

## **FOCUS AREA 3 > SCHOOL > ESTABLISH DISCIPLINE POLICIES THAT PROMOTE SEL**

### Establish Discipline Policies that Promote SEL

Students often communicate their needs through their behavior (Jones et al., 2018), and even in schools with optimal systemic SEL supports, misbehaviors will occur. How schools respond to these behaviors can have a large influence on school climate and students' social and emotional learning.

When discipline policies and practices are centered around student learning, are developmentally appropriate, and are culturally responsive, they can reinforce SEL and support stronger relationships, student engagement, and equitable outcomes. In this section, we discuss aligning schoolwide discipline policies and procedures to SEL. For more on classroom disciplinary strategies, see Student-Centered Discipline.

**As you work to align discipline policies and procedures to promote SEL, use the rubric or the questions below to identify areas for continuous improvement:**

Do discipline policies and practices provide opportunities for students to reflect, problem-solve, and build positive relationships?

Do these policies and practices take into account students' developmental stages, cultural backgrounds, and individual differences?

Does data demonstrate that these practices are used consistently and equitably in the classroom and throughout the school?

Are teachers supported in using **student-centered discipline** strategies in their classrooms?

### **How social and emotional competencies impact behaviors**

A **large body of research** has demonstrated that social and emotional learning promotes prosocial and responsible behaviors and decreases risky behaviors and conduct problems. Social and emotional competencies, such as relationship skills and responsible decision-making, help students get along with others, empathize with a different viewpoint, solve conflicts and come up with solutions, and work through frustrations and disappointment.

It's important to clarify, though, that schoolwide SEL is not a "quick fix" for misbehaviors. While the strategies for SEL can immediately help all students reflect on their emotions and resolve conflicts, some behaviors may take time and repeated guidance and practice. As pictured below, schoolwide SEL has been shown to have both short-term and long-term impact on student attitudes and behaviors (Mahoney et al., 2018).

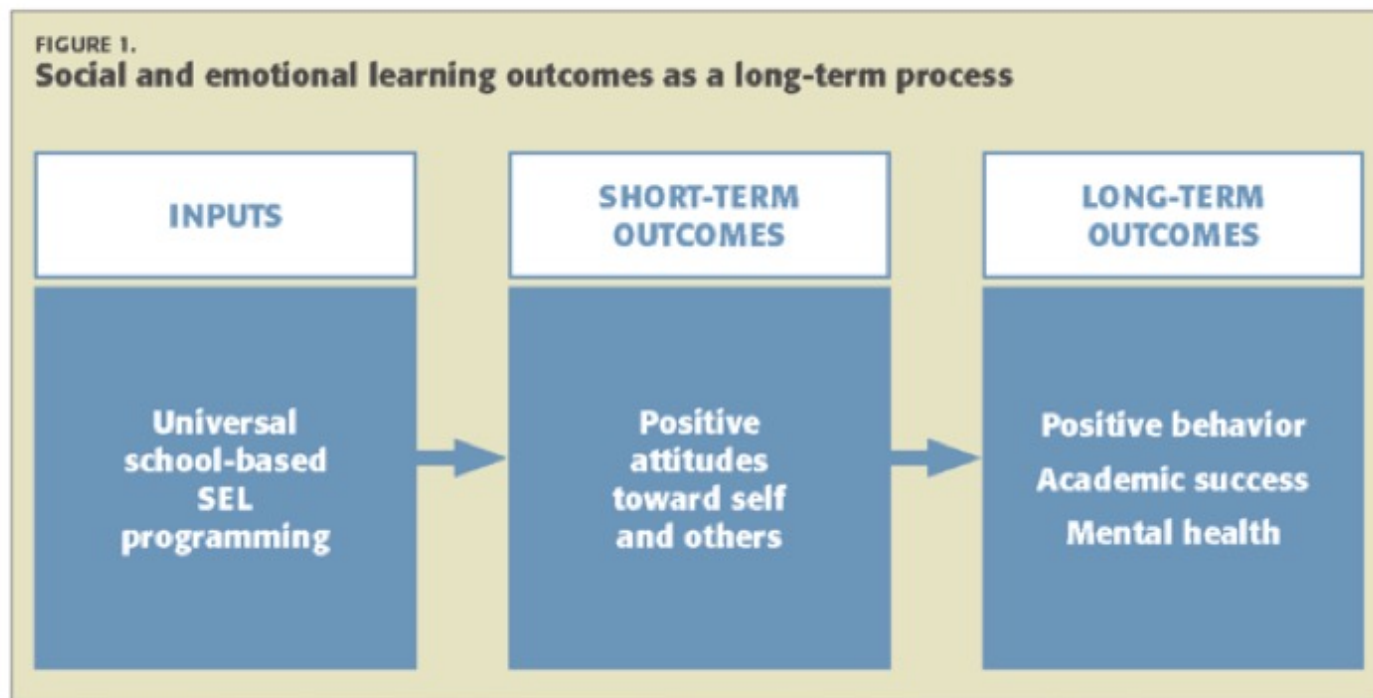


Image from: [An update on social and emotional learning outcome research](#) in [kappanonline.org](#).

