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BY CHOICE, NOT CHANCE: Engaging Social and Emotional Learning to Create a Supportive Climate and Discipline Strategies

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING INNOVATIONS SERIES

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INNOVATIONS SERIES OVERVIEW

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is committed to supporting and advancing the field of social and emotional learning (SEL) to ensure that schools honor, challenge, and inspire the academic, social, and emotional growth and development of all students. SEL has emerged as a central feature of education and is even more important at a time in which our global and local communities, adults, and young people are compelled to navigate heightened social tensions and traumas. While initial research studies have established the general benefits of SEL, the next phase of work should address the need for improvements and innovations to SEL policy, approaches, programming, and practices to increase the likelihood of maximum contributions to the well-being of each and every young person and adult (Fredrickson, 2001; Huppert, 2009; Wentzel, 2024). We understand psychological well-being as inclusive of the constructs of positive emotions (happiness and/or contentment) and the development of purpose, while also fostering positive relationships with others. This series aims to help the field, including educators, program providers, and policymakers, to imagine new, more expansive and equitable approaches to SEL and wellness to ensure that all children, adolescents, and adults feel safe, supported, and seen so that they can thrive.

Throughout this series, we will share innovative conceptions, methods, and practices that embody SEL principles, along with aligned strategies that maximize learning and well-being for students at each setting level of CASEL's systemic SEL framework. CASEL takes a systemic approach to SEL implementation that emphasizes the importance of establishing equitable learning environments and coordinating practices across key settings of classrooms, schools, families, and communities to enhance all students' social, emotional, and academic learning. A systemic approach integrates SEL throughout the school's academic curricula and culture, across the broader contexts of schoolwide practices and policies, and through ongoing collaboration with families and community organizations. Each report in this series will highlight a key setting from CASEL's framework. This report focuses on building safe and supportive schoolwide cultures. Read the first report on authentic partnership with families and caregivers and the second report on engaging instructional practices that integrate SEL in classrooms.

Within this series, we pay particular attention to research and understanding that is consistent with transformative SEL (tSEL), an approach that embodies an equitable, systemic orientation to SEL. We will share both current understandings about these practices and strategies and why they matter from a research and practice perspective. We will also provide case studies to help illustrate what these practices and strategies can look like in schools, families, and communities. We hope that the series will spark discussion around strategies, curricula, and action research agendas that lead to changes in mindsets, practices, and policies, with a focus on the centering of the voices and choices of students and their families.

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We'd like to thank our collaborators for their partnership in providing relevant content and highlighting case studies from the field.

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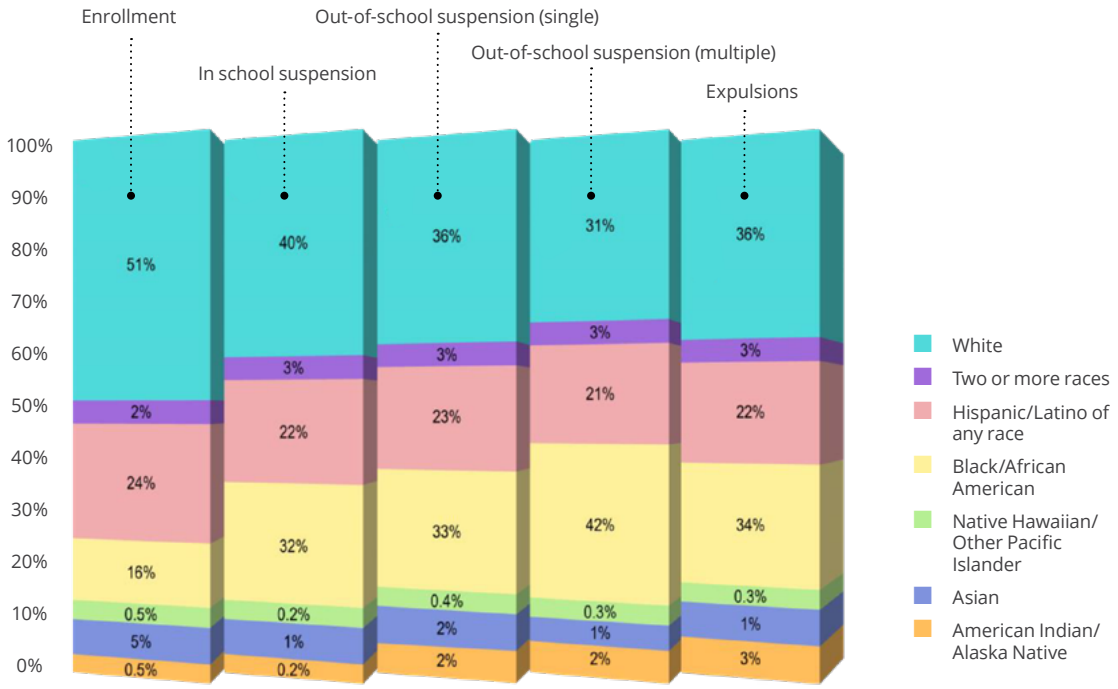
TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Schools can and should be places that support students' overall growth and development—socially, emotionally, and academically—but not all students have access to the relationships and experiences necessary to realize their fullest potential. This threatens the promise of public education by denying students the resources needed to thrive and costs society as a whole in the form of untapped potential in our schools (Jagers et al., 2019). The disparities in educational opportunity include school discipline practices. CASEL's framework looks at student behavior as part of child development. Children at different ages may struggle to express their needs or independence with words, and sometimes their actions reflect this. When educators understand behavior in this way, they can acknowledge a student's challenge while guiding them in a supportive way that strengthens their relationship. Research shows that strong student-teacher relationships play a key role in effective discipline approaches, such as restorative practices (Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015; Welsh & Little, 2018). Yet, in many schools, discipline is still seen mainly as punishment and exclusion rather than a way to support students and help them learn.

School exclusion is one common disciplinary sanction imposed by a school administrator as a consequence for student behavior. Exclusion involves removal of students from regular teaching for a period during which they are not allowed to be present in the classroom or, in more serious cases, on school premises (Valdebenito et al., 2018). School exclusion includes in- and out-of-school suspensions and expulsions, and is associated with a host of negative outcomes for excluded students (Wang et al., 2022; Welsh & Little, 2018), including lower academic achievement (Ibrahim & Johnson, 2020; Wang et al., 2022), school dropout (Noltemeyer, et al., 2015), and risk of incarceration (Hemez et al., 2020). Additionally, school exclusion disproportionately impacts marginalized students.

FIGURE 1: **STUDENTS RECEIVING SUSPENSIONS AND EXPULSIONS, BY RACE AND ETHNICITY**

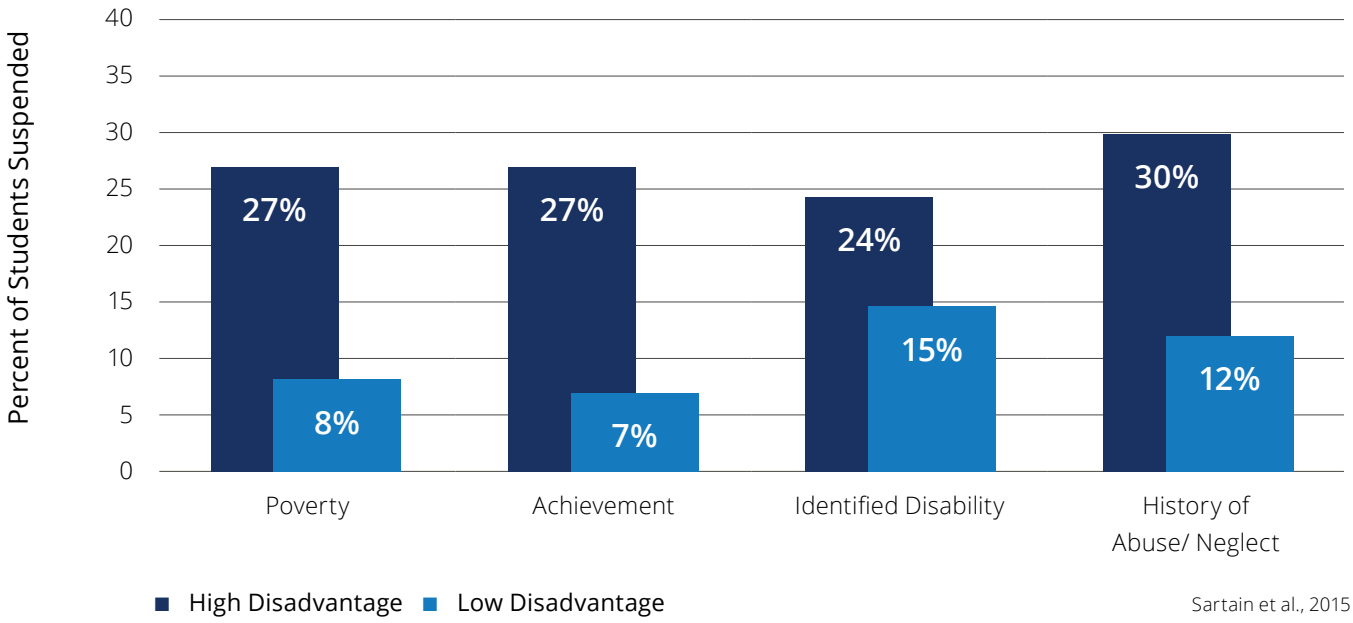


NOTE: Detail may not sum to 100% due to rounding. Totals: Enrollment is 49 million students, in-school suspension is 3.5 million students, single out-of-school suspension is 1.9 million students, multiple out-of-school suspension is 1.55 million students, and expulsion is 130,000 students. Data reported in this figure represents 99% of responding schools. SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2011-12

Decades of research finds that students experience differences in school discipline based on factors like race, family income, gender, disability, and LGBTQ identity. These gaps can be even wider for students who belong to more than one of these groups. (Gregory et al., 2010; Ibrahim & Johnson, 2020; Skiba & Peterson, 2000; Snapp et al., 2022; Welsh & Little, 2018) (see Figure 1).[1] Additionally, students who experience neglect, or those who come in far behind grade level, may also be more likely to be suspended than other students. For example, the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research, a nationwide leader in discipline data research, demonstrates these trends in Chicago Public Schools in 2013-2014 (Sartain et al., 2015) (see Figure 2).

