



Strategies for Establishing or Re-Establishing Social Connections in School

This document provides educators with a list of strategies for enhancing social connections as schools open up for face-to-face instruction.

Introduction

Given our disruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic, students and educators did not have the chance to say good-bye or to put an official end to the year as in the past. Additionally, returning to school in person will likely involve the wearing of masks, social distancing, and the absence of person to person physical contact. Although these strategies are crucial for keeping everyone physically healthy, they can create challenges in making relationship connections across students and staff. This brief document provides several quick ideas for providing a welcoming and socially connected environment during our current normal.

Personal Photo on Badge or Sticker

Description and Options

While a necessary safety precaution, wearing masks do not allow for face recognition or the human connection with seeing the entire face, this is true both for staff and for students.

One option is to have individual staff photos worn on clothing via a button or sticker to show the staff member's smiling face without the mask on. This can increase the welcoming environment for the classroom. For students, consider having a print out of the student's smiling face taped to the edge of the desk so staff can see the students without masks as well.

Prior to Return to School

Provide a rationale for the use of photo badges along with a process for obtaining photos and creating the badge.

Class or staff photos may be distributed to the class prior to students returning to school.

During Return to School

Involve the use of the badges in a "getting to know you" activity during the first day of class. Connect the photo with a positive attribute or the individual's favorite activity as an introduction.

Resources

The [pediatric nurses in this picture](#) made buttons of their smiling faces and wear the button on their scrubs each day so that children and families know what they look like without the mask.

Greeting at the Door with Social Distance

Description and Options

Students and teachers are no longer allowed to have close physical contact and required to wear a mask. Therefore, making students feel welcome when they arrive at school and to their classroom is imperative to establishing a positive school culture and feeling of connectedness.

Traditional greeting methods such as verbally acknowledging the student, referring to students by their name, and asking how they are doing are still very effective at establishing a relationship and helping students to feel welcome.

Additionally, to minimize the barriers due to the Covid-19 guidelines, age appropriate props could be used to greet students. These items could include a smiley face photo stick, school mascot, or teddy bear. School songs could be used to convey a sense of community. Non-contact greetings such as waving, nodding, bowing, air hi-five, or foot bumps could also be used.

Prior to Return to School

Provide a rationale for the use of a greeting strategy. Identify a greeting strategy to use, communicate with staff, and allow time to practice.

Review your school's traditional greeting procedure and determine what changes need to occur to meet the COVID-19 guidelines, while also creating a sense of belonging when students arrive at school and to their classroom.

Consider teaching students non-contact greeting and consider adding to your school matrix and teaching as a new expectation. See example video "bumping legs"

During Return to School

- Staff will model the identified greeting during arrivals, dismissals, and to classrooms.
- Implement the greeting during arrival and dismissal, as well as arrival to the classroom.
- Greeting could be taught during school wide PBIS Kickoff and throughout the school day.

Resources

[How to Teach F2F with a Mask and Create Caring Classrooms](#) by Jamie Landau

In this article, Landau provides advice for teacher on how to create a caring classroom while wearing a mask.

[Foot Bump video](#)

In this video, students are demonstrating the use of a foot bump as a way to maintain social distancing and still greet each other.

[Socially Connected While Physically Distant from the National PBIS Center](#)

This one-page handout provides examples of how to be more intentional with establishing positive connections.

Positive Acknowledgements with Social Distancing

Description and Options

Positive acknowledgement and feedback continue to be a vital part of implementation of School-wide PBIS practices. Less tangible acknowledgement systems will need to be utilized during social distancing to maintain safety guidelines and minimize the spread of COVID-19.

Verbal contingent praise paired with teachers acknowledging student expected behaviors can be achieved in a variety of means. Some examples include using desk charts and classroom bulletin boards to identify expected behaviors. Students could maintain their own notebook consisting of stickers and/or positive comments from the teacher. A class chant or celebratory cheer could also be used in a classroom to provide immediate or intermittent acknowledgment.

