



SEB BEFORE ABCs

Restart learning with expert tips for supporting students' social-emotional and behavioral functioning (SEB)

PLAYBOOK



CONTENTS

3 | INTRODUCTION

4 | EXPERT ARTICLES

- 04 **DR. JOSHUA P. STARR:** REMEMBER: STUDENTS RESPOND TO THE ENVIRONMENT TEACHERS CREATE
- 07 **DR. ED P. O'CONNOR:** HELP PARENTS SUPPORT STUDENTS' RETURN TO LEARNING AFTER COVID-19 CLOSURES
- 10 **DR. DAWN MILLER:** AMPLIFY SEB IN YOUR MTSS FRAMEWORK
- 14 **DR. JUSTIN AGLIO:** CREATE A MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS CALENDAR
- 16 **DR. STEPHEN KILGUS:** NURTURE SEB IN HIGH-WARMTH/ HIGH-STRUCTURE CLASSROOMS
- 19 **DR. NATHANIEL VON DER EMBSE:** STEPS TO (RE)BUILDING SAFE INSTRUCTIONAL ENVIRONMENTS
- 22 **DR. GREGORY A. FABIANO:** EMPHASIZE PREDICTABILITY AND POSITIVITY IN POST-PANDEMIC CLASSROOMS
- 24 **DR. PATTI WILSON:** RE-ESTABLISH SAFE, SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

26 | CLOSING

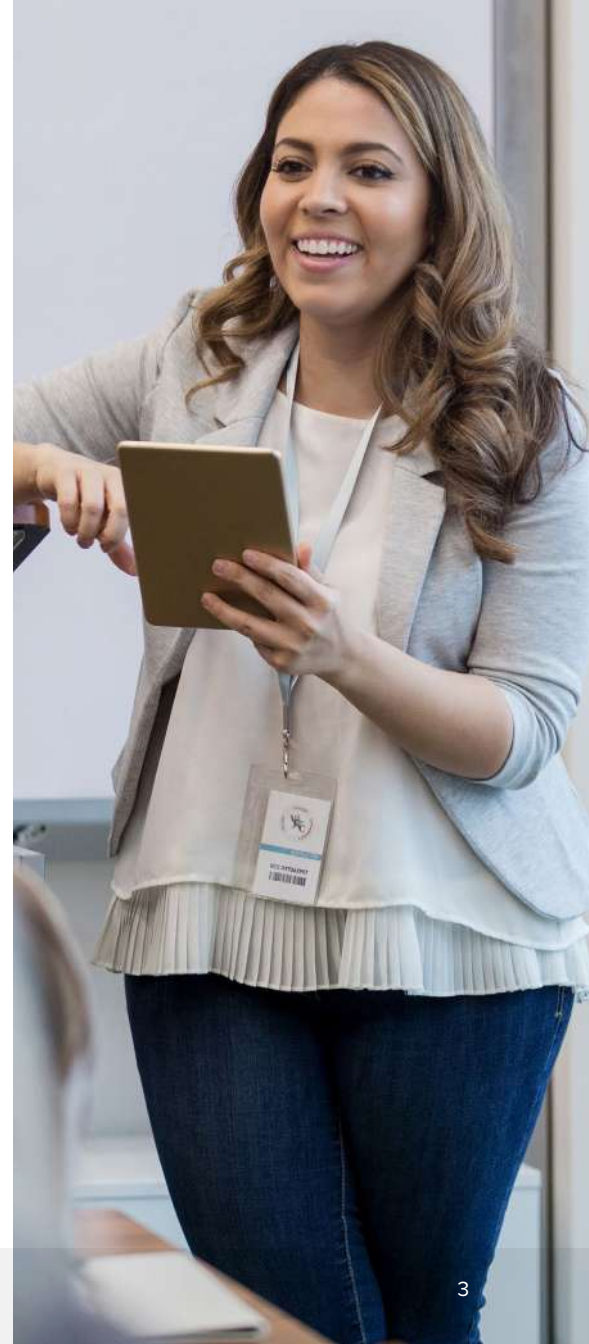
INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 disrupted everything — our routines, living and working environments, family arrangements, our sense of safety, and, of course, our education systems.

