

Auburn North Public School

Sense of belonging research series

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation



About this resource

In alignment with the NSW Plan for Public Education, this research series is a part of a suite of resources focusing on uplift in students' sense of belonging across NSW public schools. In 2023, CESE interviewed 10 schools of varied contexts. The aim was to identify practical strategies employed by schools across NSW to foster positive student belonging. These primary and secondary schools were chosen based on their sense of belonging scores in the Tell Them From Me survey. Each focus school in this research series illustrates different approaches that could be adopted to promote students' sense of belonging. Though these approaches have been tailored to the individual contexts of these schools, they offer insights that other schools can consider when addressing the specific wellbeing needs of their students.

When and how to use

School leaders and teachers can read, consider, discuss and implement strategies highlighted in this research series and its accompanying resources as part of school-developed High Impact Professional Learning (HIPL). The appropriate time to use this resource may differ for each school, leader and teacher. The accompanying resources for this research series include:

- What Works Best to increase students' sense of belonging
- Making sense of belonging
- Fact sheet: How a positive sense of belonging helps students thrive
- Fact sheet: Measuring student wellbeing for school improvement.

School leaders can:

- unpack the research series and accompanying resources as part of whole-school professional development and/or stage or grade team meetings
- access their school's data to lead discussions with staff about areas for improvement at a classroom and whole-school level.

Teachers can:

- read the research series and accompanying resources and reflect on current practice
- consider which practices could be implemented in the classroom to lift student achievement, and discuss their thoughts with colleagues
- reflect on the impact of implementation.

Contact: Email feedback about this resource to info@cese.nsw.gov.au.

You can also subscribe to the [CESE newsletter](#) and connect with us on [Viva Engage](#).

Alignment to system priorities and/or needs: Our Plan for NSW Public Education

Alignment to School Excellence Framework: Learning domain – wellbeing; Teaching domain – learning development; Leading domain – educational leadership; school planning, implementation and reporting

Alignment with other existing frameworks: What Works Best

Reviewed by: Aboriginal Outcomes and Partnerships; Learning, Teaching and Student Wellbeing; Public Schools; People, Culture and Capability; School Infrastructure NSW

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To be reviewed: CESE publications are prepared through a rigorous process. Resources are reviewed periodically as part of an ongoing evaluation plan.

About Auburn North Public School

Auburn North Public School is a coeducational government primary school located on the lands of the Darug peoples for students in Kindergarten to Year 6. As of 2023, Auburn North Public School has an enrolment of approximately 640 students. The school serves a wide range of students and families, with 98% of students with English as an Additional Language or Dialect background and 20% with refugee or refugee-like experiences. The school has a Family Occupation and Education Index (FOEI)¹ of 119, indicating that it serves a relatively socioeconomically disadvantaged population.

The school's vision for 2021 to 2025 is 'to be a truly outstanding future-focused learning community for all members of the Auburn North family'. Their goal is to foster skills in literacy, numeracy and technology, as well as other core skills such as creative thinking, critical thinking and collaboration. Also fundamental to the school's foundation are 6 core values of kindness, respect, fairness, honesty, friendship and responsibility. These values underpin every aspect of Auburn North Public School, guiding interactions and fostering a positive, inclusive environment where all students can and do thrive.

Auburn North Public School was chosen for this research due to its high sense of belonging scores in the Tell Them From Me (TTFM) student survey relative to the NSW average. In 2021, the sense of belonging at Auburn North Public School was 5.1% higher than the NSW average and the school's historical data reveals a consistent pattern of strong sense of belonging scores: in 2022, this score was 2.6% higher than the NSW average. In 2023, the score was 10% higher than the NSW average.



Sense of belonging for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds

Research suggests students from low socioeconomic status (SES) experience a lower sense of belonging compared to students from high-SES backgrounds. The gap between low- and high-SES students widens significantly during the transition to high school and continues to increase through to Year 9 ([Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation 2020](#)).

Strategies employed by Auburn North Public School to facilitate sense of belonging

Auburn North Public School staff define sense of belonging as students feeling like a valued and celebrated member of the school community, fostering an environment where their parents and caregivers are also supported as part of the Auburn North 'family'.

The school community has developed and implemented a set of dynamic programs, strategies and practices that have:

- created whole school unity with families
- embraced the wider multicultural community
- emphasised academic success to set students up for feeling successful in the classroom.

These strategies and their practical applications are outlined for other schools to consider for use as part of their own practice and can be adapted or modified for school contexts and needs.

¹ A school-level index of educational disadvantage with a mean (average) of 100 and a standard deviation of 50. Higher values indicate greater levels of need.

Creating whole school unity with families

Auburn North Public School embraces multiculturalism, upholding the core value that the school is a 'family' where everyone is included in the community. This sense of inclusion at Auburn North Public School is underpinned by trust and mutually respectful relationships. Each day begins with a morning assembly attended by teachers, students, and parents. During these assemblies, the principal presents awards based on the 6 core school values: kindness, respect, fairness, honesty, friendship and responsibility, as well as student effort and achievement. Award recipients are honoured in the fortnightly school newsletter which is translated into different languages to ensure accessibility for all families. The whole-school approach to wellbeing, including the gold badge program, also reinforces the school values and sense of belonging for students and their families. During gold badge assemblies, parents are invited onto the stage with their child, where they are able to present their child with their gold badge in front of the school.

