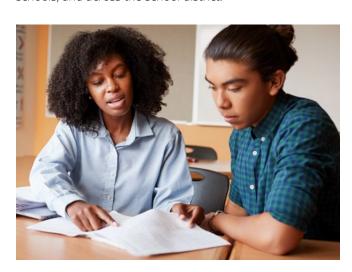
Promoting a culture where supportive relationships are positive and present across schools and districts through multiple components:

- *Systems* are in place that act on a sense of belonging, input from students, faculty, and families on a regular basis *and* promote communication to support those actions.

- *Data* is collected to provide insight into supportive relationships student and faculty have with each other (student to faculty) and among themselves, and disaggregated across grades, sub-groups, departments, roles, etc.

- *Culture* of belonging and strong relationships is modeled, promoted, and prioritized through events, activities, and interactions throughout the school year. Relationships are developed early and often, and don't wait for something to go wrong.

- *Structures* that provide time, place, and opportunities to form supportive relationships for students, families, and teachers (e.g., advisories, houses, interest inventories, working together on pro-social activities, clubs, etc.).

- Opportunities for students to help shape school classroom actions, policies, and expectations.

- Adult relationships go beyond interactions where adults feel affirmed to having a culture of professional trust where it is safe to have difficult conversations with each other about tasks, policy and data.

Everybody plays a part in supportive relationships.

Strong, supportive relationships develop and are reflected at every level of the school system, from individual relationships, to classrooms, grades and departments, schools, and across the school district.

Moving Forward

Creating a student success system that enables your school to provide the learning environment, experiences, relationships, and supports all students need to thrive in school, and ultimately graduate ready for college and/or workplace training, is an on-going, adaptive process; especially since school and community capacities and student needs continually shift.

Key considerations/tips for moving forward:

- Ensure you are gathering data to help you understand the relationship types, and components that are contributing to strong, supportive relationships and use those data to make informed decisions.

- Reflect on how strong, supportive relationships are currently reflected in your district or school. Reflect on whether some relationship types are stronger than others.

- Reflect on how your systems, data, culture, and structures are promoting strong, supportive relationships currently.

- Reflect on whether there are components that are currently stronger than others, and whether those are stronger for certain relationship types.

- Collaboratively identify and co-create tangible actions and behaviors intended to develop relationships.

- Complete the appropriate section of the team reflection and action tool (see below) for a deeper review of your progress towards strong, supportive relationships.

- Review the resources included below to support your next steps.

Resources

Are you interested in doing a deeper dive into some of the aspects of forming strong supportive relationships? Check out some helpful resources below.

- **What the CDC has to say about school connectedness**

- **Centering School Connectedness**, in the NASBEE State Education Standard, by Dr. Robert Balfanz of the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University

- Family Engagement Resources:

    - **Family Engagement Framework** (California Department of Education)

    - **Family, School, and Community Partnerships | CDE (state.co.us)**

    - **Improving how schools engage families during the crucial 9th-grade year - kappanonline.org**

    - **The Power of Family-Teacher Partnerships** (video)

- **IncludED- Through a Culture of Dignity:** How to approached educational equity

- **Strengthening the Success Team's Lead Capacity**, from the Network for College Success

References

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Balfanz, R. & Byrnes, V. (2023). Increasing School Capacity to Meet Students' Post-Pandemic Needs: Findings from the 2022-23 National Partnership for Student Success Principal Survey. Baltimore, MD; Everyone Graduates Center; Johns Hopkins School of Education. **https://jscholarship.library.jhu.edu/bitstream/handle/1774.2/68790/2023_EGC_ NPSSRANDSurveyFindings.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y**

GRAD Partnership has developed a *District Leadership Team Reflection and Action Planning Tool* and a *School Team Reflection and Action Planning Tool* to help guide reflection and planning to integrate the components of a student success system within your current practices. Each of these tools has a section specific to strong, supportive relationships.

Download your own copy of the tool.