CREATING A CLASSROOM TEACHING MATRIX

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Purpose

This brief focuses on how to promote a positive teaching and learning environment by establishing positive classroom expectations, or norms, that reflect the shared values of a classroom community (i.e., educators, students, families). Specifically, this brief provides guidance for creating and using a classroom teaching matrix to explicitly identify, define, and teach (a) predictable classroom routines, (b) positive classroom expectations, and (c) critical social, emotional, and behavioral (SEB) skills. See Supporting and Responding to Students Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Needs[1] for additional guidance and resources.
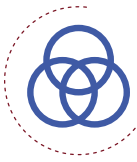
Students spend most of their school day in the classroom, learning from and interacting with their peers and educators. Establishing common SEB expectations promotes a positive, predictable, and safe environment for learning. Specifically, teaching, prompting, and providing feedback on classroom expectations is associated with improved student outcomes (e.g., Alter & Haydon, 2018; Cook et al., 2018; Faul et al., 2012; Simonsen et al., 2008). A teaching matrix can be a helpful tool for establishing common SEB expectations in the classroom. A teaching matrix identifies the expectations (as row headers), settings or routines (as column headers), and examples of critical SEB skills involved in demonstrating expected behavior within each routine (at the intersection of each row and column in the body of the matrix). This practice brief provides step-by-step guidance for developing and using a classroom teaching matrix.

Steps for Developing a Classroom Teaching Matrix

Step 1: Identify Common Expectations

Classroom teaching matrices extend school-wide PBIS expectations into the classroom setting and support consistency in learning environments for all students as they transition among classrooms and other settings throughout the day. Align or integrate classroom teaching matrices with any existing SEB initiatives by checking for consistency with language or embedding social-emotional competencies within the classroom teaching matrix (see *Teaching Social-Emotional Competencies within a PBIS Framework*).[2]

If common positive school expectations (e.g., We Respect Ourselves, We Respect Others, We Respect Property) do exist, anchor classroom expectations to the school expectations to promote consistency. Figures 1 and 2 are sample school and classroom matrices, respectively. The classroom matrix has the same expectations as the school matrix (far left columns). The school matrix identifies common settings throughout the school across the top row, whereas the classroom matrix defines the same expectations in the context of classroom routines.

If common school-wide expectations do not exist, engage students in a process to identify classroom expectations (see *PBIS Cultural Responsiveness Field Guide: Resources for Trainers and Coaches*,[3] Appendix D: School-wide Expectations and Matrix Examination Activity).
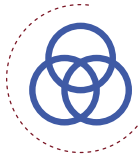
Figure 1. School SEB Teaching Matrix Example

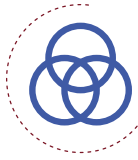| School Expectations	Setting/Routine					
	All Settings	**Hallways**	**Playground**	**Cafeteria**	**Library/Computer Lab**	**Bus**
We Respect Ourselves	• Be engaged • Give your best effort • Ask for help when you need it	• Walk • Go directly to your destination	• Have a plan • Do something you enjoy • Play safely	• Eat only your food • Select healthy foods	• Use resources to support your learning • Focus on your own work	• Watch for your stop • Keep track of your belongings • Sit with your feet on the floor and your body facing forward
We Respect Others	• Be kind • Keep hands, feet, and objects to self • Help others when they ask • Share with others	• Use a quiet voice • Walk to the right	• Include others • Share equipment • Take turns	• Wait for your turn to talk • Include everyone in conversations • Connect with new people	• Whisper • Return books • Help others stay focused	• Use a quiet voice • Stay in your seat • Be kind to the driver
We Respect Property	• Recycle • Clean up after self • Leave the space better than you found it	• Pick up litter • Maintain physical space	• Use equipment properly • Put litter in garbage can	• Take care of your belongings • Clean up eating area	• Push in chairs • Treat books carefully	• Keep belongings out of aisle • Take all belongings and any litter with you when you exit the bus

