

Creating a Caring Culture in the Classroom

Learning Environment

- music (from classical to motivational and fun)
- print rich environment (current magazines, teen friendly books, motivational books with quotes)
- daily quote of day and word of day
- actual pictures of graduates in caps and gowns
- first day photos of each student on AVID Star wall
- every kind of school supply imaginable (accessible to all students)
- composition books for journaling
- health supplies (hand lotion, sanitizer, band aids, safety pins)
- snacks for those hungry tummies
- create homelike environment

First Days

- classroom should have curbside appeal (posters should surround doorway and gateway to your room)
- greet each student at door, welcome them, make eye contact with each student
- upbeat music playing
- set tone to students that this is a “comfort” room where they can come at any time of day (room available am/pm/lunch daily)
- verbally let students know that you BELIEVE in them and that you have confidence in their future achievements, tell students that you have HIGH expectations
- begin to use teacher wait time for classroom management
- students make name tents
- provide glimpses of teacher as real person, display teacher’s family photos
- let students know you respect them as students and in turn you want their respect (mutual respect)
- discuss how students should enter room (greet teacher) and leave room (say good bye)
- set classroom expectations
- tell every student goodbye and “Have a great day”
- start building relationships among students
- teacher attire sets tone for year
- explain how to make good impression to all teachers on the first day of class
- discuss appropriate body language in class
- discuss manners and appropriate use of technology
- word of the year is “WE”
- teacher lays foundation of trust and consistency

Early in six weeks

- have students visualize themselves as successful
- set norms collaboratively
- teacher sets expectations (shares own pet peeves)
- encourage students to develop a scholarly identity
- let students know that they are courageous for being in the class, for overcoming obstacles, for stepping into AP classes and working hard
- talk about classmates becoming family
- explain “how to do” school
- discuss what good students look like in halls
- expect integrity on part of each student
- assign students to write a letter to you explaining their early life, dreams, positives and negatives of their life
- students make a mini poster consisting of 2 parts (one part is where they were 5 years ago and where they will be 5 years from now)

Throughout the year

- invite inspirational speakers and college reps into class
- make the classroom relevant
- expect students to take rigorous courses
- stop and smile and listen and give undivided attention to each student who calls out to you for help
- keep bringing a smile to class daily
- give students 5 minutes of nonverbal organizational time
- have post it notes for “to do” lists and setting priorities
- help students with planners and organizational techniques and tricks
- continue to raise the bar and raise expectations
- enlarge college acceptance letters to poster size and celebrate each acceptance
- constantly walk among class as you teach
- attend extracurricular events

Community Building

Stage 1 (low risk, high comfort): people bingo, people hunts, name tents (discuss with table/partner), ball toss to learn names, “quiz” on names of all classmates

Stage 2 (moderate risk, moderate comfort): more table discussions of what was favorite moment of summer, introduce tablemates during tutorials using name and adjective before name that starts with same letter as first name—joyful Joan—students must repeat everyone’s adjective/name, keep everyone alert and call randomly for leaders to share out (perhaps those with most bling, largest shoe size, least amount of shoe, birthday closest to today), partner interviews, partners take turns “calling” universities for information, find group common ground such as what they ate for breakfast or transportation to school, pair share quickwrite from quote of day

Stage 3 (high risk, low comfort): silently make human birthday line, icebreakers for tutorials such as favorite birthday celebration or childhood memory, find commonalities in small groups (may not use attire, anything school-related or college-related), team huddle (mingle), group according to birthday months and share out a goal for the week and a challenge, silent conversations (large paper on table and groups respond in writing and silently to a quote—“your reaction to adversity can make you better or bitter—respond first on one side of chart paper as to how adversity can make you better then groups gallery walk and add to next table chart until back to home table...then respond to how adversity can make you bitter), senior silent walk outside to think about where they will be this time next year (talk about the students as heroes of tomorrow, world is open book, seniors stay nonverbal)

Stage 4 (high risk, low to no comfort): debrief six weeks as whole class in circle setting, set expectations for Socratic seminars, Socratic seminar on quote, “People are defeated in life not because of lack of ability, but for lack of wholeheartedness. They do not wholeheartedly expect to succeed,” Socratic seminar on “Still I Rise” and “Mother to Son” and Deonte Bridges Valedictorian speech, line game, privilege walk, question game, share gratitude posters in tutorial groups, Socratic seminar on “Acting White”

Joan's general thoughts—Set an air of expectancy that all will succeed, create “I can” mindsets, have unwavering commitment to students and their success, do whatever it takes, explain to students how they need to be involved in school and not be a ghost in school, value student input, acknowledge your own mistakes, facilitate healthy decision making, explain that if “you are the smartest one in your group your group is too small,” scaffold building of relationships with students, teach students to seek wise counsel, explain who the gatekeepers are in the school and explain how to be pleasantly persistent when necessary, relate that you have not had their experiences in life but one thing you know is WHERE THEY CAN GO IN LIFE, seek to find best in each student and hone in on that, call each student by name each class period, give random compliments, speak to those who look left out, differentiate expectations based on individual differences, teach that you must do daily random acts of kindness, teach that you must get up each day and say to yourself “who can I help today,” teach paying it forward, explain your own passion for your job—not a job, not a career, but a calling, reach students before you teach, place students over content, teacher/student relationship is top priority, use humor to correct such as not allowing “bathroom words” in classroom, pick your battles, set class expectations for substitutes and have class leaders to assist, care about individuals not just transfer of knowledge, be tolerant, seek to understand, have a coach mindset, have empathy, respond to their emails/texts in timely manner, see students as overcomers and victors, tell students you miss them when they are absent...