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Social Competence: Why Is This Important?

by: Brandie Oliver, Butler University

What does it mean to be socially competent? Social competence is when we have strong interpersonal skills and the ability to build and maintain strong relationships with others.

Why might social competence be important in schools? There are many significant outcomes connected to the importance of social competence. A recent study in the *American Journal of Public Health* revealed early social competence was a consistent, significant predictor of outcomes in education, employment, criminal justice, substance use, and mental health. For every one-point increase in social competence, he or she was:

- Twice as likely to attain a college degree
- 54 % more likely to earn a high school diploma
- 46 % more likely to have a full-time job in early adulthood

However, for every one-point decrease in social competence, he or she had:

- 67 % higher chance of being arrested by early adulthood
- 64 % higher chance of spending time in juvenile detention

With these significant outcomes, how can schools help students develop social competence? A developmental and comprehensive approach is ideal. It takes time, modeling, and practice for students to develop social competence. For some of our students, our schools may be one of the few places where they feel safe and supported. Ultimately every space within our school community needs to foster our students' social and emotional development.

Below are five strategies to consider:

1. Relationships: Dedicate time to get to know your students as well as for your students to get to know one another. Think about the layout of your classroom. Is it designed for students to see one another? How often do they talk with one another? Do they share about their personal interests, strengths, challenges, and talents? How do you share about yourself?
2. Collaboration: Provide opportunities for students to partner or work in groups. Ensure they have time in class to work and discuss the project. It is important to teach students “how to” work in a group. What are the expectations of group work? We cannot assume that students know how to be good group members, so please teach them how to be good collaborators—this leads to socially competent community members.
3. Active Listening: To be present and fully listening is becoming a lost art. Take time to teach your students how to demonstrate active listening skills.
4. Growth Mindset: Carol Dweck’s work has many components. Specifically, for this aspect, to help build social competence it is critical to be able to learn from others. We all need to be able to give and to receive feedback from others. Think about how you can design lessons/projects where students are asked to give and receive feedback from peers in order to continuously improve.
5. Empathy: Teachable moments are all around us. Don’t miss the opportunity to talk to students about different perspectives on issues and how feelings may be impacted. One student may have strong emotions to an event while another student may have a very different reaction—taking time to discuss and process helps build insight for our students and broadens their perspectives. These conversations will strengthen relationships, develop empathy, and create a school culture of acceptance and support.

Regional Professional Development for Spring 2017

We will be offering the sessions below as training sessions for this spring. You may begin registering for our Spring Professional Development Sessions on the IASP website. [Click on this link](#) for more information and online registration.

Date	Site	AM: 9:00-11:30	PM: 12:30-3:00
February 10	Maconaquah MS	Speaker: Dr. Rhonda Roos Topic: 5 Problem-solving Frameworks for Principals	Speaker: Dr. Rhonda Roos Topic: 5 Dysfunctions of a Team
February 17	Wes-Del Jr/Sr. HS	Speaker: Dr. Adam Drummond Topic: Leadership Matters	Speaker: Dan Layton Topic: Technology Tools for Administrators
February 24	New Palestine HS	Speaker: Dr. Rhonda Roos Topic: 5 Problem-solving Frameworks for Principals	Speaker: Dr. Rhonda Roos Topic: 5 Dysfunctions of a Team