



## Focus: Strengthening School Safety

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# The Facts about School-based Police

by Morgan Craven, J.D.

We do not need police in our schools. Despite the mounting evidence of the harm school-based police programs can cause to students and school communities, many school leaders and policymakers wrongly view them as an important “safety” measure. Below are important facts about school policing that we must consider as we strive to create safe, excellent and equitable schools for all students, every day.

**Fact: Police contact can push students into the school-to-prison pipeline**, exposing them to issues – missed classroom time, grade retention, attrition, and contact with the juvenile justice and criminal legal systems – that can impact the likelihood they will graduate and enroll in college (Gottfredson, et al., 2020; Gottlieb & Wilson, 2019; Nance, 2016; Ryan, et al., 2018; Weisburst, 2018).

**Fact: Black students, other students of color, LGBTQ+ youth and students with disabilities are disproportionately impacted** by the presence of school police. National data show that Black students are more likely than their peers to be arrested and referred to law enforcement in their schools, despite not being more likely to break school rules. In the 2017-18 school year, Black students accounted for 32% of reported arrests in U.S. schools, though they only made up 15% of the total student population (CRDC, 2021).

Following high-profile school shootings, police presence and other surveillance measures (like metal detectors and cameras) are directed most to the schools that serve primarily students of color, even controlling for levels of reported crime at the school and in the surrounding community (Anderson, 2016; Nance, 2017).

This means that increasing law enforcement as a response to school violence is often a policy decision based on the race of the students in the school, not on real safety concerns at a campus.

**Fact: Higher arrest, suspension and expulsion rates are associated with a police presence** in schools (Homer & Fisher, 2019). One study found a 6% increase in exclusionary discipline rates, with a disproportionate increase for Latino and Black students and students from families with limited incomes, following an increase in resources for school policing programs (Weisburst, 2018).

**Fact: Students can experience physical harm and trauma due to violent interactions with law enforcement officers** who are able to use tasers, pepper spray, and other weapons and force. Nearly 200 such incidents have been tracked across the country since 2007 (Alliance for Educational Justice, 2022).

The facts are clear. A regular police presence in schools is ineffective, unnecessary and can  
*(cont. on Page 2)*

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*Instead of misusing resources on harmful law enforcement programs, policymakers and school administrators should invest in the school personnel and programs that work to protect students and increase safety.*

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(The Facts about School-based Police, continued from Page 1)

lead to the targeting of Black and Latino students, LGBTQ+ youth, and young people with disabilities.

Instead of misusing resources on harmful law enforcement programs, policymakers and school administrators should invest in the school personnel and programs that work to protect students and increase safety. For more information about what true school safety looks like for all students, see other articles in this newsletter and IDRA's issue brief, *What Safe Schools Should Look Like for Every Student: A Guide to Building Safe and Welcoming Schools and Rejecting Policies that Hurt Students* at <https://idra.news/SafeSchoolsIB>.

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The IDRA Newsletter (ISSN 1069-5672, ©2022) serves as a vehicle for communication with educators, school board members, decision-makers, parents, and the general public concerning the educational needs of all children across the United States.

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# Build Safe Schools, Reject Hurtful Policies

## Policy Responses to School Safety

All students have the right to attend safe, supportive and welcoming schools

### ✘ Safety strategies that harm students

#### School-based policing and campus hardening create unwelcoming environments

School-based law enforcement, unnecessary locks and barriers, disruptive metal detectors, and invasive surveillance technology can make schools feel more like prisons than the open and welcoming learning environments we want for students.

School policing and hardening can be expensive, ineffective and can compromise the civil rights and privacy of students. Additionally, these measures often target students of color in particular.

Schools with a population of more than 50% of students of color are 2 to 18 times more likely to use a combination of "safety" tactics, like metal detectors, locked entrances, school police, security guards and random security sweeps.

### ✔ Safety strategies that help students

#### Cultivate strong relationships that build strong schools

Schools should adopt policies that make engaging and building trust within the whole school community a standard practice, including educators, staff, students and families.

#### Create safe environments using research-based methods

Implementing research-based strategies that are preventative, focus on community building, identify issues and needs, and respond to conflict creates a safe learning environment for students.

