Improving School Climate with Emotional Intelligence

December 8, 2025

CEA · CAS Connecticut Association of Schools · CAPSS · CABE · CSDE · AFT Connecticut · CFSA · Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence

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Today's Agenda

8:30-8:45am	**Welcome & Introductions**
8:45-9:30am	**Keynote: Emotion Regulation & Co-regulation** [Marc Brackett]
9:30-10:00am	**School Climate Legal & Policy Update** [Shipman and Goodwin]
10:00-10:10am	**BREAK**
10:10-10:55am	**Breakout Sessions:**
	Shared Vision & Prevention-Focused Planning [Newington Public Schools & Yale CSC]
	Optimizing Engagement & Classroom Climate [Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence]
	Student Voice, Choice, & Leadership [Farmington High School]
	Making CT Climate Data Actionable [Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence]
10:55-11:20am	**Panel: From Insight to Action** [West Rocks Middle School]
11:25am-12:00pm	**School Team Planning Time**
12:00-12:15pm	**Closing & Next Steps**

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Introductions

Marc Brackett
Director
Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence (YCEI)

Fran Rabinowitz
Executive Director
CT Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS)

Kate Dias
President
CT Education Association (CEA)

Fran DiFiore
Co-President
CT Federation of School Administrators (CFSA)

Jody Goeler
Senior Policy Associate
CT Association of Boards of Education (CABE)

Sinthia Sone-Moyano
Deputy Commissioner, Educational Supports & Wellness
CT State Department of Education (CSDE)

Alicia Bowman
Associate Executive Director, Director CLI
CT Association of Schools (CAS)

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Emotion Regulation & Co-regulation

Pathway to Positive Classroom and School Climate

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Professor, Yale Child Study Center

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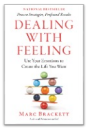

@marc.brackett

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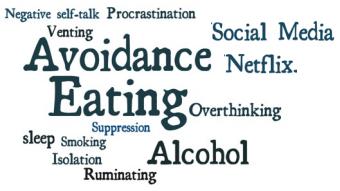
We educators aren't regulating well



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Our students aren't either

- Impulse control, tantrums, and screaming outbursts
- Excessive crying or shutting down
- Blaming and scapegoating
- Physically assaulting others
- Refusing to share or participate
- Pouting and withdrawing
- Gossiping and meanness
- Drugs and alcohol

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Why emotion regulation, why now?

The Age of Amplification - We live in constant overdrive: 24/7 news, outrage-driven feeds, political polarization, and AI-engineered triggers.

A World of Crises - Pandemic, climate disasters, wars, injustices, economic uncertainties. The collective stress has become chronic.

Violence – Most aggressive behavior is a result of dysregulated anger, despair, or humiliation (not mental illness).

Without regulation, we spiral into outrage and fear that corrode well-being. We burn out and fracture our relationships. Emotion regulation is not just self-help; it's public safety, well-being, and social stability.

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What the research shows:

- Teachers with greater emotion regulation skills are less stressed and burnt out, have stronger social support networks, and feel more accomplished and satisfied in their jobs.
- Students with greater emotion regulation skills are more attentive, better learners, have stronger and healthier relationships, make more sound decisions, and are stronger learners.
- Put simply: We are healthier, happier, more connected, and even live longer when we can regulate emotions.

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Why didn't we learn to regulate?

- We don't value emotions as a society
- We don't recognize emotion regulation as a useful skill
- Nobody taught us the skills at home (less than 10%)
- We didn't learn the skills at school (less than 7%)
- We love the quick fix
- We'd rather treat ailments than prevent them
- There's limited institutional or governmental support

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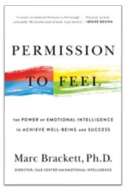
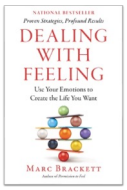
From Permission to Feel to Dealing





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The confusion. ER is not about…

- Denying emotions
- Controlling others. Strategies are aligned with people's unique identities, strengths, values, and cultural backgrounds
- Always being comfortable or happy
- Blaming temperament or personality. Emotion regulation strategies are co-constructed throughout life
- Minimizing the importance of critical life events such as poverty, discrimination, or COVID
- Having a "correct" strategy

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What's the ultimate goal?

