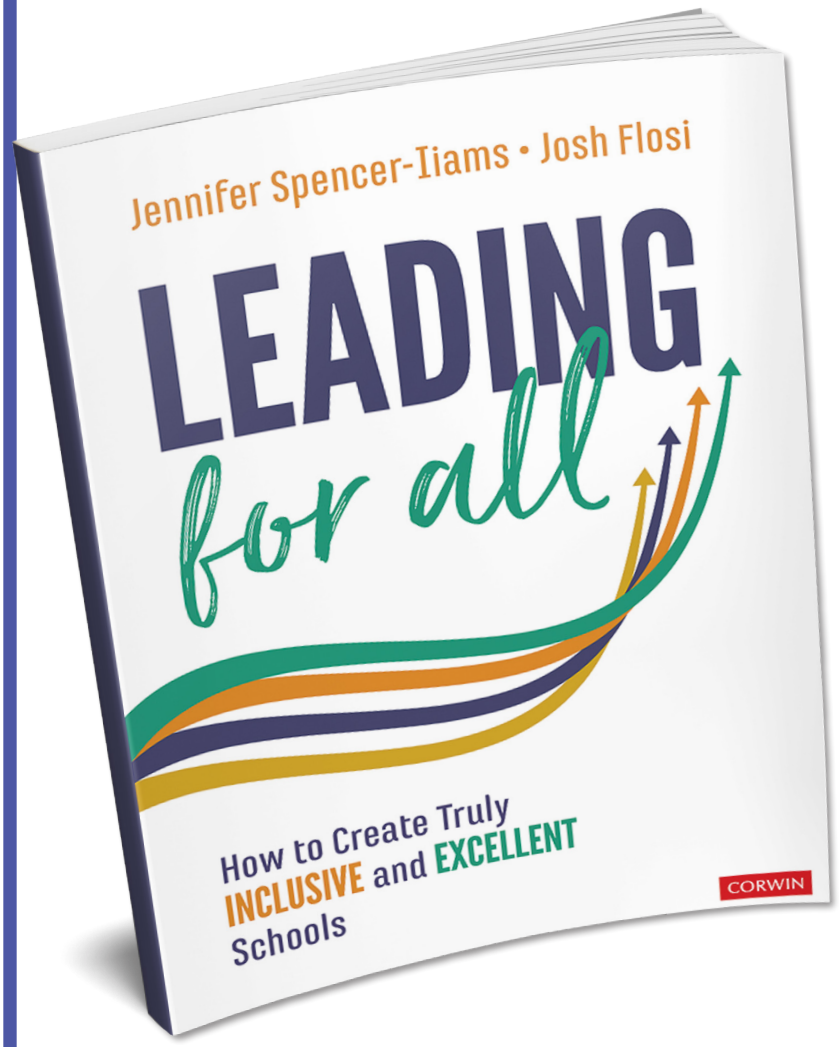

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Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from *Leading for All.* In this excerpt, the authors explain how to identify and teach social emotional skills.

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Teaching Social-Emotional Skills

As brain research develops, we are learning more and more that social-emotional regulation is critical to learning. Rich learning experiences activate the prefrontal cortex, allowing students to draw connections between ideas and build neural pathways for long-term retrieval. When students experience social-emotional dysregulation, the brain reverts to a fight/flight/freeze reflex. This disengages the prefrontal cortex and inhibits meaningful learning opportunities (Hammond, 2014). To help students engage in highly rigorous learning, we need

TABLE 6.5 "The 7 Components of Inclusive and Equitable Learning Communities": Teaching Social-Emotional Skills

TEACHING SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SKILLS	
TARGETS	**GUIDING QUESTIONS**
• Teachers identify specific social-emotional skills to teach and have appropriate resources for instruction. • Social-emotional skills (including self-awareness, self-management, and social/relational awareness) are taught in explicit and implicit ways. • Students have opportunities to generalize skills across settings and with different peer groups. • Students recognize their social-emotional strengths and areas for additional learning.	• How do the teacher and other school staff partner to provide instruction in social-emotional skills? • How does the teacher create opportunities to practice specific social-emotional skills within the context of classroom tasks? • To what degree are students able to talk about their social-emotional needs and strengths in different contexts and identify specific strategies to match their current need?

