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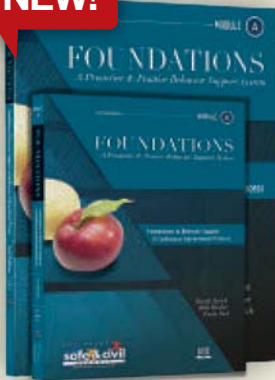
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Social-Emotional Learning and Academics: Better Together

Mike Anderson

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Is This Student Safe at School?

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Coming Up in November | Doing Data Right

- *How to have quality conversations about data, use data to adjust instruction, and involve students in using data without demotivating them.*

- *What you need to know about data dashboards, school improvement indicators, and privacy policy.*

- *Why data are more than grades and scores.*

- *How to use data to benefit, not blame, students, teachers, families, and schools.*

Among our authors: Amanda Datnow, Robert Rothman, Lorette McWilliams, Jessica Sprick, Steven Levy, Caitlin Farrell, Khaliah Barnes, Richard DuFour, Karen Engels, Rob Traver, and Kristen Swanson. Don't miss any of it!

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Meltdowns and Breakthroughs

You may have seen the photo of the 2-year-old having a meltdown in the White House. It's a funny picture. There she is face down on the Red Room rug protesting the dress she didn't want to wear that day. Her mom stands above her seemingly unconcerned, the First Lady looks down smiling, and the President's half-smile seems to indicate that the uproar is no big deal. Later, writing a story for the *Washingtonian* (August, 2015) about child psychology, the mother thanks a doctor whom she calls the "child whisperer" for teaching her how to deescalate her child's temper tantrums. Remaining calm and keeping one's sense of humor apparently works— at least this time.

In another story reported on the radio show *This American Life* (November 17, 2014), a more disquieting emotional outbreak happens in a subway car in the middle of New York City. Two teachers are escorting a group of young teens on a field trip. When a man jostles (or shoves) one of the students, the teen replies sarcastically "Say excuse me." The adult, who only later identifies himself as a plain-clothes policeman, answers with an epithet. Everything escalates, one kid lands a blow on the officer, and two kids end up getting arrested and spending a night in jail. The teachers, who ironically had been teaching their students to practice restorative justice—a way of talking out problems by using social and reflective skills— might have felt all their lessons were for nothing that day.

This issue of *Educational Leadership* on "Emotionally Healthy Kids" reminds us that students come to school with all kinds of emotions— emotions that affect how and what they learn. In fact, 20 percent of all students have what are classified as behavioral or emotional problems at school every year (Desrochers, p. 46). Some of these students may have serious or developing mental health issues; others may simply be having a bad—or overly exciting—day. Some behaviors may be a reaction to adults' own misbehaviors or misfired reactions (see Toshalis, p. 34) or to school in general (Steinberg, p. 28), and some may result from situations and conditions that are too little understood by those who teach and care for students (pp. 52, 64, 68). How educators respond to students' emotions and emotional behaviors can have lifelong effects—on students' academic growth, on the way they see themselves as people, and on the well-being of all the other students.

Our authors lay out guidelines for creating a climate where all kids feel safe, secure, and supported. They describe strategies, skills, principles, and programs that help students gain control of their own emotions in healthy ways. Over and over again, the experts show how emotion and learning connect. According to cognitive science, emotions affect our attention, decision-making, memory, concentration, relationships, and health (p. 22). In addition, brain research establishes that both the preschool and teenage years are highly emotional times when much learning—for good or bad—occurs. As neurologist Frances Jensen (p. 16) and researcher Laurence Steinberg (p. 28) both tell us, the brain will never again be as plastic as in the teen years.

Although some educators and policymakers might still believe that the need to teach social and emotional skills should not be an educator's priority, many educators today embrace what ASCD calls "the whole child approach"—an approach that says schools must consider the whole child's mental, physical, and emotional needs. As Rick Wormeli (p. 10) writes, "Some of us deny this reality and claim we aren't trained to guide children's emotional health. We think our purpose is to teach content and skills only. . . . This attitude turns a blind eye to the developmental nature of the students we serve, and it runs afoul of how minds learn." In "The Seven Habits of Highly Affective Teachers," he describes how teachers can tend to their own emotional needs so that they can better cultivate the minds and hearts of their students.

Perhaps a few years from now, when the 2-year-old has grown past the tantrum stage and the teenagers have learned healthier ways to react to disrespect and their own anger over it, they will look back and thank those who guided them to their insights. Only when the development of emotionally healthy children is seen as something that can and should be the responsibility of schools will schools know they have made a breakthrough.

Marge Scherer

The Teacher's Guide to Student Mental Health by William Dikel (Norton, 2014)

"Teachers play a pivotal role in children's mental health," writes William Dikel, child and adolescent psychiatrist. The odds are that every classroom has at least one student with a mental health disorder, so it's imperative that teachers have a basic understanding of children's mental health issues and the services they can receive in school. Dikel provides useful information about the major mental health issues affecting children and adolescents—including anxiety, depression, autism, oppositional defiant disorder, and psychotic disorders. With plentiful concrete examples, he shows how these disorders can be identified, diagnosed, and treated, and how teachers can work with administrators, social workers, psychologists, counselors, and nurses to help ensure the success of students with mental health issues.
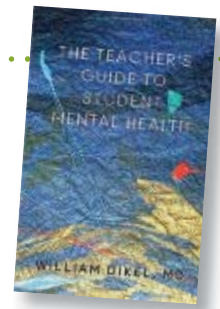
Social and Emotional Learning: A Sound Investment?

Most educators intuitively believe that social and emotional learning (SEL) programs can improve students' lives. But can schools justify the financial investments such programs require? Help may come from a study conducted by the Center for Cost-Benefit Analysis, which compares the costs of these six well-known SEL programs with their long-term economic benefits: *The 4Rs Program, Positive Action, Life Skills Training*, *Second Step*, *Responsive Classroom*, and *Social and Emotional Training*.

The analysis calculated the per-student costs of the programs in terms of personnel, materials and equipment, facilities, and other inputs. It calculated the economic pay-off by looking at how the programs' research-documented benefits relate to smoking, teenage pregnancy, child abuse, asthma, criminality and other behaviors that are costly to society, as well as lifelong earnings.

The results of the analysis were striking: "Each of the six interventions for improving SEL shows measurable benefits that exceed its costs, often by considerable amounts." For example, the cost of implementing the 4Rs Program for 100 students was $68,000, whereas the economic benefit was $832,000. Across all six programs, the study found that "identified benefits outweigh the costs by a factor of 11:1."

The Economic Value of Social and Emotional Learning, published by the Center for Cost-Benefit Analysis at Columbia University Teachers College, is available at http://cbcse.org /wordpress/wp-content /uploads/2015/02 /SEL-Revised.pdf.
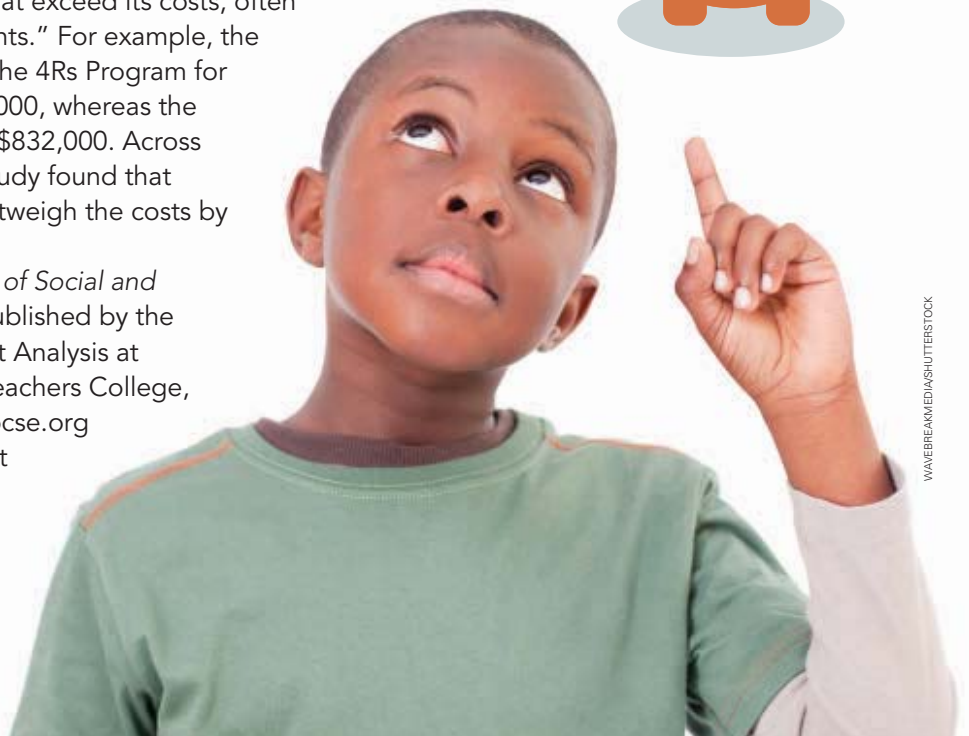
WAVEBREAKMEDIA/SHUTTERSTOCK

A Crash Course on the Brain

John and Hank Green, known on YouTube as the Vlogbrothers, have worked with subject-matter experts to create a series of Crash Courses (www.youtube.com/user/crashcourse) for teachers and students to use in and out of class.

Hank Green's 40-episode psychology course introduces viewers to historical and current research into how the mind works. Each video consists of a fast-paced lecture of about 10 minutes punctuated by animations, visual aids, and pop-culture references. (Where on the emotional spectrum were you when Harry Potter bested Voldemort?) Students—and teachers—who want to learn more about emotional health can check out the episodes "Feeling All the Feels," "Emotion, Stress, and Health," and "Getting Help," as well as episodes dealing with specific emotional and psychological disorders.

A Curriculum That Teaches Hope

According to the International Foundation for Research on Education and Depression (iFRED; www.ifred.org), the main predictor of suicide isn't loneliness, life losses, or trauma—it's hopelessness. So iFRED has created "Schools for Hope," a free curriculum for school-age students that explores what hope is (including how it ties into brain structures) and teaches kids to regulate their emotions, connect to a purpose in their lives, and stay calm and optimistic during stressful times.

Any educator can access the self-led, 10-lesson curriculum and materials at www.schoolsforhope.org. Besides the 10 core lessons, there are instructions for workshops on "Movies for Hope," "Artwork for Hope," and more. The curriculum is geared to a 5th grade level (and is being piloted with 5th graders in several schools) because research shows a rise in suicide attempts among 6th graders, but iFRED plans to expand it to other age groups.

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Numbers of Note

ZYGOTEHAASNOBRAINSHUTTERSTOCK

Mental health diagnoses for kids are increasing

8.1 Percentage of U.S. children's visits to a pediatrician in 2010 that resulted in a mental health diagnosis.

10.5 Percentage of U.S. children's visits to a pediatrician in 2013 that resulted in a mental health diagnosis.

. . .especially for boys.

14.7 Percentage of *boys'* visits to a pediatrician that resulted in a mental health diagnosis in 2013.

8.2 Percentage of *girls'* visits to a pediatrician that resulted in a mental health diagnosis in 2013.

Source: From a survey by athenaNet, reported in an October 28, 2013, blog post by athenaResearch titled "Data Points to Behavioral Health as a Growing Challenge for Pediatricians." The survey looked at pediatrician visits by children 6–17 years old (2.8 million visits) between July 2009 and June 2013 and used claims data to see whether a mental health diagnosis was made that visit.
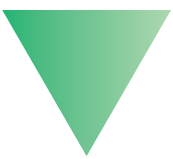
"The brain will never again be as plastic as it is during adolescence." —*Laurence Steinberg, p. 28*

THE
7 Habits OF
Highly Affective
Teachers

Want to make your school a better place for everyone? Make emotional health a habit.

Rick Wormeli

Anxious, overconfident, curious, indifferent, angry, amused, lonely, hopeful, embarrassed, empowered, afraid, excited, diminished—teachers have seen all these emotions emerge from students as they engage with classroom content. Emotional responses to lessons often go through students' minds before they even begin to think about the material: *This stuff is stupid/awesome/beyond me. I'm not comfortable with this. Finally, something I'm good at. Maybe somebody will notice I can't read. Let's see her find a mistake in that one—it's perfect. Does the teacher know I didn't study this last night?*

Some of us deny this reality and claim we aren't trained to guide children's emotional health. We think our purpose is to teach content and skills only, not to deal with the touchy-feely stuff. This attitude turns a blind eye to the developmental nature of the students we serve, and it runs afoul of how minds learn. Unless we're the most severe of sociopaths, we all have emotional responses that affect what we do.

Adding to the messiness, our individual perspectives and experiences may put us out of sync with others' emotional states, even as the institutional nature of schools demands emotional synchronicity. The resulting miscommunication, blame, anxiety, and frustration are not the best ingredients for a good day at school.

Teachers who deny the emotional elements of teaching and learning can become exhausted from ceaseless confrontations with students' emotional states, often blaming their personal stress and students' failure to learn on students' lack of motivation or maturity. They grow disconnected from students, creating an almost adversarial relationship with them: *I need to get them to shape up. It's them or me. These students are hopeless; why should I bother? It's the parents who created this situation.* This attitude can bleed into daily interactions with students and colleagues.

It doesn't have to be this way. We can develop constructive responses to our own affective needs as teachers and equip our students to do the same. These responses take mindfulness and practice to become daily habits. Borrowing and modifying the premise from Stephen Covey (1989), let's explore the seven habits of highly *affective* teachers.

1 Find joy in others' success.

Climbing the mountain ourselves and resting at the top while others struggle below isn't the goal; getting everyone to the top is. Our choice to become teachers is reaffirmed with every student's success. Do we experience genuine joy in our students' intellectual milestones? Do we let students see our encouraging smile and rising respect for their work? Or do we interrupt a student's clumsy attempt at a classroom demonstration and just do the task ourselves because it's easier?

We don't just present curriculum and document whether students sink or swim with it; we put skin in the game. We take a personal stake in Gabriella's use of proper dance technique and don't see it as a sacrifice to work with her a couple of times a week before or after school. It isn't an imposition to recommend an online tutorial to Cristian when he requests our input as he studies for an advanced test. We whisper a triumphant, "Yes!" when Carl finally contributes substantively to a class discussion. We get a little misty-eyed when Larrinda's team places first in the robotics competition, knowing how hard they worked, how much they learned, and how happy their families will be.

2 Cultivate perspective and reframe.

Perspective is often the difference between empowering optimism and defeatist isolation. When a student is disrespectful to us, instead of taking it personally, we realize that he's 14 and has only an occasional filter on impulse control. We focus on the positive young adult he's becoming and help him see how his words and actions have consequences, guiding him in making amends and restoring trust, with tomorrow as a fresh start.

A change in perspective can also help us deal with daily challenges. When parents complain about our assignments, we can reframe the problem this way: *How can I communicate more clearly and in a timely manner so parents aren't frustrated, and how can I get an honest sense of how assignments are impacting students' home life?* Instead of whining about students' distractibility in class, we can seek ways to make our lessons developmentally responsive and meaningful so students are engaged. Hall duty between classes isn't such a hardship when we realize it's an opportunity to connect with students outside class.

Think about whether it's better to be right or to be kind in our interactions with students and colleagues. Sometimes our students need a win more than they need a correction, so we might be kind today and right tomorrow. Perspective provides hope where there is little, and it helps us commit to the long haul. Teachers who have seen formerly frustrating

students come back to visit as successful adults trust in the whole enterprise of schooling and growing up. Setbacks are momentary flashes of concern, not dictates of a locked-in future.

3 Ditch the easy caricature.

Ever since the days of hunters and gatherers, humans have been known for categorizing, much of it for survival. This is still true today: *Will this person hurt me or defend me? Is this person going to require a lot or a little of my energy and time? Do I belong in this group or in that other one?* We pigeonhole others: Eudora is the contrarian, Dave wears rose-colored glasses, Hassan is deep and philosophical, Steve is a sycophant, and Liz always has to see the numbers. We make these categorizations daily, and they affect our interactions with others.

When we see people as fully developed thinkers, they become more to us than our quick categorization reveals. They have value. As a result, we are less likely to dismiss their ideas as not worth considering or to assume nefarious intent on their part. When we visit students' homes and make other efforts to really understand who they are beyond the classroom, they become someone's son, daughter, brother, sister, mentor, surrogate parent, or inspiration. When we see them play in a soccer game, swim competitively, program computers, paint with finesse, perform in a concert, celebrate a religious milestone, or get a new scout badge, we see their extended effort and intellectual fortitude.

When a student becomes more to us than the class clown, mean girl, drama queen, geek, or jock, it is easier to remember that each student matters and is worth our time. They are not just one more paper to grade. We

think of them specifically as we plan our lessons, and we look forward to watching them progress. Time in their company is time well spent.

4 Explore the ethics of teaching.

We know that massive packets of worksheets don't teach, that oral dictation spelling tests are not tests of spelling, and that lectures with no opportunities to process content are ineffective—yet we rarely confront these practices in ourselves or others. Are we open to critique, or do colleagues see us as set in our ways? And what goes unlearned among our students when we play it politically safe?

Candor is hard, but when offered constructively and in a culture where it is safe to hold different opinions from those of our colleagues, it's invigorating. When we open up our practices to the scrutiny of respected colleagues and analyze the merits of our decisions, we may find our strategies lacking, but wrestling with practice like this breathes new life into our work. And we may find our practices validated by others, which creates camaraderie. An unexamined pedagogy can hinder learning, but an examined pedagogy empowers learning and gives our students the classrooms they need.

To what degree do we allow people untrained in teaching to tell us what to do? For example, educators often agree that percentage grades distort the accuracy of grade reports and should be abandoned (Guskey, 2013), but many districts keep them because parents want them. Some teachers count homework as 50 percent of the report card grade, even though we know how much this skews our reports of student performance against standards. Do we say something and change the practice? If we do nothing, we are effectively

We can **develop constructive responses to** our own **affective needs** as teachers and equip our students to do the same.

agreeing to distort the grade report.

Discover the energy that comes with candid exploration of ethical issues. Consider how your handling of issues like these may affect your students' well-being:

■ An English language learner knows the content but cannot express his expertise because he has language limitations. Should he be allowed to take the test in his native language?

■ A student is late with a project. Should her grade on the project be lowered? Or do we give her one grade on timely attention to deadlines and a different grade on how well her project meets academic standards?

■ You want to honor diverse opinion and community values, but you teach life science and evolution in a community where a significant number of families are creationists or believe in intelligent design. How do you proceed?

5 Embrace humility.

To accept a new idea, we have to first admit that what we're doing is less effective than we thought. This can be tough because, for many of us, the way we teach defines much of who we are as individuals. If someone critiques our teaching, it feels like they're critiquing us. In humility, however, we grow comfortable with the idea that we may be wrong. One of the signs of an intellectual is the willingness to revise one's thinking. As modern educators, we are intellectuals, and hence open to revision.

Doubt can be our greatest compass rose, providing direction when needed: *My colleague posed a provocative question about that strategy I use, but I dismissed it as having no merit— Have I grown complacent? Could there be another interpretation of that classic text that's just as correct as mine? If I ask for assistance with this student, will the administration think less of me?*

Let's invite administrators, parents, and students to evaluate us at any time. Let's let students and parents complete report cards on us, ones that they design but that we augment to include elements about which we'd like feedback. We might even want to share, discuss, and respond to this feedback publicly to show our willingness to learn.

6 Value intellect.

Teaching the same age group the same topics five periods a day year after year without intellectual stimulation breeds complacency. It's easier to pull out last year's lesson sequence and go through the motions than it is to breathe new life into the unit and respond to the unique nature of the individuals before us. This problem has existed for ages, as an 1895 report attests:

> The deadening influence of routine in teaching is well known; . . . Said a college professor, "What can be more deadening to all intellectual interest than to read year after year the same classic author with the successive classes of students? I plead for a frequent change of authors.". . . No

teacher can afford to dispense with good scholarship; for without it he fails in his chief desire, which is to be of the highest service to his pupils. . . . A good test of the intellectual condition of the schools is to take an account of the studies the teachers are carrying on for themselves. (Seaver, 1895, pp. 21–22)

Teacher Diana Senechal writes on her blog (2013),

> Teachers need room for their own lives and interests, even if they devote most of their time to school. Schools and policymakers should recognize that those outside pursuits enrich lives and translate into better teaching. . . . Teachers and students thrive in relation to substantial, beautiful, meaningful subject matter.

A well-nurtured intellect ignites us, deepening our passion for the field. Let's build that intellect. Here are just a few ideas to get you started (for more, see Wormeli, 2013, 2014):

■ Start or participate in an Edcamp. To find an Edcamp near you, visit http://edcamp.wikispaces.com.

■ Write for education publications. Analyzing and explaining what you do can clarify and transform your thinking.

■ Reconsider unit sequences. Should a later unit be taught earlier, or can you move through all the topics historically, rather than treating them as disconnected units?

■ Reflect on how you're different than you were 10 years ago and where you'll be 10 years from now. Identify decisions you've made to get to where you are today and what you still need to do to achieve your current goals.

■ Write a personal grading philosophy statement listing all your grading policies and a rationale for each one.

As you grow through these experiences, think about how you can use your learning to encourage and spark greater learning in your students.

7 Maintain passion and playfulness.

Having fun with your subject and your students will give students permission to engage, even invest, in their learning, and it will elevate your spirits. There's so much stress involved in teaching today's students; moments of true passion and playfulness bring back much-needed humanity.

Save your sanity, then, by incorporating students' names into your test questions and their community culture into their projects. Use props in lessons, take on the manner of a different character from time to time as you teach, and add something startling to two of your lessons this week.

Invite a colleague to burst into your class at a specific time and blurt something related to the lesson then leave quickly as you respond to the commotion with, "That was bizarre, but by good fortune, we can use the information!" Put a mysterious box in the middle of the room with yellow police tape around it and a sign that says, "Warning: Open one week from today, only in the presence of an adult." Activities like these build a sense of

Show students you don't take yourself too seriously by daring them to find a mistake in your lessons.

wonder and curiosity in students.

Show students you don't take yourself too seriously by daring them to find a mistake in your lessons. Insert random humorous slides into your media and lesson presentations, and embrace non sequiturs from students and yourself. Let students step into your shoes by teaching a portion of a lesson (perhaps using a family-friendly puppet you have on hand). Or have a student emcee a unit review game while you take a seat as a contestant.

Speak with just as much enthusiasm about your topic during 7th period as you did in 1st period—after all, it's your students' first time hearing this lesson. Find ways to turn seemingly boring material into a great romance or heroic drama. Get manipulatives into students' hands, and ask them to build physical models of abstract and intangible things (justice, algebra, metaphor, or genetics).

Ask students to think creatively by ranking a cantaloupe, a beach ball, a suitcase, and a copy of the Magna Carta in order of importance to one of the characters in a book. Or have them compose a dialog between two punctuation marks about who's more important. Make learning fun for yourself and your students whenever you can.

And One Bonus Habit
All these habits together create a feeling of emotional wellness, but they are habits, not incidents. Like muscles that atrophy in disuse, these habits have to be used frequently to achieve emotional health benefits.

Fortunately, as we practice these seven habits, we discover an eighth habit, perhaps the most important: *Self-renew*. We need to consider which elements are ineffective and need to be dropped from our practice, what we need to change, and how to generate hope for today's students and our profession. Taking this time to renew whenever we can will enable us to move forward in positive ways.