### How discipline impacts social and emotional learning

It's also important to recognize that just because a form of discipline effectively reduces behavior issues does not always mean that students have learned lifelong social and emotional competencies (Bear, 2010).

Traditionally, many disciplinary approaches have focused on establishing control and order to prevent or correct behavior problems. For example, this might mean setting clear rules to limit talking during instruction, and staff reinforce these rules by rewarding students who are quiet and issuing a consequence to students who break the rule. Students may respond by disengaging from classwork, which minimizes disruptions but also limits opportunities for practicing social and emotional competencies.

In contrast, discipline policies that promote students' SEL focus on:

- Helping students understand the impact of their behavior and build their social and emotional competencies.
- Being respectful and encouraging while interacting with students to maintain the student's sense of belonging and significance.
- Considering what the student is thinking, feeling, learning, and deciding about themselves.
- Encouraging the constructive use of personal agency and autonomy.

(adapted from [www.positivediscipline.com](http://www.positivediscipline.com))

These types of instructive and restorative approaches to discipline lead to better behavioral outcomes while helping maintain positive school climate and student-teacher relationships (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Gottfredson et al., 2005; Steinberg et al., 2011). They are also more likely to result in deeper social and emotional learning that's transferable to new situations.

#### Chicago Public Schools Student Code of Conduct

In 2014 Chicago Public Schools updated their Student Code of Conduct to reflect a less punitive, more restorative approach to discipline. These efforts resulted in a dramatic reduction in suspensions and expulsions. To see what

discipline looks like in CPS, watch ["A Restorative Approach to Discipline."](#)

## Aligning school discipline to SEL goals

As you consider your schoolwide strategies for promoting SEL for students, you'll want to reflect on how well your current approach to discipline aligns with your SEL vision and supports students' in practicing social and emotional competencies. It may be helpful to examine how school discipline is enacted through:

- Policies and procedures—These are the established steps that staff should take to prevent or respond to behavior incidents.
- Practices—These are the actions that staff take to carry out, prevent, and respond to behavior incidents, as well as the practices that your team may engage in to examine discipline trends.
- Beliefs and attitudes—These are the staff mindsets that may underlie many of the policies and practices, including biases, the personal or cultural beliefs about how discipline should be carried out.

You can use the tool below to reflect on how your school's approach to discipline aligns with your SEL vision and identify next steps based on your reflection.

### Download Tool

#### **TOOL: Reflecting on School Discipline and SEL Alignment.**

Reflect on your school's discipline policies, procedures, practices, and mindsets. Create alignment between your discipline approach and your SEL vision.

### **The Effects of Punitive, Subjective, and Exclusionary Discipline**

Punitive, subjective, and exclusionary approaches to discipline can often be damaging to students and undermine schoolwide SEL implementation. These types of disciplinary approaches include taking away recess, detention, suspension, or expulsion.

Studies have consistently revealed that punitive discipline:

- Is not effective and often does not deter misbehavior (Mendez, 2003; Dupper et al., 2009).
- Often has a negative impact on students, including a loss of connectedness to school and instructional time, greater risk of academic failure, and higher levels of dropout and school violence (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Allensworth et al., 2014; Fabelo et al., 2011; Balafanz et al., 2015; Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Perry & Morris, 2014).

Compounding these issues are disciplinary policies that are open to interpretation (e.g., policies in which students can be cited for things like disrespect, insubordination, etc.). These subjective policies leave students vulnerable to staff's implicit biases, which can lead to inequities in student's educational opportunities.

- Black students are almost four times as likely as white students to be suspended for the same behaviors.
- Black students are more than two times as likely as white students to be referred to law enforcement for school-related behavior.
- Students with disabilities are suspended at disproportionately higher rates.
- Black boys with disabilities, who account for 36 percent of suspensions, represent only 19 percent of the population.

(From: U.S. Department of Education's Civil Rights Data Collection, 2016)

**Additional resources:**

- [International Institute for Restorative Practices](#)
- National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments Guide to [Addressing the Root Causes of Disparities in School Discipline](#).