FIGURE 2: **STUDENTS FROM MORE VULNERABLE BACKGROUNDS ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE SUSPENDED THAN OTHER STUDENTS**

Out-of-School Suspension Rates by Student Risk Factors (High School Students, 2013–14)



Sartain et al., 2015

Schools can help to ensure that all students have access to safe and supportive environments where they want to be by implementing evidence-based SEL programs and practices, and by doing so in ways that are developmentally appropriate, asset-based, locally informed, and relationally driven. As part of our systemic approach to SEL, CASEL uses the 10 Indicators of Schoolwide SEL to demonstrate how SEL can look when fully implemented in schools.

1 This use of exclusion to address behavioral challenges begins as early as preschool. A landmark study in 2005 (Gilliam, 2005) found that preschoolers were expelled from schools at 3.5 times the rate of children in kindergarten to 12th grade

Two indicators in particular, supportive school climate[2] and supportive discipline,[3] work together to help eliminate discipline disparities. A supportive school climate focuses on proactive measures, while supportive discipline provides a responsive approach. Both prioritize relationships, and both are critical.

Additionally, both require adults at all levels to engage in their own SEL, connect and collaborate with one another and with students, and model SEL in their interactions with students and other school personnel (CASEL, n.d.d).

The prioritization of supportive climates where all students feel valued can be seen not just in schools, but in government, too. In 2022, the United States' federal government passed the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (BSCA), legislation that recognizes the need for proactive climate building and support for students and adults. BSCA includes grant funding to support more local, community-based strategies for creating safe, healthy, and supportive schools. According to CASEL's 2024 study on national SEL implementation, researchers found 84 percent of states leveraged the BSCA Stronger Connections Grant funding to create safe, healthy, and supportive schools that support students' social and emotional needs and well-being (Skoog-Hoffman et al., 2024). In the national implementation study, Skoog-Hoffman and colleagues (2024) hypothesized that while suspension rates and law enforcement referrals above the national average indicated limiting conditions or barriers to SEL, leveraging BSCA grant funds to support student's well-being was an indicator of SEL-supportive policies and conditions.

Supportive climates depend on asset-based approaches to student development like mentorship programs, trauma-informed instruction, and relevant, engaging learning experiences. Research on these approaches has shown positive social, emotional, and academic outcomes. For example, City Year has shown benefit through its mentorship model, which engages young adults ages 17-25 as Student Success Coaches (SSCs) for students in grades K-12. In their work with students, SSCs prioritize proximity, relationships, trust, agency, and equity. Together, these interconnected components help to support social, emotional, and academic learning. In a 2023 report by Everyone Graduates Center at the Johns Hopkins University School of Education, SSCs reported that "quality time with students, a strong sense of belonging at school, and a supportive learning environment were key factors that could help enable relationship-building, as well as academic and SEL growth" (Harelle & Yoshisato, 2020, p. 18).

Approaches that focus on promotion and prevention by strengthening relationships and building supportive environments are better for all adults and students involved (Cipriano et al., 2021; Duchesneau & Zapata, 2023; Learning Policy Institute & Turnaround for Children, 2021) and particularly beneficial for those who have been marginalized within our school systems, including Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) students and students receiving special education services (Wallace et al., 2008). Yet these opportunities are not equitably distributed. For example, while some schools and districts have used BSCA funding to promote evidence-based strategies that focus on support and prevention, others, especially those serving Black students, have prioritized physical security measures such as metal detectors and security personnel (Kidane & Rauscher, 2023). This creates opportunity gaps and reinforces the school-to-prison pipeline.

2 School climate refers to the "quality and character of school life" based on how members of the school community experience school and the school's "norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching, learning and leadership practices, and organizational structures" (Reference: National School Climate Council).

3 We use the term discipline in alignment with its Latin roots of both "instruction and knowledge" as opposed to a focus on control and punishment. We have chosen to use this term because it is still used in the literature and our model, but hope that readers will view this paper through a lens of student leadership and learning.

WHY EQUITABLE DISCIPLINE PRACTICES MATTER

Fair and equitable discipline practices are essential for building schools that work for all students and addressing what Ladson-Billings (2006) calls the "educational debt".[4] As mentioned previously, research consistently finds that specific subgroups are over-represented in disciplinary data including Black and Latinx students, Native Americans, students in special education, and males (Gregory et al., 2010; Ibrahim & Johnson, 2020; Skiba & Peterson, 2000; Snapp et al., 2022; Welsh & Little, 2018). In recent years, there has been particular attention paid to discipline disparities impacting Black students and students using special education services (Morgan, 2020). Examining these patterns reveals that the current system of special education itself can pose challenges to students' sense of positive identity, agency, belonging, and curiosity. While disability rights advocates have ushered in positive developments, including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), there remains what Conner and Ferri (2007) have called the "paradox of special education" (p. 66). That is, while special education was created in order to guarantee students the support they need to thrive, the designation often leads to exclusion and stigmatization, which can further exacerbate discipline disparities.

Despite very consistent data that Black students do not act out more, they continue to be disproportionately disciplined, and are more likely targeted by coded and subjective language like "willful defiance" (Wang et al., 2022, p. 2). Additionally, the "adultification" of students of color can result in punishing students for developmentally appropriate behavior (Epstein et al., 2017, p. 1). As an example, research has shown that Black girls routinely experience adultification bias, wherein they are expected to be more mature and responsible than their developmental peers and, consequently, receive less protection or guidance and harsher consequences from adults (Gilmore et al., 2021). Due to these and other factors, interventions to reduce disciplinary referrals generally can actually increase disproportionality. This makes it critical to implement strategies that reduce predictability of success based on identity markers including race and disability status (Skiba, 2015; Gregory, 2022).

IDEAS IN ACTION

"EVERYONE WINS"

Although they may be focused on particular groups of students, efforts to support marginalized students often contribute positively to the entire school community. As Angela Glover Blackwell (2017) points out, **"There's an ingrained societal suspicion that intentionally supporting one group hurts another. That equity is a zero sum game. In fact, when the nation targets support where it is needed most—when we create the circumstances that allow those who have been left behind to participate and contribute fully—everyone wins"** (para. 8). An example of this is what has been called the Curb-Cut Effect. In the 1970s, disability activists created crude ramps to create accessible sidewalks for people in wheelchairs. Over time, it was observed that many others, including people pushing children in strollers and the elderly, benefited from these improvements (Mate, 2022).

4 Ladson-Billings argues that instead of focusing on the so-called "achievement gap," it is instructive to understand the "historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral decisions and policies that characterize our society" and that have a negative cumulative effect on generations of Black families.

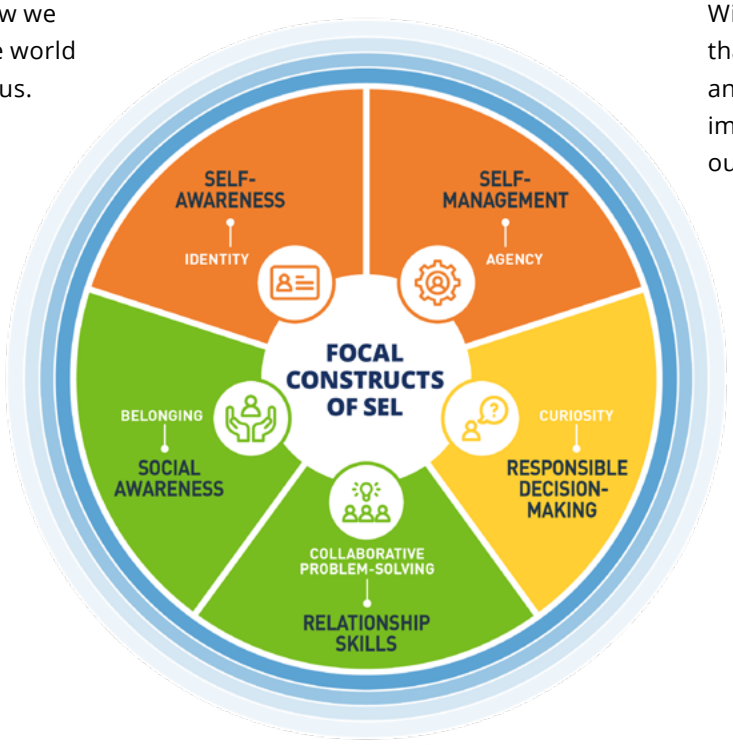
Creating lasting solutions requires critically examining the systems that lead to disparities in access to school resources. For example, we might ask, "Why do children with disabilities seem to have less access to challenging educational materials and engaging activities?" "Why do Black students often have less access to supportive approaches to behavior?" "Why are English language learning students under-represented in extracurricular opportunities?" As part of their work on justice-oriented SEL, Jagers, Rivas-Drake, and Williams (2019) share a set of focal constructs aligned with CASEL's overarching core competencies: identity, agency, belonging, collaborative problem-solving, and curiosity (see Figure 3). These constructs distill recent scholarship on how to create more equitable learning environments and opportunities for all students (Jagers, et al., 2019; Jagers et al., 2021). We will use the constructs to deepen our understanding of how we can support students' development in school as we consider:

1. *Supportive culture and climate: Indicators of proactive culture building for student success*
2. *An approach to discipline that focuses on student growth and learning*
3. *The critical roles adult social and emotional competencies plays in creating safe and supportive schools*

FIGURE 3: **ALIGNED FOCAL CONSTRUCTS TO THE CASEL FIVE COMPETENCIES**

Our **identities** impact how we perceive and navigate the world and how others perceive us.

With **agency**, we understand that we can have an impact and we choose to act to improve conditions for ourselves and others.



We all are best able to contribute when we feel we are valued, welcomed, and an **essential part of the community.**

With curiosity to learn more about ourselves, others, and the world, to seek new information and perspectives, we are better equipped to make responsible decisions.

We are more effective when we use relationship skills to authentically listen to others to better understand problems and **work together to develop solutions.**

SUPPORTIVE CULTURE AND CLIMATE: INDICATORS OF PROACTIVE CULTURE-BUILDING FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

Supportive classroom and school cultures are created by choice, not chance. The process requires intentional decision-making at all levels. At the macro level, school leaders can create systems and structures to support student and educator belonging and collaborative problem-solving (Mahfouz, et al., 2019). One example is making time throughout the year for circle discussions, where educators and staff come together to share their unique expertise, challenges, and experiences. In addition to supporting staff relationships and sharing knowledge, these structures provide experiential opportunities for educators to learn about SEL implementation for their own classrooms. At the school level, principals and other leaders can also support a culture of belonging and collaborative-problem solving by providing students with opportunities to shape SEL initiatives, instructional practices, and school climate.

