

Social Emotional Learning Edition | June 2020

Lessons from the Student Success Field

A collection of insights and ideas for PreK-12
leaders to enable success every day, every
period, and for every student.



INTELLISPARK

Student Success Starts Here

It is no secret that today's employers seek students who are flexible, critical thinkers, and experienced with project-based collaboration. While focusing on academic subjects like math and writing, districts and schools are working to ensure that students also develop socially and emotionally — holistically embedding these skills in academic studies rather than stand-alone programs or lessons.

The road to holistic student success is not easy. The good news is that PreK-12 leaders are not alone on this journey. Superintendents, student support leaders, principals, counselors, and teachers across PreK-12 are hard at work identifying new ways to help all students succeed. On the following pages, your peers within the Intellispark community share a bit of their student success journeys. Through these stories, we aim to document valuable insights, helpful reminders, and hard lessons learned.

As you create a world where all students can thrive, the Intellispark community is here to help you.

Table of Contents

Raising healthy kids who can thrive in school, career, and life requires an integrated approach to supporting kids and families.

Back to School Planning: Supporting Students Dr. Deborah Hardy	3
PBIS: Finding Good in Every Student Keeyana Riley	5
A Mindful School Lory Peroff	7
Kids Today & Social Media Dr. Marguerite Ohrtman	9
Responding to Bullying Dr. Deborah Hardy	11

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Back to School Planning: Supporting Students

How will you support students as they return to school this fall? A K-12 leader offers six considerations for supporting students in your back to school planning.

School buildings closed. Learning moved from the classroom to home. End of the year celebrations became virtual events. It all seems surreal, but now is the time to reflect and prepare for supporting students as they will head back to school this fall in whatever form that takes — in school or at home or perhaps, even both.

Back to school planning is an essential process for schools and, in a time of uncertainty, is significantly more challenging. Identifying the concerns of students, families and staff serves as an important place to begin.

What are some emerging concerns for back-to-school planning aside from the social distancing and mask regulations?

Six considerations for back to school planning

As principals and student support teams work to identify back-to-school planning priorities, I recommend a focus on the following six concerns for supporting students' social, emotional and academic needs:

- **Grief** will have impacted almost everyone at some point during the pandemic. Some students will have even experienced the passing of a loved one. It will be essential to support these students with additional supports that address the stages of grief and help them develop coping skills and closure. We shouldn't assume this support and closure has happened. Indeed, some grief may be yet to come.
- **Loss and Trauma** will be the focus of social-emotional support for many students. The loss of connections, loss of celebrations such as graduation, loss of jobs, loss of a routine, loss of a sense of belonging may create a palpable undercurrent of sadness, depression and lack of motivation. Trauma also will have an impact as students have struggled with family problems, lack of nutrition and basic physical necessities, and loss of focus and motivation for academic achievement.
- **Absenteeism** will become a topic of concern. Students who were uncomfortable entering the school building before the pandemic may find it difficult to return. Even students that traditionally did not experience chronic absenteeism might experience fear of the unknown as they navigate their approach to social re-engagement or continued distancing, whatever the case may be. Many students may feel a sense of detachment or displacement since they had begun to develop a routine—productive or not—that didn't involve coming to school to engage with peers and educators each day.
- **Privacy and personal space** have been limited during this remote time, and students are finding themselves insecure about allowing peers to see their homes or bedrooms. In addition,



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parents and students want to understand or assess the risks of attending school. Since members of the community may still feel vulnerable—physically or emotionally—it is vital that professionals reinforce a commitment to discretion and respect for all.

- **Labeling** may result from evolving or expanding academic gaps, misperceptions around the disease, economic disparities and a host of other reasons. It is essential for school and classroom leaders to reinforce the need for empathy and support to rebuild a strong, hopeful and inviting community.
- **Trust** will be on everyone's minds as students, teachers and staff members return to school. Every member of the school community wants to trust that school is, once again, a safe environment. Perspectives on what constitutes safe actions and behaviors will vary widely, so it will be important for leadership to convey clear guidelines and protocols for students, teachers and staff members.

