Social Belonging Intervention

Middle School   High school

Intervention Overview

One of the fundamental needs upon which engagement rests is belonging or relatedness (Fredericks et al., 2004). The social belonging intervention has been studied primarily with high school and college freshmen to help these transitioning students frame their fears and adversity as common and temporary. For the intervention, students will read letters or watch video clips of former students explaining their own adversity during their time at school. This activity has also proven effective at helping minority students find a sense of belonging within the school (Williams et al., 2020).

Intervention Guide

Grade Level:	6th-12th. Could be adapted to younger grade levels.
Materials:	Paper, writing utensils, letters or video clips from former students
Duration:	20-30 minutes. Additional time as needed.
Implementation:	1. This activity will require some preparation. You will need to collect letters or interviews of older students about their middle or high school experience. For high school seniors, collecting letters from college students would also be appropriate. 2. Show video clips or have students read a few letters. Williams et al. (2020) recommend showing a few videos or letters of minority students to include students of all backgrounds. 3. Have students complete a "saying-is-believing" exercise, such as writing a letter to another incoming student using the messages from the videos or letters and their own experiences.

Does it work?

Though much of the research has previously been done on the social belonging intervention's effectiveness with college students, recent research has begun to focus on K-12 students. Williams et al. (2020) assessed the impact of this program on incoming ninth graders, particularly for minoritized and female students. During an optional summer orientation, 75 students were shown a seven minute clip put together by minoritized and non-minoritized students who shared their high school transition experience and how they were able to overcome challenges. In order to further calm their fears about high school and to cement what they learned from the video, participants in the intervention wrote letters to incoming ninth graders sharing the messages from the video. In follow-up surveys, the participants, especially the minoritized students, reported a greater sense of school connectedness, improved academic achievement, and better school attendance (Williams et al., 2020).

A similar study was also completed by Borman et al. (2019) with a group of sixth grade students entering middle school. In students' homeroom and English classes, participants read compiled materials from the previous year's sixth graders addressing their experiences, how they overcame challenges and the support they received from teachers and other students during their transition. After reading these letters and survey answers from past students, participants then were asked to write a short reflection about what they read and how they would manage their own difficulties with the transition to middle school. In follow-up analyses of student engagement and belonging, it was found that students in the intervention group had improved academic and behavioral outcomes related to engagement and reported greater trust in the school and teachers (Borman et al., 2019).

References:

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