SUPPORTIVE CLIMATES TAKE ROOT WHEN EVERY PART OF THE SCHOOL DAY PROMOTES STUDENTS' SEL.

Supportive climates take root when every part of the school day promotes students' SEL. As students move between classrooms, lunch periods, hallways, and various in- and out-of-school time programs, their experiences shape how they perceive themselves, relate to others, address conflicts, and make decisions. When expectations of students are not developmentally appropriate, we may inadvertently set them up for failure (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2024). This can be exacerbated by the structure of school. For example, Rimm-Kaufman and colleagues (2024) discuss how students in middle school move from class to class, which can "dilute" support for students at exactly the time they are vulnerable to developmental declines in self-management. It is not surprising, then, that suspension rates and racial disparities spike in higher grade levels (Okonofua et al., 2022), a period of time when young people are especially in need of support (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2024). Understanding this mismatch should empower school leaders to shift away from structures that inhibit relationship-building, including exclusionary discipline

policies (Amemiya et al., 2020) and a focus on testing (Carless, 2009). Reflecting on school discipline and SEL alignment (CASEL, n.d.c) can help to ensure that disciplinary strategies support, rather than undermine, the SEL work happening in a school.

Supportive schools are also built at the macro level within the daily life of a school community. In their classrooms, educators make a multitude of decisions every class period around how to manage transitions, share their content, and respond to challenging situations. These moments combine with other factors to create the classroom climate. Adults communicate warmth or disregard in "micro-moments" with one another and with students. Ensuring these moments build towards a supportive climate and culture requires social awareness and relationship skills. Greeting students by name, noticing their interests, and appreciating their (appropriate) humor all take only moments but can help build developmental relationships (Search Institute, n.d.).

Often, building these relationships requires mindset shifts as educators begin to share power with students, making them learning partners (Hammond & Jackson, 2015). This applies to classroom management as well. With an understanding of child development, educators can act as partners as students work on the skills and dispositions they need to exercise self-management and agency inside and outside of the classroom. A teacher who finds themself feeling irritated by a middle school student tapping their neighbor might pause and reach into their toolbox for a "right fit" response. That is, one that is balanced, self-aware, and that meets the student where they are. For example, in the moment, a teacher might self reflect, and recognize that while the tapping is really getting under their skin, (1) they are also a bit stressed today in general, which has little to do with this student, and (2) this is a student who struggles with fidgeting and may not even be aware of their behavior. With this self- and social-awareness, the teacher might signal discreetly to the student that their behavior is distracting. Later, they can find a moment to check-in with the student, ask how things are going, and explain the impact of the tapping on their teaching. This helps to build trust and reinforces that the goal of schools is academic, social, and emotional growth, not compliance. Higher levels of trust between teachers and students are predictive of decreased disciplinary infractions and increased engagement (Yeager, 2017).

Unfortunately, even when schools move to implement a more supportive approach to discipline,[5] they often have not built the competencies, culture, or tools to sustain these shifts (Marsh, 2017). This can lead to a frustration with the strategies themselves if they fail to take root, despite a lack of attention to the prevailing conditions. In order to be restored, positive relationships need to have been actively built in the first place, through a supportive school climate and culture.[6] However well-intentioned, engaging in discipline reform without attending to the overall culture and climate of a school is insufficient. It does not address the roots of challenging student behavior or acknowledge the ways that the school context itself can contribute to it (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). Nor does it acknowledge the impact of the environment on educator social and emotional wellness, a necessary component of safe and supportive schools. For now, we will explore the "why" and "how" of building supportive, SEL-infused school environments. Below, we explore four indicators of supportive learning environments.

5 Educators utilize a supportive discipline approach when they prioritize relationships and learning when discipline incidents occur.

6 In a 2023 report on restorative practices, Sean Darling-Hammond elevates the importance of both practices that repair harm and community-building practices that help foster a healthy school climate.

LEARNING IS BOLSTERED THROUGH RELATIONSHIPS

Fostering safe and supportive learning environments with clear, high expectations is a critical lever for student academic achievement (Allensworth & Hart, 2018). A supportive climate, built using a range of strategies to nurture connection and a sense of belonging, creates spaces where students reduce unhealthy risk-taking behavior, lean into learning, and engage in the developmental tasks necessary for growth (Bronfenbrenner, 1995; Denny et al., 2011; Merle et al., 2024). SEL programs use a variety of strategies to build relationships and belonging for students. For example, the Character Strong's S.E.R.V.E model, which takes a teaching practices approach,[7] increases belonging[8] by asking educators to welcome students intentionally at the door, help them connect to deeper purposes for learning, and make time for their reflections and feedback.

Multiple scholars have pointed to the importance of supportive relationships, a cornerstone of both SEL and Culturally Responsive Education,[9] as a critical feature of learning (Gay, 2002; Hammond & Jackson, 2015; Learning Policy Institute & Turnaround for Children, 2021; Search Institute, 2020). This makes sense given what we know about academic mindsets (Farrington et al., 2012) or ways of perceiving oneself in relation to learning that lay the groundwork for deep academic, social, and emotional learning.[10] Throughout children's lives, teachers have a strong influence over the academic mindsets of their students; both their instructional practices and the environments they co-create with students can promote motivation, engagement, and persistence (Allensworth & Hart, 2018) or inadvertently further disengagement (Burns, et al., 2019; Ravet, 2007). For example, a dismissive response to student confusion may reinforce negative beliefs about belonging and perpetuate stereotype threat (Steele, 1997). In contrast, by acting as a learning partner (Hammond & Jackson, 2015) and modeling curiosity and collaborative problem-solving, the same educator has the potential to reinforce students' sense of determination.

Educators build relationships and trust during instruction by articulating how and what they are learning from their students (BELE Framework, p. 4); embedding opportunities for students to share about their lives, families, and backgrounds throughout the day; showing that students' and families' personal experiences and cultural knowledge are valuable assets for classroom learning; and ensuring that students and families see themselves reflected in the curriculum (Steele & Cohn-Vargas, 2013).

Outside of instruction, strategies like greeting students at the door create a sense of belonging while also providing teachers with important information about students' state of mind. These small moments, or "micro-

7 The CASEL program guide defines a teaching practices approach as one designed to help educators integrate practices that support optimal SEL conditions throughout the regular school day.

8 Results from a randomized controlled trial conducted in the 2021-22 academic year study found that students who participated in the program had significantly higher ratings of belongingness compared to students in the control group while controlling for outcome pretest, FRPL, race, and gender. The program demonstrates evidence of effectiveness in grades 6-8.

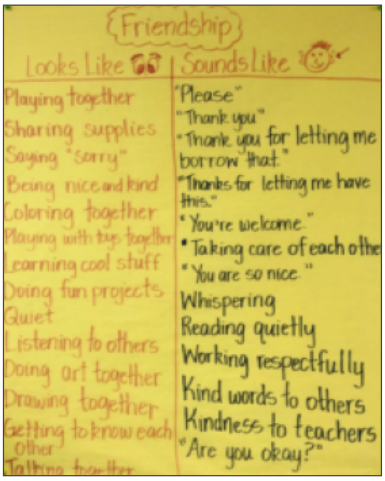
9 Culturally responsive education involves using the experiences, cultural characteristics, and perspectives of students to build connections and improve teaching and learning (Gay, 2002).

10 Examples of academic mindsets might include feeling a sense of belonging within the academic community; believing that one's competence and ability grow with effort; committing to success in an environment despite obstacles; and having the deeply held belief that the work being performed has value (Farrington et al, 2012).

affirmations," communicate warmth and understanding (Powell et al., 2013; Rowe, 2023), and may be especially powerful for students who have been traditionally marginalized from school, because these students are often subjected to "microaggressions," which undermine belonging (Essien & Wood, 2024; Okonofua et al., 2022; Rowe, 2023; Sherfinski, 2023).

Along with the benefits to students, building positive relationships within the classroom helps educators to create spaces where they themselves feel connected to and trusting of students (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). This creates positive classroom experiences for teachers[11] and helps ensure that when misunderstandings and fissures in the relationship occur, educators already have a sense of who students are, in the context of their families and cultures, including their strengths and vulnerabilities.

Adults also play a critical role in supporting connection and community between students. Students in schools and classrooms with a strong sense of community are more likely to act ethically and altruistically (Frazier et al., 2024; Schaps et al., 1997). To support student connections, educators at all levels can set the tone by developing shared classroom agreements (see examples). Throughout the year, advisory, morning meetings, collaborative learning opportunities, peer-to-peer mentorship, and community-building rituals can all help create a sense of "being in it together."



OPPORTUNITIES ARE BUILT FOR COLLABORATIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING BETWEEN YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULTS

Like any community, the classroom community will face challenges. Collaborative problem-solving activates students' sense of belonging and agency, while helping to find solutions in developmentally appropriate ways. For example, in elementary school, students might discuss challenges with consistently being late for art class. The teacher might lead a discussion about the impact on their classmates for whom this is a special part of the day and brainstorm together ways to get packed up and out the door more quickly. At the high school level, a teacher struggling over the noise level in the classroom during group time might hold a discussion about the varying cultural norms around noise levels in homes and communities. As a group, the students might decide on times when there would be space for higher-volume discussions and times that would be reserved for quieter interaction, so as to better meet the needs of everyone in the classroom. The goal of these meetings is to solve challenges, yes, but also to increase competencies like perspective-taking for students and adults and provide developmentally appropriate opportunities for student leadership and self-advocacy.

11 The focus on positive classroom experiences for educators is especially relevant given the current teacher shortage documented by the U.S. Department of Education (n.d.).

When they are student-lead, inquiry-based strategies like Project-Based Learning (PBL) and Participatory Action Research (YPAR) integrate SEL and academics while providing opportunities to support each of the focal constructs: identity, agency, belonging, collaborative problem-solving, and curiosity (Schwartz et al., 2024). With PBL, students inquire around topics or phenomena of interest and eventually share public products or performances addressing their questions (Condliffe, 2017; Mergendoller & Larmer, n.d.). As they move through cycles of reflection, planning, and action, students build relationship skills and deepen their capacity for collaborative problem-solving (Schwartz et al., 2024).