Positive lessons to remember in back to school planning

Although your back to school planning may initially focus on the concerns, it is just as important to highlight for your community any positive lessons or warm reflections that emerged during this period of social distancing.

- **Empathy.** Encourage appreciation and some comfort from the outpouring of community support demonstrated as everyone shared this unprecedented experience.

- **Strength-Based.** Highlight the student strengths emerging and heavily exercised during this time. Encourage educators and families to leverage them as a vital asset in the transition back to school or to a more structured virtual environment.
- **Resiliency.** People were challenged by many obstacles, but they learned that with hope, persistence and the support of others when needed, anyone can achieve. It allowed us to understand resiliency through difficult times.
- **Connecting.** Social distancing showed us how precious human connection is. It also taught us creative ways to reconnect with friends and family in ways that will live well past this social distancing phase.

As you think about back to school planning, remember the importance of flexibility as we must always be prepared to improvise and respond to unexpected turns in the road. Find ways to track success and build on these successes through a solution-finding team that can broadcast and celebrate what is working.

PBIS: Finding Good in Every Student

PBIS is about finding the good in every student. A K-12 PBIS coordinator reflects on lessons learned as a teacher that inform her work today.

Classroom management can be challenging for teachers, regardless of their years of experience. No one-size-fits-all strategy can be used in a classroom full of unique students. It is up to the teacher to discover what works best for reinforcing positive behavior (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports or PBIS) for each student and often that requires trial and error while forming relationships with each member of the class.

Early in my career as a high school special education teacher, I discovered that the parents of students who teetered on the boundaries of my classroom expectations the most were often aware of their children's misbehavior. Calling home to report this behavior often had little effect on efforts to bring about positive change. In fact, these same parents tended to avoid my calls. Who wants to hear from a teacher when the only time he or she calls is to deliver bad news about their child? In some cases, the calls even prompted the students to become more defiant. This proved to be an ineffective classroom management strategy. I needed a new approach to establish a positive relationship with my students, regain their trust, and mend the broken bridge of communication with their parents.

In addition to student engagement, two areas of teacher professionalism that are heavily weighted in this era of teacher evaluation include classroom management practices and communication efforts with students' families. Some underutilized yet powerful classroom management strategies that fulfill both of these evaluated areas involve simply recognizing and acknowledging the good in students. When a teacher first notices a student's efforts to make positive changes to his or her behavior, the teacher can acknowledge the student's efforts and bring them to the attention of the student and the parent. Research on classroom management reinforces that maintaining a balanced ratio of behavior-specific praise to behavior correction is an effective tool for increasing students' academic achievement and prosocial behavior. Positive phone calls and notes home can also be game-changing. They build positive relationships with the student and can foster a positive partnership between the parent and teacher.

Students thrive when they are in a safe, trusting, and supportive environment. Acknowledging students' efforts to choose positive behaviors fosters strong student-teacher relationships within the classroom. This approach cultivates reassurance for a student who is considered an internalizer, one whose emotions are undercontrolled. It can also reinforce positive behavior for a student who is considered an externalizer, one who can't deal with emotions so directs them outward. Although internalizers are not easily identified, a teacher can seamlessly boost such students' self-confidence just by practicing positive acknowledgment on a regular basis. On the other hand, a teacher may fulfill an externalizer's need for attention by acknowledging the good in them whenever possible; this ultimately reinforces more positive behaviors rather than negative behaviors.



Keeyana Riley, M.ED Special Education and General Administration serves as the PBIS District Coordinator in a PreK-12 Illinois School District. In addition to providing district wide leadership in the area of social emotional learning supports, Keeyana is also currently obtaining her doctoral degree in Educational Leadership at DePaul University. Keeyana is an advocate for social justice, equity, and inclusion and she is also passionate about special education law and educational policy.

