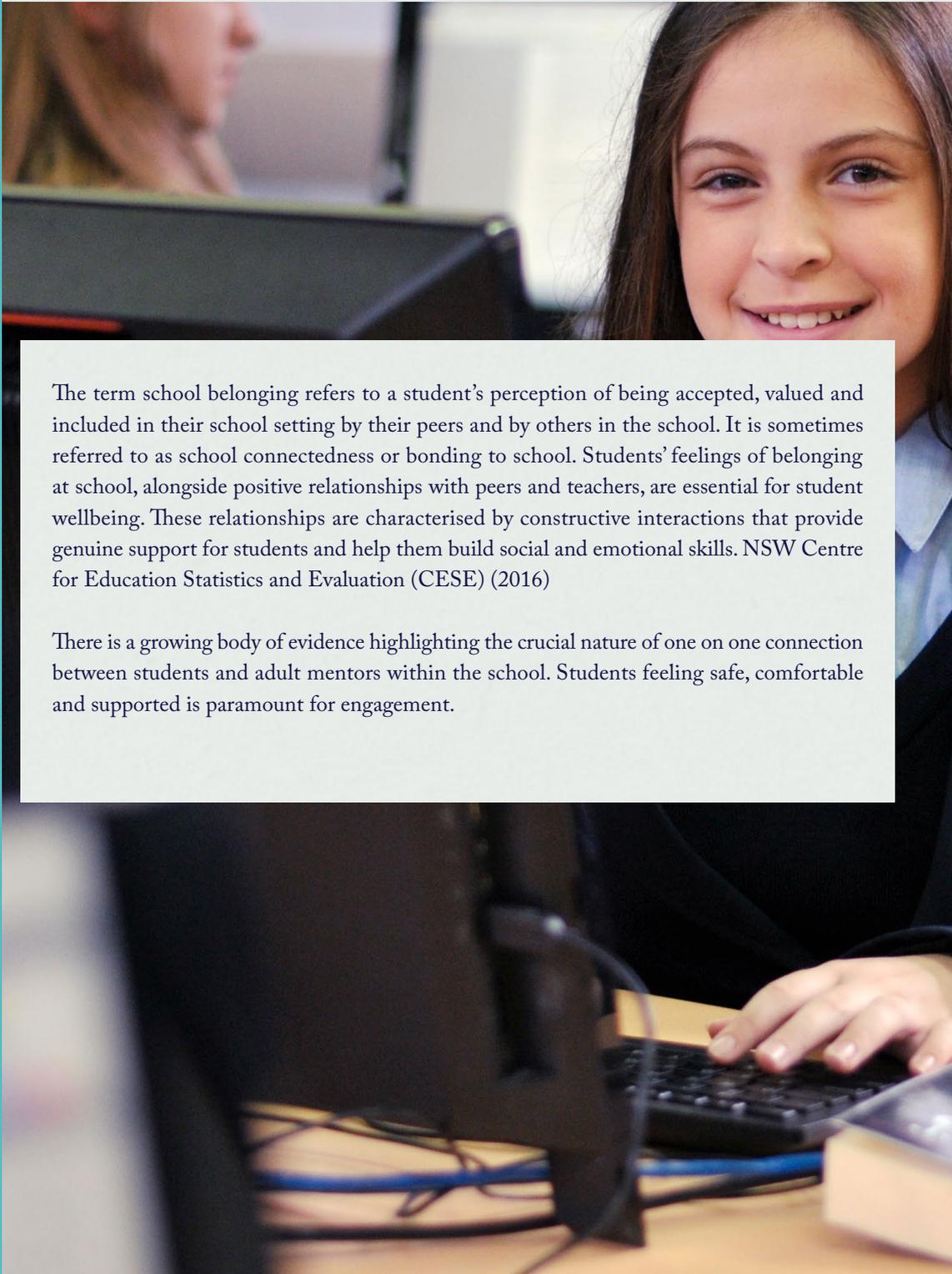


DIMENSION 4:

Student Engagement

Students are fully participating in their education. They feel a sense of belonging and connectedness to school, are intrinsically motivated and self-regulating, and are well organised and socially competent.

