



Tool VIII: Resources and Sample Strategies for Social-Emotional Learning and School Culture & Climate

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Do you have suggestions for improving these resources? Email us at team@transformingeducation.org!

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Growth Mindset

The belief that you can grow your talents and abilities with effort. Students with a growth mindset see effort as necessary for success, embrace challenges, learn from criticism, and persist in the face of setbacks. For a more detailed description of this competency, [click here](#).

Transforming Education has developed a toolkit to help educators learn more about growth mindset. The toolkit includes a more detailed explanation of growth mindset, video clips summarizing the supporting research and capturing students' own experiences related to growth mindset, as well as a variety of strategies that teachers can use to help students develop a growth mindset. To download the Growth Mindset Toolkit, [click here](#).

Sample Strategies (*excerpted directly from Carol Dweck interview)

Praise Effort and Process Over Results

Use targeted language that focuses attention on practice rather than results to convey the belief that consistent effort leads to desirable results:

"Wow, you did great on that. You must have worked really hard."

"Tell me about the different strategies you used to get to that answer."

Nurture a Culture That Tolerates Risk and Mistakes

Portray challenges as fun and exciting, while portraying easy tasks as boring and less useful for the brain. When students initially struggle or make mistakes, the teacher should view this as an opportunity to teach students how to try different strategies if the first ones don't work—how to step back and think about what to try next, like a detective solving a mystery.*

Think of the Brain as Something That Grows

Work with your students to create posters or other reminders that the brain, like a muscle, grows and gets stronger with effort.

Encourage Students to Share Advice

Have students write a letter to a struggling student explaining the growth mindset, telling the struggler not to label himself or herself, and giving the student advice on improvement strategies to try.*

Emphasize Process and Perseverance

Instead of displaying only finished student work, post work in progress or drafts so students can see how work evolves with effort and feedback.

Emphasize that fast learning is not always the deepest and best learning and that students who take longer sometimes understand things at a deeper level. Students can learn about many historical figures who were not regarded as "fast" learners in childhood. Albert Einstein swore that he was slow to learn and that's why he pondered the same questions year after year—with, as we know, excellent results.*

Additional Readings & Resources:

- [Interview with Carol Dweck on Growth Mindset](#)
- [A more detailed definition of Growth Mindset](#)
- [Even Geniuses Work Hard: Strategies for Developing a Growth Mindset](#)
- [The Power of Mistakes: Creating a Risk-Tolerant Culture at Home and School](#)
- [Students' View of Intelligence Can Help Grades](#)
- ['Growth Mindset' Gaining Traction as School Improvement Strategy](#)
- [TED Talk on Mindsets and Success](#)

Self-Management

The ability to effectively manage your emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations. This includes managing stress, delaying gratification, motivating yourself, and setting and working toward personal and academic goals. For a more detailed description of this competency, [click here](#).

Transforming Education has developed a toolkit to help educators learn more about self-management. The toolkit includes a more detailed explanation of self-management, video clips summarizing the supporting research and capturing students' own experiences related to self-management, as well as a variety of strategies that teachers can use to help students develop self-management skills. To download the Self-Management Toolkit, [click here](#).

Sample Strategies (*adapted from Character Lab)

The WOOP Method:

The WOOP strategy, which is positive thinking plus a dose of reality, contains four steps:

- **Wish:** Students name an important but feasible wish or goal that they want to fulfill.
- **Outcome:** Students imagine, as vividly as possible, what the future will be like once they fulfill this wish or reach the goal.
- **Obstacle:** Students imagine the most critical personal obstacle that stands in the way of fulfilling that wish or reaching the goal.
- **Plan:** Students name an effective behavior to overcome the obstacle and create a specific plan using an if-then statement: *"If X happens, then I will Y."**

Student Self-Monitoring

Create clear self-management expectations and provide opportunities for students to track their own progress towards these goals over time. Consider adding a public reporting component.

- **Readiness to learn:** Create a checklist and set aside time at the beginning of class for students to assess their readiness to learn: *"Do I have all the tools to learn? Books, pen, notebook, assignments..."* Track the results so that students can see progress over time.
- **Classroom behavior:** Create a simple series of expectations for students that they can track. *"Am I listening to others? Am I waiting for people to finish before I talk? Am I using appropriate language to disagree? Am I using an appropriate tone and not raising my voice?"* At the end of each class, have students rate themselves and record their results.