Figure 2. Classroom SEB Teaching Matrix Example

School Expectations	Setting/Routine					
	All Routines	**Entering and Leaving the Classroom**	**Small Group Instruction**	**Whole Group Instruction**	**Independent Work Time**	**When I Am Upset**
We Respect Ourselves	• Be engaged • Give your best effort • Ask for help when you need it	• Walk • Go directly to your destination	• Participate • Bring necessary materials to the table	• Engage with the lesson • Take notes	• Make a plan • Read or listen to directions • Focus on your own work	• Notice when you feel frustrated, confused, or uncertain • Take 3 deep breaths • Ask for help
We Respect Others	• Keep your hands, feet, and objects to self • Help others when they ask • Share with others	• Use a quiet voice • Walk to the right	• Include others • Share equipment	• Raise your hand if you have something to ask or share	• Whisper • Focus only on your tasks	• Talk calmly • Listen to other people's perspective • Take a break if you need one
We Respect Property	• Recycle • Clean up after self • Leave the space better than you found it	• Pick up litter • Maintain physical space	• Leave group materials at the table • Use materials carefully	• Sit in your seat safely • Have necessary materials handy	• Share classroom tools with others • Return materials where you found them	• Put materials down and walk away • Ask for help
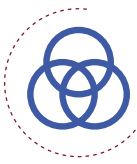
Step 2: Identify Classroom Routines or Settings

Maximize instructional time by developing and teaching routines to promote smooth interactions and transitions across activities. Consider critical times throughout the school day for which routines or straightforward sequential steps can help enhance instruction (e.g., start or end of day, class entry, independent work, asking for help). Additionally, consider routines that support students' social-emotional needs such as "When I Get Upset" or "When I Need Help." (See example routines as column headers in Figure 2.)
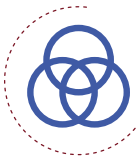
Step 3: Select Culturally and Contextually Relevant Examples of SEB Skills

Co-develop the classroom matrix with members of your classroom community (e.g., students, educators, and family members). Use language and select examples of SEB skills that reflect the unique and shared learning histories of your students and classroom community.

- **Engage student voice.** Ensure all students are actively engaged, heard, and included in drafting expectations, routines, and example SEB skills. Co-develop classroom expectations and examples with students so their voices and choices are represented. Ask students to provide examples of what following classroom expectations look and sound like across identified classroom routines. Actively listen for patterns and provide feedback throughout the discussion.

- **Identify what behaviors are important to teach and practice across routines.** Summarize relevant SEB skills into a few positively stated, observable,

and measurable indicators or examples (e.g., listen to the speaker, raise your hand to ask for help) that consider the developmental level of students, unique features of the setting, and cultural relevance. Encourage students to practice classroom agreements regularly with each other and acknowledge them for actively engaging with their learning community (e.g., "We had high levels of participation from the whole class today. It made our learning stronger. Well done!")

- **Embed family, community, and student experiences and values.** After co-designing a classroom matrix with educators and students, invite families and relevant community partners (e.g., related service providers, afterschool program coordinators, health providers) to provide feedback. Incorporate feedback and prior experiences of SEB expectations in a way that validates, affirms, builds, and bridges classroom expectations and students' unique learning histories (VABB; Hollie et al., 2011).

- **Differentiate expectations between school, home, and community settings.** Use a Personal Matrix (see *PBIS Cultural Responsiveness Field Guide: Resources for Trainers and Coaches*,[4] Appendix G: Personal Matrix) to ask students to describe how classroom expectations look at home or with their friends. By completing this step, educators can gather information to identify whether a disconnect between school and home expectations exists, identify where more instruction is needed, and determine whether some changes to the classroom matrix may be more culturally responsive to the values of the families and community. The Personal Matrix Activity has been found effective at enhancing racial and/or ethnic equity in school discipline (Gion et al., 2021; Muldrew & Miller, 2021).

Step 4: Teach Directly

Develop lessons that teach expectations within each routine and include modeling, guided practice with specific feedback, and opportunities to check for understanding to use for both initial and on-going learning. Consider ways to actively engage students in developing, teaching, and or participating in the lessons. See the *Creating Effective Classroom Environments Plan Template*[5] for a sample classroom matrix and lesson plan template to teach expectations within classroom routines.

Step 5: Post, Prompt, and Share the Expectations

In addition to teaching directly, consider how you will communicate and prompt expectations.

- **Post expectations.** Engage students in creating visual displays of the expectations in key locations in the classroom.

- **Create visual prompts.** To support students in engaging in the key SEB skills, create and post visual prompts or reminders (e.g., pictures of students engaging in the key SEB skills) close to the locations or materials for each routine (e.g., post visual prompt by the door for transitions).

- **Share expectations.** Communicate expectations and key SEB skills by sharing the matrix with others who interact with the class (e.g., specialists, paraprofessionals, substitutes, volunteers, families) to enhance consistency throughout the classroom community.

