



Indicator: All teachers teach and reinforce positive social skills, self-respect, relationships, and responsibility for the consequences of decisions and actions. (F8)

Explanation: The evidence review indicates teachers play a critical role in teaching and reinforcing the elements that define social/emotional competency, including the demonstration of positive social skills, self-respect, healthy relationships, and taking responsibility for the consequences of one's decisions and actions. These competencies are crucial to success in school and beyond.

Questions: How have teachers been prepared to foster students' social/emotional competency (including positive social skills, self-respect, relationships, and responsibility for the consequences of decisions and actions)? What practical social and emotional skills can be taught to children and reinforced in their behavior? What are examples of classroom norms that reinforce social/emotional competencies? In what ways can teachers engage parents to gain a better understanding of students and to equip parents to foster social/emotional competency at home? Where do personal competencies appear in the school's curriculum, and how can their presence be more intentional?

Redding (2014c) defines social/emotional competency as a "sense of self-worth, regard for others, and emotional understanding and management to set positive goals and make responsible decisions" (p. 6). A related definition—that of social and emotional learning—is offered by Mart, Dusenbury, and Weissberg (2011):

The basic definition of social and emotional learning revolves around five broad areas of competence:

- Self-awareness—accurately assessing one's emotions, values, strengths, and capacities.
- Self-management—managing emotions and behaviors; persevering in overcoming obstacles; setting and monitoring progress toward achieving personal and academic goals.
- Social awareness—showing empathy and understanding for others; recognizing and appreciating individual and group similarities and differences.
- Relationship skills—establishing and maintaining positive relationships based on cooperation; preventing and constructively resolving interpersonal conflict.
- Responsible decision making—making constructive choices about personal and social behavior.

Reliable science and hands-on experience have illustrated that social and emotional competencies can be taught and developed in every type of school and in students of diverse backgrounds and ages, and that academic achievement improves when social and emotional competencies are taught. (p. 38)

A meta-analysis (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011) that aggregated the results of 213 experimental-control group studies of school-based social and emotional learning programs reported that students receiving high-quality instruction in social/emotional competency demonstrated the following: better academic performance—achievement scores an average of 11 percentile points higher than students who did not receive such instruction; improved behaviors and attitudes—greater motivation to learn, deeper connection to school, better classroom behavior, and improved social relationships with peers; fewer negative behaviors—decreased disruptive class behavior, aggression, delinquent acts, and disciplinary referrals; and reduced emotional distress—fewer reports of student depression, anxiety, stress, and social withdrawal. Further, they found that “classroom teachers and other school staff effectively conducted SEL programs. This result suggests that these interventions can be incorporated into routine educational practices and do not require outside personnel for their effective delivery” (Durlak et al., 2011, p. 13).

Social/emotional competencies, along with metacognitive competencies, have a bearing both on students’ success in school and on their further pursuits of education and employment (Civic Enterprises et al., 2013; Durlak et al., 2011). Research suggests students who set high academic goals, have self-discipline, self-motivate, manage stress, and organize their approach to work learn more and get better grades (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005; Elliot & Dweck, 2005). In addition, students who overcome obstacles by problem-solving and making responsible decisions about studying and schoolwork do better academically (Zins & Elias, 2006). Research also suggests that social/emotional learning programs may affect central executive cognitive functions, such as inhibitory control, planning, and set-shifting as a result of building greater cognitive-affect regulation in prefrontal areas of the cortex (Greenberg, 2006).

Teachers can both model and directly teach social/emotional skills, use engaging curriculum materials, and implement specific instructional and classroom-management practices (CASEL, 2012). “Recent research has established that the quality of teacher–student interactions and the instructional practices that take place within the classroom are two important predictors of student academic performance and social adjustment” (CASEL, 2012, p. 10).

Relational suasion is the teacher’s ability to influence a student’s learning, motivation to learn, and metacognitive and social/emotional competencies by virtue of the teacher’s personal knowledge of and interaction with the student and the student’s family (Redding, 2013). Students develop personal competencies in part through instruction, but also “through the modeling, encouragement, and caring exhibited by teachers and other people they respect. Relational suasion, then, is a function of the role, the relationship, and the behaviors of the teacher or other people with whom the student interacts” (Redding, 2014a, p. 7).

The teacher enhances a student’s social/emotional competency by:

1. Including social/emotional objectives in the instructional plan.
2. Teaching and reinforcing positive social skills and relationships.
3. Modeling responsible behavior, caring, optimism, and positive verbal interactions.
4. Adopting evidence-based programs that enhance social/emotional competency.
5. Establishing classroom norms for personal responsibility, cooperation, and concern for others.
6. Being attentive to students’ emotional states and guiding students in managing their emotions.
7. Helping students set constructive goals for learning and social relationships and know how to pursue and achieve the goals.
8. Teaching students to understand the consequences of their decisions and to take responsibility for them.
9. Using cooperative learning methods.
10. Encouraging questioning, seeking help from others, and offering help to others.
11. Arranging for support services from psychologists and social workers when students demonstrate a need for support.
12. Working closely with parents to promote social/emotional competency at home. (Redding, 2014b, p. 21)

It is important for schools to implement the promotion of social/emotional competencies on a schoolwide basis. In recent survey research, a correlation was found between lack of student interest and schools with less of a schoolwide emphasis on social and emotional learning (Civic Enterprises, Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hariharan, 2013). States and districts can prioritize such an emphasis through policy and inclusion of social/emotional competencies within learning standards and guidelines.

Regarding teachers' interaction with families:

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory reminds us that students' development is influenced not only by characteristics of the home, school, and community settings in which they live, but also the relationships between these settings. In their extensive work on factors that support school effectiveness, Bryk and colleagues (2009) emphasize the ways that academic and personal support for teachers interact with parent supports for learning to promote student motivation and participation. Studies suggest that students may be at greatest risk for academic failure when they experience inconsistent expectations across home and school contexts (Phelan, Davidson, & Yu, 1998; Pianta & Walsh, 1996). Although creating consistent expectations around academic work is clearly important, creating continuity of goals and expectations around social and emotional behaviors may be just as essential and perhaps more challenging. This may be particularly true in cases where poverty, cultural differences, and other factors create barriers to communication and shared understandings between home and school. (Mart et al., 2011, p. 39)

Strategies for schools and districts to support teachers' implementation of these best practices include: "provide professional development, including mentoring, for teachers on instructional practices and content that enhance students' social skills, self-respect, and responsibility for the consequences of decisions and actions; provide resources and tools that encourage and enhance students' social skills, self-respect, and responsibility for the consequences of decisions and actions" (Redding, 2014a, p. 36). Many teachers report little to no preparation for teaching and supporting the development of social/emotional competencies (Civic Enterprises et al., 2013). Brief surveys of students' families at the beginning of the year may be an efficient way for educators to learn more about students' home lives and their families' goals and concerns and to establish an emphasis on so-

cial/emotional learning; teachers should be encouraged to be flexible and creative with these communications to find what works best for different families (Mart et al., 2011).

References and resources

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