Sample Strategies (continued)

Create Awareness of When Students Learn Best

Help students understand when they learn best so that they can seek out and create situations to maximize their learning.

- Each student creates a list that completes the phrase *“I focus best when...”* or *“I learn best when...”*
- Ask each student to identify three things to seek related to when they learn best and three to avoid.
- Students record how often these situations occur and track their progress over time.

Additional Readings & Resources:

- [More on the WOOP Method](#)
- [Multimedia Resources for Self-Regulation](#)
- [Interview about the Marshmallow Experiment](#)
- [University of Michigan Emotion & Self-Control Lab](#)
- [Instructional Strategies for Self-Management and Classroom Management](#)
- [Book on the Marshmallow Test](#)
- [The Duckworth Lab Resources for Educators](#)
- [Don't! The secret of self-control](#)

Self-Efficacy

The belief that you can succeed in achieving an outcome or reaching a goal. Self-efficacy reflects confidence in your own ability to control or manage your motivation, behavior, and environment. For a more detailed description of this competency, [click here](#).

Sample Strategies (adapted from materials developed by the Motivation Research Institute and from the article entitled “Golden Rules for Engaging Students in Learning Activities”)

Define “Success” in Clear and Relevant Ways:

- Focus on learning activities that are relevant and engaging so that students see inherent value in succeeding.
- Set clear, developmentally-appropriate expectations about what success looks like in a particular context.
- Model (or have other students model) what success looks like, e.g.:
 - Prior to starting a new task, mentally walk students through the task to visualize what it will take to reach the goal.
 - Display pictures or videos of students at work on projects with comments about the skills being demonstrated.

Self-Efficacy Sample Strategies (continued)

Build A Sense of Momentum and Progress:

- Teach students about growth mindset and help them understand that they can build their skills with practice and effort
- Break big goals into smaller pieces to create opportunities for “small wins” along the way
- Focus on what’s already been achieved by showing students that they’re already X% of the way to meeting their goal (even if X is a low number)
- Celebrate each incremental step towards the goal to give students the experience of being successful in small ways
- Create opportunities for students to regularly demonstrate their growing understanding throughout the activity
- Provide task-specific (rather than ability-focused) feedback to help students improve their performance
- Ask students to identify specific times that they feel confident in their ability to succeed and describe what they’re thinking and feeling in those moments

Address Potential Barriers to Success:

- Make sure that students have the time and resources needed to reach their goals
- Acknowledge competing demands on students’ time and make a plan together about how to prioritize accordingly
- Ensure that students feel physically and psychologically safe when engaging classroom activities

Additional Readings & Resources:

- [Motivation Research and Assessment Resources](#)
- [Golden Rules for Engaging Students in Learning Activities](#)
- [Video Lecture on Self Efficacy](#)

Social Awareness

The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to understand social and ethical norms for behavior, and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports. For a more detailed description of this competency, [click here](#).

Sample Strategies (adapted from the article entitled “3 Strategies to Foster Sociability”)

Create A Common Social Language & Shared Norms

One of the most effective strategies to teach social skills in school is to create a common **social language** that becomes part of the classroom culture. This language contains familiar, understandable ways to communicate with others, including how to listen, show gratitude, or apologize.

When students are actively engaged in setting social norms, research shows that cooperative behavior and learning increases. As a result of their involvement, students come to understand the benefits of collaboration. It is also an experiential lesson in democracy and social responsibility.

Engage Students in Collaborative Learning

Collaborative learning involves working together with peers toward a common goal. Often, it involves collectively identifying and studying real-world problems, interacting with classmates, and assessing each other's contributions. The best environment for cooperative learning is one where students:

1. Must cooperate to complete the assignment
2. Are each held accountable for the final outcome (they sink or swim together)
3. Help each other learn
4. Use interpersonal and small-group skills like decision making, conflict resolution, and effective communication
5. Reflect on how well their team has functioned and how it can improve.

