

2022

STUDENT SUCCESS GUIDE

STRATEGIES FOR A
SUCCESSFUL 2022-2023
SCHOOL YEAR



APERTURE EDUCATION



Now is the time to put relationships first! The past few years have been tough, and many have felt isolated. By helping educators, students, and families reconnect and build strong relationships with one another, schools and districts will increase motivation, engagement, and student achievement.

SEL will play an important role in supporting educators and students this year. This Student Success Guide is packed with helpful SEL information, lessons, and activities.

As you flip through this guide, use the **Benefits of Building Strong Relationships** articles to learn why relationships are so important and how they improve teacher and student outcomes. Use the articles in the **Tips, Strategies, and Activities for Building Relationships** section to build social and emotional skills:

- with students
- with educators
- throughout the school
- with families

We've also included a helpful tip sheet with **Additional SEL Resources**.



Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Story of Aperture	5
Benefits of Building Strong Relationships	6
Strong Teacher-Student Relationships Improve Student Achievement.....	7
8 Tips to Improve Teacher Retention with SEL.....	10
Strong Teacher-Student Relationships Strengthen Other Critical Social and Emotional Skills.....	13
Tips, Strategies, and Activities for Building Relationships	15
With Students	
Create a Positive School Climate and Culture from Day One.....	16
Build Relationships with 5 Icebreaker Activities	19
Help Students Manage Stress with SEL.....	22
5 Ways to Build Strong Relationships with Students	25
With Educators	
10 Ways to Prioritize Educator Wellness and Stress Management.....	28
Grow Teacher Support Networks.....	31
6 Ways to Build Teacher and Staff Buy-In for SEL.....	33
Throughout the School	
4 Benefits of Student Voice, Choice, and SEL	36
SEL in Windsor Public Schools.....	38
With Families	
Tips, Strategies, and Activities for Building Relationships with Families.....	41
Additional SEL Resources	44
Conclusion	47

INTRODUCTION

Now is a time to put relationships first.

The past few years have disrupted our “normal routines,” and many have felt isolated and disconnected from others. Remote and distance learning, stay-at-home orders, and all the other disruptions caused by the pandemic have taken a toll on our ability to connect with others. As we begin to return to a sense of normal, our relationships are going to help us get through setbacks we may have faced.

Students need to recover lost learning, and relationships will be crucial for this goal. Strong teacher-student relationships are powerful and benefit students in many ways, including increased engagement and motivation, improved behavior and prosocial skills, and increased academic outcomes.

Teachers also benefit from connecting with others. They will need help navigating this year’s challenges, and at times, they are going to need a shoulder to lean on. They will look toward their district leaders and administrators for support, and they will need tools for managing their stress. A strong support network will provide encouragement, mentoring, and peers to celebrate successes with. And, research shows that strong teacher-student relationships can make teachers happier, healthier, and can even improve their teaching.

SEL Can Help

The pandemic showed us why social and emotional skills are so important. An essential part of learning, SEL helps adults and students manage stress, build confidence and self-efficacy, set meaningful goals, and foster relationships based on mutual respect and trust.

This year’s Student Success Guide focuses on the theme, “relationships first.” It is filled with resources, activities, and advice to help you strengthen your relationships while improving and expanding SEL initiatives in your classroom, school, and district. We have also provided resources to connect with families.

Use this guide to set yourself and your students up for success during the first weeks of school and beyond. Pick and choose which articles are most relevant to your needs, and have fun building relationships with students, educators, and families. Working together, we can get students back on track and keep teachers motivated and successful.

For additional resources, [contact our experts](#) to learn more about how Aperture can help you and your students succeed this year. Together, we can create an SEL initiative that meets everyone’s needs.



THE STORY OF APERTURE EDUCATION

Bringing the Whole Child Into Focus

Aperture Education empowers over 7,000 unique schools, over 139,000 educators, and more than 2 million students across North America to measure, strengthen, and support social and emotional competence. The powerful data districts receive enables education leaders to take strategic action about SEL within their organizations. The Aperture System includes the DESSA suite of strength-based assessments, which is lauded by researchers for its high standards of reliability and validity. Educators also appreciate its ability to easily and quickly identify each student's personal social and emotional strengths and areas of needed support. Aperture partners with industry curriculum leaders to deliver research-based, CASEL™-informed intervention strategies to bolster specific areas of needed growth. With robust reporting in one easy-to-use system, Aperture is favored in districts nationwide. Aperture continues to develop innovative solutions to bring the whole child into focus. To learn more, visit www.ApertureEd.com/Why-Aperture.

Our Roots

Aperture Education originated from two organizations in 2017: the Devereux Center for Resilient Children, a non-profit focused on creating resilient children, and Apperson, Inc., a for-profit focused on providing educators with good data to make great instructional decisions. Aperture Education's sole focus is on student and educator social and emotional learning (SEL), specifically SEL assessment.

As a step toward achieving a common mission, Aperture Education was acquired by and became a company of Riverside Insights in 2022. Riverside is a leading provider of research-based assessment solutions serving K-12 education and extending into adulthood through public and private healthcare organizations. Riverside offers market-leading products, including the Woodcock-Johnson Family of assessments, the Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT), the Battelle Developmental Inventory — Third Edition (BDI-3), ESGI, ImPACT Applications, and the Woodcock-Munoz Language Survey III (WMLS III).

We are a company rooted in the belief that our children hold the promise for a better tomorrow and that we have an obligation to ensure that students have the skills and mindsets to be good stewards of our future. Riverside Insights and Aperture Education are invested in helping educators, families, and communities learn more about SEL and the positive impact it has on our youth, educators, and out-of-school time staff.

Our Mission

The mission of Aperture Education is to ensure that all members of school and out-of-school communities, both children and adults, have the social and emotional skills to be successful, productive, and happy.

[LEARN MORE ABOUT APERTURE EDUCATION'S SEL SOLUTIONS FOR K-8, 9-12, AND EDUCATORS.](#)

BENEFITS OF

BUILDING STRONG

RELATIONSHIPS





Strong Teacher-Student Relationships Improve Student Achievement

On average, students attend 180 days of school each year. This comes to about 1,200 hours or 72,000 minutes. That is a lot of time spent with their teachers!

And this is why strong teacher-student relationships are so important. When students feel connected to their teachers, they are more likely to engage and succeed in their learning. They are less likely to disrupt class, be chronically absent from school, or make the decision to drop out.

As students and teachers work hard to recover learning lost during the pandemic, one key way they will do this is through strong teacher-student relationships. Learn why relationships are so important this year and how they contribute to academic success.

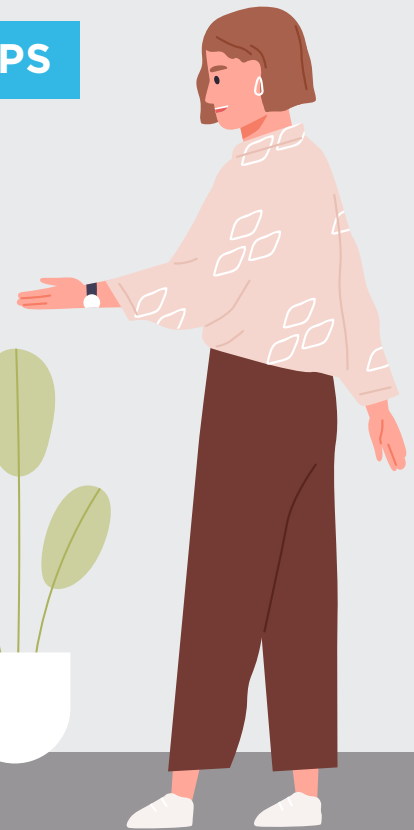
Take a look at our infographic on the next page.

STUDENTS WHO REPORTED HAVING MORE POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEIR TEACHERS ALSO REPORTED THAT THOSE TEACHERS USED MORE HIGH-IMPACT TEACHING PRACTICES.

STRONG TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

SUPPORT ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Building strong relationships with students will improve their learning experiences, engagement, and academic achievement.



Grade Point Averages

When students have strong relationships with their teachers, they are more likely to have higher GPAs and test scores.



Attendance

When students believe their teachers care about them, attendance increases and chronic absenteeism decreases.



Dropout Rates

Research shows that teacher-student relationships can help predict a student's decision to drop out and factor into a student's decision to stay in school.



College and Career Readiness

Teacher-student relationships play an important role in helping students explore college and career options and be confident in their ability to attain career goals.



Student Behavior

Students who have positive relationships with their teachers are more likely to develop prosocial behaviors such as cooperation and altruism. They are less likely to engage in disruptive classroom behaviors.



Engagement

When teachers make an effort to get to know students, students become more cooperative and engaged in their learning.

Strong Relationships Lead to Better Teaching

In addition to improving students' academic performance, strong teacher-student relationships can help teachers become better at teaching.

We know that teacher-student relationships improve student behavior. [Research](#) shows that these relationships also impact teacher behavior. Students who reported having more positive relationships with their teachers also reported that those teachers used more high-impact teaching practices — such as engaging students in their learning and making the curriculum engaging and relevant — that are linked with students' academic achievement.

Students' Perspectives

What is a positive teacher-student relationship? We've listed some examples based on [real student responses](#) about what made their relationships with teachers special and caring.

- *The teacher should be warm, trusting, caring, and supportive, but not overly dependent.*
- *The teacher should believe that every student can learn and understand that students do so at different rates.*
- *The teacher should admit mistakes, set clear rules, and be approachable.*
- *The teacher gives honest yet kind feedback and offers second chances.*

- *The teacher shows students respect and values each student's individuality.*
- *The teacher sets high expectations and is fair and available to talk with students after class.*

Nearly everyone can recall a special teacher who made a difference in their life. Why? Because teacher-student relationships are the heart of teaching.

