

Improving Teen Engagement with Literacy Through Relationships

Focus: Literacy Engagement

Grade Level: Middle

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The Plan...

Summary

The goal of this literacy action plan is to use identified strategies to build stronger relationships with students so that it will increase student engagement with literacy. Students often view literacy activities as a risk and this results in low engagement. In addition, the uncertainty of these times present unique challenges for educators and students. In a virtual setting, many students feel disconnected, compounding barriers we face in teaching literacy. With long periods of virtual learning and NTI days, it's even more important to take action to build strong relationships that will hopefully increase student engagement with reading and writing.

“Reading is a risk for older kids. A classroom in which empathy, patience, and compassion are modeled and encouraged becomes a safe place to take risks.”

“We have to do the hard work of building relationships and developing resilience and empathy in the classroom with as much attention as we dedicate to providing effective instruction, educating both the heart and the mind.”

“Want to Teach Kids How to Read? Get to Know Them as People.” We Are Teachers, July 9, 2020, <https://www.weareteachers.com/practical-relationship-building-activities/>.

Goal

The goal of this literacy action plan is to increase student engagement with literacy by building stronger relationships with and among students. It addresses both tradition in-school and virtual learning/NTI relationship-building strategies.

Big Ideas for My Plan:

- Implement birthday recognition.
- Have getting-to-know you activities and games; respond to each student to acknowledge their individuality. Students also respond to each other.
- Use positive notes home & gratitude cards for students to utilize.
- Implement SEL activities, discussions at least once per week.
- Include simulations and modeling sessions for students to see and practice these skills.
- Provide tools and pathways that provide student choice in how they share and contribute to discussions and share-outs about their reading and writing activities.
- Focus on topics that students care about or show interest in (AOW articles).
- Provide feedback on academic performance and personal connection, question, or observation.

Traditional Strategies for Relationship-building

- Plan time for getting-to-know-you activities and games.
- Initiate conversations with small groups and individual students on a regular basis. Conversations about life outside of school sends the message that you care about their lives outside of the walls of your classroom and school.
- Recognize special events, like student birthdays.
- Implement social and emotional learning and discussions. Investing time in these conversations, skills-building, and experiences builds trust, a necessary component of relationships.
- Respect where students are - allow them to decide when/if they are ready to share something.
- Provide different ways and places to share and communicate.
- Provide feedback that is personalized and connected.
- Modeling and discussions with students on building positive relationships, caring, and empathy.

Virtual/NTI Strategies for Relationship-building

- Retain as many classroom relationship building routines as possible.
- Record and share frequent video recording and clips so that students can “see & hear” you often.
- Regularly place phone calls to students that have nothing to do with school or grades.
- Hold cooperative or collaborative learning experiences and activities during online meetings. Meetings need to be something more than showing up to go over the assignment.
- Use virtual command centers that provide opportunities for students to connect, communicate, and share.
- Communicate, connect with students frequently, regularly, and timely.
- Encourage habits of gratitude, appreciation, and care by example and my own habits.
- Incorporate social and emotional learning, practices, and activities. It won't matter how much content you cover if students are struggling with non-academic issues. Students need the “how” because many do not see this at home.

Steps

The plan grew out of NTI, hybrid, and in-class environments with action strategies across four areas to strengthen relationships in an effort to increase literacy engagement :

1. Contact
2. Recognition & Celebrations
3. Opportunity
4. Choice

Contact

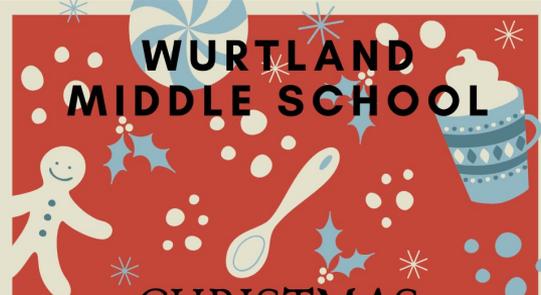
1. Contact
 - a. Small student groups for weekly wellness check-ins
 - b. Google Voice Calls & Messaging
 1. Not about school work or grades
 - c. Google Classroom Digital Check-ins
 - d. Google Virtual Meetings
 - e. Emails
 - f. Postcards

Recognition & Celebrations

1. Student birthday board in hallway
2. Holiday Events
 - i. Holiday Spirit Week (school-wide)
 1. Student Holiday Goodie Bags sent home with literacy focus: fiction book, bookmarks, journal notebook
 2. Door decorating contest with students casting votes each round.
 3. Flipgrid share board for ugly sweater day, costume day, holiday traditions
3. Focus on recognizing growth mindsets in discussions and feedback.

