

Providing Social and Emotional Supports for Adults and Students



Framing the Issue

Addressing social and emotional needs to support engagement, relationship building, and other important factors that are essential learning conditions are even more important now, given the coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.

State leaders are in the throes of providing guidance to schools and districts on how to reopen schools. District and school leaders are busy figuring out logistics and trying to maintain some level of continuity of learning. Teachers are trying to maintain connection with their students or teach students they have not met, and they are trying to address learning loss. Parents have become de facto educators at home. Students are adjusting and pivoting while missing the structure and connection school facilitated. COVID-19 continually shifts the ground underneath our feet, affecting both personal and professional lives. We are all collectively experiencing heightened stress and trauma with a plethora of unknowns and no end in sight. Addressing social and emotional needs and embedding opportunities for social and emotional learning into instruction, however, are ways to help navigate these stressful times and facilitate learning. So, how do states, districts, and schools attend to the social and emotional needs of students and adults so that learning can occur?



Key Contacts at AIR

Jessy Newman

Senior Researcher, jnewman@air.org

Kathleen Guarino

Senior Technical Assistance Consultant, kguarino@air.org

Mara Schanfield

Senior Technical Assistance Consultant, mschanfield@air.org

Jessie Kerr-Vanderslice

Technical Assistance Consultant, jkerrvanderslice@air.org

Deb Moroney

Managing Director, dmoroney@air.org



Key Takeaways

- 1. Start with health and well-being to set the table for learning to occur.** Although assessing and addressing learning loss (and gain) may be on the forefront of our minds, ensuring students and adults feel safe and supported is a precondition for learning. Students and adults (e.g., educators, caregivers) have been and are experiencing more stress, new learning environments, and less connection as a result of the current pandemic. Because strong, trusting relationships are a key driver of learning and development, school leaders should prioritize connections, relationships, social determinants of health, and safety for both students and adults, before centering significant effort on assessing and addressing learning loss. Repositories of social and emotional learning resources in multiple languages and virtual social and emotional learning opportunities can aid in this effort.
- 2. Engage students, staff, families, and community partners to understand and gauge social and emotional needs, and provide appropriate supports.** Efforts such as parent and community surveys, personal check-ins with students and their families, and community partner conversations all help to understand and address the different contexts and experiences of students and those individuals who support them. Observation as well as asking students what they need will help tailor support as long as educators listen well.
- 3. Remember that adults in and around the school need support too.** In addition to providing professional development about what social and emotional learning is and what it looks like in the classroom for students, focus on the adult behaviors, capacity, and competencies. Flight attendants always say, "Put your mask on first before assisting others." The philosophy of this statement is true of social and emotional learning as well. Adults who practice and embody social emotional competencies, such as self-awareness and self-management, are in a better position to support students. So, offer space, time, and tools for educators to reflect on their lived experiences and own social and emotional competencies and to practice self-care.



Exemplar

The Minnesota Department of Education has been providing guidance and resources and conducting social and emotional learning webinars to Minnesota stakeholders in response to COVID-19. The state is providing webinars focused on addressing educators' social and emotional needs and on integrating the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning's (CASEL's) three signature practices (i.e., incorporating a welcoming ritual, engaging activities, and an optimistic closure) into everyday learning, compatible with in-person classes, virtual lessons, and a home learning environment.



From the Field

- “Reminder that when we return we should be careful not just jump back in to only academics, but to also prioritize connections and relations.”
- “Making sure that we attend to the emotional needs of students in addition to academic needs. They are so important right now.”
- “We don't know what we don't know. How long and to what degree will the pandemic impact our students, staff, and families?”
- “I appreciate the idea that we need to encourage more outreach to students and parents.”
- “How do we provide an environment that allows for people to grieve the disruption of what was ‘normal’ and life events that would have been processed in the in-person setting?”



Resources

- **How Can Educators Balance Academics and Trauma Sensitivity During a Pandemic-Era Back to School?** (<https://region9cc.org/blog/how-can-educators-balance-academics-and-trauma-sensitivity-during-pandemic-era-back-school/>) The Region 9 Comprehensive Center blog offers educators three ways to incorporate trauma sensitivity into educators' practices, whether virtual or in person.
- **The Educator Context and Stress Spectrum** (https://gtlcenter.org/sites/default/files/Stress_Spectrum.pdf) Developed by the Center on Great Teachers & Leaders (GTL Center), this assessment is designed to support teachers and principals in gaining greater awareness of how their current personal and professional context affects their levels of stress in the time of COVID-19.
- **Supporting Student Resilience Well-Being with Trauma-Informed Care: Educator Self-Assessment and Planning Tool** (https://gtlcenter.org/sites/default/files/Supporting_Student_Resilience_Well-Being_Self-Assessment_Planning_Tool.pdf) Developed by the GTL Center, this resource offers an assessment that educators can complete and includes an array of trauma-informed strategies for fostering student well-being and resilience.
- **Building Positive Conditions for Learning at Home: Strategies and Resources for Families and Caregivers** (<https://www.air.org/resource/building-positive-conditions-learning-home-strategies-and-resources-families-and-caregivers>) The American Institutes for Research offers resources for families and caregivers on how to create safe, supportive, and engaging spaces for learning at home.
- **SEL Implementation Guidance** (<https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/safe/social/imp/>) The purpose of the Minnesota Department of Education *SEL Implementation Guidance* is to provide schools with guidance and resources to help schools integrate SEL (social and emotional learning) into schoolwide teaching and learning practices so that students will learn, practice, and model essential personal life skills that contribute to academic, vocational, and personal success.
- **The CASEL Guide to Schoolwide SEL Essentials** (<https://schoolguide.casel.org/resource/the-casel-guide-to-schoolwide-sel-essentials/>) This guide is a printable mini book that offers a compact set of essential activities and tools for school teams to use when implementing and integrating social and emotional learning schoolwide.

<https://www.air.org/resource/air-s-covid-19-response-and-resources>



AMERICAN INSTITUTES FOR RESEARCH®

1400 Crystal Drive, 10th Floor
Arlington, VA 22202
202.403.5000

www.air.org