Stephen Covey declared that our character is the composite of our habits. Let us then compose virtuous affective habits that will ensure the success of the next generation. EL

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Rick Wormeli (rwormeli@cox.net) is a longtime classroom teacher turned writer and education consultant and trainer. He is the author of several books, including *Summarization in Any Subject* (ASCD, 2004) and *The Collected Writings (So Far) of Rick Wormeli* (AMLE, 2014). Follow him on Twitter @rickwormeli2.

Secrets of the Teenage Brain

A Conversation with Frances E. Jensen

The typical teen is a mystery to parents and teachers alike. Neuroscience yields some clues.

Deborah Perkins-Gough

As the mother of two teenage sons, Dr. Frances E. Jensen was puzzled when one of them wanted to dye his hair jet black with red streaks, and she was downright alarmed when the other totaled his car by trying to squeeze in a left turn in the path of oncoming traffic. As a neuroscientist, she wanted to find out why. In this interview with *EL*, she shares some of the insights she gained when she explored the neurological research, and she suggests how that research can help educators, parents, and teenagers themselves understand what's going on in the teenage brain.

Why is adolescence such an important time for brain development?

During the teenage years, our brains are both more powerful and more vulnerable than at any other time of our lives. They're powerful because teenagers and children have more *synapses*—connections between brain cells— than adults do. So teenagers are able to learn much more efficiently than adults, with less effort. That creates a huge opportunity—an optimal time window when teenagers can grow their cognitive strengths and work on their weaknesses.

As human beings, we start off with an excess of synapses, so as we get older, our brain prunes away the connections that we don't use. At the same time, as we have experiences, learn new information, or work on motor tasks, we strengthen the connections that we do use. That pruning and building process, called *synaptic plasticity,* is much more vigorous in teenagers than in adults.

I can see why teenage brains are powerful; why are they vulnerable?

In the last decade, we've learned more about one important area of vulnerability through functional magnetic resonance imaging, or fMRI. This technology enables us to look at the brain in real time and observe what regions light up during specific thoughts or actions.

We know that different regions of teenagers' brains haven't yet built strong connections from side to side and from back to front. The different regions of the brain connect through *axons,* and for a signal to travel from one region of the brain to another is actually a very long trip compared to the distance a signal travels from one adjacent brain cell to another.

Through functional MRI, we can see whether brain regions activate one another when teens engage in specific cognitive tasks—in other words, whether regions that "fire" together are "wired" together. A major study by the National Institutes of Health observed this activation in people through age 21 and found that the brain builds connectivity from the back to the front as we get older. The last region to build strong connectivity is the frontal lobe, and that isn't completed until early adulthood.

And what does the frontal lobe do? It's our seat of executive function, judgment, empathy, insight, and impulse control. One of the interesting

Adolescence is a time for figuring out your identity and **who you're going to be** for the rest of your life.

challenges teenagers have is that they aren't able to access their frontal lobe for instant decision making the way that adults can. They *have* a frontal lobe—they use it when they take their SAT and in their physics class. But they can't necessarily access it when they're driving through an intersection and need to make a split-second decision to step on the brake, or when they need to decide whether to follow their impulse to click on that highly disturbing video online, or when they face a choice of whether to try that drug because their friends are telling them to.

Many studies have demonstrated the difficulty teenagers experience

in accessing the frontal lobe. For example, researchers at Dartmouth College asked adolescents and adults to respond to questions about whether certain activities (such as swimming with sharks, setting your hair on fire, or jumping off the roof) were a good idea. The adolescents took more time than the adults to respond, and their responses activated a more limited brain region; they appeared to rely on their ability to "reason" an answer, whereas the adults seemed to rely on automatic mental images and a visceral response.

Another reason adolescence can be a vulnerable time is that the teenage brain is highly impressionable and excitable because it has so many synapses, and synapses grow by being excited and turned on. That means that good experiences leave their mark much more quickly—but so do bad experiences. The clinical research shows that binge drinking, substance abuse, and stress all tend to have a stronger effect on teenagers than on adults. Addiction is actually a form of synaptic plasticity. When a reward circuit gets repeated exposure to a drug, that circuit starts to build stronger synapses. So sadly, the teenager can become more strongly addicted than the adult and have a much harder time shedding that addiction later.

Frustrated parents and teachers often say, "What was he thinking? How could this really smart student do something so stupid?" Well, it's partly because teenagers' connections to their frontal cortices are still under construction. Understanding the biology behind what can be frustrating behavior might make us a little bit more patient. It's not that kids are trying to be incredibly annoying or reckless; they just haven't developed that decision-making capacity. Yet they're independent enough to be able to get themselves into very precarious

situations. They can drive, they can go places without an adult—so they're potentially at risk.

This combination of excitable synapses and sluggish connection to their judgment centers in the frontal cortex, combined with hormones, makes adolescents highly emotional. The main area of our brain controlling emotion and sexual desire, the limbic system, is located behind the frontal lobe, so it builds strong connections earlier than the frontal lobe does. Teenagers' threshold for emotions being activated is low. For example, studies have shown that if you show people a series of faces with different emotions on them, the brains of children and adults have a less hyped-up response than those of adolescents. And because teenagers also lack the emotion-regulating function of a strong frontal-lobe connection, emotions are potentially going to drive behavior more during the teen years than at any other time in life.

If heightened emotion and lack of impulse control are normal parts of being an adolescent, how can educators identify adolescents who might actually be having serious mental issues or emotional problems?

An interesting thing for educators to know is that some mental illnesses, like schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and depression, tend to blossom in the mid to late teens and early 20s. Surprisingly, in many cases we need to have a mature enough brain to "do" mental illness. These mood and affective disorders involve abnormal functioning of the frontal lobes, and if the frontal lobes aren't strongly hooked up to the rest of your

brain yet, you're unlikely to manifest adultlike schizophrenia. You may have a gene or a trait that is going to cause one of these diseases, but as a child you appear completely normal.

As far as realizing that a kid is having trouble, that's becoming increasingly hard with social networking and the sort of social isolation that the Internet is creating in our lives. Even normal kids may appear to be quite socially isolated. Parents may not be interacting with their children as much as they did a couple of decades ago. The kids are coming home from school, closing the door, and staying in their room all night. Often, teachers spend more time with the kids than their parents do, so I think that teachers may need to be more vigilant these days for warning signs.

If there's an extreme loss or gain of weight, if the child appears disheveled or is suddenly sleeping a lot in school, if they appear to be abusing sub-

stances, these are all warning signs that you're dealing with something more than just a moody teenager who's just broken up with his or her girlfriend or boyfriend.

Anxiety and related disorders like anorexia, obsessive-compulsive disorder, panic disorder, and other social phobias are prevalent in this age window. In fact, recent reports have identified an epidemic of anxiety in teens. We should take note if we see a teenage withdraw from daily activities and become hesitant to engage in new experiences. Or they may go in the opposite direction and engage in more risk taking, such as drug experimentation, as a way to deny their fears. They may also experience physical symptoms like headaches, stomachaches, fatigue, or hyperventilation.

What are the likely sources of that epidemic of anxiety, and how does it physically manifest itself in the brain?

Our teenagers' lives are very intense these days. I blame the Internet partly for that. Social media can be a source of stress that can push young people over the edge. I also blame our hypercompetitive culture, in which parents are made to believe they're being neglectful if they don't have their child in several after-school activities and talent-building classes at the end of the day, not recognizing that kids need some down time.

I think sleep deprivation plays a role. Sleep is crucial to mental health—especially for teens, whose brains are so active. Teenagers' biological clocks are typically geared to fall asleep late and get up late. For one thing, melatonin, a hormone needed to induce sleep, is released two

hours later in average teenagers than in average adults, so they don't even get sleepy until around midnight. When we wake them up at 6:00 a.m., it's like waking an adult up at 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning. That's not great for learning, and it's certainly not great for anxiety and stress.

Studies have shown that stress during the teenage years can have long-lasting effects. Even though a teen may be adult-size, his or her brain is not adult yet. It's still building itself. Every day, it's building something. So whether it's chronic pot smoking, binge-drinking episodes, or stress, any negative experiences can stall brain development. And you can't ever get that development opportunity back. That's why this is such a sensitive time.

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Can giving adolescents the facts about what's going on with their brains help them deal with these emotions and stress? What role can schools play in giving them that information?

This generation of young people actually has a fair amount of respect for data and information. They grew up in the information age, and they're data-driven. So I believe that you can give them power by giving them facts.

They are also fascinated with themselves at this point. And they should be. Adolescence is a time for figuring out your identity and who you're going to be for the rest of your life. They're very interested in why they do the things they do—and they're often just as puzzled as the adults are.

It comes as a relief to them to know that there's biology behind their behavior. And it certainly comes as a relief to parents and teachers. Over and over, when I've presented this

information, parents and teachers will say, "Oh, so that's why! I can't really do much about it, but it helps to know why this teenager is acting this way." People shouldn't be beating themselves up that they didn't know much about how the teenage brain works; a lot of this research is only five years old. It needs to get out of the ivory-tower journals and into people's lives.

I wish that every teenager had to take a course on how their brain works so that they would understand that they're building their brain by what they do every day. One discovery in the field, for instance, is that your IQ can change during your teen years. We all thought that IQ was an innate property—that you could discover what your IQ is in grade school with tests, and that's the IQ you're stuck with. Well, big surprise—no. In a third of people the IQ stays the same, but in a third it goes up, and in a third it goes down. A lot of young people may not start off looking like scholars, but during the teen years they might actually turn into scholars. That's not only hugely important for educators to

know, but it's also a powerful piece of information for kids to have.

Being educated about the brain would allow teenagers to understand some of their behaviors and to realize that there's an opportunity to continue to change in a positive way. Even if a teenager does something like shoplifting, that doesn't mean that that's who they're fated to become. They don't need to pigeonhole themselves; they could be totally different people in another six years. That's a hopeful message for teenagers. **EL**

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Emotions MATTER

Cultivating the emotional intelligence of both students and teachers is our best hope for safe, caring, and effective schools.

Marc A. Brackett and Dena Simmons

Jason is one of those middle school students who come with a warning label—a long list of stories of defiance and disobedience. Most mornings, Jason eats a quick breakfast after little sleep. He rushes out the door while being lectured by his mother about being late for school. He has a 30-minute walk to school, and he usually travels alone because his neighborhood friends have already left.

Today, like many days, Jason arrives to school late. When he comes in, his first-period math teacher scolds him in front of the class. Jason and this teacher have bumped heads since the beginning of the school year because Jason consistently arrives late. As a result, he has fallen far behind. Jason has missed the beginning of the lesson and is not clear about its objectives, so he ends up doodling mindlessly for the remainder of class. As he leaves, his teacher sarcastically remarks, "Maybe tomorrow, you'll actually get here on time."

In English, Jason's favorite class, things go more smoothly. His teacher greets him at the door with a smile, does a quick check-in, and notices that Jason is "off." She recommends that he write in his journal to help him relax. Jason does so for a few minutes and then joins the class, remaining mostly on task.

In third period, Jason's social studies teacher returns an assigned paper. Jason expects a high grade because he put in a lot of effort. On learning that he received a *C,* Jason immediately shuts down and mutters, "I hate social studies." He fiercely crumples up the paper and shoves it into his backpack. His teacher notices and sends him to the principal's office. On the way, he passes Matt, another 6th grader, who makes an insulting remark. Jason retaliates with a nasty remark of his own just as the principal walks out of her office. She demands that Jason apologize, but he refuses. The principal gives both boys conduct referrals and calls their parents. Jason leaves the office in a foul mood.

The remainder of the day has its ups and downs. At recess, Jason appears to be in better spirits. He plays basketball and looks like he is having fun. Lunch also goes smoothly. He sits with a group of friends and talks about the upcoming basketball game on the weekend. But during fifth-period science class, Jason has a pop quiz for which he is unprepared. In Spanish, the last class of the day, the substitute teacher reprimands Jason for chatting while he should be reading. The teacher also criticizes Jason for not looking her in the eye when she

Boredom, anxiety, and fear disrupt concentration and interfere with the ability to learn.

speaks to him. After school, Jason walks home, where his mother lectures him yet again about his behavior. Jason eats dinner with his mother and two brothers, does about half of his homework, and falls asleep after midnight watching television.

It's easy to observe Jason's tardiness, misbehavior, and disengagement and make assumptions about the reasons for his actions. Perhaps, Jason is disengaged in math because he's tired and has a bad relationship with his teacher. Perhaps he enjoys English because he connects with his teacher and acts out in his social studies class because he is frustrated by his low grade. But how do we know what Jason is actually feeling throughout the day? And what difference does it make?

Why Emotions Matter

The science of emotions provides a lens that can help us understand Jason's experiences at school and thus serve him, and all students, more effectively. It also helps us recognize how our own emotions affect our teaching practices, our interactions with students, and our ability to model healthy emotional responses in challenging situations.

At the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, we study how emotions drive teaching and learning. We also develop evidence-based approaches to teach emotional intelligence to educators and families. Here are four reasons we believe that emotions matter a great deal in school (Brackett & Rivers, 2014).

For attention, learning, and performance

Emotions can either enhance or derail classroom performance. Interest and amusement, for example, harness attention and promote greater engagement. Boredom, anxiety, and fear disrupt concentration and interfere with the ability to learn. Extreme emotions like chronic stress, sometimes arising from trauma or the perception of danger, can result in the persistent activation of the sympathetic nervous system and the release of stress hormones like cortisol. Prolonged release of these hormones affects the brain structures associated with executive functioning and memory, hindering a student's ability to learn and thrive in school and in life.

For decision making

Emotions influence decision making in both harmful and beneficial ways. People in pleasant moods tend to perceive individuals, places, and events more favorably than people in unpleasant moods do. Pleasant moods also tend to enhance mental flexibility and creativity. In contrast, anger or sadness triggered by one situation may carry over into unrelated situations, causing people to lash out at someone who had nothing to do with the original anger or sadness.

One study we conducted with middle school teachers demonstrated that emotions could influence teacher behavior. To induce sadness, we assigned one group of teachers to write about a negative memory for five minutes; to induce a happier mood, we assigned another group to write about a positive memory. We then asked all the teachers to grade the same essay, written by a 7th grade student, on its creativity, structure, spelling and punctuation, vocabulary, and overall

quality. The ratings were about one full grade higher in the happy group of teachers than in the sad group. Interestingly, only 14 percent of the teachers believed that the mood induction influenced their evaluation of the essay (Brackett, Floman, Ashton-James, Cherraskiy, & Salovey, 2013).

For fostering good relationships

Emotions revealed in the face, body, and voice send signals about approachability. For example, sadness,

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Getting in Touch with Your Emotions

As educators, developing a deeper understanding of our own emotions can enable us to get our own needs met, to support all students, and to create the best possible learning environment. To build greater emotional awareness, ask yourself these questions:

- How do you feel in the morning as you enter your school?
- What emotions do you experience throughout the day while teaching?
- What emotions do you experience when walking the hallways, when in the lunchroom, when grading, and when in the faculty room?
- Which students and colleagues evoke pleasant versus unpleasant emotions in you?
- How do you feel at the end of the school day?

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displayed with a downward gaze and frown, indicates that a person needs help. Joy or happiness, expressed by a genuine smile, indicates that it's safe to approach and that social support is available. Anger, displayed with furrowed eyebrows and pressed lips, sends a message to stay away and can also elicit fear responses in others. Put simply, the emotions that teachers and students display in class influence the teacher-student bond, which is crucial to effective teaching and learning.

For health and well-being

Emotions release a variety of neurotransmitters that influence our physical and mental health, including our immune-system functioning. Stress, for example, is associated with increased levels of cortisol, which has been shown to lead to weight gain. High levels of serotonin, on the other hand, tend to boost mood and curb the appetite.

Pleasant emotions can provide many health benefits, including greater resilience to trauma. People who have learned healthy ways to manage emotions like stress and anger are likely to experience greater psychological well-being.

Understanding Emotional Intelligence

Emotions give us information that can be valuable—if we use that information wisely. That's why it's important for schools not only to support students' and educators' social and emotional health, but also to teach all stakeholders—school leaders, teachers, staff, students, and families—the skills of emotional intelligence.

But what exactly *is* emotional intelligence? Can it even be taught?

Mayer and Salovey (1997) defined emotional intelligence as the ability to reason with and about emotions

to achieve goals and success in life. The key skills of emotional intelligence are recognizing, understanding, labeling, expressing, and regulating emotion (Brackett & Rivers, 2014).

The first skill, *recognizing emotion*, ensures that we obtain accurate and useful information from the environment. We can recognize emotions through facial expressions, vocal tones, body language, and even physiology (for example, our own heart rate). These emotions signal whether things are going well or poorly for ourselves and other people, and they also help us attend to our own and others' needs. Joy occurs when we achieve a goal; anger when we perceive injustice; disappointment when we have unmet expectations. In the classroom, our ability to accurately recognize emotions is key to connecting and engaging with our students.

Referring back to Jason, how could his social studies teacher recognize exactly what he was feeling when he crumpled up his assignment? On the surface, he appeared angry. But it's reasonable to think that he also felt disappointed or embarrassed. We need to know because the strategies we might use to help Jason manage his feelings would likely be different for anger than for disappointment. If Jason is angry, we might give him a safe space and strategy to help him de-escalate and later invite him to discuss his feelings and what he perceived as being unfair, followed by a discussion of expected classroom behavior. These

strategies would also apply if Jason's main feeling was disappointment; but because disappointment generally results from unmet expectations, we might also want to inquire into how he prepared for the assignment and help him plan strategies he could use to do better next time.

Put simply, instead of playing the guessing game based on Jason's behavior, we need to clarify our understanding of what he's feeling. We can accomplish this by telling Jason what we observe in his facial expressions and body language and what we hear in his voice—and engaging him in a conversation that encourages him to share his feelings and experiences.

The second skill, *understanding emotions*, refers to recognizing how different emotions influence our thinking, decisions, and behavior. It's likely that the primary emotion Jason was feeling was disappointment because he didn't get the grade he expected. He also might have felt embarrassed when he was told to go to

the principal's office and even fearful about the possible consequences of the principal's call home. Jason's understanding of the causes and consequences of his emotions would provide him with crucial information about how best to shift or to maintain his emotions and behave in an appropriate manner.

When we, as teachers, understand the causes and consequences of our own and our students' emotions, we can provide greater insights to our students. We can also teach more mindfully and differentiate our instruction depending on where our students are emotionally and where we want them to be. For example, we might create the conditions for excitement when we want students to generate ideas about a topic for a paper; help them tap into feelings of anger when their task is to write a persuasive essay; induce a sad mood when they prepare to write a moving poem; and cultivate a calm, relaxed state for private journal writing.
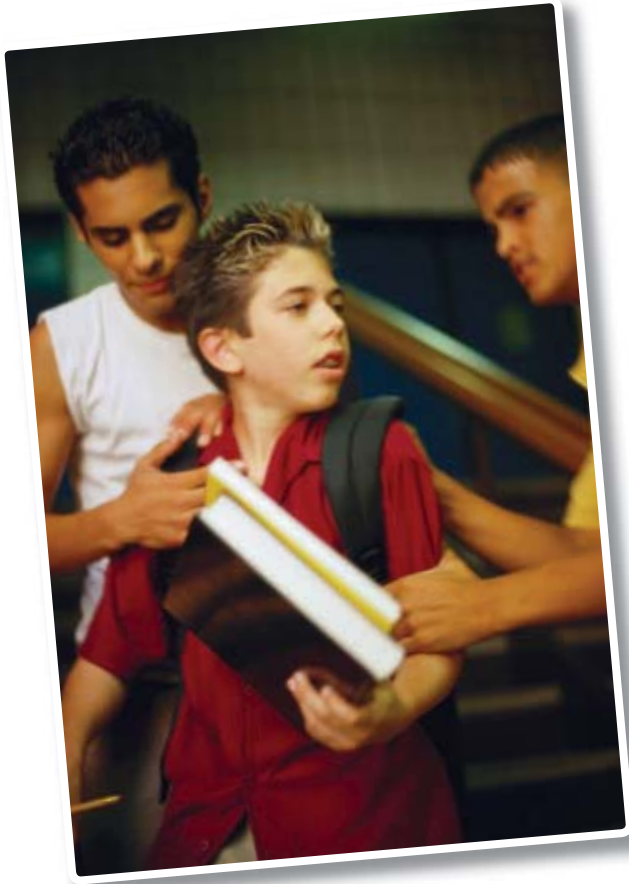
> Most people have difficulty finding the **exact word to describe their feelings.**

Labeling emotions, the third skill of emotional intelligence, includes having a diverse vocabulary to describe the full range of emotions, from basic ones like fear to complex ones like shame. It also includes the ability to differentiate emotions according to intensity. For example, emotions like contentment, joy, delight, exhilaration, elation, and ecstasy exist in the happiness family, whereas impatience, annoyance, irritation, frustration, aggravation, and rage exist in the anger family.

Most people have difficulty finding the exact word to describe their feelings. One way to expand our own and our students' emotion vocabulary is to teach words that describe various intensities of emotions from different emotion families (for example, *happiness* and *anger*). It's also important to examine how these emotions are shown and what causes

people to experience them. Referring back to Jason, if he had a more sophisticated emotion vocabulary, he might have been able to articulate that he was anxious and confused during math class and possibly ask for help.

The fourth skill of emotional intelligence is *expressing emotions*. This skill pertains to one's ability to communicate emotions effectively with different people and in multiple contexts. How we express our emotions depends on our personality (for example, whether we are an introvert or extrovert); our level of comfort with different emotions; our social norms; and larger cultural or religious rules around when, where, and with whom we express emotions. (For example, the acceptance of direct eye contact and public display of affection vary by culture.)

Because educators and students alike have different rules and comfort

levels around expressing emotions, students may mask or hide their true feelings. Jason's substitute Spanish teacher thought he was being disrespectful by not looking her in the eye; however, without knowing Jason's cultural background and past experiences, it's hard to know whether he was being disrespectful or deferential to authority. The more we know our students—from their personality to their cultural background—the better we can work with them on effective ways to express their emotions in school.

Regulating emotions, the fifth skill of emotional intelligence, involves strategies to prevent or reduce unwanted emotions and to maintain, initiate, or enhance desired ones. Many of us use unproductive strategies automatically, including negative self-talk (I'm a loser; I'm stupid); blaming others; or yelling. More effective strategies include positive self-talk (I can do this; I'm going to take the high road); positive reappraisal (for example, taking the other person's perspective); social support; and exercise. As educators, it's important to notice our own unintentional, potentially unproductive strategies and to develop effective ones so that we can be good role models for our students.

Jason uses a range of strategies. Some of them (such as procrastination, negative self-talk, and aggression) don't help him achieve his goals; others (such as journaling) are helpful. Our hope is for schools to provide opportunities from preschool to high school for all students to learn effective strategies to regulate their feelings.

Creating Emotionally Intelligent Schools

Research shows that emotional intelligence is associated with a wide range

of positive outcomes among children and adolescents, including improved cognitive and social functioning, psychological well-being, and higher academic performance. Emotional intelligence is also associated with less stress and burnout and greater job satisfaction among educators. Our own observational studies have shown that classrooms rated higher in emotional intelligence have students who are more engaged, behave in more prosocial ways, and learn better (for a review of this research, see Brackett, Rivers, Bertoli, & Salovey, in press). Additional research shows that emotional intelligence can be taught and developed in schools (Brackett & Rivers, 2014; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011).

