

# Build Adult Capacity and Culture

## Introduction

In order to support young people’s holistic development, teachers and school leaders need the ability to support students’ mental health, and they must feel mentally healthy themselves. This requires building adults’ own social-emotional competence so they can maintain and model well-being for students, dismantling implicit biases adults may hold and developing their understanding of mental health and how it is fostered and maintained. In addition to supporting student mental health, research suggests that building adults’ capacity in these ways can also reduce stress and attrition while increasing well-being and efficacy. Structures that enable adult social-emotional competence include well-developed hiring and training processes, multiple avenues for building teacher-student relationships, promoting a positive and affirming school culture, and creating opportunities for staff to prioritize their own well-being.

## Guidance to Get You Started

It is important to note that measures of adult social-emotional

competence have been well validated by research. Yet adult social-emotional capacity is an emerging field; so much is yet to be established about how to support development strategically and systemically. However, research does suggest using some or all of the following strategies:

- **Ensure adults have social-emotional knowledge, skills, and mindsets** so that they can support students in developing these same competencies. Ideally, a basic understanding of how to facilitate social-emotional learning, as well as demonstrations of social-emotional competence in one’s own life, would be criteria for hiring. However, this is not always possible, so it is also critical to continuously develop adults’ social-emotional competence through professional learning and provide opportunities for staff to reflect individually and as a group on their social-emotional strengths and areas for growth.
- **Ensure adults have knowledge of mental health**, including the importance of mental health, mental health promotion, mental health screening, and evidence-based mental health strategies. While Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports for mental health may not be implemented by all adults in

## A Look at Some Benefits

### Environment Within and Beyond School

Adult actions and words contribute to a school’s culture; when actions and words demonstrate social-emotional competence, it can help students feel safe and set a standard for students.

### Individual Factors

Adults need the knowledge, skills, and mindsets to provide students with the direct instruction, feedback, and modeling needed to build individual factors critical to mental health such as self-awareness, self-management, relationships skills, and more.

### Relationships with Others

Adults need the knowledge, skills, and mindsets to build developmentally supportive relationships with students and colleagues and model healthy interpersonal interactions.

Research suggests that adults with well-developed social-emotional competence can positively impact the learning environment in various ways:

- Reduced levels of teacher stress increases teacher efficacy and has the added benefit of reducing student stress biomarkers (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016).

- Decreased likelihood of experiencing burnout (Brackett et al., 2010).
- Increased capacity to recognize, interpret, and respond to students experiencing psychological distress (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Kusche, Riggs, & Greenberg, 1999).
- Promoting a healthy school and classroom climate, which increases students’ connection to school, has a positive impact on academic and social-emotional outcomes, and decreases peer victimization (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Everston & Weinstein, 2006; Brackett et al., 2008).
- Improved ability to model and implement social-emotional learning (Kusche, Riggs, & Greenberg, 1999; Brackett et al., 2008).
- Teaching, modeling, and co-regulating the development of appropriate social, emotional, and cognitive competencies (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Osher et al. 2017).
- Increased ability to be patient, including listening to, understanding, and empathizing with student behavior (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Brackett et al., 2008).
- Higher levels of relational trust with their peers at work (Bryk & Schneider, 2002), which increases collaboration.
- Stronger relationships with their students (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009), which leads to improved classroom management (Durlak et al., 2011) and fewer discipline problems (Marzano & Marzano, 2003).

a school, it is still important for adults to understand the menu of supports available to students and how to refer students for additional support.

- **Ensure adults can build and maintain developmentally supportive relationships with students.** This requires helping students understand the elements of developmental relationships—such as shared power and expressions of care—as well as actions they can take to foster each. Adults may also hold biases against students they are not even aware of (implicit bias), in which case anti-bias training may be critical to ensure an equitable learning environment where all students feel affirmed and supported. It is also important for students—especially students from traditionally marginalized groups—to have relationships with adults who share important identity-markers, such as sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, and language, among others.
- **Ensure adults know how to create and maintain a constructive learning environment** through restorative classroom management practices, the construction of a welcoming physical space, and implementation of effective instructional strategies. These practices should support students in developing individual factors critical to mental health, such as self-management and responsible decision making, as well as foster positive relationships and a sense of belonging.
- **Prioritize adult self-care and culture** in order to reduce staff isolation, stress, and conflict. There should be ample opportunities for staff to connect and collaborate, as well as support to help adults care for themselves and their personal well-being. This may include creating opportunities for staff to engage with mental health in the same ways students do, such as faculty circles, meditation, and physical activities. It may also include implementing school policies that provide for mental health days or increased prep and co-planning time.

## Additional Resources to Explore

### ***CARE Program***

CARE for Teachers is a unique program designed to help teachers reduce stress and enliven their teaching by promoting awareness, presence, compassion, reflection, and inspiration—the inner resources they need to help students flourish socially, emotionally, and academically.

### ***Mindful School Teacher Training Program***

This professional development training course is specifically created for educators, mentors, parents, and those who are dedicated to helping young people to learn and thrive. The central objective of this course is to introduce science, strategies, and mindful practices that support positive states of mind, such as gratitude, kindness, joy, and compassion.

### ***Strengthen Adult SEL: CASEL***

These resources will support you in cultivating a community of adults who engage in their own social and emotional learning, collaborate on strategies for promoting SEL, and model SEL throughout the school.

### ***Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning***

The Standards for Professional Learning outline the characteristics of professional learning that lead to effective teaching practices, supportive leadership, and improved student results. The standards make explicit that the purpose of professional learning is for educators to develop the knowledge, skills, practices, and dispositions they need to help students perform at higher levels.

### ***AIR's SEL Coaching Toolkit***

This toolkit is for instructional coaches, administrators, and district leaders who support teachers and other instructional staff in integrating SEL into their daily instructional practices.

### ***Leveraging SEL to Promote Equity—What Educators Need to Know and Do***

Equity in education requires a physically and emotionally safe and positive school climate for all students. Building strong social and emotional competencies, for both teachers and students, can play a key role in ensuring education equity. CASEL's 2018 February webinar shares some of the ways in which CASEL is advancing work on equity and SEL.