To move from automatic, habitual, and unhelpful ways of dealing with our emotions to conscious, deliberate, and helpful ways of dealing with them

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Regulating emotions

ER(G + S) = *f(E + P + C)*

Emotion Regulation (Goals + Strategies) = function (Emotion + Person + Context)

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Regulating emotions

The *thoughts* and *actions* we use to prevent, reduce, initiate, maintain, or enhance emotions (PRIME) to make sound decisions, have greater well-being, build and maintain positive relationships, and attain goals.

We need to learn **self-regulation** and **co-regulation.**

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What are the science-backed strategies?

- Shifting your beliefs about emotions
- Labeling your emotions precisely
- Quieting your mind and body
- Redirecting your thoughts
- Cultivating your emotional strength through relationships
- Optimizing your emotion regulation budget
- Becoming the best version of yourself

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Top self-regulation strategies

Teachers who use **mindful breathing, cognitive strategies, and have social support,** and **avoid catastrophizing and suppressing emotions** have greater job satisfaction and less burnout:

- I am confident in my ability to manage student behavior.
- My students demonstrate positive behavior.
- My students are motivated and engaged.
- My students are making academic progress.

- My colleagues are not mean or hurtful.
- I trust the leaders in my school.
- I am less exhausted.
- I feel accomplished.
- I am satisfied with my job.

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The *Dealing with Feeling Wheel*

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Co-regulation

- **Starts with us.** If we can't regulate ourselves, we can't co-regulate others.
- **Flows.** Emotions flow constantly between people whether we want them to or not.
- **Is intentional.** It means guiding another person's emotions with warmth, empathy, and strategies—it's different from simply reacting.
- **Is supportive.** Healthy co-regulation comforts, coaches, models, and reinforces. (It minimizes shaming and gaslighting, which leave scars).

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Co-regulation caveats

- **Minimization is damaging.** "Be a big kid" or "Get over it" dismisses the child and imprints unhelpful strategies.
- **There's a sweet spot.** Effective co-regulation balances empathy with perspective. Indulgence vs. support. It's certainly not ignoring, but it's not over-identifying either.
- **Boundaries matter.** Effective co-regulation is not about absorbing everyone else's stress. It's about empathizing while keeping enough perspective to be useful.

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Co-regulation and attachment

Attachment styles—secure, anxious, avoidant, disorganized—are shaped by early co-regulation experiences (in and out of school).

Anxious
Caregivers/educators were inconsistent, sometimes responsive, sometimes not.
The child learned: *"I must cling or escalate to get attention."*

Avoidant
Caregivers/educators dismissed or minimized feelings.
The child learned: *"Showing emotion won't help, so I'll handle it alone."*

Disorganized
Caregivers/educators were both a source of comfort and fear.
The child learned: *"The person I need also scares me."*

Secure
Caregivers/educators were consistent and warm.
The child learned: *"My feelings matter, and others can help me manage them."*

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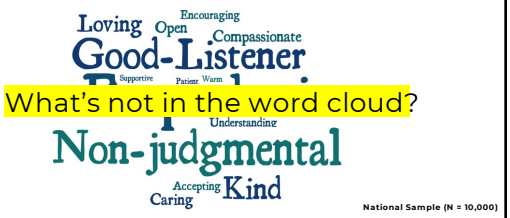
Characteristics of healthy co-regulators



What's not in the word cloud?

National Sample (N = 10,000)

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Top co-regulation strategies

Teachers who *encourage* **mindful breathing, social support, and cognitive strategies,** and *do not encourage* **negative thinking, venting, or suppression** have a more positive classroom climate.