Despite this evidence, however, U.S. schools have not devoted much attention to emotional intelligence, more broadly called social and emotional learning (SEL) (Durlak, Gullotta, Domitrovich, Goren, & Weissberg, 2015). In many ways, the strong emphasis on standardized testing and teacher accountability has pushed aside the emotions of students and educators.

Still, a large number of parents, researchers, educators, and policymakers are pushing for schools to take SEL seriously. More districts are adopting evidence-based approaches to SEL; schools of education are starting to integrate training in the area, and policies to mandate and fund SEL are being considered, including two pending federal bills: the Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Act (HR 850) and the Jesse Lewis Empowering Educator Act (S 897).

Consider how Jason's life and millions of other children's lives might improve if they learned to recognize, understand, label, express, and regulate emotions. Consider how teacher

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Are You an Emotionally Intelligent Educator?

Ask yourself the following questions:

■ *Recognizing emotion.* How often do you pay attention to your own and your students' emotions? What do you do to teach your students to accurately recognize emotions in the face, body, and voice?

■ *Understanding emotion.* Are you aware of your emotional triggers? What makes you feel angry, worried, or joyful at school? How do you help your students understand the causes and consequences of their emotions?

■ *Labeling emotion.* How sophisticated is your emotion vocabulary? How do you infuse emotion vocabulary into your teaching?

■ *Expressing emotion.* Are you comfortable expressing the full range of emotions—including happiness, sadness, anger, and calmness—with your students? What do you do to ensure that your students learn about cultural differences in the display of emotions?

■ *Regulating emotion.* Which ineffective and effective strategies do you use to regulate your feelings? How often do you teach your students helpful strategies to regulate emotions such as stress so that they can achieve their goals?

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and leader stress and burnout might be reduced if educators developed these same skills. It's time to ensure that all educators and children develop the necessary emotional skills to reach their full potential in school, at home, and in their communities. EL

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How Self-Control Drives Student Achievement

Brain research sheds light on how high schools can foster a crucial skill at the time when the brain is most ready to learn it.

Laurence Steinberg

We've known for some time that the brain is particularly malleable during the first few years of life, which has prompted renewed interest in the importance of early childhood education. However, brain science now reveals that a second period of heightened plasticity occurs during adolescence, a time when the brain is especially prone to change (Lillard & Erisir, 2011). This finding should stimulate interest in secondary education as an opportune time to intervene to improve students' lives.

Among experts in developmental psychology, there's new interest in noncognitive skills as important influences on adolescents' learning and academic achievement (Tough, 2012). In particular, self-regulation—the ability to exercise control over our feelings, thoughts, and behavior—turns out to be a stronger predictor of success in the classroom than intelligence, talent, or standardized test scores. That's because strong self-control is the main contributor to traits like perseverance, determination, and grit, all of which have been linked to higher school achievement as well as to success in the world of work.

Within the field of positive psychology, interest is growing in how schools can facilitate adolescents' emotional growth, including the development of stronger self-control (Steinberg, 2014). Of course, the more traditional focus in school on the prevention and amelioration of emotional problems is still valid—adolescence is the most likely period for the emergence of serious mental health issues, such as depression or substance abuse. But we should also be asking what schools can do to stimulate *positive* emotional development during this stage, both for its own
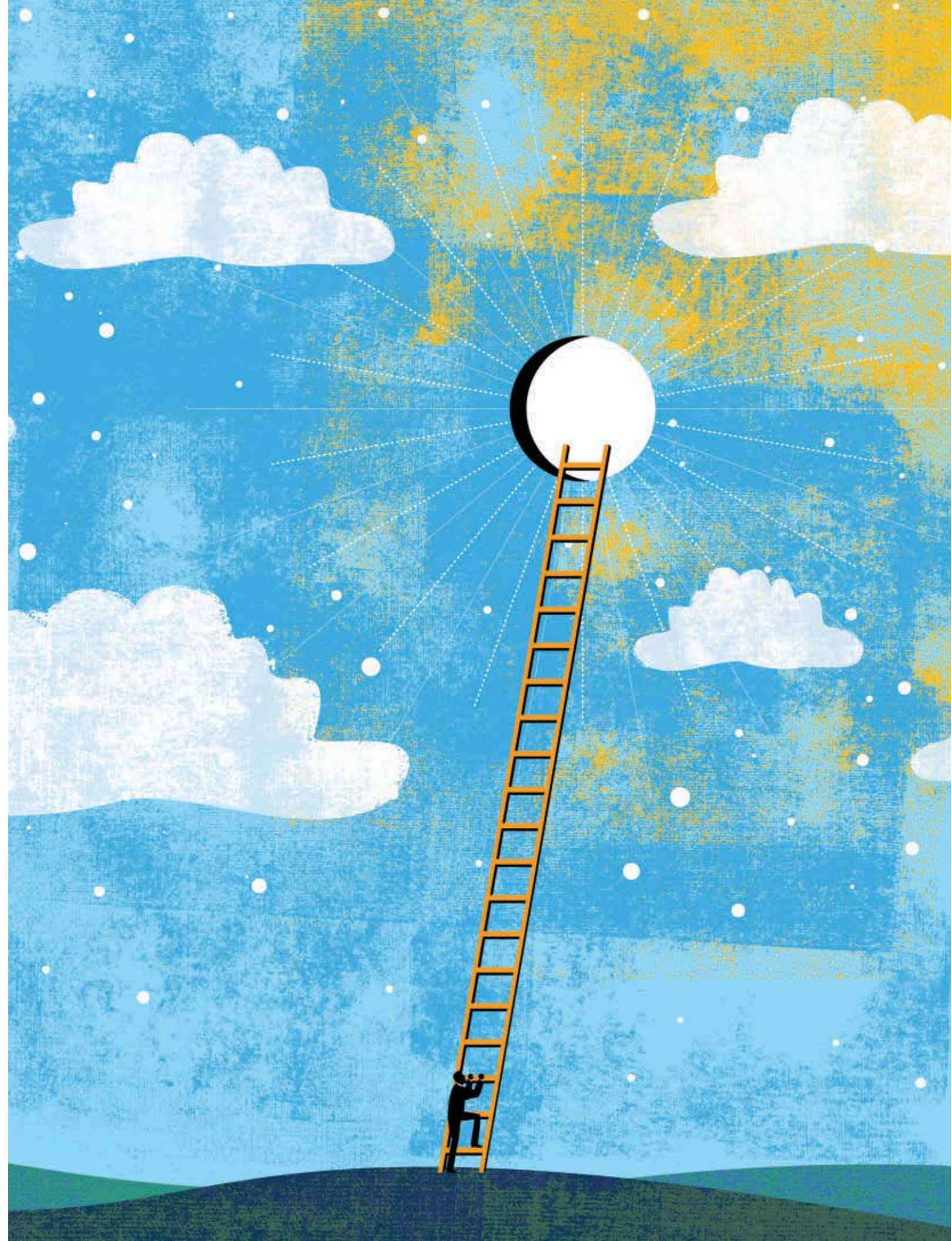
sake and because research shows that school achievement depends a lot on motivation and not just on conventional academic abilities.

High Schools: Not Making the Grade

We've known for some time that U.S. high schools are underperforming, but little that we've tried with respect to curriculum or instruction has worked particularly well. Reading and math scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) have remained flat among U.S. 17-year-olds for the past 40 years, whereas NAEP scores among our younger students have risen over this same time period. In recent NAEP assessments, only 6 percent of 17-year-olds score at the highest level of reading proficiency for their age, and just 7 percent of 17-year-olds score at the highest level of proficiency in math. Far more elementary and middle school students score at the highest proficiency levels than do their high school counterparts (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013).

The problem may be that for all but the very best students—the ones bound for the most selective colleges and universities—high school can feel tedious and unchallenging. One-third of U.S. high school students report that they have little interest in school and get through the day by fooling around with their friends (Steinberg, 1996).

One might be tempted to write off these findings as mere confirmation of the well-known fact that adolescents find *everything* boring. However, more than 80 percent of foreign students who have attended U.S. high schools report that their home schools are more challenging, and more than 50 percent of U.S. high school students who have studied in another country

agree that their home schools are easier (Loveless, 2002, 2006). Despite all the media attention given to how stressed-out adolescents are, U.S. high school students spend far less time on schoolwork than their counterparts in the rest of the world do.

Enter Self-Control

The fact is, U.S. high school students may not be up to the challenge because they lag behind many of their international counterparts in an important skill—self-control. Students who have strong self-restraint and the capacity to delay gratification have a

greater advantage in high school than they do in elementary school. A child doesn't need much perseverance to succeed in 2nd grade. In other words, it's easier to improve elementary schools without paying attention to noncognitive skills. We don't have this luxury in high schools.

As students progress from elementary to middle to high school, the work becomes more challenging, and the demands for self-reliance intensify. Adults provide less supervision and assistance, and students are expected to work more independently. High school assignments take longer to complete, and exams take longer to study for. If we want to improve our adolescents' achievement, we're going to have to rethink secondary education so that it's more geared to strengthening the self-control that students need to be successful in school and beyond.

In a cross-national study I directed of nearly 4,000 adolescents from 11 countries, ranging from 5th graders to college undergraduates, we tested students' self-regulation abilities at different ages using behavioral tasks that required planning and self-control (such as the "Tower of London," in which hasty decisions interfere with successful performance), as well as standard personality measures (such as those assessing impulsivity) (Steinberg & Chein, in press). The comparison between the results for Chinese and U.S. students is instructive. At 5th grade, there were few differences in self-control—the Chinese children scored only about 10 percent higher. But this gap widened little by little each year. By 9th grade, the Chinese students scored 20 percent higher; by college, they scored 45 percent higher. This advantage most likely isn't the result of cultural differences in temperament. If it had been, we would

have seen a larger self-control gap earlier on. Rather, it's likely a consequence of how each country raises and educates its adolescents.

What Schools Can Do

Research shows not only that adolescence is a time of considerable brain plasticity, but also that brain systems and regions that govern self-regulation are especially malleable during this time (Selemon, 2013). Given this knowledge, here are some ways that schools can strengthen student self-control and facilitate learning and achievement.

Make school more demanding for all students.

In its coverage of U.S. secondary education, the popular press tends to focus on two relatively small groups: students headed for elite colleges (many of whom are under tremendous stress and pressure) and students at risk for dropping out (many of whom come from the most disadvantaged communities).

These stories are important to tell, but they leave out the vast majority of students, who don't fall into either of these extremes. These high school students tell us they're bored. Schools don't routinely push them beyond their current capabilities—that is, the students don't always get the sort of stimulation necessary to develop brain regions that support higher-order cognitive skills and self-regulation. And more instruction aimed at the rote memorization of facts won't help. Research shows that repeating the same task, without additional challenge built into the practice, does little to stimulate brain development. Brain development is stimulated by demanding more from the brain than had previously been asked (Hulme, Jones, & Abraham, 2013).

Attend to students' physical health.

Despite considerable research showing that aerobic exercise is one of the most important contributors to healthy brain development (Verburgh, Konigs, Scherder, & Oosterlaan, 2014), many school districts have eliminated physical education from their daily curriculums. In many high schools, the only students who get regular exercise are those who are talented enough to play on competitive interscholastic teams.

Given what we know about the importance of exercise for brain development, one hour of each school day should be devoted to physical education. This will likely raise students' test scores more than additional instruction will. As with academic stimulation, the type of physical exercise that students are asked to do matters. Team sports, because they're often demanding mentally (with respect to strategy); psychologically (with respect to cooperation and teamwork); and physically, may be especially beneficial. Team sports don't have to be interscholastic or limited to the most athletically able students to provide these benefits.

Bring in mindfulness programs.

There's growing evidence that mindfulness training stimulates the development of brain systems that support self-regulation and strengthen self-control (Davidson et al., 2012). A small number of schools around the United States have incorporated mindfulness exercises, such as meditation, into their daily routines, and preliminary evaluations of these efforts have shown improvements in student learning as well as reductions in problem behavior (Steinberg, 2014). Other ways of teaching mindfulness, including yoga, may also be beneficial.

At a time of shrinking school budgets, I realize that any call to add meditation and yoga to the high school curriculum won't be warmly embraced

> It's easier to improve elementary schools without paying attention to noncognitive skills. We don't have this luxury in high schools.

and may be ridiculed as extravagant. To this resistance I can only say that our persistently mediocre record of secondary school achievement, despite the relatively long school days we force our adolescents to endure, suggests there's plenty of room to rethink how students might spend that time more profitably.

Strengthen students' working memory.

There's some evidence that providing training on certain demanding cognitive tasks, especially those designed to strengthen working memory, may contribute to the development of other skills and capabilities, including self-control (Morrison & Chein, 2011). Working memory refers to how we retain information in our minds and

use it—like keeping the first part of a long sentence in mind while you finish reading it so the end of the sentence makes sense, or holding a set of directions in your head as you drive so you know what landmarks to look for. Working memory is essential to things like planning ahead, considering multiple possible actions at the same time, or comparing the short- and long-term consequences of a potential decision.

One effective training exercise is the "*n*-back" task, in which students are presented with a sequence of items (like letters) one at a time and asked to indicate whether the letter shown is the same as the letter that appeared *n* letters ago.

Offer an SEL program.
There's good evidence that social and emotional learning (SEL) programs contribute to the development of self-regulation, as long as they follow the SAFE principles (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011): They should be *sequenced, active, focused, and explicit.*

Anyone interested in bringing SAFE SEL programs to their school should consult the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (www.casel.org), a nonprofit organization that conducts systematic evaluations of SEL programs, as well as the U.S. Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse (http://ies.ed.gov), which maintains lists of school-based social and emotional learning programs with proven track records of success. Although we tend to think of SEL programs as geared primarily toward students with emotional problems, like aggression, SEL programs benefit all students.

Our Last, Best Chance
It's time for a new national conversation about the health, development,

The brain will never again be as plastic as it is during adolescence.
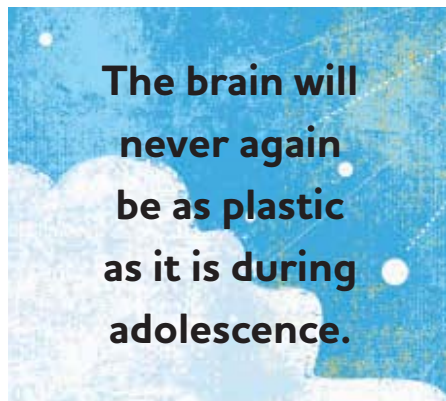
and academic success of our teenagers. But the conversation needs to be different from the one we've been having. It needs to apply the insights into adolescent brain development that have emerged over the past two decades.

We need a national focus on adolescence that is similar in magnitude to our focus on children from birth to age 3. Periods of heightened brain plasticity are times when our experiences are likely to have enduring effects. The first few years of life constitute one such period; we now know that adolescence is another.

The brain will never again be as plastic as it is during adolescence. We can't afford to squander this second opportunity to help young people be happier, healthier, and more successful. Adolescence is our last, best chance to make a difference. EL

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5 Practices That Provoke MISBEHAVIOR

Teachers can unknowingly cause misbehavior by triggering students' negative emotions. Here are five potential provocations—and what you can do instead.

Eric Toshalis

Misbehavior is a form of communication. It's how we send messages to others that something is not OK. All of us—adults and youth alike—tend to misbehave whenever we find ourselves in circumstances that threaten our well-being. When we feel vulnerable, misunderstood, humiliated, or betrayed, we're inclined to act out. Families do it at the dinner table, educators do it in faculty meetings, and students do it in classrooms. We needn't feel bad about this, however, because it's normal and often healthy to react against the circumstances that produce negative emotions. Sure, we sometimes fail to make our best decisions in such situations, but our misbehavior is rarely without cause.

Why, then, in the classroom, do we often view our students' misbehavior only as a problem? Is it fair or accurate to say that misbehaving students possess "bad attitudes" when they're responding to bad experiences? What happens to us, to our students, and to our communities when we characterize student reactions to negative experiences as "inappropriate," "disruptive," "defiant," "insubordinate," "disobedient," or "destructive"? What if the real problem is the context around the misbehaving student—a context that includes us?

These are hard questions to ask because they suggest that we may not always be right in our interpretation of misbehavior. And if we're not always right, some of what we do in response to that misbehavior might be wrong.

That's why I think that to be the best teachers we can be, we need to admit the possibility that we sometimes create circumstances in our classrooms

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Over the years that I've served as a middle and high school teacher, mentor, union president, supervisor, teacher educator, and researcher, I've seen hundreds of teachers who've struggled to understand why their students misbehave. In each instance, it's become clear to me that one source of student misbehavior is, frankly, *teacher* misbehavior. I highlight our provocations here not to blame teachers—indeed, we're enduring way too much of that toxicity already—but to equip professional educators with knowledge of specific practices that often rouse students to misbehave so that we can choose better approaches that, instead, convince students to engage.

Provocation 1. Highlighting Ability Differences

One of the surest ways to get students to disengage or misbehave is to make them feel stupid. Students (and adults) do some pretty dysfunctional things to avoid that experience. They cut class or skip school. They stay up too late the night before a test to manufacture an excuse for their

> One of the surest ways to **get students to disengage** or misbehave is to **make them feel stupid.**

that provoke student misbehavior. Admitting this doesn't absolve students of responsibility for their actions, nor does it make us bad educators if we make a mistake here or there. Rather, acknowledging that we sometimes inadvertently provoke student misbehavior helps us recognize that we're all part of complex relationships in complicated institutions, both of which don't always function optimally for everyone.

Admitting we sometimes create situations that our students experience as negative can move us away from blame-the-victim questions like, "What's wrong with this kid?" to far more powerful inquiries like, "What might I be doing that contributes to this student's decision to misbehave?" That shift is not only brave; it's also more hopeful and productive.

Five Provocations to Avoid

To help educators move from admitting to quitting those practices that incite student misbehavior, let's look at five provocations frequently committed by even the best teachers. Many of us adopted these practices because they seemed like common sense. I'll concede the "common" part, given how pervasive they are, but I'll dispute their "sense" because I've seen time and again that they don't yield the best outcomes.

substandard score. They avoid asking for help because they don't want to illuminate their incompetence. They cut peers down with insults to make themselves feel bigger. They withhold their best effort when faced with challenging academic work because if failure is likely, *choosing* to fail offers an experience of autonomy. And they may even let their dog eat their homework.

Of course, none of us intentionally sets out to make students feel dumb, but we likely do it all the time. We label and track kids on the basis of their perceived ability. We use competition to inspire students to do their best even when academic contests inevitably produce losers. We distribute our questions and attention inequitably, often supplying less higher-order thinking activity to those low-expectancy students we don't believe can handle it. We establish performance-based learning environments that force students to fixate on their scores and rank rather than

on their learning and growth. We post grades and display exemplary work even though some students never see their efforts acknowledged. We praise students for their intelligence rather than for their effort. And we cold call on misbehaving students as a way of leveraging embarrassment to produce compliance.

All these approaches broadcast to students that some are smart, whereas others are, well, not. They compel students to look for ways to avoid situations where they might be labeled "the dumb one." Distracting peers, delaying getting to work, cracking jokes, forgetting one's materials, repeatedly sharpening a pencil, feigning illness, starting a quarrel to get sent out of class—these (mis)behaviors regularly function as covers for insecurity, inadequacy, and incompetence.

But perceived deficiencies in ability aren't the problem—it's the stigma attached to students' academic struggles that provokes student misbehavior. Research has shown that when educators reduce or eliminate experiences that highlight ability differences, student misbehavior tends to decrease (for example, see Ansalone, 2010; King & McInerney, 2014; Oakes, 2005).

So if there's one sure thing you can do to reduce student misbehavior, it's this: Remove all features of the learning environment that attach significance to differences in ability. No significance, no rankings. No rankings, no threats of inadequacy. No threats of inadequacy, no need to react against a toxic learning environment and those within it.

And yes, this means that if we're truly concerned about educating all students to maximize their opportunities in life, we should be very suspicious of any claims about the intent or efficacy of tracking. Put all students

> **Students sometimes act out to expose** the **arbitrariness** of the norms we expect them to obey.

in rigorous learning environments in which challenges are balanced with differentiated supports, and you'll find far fewer discipline problems compared to those schools that provoke resistance through the ranking regimes on which tracking depends. Detracking schools shows kids that we believe in them, and that makes them want to reach for their potential. It also makes them want to behave better.

Provocation 2.
Grading Practice Work

In an effort to assess progress and motivate students to work hard, schools sometimes overstate the need for students to demonstrate their ability. We mark tests, assign quarterly and semester grades, and compute grade-point averages. We then distribute accolades on the basis of how high those scores go.

In so doing, we send the message that our students' performance is our main concern. But for peer-preoccupied youth, such a fixation can be a major source of anxiety, particularly in competitive, high-stakes, test-driven learning environments. When students start asking, "What do I have to do to get an *A*?" or "How do I compare with

my friends?" with greater frequency than they wonder, "What have I learned, and how can I improve?" it's an indicator that they're more invested in playing the school game than in maximizing their learning.

Students faced with such learning environments regularly adopt what's called a *performance goal orientation*. Because it's the answer that matters, not the learning, they will often ask to be spoon-fed the answer rather than try to figure something out on their own. They may be reticent to collaborate with others because helping a peer reduces one's own chance to be the best. They may ridicule classmates' mistakes because instigating insecurity in others is one way of staying on top. These are some of the more insidious and climate-destroying misbehaviors we confront as teachers. Unfortunately, we're often the ones who elicit them.

A prevalent way of provoking such reactions is the practice of grading homework as a summative assessment. We typically assign homework so students can independently practice new knowledge, skills, and concepts. *Practice* is the key word here. But if good practice means making and working through mistakes, why do we assign penalties to those mistakes by making them count toward a final grade? Shouldn't we expect students to temporarily fail when practicing something new?

Grading practice work provokes students to resist academic effort and misbehave as a way of distracting us and others from their insecurities. Further, it overemphasizes performance at the expense of mastery, and it compels students to obsess about social comparisons rather than focus on their own development. Essentially, grading practice tells students, "Don't mess up. Mistakes will be punished." And we

wonder why students don't do their homework!

To remove this provocation, we need to assess practice work *formatively,* restricting the use of summative assessments to those instances when students have already demonstrated they've understood the content. We can accomplish this through proficiency-based grading and the articulation and frequent reinforcement of mastery-goal orientations. After all, for students to believe us when we say that the main reason to engage in academic activities is to learn, we must remove those practices that demonstrate that they'll be punished if they try.

Provocation 3. Establishing Vague Norms

Possibly the most ubiquitous behavioral expectation codified in discipline handbooks—and likely posted on many walls throughout your school— is the command, "Be respectful." Unfortunately, that's as ambiguous as it is succinct. Just whose definition of respect are we privileging? Could one person's respect be another person's disrespect? If so, how can (dis)respectful behavior be *normed*?

Although it makes little sense to establish a behavioral norm based on a contested category, we do it routinely. Many of our students know that their teacher's definition of good behavior doesn't match their experience or what they've been taught in their community or family. But students also know that being successful in teacher-defined spaces—and being allowed to

Most **students experience open seating not as freedom but as** a form of **abandonment.**

stay within them as opposed to being sent out—depends on their regular deference to sometimes-alienating cultural norms. And forced deference is a recipe for resentment and resistance.

