Universal Benefits of School Programs that Bolster Behavioral Health and Educational Success

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Mental Health During the Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant and substantial negative impact on student mental health.

Source: Strength in our Voices, 2020
Even Before the Pandemic......

STUDENT DEPRESSION ON THE RISE

An analysis of a federal survey shows increasing rates of teen and young adult respondents reporting a major depressive episode in the last 12 months. Rates have stayed more consistent among older adults.

SOURCE: Journal of Abnormal Psychology
Similar Story for Academics

Students lose up to a year’s worth of learning
- Only 63-68% of the gains in reading and 37-50% of the gains in mathematics compared to a typical school year
- Nearly 7 million students could drop out

➢ Low-income and/or underrepresented families are particularly vulnerable

Source: Azevedo et al., 2020; Dorn et al., 2020; Kuhfeld et al., 2020
Even Before the Pandemic......
The pandemic did not create these problems. It just made them worse.
LEARNING IS PROFOUNDLY SOCIAL

A positive environment that supports a sense of belonging is key to student success.

CHANGE THE QUESTION

Do these students have poor social and emotional capacities?

How can we ensure our school climate leads to the healthy development of each student?

Provide educators with training on emotional intelligence, mindfulness, and resilience to stress and trauma.

Encourage teachers to engage in perspective-taking to better understand students’ experiences and the negative feelings that may lead to misbehavior.

Adopt strong anti-bullying policies to promote inclusivity and improve school safety for marginalized students.

Hire teachers and administrators who reflect the diversity of your students.

SCHOOLWIDE ACTIONS

Take a schoolwide approach to SEL that includes policies and practices that foster positive climate, such as replacing punitive or exclusionary discipline with restorative justice or positive behavioral interventions and supports.

Use mindfulness practices to reduce your exhaustion and stress.

Have clear expectations for all your students.

Structure dynamic group work.

Noticing students who don’t seem to feel comfortable in the school.

STRIVE TO FIND COMMON GROUND AND SIMILARITIES WITH ALL YOUR STUDENTS.

USE CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PRACTICES TO PROMOTE A SENSE OF BELONGING IN STUDENTS FROM TRADITIONALLY UNDERSERVED GROUPS.

ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO FOCUS ON MASTERY RATHER THAN PERFORMANCE GOALS.

Cultivate a classroom in which mistakes are understood to be part of learning, effort is valued, and students learn to appreciate challenge.

CLASSROOM-LEVEL ACTIONS

Are social issues at the root of the problem?
Learning is Profoundly Social

**Negative peer interactions create risk**
- Are highly stressful
- Interfere with learning
- Create mental health problems

**Positive peer interactions are protective**
- Reduce stress
- Enhance engagement and achievement
- Reduce mental health problems
School Closings Revealed Limitations

*Students with social capital were better able to cope*
- Existing friendship networks
- More able to access social connection and support
- Avoid or attenuate school engagement and mental health problems

*Students with less social capital were less able to cope*
- Few friends
- Less able to access social connection and support
- More severe school engagement and mental health problems
How can we generate peer connection and social capital for students that need it most?

Put students in small learning groups under *specific conditions* (cooperative or peer learning)

1. Create the incentive to collaborate
2. Ensure individual accountability
3. Explicitly develop group social skills
4. Guide group processing and reflection

Without this structure, we run the risk of generating negative outcomes

- Conflict over approach/tasks
- Loafing/free-riding
- Negative social *and* academic outcomes
Small-group learning can overcome student limitations
Social, Behavioral, Mental Health Benefits of Cooperative Learning

- Peer Relations
  - SocialEmo Skills
  - Reduced Stress
  - Pos Peer Influence
  - Reduced Bullying
  - Academic Engagement
  - Mental Health
  - Reduced Drug Use

Van Ryzin & Roseth (2019), Aggressive Behavior
Van Ryzin & Roseth (2020), Journal of Early Adolescence
Van Ryzin & Roseth (2019), J of Applied Devel Psychology

➢ The pedagogy is just as important as the curriculum
Reduced Disparities for Students of Color, Students with Disabilities

Source: Van Ryzin et al. 2020, 2023

![Graph showing reduced disparities in intervention schools and widening disparities in control schools across waves 1 to 4.](graph.png)
Cooperative Learning

WHAT IS IT? Cooperative learning is a successful teaching strategies where a subject. Each member of a team is responsible not only for their own understanding but also for helping others in the group. Cooperative learning is also relatively easy to implement and requires no special training.

WHY USE IT? Documented results include improved academic performance, better communication skills, increased social skills, and higher levels of student motivation.

HOW DOES IT WORK? Here are some typical strategies to consider:

- **Group Investigation**: Students work in small groups to solve problems or complete tasks. This strategy promotes collaboration and critical thinking.
- **STAD (Student Teams-Achievement Divisions)**: Students are divided into teams and work on problems or tasks. The teacher monitors the progress of the teams and provides feedback.

**Peer Review**

Spring 2009, Vol. 11, No. 2

Research Spotlight on Cooperative Learning

NEA Reviews of the Research on Best Practices in Education

by NEA Staff Researchers

Found In: teaching strategies
Why isn’t it more prevalent?

1. Core principles not widely understood
2. Can be complex to design and deliver
3. Educators lack sufficient training and support

PeerLearning.net: a **software platform** for implementing small-group learning

- Fidelity to design principles
- Accepts existing curricula and learning materials in any subject
- Scalable, accessible, sustainable
Initial Results from a Randomized Trial

PeerLearning.net vs. Business as Usual

- Significant growth in all five CASEL SEL competencies and peer relations/support
- Significant reductions in drug use, stress, mental health problems
- Significant improvements in sleep quality
- Significant improvements in teacher efficacy and reductions in stress/burnout
- Dosage effects
School does not give sufficient attention to social aspects of learning and mental health.

SEL doesn’t always imply a program or a curriculum; this structured small-group pedagogy can work just as well, or better.

The barriers to implementing this small-group pedagogy can be addressed with technology.

The effects are likely to be strongest for those students that need it the most.
Resources

• [https://www.peerlearning.net/](https://www.peerlearning.net/)
  • Web site with information, videos, and resources related to PeerLearning.net

• [https://www.theconversation.com/small-group-learning-can-mitigate-the-effects-of-school-closures-but-only-if-teachers-use-it-well-170701](https://www.theconversation.com/small-group-learning-can-mitigate-the-effects-of-school-closures-but-only-if-teachers-use-it-well-170701)
  • Summary of findings on cooperative learning written for practitioners

  • How cooperative learning can contribute to diversity, equity, and inclusion

• Please contact me if you would like professional development resources for cooperative learning
Thank you

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