

INTEGRATING SEL INTO INSTRUCTION

Schools serving high concentrations of poor students often view socioemotional learning (SEL), which is instruction that teaches self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making as an “extra” that can be considered once academic competencies have improved. However, research clearly shows that students with low socioemotional skills are limited in their ability to benefit from academic instruction.

SEL can help students from disadvantaged backgrounds overcome the cognitive and psychological traumas associated with growing up in stressful, unstable, and unsafe environments. SEL improves concentration, responding to directions, stress management, and many other factors that enables school success.

Because many teachers and schools have limited time and must navigate instruction first accountability climates, these research-to-practice briefs are dedicated to fostering the integration of SEL into academic instruction.

The Benefits of Taking Time for Social and Emotional Learning

Introduction

The development of students’ social and emotional skills goes hand-in-hand with their academic preparation and success. In fact, schools that provide students with social and emotional learning (SEL) supports tend to see increases in both achievement and engagement because students are better able to a) navigate social situations, b) understand and manage their emotions, and c) avoid risky behaviors that might lead to punitive discipline. Teachers that integrate social-emotional competencies into the classroom not only enhance the academic learning of their students, but also peak students’ intellectual curiosities to imagine the world beyond their individual classrooms.

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) supports academic achievement by helping students more mindful of their behaviors while simultaneously increasing their abilities to construct meaningful relationships with peers and school staff members.

Social-Emotional Competence and School Success

The development of academic skills is heavily reliant on students’ participation in the classroom. Interpersonal skills, intrinsic motivation, and the ability to focus and engage appropriately in class are key enablers for learning. Research indicates that high levels of these skills are associated with increased achievement (i.e., higher GPAs, higher test

scores), while lower levels are associated with low achievement and greater likelihood of at-risk status. In fact, studies show that students displaying early interpersonal skills can predict later academic achievement outcomes just as well or better than students exhibiting early cognitive abilities.

Social and Emotional Competence and Peers

Students peer relationships also benefit tremendously from improving their social and emotional competence. Research suggests that students who build these competencies often have more friends and positive connections with peers. They are also less likely to be and feel rejected, isolated, and bullied. As the research on bullying clearly articulates, negative social interactions can severely inhibit learning, reduce motivation, discourage school attendance, lower self-esteem, and beget greater anxiety in students, while also increasing risky behaviors like drug and alcohol use and carrying weapons. Students exposed to SEL tend to have more friends and tend to be both happier and more successful in schools in general.

Social and Emotional Competence and Teacher Support

The development of these competencies also helps students form more robust relationships with teachers. Research indicates that students who are socially and emotionally competent tend to receive more support from teachers and have more positive school-related goals, which contributes to their overall success in schools. On the other hand, the absence or

underdevelopment of social and emotional competencies of either the teacher or the student can work against the goals of learning. Studies indicate that negative teacher-student relationships increase the likelihood of risky behaviors in students. Thus, it is critical for the student and the teacher to be well versed in SEL competencies.

Power of School Connectedness

Building SEL competencies can strengthen the connectedness of schools by improving teacher and peer relationships. These relationships are a powerful source of support for academic growth and for the development of healthy behaviors in students. For example, greater school connectedness is associated with higher levels of academic engagement and achievement, better behavior, and lowered likelihood of grade repetition. Furthermore, effective classroom management tends to come more easily when students and teachers are socially and emotionally competent. Having a greater sense of school connectedness can also make a significant difference in students' likelihood of persisting

through to graduation. Approximately half of high school dropouts leave because they feel disconnected from the school overall. This effect is heightened for students who come from communities that are considered at-risk. Additionally, greater connection to school can act as a protective factor for students by helping to keep them safe and out of trouble. As research indicates, the bond students develop with teachers and their schools decreases the likelihood of criminal and violent behaviors, gang involvement, drug and alcohol abuse, teen pregnancy, and emotional distress.

“Students who can manage their emotions and behavior and form positive relationships with peers and adults do better in school and avoid health compromising behaviors.”

WeAreTeachers has many classroom ideas and printables that can help you along this journey of integrating SEL into academic instruction.

Below, we list 5 tips from their article titled: [21 Simple Ways to Integrate Social-Emotional Learning Throughout the Day](#). Please visit their website for more.

1. Start the day with a check-in. Make it a goal to start each day with a personal connection. It doesn't need to be a time-consuming or elaborate procedure. It could be as simple as giving a warm greeting to welcome each person as they arrive in the morning.

2. Work in partnerships. Give students lots of opportunities to work with partners. Working with a partner helps students learn to cooperate and builds community in your classroom. Alternate between strategically assigning partnerships and allowing students to make their own choices.

3. Use anchor charts to teach social-emotional skills. You can create anchor charts with your class about many different topics, from "Owning Your Learning" to "What Does Respect Look Like?" and "Be a Problem-Solver." Check out the WeAreTeachers [Classroom Management Anchor Charts](#) Pinterest board for many more ideas.

4. Teach them to monitor their own progress. Make personal goal-setting (academic, emotional, social, etc.) a regular activity with your students. It will strengthen their intrapersonal skills and give them ownership of their own learning. Help them develop the habit of revisiting and adjusting their goals often to monitor progress. Am I meeting my goals? What do I need to work on next? How do I want to grow?

5. Make space for reflective writing. Give your student time to journal and free-write. Put on quiet music. Dim the lights. Make writing time a quiet, soothing break from busyness that your students will look forward to. For stubborn starters, you can provide a menu of optional prompts.

Adapted from:

Smith, B. (n.d.). Social-Emotional Learning and Academics. Seattle, WA: Committee for Children.
www.cfchildren.org

Mulvahill, E. (October, 2016) 21 Simple Ways to Integrate Social-Emotional Learning Throughout the Day. WeAreTeachers <https://www.weareteachers.com/21-simple-ways-to-integrate-social-emotional-learning-throughout-the-day/>