



# Bringing Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Teaching Practices to Pre-K and Kindergarten Classrooms: Implementing the Pyramid Model

Early education programs offered in preschool and kindergarten classrooms have a lasting effect on students' learning and behavioral development. Research in education, child development, and neuroscience has shown that young children's educational and developmental experiences provide a foundation of skill development that profoundly influences a student's academic achievements and behavioral outcomes. Research shows that behavior problems during preschool years often persist and that adolescents with emotional disturbance have a history of problem behavior that began during preschool (Brennan et al., 2015; Denham & Brown, 2010; Feder et al., 2009). Social-emotional competence in preschool is associated with achievement, job retention, and relationship success later in life (Jones et al., 2015; Zins et al., 2007).

It is critically important that preschool and kindergarten teachers are intentional about teaching social and emotional skills and intervening when there is challenging behavior. Early educators have identified addressing challenging behavior as one of their greatest needs for professional development. National data suggest that teachers are struggling with addressing young students' behavioral concerns with alarming rates of children being suspended and expelled from preschool classrooms. When students are suspended or expelled, they not only miss the opportunity to learn critical social-emotional skills (Fox et al., 2021; Hemmeter & Conroy, 2018), but they are removed from high-quality instruction focused on academic skills. Further, these exclusionary discipline practices may have negative long-term effects, such as disengagement from school, diminished educational opportunities, and expulsion in later school grades (Adamu & Hogan, 2015; Lochner & Moretti, 2004; Raffaele Mendez, 2003).

## Promoting Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Skills Early Has a Lifelong Impact



## Pyramid Model for Promoting Social and Emotional Competence in Young Children—What’s the Evidence?

The Pyramid Model is a multi-tiered framework of promotion, prevention, and intervention practices for promoting young children’s positive social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes. The National Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) describes the Pyramid Model as providing early childhood PBIS. The Pyramid Model has been evaluated and found effective in improving student outcomes in two randomized trials with the following outcomes (Hemmeter et al., 2016, 2021):

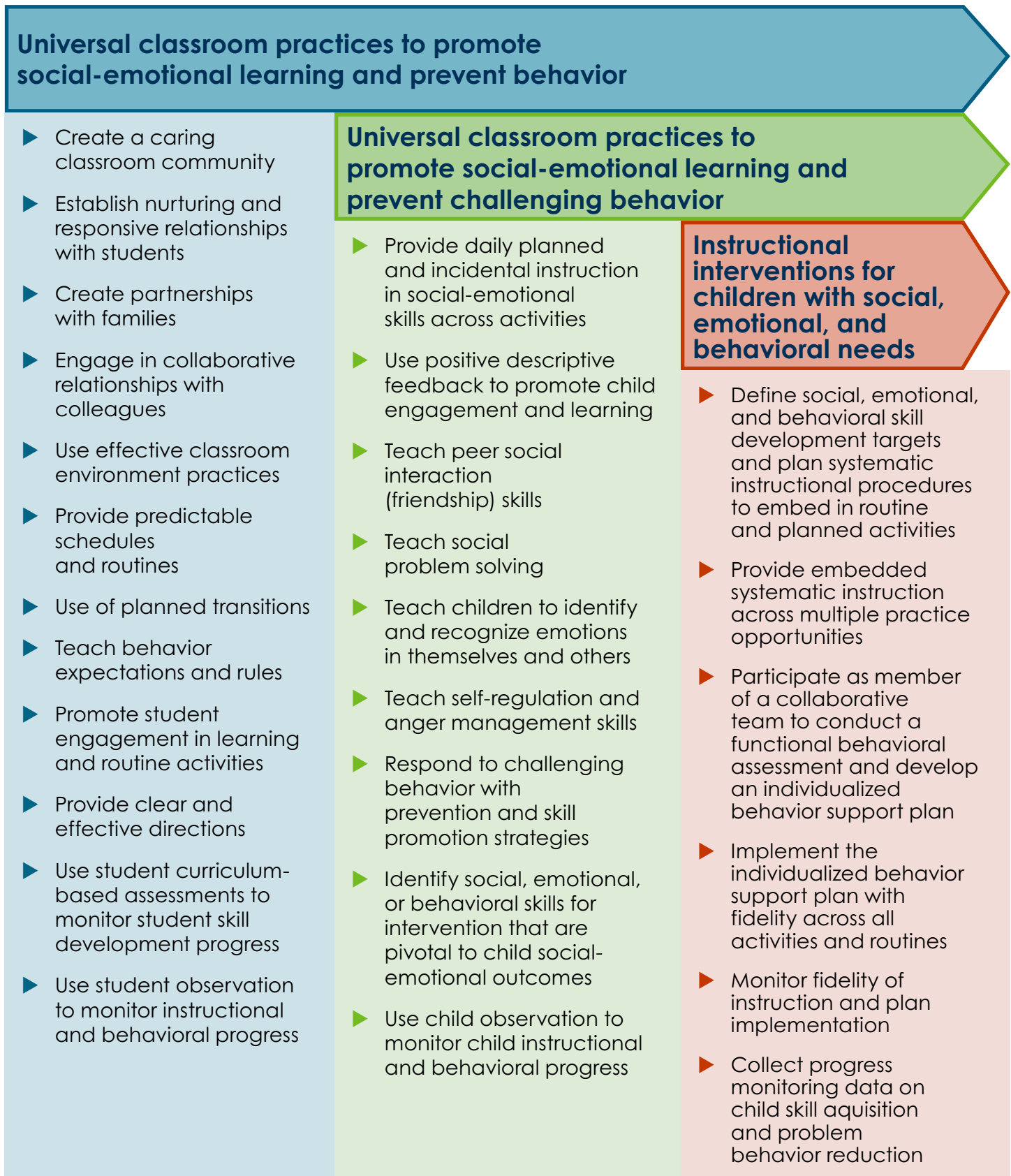
- ▶ Preschool students identified with challenging behavior were rated by teachers as having greater improvement in their behavior than students in the control classrooms.
- ▶ Preschool students identified with challenging behavior were rated by teachers as having greater improvement in their social skills than students in the control classrooms.
- ▶ Preschool students identified with challenging behavior were observed to have greater growth in their positive social interactions than students in the control classrooms.
- ▶ All students in the Pyramid Model classroom were rated by teachers as having greater growth in their social skills than students in the control classroom.
- ▶ Teachers who received training and coaching in the Pyramid Model improved their implementation of the Pyramid Model practices and continued to use the practices a year after coaching ended.

