Effective Instruction as a Protective Factor

During the COVID-19 pandemic, educational and mental health leaders have expressed growing concern about academic learning loss and the effects of the public health crisis and social isolation on social, emotional, and behavioral (SEB) wellness. The most supportive approach to addressing these concerns recognizes the reciprocal relationship between effective instructional practices and SEB supports, as illustrated by the figure to the right.
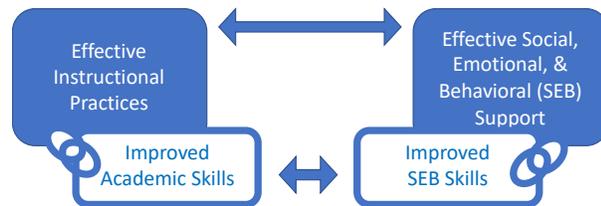
Effective academic instruction and SEB supports (a) create positive, predictable, and safe learning environments and (b) facilitate growth in key academic and SEB skills—important protective factors for wellness. This practice brief (a) describes how effective instruction may function as protection to mitigate risk and (b) provides implementation tips for school leaders, coaches, and educators.

How is Academic Instruction a *Protective* Factor for Wellness?

Effective academic instruction can be a protective factor for student wellness, mitigating competing risk factors. In contrast, ineffective instruction may exacerbate competing risk factors. When educators (a) create an effective context for learning, (b) emphasize appropriate content, and (c) use data-driven instructional practices, all students are likely to experience academic and SEB benefit, which contribute to wellness.

Create Effective *Context* for Learning

Creating an effective context for learning sets the stage for effective instruction, positive academic outcomes, and positive health outcomes (CDC, 2009). Positive, safe, predictable, and welcoming environments enable educators to teach and students to be better prepared to learn. Effective educators engage in the following protective practices to address competing risk factors.

Protective Practices	Competing Risk Factors
• Positively greet and welcome students into the lesson (learn more[1])	• Unwelcoming environments where students lack positive relationships with teachers are risk factors for poor outcomes (Gubbles et al., 2019)

Protective Practices	Competing Risk Factors
• Establish predictable routines (learn more[2]) and procedures (learn more[3])	• Unpredictable environments may increase stress (Peters et al., 2017; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2005)
• Explicitly teach positive expectations and SEB skills to support learning (learn more[4])	• Chaotic or disruptive learning environments interfere with learning, and negative climate is a risk factor for dropout (Day et al., 2015; DiPietro, 2018)

Select Appropriate *Content*

Students improve academic skills and outcomes when teachers set high expectations and select appropriate content to enable all students to meet these expectations, as described in the table below.

Protective Practices	Competing Risk Factors
• Set high expectations for all students with encouragement and support to meet them	• High expectations without support is a risk factor for poor outcomes (Lehr, 2004)
• Use academic (learn more[5]) and behavioral (learn more[6]) data to identify instructional focus, and select culturally, contextually, and instructionally appropriate content	• Students may not actively engage when instruction is too easy, too difficult, or not relevant to their experiences (Djonko-Moore et al., 2017; Sanford & Horner, 2013)
• Make connections between academic and SEB skills (learn more[7])	• Students may not have the pre-requisite skills (academic or SEB) to effectively access the instructional content (Casillas et al., 2012; Wanless et al., 2011)

Use Data-Driven Instructional *Methods*

Students are more likely to benefit from instruction when they experience academic success. Academic failure contributes to decreased engagement, challenging behaviors, and poor long-term outcomes. Effective teachers weave SEB development strategies into academic lessons and engage in the following protective practices.

Protective Practices	Competing Risk Factors
• Assess, teach connections to prior knowledge, and organize instruction (learn more[8])	• Students may struggle with instruction that is ambiguous or does not follow a logical progression of building on previous learning (Boradman et al., 2016)