The ambiguity of an expectation like "be respectful," coupled with its inevitable arbitrary enforcement, will often provoke misbehavior in students, particularly those who are marginalized as a result of racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, xenophobia, linguistic discrimination, or any other form of oppression. Many students feel chronically disrespected by the lack of responsiveness in our curricula, by

mainstream behavioral expectations, and by the lack of diversity in our teaching force.

Further, those who have limited access to the modes of behavior and communication preferred by the mainstream will sometimes struggle to adhere to vaguely defined expectations established by that mainstream. Their lack of adherence may seem counterproductive—maybe even destructive—but it's much more likely that the added stress of trying to comply with undefined rules or culturally unresponsive expectations is compelling students to "keep it real"

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even when their attempts to remain authentic get them in trouble. Consequently, students' struggle to behave "appropriately" in contexts they had no voice in designing is not an indicator of their moral failing; rather, it may be a signal that our classrooms and schools are not as inclusive as we think they are.

Think about what it's like to travel to a country where everyone drives on the opposite side of the road. The simple act of crossing a street—not to mention driving on one—becomes an exercise in concentration, reframing, and renorming. Until you get the hang of it, your stress rises, your confidence suffers, and your performance on any test associated with street navigation will likely drop even if you were an exemplary driver in your home country. And this happens even where there are signs posted to help you. Imagine adjusting to this alien set of norms with no signs, or maybe just

one—"drive respectfully"!

Likewise, in our classrooms, we tend to establish norms as though they were self-explanatory, and we expect a diverse range of students to adhere to them. But actually, our expectations for students are often arbitrary for many classroom behaviors, including how to talk with peers, when to talk with peers, how to collaborate, whether to collaborate, how to ask for help, when to ask for help, how to look at superiors, whether to look at superiors, and so on. For students to guess wrong is to risk ridicule, labeling, punishment, and ostracism. At the very least, they'll feel ashamed when the behaviors they understand to be normal are labeled by their peers and superiors as inappropriate, rude, or disrespectful. Misbehavior in this context makes a lot of sense.

Our students sometimes act out to expose the arbitrariness of the norms we expect them to obey. They may

also misbehave in an attempt to negotiate new standards that don't require assimilation as the price of acceptance. Such behaviors suggest a desire to contribute to, if not expand, the pool of who belongs in that learning environment. In that sense, the behavior is sort of heroic. But we can provoke further resentment when we view their actions only as disobedience. That's why seemingly benign pronouncements like "be respectful," rather than building a base for cooperation and congeniality, may actually inspire misbehavior.

So what's the alternative? Avoid articulating behavioral norms using vague, disputed, culturally unresponsive, or assimilative categories. Engage your students and their families in determining what is meant by words like *respectful, caring, kind, polite, appropriate,* and *mindful*. Negotiate the meaning of such terms, collaborate with students and community members to generate examples and counterexamples, and frequently revisit and revise whatever behavioral norms you decide on as the year progresses. This invites students into a democratic process that will inspire more expansive ways of taking care of one another. It will also make students want to adhere to norms rather than subvert them.

Provocation 4. Letting Students Choose Their Seats

Over the years, I've seen countless teachers (myself included) permit their students to sit anywhere they choose. Many of us rationalize this open-seating approach by claiming it makes

our students feel less dominated. Choice is supposed to elicit feelings of agency, and self-directed opportunities are supposed to encourage engagement, we argue.

But most students experience open seating not as freedom but as a form of abandonment. To youth dealing with rigid social hierarchies and peer rivalries, a classroom with no set seating arrangement offers only the illusion of choice. We can add insult to injury when students in self-chosen seats become embroiled in interpersonal conflicts or get too chatty while they're supposed to be "on task," and we respond by blaming them for not demonstrating the maturity or the commitment to learning they're supposed to possess. We may even react to their (mis)behavior by assigning seats as a form of collective punishment—or worse, by moving only a few troublemakers to those front and center seats, as though being closer to the teacher is a penalty. Again, this is a set up, and it is guaranteed to provoke student resentment and resistance.

The truth is, open seating isn't democratic, doesn't support student autonomy, and seldom teaches students to self-regulate. The tiny uptick in self-rule a student might experience when choosing a desk is quickly eclipsed when that student must search for the least dangerous seat amid adversaries, bullies, cliques, and even crushes that are always operating in our classrooms. Open seating allows the worst parts of those phenomena to fester. That stresses kids out.

"But my students plead for open seating," you say? Of course they do—or at least *some* of them do. Keep in mind that those who broadcast their desire to sit next to their friends may be doing so to flaunt the fact that they have the richest social network, may

feel entitled to have a classroom dedicated to their desires, and may believe that others can fend for themselves in determining where to sit. Instead of yielding to the more dominant voices in the room, look at your classroom from the perspective of the marginalized. Think of the new kid who mistakenly sits in a popular student's seat and is mocked for doing so. Or imagine the student who was meeting with a counselor to discuss a difficult life issue only to come to class late and be forced to find a desk while surrounded by snickering peers.

Given how difficult it is to navigate racial, gender, socioeconomic, linguistic, and sexual dynamics just to find a place to sit, it's amazing that students transition from hallway drama to classroom focus as well as they do. We can support them in that transition and provide a little predictability and safety when we give them a dependable spot that's always there for them and *always theirs*. Switching seats around every quarter will further maximize heterogeneity, promote intercultural collaboration, prevent distraction, and guarantee exposure to multiple ways of thinking and

> Recognizing that **we sometimes provoke students' actions** doesn't mean we have to accept their misbehaviors.

acting. This fosters equity and cultural responsiveness and helps break down hierarchies of status and intergroup misunderstanding.

Provocation 5. Using Tired, Old Scripts

The following statements don't need much explanation. They're frequently uttered by educators (again, myself included) when confronted with misbehaving students even though saying them almost certainly produces forms of resignation and rage that provoke misbehavior. I'll present each in the form of a question:

- Why do we say, "Do as I say, not as I do"? Do we really think that being brazenly hypocritical adds to our credibility or trustworthiness?

- Why do we glibly claim, "Rules are rules" when responding to a student's rejection of a rule's legitimacy? Have we forgotten that rules are invented, rationalized, and enforced by people who possess the power to do something different?

- When a student asks why a certain rule must be obeyed, why do we just say, "Because I said so"? Do we really believe that raw power moves, which command those of lower rank to obey for obedience's sake, will ever yield anything other than bitterness and opposition?

- And why, when a student complains that a rule or its enforcement is unfair, do we respond with, "Well, life is unfair"? Aren't we really saying, "Welcome to adulthood, where constant confrontation with injustice demands a survival tactic of either cynicism or resignation"? Is that a message we want to send?

Using these old, tired scripts essentially communicates to our students that their experience of school (or of us) is invalid, that their insights or cri-

tiques are unwelcome, and that their resistance is pointless. And responses like that don't produce better relationships and prosocial learning environments; instead, they provoke misbehavior.

Learning from Pushback
At the end of the day, students will want to learn with us when they're confident they won't feel cruddy in the process. Engaging their resistance and analyzing how we may have provoked their misbehaviors will help us take advantage of opportunities to learn about their perspectives, appreciate their experiences, and improve our practices. This approach will produce far more learning for students and teachers alike than punishments and exclusion ever will. Admitting our provocations does not mean lowering standards or giving up control; it means giving up the belief that our current standards and level of control should remain undisputed.

Likewise, recognizing that we sometimes provoke students' actions doesn't mean we have to accept their misbehaviors. But it does mean we have to ask challenging questions about our role in producing the behaviors. Tricky as it may sound, we need to find the middle ground between demanding students comply and complying with student demands. This requires us to recognize that student misbehavior is occasionally legitimate, particularly when we are the ones who provoked it. EL

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How Not to Be a Mountain Troll

For many troubled students, adults have represented danger and uncertainty. Let's change that.

Jeffrey Benson

The Harry Potter books introduced readers to mountain trolls, huge and volatile creatures who roam the landscape, unable to reason with humans, solving all conflicts by knocking people unconscious with their heavy clubs. You don't want to run into a mountain troll.

It's helpful to remember that image when we consider how our most emotionally precarious students have often experienced adults. For many of these students, adults have been like mountain trolls: unpredictable, dangerous, powerful creatures that walk through their lives, seemingly incapable of listening and unable to recognize human emotions. Many emotionally fragile students who withdraw or act out in class may be victims of pervasive and often undocumented abuse. They've lived through such abuse year after year, leading to what Bessel van der Kolk (2014) labels *developmental trauma disorder*, cloaked in various diagnoses. No wonder these students don't trust us. They enter the

arena of the classroom truly guarded.

Some might characterize such students as having a closed mindset (Dweck, 2006) because they seem averse to academic risk taking. Some might label them slow, disorganized, monosyllabic, or resistant. I urge us to think of them instead as students who challenge us. Our task with them is to identify ourselves as the antithesis of mountain trolls: predictable, organized, reasonable, and able to listen.

Gaining vulnerable students' trust is a baseline necessity, something we must do daily—even minute to minute—because there are no tricks or shortcuts. As the saying goes, if it's been a long walk into the woods, it's a long walk out of the woods (Benson, 2014). Our abused students are capable of taking that walk with us, however tentatively, through the landscape of our academic classes. At first, they may just watch us with other students to verify that we are safe guides into learning. Then they'll join us—first lagging behind, then at our side, and in the best cases, pulling us along.

Educators can engender this journey in every moment, from kindergarten through 12th grade, in academic settings. Guiding children like this isn't just the job of therapists or counselors; it's something we can all do. Our opportunities to enhance or diminish students' trust are mundane and innumerable.

Four Trust-Builders

Here are four tried-and-true actions educators can take (or, in one case, *not* take) to foster students' trust—actions that supervisors, evaluators, and staff coaches would do well to support.

1. Recognize every student.

Stand at the door to your classroom as kids walk in. Offer each a handshake; a fist bump; a hug (for the little ones); or at least a simple greeting ("Hello, Marie") and eye contact. For those most in need of trust, set aside two more seconds and add a personal touch: "I like that hat"; "How's your little sister?"; "Glad you made it today."

Teachers working in teams should track "significant conversations," making sure that one adult on the team has reached out to every at-risk student at least once a week to say more than hello. Given that there are scores of adults in a school, the expectation that at least one adult will have a significant conversation with a student at least once a week is a low threshold to meet—well within our capacity and incredibly important.

The practice of noticing students and reflecting what we see back to

that two-second time frame? They have to consider whether they have a question (confused kids may have several); organize their confusion into a question (how's that for a challenge!); and scan the social conditions of the room to make sure they won't be shamed if they pose their question in front of everyone.

All this can't be done in two seconds. Speed literally creates shutdowns, resistance, and acting out behavior. When we slow it all down by asking our question and then mentally

scrutinizing every possible place a rule might be broken.

For instance, we shouldn't ask students to be absolutely quiet for very long or very often. It's just not possible for them to hold up their end of that expectation. We'll end up giving some students a harsh look, others a "Shhh," and others the full force of our frustration, with all the consequences we can impose.

Have a few important rules about the significant safety and respect needs of your class. This is as important for traumatized quiet students as for traumatized students who act out—and for every child who needs to feel safe in a crowded room. Follow through on those rules rigidly because they are rules. Know the steps you have to take to enforce them and make sure school administrators know the part they need to play.

Adults and children have different needs, but **the need to be treated respectfully in front of one's peers transcends age.**

them ("Dave, you look tired today"), even when we can't do more than that, falls within this set of actions. In the same way teachers are mandated reporters of abuse, we can be "mandated noticers" of students' moods. Of course, it's crucial for every student to have one adult that he or she feels safe to seek out, but all teachers can take a few seconds to quietly reflect back to an at-risk student the obvious turmoil, confusion, or joy that child is displaying. A lot of student behavior is a way of getting us to notice, so notice them first.

2. *Provide think time.*
Teachers often conclude a lecture or set of directions with, "Any questions?"—and if no one responds within two seconds, they move right along. What happens in the mind of traumatized students (and others who process information slowly) in

counting to 15, we communicate that the class belongs to everyone. The first time you wait those 15 seconds may seem like an eternity. That alone is proof of our need to slow down because we can certainly afford that small portion of time in the service of our greater mission. You might use the time to scan faces, make eye contact, and smile—communicating that you are anything but a mountain troll.

3. *Minimize your absolutes.*
To be seen as trusted, predictable, organized adults, we need to reliably do what we say we will. We need to follow our part of the classroom rules. So we shouldn't have so many rules that we end up either ignoring the rules, randomly enforcing them, or becoming handcuffed to them all day long in an endless exercise of consistency that makes our job feel like we're playing Whack-A-Mole in the arcade,

Let everything else be a guideline. Work within the child's zone of proximal development. Gauge the climate of the group to assess whether a troublesome behavior might disappear if you ignore it; whether the students involved need a brief reminder; whether this is a teachable moment, a time to practice skills that students need to have reinforced; or whether you need to call home. Determine whether the situations and the personalities involved will allow that kind of intervention to succeed. And do call home with good news, too!

Our most troubled and troubling students will often surprise us with their reactions to the standard give and take of a class. You can't have a rule to predict everything, and you shouldn't. Respond respectfully in the moment, and resist the impulse to come up with a new rule—although for a particular student, you might develop an individual behavior plan.

4. Never shame a student.
In medicine, the motto is, "Above all else, do no harm." In education it must be, "Never shame a student." We can discipline students, correct and coach them, and set high expectations—all without shaming them in front of their peers. When we forget that absolute standard, every student in the class will know that he or she risks being the recipient of our adult frustration.

Students who are already traumatized often have little capacity left to manage adult power. Many traumatized students will try to disappear. Many will take few risks. Sadly, many will behave in a way that provokes our shaming because that's the kind of adult attention they have become accustomed to seeking.

Adults and children have different needs, but the need to be treated respectfully in front of one's peers transcends age. Think about how you would like to be treated by the principal at a staff meeting when he or she isn't pleased with your performance. You would never consider it good practice for the principal to yell at you across the room, hold up your evaluation as an example of what not to do, call on you when you're obviously preoccupied and unprepared to answer, or snap "No" when you make a request.

Just as we would never forget being humiliated in a staff meeting, students never forget shaming moments. Instead, walk over to the student whose behavior is difficult and give redirection. Sometimes, just your presence is enough to alter the student's behavior.

Touchstones

Students with emotional and mental health problems aren't bad people, and they aren't beyond redemption. In too many cases, their anxiety around powerful adults is a well-earned outcome of their life experiences. By committing ourselves to being predictable, organized, reasonable, and able to listen, teachers may represent these students' best hope to grow into their better selves.

It's hard work at times, and we have to hang in—often through many reiterations of the same lesson (Benson, 2012). The good news is that we can establish ourselves as touchstones for all those better selves in our students—in so many ways, every day, every hour. **EL**

Opportunities to **enhance** or diminish **students' trust** are mundane and innumerable.

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Rx

FOR
MENTAL
HEALTH

Schoolwide mental health programs improve students' social and emotional well-being—and promote academic achievement.

John E. Desrochers

Suppose that, browsing through *Educational Leadership,* you came across the following news: A low-cost, evidence-based approach has been shown to boost overall school achievement by 11 percentile points (even more for the lowest-performing students) while improving school climate, student behavior, and teacher satisfaction. How would you react? I imagine most of us would be somewhat skeptical, but intrigued.

In fact, there are many such programs. Operating under a variety of names, they're all comprehensive school efforts to promote the mental, emotional, and behavioral well-being of students. But judging by the underutilization of schoolwide mental health programs in our schools, the effectiveness of this approach appears to be a well-guarded secret.

A Growing Awareness

Each year, about 20 percent of students experience some kind of emotional or behavioral problem (Perou et al., 2013). Some of these students will develop persistent dysfunction, at a high cost of suffering and lost opportunity for themselves, their families, and their communities. These students' behavioral problems also adversely affect their classmates' learning and their teachers' morale.

Fortunately, research has begun to document the fact that many mental health problems can be prevented with early intervention (Hawkins et al., 2015; National Research Council & Institute of Medicine, 2009). In response to such research, schools are providing more extensive mental health services than they did just a few years ago. Traditional services for students who exhibit mental health problems—often provided by school psychologists, counselors, and social workers under the aegis of special education—have been expanding for decades, but a more recent development has been the expansion of mental wellness services to the entire student body. These services aim to *prevent* problems by promoting

continuum of mental, emotional, and behavioral wellness and illness. When I listen to colleagues who are successfully implementing schoolwide mental health programs, I consistently hear them use three words to describe their approach: *comprehensive, integrated,* and *authentic*.

To see these three characteristics in action, consider Long Lots School in Westport, Connecticut, one of the schools in which I work. Long Lots is a suburban elementary school serving 375 K–5 students in an upper-middle-class community. A higher percentage of students in the district perform above goal on statewide testing than in most other districts in Connecticut. Approximately 98 percent of the district's high school students graduate, with nearly all going on to some kind of higher education. Both the school and the Westport School District place a priority on student mental health, including strong schoolwide interventions.

self-awareness, self-management, social skills, and responsible decision making.

It probably comes as no surprise to educators that schoolwide mental health programs improve social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes for students. It may surprise some, however, that students exposed to these programs also do better academically. Research has found that schools with such programs have average achievement test scores 11 percentile points higher than those

that don't provide these programs (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). Education is all about outcomes these days, and academic gains of this magnitude make schoolwide mental health programs worth looking at.

Creating Successful Schoolwide Programs

I've worked my entire professional life to promote student mental health, through teaching, consulting, and counseling students along the entire

Comprehensive Mental Health Services
Comprehensive mental health programs include a multitiered system of supports: (1) a solid base of schoolwide services, (2) targeted small-group programs for at-risk students, and (3) intensive services for students with significant needs. The most important tier of this framework is the first one: schoolwide services delivered to all students. Long Lots School provides a variety of

interventions for all students, whether they show signs of social, emotional, and behavioral problems or not. Here's a brief rundown of the school's programs:

Social skills instruction. All homeroom teachers provide 12–14 social skills lessons a year in areas that include expressing emotions, making and keeping friends, dealing with negative situations, building awareness of

ipate in group meetings with a school psychologist about six times a year, developing a personal connection with an adult who serves as a consistent presence throughout the student's time at the school. The meetings reinforce students' skills in cooperation and peer interaction and also provide an informal screening process for early detection of social or emotional problems.

program offers a special session with middle school staff on the social and emotional development of middle school students, social considerations unique to middle school, and how parents can set up home routines to support their children.

Staff development. Formal and informal staff training in promoting student mental health occurs at faculty meetings, grade-level meetings, and professional development days, as well as through informal collegial consultation.

Comprehensiveness also refers to consistency across classrooms, grades, and schools in a district. Throughout the Westport School District, all elementary schools use essentially the same programs and practices, and many of these approaches extend to middle and high school. When all staff members and students have a common vocabulary, common expectations for behavior, and a common problem-solving approach, these shared understandings create a norm for behavior and expedite communication and problem solving. Rather than simply being a set of *programs*, promoting mental wellness becomes a schoolwide *approach*.

Research has found that schools with whole-school mental health programs have average achievement test scores 11 percentile points higher than those that don't provide these programs.

body language, and practicing assertive communication. Teachers reinforce these skills in everyday classroom life.

Responsive Classroom. All teachers are trained to use Responsive Classroom principles in their classrooms. This approach includes morning meetings and common rules and expectations. Classrooms actively promote positive relationships and collaborative problem-solving; students receive specific instruction in personal responsibility, self-control, cooperation, and assertive communication. A recent study found that students whose teachers more consistently followed the Responsive Classroom principles showed significantly more improvement in math and reading than did students whose teachers were less consistent in their application. The students who were initially the lowest performing showed the biggest improvement (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2014).

Lunch Bunch. All students partic-

Town hall meetings. Several times a year, students and staff members gather for whole-school meetings to discuss schoolwide issues (for example, how end-of-year misbehavior of older students affects everyone). These meetings often feature skits, videos, or other activities conducted by students.

Parent education groups. A school psychologist offers Positive Youth Development meetings to all parents about six times a year. Some sessions are devoted to explaining developmental expectations for students at different ages; others are on topics generated by the parents (for instance, setting up home routines or helping children negotiate friendships). The school offers additional sessions to parents of children with disabilities.

Support for transition to middle school. A variety of programs and activities are offered to parents of students transitioning to middle school. The Positive Youth Development

Integrated Mental Health Services
School districts with successful programs make mental health a priority. Schoolwide commitment, sufficient time to implement the program, an emphasis on positive relationships, and continuous professional development are hallmarks of a mental health program that is well integrated into the fabric of the school. Assistant principal Megan Clarke says,

> You hold social-emotional skill development to the same standard that you hold math and English and sciences; they are of equal importance. We've learned that without social and emotional learning, the academic side isn't as successful.

The district builds the teaching of social and emotional skills into instructional time, and everyone is expected to buy in.

Crucial to the success of any program or practice in school is the active, visible support of administrators. Westport school administrators, from the superintendent to the curriculum directors to the principals, are clearly committed to ensuring that the district's approach to mental health is integrated into the fabric of the school. For example, principals are assigned as leaders for each district committee, including the social skills committee. Administrators conduct town hall meetings and lead school committees such as the safe school climate committee and the Response to Intervention team (including the behavioral part of that process). District administrators have taken leadership in developing the yearly school climate assessment and coordinating a system that requires teachers to be evaluated not only on their traditional academic teaching skills, but also on goals they have developed specifically for improvements in areas measured by the school climate survey.

As school psychologist Amy Glazer sees it, commitment to an integrated system "needs to come from the top down." When administrators visit a classroom specifically to observe a social skills lesson, it "sends a message that it's really critically important to the learning of the child."

Authentic Mental Health Services

When teachers describe a program or instructional approach as *authentic*, they mean that it enables students to employ that approach in personally meaningful ways. In the context of mental health, that means teaching real-world problem-solving skills.

Teacher Kerin Tighe reminds students throughout the day, as the appropriate contexts come up, to apply the social, emotional, and behavioral strategies and lessons that they've been taught. She asks, "How can you use these skills to solve this academic problem?" She sometimes stops everything to apply a previously learned lesson or strategy to a situation as it emerges, prompting students to use the skills they've learned in an authentic way.

When you walk into Ms. Tighe's classroom, don't be surprised to be greeted by a student: "Hello, my name is James. We're working on a science project. How can I help you?" A different student is assigned as greeter every week,

providing authentic opportunities for students to practice the social skills they have been taught.

Stay to watch the science lesson, and you'll hear the teacher not only instruct the class on how to use a magnifying glass, but also coach them on how to use *I* statements and other skills appropriately to resolve any potential interpersonal conflicts in using it (such as who gets to go first). Any student feeling frustrated with the social or academic demands of the activity may go to a special chair in the classroom, use previously taught calming strategies that are listed in a poster on the wall, and return to the science lesson when ready to do his or her best work.

Across the curriculum, students receive reminders of appropriate behaviors (eye contact, active listening, disagreeing in a kind and respectful way, and so on). These routines are taught ahead of time. Kerin Tighe maintains that "if we act proactively, we don't have to respond reactively. We prevent problems from happening."

The Right Kind of Investment

Westport School District has not expended a lot of money on buying programs; its investment has been in its people. The district starts by hiring the best people it can find, and then it provides systematic, sustained professional development for everyone.

With the exception of Responsive Classroom, all the social, emotional, and behavioral programs in this school and district are homegrown. Faculty members develop the programs and train one another, thus building and sustaining capacity. Megan Clarke explains the approach:

> I think the misconception is that it costs money, and it doesn't. If you have one or two really great trained people in-house, you can train your own. Maybe up front it may take a little bit to get started, to learn more about it. But once you have those in-house trainers, the cost is minimal.