- I am confident in my ability to manage student behavior.
- I have students who demonstrate positive behavior.
- I have students who are less mean and hurtful.
- I am satisfied with my students' academic progress.
- I have fewer problems with absenteeism.
- I feel accomplished.

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Step 1: Set yourself up for success

- Consider the best time and place for supporting students.
- Be aware of what you bring to the situation.
  - How are you feeling? What are your nonverbals communicating? Are you tired or hungry? How well did you sleep?
- Remember to pause, breathe, de-activate, and check in with *your own* feelings first.
- Consider your *best self*. Are you approaching the situation as an educator who is: non-judgmental, a good listener, and has empathy and compassion?

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Step 2: Explore

- Approach with a welcoming facial expression and a calm voice. The mere presence of a caring adult helps a child to regulate.
- Be an emotion scientist.
  - Use gentle exploration, give undivided attention, listen for the underlying story or theme, validate all emotions.
  - Avoid telling students what they're feeling.
  - Find out how they're truly feeling. Is it anger, frustration, disappointment, anxiety, stress?

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Step 3: Strategize

- Coach using a range of strategies:
  - Mindful breathing
  - Positive self-talk and reappraisal
  - Creative problem-solving
- Remember, it's about them, not you! ☺
  - The strategy that might work best for you might not be best for the child
  - Are all or most strategies "permitted" in your classroom?
- Work on the immediate/short-term strategy.
- Consider obstacles and then plan & support.

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Step 4: Follow up

- Remember, this is a journey, and history often repeats itself.
- Check in with the student regularly. Ask how they are feeling and managing the situation they were struggling with.
- Find out about the student's successes and challenges with the strategies they have used.
- Praise for the success, accept the challenges, and work together to think through additional strategies.
- Help the student to build the habit of using helpful strategies.

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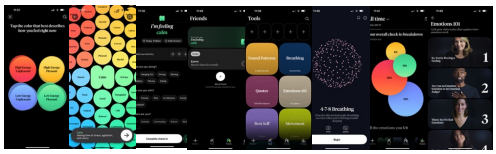
HowWeFeel.org



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It's time to redefine success!

- Technical skills aren't enough. We are all evaluated by our emotion skills or how skillful we are at managing conflict, dealing with stress, building trust, inspiring and motivating others.
- Fortune 100 companies rank emotion regulation as a top future-of-work skill.
- Emotion regulation is the difference between reacting vs. responding, burning out vs. sustaining, breaking apart vs. holding together as a school community.
- Dysregulation costs us in health, relationships, productivity, and safety.

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Stay connected to learn more

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Agenda

Topics to be discussed

- Connecticut School Climate Policy
- Connecticut School Climate Standards
- Restorative Practices Response Policy
- School Climate Improvement Plans
- Purpose
- Process
- Mandatory Elements
- Optional Considerations

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Statutory Updates

Conn. Gen. Stat. (§ 10-222aa et seq.)

All boards of education ***must adopt and implement*** the **Connecticut School Climate Policy** by July 1, 2025.

- This policy will, in effect, replace the bullying prevention and intervention policy and the implementation of safe school climate plans.
- It "provides a framework for an effectively and democratically informed school climate improvement process that serves to implement **Connecticut school climate standards** and includes a continuous cycle of (A) planning and preparation, (B) evaluation, (C) action planning, and (D) implementation."
- The new law includes requirements for reporting and assessing challenging behavior.

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"School Climate"

"…the quality and character of the school life, with a particular focus on the *quality of the relationships* within the school community, and which is based on patterns of people's experiences of school life and that reflects the *norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching, learning, leadership practices and organizational structures* within the school community."

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Connecticut School Climate Standards

- The school district community has a shared vision and plan for promoting and sustaining a **positive school climate** that focuses on prevention, identification, and response to all challenging behaviors.
- The school district community adopts policies that promote:
  - A **sound school environment** that develops and sustains academic, social, emotional, ethical, civic, and intellectual skills.
  - A **restorative school environment** focused on overcoming barriers to teaching and learning by building and supporting meaningful school-wide relationships, and intentionally re-engaging any disengaged students, educators, and families.