Protective Practices	Competing Risk Factors
• Use explicit instruction (I do, we do, you do) and actively engage students in learning ([learn more][9])	• Lack of explicit or engaging instruction is a risk factor for poor outcomes (Obasohan & Kortering, 1999)
• Use academic ([learn more][5]) and behavioral ([learn more][6]) data (e.g., student responses, progress monitoring data) to adjust instruction	• Lack of differentiated instruction may result in a poor instructional fit and poor outcomes (Valiandes, 2015; Van Ryzin et al., 2016)
• Deliver specific and supportive feedback ([learn more][10]), and provide at least 5 positive statements for 1 every corrective statement ([learn more][11])	• Harsh or reactive consequences are risk factors for poor outcomes (CDC 2009; Lehr et al., 2004)
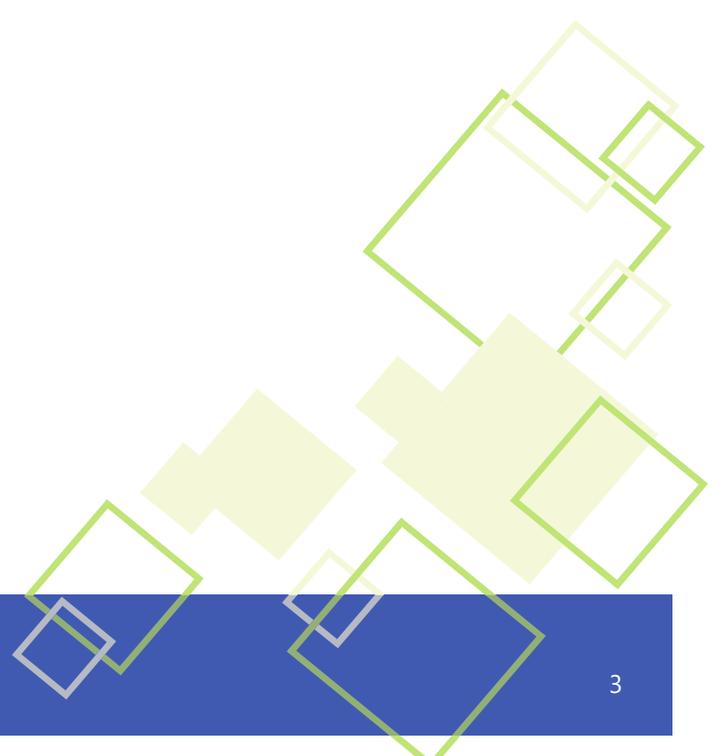
How can we support all educators in implementing protective strategies?

To support implementation of effective instructional practices, school leaders (administrators, members of the school leadership team), coaches (e.g., instructional coaches, PBIS coaches, mentor teachers), and educators should consider the following "tips,"

School Leader Tips	Coach Tips	Educator Tips
• Communicate high expectations, flexibility in timelines, & availability of supports • Arrange supportive training & coaching on implementation in new contexts • Promote community-building & staff wellness • Establish systems to prompt, monitor, & celebrate implementation of protective practices • Review fidelity & outcome data to adjust systems implementation	• Maintain high expectations, & respond to requests for flexibility & support • Provide supportive training, coaching, & feedback on implementation in new contexts • Engage in community-building & staff wellness activities • Help educators arrange environments to prompt & facilitate effective instructional practices • Celebrate progress toward successful implementation • Review student data to help educators adjust instruction	• Maintain high expectations, & request flexibility & support when needed • Participate in supportive training, coaching, & feedback on implementation in new contexts • Engage in community-building and prioritize staff & student wellness • Arrange your environment to prompt & facilitate effective instructional practices • Celebrate progress toward successful implementation • Monitor student needs and responsiveness to adjust & enhance implementation

Hyperlinks to Resources Embedded in Text

[1] https://www.pbis.org/resource/positive-greetings-at-the-door

[2] https://www.pbis.org/resource/supporting-and-responding-to-behavior-evidence-based-classroom-strategies-for-teachers

[3] https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/beh1/cresource/q2/p08/#content

[4] https://www.pbis.org/resource/creating-a-pbis-behavior-teaching-matrix-for-remote-instruction

[5] https://ceedar.education.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Assessment-Practices-Within-a-Multi-Tiered-System-of-Supports-1.pdf

[6] https://www.pbis.org/topics/data-based-decision-making

[7] https://www.pbis.org/resource/classroom-integrated-academics-and-behavior-brief

[8] https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide/1

9 https://www.pbis.org/resource/examples-of-engaging-instruction-to-increase-equity-in-education

10 https://bit.ly/ReACTWiseFeedback

11 https://highleveragepractices.org/hlps-8-and-22-provide-positive-and-constructive-feedback-guide-students-learning-and-behavior

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