For example, every summer, teachers from the district provide four days of training in Responsive Classroom to all new teachers and lead workshops for veteran staff members who want an update or refresher. Teacher leaders in each school are available for coaching. School-employed mental health professionals (school psychologists, counselors, and social workers) receive specific training in social, emotional, and behavioral development on inservice training days.

Of course, there *are* real costs involved. For example, the district prioritizes its spending so that it can meet professional standards in staffing levels for mental health personnel. Each elementary school in the district has two school psychologists.

Westport Public Schools has been slowly building its capacity for more than a decade, and the district continues to refine its approach. Not

"In the old days, teachers operated on their own little islands. Now the **school just seems** like a **happier** place."

every district will be able to move directly to this level of comprehensiveness, integration, and authenticity. Those who hope to move in this direction would need to make a long-term commitment. Megan Clarke says, "If it's important enough to the district and the parents and the other constituents, I really think that it can be done."

Mental Health as Part of the Curriculum

Mirroring the results so frequently reported in the research, Megan Clarke describes the outcomes of Long Lots Elementary School's commitment to social, emotional, and behavioral well-being:

It's not just about the students; it enhances the positive school culture among the teachers as well. In the old days, teachers operated on their own little islands. Now the school just seems like a happier place. People are encouraged because our behavior issues are down; there's more time to actually teach; and kids feel connected to their teachers, their school, and their administrators. You'll see more administrators and specialists interacting with kids outside of their classrooms or outside of their roles.

Research has shown that this connection to school is a powerful protector against mental, emotional, and behavioral problems (Resnick et al., 1997). The district enjoys very high academic outcomes, as evidenced by above-average test scores and high rates of graduation and postsecondary education. In the social, emotional, and behavioral realm, the district also gets high marks from parents, students, and staff on its yearly school climate survey.

There is no magic bullet, and it requires hard work. But when a school provides its students with comprehensive, integrated, and authentic mental health services, performance improves significantly across the board. Supporting students' mental wellness creates significant improvements in school climate, student behavior, and academic performance. It can also help prevent mental illness—and change children's and families' lives.

More and more schools are realizing that fostering mental wellness equips students with the skills they need to be successful in an increasingly competitive global environment. It's time to make mental wellness part of every school's curriculum. It can be done. **EL**

Author's note: Schools that want to start or expand schoolwide mental health programs can find evidence-based programs and practices, as well as additional resources, on the websites of the National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices (www.nrepp.samhsa.gov) and the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (www.casel.org).

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ADHD
From Stereotype to Science

Forget Dennis the Menace and other outdated stereotypes about kids with ADHD. New research reveals the breadth and complexity of the disorder.

Thomas E. Brown

In almost every classroom, at least one or two students are identified as having attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Sometimes the parents mention at the start of the term that their child has been diagnosed with ADHD; sometimes word comes from a 504 plan or a teacher who previously had that student in class. Usually the ADHD label is taken as a warning that the student is likely to be difficult to teach and manage, that he or she will be more restless and disruptive than most other students in the class.

However, this image of the student with ADHD as Dennis the Menace is an outdated stereotype. Some students with ADHD *are* restless and disruptive, but many others with this disorder are quieter, more distracted and passive, and not very productive or consistent in their work.

Ever since it was first described in the medical literature in 1902, the disorder, now referred to as ADHD, has been considered essentially a behavioral problem. For a long time, it was seen as just a problem of hyperactive little boys who couldn't sit still, wouldn't stop talking, and frustrated their parents and teachers with chronic misbehavior. The term *attention deficit* wasn't added to the name until 1980. Since then, there have been substantial changes in our scientific understanding of ADHD that are important for educators to know.

An Update on the Basic Facts

These facts are now well-established in the scientific research.

■ ADHD is a developmental impairment of the brain's self-management system that includes problems with getting motivated, organized, and started on necessary tasks; focusing on what needs to be attended to and shifting focus when needed; managing alertness and sleep; sustaining effort to complete tasks; processing and outputting information efficiently; managing emotions; using short-term working memory; and monitoring one's actions to fit the setting and avoid excessive impulsivity (see fig. 1 on p. 55).

■ All of us experience characteristics of ADHD from time to time; those with ADHD simply have more chronic and impairing difficulty with these problems. ADHD isn't an all-or-nothing situation like pregnancy, where one either is or isn't pregnant. ADHD is more like depression—it comes in small, medium, and large levels of severity. Everyone feels down sometimes, but being unhappy for a couple of days doesn't warrant a diagnosis of clinical depression. The diagnosis is reserved for those who are significantly and persistently impaired by their symptoms.

■ Although some children and adults with ADHD have significant problems with hyperactive and excessively impulsive behavior, many with the disorder don't display such behavior. The majority of those who
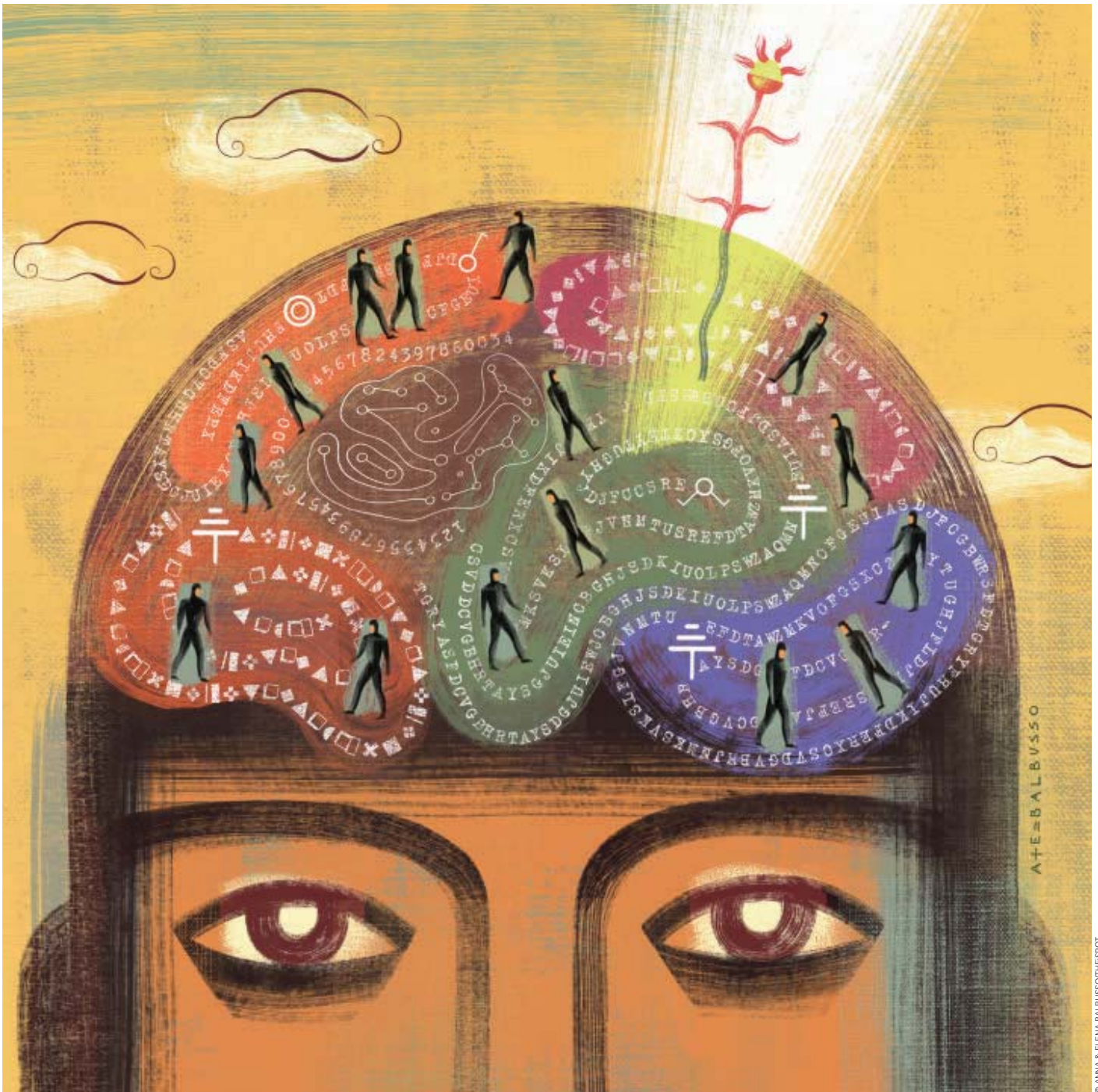
were "hyper" as children outgrow most of their hyperactivity in early adolescence but continue to have chronic difficulty with inattention and related problems.

■ ADHD is highly heritable; it runs in families. Twenty-five percent of children with ADHD have a parent with ADHD, and 30 percent have a brother or sister with ADHD. Twenty studies comparing identical twins yielded a heritability index of 0.75, which means that most of the

ADHD is found in people **across the full range of intellectual abilities.**

variability in developing ADHD is accounted for not by family environment but by inherited vulnerabilities (Faraone et al., 2005). Subsequent studies have demonstrated that this vulnerability isn't caused by any one gene; it's caused by a large number of genes in combination.

■ Longitudinal and other imaging research has demonstrated significant differences in brain development and connectivity of children with ADHD compared with typically devel-

oping children of similar age (Shaw et al., 2007). Although much brain development is similar in the two groups, some areas of the brain that are important for self-management tend to mature about three to five years later in those with ADHD.

■ It was once thought that a child with ADHD would outgrow the disorder before reaching the age of about 14. However, longitudinal studies have shown that approximately 70 percent of those who have ADHD in childhood will continue to have some ADHD impairments at least into late adolescence (Biederman, Petty, Evans, Small, & Faraone, 2010; Biederman, Petty, Monuteaux, et al., 2010.) For many but not all, the impairments of ADHD continue throughout life.

■ ADHD is sometimes apparent during the preschool years, but it's often not noticeable until the child enters elementary school or advances into middle school, where there's no longer just one teacher who provides structure and control for most of the day. Some children don't demonstrate significant ADHD impairments until they enter high school or move away from home and must deal with challenges of more independent life in college or employment. Those with later onset of ADHD can be fully as impaired as those with earlier onset.

■ ADHD has nothing to do with how intelligent a person is. ADHD is found in people across the full range of intellectual abilities.

■ Emotions play two important roles in ADHD, neither of which is reflected in current diagnostic criteria. First, conscious and unconscious emotions play a crucial role in the problems of motivation and self-regulation that are pervasive in ADHD. Second, many people with ADHD have chronic difficulty recognizing and managing the expression of their emotions.

■ ADHD is not just one or two specific symptoms. It's a complex syndrome, a cluster of impairments that often appear together, although some aspects of the disorder may be more or less prominent in any particular person. There are many differences among those with ADHD, even among those of similar age; people with the disorder are not all alike in either their strengths or their difficulties.

■ Most people with ADHD also have difficulties resulting from one or more co-occurring disorders. The incidence of learning disorders, anxiety and mood disorders, sleep disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorders, substance use disorders, and autism spectrum disorders is considerably higher among those with ADHD than in the general population. Sometimes the co-occurring disorder is recognized, whereas the ADHD is not.

■ Medication doesn't cure the disorder, but for about 8 of 10 people with ADHD, carefully managed medication significantly improves the symptoms. These medications aren't like an antibiotic that may cure an infection; they're more like eyeglasses that improve vision while they're worn.

The Central Mystery of ADHD

There's one fact about ADHD that's most puzzling: The symptoms are situationally variable. That is, people who struggle with chronic ADHD problems may have none of those problems when they engage in a particular activity or task.

Although they struggle to focus on their schoolwork, students with ADHD may demonstrate a remarkable ability to focus and work effectively when they're playing a sport, creating art or music, doing mechanical tasks, or playing a favorite video game.

Some students with ADHD are restless and disruptive, but many **others** who suffer from this disorder **are quieter and more distracted.**

Although they may not be able to keep directions for assignments in mind or retain basic facts learned in social studies or math, they may have an incredible ability to recall the statistics about their favorite baseball team or the lyrics of popular songs.

When asked why they can focus so well when it comes to these few activities, students with ADHD often reply that it depends on whether the task is interesting—that if it's not, they just can't stay tuned. Although this may be true for everyone—that we focus better on things that interest us—there's an important difference here. Most of us can make ourselves focus on something we recognize as important, even though it's pretty boring. For those with ADHD, doing so is much more difficult.

A patient once remarked to me that having ADHD "is like having erectile dysfunction of the mind. If the task you're trying to do is something that really interests you, you can perform.

But if the task you are trying to do is not intrinsically interesting, you can't make it happen." Although ADHD often appears to be a problem with willpower, it's not. It's a problem with the dynamics of the chemistry of the brain.

When people are faced with a task that really interests them—because it appears to offer pleasure to them *at that moment* or seems to ward off some imminent unpleasantness they want to avoid—that perception, conscious or unconscious, instantly changes the chemistry of the brain. This motivation process is *not* under our voluntary control.

FIGURE 1. Executive Functions Impaired in ADHD

Executive Functions (work together in various combinations)					
Organizing, prioritizing, and activating to work	Focusing, sustaining, and shifting attention to tasks	Regulating alertness, sustaining effort, and processing speed	Managing frustration and modulating emotions	Utilizing working memory and accessing recall	Monitoring and self-regulating action
1. Activation	2. Focus	3. Effort	4. Emotion	5. Memory	6. Action

Source: From *Attention Deficit Disorder: The Unfocused Mind in Children and Adults* (p. 22), by Thomas E. Brown, 2005, New Haven: Yale University Press. Copyright © 2005 by Thomas E. Brown.

ADHD and Reading

The motivation problem is often apparent in reading. Students with ADHD often report that they may understand a text as they read it—they can decode all the words and understand what's being said. Yet just a few minutes later, they don't have the foggiest idea what they just read. To extract the meaning of the text and retain it, they often have to reread it several times. One student with ADHD reported,

> When I'm reading something that's not really interesting to me, it's like I'm licking the words and not chewing them. I know what all the words mean as I'm reading them, but they just don't stick inside my head. I don't really digest them. That's why I have to write notes while I'm reading or use a highlighter or else just read the same page over several different times.

ADHD and Memory

Many students with ADHD have adequate or even exceptionally good long-term storage memory. They may be able to recite extended song lyrics or explain in detail the storyline of a movie they saw years ago. Yet they may have great difficulty keeping in mind the directions the teacher just gave for an assignment. During class discussions, students with ADHD may raise their hands to answer a question the teacher has posed and then forget what they intended to say if the teacher calls on someone else first.

Their problem isn't with long-term storage memory; the memory problem in ADHD is more with short-term working memory, the ability to keep one bit of information in mind while thinking about or doing something else.

Students with ADHD will sometimes study for a test the night before the test is given. A parent may quiz them until they have all the material clearly in mind. They walk into class the next day expecting to get a really good grade, only to find that a big chunk of what they knew so well the night before has suddenly evaporated. They can't recall the information when they need it for the test, but a few hours or days later, something jogs their memory and the information is back again.

It's not that the students hadn't learned it; they simply weren't able to retrieve the information from memory when they needed it. Working memory is the search engine of the brain. Those with ADHD often suffer from chronic difficulties with their working memory even though their longer-term storage memory works very well.

ADHD and Writing

Of all the primary academic tasks, typically the most difficult one for students with ADHD is written expression. In the earliest grades, the student with ADHD may be exceptionally slow in doing any written work. In the time it takes most other students to put the heading on their paper and copy the first three sentences from the board, the student with ADHD may still be working on

getting his or her name and date in the heading. When writing tasks get more lengthy and complex in the higher grades, students with ADHD often report that they have many good ideas for what to write, but it takes them forever to put their thoughts into organized sentences and paragraphs.

Written expression makes more demands on the executive functions that are often impaired in ADHD than do reading and writing. The words and numbers found in texts and math problems provide a structure and an organization to assist the reader, whereas written expression requires students to organize, prioritize, sequence, and elaborate their thoughts in a structure they need to create. Slow processing speed is often characteristic of students with ADHD.

What Can Educators Do?

Assessment and diagnosis of ADHD usually require a licensed physician, psychologist, or other medical specialist who has been trained to recognize the disorder and design appropriate treatment. But classroom teachers and school administrators have an important role to play.

Educators who are aware of our new understandings about ADHD are better equipped to identify students who may be struggling with this disorder. When a student demonstrates impairments that may be related to ADHD, the teacher can describe the student's difficulties in detail and encourage the family to present this information to their pediatrician or other specialist. Such early identification can prevent students with ADHD from becoming demoralized by repeated experiences of frustration and failure and can ensure that they receive the assessment and support they need to succeed. ⊞

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Resources for Educators About ADHD

Websites

Understood (https://Understood.org). This website, created by 15 nonprofit organizations, offers parents and teachers extensive and easily accessible information about attention and learning problems.

The National Resource Center on ADHD (www.help4adhd.org), a clearinghouse for the latest evidence-based information on ADHD, is funded by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Books

Bright Kids Who Can't Keep Up by Ellen Braaten and Brian Willoughby (Guilford Press, 2014).

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A New Understanding of ADHD in Children and Adults: Executive Function Impairments by Thomas E. Brown (Routledge, 2013).

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How to Reach and Teach Children with ADD/ADHD: Practical Techniques, Strategies, and Interventions (2nd ed.) by Sandra F. Reif (Jossey-Bass/Wiley, 2005).

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The 5 Literacies of

Mindful Learning

When we show students how to be present and focused, they not only learn better, but they also live better.

Daniel Rechtschaffen and Taylor Rechtschaffen

When we ask educators and parents what they really want for kids, it's rare that their first choice is "to be proficient in algebra." What they most hope for is for their children to be successful, to be happy, and to live good and meaningful lives.

If we begin with the premise that we want to support our students' well-being, we'll likely teach in a very different way. We'll focus on helping students learn mindsets and approaches that are foundational for their healthy development, both for academic success and simply to be good people. Through approaches like mindfulness, we'll teach students to be "literate" in five key areas: their bodies, their minds, their hearts, their community, and the world around them.

This Is Your Brain on Mindfulness

Before we get into how to teach mindfulness, let's talk about what mindfulness is—and its benefits. To practice mindfulness means to orient yourself toward your present-moment experience with attention and compassion—to be with what is, as it is. Research is clear on the advantages of mindfulness for adults. Now studies are showing that when students practice mindfulness, their stress, depression, and anxiety decrease, while their impulse control, emotional regulation, happiness, and empathy increase (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015).

Of course, it's great to help kids be happier, but you may be asking where this approach fits into an 8th grade math class. Amazingly, research indicates that mindfulness and social-emotional learning are profound drivers in academic success. A 2013 study found that mindfulness practice helped students raise their reading comprehension test scores 16 percent as well as build their working memory and limit their distracting thoughts (Mrazek et al., 2013). The Collaborative for Academic and Social Emotional Learning, working with eight major U.S. school districts, found that its interventions helped raise academic scores by 11 percent. It's not that mindfulness helps students memorize math tables. Such academic achievements are the result of practices that boost self-awareness, focus attention, and reduce stress (Durlak et al., 2011).

Many teachers hesitate to give time to mindfulness or social-emotional learning because our schedules are already overflowing. But these modalities aren't some intervention hoisted onto an already overburdened day; they're foundational ways of being that can be taught through short practice sessions. When we teach students the art of attention, they build executive functioning to maintain focus on the task at hand. Teachers don't need to wrestle the class back to a topic again and again. Most teachers incorporating mindfulness in their classrooms get much more done because their students are present—really present—emotionally regulated, and ready to learn.

their entire bodies while they inhale, then fully relax as they exhale. After practicing this a few times, ask them to stop tightening up but to notice if there is any extra tension any place in their bodies. Draw their attention to that place as they inhale, then tell them to let all the tension go from there with a few relaxing exhales. Have students describe their physical sensations as they do these exercises, helping them develop a literacy of the body.

Cognitive Literacy

Once students are somatically present, work with attention, distraction, and thought processes. Attention is a skill just as playing piano is. We'd never get upset with a student who played piano poorly if we had never taught the student how.

Help students build their attention muscles. Start by teaching kids to focus their attention on their breath, a particular spot on the wall, or anything happening in the present moment. Students learn to watch how their attention gets distracted by thoughts, sounds, and other stimuli. Each time they bring their attention back to the focus they've chosen, they build their muscles of attention and strengthen their executive functioning.

Once students have built their attention muscles, they begin to become aware of how self-critical thoughts and judgments toward others—as well as self-compassionate and prosocial thoughts—surface in their minds. Teachers can help students realize when they are caught up in self-judging thought spirals and shift their awareness to self-compassion. It's like giving them instructions to operate a vehicle. But this vehicle is their mind, in which they can find balance and health.

Try This: We tell students that our

Five Literacies

Any educator can use fun and accessible practices to foster a school environment where students' well-being is a top priority. Instead of always telling students to pay attention, we can guide them to "play attention" or teach them breathing techniques that help them manage their emotions when flooded with intense feelings. Let's look at five areas of awareness and some practices that strengthen each area.

Somatic Literacy

Anyone who teaches knows that even if students are physically in the room, that doesn't mean they're "present" and attentive. For students to learn, they have to feel present in their bodies. Students are often hyperaroused—with so much energy they're popping out of their seats—or hypoaroused—so spaced out that we have to spend the whole class trying to draw their attention back to the subject at hand.

Some students live with trauma or come from unsafe living situations. These kids have natural defense mechanisms that put their bodies and nerves on high alert—and that high-stakes testing only exacerbates. Our executive functioning gets hijacked by stress and trauma, shutting down when tested or pushed. Whether in a privileged or a low-income school, all students have their own stressors and need to learn how to regulate their nervous systems. So we begin mindfulness training by helping students land in their bodies and feel comfortable and safe in their skins.

Educators so often tell students to calm down or stop fidgeting. But how often do we show them practices that help them truly settle? Engaging movement practices, relaxation techniques, and other strategies can help all kids get their bodies and systems ready to learn.

Try This: Have students deliberately tighten their fists, faces, and

brains are like a popcorn maker—but instead of making popcorn, brains make thoughts. Have students put a hand on their stomachs and feel their breath as they inhale and exhale. Every time they notice they get distracted by a thought or sound in the room, they pop up their hand. Then they bring the hand back to the stomach and their focus back to their breath, building their attention muscles.

Emotional Literacy

Emotions can be a sticky business. One 4th grade student told us that when she feels nervous, it's like there's bubble gum stuck in her hair. Anxiety, sadness, anger, and even joy or curiosity can be overwhelming, especially when you're expected to sit still and follow directions for hours. What's a student supposed to do when he or she becomes filled with sadness or anger in the middle of class?

Once they've learned to feel comfortable in their bodies and have built the muscles of attention, students can learn the language of emotions. Many schools tell students to take three deep breaths when they're angry—but mindfulness practices go beyond that. We invite students to mentally observe their ruminating thoughts or strong emotions and then to actually feel the correlating physical sensations in their bodies.

Students learn what emotions feel like physically and how emotions are connected to their thoughts. With this inner knowledge, they start to develop impulse control and emotional regulation. They become aware of their thoughts as independent from the impulse to act on them. Slowly, through mindfulness practice, they put a lag time between emotion, thought, and action, which greatly improves their success. They learn to name their emotions and—instead of automatically reacting—use strategies to find balance. Students also develop empathy, gratitude, and joy. Research

shows that when students practice mindfulness, their dysregulation reduces and their well-being rises (Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, & Davidson, 2015).

