



APERTURE EDUCATION

BRINGING THE WHOLE CHILD INTO FOCUS

Strategies for a Successful School Year

2020 Back to
School Guide



ApertureEd.com

This school year we need all hands on deck. School and district leaders, teachers and other educators, and families must work together to ensure student success. As a team, we can support one another as we work to support student learning.

Social and emotional learning (SEL) will play an important role in supporting both educators and students this year. This Back to School Guide is packed with helpful SEL information, lessons, and activities. The articles are organized so you can quickly locate tips and strategies relevant to your role.

Start by referencing the Role Description Key below. As you flip through this guide, utilize the articles according to each role. Use the **Strengthening Students' Resilience** articles to build students' social-emotional skills; use the **Supporting Schools, Educators, and Staff** articles to build your own skills; and share the information and tips in the **Helping Families Build SEL at Home** articles with students' families.

Role Description Key



**Strengthening
Students'
Resilience**



**Supporting
Schools, Educators,
and Staff**



**Helping
Families Build
SEL at Home**



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2020 Back to School Guide

Introduction.....	page 4
Story of Aperture	page 5
Strengthening Students’ Resilience	page 6
Supporting Our Most Vulnerable Students with SEL.....	page 7
5 Ways to Build Strong Teacher-Student Relationships with SEL.....	page 9
3 Ways SEL Can Support Trauma-Informed Practices.....	page 12
The Importance of Tier I SEL Screening and Supports.....	page 14
Promoting Educational Equity Through PBIS and SEL	page 16
Supporting Schools, Educators, and Staff	page 20
Educators, Get Tips to Manage Stress for You and Your Students.....	page 21
Don’t Wait to Build an Inclusive, Supportive Learning Environment	page 25
Create A Safe and Supportive School Culture — Even (and Especially) During Remote Learning	page 28
Social Emotional Learning Funding: No Interruption Allowed Amid COVID-19.....	page 31
6 Tips for Leading Effective Remote and In-Person SEL Professional Development.....	page 33
Helping Families Build SEL at Home.....	page 36
7 Ways to Provide SEL Support to Students and Families Learning Remotely.....	page 37
SEL at Home.....	page 39
Conclusion.....	page 40

Introduction

Every student can succeed with the help of at least one caring adult. Great educators know they have the power to transform lives. It is about developing relationships based on mutual respect and trust, helping students develop a growth mindset, and fostering students' confidence and self-efficacy so they believe in themselves and their abilities to succeed.

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is not an educational trend — it is a necessary part of successful holistic teaching practices. But, do we understand SEL well enough to teach it?

Exploring/managing emotions and learning how to work with others is a lifelong process. To be effective at teaching SEL, a successful educator needs to:

- Understand social and emotional competencies
- Know how social and emotional skills impact learning
- Be trained in effective ways to teach SEL to students
- Work on understanding their own social and emotional competence

We are here to help! This Back to School Guide is filled with resources, activities, tips, and tricks to help you kick off the new school year with SEL. We've included resources to help you better understand SEL and improve your own social and emotional skills. We've also included plenty of lessons, activities, and strategies to teach these skills to students.

Use this guide to get through that busy first week of school and as a resource throughout the year. Pick and choose which articles are most relevant to your needs, and have fun improving student success with SEL!

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.



APERTURE EDUCATION

BRINGING THE WHOLE CHILD INTO FOCUS





The Story of Aperture Education

Bringing the Whole Child Into Focus

Aperture Education is a social enterprise focused on addressing the whole child. Our social and emotional learning (SEL) solutions allow educators to measure, strengthen, and support social-emotional competence in K-12 youth and themselves.

We assess and support SEL for both students and educators:

- Our [DESSA Comprehensive SEL System](#) includes a suite of strength-based assessments, a universal screener that can be administered in less than a minute (the DESSA-mini), and growth strategies and foundational practices to strengthen social-emotional competence. Actionable data and reporting helps SEL program administrators measure the impact of their programs and helps educators understand students' SEL strengths and needs.
- Our [Educator Social-Emotional Reflection & Training \(EdSERT\)](#) program includes comprehensive resources that help teachers and out-of-school program staff effectively teach and model social-emotional skills and develop practices to manage their own stress, the demands of teaching, and the needs of students.

Our Roots

Aperture 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 making sure educators have good data to make great instructional decisions. To realize their shared goals, a partnership was born: Aperture Education. We are a company rooted in the belief that our children hold the promise for a better tomorrow with an obligation to ensure that they have the skills and mindsets necessary to be good stewards of our future.

We are invested in helping educators, families, and the community learn more about SEL and the positive impact it has on our youth, educators, and out-of-school-time staff. Our website includes many helpful SEL [resources](#), including [white papers](#), [customer spotlights](#), [blogs](#), and [webinars](#). Whether you are new to SEL or are looking to expand your knowledge, check out our tools for the latest information and updates.

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-emotional skills to be successful, productive, and happy.

Our Approach

Our award-winning system offers a strength-based approach to assess and support the growth of social-emotional skills for both students and staff. Our DESSA Comprehensive SEL System provides accurate and actionable social-emotional data and research-based resources for students. Our Educator Social-Emotional Reflection & Training (EDSERT) is a social-emotional assessment and resource toolkit designed to measure and increase educators' social-emotional skills.

Like the aperture of a camera, we regularly adjust our lens to ensure our focus remains on supporting the social-emotional development of children and the adults who support them.

Strengthening Students' Resilience



Supporting Our Most Vulnerable Students with SEL

A growing population of students in the United States face increased risk due to a range of environmental factors and behaviors. These children are more likely to struggle academically, which can lead to dropping out of school and lifelong economic hardship.

Every day, schools work to help these vulnerable students overcome adversity and achieve positive academic and social outcomes. But this difficult job is made even more challenging during remote learning.

Despite the obstacles, there is something we can do to support the academic, social, and emotional development of our students. High-quality, social and emotional learning (SEL) programs can help support your most vulnerable students and are an important lifeline during remote learning.

Who are our “vulnerable youth”?

The definition of “vulnerable youth” is fairly broad. Here are some examples of students who will likely need additional supports during remote learning:

- **Students with special learning needs:** Remote learning can be difficult for all students, but it is especially challenging for students who already struggle with special learning needs.
- **English language learners (ELLs):** Language development is very much a social construct, and ELLs miss important interaction during remote learning. [Colorín Colorado](#) is a good ELL resource for students and educators.
- **Students in foster care:** Children in foster care are especially vulnerable at this time because things like social distancing and disruptive changes to routine can trigger traumatic memories, feelings, or physical symptoms.
- **Students suffering from Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) or domestic abuse:** For

many students with ACEs, school is a safe haven, a place of stability and structure. It’s also a place for adults to spot red flags that could mean a child’s life is in danger. These students need additional and sometimes intensive support during remote learning and should be monitored closely.

How can SEL help support vulnerable students?

There are many ways SEL can ease the stress, anxiety, and challenges that come with remote learning. Here are a few actionable ways to keep students connected and learning during the pandemic:

- **Reach out to students regularly.** One of the best ways teachers can help all students during remote learning is by fostering caring, supportive student-teacher relationships. Conduct frequent check-ins, talk about students’ safety concerns, and provide a way for students to reach you. For more tips, read the article in this guide, [“5 Ways to Build Strong Teacher-Student Relationships with SEL.”](#)
- **Access vetted resources.** There are so many remote learning resources being shared right now. It can be difficult to know which to use and which provide meaningful support. If you are looking for more than simply a list of links and want quality, vetted resources, visit [EducatingAllLearners.org](#). Support topics include: helping students mentally cope, IEP progress monitoring during school closures, and COVID-19 resources for students with Tourette Syndrome.
- **Keep in mind technology limitations.** (This isn’t really an SEL tip, but we feel it is important to list so students can keep up with assignments and connected with teachers.) Many vulnerable students may need access to computers and/or the internet. Become familiar with your school’s policy

for providing school laptops and hotspots, or try to deliver lessons/materials over the phone. Also, keep in mind any closed captioning needs for hearing impaired students.