Schools are for far more than academics. For some students, schools are safe havens. For others, they're a place for making social connections. For all students, schools are where they see and learn social-emotional and behavioral (SEB) skills that are critical to living and learning. When school buildings shut down in March, even if some form of instruction continued remotely, students lost important opportunities to grow and strengthen their SEB skills and receive SEB supports.

We know you're anxious to get back into the classroom and make up for lost learning. But this fall it will be important not to overlook the loss of SEB functioning that may have occurred during the pandemic. Before getting back to academics, you must prepare students to learn, mentally and emotionally.

We consulted with SEB experts across the U.S. — practicing social distancing — to gather their guidance about how to support students' SEB skills when school resumes in the fall. Each of these experts stressed the importance of prioritizing students' — and adults' — SEB needs. Continue reading for their tips on how to ensure everyone feels safe and supported when they return to school, whether that remains within a remote environment, in-person or a combination. Implement these practices from the district down to the classroom to nurture students' overall wellbeing and prepare them for learning.



REMEMBER: STUDENTS RESPOND TO THE ENVIRONMENT TEACHERS CREATE

There is no doubt that students' social-emotional and behavioral (SEB) needs will be of paramount importance when school resumes next fall. However, the most critical thing for educators to be cognizant of during this time is that the social and emotional needs of adults will be as important, if not more, than those of students.

Kids are resilient and respond to the environment that adults create for them. Thus, as we consider three potential re-entry scenarios for school next year, we must understand how to re-engage adults and children in positive and constructive learning environments.

Schools will either:

- 1 Be physically open with new rules for managing a COVID-19 resurgence
- 2 Be physically open but offer significantly more virtual learning options (the hybrid model)
- 3 Be fully virtual until they feel it is safe to return

Regardless of what the school day looks like next year, educators can start planning now for attending to the SEB needs of students and the social-emotional needs of adults.



SEB Standards to Set

Educators need to frame SEB as an aspiration, not an intervention. Creating positive and healthy learning environments where students and adults can learn from and with each other requires a deliberate and intentional set of strategies. Greeting students by name as they walk in the door, asking each student to contribute positively to the classroom community, and addressing negative behaviors without taking them personally are all small examples of how daily teacher-to-student interactions can influence a learning community.

As COVID-19 continues to disrupt our schools and lives, it will be essential for adults to understand how their emotional responses to students and other adults may compromise their ability to establish healthy environments for learning. To create positive school communities conducive to academic growth, educators should keep the following five principles in mind:



Empathy — Everyone's emotional state and ability to manage a new kind of stress is different. Leaders have to be attentive to the varied needs of employees, families and students.



Flexibility — While we need clear guidelines, rules and regulations, leaders will need to be flexible in their approach depending on the school/office community.



Transparency — It is essential that all leaders are maximally transparent in how and what they communicate to the community.



Coherence — There will be constant new developments and information, which will cause changes in plans. Regardless, people have to feel that it all fits together and makes sense.



Equity — The needs of the most vulnerable come first.



Educators will also have to be mindful of, and attentive to, the needs of students whose behaviors warrant more serious intervention. Schools will need plans in place and commensurate professional learning strategies to help adults attend to such needs.

All educators should be trained in basic crisis intervention techniques and the identification of potential mental health problems, with some given a more intense training so that the burden doesn't always fall on one or two educators. Clear and specific guidelines must be developed and adhered to regarding continuity of instruction, communications to parents and how students will re-engage in the learning community.

All of the above must be considered through a racial equity lens. Most of the teaching population consists of white females. Disproportionality in administering consequences for negative behaviors is a condition in most schools in America, with black, Latinx and special education students bearing the brunt. Stress is likely to increase during the next school year, which means we must be even more vigilant in creating learning environments that allow us to achieve our highest aspirations.



Joshua P. Starr, Ed.D.
Chief Executive Officer
PDK International
pdkintl.org

HELP PARENTS AND GUARDIANS SUPPORT STUDENTS' RETURN TO LEARNING AFTER COVID-19 CLOSURES

After three months or more under shelter-in-place restrictions, returning to learning will be a major adjustment for teachers, parents and guardians, and especially, students. We all have experienced unexpected and abrupt changes in our daily routines due to the pandemic and social distancing. Children and adolescents likely experienced stress and tension and observed the reactions of adults around them who were feeling anxious, too.