Key strategies for student engagement in the transition years include fostering students' relationships with peers and teachers, building their sense of belonging and providing intensive support for learning at school and at home.



The term school belonging refers to a student's perception of being accepted, valued and included in their school setting by their peers and by others in the school. It is sometimes referred to as school connectedness or bonding to school. Students' feelings of belonging at school, alongside positive relationships with peers and teachers, are essential for student wellbeing. These relationships are characterised by constructive interactions that provide genuine support for students and help them build social and emotional skills. NSW Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE) (2016)

There is a growing body of evidence highlighting the crucial nature of one on one connection between students and adult mentors within the school. Students feeling safe, comfortable and supported is paramount for engagement.



Dimension 4

http://inllen.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/JTD_TG_Dimension04.pdf



Fredericks, Blumenfeld and Paris (2004) identify three dimensions of engagement:

1. **Emotional engagement:** Students' emotional reactions in the classroom and in the school. It can be defined as students' sense of belonging or connectedness to the school.
2. **Behavioural engagement:** Students' participation in education, including the academic, social and extracurricular activities of the school.
3. **Cognitive engagement:** Students' investment in learning and their intrinsic motivation and self-regulation.



Emotional Engagement and Transition

Promoting wellbeing at school can substantially improve social and emotional outcomes for young people. If students are feeling supported beyond their classroom then they are more likely to connect with their teachers and peers and have a positive transition into their school.

A study conducted by the [NSW Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation \(CESE\)](#) (2016) identified:

- There is a decline in student engagement during the transition from Year 6 to Year 7 including a decline in students effort in learning, valuing of school outcomes and their sense of belonging at schools
- Students from low SES backgrounds and Aboriginal students experience a greater decline in their sense of belonging from Year 6 to Year 7
- Students' sense of belonging in Year 7 is influenced by their sense of belonging developed in primary school. Students who report positive friendships and teacher-student relationships in primary school are more likely to report a positive sense of belonging in early secondary school
- Students who experience bullying in Year 6 are less likely to have a positive sense of belonging in Year 7. Students' relationships with peers and teachers at the beginning of Year 7 are also positively associated with their sense of belonging in Year 7
- Support for learning at school and at home are both positively associated with a positive sense of belonging in Year 7

It is important to consider a students' wellbeing in all aspects of their lives, that is including home and school life. It is as equally important for families and schools to work together to ensure that a student's transition is positive and that all elements of their wellbeing are considered. Schools and families can work together to put plans in place that ensure that a student is building their self-belief, their confidence and developing positive friendships with their peers both in school and at home.

Regular communication and student support meetings are essential in working from the same page and having the same approach to supporting the student. Sometimes external supports from community agencies are necessary and can provide a great level of support around a student and their family. A team approach integrating both student wellbeing and learning wrapping around the student enables consistent approaches that empower students to seek support from all the adults in their lives.

Supporting Transition through the School Wide Positive Behaviour (SWPBs) and Respectful Relationships Programs

The DET Respectful Relationships initiative and the School Wide Positive Behaviour Supports (SWPBs) framework are two models that have a strong focus on student wellbeing and positive behaviour. Both these frameworks ensure that schools adopt a whole school approach to wellbeing and that there is a positive culture and ethos. Students are supported to have

a positive experience at school and feel respected and valued. Through these models, members of the school (students and staff) have the same positive language, behaviour and values. If students are feeling supported beyond their classroom then they are more likely to connect with their teachers and peers and have a positive transition into their school.

Utilising a Multi-Tiered System Of Support (MTSS)

A multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) is a tiered operating framework that assists in organising the practices and programs of schools to deliver increasingly more intensive supports to increasingly fewer and higher-need students. MTSS is an umbrella concept that includes other well-known tiered response frameworks such as School-Wide Positive Behaviour Supports. Interventions and support are planned and delivered within an MTSS framework in three tiers of increasing intensity, organised according to student need.