Recognition & Celebrations

**WURLAND
MIDDLE SCHOOL**



**CHRISTMAS
*Spirit Week***

MONDAY (12.14.20): CHRISTMAS SOCK DAY
 • THE CRAZIER THE SOCKS, THE BETTER!

TUESDAY (12.15.20): RED AND GREEN DAY
 • WEAR GREEN AND RED FROM HEAD TO TOE!

WEDNESDAY (12.16.20): CHRISTMAS MOVIE DAY
 • WEAR A SHIRT FROM YOUR FAVORITE MOVIE OR DRESS LIKE YOUR FAVORITE CHRISTMAS MOVIE CHARACTER!

THURSDAY (12.17.20): CHRISTMAS PAJAMA DAY
 • TODAY IS A COMFY WAY TO CELEBRATE THE HOLIDAYS.

FRIDAY (12.18.20): NATIONAL UGLY SWEATER DAY
 • IT'S NOT CHRISTMAS WITHOUT UGLY SWEATERS!

| | | | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|---|-----------------|----------------|
| KATIE WILLIAMS | ALEX YOUNG | CHRISTMAS DOOR DECORATING CHALLENGE | BARB NELSON | BARB NELSON |
| ALEX YOUNG | | | MIRUKA WILLIAMS | |
| BOBBI BRUMFIELD | OWEN RUNION | WINNER! | HEATHER CARTER | HEATHER CARTER |
| OWEN RUNION | | | SHANNON SAWYER | |
| KENDRA ADKINS | KENDRA ADKINS |  | CHRIS BLEVINS | CHRIS BLEVINS |
| PATTI WOODS | | | BECKY SPENCER | |
| STEFANIE TUCKER | STEFANIE TUCKER | | BARB DELANEY | BARB DELANEY |
| BARB TUSSEY | | | KIM ELLIOTT | KIM ELLIOTT |

Recognition & Celebrations

4. Winter Reading Bingo Contest



Opportunities to share and interact

1. Enrichment rotation classes
 - a. Provided time for non-academic topics, discussions, shares
 - b. Current events reading & investigations
 - c. SEL focus activities, discussions
2. Collaborative Digital Tools to “bridge” distances to build relationships
 - a. All About Me slide deck
 - b. Veteran Stories share slide deck
 - c. Digital Adventure Stories
 - d. Padlet boards
 - e. Flipgrid
 - f. Google Classroom Stream as discussion board

Choices for how they respond and interact

1. Collaborative
2. Private sharing, responses (teacher only)
3. Anonymous authoring
4. Response choice boards
5. Reading topic/interest choices

Did it work?

Overall, Engagement steadily grew.

- Article of the Week completion rates improved.
- Willingness to share out and discuss topics anchored in our readings and writings increased gradually overall. When we were hybrid and had some in-person classes, students responded more and engagement went up.
- Bell work Article-A-Day routine completion and sharing skyrocketed after providing student choice and input on topics and passages.
- Students wanted to visit the library and share what they were reading with others.
- Literacy engagement struggled more during NTI sessions.

Successes

1. Digital tools were invaluable during NTI to try to “bridge” distances and still build and grow relationships as well as students sharing and discussing topics in their readings and writings.
2. Birthday recognition means the world to middle schoolers.
3. Students appreciate calls that are not about academics. I can not stress enough what these calls meant to many of my students.

Challenges

1. Consistency
 - a. Internet access, performance unpredictable across rural areas
 - b. NTI to in-person back to NTI then hybrid to 4-day weeks
 - c. Student lacked access to books, texts, environments that value and were conducive to literacy activities
2. New tools require new digital skills required to utilize
 - a. Two steps forward but one back at times
3. Some plans were postponed due to NTI, other circumstances
4. As a school and class, we struggled with a few tragic events that deeply impacted both ourselves and our students.

Next Steps

1. Develop birthday recognition program
 - a. Google Calendar
 - b. Student birthday packages
 - c. Morning announcements
2. Create more student publishing & sharing opportunities to strengthen literacy engagement
 - a. Blogger, Google Sites
 - b. Book Clubs
3. Collect data to substantiate relationship between stronger relationships and literacy engagement

Resources

1. Google Apps
2. [Flipgrid](#)
3. [Gimkit Ink](#)
4. [Choice Boards for Engagement](#)
5. [Discussion Strategies](#)
6. [Everfi](#)
7. [Google Digital Projects](#)

"Students with a high sense of belonging are happier, healthier, and more engaged learners... and less likely to skip school, abuse substances, have emotional distress, or be involved in fighting or bullying behavior."

Conroy, A. "8 Strategies for Building Belonging With Students and Families Virtually." Panorama Education, March 20, 2020

Feel free to contact me with any questions.

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