

7

Principles for Serving Students With Disabilities and Intersectional Identities Through Social-Emotional Learning Approaches

Initiatives that focus on 21st century learning, social-emotional learning (SEL), and the science of learning must be centered in equity and inclusion. The principles below should inform the design and theories of action behind any such approach to meet the needs of students with disabilities and intersectional identities.

Principle 1: The approach seeks to help students develop agency and attends to the systemic barriers that impact student agency, self-advocacy, and self-determination for students with intersectional identities, including students with disabilities, English learners (ELs), students who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), students who have been impacted by poverty, students who are homeless, immigrant students, and LGBTQ+ students.

Examples: The Approach:

- a. helps students understand implicit and explicit bias through a culturally sensitive lens
- b. provides multiple approaches (including measures of youth perception and self-assessment) to demonstrate understanding
- c. provides students with choices that align with their interests
- d. aligns with principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) so that students are engaged, informed, and empowered to access and represent their learning in multiple ways

Principle 2: The approach recognizes that students have unique assets and individual needs and seeks to ensure that students have meaningful and purposeful experiences.

Examples: The Approach:

- a. places students, not skills, at the center
- b. addresses differences in students' executive function capacities
- c. is age-appropriate
- d. is founded on a curriculum that is based on a theory of obstruction (i.e., what happens when issues related to EL status, disability, racial prejudice and bias, or trauma inhibit development of key skills and capacities)

Principle 3: The approach is reinforced within and outside of school to promote opportunities that foster community connectedness for students.

Examples: The Approach:

- a. provides developmental learning opportunities through in-school and out-of-school programs
- b. includes activities that families can work on with students (including ELs and students with disabilities, or any students whose families may face barriers to participation)
- c. encourages coordination between stakeholders, such as in-school and out-of-school learning providers, case managers, families, students, industries, and other community partners
- d. uses measures that are appropriate and accessible for diverse families and community stakeholders

Principle 4: The approach places value on school-level climate indicators, in addition to student-level SEL indicators

Examples: The Approach:

- a. uses the level of inclusion (as measured by student reports and full participation of student subgroups in activities) as a key indicator to assess school climate outcomes
- b. measures skills at multiple times and through multiple ways (using UDL), leading to a comprehensive assessment without deepening student anxiety or biasing results
- c. builds on student assets, develops skills, and supports meaningful student engagement
- d. collects data that lead to actionable steps for schools to create a positive and inclusive school climate

Principle 5: The approach prioritizes personalization and individualization in both instruction and supports.

Examples: The Approach:

- a. equips educators to differentiate instruction for each learner
- b. uses measures that do not disadvantage learners based on individual identities, including disability status, language, race, ethnicity, income, immigration status, housing situation, gender identity, and/or sexual orientation
- c. includes built-in accommodations for students with disabilities

Principle 6: The approach provides for positive work environments that build adult capacity and support adult needs, modeling the goals and expectations for students.

Examples: The Approach:

- a. provides resources and explicit professional development for adults to ensure that each is equipped to support student growth
- b. provides educators with meaningful choice and emphasizes positive work environments that support the social and emotional needs of adults working with students
- c. defines explicit roles for adults who work with students with intersectional identities, including special and general educators and specialized instructional support personnel
- d. reflects a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) approach that includes universal positive and proactive Tier I strategies for all learners, more structured Tier II instruction for those struggling, and intensive strategies for Tier III

Principle 7: The approach prioritizes holistic needs of students, including physiological, safety, and belonging factors.

Examples: The Approach:

- a. includes a holistic assessment of the student to understand whether physiological and safety needs are being adequately met
- b. accounts for the depth of needs, including adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and external trauma students experience, that may inhibit learning
- c. provides opportunities to build and maintain positive adult and peer relationships
- d. emphasizes healthy nutrition, exercise, and sleep habits



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