Tier 1 - includes high-quality supports which are universal, preventative and core for all students

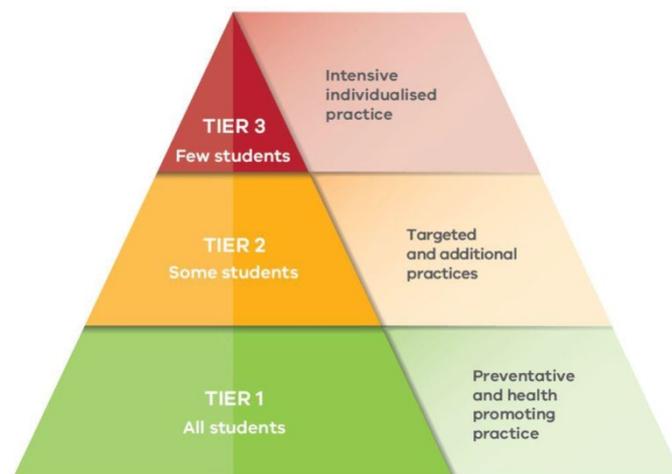
(Transition activities include classroom activities, parent information sessions and materials, orientation programs, student engagement strategies, mentoring programs, social skills programs)

Tier 2 - offers secondary interventions for students who require support in addition to Tier 1. This is targeted, based on their needs and is more intense and frequent.

(Transition activities include early identification of students at risk of disengagement, mentoring support for individual students, extra school visits for individual students, teachers sharing information about individual students)

Tier 3 - is reserved for a very small number of students who need interventions beyond Tier 2 supports. These supports are intensive and highly individualised, often involving a range of professionals, in addition to Tier 1 and 2 supports.

(Transition activities include referral of individual students and families for support, individualised adjustments to the program, Student Support Group activation)



(Health Wellbeing and Inclusion Workforces Practice Model – Tiers, DET 2019)

Common Emotional Engagement Themes Years 4 – 9

Concerns experienced by young people at this age can include; Bullying, social media, teasing (by peers), overwhelmed by the high level of homework, friendship breakdowns, fitting in, fractured teacher-student relationships, loneliness, mental health/illness, physical health, body image, grief and loss around previous friendships, strong need to be independent, gender identity and many more.

Every student has a different experience and can also manage these concerns differently. It's important to understand that not one strategy can assist all students. Some students will have tools available to them that others may not. This can include supportive adults in their lives, positive friendships, healthy help seeking skills and the ability to communicate what is troubling them. For those students that have not developed these tools and find themselves overwhelmed by any change or transition a more individualised plan should

be developed. Families and schools are best to work together to provide the relevant support. There are also agencies and services that can work with families and young people that specialise in particular areas of concern.

Schools can also support students by providing wellbeing programs that are tailored to their needs and provide opportunities for students to develop these tools via Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). This can help students learn the competencies and skills they need to build resilience and effectively manage their emotions, behaviour and relationships with others.



A valuable resource is provided by The CECV (Catholic Education Commission Victoria). It is entitled *Transition for Students with Diverse Needs* <http://www.cecv.catholic.edu.au/getmedia/6190a38b-f536-4c30-9cc1-de95a8fc6668/Transition-students-diverse-needs.aspx?ext=.pdf>

This resource is provided for schools to assist in planning and achieving successful transitions for their students. It has a particular focus on transitioning programs and experiences for students with diverse learning needs.



Behavioural Engagement and Transition

Attendance and engagement are widely recognised as preconditions for maximising learning, wellbeing and transition outcomes for students. Regular absences from school are a critical indicator for disengagement, leading to adverse outcomes for students therefore, early identification and intervention for students with elevated absence rates is critical.