Transitioning back to school, whatever that format might be, will create a new set of social-emotional and behavioral (SEB) challenges for students that will impact their ability to learn.

On one hand, there will be excitement for seeing friends, teachers and other school staff that they may not have seen in some time, along with the anticipation of returning to established routines and familiar experiences. On the other hand, there may be uncertainty and possibly fear that things will not be as expected, and children may experience anxiety about becoming ill or that someone in their family or circle of friends could become ill, too.

Students will be able to manage these feelings and adjust more successfully when their SEB functioning is being supported at school *and* at home. Here are some things you can do to help parents and guardians understand the importance of SEB skills and how to nurture them.



EXPERT: Dr. Ed P. O'Connor

Tips for Talking to Parents and Guardians About SEB Functioning

Teachers and school staff must communicate with parents and guardians regarding the importance of monitoring SEB functioning during the transition back to school. Create a communication that details your SEB support plan, plus advice for how adults can continue that support at home and where to go for help if they have questions or concerns. Once learning resumes, plan to provide brief but consistent updates to parents and guardians regarding class activities as well as observations about how their child is adjusting.

Below are several additional recommendations and resources you can use to help adults support students' SEB functioning outside of school.

- 1 Children will take their cues from the adults around them. Encourage parents and guardians to monitor their own stress and take care of themselves socially and emotionally. Suggest that they share with their children the self-monitoring and self-care options they are using to cope, and to discuss options that children may use, too.
- 2 Recommend parents and guardians discuss, in age-appropriate language, what is happening with the pandemic, how it could impact school and why certain precautions are being taken. Remind children that adults are working hard to make sure they are safe and can enjoy learning again.



EXPERT: Dr. Ed P. O'Connor

3 Suggest that parents and guardians periodically check in with children in the days leading up to the school start this fall to share what they are looking forward to when they get back to school and what they're wondering or worrying about. Some children may not be able to share their feelings at first, but may be more willing and able to voice feelings after some time. If adults are having a hard time getting children to open up, suggest that they share some examples from their own perspective. If your school will have both on-campus and online instruction in place when school starts, provide parents and guardians with guidance about how to discuss this with their children.

4 Emphasize the importance of being honest and accurate in communicating with children. If parents and guardians don't know the answer to a question, or are uncomfortable answering in the moment, it is perfectly OK to ask permission to get more information or to research a question together. Children recognize cues when adults are withholding information from them, which could make them more anxious. Pass these useful resources along to help address those tough questions:

- [American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [National Association of School Psychologists](#)
- [Mayo Clinic](#)
- [The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning \(CASEL\)](#)

5 Ask parents and guardians to keep an eye out for the following signs of increasing stress in children. If children demonstrate significant signs of stress beyond the first several days of returning to learning, encourage parents and guardians to contact you or the school for additional help.

- For all ages: sleep disturbances, nightmares, daytime fatigue, lack of appetite, stomachaches, irritability, agitation, and/or withdrawal from friends or preferred activities
- Preschool and young elementary students: reverting to thumb sucking, bedwetting, regression to overly dependent behaviors, or extreme withdrawal
- Elementary students: irritability, overexcitement, increase or decrease in activity level, varying moods, resistance to school, complaints of illness, and poor concentration
- Adolescents: increased conflicts with friends or adults, physical complaints, explosive or aggressive behaviors, difficulty concentrating, disorganized behavior or forgetfulness.



Ed P. O'Connor, Ph.D.

Education Consultant

Midwest Instructional Leadership Council

AMPLIFY SEB IN YOUR MTSS FRAMEWORK

Educators work tirelessly to create schools that provide students safety, predictability and active learning, and buffer what lies outside in the “real world.” With the immediate call for shelter in place, I, along with many educators, was concerned about students questioning their safety, experiencing anxiety, suffering trauma endured in unsafe environments, and fearing falling behind in schooling expectations. And now, with schools uncertain about what the 2020-21 school year will look like, I’m also concerned about not being able to assure students that school as they knew it prior to COVID-19 will ever resume.