Classroom-level strategies, such as setting clear expectations in the classroom, incorporating social and emotional learning and building relationships with students, reinforce positive behavior and help school climates.

#### Train educators & staff

Ensure all educators and staff are trained to recognize the needs of the campus community from basic care, like food and medical care, addressing bullying when it occurs and the needs for mental health support.

#### Meet recommended ratios between students & counselors

Schools should invest in counselors, social workers and other professionals so students can receive the support they need. The recommended student-to-counselor ratio is 250:1. Only two states meet this ratio. Students are not getting their needs met.

#### Support meaningful changes to gun regulations

Gun violence is the leading cause of death for U.S. children. It is important to reduce the presence of weapons in our schools and communities that pose a risk to staff, students and the school environment.

Learn more in our issue brief by Morgan Craven, J.D.:  
**What Safe Schools Should Look Like for Every Student – A Guide to Building Safe and Welcoming Schools and Rejecting Policies that Hurt Students**  
<https://idra.news/SafeSchoolsIB>

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# A Policy Roadmap – School Safety for All Students

by Makiah Lyons, Paige Duggins-Clay, J.D., & Morgan Craven, J.D.

Schools should be safe and supportive environments for all students to learn, play and grow. Every student should enter their classroom and know they are in an environment that affirms their culture, supports their individual dignity and rights, and protects them from bullying and harassment and physical violence.

School leaders and policymakers have a duty to adopt effective, research-based policies that protect all students, all the time. They also have a duty to reject and eliminate policies that may feel popular (particularly in the wake of school violence) but that actually compromise the safety of students. Below are recommendations for what those policy changes should be.

## End Harmful Discipline and School Policing

Arming teachers and school personnel, beefing up surveillance of students, placing police in schools and adopting exclusionary and punitive discipline measures are common strategies undertaken to address school safety. But these measures jeopardize school safety and harm students (Craven, 2022). School leaders and policymakers should instead do the following.

School districts should eliminate district police forces and end all contracts with law enforcement agencies and other entities that place police officers and other armed security personnel in schools. District policies should clearly prohibit school administrators and other staff from contacting police officers to handle any issues and tasks that are unrelated to real threats to safety.

School districts should be required to develop plans with students, teachers, families and community partners to phase out the use of exclusionary and punitive discipline practices in schools. They should work together to develop protocols to identify the needs and address the behaviors of students and adults in the school community.

States should provide strict guidelines around the use of school suspensions and alternative education settings to ensure exclusionary discipline is only used as a last resort. States should never allow zero tolerance discipline policies that automatically punish students and fail to consider and address challenges that young people may be facing, such as whether a student is homeless, is in foster care, has a disability, has no disciplinary history or a student acted in self-defense.

States should adopt policies that require robust data collection and reporting and that hold districts accountable for disproportionate discipline and policing rates that target students of color, students with disabilities, LGBTQ+ students and others.

The U.S. Congress should immediately pass bills that eliminate federal funding for school police (*Counseling not Criminalization in Schools Act*, HR 4011 & S 2125), prohibit corporal punishment (*Protecting Our Students in Schools Act*, HR 3836 & S 2029) and prohibit harmful seclusions and restraints in schools (*Keeping All Students Safe Act*, HR 3474 & S1858).

## Invest in the People and Programs Students Need

Safe schools are built and maintained through strong, enduring relationships between diverse staff, educators, students and families within the school community. These relationships are crucial to fostering welcoming and inclusive school climates and creating effective mechanisms that provide both accountability and support for all community members. Policies at every level can help schools implement strategies to grow authentic relationships and sustain the programs that ensure true safety.

States should allocate more funding and provide technical support to aid school districts  
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*School leaders and policymakers have a duty to adopt effective, research-based policies and practices that protect all students, all the time.*

