CONNECTIVITY FOCUS GROUP

Conducted by the Kentucky Center for School Safety
Eastern Kentucky University
Richmond, Kentucky

This two-hour facilitated discussion focused on identifying factors that help and hinder positive teacher/student relationships. Nine teachers/counselors from six Central Kentucky school districts participated. The session ended with each participant sharing a personal “success” story of connecting with a student.

Discussion Questions:

- **What makes you successful in “connecting” to students?**
  - Finding a niche for students who do not fit in
  - Setting high expectations; strong discipline; love – not friendship – relationship; setting limits; consistency; and flexibility
  - Accepting of best efforts (not just perfection)
  - Showing personal interest in activities outside the classroom
  - Maintaining a positive attitude at all times
  - Showing trust and respect
  - Exhibiting role model characteristics for day-to-day living
  - Getting to know parents & listening to them
  - Viewing classroom as a “family” (i.e. *our* class/*our* school)
  - Providing “personal ownership”
  - Creating a positive, fun atmosphere that automatically ensures a learning environment
  - Sending positive notes home to reinforce achievements
  - Focusing on the whole/total individual, not just in academic terms
  - Willing to be involved in & participating in extra-curricular activities
  - Using the words “our” & “mine”
  - Having a natural gift to connect
  - Exhibiting appropriate physical contact
  - Showing conscious, intentional personal attention & effort
  - Displaying genuine compassion & concern
  - Being consistent in mood and attitude
- Affording forgiveness for mistakes & willing to admit own errors
- Conveying openness by body language and proximity
- Sharing self in order to show that teachers are “human,” too
- Recognizing positive achievements, no matter how small

➤ What are the barriers that prevent staff from “connecting” with students?
  - Labeling/classifying/stereotyping of students (i.e. redneck, etc)
  - Failing to differentiate ability-levels
  - Scheduling of classes over short time frame (i.e. nine-week classes) that hinders ability to get to know students well
  - Judging students on appearance issues (i.e. style of dress, hairdo, etc.)
  - Making choices between time for students and time for family
  - Limiting quality time with students due to the accountability for testing
  - Lacking of teacher buy-in
  - Grouping/classification of age & grades currently used
  - Lacking intentional, individual student success plans
  - Lacking flexibility with individual student schedules to avoid repeating past negative experiences
  - Lacking enjoyment/enthusiasm about job

➤ How can “unconnected” students be identified?
  - Observing those who play caretaker role for younger siblings
  - Knowing who has “pressure” at home to succeed
  - Using breakfast time to observe and interact with them
  - Taking special note of those who arrive early/leave late frequently
  - Having impromptu social interaction
  - Noticing those who isolate themselves in restrooms, etc.
  - Listing of those not involved in any activities
  - Identifying new students
  - Making use of written work
  - Recognizing that “middle-of-the-road” students often get lost in the shuffle & do not get the attention given to high achievers & low achievers

➤ How can all school staff be more effective in “connecting” to students?
  - By involving staff as a group at extracurricular activities
  - By planning student activities at beginning of school year to observe students’ interaction with peers
  - By providing special attention to new students
  - By making students feel special with small rewards
  - By participating in mentoring training