The pandemic had us pivoting with little preparation, and this disruption has been a powerful reminder of how important social-emotional and behavioral (SEB) skills are for all of us. The concerns children have voiced during shelter in place should set the stage for how we mitigate the anxiety, fear and disconnect the pandemic has created. Fortunately, those practices that are associated with strong outcomes for students who have experienced trauma are practices that are bridges to productive learning, too. With the uncertainty around how the school year will unfold, it is wise to plan in advance the learning of key practices that will be generalizable to different formats of schooling should it be necessary for us to pivot again.

Educators must amplify the practices we know to be associated with both SEB and academic learning in the context of MTSS. Specifically, we must lean into solutions that address several of the “load-bearing walls” of MTSS (McCart & Miller, 2020): data, evidence-based practices and teaming.





Data

While we might not have access to the same data sources as we have in years past, we do have data. Connect with students' former teacher(s), students' parents, and your students themselves to inform your next steps. Create the following list of students and needs:

- Who were we concerned about pre-shelter in place and in what ways? What did your universal screening data indicate?
- Which students were we not as concerned about (students who were on track and low risk) that we are now concerned about after sheltering in place?
- Who has self-nominated as having a difficult time?
- Whom have parents expressed concern about?

When we look at these lists, we can think about how it helps us plan differently for our Universal Support (Tier 1), as well as plan differently for students who may need Additional or Intensified Supports (Tiers 2 and 3).

EXPERT: Dr. Dawn Miller

Evidence-Based Practices

Many concerns have surfaced around students questioning their safety, experiencing anxiety or fearing that they'll fall behind in school expectations. Here are several practices to mitigate those concerns.

Create strong teacher-student relationships.

Focus early on establishing relationships with students and families/caregivers, as well as strengthening relationships between students. Not only does this serve as a foundational piece for safety, nurturing and emotional security, it will be essential if we find ourselves having to make adjustments given the uncertainty of COVID-19. Try the 10•2•10 routine (checking in 10 times, for 2 minutes, for 10 days). You can do this in person or virtually through a video conference, email, text, or call.

Create strong classroom routines and expectations.

Think about routines that can adapt to different classroom configurations, should it be necessary to pivot mid-fall. Classroom routines that have a community element to them allow students to be seen, heard and understood. For example, you could start the day in a circle with students filling each other's buckets, sharing their readiness level for learning (red, yellow, blue zones), and ending with something they want to focus on for the day. This can be done in person, virtually or even through a class phone tree.

Provide frequent and positive feedback.

This practice has a strong evidence base for academic learning and encourages student engagement. It can also help quell anxiety, boost confidence, strengthen relationships, and improve learning.





Teaming

The pandemic has brought new appreciation and need for strong and healthy teaming structures at all levels. To maximize support for SEB in this coming year, here are considerations for different teaming structures:

School Leadership Teams

Add or emphasize the importance of self care for the entire school staff. Two different, but related, resources to get you started include [a compiled list of resources](#) by Dr. Lucy Vezzuto at the Orange County Department of Education, and a self-assessment for educators related to self care in the context of [SEL in the classroom](#).

Department or Grade-Level Teams

Take time to mine strengths that can be leveraged this school year. This may include acknowledging teaching, technology or relationship-building strengths. Educators are, by nature, a particularly humble group. Celebrate those strengths and lean into each other this next year more than ever!

Teaching Teams

Reflect on how sheltering in place impacted your ability to be successful with your planning — especially the ability to meet SEB needs virtually. Take those lessons learned and use them to strengthen your planning process this year, with an eye toward creating a flexible plan that can withstand changes to educational delivery.



Dawn Miller, Ph.D.

*Associate Director of Technical Assistance
SWIFT Education Center, University of Kansas*

EXPERT: Dr. Justin Aglio

CREATE A MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS CALENDAR

For years, students have adapted to school norms. They've been told where to go, what to do and when. But thanks to COVID-19, this is no longer the case. Schools now must adapt to students, especially when it comes to creating schedules and systems that support their social-emotional and behavioral (SEB) needs. If these needs are not supported, learning simply won't be successful.

This shift in focus to students' health, safety and SEB functioning may prove difficult for educators accustomed to an assessment-driven culture that previously prioritized teacher evaluations, annual yearly performance, school-to-school or district-to-district comparisons, and postsecondary competition. But rather than rush to meet academic standards or race to get through curriculum before yearly testing, you must provide students with meaningful tools and resources for building SEB competencies.

