



Moving from Isolation to →

Connection & Community

Too often, young people experience a sense of isolation at school because building strong relationships is not prioritized. In these environments, learners and adults work together in the same space without knowing one another deeply. This is perpetuated by instructional approaches that prioritize independent work over group work and competition over collaboration. In addition, discipline practices—such as detentions, suspensions, and expulsions—exclude learners from the community as a punishment. In order to prepare all young people to thrive in and transform the world, our schools must be relationship-rich and value authentic connection. All learners must be deeply known and respected by a variety of adults and peers, collaborate closely with one another, and form meaningful relationships across lines of difference that nurture empathy, support inclusion, and build social capital.

Developmentally supportive relationships and a sense of belonging can flourish in environments that prioritize connection and community for *all* learners. This helps learners to explore their diverse identities, buffers against stress and trauma, and contributes to positive emotions and mindsets. It also helps young people see value in the experiences they have at school, provides a critical scaffold that makes learning more manageable, creates opportunities for discussion and higher-order meaning making, and allows learners to give and receive feedback from one another. Learning environments that prioritize connection and a sense of community also build skills and mindsets—such as collaboration, empathy, and communication—that are critical for the emotional and economic well-being of all learners. These skills and mindsets enable learners to thrive in a diverse, globally connected society where the employment landscape increasingly requires the ability to build and maintain personal relationships.

This Leap Means..

- ▶ Learners engaging in tasks that foster collaboration and a reliance on one another.
- ▶ Learners deeply listening to, and learning about, one another.
- ▶ Learners supporting and encouraging one another.
- ▶ Learners working with others in the school community to grow and heal after difficult situations.
- ▶ Learners experiencing families and community members sharing their knowledge with the school.

Inequitable, Industrial-Era Learning

Isolation

Building strong relationships is not prioritized; learners and adults work together in the same space but often without knowing one another deeply, and teaching and learning approaches prioritize independent work and competition.



Equitable, 21st-Century Learning

Connection & Community

The environment is relationship-rich: learners are deeply known and respected by adults and peers, collaborate with one another, and form relationships that nurture empathy, foster belonging, support well-being, and build social capital.

Transcend's Leaps for Equitable, 21st Century Learning are informed by the [science of learning and development](#); equity in education; and [contemporary societal, political, economic, and scientific trends](#).

Connection and Community at St. Benedict's Preparatory School

St. Benedict's Prep is a 7–12 school located in Newark, New Jersey and operated by the Benedictine monks of Newark Abbey. Building community is at the core of St. Benedict's approach to helping its students, many of whom have faced significant challenges related to chronic poverty and racism, fulfill their potential. When young people enroll at St. Benedict's, they join a lifelong community. Guided by the moto, "Whatever hurts my brother hurts me. What hurts my sister hurts me," students and staff strive to grow in mutual respect, to work and pray together, and to take responsibility for one another. St. Benedict's focus on building community is reflected in a number of their core practices:

- ▶ **The Group System** – St. Benedict's students are divided into 18 groups named after a St. Benedict's alumnus or a prominent figure from the school's history. The groups become an important part of students' academic and social lives. They meet for 45 minutes each day, compete in events, and work together to run the school. Each group elects a Group Leader who is responsible for knowing about the whereabouts and well-being of all group members, oversees group activities, and represents the group in leadership meetings.
- ▶ **Convocation** – Each school day begins with a 45-minute "convo," where all students, faculty, and staff gather as a community. Convo includes time for group leaders to stand up and account for any members of their group who are not in attendance that day and, if possible, provide a reason why. This is followed by time for prayer, announcements from students or faculty, and sometimes a message from the school's leader, Fr. Edwin. Convo enables students to build intentional brotherhood and accountability for every student in their group.
- ▶ **Overnight** – All incoming students attend this intense, five-day orientation during the first week of school. The purpose of the Overnight is to teach incoming students about St. Benedict's history, logistics, school songs, and aspects of what it means to be a Gray Bee, and induct them into the community. It is also their first experience with their student group, which remains consistent throughout their time at St. Benedict's.
- ▶ **Trail** – At the end of freshman year, students complete a 55-mile hike on the Appalachian Trail in groups of approximately eight students. The purpose of the trail is to foster leadership and a sense of collaboration among students, who are expected to stay together throughout the entirety of the trail. Students prepare for the hike for almost a full month through practice hikes and classes on topics like cooking, camping, leadership, and first aid. It is largely older students, not faculty, that make the hike possible. The older students work as instructors before the hike and play coordination and support roles during the hike itself.
- ▶ **Alumni Network** – After graduation, students continue to stay in touch. The school coordinates on- and off-campus alumni events, and alumni remain involved in fundraising, and visit the school for events like Convocation.

Additional School Examples to Explore

Ann Richards School for Young Women Leaders – ARS utilizes collaborative and discussion-based learning approaches throughout their all-girls middle and high school. In addition, they seek to foster sisterhood between students through routines and traditions like Community Circle and 6th grade–12th grade student pairings.

Codman Academy – Students are part of a single crew their whole time at Codman. In crews students develop relationships, dedicate time to service projects, and engage in conversations and check-ins about their progress and other school-related issues.

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