

3 Ways to be Intentional in Relationship-Building

1. Know Every Student's Name

(and Use It Often)

What this looks like:

Make it a priority to learn every student's name as quickly as possible and use it consistently. Greet students by name at the door, acknowledge them by name during class discussions, and use their name in brief hallway or check-in interactions. Even short moments—"Good morning, Jordan" or "Thanks for that insight, Maria"—send a powerful message.



Why this matters:

A student's name is deeply tied to their identity. When a teacher knows and uses a student's name, it signals recognition, respect, and belonging. For many students—especially those who feel unseen or disconnected—this may be the first indication that an adult at school truly notices them.

How it builds motivation and engagement:

Students are more likely to participate, take risks, and stay engaged when they feel known. Using names builds trust and emotional safety, which are foundational for learning. When students feel valued as individuals, they are more motivated to show up, contribute, and invest in the classroom community

2. Passion Presentation:

What this looks like:

Teachers model vulnerability and authenticity by sharing a hobby, interest, or passion—anything from music, sports, or art to cooking, travel, or fixing cars. Then, provide structured opportunities for students to share their own interests through brief "Passion Presentations," informal discussions, or creative projects.

Why this matters:

Students often see teachers only in their professional role. When teachers share appropriate personal interests, it humanizes them and breaks down relational barriers. Inviting students to share their passions communicates that who they are outside of academics matters just as much as their performance in class.

How it builds motivation and engagement:

Passion fosters connection. When students feel their interests are valued, they are more likely to engage and participate. These moments help uncover shared interests, spark conversations, and create relational bridges—especially for students who struggle academically but shine in other areas. Engagement increases when learning environments feel personal, relevant, and relational.

3. Notice and Comment:

What this looks like:

Pay attention to small details—new shoes, a different hairstyle, a favorite sports team on a hoodie, or a band on a T-shirt—and comment genuinely and positively. These moments don't need to be public or lengthy; a simple, sincere acknowledgment goes a long way.

Why this matters:

Noticing details shows students that they are seen beyond their behavior or grades. For students who may receive attention only when something goes wrong, being noticed for something positive can be incredibly powerful. It communicates care, attentiveness, and respect.

How it builds motivation and engagement:

When students feel seen, they feel safer and more connected. That sense of connection reduces defensiveness and increases willingness to engage. Over time, these small interactions build relational trust, making students more open to feedback, encouragement, and academic challenge.