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Connecticut School Climate Standards

- The school community's practices are identified, prioritized, and supported to:
  - **Promote learning** and **positive development** of students.
  - **Enhance engagement** in teaching, learning, and school-wide activities.
  - **Address barriers** to teaching and learning.
  - Develop and sustain restorative infrastructure.
- The school community creates a school environment where **everyone is safe, welcomed, supported, and included** in all school-based activities.
- The school community creates a **restorative system** that cultivates a sense of belonging through norms and activities that promote social and civic responsibility, and a dedication to cultural responsiveness, diversity, equity, and inclusion.

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Statutory Updates

Conn. Gen. Stat. (§ 10-222aa et seq.)

All boards of education must adopt a **Restorative Practices Response Policy** by July 1, 2025.

- The policy is to be implemented by school employees for incidents of challenging behavior or student conflict that is nonviolent and does not constitute a crime.

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"Challenging Behavior"

"…behavior that **negatively impacts** school climate or **interferes, or is at risk of interfering,** with the learning or safety of a student or the safety of a school employee."

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"Bullying"

"…**unwanted and aggressive** behavior among children in grades kindergarten to twelve, inclusive, that involves a **real or perceived power imbalance**."

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"Restorative Practices"

"…evidence and research-based system-level practices that focus on (A) building high-quality, **constructive relationships** among the school community, (B) holding each student **accountable** for any challenging behavior, and (C) ensuring each such student has a **role in repairing relationships** and reintegrating into the school community."

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School Climate Improvement Plan

- Requirements are laid out in Conn. Gen. Stat. § 10-222hh.
- **PURPOSE**: Must be used in the prevention, identification, and response to challenging behavior.

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School Climate Improvement Plan: Timeline

Annually
- On or before December 31, the Plan must be updated and submitted to the School Climate Coordinator for review and approval.

Upon Approval
- Plan must be made available to members of the school community in written or electronic form.

Twice Per School Year
- School Climate Committee must hold meetings to engage the school community in the implementation of the Plan.

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School Climate Improvement Plan

Who develops it?

- Each school based on the unique needs of that building.
- Must be developed by each school climate specialist, in collaboration with the district's school climate coordinator.

What must be taken into consideration?

- Results of the school climate survey,
- Recommendations from the school climate committee, and
- Any other data deemed relevant by the climate specialist and climate coordinator.

What does it have to include?

- Must be aligned with Connecticut School Climate Standards, and
- Must include protocols and supports to enhance classroom safety and address challenging behavior.

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School Climate Improvement Plan – Required Protocols and Supports

- Plan must include **protocols and supports** to enhance classroom safety and address challenging behavior.
- Plan must **specify**, at a minimum:
  - The contact information of designated administrators for notification of incidents
  - Processes for assessing the facts, severity, and intentionality of reported incidents

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School Climate Improvement Plan – Required Protocols and Supports

- Plan must include **designated locations** for temporarily removed students, and
- The **supports students may receive** at those locations, including but not limited to:
  - Intervention from a trained school employee,
  - Therapeutic resources,
  - Available mental health supports,
  - Instructional materials and technology, or
  - Other resources to address students' temporary needs.

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School Climate Improvement Plan – Required Protocols and Supports

- Plan must include **ways to**:
  - Address challenging behavior,
  - Enhance resiliency,
  - Increase the use of de-escalation techniques, and
  - Improve social and emotional skills.
- These may include
  - Use of training,
  - Therapeutic mental health supports,
  - Restorative practices, and
  - Trauma-informed instructional strategies.

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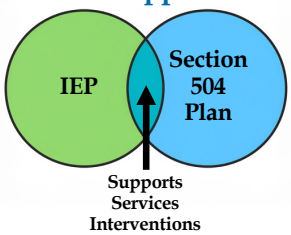
School Climate Improvement Plan – Required Protocols and Supports

- Plan must include safeguards to ensure that any supports, services, or interventions provided to any student who receives special education or accommodation for a disability **comply with such student's IEP or Section 504 plan**.