- **Understand limitations of family support.** Some families of vulnerable students may not be able to provide home instruction (i.e. families that do not speak English). It is important to keep families involved but be aware of limitations and what additional supports are needed from school staff, family liaisons, and community partners.

If students do not have access to supportive family/home environments, there are many out-of-school networks and organizations that have proven track records for helping at-risk youth who live in unstable home environments. A few examples are:

- Quality, local afterschool programs
- National and local youth organizations (e.g. YMCA, 4-H, Boys and Girls Clubs of America, and scout groups)
- Churches, synagogues, mosques, and other houses of worship
- Advocacy and mentoring groups (e.g. City Year, Americorps)

These entities can give students the supports and scaffolds they need to build the social and emotional skills critical to achieving academic and life success.

esteem⁺

Helping your child with their ADHD and other behavioral health and wellness needs doesn't have to feel so complicated. Esteem is a free app that simplifies ADHD and behavioral health care for parents.

[Learn More](#)

- **Help students feel safe.** Many students do not feel safe right now. Negative and shocking news reports, increased risk of domestic violence, financial hardships, and food insecurity are just a few of the ways students' sense of safety has been compromised during the pandemic. Educators can improve students' sense of safety by providing a caring, nurturing learning environment. Learn more by reading the article in this guide, "[Create A Safe and Supportive School Culture — Even \(and Especially\) During Remote Learning.](#)"

School closures and remote learning are difficult for all students. But vulnerable youth are especially impacted. SEL can keep students connected and learning and is a proven way to help students overcome adversity by building protective factors.

To learn more about how SEL can support vulnerable students during the pandemic, read our whitepaper, "[Promoting Resilience in Vulnerable Children and Families.](#)"



5 Ways to Build STRONG Teacher-Student Relationships with SEL

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, supportive [relationships with their teachers](#) it impacts their academic achievement, increases their likelihood to engage in disruptive behavior, and even factors into their decisions to drop out.

Especially in the age of distance learning, educators need to prioritize building strong relationships with their students. Here are five social and emotional learning (SEL) strategies to get you started.

1. Show students you care.

Students report that one of the main reasons they drop out of school is because they feel as though their teachers don't care about them. But the truth is that most teachers *do* care about their students — they are just not communicating those feelings in a way that gets through to their students.

Connecting with students on a personal level is even more challenging when learning remotely. It can be difficult to convey authentic feelings through channels like email, instant messaging, and video conferencing.

Here are a few strategies to start building and improving your relationships with students:

- Ask students about their lives outside of school. Host recurring in-person or virtual [morning meetings](#) where you invite students to share about themselves or any problems they are having.
- Pay extra attention to students who display high emotions, disrupt class, or seem withdrawn.



- Listen to students and ask them questions to show you are interested in them. During remote learning, you can set up individual or small group meetings with students to chat about how they are doing.
- Be mindful of how you talk to students, especially in front of their peers.
- 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 are at the bottom of your list — often these students can benefit the most from extra attention.

2. Develop mutual trust.

Mutual trust is important in any relationship. With students, educators often need to take the lead in building trust. One way to start building trust is to share about your own life. You don't have to get too personal, but telling students about yourself outside of school will help them see you as a real person and they might feel like you value them by opening up.

Another way to build trust is to advocate for your students. This doesn't mean getting them out of trouble or not enacting a consequence for negative behavior, but that you consistently act in the best interest of your students. This could mean sitting in on a disciplinary meeting to show support or collaborating with other educators on interventions like restorative justice circles.

During remote learning, build trust by asking about the challenges and hardships students are facing and take action to resolve or reduce those problems. For example, you might offer extra one-on-one (virtual) support, direct students to resources for free school lunches, and/or connect students with counselors and social workers.

3. Consider students' perspectives.

We often talk about the importance of teaching students empathy and encouraging them to consider the perspectives of others. Practice what you preach and try to put yourself in your students' shoes to understand their experiences. This will help you understand the root cause of an issue or problem behavior so you can better address their needs.

Start by considering what the classroom or virtual learning experience is like for a particular student. How often does the student receive positive or negative feedback? Does it seem like the student believes you care about him or her? How does the student feel about you? Test your assumptions by observing the student's behavior. You also can try explicitly asking the student what he or she likes or dislikes about class, teachers, and the school environment.

Use this exercise to improve your student's experience. For example, if the student is receiving an unproportionate amount of negative feedback, take a step back and try to understand the student's home life, how he or she is adjusting to remote learning, and if there are underlying issues that are causing the student to act out.

4. Practice constructive discipline.

Believe it or not, correcting behavior can be an opportunity to strengthen relationships with your students. The number one rule when it comes to discipline is to 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. Show that you respect and care for the student and communicate in a way that preserves the student's dignity.



As part of the CASEL CARES initiative, the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is offering free webinars every Friday to address how SEL can be most helpful in response to today's circumstances.

Check Out Resources Here

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 make sure all students are being treated fairly. [Here](#) is a quick tip sheet to help you begin this process, and check out our recent webinar, [Promoting Educational Equity Through SEL Assessment](#).

5. Get to know students' families.

Introducing yourself to students' parents or caregivers, if you haven't already, can encourage effective communication and is particularly important during remote learning. It also can go a long way toward building strong teacher-student relationships because it shows students that you care enough about them to take interest in their home and family lives.

Additionally, when you are in close communication with students' families, you can alert one another 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.

Strong relationships are an important cornerstone of any SEL program and are especially critical during distance learning. SEL programs and activities can help you take an active role in connecting with students to show them you care and are committed to their success. The bottom line is: when students believe you care about them, they are more likely to enjoy school, perform well, and follow class rules and policies.

Learn more about how SEL programs and efforts to build strong relationships contribute to positive student outcomes. [Contact](#) our experts at Aperture Education to learn more.

Student Behavior Isn't Always What It Seems

In collaboration with School Leaders Now, we created a [free poster](#) to illustrate some of the complex issues and reasons behind student behavior. Hang this in your staff break room or near the copier to remind staff to empathize with students.



3 Ways SEL Can Support Trauma-Informed Practices

Unfortunately, traumatic global and community events make top news headlines more frequently than we would like. Students across our nation can be affected by this trauma, leaving deep and lasting impacts on their core beliefs about others, their environment, and themselves.

Now more than ever, schools must focus on ensuring safe, supportive learning environments. There are many ways social and emotional learning (SEL) can help students who experience trauma. Take action by focusing on these three core social and emotional competencies that can support trauma-informed practices.

1. Relationship skills

Relationship skills are critical to students' success. The ability to maintain healthy and rewarding relationships depends on clear communication, listening, cooperating with others, standing up to peer pressure, and seeking and offering help when needed.

[Research](#) shows that traumatic incidents can affect students' learning, behavior, and relationships with teachers and peers. Students who've experienced trauma may have difficulty focusing and processing new information, show more signs of aggression and bullying, find it difficult to trust others, and view authority figures with suspicion.

Take Action: Implement restorative practices to help students establish, develop, and restore caring, nurturing relationships. Promote positive and healthy peer-to-peer relationships by giving students plenty of opportunities to practice teamwork and collaboration. Encourage adults to foster strong educator-to-peer relationships by sharing how they themselves have overcome a traumatic or stressful situation.

2. Self-awareness

Self-awareness helps students identify their emotions and understand how their thoughts and values impact their behavior. A well-grounded awareness of self relies on confidence and self-efficacy.

Students experiencing trauma often deal with strong emotions. When students are exposed to a traumatic event, they commonly experience anxiety and depression. [Research](#) shows that students with a growth mindset are more likely to maintain a sense of control over their emotions. Students are able to recognize that the volatile period after a traumatic event is a temporary state, and a growth mindset equips them with tools to bounce back.