Important research was conducted in Western Australia in 2013. The [Student Attendance and Educational Outcomes: Every Day Counts](#) report (Hancock 2013) included the following findings:

- Patterns of absence are formed at a very early age
- Attendance rates fall substantially in secondary school and are at their lowest in Years 8 and 9
- Absence from school does negatively impact learning and other outcomes for students
- There is no safe number of absence days
- The impact that absence has on the student is not only experienced at the time of the absence but also impacts on their outcomes into the future
- The absences which have the largest impact on students are those due to truancy, parent choice and unexplained absences

These findings have implications for schools when considering effective transition practice. In particular, schools need to:

- Promote high expectations for attendance at an early age and stage. In particular, primary schools need to foster sound habits for both students and families right from the first transition into the school. Secondary schools also need to ensure that transitioning students and families are aware of the schools expectations through clear and effective attendance policies and practice.
- Ensure accuracy of attendance data and follow-up processes to ensure early identification of students with elevated rates of absence
- Provide early and effective intervention for individual students and their families including the development of attendance improvement plans, return to school support and referral to appropriate community agencies.
- Transfer accurate attendance data to the destination school for each transitioning student. For DET schools see [Student Data Transfer](#)

Some high impact strategies for improving attendance for students include:

- Conducting detailed communication with families right from the first day of absence
- Ensuring that parents and students have access to current individual attendance data
- Teaching staff correlate attendance data with other student outcome data in planning teams
- Ensuring attendance policy documentation is simple and accessible

Next is a simple Attendance Health Check for your school

Health Check for your school

Strategy	Actions
<p>Maximise the accuracy and effectiveness of student absence data to support strategic approaches and the early identification of at risk students</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of consistent and accurate roll marking and data management procedures • Accurate and correct use of CASES 21 codes • Regular analysis of data using a variety of data reports • Effective student enrolment and transfer procedures • Regular data clean ups • Feedback of data to parents and students
<p>Adopt a strategic approach to improving student attendance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance made a clear priority in Strategic Plan and Annual Implementation Plans • An Attendance Improvement Team established with supported leadership • Clear and achievable goals and targets established • Evidence utilised to develop and evaluate strategies
<p>Promote a culture of attendance and punctuality through the establishment of high and clear shared community expectation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of workable policy documents which include clear statements of expectations and roles • Regular and effective statements in all school publications and at all available forums • Individual class expectations developed and attendance focused class activities implemented
<p>Develop an effective professional learning program for all staff</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular discussion and activities in staff meetings • Establish shared understandings of absence causal factors and appropriate improvement strategies • Discussion of attendance strategies in staff performance meetings • Training sessions for data entry and management personnel
<p>Prevent student absence through the development of engaging, purposeful and safe learning environments</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective transition support programs • Effective student wellbeing programs and student mentoring structures • Instructional practice which supports student engagement and student growth • Action research projects linking teaching and learning approaches with positive student attendance • Provision of out of hours programs • Provision of careers and pathways counselling
<p>Provide effective support for students at risk of non-attendance and their parents</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediate and apparent follow-up to individual student absence • Organisation of Attendance meetings • The use of Individual Student Attendance Improvement Plans • The use of Student Absence Plans and Return to School Plans • The establishment of Student Support Groups for individual student
<p>Maximise student attendance through the development of links and partnerships with key stakeholders and community groups</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referral of students and parents for support particularly for cases of chronic absence • Development of collaborative programs to support engagement and wellbeing • Regular communication and cooperation with DET Regional Office including referral of parents

Primary and secondary schools can work together to support attendance by:

- Establishing communities of practice focused on attendance
- Developing shared policies and follow-up procedures to foster consistency of practice
- Conducting shared attendance meetings with families between the two settings
- Dissemination of consistent information about attendance to students and families



To raise awareness with families about their child's attendance consider using Nudge Letters. Research has shown that most families underestimate their child's attendance by at least 50%. Nudge letters not only enable parents to access their child's attendance on a regular basis, but to also consider their child's attendance in comparison to their child's peer cohort. This can lead to positive results in improving attendance habits.

Cognitive Engagement and Transition

Students can maximize their learning when they are engaged in work that is appropriately challenging, interesting, relevant, when they receive regular effective feedback on their progress and when their goal setting and feedback shapes the learning.

A resource that schools have at their disposal is the teaching and learning programs delivered to students on a daily basis. Integrating transition into the teaching and learning programs will ensure that transition is constantly on the agenda and as such allow schools to refine policies, guidelines, practices and resources. This approach will enhance the belief that transition is a journey and not a task to be completed at the start and/or end of a school year.