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School Climate Improvement Plan – Required Protocols and Supports

Tiered responses, based on level of impact or frequency, to incidents of challenging behavior that:

Require temporarily clearing a classroom or removing a majority of students **to reduce the likelihood of injury**,

Indicate a **credible intention to cause bodily harm** to self or others, or

Result in an injury that requires medical attention beyond basic first aid, or less severe injuries caused by the same person on more than one occasion, verified by the school nurse or other medical professional.

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Tiered Responses

Tiered responses must include the following:

- For **a single incident**, the school principal must notify the parents or guardians of each student involved in a manner that complies with FERPA.
- For a **subsequent incident**, the school principal must invite the parents or guardians of each student involved in such incident to a meeting, to discuss the specific supports or interventions for their student, including, but not limited to, restorative practices.
- For **multiple subsequent incidents or a single incident that causes severe harm**, the school principal must provide notice to the parents or guardians of each student involved in such incident of other resources for supports and interventions, including the 2-1-1 Infoline program, services or programs available through the Behavioral Health Partnership, or other resources for professional services, support or crisis intervention.

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Tiered Responses

Meeting	Purpose	Student Considerations	Teacher Considerations
Within 2 days, a meeting must occur between an administrator and the school employee who witnessed the incident.	The meeting's purpose is to **discuss supports and interventions** to address the needs of students and school employees.	If the student receives **special education** or is eligible for a 504 plan, the supports and interventions will be determined by the PPT or Section 504 team, which will be notified no later than two days of the incident.	The process by which a teacher may request a behavior intervention meeting.

Plan must prohibit discrimination or retaliation against any person who reports or assists in the investigation of an incident requiring tiered response.

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School Climate Improvement Plan – Required Protocols and Supports

- Requirement that the Superintendent must submit a report, at least annually, to the Board regarding:
  - The **number of incidents** of challenging behavior that require tiered responses.
  - The **grade level** of each student involved in such incidents.
  - The **supports, services or interventions** provided in response to such incidents to address the needs of students and school employees.
- Such report shall be produced in a manner that complies with FERPA and the Connecticut State Department of Education's data suppression guidelines.

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School Climate Improvement Plan

- *May* incorporate the **school climate improvement plan template** developed by the Social and Emotional Learning and School Climate Advisory Collaborative
- Includes a **School Climate Rubric** for the School Climate Committee to assess the quality of school climate as related to Connecticut School Climate Standards.
- Once that assessment is made, the **School Climate Template** can be used to review and record, as to each standard:
  - Current school status (informed by data)
  - Areas needing improvement
  - Identified strategies to realize improvement
  - Measurement and documentation options for determining improvement
  - Timeline for reaching improvement goals

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Questions?

Thank you for joining us!

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Connect With Us

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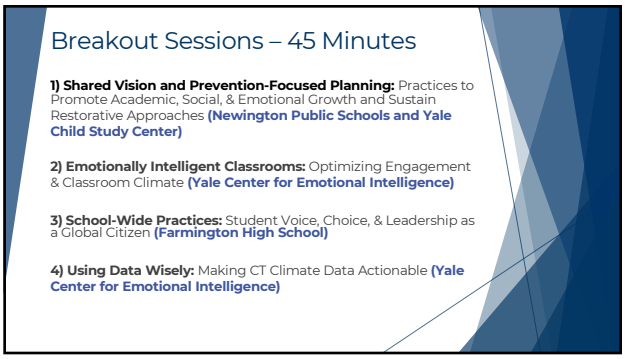