Take Action: Nurture [growth mindsets](#) so students are able to move past feelings of depression or anxiety. Provide opportunities for students to talk through their thoughts, feelings, values, and emotions so they are able to process them in a constructive way.

[Download our free Growth Mindset poster](#)



3. Self-management

Self-management helps students regulate their emotions, thoughts, and behavior. It also helps students manage stress and control impulses.

There is [evidence](#) that repeated traumatic experiences can cause students to live in a “constant state of emergency.” Our normal “fight,” “flight,” or “freeze” responses to stressful situations result in stress hormones being released in the brain. Trauma can make this response dangerous and can lead to an over-active stress response in the sympathetic nervous system.

Take Action: There are many ways to help students manage their stress and emotions. Engage them in journaling activities, deep-breathing exercises, role-playing, and relaxation techniques. Promote a healthy diet and exercise to relieve stress. And, most importantly, encourage students to seek help if they feel their stress or negative emotions are becoming unmanageable.

Schools can tap into SEL to help students work through trauma, especially when approached through a strengths-based lens. When social-emotional skills are taught proactively, students are more likely to exhibit protective factors when faced with traumatic events. Teaching students skills to build strong relationships, understand and manage their emotions, and find healthy ways to alleviate stress can help them work through pain and suffering and go on to lead healthy, happy lives.

Interested in learning more about how SEL can support trauma-informed practices? Watch our [Trauma-Informed Practices in Schools and Beyond](#) webinar, and read our [SEL and School Safety Whitepaper](#).



Dovetail Learning: Creating a world of kind, connected human beings

Are your teachers suffering from secondary trauma and compassion fatigue?

We are Resilient™ is a resilience program for educator wellness that helps teachers take care of themselves—reducing attrition rates and helping educators access the joy of teaching. We are Resilient™ offers simple, effective, and research-based skills that help all of us cope with stress and become our best selves. These skills help us center, connect and collaborate. Dovetail Learning is a non-profit organization dedicated to strengthening resilience in adults and children.

Learn More



The Importance of Tier I SEL Screening and Supports

The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a spotlight on why social and emotional learning (SEL) is so important. It helps students work through stress, uncertainty, trauma, and fear. It gives students an outlet to talk through problems and issues going on in their lives. And it fosters strong teacher-student relationships, which is essential for continuing academic learning, even during upheaval and uncertainty.

As students head back to school in the fall, many will feel a mix of emotions. They are going to need more support than ever before. Educators must prioritize supporting students' social and emotional health. The best way to do this is with a Tier 1 SEL assessment and systemic, high-quality SEL supports.

Universal SEL Screening

It's important to assess all students' social and emotional skills. Students who may have never shown any risk indicators may now be struggling. And students previously identified as at-risk are likely to need even more help. Additionally, it's important to pinpoint and address issues of concern within your student body so you can cultivate a caring and supportive school culture. A Tier 1 SEL assessment will help you identify school-wide areas to prioritize, and it also will identify students who need additional supports.

Here is a basic framework for conducting a Tier 1 SEL assessment in your school:

- **Step 1.** Assess social and emotional competence with a quality SEL screening assessment like the [DESSA-mini](#).
- **Step 2.** Deliver consistent, high-quality SEL instruction to all students.
- **Step 3.** Align SEL data with academic data, such as grades and attendance, to identify students who need additional academic and/or SEL support (Tier II).



Systemic SEL Support

There is a high possibility that schools will continue to see changes, intermittent closures, and hybrid in-person/online learning schedules over the next year. Schools need a systemic SEL program that is designed with continuous improvement in mind. The best SEL programs take a long-term, sustained approach that is centered on helping all students, families, and educators develop critical social-emotional skills.

Here are eight ways to create a sustainable, systemic SEL program:

1. Align your SEL program to state SEL standards.
2. Embed SEL into your district practices.
3. Choose a quality, evidence-based SEL assessment.
4. Start with a pilot and then scale your SEL program.
5. Provide high-quality SEL professional development to your staff.
6. Prioritize building educators' social and emotional skills.
7. Support your staff through coaching and mentoring.
8. Implement, assess, adjust, and repeat.

COVID-19 has tested our resilience and ability to work through some tough challenges. As students prepare for the fall, SEL can help them work through their feelings of stress, anxiety, and fear. It can also help keep their academic learning on track. It's important to implement a Tier 1 approach so all students get the supports they need.

DESSA^{mini}

The DESSA-mini is a reliable tool for progress monitoring that can be completed in under a minute.

Learn More

Read our [SEL Data Guide: Take Action on Your SEL Data!](#) for tips and best practices around SEL assessment and effective data usage. To learn more about continuous improvement, read our blogs, [Using SEL Assessments for Continuous Improvement: Part 1 – How to Effectively Use SEL Data](#) and [Using SEL Assessments for Continuous Improvement: Part 2 — 8 Ways to Improve Your SEL Implementation](#).

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Save on multiple choice scanners!

When students return to the classroom, there will be a lot of new challenges and we're committed to helping close the gaps widened by months of school closures. Using our DataLink test scoring machines and reporting software allows you to quickly and accurately ascertain both individual and class proficiencies. So, we're excited to offer 20% off our DataLink multiple choice scanners + free ground shipping. Use promo code ShipFree20 at checkout to redeem this offer! If you already own a test scoring machine we also sell forms for competitor machines at up to half the price. Contact us for free samples!

At Apperson, our mission is to maximize potential. We advance educational and professional development by providing innovative services and solutions designed to assess performance and measure success.

Learn More



Promoting Educational Equity Through PBIS and SEL

Educational inequity existed in our schools long before the challenges we've faced this year. But in many cases, last spring's school closures widened learning gaps and deepened existing inequities. As educators, it is important to commit to educational equity in our schools and communities to ensure that *all students* have equal access to resources and are treated fairly — no matter their race, ethnicity, gender, family income, disability, cultural background, or religious affiliation.

Take time to reflect on how remote learning impacted instruction this past spring and create an action plan to make up for learning loss in 2020-21 through equitable instruction. Social and emotional learning (SEL) should be an integral part of this plan, especially with the likelihood that some remote learning will continue this fall.

Creating Equity with SEL

Equity in education is comprised of two main principles.

1. The first principle is fairness. All students should be treated fairly.
2. The second principle is based on our society's belief that all students should have basic foundational knowledge in core areas like reading, writing, and simple math.

SEL can play a role in achieving both of these principles. SEL helps educators treat students with fairness and

better understand where students are coming from. SEL also impacts students' academic achievement. [Research](#) shows that universal social-emotional interventions can help *all* students improve academically by:

- Helping staff and students build prosocial skills critical to learning
- Driving a district-wide policy to reduce suspensions and expulsions
- Teaching adults how to use restorative practices
- Establishing a school environment that encourages and supports positive behaviors



Ready for more? Review our full library of webinars on-demand, covering all aspects of SEL for students, educators, and administration.

Learn More

- Enabling the use of multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) to meet the needs of all students
- Promoting culturally responsive teaching whereby every student is treated fairly
- Helping school staff identify and provide extra resources to students who need them through equitable assessments

Take Action: Learn how to promote equity through SEL with our free tool, [5 Equitable Action Activities for Educators Using SEL](#).

Integrating PBIS and SEL into Teaching Practices

[Educators can address](#) implicit bias and equity in schools with a multi-tiered strategy that includes shifting disciplinary practices within a Positive Behavior Intervention & Supports (PBIS) framework and building social-emotional competence for students and staff. SEL and PBIS work together to address the root cause of disproportionate disciplinary actions and referrals while simultaneously providing a flexible framework that addresses the unique needs of a school.

PBIS and SEL can be integrated into a range of school practices and procedures, including new teacher onboarding processes focused on equity, collaborative professional learning, district policies aimed at reducing suspensions and expulsions, and restorative practices.

Take Action: [Download](#) our free detailed crosswalk that leads you through each tier of the MTSS framework and provides easy steps for integrating SEL into your PBIS program.