Prioritize building strong relationships with students this year. Your efforts will help students re-connect to school and re-engage in their learning. Students will also do better academically, and you just may find your instructional skills will improve.



The Urban Assembly

The Urban Assembly is a school support agency that develops learning tools and programs that boost student growth and school performance. The UA's network of high-performing public schools in NYC is open to all students, ensuring that all young people have access to specialized career-centered education that prepares them to be successful in the 21st-century workforce. The UA also works with schools and districts throughout the county, providing data-driven, student-centered approaches to career and technical education, academics, SEL, and postsecondary readiness and success.

[LEARN MORE](#)



Mark your calendar for the can't-miss SEL event. The SEL Exchange Virtual Summit, *Weaving a New Tapestry:*

Schools, Families, and Communities Together, will be October 13 from 1:00–5:00 pm ET. Join us to strengthen collaboration and spark innovations with SEL. Sign up to be alerted when registration opens in August 2022.

[LEARN MORE](#)



8 Tips to Improve Teacher Retention with SEL

Schools and districts are working hard to improve teacher retention. The high number of teachers and school staff leaving the education field was a problem before the pandemic, and it has increased considerably in recent years. Staffing shortages have become a crisis in many districts.

How can we better support teachers so they retain the passion and drive that led them to teaching? How can we equip educators and support staff to persevere through tough times?

Increasing teachers' pay is an obvious first step. But beyond inadequate financial compensation, teachers face other challenges like navigating frequently changing testing and accountability systems, a lack of administrative support, and stressful working conditions.

SEL can help alleviate some of the challenges teachers face.

By developing school cultures that foster trust, care, and engagement, districts can create healthy and happy work environments and strengthen staff retention. And, just like students, educators can benefit from strengthening their social and emotional skills. SEL can assist them in managing stress and emotional fatigue, creating strong relationships with students and peers, and becoming resilient to the many challenges they face.

IT'S CRITICAL TO SUPPORT TEACHERS AND STAFF THROUGHOUT THE YEAR WITH SEL. HERE ARE EIGHT WAYS TO GET STARTED.

1 Consistently check in with staff.

Regular check-ins give educators and staff a sense of connection and continuity. This can be as simple as 15-minute bi-weekly meetings in which staff share about their successes and challenges, ask questions, or bring attention to issues they're facing. Hosting these regular meetings will show your staff that you care about them, value their experiences, and want to support them.

2 Teach staff self-care and stress management skills.

High stress levels contribute to teacher absenteeism and high turnover rates. Stress also can negatively impact a person's health and well-being and contributes to high rates of burnout.

But research shows that when teachers are able to effectively manage stress and the demands of teaching, their health and well-being improve and they are less likely to leave their profession. They are also more effective at reducing classroom conflict and behavior incidents, promoting cooperation and effective communication, and building supportive relationships with students.

Here are 10 tips for teaching effective stress management skills to staff.

3 Train staff to build healthy relationships.

Strong relationships are an important cornerstone of any SEL program. Teachers and staff need to know how to build healthy and trusting relationships with students. When students believe educators care about them, they are more likely to enjoy school, perform well, and follow class rules and policies. In addition, new research shows that strong teacher-student relationships can improve teaching practices.

Teachers also benefit from strong peer relationships. Educator SEL encourages adults to establish a professional support network of colleagues, coaches, and mentors, and encourages consistent communication with this network to share advice, trade ideas, and talk through challenges.

4 Encourage teacher voice and choice.

Promoting student voice and choice is a well-known practice used to increase student motivation and engagement. Teachers can also benefit from

this empowerment! Many teachers want to be involved in school-wide decisions, and increasing teacher participation in decision-making improves their sense of agency, value, and motivation.

5 Cultivate a mentoring program.

All educators and staff can benefit from mentoring. Mentoring can be a set of structured supports, or it can be an informal buddy system. While it has commonly been used to support new teachers, in the age of the pandemic, mentoring can provide much-needed emotional and professional support for all staff. Effective mentoring programs contribute to healthier and happier teachers who are more likely to remain in their field.

Establish a mentorship program for your staff. You can utilize veteran teachers' knowledge and expertise to support new teachers, but be sure to provide veteran teachers with support too. Veteran teachers are leaving education at alarming rates and are especially in need of extra help right now. Consider identifying senior faculty members who have collaborative and cooperative skills and can commit time to the mentoring initiative.

6 Coach, coach, coach!

Coaching is one of the best — yet often most underutilized — tools to support teachers. Coaching is like mentoring, but it's more structured and provides a defined plan for professional improvement. Coaching goes beyond training and addresses teachers' stress, resilience, and emotional needs. Consider setting up a coaching program in your school or district. Select trained coaches, create a targeted coaching strategy, and continually evaluate the impact of your program.

7 Show teachers and support staff that you care.

Just like students, educators are more likely to perform well and succeed when they feel valued and believe school leadership cares about them. Finding ways to show teachers that you care about them goes a long way toward boosting morale and improving school culture. A

few simple ways to show your appreciation are to surprise teachers with coffee and donuts or an afternoon snack, write personalized thank you notes, or take over a supervision duty for a day.

8 Meet teachers and staff where they are.

Teachers are very busy people! It's important to be mindful of adding more to their already full plates. When starting a new SEL program for educators, be sure to give them time to learn about the program and prep during their normal work hours. Start slow and make sure staff understand the benefits of SEL. [Here](#) are five tips to increase teacher buy-in for SEL.

Teachers and staff need additional supports to get through the challenges they face. SEL can help by creating a positive and nurturing school culture where teachers and staff have the resilience and emotional skills needed to

maintain their passion for teaching for years to come.

We truly believe in the importance of providing SEL for educators. Our [Educator Social-Emotional Reflection & Training \(EdSERT\)](#) tool includes professional development and strategies to support the social and emotional competence and well-being of all educators.



Riverside Insights is a clinical and PreK-12 classroom assessment company on a quest to elevate the potential of every learner by using multi-dimensional insights to understand student aptitude, skills, and strengths. Your Expertise + Our Insights = Limitless Learning for All Students.

[LEARN MORE](#)



Join us for our second annual **SEL Vision Summit: Leading a Legacy** on November 3, 2022 from 10:00 am–5:00 pm EST. Scan the QR code and use code "AUGPROMO22" for 25% off Leading a Legacy ticket prices!



[LEARN MORE](#)

Strong Teacher-Student Relationships Strengthen Other Critical Social and Emotional Skills

A key dynamic of SEL is that building competence in one area often leverages improvement in other areas, which in turn improves the likelihood of student success.

Students are most successful in school and in life when they have social and emotional competence — that is, they are able to manage their feelings and emotions, they understand that they matter and belong, they are able to work well with others, and they are able to solve problems.

While teachers can't change the circumstances that youth face outside of school, they can build strong relationships with students in the classroom. These relationships set the foundation for social and emotional competence in all areas so students have the skills to lead productive, happy, and healthy lives. Keep reading to see how strong teacher-student relationships are connected to critical social and emotional skills.



The Character Effect™ is an evidence-based social and emotional learning program grounded in positive psychology and

the science of mindfulness. The K-12 program is unique, beginning first with teachers seeing their own character strengths and learning about mindfulness. Flexible program offerings are available, from a comprehensive engaging online curriculum to individual coaching sessions for teachers, depending on your school's needs.

[LEARN MORE](#)