Some schools have begun using Google Forms as a means to deliver what use to be a tangible acknowledgement ticket. The Google Form records the information that the teacher would have written on a paper ticket and can be shared with students electronically.

Emails or texts to parents or students themselves (secondary) could also be a means to provide acknowledgment. The text or email could contain a smiling photo of their child including a written note identifying the positive behavior.

Prior to Return to School

The School Leadership Team should consider the following

- Provide a rationale for the use of an acknowledgement system using social distancing guidelines.
- Review current Acknowledgement System; Immediate, Intermittent, and Long Term, and determine what adaptations need to be included.
- Develop a process for establishing a modified reward system.
- Determine what resources or supplies are needed.
- Communicate, share and practice with staff.

During Return to School

Staff will implement the social distancing acknowledgement system school wide and in classrooms. The School Leadership Team will continually evaluate the effectiveness and make changes as data indicates.

Resources

[Minnesota PBIS](#) has examples of acknowledgments when implementing PBIS in Distance Learning. These can be adapted for face-to-face learning with social distance.

Family Connections

Description and Options

Families will have concerns/anxiety about their child's safety, academic instruction, and school climate. Connections and communication with parents will foster a more welcoming environment for families.

Consistent, informative, and supportive school wide and teacher communication with families via emails, phone calls, virtual newsletter (school wide and classroom) and social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook will help foster parent/ family connectiveness.

Topics for communication could include: updated behavioral matrix, acknowledgment system, procedures and guidelines, resources, and recommendations to stay connected.

Prior to Return to School

The School Leadership Team should:

- Review the current protocol and process for communicating with families
- Communicate and share with staff to determine any updates that need to be included school-wide and class-wide
- Determine if any resources or training are needed for staff related to technology aspects of the communication plan
- If using social media to communicate with families, ensure appropriate documentation is in place to share information and photos

During Return to School

Implement your updated communication process with families and consider surveying families to get feedback on the communication given the current normal.

Resources

[*A Strategy for Building Productive Relationships with Parents*](#) by Crystal Frommert

This brief article discusses the benefits of reaching out to families early in the school year with positive messages as a means for building successful partnerships with families.

[*Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Family Engagement in the Time of COVID-19 and Remote Learning, and Always*](#) from the Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools

[*Connecting with Families*](#) from the National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations

URLs Used in Document

[Pediatric Nurses in this picture](#)

(<https://www.dropbox.com/s/umozkhfblzy0nwn/Pediatric%20Nurses.png?dl=0>)

[How to Teach F2F with a Mask and Create Caring Classrooms](#)

(<https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2020/08/26/effective-ways-teach-person-mask-opinion>)

[Foot Bump video](#)

(<https://fox4kc.com/news/school-children-learn-new-way-to-greet-each-other-to-limit-coronavirus/>)

[Socially Connected While Physically Distant](https://www.dropbox.com/s/nc0783t7g9nenfa/Center%20on%20PBIS%20Socially%20Distant%20Positive%20Greetings%20%283%29.pdf?dl=0)

(<https://www.dropbox.com/s/nc0783t7g9nenfa/Center%20on%20PBIS%20Socially%20Distant%20Positive%20Greetings%20%283%29.pdf?dl=0>)

[Minnesota PBIS](https://sites.google.com/view/pbismndistancelearning/acknowledgments?authuser=0)

(<https://sites.google.com/view/pbismndistancelearning/acknowledgments?authuser=0>)

[A Strategy for Building Productive Relationships with Parents](https://www.edutopia.org/article/strategy-building-productive-relationships-parents)

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[Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Family Engagement in the Time of COVID-19 and Remote Learning, and Always](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5bc5da7c3560c36b7dab1922/t/5e84aac1e21ae556868a53a8/1585752769220/Culturally+responsive+family+engagement+.pdf)

(<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5bc5da7c3560c36b7dab1922/t/5e84aac1e21ae556868a53a8/1585752769220/Culturally+responsive+family+engagement+.pdf>)

[Connecting with Families](https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/Connecting-with-Families_tipsheet.pdf)

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