How school climate and social-emotional learning can improve student outcomes

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The science of learning and development
Learning and development happens through relationships

The brain develops throughout life as a function of experiences that activate neural pathways, which permit new kinds of thinking and learning.

The kinds of experience matter greatly.

- Secure relationships
- Rich, stimulating environments
- Back-and-forth conversation

Social, emotional, affective, and cognitive processes are neurobiologically linked.

Science of Learning and Development (SoLD) practice principles

A Framework for Whole Child Education

Whole Child
social-emotional, cognitive, academic, ethical, physical, psychological development

Social and Emotional Development
Promotes the skills, habits, and mindsets that enable self-regulation, interpersonal skills, perseverance, and resilience.

Positive School Climate
Promotes strong attachments and relationships, a sense of safety and belonging, and relational trust.

System of Supports
Ensure healthy development, meet student needs, and address learning barriers.

Extended learning opportunities
Coordinated access to integrated services
Multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS)
Learning to learn strategies
Productive instructional strategies
Connect to student experience, support conceptual understanding, and develop metacognitive abilities.

Identity-safe classroom learning communities
Trust and connections among staff and families
Integration of social emotional skills
Development of positive mindsets
Educative and restorative behavioral supports
Student-centered instruction
Conceptual understanding and motivation

Darling-Hammond, Flook, Cook-Harvey, Barron, & Osher, 2019
School climate and SEL
School climate is the physical, academic, social, and disciplinary environment

- Culture, norms, goals, values, practices, characteristics of relationships, and organizational structures.

- Disparities in how students experience school climate creates inequities and alienation; inclusive, culturally competent school climates helps everyone.

- Positive school climates are protective during school transitions.
SEL is the process of learning and building competencies

- Understand and manage emotions.
- Set and achieve positive goals.
- Feel and show empathy for others.
- Establish and maintain positive relationships.
- Make responsible decisions.
School climate and SEL have been studied separately

**School climate**
- Policies, procedures, and norms
- Cultural context
- Physical environment
- Partnerships with families and community

**Social and emotional competence**
- Social and emotional skills
- Values
- Perspectives
- Identities
Research on SEL and school climate shows positive effects on both

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Barriers to equitable, high-quality SEL

Simmons, Brackett, & Adler, 2018
Systemic schoolwide implementation of SEL

- Explicit SEL instruction
- SEL integrated with academic instruction
- Youth voice and engagement
- Supportive school and classroom climates
- Focus on adult SEL
- Supportive discipline
- A continuum of integrated supports
- Authentic family partnerships
- Aligned community partnerships
- Systems for continuous improvement
The integration of school climate and SEL
Research shows four primary conditions in a school’s environment can have a positive or negative effect on students, including their academic outcomes and attendance record.

**Safety**
- Physically, emotionally and identity-safe environment
- Low-risk environment
- An absence of microaggressions and stereotype threat
- Respectful

**Connectedness & Belonging**
- Meaningful connection between adults and students
- Cultural respect, inclusiveness, and responsiveness
- Positive peer relationships
- Belonging and membership
- Sense of support

**Academic Challenge**
- High goals and expectations
- Connection to life goals
- Culturally responsive & engaging
- Robust opportunities to learn
- Strong individual motivation
- Developmentally appropriate

**Social & Emotional Support**
- Attention to student development, experience, and circumstance
- Support of young people's potential
- Humble, persistent, responsible, and empathetic educators
- Creativity and collaboration modeled and valued
- Growth mindset
- Social and emotional learning and support

**SOURCE:** Conditions for Learning (CFL) Reference Guide, National Clearinghouse on Supportive School Discipline
Conditions for SEL

**School climate**
- Policies, procedures, and norms
- Cultural context
- Physical environment
- Partnerships with families and community

**Supportive relationships**
- Engagement
- Safety
- Cultural competence
- Culturally responsiveness
- Challenge and high expectations

**Social and emotional competence**
- Social and emotional skills
- Values
- Perspectives
- Identities
Build Cultural Competence

- Engage in self-awareness & self-reflection
- Recognize the impact of individual and social identities & bias
- Understand the impact of power and privilege in context
- Model SEL competencies

(Blair, 2002; Jemal, 2017; Johnson, 2005; Major, 2002; Radd & Macey, 2013; Rudman, 2004; Staats, 2014)
School climate and SEL are interactive, co-influential, and occur in all settings.
Work at three levels

Provide individualized intensive supports
Provide coordinated, intensive, sustained, and culturally appropriate child- and family-focused services and supports.

Intervene early and provide focused youth development activities
Implement strategies and provide supports that address risk factors and build protective factors for students at risk for severe academic or behavioral difficulties.

Build a schoolwide foundation
Universal prevention and youth development approaches, caring school climate, positive and proactive approach to discipline, personalized instruction, cultural competence, student voice, and strong family involvement.
10 key ideas for SEL and school climate integration

1. Focus on equity
3. Create a unified message.
4. Spread the word.
5. Invest in professional development.
6. Incorporate student leadership.
7. Involve families and community.
8. Identify what we know and don’t know.
10. Act quickly and strategically.

District implementation of school climate and social-emotional learning policy

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Improving school discipline

- Discipline policies
- Multi-tiered supports
- Positive approaches
Targeted programs and strategies

• School climate standards
• Bullying prevention
• Social and emotional learning
• Character education
• Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)
• Trauma-sensitive approaches
• Student voice/Student leadership
Culturally responsive practices

• School climate and equity
• Creating bias-free and respectful school environments
• Culturally responsive teaching
Interagency collaboration and stakeholder engagement
Assessing school climate