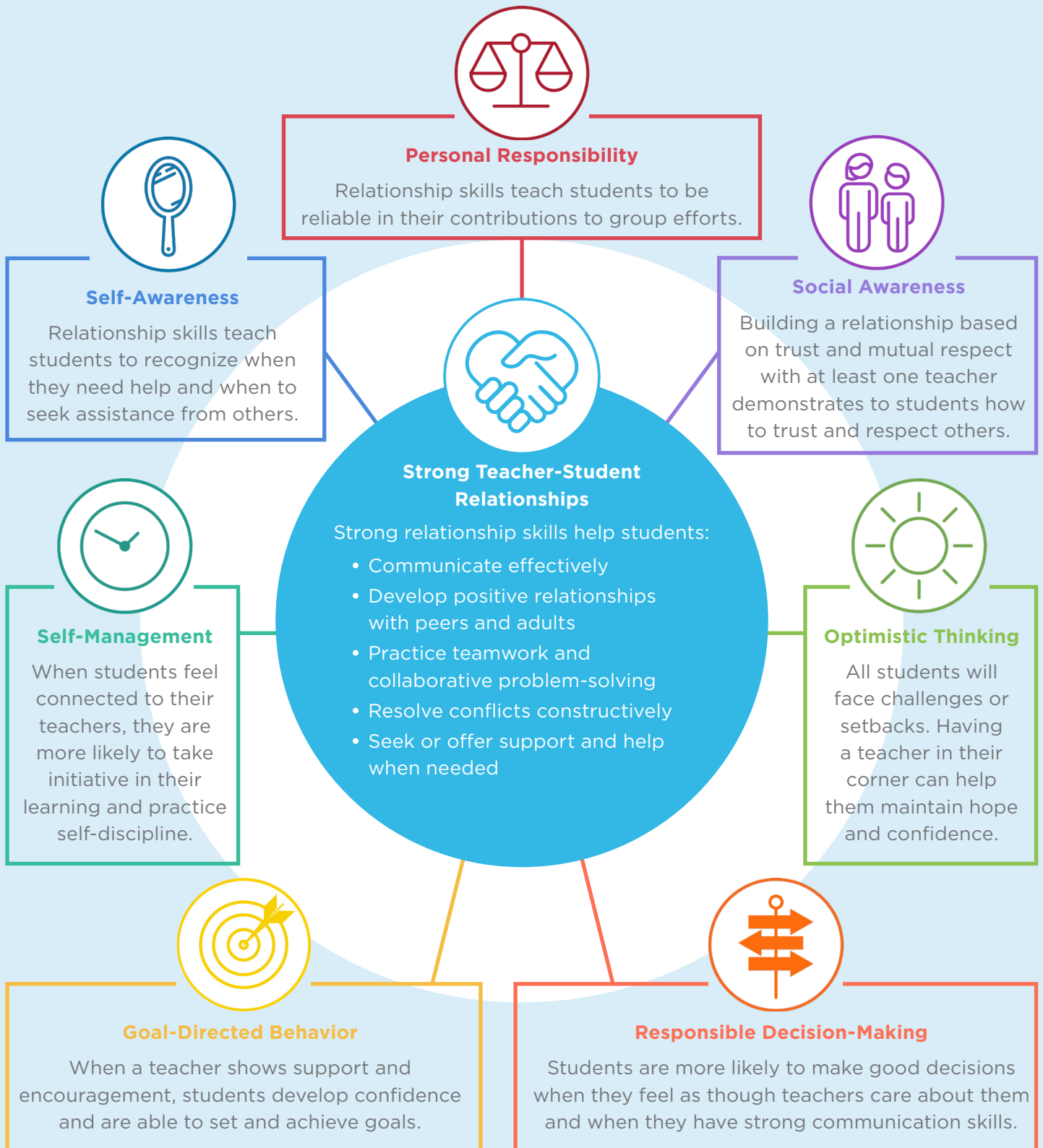


The Devereux Center for Resilient Children aims to promote social and emotional development, foster resilience, and build skills for school and life success in children (birth through five), as well as to promote the resilience of the adults who care for them.

[LEARN MORE](#)

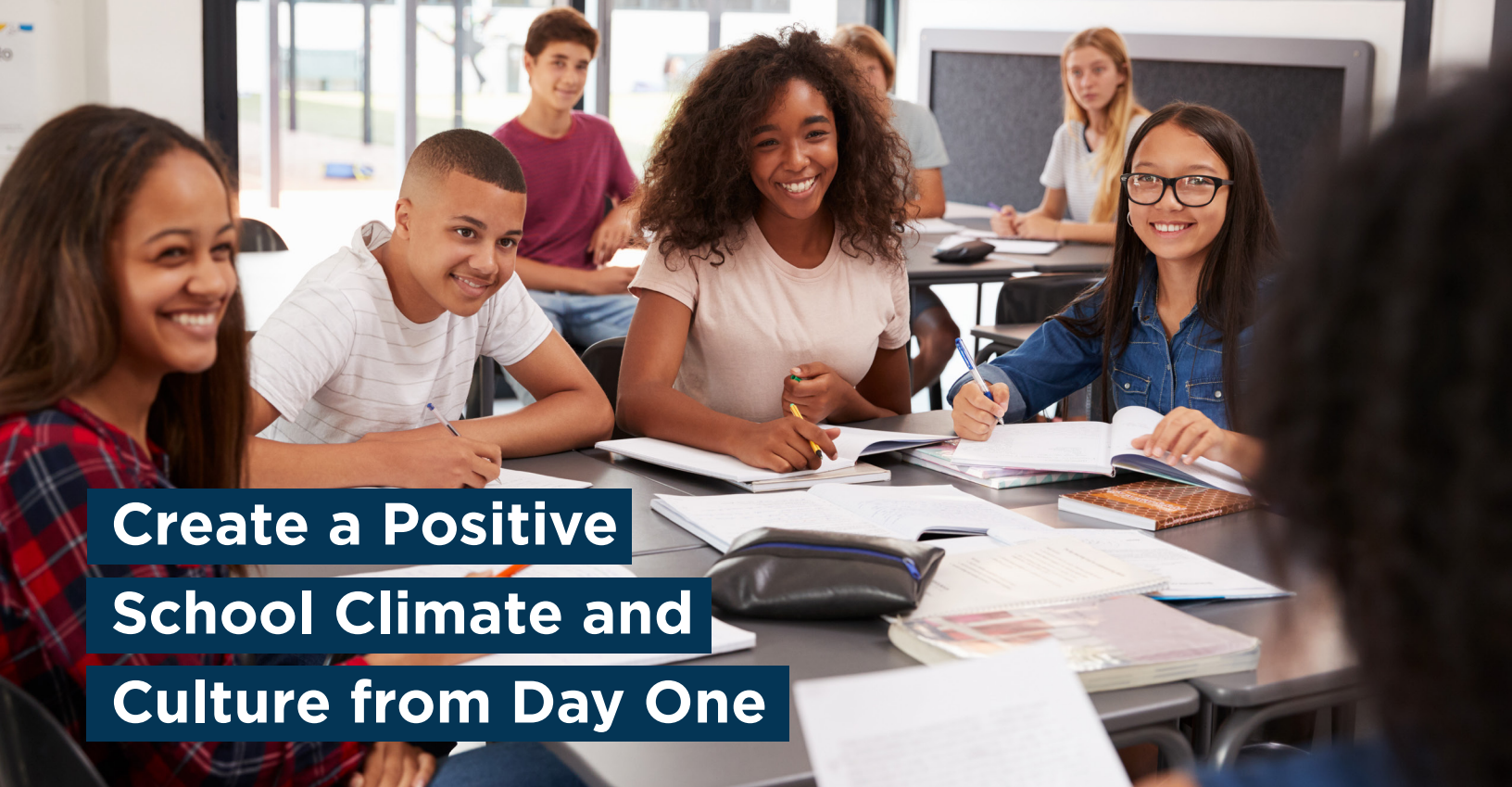
Strong Teacher-Student Relationships Grow Critical Social and Emotional Skills

Building strong relationships with students increases their competence in other SEL areas and positively impacts their success.



**TIPS, STRATEGIES,
AND ACTIVITIES
FOR BUILDING
RELATIONSHIPS**





Create a Positive School Climate and Culture from Day One

As we head into a new school year, most teachers are focused on ways to re-engage students in their learning. And top of mind for most district and school leaders is how to make teachers and staff feel supported, inspired, and engaged so they can help students succeed.

One of the best ways to achieve these goals is to create an inclusive and positive school culture. This is a place where staff, students, and families feel connected, supported, and involved in meeting every student's learning needs; where teachers have enough time to plan their lessons; where educators have access to opportunities for collaboration and mentoring; where students feel welcome and engaged in their learning.

Learn more about the benefits of fostering a positive school

culture and get seven strategies for building one in your school with SEL.

Benefits of a Positive School Culture

There are many areas you are prioritizing this school year, and chances are good that building an inclusive and supportive school culture can support your goals. For example, a positive school culture can:

- **Decrease chronic absenteeism**
[Research](#) shows that schools have lower absentee rates when students feel their school culture is caring and supportive.
- **Improve educational equity**
A quality SEL program — that includes quality professional development, coordination with Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), and

equitable SEL assessments — can promote equity so all students are treated fairly and receive the resources they need to succeed.

- **Reduce bullying**
[Studies](#) show anti-bullying campaigns are most effective when they include school-wide training and awareness, classroom instruction and activities, and intervention.
- **Increase academic performance**
[Many studies](#) have found evidence that quality SEL programming promotes higher test scores and GPAs, increased graduation rates, meaningful connections between educators and peers, positive social behavior, and improved attitudes toward self, school, and others.

How to Create a Positive School Culture with SEL

Here are a few ways to create a safe, caring, and inclusive environment that benefits students and teachers.

1 Help teachers and students build relationships, connect, and heal.

The pandemic took a toll on educators' and students' mental health and well-being. Prioritize strong, supportive relationship-building and give students and teachers opportunities to work through issues and concerns.

2 Invest in your staff.

Teachers need extra support now more than ever. Ask educators what they need and do all you can to support them. Provide opportunities for staff to express their concerns and be heard, involve them in the decision-making process, and provide effective and empowering professional learning.

3 Re-align supports as needed.

Pre-pandemic, schools operated knowing that their Tier 3 students had the highest needs, and thus received the most supports. You may find now that students in Tier 2 and even Tier 1 have more intensive needs. It is important to set a solid SEL foundation for every child so you can ensure all students get the services and support they need.

Get creative in how you provide additional supports to a wider



group of students. For example, create a task force focused on a particular priority, such as attendance. Find ways to get all staff involved. School counselors and social workers could conduct home visits. School admin and support staff could call students' homes to check in. Teachers could incorporate SEL lessons to help students realize the importance of attending school. Getting the whole school involved will increase the impact of your SEL program.

4 Plan an SEL blitz.

Set a strong tone for the 2022-23 school year with an "SEL blitz." During school year consider planning a full week (or more) dedicated to activities that engage and reconnect students. This could include engaging in class or school-wide activities that promote a safe and supportive school culture, taking time to foster strong teacher-student relationships, planning fun icebreaker activities, meeting students' families, working with students to establish class rules and routines, etc.

Continue your focus on SEL throughout the school year and plan similar events that center around SEL to bolster a strong school culture.