Try This: Have students picture in their minds a time when they were frustrated. (It's better to probe for a time they felt "a little frustrated" rather than sad or angry, because remembering stronger emotions might lead a child to call up a traumatic memory.) Guide students to notice what their bodies feel like when they're picturing something frustrating. Then have them inhale, noticing where the stress is in their bodies as they remember the frustration and, on each exhale, relax their body, loosening that place of stress.

This practice is a training ground. A student who gets comfortable doing this will have better mental resources to regulate himself or herself in emotionally stressed times at school. When a conflict arises or students are overwhelmed with emotion, remind them to check into their bodies, feel where the tension is, and regulate themselves with each exhale. We can bring this practice into our classrooms before tests, after transitions, or during other events that may bring on a flurry of feelings.

Social Literacy

Social-emotional literacy is dearly needed in our world, and certainly in schools. For instance, we visited one 6th grade classroom to lead mindfulness trainings. The teacher told us the group had been experiencing lots of exclusion and meanness among students. When we sat down with

the students and invited them to each picture someone they really liked and say in their heads, "Just like me, this person wants to be happy," students found this easy and pleasant. But when asked to do the same thing picturing a person who annoyed them, most said it wasn't easy. Students had amazing explanations of how their hearts

Attention is a skill just as playing the piano is. We'd never get upset with a student who played piano poorly if we never taught the student how.

literally tightened up as they tried, not wanting to open to this person. We then suggested they each imagine the person they were annoyed with winning an award and see whether they could feel excited for them. One student said, "Wow, I didn't realize I could do that. I felt good for him even though I don't like him. That was weird."

Through such practices, we can teach kids the inner mechanisms for forgiveness, acceptance, and kindness. When we bring mindfulness into social interactions, it opens our eyes to really understanding others and our impact on them. Kids face so much bullying and social friction, and rarely do we teach them how to understand the roots of such friction. Using mindfulness, with some guidance, students begin to inquire into themselves, asking questions like, *Why do I include some people and exclude others? Why do I judge? Why can't I just accept those who are outside my realm of understanding?*

Try This: Sit with students in a circle and settle into your mindfulness practice, then have each student mentally check in to identify how he or she feels right now. Then, play Flow and Tell. Around the circle, each student says what he or she is aware of in the present moment. Gently tell students

not to talk about what happened in the past or what will happen in the future, but just name what they're experiencing right now—what they feel, hear, see, or what emotions they notice. This practice offers students an experience of community authenticity.

Ecological Literacy
We tell our students to be good stewards of the earth, but this can seem like an abstract idea if we don't give them ways to feel their place in the greater ecosystems. An effective

think this food came from? Through exploring this question, students will learn how rain, soil, sun, and other natural forces were needed to grow this food. They'll build understanding about the farmers, truckers, and other workers who labor to feed people.

Don't Forget the Adults
In a sense, by exploring how to help students develop mindfulness, we've gotten ahead of ourselves. Adults need stress relief, well-being, focused attention, and the other benefits of

would have no problems: Didn't our kindergarten teachers tell us again and again to think of others and do the right thing? We've all heard ethical lessons—but something keeps us from acting on them.

Mindfulness can be a pathway to being the human beings we want to be. First we can cultivate our own attention, self-awareness, and compassion. Then we can help students do so. Yes, we hope this will bring them academic success. But more than that, we believe it will make the world a better place. **EL**

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Most **teachers incorporating mindfulness** in their classrooms tell us they **get more done.**

mindfulness practice begins with self-awareness, extends out to understanding others and our community, and eventually opens awareness to larger systems and the natural world. It helps students understand that they aren't the center of the universe, that they have a responsibility to make their world a healthier place for all.

Ecological literacy can be practiced by going into nature and experiencing the elements that living creatures rely on to live. Or students can sit in their classrooms looking at a pencil and discuss together where elements in it come from. Students can eventually extend their kindness and attention to all things; they can learn how the world affects them and how their actions affect the world. Through understanding interconnectedness, we empower students to be mindful ambassadors in the world.

Try This: Invite students to understand our interconnectedness. Offer a raisin, tangerine, or other small natural food. Give kids an opportunity to slow their eating down so they can be mindful of the taste and the sensory experience. Then ask, Where do you

mindfulness as much as or more than students do. So when we integrate mindfulness into a school, we begin with the adults.

We saw the importance of this when a principal called us the day before a professional development training to say that this might not be the best day because assessments were due and all teachers were on edge. We replied there could be no better day for mindfulness training. The group of teachers and administrators spent much of that training naming their stress, identifying what stress felt like, and using the methods described here to regulate their emotions, work with ruminating thoughts, and find balance amid the storm. This helped prevent stress from creating a toxic working environment and helped faculty remain present to themselves and their community.

Teaching mindfulness is easier when adults embody compassionate presence. We know it doesn't work to yell at students to be calm; punish them so they'll be kind; or simply tell them to be relaxed, focused, and empathetic. If it worked to tell kids how we want them to be, the world

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SELF-INJURY
What Educators Need to Know

Students who cut themselves to cope with painful emotions need support. Here's how schools can help.

Sylvia J. Krinsky and Nancy Rappaport

For many students, the transition to young adulthood comes with intense emotional experiences, such as the thrill of a first love and the pain of a first heartbreak. When learning how to cope with this new phase of life, some teens find themselves overwhelmed. Many harmful behaviors, including self-injury, stem from these teens' frantic efforts to relieve a painful emotional state.

Data from anonymous surveys reveal that about 15–20 percent of teenagers have engaged in self-injurious behavior, such as cutting (Walsh, 2012). Although self-injury is not necessarily a suicide attempt, it puts a student in a higher risk group for suicide (Linehan, 1993; Walsh, 2012). That's one reason it's important to understand self-injury and how to address it.

Why Do Students Engage in Self-Injury?

The first step to stopping self-injury is having a shared understanding of why these behaviors occur. Many people engage in this behavior as an attempt to relieve intense emotional pain. In the moment, cutting is their best effort to manage emotional distress. However, alternative strategies are available and effective. Dialectical behavioral therapy, for example, is a cognitive

behavioral therapy developed by Marsha Linehan (1993) that specifically targets self-injury.

Dialectical behavioral therapy teaches *distress tolerance skills* (discussed in Linehan, 2015, pp. 420–492), alternate ways of dealing with emotional pain without engaging in risky behavior. Most people use distress tolerance skills without knowing it. Common examples include taking a deep breath when stressed, going for a run after a frustrating day, or venting to a friend. Distraction, a very common distress tolerance skill, can include watching TV, listening to music, doing puzzles, reading, or engaging in any other enjoyable activity. Imagining a safe place or doing relaxation exercises, such as progressive muscle relaxation, may also be helpful. Experiences that engage the senses, such as using a favorite hand lotion or eating a small piece of a favorite food, can also increase self-soothing. A small piece of high-quality chocolate can be very comforting!

If a student who is self-injuring is already engaged in outpatient therapy, school staff must coordinate with the student and his or her therapist to ensure access to distress tolerance skills at school. For example, a student may need access to a quiet place and a portable music player that he or she can use when overwhelmed to calm down and then return to class.

How Should Schools Approach a Student Who Is Self-Injuring?

When school staff members discover that a student is self-injuring, they should be calm and prepared. Designate a trained staff person who is responsible for meeting with the student and assessing the situation. A sample school protocol for determining what steps to take can be found in *Treating Self-Injury: A Practical Guide* by Barent W. Walsh (2012, pp. 297–298).

It's important to assess the type of self-injury as well as its frequency and severity (Walsh, 2012). High-risk self-injury includes severe self-injury requiring medical attention (usually stitches) and self-injury that occurs

Many harmful behaviors, including self-injury, **stem from teens' frantic efforts to relieve a painful emotional state**.

on the face, breasts, or genitals. Given the link between suicide and self-injury, the counselor should assess suicide risk by asking the student about suicidal ideation, history of suicide attempts, history of psychiatric treatment, family history of mental

illness, access to firearms, substance use, sexual risk-taking, and symptoms of other mental illnesses, as well as any recent losses, including deaths of family or friends, break-ups of romantic relationships, or recent suicides in the community (Fowler, 2012; Linehan, 1993). It is equally important to ask about protective factors, including reasons for living and community supports (Fowler, 2012; Miller, Rathus, & Linehan, 2007).

A student with high risk of self-injury or at imminent risk of suicide should be evaluated immediately in an emergency room. However, a student who is not suicidal and has been self-injuring to cope with distressing emotions would benefit more from a

referral to outpatient treatment. If an outpatient referral is recommended, it is important to follow up with the student's parents or guardian to make sure the student is connected to the appropriate resources.

When contacting parents, emphasize that the student is not in trouble. The purpose of the phone call is to ensure that the student has adequate support. It may be helpful to allow the student to be present during this phone call so that he or she knows exactly what information was communicated. If the parent or guardian repeatedly doesn't follow through on recommendations for mental health treatment, the school administration may consider filing for medical neglect.

What Kind of Counseling Should Staff Provide?

A designated adjustment counselor or school psychologist with expertise in self-injury might meet regularly with students who self-injure or answer questions students and staff have about self-injury. These two examples show how a counselor might address self-injury.

A Student in Distress

Susan is a 13-year-old girl who has been meeting with the school adjustment counselor every month because of trouble with schoolwork and arguments with her father. During their session, Susan discloses that after her most recent fight with her father, she cut herself on her left wrist with a razor blade. She did not need stitches.

ADJUSTMENT COUNSELOR (AC): How often have you been cutting yourself?

SUSAN (S): I started a few months ago. At first, it was just a few times, but now it's whenever I'm upset. I just get so angry,

Video Bonus

Nancy Rappaport shares additional insights into self-injury at http://youtu.be/ZCC1yvq5uGg

I don't know what to do. I've never told anyone.

AC: Well, I'm really glad you told me. Have you done anything else to hurt yourself?

S: Like what?

AC: Like burning yourself, pulling your hair, or picking your skin?

S: No. . . . Well, sometimes I pick at scabs.

AC: Have you ever been so upset you wished you were dead?

S: Well after one really bad fight, I went to bed and wished I never woke up.

AC: You must have been feeling pretty bad. Do you feel like that now?

S: No. That was a few months ago. But I have been feeling pretty sad since school started. I can't concentrate on my schoolwork, and I never want to go out with my friends anymore. Nothing feels fun.

AC: Sounds like you've been feeling depressed. Have you ever thought about suicide?

S: No, I would never do that.

AC: Why not?

S: Well, because then I wouldn't have a future. I really just want to go to college and move out of my house. Then my dad can't boss me around anymore.

AC: I think that makes a lot of sense. Have you been drinking alcohol or using drugs?

S: No way!

AC: Do you or your parents have a gun at home?

S: No.

AC: Have you ever seen a counselor outside of school?

S: No. *(pause)* Are you going to call my parents?

AC: Don't worry, you're not in trouble. But I need to call your parents to get you some help. Would you like to be here while I call?

S: OK.

The adjustment counselor then notifies Susan's mother with Susan in the room. She outlines her concern, emphasizing that this is not a disciplinary phone call. Susan's mother agrees for Susan to see a therapist outside school. They plan a follow-up call in one week, and Susan agrees to connect back with the school adjustment counselor later that week.

Concerned Friends

Three girls come to the school adjustment counselor with concerns about their friend, Vanessa, who has made an increasingly dark and despondent series of posts on social media following the breakup of her first romantic relationship. They know that Vanessa has cut herself in the past, but they have never told anyone because they were sworn to secrecy. The adjustment counselor pulls Vanessa aside before her next class:

ADJUSTMENT COUNSELOR (AC): Don't worry, you aren't in trouble. I just wanted to check in and see how you're doing.

VANESSA (V): *(guarded)* Why? I'm fine.

AC: Well, a few of your friends told me they were worried about you. They noticed you were really sad, and they've been worried about some comments you posted on social media. They also said that you've been cutting yourself.

V: Who told you? They promised they wouldn't tell! They're not my friends anymore!

AC: I think they care about you too much to let you go through this alone. I read some of your posts, and it sounds like you've been really down.

V: *(tearful)* Yeah.

AC: Have you been so sad you wish you were dead?

V: Sometimes.

AC: Have you thought of suicide?

V: *(Nods)*

AC: What have you thought about?

V: I have some pills set aside at home for if things get any worse *(starts to cry)*.

AC: I'm really glad you told me how bad things have been. This is really serious.

V: Are you going to call my mom?

AC: Yes. This is an emergency, and you need to be seen in the emergency room.

Vanessa's mother is contacted and reports that she has also been concerned. Vanessa is seen in the emergency room and then admitted to the inpatient unit and connected with an outpatient therapist after she is discharged.

What Else Can Schools Do?

Self-injury can be stigmatizing, and it's important to have a calm, non-judgmental stance when discussing self-injury with students. Never call students manipulative or make statements like, "You're doing this for attention!" Instead, reflect back the student's distress and need for support with statements like, "I can see you're really hurting, and I really want to get you some help."

Self-injury can spread from one teen to another, a phenomenon called social contagion (Walsh, 2012). Two important interventions to combat this are requesting that students who self-injure not share the details of self-injury with friends and requesting that they wear clothing that covers their wounds. Students who self-injure often comply with these requests as they do not want to harm or trigger their peers.

To further limit social contagion, treatment for self-injury should be largely individual. Groups for students who are self-injuring should focus on alternate coping skills and not delve into the details of self-injurious behavior.

A Large Responsibility

School staff in charge of assessing students with self-injury have a large responsibility, and it is imperative that the administration support them with training and materials needed to competently and confidently assess these difficult situations. They should also have access to clinical support, such as a peer supervision group or a clinical consultant with whom they can discuss difficult cases.

School cultures promoting acceptance and inclusion can also indirectly target isolation and loneliness, two emotional states frequently seen in individuals who self-injure. It's important that a trained counselor act as a point person for students who self-injure, but everyone in the school can be involved in promoting a culture in which students feel safe and supported. EL

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THE SKILL-BUILDING LENS

Helping Students with Behavior Challenges

Jessica Minahan and Diana Baker

There's a disconnect between the needs of students with mental health issues and teachers' skills. Twenty-one percent of U.S. teenagers have struggled with a debilitating mental health problem at some point during their school years (Merikangas et al., 2010), yet programs for elementary and special education teachers typically provide *one* course—if that—in mental health and behavior management. Thus, most teachers lack the skills and knowledge to intervene effectively with students facing mental health challenges.

Teachers realize they need such skills. They want to create positive outcomes for students who are struggling. And some fear that a disruptive student might jeopardize the academic performance of their entire class—a fear that has become more prominent in light of contemporary initiatives that yoke teacher pay and school funding to student performance.

When a teacher struggles with a particularly troubled student, he or she often seeks guidance from a team composed of the school psychologist, special educators, administrators, and other colleagues. But this strategy often doesn't live up to its potential.

A New Lens

Conversations at these problem-solving meetings are often emotionally charged. With good intentions, participants let discussion drift to outside-of-school topics—a parent's arrest, a family's eviction, or the student's seemingly daunting psychiatric profile. Students' home lives and diagnoses profoundly affect their behavior at school, so such topics shouldn't be off-limits. The problem is that conversations focused on life problems don't fit well within the short time allotted for team meetings, and the solutions to such problems—if there are any—are generally beyond what a teacher can implement. Too often, problem-solving meetings become long and emotionally draining—and don't result in concrete strategies teachers can try.

Consider this scenario. In early March, after countless previous meetings with the principal and school psychologist, 3rd grade teacher Mrs. Shin is in the conference room with them again. She's concerned about the approaching standardized tests and how a very troubled student of hers, Jared, is likely to fare. Jared has been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and oppositional defiant disorder. He's currently being tested to determine whether he's eligible for an individualized education program (IEP). He has refused to do any writing all year and hasn't produced math work in three months.

Lately, Jared has been displaying aggressive behavior on the playground. Mrs. Shin hasn't been able to discuss the problem with his foster mother because the mother's car broke down and she missed a scheduled conference. This Monday, Jared mentioned he had received a birthday card from his biological mother—and he's looked angry all week. What is Mrs. Shin supposed to do?

Here's where using a skill-building lens helps. It's important for administrators to create an environment in which teachers like Mrs. Shin who ask for help feel

Teachers often feel overwhelmed by a student's mental health challenges. The key to helping is to focus on what teachers can do—build student skills.

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underdeveloped skill—and educators *can* teach these missing social, behavioral, and emotional skills alongside academics, even in busy classrooms. Breaking down an overwhelming challenge into smaller skill areas can make the problem seem manageable, while giving the teacher a road map to address it.

For example, the avoidance Jared is displaying toward work is a behavior common to kids with emotional issues that can become increasingly troublesome in the upper grades. Kids like Jared often experience the flight response when faced with a daunting task. Teachers can address such work avoidance by teaching skills many students lack: how to initiate a task, how to persist when facing difficulties, and how to seek help. Simply shifting the conversation from how many months Jared has been avoiding work to how we might teach him to ask for help can result in a much more productive conversation.

Five Skills No Learner Should Be Without

Let's look at five skill areas that are often underdeveloped in disruptive students and things classroom teachers can do to help kids strengthen them (Minahan, 2014; Minahan & Rappaport, 2012).

1. Self-regulation

Most students who exhibit challenging behaviors need to be explicitly taught

empowered and optimistic—even when it feels like every conceivable intervention has been tried. A teacher should leave a problem-solving meeting with a plan—and with the confidence that he or she can carry it out.

Breaking Big Challenges into Smaller Skills

In *The Explosive Child,* Ross Greene (2014) writes that children would behave if they could. We can generally interpret any inappropriate student behavior as the manifestation of an

self-regulation skills, such as how to identify their feelings and recognize warning signs that they're about to lose control (like clenched fists or a racing heart). Providing a cue such as saying "self-check" allows the student to notice and reflect on the clues his body is giving him. Over time, this will help him catch himself getting frustrated and use a self-calming strategy before he becomes explosive. A small box of comforting items and self-regulation strategies put together with the student can be kept available. Cognitive distraction activities like word games or hidden-picture books are great for self-calming.

Another innovative strategy is biofeedback, which uses electronic monitoring—usually a sensor on the finger connected to a device that displays signals like heart rate in real time—to teach a student how to control her body's responses. The display helps a student know whether a self-calming strategy worked.

2. Social skills

Perspective taking, the ability to understand others' thoughts and feelings, improves people's ability to navigate social situations. It's often underdeveloped in students with social-emotional disabilities.

Setting up an alternative small-group lunch or recess helps these kids tune in better to others, reduces social anxiety, and facilitates positive social interaction. Social successes improve a student's self-esteem and often lead to fewer negative interactions throughout the day.

3. Executive functioning

Executive-functioning skills are key to setting goals and solving problems. They help students start tasks, organize materials, plan projects, manage time efficiently, and stay on task. Students with poor executive functioning often have difficulty handling frustration and completing work.

To boost executive functioning, use checklists and how-to lists, break long assignments into smaller chunks, and help students organize through calendars, time organizers, and mnemonics. Communicating expectations visually—such as a giving a student a laminated photo ("Here's how your desk should look when you're ready to go to lunch"), rather than saying "Get ready for lunch!"—helps an organizationally challenged child remember what needs to be done.

4. Positive thinking

Students who struggle with positive thinking engage in all-or-nothing thinking ("I hate math") or have frequent catastrophic thoughts ("If I fail this test, I'll never get a good job!"). This can lead to shutting down before even trying an assignment—or outright refusing to participate in a certain subject. To promote more positive, realistic thinking,

■ Take photographs of a student's successful moments during the school day (and send them home).

■ Provide a daily check-in and check-out sheet. In the morning, the student jots down what he or she

thinks will be difficult that day; at day's end, he or she reflects on what happened with that task, perhaps talking with a teacher. If the task *was* difficult, did he persist? What helped her cope?

■ Try a similar strategy with challenging assignments. Before the student tries the assignment, ask "How hard will this be, from 1 to 5?" and after the assignment, ask, "How hard was it?" Reflecting over time on the differences between the recorded numbers helps learners realize that assignments often aren't as difficult as they fear they'll be and reduces their initial negative thinking.

5. Flexible thinking

Flexible thinking enables students to manage unpredictable events and disrupted routines. Improving flexible thinking helps a learner adapt to new situations and improvise to meet different types of challenges.

A great way to heighten this skill is to catch kids being flexible and reinforce them for it. Set up a Flexibility Jar and add a pom-pom to it every time the student demonstrates flexibility. Displays of flexibility might include calmly allowing a peer to use the computer first or saying "Oh well!" when there's an unexpected change like the class not being able to watch a planned movie. For young children, define flexibility as any time the child stops, stays calm, and makes a new plan.

Three More to Grow On

We should also empower teachers to strengthen weak skills connected to work avoidance—initiation, persistence, and seeking help.

Initiation

Some students won't even attempt to start an activity once they perceive it might be too difficult for them. Procrastination increases their stress and reduces the time they have to complete

the assignment. The teacher often has a 30- to 60-second window to jump in and help an overly anxious student start working with confidence before negative thinking leads to a shutdown.

If several students have this issue, provide a nonthreatening warm-up activity like a word search until you have time to help each student start the assignment. Or preview the assignment before the whole class tackles it. For example, do the first two problems on a math worksheet with vulnerable students in the morning: When you hand back that worksheet later during math class, these students have an entry point and won't be so scared of the task.

Persistence

When some students make a mistake or struggle, they stop working to avoid feeling inadequate. Teach persistence by pointing out that the brain actually grows when a person pushes himself out of his comfort zone to learn hard things (Dweck, 2008). Have part of the student's grade reflect not just the product, but also a self-reflection on how well he or she persevered ("Did I attempt more problems today than yesterday?").

Seeking Help

Overwhelmed students can be too embarrassed to ask for help—or not know how. It's invaluable to teach students how to ask for *specific* help ("I don't know how to start this assignment. Please help me think of what to write about.") Often, a student will feel more comfortable when you set up a subtle system for asking for help, such as agreeing on an object the student will put on her desk to indicate she needs assistance.

Toward Empowered Problem-Solving Meetings

A problem-solving team that approached a situation like Mrs. Shin's with the view that behavior is both a way of communicating and a symptom of underdeveloped skills would have a better shot at helping. Team members might reframe a concern like "Jared hasn't done *any* math work in months" into a conversation around questions like, "Are we teaching Jared the skill of initiation? How does he typically react to challenging work? How are we teaching him to persist?" Such questions would lead into brainstorming ways to build up weak skills.

Meetings about student behavior are more constructive when certain systems, such as looking at data on the student in question, are in place. It's especially effective for the student's teacher to come with ABC data (O'Neill et al., 1997): information about antecedents (what happened just before a problematic incident); behavior (what the student did); and consequences (how peers and adults responded). For many students like Jared, common hot spots or conditions throughout the school day trigger episodes of anxiety-fueled, oppositional behavior (Minahan & Rappaport, 2012). These hot spots include unstructured times (like recess or lunch); transitions (such as shifting between classes or activities); any writing task; situations that require social skills; or unexpected changes—for example, indoor recess because of weather (Minahan & Rappaport, 2012).

With ABC data in hand, educators can look for tendencies, differentiating between one-time events and larger patterns, and formulate hypotheses about what the student is trying to communicate and which skills need to be bolstered. For example, if a student has a meltdown every time there's a math quiz, a team might hypothesize that he's motivated by escape. He may need further support because of an underlying math disability.