A simple but effective strategy is to create a Mental Health Awareness Calendar that details specific actions students can take each week to improve their social, mental and emotional wellbeing. Activities should be relevant, rewarding and age- and grade-level appropriate. Plan them as often as your students need (once a week, three times a week, even daily). And if you run out of ideas, ask students to suggest activities to fill out your calendar.



Create Your Own Calendar

Use our template to get started. Keep activities to once a week, like we've done here, or fill out your calendar with more ideas as you see fit. The key to the Mental Health Awareness Calendar is to make it relevant, rewarding and age- and grade-level appropriate. If the activities suggested in our template don't suit your students, modify as you see fit. This template is meant to serve as inspiration for building your own calendar that gives students purpose and a guide of activities to build esteem and stay on the path of SEB wellness.

[Download & Print the Calendar Template](#)

Mental Health Awareness Calendar

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Week 1			Journal 10 things you like about yourself.			
Week 2				Video call a friend just to ask how their day was.		
Week 3					Take 10 minutes to meditate.	
Week 4		Sit outside and draw something you see happening around you.				
Week 5	Write a letter to a family member who lives far away.					



Justin Aglio, Ed.D.

*Director of Academic Achievement and District Innovation
Montour School District (PA)*

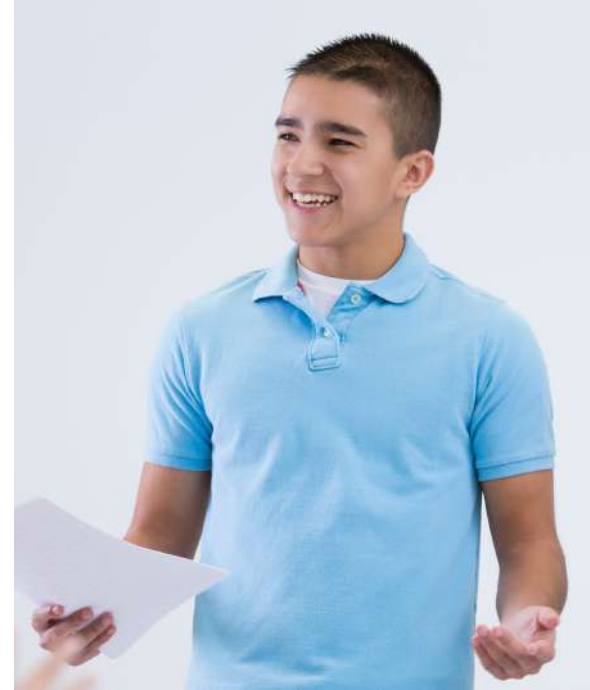
EXPERT: Dr. Stephen Kilgus

NURTURE SEB IN HIGH-WARMTH/ HIGH-STRUCTURE CLASSROOMS

While in quarantine, many students likely struggled to maintain social connections with their peers and adults within the school and community (e.g., teachers, counselors, administrators). Though students might have seen these individuals over video conferences or communicated with them via text, the quality and frequency of interactions likely changed. This shift in social support will have far-reaching consequences. This is particularly true for students with, or at risk for, social-emotional and behavioral (SEB) concerns. Research has revealed social support to be an important buffer against mental health challenges (Chu, Saucier, & Hafner, 2010).

The potential for SEB challenges will be exacerbated as students return to learning. This potential is the result of several factors, including:

- 1 The extended time away from a structured educational environment
- 2 The enhanced academic needs of students who may have fallen behind
- 3 The grief, stress and trauma resulting from time and opportunities lost



The pandemic and its effects have the potential to be traumatizing for many students. Spending too much time discussing or reliving these circumstances could be re-traumatizing for many students.

EXPERT: Dr. Stephen Kilgus

Schools will need to consider what strategies can be implemented across the school and within classrooms to support students and prevent SEB challenges. Having strong SEB skills will permit students to navigate this stressful transition and re-engage with instruction.



The ability to stay motivated and engaged will allow students to encounter materials and sustain the level of effort and attention needed to make progress. Social awareness will permit them to understand how others are doing and navigate challenging social situations. Finally, self-awareness and self-management will help students appreciate their own emotional states and enact strategies that enhance their potential for success.