MOVE THIS WORLD

Move This World is the leading provider of interactive SEL experiences for PreK-12 students, educators, and families. Rooted in creative arts therapy and positive psychology, Move This World programs are evidence-based and designed for seamless delivery through multimedia experiences that spark movement, connection, and social and emotional development.

[LEARN MORE](#)



5 Use data to create a sustainable SEL program to support students and staff all year.

Keep your SEL program going strong all year with a quality SEL assessment and an effective action plan centered on data. For example, conduct a baseline SEL assessment to understand students' needs.

You can use class data to determine one or two social and emotional skills you should prioritize. Individual student data can be used to tailor instruction and interventions. Throughout the year, conduct regular progress monitoring and quick checks for content comprehension. Be sure to use a quality SEL assessment, like the [DESSA](#) suite of assessments from Aperture Education.

6 Encourage innovation in the classroom.

The pandemic taught us that it's important to look at our practices and problems with fresh eyes and address them in new ways. Encourage a spirit of innovation in the classroom with strategies like [game-based learning](#), by introducing more technology (when appropriate) and incorporating multimedia, and by utilizing assignments

that promote student creativity. The [Aperture Student Portal](#) combines social and emotional self-assessment and gamified challenges and goal-setting for high school students.

7 Incorporate student voice and choice.

Giving students a voice and choice in their learning helps them feel valued and improves school climate and culture. It also increases student engagement, empowers students to take control of their learning, and promotes positive outcomes.

Learn more about student voice

and choice. [Read this blog and download our white paper](#) to learn how you can incorporate it in students' learning.

School culture can sometimes be an afterthought, but it is an integral component of a successful school or program. It takes a safe and supportive environment to nurture student growth. And it takes strong social and emotional skills for students to be active participants in their learning. Maximize success this year by prioritizing a strong climate and culture.



Taproot Learning provides the market's most robust and engaging online SEL educational suite, boasting more than 500 multimedia activities surpassing the most rigorous state and CASEL standards.

[LEARN MORE](#)



The Second Step® family of programs creates brighter futures for kids through SEL, with curricula for grades K-8 and new programs for out-of-school time and adult SEL.

[LEARN MORE](#)



Build Relationships With 5 Icebreaker Activities

Starting the school year with fun icebreaker activities can establish a foundation for solid relationships with your students and a strong sense of community in your classroom. It also sets a caring and welcoming tone in those first few days of school and can ease students' anxiety about meeting their classmates.

Here are five fun SEL-themed icebreakers to help students connect and see what they have in common, while providing you a window into their personalities, hopes, anxieties, and even their academic skills.

1 Who's In Our Class Jigsaw Puzzle

Draw a jigsaw puzzle on a large piece of poster board or cardboard. Cut out the pieces and give one to each student (and save one for yourself). Have students decorate the puzzle pieces in a way that showcases who they are — i.e. things they like, words that describe them, elements from their families or cultures, etc. Ask students to share about their puzzle pieces and create a wall display with the finished puzzle.

2 Questions of the Rainbow

Grab M&Ms, Skittles, Lego pieces, or any colorful object and gather students in a circle. Have students blindly pick one item and then answer a corresponding question from a pre-made chart. Here are some examples:

- Red — Share your favorite food
- Orange — Share a hobby you enjoy



- Yellow — Share your favorite color
- Green — Share about a cool place you have visited
- Purple — Share about a favorite game you play

3 Circle Up

“Circle up” helps students get to know one another in a semi one-on-one setting. To play, have students form two circles, one inside ring and one outside ring, facing each other to form pairs. Have students

briefly introduce themselves to their partners and then discuss an open-ended question like “What is your favorite TV show?” or “If you could have any superpower, what would it be?”

After a minute or two, have the inner circle stay stationary and the outer circle rotate so that each student has a new partner. To ensure students get a chance to pair up with everyone, play again later in the week with new questions.

SCHOLASTIC EDUCATION SOLUTIONS

Scholastic Education Solutions creates custom literacy solutions for grades PreK-12 that empower educators, students, and families to achieve better academic outcomes together. When you partner with us, your students get access to diverse Scholastic content that supports their social-emotional growth and celebrates their voices and identities. Your school gets access

to ongoing professional development and actionable data to help teachers pinpoint students' strengths and needs. You'll also have a wealth of opportunities to engage families meaningfully and equitably in the learning process. So partner with Scholastic Education Solutions, and let's build stronger readers, writers, and thinkers together.

[LEARN MORE](#)



harmony

SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Are you ready to Inspire Harmony in your classrooms? Harmony SEL is an SEL program for pre-K-6 grade students designed to foster communication, connection, and community in schools and out-of-school time organizations. Harmony builds affirming SEL skills through relationship-driven lessons and activities to help children grow up to be compassionate and caring adults. Newly refreshed units available now! Inspire celebrates and supports pre- and in-service educators and staff with online professional development resources and educator SEL opportunities. Learn more about our no-cost SEL solutions from Harmony SEL and Inspire.

LEARN MORE

4 Match That Trait Game

[This game](#) helps ease school year anxiety by encouraging students to get to know their peers and make friends. Students are tasked with finding classmates who match different traits, and the student with the most check marks wins.

5 Getting to Know You Bingo

This icebreaker is one of the most popular games for getting to know your students. [Create a 5 x 5 bingo card](#) that has personal statements, such

as “has brown eyes,” “has a dog and a cat,” “likes rock music,” etc.

Give a bingo card to each student and have them find classmates who meet the criteria in each box (classmates can only be used once on their sheet). Whoever completes the grid first wins.

Enjoy these SEL-themed icebreakers! Starting the school year with fun activities is a great way to get to know your students and build community in your classroom.



LEARN MORE

“We Are Resilient™ — SEL for adults and teens — promotes equity and social justice by revealing our Cultural and Protective Patterns, and creating a foundation for cultural responsiveness. Our newest resource, the “For Teens, By Teens” student workbook, is hot off the presses. Digital resources are available for free as open education resources or physical copies can be purchased. Training and Resilience Circles are customized for each site.



Help Students Manage Stress with SEL

Students are more stressed than ever before, and some [research](#) shows that teens are even more stressed than adults. Adolescents don't always know how to recognize stress, how to talk about it, or how to get help.

We all deal with stress in our lives. Some stress is normal and can actually help us learn and grow. But if left unchecked, stress can become emotionally and physically toxic. It can lead to harmful health concerns like anxiety and depression, reduced attention, impaired self-regulation, and decreased learning readiness when not addressed. It can also lead to negative well-being factors, such as sleep and eating disorders.

It's important to teach students about stress and

how to manage it. We have compiled 10 SEL techniques to teach students effective stress management. Help them explore the different techniques so they can find strategies that work for them.

1 Host morning meetings.

[Morning meetings](#) are an important way to connect with your students and address anything they may be having. Spend some time at the start of each school day to check in with students. This can be a time to address any issues they may be facing, talk through their feelings and emotions, and practice social and emotional skills. Morning meetings can strengthen teacher-student relationships, increase social awareness and self-efficacy, and reduce stress.

2 Teach mindfulness.

We can help students reduce the adverse effects of stress through mindfulness. Mindfulness is an awareness of your thoughts, feelings, and body sensations and how they can impact your actions. This framework has been proven to help students recognize triggers and changes within their bodies, which can help them calm and regulate their emotions before they act on a trigger in a negative way.

Teach students how to practice mindfulness. Our partner, Move This World, has a terrific guide to teaching mindfulness to students. [Click here to access their Calm Down and Mindfulness Strategies.](#)

3 Practice deep breathing.

Deep breathing works just as well for students as it does for adults. It can have a powerful physical effect on reducing tension and relaxing the body — and it can have immediate results. [Clinical research](#) shows that regular deep breathing exercises affect the heart, brain, digestion, and the immune system. They can have immediate results and can also be used to reduce the production of harmful stress hormones. Teach students [deep breathing techniques](#) to calm down and reduce stress.

4 Teach through games.

Games are a fun and interactive way to teach students social and emotional skills like self-management, which can equip them to work through stress. Here are a couple of our favorites:

- [Stress Management Escape Room](#): Students engage in hands-on, interactive puzzles that explain the biological stress response and how to manage stress

by getting organized, doing exercises or yoga, relying on social supports, etc.

- [Coping Skills Bingo](#): This free game teaches students how to manage anger and cope with stress in a fun, interactive way.
- Coloring, Jigsaw Puzzles, and Word Scapes: Research shows that these types of activities can help folks calm their minds and relax. You may want to devote time during the day to give all students a chance to do one of these calming activities. Or, you could create a quiet corner where students can work on a jigsaw puzzle, color, etc. during times they feel particularly stressed.

5 Promote a growth mindset.

Having a [growth mindset](#) helps students rise above negative thoughts and perceived limitations. Growth mindsets allow us to see the world through a lens of growth and encourages perseverance and determination. Help students develop a growth mindset by

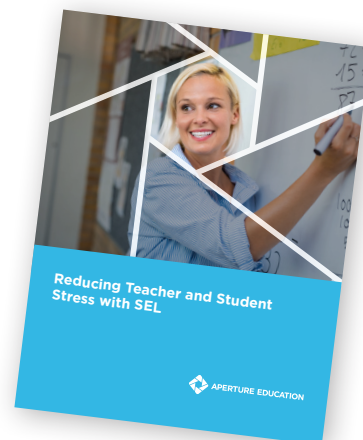


teaching them to focus on the positive and view challenges as opportunities for growth, rather than threats. [Here](#) are 10 fun activities to help students learn about and develop a growth mindset, and [here](#) is a list of SEL-themed books compiled by educator Mirhanda Alewine.