Youth Participatory Action (YPAR), where students often focus on school climate concerns, prepares young people and educators to co-design research projects they care about while supporting their sense of agency and belonging (Checkoway & Richards-Schuster, 2012; Ozer, 2016; Schwartz et al., 2024). This focus on leadership and collaborative problem-solving is important at all ages, but especially within the middle and high school years where students have a greater sense of their own autonomy as well as a desire to shape their environments (Ozer et al., 2021). Through the YPAR process, students learn how to conduct research and translate their research into social change efforts (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Ozer et al., 2022). However, attempts at authentic inclusion of youth voices need not be this labor-intensive. Educators may develop schoolwide norms in partnership with students to ensure that they align with the messages students hear at home or include students in ongoing schoolwide committees to gain their perspectives on decisions that will impact them. Whether during more structured opportunities like YPAR or informal conversations, hearing from students who feel disconnected from school, specifically, can help adults better understand the factors that are contributing to their sense of alienation.

Providing developmentally appropriate tools such as problem-solving protocols helps to prevent serious challenges from emerging in the future and ensures that if challenges do occur, students already have experience with self-reflection, perspective-taking, and repair. Educators can also teach and model strategies for monitoring and working with emotions, including understanding how our emotions impact our actions. Students are bound to have normal friction as they go about their days collaborating on projects, socializing, and struggling through the myriad challenges of growing up. This can manifest differently depending on the developmental level and active speaking and listening skills of the students.

IDEAS IN ACTION

CREATING SPACES OF BELONGING

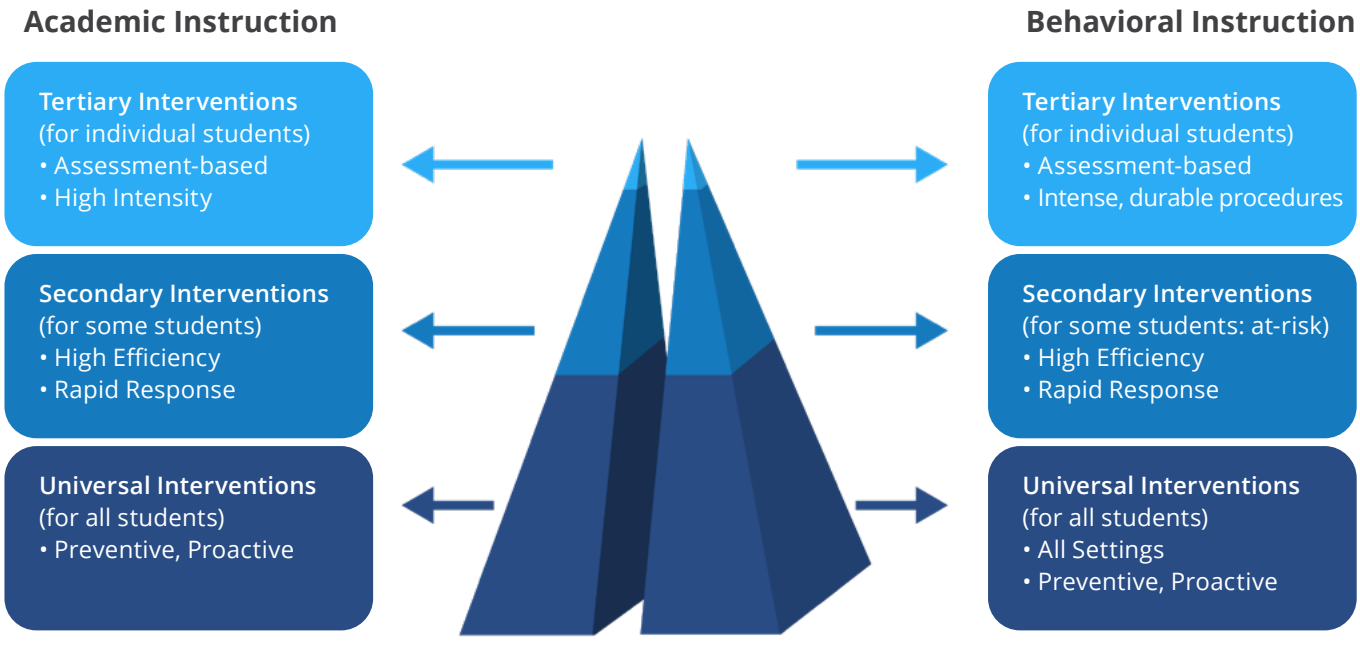
The Neurodiversity Alliance's **Eye to Eye Mentoring Program** creates spaces of curiosity and belonging through art, community, and advocacy by pairing 10- to 14-year-old mentees with high school and college mentors. They come together about once a week to make art and talk about what it means to be neuro-diverse, using the CASEL competencies to frame their focus. Read more about Eye to Eye mentoring in the case study below.

In early childhood, a period characterized by the development of social, emotional, and peer engagement skills, students practice navigating shared spaces and materials and begin to develop strategies for managing their own responses to delayed gratification, peer conflicts, and differences of opinion (Head Start). In young children, these skills, which contribute to their comfort in managing common group learning situations, are often seen as predicting future academic success (Ulloa et al., 2010). In adolescence, peer-to-peer mentorship programs provide opportunities for students to support one another and practice collaborative problem-solving. In this model, youth are empowered with the appropriate training to best intervene and support their fellow students. Mentorship programs, youth-run community circles, student-driven IEP meetings and youth-facilitated school events provide opportunities for students to express leadership, try out ways of being, and practice skills for the future (Jenner et al., 2021; Meredith & Anderson, 2015).

SEL IS INTEGRATED WITH MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORTS (MTSS)

Establishing a strong MTSS (Figure 4) is a critical component to ensuring all students receive the support they need to thrive. MTSS is a prevention-focused framework to provide evidence-based academic and behavioral supports for all students (Tier 1), for students who need small and targeted group interventions (Tier 2), and for students who need individualized targeted interventions (Tier 3). SEL should be included as a Tier 1 evidence-based support to help create a positive learning environment for all students.

FIGURE 4: **DESIGNING SCHOOLWIDE SYSTEMS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS**



Source Integrate Student Supports With SEL, Casel School Guide

When implemented systemically, SEL can be integrated with MTSS to better deliver high-quality instruction and interventions to address students' learning and social and emotional needs (CASEL, n.d.b). For example, if a student with a disability and a history of trauma is demonstrating significant outbursts, the school team must first identify what supports are delivered to all students as "Universal Interventions" at Tier 1 (indicated in the darkest blue in Figure 4). In this case, it is critical to ensure that the classroom is an SEL-infused environment that is set up in a safe and supportive way, with clear and consistent routines and procedures, high expectations, and a balance of challenge and support. Then, if needed, qualified teachers, support staff, community partners, or other professionals can deliver classroom-based or small group "secondary interventions." What is left is then delivered as a "tertiary intervention," which is highly intensive and individualized. A student who is being served at Tier 3, therefore, should still be part of SEL programming for general education, while also receiving intervention in a small group, and have individual goals and related services.

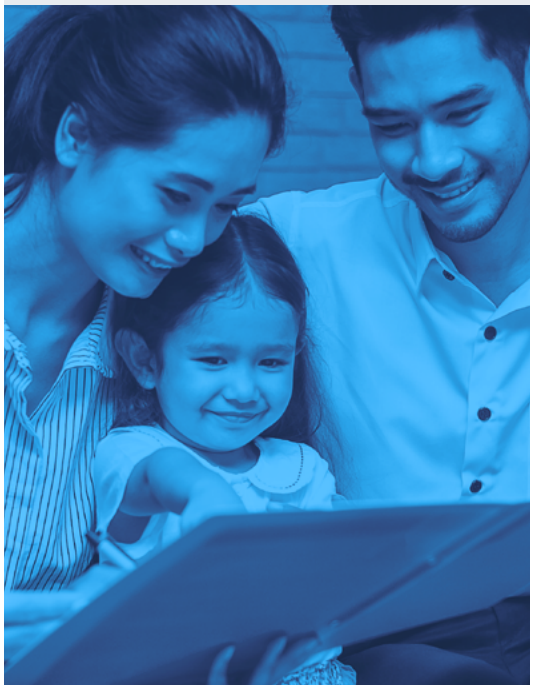
Without providing the necessary support, it is unrealistic to expect students to demonstrate the desired mindsets and behaviors. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) recognizes this responsibility by suggesting that in the case of frequent disciplinary removal of children with disabilities from the classroom, the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team should reconvene to consider whether the student's IEP appropriately addresses their behavioral needs (U.S. Department of Education). Additionally, researchers from the University of Chicago's Consortium on School Research found that students from various backgrounds were better supported when assistance was offered proactively and consistently and did not require students to seek it out (Allensworth & Hart, 2018). For example, a school might support any student who has more than one discipline referral through Check-In/Check-Out, a quick daily check-in with a trusted staff member, instead of hoping that students who are struggling will reach out to an adult in the building for help. Intentionally building spaces of relationship and belonging can also help mitigate students' feelings of shame when there is conflict or behavioral redirection, which may lead them to withdraw or lash-out further (Wachtel, 2016).

Although students with special education needs require and deserve tailored support, it is notable that many of the Tier 1 strategies (and even some of the Tier 2 strategies) that are helpful for students

IDEAS IN ACTION

FROM THE CASEL PROGRAM GUIDE

Building Assets, Reducing Risks (BARR), featured in the CASEL Guide to Evidence-Based Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL Program Guide), is a model that provides educators with the tools and structure to work together in support of students. In this model, teams of educators come together to develop proactive strategies based on the individual academic, behavioral, and social and emotional needs of every student. Results from a randomized controlled trial evaluation showed significant outcomes around academic achievement, social connectedness, and teaching practices.



with disabilities are beneficial for most students. This aligns with the "curb cut" effect theory mentioned earlier. For example, The Council for Exceptional Children in collaboration with the CEEDAR Center, suggests a series of high-leverage special education practices that "all teachers of students with disabilities should master for use across a variety of classroom contexts" (2024). Under the bucket of "instruction in behavior and academics," there are two practices that are indicated as "pillars" due to their importance: (1) establish consistent, organized, and responsive learning environments; and (2) use explicit instruction. In CASEL's indicators of schoolwide SEL, these align with "explicit instruction in SEL" and "supportive classroom and school climates." For another example, the table below (Figure 5) shares ways to support the social and emotional competencies of students with intensive needs through the MTSS framework (for the entire chart, see Appendix A). Taken together, these examples suggest that when implemented thoughtfully, SEL can support inclusion by focusing on high-leverage strategies that serve all students, especially those who are furthest from opportunity.