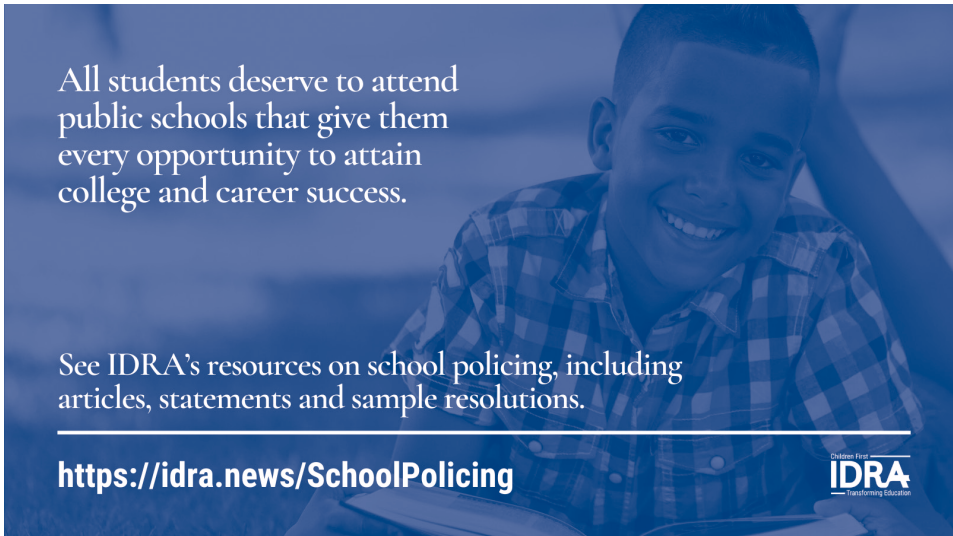
in adopting research-based strategies like restorative practices. Restorative practices are methods that can be used to build strong relationships throughout the school community, shifting emphasis away from the punishment, shame and exclusion of traditional discipline and toward policies that instead focus on community-building both before and following conflict (Duggins-Clay, 2022; Yusem, nd). State funds can be used to support campus-level staff, resource hubs through state education agencies, and training and monitoring programs. (See article on Page 5.)

States and school districts should adopt policies that provide funding, create technical assistance programs, and articulate clear, public support to programs that train teachers to adopt culturally-sustaining instructional practices. Culturally-sustaining practices are another research-based strategy that schools can use to promote strong relationships across school communities by valuing and nurturing students, staff and families of all races and ethnicities (Caldera, 2021). These practices encourage students to be authentic and engaged in the classroom because they recognize their identities and community connections as a strength.

Through strong, clear policies that provide support and monitoring protocols for implementation and impact, states, schools and districts can ensure all education professionals are prepared to recognize and appreciate diversity and affirm and celebrate the diverse identities of students within the classroom (Latham Sikes, 2020).

States and school districts should invest in recruitment and retention programs to attract diverse, well-qualified people to the teaching profession. These can include “grow your own” programs that support aspiring teachers who want to remain in schools in their communities (IDRA EAC-South, 2019; Carver-Thomas & Grayson, 2017).

States and school districts should enact clear and consistent discipline policies and train school personnel in classroom management. Schools receiving federal funds are required by law to intervene in bullying or harassment incidences that are related to a student’s identity. Schools should avoid sinking resources into anti-bullying campaigns that research shows are ineffective, such as student bystander strat-



All students deserve to attend public schools that give them every opportunity to attain college and career success.

See IDRA’s resources on school policing, including articles, statements and sample resolutions.

<https://idra.news/SchoolPolicing>

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egy, anti-bullying assemblies and slogans, and instead train teachers and school employees in effective classroom management techniques (Brion-Meisels, et al., 2022; IDRA EAC-South, 2021).

States and school districts should expand ethnic studies courses, which have been shown to improve student outcomes and build community (IDRA, 2021). State legislatures and state education agencies could formally adopt ethnic studies courses as electives or identify them as courses available to fulfill a required credit (Gómez, 2021). With student and community input, districts can implement budget and timeline plans to ensure they are able to train and hire diverse educators to teach ethnic studies courses at campuses across the district.

States and school districts should invest in resource hubs, refine guidelines around professional duties, and allocate funding to support programs and school personnel who are trained to address mental, behavioral and other health needs.

School counselors, social workers and other health professionals are extremely valuable and help schools identify and respond to the diverse and critical needs of their staff and students and improve school climates (Lapan, et al., 2012). These professionals are a critical part of ensuring holistic school safety and addressing the issues adults and students are facing. Professional organizations recommend a student-to-counselor ratio of at least 250:1 (ASCA, 2022). Unfortunately, many schools are not meeting this recommendation and stu-

dents do not have access to these professionals, even as school districts invest instead in school policing and other programs that are harmful for students (ASCA, 2022; Whitaker, et al., 2019).

