

# Punchbowl 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](mailto:info@cese.nsw.gov.au).

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**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 Punchbowl Public School

Punchbowl Public School is a coeducational government primary school located on the lands of Darug and Eora peoples for students in preschool to Year 6. As of 2023, Punchbowl Public School has an enrolment of 502 students. 92% of students identify as having a non-English speaking background, with 34 students coming from refugee backgrounds and 10 students who are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. The school has a Family Occupation and Education Index (FOEI)<sup>1</sup> of 136, indicating that it serves a relatively socioeconomically disadvantaged population.

Punchbowl Public School has an on-site public preschool that caters to 80 students over the week. The school also has an early intervention preschool, with 28 students attending the early intervention program, as well as 2 support unit classes catering for students with autism. The school prides itself on having a large and diverse staff, including 2 community language teachers teaching Arabic, student learning support officers and English as additional language or dialect teachers.

Punchbowl 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 Punchbowl Public School was 10.6% 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 on par with the NSW average. In 2023, the score was 9% 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 Punchbowl Public School to facilitate sense of belonging

The principal at Punchbowl Public School defines belonging as students feeling accepted, valued and connected to the school and wider community. When students feel connected to the school, they feel proud to be a 'Punchbowl kid' – they feel part of the school's legacy. The principal also emphasises the importance of a collective school identity. While the students and staff are recognised and celebrated as individuals, they also abide by collective values and journey together in their learning.

There are different ways that Punchbowl Public School maintains a positive sense of belonging for students, especially for students from disadvantaged or vulnerable backgrounds.

The strategies discussed include:

- early intervention and transition between early childhood learning and Kindergarten
- strategies to support disadvantaged or vulnerable students
- supporting students in their academic learning
- implementing the PAX Good Behaviour Game.

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.

<sup>1</sup> 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.



## Supporting families through community-based care and school transition

The principal at Punchbowl Public School believes that when families experience a sense of belonging, this will organically lead to their children having similar feelings of safety and trust within the school community.

To facilitate this sense of belonging for children and their families, Punchbowl Public School hosts an in-built Community Centre as part of the School as a Community Centre project (SaCC), one of 46 schools across the state participating in this project. The SaCC is open to all families in the local community, with programs for children aged 0 to 8 years old. Programs include playgroups, adult literacy lessons, technology tutorials, homework clubs, parenting courses, health promotion courses and employment programs, all offered with bilingual workers on-site for families who need translation. The SaCC facilitator at Punchbowl Public School has built a strong relationship with the wider community and has collaborated closely with local service providers to offer these activities to families.

The SaCC has the additional benefit of providing a 'soft landing spot' for families before their children start school. The principal emphasises the role of early childhood education and intervention to develop positive wellbeing. Both the SaCC and the on-site public preschool work together to get to know the children and their families before they start their formal schooling, which assists Kindergarten teachers in identifying students who might need extra support during the transition.

## Strategies to support disadvantaged or vulnerable students

Punchbowl Public School seeks to guarantee that all students, irrespective of their socioeconomic status, experience every aspect of schooling and have opportunities for personal and academic success. The school has systems and processes in place to ensure that every student has access to necessary resources without having to navigate administrative hurdles. One such system involves centralised student data management through Sentral software. The centralised database allows the school to track student needs, helping to deliver targeted help to families without them having to always ask for support. The leadership staff and classroom teachers consistently engage with students and their families (for example, out on the playground during pick-up times) to build rapport and proactively respond to evolving needs. This foundation of trust means that when the school offers tailored help to families, this assistance is accepted without fear of judgement.

The principal acknowledges the school's significant access to equity funds that can be used flexibly to support students and their families. This funding has, for example, enabled the creation of new positions, including a deputy principal focused on student support and community engagement. The additional staffing helps the school to engage with external agencies, such as National Disability Insurance Scheme programs, and to successfully manage complex issues with students and families that arise, allowing teachers to focus on teaching and supporting students in the classroom.



## Supporting students in their academic learning

There is a firm belief at Punchbowl Public School that wellbeing and academic achievement go hand in hand. The principal emphasises that for students to truly feel a sense of belonging, they need to be confident learners and know they are being supported with their learning at school.

The school implements individualised learning programs for students requiring additional support and has interventions across all grades for reading. The learning and support team is closely connected with the school community right through from preschool to Year 6. This team includes a community liaison officer who is a respected and trusted community member. For targeted students, in-school speech therapy and behaviour therapy are offered throughout the week. Providing these services helps support students' readiness to learn and ultimately their wellbeing and academic outcomes at school. The principal acknowledges that Punchbowl Public School is a complex school environment, with many factors impacting families' lives, such as mental health challenges and socioeconomic disadvantage. Ultimately, the goal of Punchbowl Public School is to provide learning opportunities for all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background.

## Implementing whole-school classroom management strategies

The Punchbowl Public School's leadership team has established strategies to create a positive learning environment for students, closely linked to their sense of wellbeing in the classroom. In the last 3 years, Punchbowl Public School has implemented a trauma-informed approach for classroom management. This approach focuses on promoting peace, productivity, health, and happiness in classrooms. It includes a set of proven strategies that teachers use daily to help students regulate their behaviour, build better friendships, control impulsive actions, and make positive choices at school.

The school initially implemented the program with one year level and has progressively introduced it across the school. Now, the whole school is using the same language around wellbeing and expected behaviour in the classroom. This aligns well with the existing positive behavior structures that were already in place at the school. The whole-school approach has had a big impact on students across all cohorts, helping them feel that they belong, are safe, well looked after by teachers, and ready to learn.

To ensure everyone was on the same page, all staff members went through the same trauma-informed training to ensure a unified approach to classroom management. The school is intentional about carefully choosing programs in alignment with the needs of Punchbowl Public School and allowing staff members to access comprehensive professional learning so that any new classroom management strategies can be successfully embedded at the school. The intention is to create lasting change in the classroom climate over the long term, rather than being a quick-fix solution.



## Conclusion

Punchbowl Public School fosters a strong sense of belonging through early intervention and seamless transitions from early childhood learning to Kindergarten, heavily drawing upon their School as a Community Centre program to facilitate children's sense of belonging even before they begin formal schooling. The school employs targeted strategies to support disadvantaged and vulnerable students, using effective administrative processes to provide support for students and families. Academic learning is prioritised, with a variety of programs and resources aimed at enhancing students' confidence in their learning. Additionally, using the PAX Good Behaviour Game across the whole school promotes a peaceful and productive classroom environment, encouraging self-regulation, positive peer interactions, and prosocial decision-making. These comprehensive efforts collectively create an inclusive and supportive school community where students of all backgrounds can thrive.



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