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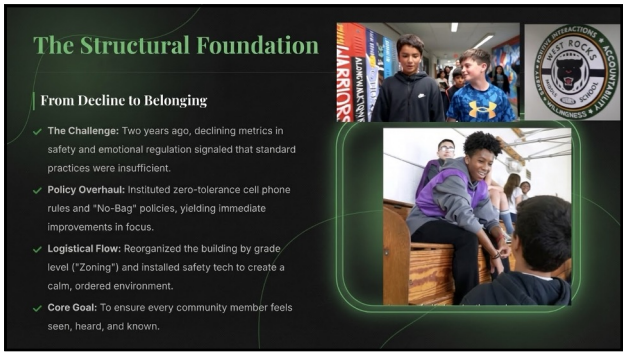

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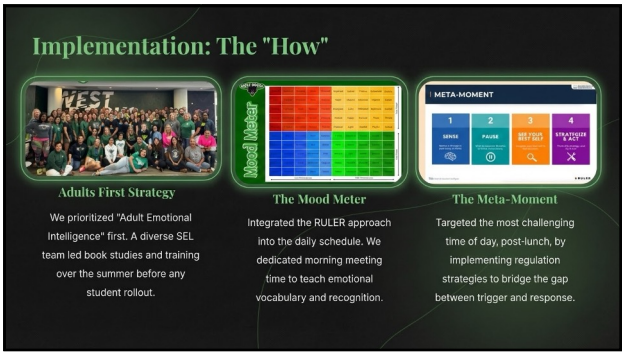

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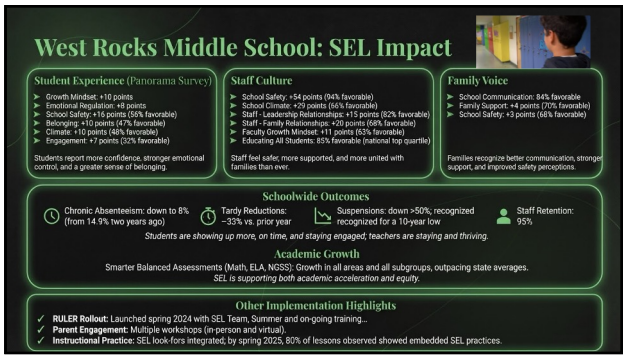
West Rocks Middle School: SEL Impact
Student Experience (Panorama Survey)
Growth Mindset: +10 points
Emotional Regulation: +8 points
School Safety: +16 points (56% favorable)
Belonging: +10 points (47% favorable)
Climate: +10 points (48% favorable)
Engagement: +7 points (32% favorable)
Students report more confidence, stronger emotional control, and a greater sense of belonging.
Staff Culture
School Safety: +54 points (94% favorable)
School Climate: +29 points (56% favorable)
Staff - Leadership Relationships: +15 points (82% favorable)
Staff - Family Relationships: +20 points (68% favorable)
Faculty Growth Mindset: +11 points (53% favorable)
Educating All Students: 85% favorable (national top quartile)
Staff feel safer, more supported, and more united with families than ever.
Family Voice
School Communication: 84% favorable
Family Support: +4 points (70% favorable)
School Safety: +3 points (68% favorable)
Families recognize better communication, stronger support, and improved safety perceptions.
Schoolwide Outcomes
Chronic Absenteeism: down to 8% (from 14.9% two years ago)
Tardy Reductions: –33% vs. prior year
Suspensions: down >50%; recognized recognized for a 10-year low
Staff Retention: 95%
Students are showing up more, on time, and staying engaged; teachers are staying and thriving.
Academic Growth
Smarter Balanced Assessments (Math, ELA, NGSS): Growth in all areas and all subgroups, outpacing state averages.
SEL is supporting both academic acceleration and equity.
Other Implementation Highlights
RULER Rollout: Launched spring 2024 with SEL Team, Summer and on-going training...
Parent Engagement: Multiple workshops (in-person and virtual),
Instructional Practice: SEL look-fors integrated; by spring 2025, 80% of lessons observed showed embedded SEL practices.

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Thank you for your feedback!
(Responses are anonymous)
5:00

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Closing Remarks & Next Steps
Need additional support?
Let's stay connected!
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