

Supporting Students' Social, Emotional, Behavioral, and Academic Well-Being and Success: Strategies for Educators and School-Based Staff



This fact sheet is one of four developed by a collaboration of U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Safe and Supportive Schools technical assistance centers to enhance state and district implementation of the [Guiding Principles for Creating Safe, Inclusive, Supportive, and Fair School Climates](#) to ensure that all students have the opportunity to learn in environments that are safe, inclusive, supportive, and fair. Please view the supporting fact sheets here: <https://t4pacenter.ed.gov/SupportiveSchools>.

Framing the Topic and Needs

Educators and other school-based staff are critical to provide an important foundation of social, emotional, behavioral, and academic support for all students. Without that support, students may experience more challenges, higher rates of discipline, and increased mental health concerns. Further, national data suggest that students of color and students with disabilities—particularly Black male students with disabilities—are the least likely to receive effective social, emotional, behavioral, and academic support and are the most likely to experience out-of-school suspensions, expulsions,

and other exclusionary disciplinary actions, which impacts their access to instruction and learning.¹ Ensuring that all students have equitable access to high-quality social, emotional, behavioral, and academic support makes an important contribution to students' well-being and success.

To maximize each student's success, educators and other school-based staff should implement evidence-based practices within a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) framework. Specifically, as a part of universal (Tier 1) support, educators implement and differentiate key proactive practices to provide robust universal prevention.² For students



whose needs persist, educators further target (Tier 2) or intensify (Tier 3) support within a prevention framework. This fact sheet describes positive and proactive approaches to help adults support and respond to students' social, emotional, and behavioral needs in classrooms or other instructional settings. These approaches include practices designed to reduce the need for exclusionary discipline.

Strategies or Practices to Address Needs

A full continuum of schoolwide and classroom support is critical to (a) support students' social, emotional, behavioral, and academic well-being³ and (b) reduce the overuse and disproportionate use of exclusionary discipline. While developing the full continuum, educators and school-based staff should prioritize a few key evidence-based practices to make immediate and impactful changes in their classrooms or other instructional settings.



Strategy #1: Prioritize Connection

Educators should work to create a welcoming schoolwide and classroom environment where all students and families⁴ feel that they [belong](#). To achieve this, educators can learn about students, their families, and their communities to facilitate connection, and educators can take every opportunity to connect with other educators, students, and families. One simple strategy for educators to implement is to [greet](#) students as they enter the space. A positive greeting includes welcoming each student by name, briefly interacting, and providing a quick reminder about shared classroom norms, thereby setting students up for success and creating opportunities for consistent interaction and relationship building.

Strategy #2: Engage Students in Relevant Instruction

Educators incorporate students' interests and experiences into instruction, prioritize [explicit](#) and [engaging lessons](#), and [use data](#) to guide instruction. To [effectively engage students](#), educators can provide students with frequent, high-quality opportunities to engage during [universally designed](#) and culturally and linguistically relevant and responsive instruction. Educators may also incorporate a few strategies to increase students' opportunities to engage (e.g., response cards, wipe-off boards, online applications that track and graph student responses) throughout the week. Educators can also ensure that opportunities to engage are inclusive, and all students have the skills, support, technology, and accommodations necessary to meaningfully engage—including students with diverse abilities, language backgrounds, and communication needs.⁵

Strategy #3: Provide Positive and Supportive Feedback

To support students' social, emotional, behavioral, and academic well-being, educators provide [specific positive feedback](#), or praise, to acknowledge students' effective use of learned skills (e.g., correctly applying a math strategy, displaying

the ability to express and respond to personal and group challenges). When students make inevitable mistakes (e.g., incorrectly applying a math strategy, inappropriately managing stress), educators create an opportunity for them to learn and grow by calmly and privately providing [specific supportive feedback](#) that addresses the error and teaches the skills needed to be successful in the future. To promote desired outcomes, educators may monitor their positive-to-corrective ratio (e.g., keep a tally, use the [Be+ App](#)) and provide more positive than corrective feedback.

Each of these positive and proactive practices can (a) improve student outcomes (see [Supporting and Responding to Students' Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Needs](#)⁶) as part of universal (Tier 1) support, (b) be further targeted (Tier 2) or intensified (Tier 3) within an MTSS framework, and (c) be combined with other practices to meet the needs of all students (see [Multi-Tiered System of Supports \(MTSS\) in the Classroom](#)⁷).

Systems Considerations

To support students' needs, reduce the use of exclusionary discipline, and enhance implementation of key practices, educators can

- Learn more about evidence-based practices in the classroom (e.g., review resources listed in the next section) and prioritize a few (one to three) key practices (e.g., connecting, engaging, and providing feedback).
- Make a plan to enhance implementation (e.g., identify supports, remove roadblocks).
- Monitor implementation and student benefits and use data to adjust implementation.
- Ask for help from a colleague, coach, administrator, or other professional with additional expertise, when needed.
- Celebrate successes!