FIGURE 5: **SEL AND MTSS**

Competency	Tier 1 strategies that support students with intensive need	Tier 2 and 3 strategies to intensify supports
Self-awareness/Identity	Help students understand their strengths and areas of need, including their disability and associated terminology when appropriate.	Help students identify common behavioral triggers and potentially challenging situations in advance.
Self-management/Agency	Use predictable, proactive classroom routines and structures to support students' ability to manage their emotions and behaviors.	Provide opportunities for students to self-monitor their behavior and graph the data.
Social awareness/Belonging	Provide opportunities for students to share about their home cultures and engage in discussions about cultures different from their own.	Use role play to help students empathize with and understand the perspectives of others.
Relationship skills/Collaborative problem-solving	Provide coaching on conflict resolution and problem-solving in preparation for when students encounter difficulties during collaborative work.	Provide opportunities for students to practice relationship skills in small groups (e.g., lunch buddies, social skills groups).
Responsible decision-making/ Curiosity	Have students participate in developing classroom norms and appropriate consequences for rule violations.	Use a reflection sheet to prompt students to evaluate their behavior following a conflict.

Weingarten et al., 2020

STUDENT VOICE HELPS GUIDE DECISION-MAKING

Although there are broad strategies for building supportive environments, this work should be informed by the perspectives of students. Without an explicit examination of whether different groups of students feel safe, seen, and heard, educators risk implementing a "one size fits all" approach to SEL and supportive discipline, which can reinforce inequities (Cipriano et al., 2023). Student voice plays an important role in helping adults understand the impact of SEL intervention. This cross-communication is an important part of building developmental relationships.

Developmental relationships are close connections that help students to discover themselves and grow. According to the Search Institute (n.d.), "developmental relationships are about bi-directional, two-way development, not simply the socialization or training of young people" (section 3). As educators build these relationships, they make space for students to share what they are thinking, feeling, learning, and deciding about themselves. Wang and colleagues (2022) found that when educators affirm students' values and experiences, there is a 69 percent lower rate of disciplinary incidents. This is consistent with strategies Powell and colleagues (2013) share for practicing micro-affirmations, including demonstrating the capacity for empathy and perspective-taking. For example, an educator who feels locked in a pattern of conflict with a student might actively take their students' perspective ("I can tell I'm getting on your nerves with my redirections. It just seems like you are a bit off-task today. How about this: you try to stay focused as much as you can, and I will try to notice all the positive things you are up to.").

In addition to building strong developmental relationships, educators can use exit tickets[12] and climate surveys or more formal tools like PERTS Copilot-Elevate Survey to measure students' perceptions of their learning conditions and provide practical recommendations for research-based instructional strategies that support the needs of each class. These insights can be used to strengthen classroom practices that boost student engagement and learning for all students (perts.net/elevate, 2024). For example, one teacher who used this PERTS survey with his middle school social studies classes was surprised to learn that while he had generally good relationships with his students, many did not feel that the work he assigned was meaningful. Although it took some vulnerability, truly considering this data helped him to hatch an action plan. First, he asked his students what meaningful work looked like for them. Second, he shared the survey data with his class and used a discussion protocol to generate ideas for changes to the curriculum. Through the process he used, this teacher not only adjusted his curriculum and his assignments, but he invited students to take ownership over their learning.[13]

Approaches that revolve around soliciting and hearing student feedback may be simple, but they are not always easy. Giving students consistent opportunities to provide input and feedback on classroom routines, procedures, and community agreements is a way of sharing power and can challenge educators to reimagine their classrooms.

12 While exit tickets are generally thought of as informal assessments of learning, where students are asked to complete a quick task related to the day's lesson, it is informative and quick to include an opportunity for student feedback, as well; for example, by asking students to rate 1-5 how comfortable they felt taking risks in class, write one thing that would have made their learning experience even better, or include one word that describes how they feel at the end of the class (e.g., proud, confused, etc), among many other options.

13 This example first appeared in From Feedback to Action: Using Student Experience Data to Transform Learning Environments (Nwafor, 2023).

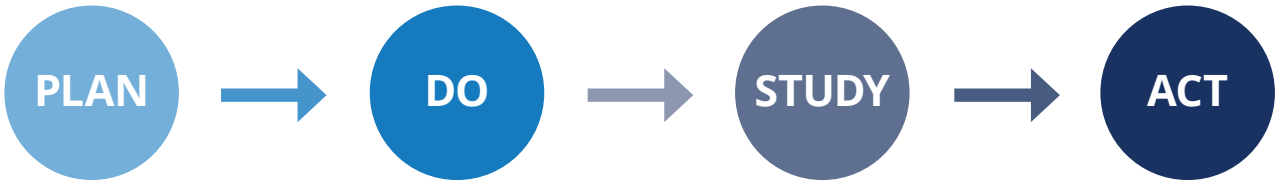
A key strategy can be training and supporting youth leaders to drive co-generative conversations (structured, reflective conversations around the classroom experience between the teacher and a small group of students) to leverage youth voice from within. Additionally, educators can utilize student-led data reflection protocols (CASEL, n.d.e) to help students and adults reflect on data in partnership. Like adults, students are also more likely to share their experiences when their input leads to positive, tangible changes.

In elevating student voices, adults are bound to find areas in need of attention and repair. A focus on continuous improvement can help shift adult mindsets from defensiveness to curiosity.

How we approach student experience data matters, especially when our analysis exposes painful realities. In elevating student voices, adults are bound to find areas in need of attention and repair. A focus on continuous improvement can help shift adult mindsets from defensiveness to curiosity. Triangulating between multiple data sources, including qualitative and quantitative data, helps tell the story of how students are being supported and what remains to be done. Disaggregating data for different subgroups of students is an especially powerful way of understanding the effectiveness of school interventions and can help educators answer the questions "What works? For whom? And in what circumstances?" This understanding of student experience is important for building supportive environments throughout the school, and can inform everything from classroom instruction to a school's discipline policy.

Empowered with tools to understand how students are experiencing their day-to-day life at school, educators can engage in a more responsive, experimental approach to teaching (Casey et al., 1988). That is, trying out new strategies, getting feedback from students, and being willing to quickly pivot if they are not having the desired effect. In this way, student voice is not static, but part of an interactive process between educators and students. Information gathering can also happen in real time. For example, noticing that students are beginning to appear checked-out of the lesson, a teacher might do a quick "fist to five" poll on her pacing, with five being "too fast" and fist "too slow," and adjust the pace accordingly. A similar plan can be implemented at all developmental ages. CASEL recommends a Plan, Do, Study, Act cycle to provide structure for applying this mindset to interventions at the school level. This continuous improvement approach honors the challenging work of educators and reminds us that helping each child reach their potential is a process.

Using the School Guide, your school engages in the PDSA continuous improvement cycle as you:



Clarify your current state, needs and resources, and your goal, determining what steps the team will take to drive implementation, and the metrics used to measure whether the goal was achieved.

Implement the plan, documenting how things are done, and collecting high-quality implementation and outcome data.

Examine and reflect on data to reflect on successes, challenges, and learnings, comparing the progress you made to the progress you thought/expected to make.

Take action based on what you've learned, and make adjustments to SEL goals or strategies as needed.

SUPPORTIVE DISCIPLINE: THREE GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR GROWTH THROUGH ACCOUNTABILITY

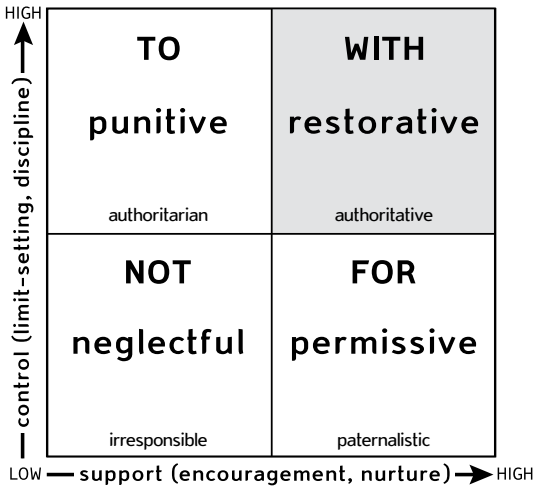
At all stages of development, children engage in trial and error as they navigate rules and behavioral expectations (Gehring, et al., 1993). Although milestones provide a rough guide of where students might be developmentally, variability in education is the norm, not the exception, and students evolve at different rates due to both biological and environmental factors (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Educators utilize a supportive discipline approach when they prioritize relationships and learning when discipline incidents occur. This makes it less likely that disciplinary infractions will occur again by addressing some of the reasons they occur in the first place (e.g., feelings of disconnection from school, need for continued practice with social and emotional skills).

Supportive discipline does not mean ignoring or excusing negative student behaviors; in many ways it asks more of students (Wachtel, et al., 2010). For example, instead of showing up for detention and staring blankly at the wall, supportive discipline would help a child do the social and emotional work to (1) examine the underlying feelings (e.g., helplessness, anger, etc.) or conditions (e.g., hunger) that led to the behavior; (2) understand the impact of their behavior on others; and (3) practice skills to reduce the chances the behavior occurs again. Sometimes, upon further examination, calls for "accountability" or "consequences" actually mean "punishment." Here, we discuss what these concepts look like through a supportive discipline approach. Namely, we focus on the ways in which accountability includes a shared focus on (1) growth, (2) repair, and (3) context, not necessarily in this order. As part of the process of human development, adults and students engage in collective accountability, in which all stakeholders are willing to own their mistakes and offer one another grace as they learn and correct course (Lieber et al., 2015). In this model, adults take action with students through a collaborative problem-solving approach, as modeled by the social discipline window (figure 6).

Supportive discipline does not mean ignoring or excusing negative student behaviors; in many ways it asks more of students.

FIGURE 6:

SOCIAL DISCIPLINE WINDOW



Source:
Defining Restorative, IIRP

SUPPORTIVE DISCIPLINE ENABLES HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Young people and adults develop their social, emotional, and cognitive capacities through the opportunity to reflect on real-world interactions. Understanding the naturally occuring consequences of our actions on our community is an important component of responsible decision-making. Supportive discipline focuses on restoring relationships. Unlike more punitive forms of discipline, where students may be guided by the risk of punishment, supportive discipline approaches, including restorative practices (see Figure 7), helps prepare students with the skills and mindsets to analyze and effectively respond to transgression. At times, this requires educators' critical appraisal of their own disciplinary approaches—a form of self-accountability that can lead to growth in and of itself.