SOURCE: Used with Permission from West Linn-Wilsonville School District

to help them maintain social-emotional regulation. And therefore, we need to explicitly teach social-emotional skills (Table 6.6).

Another way to think of this is Bruce Perry's (2018) sequence of engagement: Regulate-Relate-Reason. First, we need to help students regulate their social-emotional or sensory state. Then we need to relate to them as individuals. Only at that point can we connect to their reasoning brain.

IDENTIFYING SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SKILLS TO TEACH

Target from The 7 Components:

Teachers identify specific social-emotional skills to teach and have appropriate resources for instruction.

The first step for teachers and school leaders is to identify which social-emotional skills we want to teach and what resources we are going to use to teach them. This varies across grade levels. Some of the key areas to consider are (CASEL, 2017)

- self-awareness,
- self-management,
- social awareness,
- relationships skills, and
- responsible decision-making.

Specific lessons and activities help students develop the skills to identify and regulate feelings, build and maintain healthy relationships, use productive self-talk, and engage in effective problem solving. In our district, we use the Zones of Regulation at the elementary level and the Second Step curriculum in elementary and middle school. In high school we use School Connect and Sources of Strength. The specific curriculum is less important than the fact that students are learning to recognize their social-emotional state and use regulation techniques that work for them.

EXPLICIT AND IMPLICIT INSTRUCTION FOR SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SKILLS

Target from The 7 Components:

Social-emotional skills are taught in explicit and implicit ways.

As with most other things in school, students will come to us with a range of proficiency in managing their social-emotional state. Some families will have taught students to recognize and regulate their emotions from an early age. Students who have experienced trauma may have developed pathways in the brain that lead to more frequent dysregulation.

Counselors and teachers in our district have been using the Hand Model of the brain to help students think about what they are experiencing and how to control it. Popularized by Dr. Dan Siegel, the Hand Model helps students understand how fear sensors in the "reptile brain" (amygdala) may trigger a fight, flight, or freeze response when they face unfamiliar or unexpected circumstances. When the brain is working most efficiently, the prefrontal cortex is active, and students can reason and relate effectively. But when the amygdala takes over, the prefrontal cortex becomes disengaged. Dr. Siegel (2010) calls this "flipping your lid."

Saying, "I flipped my lid" is not an excuse for bad behavior, however. Instead, it is a way for students to talk about what is happening in their brain using safe and accessible language. Helping students visualize what is happening in their brains when they are dysregulated, and giving them language to name it, helps to demystify what they are experiencing. This is empowering for students and allows them to develop a sense of control over their social-emotional regulation. It also helps teachers and classmates empathize with students who are struggling to control their behavior. Having a common language for students, teachers, and parents makes it easier to teach and practice effective social-emotional skills.

PRACTICING SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SKILLS

Target from The 7 Components:

Students have opportunities to generalize skills across settings and with different peer groups.

We recognize that understanding what is going on in the brain is not enough. The whole point, after all, is that the reason centers of the brain are disengaged when the amygdala takes over. So once students have a framework and language to understand what is happening in their brains, the next step is to give them opportunities to practice their regulation skills.

Teachers can create opportunities to practice social-emotional regulation skills in a variety of ways. Some of the most common occasions for dysregulation are initiating high-rigor tasks (like writing), transitioning between activities (especially at the end of a high-interest activity), and unstructured times like recess and lunch. Before moving into one of these activities, the teacher can prepare the whole class by reviewing the Hand Model of the brain and prompting students to think about which social-emotional regulation strategy they will use if they feel themselves about to "flip their lid." Teachers can also lead the class in a brief regulation exercise, like deep breathing, stretching, or a movement break. While these activities may be targeted toward a few students with intense social-emotional needs, they are likely to benefit all students in the class.

