Belonging & Caring
Having a regular time to check in with a consistent group of peers and an adult to share what’s happening in their lives helps students build a sense of belonging and caring.

Key Method
Creating a regular personal check-in time for students and the teacher to hear what’s going on in each other’s lives (often called an advisory), engaging in a short group activity that develops a sense of belonging and caring for each other, and building a supportive community of learners can boost students’ social and emotional well-being by supporting important personal connections to a caring adult, other students, and the school.

Method Components
As students build community within the classroom, the educator guides them through a check-in circle and an additional belonging and caring activity. These strategies can be deployed as a stand-alone activity or as part of a lesson. Each step can be conducted individually, in small groups, or in whole-group instruction.

Check-in circle components
- Circles occur regularly (weekly or more often).
- Students first spend quiet time thinking of something that’s happened to them recently, in or out of school, that has affected how they feel or think—something that has made an impression on them that they’d like to share with others.
- Students briefly share one thing that’s going on in their lives inside or outside of school. Emphasize that they need to give a short summary of what happened, with just enough detail to help others understand how it affected them.
- Students participate in a short group activity that helps build positive relationships.
- Students reflect on what was experienced and learned during the check-in circle.

Guidelines for belonging and caring group activity
- Goals include:
  - Help students get to know each other in pairs or small groups.
  - Build social and emotional understanding among students.
- Possible themes to address:
  - Getting acquainted
  - Health and well-being
  - Personal needs
  - Multicultural understanding
  - Interpersonal issues
  - Societal issues

Suggested review
- Students write in their reflection journals (see the Reflecting Strategies micro-credential) or simply take some time to think about what they learned from the check-in circle or group activity.
- Each student shares one thing he or she wrote about in his or her reflection journal.
- Students thank another student or adult for something that person did to help them feel more connected and cared for, in school or out of school.

**Supporting Research**

Having a sense of being known and cared for, of being connected to other students in a meaningful way, and of belonging to a group of students, a caring adult, and the school community are all highly predictive of students’ persistence and success in their education; taking time out to develop a sense of belonging and caring for each other (often done in advisory activities and programs) can have powerful impacts on students’ social and emotional motivation and well-being and is strongly correlated with positive academic achievement.

- Sulkowski, Demaray, and Lazarus, *Research-Based Practice: Connecting Students to Schools to Support Their Emotional Well-Being and Academic Success*, NASP Communiqué 40(7), http://www.nasponline.org/publications/cq/40/7/connecting-students.aspx

**Resources**


**Submission Guidelines & Evaluation Criteria**

Following are the items you must submit to earn this micro-credential and the criteria by which they will be evaluated. To earn this micro-credential, you must receive a passing evaluation for Parts 1, 3, and 4 and a “Yes” for Part 2.

**Part 1. Overview questions**

(200-word limit for each response)

- **Activity Description**: What kind of project activities did you and your students engage in to become more proficient in applying belonging and caring strategies to improve learning? Please describe the learning activities and strategies you used.
  - **Passing**: Activity description is clear with sufficient detail to illustrate what the students did to gain competencies.
- **Activity Evaluation**: How do you know your students increased their proficiency by engaging in the belonging and caring activities and what evidence did you collect that demonstrates these learning gains?
Part 2. Evidence/artifacts
Please submit work examples from two students (such as links to writing, audio, images, video, and other media) that demonstrate progress toward the Belonging & Caring competency, including items such as videos of check-in circle activities, examples of group activities designed to develop a sense of caring for each other and belonging to a community, samples from student reflection journals, and other items.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Yes”</th>
<th>“Almost”</th>
<th>“Not Yet”</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student work clearly demonstrates learning from the belonging and caring strategies by:</td>
<td>Student work demonstrates learning from belonging and caring strategies with some evidence of changes in attitudes and some examples of improvements in achieving personal and academic goals, but little evidence of how the strategies directly impacted personal attitudes about belonging and caring and few specific examples or discussions of how an improved sense of belonging and caring helped them improve their learning and attitudes toward school</td>
<td>Student work shows some learning from the belonging and caring exercises, with a few examples of artifacts from the exercises, but little evidence of student progress in having an improved sense of belonging and caring, and no discussions about how their attitudes toward school have changed as a result of the activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Evidence of active participation in the check-in circle and group activities</td>
<td>2. Artifacts such as reflection journals and evidence from group activities that show specific growth in belonging and caring qualities</td>
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<td>3. Specific examples of improvements in both academic and social/emotional factors tied to participation in the belonging and caring strategies</td>
<td>4. Student reports of reflections and discussions on how their mindsets and attitudes toward engaging in school and being a member of the school community have improved</td>
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Part 3. Student reflections
For the two students whose work examples were included above, submit student-created reflections on their experience of the belonging and caring activities. Use the following questions as a guide (200-word limit for each reflection):

- How did the belonging and caring activities help you feel more a part of your class and the school community?
- How did the belonging and caring strategies change your attitude toward what you need to feel a sense of belonging and caring and what you can do to help others feel that way?

- **Passing:** Student reflections clearly indicate how the belonging and caring activities increased their sense of belonging and caring for others and clearly discuss how the activities changed their attitudes toward what can be done to feel more connected and caring at school. The reflections are specific and convincing.

Part 4. Teacher reflection
Provide a reflection on what you learned, using the following questions as a guide (200-word limit):
- What was the impact of engaging your students in the belonging and caring activities?
- How will experiencing these project activities shape your daily teaching practice in the future?
  - **Passing:** Teacher reflections clearly indicate how the activity affected both the students and the teacher and clearly state how the experience will affect the teacher’s future practice. The reflections are specific and convincing.