Additional Tips for Creating a Classroom Teaching Matrix

Prompt Frequently and Intentionally

After directly teaching each expectation, routine, and critical SEB in a classroom teaching matrix, regularly prompt or remind students of the expectations before expecting students to demonstrate them. For example, while positively greeting students at the door[6] before class begins, an educator might say, "Remember to be responsible by putting your assignments in the finished work basket."

Also provide prompts during routines when behavior errors are likely to occur. For example, as the class period wraps up, an educator may say "Check around your desk for all your belongings before leaving the classroom."

Provide Specific Feedback

When students practice SEB skills, provide specific feedback so students are able to distinguish when they have demonstrated the skill as expected and when they have made an error. Specific feedback includes naming the skill/behavior and pairing it with either praise or a brief correction.

- **Specific praise example:** "You raised your hand before speaking. That allows everyone to have an opportunity to be heard. Well done!"

- **Specific correction example:** "Next time, please raise your hand if you would like to share your thoughts. This allows everyone a chance to be heard."
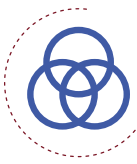
When providing specific feedback, strive for a higher ratio of praise to corrections. Ideally, students should receive at least 5 praise statements for every correction (Cook et al., 2017). Students with or at risk for emotional-behavioral disorders and other disabilities may benefit from an even higher praise to correction ratio (e.g., >9 praise statements to each correction; Caldarella et al., 2019).

Reteaching

Plan to teach and reteach SEB skills periodically throughout the year. Delivering booster lessons after school breaks, at the start of a new semester, and when patterns or trends of SEB errors develop provides opportunities to refresh student learning and repeat practice opportunities. For example, an educator notices students are often leaving textbooks, writing utensils, and other items behind when they leave class. Next class, the educator wraps up the lesson 5 minutes early to reteach how to respectfully leave the classroom.

For further guidance on prompts, specific feedback, reteaching, and other effective classroom practices, check out: *Supporting and Responding to Students' Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Needs: Evidence-Based Practices for Educators*[7] and *Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) in the Classroom*.[8]
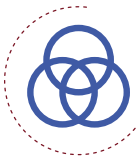
Collaborate with Families

The classroom matrix offers an opportunity for educators and families to collaborate and align family values with SEB expectations needed for a positive, equitable, safe, and effective learning environment.

- Use the classroom teaching matrix as a bridge between home, school, and community by (a) asking families to contribute to the development of the classroom teaching matrix, (b) providing information on ways that SEB skills will be embedded into their child's classroom, and (c) encouraging two-way communication about the role SEB skills play in learning.

- Engage families in strengthening students' SEB skills by explaining to families when and how SEB skills will be directly taught to the class. Then, provide families with examples of how to encourage SEB skills at home.

- Encourage families to adapt and use a teaching matrix at home to further support SEB skills and align the expectations with family values. Consider sharing resources with families to support positive behavior at home, including: (a) *Supporting Families with PBIS at Home* in English[9] or Spanish[10] and (b) *Family Plan for Positive Behavior at Home*.[11]
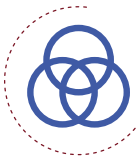
Summary

Creating a classroom teaching matrix strengthens the consistency, predictability, and explicit teaching necessary for students to experience a positive, effective, and equitable learning environment. Co-designing the matrix with students and collaborating with families can enhance the cultural responsiveness of this important instructional tool.

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Embedded Hyperlinks

1. https://www.pbis.org/resource/supporting-and-responding-to-behavior-evidence-based-classroom-strategies-for-teachers

2. https://www.pbis.org/resource/teaching-social-emotional-competencies-within-a-pbis-framework

3. https://www.pbis.org/resource/pbis-cultural-responsiveness-field-guide-resources-for-trainers-and-coaches

4. https://www.pbis.org/resource/pbis-cultural-responsiveness-field-guide-resources-for-trainers-and-coaches

5. https://www.pbis.org/resource/creating-effective-classroom-environments-plan-template

6. https://www.pbis.org/resource/positive-greetings-at-the-door

7. https://www.pbis.org/resource/supporting-and-responding-to-behavior-evidence-based-classroom-strategies-for-teachers

8. https://www.pbis.org/resource/multi-tiered-system-of-supports-mtss-in-the-classroom

9. https://www.pbis.org/resource/supporting-families-with-pbis-at-home

10. https://www.pbis.org/resource/supporting-families-with-pbis-at-home-spanish-translation

11. https://www.pbis.org/resource/family-plan-for-positive-behavior-at-home