For more information about IDRA’s policy, advocacy, community engagement, and research on school safety, join our Southern Education Equity Network at [www.idraseen.org](http://www.idraseen.org).

References are available online at <https://idra.news/allIndex22>.

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# Implementing Restorative Practices to Strengthen School Communities

by Paige Duggins-Clay, J.D.

Restorative justice is a relational approach to strengthening connections, establishing values, building trust and responding to harm in our communities (Duggins-Clay, 2022). This article walks through the foundational principles of restorative justice, discusses how restorative principles have translated into restorative practices in education, and provides recommendations for beginning implementation of restorative practices as an alternative to exclusionary discipline.

## A Rich History Grounds Restorative Practices

Educators have been incorporating restorative practices in schools across the world for generations. In recent history, though, western countries and the United States in particular shifted away from relational and communal methods of conflict resolution and instead emphasize punitive, carceral and violent responses to wrongdoing (Evans & Vaandering, 2016; Thorsborne & Blood, 2013; Gonzalez, 2012).

Since at least the 1980s, the so-called “war on drugs” ushered in an era of mass incarceration in the United States (Alexander, 2010). Predictably, this trend of imposing harsher sentences for individuals accused of relatively minor offenses found its way into education law and policy. Beginning in the 1990s, schools increasingly became secure facilities in which exclusion, isolation and incarceration have become normalized as responses to both ordinary and more serious student misbehavior (Gonzalez, 2012). These policies have resulted in negative academic and life outcomes for children, particularly Black and Latino children (Johnson, 2016; IDRA, 2022).

In comparison, as many U.S. schools began to establish zero tolerance policies, schools in Australia and New Zealand adopted legislation to codify the Maori (an indigenous community native to New Zealand) approach to conflict

resolution (Gonzalez, 2012). The *Oranga Tamarii Act* 1989 (originally named the *Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act*) codified the Maori “family group conferencing” framework for youth justice that centers and involves family and affected community members in decision-making about what to do in the wake of youth misconduct (Thorsborne & Blood, 2013). Schools in Australia and New Zealand then began using restorative conferencing to provide meaningful methods of accountability for students who cause harm and later to build a more positive school culture (Thorsborne & Blood, 2013). The Maori model is widely credited as being a springboard for incorporating restorative practices in educational settings (Evans & Vaandering, 2016; Gonzalez, 2012).

A growing body of research establishes the effectiveness of school-based restorative practices in U.S. schools in reducing suspensions, expulsions and police referrals, while improving academic outcomes and decreasing violence (Davis, 2019; Gonzalez, et al., 2018).

## Restorative Practices in School Policy – Guiding Principles for Implementation

Restorative practices reject punitive and exclusionary responses to harm, which use isolation, shame, and deprivation of privileges and rights as tools to punish a person who engages in misconduct. Instead, restorative practices value all school community members, including students who have wronged their peers or their classroom community.

When student misconduct occurs, rather than pushing students out of the classroom or labeling them as “bad kids,” we affirm their worth, find ways to strengthen their ties and commitments to the school community through support and accountability, and invest in the support and resources necessary to address any root causes underlying the misbehavior.

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*A growing body of research establishes the effectiveness of school-based restorative practices in U.S. schools in reducing suspensions, expulsions and police referrals, while improving academic outcomes and decreasing violence.*

(Implementing Restorative Practices to Strengthen School Communities, continued from Page 5)

Under a restorative framework, students who cause harm are expected to repair it to the fullest extent possible with the support of adults and other community members. And by working to repair the situation, the person who caused harm is able to regain respect and trust from the community. Restorative practices can be available for all kinds of harm created by all kinds of school community members, including educators and parents.

With growing awareness of and commitment to restorative values, educators are now turning to the work of establishing and expanding restorative practices in schools. Implementation of restorative practices tends to fit within one of the three following categories:

- Restorative circles (community building through group reflection guided by a trained facilitator);
- Restorative conferences (alternative discipline and mediation through small circles designed to respond to incidents and identify root causes of behaviors in order to prevent future harm); and
- Restorative climate and culture (addressing and promoting equity, culturally-sustaining learning environments and social-emotional learning). Often referred to as the “whole school approach” to restorative practices in education, these three “tiers” provide the foundation for developing restorative school communities (Gonzalez, et al., 2018).

