

CLASSROOM COMMUNITY

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A classroom is just four walls until a teacher enters. Step by step, teachers build their classrooms: They build the environment, they build relationships with the children, they build partnerships with families, they build classroom communities, and most important, they build competent, successful learners.

Fostering a sense of belonging increases academic performance in the classroom. A teacher can enhance this feeling by building a classroom community. When students feel like they belong and are safe in your classroom, you have increased your ability to engage your students' minds.

Smile. Welcome students at the door of your classroom with a handshake or a high five. Smile, have an open posture, lean forward, and make eye contact. Remember that this may be the only positive contact that they have had with an adult today.

Get to Know One Another. Plan class- and team-building activities that will increase familiarity among your students. Let them see your human side. Share some information about your life outside of the school day. Develop an index card for each student, including information related to the individual's likes, dislikes, and learning style preferences. Set aside a reasonable amount of time for students to share information about themselves and their families.

Celebrate the Diversity in Your Classroom Community: Focus on the individuality of each of your students and emphasize how every student's differences and strengths contribute to the classroom community you are creating. By celebrating each person's differences, you set a tone of acceptance and tolerance within your classroom community.

Here is a community building lesson plan you can use for the first day of school.

Purpose for the Lesson: A first day assignment to introduce the class to one another in a supportive, team-minded way.

Materials: A bulletin board that says "Each Piece Counts" on the top of it and has an outline of jigsaw pieces, construction paper pre-cut in jigsaw pieces for each student, pencils, radio, pins, blank paper.

Sequence of the Activity: Guide a short discussion about a puzzle and how each piece is vital to the makeup of the whole, and that all pieces are needed to complete it. Randomly give a jigsaw piece to each student with another student's name printed on it. Each student interviews and finds out a few interesting things about the other student. Each student writes biographical items on their partner's puzzle piece. During this time, play soft classical music to make the atmosphere more comfortable. In front of the group, each pair of students introduces their partner and pins the puzzle piece on the bulletin

board where it fits. When all have finished, the board should be full and everyone will have a better idea who is in their community this year.