Additional Readings & Resources:

- [3 Strategies to Foster Sociability](#)
- [Dr. Marc Brackett on Emotional Intelligence](#)
- [The Morningside Center for Social Responsibility - Teachable Moment Classroom Activities](#)
- [5 Strategies to Teach Social Responsibility](#)
- [Facing History and Ourselves - Teaching Strategies](#)
- [Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence – Mood Meter App](#)

General SEL Resources:

- [What is Social-Emotional Learning?](#)
- [CASEL Guide to Effective SEL Programs](#)
- [A National Teacher Survey on How Social and Emotional Learning Can Empower Children and Transform Schools](#)
- [Smart Hearts: Social and Emotional Learning Overview Video](#)
- [Emotional Intelligence Is the Missing Piece](#)
- [Can Emotional Intelligence Be Taught?](#)
- [The Heart-Brain Connection: The Neuroscience of Social and Emotional Learning](#)

CULTURE & CLIMATE

Climate of Support for Academic Learning

Students and teachers feel that there is a climate conducive to learning and that teachers use supportive practices, such as encouragement and constructive feedback; varied opportunities to demonstrate knowledge and skills; support for risk-taking and independent thinking; atmosphere conducive to dialog and questioning; academic challenge; and individual attention to support differentiated learning.

Sample Strategies (excerpted from WestEd What Works Briefs on *Caring Relationships, **Meaningful Participation, and ***Family Engagement)

Focus on Growth, not Ability*

- Communicate high expectations for effort (e.g., “I know that you will work hard on this!”)
- Communicate a belief in the ability for students to grow (e.g., “You worked hard on this. Tomorrow you will finish even more than you did today!”)
- Give opportunities for students to re-take tests. This communicates that your focus is on growth and learning, not absolute performance.
- Base statements of encouragement on growth, not ability. Don’t say, “You’re so smart, I knew this would be no problem for you.” Do say, “Wow, you got this done so quickly. It looks like you are ready to challenge yourself with the next assignment!”

Support Meaningful Learning**

- Give opportunities for choice, including choice within assignments, project topics, and subjects of inquiry.
- Have students set challenging goals for themselves.
- Have students collaborate to set class and school norms, as well as learning goals.
- Integrate project-based learning, place-based learning, and hands-on activities into your curriculum. Take students where they want to go—literally! Have students brainstorm places they should visit to learn more about their topic of study, then take them there. This need not be elaborate; it might include a trip within the local neighborhood.
- Collaborate with faculty from other departments to develop project-based assignments that span multiple classes and topics.

Model High Expectations and Encourage Self-Determination and Self-Reflection***

- Talk with students and families about college readiness.
- Set up tours or ask families and students to visit local colleges and universities.
- Share scholarship opportunities with students and families.
- Give students opportunities to revise their assignments or retake tests.
- Find internship and volunteer opportunities for students who demonstrate readiness.
- Invite a variety of professionals to speak to students and families about their fields of work.
- Help students prepare to participate in Advanced Placement courses.
- Reward students with encouraging statements and actions (e.g., special lunch time meetings or calls to parents) over external rewards (e.g., gift cards).

Additional Resources:

- [Opportunities for Meaningful Participation – WestEd What Works Brief](#)
- [Caring Relationships and High Expectations – WestEd What Works Brief](#)
- [Family Engagement – WestEd What Works Brief](#)
- [More on Project-Based Learning](#)
- [More on Place-Based Learning](#)

Knowledge and Fairness of Discipline, Rules and Norms

Clearly communicated rules and expectations about student and adult behavior, especially regarding physical violence, verbal abuse or harassment, and teasing; clear and consistent enforcement and norms for adult intervention.

Sample Strategies (excerpted from pg. 3-4 of WestEd What Works Brief – Proactive and Inclusive School Discipline Strategies)

The District Role: Use Data, Write Smart Policy & Identify School Leaders

- Select school leaders who articulate an innovative philosophy on the purpose and practice of school discipline.
- Reconsider Zero Tolerance policies, which can remove students from active learning environments.
- Regularly examine school discipline data with careful attention to disparities across subgroups (e.g., race, gender, disability, language learner status).
- Include policy standards for involving Student Voice in school discipline policies (e.g., convene a representative group of students to provide input on any proposed new school discipline policy).
- Focus on prevention. Consider what skills students need to acquire in order to reduce the need for undesired behavior.
- Adopt curricula and strategies designed to build and reinforce social and emotional skills. Build time into school days to allow teachers to provide instruction on social and emotional skills.
- Identify district personnel responsible for helping school adults move from traditional discipline philosophies and practices to innovative ones. Teachers need support and coaching in order to make sustainable changes to classroom management practices.
- Identify funds and resources needed to implement effective, innovative discipline practices, including funds for professional development and ongoing coaching.
- Train staff in principles and procedures of Threat Assessment.