Principal, Westbreen Primary School

To foster cognitive engagement and consistency between primary and secondary classrooms, teaching should involve:

- High expectations of student learning
- Collection of robust evidence of student learning and the use of formative assessment to refine teaching approaches
- Activities focused on developing critical and creative thinking
- Authentic and relevant tasks
- Collaborative group work
- Opportunities for negotiation and individual goal setting

- Integration of student voice into all aspects of classroom practice
- Challenging students at their point of need through knowing students well
- Explicit teaching of metacognition to enable student self-reflection, assessment, self-regulation and responsibility for learning
- Intensive support for students who are achieving below expected levels or who are at risk of disengagement



Case Study

Coburg High School's value of community is well ingrained into the school and extends to the wider community. We share best practice with our feeder primary schools, collaborating in the process of learning. Pre-transition on campus events allow for students to engage in a variety of peer teaching learning programs, across all learning areas. This aims to build early connections with our prospective students, whilst involving them in learning activities that are often different from primary school experiences and thus highly engaging and innovative.

Our transition team is highly dedicated to ensuring a successful transition for all students. We pride ourselves on knowing each and every student well before their arrival.

Knowing each student's strengths, interests and learning needs ensures our programs are inclusive of every child, whilst also being appropriately challenging. An exclusive 8-week pre-orientation program leads successfully into Orientation Day, serving to offer additional assistance to allay students' anxieties during this critical time.

The beginning of the school year shifts the focus of our efforts to forming new connections and engendering a real sense of belonging to Coburg. A structured Start Up program assists students to learn the functions of the school, whilst also working in a range of teams. Purposefully structured events are planned for the beginning of the school year to encourage relationship development between our students and their families.

Homegroup and Peer Support programs nurtures students' academic, social, emotional and physical well-being, and provides opportunities to try new and exciting possibilities to extend particular skills or interests. Through these programs we develop students' personal resources to foster their sense of self capability and interpersonal skills, leading to capable young people who strive to achieve their personal best, for themselves and their community and meeting our goal to be a school where students are happy, healthy and resilient learners.



Case Study

In 2017 William Ruthven Secondary College embarked on a journey to revamp the Year 9 curriculum and electives. After analysing the attitudes to school survey, it was evident that there was a high level of disconnection with the school and disengagement in their education, and a need to improve student voice and agency.

A staff committee was formed to develop a variety of proposals with a range of pedagogical models for a revised Year 9 program. The committee then embarked on visiting a variety of school settings and exploring alternative models.

The proposals were then presented to the staff by the committee. Staff were able to ask questions to clarify each model and were asked to submit a recommendation of

the proposed models. As part of the proposed model we also surveyed the student to look at revamping our electives for our Year 9 and 10 students. After surveying the students, it was evident that we were required to consult the students and explain the purpose of the elective program. We wanted students to give us information (student voice) on what they were passionate about learning as an elective. As a result, we moved from traditional electives to specific electives such as school of rock, where students learn to play a musical instrument, form a band with other students and learn to play songs together for our end of year concert. As a trade-off to ensure we could have maximum numbers and offer a wider variety of electives we combined year nine and ten students in electives. We have also refined certain elective parameters ensuring all domain areas and Victorian Curriculum are addressed over a two-year rotation.

A substantial challenge has been the documentation of the PEEL program in Year 9 where we have a specific focus inquiry-based learning for English, Mathematics, Science and Humanities as well as the documentation of the new electives for our Year 9 and 10 students. By engaging and consulting the students we have noticed a significant increase in student engagement and behaviour for the electives and PEEL program.

For any school looking to embark on similar program we would recommend going to see different school settings in action. Remember you know your school context well, you cannot replicate something from another school but you can recreate a version, by adapting and modifying aspects to suit your school.



For further strategies and activities to support sharing practice and knowledge in the transition Years 4-9 refer to the [Transition Review Process Session 2 Grid and Model](#)