Improving the Odds

Social-Emotional Learning

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Meeting of the UEN – Middle School Administrators
November 10, 2004
Council Bluffs, Iowa
All youth are:

- successful in school;
- healthy and socially competent;
- prepared for productive adulthood;
- in safe and supportive, families, schools, and communities.
Results for Iowa Youth

All youth are:

**successful in school;**
- healthy and socially competent;
- prepared for productive adulthood;
- in safe and supportive, families, schools, and communities.
Indicators of School Success

- Academic proficiency
- High level of attendance
- Staying in school (doesn’t drop out)
- Graduating from high school
- Commitment to school and learning
What is social-emotional learning?

In school, SEL is the process for integrating thinking, feeling and behavior to achieve important social tasks; meet personal and social needs; and develop the skills necessary to become a productive, contributing member of society.

More specifically, social-emotional learning is learning the skills involved in being self-confident and motivated, knowing what behaviors are expected, curbing impulses to misbehave, being able to wait, following directions, knowing how to ask for help, expressing needs, and getting along with others.

- Zins, Weissberg, Wang, and Walberg
Why social-emotional learning?

“...while intellectual development is and must continue to be the basic responsibility of the middle school, the education and nurture of young adolescents has to be an integrated venture that provides a balance between academic rigor and humanness. The physical, social, emotional, and intellectual aspects of young adolescents are inexorably woven together in the fabric of their lives. One’s readiness to achieve academically is heavily influenced by one’s personal security and self-esteem.
Why social-emotional learning?

...the reality is the whole child does come to school. It is the individual that learns, and the individual is a total organism. If an individual faces difficulties in his or her personal and out-of-school life, that individual is seriously handicapped in mastering the school’s lessons. Middle schools cannot just be schooling places; they are also growing places where much of the learning that occurs deals with the social and personal aspects of life that are not part of the content of the formal curriculum.”

- National Middle School Association’s Position Statement on Academic Achievement
Barriers to Learning Supports Success in School

Range of Learners

I  = Motivationally ready & able what the teacher is prepared to teach

II = Some students who are not very motivated/ lacking prerequisite knowledge & skills

III = A few students with complex and intensive barriers to their learning

No Barriers

Barriers to Learning

Learning Supports

Success in School

1. Classroom focused supplements to instruction
2. Safe, healthy, and caring learning environments
3. Support for transitions
4. Family support and involvement
5. Child/Youth engagement
6. Community partnerships
**Primary Prevention**: Universal school- / classroom-wide systems for all students, staff, settings

**Secondary Prevention/Early Intervention**: Specialized group systems for students at risk for problem behaviors.

**Tertiary Prevention/Intensive Interventions**: Specialized individual systems for students with chronic, intense problem behaviors.

**Target Population**: All 75% - 100% of all students

**Target Population**: Students at Risk 20-25%

**Target Population**: Students at High Risk or with Intensive Needs 1-7%

(Adapted from work of George Sugai)
Well-Designed, Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum

Improved Student Learning

Improved Academic Performance

Better Social Emotional, and Behavioral Adjustment in School and in Life

Evidence-Based Academic Programming

Quality Instruction

Short-Term 1st Order Change

Longer Term 2nd Order Change
Evidence-Based Social Emotional Learning Programming

Safe, Caring, Well-Managed Learning Environments

Greater Attachment to School

Social and Emotional Competencies

Less risky behavior and more assets and positive development

Improved Academic Performance and Success in School and in Life

Short-Term 1st Order Change

Longer Term 2nd Order Change

From CASEL (2002). Safe and Sound: An Educational Leader's Guide to Evidence-Based Social-Emotional Learning Programs
“Improving the social and emotional climate of schools and the social and emotional competence of students advances the academic mission of schools in important ways. A study estimating the relative influence of 30 different categories of educational, psychological, and social variables on learning revealed that social and emotional variables exerted the most powerful influence on academic performance.”

“Motivational problems in early adolescence may be a consequence of the type of school environment changes students are forced to adapt to rather than the characteristics of the developmental period per se. The fit between the individual’s psychological needs and the opportunities provided by the school contributes significantly to an individual student’s response to the pressures of this period.”

- National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (2002)
What Researchers Found:

- The mental and behavioral health of children in the U.S. is deteriorating.
- The cause is largely attributed to a lack of connectedness experienced by our young people.
- Connectedness comes from groups of people organized into social institutions.
- In recent decades social institutions that foster connectedness have gotten significantly weaker.
- The nature of brain development during adolescence creates a continuing need for a nurturing environment.

- Commission Children at Risk
What Researchers Found:

1. Surrounding kids with a richly nurturing environment from birth through adolescence is critical to promoting their healthy physical, emotional, moral, and spiritual development.

2. Positive social, moral, and spiritual development is integral to the healthy overall development of children and youth, and, in turn, fundamentally depends on kids receiving consistent and effective nurture from committed and caring adults.
Core Social and Emotional Competencies

- Self Awareness
- Social Awareness
- Responsible Decision-Making
- Self Management
- Relationship Management
Academic Competence: Iowa

Reading
Math
Science

Subject Areas

Percent Proficient

4th
8th
11th
“Satisfying the social and emotional needs of students...actually increases their capacity for learning. Social and emotional competence has been shown to increase mastery of subject material, motivation to learn, commitment to school, and time devoted to schoolwork. It also improves attendance, graduation rates, and prospects for constructive employment while at the same time reducing suspensions, expulsions, and grade retention.”