These practices recognise students' achievements and reinforce the values integral to the school community, creating a sense of whole-school unity.



Embracing the wider multicultural community

A sense of belonging is promoted for the wider community as soon as families step through the school gates. The enrolment process is supported by the school administration team, who are referred to as Auburn North's 'ambassadors of first impressions'. The office acts as a 'welcome centre' and is the first point of contact for families arriving at the school. The welcome centre is important in facilitating connection and belonging for all families, including those arriving from overseas. A translator is present during the enrolment process when needed, and members of the school's executive team are available to talk to families about ways they can offer support to students and parents/guardians as needed. By addressing these needs early on, the school can ensure appropriate resources are in place.

The emphasis at Auburn North Public School is on partnership and connecting parents with programs designed to support families. This approach aims to create a collaborative relationship between the school and families, enhancing the overall feelings of connection with the school for students.



Three of the most significant parent engagement programs are the ‘Harmony House’ program, ‘Parents as partners in learning’ program and ‘Three-way conferences’ program.

Harmony House offers on-site support at Auburn North Public School, providing opportunities for families to connect with others and participate in educational and wellbeing programs. These programs include English language lessons for parents and playgroups for preschool children to assist with their transition to Kindergarten. Harmony House has become a home away from home for hundreds of parents, especially mothers, since 2004.

The ‘Parents as partners in learning’ program is designed to foster collaboration between teachers and parents in the educational process. At least 10 grade-based parent workshops are held each year, and videos of some of these workshops are located on the school’s website. These sessions bring together teachers and parents to explore how literacy and numeracy are taught at specific grade levels. During these sessions, parents learn instructional methods and content, with students participating alongside them. This collaborative learning experience empowers parents with the knowledge and skills to support their children’s education at home. Students particularly enjoy having parents learning alongside them.

After each session, some ‘goodie bags’ filled with educational resources are distributed to the families. These resources are designed to be used at home, enabling parents to continue supporting their children’s learning beyond the classroom. On the day of the sessions, translators, school learning support officers (SLSOs), and community language teachers provide translation assistance. The ‘Parents as partners in learning’ program fosters a sense of belonging by actively involving families in the educational process, creating a collaborative and supportive community where parents and teachers work together to enhance students’ learning experiences.

The ‘Three-way conferences’ program also aims to nurture collaborative and productive relationships between students, parents and teachers. Three-way conferences are held twice per year and provide the opportunity for students, parents and teachers to meet to discuss and celebrate the student’s learning achievements and progress, and set goals to further extend their learning. Translation is provided where required to support these conversations.





Emphasis on academics to set students up for feeling successful in the classroom

At Auburn North Public School, there is a strong emphasis on quality teaching and learning to ensure students feel successful and develop a sense of belonging in the classroom. Auburn North aims to assist every single student to love school, love learning, and be successful learners every single day. Four of the most significant strategies to achieve this include the Auburn North explicit teaching model, whole-school instructional coaching and integrated professional learning programs, strategic use of specialist teachers to differentiate learning, and the ongoing focus on an orderly learning environment.

The school has developed an 'Auburn North instructional model' which provides a framework for explicit teaching across the K to 6 school. Teachers are supported to implement this model through professional learning, including instructional coaching.

Every classroom teacher has a facilitator who is their coach and mentor. The coaching process involves teachers participating in demonstration lessons where they can observe and model effective teaching practices. These sessions are often filmed, allowing for detailed analysis and discussion during post-teaching conversations. Video recordings of best practice teaching are used as a tool for stage-based and whole-school professional learning and capacity building. This collaborative teaching model allows teachers to collaborate, share insights, and develop new strategies to address students' needs. The sense of community and teamwork among teachers extends to the students, creating a more inclusive and supportive classroom environment where everyone feels valued.

The school strategically uses its staffing to provide differentiated, ability-based K to 6 literacy groups 5 mornings per week. Students benefit from targeted instruction and develop relationships with a number of teachers and peers which enhances their sense of belonging.

The school has developed an orderly learning environment which maximises time spent on teaching and learning. Each class collaboratively develops a class vision and agreements which align to the school vision, school values and annual school mottoes, creating a sense of whole-school and class unity.



Conclusion

Auburn North Public School successfully cultivates a strong sense of belonging through its commitment to whole-school unity, multicultural inclusion, and academic excellence. By involving families in daily assemblies and celebrating student achievements, the school creates a unified environment where all students and their parents/guardians are considered part of the Auburn North Public School 'family.' The emphasis on welcoming new families through the 'welcome centre' and offering tailored support programs like Harmony House and the 'Parents as partners in learning' initiative further strengthens connections between the school and its diverse community. The focus on academic support through collaborative teaching practices and instructional coaching ensures that both teachers and students feel supported and valued. When students feel successful with their learning, they are more likely to feel a stronger sense of belonging to school. These comprehensive efforts collectively contribute to an environment where every member of the Auburn North Public School community feels connected and respected.



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