Setting Up High-Warmth/High-Structure Classrooms

I would recommend that educators prepare for a high-warmth/high-structure approach to setting up their classrooms. Regarding high structure, when students return, they will (like all of us) have spent the last few months in a place of confusion and uncertainty. Returning to a classroom environment defined by structure will help to address this uncertainty and prepare them to learn.

Of course, this doesn't mean this structure will resemble "business-as-usual." As indicated by experiences in other countries, students might have to wear protective equipment like masks and gloves, maintain a minimum physical distance from peers and adults, and perhaps attend school on a modified schedule (e.g., part-time and with only half of their classmates). Within this scenario, it will be important to be explicit with students about the schedule, school- and class-wide rules, and expectations for their behavior. Students should know they are working with you and other educators to keep everyone safe.

Regarding high warmth, just because we're looking to maintain a structured and safe environment does not mean we can't be attuned to student needs. Be prepared to provide students with lots of feedback and copious amounts of praise. Also be prepared to listen and acknowledge their concerns and worries without overemphasizing them or reliving the challenging circumstances.

5 Steps for Structuring Your Classrooms

- 1 Prepare to review school-wide expectations for appropriate behavior.** Post these expectations prominently within the classroom. Regularly prompt students to engage in expected behavior, and reteach expectations when necessary.
- 2 Review the class schedule early and often with students.** Let students know in advance of any changes to the schedule. Look to enhance the predictability of class functioning.
- 3 Set up the class environment to align with any social distancing guidelines.** It is likely many states will require students to be six feet apart when they first return to school. Something as simple as placing tape on the floor can help enforce these distancing rules. Make sure the physical arrangement is also conducive to academic engagement while limiting distractions. For instance, students should face the teacher during large-group instruction rather than each other, such as within a desk cluster.
- 4 Provide frequent praise to students.** A good heuristic is to use a 4-to-1 ratio of praise statements to behavioral corrections. In other words, prepare to provide students far more positive comments than reprimands or redirections.
- 5 Be an “emotion coach” by:**
 - Being aware of student emotions and recognizing them as teachable moments
 - Listening to students, demonstrating empathy and validating feelings
 - Helping students to recognize and name their emotions
 - Encouraging the use of coping skills, such as deep breathing, when necessary

Chu, P. S., Saucier, D. A., & Hafner, E. (2010). Meta-analysis of the relationships between social support and well-being in children and adolescents. *Journal of social and Clinical Psychology, 29*, 624-645.



Stephen Kilgus, Ph.D.

*Associate Professor, School Psychology
Department of Educational Psychology, University of Wisconsin-Madison*

EXPERT: Dr. Nathaniel von der Embse

STEPS TO (RE)BUILDING SAFE INSTRUCTIONAL ENVIRONMENTS

The significant and unprecedented disruption brought forth by the COVID-19 pandemic has had substantial impacts on the social-emotional wellbeing of school children. Kids clearly benefit from structure and having access to social-emotional and behavioral (SEB) supports while at school; constant change and not knowing what to expect causes stress and anxiety for us all, and is especially challenging for children.

Consider a typical school setting where children are constantly interacting with peers, teachers and support staff. Each of these interactions are opportunities to learn social skills in addition to academic content. Without peer modeling of social skills, combined with the stressors of a substantial change to students' environments, it is no wonder why parents are reporting significant increases in challenging behavior and emotional concerns.

When returning to school, there is an urgent need to provide SEB supports for **all** children. Some schools have provided these supports via distance learning, but many have not. Moreover, oftentimes the children most at-risk for SEB concerns have the least available resources (including requisite technology) at home — and the pandemic has only exacerbated these inequities. These students are used to receiving critical supports at school and without these services, problems may worsen. Many more students are experiencing significant stressors and emotional concerns for the first time. Thus, schools are anticipating greater numbers of students in need of support — including students with more severe challenges — without more support staff.



EXPERT: Dr. Nathaniel von der Embse

You may feel pressure to quickly make up for lost instructional time by emphasizing academic content when students return to school. But without SEB supports, no child will benefit from a high-quality instructional environment. That is, a child needs to know the environment is physically and psychologically safe before instruction can be effective. Teachers play a critical role in facilitating a socially and emotionally well environment.

