Community Builder: Social Norms Contract

Student Objective

Students will adhere to social norms established as a classroom community.

Overview

Social norms are ideals and standards of behavior shared by a group. They can be used with students in the classroom and with adults during meetings. Establishing norms enables learning to happen more respectfully and efficiently. Allowing involvement in determining the norms gives students and/or adults a sense of ownership that leads to enhanced adherence to the norms. It is recommended that social norms be developed at the beginning of each school year and revisited as needed throughout the year. The following social norms are an example from Learning Forward (www.learningforward.org; used with permission, all rights reserved):

- **A**sk questions.
- **E**ngage fully.
- **I**ntegrate new information.
- **O**pen your mind to diverse views.
- **U**tilize what you learn.

Materials/Set-Up

- Chart paper
- Markers

Instructional Steps

- Define norms and give some examples from within the school (e.g., fire alarm procedure, attendance process, lunch line instructions) that will help to build background knowledge of what norms are before the lesson.
- Discuss with students the importance and purpose of setting social norms that everyone can agree upon in order to promote positive learning experiences.
- Introduce the norms listed above—or an appropriate acronym of the educator's choosing—and solicit additional suggestions for expectations and behaviors from the class, ensuring that all suggestions are framed in a positive manner (e.g., "Be a good listener" or "Listen carefully," instead of "Don't talk when others are talking").
- If choosing an acronym, such as COMMIT, have each letter in the word represent a desired behavior.

- Determine students' levels of agreement with the norms by asking, "Is this set of norms something that, as-is, we can all agree to live with and practice?"
  - It is important that the norms apply to everyone in the classroom learning community, and that all community members feel empowered to bring anyone back to the norms. This means that reminders to adhere to community norms can be teacher-to-student, student-to-student, or student-to-teacher.
  - Refine the norms, as needed, and post them on the wall for all students to sign.
- Utilize the acronym to remind others that they are doing something that is not supported by the agreed-upon norms.
- As a follow-up to creating a set of social norms, have students sign an agreement that is posted on the wall. The agreement may state:

  "You are entering a classroom with a diverse community, engaged in mutual respect and a global perspective."
- Periodically, the teacher or a student can introduce a new "policy" to discuss with the class to redirect a behavior or situation.

Extension

- To increase rigor, group students and have them discuss and list words describing the tone that they want to set in their group for a positive learning experience (e.g., study, learn, effort, success, college). Direct groups to pick one word to represent the entire group. Remind groups that this is about what they need to have in place in order for this to be a successful year.