A series of guiding questions, like the following, helps team members spend a problem-solving meeting brainstorming productively.

1. In three sentences, what is the behavior or concern?

2. Which underdeveloped skills do you think underlie the behavior? (It's helpful to review the student's IEP and recent test results.)

3. Which helpful interventions are currently in place to address these underdeveloped skills?

4. Which interventions have been tried consistently and *weren't* helpful?

5. What are the antecedents of the behavior? When and where is it most likely—or least likely—to occur (O'Neill et al., 1997)?

6. Which interventions are in place to mitigate these antecedents?

7. What is the typical response or consequence for the student when this behavior happens? Do these responses maintain the behavior (for instance, by letting a student consistently get out of work by yelling) or help solve the problem?

8. What should our next steps be? (List the agreed-on recommendations and what each team member's role will be and set a time to meet again and report on results.)

Fostering a skill-building lens creates a community of practice that

> It's important for administrators to **create an environment in which teachers who ask for help feel empowered.**

enables teachers to coach one another through analyzing behavior problems, empowers them to be less dependent on administrators and external consultants, and gives them confidence to keep trying with a challenging student.

How It Worked for Jared

Let's look at how adopting a skill-building lens helped the team help Mrs. Shin work with Jared. The principal asked her to report Jared's behavior in three sentences. She did so and indicated work-avoidant behavior, especially in writing and math, and playground aggression as her top concerns.

The school psychologist, drawing from her recent testing and inter-actions with Jared, described his underdeveloped skills: positive thinking, initiation, and persistence. She explained that when Jared looks at a blank piece of writing paper or math work, he automatically thinks he can't do the task. Recess is difficult because of Jared's weak social skills—he often misperceives social interactions and gets upset—and self-regulation—he goes quickly from zero to 60 and becomes aggressive.

After reviewing some ABC data Mrs. Shin brought, team members realized that typical antecedents for Jared's work avoidance included any academic demand with an open-ended writing component and math work. His aggressive incidents usually happened when he faced an unstructured time with a social demand. They agreed that Jared's work avoidance resulted largely from his lack of initiation skills, which were fueled by his negative thinking.

Because there were no successful interventions in place, the group brainstormed some. Mrs. Shin agreed to preview all writing and math assignments, helping Jared start his work individually the day before she handed an assignment to the class. Looking at a paper on Tuesday that he'd

*Fostering a skill-building lens creates a community of practice in which **teachers coach one another** through analyzing behavior problems.*

already started on Monday helped him bypass negative thinking. He began to approach work during class with more confidence. Mrs. Shin added points to his math grade whenever she saw any sign of persistence.

The group agreed to provide Jared with an alternative recess—a time when a small group played non-competitive games facilitated by an adult. The principal assigned an experienced paraprofessional to facilitate this alternative recess; the physical education teacher provided equipment for the games. The school psychologist helped Jared learn to take deep breaths and draw in the sand when he caught himself becoming frustrated on the playground. She followed up with Jared's foster mom and outside counselor so they could help him process interactions with his biological mother and his negative thinking around work.

Jared's improvement in starting tasks and sticking to them helped him become more successful during writing and math and stop maneuvering to avoid work. Aggressive incidents decreased, and he found social success with peers. With his foster mother's permission, Mrs. Shin took photos of Jared working on his assignments—and of his completed work—which she sent home. Jared

began to talk and think about himself as a competent student.

When educators structure problem-solving meetings using this skill-building lens, teachers feel more empowered and revitalized. This attitude transfers to students. Everyone wins. ⎚

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Being Human

The combination of a good mind and heart is key for developing emotionally healthy kids—and teachers.

Carol Ann Tomlinson

I may have known a few things about what it means to teach well when I first entered the classroom as a teacher. Most of those inklings were gifts from a few teachers who shaped my young life in profound and positive ways. Over time, my students clarified and extended those early stirrings. Time itself, a bit of maturity, and an inclination to be reflective further refined my sense that teaching allows us to be much more than dispensers of knowledge.

Teaching is the rare profession that allows its practitioners to model a world that dignifies—lifts up—all its members. It became important to me, then, to create a classroom where my students and I learn together to be more fully human. As is the case with all humans, I fall woefully short of that aspiration more times than not, but pursuit of that intention has made me a stronger person and a better teacher.

For years, my sense of what I meant by being more fully human was amorphous. Geoff, a student I taught for three years in middle school, helped me organize my reflections when he wrote on an application for a summer program that he had been given the gift of a good mind and felt a responsibility to develop a good heart to go with it. That, I think, is the real calling of a teacher—to model and encourage students to develop good minds and good hearts. Certainly helping young people develop good hearts and good minds is key to developing emotionally healthy kids. And developing emotionally healthy kids should be high on the list of essential teaching goals.

There's no "right" definition of what it means to develop a good mind or a good heart. Clearly, they are interdependent, as Geoff understood. To become more fully human is to value and be good stewards of both. A teacher plays a dual role in cultivating them: both modeling them and teaching them.

Developing a Good Mind

We tend to think about teachers as developers of minds—or at least I think we ought to. We are better guides for young people when our work helps them *build* their minds rather than *stuff* them. Achieving that end is different from covering content, ticking off a list of standards, or preparing for tests.

Toward that end, I'd like to get better and better at commending and living out at least four propositions. This list of propositions is in no way exhaustive. Add your own propositions to the list, or recraft the ones offered here.

Proposition 1. Learning should nearly always be satisfying—and often exhilarating.

Learning is a defining feature of human beings. It's how we grow into what we can be. We have the capacity to develop our brains and, in so doing, to better our lives. To model this proposition, I need to understand that although learning is not by any means confined to school, it's what school is for.

There's nothing more electric than having an insight, so I'd better be invested in creating learning that provides consistent "electric moments" and the satisfaction that follows a good mental stretch. I need to share with students my own joy in learning—both my learning and theirs. Conversely, I need to avoid reducing learning to that which is rote, flat, purposeless, or perfunctory.

in the Classroom

My students hear every message I send—whether overt or implied—**about their capacity to learn** and succeed.

Proposition 2. Making meaning of the world around us is central to learning.

The human brain is a meaning-making mechanism, seeking patterns to inform and protect us. I need to encourage my students to figure things out, ask good questions, and find reliable information from which to construct answers. I need to push them to speak, write, and act on the basis of trustworthy information, evidence, and reason.

To model the proposition, I need to be a reasoning human being and to share my reasoning with my students. They need to see me seek deeper understanding of what I teach and why it matters. I need to invite students to explore their understanding with me and with one another. And I need to resist confronting them with so much information that there's no time to make sense of it.

Proposition 3. Working hard and working wisely are the secrets to mastery.

It's a scandalous fiction that only a relatively few people can be successful. Dogged and informed persistence is the ticket to success in most domains of human endeavor. Human history is laden with accounts of people who were told they'd never succeed at something and who made their naysayers look foolish by persisting to achieve their goals.

I need to be an exemplar of devoted effort, unafraid to say to my students, "What we did today didn't work. I'll be back with a better plan tomorrow." This helps students see what genuine effort looks like and helps them adopt the habits of mind and work that are most often precursors of success. I must also stand against the insidious

inclination to see young people as smart or not smart, understanding that my students hear every message I send—whether overt or implied—about their capacity to learn and succeed.

Proposition 4. All humans have the ability to be creative.

To be creative is to find a better way, to improve one's corner of the world. We become more fully actualized as we become more creative. We also expand our opportunities to become more productive.

The classroom is a microcosm of the human family. **We all need to pitch in to make the classroom work for everyone** in it.

I need to model the attributes of creativity—flexibility, originality, a problem-solving orientation, intellectual risk-taking, tolerance for ambiguity, a belief that mistakes are catalysts for growth, a willingness to play with ideas, and the ability to take pleasure in my own work. I need to call on my students to be divergent thinkers at least as often as I call on them to be convergent thinkers.

Developing a Good Heart

My student Geoff understood that a keen mind without a generous heart can easily become a guided missile gone awry. Goodness of spirit magnifies the positive power of a good mind. Teachers often spend more time with our students than do any other adults in their lives, giving us remarkable opportunity to help young people see, reflect on, and enact attitudes and behaviors that lead to good

hearts. The following four propositions can point us in that direction.

Proposition 1. Kindness is the air and water that humans need to thrive.

Being unkind hurts, stunts, and ultimately destroys pieces of the person to whom we were unkind. I need to ask my students to look for the best in their peers, to listen in order to understand others' perspectives and see their humanity, and to see themselves in others and others in themselves. This means asking them to be kind—

especially to those who need it most. They need to say they're sorry when they hurt someone's feelings, even if they feel their viewpoint was right. Kindness does not require agreement with another person. Rather, it reflects our understanding of the value of another's life.

Of course, as a teacher I must also consistently speak, act, and react from a position of kindness. Our kindness and unkindness is present or absent in our faces, lesson designs, grading practices, responses to wrong answers and bad behavior, and all other aspects of classroom life. We need to strive to live with kindness at our core.

Proposition 2. We need to decide what we stand for and who we want to be.

Developing a good heart requires clarity of purpose and the discipline

of practice. We need to name the attributes that elevate us and build together a mental rubric to guide our growth in those areas. As a classroom of learners, let's decide who we want to be. What do we want to stand for? What will elevate us as a community or a team? How can we grow in ways that make each of us stronger?

Although my compass as a teacher does not dictate the compass students elect to follow, my ability to teach

conflict, we need to seek reasonable compromises and work for peace.

As a teacher, I need to work with my students to be architects and nurturers of community in our classroom. How we live our days enhances the life of each member of our group and of the group as a whole, so we celebrate individual and group successes and learn how to work redemptively in the face of our differences and shortcomings. To that end, I need to

in the midst of difficult ones. To help my students make good memories, individually and as a group, I act as chief celebrant of the memories we all will share.

Strong Lives and Strong Resumés

It's regrettably easy for teaching to become a job we do to pay the rent and make it to retirement. It's similarly easy for "going to school" to become
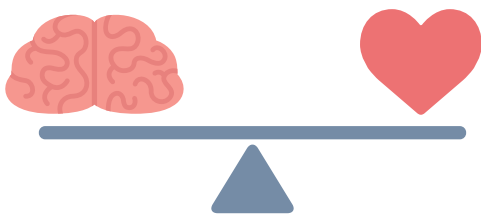
A keen mind without a generous heart **can** easily **become a guided missile** gone awry.

from my compass is essential. *Who I am as a person and as a teacher and how I am to my students pre-*dicts much about the likelihood that we can, together, celebrate who we are, what we do, and how we have come to that point of fulfillment and gratification.

Proposition 3. We must strive to be good members of the human family.

The classroom is a microcosm of the human family. To make the classroom work for everyone in it, we all need to pitch in by taking responsibility for ourselves, dignifying one another, seeking to understand more than we seek to judge, competing with ourselves rather than with others, celebrating one another's victories, and, when possible, buffering one another's hurts. We should also treat materials with respect, clean up after ourselves, do our best work, and help one another grow. And when there's

muster patience and temperance in challenging moments—and ask for students' forgiveness and help when I cannot. I must attempt always to use my influence constructively and instructively.

Proposition 4. We make our own memories.

Our memories become more positive as we look for good things around us. We need to find time to do things we love doing. We might sing or giggle or be a little goofy sometimes. We are happier when we learn to appreciate small kindnesses. To see the bright side is not to be blind to difficulty, but rather to refuse to be hobbled by it.

When I teach, I try to share stories about happy and funny things that happen in my life and lead my students in laughter and silliness. I tell them about times I work with projects or causes that "swallow me" and help me find greater purpose, and I share examples of how I find good moments

something a kid does for 13 (or more) years to make it to adulthood. It's possible, however, for a teacher to live in a way that makes both the teacher and his or her young charges more fully human.

This orientation does not diminish the role that academic learning plays in human development. Rather, it suggests that academic pursuits are rich contexts for developing good minds and hearts. Teachers who make and hold fast to that choice help their students construct strong lives as well as strong resumés. **EL**

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Bryan Goodwin

Promising, But Incomplete, Results for Mindfulness

At the DREAM Academy in Harlem, New York, with a backdrop of car horns and sirens, students enter a darkened classroom, sit down, and breathe deeply. For several minutes, they do nothing—except clear their minds and focus on the here and now (Gregoire & Resmovits, 2015). School leaders insist this daily practice improves behavior, classroom focus, and ultimately, achievement. They're joined by many schools across the United States that have begun incorporating mindfulness programs into their school days.

Borrowing from the positive psychology movement that aims to head off negative behaviors before they arise by fostering optimism and self-determination, mindfulness programs teach students to practice meditation, yoga, reflection, and self-talk to help them embrace the moment, ruminate less on the past, and worry less about the future. It's a sensible proposition: Scientific studies have, in fact, shown that mindfulness practices like yoga and meditation can reduce stress, create positive states of mind, bolster immune systems, improve eating and sleeping habits, and reduce substance abuse (Meiklejohn et al., 2012). So what does research say about the benefit of mindfulness for students?

> The simplicity of mindfulness programs may, in fact, turn out to be their advantage.

Research Shows Promise

Not much rigorous research has been done on mindfulness programs—a recent review found only 14 rigorous studies—yet this small body of research has found positive effects on a variety of outcomes: student attention, anger management, focus, behavior, test anxiety, executive function, and sleep patterns (Meiklejohn et al., 2012).

Canadian researchers, for instance, examined 246 students in grades 4–7 who participated in a 10-week program called MindUp, a series of lessons during which students practiced "mindful attention awareness" techniques, such as quieting their minds, managing negative thoughts, and viewing challenges as opportunities. Researchers found positive pre- to post-test changes in students' optimism (such as affirmative responses to statements like "more good things than bad things will happen to me"). Teachers reported immediate changes in student behavior and found students in the program to be generally more attentive, emotionally regulated, and socially competent than students in the control group (Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010).

More recent studies have added to our knowledge on mindfulness's effects.

■ A British matched-comparison study involving 500 students ages 12 to 16 examined the effects of the Mindfulness in Schools Program (a nine-week program of scripted weekly lessons). After three months, students participating in the program reported lower stress, fewer symptoms of depression, and greater well-being than nonparticipants (Kuyken et al., 2013).

■ One study tracked 400 students in the Mindful Schools program (which taught them to meditate over five weeks). Researchers found improvements in all four outcomes: paying attention, self-control, classroom participation, and respect for others (Black & Fernando, 2014). The effects persisted even when students were retested seven weeks later.

■ A study at a low-income elementary school in the Midwest examined the effects of the Move-into-Learning program, which provides weekly 45-minute sessions of yoga, meditation, and breathing exercises set to music along with opportunities for self-expression through writing and visual arts. Children's hyperactive behavior,

symptoms of ADHD, and inattentiveness decreased, according to teacher observations (Klatt, Harpster, Browne, White, & Case-Smith, 2013).

The Missing Link: Achievement

Despite these positive outcomes, researchers haven't demonstrated a link between mindfulness programs and student achievement. Moreover, mindfulness programs aren't without critics. An elementary school in Ohio, for example, discontinued its meditation program after parents expressed concerns about its connections to Eastern religion. A California district was sued on the grounds that its mindfulness program was indoctrinating children with Hindu beliefs (Machado, 2014).

Proponents of mindfulness programs insist that they are secular, but without a stronger link to student performance, it can be difficult to persuade skeptical communities to support them. In light of this resistence, it's worth noting that a meta-analysis of 213 studies of social-emotional learning (SEL) programs—which aim to teach students to recognize and manage their emotions, set and achieve goals, appreciate others' perspectives, and develop positive relationships—found these programs effective in improving students' social and emotional skills, attitudes, behavior, *and* academic performance—equivalent to an 11-percentile-point gain in achievement (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). Schools wishing to achieve many of the same outcomes as mindfulness programs plus raise student performance might do so with these presumably less controversial, better-documented approaches.

Toward Simplicity

As the adage goes, absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. Just because researchers haven't yet shown a link between mindfulness and student performance doesn't mean it's not there. It's probably not a stretch to speculate that, like SEL programs, mindfulness programs could someday be shown to have positive effects on student achievement, especially as many of the already demonstrated outcomes—including greater executive function, self-efficacy, and self-regulation—*are* linked to student achievement.

Anecdotally, some schools trying mindfulness report positive effects on learning. After implementing daily meditation, Visitacion Valley Middle School, a high-poverty school in San Francisco, saw attendance rates climb, suspension rates plummet, and grade point averages improve (Kirp, 2014). The simple program affected student behavior, school climate, and academic performance—outcomes that more complex, expensive efforts like adding counselors, tutors, and after-school programs hadn't achieved.

The simplicity of mindfulness programs may, in fact, turn out to be their advantage. Durlak and colleagues' meta-analysis (2012) divided SEL programs into two groups—multicomponent programs (involving parent, schoolwide, and classroom interventions) and single-component programs (occurring only in classrooms)—and found that more complex programs didn't deliver better results. They also found that 39 percent of SEL programs were plagued by implementation issues, leading to significantly poorer outcomes (effectively cutting effect sizes in half). Program complexity likely contributed to poorer implementation.

In the end, improving social-emotional outcomes may not require complex approaches but may be possible with something as simple as brief meditation sessions, which themselves could be an antidote to the "busyness" of school life—that nagging feeling that we must *do* more to *accomplish* more. Implemented thoughtfully and documented carefully, mindfulness approaches could serve as another example of the fact that sometimes the best approaches work precisely because of their simplicity. 𝖤𝖫

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Hope-Building Schools

Children are hopeful by nature. But what adults say and do can either support a student's sense of hope for the future or chip away at it. For example, suppose you heard a student speak unkindly to another person. A common teacher response might be, "I overheard what you said. You need to fix that." We can imagine that the student would respond to this criticism defensively. But adding just two sentences could change the dynamic: "I overheard what you said. *That's not the person you want to become.* You need to fix that. *How can I help?*" Messages like this help students separate their actions from their characters and instill the belief that they can improve.

The point is that everything we do as educators, whether big or small, helps create a school environment that affects student hope and engagement. A 2014 Gallup poll of 600,000 students in grades 5–12 found that students who strongly agreed with two statements—"My school is committed to building the strengths of each student," and "I have at least one teacher who makes me excited about the future"—were nearly 30 times more likely to be engaged in school, and such engagement was associated with higher academic achievement.[1] Here are a few of the purposeful strategies that the staff at Health Sciences High and Middle College (HSHMC) has developed to support student hope and engagement.

> What adults say and do can either support a student's sense of hope for the future or chip away at it.

Building Hope

Impromptu conferences. When teachers talk one-on-one with students about challenges they face, it's an opportunity to reframe the student's experience or situation in a positive light. For instance, we've been using the following script when talking with students who are having difficulty confronting an academic or behavioral challenge:

1. When have you felt proud of yourself, inside or outside of school?
2. Why did you feel that way?
3. What obstacles did you overcome, and how did you do it?
4. What obstacle is holding you back right now?
5. Could some of those same strategies you used to overcome obstacles before be used in this situation?
6. Let's make a plan to overcome that obstacle.

I bet you're already feeling proud of yourself for tackling this.

Circles. Sometimes, building hope requires more than a brief individual interaction. In these cases, educators can use circles to facilitate discussions about hopes, dreams, and fears. Circles can also be used to address social or academic concerns. In the video that accompanies this column (www.ascd.org/el1015fisherfrey), Dominique Smith, a social worker and HSHMC director of student support, leads a circle with a group of students at the end of the school year. These students had experienced some struggles during the year, and Mr. Smith

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▶ **WATCH the Video**   Click here to see how an educator facilitates a discussion to help students set goals.

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wanted to help them reflect and make plans for the next school year. He takes notes during the circle so that he can meet individually with students to follow up.

Aspirations. Everyone has dreams. These dreams can be supported and molded, or they can be crushed. Last school year, in a Student Voice survey (www.iknowsurvey.com/studentvoice.jsp) that our school administered, 81 percent of our students reported that they "know who they want to be." We quickly realized, however, that *we* didn't know who they wanted to be.

Since then, we've worked as a school to identify and recognize student aspirations. We posed the questions *Who do you want to be?* and *What do you want to be?* as schoolwide essential questions for the first quarter, and we're recording students' aspirations in the school's information management system.

Every adult in the school also makes a point of weaving his or her own personal aspirations into classroom conversations and discipline-focused conferences. In addition, adults integrate student aspirations into their lessons. For example, the math team writes formative assessments with examples drawn from student aspirations, including medicine, architecture, firefighting, and cosmetology. English teachers search for independent reading texts that directly relate to students' ideas about who they want to be, not just what they want to be.

Building Engagement

Engagement begins with an individual's sense of connection with the school community. We start the school year with a tradition called First Four Days. Rather than holding traditional classes, we weave an element of fun throughout the first week while also administering academic screening tests, teaching school procedures, and addressing the logistics of technology passwords and such.

But the real engine of engagement is the family groups that are formed. We assign each student to a mixed-age family group (grades 9–12 in the high school; grade 6–8 in the middle school) that meets each day during the week, participates in team-building exercises, and competes against other families in a field-day event that Friday. The family groups continue to convene every 3–5 weeks throughout the year, building ties between older students and their younger counterparts. This engagement among students pays off throughout the year. Students get to know other students outside their own grade level, and older students have a chance to mentor their younger family members.

Student-directed conferences. Last year, we began A Day of Understanding, a schoolwide conference held at the local convention center. Students designed and delivered sessions on such topics as religion, gang violence, gender, and sexuality; and a committee of adults and students selected outside speakers. The family groups met to debrief the experience and continue the discussions.

A smaller group of juniors and seniors plan an annual conference in the spring, called TRUST (Teens Reflecting and Understanding Stigma Together), to promote awareness of mental health and wellness issues for 300 other high school students in the county. They receive training on mental health, create public service announcements, recruit national speakers, host sessions on mental disorders, and provide resources for addressing mental health issues.

Even when students' living conditions outside of school are stressful, we have the power as educators to **create practices and procedures that build hope.**

What Schools Can Do

Even when students' living conditions outside of school are stressful, we have the power as educators to create practices and procedures that build hope. When students have caring adults who recognize and support their aspirations—and when they are part of a community that celebrates successes and helps them overcome challenges—they're likely to develop a sense of well-being that makes learning possible. **EL**

[1]Gallup. (2014) *State of American schools: Executive summary.* Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from www.gallup.com/services/176762/state-america-schools-executive-summary.aspx

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Catlin Tucker

Creating a Safe Digital Space

When teachers talk about ensuring that students feel safe and supported, we usually focus on what can be done in the physical school environment. Before the school year starts, we create welcoming hallways and make our classrooms warm and comfortable. During the first few days of school, we establish clear expectations for behavior and engage students in community-building activities to ensure that they feel safe, respected, and valued.

But this focus on setting up a safe environment in the physical classroom addresses only one of the many spaces that our digital natives inhabit each day.

Students today must navigate many different spaces. Each environment comes with its own norms, expectations, and challenges. This complex landscape can be stressful and scary. So when we think about making students feel safe, it's crucial that we also consider how we can support students' mental health and well-being in their online spaces.

Teaching Skills Proactively

Despite the frequency with which most students interact online through social media, many never see the impact of their words on the faces of the people reading their comments, texts, or Snaps. It's easy for hastily written comments to hurt feelings or alienate people—which is one reason many teachers shy away from embracing online collaboration and asynchronous discussion tools.

I understand the rationale behind this decision, and I harbored many of the same fears when I first began working with kids online. That said, I don't believe we should allow our apprehension to limit our potential as educators or our students' potential as learners.

