

# Sixty Ways to Build Community at School

Community strengthens through the hundreds of little actions we take every day. Read this list and put a star next to those that you've already done or regularly do. Pick several to try this month, and schedule those on the calendar or someplace where you'll remember to do them. Add your own ideas as well! If you do one of these every day for a month, I guarantee that your community will be far wider, deeper, and stronger than ever before.

1. Ask some students (if they're old enough) to take you on a tour of their neighborhood. If you teach young children, ask one of their parents to take you on a tour.
2. Shop in the stores where your students shop.
3. On a Sunday morning, walk around the neighborhood where your students live.
4. Ask your students what their favorite restaurants are and try one.
5. Host a back-to-school potluck for your students and their families, even if you teach 130 students. Bring a member of your family or a friend to that potluck.
6. Learn the names of your students' parents/guardians (especially if you have fewer than 35, you should be able to remember their names). Find out if they prefer to be addressed by their first or last name.
7. Smile when you talk to your students and to their families.
8. Have lunch with students occasionally. Or if you teach 30 kids or fewer, have lunch with pairs of kids in the beginning of the school year so that after a few weeks, you've had lunch with all your students. They can bring their lunch. You bring cookies or strawberries.
9. Do home visits. (But first, do some learning about how to make home visits comfortable and meaningful for all.)
10. If you teach a reasonable number of students, meet in person with all of their parents/guardians during the beginning of the year. Ask one good question—perhaps, "What do you think is most important for me to know about your child?" and make the purpose of the meeting to listen to them.
11. Send postcards to all of your students before school starts to introduce yourself.
12. Accept invitations to students' special events (birthday parties, quinceañeras, First Communion, and so on) and, especially if you're in a new community, try to attend as many as possible.
13. Identify a colleague you'd like to know better, and initiate lunch, a walk, or some other activity with him or her.
14. Ask to observe a colleague whom you admire. When you observe, write down all the bright spots and highlights. Share those with a colleague.
15. Ask a colleague, "What's the most impactful book you've read related to our work?"
16. Initiate a book study with colleagues.
17. Ask a colleague, "Why did you become a teacher?"
18. Even if you're an introvert and you hate staff social events, force yourself to go. Go for an hour. It won't be that bad, and it'll be worth it.

# Sixty Ways to Build Community at School

19. Ask your principal to tell you about a student he or she cared deeply about.
20. Tell your supervisor a few things you appreciate about him or her.
21. Ask your principal (or supervisor) if he or she has any professional goals that he or she would be willing to share with you.
22. Ask your principal (or supervisor) what he or she loves about his or her job.
23. Bring a house plant to front office staff .
24. Ask front office staff if there's anything you could do to make their work easier.
25. Say good morning/afternoon when you walk through the front office.
26. Ask the custodial or lunchroom staff what they enjoy doing when they're not at work.
27. Ask the custodial or lunchroom staff if there's a student they have connected with or whom they really like.
28. Ask the custodial or lunchroom staff about their experience as a student.
29. Tell the custodial or lunchroom staff what you appreciate about them.
30. Tell a colleague that you're aware that you're not supposed to have favorite students, but ask, "Who is your favorite kid this year?"
31. Show a colleague a piece of student work that you're really excited about.
32. Eat lunch at least once a week with a colleague or two.
33. Eat lunch in the cafeteria with your students (even just once).
34. Attend an athletic event, play, or concert that your students participate in.
35. When you welcome your students to class, stand at the door and express enthusiasm at seeing them.
36. Greet each student by name as he or she enters your classroom. Shake hands or give a high five.
37. On Monday, chat with a few students as they arrive or during recess or lunch and ask, "Tell me about a moment this weekend when you felt happy."
38. Go on an appreciation hunt. Look for every little thing to appreciate in your students' or colleagues' actions. Name those things in an authentic way: "Kathryn, I really appreciate that you always greet me in the morning. It makes me feel welcomed."
39. Introduce people to each other who might appreciate and learn from each other.
40. Ask for introductions: "I'm looking for another eighth-grade science teacher whom I can observe teaching this unit. If you can recommend anyone, I'd be grateful for an introduction."
41. Tell colleagues what you're working on learning as a teacher and ask for their help: "This year I'm working on being more organized. If you have any resources that might be useful to me, I'd love to know about them."
42. Ask a colleague, a staff member, or a supervisor if there's something you can help him or her with one day after school.

# Sixty Ways to Build Community at School

43. If your school has counselors or student support specialists, find a time to meet with them individually. Learn about what they do and how they can support you. Ask them why they got into their field. Ask them how you can make the most of what they can offer.
44. Surprise someone with a breakfast treat—a bagel or fruit salad.
45. Bring a small snack to share with your grade level or department during a meeting.
46. Host your grade level or department for a potluck dinner.
47. Pick up trash around school during lunch or after school.
48. Stand outside school during dismissal and greet families—especially those whose students you don't teach.
49. Take photos of your students during the first month of school, print them, and post them in your classroom or on a bulletin board.
50. Invite students to bring in and post photos of their families and loved ones.
51. Propose a bulletin board in the staff room where all the teachers post photos of themselves at the same age as the students they now teach (and then help create it if you get a positive response).
52. Post a few photos of your family, pets, or personal life in your classroom near your desk. Be thoughtful about the images you select.
53. Create an anonymous appreciation box in your classroom and perhaps in the front office, and invite your students and colleagues to leave notes for each other there. Open the box together and read appreciations once a month.
54. Host a Grandparents and Extended Family potluck lunch and get to know your students' families.
55. Celebrate the birthdays of students and staff with simple acknowledgments and appreciation.
56. Ask teachers at your school which other schools they think you should visit for ideas and inspiration.
57. Visit another school in your district or network, ideally during the day so that you can observe a class or two, but after school is worthwhile too. Walk through the halls and look for inspiration; knock on a door or two and chat with teachers.
58. When you meet teachers from other schools, ask them if there's something they do in their classroom that they feel really good about and would be willing to share.
59. Meet central office staff, learn about how they support school sites, and make a friend. Reach out and ask for help, resources, coaching, and feedback.
60. Meet your superintendent. Stalk the halls of the central offices, linger outside of board meetings, and then boldly introduce yourself. Offer an appreciation for his or her work and invite him or her to drop by your classroom any time.