

3 pillars for students' wellbeing

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When students feel they are part of a supportive and caring environment, attendance increases and dropout rates decrease. - NSTP file pic

LETTERS: THIS letter is written in light of the recent focus to reform and improve education at a systemic level.

Besides focusing on exterior changes of a school, intrinsic motivation should be cultivated in students at the secondary school level to encourage them to pursue higher education.

Higher education marks a significant transitional phase in the lives of students, with the initial year being pivotal as they endeavour to manage life goals and challenges.

Cultural norms and expectations influence the desire and motivation to pursue higher education.

Emphasis on external validation instead of intrinsic motivation can hamper students' commitment to lifelong learning.

The emotional and psychological welfare of students is often obscured by the focus on academic achievements and standardised testing.

Cultural beliefs and practices surrounding education can either stigmatise or support mental health in students.

Students need to feel a strong sense of autonomy, connectedness to their school, and confidence in their academic competence to thrive and achieve excellence.

These essential components must be cultivated in the education system, as they have significant effects on students' desire to engage in lifelong learning.

Autonomy in education refers to the students' capacity to have a say in their learning process. This doesn't mean they should dictate the curriculum, but rather have a choice in how they learn, a voice in classroom discussions, and an opportunity to pursue their interests in the school structure.

When students feel their opinions are valued, they become more engaged. This engagement is a cornerstone of intrinsic motivation, which studies have shown to be a precursor to deep learning and creativity.

A sense of belonging in the school is another critical element that influences a student's decision to continue with higher education. It's the emotional glue that binds a student to their teachers, peers and the broader educational community.

When students feel they are part of a supportive and caring environment, attendance increases and dropout rates decrease.

Moreover, they are more likely to participate in school activities and take an active role in their education. This sense of belonging can act as a buffer against the stressors of school life, fostering resilience and a positive school climate.

Scholastic competence and confidence, or the students' belief in their ability to succeed academically, influences their performance. When students believe they can meet the challenges presented to them, they are more likely to embrace difficult tasks, persist in the face of setbacks, and achieve higher levels of academic success.

This competence becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy; success breeds confidence and confidence breeds further success.

These three pillars — autonomy, sense of belonging and competence — are not just indicators of a positive learning environment; they are also the ingredients for students' wellbeing.

It is incumbent upon educators, parents and policymakers to foster these conditions in schools.

We must shift the paradigm from a purely performance-based model to one that regards students as whole beings, whose emotional and psychological health is as vital as their academic skills.

In doing so, we will not only elevate the quality of education but also cultivate a generation capable of genuine happiness and societal contribution — a true measure of success.

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