Recognizing and acknowledging students' efforts to improve their behavior gives teachers the opportunity to reach out to parents as the bearers of good news they may not be accustomed to hearing from their school. Such outreach gives teachers leverage to be heard when more pressing issues arise and robust dialogue is needed. Chances are a parent would dodge educators less and actually look forward to engaging in conversation if a favorable communication channel has already been established. Positive interactions facilitate the creation of a productive parent-teacher partnership focused on student success.

When choosing a strategy that recognizes the good in every student, it is vital to know each student's preferences. Some students will appreciate public acknowledgment in front of their peers and others may prefer one-on-one acknowledgment. Either way, it is important to let the student know that you see their positive efforts and recognize their progress. Certainly, there will be those inevitable days when students regress in their words and actions, but it is by reinforcing every positive step forward that we pave the way for near-term and long-term student success.

A Mindful School

What does a Mindful School really mean? A snapshot of what mindfulness looks like in one school and the impact it has on the lives of students and staff.

Mindfulness is all the rage. Articles about mindfulness feature serene people meditating in gardens amidst pink lotus flowers. *Time* magazine titled an issue “The Mindful Revolution.” There is even an entire magazine called *Mindful*. Mindfulness is creeping into our daily vernacular. Parents at playgrounds are reminding their kids to “Be mindful of your behavior” or chiding “That’s not very mindful.”

But what does mindful really mean? Here is a snapshot of what mindfulness looks like in one school.

A mindful school is more than a mindful minute

As you walk onto our mindful school campus, you will not hear a morning gong followed by a mindful minute. You are unlikely to see students practicing deep breathing. You might see yoga, but only in P.E. class. At our school, mindfulness is not about meditation. It is cognitive mindfulness. It is all about thinking.

You will see teachers teaching lessons developed with not only an academic objective but also a mindful habit objective. You will see students reflecting on academic goals as well as mindful habits that they use to help meet their academic objectives. You will hear students identifying what mindful habits help them accomplish personal and academic goals.

As you walk down the open-air corridors of Waikiki School, the cement floors are colorfully adorned with hopscotch and four square games. Arching overhead, phrases such as “Flexibility in Thinking,” “Cooperation and Caring,” “Humor and Joy” are painted brightly in bold blue and white.

Habits of the mind

In addition to learning reading, writing, and arithmetic, students at Waikiki School are explicitly being taught and assessed on “Habits of the Mind” (HOM) developed by Art Costa. The HOM was initially used as tools for adults, but Costa thought, “why not teach the HOM to children in schools?”

Habits of the Mind are a set of sixteen habits upon which students can draw to be better equipped for the challenges they may face in the future. These habits will help students navigate any challenging situation ranging from trying new foods to choosing what game to play at recess. These habits do not lose their usefulness in childhood but rather become more important as the child matures. These mindsets, when practiced at a young age, can help students develop into adults who are able to navigate challenging situations with intelligence, clarity, and poise. Costa describes the HOM stating “when we teach the Habits of Mind, we are interested in how students behave when they don’t know an answer.”



Lory Walker Peroff is a fourth grade teacher at Waikiki Elementary School and a Hope Street Group National Teacher Fellow alumna who believes writing is not only enjoyable but essential. She lives in Honolulu with her husband, two energetic and curious daughters, five chickens, two ducks, and one peahen.

One huge unanswered question in the state of Hawaii has to do with the installation of the thirty-meter telescope (TMT) on top of our state's tallest mountain Mauna Kea. Some scientists think Mauna Kea's location and elevation make it an ideal location for the TMT to make groundbreaking discoveries about deep space. Others disagree. To many Hawaiians, Mauna Kea is a sacred place. Many think Mauna Kea is not a suitable location for the TMT for a variety of reasons including environmental and cultural ones. Student opinion is also mixed. As a class assignment, students read a short article about the recent controversy and were asked what advice they would give to help protesters and government officials.

Student voices

Fourth-grade students with a maturity far beyond their years used the HOM to help inform their answers.