Connectedness to School

“A key to the success of students’ experiences in school is their sense of connection to their school. School connection is the belief by students that adults in the school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals. Research shows us that the critical requirements for feeling connected include students experiencing: high academic expectations and rigor coupled with support for learning; positive adult-student relationships; and safety, both physical and social.”

- The White House Task Force for Disadvantaged Youth
Research from the Center for Adolescent Health and Development, University of Minnesota, has shown a strong association between school connectedness and every risk behavior they studied, including school failure.
Scales

School Connectedness

- I feel close to people at this school*
- I am happy to be at this school*
- I feel like I am part of this school*
- The teachers at this school treat students fairly
- I feel safe in this school

*also used by Moody and Bearman
Results

Factors Associated with School Connectedness

THE SCHOOL

- School size mattered
  ...classroom size did not
- School type is not associated with connectedness
  ...public, private, parochial
- Location of school is not associated with connectedness
  ...urban, suburban, rural
No single school policy was associated with connectedness ...

A climate of harsh discipline is associated with lower school connectedness
Integrated social groups are associated with greater connection
  - Gender integration
  - Racial integration

Numeric integration does not necessarily lead to social integration
  - Often the more racially integrated the school was numerically the lower the mean level of connectedness.
Results – What the Research Said

Factors Associated with School Connectedness

**FRIENDSHIPS**

- The greater the number of friends from within the school a student has, the more connected he/she is.
- The more socially isolated, the less connected.
- Where the “popular” kids are academically motivated connectedness increases.
The single strongest association with connectedness was school climate.
Supportive Relationships and Probability for School Success

From Finding Out What Matters for Youth

Number of Supportive Adult Relationships

Probability

Success in School
Difficulty in School

Optimal Level
Risk Level
School Staff/Student Support: Iowa

My teachers care about me.
Teachers available to talk one on one.
Teachers notice I’m doing good job.
Students treat each other with respect.

School lets parents know if I’m doing a good job.
At least one adult at school I could go to with a problem.
My teachers care about me.

Strongly Agree

Girls = 86%  
Boys = 81%

Agree

94%  
82%  
74%
My teachers are available to talk to students one-on-one.

- Strongly Agree: 92%
- Agree: 83%
- Girls = 85%
- Boys = 84%
Teachers notice when I am doing a good job.

- Strongly Agree: 81%
- Agree: 79%
- Agree: 66%

Girls = 79%  
Boys = 78%
Students in my school treat each other with respect.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree

Girls = 54%  
Boys = 51%
School lets parents know if I’m doing a good job.

Strongly Agree Agree

Girls = 72%  Boys = 71%
There is at least one adult at school who I could go to for help with a problem.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6th</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th</td>
<td>84%</td>
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</tbody>
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Girls = 89%  Boys = 87%
Commitment to School: Iowa

I care about my school.
I try to do my best in school.
I plan to finish high school.
I do the homework that is assigned.
I care about my school

- Strongly Agree: Girls = 83%, Boys = 75%
- Agree: 6th Grade = 92%, 8th Grade = 77%, 11th Grade = 70%
I feel safe at school.

- Strongly Agree: 88%
- Agree: 81%
- 81%

Girls = 85%
Boys = 82%
“The early adolescent needs “an environment that is both reasonably safe and intellectually challenging – one that provides a ‘zone of comfort’ as well as challenging new opportunities for growth…Research studies suggest that school environments that are responsive and developmentally sensitive to the changes in young adolescents’ needs and desires can facilitate positive development during the turbulent adolescent years.”

- Eccles (1999)
“The underlying theory, based on years of research, is that in order to experience healthy development youth need to be provided fundamental supports and opportunities in every setting...where they spend their time. These supports and opportunities are:

1. Supportive relationships;
2. Physical and psychological safety;
3. Youth involvement;
4. Skill building - academic and social-emotional competence;
5. Community involvement.”

- Finding Out What Matters for Youth – Institute for Research and Reform in Education
The White House Task Force for Disadvantaged Youth states, “based on current research evidence, the most effective strategies for increasing the likelihood that students will be connected to school include:

- Implementing high standards and expectations, and providing academic support to all students;
- Applying fair and consistent disciplinary policies that are collectively agreed upon and fairly enforced;
- Creating trusting relationships among students, teachers, staff, administrators, and families;
- Hiring and supporting capable teachers skilled in content, teaching techniques, and classroom management to meet each learner’s needs;
- Fostering high parent/family expectations for school performance and school completion; and
- Ensuring that every student feels close to at least one supportive adult at school.
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Person-Environment Fit: Early Adolescence and the Middle School Environment

**Person**
- Focus on self
- Desire for control
- Increased ability to use higher level cognitive strategies
- Peer relationships important
- Need for close adult relationships outside home

**Environmental Mismatch**
- Emphasis on competition, social comparison, and ability self assessment
- Decreased decision-making/choice
- Emphasis on lower level cognitive strategies
- Disruptive to social networks
- School size, scheduling & other structural factors interfere with development of relationships with adults at school
- **Contexts that promote social-emotional learning**
  - Safe
  - Supportive
  - Caring
  - Developmentally appropriate

- **Strategies that develop social-emotional competence**
  - Direct instruction
  - Modeling
  - Practice
  - Feedback
What Works

- Schoolwide discipline programs that teach prosocial behavior
- Social skills instruction
- Instruction in decision-making and problem solving
- Mentoring
- Student involvement
Worth Reviewing

- Hardwired to Connect – Commission on Children at Risk (2003)
- Community Programs to Promote Youth Development, National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (2002)
- Improving the Odds: The Untapped Power of Schools to Improve the Health of Teens, Robert Wm. Blum, MD, Ph.D., Director, Center for Adolescent Health and Development, University of Minnesota