WHITE PAPER: REDUCING TEACHER AND STUDENTS STRESS WITH SEL

[Read our white paper](#) to learn more about stress and its impact on teacher and student performance. You will also gain insight into how SEL can help teachers and students learn how to manage stress effectively.

[DOWNLOAD WHITE PAPER](#)



6 Teach visualization.

Daydreaming in class is sometimes ok! Visualization involves using mental imagery to achieve a more relaxed state of mind and can be an effective way for students to de-stress. This [free lesson plan](#) guides students through the process and has them use visualization to improve reading comprehension.

7 Encourage students to be smart about social media.

We are realistic — we know that no matter what adults tell students, there is little chance they will stay off of social media. But we can teach them to be smart about using it. We can help them understand that too much media exposure (especially on social media) can increase stress and anxiety. We can teach them how to access

reputable news sources like the Centers for Disease Control and World Health Organization to get accurate information. And we can teach them to be safe online. Being smart about using social media can keep students safe and grounded and reduce negative effects like stress and low self-esteem.

8 Encourage students to get enough sleep.

Younger children need 10-12 hours of sleep each night, and high school students need around eight to nine hours. Talk to students about why getting enough sleep is important for their physical and mental health.

9 Help students get the services they need.

Some students may be experiencing high levels of stress due to housing or food insecurities or because they

need more intensive services, like mental health support. Teachers can do a lot to help, such as helping identifying students in need; connecting students with appropriate school services; partnering with school wellness or school health advisory committees; and advocating for students within their schools, districts, and communities.

10 Be a listening ear.

Some students don't have an adult at home who they feel they can turn to in times of need. Encourage students to talk to a school counselor about their feelings so they can work through any concerns they may have.

Helping students find ways to manage their stress will be a skill they will use throughout their lives. We hope these de-stressing tips are helpful as you teach students about stress and strategies for managing it.

3 COMMON MYTHS ABOUT STRESS

Myth 1. Stress feels the same for everyone.

Fact: Stress is a very subjective experience. People feel — and cope with — stress in different ways. What is stressful for one person may not be stressful for another.

Myth 2. You can always tell when someone is stressed.

Fact: While many experience common symptoms of stress, such as social withdrawal, anger, and mood swings, there are many other symptoms that are internal and may not be noticeable. Symptoms like anxiety, depression, and excessive worry may not be apparent.

Myth 3. Only major stress symptoms need attention.

Fact: Minor and major stress symptoms need to be addressed. Minor stress can quickly become more severe and lead to chronic stress. Additionally, [stress hormones](#) (which are present even during minor stress) can have a negative impact on a person's memory, learning, and wellness.



5 Ways to Build Strong Relationships with Students

One of the strongest ways teachers can connect with students is by making them feel valued and respected. When students feel their teachers care about them, want what's best for them, and have confidence in their abilities, this can be powerful enough to move mountains.

Strong teacher-student relationships improve students' academic achievement, increase cooperation and prosocial behavior, and even factor into students' decisions to stay in school and graduate.

Some students are harder to reach than others, but these students often benefit most from a caring teacher relationship.

Here are five strategies to help you build stronger relationships with all of your students:

1 Show students you care.

Think about a mentor in your life and the impact that individual had on your success. Chances are, this person made you feel like they cared about you and believed in your ability to succeed.

Showing students that you care about them is critical to building strong relationships and sets the foundation for trust, mutual respect, and cooperation.

Here are a few simple ways you can reach your students on a personal level:

- Make a list of your students and rank how well you think you know them. Make a point of learning more about the students who rank lowest on your list.
- Every student wants to feel seen and heard. Take a few minutes to focus your attention on each student

throughout the week. Listen to students and ask questions to show that you are interested in their lives.

- Host regular [morning meetings](#) to give students a space where they can share about their lives outside of school. Morning meetings set a positive tone for the day, build a sense of community, and fulfill students' need to belong, feel valued, and have fun.

2 Consider your students' perspectives.

We often talk about the importance of teaching students empathy. Practice what you preach and try to put yourself in your students' shoes to understand their experiences better. This will help you address the root cause of issues and problem behavior to better address their needs.

Try asking yourself these questions when working with a student:

- What is the classroom experience like for this student?
- How often does the student receive positive or negative feedback?
- Does the student believe you care about them?
- How do you think the student feels about you?
- What outside conditions or experiences influence the student's behavior and actions?

Use this exercise to improve your students' experiences. For example, if a student is receiving an unproportionate amount of negative feedback, take a step back and try to correct their behavior or performance in a more constructive way. You can also try explicitly asking the student what they like or dislike about class, teachers, and the school environment. Find common ground that you can use to build a relationship based on mutual respect and trust.

3 Develop mutual trust.

Mutual trust is important in any relationship. With students, educators often need to take the lead in building trust. Here are a few ways you can do that:

- Share about your own life. You don't have to get too personal, but telling students about yourself outside of school can help them see you as a real

person, and they might feel more valued because you opened up.

- Give students the opportunity to make choices as often as possible. This could be in their assignments, how they demonstrate specific skills or knowledge, setting class rules, etc.
- Ask students about the challenges and hardships they face and help them take action to resolve or reduce those problems. For example, you might offer extra one-on-one support, direct students to needed resources (i.e. free school lunches or tutoring services), and/or connect students with counselors and social workers.
- Advocate for your students and consistently act in their best interests. This could mean sitting in on a disciplinary meeting to show support or collaborating with other educators on interventions like restorative justice circles.

4 Practice constructive discipline.

Believe it or not, correcting behavior can be an opportunity to strengthen relationships with students. Too often, teachers do not take the time to explain why rules are in place and the need for fair consequences when rules are broken. By establishing clear guidelines and consequences, you can create a predictable, stable, and fair environment where students are treated with respect and know what is expected of them.

Here are a few tips for practicing constructive discipline:

- Be respectful. Losing your temper and reacting with sarcasm, scolding, or anger can harm your relationship with a student. Instead, take a deep breath and administer a consequence that is fair and meaningful, and communicate in a way that preserves the student's dignity.



Branching Minds is an MTSS system-level education platform that brings together innovative, easy-to-use technology with the latest insights from the learning sciences to help drive student and school success while making teachers and administrators work easier and more effectively. Branching Minds connects data, systems, interventions, and stakeholders so that educators, administrators, and families can work better together to support students' holistic needs.

LEARN MORE



- Involve students in the process of establishing class rules and defining the consequences for breaking rules. This will help hold students accountable and reinforce that students are responsible for their choices.
- Give students one-on-one time. Often those students who struggle with behavioral issues can benefit from individualized attention. When a student has your full attention, they may not feel compelled to perform for other students and will usually open up and speak more honestly.
- Be mindful of equity in your discipline and corrective behavior. [Research](#) shows that students of color receive significantly higher rates of disciplinary action. Take steps to reduce unconscious bias and ensure all students are treated fairly. [Here](#) is a quick tip sheet to help you begin this process.

5 Get to know students' families.

Getting to know parents or caregivers encourages effective communication and

can be particularly helpful with students who need extra support. Your efforts can show students that you care enough about them to take interest in their home lives.

These tips can help you better connect with your students' caregivers:

- Make it a goal to call each family in the first few weeks of school. Introduce yourself, share a positive observation of their student, and ask the parent or caregiver about their child and if there's anything you should know that will help them succeed.
- Learn about your students' cultures and customs. You can send home a simple questionnaire or give students an assignment to share about their families. Talk with your students about how every family is different and why it's important to celebrate diversity and practice inclusion.
- Send home a weekly or monthly newsletter to share what you are working on in class and any themes you are focusing on.

- Ask parents to alert you if something is going on with a student that should be addressed. If something is affecting the student at home, you can talk with the student, offer support, and connect the student to outside resources.

As an educator, one of the strongest impressions you can make on students is how you make them *feel*. When students feel their teachers care about them and want what's best for them, they are more likely to engage, work hard, and cooperate.

The opposite is also true: When students lack strong relationships with their teachers it impacts their academic achievement, increases the likelihood of disruptive behavior, and even factors into their decision to drop out.

Centervention®

Centervention® provides online games to help students in grades K-8 improve social-emotional skills. These online games are research and evidence-based and they also include a library of over 90 free supplemental lessons. You can learn more about the programs and request a free trial [here!](#)

LEARN MORE



10 Ways to Prioritize Educator Wellness and Stress Management

You can't pour from an empty cup.

To help students succeed, meet the demands of teaching, and stay motivated and energized, educators must focus on their own health and well-being and practice self-care. Prioritizing wellness and stress management will give your staff the energy and motivation they need to be the best teachers they can be.

But don't just take it from us. We turned to the 2020 Teachers of the Year to see how they practice self-care and manage stress. Nearly all admitted that self-care can be tough, but they also agreed that practicing self-care is essential to maintaining stamina and focusing on teaching.

Share their tips, below, with your staff to encourage them to be proactive about practicing self-care and keeping stress levels in check.

1 Set healthy boundaries between work and home-life.

"I don't grade papers at home. I don't check my email much at home. I'm a better teacher when I establish healthy boundaries and leave work at work."

Erin Bell, 2020 Teacher of the Year, Kentucky

Like everyone, teachers need balance between their work and home lives. Setting healthy boundaries is about protecting your energy, attention, and motivation and is an investment in your long-term success. Find what works for you —

whether it's only working during contracted hours or going into work a little early to take advantage of the quiet time before students arrive. Set those boundaries at the beginning of the year so that it becomes an integrated part of your routine.