Instead, we need to be proactive. After all,

school is a natural place to teach respectful online communication; when students communicate online with classmates, they know that they'll see those classmates the next day in class and that there will be real consequences if they've been unkind.

When I first transitioned to a blended learning model, I knew that I needed to dedicate as much time to creating a safe space and building community online as I did in my actual classroom.

Here are some steps I take to ensure that my students' online interactions are safe and productive.

Establishing Norms

Although students spend much of their personal time online, educators should not assume that this experience translates into proficiency in an education environment. The skill sets needed to navigate informal, personal social media exchanges are quite different from those needed for academic conversations and collaborative tasks. To highlight the different expectations for communicating in different spaces, we might begin by giving students an opportunity to discuss communication norms with their peers.

At the start of each school year, I post papers labeled with four modes of communication on the wall in the corners of my classroom: (1) face-to-face conversations, (2) text or instant message, (3) photo-sharing apps with commenting features, and (4) e-mail. Then I break students into four groups, one in each corner, and ask them to discuss the following questions: How often do you engage in this type of communication? What are the norms for this type of communication? What is considered polite or rude behavior when communicating this way? and, Describe a time when your feelings were hurt by something someone did or said when communicating this way. How did you

> Have students participate in creating a class contract of agreed-on online behaviors.

handle this situation?

Each group of students spends 10 minutes in each corner engaged in conversation, and then they crowd-source a list of *do's and don'ts* for each type of communication. This exercise is always enlightening for me as a teacher.

Here are some of my favorite takeaways. Students say it's rude to repeatedly check one's phone when talking face-to-face. (This strikes me as ironic because I often see students do this.) Students say that e-mail should be reserved for formal communication, "like when you need to say something really important"; most students report that they rarely use it. When using Snapchat, Instagram, or other photo-sharing apps, they warn not to over-post or post pictures of other people without their consent, and they encourage one another to "like" photos and post compliments.

Text messaging generates the most do's and don'ts of all four categories of communication. Some of students' do's include "respond quickly" and "reread your texts to make sure they make sense." They warn not to respond to a long text messages with a short response, like "K," and not to respond when you're angry.

I use students' conversations about communication norms to transition into a discussion of appropriate online communication for school-related interactions. I begin by providing students with a list of guidelines for online academic discussions, and then I invite them to add to my list. Here are some of the do's and don'ts on my list.[1]

■ *Use names.* Using a person's name when you respond to his or her postings creates a friendly online tone.

■ *Read questions and conversational postings carefully* to avoid unnecessary confusion.

■ *Compliment your peers* when they post strong responses or contribute

original ideas to the conversation.

■ *Ask questions.* If anything is unclear or you want further information or insight on a topic, just ask.

■ *Be considerate.* Remember that your peers cannot see your body language or hear your tone of voice, so you need to keep your language direct and respectful.

■ *Respond instead of reacting.* Do not write a response if you are angry or upset. Instead, wait until you have had time to calm down and collect your thoughts.

■ *Critique the content,* not the person.

■ *Don't use all caps* when writing. It is interpreted as yelling.

Instead of just distributing their own list of guidelines, some teachers may want to have students participate in creating a class contract of agreed-on online behaviors. Such a contract can create a stronger incentive for students to maintain a safe online space. And sharing the contract with parents and administrators can help reduce their concerns about online engagement.

Building an Online Community

Once we've established the norms for online communication, I engage my classes in online icebreakers to build community. I post fun discussion topics like, "If you could have a super-power, what would it be?" or "If you could travel in time, where would you go?" These icebreakers give students a chance to practice appropriate online communication while getting to know one another. Building strong social relationships is a crucial element in motivating students to remain respectful and supportive online.

Once students have engaged in online icebreakers, I take samples from their online work and ask small groups to critique what was done well and what needed improvement. This encourages students to look at their interactions with a critical eye

and revisit the expectations for online communication. During these small-group critiques, students often notice and correct mechanical errors or point out places when a reply did not begin with a classmate's name.

This activity also gives me the opportunity to gently correct mis-steps before we dive into academic conversations. I share examples of strong responses that clearly answer the question, and I show examples that lack development and high-light ways the responses could have been stronger. I point out instances of informal text talk—like "lol" or emojis—reminding my students that this type of informal communication is not appropriate for an academic setting.

From Safe Spaces to More Meaningful Learning

When we ask students to share their ideas and take intellectual risks, we need to make sure we've created a safe space that fosters encouraging and constructive interactions among students. This safety is even more important online, where we as teachers are not physically present to enforce expectations. As we blend online elements into our teaching and learning, we must approach online student work with the same mindfulness we apply to work done in our physical classroom. ⬛

[1]For an expanded list of do's and don'ts and more tips on creating expectations for online interactions, see my book *Blended Learning in Grades 4–12: Leveraging the Power of Technology to Create Student-Centered Classrooms* (Corwin, 2012).

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What's an Instructional Leader?

How important is it for a principal to be an instructional leader? Or *is* it important? And if it's important, is it realistic?

Perhaps there was a day when the principal was the best teacher in the building and knew the most about curriculum and child development. Maybe. But even if that was the case, those days are long gone. Knowledge about how children learn and what they need to learn has exploded, and it's not realistic for the principal to be the font of education wisdom for his or her staff. Indeed, something is amiss if the principal is the most knowledgeable person in the building! And as more responsibilities land on principals' desks each day, although those responsibilities may not be more important than student learning, they must not be ignored. So how can a principal be an instructional leader and lead a school to better education outcomes when he or she lacks time and has more knowledgeable people on the faculty?

It's essential for principals to view themselves as "lead learners."[1] This doesn't mean they know the most; rather, it means they believe their job is to ensure that good teaching routinely takes place in every classroom. Principals need to be engaged in curriculum, assessment, and pedagogy in ways that are obvious to everyone. The principal needs to be integral to—initiating, encouraging, and sometimes pushing—student and faculty growth. Three attitudes bring a principal's instructional leadership role to life.

1. We need to ensure that differentiation is valued throughout the school culture. This begins with recognizing and appreciating student diversity. School needs to be a safe place where all students feel accepted and respected and, therefore, comfortable enough to learn.

Although the debate on the Common Core standards has been good (and necessary), I worry that we give so much attention to *what* we teach that we ignore *how* we teach. Principals can lead the effort to recognize all students' strengths. Honor rolls and team trophies should be evident, for example, but there's more. Highlighting students' progress, trajectories, and grit recognizes a wider range of learners. How can achievements in the arts be displayed? How can we publicly celebrate students' kindness? That's part of differentiation, too.

2. Curiosity about what's happening in classrooms is also important. Principals must be good questioners. Teachers grow through the questions we ask, whether or not we have mastered the content being taught. Prior to observing, we might ask these questions:

- How will you know whether your lesson is successful?
- How will you challenge the high flyers and support those who might struggle?
- How can you assess in an intelligence-friendly way?
- What's different in this lesson from when you first taught it?

After a lesson, we can ask,

- How did the lesson evolve differently than you planned?
- Which student(s) surprised you, and why?
- What will you do differently next time?
- What happens next?

These questions need not be part of one-on-one conversations (although there is merit in doing that with newer or struggling teachers). Bringing teachers together to respond to these questions is a wonderful way to facilitate and enhance collegiality. The instructional leader not only asks, but also does so in a way that supports reflection, candor, and collaboration. If a faculty meeting is

> Something is amiss if the principal is the most knowledgeable person in the building!

designated for this discussion, teachers could come prepared to talk about a particular lesson they've taught.

Of course, asking good questions only counts if we're good listeners. We need to screen out distractions and focus on what is being said. It's helpful for me to write follow-up notes that I send back to others in the meeting to clarify and ensure that my understanding and memory are correct.

3. Earlier I noted that principals' engagement in instruction is essential. Actions count more than words, so we need to be active members of faculty committees that look at learning—and we must not just attend, but also participate.

As we lead adult learning, it's

> The principal needs to **be integral to**— initiating, encouraging, and sometimes pushing—**student and faculty growth.**

important to give as much attention to setting, focus, and outcome when we plan committee and faculty meetings as teachers do when they plan math or social studies lessons. We should be aware of what our teachers know and how they learn so we can differentiate

learning for them just as they do for their students.

Being an instructional leader is the most important part of our job, and it's also the most fun. What ideas and strategies have I missed? What works for you? ᴇʟ

[1]Fullan, M. (2014). *The principal: Three keys to maximizing impact*. San Francisco: Wiley.

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Intersections: Emotional Health and Learning

R ecently, I observed a university class session on learning theories. The class was well-planned, the instructor passionate, and the students well-prepared for the lesson. I left thinking more deeply about the topic. All good things. But I also left wondering whether a room full of preservice teachers can make sense of theories about learning when they've never really taught a class of their own. More to the point, I was aware (not the first time!) of how little I took away from my education classes during my college days—and of how scant the transfer of ideas from those classes was to my early work as a teacher.

I wanted my students to learn, of course, and I wanted them to be emotionally healthy. I taught for many years before I understood how tightly linked those two goals are. It took more years before I revisited key learning theories and mined from them insights that I wish had informed my thinking all along.

> When a student's fundamental needs for things like food, safety, and respect are denied, the "early brain" trumps cognition.

Basic Needs and Learning

Maslow's hierarchy of human needs (1943) has, on the whole, stood the test of time. Its wisdom should be at the core of teacher awareness. It reminds us that the goal of life is self-actualization: Humans want to become the best we can be. Seems to me, that should be the goal of the classroom as well—helping young learners progress a bit more each day toward their best selves. Surely teachers want to help each young person become his or her best in math, art, science, music, and so on.

Not so fast, though, Maslow tells us. There are barriers—speed bumps—along that path. If a student's physiological needs are unmet, the progression stalls. A child who is hungry, unhealthy, or in need of adequate housing may be stuck in place, weighed down by those concerns. So too with the next barrier, safety. Those who lack a basic safety net against life's dangers will generally find themselves unable to access the promise that should lie before them. Then there's the need for love and belonging—the hunger to be part of a "we." In the absence of feeling accepted and loved, the progression toward real learning is blocked by loneliness, anxiety, and depression.

So it is with the need for esteem. Humans need to be valued by others, yet even that level of esteem is inadequate to help us move forward; developing *self*-esteem is also crucial. Self-esteem accrues as we master skills that seem important to us, develop self-confidence, and come to recognize ourselves as competent and increasingly independent. Only then is self-actualization visible on the horizon.

Here's Maslow's bottom line for teachers: Most meaningful and enduring learning resides beyond the first three barriers. Insufficiently addressed physiological, safety, and belonging needs impede—or halt—the learning process.

A Complex Dance Step

Edward Deci and Richard Ryan's research (2000) on the relationship among human needs, motivation, and learning echoes many of Maslow's themes. They remind us that learning is not a neutral act of absorbing and repeating information. Rather, it's a complex pas de deux in which emotions and cognition are mutually interdependent—and in which individuals differ markedly.

These researchers define motivation as feeling moved to do something, being energized to pursue

a goal. Motivation to learn, they tell us, occurs when three psychological needs are met: relatedness, autonomy, and competence.

Intrinsic motivation to learn increases when a prospective learner feels cared for and valued by his or her teacher and feels a sense of bonding with peers who share a common pursuit. In addition, students are more intrinsically motivated to learn when their teacher actively supports them in developing autonomy, as opposed to being controlling.

Finally, as a student's competence with particular aspects of learning increases, so does his or her motivation to learn. Competence evolves, however, only when students work at a challenge level that's optimal for them and receive targeted feedback that works as a kind of GPS to move them ahead "plus one" (Hattie, 2012) in the journey. Here's the dance. Psychological needs impact learning, and learning impacts psychological health.

Echoes from Neuroscience

The nascent field of neuroscience in education points to the physiology behind the psychology of theorists like Maslow, Deci, and Ryan (Sousa & Tomlinson, 2011). When a student's fundamental needs for food, safety, and respect are denied, the "early brain" trumps cognition. The brain's primary energies focus on protecting its owner rather than on learning. When learning tasks are too difficult—or too simple—for a student, learning can't happen. Work that's consistently too difficult threatens safety; work that's consistently too easy threatens respect.

Learning doesn't happen because information is served up on a regimented timetable. It happens only when a learner is in a "learning condition" and when instruction meets that learner where he or she is developmentally.

A teacher's first job is to care—really care—about kids. This means noticing when their fundamental needs are unattended to and meeting those needs, making your commitment to their success public and visible by connecting with kids, and connecting young people with one another so no one need be lonely in the learning struggle. But our role isn't only to understand the basic trajectories of a healthy life and right the course when a student is off-course. It's also to understand the trajectories of learning in the disciplines we teach so we can confidently invite students into their varied points of entry.

Those roles are neither optional nor supplementary. They are cornerstones of helping young people become who they need to become. 🔲

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Tell Me About . . .

Poem of the Week

Last year I implemented a "poem of the week" activity with my RTI reading groups. On Mondays each group receives its poem. Throughout the week, groups practice 3–5 minutes daily, and then on Fridays each group recites its poem. Upon conclusion, the audience (the other groups who are waiting for their turn) has the opportunity to give positive feedback. The original goal was to have an authentic reason to practice fluency, but I noticed two additional benefits. First, shy students experience success presenting to a group. They have five other people reciting with them, and their confidence is bolstered by experiencing success weekly. The second benefit comes from the compliments. Giving compliments makes kids feel good, and receiving the compliments makes kids feels proud. For my RTI students, receiving success and compliments with their reading is something they are not used to, so our poem practice turned out to be pure gold!

—*Jennifer Sharer, LAP coordinator,*
Kelso, Washington

Advisory Groups

At Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom High School, our advisory system enables students to support one another socially, emotionally, and academically. Advisory groups stay together for two years, enabling students to get to know and support one another and the group, with support from the teachers. Each group uses three core strategies to benefit our students. Focusing on college in advisory creates a college-bound community for our school. Navigating the emotional roller coaster of applying to college is vital because the majority of our students will be the first in their families to go to college. This social support around applying and attending college starts in the 9th grade and continues until senior year. A focus on

extended learning opportunities (internships, after-school programs) helps students find and apply to organizations that they are interested in participating in. This positive peer pressure lets students see learning as something that occurs both inside and outside the school building. Finally, through restorative circles, we develop caring communities that focus on current events, issues in the school, and/or student-decided topics.

—*Jeff Palladino, principal, Fannie Lou Hamer*
Freedom High School, Bronx, New York

"It's Cool!"

From day one, our students learn to use the phrase "It's cool" whenever someone makes a mistake. We don't make fun of others but support them, knowing we are all learning. Students say those two words to each other or even to teachers . . . yes, teachers make mistakes, too! This idea is from Chris Biffle's *Whole Brain Teaching for Challenging Kids*.

—*Melissa Williams, 1st grade teacher,*
Dalton Local Schools, Dalton, Ohio

Student of the Week

At the beginning of the school year, every student in my 3rd grade class gets assigned five days when they will be the student of the week. They must create a poster about themselves at school or at home (I'm more than willing to lend necessary resources). Each poster is displayed in the classroom, where the students and I post compliments and questions for this student on sticky notes throughout the week. On Friday afternoon, the student of the week sits in my special chair and answers the questions. He or she gets to explain what it was like to be student of the week. This practice helps students get to know and appreciate one another and builds self-confidence. The students work diligently on their posters, writing compliments, and recording questions.

Viewing each poster and listening to each of the students helps me get to know all students better on a personal and academic level.

—Todd Feltman,
literacy achievement coach,
New York City Department of Education,
New York, New York

Defining a Fair Teacher . . . and a Fair Student

I ask students for their definition of a fair teacher. I then highlight the adjectives, verbs, and nouns in their definitions and create a word cloud. This is made into a class poster, and students are encouraged to kindly redirect me to the poster if I am not living up to their expectations. I tell them that I will expect the same of them. This gives us equal footing and is a first step in building trust and respect.

—Charity Stephens,
teacher and doctoral student,
Liberty Public Schools, Liberty, Missouri

Taking a Risk with Art

I tell my art students and their parents that I feel my biggest responsibility in the classroom is to honor the fact that children choose to expose their inner thoughts and feelings, risking their emotional well-being by being creative in class. Art is personal for me, so I choose to believe it is for them as well. Because of this, I have a policy that says, "We lift each other up, not tear each other down." That means we never laugh at or make fun of someone's work; we offer help or ask questions to seek understanding, and we give constructive feedback. I model this so that they get an understanding of how it looks. Sometimes it's as simple as asking, "You only used red in this project, is there a reason?" versus saying, "It's too much red, I don't like it." I find this policy especially important in my middle school classes, where students seem the most reluctant to stand out or be different

from their peers. I know this practice works because they remind one another of our motto.

—Deborah Hargadon, art teacher,
Sonoran Science Academy DMAFB,
Tucson, Arizona

Adventure Programs

I take students from my 7th grade math class canoeing in order to develop their self-regulation skills. John Hattie recommends adventure programs for improving participants' sense of self-regulation—and it works. In addition, outdoor experience promotes peer relations, identity, belonging, competence, and autonomy, all of which are foundational to their emotional intelligence.

—Bill Shively, teacher,
Willows Unified School District,
Willows, California

For more reader stories, see the online version of this article at www.ascd.org/el1015tellmeabout.

Poverty Affects . . . Health, Well-Being, and Education

Poverty affects our schools, our economy, and our future; and it's becoming the norm. What was once a local, regional, or state concern is now a national issue; according to the Southern Education Foundation, 51 percent of public school students now come from poverty.

In July, ASCD released the Report from the Spring 2015 Whole Child Symposium that focused on Poverty and Education. Read and watch the conversation from two education panels that outlined the steps and actions we can all take to ameliorate the effects of poverty at www .ascd.org/wcsymposium.

Multimetric Accountability White Paper

A new ASCD white paper, *Multimetric Accountability Systems: A Next-Generation Vision of Student Success*, highlights five examples of education systems at the state, province, and local levels in the United States and Canada that have successfully put in place multimetric accountability models.
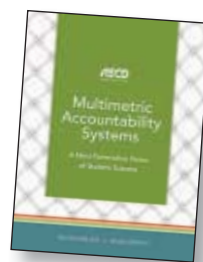
ASCD has been calling for more meaningful accountability systems that promote continuous support and improvement and align with the broader outcomes we collectively want for our students. Such systems should incorporate a variety of measures that more fully reflect a comprehensive definition of student success, accurately measure student learning, and systematically track educators' efforts to engage and support learners. For the systems highlighted in the paper, next-generation accountability has already arrived. These systems are demonstrating that such accountability systems are both achievable and successful. You can read the full report at www.ascd.org/multimetric.

Interested in Serving on the Board of Directors?

The ASCD Nominations Committee is seeking individuals to run for a position on the Board of Directors in next year's General Membership election. The application process opened on September 1, 2015, and completed applications are due by November 15, 2015. Visit www .ascd.org/nominations for information on the qualifications for office and time commitment involved (Board members serve a four-year term.) If you have questions, please contact ASCD governance at governance@ascd.org.

THE WHOLE CHILD

A Lexicon for Educating the Whole Child

The commonly accepted—but narrow—definition of student "success" that centers on academic achievement dismisses research documenting lifelong payoffs of a whole child–centered approach. Yet across the varying groups that promote a broader definition of success, there has sometimes been a lack of clarity and uniformity.

ASCD's recent *Policy Priorities* makes the case for greater understanding of and collaboration on the key education terms and philosophies—including character education, school climate, social-emotional learning, and 21st century skills—that support a whole child approach. Reaching such clarity will help multiple stakeholders—including parents, policymakers, and business and community leaders—appreciate the value of supporting learning beyond academic achievement.

Read the issue at www.ascd.org/ policypriorities.

Free Webinar on Motivating Students

At 3:00 p.m. ET, on October 13, Gayle Gregory and Martha Kaufeldt will lead a free webinar on "The Motivated Brain: Using the SEEKING System to Improve Student Attention, Engagement, and Perseverance." One of the promising frontiers of educational neuroscience lies in understanding our basic emotions. Students' brains are programed to "seek and find," and teachers can enhance this need by planning strategically to engage the SEEKING system to maximize motivation and, ultimately, learning. Register for this free webinar at www.ascd.org/webinars.

New ASCD Books

Hanging In: Strategies for Teaching the Students Who Challenge Us Most (ASCD, 2014) by Jeffrey Benson. Stock No. 114013. Price: $19.95 (member); $26.95 (nonmember).
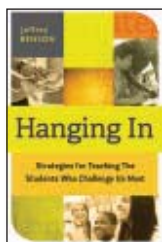
This book uses real-life examples to show how educators can marshal empathy and patience to support the learning of students with behavioral difficulties in the classroom.

Handling Student Frustrations: How Do I Help Students Manage Emotions in the Classroom? (ASCD Arias, 2014) by Renate Caine and Carol McClintic. Stock No. SF114068. Price: $9.99 (member); $12.99 (nonmember).

With grade-specific examples throughout, *Handling Student Frustrations* offers strategies that educators at all levels can immediately apply to help students overcome stress and focus on learning.

Encouragement in the Classroom: How Do I Help Students Stay Positive and Focused? (ASCD Arias, 2014) by Joan Young. Stock No. SF114049. Price: $9.99 (member); $12.99 (nonmember).

Explore practical ways to foster humor, mindfulness, resilience, curiosity, and gratitude for a positive classroom that engages students and enhances their learning.

Self-Regulated Learning for Academic Success: How Do I Help Students Manage Thoughts, Behaviors, and Emotions? (ASCD Arias, 2013) by Carrie Germeroth and Crystal Day-Hess. Stock No. SF114041. Price: $9.99 (member); $12.99 (nonmember).

Specific instructional strategies to help teachers at all grade levels foster self-regulation—the critical fourth *R* of education that students need in order to achieve academic goals and interact appropriately in the classroom.

Upcoming ASCD Conferences

Find details about these upcoming conferences at www.ascd.org /conferences.

2015 ASCD Conference on Educational Leadership

October 30, 2015–November 1, 2015, in San Diego, CA
Whether your leadership imperatives are in a classroom, a school, or systemwide, this ASCD event will address your needs with immediate and practical solutions.

2016 ASCD Annual Conference and Exhibit Show

April 2–4, 2016, in Atlanta, GA
Don't miss the must-attend event for education leaders of all levels.

ASCD
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7 Reminders About Emotional Health

01

If we think our purpose is to teach content and skills only, not to deal with the touchy-feely stuff, we're turning a blind eye to the developmental nature of the students we serve.

—*Rick Wormeli, p. 10*

02

For many challenging students, adults have been like mountain trolls: unpredictable, dangerous, powerful creatures that walk thought their lives incapable of listening or recognizing human emotions.

—*Jeffrey Benson, p. 42*

03

Self-regulation is a stronger predictor of success in the classroom than intelligence, talent, or standardized test scores.

—*Laurence Steinberg, p.28*

04

Research shows that schoolwide mental health programs can improve social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes—as well as students' academic performance.

—*John E. Desrochers, p. 46*

05

The teenage brain is highly impressionable because it has so many synapses. That means that good experiences leave their mark much more quickly—but so do bad experiences.

—*Frances E. Jensen, p. 16*

06

Misbehavior is a form of communication. We all tend to misbehave when we find ourselves in circumstances that threaten our well-being.

—*Eric Toshalis, p. 34*

07

Educators so often tell students to calm down or stop fidgeting. But how often do we show them practices that help them truly settle?

—*Daniel Rechtschaffen and Taylor Rechtschaffen, p.58*