How to (Re)Build a Socially and Emotionally Well Instructional Environment

Acknowledge the difficulties over the past few months in not having physical access to other people. By expressing your own thoughts and feelings on the situation, you can model for students that it is ok, not to be ok. Depending on the age level, you could use a variety of verbal prompts or visual aids to help students express their emotions.

Describe the supports available in school. For example, first acknowledge the presence of emotional stressors to connect the need to see a school counselor or school psychologist for individual supports. At the classroom level, implement a variety of SEB learning programs, including free curricula such as Sanford Harmony or the Choose Love Movement.

Help students know what to expect. Describing a daily, weekly and even semester schedule can be reassuring to students and can begin to establish necessary routines. This provides normalcy to children after many months without.



Pay particular attention to students who may continue to experience difficulty (e.g., atypical emotional reactivity) after supports are put in place. While a period of adjustment is to be expected, continued non-responsiveness to school and classroom supports may indicate the need for more targeted and individualized interventions. It will be absolutely essential to use data to inform effective instructional approaches and intervention strategies for mitigating more severe problems.

If you don't have a system in place for assessing students' SEB functioning, consider implementing universal screening. The best systems combine SEB assessment with screening and progress monitoring of academic skills. Students' SEB functioning will greatly impact their ability to learn after this pandemic. Having access to data around the whole child will help you not only understand where students are struggling, but also why.



Nathaniel von der Embse, Ph.D., NCSP
Associate Professor
University of South Florida

EMPHASIZE PREDICTABILITY AND POSITIVITY IN POST-PANDEMIC CLASSROOMS

A major concern with the emphasis on physical distancing and home instruction is that students are unable to benefit from socially rich classroom and school environments. There is much to be learned from the modeling of appropriate social-emotional and behavioral (SEB) responses on the part of teachers and classmates. Social classroom settings push students to develop new skills (e.g., handling frustration, waiting turns, positively contributing to groups) — something that's difficult to recreate in a home instruction setting.

The present approach to home instruction is largely self-directed and parent- or guardian-supported. When students return to the classroom, they may need help in (re)learning typical classroom routines, expectations and contingencies. Learning is dependent on academic engagement, student motivation and student self-concept. It will be critical to support students' SEB functioning so these academic enablers are present and strong in the fall.

One of the best things you can do for students is make your classroom situation predictable with schedules, routines, rules, and consistent feedback for positive behaviors. This predictability directly addresses the uneasiness that might be present in the minds of students after a very unpredictable time.



Focus on Predictability and Positivity



Welcome students back with a formal meeting to review any new rules or procedures (e.g., physical distancing, changes in school schedules).



Optimize positive feedback. Catch students doing the right thing and pay attention to good examples of SEB skills (e.g., cooperation, saying nice things to other students, managing disappointment).



Embed rewards and celebrations into the school day. Children have missed birthdays, graduations and other milestone events. One way we can make up for this is to celebrate other positive events on a class-wide level (e.g., “Everyone passed our spelling test! Let’s march around the class with pride!”) or individual level (“Mia just joined the ‘Homework every day’ club!”).



Use clear behavioral instructions and requests (e.g., one step at a time, telling students what to do rather than what not to do). Post these expectations around the school and in classrooms.



Model appropriate behavior. Show kids how to appropriately handle an interruption, a difficulty that arises and disappointment. Also model good social skills such as issuing a warm greeting each morning, using good manners and offering to help when needed.



Finally, it’s helpful to be an active listener. The last few months have been hard on everyone, and children are no exception. If a child brings up a concern or issue, actively listen and offer support.



Gregory A. Fabiano, Ph.D.
*Professor of Psychology
Florida International University*

RE-ESTABLISH SAFE, SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, our world faced an unprecedented crisis that tested us at our core. Although the early days felt a bit exciting — more like snow days or vacation days instead of a surreal global pandemic — the reality of “Stay Safer at Home” soon affected all of us as social distancing crashed upon an international stage. This challenging time reminded us how desperately humans crave emotional and social connectivity, as evidenced by the number of video conferencing social hours and “Together at Home” events. Educators tried to stay connected to their students in all kinds of ways including text messages, emails, live online classes, pre-recorded video lessons, and even postal mail sent to students’ homes.

As we prepare to start a new school year, take a moment to reflect on your practice and plan for whole-child supports.

