

## Shifting the Current School Climate

# SENSE OF BELONGING AND SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Often, conversations about social and emotional learning (SEL) focus on what students bring to the table and how they can increase their SEL skills. However, SEL is just one of many factors that affect students' social, emotional, and academic well-being. When we emphasize only students' capacities and characteristics, we may overlook the equally important influences of school climate; sense of belonging; and adults' attitudes, actions, and behavior.

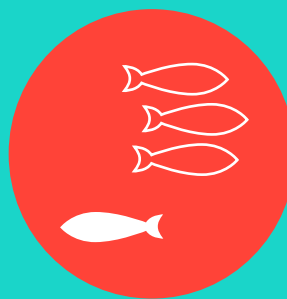
Like the current of a stream, school climate shapes how adults and students engage in the school community. A positive climate in which everyone feels safe, valued, and respected can help increase each student's sense of belonging in school. And when all students feel like they belong, they are more engaged, more motivated, and healthier—and they achieve more.

In addition, because climate permeates everything educators and students do and experience in schools, removing barriers to promote a healthy climate isn't "just one more thing to do" or something that diverts attention from academic development. Rather, intentionally or not, it is the foundation for all school activities.

Students need to know that adults care for them, genuinely believe in their potential, and have their best interests at heart.



**Belonging is linked to better academic, psychological, and health outcomes<sup>1</sup>**



**About 25 percent of students are classified as having a low sense of belonging<sup>2</sup>**



**Teacher support is one of the strongest predictors of having a sense of belonging in school<sup>3</sup>**



**Emotional support from teachers is linked to SEL development in students<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Jose, Ryan, & Pryor, 2012  
<sup>2</sup> Willms, 2003

<sup>3</sup> Allen, Kern, Vella-Brodrick, Hattie, & Waters, 2018

<sup>4</sup> Merritt, Wanless, Rimm-Kaufmann, Cameron, & Peugh, 2012

# LEARNING IS PROFOUNDLY SOCIAL

A positive environment that supports a sense of belonging is key to student success

Hire teachers and administrators who reflect the diversity of your students<sup>7</sup>

## CHANGE THE QUESTION

Why do these students have poor social and emotional capacities?



How can we ensure our school climate leads to the healthy development of each student?

## SCHOOLWIDE ACTIONS

Take a schoolwide approach to SEL that includes policies and practices that foster positive climate, such as replacing punitive or exclusionary discipline with restorative justice<sup>9</sup> or positive behavioral interventions and supports<sup>10</sup>

Provide educators with training on emotional intelligence, mindfulness, and resilience to stress and trauma<sup>6</sup>

Encourage teachers to engage in perspective-taking to better understand students' experiences and the negative feelings that may lead to misbehavior<sup>8</sup>

Adopt strong anti-bullying policies to promote inclusivity and improve school safety for marginalized students<sup>5</sup>

# BELONGING

Have, communicate, and support high expectations for all your students<sup>12</sup>

Use mindfulness practices to reduce your exhaustion and stress<sup>14</sup>

Strive to find common ground and similarities with all your students<sup>13</sup>

Use culturally responsive practices to promote a sense of belonging in students from traditionally underserved groups<sup>16</sup>

Encourage students to focus on mastery rather than performance goals. Cultivate a classroom in which mistakes are understood to be part of learning, effort is valued, and students learn to appreciate challenges and hard work<sup>15</sup>

## CLASSROOM-LEVEL ACTIONS

Noticing students who don't seem to feel comfortable in the school? Here are actions you can take.

Structure dynamic group work in which small groups jointly solve a problem in ways that encourage cooperation<sup>11</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Kull, Greytak, Kosciw, & Villenas, 2016  
<sup>6</sup> Jennings & Greenberg, 2009  
<sup>7</sup> Dee, 2004  
<sup>8</sup> Okonofua, Paunesku, & Walton, 2016

<sup>9</sup> Greenberg, Domitrovich, Weissberg, & Durlak, 2017  
<sup>10</sup> Ross, Romer, & Horner, 2012  
<sup>11</sup> Aronson & Patnoe, 1997; Hake, 1998  
<sup>12</sup> Yeager et al., 2016

<sup>13</sup> Gehlbach et al., 2016  
<sup>14</sup> Jennings et al., 2017  
<sup>15</sup> National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018  
<sup>16</sup> Covarrubias, Herrmann, & Fryberg, 2016

## OTHER RESOURCES

- ➔ **“Getting It Right: Reference Guides for Registering Students with Non-English Names”** from Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest: [https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northwest/pdf/REL\\_2016158.pdf](https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northwest/pdf/REL_2016158.pdf)
- ➔ **“Pursuing Social and Emotional Development Through a Racial Equity Lens”** from Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development: <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/pursuing-social-and-emotional-development-through-a-racial-equity-lens-a-call-to-action/>
- ➔ **“School Climate and Social and Emotional Learning”** from Robert Wood Johnson Foundation: <https://www.rwjf.org/en/library/research/2018/01/school-climate-and-social-and-emotional-learning.html>
- ➔ **“School Connectedness: Strategies for Increasing Protective Factors Among Youth”** from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [https://www.search-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/cdc\\_school\\_connectedness\\_report.pdf](https://www.search-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/cdc_school_connectedness_report.pdf)
- ➔ **“Strengthening Relationships with Students from Various Backgrounds”** from Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AWliHzJVVeQ&feature=youtu.be>

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