To begin implementing restorative practices using a whole school approach, school leaders should consider the following action steps.

### Planning and Preparation

- Identify and provide foundational training for a core group of educators, school leaders and students that can lead your school's restorative justice implementation. This core team can receive, evaluate and facilitate discipline cases referred for restorative responses and can serve as ambassadors to help educate and model restorative practices throughout the school community.
- Review current policies, procedures and practices to eliminate formal and informal barriers to restorative responses to student misconduct, such as mandatory referrals to administration or suspension that are not required by law.
- Build community engagement and awareness of your school's commitment to restor-

## Restorative Justice Assistance

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ative justice through community presentations, listening sessions and roundtables.

### Initial Implementation

- Provide training for all school personnel on restorative justice foundations and circle-facilitation basics. Encourage educators to begin using community-building circles within the classroom to familiarize students with restorative practices.
- Review campus and/or district discipline data and engage in listening sessions with educators to identify one or two categories of misconduct that will be addressed using exclusively restorative responses. Consider selecting low-level conduct offenses for initial implementation and build toward using restorative responses to more serious incidents.
- Document your campus's or your district's commitment to responding to the identified misconduct using restorative process and establish referral processes. Share this commitment and information about the policy and process with community members, including educators, parents, students and any community partners.

- Begin to refer and engage in restorative conferences for identified cases. Document outcomes and observations for continuous improvement and evaluation. Share stories of success with the school community.

### Broader Implementation

- Continue to use restorative practices to build and strengthen community relationships. Incorporate circles into weekly and/or daily school routines.
- Evaluate and reflect on outcomes and observations from initial implementation of restorative responses. Adjust practice as necessary to address challenges and opportunities for improvement.

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IDRA works with school systems, institutions of higher education, and communities across the country to transform education by putting children first.

**Restorative Practices Campus Team Training and Coaching Support Services**

Restorative practices are part of the Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS) and shift the paradigm of traditional behavior management to focus on community building and development of strong and powerful relationships, rather than punishment alone. IDRA professional development and coaching training explores the key goals of restorative practices that help schools to:

- Create strong circles to support healthy learning communities.
- Encourage accountability and responsibility through personal education with a collaborative planning process.
- Increase engagement on campus.
- Understand why traditional discipline systems contribute to the harm.
- Identify how to change the current discipline system.

**We are here to help. Email us!**  
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**About IDRA**  
IDRA is an independent, non-profit organization. Our mission is to advance social educational opportunities for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to succeed and succeed in college.

**What IDRA Can Do For You**

- Research-based professional development in restorative practices
- Team training for schoolwide implementation
- Coaching and mentoring

**IDRA Restorative Justice Team**  
Our education associates have completed over 50 hours of professional development in both restorative practices and coaching and mentoring training from UT Austin's Institute for Restorative Justice and Resiliency Design. The IDRA EAC-South has partnered with the Texas and the National Comprehensive Center (NCC) to deliver restorative practices. Additional training with some school districts across Florida is available. [www.idra.org](http://www.idra.org)

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- Expand use of restorative practices in other conduct cases as comfort and experience grows. Include cases involving more serious offenses, in collaboration with other support professionals (e.g., counselors, violence prevention specialists).

The IDRA EAC-South supports public schools, districts and education agencies across the U.S. South that seek to address issues of discrimination and implement strategies, like restorative practices, that build safe and supportive schools for all young people. For more information about our work and services visit [www.idraeacsouth.org](http://www.idraeacsouth.org) and check out more resources for advocacy organizations and individuals at [www.idraseen.org](http://www.idraseen.org).

### Resources

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# Alternative Responses to Student Behavior – Steps for Teachers, Administrators and School Staff

by Paula Johnson, Ph.D.

As much as we care for our students, there are times when their behavior can disrupt learning. Sometimes, minor distractions like side conversations or students who are unprepared for class take the focus off course. Other times, we experience disturbances like a heated argument or fight. These incidents not only interrupt instruction, they sometimes may also put students' safety in jeopardy.

