



SUPPORTING SEL THROUGH TECH

How blended learning can foster social-emotional development.

Teachers have long understood the connection between how a student feels and acts and their academic success. If students can't manage themselves in the moment, they're not learning. Now, the research has caught up. A [Wallace Foundation report](#) states, "Classrooms function more effectively and student learning increases when children have the skills to focus their attention, manage negative emotions, navigate relationships with peers and adults, and persist in the face of difficulty."

Lucy Ford has seen the impact up close. Ford is a coordinator for the Department of Social and Emotional Learning in the Dallas Independent School District. There, she says, several of the campuses use "mindful minutes," where the entire school "shuts down" for 90 seconds.

"They play some nice music on the intercom, the kids sit and breathe, they close their eyes, they listen to the music," Ford says. Those schools where SEL is being used with "fidelity," Ford notes, "are seeing huge improvement. They're noticing that the students are now understanding their emotions — that it's OK to be upset, it's OK to get angry, it's OK to be sad."

Similarly, teachers are recognizing that the sooner they can pinpoint areas where individual students struggle academically, the faster they can develop plans of support for those students. This helps bolster the social-emotional learning going on in their classrooms.

Personalized learning technology integrated into a blended learning program can augment educator efforts by identifying where students need

assistance and then providing tailored support. These individualized programs let students work at a calibrated level, helping them strengthen the aspects of the core SEL competencies laid out by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning: self-awareness, self-confidence, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making.

BUILDING SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SKILLS

Jane Moore and Georgia Thompson began teaching in the early 1970s, and they remember discussions with their colleagues about how, if a student was hungry, "he wasn't going to be able to sit there and learn. He was going to be thinking about hunger," Moore recalls. The same was true if the child was worried about going home and being alone in the afternoon or concerned about abuse in the family. "That's what they worry about all day long," Moore said. So, it makes sense to them that schools now put a big emphasis on SEL. Moore explains, "If [students] have the opportunity to express what's going on and tools to help them manage it, then they can have room for learning."

Now, both Moore and Thompson serve as professional-development consultants for Istation, working with teachers on how to best implement blended learning strategies in the classroom.

Istation includes thousands of lesson plans, automated tools and flexible resources to help educators customize instruction and support diverse teaching approaches.

MODEL THIS: Teaching Persistence with Istation

Crystal Smith teaches third grade at Chapel Hill Preparatory Academy in the Dallas Independent School District and has used Istation for 15 years.

This year, Smith has set up stations — or centers — in her room to better personalize lessons. She created learning pathway trackers that have three modalities as categories: listening, visual and kinesthetic. Each category has two activities. She uses Istation's assignments within the modalities.

"With the learning pathways I have seen an increase in each student's understanding of their own self-actualization, and each perseveres through challenging work in a healthy way," Smith says. "This is a continuous SEL lesson during our morning meeting: perseverance and effort stamina." ■





BLENDED LEARNING TIP

Use data to deliver targeted praise.

Blended learning generates information that gives the teacher, Istation's Jane Moore says, "something specific to talk to the child about: 'I noticed that you worked hard on the vocabulary lesson. Did you do better than last time?' And if they didn't do better: 'I noticed that you really stuck with it today and you worked hard on that lesson.'" This type of targeted praise lets students see the milestones of their growth and helps build the confidence to try something new that might be difficult, Moore adds.

"[B]lended learning never takes the teacher out of the equation," Moore says. "The teacher looks at the [student] data, acts on the data and makes decisions about how to use the technology appropriately."

Moore and Thompson also say they believe that blended learning can support social-emotional skill development, giving students a platform through which they can build confidence, practice self-management, foster collaborative skills and tap into the resilience of the growth mindset.

SELF-CONFIDENCE

Ford has seen children's attitudes change as they work through lessons on their computers. "When you see that the computer says, 'You're right!' or 'That's correct!' or 'You're a superstar!' you can see the demeanor of the child improve," she says. "They're listening to positive reinforcement [which can] build their confidence because it's not judgmental."

Moore has seen the same effect specifically in the use of Istation. At the start of a new month, all students using Istation take a quick formative assessment called ISIP™. While the data is valuable for the teachers to use in planning intervention and instruction, the results are also displayed on payoff graphs that students can easily follow. Each subsequent assessment will allow them to track their progress over time, Moore says, adding, "They'll see their own personal growth and experience that feeling of success."

SELF-MANAGEMENT

Blended learning gives opportunity to practice self-management. Some students have little experience with computers, Ford points out. By putting them in front of the devices and teaching them certain skills, such as how to manipulate the mouse and follow directions, they quickly gain the driver's seat. Soon, they're able to pick their own stories for reading, work on math problems they're trying to solve and move through other activities they've chosen.

"What we're trying to encourage is that self-management of learning, the responsibility to learn — to care about what you're doing and to want to be successful," Thompson says.

COLLABORATION AND RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING

Today's work involves technology, Ford explains. "We can't do anything without [it]," she emphasizes, adding that the same is true now for children, too. Tech tools provide opportunities for students to practice collaborative skills. "[S]ome kids could be putting together a chart. Others could be on a computer doing the research. They could be sharing information," Ford says. And, given access to computers outside of school, they could even be "logging in and working together from home."

Istation supports collaboration with projectable lessons or games that call for students to work in teams, Thompson adds. Teachers often use it in a rotation-station format, with multiple students working on a single activity "as a collaborative effort. It might be a little boy working on an interactive whiteboard and the other kids encouraging him or a group of fifth- or sixth-graders sitting around a computer solving a problem together or working through one of our games," she explains.

GROWTH MINDSET

Ford says she believes technology offers "a lot more options" in encouraging a growth mindset. The right programs enable students to hear "the positives over and over again" and to learn that "it's OK to make a mistake."

SEL and growth mindset in an adaptive, blended learning solution "are intertwined," Moore states. "With support and feedback from a computer-adaptive blended learning program, the student will have enough challenge where they're going to be learning, but they will not be frustrated."

Many teachers encourage students to set and track their own goals. "It might be a five-year-old who colors in his or her score on a bar graph or a middle-grader collecting digital tokens," Thompson suggests. In both cases students monitor learning gains for themselves. Thompson explains, "We've found that when kids see that they are successful, that really helps with their motivation and [builds] self-confidence." ■



BLENDED LEARNING TIP

Choose content to echo SEL lessons.

Dallas ISD's Lucy Ford suggests that teachers can push students toward lessons that focus on specific SEL messages. Tailor the lessons to emphasize whatever message you've been delivering,

that have "SEL skills built in." For example, when they're reading for comprehension, she says, pick stories "that teach the reader about what was going on, why [the characters] acted this way and why they changed their minds later."



ABOUT ISTATION

Istation's computer-adaptive intervention and instruction for [reading](#), [math](#), and [Spanish literacy](#) helps thousands of schools predict student success and more. Research-based and aligned to [state standards](#), Istation's computer-based diagnostic and screening programs, progress monitoring, and interactive lessons provide formative data that give teachers the insight to prioritize interventions, differentiate instruction, and reveal student potential.

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