2 Know your limits.

"One of the ways I practice self-care is being able to say no. Sometimes you have to be able to take a step back and refresh before going on to that next project."

Mercedes Munoz, 2020 Teacher of the Year, Oregon

Being a great teacher doesn't mean that you do everything for everyone. Knowing your limits and not biting off more than you can chew will preserve your energy and keep you focused on your most important tasks.

3 Meditate.

"I practice one-minute meditations. I close my eyes, take a deep breath, and try not to think too much about what happens. When I open my eyes I feel much better."

Takeru Nagayoshi, 2020 Teacher of the Year, Massachusetts

Meditation, or mindful awareness, can have a

tremendous impact on our ability to de-stress. Meditation has been practiced for thousands of years and can bring clarity to our thoughts and promote peace and balance. Even a few minutes of meditation can significantly reduce stress. [Try this 10-minute meditation activity](#) to calm your stress and clear your mind.

4 Exercise.

“My goal is to get outside more and do more engagement with our environment.”

Lynette Stant, 2020 Teacher of the Year, Arizona

A little exercise can go a long way toward stress management. According to the Harvard Medical School, regular aerobic exercise (like walking) can boost memory and critical thinking, improve sleep, and reduce anxiety. Regular exercise will help you feel more energized and much less stressed.

5 Tap into your creativity.

“I crank up the tunes in the kitchen and cook something delicious for my family.”

Kimberly Piper-Stoddard, 2020 Teacher of the Year, New Hampshire

“I play piano in the evenings or read a book. I try to take time [to be] still and also be active.”

Katie Pourcho, 2020 Teacher of the Year, Indiana

Just like physical exercise, creative stimulation can reduce stress and anxiety by engaging and focusing our minds on the task at hand. Whether it is



writing, cooking, gardening, etc., creative activity improves brain function, mental and physical health, and our overall well-being.

6 Practice deep breathing exercises.

“I try to turn my brain off and let it be quiet sometimes.”

Kimberly Dickstein Hughes, 2020 Teacher of the Year, New Jersey

Try the equal breaths exercise. Breathe in for a count of four, hold it for a count of four, and breathe out for a count of four. Continue this for a few rounds, and then try adding an extra count (in for a count of five, hold for a count of five, and out for a count of five). You can continue this exercise until your stress levels decrease and your heart rate slows.

Deep breathing exercises can quiet our mind and refocus our energy. They also can have immediate effects, reducing the production of harmful stress hormones and relaxing

our bodies. This activity also has long-term benefits for your heart, brain, digestion, and immune system.

7 Identify your stress triggers.

“I disconnect from technology and distractions and spend quality time with my loved ones.”

Karen Sams, 2020 Teacher of the Year, Texas

Knowing your stress triggers and having a plan to cope is an important step in managing stress. When you are faced with a trigger, you will be much better equipped to deal with the stress before it becomes overwhelming.

Make a list of all the stressors in your life, noting those you have control over and those you do not. Begin tackling the list by choosing one or two items you have some control over that cause you the most stress. Make a plan to manage the stressor(s), write down a goal, and add accountability measures to help you follow through.

8 Get enough sleep.

The link between stress and sleep is complex. Stress can lead to sleep loss, and not getting enough sleep can cause stress. Stress can reduce sleep quality, and chronic stress can increase insomnia, the occurrence of nightmares, and teeth grinding. Getting enough sleep is critical to your health and to reducing stress.

Do your best to get seven to eight hours of sleep each night. Set an alarm for bedtime and stick to it. Most smartphones have a feature that reduces blue light in the evenings — try putting your phone on this setting after 10 p.m. to help your eyes relax. You can maximize the sleep you do get by “unplugging” (i.e. turning off the computer, phone, TV, etc.) at least an hour before bed.

9 Laugh.

According to the Mayo Clinic, laughter promotes a stronger immune system, increases your ability to cope with difficult situations, and can improve your mood by lessening depression and anxiety.

Finding humor is especially important during challenging times. It will do wonders for relieving stress. Find ways to laugh every day — share a funny meme or joke with colleagues or watch a favorite funny movie or television show.

10 Tap into your support network.

Sometimes our connections with others can be the best stress relievers. Establishing a good support network is critical to maintaining healthy stress levels.

Lean on your colleagues for advice and ideas, and create mentoring relationships. Friends and family can also provide invaluable support by lending an ear on especially difficult days. You can further expand your network through [educator-based online support networks and learning communities](#).

Join one or more, and share in a wealth of knowledge from educators across the country.

Practice self-care and prioritize wellness this year. Decades of research show that when teachers feel better, they perform better. With these

strategies, you and your colleagues can reduce your stress and improve your well-being.



Education
Development
Center

Solutions

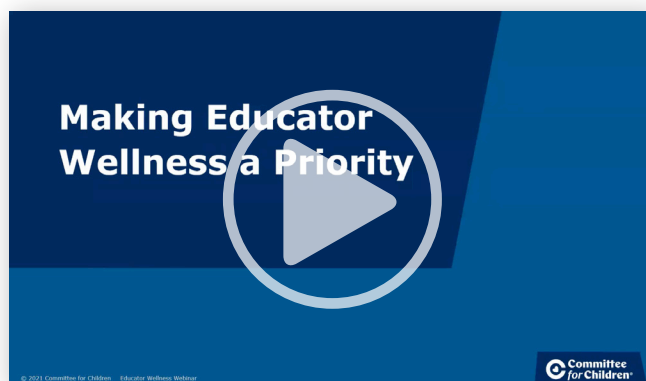
EDC Solutions for Education & Wellbeing provides targeted coaching and training to support district-wide implementation of effective, multitiered supports that promote students' social and emotional well-being. Our experienced experts work hand-in-hand with teachers, mental health staff, and administrators on a data-driven, systems approach to SEL and mental health. Our services range from integrating SEL into practice and policy to alleviating teacher and administrator stress and trauma to multitiered suicide prevention improvements in policy and community relationships.

[LEARN MORE](#)

WEBINAR: MAKING EDUCATOR WELLNESS A PRIORITY

[Watch this on-demand webinar](#) presented by Amy Walker and Jenny Nelson from Committee for Children to learn strategies for improving educators' self-care and wellness.

[WATCH THE WEBINAR](#)





Grow Teacher Support Networks

Now is a time when teachers need extra support.

Creating a strong personal support network can be one of the best ways to prepare for a busy school year. A personal support network is more than having a family member or coworker to vent to after a difficult day. It is a network of people who are there to help you, are mindful of your needs, and care about you.

The best personal support networks are comprised of people who will:

- Give helpful advice
- Build you up and give you confidence
- Provide constructive criticism and help you grow
- Be concerned about improving your well-being

There are many types of support, it is important to tap into a variety of forms for maximum benefits. Here are a few:

Instructional Support

Instructional coaches and curriculum experts can support teachers' instructional needs. One way to take instructional support a step further is by implementing a professional learning community (PLC) within your school or district. PLCs give educators the opportunity to collaborate and communicate with one another; share tips, ideas, and lessons learned; and mentor each other. A great way to facilitate these PLCs is through online forums or chat rooms.



Equip educators in your schools and out-of-school programs with the tools they need to strengthen their social and emotional skills and to help students excel in the classroom. Incorporating educator SEL through Aperture's EdSERT program creates confident educators. A program like EdSERT not only strengthens the relationships educators have with their students but also results in positive impacts on the school climate.

[LEARN MORE](#)



SEL4US is a grassroots network of state alliances promoting and supporting SEL in communities across the country. Membership is FREE!

LEARN MORE & JOIN NOW!



GrantsAlert.com is your one-stop shop for finding current grant funding opportunities. With featured grant opportunities, a database of current grants by state and interest, grant writing resources and tips, and information about fundraising, this site contains free, easy-to-navigate knowledge and insights all about funding. Need help with more, contact the Funding Doctor at info@grantsalert.com.

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Administrative Support

School and district administrators play an essential role in supporting teachers and staff. They need to *really* listen to teachers, find out their pain points, and take action to help them.

Strong communication is key. Administrative staff should set office hours when they can be reached, and teachers should be encouraged by staff to stop by to talk.

Connecting with Peers

Leaning on colleagues for advice and to trade ideas is a valuable form of support. Likely there is another teacher who has experienced a similar issue or problem. Connecting with colleagues can strengthen peer relationships and can be an opportunity for mentoring.

You can expand your peer network through educator-based online support networks and learning communities. Join one or more, and share in a wealth of knowledge from educators across the country.

Support from Friends and Family

Those closest to us are valuable resources for support. They lend an ear to listen on especially difficult days; they care about us and our hopes and dreams; and they want us to succeed. They also tend to know us very well and can offer constructive criticism.

Social and Emotional Support

Many schools have SEL programs to help students and teachers build social and emotional competence. [Aperture's EdSERT](#) is an example of a quality SEL program for educators, and it includes professional development, self-reflective assessments, growth strategies, and guidance on creating a personal development plan.

There are many types of support teachers can rely on to stay happy, healthy, and productive this school year. Find the strategies that work best for you!



6 Ways to Build Teacher and Staff Buy-In for SEL

Getting teacher buy-in for any new initiative or program is crucial for success. As you build out your SEL program, it is important to help teachers and staff understand the benefits of SEL — both for their students and for their own instruction, health, and well-being.

Set your SEL program up for success by getting strong buy-in. Here are six tips that will increase teacher buy-in and get them excited about implementation.