FIGURE 7: **TRADITIONAL VS. SUPPORTIVE DISCIPLINE**

TRADITIONAL DISCIPLINE	SUPPORTIVE DISCIPLINE
The focus is on rules.	The focus is on relationships and repairing harm.
The conflict/wrongdoing is impersonal (school versus student).	The conflict/ wrongdoing is relational.
The focus is on assigning blame and punishing misbehavior.	The focus is on learning and healing.
Discipline/accountability is defined in terms of punishment.	Discipline/accountability is defined as understanding the impact of actions, taking responsibility for choices, and finding ways to repair harm.
Process unfolds through an adversarial relationship (e.g., who will win?).	Process evolves through dialogue and shared responsibility for problem-solving (e.g., how can we resolve this?).

Accountability procedures should consider students' varying needs for growth and skill development. For example, a second grade student throwing food in the cafeteria may truly not have the social awareness to consider the impact of her actions on others. A teacher might discuss the consequences of her actions in a developmentally appropriate way before engaging the student in an act of repair, for example, by warmly introducing the student to the school custodian and suggesting that she help with cleaning up after the meal. Growth can also occur through a more formal problem-solving process that follows a conflict or disciplinary incident. For example, being asked to hear how others were impacted by an incident requires practicing self-regulatory skills including active listening (Cleary et al., 2020). Listening to others elicits perspective-taking and empathy which, in turn, can increase both self- and social awareness (Eisenberg & Morris, 2001). In this manner, the problem-solving process itself can foster growth.

As specific, ongoing needs become clearer, teachers can continue to foster growth through an explicit plan to address underdeveloped social and emotional skills. Proactive strategies such as students' self-monitoring (Miller & Muldrew, 2021), adults' use of specific praise to strengthen positive behavior (Collins et al., 2021), and social-emotional skill practice and performance feedback (Zieher et al., 2024) reinforce students' budding skills. This can happen at the Tier 1 level ("As a class, we seem to be having a hard time working together. Let's talk about some strategies for active listening …") and supported in Tiers 2 and 3 as well. For example, at Tier 2, specific students might be engaged in a social skills group. At Tier 3, support may be deepened even further with coordinated, wrap-around services that could include individual counseling and working with family members to identify needs, goals, and potential supports within the broader community.

SUPPORTIVE DISCIPLINE PRIORITIZES INTERPERSONAL REPAIR

To be held accountable for our own actions includes recognizing harm and repairing it. This requires slowing down so a child, adolescent, or adult has time to understand and take perspective about how they have impacted others. Students who struggle with challenging behaviors can alienate their peers and adults. It is important that these relationships be restored so that every student feels safe and respected within the learning community. As mentioned in previous sections, repair is more likely in schools and classrooms where relationship-building has already been supported and where competencies like social awareness have been developed. In this way, supportive discipline uses "teachable moments" to practice and reinforce social and emotional competence and can be seen as a continuation of the work of building supportive schools.

When done in earnest, acknowledging impact through an apology can go a long way in starting to repair or heal relationships with affected peers or adults. Accountability can also include a reparative act that connects to the discipline incident. For example, in response to a middle schooler engaging in name calling towards a gay peer, they might undertake a project to learn more about how biased language has been used against many groups and how such language impacts health and well-being. With adult guidance, they might present their realizations to others. In doing so, they increase their social awareness and model to peers their understanding about the need for identity-safety in school.

Educators can engage in acts of repair, too. After being sarcastic with a student in a moment of stress, an educator can acknowledge their tone was off and apologize. Allowing the space and time necessary for educators to authentically grow is not without challenges, but there are rewards to individuals and the entire system; research around decreasing teacher burnout has pointed to the positive role of increased self-efficacy and reflective capacity

in supporting educators to meet the current challenges of this demanding profession (Dexter & Wall, 2021). In addition, a framework that allows for repair communicates to educators (and students) that the goal is not perfection but a willingness to engage and learn.

SUPPORTIVE DISCIPLINE REQUIRES ADULTS TO EXAMINE CONTEXT

Accountability for individual students should be considered within the full "context." This means determining who takes responsibility for what depends on the unique needs of the individual, educator, and setting. Paying attention to context also means understanding how both individual actions and existing school practices and policies may contribute to inequitable experiences (Lustick, 2020).

Getting at the "root cause" underlying a students' behavior is key (Fergus, 2017). For example, a student's dysregulation may relate to challenges with impulsivity and inattention, or it may relate to hunger (e.g., food insecurity, Fergus, 2017). Knowing this would shift how educators approached this student, including what the student would be asked to do or change in the future and what support would be provided. The "root cause" may also be related to how school itself is structured. Rimm-Kaufman and colleagues (2024) use stage-environment fit theory (Eccles et al., 1993) to frame how the structure of middle schools, with students changing teachers, and often classmates, from subject to subject, makes it hard for students in early adolescence to get the relational support they need. Additionally, poor quality adult relationships (e.g., low warmth/support and structure as explored in Figure 4), adult discrimination and disrespect, or adult coercive control with a lack of engaging instruction may contribute to student disengagement and resistance to school (e.g., Gregory & Ripski, 2008).

In addition to root causes, supportive discipline encourages educators to recognize precipitating factors, or the events that immediately precede behavioral escalations. Taking responsibility may mean adults need to confront how they have contributed to the students' struggle and make amends through their own process of growth and change (Gregory & Fergus, 2017). This willingness to change is important for the entire class and school community, not only for the affected student. Students of all ages are watching how educators model self-management and relationship skills. Adolescents especially are attuned to injustice, and doubts about the fairness and consistency of teachers' disciplinary practices can diminish trust in both the educator and the institution (Maxwell et al., 2017).

An example of accountability through restorative conferences

> **Restorative conferences (RC)** were modeled after family group conferences, which use the Maori indigenous people of New Zealand's principles of communal responsibility for its youth (Levine, 2000). Restorative conferences are an example of a supportive disciplinary process that leverages joint problem-solving and accountability using the lenses of repair, growth, and context. While research on conferences is still emerging, some positive findings include Anyon et al. (2014)'s study from the Denver Public Schools. They found that when students participated in restorative conferences after a conflict or behavioral referral, they were less likely to receive an out-of-school suspension relative to non-participating peers.

Restorative conferences follow a set of procedures that include obtaining consent for all those who participate and acknowledging harm and responsibility before the formal conference begins (Zehr, 2015). Conferences include (1) those harmed (broadly defined to include those impacted by the ripple effects of the incident), (2) those who acknowledge doing harm (the disputants), and (3) supporters of parties involved. Facilitators ask disputants about the incident including "What were you thinking/feeling at the time?", "Who has been impacted?", "What impact has this incident had on you and others?", and "What do you think needs to happen to make things right?" (Wachtel et al., 2010). Such questions open up the exchange to consider "root causes" and broader needs in the family, community, or schools. Conferences can end with acknowledgement of harm or enter a more formal agreement phase in which an action plan is developed to guide future actions to repair the harm and elicit learning and growth.

Although strategies like restorative conferences and circles are helpful when conflict occurs, they need to be practiced and normalized as community-building strategies before they are employed in heightened circumstances. Therefore, a leadership team should determine whether proactive Tier I strategies are being used with fidelity before introducing strategies for repairing harm and conflict.[14] The best model is to have those responsible for formal conferencing receive training over multiple weeks, often months. The training should include practice with real-world scenarios and role play. Once the trainees feel comfortable, the next step is for the coach to model formal conferencing in a real school setting with real students and staff. When the trainee communicates they are ready to try on their own, the coach provides feedback and support before, during, and after the conference (Darling-Hammond et al., 2023).

14 This should be a collaborative process that develops and sets clear expectations for how teachers address harm and conflict in the classroom, including a clearly defined and articulated process for accessing the different tiers of support.

IDEAS IN ACTION

ADDRESSING ROOT CAUSES

At Da Vinci RISE High School, restorative justice is leveraged as a framework to support the development of social-emotional competencies to mitigate the school-to-prison pipeline and to provide needed resources, support and guidance that decreases recidivism rates after breaches occur. This can be most observed in how RISE responds to instances of substance use. Rather than suspending or expelling youth, often sending youth back into the environment where the substance use was introduced, Da Vinci RISE uses a restorative justice framework devoted to addressing the causal factors rather than simply punishing the behavior. The RISE Restorative Response to Substance-Use Matrix provides practitioners with a menu of potential interventions that can assist in redirecting this behavior. These responses are inclusive of daily counseling, substance-use therapy, and job and internship assignments. RISE constructed this response matrix through consultation with community partners, students, and stakeholders to garner a deep understanding of the causal factors for substance use to frame how the challenge can be more holistically addressed. Learn more about Da Vinci RISE in the case study below.

THE ROLE OF ADULTS IN CREATING SUPPORTIVE SCHOOLS

Educators' social and emotional competence has a profound impact on students' experiences of school (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Educators with strong SEL skills design their classrooms in ways that support inclusion and create spaces of belonging for students at all academic levels, including those receiving special education services. Strategies may include flexible grouping, promoting choice in how students engage with materials, and modeling inclusive and asset-based language. This is especially important because educators' expectations of students have an impact on how students perceive themselves and one another (Timmermans & Rubie-Davies, 2022). Educators who build their own self and social awareness can model inclusion, empathy, and curiosity in their classrooms (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Modeling an interest in the diversity of the human experience, along with providing aligned content material, sets the tone for the classroom and helps diminish the chance of identity-based bullying among peers based on race, class, religion, perceived gender/sexual identification, and body shape and size, among others (Conklin, 2008; Fleshman, 2019).

The social and emotional competencies of adults have important implications for educational equity as well. Research shows that white educators are more likely to judge Black students as troublemakers while seeing misbehavior from white students as circumstantial (Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). As personal identity development intensifies in middle school, BIPOC students are more likely to be exploring ethnic and racial identity than white students and therefore may be more endangered by stereotype threat (Steele, 1997) and other ways that schools communicate "otherness" (Tatum, 2017). This can lead to what Okonofua et al. (2022) call "recursive cycles of growing mistrust and disrespect" between students of color and white educators (para. 6). Understanding this can help white teachers be intentional about the messages they are sending BIPOC students explicitly and implicitly about belonging.

Despite the enormous pressure they face to move quickly, this awareness can help educators slow down and reflect on the ways that behavior they find challenging may be a response to perceived injustice or other environmental factors (Okonofua et al., 2022). This perspective-taking helps teachers avoid escalation while learning from students about what is working, and not working, in their classrooms.