Many students advised protesters to use persistence to help solve the problem. One eight-year-old boy wrote, "I think the protesters and government officials will have to use persistence. First, because they have work[ed] together on making a deal. Next, they need to persist on [continued] agreeing and no arguments. Last, because they need to think quickly or else [they will] have more problems. They can not give up until they make an agreement."

Another student wrote that the HOM flexibility in thinking would be most helpful in making a difficult decision by offering

"I think the best HOM is flexibility in thinking. One reason is maybe somebody will say a different solution after you said a solution, then you need to use flexibility in thinking and think about their ideas, too. Another reason is that you need to think of an idea with flexibility in thinking. If you never listened to other people's perspectives, it would be boring. Those are the reasons that flexibility in thinking is the best HOM for this."

Lastly, a nine-year-old girl shared her thoughts. She wrote, "I think listening with empathy would help because the protesters and government officials would have to listen to each other's idea! Also, this is a big problem, so, there has to be A LOT of ideas to listen to. Plus, someone has this idea, and this person has another idea and they both want to do their [own] ideas. Maybe if they LISTEN to each other, maybe they can...bring their ideas together and can solve in reaching an agreement. Those are just some of the reasons why the HOM listening with empathy should be the most helpful."

With a future full of unknowns, students fortunate to have nurtured the habits of mind will be blessed with lifelong skills they need to be successful.

Kids Today & Social Media

Much is written about kids and social media today. A parent and educator who has researched this topic offers guidance for K-12 educators and parents.



Dr. Marguerite Ohrtman is a licensed school counselor and professional counselor and serves as the Director of School Counseling and Clinical Training at the University of Minnesota. She is a former classroom teacher and school counselor, with experience as an in-patient counselor, therapist, supervisor, and is a Nationally Certified Counselor. Currently serving as the President of the Minnesota School Counselor Association, she recently co-authored a book to help train school counselors entitled Contemporary Case Studies in School Counseling. Marguerite is passionate about improving the training of school counselors, the impact that social media has on students, and improving school counselor to student ratios in Minnesota.

When asked about social media and my children, I quickly feel “mom” guilt. My children use technology more than the “recommended” two hours a day. As a mom, I struggle with how much to let them use technology for learning and discovery. In doing so, am I really ruining their ability to free play?

As a researcher and educator, I am realizing that there need to be more conversations about the impact of social media with our children. As a mom of a three and four year old, I worry about online bullying and what their online images will be. Children have a lot more to worry about than I did growing up. Notes are no longer being passed; instead, children use quick Snapchats that disappear after ten seconds. How can we possibly monitor what our children are doing through all these apps, not to mention what they are watching on YouTube?

In order to calm my own anxiety and to fill a research need, I began to explore the impact of social media on students in grades K-12. I wanted to learn more about their use of social media and the impact it has on them. Even the graduate students that I instruct and advise are being impacted by social media, so I knew the younger students couldn't be immune.

Positive Uses of Social Media

Research has shown social media not to be “all bad,” linking social media usage to positive social development and to building self-confidence. There was, however, a gap in the research about elementary students and their use of social media. For example, many social media platforms and apps require persons to be age 13 or older. Young children, however, can bypass this requirement and create their own social media accounts.

With a team of researchers from the University of Minnesota, we explored social capital and social media usage. A few of the findings left more questions than answers. For example:

- Girls seem to utilize social media more for bonding than boys do.
- YouTube was more significantly correlated with bridging social capital.
- Snapchat was more significantly correlated with bonding social capital.
- There was no correlation between emotional intelligence and social media use. This contradicts popular media reports that social media can contribute to hyperactivity and problems with peers.