## Multi-Tiered Systems of Support for the Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Outcomes of Young Children: The Pyramid Model

Figure 1 lists the evidence-based Pyramid Model practices for preschool and kindergarten classrooms used within a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS). The figure identifies three categories of practices: 1) universal classroom practices that are essential for promoting social-emotional learning and preventing challenging behavior; 2) universal instructional practices that are necessary to foster social, emotional, and behavioral skill development; and 3) the practices that are effective in the development and delivery of individualized instructional interventions to improve social and behavioral outcomes. Teachers in preschool and kindergarten classrooms should be proficient in all these practices.

The Pyramid Model does not replace the school-wide implementation of SEL Foundations, Restorative Practices, or Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. Instead, it provides classroom practices aligned with those approaches and operationalized for implementation in preschool and kindergarten classrooms. Teachers implementing the Pyramid Model implement universal practices for teaching rules and expectations, building relationships and classroom community, using practices to promote the engagement of each and every student, acknowledging students for following expectations and rules, and the intentional and integrated teaching of social and emotional skills. The Pyramid Model practices also include tier two practices for providing systematic instruction on targeted social, emotional, and behavioral skills to students who need targeted intervention. Finally, teachers are prepared for their role as collaborative team members in the development of tier three interventions and the implementation and progress monitoring of those interventions.

**Figure 1. The Pyramid Model as a Multi-Tiered System of Support**



## References

- Adamu, M., & Hogan, L., (2015). Point of entry: The preschool-to-prison pipeline. *Center for American Progress*.
- Brennan, L. M., Shaw, D. S., Dishion, T. J., & Wilson, M. N. (2015). The predictive utility of early childhood disruptive behavior for school-age social functioning. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 42, 1187-1199.
- Denham, S. A., & Brown, C. (2010). "Plays nice with others:" Social emotional learning and academic success. *Early Education and Development*, 21, 652-680.
- Feder, A., Alonso, A., Tang, M., Liriano, W., Warner, V., Pilowsky, D., Barranco, E., Wang, Y., Verdeli, H., Wickramaratne, P., & Weissman, M. M. (2009). Children of low-income depressed mothers: Psychiatric disorders and social adjustment. *Depression and Anxiety*, 26, 513-520.
- Fox, L., Strain, P. S., & Dunlap, G. (2021). Preventing the use of preschool suspension and expulsion: Implementing the Pyramid Model. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth*, 65, 312-322.
- Hemmeter, M. L., & Conroy, M. A. (2018). Advancement of evidence-based programs for young children with social and emotional learning difficulties. *School Mental Health*, 10, 199-201.
- Hemmeter, M. L., Fox, L., Snyder, P., Algina, J., Hardy, J. K., Bishop, C., & Veguilla, M. (2021). Corollary child outcomes from the Pyramid Model professional development intervention efficacy trial. *Early Children Research Quarterly*, 54, 204-218.
- Hemmeter, M. L., Snyder, P., Fox, L., & Algina, J. (2016). Evaluating the implementation of the Pyramid Model for promoting social-emotional competence in early childhood classrooms. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 36, 133-146.
- Jones, D. E., Greenberg, M., & Crowley, M. (2015). Early social-emotional functioning and public health: The relationship between kindergarten social competence and future wellness. *American Journal of Public Health*, 105, 2283-2290.
- Lochner, L., & Moretti, E. (2004). The effect of education on crime: Evidence from prison inmates, arrests, and self-reports. *American Economic Review*, 94, 155-189.
- Raffaele Mendez, L. M. (2003). Predictors of suspension and negative school outcomes: A longitudinal investigation. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 99, 17-33.
- Zins, J. E., Bloodworth, M. R., Weissberg, R. P., & Walberg, H. J. (2007). The scientific base linking social and emotional learning to school success. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, 17, 191-210.



---

### National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations | [ChallengingBehavior.org](https://ChallengingBehavior.org)

The reproduction of this document is encouraged. Permission to copy is not required. If modified or used in another format, please cite original source. The contents of this were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Education Innovation and Research (EIR) Program. This product is disseminated by the National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations funded by Cooperative Agreement #H326B220002 which is funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the federal government.

Pub: 11/14/23