

# How Do Social and Emotional Skills and School Climate Relate to College Readiness in English?

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Social and emotional (SE) skills are related to many positive outcomes, including degree attainment, improved academic performance, and increased life satisfaction (e.g., Poropat, 2009; Steel, Schmidt, & Shultz, 2008), and are often taught through social and emotional learning (SEL) programs. Furthermore, a positive school climate is important for students' social and emotional wellness and ability to learn. For example, students who have positive relationships with their teachers and feel safe at school tend to show higher academic performance (Korpershoek, Canrinus, Fokkens-Bruinsma, & de Boer, 2020). The purpose of the current study was to examine how SE skills and students' perceptions of school climate relate to college readiness in English, as measured by the ACT® English test and ACT's College Readiness Benchmark for English.

Mosaic™ by ACT® Social Emotional Learning assessment data were collected from 6,747 students (53% female and 47% male; 67% White, 12% Hispanic, 6% Black, and 3% Asian; 74% 11th graders and 23% 12th graders at the time they took the ACT test) and matched to their ACT scores. Their SEL assessment data were captured during the school years 2018–2019 and 2019–2020, while the ACT tests occurred from 2018 to 2021. The SEL assessment measures five social and emotional skills and two school climate scales.

## Social and Emotional Skills

- **Sustaining Effort:** diligence, effort, organization, self-control, and compliance with rules
- **Getting Along with Others:** positive interactions, cooperation, kindness, friendliness, and tactfulness
- **Maintaining Composure:** relative calmness, serenity, and the ability to manage emotions effectively
- **Keeping an Open Mind:** open-mindedness and curiosity about a variety of ideas, beliefs, people, and experiences
- **Social Connection:** a preference for social interaction, assertiveness in social situations, and optimism

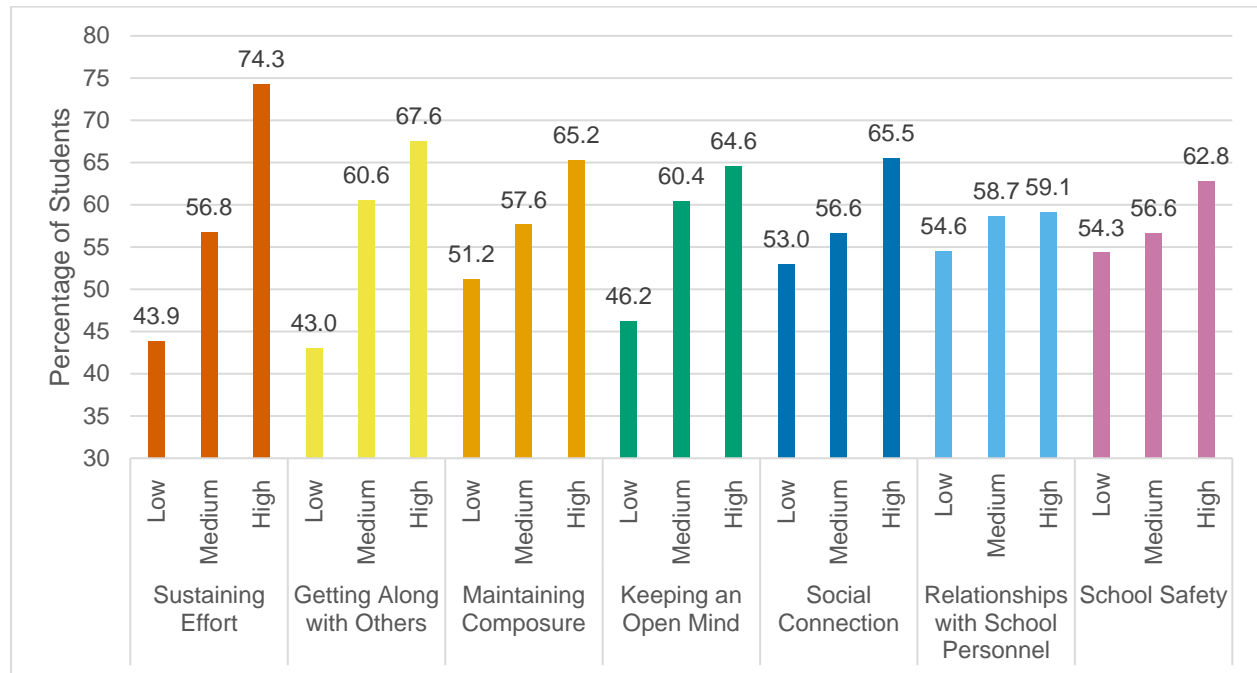
## School Climate Scales

- **Relationships with School Personnel:** the extent to which students relate to school personnel as part of their connection to school
- **School Safety:** students' perception of the qualities related to security at school

Students in the lowest quartile on a given skill or scale were placed in the **low** category, students in the top quartile were placed in the **high** category, and the rest of the students were classified as **medium**.

Students who meet or exceed the ACT College Readiness Benchmarks have a 50% chance of obtaining a B or higher in corresponding credit-bearing first-year college courses, and a 75–80% chance of earning a C or higher in such courses (Allen & Radunzel, 2017). Our data show that a larger percentage of students in the high category of each SE skill or school climate scale met or exceeded the ACT English Benchmark. These results can be seen in the figure below.

**Figure 1.** Percentage of Students Who Met or Exceeded the ACT English Benchmark



As shown in the figure above, fewer students who are classified as low for any of the social and emotional skills or school climate scales met or exceeded the ACT English Benchmark, and the percentage increases substantially as their SE skills and school climate scale scores increase. The trend holds true for the Relationships with School Personnel scale, where a notable increase is found between students classified as low and those classified as medium, but a smaller increase is seen between students classified as medium and those classified as high.

Although this study was descriptive in nature, these results are consistent with previous research showing that SEL programs lead to significant gains in academic achievement (e.g., Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Mahoney, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2018) and that students who have positive relationships with their teachers and feel safe at school tend to show higher academic performance (Korpershoek et al., 2020).

## References

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