Reducing Implicit Bias Toward Students

These four SEL activities can help staff understand how their own views affect how they interact with and discipline students. Staff will learn how to recognize and reduce implicit bias so all students are treated fairly and get access to the resources they need to succeed.

1. Increase self-awareness.

A deeper self-awareness can have a profound impact on how school staff interact with students and react to disruptive behaviors. Ask staff to consider how their social identities (i.e. race, gender, income status, etc.) have shaped their beliefs. Challenge them to also consider where students are coming from and how their views may differ from their own.

2. Teach strategies for building trust with students.

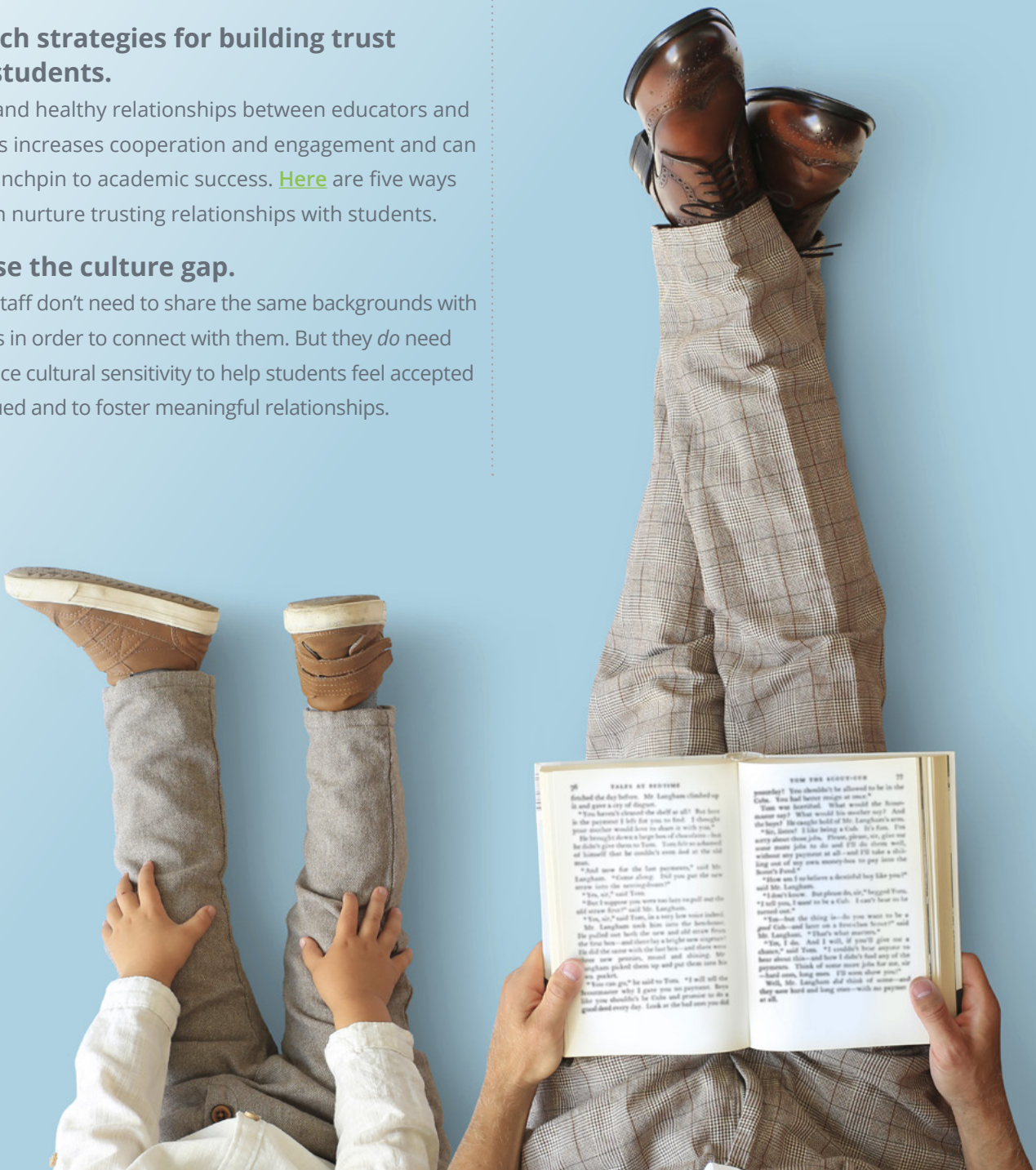
Strong and healthy relationships between educators and students increases cooperation and engagement and can be the linchpin to academic success. [Here](#) are five ways staff can nurture trusting relationships with students.

3. Close the culture gap.

School staff don't need to share the same backgrounds with students in order to connect with them. But they *do* need to practice cultural sensitivity to help students feel accepted and valued and to foster meaningful relationships.

4. Learn about systemic racism.

Expanding knowledge about systemic racism — including its history and lasting effects — can help school staff become more aware of their relationships with students. Be sure to explore unconscious bias and strategize ways to minimize its effects.





Kickboard's classroom behavior management solutions & training help schools implement equitable PBIS, SEL & RTI programs.

[Learn More](#)

Choosing an Equitable SEL Assessment

Strong social-emotional competence is one of the most important skill sets for students to be successful in school and in life. Quality SEL assessments can help you understand the needs of your students and which skills need the most improvement.

But is your SEL assessment equitable?

When selecting an SEL assessment, choose one that was designed with equity in mind. The assessment should:

- Measure widely accepted social-emotional constructs, including CASEL's five competencies
- Help educators adjust their instructional practices to better meet the needs of their students
- Provide data that can be used to develop interventions tailored to each student's needs
- Include reporting that is based on norms and comparisons comprised of racially, demographically, and geographically diverse populations to increase data accuracy and provide a clearer, more reliable picture of where students should be in their social-emotional development
- Track students' social-emotional growth over time so educators are able to adjust instruction and interventions accordingly

The [Devereux Student Strengths Assessment \(DESSA\)](#) is an [evidence-based](#) and [award-winning](#) SEL assessment that meets rigorous research and equity standards.

Take Action: Watch our webinar, [Advancing Equity with the DESSA: Practical Applications to a Crucial Issue](#), to learn about the specific, practical tools and techniques embedded in the DESSA and how the assessment is designed around equitable best practices.

Because our classrooms serve diverse populations, we must consider how to help *all* students achieve, in spite of the systemic inequities that may face them.

To truly address equity in schools, we need to understand how implicit and unconscious bias impacts students of color, particularly around access to an equal, quality education and disparities in discipline referrals. The best approaches to achieving equity include a multi-tiered system that uses PBIS and SEL. But like core instruction, SEL programs need to be designed with equity in mind.

Dive deeper into how SEL can promote equity within your school or district with our [How-To Guide: Promoting Equity Through Social and Emotional Learning](#).



Supporting Schools, Educators, and Staff



Educators, Get Tips to Manage Stress for You and Your Students

We are all dealing with high levels of stress right now. On top of normal pressures, current events are causing stress related to job and financial worries, health risks, and disruption to our normal routines. We need to find ways to effectively manage our stress.

When not addressed, stress can lead to harmful health concerns like anxiety and depression, reduced attention, impaired self-regulation, and decreased learning readiness. It can also lead to negative well-being factors, such as sleep and eating disorders. Extended exposure to toxic stress also can have lasting mental and physical health effects.

We've compiled 10 tips to help educators work through stress and 10 tips to teach students effective stress management. Try these out to find which work best for you and your students.

Educators: 10 SEL Activities to De-Stress

Educators, we know you have a lot on your plates right now. Besides the normal preparation required for back to school, you are most likely planning for at least some online and distance learning, canceled school events, and disruptions to your personal lives. We know these are just a few of the big challenges you are facing.

Be proactive about keeping your stress levels in check. Try these 10 de-stressing activities to find out which strategies work best for you.

1. Identify your stress triggers.

Stress can be caused by many different factors — long hours, frustrations around technology and virtual learning, too much news exposure, etc. 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 create accountable measures to help you follow through.

