



Helping teachers and children develop their social and emotional competencies pays big dividends – and developing social-emotional competency should be an education priority as early as Kindergarten – (see chart below). During the 2011-2012 school year, the US Department of Education counted 130,000 expulsions and roughly 7 million suspensions among 49 million K-12 students – one for every seven children in school. And recent estimates suggest there are a quarter-million instances of corporal punishment in US schools every year. A recent Stanford University study showed that training teachers to have more empathy towards students reduced school suspensions by more than 50%. According to Tony Wagner, Expert in Residence at the Harvard Innovation Lab, empathy is an essential skill that helps students become innovators. So, in this issue, we offer four tips to help you build your own social-emotional skills and those of the children you teach!

**For every one-point INCREASE in social competence in kindergarten, he/she is:**

- **Twice** as likely to attain a college degree in early adulthood
- **54%** more likely to earn a high school diploma
- **46%** more likely to have a full-time job at the age of 25.

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**For every one-point DECREASE in social competence in kindergarten, he/she is:**

- **64%** higher chance of spending time in juvenile detention
- **67%** higher chance of being arrested by early adulthood
- **52%** higher rate of recent binge drinking
- **82%** higher rate of recent marijuana use
- **82%** higher chance of being in or on a waiting list for public housing

**What:** Share your classroom frustrations, thoughts, ideas, and feelings towards your students. Seek mentors and understanding peers so you can be sure to get good feedback and suggestions.

**Why:** No one is exempt from having mixed feelings, or feeling upset or frustrated about working with students. But remember, the research is on your side – learning new techniques to build empathy means you are doing a better job of fulfilling your role as a teacher and taking care of yourself as well.

**What:** Remember that when students don't perform up to certain standards or expectations, they may not have developed the necessary skills yet. Consider the context from which each student comes and adapt as needed.

**Why:** In the same way chronically hungry kids find it difficult to learn, so do kids who are chronically hurting. When kids suffer from trauma, they often struggle with impulse control, they may lack the ability to concentrate and often find it difficult to make good decisions. So, in the same way we offer hungry kids a snack, try offering them an emotional “snack” – a kind word, a calming voice, a moment for them to refocus. That may help the child get back on track.

**What:** Take time for self-care: go to the movies, read a book, close your eyes and imagine a serene place, plan a monthly teacher’s group, work out, take a nap; whatever allows you to most feel like you have invested in yourself.

**Why:** You are educating children whose needs often go beyond academic training. An old adage rings true here: “Before you can fill the gas tank of others, you must first have a reservoir of your own.”

**What:** Many students may hear few compliments or positive reinforcements in their day-to-day lives. They arrive to class expecting negative comments or even punishment. As Ms. Young says, try to give five positives for every negative. Look for the good things students do and reinforce that behavior.

**Why:** Small compliments and genuine delight in students’ achievements can inspire them to do even better. Remember, knowing is easy, learning is hard. Everyone needs a champion during difficult times.