School Leader Role: Communicate, Motivate & Empower

- Communicate clearly and regularly a vision for innovative discipline practices.
- Enlist all members of the school community, including staff, students, and families, in the process of writing just and equitable school rules.
- Build a team of motivated students and school adults to review discipline-related data; critically examine school discipline policies; and provide recommendations for improvement that are consistent with an innovative vision.

Sample Strategies (continued)

- Administer consequences for infractions fairly and consistently.
- Carefully log all infractions into student information systems software to ensure that data represent a clear and accurate vision of how discipline is administered in the school (i.e., by student demographics, by teacher, and by location).
- Prioritize innovative behavior management practices as a topic for staff professional development.
- Observe teachers and school staff regularly and systematically to ensure that innovative behavior management practices are being applied as intended. Provide feedback immediately and add additional supports (e.g., coaching) as needed.

The Teacher Role: Build Trust, Establish Community, & Engage Students

- Engage students in developing “classroom norms.” Explain that norms are ways that we agree to behave in a group. Classroom norms help ensure that everyone feels like the classroom is a safe place to learn and to build friendships.
- Develop “classroom agreements” by asking students what they think other members of the classroom community, including you the instructor and they the students, should do when an established classroom norm is broken. Encourage students to think of breaks in norms as opportunities for learning.
- After classroom norms are developed, enforce these agreements every time a norm is broken. This gives students the impression that you are fair and consistent and lays the foundation for trust.
- Avoid reprimanding students in public. Find ways to talk with students privately about their behavior, thinking carefully about what skills (e.g., controlling anger; managing conflict) the student may need help building.
- Give the benefit of the doubt to students by listening carefully and avoiding reactionary impulses.
- Allow students to reflect on their behavior and articulate better ways they might have handled a conflict.
- Help students “restore” the community by offering opportunities for repairing harm (e.g., apologizing, repairing or replacing property).
- Send postcards home or call parents when students make exceptional contributions to the classroom community.
- When problem behaviors arise, inquire in a professional, appropriate way about challenges students may be experiencing outside of school. Knowing about your students’ lives helps you understand their behavior in your classroom.
- Provide authentic praise to students for exceptional contributions to the classroom social and physical environment.
- Establishing trusting, warm relationships is paramount. For additional ideas on building relationships with youth, review [What Works Brief #1: Caring Relationships and High Expectations](#).

Sample Strategies (continued)

- Provide authentic opportunities for students to contribute to the school environment, thereby decreasing the need to behave in counter-normative ways. For additional ideas, review [What Works Brief #2: Opportunities for Meaningful Participation](#).

Consider the Use of Positive, Restorative Discipline Practices

Consider implementing school-wide positive classroom management practices. References for practices include:

- [Transformative Classroom Management](#): Founded upon evidence-based principles of motivation and engagement, Transformative Classroom Management practices help schools increase students' interest in learning and willingness to follow school and classroom behavioral norms.
- [Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports](#): PBIS is an framework for helping school personnel organize and deliver evidence-based behavior management practices.
- [Restorative Justice](#): Restorative justice programs are based on the premise that individuals and/or groups in conflict must work together to resolve the problem and repair the resultant damage caused to their relationship.
- [Conflict Resolution Education](#): Consider implementing a conflict resolution education program, such as a peer mediation program and/or curriculum.

Additional Resources:

- [Proactive and Inclusive School Discipline Strategies - WestEd What Works Brief](#)
- [Improving Staff Climate - WestEd What Works Brief](#)
- [Family Engagement – WestEd What Works Brief](#)

Safety

Students and adults report feeling safe at school and around school, including feeling safe from verbal abuse, teasing, or exclusion by others in the school.

Sample Strategies (*excerpted from WestEd What Works Brief – Perceptions of Safety)

Be Visible, Active, and Interested

- Volunteer to provide a physical presence during typically unstructured (and non-supervised) times, such as during passing periods, lunch breaks, and in parking lots. Advocate for collecting neighborhood volunteers to be present during these times, including parents and grandparents.