As teachers and administrators, we do our best to redirect students. However, sometimes our response is more extreme than the behavior calls for, especially if we are overwhelmed in the moment by external factors. In either case, adult response to student behavior depends largely on experience, emotion and educator bias. This combination results in a largely inequitable assignment of consequences and creates a negative school environment.

Schools are in dire need to advance equitable school discipline reform. Exclusionary and corporal discipline practices are more likely to negatively impact Black students, boys and students with disabilities. For example, Black students experience corporal punishment 2.5 times more than their percentage of the student population (37% vs. 15%). To reduce these disparities, responses to student behavior must center their social, emotional and academic development through an asset-based approach.

School climate speaks broadly to the quality and nature of the school environment. Not only for students but also for families, teachers and the larger school community. *School climate* describes the way we feel at school. Climate is based on patterns of an individual's experience of school life.

Additionally, school climate reflects the school's values, relationships, instructional practices and traditions. A valuing school climate leads to an inclusive school culture where everyone feels a sense of community. This sense of be-

longing positively pours over into other areas like classroom behavior, academic mindsets and student interactions with others.

Note: Our goal here is not to replace one punishment with another. Rather, the following recommendations provide opportunities for students and adults to learn and grow in resolving conflict through relationship building by developing social and critical thinking skills and problem-solving strategies.

**Recommendation 1: Establish high expectations for student behavior.** This is an effective way to support students' academic and behavioral success. Clear and consistent classroom expectations provide goals for students. Students know which behaviors are appropriate. Expectations enable students to take responsibility for their behavior as well as their learning. Teachers can more easily observe and encourage positive behaviors. For example, a teacher individually thanking students who are prepared for the day's lesson signals to other students that it is time to get ready for learning.

Teachers can address off-task behaviors without judgment by referring to the agreed-upon classroom expectations. Additionally, using reflective questioning enables students to redirect their own behavior. When a teacher observes a student who does not appear to be following instructions, they might ask the student the following questions: What are you currently doing? What task should you be working on? Do you need assistance? Clarify and confirm the given directions. Then allow the student time to return to the assigned task. Finally, thank them for making good decisions. Remember that students need multiple opportunities to practice self-management. Pre-established privileges and consequences enable students to monitor their own behavior and learning.

**Recommendation 2: School staff, teachers and administrators must establish effective**

**means of communication with students and families about behavioral and academic expectations.** This assists families in providing positive reinforcement at home to teach and model the use of appropriate problem-solving and social skills. Communication helps students maintain consistent expectations for interactions with peers, teachers, and parents or caregivers. Open and respectful communication about behavior and academic habits also encourages honest discussions when concerns do arise. Students' capacity for self-management increases through teacher feedback, peer and family support, and other community building activities. When students feel they are secure in their environment, they spend more time engaged in the learning process and experience more positive interactions with others.

**Recommendation 3: Increase the regular use of social and emotional learning (SEL) supports to address students' needs.** Many inappropriate student behaviors developed or became magnified during the pandemic. It is crucial to provide students with multiple opportunities to discuss their experiences over the last three years. For example, the U.S. Department of Education Return to School Roadmap (<https://sites.ed.gov/roadmap>) offers suggestions on classroom activities that include journaling exercises, group discussions, and letter writing about how the pandemic has impacted them. Other outlets include artwork, music and poetry. SEL encourages students' self-awareness and mindfulness, develops our empathy for others and builds emotional safe spaces for students to learn.

Positive school climate strategies also help address adult behaviors. Teachers, administrators and parents can learn to recognize biases and assumptions they may hold that impact their interactions with adults and students. It is important to take time to analyze how they may view and treat others differently based on their  
(cont. on Page 8)

## Focus: Strengthening School Safety

(Alternative Responses to Student Behavior, continued from Page 7)

identities. This practice enables them to spot growth opportunities in themselves and others. Disrupting bias-based attitudes and actions increases student outcomes, behaviorally and academically, and positively affects the school community. Shifting toward a more inclusive school culture improves instructional practice and increases student and family engagement.

Inclusive school climates ensure that the conditions for successful teaching and learning are in place. Students thrive in a school community that encourages and maintains respectful, trusting and caring relationships. Similarly, welcoming school climates demonstrate the school's efforts to foster a safe and respectful atmosphere that promotes and supports the academic, social and emotional, and physical well-being of the entire school community.

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