2. Perform deep breathing.

Deep breathing can have a powerful physical effect in reducing tension and helping the body relax. [Clinical research](#) shows that regular deep breathing exercises affect the heart, the brain, digestion, and the immune system. They can have immediate results and can also be used to reduce the production of harmful stress hormones.

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

3. Get enough sleep.

We can't stress this one enough. Getting enough sleep is critical to your health and to reducing stress. Try setting an alarm for when it is time for bed and do your best to get seven to eight hours of sleep each night. 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. Maximize the sleep you do get by “unplugging” (i.e. turning off the computer, phone, TV, etc.) at least an hour before bed.

4. Watch what you eat (and drink).

A balanced diet does wonders for your health and state of mind. Try to eat nutritious foods and cut down on processed or sugary foods that can deplete your energy. Also be sure to drink plenty of water. An estimated 75% of people in the U.S. are chronically dehydrated. A good rule of thumb is to drink half of your



North Carolina ASCD is the premier teaching and learning organization in the state which cuts across job titles in enlisting all categories of educators in the improvement of educational opportunities for children. The resulting synergy ignites a common goal — the best interest of students everywhere.

With over 5,000 members, NCASCD has a long standing reputation as a prime source for critical thinking and unbiased information about education. We serve educators all across NC as an independent state unit affiliated with International ASCD.

Learn More

weight in ounces each day (example, a person who weighs 150lbs would drink 75oz of water per day). You may need more or less depending on the climate you live in, your body type, or how much you exercise.

5. Exercise.

According to [the Harvard Medical School](#), regular aerobic exercise (like walking) can boost memory and critical thinking, improve sleep, and reduce anxiety. Find creative ways to exercise while practicing safe social distancing. If you can, go for a 20-minute walk and enjoy some fresh air, or take advantage of a free or discounted

[online workout class](#). Regular exercise will help you feel more energized and much less stressed.

6. Tap into your support network.

Establishing a good support network is critical to maintaining healthy stress levels, especially when you are physically isolated. Lean on your colleagues for advice, trade 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.

7. Stay organized.

Being organized is a proactive way to reduce stress while you work from home. Just think about how much time you waste searching through email or computer files to find what you need, rewriting misplaced work, or trying to manage your calendars. Set an organization plan — and stick to it — to reduce stress, improve efficiency, and be a more effective educator.

8. Meditate.

Meditation, or mindful awareness, can have a tremendous impact on your ability to de-stress. Meditation has been practiced for thousands of years and can bring clarity to your thoughts and promote peace

and balance. Even a few minutes of meditation can significantly reduce stress. [Listen to this SEL Chat Podcast](#) to get tips and tricks for practicing mindfulness and meditation techniques at home during COVID-19.

9. Practice visualization.

[Visualization](#) is another effective tactic for reducing stress. To give it a try, sit comfortably and think about a peaceful scene (a beach, the mountains, a favorite spot in your neighborhood). Or, visualize yourself realizing a goal — like finally getting back in the classroom safely!

10. Laugh.

Even during trying times, we need to find humor. It will do wonders for relieving stress. [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. Find ways to laugh every day — share a funny meme or joke with colleagues and friends or watch a favorite funny movie or television show.

Watch now!

A recent webinar in collaboration with Dr. Maurice Elias, “How, Not “If”: Promoting Social-Emotional Learning and Character Development in Young Children is a Necessity”.

Students: 10 SEL Activities to Help Students Manage Anxiety and De-Stress

During these uncertain times, it is critical that educators find ways to effectively manage and reduce stress. It is also critical that we help students do the same.

Just like with adults, if students' stress goes unmanaged, it can lead to anxiety and depression and can cause harmful physical effects. It can also increase students' risk of dropping out, substance abuse, and suicide.

As an educator, you are in a unique position to provide stability and support to your students and their families during uncertain times. One of the best ways you can help students is by looking after their social-emotional health.

Here are 10 activities to help your students learn effective stress management.

1. Help students understand what is happening.

A simple and age-appropriate conversation about what is going on and why their routine is disrupted can help alleviate students' anxiety and stress. Send home [talking points](#) to help parents talk to their students about what is happening in a constructive way. If you have a school or class web page, keep it current with the latest information about your district's plans and available resources.

2. Host morning meetings.

[Morning meetings](#) are an important way to stay connected (during in-person and virtual learning) with your students and address any issues they may be having. Spend some time at the start of the 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-emotional skills.

Morning meetings can strengthen student-teacher relationships, increase social awareness and self-efficacy, and reduce stress.

3. Promote a growth mindset.

[Research](#) shows that a [growth mindset](#) can help students maintain a sense of control over their lives, and it addresses the cognitive causes of stress within the brain. Growth mindsets allow us to see the world through a lens of growth, which means we have the power to turn our thoughts from a negative focus induced by stress to a positive focus striving toward improvement. Help students develop a growth mindset by teaching them to focus on the positive and view challenges as opportunities for growth, rather than threats.

In a recent webinar, Paul LeBuffe, VP of Research & Development presented on **Promoting Teacher Resilience.**

[Watch the replay now!](#)

4. Teach through games.

Games are a fun and interactive way to teach students social-emotional skills like self-management. Here are a couple of our favorites:

- [Coping Skills Bingo](#): This free game teaches students how to manage anger and cope with stress in a fun, interactive way.
- [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.

5. 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.

6. Teach mindfulness.

We can help students reduce the negative effects of stress through mindfulness. Mindfulness involves 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.

[Download and print our free Self-Awareness Mini-Unit lesson, Progressive Relaxation and Mindfulness.](#)

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 can reduce negative effects like stress and low self-esteem.

8. Practice deep breathing.

Deep breathing works just as well for students as it does for adults. It can have a powerful physical effect in reducing tension and relaxing the body — and it can have immediate

results. [Clinical research](#) shows that regular deep breathing exercises affect the heart, the 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.

9. Teach visualization.

Day-dreaming 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.

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 you about their feelings so you can work through any concerns they may have. During remote learning, keep the communication going through email, online chat, text message, virtual meeting spaces, or an old-fashioned phone call.

We are certainly going through challenging and stressful times. Put your social-emotional skills to work and develop a plan to tackle stress before you get overwhelmed. We hope these de-stressing tips are helpful to keep you and your students happy and healthy!



THE CHARACTER TREE

Character does not just “happen.”

It is taught and learned and it starts early in life. Recent research also shows that social-emotional learning (SEL) skills are essential for character development. The Character Tree is an educational video subscription series for K-2 students that includes character education videos, printable supplemental resources, and teacher's guides. Every episode, hosted by a real 1st-grade teacher, discusses an essential positive character trait exemplified by prominent figures.

Kindergarten Subscription Includes: 12 Classroom Citizenship Episodes (standing in line, hand raising, etc.), 24 Character Education Episodes, 32 Sets of Supplemental Resources, and 12 Original Songs to Reinforce Positive Character & Classroom Citizenship.

First Grade Subscription Includes: 36 Character Education Episodes, 36 Sets of Supplemental Resources & Teacher's Guides, Closed Captions, Spanish Subtitles, & More!

[Learn More](#)

Don't Wait to Build an Inclusive, Supportive Learning Environment

This school year will most likely not be “business as usual.” So much is in flux, and there are many unknowns. Will students learn in-person, remotely, or a through a hybrid of both? How will school practices change? What will our new routines look like?

It is difficult to plan for the unknown. But as we adjust to this “new normal,” we can ensure that students are learning in inclusive, supportive learning environments. We can help students make a smooth transition into the new school year, and we can lay a foundation early on that teaches students how to cope with change. And all of this can be done through social and emotional learning (SEL).

The following four tips can help students build the skills needed to succeed all year long. Use SEL strategies to build strong relationships, create an inclusive community, and foster a learning environment that meets the varying needs of your students — especially in these unprecedented times.