WHEN TEACHERS UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF SEL AND HOW IT CAN MAKE THEIR JOBS EASIER, THEY ARE MORE LIKELY TO IMPLEMENT THE PROGRAM WITH FIDELITY.

1 Let staff know why you are prioritizing SEL.

There are many reasons you made the decision to create an SEL program within your school or district. It's important to share these reasons with your educators so they understand why SEL is so important and why you are prioritizing it. Engaging staff in the decision process will go a long way toward building staff enthusiasm.

Host a professional development session to “make the case” for how SEL can make teachers’ jobs easier. Bring in industry leaders and research experts to speak about the



power of SEL. To make the session even more compelling, consider inviting students who have benefited from SEL programming to share how SEL changed their lives. This session will show teachers firsthand how SEL can improve instruction, increase student achievement, and improve their own well-being. Your staff will come away from the training motivated and excited to get started.

2 Communicate.

Communication is key to any program’s success. Be sure to use common language that clearly defines SEL and emphasizes the importance of SEL for both students and adults. Build clear messaging into all communication about the program and incorporate it into your district’s strategic plan. Strong communication will make it clear that SEL is a district priority, which can facilitate widespread buy-in.

Check out CASEL’s [guide for creating an SEL Communication Plan](#) to get started.

3 Provide support throughout implementation.

Educators don’t just need support at the beginning of a new program. You can continue to increase buy-in — and implementation fidelity — throughout the year by forming effective support networks. Consider training an “SEL expert” in each school or program. These experts can support other educators by instructing teachers on best

practices for implementing SEL curriculum, monitoring the program’s progress, and tracking student gains.

Additionally, the SEL expert or another designated staff member can provide support through coaching and mentoring. Have the coach observe an SEL lesson from each of your teachers. In this instance, it is important to ensure that teachers understand that the coach is simply there to help improve their instruction and will not report back to school or program leadership. After the lesson, the coach should follow up with each teacher to discuss how the lesson went and offer guidance for improvement. This is an excellent way to build teachers’ confidence by emphasizing their strengths. It also provides a non-threatening framework for delivering constructive and meaningful feedback without the anxiety of a performance review.

4 Foster peer-to-peer support.

Teachers are an invaluable source of support for one another. Help teachers build peer support by creating an online forum where staff can post things such as SEL tips and tricks, notes about their implementation, and SEL research articles. This forum will give your teachers a platform for sharing their experiences and create a supportive SEL community within your school/district or program.



5 Ask for feedback.

At the end of the year, encourage teachers to share their wins and any challenges they faced during implementation. Talk through ways to improve on what they've done and how they addressed any issues that came up. Asking for teachers' feedback helps staff feel like their voice matters, and they will be more engaged in making improvements throughout the year.

6 Use SEL data.

From beginning to end, SEL data can support your program and staff by providing a clear roadmap for instruction and intervention. Part of the power of social and emotional data is that it provides insight into why a student is struggling. By collecting data on students' social and emotional needs, educators get a clear picture of where each student is excelling and where they need additional instruction. This data can guide both classroom and small-group instruction

and can also be used to create targeted interventions tailored to each student. In addition, it can support individualized education programs.

When selecting an SEL assessment, be sure to look for one, such as [the DESSA](#), that is research-based, aligned to your SEL goals, and easy to administer.

Additional Resources

Here are additional resources, ideas, and initiatives for building large-scale SEL buy-in from important stakeholders:

[SEL Resource Library: Supporting Parents and Caregivers](#)

[SEL Resource Library: Supporting Staff with Effective Professional Development](#)

[SEL Resource Library: SEL Research](#)

[SEL School and District Success Stories](#)

[Blog: SEL and Your Community: Five Ideas for Inviting Community Members to Support Your Students](#)

Gaining teacher buy-in is essential for the success of any initiative in your school or district. When teachers understand the importance of SEL and how it can make their jobs easier, they are more likely to implement the program with fidelity. Engage teachers in the process and be sure to support their needs along the way. Together, you can create an effective SEL program that will improve student achievement.

 Apperson™

The need for formative classroom assessment is more crucial than ever. Join more than 10,000 schools that have upgraded to obtain better assessment results and saved money in the process.

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4 Benefits of Student Voice, Choice, and SEL

In the “real world,” outside the classroom, students need initiative, self-efficacy, and creative problem-solving to succeed. We can begin cultivating these skills in the classroom.

Student voice, choice, and SEL can engage students in their learning and give them the agency to develop self-regulation and become self-directed learners. This can also help students feel valued and encourage them to realize their interests and potential.

HERE ARE FOUR WAYS INCORPORATING VOICE, CHOICE, AND SEL IMPROVES STUDENTS’ LEARNING AND ACHIEVEMENT:

1 Leadership Skills

Students become more invested in their education when they have an authentic voice in decision-making about school events and policies that impact them. Additionally, involving students in designing their instruction promotes equity, builds leadership skills, and increases intrinsic motivation.

Invite students to design all or part of their SEL instruction, perhaps during an advisory period. Have students define what the



instruction will include, how it will be facilitated, and how they can measure program impacts.

2 Teacher-Student Relationships

Strong teacher-student relationships are fostered through mutual respect and valuing what students have to say. Educators and students strengthen relationships through meaningful collaboration opportunities, which build essential skills like teamwork and cooperation.

Include students in the administration of the SEL program, involve them in analyzing SEL data trends, and invite them to participate in making collaborative decisions around how to improve school climate based on aggregate SEL survey results.

3 Self-Efficacy and Goal-Setting

Giving students a sense of agency and the ability to affect their education builds self-efficacy and goal-setting skills. SEL assessment data can be a valuable tool to facilitate this process.

Start with a quality SEL assessment, like the DESSA. Have students examine and reflect on their SEL data. This could be a simple conversation in which you ask students if they agree with the data, talk about their strengths, and work together to brainstorm ways they can improve. This is an effective way for students to express their own voice, set goals, and work toward their

growth opportunities in a personalized and effective way. Programs like the [Aperture Student Portal](#) allow high school students to complete a self-assessment on social and emotional skills, and then take on challenges and set personal goals based upon their results, putting them in the driver's seat of their own growth.

4 Student Expression

Giving students opportunities to express their personal beliefs, thoughts, and emotions helps them learn how to regulate their emotions and express themselves in considerate and thoughtful ways.

Host a school town hall and invite students to speak about topics that are important to them. The town halls can center on topics of students' choice, such as learning challenges, celebrating areas of strength, equity, etc. Giving students meaningful ways to express their strengths and concerns,

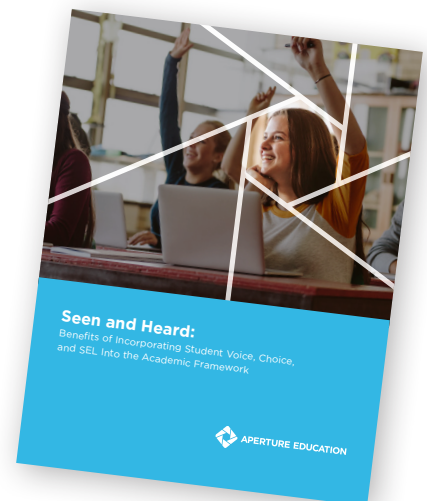
while also eliciting feedback from teachers and peers, will make them feel valued.


These are just a few benefits of integrating student voice, choice, and SEL within a school. Giving students agency and influence in their learning encourages them to be more invested in their education and realize their potential. It also improves their academic outcomes and helps them become healthy, happy, and productive members of society.

SEEN AND HEARD: BENEFITS OF INCORPORATING STUDENT VOICE, CHOICE, AND SEL INTO THE ACADEMIC FRAMEWORK

Aperture Education is committed to helping schools empower students through student voice and choice. [Read our student voice and choice white paper](#) to learn more about this important practice.

READ THE WHITE PAPER





SEL in Windsor Public Schools

Windsor Public Schools in Connecticut has a thriving SEL program. The Urban Assembly and Aperture Education support the district with the implementation, integration, evaluation, and capacity building of their SEL program.

[This video](#) shows high-quality SEL in action in Windsor Public Schools. Click on the links below to watch highlights from the full video and learn more about individual aspects of the district's impressive SEL program.

SEL at Windsor High School

Students at Windsor High School learn SEL in workshops that teach about the five social and emotional domains. The program is strengths-based and gives students context to understand learning in academic subjects. [Watch](#) high school students speak about SEL and how it has helped them succeed.



WATCH NOW

“I FEEL LIKE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING IS KIND OF LIKE THE ROOTS OF A TREE. WE NEED SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING TO BE ABLE TO DO EVERYTHING ELSE.”

- Kruit Dharsandiya, student at Windsor High School

SEL in Clover Street School

At Clover Street School, students spend time each morning working on SEL competencies. Students benefit from direct SEL instruction and get the chance to work in small groups to build their skills. [Watch](#) how morning circles work at Clover Street School.

WATCH NOW



SEL in JFK School

At JFK School, SEL is about improving behavior, building classroom community, and helping students become productive citizens. Teachers implement SEL in creative ways, such as interacting through games and social stories and establishing community commitments. [Watch](#) what SEL looks like at JFK School.

WATCH NOW



SEL in Sage Park Middle School

In Sage Park Middle School, all staff — from the principal to math and art teachers — teach SEL. [Watch](#) how educators integrate SEL into their daily instruction and hear from students about how they celebrated SEL Day this year.

WATCH NOW



“I FEEL...THAT STUDENTS, STAFF, AND ADMINISTRATORS ARE UNDERSTANDING THAT [SEL] IS IMPORTANT.”