The importance of adult social and emotional skills to build supportive environments has implications for teacher education. The good news is that there are teacher preparation programs that understand this, and are integrating SEL into their coursework (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017). However, there is more work to be done. Educators need access to professional development in trauma-informed care, healthy youth-adult relationships, and restorative justice to build positive teacher-student interactions. Indeed, research demonstrates the promise of programs that are sustained, rigorous, and focused on teachers' interactions with students (Gregory et al., 2016). Teacher professional development wherein educators reflect on their instructional practices can minimize racial disparities in classroom discipline referrals (Gregory et al., 2015). It's important to highlight that, along with specific tools, this work often requires changes in values, beliefs, roles, relationships, and approaches. Without professional development that allows for reflection, active learning, and collaborative problem-solving, we risk providing educators opportunities to attain information, but not transformation.

IDEAS IN ACTION

EMPATHIC INTERVENTIONS

One intervention around empathic discipline (Okonofua et al., 2022) has shown promise in reducing in-school suspensions, which tend to happen around "relational offenses" (e.g., "disrespect"), in part due to the subjectivity of these classifications. This subjectivity, along with educator bias, leads white educators to view Black students' misbehaviors as fixed aspects of character and to "knit together a series of misbehaviors as a pattern" more often than they do for white students. (Okonofua et al., 2022, para. 3).

Through an online intervention that uses stories from teachers and students, empathic interventions invite educators to tap into their personal ideals around teaching as they consider responses to student misbehavior, making it maladaptive to lean into biased or fixed beliefs about students. By connecting to their important role in helping students grow, educators are able to respond to challenges in ways that demonstrate empathy and keep their relationships with students intact. This seems to help set students on a different trajectory with an expanded sense of what their relationships with teachers can be like.

CONCLUSION

Our educational system's capacity to grow future-ready leaders begins with effective implementation of evidence-based practices and policies. Over the past three decades, scientists have greatly pushed the field in better understanding how learning happens for young people (Jones & Kahn, 2017). Not only does learning have multiple linked dimensions, but the conditions for learning are pivotal to student success. Research points to the importance of learning environments that prioritize relationships, belonging, and developmental fit to ensure that schools are spaces of deep learning and development. When schools prioritize opportunities for collaborative problem-solving, agency, and student voice, they bring students into the conversation around how to build schools that empower all learners.

Prioritizing the SEL of youth and educators alike helps to create safe and supportive schools where students are engaged and connected, making disciplinary infractions less likely. But in order to be most effective, SEL needs to permeate the entire school experience from the time a student is greeted in the morning to the time they leave after the bell rings. When siloed to one class period or implemented by only a handful of committed teachers and staff, SEL is less likely to deliver the desired results. Read on for case study spotlights that illustrate supportive climates and discipline in schools and organizations successfully serving young people. From peer mentorship to wraparound services and innovative systems-level work, these programs and schoolwide approaches provide inspiration for anyone seeking to help students thrive, no matter the context.

CASEL provides free tools and resources to complement the wealth of research and practice from the field highlighted in this report. If disparities in access to supportive environments and disciplinary practices prevail, we risk excluding or alienating entire groups of students from school. For our communities and nations to thrive, we must do better.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE FIELD: SIX KEY DISTRICT ACTIONS

Although each district has its own context, there is a lot to learn from those that come before us. These recommendations are based on the authors' collective experiences with varied districts across the country.

1 Assess the needs, readiness, and resources available

Once you have built a team of individuals who represent different stakeholders, they should critically assess the school's needs and resources. Through the evaluation and assessment process, teams gain a comprehensive understanding of the needs of students and staff, current assets that could strengthen the work, and school/staff readiness to accept and implement the work over time. From this, the school team can set specific and actionable goals, and develop plans for program implementation and assessment.

2 Partner with those who will be responsible for implementation

Having a clear process with outlined expectations and responsibilities for all stakeholders, including support staff, teachers, and administration will ensure there is a team-driven leadership process, allowing staff and the school community to be authentically engaged with consistent opportunities to voice concerns, ask questions, and provide input. When schools/districts fail to implement this critical step, it can lead to multiple roadblocks and often failure and/or false starts.

3 Include the broader community

Remain proactive in community outreach and communication about the why, when, and how of the work to establish community trust and open doors for partnership. The entire school team needs to be able to look outside their own classrooms and environment to understand and know the parents, community members, and outside resources available. This can help prevent misunderstandings about the purpose and process of the initiative and the resulting pushback.

4 Braid initiatives

Early on, braid together prevention-based initiatives like restorative practices, SEL, and MTSS to ensure no approach supplants or contradicts another. Show how the components blend together to support fidelity, buy-in, and consistency. This helps to ensure staff won't feel overwhelmed and that they can have productive conversations to ensure all students receive the interventions necessary to be fully engaged in the learning environment.

5 Address the well-being of adults

Adult SEL matters. When we become too myopic and focus solely on the well-being of students, it can lead to compassion fatigue and burnout for those that teach them.[15] A 2022 Forbes survey found that teachers and school leaders are more than twice as likely to be stressed as other working adults. To offset the impact of stress, assess staff well-being and create plans to address systemic and individual gaps.

6 Start with small wins

Build momentum by starting with easily achievable strategies that teachers buy into and leaders can supervise and assess fidelity of implementation. For example, it is common to spend an entire school year building teacher efficacy by committing to affective language and positive proactive circles. These strategies build relationships, are easy to implement and assess, and provide many opportunities for teachers and students to feel success. During this first year, while teachers are doing proactive work, the leadership team is looking at discipline practices, policies, and clear expectations.

From Measuring Restorative Practices to Support Implementation in K-12 Schools

15 A Gallup survey found that K-12 teachers have a 14 percent higher burnout rate than other industries (Marken & Agrawal, 2022).

CASE STUDY SPOTLIGHTS

The Neurodiversity Alliance

For neurodiverse students, school does not always offer strengths-based ways to connect, develop self-awareness, and express agency. The Neurodiversity Alliance peer mentoring program demonstrates that when we nurture relationships and make students' experiences central, all students can thrive. Images courtesy of The Neurodiversity Alliance's Eye to Eye Mentoring Program.

The art room pulsed with energy. For many of the middle schoolers entering the space, it had often been communicated that their neurodiversity was a hurdle to overcome, something that separated them from their classmates. But today they would be meeting their mentors as part of Eye to Eye's near peer mentoring program, and, together, they would explore and develop new understandings of themselves and each other.

The Neurodiversity Alliance began as "Eye to Eye" in 1998 when a group of college students with learning differences met with young people at a nearby school as part of a service project to inspire hope. It has since become a national organization with a mission to "improve the educational experience and outcomes of neurodiverse young people, while engaging them and their allies in the movement for a more equitable and inclusive society." The near peer mentoring program creates spaces of curiosity and belonging through art, community, and advocacy by pairing 10- to 14-year-old mentees with high school and college mentors. They come together about once a week to make art and talk about what it means to be neuro-diverse using the CASEL competencies to frame their focus.

After creating community agreements, the students dive into a series of projects, each designed around one of the following topics: community, belonging, group identity, neurodiversity, neurodivergent identity, and accommodations. This series builds the safety and support for students to dive into projects on emotional awareness. The mentors begin by explaining that people with neurodiversity may experience emotions differently than their neurotypical peers. They explore the phenomenon of emotional flooding, share personal examples of this experience, and use an emotion wheel to name and discuss emotions before engaging in an art project where they explore joy, anger, and anxiousness, three emotions chosen with mentors and chapter leaders as being particularly tricky. Students share their paintings during a

gallery walk during which mentors and mentees discuss challenging emotional experiences and ways to work with them. This requires strong relationships and honest conversations with peers and near peers, which is made possible by the focus on belonging.

While it can be challenging to lead programming as someone outside of the school community, behavior challenges during near peer mentoring rarely escalate. Given their personal experiences and their training, mentors are willing to see behaviors that could be coded as disruptive as information about their mentee's emotional state, allowing them to respond with curiosity and flexibility, for example, by getting down next to a struggling student to check in rather than instinctively demanding they get up from the floor. This response preserves the relationship between mentee and mentor while also providing mentors with a powerful teaching opportunity. Connecting behaviors to needs allows mentors to say, "Listen I've been there, and this is what I've started to do instead." This approach reflects the mindset of the group: There is space for us, with all our strengths and challenges. As one mentee noted about their experience in the art room, "I learned about my differences and how I can see the world differently than others."

A powerful component of the program is the way both mentors and mentees disrupt enduring negative mindsets learned throughout their schooling. As one student noted, "I got the feeling like I was not alone anymore." For mentees, it can be powerful to see an older student thriving in school. Mentors are transparent about productive struggles and times where "you succeed even when you fail." As they are helping young people feel seen, heard, and valued by the community around them and in the context of school and work, mentors often share that they experience a shift in how they view their younger selves and feel more hopeful about their futures. As one mentor put it, it was a reminder that "a 'leader' doesn't need to have a specific image/way of thinking; instead, what makes someone a leader is their devotion and passion."

Given their personal experiences and their training, mentors are willing to see behaviors that could be coded as disruptive as information about their mentee's emotional state, allowing them to respond with curiosity and flexibility.

CASE STUDY SPOTLIGHTS

Generation Schools Network

Across the nation, students, school staff, families, and communities are demonstrating the need for increased support in fostering students' social, emotional, and academic wellbeing. Generation Schools Network uses a whole-school approach that fosters belonging over exclusion to build environments where students thrive. Images courtesy of Generation Schools Network.

Principal Jeremy Brent of Morrison[16] High School in Colorado was stressed. He was just finishing his first year as the school's new leader, and student-student and teacher-student conflict felt like an intractable challenge. Fights were breaking out, students were being sent out of class, and the learning community he envisioned felt far from a reality. When he took on the role, he was told that the school had been doing restorative practices for a few years and that the entire staff had received professional development from an outside trainer. However, his informal assessment told him that the school was not implementing restorative practices with fidelity. But how to do a reset? Already, he was hearing from staff members that they had "tried that and it didn't work." While Principal Brent knew the trainers who had come in previously had a great deal of knowledge about restorative practices, he wondered if maybe the school needed something more systemic. He reached out to Generation Schools Network.

Launched in 2005, Generation Schools Network (GSN) works alongside K-12 schools and districts to create equitable learning experiences that ensure all students have the opportunity to thrive. Their Health, Wellness, and Prevention team supports schools nationwide with implementation of Restorative Practices. After meeting with the Principal, the first step was to engage the staff and ask them to complete a formal survey to assess the school's readiness and capacity for restorative practices. This included questions around the staff's perception of overall leadership, the degree of SEL implementation at the school, their understanding of trauma responsive practices, and their own well-being. GSN also conducted a Leadership team assessment through in-person interviews, asking questions like "What are your other school/district priorities? What does the larger community prioritize? What else do you have going on that you'd like to address?" Upon completion of the survey, GSN staff created a report that outlined the school's readiness and capacity.