Overall, we found that pre-adolescents want to use social media as a tool to connect with others. In some cases, it is being used to connect with other children that are close to the child, but it is also being used to connect with others outside their immediate circle of friends. As I worry about

my own children exploring and cultivating all these new friendships, I have some concerns. How can I monitor and make sure my children are safe? Here are some great resources I have found to help monitor social media usage for children:

Social Media Resources For Families and Educators

- Common Sense Media
<https://www.commonsensemedia.org/>
- Guarding Kids
<http://www.guardingkids.com/>
- Netsmartz
<https://www.missingkids.org/NetSmartz>

Moving Forward

After researching kids' social media usage, I wish I had more answers than questions about what the lasting impact of social media will be. I still am not sure what is so intriguing about YouTube and what children are gaining from watching all these bizarre videos. I still question how to help individuals navigate their online persona and how to be consistent with how they represent themselves in the present world. How can we help students develop both personas, a strong self-identity, and maintain their self-esteem? This is something that adults struggle with, too.

Parents and guardians, school staff, and our communities need to be part of these conversations. As the use of social media grows, we need to start exploring ways to help students develop into resilient, empathetic adults in a manner that acknowledges the role it plays. The question of how to do this remains, but the first step is to start the conversation!

Responding to Bullying

Knowing how to respond to students experiencing bullying is not easy. One expert offers five effective steps for supporting bullied students.

Recently I was invited to speak about the difficulties of dealing with bullying in school on *That Expert Show*. Bullying happens when one individual removes the power from the other and creates an unsafe environment. The individual receiving such negative behaviors from another will feel intimidated and unwanted. Bullying has an additional impact on self-esteem and self-confidence.

Bullying can happen anywhere and at any time. It can occur at any educational level, in the workforce or even in a family dynamic. Bullying is not just about the one being bullied. The bully is often a victim, too. A whole child approach to addressing this dynamic provides empathy for both victims as there are underlying issues that lead the “bully” to attack another student.

When students feel attacked, they often withdraw. You may notice a change in their school attendance and/or academic performance. Avoiding social situations with other peers may also be a response to what is happening. Eating and sleeping patterns may be impacted.

Students spend more than six hours a day in school. Ideally they learn about community and develop positive personal relationships with peers and adults. The hope is that a school is a place where students learn how to handle challenges such as bullying. The goal is to support the whole child as they move through each grade level.

Following are some effective steps for supporting bullied students:

Acknowledge emotions

Talk to the child about what is going on and acknowledge that this is a difficult situation. Let them speak to you about their feelings and listen. Use an activity to chart the size of the problem. Is this happening to everyone or just this student? From this discussion identify ways to handle this situation.

Understand the power of words

What we say can inform, help or hurt. It is hard to take back what is said. An exercise that can help illustrate this is to have the student squeeze a toothpaste tube and then attempt to put the toothpaste back in the tube. This is very difficult if not impossible to do and can illustrate that words can be said, but often the emotional impact on another person cannot be removed. Before saying something, think and reflect on how it might be perceived. Teach the student to share their emotions with the individual. They may not be aware that their words are causing such distress. Understand and define the idea of perceptions.



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Role-play

Take time to set up some scenarios that the child may encounter. From this experience, you can help them generate a list of how best to handle different interactions. Role playing also assists with the upstander role. Being an upstander for others being bullied can help change the culture of relationships and can help the student establish a connection to the other student's needs.

Create kindness

Studies find that the resultant mindset changes when we share more gratitude and kindness positively shape our overall behavior. Relatedly, the cascading impact of transforming a negative situation into a positive one can be significant for all involved. Providing our students the opportunity to engage in acts of kindness through community service and other collaborative projects benefiting others builds their self-esteem and confidence. The centering impact gives them the strength to see beyond confrontational moments and to recognize that such events do not define one's life.

Connect with a school team

The school counselor, social worker, psychologists, teachers, and administrators can include classroom lessons on topics related to bullying and social-emotional issues. Connect this to a student's home life by providing family members with tips to reinforce concepts at home with the child. If it is an individual situation, discuss what is happening with the child and create an acceptable plan of action.

We need to know our students' strengths and challenges to best offer meaningful supports and strategies for dealing with bullying. What supports and activities would you add to this list?