

Student Belonging

Oregon Department of Education

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5CpfQgTgbjQ>

Narrator: In this video, we will hear educators respond to the question, how do you help students feel a sense of belonging in your classroom? We will first hear from Marissa Quesada, kindergarten and first grade teacher, then Melissa Standley, first grade teacher, and then Lisa Moreira, early reading specialist. Leading with relationships.

Marissa: Every single morning I stand at the door and I greet them by name. I ask them how their morning is. It's just like a little important check in so that I can see how they're doing and so they feel seen and valued. When they come in every single morning, we start with community circle. Sometimes we do a really fun question. Sometimes we just do a quick little turn and talk. But every single day, we are building relationships with each other. I'm building relationships with them. They're building relationships with me. For example, my kids know that I'm obsessed with Taylor Swift, and they love to tell me all of the Taylor Swift updates because we've built that connection.

Melissa: A few big things that I do every year is they bring family photos in. And so at the start of the year, for the first few months, our board has pictures of our families. And so we describe our families, we talk about our families. We play a lot of games that make a lot of connections with what kids do at home and what kids do here, what their neighbors might do, what their friends might do. And they find a lot of connections and community that way. So we spend September and October learning what it means to be our classroom community—why we apologize, why we forgive, why we do second chances. And they learn what all those phrases mean. At the end of every day, every child, we all say together our class commitment and we talk about what it means to have a commitment.

Narrator: Establishing supportive routines.

Melissa: We do morning meetings and circles. And I have the kids lead the circles after a few months. And they bring in special items that they can talk about why they have meaning to them. A lot of kids will bring things around special holidays for them. I had a boy travel to France, and so he brought something back to share. A little girl painted a gung hay fat choy sign and she used that as her item. So the kids will ask questions of each other, things they want to know. But they'll also bring up things that they're concerned about or worried about in those circles.

Lisa: I foster a sense of student belonging in my classroom by greeting each student every time they come into my room by saying, "I'm so happy to see you and I'm so glad you're here with me today." Using growth mindset messaging for the kids. In my classroom, we celebrate our mistakes because they are opportunities to make corrections. And I tell our kids that's how we make it stick in our brains. That's how we make it stay. We celebrate mistakes as well as celebrating our growth. I like to have students keep track of their own fluency growth so that we can look back and see how far they've come. And that's always a great way to celebrate the students' learning. Keeping on reinforcing those growth mindset messages and reinforcing that mistakes are a way we learn. I've seen students get further and further from saying, I can't do this. It's too hard. And for a lot of kids, learning to read is really hard.

Narrator: Centering representation.

Marissa: I incorporate students' home lives into my teaching by making sure I center student voices. So sometimes if I'm doing a read aloud, I'll make sure that read aloud is representative of my students and not just one group, but multiple groups of students. If I'm drawing a picture of a home, I'll draw an apartment building because I know that a lot of my students live in apartment buildings. And it's those little tiny details I've noticed that make them feel seen and represented. I also make sure to include music of their home culture. I have a lot of Spanish speakers in my class, and I know their favorite artists. And so, if the song is appropriate, we'll listen to a little bit of their favorite music after the day is over and they dance and they sing. And it's just, it's those little moments where they feel connected and I can see their home culture visible in the classroom. When I was growing up, I didn't really see a lot of my culture represented being from a Spanish speaking family, and I have a lot of memories of being through school and feeling really sad and wanting to be blond and pretty. And I it wasn't until I saw myself represented that I felt really connected to school and my first Spanish speaking teacher is the one who made me want to be a teacher. So I look back at my experiences of my childhood and think, if my students have that, then they will be set up for success and they might have a more positive experience later on in life.

Narrator: To learn more, visit the framework website at oregoninstructionalframeworks.org and download the Early Literacy Framework.