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## THE POWER OF RELATIONSHIPS FOR STUDENTS AND EDUCATORS

There are many reasons that children succeed in school. One element is constant: every child deserves excellent teachers and administrators. The research and science of learning and development tell us that it is critical to focus our learning environments around building long-term relationships for students.

Our standard process is designed to move children rapidly through the system. Moving at least annually in a grade, and class-by-class at the secondary level can be a challenge. Gone are the days of a one-room schoolhouse, or the old K-12 school. Moving means new friends, new dynamics, and changes, and new teachers, administrators, and guidance counselors. Today it is also a balancing act between embracing new technologies, without abandoning the basics.

We know innately that children must become involved in school and attached to other children and adults to create a sense of belonging. Yet current school design does not necessarily produce that objective. Students must know that they important to one another and to the adults in that school.

One question every administrator has to ask: How do students, staff, and strangers feel when they walk into your school building? Creating a caring and welcoming atmosphere is vital to a school's success, and it is necessary for student achievement. Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond points out that "strong relationships are central to the learning process." More importantly, students who feel safe and supported by adults at school are better able to learn. Leaders must create a sense of community where children can feel secure, nurtured, and supported.

The same is true for educators. They bring diverse experiences to the classroom. Some are fluent in multiple languages or have unique technical skills which can strengthen a school and build the community. These skills can assist in building connections between the students in the school and improve the shared community for students and teachers.

Educators often feel left behind in a place that should be a community, not merely a place of employment. In their book *How to Create a Culture of Achievement in Your School and Classroom*, Douglas Fisher, Nancy Frey, and Ian Pumpian explain that the culture can successfully develop with a combination of "actions, traditions, symbols, ceremonies, and rituals that are closely aligned with [the] vision" of the school.

### SUMMARY

*Real transformation will occur when families, community groups, business, and schools band together to support learning, young people achieve more in school, stay in school longer, and enjoy the experience more.*

When a teacher is passionate about their job, they are unlikely to experience burnout or poor performance. Passion begins with an environment where they feel appreciated and valued. Administrators have the power to transform school culture and develop a sense of community for students and teachers. However, they need support from the central office and the school boards. We welcome school board members visiting the schools in their district frequently so they can know and understand the needs of administrators, teachers, and students.

If we want students to experience high-quality teaching they must be supported to become effective learners. It is important that students are provided with the highest quality learning conditions and that teachers have every opportunity to deliver quality education. The key to a successful work that not only engages students in learning but also invigorates staff and gets teachers excited about teaching.

We know from television that even the Lone Ranger didn't do it alone. Like Ben Stein wrote: "Personal relationships are the fertile soil from which all advancement, all success, all achievement in real life grows." We would be irresponsible if we fail to build community in education. Real transformation will occur when we build strong, authentic community connections and actions in public education. "When families, community groups, business, and schools band together to support learning, young people achieve more in school, stay in school longer, and enjoy the experience more," added Brendan O'Keefe. We couldn't agree more. The same is true of our educators.

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