1. Build strong relationships.

Strong student-teacher relationships can greatly impact students’ academic, social, and emotional development. Many studies show that student success dramatically improves when students have strong and meaningful relationships with educators and other caring adults.

During remote learning, strong student-teacher relationships matter even more.

Students may feel disconnected and isolated during school closures. Keep them connected and engaged in learning by fostering strong relationships with them from day one. Here are a couple activities to get started.

- **Learn your students’ names:** Learning students’ names, (and, most importantly, how to pronounce them), is the first step in building meaningful relationships. It is such a simple action, but it shows students you value them. For many students, their names convey their very identity. Make it a priority to learn students’ names quickly. Quick Tip: Take a picture of your class and label the picture with each student’s name. Review the picture often during the first few weeks to help you learn your students’ names faster.
- **Share a personal experience:** One of the best ways to break the ice and start getting to know your students is by sharing a personal experience. Tell students about an obstacle you overcame or a time when you were nervous. Students will appreciate you opening up to them. And when students realize that teachers also struggle, it helps them realize that they, too, can overcome challenges.

Download and print our [free Educator Social-Emotional Reflection and Training \(EdSERT\) activity](#). This activity will help you improve the cultural sensitivity of your classroom or program by correctly pronouncing every student’s name.





2. Teach students how to cope with abnormal routines and change.

The evolving changes in daily life caused by COVID-19 can be difficult for children to adjust to. As students head back to school, they will face different disruptions to their normal school routines, schedules, and school practices.

Most students will experience some anxiety and stress, but many will manage well with the help of school staff and their family. Some students will have more extreme feelings of anxiety, stress, and depression and may need more intensive supports. All students can benefit from learning ways to cope with change by increasing their self-awareness and optimistic thinking skills.

Here are a few things you can do to build these important skills in students:

- Create a routine and stick to it as much as possible. If things change, make sure to explicitly communicate with your students about that change.
- Encourage students to talk about their feelings and make sure they understand that your classroom (whether in-person or not) is a safe place for them to share.
- Help students see what they are in control of and what choices are available to them. Help them develop coping mechanisms for things that may be outside their control.

- Remind students to recognize and appreciate the elements of stability in their lives. This could be as simple as having them keep a gratitude journal.
- Work with students to set goals and create an action plan to achieve them.
- Stay connected — check in with your students regularly. Ask student support staff to help you identify signs of stress or anxiety, especially internalizing behaviors.

Here are a couple additional resources to help students cope with COVID-19-related change:

- [8 Tips for Managing Children's Anxiety About COVID-19](#)
- [Coping with Stress and Anxiety During COVID-19 Concerns](#)

3. Establish a sense of community.

Students' learning improves when they feel included and empowered. An inclusive community can make students feel valued and can strengthen their connections with peers and educators. An environment where students feel respected and appreciated can improve their confidence, encourage them to take more personal responsibility, and make them more willing to follow class rules and procedures.

Try these ideas for building a sense of community:

- **Give students a voice.** Students feel empowered when they are able to exercise control over certain classroom decisions. This, in turn, can improve their learning. Try giving students a say in the physical layout of the classroom or, if you are distance learning, certain aspects of their daily schedule. You can also implement a classroom reward system based on the [Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports \(PBIS\) framework](#).

Remote learning tip: Morning meetings can make students feel empowered during times when they feel powerless. Set aside time each week to have students share about themselves and talk through problems they may be having.

- **Establish classroom rules as a group.** Involving students in the process of establishing classroom rules and procedures at the start of the school year can be a great opportunity for students to take ownership of their learning and feel like they have a voice. Empowering students and validating their opinions will strengthen your relationships with them.

Remote learning tip: Be sure to revisit and adjust the classroom rules if you transition to remote learning.

- **“Decorate” your classroom with students’ work:** Have students complete an assignment that you can post in your classroom. Putting their work on display will show them that what they are doing matters, and it can create a space where all feel included and valued.

Remote learning tip: In a virtual learning environment, you can share students’ work in a class chatroom and/or have students present their work during a video call. You could even display student work as your background during a virtual meeting.

4. Teach to a range of learning styles.

Students learn in different ways, and there is no proven one-size-fits-all teaching method. Presenting content in a variety of ways creates a more effective learning

environment where all students can achieve. This is especially important during remote learning, since many students will struggle with virtual learning environments.

Keep these tips in mind to ensure instruction meets the needs of many learning styles:

- Whenever possible, incorporate sensory elements into instruction that engage students’ sight, touch, taste, smell, and hearing.
- Use a [dyslexia-friendly](#) font on handouts and assignments.
- Make a free [e-reader](#) app available to students who have poor eyesight or learn better with audio.
- Make [fidget toys](#) available to students who need extra help focusing and staying on task.
- Create flashcards for visual learners and use color to highlight important points.
- For kinesthetic learners, incorporate role-play into instruction or encourage students to visualize the subject matter being acted out (i.e. the student could imagine she is a character in a story).

Building SEL into your daily practice from the first day of school will establish a culture that promotes strong student/educator relationships, inclusion, and positive attitudes about learning. Incorporate these SEL strategies into your daily routine to set a course for a smooth and productive school year — even amidst the uncertainty caused by COVID-19.



Centervention® provides online games to help students in grades K-8 improve social and emotional skills; and now, parents and families can access expert resources for home use, too. Bridge the gap between home and school social and emotional skills and behaviors with Centervention’s online resources.

[Learn More](#)



Create A Safe and Supportive School Culture – Even (and Especially) During Distance Learning

Close your eyes and ask yourself, “What does a positive school culture actually look like?”

Is it a place where staff, students, and families feel connected, supported, and involved in ensuring the school is meeting all students’ learning needs? Is it an environment where teachers have enough time to plan their lessons and have access to opportunities for collaboration and mentoring? Is a positive school culture where students feel welcome and engaged in their learning?

Turns out, it’s all of these things.

School culture can sometimes be an afterthought, but it is an integral piece of a successful school or program. It takes inspired, engaged teachers and staff to ensure students thrive; a safe and supportive environment to nurture student growth; and strong social-emotional skills for students to be positive and engaged participants in their learning.

Here are a few benefits of a positive school culture, including practical tips to build morale, inclusivity, strong relationships, and a sense of safety and support.

Benefits of a Positive School Culture

A positive culture has benefits beyond happy students and staff. Developing 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 of them.
- Improve educational equity: SEL — through quality professional development, coordination with Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), and equitable assessments — can help promote equity so all students are treated fairly and receive the resources they need to achieve.
- 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.

Building a Positive School Culture During Distance Learning

Even when students are learning remotely, educators can keep them connected and learning in a safe, caring, and inclusive environment. Here are a few ways to continue building a positive school culture during distance learning:

What School Leadership Can Do

It is important to keep a close reading on the culture of your school. How are educators, parents, and students dealing with extra pressures caused by distance learning?

Here are some ways you can support each group:

Teachers and staff

Provide quality professional development that helps your staff build critical social-emotional skills. Support new teachers by pairing them with a veteran mentor teacher. Set up dedicated and regular times to ask for feedback, address concerns, and problem-solve challenges. Consider using our tool, [Educator Social-Emotional Reflection and Training \(EdSERT\)](#), a comprehensive program to enhance the social-emotional knowledge, skill set, and well-being of educators.

Parents and families

Host virtual parent nights to help family members continue to feel connected to the school. Conduct regular surveys to check in on how they are doing. Visit our [SEL at Home](#) web page for more resources to support families during this transitional time.

FLIP IT!

Transforming
Challenging Behavior

Online Course 2nd Edition

Teachers and parents can help children learn about their feelings and gain self-control by using the FLIP IT! strategy. Using the mnemonic: F – Feelings, L – Limits, I – Inquiries, and P – Prompts, adults can respond positively to everyday challenges and challenging behaviors in children ages 3-8. Learn this evidence-based strategy online and at your own pace, with the FLIP IT! Online Course.