- Dr. Terrell Hill, Superintendent, Windsor Public Schools

SEL in Poquonock School

At Poquonock School, SEL is implemented throughout the day. School family and positive language are very important, and the school prioritizes ensuring students feel cared for. [Watch](#) what SEL looks like at Poquonock School.

WATCH NOW



How the DESSA Supports SEL Implementation Throughout the District

Windsor Public Schools uses the DESSA to measure students' social and emotional skills. This data helps educators work together collaboratively to identify students' needs and provide additional instruction to students in need. [Watch](#) to learn more about how the DESSA SEL data is used in Windsor Public Schools to support program implementation and student achievement.

WATCH NOW



[Contact](#) our SEL experts to learn how we can help your school or district create a successful SEL program that improves school culture, teacher effectiveness, and student outcomes.

“SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING FROM A DISTRICT LENS IS AMAZING. WE ARE BUILDING SOMETHING SPECIAL HERE IN WINDSOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS.”

- Dr. Michael Mallery, District Coordinator of Social and Emotional Learning, Windsor Public Schools



LEARN MORE

Drive meaningful change and evaluate outcomes in your school, district, or program through our strength-based SEL assessment system. Aperture Education's strength-based SEL assessments for K-8 are nationally normed and psychometrically sound to provide districts and programs with the most reliable, actionable data possible. Learn more about our practical approach to ensuring all students have the tools to succeed!



Tips, Strategies, and Activities for Building Relationships with Families

Schools need all the support they can get this year, and families are an excellent resource for strengthening your SEL program.

During the pandemic, families worked to help their children through remote and hybrid learning while juggling work and managing their daily routines. They have a new understanding of all that goes into teaching, and many have a desire to deepen school-family connections. In schools and districts across the country,

educators are working more closely with families than they did pre-pandemic.

Now is an ideal time to teach families about the importance of SEL. SEL helped many students and families push through a difficult time, fostering skills for stress management, goal-setting, and developing relationships. Keep the momentum of SEL going by increasing family involvement with strong communication.

ESTABLISHING STRONG COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES WILL HELP YOU BUILD STRONGER TEACHER-FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS THAT WILL BENEFIT YOUR STUDENTS.

6 WAYS TO COMMUNICATE WITH FAMILIES

AND BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

A good teacher-family relationship can be one of the best tools in your toolkit to support students, address areas that need growth, and better understand their needs.

Establishing good communication with families will increase their engagement and foster a sense of teamwork in ensuring students succeed. But sometimes parent-teacher communication can be challenging, and teachers don't always know how to go about forming strong relationships with families.

Below are six tips for opening the lines of communication with your students' families, parents, and caregivers.

1 Open a variety of communication channels.

Families have different ways they prefer — and are able — to communicate. Some parents and caregivers prefer email, while others may not have access to computers and electronic forms of communication. Some might prefer text messages or phone calls, while others prefer letters sent home with students. Additionally, there may be language barriers that you need to address.

Being mindful of a variety of ways you can communicate with families is an important first step in establishing strong relationships and setting clear lines of communication.

2 Get to know your students' families.

Try to learn something about each of your student's families. What are their cultural and ethnic backgrounds? Do they speak more than one language at home? What jobs and careers do they have? Do you share any common hobbies or interests with them?

Set up parent-teacher meetings or send home a questionnaire at the beginning of the school year to get to know your students' families.

3 Don't just share bad news.

Too often, a request for a parent meeting is about something the student needs to work on or to address a

SEL RESOURCE TO SHARE WITH FAMILIES

We created a helpful resource for getting parents and caregivers interested in teaching SEL at home. This letter is available in English and Spanish and can be downloaded and shared with families. It includes:

- A description of SEL and why it is important
- 3 easy ways families can get started teaching SEL at home
- 3 free SEL activities parents can use to teach SEL to their children

[Download](#) and email this letter to families to help them start teaching SEL at home.

[DOWNLOAD LETTER](#)



Partnership4Success (P4S) is a community of equity-driven practitioners focused on strengthening the social, emotional, and academic achievement of youth in Central Ohio.

[LEARN MORE](#)

student's behavior infraction. Make a point to share positive updates as well, such as improvements made, a lesson the student excelled on, etc. Receiving positive feedback and updates will show parents that you care about their children, and this will go a long way toward building trust.

4 Tap into technology.

Consider creating a classroom website that has a link or code for families to access. Or, depending on your district's rules, you could create a page or group on social media. Regularly post about what you are doing in the classroom, projects you are working on, and share photos and videos of students.

Not all families have access to technology, so you may want to also occasionally share handouts with updates.

5 Ask caregivers for help.

If you notice a student is struggling with a particular lesson or concept, ask parents to reinforce the instruction at home. This could be a simple text message or note sent home in the student's homework folder. Asking parents for help empowers them to play a bigger role in their child's education and deepens teacher-family connections.

6 Invite families into the classroom.

Sometimes you need an extra set of hands or eyes in the classroom. By inviting families into your classroom, you not only get that valuable extra help, but also create an opportunity to connect with families and get to know them better.

Establishing strong communication with families will help you build stronger teacher-family relationships that will benefit your students.



THE CHARACTER TREE

The Character Tree is a character development & SEL video subscription series for K-2 classrooms. Find out why students love Miss Sara, Gray Squirrel, & the classroom puppets! Watch a sample episode!

LEARN MORE

#SELday

The Urban Assembly and SEL4US invite communities across the globe to celebrate the importance of SEL on the fourth annual International SEL Day on March 10, 2023.

LEARN MORE



ADDITIONAL

SEL

RESOURCES





Here are some additional SEL resources that will support you in strengthening relationships and improving outcomes throughout the year.

SEL Resources for Educators

Below are professional learning resources for teachers, administrators, and other staff.

Watch our SEL webinars. Deepen your knowledge about SEL and enhance your instructional practices with our on-demand webinars. [Here](#) is a list of our top 10 most popular webinars. You can watch them anywhere, anytime it's convenient for you!

Read SEL program success stories. Aperture serves 7,000 schools and more than two million students across the United States. Seeing how other schools and districts are implementing SEL can provide

insight into how to adjust or improve your own SEL program. [Take a look](#) at our case studies.

Dive deeper into SEL research. [Visit](#) the research section of our website for white papers and peer-reviewed articles explaining the evidence base for the Aperture System's DESSA assessment suite.

Learn about upcoming conferences, webinars, and events. There are many ways to collaborate with other educators and stay current on your professional learning. [Here](#) is a list of upcoming SEL-themed conferences, future Aperture webinars, and upcoming SEL events.

EdSERT

Our [Educator Social-Emotional Reflection and Training \(EdSERT\)](#) program is designed to enhance the social and emotional knowledge, skill set, and well-being of educators.

We are offering a [free, special edition of our EdSERT Educator Guide: Optimistic Thinking](#).

This guide includes:

- A free Optimistic Thinking self-assessment
- A guided reflection and review of your self-assessment ratings
- A Growth Strategy that teaches how to align your work activities with your sense of purpose, approach work with positivity and optimism, and enhance work satisfaction and self-efficacy

SEL Resources for Students

SEL can easily be taught to students right alongside, and integrated within, core academic instruction in classrooms or afterschool programs. From reading, writing, and arithmetic, SEL can be woven into nearly any subject. In fact, SEL often makes teaching core instruction easier because when students have strong social and emotional competence, they are more engaged, motivated, and ready to learn.

Click on the links below to get fun SEL activities and lesson ideas — organized by subject area and grade level — to get you started.

[10 SEL Activities for Grades K-8](#)

[10 SEL Activities for High School Students](#)



SEL Resources for Families

Involving families in teaching and practicing SEL is an important way to strengthen students' social and emotional skills. Encourage families to continue SEL instruction at home.

Help families understand the importance of SEL. Make sure your students' families know what SEL is and why it's important. Share [this parent letter](#) (available in English and Spanish) with parents and make sure they understand that SEL helps students:

- Stay focused and engaged in learning
- Work through emotions like stress, fear, anxiety, and trauma
- Remain connected with educators and peers
- Achieve academic success

Share SEL resources families can use at home. A great resource for families to learn about SEL and start building their children's social and

emotional skills is our [Parent Portal](#). We've recently refreshed this portal to make it even easier for parents to access resources such as:

- SEL basics
- Informal conversation scripts about SEL
- Explanation of the importance of monitoring students' skill acquisition over time

Use Aperture Education's free Growth Strategies. Another SEL resource you can share with parents and families are these free Growth Strategies. These resources are easy to use and will help students improve their social and emotional skills.

- Grades K-2: [Goal Directed Behavior: Working to Make Dreams Come True!](#)
- Grades 3-5: [Optimistic Thinking: Home Connection: Encouragement Folders](#)
- Grades 6-8: [Relationship Skills: Teacher: Relationship Skills Goals](#)



CONCLUSION

Let's make it a priority this year to focus on building strong relationships. With the help of SEL, we can work together to work through high teacher stress and turnover, the challenge of making up learning loss, and ensuring every student has the tools they need to succeed in school and in life.

We hope you find the resources in our Student Success Guide helpful as you prepare for the coming school year. All educators play an important role in SEL, and all staff can benefit from learning about SEL, developing their own social and emotional skills, and becoming more effective at teaching SEL to students.

Have fun trying out the activities in this guide and creating a support network that works for you. You and your students will benefit from your efforts.

Learn more about Aperture Education's System and how it impacts districts and organizations across the country by visiting ApertureEd.com or by [emailing us!](#)

Have a great school year!



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