Teachers are working toward teaching and reaching all kids, but misconduct can really throw a wrench in their plans to create a safe and engaging learning environment for students. School discipline has evolved from exclusionary discipline to finding more effective ways to address behavior issues that ensure kids remain in the learning environment and grow from a whole-child perspective. But with a global pandemic and a nation grappling with social injustice, students—many of whom haven’t experienced “normal” school in years—are rightfully struggling when it comes to mental health and overcoming trauma, leading to increases in behavioral issues in schools.

A POSITIVE APPROACH TO SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

Identifying common discipline mistakes and incorporating relationship-building interventions with students can benefit the whole child.

naesp.org

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5 Core Competencies of SEL

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning identifies five core competences of SEL:

1. Self-awareness;
2. Self-management;
3. Social awareness;
4. Relationships skills; and
5. Making responsible decisions.

Combined, these five competencies help students grow their self-discipline and ownership, which is critical in how they work with others and keep themselves balanced. Self-discipline leads to students choosing to behave in ways that align with their goals. Schools can include SEL lessons in student learning either through embedding it within academic content or by teaching it in addition to academic content.

**Reflection Questions**

1. How does your school discipline policy incorporate social-emotional learning?
2. What strategies does your school have in place to address each of the five competencies?
3. How could you improve on any of these competencies to focus more on the whole child?

How can schools help students overcome these challenges? Enter social-emotional learning (SEL) strategies that help students learn to cope, grow as a whole child, and remain in classrooms to continue learning.
Common Discipline Mistakes

Creating a positive approach to discipline involves reflecting on how things are going—and what can be improved. Some common mistakes schools make are expecting compliance from all students, responding to surface-level behaviors instead of what’s at the core of the issue, not considering cultural or family norms, assuming it’s not an academic issue, shaming and blaming others, and letting emotions dictate actions as school leaders.

**KEY CONSIDERATION:**

Students of color are disciplined at disproportionately higher levels and are removed from classrooms as a discipline approach more often than other students. Learn how to incorporate equity-based discipline strategies into your school’s process.

These articles are a good starting place:

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. What discipline mistakes are we making right now?
2. What are the most common reasons we’re taking disciplinary action against students, and how can we work in SEL strategies to get ahead of these issues?
Relationship-Driven Interventions

Disciplinary practices come down to restoring and building relationships with students and their families. Schoolwide tiered behavior support plans—as opposed to consequence plans—will enable you to react with supportive practices instead of using blame and punishments. There are many ways to accomplish this, but these research-based practices can help you get started.

+ **2x10**: 2 minutes a day for 10 consecutive days with students who need support;
+ **Take 10**: 10 minutes a day with students who need support;
+ **Check In/Check Out**: Daily, goal-oriented, individual conferences;
+ **Restorative Circles**: Reflections on impact and restitution;
+ **Driveway Discipline**: Complete home visits to touch base;
+ **Positive Contact Home**: Make phone calls, send emails, or mail postcards;
+ **Peer Mentors**: Older students guiding younger students; and
+ **Community Mentors**: Parents and community members guiding students.

Ways to Check in on Kids

Building relationships starts with knowing your students’ names, pronouncing them correctly, and using their names when you interact with them. Using their correct pronouns, too, shows you care about them as individuals. Follow up with check-ins in ways that make sense for each student’s needs. There are many ways you can check in on students that make it fun and interactive; sketch sessions where they get to draw, writing reflections, sticky note ratings, surveys, and small group meetings are just a handful of options that are out there.

**Andy Jacks, Ed.D.,** is principal of The Nokesville School in Virginia and author of *Discipline Win: Strategies to Improve Behavior, Increase Ownership, and Give Every Student a Chance.*