[Learn More](#)

Students

Take time to participate in virtual student learning sessions so you get a clear picture of how students are responding to remote learning. Host virtual school-wide assemblies and give out personal achievement awards. A school-wide competition can help build morale and keep students connected, especially during distance learning. Have students participate by posting pictures of their entries on the school's social media channels. Contests can be anything from writing and sharing a poem to creating cool chalk art. Contest winners can win a small prize.

After you get a sense of your school culture, show staff, parents, and students you care about them by taking action to address and resolve concerns. Continue regular communication to keep connected with staff, families, and students and build school-wide morale.

What Teachers Can Do

The best way to keep students engaged and learning during remote learning is to show them that you care. Empathize with your students and know that some

students might find the switch to distance learning extremely difficult. Some students might be experiencing financial hardship or increased domestic turmoil, and students who were vulnerable or at-risk prior to distance learning are probably even more at-risk now.

Here are some ways teachers can promote a positive school culture:

- Encourage innovation in the classroom as students adjust to new ways of learning. For example, consider [game-based learning](#), incorporate multimedia, and utilize assignments that promote student creativity.
- Keep prioritizing goals. Helping students set meaningful, attainable goals is important for their motivation and confidence. This [free activity](#) can be used in class or at home and will teach students how to set a goal and create a plan to achieve it.
- Prioritize building relationships with students. Strong teacher-student relationships matter now, more than ever. Host regular video meetings for lesson delivery, and record the sessions so students can watch them later and learn at their own pace. Also consider using

an instant messaging platform, like Slack, where you can set up a personal chat channel for each student. Encourage students to message you if they have questions, are struggling with the class content, or are having a personal problem.

Teachers play an important role in building a positive school culture by being a rock of support, a source of much-needed routine, and a presence of normality.

Developing a positive school culture will not only boost morale during distance learning, but will also increase connectedness within the school, increase engagement, and improve students' academic performance.

Binge-Worthy Webinars Around Building a Positive School Climate and Culture

[**Promoting Positive School Climate: A Social-Emotional & Character Development Approach**](#)

[**Roadmap to Strategic Culture Planning**](#)

[**Improving Schoolwide Social Climate**](#)





Social Emotional Learning Funding: No Interruption Allowed Amid COVID-19

During these challenging times, you may be wondering when funding will catch up with your students' and community's needs. Pre-COVID, many state educators, business community leaders, and elected officials increasingly recognized the value of social and emotional learning (SEL) and began to use targeted funding for SEL to improve the conditions of learning.

Many formula funds enabled SEL to grow and flourish in schools, including:

- Title IV, Part A: Student Support and Academic Achievement
- Title I, Part A: Improving Basic Programs
- Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)

Then COVID-19 happened, and with it came trauma, anxiety, and distance from the important relationships students form at school. But instead of causing a downward turn in SEL, COVID-19 has intensified the need for high-quality, evidence-based social-emotional supports for students as well as educators. This need for SEL has opened up new funding opportunities!



GrantsAlert.com is your one-stop shop for finding current grant funding opportunities. It has helped thousands of K-12 teachers and schools find funding to enrich classroom learning. Powered by the extensive RFPMatch.com database, GrantsAlert.com includes help with finding applicable grants, using fundraising, finding a grant writer, writing proposals, and uncovering grant secrets, as well as an option to ask the Funding Doctor for advice. GrantsAlert brings the best of education funding matchmaking and delivers premier funding knowledge and insights to the education community it serves.

[Learn More](#)

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act

Consider CARES Act funding to augment the development of your SEL initiatives. **The Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSERF)** can support educator professional learning and pave the way for evidenced-based SEL programs. To learn more about this program, visit the [U.S. Department of Education Stabilization Fund](#).

Many states are still contemplating their process for allocating CARES funds to local school districts. The deadline is September 30, 2021 so continue checking your state department of education website to uncover how funds are going to be released and the priority for using those funds.

Beyond CARES and traditional funding sources, explore SEL funding that:

- Provides professional learning to support educators in delivering social and emotional supports;
- Offers resources to deliver general behavioral and mental health screening;
- Promotes implementation of SEL curriculum/programming and outreach on Equity, Implicit Bias, and Inclusion.

As you prepare for the broad array of funding opportunities, you should quickly reflect on three key factors:

1. How to use federal and state funds most effectively
2. What data, evidence, and input will be needed to justify specific funding areas
3. How to coordinate efforts and adopt the most coherent approach across many funding streams, including CARES Act funds

Dr. Paula Love, President of [RFPMatch.com](#), is known as the Funding Doctor. RFPMatch.com provides funding insights to education solution providers through [RFPMatchOnDemand.com](#) and to educators and community leaders through [GrantsAlert.com](#).



6 Tips for Leading Effective Remote and In-Person SEL Professional Development

Effective professional development doesn't start and end on training day. There is a lot of planning and preparation that takes place beforehand. Afterward, staff need coaching and ongoing support. And this year, schools and districts have the additional challenge of hosting professional learning remotely.

Follow these steps to ensure your social and emotional (SEL) training is engaging, inspiring, and effective at preparing your staff for long-term success. Included are tips to keep staff connected and learning in the age of school closures.

6 Tips for Leading Highly Effective SEL Professional Development

1. Embed SEL in the school and district plans

Increase staff buy-in by clearly aligning SEL to school goals and priorities and integrating it in your school improvement plan. Ask district leaders to integrate SEL into your district's strategic plan. Share your vision, goals, and expectations during the training, and ask school/district leaders to attend to show admin endorsement.

2. Start the session with a success story

Sharing personal experiences can be a powerful way to increase staff buy-in for a new initiative. Consider inviting:

- At-risk students to share how SEL helped them overcome obstacles
- Teachers or counselors to share how SEL helped improve their teaching and connections with students
- Administrators to share how SEL helped improve school climate and culture

Remote Learning Tip: Gain buy-in throughout the training by engaging staff in active learning. For example, take turns role-playing different scenarios. As the scene unfolds, pause to ask other educators for feedback and guidance. You can also try live modeling and open-ended discussions.

3. Don't just tell — show

Try to minimize lecture time. Instead, show staff how SEL works and model how to teach it to students. Highlight schoolwide SEL practices in staff meetings. Use data

to demonstrate how SEL improves achievement and reduces behavior incidents. Play a video of a teacher modeling a lesson. Share photos of how a school is embedding SEL within day-to-day activities.

Remote Learning Tip: Polls and surveys are a great way to engage staff in the discussion and give them the opportunity to share their opinions. Virtual meeting platforms like Zoom [make it easy](#) to share a poll during a session. You can use polls as an icebreaker, to assess comprehension, and to get input on the content.



Committee for Children's social-emotional learning (SEL) and child safety programs reach more than 16.5 million children worldwide. Second Step®, created by Committee for Children, is an innovative program rooted in SEL. Second Step blends research and rigor with intuitive design, helping children and adults build the skills they need to reach their goals in the classroom and throughout their lives.

[Learn More](#)

4. Provide practice opportunities

Equip staff with skills and confidence to teach SEL by giving them a chance to practice a skill during training. Break out into small groups and have staff take turns practicing content with one another. Encourage them to provide constructive feedback and collaborate to make improvements.

Remote Learning Tip: To support educators' SEL professional learning, 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*

Use our free resource to help staff learn about, develop, and practice optimistic thinking.

5. Offer ongoing coaching and support

In addition to modeling, practice, and feedback, **ongoing coaching and support** is critical to the success of any implementation. Throughout the year, provide:

- Mini follow-up training sessions to refresh and reinforce SEL
- SEL practice sessions with low-stakes feedback
- Opportunities for classroom observation (either recorded or in-person sessions)
- Resources for staff to collaborate, share ideas, and ask for help

Remote Learning Tip: Even if you aren't able to meet face to face, there are many ways to coach and mentor staff. Create and share a Facebook group where you post resources and encourage staff to share tips, tricks, funny messages, hobbies, etc. When possible, plan video calls for a more personal interaction. Be sure to check on the social-emotional well-being of your staff, too; start meetings by asking how THEY are doing.