16 Pseudonyms have been used for all case studies.

Next, GSN and a school team (including administration, teacher leaders, mental health staff) met to discuss the data using a protocol that guided them through wonderings, observations, and common themes. They worked collaboratively to identify four priority needs: (1) Educator Wellness; (2) Building staff competence/ confidence; (3) Aligning to other initiatives; and (4) Tiered supports for behavior and discipline. In a conference room with chart paper and sticky notes, the team came together for some collaborative problem-solving, taking half a day to create action plans for each of the needs. GSN facilitated a logic model protocol to help the team identify measurable short, midterm and long-term outcomes. The team then identified the action steps, activities, resources, and team members responsible for each step of the plan.

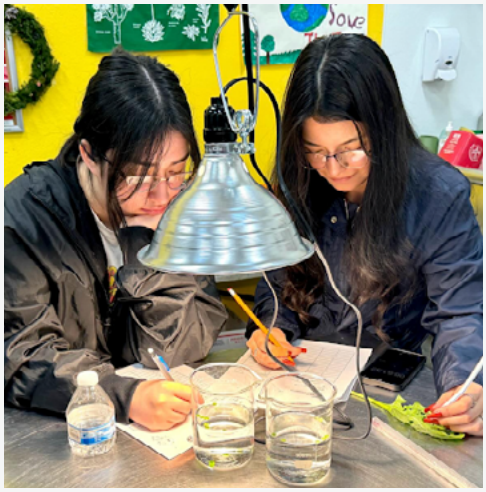
The first step was to build awareness of restorative practices, which was part of a bi-directional conversation. GSN encouraged Principal Brent to start talking with the broader community to learn about their values and concerns. This included community meetings with families, teachers, and board members. To build awareness for school staff, GSN provided professional development, starting with the foundations. For Morrison high school, this meant starting with SEL 101 to provide grounding in asset-based prevention based around the five SEL competencies. In addition, the GSN staff hoped to normalize the stress responses most educators experience and provide strategies for building resilience. As the year went on, educators were introduced to Restorative Practices with a focus on proactive strategies for building inclusive communities.

Equipped with this knowledge, educators began implementing circles, knowing that they were embarking on a two- to four-year process that would require them to try out and assess new strategies and ways of being. Congruently, GSN worked with the leadership team to help them use a systems approach to increasing staff wellness and supportive implementation. While GSN provides technical assistance during the life of the grant, their goal is to partner in a way that increases a school's capacity to sustain the work beyond their involvement. To this end, Principal Brent and his team engaged in a Train the Trainer model, preparing staff to take on the work when the grant period with GSN was complete. The hope is to prepare the team to internalize the "why" and the "how" and not simply the knowledge or "what" of restorative practices.

CASE STUDY SPOTLIGHTS

Da Vinci RISE High School

Still I RISE: A Case Study of Revolutionary Work by Dr. Erin Whalen, Assistant Superintendent of Student Services at Da Vinci Schools and Co-Founder of Da Vinci RISE. Images courtesy of Da Vinci RISE HIgh School.



Nestled on Central Ave and 29th, in the epicenter of what was once the west coast jazz scene, blocks away from the location of the first national convention of the NAACP, sits the first Da Vinci RISE High School micro-campus. RISE serves as the home of a new revolution in Los Angeles, one centering the lived-experiences of youth who have been historically underestimated. Designed and redesigned around the intricate needs of youth who interface with foster care, housing instability and the juvenile justice system, RISE is committed to using these experiences to construct a universally designed school well-equipped to serve all students.

A cornerstone of the RISE model is collocating with mission-aligned nonprofits that serve as collaborators in providing the material, academic, physical, and mental health resources youth need to access an empowering education. The students RISE serves often have complicated lives and schedules; many were let down by their traditional high schools and now need extra support. This multi-campus model ensures that when/if students are displaced, they likely have a RISE site within their region and can advocate to remain at their school of origin as they are transitioning placements. Micro-campuses also allow this population an easier access point to develop supportive relationships in a space where many of them have historically been traumatized and excluded.

At Da Vinci RISE, creating a supportive culture is everyone's job; the student services team works in tandem with the teachers, admin and operations staff to ensure youth are holistically cared for. Behavior interventionists, Case Manager-Counselors and School Psychologists circulate the building pulling students for 1:1 counseling, college and career advising, anger management, resource allocation, and more, ensuring that students' baseline needs are always accounted for. Prioritization around training all staff in the fields of restorative justice, trauma informed care and non-violent crisis intervention allows RISE to operate as a largely non-expulsion and non-suspension school, even while recruiting and serving youth who are often expelled and suspended from their previous schools.

RISE High's design reflects a set of beliefs about how learning best occurs, tied to the school's overall principles and values, based in extensive conversations with stakeholders (including students), and grounded in research on best practices in education, particularly for those students who have not been successful in more traditional learning environments. Project-based learning, culturally responsive pedagogy, trauma-informed care, and flexible scheduling are all key facets of the RISE model that ensures our students' success.

Many RISE students are unable to attend school for eight hours a day due to competing priorities deeply related to their survival. As such, we became chartered as an independent studies school to allow our youth to complete assignments whenever and wherever they are. This also means we can curate individualized schedules upon intake. The traditional independent study model of a single teacher managing multiple course packets for scores of students limits academic rigor and frustrates often already academically low-skilled students. At RISE High, students understand that learning happens in all aspects of life and not just within the four walls of a traditional classroom during specified times each day. Our flexible scheduling model within an independent study framework enables students to both receive instructional time and meet their personal needs outside of school, such as working to support themselves and their families, attending court dates, receiving counseling and mental health services, or caring for their own children or younger siblings. Students engage in interdisciplinary and real world-driven projects with industry partners and rigorous feedback cycles during their days on campuses. When offsite, they continue their learning online through Google Classroom leveraging adaptive learning technologies and teacher-curated assignments and lessons.

At RISE High, students understand that learning happens in all aspects of life and not just within the four walls of a traditional classroom during specified times each day.

RISE High seeks to make education relevant and engaging for all students by providing opportunities for thinking about how their education will apply to their life and career beyond school. Through partnerships with local industries and organizations, students have opportunities to participate in exciting internships and earn work experience that prepare them for jobs they wish to pursue in the future. Students are also connected to paying jobs where possible if they need financial support and are prepared and supported through work readiness and financial literacy courses. Skills learned in real-world experiences can result in mastered competencies and count towards course credit.

As RISE has stayed committed to the holistic wellness and preparedness of our youth, we have seen an influx of highly qualified alumni coming back to work at RISE and throughout the Da Vinci School network. RISE currently has three alumni serving on staff and a fourth working at another school within the network. We can't think of a better endorsement of the supportive climate we seek to create.

APPENDIX A: SUPPORTING COMPETENCIES OF STUDENTS WITH INTENSIVE NEEDS WITHIN A MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORTS

COMPETENCY AND DEFINITION	STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT STUDENTS WITH INTENSIVE NEED WITHIN TIER 1	STRATEGIES TO INTENSIFY SUPPORTS AT TIERS 2 AND 3
Self-awareness/ Identity	Help students understand their strengths and areas of need, including their disability and associated terminology when appropriate. If applicable, help students understand the accommodations that are in place, why they receive them, and how to appropriately self-advocate. Ensure that students are aware of learning and behavior goals, and include them in the process of developing goals in age appropriate ways.	Use a daily behavior report card to encourage students to reflect on their behavior and choose what behavior to focus on each day. Help students identify common behavioral triggers and potentially challenging situations in advance. Use a menu of reinforcement options, a survey, or an interview to help students identify what they find reinforcing.
Self-management/ Agency	Teach students strategies to regulate their emotions and solve problems (e.g., take a deep breath, count to 10). Use predictable, proactive classroom routines and structures to support students' ability to manage their emotions and behaviors. Encourage students to identify and select stress management strategies (e.g., taking a break, using breathing exercises, turning off the camera during remote learning). Use schedules and organizers to help students manage transitions or unexpected events.	Use a group contingency strategy during academic instruction to help students successfully manage behaviors. Provide opportunities for students to self-monitor their behavior and graph the data. Provide additional explicit instruction in self-management strategies and more frequent opportunities to practice and receive feedback.

COMPETENCY AND DEFINITION	STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT STUDENTS WITH INTENSIVE NEED WITHIN TIER 1	STRATEGIES TO INTENSIFY SUPPORTS AT TIERS 2 AND 3
Social awareness/ Belonging	Provide opportunities for students to share about their home cultures and engage in discussions about cultures different from their own. Integrate students' home cultures into instruction and classroom management strategies. Use literature to help students identify the emotions of characters and make connections to their own life.	Use role play to help students empathize with and understand the perspectives of others. Practice recognizing strengths in others and complimenting others. Engage students in cross-age tutoring and mentoring to promote student understanding of how to interact with others in a variety of situations.
Relationship skills/ Collaborative problem-solving	Provide coaching on conflict resolution and problem-solving in preparation for when students encounter difficulties during collaborative work. Model language to use when respectfully disagreeing with peers and how to verbally and nonverbally demonstrate respect for others' opinions during discussions. Deliver explicit instruction on how to participate in group work and collaborate with others (e.g., model the social skills needed to engage in cooperative learning). Develop structures to support collaborative work (e.g., assigned roles and responsibilities). Set up check-ins with a caring adult daily for students who may need additional SEL support.	Use more prompting and structure (e.g., sentence stems) when supporting students with interacting with peers and/or when supporting students with resolving interpersonal conflicts (e.g., "I feel _____ when you _____"). Provide opportunities for students to practice relationship skills in small groups (e.g., lunch buddies, social skills groups). Establish peer mentoring relationships to provide additional opportunities to practice relationship skills.
Responsible decision-making/ Curiosity	Help students reflect on their decisions and the consequences of their decisions. Have students participate in developing classroom norms and appropriate consequences for rule violations. Model the behaviors that are part of classroom norms (e.g., listening with respect, making comments using "I" statements, writing thoughts in their journals if they do not have time to share in class).	Use a reflection sheet to prompt students to evaluate their behavior following a conflict. Use a choice menu to help students practice responsible decision-making. Partner with families to promote responsible decision-making (e.g., align behavior expectations and reinforcement strategies across home and school).

Weingarten et al., 2020

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