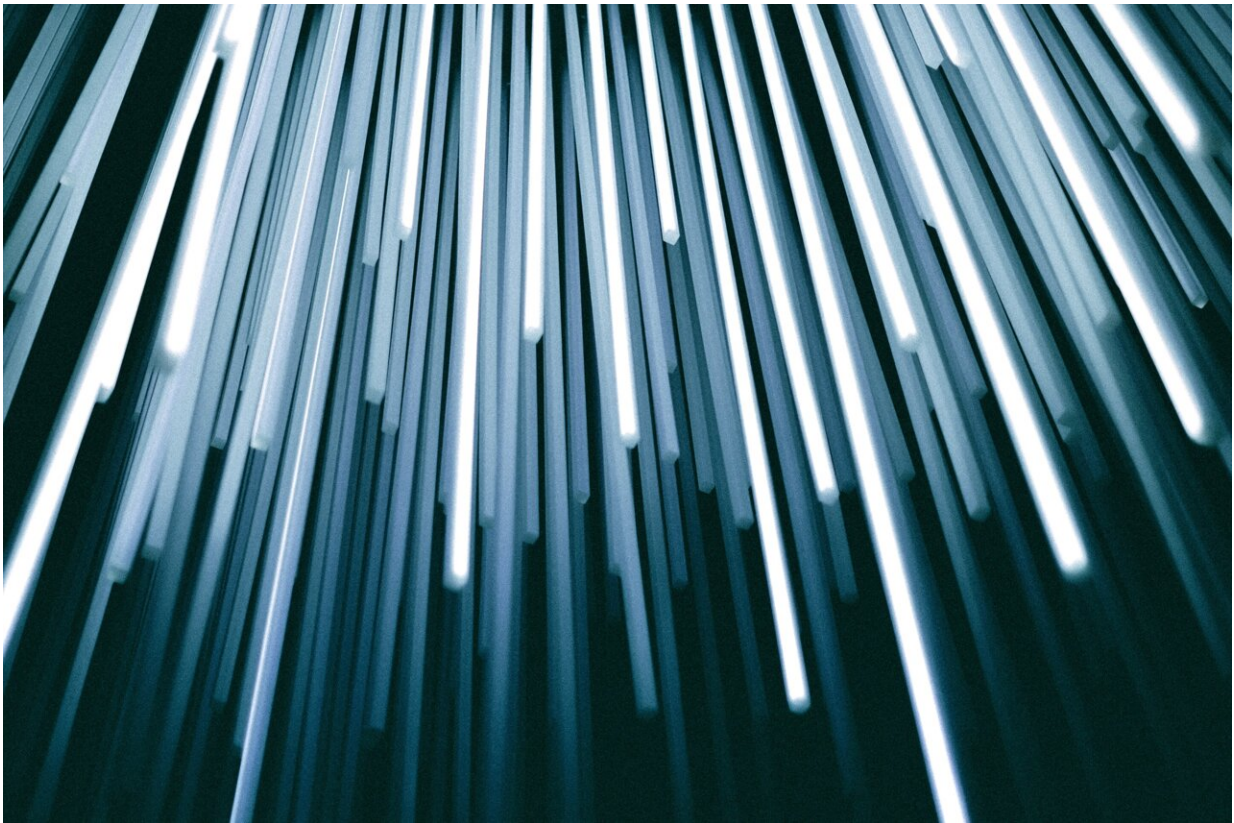


Preparing kids for high school? Here's what parents should know

October 16 2015, by Cristy Burne, Sciencenetwork Wa



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Before you shirk canteen duty (again), consider your kids.

Research by Curtin University scientist Dr Sharmila Vaz suggests

parents who are involved in their child's primary [school](#) environment improve their offspring's perception of belonging at [secondary school](#).

"To belong in school is to feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported," Dr Vaz says.

"Students who report greater belonging in school are more likely to succeed academically, less likely to engage in health-compromising behaviours such as alcohol or drug use, and are more likely to have better mental health."

Dr Vaz's research suggests fostering a sense of belonging in children should start early, with children who feel they belong in their final year of primary school more likely to feel they belong in secondary school.

Her data comes from 266 local [students](#) transitioning from 52 primary schools to 152 secondary schools.

Sense of resilience and classroom goals foster belongingness

In strengthening the student's sense of belongingness Dr Vaz says attributes such as resilience and coping skills matter the most.

"Promoting students' sense of competence and self-worth is very important, ensuring they cope well and use productive coping strategies like problem solving rather than worrying and escapism," she says.

"A second factor is the way classroom goals are structured, so teachers can empower students by affording direction and initiative on how to pursue academic goals, and providing a landscape where everyone feels empowered."

But what about your family's socioeconomic status? Or those thousands of dollars you're spending on private schooling?

Despite 40 per cent of the [primary school](#) cohort moving from the government education system into the Catholic or non-government system for their secondary schooling, Dr Vaz says the type of school didn't impact student belonging.

"Being at a government school, or having a lower socioeconomic status, or having a disability didn't influence belonging," Dr Vaz says.

"What matters is student empowerment and resilience.

"This is really an empowering message, to say anyone can take the initiative to ensure that kids belong."

Dr Vaz says classrooms where everyone is equally valued help promote belonging.

"If the school promotes the fact that everyone is empowered and accepted and included, regardless of whether they have a medical condition, then students have a better sense of belonging," she says.

Dr Vaz also found that in secondary school, children who focused more on effort-based rather than socially geared goals were more likely to feel a strong sense of belonging.

More information: "Belongingness in Early Secondary School: Key Factors that Primary and Secondary Schools Need to Consider." *PLoS ONE* 10(9): e0136053. [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0136053](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0136053)

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