Sample Strategies (continued)

- Use relationship-building strategies outlined in the following What Works Briefs: [Caring Relationships and High Expectations](#) (#1), [Opportunities for Meaningful Participation](#) (#2), and [School Connectedness](#) (#4).
- Volunteer to be an advisor to a “student discipline advisory board,” wherein students maintain voice and ownership over classroom and school-wide rules and expectations. As members of the advisory board, students would be given the opportunity to inform both policies and related disciplinary practices.
- Notice positive actions taken by students. Provide praise and encouragement for responsible choices, such as informing an adult about a potential threat to school safety.
- Take special interest in students that appear socially isolated. Build relationships with these students and also refer them to appropriate school-based student support personnel.

Implement and advocate for clear, consistent, and fair behavior management policies, practices, and programs

- Give students a voice in the selection of the norms and expectations for themselves and their peers. Have all students in the class sign their names to the agreed-upon rules and expectations as a representation of the classroom community’s norms.
- Focus rules and expectations on what the student should do, rather than what they should not do.
- Enforce these rules consistently, uniformly, and without negotiation. Any deviation from standardized enforcement of classroom and school-wide rules and expectations by an adult will communicate preference among students, a process which undermines the sense of community.
- Avoid threats. Threats are coercive and undermine the climate of the classroom. The need for threats is eliminated when rules, expectations, and related consequences are transparent, fair, and distributed consistently.
- Be an advocate for clear, consistent, and fair school-wide discipline policies and practices.
- Involve parents in discipline decisions.
- Reconsider the use of zero tolerance policies, especially for nonviolent infractions. Begin with a review of your suspension and expulsion data. Look specifically for disproportionate suspensions and expulsions of minority youth.

Additional Resources:

- [Perceptions of Safety - WestEd What Works Brief](#)
- [Physical and Emotional Violence Perpetration - WestEd What Works Brief](#)
- [Physical and Emotional Violence Victimization - WestEd What Works Brief](#)
- [Harassment and Bullying - WestEd What Works Brief](#)
- [Substance Use at School - WestEd What Works Brief](#)

Sense of Belonging (School Connectedness)

A positive sense of being accepted, valued, and included, by others (teacher and peers) in all school settings. Students and parents report feeling welcome at the school.

Sample Strategies (excerpted from WestEd What Works Briefs on *School Connectedness, **Caring Relationships, and ***Family Engagement)

Make Connections*

- Practice active listening, including reflecting what students have said.
- Make time for greetings in the morning—go beyond roll call.
- Know not only the names of students in your class, but also the names of students you see often in the hallways and shared spaces.
- Take time to learn about students' special interests and family members, and recall those details when speaking with students.
- Volunteer to coach a team or become an advisor to a student-led group.
- Offer volunteering opportunities for causes that you and the students care about.
- Avoid sarcasm or negativity.
- Become a member of your school's Student Support Team.
- Consider co-teaching. Staff model healthy working relationships through their own interactions with colleagues.
- Request parent volunteers for your classroom. Folding parents into the day-to-day functioning of the school helps build relationships without requiring staff to work after school hours.

Connect Outside of the Classroom**

- Attend the extracurricular events students are involved in.
- Facilitate an extracurricular project or activity in your content area (e.g., bridge building teams for physics).
- Personally invite students who are at risk of dropping out to school-related activities.
- Become a mentor to a student-led initiative/campaign or interest group.

Encourage Open Family Communication***

- Provide families with your contact information, including email address, so they can ask questions.
- Find routes of communication that work best for different families (e.g., in person, e-mail, or phone/text message).
- Personally invite families to meet with you.

Sample Strategies (continued)

- Regularly welcome family members into the school and classrooms. Provide creative opportunities to talk with the principal (e.g., coffee with the principal) and teachers (e.g., monthly family visits).
- Communicate with families about the special talents of their students.
- Share good news about students promptly and through the family members' preferred method of communication.
- Help families meet other families and create social networks.
- Avoid correcting errors in family members' written or spoken language.
- When speaking with family members, use their words when reflecting back what you've heard them say.

Additional Resources:

- [School Connectedness - WestEd What Works Brief](#)
- [Caring Relationships and High Expectations – WestEd What Works Brief](#)
- [WestEd Climate Connection Toolkit](#)

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