

STRONG CONNECTIONS

GRADES 1-8 • SEPTEMBER 15 & 18

HANOVER SCHOOL DIVISION | 2023-24 SCHOOL YEAR

BUILDING RELATIONAL CONNECTIONS

Strong Connections aims to provide Grades 1-8 teachers and staff with the opportunity to build relational connections with each student in their classroom and the school community.

SCHEDULE AND FORMAT

Students will attend the full day either September 15th OR September 18th. Schools will assign the day each child will attend and communicate this in advance to parents/caregivers. Schools will do their best to accommodate families with children attending multiple schools so that family members can participate in Strong Connections on the same day.

Students attending a Strong Connections day may be separated into two groups depending on their grade level. For example, one group may work with staff through various engaging and interactive learning activities while the second group meets with their homeroom teacher. The small group format creates a small student-to-teacher ratio for half the school day, facilitating relational connections.



**“You cannot teach the mind until you have the heart.
Connect before you direct.”**

~ Dr. Gordon Neufeld - Neufeld Institute



WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF STRONG CONNECTIONS?

With a small student-to-teacher ratio, teachers will have the opportunity to learn about each student socially, emotionally, and academically through various learning activities that promote relationship building.

Research has made it clear (Cornelius-White, 2007; Hattie, 2014; Kincade et al., 2020) that strong teacher-student relationships are very important and significantly impact student learning. For example, teachers may want to learn about what activities students enjoy participating in away from school, what excites them about attending school, and what are some things that might worry them about school. Teachers may also want to know who the student's friends are at school and whom they might want to be friends with at school.

We want our students to feel that they belong at their school. Building positive relationships with teachers and peer-to-peer relationships can impact students' sense of belonging at school. School belonging is positively related to good academic performance (Sari, 2012) and encourages stronger prosocial behaviours (Jose et al., 2012). Small group activities will promote building connections with students to help create a safe, caring, and engaging learning environment where every student feels that they belong.

As an added benefit, and if needed, the day provides teachers with an opportunity to collect additional academic information. Teachers might check for continuity between the data collected in June and what they have seen from the students after the first week of school in September. The day may also provide an opportunity for teachers to complete assessments of students new to the Hanover School Division.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER STRONG CONNECTIONS?

At the beginning of each school year, school staff work to create class and grade profiles for their students. These profiles help staff understand each student's strengths, challenges and next steps.

Upon completion of Strong Connections, teachers will plan the next steps for each student, including setting learning goals for individual students and the entire class. These learning goals help teachers understand where to start with their students. For example, teachers might have learned during Strong Connections that several students are interested in learning about flight, simple machines, or world geography. Knowing these interests of their students will help teachers engage students in the curriculum early in the school year.

Further learnings from Strong Connections might include how students feel about particular curriculums such as mathematics. If students express that they enjoy math, teachers can plan accordingly. However, if students do not enjoy math and it creates significant anxiety, teachers can plan with this in mind.

Strong Connections are integral to the continued success of serving students in the Hanover School Division. Our staff is excited to strengthen and build new connections with students each year. Please contact your child's school if you have any questions/concerns.