Social-emotional and behavioral (SEB) functioning is the foundation of safe and positive learning environments. It enables students to form meaningful connections; be mindful and self-aware to promote emotional regulation and responsible decision-making; and enhances students’ ability to succeed in the academic, social and physical realms of the educational and community environment. The first step to achieving academic success and making up for learning time lost in the spring is to ensure we have students who feel safe, nurtured and connected. Here are four simple ways you can do that.



4 Tips for Easing Back Into the Classroom

Make connections.

Reach out and make connections, possibly in new formats. Let students, families and colleagues know you are excited to see them and that you are excited to be together again and share with them your own experience and thoughts, both positive and negative. It is important to acknowledge that everyone experiences the same emotions and we can get through this together! Make your inner dialogue known and model the skills associated with growth mindset and self care. Consider kicking off the school day with morning circles, where students and teachers have an opportunity to check-in and start their day positively, knowing they are surrounded by supportive and caring individuals ready to assist.

Teach, reteach and embed routines into daily instruction.

Given that some students (and adults) may be returning from environments that were less structured, included more breaks and had possibly fewer and/or lower task demands, remember the principles of Explicit Direct Instruction (EDI) and apply them to teaching social and behavior routines. Be explicit when instructing on expectations (include examples and non-examples); provide opportunities for questions and role-plays; build in prevention strategies, prompts and opportunities for private corrective guidance; and be consistent and vigilant in acknowledging, praising and rewarding appropriate behaviors.

Assess and use data to scaffold and intensify supports.

In the words of Maya Angelou, “When you know better, you do better.” There will be many priorities when we return to traditional school routines, none as important as ensuring we have focused and intentional whole-child support teams. Build on the data you have and when additional data are available, allow those additional pieces of the data story to inform team decisions. Academic instruction is important; but if not built upon solid SEB foundations, it is wasted. Data from SEB assessments like the FastBridge formative assessment system’s SAEBRS and mySAEBRS may be the most important data points you have to get supports to families in need.

Support each other and promote self care.

Be kind to yourself and each other. Allow space for grace and attend to your individual needs as intently as you support others. Be mindful of each act of love and find gratitude, peace and joy in the simple things.



Patti Wilson, Ph.D.

*RT12 Coordinator
Clarksville-Montgomery County School System
(TN)*

CLOSING

We hope you've come away from reading this Playbook with actionable takeaways you can use to prepare for fall instruction. There are still many unknowns surrounding next school year, but there's one thing we can say with certainty. The events of last spring will affect student achievement. Restart learning and minimize the impact of lost instruction by offering SEB supports that prepare students to learn.

Illuminate provides the only comprehensive assessment solution offering insight into students' SEB functioning together with academics. Included in every FastBridge subscription are evidence-based Computer-Adaptive Tests (CAT) and Curriculum-Based Measures (CBM) for universal screening and progress monitoring across reading, math and SEB so you can form a more complete picture of student achievement and provide instruction and interventions that nurture the whole child.

Using the expert tips in this Playbook, plus data to guide SEB supports, you can plan for a less stressful, more successful transition back to learning and ensure each and every student gets the supports they need to thrive.

Learn how Illuminate can guide SEB instruction and interventions across your Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework to restart learning and accelerate student achievement after COVID-19. [Contact Illuminate today.](#)

Illuminate Social-Emotional Behavioral Assessments

FastBridge SAEBRS

The Social, Academic and Emotional Behavior Risk Screener (SAEBRS), along with its student version mySAEBRS, identifies students in grades K-12 who are at-risk for academic, social and/or emotional behaviors. SAEBRS can also universally screen by class, grade or school to identify trends that may need system-wide attention.

FastBridge DevMilestones

DevMilestones provides insightful data by evaluating each student's performance relative to established developmental milestones across the Preschool through Kindergarten years. Capture the time and stage at which students demonstrate these skills — from emerging levels through to mastery — to inform SEB supports and interventions.

[Learn More](#)



Illuminate Education partners with K-12 educators to equip them with data to serve the whole child and reach new levels of student performance. Our solution brings together holistic data and collaborative tools and puts them in the hands of educators. Illuminate supports over 17 million students and 5200 districts/schools.

© 2020 Illuminate Education, Inc.