6. Respect staff's time

Training, lesson-planning, coaching, collaboration, and feedback sessions all require time. Allocate sufficient planning time for your staff — not just for the initial training, but throughout the year to meet their ongoing implementation needs.

Remote Learning Tip: In the age of COVID-19, sending too many emails can quickly become overwhelming, especially now that teachers are using email more often than ever to communicate with their school, students, and students' parents. Limit email communication as much as possible and keep communication short, clear, and direct.

Aperture Education can help your school or district create and implement effective, engaging SEL professional learning — even during times of remote learning. Learn more about our professional learning services and check out our newest tool, [Educator Social-Emotional Reflection & Training \(EdSERT\)](#), which is designed to support educators' social-emotional competence and well-being.

Get the most out of our free [EdSERT Educator Guide: Optimistic Thinking](#) by listening to the [Special Edition Optimistic Thinking episode](#) of our SEL Chat podcast. You will hear real stories from educators on how optimistic thinking has improved their teaching practices.



i-LEADR

i-LEADR is committed to providing the best services, experiences, and products to support educators in service of children. We work with school and district teams to encourage innovation and push the status quo. Beginning with a needs assessment, i-LEADR offers perspective and supports planning that transforms schools. Our team of expert consultants can deliver a variety of professional development and training to support instruction, leadership, and effective MTSS implementation.

In addition, we have developed RtI: Stored!, a digital and online platform that houses Students' Response to Instruction through implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) Framework. RtI:Stored! keeps the focus on effective problem-solving while reducing barriers of implementation.

Learn More

Helping Families Build SEL at Home



7 Ways to Provide SEL Support to Students and Families Learning Remotely

Remote learning has shifted the responsibility of teaching to parents and caregivers. These adults are helping children learn core skills like reading, writing, science, and math. But they need to be teaching social and emotional learning (SEL), too.

Especially during remote learning, SEL can help students:

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

As schools prepare for the probability of at least some remote learning this fall, it is important to provide parents and caregivers with resources for supporting the social-emotional health of their children. Building SEL into their new routine will also help parents and caregivers work through many of the challenges presented by remote learning.



The mission of the Devereux Center for Resilient Children (DCRC) is to promote social and emotional development, foster resilience, and build skills for school and life success in children birth through preschool, as well as to promote the resilience of the adults who care for them. Our nationally standardized, strength-based assessments, our strategy resources and professional development are grounded in resilience research, and for over 20 years have been used by thousands of programs across the U.S. and internationally.

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Here are seven ways you can encourage parents and caregivers to weave SEL support into remote learning.

- 1. Manage expectations.** Remote learning isn't the same as traditional classroom instruction. Encourage families to set realistic expectations around student learning. This will help reduce stress and will give them a reasonable goal to work toward. A goal of two to three hours of quality remote learning time a day is a good place to start.
- 2. Establish a routine.** Students do best when they follow a routine. Their behavior improves, and they are more likely to stay on-task. [Share a sample routine](#) with parents and let them know that it is ok to adjust this to fit their personal situations.
- 3. Make time for breaks and fun.** Students can only concentrate for so long before their attention and retention wanes. Younger students need more breaks, (roughly one break for every 20 minutes spent learning). Middle and high school students can usually concentrate for longer periods, only needing a break between each subject. Remind parents to build in brain breaks. These can be as simple as burning off some energy with a few minutes of exercise or eating a healthy snack.
- 4. Learn each student's education plan and online learning tools.** Try to meet one-on-one with parents and caregivers for each of your students to discuss your expectations for their child and walk through your class's remote learning tools. (Hint: Common Sense Media has compiled helpful tips for families as they get started using the popular [Zoom](#) and [Google Classroom platforms](#). Share these or similar tutorials with families.)
- 5. Find ways to de-stress.** In these uncertain times, effective stress management is critical for improving our quality of life, and it can lead to improved

health, an increased sense of control, enhanced self-esteem, and decreased likelihood of depression. Share resources with families on how they and their children can de-stress. For example, our blog, [10 Tips to Help Educators Manage Stress During Difficult Times](#), can be adapted for parent and



Move This World cultivates the development of social and emotional learning (SEL) skills to empower students to navigate the complex and rapidly changing realities of our world. An SEL program that has impacted the lives of over one million students across 35 states, Move This World provides educators and students with a robust, daily curriculum designed to strengthen social and emotional wellbeing in order to create and maintain healthy environments where effective teaching and learning can thrive. Move This World's extensive online library of PreK-12 videos and resources are rooted in creative expression and designed to help students develop a common language to improve communication, build trust, and create stronger communities.

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caregiver use. Another post, [10 Tips to Help Students Manage Stress](#), will provide tips to help students work through anxiety caused by school closures and other triggers.

- 6. Manage everyone's social-emotional well-being.** Besides managing stress, it is important to keep a close eye on the full social-emotional health of students and their families. Aperture Education has developed a [resource database to support social-emotional learning at home](#). Share these tools with parents and caregivers and help them learn how to build these important skills in their children.



We've revamped our [Parent Portal](#) to support parents during remote learning. Share it to shed light on everything SEL, from SEL basics and informal conversation scripts about SEL and the DESSA to building an SEL growth strategy.

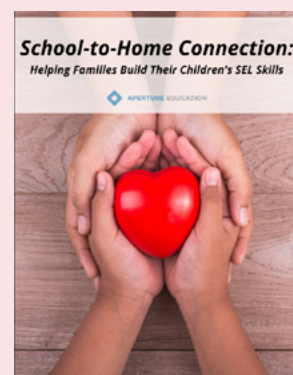
- 7. Reach out with concerns.** Communication is essential, especially during this disruptive period. Strong relationships can make all the difference in staying connected and ensuring

students are continuing to learn. Invite parents to reach out to you or other appropriate school staff if they are experiencing difficulties with remote learning, suffering from hardship, or need access to additional resources.

Between juggling work, parenting responsibilities, and getting through their normal daily routines, many parents and caregivers struggle with remote learning. Helping families learn about and teach SEL to children can not only make remote learning easier, but it can also improve outcomes.

Get more resources for supporting families during remote learning with our [toolkit to support SEL at home](#).

Share our parent resource, [School-to-Home Connection: Helping Families Build Their Children's SEL Skills](#) to help families learn about SEL, why it is important, and how to teach these important skills to their children.





SEL at Home

SEL at Home is a series of developmentally appropriate social and emotional learning (SEL) resources for parents, families, and caregivers to use at home. These lessons, in both English and Spanish, facilitate the development of SEL skills in children, from infancy through high school. Aperture Education partnered with Devereux Center for Resilient Children to create these easy-to-follow SEL lessons in eight competencies. Each lesson quickly defines the skill then breaks down activities based on age and includes tips for parents, too! Find more information and download each SEL at Home Strategies Guide [here](#).



Conclusion

We hope this Back to School Guide helps get you prepared to teach SEL in the year ahead. 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. We hope you enjoy trying out the activities in this guide during that busy first week of school and throughout the entire year.

Have a great school year!

We invite you to learn more about the DESSA Comprehensive SEL System and how it impacts districts and organizations across the country.

Visit ApertureEd.com or [email](mailto:info@ApertureEd.com) us anytime!



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We'd like to thank our outstanding partners for their help in making this year's Back to School Guide possible.

"Alone we can do so little. Together we can do so much." -Helen Keller



Educators are amazing. At Spyre Marketing, we are honored to work with organizations that provide the tools and resources that help educators teach, guide and support our nation's youth. We are a full-service marketing agency that helps K-12 education businesses capture the attention of educators, make authentic connections, and drive sales through multi-channel marketing campaigns.

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KEH Communications is a specialized PR agency filled with individuals who are passionate about spreading the good news about education. We help clients connect with learners of all ages, their families and the educators and administrators who serve them. We also help schools and districts who want to share their successes with their communities.

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