

Student Well-being: A Collective Responsibility

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Student/Teacher Relationships

JOHN ALMARODE: One of the biggest factors in determining how students feel is to know your students. Student-teacher relationships cannot be overstated in terms of importance. Knowing your students, knowing where your students come from, what your students are thinking about, what their interests are, what their passions are, what gets them out of bed in the morning, there's just no replacement for that. And so I have to be able to respond to students based on knowing them on a level that allows me to make adjustments in the classroom when needed. And it doesn't mean we have to know them to the point where they're our friends. There are clear boundaries here. But we do have to understand and know them well enough to read some cues that someone who doesn't know them or treats them simply as a number or a name on their roster may not pick up on. And it's those decisions that we make. Some students may need a little extra time in the morning transitioning from home. Some students may need a little extra time as we establish the learning targets or the success criteria for the day because they're either nervous about the content or their performance in the previous year wasn't at a certain level and so there's some anxiety. We may find out that a student worked late last night and so didn't get a lot of sleep. The only reason we know that is when we ourselves engage with them on all three levels. It's one of the easiest things we can possibly do in schools. It costs no money and takes very little time, and the answer is talk to your kids. Talk to your students. Do you greet them at the door? Do you greet them when they get off the school bus? Do you meet them in the hallway and ask them how their day was? You don't have to do all 30 every day -- although you should -- but simply walking with your students down the hallway asking them questions, finding out how they're doing, asking them what they think about certain things. They will reveal information, especially if they find you trustworthy and credible and your questions are sincere. So, the best thing to do? Talk to your students and break down that barrier that is often represented by the teacher's desk and roll up our sleeves and get out there with them, and we start to find things out that are going to help us make decisions later. As a secondary teacher, I used to try to figure out where my students worked after hours or what they did after hours and go visit those places. If they worked at a coffee shop, I made sure to get coffee there. If they worked at an auto body shop, I made sure to get the oil changed in my car at that particular spot. If they participated in extracurricular sports, I would make sure I attended a soccer game or a football game so that they could see that I was more than just a mathematics textbook, a social studies textbook, or an English language arts textbook.