In one third-grade classroom we observed, the teacher helped the students practice these skills at the end of a mathematics lesson. The students had worked in small groups or pairs on a challenging mathematical task. The teacher called the students to gather in a circle "around the perimeter of the room" (using mathematical vocabulary in the daily routine). Then she called on a few students to share about how they had worked with their partners, the challenges they faced in their work, and how they overcame those challenges. As she neared the end of the sharing time, there were many students with their hands raised. The teacher knew she did not have time for each student to tell the class about their work. So she said, "I'm going to call on one more friend to share with the class. So get ready to shrug and say, 'Oh, well' if you don't get called on." She called on a student to share. Then she modeled shrugging her shoulders and saying "Oh, well." The rest of the class followed along, and no one demonstrated signs of being upset or dysregulated.

This is a quick teacher-led activity to help students recognize a potentially upsetting situation in class (not getting called on when you have your hand raised) and practice a social-emotional regulation skill (shrugging your shoulders and saying "Oh, well."). It doesn't require any specific social-emotional learning curriculum or expertise. Any teacher can help build students' social-emotional skills through this kind of practice.

In addition, by teaching social-emotional strategies to the whole class, students become more empathetic to their classmates who are struggling with social-emotional regulation. When a student sees their peer in a state of escalation, they have some language to describe what's going on in their brain. This can help make the unexpected behavior seem a little less scary, resulting in the student who is dysregulated being less likely to be isolated or alienated from their peers.

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SELF-AWARENESS

Target from The 7 Components:

Students recognize their social-emotional strengths and areas for additional learning.

Similarly, when all students in the class have the opportunity to learn about social-emotional regulation, they begin to see patterns in themselves. In some cases we even have students gather data to monitor their own social-emotional state. They can see when they are most likely to be regulated—what times of the day or what classroom activities are most comfortable and successful for them. They can then reflect on what times of the day or what activities provoke feelings of social-emotional discomfort.

The purpose of this self-awareness is not about avoidance. We want students to be aware of the times or tasks that cause anxiety or disruptive patterns of thinking—but not so they can simply leave the room and avoid having to engage in challenging tasks or difficult interactions with peers. Instead, we want students to be able to recognize patterns so they can engage in intentional self-regulation activities before and during these challenging times.

For example, teachers in all of our primary school classrooms use the Zones of Regulation, a system of categories that helps students recognize their social-emotional state (Kuypers, 2011). Teachers emphasize that it is normal for students to move through a variety of social-emotional states throughout the day.

The Zones of Regulation are color coded to help students and teachers talk about them in simpler language.

- *Blue Zone:* very calm, sleepy, mellow, tired, sick, lonely
- *Green Zone:* alert, aware, engaged, happy, ready to learn
- *Yellow Zone:* silly, wiggly, excited, frustrated, worried, agitated
- *Red Zone:* angry, yelling, hitting, screaming, shouting

The message is not that students should always be in the Green Zone but that they should be aware of their zone and how to change into the desired zone for their current context. For example, when getting ready for bed, we may want to be in the Blue Zone. When playing tag at recess, we may want to be in the Yellow Zone. When cheering at a basketball game, we may want to be in the Red Zone. And when we are in class getting ready to learn, we usually want to be in the Green Zone.

This helps students accept that their emotions are natural and may be appropriate depending on the context. By acknowledging the range of emotions that we all feel, the Zones of Regulation can help students talk about their social-emotional state and how to practice getting into a desired state.

Teachers help students learn "Zone Changer" activities so they can get their bodies and minds into an appropriate state for learning. For example, if a student is in the Blue Zone, they may need to get up and take a vigorous walk down the hall to the drinking fountain. If a student is in the Yellow Zone, they may benefit from a pattern of deep breathing exercises to calm their mind and body. If a student is in the Red Zone, they may need to go down to the gym and throw a heavy ball against the wall or go into a room where they can shout really loud without disturbing other learners.

One of the key concepts in an inclusive school is building capacity in classroom teachers and paraeducators so students do not need to rely on a few specialists to help them access their education. The Zones of Regulation is a great example of this. Our learning specialists, school psychologists, occupational therapists, and SLPs have modeled lessons for teachers in Zones of Regulation, so the teacher can learn the language and then reinforce it throughout the day with their students. In Chapter 9 we talk more about the leadership moves to make these inclusive practices possible.