Resources

These general resources will help in the implementation of practices to support and respond to students' social, emotional, and behavioral needs and apply the systems considerations recommended in this fact sheet.

- [Supporting and Responding to Students' Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Needs](#) — learn more about evidence-based, positive, and proactive practices that support and respond to students' social, emotional, and behavioral needs in classrooms and similar teaching and learning environments.
- [Habits of Effective Classroom Practice](#) — learn more about developing habits of effective classroom practice and expanding effective habits in our schools, districts, and states.
- [Multi-Tiered System of Supports \(MTSS\) in the Classroom](#) — find guidance on implementing positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) in the classroom across the continuum of student needs.
- [Creating a Safe and Respectful Environment in Our Nation's Classrooms](#) — find more information on intervening in bullying behavior and creating a positive classroom climate.
- [Improving Students' Relationships With Teachers to Provide Essential Supports for Learning](#) — learn more about how positive relationships can help students develop socially and academically.
- [Fostering School Connectedness: Improving Student Health and Academic Achievement](#) — find strategies that can help foster school connectedness.

Endnotes

¹ Fabelo, T., Thompson, M. D., Plotkin, M., Carmichael, D., Marchbanks, M. P., & Booth, E. A. (2011). *Breaking schools' rules: A statewide study of how school discipline relates to students' success and juvenile justice involvement*. Council of State Governments Justice Center; Sullivan, A. L., Van Norman, E. R., & Klingbeil, D. A. (2014). Exclusionary discipline of students with disabilities: Student and school characteristics predicting suspension. *Remedial and Special Education, 35*, 199–210. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0741932513519825>; U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. (2019). *School climate and safety: Data highlights on school climate and safety in our nation's public schools*. U.S. Department of Education. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/school-climate-and-safety.pdf> (Original work published 2018); Vincent, C. G., Tobin, T. J., Hawken, L. S., & Frank, J. L. (2012). Discipline referrals and access to secondary level support in elementary and middle schools: Patterns across African-American, Hispanic-American, and white students. *Education and Treatment of Children, 35*, 431-458. <https://doi.org/10.1353/etc.2012.0018>

² Long, A. C. J., Miller, F. G., & Upright, J. J. (2019). Classroom management for ethnic-racial minority students: A meta-analysis of single-case design studies. *School Psychology, 34*(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1037/spq0000305>; Oliver, R. M., Wehby, J. H., & Reschly, D. J. (2011). Teacher classroom management practices: Effects on disruptive or aggressive student behavior. *Campbell Systematic Reviews, 4*, 1–55. <https://doi.org/10.4073/csr.2011.4>; Simonsen, B., Fairbanks, S., Briesch, A., Myers, D., & Sugai, G. (2008). Evidence-based practices in classroom management: Considerations for research to practice. *Education & Treatment of Children, 31*(3), 351–380. <https://doi.org/10.1353/etc.0.0007>; Sutherland, K. S., Conroy, M. A., McLeod, B. D., Kunemund, R., & McKnight, K. (2019). Common practice elements for improving social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes of young elementary school students. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 27*(2), 76–85. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1063426618784009>;

³ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. (2021). *Supporting child and student social, emotional, behavioral, and mental health needs*. <https://www2.ed.gov/documents/students/supporting-child-student-social-emotional-behavioral-mental-health.pdf>

⁴ Families refers inclusively to parents, other family members, caregivers, guardians, and in some cases students.

⁵ For more information on federal civil rights laws that protect students from discrimination based on disability, sex, race, color, or national origin, including English Learners, visit the Office for Civil Rights' Web site at <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/index.html>.

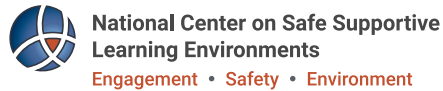
⁶ Center on PBIS. (2022). *Supporting and responding to students' social, emotional, and behavioral needs: Evidence-based practices for educators (Version 2.0)*. Center on PBIS, University of Oregon. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/supporting-and-responding-to-behavior-evidence-based-classroom-strategies-for-teachers>

⁷ Simonsen, B., Robbie, K., Meyer, K., Freeman, J., Everett, S., & Feinberg, A. (2021, November). *Multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) in the classroom*. Center on PBIS, University of Oregon. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/multi-tiered-system-of-supports-mtss-in-the-classroom>

For more information:



<https://bestpracticesclearinghouse.ed.gov>



<https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov>



<https://oese.ed.gov/student-engagement-and-attendance-technical-assistance-sea-center/>



<https://rems.ed.gov>



<https://www.pbis.org/>



<https://selcenter.wested.org>



<https://t4pacenter.ed.gov>

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